

Rivers of Ice

R.M. Ballantyne

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Chapter I. THE ROVER'S RETURN.

On a certain summer morning, about the middle of the present century, a big bluff man, of seafaring aspect, found himself sauntering in a certain street near London Bridge. He was a man of above fifty, but looked under forty in consequence of the healthful vigour of his frame, the freshness of his saltwater face, and the blackness of his shaggy hair.

Although his gait, pilot-cloth coat, and pocketed hands proclaimed him a sailor, there were one or two contradictory points about him. A huge beard and moustache savoured more of the diggings than the deep, and a brown wide-awake with a prodigiously broad brim suggested the backwoods.

Pausing at the head of one of those narrow lanes which—running down between warehouses, filthy little rag and bone shops, and low poverty-stricken dwellings—appear to terminate their career, not unwillingly, in the Thames, the sailor gazed before him with nautical earnestness for a few seconds, then glanced at the corner house for a name; found no name; cast his eyes up to the strip of blue sky overhead, as if for inspiration; obtained none; planted his legs wide apart as if he had observed a squall coming, and expected the lane to lurch heavily—wrinkled his eyebrows, and pursed his lips.

“Lost yer bearin’s, capp’n?” exclaimed a shrill pert voice at his side.

The seaman looked down, and beheld a small boy with a head like a disorderly door-mat, and garments to match. He stood in what may be styled an imitative attitude, with his hands thrust into his ragged pockets, his little legs planted wide apart, his cap thrust well back on his head, and his eyebrows wrinkled. He also pursed his lips to such an extent that they resembled a rosebud in a dirty bush.

“Yes, imp,” replied the seaman—he meant to have said “impudence,” but stopped at the first syllable as being sufficiently appropriate—“yes, imp, I HAVE lost my bearings, and I’ll give you a copper if you’ll help me to find ‘em.”

“Wot sort o’ copper?” demanded the urchin, “there’s three sorts of ‘em, you know, in this ‘ere kingdom—which appears to be a queendom at present—there’s a farding and a ha’penny and a penny. I mention it, capp’n,” he added apologetically, “in case you don’t know, for you look as if you’d come from furrin parts.”

The seaman’s look of surprise melted into a broad grin of amusement while this speech was being fluently delivered. At its conclusion he pulled out a penny and held it up.

“Well, it ain’t much,” said the small boy, “and I ain’t used to hire myself out so cheap. However, as you seem to be raither poorly off, I don’t mind if I lend you a hand for that. Only, please, don’t mention it among your friends, as it would p’raps lower their opinion of you, d’you see? Now then w’ot d’you want to know?”

To this the “capp’n,” still smiling at the small boy’s precocious insolence, replied that he was in search of an old woman who dwelt in a small court styled Grubb’s Court, so he was told, which lay somewhere in that salubrious neighbourhood, and asked if he, the imp, knew of such a place.

“Know’s of it? I should think I does. W’y, I lives there. It’s right down at the foot o’ this ‘ere lane, an’ a wery sweet ‘ristocratik spot it is—quite a perinsular, bein’ land, leastwise mud, a’most surrounded by water, the air bein’ ‘ighly condoosive to the ‘ealth of rats, likewise cats. As to old women, there’s raither a broad sprinklin’ of ‘em in the court, rangin’ from the ages of seventy to a hundred an’ twenty, more or less, an’ you’ll take some time to go over ‘em all, capp’n, if you don’t know your old woman’s name.”

“Her name is Roby—,” said the seaman.

“O, Roby? ah,” returned the small boy, looking sedately at the ground, “let me see—yes, that’s the name of the old ‘ooman, I think, wot ‘angs out in the cabin, right—‘and stair, top floor, end of the passage, w’ere most wisiters flattens their noses, by consekince of there bein’ no light, and a step close to the door which invariably trips ‘em up. Most wisiters to that old ‘ooman begins their acquaintance with her by knocking at her door with their noses instead of their knuckles. We calls her place the cabin, ‘cause the windows is raither small, and over‘angs the river.”

“Well then, my lad,” said the seaman, “clap a stopper on your tongue, if you can, and heave ahead.”

“All right, capp’n,” returned the small boy, “foller me, an’ don’t be frightened. Port your helm a bit here, there’s a quicksand in the middle o’ the track—so, steady!”

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Avoiding a large pool of mud with which the head of the lane was garnished, and which might have been styled the bathing, not to say wallowing, quarters of the Grubb's Court juveniles, the small boy led the bluff seaman towards the river without further remark, diverging only once from the straight road for a few seconds, for the purpose of making a furious rush at a sleeping cat with a yell worthy of a Cherokee savage, or a locomotive whistle; a slight pleasantry which had the double effect of shooting the cat through space in glaring convulsions, and filling the small boy's mind with the placidity which naturally follows a great success.

The lane presented this peculiarity, that the warehouses on its left side became more and more solid and vast and tall as they neared the river, while the shops and dwellings on its right became poorer, meaner, and more diminutive in the same direction, as if there were some mysterious connection between them, which involved the adversity of the one in exact proportion to the prosperity of the other. Children and cats appeared to be the chief day-population of the place, and these disported themselves among the wheels of enormous waggons, and the legs of elephantine horses with an impunity which could only have been the result of life-long experience.

The seaman was evidently unaccustomed to such scenes, for more than once during the short period of his progress down the lane, he uttered an exclamation of alarm, and sprang to the rescue of those large babies which are supposed to have grown sufficiently old to become nursing mothers to smaller babies—acts which were viewed with a look of pity by the small boy, and called from him the encouraging observations, “Keep your mind easy, capp'n; THEY'RE all right, bless you; the hosses knows 'em, and wouldn't 'urt 'em on no account.”

“This is Grubb's Court,” said the boy, turning sharply to the right and passing through a low archway.

“Thank 'ee, lad,” said the seaman, giving him a sixpence.

The small boy opened his eyes very wide indeed, exclaiming, “Hallo! I say, capp'n, wot's this?” at the same time, however, putting the coin in his pocket with an air which plainly said, “Whether you've made a mistake or not, you needn't expect to get it back again.”

Evidently the seaman entertained no such expectations, for he turned away and became absorbed in the scene around him.

It was not cheering. Though the summer sun was high and powerful, it failed to touch the broken pavement of Grubb's Court, or to dry up the moisture which oozed from it and crept up the walls of the surrounding houses. Everything was very old, very rotten, very crooked, and very dirty. The doorways round the court were wide open—always open—in some cases, because of there being no doors; in other cases, because the tenements to which they led belonged to a variety of families, largely composed of children who could not, even on tiptoe, reach or manipulate door-handles. Nursing mothers of two feet high were numerous, staggering about with nurslings of a foot and a half long. A few of the nurslings, temporarily abandoned by the premature mothers, lay sprawling—in some cases squalling—on the moist pavement, getting over the ground like large snails, and leaving slimy tracks behind them. Little boys, of the “City Arab” type, were sprinkled here and there, and one or two old women sat on door-steps contemplating the scene, or conversing with one or two younger women. Some of the latter were busy washing garments so dirty, that the dirty water of old Father Thames seemed quite a suitable purifier.

“Gillie,” cried one of the younger women referred to, wiping the soap-suds from her red arms, “come here, you bad, naughty boy. W'ere 'ave you bin? I want you to mind baby.”

“W'y, mother,” cried the small boy—who answered to the name of Gillie—“don't you see I'm engaged? I'm a-showin' this 'ere sea- capp'n the course he's got to steer for port. He wants to make the cabin of old mother Roby.”

“W'y don't you do it quickly, then?” demanded Gillie's mother, “you bad, naughty, wicked boy. Beg your parding, sir,” she added, to the seaman, “the boy 'an't got no sense, besides bein' wicked and naughty —'e ain't 'ad no train', sir, that's w'ere it is, all along of my 'avin' too much to do, an' a large family, sir, with no 'usband to speak of; right up the stair, sir, to the top, and along the passage-door straight before you at the hend of it. Mind the step, sir, w'en you gits up. Go up with the gentleman, you bad, wicked, naughty boy, and show—”

The remainder of the sentence became confused in distance, as the boy and the seaman climbed the stair; but a continuous murmuring sound, as of a vocal torrent, conveyed the assurance that the mother of Gillie was still holding forth.

“Ere it is,” said the young pilot, pausing at the top of the staircase, near the entrance to a very dark passage. “Keep 'er 'ead as she goes, but I'd recommend you to shorten sail, mind your 'elm, an 'ave the anchor ready to let

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go.”

Having thus accommodated his language to the supposed intelligence of the seaman, the elfin youth stood listening with intense eagerness and expectation as the other went into the passage, and, by sundry kicks and bumps against wooden walls, gave evidence that he found the channel intricate. Presently a terrible kick occurred. This was the seaman's toe against the step, of which he had been warned, but which he had totally forgotten; then a softer, but much heavier blow, was heard, accompanied by a savage growl—that was the seaman's nose and forehead against old Mrs. Roby's portal.

At this, Gillie's expectations were realised, and his joy consummated. With mischievous glee sparkling in his eyes, he hastened down to the Court to exhibit his sixpence to his mother, and to announce to all whom it might concern, that “the sea-capp'n had run his jib-boom slap through the old 'ooman's cabin-door.”

Chapter II. THE SEAMAN TAKES THE "CABIN" BY SURPRISE AND STORM.

Without having done precisely what Gillie had asserted of him, our seaman had in truth made his way into the presence of the little old woman who inhabited "the cabin," and stood there gazing round him as if lost in wonder; and well he might be, for the woman and cabin, besides being extremely old, were exceedingly curious, quaint, and small.

The former was wrinkled to such an extent, that you could not have found a patch of smooth skin large enough for a pea to rest on. Her teeth were all gone, back and front, and her nose, which was straight and well-formed, made almost successful attempts to meet a chin which had once been dimpled, but was now turned up. The mouth between them wore a benignant and a slightly humorous expression; the eyes, which were bright, black, and twinkling, seemed to have defied the ravages of time. Her body was much bent as she sat in her chair, and a pair of crutches leaning against the chimney-piece suggested the idea that it would not be much straighter if she stood up. She was wrapped in a large, warm shawl, and wore a high cap, which fitted so close round her little visage, that hair, if any, was undistinguishable.

The room in which she sat resembled the cabin of a ship in more respects than one. It was particularly low in the roof so low that the seaman's hair touched it as he stood there looking round him; and across this roof ran a great beam, from which hung a variety of curious ornaments, such as a Chinese lantern, a Turkish scimitar, a New Zealand club, an Eastern shield, and the model of a full-rigged ship. Elsewhere on the walls were, an ornamented dagger, a worsted-work sampler, a framed sheet of the flags of all nations, a sou'-wester cap and oiled coat, a telescope, and a small staring portrait of a sea-captain in his "go-to-meeting" clothes, which looked very much out of keeping with his staring sunburnt face, and were a bad fit. It might have been a good likeness, and was certainly the work of one who might have raised himself to the rank of a Royal Academician if he had possessed sufficient talent and who might have painted well if he had understood the principles of drawing and colour.

The windows of the apartment, of which there were two very small square ones, looked out upon the river, and, to some extent overhung it, so that a man of sanguine temperament might have enjoyed fishing from them, if he could have been content to catch live rats and dead cats. The prospect from these windows was, however, the best of them, being a wide reach of the noble river, crowded with its stately craft, and cut up by its ever-bustling steamers. But the most noteworthy part of this room, or "cabin," was the space between the two windows immediately over the chimney-piece, which the eccentric old woman had covered with a large, and, in some cases, inappropriate assortment of objects, by way of ornament, each article being cleaned and polished to the highest possible condition of which it was susceptible. A group of five photographs of children—three girls and two boys, looking amazed—formed the centrepiece of the design; around these were five other photographs of three young ladies and two young gentlemen, looking conscious, but pleased. The spaces between these, and every available space around them, were occupied by pot-lids of various sizes, old and battered, but shining like little suns; small looking-glasses, also of various sizes, some square and others round; little strings of beads; heads of meerschaums that had been much used in former days; pin-cushions, shell-baskets, one or two horse-shoes, and iron-heels of boots; several flat irons belonging to doll's houses, with a couple of dolls, much the worse for wear, mounting guard over them; besides a host of other nick-nacks, for which it were impossible to find names or imagine uses. Everything—from the old woman's cap to the uncarpeted floor, and the little grate in which a little fire was making feeble efforts to warm a little tea-kettle with a defiant spout—was scrupulously neat, and fresh, and clean, very much the reverse of what one might have expected to find in connection with a poverty-stricken population, a dirty lane, a filthy court, a rickety stair, and a dark passage. Possibly the cause might have been found in a large and much-worn family Bible, which lay on a small table in company with a pair of tortoiseshell spectacles, at the old woman's elbow.

On this scene the nautical man stood gazing, as we have said, with much interest; but he was too polite to gaze long.

"Your servant, missis," he said with a somewhat clumsy bow.

"Good morning, sir," said the little old woman, returning the bow with the air of one who had once seen better society than that of Grubb's Court.

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“Your name is Roby, I believe,” continued the seaman, advancing, and looking so large in comparison with the little room that he seemed almost to fill it.

The little old woman admitted that that was her name.

“My name,” said the seaman, “is Wopper, tho' I'm oftener called Skipper, also Capp'n, by those who know me.”

Mrs. Roby pointed to a chair and begged Captain Wopper to sit down, which he did after bestowing a somewhat pointed glance at the chair, as if to make sure that it could bear him.

“You was a nuss once, I'm told,” continued the seaman, looking steadily at Mrs. Roby as he sat down.

“I was,” answered the old woman, glancing at the photographs over the chimney-piece, “in the same family for many years.”

“You'll excuse me, ma'am,” continued the seaman, “if I appear something inquisitive, I want to make sure that I've boarded the right craft d'ee see—I mean, that you are the right 'ooman.”

A look of surprise, not unmingled with humour, beamed from Mrs. Roby's twinkling black eyes as she gazed steadily in the seaman's face, but she made no other acknowledgment of his speech than a slight inclination of her head, which caused her tall cap to quiver. Captain Wopper, regarding this as a favourable sign, went on.

“You was once, ma'am, I'm told, before bein' a nuss in the family of which you've made mention, a matron, or somethin' o' that sort, in a foundlin' hospital—in your young days, ma'am?”

Again Mrs. Roby admitted the charge, and demanded to know, “what then?”

“Ah, jus' so—that's what I'm comin' to,” said Captain Wopper, drawing his large hand over his beard. “You was present in that hospital, ma'am, was you not, one dark November morning, when a porter-cask was left at the door by some person unknown, who cut his cable and cleared off before the door was opened,—which cask, havin' on its head two Xs, and bein' labelled, ‘This side up, with care,’ contained two healthy little babby boys?”

Mrs. Roby, becoming suddenly grave and interested, again said, “I was.”

“Jus' so,” continued the captain, “you seem to be the right craft—'ooman, I mean—that I'm in search of. These two boys, who were supposed to be brothers, because of their each havin' a brown mole of exactly the same size and shape on their left arms, just below their elbows, were named ‘Stout,’ after the thing in which they was headed up, the one bein' christened James, the other Willum?”

“Yes, yes,” replied the little old woman eagerly, “and a sweet lovely pair they was when the head of that barrel was took off, lookin' out of the straw in which they was packed like two little cheruphims, though they did smell strong of the double X, and was a little elevated because of the fumes that 'ung about the wood. But how do you come to know all this, sir, and why do you ask?”

“Excuse me, ma'am,” replied the sailor with a smile, which curled up his huge moustache expressively,—“you shall know presently, but I must make quite sure that I'm aboard of—that is to say, that you ARE the right 'ooman. May I ask, ma'am, what became of these two cheruphims, as you've very properly named 'em?”

“Certainly,” answered Mrs. Roby, “the elder boy—we considered him the elder, because he was the first took out of the barrel—was a stoodious lad, and clever. He got into a railway company, I believe, and became a rich man—married a lady, I'm told,—and changed his name to Stoutley, so 'tis said, not thinkin' his right name suitable to his circumstances, which, to say truth, it wasn't, because he was very thin. I've heard it said that his family was extravagant, and that he went to California to seek his brother, and look after some property, and died there, but I'm not rightly sure, for he was a close boy, and latterly I lost all knowledge of him and his family.”

“And the other cheruphim, Willum,” said the sailor, “what of him?”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mrs. Roby, a flush suffusing her wrinkled countenance, while her black eyes twinkled more than usual, “he was a jewel, HE was. They said in the hospital that he was a wild good-for-nothing boy, but I never thought him so. He was always fond of me—very fond of me, and I of him. It is true he could never settle to anythink, and at last ran away to sea, when about twelve year old; but he didn't remain long at that either, for when he got to California, he left his ship, and was not heard of for a long time after that. I thought he was dead or drowned, but at last I got a letter from him, enclosing money, an' saying he had been up at the noo gold-diggings, an' had been lucky, dear boy, and he wanted to share his luck with me, an would never, never, forget me; but he didn't need to send me money to prove that. He has continued to send me a little every year since then;—ah! it's many, many years now,—ay, ay, many years.”

She sighed, and looked wistfully at the spark of fire in the grate that was making ineffectual attempts to boil

the little tea-kettle with the defiant spout; "but why," she continued, looking up suddenly, "why do you ask about him?"

"Because I knew him," replied Captain Wopper, searching for something which appeared to be lost in the depths of one of his capacious pockets. "Willum Stout was a chum of mine. We worked together at the Californy gold-mines for many a year as partners, and, when at last we'd made what we thought enough, we gave it up an' came down to San Francisco together, an' set up a hotel, under the name of the 'Jolly Tars,' by Stout and Co. I was the Co., ma'am; an', for the matter o' that I may say I was the Stout too, for both of us answered to the Stout or the Co., accordin' as we was addressed, d'ee see? When Co. thought he'd made enough money to entitle him to a holiday, he came home, as you see; but before leavin', Willum said to him, 'Co., my lad, w'en you get home, you'll go and see that old 'oom of the name of Roby, whom I've often told you about. She lives in Lunun, somewheres down by the river in a place called Grubb's Court. She was very good to me, that old 'oom was, when she was young, as I've told you before. You go an' give her my blessin'—Willum's blessin'—and this here bag and that there letter.' 'Yes,' says I, 'Willum, I'll do it, my boy, as soon as ever I set futt on British soil.' I did set futt on British soil this morning, and there's the letter; also the bag; so, you see, old lady, I've kep' my promise."

Captain Wopper concluded by placing a small but heavy canvas bag, and a much-soiled letter, in Mrs. Roby's lap.

To say that the little old woman seized the letter with eager delight, would convey but a faint idea of her feelings as she opened it with trembling hands, and read it with her bright black eyes.

She read it half aloud, mingled with commentary, as she proceeded, and once or twice came to a pause over an illegible word, on which occasions her visitor helped her to the word without looking at the letter. This circumstance struck her at last as somewhat singular, for she looked up suddenly, and said, "You appear, sir, to be familiar with the contents of my letter."

"That's true, ma'am," replied Captain Wopper, who had been regarding the old woman with a benignant smile; "Willum read it to me before I left, a-purpose to enable me to translate the ill-made pot-hooks and hangers, because, d'ee see, we were more used to handlin' the pick and shovel out there than the pen, an' Willum used to say he never was much of a dab at a letter. He never wrote you very long ones, ma'am, I believe?"

Mrs. Roby looked at the fire pensively, and said, in a low voice, as if to herself rather than her visitor, "No, they were not long—never very long—but always kind and sweet to me—very sweet—ay, ay, it's a long, long time now, a long time, since he came to me here and asked for a night's lodging."

"Did you give it him, ma'am?" asked the captain. "Give it him!" exclaimed Mrs. Roby, with sudden energy, "of course I did. The poor boy was nigh starving. How could I refuse him? It is true I had not much to give, for the family I was with as nuss had failed and left me in great distress, through my savings bein' in their hands; and that's what brought me to this little room long, long ago—ay, ay. But no blame to the family, sir, no blame at all. They couldn't help failin', an' the young ones, when they grew up, did not forget their old nuss, though they ain't rich, far from it; and it's what they give me that enables me to pay my rent and stay on here—God bless 'em."

She looked affectionately at the daguerreotypes which hung, in the midst of the sheen and glory of pot-lids, beads, and looking-glasses, above the chimney-piece.

"You gave him, meanin' Willum, nothing else, I suppose?" asked the captain, with a knowing look; "such, for instance, as a noo suit of clothes, because of his bein' so uncommon ragged that he looked as if he had bin captured in a clumsy sort of net that it would not have been difficult to break through and escape from naked; also a few shillin's, bein' your last, to pay his way down to Gravesend, where the ship was lyin', that you had, through interest with the owners, got him a berth aboard?"

"Ah!" returned Mrs. Roby, shaking her head and smiling gently, "I see that William has told you all about it."

"He has, ma'am," replied Captain Wopper, with a decisive nod. "You see, out in the gold-fields of Californy, we had long nights together in our tent, with nothin' to do but smoke our pipes, eat our grub, and spin yarns, for we had no books nor papers, nothin' to read except a noo Testament, and we wouldn't have had even that, ma'am, but for yourself. It was the Testament you gave to Willum at partin', an' very fond of it he was, bein' your gift. You see, at the time we went to Californy, there warn't many of us as cared for the Word of God. Most of us was idolaters that had run away from home, our chief gods—for we had many of 'em—bein' named Adventure, Excitement and Gold; though there was some noble exceptions, too. But, as I was saying, we had so much time on our hands that we recalled all our past adventures together over and over again, and, you may be sure, ma'am, that

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your name and kindness was not forgotten. There was another name," continued Captain Wopper, drawing his chair nearer the fire, crossing his legs and stroking his beard as he looked up at the dingy ceiling, "that Willum often thought about and spoke of. It was the name of a gentleman, a clerk in the Customs, I believe, who saved his life one day when he fell into the river just below the bridge."

"Mr. Lawrence," said the old woman, promptly.

"Ah! Mr. Lawrence; yes, that's the name," continued the Captain. "Willum was very grateful to him, and bid me try to find him out and tell him so. Is he alive?"

"Dead," said Mrs. Roby, shaking her head sadly.

The seaman appeared much concerned on hearing this. For some time he did not speak, and then said that he had been greatly interested in that gentleman through Willum's account of him.

"Had he left any children?"

"Yes," Mrs. Roby told him; "one son, who had been educated as a doctor, and had become a sort of a city missionary, and was as pleasant a young gentleman as she ever knew."

"So, then, you know him?" said the Captain.

"Know him! I should think so. Why, this is the district where he visits, and a kind friend he is to the poor, though he IS bashful a bit, an' seems to shrink from pushin' himself where he's not wanted."

"Not the less a friend to the poor on that account," thought Captain Wopper; but he said nothing, and Mrs. Roby went on:—

"You see, his father before him did a great deal for the poor in a quiet way here, as I have reason to know, this district lying near his office, and handy, as it were. Long after the time when he saved Willum's life, he married a sweet young creeter, who helped him in visitin' the poor, but she caught fever among 'em and died, when their only son George was about ten year old. George had been goin' about with his mother on her visits, and seemed very fond of her and of the people, dear child; and after she died, he used to continue coming with his father. Then he went to school and college and became a young doctor, and only last year he came back to us, so changed for the better that none of us would have known him but for his kindly voice and fine manly-looking manner. His shyness, too, has stuck to him a little, but it does not seem to hinder him now as it once did. Ah!" continued Mrs. Roby, in a sympathetic tone, "it's a great misfortune to be shy."

She looked pensively at the little fire and shook her tall cap at it, as if it or the defiant tea-kettle were answerable for something in reference to shyness.

"Yes, it's a great misfortune to be shy," she repeated. "Were you ever troubled with that complaint, Captain Wopper?"

The Captain's moustache curled at the corners as he stroked his beard, and said that really, on consideration, he was free to confess that he never had been convicted of that sin.

Mrs. Roby bestowed on him a look of admiration, and continued, "Well, as I have said—"

She was interrupted at this point by the entrance of an active little girl, with the dirtiest face and sweetest expression imaginable, with garments excessively ragged, blue eyes that sparkled as they looked at you, a mouth that seemed made for kissing, if only it had been clean, and golden hair that would have fallen in clustering curls on her neck, if it had not been allowed to twist itself into something like a yellow door-mat which rendered a bonnet unnecessary.

Bestowing a glance of surprise on the seaman, but without uttering a word, she went smartly to a corner and drew into the middle of the room a round table with one leg and three feet, whose accommodating top having been previously flat against the wall, fell down horizontal and fixed itself with a snap. On this the earnest little woman, quickly and neatly, spread a fairish linen cloth, and proceeded to arrange thereon a small tea-pot and cup and saucer, with other materials, for an early tea.

"Two cups, Netta, my dear," said Mrs. Roby.

"Yes, grannie," replied Netta, in a soft quick, little voice.

"Your grandchild?" asked the Captain.

"No; a neighbour's child, who is very kind to me. She calls me grannie, because I like it. But, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Roby, "young Dr. Lawrence came back last year and began to visit us in the old way, intending to continue, he said, until he got a situation of some sort in the colonies, I believe; but I do hope he'll not be obliged to leave us, for he has bin a great blessin' to this neighbourhood, only he gets little pay for his work, I fear, and

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appears to have little of his own to live on, poor young man.—Now, Captain Wopper, you'll stop and have a cup of tea with me. I take it early, you see,—in truth, I make a sort of dinner of it,—and we can have a talk about William over it. I'm proud to have a friend of his at my table, sir, I do assure you, though it IS a poor one.”

Captain Wopper accepted the invitation heartily, and thought, though he said nothing, that it was indeed a poor table, seeing that the only food on it besides the very weak tea in the wonderfully small pot, consisted of one small loaf of bread.

“Netta,” exclaimed Mrs. Roby, with a look of surprise, “there's no butter! Go, fetch it, dear.”

Mrs. Roby was, or thought herself, a remarkably deep character. She spoke to Netta openly, but, in secret, bestowed a meaning glance on her, and slipped a small coin into her hand. The dirty, sweet-faced damsel replied by a remarkably knowing wink—all of which by-play, with the reason for it, was as clear to Captain Wopper as if it had been elaborately explained to him. But the Captain was a discreet man. He became deeply absorbed in daguerreotypes and sauce-pan lids above the fireplace, to the exclusion of all else.

“You've forgotten the bag, ma'am,” said the Captain, drawing his chair nearer the table.

“So I have; dear me, what is it?” cried Mrs. Roby, taking it up. “It's heavy.”

“Gold!” said the Captain.

“Gold?” exclaimed the old nurse.

“Ay, nuggets,” said the seaman, opening it and emptying its contents on the table.

As the old nurse gazed on the yellow heap her black eyes glittered with pleasure, as though they had derived additional lustre from the precious metal, and she drew them towards her with a trembling, almost greedy, motion, at sight of which Captain Wopper's countenance became troubled.

“And did Willie send this to me, dear boy?”

“He did, ma'am, hoping that it would be of use in the way of making your home more comfortable, and enabling you to keep a better table.”

He glanced uneasily round the poor room and at the small loaf as he spoke, and the old woman observed the glance.

“It is very kind of him, very kind,” continued Mrs. Roby. “What may it be worth, now?”

“Forty pounds, more or less,” answered the Captain.

Again the old woman's eyes sparkled greedily, and again the seaman's countenance fell.

“Surely, ma'am,” said the Captain, gravely, “things must be uncommon dear in London, for you tell me that Willum has sent you a deal of money in time past, but you don't seem to be much the better for it.”

“Captain Wopper,” said Mrs. Roby, putting her hand lightly on the Captain's arm as it lay on the table, and looking earnestly into his face, “if you had not been an old and valued friend of my dear Willie—which I learn that you are from his letter—I would have said your remark was a rude one; but, being what you are, I don't mind telling you that I save up every penny I can scrape together for little Netta White, the girl that has just gone out to fetch the butter. Although she's not well cared for,—owing to her mother, who's a washerwoman, bein' overburdened with work and a drunken husband,—she's one of the dearest creeters I ever did see. Bless you, sir, you'd be amazed if you knew all the kind and thoughtful things that untrained and uncared for child does, and never thinks she's doing anything more than other people. It's all along of her mother's spirit, which is as good as gold. Some months ago Little Netta happened to be up here when I was at tea, and, seeing the difficulty I had to move about with my old rheumatic limbs, she said she'd come and set out my tea and breakfast for me; and she's done it, sir, from that time to this, expecting nothing fur it, and thinking I'm too poor to give her anything. But she's mistaken,” continued Mrs. Roby, with a triumphant twinkle in her black eyes, “she doesn't know that I've made a confidant of her brother Gillie, and give him a sixpence now and then to give to his mother without telling where he got it, and she doesn't know that I'm saving up to be able to leave something to her when I'm called home—it can't be long, now; it can't be long.”

“Old 'ooman,” cried Captain Wopper, whose face had brightened wonderfully during this explanation, “give us your flip—your hand. I honour your heart, ma'am, and I've no respect whatever for your brain!”

“I'm not sure that that's a compliment,” said Mrs. Roby, with a smile.

Captain Wopper assured her with much solemnity that it might or might not be a compliment, but it was a fact. “Why, look here,” said he, “you go and starve yourself, and deny yourself all sorts of little comforts—what then? Why, you'll die long before your time, which is very like taking the law into your own hands, ma'am, and

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then you won't leave to Netta nearly as much as you might if you had taken care of yourself and lived longer, and saved up after a reasonable fashion. It's sheer madness. Why, ma'am, you're starving NOW, but I'll put a stop to that. Don't you mind, now, whether I'm rude or not. You can't expect anything else from an old gold-digger, who has lived for years where there were no women except such as appeared to be made of mahogany, with nothing to cover 'em but a coating of dirt and a blue skirt. Besides, Willum told me at parting to look after you and see that you wanted for nothing, which I promised faithfully to do. You've some regard for Willum's wishes, ma'am?—you wouldn't have me break my promises to Willum, would you?"

The Captain said this with immense rapidity and vigour, and finished it with such a blow of his heavy fist on the little table that the cups and plates danced, and the lid of the little tea-pot leaped up as if its heart were about to come out of its mouth. Mrs. Roby was so taken by surprise that she could not speak for a few seconds, and before she had recovered sufficiently to do so, Little Netta came in with the butter.

"Now, ma'am," resumed the Captain, when the girl had retired, "here's where it is. With your leave I'll reveal my plans to you, and ask your advice. When I was about to leave Californy, Willum told me first of all to go and find YOU out, and give you that letter and bag of nuggets, which I've done. 'Then,' says he, 'Wopper, you go and find out my brother Jim's widow, and give 'em my love an' dooty, and this letter, and this bag of nuggets,'—said letter and bag, ma'am, bein' now in my chest aboard ship. 'So,' says I, 'Willum, I will—trust me.' 'I do,' says he; 'and, Wopper,' says he, 'keep your weather eye open, my boy, w'en you go to see 'em, because I've my suspicions, from what my poor brother said on his deathbed, when he was wandering in his mind, that his widow is extravagant. I don't know,' Willum goes on to say, 'what the son may be, but there's that cousin, Emma Gray, that lives in the house with 'em, SHE'S all right. SHE'S corresponded with me, off an' on, since ever she could write, and my brother bein' something lazy, poor fellar, through havin' too much to do I fancy, got to throw all the letter-writin' on her shoulders. You take special note of HER, Wopper, and if it should seem to you that they don't treat her well, you let me know.' 'Willum,' says I, 'I will—trust me.' 'Well, then,' says Willum, 'there's one other individooal I want you to ferret out, that's the gentleman—he must be an old gentleman now—that saved my life when I was a lad, Mr. Lawrence by name. You try to find HIM out and if you can do him a good turn, do it.' 'Willum,' says I, 'I'll do it—trust me.' 'I do,' says he, 'and when may I expect you back in Californy, Wopper?' 'Willum,' says I, 'that depends.' 'True,' says he, 'it does. Give us you're flipper, old boy, we may never meet again in these terrestrial diggings. Good luck to you. Don't forget my last will an' testimony as now expressed.' 'Willum,' says I, 'I won't.' So, ma'am, I left Californy with a sacred trust, so to speak, crossed the sea, and here I am."

At this point Captain Wopper, having warmed in his subject, took in at one bite as much of the small loaf as would have been rather a heavy dinner for Mrs. Roby, and emptied at one gulp a full cup of her tea, after which he stroked his beard, smiled benignantly at his hostess, became suddenly earnest again, and went on—chewing as he spoke.

"Now, ma'am, I've three questions to ask: in the first place, as it's not possible now to do a good turn to old Mr. Lawrence, I must do it to his son. Can you tell me where he lives?"

Mrs. Roby told him that it was in a street not far from where they sat, in a rather poor lodging.

"Secondly, ma'am, can you tell me where Willum's sister-in-law lives,—Mrs. Stout, ALIAS Stoutley?"

"No, Captain Wopper, but I daresay Mr. Lawrence can. He knows 'most everythink, and has a London Directory."

"Good. Now, in the third place, where am I to find a lodging?"

Mrs. Roby replied that there were plenty to be found in London of all kinds.

"You haven't a spare room here, have you?" said the Captain, looking round.

Mrs. Roby shook her head and said that she had not; and, besides, that if she had, it would be impossible for her to keep a lodger, as she had no servant, and could not attend on him herself.

"Mrs. Roby," said the Captain, "a gold-digging seaman don't want no servant, nor no attendance. What's up aloft?"

