The Career of Puffer Hopkins

Cornelius Mathews

Table of Contents

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PREFACE.

It was the hope of the author when he began the following work, that he might be able to produce a book, in some slight degree, characteristic and national in its features. Now, that it is completed, he fears it may be found far short of that hope, and unequal even to his own feeble purposes. He had a design which seemed, in some of its circumstances, to partake a little of utility and truth; but which, he is afraid, is not made quite so clear to the reader.

Where he has attempted to shade and soften, he may have blurred; and where he would have cut sharp lines and effected contrasts, it may prove that he has merely mangled character and story. Imperfect as is his own judgment in such a case, he thinks he can discover one or two places at least, where more should have been said and less done; or more done and less said. He wishes only that he had sufficient influence with the reader to persuade him to guard against a single false alarm frequently raised against works of this class. The constancy, with which the charge of caricaturing Nature is brought against writers who attempt the humorous, should lead us to suspect— particularly as Cervantes, Smollett, Fielding and Scott, to say nothing of more recent eminent examples, have all, at one time or another, been included in the accusation—that there is less justice and more assumption in the charge, than seems at first possible.

These authors all wrote from a sure instinct, a profound knowledge of their art. They knew very well, or must have early learned, that the spirit of the accusation would drive all literature upon a servile transcript of every−day objects, and most effectually stifle every work claiming to be a work of art. It was their province, they knew, to discover in nature the germ of character, and to expand it by processes of which genius is master, into a livelier, truer development than nature, in her ordinary moods, presents. To group, to separate, to soften and elevate nature, is allowed to the author as well as the painter; and the charge of caricaturing should be brought only where Nature is lost sight of and fails to furnish the original staple, out of which the product is wrought.

It happened to the author, during the progress of the early parts of this Tale through the pages of a Magazine (Arcturus,) to be engaged in the advocacy of a Law of International Copy−right: a cause which he will not fail to urge at all proper opportunities. As it was not found altogether convenient to answer what he advanced, an attack was made, by a new sort of evasive logic, upon the present work. What kind of generalship it would be to set out with the valiant purpose of the conquest of Mexico and proceed to its execution by marching a couple of thousand miles in directly the opposite course, and opening a brisk cannonade upon the Heights of Abraham, for example,— the reader may determine. The author only expresses a wish that the following work may be judged by itself, apart from collateral issues and distracting personalities. In that spirit he believes it will be judged by all fair−minded and capable critics. Whatever the issue may be, he cannot altogether regret that he has written it since it has afforded him an opportunity to serve, in a very humble way, objects, of which he ought not to be ashamed.

It will be perceived that a portion of the text is illustrated by H. K. Browne, Esq., (Phiz,) of London. In justice to the artist, it should be added, that the great distance, at which he labored, from the author, has caused him to depart, in some particulars, from the conception it was the author's purpose to embody. As they are the first and only designs procured from that gentleman for America, the author ventures to add, that he regards them, with this reservation, as eminently ingenious and spirited. *New−York, − Oct. 28th, 1842.*

CHAPTER I. THE PLATFORM.

To say that the townspeople of this mighty metropolis were in a state of greater excitement and activity on a certain night in a certain month of November—which it is not necessary more particularly to define—than they are on certain other nights of periodical recurrence, would be to do the said townspeople arrant injustice, and to establish for the chronicler of the following authentic history, at the very outset, a questionable character for truth and plain−speaking. On this immediate occasion, however, there was, it must be confessed, a commendable degree of agitation and enthusiasm visible, in almost every quarter of the city. Crowds were emerging from lane, alley and thoroughfare, and pouring into the central streets in the direction of the Hall; sometimes in knots of three, four or more, all engaged in earnest conversation, in a loud key, with vehement gesture, and faces considerably discolored by excitement. The persons composing these various peripatetic and deliberative groups, could not be said to be of any single class or profession, but mingled together indiscriminately, much after the fashion of a country store−keeper's stock, where a bale of fourth−price flannel neighbors a piece of first−quality linen, and knots of dainty and gallant wine−glasses are brought into a state of sociable confusion, with a gathering of hard−headed plebian stone−bottles. Although all tended the same way and on the same errand, let no man be so rash and intemperate as to imagine that no distinctions were observed; that certain lines and demarcations were not maintained; and that broadcloth was not careful here, as usual, not to have its fine nap destroyed by the jostling of homespun.

The knot of tough−fisted mechanics kept its course, roaring out its rough sarcasms and grat gusts of invective, while the company of well−dressed gentlemen bound for the same harbor, glided more quietly along, their talk scarcely disturbed by the extravagance of a rippling phrase or an oath.

Here a substantial citizen advanced in great state and dignity, alone, toward the place of gathering, unless his horn−topped walking−stick might be held as suitable company for so grave and dignified a personage; and again a thoughtful young gentleman might be discovered, striding along with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, conning a few common−places for a speech.

This various crowd has at length reached its destination, and scampering up the stairs of a large mis−shapen building, with no little heat and racket, finds itself landed in a spacious saloon, facing a raised platform, protected in front by a rough railing with some score of vacant chairs occupying the floor of the same, and as many stout candles ranged against the rail. Beneath the platform is a small square table, holding a capacious inkstand, ornamented with two or three huge grey goose−quills. Abreast of the table are stretched a number of rude benches, to afford accommodation for such infirm, ease−loving and sedentary individuals, as may see fit to take possession of them; and taken possession of they are at a very early stage of the proceedings, first by a squad of precocious ship−wrights' 'prentices, secondly by a broad−bottomed dairyman who was left at the Hall in the afternoon by one of his own wagons from Bloomingdale, and thirdly by a rout of scrambling fellows, from no place in particular, who push and jostle and clamour their best for the occupancy. The meeting is on the eve of being organized, when in marches a well−fed uppish man—the very citizen that was alone with his cane in the street—who, contemplating the crowd with an air of austere regard, urges himself towards one end of the platform, where he meets a scraggy man, smartly dressed, and displaying from the pillory of a sharp−edged clean shirt−collar, a very knowing countenance extended to the audience, and engages in a whispered conversation, the concluding clause whereof embodies this sterling sentiment, (enforced by the thrusting of a roll at the same time into the open hand of the scraggy gentleman.) "There's a current ten—make me a vice, will ye?" The scraggy man thereupon cocks his eye significantly, and the stout citizen, slipping away, gets into the outskirts of the crowd, where he stares at the platform and the candles—the political Heaven of ambitions stout gentlemen—as if they were the most remarkable objects in creation, and as if he was perfectly unconscious of the objects for which the meeting was then and there convened.

In due time the meeting was called to order, and the innocent stout gentleman established himself, with five others, upon the platform, as an assistant presiding officer—a vice—of the same. Silence was proclaimed and a dwarfish little man, with one of the oddest countenances in the world was lifted upon a high stool by the mob, and

commenced reading a manuscript, which he dignified with the name of the "Report of the Anti−Aqueduct Committee, appointed by the citizens of New−York, at a large and respectable meeting held at Fogfire Hall, &c., &c.," in which was furnished a certain amount of statistics (taken from the 'Cyclopedia): a decoction of mouldy jokes from the newspapers): and a modicum of energetic slang—a direct emanation from the inventive genius of the reader of the Report.

This was a great, a tremendous question—suggested the Anti−Aqueduct manuscript—a question, to come to the point at once, involving the rights of mankind, the interests of universal humanity. If this principle was allowed to pass unopposed—this pernicious principle of setting up pure water, democratic Adam's ale, the true corporation gin, for purchase—where would we land? The Committee that drafted the Report could tell 'em!—in tyranny, despotism, bloodshed and debauchery. Individuals would get drunk at the pump, as soon as the price was made an object: there was a consideration for them! The people had their rights—here the reader wagged his head vehemently, and grinned like a demon just going out of his slang—he could tell them, and the people could take care of 'em.

A general dissemination of genuine gin cock−tails among the hearers, could have scarcely produced greater excitement than did this most apposite and thrilling sentiment: caps flew up, and hats flew off, as if the air were alive with great black insects, and canes came down with a general crash, like a cane−brake itself in a state of tornado. It seemed as if they never would be done applauding this happy allusion; and the Committee−man stood on the stool, swaying on one leg, and smiling, as if he considered it the most agreeable spectacle he had ever enjoyed. The Committee did not suppose that it was the purpose of Providence to destroy mankind by a second flood, but they were satisfied, morally satisfied, if such an intention ever did come within the purview of the divine displeasure, the object would undoubtedly be accomplished by the bursting of the Reservoir which it was proposed to erect at the junction of the Third Avenue and Bowery:—at least, the Committee thought it proper to add, as far as the citizens of New−York were concerned. And so the Report rambled on, like an echo among the Dutch Hills, until it finally died away in a thundering Resolution, and the little reader was inadvertently knocked off the stool by a charcoal−vender, who was employed, besides grinning through the sable stains of his trade in a ghastly manner, in swinging his hat in approval of one of the concluding sentiments of his Report.

The charcoal−man was hustled, the little Committee−man set upon his legs, and a vote of thanks unanimously passed for the able Report just read.

A very long, dull−looking man, next offered a resolution, and delivered a speech, as long and dull as himself; which resolution and speech were seconded, by a round, heavy man, in an harangue quite as rigmarole and ponderose;— when a pause occurred, during which the mob seemed to be reflecting what they should do next. After a proper degree of cogitation, they commenced shouting for a favorite speaker, who always interested their feelings by proposing a general division of property: which was very liberal in him, as he had nothing to divide but the payment of two−score old debts, and the expenses of a small family; but he failed to make his appearance. Upon which certain sagacious persons began peering about in the crowd, as if they expected to find him sandwiched away snugly among the carmen, omnibus−drivers and stevedores, there present. Certain other active persons were despatched into the halls and purlieus of the building; a self−formed committee of five rushed post−haste for the bar−room; and one over−zealous individual was so far carried away by his enthusiasm, as to run a mile to the orator's dwelling, and there to demand his person with such breathless incoherence, as to lead his small family to suspect that their dear protector and pay−master harbored the intention of making way with himself.

A second popular favorite was called by the audience; the same scrutiny instituted, and with the same result. Affairs now looked exceedingly blank, the audience began to despair, and to entertain the horrible expectation of having to go to bed speechless, when an unknown individual pushed convulsively through the crowd, struggled up the steps, and placed himself at the foot of the platform; and stretching out his right arm to its full extent, began.

He was young—the bloom of roseate health upon his cheek would satisfy them of that. He was timid and doubtful: witness his tremblings and shiverings on presenting himself for the first time before that highly respectable body of august citizens. He was rash and foolhardy, he was aware, in coming before so intelligent an audience, at that critical moment. But he was actuated and impelled by a sense of duty, which would not allow him to be silent while that great question called for an advocate. They had heard the thunder of the cannon, in the

Report; the braying (a slight titter at this word) of trumpets, in the speeches of the two learned gentlemen that had preceded him: and now that the grand overture of battle had been performed, he ventured to come upon the field, and with his simple shepherd's pipe to sound the humbler music of peace. He trusted that no violent, no vindictive feeling, would be indulged toward their opponents. Let their measure pass—let the Aqueduct be reared, and let its waters begin to flow:—from these very waters, pernicious as they seemed, should be drawn the rainbow of promise for his friends; for the friends of cheap government and good order! Taxation was not democracy: debt was not democracy: public ruin and bankruptcy were not democracy (gently warbled the shepherd's pipe): and if this insane, wolfish and reckless party, wished to destroy itself with its own fangs—why, in God's name, bid them God−speed, and give them a clear field. He would not suggest that the farmers in Westchester county should oppose the passage of the Aqueduct through their own lands; they were freemen, and knew what was what. He would not stir up the Harlaem Bridge Company (Heaven forbid) to withstand this encroachment upon their rights; they were a corporation, and could discriminate carrot from horse−radish. He hoped, he fervently and sincerely hoped and trusted, that the entire race of water−rats and ground−moles might be annihilated, before the undertaking was commenced; so that it might not be impeded or undermined by their operations. At these various hopes and suggestions, as they were delivered, there was an uproarious ha! ha! uttered by the assemblage, who seemed to relish them hugely: and, with a hint or two to the audience, not to allow themselves to be tampered with; not to look on and see their heads taken from their shoulders, and the bread from their children's mouths (all of which was heartily seconded by the hearers); the young orator—the gentle friend of peace—stepped from the platform.

At the conclusion of the speech, some one in the crowd jumped up a foot or two, and shouted, "Three cheers for the last speech!" and three cheers were given, with great animation; and then, at the same suggestion, three more; and three at the end of them. Different members of the audience turned to each other and shook hands, and exclaimed, "Royal," "That was fine," and other like phrases of approbation: and then inquiries were set on foot as to the name of the new speaker, to which no one could furnish a satisfactory answer; and whether he was from this ward or that ward, which was in a state of equal doubt and uncertainty; and finally it was conjectured and suggested, that he did n't belong to any ward at all, but had come from the country: which they were for proving by his rural simile of the rainbow, (rainbows not being indigenous in incorporated towns), and his intimate acquaintance with the feelings of the Westchester County farmers, and ground−moles.

Whatever might be his name and origin, his foot had no sooner touched the floor than he felt his sleeve twitched, and turning, he discovered a singular−looking little gentleman, beckoning him to follow.

CHAPTER II. FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH HOBBLESHANK.

Disengaging himself from the crowd at Fogfire−Hall, the young Politician followed his unknown conductor into the open air. From the rapidity with which he moved, in advance, although his gait was shuffling and uncertain, he was not fairly overtaken until he had reached the mouth of a neighboring Refectory, at which, pausing only for an instant glance at the young man's countenance—which seemed to create a pleasurable feeling, and caused him to smile strenuously—he plunged down the steps. The young Politician followed, and found himself in a close narrow room, the air of which was musty with confiement, and, having no opportunity from the pent place where it was imprisoned, to ramble about among meadows and fresh streams to enliven itself, depended on fumes of brandy and clouds of cigarsmoke, for whatever life it exhibited. A tall man stood before the fire, who would have inevitably perished of its noxious qualities if he had not taken occasion, through the day, to stand up the steps with his head and shoulders above ground, contemplating the clay−covered wagons that came in fresh from the country.

Judging from the starved, narrow−breasted skeletons of turkies and fowls, the cold, sepulchral hams, the cadaverous, shrunken legs of mutton, and the dwarfed tarts and bread−rolls, that lay in miserable heaps on the table, they might have easily concluded that the pie−house into which they had descended was the dreary family vault, to which melancholy butchers, bakers and poulterers were in the habit of consigning such of their professional progeny, as had ceased to have life and merchantable qualities on earth. The room was, of all possible dirty rooms, the dirtiest: with walls smoked and tallow−stained; an unsanded floor; tables spotted all over, like the double−six of dominoes; and a fire, with just enough animation to blush at the other appointments of the place. The pie−house had its pretensions, too: for it possessed not only a common−room for outside customers, but a private parlor, snug and select, cut off from its vulgar neighbor by elegant blue curtains, made to resemble patches of dirty blue sky—moving on a wire with jingling brass rings, and entered by a half−raised step.

Upon this, which was little more than a large stall after all, they entered. The mysterious little gentleman, drawing the curtains behind them, rushed up to the fire and rubbed his hands together over the blaze, opened the curtains, thrust out his head, called for oysters and beer, and took his station at one side of the table in the middle of the floor. "It's all right," said the stranger. "Don't be alarmed. My name is Hobbleshank—what's yours?"

"Puffer Hopkins," replied the young Politician, surveying more closely his whimsical companion.

He was an irregular−built little gentleman, about fiftyfive years of age, with a pale face, twitched out of shape somewhat by a paralytic affection: with one sound eye, and one in a condition of semi−transparency, which gave to his features something of a ghostly or goblin character; and hedging in and heightening the effect of the whole, a pair of bushy black whiskers, of a fine, vigorous growth. The little gentleman wore a faded blue frock, short pantaloons, low shoes, an eye−glass, and a hat considerably dilapidated and impaired by age.

The singularity and whim of the little old gentleman's demeanor was shown, in his shambling up side−ways toward Puffer whenever he addressed him, and looking up timidly, first with the doubtful eye, as if sounding his way, and then with the sound one; fortifying himself, from time to time, from an immense snuff−box, which he carried awkwardly in his left hand.

"That was an excellent speech, young man!" said the strange little gentleman, dropping into a seat and simultaneously swallowing an oyster black with pepper.

"I trust the sentiments were correct," modestly suggested his companion.

"Never better, sir: sound as a Newton pippin, to the core," continued the strange little gentleman. "But you are young yet, sir—quite young—and have a thing or two to learn. Be good enough not to advance upon the stage again, if you please, without your coat buttoned snug to the chin, which shows that you mean to give them a resolute speech—a devilish resolute speech," exclaimed the little gentleman, glaring on the youth with his spectre eye, "full of storm and thunder, sir:—or else with your breasts thrown wide back, indicating that you are about to regale them with an airy, well−ventilated and very candid effusion."

Appreciating the interest that the little old gentleman expressed in his future success, his companion promised to comply, as far as in him lay, with these new requisitions in the art of addressing public bodies.

"There was an awful omission," continued the strange gentleman, "a very awful and unpardonable omission, in your harangue to−night." The little old gentleman's voice sounded sepulchral, and his companion cast his eyes anxiously about the select parlor.

"For Heaven's sake, what was that, sir?" asked the young gentleman, regarding his censor with intense interest.

"Why, sir," said the little old gentleman, relaxing into a grim smile, "where were your banners? You had'nt one in your whole speech! An address to a political assembly in New−York, and not a tatter of bunting in the whole of it— you must excuse me, but it's the weakest thing I've ever known. An army might as well go into battle as an orator into our popular meetings, without his flags and standards. Where were your stars, too? There was'nt even the twinkle of a comet's tail in the whole harangue: they expect it. Stars are the pepper and salt of a political discourse—mind that if you please!"

At this passage, the little old gentleman became thoughtful, and fell upon his oysters and beer with horrible avidity; which process caused him to grow more thoughtful than ever. "Many a good speech have I heard," he at length said, contemplating Puffer Hopkins with melancholy regard, "whose deliverer now lies under the tombstone. Others lie there, too!—I'd give my life, sir," he exclaimed earnestly, pressing his hands closely together, "my life with its resulting interest, if I dared, for a minute's gaze at features that are lying in the silence and darkness of dust. That's hard, sir—too hard to bear: a young wife borne away in her bloom by a cold, cruel hearse—black, all over black! And then what followed— do you recollect what followed? I'm a fool—you know nothing of it; why should you? Life is a green field to you, without as much as a grave or a furrow in it all."

"I am not too sure of that," answered Puffer Hopkins, "for I have a dim remembrance of a death that touched me nearly, long ago; whose death I cannot say, but a vision, away off in past times—of a darkened house—a solemn train issuing forth, with one figure staggering into the funeral coach, drunk with excess of grief—the heavy roll of wheels—and many tears and lamentations in the small household."

While he delivered this, Hobbleshank looked earnestly in his face, as if he discovered in what he said a meaning deeper than the words. At this there was a long silence, which Puffer Hopkins at length attempted to break, by stating to his companion the character in which he had appeared that night, for the first time, at Fogfire Hall.

"I know," said Hobbleshank, pushing his open palm toward Puffer Hopkins, "Do'nt say a word:—I know all about it. You're a young professional trader in politics and patriotism; a beginner—just opened to−night with your first speech, and a fresh assortment of apostrophes and gesticulations. I know you are new in the business, for when you spoke of Heaven, and Eternal Justice, you looked at the audience! Very green, my boy: an old spouter, in such a case, always rolls his eye−balls back under their lids, and smells of the chandelier, which is much better, although the odor is'nt pleasant."

"A mere 'prentice at the business I confess myself," answered Puffer.

"I wish you would bear in mind, too," continued his whimsical adviser, "when you address a mixed audience, and have occasion to speak of the majesty of the people, that the established rule is, not to stare at any individual dirty face in the middle of the crowd, but to look away off, beyond the crowd entirely; as if you discovered what you're speaking about in some remote suburb with which they have nothing to do. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do," replied Puffer: "But is'nt there generally some placid gentleman or other, who comes to the meeting early, and plants himself in front of the platform at a proper distance, with the praiseworthy purpose of having the speaker lay out all his strength in gazing at him, and moving his bowels and understanding? I used to think so—and have tried it more than once: it feels very pleasant, I can assure you."

"What of that? It's your business to humble these gentry— they're aristocracy in disguise, and borrow their cartmen's hats to come to public meetings in. No, no:" cried Hobbleshank with emphasis, "Do'nt you be caught in that trap. Do you pick out the dirtiest waistcoat in the audience, with the most cadaverous face in the room peering over it—pitch your eye upon the second button from the top, just where the proof of a lack of under−garments becomes overwhelming— and fire away. Your target's a poor scamp—the beggarliest in the house with an understanding like a granite rock, (needing the whole force of an incorporated company of metaphysicians to quarry and dress it)—and a select circle of acquaintance, among wharfingers, small boatmen and bean−eaters, near the market. That's your man. Dash your hair back from your brow, swing your arms, and do'nt spare flowers, knuckles, tropes and desk−lids."

By the time Hobbleshank had arrived at this division of his subject, he had reached—working himself along by

degrees— the extremity of the stall, and was standing on his toes, with his goggle eyes glaring over the partition at a melancholy personage—the very counterpart of his description— who sate on a stool by the fire, with his piece of hat drawn over his eyes, with one leg on the ground, and the other thrust under him on the seat.

"That's one of them," whispered Hobbleshank, casting an eye down at Puffer, and pointing with his finger over the partition. "No, it is'nt, after all, for there's the top of a book sticking out of his pocket. Our kidney don't know books."

Puffer Hopkins leaned out of the stall, and stretching himself forward, contemplated the object to which Hobbleshank directed him; but instantly drew back, and seizing his companion by the skirts, pulled him, almost by main force, into his seat.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake!" he said, as he bent forward and placed his mouth at the ear of Hobbleshank, "That's my poor neighbor, Fob, the tailor."

These brief words were delivered in such a way as if Puffer Hopkins expected their mere utterance would silence his companion, and cause an entire revolution in the feelings with which he had regarded the sorry creature before the pie−house fire.

"A poor tailor!" he echoed, "well, is that all?"

"Yes: that's all!" answered Hopkins.

"Nothing more?" asked Hobbleshank.

"Nothing more," replied Puffer Hopkins.

These questions were asked and answered, in tones that brought the conversation between them to a dead pause; at which it staid for a good many minutes: when Puffer Hopkins, rousing a little, asked "If that was'nt enough?"

At this moment the poor gentleman at the fire waked, heaved a great sigh, and taking an imperfect copy of a book from his pocket, and lifting his hat from his eyes, fell to perusing it with great earnestness; all of which interfered, very seriously, with any further conversation on his condition and prospects in life—so that after contemplating him steadily for several minutes, they thought proper to retreat to the previous subject of their discourse.

"You should'nt have dropped from the platform so suddenly," said Hobbleshank.

"I was through my speech," answered Puffer Hopkins, "and wished to get out of sight at once."

"Out of sight!" exclaimed his companion, as if unconscious of Puffer's presence, "What a fool the boy is. Why, sir, if you intend to be a politician—a thriving one I mean— you must keep yourself in view, like St. Paul's steeple, that frowns down on you, wherever you go through the city. Out of sight, indeed! You should have made a bow to the audience—wheeled about—seized the first adjacent hand on the stage—shook it with the utmost violence, smiling in the owner's face all the while, very pleasantly—and then planted yourself on a chair fronting the audience—hooked your elbows over the corner of the chair−top—smiling steadily on the populace, and leaving off, only, every now and then, to nurse your ruffle and pull down your wristbands."

"I'll endeavor to practice this next time," said Puffer, meekly.

"Do," said Hobbleshank, "And look to your costume, if you please. What do you mean by wearing this brown coat, and having your hair cut plain?"

"I don't know why I had my hair cut this way," answered Puffer, "but I wore the coat, because it was large in the sleeves, and allowed a wide spread of the arms when I came to the rainbow thus," and he expanded his arms after the manner of an arch, as he had, indeed, endeavored to do in the delivery of his speech, but was prevented, at the time, from the embarrassment of having to employ his handkerchief in clearing the sweet which oozed out in liquid drops on his forehead. "You recollect the simile?"

"Perfectly," answered Hobbleshank: "And don't station yourself next time, sir, on the lowest point of the platform— but stand forth in the centre, making wings of the six vices on either side of you, and compelling the anxious presiding officer directly behind you to stretch his neck around the skirt of your coat, and to look up in your face with painful eagerness to catch what you're saying, which always makes the audience, who have great confidence in the head of the meeting, very attentive. It's a grand stroke to make a tableau on any stage worthy of the biggest type on the showbills and here you have one of the very finest imaginable."

"But as to the orator's position," asked Puffer, "Do you think a public speaker is ever justifiable in standing on his toes?"

"In extreme cases, he may be," answered Hobbleshank, pondering, "But it's best to rise gradually with your hearers: and, if you can have a private understanding with one of the waiters, to fix a chair conveniently, a wooden−bottomed windsor, mind, and none of your rushers—for it's decidedly funny and destroys the effect, to hear a gentleman declaiming about a sinking−fund, or a penal code, or the abolition of imprisonment for debt, up to his belly in a broken chair−frame. As the passion grows upon you, plant your right leg on one of the rounds, then on the bottom, and finally, when you feel yourself at red−heat, spring into the chair, waive your hat, and call upon the audience to die for their country, their families and their firesides—or any other convenient reason." As Hobbleshank advanced in his discourse, he had illustrated its various topics by actual accompaniments: mounting first on his legs, then the bench, and ended by leaping upon the table, where he stood brandishing hisb roken hat, and shouting vociferously for more oysters.

No reply to this uproarious summons appearing, Hobbleshank thrust his head between the curtains, discovered that the tailor had vanished, and that the tall man was sitting against the chimney−piece with his legs stretched upon a stool, and sound asleep. He snatched up his hat, and hurrying toward the street, said he thought it was time to go.

As it had worn far into the heart of the night, Puffer Hopkins could not gainsay the postulate, and followed on. Hobbleshank keeping a little in advance, they rambled thus through many streets; the little old gentleman sometimes hurrying them forward at a gallop, and again subsiding into a slow, careful step—as if he kept pace with the heavy chimes that were sounding midnight from the town−clocks, or perchance, with thoughts that beat at his heart with a sharper stroke.

"Be constant, child," said he, as he was preparing to leave his companion, "in your visits to popular associations and gatherings: many a man is platformed and scaffolded by these committees and juntos, into the high places of the nation." He then told Hopkins where he could leave word for him, in case he should at any time require advice or assistance; said that, if he chose, he might be at Barrell's oyster−house the next evening, and he would wait upon him to one of these assemblages; and before Puffer Hopkins could answer one way or the other, he had disappeared from his side, and vanishing into a bye−street, was soon lost in the darkness.

It cannot be matter of wonder that Puffer made his way home with a head considerably bewildered and unsettled by the occurrences of the night. The great popular gathering; his own first speech; the thundering and tumultuous applause; and, what fastened itself with peculiar force upon his imagination, the voice and figure of the little old man, uttering pensive truths or shrewd observations, with the kindly interest he had expressed in himself from the first moment— all crowded upon him, and made him feel that he was in an actual world, where, if he would but bestir himself, fortune might prove his friend. The result of the whole was, that he determined to prosecute his career: and in furtherance of that determination, he resolved to meet Hobbleshank again; the last image that his mind distinctly recognized, ere it yielded to sleep, being that of the little paralytic, passing and repassing, at times dissolved in tears, and again, filling his chamber with the echoes of smothered laughter!

CHAPTER III. THE BOTTOM CLUB.

Punctual to his appointment with Hobbleshank, Puffer Hopkins, at a few minutes of seven o'clock the next evening, directed his steps towards Barrell's oyster−house, where in due time he arrived, and made discovery of one of the most singular little oyster−houses that could be found throughout the whole of oyster−eating Christendom. Mr. Jarve Barrell, it would seem, had, in the golden age of his career, been the proprietor of a large Public House, occupying an entire building and surrounded by his regiments of waiters and wine−bottles, whose services were clamorously and steadily demanded, by a mob of customers, from six in the evening until one, morning; in fact the poor man's head had been half−turned, by the pressure of a prosperous and growing business. But, somehow or other, oysters, one unlucky season, grew smaller, waiters more impudent for their pay, and custom walked out of that street into the next on a visit to a new landlord, who served his stews with silver spoons and his oysters in scollop−shells; so that poor Jarve Barrell was compelled, in spite of himself, to clip his wings and confine himself to a humbler cage: in a word, he rented his second floor to a boarding−house keeper, took in a barber at the rear of the first floor, and continued business on his own account in the front room of the same. A second decrease in the size of shell−fish, the opening of a street that carried travel in another direction, and Barrell was forced into that last stronghold of the oyster−man, the cellar; and there it was that Puffer Hopkins now found him, standing on one leg of his own and one that came out of a fine piece of oak woods at West Farms, a coarse white apron about his waist and a salamander in his countenance, declaring stoutly to a customer that although he had roughed it against the tide all his life, he was determined to have his own way in dying.

Being questioned as to the way to which he alluded, he proceeded to explain, that whenever he felt the approaches of death he should hire a White−haller to pull him over to Staten Island, cast anchor just above the richest bed in the shore, and giving one good deep plunge, said Jarve Barrell, I'll carry myself to the bottom, and stretching myself out on a picked oyster−bed, make up my mind to die; so with the tide rippling over my head, and a dozen or more pretty mermaids standing about me, I'll give up the ghost, and hold myself entitled to haunt the Bay and Island ever after, with a spruce ruffle of sea−weeds in my bosom.

Puffer Hopkins was well pleased with the joyous spirit of the decayed oyster−man, but had scarcely heard him through when he detected a quick clatter upon the steps, and turning, he discovered his singular companion of the previous night hurrying down. In a moment he had Puffer by the hand, and hailed his appearance with a sort of wondering enthusiasm as if it gave him great joy to find him there and to take him again in a friendly grasp. Hobbleshank interchanged a few words with Mr. Jarve Barrell as to the influence of certain recent enactments relating to oyster−beds upon his own trade and custom, to which Mr. Jarve Barrell gave very lucid and convincing replies, and they set out forthwith for the Bottom Club. This they were not long in finding, for Hobbleshank guiding Puffer rapidly through sundry dark alleys and bye−ways, for which he seemed to have a peculiar inclination, they reached a building in front of which a dusky lamp was glimmering, ascended two flights of stairs, and knocked at a low dingy door.

The door was opened from within, and Puffer advancing, with Hobbleshank in front, found himself in a long narrow room, with a plain pine table stretched through the centre, a forlorn−looking eagle, with a bunch of arrowy skewers in its talons and a striped flag about its head for a turban, two or three carpenters' benches along the walls, and the whole lighted by four sombre tallow twopennies at the farthest extremity.

Upon the table was planted a large earthen pitcher, with an emblematic toper with his leg cocked up, in a state of happy exaltation, displayed on the side thereof in white ware—and around the board were established a dozen individuals or more, constituting the chief force of the immortal Bottom Club.

The gentlemen of the Bottom Club, as they presented themselves at that moment to Puffer Hopkins, certainly furnished a remarkable spectacle; the most remarkable feature of which was, that all the large members of the Club, by some inscrutable fatality, were constrained and restricted in small hats and irksome jackets, while all the small members, by some equally potent dispensation, were allowed to revel in an unlimited wilderness of box−coat, petersham and tarpaulin. The delicate gentlemen wore great rough neck−stocks, and commanded huge iron snuff−boxes on the table: and the robust and muscular members assumed dainty black ribbons and elegant turn−down collars, with more or less ruffle crisping up under their broad heavy−bearded chins.

A thin, thoughtful gentleman, at one corner of the table, was enveloped in an overgrown vest, hideous with great red vines creeping all over it, and large enough to serve the purpose of a body coat: and confronting him, at an opposite corner, sate a stout omnibus−driver, making himself as comfortable as he could in a waistcoat, so many sizes too small, that it gaped apart like a pair of rebellious book−covers, and drew his arms into a posture that resembled not a little that of the wings of a great Muscovy gander prepared for the spit.

"We welcome you," said the pale thoughtful man, rising and extending his right hand toward Puffer as he advanced, while with his left he secured the sails of his great red vest, "We welcome you, Mr. Hopkins, to this association of brethren. In us you see exemplified the progress of Social Reform: we are wearing each others' coats and breeches in a simultaneous confusion, and, laboring under a passional excitement, we may yet ameliorate our condition so far as to undertake to pay each others' debts. We are subjecting ourselves to a great experiment for the benefit of mankind, the interests of the total race. You see what hardships we are undergoing"—he did, for at the mere mention of the thing, the whole Club wriggled in their ill−assorted garments like so many clowns in the very crisis of a contortion—"to test the principles of an ameliorated condition of things. Yet, sir, we are happy, very happy to see you here to−night: this spot on which you stand is consecrated to freedom of opinion; to the festival of the soul. This is no Musical Forest, no Hindoo Hunters' Hut, got up for effect at the amphi−theatre: we haven't trees here alive with real birds! the branches laden with living monkies! the fountains visited by long−legged Flamingoes! the greensward covered with Gazelles, grazing and sporting! Oh, no: we are a mere caucus of plain citizens, in our every−day dresses, sitting in this small room on rough benches to re−organize society, and give the world a new axle: that's all."

Hereupon the thoughtful gentleman sate down; the Club looked at each other and shook their heads, as much as to say, "This Chairman of ours, is, certainly, a born genius"; and Puffer and Hobbleshank were earnestly invited to the upper end of the board, where they could possess the immediate society of the intellectual president, with the convenient solace of the beer−pitcher. As soon as they were seated, and furnished with a draught from the earthen jug to make them feel at home, (a man always feeling most at home when his wits are abroad), the legitimate business of the Club proceeded with great spirit.

The first subject that was brought before them was, a general consultation as to the part the Club—the friends of Social Reform and a Re−organization of Society—should play in the approaching election of a Mayor for the City and County of New−York: something striking and decisive being always expected from the redoubted Bottom Club. One member hinted and proposed that there should be a general destruction of the enemy's handbills; which was amended so as to embrace a thrashing of the enemy's bill−stickers, wherever found; which was still further enlarged, so as to cover the special case of freighting a hostile bill−sticker's cart with building−stone and breaking a bill−sticker's donkey's back. The cutting of flag−ropes and sawing down of liberty−poles next came up, and passed promptly—a stout man in a small roundabout asseverating vehemently that the price of fire−wood should be brought down, if he staid up till midnight three nights in the week to accomplish the benevolent object. The Club then proceeded to preamble and resolve that they considered the liberty of the citizens of this metropolis in imminent danger, and that they would protect the same at the hazard of their lives: by which the Bottom Club meant, that they would hold themselves prepared to breed a riot at five minutes' notice, if found necessary to prevent a surplus of voters on the opposite side from enjoying the invaluable franchise of depositing their ballots. Two sturdy members belonging to the intellectual and highly refined fraternity of omnibus−drivers, next pledged themselves in the most earnest manner, to conduct their respective vehicles, at such time as might be most apposite, through the centre of any well−dressed crowd that might be in the neighborhood of the Poll, and also to indulge in such incidental flourishes of the whip on their way, as would inevitably persuade the gentry to stand back. As beer and brandy flowed through the Club—which they did with a marvellous depth and celerity of current—the tide of heady resolution deepened; and they at length, in their extreme heat and fervor, determined to throw off their coats to a man, and enjoy a regular breakdown dance about the table.

With wonderful alacrity they carried this judicious resolution into effect, by disrobing themselves of coats, shad−bellies and jackets, and casting them into a heap on a sailor's chest established under the eagle's wing. They then, hand in hand, Hobbleshank and Puffer Hopkins joining in, commenced capering in a circle, dashing down, first the right heel and then the left, with astonishing energy, and as if they were driving in the nails of the floor all

over again; meantime roaring out the tag−ends of a partizan song, which intimated that, They were the boys so genteel and civil, That cared not a straw for Nick nor the Devil: with other choice sentiments metrically stated. While they were immersed in this elegant recreation, a single gentleman—a member of the Club—who did not choose to partake thereof, sate apart indulging in his own profound cogitations. He was in many respects a peculiar personage, and seemed to enjoy a copy−right way of his own; which copy−right might have borne date as early as his birth and entrance into the world,— for Nature had given him a pale, chalky countenance, a sort of blank betwixt youth and age, a pair of knavish grey eyes, always turned upward, and a nose of the same class, which appeared most honestly to sympathize with them: he was of a small, shrunken figure, with a slight indication of a hump at the shoulders, long, thin fingers, and legs of a somewhat mis−shapen and imperfect character.

This singular little gentleman, as we said, sate apart indulging in his own thoughts; the purport of which appeared presently to be, a determination to investigate and scrutinize the pockets of the various coats, jackets and shad−bellies, which had been laid aside by the dancers, for to this task he now assiduously applied himself, and while his companions were enjoying themselves in their way, he enjoyed himself in his own way, by divesting them of such of their contents as suited his purposes, whatever they might be. In this general scrutiny it would have been an impeachment of his talents as an inquisitor to have charged him with neglecting the remotest corner or out−of−the−way borough of the apparel either of Hobbleshank or Puffer Hopkins.

Having accomplished this undertaking to his own satisfaction, he established himself at a side of the long table, planted a fur cap of great antiquity, after a drunken fashion, over his brows, dropped his head upon his folded arms, and devoted himself with great apparent zeal and sincerity, to the business of sleeping.

Meantime the gentlemen of the Bottom Club had wearied of their sport, and oppressed by beer and hard work, they dropped into their seats.

The pitcher went round, once, twice and thrice, and by this time they had attained an elevation of conduct and expression that was truly sublime to behold. The heavy−bearded man swore and laughed, and dashed his fist upon the table, with the uproar of half a dozen bakers at kneading time. The two omnibus−drivers, for some unknown, and at this remote period from the event, unconjecturable cause, entered solemnly into a set−to, in which much muscle and science were displayed, and which ended in a most fraternal embrace under the table.

A cadaverous thoughtful man—not the chairman—who was no talker but a wonderful deep thinker and metaphysician, grew mysterious and communicative, and hinted that he had that in the pocket of his swallow−tail which would raise a devil of a ferment if the public but knew of it.

A fifth associate of the Club, who still retained an insufficient hat planted jauntily on his head, thought it would be a capital idea—a very capital idea—a devilish first−rate idea in the way of a social re−organization—to get together a parcel of gilt steeple−balls, and hatch out a brood of young churches by clapping a bishop upon them.

Another gentleman was inclined to think that the Bottom Club had better mind its own business, by petitioning the Common Council to have jugglers appointed Inspectors of election, who could pass into the ballot−box two tickets for one on their own side, and no tickets for ever so many on the other.

A wide−mouthed member, the author of the ditty that had been sung, and clerk and bell−ringer to a neighboring market, became horribly sentimental, shed tears in his beer, and kissed his hand to the eagle at the other end of the room. As the entertainments were manifestly drawing to an end, Hobbleshank glanced warily towards Puffer Hopkins, and made for the door: but they were not let off so easily,—for simultaneous with the rising of Puffer Hopkins was that of the entire Bottom Club; and a general friendly assault was begun upon the person of that worthy young gentleman.

First, the gentlemen of the Club insisted on shaking hands all round toward the right, and then all round toward the left; one or two were resolved to embrace him, and did so; and at last, after the pantomime, there was an unanimous call for a speech from that gentleman, which summons was, however, without a discovery of the substitution on the part of the astute members of the Bottom Club, responded to by Hobbleshank after his own peculiar fashion, with a very happy allusion to the striped flag and the refreshments.

The unshorn man hoped Puffer Hopkins would come again, and vowed he was his friend to command, from the state of Maine to Cape May; and the metaphysical deep thinker, struggling manfully with the beer he had imbibed, promised next time to communicate something of vital consequence to the welfare of this Union: with

which promises, protestations and God−speeds, Hobbleshank and Hopkins departed.

CHAPTER IV. MR. FYLER CLOSE AND HIS CUSTOMERS.

It cannot be denied that Mr. Fyler Close had selected his lodgings with commendable thrift and discretion. A single small apartment over a bakery, and looking out upon a public pump, supplied him at the lowest current rate with the three primary necessaries of life; namely, warmth, from the bi−daily inflammation of the oven for the benefit of neighboring families—biscuits, the legitimate spawn of the oven— and water, the cheap creature of corporate benevolence. It could scarcely be expected that sundry fat spiders that kept their webs in the different corners of his room would be incorporated in any of the banquets of Mr. Fyler Close, although by many people they might have been regarded as a respectable addition thereto. With the exception of its inhabitants, the single small apartment was almost wholly void—there being no covering upon the floor, no curtains at the window, no paper upon the walls, and not the slightest semblance of a fire, past, present or future, on the deserted hearth−stone. To be sure, if you had opened a narrow door on one side, you might have detected in a cramped closet a pair of coverlids in which Mr. Close was in the habit of sheathing his meagre limbs every night, as a nominal protection against chilblains and rheumatism: while the door of the closet was carefully fastened and secured within, from a fear which the occupant somehow or other encouraged, that he should be roused some unlucky morning with a heavy hand on his throat, a big grim face bending over him, and his pockets all picked clean.

In the outer room stood a dilapidated candle−stand, covered with a tattered baize, with a battered inkstand and two stumpy pens lying upon the same; three chairs with decayed bottoms; and, in the corner of the hearth, a single long gloomy poker, with its head up the chimney.

The advantages of these commodious quarters were, at the present juncture, enjoyed by Mr. Fyler Close himself, who being a short, hard−visaged gentleman, in a great blue coat some three sizes too large for him, and a pair of ambitious trowsers that climbed his legs disdaining intercourse with a pair of low cheap−cut shoes, became the accommodations admirably. There was another, a long, spare personage, with a countenance so marked, and scarred, and written all over with ugly lines and seams, as to resemble a battered tomb−stone; and having old decayed teeth that disclosed themselves whenever he opened his mouth, the fancy of uncouth dry bones sticking out at the corner of a grave was still further kept up. There was something extremely sinister in the features of this individual, who sate in the nook between the closet and chimney−piece, and constantly glared about him, in a restless manner, as if the air swarmed wherever he looked with unusual sounds, and as if he caught sudden sight of faces by no means pleasant to look upon.

"I don't see that I could have managed my little monies much better," said Mr. Fyler Close, "unless I had locked them up in an iron safe, and buried the key under the walls of the house. There's only about four hours—and they're at dead midnight—when my debtors could slip away from me; and then they'd have to do it devilish cautiously, Leycraft, not to be heard. See, sir! I am in the very centre of all my investments, and have a watch on them like an auctioneer at the height of his sales. You see that yellow house? I make the owner keep his shutters open, because I have a mortgage on his piano—which I wouldn't lose sight of for the world."

"Quite an eye for music, I should think!" interposed his companion.

"And a pretty good ear, too," continued Mr. Close, "for if I should fail to hear my little blacksmith's hammer in the old forge, off this way, I should go distracted. It soothes me very much to hear that anvil ringing from early light down to broad dusk: and you can't tell what a comfort it is to me when I'm sick!"

"Is he punctual in his interest?" asked Mr. Leycraft, well knowing that the Fine Arts must be associated in Mr. Fyler Close's mind with some such disagreeable contingency.

"Exemplary, sir:—and when he falls sick and can't make a racket himself, he always sends round word and employs a couple of boys to keep it up, just to satisfy my mind. If the forge stopped for two days, I should be under the necessity of coming down on his shop with a sharp−clawed writ— which would be very painful."

"Excruciating, I should think," said Mr. Leycraft, smiling grimly; "It would give you a sort of moral rheumatism, I've no doubt!"

"You know it would!" rejoined Fyler Close, returning the smile. "Then here's the baker—he can't run away

without my smelling the fresh loaves as they go into the cart: and the haberdasher over the way in front, couldn't escape me unless she undertook to dress up all her male acquaintance in ruffles and false bosoms, and let them out through the alley. That might do, but I guess she isn't up to it: since she lost her husband she's gone a little weak in the head, and pays an extra cent on the dollar when she is borrowing from Mr. Fyler Close."

"These are small gains and slow ones," said Mr. Leycraft, "You might sit on spiders' eggs like these for a century, and not hatch out a fortune. Let's have something bold and dashing—something where you put in no capital and double it to boot in less than a week!"

"Something modelled on the Farm−house affair, eh?" said Fyler Close, leering on his companion significantly.

"Will you let that subject alone, if you please, Mr. Fyler Close!" cried Mr. Leycraft, whose countenance darkened and lowered on his companion as he spake. "We have had talks enough about that cursed house, and one too many. I wish the title−deed was in the right owner's hands!"

"You do—do you?" urged Mr. Close, pleasantly. "Shall I ask Mrs. Hetty Lettuce, the market−woman, when she comes here next to pay the rent or renew her mortgage, if she can't find him for us? Perhaps if we paid her well she might relieve us of the property, and provide a very gentlemanly owner in our place. Shall we advertise—offer rewards— post placards? I've no doubt if the purlieus of the city were well−dragged, that an heir would turn up."

"Stuff! Fyler Close, you know well enough that an heir couldn't be brought alive off either one of the five continents that could make good his claim: and that makes you chuckle so like a fiend. Mrs. Lettuce has lost trace of him for more than twenty years—has grown fat and lazy—borrows money on bond and mortgage, and don't care a straw about the subject:"—

"Where's your grand project all this time?" interposed Fyler Close. "Shall we have something new to practice our wits on, or shall we rake among our dead schemes for wherewithal to warm our brains with?"

"Now that you are on that," said Mr. Leycraft, rapidly surveying the nooks and privacies of the apartment, and bestowing a broad glare on the door and windows, "I say freely and without the lest reserve, that my head's a nine−pin if I don't lay a plan before you will make you thrill down to your pocket−ends with rapture: it's a neat scheme—very neat,—but at the same time mighty magnificent."

Saying this, Leycraft drew close up to the side of the broker, laid their heads close together, and bending over the stand, he moved his finger slowly in a sort of hieroglyphic over it, and tapping his forehead complacently, was about to detail his notable plan, when a knock was heard at the door, which cut short any further communication for the present.

The knock was repeated a little louder; Fyler Close motioned to his companion, who vanished expeditiously down a pair of back−stairs into the yard, looking anxiously back all the time as if under pursuit, and so through the baker's; and Close, snatching from his pocket a well−worn Hymn−book, began reciting a most excellent passage of psalmody, in a deep and nasal intonation.

The knock was repeated three or four times before an invitation was given to enter; and although the broker glanced over the top of his book as the door opened and discovered his visitor, he assumed not to be conscious of the presence of any person whatever, but proceeded steadily, in fact with rather increased energy, in his capital divertisement. "Please, sir," said the visitor, a stout−built lady, curtsying and advancing timidly a step or two, "Please sir,—what's to be done about the little mor'gage on my grounds, sir?"

This question Fyler Close seemed at first altogether unable to apprehend, but when it was repeated, accompanied by a slight jingle of silver in the visitor's pocket, he started, deposited his book open upon the stand—as if he wished to resume it at the very earliest convenience—looked about him, and pensively remarked, twitching his whiskers, of which there was a dry tuft on either cheek, violently,

"Poor old man!—There's no comfort left for you now, but psalm−singing and class−meetings every other evening in the week. These are old chairs, madam!"

"They certainly are; Mr. Close; very old. There's no denying facts," answered the huckster.

"This is a dreadful dreary room for an old man to live in!" again groaned the broker.

"Sartain!" responded the unwary market−woman, "I think in that point, to do you justice, it's but next better than a family vault, saving the death's heads and the smell."

"And now you ask me, a poor lonesome man, living like Death himself, as you admit, and that can afford to keep no better company than three poor crazy chairs, to renew your mortgage at seven per cent!—why, a cannibal, with good cannibal feelings, wouldn't ask it!"

Mr. Close, on delivery of this speech, fell silent, and dropped into a profound meditation, during which he from time to time looked up and eyed the stout person of the huckster as if he thought it would furnish a most delicate morsel for a Carribee. But his own method of devouring a victim differed essentially from that adopted by the benighted heathen, and he now proceeded to demonstrate his dexterity in his own particular line of manipulation.

"Well, you shall have it!" he cried, awaking as from an anxious reverie: "I have considered it—your business shall be done, Mrs. Lettuce."

"Thank you, sir, thank you, sir! I am very much obliged," exclaimed the market−woman, bowing and curtsying with great show of gratitude, but misapprehending slightly the meaning of Mr. Fyler Close, and promising the accruing interest in hard dollars, punctually on quarter−day.

"But I must have my summer supply of radishes!" said lose.

"Oh, for the trifle of that, Master Close—we'll not differ. I can send you down a bunch or two by the girls, every now and then."

"Every now and then will not do, madam:—I must have them regularly, for I can't live without putting a few for sale, in the season of them, at the baker's window, below stairs."

"Well, I don't mind a handful of greens in the way of binding a bargain; so the cart shall stop every morning, if you please, and leave you a dozen bunches."

"Very good, very good," exclaimed the broker, rubbing his hands together, "you are a woman of sense;—and now, I must have my asparagus, that's a dainty herb—I love asparagus dearly—and it sells well when it's early. Mind, I must have early tops, or none at all! Pick me the tops that grow near the house, close up by the foundations, will you?"

Early tops, and such as he desired, were accordingly promised, perforce: Mrs. Hetty Lettuce diving convulsively into her pockets to make sure of such small change as she had about her, as every thing appeared to be slipping away from her ownership with extraordinary velocity and despatch.

"I'll not ask you," continued the discriminating Mr. Close, "to supply me with butter nor with eggs, although something nice might be done with them through my neighbor below— but eggs are quite apt to addle on hand, and butter must be kept in ice, which costs two−pence a pound, and melts without leaving as much as a thank−ye in your pocket."

"Your sentiments are very excellent, sir, on that subject," said Mrs. Lettuce, brightening up.

"Yes, they are very excellent; but you'll think them far nicer on the subject of good worsted stockings made with your own dainty hands, three pair for winter use—I should have three pair at least—and as many more for fall: you know we must guard against frosts and chilblains a little; made with low tops, with red clocks to show they are your fabric,—one of the sweetest knitters in the market."

With this he fell back quietly in his chair, and reminding Mrs. Lettuce that he should expect his first pair of fall socks Wednesday week, he wished her good day; which wish Mrs. Lettuce was by no means idle in accepting, for her departure was in fact accomplished with such expedition as to amount almost to a precipitate flight. At this we cannot be greatly astonished, when we consider the chance of a requisition being made upon her to furnish the entire outfit and wardrobe of the broker, by way of lightening his doleful condition and eking out the percentage of his mortgage.

As soon as Mrs. Lettuce had departed, the broker ascended a chair, and after careful inspection of an old chest in his closet, and making discovery of a single pair of fragmentary hose and an old stocking, he said, laughing to himself. "This merchandize of the old market−woman's must go into the hands of Ishmael; that's clear. Nights are growing sharper; a little, a very little wood, must be laid in; and where fires are kept, socks should be discountenanced." He had just stepped down from this inquisition, when a sharp rap echoed through the hall, and without waiting for a summons to enter, the strange old body, Puffer Hopkins' friend, marched abruptly into the apartment, with a very peremptory and threatening aspect.

"I have come again!" said the old gentleman, sternly.

"I see you have," replied Mr. Fyler Close, smiling on him with all the suavity and mellowness of an August

day.

"Do you see that I am here?" continued Hobbleshank.

"Most assuredly—unless you are an apparition; and then you are here and not here, at the same time," answered the broker.

"If I were a goblin, sir—come in here with a thong of leather to strip you to your skin and stripe you all over with blows—would I be out of place, do you think?"

"Perhaps not much: a little, we'll say a little," answered Mr. Close, still smiling gently on his visiter, "Just to balance the sentence."

"And then if I carried your bruised old carcase," continued Hobbleshank, "and plunged it in a gulf of boilingfire, and held it there by the throat for a century, or so—would it be pleasant and satisfactory?"

"Extremely so," answered the broker; "Nothing could be desired more charming: unless it might be a bond on compound interest, with the interest payable at twelve o'clock, daily."

"That would be finer, you think?"

"Much finer—because that would leave one the use of his legs to get out of troubles with."

"Now, sir," said Hobbleshank, who always made it a point to subject the broker to a searching and playful cross−examination— the answers to which, as has been seen, on the part of the broker, were always extremely candid and confiding, "Now, sir, I want to know of you, whether you think a gentleman who has stood by and seen a man's wife die by inches in the veriest need of common food—has seen the man go mad—yes, mad, sir—with grief, and rush from his house in utter despair and misery—do you think this gentleman, who, when he has put the child and heir of these poor wretches out of the way—God knows how—takes the roof that should have sheltered his boy's head—do you think he deserves the use of his legs? or his cursed griping hands? or his great devilish eyes?"

"Not at all—by no means, my dear sir," answered Fyler Close, blandly. "It would be waste and extravagance to allow such a monster any thing, but his neck: you know he might hang by that!"

"Suppose you had'nt conveniences to hang him with— no tackle—no scaffold—no murderer's cap," continued Hobble shank, "and could'nt persuade the gentleman to lend his neck to a noose—what then?"

"What then?—I confess I should be at a stand:— The case stands thus, if I apprehend you, my dear sir," answered Mr. Close, with the same astonishing equanimity. "Here's a great villain to be punished; the law can't reach him, he won't consent to be strung up without law, and declines— is it so?—positively declines to come into any friendly arrangement to be burned or bastinadoed: what's to be done? Upon my honor, my good sir, I must allow the knave has the better of you. I am sorry for it: extremely sorry, but the ways of Providence are just, very just, and I guess you'll have to wait for them."

As Mr. Close uttered these words he assumed a benign and tranquil expression of countenance, and looked serenely forward into empty space, as if it was a hardship, a very great hardship, that such a case should exist, but that it was his duty, as an exemplary citizen, to resign himself to it without a murmur. In this seeming quietude of feeling Hobbleshank scarcely shared.

"What's to be done?" he shouted, darting forward toward the broker. "His ugly flesh is to be torn with sharp nails, like pincers; his head's to be broken, where these maggots hatch—wretch!"

But ere he could fasten upon the broker, and exemplify his notions of punishment, that gentleman, who had been warily watching his visiter all through the interview, dropped from his chair, glided athwart the candle−stand, and throwing himself into the adjoining closet, secured it from within.

Having rehearsed this performance many times before, in previous interviews with his visiter, Mr. Fyler Close achieved it at present with marvellous dispatch. For a few minutes, Hobbleshank made furious assaults upon the broker's fortress, with his feet and clenched fists, which he dashed violently against the panels; all of which proceedings were echoed from within by a hard, iron laugh, that almost set Hobbleshank beside himself. From time to time the laughter continued, and the rage of the old man increased, until at length, in his extremity of passion, he snatched up the single piece of furniture—the prime ornament of the apartment— dashed it in fragments upon the hearth, kicked open the outer door, and rushed almost headlong into the street.

Mr. Fyler Close had no sooner heard his retreating steps than he quietly unearthed himself, and stepping along the hall of the building, hoisted a window in front, and putting forth his head, watched with considerable interest the form of Hobbleshank as it was whirled along by the rage and desperation of its owner, without much regard to

children, fish−mongers—with which the street swarmed—wheelbarrows, or ladies in full dress. He then tranquilly gathered the remains of his writing−table, tied them in a bundle with a string, and placing them tenderly in the corner, produced from an upper shelf of his closet stronghold a single sea−biscuit, and proceeded to his evening meal.

CHAPTER V. THE AUCTION ROOM.

Anxious to become familiar with the people in their assemblies and public gatherings—to learn how crowds are excited and assuaged, and made to do the bidding of cunning men: how that which would be folly and sheer madness with one, may, practised upon many in a confused mass, take the hue of profoundest wisdom and justice: and having at heart withal the suggestions of his strange old friend of Fogfire Hall, Puffer Hopkins now made it a point to haunt meetings and congregations of every sort, anniversaries, wharf crowds and lectures, and to detect how the Leviathan populace is snared in a fair net of silvery words and pleasant speeches.

At the lower extremity of the great thoroughfare of Chatham Street, just below the theatre, lies an oblong deep shop, into which is drawn, between the hours of seven and nine, evening, a portion of the metropolitan life, where it is kept raging and fuming—pent up in a close mass—and struggling with the black−haired demon of the place. The genius of the oblong warehouse is none other than a gloomy looking auctioneer, who hangs over a counter fixed on a raised platform, calling on the individuals before him—who are chiefly clerks, news−boys, journeymen and innocent gentlemen from the country—to sustain him in his disinterested desire to advocate the elegance of binders, the instructive and entertaining qualities of authors, and the gorgeous genius of colorists, engravers and paper−rulers.

This gentleman is ably sustained and seconded, in the performance of these arduous duties, by a sable−haired associate, who makes it his business to stroll cheerfully up and down the enclosed space behind the counter, rubbing his hands from time to time, as in token of internal satisfaction at the success of their joint efforts, and dashing down upon the counter such wares as a sagacious glance at his audience satisfies him are most likely to be competed for.

On some occasions, one or other of the black−haired gentlemen behind the counter condescends to be facetious, and says remarkably funny things for the special benefit and solace of the citizens underneath: this department properly belongs to the auctioneer, but is incidentally filled by the feeder, with such chance morsels of humor as may suggest themselves to him as he rambles to and fro.

Into this oblong region of sale, as one of the resorts where his plans might be furthered, Puffer one evening made his way.

"Gentlemen," cried the black−haired auctioneer with increased animation as Puffer Hopkins entered; discovering perhaps in the peculiar costume and manner of that excellent young gentleman some indications of a melo−dramatic tendency: "Gentlemen, here's the primest article I've offered to−night: this is `Brimstone Castle,' a native melo−drama, as performed one hundred nights at the Bowery Theatre, Bowery, New York. The hero of this piece, gentlemen, is a regular salamander, and could take out a policy in any company in this city at a low hazard: he 's fire−proof. In the first act, he appears sitting on a log, meditating; is suddenly surprised and taken by a band of savages of a redochre complexion, from whom he escapes by ruthlessly cutsting off the right leg of every mother's son of them—rushes over a bridge—rescues a lady with dishevelled hair and a small boy in her hand, climbs up a cataract, waives his cap to the rescued lady, loses his appetite, and is finally re−taken by the savages, and burnt at the stake for an hour—when he walks out of the flame, advances to the foot−lights, and, with a very cheerful smile on his countenance, announces `Brimstone Castle' for the next twelve nights, with an extra savage and fresh faggots every night. How much gentlemen? Going, going. How much? It 's a master−piece, gentlemen—a perfect work of art. How much?"

The melo−drama was bandied about for more than a quarter of an hour among sundry young gentlemen in round−crowned hats, with sleek shining heads of black hair and broad−skirted blue coats, but finally fell to the lot of a bidder with a stout voice, just one of those voices that are irresistible in an auction−room, and a terror to gentlemen that desire cheap purchases.

"I now offer you," cried the auctioneer, "one of the most astonishing and wonderful works of the present day. It's full of thought, gentlemen, expressed in the very happiest words *out* of Todd's Johnson and Noah Webster, as clear as a moonbeam, gentlemen, and profound as the Atlantic. It treats of various subjects, such as"—here the auctioneer turned the pages of the book in his hand rapidly, after the manner of a quarterly Reviewer, with the hope of gleaning a comprehensive knowledge of its contents, but, judging by the face of ineffable despair he

assumed after thrusting his nose half a dozen times between the leaves, with little success. "Excuse me," he continued, smiling sardonically on his audience; "It would be presumptuous in me, a plain, unlearned citizen, to undertake to convey to your minds the substance of a volume like this. Gentlemen, I'll read you a passage from the `Introduction,' which explains itself. `Ponds have presented turtles in two aspects; either as turtles or as not turtles. In the one, turtle, the living, breathing, air−cased creature, the individual in his pneumatic being, sitting on a rock pond−centred, is mighty, supernal, vastly infinite—more than frogdom at bottom, blind eel or muscle life: not he theirs, or for them, but they nothing save for him. Outward world—to them, mud−encompassed—otherwise dead, as door−nail: in the other, slidden from pond−centred rock down to the depths of the unsearchable (pond?) frogdom, blind eel and muscle life—each more than turtle; he theirs—being thick−headed, obfuscated by lack of light and doltish—and for them, he little or nothing save a black lump, part of the general pond−bottom, pavement, chips, wind, gas, snake−grass and bulrushes.'"

It need scarcely be added that the lucid work on which the auctioneer was engaged, was nothing more nor less than a volume of Transcendental lectures. Puffer Hopkins detected the same burly voice bidding for this—and triumphing in its bid—that he had heard twice before.

At this juncture a member of the great fraternity of laybishops— in other words, a very worthy cartman in his short frock—came in, and supposing, from the few words that he caught as he entered, that the work in hand was illustrative of some new and improved method of "bobbing for eels," was rash enough to invest seven shillings in the purchase of a second copy. Paying his money very awkwardly at the counter—out of a blind−pocket in his cartfrock— he carried his purchase to a lamp in another quarter of the auction−room, and proceeded very slowy and painfully to enlighten himself on the favorite pursuit of eel−bobbing. He bobbed, however, in that pond to very little purpose—and becoming confused and horribly enraged at the constant recurrence of the phrases a "oneness," an "obscure and unreachable infinite," "divergence towards central orbits," and "revolutionary inwardnesses,"—intemperately sold it (for six cents and a fraction) to a match−boy, who stood by with a basket ready to catch such purchases as might prove unavailable or disrelishing to the buyers. "There's an acre of fog−bank there, boy," said the cartman from between his teeth, "take it away. My horse has a better head for writings, and authorships, and what not, than the stupid journeyman fellow that spoked this wheel together. Just away with it."

"If there's a patriot in the room," continued the salesman, "a single young or middle−aged gentleman that loves his country and the story of her achievements—let him come forward and lay down his one dollar fifty. I offer you, gentlemen, the `Battle of Bloody Puddle,' a narrative poem, in six books. This master−piece of genius has nine heroes—each one of whom accomplishes more in the way of slaughter, swordsmanship and small−talk, from various elevations, peaks, cliffs and hill−tops, than any nine heroes ever let loose on the world before. The stanza is irregular, to correspond with the thought, which is very wild and super−human. The chief hero—the A. No. 1,—pattern warrior, is discovered by moonlight sharpening his sword on a boulder of granite, in two nimble−foot octosylabic stanzas —he loses his scabbard and temper in four Spenserian— entering a cave to conceal himself from the bloody British foe—who are tracking him about like dogs, in twenty−five hexameters—but recovers both in an eleven−syllabled song; in which he grows very happy about wine, war and woman— particularly Isobel the fair—until, all at once, he discovers a cloud on the moon; which reminds him to prepare for a few elegiac verses and death. He ultimately hangs himself in a hemlock sapling, and leaves his pocket−book—with a counterfeit bill and some forged letters in it—to his Isobel; bidding her, in a brief touching epistolary farewell, never to part with these relics of his affection—never, never! which it is'nt very likely she ever will: particularly the counterfeits. The rest of the poem corresponds; how much, how much? Cheap—going cheap—as politicians' consciences, a penny a dozen. It's yours, sir, at twenty−five cents. It's perfectly ruinous to sell this work at that price," sighed the auctioneer, wheeling round and stoically receiving from his assistant a bundle of two dozen more of the same.

There was something in the voice of the bidder who had borne off the chief purchases of the evening, that excited the curiosity of Puffer Hopkins; he thought he had heard it before, and, to ascertain the owner, now mounted a bench, and peered over the heads of the audience towards the quarter whence it had issued.

In a remote angle of the auction room, apart from the crowd, in a little domain of his own, stood a square, broad−breasted gentleman, with his arms folded and gazing at the auctioneer with a fixed and intense look, that

could not have been readily surpassed by a Spanish inquisitor, or a petty justice reproving a constable. The fury of his demeanor was heightened by the close buttoning of his coat, to the very throat, the inflation of his coat skirts with a thick bundle of newspapers and a large bandanna handkerchief, the strapping of his pantaloons firmly down upon the boot, and still further, by his being a gentleman of moderate stature, in whom, it is well known, fierceness is natural and quite becoming. It was this gentleman that bid for the melo−drama, the poem of Bloody Puddle, and the volume of Transcendental Lectures; and now that he had attained a full view of his person, Puffer felt quite sure that he knew him. Pushing through the mass of bidders, he reached the little Zahara which this gentleman's frowns and dignity had created for himself.

"Mr. Fishblatt—I think," said Puffer, respectfully contemplating the figure before him.

"The same, sir," responded the broad−breasted gentleman, starting back a pace or two, dropping his brows, and regarding the questioner steadily for a minute or more. "You are one of our speakers I believe," continued Mr. Fishblatt, still maintaining his survey, "one of the oratorical youth of Fogfire Hall—am I right?

"You are," answered Puffer Hopkins: "I had the honor of speaking before you at the last general meeting; you were a Vice−President."

"What!" cried Mr. Fishblatt, in an earnest whisper, "you are not the young gentleman that used the simile of the rainbow? On my soul you are; don't blush, my dear sir, and turn every color in a minute, for that convicts you at once. I'm glad to see you: it 's quite a treat. Take my hand, Mr. Hopkins."

Hereupon Mr. Fishblatt took possession of Puffer Hopkins' right hand, shook it strenuously, and then turning to the auctioneer on service, said:

"That man 's worthy to be a Quarterly Reviewer. He 's a Jeffrey, a Babbington Macaulay, sir; an Edward Everett, with the devil in him. He tells books by the smell of the leather. And see how daintily he holds an annual up, as a fishmonger does a bass by the tail, so as to send the circulation to the head, and give the eyes a life−like look. Don't he play on the leaves and illustrations like a musical genius? See, my good sir, how he displays that volume with colored plates; it 's like a glimpse into the fall woods. This is the shop for sound criticism; writers that are disdainfully treated in the weeklies and monthlies, need'nt be afraid to come here; if they're hacked and hewed so that their best friend could'nt know them, all they need do is to huddle themselves into a coarse blue−cloth apparel, and throw themselves before that black−haired gentleman; and they'll have a blast sounded in their behalf that will bring every two and six pence in the place rattling on the counter."

While the broad−breasted gentleman was engaged elaborating this artful encomium on his friend, the auctioneer had produced a huge bundle of controversial tracts and almanacs, black with wood−cuts, and dashed them upon the counter with great spirit; at which Mr. Fishblatt started, again grasped Hopkins by the hand, gave him the street and number of his residence, and urged him to call speedily.

"You can't mistake the house; it 's a red front, with tall chimney−pots—grenadier pots we call them—and a slab of brass on the door, with `Halsey Fishblatt' in large text. Any of the hackmen on the Square can direct you, for they can all read my plate as they stand, nearly two rods off. Come soon!"

Pouring out his passages of description and invitation vehemently, Mr. Fishblatt gave Puffer a strenuous good−night— advanced and threw his card upon the counter, and thrusting his right hand into the breast of his coat, marched out of the auction room with great vigor and self−possession.

Now that the chief bidder, who had held the room in awe by his peremptory and majestic manner of calling the price, had departed, the minor customers immediately swelled into consequence, and a horrible conflict was forthwith engendered betwixt the match−boy—whose imagination always kindled at the slighest suggestion of a goblin; a small retail clerk, who had sympathies with coffins and family vaults, as he slept every night in an unwholesome and gravelike cabin at the rear of the dry−goods shop; and a broken−down gentleman—a speculator in cemeteries—who was on the look out for information on sepulchral subjects.

"Here's a rare morsel for you, my lads," said the auctioneer, whose style grew more familiar on the departure of the majestic Fishblatt: "a dainty mouthfull, I can tell you. `*The Vision of the Coffin−maker's 'Prentice*—a story in manuscript— never published.' It 's a copyright, boys: as good as new in first hands. It 's said the author starved to death, because the publishers would'nt buy his book; they could import goblins and bugbears cheaper than they could be grown on the spot." "The biggest bugbears always come from abroad," said the feeder, pausing a moment from his rambles— facing the audience, and laying both hands on the counter. "Come, bid up—will ye? Don't go to sleep, if you please, in that corner. Others say the author choked himself with a

chicken−bone—nobody believes that. Poets and poultry have never been on good terms, that I could learn. Will the band be good enough to strike up!"

"Sixpence—there 's a dodge," cried the match−boy.

"I'll go nine," said the retail clerk. "That's a more superlative go, I know."

"Nine and one," cried the match−boy, reddening in the face, and glancing spitefully at the retail bidder.

"No penny bids in this shop," interposed the auctioneer, authoritatively. "Try again, gentleman—yours, twelve and a half—twelve and a half!"

This last was the bid of the cemetery speculator.

"Twelve and a half. Fifteen, fifteen, fifteen—one and nine." The bids ran on; the auctioneer chanced to turn the volume toward Puffer Hopkins, who discovered at the side of one of the pages, a pen−and−ink drawing of a stout gentleman, standing in a coffin, with his right arm outstretched as if on the point of beginning a speech. Not knowing but that this might be some new exercise in oratory, and seeing at once the facilities for the pathetic afforded by a snug−built coffin, Puffer entered the field, and overtopping all competition by a half−dollar bid, paid the purchase money in silver—which it employed him some ten minutes to hunt into a corner of his pocket and secure—and bore it away.

In less than a quarter of an hour, he was at his own room in the Fork; had called in his poor neighbor, the tailor, and by the light of a dim candle, (snuffers not being within the appointments of his establishment), entered upon the perusal of his new−bought story.

The manuscript was bound in a black linen cover, worn threadbare and ragged by much handling; was ornamented with rude drawings of cross−bones and tombstones, with quaint inscriptions on the margin; and the leaves were spotted in various places, and the ink faded, as if many burning tears had fallen on the page.

CHAPTER VI. THE VISION OF THE COFFIN−MAKER'S 'PRENTICE.