By pointing to a small trap-door in the ceiling, he rendered the question intelligible.

"It's a garret, I believe," replied Mrs. Roby, smiling; "but having no ladder, I've never been up."

"You've no objection to my taking a look, have you?" asked the Captain.

"None in the world," replied the old woman. Without more ado the seaman rose, mounted on a chair, pushed

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open the trap-door, thrust his head and shoulders through, and looked round. Apparently the inspection was not deemed sufficiently close, for, to the old woman's alarm and inexpressible surprise, he seized the edges of the hole with his strong hands, raised himself up, and finally disappeared in the regions above! The alarm of the old woman was somewhat increased by the sound of her visitor's heavy tread on the boards overhead as he stumbled about. Presently his head appeared looking down through the trap. In any aspect, Captain Wopper's shaggy head was an impressive one; but viewed in an upside-down position, with the blood running into it, it was peculiarly striking.

"I say, old lady," he shouted, as if his position recalled the action and induced the tones of a boatswain, "it'll do. A capital berth, with two portholes and a bunk."

The Captain's head disappeared, and immediately his legs took its place, suggesting the outrageous idea that he had thrown a somersault. Next moment his huge body slid down, and he stood on the floor much flushed and covered with dust.

"Now, old girl, is it to be?" he said, sitting down at the table. "Will you take me as a lodger, for better and for worse? I'll fit up the berth on the main-deck, and be my own servant as well as your's. Say the word."

"I can refuse nothing to Willie's friend," said old Mrs. Roby, "but really I—"

"Done, it's a bargain," interrupted the Captain, rising abruptly. "Now, I'll go visit young Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Stoutley, and to-morrow I'll bring my kit, take possession of my berth, and you and I shall sail in company, I hope, and be messmates for some time to come."

Chapter III. DIFFICULTIES AMONG THE SOCIAL SUMMITS.

In one of the many mansions of the "west end" of London, a lady reclined one morning on a sofa wishing that it were afternoon. She was a middle-aged, handsome, sickly lady. If it had been afternoon she would have wished that it were evening, and if it had been evening she would have wished for the morning; for Mrs. Stoutley was one of those languid invalids whose enjoyment appears to be altogether in the future or the past, and who seem to have no particular duties connected with the present except sighing and wishing. It may be that this unfortunate condition of mind had something to do with Mrs. Stoutley's feeble state of health. If she had been a little more thoughtful about others, and less mindful of herself, she might, perhaps, have sighed and wished less, and enjoyed herself more. At all events her doctor seemed to entertain some such opinion, for, sitting in an easy chair beside her, and looking earnestly at her handsome, worn-out countenance, he said, somewhat abruptly, being a blunt doctor.

"You must go abroad, madam, and try to get your mind, as well as your body, well shaken up."

"Why, doctor," replied Mrs. Stoutley, with a faint smile; "you talk of me as if I were a bottle of physic or flat ginger-beer."

"You are little better, silly woman," thought the doctor, but his innate sense of propriety induced him only to say, with a smile, "Well, there is at least this much resemblance between you and a bottle of flat ginger-beer, namely, that both require to be made to effervesce a little. It will never do to let your spirits down as you have been doing. We must brighten up, my dear madam—not Brighton up, by the way, we've had enough of Brighton and Bath, and such places. We must get away to the Continent this summer—to the Pyrenees, or Switzerland, where we can breathe the fresh mountain air, and ramble on glaciers, and have a thorough change."

Mrs. Stoutley looked gently, almost pitifully at the doctor while he spoke, as if she thought him a well-meaning and impulsive, but rather stupid maniac.

"Impossible, my dear doctor," she said; "you know I could not stand the fatigues of such a journey."

"Well, then," replied the doctor, abruptly, "you must stop at home and die."

"Oh! what a shocking naughty man you are to talk so."

Mrs. Stoutley said this, however, with an easy good-natured air, which showed plainly that she did not believe her illness likely to have such a serious termination.

"I will be still more naughty and shocking," continued the doctor, resolutely, but with a twinkle in his eyes, "for I shall prescribe not only a dose of mountain air, but a dose of mountain exercise, to be taken—and the patient to be well shaken while taken—every morning throughout the summer and autumn. Moreover, after you return to England, you must continue the exercise during the winter; and, in addition to that, must have an object at the end of your walks and drives—not shopping, observe, that is not a sufficiently out-of-door object; nor visiting your friends, which is open to the same objection."

Mrs. Stoutley smiled again at this, and said that really, if visiting and shopping were forbidden, there seemed to be nothing left but museums and picture-galleries.

To this the doctor retorted that although she might do worse than visit museums and picture-galleries, he would prefer that she should visit the diamond and gold fields of the city.

"Did you ever hear of the diamond and gold fields of London, Miss Gray?" he said, turning to a plain yet pretty girl, who had been listening in silence to the foregoing conversation.

"Never," answered Miss Gray, with a look of surprise.

Now, Miss Gray's look of surprise induces us to state in passing that this young lady—niece, also poor relation and companion, to Mrs. Stoutley—possessed three distinct aspects. When grave, she was plain, —not ugly, observe; a girl of nineteen, with a clear healthy complexion and nut-brown hair, cannot in any circumstances be ugly; no, she was merely plain when grave. When she smiled she was decidedly pretty, and when she laughed she was captivating—absolutely irresistible! She seldom laughed, occasionally smiled, and was generally grave. There was something quite incomprehensible about her, for she was not an unusually good girl, and by no means a dashing girl, neither was she an intensely modest girl—and yet, plain Emma Gray had perhaps driven more young men into a condition of drivelling imbecility than any acknowledged beauty of the metropolis.

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Observe, we say “perhaps,” because we lay claim to no superhuman knowledge in regard to such matters.

“They are rather extensive fields,” continued the doctor, “scattered here and there about the metropolis, but lying chiefly in the city and on the banks of the Thames. They comprise many picture-galleries, too, and museums; the latter containing wonderful specimens of old bones and fossil remains, filth, and miscellaneous abominations, in which the gold and diamonds are imbedded—sometimes buried,—and the former being hung with subjects—chiefly interiors—incomparably superior, in respect of graphic power, to the works of Hogarth.”

“Oh! I know what you mean,” said Miss Gray, with a little smile.

“Your wits are sharper than mine, Emma,” said Mrs. Stoutley, with a sigh and a placid look. “What DO you refer to, Doctor Tough?”

“I refer to those districts, madam, chiefly inhabited by the poor, where there are innumerable diamonds and gold nuggets, some of which are being polished, and a good many are glittering brightly, though not yet fixed in their proper setting, while by far the greater number of them are down in the earth, and useless in the meantime, and apt to be lost for want of adventurous diggers. They are splendid fields those of London, and digging is healthful occupation—though it might not seem so at first sight. Did you ever visit the poor, Mrs. Stoutley?”

With a slight elevation of her eyebrows, and the application of a scent-bottle to her delicate nose, as if the question had suggested bad smells, the lady said that—Well, yes, she had once visited a poor old gardener who had been a faithful creature in the family of a former friend, but that her recollection of that visit did not tend to induce a wish for its repetition.

“H'm!” coughed the doctor, “well, the taste of physic is usually bad at first, but one soon gets used to it, and the after effects, as you know, are exceedingly beneficial. I hope that when you visit the London diggings you may find the truth of this; but it will be time enough to speak of that subject when you return from rambling on the glaciers of Switzerland, where, by the way, the dirt, rubbish, and wrack, called moraines, which lie at the foot of the glaciers, will serve to remind you of the gold-fields to which I have referred, for much of what composes those moraines was once solid rock in a fixed position on the heights, or glittering ice which reflected the sun's dazzling rays on surrounding high life, though it lies low in the earth now. To a lady of your intelligence, madam, I need not expound my parable. There are many avalanches, great and small, in English society as well as among the Swiss mountains; and, whether by gradual subsidence or a tremendous rush, we must all find our places in the moraine at last.”

“Really, doctor,” said Mrs. Stoutley, with a light laugh, “you seem to have already wandered much among these moral moraines, and to have acquired some of their ruggedness. How CAN you talk of such dismal things to a patient? But are you really in earnest about my going abroad?”

“Indeed I am,” replied the doctor, firmly, “and I advise you to begin your preparations at once, for you must set out on your travels in less than a month. I lay the responsibility of seeing my orders carried into effect on your shoulders, Miss Gray.”

So saying, the doctor rose and took his leave. Mrs. Stoutley and her niece immediately began to discuss the subject of Switzerland—the one languidly, the other with animation. It was plain enough that, although the invalid protested to the doctor her inability to travel, she really had no objection, perhaps felt some desire, to go abroad, for when Miss Gray mentioned the fact that there was a difficulty in the shape of insufficient funds, she replied with more warmth than usual—

“Now, Emma, what is the use of always bringing up that ridiculous idea?”

“No doubt, auntie,” the maiden replied, “it is a little ridiculous to run short of ready money, considering the style in which we live; but it would be still more ridiculous, you know, to go to Switzerland without the means of paying our expenses while there.”

“What's that you say about expenses, cousin?” exclaimed a tall handsome stripling who entered at the moment, and seated himself on the sofa at his mother's feet.

“Oh, bother the expense!” he exclaimed, when the difficulty had been explained to him, “it can't cost so much to spend a few months in Switzerland,—besides, we can do it cheap, you know. Didn't Mr. What's-his-name, our man of business, say that there was a considerable balance at the banker's, and that if the What-d'ee—call-'em mines paid a reasonable dividend, we should easily get over our difficulties?”

“He said something of that sort, I believe,” replied Mrs. Stoutley, with a sigh.

“I rather think, cousin Lewis,” said Emma, endeavouring to repress a smile, “that he said there was an

inconsiderable balance at the bankers, and that UNLESS the Gorong mine paid a reasonable dividend, we shouldn't easily get over our difficulties."

Both Lewis and his mother laughed at the quiet way in which this was said, but, while both admitted that Emma's view of the matter might perhaps be correct, Lewis held that there was no good reason for supposing there would be any difficulty in the meantime in obtaining from their "man-of-business" the paltry sum that was required for a short tour on the Continent. Indeed Mrs. Stoutley regarded this man-of-business as a mere sponge, who required only to be squeezed in order to the production of what was desired, and the man-of-business himself found it no easy matter to convince her that she held erroneous views on this subject, and that at her present rate of progress, she would, to use the doctor's glacial simile, very soon topple from the pinnacle of fashion, on which she sat, and fall with the crash of a social avalanche into the moraine of ruin.

"What a wise little woman you are, cousin Emma," said Lewis, gaily. "You ought to have been bred to the law, or trained an accountant. However, we won't be guided by your advice just now, first, because the doctor has ORDERED mother abroad for her health, which is our chief consideration; and, second, because I wish of all things to see Switzerland, and climb Mont Blanc. Besides, we are not so poor as you think, and I hope to add a little to our general funds in a day or two. By the way, can you lend me ten pounds just now, mother?"

"Why do you want it?" asked Mrs. Stoutley, sternly, as if she meant to refuse, but at the same time opening her purse.

"Don't ask me just now. I will repay you tomorrow, with interest and shall then explain."

With an easy, languid smile, the carelessly amiable invalid handed her last ten-pound note to her hopeful son, who had just transferred it to his pocketbook, when a footman entered and presented a scrap of dirty paper, informing his lady that the person who sent up the "card" desired to see her.

"What is this?" said Mrs. Stoutley, holding the paper gingerly with the tips of her fingers, "Wip—Wap—Wopper! What is Wopper? Is the person a man or a woman?"

The footman, who, although well-bred, found it difficult to restrain a smile, intimated that the person was a man, and added, that he said he had come from California, and wanted to see Mrs. Stoutley very particularly.

On hearing this, the lady's manner changed at once, and, with more animation than she had yet exhibited, she desired that he should be shown in.

With his large wide-awake in one hand, and a canvas bag in the other, Captain Wopper entered the drawing-room, and looked around him with a beaming and rather bashful smile.

"Mrs. Stoutley, I believe," he said, advancing, "and Miss Emma Gray, I suppose," he added, turning with a beaming glance towards the young lady.

Mrs. Stoutley admitted that he was right, and expressed some surprise that he, a perfect stranger, should be so well acquainted with their names.

"I am indeed a stranger personally, ma'am," said Captain Wopper, smoothing the hair down on his rugged brow, "but I may be said to know you pretty well, seeing that I have for many years been the friend and messmate of your late husband's brother in Californy."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Stoutley, with increasing animation, as she rose and held out her hand; "any friend of my brother-in-law is heartily welcome. Be seated, Mr. Wopper, and let me hear about him. He was very kind to my dear husband during his last illness—very kind. I shall never forget him."

"No doubt he was," said the Captain, accepting the chair which Emma Gray handed to him, with looks of great interest. "Thank 'ee, Miss. Willum Stout—excuse my familiarity, ma'am, I always called him Willum, because we was like brothers—more than brothers, I may say, an' very friendly. Yes, Willum Stout WAS kind to his brother in his last days. It would have bin shame to him if he hadn't for your husband, ma'am, was kind to Willum, an' he often said to me, over the camp-fires in the bush, that he'd never forget HIS kindness. But it's over now," continued the seaman in a sad tone, "an' poor Willum is left alone."

"Is my uncle VERY poor?" asked Lewis, who had been paying more attention to the appearance of their rugged visitor than to what he had said.

"Ay, VERY poor," replied the seaman, "as regards near relations, leastwise such as he has seen and known in former days, but he an't poor as regards gold. He's got lots of that. He and I worked not far from each other for years, an' he used to hit upon good claims somehow, and shovelled up the nuggets like stones."

"Indeed! I wish he'd send a few of them this way," exclaimed Lewis, with a careless laugh.

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“No doubt he might do so, young man, if he knew you were in need of 'em, but your father gave him to understand that his family was rich.”

“Rich!” exclaimed Lewis, with a smile, in which there was a touch of contempt. “Well, yes, we were rich enough once, but when my father was away these wretched mines became—”

“Lewie!” exclaimed his mother, hastily, “what nonsense you do talk! Really, one would think from your account that we were paupers.”

“Well, mother, so we are—paupers to this extent at least, that we can't afford to take a run to Switzerland, though ordered to do so for your health, because we lack funds.”

Lewis said this half petulantly, for he had been a “spoilt child,” and might probably have been by that time a ruined young man, but for the mercy of his Creator, who had blessed him with an amiable disposition. He was one of those youths, in short, of whom people say that they can't be spoiled, though fond and foolish parents do their best to spoil them.

“You mis-state the case, naughty boy,” said Mrs. Stoutley, annoyed at being thus forced to touch on her private affairs before a stranger. “No doubt our ready cash is what our man-of-business calls ‘locked up,’ but that, you know, is only a matter of temporary inconvenience, and cannot last long.”

As Mrs. Stoutley paused and hesitated, their visitor placed on the table a canvas bag, which, up to this point he had rested on one knee.

“This bag,” he said, “of nuggets, is a gift from Willum. He desired me to deliver it to you, Miss Gray, as a SMALL acknowledgment of your kindness in writin' so often to him. He'd have bought you a silk gown, or a noo bonnet, so he said, but wasn't sure as to your taste in such matters, and thought you'd accept the nuggets and buy it for yourself. Leastwise, that's somethin' like the speech Willum tried to tell me to deliver, but he warn't good at speech-makin' no more than I at remembrin', and hoped you'd take the will for the deed.”

With a flush of surprise and pleasure, Emma Gray accepted both the will and the deed, with many expressions of gratitude, and said, that as she did not require either a silk dress or a bonnet just then, she would invest her little fortune; she would lend it at high interest, to a lady under temporary inconvenience, who was ordered by her doctor to Switzerland for the benefit of her health. To this Mrs. Stoutley protested very earnestly that the lady in question would not accept the loan on any consideration; that it must not be diverted from its destined use, but be honestly expended on silk-dresses and new bonnets. To which Emma replied, that the destiny of the gift, with interest (she was very particular on that head), should be fulfilled in good time, but that meanwhile it must be lent out.

In the midst of a cross-fire of this kind the bag was opened, and its contents poured on the table, to the immense admiration of all the company, none of whom had, until that day, beheld gold in its native condition.

“How much may it be worth, Mr. Wopper?” asked Lewis, weighing one of the largest lumps.

“About two hundred pound, I should say, more or less,” replied the seaman.

“Indeed!” exclaimed the youth in surprise—an exclamation which was echoed by his mother and cousin in modified tones.

While they sat thus toying with the lumps of gold, the conversation reverted to the sender of it, and the Captain told such entertaining anecdotes of bush life, in all of which “Uncle Willum” had been an actor, that the afternoon arrived before Mrs. Stoutley had time to wish for it. They also talked of the last illness of the deceased father of the family; and when it came out that Captain (they had found out by that time that their visitor had been a skipper, and, by courtesy, a captain), had assisted “Willum” in nursing Mr. Stoutley, and had followed him to the grave, Mrs. Stoutley's gratitude was such that she insisted on her visitor staying to dinner.

“Thank 'ee, ma'am,” he said, “I've dined. I always dines at one o'clock if I can manage it.”

“But we don't dine till eight,” said the lady, “so it will just suit for your supper.”

“Do come,” said Emma Gray, “we shall be quite alone, and shall have a great spinning of yarns over Uncle William and the gold-fields.”

“Well, I don't mind if I do,” said the Captain, “but before supper I must go to the docks for my kit and settle my lodgings.”

“I am going to the Strand, and shall be happy to give you a lift,” said Lewis.

The Captain accepted the offer, and as they drove along, he and his young friend became very intimate, insomuch that Lewis, who was lighthearted, open, and reckless, let him into his confidence, and spoke quite freely

about his mother's difficulties. It is only justice to add that the Captain did not encourage him in this. When, however, the youth spoke of himself, he not only encouraged him, but drew him out. Among other things, he drew out of him the fact that he was in the habit of gambling, and that he fully expected—if his usual luck attended him—to assist in adding to the fund which was to take the family abroad.

The Captain looked at the handsome stripling for a few seconds in silent surprise.

“You don't mean to tell me,” he said slowly, “that you gamble?”

“Indeed I do,” replied Lewis, with a bland smile, and something of a twinkle in his eye.

“For money?” asked the Captain.

“For money,” assented the youth; “what have you to say against it?”

“Why, I've to say that it's mean.”

“That's strong language,” said Lewis, flushing.

“It an't strong enough by a long way,” returned the Captain, with indignation, “it's more than mean, it's contemptible; it's despicable.”

The flush on Lewis's face deepened, and he looked at his companion with the air of one who meditates knocking another down. Perhaps the massive size and strength of the Captain induced him to change his mind. It may be that there occurred to him the difficulty—if not impossibility—of knocking down a man who was down already, and the want of space in a cab for such violent play of muscle. At all events he did nothing, but looked “daggers.”

“Look 'ee here, my lad,” continued the Captain, laying his huge hand on his companion's knee, and gazing earnestly into his face, “I don't mean for to hurt your feelin's by sayin' that YOU are mean, or contemptible, or despicable, for I don't suppose you've thought much about the matter at all, and are just following in the wake of older men who ought to know better; but I say that the THING—gambling for money—is the meanest thing a man can do, short of stealing. What does it amount to? Simply this—I want another man's money, and the other man wants mine. We daren't try open robbery, we would be ashamed of that; we're both too lazy to labour for money, and labour doesn't bring it in fast enough, therefore we'll go PLAY for it. I'll ask him to submit to be robbed by me on condition that I submit to be robbed by him; and which is to be the robbed, and which the robber, shall depend on the accidental turn of a dice, or something equally trifling—”

“But I don't gamble by means of dice,” interrupted Lewis, “I play, and bet, on billiards, which is a game of skill, requiring much practice, judgment, and thought.”

“That makes no odds, my lad,” continued the Captain. “There is no connection whatever between the rolling of a ball and the taking away of a man's money, any more than there is between the turning of a dice and the taking of a man's money. Both are dishonourable subterfuges. They are mere blinds put up to cover the great and mean fact, which is, that I want to get possession of my neighbour's cash.”

“But, Captain,” retorted Lewis, with a smile—for he had now entered into the spirit of the argument—“you ignore the fact that while I try to win from my friend, I am quite willing that my friend should try to win from me.”

“Ignore it? no!” cried Captain Wopper. “Putt it in this way. Isn't it wrong for me to have a longing desire and itching fingers to lay hold of YOUR cash?”

“Well, put in that simple form,” said Lewis, with a laugh, “it certainly is.”

“And isn't it equally wrong for you to have a hungering and thirsting after MY cash?”

“Of course that follows,” assented Lewis.

“Well, then,” pursued the Captain, “can any agreement between you and me, as to the guessing of black or white or the turning of dice or anything else, make a right out of two wrongs?”

“Still,” said Lewis, a little puzzled, “there is fallacy somewhere in your argument. I cannot see that gambling is wrong.”

“Mark me, my lad,” returned the Captain, impressively, “it is no sufficient reason for the doing of a thing that you CANNOT SEE it to be wrong. You are not entitled to do anything unless you SEE it to be right. But there are other questions connected with gambling which renders it doubly mean—the question, for instance, whether a man is entitled to risk the loss of money which he calls his own, but which belongs to his wife and children as much as to himself. The mean positions, too, in which a gambler places himself, are numerous. One of these is, when a rich man wins the hard-earned and much-needed gains of a poor one.”

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“But one is not supposed to know anything about the affairs of those from whom one wins,” objected Lewis.

“All the more reason,” replied Captain Wopper, “why a man should never gamble, lest, unwittingly, he should become the cause of great suffering—it might be, of death.”

Still Lewis “could not see” the wrong of gambling, and the discussion was cut short by the sudden stopping of the cab at a door in the Strand, over which hung a lamp, on which the Captain observed the word “Billiards.”

“Well, ta-ta, old fellow,” said Lewis, gaily, as he parted from his new friend, “we’ll finish the argument another day. Meanwhile, don’t forget the hour—eight, sharp.”

Chapter IV. SHOWS HOW THE CAPTAIN CAME TO AN ANCHOR, AND CONCEIVED A DEEP DESIGN.

When Captain Wopper parted from his young friend, he proceeded along the Strand in an unusually grave mood, shaking his head to such a degree, as he reflected on the precocious wickedness of the rising generation, that a very ragged and pert specimen of that generation, observing his condition, gravely informed him that there was an hospital for incurables in London, which took in patients with palsy and St. Wituses' dance werry cheap.

This recalled him from the depths of sorrowful meditation, and induced him to hail a cab, in which he drove to the docks, claimed his chest—a solid, seamanlike structure, reminding one of the wooden walls of Old England—and returned with it to the head of the lane leading to Grubb's Court. Dismissing the cab, he looked round for a porter, but as no porter appeared, the Captain, having been accustomed through life to help himself, and being, as we have said, remarkably strong, shouldered the nautical chest, and bore it to the top of Mrs. Roby's staircase.

Here he encountered, and almost tumbled over, Gillie White, who saluted him with—

“Hallo! ship aho—o—oy! starboard hard! breakers ahead! Why, Capp'n, you've all but run into me!”

“Why don't you show a light then,” retorted the Captain, “or blow your steam—whistle, in such a dark hole? What's that you've got in your arms?”

“The baby,” replied Gillie.

“What baby?” demanded the Captain.

“OUR baby, of course,” returned the imp, in a tone that implied the non—existence of any other baby worth mentioning. “I brought it up to show it to the sick 'ooman next door but one to Mrs. Roby's cabin. She's very sick, she is, an' took a great longing to see our baby, cos she thinks it's like what her son was w'en HE was a baby. If he ever was, he don't look much like one now, for he's six—feet nothin' in his socks, an' drinks like a fish, if he don't do nothin' wuss. Good—night Capp'n. Baby'll ketch cold if I keep on jawin' here. Mind your weather eye, and port your helm when you reach the landin'. If you'll take the advice of a young salt, you'll clew up your mainsail an' dowse some of your top—hamper—ah! I thought so!”

This last remark, delivered with a broad grin of delight, had reference to the fact that the Captain had run the corner of his chest against the low roof of the passage with a degree of violence that shook the whole tenement.

Holding his breath in hopeful anticipation, and reckless of the baby's “ketching cold,” the small boy listened for more. Nor was he disappointed. In his progress along the passage Captain Wopper, despite careful steering, ran violently foul of several angles and beams, each of which mishaps sent a quiver through the old house, and a thrill to the heart of Gillie White. In his earnest desire to steer clear of the sick woman's door, the luckless Captain came into collision with the opposite wall, and anxiety on this point causing him to forget the step on which he had “struck” once before, he struck it again, and was precipitated, chest and all, against Mrs. Roby's door, which, fortunately for itself, burst open, and let the avalanche of chest and man descend upon Mrs. Roby's floor.

Knowing that the climax was now reached, the imp descended the stair filled with a sort of serene ecstasy, while Captain Wopper gathered himself up and sat down on his nautical portmanteau.

“I tell 'ee what it is, old 'ooman,” said he, stroking his beard, “the channel into this port is about the wust I ever had the ill—luck to navigate. I hope I didn't frighten 'ee?”

“Oh, dear no!” replied Mrs. Roby, with a smile.

To say truth, the old woman seemed less alarmed than might have been expected. Probably the noise of the Captain's approach, and previous experience, had prepared her for some startling visitation, for she was quite calm, and a humorous twinkle in her eyes seemed to indicate the presence of a spirit somewhat resembling that which actuated Gillie White.

“Well, that's all right,” said the Captain, rising and pushing up the trap—door that led to his private berth in the new lodging; “and now, old lady, havin' come to an anchor, I must get this chest sent aloft as fast as I can, seein' that I've to clean myself an' rig out for a dinner at eight o'clock at the west end.”

“Dear me,” said Mrs. Roby, in surprise, “you must have got among people of quality.”

“It won't be easy to hoist it up,” said the Captain, ignoring the remark, and eyeing the chest and trap—door in

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the roof alternately.

Just then a heavy step was heard in the passage; and a young man of large and powerful frame, with a gentle as well as gentlemanly demeanour, appeared at the door.

“Come in—come in,” said Mrs. Roby, with a bright look, “this is only my new lodger, a friend of dear Wil—”

“Why, bless you, old 'ooman,” interrupted Captain Wopper, “HE knows me well enough. I went to him this morning and got Mrs. Stoutley's address. Come in, Dr. Lawrence. I may claim to act the host here now in a small way, perhaps, and bid visitors welcome—eh! Mrs. Roby?”

“Surely, surely,” replied the old woman.

“Thank you both for the welcome,” said the visitor with a pleasant smile, as he shook hands with Mrs. Roby. “I thought I recognised your voice, Captain Wopper, as you passed Mrs. Leven's door, and came out to see how you and my old friend here get on together.”

“Is she any better to—night, sir?” asked Mrs. Roby, anxiously.

Lawrence shook his head sadly and said she was no better, and that he feared she had little chance of getting better while her dissipated son dwelt under the same roof with her. “It is breaking her heart,” he added, “and, besides that, the nature of her disease is such that recovery is impossible unless she is fed on the most generous diet. This of course she cannot have, because she has no means of her own. Her son gambles away nearly all his small salary, and she refuses to go to an hospital lest her absence should be the removal of the last restraining link between him and destruction. It is a very sad case— very.”

Captain Wopper was struck with this reference to gambling coming so soon after his recent conversation on that subject, and asked if there were no charitable societies or charitable people in London who would help in a case so miserable.

Yes, there were plenty of charitable institutions, Lawrence told him, but he feared that this woman had no special claim on any of them, and her refusal to go to an hospital would tell against her. There were also, he said, plenty of charitable people, but all of those he happened to be acquainted with had been appealed to by him so often that he felt ashamed to try them again. He had already given away as much of his own slender means as he could well spare, so that he saw no way out of the difficulty; but he had faith in Providential supervision of human affairs, and he believed that a way would yet be opened up.

“You're right, sir—right,” said Captain Wopper, with emphasis, while he looked earnestly into the face of the young doctor. “This world wasn't made to be kicked about like a foot-ball by chance, or circumstances, or anything of the sort. Look 'ee here, sir; it has bin putt into my heart to feel charitable leanings, and a good bit o' cash has bin putt into my pocket, so that, bein' a lone sort o' man, I don't have much use for it. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, here are you, sir, the son of a friend o' my chum Willum Stout, with great need of aid from charitable people, an' here we two are met together —both ready for action. Now, I call that a Providential arrangement, so please putt me down as one of your charitable friends. It's little I can boast of in that way as yet but it's not too late to begin. I've long arrears to pull up, so I'll give you that to begin with. It'll help to relieve Mrs. Leven in the meantime.”

As he spoke, the Captain drew a black pocketbook from his breast pocket and, taking a piece of paper therefrom, placed it in the doctor's hands.

“This is a fifty-pound note!” said Lawrence, in surprise.

“Well, what then?” returned the Captain. “You didn't expect a thousand-pound note, did you?”

“Not quite that,” replied Lawrence, laughing, “but I thought that perhaps you had made a mistake.”

“Ah! you judged from appearances, young man. Don't you git into the way of doin' that, else you'll be for ever sailin' on the wrong tack. Take my advice, an' never look as if you thought a man gave you more than he could afford. Nobody never does that.”

“Far be it from me,” returned Lawrence, “to throw cold water on generous impulses. I accept your gift with thanks, and will gladly put you on my list. If you should find hereafter that I pump you rather hard, please to remember that you gave me encouragement to do so.”

“Pump away, sir. When you've pumped dry, I'll tell you!”

“Well,” said Lawrence, rising, “I'll go at once and bring your liberality into play; and, since you have done me so good a turn, remember that you may command my services, if they can ever be of any use to you.”

The Captain cast a glance at the trap-door and the chest.

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“Well,” said he, “I can scarcely ask you to do it professionally, but if you'd lend a hand to get this Noah's ark o' mine on to the upper deck, I'd—”

“Come along,” cried Lawrence, jumping up with a laugh, and seizing one end of the “ark.”

Captain Wopper grasped the other end, and, between them, with much puffing, pushing, and squeezing, they thrust the box through the trap to the upper regions, whither the Captain followed it by means of the same gymnastic feat that he performed on his first ascent. Thrusting his head down, he invited the doctor to “come aloft,” which the doctor did in the same undignified fashion, for his gentle manner and spirit had not debarred him from the practice and enjoyment of manly exercises.

“It's a snug berth, you see,” said the Captain, stumbling among the dusty lumber, and knocking his head against the beams, “wants cleaning up, tho', and puttin' to rights a bit, but I'll soon manage that; and when I git the dirt and cobwebs cleared away, glass putt in the port-holes, and a whitewash on the roof and walls, it'll be a cabin fit for an admiral. See what a splendid view of the river! Just suited to a seafarin' man.”

“Capital!” cried Lawrence, going down on his knees to obtain the view referred to. “Rather low in the roof, however, don't you think?”

“Low? not at all!” exclaimed the Captain. “It's nothin' to what I've been used to on the coastin' trade off Californy. Why, I've had to live in cabins so small that a tall man couldn't keep his back straight when he was sittin' on the lockers; but we didn't SIT much in 'em; we was chiefly used to go into 'em to lie down. This is a palace to such cabins.”

The doctor expressed satisfaction at finding that his new “charitable contributor” took such enlarged views of a pigeon-hole, and, promising to pay him another visit when the “cabin” should have been put to rights, said good-bye, and went to relieve the wants of the sick woman.

As the captain accompanied him along the passage, they heard the voice and step of poor Mrs. Leven's dissipated son, as he came stumbling and singing up the stair.

He was a stout good-looking youth, and cast a half impudent half supercilious look at Captain Wopper on approaching. He also bestowed a nod of careless recognition on Dr. Lawrence.

Thinking it better to be out of the way, the Captain said good-bye again to his friend, and returned to the cabin, where he expressed to Mrs. Roby the opinion that, “that young feller Leven was goin' to the dogs at railway speed.”

Thereafter he went “aloft,” and, as he expressed it, “rigged himself out,” in a spruce blue coat with brass buttons; blue vest and trousers to match; a white dicky with a collar attached and imitation carbuncle studs down the front. To these he added a black silk neckerchief tied in a true sailor's knot but with the ends separated and carefully tucked away under his vest to prevent their interfering with the effulgence of the carbuncle studs; a pair of light shoes with a superabundance of new tie; a green silk handkerchief, to be carried in his hat, for the purpose of mopping his forehead when warm, and a red silk ditto to be carried in his pocket for the benefit of his nose. In addition to the studs, Captain Wopper wore, as ornaments, a solid gold ring, the rude workmanship of which induced the belief that he must have made it himself, and a large gold watch, with a gold chain in the form of a cable, and a rough gold nugget attached to it in place of a seal or key. We class the watch among simple ornaments because, although it went—very demonstratively too, with a loud self-asserting tick—its going was irregular and uncertain. Sometimes it went too slow without apparent cause. At other times it went too fast without provocation. Frequently it struck altogether, and only consented to resume work after a good deal of gentle and persuasive threatening to wind it the wrong way. It had chronic internal complaints, too, which produced sundry ominous clicks and sounds at certain periods of the day. These passed off, however, towards evening. Occasionally such sounds rushed as it were into a sudden whirr and series of convulsions, ending in a dead stop, which was an unmistakeable intimation to the Captain that something vital had given way; that the watch had gone into open mutiny, and nothing short of a visit to the watchmaker could restore it to life and duty.