"What was more natural than that the thoughts of Sam Totton, the coffin−maker's 'prentice, should be running on death's heads and grinning skulls, and damp, dark vaults, deep down in the earth; with now and then a cheerful feeling of the pleasantness of country church−yards, with tomb−stones interspersed among sweet−scented apple−trees, and rich green palls of bright meadow−grass spreading over the grave. Now and then, too, he might think of ghosts releasing themselves from the grave, and taking a night's ramble, and whistling down tall chimnies in cities, or glaring in, with great cold eyes, at farm−house windows, and frightening the quiet circle at the fireside with a dread token of death near at hand, or some heavy evil about to burst on the unlucky house. By the hour would the young 'prentice sit in tke undertaker's shop, meditating on the sorry chances of life; the wonderful demand for coffins in the summer months, and the strange world into which many merry stout gentlemen, and joyous ladies, would ere long be transported, screwed close down in the cruel coffins that stood in a grim row before him.

"Some he knew would stretch themselves quietly at length, and fall asleep; others would fight and wrestle, like very demons, ere they could be brought to bear to be shut down and cabined in forever; and others again, in whom life was furious, and not to be readily extinguished, would smite and dash their deadly hands against the coffin−lid, and would cry out, in voices stifled in the damp thick clay, to be freed.

"With this turn of mind, the 'prentice was sitting one night in the shop, on an undertaker's stool, and watching the various shadows that came through the door, as the August sun settled in the sky. Now the shadow would flit in at one coffin, filling it only breast−high; then shifting itself, it would take entire possession of a child's, that stood next; and so flitting past, from one to the other, it brought into Sam's mind the thought how these coffins would one day be tenanted, and what manner of people it might be that should be laid in the coffins that stood about him—large and small—and how soon they would all be filled and borne silently away.

"The thought had scarcely formed itself in Sam's mind, when the shop−bell was rung very gently—a glass door that was between him and the street was opened, and a figure, more wo−begone, wretched and disconsolate than he had ever before beheld, presented himself, and paused for a moment, just long enough for the 'prentice to take note of his appearance. His eyes were wild, and sunken far behind pale, ghastly, hollow cheeks, in which there was no drop of blood; his head was without covering of any sort, except a shock of uncombed, matted hair, and he limped sadly forward on disproportioned, infirm legs, in scanty apparel, and with an apologetic appeal in his looks to the young 'prentice, shambled away into a remote corner of the shop, and planted himself as nearly upright and with as great show of decorum as he could, in a cheap pine coffin that stood by itself.

"Sam felt strongly inclined to enter into conversation with the Poor Figure, and to learn by what chances it had been brought into that lean and melancholy beggary. Ere he could do this, the door was pushed forcibly open, and a portly personage entered, and stalking across the shop with great dignity and majesty of bearing, proceeded to an inspection of the coffins; going close up to them, examining nicely the grain of the wood—yea, even smelling of it, and turning away with an air of vast disdain whenever it proved to be cedar or baywood—the quality of the muslin and the action of the hinges. After turning up a majestic nose, discolored slightly by the use of wine or table−beer, at two−thirds of the undertaker's assortment, the portly gentleman at length pitched upon a magnificent tabernacle of mahogany, with fine rolling hinges, that could'nt jar on his delicate ear when he should come to be fastened in, and an enormous silver−plate, with a chased border of cheerful flowers, that took away the very appearance of death. Having concluded to occupy this tenement, the portly gentleman proceeded to take possession, and with great difficulty crowded himself into the coffin; forgetting, however, to put off his hat, which remained fixed on his head in a very sturdy and consequential position; and there he stood, bolt−upright, staring at the young 'prentice, as if it was his determination to chill him into an icicle. Sam was, however, not so easily over−awed, but on the contrary felt greatly inclined to burst into a good hearty laugh at the comic figure the nice portly gentleman made in his dainty brass−hinged mahogany coffin.

"As he turned away his eyes, they encountered a spectacle which came nigh changing their merry humor to tears— for a sweet lady, all in white, floated gently past him; of a fair, meek demeanor, and bearing in either hand two little children, a boy and girl, whose faces ever turned toward the lady's with an expression of intense and

tender regard. Clinging to her with a firm grasp, they glided by, and tried at first to find rest in one coffin together, which proving ineffectual, they chose coffins neighboring to each other, and quietly assuming their places, they stood calm and patient, as if death had fallen kindly upon them; the two children turning reverently toward their dear mother, and hanging on her pale sweet look with passionate constancy.

"Directly in the steps of these visiters, there entered a personage, who, judging from the dotted apparel in which he presented himself, might have been the ghost of some black−spotted card or other, come to take a hand with Sam's master, who was greatly addicted to the sport and entertainment of whist−playing. However this might be, the new−comer entered with a couple of somersets, turned about when he had reached the centre of the shop, took off his piebald cap, and made a leg to Sam, and then scrambled into a coffin directly opposite that of the portly gentleman.

"For a long time these two personages stood regarding each other; the one grinning and hitching up his leg, as if he felt the irksomeness of confinement; and the other, with a solemn look of consequence and self−importance, determined the very grave itself should not get the better of him.

" `This is pleasant!' said the portly gentleman, at length, with a slight tone of irony and condescension, to his neighbor, the clown.

" `Very, but not so airy as the ring!' answered the merryandrew.

" `Nor as snug as a corporation pantry, with a cut of cold tongue between two debates,' returned the portly gentleman. `But then it has its advantages. No taxes, mind that, (those tax−gatherers used to be the torment of my life), no ground−rents, poor−rates; no beggar's ding−ding at the front−door bell.'

" `But consider,' responded the clown, `tho' we lodge in a cellar, as it were, a good under−ground, six steps down, where are the oysters and brandy? Did that occur to you?'

" `I confess it did not,' said the portly gentleman, slightly staggered, `but I was thinking now what a choice storage this would be for half a gross of tiptop champagne, with the delicate sweat standing on the outside of the bottles.'

" `There's no room for a somerset here, either,' said the clown.

" `Nor to deliver a speech in,' answered the portly gentleman. "See, I could'nt stretch out my right arm half its length, to make even my first gesture; rather a cramped, close place, after all.'

" `Vanities! vanities!' cried the Poor Figure, from his distant coffin, unable to suppress his feelings any longer. `Cramped and close is it! It's paradise compared to the dark, damp dungeons on the earth, where the living body is pent up in dreary walls, and the cheerful light of day comes in by stealth through grim bars. When the world moves past the poor prisoner's window without a look of recognition; when no man's hand takes his in a congenial grasp— is that life, d'ye say? He is dead—I tell you, dead!' cried the Poor Figure, in a voice of piercing agony, `as if the marble slab was laid upon his breast, and the grave−diggers piled mountains upon his corse!'

" `Many's the jolly time,' resumed the portly gentleman, without much heed to the Poor Figure's declamation, `we've had at city suppers. How tenderly the turkey's breast—bought by the commonalty, purchased by the sweat of the hard−worked million—yielded to the shining knife. How sweetly the popular port−wine, and the public porter, glided down the throat. Choice times were those, my good sir, when the city paid the hackman's fare for dainty rides to the suburbs, and when we made the poor devil paupers stand about us licking their thin chaps, while we rolled the rich morsels under our tongues. But now,' he added in a rather melancholy tone, `I am little better than one of the heathen. I smell nothing but the musty earth; my gay apparel is falling piecemeal into doleful tatters, and I can get nothing to chew upon but an occasional mouthful of black mould, that sadly impedes digestion, if one had any digestion, in such a place as this worth speaking of.

" `Think but of one thing, sir,' said the clown, with an uneasy movement in his coffin, `and you cannot fail to be content. Where are the duns in this new empire of ours? We are as inaccessible to the vile creatures as the crown of an ice−berg. Why, sir, there was a poor wretch of a collector that haunted me for a vile debt of twenty−two and sixpence, until I was sorely tempted to take his very life; and put myself upon contrivances how I could take it with most pain and torture to his body and soul. I thought of all sorts of man−traps, and pit−falls in blind−alleys, and leadenheaded bludgeons; and at length—heaven save the mark!— I pitched upon the scheme of carrying him off in a balloon, and about two miles up, letting him slip with a cord about his neck, and hang dangling by the neck until dead, ten thousand feet high. He was got safely into the balloon by a dexterous

accomplice; was carried up—and, now that my mind was at ease as to the result, I went home to take a quiet cup of tea, and to settle up my books, meaning to run my pen through the twenty−two and six as a settled account, when—the Lord save us—who should knock gently at my door, and march in with his old impudent smile, than my old enemy the collector, with his customary phrases—hoping he did'nt intrude—and, if it was'nt too much trouble, he would like to have the small amount of his bill, which, as I knew, had been standing some time. The rope had broken, sir, just as they passed over my house, the vile little rascal had pitched upon the roof, and making the best of circumstances, had walked down my scuttle, and availing himself of the opportunity, had looked in with his cursed little bill. We're free from the scamp now.—I'm not sure, isn't that he in the pine coffin?'

"Sure enough, there stood the Poor Figure, leaning toward them, and listening in an attitude of intense regard, to every word that had fallen from the lips of the clown.

" `I am the man!' he cried with great emphasis, when the clown had ended. `None other but I. On the little paltry debt of twenty−two and sixpence, hung my old father's life, who lay rotting in the cold jail: waiting for deliverance, which I had promised him many times—with as false a tongue as man could. I said I would come to−morrow at such an hour, and the next to−morrow at such an hour— naming, in my desire to bring him definite hope, the very minute and second: and I did not come. Was not that a lie? And did you not stand behind me, another liar? How many lying, false tongues wagged with yours and mine, in that little business of the twenty−two shillings and sixpence, God only knows! I forgive you the debt: the old man's bones are at the bottom of the prison well where he perished. They should plead for truth from its gloomy womb, and have a voice to shake prison walls and fetters from manly limbs. God grant they may.'

"The Poor Figure had scarcely ended when the door was slowly opened, and disclosed a meek little man clad in a neat suit of plain black, with two snow−white bands falling under his chin. His gait and aspect denoted many solemn thoughts, and with a slow pace, and a seeming consciousness of the gloomy realm in which he was treading, he advanced to an obscure corner of the place, and folding his arms calmly upon his breast, stood silently in his coffin—his head only inclined a little to one side, as if he expected momently to catch the sound of the last great trump, and to welcome the summons.

"Sam heard a noise in the hall, as of some person shuffling about in heavy boots in search of the door, and after the lapse of a few minutes a large man in a white coat with a dirty cape, a ponderous leather hat, and a club in his hand, swaggered boldly in, and after looking about him for a while as if on the watch for a ghost or apparition, walked quietly off, and taking his station in a comfortable cedar coffin in the middle of the apartment—obviously mistaking it for a watch−box—fell gently asleep. From all that he saw, Sam imagined that this was a city watchman; and the presumption is, that he was not far wrong.

"After a salubrious slumber of some ten minutes or more, this gentleman waked up, and thrusting his head out of his coffin, stretched his neck, and gazed up and down the apartment, and then toward the ceiling.

" `How the devil's this?' he at length exclaimed, `the lamps are out early to−night: and the alderman must have put the moon in his pocket, I guess. That's the way they serve us poor charleys. We wouldn't catch a rogue more than once an age if we didn't take them into porter−houses and get 'em drunk, and study their physiognomies, and so set them a stealing half fuddled!'

" `What's that you say, my man?' cried the voice of the portly gentleman. `What fault have you to find with the corporation, I'd like to know? Do you pretend to impeach their astronomy, Sir; and to say, Sir, that the moon doesn't rise when she is set down for in the almanac? I'd have you know, Sir, the moon's bespoke three months ahead; and that the oil−dealers know when they put a short allowance in the lamps! I'll have you broke, if you haven't a care how you speak of an alderman. A word to the wise in your ear, Sir.'

"The watchman was making up his mouth for a reply, and it is impossible to say what choice specimens of rhetoric might not have been furnished between them, but at this moment the shop−bell was rung with great fury: Sam started up with wonderful alacrity—distinguishing the ring at once from all other possible rings—and receiving, as he advanced to the front of the warehouse a thumping blow on the side of the head, was asked what he meant by leaving the shop open at that time of night, and coffins out at the door to be rotted by the night dew and chalked up by young vagabonds in the street?

"This was of course Sam's master: Sam's visiters mistook it. however, for a summons of a very different kind; the watchman, supposing it to be an alarm of fire, rattled his club against the coffin−side and sprang for the door: the portly gentleman thought it a melodious supper−bell, and, disengaging himself, exhibited equal activity: the

Poor Figure followed, hobbling along like a waiter in a hurry: the clown, for the call−boy's notice, and somerseted through the door: the sweet lady in white, for the last peal of the Sunday summons, and glided away with her children at her side: and the little parson, smoothing down his bands and calming his thoughts to the purpose of the hour, taking it for the Wednesday−evening lecture call:—and so the company dispersed.

"Sam busying himself in obeying the undertaker's orders, soon closed the warehouse; and as he moved past the empty coffins, to his bed at the end of the shop, and thought how they had been lately filled, it occurred to him how inopportunely men might be laid in their graves: debtors lying nearest neighbors to catchpoles and deputies, whose approach was the curse of their life: the clown and the alderman, parsons and profligates, in a tender vicinage: tapsters and favorers of the pure stream, perchance murderers and their victims, and breakers of troth and violators of faith pledged to woman, in a proximity so close, that the skeleton arm outstretched might reach into the grave where the broken heart lay, and take its cold and ineffectual hand back into that which had done it such deadly wrong. On Judgment Day, when the trump sounds among burials like these, if aught of fiery or human passion remain, what awful scenes will bear witness to the fancy of the young 'prentice−boy: when forms shall start up and have life again but to glare on other wakened forms—to loathe, curse, scorn and abhor that on which they gaze. Grave−yards would then know a strife and passionate conflict, that battle fields could not match, with all their sanguinary stains, and cries of horror, vengeance or despair."

CHAPTER VII. PUFFER HOPKINS RECEIVES AN APPOINTMENT.

Toward the close of an afternoon, a few days after the visit of Puffer Hopkins to the auction−room, a deformed little personage was strolling through the street, with his arms nearly to his elbows in his breeches−pockets, his head thrown back a trifle, and his eyes turned up as if he were in the very depths and profundities of a cogitation of some consequence: in short, it was our gentleman of the Bottom Club, who practiced upon certain pockets, as has been seen, on a former occasion.

"Three pair of fowls at three shillings, makes nine," said the little gentleman, "the old red rooster at five shillings— though his liver's disordered, for I smelt his breath this morning— fourteen. That's for after−breakfast work. Then before, there 's twenty pound of hoop, twopence a pound, and a sheet of copper, seven pound, at five pence—thirty−five and forty; as good as seventy−five: and all the afternoon for a holiday, to find out where this Puffer Hopkins lives, and to hatch out an acquaintance with him. There's something brewing in the wind 'twixt him and that shabby old lunatic, Hobbleshank: something going on that ought to be put a stop to; and as the Wice Chance−seller of Law wo'nt interfere to separate such good friends, we'll see what Mr. Small, Ish Small, of Pell street or thereabouts, can do." He walked a few paces further, and again broke out, "Let me catch that old fellow trying any of his tricks on uncle Close, as he did ten year ago, when he pitched his family watch at my crown, and we'll see if there an't a spice of sport from it. Strike up, old 'un, I'm here!"

Saying this, he trotted down the street, turned into a by−way, crossed that at a good pace, and speedily reached a corner building, from which a great striped flag was waving and a tumult of voices issuing. Into this he made his way, selected a suitable position, and at the proper moment, (a great deal of the same sort of business going on at the time), he called out the name of Puffer Hopkins, which was duly entered by one of the clerks of the meeting upon a roll, and the agile little performer, thereupon, departed.

This time he selected a different course, striking straight towards the heart of the city, for several blocks, and emerging upon an open square. He now looked about him for several minutes, indulging in a severe scrutiny of the neighboring buildings, and at length fixed his eye upon a dingy, yellow house, which stood facing the square and forming the fork or extreme point of two streets.

"I think I should know the house by the description," he said, measuring it again with his eye, from top to bottom, "it isn't quite a palace, that's clear: I don't believe the Grand Signior lives here, nor his Highness the chief of the Seneca tribes. There's considerable poverty written in dirty paint all about the front; and, judging by the windows, I guess it's had a hard fight with the brick−front across the way, and got an eye or two put out." At this moment, the light of a lamp fell from a window of the upper story, and Mr. Small, turning his face up towards it, exclaimed, "His light, by all that shines! It an't a astral, anyhow! He's studying a speech, or mixing a dose of resolutions, now—and I'll step in and surprise him! I've no doubt the stairs will hold out till I get up and down, although they look as if they was on their last legs."

Climbing a narrow and ill−arranged way, he attained the topmost landing, where he stood for some time, in doubt which door, of the many that presented themselves, to select; when turning suddenly, as he heard some one ascending the stairs, he stumbled, and falling against a door, dashed it open and landed in the very centre of a room. It would be perhaps a sufficient description of this apartment to say, that it was hardly large enough to fight a boxing−match in, with the attendant spectators; that besides the person of Puffer Hopkins, it held the heads of Demosthenes and John Randolph, a solitary chair, a small auction−bought desk, and a long fragment of looking−glass established in one corner.

"Your humble servant, sir; your most obedient! I thought I'd just stop as I was passing, and tell you, you are a regularly elected member of the Vig'lance Committee of this Ward!" said the visitor, grasping his cap in both hands, assuming a countenance of great simplicity and innocence, and travestying a bow, a good deal in the style of a theatrical waiter, retiring.

"By whose goodness is this?" asked Hopkins, eagerly.

"Mine, for lack of a better, sir:—I thought it would be a little sort of a treat, now that strawberries are out of season!" answered the little gentleman, licking his lips.

"Yours, sir?" exclaimed Puffer, seizing him by the hand; "I owe you a debt of gratitude for life for this. Do n't I

know you, sir? you are a member of the Club, I believe; the memorable, and immortal Club—the Bottom, I mean?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he ran on in a very fluent and enthusiastic style, pronouncing his introduction to the Bottom Club one of the most fortunate incidents of his life; his acquaintance with the gentleman before him as one of the greatest pleasures he had ever known; said that he was attached to his party and his principles, no man more; and that he was resolved to perform his duty as a member of the Vigilance Committee with the utmost zeal, promptitude and dispatch.

The stranger, although a small man, was not a little astonished at this tide of eloquence, (for Puffer Hopkins was in the middle of a declamation to his looking−glass on some supposed festive occasion when the visitor had broken in, and which declamation, in the flutter of the interruption, he applied to his unexpected advent): we say he was not a little surprised, but it was with main effort he subdued his mirth, when, at the end of all these elegant promises and professions, Puffer Hopkins asked him "What he had to do?"

Now, there are many things that a member of a Vigilance Committee, giving a liberal construction to the designation, might be supposed to be engaged in with great propriety. Possessing the sharp eye that of right belongs to a functionary so entitled, he should pierce into the heart of hidden abuses— following them with close, wary steps, into obscure dens and haunts—getting at awful secrets of crime, veiled from all other eyes—detecting, through the world, in their thousand disguises and hypocritical mantles, fraud, cruelty, domestic wrong, and the whole brood of cozenage and knavery.

It is pretty clear that it was to none of these varieties of service that Puffer Hopkins was expected to devote his very promising talents: and of this Puffer himself had some faint conception—for when he puzzled his brain in search of the duties of his new character, it did not occur to him that it had ever been the business of any politician, past or present, or would be in all future time, to subserve in any possible way the plain, simple, every−day interests of humanity.

At this question, Mr. Small laughed; not, however, as if any circumstance of the present interview, or relating thereto, had struck him as at all humorous, but as if his thoughts were fixed upon some remote incident, away off a good many miles, and arising from such innocent sources as might be supposed to move the mirth of so simple−minded a gentleman. Laugh he did, however, with such violence as to compel him to place a hand upon one of his ribs, while he planted his elbow against the wall to support the other.

From all which, it might be presumed that the little gentleman thought it quite a diverting question to be asked, What the members of a Vigilance Committee had to do? Laughing, and still holding his sides, the dwarf gentleman again burlesqued a bow and hurried from the apartment: leaving Mr. Puffer Hopkins in a state of no little wonder and bewilderment.

Determined, nevertheless, to acquire a more definite knowledge of the functions and duties of this majestic office, Puffer snatched up his hat, shifted himself into a bright blue coat with intense brass buttons, and went forth. In the excitement and anxiety of mind resulting from the sudden knowledge of his appointment, he had enjoyed a brisk walk of two squares or more before it occurred to him that it would greatly further his inquiries if he would take a minute or two to consider where they should be made.

After many misgivings and fluctuations of opinion, he at length fixed on Mr. Fishblatt, and, for a variety of reasons, selected that gentleman as an adviser in his present emergency: to whose residence he turned his steps with all becoming expedition. Glancing about for an overgrown door−plate and a red front surmounted with gigantic chimney−pots, Puffer was not long in discovering the domicil of which he was in search; which domicil was, however, adorned, beyond the description of Mr. Fishblatt, by an oblong sign stretched across the entire front, and cutting the house unpleasantly into halves, indicating that the safe, cheap and accommodating corporation of the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company harbored within.

Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, therefore, inhabited a second floor; and after a due performance on a door−bell, and ringing all the customary changes, Puffer was led by a frouzy−haired servant girl through the hall, up one flight of stairs and into a small supplemental building, in a small room whereof—comprehending the entire breadth and length of the same—he came upon Mr. Fishblatt, seated grandly in a very high−backed chair— holding in his outstretched arms an enormous newspaper, on which his eyes were fixed as keenly and comprehensively as if he expected by the perusal of the sheet before him at that very time and the mastery of its contents, to become one of the finest scholars and profoundest critics in the country. He was assisted in the achievement of this mighty

purpose, if he entertained it, by a gorgeous spirit−lamp which was fed by a ball, and blazed away on a table at his side, like a meteor.

On the entrance of Puffer Hopkins, the reader sprang to his feet, cast down the paper, and rushing anxiously towards his visiter, fixed upon his right hand with the tenacity of a griffin. "My dear fellow," cried Mr. Fishblatt, earnestly, "I 'm glad to see you. Down with your hat. Make yourself at home: this looks like home, does n't it? Every body thinks so that comes here. I do n't suppose you could find a snugger room of the kind in the whole planetary system: you see how cosy and quiet it is; here are all my books around me—pamphlets, sermons, speeches, documents from Congress, documents from Legislatures, catalogues, tracts, and lexicons. Is n't it very nice?"

"I certainly think it is," answered Puffer, contemplating the questioner with considerable astonishment.

"There's something on your mind," continued Mr. Fishblatt, scarcely waiting an answer, "I know it: I see it plainly, something that harasses and worries you. You don't sleep, you can't rest, it troubles you so. Come, out with it, my boy; let's have it, at once. What is it that makes you look so anxious?"

"To tell the truth, I 'm a member of the Vigilance Committee, and do n't know what my duties are," answered Puffer. "And I have taken the liberty to come and ask you what I shall do, in my new capacity?"

"If I was a member of a Vigilance Committee," said Mr. Fishblatt, regarding Puffer Hopkins with great gravity and steadiness. "I should consider it my duty to have immense telescopes constructed—and I would plant them, sir, where I could look into the very interior of every domicil in the ward, and know what was in every man's pot for dinner six days in the week. This may not be your view of duty, sir; but I should feel bound to have great ledgers kept—with leaves that opened like doors—and there write down every man's name in large letters: and I 'd have a full length of him drawn on the margin, and colored to the life. I 'd give his dress, sir, down to the vest buttons, and if there was a mote in his eye, I 'd have it there to be cross examined, when he came up to vote. Now don't say you can't do this—you have n't the physical strength to keep such a set of books."

"Would you inquire so very particularly," asked Puffer, timidly—for he felt abashed by the grand conceptions of the imaginative Fishblatt—"into the private habits of voters?"

"I would, sir!" answered Mr. Fishblatt, peremptorily; "I 'd know whether they slept in trundle−bedsteads or highposts; whether they preferred cold−slaugh cut lengthwise or crosswise of the cabbage; whether their shoes were hobnailed or pegged. Can you tell why I 'd do this?"

Puffer Hopkins frankly and heroically confessed that he could not very readily, without the aid of Mr. Fishblatt.

"I knew you could n't," said that distinguished rhetorician. "Don't you see that the public conduct of the man is foreshadowed in his personal habits? A man that wears red flannel shirts is always for war: a man that employs nightcaps is opposed to riots. The voters that browbeat their servants at home, sir, always cry out for strengthening the Executive. Go into that man's house over the way, sir—the house with the meek, salmon−colored door:—that door is a hypocrite and deceiver, sir! Climb to the fourth shelf of his pantry, and you 'll find two red−handled rawhides:—that man approves of despatching the Florida Indians by drugging their brandy with ratsbane. That man 's on his knees every Sunday, in the Orthdox chapel—wears out a pair of knee cushions every year—and has breeches made without pockets, to escape the importunities of beggars in the streets and highways. Put him down in your journal, sir, as a knave, a villain, a low base fellow—will you?"

"The laws hardly reach such men," suggested Puffer.

"I 'd make them reach," said Mr. Fishblatt, confidently, "I 'd stretch 'em till they did reach. I 'd hang such men higher than Haman: I 'd invent every kind of rack and thumb−screw, and worry their lives out by inches: I 'd fill their houses with bugs and alligators: they should have pirates to wait on them at table: and they should sleep with bandits swarming about their beds—great black−whiskered bandits—with pistols charged to the muzzle and always on the full cock. Would that serve them right?"

"I think it would—strictly speaking," answered Puffer; "But as member of a Vigilance Committee, should I undertake to spy out such abuses?"

"Oh, no: your business is—have I told you what your business is?—to go along the wharves, and up into alleys, and down into cellars, and inquire for voters—disseminating the right doctrine by the way, and making every body of your opinion, by having no opinion at all. Are you on the Dock Committee, or one of the Alley Committees?"

"Neither," answered the young politician; "I think mine is known as the Rear−Building section."

"Are you advised whether there are any old women there— to give iron spectacles to? or small children—to nurse with gingerbread? or any recent deaths in any of the families— that you may sympathize in the bereavement, by wearing a strip of crape on your hat?"

"I have no instructions," answered Puffer Hopkins.

"Then you had better go prepared for all emergencies— you had better carry a piece of calico under your arm, to cut into gowns; half a dozen papers of confectionary in your pockets; a gross of clay−pipes, for the superanuated voters or their aged relatives; a bale of corduroys; and, perhaps— I only suggest this—a basket of sheep's pluck."

"What is this last for?" asked Puffer, gaping with astonishment at the personal services required of him, as a member of the high and mighty Ward Vigilance Committee.

"To wheedle their dogs with," answered Mr. Fishblatt, "if they happen to keep any in the front yard."

Surprised and perplexed by the requisitions of the Vigilance branch of the service—as expounded by Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, the extraordinary fervor of whose fancy Puffer Hopkins had not yet quite learned to appreciate—he directed his steps towards his lodgings in the Fork, striving his best to project the means by which he should procure the articles enumerated, and the kind of conveyance by which they were to be transported to voters' houses.

As to the latter, his mind wavered between a porter's gocart and a small boy, with broad shoulders,—and as to the first, he had not reached a conclusion when he reached home; where he was opportunely relieved from further perplexity for the present, by having a dirty billet placed in his hands, inviting him to a meeting of the very Vigilance Committee itself, at the Head Quarters, at half past seven that evening.

Disposing of a thrifty meal, consisting of two cheap slices of bread, a saucer of onions in vinegar, (an excellent thing for the voice), and a bowl of black tea, he whirled his hat half a dozen times about his left hand, applying to its nap, meantime, the sleeve of his right arm, buttoned his coat as smartly as he could, and leaving word that he had gone to a public meeting, the young politician put forth.

A few minutes' rapid walking—for he was behind his time— brought him to the room in which the Committee assembled, and halting for a moment for a general survey, he entered, and assumed his seat on a bench against the wall with his fellow−laborers, who were present in great force, looking as vigilant and shrewd−minded as their station required. A member was on his legs, expounding, in very animated and felicitous style, the glory to be reaped by any adventurous canvasser—who, in the service of his country and impelled by a desire to transmit a name to his children, should plunge down a certain cellar—which he described—and secure the names of several desperate villains who there harbored with the intent of coming forth as voters at the spring election, and perjuring themselves in the very face and eye of heaven.

This gentleman was followed by a second, of equal power and comprehensiveness of vision, who declared, on his personal honor and well known character for integrity, that they might look out for a riot; and one of a very serious cast. He had said serious cast, because the size of the clubs in preparation was unusual. He had a friend (thank Heaven!) whose confidence he believed he possessed. He was a turner: he had been secretly employed to furnish a gross of heavy bludgeons— in the disguise of balustrades. For this fact they might take his word. He did n't mention it to alarm any gentleman present. He did n't wish any gentleman to stay at home or to put himself at nurse on election day, to avoid anything unpleasant that might be abroad, in the shape of clubs or bludgeons. For his part, he had nothing to fear— he only wished to put gentlemen of the Committee on their guard, and to drive them to take into serious consideration the expediency of reviving the use of the ancient helmet.

These words had scarcely escaped him, when a pale young gentleman sprang up from a table at the corner of the room, and offered a resolution embodying the suggestions of his friend; which was promptly seconded by a respectable and worthy tinker, across the room, who had a presentiment that the helmets in question must be made of sheet−iron quilted with tin—which would all fall in his line of trade. The resolution was, notwithstanding this able advocacy, doomed not to become an heroic determination of the Committee corporate, being extinguished and quenched forever by a flood of invective and ridicule issuing from a gentleman who condescended to perform journey−work in a hatter's establishment, and who properly enough regarded such an attempt as an invasion of the rights of the guild.

The early part of the evening proved, therefore, very tempestuous and windy; but as soon as the various gusts

of debate and declamation had blown over, a very plain−looking gentleman, at about ten o'clock, rose; and beginning in a very soft voice, which seemed to grow softer as he advanced, proved himself to be a very sensible fellow, by calling the attention of the meeting to some little particulars which had been overlooked. These particulars consisted of the division and organization of the Committee into sections, enrolling their names in a book, each section having its own head or chairman, and the allotment of their duties to the various members of the Committee.

There was the Dock Committee—they wanted a gentleman on that, who would n't feel the inconvenience of a tarpaulin hat, a wide−skirted shaggy box−coat with two sepulchral pockets, for his fists to be carried in, at the sides, and who could n't well live without a cigar. Then, they wanted a short man for cellars and areas: a thin man to go up the allies: a sprucelooking member to visit at the quality houses: a supple man, of an enterprising turn, for rear−building and garret service: and a jolly−looking portly dog to talk with the landlords and tavern−keepers.

The plain man described, in a few words and with becoming modesty, what he thought the duty of the members of the Vigilance Committee then and there assembled: they should be keen−eyed in discovering voters, artful and insinuating in approaching them, copious of tongue, subtle in argument, and prepared to clinch anything they might choose to assert.

He thought vilifying the opposition was n't bad, if it was done in a christian−like way—and by describing them as "some persons," or, "there were people who he (the member) knew could n't bear the poor; who would take the last potatoe out of a poor man's pot," and similar fetches of expression.

When this gentleman had occupied the floor for about an hour, Puffer Hopkins very discreetly held himself to be as well advised as to the services required as he was ever likely to be; and determining in his own mind not to be easily outdone, and to set about his portion of the task on the morrow, he departed.

CHAPTER VIII. ADVENTURES OF PUFFER AS A SCOURER.

The sun had certainly made up his mind, that morning, not to see company; and if all the Vigilance Committees in the seventeen wards had turned out expressly for that purpose, it would have been impossible for even their well−known and extraordinary astuteness to have detected the slightest glimpse of his benevolent features anywhere in the very murkiest sky of a November day. The forty−five spirited fire−companies of the metropolis—who had seen proper, at a very early hour in the day, to take a run at a horse−shed near Bowling Green, which had extinguished itself the moment it was discovered nothing else could catch from it—might with equal propriety have turned in and staid at home, smoking longnines and talking over past achievements: for the rain came down in torrents, and kept every combustible plank in the city as nice and moist as heart could wish.

Omnibus−drivers and hackmen carried a proud head, and looked down on the sinful world of dry−goods men and indoor trades−people, from their box seats, with an air of pleasant disdain; and the proprietors of livery−stables peered forth from their small office−windows, smiling and making themselves happy and comfortable at the prospect, as Noah might have done, on a similar occasion. Pedestrians with umbrellas looked melancholy, and buried themselves in their blue−cottons and brown−silks, to indicate their misanthropy; and pedestrians without umbrellas looked small and miserable, and making the most of their wrappers, hurried along, in a supreme unconsciousness of the inhabited character of any window they might pass, or the identity of any possible friend in the street.

Others pushed along, thinking more of the respective errands on which they were bound than of any violence of weather, and heeding the plashing shower no more than if it had been sunshine and fair walking. Among these was the resolute Hopkins, who, embowered in a cheap blue−cotton umbrella, strided along, bent on the thorough and faithful discharge of his arduous duties as scourer or canvasser of the Ward.

He had selected for the first visitation, a rear−building in a bye−street, inhabited by sundry gentlemen of doubtful politics, and making all proper speed, he arrived in a short time in the neighborhood where he intended to operate. Opening a blind gate, which worked with a pulley and closed swiftly behind him, Puffer found himself in a square enclosure, filled with carts, fragments of boarding, old iron pots, broken pieces of garden−fence standing against the walls, two cistern−heads, and, at the rear, a row of cheap wooden houses, with the windows dashed out, sundry breaches in the casing, and various red−pots, supposed to contain stunted specimens of horticulture, arranged in the upper windows. Directly in the middle of the yard, there stood, under one large ivoryhandled umbrella, a couple of well−dressed white−haired individuals— one of whom was very stout, portly and commanding, and the other very shrunken, round−shouldered and obsequious—looking up at the buildings; the portly gentleman staring at them with great severity and talking boisterously, and the round−shouldered, glancing up at the portly gentleman, meekly, and making minutes of what he said.

"Draught of the chimneys, heavy: note that down, will you?" said the portly gentleman, peremptorily.

"I will," said the meek man, "It 's down, sir."

"Supposed equal to two factory furnaces, with the blowers on: down with that—and put my initial to it, if you please."

"I have, in large capitals," said the timid gentleman.

"That 's right," said the portly gentleman, promptly. "Skuttles always open, and children allowed to smoke burnt rattans: I see one of 'em at it now. Will you mark *that* down?" cried the stout gentleman, evidently very much enraged, and with a startling emphasis that caused the meek man to jump out from under the shelter, which compelled his superior to order him back, twice, very distinctly, before he could be induced to return to his duty, and chronicle what fell from the stout gentleman's lips. "They dry their hose at No. nine, on the back of a rocker before the fire; and use a decayed Duch−oven at No. eleven,—this last attributable to the extravagance of the lower orders, who are too proud to patronize the baker."

"That 's a very happy observation," said the meek man, "Shall I print it out large, like the play−bills?"

"Stuff!" cried the portly gentleman, smiling haughtily, "just mind your business, and recollect that all private feelings are absorbed in the Company's interests—will ye?"

"I 'll try," said the meek man, timidly.

"Do! and just say, if you please, that the first floor 's occupied by a journeyman lightning−maker."

"A journeyman lightning−maker!" echoed the meek man.

"None of your nonsense, now, Crump—but down with what I tell you: a journeyman lightning−maker, in the employ of one of the theatres. Say, we are informed, that he lives on brandy, (brandy 's a pretty inflammatory article, I believe, and cases of spontaneous combustion have occurred: put that reflection in a note, and mark it J. B. in the corner), and makes lightning in the garret. Now, for the cisterns. Have you smelt No. eleven?"

"I have, sir," answered the secretary, making a wry face, "and it 's uncommon noxious."

"Do you know the cause?" asked the portly gentleman, disdainfully.

"I do not, sir?" answered the meek gentleman, groping in his pockets.

"A child—a juvenile small child—that went to a Public School, took his own life in despair, one day, in that very cistern, sir—because he could n't spell phthisic, sir!"

"That was strange, was n't it?"

"Very strange, Crump. The child came home in the afternoon, with the same green bag—take notice, sir—the same green bag on his arm that he 'd carried for fourteen months, and said, `Mother, there 's a pain,' laying his hand on his head, `a great violent pain here.' That was all he said, and then he went up stairs, made up his little couch, tied his wooden horse to a bed−post, with a new ribbon about his neck, put on his Sunday hat and a clean apron, and stepping stealthily down stairs, walked comfortably into the cistern, and ended all his agonies."

"That's a remarkable affair," said the secretary, with his mouth and eyes wide open. "Do n't you think it's a serious argument against the Public Schools, sir?"

"It's a smasher, Crump: an extra−hazardous smasher," said the Insurance President, for that proved to be his official station. "There's something wrong in the system, you may depend on it; or children would never destroy themselves in this way because they can't spell dipthong words of two syllables. Now, to business, if you please. Say, it's the opinion of the President, that no engine will ever consent to draw water from the cistern of No. eleven; that engines can't be expected to take little boys or little girls into their chambers and extinguish their bereaved parents' burning dwellings with the rinsings. Firemen have feelings, (this is a moral axiom, for the benefit of the Directors), engines have works: and although the coroner did sit on the cistern−lid the better part of an entire night, inquiring into this melancholy case, and sent down several courageous small boys with boat−hooks, and called patriotically into the cistern himself, yet add, the boy was never found; and from the fact of deceased's never having been seen to come out, a strong suspicion prevails in the neighborhood that he is still in: but what makes the corpse so very outrageous and stubborn, nobody can say. Is that it, Crump?"

"All down, sir," answered Mr. Crump.

"Stand out from the umbrella, then, if you please, Mr. Crump: business is over. You're Crump and I'm Blinker." And the Insurance President looked down upon his assistant in the most commanding fashion.

Crump obeyed, and, withdrawing from the brown−silk protector, stood outside, awaiting the further pleasure of the portly gentleman.

"This is a sweet day, Crump," said the President, contemplating with evident satisfaction the huge drops that pashed in one of the puddles.

"Charming!" said Crump, slily inserting a cotton pocket−handkerchief between his coat−collar and the back of his neck, for Crump was slightly rheumatic.

"Stocks should rise, in weather like this," said Mr. Blinker. "The roofs are all good and wet, cellars under water, and a good number of garrets flooded. Now, if we could have a little rain horizontally, the second stories would be nice and safe. To be sure, families might suffer a little inconvenience— but it would be morally impossible for fires to show themselves, and I should look in the papers for two or three melancholy cases of incendiaries' having made way with themselves. It's a pelter, Crump."

"That, I believe, is admitted," answered that worthy individual, with a slight tinge of impudence in his manner—buttoning up his side−pockets, which began to fill, and throwing his hands behind him under his coat−tails, which arrangement, as he stooped forward, formed a commodious roof for the rain to run off at.

"It's lucky we're not in the marine line," continued the President, glancing at the Secretary: "Goods, not under hatches, will be nicely soaked, I'm sure; particularly woolens and drabs."

Now it so happened, that the unfortunate Crump was the owner of a very pretty pair of woolen drabs—rather old fashioned, to be sure—which, very singularly, he was wearing at that very moment, as he stood in the shower

in the open yard: but as Mr. Blinker was well known as a benevolent−minded gentleman, and above all manner of personalities, Crump was bound to regard his observation as one of those happy general reflections for which he was equally remarkable.

"The shower comes down so nice and straight," said Mr. Blinker, erecting his umbrella, and drawing himself close under its centre, at the same time consulting his watch, "so nice and straight, that it must put out a good many kitchenfires; which all helps:—but it's time to be at the office. Do you go on, Crump, and have the grate well piled—don't spare the coals, for I am chilly. But stop—whose buildings are these, did you say?"

"I did n't say," answered Mr. Crump, flushing slightly.

"Whose?" cried Mr. Blinker, in his official key, which started the secretary into a small pond.

"Fyler Close's, sir," answered the intelligent Crump, speedily.

"Humph—very well," said Mr. Blinker. "Go on: and don't forget to wheel my chair out, and warm my slippers. And if the lime−dealer calls for his policy, tell him it isn't made out, and that he may call the first fair day. This is fine weather for slacking that article, Crump; excellent weather to set houses on fire with water and white chalk—do you understand? Go!"

At this, the secretary picked his way through the yard, carrying his head obliquely, to avoid the rain that dashed directly in his face, and holding the gate for a moment, was followed by the superior functionary, in great state; who paused once or twice, however, and turned about to take a glance at the buildings under survey for insurance.

"Very well," said Puffer Hopkins, stepping out from under a shed, where he had ambushed himself during this instructive conversation: "These gentlemen must be on the reliefcommittee— they have a wonderful tenderness for poor people, and wouldn't see 'em made martyrs of by a conflagration, for all the world. Let me see: I think I'll visit the lightning−maker in the garret, first. He's a genius, no doubt— and, belonging to the melo−dramatic school, may dazzle two or three weak minds in the neighborhood."

With these words, the young politician proceeded to the house which had been pointed out as the residence of the lightning−maker, and knocked gently at the door.

The summons was answered by a small girl, with an unclean face and eyes that twinkled through the dirt like a ground−mole's, who gave him to understand that the gentleman in question was at that moment in the garret of the building, busy upon a two−quarter, and that he, Puffer Hopkins, if he went up stairs, had better come upon him cautiously, lest he might, in the confusion of a sudden surprise, let slip a volcano, or something horrible of that nature, in the combustible line.

Taking to heart the suggestion of the small adviser, Puffer walked up stairs, and knocked at the door of the artizan's laboratory with great discretion, beginning with a rap in the very lowest key, and ascending gradually to a clear doubleknock.

"Hold a minute," cried a voice from within, "till I mix in a trifle of red and blue. If you should come in now," continued the voice, pondering and speaking a word or two only at a time, at if it was interrupted by some manual operation, "you'd lose us three good rounds with the pit. They always loves to see a sheet of red fire, provided there's a cross of blue in it."

In a moment Puffer was admitted, and discovered a lean man, bending over a mortar, with great staring eyes, and cheeks discolored with brimstone or yellow fumes of some other kind; and surrounded by black bottles, two or three broken pestles, an iron retort, and various other implements of his trade. Puffer introduced himself, and proceeded at once to the exercise of his function as a scourer.

"This profession of yours," said Puffer—he dared not call it a trade, although the poor workman was up to his eyes in vile yellow paste and charcoal−dust—"This profession, sir, must give you many patriotic feelings of a high cast, sir."

"It does, sir," answered the lightning−maker, slightly mistaking his meaning: "I've told the manager, more than fifty times, that lightning such as mine is worth ninepence a bottle, but he never would pay more than fourpence ha'penny: except in volcanoes—them's always two−quarters."

"I mean, sir," continued the scourer, "that when you see the vivid fires blazing on Lake Erie—when Perry's working his ship about like a velocepede, and the guns are bursting off, and the enemy is paddling away like ducks—is not your soul then stirred, sir? Do you not feel impelled to achieve some great, some glorious act? What do you do—what can you do, in such a moment of intense, overwhelming excitement?"

"*I* generally," answered the lightning−maker, with an emphasis upon the personal pronoun, as if some difference of practice might possibly prevail, "*I* generally takes a glass of beer, with the froth on."

"But, sir, when you see the dwelling−house roof, kindled by your bomb−shells, all a−blaze with the midnight conflagration— the rafters melting away, I may say, with the intense heat, and the engines working their pumps in vain—don't you think then, sir, of some peaceful family, living in some secluded valley, broken in upon by the heartless incendiary with his demon matches, and burning down their cottage with all its out−houses?"

"In such cases," answered the lightning−maker, "I thinks of my two babies at home, with their poor lame mother— and I makes it a point, if my feelings is very much wrought up, as the prompter says, to run home between the acts to see that all's safe, and put a bucket of water by the hearth:— isn't that the thing?"

"I think it is: and I'm glad to hear you talk so feelingly," answered Puffer Hopkins; "our next mayor's a very domestic−minded man—just such a man as you are—only I don't believe he'd be so prudent and active about the bucket on the hearth."

At this, the lightning−maker smiled pleasantly to himself, and unconsciously thrust a large roll of brimstone in his cheek.

"Is this your natural complexion that you have on this morning?" resumed Puffer Hopkins, seeing how well the personal compliment took, and glancing at the lightning−maker's yellow chaps. "If it is, the resemblance between yourself and the gentleman I have mentioned is more striking than I could have expected: his nose is a copper—isn't yours inclining a little that way?"

"I believe it is," answered the journeyman lightning−maker, complacently.

"Your eye is a deep grey, I think, as far as I can see it by this light: that's what the Committee of Nomination, when they waited on the next Mayor, thought was his."

In the flutter of nerves created by the scourer's instituting these pleasant comparisons, the lightning−maker unadvisedly brought together a couple of hostile combustibles, which occasioned the premature bursting of a small bottle of azure lightning—without scenery to match; and a small sky−light was opened thereby, through a decayed shingle in the roof. Instructed, by this, of the tropical climate of the lightning−maker's garret, and thinking that a sufficient train had been laid for a future vote, Puffer—who had been advised of the residence of a stout cobbler in the neighboring attic—trotted up a ladder and through the open skuttle, and scrambling over the pitched roof, plunged down a similar opening in the next house, and came very suddenly upon the object he sought. The burly shoe−maker was seated on a cobbler's bench, working away merrily enough: at his side was laid a long clay−pipe, filled ready to be lighted, and hard by him a bundle of chattels, corded up, and arranged, apparently, for instant transportation.

"How is this?" cried the cobbler, as his eye caught the person of Puffer Hopkins: "This isn't fair—nor is it legal in any courts, whether of Chancery or common law. Writs don't descend, sir—I know enough for that: no deputy sheriff was ever enough of an angel to come from above. I resist process—do you hear that?"

Saying this, the cobbler started up, and seizing his bench, planted it on end in front of the corded bale of chattels, and standing between the two, he glared fiercely, through the circular broken seat of the bench, on the suspected deputy.

A few words, however, calmed his agitation: he threw down his bench, resumed his seat, and in token of his perfect satisfaction and pleasure in the explanation Puffer had given, of the character in which he visited him, he kindled his pipe and smoked away in good, long, hearty puffs.

Growing communicative, as their intercourse continued, Puffer at length learned that the gentleman was the proprietor of the Dutch oven down stairs—the terror of Mr. Blinker, the President—was greatly distressed by creditors, who hunted him with catchpoles and marshals from morning till night, that all his proprietary interest on the lower floors lay in the oven aforesaid and a very comfortable little fat wife, (whose pride and comfort consisted in a turkey browned before a slow fire), and other little necessaries allowed by law. The corded bale, held his valuables; and with these, he was prepared to mount, at a moment's warning, through the scuttle, and to convey himself to the peak of the house, where he made it a point to sit in the shadow of a broad chimney and smoke his pie at ease, until the cloud of pursuers was fairly dispersed or blown over.

"They shall never catch me, while I live," cried the cobbler, energetically. "If they come on the roof, I'll climb down the lightning−rod with that bundle on my back; I can do it:—and if one of the rascals attempts to climb up to me, I'll drop it, and break his neck off, short—depend on that. My dear fellow, I'd be at the expense of the

board, lodging and education of a South American Condor, and teach him to bear it off in his beak, before they should touch a thread of it. Now you know my mind!"

At this, he struck a thick heel, on which he was at work, a thumping blow with his hammer, and kicked his lapstone across the whole breadth of the garret.

Puffer Hopkins of course applauded the spirit of the cobbler, and artlessly suggested that no man, with the soul of a man, would submit quietly to such impertinent intermeddling with his private affairs.

"However, my friend," he continued, scouring as industriously as he well knew how, "I trust this will not always be so. These gentlemen of the law may yet have their combs cut: I don't think they will always be allowed to crow and chanticleer it over honest men!"

"Why not?" asked the cobbler, looking at Puffer Hopkins anxiously, and planting his great hands upon his knees.

"For no very particular reason," answered the scourer, "except that I have heard it suggested that our new Common Council—mind, I say our new Common Council—will abolish the office of sheriff, and all others that interfere with the enjoyment of a man's property by himself. They'll do away with writs, and executions, and all that sort of thing," said Puffer, coolly, "that's all!"

"Say you so?" shouted the cobbler, springing from his bench and seizing Puffer by the hand: "I'm your man! Now try your luck on the down−stairs people—don't let me keep you back a minute. Try the bereaved mother, down stairs: her husband's a'wavering—have him, by all means. Dogs! you've done me more good than the sight of the big boot in the square the first time I set eyes on it. God speed you! Luck to you!"

With these ejaculations, the cobbler dismissed his comforting visiter, who hurried below, and opening, according to the instructions he had received, the first door to the right, arrived at a new field in the domain to be canvassed.

Taking a rapid and comprehensive survey, Puffer Hopkins was aware that he had entered the apartment of the bereaved mother—for there upon the mantel in a glass case, dressed in crape, stood the identical wooden horse, with the ribbon about his neck that had been attached to the bed−post by the little misanthrope, on the day he had taken his own life in the cistern.

As he discovered this, a gloom suddenly came over the countenance of the scourer, and he approached the afflicted parent with an aspect as wo−begone and dolorous as the wood−cut frontispiece of the most melancholy Mourner's Companion ever printed.

"Mr. Hopkins, of the Ward Committee," said Puffer, advancing and taking the bereaved one by the hand. "The good man of the house is not in, I think?"

"No, he isn't, sir," she answered; "it's very little that he is in now, since the event. He can't bear the sight, poor man, of that grievous monument there"—pointing to the quadruped in the glass case—"always in his sight. It e'en a'most drives him mad."

Puffer Hopkins wondered—if the sight of a miserable caricature of a horse in wood, under a glass cover, was so near making a lunatic of him—why he didn't go mad at once, like a sensible man, and shiver it all in atoms, which would have done something towards making it invisible: but he didn't utter these thoughts, but on the contrary kept them hidden in the very darkest recess of his bosom.

"You do right, madam," continued Puffer, "to keep that constantly before your eyes. It's a softening object—a mellowing spectacle for the heart to contemplate. Oh, no; there is nothing, there can be nothing," pursued the scourer, in a voice choked with agony, and turning away as if he was too manly to expose his feelings, "like a mother's grief. A mother's grief—it is a sacred and a solemn thing: and when the affliction comes thus—in this ghastly shape—it's too much to think of. Who can repress their tears at the thought of the agony of this family on the day of this fatal discovery? the father frantic with sorrow and exertions to get the body; sisters and brothers—how many have you, madam?"

"Five small ones—one at the breast."

"Five little ones, shouting for the departed angel: and his mother—his poor, bereaved, broken hearted mother—when she thinks of the suit he had on, his nice, tidy Sunday suit, bends over the cistern and drops in her tears till it overflows! Oh, there's a picture for the moralist and the patriot!"

"Don't, sir—don't," cried the afflicted mother. "Don't— your eloquence quite breaks my heart: it makes me feel

it all over again."

"I will not," said Puffer, "I'll resist my feelings, and say no more about it: not if you'll be good enough to take this little order on the dry−goods dealer—just so that the poor boy, if he should ever be found, may be put in a decent shroud; he was a small boy, I think—the order's for a small boy—a very small boy. And oblige me by telling your husband that Puffer Hopkins, of the Vigilance Committee, called. Good day: good day—poor child." Uttering these last words with a pathetic glance at the toy on the mantel, and heaving a profound sigh, the scourer closed the door.

With the door, he closed his labors for the day, and shaped his course homeward, satisfied that he had done his country some slight service, and that two or three minds, at least, had been sufficiently enlightened to vote the proper ticket at the next charter election.

CHAPTER IX. AN ENTERTAINMENT AT MR. FISHBLATT'S.

A few mornings after his adventures as scourer, Puffer Hopkins was sitting at his desk in the Fork, earnestly engaged in the preparation and composition of a handbill, for the approaching election. That this was a sufficiently arduous undertaking for the young politician, was proved by the great multitude of model placards strewn about the floor, from which he at intervals solaced himself with a line or two; by the blank looks with which he at times entirely halted in his task; and by the painful gaze he occasionally directed towards the wall, as if he expected to discover there handwriting wherewith to eke out the unfinished sentence. Having a good eye for catching phrases, and considerable readiness in sounding words that would tell well in the popular ear, the composition presently flowed apace; line upon line lengthened out, Puffer reciting each aloud as it was finished, and in the course of about two hours, a thundering manifesto, doomed soon to echo back from wall, shutter, bulk−head and house−side, great words of fearful import, and to set the whole world of meeting−hunters and politicians astir, was completed.

Puffer Hopkins was clearing his throat and preparing for a grand rehearsal of this master−piece, when he was suddenly confronted by a frouzy−headed small girl, who had got into the apartment, it seemed to him—for he had no notice of her entrance—by some underhand jugglery or legerdemain, and who, assuming a face of great mystery, levelled at him a diminutive billet, with a faint streak of gold about its edges, and his own name written elaborately on the back.

"Compliments—hopes as how you'll come—and wishes the bearer to say, wouldn't feel cheerful if Mr. Hopkins should fail," said the frouzy−haired girl reciting something that had been evidently ticketed and laid away in her mind, to be delivered when called for.

Three lines of writing and a date within, worked out obviously with painful toil and a great variety of pens, explained the object of the small visiter, in a request that "Mr. P. Hopkins would favor Mr. H. Fishblatt with company at seven o'clock this (Thursday) evening, at the sign of the brass plate and chimney−pots, as before; giving him at the same time street and number.

Puffer was in fine spirits, for he had been successful in his literary labors—and what author's heart is not a−glow when his invention proves ready, and his hand runs free across the page?—and he accepted the note with great complaisance, and bade the frouzy−haired messenger (who stood staring at the huge text scattered about the floor, as if the great black letters might be ogres, giants, or some other monsters), inform Mr. Fishblatt he would attend his summons with the utmost pleasure.

He was as good as his word; and two hours before the time named in the invitation, Puffer began to prepare for the party at Fishblatt's. First and foremost, he drew forth from a case, in the corner of his lodgings, a brass−buttoned blue coat, of a popular cut, and fell to beating it over the shoulders and down the back with a yard stick, as if he had under his hand the body and person of his direst enemy in the world: then he twisted the right arm up and dashed at the place where the ribs might have been; then he fell upon the breasts and pumelled them horribly; and then, casting aside his stick, he fastened fiercely on the collar and gave the whole a mighty shaking, as if he would have the very life out of it. A pair of light drab cloth pantaloons, dragged from the same confinement, shared in like manner at his hands; a striped vest was stretched on the back of a chair like a rack; then his boots were forced into a high polish, the pantaloons drawn on, the vest released, and the coat occupied by its legitimate lord, and Puffer, first attitudenizing a little before the long glass, and running his fingers through his hair—to get his head as nearly as possible into the model he had in his eye of a great politician, whose portrait was in the gallery at the museum—was ready for the party. Sallying gently forth, and marching steadily through the streets, with a secret conviction that every eye in the metropolis was fixed immovably upon him, he shortly discovered the great brass plate of Halsey Fishblatt gleaming through the dark, where he knocked, waited for a minute in a state of awful suspense and was admitted, as before, by the message−bearer, who came to the door with a face wrinkled with smiles, and strongly suggestive of something very nice and choice to be had within. The small girl asked Puffer to be good enough to go to the third−story back room, and thither he proceeded; encountering on his way, and at the base of the second flight of stairs, a fry of dolorous−looking gentlemen, who

lingered about the parlor door, pulling down their wristbands and contemplating it, as it opened and shut, with as much dread as if it had been the gate of the doomed; while others hovered about the great balustrade of the stair−case, in waiting for the descent of their lady partners from the third−story front room above. Every now and then an angelic creature, in a white gown and abundant pink ribbons, came down this Jacob's ladder, and fastening upon the arm of one of the sentinels, they marched into the parlor with great state. Returning from his toilet up stairs, Puffer Hopkins followed the general current, and discovered a scene the solemnity whereof was exceedingly impressive and disheartening.

The walls of the parlor upon which he had entered were lined all round with well−dressed ladies and gentlemen, sitting as erect as corpses, and gazing into the empty space in the middle of the apartment, as if some curious meteorological phenomenon were going on there, in which they all had a special interest. At the announcement of Puffer Hopkins by a pale young gentleman at the door, the corpses waked up a little, some twittered spasmodically, a few moved uneasily in their chairs, and by the time Puffer had attained a seat in a corner, the company had again subsided into its condition of tomb−like repose.

They were presently, however, again wakened—and with rather more success—by the entrance of the host, Mr. Fishblatt himself, bearing before him firstly a huge ruffle, which stood straight out from his bosom like a main−sail, and secondly, reposing in the shadow of the said ruffle, a black teaboard of proportionate dimensions, garnished with small jugs or tumblers of lemonade.

Mr. Fishblatt walked very erect and majestically, and holding the waiter at arm's length—smiling pleasantly, as a gentleman always does when he's engaged in a business he knows himself to be altogether too good for, but which the crisis of affairs requires him to look after—presented it to the ladies all around, beginning at the left hand as he was bound to do and skipping ever so many thirsty gentlemen who gloated on the small jugs: and then coming down toward the right hand, as he was likewise bound, he allowed the thirsty gentlemen to glean from the waiter the tumblers that remained. It is not to be supposed that Mr. Halsey Fishblatt all this time held his peace: on the contrary, the bearing of the waiter was not a tithe of his toils, for he kept strenuously urging wherever he went the propriety of taking a tumbler— the necessity of a draught of the lemonade to cool themselves, and particularly soliciting and entreating the ladies to make a paradise of his (Mr. Fishblatt's) parlors, by enjoying themselves with all their might and main.

The lemonade had scarcely vanished and the empty tumblers been gathered and borne out of sight, when it was announced—to the discomforture and confusion of the company—that the celebrated and distinguished representative of the Thirteenth Ward in the city Councils— Alderman Punchwind, by name—was in the house: having, as it was understood, done Mr. Fishblatt the honor to call in and partake of the agreeable hospitalities that were then and there going forward. Mr. Fishblatt, at the thought of so august a presence, recoiled a little, but recovering speedily, a deputation was immediately sent out, consisting of Puffer Hopkins and two young gentlemen who wore large watch seals, and were rather ambitious of office and employment of this kind, to wait upon his eminence. In a few minutes a heavy tread was heard upon the stair, a commotion in the entry, and in stalked, in a broad−brimmed hat, a portly, capacious and solid gentleman, of such dimensions as to resemble not a little a great school−globe, stepped out of its brass ring, and taking a walk of pleasure: in he marched, accompanied by his delegation, who clung close to his skirts to watch the impression his presence might make on the commonalty assembled.

Puffer Hopkins had a glimmering reminiscence of a broad−brimmed hat, very much like the Alderman's, escaping into a pantry at the end of the hall as he came in at the beginning of the evening, worn by Crump—could it be so?— Crump, the meek secretary who had been so brow−beaten in the shower by Mr. Blinker. His brows overshadowed by the huge hat, and his chin buried in a capacious collar, Alderman Punchwind paused for a minute at the door, glanced about slowly and with an air of solemn importance, and then, without removing his hat or uttering a word, stalked across the parlor, proceeded to fill a glass from the side−board where relays of refreshment in liberal quantities were arranged, and at this moment, deigning to turn around and recognize the company, he intimated by a look that he would drink *all* their good healths; which he did, very emphatically absorbing his wine much as the Norwegian Maelstrom might if it were a corporate Alderman and fed at public charge. Having disposed of the wine, the Alderman next devoted his attention to the cake and other eatables, of which great batches disappeared from time to time; with a pause now and then, to allow him to vary the entertainment with a friendly return, just to show he had n't forgotten it, to the decanter; which proceedings were

watched with painful interest by Mr. Fishblatt's guests—who were horrified at the miraculous disappearance of the provision for the party, and who looked upon the performance much as they would at the elephant at the menagerie, feeding with a bale or two of hay, or the pagan anaconda at the museum, lunching on a pair of fowls and a live rabbit, without so much as a grace to the meal.

As soon as Alderman Punchwind had concluded his corporate banquet by stripping the board of something more than two−thirds of its contents, solid and liquid, he wiped his lips, and marching steadily toward the centre of the rooms, there planted himself by the side of a column and looked abroad upon the company: fixing his eye, now and then, with peculiar sternness on some young lady who happened to be fairer than her neighbors.

After he had enjoyed this recreation for some time, various members of the company were brought up by Mr. Fishblatt and introduced (by consent) to the distinguished functionary, who kept his ground manfully and received them all with an air of bland and gracious condecension; allowing each of them to take him by the hand and to enjoy a few minutes contemplation of his very classic and expressive features, and then pass off, making room for others.

While this was proceeding, attention was drawn toward the door by the entrance of a very uppish gentleman, of a severe aspect, who carried himself with great state and port, and cast his eyes disdainfully about, as if he held the individuals of both sexes and all ages there assembled supremely cheap and of no account whatever in making up any thing like an accurate scale of society.

This disdainful and evidently select personage was no other than John Blinker, Esq., First Director and President of the Phoenix Fire Company below stairs, who, as soon as he had heard there was a live Alderman in the room, came forward extending his hand and smiling pleasantly, quite anxious, it would seem, to conciliate the favor of a mighty Alderman and Common Council−man. These overtures on the part of Mr. Blinker were received by the Alderman, however, with an air of slight disdain, which caused the President to cower and fall back a little until Mr. Punchwind thought proper to relax his features, when the President advanced again, and had the satisfaction at last, and after many difficulties, of taking him by the hand.

"Do I understand that the fire−limits of the city are to be extended?" asked Mr. Blinker, whose mind hovered about the fiery principle of his calling like a moth about flame, after waiting in vain for a communication from the Alderman.

The question was asked, but not answered: for Alderman Punchwind, reclining his head a little toward his questioner, allowed a smile to spread over his features—as much as to say, you don't know how important, how critical and how solemn a question you have put to me—and said not a word.

"I think it would be an advantage to the city to have them extended, sir. I hope I am not so unfortunate as to differ in opinion with Alderman Punchwind!" said Mr. Blinker, meekly.

The Alderman only smiled again—intimating thereby, apparently, that there were state reasons why this anxious interrogatory of the great President's could n't be answered, just then.

At this moment, Puffer Hopkins, who had overheard the questions of Mr. Blinker, and entertaining a becoming reverence for the distinguished individual before him—feeling, too, perhaps, that a modicum of metropolitan information from the very fountain head, on a subject in which he felt an interest, from his frequent professional pilgrimages to political meetings, lectures, and other night−resorts, might be serviceable— impelled by some, or all of these considerations, Puffer proceeded to ask, in a tone of profound respect,— "Whether they were to have new windows in the public lamps?"

"New lamp−windows, did you ask?" retorted the Alderman, as plainly as he could without the trouble of opening his lips.

"I did, sir," reiterated Puffer Hopkins, beginning to feel rhetorically inclined, and so understanding the learned gentleman, "and knowing the interest felt in the answer, and your ability to give us a clear and decisive reply, I put it to you in this public manner—whether we are to have new glasses in the public lamps! A gust of wind in our streets of a dark night is equal to an eclipse of the sun in broad day, in their present dilapidated condition. The darkness of Egypt overspreads this city, sir, at times; a Siberian darkness, where bears and catamounts might dwell, perhaps, if it were not for the city police and our vigilant magistracy."

The Alderman paused, and looked about him with a grave and majestic air. He seemed reluctant to respond.

"It's your duty, sir," said Mr. Fishblatt, coming in at this crisis, standing directly in front of the Alderman, and

looking him steadily in the face, "to inform us of your views on this all−important subject. The happiness of this community is dependent on it, sir. There'll be an immense oversetting of hacks, breakage of legs, and fracture of skulls, if things remain in their present condition, I can tell you. This metropolis is as black now, sir, at night, as the bottom of an ink−bottle, and people float about the streets at random, like so many bugs on the surface of a dark pool. What's all the crime of this great city owing to, sir? Some will say, its intemperance, and a neglect of the public pumps. Others will say, its ignorance, and neglect of the public schools. Some will tell you, it's because we've got too many penitentiaries and houses of refuge, and others will tell you, it's because they're too few. Pumps, penitentiaries, and public schools, can't explain it;—it's your miserable public lamps, sir! It's your knavish oil−men, and your rascally glaziers, that are corrupting us every day and every night— more particularly at night. They're the origin of your dissolute sons, your profligate daughters, your sinful judges, and your dishonest clerks. Nobody comes out at noon and makes a beast of himself in the street. Keep the city welllighted, and you keep it virtuous, sir. You should have a lamp at the front of every tenement; and where the streets are so narrow that the houses might catch from the wick, you should have men moving up and down with great lanterns, and keep all the thoroughfares and alleys in a glow. You would n't have a murder once in a century, and as for burglaries and larcenies, they'd be forgotten crimes, like the Phoenix, sir, and the Megalosaurius!"

At the termination of this earnest appeal, the company had gathered in a body about the person of the Alderman, and stood waiting, with intense interest, for his answer. Alderman Punchwind hereupon canvassed the assemblage with great deliberation, and having finished, elevated the fore−finger of his right hand, and passed it significantly down his nose, dispatched a sagacious wink toward Mr. Blinker, with his sinister eye, and mildly muttering "Smoked beans," departed.

Can it create surprise to know that the company there assembled by invitation of Mr. Fishblatt, were astounded at this strange and unseemly exit of the distinguished gentleman from the Thirteenth Ward? that Mr. Fishblatt was horrified and stricken with amaze? that Mr. Blinker was indignant? that the delegation that had waited upon the Alderman felt slightly humiliated and abashed at the conduct of their superior? That Puffer Hopkins was profoundly penetrated with a sense of the uncertainty of human affairs—for had there not been here an individual occupying but a minute before the very highest conceivable pinnacle—the very Himalayah−top of human greatness attainable at a small party—and had n't that individual, with most suicidal rashness, pitched himself off headlong into the very centre of a low, vulgar kitchen−garden, by an allusion to fumigated beans?

The entertainment was now, in truth, at an end; and although fragments of cake and fag−ends of decanters—generously left by Alderman Punchwind—were from time to time brought forward, the spirits of the party flagged. Mr. Fishblatt hung his head; and when, at a few minutes of midnight, the Insurance President disappeared, the party gradually broke up; two or three, at first, leaving at a time, and then a shoal of half a dozen, and in less than an hour the rooms were deserted.

Puffer Hopkins, who had gallantly assumed the charge of a young lady, with a pair of piercing black eyes, who lived in a remote suburb, with which Puffer was by no means familiar, spent the remainder of the night, up to three o'clock, in piloting the young lady homeward, and the balance, till dawn, in discovering his way back again, through divers crooks and crosses, through streets that ran at first directly for half a mile into town, and then directly for half a mile more out again; getting now and then into a road that had no outlet, and then into one that had an outlet that led into nothing.

The mysterious proceedings of Alderman Punchwind, it should be stated, remain to this day unexplained. On inquiry, a few days after the entertainment, Mr. Fishblatt was assured, that on the night in question, Alderman Punchwind, the authentic and accredited representative of the Thirteenth Ward, was in his own room laboriously employed on a report of fifty−three pages foolscap, on the subject of spiles and pier heads, and had n't left it for a moment, except to step over the way to his neighbor the timber−merchant, to get a few facts to put in his report. It therefore only remained for rumor to say that this was the apparition of the Alderman; which was confirmed with the superstitious by Mr. Punchwind's being carried off just seven days afterward by an apoplexy, at one of the city suppers. Others thought it might have been all a dream and delusion on the part of the company, who may be reasonably supposed to have been at the time under the influence of Mr. Fishblatt's good cheer: and others again— and certain mysterious smiles on the part of the frouzy−haired servant girl hinted as much—would not be beaten from the belief that it was Crump; Crump, the humble secretary of the Phoenix Fire Company, himself; who had adopted this method, it was suggested, of enjoying one first−rate banquet, which his own salary did n't

admit of, and at the same time of retaliating the severities of his superior; having the entire pleasure of both amusements, the feast and the revenge, to himself, which was very characteristic.

For ourselves, we rather incline to this last solution, inasmuch as the subject of Mr. Fishblatt's party was, from the time of the starting of this hypothesis, a forbidden subject thenceforth and forever in the office of the Phoenix Company, by express order of Mr. Blinker, who said it was altogether too frivolous to think of.

CHAPTER X. HOBBLESHANK AT HIS LODGINGS.

The interest with which Mr. Fyler Close watched the flight of Hobbleshank was by no means diminished, when he discovered faring forth from behind a stable−door, where he had lain in ambush, and keeping, at an easy distance, diligently in the track of the wrathful old gentleman, no other than Ishmael Small. Speeding along in a very eccentric route, sometimes on the pavement, again in the middle of the road, and then, with one foot on the curb and one in the gutter, Hobbleshank made his way through the straitened purlieu of Pell street: Pell street that lies just off of the great thoroughfare of the Bowery with a world of its own, where great mackerel−venders' trumpets, nearly as long as the street itself, are blown all day long, where vegetable−waggons choke the way and keep up a reek of greens and pot−herbs until high noon, and where, if all the signs and omens that pervade the street—sights, sounds and smells—are of any worth, the denizens lead a retired life, with a lenten diet, ignorant of what the great world beyond may think of beefless dinners or breakfasts after Pythagoras.

Through this choice precinct they sped, Hobbleshank pushing swiftly on, and his pursuer following at a distance with equal pace, darting in at entry doors and out again in a glance, to avoid discovery, if the old man should look back; and so they soon entered the mouth of Doyer street—the Corkscrew lane—through which it needs skilful pilotage to bear one safely, every house a turn, and every curb−stone set at a different angle, for thus, like a many−jointed snake Doyer street creeps out of the damp and green−grown marsh of Pell street, upon the open sunny slope of Chatham Square.

Following the whim of the street, which must needs have its way, they got forth into the broad region of the Square, along which Hobbleshank speeded at a good round rate, while Mr. Small regaled himself with an eleemosynary ride on the foot−board of a hackney−coach, where he sat comfortably balanced and keeping the old man in view until they reached Mulberry street, when he dismounted,—just in time to evade the crack of a whip from the box−seat—and followed Hobbleshank warily into a building some dozen or two paces off of the main street. It was a dark, ruinous, gloomy−looking old house—built on a model that was lost twenty years ago and never found again—and had a wide greedy hall, that swallowed up as many chairs, tables and other fixtures, as the various tenants chose to cast into it.