“I'm off now,” said the Captain, descending when he was fully “rigged.” “What about the door-key, mother?—you've no objection to my calling you mother, have you?”

“None whatever, Captain,” replied Mrs. Roby, with a pleasant smile, “an old friend of William may call me whatever he pleases—short,” she added after momentary pause, “of swearin'.”

“Trust me, I'll stop short of that. You see, old lady, I never know'd a mother, and I should like to try to feel what it's like to have one. It's true I'm not just a lad, but you are old enough to be my mother for all that, so I'll

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make the experiment. But what about the key of the door, mother? I can't expect you to let me in, you know."

"Just lock it, and take the key away with you," said Mrs. Roby.

"But what if a fire should break out?" said the Captain, with a look of indecision.

"I'm not afraid of fire. We've got a splendid brigade and plenty of fire-escapes, and a good kick from a fireman would open my door without a key."

"Mother, you're a trump! I'll lock you in and leave you with an easy mind—"

He stopped abruptly, and Mrs. Roby asked what was the matter.

"Well, it's what I said about an easy mind that threw me all aback," replied the Captain, "for to tell 'ee the truth, I haven't got an easy mind."

"Not done anything wicked, I hope?" said Mrs. Roby, anxiously.

"No, no; nothin' o' that sort; but there IS somethin' lyin' heavy on my mind, and I don't see why I shouldn't make a confidant o' you, bein' my mother, d'ee see; and, besides, it consarns Willum."

The old woman looked eagerly at her lodger as he knitted his brows in perplexity and smoothed down his forelock.

"Here's where it is," he continued, drawing his chair closer to that of Mrs. Roby; "when Willum made me his exikooter, so to speak, he said to me, 'Wopper,' says he, 'I'm not one o' them fellers that holds on to his cash till he dies with it in his pocket. I've got neither wife nor chick, as you know, an' so, wot I means to do is to give the bulk of it to them that I love while I'm alive—d'ee see?' 'I do, Willum,' says I. 'Well then,' says he, 'besides them little matters that I axed you to do for me, I want you to take partikler notice of two people. One is the man as saved my life w'en I was a youngster, or, if he's dead, take notice of his child'n. The other is that sweet young creeter, Emma Gray, who has done the correspondence with me so long for my poor brother. You keep a sharp look-out an' find out how these two are off for money. If Emma's rich, of course it's no use to give her what she don't need, and I'll give the most of what I've had the good fortune to dig up here to old Mr. Lawrence, or his family, for my brother's widow, bein' rich, don't need it. If both Emma and Lawrence are rich, why then, just let me know, and I'll try to hit on some other plan to make away with it, for you know well enough I couldn't use it all upon myself without going into wicked extravagance, and my dear old Mrs. Roby wouldn't know what to do with so much cash if I sent it to her. Now, you promise to do this for me?' says he. 'Willum,' says I, 'I do.'"

"Now, mother," continued the Captain, "what troubles me is this, that instead o' findin' Miss Emma rich, and Mr. Lawrence poor, or WICE WERSA, or findin' 'em both rich, I finds 'em both poor. That's where my difficulty lies."

Mrs. Roby offered a prompt solution of this difficulty by suggesting that William should divide the money between them.

"That would do all well enough," returned the Captain, "if there were no under-currents drivin' the ship out of her true course. But you see, mother, I find that the late Mr. Stoutley's family is also poor— at least in difficulties—although they live in great style, and SEEM to be rich; and from what I heard the other day, I know that the son is given to gamblin', and the mother seems to be extravagant, and both of 'em are ready enough to sponge on Miss Emma, who is quite willin'—far too willin'—to be sponged upon, so that whatever Willum gave to her would be just thrown away. Now the question is," continued the Captain, looking seriously at the kettle with the defiant spout, "what am I to advise Willum to do?"

"Advise him," replied Mrs. Roby, promptly, "to give ALL the money to Dr. Lawrence, and get Dr. Lawrence to marry Miss Gray, and so they'll both get the whole of it."

A beaming smile crossed the Captain's visage.

"Not a bad notion, mother; but what if Dr. Lawrence, after gettin' the money, didn't want to marry Miss Gray?"

"Get him to marry her first and give the money afterwards," returned Mrs. Roby.

"Ay, that might do," replied the Captain, nodding slowly, "only it may be that a man without means may hesitate about marryin' a girl without means, especially if he didn't want HER, and she didn't want HIM. I don't quite see how to get over all these difficulties."

"There's only one way of getting over them," said Mrs. Roby, "and that is, by bringin' the young people together, and givin' 'em a chance to fall in love."

"True, true, mother, but, so far as I know, Dr. Lawrence don't know the family. We couldn't," said the

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Captain, looking round the room, dubiously, “ask 'em to take a quiet cup of tea here with us—eh? You might ask Dr. Lawrence, as your medical man, and I might ask Miss Emma, as an old friend of her uncle, quite in an off-hand way, you know, as if by chance. They'd never see through the dodge, and would fall in love at once, perhaps—eh?”

Captain Wopper said all this in a dubious tone, looking at the defiant kettle the while, as if propitiating its favourable reception of the idea, but it continued defiant, and hissed uncompromisingly, while its mistress laughed outright.

“You're not much of a match-maker, I see,” she said, on recovering composure. “No, Captain, it wouldn't do to ask 'em here to tea.”

“Well, well,” said the Captain, rising, “we'll let match-makin' alone for the present. It's like tryin' to beat to wind'ard against a cyclone. The best way is to square the yards, furl the sails, and scud under bare poles till it's over. It's blowin' too hard just now for me to make headway, so I'll wear ship and scud.”

In pursuance of this resolve, Captain Wopper put on his wide-awake, locked up his mother, and went off to dine at the “west end.”

Chapter V. IN WHICH SEVERAL IMPORTANT MATTERS ARE ARRANGED, AND GILLIE WHITE UNDERGOES SOME REMARKABLE AND HITHERTO UNKNOWN EXPERIENCES.

It is not necessary to inflict on the reader Mrs. Stoutley's dinner in detail; suffice it to say, that Captain Wopper conducted himself, on the whole, much more creditably than his hostess had anticipated, and made himself so entertaining, especially to Lewis, that that young gentleman invited him to accompany the family to Switzerland, much to the amusement of his cousin Emma and the horror of his mother, who, although she enjoyed a private visit of the Captain, did not relish the thought of his becoming a travelling companion of the family. She pretended not to hear the invitation given, but when Lewis, knowing full well the state of her mind, pressed the invitation, she shook her head at him covertly and frowned. This by-play her son pretended not to see, and continued his entreaties, the Captain not having replied.

"Now, do come with us, Captain Wopper," he said; "it will be such fun, and we should all enjoy you SO much—wouldn't we, Emma?" ("Yes, indeed," from Emma); "and it would just be suited to your tastes and habits, for the fine, fresh air of the mountains bears a wonderful resemblance to that of the sea. You've been accustomed no doubt to climb up the shrouds to the crosstrees; well, in Switzerland, you may climb up the hills to any sort of trees you like, and get shrouded in mist, or tumble over a precipice and get put into your shroud altogether; and—"

"Really, Lewie, you ought to be ashamed of making such bad puns," interrupted his mother. "Doubtless it would be very agreeable to have Captain Wopper with us, but I am quite sure it would be anything but pleasant for him to travel through such a wild country with such a wild goose as you for a companion."

"You have modestly forgotten yourself and Emma," said Lewis; "but come, let the Captain answer for himself. You know, mother, it has been your wish, if not your intention, to get a companion for me on this trip—a fellow older than myself—a sort of travelling tutor, who could teach me something of the geology and botany of the country as we went along. Well, the Captain is older than me, I think, which is one of the requisites, and he could teach me astronomy, no doubt, and show me how to box the compass; in return for which, I could show him how to box an adversary's nose, as practised by the best authorities of the ring. As to geology and botany, I know a little of these sciences already, and could impart my knowledge to the Captain, which would have the effect of fixing it more firmly in my own memory; and every one knows that it is of far greater importance to lay a good, solid groundwork of education, than to build a showy, superficial structure, on a bad foundation. Come, then, Captain, you see your advantages. This is the last time of asking. If you don't speak now, henceforth and for ever hold your tongue."

"Well, my lad," said the Captain, with much gravity, "I've turned the thing over in my mind, and since Mrs. Stoutley is so good as to say it would be agreeable to her, I think I'll accept your invitation!"

"Bravo! Captain, you're a true blue; come, have another glass of wine on the strength of it."

"No wine, thank 'ee," said the Captain, placing his hand over his glass, "I've had my beer; and I make it a rule never to mix my liquor. Excuse me, ma'am," he continued, addressing his hostess, "your son made mention of a tooter—a travellin' tooter; may I ask if you've provided yourself with one yet!"

"Not yet," answered Mrs. Stoutley, feeling, but not looking, a little surprised at the question, "I have no young friend at present quite suited for the position, and at short notice it is not easy to find a youth of talent willing to go, and on whom one can depend. Can you recommend one?"

Mrs. Stoutley accompanied the question with a smile, for she put it in jest. She was, therefore, not a little surprised when the Captain said promptly that he could—that he knew a young man—a doctor—who was just the very ticket (these were his exact words), a regular clipper, with everything about him trim, taut, and ship-shape, who would suit every member of the family to a tee!

A hearty laugh from every member of the family greeted the Captain's enthusiastic recommendation, and Emma exclaimed that he must be a most charming youth, while Lewis pulled out pencil and note-book to take down his name and address.

"You are a most valuable friend at this crisis in our affairs," said Lewis, "I'll make mother write to him

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immediately.”

“But have a care,” said the Captain, “that you never mention who it was that recommended him. I'm not sure that he would regard it as a compliment. You must promise me that.”

“I promise,” said Lewis, “and whatever I promise mother will fulfil, so make your mind easy on that head. Now, mother, I shouldn't wonder if Captain Wopper could provide you with that other little inexpensive luxury you mentioned this morning. D'you think you could recommend a page?”

“What's a page, lad?”

“What! have you never heard of a page—a page in buttons?” asked Lewis in surprise.

“Never,” replied the Captain, shaking his head.

“Why, a page is a small boy, usually clad in blue tights, to make him look as like a spider as possible, with three rows of brass buttons up the front of his jacket—two of the rows being merely ornamental, and going over his shoulders. He usually wears a man's hat for the sake of congruity, and is invariably as full of mischief as an egg is of meat. Can you find such an article?”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Captain. “What is he used for?”

“Chiefly for ornament, doing messages, being in the way when not wanted, and out of the way when required.”

“Yes,” said the Captain, meditatively, “I've got my eye—”

“Your weather eye?” asked Lewis.

“Yes, my WEATHER eye, on a lad who'll fit you.”

“To a tee?” inquired Emma, archly.

“To a tee, miss,” assented the Captain, with a bland smile.

Lewis again pulled out his note-book to enter the name and address, but the Captain assured him that he would manage this case himself; and it was finally settled—for Lewis carried everything his own way, as a matter of course—that Dr. George Lawrence was to be written to next day, and Captain Wopper was to provide a page.

“And you'll have to get him and yourself ready as fast as possible,” said the youth in conclusion, “for we shall set off as soon as my mother's trunks are packed.”

Next morning, while Captain Wopper was seated conversing with his old landlady at the breakfast-table—the morning meal having been just concluded—he heard the voice of Gillie White in the court. Going to the end of the passage, he ordered that imp to “come aloft.”

Gillie appeared in a few seconds, nodded patronisingly to old Mrs. Roby, hoped she was salubrious, and demanded to know what was up.

“My lad,” said the Captain—and as he spoke, the urchin assumed an awful look of mock solemnity.

“I want to know if you think you could behave yourself if you was to try?”

“Ah!” said Gillie, with the air of a cross-examining advocate, “the keewestion is not w'ether I could behave myself if I wos to try, but, w'ether I THINK I could. Well, ahem! that depends. I think I could, now, if there was offered a very strong indoocement.”

“Just so, my lad,” returned the Captain, nodding, “that's exactly what I mean to offer. What d'ee say to a noo suit of blue tights, with three rows brass buttons; a situation in a respectable family; a fair wage; as much as you can eat and drink; and a trip to Switzerland to begin with?”

While the Captain spoke, the small boy's eyes opened wider and wider, and his month followed suit, until he stood the very picture of astonishment.

“You DON'T mean it?” he exclaimed.

“Indeed I do, my lad.”

“Then I'M your man,” returned the small boy emphatically, “putt me down for that sitoation; send for a lawyer, draw up the articles, I'LL sign 'em right OFF, and—”

“Gillie, my boy,” interrupted the Captain, “one o' the very first things you have to do in larnin' to behave yourself is to clap a stopper on your tongue—it's far too long.”

“All right, Capp'n,” answered the imp, “I'll go to Guy's Hospital d'rectly and 'ave three-fourths of it amputated.”

“Do,” said the Captain, somewhat sternly, “an' ask 'em to attach a brake to the bit that's left.

“Now, lad,” he continued, “you've got a very dirty face.”

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Gillie nodded, with his lips tightly compressed to check utterance.

“And a very ragged head of hair,” he added.

Again Gillie nodded.

The Captain pointed to a basin of water which stood on a chair in a corner of the room, beside which lay a lump of yellow soap, a comb, and a rough jack-towel.

“There,” said he, “go to work.”

Gillie went to work with a will, and scrubbed himself to such an extent, that his skin must undoubtedly have been thinner after the operation. The washing, however, was easy compared with the combing. The boy's mop was such a tangled web, that the comb at first refused to pass through it; and when, encouraged by the Captain, the urchin did at last succeed in rending its masses apart various inextricable bunches came away bodily, and sundry teeth of the comb were left behind. At last, however, it was reduced to something like order, to the immense satisfaction of Mrs. Roby and the Captain.

“Now,” said the latter, “did you ever have a Turkish bath?”

“No—never.”

“Well, then, come with me and have one. Have you got a cap?”

“Hm—never mind, come along; you're not cleaned up yet by a long way; but we'll manage it in course of time.”

As the Captain and his small PROTEGE passed along the streets, the former took occasion to explain that a Turkish bath was a species of mild torture, in which a man was stewed alive, and baked in an oven, and par-boiled, and scrubbed, and pinched, and thumped (sometimes black and blue), and lathered with soap till he couldn't see, and heated up to seven thousand and ten, Fahrenheit and soused with half-boiling water, and shot at with cold water—or shot into it, as the case might be—and rolled in a sheet like a mummy, and stretched out a like corpse to cool. “Most men,” he said, “felt gaspy in Turkish baths, and weak ones were alarmed lest they should get suffocated beyond recovery; but strong men rather enjoy themselves in 'em than otherwise.”

“Hah!” exclaimed the imp, “may I wentur' to ax, Capp'n, wot's the effect on BOYS?”

To this the Captain replied that he didn't exactly know, never having heard of boys taking Turkish baths. Whereupon Gillie suggested, that if possible he might have himself cleaned in an ordinary bath.

“Impossible, my lad,” said the Captain, decidedly. “No or'nary bath would clean you under a week, unless black soap and scrubbin' brushes was used.

“But don't be alarmed, Gillie,” he added, looking down with a twinkle in his eyes, “I'll go into the bath along with you. We'll sink or swim together, my boy, and I'll see that you're not overdone. I'm rather fond of them myself, d'ee see, so I can recommend 'em from experience.”

Somewhat reassured by this, though still a little uneasy in his mind, the imp followed his patron to the baths.

It would have been a sight worth seeing, the entrance of these two into the temple of soap-and-water. To see Gillie's well-made, but very meagre and dirty little limbs unrobed; to see him decked out with the scrimpest possible little kilt, such as would, perhaps, have suited the fancy of a Fiji islander; to see his gaze of undisguised admiration on beholding his companion's towering and massive frame in the same unwonted costume, if we may so style it; to see the intensifying of his astonishment when ushered into the FIRST room, at beholding six or seven naked, and apparently dead men, laid round the walls, as if ready for dissection; to see the monkey-like leap, accompanied by a squeal, with which he sprang from a hot stone-bench, having sat down thereon before it had been covered with a cloth for his reception; to see the rapid return of his self-possession in these unusual circumstances, and the ready manner in which he submitted himself to the various operations, as if he had been accustomed to Turkish baths from a period long prior to infancy; to see his horror on being introduced to the hottest room, and his furtive glance at the door, as though he meditated a rush into the open air, but was restrained by a sense of personal dignity; to see the ruling passion strong as ever in this (he firmly believed) his nearest approach to death, when, observing that the man next to him (who, as it were, turned the corner from him) had raised himself for a moment to arrange his pillow, he (Gillie) tipped up the corner of the man's sheet, which hung close to his face in such a manner that he (the man), on lying down again, placed his bare shoulder on the hot stone, and sprang up with a yell that startled into life the whole of the half-sleeping establishment with the exception of the youth on the opposite bench, who, having noticed the act, was thrown into convulsions of laughter, much to the alarm of Gillie, who had thought he was asleep and feared that he might “tell;”—to see him

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laid down like a little pink-roll to be kneaded, and to hear him remark, in a calm voice, to the stalwart attendant that he might go in and win and needn't be afraid of hurting him; to observe his delight when put under the warm "douche," his gasping shriek when unexpectedly assailed with the "cold-shower," and his placid air of supreme felicity when wrapped up like a ghost in a white sheet, and left to dry in the cooling-room—to see and hear all this, we say, would have amply repaid a special journey to London from any reasonable distance. The event, however, being a thing of the past and language being unequal to the description, we are compelled to leave it all to the reader's imagination.

Chapter VI. A LESSON TAUGHT AND LEARNED.

Two days after the events narrated in the last chapter, rather late in the evening, Dr. George Lawrence called at "the cabin" in Grubb's Court, and found the Captain taking what he called a quiet pipe.

"I have been visiting poor Mrs. Leven," he said to Mrs. Roby, sitting down beside her, "and I fear she is a good deal worse to-night. That kind little woman, Netta White, has agreed to sit by her. I'm sorry that I shall be obliged to leave her at such a critical stage of her illness, but I am obliged to go abroad for some time."

"Goin' abroad, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Roby in surprise, for the Captain had not yet told her that Lawrence was to be of the party, although he had mentioned about himself and Gillie White.

"Yes, I'm going with Mrs. Stoutley's family for some weeks to Switzerland."

Captain Wopper felt that his share in the arrangements was in danger of being found out. He therefore boldly took the lead.

"Ah! I know all about that, sir."

"Indeed?" said Lawrence.

"Yes, I dined the other day with Mrs. Stoutley; she asked ME also to be of the party, and I'm going."

Lawrence again exclaimed, "Indeed!" with increasing surprise, and added, "Well, now, that IS a strange coincidence."

"Well, d'ee know," said the Captain, in an argumentative tone, "it don't seem to me much of a coincidence. You know she had to git some one to go with her son, and why not you, sir, as well as any of the other young sawbones in London? If she hadn't got you she'd have got another, and that would have been a coincidence to HIM, d'ee see? Then, as to me, it wasn't unnatural that she should take a fancy to the man that nussed her dyin' husband, an' was chum to her brother-in-law; so, you see, that's how it came about and I'm very glad to find, sir, that we are to sail in company for a short time."

Lawrence returned this compliment heartily, and was about to make some further remark, when little Netta White rushed into the room with a frightened look and pale cheeks, exclaiming, "Oh, Dr. Lawrence, sir, she's VERY ill. I think she's dying."

Without waiting for a reply, the child ran out of the room followed by Lawrence and Mrs. Roby, who was assisted by the Captain—for she walked with great difficulty even when aided by her crutches. In a few seconds they stood beside Mrs. Leven's bed. It was a lowly bed, with scant and threadbare coverings, and she who lay on it was of a lowly spirit—one who for many years had laid her head on the bosom of Jesus, and had found Him, through a long course of poverty and mental distress, "a very present help in trouble."

"I fear that I'm very ill," she said, faintly.

"No doubt you feel rather low just now," said the doctor, "but that is very much owing to your having lived so long on insufficient diet. I will give you something, however, which will soon pull you up a bit. Come, cheer up. Don't let your spirits get so low."

"Yes," she murmured, "I AM brought very low, but the Lord will lift me up. He is my strength and my Redeemer."

She clasped her hands with difficulty, and shut her eyes.

A silence followed, during which Captain Wopper drew Lawrence into the passage.

"D'you think she is near her end, doctor?"

"She looks very like it," replied the doctor. "There is a possibility that she might recover if the right medicine could be found, namely, ease of mind; but her dissipated son has robbed her of that, and is the only one who can give it back to her—if indeed he has the power left now. She is dying of what is unprofessionally styled a broken heart. It is unfortunate that her son is not with her at present."

"Does no one know where to find him?" asked the Captain.

"I fear not," replied the doctor.

"Please, sir, I think I know," said a subdued voice behind them.

It was that of Gillie White, who had drawn near very silently, being overawed by the sad scene in the sick-room.

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“Do you, my lad? then get along as fast as you can and show me the way,” said the Captain, buttoning up his pilot-coat. “I’ll bring him here before long, doctor, if he’s to be found.”

In a few minutes the Captain and Gillie were at the head of the lane, where the former hailed a passing cab, bade the boy jump in, and followed him.

“Now, my lad, give the address,” said the Captain.

“The Strand,” said the boy, promptly.

“What number, sir?” asked the cabman, looking at the Captain.

“Right on till I stop you,” said Gillie, with the air of a commander-in-chief—whom in some faint manner he now resembled, for he was in livery, being clothed in blue tights and brass buttons.

In a short time Gillie gave the order to pull up, and they got out in front of a brilliantly-lighted and open door with a lamp above it, on which was written the word Billiards. The Captain observed that it was the same door as that at which he had parted from Lewis Stoutley some days before.

Dismissing the cab and entering, they quickly found themselves in a large and well-lighted billiard-room, which was crowded with men of all ages and aspects, some of whom played, others looked on and betted, a good many drank brandy and water, and nearly all smoked. It was a bright scene of dissipation, where many young men, deceiving themselves with the idea that they went merely to practise or to enjoy a noble game of skill, were taking their first steps on the road to ruin.

The Captain, closely attended by Gillie, moved slowly through the room, looking anxiously for Fred Leven. For some time they failed to find him. At last a loud curse, uttered in the midst of a knot of on-lookers, attracted their attention. It was followed by a general laugh, as a young man, whose dishevelled hair and flushed face showed that he had been drinking hard, burst from among them and staggered towards the door.

“Never mind, Fred,” shouted a voice that seemed familiar to the Captain, “you’ll win it back from me next time.”

Ere the youth had passed, the Captain stepped forward and laid his hand on his arm.

Fred uttered a savage growl, and drew back his clenched hand as if to strike, but Captain Wopper’s size and calm look of decision induced him to hold his hand.

“What d’you mean by interrupting me?” he demanded, sternly.

“My lad,” said the Captain, in a low, solemn voice, “your mother is dying, come with me. You’ve no time to lose.”

The youth’s face turned ashy pale, and he passed his hand hastily across his brow.

“What’s wrong?” exclaimed Lewis Stoutley, who had recognised the Captain, and come forward at the moment.

“Did he lose his money to YOU?” asked the Captain, abruptly.

“Well, yes, he did,” retorted Lewis, with a look of offended dignity.

“Come along, then, my lad. I want YOU too. It’s a case of life an’ death. Ask no questions, but come along.”

The Captain said this with such an air of authority, that Lewis felt constrained to obey. Fred Leven seemed to follow like one in a dream. They all got into a cab, and were driven back to Grubb’s Court.

As they ascended the stair, the Captain whispered to Lewis, “Keep in the background, my lad. Do nothing but look and listen.”

Another moment and they were in the passage, where Lawrence stopped them.

“You’re almost too late, sir,” he said to Fred, sternly. “If you had fed and clothed your mother better in time past, she might have got over this. Fortunately for her, poor soul, some people, who don’t gamble away their own and their parents’ means, have given her the help that you have refused. Go in, sir, and try to speak words of comfort to her NOW.”

He went in, and fell on his knees beside the bed.

“Mother!” he said.

Fain would he have said more, but no word could he utter. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. Mrs. Leven opened her eyes on hearing the single word, and her cheek flushed slightly as she seized one of his hands, kissed it and held it to her breast. Then she looked earnestly, and oh! so anxiously, into his face, and said in a low tone:—

“Fred, dear, are you s—”

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She stopped abruptly.

“Yes, yes,” cried her son, passionately; “yes, mother, I’m sober NOW! Oh mother, dearest, darling mother, I am guilty, guilty; I have sinned. Oh forgive, forgive me! Listen, listen! I am in earnest now, my mother. Think of me as I used to be long ago. Don’t shut your eyes. Look at me, mother, look at Fred.”

The poor woman looked at him with tears of gladness in her eyes.

“God bless you, Fred!” she murmured. “It is long, long, since you spoke like that. But I knew you would. I have always expected that you would. Praise the Lord!”

Fred tried to speak, and again found that he could not, but the fountain of his soul was opened. He laid his face on his mother’s hand and sobbed bitterly.

Those who witnessed this scene stood as if spellbound. As far as sound or motion went these two might have been in the room alone. Presently the sound of sobbing ceased, and Fred, raising his head, began gently to stroke the hand he held in his. Sometime in his wild career, he knew not when or where, he had heard it said that this slight action had often a wonderful power to soothe the sick. He continued it for some time. Then the doctor advanced and gazed into the invalid’s countenance.

“She sleeps,” he said, in a low tone.

“May I stay beside her?” whispered Fred.

Lawrence nodded assent, and then motioning to the others to withdraw, followed them into Mrs. Roby’s room, where he told them that her sleeping was a good sign, and that they must do their best to prevent her being disturbed.

“It won’t be necessary for any one to watch. Her son will prove her best attendant just now; but it may be as well that some one should sit up in this room, and look in now and then to see that the candle doesn’t burn out, and that all is right. I will go now, and will make this my first visit in the morning.”

“Captain Wopper,” said Lewis Stoutley, in a subdued voice, when Lawrence had left, “I won this ten–pound note to–night from Fred. I—I robbed him of it. Will you give it to him in the morning?”

“Yes, my lad, I will,” said the Captain.

“And will you let me sit up and watch here tonight?”

“No, my lad, I won’t. I mean to do that myself.”

“But do let me stay an hour or so with you, in case anything is wanted,” pleaded Lewis.

“Well, you may.”

They sat down together by the fireside, Mrs. Roby having lain down on her bed with her clothes on, but they spoke never a word; and as they sat there, the young man’s busy brain arrayed before him many and many a scene of death, and sickness, and suffering, and sorrow, and madness, and despair, which, he knew well from hearsay (and he now believed it), had been the terrible result of gambling and drink.

When the hour was past, the Captain rose and said, “Now, Lewis, you’ll go, and I’ll take a look at the next room.”

He put off his shoes and went on tiptoe. Lewis followed, and took a peep before parting.

Fred had drawn three chairs to the bedside and lain down on them, with his shoulders resting on the edge of the bed, so that he could continue to stroke his mother’s hand without disturbing her. He had continued doing so until his head had slowly drooped upon the pillow; and there they now lay, the dissipated son and the humble Christian mother, sleeping quietly together.

Chapter VII. THE GREAT WHITE MOUNTAIN.

We are in Switzerland now; in the “land of the mountain and the flood”—the land also of perennial ice and snow. The solemn presence of the Great White Mountain is beginning to be felt. Its pure summit was first seen from Geneva; its shadow is now beginning to steal over us.

We are on the road to Chamouni, not yet over the frontier, in a carriage and four. Mrs. Stoutley, being a lady of unbounded wealth, always travels post in a carriage and four when she can manage to do so, having an unconquerable antipathy to railroads and steamers. She could not well travel in any other fashion here, railways not having yet penetrated the mountain regions in this direction, and a mode of ascending roaring mountain torrents in steamboats not having yet been discovered. She might, however, travel with two horses, but she prefers four. Captain Wopper, who sits opposite Emma Gray, wonders in a quiet speculative way whether “the Mines” will produce a dividend sufficient to pay the expenses of this journey. He is quite disinterested in the thought, it being understood that the Captain pays his own expenses.

But we wander from our text, which is—the Great White Mountain. We are driving now under its shadow with Mrs. Stoutley's party, which, in addition to the Captain and Miss Gray, already mentioned, includes young Dr. George Lawrence and Lewis, who are on horseback; also Mrs. Stoutley's maid (Mrs. Stoutley never travels without a maid), Susan Quick, who sits beside the Captain; and Gillie White, ALIAS the Spider and the Imp, who sits beside the driver, making earnest but futile efforts to draw him into a conversation in English, of which language the driver knows next to nothing.

But to return: Mrs. Stoutley and party are now in the very heart of scenery the most magnificent; they have penetrated to a great fountain-head of European waters; they are surrounded by the cliffs, the gorges, the moraines, and are not far from the snow-slopes and ice-fields, the couloirs, the seracs, the crevasses, and the ice-precipices and pinnacles of a great glacial world; but not one of the party betrays the smallest amount of interest, or expresses the faintest emotion of surprise, owing to the melancholy fact that all is shrouded in an impenetrable veil of mist through which a thick fine rain percolates as if the mountain monarch himself were bewailing their misfortunes.

“Isn't it provoking?” murmured Mrs. Stoutley drawing her shawl closer.

“Very,” replied Emma.

“Disgusting!” exclaimed Lewis, who rode at the side of the carriage next his cousin.

“It might be worse,” said Lawrence, with a grim smile.

“Impossible,” retorted Lewis.

“Come, Captain, have you no remark to make by way of inspiring a little hope?” asked Mrs. Stoutley.

“Why, never havin' cruised in this region before,” answered the Captain, “my remarks can't be of much value. Hows'ever, there IS one idea that may be said to afford consolation, namely, that this sort o' thing can't last. I've sailed pretty nigh in all parts of the globe, an' I've invariably found that bad weather has its limits—that after rain we may look for sunshine, and after storm, calm.”

“How cheering!” said Lewis, as the rain trickled from the point of his prominent nose.

At that moment Gillie White, happening to cast his eyes upward, beheld a vision which drew from him an exclamation of wild surprise.

They all looked quickly in the same direction, and there, through a rent in the watery veil, they beheld a little spot of blue sky, rising into which was a mountain-top so pure, so faint so high and inexpressibly far off, yet so brilliant in a glow of sunshine, that it seemed as if heaven had been opened, and one of the hills of Paradise revealed. It was the first near view that the travellers had obtained of these mountains of everlasting ice. With the exception of the exclamations “Wonderful!” “Most glorious!” they found no words for a time to express their feelings, and seemed glad to escape the necessity of doing so by listening to the remarks of their driver, as he went into an elaborate explanation of the name and locality of the particular part of Mont Blanc that had been thus disclosed.

The rent in the mist closed almost as quickly as it had opened, utterly concealing the beautiful vision; but the impression it had made, being a first and a very deep one, could never more be removed. The travellers lived now

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in the faith of what they had seen. Scepticism was no longer possible, and in this improved frame of mind they dashed into the village of Chamouni—one of the haunts of those whose war-cry is “Excelsior!”—and drove to the best hotel.

Their arrival in the village was an unexpected point of interest to many would-be mountaineers, who lounged about the place with macintoshes and umbrellas, growling at the weather. Any event out of the common forms a subject of interest to men who wait and have nothing to do. As the party passed them, growlers gazed and speculated as to who the new-comers might be. Some thought Miss Gray pretty; some thought otherwise—to agree on any point on such a day being, of course, impossible. Others “guessed” that the young fellows must be uncommonly fond of riding to “get on the outside of a horse” in such weather; some remarked that the “elderly female” seemed “used up,” or “BLASEE,” and all agreed—yes, they DID agree on this point—that the thing in blue tights and buttons beside the driver was the most impudent-looking monkey the world had ever produced!

The natives of the place also had their opinions, and expressed them to each other; especially the bronzed, stalwart sedate-looking men who hung about in knots near the centre of the village, and seemed to estimate the probability of the stout young Englishmen on horseback being likely to require their services often—for these, said the driver, were the celebrated guides of Chamouni; men of bone and muscle, and endurance and courage; the leaders of those daring spirits who consider—and justly so—the ascent to the summit of Mont Blanc, or Monte Rosa, or the Matterhorn, a feat; the men who perform this feat it may be, two or three times a week—as often as you choose to call them to it, in fact—and think nothing of it; the men whose profession it is to risk their lives every summer from day to day for a few francs; who have become so inured to danger that they have grown quite familiar with it, insomuch that some of the reckless blades among them treat it now and then with contempt, and pay the penalty of such conduct with their lives.

Sinking into a couch in her private sitting-room, Mrs. Stoutley resigned herself to Susan's care, and, while she was having her boots taken off, said with a sigh:—

“Well, here we are at last. What do you think of Chamouni, Susan?”

“Rather a wet place, ma'am; ain't it?”

With a languid smile, Mrs. Stoutley admitted that it was, but added, by way of encouragement that it was not always so. To which Susan replied that she was glad to hear it, so she was, as nothink depressed her spirits so much as wet and clouds, and gloom.

Susan was a pretty girl of sixteen, tall, as well as very sedate and womanly, for her age. Having been born in one of the midland counties, of poor, though remarkably honest, parents, who had received no education themselves, and therefore held it to be quite unnecessary to bestow anything so useless on their daughter, she was, until very recently, as ignorant of all beyond the circle of her father's homestead as the daughter of the man in the moon—supposing no compulsory education-act to be in operation in the orb of night. Having passed through them, she now knew of the existence of France and Switzerland, but she was quite in the dark as to the position of these two countries with respect to the rest of the world, and would probably have regarded them as one and the same if their boundary-line had not been somewhat deeply impressed upon her by the ungallant manner in which the Customs officials examined the contents of her modest little portmanteau in search, as Gillie gave her to understand, of tobacco.

Mrs. Stoutley had particularly small feet, a circumstance which might have induced her, more than other ladies, to wear easy boots; but owing to some unaccountable perversity of mental constitution, she deemed this a good reason for having her boots made unusually tight. The removal of these, therefore, afforded great relief, and the administration of a cup of tea produced a cheering reaction of spirits, under the influence of which she partially forgot herself, and resolved to devote a few minutes to the instruction of her interestingly ignorant maid.

“Yes,” she said, arranging herself comfortably, and sipping her tea, while Susan busied herself putting away her lady's “things,” and otherwise tidying the room, “it does not always rain here; there is a little sunshine sometimes. By the way, where is Miss Gray?”

“In the bedroom, ma'am, unpacking the trunks.”

“Ah, well, as I was saying, they have a little sunshine sometimes, for you know, Susan, people MUST live, and grass or grain cannot grow without sunshine, so it has been arranged that there should be enough here for these purposes, but no more than enough, because Switzerland has to maintain its character as one of the great refrigerators of Europe.”

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“One of the what, ma'am?”

“Refrigerators,” explained Mrs. Stoutley; “a refrigerator, Susan, is a freezer; and it is the special mission of Switzerland to freeze nearly all the water that falls on its mountains, and retain it there in the form of ice and snow until it is wanted for the use of man. Isn't that a grand idea?”

The lecturer's explanation had conveyed to Susan's mind the idea of the Switzers going with long strings of carts to the top of Mont Blanc for supplies of ice to meet the European demand, and she admitted that it WAS a grand idea, and asked if the ice and snow lasted long into the summer.

“Long into it!” exclaimed her teacher. “Why, you foolish thing, its lasts all through it.”

“Oh indeed, ma'am!” said Susan, who entertained strong doubts in her heart as to the correctness of Mrs. Stoutley's information on this point.

“Yes,” continued that lady, with more animation than she had experienced for many months past, so invigorating was the change of moral atmosphere induced by this little breeze of instruction; “yes, the ice and snow cover the hills and higher valleys for dozens and dozens of miles round here in all directions, not a few inches deep, such as we sometimes see in England, but with thousands and millions of tons of it, so that the ice in the valleys is hundreds of feet thick, and never melts away altogether, but remains there from year to year —has been there, I suppose, since the world began, and will continue, I fancy, until the world comes to an end.”

Mrs. Stoutley warmed up here, to such an extent that she absolutely flushed, and Susan, who had heretofore regarded her mistress merely as a weakish woman, now set her down, mentally, as a barefaced story-teller.

“Surely, ma'am,” she said, with diffidence, “ice and snow like that doesn't fill ALL the valleys, else we should see it, and find it difficult to travel through 'em; shouldn't we, ma'am?”

“Silly girl!” exclaimed her preceptress, “I did not say it filled ALL the valleys, but the HIGHER valleys—valleys such as, in England and Scotland, would be clothed with pasturage and waving grain, and dotted with cattle and sheep and smiling cottages.”

Mrs. Stoutley had by this time risen to a heroic frame, and spoke poetically, which accounts for her ascribing risible powers to cottages.

“And thus you see, Susan,” she continued, “Switzerland is, as it were, a great ice-tank, or a series of ice-tanks, in which the ice of ages is accumulated and saved up, so that the melting of a little of it —the mere dribbling of it, so to speak—is sufficient to cause the continuous flow of innumerable streams and of great rivers, such as the Rhone, and the Rhine, and the Var.”

The lecture received unexpected and appropriate illustration here by the sudden lifting of the mists, which had hitherto blotted out the landscape.

“Oh, aunt!” exclaimed Emma, running in at the moment, “just look at the hills. How exquisite! How much grander than if we had seen them quite clear from the first!”

Emma was strictly correct, for it is well known that the grandeur of Alpine scenery is greatly enhanced by the wild and weird movements of the gauze-like drapery with which it is almost always partially enshrouded.

As the trio stood gazing in silent wonder and admiration from their window, which, they had been informed, commanded a view of the summit of Mont Blanc, the mist had risen like a curtain partially rolled up. All above the curtain-foot presented the dismal grey, to which they had been too long accustomed, but below, and, as it were, far behind this curtain, the mountain-world was seen rising upwards.

So close were they to the foot of the Great White Monarch, that it seemed to tower like a giant-wall before them; but this wall was varied and beautiful as well as grand. Already the curtain had risen high enough to disclose hoary cliffs and precipices, with steep grassy slopes between, and crowned with fringes of dark pines; which latter, although goodly trees, looked like mere shrubs in their vast setting. Rills were seen running like snowy veins among the slopes, and losing themselves in the masses of DEBRIS at the mountain-foot. As they gazed, the curtain rose higher, disclosing new and more rugged features, on which shone a strange, unearthly light—the result of shadow from the mist and sunshine behind it—while a gleam of stronger light tipped the curtain's under-edge in one direction. Still higher it rose! Susan exclaimed that the mountain was rising into heaven; and Emma and Mrs. Stoutley, whose reading had evidently failed to impress them with a just conception of mountain-scenery, stood with clasped hands in silent expectancy and admiration. The gleam of stronger light above referred to, widened, and Susan almost shrieked with ecstasy when the curtain seemed to rend, and the gleam resolved itself into the great Glacier des Bossons, which, rolling over the mountain-brow like a very world

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of ice, thrust its mighty tongue down into the valley.

From that moment Susan's disbelief in her lady's knowledge changed into faith, and deepened into profound veneration.

It was, however, only a slight glimpse that had been thus afforded of the ice-world by which they were surrounded. The great ice-fountain of those regions, commencing at the summit of Mont Blanc, flings its ample waves over mountain and vale in all directions, forming a throne on which perpetual winter reigns, and this glacier des Bossons, which filled the breasts of our travellers with such feelings of awe, was but one of the numerous rivers which flow from the fountain down the gorges and higher valleys of the Alps, until they reach those regions where summer heat asserts itself, and checks their further progress in the form of ice by melting them.

"Is it possible," said Emma, as she gazed at the rugged and riven mass of solid ice before her, "that a glacier really FLOWS?"

"So learned men tell us, and so we must believe," said Mrs. Stoutley.

"Flows, ma'am?" exclaimed Susan, in surprise.

"Yes, so it is said," replied Mrs. Stoutley, with a smile.

"But we can see, ma'am, by lookin' at it, that it DON'T flow; can't we, ma'am?" said Susan.

"True, Susan, it does not seem to move; nevertheless scientific men tell us that it does, and sometimes we are bound to believe against the evidence of our senses."

Susan looked steadily at the glacier for some time; and then, although she modestly held her tongue, scientific men fell considerably in her esteem.

While the ladies were thus discussing the glacier and enlightening their maid, Lewis, Lawrence, and the Captain, taking advantage of the improved state of the weather, had gone out for a stroll, partly with a view, as Lewis said, to freshen up their appetites for dinner— although, to say truth, the appetites of all three were of such a nature as to require no freshening up. They walked smartly along the road which leads up the valley, pausing, ever and anon, to look back in admiration at the wonderful glimpses of scenery disclosed by the lifting mists. Gradually these cleared away altogether, and the mountain summits stood out well defined against the clear sky. And then, for the first time, came a feeling of disappointment.

"Why, Lawrence," said Lewis, "didn't they tell us that we could see the top of Mont Blanc from Chamouni?"

"They certainly did," replied Lawrence, "but I can't see it."

"There are two or three splendid-looking peaks," said Lewis, pointing up the valley, "but surely that's not the direction of the top we look for."

"No, my lad, it ain't the right point o' the compass by a long way," said the Captain; "but yonder goes a strange sail a-head, let's overhaul her."

"Heave a-head then, Captain," said Lewis, "and clap on stun's'ls and sky-scrappers, for the strange sail is making for that cottage on the hill, and will get into port before we overhaul her if we don't look sharp."

The "strange sail" was a woman. She soon turned into the cottage referred to, but our travellers followed her up, arranging, as they drew near, that Lawrence, being the best French scholar of the three (the Captain knowing nothing whatever of the language), should address her.

She turned out to be a very comely young woman, the wife, as she explained, of one of the Chamouni guides, named Antoine Grennon. Her daughter, a pretty blue-eyed girl of six or so, was busy arranging a casket of flowers, and the grandmother of the family was engaged in that mysterious mallet-stone-scrubbing-brush-and-cold-water system, whereby the washerwomen of the Alps convert the linen of tourists into shreds and patches in the shortest possible space of time.

After some complimentary remarks, Lawrence asked if it were possible to see the summit of Mont Blanc from where they stood.

Certainly it was; the guide's pretty wife could point it out and attempted to do so, but was for a long time unsuccessful, owing to the interference of preconceived notions—each of our travellers having set his heart upon beholding a majestic peak of rugged rock, mingled, perhaps, with ice-blocks and snow.

"Most extraordinary," exclaimed the puzzled Captain, "I've squinted often enough at well-known peaks when on the look-out for landmarks from the sea, an' never failed to make 'em out. Let me see," he added, getting behind the woman so as to look straight along her outstretched arm, "no, I can't see it. My eyes must be giving

way.”

“Surely,” said Lawrence, “you don't mean that little piece of smooth snow rising just behind the crest of yonder mountain like a bit of rounded sugar?”

“Oui, monsieur”—that was precisely what she meant; THAT was the summit of Mont Blanc.

And so, our three travellers—like many hundreds of travellers who had gone before them, and like many, doubtless, who shall follow—were grievously disappointed with their first view of Mont Blanc! They lived, however to change their minds, to discover that the village of Chamouni lies too close to the toe of the Great White Mountain to permit of his being seen to advantage. One may truly see a small scrap of the veritable top from Chamouni, but one cannot obtain an idea of what it is that he sees. As well might a beetle walk close up to the heel of a man, and attempt from that position to form a correct estimate of his size; as well might one plant himself two inches distant from a large painting and expect to do it justice! No, in order to understand Mont Blanc, to “realise” it, to appreciate it adequately, it requires that we should stand well back, and get up on one of the surrounding heights, and make the discovery that as WE rise HE rises, and looks vaster and more tremendous the further off we go and the higher up we rise, until, with foot planted on the crest of one of the neighbouring giants, we still look up, as well as down, and learn—with a feeling of deeper reverence, it may be, for the Maker of the “everlasting hills”—that the grand monarch with the hoary head does in reality tower supreme above them all.

Chapter VIII. INTRODUCES THE READER TO VARIOUS PERSONAGES, AND TOUCHES ON GLACIERS.

At this time our travellers, having only just been introduced to the mountain, had a great deal to hear and see before they understood him. They returned to the hotel with the feeling of disappointment still upon them, but with excellent appetites for dinner.

In the *SALLE A MANGER* they met with a miscellaneous assortment of tourists. These, of whom there were above thirty, varied not only as to size and feature, but as to country and experience. There were veteran Alpine men—steady, quiet, bronzed-looking fellows, some of them—who looked as if they had often “attacked” and conquered the most dangerous summits, and meant to do so again. There were men, and women too, from England, America, Germany, France, and Russia. Some had been at Chamouni before, and wore the self-possessed air of knowledge; others had obviously never been there before, and were excited. Many were full of interest and expectation, a few, chiefly very young men, wore a *BLASE*, half-pitiful, half-patronising air, as though to say, “that’s right, good people, amuse yourselves with your day-dreams while you may. *WE* have tried a few weeks of this sort of thing, and have done a summit or two; in imagination we have also been up Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, and the Matterhorn, and a few of the Hymalaya peaks, and most of the mountains in the moon, and several of the fixed stars, and—haw—are now rather *boa-r-d* with it all than otherwise!” There were men who had done much and who said little, and men who had done little and who spoke much. There were “ice-men” who had a desire to impart their knowledge, and would-be ice-men who were glad to listen. Easy-going men and women there were, who flung the cares of life behind them, and “went in,” as they said, for enjoyment; and who, with abounding animal spirits, a dash of religious sentiment, much irrepressible humour and fun, were really pleasant objects to look at, and entertaining companions to travel with. Earnest men and women there were, too, who gathered plants and insects, and made pencil-sketches and water-colour drawings during their rambles among mountains and valleys, and not a few of whom chronicled faithfully their experiences from day to day. There was a Polish Count, a tall, handsome, middle-aged, care-worn, anxious-looking man, who came there, apparently in search of health, and who was cared for and taken care of by a dark-eyed little daughter. This daughter was so beautiful, that it ought to have made the Count well—so thought most of the young men—simply to look at her! There was a youthful British Lord, who had come to “do” Mont Blanc and a few other peaks. He was under charge of a young man of considerable experience in mountaineering, whose chief delight seemed to be the leading of his charge to well-known summits by any other and more difficult tracks than the obvious and right ones, insomuch that Lewis Stoutley, who had a tendency to imprudent remark, said in his hearing that he had heard of men who, in order to gain the roof of a house, preferred to go up by the waterspout rather than the staircase. There was an artist, whom Lewis—being, as already observed, given to insolence—style the mad artist because he was enthusiastic in his art, galvanic in his actions, and had large, wild eyes, with long hair, and a broad-brimmed conical hat. Besides these, there was a Russian Professor, who had come there for purposes of scientific investigation, and a couple of German students, and a Scotch man of letters, whose aim was general observation, and several others, whose end was simply seeing the world.

In the arrangements of the table, Captain Wopper found himself between Emma Gray and the Polish Count, whose name was Horetzki. Directly opposite to him sat Mrs. Stoutley, having her son Lewis on her right, and Dr. Lawrence on her left. Beside the Count sat his lovely little daughter Nita, and just opposite to her was the mad artist. This arrangement was maintained throughout the sojourn of the various parties during their stay at Chamouni. They did, indeed, shift their position as regarded the table, according to the arrival or departure of travellers, but not in regard to each other.

Now it is an interesting, but by no means surprising fact, that Cupid planted himself in the midst of this party, and, with his fat little legs, in imminent danger of capsizing the dishes, began to draw his bow and let fly his arrows right and left. Being an airy sprite, though fat, and not at any time particularly visible, a careless observer might have missed seeing him; but to any one with moderate powers of observation, he was there, straddling across a dish of salad as plain as the salt-cellar before Captain Wopper’s nose. His deadly shafts, too, were visibly quivering in the breasts of Lewis Stoutley, George Lawrence, and the mad artist. Particularly obvious were these

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shafts in the case of the last, who was addicted to gazing somewhat presumptuously on “lovely woman” in general, from what he styled an artistic point of view—never from any other point of view; of course not.

Whether or not Cupid had discharged his artillery at the young ladies, we cannot say, for they betrayed no evidence of having been wounded. In their case, he must either have missed his aim, or driven his shafts home with such vigour, that they were buried out of sight altogether in their tender hearts. It is probable that not one member of that miscellaneous company gave a thought at that time to the wounded men, except the wounded men themselves, so absorbing is the love of food! The wounded were, however, sharp-set in all respects. They at once descried each other's condition, and, instead of manifesting sympathy with each other, were, strange to say, filled with intense jealousy. This at least is true of the younger men. Lawrence, being somewhat older, was more secretive and self-possessed.

At first Captain Wopper, having declined a dish of cauliflower because it was presented ALONE, and having afterwards accepted a mutton chop ALONE, with feelings of poignant regret that he had let the cauliflower go by, was too busy to observe what the heathen-mythological youngster was doing. Indeed, at most times, the said youngster might have discharged a whole quiver of arrows into the Captain's eyes without his being aware of the attack; but, at the present time, the Captain, as the reader is aware, was up to the eyes in a plot in which Cupid's aid was necessary; he had, as it were, invoked the fat child's presence. When, therefore, he had got over the regrets about the cauliflower, and had swallowed the mutton-chop, he began to look about him—to note the converse that passed between the young men, and the frequent glances they cast at the young women.

It was not the first time that the Captain had, so to speak, kept his weather-eye open in regard to the affection which he had made up his mind must now have been awakened in the breasts of George Lawrence and Emma Gray; but hitherto his hopes, although sanguine, had not received encouragement. Though polite and respectful to each other, they were by no means tender; altogether, they acted quite differently from what the Captain felt that he would have done in similar circumstances. A suspicion had even crossed the poor seaman's mind that Emma was in love with her handsome and rattling cousin Lewis; but anxiety on this head was somewhat allayed by other and conflicting circumstances, such as occasional remarks by Lewis, to the effect that Emma was a goose, or a pert little monkey, or that she knew nothing beyond house-keeping and crochet, and similar compliments. Now, however, in a certain animated conversation between Lawrence and Emma, the designing seaman thought he saw the budding of his deep-laid plans, and fondly hoped ere long to behold the bud developed into the flower of matrimony. Under this conviction he secretly hugged himself, but in the salon, that evening, he opened his arms and released himself on beholding the apparently fickle Lawrence deeply engaged in converse with the Count Horetzki, to whose pretty daughter, however, he addressed the most of his remarks.

The Captain, being a blunt honest, straightforward man, could not understand this state of matters, and fell into a fit of abstracted perplexity on the sofa beside Mrs. Stoutley, who listened listlessly to the Russian Professor as he attempted to explain to her and Emma the nature of a glacier.

“Well, I don't understand it at all,” said Mrs. Stoutley, at the end of one of the Professor's most lucid expositions.

We may remark, in passing, that the Professor, like many of his countrymen, was a good linguist and spoke English well.

“Not understand it!” he exclaimed, with a slight elevation of his eyebrows. “My dear madam, it is most plain, but I fear my want of good English does render me not quite intelligible.”

“Your English is excellent,” replied Mrs. Stoutley, with a smile, “but I fear that my brain is not a sufficiently clear one on such matters, for I confess that I cannot understand it. Can you, Captain Wopper?”

“Certainly not, ma'am,” answered the Captain, thinking of the fickle Lawrence; “it takes the wind out of my sails entirely.”

“Indeed!” said the Professor. “Well, do permit me to try again. You understand that all the mountain-tops and elevated plateaus, for many miles around here, are covered with ice and snow.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the Captain, awaking to the fact that his answer was not relevant; “may I ax what is the particular pint that puzzles you, ma'am?”

Emma laughed aloud at this, and coughed a little to conceal the fact. She was rather easily taken by surprise with passing touches of the ludicrous, and had not yet acquired the habit of effectually suppressing little explosions of undertoned mirth.

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“The thing that puzzles me,” said Mrs. Stoutley, “is, that glaciers should FLOW, as I am told they do, and yet that they should be as hard and brittle as glass.”

“Ah, well, yes, just so, h'm!” said the Captain, looking very wise; “that is exactly the pint that I want to know myself; for no man who looks at the great tongue of that glacier day Bossung—”

“Des Bossons,” said the Professor, with a bland smile.

“Day Bossong,” repeated the Captain, “can deny that it is marked with all the lines, and waves, an eddies of a rollin' river, an' yet as little can they deny that it seems as hard—and—fast as the rock of Gibraltar.”

The Professor nodded approvingly.

“You are right, Captain Whipper—”

“Wopper,” said the Captain, with a grave nod.

“Wopper,” repeated the Professor, “the glacier des Bossons, like all the other glaciers, seems to remain immovable, though in reality it flows—ever flows—downward; but its motion is so slow, that it is not perceptible to the naked eye. Similarly, the hour—hand of a watch is to appearance motionless. Do you want proof? Mark it just now; look again in quarter of an hour, and you see that it has moved. You are convinced. It is so with the glacier. Mark him to—day, go back to—morrow—the mark has changed. Some glaciers flow at the rate of two and three feet in the twenty—four hours.”

“Yes, but HOW do they flow, being so brittle?” demanded Mrs. Stoutley.

“Ay, that's the pint, Professor,” said the Captain, nodding, “HOW do they flow, bein' made of hard and brittle ice?”

“Why, by rolling higgledy—piggledy over itself of course,” said Lewis, flippantly, as he came up and sat down on the end of the sofa, being out of humour with himself and everybody in consequence of having utterly failed to gain the attention of Nita Horetzki, although he had made unusually earnest efforts to join in conversation with her father. Owing to somewhat similar feelings, the artist had flung himself into a chair, and sat glaring at the black fireplace with a degree of concentration that ought to have lighted the firewood therein.

“The cause of a glacier flowing,” said the Professor, “has long been a disputed point. Some men of science have held that it is the pressure of ice and snow behind it which causes it to flow. They do not think that it flows like water, but say it is forced from behind, and crushed through gorges and down valleys, as it were, unwillingly. They say that, if left alone, as they now are, without additions, from this time forward, glaciers would no longer move; they would rest, and slowly melt away; that their motion is due to the fact that there are miles and miles of snow—fields, thousands of feet deep, on the mountain—tops and in the gorges, to which fresh snows are added every winter, so that the weight of what is behind, slipping off the slopes and falling from the cliffs, crushes down and forward that which is below; thus glaciers cannot choose but advance.”

“Ay, ay,” said the Captain, “no doubt no doubt that may be so; but why is it that, bein' as brittle as glass, a glacier don't come rumblin' and clatterin' down the valleys in small hard bits, like ten thousand millions of smashed—up chandeliers?”

“Ay, there's the rub,” exclaimed Lewis; “what say you to that?”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Professor, again smiling blandly, “there you have touched what once was, and, to some philosophers it seems, still is, the great difficulty. By some great men it has been held that glacier ice is always in a partially soft, viscid, or semi—fluid condition, somewhat like pitch, so that, although APPARENTLY a solid, brittle, and rigid body, it flows sluggishly in reality. Other philosophers have denied this theory, insisting that the ice of glaciers is NOT like pitch, but like glass, and that it cannot be squeezed without being broken, nor drawn without being cracked. These philosophers have discovered that when ice is subjected to great pressure it melts, and that, when the pressure is removed, the part so melted immediately freezes again—hence the name regelation, or re—freezing, is given to the process. Thus a glacier, they say, is in many places being continually melted and continually and instantaneously re—frozen, so that it is made to pass through narrow gorges, and to open out again when the enormous pressure has been removed. But this theory of regelation, although unquestionably true, and although it exercises SOME influence on glacier motion, does not, in my opinion, alone account for it. The opinion which seems to be most in favour among learned men—and that which I myself hold firmly—is, the theory of the Scottish Professor Forbes, namely, that a glacier is a semi—fluid body, it is largely impregnated throughout its extent with water, its particles move round and past each other—in other words, it flows in precisely the same manner as water, the only difference being that it is not quite so fluid; it is sluggish in its flow,

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but it certainly models itself to the ground over which it is forced by its own gravity, and it is only rent or broken into fragments when it is compelled to turn sharp angles, or to pass over steep convex slopes. Forbes, by his careful measurements and investigations, proved incontestably that in some glaciers the central portion travelled down its valley at double or treble the rate of its sides, without the continuity of the mass being broken. In small masses, indeed, glacier-ice is to all appearance rigid, but on a large scale it is unquestionably ductile."

"Has the theory of regelation been put to the proof?" asked Lewis, with a degree of interest in glaciers which he had never before felt.

"It has," answered the Professor. "An experimentalist once cut a bar of solid ice, like to a bar of soap in form and size, from a glacier. To this an iron weight of several pounds was suspended by means of a very fine wire, which was tied round the bar. The pressure of the wire melted the ice under it; as the water escaped it instantly re-froze above the wire; thus the wire went on cutting its way through the bar, and the water went on freezing, until at last the weight fell to the ground, and left the bar as solid and entire as if it had never been cut."

"Well, now," said Captain Wopper, bringing his hand down on his thigh with a slap that did more to arouse Mrs. Stoutley out of her languor than the Professor's lecture on glacier ice, "I've sailed round the world, I have, and I've seen many a strange sight, and what I've got to say is that I'll believe that when I SEE it."

"You shall see it soon then, I hope," said the Professor, more blandly than ever, "for I intend to verify this experiment along with several others. I go to the Mer de Glace, perhaps as far as the Jardin, to-morrow. Will you come?"

"What may the Jardin be?" asked the Captain.

"Hallo! monkey, what's wrong?" said Lewis to Emma, referring to one of the undertoned safety-valves before mentioned.

"Nothing," replied Emma, pursing her little lips till they resembled a cherry.

"The Jardin, or garden," said the Professor, "is a little spot of exquisite beauty in the midst of the glaciers, where a knoll of green grass and flowers peeps up in the surrounding sterility. It is one of the regular excursions from Chamouni."

"Can ladies go?" asked Lewis.

"Young and active ladies can," said the Professor, with his blandest possible smile, as he bowed to Emma.

"Then, we'll all go together," cried Lewis, with energy.

"Not all," said Mrs. Stoutley, with a sigh, "I am neither young nor active."

"Nonsense, mother, you're quite young yet, you know, and as active as a kitten when you've a mind to be. Come, we'll have a couple of porters and a chair to have you carried when you knock up."

Notwithstanding the glowing prospects of ease and felicity thus opened up to her, Mrs. Stoutley resolutely refused to go on this excursion, but she generously allowed Emma to go if so disposed. Emma, being disposed, it was finally arranged that, on the following day, she, the Captain, Lewis, and Lawrence, with Gillie White as her page, should proceed up the sides of Mont Blanc with the man of science, and over the Mer de Glace to the Jardin.

Chapter IX. A SOLID STREAM.

There is a river of ice in Switzerland, which, taking its rise on the hoary summit of Mont Blanc, flows through a sinuous mountain-channel, and terminates its grand career by liquefaction in the vale of Chamouni. A mighty river it is in all respects, and a wonderful one—full of interest and mystery and apparent contradiction. It has a grand volume and sweep, varying from one to four miles in width, and is about twelve miles long, with a depth of many hundreds of feet. It is motionless to the eye, yet it descends into the plain continually. It is hard and unyielding in its nature, yet it flows as really and steadily, if not with as lithe a motion, as a liquid river. It is NOT a half solid mass like mud, which might roll slowly down an incline; it is solid, clear, transparent, brittle ice, which refuses to bend, and cracks sharply under a strain; nevertheless, it has its waves and rapids, cross-currents, eddies, and cascades, which, seen from a moderate distance, display all the grace and beauty of flowing water—as if a grand river in all its varied parts, calm and turbulent, had been actually and suddenly arrested in its course and frozen to the bottom.

It is being melted perpetually too. The fierce sun of summer sends millions of tiny streamlets down into its interior, which collect, augment, cut channels for themselves through the ice, and finally gush into the plain from its lower end in the form of a muddy river. Even in winter this process goes on, yet the ice-river never melts entirely away, but holds on its cold, stately, solemn course from year to year—has done so for unknown ages, and will probably do so to the end of time. It is picturesque in its surroundings, majestic in its motion, tremendous in its action, awful in its sterility, and, altogether, one of the most impressive and sublime works of God.

This gigantic glacier, or stream of ice, springing, as it does, from the giant-mountain of Europe, is appropriately hemmed in, and its mighty force restrained, by a group of Titans, whose sharp aiguilles, or needle-like peaks, shoot upward to a height little short of their rounded and white-headed superior, and from whose wild gorges and riven sides tributary ice-rivers flow, and avalanches thunder incessantly. Leaving its cradle on the top of Mont Blanc, the great river sweeps round the Aiguille du Geant; and, after receiving its first name of Glacier du Geant from that mighty obelisk of rock, which rises 13,156 feet above the sea, it passes onward to welcome two grand tributaries, the Glacier de Lechaud, from the rugged heights of the Grandes Jorasses, and the Glacier du Talefre from the breast of the Aiguille du Talefre and the surrounding heights. Thus augmented, the river is named the Mer de Glace, or sea of ice, and continues its downward course; but here it encounters what may be styled “the narrows,” between the crags at the base of the Aiguille Charmoz and Aiguille du Moine, through which it steadily forces its way, though compressed to much less than half its width by the process. In one place the Glacier du Geant is above eleven hundred yards wide; that of the Lechaud is above eight hundred; that of Talefre above six hundred—the total, when joined, two thousand five hundred yards; and this enormous mass of solid ice is forced through a narrow neck of the valley, which is, in round numbers, only NINE HUNDRED yards wide! Of course the ice-river must gain in depth what it loses in breadth in this gorge, through which it travels at the rate of twenty inches a day. Thereafter, it tumbles ruggedly to its termination in the vale of Chamouni, under the name of the Glacier des Bois.

The explanation of the causes of the rise and flow of this ice-river we will leave to the genial and enthusiastic Professor, who glories in dilating on such matters to Captain Wopper, who never tires of the dilations.

Huge, however, though this glacier of the Mer de Glace be, it is only one of a series of similar glaciers which constitute the outlets to that vast reservoir of ice formed by the wide range of Mont Blanc, where the snows of successive winters are stored, packed, solidified, and rendered, as it were, self-regulating in their supplies of water to the plains. And the Mont Blanc range itself is but a portion of the great glacial world of Switzerland, the area occupied by which is computed at 900 square miles. Two-thirds of these send their waters to the sea through the channel of the Rhine. The most extensive of these glaciers is the Aletsch glacier, which is fifteen miles in length. It is said that above six hundred distinct glaciers have been reckoned in Switzerland.

This, good reader, is but a brief reference to the wonders of the glacial world. It is but a scratching of the surface. There is a very mine of interesting, curious, and astonishing facts below the surface. Nature is prodigal of her information to those who question her closely, correctly, and perseveringly. Even to those who observe her carelessly, she is not altogether dumb. She is generous; and the God of Nature has caused it to be written for our

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instruction that, "His works are wonderful, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein."

We may not, however, prolong our remarks on the subject of ice-rivers at this time. Our travellers at Chamouni are getting ready to start, and it is our duty at present to follow them.

Chapter X. THE FIRST EXCURSION.

"A Splendid morning!" exclaimed Dr. George Lawrence, as he entered the SALLE A MANGER with an obviously new alpenstock in his hand.

"Jolly!" replied Lewis Stoutley, who was stooping at the moment to button one of his gaiters.

Lewis was addicted to slang, not by any means an uncommon characteristic of youth!

"The man," he said, with some bitterness, "who invented big buttons and little button-holes should have had his nose skewered with a button-hook. He was an ass!"

In order to relieve his feelings and accomplish his ends, Lewis summarily enlarged the holes with his penknife.

"And ROUND buttons, too," he said, indignantly; "what on earth was the use of making round buttons when flat ones had been invented? A big hole and a flat button will hold against anything—even against Scotch whins and heather. There, now, that abominable job is done."

"You are fond of strong language, Lewie," said Lawrence, as he examined the spike at the end of his alpenstock.

"I am. It relieves my feelings."

"But don't you think it weakens your influence on occasions when nothing but strong language will serve? You rob yourself of the power, you know, to increase the force of it."

"Oh bother! don't moralise, man, but let's have your opinion of the weather, which is an all-important subject just now."

"I have already given my opinion as to that," said Lawrence, "but here comes one who will give us an opinion of value.—He is in capital time."

"Good morning, Antoine."

Their guide for the day, Antoine Grennon, a fine stalwart specimen of his class, returned the salutation, and added that it was a very fine morning.

"Capital, isn't it?" cried Lewis, cheerfully, for he had got over the irritation caused by the buttons. "Couldn't be better; could it?"

The guide did not admit that the weather could not be better.

"You look doubtful, Antoine," said Lawrence. "Don't you think the day will keep up?"

"Keep up!" exclaimed Lewis; "why, the sky is perfectly clear. Of course it will. I never saw a finer day, even in England. Why do you doubt it, Antoine?"

The guide pointed to a small cloud that hung over the brow of one of the higher peaks.

"Appearances are sometimes deceitful in this country," he said. "I don't doubt the fineness of the day at present, but—"

He was interrupted here by the sudden and noisy entrance of Captain Wopper and the Professor, followed by the mad artist, whose name, by the way, was Slingsby.

"No, no," said the Captain to the Professor, with whom he had already become very intimate, "it won't do to part company. If the Jardang is too far for the ladies, we will steer for the Mairdyglass, an' cross over to the what's-'is-name—"

"Chapeau," said the Professor.

"Ah! the shappo," continued the Captain, "and so down by the glacier dez boys—"

"The what?" asked Lewis, with a half-suppressed smile.

"The glacier dez boys, youngster," repeated the Captain, stoutly.

"Oh, I see; you mean the Glacier des Bois?" said Lewis, suppressing the smile no longer.

"What I mean, young man," said the Captain, sternly, "is best known to myself. You and other College-bred coxcombs may call it day bwa, if you like, but I have overhauled the chart, and there it's spelt d-e-s, which sounds dez, and b-o-i-s, which seafarin' men pronounce boys, so don't go for to cross my hawse again, but rather join me in tryin' to indooce the Professor to putt off his trip to the Jardang, an' sail in company with us for the day."

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“I will join you heartily in that,” said Lewis, turning to the man of science, who stood regarding the Captain with an amiable smile, as a huge Newfoundland dog might regard a large mastiff; “but why is our proposed excursion to the Jardin to be altered?”