Up the broad rambling stairs Hobbleshank ascended, and by the time he had attained a cramped room at the head of the second flight, Mr. Small had accomplished the same journey, crept along and clambered up a narrow cornice in the throat of the hall, and gaining, by an exercise of dexterity peculiar to himself, a small window in the wall, was looking very calmly and reflectively through the same at two aged women upon whose presence Hobbleshank had entered.

One of them sate by the hearth: she was small and shrivelled, with a pinched and wrinkled countenance; so shrivelled and thin, and seemingly void of life−like qualities, as if she hovered only on the borders of the world, and was ready to go at any moment's summons. The other was stouter, though she too was bowed with years and bore in her features traces of many past cares; which she seemed zealous to make known by larding her discourse with great sighs, which she heaved at the rate of twenty a minute, while she bustled about the chamber and busied herself in various household offices.

These scarcely noticed the entrance of Hobbleshank, who opened the door gently, and stealing in proceeded to a corner of the room, where, taking a chair and turning his back upon them, he bowed his head upon his hand and was silent.

"I tell you—you have been a blessed woman, Dorothy— that you have," cried the elder, in a sharp wiry voice from the chimney−corner, where she was painfully employed in rubbing her withered palms together over the blaze, "a blessed woman. There was my first born, Tom, with as handsome a pair of blue eyes as mother ever looked at, did n't he fall into the old Brewery well, and die there, like a malt−rat, shouting for help, which came, of course, just the minute after he was stifled. Always so—always so, I tell you!"

"Whose roof was blown off in the great September gale —yours or mine, Aunt Gatty? I'd like to know that," rejoined the other, heaving a sigh of course. "Whose son was buried in a trance for three days and better, and when he comes to again has to be taught his alphabet all over like a suckling child? Your loss—Lord preserve

us!— was a drop in the bucket, so speaking, when the brewers wound it up—nothing more."

And the stout old lady laughed gently at the thought of the brawny brewers tugging away at the rope for so lively a hoist, and then fell straightway to sighing.

"Why, you talk like a simpleton," answered the other sharply, "a natural simpleton in a dotage: there was a child of mine, Dorothy, you mind it well—you used to say he had hawk's eyes—so wild and bright and glancing. That boy went mad, I think, and struck at me—me, his mother—and that you know too, for many's the look you've taken at the old scar—me, who had watched his steps all through infancy and childhood and boyhood, up to the very manhood that gave him strength to strike: smote her down to the earth—was it he or the fiend that did it?—and would have snatched her life away, but for the men who beat him off like a dog? There was Joe, too, my dear," continued aunt Gatty "that went down of a dark drearisome night, in the wild Gulf Stream, crying Heaven's help! in vain, and snatching at the waves, as old Buncle, the ship−master, told me, like a madman." The old woman shook as in a palsy, and waved her head painfully to and fro, as she recited these passages of past trouble.

"True, true, true," said her companion, who had paused in her labor and watched her for a moment, "true; just as true as that Jacob—my Jacob, I used to call him, but now he's anybody's or nobody's—was carried off to prison by cruel men, ten times fiercer than your Gulf Streams and your Tornadoes—had his limbs chained, and was put to hewing great blocks of stone like a devil on penance—taken away from good day wages and bound in a jail—"

"Peace! you foolish praters!" exclaimed Hobbleshank, starting up at this moment from the deep silence in which he had been buried, turning toward them and lifting both his arms tremblingly up, "Peace! while I read you a page, a black page, out of the book of lamentations—that should make the blood creep in your old veins like the brook−ripples in December. There 's a quiet serene farm−house—a quiet serene farm−house—with a father, a mother, yes, merciful God! a young, happy, beautiful mother." He paused and bowed his head, but in a few minutes he proceeded, "and a young child that has just crept out upon the bleak common of this world of ours, lying in her bosom, as it might be Adam and his spouse, in some chosen corner of their old garden. Some devil or other secretly engulphs all the fortune of that household, tortures with a slow, killing pain, the father of the family, by ever−lending to him and everdriving him for horrid interests—making him toil and moil in that great, inexorable mill of usury and borrowing: till his brain turns—his old reason totters like a weak tower that shakes in the wind:—he flies from his home wandering to and fro, he knows not whither—straying back to it at times, after long lunatic absences; and one day—there 's a word that should prick your foolish old hearts like a sword's point—coming suddenly back, he finds his fair young wife dead—yes dead!—starved into a skeleton so pale and ghastly that anatomists and men of death would smile to look on it—and the boy—the boy that should have gone with her, she loved him so, into the grave she had traveled to through hunger, or have staid back to inherit that roof that was his and cheer up this sad old heart that is mine—snatched away, secretly, nobody could tell how, or when, or whither—and the very nurse that should have tarried to keep company with death in that house of sorrow— was likewise fled; and I, an old, shattered, uncertain poor creature, left alone in the midst of all this desolation— as if it became me—and had only waited for me as its rightful master and emperor. Well; God's blessing with you—and if you have seen greater trouble than that, you have borne it merrily and are miracles of old women to have lived through it to this day!"

Saying this, the old man started up from his chair, and staggering across the room, trembling in every limb, he hurried into a small chamber at the end of the apartment and cast himself upon his couch. The two old women, abashed by the passion and energy of the speaker, were silent for a while and moved not a limb. They both sate looking toward the door where Hobbleshank had entered, as if they expected him, momently to emerge.

"A sad tale; a sad tale, in truth," at length said the younger. "Was the boy never heard of?"

"Never, that I know, from that dark day to this," answered the other, mumbling as she spake and shrinking back into the chimney, as if what she recalled stood shrouded before her in a deadly form; "Search was not made for him, until years after the mother's death—the worms' banquet had been set and cleared away many a day—when the old man, who had wandered away, as soon as the funeral was over, the Lord knows whither, came back, and loitered and lingered about his former residence, the old farm−house, in the suburbs of the city, day after day, watching in vain, hour by hour, for the forthcoming of some one who could tell the history of what was past. The building is closed and deserted, and has no historian but itself, or such as would not tell, if they could, the fate of the lost child, or the secret of his death, if dead he be."

"And where is the nurse?"

"Absent; missing; drowned, or murdered, or dead in due course of nature; nobody can tell. The house is deserted and gone to decay, and is said to belong to a wretched miser, whose right came, somehow or other, through the child's death. There's the whole story, and this old man, who came to live with me so long ago—even before you knew me—and has never once spoken of it till this night, is the only wreck of the troubles and cares and crosses that howled about it, till they found entrance, twenty years ago! Something has stirred him strangely, or he would not have spoken this night."

"Perhaps his mind is failing," said the other: "for when that 's ebbing away, it always uncovers what is at the bottom, and brings to light things hidden in its depths for years."

"He may have seen some object associated with old times that has touched him," answered aunt Gatty "visited, perhaps, the farm−house itself; or have chanced upon some person connected with these terrible events."

"It may be so. But let us to bed, my dear old friend, and pray that the Spirit of Peace be in the old man's slumbers."

"Amen!" said her companion: and extinguishing their light, and carefully drawing a curtain before the chamber−window where Hobbleshank lodged, that the morning beam might not disturb his repose, they were soon sheltered in the quiet and darkness of night that wrapped them all about.

Ishmael Small, who had greedily watched them all through, after stretching his blank features forward into the gloom of the apartment to catch any further word that might chance to fall, crept down from his post of observation and stole cautiously away.

CHAPTER XI. MR. LEYCRAFT RAMBLES PLEASANTLY ABOUT.

By the time Ishmael Small had returned to the street, darkness had set in, and was growing along all the thoroughfares into the wide−bodied mantle worn by so many stragglers and evil−minded persons, and supposed to be a commodious cloak for all sorts of villanies and misdemeanors. As Ishmael came into the open way, his eye fell upon a tall, gaunt figure, that kept before him, not altogether in a straight line, but winding about through the crowd of laborers and 'prentices that began to set up Chatham street at this hour, in a strong current; not halting at any time, exactly, but pausing every now and then in its progress, and glancing about into the faces of those it encountered. Mr. Small observed that the tall figure occupied itself exclusively in gazing into men's faces, and into none of these save such as seemed to be in the early prime of life. The figure would look about and contemplate a face in this way for a moment, and then disengaging itself from the crowd—as if thwarted in its purpose—would hurry forward, until it plunged again into another, and renewed the never−ending scrutiny.

On the traces of this personage, Ishmael hung, until they reached Doyer street, and into this crooked by−way it hastened, first casting a swift glance back upon the throng that speeded by, and Ishmael Small followed.

The tall figure glided stealthily along, close up by the house−walls, and peered in wherever he could at the casements, coming at times to a dead pause, putting his face against the window and looking long and painfully within, as if he were bound to have an inventory of every article in the apartment.

In this way he toiled through the street, until he had reached its farthest extremity, where he crossed, entered a covered stable−way, and took up his station against the wall, his eyes still gleaming restlessly about, and his body bent forward into the partial darkness to catch sight of any face that chanced to pass.

"Evening, Emp'ror," said Ishmael Small, crossing over at this juncture, and approaching him—lifting his cap at the same time with an air of profound respect—"taking the census, eh?"

"I wish I was," said the other, sternly, plucking his hat over his brow, "I'd have a chance then of learning whether he lives among men yet."

"You have the queerest fancy for faces I ever did see, Mr. Leycraft" said Ishmael, turning his own delightful countenance comically up towards Leycraft's, "the very funniest taste for juvenile noses that was ever heard of. Nothing 'll serve you but a first−swathe mug, about twenty−three year old, with a small black−berry mole under the left eye. Is that it?"

"That describes the child—that was put foully out of the way," answered Leycraft, "so long ago, that it seems as if all had passed in another world, and yet as fresh, by heaven! as if it belonged to yesterday."

"There 's a plenty of boys in this street," answered Ishmael, "and in the next, and the next to that—that 'ud answer, Emp'ror: you can have your pick, perhaps you won't get the black−berry under the eye, but then you can get lots of hair−lips, and boar−teeth; burnt faces and scald heads, and what do you say to a lad with a portmantle on his shoulders, like Ishmael Small, for example."

"Do you think Fyler Close has any clue to the boy— dead or alive?" asked Leycraft, paying no heed to the suggestion of Ishmael.

"Lord! He know anything of the scape−grace," exclaimed Mr. Small, turning about so that the light of a stable lamp that hung above them should fall directly on his blank visage, "bless you, Mr. Leycraft, he 's ignorant as the Mogul—the great grand Eastern Mogul, that takes tea with the moon. He knows nothing, nor cares nothing!"

Mr. Leycraft grasped the seat with both hands, and bending down, looked sternly into the countenance of his companion, but discovering there nothing to the purpose, soon returned to his former position, and standing almost bolt upright, gazed straight forward, as if he would pierce the utmost limits of the darkness with his glance.

"I 'd give my soul if the boy were alive!" he at length exclaimed, with startling energy, reining in his breath as he spake, and discharging each word with the force of a missile; "alive! Ragged though he might be, maimed, blind, in prison, the commonest vagabond, or vilest felon that stalks a prison−hall; yea, though he stood before me now, and with his raised hand should strike me to the earth, I 'd leap up to greet him, and would bid him welcome back to God's light, readier than his mother's lips hailed his first coming into life!"

"Why do 'nt you go to bed and sleep off this nonsense?" inquired Mr. Small; "the youth 's abed somewhere or

other, I 'll warrant; if not in a four−poster, may be in a church−yard crib. Sleep 's the physic for your Excellency."

"Curse it! I can't sleep," rejoined Leycraft, "I have put myself on board sloops and dirty coal−smacks, and toiled away at the ropes till my palms were blistered; have let myself to carry logs and great iron sticks of timber, by the day, and yet, when night came—night, that 's nothing but a hideous dream to men like me—I 've laid down and shut my eyes, and just as slumber began to come pleasantly upon me, a hand, a small hand seemingly, but as strong as a giant's, would be laid on my arm, would shake me, and rousing, I beheld that accursed child's eyes looking steadily in mine, broad awake and glittering, but not half so cheerful, as broad day; and then shaking its head mournfully, for a minute or two, it would move away, leaving me gasping and struggling for breath, on the hard couch, like a drowning man. Blast my face, I 'm but a dead−alive, after all; pleasant company this, every night, but a little too much of it!"

While Leycraft ejaculated this passage in an under−breath, Mr. Small stood aside, and grinned cheerfully, as if at an imaginary spectacle of a very pleasant nature, which might be going on at a short distance before him; at one minute he leaned forward with an ideal opera−glass at his eye; then he clapped his hands gently, as if the sport were well−conducted, and then he fell back, as against a comfortable support, and laughed, as if it were too much for him.

All this he did as if entirely unconscious of the presence of Mr. Leycraft or any one whatever.

"Blast you!" cried Leycraft, fixing his eye sharply upon Ishmael, "You don't make a mock of me—do you, young Radish−legs? eh!"

"Lord bless your Excellency!" rejoined Mr. Small, waking, as by surprise, from an agreeable reverie, "You can't seriously mean such a thing. I was thinking just then of a cumbat I had seed once at the thea−ter, betwixt a fine speckled India tiger, and a little pock−marked man in a military jacket. The brute−beast was too much for him I guess," continued Ishmael smiling pleasantly directly in Mr. Leycraft's face: "the way he got the fangs, first here and then there, now in the head, now in the bosom, was very agreeable to a young operative surgeon what was aside o' me in the pit, very agreeable I can assure you."

"In God's name, Ishmael," said Leycraft, his mood changing abruptly from that of extreme fierceness, to one of earnest entreaty, "Tell me what you know of this matter! If the child be dead, let me go and gather up his bones and give them decent burial at least!

"Suppose the lad died where you think he did, Emp'ror," said Ishmael, evading a direct answer, "It was a natural death, without drugs or doctors: that's a comfort, I'm sure."

"A natural death, do you call it!" cried Leycraft, "the death of a pilfering weasel, or a foul mud−rat rather. There's plenty of nature in great black woods, that swarm with bats and hideous birds of darkness: where no step comes but that of villains fled from city justice; and where the earth is dank with slime and sluggish ooze. A cradle and a calm pillow, with a face or two to look in upon it when one dies, is rather nearer the mark!"

"And it's a very pleasant subject to talk of too," said Ishmael. "There's no place like a open stable−way for an agreeable interview; unless it's in the jail entry. `Mr. Leycraft's case is a very bad one,' says the keeper with his twist in his mouth. `Not so bad, after all,' says the keeper's man, knocking the bunch o' keys agin his leg. `It was only a juvenile boy.'"

"Blast you again!" exclaimed Leycraft, seizing Ishmael this time by the collar, and holding him in a hard gripe, "Do you mock me for journey−work I've done for that old devil," pointing toward the lodgings of Mr. Fyler Close, "Do you tell me I may come to hang for the job! There'll be three pairs on the tree, my brave fellow, the day John Leycraft swings: Three ripe villains and you'll be the youngest, and that old chap who begins to smell over−ripe, shall have the middle place, out of respect to his talents!"

Ishmael again protested that he was friendly, and that he was only striving with his little wit, to help Mr. Leycraft realize a pleasant scene that he might one day come to be a party to: to which explanation Mr. Leycraft would, however, by no means hearken, but dragging Ishmael forth by the collar into the street, he pushed him from him with great vehemence, and while Mr. Small reeled off laughing to himself as he staggered, Leycraft turned his back upon him and hastened away.

At first he hurried forward, with his head down and his hands clenched like one bound on a task that must be performed; but presently, as he got into the throng of a thoroughfare, another purpose seemed to enter his mind, and raising his eyes suddenly he began to peer about like one wakened from a dream. Then he watched every face

that passed him; sometimes singled one out from all others, and followed it for a while until it crossed a light, and then he fell back as if he had made a fatal mistake; and then taking up another, and another, and another, he renewed the pursuit, and again fell off into a state of blank despair. At times, too, he would strike from the crowd into by−streets, lone and deserted, where no soul was to be seen, and walking here for awhile, cast his thoughts back upon what had passed—would to God, there were no such past time, he thought—years and years ago.

"I remember well," he said to himself, in one of these pauses, "how the old devil brought the work about: `Leycraft,' said he, with a very pleasant and cheerful smile on his countenance, `There's a sweet child—it 's young, quite young, that 's never been in that piece of woodland,' pointing to the hemlocks to the north−west, `in its life, near as it is. Now it 's quite a warm evening and the wood will be much cooler than the close room; the mother 's dying within there — she can't last above a couple of hours — not beyond day−break at the best, and I 'm quite curious, as she must go to Heaven, for she 's a delightful woman as ever was made; I 'm quite curious to see which 'll get there first, the mother post−marked by the doctors, or the young lad franked by the night air. It 's a very curious little problem, is'nt it?' I of course, fool, double−woven, three−ply ass that I was,— answered to his wish, and when night fell, having the very sighs and moans of the poor dying lady in my ear, bore the child away. An apoplexy the first step I had taken would have been Heaven's blessing on the job."

At that moment a sick man was borne by in a curtained litter; Leycraft heard a groan, as of severe suffering and anguish from within; and this goaded his restless and uncomfortable thoughts anew.

"He, the generous, noble−hearted gentleman that he is, allowed me a lodging in the garret as long as I chose," said he, or rather recited to himself as he formed the thought in his own mind—"I might as well have lodged in the oven of eternal flame; the whole house cried out, from peak to foundation, against the deed I had done. The first night—good Heaven, can I ever forget it?—I slept well for a few hours, the agony of doing the crime had exhausted me; but when I awoke, it was from a dreadful, dreary phantasm, made up of howling crowds in pursuit, dark, chill woods, and a whole army, it seemed, of innocent children, surrounding and pleading with me, or cursing, I do'nt know which. Before me—in a gloomy corner of the garret I saw—where the moonbeam fell upon it through a rent in the roof and dressed it in ghastly light, the very child I had slain. It stood like a spectre, stiff, cold, threatening and rebuking me with its snake's eyes and visage of church−yard marble. At first I was smitten aghast—but soon the devil stirred within me, and rushing from my bed I seized upon an old revolutionary sword, one that had been dyed long ago in a black Hessian's blood, and stood at the bed−head— and advancing upon the apparition, struck at it. It moved not. I struck again and again—it was still dumb. In this way I wrestled with it, grasping my sword fast with a death−hold, all night, at least till I fell down where I had fought, like one in a swound. When morning dawned, I turned my eyes fearfully toward the quarter of my adversary, and then discovered that I had been battling all night long with nothing but the picture of a little old man—in all seeming an ancestor of the murdered child; and that I had pierced it at a hundred points. A hideous night—God, thanks be to him, sends few such to men!"

Whenever his thoughts ceased to toil with visions like these, he renewed his inquisition among the crowds through which he was passing, or which he hurried on to meet. In this way he struggled with himself or speeded forward the better part of the night. Toward day, when one might suppose he would have sought home and rest, wriggling his way through lanes and crooked streets, that plunged down into the heart of the city, he entered an alley of ten−pin players, and casting aside his coat without a word, joined a grim−looking man who had amused himself with tossing the balls, one over the other, against flies upon the ceiling, till Leycraft came in. They rolled away for hours; bowling at the pins as if they had been men, and knocking six at least in head at each stroke.

CHAPTER XII. A FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE WITH FOB, THE TAILOR.

It was in the peak of the Fork, even higher up than Puffer Hopkins, that Fob the tailor lodged, and there Puffer, ascending by ladder steps, one pleasant morning about this time, found him nestling like a barn−swallow, under the eaves, with his legs gathered under him, after the immemorial fashion of the craft.

The room which was occupied by Fob, was scarcely more than an angle in the roof: the ceiling was formed by the slope of the house−top, and it was lighted by a small dormer window which bulged out of the roof like an eye, and, being the only dormer in the neighborhood, stared boldly down into the yards and alleys adjacent. It enjoyed the further privilege, from its great elevation, of peering off beyond the river, into a pleasant country prospect, in the suburbs of Williamsburgh, and furnished many cheerful rural images to any one that looked forth. Besides this paramount advantage of the dormer, there was within the apartment, a pair of glass bottles on a small mantel garnished with sprigs of asparagus stuck in at the top; a chain of birds' eggs hung against the wall over the shelf; an old fashioned clothes−press, very much broken up and debilitated, at the foot of a dwarf truckle−bed: parts of old spinning wheels, rusty stirrups and sur−cingles, the back of a mouldy and moth−eaten saddle, and other ancient trumpery in a corner, and suspended at the window, overlooking a pot of plants, a cage with a black−bird in it, busily engaged in passing up and down from a second−story perch to the ground−floor of his tenement.

Although Puffer had many times before visited the lodgings of the little tailor, he had not failed, each time, to express, by his manner at least, a degree of surprise and bewilderment at the peculiar appointments and furniture of the apartment. To come up out of the noisy and brawling street, where every thing was so harsh and city−like, into a little region, where every thing was quietly contrived to call up remote places, with the thought of a life so different, so simple and pastoral, compared with the dull tumult below, was like magic, or playhouse jugglery; and such a feeling betrayed itself in the countenance of Puffer Hopkins.

"You wonder I doubt not, to see this black−bird here— don't you?" said the tailor, detecting the question which Puffer's looks had often asked before: "What business have I with a black−bird, unless I might fancy that I could catch the cut of a parson's coat from the fashion of his deep sable feathers. That blackbird, sir, is to me and my opinions, what the best and portliest member of Congress is to the mind of this metropolis. He has come a great way out of the country, from the very fields where I was born, and where my childhood frolicked, to remind me of the happy hours I have passed, and the sweet dreams I have dreamt, in the very meadows where he and his brethren chattered on the dry branches of the chestnut tree. He stands to me for those fields and all those hours and occasions of the past. I am a fool for being so easily purchased to pleasure: and so I am!"

Puffer had indicated by the attentive ear and glistening eyes with which he had regarded his poor neighbor, that, although a politician and crowd−hunter, he had yet something in his heart that answered these conceits of the fancy−stricken tailor.

"This pot too, of worthless flowers," continued Fob, "my neighbors every morning and evening, see me water them, and wonder how I can so waste my time. They see in it nothing but a few coarse weeds in a cheap earthen pot. I, and thank God for it, recognize in it the great, green wood where summer and I haunted when we were young, together. I hear in every breath that stirs them, the rustling of the noon−day wind, as it spake to me long ago, in a quiet nook of the old ancestral woodside; and the pattering of the rain on their leaves renews the sound of that ancient brook, whose voice was like a prophet's, to cheer and encourage all that green region in its growth. From its banks these flowers were plucked and brought into this heart of humanity, to give me a thought at times of the good childhood that was buried by me long ago where they had their birth."

Puffer still listened and said not a word.

"Oh how many delicious discoveries in the tall grass: how many stealthy approaches; how many swayings in perilous branches and mad antics in tree tops; how many boisterous pursuits of the young bird and lucky arrests of winged fugitives, resound and come back and repeat themselves in this speckled string of birds' eggs hanging against the dingy wall!"

As he spake, the large black eyes of the tailor grew more lustrous, and still the more from the tears which stole out and back again with the emotions that stirred him.

Fob had scarcely finished his earnest declamation, when they heard creaking steps upon the stair, and in a minute or two while they listened, the door was thrust open, and a person of no little consequence, if his own countenance was to be taken as a commentary on his pretensions, came forward. He was a fine, sleek, well−fed gentleman, of a good middle stature, apparelled as daintily and cleanly as one could wish; and judging by his jet black hair and whiskers which shone again with oil or some other ointment; his shapely and well−cut coat which sat to his back like a supplementary skin; his pantaloons so straight and trim that the legs must needs move rectilinearly or not at all; his hat with its smooth, glossy nap; his boots quite as polished and serenely bright; and the massy gold chain that stretched like an arc of promise over the azure heaven of a deep blue vest: judging, we say, by all these, this personage must have been the first favorite of all the guilds and craftsmen, whose business it is to prepare a gentleman for a promenade.

"Are those pants finished, Fob: I mean the superior, with open fronts and patent straps?" said the sleek visiter, swelling as he spake and staring over the little tailor's head very fiercely, as if he meditated boring a couple of holes in the wall beyond with his glances. "Curse it, sir, my boy sate up in the ware−house 'till midnight, expecting you every moment. What do you think I'm made of," he continued, dashing his elegant heel on the floor, "cast−iron or New Hampshire granite? Eh?"

"I worked, sir," answered Fob, looking up timidly into the face of the sleek gentleman "'till my needle grew so fine I could'nt see it: and by the time I had got down the right leg, the moon was set; my candles all burnt out, and I fell back on my lap−board, sir, and slept 'till dawn, when I took up my last stitch with the rise of the sun. You shall have them by three this afternoon, if you'll be good enough to wait."

"Rot your slow fingers—do you call that work?" pursued the visiter. "Get in a new supply of lights, and keep it up all night—your wages would bear it. Here am I paying you at the extravagant rate of nine−pence an hour for your labor, and you grumble—do you?"

"I do not, sir," said Fob meekly, "I am satisfied, perfectly satisfied. I'm bound to make clothes for gentlemen, and it pleases me to see gentlemen wear them, if they suit."

"Do you know, Fob, that it's my private opinion," continued the sleek visiter, "my private opinion, if you had fallen a corpse on that board and had never got up again—it would have done you great honor."

Fob assumed a puzzled look at this, as if he did'nt exactly fathom and comprehend how that could be.

"I should like to know," resumed the well−apparelled visiter, "whether it is'nt as creditable to a man to lose his life on a pair of patent−strapped, open−fronted pantaloons, as in a ditch with a ball in his head, or a great bagnet in his belly—tell me that, will you? If some man, you for instance, would only make a martyr of himself, in getting up a new−fangled coat, or a vest extraordinary, the craft of clothiers would make a saint of him: overwork yourself, Fob, and be found by a coroner's quest stone−dead, with the pattern griped in your hand, and I'll bury you at my own expense! 'Gad I will—and that as soon as you choose!"

To this pleasant proposition Fob made no answer, but smiled doubtfully and glanced up at his bird in the cage, thinking perhaps he'd rather be black and idle, and in prison like him, than a feeble−bodied tailor, working for journeyman's wages, with a delightful circle of calling acquaintance, like the gentleman there present, among Broadway masters and down−town clothing merchants.

"Never mind that now," said the master, "you may think of it. Don't fail to run down at three with the pants on your arm: mark me now Fob," and he shook his finger as he turned for the door. "I've got a wedding coat to give out to you, to be ready for Monday evening, so there may be a little light Sunday work for you. You need'nt put any button−holes in the coat−tails as you did once before, if you please. The blunder did'nt take with the fashionables, although it was quite original and fresh. Down by three, or I cut you off from our shop!"

With this solemn admonition and menace, the high and mighty master−tailor from Broadway descended the narrow steps with great caution, and getting once again into the free and open street, and on a good level pavement, launched out into some of his finest paces, at which he was soon so well pleased as to begin smiling to himself, and kept on in both recreations, smiling and launching out, until he reached his shop−door, where he entered majestically in.

After the Broadway master had departed, Fob laid aside his implements and the garment he was busy on, and getting down from his lap−board walked to the window, where he stood gazing earnestly out, beyond the river, for several minutes.

"I am sometimes surprised," he at length said, returning and taking a seat on the corner of his board, while a

little globule, that wonderfully resembled a tear, stood in the corner of his eye, "I am sometimes surprised," said he, "at the passionate fondness with which my mind dwells on the country. But it has always been so. When I was a mere child, and my father lived then in the city, how I used to yearn after a sight of the green fields. I watched the months as they waned away, with one hope, and that was that August would soon be here and take me with its holiday coach away to the dusty turnpike, the long green lane, and the low roof of the Homestead. At school I bent over my desk, and folding my hands upon my eyes to help the labor of fancy, would strive with all my might to call up vividly some little scene or spot that I loved or preferred to others. When the world was rough with me, even at that early time, I would hie away in thought to the side of a shady pool that I knew of, and quench my thirst and drown my troubles in waters, purer and more limpid, as it seemed to me, than any other that ever flowed or bubbled up from the earth."

In explanation of the character of his poor neighbor, Puffer afterwards learned, that the homestead of Fob's ancestors, for poor and wretched as he now seemed, the fanciful tailor once had ancestors—the homestead which Fob loved next after his own soul, every rood of which was fairy ground to his memory, peopled with lovely shapes, having power to stir the fountain of tears, every nook and angle associated in his fancy with precious hours long passed away; that this dear homestead had been wrested out of the hands of its rightful heritors, and was, by law and custom, a forbidden realm to him. In spite of this, it was Fob's wont to visit it secretly every year, at mid−summer, to wander silently about its familiar fields and dusky woods, and returning when he had gathered a store of pleasnat thoughts and fancies to last him a twelvemonth, to bring back such memorials and relics—like those that garnished his garret—as would suggest to his mind the kindliest recollections of his favorite haunts.

"Among many images which perpetually come into my mind associated with that old past time," resumed the little tailor, after a pause, "there is one more distinct, more fixed and impressive than any other. I know not why, nor do I know how it should occur to me so forcibly now that you are here. There was a strange old man who many years ago was a wanderer along the Scarsdale road—they said he had spent his school holidays some where there—I marked him and loved him for that—and whose wild actions were a constant theme at half the country fire−sides. I saw him once—at midnight, or very near that time—upon the shore of the Sound, where I had been walking up and down, for I chanced to be a sorrower myself: He had cast off his hat and stood facing the water with his hair streaming wildly back, and his eyes gleaming forth upon the wave, with all the splendor of madness. He cried aloud as if in discourse with the billows. `Has't any thing to lend to−day? I must have money—disgorge, or I shall starve—my wife is hungry— my boy cries for bread. Foam will not feed him—nor will these loud−sounding rebuffs of yours! Wave on wave—cent per cent—how they jump, and frolic, and climb each other at a compound pace. Oh what a ledger of interest must there be on the other shore, when we reach it. God's there, keeping count!—Mark that.'

The Sound was in a stormy state; a ship was passing that wrestled fiercely with the billows that tumbled against her sides, and rushed in the way of her prow, and kept her in a perplexing grasp, struggling in vain to get free. The old man caught sight of this. `Dash and howl, and drag her down, will you?' he shouted, `That's the true death−grapple, and old ship you must yield. See, she shivers against the rock and down she pitches,' at this the vessel struck a bulging crag, and was in a moment broken into a thousand fragments. `Pull her in pieces, joint by joint, and make shreds of her, as I do of this—yes, this cursed scroll that the old engulphing miser gapes for in the city! So—so, thus!' Saying this he snatched from his breast what seemed a large square of parchment and tearing it into tatters, scattered it with the wind, along the beach!"

"What became of the fragments—were they never gathered?" asked Puffer Hopkins.

"They were—and by me," answered Fob.

"And where are they now?"

"The Lord, that hath a record of all things lost, only knows!" he answered. "I collected them, patched them together, and after passing from hand to hand, without much advantage to any, they were thrown into some old trunk or garret, where doubtless, they are mouldering now— and in all human chances, passing through the same process their once owner—that poor, wild, sorrow−stricken old man is undergoing in some alms−house burial ground!"

"Do you recollect nothing of the purport of this recovered paper?" asked Puffer Hopkins.

"Only this much," answered Fob, "that it was a conveyance of house and land, with the singular provision that

no transfer or sale of the property could be good and sufficient while the child or son, I forget now his name, was living. The names, the dates, much more the boundaries, have all fled from my memory: but I shall never forget the wild tones and eager looks of the old creature that made the deed into fragments; whose voice seemed to echo the Sea, and who borrowed from it the method of his acts!"

It suddenly entered the mind of Puffer Hopkins, whose attention had been strongly fastened upon the narrative of the little tailor, that the old man, that this sufferer, of so long since, and who was supposed by Fob to lie in his grave, might be none other than his kind and singular companion whom he had followed from the Public Hall. He was full of the thought and interchanging scarcely another word with the tailor, he left the garret, pondering on what he had heard, and striving to gather out of it something that might bear on what seemed the distracted fortunes of Hobbleshank.

CHAPTER XIII. THE ECONOMY OF MR. FYLER CLOSE AND ISHMAEL SMALL.

Recovering from the blow administered by Mr. Leycraft, Ishmael promptly regained his legs, and putting them into active service, he moved down with good speed—the night air was sharp and pinching—upon a neighboring shop window, and knocking up his cap−front employed a minute or two in gazing through the pane, at what lay inside.

"There's fine slices of liver in there," said Ishmael to himself, "and excellent chops; and all sorts of greens. A pound or two of chops would be very nice, with carrots; and so would a slab of liver. But I guess I'll take a small porter−house steak, without the bone, for this time only!"

He accordingly proceeded to invest a small sum in the delicacy in question, skewered it, and concealing it in an ingenious brown paper hood, bore it exultingly away.

"Something to wet the fibres of course," he resumed, as he approached a grocer's, "something to drown the young critters in: a pint of fresh cider from the Newark keg; the very choicest squeezin's of a thousand pippins! That'll do!" This beverage was procured and, in a borrowed pitcher, was put in company with the steak; and skipping along faster than ever, bounding nimbly over any obstacle that crossed him, he was in a very few minutes in the hall that passed the broker's door. Lightly as he stepped along, the ear of the old man was too quick for him, and in answer to a summons from within, he halted, placed his steak and pitcher privily on a chair in the corner of the hall, and turning a baker's measure that stood by over them, for a screen, entered.

The lodgings of Mr. Close, were, as Ishmael now entered them, if anything, more desolate than ever. There was the dull bare floor, the naked walls, the great cold chimney, breathing, instead of warmth and comfort, a dreary chillness through the room; and the shivering broker seated by the hearth, as if he would coax himself into a belief that a cheery fire was crackling upon it.

The only light the apartment was allowed, came in through the open windows in the rear, and was contributed by the various candles and lamps of the neighborhood. In this half−lighted gloom, Mr. Small entered, removed his cap, and stood by the door. He was hailed at once, but in a very feeble voice, by Mr. Close.

"Don't stand there, Ishmael—take a chair by the hearth; it's much pleasanter than by the door." Ishmael came forward and did so.

"Don't you perceive a difference?" said Mr. Close, as soon as Ishmael was seated. "Don't you think of the many pleasant fires that have blazed on this very hearth, and does'nt that make you feel cheerful?"

Ishmael confessed that it was a comforting thought.

"Yet pleasant as it is," pursued Mr. Fyler Close, "as this is a Thursday, I'd like to be out: out in the open air, hurrying through the streets at my best pace. What do you think of that?"

"To class−meeting, of course," suggested Ishmael, with the faintest possible smile on his delightful features.

"To be sure—but my age and infirmities, Ishmael, won't allow me, you know," answered Fyler, pleasantly, "to attend those delightful social and moral gatherings, as I'd like to."

"Certainly not," rejoined Mr. Small, grinning slightly. "Nor to be at Missionary Lectures, dropping in my little mite for the heathen," continued Fyler, "nor at the Chapel, listening to the Native African giving an account of the vices and wild beasts that beset the aboriginal negro in that benighted country. What a loss to an evangelical mind!"

"Dreadful, sir," answered Ishmael. "And there's the privilege of subscribing to a new cloak for the minister, and helping make up a box of trowsers and clean linen for the Tuscaroras!"

"Very true, Ishmael—very true! I'm a melancholy old fellow, doing nothing but sit here all day long—with people coming in and begging me to take twenty per cent interest, coaxing me with tears in their eyes, to ruin 'em: and when I have done it, coming back to break my furnitur' up, like old crockery—just to get me into temper, and make me mar my christian deportment. That's what I call ingratitude, Ishmael."

"The very basest sort, sir," said Mr. Small, "caught in the wild state, caged, and marked on the peak of the den, `This ere's the Monster!'"

"Providence is a wonderful thing, Ishmael," continued Fyler Close.

"Very much so!" answered Mr. Small, lifting his knavish grey eyes to a great spider on the wall, sitting in the middle of his web, where the light of a bright lamp shone from without, in waiting for a gold−spotted fly caught by the legs in a mesh.

"Now I suppose you followed old Hobbleshank providentially, down to his den—eh! Ishmael?" said Fyler, leering on Mr. Small. Ishmael replied in the affirmative.

"And no doubt you happened to put your head through the window and overhear what the old gentleman said. He was'nt very noisy, I hope."

"Not more than the Hen and Chickens in a storm!" answered Ishmael. "Why sir, he made a speech that 'ud have done honor to a United States Senator: and the two old women whimpered like a couple of water−spouts. A delightful speech, sir, and all about that boy again."

"Ha! ha!—and did'nt he tell 'em how like a father I had been to him; and how I advised him not to bother his head about what was past and gone for good—and the old women, had'nt they something to say too, Ishmael?"

"Not much—the old story," answered Mr. Small, "about the old house, and the nurse, and all that sort o' thing."

"All in the dark as much as ever?" asked Fyler, pulling his whiskers with all his might, in order to throw an expression of great suffering into his countenance.

"I guess so; and old lunatic's wits are breaking under him, and won't carry him through the winter. That's better yet. Don't *you* think it is?"

"O no, by no means," responded Mr. Close. "We should always hope for the best. It would be a very painful thing—a very painful thing indeed, Ishmael, to have the worthy old gentleman go mad, out of mere ugliness and spite, because he can't find a boy that he thinks he's the father of. Don't you see that?"

"Very melancholy indeed," said Ishmael, who began to think remorsefully of the neglected cheer in the hall, "so much so that I don't feel equal to conversation on the subject. Won't you be good enough to excuse me?"

"Certainly—I have too much respect for your feelings. Go by all means, Ishmael, and the sooner you're abed, reflecting on the wilfulness of man and the mysterious ways and goings−on of Providence, the better for you! Good night; you'll be in bed at once I hope. Keep yourself nice and warm, Ishmael."

"I'll try sir," answered Mr. Small, artlessly, "Altho' it's a piercer out o' doors," and partly aside, "What a precious old man: a perfect martyr to his feelings."

The door was closed; the old man leaped up and dancing about the room, running forward every now and then to the window and staring into the open casements that furnished the free light to his chamber, rubbed his hands together with very glee.

Ishmael paused for a moment without, to look through a private crevice in the wall and enjoy the spectacle; then uncovered his steaks and pitcher, and taking them in his hand, bore them up stairs, and entered the apartment immediately over Mr. Close. This was scarcely more than a loft at the very top of the house; with beams and rafters cutting it crosswise and lengthwise in every direction; which beams were garnished with a great number of suspended market−baskets; coils of ancient iron hoops; great pieces of tarred cable; and here and there, bunches of rusted keys of all possible sizes;—some perfect giants, suited for great warehouses, and others scarcely large enough for ladies' writing−desks. The room, poor and parti−furnished as it was, had an air of comfort from the circumstance of the walls being lined on every side, with coats, trowsers, vests, roundabouts, and cloaks, hung upon pins about, in great abundance and variety: and when Ishmael, stepping gently about the room, gathered together from corners and hiding−places, fragments of wood and shaving, heaped them in the chimney and lighted a fire that blazed and crackled up the flue, throwing out a wavering flame into the gloom of the apartment, it seemed as if the room swarmed with visiters, who stood shrouded in their various apparel against the wall, and only waited an invitation from Ishmael to come forward and make themselves merry over his fire.

When Ishmael saw how cheerily the fire sparkled on the hearth, he could not hold from laughing gently, and thinking of the old gentleman below stairs. Then he took down from the wall, an old rusted gridiron, planted it upon the coals, and spreading his steak upon the bars, watched the process that followed with an eager eye. In a few minutes it was finished to a turn, and while a pleasant savor steamed up and filled the garret with a grateful smell, Ishmael arrayed his cheer on a blue plate on a little mantel or shelf that overhung the hearth; placed a small loaf (a perquisite from the baker) with a knife and fork at its side; and drawing a well worn counting−house stool from a corner, vaulted upon it with an easy leap, and first perching his heels upon a round near the top, and

placing the blue plate on his knee, entered with steady glee upon the business before him.

The meal was dispatched, as all meals are that are relished hugely; and when it was fairly at an end, Ishmael jumped up, and standing for a minute on the very top of the stool, and raising his hand above him, he brought down from a beam a long clay pipe and a handful of well dried tobacco; bent down and lighted it with a coal; and balancing his seat upon its hind legs, fell back against the wall, and watched the smoke complacently, as it was lost among the rafters.

All this process seemed to operate with a kindly influence upon Mr. Small, and as, from time to time, he removed the pipe from his lips, he discovered that he was in a fine narrative humor, and having no one to talk to, was driven, from the sheer necessity of the case, to talking to himself.

"That's not so bad," said Ishmael, glancing about at the various distenanted garments that filled the room, "four pence a day for trowsers, and sixpence for the use o' respectable men's coats with skirts: all for honest voters that goes to the polls in other people's clothes out o' respect to their memory. Nick Finch 's a capital 'lectioneerer, and dresses up his voters as pretty and natural as any man ever did; but if Nick's friends only knew what dignified gentlemen had wore their coats and trowsers before 'em, they 'd carry their heads more like lords and commodores than franchise citizens. Here's this nice suit of crowblack," pursued Mr. Small, turning about and fixing his eye upon the garments in question. "There was 'nt a nicer parson in the whole hundred and forty pulpits, than that gentleman afore he took to private drinks, and began to borry money of uncle Close on his gilt−edge prayer books and great Bibles out o' the pulpit. He used to look quite spruce and fine, I can tell you, when he first come here; then his beard began to stubble out; then his boots was foxy; and then he 'd come with his hat knocked in, and his pockets full of small stones, which he tried to pass off on the old 'un for change. When he got to that, uncle Close had him took up by the police for a deranged wagrant: and that was the last of you, old fellow!"

"Volunteer firemen is queer chaps!" continued Ishmael, casting his eyes upon a shaggy white overcoat with enormous pearl buttons. "Bully Simmons was one of the primest: and 'ud play a whole orchestra on a firetrumpet, on the way to a one−story conflagration. But fires was too much for him—they come on too thick and shiny on wet nights! First, Bully lost his appetite, and then he sold out all his red shirts; then he lost the use o' his legs, and could 'nt travel a ladder, with a pipe in his hand; and that made him part with his best figured hoists, every one of'em; and, one night, Bully tried his voice agin a norwester that was howling among the flames of a big factory, and when he found himself beaten out, he stood at the back of old forty and shed tears into an engin' bucket like rain; stopped at the old gentleman's on his way home and sold out his fire−hat, his belts, his boots, and that great rough jacket, for a song; borrowed a coal−heaver's shirt to go home in, and turned agin' engines for life! Bully's a very moral man, they say, now, and takes in the tracts by handfulls every time they come round, for shavin' paper.

As Ishmael sate perched upon his stool, framing, in this way, a memoir of each boot, vest, and overcoat, or meditating the course of the next day's business, a humble tap was given at the door, the door solwly opened, and a forlorn−looking personage, in a shabby hat, covered with dust, as was also his whole person, from crown to boot, and having under his arm a small parcel, came in. Advancing timidly, removing his hat and standing before Ishmael— while he looked piteously in his face, he accosted him. "Please, sir," said the stranger, "is there no corner of a bed a poor traveller might have! with a morsel to keep down the famine of a long day's march?"

To this appeal Mr. Small made no answer, but reclining against the wall, assumed to fall into a profound slumber.

"Do, for heaven's sake, hear me!" continued the stranger. "Wake, and hear me! I have come from burying an only child, in the country, and have neither crust nor couch to keep off the cold and hunger this night."

"Hallo! What's all this?" cried Ishmael, feigning at that moment to waken from his sleep. "Who's here? Thieves! Thieves! Do you mean to murder us in cold blood?"

The poor stranger stood shivering before him, with his hat crushed in his hand.

"There are no thieves here," said the stranger, as soon as he could be heard. "No man's life to be taken but mine, from sheer lack of food!"

"Oh, you 're a beggar, are you?" said Ishmael, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles. "Why did'nt you stop below, at the old man's? He would have helped you, I'm quite sure."

"So he would—so he would, sir," said the traveller, "but he's poor too; poorer than I. His health was broken, he told me; he 's cut off from all his religious comforts; and sits watching there, in that cold room, the pleasure of Providence. He's a nice, a worthy old man; that I judged by what he said. He referred me to you: there was a

benevolent young gentleman up stairs, he said, that would do anything I asked."

"He did, eh? And so you come to me," said Ishmael, smiling mildly upon the stranger. "Lodgin' in a garret, and old clothes cem−e−tery; as if I had a scrap to spare. You 're a wag: I know you are: but you should 'nt play off your humor on poor lads that lives in the roof. Oh, no— it won't do—and just, by way of apology for your rudeness, be good enough to give my compliments to the first watchman—you know what watchmans are, I guess— you meet at the door. Tell him to lend you his overcoat— he's sure to do it—borry his rattle for a cane; rattles make first−rate walking−sticks, and waddle home as fast as you can! Good night, turnip patch!"

The poor stranger dropped his head, and, without murmur or answer, went away.

Mr. Small now felt that he was wrought to as comfortable a state, intellectually and physically, as was attainable by such a gentleman as himself: and turned his eye bedward. Casting his coat off, and dexterously jerking a boot from either leg as he stood, into a remote corner, he pulled down from their pegs, every one of them, all the coats, vests and other garments in the apartment, into a heap upon his truckle bed, and creeping under the same, his knavish grey eyes, alone, peering out from under the mass, he fell into a tranquil sleep.

CHAPTER XIV. PUFFER HOPKINS ENCOUNTERS HOBBLESHANK AGAIN.

There could be no doubt—apart from what had occured to Mr. Small—that a general election was close at hand; and that the city was rapidly falling into a relapse of its annual fever. The walls and stable−doors broke out all over with great placards and huge blotches of declamation; an erisypelas of liberty−temples and muscular fists clenched upon hammers, appeared upon the forehead of the pumps; the air swarmed as with forerunners of a plague, with ominous flags streaked from end to end with a red and white and spotted inflammation; journeyman patriots and self−sacrificing office−seekers began to shout and vociferate as in a delirium; in a word, unless the customary blood−letting incident to a charter contest afforded relief, the patient was in a fair way of going stark mad, and losing the humble share of sense with which it looks after its washing and ironing, and provides for its butchers and bakers' dues during the rest of the year. It could scarcely be expected that Puffer Hopkins should escape the general endemic; on the contrary, it being his first season, the symptoms were in him extremely violent, and furious. From morning till night he sate at his desk like one spell−bound, fabricating resolutions, preambles, and reports of retiring committees, by the gross; or starting up every now and then and stalking the room vehemently, and then returning and committing the emphatic thoughts that had occurred to him in his hurried travel, to the record before him; varying this employment with speeches without number, delivered in all possible attitudes to imaginary audiences of every temper, complexion and constitution.

Sometimes he had very distinctly before him, in his mind's eye, an assemblage where the carting interest prevailed, and where the reduction of Corporation−cartmen's wages, for instance, might be undergoing an examination.

"Gentlemen," said Puffer, to the prospective audience, "Gentlemen, I put it to you whether twenty cents a load will pay a cartman and a cartman's horse? Gentlemen, I see a prospect before me for any man that undertakes to work for such prices. In six month he is a pauper, his children's paupers, his horse's a pauper, and what's better, walks up and down the Avenue, where he's turned out to die, like the apparition of a respectable dirtman's horse that had been: meeting the Aldermen as they ride out in their jaunts, and rebuking 'em to the face for their niggardly parsimony. Has'nt a cartman, a dirt−cartman, rights, I'd like to know? Has'nt he a soul; and why should he submit to this inhuman system: why should the sweat of the poor man's brow be wrung out to fertilize the soil of the rich man's field?" (Imaginary cheers, beginning in a gentle "G' up," and ending in an earthquake hurrah!)

Then his audience consisted of a great number of individuals, who from their being clad in nice broadcloth coats, and always having their beards closely trimmed, are supposed to be gentlemen and Christians.

"Fellow citizens!" cried Mr. Hopkins, "We all see what they're driving at;" alluding to the other party, of course; "They're at work undermining the pillars of society. That's what they would have! Not a man of 'em but would plant a keg of powder under every pulpit, on Sunday morning, and blow all our respected clergy to heeven in a twinkling. They're infidels and agrarians, fellow−citizens, and when they'd done that, they'd let the pews out for apple−stands, and fall straightway to eating soup out of the contribution plates. If you don't beat 'em at the next election, if you don't rouse yourselves in your strength and overwhelm these monsters and Jacobins, I despair of my country. I despair of mankind; and you'll have a herd of vipers saddled on you next year for a corporation!"

Abandoning this disagreeable region, Puffer relieved himself by the fiction of a room full of stout, rosy, comfortable looking gentlemen, who groaned in spirit under a great burthen of city charges, and whose constant saying it was, that they, figuratively only, were eaten up with taxes.

"The city aldermen, the common council of this mighty metropolis," said Puffer, "is nothing but a corporation of boa−constrictors; a board of greedy anacondas, that swallow lot after lot, house upon house, of the freeholders, as if they were so many brick−and−mortar sandwiches. Commissioners of street−opening run the plough through a man's sleeping−room of a morning before he's out of bed; and clap a set of rollers under his dwelling and tumble it into the river, as if it were so much old lumber. Will you submit to this? Never! The spirits of your forefathers protest against it; your posterity implore you to snatch their bread, their very subsistence, from the maw of these gigantic wolves in pacific apparel! The little children in their cradle raise their hands and ask you to save *them* from ruin!"

It is impossible to conjecture to what regions of rhetoric and simile−land the imagination of Puffer Hopkins

might have conveyed him, now that he was fairly on the wing; for at this moment, and in the very midst of these pleasant fables and suppositions, Puffer received by the hand of a messenger, a notice from the chief or executive committee, directing him to proceed forthwith to the house of Mr. Nicholas Finch, an electioneering agent, and secure his services. Now Puffer had heard of Nick Finch, as he was familiarly entitled, before; believed him to be as thorough−going, limber−tongued and supple−jointed fellow as could be found in the county; and therefore relished not a little the honor of effecting a negociation for his distinguished talent. Without delay he hurried forth; rousing by the way the messenger, who being a fellow besotted by drink and stupified with much political talk, in tap−rooms and elsewhere, had halted in one of the landings, and there, retiring, penitentially, to a corner, had gone off into a profound and melodious slumber. Performing this agreeable duty, and lending the gentleman an arm to the street, Puffer proceeded to the quarters where he understood Mr. Finch held his lair. He soon approached the precinct, but not knowing it by number, he put the question to one of a group lads playing at toys against a fence side. A dozen started up at once to answer.

"Nick Finch!—Nick Finch, sir,—over here, sir,—this way, through the alley!" And word having passed along that a gentleman was in quest of Mr. Finch, Puffer was telegraphed along from window to window, area to area, until he was left at the foot of an alley, by an old woman who had galloped at his side for several rods, who shouted in his ear, "Up there, sir, up there!" and hobbled away again. Left to himself, Puffer entered by a gate, and making cautious progress along a boarded lane, arrived in front of a row of common houses, to which access was obtained by aid of outside steps fastened against the buildings. Ascending the first that offered, he rapped inquiringly at the door, was hailed from within by a decisive voice, and marched in. The apartment he had invaded was an oblong room, with a sanded floor, a desk on a raised platform at the farthest extremity, a full length George Washington in perfect white standing in one corner, and a full length Hamilton, bronzed, in the opposite; against the wall, and over a fire−place in which a pile of wood was crackling and blazing, was fastened the declaration of Independence, with all those interesting specimens of hand−writing of the fifty−two signers, done in lithograph; and across a single window that lighted the room, where he had entered, was stretched a half American flag, cut athwart, directly through all the stars, and suspended by a tape.

The owner of the voice, a short, thick−set man, with a half−mown beard, a hard, firm countenance, and apparelled in a cart−frock, stood in the middle of the apartment, and before him, ranged on a bench, sate a dozen or so ill−dressed fellows, whose countenances were fixed steadily fixed on his.

"Come in, sir—come in," said the thick−set man. "Don't hesitate—these are only a few friends, that are spending a little time with me: paying me a sociable visit of a day or two, that's all." It occurred to Puffer that if these fellows were actually visiters of the gentleman in the cart−frock, that he had decidedly the most select circle of acquaintance of any one he could mention.

"I'm glad you 've come, sir," continued the electioneerer. "I've been expecting you some days."

"Then you know me?" said Puffer.

"Of course I do," answered the other. "Allow me to introduce you to my friends. Gentlemen, (turning to the line of ragged gentry on the bench) Puffer Hopkins, Esq., of the Opposition Committee. Rise, if you please, and give him a bow!"

The ragged gentry did as they were bid: and straightway sate down again, as if the unusual exertion of a salutation had entirely exhausted them.

"I am afraid I interrupt business," said Puffer. "You seemed engaged when I came in."

"I was," answered the electioneer, "and you entered just in the nick of time to aid me. You must act as an inspector of election; you have a good person, a clear full voice, and will judge my voters tenderly. Take this chair, if you please!" Saying this, he at once inducted Puffer in a seat behind the desk on the raised platform, placed before him a green box, and proceeded to distribute among the gentlemen on the bench, a number of small papers curiously folded, which they received with a knowing smile.

"Now, gentlemen, go up as I give the signal," said Mr. Finch. "Mr. Peter Foil, will you have the goodness to deposite your ballot?"

At this, one of the company who had found his way, by some mysterious dispensation, into a faded suit of black—it was the broken−down parson's—but whose hair was, nevertheless, uncombed, and his hat in very reduced circumstances, shambled across the floor, and made a show of inserting a vote in the green box before Puffer Hopkins.

"That will never do, sir," said the electioneerer rather sternly, as he was crossing back again. "You shuffled up to the counter as if you were shoaling through the market, according to your well−known habits, stealing pigs' feet of the butchers to make broth of: and when you attempted to give the inspector your ticket, any one could have sworn you had been a fish−vender's secretary, thrusting your hand in a basket to pull out a flounder or a bunch of eels. Try it again."

Mr. Foil renewed the attempt: this time with greater success.

"That's better," said Mr. Finch, encouragingly, "worthier the respectable man whose clothes you 've got on: more of the air of a civilized being. Now, Mr. Runlet."

At this, a heavy built personage proceeded to perform his duty as a franchise citizen; but in so cumbrous a gait and with so weak an eye to the keeping and symmetry of his part, as to call down a severe rebuke from Mr. Finch.

"You pitch about, as if you were on your own ploughed land at Croton, and not down here earning handsome wages on the pavement for doing freeman's service. You must walk more level, and not up and down like a scart buffalo: carry your arms at your side, and don't swing them akimbo, like a pair of crooked scythe−sneaths. You'll do better with your dinner to steady you!"

After Mr. Runlet, a third was summoned, who wore the garments of the volunteer fireman; but was condemned as failing most lamentably in his swagger, and missing to speak out of a corner of his mouth, as if he carried a cigar in the other. After several trials, he amended his performance, and succeeded at last in bullying the inspector with a grace, and getting his vote in by sheer force of impudence.

Another was called, who, springing up with great alacrity, endued, in a pair of stout corduroys, with a shirt of red flannel, rolled back upon his arms over one of white: a great brawny fellow, pitched about from one quarter of the room to another, putting it into imaginary antagonists with all his might; at one time, knocking one on the head with his broad hand, then teasing another's shins with a sideway motion of the leg, and discomfiting a third with a recoil of a bony elbow; to the unqualified satisfaction and delight of Mr. Finch and all lookers−on: and then retiring to his seat, apparently exhausted and worn out with his savage sport.

About half the company had been drilled and exercised in this manner, when a door was suddenly thrown open at the lower end of the apartment; a shrewish face thrust in, and a shrill voice appertaining thereto called out that dinner was ready, and had better be eaten while it was hot. Puffer Hopkins caught sight of a table spread in a room that was entered by a descending step or two: the voters in rehearsal started to their feet, and cast longing eyes towards the paradise thus opened to their view; and before Mr. Finch could give order one way or the other, they had broken all bounds, and rushed down, like so many harpies, on the banquet spread below.

"If my eyes are not glandered," cried Mr. Finch, as soon as they were gone, "this is capital sport. Dang me, Mr. Hopkins, if I would 'nt rather drive a tandem through a china−shop, than manage these fellows. I 've polished 'em a little, you see: but they're too thick on the wall yet, they daub and plaster, and do 'nt hard−finish up. You 'd like to have 'em for a day or two, would 'nt you?"

Puffer, descending from the inspector's seat, which he had filled during the rehearsal, with all the gravity he could command, and, complimenting Mr. Finch upon the show of his men, admitted that he would; and that he was there on that very business.

"There is'nt a better troop in town, tho' I say it," pursued the agent, "a little rough, but there's capital stuff there. I don't flatter when I assert that Nick Finch gets up finer and sturdier rioters than any man in town: only look at that chap in the red shirt—he 's a giant, a perfect Nilghau with horns, in a crowd."

Puffer answered that he thought that proposition could 'nt be safely denied.

"Perhaps my sailors, an't got the salt water roll exactly: but they'll pass pretty well I reckon for East River boatmen, and Hellgate pilots, and that's full as good; you want twelve men for three days' work, in how many wards?"

"The whole seventeen if you please:" answered Puffer. "I'm afraid to try 'em in so many;" continued Mr. Finch. "You might have 'em for five river wards, and one out o' town: and the volunteer Fireman, (he's first rate when he's warm'd with a toddy,) for any number. Terms, twenty−five dollars per diem, as they say in Congress."

"It's a bargain, sir"—said Puffer, seizing the virtuous gentleman by the hand. "You'll bring them up yourself?"

"I will—you may depend on it: your'e a lucky man— the other side offered me twenty, and as much oats as my horse could eat in a week; but it would'nt do."

With this understanding, Puffer left; the agent crying after him to call in on Monday week, when they would

be finally broken in—"You make a capital inspector; all you want is age and silver spectacles to make you as respectable a rogue as ever sat behind a green box!"

Breathing the word "mum" in an under tone, and shaking his head in reproof at the hardihood of the agent Puffer descended into the yard.

He had reached the ground, and was turning to leave the place, when he discovered moving across the extremity of the yard and passing into a house many degrees poorer than the agent's, a figure bent with years; he walked with a slow shuffling gait, and pausing often, wrung his hands and looked keenly into the earth, as if all his hopes lay buried there. Puffer knew not whether to advance and greet the old man, as his heart prompted, or to withdraw; when he raised his head as if he knew the footstep that was near, and discovering Puffer Hopkins, started from the dotage of his walk and manner, hastened across the ground, and while his face brightened at every pace he hailed him from the distance.

"God bless you,—God bless you, my boy!" cried Hobbleshank. "Where have you tarried so long? You have not forgotten the old man so soon, eh? If you knew how often I had thought of you; you would have paid me but fair interest on my thoughts to have called at the old man's lodgings, and asked how the world, a very wilful and wicked one, had gone with him? Am I right?"

"You are—you are," answered Puffer, who could not fail to be touched by the kindly eagerness of the old man. "I have abused your goodness, and was repenting of my folly but this morning—I meant to call." "You did!" said the old man quickly. "Well never mind that—but come with me."

With this they entered a low building, the roof of which was moss−grown, and hung over like a great eyebrow, and the door sustained by a single hinge, stood ever askew, allowing snow, tempest and hail to beat in and keep a perpetual Lapland through the hall. Opening the first door, they entered a square room, cold, bare and desolate−looking, with no soul apparently present.

"How is this?" said Hobbleshank. "I thought Peter Hibbard dwelt here."

"So he does!" answered a broken voice from the corner of the apartment. "Peter Hibbard's body lodges here. Heaven save his soul—that may be wandering in some other world."

"Are you Peter Hibbard?" asked Hobbleshank, approaching the bed−side where the speaker lay.

"Peter Hibbard am I," he answered, "as far as I can know: though I sometimes think Peter—one Peter—died better than a score of years ago. When a man's soul is killed and his heart frost−stricken—then he's dead, is'nt he?"

"He should be!" answered Hobbleshank. "But Heaven is'nt always so kind. Sometimes the body's dead, and the soul all alive, like a fire—driving the poor shattered body to and fro, on thankless tasks and errands that end in despair: that's worse."

"There's no despair for me!" pursued Peter, disclosing a lean haggard face, and leering at Hobbleshank from under the blanket. "There's nothing troubles me; I've got no soul."

"Where's your wife Peter?" asked the old man.

"I've got none," answered the other. "No wife, nor child, nor grand−child, boy nor girl, nor uncle, aunt, sister, brother or neighbor: I and these four walls keep house here."

"But where are your old friends?" continued Hobbleshank.

"Ah! my old friends—there you are—are you? oh, ho! There was Phil Sherrod—he died in his bed—of an inflamed liver; Phil died finely, they say singing Old Hundred. Don't believe it: he yielded the ghost choking the parson with his bands. Parker Lent, at sea; Bill Green, in jail for a stolen horse; it was St. John's pale horse, they say; Charlotte Slocum, she married a Long Island milkman and was drowned. There was another," continued the bed−ridden man, rising in his couch and pressing his hand upon his brow—and peering from under it towards Hobbleshank and Puffer, "another."

"Yes—what of her?" asked Hobbleshank quickly.

"What of her?" he replied. "Are you sure it was a woman? Yes, by Heaven, it was—it was; a rosy buxom girl, but never Peter Hibbard's wife—why not?"

With this question he fell back and lay with his eyes wide open and glaring; but still and motionless as a stone.

"Why not?" said the bed−ridden man waking suddenly from his trance of silence. "Why should Sim Lettuce win where I lost? That was a flaming carbuncle on Sim's nose, and many's the laugh Hetty and I have had

thinking of it; and yet she married him spite of it."

"And Sim died—what then?" asked Hobbleshank, watching the countenance of him he questioned with painful earnestness. "What then, my good sir, what then?"

"Let me see—Sim died; the carbuncle struck in and turned to a St. Anothony's fire, and carried him off: Hetty turned nurse. Did you know that? Nurse to a lovely lady; she died too one day. Hetty went off—I followed her."

"Yes, yes, you followed her," repeated Hobbleshank, anxious to keep the wandering wits of the sick man to the subject. "Go on."

"I followed her—did'nt I say so! On my honor, red−nosed Sim's widow would not have me, eh! eh! not she. Off she slipped, to keep a garden in an out of the way place, I can tell you. Peter Hibbard watched her many a year; but she never would be Mrs. Hibbard, and here I lie this day, without a wife, or child; chick nor grandchild, boy nor girl, nor uncle, aunt, sister, brother or neighbor. We have a merry time, these four walls and I."

It was in vain that Hobbleshank attempted again and again and by various devices, to bring back his mind to a narrative humor; he kept reciting the incidents of his hopelessness and desolation, and after a while fell into a wild jumble, where every thing pointless and trivial was huddled together; and then he declined into a senseless torpor, where he lay dumb to every speech and entreaty of the old man.

Leaving him in this mood, Hobbleshank and Puffer turned away from his bed−side, and sending in a neighbor that had stood watching at the door—for on such chance aid the bed−ridden man trusted solely for life—to minister to his wants, they escaped swiftly from the place. In perfect silence they walked through street after street together, until they reached a corner where their way separated.

"All is lost—all is lost!" said Hobbleshank grasping Puffer Hopkins by the hand, as tears flowed into his eyes; and parting without a further word, in gloom and silence, each took his way.

CHAPTER XV. PUFFER HOPKINS INQUIRES AFTER HOBBLESHANK.

"All is lost, all is lost!" The piteous look and tone with which the old man had uttered these words, lingered in the ear of Puffer Hopkins, long after they had parted, and came up in every interval of business and labor, to fill the pause and excite in his mind a vague wonder as to what they might refer. Some deep trouble —some profound grief, reaching through years, and embracing the whole hope of the old man's life they seemed to point at. He resumed the pursuit in which the messenger had found him engaged, but every now and then, there started out of the papers before him the woe−stricken face of Hobbleshank and he heard his voice, repeating again and again, that all was lost, lost. Wavering in this way between idleness and toil, night drew on; a dark, stormy and troubled night; winds howling about the Fork, clamoring at the chamber−windows, where he lay, as if demanding entrance; subsiding, springing up afresh, and suggesting to the watcher, to whom the turmoil would not allow sleep, thoughts of poor sailors far abroad, sailing on the wide ocean, reefing and gathering canvass, or lying−to, for shelter's sake, in cold harbors, or drifting along on the pitiless tide.

Perplexed by thought of storm and tempest, in the midst of all which his mind had recurred to the subject of yesterday, Puffer awoke, and after in vain endeavoring to shake off the gloomy shadow of the old man, that still haunted his chamber, he resolved to call at the lodgings of Hobbleshank and seek there further confirmation of the good or evil of his thoughts.

Making good speed for the fulfilment of this purpose, he was soon apparelled and in the open air. The sky was clear as if no cloud had ever crossed it; the house−tops lay basking in the early sun; and the streets, half shadow, half light, were filled with a throng of people come forth to enjoy the tranquillity of the morning. The distance was not great, and he found the place he sought at once, and in a moment was directly at the entrance of the chamber, where he knew by his description, Hobbleshank lodged.

The door was ajar, and Puffer entered without notice. On either side of the hearth the two old women were seated, discoursing in a whisper. A night−taper flickered in its socket on the shelf; the fire was smouldering and expiring in its own ashes, and the sun−light, as it streamed through the small window in the wall, showed the features of the two women, haggard, care−worn and anxious. The elder was speaking as he came in.

"Why do you say me nay, when I tell you it must have tumbled in such a night; I'm not deaf, good woman, though seventy and past—Heaven save us! Do you think I did not hear the storm, howling and raging? Your own eyes saw the chimney fall, and the same wind that blows down chimney−stacks must overturn steeples and church tops. Let me see—it was built before the war, so it had lived to a good old age, and was cut down not a minute before its time."

"Why do you vex yourself with thinking in this way, Aunt Gatty?" asked the other, laying her hand gently in her arm and looking her anxiously in the face. "The storm was heavy. God help our poor old friend that was abroad in it; but the city still stands!"

"Be not too sure of that!" answered the other. "Have a care! Are you quite clear that the fire−bell was not ringing all through the night? I heard it in every pause of the storm; and what is not blown over, you may be sure was burned up."

"Grant it so," said Dorothy. "Grant as you say, that the city was ravaged and torn from end to end by fire and tempest, it was no fault of ours!"

"No fault of ours, do you say?" cried Aunt Gatty, turning suddenly about, and laughing hysterically in her face. "Then all that howling of winds meant nothing? All the ships that went ashore or were dashed against piers and wharves, did it in mere sport!—Ha! ha! Children that perished in the streets, or in dwellings drearier than the open street, and beasts frozen in the field, were all in a frolic?—ha! ha! No, no," she continued, dropping her voice to a fearful whisper, "these were judgments: come near to me and I'll tell you how."

Dorothy, at this bidding drew close to her side, and watched for what she said.

"Where was the old man last night?" she asked; "can you tell me that?"

"Heaven knows!" echoed the other. "It's morning, and he has not come."

"Did we go search for him?—Did we waken neighbors, and raise the cry that a good old man was perishing somewhere, and hurry off in hunt for him? Did we ring bells and alarm all sleepers through the town—that we do,

when even a worthless old building of boards is burning— why not for a dear old friend? No, no—he's dead," she cried in a voice that pierced the ear to the quick. "Dead somewhere, and his blood is on our old idle heads! Dead! dead!"

With this she turned away, and, heeding no further any speech that was addressed to her, sate in the corner of the hearth, mumping, and muttering unintelligibly to herself. At this moment Puffer Hopkins came forward, and made inquiry for Hobbleshank.

"Good Lord! you did not know then that the old man has been absent all night long!" she answered, sighing; "she knows it: she knows it too well!—all night in the rough weather: Heaven send that he has found shelter in some shed, or under some poor roof, although it's not to be hoped. Have you seen the old man of late? you are his friend."

"I am; and saw him but yesterday morning," answered Puffer. "I expected, from what passed then, to find him downcast, but safe at home at least."

"Good angels help us all!" cried Dorothy, fixing her eyes upon the ceiling; "was he calm when you left him, or was he stirred with a passion?"

"Greatly moved, I must confess: cut to the very heart, if I might judge by what fell from him," answered Puffer. "He was in despair, and left me weeping, hurrying swiftly away!"

"I knew it would be so," exclaimed Dorothy—"I knew it would be so! Arouse, Aunt Gatty, arouse," she continued, bending down to the ear of her companion, and crying at the top of her voice. "This gentleman has seen Hobbleshank; and has seen him fly away from him like one distracted!—Do you hear me?"

"Did you say Joe was dead?" answered Aunt Gatty, gazing at the other like one in a dream. "I thought such a storm was too much for him!" And she relapsed again into silence, or mumbled in confused and broken words.

"Poor thing!—she thinks of her Joe that was drowned half a lifetime since: watching all night through, with age and infirmity, have bewildered her brain. She thinks, sorrowful creature, that St. Paul's steeple, too, fell in the storm last night: nothing can drive it from her mind; and, because a neighbor's chimney was overturned, and a few tiles blown through the street, she will have it that the storm has made a wreck of the city, leaving no stone upon another!—Poor thing!"

"Then you have no tidings of Hobbleshank, and cannot tell where he passed the night?" asked Puffer.

"None whatever. He left us," said Dorothy, "yesterday, a little after noon in cheerful spirits, for he had learned, by a poor stranger that came in from the country, something relating to his child that was lost many years ago. He said that a few hours would bring him back a happy man: it will be happiness enough for us, alas!— for this poor old woman, that has been his friend and companion for fifteen years, if he come back alive!"

"Who was this poor stranger, that you speak of?" continued Puffer. "Is he known to any one here? or did he utter his news aloud?"

"The stranger," answered Dorothy, "was stained with travel, and bore with him a parcel, which he did not open in our presence: Aunt Gatty thought it might be some garment of the child's that was lost. They spake apart—the stranger pointing often to the parcel under his arm; something was said of a bed−ridden man, whom we could not guess; and then they went forth together. Since then the old man has not returned."

"What noise was that?" cried Aunt Gatty, starting up at this moment, and looking up earnestly into the face of Puffer Hopkins. "A heavy wall has fallen; you heard the bell jingle as it fell?—it tolls for him!"