“Because,” said the Professor, “your amiable sister—I beg pardon, cousin—with that irresistible power of suasion which seems inherent in her nature, has prevailed on Mademoiselle Horetzki to join the party, and Mademoiselle is too delicate—sylph-like—to endure the fatigues of so long an excursion over the ice. Our worthy guide suggests that it would afford more pleasure to the ladies—and of course, therefore, to the gentlemen—if you were to make your first expedition only to the Montanvert which is but a two hours' climb from Chamouni, picnic there, cross the Mer de Glace, which is narrow at that point, and descend again to Chamouni by the side of the Glacier des Bois, where you can behold the great moraines, and also the source of the river Arveiron. This would be a pleasant and not too fatiguing round, and I, who might perhaps be an encumbrance to you, will prosecute my inquiries at the Jardin alone.”

“Impossible,” exclaimed Lewis, “the Captain is right when he observes that we must not part company. As my mother says, we are a giddy crew, and will be the better of a little scientific ballast to keep us from capsizing into a crevasse. Do come, my dear sir, if it were only out of charity, to keep us in order.”

To this entreaty Lawrence and the artist added their persuasions, which were further backed by the eloquence of Emma Gray and Nita Horetzki, who entered at the moment radiant with the flush of life's dawning day, and irresistible in picturesque mountain attire, the chief characteristics of which consisted in an extensive looping up of drapery, and an ostentatious display of those staffs called alpenstocks, five feet long, tipped with chamois horn, which are an indispensable requisite in Alpine work.

“Oh! you MUSS go,” said Nita, in silvery tones and disjointed English. “If you go not, monsieur, I go not!”

“That of course decides the question, Mademoiselle,” said the gallant Professor, with one of his blandest smiles, “I shall accompany you with pleasure. But I have one little request to make. My time at Chamouni is short; will you permit me, on arriving at the Mer de Glace, to prosecute my inquiries? I am here to ask questions of Nature, and must do so with perseverance and patience. Will you allow me to devote more of my attention to HER than to yourself?”

“I'm! well—what you say, Mademoiselle Gray?” demanded Nita, with an arch look at her companion. “Is the Professor's request reasonable?”

To this Emma replied that as Nature was, upon the whole, a more important lady than either of them, she thought it WAS reasonable; whereupon the Professor agreed to postpone his visit to the Jardin, and devote his day to fixing stakes and making observations on the Mer de Glace, with a view to ascertaining the diurnal rate of speed at which the glacier flowed.

“You spoke of putting certain questions to Nature, Professor,” said Lawrence, when the party were slowly toiling up the mountain-side. “Have they not already been put to her, and satisfactorily answered some time ago?”

“They have been put,” replied the Professor, “by such learned men as Saussure, Agassiz, Rendu, Charpentier, and by your own countryman Forbes, and others, and undoubtedly their questions have received distinct answers, insomuch that our knowledge of the nature and action of glacial ice is now very considerable. But, my dear sir, learned men have not been agreed as to what Nature's replies mean, nor have they exhausted the subject; besides, no true man of science is quite satisfied with merely hearing the reports of others, he is not content until he has met and conversed with Nature face to face. I wish, therefore, to have a personal interview with her in these Alps, or rather,” continued the Professor, in a more earnest tone, “I do wish to see the works of my Maker with my own eyes, and to hear His voice with the ears of my own understanding.”

“Your object, then, is to verify, not to discover?” said Lawrence.

“It is both. Primarily to verify; but the man of science always goes forth with the happy consciousness that the mine in which he proposes to dig is rich in gems, and that, while seeking for one sort, he may light upon another unexpectedly.”

“When Captain Wopper turned up yonder gem, he lit on one which, if not of the purest water, is unquestionably a brilliant specimen of the class to which it belongs,” said Lewis, coming up at that moment, and pointing to a projection in the somewhat steep part of the path up which they were winding.

The gem referred to was no other than our friend Gillie White. That hilarious youth, although regenerated

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outwardly as regards blue cloth and buttons, had not by any means changed his spirit since fortune began to smile on him. Finding that his mistress, being engaged with her dark-eyed friend, did not require his services, and observing that his patron, Captain Wopper, held intercourse with the guide—in broken English, because he, the guide, also spoke broken English—that Lawrence and the Professor seemed capable of entertaining each other, that Lewis and the artist, although dreadfully jealous of each other, were fain to hold social intercourse, the ladies being inseparable, and that he, Gillie, was therefore left to entertain himself he set about amusing himself to the best of his power by keeping well in rear of the party and scrambling up dangerous precipices, throwing stones at little birds, charging shrubs and stabbing the earth with Emma's alpenstock, immolating snails, rolling rocks down precipitous parts of the hill, and otherwise exhibiting a tendency to sport with Nature—all of which he did to music whistled by himself, and in happy forgetfulness of everything save the business in hand. He was engaged in some apparently difficult piece of fancy work, involving large boulders, when Lewis drew attention to him.

“What can the imp be up to?” he said.

“Most likely worrying some poor reptile to death,” said the artist, removing his conical wideawake and fanning himself therewith. (Mr. Slingsby was very warm, his slender frame not being equal to his indomitable spirit.)

“I think he is trying to break your alpenstock, Emma,” observed Lewis.

There seemed to be truth in this, for Gillie, having fixed the staff as a lever, was pulling at it with all his might. The projection of rock on which he stood, and which overhung the zigzag road, was partially concealed by bushes, so that the precise intention of his efforts could not be discovered.

At that moment Antoine, the guide, turned to see what detained the party, and instantly uttered a loud shout of alarm as he ran back to them.

The warning or remonstrance came too late. Gillie had loosened an enormous rock which had been on the point of falling, and with a throb of exultation, which found vent in a suppressed squeal, he hurled a mass, something about the size and weight of a cart of coals, down the precipice.

But the current of Gillie's feelings was rudely changed when a shriek from the ladies, and something between a roar and a yell from the gentlemen, told that they had observed a man with a mule, who, in ascending from the valley, had reached a spot which lay in the direct line of the miniature avalanche; and when the muleteer, also observing the missile, added a hideous howl to the chorus, the poor urchin shrank back appalled. The rock struck the track directly behind the mule with a force which, had it been expended only six inches more to the right, would have driven that creature's hind legs into the earth as if they had been tenpenny nails; it then bounded clear over the next turning of the track, crashed madly through several bushes, overturned five or six trees, knocked into atoms a sister rock which had taken the same leap some ages before, and finally, leaving behind it a grand tail of dust and DEBRIS, rolled to its rest upon the plain.

At the first symptom of the danger, Captain Wopper had rushed towards the culprit.

“Rascal!” he growled between his teeth, as he seized Gillie by the nape of the neck, lifted him almost off his legs, and shook him, “d'ee see what you've done?”

He thrust the urchin partially over the precipice, and pointed to the man and the mule.

“Please, I HAVEN'T done it,” pleaded Gillie.

“But you did your best to—you—you small—there!”

He finished off the sentence with an open-handed whack that aroused the echoes of Mont Blanc, and cast the culprit adrift.

“Now, look 'ee, lad,” said the Captain, with impressive solemnity, “if you ever go to chuck stones like that over the precipices of this here mountain again, I'll chuck you over after 'em. D'ee hear?”

“Yes, Cappen,” grumbled Gillie, rubbing himself, “but if you do, it's murder. No jury of Englishmen would think of recommendin' you to mercy in the succumstances. You'd be sure to swing—an' I—I could wish you a better fate.”

The Captain did not wait to hear the boy's good wishes, but hastened to rejoin his friends, while Gillie followed in rear, commenting audibly on the recent incident.

“Well, well,” he said, thrusting both hands deep into bush trouser-pockets, according to custom when in a moralising frame of mind, “who'd a thought it, Gillie White, that you'd 'ave bin brought all the way from London to the Halps to make such a close shave o' committin' man—to say nothin' of mule-slaughter, and to git whacked

by your best friend? Oh! Cappen, Cappen, I couldn't 'ave believed it of you if I 'adn't felt it. But, I say, Gillie, WASN'T it a big 'un? Ha! ha! The Cappen threatened to chuck me over the precipice, but I've chucked over a wopper that beats HIM all to sticks. Hallo! I say that's worthy of PUNCH. P'r'aps I'll be a contributor to it w'en I gets back from Zwizzerland, if I ever does get back, vich is by no means certain. Susan, my girl, I'll 'ave summat to enliven you with this evenin'."

We need scarcely say that this last remark had reference to Mrs. Stoutley's maid, with whom the boy had become a great favourite. Indeed the regard was mutual, though there was this difference about it, that Susan, being two years older than Gillie, and tall as well as womanly for her age, looked upon the boy as a precocious little oddity, whereas Gillie, esteeming himself a man—"all but"—regarded Susan with the powerful feelings of a first affection.

From this, and what has been already said, it will be apparent to our fair readers that Cupid had accompanied Mrs. Stoutley's party to Chamouni, with the intention apparently of amusing himself as well as interfering with Captain Wopper's matrimonial designs.

The road to the Montanvert is a broad and easy bridle-path, which, after leaving the valley, traverses a pine-forest in its ascent and becomes in places somewhat steep. Here and there a zigzag is found necessary, and in several places there are tracks of avalanches. About half-way up there is a spring named the Caillet which was shaded by trees in days of yore, but the avalanches have swept these away. Beside the spring of pure water there was a spring of "fire-water," in a hut where so-called "refreshments" might also be obtained. As none of our party deemed it necessary to stimulate powers, which, at that time of the day, were fresh and vigorous, they passed this point of temptation without halting.

Other temptations, however, were not so easily resisted. The Professor was stopped by rocky stratifications, the ladies were stopped by flowers and views, the younger gentlemen were of course stopped by the ladies, and the mad artist was stopped by everything. Poor Mr. Slingsby, who had been asked to join the party, in virtue of his being a friend of the Count, and, therefore, of Nita, was so torn by the conflict resulting from his desire to cultivate Nita, and cut out Lewis and Lawrence, and his desire to prosecute his beloved art, that he became madder than usual. "Splendid foregrounds" met him at every turn; "lovely middle-distances" chained him in everywhere; "enchancing backgrounds" beset him on all sides; gorgeous colours dazzled him above and below; and Nita's black eyes pierced him continually through and through. It was terrible! He was constantly getting into positions of danger—going out on ledges to obtain particular views, rolling his large eyes, pulling off his hat and tossing back his long hair, so as to drink in more thoroughly the beauties around him, and clambering up precipices to fetch down bunches of wild flowers when Nita chanced to express the most distant allusion to, or admiration of, them.

"He will leave his bones in one crevasse!" growled Antoine, on seeing him rush to a point of vantage, and, for the fiftieth time, squat down to make a rapid sketch of some "exquisite bit" that had taken his fancy.

"Tis of no use," he said, on returning to his friends, "I cannot sketch. The beauties around me are too much for me."

He glanced timidly at Nita, who looked at him boldly, laughed, and advised him to shut his eyes, so as not to be distracted with such beauties.

"Impossible; I cannot choose but look. See," he said, pointing backward to their track, "see what a lovely effect of tender blue and yellow through yonder opening—"

"D'you mean Gillie?" asked Lewis, with a quiet grin, as that reckless youth suddenly presented his blue coat and yellow buttons in the very opening referred to.

The laugh called forth by this was checked by the voice of Captain Wopper, who was far in advance shouting to them to come on.

A few minutes more, and the whole party stood on the Montanvert beside the small inn which has been erected there for the use of summer tourists, and from which point the great glacier broke for the first time in all its grandeur, on their view.

Well might Emma and Nita stand entranced for some time, unable to find utterance to their feelings, save in the one word—wonderful! Even Slingsby's mercurial spirit was awed into silence, for, straight before them, the white and frozen billows of the Mer de Glace stretched for miles away up into the gorges of the giant hills until lost in and mingled with the clouds of heaven.

Chapter XI. THE PURSUIT OF SCIENCE UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

After the first burst of enthusiasm and interest had abated, the attention of the party became engrossed in the proceedings of the Professor, who, with his assistants, began at once to adjust his theodolite, and fix stakes in the ice. While he was thus engaged, Captain Wopper regarded the Mer de Glace with a gaze of fixedness so intense as to draw on him the attention and arouse the curiosity of his friends.

"D'you see anything curious, Captain?" asked Emma, who chanced to stand beside him.

"Coorious—eh?" repeated the Captain slowly, without altering his gaze or adding to his reply.

"Monsieur le Capitaine is lost in consternation," said Nita, with a smile.

"I think, Miss Horetzki," said Lewis, "that you probably mean ADMIRATION."

"How you knows w'at I mean?" demanded Nita, quickly.

"Ha! a very proper and pertinent question," observed Slingsby, in an audible though under tone.

"I nevair do put PERTINENT questions, sir," said Nita, turning her black eyes sharply, though with something of a twinkle in them, on the mad artist.

Poor Slingsby began to explain, but Nita cut him short by turning to Lewis and again demanding, "How you knows w'at I mean?"

"The uniform propriety of your thoughts, Mademoiselle," replied Lewis, with a continental bow, and an air of pretended respect, "induces me to suppose that your words misinterpret them."

Nita's knowledge of English was such that this remark gave her only a hazy idea of the youth's meaning; she accepted it, however, as an apologetic explanation, and ordered him to awaken the Captain and find out from him what it was that so riveted his attention.

"You hear my orders," said Lewis, laying his hand with a slap on the Captain's shoulder. "What are you staring at?"

"Move!" murmured the Captain, returning as it were to consciousness with a long deep sigh, "it don't move an inch."

"WHAT does not move?" said Lawrence, who had been assisting to adjust the theodolite, and came forward at the moment.

"The ice, to be sure," answered the Captain. "I say, Professor, do 'ee mean to tell me that the whole of that there Mairdy-glass is movin'?"

"I do," answered the Professor, pausing for a minute in his arrangements, and looking over his spectacles at the Captain with an amused expression.

"Then," returned the Captain, with emphasis, "I think you'll find that you're mistaken."

"Ha! Captain Weeper—"

"Wopper," said the Captain.

"Wopper," repeated the Professor, "you are not the first who has expressed disbelief in what he cannot see, and you will assuredly not be the last; but if you will wait I will convince you."

"Very good," replied the Captain, "I'm open to conviction."

"Which means," said Lewis, "that you have nailed your colours to the mast, and mean to die rather than give in."

"No doubt," said the Captain, paying no attention to the last remark, "I see, AND believe, that at some time or other the ice here must have been in a flowin' state. I'm too well aware o' the shape of waves an' eddies, cross-currents and ripples, to doubt or deny that but any man with half an eye can see that it's anchored hard and fast NOW. I've looked at it without flinchin' for good ten minutes, and not the smallest sign of motion can I detect."

"So might you say of the hour-hand of a watch," observed Lawrence.

"Not at all," retorted the Captain, becoming argumentative. "I look at the hour-hand of a watch for ten minutes and don't see it move, but I DO see that it has in reality passed over a very small but appreciable space in that time."

"Just so," said the Professor, "I will ere long show you the same thing in regard to the ice."

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"I'll bet you ten thousand pounds you don't," returned the Captain, with an assured nod.

"Colours nailed!" said Lewis; "but I say, Captain," he added, remonstratively, "I thought you were a sworn enemy to gambling. Isn't betting gambling?"

"It is, young man," answered the Captain, "but I always bet ten thousand pounds sterling, which I never mean to pay if I lose, nor to accept if I win—and that is NOT gambling. Put that in your pipe and smoke it; and if you'll take my advice, you'll go look after your friend Slingsby, who is gambolling up yonder in another fashion that will soon bring him to grief if he's not stopped."

All eyes were turned towards the mad artist, who, finding that his advances to Mademoiselle Nita were not well received, had for the time forsaken her, and returned to his first (and professional) love. In wooing her, he had clambered to an almost inaccessible cliff from which he hoped to obtain a very sketchable view of the Mer de Glace, and, when Captain Wopper drew attention to him, was making frantic efforts to swing himself by the branch of a tree to a projecting rock, which was so slightly attached to its parent cliff that his weight would in all probability have hurled it and himself down the precipice.

The remonstrative shouts of his friends, however, induced him to desist, and he sat down to work in a less perilous position.

Meanwhile the Professor, having completed his preliminary preparations, ordered his assistants to go and "fix the stakes in the ice."

It had been arranged that while the scientific experiments were in progress, the young ladies should ramble about the neighbourhood in search of flowers and plants, under the care of Lewis, until two o'clock, at which hour all were to assemble at the Montanvert hotel for luncheon, Captain Wopper and Lawrence resolving to remain and assist, or at least observe, the Professor. The former, indeed, bearing in mind his great and ruling wish even in the midst of scientific doubt and inquiries, had suggested that the latter should also accompany the ladies, the country being somewhat rugged, and the ladies—especially Miss Emma—not being very sure-footed; but Lawrence, to his disappointment, had declined, saying that the ladies had a sufficient protector in the gallant Lewis, and that Miss Emma was unquestionably the surest-footed of the whole party.

Lawrence therefore remained, and, at the Professor's request, accompanied the party who were to fix the stakes on the ice.

As this operation was attended with considerable difficulty and some danger, we will describe the process.

Finding that the spot which he had first chosen for his observations was not a very good one, the Professor changed his position to a point farther down on the steep sloping rocks that form the left bank of the Glacier des Bois. Here the theodolite was fixed. This instrument as even our young readers may probably know, is a small telescope attached to a stand with three long legs, and having spirit-levels, by means of which it can be fixed in a position, if we may say so, of exact flatness with reference to the centre of the earth. Within the telescope are two crossed hairs of a spider's-web, so fine as to be scarcely visible to the naked eye, and so arranged that their crossing-point is exactly in the centre of the tube. By means of pivots and screws the telescope can be moved up or down, right or left, without in the smallest degree altering the flatness or position of its stand. On looking through the telescope the delicate threads can be distinctly seen, and the point where they cross can be brought to bear on any distant object.

Having fixed the instrument on the rocks quite clear of the ice, the Professor determined the direction of a supposed line perpendicular to the axis of the glacier. He then sought for a conspicuous and well-defined object on the opposite side of the valley, as near as possible to that direction. In this he was greatly helped by Captain Wopper, who, having been long accustomed to look-out with precision at sea, found it not very difficult to apply his powers on land.

"There's a good land-mark, Professor," he said, pointing towards a sharply-cut rock, "as like the Dook of Wellington's nose as two peas."

"I see it," said the Professor, whose solid and masculine countenance was just the smallest possible degree flushed by the strong under-current of enthusiasm with which he prosecuted his experiments.

"You couldn't have a better object than the pint o' that," observed the Captain, whose enthusiasm was quite as great as, and his excitement much greater than, that of the Professor.

Having carefully directed the telescope to the extreme point of the "Dook's" nose, the Professor now ordered one of his assistants to go on the glacier with a stake. Lawrence descended with him, and thus planted his foot on

glacier-ice for the first time, as Lewis afterwards remarked, in the pursuit scientific knowledge.

While they were clambering slowly down among the loose boulders and DEBRIS which had been left by the glacier in previous years, the Professor carefully sketched the Duke of Wellington's nose with the rocks, etc., immediately around it, in his notebook, so that it might be easily recognised again on returning to the spot on a future day.

The assistant who had been sent out with the first stake proved to be rather stupid, so that it was fortunate he had been accompanied by Lawrence, and by the guide, Antoine Grennon, who stirred up his perceptions. By rough signalling he was made to stand near the place where the first stake was to be driven in. The telescope was then lowered, and the man was made, by signals, to move about and plant his stake here and there in an upright position until the point of intersection of the spider's threads fell exactly on the bottom of the stake. A pre-arranged signal was then made, and at that point an auger hole was bored deep into the ice and the stake driven home.

"So much for number one," said Captain Wopper, with a look of satisfaction.

"They won't fix the other ones so easily," observed the Professor, re-examining the stake through the telescope with great care.

He was right in this. The first stake had been planted not far from the shore, but now Lawrence and his party had to proceed in a straight line over the glacier, which, at this steep portion of its descent into the Vale of Chamouni, was rent, dislocated, and tortured, to such an extent that it was covered with huge blocks and pinnacles of ice, and seamed with yawning crevasses. To clamber over some of the ice-ridges was almost impossible, and, in order to avoid pinnacles and crevasses, which were quite impassable, frequent DETOURS had to be made. If the object of the ice-party had merely been to cross the glacier, the difficulties would not have been great; but the necessity of always returning to the straight line pointed out by the inexorable theodolite, led them into positions of considerable difficulty. To the inexperienced Lawrence they also appeared to be positions of great danger, much to the amusement of Antoine, who, accustomed as he was to the fearful ice-slopes and abysses of the higher regions, looked upon this work as mere child's play.

"You'll come to have a different notion of crevasses, sir," he said, with a quiet smile, "after you've bin among the seracs of the Grand Mulet, and up some of the couloirs of Monte Rosa."

"I doubt it not, Antoine," said Lawrence, gazing with feelings of awe into a terrible split in the ice, whose beautiful light-blue sides deepened into intense blackness as they were lost to vision in an abyss, out of which arose the deep-toned gurgling of sub-glacial streams; "but you must not forget that this is quite new to me, and my feet are not yet aware of the precise grip with which they must hold on to so slippery a foundation."

It was in truth no discredit to Lawrence that he felt a tendency to shrink from edges of chasms which appeared ready to break off, or walked with caution on ice-slopes which led to unfathomable holes, for the said slopes, although not steep, were undoubtedly slippery.

After much clambering, a ridge was at length gained, on which the second stake was set up, and then the party proceeded onwards to fix the third; but now the difficulties proved to be greater than before. A huge block of ice was fixed upon as that which would suit their purpose, but it stood like a peninsula in the very midst of a crevasse, and connected with the main body of ice by a neck which looked as sharp as a knife on its upper edge, so that none but tight-rope or slack-wire dancers could have proceeded along it; and even such performers would have found the edge too brittle to sustain them.

"You'll have to show, Monsieur, some of your mountaineer skill here?" said the man who carried the stakes to Antoine.

He spoke in French, which Lawrence understood perfectly. We render it as nearly as possible into the counterpart English.

Antoine at once stepped forward with his Alpine axe, and, swinging it vigorously over his head, cut a deep notch on the sloping side of the neck of ice. Beyond it he cut a second notch. No man—not even a monkey—could have stood on the glassy slope which descended into the abyss at their side; but Antoine, putting one foot in the first notch, and the other in the second, stood as secure as if he had been on a flat rock. Again he swung his axe, and planted his foot in a third notch, swinging his axe the instant it was fixed for the purpose of cutting the fourth. Thus, cut by cut and step by step, he passed over to the block of ice aimed at. It was but a short neck. A few notches were sufficient, yet without an axe to cut these notches, the place had been absolutely

impassable. It was by no means a "dangerous" place, according to the ideas of Alpine mountaineers, nevertheless a slip, or the loss of balance, would have been followed by certain death. Antoine knew this, and, like a wise guide, took proper precautions.

"Stay, sir," he said, as Lawrence was screwing up his courage to follow him, "I will show you another piece of Alpine practice."

He returned as he spoke, and, unwinding a coil of rope which he carried, fastened one end thereof round his waist. Allowing a few feet of interval, he then fastened the rope round Lawrence's waist, and the assistants with the stakes—of whom there were two besides the man already referred to—also attached themselves to the rope in like manner. By this means they all passed over with comparative security, because if any one of them had chanced to slip, the others would have fixed the points of their axes and alpenstocks in the ice and held on until their overbalanced comrade should have been restored to his position.

On gaining the block, however, it was found that the line communicating with the theodolite on the one hand, and the Dook's nose on the other, just missed it. The Professor's signals continued to indicate "more to the left," (HIS left, that is) until the stake-driver stood on the extreme edge of the crevasse, and his comrades held on tight by the rope to prevent him from falling over. Still the professor indicated "more to the left!"

As "more to the left" implied the planting of the stake in atmospheric air, they were fain to search for a suitable spot farther on.

This they found, after some scrambling, on a serrated ridge whose edge was just wide and strong enough to sustain them. Here the exact line was marked, but while the hole was being bored, an ominous crack was heard ascending as if from the heart of the glacier.

"What was that?" said Lawrence, turning to the guide with a quick surprised look.

"Only a split in the ice somewhere. It's a common sound enough, as you might expect in a mass that is constantly moving," replied Antoine, looking gravely round him, "but I can't help thinking that this lump of ice, with crevasses on each side, is not the best of all spots for fixing a stake. It isn't solid enough."

As he spoke, another crash was heard, not quite so loud as the last and at the same moment the whole mass on which the party stood slid forward a few inches. It seemed as if it were about to tumble into the very jaws of the crevasse. With the natural instinct of self-preservation strong upon him, Lawrence darted across the narrow ridge to the firm ice in rear, dispensing entirely with that extreme caution which had marked his first passage over it. Indeed the tight-rope and slack-wire dancers formerly referred to could not have performed the feat with greater lightness, rapidity, and precision. The stake-drivers followed him with almost similar alacrity. Even the guide retraced his steps without further delay than was necessary to permit of his picking up the stakes which their proper custodians had left behind in their alarm—for they were not guides, merely young and inexperienced porters.

"For shame, lads," said Antoine, laughing and shaking his head, "you'll be but bad specimens of the men of Chamouni if you don't learn more coolness on the ice."

One would have thought that coolness on the ice was an almost unavoidable consequence of the surrounding conditions, yet Lawrence seemed to contradict the idea, for his face appeared unusually warm as he laughed and said:—

"The shame lies with me, Antoine, for I set them the example, and all history goes to prove that even brave men are swept away under the influence of a panic which the act of one cowardly man may produce."

As Lawrence spoke in French, the porters understood and appreciated his defence of them, but Antoine would by no means encourage the fallacy.

"It is not cowardly, sir," he said, "to spring quickly out of a danger that one don't understand the nature of, but the young men of Chamouni have, or ought to have, a good understanding of the nature of ice, and the danger should be great indeed that would necessitate the leaving of their tools behind them."

A roar like that of a bull of Bashan, or a boatswain, here interrupted the conversation.

"Don't plant your post the—r—r—re," shouted Captain Wopper from the banks of the ice-river, "the Professor says the ice ain't firm enough. Heave ahead—to where its ha—a—ard an' fa—a—ast."

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted Lawrence, with nautical brevity, in reply.

The next stake was accordingly fixed on a part of the ice which was obviously incapable of what might be called a local slip, and which must, if it moved at all, do so in accordance with the movements of the entire

glacier.

Thus one by one the stakes were planted in a perfectly straight line, so that when Captain Wopper was requested by the Professor to look through the telescope—which he did with a seaman's readiness and precision—he observed that all the stakes together appeared to form but one stake, the bottom of which was touched on one side of the Mer de Glace by the centre—point of the crossed threads, and, on the other, by the extreme point of the “Dook” of Wellington's nose. The last stake had been fixed not many yards distant from the opposite bank of the glacier.

“Now,” said the Professor, with a deep sigh of satisfaction when all this was accomplished and noted, “we will go have our luncheon and return hither to—morrow to observe the result of our experiments. But first we must fix the exact position of our theodolite, for unless it occupies to a hair's—breadth to—morrow the same position which it occupies to—day, the result will be quite inconclusive.”

So saying, the man of science took a little line and plummet from his pocket, which he hung under the theodolite, and the spot where the plummet touched the ground was carefully marked by a small stake driven quite down to its head.

Thereafter an attempt was made to gather together the scattered party, but this was difficult. Owing to various causes several members of it had become oblivious of time. Emma had forgotten time in the pursuit of wild—flowers, of which she was excessively fond, partly because she had learned to press and classify and write their proper names under them, but chiefly because they were intrinsically lovely, and usually grew in the midst of beautiful scenery. Nita had forgotten it in the pursuit of Emma, of whom she had become suddenly and passionately fond, partly because she possessed a loving nature, but chiefly because Emma was her counterpart. Lewis had forgotten it in pursuit of Nita, of whom he had become extremely fond, partly because she was pretty and pert, but chiefly because he—he—well, we cannot say precisely why, seeing that he did not inform us, and did not himself appear clearly to know. Slingsby had forgotten it in the ardent effort to reproduce on paper and with pencil, a scene so magnificent that a brush dipped in the rainbow and applied by Claude or Turner would have utterly failed to do it justice; and last, as well as least, Gillie White had forgotten it in the pursuit of general knowledge, in which pursuit he had used his alpenstock effectively in opening up everything, stabbing, knocking down, uprooting, overturning, and generally shattering everything that was capable of being in any degree affected by the physical powers and forces at his command. There can be no doubt whatever that if Gillie White had been big and strong enough, Mont Blanc itself would have succumbed that day to his inquiring mind, and the greatest ice—reservoir of Europe would have been levelled with the plain. As it was, he merely levelled himself, after reaching the point of exhaustion, and went to sleep on the sunny side of a rock, where he was nearly roasted alive before being aroused by the shouts of Captain Wopper.

At last, however, the party assembled at the Montanvert, where, amid interjectional accounts of the various incidents and adventures of the forenoon, strength was recruited for the subsequent operations of the day. These, however, were only matters of amusement. The Professor, remarking jocosely that he now cast science to the dogs and cats (which latter he pronounced cawts), sent his instruments back to Chamouni, and, with the zest of a big boy let loose from school, crossed the Mer de Glace to the Chapeau.

This feat was by no means so difficult as that which had been accomplished by Lawrence. It will be remembered that the spot selected for measurement had been at the steep and rugged part of the ice—river styled the Glacier des Bois, below the Montanvert. The ordinary crossing—place lay considerably higher up, just opposite to the inn. The track had been marked out over the easiest and flattest part of the ice, and levelled here and there where necessary for the special benefit of tourists. Still man—even when doing his worst in the way of making rough places plain, and robbing nature of some of her romance—could not do much to damage the grandeur of that impressive spot. His axe only chipped a little of the surface and made the footing secure. It could not mar the beauty of the picturesque surroundings, or dim the sun's glitter on the ice—pinnacles, or taint the purity of these delicate blue depths into which Emma and Nita gazed for the first time with admiration and surprise while they listened to the mysterious murmurings of sub—glacial waters with mingled feelings of curiosity and awe.

Full of interest they traversed the grand unfathomable river of ice, —the product of the compressed snows of innumerable winters,—and, reaching the other side in less than an hour, descended the Chapeau through the terminal moraine.

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Those who have not seen it can form but a faint conception of the stupendous mass of DEBRIS which is cut, torn, wrenched, carried, swept, hurled, rolled, crushed, and ground down by a glacier from the mountain–heights into the plain below. The terminal moraine of the Mer de Glace is a whole valley whose floor and sides are not only quite, but deeply, covered with rocks of every shape and size, from a pebble the size of a pea, to a boulder as large as a cottage, all strewn, piled, and heaped together in a wild confusion that is eminently suggestive of the mighty force which cast them there.

“To me there do seem something dreadful as well as grand in it,” said Nita, as she sat down on a boulder beside Emma, near the lower end of the chaotic valley.

“It is, indeed, terrible,” answered Emma, “and fills me with wonder when I think that frozen water possesses power so stupendous.”

“And yet the same element,” said the Professor, “which, when frozen, thus rends the mountains with force irresistible, when melted flows through the land in gentle fertilising streams. In both forms its power is most wonderful.”

“Like that of Him who created it,” said Emma, in a low tone.

The party stood on the margin of a little pond or lakelet that had collected in the midst of the DEBRIS, and which, by reflecting the clear sky and their figures, with several large boulders on its margin, gave point and a measure of softness to the otherwise confused and rugged scene. While they stood and sat rapt in silent contemplation of the tongue of the Mer de Glace, at whose tip was the blue ice–cave whence issued the Arveiron, a lordly eagle rose from a neighbouring cliff and soared grandly over their heads, while a bright gleam of the sinking sun shot over the white shoulders of Mont Blanc and lit up the higher end of the valley, throwing the lower part into deeper shade by contrast.

“There is a warning to us,” said Lewis, whose chief interest in the scene lay in the reflection of it that gleamed from Nita Horetzki's eyes.

“Which is the warning,” asked Slingsby, “the gleam of sunshine or the eagle?”

“Both, for while the sun is going to bed behind the snow, the eagle is doubtless going home to her eyrie, and Antoine tells me that it is full three miles from this spot to our hotel in Chamouni.”

It did not take them long to traverse that space, and ere long, like the eagle and the sun, the whole party had retired to rest—the younger members, doubtless, to dreamless slumber; the Professor and the Captain, probably, to visions of theodolites and ice.

Although, however, these worthies must needs await the coming day to have their scientific hopes realised, it would be cruel to keep our patient reader in suspense. We may therefore note here that when, on the following day, the theodolite was re–fixed, and the man of science and his amateur friend had applied their respective eyes to the telescope, they were assured beyond a doubt that the stakes HAD MOVED, some more and some less, while the “Dook's nose,” of course, remained hard and fast as the rock of which it was composed. The stakes had descended from about one to three feet during the twenty–four hours— those near the edge having moved least and those near the centre of the ice–river's flow having moved farthest.

Of course there was a great deal of observing with the theodolite, and careful measuring as well as scrambling on the ice, similar to that of the previous day; but the end of the whole was that the glacier was ascertained to have flowed, definitely and observably down its channel, there could be no doubt whatever about that; the thing had been clearly proved, therefore the Professor was triumphant and the Captain, being a reasonable man, was convinced.

Chapter XII. IN WHICH GILLIE IS SAGACIOUS, AN EXCURSION IS UNDERTAKEN, WONDROUS SIGHTS ARE SEEN, AND AVALANCHES OF MORE KINDS THAN ONE ARE ENCOUNTERED.

“Susan,” said Gillie, one morning, entering the private apartment of Mrs. Stoutley's maid with the confidence of a privileged friend, flinging himself languidly into a chair and stretching out his little legs with the air of a rather used-up, though by no means discontented, man, “Susan, this is a coorious world—wery coorious—the most coorious I may say that I ever come across.”

“I won't speak a word to you, Gillie,” said Susan, firmly, “unless you throw that cigar out of the window.”

“Ah, Susan, you would not rob me of my mornin' weed, would you?” remonstrated Gillie, puffing a long cloud of smoke from his lips as he took from between them the end of a cigar that had been thrown away by some one the night before.

“Yes, I would, child, you are too young to smoke.”

“Child!” repeated Gillie, in a tone of reproach, “too young! Why, Susan, there's only two years between you an' me—that ain't much, you know, at OUR time of life.”

“Well, what then? I don't smoke,” said Susan.

“True,” returned Gillie, with an approving nod, “and, to say truth, I'm pleased to find that you don't. It's a nasty habit in women.”

“It's an equally nasty habit in boys. Now, do as I bid you directly.”

“When a man is told by the girl he loves to do anythink, he is bound to do it—even if it wor the sheddin' of his blood. Susan, your word is law.”

He turned and tossed the cigar-end out of the window. Susan laughingly stooped, kissed the urchin's forehead, and called him a good boy.

“Now,” said she, “what do you mean by sayin' that this is a curious world? Do you refer to this part of it, or to the whole of it?”

“Well, for the matter of that,” replied Gillie, crossing his legs, and folding his hands over his knee, as he looked gravely up in Susan's pretty face, “I means the whole of it, THIS part included, and the people in it likewise. Don't suppose that I go for to exclude myself. We're all coorious, every one on us.”

“What! me too?”

“You? w'y, you are the coorriouset of us all, Susan, seeing that you're only a lady's—maid when you're pretty enough to have been a lady—a dutchess, in fact, or somethin' o' that sort.”

“You are an impudent little thing,” retorted Susan, with a laugh; “but tell me, what do you find so curious about the people up—stairs?”

“Why, for one thing, they seem all to have falled in love.”

“That's not very curious is it?” said Susan, quietly; “it's common enough, anyhow.”

“Ah, some kinds of it, yes,” returned Gillie, with the air of a philosopher, “but at Chamouni the disease appears to have become viroolent an' pecoolier. There's the Capp'n, HE'S falled in love wi' the Professor, an' it seems to me that the attachment is mootooal. Then Mister Lewis has falled in love with Madmysell Nita Hooray—tskie (that's a sneezer, ain't it), an' the mad artist, as Mister Lewis call him, has falled in love with her too, poor feller, an' Miss Nita has falled in love with Miss Emma, an Miss Emma, besides reciprocatin' that passion, has falled in love with the flowers and the scenery—gone in for it wholesale, so to speak—and Dr. Lawrence, HE seems to have falled in love with everybody all round; anyhow everybody has falled in love with HIM, for he's continually goin' about doin' little good turns wherever he gits the chance, without seemin' to intend it, or shovin' hissself to the front. In fact I do think he DON'T intend it, but only can't help it; just the way he used to be to my old mother and the rest of us in Grubb's Court. And I say, Susan,” here Gillie looked very mysterious, and dropped his voice to a whisper, “Miss Emma has falled in love with HIM.”

“Nonsense, child! how is it possible that YOU can tell that?” said Susan.

The boy nodded his head with a look of preternatural wisdom, and put his forefinger to the side of his nose.

“Ah,” said he, “yes, I can't explain HOW it is that I knows it, but I DO know it. Bless you, Susan, I can see

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through a four-inch plank in thick weather without the aid of a gimlet hole. You may believe it or not, but I know that Miss Emma has fallen in love with Dr. Lawrence, but whether Dr. Lawrence has fallen in love with Miss Emma is more than I can tell. That plank is at least a six-inch one, an' too much for my wision. But have a care, Susan, don't mention wot I've said to a single soul—livin' or dead. Miss Emma is a modest young woman, she is, an' would rather eat her fingers off, rings and all, than let her feelin's be known. I see that 'cause she fights shy o' Dr. Lawrence, rather too shy of 'im, I fear, for secrecy. Why he doesn't make up to HER is a puzzle that I don't understand, for she'd make a good wife, would Miss Emma, an' Dr. Lawrence may live to repent of it, if he don't go in and win."

Susan looked with mingled surprise and indignation at the precocious little creature who sat before her giving vent to his opinions as coolly as if he were a middle-aged man. After contemplating him for a few moments in silence, she expressed her belief that he was a conceited little imp, to venture to speak of his young mistress in that way.

"I wouldn't do it to any one but yourself, Susan," he said, in no wise abashed, "an' I hope you appreciate my confidence."

"Don't talk such nonsense, child, but go on with what you were speaking about," rejoined Susan, with a smile, to conceal which she bent down her head as she plied her needle briskly on one of Emma's mountain-torn dresses.

"Well, where was I?" continued Gillie, "ah, yes. Then, Lord what's—'is— name, HE'S fallen in love with the mountain-tops, an' is for ever tryin' to get at 'em, in which he would succeed, for he's a plucky young feller, if it worn't for that snob—who's got charge of 'im—Mister Lumbard—whose pecooliarly lies in preferrin' every wrong road to the right one. As I heard Mr. Lewis say the other day, w'en I chanced to be passin' the keyhole of the sallymanjay, 'he'd raither go up to the roof of a 'ouse by the waterspout than the staircase,' just for the sake of boastin' of it."

"And is Mr. Lumbard in love with any one?" asked Susan.

"Of course he is," answered Gillie, "he's in love with hisself. He's always talkin' of hisself, an' praisin' hisself, an' boastin' of hisself an' what he's done and agoin' to do. He's plucky enough, no doubt, and if there wor a lightnin'-conductor runnin' to top of Mount Blang, I do b'lieve he'd try to—to—lead his Lordship up THAT; but he's too fond of talkin' an' swaggerin' about with his big axe, an' wearin' a coil of rope on his shoulder when he ain't goin' nowhere. Bah! I don't like him. What do you think, Susan, I met him on the road the other evenin' w'en takin' a stroll by myself down near the Glassyer day Bossong, an' I says to him, quite in a friendly way, 'bong joor,' says I, which is French, you know, an' what the natives here says when they're in good humour an' want to say 'good-day,' 'all serene,' 'how are you off for soap?' an' suchlike purlitenesses. Well, would you believe it, he went past without takin' no notice of me whatsumdever."

"How VERY impolite," said Susan, "and what did you do?"

"Do," cried Gillie, drawing himself up, "why, I cocked my nose in the air and walked on without disdainin' to say another word—treated 'im with suvrin contempt. But enough of HIM—an' more than enough. Well, to continue, then there's Missis Stoutley, she's fallen in love too."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, with wittles. The Count Hur—what's—'is—name, who's always doin' the purlite when he's not mopin', says it's the mountain hair as is agreein' with her, but I think it's the hair-soup. Anyhow she's more friendly with her wittles here than she ever was in England. After comin' in from that excursion where them two stout fellers carried her up the mountains, an' all but capsized her and themselves, incloodin' the chair, down a precipice, while passin' a string o' mules on a track no broader than the brim of Mister Slingsby's wide-awake, she took to her wittles with a sort of lovin' awidity that an't describable. The way she shovelled in the soup, an' stowed away the mutton chops, an' pitched into the pease and taters, to say nothing of cauliflower and cutlets, was a caution to the billions. It made my mouth water to look at her, an' my eyes too—only that may have had somethin' to do with the keyhole, for them 'otels of Chamouni are oncommon draughty. Yes," continued Gillie, slowly, as if he were musing, "she's fallen in love with wittles, an' it's by no means a misplaced affection. It would be well for the Count if he could fall in the same direction. Did you ever look steadily at the Count, Susan?"

"I can't say I ever did; at least not more so than at other people. Why?"

"Because, if you ever do look at him steadily, you'll see care a-sittin' wery heavy on his long yeller face."

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There's somethin' the matter with that Count, either in 'is head or 'is stummick, I ain't sure which; but, whichever it is, it has descended to his darter, for that gal's face is too anxious by half for such a young and pretty one. I have quite a sympathy, a sort o' feller-feelin', for that Count. He seems to me the wictim of a secret sorrow."

Susan looked at her small admirer with surprise, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"You're a queer boy, Gillie."

To an unsophisticated country girl like Susan Quick, the London street-boy must indeed have seemed a remarkable being. He was not indeed an absolute "Arab," being the son of an honest hardworking mother, but being also the son of a drunken, ill-doing father, he had, in the course of an extensive experience of bringing his paternal parent home from gin-palaces and low theatres, imbibed a good deal of the superficial part of the "waif" character, and, but for the powerful and benign influence of his mother, might have long ago entered the ranks of our criminal population. As it was, he had acquired a knowledge of "the world" of London—its thoughts, feelings, and manners—which rendered him in Susan's eyes a perfect miracle of intelligence; and she listened to his drolleries and precocious wisdom with open-mouthed admiration. Of course the urchin was quite aware of this, and plumed himself not a little on his powers of attraction.

"Yes," continued Gillie, without remarking on Susan's observation that he was a "queer boy," for he esteemed that a compliment "the Count is the only man among 'em who hasn't falled in love with nothink or nobody. But tell me, Susan, is YOUR fair buzzum free from the—the tender—you know what?"

"Oh! yes," laughed the maid, "quite free."

"Ah!" said Gillie, with a sigh of satisfaction, "then there's hope for ME."

"Of course there is plenty of hope," said Susan, laughing still more heartily as she looked at the thing in blue and buttons which thus addressed her.

"But now, tell me, where are they talking of going to-day?"

"To the Jardang," replied Gillie. "It was putt off to please the young ladies t'other day, and now it's putt on to please the Professor. It seems to me that the Professor has got well to wind'ard of 'em all—as the Cappen would say; he can twirl the whole bilin' of 'em round his little finger with his outlandish talk, which I believe is more than half nonsense. Hows'ever, he's goin' to take 'em all to the Jardang, to lunch there, an' make some more obserwations and measurements of the ice. Why he takes so much trouble about sitch a trifle, beats MY understandin'. If the ice is six feet, or six hundred feet thick, what then? If it moves, or if it don't move, wot's the odds, so long as yer 'appy? If it WON'T move, w'y don't they send for a company of London bobbies and make 'em tell it to `move on,' it couldn't refuse, you know, for nothin' can resist that. Hows'ever, they are all goin' to foller the lead of the Professor again to-day—them that was with 'em last time—not the Count though, for I heard him say (much to the distress apperiently of his darter) that he was goin' on business to Marteeny, over the Tait Nwar, though what that is I don't know—a mountain, I suppose. They're all keen for goin' OVER things in this country, an' some of 'em goes UNDER altogether in the doin' of it. If I ain't mistaken, that pleasant fate awaits Lord what's-'is-name an' Mr. Lumbard, for I heard the Cappen sayin', just afore I come to see you, that he was goin' to take his Lordship to the main truck of Mount Blang by way of the signal halliards, in preference to the regular road."

"Are the young ladies going?" asked Susan.

"Of course they are, from w'ich it follers that Mr. Lewis an' the mad artist are goin' too."

"And Mrs. Stoutley?" asked Susan.

"NO; it's much too far and difficult for her."

"Gillie, Gillie!" shouted a stentorian voice at this point in the conversation.

"Ay, ay, Cappen," yelled Gillie, in reply. Rising and thrusting his hands into his pockets, he sauntered leisurely from the room, recommending the Captain, in an undertone, to save his wind for the mountainside.

Not long afterwards, the same parties that had accompanied the Professor to the Montanvert were toiling up the Mer de Glace, at a considerable distance above the scene of their former exploits, on their way to the Jardin.

The day was all that could be desired. There were a few clouds, but these were light and feathery; clear blue predominated all over the sky. Over the masses of the Jorasses and the peaks of the Geant, the Aiguille du Dru, the slopes of Mont Mallet, the pinnacles of Charmoz, and the rounded white summit of Mont Blanc—everywhere—the heavens were serene and beautiful.

The Jardin, towards which they ascended, lies like an island in the midst of the Glacier du Talefre. It is a

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favourite expedition of travellers, being a verdant gem on a field of white—a true oasis in the desert of ice and snow—and within a five hours' walk of Chamouni.

Their route lay partly on the moraines and partly over the surface of the glacier. On their previous visit to the Mer de Glace, those of the party to whom the sight was new imagined that they had seen all the wonders of the glacier world. They were soon undeceived. While at the Montanvert on their first excursion, they could turn their eyes from the sea of ice to the tree-clad slopes behind them, and at the Chapeau could gaze on a splendid stretch of the Vale of Chamouni to refresh their eyes when wearied with the rugged cataract of the Glacier des Bois; but as they advanced slowly up into the icy solitudes, all traces of the softer world were lost to view. Only ice and snow lay around them. Ice under foot, ice on the cliffs, ice in the mountain valleys, ice in the higher gorges, and snow on the summits,—except where these latter were so sharp and steep that snow could not find a lodgment. There was nothing in all the field of vision to remind them of the vegetable world from which they had passed as if by magic. As Lewis remarked, they seemed to have been suddenly transported to within the Arctic circle, and got lost among the ice-mountains of Spitzbergen or Nova Zembla.

“It is magnificent!” exclaimed Nita Horetzki with enthusiasm, as she paused on the summit of an ice-ridge, up the slippery sides of which she had been assisted by Antoine Grennon, who still held her little hand in his.

Ah, thoughtless man! he little knew what daggers of envy were lacerating the heart of the mad artist who would have given all that he possessed—colour-box and camp-stool included—to have been allowed to hold that little hand even for a few seconds! Indeed he had, in a fit of desperation, offered to aid her by taking the other hand when half-way up that very slope, but had slipped at the moment of making the offer and rolled to the bottom. Lewis, seeing the fate of his rival, wisely refrained from putting himself in a false position by offering any assistance, excusing his apparent want of gallantry by remarking that if he were doomed to slip into a crevasse he should prefer not to drag another along with him. Antoine, therefore, had the little hand all to himself.

The Professor, being a somewhat experienced ice-man, assisted Emma in all cases of difficulty. As for the Captain, Gillie, and Lawrence, they had quite enough to do to look after themselves.

“How different from what I had expected,” said Emma, resting a hand on the shoulder of Nita; “it is a very landscape of ice.”

Emma's simile was not far-fetched. They had reached a part of the glacier where the slope and the configuration of the valley had caused severe strains on the ice in various directions, so that there were not only transverse crevasses but longitudinal cracks, which unitedly had cut up the ice into blocks of all shapes and sizes. These, as their position shifted, had become isolated, more or less,—and being partially melted by the sun, had assumed all sorts of fantastic shapes. There were ice-bridges, ice-caves, and ice obelisks and spires, some of which latter towered to a height of fifty feet or more; there were also forms suggestive of cottages and trees, with here and there real rivulets rippling down their icy beds, or leaping over pale blue ledges, or gliding into blue-green lakes, or plunging into black-blue chasms. The sun-light playing among these silvery realms—glinting over edges and peaks, blazing on broad masses, shimmering through semi-transparent cliffs, and casting soft grey shadows everywhere—was inexpressibly beautiful, while the whole, looming through a thin golden haze, seemed to be of gigantic proportions.

It seemed as if the region of ice around them must at one time have been in tremendous convulsions, but the Professor assured them that this was not the case, that the formation of crevasses and those confused heaps of ice called SERACS was a slow and prolonged process. “Doubtless,” he said, “you have here and there the wild rush of avalanches, and suchlike convulsions, but the rupture of the great body of the ice is gradual. A crevasse is an almost invisible crack at first. It yawns slowly and takes a long time to open out to the dimensions and confusion which you see around.”

“What are those curious things?” asked Nita, pointing to some forms before her.

“They look like giant mushrooms,” said Captain Wopper.

“They are ice-tables,” answered Antoine.

“Blocks of stone on the top of cones of ice,” said the Professor. “Come, we will go near and examine one.”

The object in question was well suited to cause surprise, for it was found to be an enormous flat mass of rock, many tons in weight, perched on a pillar of ice and bearing some resemblance to a table with a central leg.

“Now,” said Captain Wopper emphatically, “that IS a puzzler. How did it ever get up there?”

“I have read of such tables,” said Lawrence.

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“They are the result of the sun's action, I believe.”

“Oh, it's all very well, Lawrence,” said Lewis, with a touch of sarcasm, “to talk in a vague way about the sun's action, but it's quite plain, even to an unphilosophical mind like mine, that the sun can't lift a block of stone some tons in weight and clap it on the top of a pillar of ice about ten feet high.”

“Nevertheless the sun has done it,” returned Lawrence. “Am I not right Professor?”

The man of science, who had listened with a bland smile on his broad countenance, admitted that Lawrence was right.

“At first,” he said, “that big stone fell from the cliffs higher up the valley, and it has now been carried down thus far by the ice. During its progress the sun has been shining day by day and melting the surface of the ice all round, with the exception of that part which was covered by the rock. Thus the general level of the ice has been lowered and the protected portion left prominent with its protector on the top. The sides of the block of ice on which the rock has rested have also melted slowly, reducing it to the stalk or pillar which you now see. In time it will melt so much that the rock will slide off, fall on another part of the ice, which it will protect from the sun as before until another stem shall support it, and thus it will go on until it tumbles into a crevasse, reaches the under part of the glacier, perhaps there gets rolled and rounded into a boulder, and finally is discharged, many years hence, it may be, into the terminal moraine; or, perchance, it may get stranded on the sides of the valley among the DEBRIS or rubbish which we call the lateral moraine.”

As the party advanced, new, and, if possible; still more striking objects met the eye, while mysterious sounds struck the ear. Low grumbling noises and gurglings were heard underfoot, as if great boulders were dropping into buried lakes from the roofs of sub-glacial caverns, while, on the surface, the glacier was strewn here and there with DEBRIS which had fallen from steep parts of the mountains that rose beside them into the clouds. Sudden rushing sounds—as if of short-lived squalls, in the midst of which were crashes like the thunder of distant artillery—began now to attract attention, and a feeling of awe crept into the hearts of those of the party who were strangers to the ice-world. Sounds of unseen avalanches, muffled more or less according to distance, were mingled with what may be called the shots of the boulders, which fell almost every five minutes from the Aiguille Verte and other mountains, and there was something deeply impressive in the solemn echoes that followed each deep-toned growl, and were repeated until they died out in soft murmurs.

As the party crossed an ice-plain, whose surface was thickly strewn with the wreck of mountains, a sense of insecurity crept into the feelings of more than one member of it but not a word was said until a sudden and tremendous crash, followed by a continuous roar, was heard close at hand.

“An avalanche!” shouted Slingsby, pointing upwards, and turning back with the evident intention to fly.

It did indeed seem the wisest thing that man or woman could do in the circumstances, for, high up among the wild cliffs, huge masses of rock, mingled with ice, dirt, water, and snow, were seen rushing down a “couloir,” or steep gully, straight towards them.

“Rest tranquil where you are,” said the guide, laying his hand on the artist's arm; “the couloir takes a bend, you see, near the bottom. There is no danger.”

Thus assured, the whole of the party stood still and gazed upward.

Owing to the great height from which the descending mass was pouring, the inexperienced were deceived as to the dimensions of the avalanche. It seemed at first as if the boulders were too small to account for the sounds created, but in a few seconds their real proportions became more apparent, especially when the whole rush came straight towards the spot on which the travellers stood with such an aspect of being fraught with inevitable destruction, that all of them except the guide shrank involuntarily backwards. At this crisis the chaotic mass was driven with terrible violence against the cliffs to the left of the couloir, and bounding, we might almost say fiercely, to the right, rushed out upon the frozen plain about two hundred yards in advance of the spot on which they stood.

“Is there not danger in being so close to such places?” asked Lewis, glancing uneasily at Nita, whose flashing eyes and heightened colour told eloquently of the excitement which the sight had aroused in her breast.

“Not much,” answered the Professor, “no doubt we cannot be said to be in a place of absolute safety, nevertheless the danger is not great, because we can generally observe the avalanches in time to get out of the way of spent shots; and, besides, if we run under the lee of such boulders as THAT, we are quite safe, unless it were to be hit by one pretty nearly as large as itself.” He pointed as he spoke to a mass of granite about the size of an

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omnibus, which lay just in front of them. "But I see," he added, laughing, "that Antoine thinks this is not a suitable place for the delivery of lectures; we must hasten forward."

Soon they surmounted the steep of the Glacier du Talefre, and reached the object of their desire, the Jardin.

It is well named. A wonderful spot of earth and rock which rises out of the midst of a great basin of half-formed ice, the lower part being covered with green sward and spangled with flowers, while the summit of the rock forms a splendid out-look from which to view the surrounding scene.

Here, seated on the soft grass—the green of which was absolutely delicious to the eyes after the long walk over the glaring ice—the jovial Professor, with a sandwich in one hand and a flask of VIN ORDINAIRE in the other, descanted on the world of ice. He had a willing audience, for they were all too busy with food to use their tongues in speech, except in making an occasional brief demand or comment.

"Glorious!" exclaimed the Professor.

"Which, the view or the victuals?" asked Lewis. "Both," cried the Professor, helping himself to another half-dozen sandwiches.

"Thank you—no more at present," said Nita to the disappointed Slingsby, who placed the rejected limb of a fowl on his own plate with a deep sigh.

"Professor," said Nita, half-turning her back on the afflicted artist, "how, when, and where be all this ice formed?"

"A comprehensive question!" cried the Professor. "Thank you—yes, a wing and a leg; also, if you can spare it, a piece of the—ah! so, you are right. The whole fowl is best. I can then help myself. Miss Gray, shall I assist you to a—no? Well, as I was about to remark, in reply to your comprehensive question, Mademoiselle, this basin, in which our Jardin lies, may be styled a mighty collector of the material which forms that great tributary of the Mer de Glace, named the Glacier du Talefre. This material is called neve."

"An' what's nevy?" asked Captain Wopper, as well as a full mouth would allow him.

"Neve," replied the Professor, "is snow altered by partial melting, and freezing, and compression—snow in the process of being squeezed into ice. You must know that there is a line on all high mountains which is called the snow-line. Above this line, the snow that falls each year NEVER disappears; below it the snow, and ice too, undergoes the melting process continually. The portion below the snow-line is always being diminished; that above it is always augmenting; thus the loss of the one is counterbalanced by the gain of the other; and thus the continuity of glaciers is maintained. That part of a glacier which lies above the snow-line is styled neve; it is the fountain-head and source of supply to the glacier proper, which is the part that lies below the snow-line. Sometimes, for a series of years, perhaps, the supply from above is greater than the diminution below, the result being that the snout of a glacier advances into its valley, ploughs up the land, and sometimes overturns the cottages. [See Note 1.] On the other hand the reverse process goes on, it may be for years, and a glacier recedes somewhat, leaving a whole valley of DEBRIS, or terminal moraine, which is sometimes, after centuries perhaps, clothed with vegetation and dotted with cottages."

"This basin, or collector of neve, on whose beautiful oasis I have the felicity to lunch in such charming society (the jovial Professor bowed to the ladies), is, according to your talented Professor Forbes (he bowed to Lawrence), about four thousand two hundred yards wide, and all the ice it contains is, farther down, squeezed through a gorge not more than seven hundred yards wide, thus forming that grand ice-cascade of the Talefre which you have seen on the way hither. It is a splendid, as well as interesting amphitheatre, for it is bounded, as you see, on one side by the Grandes Jorasses, on the other by Mont Mallet, while elsewhere you have the vast plateau whence the Glacier du Geant is fed; the Aiguille du Geant, the Aiguille Noire, the Montagnes Mandites, and Mont Blanc. Another wing, if you please—ah, finished? No matter, pass the loaf. It will do as well."

The Professor devoted himself for some minutes in silence to the loaf, which was much shorn of its proportions on leaving his hand. Like many great men, he was a great eater. The fires of intellect that burned within him seemed to require a more than ordinary supply of fuel. He slept, too, like an infant Hercules, and, as a natural consequence, toiled like a giant when awake.

Little Gillie White regarded him with feelings of undisguised awe, astonishment and delight, and was often sorely perplexed within himself as to whether he or Captain Wopper was the greater man. Both were colossal in size and energetic in body, and both were free and easy in manners, as well as good-humoured. No doubt, as Gillie argued with himself (and sometimes with Susan), the Professor was uncommonly learned and deep, but then

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the Captain had a humorous vein, which fully counterbalanced that in Gillie's estimation.

The philosophic urchin was deeply engaged in debating this point with himself, and gazing open-mouthed at the Professor, when there suddenly occurred an avalanche so peculiar and destructive that it threw the whole party into the utmost consternation. While removing a pile of plates, Gillie, in his abstraction, tripped on a stone, tumbled over the artist, crushed that gentleman's head into Nita's lap, and, descending head foremost, plates and all, into the midst of the feast, scattered very moraine of crockery and bottles all round. It was an appalling smash, and when the Captain seized Gillie by the back of his trousers with one hand and lifted him tenderly out of the midst of the DEBRIS, the limp way in which he hung suggested the idea that a broken bottle must have penetrated his vitals and finished him.

It was not so, however. Gillie's sagacity told him that he would probably be wounded if he were to move. He wisely, therefore, remained quite passive, and allowed himself to be lifted out of danger.

"Nobody hurt, I 'ope," he said, on being set on his legs; "it was a awk'ard plunge."

"Awk'ard? you blue spider," cried the Captain; "you deserve to be keel-hauled, or pitched into a crevasse. Look alive now, an' clear up the mess you've made."

Fortunately the feast was about concluded when this CONTRETEMPS occurred, so that no serious loss was sustained. Some of the gentlemen lighted their pipes and cigars, to solace themselves before commencing the return journey. The ladies went off to saunter and to botanise, and Slingsby attempted to sketch the scenery.

And here again, as on the previous excursion, Captain Wopper received a chill in regard to his matrimonial hopes. When the ladies rose, Lewis managed to engage Nita in an interesting conversation on what he styled the flora of central Europe, and led her away. Emma was thus left without her companion. Now, thought the Captain, there's your chance, Dr. Lawrence, go in and win! But Lawrence did not avail himself of the chance. He suffered Emma to follow her friend, and remained behind talking with the Professor on the vexed subject of the cause of glacial motion.

"Most extraor'nary," thought the Captain, somewhat nettled, as well as disappointed. "What can the youngster mean? She's as sweet a gal as a fellow would wish to see, an' yet he don't pay no more attention to her than if she was an old bumboat 'ooman. Very odd. Can't make it out nohow!"

Captain Wopper was not the first, and will CERTAINLY not be the last, to experience difficulty in accounting for the conduct of young men and maidens in this world of cross-currents and queer fancies.

Note 1. Such is actually true at the present time of the Gorner glacier, which has for a long time been advancing, and, during the last sixty years or so, has overturned between forty and fifty chalets.

Chapter XIII. SHOWS WHAT DANGERS MAY BE ENCOUNTERED IN THE PURSUIT OF ART AND SCIENCE.

Who has not experienced the almost unqualified pleasure of a walk, on a bright beautiful morning, before breakfast? How amply it repays one for the self-denying misery of getting up! We say misery advisedly, for it is an undoubted, though short-lived, agony, that of arousing one's inert, contented, and peaceful frame into a state of activity. There is a moment in the daily life of man—of some men, at least—when heroism of a very high stamp is displayed; that moment when, the appointed hour of morning having arrived, he thrusts one lethargic toe from under the warm bed-clothes into the relatively cold atmosphere of his chamber. If the toe is drawn back, the man is nobody. If it is thrust further out, and followed up by the unwilling body, the man is a hero! The agony, however, like that of tooth-drawing, is soon over, and the delightful commendations of an approving conscience are superadded to the pleasures of an early morning walk.

Such pleasures were enjoyed one morning by Emma Gray and Nita Horetzki and Lewis Stoutley, when, at an early hour, they issued from their hotel, and walked away briskly up the Vale of Chamouni.

"I say, Emma, isn't it a charming, delicious, and outrageously delightful day!" exclaimed Lewis.

Although the young man addressed himself to his cousin, who walked on his left, he glanced at Nita, who walked on his right, and thus, with a sense of justice peculiarly his own, divided his attentions equally between them.

"You are unusually enthusiastic, cousin," said Emma, with a laugh. "I thought you said last night that weather never affected you?"

"True, but there is more than weather here, there is scenery, and— and sunshine."

"Sunshine?" repeated Nita, lifting her large orbs to his face with a look of surprise, for although the sun may be said to have risen as regards the world at large, it had not yet surmounted the range of Mont Blanc, or risen to the inhabitants of Chamouni. "I not see it; where is the sunshine?"

"There!" exclaimed Lewis, mentally, as he gazed straight down into her wondering orbs, and then added aloud, as he swept his arm aloft with a mock-heroic air, "behold it gleaming on the mountain-ridges."

There is no doubt that the enthusiasm of Lewis as to the weather, scenery, and sunshine would have been much reduced, perhaps quenched altogether, if Nita had not been there, for the youth was steeped in that exquisite condition termed first love,—the very torments incident to which are moderated joys,—but it must not be supposed that he conducted himself with the maudlin sentimentality not unfrequently allied to that condition. Although a mischievous and, we are bound to admit, a reckless youth, he was masculine in his temperament, and capable of being deeply, though not easily, stirred into enthusiasm. It was quite in accordance with this nature that his jesting tone and manner suddenly vanished as his gaze became riveted on the ridge to which he had carelessly directed attention. Even Nita was for a moment forgotten in the sight that met his eyes, for the trees and bushes which crowned the ridge were to all appearance composed of solid fire!

"Did you ever see anything like that before Emma?" he asked, eagerly.

"Never; I have seen sunrises and sunsets in many parts of our own land, but nothing at all like that; what CAN be the cause of it?"

There was good reason for the wonder thus called forth, for the light was not on the trees but BEHIND them. The sun had not quite risen, but was very near the summit of the ridge, so that these trees and bushes were pictured, as it were, against the brightest part of the glowing sky. In such circumstances we are taught by ordinary experience that objects will be unusually dark, but these trees were incomparably brighter than the glowing sky itself. It was not that their mere edges were tipped with fire, but their entire substance, even to the central core of the pine-stems, was to all appearance made of pure light, as if each tree and shrub had been made of steel raised to a condition of intense white heat. No shining of the sun through or upon trees can convey the slightest idea of the sight. It was something absolutely new to our travellers, and roused their astonishment as well as wonder to the highest pitch.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nita, clasping her hands with a force peculiar to her demonstrative nature, "how wonderful! How I do wish the Professor was here to tell us how and what it be."

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That evening the Professor, who had observed the phenomenon more than once, told them all he knew about it. There were differences of opinion, he said, as to the cause, for men of physical science, not less than doctors, were prone to differ. For himself, he had only noted the facts and knew not the cause. The luminous trees appeared only at that part of the ridge where the sun was JUST GOING to rise—elsewhere the trees were projected as dark objects, in the usual way, against the bright sky. Not only were the trees thus apparently self-luminous, but when birds chanced to be flying amongst them, they had the appearance of sparks of molten silver flitting to and fro. See Note 1.

“But you have not yet told me, ladies,” said Lewis, as they resumed their walk, “what has induced you to indulge in so early a ramble to-day?”

“Can you not imagine,” said Nita, “that it is the love of Nature?”

“Undoubtedly I can; but as this is the first time since we came that you have chosen to display a love for Nature before breakfast, I may be forgiven for supposing there is another and no doubt secondary cause.”

“You are right,” said Emma; “were you not present last night when we discussed our plans for to-day?”

“No, he was in the verandah,” interposed Nita, with an arch smile, “indulging that savage and unintellectual taste you call smoking.”

“Ah, Mademoiselle, be not too severe. It may not, indeed, be styled an intellectual pursuit, but neither, surely, can it be called savage, seeing that it softens and ameliorates the rugged spirit of man.”

“It is savage,” returned Nita, “because you do not encourage ladies to join you in it.”

“Pardon me, Mademoiselle,” cried Lewis, pulling out his cigar-case, “nothing would gratify me more than your acceptance of—”

“Insult me not, Monsieur,” said Nita, with a toss of her pretty little head, “but reply to your cousin's question.”

“Ah, to be sure, well—let me see, what was it? Was I present when the plans for the day were arranged? Yes I was, but I missed the first part of the conversation, having been, as Mademoiselle Horetzki truly observes, occupied with that—a—”

“Savage habit,” interposed Nita.

“Savage habit,” said Lewis, “the savage element of which I am willing to do away with at a moment's notice when desired. I merely heard that the professor had fixed to go on the glacier for the purpose of measuring it, as though it were a badly clad giant, and he a scientific tailor who had undertaken to make a top-coat for it. I also heard that you two had decided on a walk before breakfast, and, not caring to do tailoring on the ice, I begged leave to join you—therefore I am here.”

“Ah, you prefer woman's society and safety to manly exercise and danger!” said Nita.

Although Lewis was, as we have said, by no means an effeminate youth, he was at that age when the male creature shrinks from the slightest imputation of a lack of manliness. He coloured, therefore, as he laughingly replied that in his humble opinion his present walk involved the manly exercise of moral courage in withstanding shafts of sarcasm, which were far more dangerous in his eyes than hidden crevasses or flying boulders.