"For Heaven's sake give her comfort," said Dorothy, appealing to Puffer, who stood aside, not knowing how to answer this sudden question; "tell her the city is not in ruins—that no church−steeple is cast down."

"St. Paul's stands this morning," answered Puffer, "where it has stood many thousand mornings; the sun shines upon its weathercock as high in air as ever. Would that Hobbleshank could be found as securely as that!"

"Hobbleshank!" echoed Aunt Gatty, "I knew him in his life−time: he was an excellent old man; and sorely tried; let me see, where was he laid? In Trinity yard; oh, no, that was too full. In the middle burying−ground. He had no right there, poor man; he was not stout enough to fill a grave. Ha! ha! I have it, it was in the old brewery well, where Tom was drowned; they buried him there, because he knew Tom, when the poor boy was alive."

"Does she indeed think her old friend to be dead?" asked Puffer, looking from one to the other.

"She does, and its that that has unsettled her mind," answered Dorothy: "Her life seems to hang by some strange link, an invisible thread, on that of the old man: with him she seems to think the sun is blotted out and all

things fallen into decay, like herself. For her sake, I would that Hobbleshank might return."

"There was no mark, then, by which you could guess his purpose, or the course he might take to bring it about?" said Puffer Hopkins; "nothing by which you could judge, further than it involved a thought of the lost child—on what his mind was fixed?"

"Did I say there was nothing more? I was wrong. He wore with him when he left, he came back for it, a woman's likeness, painted in a breast−pin; the pin was a great square one, and the lady a mild lovely creature, with gentle eyes. He took it from the closet, and fixed it in his breast, where it had not been, in my knowledge, ever before. His look softened when his eye fell on it; and his step was slower, it seemed to me, and more thoughtful, when he left, than it had been when he came in. I thought the lady's face had touched his heart."

"It's all darkness and shadow to me now," said Puffer, pondering and fixing his eyes upon the ground, "darkness, with a single ray of light: you have told me all?"

"All! But do, I pray you, bring back the old man; seek for him, as you would for your own father! Spare no time, night or day to track his steps. There is some deep trust rests upon him—some great wrong to be avenged. If he die in the streets, with sealed lips; if his old life should be taken by wicked hands—and such may be watching for him—who shall answer? Will you try, will you seek him out? Promise me on your truth!"

As the woman spake she raised both her hands, and letting them fall, as in benediction, on the person of him she addressed, she watched him silently for an answer.

"I am but poor and helpless myself," answered Puffer, "with few friends and narrow means; I know not what I can do, but, in God's name, I will do what I can; what a friendless and fatherless young man may hope to do."

"For his sake—for her's—for your own humanity's sake, be true to what you would do!" exclaimed Dorothy, glancing from the helpless old creature at the hearth toward Puffer, who stood, glowing with his good resolution, by the door.

She had uttered the entreaty; turned to the old woman, who began to speak again; and, when she had turned again, Puffer was gone.

CHAPTER XVI. THE NOMINATING CONVENTION HATCH A CANDIDATE.

To what purpose had Puffer Hopkins pledged his efforts in tracing and recovering Hobbleshank? What clue—what single clue remained in his hand, now that he reviewed all that had fallen within his knowledge, relating to the old man?

At one time it had occurred to him that light shone through upon his fortunes, from the chance discourse of the tailor: that hope was at an end, for, on a re−questioning, he extracted no more than he knew already, and that was nothing to the purpose.

Any hope that had arisen from the wish to enlist the personal services of his poor neighbor in a further search, was idle; for Fob, from overwork, feebleness of body, and, as it seemed to Puffer, some secret care that was preying upon him, was failing every day. To be sure, Fob dwelt upon the incident he had first recited the same as ever; spoke of the look and voice of the old man; his wild talk with the billows and breakers; and his final act in rending the parchment in pieces. Of what avail was this? It might be a mere fantasy—a useless humor of both, that this man was Hobbleshank—this paper, the bond and tenure by which he held or relinquished his rights. Then Fob would pass from this topic to talk of the old subjects, the country, the wood, the field; dwelling upon them with more enthusiasm than ever, and pausing, at times, to bedew their memory with a tear. While his strength lasted, the little tailor performed his daily tasks manfully, murmuring not once, repining not at all, save over the remembrance of his country life.

Any hope, therefore, built by Puffer on the services of Fob dwindled day by day. To what purpose, then, had Puffer Hopkins proffered aid in tracing and recovering Hobbleshank? To none whatever! Feeling this, and admitting to himself how completely darkness hedged him in on every side, he determined—as most people do in such emergencies—to let the world take its course, but at the same time was ready to seize promptly on the first opportunity that offered—and, to do him justice, fervently hoping it might be near at hand—to execute his trust. In the meantime, and while the fortunes of Hobbleshank were so full of shifting currents that hurried onward or eddies that tarried and were lost in themselves, the tide of public life rushed on, swelling steadily. Puffer had learned by this time that pausing is to a politician, ruin; and so kept himself abroad in the stream. He was now known as an active and zealous partisan: was regarded as a promising and rising young man; and somehow or other had found himself, by some secret agency, which he could not guess, (it was the kind old man toiling for him in silence) pushed forward steadily, and appointed to offices of confidence and trust, as they arose in the due progress of his career. A convention to nominate a Mayor for the city of New York, was soon to be held and assembled at Fogfire Hall: a delegate to this he was likewise appointed. Prompt in the performance of all his duties of this nature, Puffer only waited for the evening of its gathering to make his way to the Hall. The night was somewhat stormy, and the streets were muffled and shrouded in mist; but this did not prevent its being quite apparent that something more than usual was a−foot at Fogfire Hall.

Brighter lights streamed through the tap−room windows as he approached; a din of voices was heard issuing forth and silencing the turmoil of the street, whenever the door opened; and quick feet hurried in and out, and kept up a constant commotion at the door. The tap−room—at all times a resort of gossips and talkers—swarmed with politicians and quid−nuncs, some of whom were gathered in knots, from which a gusty voice would spring up every now and then above all others, and then subside again; some walking the room in couples, arm−in−arm at a hurried pace; some lounging about easily, with sticks in their hands, from group to group; and others dropping off from the knots of loud talkers, would saunter to the bar, and arraying themselves in front of a long round pole—a liberty−pole shaved down and shod at either end with brass—replenished the thirsty spirit without stint. The air of the place was close and odorous, and every man's face was flushed and wore a burnt and heated look, as if the tap−room lay directly in the fiery zone. Through this torrid region Puffer passed, recognizing a friend or two by the way, and pausing for a grasp; and emerging at a side door upon the hall, ascended a flight of stairs and was presently in the committee−room.

The delegates, there assembled in great numbers, stood about the floor, talking in groups and growing red and excited, as they plunged, by degrees, deeper and deeper into the topics of discourse. In a few minutes, when the

room was quite full and the hubbub at its height, a pale man in whiskers stood up at the other end of the apartment, holding his hat in one hand and knocking with the knuckles of the other, with great vehemence, on a table at his side. This sound caused a sudden silence, and the members wheeling about in a body, contemplated any further movement on the part of the pale man in whiskers, with great interest; which united gaze, the pale man met with another quite as bold and decided, and, drawing a deep breath, he nominated, in a loud voice, Mr. Epaminondas Cobb, as chairman of the committee; which was unanimously acceded to; then a couple of secretaries— then a door−keeper; all of whom with due ceremony assumed their respective stations, and the committee was organized and in session.

Then Mr. Epaminondas Cobb—who was a short, brick−complexioned gentleman, with dim eyes, and a pair of stout silver spectacles astride a dignified, but by no means massive nose—stood up and asked them if it was their further pleasure to proceed to the nomination of a Mayor for the city and county of New−York? To which question no response being given, it was concluded, (the chief wisdom of public bodies in such cases lying in the observance of a profound silence) it was; and they accordingly entered at once upon the exciting and engrossing business of nomination.

Candidates were forthwith put in nomination by members, with great rapidity; some were merely named; others proclaimed and sustained, and advocated at length, in formal harangues. There was one committee−man, a little, shrunken, dried−up gentleman, who was up and down every five minutes, with a speech in advocacy of the extraordinary and unquestionable claims of Thomas Cutbill, butcher: the said Thomas Cutbill being the great man of his neighborhood—the good Samaritan of his ward; and furthermore, a luminous expounder, to the delight of the little committee−man and a knot of cronies, of profound political doctrine at a familiar bar or coffee−room, where Mr. Cutbill condescended to be present of a Wednesday night and take a hand in backgammon or other intricate games, there going forward.

"I knows Thomas Cutbill," said his champion, "and his claims is decided; pig lead is 'nt surer. A benevolenter gentleman, and a more popular one was never known. To Mr. Cutbill the people was indebted for the new fish−market; and asking who it was that invented the mode of ringing alarms by districts, he'd beg leave of the committee to say, Cutbill was the man! Cutbill had been vilified—but there never was a nicer man to the poor, a more lovely friend of the pauper than that aggravated individual. He was proud of Mr. Cutbill. Mr. Cutbill should have his vote!"

When the little champion had uttered this vindication something like half−a−dozen times—a very mild gentleman remarked, that what the gentleman opposite had said was true enough; Mr. Cutbill *was* a very benevolent and worthy individual, for he had to his knowledge, on several occasions arrested lads, ragged and unclean lads in the street, and advised them—in good faith advised them, laying his hand kindly upon their heads—to go home and wash their faces, and put on clean clothes! What had the gentlemen of the committee to say to that?

On another occasion he had known Mr. Cutbill lift a poor woman out of the gutter, take her by the arm and lead her directly into a respectable neighboring house, seat her on a sofa in the front parlor, and call out, with a vehemence worthy of himself and the charitable object he had in view, for a jug of hot negus immediately, and, if that could'nt be had, for half a dozen Seville oranges, for the poor lady. Was'nt that man worthy of their suffrages, *he* would like to know?

Just as this speaker was concluding, there entered the committee−room in great state, a gentleman enveloped in a long brown over−coat, buttoned to the chin; an ample bandanna muffling his lower features and his head carried erect. He entered in a straight line, aimed for a blank corner of the room, looking about as if surprised that the committee could be in session and he not there—attaining which, he cast off his over−coat, unmuffled his chin, and rising at once bolt−upright in his place, proceeded to deliver himself of his sentiments, first taking his hat by either rim and fixing it on more firmly than ever.

"A single case was nothing this way or that," said the new comer. "Did Mr. Cutbill make it a habit, he would like to know, to send ragged boys home for clean clothes? Did he go about encouraging them to dismiss their broken garments?—that was the point. Was or was not Mr. Cutbill privately associated, in interest, in some clothing or ready−made linen establishment? Was Mr. Cutbill a tall man or a short man? Did he wear red vestings or white? Was he lean−featured or rubicund? He would not vote for any man as candidate for the mayoralty of

this great city until he knew his person, his principles, his private habits to a hair—to an inch! He might as well tell the committee, at once, that he had his eye on a gentleman that would make the very candidate they wanted. On reflection, the gentleman alluded to had differed from the community in some slight particulars: he was a man in years, of a very venerable appearance, but somehow or other had fancied that all his grand−children were vinegar−cruets, and tried to unstoppel them by screwing their heads off. This had occasioned his going into the country for a time, and this would, perhaps, prevent his running at the approaching election."

Opposite this speaker sate a thin, thoughtful gentleman, rather grotesquely habited in a red vest, which wrapped him round like a great Mohawk blanket, who watched what fell from him, touching the eccentric candidate, with extraordinary interest.

The other was no sooner seated, than this individual started to his feet, and stared wildly about.

"The man he desired to see presiding over the destinies of this vast metropolis, was the very one that Mr. Fishblatt had just mentioned; but he could'nt be had! Who then should it be? Not the Cham of Tartary, he was quite sure: not the Imaum of Muscat, nor the King of the Pelew Islands. He must be honest; honest by all means. He must be in favor of the largest liberty—boundless liberty, he might say; also opposed to all private rights. He wanted a man in favor of all colors—of no color himself. In a word, he must be opposed entirely to the present condition of things: but what condition of things he must be in favor of he (the speaker) would'nt at present undertake to decide. This is no musical forest," concluded the gifted declaimer, reiterating sentiments he had expressed many times before, but more particularly to our knowledge on Puffer's introduction to the Bottom Club. "This is no musical forest, no Hindoo hunter's hut, got up for effect at the amphi−theatre. We have'nt trees here alive with real birds!—the branches laden with living monkies!—the fountains visited by long−legged flamingoes!—the greensward covered with gazelles, grazing and sporting! Oh! no—we are a mere caucus of plain citizens in our every−day dresses, sitting in this small room on rough benches, to re−organize society by giving it a new mayor worthy of ourselves!" And thereupon the illustrious chairman of the Bottom Club sate down.

At the conclusion of this powerful and majestic effort, the committee might have laughed, had they not reflected that the speaker controled a couple of hundred votes or so— the disciples and dependents of the Bottom Club—and they, therefore, on the contrary, looked extremely grave and respectful.

Candidates now began to be proclaimed by the score; sometimes they were let slip—one by one in quick succession—then half a dozen propounders would rise and discharge their names among the committee in a body. The chairman was constantly up shouting order; and whenever a pause occurred some member or other would spring to his legs, and call their attention to the undoubted claims, the unsurpassed, unequalled, and unrivalled services of the Smith or Brown whom he happened to advocate.

At length, after a great number of ballotings, and a great variety of fortune, the contest was narrowed to two candidates; upon these the divided members of the Convention pitched their whole strength and stripping themselves to a final rencontre, they respectively entered upon the public and private history of the gentlemen in question, with a minuteness and eagerness of biographical ardor quite astonishing.

One of these was Mr. Bluff, a wholesale grocer; the other, Gallipot, a retail painter. Mr. Bluff was a stout, comely gentleman; Gallipot thin and livid, as became his trade; Mr. Bluff leaned toward the elegant and ornate in dress; Gallipot, to the vernacular and home−spun. Mr. Egbert Bluff exercised his wholesale ingenuity, in disposing of pipes, puncheons, casks and merchandize in gross; while the revenues of Gallipot accrued from the embellishment, by retail, of the houses of the middle−class, the adornment of tradesmen's boards, and the displays of professional literature on attorney's signs. Mr. Bluff, the master of every elegant accomplishment, from the delicate swaying of a cane, up to the cock of a hat and the proper wearing of a ruffle—belonged to the Ionian order of candidates; Gallipot, rough in dress, blunt of speech, rude of grasp, was of the sterner Doric.

The two candidates, so contrasted, stood palpably before the mind's eye of the committee; and it was their present and immediate duty to determine, not the separate value of each of their qualities in itself; but their aggregate influence in either candidate on the community and their value when translated in good current votes.

How many streets? how many blocks, squares, wards, could they respectively command? All they had done, through many years of struggle and endeavor in their various callings, for they were both men in middle life, was now to be nicely weighed against ballots, little talismanic papers—the secret prescriptions of the public acting as the physician; the whole life of each to be tallied off against so many of these mystic counters.

"As for Mr. Bluff," said Mr. Fishblatt, who was always the first to deliver his views on the topic before the

committee, "I beg to know, whether it is true, as I am informed, he is the gentleman that wears a lepine watch with five jewels? Before receiving an answer to this, I would inquire, whether Mr. Bluff keeps a carriage, with a black footman in a silver−buckled hat and white cambric pocket handkerchief? Also, could any member of the committee instruct him whether Mr. Bluff's pew was lined with red damask and fastened with copper tacks, rotten−stoned every Saturday morning by one of his servants, privily admitted to the church? Mr. Bluff might dress his children in scalloped collars and laced pantalettes—the children of a public man did not always belong to the public (although he sometimes made it a present of them when he died) but what business had Mr. Bluff to put two stone dogs on his stoop? If they had been lions, he (Mr. Fishblatt) might have forgiven him; two great roaring open−mouthed lions; even a pair of elephants. These were noble animals. But dogs! Had any gentleman of the committee kept a diary of Mr. Bluff's doings for the past fifteen years? Was any one prepared to say what had been his private and personal habits, during that time? If not, the committee were entering upon a most solemn and important business, with very imperfect materials in their hands. He had heard that there had been a lurking committee of five or more to institute a watch upon Mr. Bluff; to have an eye upon all he did and said from the first moment he was contemplated as a candidate. Where was that committee? They had followed him, Mr. Bluff, he had been informed in confidence, for more than two weeks; knew all his opinions as expressed in various places of public and private resort. Mr. Fishblatt would like to see their minutes. He had been told that Mr. Bluff had been measured in all the past fortnight, for two new coats, and a new double vest of black velvet. What was the meaning of this?"

Mr. Fishblatt had spoken in his hat, which he insisted on, in despite the remonstrance of the brick−complexioned chairman, as being more formidable, and more according to strict congressional method, when at this juncture, occasioned by the loud and peremptory character of his oratory, or from some other adequate cause, a brass trumpet fixed against the ceiling was dislodged, and striking Mr. Fishblatt on the crown, buried him to the eyes. Before he could fairly emerge from this sudden midnight and renew his appeal, another speaker had possession of the floor.

"He had satisfied himself," this was a gentleman of a very nice and accurate turn of mind—"of the exact number of three−story brick tenements in the city and county of New York. He would'nt say how many there were, because he knew, and that was enough. Every brick tenement had its own voters—say three to each: very good. Around these were scattered a great many low−roofed wooden buildings. Three−stories was always commanding: every three−story—that was his view—would carry three frame−houses with it to the polls. There was a calculation, and if Mr. Bluff was'nt the man, he had no more to say!"

And so this calculating prodigy sate down.

"Will the committee be cautious," followed a dark−looking member, with a low forehead, from which a shock of jet black hair bristled and stood straight up, and a very harsh voice, "will they look out what they're at? Gallipot's a painter: there's no objection to that. He's a working−man, and rolls back his sleeves when he's on a job. He has a right. Peleg Gallipot's a popular man— who says he is'nt? What's the matter then! I know what's the matter—Gallipot, this Peleg Gallipot afore the committee, had lately painted a Presbyterian church! There was a snag: get over it if you can!"

To tell the truth, this was a snag; the friends of Gallipot felt that it was, and, for a time, the Bluffites had it all their own way. Here were the religious prejudices of the community, by a single act of the unfortunate Gallipot, arrayed in deadly hostility against him: all the other sects would go against him to a man. Gallipot had, in some unhappy moment of professional hallucination, painted a Presbyterian church. In this state of affairs the question was about to be put.

"Hold a minute, my excellent friends," said the very mild gentleman who had spoken once before. "Mr. Gallipot wishes to get upon his legs, and I hope you will allow him a chance. They need have no fears—they might put their minds at rest at once about a religious antipathy to Mr. Gallipot. It was true, and he felt it his duty to confess it, Mr. G. had painted a Presbyterian church a short time ago: it was also true, and he felt great pleasure in being able to make the statement, Mr. G. was now, also, under contract to paint an Episcopal church, also a Quaker meeting−house, also a Unitarian chapel. There was an antidote; and, now, the sooner they went into an election, the better he and other friends of the poor man's candidate (as he would venture to call his worthy friend) would like it!"

Notwithstanding another last desperate attempt on the part of Mr. Cutbill's champion to press the claims of that philanthropist on their attention, they did go into an election, and Gallipot was the man. The announcement of this result was hailed by the friends of Gallipot in the committee, with shouts and stamping; and as soon as it was made known below, where they had been kept throughout the evening in a state of feverish excitement by the contradictory reports of various members, who had dropped down into the tap−room from time to time, by similar demonstrations.

During all these deliberations, harangues and ballotings of the Convention, Puffer, under judicious advisement, had refrained from any public expression of his opinions; but, as an offset to this inactivity, had gone about the committee−room and declared himself privately, separately and apart to each member, in behalf of his candidate, and had taken great pains, when it came to a final and decisive ballot, to cast his vote—and to have it so known by his friends, in favor of Gallipot, the strongest man. When the committee was dismissed, to avoid troublesome questionings or reproaches, Puffer escaped as swiftly as he could, not even tarrying to interchange a word with Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, who, somewhat discomfited by the sudden rebuff he had met, pushed his way, as stately as ever, through the crowd in the bar−room, not deigning speech or recognition to a solitary soul.

Did no thought of the kind old man enter Puffer's mind as he departed from Fogfire Hall? No thought of the first strange interview, the kind counsel, the anxious look? It did: and Puffer dwelt upon it till it all rose up anew before him, bright and fresh as the reality. Out of the past—the brief but eventful interval—the old man came shambling forth with the old gait, the sidelong demeanor; the one eye closed, and the one fixed upon him. He walked by Puffer's side all the way home to the Fork; and when sleep and darkness again closed in upon him, again the little paralytic crossed and re−crossed before him in tears and laughter; and was, finally, lost in a deep gloom, which compassed him in and shut him from the sight.

CHAPTER XVII. CERTAIN DISTINGUISHED PERSONS NEGOTIATE WITH THE NEWS−BOYS.

The two parties, it was now quite obvious, were rapidly approaching the field of encounter. Both were on the alert for recruits; busy at the drum, keeping up such uproar as they could; summoning meetings; despatching spies to the opposite camp; in a word, availing themselves of every opening to obtain an advantage over the adversary. Among other schemes, it was thought expedient to secure, as early as possible, the services of a corps of bold, active and ready−witted billposters, who would not only come in aid of the Bottom Club and other fraternities of that class, in laying waste and ravaging the enemies' placards, but also serve, by their ingenuity and vigor, to give prominence and conspicuous display to their own calls and handbills.

On this service Mr. Fishblatt and Puffer Hopkins, as combining great readiness of invention, with handsome powers of persuasion, were named; and Puffer, accordingly, one evening called by appointment on his associate, to set out with him on the performance of this delicate duty.

Mr. Fishblatt was discovered, as might perhaps have been expected, in his high−backed chair, in nearly the same attitude as before, with an immense newspaper,—it was larger than the other, and had sprung up in the interval,— in his outstretched arms; his feet braced against the wall: and ranging with his eye up and down the long columns of solid print, like a dragoon under demonaical possession. It was a little time before Puffer's entrance caught his attention; but when it did, he sprang suddenly to his feet, welcomed him, and spreading the great sheet over a horse by the fire,—which contrivance he had been driven upon by the extraordinary expansion of the weekly press,—said he would be ready in a trice.

"A wonderful age this," said Mr. Fishblatt, while in act of enduing his long brown overcoat, "an astonishing, an immense age; all the ages that have gone before it, should be counted as nothing, sir, and this year, this very year of our Lord, should be called the year one. We do our ancestors too much honor by keeping any accounts with them. We should cut them at once; deny any knowledge of them. They were a poor, mean, miserable set of sneaking folio−readers; do you know that? The editor of this paper, sir," pursued Mr. Fishblatt, grasping a sturdy stick that stood in a corner, "is a wonderful man. His sheet is two inches longer and four inches broader than any other in the country; he always has news an hour and three quarters in advance of the regular mail; and he has lately—there's enterprise for you—purchased a small blood poney to ride down to the office with his leaders. It's astonishing to think what a popularity this man enjoys; he's known from one end of the country to the other, and gives us a half column of notices of his paper every week, speaking of him—him individually— in the very handsomest terms. There's the Nauvoo `Bludgeon' says he wields a trenchant and vigorous pen—yes sir, the Nauvoo `Bludgeon' says that— then the Potomac `Trumpet' admits he has an unrivalled genius for the more elegant species of composition; and by the Western `Thunder−gust,' which has just come in, I see they allow him `a penetrating eye and a remarkable talent for journalism.' He's a wonderful man:—we must go." And forth they issued. They struck through the heart of the city for the quarter they were in quest of; Mr. Fishblatt, whenever they passed through an obscure street, unbending a little and addressing his companion in a familiar tone, but as soon as ever they were abroad again in a great thoroughfare, he stretched himself to his full stature, and marched forward very gravely, without so much as uttering a word. From the manner in which he wielded the cane that he bore in his hand—sometimes twirling it about in his fingers, sometimes making a home−thrust at an imaginary object just before him—he may have been employed in revolving a passage or two of declamation: any how, so they walked on. An old dingy building soon stood before them, and they knew they had reached their destination. The quarter in which they had arrived was gross, squalid and unclean, and the building itself seemed a natural production of the soil, and not the work of human hands. A broad gaping area was there, in which such other fungi of the place, as broken quarter−kegs, stockingends, and shattered hats lay in heaps about, and into this they plunged.

They descended a few steps: and by the aid of a flickering lamp getting into an unclean passage, the walls of which were embellished with numerous impressions of small hands taken in primitive earth, they reached a door from which a great hubbub of voices and confused sounds constantly escaped. Here they entered, and found

themselves in a low−roofed apartment, lighted by various glittering and resplendent reflectors pinned against upright posts at the side: around the whole room there was a narrow bench, and at the farther extremity was a desk several feet above the level of the floor. Puffer and his companion were ushered to a place by the side of the desk; a tall young gentleman, who seemed to act as president, or chairman, stood up and knocked on the board before him, in imitation of a popular tune, when there came pouring in at a side passage, which Puffer had not at first observed, a swarm of youths, of all sizes, ages and complexions; dressed in all possible varieties of apparel; and bearing themselves with as great freedom and independence of demeanor as any number of gentlemen that could be found. Many of them bore in their hands threepenny pies, out of which, from time to time, they cut a mouthful: many more carried cigars in the corners of their mouths, at which they puffed with an exemplary vehemence and unction. At another bidding they were all seated, or gathered in groups and clusters about pillars in the middle of the apartment, and pausing for a season in their respective labors, turned their faces toward the tall chairman.

"Ge'mmen!" said the chief of the news−boys, rising in his place, having first priggishly buttoned his coat and thrust a broken yellow handkerchief in his breast, "Ge'mmen!" said he, "we all knows—what we've come here for, to−night. You know Tom Hurley, and Joe Shirks, and Bill Gidney—what we're come here for to do. We all knows what a low ebb 'Mery−kin literature had got to, when we took hold of it. We all knows what it is now—the wery pride and ornament of the earth. I can say it of a truth, ge'mmen, that Bill Gidney, the activest news−boy in the metropolis, is a honor to his species: so is Joe Shirks, and so is Tom Hurley. Where was natyve genius afore we took hold of it?—it was a bud in the worm, a undeveloped onion. What's the complaint now? There's too much genius, too much surprisin' talent and keen obserwation and overpowerin' eloquence. King Solomon and the greasy wise men 'ud be ashamed o' themselves, if they only knew Mr. Flabby, what edits the `Empty Puncheon,' or Mr. Busts, what conducts the `Daily Bladder,' or Mr. Bloater, what writes four−horse leaders for the `Junk Bottle,' but what's going to be the head man of the new and interestin' paper, called the `Mammoth Mug.' That 'll be a remarkable paper, ge'mmen: depend on it! The uncommon stock of brains put into that newspaper will be mere waste; it 'll be a extravagant usin' up o' the human intellect. For myself, ge'mmen, if you ask my views of litter−a−toor, I don't hesitate to say, in vun sense o' the word, excuse the expression, it's nothin' but a powerful combination o' rags and brass: by which I means to say, it takes a uncommon quantity o' rags to make the paper out of, and it takes a uncommon sight o' brass and courage to make the paper full o' readin' matter. Now what's our duty? Shall we give the cause of natyve genius the go−by; a sort of a wink to a blind horse, instead of a nice nod of encouragement? As long as we can make twenty−five off of a hundred, and lunches—shall we give it up?"

Here the speaker was interrupted by a terrific and general cry of "No, no." "Carry that man to Bellewue: he's lost his wits!"

It was quite obvious that his excellency, the chairman, was prepared still further to thrill and enlighten them with his peculiar eloquence: but at this stage of the proceedings there came into the meeting, pushing his way through the news−boys, with the most easy, natural and serene self−possession—a stout, blustering fellow, with great staring eyes—not altogether ill−looking either—a red neckerchief about his throat, a frock−coat flaunting from his side, his hair in disorder, and his countenance beaming with a broad, unrestrained expression of assurance and conceit. This was an editor. It was Piddleton Bloater himself; and Piddleton Bloater, the Mighty, the Immense, the Immeasurable, had come to bargain with the news−boys to take an interest in a new journal in which he was about to embark his magnificent talents.

"The new paper to be issued on Saturday morning," said Mr. Bloater, looking gigantic, so as to overawe the juvenile gentry before him, "will be the completest paper ever published; eight feet square, honest measure; illustrated by the most splendid wood−cuts, head−pieces, tail−pieces, and so forth, by the most celebrated artists. Correspondents in every quarter of the world. We have already engaged Commissioner Lin for the Chinese department; President Boyer, of Hayti, does the African branch. The Board of Directors of the N. Y. Gas Company are retained as regular contributors. Mr. Bulfinch Twaddle will furnish a poem to every number. We expect to have a circulation of one hundred and fifty thousand by the end of the present year: in fact, we have it already, although they have'nt all paid in yet. We intend to make the `Mug' the most remarkable journal of the day. The `Mug' must go. Don't all speak at once!"

Here the orator produced from his coat−pocket a great red handkerchief, the duplicate segment of that about his neck, which he unfurled with a flourish, and disclosed before the gaze of the assembled news−boys, the

words, "The Mammoth Mug—Edited by Piddleton Bloater, Esq.," wrought thereon in portentous capitals. This movement was hailed with a cheer, and as he waived it about his head, and reddened in the face by the exertion, the cheers grew in energy and emphasis.

"But gentlemen," continued Mr. Bloater, when the enthusiasm had a little abated, sinking his voice to an awful whisper, "there's a secret I've got to disclose, that will astonish you. Prepare yourselves. Brace up, and hold fast of each other. Rum−Fusti, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, is employed to write an entirely original Continuous Tale for the `Mug;' to be contributed exclusively to the `Mug' and to no other paper!"

This had a fine sounding style, and the news−boys, from the very circumstance of not apprehending it very thoroughly, cheered and shouted more heartily than ever. With this tremendous announcement, Mr. Piddleton Bloater paused and taking a notebook from his pocket, said he was ready for orders; but hoped they would restrain themselves, and not come on too fast.

"Eight feet square—that's ever so many thousand surface inches!" said Master Tom Hurley, a pale−faced news−boy, apparelled in a long tail coat, with metal buttons. "I'm death for the Mug, Mr. Bloater. I'll cut the `Empty Puncheon,' and take a hundred Mugs to start with."

"The Puncheon! How in the name of Heaven could any one patronize that miserable abortion!" exclaimed Mr. Bloater. "Flabby's a poor withered alligator; and the Puncheon a mere pothecary's show−bottle, that shines a mile or two off, but's nothing after all but colored water, and that not fit to drink."

"If Rum−Buster out o' Noah's ark, writes for the first number," said Master Gidney, a small, corpulent, jolly−looking fellow, in a roundabout and tasselled cap, grinning, and speaking up, as he cocked it on his brow, "I'll cut in for a gross of number one; if I seed his Tale's name in big letter on the fences, it 'ud give me confidence, and I might go in for a couple o' hundred; but that's as many as 'ud do, till I have a interview with the fire−board makers."

Mr. Bloater, not exactly understanding how a privity of knowledge between the fire−board makers and Master Gidney could affect the sale of the Mug, looked upon the youth approvingly, and dashed his open palm upon his leg, crying out that was "juicy, and just the thing!"

"I think Busts of the `Daily Bladder' is breaking down," interposed another news−vender, in a suit all shreds and patches, with an unclean face, uncombed hair, (the prevailing fashion of the place) and no covering to his head. "He writes all his editorials in a cheer made out of the staves of a rum cask: he loves the smell of the thing wonderfully; and has to be tied in by the foreman, while he's writin'. Busts writes a history of his sprees over night, in somebody else's name, and that fills up the Police Head. I'll take fifty `Mugs' fresh and bright, with the froth on."

"The best thing you could do, my lad!" cried Mr. Bloater from where he stood, smiling. "That Busts is a poor miserable wretch: a viper in the uniform of the rifle brigade, and he kills character by the platoon. They call Busts a keen observer of life! so he is of animalcul æ that live in the kennel: there is'nt a viler wretch on the face of the earth than this same Busts, if you except Flabby of the `Empty Puncheon!' But how many copies do you take Mr. Chairman?" asked Mr. Bloater turning toward that functionary: "I know you to be one of the longest−legged and loudest−voiced of the Society."

"That's a wery delicate question sir," answered the president, rising with dignity, and buttoning his coat calmly as he ascended, "a wery delicate question—unless I was informed of the principles the Mug 's to be conducted on: does it go Captain Kidd, or the moral code?"

"Captain Kidd—decidedly," rejoined Mr. Piddleton Bloater. "We shall pirate all foreign tales regularly; and where we can purloin proof sheets shall publish in advance of the author himself; shall in all cases employ third−rate native writers at journeyman−cobbler's wages, and swear to their genius as a matter of business: shall reprint the old annuals and almanacs, systematically, as select extracts and facetiæ, and shall reproduce their cuts and illustrations, as new designs from the burin of Mr. Tinto, the celebrated Engraver."

"That'll do—that'll do," cried the chairman, interrupting the speaker. "Set me down for the balance of the fust edition: it'll be a fust rate paper, and conducted on fust rate principles."

"There's another thing," said Mr. Bloater, continuing the subject, "another thing to be distinctly and clearly understood. Whoever writes the chief article of the Mug is to be the great writer—the biggest penman in America, for that week. For instance, if it should even be Busts or Flabby; Flabby is to be advertised as an angel in large caps, and Busts as a genius of the first water."

"Of course!" cried the president: "Of course!" echoed the news−boys to a man, who understood this policy thoroughly.

"With this understanding, I'll say good night to you," said Mr. Bloater, wiping his brow. "I hope you'll be in good voice for the first day: I'd suggest a little practice in crying false alarms for a night or two, the length of half a dozen streets."

"We does that regularly," answered Master Joe Shirks, "and some of us goes on amateur duty as oyster boys, when shell fish 's in season and big enough to cry!"

With this satisfactory assurance, Mr. Piddleton Bloater departed, sounding the natural trumpet of his nose with all his might as he went.

"Who knows, but some of these youth," asked Mr. Fishblatt, who had been thrown into temporary shade by the presence of so astounding a genius, wheeling about and looking Puffer full in the face, "may come to serve their country one of these days in the halls of legislation? Who knows but nature may be unconsciously training in the crier of a `Junk Bottle,' a future speaker of the House? or in the street shouter of the `Empty Puncheon,' a leading Congressional orator? I begin to think its the true training for rhetorical talent; and why should not their ambition be turned in this direction? My young friends and Mr. President," he continued, elevating his voice, now that he was fairly roused, and falling back a step or two, "To return to what I was about to say when interrupted by Mr. Bloater—I would put it to your patriotism, whether you should not withdraw for a time from the literary luxury of crying the news and take an active part in public affairs. Here is a noble opportunity to serve your country, my young friends: don't let it pass. Gidney and Shirks and Hurley—for such I understand to be the names of some of you—have now an enviable opportunity of achieving lasting glory. Think of it, you may save your country: the conspicuous exhibition of a placard by your ingenuity may draw to the polls, say only a single voter, that voter casts for Gallipot, and the business is done. Give up every thing to serve your country, abandon your cherished pursuits, sacrifice your feelings, and endear yourselves to all the good and virtuous, and public−spirited throughout this great metropolis— this mighty nation!"

"For my part," responded Mr. Gidney, who was the first to rise, "I considers it degradin' for a news−boy to become a bill−sticker; it's lowerin' oneself in the scale of society and makin' a object of hisself for all future times and generations. The woice of Fame is agin it."

"You are wrong, my young friend," continued Mr. Fishblatt, rising again majestically, stretching out his right hand and depositing it on the desk top, while he passed his left behind his person, and thrust it in one of the nether pockets of his coat. "The vocation of a bill−sticker is a highly honorable one and admits of a great expansion of natural talent. What does he do? Why, Mr. Chairman, he makes dumb walls and dead stones speak; he puts a tongue in the old thirsty street−pump; and he causes shutters and bulk−heads to cry aloud and shout out, at all hours, day and night; night and day. Is'nt that enough? Where do you find the bill−sticker? Why he's at the bottom, the very prime mover and getter up of all public gatherings, concerts, lectures, balloonings, ballotings, packet−sailings, fairs, shows and spectacles. He's the prompter and bell−puller of society. Is'nt this an honorable calling? Why, sir, next to the popular preacher and the popular author the bill−sticker is certainly the greatest benefactor of his race!"

As soon as Mr. Fishblatt had taken his seat, after this powerful outbreak, Master Joe Shirks rose in reply.

"We can't do it—no how," said Master Shirks, addressing the chair. "We are pledged contrarywise to the citizens of New−York. What'll they say, I'd like to know, when you, Mr. Chairman, and I, and Bill Gidney here, loses our voice, and cry no more papers than if we was dumb−fish and flounders. Papers must be cried; and there's the Extras—who's to know anything about that 'ere sudden murder, where a affectionate husband has chopped his wife into tender−loins, with a new broadaxe; or that 'ere dreadful case of explosion, where the benevolent gentleman has called a tea−party over his steamboat boiler, and blowed 'em all to atoms with gitting the fun and the jollification up too high? What's to become of these little things sir, if we go off duty. It's easy to see, without a telyscop, or a constable's peepers, the city 'ud have a shock of the apoplexy, and go into fits regularly till we begun to cry again. The news−boys, sir, and we all knows it—but we're too modest to say it out of doors—is the moral lamplighters of this 'ere city. The ge'mmen talks about public affairs: that's a good 'un, as if we did'nt keep the public mind straight about all that 'ere! If the Englishers go up into the bowels of China, and drink up all the old hyson, that's been laid away there, drying and gitting strength for four hundred year, I guess we knows it! What's the use of all our private interviews with the pressmen and clerks about Extras, if it don't

come to that? By private advices we learns that the Florida Indians all waded in a body into a large swamp, and committed soo−cide by holding each others heads under water, on the nineteenth instant: where do you get all that from old fellow? Why from news−boy Tom or news−boy Bill or Joe Shirks, your sarvant.

I'm agin the motion, Mr. Cheerman, and move we sticks to *our* business, and lets overybody else stick to theirs!"

Another young gentleman followed who could'nt think of the proposition, as he had been assured, from good sources, that there were to be four powerful Extras issued in the course of the month—containing a vast deal of inflammable information, in advance of all the regular packets, steamers and stages; and for his part, he would'nt lose the chance. Theatre−money was low in his pocket—he had'nt seen a mellow−drama for a week, and it was asking too much of him.

Another was willing to do all *he* could to forward the proposition; but he'd like to know why the gem'men did'nt stick the bills himself; he seemed to have good legs of his own, and a very respectable pair of reachers. At this suggestion the chairman cried "order," and there was a general shout of disapprobation at the line of questioning adopted by the young gentleman.

After a pretty thorough discussion of the subject, when no satisfactory result seemed possible, the chairman himself arose.

"Ge'mmen!" said he, "this 'll never do. These ge'mmen come to us with the very highest recommendations, and from the very most respectable quarters. We must'nt let 'em go away without a lift. We can help 'em, and we must. Now, there is in this very meeting, and I'm not afraid to say it, certain young gentlemen that had better go to be bill−stickers afore their healths is ruined and entirely broken up. There's one of us—I don't mention names, ge'mmen—that bursted his voice on extra Junks last week; he was entirely too wiolent on the China question. His voice is gone. Then there's another of us—you recollect him, ge'mmen— who broke down (there was a sight for you) in the wery middle of the street, with a wery exciting number of the `Puncheon' (containing all them pleasant particulars about the two dead bodies found in a gen'leman's iron−safe) under his arm, tryin' to do justice to it. How many wictims of weto messages there is in this room, *I* would'nt like to say: but I do know that a weto message from the presidin' chief of these United States, and a influenza is equally fatal to the woice of the news−boy. Then there's you, Ikey Larkins," continued the chairman, addressing a lumbering, over−grown fellow, that stood shouldering a post in the corner: "Have n't I told you more nor twenty times that you'r beyond the news−boy age. Its immoral of such a weteran as you to be cryin' papers about New−York streets: don't you see that your'e too big a build, that your'e lame of one leg and short of an eye; and yet you will keep hanging about the offices, and cutting in as if you was born to the business. Ge'mmen, let's give Mr. Fishblatt six to begin with (Ikey Larkins for one) and throw 'em in one a day as fast as they break down. It's carried!"

And in this summary way the mission of Puffer Hopkins and Mr. Fishblatt was accomplished, and amidst an uproar of cries, among which they heard above all others "three cheers for the cheer!" and "Ikey Larkins is a `extra foolish'"—they left.

CHAPTER XVIII. STRANGE MATTER: PERHAPS NOT WITHOUT METHOD.

At early morning—the very hour, or nearly so, when Puffer Hopkins was holding an interview with the two women—an aged figure, wild and distracted, wandered about the fields beyond the city. His steps were uncertain and his whole look and action full of confusion and doubt: he seemed to be seeking something that was not to be found, and wherever he cast his eyes, wondered that it was not there. Where he had past the night, God only knows; but now that it was morning, he came abroad, drenched, disordered in dress, and wavered and groped about in the clear sunshine as if it had been mist. Bewildered and with troubled steps, he crossed the low hollows and meadows; straggled more perplexed than ever, through a crowded orchard; and at length stood on an ancient highway, the old Post Road. The moment his steps touched the road, they seemed on a familiar track; his look brightened; and with a gleaming countenance, he glanced about, till his eye fell on an old, faded country house. What joyful and happy gleams broke through the old man's features as he looked upon that old faded house! His eyes sparkled, his hands trembled for joy; and he raised them up and stretched them forth as if he could grasp that building, as a familiar friend, by an outstretched hand. Then the brightness passed away from his look; he was deeply moved, and in his agitation could scarcely drag himself to the spot where his eyes were fixed. With trembling hand he lifted the latchet of the gate; and as he walked up the path, he shook like one in a spasm.

Many times he walked round and round the house, before he entered. Then he went to the rear, raised a door that led to a ground cellar, and peered for a long space down into the gloom of the earth before he would descend. Through heaps of lumber, old decaying casks, and other ancient fragments, he picked his way; holding his breath and spreading out his arms before him. He soon found stairs that led into the upper chambers, and climbing these, he was in an apartment all dust and darkness, still as death, barren and silent as the grave itself. He paused and listened, as if he expected the approach of some well−known tread; the greeting, perhaps, of a familiar voice. No voice answered—how could it at that lapse of time, unless it had lingered in the corners and recesses of the chamber, years after its owner was laid in the earth?

"Shall I let the morning light in upon all these?" said the old man, who called up in his mind a vivid image of all that this chamber held: "not yet; I think I could not bear it yet! I know that broad day is without," he felt it more because of the darkness, "but I dare not let it in this chamber yet."

With this he moved about the apartment, touching every thing with his hand—gently and kindly, as a blind man features and faces he would know—until he had gone through every article about the room, save one, and that was a chair—a simple, old−fashioned arm−chair, that stood by the hearth. He many times approached this as if he would know it as he had known whatever else was there; but his heart gave out and he fell back, leaning, in the darkness, against whatever chanced to be nearest.

Wrought upon by his own fancy and these acts of association, finding these many endeavors to no purpose, he rushed to a window, burst its hasp, and casting its shutters wide back, turned about and straining his gaze upon the empty chair by the hearth, he fell down like one in a fit.

Recovering, when the mid−day began to pour its warm beams into the chamber, he looked about the apartment, dwelling for a long time on each object; but when his eye fell on a door which led into a small chamber in one corner of the room, a change came over his countenance, and he turned aside as if he dared not look that way again. Presently, however, and seemingly moved thereto by some sudden impulse, he proceeded to the door, which was closed, drew it open, and clutching the door−post to hold him up, he leaned forward and looked within. There was nothing there but a narrow truckle−bed with a single tattered blanket upon it, and the cords, such as were visible, mouldering and dragging upon the floor; and yet what a shuddering horror crossed the old man's face as he gazed upon it, how he trembled and bore heavily against the door−post, as if he had been smitten blind and helpless by the shock of a sudden blow.

He could neither enter nor retire; but stood there like one rooted to the earth. His mind was dwelling on what had passed there twenty years before: a little hideous old man, older than himself, lay, shivering under that blanket—he saw every line of his countenance— resting on his elbow, straining his ear to catch what passed in the neighboring chamber, and chuckling like a fiend, as he listened.

Consciousness and some power of motion, by degrees came back; he went away and sate down for a time, lost

in a deep reverie; then he rose, and going forward cautiously, as if under the horrible belief that, that other old man was lying in wait within—he closed the door, turned the key in the lock which groaned aloud, and caused him to start; placed a chair with its back against the door, dropped into the seat, and fixed his eyes, as if he would never remove them thence, upon the old arm−chair standing by the hearth. Sometimes he wept as he looked there; then smiled, as if he would cheer some one that filled its seat; and then a keen anguish, an imploring look—full of sharpest desolation—shot into every feature and blinded his eyes with grief.

In this way he sate there for an hour or more, suffering with pangs that spake aloud in every line of his face, every muscle of his tortured old body—but immoveable. He strained his eyes forward—"She is going—God help us all—she is gone!" he cried, and broke from the chamber. He speeded swiftly into the hall; unfastened the door—the old bar crumbled as he pulled it down—and was in the open air. Much as he was moved, his feet yet lingered about the place; and while he wavered in his mind whether to stay or fly—standing and looking by turns back upon the house and out upon the road that stretched away into the country—his attention was fixed by a young figure that approached. It was a fair creature that he saw, not yet grown to the full age of care; but, nevertheless, pale, travel−stained, and partly borne down by a burthen (it was a plain willow basket) which she carried, and which she held close to her side.

She was hurrying by, when the old man accosted her.

"Stop me not, for heaven's sake, stop me not," she cried, as Hobbleshank stood in her way. "Life and death are in my steps. Death behind and death before me; and life only—a little lingering life—in such speed as I may make. I must be gone at once!"

The old man stood for a time, gazing at the pale young creature, and wondering what her meaning might be; recovering from his surprise, he presently laid his hand in hers (which was cold as marble) and said:

"Come in with me; you are sick and weary—that you cannot deny—with long travel. You need rest, and may find a little here. I once had good right to say to all comers, `welcome here!'—that was many, many long, dreary years ago—it was then a cheerful, merry house; and now, we who are both stricken in sorrow, have a privilege any where, where darkness is, and dust and lonely gloom. Come in and rest."

As he spake, he drew her gently toward the house: she hesitated at first, and when she cast her eyes up at the old building, shuddered and started back as if it had been a prison; but when she turned and saw tears streaming in the old man's eyes—he had watched her with a sad constancy—she smiled sorrowfully, and at once entered in.

Why did *she* pause as she paced that broad old hall? What were those crumbling old walls, and those fading figures painted to the ceiling, saying to her? She looked about like one restored to a world she had known before; and could not tell where nor when. Wondering more and more, and on the watch at every step, like one that looks for a surprise, she was led by Hobbleshank, whose steps seemed moved that way by a force he could not control, into the chamber where he had suffered so much. He would have closed the door behind them, to shut off the cold airs that dwelt about the hall.

"In God's name," cried his young companion, "do not shut this chamber up so tight; you will stifle me. I had rather suffer all the unkindness of winter, than see any thing more of closed doors and darkened windows. I have seen enough already!" She looked uneasily about as she spake, sighed as in spite of herself, and was silent.

"You have had heavy troubles, for one so young," said the old man, "I know you have: for your eyes seem to be looking not at present objects, but on what is behind and far away!"

"Don't speak of them now," she answered, drawing her breath short and fast; "but go out and look back upon the road, whether any travellers are coming this way in great haste. There will be a dark, deadly carriage close behind them."

Hobbleshank begged her to be seated, and went forth as she requested. He soon came back, and answered that there was none to be seen.

"I strained my gaze," said the old man, "the whole length of the road. Be comforted; there is no one in pursuit."

"In pursuit?" she answered, lifting her eyes upon him with a broad look of surprise and wonder. "Then you know that I have fled. Do you know from whom?"

"How could I fail to know?" answered Hobbleshank, whose heart softened toward the gentle questioner. "You have fled from tyrants. I see no stripes upon your person; you do not wear a prison garb; and yet I will swear that you are flying from the most cursed, cruel relentless despotism that could be laid on a young spirit like yours. Some one that may have spared your fair flesh, has been cutting your young heart to the quick— has been

breaking your beautiful hopes, one by one; and you feel the sunshine and the free air to−day, for the first time, perhaps, in many a long year. Give an old man credit for some spirit of sorrowful judgment, and say I am right!"

Could the earnest truth with which Hobbleshank spake, out of the very bosom of a great inner world of sorrow in himself, fail to touch the other pale sufferer?

"I have had some troubles," she answered, feigning to smile. "But what of that, I am only grown old a little before my time. I will try to forget what is past; would God grant me strength to bear up against what is to come!" As she spake, a deadly paleness blanched her cheeks, and her eyes brightened into a vague splendor, that was almost fearful to look upon.

The old man sate fixed in his seat, gazing upon her; while there came floating into his mind, and assuming form and color, as he watched her haggard look, her features white as the tombstone marble, and her thin trembling form, the memory of one just so troubled, shrunken and sorrowful, that faded away from that old arm−chair, a life−time ago.

Each lost in their own wandering and troubled thoughts, they sate there dumb and silent as two images in a cold vault.

"Do you dwell here?" she said at length; but seeing the dusty walls, from which the hangings tumbled piece−meal, and how dull cob−webs had engrossed the corners of the room, she added, "But I know you cannot."

"And yet I do," answered Hobbleshank, "in the spirit. My mind has lived in these chambers for many years; but this poor old body drags itself along in yonder city. This house is mine, and yet not mine; rather it belongs to a child of mine, whether in his grave or no, I cannot tell."

"Then he may be happy!" she said. "I have looked down into many graves, and used to think them dreary. But now I know there are graves on the earth, gloomier than any dug in the soil. Why do I stay here, talking so: when I should be abroad on my journey? I would not have tarried—though I am glad for your sake and my own, now, that I did—had I not wished, most fervently wished, to cross the threshold of the city with some strength and spirit to meet my task. I must go."

She rose; possessed herself of the willow basket, which she had laid on the ground, at her side, and took the old man by the hand.

"I am sorry that you go," he said, looking kindly upon the gentle creature. "You know not what guests and fancies you leave me to. Can I go with you to the great city in no friendly service?"

"In none whatever, I fear," she answered. "My task is a simple one, and asks only a kindly spirit to fill it well. I go to tend at the bedside of a dear friend who is sick. I must hasten, or he may have bid the world goodby already. I think," she added, laying her pale white hand upon the basket, "I have some comfort here for him."

"An old man's good wishes shall go with you every step! Cheer up and speed, then, if such be your errand: the city darkens apace, and I shall be alone again, as I have been, and shall be, how long heaven knows."

He led her through the old broad hall; she looked at the dim old figures with the same strange interest as before; and in a moment they stood upon the door−step.

"Remember," said Hobbleshank, "though we have met but once, we are old friends."

She pressed his hand closely in her own, and proceeded on her way. Once forth upon the road again, she strained her eyes with painful earnestness toward the city, as if she could so call up out of all the great and turbid mass, the little bedside she wished to see; pausing only once or twice to look back at the old man, who at last fell within and closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX. THE PALE TRAVELER ENTERS THE CITY.

She had not walked far, when a sudden turn brought her where the road plunged down with a swift declivity at her feet. She stopped and trembled. Underneath her troubled eye lay the mighty metropolis, with its thousand chimnies, its blackened roofs, its solemn church−turrets and glittering vanes—spreading out whereever she gazed, and filling her mind with an indescribable awe.

How dark, how cold and chill, seemed that multitude of houses to her! They suggested to her no thoughts of neighborhood and fellowship by their closeness, but rather one of dumb creatures huddled together by sheer necessity, to shut off the shivering airs that beset them from the rivers on either side. When she looked for broad and cheerful ways, and found only narrow streets that yawned like chasms and abysses along the house−fronts; when her eyes sought waving trees to gladden the air, in vain; her heart shrunk within her: it seemed to her a wilderness of dungeons, and nothing more. A dark dismal mist, formed of dust, smoke, the reek of squalid streets, the breath of thousands and hundred thousands of human beings—crept, like a black surge, along the house−tops.

The hoarse murmur deepened as night drew on; the moaning of one vexed with pain and confinement, of prisoners pining to be free. If the whole broad shadow of the city, cold and vast, had fallen on her spirit, it could not have chilled her more: but when the thought came to her again of the sacred errand on which she was bound, her heart was renewed, her eye brightened, and clasping her burden anew, she hurried on. And now the great city which she had wondered at, in its entirety and vastness, met her, part by part, and bewildered her with its countless details. There were country waggons hurrying out: sulkies, stanhopes, baronches flying past as if desolation followed fast behind; then great carts and trucks, loaded to the peak with heavy merchandize. All these she regarded with a wandering eye; but when she caught sight of dark foundation−stones, still clinging to the earth, where an old penitentiary had been lately razed to the ground—she felt the uses it had served.

Whenever she passed houses with closed shutters, she shuddered and quickened her pace; to some there were barred windows — these she regarded with a sidelong glance of curiosity, as if she expected to see pale faces peering out between the irons. Once she passed an old stone−building, with every casement from cellar to garret closely ironed; it was only an old sugar−house, and she speeded past it as if it had been a jail.

Full of vague fears, startled at every object that crossed her, suggestive in any, the remotest degree, of that she dreaded—and had good cause to dread the most—she hastened on. A green waggon, close and dark, passed her—the prison carriage, plying between the city prison and the Island—and she felt it like a cloud as it hurried by. The very streets, murky as they were, seemed to close upon her in the distance, but opened again constantly as she advanced; new houses, new sights and objects, springing as from a perpetual womb, out of the cloudy haze that lowered in her way. As far as her eye could pierce, the roads were dark with vehicles of one sort and another, crossing and re−crossing, rushing tumultuously in every direction; some driven by boys, some by men; some sitting under shelter, others, the cartmen, standing up in their professional frocks, with a firm hold upon the reins, darting rapidly from one side of the street to the other. Above the whole throng and procession, a great coach or stage at times towered up, over−topping the street, and swarming to its very summit with passengers.

All along the way, people poured into the streets in uninterrupted succession, out of damp, dull rooms; out of narrow alleys; from work−shops; from cellars; from churches; and the way was perpetually choked and glutted with the throng. What multitudes went past pent up in carriages—a pleasure to them, a hideous bondage, it seemed to her!

She saw no one, not one, with gyves and irons on their limbs, and yet how care−worn, and bowed, and convictlike they all looked to her!

She passed along, looking anxiously at dark door−ways, at iron gates and steep areas, and heavy churches oppressing the earth with their massive granite or marble; smithies, where men were busy forging vast chains and cables; shops, where great locks and bolts leaned in the windows. A long way after all these, she came upon a grim, ill−dressed, smoke−stained man, who bore in his hand a bunch of keys, which he grasped close and clashed together as he walked, and she shrunk from him as if he had been the deadliest and fastest of all the jailer race. Gazing fearfully about in this way, she espied, far off, through a side−street, dimly seen moving through the dusk,

that grew every minute deeper, a hearse and funeral train—at that distance it seemed scarcely more than a shadow—and a cold shudder crept through her frame. What if it were her friend, her dear friend, whose burial she thus regarded? Her first impulse was to hasten after it; but ere she had taken many steps in this resolution it had glided away, and she returned to the path she had been pursuing. Night now came swiftly on; the black shadows fell in broad masses in the streets; the confusion, the hurry, the press of life in every direction deepened.

She moved along as speedily as she could, consulting from time to time at a window lamp, a chart she had borne in her hand all along. At intervals, as if by chance and no design, a public light broke out, sometimes in one quarter, sometimes in another, and glimmered with a feeble ray. This only made the gloom deeper and drearier than before; and she kept, while she could, in the streets where the shop windows blazed upon the pavement.

It was not easy for her, with all her care, her painful scrutiny of the paper she carried, and study of the sign−boards at the corners, to shape her course aright. There was a street−fight once; then a crowd gathered at the door of a show; then a poor woman who was doling forth from the steps of a gentleman's domicil, a piteous tale of poverty and suffering. Once there was a hideous cry, a light rose high in the air, and she looked about and saw more plainly than ever how darkness had stretched his mighty arms abroad and held the city in his grasp.

Not a whit fairer or freer did the houses show to her now at night, than when she first beheld them and ever since; they all seemed like graves or tombs, or prison−fastnesses. Striking through thoroughfares that diverged from the main path she had been traveling, she was gradually approaching the point she sought. She passed a thoroughfare, little frequented, where the unfed lamps winked and blinked at each other across the street, like so many decayed ghosts. Then another, where all the lights had gone out. Then others, until at length, by what she saw around, she felt that the object of her wish was near at hand.

There was a square, so her chart informed her, here it was; a discolored yellow house—here, too, only it seemed more golden and precious than the description allowed: and there, yes there, where her eyes were fixed, as on a star, shone a little light, just at the height she might have looked for. The house, the home, the shelter of her sick friend was found. The door stood open to receive and welcome her in. She looked around, the tall houses that guarded the square growing blacker every minute, seemed frowning on her and gathering about her, closer and closer, as if they would shut her in: she glanced timidly up to them, as if they had been in truth cruel living creatures, and trembling with fear and joy, fled into the house for shelter, like one pursued.

CHAPTER XX. FOR AND HIS VISITER FROM THE COUNTRY.

The stairs were steep and narrow; and as she clambered up, a thousand visions thronged about her and crowded in her way. At one time she was oppressed with the gloomy thought that *he* might be dead and gone: not to be found any more in that house, or any other of mortal habitation. Then all the great city, in the many dreadful and oppressive shapes it had taken in her mind, whirled past, filling the air with darkness, and confusion and boundless tumult. It was a gloomy way for a poor lonely woman to travel—that ill arranged stairway, lighted only by the chance flickering of cheap candles, where the doors stood ajar; or by whatever of the public light strayed in through the entry windows. Every step brought her nearer to the chamber she sought; and although there were many others under that same roof, children, and women, and aged men, dwelling in many apartments, (for they were all poor, and poverty straitens itself to a narrow fold,) she seemed to know that chamber only, among them all.

At length she stood at the door; she knew it even in the dark, as her hand passed over it; she paused a moment, to gather strength and spirit. While she lingered, in a deep conflict of many emotions, she thought she heard the murmur of gentle music within; it was fancy only, associating with the place an incident that raised it out of its low estate. She entered: there was the room, lighted by a single candle, gleaming from the corner where it stood, as cramped and narrow as ever; the asparagus in bottles; the chain of birds' eggs against the wall; the pot of plants brought in and stationed on the shelf; the blackbird in his cage, removed from his old look−out at the window and hung upon a beam inside; and underneath these, where his waking eye could command them all, lay the little tailor, poor, wan, wasted with sickness, and slumbering from very want of strength. She looked upon him, scarcely believing it was he: she looked upon the objects which carried her mind far away, and she knew it was, indeed, no other. She sank into a chair by the wall, and looked around: how strong was the sympathy of her fancy with the fancy of the sick man! While she gazed upon them, the room broadened into wide meadows; the asparagus sprigs shot up into fair, green trees; the birds' eggs, in the instant, swarmed with many beautiful and melodious lives; and the single blackbird darkened the air, as if he had been a whole flock in himself. There was more freedom to her in that little room, than in all the broad streets she had wandered through!

Then she watched the sick man himself: so thin, so pale, he seemed to have come to her a long way out of the past, divested of all the clogs and shackles that had held him from her so long. He smiled: by that she knew him again. It was meant, she was sure, for herself; and her heart lightened at the thought. Dwelling upon it, remembering how often such a look had brightened that pale face in old days, her thoughts were led, by degrees, to the basket she had laid down at her side. Unclasping it with trembling hands, she brought from its bosom a slip of the wild−rose, which she carried gently and laid on the pillow by his brow, with the hope that it might suggest to his dreams scenes, dear to him as life. She was right; mingling with his own willing thoughts, what his sense reported to him, there sprang up before him a fantasy of other days, so sweet, so life−like, so lively, that he smiled on it as if it had been reality. His lips moved, and murmured softly, as to a listening ear. She glided quickly forward, and bent down to catch what he uttered: she would have given the world had his words— she thought she knew what they would say—been audible.

Presently the poor tailor wakened from his charmed slumber; sate up in his couch, and looked about. His eyes, which wandered as in search of something not present, no sooner fell on the pale visiter than they were fixed at once. So unreal they seemed to each other, and yet shadows of what both knew well, they sate gazing each into the other's eyes, without motion or utterance.

"Martha?" at last said Fob, whispering the name, in doubt whether he would be answered, or whether the vision would be dispelled, "Martha Upland?"

She started up and rushed to his bedside.

"I thank God for this," she cried, casting herself upon his neck; "I had not hoped to see you alive!"

"You should scarcely think of the living," answered Fob, with an inexpressible anguish in his look; "you, who have been dead and buried three long years."

"Little better than that," she answered, "or not so good. A close, silent bondage in one's father's house, with eyes, colder than the grave−worms, ever fixed on you; all the motions of nature going on about you, so that you

can hear the murmur and not share it; on the same earth with friends you love, and yet sundered, in an everlasting parting, from them: this *is* death. There can be no other and no worse."

"I could not, dear Martha—it was madness for me to dream, that you would come or could, when I sent for you. I was going to the grave you have prayed for so often; and tarried only to shake hands and part."

"It was only by long watching, and at last, by stealth, that your message came to my hand. Yesterday at daybreak, the cruel guards, who have watched me so long, grew, for once, drowsy with sleep; I found access to an upper chamber, clambered to the roof; down upon the old outhouse, (you remember it well,) and at length leaped to the ground. In an hour—an hour sacred to you—I was on my journey, and, now, foot−weary, as you may guess, but glad of heart, I am here."

"Three years—what years—since the awful interdict that divided us was pronounced. It was folly that I, a poor, outcast, landless tailor, should lift my heart to you; but with God's blessing, what I then gave has prospered (I know it has) in your silent prison, as well as it would with all the summer's sun, and the autumn's bounty, shed upon it. Three years; and now I look upon what my eyes have wandered through the whole firmament in vain, to behold. I have toiled, God knows, for this sight, and have failed till now."

"I saw you once, dear Fob," she answered, returning his look of truthful fondness, "once only: and that was a year ago, yesterday, at dusk, gliding by the garden wall; they seized you and dragged you away before my sight; and ever after, *that* window was closed. The morning light that came that way (they said) was too strong for my fading eyes."

"For many long days," said Fob, "I was the ghost of that dwelling: I haunted all the ways that led to it—sometimes in the orchard, sometimes in the meadow, sometimes, as you saw, under the very eaves of the house itself. But to what purpose? I had been driven, you know, by the iron hand that no man can resist, the relentless law, from fields that were mine; and men followed in its scent, and yelled on my steps, like so many hounds. I was buffeted, reproached, driven off like a dog, till I came to curse the very house that held your enemies and mine. I have failed not, as you learned by what I wrote, to visit our old haunts, and to dream you back again to the life we once led in woods and meadows, and by the margins of smiling streams. How has the time gone with you?" he asked in a choking voice, for he knew the answer too well. "You have had no free air for three weary years."

"No breath whatever," she said, and a deeper paleness struck through her features as she spoke, "closely housed—stealthily watched all that time; while the story has gone abroad that I was deadly sick, of a sickness so frail and delicate, that nearest friends could not see me without endangering life. A physician—a false, corrupt villain as God ever made—came at studious intervals as if to my bedside, and went forth with a piteous sigh, shaking his head over the sad malady that could not be cured. So they thought. They deemed that disease of horrid bondage would never be conquered; but, thanks to Heaven, thanks, never too many nor too devout, I am a free child of the air and the open light once more!"

Even while she spake, swift, copious tears gushed into her eyes; she fell upon her knees, and bowing her head upon the couch of her sick friend, felt that her heart was bursting with thoughts of past sufferance and present joy! Could Fob behold this, and fail to be moved? He looked upon her a moment; a pang writhed his countenance, and clasping one of her pale hands in his, he wept like a child. The wild slip with which she had soothed his sleep, lay where all their tears fell upon it; and if it had budded that moment, and shot forth there, in fair green leaves and brighter flowers than bush or tree ever bore, would it have been less than a true testimony to the beautiful and gentle spirit of the hour?

When they looked up again, the sorrow had passed from their brows, and they smiled on each other, with something like the gladness of a happier time.

"I have brought down all of the old homestead that I could," said Martha, who had her willow basket at the bedside; "and it is here."

She unclasped it; and as Fob glanced down into its fragrant womb, his eyes shone with a new light. He saw whole tracts and acres there.

"These, you know," continued Martha, producing a handful of green cresses, "I plucked them from the Mower's Nook in the wood, so calm and shady in the summer time. You remember it?"

"I think I should," answered Fob, who could not fail to detect a ruddy tinge that crossed the questioner's countenance. "Had that Nook a memory of its own, and could echo what it has heard, how many gentle stories it

could tell: that *you* know as well as I."

"Here is clover too," said Martha, "you know that?"

"To be sure I do," answered Fob, quickly, "The sweet, red−blossomed clover that grows by the great Rock in the lane—you found it there, I know. Is the shadow of the old Rock as broad and cheerful as ever?"

"You forget, my dear friend," she replied; "I have not seen its summer shadow for three long years. Boards and casements, thin and frail, have held me in faster than if I had been walled round with rocks as massy and cold as that!"

"What a fool I am!" said Fob, "I knew that well;— but here—what is this?" (taking up a green plant that she had produced, and looking on his pale visiter in wonder) "you have not truly trusted yourself in the dark old Hollow, always so full of midnight and gloomy thoughts, to pluck this for me?"

"From no other place has it come!" answered Martha. "It was the first I sought after my escape. Dark, dreary, cheerless as you think it—though we have had many a pleasant ramble in its ways—it glared as with sunshine, to my long darkened eye. The dismal pines that dwell on its sides, seemed to laugh in my ear, as the wind whispered with them; the dark bats and ill−omened owls glanced about as glorious as eagles!"

"Our gloomy old friend, the Hollow—you think so hardly of—see what he has yielded," said Martha, after a moment's pause, lifting in her hand a bunch of sparkling red berries, and waving them before the little tailor till they danced again, and shone brighter than his own pleased eyes.

Then there were buttercups gathered from the heart of a meadow, where they had often lingered together, gathering them before; green rushes, from the brook; feathers of the blue−bird, that had moulted where they were found. On each they dwelt, babbling over old memories and associations like children; and finding a solace and joy in those simple treasures, that the costliest banquet might have failed to yield.

All the green and fanciful treasures she had brought, lay spread about him; and his eye gleamed with a tearful joy, as it passed from one to the other.

"I have something more here," said Martha, dipping again into the basket, "something to please you for the sake of others, and not yourself."

"I shall shed no tears, even if it be so," said Fob, smiling. "Let us see."

She brought forth, from the very bottom of the basket, an old, tattered, patched−up parchment, and held it up exultingly before his eyes. He no sooner caught sight of it and learned what it was, than he clapped his hands and stretched them forth, to pluck it gently from her. It was the deed, the very deed, rent in pieces so long ago—which he thought lost forever, rescued to the light by bright eyes that had peered for it amid dust and tumbling fragments, because she knew it would pleasure him. Here was joy—joy for Puffer Hopkins; joy for Hobbleshank; and as he held it close to his eye, it seemed, as every good act and record should, to have a fragrance of all the sweet and fair things among which it had lurked in the basket of the fair fugitive. So they sate there many hours, in which Fob gathered new strength and spirit, talking over the recovery, past times, scenes, occasions— too sacred for a record. If unseen angels, as some have fondly deemed, watch in our chambers, linger at our bedsides, and bless us in act of doing well, how must they have swarmed in that little chamber, and through the holiest hours of night, held joyful watch over two spirits so like themselves!

CHAPTER XXI. ISHMAEL SMALL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Angel−guarded as a generous faith would fain persuade us, were the little tailor and his country friend, within—an eye, by no means so kindly or auspicious in its gaze, watched all their doings, from without. Perched in the very gutter of the Fork, clinging to the casement of the dormer window, as he best could, and holding his head obliquely—sate or couched—Ishmael Small. His turned−up nose against the window as close as he could press it, he kept a hungry look fastened on every glance, or gesture, or motion, that passed within: he could not catch their voices where he sate, but seemed to know all that passed as if he had heard it slowly uttered, word by word. When the deed was produced, could they have caught sight of that sharp grey eye, piercing through the very centre of the bull's−eye with which the cheap casement was glazed, they would have both shrunk back, and said, "What ugly spirit is that—that glares, like a sunglass, upon us!"

Up to that moment, Ishmael had looked calmly on; but when he saw the old, shivering parchment brought forth, and clutched so greedily by the poor tailor, he gnashed his teeth, and, turning about, with a glance downward at a stout man in jolly health who passed in the street below, with a market−basket on his arm, as if it would afford him a most exquisite pleasure to topple himself down upon him, and crush all that manly vigor out of him—he crept up the roof, and espying a narrow rent— scarcely larger than his hand—where a single ray came through from the chamber, laid his ear close down, and with his chalky visage turned to the sky, he held his breath, and listened to what passed. He was right. All the hours he had spent in tracking Hobbleshank from place to place; all the vague rumors that had crept into his mind, as from time to time his acquaintance with Puffer Hopkins grew; all his long vigils about the Fork, (whose evil genius, as night and day, but mostly by night, he hovered round it, he seemed,)—all confirmed and made true. When this conviction shot through the brain of the deformed little eaves−dropper, his knees shook, his eyes dimmed for a moment, his grasp relaxed, and, had he not summoned at once with desperate force his ebbing strength, he would have rolled headlong into the street. Recovering himself, he paused not a minute to listen—he knew enough and more than enough already—clambered the roof again—plunged into the open scuttle by which he had at first emerged—and dived—so swift was his descent of the narrow stairs, it seemed, from top to bottom, a single act—into the open air. Buttoning his coat close together—fixing his cap firmly on his head, and thrusting in his straggling pocket handkerchief behind—so that not a single fluttering rag might check his course, he started off. Like lightning he sped along, bounding over obstacles; winding his way through crowds that crossed him; and gliding between vehicles that seemed rushing together from opposite directions—in a fashion that was perfectly miraculous.