“But you both forget,” interposed Emma, “that I have not yet explained the object of our morning walk.”

“True, cousin, let us have it.”

“Well,” continued Emma, “when you were engaged in your ‘savage’ indulgence, a difficulty stood in the way of the Professor's plans, inasmuch as our guide Antoine had asked and obtained leave to absent himself a couple of days for the purpose of taking his wife and child over the country to pay a short visit to a relative in some valley, the name of which I forget. Antoine had said that he would be quite willing to give up his leave of absence if a messenger were sent to inform his wife of his change of plan, and to ask a certain Baptist Le Croix, who lives close beside her, to be her guide. As we two did not mean to join the ice-party, we at once offered to be the messengers. Hence our present expedition at so early an hour. After seeing Madame Antoine Grennon and having breakfast we mean to spend the day in sketching.”

“May I join you in this after-portion of the day's work?” asked Lewis. “I may not, indeed, claim to use the pencil with the facility of our friend Slingsby, but I am not altogether destitute of a little native talent in that way. I will promise to give you both as many cigars as you choose, and will submit my sketches to Mademoiselle's criticism, which will be incurring extreme danger.”

“Well, you may come,” said Nita, with a condescending nod, “but pray fulfil the first part of your promise, give me the cigars.”

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Lewis drew them out with alacrity, and laughingly asked, "how many?"

"All of them; the case also."

In some surprise the youth put the cigar-case into her hand, and she immediately flung it into a neighbouring pool.

"Ah, how cruel," said Lewis, putting on a most forlorn look, while Emma gave vent to one of her subdued little explosions of laughter.

"What! is our society not enough for Monsieur?" asked Nita, in affected surprise.

"MORE than enough," replied Lewis, with affected enthusiasm.

"Then you can be happy without your cigars," returned Nita.

"Perfectly happy," replied Lewis, taking a small case from his pocket, from which he extracted a neat little meerschaum pipe, and began to fill it with tobacco.

Again Emma had occasion to open the safety-valve of another little explosive laugh; but before anything further could be said, they came in sight of Antoine Grennon's cottage.

It was prettily situated beneath a clump of pines. A small stream, spanned by a rustic bridge, danced past it. Under the shadow of the bridge they saw Madame engaged in washing linen. She had a washing-tub, of course, but instead of putting the linen into this she put herself in it, after having made an island of it by placing it a few inches deep in the stream. Thus she could kneel and get at the water conveniently without wetting her knees or skirts. On a sloping slab of wood she manipulated the linen with such instrumentality as cold water, soap, a wooden mallet and a hard brush. Beside her, in a miniature tub, her little daughter conducted a miniature washing.

The three travellers, looking over the bridge, could witness the operation without being themselves observed.

"It is a lively process," remarked Lewis, as Madame seized a mass of linen with great vigour, and caused it to fall on the sloping plank with a sounding slap.

Madame was an exceedingly handsome and well-made woman, turned thirty, and much inclined to EMBONPOINT. Her daughter was turned three, and still more inclined to the same condition. Their rounded, well-shaped, and muscular arms, acted very much in the same way, only Madame's vigour was a good deal more intense and persistent—too much so, perhaps, for the fabrics with which she had to deal; but if the said fabrics possessed the smallest degree of consciousness, they could not have had the heart to complain of rough treatment from such neat though strong hands, while being smiled upon by such a pretty, though decisive countenance.

"It is dreadfully rough treatment," said Emma, whose domestic-economical spirit was rather shocked.

"Terrible!" exclaimed Nita, as Madame gripped another article of apparel and beat it with her mallet as though it had been the skull of her bitterest enemy, while soap-suds and water spurted from it as if they had been that enemy's brains.

"And she washes, I believe, for our hotel," said Emma, with a slightly troubled expression. Perhaps a thought of her work-box and buttons flashed across her mind at the moment.

"You are right," said Lewis, with a pleased smile.

"I heard Antoine say to Gillie, the other day, that his wife washed a large portion of the hotel linen. No doubt some of ours is amongst it. Indeed I am sure of it," he added, with a look of quiet gravity, as Madame Grennon seized another article, swished it through the water, caused it to resound on the plank, and scrubbed it powerfully with soap; "that—a-what's-'is-name, belongs to me. I know it by the cut of its collar. Formerly, I used to know it chiefly by its fair and fragile texture. I shall know it hereafter as an amazing illustration of the truth of the proverb, that no one knows what he can stand till he is tried. The blows which she is at present delivering to it with her mallet, are fast driving all preconceived notions in regard to linen out of my head. Scrubbing it, as she does now, with a hard brush, against the asperities of the rough plank, and then twisting it up like a roly-poly prior to swishing it through the water a second time, would once have induced me to doubt the strength of delicate mother-of-pearl buttons and fine white thread. I shall doubt no longer."

As he said so, Madame Grennon chanced to look up, and caught sight of the strangers. She rose at once, and, forsaking her tub, advanced to meet them, the curly-haired daughter following close at her heels, for, wherever her mother went she followed, and whatever her mother did she imitated.

The object of the visit was soon explained, and the good woman led the visitors into her hut where Baptist Le Croix chanced to be at the time.

There was something very striking in the appearance of this man. He was a tall fine-looking fellow, a little

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past the prime of life, but with a frame whose great muscular power was in no degree abated. His face was grave, good-natured, and deeply sunburnt; but there was a peculiarly anxious look about the eyes, and a restless motion in them, as if he were constantly searching for something which he could not find.

He willingly undertook to conduct his friend's wife and child to the residence of their relative.

On leaving the hut to return to Chamouni, Madame Grennon accompanied her visitors a short way, and Nita took occasion, while expressing admiration of Baptist's appearance, to comment on his curiously anxious look.

"Ah! Mademoiselle," said Madame, with a half sad look, "the poor man is taken up with a strange notion—some people call it a delusion—that gold is to be found somewhere here in the mountains."

"Gold?" cried Nita, with such energy that her companions looked at her in surprise.

"Why, Nita," exclaimed Emma, "your looks are almost as troubled and anxious as those of Le Croix himself."

"How strange!" said Nita, musing and paying no attention to Emma's remark. "Why does he think so?"

"Indeed, Mademoiselle, I cannot tell; but he seems quite sure of it, and spends nearly all his time in the mountains searching for gold, and hunting the chamois."

They parted here, and for a time Lewis tried to rally Nita about what he styled her sympathy with the chamois-hunter, but Nita did not retort with her wonted sprightliness; the flow of her spirits was obviously checked, and did not return during their walk back to the hotel.

While this little incident was enacting in the valley, events of a far different nature were taking place among the mountains, into the solitudes of which the Professor, accompanied by Captain Wopper, Lawrence, Slingsby, and Gillie, and led by Antoine, had penetrated for the purpose of ascertaining the motion of a huge precipice of ice.

"You are not a nervous man, I think," said the Professor to Antoine as they plodded over the ice together.

"No, Monsieur, not very," answered the guide, with a smile and a sly glance out of the corners of his eyes. Captain Wopper laughed aloud at the question, and Gillie grinned. Gillie's countenance was frequently the residence of a broad grin. Nature had furnished him with a keen sense of the ludicrous, and a remarkably open countenance. Human beings are said to be blind to their own peculiarities.

If Gillie had been an exception to this rule and if he could have, by some magical power, been enabled to stand aside and look at his own spider-like little frame, as others saw it, clad in blue tights and buttons, it is highly probable that he would have expired in laughing at himself.

"I ask the question," continued the Professor, "because I mean to request your assistance in taking measurements in a somewhat dangerous place, namely, the ice-precipice of the Tacul."

"It is well, Monsieur," returned the guide, with another smile, "I am a little used to dangerous places."

Gillie pulled his small hands out of the trouser-pockets in which he usually carried them, and rubbed them by way of expressing his gleeful feelings. Had the sentiment which predominated in his little mind been audibly expressed, it would probably have found vent in some such phrase as, "won't there be fun, neither—oh dear no, not by no means." To him the height of happiness was the practice of mischief. Danger in his estimation meant an extremely delicious form of mischief.

"Is the place picturesque as well as dangerous?" asked Slingsby, with a wild look in his large eyes as he walked nearer to the Professor.

"It is; you will find many aspects of ice-formation well worthy of your pencil."

It is due to the artist to say that his wildness that morning was not the result only of despair at the obvious indifference with which Nita regarded him. It was the combination of that wretched condition with a heroic resolve to forsake the coy maiden and return to his first love—his beloved art—that excited him; and the idea of renewing his devotion to her in dangerous circumstances was rather congenial to his savage state of mind. It may be here remarked that Mr. Slingsby, besides being an enthusiastic painter, was an original genius in a variety of ways. Among other qualities he possessed an inventive mind, and, besides having had an ice-axe made after a pattern of his own,—which was entirely new and nearly useless,—he had designed a new style of belt with a powerful rope having a hook attached to it, with which he proposed, and actually managed, to clamber up and down difficult places, and thus attain points of vantage for sketching. Several times had he been rescued by guides from positions of extreme peril, but his daring and altogether unteachable spirit had thrown him again and again into new conditions of danger. He was armed with his formidable belt and rope on the present excursion, and his aspect was such that his friends felt rather uneasy about him, and would not have been surprised if he had put the

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belt round his neck instead of his waist, and attempted to hang himself.

“Do you expect to complete your measurements to-day?” asked Lawrence, who accompanied the Professor as his assistant.

“Oh no. That were impossible. I can merely fix my stakes to-day and leave them. To-morrow or next day I will return to observe the result.”

The eastern side of the Glacier du Geant, near the Tacul, at which they soon arrived, showed an almost perpendicular precipice about 140 feet high. As they collected in a group in front of that mighty pale-blue wall, the danger to which the Professor had alluded became apparent, even to the most inexperienced eye among them. High on the summit of the precipice, where its edge cut sharply against the blue sky, could be seen the black boulders and DEBRIS of the lateral moraine of the glacier. The day was unusually warm, and the ice melted so rapidly that parts of this moraine were being sent down in frequent avalanches. The rustle of DEBRIS was almost incessant, and, ever and anon, the rustle rose into a roar as great boulders bounded over the edge, and, after dashing portions of the ice-cliffs into atoms, went smoking down into the chaos below. It was just beyond this chaos that the party stood.

“Now, Antoine,” said the Professor, “I want you to go to the foot of that precipice and fix a stake in the ice there.”

“Well, Monsieur, it shall be done,” returned the guide, divesting himself of his knapsack and shouldering his axe and a stake.

“Meanwhile,” continued the Professor, “I will watch the falling DEBRIS to warn you of danger in time, and the direction in which you must run to avoid it. My friend Lawrence, with the aid of Captain Wopper, will fix the theodolite on yonder rocky knoll to our left.”

“Nothin' for you an' me to do,” said Gillie to the artist; “p'r'aps we'd better go and draw—eh?”

Slingsby looked at the blue spider before him with an amused smile, and agreed that his suggestion was not a bad one, so they went off together.

While Antoine was proceeding to the foot of the ice-cliffs on his dangerous mission, the Professor observed that the first direction of a falling stone's bound was no sure index of its subsequent motion, as it was sent hither and thither by the obstructions with which it met. He therefore recalled the guide.

“It won't do, Antoine, the danger is too great.”

“But, Monsieur, if it is necessary—”

“But it is not necessary that YOU should risk your life in the pursuit of knowledge. Besides, I must have a stake fixed half-way up the face of that precipice.”

“Ah, Monsieur,” said Antoine, with an incredulous smile, “that is not possible!”

To this the Professor made no reply, but ordered his guide to make a detour and ascend to the upper edge of the ice-precipice for the purpose of dislodging the larger and more dangerous blocks of stone there, and, after that, to plant a stake on the summit.

This operation was not quickly performed. Antoine had to make a long detour to get on the glacier, and when he did reach the moraine on the top, he found that many of the most dangerous blocks lay beyond the reach of his axe. However, he sent the smaller DEBRIS in copious showers down the precipice, and by cleverly rolling some comparatively small boulders down upon those larger ones which lay out of reach, he succeeded in dislodging many of them. This accomplished, he proceeded to fix the stake on the upper surface of the glacier.

While he was thus occupied, the Professor assisted Lawrence in fixing the theodolite, and then, leaving him, went to a neighbouring heap of DEBRIS followed by the Captain, whom he stationed there.

“I want you,” he said, “to keep a good look-out and warn me as to which way I must run to avoid falling rocks. Antoine has dislodged many of them, but some he cannot reach. These enemies must be watched.”

So saying, the Professor placed a stake and an auger against his breast, buttoned his coat over them, and shouldered his axe.

“You don't mean to say that you're agoing to go under that cliff?” exclaimed the Captain, in great surprise, laying his hand on the Professor's arm and detaining him.

“My friend,” returned the man of science, “do not detain me. Time is precious just now. You have placed yourself under my orders for the day, and, being a seaman, must understand the value of prompt obedience. Do as I bid you.”

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He turned and went off at a swinging pace towards the foot of the ice-cliff, while the Captain, in a state of anxiety, amounting almost to consternation, sat down on a boulder, took off his hat, wiped his heated brow, pronounced the Professor as mad as a March hare, and prepared to discharge his duties as “the look-out.”

Although cool as a cucumber in all circumstances at sea, where he knew every danger and how to meet or avoid it, the worthy Captain now almost lost self-control and became intensely agitated and anxious, insomuch that he gave frequent and hurried false alarms, which he no less hurriedly attempted to correct, sometimes in nautical terms, much to the confusion of the Professor.

“Hallo! hi! look out—starboard—sta—a—arboard!” he shouted wildly, on beholding a rock about the size of a chest of drawers spring from the heights above and rush downward, with a smoke of ice-dust and DEBRIS following, “quick! there! no! PORT! Port! I say it's—”

Before he could finish the sentence, the mass had fallen a long way to the right of the Professor, and lay quiet on the ice not far from where the Captain stood.

In spite of the interruptions thus caused, the lower stake was fixed in a few minutes. The Professor then swung his axe vigorously, and began to cut an oblique stair-case in the ice up the sheer face of the precipice.

In some respects the danger to the bold adventurer was now not so great because, being, as it were, flat against the ice-cliffs, falling rocks were more likely, by striking some projection, to bound beyond him. Still there was the danger of deflected shots, and when, by cutting a succession of notches in which to place one foot at a time, he had ascended to the height of an average three-storey house, the danger of losing his balance or slipping a foot became very great indeed. But the man of science persevered in doing what he conceived to be his duty with as much coolness as if he were the leader of a forlorn hope. Following the example of experienced ice-men on steep places, he took good care to make the notches or steps slope a little inwards, never lifted his foot from one step until the next was ready, and never swung his axe until his balance was perfectly secured. Having gained a height of about thirty feet, he pierced a hole with his auger, fastened a stake in it, and descended amid a heavy cannonade of boulders and a smart fire of smaller DEBRIS.

During the whole proceeding Lawrence directed his friend as to the placing of the stake, and watched with surprise as well as anxiety, while Captain Wopper kept on shouting unintelligible words of warning in a state of extreme agitation. The guide returned just in time to see this part of the work completed, and to remonstrate gravely with the Professor on his reckless conduct.

“All's well that ends well,' Antoine, as a great poet says,” replied the Professor, with one of his most genial smiles. “We must run some risk in the pursuit of scientific investigation. Now then, Lawrence, I hope you have got the three stakes in the same line—let me see.”

Applying his eye to the theodolite, he found that the stakes were in an exactly perpendicular line, one above another. He then carefully marked the spot occupied by the instrument and thus completed his labours for that time.

We may add here in passing that next day he returned to the same place, and found that in twenty-four hours the bottom stake had moved downwards a little more than two inches, the middle stake had descended a little more than three, and the upper stake exactly six inches. Thus he was enabled to corroborate the fact which had been ascertained by other men of science before him, that glacier-motion is more rapid at the top than at the bottom, where the friction against its bed tends to hinder its advance, and that the rate of flow increases gradually from the bottom upwards.

While these points of interest were being established, our artist was not less earnestly engaged in prosecuting his own peculiar work, to the intense interest of Gillie, who, although he had seen and admired many a picture in the London shop-windows, had never before witnessed the actual process by which such things are created.

Wandering away on the glacier among some fantastically formed and towering blocks or obelisks of ice, Mr. Slingsby expressed to Gillie his admiration of their picturesque shapes and delicate blue colour, in language which his small companion did not clearly understand, but which he highly approved of notwithstanding.

“I think this one is worth painting,” cried Slingsby, pausing and throwing himself into an observant attitude before a natural arch, from the roof of which depended some large icicles; “it is extremely picturesque.”

“I think,” said Gillie, with earnest gravity, “that yonder's one as is more picturesker.”

He had carefully watched the artist's various observant attitudes, and now threw himself into one of these as he pointed to a sloping obelisk, the size of an average church-steeple, which bore some resemblance to the

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leaning-tower of Pisa.

“You are right, boy; that is a better mass. Come, let us go paint it.”

While walking towards it, Gillie asked how such wild masses came to be made.

“I am told by the Professor,” said Slingsby, “that when the ice cracks across, and afterwards lengthwise, the square blocks thus formed get detached as they descend the valley, and assume these fantastic forms.”

“Ah! jis so. They descends the walley, does they?”

“So it is said.”

Gillie made no reply, though he said in his heart, “you won't git me to swaller THAT, by no manner of means.” His unbelief was, however, rebuked by the leaning-tower of Pisa giving a terrible rend at that moment, and slowly bending forward. It was an alarming as well as grand sight, for they were pretty near to it. Some smaller blocks of ice that lay below prevented the tower from being broken in its fall. These were crushed to powder by it, and then, as if they formed a convenient carriage for it, the mighty mass slid slowly down the slope for a few feet. It was checked for a moment by another block, which, however, gave way before the great pressure, fell aside and let it pass. The slope was slight at the spot so that the obelisk moved slowly, and once or twice seemed on the point of stopping, but as if it had become endowed with life, it made a sudden thrust, squeezed two or three obstacles flat, turned others aside, and thus wound its way among its fellows with a low groaning sound like some sluggish monster of the antediluvian world. Reaching a steeper part of the glacier, on the ridge of which it hung for a moment, as if unwilling to exert itself, it seemed to awake to the reality of its position. Making a lively rush, that seemed tremendously inconsistent with its weight, it shot over the edge of a yawning crevasse, burst with a thunderclap on the opposite ice-cliff, and went roaring into the dark bowels of the glacier, whence the echoes of its tumbling masses, subdued by distance, came up like the mutterings of evil spirits.

Gillie viewed this wondrous spectacle with an awe-stricken heart, and then vented his feelings in a prolonged yell of ecstasy.

“Ain't it splendid, sir?” he cried, turning his glowing eyes on Slingsby.

“Majestic!” exclaimed the artist, whose enthusiasm was equal to that of his companion, though not quite so demonstrative.

“Raither spoiled your drawin', though, ain't it, sir?”

“Yonder is something quite as good, if not better,” said Slingsby.

He pointed, as he spoke, to a part of the crevasse higher up on the glacier, where a projecting cave of snow overhung the abyss. From the under-surface of this a number of gigantic icicles hung, the lower points of the longer ones almost lost in the blue depths. A good position from which to sketch it, however, was not easily reached, and it was only by getting close to the edge of the crevasse that the persevering artist at length attained his object. Here he sat down on his top-coat, folded several times to guard him from the cold ice, spread out his colour-box and sketching-block, and otherwise made himself comfortable, while Gillie sat down beside him on his own cap, for want of a better protector.

Had these two enthusiasts known the nature of their position, they would have retired from it precipitately with horror, for, ignorant of almost everything connected with glaciers, they had walked right off the solid ice and seated themselves on a comparatively thin projecting ledge of snow which overhung the crevasse. Thus they remained for some time enjoying themselves, with death, as it were, waiting for them underneath! What rendered their position more critical was the great heat of the day, which, whatever might be the strength of the sustaining ledge, was reducing its bulk continually.

After having sketched for some time, the artist thought it advisable to see as far down into the crevasse as possible, in order to put in the point of the longest icicle. The better to do this, he unwound his rope from his waist and flung it on the ice by his side, while he lay down on his breast and looked over the edge. Still he did not perceive the danger of his position, and went on sketching diligently in this awkward attitude.

Now it was a melancholy fact that Master Gillie's interest in art or science was short-lived, though keen. He soon tired of watching his companion, and began to look about him with a view to mischief. Not seeing anything specially suggestive, he thought of aiding the operations of nature by expediting the descent of some neighbouring boulders from their positions on ice-blocks. He intimated his intention to Slingsby, but the artist was too much engrossed to give heed to him. Just as he was rising, Gillie's eye fell on the rope, and a happy thought struck him.

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To carry striking thoughts into immediate execution was a marked feature of the boy's character. He observed that one end of the rope was attached to Mr. Slingsby's belt. Taking up the hook at the other end, he went with it towards a large boulder, drawing the rope after him with extreme care, for fear of arousing his companion by a tug. He found that, when fully stretched, it was just long enough to pass round the rock. Quickly fastening it, therefore, by means of the hook, he walked quietly away.

He did not exhibit much excitement while doing this. It was, after all, but a trifling jest in his esteem, as the only result to be hoped for would be the giving of a surprise by the little tug which might perhaps be experienced by the artist on rising.

Thereafter, Gillie sent innumerable ice-blocks to premature destruction, and enjoyed the work immensely for a time, but, having exploratory tendencies, he soon wandered about among obelisks and caverns until he found himself underneath the ice-cliff on which his friend was seated. Then, as he looked up at the overhanging ledge from which gigantic icicles were hanging, a shock of alarm thrilled his little breast. This was increased by the falling of one of the icicles, which went like a blue javelin into the crevasse beside him. Gillie thought of shouting to warn Mr. Slingsby of his danger, but before he could do so he was startled by an appalling yell. At the same moment part of the ice overhead gave way, and he beheld the artist descending. He was stopped with a sudden jerk, as the rope tightened, and remained suspended in the air, while his coat and colour-box accompanied icicles and snow-blocks into the abyss below. A second later and the struggling artist's head appeared to fall off, but it was only his hat.

Gillie had by this time recovered himself so far as to be able to add his piercing shrieks for help to the cries of the artist, and well was it that day for Mr. Slingsby that Gillie had, since the years of infancy, practised his lungs to some purpose in terrifying cats and defying "Bobbies" in the streets of London.

"Oh, sir! sir!—I say—hi!" he cried, panting and glaring up.

"Eh? what? Hah!" gasped Slingsby, panting and glaring down.

"Don't kick like that sir; pray don't," cried Gillie in agonised tones, "you'll start the boulder wot yer fast to, if you don't keep still."

"Oh!" groaned the artist and instantly hung limp and motionless, in which condition he remained while Gillie ran towards the place where he had left the rest of the party, jumping and slipping and falling and yelling over the ice like a maniac in blue and buttons!

"D'ee hear that?" exclaimed Captain Wopper with a startled look, as he and his companions busied themselves packing up their instruments.

Antoine Grennon heard it but made no reply. He was familiar with cries of alarm. Turning abruptly he dashed off at full speed in the direction whence the cries came. The Captain and Professor instantly followed; Lawrence overtook and passed them. In a few minutes they met the terrified boy, who, instead of waiting for them and wasting time by telling what was wrong, turned sharp round, gave one wild wave of his hand, and ran straight back to the ledge from which poor Slingsby hung. Stout willing arms were soon pulling cautiously on the rope, and in a few minutes more the artist lay upon the safe ice, almost speechless from terror, and with a deadly pallor on his brow.

Strange to say the indomitable artist had held on tight to his sketch-book, possibly because it was almost as dear to him as life, but more probably because of that feeling which induces a drowning man to clutch at a straw.

Note 1. We ourselves had the satisfaction of witnessing this wonderful and beautiful phenomenon before having read or heard of it, while on a trip from Chamouni to Martigny over the Tete Noire.

Chapter XIV. THE GRAND ASCENT BEGUN.

Mrs. Stoutley, reposing at full length on a sofa in the salon one evening, observed to the Count Horetzki that she really could not understand it at all; that it seemed to her a tempting of Providence to risk one's life for nothing, and that upon the whole she thought these excursions on glaciers were very useless and foolish.

The salon was full of people grouped in little knots, fighting the battles of the day o'er again, playing backgammon and chess, or poring over maps and guide-books.

"It does indeed seem foolish," answered the Count whose native politeness induced him always to agree with ladies when possible, "and as far as any practical purpose is served I should think it useless. Nevertheless it seems to afford amusement to many people, and amusement, in some form or other, would appear to be almost necessary to our happy existence."

"True," replied Mrs. Stoutley, languidly, "but people ought to content themselves with quiet and safe amusements. How ridiculous it is to find pleasure in climbing ice-precipices, and leaping over crevasses, and sitting under shower-baths of boulder-stones. I'm sure that I could not find pleasure in such pranks even if I were to make the effort. How much better to seek and find enjoyment in wandering with a book through shady forests and gathering wild-flowers! Don't you agree with me, Count?"

The Count's usually grave and anxious visage relaxed into a smile as he protested that he agreed with her entirely. "At the same time," he added, "there does appear to be some sort of aspiring tendency in the young and strong, to attempt the repression of which would seem to be useless, even if desirable. Do you know, Madame, while on a voyage some years ago I saw a boy who used to dive off the fore-yard-arm into the sea, and who went regularly every morning before breakfast to the main-mast-head and sat on that button-like piece of wood called the truck?"

"How very reckless," said Mrs. Stoutley, "and how shamefully regardless of the feelings of his mother, for of course if he had a mother, and if she were a woman of right feeling, she must have been horrified!"

"I am afraid, Madame, that you would have esteemed her a lady of wrong feeling, for she applauded her boy, and used to say that if he only took care to acquire as much moral as he had physical courage, so as to become as brave and bold a soldier of the Cross as he was sure to be of the Crown, he would resemble his own father, who was the best and bravest man that ever lived."

"How strange!" murmured Mrs. Stoutley, "such inconsistencies! But there does seem to be a considerable number of masculine women in the world, who encourage what we call muscular Christianity."

"Yes, there are indeed strange inconsistencies around us," returned the Count. "You have, however, mistaken the character of this particular mother, for she was the reverse of masculine, being delicate, and tender-hearted, and refined, and ladylike, while her boy was bold as a lion—yet obedient and gentle to her as a lamb. He afterwards became a soldier, and on the occasion of a wild storm on the east coast of England he swam off to a wreck with a rope, when no man in the place could be got to do it for love or money, and was the means of rescuing four women and six men, in accomplishing which, however, he lost his life."

"Oh, how shocking! how VERY sad!" said Mrs. Stoutley, startled into animation by the suddenness of the revelation, "and how different it might have been if the youth had been trained to gentler amusements. He might have been alive now."

"Yes," returned the Count, "and the four women and six men might have been dead! But here come two friends who are better able to give an opinion on the point than I am."

"What may the pint be?" asked Captain Wopper, with a genial smile, as if he were ready to tackle anything from a pint of beer to a "pint" of the compass. "Only state your case, Mrs. Stoutley, an' the Professor here, he'll act the judge, an' I'll be the jury."

"The jury is too small," said Lewis, coming up at that moment.

"Small, young man!" repeated the Captain, with feigned surprise, as he drew himself up to his full height and squared his broad shoulders.

"Not physically, but numerically," retorted Lewis, with a laugh—"ho! Emma, Miss Horetzki, Lawrence, Slingsby," he called to the quartette, who sat chatting in a bay window, "you are hereby summoned to act on a

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jury. Come along and have yourselves impaled—I mean to say impanelled. A most important case, just going on for trial.”

“What is the nature of the case?” asked Lawrence, as they all came forward and sat down in a semicircle before Mrs. Stoutley.

“It han't got no natur—it's unnateral altogether,” said the Captain, who had just heard it briefly stated by the Count.

“Hallo! are you appointed public prosecutor?” demanded Lewis.

“Yes, I am,” retorted the Captain, “I've appinted myself public persecuter, Lord Advocate, Lord High Commissioner to the Woolsack, an' any other legal an' illegal character ye choose to name. So you clap a stopper on yer muzzle, youngster, while I state the case. Here is Mrs. Stoutley, my lords, ladies, and gentlemen, who says that climbin', an' gaugin', and glaciers is foolish and useless. That's two counts which the Count here (nothin' personal meant) says the prisoner was guilty of. We'll go in an' win on the last count, for if these things ain't useless, d'ee see, they can't be foolish. Well, the question is, `Guilty or not guilty?’”

“Guilty!” replied Mrs. Stoutley, with an amused smile.

“Hear! hear!” from Slingsby.

“Silence in the Court!” from Lewis.

“I'm afraid,” said the Professor, “that our forms of legal procedure are somewhat irregular.”

“Never mind that, Professor,” said the Captain, “you go ahead an' prove the prisoner wrong. Take the wind out of her sails if 'ee can.”

The Professor smiled blandly, and began in jest; but his enthusiastic spirit and love of abstract truth soon made him argue in earnest.

“Oh, that's all very well,” said Mrs. Stoutley, interrupting him, “but what possible use can there be in knowing the rate of speed at which a glacier flows? What does it matter whether it flows six, or sixty, or six hundred feet in a day?”

“Matter!” cried Lewis, before the Professor could reply, “why, it matters very much indeed. I can prove it. Our excellent guide Antoine told me of a man who fell into a crevasse high up on the Glacier des Bossons, and was of course lost; but about forty years afterwards the part of the glacier into which he fell had descended into the valley, and the body of the man was found—at least portions of it were found here and there. This, as you are all aware, is a well-known fact. Bear in mind, in connection with this, that all glaciers do not travel at the same rate, nor all parts of a glacier at an equal rate. Now, suppose that you were to lose a gold watch or a diamond ring in a crevasse, the value of which might be incalculable in consequence of being a gift from some beloved one, would it not be a matter of the last importance to know exactly the rate at which the said crevasse travelled, so that you or your grandchildren might return at the precise time and claim the property?”

“Don't talk nonsense, Lewie,” said his mother.

“No doubt,” said the Professor, laughing, “my young friend's illustration is to the point, and I fear that I cannot give you anything more definite to prove the value of glacial measurements and observations. I must rest my proof on the abstract truth that ALL knowledge is desirable, and ought to be sought after for its own sake, as being the means whereby we shall come better to know the good and wise Creator, `whom to know,' as His own Word says, `is life eternal' But I can give you distinct proof, in a somewhat analogous case, of good resulting from knowledge which was eagerly pursued and acquired without the searcher having the slightest idea as to the use to which his knowledge would be ultimately put. You have doubtless heard of Captain Maury, of the United States Navy?”

“Oh yes,” replied Mrs. Stoutley, “he who writes that charming book, the Physical Geography of the Sea, or some such title. My son is a great admirer of that work. I tried to read it to please him, but I must confess that I could not go far into it. It seemed to me an endless and useless search after currents of wind and water.”

“I see you must have missed the very illustrations which I am about to cite, for they are given in his book—one of the most interesting I ever read, and not the less interesting that its author distinguishes a connection between the Creator's Word and His works. You know that Captain Maury's investigations of currents of wind and water were conducted wisely, and on a vast scale. Nautical men of many nations sent in their `logs' to him, and he patiently collected and collated all the facts observed in all parts of the ocean.”

“Yes, and quite useless knowledge, it appears to me,” said Mrs. Stoutley.

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“Well, we shall see,” returned the Professor. “There was once a terrible storm on the Atlantic, and a vessel with troops on board was so disabled as to be left at last a helpless log upon the sea. She was passed by other vessels, but these could render no assistance, owing to the raging storm. They, however, took note of the latitude and longitude of the wreck, and reported her on arriving at New York. A rescue-ship was at once ordered to search for her, but, before sailing, Captain Maury was applied to for instructions how they should proceed. The man of science was seated in his study, had probably scarce observed the storm, and knew nothing about the wreck save her position, as observed at a certain date. Why, therefore, we might ask; apply to him? Just because he sat at the fountain-head of such knowledge as was needed. He had long studied, and well knew, the currents of the ocean, their direction and their rate of progress at specified times and particular places. He prepared a chart and marked a spot at, or near which, the wreck, he said, would probably be found. The wreck WAS found—not indeed by the rescue-ship, but by another vessel, AT THE VERY SPOT INDICATED—and the surviving crew and troops were saved. So, in like manner, the study of truth regarding currents of air has led us to knowledge which enables mariners to escape the Atlantic Sargasso-sea—”

“Ha! the Doldrums,” growled Captain Wopper, as if he had a special and bitter hatred of that sea. “Yes, the Doldrums, or Sargasso-sea, where ships used to be detained by long, vexatious calms, and islands of floating sea-weed, but which now we escape, because studious men have pointed out, that by sailing to one side of that sea you can get into favourable breezes, avoid the calm regions, and thus save much time.”

“Now, Madame,” said Captain Wopper, “are you convinced?”

“Not quite,” replied Mrs. Stoutley, with a baffled look; “but, I suppose, on the strength of this, and similar reasons, you intend to ascend Mont Blanc to-morrow?”

“We do,” said the Professor. “I intend to go for the purpose of attempting to fix a thermometer on the summit, in order to ascertain, if possible, the winter temperature.”

“And pray, for what purpose?” said Mrs. Stoutley with a touch of sarcasm, “does Dr. Lawrence intend to go?”