It was only a few minutes, and he stood at the broker's door. He stopped an instant to recover his breath, listening if he were astir; then, thrusting his arm in at a concealed opening in the wall, he drew back the bolt, and stepped in. Closing the door behind him, and cautiously crossing the room, he knocked at the broker's closet.

"Hold back," cried the old man, in a suppressed voice, like one engaged in a desperate struggle, "what are you choking me for? Take it back, take it all back; but let me go. There, curse it, there—she glides by again. It was your own fault."

Ishmael knocked again.

"Let me go, or I'll beat you," shouted the old broker, who seemed to be vexed and goaded on by the sound, mingled, as it doubtless was, with the subjects of his dream. "What did you cross me for? She is mine, I tell you, as much as yours, Hobbleshank! Marry her, and I'll grind you to powder; ha! ha!" and he laughed with a broad chuckle in his dream. "That fixes you. Buy bread if you can: a cord or two of wood; I'm sorry the poor lady's so sickly. Take the boy away: smother him, choke him, drown him! ha! ha!"

"Wake up, wake up!" whispered Ishmael, whose spirits, to tell the truth, were not a little subdued by what the restless slumbers of the old broker seemed to point at. "I have news, great news for you!"

"I know you have," continued Fyler, who seemed bent on pursuing his dreaming thoughts at all hazards. "That was well done, Jack Leycraft—excellent; the little fellow fainted away, did he?—so far that he won't come back again, I guess."

And Mr. Fyler Close, wonder at it as the world may, such was the flow of his spirits, went off, chaunting Old Hundred; to be sure, in a somewhat dissonant and imperfectly developed vocalization. This divertisement had the

effect of restoring him to the familiar use of his organs, and availing himself of his ears, quite readily, he heard a quadruple rap, which Ishmael was now practising on the door; and asked, who was there. Ishmael made himself known, and the old man, sliding rapidly into his garments, unbarred his closet door, and stepped forth.

"Well, what word, Ishmael?" he asked, as soon as he was disinterred.

"Come this way," said Mr. Small, taking the broker by the arm, and leading him toward the window. As they stood where the light fell from a neighboring chamber, in which watch was kept with one disordered in his reason, and whose cries could be heard where they stood, and Ishmael saw how haggard and withered was the broker's look, he doubted whether to utter his news now that he was there. He paused a while and looked at Fyler:

"You heard nothing," said he, eyeing Ishmael in turn. "Did I disturb you? I was running over a long sum in compound interest. I got the figures wrong, and that put me in a passion. You saw that?"

Ishmael professed to have seen nothing.

"What's your news?" asked Fyler. "Nothing terrible, I hope. Is it a thunder−clap or a burst of music?— speak quick."

Before he answered, Mr. Small went to the door, thrust forth his head into the hall, and, opening wide both his ears, listened to catch any sound that might be stirring. The whole house was dead and still, and he returned.

"A cross between the two," answered Ishmael, subduing his voice; "they have found the deed."

"What deed—Hobbleshank's?" asked the old man, gasping for breath, and drawing Ishmael close up to him by the collar, so that their faces almost touched.

"The wery same, sir," answered Ishmael, "yaller with age, and patched up like a old bed−quilt."

If the blackest thunder−cloud hovering in the sky had settled down that moment, and become part and parcel of the features of Fyler Close, they could not have scowled more darkly than they did. He let fall his hand from its hold on Ishmael Small; and turning away, he paced the chamber; at every turn, as he came near the light, glaring like a wild beast on Ishmael, and showing his teeth firmly set together, in the extremity of his passion.

After traveling the apartment in this wild way for twenty times or more, he suddenly stepped aside, and leaping into his closet, bolted it within. Ishmael waited till the clock struck midnight, sitting on a broken chair, listening to the disordered sick man's cry from above: but not a breath or sound denoted that any other living creature was in that chamber but himself. The closet might have been the broker's tomb, for all he heard. At the end of that time, the closet−door was again opened; Fyler Close came forth, as if nothing unusual had passed, and, bringing a chair, took his seat, calmly and pleasantly, directly opposite Mr. Small.

"Where is John Leycraft, of late, Ishmael?" asked Mr. Close, as though his mind was entirely disengaged, and free to any general subject that might come up. "He doesn't come here, now−a−days. Have you kept track of him?"

"I have," answered Ishmael. "Last week, he was busy in a cardin' mill; week afore last, he was journeyman to a stun−mason; this week he's a rope−walker: where he'll be next week, and the week after, would puzzle a jury of o' Solomons to guess. His mind's distempered, judging by what he says to me when I sees him, about that old business of the farm−house. He can't rest a day anywheres, but flies about like a singed pigeon over a conflagration, or a dove what's got sore feet."

"Will he blab, Ishmael?" answered Mr. Close, in a perfectly calm and dispassionate tone. "He's got a first−rate memory, and might turn it to account with the magistrates. Don't you think so, eh?"

"By no manner o'means," rejoined Mr. Small. "It's his own mind what unrests him and keeps him wake o' nights. He wants to find the boy, and clear his conscience with the yolk of the egg: that's all."

"If he's got an eye that can look through the crust of the earth, six feet or more, perhaps he'll find him, perhaps he won't," said the broker, smiling on his companion, and twisting his shrubby whiskers in his fingers. "So you've seen the deed," he added, as if that had just occurred to him. "You could'nt borrow it for me to look at for a few minutes, eh? Was it in good preservation, in a fine state of health?"

"Capital," answered Ishmael, "considerin' it had n't a sound square inch on its body, and was a little bilious in the face: if there had been a hole two inches bigger in the roof, I'd have brought it round for a interview." Whereupon, Mr. Small indulged in a gentle laugh; but not so as to disturb the neighbourhood.

"Where in the name of heaven, have you been tonight?" continued Mr. Close, "running about citizens' roofs, like a cat?"

"To be sure I have," answered Mr. Small; "and a wery agreeable time I've had of it I can tell you; overseein' the city, and lookin' out that the watchmen was on duty, and the lamps lit. Church steeples and tops o' public buildings, is spruce beer, at two pence a glass, compared with it. Then there was a wery charmin' young 'oman, that brought the parchment out of the country where she found it, inside, sitting like a wax−figure to be looked at; and Fob, the little tailor, actin' like mad, kissing 'sparagus−sprigs and mock−oranges, like a hero, just for greens. I can't say I ever had a more agreeable night of it in my life, where there was only three of the party!"

"Ishmael," said Fyler Close, withdrawing the attention of his companion from these delightful prospects, "we must distrain in the Row to−morrow."

"Out and out?" asked Ishmael.

"Out and out," answered Mr. Close. "Down to the plant−pots, and Dutch oven. No nonsense, but a clean sweep: here's the warrants. Go down to Meagrim, at the very earliest hour in the morning." And he handed Ishmael a bundle of documents filled up and ready for use.

"No delay?" asked Ishmael.

"Not a minute: and tell Meagrim to move the goods off, sell at the shortest notice, close up at once, and bring me the result in gold. He must throw off interest on his commissions: mention that to him when you see him to−morrow."

Ishmael promised it should be looked to the very hour the court opened; and was about to leave.

"You'll stand by me, Ishmael!" asked Fyler, regarding him with a look that Ishmael did not recollect to have seen him ever wear before. "You'll stick to me through all?"

"I will, uncle Fyler," answered Ishmael, taking the old broker's proffered hand. "I'll be a stren'thin' plaster to your back; a pair o' double magnifiers to your eyes: and a patent truss to your hip−jints. Losin' the use of your legs, I'll be crutches to you; and when you come to give up the ghost"—

"As to that last particular," interposed Fyler Close, "suppose we adjourn conversation twenty five years. That is'nt too long? But when it does happen, as I suppose it must one day, I'll leave you an old chest or two to rummage, that's all I can, you know; and if you find any thing it shall be yours."

Mr. Small shook hands upon the understanding, and was moving off again.

"Come this way Ishmael," said the broker, as Mr. Small was at the door. "Listen!"

At that moment, a fearful cry issued from the chamber where the disordered man lodged; voices in supplication or menace were raised upon him; and, presently, a dead silence followed, as if the struggler had been finally subdued.

"There's close quarters, up there," said Fyler, looking first at Ismael, then lifting his meagre finger, and shaking it in the direction from whence these sounds had come. "Stout chaps, brawny fellows; and not a word uttered by the poor sick devil that's believed." He dropped his voice to the lowest whisper, and added, "I'll drive Hobbleshank to *that* pass yet!" Ishmael renewing his promise to execute his orders promptly, on the morrow, and smiling in answer to the hideous grin that lighted the old broker's countenance, withdrew.

The broker himself sate by the window, listening to the cries of the lunatic, and waiting for the break of day that he might hear the blacksmith's mortgaged hammer sound, and fix his eyes once more on the securities spread about him.

CHAPTER XXII. MR. FYLER CLOSE INVOKES THE AID OF MR. MEAGRIM AND THE LAW.

Pursuant to his engagement with the broker, Ishmael at the proper hour, having first laid aside his cap, and substituted in its place a round−rimmed hat, embellished with a strip of crape—set forth to carry the wishes of Mr. Fyler Close into effect. Getting by an easy road into Chatham−street, which was his favorite promenade, he pursued his course, not quite so gaily as usual, but with sufficient exuberance of spirits to indulge in an occasional sportive sally, as he pushed his way along the crowded street. Once feigning to be taking a leisurely walk, a mere after−breakfast stroll, with his hands crossed quietly behind him, he suddenly brought one of them forth, and letting it drop gently on the crown of an errand−boy, fresh from the country, and who was gaping and staring at the various street sights—he left the young gentleman staggering about as if under the influence of a sturdy morning draught. This, and a few others like it, were, however, mere prefaces and flourishes of his humor; but when he got to the declivity of the street, where it forms a cheerful perspective of mouldy garments and black−whiskered Jews, Mr. Small knew that he was in a province that his genius had made his own. He slackened his pace a little, as he began to climb the street; and keeping his eye fixed on its other extremity, waited a moment till he espied certain figures turning into it out of another thoroughfare; his eye kindled, and smiling, and touching his hat gracefully to the young gentlemen, who stood in the shop−doors, many of whom were his particular friends, he strolled on. It was Almshouse morning, Wednesday, when the public charities are distributed at the Park office to the poor; and as Ishmael rambled on, he met the various creatures of the city bounty hobbling forward in every variety of gait, aspect, and apparel; and bearing their alms in every kind of characteristic utensil and implement; poor women bringing theirs in broken baskets, concealed with woman's shrinking care, under old, tattered cloaks; and the men bearing theirs openly on their backs, or tied in soiled cotton handkerchiefs.

As he approached these parties, Ishmael assumed a benevolent aspect, and proceeded to put in practice the philanthropic purpose with which he was inspired. The first that he encountered was a glazier carrying his alms in an old glazier's box; drawing near, Mr. Small accosted him with "Stop a moment, my friend—don't trouble yourself to set it down;" lifting the lid and depositing within what seemed a liberal donation in money, "There; go home as fast as you can, and invest that little deposit in a couple of tender steaks and two twisted rolls: you're hungry and they'll do you good!" Ishmael passed on to another, (amid the smiles of his acquaintance in the shops, who seemed to admit it was well done) who might have been a great traveler in his time, for he sustained his burthen in a faded carpet−bag, slung from his shoulder at the end of a walking−staff. Ishmael begged to know what was his favorite dish, which the beggar modestly declining to answer, Mr. Small said, "I know what it is—it's turkey done brown, with sauce of oysters; here's a couple of quarters," placing in his hand the apparent coin, "and there's a extra twenty−five center to treat yourself to the pit o' the the−a−tre after dinner." And Ishmael drew another from a pocket, the issues of which seemed to be as free and unlimited as those of any modern bank.

Mr. Small claimed to be no banker or financier, but he had certainly managed to create a currency which diffused a pleasure and satisfaction wherever it flowed. Was it any fault of his, if his pensioners should afterwards chance to waken from a delusion, and find that what they took for a legal mintage, was nothing more than a fictitious currency of electioneering silver, bearing on one side the device of an attractive donkey with his mouth full of political labels, and on the reverse that of a man in a cage, starving in consequence of the times brought upon the country by the party against whom it was aimed? The silver was a purchase of Ishmael's from one of the churches—to whose plate it had been contributed by certain liberal−minded politicians, who were pew−holders therein.

Spreading his largesses in this way on every side, with the unqualified approbation of his Jewish friends, and maintaining for the time at least the character of a large−souled philanthropist, Ishmael reached the Court, with more sincere good wishes and blessings sent after him, than ever, in all probability, accompanied a traveller in that direction before.

A rarer or more curious gathering of mortal creatures than compose the posse of officers, marshals and litigants that haunt the Small Court—the Twenty Pound Jurisdiction, it has been no man's fortune to see. In the first place, the Small Court is held in a square room, of very limited dimensions— where the Court itself in triple

majesty sits—with its purlieus, in the rear of the city Park: the purlieus consisting in part of another square−room where a very red−nosed man roams about inside of a railed cage, opening great ledgers and closing them; and holding no other intercourse with the barbarous world without, than to accept from time to time small tributes of coin, which he carefully deposits in a yawning drawer, wide and deep enough to swallow all that may be cast in.

A further purlieu of the small court adjoins this sacred precinct, and consists of two small dens to which the worshipful judges withdraw, at certain seasons of the day, and brood over the wickedness and corruption of mankind: which they avenge by giving wrong−headed verdicts against parties who venture to molest them in their retirement. Through these various purlieus and avenues, there circulates from ten, morning, till three, afternoon, a constant tide of unclean, unwashed, and wrathful humanity; in at one door, out at another, making noisy friths and creeks, as it were, all over the place, and whirling round and round in a perpetual vortex. The tide was not quite at its height when Ishmael entered, and the retainers of the Court who had assembled were therefore not too many to be observed apart. It was the Clerk's room that Ishmael entered—where the officers and others are in waiting till they are called—or transacting such business as may be put in their charge.

There was one man sitting in a corner, stout−built and heavy, with a great red nose—even much larger and fierier than the clerk's—that seemed to throw a glow over the newspaper he held before him, and which he was reading through a pair of coarse horn spectacles: while a spare man of a pale aspect was hobbling across the court−room on unequal legs, bearing a process to the clerk's desk within the rail. Another ruby−nosed officer, much taller, but not as stout as the other, was sitting in the door−way, looking out steadily, and with as much keenness as his brandy−stained face would permit, for the approach of one of their High Mightinesses and Supreme Disposers of Twenty Pound Cases—the Justice himself. There was a constable with one eye gone, but concentrating in the other sufficient spite and small malice to light up the organs of four and twenty rattle snakes or more: and another, a huge, over−grown man, in a dirty grey coat, with a great wen on his forehead, who sate upon a stool at a high desk, leaning over a paper and painfully casting up the interest on a very small sum for a very short time, and due and accruing from a retail grocer, both stout and small; and, furthermore, at this time, sadly invalid from want of funds.

Presently there was a bustle at the door; a great rapping on a desk in front of the bench, on the part of an impudent looking man, who directed his eyes steadfastly toward the door as he knocked; a tumultuous shout of "hats off" from all quarters of the room, a rush from the side−rooms to the door of that where the chief court was held, and along came a little weazen−faced, crop−haired gentleman, shuffling through the press, and making his way towards the Judge's seat, into which he presently dropped; and after wriggling about uncomfortably for a few minutes as if he had got into the prisoner's dock by mistake, and was on trial for non−compos or something corresponding, he called to the crier, over the desk−rail, for the day's calendar.

Recovering a little, as he became better accustomed to his station, he began shortly to call order, and in very doubtful English, required people to "make less noise" in the outskirts of the court−room, where a great hubbub was rapidly engendering; to which the offenders listened with the most profound respect, while it was uttering, but as soon as his voice had fairly ceased, proceeded with renewed animation, and as if it had been the purpose of his Honor to cheer them on and encourage them in what they were about.

Immediately in the heels of the Judge—he had walked down with that functionary, that he might enjoy an opportunity to color his mind to the right complexion for a case that was coming on that morning—a marble−faced man came in, dressed in clean black from crown to toe, with a pair of vicious black eyes, and a chattering smile as he entered. This was Mr. Meagrim, the marshal; and glancing about to recognize his customers and acquaintance, he glided out of the court−room into the clerk's purlieu, where Ishmael waited his coming.

"Ah! Mr. Small," he said, recognizing that gentleman where he stood, in a corner, talking with one of the brandy−painted constables, "what is it, now?" And he drew Ishmael aside, and dropping his voice to a stealthy whisper inquired what he needed. They whispered apart for a short time; and Mr. Meagrim, gliding away again, promised to return in a minute, as soon as he had seen the oath sworn against a brass−founder defendant, that he might levy on his cart and harness as they passed along.

When Mr. Meagrim had left, the brandy−stained gentleman returned, and renewed the discourse the marshal had interrupted.

"What did you say this crape was for, Ish.?" asked the constable, glancing at Mr. Small's round−rimmed

beaver.

"That crape," answered Ishmael, "is a sign o'mournin' and lamentation, for the juryman that was killed in the box, last week, by Counsellor Boerum's speech, which was slow in its operations, you know, but sure. Where's your weeper and Crany's and Jimmerson's? Why han't all the officers got their weepers on?"

"There's no occasion that I can see," answered the constable, "nobody's lost any relations here that I know on, this week: has there?"

"Hallo!—what are you dreamin' about," cried Ishmael, in well−feigned surprize, "I thought your judges was all dead. I understood this court, and who'll deny it I wonder? was under the jurisdiction of Judges' ghosts—not live Judges—but Judges in a state of semi−anymation and imperfect witality!"

By the time the subdued laughter which prevailed among the officers on the occasion of the ingenious observations of Mr. Small had subsided, Mr. Meagrim returned, quietly interchanged a word or two with the clerk; ordered Messrs. Crany and Jimmerson to follow, and set forth in company with Ishmael.

When they got into the street, Ishmael and the marshal led the way, and Messrs. Crany and Jimmerson, who were a pair of ill−matched constables, greatly dilapidated by use and age, trotted after. Presently Mr. Small, suggesting to Mr. Meagrim, that he had a slight commission to execute by the way, dropped behind, with a promise to overtake them in the course of a block or two. Soon after, and when his companions were well out of sight, he began to cast about, with an impatient and ominous look; and in a moment, hastening to a spot on which his eye had rested with unbounded satisfaction, he stood at a baker's window: a minute after he was in the baker's shop—and, allowing him a minute more, and he was strolling forth, holding in his hand a delicate amalgam, formed of a slice of fresh bread and a slice of pound−cake laid close together.

"The wickedness and desperation of the world is such," said Ishmael, as he cut into the amalgam, "that it exhausts one's ingenuity and wits to make it go down. It's not bad, however," and he cut again, "if one could only wet it with a drink of pure gin; without being put to the vulgarity of payin' for it!"

Now it is pretty generally known that there is a body of thirty−four gentlemen, recognized and described as the Corporation of the City and County of New York, whose sole business it is, according to popular belief, to sit as a board of Brewers, and whose constant employment it likewise is, for which they are chosen by the people at large and held in great honor therefor, to brew and distil a well−known popular beverage, which has gone into extensive use. Ishmael, faithful to the promise he had made to himself, paused at one of the public stills, where this drink is distributed, and lifting a long wooden arm in the air, bending his head forward and drawing the wooden arm after him, with a good deal of dexterity and manual skill, took a large, copious, and exhilirating draught of the beverage in question. He then gracefully wiped his mouth; and restoring his handkerchief to his pocket, leaving a small segment only exposed for the public admiration, he followed on.

Hurrying along, now that he was thoroughly refreshed, Ishmael reached Mr. Meagrim at the Square, where he was busy bargaining for the services of a cartman, who being at last retained, galloped forward up the street, while Mr. Meagrim and his followers, keeping him in view, swept on.

When they reached the neighborhood of Close's Row, Mr. Meagrim ordered the cart to halt without, and entering slyly with his train, took but a moment's glance at the building, and fell to business.

Ishmael was despatched to the roof, with a handful of nails and an upholsterer's hammer, produced from the marshal's pocket; Mr. Jimmerson to the lightning−maker's garret; and Mr. Meagrim himself, with the cartman and Mr. Crany in his train, proceeded to the recusant cobbler's. Such was the nimbleness and dexterity with which Mr. Small executed his portion of the business, that by the time Meagrim and his followers reached the garret, they found the cobbler knocking his head and fists, like a madman, against the closed scuttle, and threatening to pitch his besieger from the roof, if he could once get out. When he found himself hemmed in by other tormentors, in the person of the officers and posse, his rage was greatly increased, and he danced about the apartment in an extempore hornpipe, more like a Huron chief than a franchise citizen. Notwithstanding he saw that he was overpowered,—when the officers seized one end of his corded bale of valuables, he fastened on the other, and tugged at it, until they had fairly dragged it down stairs, the cobbler asseverating that marshals and all such cattle were a nuisance in a civilized community; demanding to know what right they had to touch his property, and pointedly aspersing the Legislature for presuming to pass such laws.

Sweeping everything in in their progress—chairs, tables, stair−rods, Dutch oven—they descended into the precinct of the bereaved mother; the cobbler shouting lustily after them, all the way.

Here their proceedings were quite as summary—although they were impeded not a little by the levity of Mr. Crany, who clapped his hands upon his knees, and, bending almost double, burst into a horse−laugh, every time his eye fell on the wooden quadruped and crapedressed vase on the mantel; for which extravagance he was sharply rebuked by Mr. Meagrim, who told him he'd better stick to business; while the cartman, who seemed to have a woman's soul under his cart−frock, privily thrust, what was equivalent to his whole day's wages, in the mother's hand.

In the mean time, Mr. Jimmerson, pursuant to order, had proceeded to the lightning−maker's quarters, but coming in at an unlucky moment, when the artist was in one of his absent moods, he had scarcely had time to disclose his business, when, by some cursed mischance, a large bottle slipped off, and striking him in a most sensitive part of his person, he was unceremoniously thrown on his back. There he lay, agitating his hands and feet, like a great green turtle in a spasm, until the lightning−maker, who was up to his elbows in a vile yellow mixture, rushed towards him, and, expressing a profound regret for what had occurred, began chafing his temples, beating his head and punching his body.

The lightning−maker was bending over Mr. Jimmerson, when Mr. Small—who had lingered on the roof, watching a market sloop that was sailing down the river—came down, and adding his own endeavors to the artist's, the constable was soon put upon his legs, and they proceeded in their business. Acting in the self−same spirit with the others, Ishmael and his aid cleared the house, down to the very cellar−floor, of all that came, by the most liberal construction, under their warrant. Two wide gates that led into the yard were thrown open; the cart driven in; the goods piled on in a threatening pyramid; and perching on the very top, whither he had climbed, with saucepans, broken candle−stands, and rugged tables, for the steps of his arduous ascent, sate Mr. Ishmael Small, presiding over the whole, like the very genius of Distress−warrants and chaotic chattels. Men, women, and children—the tenants of the Row—gathered in the windows, looking upon the wreck, pale−cheeked and hollow−eyed; the cobbler, alone, holding his station in a door−way, and manfully vociferating against the iniquity of the whole proceeding.

The cart was driven off; Messrs, Crany and Jimmerson— the last with a dolefully bilious complexion—trotting along, and keeping watch on either side; and Mr. Meagrim, smooth−browed and unruffled, following, with a hawk's eye, in the rear.

CHAPTER XXIII. PUFFER HOPKINS INQUIRES AGAIN AFTER HOBBLESHANK.

Day had scarcely dawned when Puffer was called up into the chamber of the little tailor. As he entered, in quick answer to the summons, dreading some fatal crisis in his disease, Martha was at the bed−side dwelling upon the countenance of Fob with a fixed earnestness, watching every look and turn, and ministering to his wish before it was uttered; and Puffer, who knew that Fob had had the whole house, in every one of its chambers, for a nurse, and yet none so gentle as this one, wondered whence she came, and turned toward the little tailor with a question in his look. Fob, busy with other thoughts, held spread out before him as wide as his thin, feeble arms would allow, the old parchment, on which his eyes,— wide apart, too,—were steadfastly fastened. He greeted Puffer, as he drew nearer to his couch, and requested him, with a knowing smile, to stand off.

"You shan't come so near!" said Fob, still with a grave smile, "I can't allow it. There—stand where you are—now look and tell me what you see?"

Puffer, who had been driven back by Fob's urgency, to almost the other wall of the chamber, confessed, that, with the doubtful light, he could see nothing worth mentioning.

"Well, well," pursued Fob, rising upon his elbows in his bed, and shifting the position of the parchment so that it fronted the window, "I must allow you a sunbeam or two: what do you see now?"

Still, Puffer averred, nothing. Then Fob permitted him to come a foot or two nearer, still without effect: and at last, in a sort of pleased impatience, he threw the Deed towards him and told him to read for himself.

"He wants to show off his scholarship, Martha, that's all," said Fob, who stretched his neck forward and watched the countenance of Puffer. A glance had sufficed to show him all. There it was, written in a good bold hand, Hobbleshank; and there was the clause, word for word, as Fob had recited it, touching his child, and showing, clearly enough, the tenure by which he held his right. And now something of the old man's hopes began to break upon him; as his mind ran back, with inconceivable swiftness, he found he held the key by which to interpret his sad snatches of talk; his wild, melancholy cry that all was lost; and then returned upon him too the pledge he had proffered to his aged friends. He clasped the little tailor in an earnest grasp; thanked him that he had borne in mind his poor wish that he might do a service to the kind old man; and, returning the Deed again to Fob, for present custody, he set forth in a renewed search after Hobbleshank. There was not a spot nor place where he had but heard the name of Hobbleleshank mentioned that he did not visit. Till noon−day he was busy going about from one place to another, following out an imperfect clue—when, having learned that the old man had been a constant lounger upon the wharves, spending whole days in looking up and down the river, (with what purpose nobody could ever guess,) Puffer spent several hours more, in going from pier to pier, watching the sloops and other river craft as they arrived, with the hope that he might have wandered away into the country and would choose this path back. Then he crossed the city to the piehouse where they had passed their first night together: being told that he never came there till towards dusk, he waited about, questioning every one that entered; but dusk and broad night, even, failed to bring the one he sought. He then aimed for Barrell's oyster−house—he had reserved this, with a strong hope, for the last. When he had reached the oyster−house his heart smote him—the cellar−doors were closed and a faint light streamed upon the walk and up into the faces of passers−by from the glass bull's−eye in the door. It might be shut for the night. He knocked; no answer was returned: knocked again, and the glass−eye grew dull; he bent down and whispered his name; the eye brightened at once, and he was admitted. Politician as he was, he was compelled to stop and stand stone−still on the steps, in wonder and amazement at what he saw.

The little stalls about the place, used to hold one customer with difficulty—and not that, if he grew too fast and stout upon the choice shell−fish of Mr. Jarve Barrel— now swarmed with damp, dripping faces, as thickly set as dewy cauliflowers on a wall; the fire was out; and the rear of the cellar, shorn of its benches and small square tables, had passed through a remarkable transformation; the chief circumstance of which was that Mr. Nicholas Finch, the indefatigable agent, was seated on a stool, his legs spread apart, and between his legs so spread apart, the head of a kneeling gentleman, of scant apparel, bent down. Upon the head Mr. Finch was most industriously employed, in spite of the remonstrances, entreaties, and contortions of the catechumen. Lounging against the end

of the oyster−stand, picking off oysters from a plate with a delicate touch and surveying this proceeding from time to time as his leisure permitted, stood a young gentleman, chastely apparelled in white−jean pants of a fashionable cut, an elegant blue coat and bushy whiskers.

"Hallo!" cried the oyster−eater, at an unusual spasm on the part of Mr. Finch's gentleman, "you'r a purty feller, ar'nt you, for a feller citizin—when you know towels and soap is the price of freedom—blow me tight if it ai'nt, Nick." The oyster−eater had small eyes and stout chaps, and he smiled, with an oyster on his fork, as he uttered these words. Mr. Finch was silent, but plied his arms with wonderful diligence.

"I'll take another, Mr. Codwise," said Mr. Finch, looking up. The kneeling gentleman jumped to his feet, rubbed his eyes, and walking off to a corner of the cellar, took his seat on a bench the second in a row. The oyster−eater laid down his fork, pickd his way nicely to one of the stalls, and taking one of the ragged tenants daintily by the collar, led him out upon the floor, and giving him an energetic impulse with his foot, directed him to Mr. Finch. Upon this gentleman Mr. Finch fell to work in like manner; and the owner of the blue coat and bushy whiskers resumed his oysters. This was certainly a lively subject; his outcries were much louder and his writhings more frequent, and the raptures of Mr. Codwise proportionably heightened: so much so, that he at last left off his oysters entirely, to watch the spectacle, and smiled so earnestly, that the tears came into his eyes.

"Bear your sufferin's like a man and a gentleman," said Mr. Codwise, whose delivery was somewhat imperfect, but in a tone of patronizing encouragement. "Split my vest, but do'nt be cast down, because the fibre's coarse. Oh! it's a glorious privilege, ai'nt it, Mr. Finch, to enjoy the right of votin' an independent ticket." The consolation administered by Mr. Codwise was not quite satisfactory, for Mr. Finch's patient writhed again at a fresh application, down to his very extremities. At this moment a plunge was heard beyond, from behind a faded curtain, stretched across the rear of the apartment, and through which a dull light glimmered and painted upon it shadowy figures moving within. A voice remonstrated—a voice, Mr. Jarve Barrell's, by the accent, responded, and a second plunge. What could this mean? Could it be that Puffer Hopkins had got into a branch penitentiary, established under ground, where new tortures and fresh−devised penalties were inflicted on the criminal?

When he looked at the men about him, there was certainly something in their gait to warrant the belief; and when he saw the secrecy with which the rites of the place were performed, he might have been easily assured that these men had been guilty of offences against God and man, that drew upon them the dungeon and the rack, which Mr. Finch and Mr. Barrell seemed to be administering. There was the smell of the prison in their garments and something of the dull fixedness of prison walls in their look.

There seemed at this juncture, to be a struggle behind the red curtain. "Don't drown me, for Heaven's sake, don't drown me!" cried the first voice again, in a tone of earnest entreaty.

"Dip your head under, you rascal!" cried the voice of Mr. Jarve Barrell. "Dip your head under, you burglary knave!"

"Petty larceny, sir," whined the other voice, which savoured strongly of thin soup and damp lodgings.

"Don't spare the villain!" shouted Mr. Codwise, who had mounted a stool, and with a light in his right hand held high above his head, was peering over the curtain, "Its burglary; I saw it on the keeper's books; its so on my list. Don't spare him—its good for his system—ain't it Mr. Barrell? He broke into a respectable house in Fourteenth street, and stole a bottle of Muscat wine and a plate of anchovies. "I'll make a patriot of you, you villain—Don't you want to serve your country—Eh! tell us that, will you?"

And so it was kept up: Mr. Finch dumb and devoted heart and soul to the performance of his share of the service; Mr. Barrell, coaxing and clamoring from behind the curtain, with the resisters of his authority; and Mr. Codwise dividing his time in equal proportions between the oysters, the leading out of the men from the stalls, baiting Mr. Finch's patients from where he stood, and bantering Mr. Barrell's from over the top of the curtain. At length the noise ceased from behind the curtain and Mr. Barrell came stumping forth; Mr. Finch dismissed his last patient from under his hand; Mr. Codwise's last oyster had disappeared. The benches were full; and there they sate, all in a row, in their sleeves, their faces of a bright red—brought on by the spirited exertions of Mr. Finch, and their hair flying all abroad.

Puffer inquired what all this meant. What did it mean? He did n't want respectable voters—freemen, freshly delivered from bondage, voting an independent, patriotic ticket—coming up to the polls in dirty faces—did he?

He'd like to have 'em show a clean countenance among their fellow citizens—would n't he! What was better for 'em then than baths and towels? This was Mr. Barrell's explanation, and it agreed well enough with a rumour which had prevailed that prisoners were to be brought down from the Island to vote at the coming election.

At the head of the row, there was an old window, which being greatly battered and damaged by age, admitted such currents of air as might be prowling about. The gentlemen in the sleeves murmured at this, and ventured to hint that the cold was coming it rather sharp and strong.

"Be silent, ye scum of the earth," cried Mr. Codwise, the moment he detected a glimpse of insubordination—coming forward, and planting himself directly in their front, at the same time gently hoisting his shirt collar. "Ar'nt we making men of you? How do ye expect to be worthy of freedom if you don't fit yourself for it by a course of trials and tribulations? Look at me! Did'nt I risk my neck in getting you off the Island—whose your deliverer but me, you bottle−flies? There's few rich men's sons would ha' done as much—is there Mr. Finch—is there Barrel? True, I might ha' been sittin' by my father's parlour fire, eatin' sandwiches and drinkin' claret—and what do I do? Why, I hire an omnibus at an expense of three dollars an hour, didn't I, Mr. Finch? and blow me tight if I didn't wait upon you—you miserable wretches off the Island, as though you had been so many Broadway promenaders of the sex—help you into your carriage, and bring you to a friend's house for lodgings—didn't I, Mr. Barrell? and now you grumble about that winder, do you? May my buttons drop off, and my boots run down at the heel, if I don't give up politics and go into the shades of private life, if I see any more sich ingratitude and beastliness!"

Puffer looked at the speaker; saw how poor and frivolous he was, in spite of his trinkets and fair apparel, but when he spoke, in boast, of the home where he might be sheltered, a feeling wakened in Puffer's heart which he could not subdue. He thought of himself and the other together, side by side, and asked himself, almost repiningly, why the vague hope that *he* might be one day restored to a home he had not known for years, should not be fulfilled? Why, as in the other case, the trinkets he wore upon his person were pledges of parental attachment— why the little trinket—the little broken jewel he had treasured so long, as the sole relic of any parent's love towards him, should not guide him by some kindly providence back to the happiness he should have known? He wakened from this reverie, and turning quickly upon Mr. Jarve Barrell, who stood by his side, he asked after Hobbleshank. Mr. Jarve Barrell's information was strictly professional. All he knew or could tell in the premises was, that the old man, in company with a stranger, had stopped a long while ago and ordered a large supply of oysters to be ready on their return, with sufficient beer to answer. They had never come back, and the oysters were kept till midnight, when a party of sailors luckily coming in swept them up. That was all. Puffer asked no further questions, but climbing the steps, thoughtfully, without salutation or farewell of any kind either to the agent or Mr. Barrell, was in the open air. There he wandered up and down two or three by−streets lost in thought.

At last it occurred to him that he would repair to the old man's lodgings, and seek information of his two old friends;—this might only give pain—and to what purpose? Just then a drum sounded about the corner,— the current of his thoughts was changed, and he turned into the next street. A boy, in a cocked paper−hat, (a brigadier's hat at least), beating a drum with great energy, marched at the head of a company of youth, who, fitted out in belts and sticks, and bearing crickets and hurdygurdys in their hands, tramped along, assuming the port of martialists and sticking close to the heels of their leader. Puffer, with others, fell in at their wake and followed them down the city to the front of a public hall, embellished with the full−length of a tall military gentleman in a blue coat and yellow breeches, where, forming a line, they plied their instruments for a quarter of an hour—and then marched off. Puffer Hopkins entered the Hall; the great room up stairs was packed close with citizens, listening to an excited individual, who walked up and down the platform, swaying his arms and foaming at the mouth, as though he were in a cage, roaring to be let out. This seemed to be to the crowd an entertainment of the first description; but Puffer, paying little heed to the orator, who he knew was going furious according to an understanding with the committee that arranged the meeting, glided about the room, singling out a man here,—a man there—and whispering a word in his ear. In a few minutes, keeping clear of the platform and coasting along the wall out of view of the light, he got forth into the street again.

Wherever he moved indications of the contest of tomorrow were rife. The oyster−houses and tap−rooms, everywhere, were full; the citizens throwing themselves upon oysters and punches, with infinite spirit all through the night, and pausing only every now and then to form into a group, and enter upon a discussion of the prospects

and chances of the day. Sometimes a grim boy staggered by under a fardel of ballots from the printers; sometimes a bill−sticker paused, and clattering his paste−pot on the pavement, proceeded to embellish the wall with a pictorial and ornamental broad−sheet. Every street had its public meeting in the upper chamber of a tavern, whose windows glared with light. It was noticeable that in the neighborhoods of the Gallipot meetings—the friends of Gallipot being in possession of the city—the public lamps were well lighted and burned away in the most brilliant and cheerful humour imaginable; whereas, in all the streets lying about a meeting of the opposition, for a furlong or better, they utterly refused to afford a single ray to any that might be in search of such meeting or place of resort. Not only this, but it would not infrequently happen that a public well would be found to be sunk or undergoing repair, at the very mouth of the opposition halls, affording a capital opportunity for curious geological investigation to such gentlemen of the opposition as might be inclined to step in. Even as it was—as if to supply any deficiency of the corporate light—new lights sprung up on every hand as the night deepened. In committee−rooms and other resorts all over town, men were gathered about their tables, mapping out the work of to−morrow, brooding stealthily over circumventions and manoeuvres and strokes of craft; in others, cutting tickets and folding them; in others, nursing the patriotic furor in innumerable punches, cock−tails and cobblers. And so from every quarter their dusky lights streamed upon the street—making the air close and sultry—and portending surely enough the storm that was to break by morning. Puffer as he hurried about, dipping in for a minute at a caucus, for another minute at a tap−room, and again at a public meeting, where they seemed bent on keeping huddled together all night long, seething and reeking and growing more confused and more determined, the longer they tarried— Puffer waxed warm, too, and retired to the Fork, with a head full of schemes and a heart all on fire with the sure hope of a triumph.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE CHARTER ELECTION.

The April sun streamed upon a city in the very crisis of a fever, flushed and curtained all over with flags like a mighty booth or tent of war. The color had apparently all passed out of the red brick houses—now pale with placards—into the faces of the inhabitants. The election, rumbling and foretelling itself for months, had come; and while parts of the town—whole streets and neighborhoods— had the appearance of being abandoned and desolate, others boiled and overflowed with life like so many whirlpools. Each poll or head−quarter of the wards was the centre and heart of streams that choked the streets and blocked up all passage through or beyond. Banners run high up in the air, coiled and twisted and turned about as often as the politicians over whose heads they floated; others, stretched across the thoroughfares, brushed the hats of the crowds, and as they wavered to and fro, helped to fan the fire into a flame. The excitement was by no means diminished when the voters—many of whom had been up all night long preparing for the contest— rubbed their eyes, and read upon the fences affidavits (which had just come out) to the effect that Gallipot, the candidate of the Bottomites—as they were known at the canvass—had been a smuggler of British paints through the custom−house for years; yes, British paints. Mr. Gallipot's enemies laughed horribly when they read it; but when they had leisure to turn round and read on an opposite wall (it had been drafted, printed, sworn to, and posted up almost while they were busy spelling out the other,) that Mr. Blinker, the President of the Phoenix Company, and their own candidate—he had been put up at the last moment by the opposition—had murdered a traveler fourteen years before, at Rahway, New−Jersey, whose bones he had kept ever since in a writing desk with a false bottom, in his own house—they grinned again, but this time they writhed and twisted as they grinned.

In the mean time all parties were at work at their polling places. In all the lower region of the city the battle went smoothly: the voters dropped in one by one, as to a party, with their notes of invitation in their hands, and quietly deposited their ballots, and passed away. Further up, and nearer the heart of the city, where life may be supposed to be more rampant and furious, there were constant outbreaks—little playful jets—all day long.

As these bubbled up from time to time and burst, fragments of timber, branches of oak and hickory, were thrown out with such violence and spirit, as to send voters of a peaceful turn of mind trotting up the sloping streets which lead from this infested region; and when such voters chanced to be of a respectable bulk and tonnage, they were watched with no little curiosity and interest by lookers−on who stood at the top, and saw with what pain and anxiety and redness of face, they toiled up.

In another ward the poll had been constructed and arranged a good deal on the principle of a puzzle, which the voters frequenting there were required, as an agreeable day's pastime, to solve. First, you had to go through a long blind hall, from the street; then out into a yard; then up a flight of stairs, through a long, dark room; and then up a ladder, when, in an apartment so small that its inmates must have been got in by legerdemain, you had the pleasure of meeting three gentlemen—two of them, who approved of the juggle which had been set by their own party, smiling cheerfully—behind their green box, ready to wait upon you. Here was a delightful recreation for aged gentlemen of inactive habits, and delicate young gentlemen in tight−strapped pants; an admirable device, and it worked well, for the plotters polled two votes to one—as they had a great run of sailors, from a government vessel in the harbour, in the morning, all on their side, and quite as spirited an accession of lamplighters in the afternoon.

But it was at the East−River poll, where Puffer Hopkins labored, that the struggle was steadiest and fiercest; it was the tie ward, where parties had in the previous election cast an equal vote, and the whole city now hung anxiously upon its returns. The poll was held in an old yellow building, its gable upon the street, and its front facing the river; the voting room was an obscure dark corner, reached by a narrow entry, full of crooks and turns, through an old−fashioned door−way. Around this a great number of voters had lodged the night through, to be in readiness to put in the earliest vote the first day; among them were the lightning−maker, whose uneasy slumbers against the wall had betrayed themselves by incessant cries of "bring the buckets!" and the cobbler, who had not slept a wink, inasmuch as he had been engaged with a one−eyed stone−cutter, in an elaborate argument to show that the only debts a man was bound to pay, were his grocer's, (a line of business his wife's brother was in,) and his shoemaker's. It was a pleasure to Puffer Hopkins to learn that the cobbler,—a convert of his own,—had

deposited the first vote, although with such emphasis as to stave in the cover of the ballot−box, and cause himself to be taken into keeping by a couple of officers, who led him, roaring and remonstrating, to a neighboring watch−house. Before the morning was half spent, the election was in full progress; there were men running up and down the streets bringing in voters; others, housed in small wooden booths or cabins, distributing ballots; some declaiming, in high, gusty voices; some, farther apart from the throng, calculating the chances of the candidates; and others, even, who had withdrawn into bye−streets in the neighborhood of the poll, plotting the distribution of the offices that would fall to the share of the victorious party. Towards the evening of the first day, to which moment, as commanding the largest throng of spectators, he had reserved himself, Mr. Blinker came upon the ground, attended by two or three hangers−on and runners, and looking very grand and decisive. There was an extraordinary severity in his look; although his coat, a faded chocolate, was something the worse for wear, and a thought or two below the usual style of the president. This was odd; but presently it began to be whispered about, as all eyes were fixed upon it, that this identical chocolate garment was the cast coat of a distinguished senator of the United States, who had lately made a triumphant tour through the city. It was soon discovered, too, that the neck−stock which Mr. Blinker now wore was of the very same sable and satin texture, as that worn by his eminent model on that occasion. Mr. Blinker had made influence with the great man; and this was the result. As he was watched, moving down the walk majestically, making gracious nods and recognitions on either hand, it occurred to the lookers−on, that Mr. B. emulated not a little the gait and manner, and assumed, as nearly as was attainable, the voice of the illustrious senator. The spectacle was imposing but not conclusive; two loafers, to be sure, bailed the air with their hats, with such vehemence as to drive the bottoms out; but the effect of this was entirely destroyed by a couple of ragged young rascals, who had been put forward, clinging to his chocolate skirts, and whining out the paternal appellation, till they were dragged off by main force, amid the shouts of the mob—"That's a cruel wretch!" "What a unfeelin' father!" and so forth.

While Mr. Blinker spent his time in this way, strutting about the poll, it was his native ward, and he had a pride in sticking to it—his antagonist, Mr. Gallipot, honest Peleg Gallipot, was all over town, in his paint−dress, making interest, shaking hands, chewing, smoking, drinking as though he had been fifty men instead of one. The Gallipot hacks and stages rushed about, with great linen flags streaming to the wind, as though the horses had votes as well as the half−drunken gentlemen inside, and were anxious to get them in. Puffer Hopkins, for one, was everywhere; haranguing; folding tickets; diving into committee rooms; arguing on the curb: was at every man's ear; had every man by the hand. He seemed to have multiplied himself: every third carriagedoor that opened, lo! out popped Puffer, leading by the hand, a couple of misty sailors; a superannuated old man; a Quaker that hadn't voted for nineteen years, or some other wonder and miracle.

The first day closed; and at night the Gallipots and Blinkerites, repaired to their respective quarters for an irregular canvass of the result. The Gallipot party met in the upper chamber of the poll, of which, as the party at present in power, they had possession; and their meeting was sufficiently promiscuous and piebald. Along benches fronting the raised platform, were seated, cheek by jowl, gentlemen in fine beaver hats, and tatterdemalions, with no covering but their own matted and discordant locks; some in broadcloth coats of the latest cut, and some in jackets that, judging by their texture and complexion, seemed to have been fashioned out of sweeps' blankets. The room was full, so full that it overflowed, a loafer or two, upon the stairs; and two or three men who occupied the platform, and who had watched the progress of the voting, down stairs, through the day, called over by turn, a list of voters which they held in their hands. As they called, some one or other in the crowd, would answer for each name, "good," "bad," "doubtful," as the case might be; the answer being given by such as supposed themselves familiar with the way of thinking and political turn of the person called. This proceeding was kept up till the roll was finished; which was no sooner done, than an ambitious young gentleman, who had stood at the doorway watching its close, rushed off as special express and post−boy, to carry the result to Fogfire Hall, where it was waited for with much anxiety. Two or three speeches of a highly inflammatory character were delivered—the meeting broke up—and the first day's work was over.

The sun, which had been in a fine mood all the first day, shining like a great eye into all corners of the city, warming voters into life like so many bull−frogs, rolled up the sky, on the morning of the second, apparently as good−humored as ever. The Blinkerites were delighted; they were the fair−weather party, and their well dressed voters poured in in a steady stream for a couple of hours or better; but when, towards noon, a large, ill−looking cloud came looming along from the north−west, they began to grow gloomy, and sundry of the Bottom leaders

walked round the corner and shook hands on the prospect of a good, pelting shower.

It was a false alarm; the cloud, a mere gust of wind, passed off; the Blinkerites brightened up wonderfully. The tide was running strong and deep in their favor; two to one, at least, entering the boxes on their side. Troops of nice−looking gentlemen were hurrying in; gentlemen of doubtful politics were going over every minute. Blinker was standing against a great empty hogshead, on the corner, dividing the offices to his friends, who were gathered round him in large numbers, in advance. Ever since the cloud had blown over, (which, to be sure, they could n't help,) the Bottomites had been horribly cast down: what was to be done? Just then there was a shuffling of feet in the neighborhood of the poll; a tumult in the entry; the crowd outside looked in—there were officers' staves crossing and clashing in the hall; great brawny arms raised and brought down with wonderful vigor—bodies pushed about—and presently the whole melee came tumbling into the street. The Gallipot leaders rubbed their hands and chuckled; *they* knew what it meant; a detachment of the Bottom Club had been concealed under the stairway of the hall, all the morning, lying in wait for an opportunity (in the meantime amusing their leisure by tripping up as many inconsiderate Blinker voters as they could as they passed in) for a decisive demonstration. They, like their friends without, had formed good hopes of the shower, but when the air cleared up so brightly and provokingly, they could restrain themselves no longer. A cat−call had been given, certain members of the fraternity had forced their way in at the back−door of the polling−room, others from the neighboring bar, and, first crowning the officers in attendance, they had distributed themselves about the hall and engendered the tumult—one of their little plans for re−organizing and reforming society—which gave such unmixed satisfaction to their out−of−door friends. This blow was a decisive one; the timid and peace−affecting Blinkerites kept aloof; and although the Blinkerite leaders came upon the ground in the afternoon, in tarpaulin hats and shag roundabouts, it was impossible to recover themselves. When the poll was shut, it was admitted on all hands, that they had run behind, a hundred at least. There was another meeting for a canvass, which differed from the other in no respect, save that in its very midst, a great political calculator rushing in breathless from his own house, where he had been casting up the question, averred that they were to have, unless their friends made superhuman exertions to−morrow, (notwithstanding present flattering prospects) a majority of only twenty−five, with a floating prospect of three more if the weather proved foul. He staked his head on this result. Another express was run to Fogfire Hall; sundry speeches of a still more excitable quality delivered: and the meeting dispersed feverish and resolute.

The third day brought unexpected relays from all quarters. The halt, the blind, the feeble, the asthmatic— came wheezing, and hobbling, and tottering, and groping their way to the poll. Some poor scarecrows that appeared to have been mouldering away for years, in their piece−meal garments, in out of the way holes and corners, were led in by the hand, and stood around as though they had been just dug out. Others, reeking and bloated, with lack−lustre eyes, appeared before the green boxes, and voted in the same manner as they would have called for a two−penny pint of spirits.

The cauldron had been stirred to its bottom, and its very dregs were floating up. Those that now voted were stragglers, coming in one by one; but presently, a sharp−eyed looker−on, might have discovered that a more steady stream was setting in, of a somewhat similar class. This was Mr. Finch's second detachment, (his first had finished their work in the various wards, stealthily, the two previous days;) his Island volunteers, who entered the polls at intervals, deposited their votes and quietly withdrew beyond reach of the officer's eyes as soon as possible;— going in, that was Mr. Finch's device, most frequently on the arm of some gentleman of known character, who lent his responsibility for the purpose, and sharing his good character at the ballot box. One of them—a notorious pickpocket—but who had chalked his face deeply enough to get for himself the sympathy of being a gentleman in ill health, had even tottered in leaning on the shoulder of a little parson, of an earnest partizan disposition.

Sometimes, as it happened more than once, when the volunteer firemen of Blinker politics gathered in any considerable number about the poll, waiting to put in their vote, a violent fire−alarm would happen to be rung out from a neighboring market, which soon sent them scampering away: a fire in New−York taking precedence of a funeral, an election, and every thing else but an invitation to a hanging inside of the prison−yard. For these alarms, the Bottomites were indebted to the bell−ringer of their Club, who lingered about the market, pulling the bell at opportune moments, of which he was advised by a trusty messenger sent down from the poll. The excitement deepend as the day advanced: quidnuncs and inquirers came hurrying in from every direction to learn

how the contest was going.

As the day approached its close the creed of the two parties broadened; their promises and professions became more frequent and more liberal; their affection for the poor— the most readily reached by such devices—more devoted and fraternal. One party threw out the suggestion that a poor man should have *two* votes, in consideration of the hardships and disadvantages of his lot. This the drummers and declaimers of the other party answered by suggesting that if gentlemen—gentlemen of means and ability—had the disposition they professed to serve the poor, why didn't they give 'em rooms in their three−story houses, with clean basins and towels, and plenty to eat? Advancing in this way in their proclamations and professions they at last became so comprehensive in their philanthropy, that certain poverty−stricken and simple−minded gentlemen who stood by listening with greedy ear, flattered themselves, that they and their families were as good as provided for, for the ensuing year, and went in and voted for one ticket or the other, according as they preferred the fare, lodgings and accommodations held out by either party.

The concourse about the poll had swelled steadily for hours: the street was full; the windows of the neighborhood were packed close with heads and faces; every look−out place of the Head−Quarters itself to the very roof was occupied by men, women and children looking eagerly down, and watching the progress of the contest. There was a great lumber−pile hard by, and this, too, the crowd had climbed and now swarmed about its top. As the sun went down, the crowd swayed to and fro—and there were certain persons in it who seemed to rock it back and forth as they would a cradle—when suddenly surging, with a terrible impulse against the wall, it burst its way into the house, and there was a cry that the ballot boxes were in danger. In a minute the officers came hurrying, pale−faced, into the street, where they were tossed about in the crowd—the black−and−white tops of their staves floating about like so many fishing−doppers—the mob swarmed in at the windows, over the back−fence, through the hall (last of all), and the polling−room was in a trice completely overrun.

At this moment Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, who had prevailed upon two or three sturdy men to lift him on their shoulders, stood up, as well as he could, with such a support— and removing his hat, from which a cloudy shower of newspapers fell, presented his face at the broken fanlight of the entry−door. His hands were lifted up in supplication, and his look was an imploring one. It was some time before he could get a hearing.

"Gentlemen, I do beseech you, I entreat and implore you, as you value your characters as citizens and as men, to restrain yourselves." From the imperfect character of the support on which he depended, Mr. Fishblatt's observations were extremely irregular in their delivery; one being given, as was this, with his face at the window; and the next being entirely lost in the wood−work behind which his head descended. "I would ask any gentleman here," remarked Mr. Fishblatt, when he came up again, "if he keeps a snuff−box? Did he value his privileges? There were a couple of thousand persons in that crowd, as far as he could judge, three children to each—there was a spectacle, was it not—the rights and immunities of six thousand of the rising generation hazarded by the present outrageous outbreak." He went down again for a few minutes. "The ballot−box, gentlemen," continued Mr. Fishblatt, on his re−appearance, "is the ark of our safety: it 's the foundation of our institutions—board, lodging, and two suits a year to all of us. What would we be without the sacred ballot−box? Where would stand your City Hall? Where the old Sugar House in Liberty−street? Where the Fourth of July? Where the immortal names of Perry and Hamilton? Where"—

He went down again; this time for good, for his supporters, learning that the inspectors had got off with their boxes through a bye−gate into the next yard, and so from one yard to another, to a place of safety, had withdrawn, and Mr. Fishblatt was permitted to fall like a half−risen balloon, among the crowd. The crowd—who had given but little heed to Mr. Fishblatt's appeal, finding there was no further sport going forward, gradually broke up and dispersed. The election was at an end; the great contest determined one way or the other.

CHAPTER XXV. THE END OF LEYCRAFT.

Poor Leycraft! The belief which his repentant soul had cherished for years, lay dead at his heart. One by one every hope had crumbled; the boy—such was the conviction each unanswering face pressed upon him—the boy was dead. To that pale young form, cold and deathward, as to him it always lay stretched in the wood— there was no resurrection. It was gone into another world, and seemed dragging him, by a gentle violence he could not resist, after. The remorse, which though sometimes torpid, had been never entirely subdued, uncoiled itself more and more and pierced him with strokes which caused him to cry aloud with anguish. He could not be silent nor at ease. He had fled from house to house, lodging to lodging, where the horrible secret he was constantly urged to babble, caused men and women to fall away from his presence like that of one sick with the plague. Even in cellars and cheap resorts, where the language of crime and wrong is a familiar dialect, they avoided his conversation, and begged him, in God's name, to ease his soul to parsons and magistrates, and not to them. Even the grim ten−pin player had deserted him. Leycraft's constant wakings at the dead of night, and the dreadful reproaches with which his soul laboured against itself, were too much for him. So he flew from place to place; from employment to employment. He tried—and in vain—to quell his unhappy thoughts, to cheat himself of that dreadful belief of the boy's death, by constant change of work. He was now alone, in a rope−walk, where Ishmael Small's prying ubiquity had found him. The Walk was a long, low−roofed shed. It was pitched in a hollow, on the outskirts of the city, and was out of sight of human habitation and beyond the sound of human voice. About it nothing but rank grass and odious weeds, thick with thorns and death−white blossoms, grew and pressed forward to the very door. On either side the shed was pierced with small, narrow windows—its whole length—looking out, on one hand, on a sluggish vein of water that oozed through the hard soil, and on the other, upon the field of shrubs and brambles. Here Leycraft, at the earliest hour of the day—it was just sunrise, and the sun, striking the shed on its eastern end, filled the Walk with shadows—stood, his beard untrimmed and his waste encompassed with unworked flax, giving him the appearance of a satyr.

He stood at the remotest end and looked down its whole dark length, with an eye which grew blank and unsettled when it found nothing to rest upon. Then it passed from window to window back again, more blank than ever; no friendly face looked in, not even the miserable picker who used to beg the refuse flax and ropes' ends. He would have given the world if only Ishmael had come and taunted him in the old fashion. And then, with something of prayer and earnest imploring in his features, he shot his glance into a corner, where two wrens had held their nest for years, borrowing tow and threads of twine from the floor, to build. The two wrens were gone. Not a sparrow nor a fly crossed the unlucky window−sills. A dread stillness was present, resting like a cloud upon the roof and thickening the air. The very Walk seemed to have gone into decay; it tottered and shook like one in a palsy, as the silent winds hurried past. What wonder if Leycraft's soul was appalled within him!

"Lightnings blast me!" he muttered, struggling against the feeling that crept upon him, and made him cold to the heart; "What do they mean by leaving me here! Why don't the sharks and indefatigables come and take me and hang me?" Here he cast a side−way look at the rope he had begun to twist. "I wish they'd send out the green wagon, and treat me to a ride to the Tombs. Why don't they? What do they mean? They don't know their duty—that's plain. I ought to be kept in a cell till this cursed fever's gone off; and then I should be hung out to dry." He laughed at the fancy; but it was a wretched, soulless laugh, which betrayed him more than his words. His thoughts took a new turn, and, catching his breath, in the surprise with which another and deeper purpose than that of yielding his body to the magistrates glided into his mind, he went on now faster than ever with his task; drawing out the flax, with a secret satisfaction—as he paced backward, along the hard cold floor—every now and then putting forth his whole strength, and twisting the strands as firm and close as iron. It was wonderful with what care and skill he framed his work; choosing the cleanest flax in all the bunch, where there was no spot nor blemish—his eye, in its supernatural keenness, could have detected a fly−blow—shaping each strand delicately to an equal size; and twisting them all so cleanly together, that the cord, as fast as formed, was admirably round and firm, and not a thread or fibre hung loose. There was a strange pleasure in Leycraft's look when he saw how well he prospered in his work. But even in the midst of his task a shudder came upon him; his face grew dark and livid by turns, and his eyes wandered about and seemed to dwell on a terrible and appalling company that was present

only to him. For a time his hands refused to do the service to which they had been constrained and struggled against it, as if they too were endowed with a fearful consciousness. In this pause and agitation of his spirit, he searched his garments, and brought forth from his breast−pocket a small, square parcel, which he proceeded tremblingly to open, fixing his eyes more keenly and steadily as each envelope was removed. His hand at length held disclosed a half−bracelet, with its clasp; and while he regarded it he shuddered anew, and writhed as in sudden pain. What was he to do with this? He could not bear it about with him longer; it seemed too like the child's voice whispering in his ear; frail tress as it was, it held him fast, as a cable, to the spot where the deed had been done; its brassy clasp glared upon him like a serpent's eye. It seemed to him now like the dead boy's legacy—for he had taken it almost from his hand—carrying with it at all seasons of day and night, its own avenging conditions. What was to be done with it? At this moment, and while the question demanded, every minute, an answer more loudly, a shrunken and troubled face looked in at one of the windows of the Walk. It was the face of an old man, who, full of an anguish different—ah, how different, from that of Leycraft—had wandered in the suburbs, many days, and many weary, weary nights too, and who had strayed, in the vacancy that had come upon him, to that place. It was Hobbleshank: who, when he had gathered thought to persue the person before him more closely, and saw what unearthly look had settled in his features—how, white and trenched with deep, dark lines as it was, like a scarred coffin−plate, it seemed—recoiled from the window, and gave signs of retreating altogether.

"For Heaven's good sake!" cried Leycraft, in a tone of anguish that went to the old man's heart, "don't leave me now. Stay only an hour or so—if not so long—five minutes may do; five minutes at least. Come, come, you'll give me five minutes!"

The old man returned to the window; but resisted steadily all entreaty to come in.

"This is cruel!" said Leycraft aloud, and then, partly to himself, "The last man with whom I shall change word; and he wont give me his company as a christian, but stands there gazing through a window on me as if I were a wild beast at a show."

At that moment Leycraft, who had bent down while uttering these words to himself, raised his head and caught the eye of the old man—his neck stretched forward its utmost length—fastened on the bracelet which he held in his open hand. He caught it back at once, and restoring it quickly to its enclosure, thrust it into his breast.

There was something fearful in that old man's face, now that the light fell upon it;—it was the very face that had watched him all through the night, in the garret of the farm−house, and against which he had contended. This was another blow that staggered him on swifter to his fate. He went on stranding and coiling the rope, holding every feature rigid and bracing his nerves with all his will, lest his purpose should give way. The cord was finished. Leycraft rose up, wiped his brow, on which a cold, thick sweat had gathered—went to the window, and while Hobbleshank could not move in his surprise, he placed in his hand the parcel he had concealed.

"There," said he, "take that; it's a bequest from a man that will never know man more. It's the gift of a young friend, the dearest I ever had, and I wish you'd make much of it."

He then proceeded, without another word, to put every utensil of the Walk in its place; coiled up the rope he had made with so much care, in the crown of his hat; closed the windows, leaving Hobbleshank without, lost in vague wonder and alarm; drew to the door, and putting the key in a safe concealment where the other workmen might find it when they came—as they would in an hour or two—he withdrew from the Walk, which was now dark and close as a tomb. He shaped his way toward the river, looking back not once, but choosing the obscurest paths and bye−ways, and following them steadily. Once he leaped a wall, and crouching as he ran, he skirted along the fence for half a mile or more, and then he got into an untraveled road, where he made good speed, and with a comfort—such comfort as his condition allowed— to himself. In leaving this he was forced to pass a public way where there was a constant throng of travel; and while in act of crossing, hearing the rattling of wheels from the city, he fled into a blackberry meadow, and there lay hid in the bushes for better than an hour.

He was now within sight of the woods; and when, emerging from his ambush, his eye first fell upon them— he shrunk back, and his feet for a moment refused to bear him on. It was an instant only; and then he laughed to himself at his folly in spoiling the good gait he had been traveling.

At the woods—the black, dull, hemlock woods—which lay like a dark stain upon the earth—he did not enter at a point which would bear him soonest to the place he sought; but fetched a circuit of better than a furlong, and looking about him with a trembling eye, he crept into them, as if by stealth. The sun had not yet made good his

strength, and the woods still swarmed with bats and birds of darkness, which kept about and shut back the light by the wide spread wings with which they oppressed the air. Under foot the ground was heavy with a sluggish sweat, rather than dew, and through blind paths and among tufts of useless grass, Leycraft picked his way; winding about in long circles and only approaching the spot by degrees. His eyes wandered between the trees, as though a phantom were walking just before him; if he had cast a look upward but once, he would have seen how blue and peaceful was the sky above him—but this he heeded not. He had come to the edge of a bye−path that cut through the woods; in a minute more and he would be on the very spot itself. He paused and sate upon a fallen trunk to gather his strength. What he had done and what he was to do came upon him in all their hideousness, and his heart misgave him. He would have retreated if he could. At that moment he heard a step approaching; a man passed by, and as Leycraft looked out, oh how his soul begged and implored that he would come and reason with him, and steal from his heart the purpose which clung like a dagger in its very core! The cold sweat stood upon his brow in the agony with which he was moved. The man bore in his hand a walking−stick, with which, with a determined look, he smote a tall weed that grew in the path, to the ground. There was clearly no hope for Leycraft. He sprung up, and almost at a bound, stood upon the earth where, more than twenty years ago, he had cast down a young child, as he would a frail vessel, that all its life might be spilled and never gathered up again. He knew the place—knew it at once, down to the smallest blade that grew about. The rock was there, under the lee of which the basket that held the child had been set; the old gnarled branch stretched over it—older now than when it shook its young summer leaves upon the ground. Every circumstance and incident of the act rushed back into his mind with a fearful distinctness. How he had borne the child from the farm−house in his arms—the very look of the nurse who had entrusted it to him in the belief that a little air would be so reviving and refreshing to the poor dear—how, when he heard the laugh and prattle of young children at play in an orchard through which he passed, he had repented of any part in the deed— and how, again, when he bethought him of the rage of the broker, and the spite he would wreak on him through the debtor's jail—he had burried on. There was one good thought, too, that came back; that when he had laid the child where he was to be left to die—for his soul refused to do it rougher violence—he had lifted a leaf, shed by the overhanging branch upon its little lips, so giving it another chance to live. He remembered, too, how he had severed the bracelet about its neck in twain, taking one of its parts and leaving the other, with the hope that the child, should it live to escape its perilous exposure, might be recognized and reclaimed.

As he was pondering, the dead child seemed to spring from the ground, rising slowly upon him and growing rigid in every limb as he rose, until he stood regarding him with a fixed stony eye, his little arm stretched towards him in menace, more terrible than if it had been a mailed hand aimed against his breast. He staggered before it. The wind, which had been gathering since sun−rise, swept through the wood with a howl like that of an angry populace. Leycraft, whose face and brow dripped with sweat, and whose body was as chill and comfortless as if it had been steeped in the river, cast a fearful glance behind him, and snatching off his hat in desperate haste, he stepped upon the rock, and made fast an end of the cord to the old branch, which the tree held out like a withered arm toward him. The tree creaked—there was an awful groan—and the forfeit was paid. At that moment a crow flew screeching from a neighboring tree top straight through the wood, and as it rose toward the clouds that lowered on its flight, it seemed like the dark spirit of the man, on its way to the angry heaven whose judgment he had dared to invoke.

CHAPTER XXVI. HOBBLESHANK'S RETURN.

Upon the ground where he had fallen in the shock of surprise and bewilderment, Hobbleshank sate, with the trinket in his hand which seemed to hold him spell−bound and motionless. As he recovered his powers, and was aware of the gift in his charge, he would have shouted to Leycraft and called him back—but when he looked in the direction he had taken, Leycraft was out of sight.

The clasp was discolored as if often held in a damp hand; but the tress, its other part, was fresh and bright, in its auburn hues, as when first set in its place; and as he turned it over and over again, his tears fell fast upon it, for he knew well—who could mistake it?—the sweet brow, now lying in the earth, from which it had been shorn. Then he recalled what the strange man had said. "It's the gift of a young friend, the dearest I ever had, and I wish you'd make much of it!" He repeated them over and over again. Yes, those were the words. And then a hope came floating into his mind that was like a new life and air to all his powers; a hope that filled his heart with a genial noon, in which all old despondencies and sorrows and sadnesses shrunk away, and left him glad and happy, beyond measure. The boy—his child— his young self—so the words gave him warrant—was not dead. He had lived to be the companion of grown men; to be with them, and with them share friendship and intimacies. So he construed what Leycraft had said. He bounded up, and choosing out the fairest of all the roads, he took his way to the city. It was a green path; and the trees, which had stepped to the road side from a neighboring wood, for that very purpose, bent over the traveller, and whispered peace and a pleasant journey to him. Then he came to bare fences, along which the small−eyed birds hopped and twittered, making merry with the old man as he came galloping along. After this, there was an open tract of sky and field about which the swallows flew swiftly, writing their names in the air, and tying all sorts of hard knots as they skimmed along backwards and forwards, and up and down.

At the pace, with which he speeded on, he was soon in the edge of the city. The bells, for some reason or other, were ringing a quick peal; if they had been the voices of angels hovering in the air, they could not have sounded more sweetly to Hobbleshank.

He came to a park or square, in which children were at play, and bursting through a gate, he borrowed from a little blue−eyed lad—who yielded it partly in fear, partly in love—the hoop on which he was resting—the old man sprang away like the youngest of them all, and in the madness of his new hope, drove it round and round the park, humming to himself, "It's the gift of a young friend, the dearest I ever had, and I wish you'd make much of it!" Leaving the park, with thanks to his young friend, whom he had caught in his arms and blessed with kisses that exploded like so many squibs through the place, he rambled breathless, but by no means wearied, into a great thoroughfare. Here he found new objects to feed his rapture. There were caps and canes and dainty little Wellington−boots in the shops, in which the haughtiest parent, the show−bill said, might be proud to see his son eating ices and walking Broadway.

How often, ah, how often, during his twenty years of sore trial and anguish, had the old man rambled from window to window, from shop−door to shop−door, choosing a little blue−tasseled cap at one, a pearl−tipped cane at another, and the jauntiest pair of Wellingtons he could pitch his eye upon at another—and, in his fancy, arraying the boy who should have been so appareled, and at that moment walking, with a little hand in his, at his side! He had so taken the child, from the day he was lost, and carried him forward, in imagination, through all the stages of childhood and youth, up to the manhood, where if but now living he would have arrived.

He well remembered the very day on which the child had attained his quizzical, bird−like swallow−tail, which the doating old man had picked out and even bargained for months before. Pondering upon these old time pleasures, his feet had brought him, almost without the guidance of his will, to a door in a bye−street, the red and yellow board over which denoted that a select school for children was kept within.

He opened the gate—the trick of which he knew well— walked through a paved alley, and turning in at a door half way up, was in the very heart and bosom of the select school at once. The select schoolmistress—his old friend and who knew his humour well—was seated in a well−worn rocker in the middle of her little room, arrayed in her plain neat gown and cap, her book open on her lap, her arms folded upon her breast, and watching, with a

kindly look, through her great glasses, the efforts of a tiny, white−haired child, to master the twenty−sixth letter of the alphabet. Hobbleshank laid off his hat, took his seat at the side of the mistress, who had not even turned when he came in; although the whole row of little scholars stared in a line from the bench on which they were fixed against the wall. They all knew the old man, but it was so long now since he had been at the school, that they could not avoid a welcome with their looks. What a tuneful nest—embowered in its obscure corner—had that little school been to him! How his eye had ranged—as his finger would on a musical instrument—along the class, beginning at the least and youngest, and sounding his way up, fancying each in turn to be his child and son. They had caught his look, and loved him for it. His joy was too overflowing—too much in excess—to admit of his tarrying long there or any where—and so leaving a tribute of good will in the mistress' hand, to be distributed among the scholars, and begging in her ear for a half−holiday for the school, he broke away and was in the street again.

Even the three gilt balls which hung dangling over the broker's door in the street through which he hurried, and which used to look so hideous to him, now seemed to have a gleam of sunshine and promise in them. There was another street—the next to this—through which he could not fail to pass. Here, years before, he had formed an intimacy—a very close and friendly intimacy—with a clothier's block which stood at the corner, (to be sure it had no head, your finely−dressed gentlemen rarely have,) swelling and expanding its breast in all the splendors of a blue frock and pantaloons, with a handsome white vest and ruffles to match. The intimacy lasted six months—during which the old man had paid a daily visit to his silent friend—when it was abruptly broken off, because Hobbleshank was quite sure his son must by that time have outgrown garments of that gentleman's cut and dimensions.

Farther on, and still nearer the heart of the city, Hobbleshank, hurrying along in a joyous mood—he had directed his feet that way—came upon a house in which, even at broad day, there was a sound of music, a throng of carriages at the door, and the very house itself palpitating and quaking with the pulses of the gay dance that was going on within. The old man had a good heart to join in on the very flagging where he stood, for the house and he were old and early friends. Far back in that past time, whence dated, in two directions, all his joys and sorrows, it had been Aunt Gatty's; there it was that Hobbleshank had first met his young wife; there had been wedded to her; and there had spent many a joyous night, when the world was young with him, and when even old Aunt Gatty had wealth and kind words more at command than now. As he stood by the door gossiping with the drivers and other loungers—gathering what he could of the story of the wedding that was going forward, and comparing it as he went along with the circumstances of his own, his heart reproached him for tarrying there, and withholding his good fortune from his two kind old friends at home. Casting a bright half−dollar upon the ground— where he left the coachmen, who had been for a long time scant of calls, scrambling for it—he hurried away. At the good speed with which he moved, and by dint of running in and out—from street to pavement, from pavement to street—not less than forty times—he was in no very long time at his own door, which he confessed to himself had something of an outlandish look, now that he had been absent from it so long.

Bursting in to declare his news, he was arrested in the very mid−career of his exultation, by a deep moan, proceeding from the corner of the chamber. Looking thither he was inexpressibly shocked, and stood rooted at the very threshold. In the corner of the room, close in the remotest angle of the hearth—bent nearly double, (ten years at least older in her look than when he had left her,) and gazing into vacancy, sate Aunt Gatty, clad in deep mourning—even to her small crimped cap, which jet−black and fitted closely to her head, gave to her features a pale and deathly aspect. At her side stood Dorothy, tending on her in some office suited to her condition, and striving to soothe her with words of solace and comfort.

The aged woman refused to be comforted, and thrust her companion away from her, constantly ejaculating, "He is dead—dead, and I am the unlucky woman that killed him. Is this the way that I fulfilled a death−bed trust? God! oh, blessed God!" and here she moaned and pined as in an agony that wrung her very soul. "Deal gently with me for this—it was not my wish—he would go forth; but then I should have held him back, even by force. Oh! my dear kind play−fellow—now in Heaven—is this the way I have kept my promise? Look not in God's book of records and see what is against Gatty— your Gatty, you loved to call me. Plague me no more, Dorothy I have slain the poor old man: go away, in Heaven's name, and let me die. Go away."

Then, while Dorothy stood by, weeping and wringing her hands over this mournful wreck, the aged woman fell away into vacancy, awaking only every now and then to utter a deep moan, and renew her complaint.

Hobbleshank, who had regarded all these goings−on with a bewildered look, could restrain himself no longer, but, hurrying forward, stood before them—his hat a little to one side, where he had fixed it that his friends might know at a glance what mood he was in, and the great, square breast−pin, shining like an illumination in the front of his bosom. He stood before them—his doubtful eye closed hard, and the other opened in full blaze upon them, a smile on his face, and a hand extended to each. In this extraordinary costume and posture—it was some time before even Dorothy was willing to acknowledge him; and even after she had admitted it was Hobbleshank and no counterfeit—there remained his right hand still extended, waiting to be grasped by Aunt Gatty. It was a long time before Aunt Gatty was willing to look at him; and when she did, at length, turn her head slowly about and take measure of his person, she regarded him with infinite scorn and repulsion.

"It's a cheat," she said after a long survey, and a longer pondering, "you are practising upon me; this is not my old friend that I am to account for; no, no. Don't you think I know my good friend Hobbleshank? This is some one that has stolen his garments and is trying to play tricks with me." She returned to her old posture and could be brought by no persuasion or entreaty to a further recognition.

"We must leave her to herself," said Dorothy, drawing Hobbleshank apart; "You will get back into her recollection by degrees. It takes days with her now to fix and unfix a notion. She will presently fall asleep."

They watched her for a little while, when slumber, coming in to befriend exhausted Nature, crept upon her, and bearing her to her bed within, and laying her gently to rest, they returned to the other chamber. Hobbleshank, reviving rapidly from the gloom which Aunt Gatty had cast upon his spirits, took a place by a small table that Dorothy had drawn out, and launched forth in a glowing description of the good luck on which he had so lately stumbled. Dorothy—who could not share in all the good hopes which he built on the disclosure of the stranger and the possession of the half−bracelet—did nevertheless strengthen and encourage Hobbleshank to go on in these communications, by a cold ham, which she produced from a closet, where it had stood untasted and inviting the knife, for several days; and also by calling in—through the ministry of a ragged−haired and bare−footed girl, who was always on the prowl for small errands in the great hall—a pot of Albany−brewed and two dozen oysters, which, the last being well peppered and swallowed at a snap, added not a little to the spirit of the old man's narration.

CHAPTER XXVII. A NOTABLE SCHEME OF MR. FYLER CLOSE'S.

There was not a phaze of the neighboring sick man's malady, from the day he mis−buttoned his coat as he paced his yard—to which pass he was brought, being a tradesman, by the fall of wheat from twenty shillings to ten at a clap—down to that when he was laid shouting on his bed, that Fyler Close had not watched. By the hour he stood at his window—forgetting baker, blacksmith, and haberdasher, in the earnest gaze with which he regarded every turn of the disease; while the patient rambled the yard, in its early stages, or lay strapped upon his couch, at its height. The tears, the groans, the whims, the flights and wanderings of the lunatic, were a delicious banquet to Fyler. He meant to cut with a weapon of double edge, and this sharpened it, both sides at once. The deed was found—there could be no question of that—which helped Hobbleshank back into the farm−house whence Fyler had dislodged him, by a master−stroke, many years ago. Should he succeed in recovering possession, there would be a long and heavy arrear of rents to be returned. This would never do. The boy, to be sure, must be found— must be proved to be alive. Notwithstanding the bold and hardy face with which he gave out that such as would find the child must grope in the earth, digging deep, an uneasy conviction that he lived kept crowding into his mind. Vague rumors to this effect, traceable to no clear source it is true, had from time to time prevailed. He knew of Leycraft's death; Ishmael had brought in the news the second day after. He had been found on his knees, the branch bent and twisted from its place by an unearthly struggle, his head turned to one side, as if regarding an object that stood at his side, just behind him—and his hands clasped firmly together.

Fyler, on hearing these circumstances, had merely called the man a fool, wondered he had n't taken poison, which would have been a quieter death—and dismissed the subject, apparently, from his mind. To be sure, he had had an unpleasant vision the night after, in which Leycraft appeared, on his knees, knocking at the door of his closet, and begging, in God's name, to be let in. But what of that?—The dream had passed away; and getting up the next morning a quarter of an hour earlier than usual, he opened his door cautiously, and finding no such supplicant there—as in truth he had half expected to—he put himself at ease.

Then there was the bracelet—which he knew Leycraft had carried on his person for years, but which Ishmael's stealthy scrutiny had failed to find there now—another clue to the child. The cloud, he confessed to himself, began to thicken a little; and now he meant to clear all obstacles and entanglements at a bound. In a few days the forge was silent; the anvil uttered not so much as a tinkle—the broker had levied his judgment, which had hung dangling, like a great chain, for months over the blacksmith's head:—the blacksmith's fire was quenched, and his hammers muffled forever. A few days more, and the haberdasher—thriftless woman—was forced to send her children out privily to beg; Fyler had swept her shop with a comprehensive bill of sale. The piano in the yellow house had gone gouty in the legs long ago; and was now taken to the hospital in the square, out of a movement of pure benevolence in the bosom of Mr. Close. As to the baker, on a close scrutiny of accounts, the broker, finding a clear balance against himself of four−and−threepence, with a fraction, thought it not expedient to move him just at present. All that remained was the Row, to show to the world that Fyler Close was worth a cent; and Fyler chaunted a psalm to the tune of a rattling song he had heard at a cheap place of entertainment, when he was a young man, with great spirit, as he chinked the silver in his hand and thought of this. He had finished the psalm, and getting into a more advanced stage of pleasantry, was striving, with whimsical success, to adapt some common−metre measure that he might recall, to the fitful shouts of his neighbor; when Mr. Small came in, bearing upon his left arm a pile of clothes, hung loosely over, and in his right a crook−necked staff, with which he had thrust the door open, and which he now employed in putting it to again. Upon his head, covering and extinguishing the glory of his own individual cap, rested a straw hat, stretching out before and behind, twisted up convulsively at the sides, and discolored and stained in every strand with sweat. Mr. Small might have been mistaken by a rash observer at first sight, as he stood resting on his crook, for a patriarch gone to seed. The broker knew him for what he was, and hailed him at sight.

"This is a melancholy affair, Ishmael," said the broker, shaking his head dolefully.

"It can't be helped?" asked Ishmael, while a lurking smile crept upon his visage.

"I am afraid it can't," rejoined Mr. Close; "I do'nt see how I can avoid going out of my wits."

"Any how, uncle Fyler," said Ishmael, "I hope for my sake you'll not go so far, you can't come back again. You'll be good enough to recollect that!"

"It's very painful, though," continued Fyler; "Here am I, Ishmael, this morning in full possession of all my faculties according to human observation, equal to a calculation in compound interest, or the drawing of a mortgage with extra−conditions and policy−clauses—before night what'll I be?"

"I am afraid to say," said Ishmael, starting back and lifting both hands as though to shut out a disagreeable vision.

"But I'm not," answered Fyler, twitching his whiskers, "a miserable wreck, an insane rag−picker; what'll be my business? To go about running into gutters, and poking street−pools and rag−heaps—and I should'nt wonder if it disagreed with me so much as to make me twist my face and beat myself, and do such goings−on, that every body'll say, `Fyler has lost his reason.'"

"I should'nt wonder!" echoed Mr. Small, and at the prospect of so cheerful a result presented so vividly, both Fyler and Ishmael broke into a gentle laugh.

"Was *he* in his right mind always?" asked Fyler, looking up edge−wise at Ishmael from where he sat, allowing his glance to rest a moment, in its way, upon the garments over his arm. "Was the owner of these always right?"

"Wonderfully so," answered Ishmael; "The very sanest picker I ever knew. He was a extraordinary chap—that old fellow," pursued Mr. Small. "He would pick a couple of hogsheads a day, sir, and with a run jump over 'em at night, standing on end, as lively as a grasshopper in the first line o' business. He had a ambition above rags, and that was the ruin of him. One morning—it was a lovely one—the baker's winders was all full of smoking rolls and fresh gingerbread, the milkwagons was on the jump, and the red−cheeked chambermaids puttin' their houses into clean faces, like queens'— our friend goes out in prime spirits to pick a little before breakfast. There was a big heap in Hanover Square to be overhauled that afternoon, and the thoughts of that before him put him in such a flow, he could hardly hold in for joy. Well, sir, he was a−goin' along all well enough, till he comes to 'Publican Alley, and there he balked— he wanted to be an old clo' man, and there was something up that alley that tempted him worse than a evil spirit. He could'nt hold back: so up the alley he bolts, leavin' his basket (which he begun to be ashamed of,) at the mouth; he comes to a airy, a very deep but very delicious airy, too, for there, as he peeps thro' the railin', he sees that vicious old coat that was to be his undoin', a hanging in its old place over the back of a chair, close up by the winder; the winder was up—the old chap listened— there was nobody stirrin'—he laid himself close up against the rail, and stretched down his stick till he gets the old feller by the collar, and begins to tug. Tuggin' was fatal work; he was too wiolent; the gate he was leanin' agin gives way—the gratin' to the coal−hole was up—the old chap pitches headlong in, and sliding on his belly to the very bottom—cracks his neck. There was the vanity of 'spirin' above his sphere! He was a bosom friend o' mine; and as he forgot to mention me in his will, I bought his hat and trowsers and stick and basket, from the crowner's man, for a couple of plugs, to remember him by. They was cheap at that!"

"I wonder if they would fit me, Ishmael—it would be curious to try, would n't it?"

The broker lifted the garments gently from Ishmael's arm, displaced the hat, and, possessing himself of the crook and basket, placidly withdrew to his closet, leaving Mr. Small leaning against the casement, his cap jauntily cocked and one leg crossed upon the other, regarding the broker as he withdrew with a look of the profoundest admiration and respect. It was capitally done—that he could n't deny.

In a few minutes, during which audible laughter, kept pretty well under though, had resounded from the closet, an outlandish figure appeared from its concealments, locking the door carefully behind and thrusting the key in a pocket. It was n't the broker. Ishmael, unbending from the posture he had maintained, and spreading himself, with a hand on either knee after the manner of a jockey making himself familiar with the points of a horse on show, said it was n't Fyler Close—he'd stake his life on it—it was n't Fyler.

The figure moved out upon the floor, as if to give Mr. Small an opportunity to confirm his impressions. They couldn't be shaken: he clung to his first belief. There was the old yellow hat, which helped the face underneath it to a look so small and shrunken; then the roundabout and trowsers, loose and flaunting, and washed by a thousand showers and sweats and stains, out of all color; no reasonable man could have thought of going out of his senses, (even from an overgrown coat and short pantaloons,) into such an ill−assorted apparel. Moving up and down, the figure, keeping a hard, steady countenance, proceeded to fish with the crooked stick which he carried in his hand, in various sections of the apartment as in imaginary pools, and drew up from time to time supposititious strips of

canvass and linen, which, with great care and skill, he deposited in the bottom of a basket that hung upon his arm. Excellent! Ishmael protested that it brought his friend, the picker, back so vividly before his mind, that it was as much as he could do to refrain from tears. After practising in this way for better than a quarter of an hour, the figure came and halted before Ishmael, letting the arm which held the basket fall its full length, and in the other holding the stick—as is the established custom of pickers—with its crook downward, and regarding Mr. Small with melancholy steadiness of visage.

"I'm a poor old man now, Ishmael," said the old gentleman; "Very poor—worth not so much as Mrs. Lettuce. By−the−by, Ishmael, isn't it strange, Mrs. Lettuce has never called for that balance on the mortgage in the master's hand? It was just three shillings and a penny, and it's very wrong in her not to look to it. You should mention it when you see her; it's flying in the face of Providence not to look to her own. Have you seen the poor woman lately, Ishmael?"

Ishmael averred that he had—in the market.

"What did she say, Ishmael; did she seem to bear her fortune meekly?"

"She said," answered Ishmael, who was bursting with suppressed satisfaction at the masterly manner in which the old gentleman was carrying it off—"She said, sir, that you was one of the greatest scoundrels that ever went unhung; that you had robbed her of her radishes, and 'sparagus, and stockings and money, and character, like a heathen boy constrictor, she called it; and she'd see, sir, whether she wouldn't have satisfaction out of you yet!"

"I wonder what the poor old woman's living on that makes her so savage?" asked Mr. Close mildly.

"As far as I can learn," answered Ishmael, "for the last fortnight on b'iled turnip−tops—not such a very violent species of food."

"Where does she get boiled turnip−tops, I'd like to know?" asked Mr. Close, whose eyes began to gleam a little.

"They're given to her by her old friends in the market," replied Ishmael. "But they've cut off the supply at last; it sp'ilt the sale. She'll beg a couple of weeks more with an old cloak and red handkercher, they all say, and then she'll go to the almshouse."

"The best thing the poor creature can do," said Fyler: "I thought so long ago. She'll be much more comfortable there than out of doors blabbing secrets and ripping up old stories of no use to any one."

The interview with Mr. Small concluded, the broker saying that he had a heavy day's work before him—four squares, and better than a dozen streets to scour—pulled open the door, and went forth—Ishmael following at a distance.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE BURNING OF CLOSE'S ROW.

At day−wages the broker could not have toiled more painfully. Early and late, he was busy, with stick and basket, in alley, highway and thoroughfare. He groped every kennel, and questioned every heap in the ward. After a shower he might be seen hovering about the street− pools like a buzzard. If he had been a picker from infancy he could not have driven his trade with more diligence. He was specially careful to ply his business where he would fall under the eye of certain gentlemen, pointed out to him by the vigilance of Mr. Small, as possessing a talent for observation, and an obliging disposition in coming forward, which would render them very useful in the event of any little matter of Mr. Close's being brought before the courts. This was a class of sharp−eyed small−tradesmen, who were always in their doors, or at the corner, or coming through a street, or passing to a ferry, or doing something or other, which enabled them to be eye−witnesses of more than half the stage−accidents, brawls, frays, and other street−incidents of the whole city. As Fyler passed the doors of these vigilant observers, he would place his basket on the ground, his crook lying across it, and proceed to rap his forehead with great violence with his knuckles; which performance over, he would take up his basket and proceed to his work, knocking his brow steadily through the day, at the rate of about three knocks to a square. There was, among his prospective witnesses, one in particular— a dealer in crockery—of such an extremely acute turn of mind as to have been known in a case of manslaughter tried at the Oyer and Terminer, to have seen the blow struck, standing in his own shop−door, and looking through two bow windows, to the other side of a corner where the affray had happened; identifying the prisoner by the color of his hair. There was a valuable man for Mr. Close! and when he came along the front of his shop, the knocking was very violent and long−continued, and varied by a succession of lively leaps over the basket, back and forth, as it stood upon the ground.

Ishmael, in the mean time, performed the part cast to him, by happening in the neighborhoods where Fyler plied his calling, and taking occasion to point him out to various doctors, as a worthy old gentleman, (reduced in circumstances) a little beside himself, and whom he would be sorry to see committing any violence, such as braining a child or the like, they had furnished him with certificates of his condition, and learning that he was a friend of the poor old gentleman's begged him, in Heaven's name, to take him straight to Bellevue.

One night—Fyler had been missed from all his customary rounds that day—towards its close, there was a portentous cry sounded through the city. A flame, no larger than a man's hand, had been seen to flicker through the ground window of a wooden building, and presently the whole city was astir. At first, two or three distracted men, in leathern hats—they had been the first to discover it—ran up and down the adjacent streets, shouting at the top of their lungs, Fire! Fire! Then a score or two of neighbors tumbled out of their beds, and taking it up, with the scantiest possible apparel for a public appearance, hurried about the block echoing the cry. Then other distracted people, bursting out at front doors, which went to after them with a crash, scrambling up from cellars or down from garrets where they lodged, tore through the streets. Presently a reinforcement of men in leathern hats appeared, rushing in wherever there was a lane or square or alley, and renewing the shout. Fire! Fire! From various taverns and rooms about the city where dancing had been kept up to a late hour, certain young gentlemen—casting off their coats and leaving them in charge of their fair partners which, it appeared when the red shirts came to be disclosed, that they were volunteer firemen in disguise— broke into the street, rushed distractedly about for a few minutes, until they had fixed their gripe upon an engine−rope when setting forward, they aimed, with many others in a like plight, fbr the spot where the blaze was now mounting into a beacon−light. The throng and tumult—which deepened every minute— centred about a row of wooden buildings standing in a back yard. The flame had a sure hold upon his prey, and coiled round, striking it over and over again, in some new and vulnerable point with its tongues of fire. Every bell in the metropolis was now sounding, and new forces came hurrying into the yard; the engines clattered over the fence which had been thrown down, and began to take their order—the flame seemed to know it all, thrusting out a broad red face from the windows, to welcome them, skipping with a nimble step up and down the stairs, and dancing about the roof and in the very eaves for joy, to see so many friends about. The crowd swelled, till it

overflowed not only that yard, but the next and the next, and all the neighboring streets.

The roofs, stoops and windows all about were filled with faces that glowed in the flame; and even on the house tops, far away, a single figure, sometimes more, might be described standing out against the sky. The hoarse trumpets of the engineers sounded—the hose had been dropped in the cisterns—there was a thumping of engine arms—a thin jet of muddy water rose against the flame, and the fire bounded up livelier than ever. The supply had given out. The river was tried, and now they would have gone on triumphantly, had not a discovery been made to the effect that all the tall men on the engines were wasting their strength in hoisting up certain short gentlemen and half−grown youths, who had fastened upon the engines, that they, the short gentlemen, might be in reach of the arms to do their part in bringing them down again. As soon as this was amended—by ejecting the short gentlemen and their associates, in a body, peremptorily from the yard, from returning to which they were only restrained by the officers' staves that began to ply about— they made head. The inmates now came hurrying out—men, women, and children—bearing in their arms some little worthless trifle, and casting back a frightened look upon the burning row. There was one, a stout man, who carried in his arms as tenderly as though it had been a child, a glass case shrouded in crape, which concealed, as might be guessed by such glimpses as the flame allowed, what seemed some child's toy or other. Then a lean man, with great staring eyes came out with a run, and looked about him as though something had happened on a much grander scale than he had expected. As soon as this person had recovered himself a little, he borrowed from one of the companies a couple of fire−buckets, filling which constantly, (although some considerable rents in the sides and bottoms prejudiced his labors not a little) he did what he could, running back and forth, towards extinguishing the fire. They had now all escaped from the row except one; and that one, (the stout cobbler) instead of descending quietly like a christian and good citizen, was seen tramping and dancing about the roof like a mad−man; throwing his hat into the air and catching it, with other demonstrations of the wildest joy. He and the fire seemed to understand each other well. They shouted to him to come down, to little purpose; they sent up huge jets of water, and these he shook from his ears like a great dog that liked the sport. Even a fireman, who had acquired a great name by his prowess in bringing old men and women out of dormer windows down the long ladder, and who had been constantly climbing up and down the same and calling to any that might be lurking there, roasting privily, to come out,—even he had gone to the very top round and besought the cobbler, in vain. In his own good time, and when everybody thought there was no escape for him—a minute before the roof tumbled in— he came hand over hand down the lightning−rod fixed against the gable, and reached the ground without a scratch. Once down, instead of employing his time in rescuing what he could, he devoted himself with extraor− dinary ardor to casting such articles of furniture, bed− posts, chairs or utensils, as he could lay hands on, into the flames; which, hurrying from point to point, he kept feeding as he would a hungry dog that had found great favor in his eyes for the very force of his appetite. So the cobbler kept the fire alive; and diminished more and more the stock of property whose distinctions it was his pleasure to loathe and help to level.

Whenever a rafter yielded or a heavy timber fell in, a spare, old figure, apparently availing himself of the new light that flamed up to the sky and fell back, reflected on the earth, was seen stealing about, bearing a basket on his arm, and in his hand a crooked stick, with which he drew from the heaps small charred bits of wood and worthless cinders, and filled his basket.

At times he paused in his painstaking task, and going about to the circle nearest the fire, he removed his hat, and extending it to each, in turn, begged piteously, both with look and voice, for alms, a penny only—a penny only for a ruined man. Whenever they refused him, as they often did, not knowing him as the owner of the burning Row—he would turn away, and mutter in answer to questions which no one had addressed to him.

"You are right, sir," he would say; "the man's leg was out of joint, and General Washington thought a potato−poultice just the thing." Then, going a few steps forward, he would pause at a heap, and begin counting cinders into his basket, as though it had been so much solid coin. Such as knew the broker heaved a sigh of compassion. Fyler Close was certainly distracted—gone mad beyond all controversy. No wonder, they said to themselves; such a blow—meaning the burning of his buildings— was enough to unsettle any man's senses.

Ishmael too was on the ground, displaying a praiseworthy and astonishing activity in his endeavors to save what he could from the wreck, so as not to bankrupt the Phoenix Company at once! Every other minute he was diving into the Row, at the seeming peril of his neck, but taking good care to emerge at an early opportunity by means of an outlet on the other side, which he knew of, tarrying in the cellar only long enough to whistle such a

tune as might lead the by−standers to scamper off, dropping whatever they had in their hands and protesting that there was a goblin in the vault. And when at length the flames reached the lightning−maker's loft, there was a dozen reports or more in succession, a broad sheet of all colors, blood red and lightning blue predominating, shot up into the sky—there was an involuntary clapping of the hands on the part of the juvenile portion of the crowd—Ishmael stood by, as ardent, but more secret, in his applause than any. At the moment of the illumination— which had been duly announced in advance, by the explosion— the lightning−maker, who was still busy with his impracticable buckets, paused in his labors, and looking up, a smile crossed his pallid face. His works had gone off to the satisfaction of his audience, and he was almost content; although his wife and children stood in the next yard with scarcely a rag to their backs.

This brilliant display seemed to have a peculiar effect upon Mr. Close: for he ran about while its brightness lasted, with extraordinary nimbleness pointing it out to every one in the yard, and saying in a wild way, "That's the man—his name is John Augustus Jones, and he owes me one and nine pence for tapping his heels."

How mad the poor broker was! The fire kept burning— although it began to yield—rolling up smoke and flames, which, mixing together, passed off in a turbid cloud to− wards the river. The night itself was dark and gusty; and the flames, at one time, driven hither and thither by the wind, laid eager hold of houses, and sheds, and churches, so that had not men flitting about with buckets, driven them back, the whole neighborhood would have been in a blaze.

But now it began to yield, and the broker moved about in its flickering light. He was suddenly accosted by a person of a bluff physiognomy, strengthened with huge black whiskers, who, taking him by the arm, would have drawn him quietly aside. Fyler turned, and, regarding him with a look of great steadfastness and severity, requested his arm to wither. The arm did not wither, but, on the contrary, seemed to acquire, by the very behest, a greater tenacity of gripe; which, when Fyler discovered it, he attributed to the circumstance of his having touched it with the wrong hand.

"This will do, old chap," said the other, transferring his hold to the collar and drawing the broker about with very little regard to the established usages of society; "We've had enough of this. These buildings were heavily insured, and you're wanted down town on business Come, I know you well enough, Mr. Fyler Close."

"You lie, sir, allow me to say," rejoined the broker, turning upon his assailant. "I am Barabbas, the king of the Jews, and my mother's Mary Scott the clear−starcher in Republican Alley. I am Barabbas, I tell you, and you owe me for the whiskers you've got on."

"It wont do, uncle," said the officer, "It's a capital fetch—but your primin's wet; you must come." Whereupon folding the broker's arm closely in his own, and putting on the air of his bosom−friend taking him out on a pleasure excursion against his will, he drew him along. Some of the by−standers who had been moved by the affecting manner in which Fyler had conducted himself through the evening murmured a little, but refrained from active interference. Ishmael, who had held himself aloof—and who, to tell the truth, had observed the eye of the black−whiskered man more than once fixed on his friend, during the fire, and who noticed that he went off, and returned whispering with another before he left, (which observations there had been, however, no opportunity tunity to make known to Fyler,) Ishmael now stole close by his side and pressed his hand.

Fyler knew the hand, and felt its pressure. In that there was some hope yet.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE ROUND−RIMMERS' COMPLIMENTARY BALL.

From the point where the peninsula of brick puts forth upon Chatham Square, running or walking along its base on the Bowery a mile or better out of town, and shooting along its oblique side on Division−street, gliding gradually off towards the East river, at Scammel−street or thereabouts— lies the mighty province of East−Bowery. And over all the region of East−Bowery is spread—holding it in close subjection—the powerful clan of Round−Rimmers; a fraternity of gentlemen, who in round, crape−bound hats, metal−mounted blue coats, tallow−smoothed locks, and with the terrible device of a pyramid, wrought of brassy buttons, standing square upon their waistcoats, carry terror and dismay wherever they move. It is'nt the crape−bound hats—giving out to the public, as they do, that the gentlemen who wear them are dead to the great world of watchmen and indefatigables, preachers and practitioners of peace and amity; nor is it their strait−skirted blue coats, nor their brazen pyramids, that make them a terror to all ages and both sexes;—nor is it their independent carriage in public, and the extreme freedom with which they sway their arms. The true secret of their power lies rather in the circumstance that they always rove in bands; that, like the wolf, when one only is seen on the prowl, the herd may be guessed to be close at hand, ready to rush in and bear their brother through whatever peril he may encounter, from the clandestine kissing of a woman to the tripping up and desecration of the corporate person of a mayor. Now it is well known that these classical gentry have haunts of their own, where no small−heeled boot or moustached face is permitted to intrude; that they drink at their own resorts; grow temperate and moral in churches or chapels of their own; and that they breakdown or pigeon−wing, where a white−kid glove would, at a single waive, raise an insurrection.

And yet the Round−Rimmers condescend to join the common world in certain of their observances; they have committees, among themselves, where small men swell into great, by dint of volubility and intrigue; they make presentations after their fashion to distinguished men; and give complimentary balls, where they get a fever to a boiling pitch. It was, in fact, with these very objects in view that the mighty brotherhood of Round−Rimmers resolved on irradiating the head of Mr. Ambrose De Grand Val with the splendors of a grand complimentary ball, for the accuracy with which he had chalked their floors and mixed their punches, and the skill with which he had guided them and their fair partners through the mazes of a winter's dances. Of course there was the calling of a meeting; the passage of resolutions, very tender and affecting as they touched upon the relations which had existed between the parties, and very flattering when they came to mention Mr. De Grand Val; and the appointment of a committee to preside over the arrangements. The arrangements were made. The night had arrived.

The committee, on which were several resolute men, had determined on a bold stroke. They meant to have this known, through all coming time, as the ball, the grand complimentary ball, before which the lamps of all future balls should wax dim, and all future committees of arrangment stand abashed. It should be a double−headed ball—a ball with two great overwhelming attractions. One of them would be Mr. De Grand Val, the distinguished beneficiary, whose head was already engraved on the ticket, with an entire wheat−sheaf in one corner, in lieu of the more regular accompaniment of a chaplet for his brow, and a pair of long−legged doves, billing each other, and going through a duet in the other. So far— good. In looking about for another, they determined, in the abstract, that it should be a politician, an eloquent, distinguished and popular politician, of prepossessing manners and agreeable address. Puffer Hopkms—who had won such honor in the late contest—who was hand and glove with several of the leading members of the committee mittee, was the very man; and Puffer was invited, to be present, which he graciously acceded to, and requested to be in readiness, by a certain hour, to be put in a hack by a brance of the general committee who would wait upon him to the ball.

Puffer, who was not sorry to avail himself of so capital an apportunity to extend his fame among the members of a powerful body, was appareled and ready to a minute; having approached as nearly as was prudent to the costume of his constituents—he dared not adopt the pyra− mid, nor the flat locks exactly, but he laid aside his straps, and garnished his hat with a broad belt of black ribband. With the aid of the committee—who called for him—he entered the carriage, two aiding from within by seizing his arms, and two from without by placing a hand against his person, and thrusting it gently forward with a respectful pressure. The supernumerary

committee−man—four inside—mounted the box with the driver; the coach whirled away; and, at a rattling pace, they were soon at the mouth of the Bowery or Vauxhall Gardens—the royal pleasure− ground of the Round Rimmers—the extreme limit of their territory on the west—where the Grand Complimentary Ball was to be given. Two large variegated lamps blazed in the front of the gate, to the admiration of one or two hundred observant boys; the blast of the trumped—evidently blown by a short−winded gentleman, from teh intermittent nature of his peals—burst forth; and Puffer entering, was overwhelmed with the gorgeousness and splendor of the spectacle that broke upon him. In the first place, the Garden, to which he was a stranger, was filled with trees—which was a novelty in a New−York public garden— some short and bushy, others tall and trim, but actual trees; then there were a thousand eyes or better lurking and glaring out in every direction, in the shape of blue and yellow and red and white lamps, fixed among the trees and against the stalls; then there was a fountain; and then, through two rows of poplars, commanding a noble perspective of two white chimney−tops in the rear, there stretched a floor—the ball−room floor itself. He had no further opportunity for observation, for the committee, hurrying him away lest he should be seen before the proper time for his presentation to the company had ar− rived—bore him to a small room aside, where he found a separate pitcher of lemonade and an honorary paper of sandwiches devoted to himself, partaking of which, and being allowed time to smooth his locks and dust his pumps, he was carried forth into the air again. This time he was borne by the committee—who stud: close to his person—into a private path, so dart; and shady that a deed of blood might have been quietly clone upon him ; winding in and out among the shrubs whenever any of the company—the more tender−hearted of whom affected the place in couples—until they reached the extremity of the garden opposite that at which they had entered The chairman of the committee gave a low whistle—there was a burst of music from the orchestra, who swarmed in a box mid−way among the trees, like so many robin redbreasts, and Puffer found himself upon a platform his hat in his hand, his hand upon bis waistcoat where his heart lay, bowing to a large assemblage of both sexes, who stood gathered upon the floor waving handkerchiefs and shouting, shrieking and hallooing a whole menagerie of welcomes. An acute ear might have detected in the pauses of this tumult, a sound arising in a remote quarter of the garden, resembling, not a little, the blows a stout−handed cooper deals upon his kegs when he is anxious to fix or unfix their hoops; thither two ambitious members of the committee, who had been unable to agree which should have the honor of attending Mr. Hopkins upon the platform, had, by the advice of mutual friends, withdrawn, and in a stall, by the light of three or four blue and yellow lamps, were proceeding to settle the point according to the established custom and usages of Round−Rimmers.

From his elevated position Puffer commanded a view of the entire spectacle as it moved forward. Upon the floor, arranged in sets of eight each—which had been momentarily disturbed by his reception, and which were now re−formed—were a great number of young gentlemen in fancy pantaloons of corduroy, white jean and Nankin close at the knee and flaunting at the ankle, collars rolled tight under the chin over parti−colored neckerchiefs of emphatic blue or red, the smoothed locks cropped close behind, and the customary brass−mounted coats, ornamented with cauliflowers flowers or large monthly roses at the button−holes, and at their sides an equal number of young ladies, some of whom were red−nosed and flat−breasted, and others of a rounded form and great beauty of feature—in dazzling calicoes, dangling earrings that shone through the night like fire−flies, kerchiefs of an equally emphatic hue spread upon their breast, and ringlets disposed upon their brow with a glossy smoothness that emulated their partners. The gentlemen stood with their arms a−kimbo on their hips; the ladies doing homage to their lieges with faces turned smilingly upon them. The band struck up— the couples dashed off, throwing out limbs, with an unexampled vigor in every direction—the gentlemen thumping the floor with their heels at every descent—the ladies mounting into the air and whizzing about, till the dangling rings buzzed through the trees like fire−flies on the wing. Sometimes a gentleman in the furor of his zeal came spanking upon the floor; sometimes a lady, losing balance in the heat of her motion, dashed headlong into the ruffles of one of the stationary young gentlemen off duty, who were gathered in groups about the edges of the dance. Suddenly there was an abrupt pause in the orchestra, every instrument down to the triangle stood still, and the company, looking up, in wonder of the cause, saw that the orchestra to a man was standing, and that every eye was fixed with painful earnestness upon the other end of the floor. The beneficiary—the illustrious De Grand Val had come in sight. He was in the hands of the committee; and the committee were coming along as fast as the crowd that hung upon their progress would allow them. Every now and then, a face, smiling and black−whiskered, was just visible for a moment and disappeared again in the throng: then a hand might be discovered touching the smiling face and flying off from it,

as in a sort of playful or affectionate spasm. This by no means helped to abate the enthusiasm; the orchestra was excited beyond bounds. The trombone had climbed a tree and was shaking down lamps and green caterpillars ever so fast, in a disordered state of mind, brought on by over−excitement. With many pauses—by slow stages—they had reached the head of the floor, where certain gentlemen, with blue ribbands at their button holes, who had restrainness and dissipating the midnight winter−strained. The smalls are three feet in length, have two feet six inches breadth of beam and front, and carry one person. Other causes than the mere desire of seeing you clothed, have led to the construction of the great work now before us; they have been built not only to warm your limbs, but also to gratify the eyes of your affectionate scholars and friends. The importance of having the seams made secure and the buttons well−fastened, was awfully demonstrated in the case of Mr. Wail, whose pantaloons, being inadequately constructed, burst open, as you may recollect, the season before last, in the presence of one hundred and eighty scholars, in no less than five distinct rents. The late Mr. Larkin was also a sufferer in the same way; but not to quite the same extent. In presenting you these smalls I wish to call your attention to some of their peculiar and characteristic features. Examine them—they are not breeches—they are not trowsers—they are not slops. They have neither open−bottoms nor straps; but what is most singular, they have neither a hind pocket nor side pocket—not even a place to put a watch in. I desire now, to express an individual wish. As boy and man I have witnessed the devotion and personal sacrifices with which you have flown about your ball−rooms, rending your linen for the pleasure and gratification of your fellow−citizens. But I have witnessed too, with sorrow, what individual mortification and discomfort you, with others, have brought upon yourself by sitting thoughtlessly down on dusty chairs and unclean benches. The wish which I ardently offer is, that while you employ these smalls in dancing to the delight of our whole community, they may be associated in your mind only with what is pure and agreeable, disdaining any familiarities with Windsor soap and washingtubs. In conclusion, I take the liberty on behalf of our company generally, in saying that we feel ourselves honored by the presence of Puffer Hopkins, Esq., our distinguished friend and fellow−citizen. We do not show him sky−rockets and Bengola lights, but we show him that James Jones has been busy in the arts of peace, with a view to promote the comfort of our beloved preceptor, Mr. De Grand Val. Accept these smalls."

The gentleman in the blue ribband advanced a step or two again — Mr. De Grand Val likewise advanced a step or two. Mr. De Grand Val was in possession of the parcel. He cast his eye down upon the wrapper — then he turned enchantingly and looked about with a comprehensive smile — which opened his whiskers and disclosed his teeth and embraced all parties present, on the platform and off, both sexes, and even an interloper who stood gazing from the remotest end of the floor. There was a dead silence again. Mr. De Grand Val was about to reply.

"Ladies and Gentlemen:" said Mr. De Grand Val, deeply moved, "I accept this token in the spirit in which it is given. I regard it — and shall always regard it — as an evidence of your devoted attachment, tried principles and prompt payments, as long as I live. Whenever I look at them, whenever I wear them, I shall call to mind the spirit with which you have availed yourself of my instructions — the promptitude with which you have cashed my quarterly bills. They and I shall be inseparable, provided, as I have an abiding conviction, they fit. They will serve — how happily! — to recall to me the purity of the young ladies whom I have instructed, the manliness of the young gentlemen." Here there began to be a movement of applause. "By saying this, however, ladies and gentlemen I do not mean that I shall always wear these satin smalls. No,no. God forbid that I should ever be seen performing the ordinary duties of life in these precious garments, your affectionate gift. Distant be the time when it shall be said that Ambrose De Grand Val was known to have had on his smalls, riding a trotting match on the avenue, or mixing slings at Fogfire Hall, or climbing a sloop's mast on the East river. I shall reserve them, ladies and gentlemen — and I think you have anticipated me in this statement — for more select and dignified I think I may venture to wear them at a wedding ?" ("You may," from a large portion of the audience "But not on a fishing excursion ?" ("No, no, shrimps and salt−water is fatal!") "On the shady side of the Bowery?" ("To be sure.") But not to church — that would'nt do." And Mr. De Grand Val laughed aloud, as much as to say, "That's a good one!" — "But, ladies and gentlemen, I am afraid I shall be compelled to make an exception—a single exception—as to the rule I have laid down for myself in the use of these smalls. I have a friend, ladies and gentlemen, a dear friend, a former pupil of mine—known to some of you—who in a moment of unrestrained hilarity, playfully thrust a caseknife, which he happened to have about him, a couple of inches or so into the body of a thick−headed watchman; this trifling circumstance has called the attention of the state towards him; the state wants him up the river, and when he's called for he asks, as a favor, that I will go up with him. I know how gratifying it will be to

our friend to see me in these smalls, and now, ladies and gentlemen, as a parting favor, I ask to be permitted to use them on that occasion!" At this there was an universal response, "In course"—"By all means"—and so forth, to which Mr. De Grand Val bowed in his best manner, and ended by laying his hand upon his breast, and uttering in a heartbroken voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!" There was scarcely a dry eye in the garden. At the moment when Mr. De Grand Val was discovered with the wrapper under his arm, descending the platform with the committee, twelve cotillions—spread along the floor— burst into a dance expressive of tumultuous joy. Puffer kept his station on the platform, surveying the dance, his thumbs thrust politician−wise in the arm−holes of his vest— and his eye ranging along from set to set—when suddenly it came upon an object which fixed it as firmly in his head as if it had been an eye of stone. A dark−eyed young lady, only three sets from the stage, of great personal attractions, stood facing a great sturdy−shouldered fellow, who seemed to be her partner in the dance, (although Puffer would not believe it,) and where the light of more than a dozen lamps fell upon her face. He could not be mistaken. It was—it must be the dark−eyed young lady he had met at Mr. Fishblatt's entertainment. He stepped from the platform and lounged down the floor in company with a member of the committee. He thought he would like to confirm his impressions by her voice; in that he could not err, for he recollected, now that his head swayed that way, there were tones in it that could not be counterfeit or delusive.

'Fine weather for young ducks," said the dark−eyed young lady.'

"Not bad neither for heifers and bullocks," said the sturdy−shouldered young gentleman. "Speaking of bullocks, if Bill Winship don't keep inside his chalk I'll cut his plumb for him." And he glanced at a young gentleman of a brawny build, who was working his way with might and main, through a complicated figure.

"Bill!—Bill Winship, come over here!" cried the dark−eyed young lady across the floor, as soon as Mr. Winship had achieved his position again. "Joe Marsh's distributing knuckle soup, to−night, and he wants you to take a sup."

"Never mind quite yet," cried the sturdy−shouldered young gentleman, Mr. Marsh himself; "only don't you throw your legs quite so much ox−fashion or knockin'−down time'll come afore to−morrow daylight! That's all!"

The dark−eyed young lady and the sturdy−shouldered young gentleman laid their heads together and conferred in a dialect which was in a great measure unintelligible to Puffer Hopkins, but having reference, as he saw by their glances, to the young gentleman across the floor who kept dancing beyond his chalk in spite of the friendly warning of Mr. Marsh. As soon as he could address the young lady, without rashly invading the privacy of her interview with Mr. Joe Marsh, Puffer came forward and, begging her hand for the next dance,' took the place of the sturdy−shouldered Marsh, who withdrew, tugging very fiercely at the ties of his neckcloth, evidently meditating summary death, either to himself or his brawny opposite. The dark−eyed young lady immediately entered upon conversation with Puffer—referred to the entertainment at Mr. not forgetting Alderman Crump nor Mr. Blinker; touched pleasantly upon their wanderings on the way to her residence; came down to the present Ball, glanced at its striking points, and all in very chaste, appropriate and elegant language, which startled Puffer not a little when contrasted with her discourse with Mr. Joseph Marsh. Who was the young lady? What was she? There was evidently a mystery about her. She had two tongues like the double−headed heifer at the show; and now that he looked more closely, she was dressed in a style quite as singular and composite. A part of her dress—her gown and shawl, folded over the breast, were in the very height of the Round−Rimmers' fashion; but, then, about her neck there was a delicate necklace of pearl and her hair hung from her brow, in fair, glossy curls that leaped like the young tendrils of the vine in the spring breeze, at every motion of the dance.

The Ball went on with unabated spirit. Puffer Hopkins and his partner bounded forward; chasséd; dosa−dos'd, and balancéd with a vigor and accuracy that were the delight of the whole set.

"I balancé for you," said the dark−eyed young lady, as soon as it was their turn to rest. "I chasséz and forward across for my father."

What could this mean? The mystery was deepening and the dark−eyed young lady brightened into clearer and fairer beauty every minute. He ventured to ask if her father was in the gardens. Oh, no: he was at home studying the gazetteer. There was no opportunity for further questions, for at that moment a figure encased in white came bounding up the floor—the dancers opening and forming a line on either side and clapping their hands with great earnestness, as he came along. There seemed to be no point or pitch at which you could say, the excitement is at its height. De Grand Val had come upon the floor (having privily withdrawn for that very purpose) in his presentation satin smalls! How well they fitted him! What a figure! What motions!

De Grand Val begged them, if they loved him, to reform at once—he couldn't bear to see them idle—and taking his place at the head of the first set at the very top of the floor, he struck into the dance. Were there ever such leaps, such pirouettes, such graceful turnings of a partner, such pigeon−wings! Every eye was upon him—and when, in the enthusiasm of art he sprung into the air, tossing his skirts almost over his ears, there was visible on the waistband of his smalls, an inscription worked in with black silk, "Presented to Ambrose De Grand Val by his affectionate and admiring pupils"—there was another thrill, deeper, stronger, more like electricity than any yet! The excitement *was* now at its height. The orchestra was in a state of extraordinary fervor; the bass drum roared and rumbled out of all bounds; the violin snapped a string in its excessive agitation and hurry; the trombone and triangle were beside themselves, and wonldn't keep in tune. The young ladies threw off their kerchiefs upon their arms—the gentlemen their coats upon the bushes and benches behind them, displaying red under— shirts and a great variety of hoists, embellished sometimes with a great black heart of leather in the middle, or with mystical creeping vines, breaking out all over in sheepskin blossoms. At intervals the company rushed down from the floor into the stalls at the sides of the garden, and falling upon various refreshments there set out, acquired so much vigor as to return to the stage in astonishing force of wind and limb. At the end of every third dance or so, the gentlemen resigning all care of their partners, marched in a body to the bar at the other end of the, fronting the floor, where the bar−tenders, standing in a row in their sleeves, wrought constant miracles in the mixing of slings, punches, and cobblers. And so they kept it up by the hour, beyond midnight, when some slight abatement in the spirit of the entertainment began to show itself. Every now and then a set fell off, one by one, until there were only a few stragglers about the floor kept together by almost superhuman exertions on the part of the gentlemen in the blue ribbands. At last there was no one left but the gentlemen in blue ribbands themselves, who wandered hither and thither, gathering up shawls, combs, and other stray articles abandoned by their owners.

The lights were out or smoking in their last remains— the waiters asleep upon the benches—and the great De Grand Val roamed about the paths and bowers of the garden, in his satin smalls, unattended and unobserved.

Puffer—to whom she had been courteously resigned by Mr. Joseph Marsh, who had attended her thither, and who went off in search of Mr. Bill Winship, the obnoxious dancer— took the dark−eyed young lady's arm in his, and had long ago set forth. He knew the way now, and it was a very different one—so it seemed to him, although it remained untouched—than when he traveled it before. The crossings were as broad—the roads as crooked—the squares as long; but how miserably short and narrow, how provokingly straight they seemed! It would have been a pleasure to him to have got into Doyer−street and wandered about all night long. The door was reached before he had thought of it; an old woman came with a nimbleness, the very recollection of which took his breath away; and then—when the dark−eyed young lady entered in—how cruelly quick she was in closing it, with her ugly old face in her very hood, and hurrying her away.

CHAPTER XXX. MR. FISHBLATT'S NEWS−ROOM.

Through all of Puffer's dreams that night there glided a graceful form; a pair of bright dark eyes glanced hither and thither like meteors, in all the motions of the dance: sometimes he was moving by its side, sometimes it parted from him—and when she left his hand, ah! how keen a pang shot through his heart! But gliding, and glancing, and full of cheerful images as were his dreams—whatever the mazes, whatever the turns, the pirouettes, the long country dances, the perspective always closed with the fair dancer's wearing a great green hood, and an old woman's head thrust inside, chattering and bobbing up and down. He had danced a score or more cotillions, reels, and flings—always with the same ending, when, at length, the old head seemed somehow to get fixed upon the young shoulders, the old body, without a head, galloped off, and the fair, young form was left, chasséing, doubleheaded, among the trees. This was too much for mortal patience to bear, and Puffer waked up. His first business, when he had fairly recovered himself, was to recall the dark−eyed young lady, in all her agreeable proportions, one by one, and replace her in his mind as she had been when he had stretched himself to sleep. Lately as he had looked upon her, it was something of an effort: at one time he would fix her in a graceful attitude bending forward to move—her head slightly turned back towards him—but then the eyes, or the motion of the arm, or the smile that had played upon her lip, would escape him, and he would begin again. He went puzzling on in this way, even till he was dressed—though this did not prevent his appareling himself with great skill and judgment; drawing out, from the very bottom of a drawer, where it had been laid religiously aside for some select occasion, a bright blue neckcloth; arraying his new buff vest, which he had worn to the Ball, to marked advantage, and disposing of his handsome blue coat so that every wave and plait should tell. With the two tasks, his mind, it must be confessed was sufficiently engaged; and when he had laid the last lock in its exact place upon his brow, and succeeded in recalling the dark−eyed young lady, in all her beauty, even down to the neat shoe−tie, (that his dreams had not forgotten,) it came into his head, as opportunely as one could wish, that he ought to go down to Mr. Fishblatt's, at whose entertainment he had first met the dark−eyed young lady, and have a little gossip, just by way of relief! The day had, in this way glided past dinner time, and he thought the pleasing idleness of the morning had fairly purchased the afternoon as an extension of his holiday.

When he reached the house of Mr. Fishblatt, the door, in compliment to the pleasant weather, stood wide open and Puffer, having established a sufficient friendship to warrant it, proceeded at once to the small supplemental room in the rear; where Mr. Halsey Fishblatt held his lair. Here he found Mr. Fishblatt in his arm−chair, holding in a firm gripe, a wet sheet, which he regarded with a steady gaze. At his side there was a wooden stool, on the top of which lay a pile of damp newspapers. The reading of the wet sheet seemed to move Mr. Fishblatt greatly; his teeth were firmly fixed, and a thick sweat, as though it had steamed up from the newspaper stood upon his brow. His attention was so entirely engrossed that, notwithstanding the unusual gloss and neatness of Puffer's apparel, he merely nodded to him as he came in, and, unfixing one of his arms, waived him to a seat. As soon as one side of the paper was finished— very little, apparently, to the satisfaction of Mr. Fishblatt— he gave the sheet a gentle shake, and, letting it fall into a current of air, which set in from the entry, he turned a leaf, and folding it back, fixed himself upon the fresh side.

Glancing aside not once, but ranging up and down the solid columns as steadily as a plough−horse in a furrow, Mr. Fishblatt finished his acre or half acre of print.

"This is certainly an astonishing circumstance," he exclaimed, folding his paper, laying it upon his knee, and smiting it with his open palm, breathing now for the first time freely; "An astonishing circumstance; on Monday, Busts, of the Bladder, made that pungent sally, and here it's Saturday, and no rejoinder from Flabby—what can this mean?"

At this moment a series of shouting boys streamed by in the street, whose voices, at their very top, were broken in passing through the long hall and up a flight of stairs. Mr. Fishblatt, however, whose ear was better practised, started up, with a stern smile upon his face, and proceeding to the stair−head, called down. Shuffling feet were heard in answer, and tossing down a coin of small dimensions upon the entry−floor, merely said "The Puncheon," and returned to his seat. In a second or two the frowzy−headed servant girl, with her hair all abroad,

appeared at the door, and presented to him a fresh sheet, which he fastened upon with great eagerness.

"As I thought," said Mr. Fishblatt, glancing rapidly down the columns. "An `Extra Puncheon,' pretending to give late news from the Capitol, but containing, in reality, Flabby's long−expected reply. Capital! capital!" cried Mr. Fishblatt, as he hurried on; "Flabby called Busts a drunken vagabond, in the Puncheon of Wednesday week; Busts called Flabby a hoary reprobate, in Monday's Bladder, and now Flabby calls Busts a keg of Geneva bitters—says the bung's knocked out and the staves well coopered. Capital! This alludes to a thrashing, in front of the Exchange, in which Busts had his eye blacked and a couple of ribs beaten in. Give us plenty of newspapers!" pursued Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, starting from his chair in the furor of his enthusiasm. "They make a people happy and intelligent and virtuous. The press, sir, the press is the palladium of liberty, and the more palladiums we have the freer we are—of course. See here, sir, here's a big palladium and here's a little palladium." At this he held forth to Puffer's gaze first the mammoth sheet, and then the dwarf, and brandishing them in the air, proceeded: "This"—referring to the small sheet—" is edited by a couple of overgrown boys in Williamsburg, who do their own press−work—and this by an undergrown man in Ann−street, who does his thinkinh on the other side of the Atlantic. Never mind that—give us more. This people can never be free, Mr. Hopkins, thoroughly and entirely free, till every man in the country edits a newspaper of his own; till every man issues a sheet every morning, in which he's at liberty to speak of every other man as he chooses. The more we know each other, the better we'll like each other—so let us have all the private affairs, the business transactions and domestic doings of every man in the United States, set forth in a small paper, in a good pungent style, and then we may begin to talk of the advancement of the human race. That's what I call the cheap diffusion of knowledge; a penny−worth of scandal on every man's breakfast table, before he goes to business."

Mr. Fishblatt having refreshed himself and his hearer with a tumbler each of lemonade, from the mantle, (the probable remains of a last night's entertainment,) was about to resume, when he was brought to a pause by the sudden entrance of the frowzy−haired servant−girl, who brought him a parcel from the postman who was distributing the southern and western mail.

"Ah! what have we here ?" said Mr. Fishblatt, taking the parcel from her hand. `The Nauvoo Bludgeon,' `Potomac Trumpet,' `Western Thundergust,' something rich in each, I will warrant." "The corporal," says the Nauvoo Bludgeon, pursued Mr. Fishblatt, reading from the newspapers as he unfolded them; " The corporal, we are glad to see, has resumed his editorial chair. There are few men in the press in the United States, that could be better spared than Tompkins ; there is a raciness about his paragraphs, his humour is so delicate, his go, 0. taste so marked and prominent in all he writes. In a word we could'nt spare Tompkins." Mr. Fishblatt unfolded another paper, remarking that the corporal edited the Potomac Trumpet—and here. it was, a day's date later than the Bludgeon. "Our friend Smith of the Bludgeon," continued Mr. Fishblatt, reciting from the Trumpet, "has our thanks for the handsome manner in which he has alluded to our recovery from a critical sickness. Smith, we owe you one and will pay you as soon as *you* are on your back—if not sooner. We were passing down Market−lane yesterday, when we heard a voice. `Tompkins,' said the voice; `Hallo!' We looked up; it was Grigsby—our old friend Grigsby, of Clambake Point. He understood us, and we passed on. Do you take, Smith?"

Having despatched these, Mr. Fishblatt came to the Western Thundergust. The Thundergust was in a furious rage; they had been purloining his jokes, and he wouldn't tolerate it any longer.

"We have submitted long enough," said the Thunder−gust, "to the unbridled plunderings of the Nauvoo Bludgeon and the Potomac Trumpet. We mean to put a stop to it; and to begin at the beginning, we would like to ask the *man* of the Bludgeon where he got that phrase, `In a word, we couldn't spare Tompkins'? Does he recollect the Thundergust of Wednesday, the 15th of July? If he doesn't we can refresh his memory. `In a word,' said we, speaking of an article of furniture in our late office, `we couldn't spare our cedar−wood desk.' There— we think we have pinned the Bludgeon man to the wall, and now we'll dispose of him of the Trumpet, by suggesting whether it wouldn't be better for him to buy a copy of the works of Mr. Joseph Miller at once, rather than be at the trouble of stealing his jokes from all the newspapers in the country? We only suggest it;—while we are on the point, we might as well say that the anecdote of Grigsby, in the last Trumpet, was stolen as it stands, from the first number of this paper, where the reader will find it printed at the head of the first column of the second page. Paste−boy, scratch off the `Trumpet'—it'll be your turn next, Mr. Bludgeon; so you're on your good behaviour!"

Just then, and before Mr. Fishblatt could dive deeper into the beauties of the press, an indifferently dressed gentleman in a heated face and damp hair, rushed in, stumbling at the threshold in his haste, and pitching forward,

but taking the precaution to knock his hat tight with one hand as he stumbled.

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed the damp−haired stranger, as soon as he recovered himself, "It's passed!"

"It is?" echoed Mr. Fishblatt, in a hollow sepulchral tone.

It is, sir !" responded the stranger, wildly.

What—you don't say, sir," continued Mr. Fishblatt, gazing steadily at him, "that the bill for clearing the navigation of the upper Wabash has passed?"

The stranger did; and he had in his hat an accurate report of the debate. It had been brought in by special express for the Junk Bottle. An express rider, by−the−bye, had broken his neck in coming through New−Jersey, and the messenger had pitched into the office of the Junk Bottle, with such precipitation with his parcel, as to have struck the senior editor where he knocked all the wind out of him; so that they needn't look for any leader tomorrow. He would take off his hat and they would get at the particulars. The damp−haired stranger did so; set his hat upon the floor—planted one foot upon a chair−seat near by, and bending forward, so that the sweat dropped on the paper as he read, proceeded to furnish the following account, which was heralded in the Junk Bottle with the portrait of a small fat cherub, flying at the top of his speed, his cheeks distended, and a trumpet at his mouth, from which issued the word "Postscript," in a loud, bold type. It was from the Washington correspondent of the Junk Bottle.

"I can hardly hold the quill in my hand with joy at the news I am about to communicate; news that will, I am satisfied, thrill the whole country from one end to the other. THE BILL FOR CLEARING THE NAVIGATION OF THE UPPER WABASH was passed last night between eleven and twelve o'clock, after a most animated and stormy debate, in which the emissaries of power put forth their utmost strength. Their subterfuges, their cavils and cries of I `order' were, however, of no avail. The bill had a clear majority of five, and the country is safe. Of the true−hearted men who distinguished themselves on the side of justice and patriotic principle, Peter Alfred Brown, of Massachusetts, was pre−eminently conspicuous. He was seen every where during the debate, animating, exhorting, encouraging; from his place in the house; sometimes, in the energy of his extraordinary powers, standing up in his chair, and sometimes addressing the house from his desk−top, where he took his station at last, and maintained it for better than hour, during which he delivered one of the most remarkable and wonderful speeches of the present epoch. There are few men, in any age or country, to be compared with Peter Alfred Brown. I subjoin a hasty outline of a few of the most striking passages in the debate.

"Mr. Buffum, of Kentucky, in opening the discussion, remarked that the country was in imminent danger, much more imminent than he was willing to confess. The people expected much and they got nothing. A crisis had arrived which *must* be met. He need not describe to them the present condition of the whole region around the Upper Wabash. It was little better than a desert; trade, by the obstruction of navigation, had fallen off to nothing—the grass in the neighboring meadows was four feet high— vessels of transportation were sticking, absolutely sticking in the mud at the wharves; and the cartmen went about the streets whistling dirges and psalm−tunes.

Mr. Woddle, of South Carolina, who rose in reply to Mr. Buffum, would not answer for the consequences, if the bill before the House should become a law. His, (Mr. W.'s) constituents were in a highly inflamed and excited state of mind, on the subject of the proposed clearing. If the Upper Wabash (they asked) was once made navigable, what would become of the Little Peedee? Why, it would sink to a third−rate stream, and in the place of the honorable gentleman's whistling cartmen, they would have a stagnant marsh, full of musical bull−frogs. He (Mr. W.) respected the constitution of the country, and so did his constituents; but should this bill pass, he could not promise that a flag with some terrible device would not be seen flying, in twenty−four hours after the news, from the walls of Charleston.

It was at this juncture that Peter Alfred Brown, of Massachusetts, rose. Every eye was upon him; and without faltering for a moment, he entered upon the subject. He showed clearly, in a masterly effort of better than two hours, that the constitution had manifestly contemplated the object in the proposed bill. He showed, so that the blindest and most jaundiced eye could not fail to see it, that the framers had provided for the very contingency that had now arisen. He would not occupy the time of the House in pointing out the express clause in the constitution covering the present case; but he proved, by an ingenious and elaborate train of reasoning, in something less than an hour, that the entire scope of that instrument went to such an effect. In a peroration, never surpassed in the House, he begged them to stand by the constitution. His arms trembled, as he held up to their

view a printed copy which he had in his hand; and when he sate down, the universal conviction was that he could not be answered. Notwithstanding this feeling, he was immediately followed by Marc Anthony Daggers, the notorious member from Virginia, who poured out upon the head of the illustrious Brown, the vials of his wrath. There was no epithet of denunciation he did not heap upon the head of that distinguished man. "Sir," said Daggers, turning so as to face Mr. Brown, who sat complacent and unmoved, writing a letter at his desk; "Sir, you are a disgrace and a contumely to the American Congress; a pedlar of logic, and a wholesale dealer in falsehood and fable. Where you were born, sir, the land, in sympathy with you, breeds nothing but copper−heads and toadstools, the soil is rocky as your bosom, sterile as your brain." Here there were loud cries of order, but Daggers went on without heeding them in the least. Brown was a buffalo, ready to plunge his horns into the vitals of his country; he was a volcanic fire, a monster, a doting idiot, and a political mountebank.

At nine o'clock in the evening, to which hour they had been kept listening to the tirade of Mr. Marc Anthony Daggers, Mr. Blathering, of Missouri, obtained the floor. His effort was in every way worthy of his matured powers and reputation. For fourteen years he (Mr. B.) had labored, single−handed and alone, to obtain justice for the citizens of Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. For fourteen years he had cried at the top of his lungs to the people of the United States, to render their right to the residents on the Wabash. The Wabash was still obstructed, and if be, like Curtius of old, could, by casting himself headlong in, reverse the spell and open the river, he was ready, at any moment, for the sacrifice. All he asked was an hour's notice, and an opportunity to say "farewell," a last farewell, to his wife and children.

The Upper Wabash, Mr. Speaker, is a stream rising in the interior of Indiana, at about the latitude of 40°, &c. (Here he produced several maps, and quoted freely from two piles of books before him, which occupied about an hour and a half delightfully.) He closed with an appeal to the House, which surpassed any thing ever heard before within its walls. I need only give you the concluding sentence to show you the magnificent stamp of the whole.

"If I were now standing upon the summit of the Chippewyan mountains, instead of the floor of this House, and were suddenly and unexpectedly seized with the icy pangs of death;—if I saw that my last hour had come, and that but one more breath was left me to draw, I would say with that last breath, so that I might be heard by every man in America, `Clear the Wabash; in Heaven's name careen its mighty bottom and let its waters flow in a mercantile tide into the Ohio at Shawneetown, and into the Mississippi at Big Swamp!' "

The Bill was engrossed at twenty minutes past eleven, and at twelve was sent to the Senate for concurrence. There was an unexampled rush toward the stalls in the lobby and the hotels on the Avenue the moment the House was adjourned. This tended somewhat to allay the excitement. Thank God the country is safe!"

"Curse that Junk−Bottle!" cried Mr. Fishblatt, who had watched closely the reading of the Washington Letter. "It's always bringing unpleasant news by express in advance of the mail. Our trade is ruined, sir. New−York is a dead herring. All Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, will flow into the Wabash, the Wabash into the Ohio, the Ohio into the Mississippi, and the Mississippi makes a mouth at New−Orleans. Where does that bring us? Not an Indiana turkey, nor a Kentucky ham, nor an Illinois egg reaches the New−York market henceforth forever. In ten years you may expect to see this mighty metropolis a heap of ruins, and auctioneers going about knocking down the rubbish in lots to suit purchasers. What do they mean by passing such bills?" Mr. Fishblatt turned to Puffer: the damp−haired stranger, released from the steadfastness of his gaze, hastily resumed his hat—to the crown of which he had restored his paper—and escaped to dispense his news in some other quarter of the town. Puffer, who had stood aside, pondering in his own way, on the subject of the Upper Wabash, and, turning it about in his mind till he got it in a light that pleased him, looked at Mr. Fishblatt, but made no answer. But when Mr. Fishblatt added, "I'll go and see my friend, Mr. Samuel Sammis, and have this explained—will you join me, Puffer? " he started from his reverie, and said it was the very best thing they could do. In a moment he threw down the newspaper, with which his fingers had been toying, held his hat in his hand, and was ready to issue forth on the instant. Now this alacrity, on the part of Puffer—must we confess it?—was owing to an unavoidable accident. Mr. Samuel Sammis was the father of the dark−eyed young lady.

CHAPTER XXXI. PUFFER HOPKINS IMPROVES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

A half−hour's walk, in which Mr. Fishblatt harangued and expatiated, without limit, upon the iniquity of the Bill for clearing the Upper Wabash, brought them to the Great−Kiln Road, abutting on the Hudson, in Greenwich. And there, with a, flaming red front, and a couple of apothecary's bottles staring from the first floor like two great bloodshot eyes, stood by itself the domicil of Mr. Samuel Sammis. Beyond—standing upon the river, and just visible across the angle of the house−arose a pair of hay−scales with an inscription to the effect that Samuel Sammis was weigh−master and president of' the same.

They were led to an upper story—for Mr. Sammis, like his friend Fishblatt, possessed the second floor—and being ushered in they came upon a party of old and young ladies, scattered about the apartment, in the very zenith and ecstasy of a full−blown litter of work−baskets, sewing−silk and small talk. The first object that fixed the attention of Puffer as they entered, was the dark−eyed young lady herself, busy fashioning portentous capitals, in white thread, upon a long red banner or bunting; and at her ear that everlasting old woman, whispering away, apparently, at the rate of a page a minute at least. There were other young ladies, each diligent with her scissors and needle, clipping, binding, patching; none seemed to be engaged in the literary department but the dark−eyed young lady, and not one, in Puffer's eye, was half as fair as she! There was one small and gentle, with auburn hair and lucid blue eyes; another round and plump; another quite stately, with wild a flashing look;—there seemed to be a mould in his heart, and no other image would fit it but that one.

The dark−eyed young lady smiled a welcome to Puffer— turned to the old lady at her side, and whispering the words "my aunt," as an introduction, invited him to a seat. Mr. Fishblatt, who was quite at home, was already in a chair.

"You are quite a stranger, Mr. Fishblatt," said the aunt, who was a little prim old woman, dressed with exemplary neatness and with a pair of dancing eyes. "You have n't been to see us since last election. What's kept you away—Rheumatics?—no: perhaps it's been the winds that has blown down the city for the last month and better. You was afraid of getting a mouthful if you walked up this way. Was n't that it? Ah! ah!" And the little old woman broke into a clear joyous laugh which rung through the room, and was echoed by the whole company of stitchers and sewers.

"Oh, no; nothing of that sort, I promise you, upon my honor," answered Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, gravely. "My whole mind, soul, heart and body have been engrossed with public affairs—horribly engrossed: so many exciting, and important, and weighty questions. One's no sooner well disposed of than another pops up. I only despatched the other day the question about the Aqueduct, and curse it, here's another water−question. I am borne down with anxiety and excessive thinking. Where's Sammy?"

To this question the old lady made answer that Samuel was at the Scales; that he was very busy at this season; that she would call him in if Mr. Fishblatt would like to see him; and jumping up, in a minute more, would have put her head forth towards the river, and summoned him; but on Mr. Fishblatt's entreaty she refrained, and he went out to seek him for himself:

Finding the field clear for conversation, Puffer addressed himself to the dark−eyed young lady to the effect that she seemed to be a little in public life as well as Mr. Fishblatt, judging by the use to which she was putting the bunting on which she was at work.

Oh, I only do as I am bid!" answered the dark−eyed young lady, "I'd as leave write one thin in here as another; my thread and needle are neutral, I assure you."

"How can you say so, Fanny!" exclaimed the aunt, smiling upon her," she is one of the most arrant little politicians in the city, Mr. Hopkins; she keeps this whole ward in a constant ferment with her political tea−drinkings, and dances, and complimentary balls. You know something of her there, I guess ; and now she's corrupting the alphabet itself."

"Aunt, I detest politics, and you know I do!" answered the young lady; "I 'd rather, any day, walk down the sunny side of Hudson−street, than carry the state for our party!"

You see she has a party—ah! ah!—Now, Fanny, I shall expose some of your tricks. What do you think, Mr. Hopkins? This young lady, here, is so much of a demagogue, that though her own tastes run in favor of broad

laces and net−work gloves, she tramps, three times a week, the whole breadth of the city, and spends the morning in running up and down the stores in Division− street—you've seen them, the little, square shops, with a back entry and a glass door, and a green vine dangling against the fence, and a young lady with twisted ringlets sitting between the two?—there she goes—and with the aid of the two−and forty milliners of that street, gets up dresses and costumes to catch the cartmen's daughters and the young mechanics!—Now don't deny it, Fanny!"

During this narrative, Fanny glanced stealthily at Puffer, and blushed as deep a red as the silk she was at work upon. Before Puffer could enter upon a vindication of the young lady, which he fully meditated, the little old lady sprang up from her chair, ran into the corner of the room where a green shrub of some kind or other was vegetating in a blue tub, and called Puffer after her.

"Here's something great for you to look at, Mr. Hopkins;— what a stem—did you ever see such a stem to a seven months' tree?—What leaves!—The lemons are every bit as big as plums—they'll be twice as large this time, a year!" There was no limit to the eloquent praises poured out upon this domestic lemon; which was steadily exhibited to all visiters. This was Fanny's too—she had brought it up from a sprig. Then the old aunt—who seemed to have taken a sudden fancy to Puffer—caused a sampler to be unhooked from the wall, carried it to the light and expatiated upon it at equal length. Then she bustled to the door and whistled in a short−legged yellow dog, who stumped about the room, looking up in every body's face in the most comical fashion. He proved to be the property of Miss Fanny too; and his birth, parentage, history, and past exploits, (especially the incident of his drinking gin out of a bottle, in his infancy) were dwelt upon with edifying particularity. By the time the short−legged dog had finished the circuit of the company, a savour of supper began to creep through the key−hole of an adjacent folding door, and the aunt, breaking off her discourse abruptly, hoisted the window and shouted to Mr. Samuel Sammis that tea was ready. Having delivered this summons, she closed the window; but presently hoisted it again to say that he had better come at once. Mr. Sammis failing to appear as soon as she desired, she raised it a third time to suggest that he had forgotten they had short−cake! The appeal was not in vain—Mr. Sammis's soul was touched at last, and he came in with Mr. Fishblatt.

Mr. Samuel Sammis was a foxy−looking little gentleman, in drab pants and a weather−washed blue coat, his hair was thin, his linen questionable, and when he came forward to greet Puffer, his face was a cobweb of smiles.

"I'm very happy to see you, sir," he said; "I knew you well by reputation, although I hadn't had the honor to be personally acquainted. It's always a pleasure to become acquainted with gentlemen of tried patriotism, Mr. Fishblatt?"

Mr. Fishblatt assented to the postulate, and—the folding−door being cast open—they marched in to supper. The opening of the folding−door disclosed a table spread with a liberal variety of dishes, and steaming with a cloud of tea−smoke that hung aloft. The chairs were placed, and the company were about to take seats at random, when Mr. Sammis begged them to pause.

"This table," said Mr. Sammy Sammis, evolving a little piece of pleasantry which he had elaborated in secret, with great care; " This table," said he, " is the Empire State, with the various products of its soil. The chairs, of which you see there are eight, represent the eight senate districts or divisions. Aunt," addressing the old lady, "will you be good enough to sit for Dutchess and Orange—here, opposite the butter, for which Goshen, you know, is famous. Mr. Fishblatt, I'll send you up the river as far as wheat−growing Albany—there, that's it, abreast the short−cake. Mr. Hopkins, you're the member for New−York, and must take your place at the bottom of the table, and catch what you can from the river−counties as it comes down. Will you take charge of the salt−springs of Salina—I mean the salt−cellars," pointing two of the young ladies to chairs at the corners of the board ; "And you," motioning the third to a seat in the centre, "Miss Erie, famous for your fruits—have the region of the peaches and preserves. I'll take the Oneida sheep−farms under my care," settling into a chair opposite a plate of cold mutton. "And for you, Miss Fanny, who are always babbling and making a noise, there's the tea−board for you—the district of Trenton Falls ; you may pour the tea, but don't put *too* much water in it. You may begin as soon as you please."

They were all in their places; the dishes were passed rapidly from hand to hand, the tea poured—and they were fairly launched upon the meal. The weight of responsibility heaped upon them by Mr. Sammis, did not seem to have impaired their natural powers a jot; but each one— young ladies and all—fell to as though they were in reality so many great public characters, each eating for a county.

After a half hour's sturdy devotion to the products of the Empire State—as represented by the table—a pause sprung up, and Mr. Sammis availed himself of it for a little professional talk.

"Fanny, my dear," said Mr. Sammis, "How far have you got in your lettering of the banner?"

"The whole inscription," she answered. " `Bottomites— Uncompromising Friendship to the clearing of the Wabash.'—That was it?"

"How *could* you make such a mistake?" exclaimed Mr. Sammis, in a rapture of surprise. "It was `hostility,' not `friendship.' "

"I'm sure you told me `friendship,' father," retorted the young lady, "and to use the longest letters I could for the word."

"It was wrong, my dear," answered Mr. Sammis calmly; "Absence of mind—you'll alter it after tea, if you please."

The Bottomites had cried aloud in favor of the clearing as long as they thought it wouldn't pass; now that it had unexpectedly passed, they changed their cry. The re−lettering of the banner was the result of an elaborate conference of Messrs. Fishblatt and Sammis, at the HayScales.

"You think it all important," said Mr. Sammis, addressing Puffer after a pause, during which the business of the table had been diligently prosecuted; "You think it all important to carry our next state election?"

"Certainly!" responded Puffer.

"We must come down to Cayuga Bridge," proceeded Mr. Sammis, "with four thousand, or we are done for in the next presidential campaign. The river counties are all right, I am told; Dutchess gives us five hundred, and Albany county is safe for at least three hundred and seventy−five."

"How is the fourth ward of the Capitol?" asked Puffer, having in mind a political common−place which he was quite sure Mr. Sammy Sammis would quote upon him.

"We must have it!" averred Mr. Sammis, "as goes the fourth ward so goes Albany, and as goes the fourth ward so goes the State, you know."

"To be sure!" echoed Puffer, "and we must make what we can out of the Upper Wabash, at the first election that's held."

"By all means!" said Mr. Fishblatt, with enthusiasm, "we must rouse the popular mind with strong appeals; we must show them the enormity of the measure; point to the results, if the bill is allowed to pass into effect, to this city and State."

"Yes—and call upon them in the name of the lamented Decatur, to save the country from ruin!" added Mr. Sammis. "Decatur was a man of tried patriotism, I think?"

It was not easy to keep Puffer's mind to the subject: his eyes wandered constantly to the quarter where a certain young lady was seated: so that he was soon dropped out of the discourse, leaving Messrs. Sammis and Fishblatt to keep it up in their own way. Puffer's glances were not entirely unnoticed or unrewarded. Miss Fanny, too, had, somehow or other, grown pensive and uncommunicative with a marvellous coincidence as to time and circumstance. When they had returned to the sewing−room she exhibited to Puffer another flag on which she had wrought the words "*For Congress*," with a blank underneath for the name of the candidate.

"I wish I were allowed to fill it up," she said, looking at Puffer.

Puffer felt his heart beat quick, but did not venture to ask whose name it would bear. They seemed to understand each other better from that moment.

"My aunt was right," she continued after a pause, speaking now without reserve. "I put a constraint upon my feelings to please my father: you understand now what I said at the Ball! For my own part, and on my own account, I would rather lead a quiet life, aside from the bustle and face making of politics. Have you ever had such a feeling in your busy life?"

"Many and many a time!" answered Puffer, calling to mind his poor neighbor, and the gentle quietude of his little chamber. "The life that glides away, like the stream that clings to its bed, I sometimes think may be happier than if it had foamed, and brawled, and was broken in pieces in the clamor of a water−fall."

"And yet I don't deny," continued Miss Fanny Sammis, "that I would like to have my carriage, with one sleek horse, and ride through Broadway once a week. I would not care about it oftener."

"Come, Miss Fanny, we must have some music!" cried Mr. Sammy Sammis, stepping out upon the floor,

leading out one of the young ladies by the hand. "We have rested long enough—John, take a partner," to one of a swarm of young clerks that had come in after tea. "Mr. Fishblatt—aunt. Aunt—Mr. Fishblatt. Start up, William," to another of the young clerks—and to the last of them. "Mr. Jones, there's another young lady left— lead her out!"

Puffer had walked with Miss Fanny into the other room, where, in a recess behind the door, stood an old red piano. Miss Fanny ascended the stool, and Mr. Sammis cried out to his partners in the dance, "Now, recollect—it's the Northern and Western Districts"—his head was still running on the political divisions of the State. "It's Northern and Western against Eastern and Southern: the first couple that breaks down is in a minority, and incapable of taking partners for the next three dances. Strike up, Miss Fanny: the Governor's March, if you please."

Miss Fanny, with Puffer at her side, struck the first few notes with a bold hand, as Mr. Sammis desired—but presently, as in spite of herself, a gentler air crept upon the keys, and, instead of a cotillion, she was playing a pathetic ditty.

"Louder and livelier!" shouted Mr. Sammis. "We want the Governor's March—four thousand strong!"

She essayed the tune; but the notes came again softened from her fingers, and seemed sighing back to the words that Puffer breathed gently in her ear.

With constant remonstrances on the part of Mr. Sammy Sammis, who was dancing for the whole northern tier of counties (the six war−dancing tribes included,) and constant relapses on the part of Miss Fanny, the evening wore away.

At a late hour, Mr. Fishblatt, who, being a slow and solid dancer, had, to the surprise of all parties, carried the day, called for his hat; had Mr. Sammis aside in a whispered conversation, with occasional glances at Puffer, for a quarter of an hour; and, gallantly kissing the old aunt, summoned Puffer, and left.

Miss Fanny thought the travel of the stair−way so perilous, as to bring a light event to the very front door; what passed there between the dark−eyed young lady and the young politician, while Mr. Halsey Fishblatt stood in the street calling to him, remains a profound mystery. The spectacle—could he have looked upon it as an observer—would have doubtless seemed to Puffer infinitely more agreeable than that of the old aunt with her wrinkled visage inside of the dark−eyed young lady's hood. Marching arm in arm with Mr. Fishblatt, it is well known that Puffer put several pointed and searching questions to that gentleman, the answers to which were to the effect that Mr. Sammy Sammis was an incessant letter−writer to all parts of the state; a wire−puller and waker−up of counties and villages; that Miss Fanny was his only child, the old lady, his aunt, and Fanny's grand−aunt—and being an unincumbered woman, with a round sum out at interest, Fanny was her favorite. After procuring which results, Puffer fell silent, and although Mr. Fishblatt addressed him in several most elaborate and animated harangues, he kept on musing, till they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXXII. THE DEATH OF FOB.

It was all a cheat. The lustre in his eyes was false and treacherous as the glittering whirlpool; the bloom upon his cheek was of the hue of the rose with the canker at its heart. Fob was dying. Martha had procured a little lodging directly opposite his chamber, and there she stayed when driven from his bedside by the considerate poor neighbors, who saw how her strength was wasted in efforts to preserve his. Even on such nights as she was not allowed to be a watcher in his chamber, she would hover about the door and through the hall—a gentle spirit—eager to catch the slightest cry of pain, and taking keen note if he but turned in his couch. Spring had gone: Summer had come, and was ebbing fast, and, as its gentle breath died murmuring by the window of the little tailor, his pulses faltered more and more. At first he had been able to rise at times, and going to his dormer—that precious window of all the Fork—had cheered himself with the sight of the sun at its rising—the slow−lapsing motions of the vessels as they glided down the river. Now that he was stretched all day long upon his couch, he made Martha—a service she was skilful to perform—stand at the window, and report to him, day by day, all that passed. The little street−sights, the crowds that gathered about the blind flute−player, the color of the horses and carriages that went by, the shape of the country wagons that clattered into town, with guesses whence they came. But, most of all, he made her dwell upon the aspect of the country beyond the river: from her look−out she had followed the farmers through all their harvesting, from the first glance of the sickle among the grain to the garnering in the old red−roofed barns. She had told him— no more faithful chronicler than Martha—the color the fields had put on in all their changes, from green to brown, and back again to green; and how the woods grew bright and ruffled and swelled with their palmy leaves; and then when the yellow crept among them—but this she did not dwell on as the other, for Fob's heart fell when he heard that Summer, the sweet, calm, gentle Summer was leaving the country. She had watched his fancy, and served it even in bringing him cider to drink, pressed from the old orchards in Westchester, where his youth, and hers too for that, had climbed and frolicked. One day, he called to her to bring all his country treasures, his plants, his bird's egg chain, his asparagus, and the fair addition she had made herself, and lay them on his bed. Martha came and sate down at its head. As his look passed from one to the other, tears gathered in his eyes and fell, like the summer−rain, upon the pillow. His heart was full, and he began to babble of old times. He spoke of his youth, and asked Martha if she remembered how he used to come riding into the country, seated gravely on the coach−seat, high in the air, making a show of helping the driver with his horses. She did, of course she did; and how she, with her mother, now dead and gone, used to run and help him down. Then, there was the visit to the garden, to see her robin that she had been feeding sleek and plump all the latter spring and early summer against his coming. Then the black−berrying, and the grape−hunting, and the birdnesting.

So summer after summer had passed: his father—the cousin of Martha's father—had, to the surprise of all the country round, come by the will of their whimsical grandfather into ownership of the homestead, which Martha's, as the expectant and favored heir, had occupied before. Then, fortune turning once again, (a little law and a little doubtful practice helping her to turn,) Martha's father had reinstated himself. Fob—his father had died of vexation and a broken heart, it was said—young and pennyless, was pushed forth upon the world, was driven upon the unpropitious craft he had lately followed. Martha begged him, when he came to this, to pass it by—though her father had been her cruel jailer for years—to pass it by as he loved her. How dark and unnatural the little tailor's features grew as he came upon these recollections. He felt that his countenance was changed, and turned to the wall that Martha might not learn how keen was his sense of the wrong her father—her unkind, her unpaternal father— had done him. He had done her too a cruel wrong—but she showed by no change of look or color any remembrance of it whatever. When this cloud had passed, and he could speak again, Fob dwelt upon the old haunts he had visited while she was in her dark dungeon at home, how she had been with him in all.

"In the lane, the meadow, the orchard," said Fob, "I lingered, striving to tread in the very tracks we had made together when the world went right with us. But it was all by stealth—at early morning, or by the dull dusk; and in the indistinct light, how often, Martha, did you seem to me to be gliding about, pale and breathless, but still loving—paler than even now. As it was—cautious and secret as I could be in my watch, the laborers or boys of

the farm, crossing the paths on their way home at night or back at morning, sometimes came upon me, and started aside, as though I had been a spirit of evil."

"I knew that it must be so," answered Martha, "For these were days (it was when report of yourself, the strange wanderer, had reached my father's ear) when— they said my illness was deepening upon me—I was moved to an inner chamber, gloomier than the other, the curtains drawn close, the shutters sealed, and secretly nailed, too—for I heard the dull sound of the hammer— and light was shut from me as if it had been a wicked thing."

"Was that the result?" cried Fob, with a piteous look, "What a fool I was, to bring such hardship upon you."

"I do not say it was a hardship!" said Martha, "I loved the darkness they thrust upon me, deep and deadly as it was; it was full of voices and bright eyes, like your own, telling me of your love and faithful constancy. They said the darkness made me more cheerful—and they were right."

"And what followed to you," continued Fob, "when they seized me as I was stealing along under the garden wall?"

Fob stopped at once; the countenance of Martha was whitening with a look of sorrowful entreaty, and her eyes filling with tears. He understood it at a glance—she wished to have her father spared, though he had never thought of sparing her—and Fob turned at once to talk of other things.

"Do you remember the old orchard burying−ground," he asked, "and the uses to which we were wont to put it?"

"To be sure I do," answered Martha, recovering her composure. "The old burying−ground, full of fruit−trees, with the little school−house pushed in at one side, as if it meant to be a good neighbor. Toddling infants, dear Fob, we strayed there to gather blossoms and flowers, brighter than we could find any where else;—as we grew older and more learned, you know, we loved to read our letters there upon the tomb−stones; and older still, and wiser were we not?—we began to pluck the red and yellow apples—the earliest ripened of the neighborhood."

"And then," said Fob, taking up the theme as Martha paused, "when our hearts ripened, and our cheeks flushed like the fruit above us, we used to sit in the summer noon under the broad shade, leaning upon a grave, it might be; and while the country round, for a wide circuit, was steeped in a listening stillness, the little burying−ground— swarming with bees and crickets, and melodious locusts— was filled with a gentle murmur, which seemed like the undersong of the spirits that slept beneath its turf."

Martha bent above Fob, as he spoke, hanging upon his words. "And when," said Fob, rising in his couch in his enthusiasm, "the little brook between the school−house and the graves, swelled by its tributes from the woods, babbled above them all—the gentle hum died away towards night−fall, and the children came tumbling out of school, you know—they used to cross it, and letting their feet rest a moment on the graveyard's edge, they escaped into the road, and scampered to their homes, leaving a sound of cheerful young voices far behind. There—where little feet tread every day, so that they may say, `Fob lies here!'—lay me there!"

He had spoken beyond his strength; and these words were no sooner uttered than he fell back upon his couch. Martha seized his pale hand passionately—as though she could so hold him back from the world to which he was hastening—and bending above him, begged him to speak again. Presently his eyes opened, and he dwelt upon her face with a bewildered gaze. Was he among angles— this at his bedside the first he was to know? There was not a word spoken—but their eyes were busy interchanging their lustrous light—a calm, bright, spell−bound gaze—was this the talk of the spiritual world?

At this moment the door opened; a young gentleman of an ashen aspect, sandy hair, and a look of strenuous cunning about the eye, came in, and behind him, treading lightly, and with a mournful look, Puffer Hopkins.

The young gentleman bore under his arm a great bundle of papers, tied in a red string, which he was at the pains to carry about, to notify the public that he was a lawyer in practice—a good, brisk, chopping practice, as they might infer from the size of the bundle. While Puffer looked sorrowfully upon Martha and Fob, the young gentleman busied himself in slashing the feathers of a quill which he had brought with him, and in peering about the apartment for an inkstand.

"He's going fast," said the young gentleman, calling in his glances from their unproductive search, and fixing them upon the quill, which he was still trimming. "Did'nt he gasp, then, or was that a cat sneezing on the roof?"

Puffer avoided his question, and asked whether it was absolutely necessary to disturb him now; he seemed to be in great pain.

"To be sure it is," answered the young gentleman, poising his papers in his two hands to show their weight,

"You could'nt have a better. Testimony *in extremis* is the finest in the world. Mr. Mouldy says he must have it; and what Mouldy says is law!"

"Mr. Mouldy thinks he ought to be identified as the person that had the deed in possession, and who destroyed it? I so understood him."

"You understood him right, then," said the young gentleman, turning calmly on his heel as soon as he had made this answer, and breaking into a subdued whistling.

"You attended to getting the old man here, I believe?" suggested Puffer.

"I asked Mr. Mouldy about that before I left the office. One of the boys has gone for him; he will be here in a minute." With which answer the young gentleman stepped across the floor, and unfastening the blackbird from where it hung upon the beam, took it to the window, and began to make it hop about in its cage, by pricking it under the feathers with his quill. Puffer, standing aside, dwelt upon Fob and his pale companion, holding his breath lest he should disturb them. Quick feet, clattering up, were heard upon the stairs, and Hobbleshank came hurrying in; at first he started in surprise when he saw Martha, but recovering himself speedily, he stepped about the chamber, shaking hands with the young gentleman, then with Puffer, and, last of all, accosting Martha.

"This, then, is your friend," said he, smiling upon her. She glanced at Fob, with a look that went to the old man's heart, and he was answered. Fob lifted his eyes, and regarded Hobbleshank with curious interest. Was this another risen from the dead? Changed as he was by years, the furrows on his countenance ploughed in, his hair grizzled and grey−sprinkled by time—he could not mistake him. It was the old wanderer of the Scarsdale road. The melancholy midnight—the raging sea—the rent deed—all came up before him. A chair was placed for Hobbleshank, and he took his station by the bed−side, where Fob could look upon his countenance with the light streaming upon it. The young gentleman had drawn up the curtain; led Martha and Puffer aside, to get rid of their shadows upon the bed; and himself retreated behind a little screen at the head of the bed, from which bower there issued, from time to time, a scratching sound.

"You have had troubles, sir," said Fob, bearing in mind what he had seen on the memorable night.

"A few," answered Hobbleshank, rubbing his hands; "A few, but they are all clearing away. Have you had none?"

"Yours are older than mine," resumed Fob. "They have followed you to an old age; but they are leaving me while I am still a young man." Martha knew what he meant, and turned and wept. "You have been eighteen years a sufferer, at least."

"Let me see," said Hobbleshank, taking the square breast−pin from his bosom and referring to its back, which was graven and lettered. "Quite as long as that; but I'll soon be young again. Fortune is my friend, and all is coming right. An old parchment or so—a clue or two more—and I shall find my child, and have a home to bring him to. In a day or two all will be right."

They all smiled, the clerk even laughed aloud in his bower, at the earnest hopefulness of the old man.

"How a deed, all torn in fragments and parcels, can come back," said Fob, smiling with the others, "it would be hard to guess. Wont you admit that?"

"It seems so at first," answered Hobbleshank; "But a good providence, I am sure—I feel it whispering in my ear this very minute—is putting it together. It will be ready when I want it."

"And that is now," said Fob, reaching backward under his pillow. "And here it is."

Hobbleshank held in his hand the parchment he had scattered on the sea−shore a life−time ago. He would not believe it, but springing from his chair, ran to the window, where he would have read it, but his hands trembled and made it waver, all blurred and confused before him. He called Puffer to his aid, who going over it slowly line by line, made known its contents. When Puffer came to the passage relating to his child, he made him pause and read it over twice, looking up into the reader's face with a look of indescribable satisfaction. It was his old deed and no other.

"Where did this come from—where was it found—by whom?" asked Hobbleshank, looking toward the little tailor.

"Eighteen years ago," said Fob, as soon as Hobbleshank could be brought to take his seat again by the bed−side, "there was an old, sorrow−stricken man, travelling by the shore of the Sound. Eighteen years ago this deed was rent by his hands in a hundred fragments."

"Where—where is he now?" asked Hobbleshank, from whose mind all recollection of the occurrence—so fast had troubled thoughts and times huddled upon him— had entirely faded. "Where is this man?"

"You are the man; older, but happier it would seem— and I am the other, your fellow wanderer that night. Live and grow in happiness, while I pass beyond the sphere of earthly pain or pleasure. You are the man!"

His strength was utterly gone, and ere Martha could reach his side, he lay, his arms stretched out, his head fixed and rigid on the pillow. They all thought he was dead. In a little while—Martha ministering what she could to bring him back—a faint color came into his cheek, his eyes opened again upon the light; but now their expression was changed. They wandered from face to face with a hopeless and bewildered glance. His mind was gone astray. He babbled incoherently of the green fields— the old coach—the homestead; sometimes he repeated the name of Martha—then he had another upon his tongue, but shuddering, it died away before it was uttered.

Whenever his hands, straying about the covering of his bed, fell upon any one of his country treasures—he came back and talked of early times. News had spread throughout the Fork that Fob was dying, and they thronged up, and holding the little children in their hands—Fob had always been a friend of theirs—they stood at the door, looking on with sorrowful respect. At this moment the young gentleman came from behind the screen, pressed his quill upon his coat−skirt, and thrust the new paper he had been framing among the others in the bundle. He then scrutinized the deed curiously for a minute, and handing it to Hobbleshank advised him to roll it up and put it in his pocket; and clapping his bundle of papers under his arm, he walked off.

As the sun waned away in the sky, the brightness faded from Fob's look, and he spoke only at long intervals: murmuring what he would say, so that no one but Martha, whose face was always close to his, could gather what he uttered.

A little while after sunset—the room was growing dark in all its corners—he began to talk aloud again. He called, over and over again, for an old serving−man of the homestead, whose name he mentioned, to come to his side; fixed his look upon the poor blackbird, whose cage had been restored to its place upon the beam, and clasped tighter and tighter Martha's hand in his. With the gentle motion of the wind upon a field of autumn grain, his spirit stole away; and at an hour past sunset Fob was dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII. PUFFER IS NOMINATED TO THE AMERICAN CONGRESS.

It would be a great wrong to Puffer—colored as were all his acts by some hue of his trade—to suppose that the death of his poor neighbor had not touched him nearly. The genial spirit of the Fork was gone; the kindly sunshine which had flowed from that little dormer through all its chambers, was darkened. Puffer felt that a dear friend was dead. He would have helped, with other ready hands, to lay him in a quiet grave; but when he would have offered aid, the body—which Martha had watched alone, refusing, even angrily, all aid or company—was gone, no one could tell whither. It had been borne forth secretly at dusk; and one of the children, who had been out at play upon the Meadows, brought news that he had seen it upon the shoulders of two men, in the suburbs, gliding toward the country, with Martha watching and following it alone.

With the kindliest remembrance of his poor friend, Puffer was not permitted long to rest; the pressure from without forced upon him other thoughts. His fortunes were on the advance, and he would set apart a quiet hour, at some better day, to think of the little tailor and his virtues.

An unlucky accident at the Capitol required that an election should be held for a single member of Congress. The late city representative—the lamented Slocum, he was entitled in the newspapers—had lost his invaluable life under a surfeit of Potomac oysters and long speeches, and his place was now to be supplied. To carry on the contest with spirit, and any chance of success, it was necessary that an issue should be raised; it didn't matter greatly what or which side either espoused. The Upper Wabash presented itself, and was adopted. The excitement rose to an unexampled pitch. The orators of Puffer's party—the Bottomites—having mastered their cue— went all lengths in denouncing it as an infraction of the rights of citizens—an invasion of the Constitution—an act of the most high−handed despotism; and foremost and conspicuous among these was Puffer himself. He was the very embodiment of the Anti−Upper−Wabash feeling; and he was nominated to the vacancy. Was there ever a more extraordinary character known—in history ancient or modern, sacred or profane—than Puffer Hopkins, now that he was nominated to Congress on the eve of a decisive contest? The newspapers—morning, noon and night—teemed with his praises. Little, obscure, out−of−the−way circumstances in his history, were dragged forth and made the occasion of the most flattering comment and allusion.

Some one or other had discovered his habit of visiting the city cellars in quest of oysters; he was immediately styled the Patriot of the Pie−houses. He had caught, one afternoon, in company with a crew of political cronies, a small car−full of striped bass and Lafayette fish, in the East river, and was declared the Hero of Kipp's Bay. He had saved an omnibus−driver from being beaten to death by a crowd, for riding over the legs of a boy—and he was the Champion of Conveyance. His very head was taken off of his shoulders and put in plaster; delegations of tradesmen were constantly waiting upon him, or writing complimentary letters, humbly soliciting the honor of crowning him with a new hat, or arraying him in a clean dickey. The Bottomites—being staunch friends of free trade—insisted on clapping him in a coat of Thibet's wool, fancy pants of French jean, boots of Poughkeepsie leather, and a Panama hat, so that he should be a representative of the unrestricted fabrics of the four quarters of the earth.

On the other side, the illustrious Insurance President, Mr. Blinker, being a bitter foe to fire, and quite as close a friend to the opposite element, and having recovered his popularity in the interval since his defeat, by insuring two poor cartmen's sheds at his own risk, and adopting the son of a disabled sailor as one of the secretaries of the company, (though the young gentleman was as innocent of pot−hooks and ledgers as a Kamschatkan,) Mr. Blinker was nominated by the advocates of the Upper Wabash.

To carry out his principles, Mr. Blinker—having discovered that a second−hand senatorial coat and a green and white neck−cloth were not always triumphant—assumed a round−crowned hat, and a homespun coat and breeches of the plainest texture; in which array he went about diligently, drinking incessant glasses of gratuitous water at the grocers' in furtherance of his Upper Wabash principles.

He also proceeded to an active canvass of the churches by attending a new one every Sunday, and rattling in a donation of half a dollar at least, at each.

Puffer, not to be outdone by Mr. John Blinker, canvassed the markets in opposition to the churches; and having

drilled a small company of young vagabonds, he made a circuit of the market−places on Saturday nights with these— their rags flying to the wind, and an expression of doleful gratitude in their faces—running at his heels; Puffer keeping in the advance, and from time to time ordering a cutlet, or steak, or tender−loin to be cast in. This was so well enacted that he had not made a tour of the markets more than twice, before he had the butchers in tears, and swearing by liver−and−lights, their own tender−loins, and all that they hold holiest, that Puffer was an angel, with a heart as big as an ox.

Every thing gave token of a close and furious contest. Appeals, fresh and frequent, were made to every possible interest and every possible voter. It was shown conclusively, in more than one harangue, and a hundred leaders, that every trade and denomination in business—laity, clergy, law, medicine, merchandize—were particularly and vitally affected in the questions presented at the coming election. And, as the time drew nearer, a forcible address was made to that one voter in particular, by whose deportment, as is well known, the fate of every contest is determined. There was not a device for creating or securing electors that was not brought to bear; and the one party or the other was constantly startled into unheardof exertions by learning that its opposite was strengthening itself with fresh recruits from quarters that could have never been dreamed of.

There was one that toiled in Puffer's behalf more like a spirit than a man; a little shrunken figure, that was every where, for days before the canvass—an universal presence breathing in every ear the name of Puffer. There was not a tap−room that he did not haunt; no obscure alley into which he did not penetrate, and make its reeking atmosphere vocal with his praises. Wherever a group of talkers or citizens were gathered, the little old man glided in and dropped a word that might bear fruit at the ballot−box. At night−fall he would mix with crowds of ship−wright's prentices and laborers, and kindle their rugged hearts with the thought of the young candidate.

He stopped not with grown men and voters, but seizing moments when he could, he whispered the name in children's ears, that being borne to parents by gentle lips, it might be mixed with kindly recollections, and so be made triumphant.

It was given out that the Blinkerites had established or discovered, in some under−ground tenements that never saw light of day, a great warren of voters. When the toilsome old man learned of this burrow that was to be sprung against his favorite, he looked about for an equal mine, whence voters might be dug in scores, at a moment's notice, should occasion demand. With this in view, one afternoon he entered Water−street, at Peck Slip, like a skilful miner, as though a great shaft had been sunk just there.

And a strange climate it was that he was entering; one where the reek and soil are so thick and fertile, that they seem to breed endless flights of great white overcoats, and red−breasted shirts and flying blue trowsers, that swarm in the air, and fix, like so many bats, against the house−sides.

Tropical, too, for there's not a gaudy color, green or red or orange−yellow, that the sun, shining through the smoky atmosphere does not bring out upon the house−fronts; and for inhabitants of the region, there are countless broad−backed gentlemen, who, plucking from some one of the neighboring depositories a cloth roundabout, a black tarpaulin and white slops, sit in the doorways launching their cigars upon the street, or gather within.

Hobbleshank, a resident of the inland quarter of the city, certainly came upon these, with his frock and eye−glass, as a traveler and landsman from far in the interior; and when he first made his appearance in their thoroughfare, looking hard about with his single eye, it could not be cause of surprise that they wondered aloud, as he passed where the little old lubber had come from, and that more than one of them invited him to a drink of sheep's milk, or a collop of a young zebra, that one avowed they were chasing in the back yard for supper, at that moment.

But when, as he got accustomed to the place, he accosted them with a gentle voice, said a complimentary word for their sign−board, with its full−length sailor's lass— Hope upon her anchor, or sturdy Strength, standing square upon his pins, they began at once to have a fancy for the old man.

He passed from house to house, making friends in each. Sometimes he made his way into the bar−room, where, seated against the wall, on benches all around the sanded floor, with dusky bamboo−rods, alligator skins, outlandish eggs, and sea−weeds plucked among the Caribees or the Pacific islands, or some far−off shore—he would linger by the hour, listening with all the wondering patience of a child, to their ocean−talk. And when they were through, he would draw a homely similitude between their story—the perils their ship had crossed—with the good ship of state; and then tell them of a young friend of his, who was on trial before the ship's crew for a master's place. Before he left, in nine cases of ten, they gave their hands for Puffer, sometimes even rising and

confirming it with a cheer that shook the house, and brought their messmates thronging in from the neighborhood, when the story would be recited to them by a dozen voices, and new recruits to Puffer's side enrolled.

Then, again, he would be told of an old sick sailor in an upper chamber—tied there by racking pains in his joints, answering, they would say, each wrench to the trials his old ship's timbers were passing through on the voyage she was now out upon—and mounting up, he would find him busy in his painful leisure, building a seventy−six, razeed to the size of a cock−boat, for the landlord's mantle. Gaining upon him by degrees, Hobbleshank would sit at his side; and by−and−by, when he saw it would be kindly taken, gathering up a thread of twine or two, and helping to form a length of cable or rigging. By the time a dozen ropes were fashioned he would have a promise from the old sea−dog that he would show his teeth at the polls when roll−call came.

There were some, too, engaged in boisterous mirth and jollity in back−parlors, just behind the bar; where a plump little fellow, in his blue roundabout, duck trowsers supported by the hips, and tarpaulin hat, with a flying ribband that touched the floor, and shortened him in appearance by a foot, broke down in a hornpipe to the sound of an ancient fiddle, that broke down quite as fast as he did. In the enthusiasm that held him Hobbleshank even joined in, and with some comic motions and strange contortions of the visage, carried the day so well that he won the back−parlor's heart at once; and they promised him whatever he asked.

The little old man—true to the interest he had first shown—bent himself with such hearty good will to his task, that when, after many days' labor, he left Water−street at its other extremity, there was not a ripe old salt that was not gathered nor a tall young sailor that was not harvested for the cause. And so he pursued the task he had set to himself without faltering, without a moment's pause. For days before the contest came on, he was out at sunrise moving about wherever a vote could be found; nursing and maturing it for the polling−day, as a gardener would a tender plant; watching and tending many in out−of−the−way places, and by skilful discourse, a chance word, an apt story, ripening it against the time when it was to be gathered.

Late at night, when others, who might have been expected to be stirring and making interest for themselves, slumbered, Hobbleshank, taking his rounds through the city with the watchmen, with more than the pains of an industrious clear−starcher, smoothed the placards on the fences; jumping up where they were beyond his height, as was often the case, and brushing them down, both ways, with outspread hands, so that they should read plain and free to the simplest passer−by. Was there ever one that toiled so, with the faith and heart of an angel, in the dusty road that time−servers use to travel!

CHAPTER XXXIV. HE DINES WITH THE MAGISTRATES.

In the very midst of these silent labors of Hobbleshank, Puffer was at his desk meditating a letter from an imaginary constituent to himself, and had got as far as "To the Honorable Puffer Hopkins, M. C.," when there filed into his chamber three gentlemen, who, looking about for a moment and discovering that there were not chairs enough to hold them all, drew themselves up in a line and stood before him. Puffer, quite equal to the emergency, rose from his desk and faced his platoon of visiters. One of them, the head of the line, was a tall gentleman in a cigar−ash complexion, and a rough frock−coat, in the pockets of which he deposited his hands; the centre, a stout, rosy personage, whose head was propped up by a shirt−collar of alabaster purity and stiffness under his ears; and the other, a little black−haired man, with a large mouth, and arms of an extraordinary length. Mr. Hopkins inquired, delicately, into the object of their mission.

"We have come, sir," said the long−armed gentleman, reaching forth convulsively to the chair from which Puffer had risen, drawing it before him and fastening both hands firmly on its top; "We have come, sir, to express our respect for your past public career—our admiration of the unflinching fortitude with which you have adhered to objects"—

"Yes, sir—to objects," interposed the stout gentleman, cutting in as if he thought the long−armed man was getting more than his share; "Yes, sir—to objects of a profoundly patriotic character; and, sir, we feel the honor of being delegated to wait upon you for the purpose of testifying the interest with which your course has been watched, not only, sir," he pursued, thrusting his left hand into his coat and spreading it upon a ruffled bosom; "not only, sir, by the friends of good order and correct principles— of advanced age—but also"—

"By the rising generation;" continued the tall gentleman, groping earnestly in the bottom of his frock−coat pockets, and drawing himself up to his full height. "You will not be surprised, therefore, sir, to learn that we are authorized to ask you, in the name of the Common Council of New−York, to partake of a dinner with the magistrates of this city"—

"At the almshouse," said the long−armed gentleman, "this afternoon"—

"At five o'clock," said the stout speaker.

The three orators had put Puffer in possession of their errand, and he had a shrewd guess—as one of them was an alderman, and the others assistants—that this was one of those cases where a committee had been unable to agree upon a mouth−piece, and had compromised the difficulty by distributing the speech, as fairly as they could, in three parts.

The invitation was not to be slighted; and, having appointed to call for him at four, they filed out of the apartment in the same order in which they had entered. At four o'clock they re−appeared, coming up in a body to wait upon him to the carriage, as if determined that no one should enjoy a crumb of honor more than the other. The vehicle into which the party mounted was an old corporation hack, and the horses, having traveled this road any time for ten years past, jogged along at an easy gait, knowing well enough that an alderman does not like to be disturbed in his agreeable reveries on the way to dinner. Leaving the streets, in less than half an hour they were out upon the avenue, where, as they glided comfortably along, they were constantly passed by gentlemen in rough coats, just like the tall assistant's, who, bending over in light wagons, gave the rein to long−legged, dock−tailed horses, and emulated the speed of other gentlemen with long−legged nags and rough coats. Sometimes one passed, perched in the air upon an invisible axle resting between two huge wheels, and who held himself suspended, it seemed, by a constant miracle. Not more than fifty of these gentry had whirled by, tearing up the avenue, and losing themselves in clouds of dust in the distance, when the three aldermen, looking unanimously out of the coach−window, exclaimed in a breath, "Here we are!"

Puffer looked out too. A great gate opened silently from within; their carriage glided through, and rolling gently down a broad way, they found themselves at the East river's brink, shut out by thick walls from all the city world. The buildings that stood behind them, and with which they were fellow−prisoners in this silent realm, were dark and grey.

The air and place were tranquil as midnight, and in strange contrast with the incessant motions and shoutings of the busy road they had left. The old Alms−House, resting on the very water's edge, sate as silent as a stone; the

water, calm and smooth, seemed to stretch away before its dark old front, to furnish a glass in which it might view itself and learn how it bore its age. The sun poured a full afternoon into the yard—and, sitting in its very centre, his face against the river, in the porch of the building as they entered, was an old beggar, who, with a countenance of marble firmness, and locks white as the unhetcheled flax, seemed to be the image and god of the stillness that reigned about.

The moment they ascended a few steps and opened a door, a peal of laughter burst, like a cloud, upon the silence, in their very faces, and passing through the hall, they were in a room where the chief guests were assembled. In the centre of the group stood Mr. Gallipot, the mayor, in an entire new outfit, so ill−adjusted and disproportioned to his person, that there could not be a doubt but that it had seen Chatham−street in its infancy, and while it was growing into the dress of an adult mayor.

"How are you, Hopkins?" cried his honor from the midst of his guests; "Let's have you this way! Open the ring, Jenkins—stand back there, Tom Smith;" and, falling away as they were bidden, Mr. Gallipot came forward and seized Puffer cordially by the hand. Messrs. Jenkins and Tom Smith—two noted bottle−holders of the mayor's—offered him as hearty a welcome, with others, the chief politicians of the city, who were there; and a short fellow, in a poor−house grey roundabout and poor−house cut hair, coming in and giving the summons, they marched across the hall to dinner. The table was spread in a large square room, with delicious windows upon the river, and under the auspices of a stout gentleman, who hung in a great frame upon the wall, and gave warrant—having been a noted haunter of the room in his life−time—of the good cheer that there abounded.

There was no quarrel for precedence; the mayor, with Puffer at his right hand, seized the head of the table; the others fell into chairs, whose locality they seemed to have pitched upon long before, and, seated once, they filled them so happily, one might have sworn they were born, each man, for the particular windsor or rush−bottom he occupied. The three stickling committee−men, even, had adjusted matters, the stout one sitting at the foot of the table, in its centre, and each of the other two at his wings. And when, speedily and in solemn order, the dishes began to appear, as one after the other came in at the head of the apartment, a whole galaxy of eyes rolled that way and fixed upon them with a lingering fondness that would have moved the soul of a pagan.

And now that the table was full, Puffer was not a little surprised—but quite as well pleased—to see his old friend Hobbleshank handsomely laid between a couple of aldermen, with whom he seemed to have a good understanding, at the other end.

Imperfect and obscure is the experience of any one who has not eaten a poor−house dinner. The highest happiness allotted to man—at least in his imperfect and sinful state of existence as a New−Yorker—it would seem, is to dine at the old Alms−House. Jupiter, restored to earth, would make his first call there; and there Bacchus, if allowed, would undoubtedly bespeak lodgings for the rest of his immortality.

For two weeks, in anticipation of the present banquet, the garden had been hoed and harrowed and forced; the neighboring river had been anxiously searched for certain delicate fish that were known to lurk in the rocks, holding themselves in reserve for an alderman, for an equal fortnight; and two sharp−eyed paupers had been off on an excursion up the Sound, in watch for duck and pigeon. Nothing could be more perfect, more delicious and grateful, than the dinner spread upon the board; and nothing more artful and ingenious than the arrangement of the diners. The cooks and servants of the establishment, moved by a sure instinct—most of the guests were habitual frequenters of the place—seasoned each dish to a turn, and each gentleman was now found seated directly opposite whatever a well−practised appetite most earnestly coveted. For better than an hour, a silence profound as death reigned through the hall. The waiters, in their poor−house livery, and licking their chaps, moved about on tip−toe; it would have cost them their standing as paupers to have broken the charm by a word. Dishes were brought in and removed, in a mysterious stealth, which lent a piquancy to the proceeding; and the very feeders themselves, absorbed in the sacred rites of the place, only ventured now and then to look off, for a minute, and smile to each other, and then started afresh.

This at an end—wine was brought in, a basket at a time, and being placed near his honor the mayor, he proceeded to uncork, but so unskilfully, it seems, that the corks took a blank range down the table, and, what was singular, they always fell into a line that caused them to strike, dead−point, the sconce of a little quid−nunc, who was said to be a butt of the mayor's. Then the bottles were distributed down the table, one to each man—which,

being planted upon the board, stood there, a sort of tipsy nine−pin, to be bowled down by the evening's mirth. When it was known that every glass was loaded to the brim, Mr. Gallipot sprang to his feet; every eye was fixed upon him with intense anxiety, and when he announced, "Our Country," they started in like manner to their feet and fell upon their wine with such patriotic ardor, that no one could have in the least suspected that country or its institutions of being in any way the bottom and main supply of the present festivities. But when Mr. Callipot followed this with "The Public Charities," a faint surmise might have dawned on the beholder's mind, that the enthusiasm was real, and that they meant all they did when they drank a bumper to these excellent corporate contrivances for such as are an hungered and athirst. And when, further on, his honor, allowing scarce a breath between, followed this up with, "Our distinguished guest and next member—Puffer Hopkins"—a fearful tempest swept the table from end to end; and one or two of the lighter quid−nuncs were even lifted from their feet, and landing upon the table, shook the glasses and bottles till they danced with them with joy.

They felt grateful to Puffer for furnishing them so plausible an opportunity to investigate the economy of so excellent a city charity. Puffer was bound, of course, to respond to these admirable sentiments.

Really, (this was the train of his observations) he never felt so oppressed in his life in rising to speak; he was surrounded by kind and generous friends. He was their creature—they had taken him a poor friendless youth and made him what he was. Little had he dreamed when making his first humble effort at Fogfire Hall of attaining an honor like this. If any one had told him the time would arrive when he should partake of canvass−back and champagne with his honor, the mayor, and the common council of New−York, at the almshouse, he would have laughed at their folly. Canvass−back and champagne!—they might as well have talked to him of a steam carriage to Chimborazo, or a balloon−ride to the first fixed−star!

While Puffer was speaking, one or two of the inmates of the place were drawn to the door, and as he advanced in his speech, and looked off in that direction by way of illustration or gesture, he observed that two of them had fixed their attention keenly upon him himself. One of them was a woman, of a stout person, into whose face some color was creeping through easy living and good fare, and the other a man, thin and sorrowful of look.

By the time he was done speaking, one of the poor−house attendants had touched Hobbleshank upon the shoulder, and he now helped to make the group that gathered in the door−way.

When Hobbleshank and the woman met, it was, as their looks told, as those who have been parted for years—between whom some mighty secret is kept, and who have some great trouble in common. They talked earnestly together—the woman and the forlorn−looking pauper asserting something over and over again, it seemed, to which the old man would not yield, nor would he altogether withhold, belief.

The diners were meanwhile fairly embarked—the stream of mirth was full: as it flowed up and down the board it sometimes attained a rapid head, carrying all before it, in a general glee; or paused in little eddies and islets of drinkers, where it tarried and circled round and round within itself. There was one, a roaring whirlpool of jockeys from the Avenue, who with loud jokes and broad gusts of anecdote, kept up a constant pother where they sat; then, farther on, there was a more quiet fry of ex−sheriffs—fine, rosy fellows—hanging and jumping of the rope are your healthiest exercises, it would seem— and then, in a stormier latitude, a shoal of aldermen, who kept up in their drink windy discussions without end. Among these, Puffer, as the jollity grew apace, was called down from his station near Mr. Gallipot; and it brought him within ear−shot of the group in the passage, who had watched him so strangely in his speech. They were still there—their heads close together, Hobbleshank's central and busiest of all—and they still turned from time to time in their talk, and regarded Puffer with the same strange gaze. Whatever Puffer, with an ear sharpened by a curiosity he could not control, caught, was so straggling and disjointed, that it conveyed to his mind no distinct impression of their purpose. Their conference seemed at length, at an end.

"I think as you do;" he heard Hobbleshank whispering to the others, looking from the woman to the stranger, and then towards himself; "I thought so from the first; but I have been too often mistaken—I could not bear to be wrong again—it would kill me, Hetty; let us be cautious."

He muttered something in a broken and earnest tone— Puffer could see his lips grow pale and quiver as he spoke—and leaving them, he hurried up the room and took the place at the table among the friends he had left.

There was no pause in the mirth of the magistrates and their guests; fresh baskets were broached every minute— a tipsy song roared out—and the adults there present attached themselves to the long−necked flasks, as

if they had been brought there to be nursed on claret and champagne at the city charge. It was a relief to Puffer to hear what passed among the nurslings in their probation. Obliquely from him up the table, an arm's−length or two, there were a couple whose nursing seemed to try the constitution to an alarming pitch; and instead of being benefitted in any degree by the dark spirit with whom they held so many close and earnest conferences, they always got back from the interview less robust in person and demeanor than ever.

"You know well enough, Bill—that I o'rt to have that— place if any—chap has it," said one of them, a fine, large, sturdy−looking fellow for a nursling, speaking slowly, out of respect to the understanding of his friend. "D—n it, Bill, dep'ty street inspector—its chalk for cheese—for one what's done what—what—what"

His chin knocked upon his breast, and he kept asking himself for five minutes or more, what it was.

"I'm the man that's got up twelve public meetings in the course of a humble life," said the other at the top of his voice, and looking around to call the attention of the company: "Carried banners in five processions; pallbearer to the late devoted alderman Smith; you know me, Mr. Gallipot? Did you ever know a more ardent friend of his country than William Scraggs?—Who'll sign this 'ere roll for Billy Scraggs?" and Mr. Scraggs produced from his breast−pocket a soiled scroll, which he unfurled across the table, and holding an end in his hand, he tumbled into the same slumber that had already engulphed his rival.

After an interval of half an hour they wakened, one getting the advantage of the other by not more than a minute, and renewed the dispute for the inspectorship; and after a brief and slightly confused statement of their claims, they lapsed back again into their dreams. There was no abatement in the spirit of the alms−house dinner. Even till midnight, speeches were made by aldermen and laymen and ex−sheriffs; healths—sometimes of individuals, sometimes a broadside of the table against broadside— were drained, and Puffer, finding that a sadness had crept upon him, out of all harmony with their mirth, quietly withdrew, leaving his three committee−men on their feet together, and at an advanced stage of champagne, delivering speeches against each other; and his honor, the mayor, with his bottle−holders squeezing lemons vehemently at each side of him, brewing a drink for which he was famous.

In the open air, he found the door−way and high steps thronged with paupers, who had kept themselves from bed that they might listen to the uproar and jollification of their masters. "It was such precious fun," one of them said, "to see the copporation feeding its copporation—and getting high on taxes and brown bread." Puffer thought he had escaped unobserved, but as he entered the carriage he found Hobbleshank at his side, asking to bear him company.

"To be sure," answered Puffer, "I would rather ride back with one like you than the three I came up with."

The old man smiled, but was silent, and this silence he maintained till they were half down the city; and when he began to speak, Puffer observed that his discourse was not of that in which either had an interest, but of remote and indifferent things; like one unwilling to speak of that which is nearest his heart, and who trifles in this way lest he betray himself.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE TRIAL OF MR. FYLER CLOSE.

Two months from the burning of Close's Row, a large−nosed man with brandy−colored cheeks was busy, at early morning, locking the Hall gates, when a small old man shambled up, and holding on at the outside, accosted him.

"Does the trial come on to−day?" he asked.

"To be sure it does," answered the other, looking up; "Didn't you know that? A man with a augur−hole for an eye might see that. Look at them wagons over there," pointing with a key through the bars, into Chatham−street. "When you see 'em taking in pies at that rate in them shops, there's a capital offence coming on up stairs. Them shop−keepers is growing blessed rich on murders and hommysides—the Oyer and Terminer demand for pies sells 'em out twice a day while the court sits."

"How did he sleep last night?" asked the old man. He did not mention him by name, but the other knew that he meant the prisoner.

"Oh, beautiful, sir—very beautiful, sir!" answered the large−nosed gate−fastener. "We haint had a lovelier prisoner sin' Johnson's day."

An inexpressible spasm convulsed the countenance of the questioner, which, being busy at the lock, the officer did not observe.

"No dreams?" resumed the old man, holding hard upon the bars. "Wasn't he troubled a little in his sleep, sir?"

He watched the answer with a breathless look.

"Not a bit of it; not as much as 'ud stir a eye−lash; I was in the passage by his cell the better part of the night, and his breath comed and went like a infant's."

The old man's features fell; he had evidently expected a different report. The gates were by this time all fastened close and sure—the gate−fastener hurried away, clattering his keys—and going round where an opening was left for passers in and out, the old man went in. Climbing the winding stairs, he proceeded along the upper passage, and took his station by the court−room door, where he hoped the prisoner would pass. For a long time he stood there alone, starting at every sound that broke through the Hall. By and by they began to come in, one by one, and cluster about the door; and by ten o'clock the passages were all filled. Presently blacktopped staves were seen bobbing up and down in the press, and forcing their way, with much jostling and an occasional oath, the officers reached the door, and thrusting the crowd back, held them in check till the door was unbarred from within.

The crowd poured in in a flood−tide, bearing the officers every now and then from their post at the door, into the very centre of the court−room. In less than a quarter of an hour the room was overflowed, crowded in every corner, all the seats back from the rail to the ceiling—all the passages—and some stood perched in the window−seats and about the cornices, holding on by what they could. The prisoner was already at the table inside of the bar; he had been got in by a private stairs; and when the first rush of the crowd broke in, he started in his chair and looked wildly round, supposing, for the moment, they had been let in to tear him in pieces.

He soon recovered himself, and turning his seat about, watched them as they came in one by one. Among the first to enter was the small old man, upon whom, from the first moment, Fyler fixed his eye, and turning from time to time, watched him in the crowd. Was that man abroad yet? his look seemed to say. Fyler thought he had driven his plans so keenly, that he must have been by this time clean out of his wits, and pent up in some cell of madmen or other.

Presently the judge entered—a long, withered man, with a face as dry and yellow as a mummy, and a shrub of dusty−looking hair, standing off from his crown in every direction. Fyler looked up into his face as he passed, and smiled; the judge, without taking the slightest heed of the prisoner, proceeded to his place upon the bench, where he busied himself with a newspaper. In a couple of minutes more he was followed by a large red−cheeked man in a predominant shirt−collar, and a supple, small man, who, bestowing themselves upon chairs on either side of his honor, looked as judicial and dignified as a pair of weazel−eyes and a highly−starched shirt collar would allow them. The court was in session; and order being demanded by the presiding judge, there was for five minutes an incessant running to and fro of officers through every part of the court room, crying "hats off," and waking up

every echo that had slept over night in the angles and cobwebs of the chamber. One rushed into the outer passage shouting "silence" with such vehemence that one might have supposed he was calling, in his distraction, for a personal friend instead of a genius or spirit with which he was on such doubtful terms of understanding. The court was duly opened by proclamation, and at the judge's bidding a crier of the court, a white−haired old fellow, began turning a wheel, and drawing ballots on which were written the names of the persons summoned for the present trial.

One by one, as they were summoned, they emerged from the crowd and were sworn. Some had read the newspapers, and couldn't sit on the jury without hanging the prisoner. One had a theory about heads which would compel him to acquit the prisoner; and another a theory about faces which would oblige him to convict. There was a keeper of a livery−stable that never knew a man nor a horse with such an eye as the prisoner's, that wasn't vicious. More than a hundred were dismissed in this way. At last, by dint of baffling the point, and hunting scruples in at a needle's point, and out at an eyelet−hole, they succeeded in obtaining twelve men, who, though they read the newspapers, didn't believe a word of them; who knew the facts of the case, but hadn't formed an opinion; and who, though they had conscientious doubts about hanging in any case, thought they could string a man up if the law positively required it.

The case was called—the prisoner was arraigned—and being helped to his feet by two officers at his side, was asked for his plea.

"I'm a ruined man, sir!" answered Fyler, looking wildly around; "and I 'd like to have a pint of beer!"

Saying which, he knocked his head through his hat, and winked out at the top, at the judge, with all his might.

"I see how it is;" said the judge, coolly; "remove his hat, officer—go on, Mr. District Attorney."

The district attorney—who was for all the world, just such another looking person as the judge, cut down two sizes, that is, he was as dry, as hard featured and thinhaired, but not so tall by a head—pulled down his waistcoat and opened the case.

The crime of arson was a dreadful crime; it had prevailed to an alarming extent in this community, and he called upon the jury in that box to say whether a stop should be put to it or not. Was there a more dreadful crime conceivable, gentlemen of the jury, than the one with which the prisoner at the bar was charged? Who was safe in this community if such things were allowed? Fire—that terrible element whose wing scathed wherever it swept; (he detected in the jury−box a Presbyterian gentleman who smiled at this allusion, and he worked it out at great length.) Fire—the accredited agent of omnipotenee in balancing accounts with the world; the element by which temples, and palaces, and warehouses were to be all wrapped into everlasting nothingness. He would be able to show the circumstances under which the buildings in question, (he meant Close's Row) were fired; that it was an act of cool, fiendish, and black−hearted villany. That it had been premeditated for a long time, and that a moment had been chosen to put it in execution when a terrible loss of life must have ensued. He would show that jury that the prisoner at the bar was inspired by the spirit of a fiend; and had acted true to the spirit by which he was inspired. It was to be seen whether this community would countenance such a spirit. He sat down, and the moment he struck the seat called out for J. Q. R. Sloat.

Mr. J. Q. R. Sloat thereupon stepped forward, and proved to be a gentleman with staring eyes, a pair of thick−set whiskers, and extraordinary coolness of deportment. He took the witness's stand, and, sucking his teeth sonorously, was sworn.

"You are an officer of police, Mr. Sloat?" said the district attorney.

"I am, sir," answered Mr. Sloat.

"What do you know of the firing of the buildings called Close's Row, on the 19th of June last?"

"I was a−walking about that time, at nine o'clock in the evening," answered Mr. Sloat, coaxing his whiskers with his hand, and addressing himself to the jury, "along Madison−street, in company with officer Smutch, when we brushed by a man in a grey over−coat. `Smutch,' says I, when we had passed him a step or two, `I smell brimstone!' `So do I,' says Smutch, putting his fingers to his nose; and here let me say, gentlemen of the jury, there isn't a more indefatigable officer"—

"Never mind that," interrupted the attorney for the prisoner; "you needn't puff the police—we all know what they are!" And the prisoner's attorney smiled knowingly upon the jury.

"As I was saying when I was interfered with," resumed Mr. Sloat, rather impertinently; "`It's that man in the grey over−coat,' says I, `and we'll track him.' The smell was strong upon him, and as Smutch and I's both quick of

scent, it wasn't much to do that. The grey over−coat turned a corner, and went into an alley in Scammel−street. Smutch and I followed. There the grey over−coat got down into an area—crept into a window—which was too small for Smutch and I to go in at—and we saw nothing more till there was a blaze in the middle of the floor, and the grey over−coat along side of it, feeding it with shavings out of a basket."

"Well, sir," said the judge, hurrying him along, "you waited till the person came out, and then seized him."

"No, sir—begging your honor's pardon—no such thing," answered the heavy−whiskered witness, bristling up; "`Smutch,' says I, `we'll walk away for an hour, and then be hack and see what comes of this.' Smutch said, `by all means;' and we went off to a porter−house and played a couple of games of dominoes—and then walked back quietly, so as to come upon the prisoner unawares."

"Did you now arrest the person?" asked the judge sharply.

"We did not, sir," answered the officer: "But as luck would have it, when we got back there was a grand blaze of light; the buildings was all in flames. `The best thing that could have happened,' said Smutch to me, `for now we'll be able to catch the prisoner when we see him.' `You're right,' says I, `and there he goes!' A man at that minute went by the alley, and run down Scammel−street at the top of his speed. `Now for it!' I cries to Smutch, and we started off. We run him pretty keen around four blocks, and got him at last into an enginehouse."

"Well, sir, you took him prisoner?" said the judge again.

"No, sir, it was a watchman running to give the alarm," rejoined the witness. "But we chased two or three other men in the course of the night, on suspicion; when luck would have it, we thought of going back to the fire."

"Where you took the prisoner, I believe?" said the district attorney,

"Not quite yet, sir; there we saw the prisoner, and there we watched him, on suspicion; and seeing what I did, I felt justified, at last, in taking him into custody. He tried gammon some, but Smutch and I was too much for him. I takes no credit to myself," concluded the witness, turning to the judge. "Please your honor, it was Smutch that planned the whole thing. If it hadn't been for that indefatigable man"—But he was cut short again.

The attorney for Fyler was a square−built man, with iron−grey locks, a determined eye and look, and sate confronting the witness through his evidence, with his coat−cuffs rolled back.

"Now, sir," said he, leaving his seat and taking a place where he could put his face close to the witness; "Do you mean to say that a police officer has sufficient knowledge of law to know how to arrest a criminal in a case of arson? answer on your oath!"

"Police officers know some things as well as other folks," he replied, looking about the court to the constables on duty, for approval.

"Now tell me, sir—didn't the prisoner tell you at the time of his arrest that he was Barabbas, King of the Jews?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir—and didn't he tell you that his mother was Mary Scott, the clear−starcher in Republican Alley?"

"He did."

"And you knew his name was Close. One more question; Didn't he, when you seized him, order your arm to wither?"

"Yes, sir, he did, but I thought"—

"Never mind what you thought—you forgot to mention these rather material circumstances: That'll do!"

Mr. Smutch being next called upon the stand, corroborated Mr. Sloat, with a single exception; he said it was owing to Mr. Sloat's unparalleled exertions and ingenuity that the prisoner was arrested, and not to himself.

During the testimony of these witnesses Fyler was restless and uneasy, constantly murmuring to himself; putting on and taking off his dilapidated hat, and dancing his feet upon the floor. Having at length drawn the attention of the court upon him, the judge asked whether there was not some way to restrain the prisoner. Fyler's counsel answered that he believed there was a young man in court who was familiar with his ways, and who might perhaps be able to pacify him. Whereupon Ishmael Small being summoned, came forward from behind a pillar, whence he had watched the proceedings of Fyler with unbounded delight.

"Do you know this man?" said the judge.

"A little, sir," answered Ishmael, scraping the floor with his foot, and waving his crape−bound hat. Ishmael always wore a weed in public; it was more respectable, and made the public sympathize with him as a bereaved young gentleman.

"Can you mention any thing to make him quiet?"

"Nothin'll make him comfortable," answered Mr. Small, with the air of an oracle, for the eyes of the whole court room were upon him—"but givin' him a small bag of gold to look at, containin' about five hundred dollars."

A small bag of gold was accordingly sent for at a neighboring broker's, in the name of the Oyer and Terminer; and being brought in was set down in front of Fyler.

"You'll have to shake it, sir," added Ishmael, appealing to the court, "to satisfy him it's the full sum."

An officer was directed to put him at rest on that point; as soon as he was assured it contained honest metal to the proper amount, he fixed his eyes upon the black brand on the outside of the bag, and was quiet.

The cobbler, one of the tenants of the Row, was called to the stand. He set out in his testimony, with a protest against the organization of the court—avowed a hostility to all courts, and forms of law—against all proceedings, officers, sheriffs, and appurtenances of law—and was at last brought to admit, which was the git of his evidence, that with his wife, he was in Close's Row on the evening it was fired.'

The lightning−maker proved a much more exuberant and productive witness. He expatiated upon the domestic comforts he had enjoyed; shed tears when he spoke of his two children and his lame wife; and concluded by saying he was never more taken aback in his life, except once, and that was when Commodore Decatur was struck in the pit of his stomach with a couple of quarts of lightning, off Algiers. When called upon, in his cross−examination, to explain this incident in Decatur's career, he stated that it occurred at the theatre, by mistake, when Mr. Smirk, an intemperate gentleman, performed the part of the Commodore.

Two or three other tenants of the Row were brought forward, who showed that they were at home in the Row when the fire occurred—and the district attorney, raising his voice, said—"We rest!"

Springing from his chair at this summons, counsellor Blast unslipped the knot of his tape−tied bundle of papers, and dashed them sideways with his hand so that they spread out over the table. Confirming the backward roll of his coat−cuffs, and dotting the floor with a discharge of tobacco pellets, he addressed the jury, in a manner peculiar to himself; sometimes starting forward with doubled fists, as if it were his purpose to challenge the twelve respectable gentlemen before him to a personal encounter, and sometimes ranging up and down their front discharging a broadside of invective into the jury−box as be passed.

He had never risen, he said, under so great a sense of embarrassment in his life, as in the present case. His client, the prisoner at the bar—a poor, friendless old man—looked to him as his last hope, the final wall and barrier between himself and the grave that yawned for him. It had never been his fortune to present to a court and jury, a case like this one, so full of all that appealed to the noblest sympathies of our nature. They beheld before them, in the prisoner at the bar, a melancholy case—one of the most melancholy he had ever known—of mania in a subdued form. The unfortunate prisoner was *non compos mentis*, as he meant to show, at the time of the alleged crime; and they now saw in him a wreck of what he had been.

Fyler Close, gentlemen, the prisoner at the bar, was once blessed with peace, and health, and competence like you; but now what is he?—Behold for yourselves! (Fyler was busy eating the end of a pipe−stem which had been handed to him by his counsel before he rose to open the case.) His faculties are all in disorder—his eye has lost its lustre—in a word, reason has left its throne. By a series of misfortunes, gentlemen, which it is out of the power of the best of us to foresee and guard against, this unfortunate prisoner has been deprived of all he possessed— and at one time it was considerable. It was not necessary to go into the particulars of this loss; it was enough to say he stood before them that day pleading in behalf of a starving, a penniless, and a houseless lunatic. And how was this lunacy brought on? Why, gentlemen, as you have doubtless anticipated me, by the peculiar state of his pecuniary affairs. It was four weeks and four days, as they would show by competent testimony, from the commission of the alleged act of firing, since the belief first entered the mind of the prisoner, that he, the prisoner, was an angel of light. We will show you, gentlemen, that he acted up to the belief; and we will show you further, that he, the prisoner, was of the opinion that when he had served out a brief apprenticeship of four weeks and four days, as a rag−picker—being all this time an angel of light—he would become a regularly licensed angel of Fire, empowered and authorized to burn buildings and kindle conflagrations wherever he chose, throughout the city of New−York. It does not appear that his patent extended beyond that. And now, gentlemen, continued the learned counsel, raising his voice after a visit to his papers at the table; and now, gentlemen, how is this borne out? Why, gentlemen, by the most incontrovertible proofs that all his habits were regulated on this belief; that he conformed as far as it is in sinful man to conform, (this was for the Presbyterian juror, in offset to the prosecuting attorney's

appeal,) to his angelic calling. He had from that time forward led the life of a pure spirit in all his private acts, serving out only his probation as a rag−picker. If he succeeded in showing this—if he succeeded, as he believed he would, in proving that the insane belief had taken entire possession of the prisoner's mind— how much soever it might conflict with the policy and interests of insurers, increasing the risk, as it did, of fires; howmuch soever it put to the blush the religious portion of the community, who had had in this poor, aged rag−picker an example of true and beautiful humility; he was sure of their verdict.

Mr. Clerk, call Ishmael Small.

Counsellor Blast retreated to his chair, and Ishmael, emerging from a knot of officers with whom he had been conferring, passed Fyler, casting a mournful look upon him as he went by, and appeared in the witness' stand, with his crape−wreathed hat upon his head.

The Clerk presented the Bible, and hinted a removal of the hat.

"Conscientious scruples, your honor," said Ishmael, looking toward the judge, and laying his right hand upon his breast. "The 'Pocryphal—give me the 'Pocryphal."

It being found, on investigation, that the Apocryphal books were not included in the court version, Mr. Small consented to compromise matters by spreading his palm upon the blank pages between the Testaments, and was sworn.

"Be good enough to tell the court and jury, Mr. Small," said Fyler's counsel, "what you know of the belief that has got possession of this unfortunate prisoner's mind?— When did you first begin to observe symptoms of his malady?"

"I'm inclined to think," answered Ishmael, "it's a long time since he thought he was a angel of light, but it's only lately—about four weeks and four days before the fire, as you mentioned in that eloquent openin' of yours—since he took up the business regularly."

"He seemed to consider himself a sort of angel a long time ago—did he?"

"He did, sir, judgin' by his conduct," continued Mr. Small. "He seemed to despise all sorts of plain food— and as for roast beef and baked 'taters, the very smell of the family dishes from the baker's down stairs, almost drove him mad."

"How was it about fire and clothing?"

"Worse and worse. To see how he'ud sit in that room o' his in the sharp, blowy nights, countin' the bare bricks in the fire−place, one would ha' thought there never was such a angel for standing low temp'ratures; and as for clothing, he thought flannels was invented by a man out o' work. He was a great advocate, when he was himself, for cut−down shoes and round−jackets. That was Mr. Close's model for a well−dressed angel."

"Did Mr. Close ever assume such a dress himself?"

"He did, sir, when he began to turn out as a rag−picker. He was to be a rag−picker four weeks and four days, and then he was to be a angel of fire."

"That will do, Mr. Small," said counsellor Blast; "you may go down."

"Stop a minute," cried the prosecutor, as Ishmael was stepping from the stand. "Do you say, sir—recollect you are in a court of justice"—

"I do, sir," interrupted Ishmael, "and I feel a veneration for that plaster−head over there, that I can't express."

The audience turned in a body towards the nondescript bust fixed in a niche of the opposite wall, and laughed. The court ordered silence; the officers shouted silence; and an echo, to the same effect, came from the niche where the cast in plaster stood—and the district attorney put his question directly—

"Do you say that this prisoner's conduct has been, since the time you speak of, that of an angel?"

"Not havin' the pleasure of a personal acquaintance in that sphere of life," answered Ishmael, "I wouldn't say."

"I will ask you," continued the district attorney, "if you don't know that he was in the habit of taking heavy usury on money which he loaned?"

"If he did take twenty or thirty per cent. from a seedy feller, now and then, he learned it from a church−member that he knew—and he was the most angel−like gentleman that ever come to see him. The church−member used to tell Fyler he felt the cherrybins wings a−fanning him."

"Then you consider the prisoner an angel—do you?"

"All things considered," answered Ishmael, pondering and turning his hat in his hands, "I do. If there ever was

a angel on earth, he was one."

"It's a lie—he was a thumping villain!" cried a voice in the crowd.

The court started to their feet; the lawyers sprang up and turned around; the officers ran to and fro, shaking their staves, and on the look−out for the offender—there was an universal commotion.

"Bring that man up!" shouted the chief judge. The officers echoed the order from one to the other; every eye was hunting for the culprit—yet he was not found.

The prisoner knew the voice well, and would have named the peace−breaker if he had dared. It was the little old man who had been the first at the Hall−gates in the morning. After a while the excitement subsided, and they resumed business.

"I'd like to have that gentleman as a witness," said the state's attorney to a brother counsellor, in a whisper, and then to Ishmael, who was withdrawing from the stand—"Are you related, in any way, to the prisoner, Mr. Small?"

"I call him uncle, sir, sometimes," answered Ishmael, falling stupid, suddenly, at the question; "I'd call you uncle, sir, if you'd let me."

"Has it ever been suggested to you, that there's a family likeness between you and the prisoner?"

"A family likeness," exclaimed Ishmael, "between me, a sinful eater of cutlets, and that pure−minded old gentleman that lives on fresh air and sea−biscuit! Don't mention sich a thing again, sir—you hurt my feelings!"

"I see how it is," said the district attorney; "you may go down, sir."

Ishmael touched his hat to the judge, and making a graceful bow to the court−room generally, descended to common life, and resumed his post as an observer, as before.

The next that appeared in behalf of the defence, was a sharp−eyed little man, (the dealer in crockery, whom Fyler had foreseen as a witness,) who hopped upon the stand, and was very uneasy till he was sworn; a rite which he seemed to enjoy.

"You know the prisoner, I believe," suggested Fyler's counsel.

"I do, sir," answered the crockery−dealer, fastening upon the rail before him with both hands, and jerking his body back and forth as he delivered his testimony. "His name is Fyler Close, he lives in Pell−street, up one pair of stairs; there's a bakery underneath with a back−yard, there's a cistern in the yard, but the water isn't good; that's owing to pigeon−houses in the next street—there isn't a finer collection of pigeons in the city, however— the owner's a potter−baker in Doyer−street, a large man with a wen on his nose"—

"Stop—stop!" cried Mr. District Attorney Pudlin, as he would have done to a runaway horse; "You must come a little nearer the case. We don't want Long−worth's Directory."

"Be good enough to tell the court," resumed counsellor Blast, "what you know of an aberration of mind on the part of the prisoner. Answer directly, if you please."

"I will answer directly," said the crockery−dealer, "and I know this much—I was standing in my shop−door, if the court please, in the month of June last, looking about me, as is my custom, when about two blocks off I saw"—

"Two blocks?" interrupted the district attorney.

"Yes, sir, two blocks," retorted the crockery−dealer rather angrily; "I saw a man engaged—he was about five feet high, a little under perhaps—the sun was setting up the street, and I saw his face was as pale as a white china dinner−set; he had on a blue roundabout, a broad straw hat, and he was running backward and forward in the gutters, at a terrible rate, stooping down and raising up like whalebone. `I see how it is,' said I to myself; `Judging by the rate at which he's at work, that's an insane rag−picker.' Presently he works his way down directly opposite my shop—I keep in Division−street, gentlemen of the jury, No. 19½, china−ware, earthern−ware and every thing, of the first quality—and by that time his basket was brim−full and running over the top of the handle, and I saw it was the prisoner at the bar."

"Well, sir—was there any thing peculiar in his look at that time?" asked the judge.

"There was, sir—he looked sideways out of both eyes at once. I saw the mania was coming on him strong, for he began to fumble with his jacket−buttons, and whistled for an invisible dog."

"What was the dog's name, sir—perhaps you'll be good enough to give us that," said the prosecuting attorney, looking at the jury and then at the witness.

"He didn't whistle it quite slow enough to make it out," answered the omniscient dealer in crockery; "but as soon as he whistled, and the dog didn't come, I know he dashed his basket upon the ground, and running

backwards first, came back to the basket again with such a supernatural leap as I shall never see again while I live. And this he kept doing till it was broad dark, and when I went in to strengthen myself with a cup of tea and a piece of toast, (I like my toast done brown, please your honor,) against the shock of such a pitiful sight, leaving my shopboy to keep an eye on it. When I got back the basket was gone, the prisoner at the bar was gone, and when I came to question the boy, I found out"—

"That will do, sir," interrupted the district attorney, bringing him to a dead pause; "We don't want to know what your boy said or what your boy saw. Now, sir, if your friends can spare you I'll put a question or two to you."

"He's your witness, sir," said counsellor Blast, waiving his hand over the table.

"Now, sir, you say you judged the prisoner to be insane from the rate at which he was picking rags into his basket when you first saw him. How fast would that be, sir?"

"Why, sir," rejoined the witness, not taken by surprise in the least; "A sane man might pick a ton a day."

"Then an insane one would pick a ton and a quarter, perhaps?"

"No, I don't think that would be conclusive of his insanity— a ton and a half might."

"Will you be good enough to account for the remarkable observation you have made: How do *you* explain it," smiling to the jury.

"Why, sir, if the court will pardon me, I should say it was owing to an increased nervous vitality in the fingers"—

"You needn't go any further," interrupted counsellor Blast; "we are done with you, and much obliged. We have a medical gentleman here, Mr. District Attorney, who will perhaps be able to put your mind at ease on that point. Will Dr. Mash be good enough to take the stand?"

At this request, a stout gentleman in a red face, a red camlet wrapper, as much overrun with frogs as the land of Egypt itself, and bearing in his hand a burly cane with an ivory head, came forward, and climbing into the witness' station, propped himself with both hands upon the cane, and looked steadily at Fyler's counsel in waiting for a question. He was evidently loaded to the very mouth.

"Dr. Mash is so well known, I will not put the usual questions as to how long he has practiced, &c.," said Fyler's counsel; "will you be good enough to oblige the court, Dr. Mash, with a definition of insanity?"

"Insanity, I would say, sir," answered the doctor swelling, till he strained his very red−camlet coat fastenings, with professional pride; "insanity, I would say, sir, is a general looseness, or incoherence of ideas, brought on by the over−action of the brain. For instance"—

"Ah," interposed Fyler's counsel with deference; "you will favor the court by giving an example."

"I will, sir," rejoined the doctor; "for instance: if the district attorney, there, should become so engrossed in his duties as a public officer, as to put the fines he collects into his own pocket, instead of carrying them to the city treasury; that would be a case of limited mania, or partial insanity."

There was a general laugh at this view of the case.

"That would be an example of looseness of ideas brought on by over−action of the brain, would it?" asked counsellor Blast, grinning; "How would that apply to the case of the prisoner?"

"Very clearly, sir," answered the doctor; "the sudden loss of fortune fixing the mind upon one point constantly— that of the loss in question—would exhaust the recuperative powers of the other faculties; and the consequence would be, that in a very short time the brain would go by the board."

"Have you had opportunities of observing the deportment of the prisoner before to−day?"

"I have, sir; and I am decidedly of opinion, as I was then, that he is disordered in reason. I have seen him in the public streets, and such were my convictions as a professional man, that I thought the public safety required that he should be lodged in an asylum."

"That's all, Dr. Mash."

"Stop a minute, sir," cried Mr. Attorney Pudlin; "Perhaps you will be good enough to tell us who first called your attention to the lunacy of the prisoner?"

"I think it was the young gentleman on the stand this morning," answered the doctor.

"You think?—You *know* it was, Dr. Mash," pursued the district attorney; "and now tell me, sir, hadn't you a suspicion all along, that this was a got up thing between the prisoner and that young gentleman?"

"Not the slightest," said the learned doctor. "He seemed to be a benevolent young person, who meant well by

the community—and I gave him a certificate of prisoner's lunacy."

At this there was a general laugh through the court−room; every body that had seen Ishmael seemed to be pretty thoroughly satisfied that he was badly treated when he was called a philanthropist.

"You did, eh?" said the district attorney; "then the sheep was wronged that was killed to furnish your diploma: we are done with you—you are not wanted any more."

Dr. Mash went down, clinging to his came in his vexation till the sweat poured from his brow.

"As it may be as well to set the jury right on this question of insanity, I'd like to put a question or two to Dr. Parsley if he is in court," said Mr. Attorney Pudlin.

Dr. Parsley, being called, came forward briskly: he was a little bald−headed man with glasses, and a nose as red and shining as a cherry. He hopped into the witness' stand smartly—and having his coat buttoned, and a slight shrub of hair brushed away from either side of his head to give him a more formidable appearance—he stood ready for questioning.

"Dr. Parsley, will you be good enough to give the court your definition of insanity?" asked the District Attorney.

"With pleasure," answered the bald−headed Doctor, speaking up: "Insanity, according to my notion, is a general concentration, not a looseness, of ideas superinduced by the apathy or imperfect action of the rest of the brain."

"Do you think the prisoner insane from what you have heard?"

"I do not, sir."

"Will you be good enough to tell the court and jury, Dr. Parsley, why you think the prisoner *not* insane?"

"I will, sir, with great pleasure," answered the Doctor. "It appears, from a part of the testimony, that the prisoner, in his supposed attacks of the disease, jumped backward and forward over a basket. It does not appear that he ever jumped into the basket. Now, insane men—as far as my observation extends, and it has been by no means limited—always jump into a basket when they get a chance."

"He is your witness," said the District Attorney.

"One question only, Doctor. How does that agree with your definition," asked counsellor Blast.

"Well enough—in this way, sir. If his mind had been concentrated, or overtasked to an insane degree, he *must* have jumped into the basket."

The case was now mainly closed, and a clerk of the Phoenix Company being called, only to show that the buildings in question belonged to Fyler Close, and had been insured for a handsome sum in that Company, rather more in fact than their real value; the court suggested that it was ready to hear the summing up of the prisoner's counsel. The plea for Fyler was brief:—he was an old man; he had lost his all; he was before them a melancholy spectacle of dethroned reason; a verdict of "Guilty" would be a judicial murder; and he appealed to them as humane men—men having grandfathers and old uncles, to deal to the prisoner justice tempered with mercy.

The district attorney—hoisting and lowering his waistcoat incessantly, in the intensity of his eloquence—followed at greater length.

He had proved the arson beyond all question: the prisoner's counsel had yielded that point: and now, as for the insanity, he regarded it as a fetch from beginning to end—there were certain eccentricities in the prisoner to be sure, but not more than an old apple woman exhibited every day in the year. There was cunning, he was inclined to think, mixed with the prisoner's madness. Did you observe, gentlemen, in opening this case, how silent the prisoner was when his own counsel was before you? and yet when I addressed you, you recollect, he was as busy as he could well be crushing his teeth and kicking the table in the legs. You can draw your own inference from that, gentlemen. I had expected to prove that the young gentleman, who appeared on the stand, was more nearly connected with the prisoner by ties of blood than he was willing to admit? that a corrupt understanding existed between them in relation to the circumstances of the present case, there could be no reasonable doubt. I have now done my duty, gentlemen of the jury, as prosecuting officer, and it only remains for you as good citizens to do yours.

Calling an officer to him, and whispering him to bring a tumbler of brown stout, by the private stairs, and place it in the folds of the ermine—the red curtain behind him— to be ready when he was through, the long judge rose from his chair, drawing himself out, joint by joint, and proceeded to charge the jury. As the sole object of the long judge seemed to be to wrap the case up in a swathing of words and generalities, to prevent its taking cold, it

would be impossible to do him any thing like justice in a report. The result was, that after he had been on his legs better than two hours, when the clock numbered towards midnight, the jury—all abroad as to the facts, the law and the equity—were put in charge of an officer and led off through a door into a small, dusty, cobwebbed, candle−lighted room, where they were locked in, in company with a small square table, to meditate upon the case.

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE JURY−ROOM.

For the first few minutes after they entered the jury−room, not a word was spoken; they sate around the square table, which just held twelve, with their heads toward the centre, watching each other's faces sharply for the first glimpse of a verdict.

A spider's thread fell from the ceiling and hung dangling above the table, bearing a fly struggling at its end.

"Guilty or not guilty, gentlemen?" said the foreman, a close−shaven, blue−faced man, with glittering eyes, glancing round the board as he put the question, by way of breaking ground.

"Guilty, for one," answered a fat citizen on his right hand, sweeping the struggling fly into his hat which he produced suddenly from behind his chair. "We must have an example, gentlemen. The last three capital indictments got off, and now it's the sheriff's turn for a pull. We must have an example."

"Three for breeders and the fourth to the bull−ring," spoke up a gentleman with a deep chest and brawny arms. "That's the rule at the slaughter−house. We always follow it—and so I say guilty, if the rest's agreeable."

But the rest were not agreeable, and they launched into an elaborate and comprehensive discussion of the case, led on by a high−cheeked gentleman in a white−neck−cloth, who begged to ask whether any one there was prepared to say whether angels could, under any circumstances, become rag−pickers? That was the gist of the case. There might be angels of fire—he had heard an excellent discourse on that subject in the Brick church— and that would account for the prisoner's burning the buildings. He had been rather pleased with the district attorney's calling Fyler Close the demon of that element; but then would it be in character for a demon to go about with a basket and a hooked stick? He couldn't see into it just yet—he would like to hear the opinion of the other gentlemen of the jury on that point.

"It is n't always easy to tell them insane chaps at first sight," pursued another, a short juror, who, resting his elbows upon the table, looked out from between them with flat face and saucer eyes, fading far away in his head, like the hero of a country sign−board. "There was one of 'em got into our house in Orchard−street one day, and when he was caught, he was at work on a stun' lemon with his teeth like vengeance. Now, that was insanity at first view, but when we come to find his pockets full of silver−spoons and table−knives, that was *compos mentis* and the light of reason."

"How many stun' lemons would you have a feller eat, I'd like to know," retorted the deep−chested member, "to make it out a reg'lar case?"

"One full−grown 'd satisfy me," answered the sign−board, "other gentlemen might require more."

The Board was unanimous on this point, one would be enough.

"I'd have you take notice of one thing, gentlemen," said a thin little man, starting in at this moment from a corner of the table, with a nose like a tack, and eyes like a couple of small gimlet−holes. "There was a point in the testimony of that Sloat—the police−officer—that's very important, and what's better, it escaped the district attorney, and the prisoner's counsel, and the very judge on the bench. Now, I want your attention, gentlemen. You will recollect that Sloat testifies to a man in a grey over−coat going into an alley in Scammel−street, and getting into the basement of Close's Row. That was the incendiary, no one doubts that. Very good. And then Sloat goes a little further, and says he was gone long enough to play a couple of games of dominoes; and when he gets back, he says, a man went by the alley—mark that—went by the alley and down Scammel−street. That wasn't the incendiary, was it? By no means, gentlemen; where was he then all this time? I'll tell you"—he drew his breath hard, and turned quite pale as he looked around. "It's my opinion, gentlemen, the incendiary was roasted alive in the basement of them buildings."

There was a shudder through the jury−room: the jurors turned about to each other, and said, "Who would have thought of that?" and it was admitted on all hands to be a very plausible and acute conjecture and well−worthy of the gentleman in the eyelets and tack−shaped nose.

"It can't be," said the fat citizen, balancing his hat in his two hands, and looking sternly at the fly in the bottom of the crown. "If you could only make that out, we might let this prisoner at the bar off. I can't believe he was so nicely caught. No, no—if that had been the case, somebody would have found the bones done brown and a pair of

shoe−buckles. Don't give way, I beg you, gentlemen, to the pleasing illusion."

And so saying, he knocked his hat upon his head and smothered the fly.

"I have great faith in that China−ware witness," said the gentleman in the sign−board face. "He was right in that observation of his: a man out of his wits always talks to people a couple o' hundred miles off and whistles for a invisible dog. I had a cousin, gentlemen of the jury, that went mad as he was coming through this ere Park one day; he was a boat−captain, and was a comin' from his sloop, and he asked the Liberty−Goddess, a top of the hall, to take snuff with him. On re−considerin', I think Fyler Close's is a case of lunat−ics."

Two or three other jurors thought as much.

"That mug of beer satisfied me," said one.

"Would he ha' sp'ilt a new hat that his counsel had bought to give him a respectable first appearance in court with do ye think, Bill," said another, appealing to the last speaker, "If his head hadn't a been turned clean round. It's a gone nine−pin, that head o' his?"

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, you must excuse *me* a few minutes, if you please," said a stout, rugged, hard−headed gentleman, with heavy eye−brows, rising at one end of the table, and thrusting back his skirts with both hands. "This is a great moral question, whether the prisoner shall be hung or not. Am I right?" "You are!" "You are!" from several voices at the upper end of the table. "A great moral question, I say: and its owing to a great moral accident that I am with you this day, for if if I hadn't eaten too many tom−cods for my supper last night, I should have been off in the seven o'clock boat this morning, to the anniversary of the Moral Reform at Philadelphia. Now the community looks to us for action in this case. If this man escapes, who can be hung? Where's the safety for life and property if we can't hang a man now and then? Hanging's the moral lever of the world, and when the world's grown rotten by laying too much on one side, why, we hang a man and all comes right again. If we don't hang Fyler Close he'll hang us—morally, I mean."

This was a director in a fire company, who had smuggled himself upon the jury, by giving out that he was a gentleman, and blinded Fyler's counsel, by hinting that he was doubtful of the policy of hanging; what he said produced a sensation in the jury−room. The twelve judges began to put it to themselves, some of them, whether premiums wouldn't go up if this house−burner escaped; others, that New−York might be burned to a cinder if this was'nt put a stop to somehow or other (There had been a brilliant and well−sustained series of fires for better than a twelve−month;) and others, that as he had failed to turn his insanity to the best account by hanging himself, they would take it off his hands and attend to it—as he was a decrepid old gentleman—for him.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said the foreman at this stage of feeling; "I think this is a clear case for the sheriff. The prisoner is an old man; he has no friends—not a relation in the world, one of the witnesses said; he's lost his property—and as for his wits, you see what they're worth. Now the next candidate that comes along may be a fine black−haired, rosy young fellow, who may have tickled a man with a sword−cane, or something of that sort, with a number of interesting sisters, an aged mother, and a crowd of afflicted connexions. You see what a plight we would be in if we should happen to be drawn on that jury. Are you agreed, gentlemen?"

There was not a little laying of heads together; discussion in couples, triplets, and quadruplets; and in the course of two hours more they were agreed, and rose to call the officer to marshal them into court.

"Stop a minute, gentlemen, if you please," said the fat citizen; "this is a capital case, you will recollect— and it wouldn't be decent to go in under five hours."

"He's right," said the foreman; "and you may do what you choose for an hour."

Two of the jury withdrew to a bench at the side of the room, where, standing close to the wall, one of them planting his foot upon the bench, and bending forward, entered upon a whispered interview. Two more remained at the table; while the others grouped themselves in a window looking forth upon the Park at the rear of the hall, and amused themselves by watching a crowd that had gathered there, under a lamp, and who began making signs and motions to them as soon as they showed themselves. The most constant occupation of the crowd seemed to be passing a finger about the neck and then jerking it up as though pulling at a string, with a clicking sound, which, when once or twice they lifted the window, and as it seemed the most popular and prevailing sound, could be distinctly heard.

"This is the luckiest thing that could have happened in the world," said one of the two jurors that had taken to the wall—the gentleman in the sharp nose and weazel−eyes— addressing himself to the deep−chested juror with

brawny arms, who was the other; "I wanted to speak to you about that black−spotted heifer, and this is just the chance."

"You couldn't speak on a more agreeable subject," retorted the deep−chested gentleman; "but you mustn't expect me to take off the filing of a copper from the price; what I asks at Bull's Head this morning, I asks now."

"I know your way," rejoined the other; "you never come down even the value of a glass of beer to bind the bargain; but it wasn't that—what grass was she fatted on?"

"Short blue," answered the deep−chested gentleman, firmly.

"Any salt meadow near?" asked the other.

"Not more than twenty acres," responded the deep−chested juror, with the air of a gentleman carrying all before him; "and swimmin' a healthy run o' water a rod wide give the critter a belly−full any time."

"Two years old the next full−moon?—and a cross of the Durham in her, I think?"

"Not a cross of the Durham, I tell you," answered the deep−chested gentleman, raising his voice a little, "but the Westchester bottom, and hasn't known a dry day, nor a parched blade, since she was calved."

"No Durham blood? I'm sorry for that," said the sharp−nosed gentleman; "If you could throw me in that lamb I took a fancy to, we would close."

"Throw you in the lamb? That's a good one," cried the deep−chested gentleman, bursting into a laugh of scorn. "Why, I wouldn't throw you in the singeing of that lamb's wool. Only five and twenty for the prettiest heifer that ever hoofed it down the Third Avenue—and throw you in a lamb! That *is* a good one!" And he burst into another scornful laugh.

"Well, well," said the sharp−nosed gentleman, soothing him with a prompt compliance. "Drive her down to my stable as soon as the verdict's in."—

Meanwhile the two that remained at the table were employed.

"Have you got that ere box in your pocket, Bill?" said one of them, a personage with a smoth clean face, from which all the blood would seem to have been dried by the blazing gas−lights under which he was accustomed to spend his time.

"To be sure I have," answered the other, a gentleman of a similar cast of countenance, but a trifle stouter. "Did you ever catch Slickey Bill a−travelling without his tools?" He produced a well−worn dice−box from his coat, and began rattling. "What shall it be?"

"The highest cast, `guilty,' " said the other, "and three blanks shall let him go clear. That 'll do—wont it?"

"Jist as good as the best. It's your first throw."

The other took the box in hand, gave it a hoarse, rumbling shake—three fours. The other shook it sharply—two blanks.

"Guilty by —," they both said together.

They then indulged themselves with a variety of fancy throws, as to the state of the weather—the winning−horse at the next Beacon course—whether the recorder (a gentleman in whom they felt a special interest,) would die first or be turned off the bench by the Legislature. Every now and then they came back to the case of the prisoner, and—what was singular—the result was always the same.

The Hall−clock struck three—the legitimate five hours were up—and the jurors gathered again around the table.

"Gentlemen, are we agreed?" asked the foreman.

"We are!" answered the jury.

"Yes, and what's queer, we've been trying it with dice, and every time it's turned out three twelves agin the prisoner; so the result's right, any way you can fix it—isn't it so, Bill?"

"Exactly!" answered the gentleman appealed to. The officer was summoned, and putting himself at their head, they marched into the court−room with the air of men who deserved well of the newspapers for their moral firmness; and who, at the sacrifice of their own feelings, were rendering a great service to the community.

The court−room was nearly a blank. The judge and the two aldermen had waited with exemplary patience the deliberations of the jury, and were now in their places to hear the result. Fyler's counsel, with a clerk, was there also; and the district attorney, the clerk of the court, and two or three officers and underlings, loitering about. The prisoner himself sate at his table, a little pale, it seemed in the uncertain light, but unmoved.

The crowd of spectators had dwindled as the clock struck ten—eleven—twelve. Mr. Ishmael Small, after

tarrying an hour or two, had gone out with the others, and disposed of his leisure in playing a new game of ball, of his own devising, in the west side of the Park, with a crew of printer's boys from the neighboring offices.

In the whole outer court−room, there was but a single spectator, the little old man that had been the first at the Hall−gates in the morning, who looked on, leaning against a remote column, at the judges, who, from that distance, seemed, in the dusky shade of the unsnuffed candles standing about them, like spectres, gradually fading into the red curtain that hung at their back.

"Mr. Clerk, call the jury!" said the chief judge in a voice, which great usage on the trial and the incidents of the place made to sound sepulchral.

The jury was called, man by man.

"Arraign the prisoner!" in the same unearthly and startling voice.

The prisoner was arraigned.

"What say you, gentlemen of the jury—Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"Guilty!"

Fyler started for a moment, but instantly recovering himself, smiled vacantly upon the judge and jury, and began whistling, as described by the crockery−dealer. The little old man clasped his hands firmly together, and breathed an earnest thanksgiving from the dusky corner where he stood alone. In a few minutes it got abroad that the prisoner was convicted—a shout shook the air without, and presently a crowd rushed in that filled the Hall afresh. The prisoner was to be taken out by the private way, but the little old man was not to be cheated this time. He had urged himself through the press, and stood against the lintel of the door through which he must pass. In a few minutes he came along—when Fyler saw who it was that watched his steps, he glared upon him. Hobbleshank gazed after him as he passed away to his doom, with a look of unrevengeful triumph.

CHAPTER XXXVII. MR. CLOSE'S LAST SPECULATION.

In the Tombs' prison, where he lay under sentence of death, Fyler Close maintained, as far as the limits of his cell allowed, the same sports and humours he had practised in the open air. The turnkey, who had charge of this range of cells, whenever he looked in or brought his food, never failed to come upon him in the very ecstacy of a new device or gambol. This was in the day when Fyler would place himself in the middle of the floor, and sit, huddling his limbs together, gathering the sun—that streamed in at the window of the cell at certain hours—in his outspread hands like so much fire. But with the night he crept into a corner, and stood shivering and driving off with the self−same hands, shapes that swarmed thicker than the sun−beams by day. He cursed the darkness; it was no friend of his. The very first night he had lain there after the trial he got into the corner furthest from the door, and while he crouched there, the jurors glided across the floor, one by one, and whispered in his ears, "Guilty"—then after them the judge, with the same word in his mouth—then the haberdasher, the poor blacksmith, Hobbleshank, and whoever else he had dealt with, and muttering the word so that it hissed in his ear, passed away.

One night the two lamps that light the prison−yard at the rear, and lend a ray or two to the condemned cells, went out; and Fyler, vexed beyond measure, dashed his hands against the door, and shouted for Light—Light! They left him alone, supposing it was some new freak, until he fell down in his agony, and was found in the morning pale and trembling, his eyes starting from his head, and his hair bristling up. The keepers wondered what he had seen to stamp such a horror in his look. With the day he recovered his strength, and tried his gambols afresh. It was the second morning after this that the turnkey entered his cell, and placed his food before him, standing aside while he despatched it if he choose. This officer was square and heavy in his frame; but with one of his lower limbs so far beyond the other in the length that he had the appearance, as he came along the gallery, swinging his long arms, and stretching it out before him, of working a great wheel the revolutions of which drove him on. He stood against the door, his long limb planted before him like a table, and on this he rested his elbow, and regarded Fyler, who made it a part of his scheme, to devour such food as was set before him, with the ravening eagerness of a wolf.

"I suppose you're aware the hanging comes off next Friday?" said the turnkey, by way of sharpening his appetite.

"That's a capital idea!" answered Fyler Close, looking up from his meal, "I hope I'll have flitters and fresh biscuit for breakfast that morning: Whose to be hung, eh?—"

"You are the queerest chap!" pursued the turnkey, slapping his long leg with his knuckles. "Why, next Friday's you're day—you own it and can do jist what you please with it till twelve o'clock. It's only a half apple, after all. Next Friday's got no afternoon to you, old chap. Now, between ourselves, aint you afeard to die?"

This interrogatory moved Mr. Close's mirthful feelings greatly: he rose from his bench, tossed his knife and fork high in the air—and marching to the basket that had brought his food, and which was at the turnkey's side, he cast in the great blue plate from which he had eaten, as if it had been a huge coin, and said: "There, sir—there's two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the bread and steak." He broke into a dance which extended through the cell, and occasionally included his bed, upon which he mounted, by way of interlude.

The turnkey was answered: he gathered the basket under his arm—turned for a look at Fyler, shaking his head—and locking the door, set his wheel in motion and moved away.

A week only. Fyler began, in his mind, to see the gallows−tree rising in the yard. Instead of sleeping now, as he had done all along, with some comfort, he spent the better part of the night, standing upon his bed, which he had drawn there, stretching himself up, his whole length, and gazing through the narrow window of his cell, to catch a sight of men moving in the yard below, or the stars, or the line of dusky light that rose beyond the prison−wall, where men were free, and walked the streets unchained. A week only. The chance of a commission to inquire into his madness, with a hope of which he had toiled so hard and long in his freaks, seemed fading fast and leaving him manacled more than ever. One trial more and he would fix his mind. The next day when the turnkey came in he took him apart, as though there had been a great crowd listening to catch every word that

dropped, and in a mysterious whisper made known that he had great news for the keeper, and begged him to be brought at once. The turnkey turned about and stared at Fyler, but not knowing what there might be in his wish, went away and presently came back announcing that the keeper was at hand. This was no sooner made known than Fyler, standing out upon the floor, and fixing his hand, bent up after the fashion of a born, began blowing furious blasts. The keeper was a stout personage, with an inquiring nose, and dark brows; he stood in the door, filling it to a hair, and looking doubtfully at Fyler, asked what this meant?

"That's what he calls his Final Trump," answered the turnkey; "he was blowing trumpets all last night."

When he had blown not less than forty peals, Fyler came down his cell, and taking the keeper by the collar, led him into the middle, and turned him about so that he faced a blanket pinned against the wall. Having provided him with this eligible point of view, he pulled down the blanket and disclosed a great number of rude figures, sketched upon the stone in chalk.

"What's all this?" asked the keeper, again.

"You know he's a angel of fire, sir, as was shown at the Oyer," answered the turnkey; "and these is his victims!"

On a closer inspection, one of them was found to resemble not a little the long judge; there was another, a little shambling figure with one eye out, and another, heavybrowed, and solid of port as he could be made to appear in rude chalk. This the turnkey thought was a juror who had pressed matters against Fyler at the trial. They were all scarcely more than scrambling lines upon the wall; about them was a great pother of shrubby marks and scratches—this was the fire.

"Well, sir," said the keeper to Fyler, when he had studied the lines a while; "What are you going to do with these gentlemen—with this one for instance?" pointing to the long judge.

"He's in for a couple of hundred years, only," answered Fyler; "but it's a slow fire, and it'll roast him tender before his time's out."

"You don't give a juryman as much as a judge?" asked the keeper.

Fyler feigned to be all abroad for an answer till the question was renewed by the turnkey, when it appeared that he had allotted to the juror for special reasons, a fire that was to last three hundred and twenty−five years and a day.

But the fire seemed by all odds to rage hottest in the neighborhood of the little figure with the single eye; he seemed to have never tired of piling on the fuel, and as far as chalk could represent, it was all a live coal. At first Fyler said that was to burn a week—then he added a year—then a hundred years—and so kept on extending his term, till the keeper, out of all patience, broke away.

"A clear lunacy case as ever was!" said the turnkey, appealing to the keeper with deference.

"Hold your tongue!" rejoined the keeper; "there will be no more lunacy cases. The governor was gammoned in the last case. Wearing spectacles without glasses and eating sticks for beef steaks wont go any longer. Lock the door and come along!"

Fyler pondered on what fell from the keeper. Another rivet held his prison door—how should that and all others be drawn at once? That same afternoon he read in his cell, by close stealth, although no soul was present, a paper which had got there, heaven knows how. Late the night before a mysterious figure, more like a goblin with interminable legs than any thing else, (it might have been Ishmael Small,) had stalked in the street at the back of the prison; some said afterwards it had climbed the wall. As the paper fell through his window, dropped from above, this might be so. Whatever it was, and whoever might be its sender, it quickened his thoughts not a little. It was clearly expedient for him to get back into his wits at once. Accordingly when the turnkey brought his supper that night, he found Fyler quietly seated and looking about him with the air of one just wakened from a dream.

"Where am I? who am I?" said Fyler. "How long have I been in this place?"

"Why, old fellow, you're in the Tombs, Centre−street," answered the turnkey, "where you've been these four weeks and better; and as to who you are, you're Fyler Close as you was yesterday, and the day afore, and the day afore that. That's who you are."

"You must be wrong," rejoined Fyler, quite calmly. "I have been asleep twenty−five years or so, I think. What a dream I've had! Angels about me in swarms, dressed in handsome red dresses, and beautiful cherubs carrying sticks with gilt tops."

"Oh, oh!" cried the turnkey, slapping his long knee like one that makes a great discovery—"I see how it is: them red angels that was about you so thick was volunteer firemen; and as for the cherubs they're nothing else but the indefatigables that you see in court on your trial with their staves. Oh, oh—that's a very good one, Mr. Prisoner. I see you're a coming−to."

"So I think, too," continued Fyler, placidly. "And now that I have got back to this sinful world, I'd like a slice or two of the bread o' life, just to cheer me up and keep me from fainting."

"Something in the way of a parson, eh?" asked the turnkey, looking curiously at him. Fyler gave him to understand it was; "If that's it, you can have a whole loaf: we have a wonderful run of blackcoats to this prison. They come here to get moral texts for their sermons: you'll be a capital one—and when it's known, won't there be a competition! I guess not!" The turnkey laughed disdainfully at himself: and Fyler hoped he might be made a good text, and be a comfort to some poor creatures in that way. The turnkey took his basket and keys and went away; but presently returned and, putting his head in at the door, asked Fyler "What he'd begin with?"

"You may send me a Presbyterian gentleman, if you please," said Fyler.

"You shall have one fresh and first−rate," answered the turnkey. "I'm glad you're come−to, old feller, you'll hang so much cheerfuller. Good night!" He locked the cell, and propelled himself at an increased speed along the gallery, making known to the other keepers, as he passed, that the old prisoner was in his wits again.

The Presbyterian came. Fyler eyed him sharply: he was tall and narrow−faced. After a very brief interview he left, finding the prisoner not open to his counsels. Fyler confessed he didn't like his views of predestination at all, and called for another parson. The next was large and stout: and Fyler discovered there was an irreconcileable difference in their notions of total depravity. Then there came another, a short square man, who broached such doctrine on the subject of infant baptism that Fyler almost drove him from his cell. What a delicate conscience this prisoner had, and how hard to please! He had but three days more to live, and they would give him such comfort as they could. At last there came along, after so many trials, a snug little man, about Fyler's size, who wore a wig, and whose religious views harmonized so entirely with Fyler's that the broker took a fancy to him at once, and made him spend hours with him in his cell. Fyler spared no pains to cultivate an intimacy, and was not backward in showing his affectionate regard for the little parson. One night, after a long and delightful interview, in which the little parson had inculcated a great number of excellent principles, Fyler said to him, "Did it ever occur to you how much we resemble each other in look?" The little parson confessed it had not.

"Now I'll show that it is so," said Fyler; "Let me take your wig a minute."

He accordingly removed it from the parson's head, and placed it on his own.

"It would be so odd," said Fyler laughing, "if any one should come in now—I guess I'll fasten the door."

He drew a string, which was somehow or other hanging there, and the door was held close.

"Now let me have your coat," said Fyler. The little parson yielded it with some show of reluctance. Then he took his vest, his pantaloons, his shoes; then he put on his neck−stock and his plain black hat.

"Isn't the resemblance wonderful?" asked Fyler, giving the parson, who stood shivering by, a look that made him shake a little more. Fyler then invited him to another quarter of the cell, where he insisted it would be to his advantage to have a bandage put about his arms and waist, to keep him from catching cold. The little parson might have made some trifling objection, but he saw that in Fyler's look which silenced him.

"It must be death to one of your tender constitution," said Fyler, "if you should get into the gallery in your present state." He bound him to a ring in the floor, and fastened an end of the cord to the water−fascet, so that the least motion on the part of the parson would flood the cell. He then placed in his hands the pocket Bible he had brought in with him, and opening it at the book of Job, and commending patience to him, as the best virtue under present circumstances, he left him—shivering and bald−headed—upon the floor, and stepped lightly forth.

Moving smoothly along in his parson's dress, and catching as much of the parson's gait as he could, he reached the prison−yard. When his feet struck the ground he felt free—but looking up, with the high prison walls about him, he breathed hard again, like one at the bottom of a well. The sky was strangely overcast, and a chill crept through his frame. The officers of the lower door were away, and he was obliged to pass through the Session's court−room. He stole up the steps, and looked through the glass door leading from the prison−yard into the court. A trial was going forward, and the court−room was thick with people. He looked on for a moment with a curious eye, remembering his own; and then shrunk back, shuddering at the prospect of passing through. With a keen sense in himself of what his parson's dress concealed, he feared they might seize him and hurl him back to the cell

he had left. He opened the door—the officers glanced at his black coat, and tapped the nearest of the crowd to give him way. With a respect for the errand of charity on which they supposed he had been bound, they fell back, leaving a wide space through which he must pass to the outer door. He would rather they had stood close packed, and treated him in that regard like the meanest of themselves. At length, with a heart fifty times at his throat, he was upon the outer stairs; creeping stealthily down from column to column, he reached the street. He started forward at a swift pace, but becoming presently confused, he halted and looked about. There was a trouble in the sky—a darkness, not of tempest or customary clouds; an eclipse was brooding above him. A cold shadow filled the air, and Fyler was bewildered and alarmed. At first he went to the right, and coming upon an object that told him he was wrong, he returned upon his track and went as far astray on the other hand. He had lost his way, and seemed to have forgotten, all at once, the bearings of the streets. While he wandered, in this uncertain mood, the cold drops starting to his brow, there came upon the wind a loud clamor of drums and trumpets and marching feet. Torches flashed upon the darkness—as a long procession turned a corner—and Fyler, aided by their light, crept along a coal−yard wall.

In a minute more he was at an opening of the Great Sewer, which was undergoing repair; falling flat upon his face that no eye might watch him, he crept down its mouth, holding on to the broken stones and fastenings of iron with his hands, till he reached the bottom. He heard the tread of feet above him—a gleam of light—and all laws silence and darkness. How far within he ever groped his way was never known, nor what scheme he had in view, unless it might have been—wild and bold enough—to escape in this way to the river, where Ishmael Small, it was said, had been seen for many hours hovering in a boat about that mouth of the Sewer.

Nor was Ishmael himself, who had the morning after the arrest borne away an old trunk or two from the den in Pell−street, seen after that night. The last act that could tell where the broker stopped, was, that passers−by had heard at a certain place, as they crossed the street, a sharp and dreadful cry for help, riving the very earth beneath their feet. The broker's body, perishing thus amid all the foulness and infamy of the city's drain, was never found.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE NIGHT−PROCESSION.

The unparalleled outrage of clearing the Upper−Wabash, being sufficiently insisted upon, answered the purpose as well as any device they could have contrived. The triumph of Puffer was complete: he had carried his election by a handsome majority—bowling down Mr. John Blinker, majestically as he carried himself, as easily as a nine−pin with a rolling bottom—Hobbleshank's strong recruits (of which Puffer had just now heard) coming in to give the decisive blow. The popular mind still heaving and surging, searched for a channel through which to vent the enthusiasm, (in such cases there's always a little over) which had not been exhausted in the contest itself. The Bottomites resolved to make a public demonstration of their victory—one to allure new friends and terrify old enemies— and a street parade, a Grand Procession by torch−light, was fixed upon as most imposing. The newspapers began immediately to trumpet the show: the wire−pullers and busybodies in every direction were on the alert, dusting their banners and waking up their retainers. In a week from the election the preparations were concluded, and at sun down of the day appointed, the forces of the procession began to assemble in the Houston−street Square, East−River. Two men were seen with highly flushed faces, the dawn of the procession, to roll off a couple of barrels around a corner from a neighboring pump, and hoist them upon a truck behind a canvass banner, which denoted that these were two genuine and unadulterated barrels of the water of the UpperWabash, in its aboriginal condition before the clearing under the New Bill. A few minutes after two other flushfaced gentlemen came around another neighboring corner with a couple of rolling barrels, which were duly planted on a second truck, and which were, in like manner, given out as so much pure fluid drawn from the mighty Hudson by an aged sailor, who would ride in one of the barouches. Presently a body of horsemen, with new beaver hats and blue ribbons at their button−holes, came scampering distractedly into the square; and rode about issuing enthusiastic orders, and inspecting with military activity the condition of the square, from one end to the other. These were the marshals of the procession; and in less than a couple of minutes they were followed by numerous detachments of one kind and another, dropping in at different points. In an hour the square was full of horsemen, pedestrians, barouches, carts, banners—and for a time there was an unbroken hubbub of shouting voices, and an inextricable confusion and entanglement of all classes and orders of society.

By dint of driving up and down at the top of their speed—riding every now and then over a child or an old woman—assailing a detachment of clamoring clerks in a high voice of command, or imploring, with bended knees in their saddles, a squad of mounted cartmen—they succeeded in forming the line. A gentleman in a dirty round−jacket filled his trumpet till it overflowed; a short−legged drummer dashed his sticks against the parchment; the crowd gave three cheers, as they do when a ship breaks from her stays, and the Great Bottomite Procession was launched upon the streets. There was a barouche containing a standard−bearer, with two committee−men to fill up, that led the van; then a barouche bearing two ancient residents on the Wabash, (brought on expressly for this occasion,) extremely pale and sickly—as might have been expected—and obliged to be fed out of a bottle, by a boy in the carriage with them, to keep the breath in their body. This device the crowd approved of, and gave three cheers more as they trotted in the wake of the procession. Then there was a barouche with two fishermen— great, sturdy, grampus−like fellows—educated, of course, on the banks of the Hudson, and chewing pig−tail, in evidence of the holiness and majesty of the anti−Wabash cause.

But when behind these the crowd caught sight of another barouche—wrapped round and round with banners—the very horses trotting forward in trowsers made of striped bunting, there was no limit to the popular enthusiasm. In this, the Hero of Kipp's Bay—the redoubtable Champion of New−York—the illustrious Hopkins himself, stood up, and removing his hat, waved it pleasantly to the crowd, at full arm's length, as though he was bailing up their cheers, and pouring them out of the hat into the barouche. High above his head danced the banner wrought by the dark−eyed young lady—the blank filled as she had wished— "Uncompromising Hostility to the Clearing of the Wabash.— For Congress, Puffer Hopkins, the Hero of New−York!"

In the carriage with Puffer rode Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, who had assumed a clean ruffle, of extraordinary dimensions, and whose very waistcoat seemed swelling and ready to burst with a speech, with which he was no doubt prepared to explode the moment he should be touched. Then there were the fire companies—the earnest

and ardent friends of the successful candidate—all in their red shirts and leather caps, dragging their engines by the rope, and joining in the cheerings of the crowds with lusty voice. A throng of sailors, surging and swaying along, twelve abreast and arm in arm, in duck trowsers, blue shirts, and hats of tarpaulin; and then, in an uninterrupted line, in seventeen carriages, the seventeen wards of the city, represented by as many emblematical gentlemen; the first, second and third being solid, substantial old fellows, with well−fed persons, and a cross of the Dutchman in their look; the sixth a strapping, raw−boned genius, with a cane in his hand quite large enough for a club or shillelah; the seventh a plain citizen, evidently, by his dress and aspect, rising rapidly in the world; the fifteenth a dainty gentleman, with a well−plaited ruffled shirt, and copious rings upon his fingers; and so throughout the seventeen. In strong contrast came a shoal of woe−begone, unhappy looking gentlemen, who called themselves, in a portentous banner which they bore above their heads, "The Proscribed Watchmen," (they complained that the public offices, to which they had acquired a legal right, by ten years uninterrupted possession, had been taken from them,) and they wore their caps hind−foremost to denote the depth and agony of their bereavement. With these—a fellow−sufferer in a common cause, there rode, in a single gig, a lady of a venerable aspect, who had for fifteen years dispensed at one of the public watch−houses, pigs−feet and coffee, to the watchmen, as they came in from their rounds. She was the mother of five children—her husband now dead, had lost an arm in an election riot— and she, a widow, had been ruthlessly thrust from the watch−house. All this was expressed in the banner which her eldest boy carried above her, on which were painted the Goddess of Liberty, with a crape around her liberty−cap, (to denote the lady's widowhood;) a one−armed ghost appearing from a neighboring tomb, (her late husband;) and a table spread in a corner of the standard, at which five small skeletons were represented as feeding on pea−soup out of a large blue bowl.

This division of the show was received by the crowd with an outbreak (as it was described in the newspapers) an outbreak of irrepressible indignation. Public opinion is always outraged in such cases, and follows the perpetrators, they said, as surely as the shadow the sun; and here came public opinion itself. Through all the length and breadth of the United States there is, at all times, supposed to be rolling a great sphere or ball—pausing sometimes at villages which it takes in its way, then at cities or hamlets— but ever rolling on, on, along the seaboard, up mountainsides— bounding and rushing through vallies—growing steadily larger, larger, and keeping up a horrible rumbling and tumult wherever it moves. The knocking to and fro of this mighty ball is a favorite sport of congressmen, editors and others, who find a great diversion in their sedentary and arduous labors in racketting it about.

It was this mighty ball that was set in motion in behalf of the lady in the single−gig; and typifying this—public opinion, which rolls and gathers like an avalanche—a great canvass wheel was now pressed forward, at the rear of the single−gig, by an axle, at either end of which toiled a dozen or two sallow gentlemen with ricketty legs, who, in the present case, stood for Congress and the public press. Directly behind public opinion, and taking such advantage of its motions as he could, in a special hackney−coach to preserve his invaluable health from the assaults of the night air, came Colonel Clingstone, a venerable revolutionary veteran, whose patriotic ardor had been incontestably established by his eating an entire British ox (the property of a cowboy) during the first week of the war, which proved to be so substantial diet that he was able to live on the very name or shadow of it ever after: seasoned with a rumor of some gunshot wound or other. In the rear of the venerable colonel—who did not fail from time to time to show his frosty head at one window or the other, just to see how public opinion got along—there swarmed a lean, cadaverous, deadly−looking troop, in soiled garments and battered hats, and headed by our electioneering agent, Mr. Nicholas Finch, with a banner representing a group of citizens greatly cast down, and with pocket−handkerchiefs at their eyes, weeping profusely at the Tomb of Washington. It was observed of these gentlemen, who had chalked their faces to an interesting paleness to create public sympathy—that whenever the revolutionary veteran thrust his portly person into view, one or other of them would mutter between his teeth— "Cu's' that old chap! he's had fat pickings forty years from a pin−prick!" The sympathies of the crowd were evidently with the cadaverous followers of Mr. Finch.

"I know them fellers," said a squint−eyed bar−tender, who was on the look−out; "them's Finch's hunters; they're wonderfully ill−used gem'men—they wants berths in the custom−house, for the sake of their country, and their country wont let 'em take the berths! Aint that a hard case, Joe?"

"Crueller nor the anaconder!" answered Joe, a dependent of a neighboring bakery; "I say let every man bake his bread in the gov'ment oven, if he likes to. Don't we own the gov'ment—and what's gov'ments good for if they

can't do a man's private washing and ironing, and bread−making? That's my views."

The lean gentlemen, in a word, were office−seekers, ambitious to serve the public on any terms—belonged to either side, or both sides, as occasion required. It *was* a great wrong to keep them out of place, for if they expended half the ardor in serving the public which they did to serve themselves, public affairs must have been managed with extraordinary prudence and despatch. Poor fellows! they were in a sad plight; no bread nor beef at home, and their ungrateful country refusing to cash their bills. It was as much as Mr. Finch could do—moving about and whispering cheerful promises in their ears—to keep them in spirits to go through their parts in the procession.

Behind these, comfortably quartered in a series of light wagons, followed a body of gentlemen in high glee, rosy−gilled, laughing and making merry of every object on the road. They seemed entirely at their ease, and to have nothing to do in this world but to carry certain torches which they waved and flaunted about their heads as in pastime, and merely to show the world how comfortable they were. It is hardly necessary to add, that the gentlemen in the light wagons were office−holders: and that in evidence their grateful remembrance of the man who founded *such* a government, they carried a full−length of the Father of his country. On a closer inspection certain members of the Bottom Club might have been discovered settled in the light wagons; they had doubtless left off ameliorating the condition of society in order to devote their undivided attention to their own comfort and the public service, on which their outcry had quartered them. Behind these, singling himself out from the common herd, a little man, marched about a platform, which he had caused to be built at his own private expense and borne up on the shoulders of four sturdy partizans, blowing a small brass trumpet, of great depth of wind, from time to time, and waving a small white flag with great earnestness about his head. This gentlemen, too, was ambitious of office, and by no means inclined to have the magnificence of his claims confounded with the demerits of the gentry who plodded on foot.

And then came scampering forward Mr. Sammis at the head of a hundred and fifty mounted cartmen; and as they rode in their frocks, tottering and tumbling in their saddles, they resembled not a little a hundred and fifty clowns in an equestrian pantomime, slightly beside themselves with strong drink.

There was a part of the line obscured by a cloud of hangers−on, from which a report of lusty voices constantly broke in cries of "Here's the extra infantry!" "Terrible murder, sir,—don't tread on my toes!" "Only three cents—and full of pipin'−hot soocides and seductions!" When, in turning a corner, the cloud broke, it disclosed in their usual undress uniforms of baggy caps, half−coats and inadequate breeches, a detachment of news−boys bearing aloft, with an air of haughty defiance, numerous paper ensigns on which were inscribed, "Freedom of speech and plenty o' pies!" "Long Nines and Liberty!" and other decisive axioms of the news−boy creed.

At the heels of the news−boys, there fell in great swarms of citizens, in long coats, short coats, hats, caps, badges and locked arms; and, when every joint was set, it began, at first slowly, but afterward with increased motions, to creep like a three−mile snake, along the streets. As far as the eye could reach either way, there was a tumultuous flow of faces—lighted up by torches, borne on high or shadowed by banners and emblems, seeming to fill the city, and hold possession of the night at every point.

The drum beat, the trumpet sounded, the marshals in an ecstacy of excitement, hurried up and down the line—there was one in buckskin breeches and military top−boots, who did immense execution in clearing the line of the curbstone by riding over loafers and women who stood in the gutters—the procession moved on. With flaring torches they filed through the streets—turned the distant corners—and swept in in their course whole armies of recruits. About the chief divisions of the line the populace clustered in swarms; and the rear−ward was swelled with a great crowd of laggards, who in tattered garments, many of them shoeless and hatless, shambled after. Wherever they passed there were innumerable faces at the windows, peering out; and the side−walks were thick with gazers. Like a turbid stream it rolled on, street after street, staying itself only for an instant, at different houses, to heave a great cheer in compliment to some friend of the party who dwelt within, or a portentous groan in condemnation of an enemy. When they arrived at a narrow street that crossed their way, they came to a dead halt. A stumping noise, in the deadly silence, was heard upon the steps of an oyster−vault—a jolly face presented itself— the crowd burst into a cheer of recognition—Mr. Jarve Barrell laid his hand upon his breast, waved his hat— and the crowd passed on.

At length, in an overwhelming flood of a thousand tributaries, they poured down upon the great square in front

of Fogfire Hall. At a given signal, and as one man, the vast gathering bellowed forth cheer after cheer—the very air rocked. The torches were gathered in a ring, shedding a gloomy light upon the Park, and on the tall gaunt buildings hard−by; a gallows−tree was brought from a neighboring deposit. As soon as it was planted in the centre of the square, the red−shirted firemen swarmed in from every direction at its foot—a chain dropped from its summit—a blazing fire kindled beneath, and a hoarse voice shouted through a trumpet, "bring him forth!"— The crowd shuddered involuntarily—but when they saw what it was that hung dangling from the chain, they burst into a huge laugh. All the uplands and winding ways of the city, wherever the eye could reach, were set thick with faces, fixed upon the gallows with its iron fingers ready to pounce upon the victim. It was a portly little figure with a white head and green coat—a pair of supercilious eyes, (these they couldn't see)—altogether not more than eighteen inches high. Such as were near enough said it was the great Insurance President—Mr. Blinker, the late opposition candidate, reduced half a dozen sizes or so, and it was given out that he was brought to his present ignominy by the firemen, who may be supposed to have harbored a special ill−will against one who, by his constant presence at burnings and conflagrations, caused their sport to be stayed half way. However this was, he had been brought thither in an engine chamber, and was now swinging above the flames which crackled up and lovingly licked his feet, while the engine men stood grinning about. For a long time he hung, swaying to and fro, toying as it were with the fire, to the infinite delight of the crowd, who gathered in masses upon the wagons, barouches, trucks, even upon each other's shoulders, watching the progress of the immolation. At length fire took upon his person. "It's caught his right boot!" cried one. There was an uproarious shout. "It's caught his left!" There was another still louder. But when the flame began to invade the vital parts, there were no limits to their satisfaction, which they expressed by ironical calls to the firemen to put him out.

"Why don't you play upon his second story and upperworks, you fellers!—Give him a jet in th' abdomen!—Why will you let the cruel flame take the venerable man by the nose in that way!" It was to no purpose; and though, as the blaze twinkled in his eyes—looking mischievously into their very sockets—he seemed to frown scornfully upon them, in the course of half an hour, during which the volunteers had given the fire many an ugly stir, the great Insurance President, with all his dignity of person and majesty of look, was a cinder, picked up by a quid−nunc, and in less than an hour deposited in the neighboring museum, among the bears and alligators, and potted beetles there preserved. Some say that this was Crump, the Secretary of the Phoenix Company, who had made himself active in feeding the flame by which the President had been burned.

This business over—Mr. Blinker done to a turn—to the entire satisfaction of every body present, there was a loud call upon Puffer Hopkins for a speech; which call his associate, Mr. Halsey Fishblatt, was quite anxious to respond to.

"Let me answer it!" said Mr. Fishblatt; "I'll tell them a thing or two about the old villain we've just burnt. I know him from his cradle. They expect something about him." And while Puffer kept his seat, Mr. Fishblatt mounted to his legs in answer to the summons. A broad, universal sibilation or hissing, admonished Mr. Fishblatt that his orations were not, just then, in request, and he dropped back into his seat like one stricken with a ball.

There was the broad sky above them—the surging sea of heads—the Goddess of Justice, in snow−white wood, at his back—the streaming banner and refulgent transparency of Fogfire Hall in front—and, by no means least of all, the two pure barrels of Hudson, and two of reeking Upper Wabash, under his very eye, upon the trucks;—could Puffer fail out of all these to frame a triumphant speech? He could not, and, as he concluded, three peals, four times renewed, rent the circuit, and made the very pennons rustle in the air.

Re−forming as soon as they could recover from the bewilderment of the harangue, and in much less order than they had set out, the procession returned up the city in the direction of the Tombs. Though the music still sounded, and the torches still flared against the sky, a sudden depression seemed to have fallen upon the crowd. Many of the standard−bearers dropped their standards, and allowed them to trail in the dust; great numbers left their places in the ranks and skulked away. A change had come over the very heaven itself; the face of the sky was dark—not with accustomed clouds or shadows—the great shadow of the earth itself was spreading over the firmament; an eclipse was at hand. At this moment, and while yet there was some show of triumph and rejoicing in the crowd, Puffer's attention was withdrawn to a dark figure, which, scudding away from the glare of the procession, coasted along the walls, turned a corner and disappeared, as though it had dived into the earth. The contrast of this single silent figure, and the great tumultuous crowd, was so marked, that Puffer's mind was strongly fixed upon it.

The darkness deepened, and multitudes kept falling off; among others, Puffer descried Mr. Sammis, as he left

his place and passed by, looking up and smiling as he passed.

Then Mr. Fishblatt ordered a sudden halt, and without a word of explanation disappeared from his side. What could this mean? Were all things coming to an end? He was meditating upon the incident, when a small, spare figure—which he had noticed throughout the night hovering about the carriage, and keeping its face turned constantly towards his own, on whichever side he looked, but which, in the uncertain light he could not more closely discern—leaped upon the wheel and twitched him by the sleeve. How like it was to a similar summons at the very outset of his career! A voice was at his ear entreating him to leave the carriage.

"You know you are mine, now!" said the voice.

It sounded other than it ever had before.

"To see your friends at the Farm−house, I know," answered Puffer, bending toward the questioner; "but why not come into the carriage with me, and ride out together?"

"No, no, you could not get out of the line," answered the other quickly. "You will not deny me this wish? Come quickly—it darkens apace."

Puffer did not hesitate—the pageant was fast growing to an end—but seizing a favorable pause, escaped to the ground and followed the other cautiously through the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXIX. HOBBLESHANK AND PUFFER HOPKINS VISIT THE FARM−HOUSE.

In a few minutes they were beyond its skirts, and moving at a good pace toward the suburbs. Hobbleshank led the way at such eager speed, looking forward to his path and back to Puffer, constantly, that it was some time before the young steps that followed reached him, and when they did, Puffer found him so pale, and shaken by fatigue, it seemed, he begged him to borrow his support.

Hobbleshank accepted it at once, and, with a smile of hope and trust in his look as he turned to answer, leaned upon Puffer, and they pursued their way. The old man's guidance and the young man's strength bore them swiftly on. When they looked back, from an eminence they had reached in traveling up the city—the procession, they saw by the flaring torch−light, was crumbling in pieces; detachment after detachment falling off in flakes, and with drooping banners, melting in the neighboring streets.

As the old man and his companion moved along, there crept out upon the air a thick darkness—the earth's shadow lay, every minute, closer and closer to the pale moon above. The houses seemed, in the ghastly light, like ghosts or spectres of their former selves; the church steeples, quenched in the dim atmosphere, were broken off at the top.

The passengers they met as they advanced came towards them, wrapped in the strange darkness, like travellers from another world. The great heart of the city itself seemed to grow still and be subdued to a more quiet beating under the heavy air that oppressed its church towers and its thoroughfares. Hobbleshank and Puffer drew closer to each other's side at every step.

"You had not forgotten that you were mine to−night?" asked Hobbleshank.

"Not at all—how could I?" answered Puffer. "I am yours now and at all times."

"You are?" interrupted Hobbleshank, quickly. "Thank Heaven for that!"

"To be sure I am," continued Puffer. "You have made me what I am, (I know this in more ways than one,) and I am your creature as much as the pitcher is the potter's, to carry me where you will, and to put me to what uses you choose. I am not sorry that the Farm−house, now your own again, is the first to visit."

"Never mind that," returned the old man. "But now that you have grown to be a great man, no matter how, won't the world be asking questions of your early life and history? What can you tell them, eh?"

Although this was spoken in a cheerful tone, he drew a hard breath as it escaped him.

"Not much," answered Puffer. "I don't know that I would tell the world any thing, let them ask as much as they choose: but to you, my good old friend, always true, I may say that I had no early life."

"You don't mean," interrupted Hobbleshank, quickly, "that you ever suffered from want of food, or lodging, or warmth? In God's name, you don't say that!"

Puffer was startled by the old man's eagerness, and seeing with how anxious a look he hung upon him, he answered at once:

"Oh, no—never that—I meant merely that my childhood had neither father nor mother's care; and can there be life without them? But I ought not to repine—I had kindness and some friends. As I meant to tell you, my first seven years were passed with a boatman who lived on the edge of the North−River near Bloomingdale; where I came from at first I don't know, although he used to tell me I was found by him in the woods, when an infant."

"In the woods?" said Hobbleshank, cheerfully, "Go on, go on, you couldn't have been found in a better place."

"The boatman's wife, or some one that was near to him died," continued Puffer, wondering at the old man's enthusiasm. "His heart broke, his affairs went into decay, and I into the Banks−street Asylum, as an orphan. When I had been there some six or seven years, one day there came into the room where we were all seated, our faces just shining from the towel, a stout, white−headed, rosy gentleman of a middle age; and pitching his eye upon me, after ranging up and down the bench, said "This is the boy I spoke of!" The matron answered it was.

"Very good," said the rosy gentleman. "His name is Puffer Hopkins; and when he's of age let him draw this check." He handed a paper to the matron, and smiling upon me once more, went away."

"What does this mean?" asked Hobbleshank, anxiously. "He was no relation of yours?"

"I don't believe he was," answered Puffer, laughing. "Although I learned on inquiry in the neighborhood years after, when I had drawn the money he had left me, that he had been a bachelor, who had married late in life, and been much mocked and joked−at for having no children. He had given out that they might be mistaken, and by frequent visits to the asylum and this goodness towards me, succeeded in getting his gossips and aspersers off the scent. He was dead and his wife too, when I inquired, and that was all I ever knew of him."

"It was a joke then; a mere joke?" said Hobbleshank.

"I suppose it was," answered Puffer. This answer seemed to be a great comfort to the old man, for he breathed more freely and they hurried on at a quicker pace.

The mighty shadow of the eclipse deepened and grew heavier upon the earth. Foot passengers paused and stood still in the road. The trees in the fields, looked like solid shadows; the sound of wheels died away in every thoroughfare. All life and motion were arrested for the time; every thing was at a pause but Puffer and Hobbleshank; they were moved by impulses, it would seem, not to be stayed or dampened even by a disastrous darkness, or the obscuration of the sky. The blue heavens, they knew, lay beyond the apparent shadow and they pressed on. They came to a steep road, and as they climbed this, Hobbleshank clung closer than ever to Puffer. At its top was an old country−house; from the windows of which, cheerful lights gleamed upon the darkness. The moment they came in sight of this, the old man trembled as with an ague, and fell upon Puffer's arm for support.

They were almost at its threshhold, when Hobbleshank, arresting Puffer, they paused, and the old man turned so as to look him full in the face. It was evident there was something on the old man's mind he had reserved to this moment.

"Was there nothing," he said at length, like one who lingers to gather resolution; "was there nothing the boatman gave you, as evidence of the place you were found in?"

"To be sure there was!" How the old man's look was renewed to youth by these few words, and shined in Puffer's. "To be sure there was—I forgot to mention it, but not to wear it with me always in my breast, with a hope." His hand was in his breast, but Hobbleshank stayed him, and told him, "not yet—not yet—it will be time presently." He would not trust himself to look at it.

Puffer knew something of the old man's mood, and followed him silently as he led the way. There had been cheerful voices from within the house, but when it was known that Hobbleshank and Puffer were at hand, a dead stillness fell upon the place; it was as if the old house itself listened, in expectation of what was to be told.

They were no sooner within the hall than Hobbleshank, pointing to a door at the left hand, said, "In there—go in quickly—God grant that all may be right!"

While Hobbleshank walked the old hall, the dim figures on its walls, watching him, as he might regard them as so many good spirits, or evil spectres, Puffer found himself in a small room, an ante−chamber, with two persons, one a woman, stout, hale, and of middle age; the other a man, spare of person, and of a sorrowful and forlorn look. They both stood before him, as he entered, with looks riveted upon the door with a steady gaze. The moment he crossed its threshhold, a swift change crossed their features—their whole expression was shifted, like a scene, from that of dreadful doubt to one of certainty and confirmation.

"It's Paul—little blackberry Paul—although the berry's worn out in course of time," said the woman, speaking first, and closely perusing Puffer's features; "Do you know us?"

Puffer's mind was sorely vexed and troubled; he knew them, and yet it seemed he knew them not, for he could call neither by name.

"If I dared to hope it," he answered at length, scrutinizing his countenance, "I might say this is my early friend who brought me to be a boy seven years old; but I don't believe it!"

The man seized his hand quickly, and told him he must, for he was no other.

"You don't recollect *me*, then?" said the woman, somewhat cast down by the inequality of Puffer's memory; "you sartainly haven't forgot Hetty—Hetty Simmons, it was then, Hetty Lettuce now—your old nurse? Ah, me! I can't be changed so sadly since then!"

After a while Puffer—she pressed him to it—admitted that he caught now and then a tone in her voice that he ought to know.

"Now, to tell the truth," said Hetty, a little vexed, "I didn't know your face either; but I knew your voice the minute I heard it at Bellevue the other night; it was me that fastened that bracelet on your arm the night you were

stolen away."

"What bracelet?" said Puffer. "You don't mean the one I wear in my breast?"

"Sartain—the very one," answered Hetty; "Let's see; I guess it's a match." Hetty held in her hand a half bracelet; in a minute more she had Puffer's;—they were matches, as she had guessed; the same auburn hair—the same golden clasp. She threw open the door— Hobbleshank stood there like one in a swoon, white and trembling, his two hands hanging like dead branches at his side.

"Come in," said Hetty; "Good heavens, it's all as we thought!"

At this bidding Hobbleshank staggered across the doorsill, and casting himself upon Puffer's neck, muttered brokenly, "My son—my son!" The tears fell from his old lids like rain. Mrs. Lettuce, and the other, laying the broken bracelet upon a table by the side of the great breast−pin which was there already, took each other by the hand and silently withdrew, leaving father and son to know each other, after a life−time's separation, in peace. With halting words, with tears and passionate embraces, Hobbleshank made known to Puffer the chances of his past life, how his mother died—he did not tell him all, there were dreadful words he could not trust himself with—how he was lost—how in twenty years he had often thought his child found again, but was so often sore baffled, and almost broken in hope. From the first, he felt that Puffer was his child and no other; he dared not claim him till the last rivet fastened him back, as it had to−night.

For many hours they had lingered together, dwelling upon the past, so full of hope and fear and strange vicissitude, when Hobbleshank, starting up as though it had just come into his mind, said—

"What will they think of us? Come, Paul, we have friends hard by that must not be forgotten."

He led him along the hall, and, with his hand in his own, they entered another room, larger than the first, where a company sate, in an attitude of expectation, looking toward the door, and watching it as it opened. They knew, without a word, what the story was. It was Hobbleshank and his long lost, new−found son. They looked upon him whom they had all known as Puffer—now that he was Paul, and the old man's child—with new eyes. How kind in Hobbleshank, to bring together such, and such only, as he knew Puffer (for so we love to call him still,) would most desire to meet. There was Mr. Fishblatt, standing with his skirts spread, in the middle of the floor, ready to open upon the case at the first opportunity; and at his side Mr. Sammy Sammis, whose face, from being a cobweb of smiles on ordinary occasions, was now a perfect net, in every line and thread of which there lay lurking a gleam of welcome. Then there was old aunt Gatty, who smiled too, but afar off, like one who has not quite so sure a hold of the occasion of her smiling as might be desired, and seated near Dorothy, who whispered in her ear, and did what she could to make her conscious of the change that had come over the fortunes of her old friend. Not far from these, something of a shadow in their midst, was Puffer's early friend, the forlorn stranger; and Mrs. Hetty Lettuce, who had not altogether recovered her spirits from the shock of not being recognized by her boy and nursling. But who were next—to whom Puffer gave his earliest gaze—where his eye lingered so long? No other than the little old aunt and the dark−eyed young lady.

Puffer shook hands with them one and all: as if he were starting the world anew, and wished to set out well. There was no lack of voices, one might be well assured. Mr. Fishblatt, at the top of his, declaiming upon it as one of the most extraordinary, unparalleled, wonderful histories he had ever known. (He had heard but the half yet.) Mr. Sammy Sammis corroborating, and Hobbleshank running from one to the other, and demanding, in a highly−excited state of mind, opinions upon his boy. Then he would come back again, requiring to be informed whether he hadn't done well—whether all had not been managed with great discretion, and as it should have been.

"Hold there a minute," cried Mr. Halsey Fishblatt at one of these questionings. "Are you sure of your title here?"

"Quite sure," answered Hobbleshank.

"What, sir!" retorted Mr. Fishblatt. "Won't the State come in as the successor to the broker, who, as a prisoner, is a dead man in the law, and seize the farm−house?"

"Ah! you haven't heard the story of the deed," answered Hobbleshank, quickly. "Who has kept that back from you? You ought to know that."

And he proceeded to give him a full and authentic account of the marvel by which it had been preserved, rescued and transmitted to his hands by Fob and his pale country friend.

"Come and sit by me," said Aunt Gatty, in a voice so affected by age that every other word was at the ceiling and the next plumb−down upon the floor. "Come here by your old aunt." Puffer placed a chair by her side: she

seized both his hands in hers, regarded him steadily for some minutes, and then said, still gazing, "How like his mother!—very like—don't you see it, Dorothy?"

Dorothy, although she had never seen that lady, rather than cross her old companion in her whim, admitted it was marvelous.

"That's her eye exactly—but her hair—was that black or flaxen—how was that, Dorothy, you remember? How old are you, my child—ten—perhaps twelve—ah, I forget ages wonderfully," and she fell off into an idle pondering. She evidently supposed the world had stood still for at least fifteen or twenty years. Dorothy shook her head to the company round, and soothed her aged friend as she could. She presently after brightened a little, and asked if this old man they saw was the Hobbleshank whom she was bound to watch and guard as a death−bed trust— by a promise, at his mother's bed−side, fifty years old at least? It was the same, Dorothy answered, and this was his son. Aunt Gatty smiled at the news, and fell into a new vacancy.

There was a close and whispered interview on Puffer's part with the dark−eyed young lady, which, strain their ear as they might, was pitched in far too gentle a key to be gue sed at by any round, unless it might have been the smart little aunt who sat by, brightening up as it advanced as though it afforded her infinite satisfaction to see how close and whispered it was.

"I buried my only daughter," said the sorrowful boatman, when Puffer questioned him, "many months ago—you remember her—your little play−fellow—whose blue eyes you used to watch so closely?"

Puffer did—but years had changed the hue of his mind, and with that the color of the eye that fixed his fancy most.

The sorrowful stranger sighed and Puffer turning away, with some kindly thought at his heart, fell into the hands of Mrs. Lettuce, who stood near by with a candle and motioned Puffer to follow her. She crossed the room and led him into a small chamber at its side. The chamber, unlike the other parts of the house he had seen, was unfurnished; it held nothing more than a low, narrow bed, a tattered blanket, and a few broken bed cords, trailing upon the floor. It was cold and damp, and a chill struck through Puffer as his companion closed the door and shut them in, what seemed to Puffer, from the first moment, a hideous place.

"It's strange you didn't recollect your old nurse," said Mrs. Lettuce. "But never mind that: all your troubles and tribulations began in this room; and I want to tell what your old father's heart failed him to speak of. This was Fyler Close's sleeping−room for more than a year: all the while your poor mother was sick,—what snake's eyes that old villain had!—and when he stretched his neck toward that door, when your'e poor mother was a dying, and spread out his old ugly hands, as if he had 'em hold of her young throat squeezing the life out—But that is'nt it. You'll ask what all this means? The long and the short of it is this. Fyler Close and your father loved the same woman; and there wasn't brighter angel out of heaven than that girl; they both loved her, Paul, but your father married her; and from that day to this, he has had the shadow of the devil, yes the devil himself in the form of that broker, at his heels. Your father, Paul, was always quick and free and lavish with his money; and that Fyler Close knew well. He made believe that he didn't care which married the girl, but he hated your father to the death; and as he knew your father's weakness, he worked upon it; he urged him to all sorts of extravagance; to buy this, and buy that, and buy the other—till the tide begun to run back with him—and then Fyler comes in, and like a dear friend, lends him all he wants. He was always of a lending nature, more for spite than gain, I always thought; and so he went on lending till your father wasn't worth a cent he could call his own. Then Fyler began to call it in by degrees, so that your father didn't see what he was driving at: first he had to sell a picture, then an up−stairs carpet; then Fyler came to board in this house, to keep an eye on things. He thought plainer living proper; and the family was put upon a short allowance."

"This is a devil, as you say," said Puffer, from his closed teeth, while the sweat started to his brow. "A devil with two hoofs!"

"By and by your mother fell sick—it was the presence of the old broker and a change in her way of living; she grew worse day by day; it was no seated sickness, the doctors said, nothing they could name; she was perishing, I verily believe, of hunger, for every day the table was more spare than before; the broker himself seemed to live on air to keep it in countenance, and all that time, all the while that poor dear creature was famishing with the pangs of hunger at her heart, which made her cry out, though for his sake, your father's sake, and least some direr calamity might be brought upon him, she said not a word. But such cries as she uttered, so sharp and awful I never heard in my life: and Fyler Close lay on that couch, that very couch, drinking them all in like music. The devils

must have him, if any man. Your mother was buried."

"Starved to death!" gasped Puffer.

"Even, so, I fear," answered Mrs. Lettuce, "and her grave is just by the house−wall, where the broker could thrust forth his head from this chamber window, and gloat upon it any time he chose. Your father saw her in her grave, but more like one raving mad than a rational creature; immediately after the funeral he disappeared, was gone no one knows whither to this day, though it is said he lived during that time upon the roads and highways of the country, and sheltered himself in sheds and barns. The old broker lodged here a few nights, grew disquieted it is thought, and went into the city. Paul, Paul," said Hetty, breaking into tears, "I never thought when you were a month's infant on my lap, that I should live to tell you a tale like this. You didn't remember me, but I forgive you."

Puffer stood gazing upon the bed, with a blanched face and glassy eye, and rigid in every limb. Hetty would not let him dwell upon it longer, but taking him by the arm led him gently back. So pale and unearthly was his look and action when he came forth, they all gathered about and asked what sudden sickness it was that shook him so.

"Nothing—nothing," he answered. Before they could put further question, Hobbleshank entereated them to pardon him for a while, and drew Puffer away. They went into the open air, and treading gently on the earth, as though a grave lay under every step, they stood beside a tomb, built close under the wall. It heaved above the earth, and Hobbleshank, laying his hand upon its top, said to Puffer, "This is your mother's grave." The swelling vines, crested with pure white blossoms, broke like a green wave over its marbled top.

As they re−crossed the threshhold the trouble passed away from heaven, and the pale clear light lay on all the country round.

Hobbleshank led Puffer again into the little chamber.

"I have a favor to ask of my child," he said, "but one— and that he will not fail to grant—I am sure, am I?"

To be sure he was, let him ask any thing he chose.

"I want you," said Hobbleshank, "to fix this breast−pin in your bosom and get married to−night."

To−night! Puffer hadn't thought of such a thing; twenty−five years to come would be time enough. The young lady was in the other room—the parson at hand—how could it be avoided—he'd like to know from Puffer how it was to be avoided? Puffer could suggest no practicable means of escape, and proceeded with the old man to the other room, to be married with as good a grace as he could. The little parson had come; there was the bride, too, whose consent had scarcely been asked, in her snow white dress; the smart old aunt smoothing the folds and rubbing her hands alternately. In half an hour a change had come over the aspect of Puffer's sky, as great as the eclipse without—brightening, not darkening all that lay beneath. Who can tell what gossip the old farmhouse rung with that night—what plans, what jests were broached—what good cheer went abroad, among them all. How Halsey Fishblatt declaimed—how the little old aunt chattered—how Hobbleshank shambled up and down the room in a constant glow—how it was finally determined that Hetty Lettuce and Dorothy, and aunt Gatty should come to live in the old farm−house (there was a chirping house−full) with Hobbleshank and Paul and the new wife. How Mr. Halsey Fishblatt would strike out some grand scheme or other, by which they should hear and know all that the city did or thought or said; how Mr. Sammy Sammis, and the little old aunt would come out and visit them, twice a week at least, in a new one−horse to be immediately established; and the poor stranger, too, Puffer's early friend—there was a pleasant berth to be thought of for him—a nice little office Mr. Sammy Sammis had pitched upon in his own mind already, and about which he would see seventeen influential gentlemen to−morrow.

A blessing upon the old household and the young— having spun out a long sorrow as the staple of their life, they have come upon a clear white thread, which will brighten on in happiness and mirth to the very grave's edge! THE END.