“For the purpose of seeing the magnificent view, and of testing the lungs and muscles, which are now, I think, sufficiently trained to enable me to make the ascent with ease,” replied the doctor, promptly.

“I go to assist the Professor,” said Captain Wopper.

“And I,” said Lewis, “intend to go for fun; so you see, mother, as our reasons are all good, you had better go to bed, for it's getting late.”

Mrs. Stoutley accepted the suggestion, delivered a yawn into her pocket-handkerchief, and retired, as she remarked, to ascend Mont Blanc in dreams, and thus have all the pleasure without the bodily fatigue.

We are on the sides of the mountain monarch now, slowly wending our way through the sable fringe of pines that ornaments the skirt of his white mantle. We tramp along very slowly, for Antoine Grennon is in front and won't allow us to go faster. To the impatient and youthful spirits of Lawrence and Lewis, the pace appears ridiculously slow, and the latter does not hesitate to make audible reference in his best French to the progress of snails, but Antoine is deaf to such references. One might fancy that he did not understand bad French, but for the momentary twinkle in his earnest eyes. But nothing will induce him to mend his pace, for well does he know that the ascent of Mont Blanc is no trifle; that even trained lungs and muscles are pretty severely taxed before the fifteen thousand seven hundred and eighty feet of perpendicular height above the sea-level is placed below the soles of the feet. He knows, also, from long experience, that he who would climb a mountain well, and use his strength to advantage, must begin with a slow, leisurely pace, as if he were merely out for a saunter, yet must progress with steady, persevering regularity. He knows, too, that young blood is prone to breast a mountain with head erect and spanking action, and to descend with woeful countenance and limp limbs. It must be restrained, and Antoine does his duty.

The ascent of Mont Blanc cannot be accomplished in one day. It is therefore necessary to sleep at a place named the Grands Mulets, from which a fresh start is made for the summit at the earliest hours of morning on the second day. Towards this resting-place our travellers now directed their steps.

The party consisted of the Professor, Captain Wopper, Lewis, Lawrence, and Slingsby, headed by their trusty guide, besides three porters with knapsacks containing food, wine, etc. One of these latter was the chamois-hunter, Baptist Le Croix. He brought up the rear of the party, and all proceeded in single file, each, like the North American Indian, treading in his predecessor's footsteps.

Passing from the dark fringe of pines they emerged upon a more open country where the royal robe was

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wrought with larch and hazel, bilberry, and varied underwood, and speckled with rhododendrons and other flowers on a ground of rich brown, green, and grey. Steadily upwards, over the Glacier des Bossons, they went, with airy cloudlets floating around them, with the summit at which they aimed, the Dome du Gouter, and the Aiguille du Gouter in front, luring them on, and other giant Aiguilles around watching them. Several hours of steady climbing brought them to the Pierre l'Echelle, where they were furnished with woollen leggings to protect their legs from the snow. Here also they procured a ladder and began the tedious work of traversing the glaciers. Hitherto their route had lain chiefly on solid ground—over grassy slopes and along rocky paths. It was now to be confined almost entirely to the ice, which they found to be cut up in all directions with fissures, so that great caution was needed in crossing crevasses and creeping round slippery ridges, and progress was for some time very slow.

Coming to one of the crevasses which was too wide to leap, the ladder was put in requisition. The iron spikes with which one end of it was shod were driven firmly into the ice at one side of the chasm and the other end rested on the opposite side.

Antoine crossed first and then held out his hand to the Professor, who followed, but the man of science was an expert ice-man, and in another moment stood at the guide's side without having required assistance. Not so Captain Wopper.

"I'm not exactly a feather," he said, looking with a doubtful expression at the frail bridge.

"It bore me well enough, Captain," said the Professor with a smile.

"That's just what it didn't," replied the Captain, "it seemed to me to bend too much under you; besides, although I'm bound to admit that you're a good lump of a man, Professor, I suspect there's a couple of stones more on me than on you. If it was only a rope, now, such as I've bin used to, I'd go at it at once, but—"

"It is quite strong enough," said the guide confidently.

"Well, here goes," returned the mariner, "but if it gives way, Antoine, I'll have you hanged for murder."

Uttering this threat he crossed in safety, the others followed, and the party advanced over a part of the glacier which was rugged with mounds, towers, obelisks, and pyramids of ice. For some time nothing serious interrupted their progress until they came to another wide crevasse, when it was found, to the guide's indignation, that the ladder had been purposely left behind by the porter to whom it had been intrusted, he being under the impression that it would not be further required.

"Blockhead!" cried the Professor, whose enthusiastic spirit was easily roused to indignation, "it was your duty to carry it till ordered to lay it down. You were hired to act, sir, not to think. Obedience is the highest virtue of a servant! Shall we send him back for it?" he said, turning to Antoine with a flushed countenance.

"Not now, Monsieur," answered the guide, "it would create needless delay. We shall try to work round the crevasse."

This they did by following its edge until they found a part where crossing was possible, though attended with considerable danger in consequence of the wedge-like and crumbling nature of the ice.

Hoping that such a difficulty would not occur again they pushed on, but had not gone far when another, and still more impassable, fissure presented itself.

"How provoking, couldn't we jump it?" said Lewis, looking inquiringly into the dark-blue depths.

"Pr'aps YOU might, youngster, with your half fledged spider-legs," said the Captain, "but you'll not catch fourteen-stun-six goin' over THAT with its own free will. What's to be done now, Antoine?"

The guide, after looking at the crevasse for a few minutes, said that the next thing to be done was to look for a snow-bridge, which he had no doubt would be found somewhere. In search of this he scattered the whole party, and in a few minutes a loud shout from the chamois-hunter told that he had been successful. The members of the party at once converged towards him, but found that the success was only partial. He had indeed found a part of the crevasse, which, during some of the wild storms so frequent on the mountain, had been bridged over by a snow-wreath, but the central part of the bridge had given way, and it was thus divided by a gap of about a foot wide. This would have been but a small and insignificant step to take had the substance been solid, but although the ice on one side was strong the opposite edge was comparatively soft snow, and not much more than a foot thick. The chamois-hunter, being the lightest of the party, was called to the front and ordered to test the strength of the frail bridge, if bridge it could be called.

"Why, he might as well try to step on a bit of sea-foam," said the Captain in surprise.

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Lawrence, Lewis, and Slingsby, having as yet had no experience of such places, expressed, or held a similar opinion, but the Professor bade them wait and see.

Baptist, throwing off his pack, and fastening a rope round his waist, which his comrades held, advanced to the extreme edge of the ice, and with his long-handled axe, gently patted the snow on the opposite side. The surface yielded, and it seemed as if even that small weight would break the lump OFF, but the operation consolidated the mass in a few minutes, by reason of what the Professor termed "regelation." He then stepped tenderly on it, crossed over, and drew the rope after him. Antoine followed next, and in a few minutes the whole party was safe on the other side.

"Dr. Lawrence," said Slingsby, in a low grave tone, as they walked along after this, "if we ever see Chamouni again I shall be surprised."

"Indeed?" returned Lawrence, with a short laugh, "I don't take quite so gloomy a view of our case. Don't you think that the free and easy, quiet look of our guide and porters indicates that such work looks more dangerous than it really is?"

"I don't know that," said the artist, shaking his head, "when men get thoroughly accustomed to danger they become foolhardy, and don't realise it. I think it sheer madness to cross such places."

Lewis, who overheard the conversation, could scarce refrain from a burst of laughter.

"Upon my word, Slingsby," said he, "such observations come strangely from the lips of a man, who only a day or two ago was caught sketching on a snow-wreath over the edge of a crevasse."

"Ah, but I didn't know it," retorted the other, "and even if I HAD known it, the ledge of snow was immensely stronger than that on which we have just stood."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the guide stopping and saying that it was now necessary to tie the party together.

They had reached those higher parts of the glacier where snow frequently falls and covers, to some extent the narrower crevasses, thus, by concealing them, rendering them extremely dangerous traps. It therefore became necessary to attach the various members of the party together by means of a rope, which, passing round their waists, with a few feet between each, enabled them to rescue any one who should chance to break through.

Thus, in a string, they advanced, and had scarcely proceeded a hundred yards when a surprised "hallo!" from Captain Wopper arrested them. He had sunk up to the knees in snow. A "hallo!" of alarm instantly succeeded. He was waist deep. A stentorian yell followed:

"Ho! hallo! hi!—avast! Hold on there abaft! My legs are waublin' in nothin'!"

His great weight had indeed nearly plunged him into a hidden crevasse, over which those who preceded him had passed in safety. If the Captain had stood alone that crevasse would certainly have been his grave, but his friends held him tight, and in a few seconds he was dragged out of danger.

"Well, well," he said, wiping some large drops of perspiration from his brow, as he stood on the other side of the chasm, "land-lubbers talk about seafarin' men havin' nothin' but a plank between them an' death, but to my thinkin' the rottenest plank that ever was launched is absolute safety compared to `a snow-wreath."

"Ah! Captain," said the Professor, laughing, "you think so just now because you're not used to it. In a few weeks you'll hold a different opinion."

"May be so," replied the Captain quietly, "but it don't feel so— heave ahead, my hearties!"

Thus encouraged the party proceeded with caution, the guide sounding the snow at each step with his long axe-handle as he moved in advance.

Slowly they mounted higher and higher, occasionally meeting with, but always overcoming, difficulties, until towards evening they reached the little log cabin on the Grands Mulets, not sorry to find in it a sufficient though humble resting-place for the night.

Here they proceeded to make themselves comfortable. Some firewood had been carried up by the porters, with which a fire was kindled, wet garments were hung up to dry, and hot coffee was prepared, while the sun sank in a gorgeous world of amber and crimson fire.

One by one the stars came out and gradually twinkled into brilliancy, until at last the glorious host of heaven shone in the deepening sky with an intensity of lustre that cannot be described, contrasting strangely with the pallid ghostly aspect of the surrounding snow-fields. These were the only trace of earth that now remained to greet the eyes of our travellers when they looked forth from the door of the little hut. Besides being calm and

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beautiful, the night was intensely cold. There is this peculiarity, on Alpine mountain tops, that when the sun's last rays desert them the temperature falls abruptly, there being little or nothing of earth or rock to conserve the heat poured out during the day. The mountaineers, therefore, soon after night closed in, found it necessary to shut the door of their cabin, where they roused up the fire, quaffed their steaming coffee, and smoked their pipes, in joyful anticipation of the coming day.

Chapter XV. THE GRAND ASCENT CONTINUED AND COMPLETED.

Need we say that the younger of our adventurers—for such they may truly be styled—felt a tendency to “spin yarns,” as Captain Wopper expressed it, till a late hour that night, as they sat round the fire at the Grands Mulets?

During this enjoyable period, Lawrence and Lewis made themselves better acquainted with Baptist Le Croix, the chamois-hunter, whose quiet, gentle, and unobtrusive manner was very attractive to them. Many an anecdote did he relate of adventures among the Alpine peaks and passes while pursuing the chamois, or guiding travellers on their way, and it is probable that he might have roamed in spirit among his beloved haunts—eagerly followed in spirit by the young men—if he had not been called to order by the guide, who, remembering the hard work that lay before them on the morrow, suggested repose. The profound silence that soon reigned in the hut was broken only by an occasional long-drawn sigh. Even Captain Wopper was quiet, having been so powerfully influenced by fresh mountain air and exercise as to have forgotten or foregone his ordinary and inveterate snore.

There is something peculiarly disagreeable in being awakened, when one is very tired and sleepy, about two minutes after one has dropped into a profound refreshing slumber; and the annoyance is severely aggravated when it is caused by the wanton act of one of whom we had expected better things.

So, in a hazy way, thought Lewis Stoutley when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and heard the voice of Antoine Grennon.

“Monsieur! Monsieur!” said the guide.

“G—t—long. D—n borer me,” murmured Lewis, in tones so sleepy that the dash of crossness was barely perceptible.

“It is time to rise, sir,” persisted Antoine.

“‘mposs'ble—'v jus' b'n two min'ts sl—e—”

A profound sigh formed an eloquent peroration to the sentence.

A loud laugh from his companions, who were already up and getting ready, did more than the guide's powers of suasion to arouse the heavy sleeper. He started to a sitting posture, stared with imbecile surprise at the candle which dimly lighted the cabin, and yawned vociferously.

“What a sleeper you are, Lewie!” said Lawrence, with a laugh, as, on his knees before the fire, he busied himself in preparing coffee for the party.

“And such a growler, too, when any one touches you,” observed Slingsby, buttoning on his leggings.

“Sleeper! growler!” groaned Lewis, “you've only given me five minutes in which to sleep or growl.”

“Ah, the happy obliviousness of youth!” said the Professor, assisting one of the porters to strap up the scientific instruments, “you have been asleep four hours at least. It is now past one. We must start in less than an hour, so bestir yourself—and pray, Dr. Lawrence, make haste with that coffee.”

The doctor was by no means slow in his operations, but the difficulties in his way delayed him. At such a height, and in such a frozen region, the only mode of procuring water was to place a panful of snow on the fire; and, no matter how full the pan might be stuffed with it, this snow, when melted, was reduced to only a very small quantity of water; more snow had, therefore, to be added and melted, so that much time was spent before the boiling point was reached. Patience, however, was at last rewarded with a steaming draught, which, with bread and ham, did more than fire towards warming their chill bodies.

Outside, the scene was still exquisitely calm and beautiful. The stars appeared to have gathered fresh brilliancy and to have increased in number during the night. Those of them near the horizon, as the Professor pointed out, twinkled energetically, as if they had just risen, and, like Lewis, were sleepy, while those in the zenith shone with steady lustre, as if particularly wide awake to the doings of the presumptuous men who were climbing so much nearer than usual to their habitation in the sky. One star in particular gleamed with a sheen that was pre-eminently glorious—now it was ruby red, now metallic blue, anon emerald green. Of course, no sunlight would tinge the horizon for several hours, but the bright moon, which had just risen, rolled floods of silver over the snowy wastes, rendering unnecessary the lantern which had been provided to illumine their upward path.

The party, having been tied together with a rope as on the previous day, set forth in line over the snow, each following the other, and soon they were doing battle with the deep crevasses. The nature of the ice varied, of

course, with the form of the mountain, sometimes presenting rugged and difficult places, in which, as the Captain put it, they got among breakers and had to steer with caution, at other times presenting comparatively level plains of snow over which all was "plain sailing," but the movement was upwards—ever upwards—and, as the day advanced, felt so prolonged that, at last, as Slingsby said, the climbing motion grew into a confirmed habit. Meanwhile the old world sank steadily below them, and, seen from such an elevation in the pale moonlight, lost much of its familiar look.

Even sounds appeared gradually to die out of that mysterious region, for when they chanced to pause for a moment to recover breath, or to gaze downward, each appeared unwilling to break the excessive stillness, and all seemed to listen intently, as it were, to the soundlessness around—hearing nought, however, save the beating of their own pulsations. In such a spot, if unaccompanied by guide or friend, one might perhaps realise, more than in other parts of earth, the significance of the phrase, "Alone with God."

As dawn approached, Lewis, who had taken care to have himself placed next to Baptist Le Croix, renewed his converse in reference to chamois-hunting, and made arrangements to accompany the hunter on one of his expeditions.

"Is that your sole occupation?" he asked, as the party entered upon a somewhat level snow-field.

"That and assisting travellers," answered Baptist.

"By the way," said Lewis, in a careless tone, "they tell me that gold is to be found in some parts of these mountains. Is that true?"

If the youth's back had not been towards the hunter, who walked behind him, he might have seen that this question was received with a startled look, and that a strange gleam shot from the man's eyes. The question was repeated before he answered it.

"Yes," said he, in a low voice, "they say it is to be found—but I have never found it."

"Have you sought much for it?"

"I have sought for it."

The answer was not given promptly, and Lewis found, with some surprise, that the subject appeared to be distasteful to the hunter. He therefore dropped it and walked on in silence.

Walking at the time was comparatively easy, for a sharp frost had hardened the surface of the snow, and the gem-like lights of heaven enabled them to traverse valleys of ice, clamber up snow-slopes and cross crevasses without danger, except in one or two places, where the natural snow-bridges were frail and the chasms unusually wide.

At one of these crevasses they were brought to a complete standstill. It was too wide to be leaped, and no bridge was to be found. The movements of a glacier cause the continual shifting of its parts, so that, although rugged or smooth spots are always sure to be found at the same parts of the glacier each year, there is, nevertheless, annual variety in minute detail. Hence the most expert guides are sometimes puzzled as to routes.

The crevasse in question was a new one, and it was Antoine's first ascent of Mont Blanc for that year, so that he had to explore for a passage just as if he had never been there before. The party turned to the left and marched along the edge of the chasm some distance, but no bridge could be found. The ice became more broken up, smaller crevasses intersected the large one, and at last a place was reached where the chaos of dislocation rendered further advance impossible.

"Lost your bearin's, Antoine?" asked Captain Wopper.

"No; I have only got into difficulties," replied the guide, with a quiet smile.

"Just so—breakers ahead. Well, I suppose you'll 'bout ship an' run along the coast till we find a channel."

This was precisely what Antoine meant to do, and did, but it was not until more than an hour had been lost that a safe bridge was found. When they had crossed, the configuration of the ice forced them to adopt a route which they would willingly have avoided. A steep incline of snow rose on their right, on the heights above which loose ice-grags were poised as if on the point of falling. Indeed, two or three tracks were passed, down which, probably at no distant period, some of these avalanches had shot. It was nervous work passing under them. Even Antoine looked up at them with a grave, inquiring glance, and hastened his pace as much as was consistent with comfort and dignity.

Soon after this the sun began to rise, and the upper portions of the snow were irradiated with pink splendour, but to our travellers he had not yet risen, owing to the intervening peaks of the Aiguille du Midi. In the

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brightening light they emerged upon a plain named the Petit Plateau, which forms a reservoir for the avalanches of the Dome du Goute. Above them rose the mountain-crest in three grand masses, divided from each other by rents, which exposed that peculiar stratified form of the glacier caused by the annual bedding of the snow. From the heights, innumerable avalanches had descended, strewing the spot where they stood with huge blocks of ice and masses of rock.

Threading their way through these impediments was a matter not only of time, but of difficulty, for in some parts the spaces between the boulders and blocks were hollow, and covered with thin crusts of snow, which gave way the instant a foot was set on them, plunging up to their waists the unfortunates who trod there, with a shock which usually called forth shouts of astonishment not unmingled with consternation.

"Here, then, we draw near to the grand summit," said the Professor, pointing to the snow-cliffs on the right, "whence originates the ice-fountain that supplies such mighty ice-rivers as the Glacier des Bossons and the Mer de Glace."

"Oui, Monsieur," replied Antoine, smiling, "we DRAW near, but we are not yet near."

"We are nearer to the summit however, than we are to the plain," retorted the Professor.

"Truly, yes," assented the guide.

"I should think no one could doubt that," observed Slingsby, looking upwards.

"It looks quite near now," said Lewis.

"Not so near, however, as you think, and as you shall find," rejoined the guide, as they resumed their upward march.

This was indeed true. Nothing is more deceptive to an inexperienced eye than the apparent distance of a high mountain-top. When you imagine that the plain below is miles and miles away, and the peak above close at hand, you find, perhaps, on consulting your watch, that the plain cannot be very far distant, and that the greater part of your work still lies before you. It requires no small amount of resolution to bear up against the depression of spirit caused by frequent mistakes in this matter.

Owing to the increasing height and power of the sun, the snow beyond the Petit Plateau soon became soft, and the steepness of the ascent increasing, their advance became slower, and their work much more laborious. A pleasant break was, however, at hand, for, on reaching the Grand Plateau, they were cheered by the sun's rays beaming directly on them, and by the information that they had at length reached their breakfast-point.

It may not be a very romantic, but it is an interesting fact, that the joys connected with intellectual and material food are intimately blended. Man, without intellectual food, becomes a "lower animal." What intellectual man is without material food, even for part of a day, let those testify who have had the misfortune to go on a pic-nic, and discover that an essential element of diet had been forgotten. It is not merely that food is necessary to maintain our strength; were that so, a five minutes' pause, or ten at the outside, would suffice, in Captain Wopper's phraseology, to take in cargo, or coal the human engine; but we "REJOICE in food," and we believe that none enjoy it so much as those whose intellectual appetite is strong. If any doubters of these truths had witnessed the Professor and his friends at breakfast that morning on the Grand Plateau, they must have infallibly been convinced.

"What a gourmand he is!" whispered Lewis to the Captain, in reference to the man of science, "and such a genial outflow of wit to correspond with his amazing indraught of wittles."

The Captain's teeth were at the moment fixed with almost tigerish ferocity in a chicken drumstick, but the humour and the amazing novelty—to say nothing of the truth—of Lewis's remark made him remove the drumstick, and give vent to a roar of laughter that shook the very summit of Mont Blanc—at all events the Professor said it did, and he was a man who weighed his words and considered well his sentiments.

"Do not imagine that I exaggerate," he said, as distinctly as was compatible with a very large mouthful of ham and bread, "sound is a motion of vibration, not of translation. That delightfully sonorous laugh emitted by Captain Wopper (pass the wine, Slingsby—thanks) was an impulse or push delivered by his organs of respiration to the particles of air in immediate contact with his magnificent beard. The impulse thus given to the air was re-delivered or passed on, not as I pass the mutton to Dr. Lawrence (whose plate is almost empty), but by each particle of air passing the impulse to its neighbour; thus creating an aerial wave, or multitude of waves, which rolled away into space. Those of the waves which rolled in the direction of Mont Blanc communicated their vibrations to the more solid atoms of the mountain, these passed the motion on to each other, of course with

slight—inconceivably slight—but actual force, and thus the tremor passed entirely through the mountain, out on the other side, greatly diminished in power no doubt, and right on throughout space.—Hand me the bread, Lewis, and don't sit grinning there like a Cheshire cat with tic-douloureux in its tail.”

At this Slingsby laughed and shook the mountain again, besides overturning a bottle of water, and upsetting the gravity of Antoine Grennon, who chanced to be looking at him; for the artist's mouth, being large, and also queerly shaped, appeared to the guide somewhat ludicrous. Sympathy, like waves of sound, is easily transmitted. Thus, on the Captain making to Antoine the very simple remark that the “mootong was mannyfeek,” there was a general roar that ought to have brought Mont Blanc down about their ears. But it didn't—it only shook him. Laughter and sympathy combined improve digestion and strengthen appetite. Thus the Professor's brilliant coruscations, and the appreciative condition of his audience, created an enjoyment of that morning's meal which was remembered with pleasure long after the event, and induced an excessive consumption of food, which called forth the remonstrances of the guide, who had to remind his uproarious flock that a portion must be reserved for the descent. To the propriety of this Lewis not only assented, but said that he meant to continue the ascent, and rose for that purpose, whereupon the Doctor said that he dissented entirely from the notion that bad puns increased the hilarity of a party, and the Captain, giving an impulse to the atmosphere with his respiratory organs, produced the sound “Avast!” and advised them to clap a stopper in their potato-traps.

Even at these sallies they all laughed—proving, among other things, that mountain air and exercise, combined with intellectual and physical food, are conducive to easy-going good humour.

It is not impossible that the tremors to which Mont Blanc had been subjected that morning had put him a little out of humour, for our mountaineers had scarcely recommenced their upward toil when he shrouded his summit in a few fleecy clouds. The guide shook his head at this.

“I fear the weather won't hold,” he said.

“Won't hold!” exclaimed the Captain, “why, it's holdin' now as hard as it can grip.”

“True,” observed the Professor; “but weather in these regions is apt to change its mood rather suddenly.”

“Yet there seems to me no sign of an unfavourable change,” said Lawrence, looking up at the blue and almost cloudless sky.

“Fleecy clouds are fleeting at times,” returned the Professor, pointing to the summit which again showed its cap of clear dazzling white, “but at other times they are indicative of conditions that tend to storm. However, we must push on and hope for the best.”

They did push on accordingly, and all, except the guide, had no difficulty in “hoping.” As they passed over the Plateau the sun poured floods of light on the snow, from the little crystals of which it shone with prismatic colours, as though the place had been strewn with diamonds. The spirit of levity was put to flight by this splendid spectacle, and the feelings of the travellers were deepened to solemnity when the guide pointed to a yawning crevasse into which, he said, three guides were hurled by an avalanche in the year 1820. He also related how, on one occasion, a party of eleven tourists perished, not far from where they then stood, during a terrible storm, and how an English lady and her guide were, at another time, lost in a neighbouring crevasse.

By this time all except the chief among the surrounding heights were beginning to look insignificant by comparison, and the country assumed a sort of rugged flatness in consequence of being looked down upon from such an elevation. Passing the Grand Plateau they reached a steep incline, which rose towards a tremendous ice-precipice. From the upper edge of this there hung gigantic icicles. Up the incline they went slowly, for the crust of the snow broke down at every step, and the Captain, being heavy, began to show symptoms of excessive heat and labouring breath, but he grew comparatively cool on coming to a snow-bridge which had to be passed in order to get over a crevasse.

“It'll never bear my weight,” he said, looking doubtfully at the frail bridge, and at the blue gulf, which appeared to be a bottomless pit.

Antoine, however, thought it might prove strong enough. He patted the snow gently, as on previous occasions of a similar kind, and advanced with caution, while his followers fixed their heels in the snow, and held tight to the rope to save him if he should break through. He passed in safety, and the others followed, but new difficulties awaited them on the other side. Just beyond this bridge they came to a slope from which the snow had been completely swept, leaving the surface of hard ice exposed. It was so steep that walking on it was impossible. Antoine, therefore, proceeded to cut steps along its face. Two swings of his ponderous mountain-axe were

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sufficient to cut each step in the brittle ice, and in a few minutes the whole party were on the slope, every man having a coil of the rope round his waist, while, with the spike of his alpenstock driven firmly into the ice, he steadied himself before taking each successive step.

There would have been no difficulty in crossing such a slope if its base had terminated in snow, but as it went straight down to the brow of an ice-precipice, and then abruptly terminated in a cornice, from which the giant icicles, before mentioned, hung down into an unfathomable abyss, each man knew that a false step, a slip, or the loss of balance, might result in the instant destruction of the whole party. They moved therefore very slowly, keeping their eyes steadily fixed on their feet.

The mercurial temperament of Mr. Slingsby was severely tried at this point. His desire to look up and revel in the beauties of nature around him proved too strong a temptation. While gazing with feelings of awe at the terrible edge or cornice below he became, for the first time, fully alive to his situation,—the smallness of the step of ice on which he stood, the exceeding steepness of the glassy slope below, the dread abyss beyond! He shut his eyes; a giddy feeling came over him—a rush of horror.

“Take care, Monsieur!” was uttered in a quick, deep tone, behind him.

It was the warning voice of Le Croix, who observed his condition.

The warning came too late. Slingsby wavered, threw up his arms, slipped, and fell with an appalling shriek.

Le Croix, however, was prepared. In an instant he had fixed his staff and heels firmly, and had leaned well back to resist the pull. The porter in front was not less prompt; the stout rope stood the strain; and in another moment the artist was restored to his position, panting, pale, and humbled.

A few minutes sufficed to restore his confidence sufficiently to admit of his proceeding, and, with many warnings to be more cautious, the advance was continued.

Up to this point the weather had favoured them, but now Mont Blanc seemed as if inclined to resent the free and easy way in which these men of mingled muscle and science had attacked his crown. He drew several ominous clouds around him, and shook out a flood of hoary locks from his white head, which, caught up by a blast, created apparently for the purpose, were whirled aloft in wild confusion, and swooped down upon the mountaineers with bitter emphasis, in the form of snow-drift, as if they had come direct from Captain Wopper's favourite place of reference,—Nova Zembla. Coats, which had hitherto been carried on the arm or thrown open, were put on and buttoned, and heads were bent to meet the blast and repel the snow-drift. Little was said, save a murmured doubt by Antoine as to the possibility of gaining the summit, even although they were now so near it, for the day was far spent by that time, and the rugged nature of the route over they had passed, precluded the possibility of a rapid return to the hut at the Grands Mulets. They pushed steadily on, however, for the Professor was anxious to bury his thermometer in the snow at the top; the guide was anxious to maintain his credit for perseverance; and the others were anxious to be able to say they had reached the highest height in Europe.

In any weather the ascent of Mont Blanc requires somewhat more than the average share of physical vigour and perseverance; in bad weather it demands unusual strength and resolution. When, therefore, a severe storm of wind arose, most of the party began to show symptoms of distress. The labour of ascending, being coupled with that of forcing way against the blast, was very exhausting to the muscles, while the extreme cold reduced the physical energy and cooled the most sanguine spirit. Antoine alone seemed to be proof against all influences, but the responsibility lying on him clouded his usually open countenance with a careworn expression. Prudence counselled immediate return. Ambition, as they were now so near the top, urged prolonged effort. The guide expressed his anxieties, but meeting with no response, followed the dictates of his feelings, and pushed on.

Like pillars of living snow they toiled patiently upwards. Breath became too precious to waste in words. They advanced in silence. The wind howled around them, and the snow circled in mad evolutions, as if the demon of wintry storms dwelt there, and meant to defend his citadel to the “bitter end.” There are two rocks near the summit, which crop through the ice like rugged jewels in the monarch's diadem. The lower is named the Petits Mulets, the upper the Derniers Roches. On reaching the latter of these they paused a few moments to rest. A feeling of certainty that the end would be gained now began to prevail, but the guide was a little alarmed, and the Professor horrified, on looking at their companions' faces, to observe that they were pinched, haggard, and old-looking, as if they all had aged somewhat during the last few hours! Captain Wopper's rubicund visage was pale, and his nose blue; the face of Lewis was white all over, and drawn, as if he were suffering pain; Dr. Lawrence's countenance was yellow, and Slingsby's was green. The Professor himself was as bad as his

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comrades, and the porters were no better.

“We shan't be beaten now,” said the man of science, with a ghastly smile.

“Go 'head! nev'r s'die s'l'ng's th'r's shot 'n th' locker!” replied the Captain, in the tone of a man who would rather avoid speaking, if possible.

“What a face you've got, Stoutley!” said the artist.

“You're another!” replied Lewis, with a horrible grin.

“Allons!” exclaimed the guide, bending once more against the storm.

Once, for a few minutes, the wind ceased and the clouds lifted. Captain Wopper uttered a cheer, and rushed forward in advance of the guide, took off his hat and threw it into the air. They had reached the round summit without being aware of it. They stood 15,781 feet above the sea-level! No envious peak rose above their heads. The whole world lay below them, bathed, too, in bright sunshine, for the storm, which had so suddenly swooped upon them, was confined, like an elemental body-guard, to the head of the mountain-king. But, clear though it was at the moment, they were too high in the air to see anything quite distinctly, yet this hazy aspect had a charm of its own, for it increased the feeling and idea of vastness in connection with surrounding space. Around, and now beneath, stood the mountain nobility of the land, looking, however, somewhat reduced in size and majesty, as seen from the royal presence.

Scarcely had the mountaineers assembled and glanced at the wondrous panorama, when the envious clouds swooped down again and mingled with the snow-drift which once more rose to meet them.

“We must be quick, Monsieur,” said Antoine, taking a shovel from one of the porters, while Le Croix grasped another. “Where shall we dig?”

The Professor fixed on a spot, and, while the grave of the thermometer was being dug, a plaid was set up on a couple of alpenstocks, in the shelter of which the others consumed the bread and wine that had been saved from breakfast. It did them little good, however; the cold was too intense. The Captain's beard was already fringed with icicles, and the whiskers of those who had them were covered with hoar-frost, while the breath issued from their mouths like steam. Before the thermometer was buried all had risen, and were endeavouring to recover heat by rubbing their hands, beating their arms across their breasts, and stamping violently.

“Come,” said the Professor, quickly, when the work was done, “we must start at once.”

“Oui, Monsieur,” assented the guide, and, without more words, the whole party began to descend the mountain at a run.

There was cause for haste. Not only did the storm increase in violence, but evening drew on apace, and all of them were more or less exhausted by prolonged muscular exertion and exposure to severe cold.

Suddenly, having gone a considerable way down the mountain, they emerged from fog and snow-drift into blazing sunshine! The strife of elements was confined entirely to the summit. The inferior ice-slopes and the valleys far below were bathed in the golden glories of a magnificent sunset and, before they reached the huts at the Grands Mulets, they had passed from a condition of excessive cold to one of extreme heat, insomuch that the Captain and Professor were compelled to walk with their coats slung over their shoulders, while perspiration streamed from their bare brows.

That night the party slept again at the Grands Mulets, and next day they reached Chamouni, fagged, no doubt, and bearing marks of mountaineering in the shape of sun-burnt cheeks and peeled noses, but hearty, nevertheless, and not a little elated with their success in having scaled the mighty sides and the hoary summit of Mont Blanc.

Chapter XVI. TELLS HOW LEWIS DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF.

Seated one morning on an easy chair in Susan Quick's apartment and swinging his little blue legs to and fro in a careless, negligent manner, Gillie White announced it as his opinion that Mister Lewis had gone, or was fast going, mad.

"Why do you think so?" asked Susan, with a smile, looking up for a moment from some portion of Lewis's nether integuments, which Mont Blanc had riven almost to shreds.

"W'y do I think so?" repeated Gillie; "w'y, cos he's not content with havin' busted his boots an' his clo'se, an' all but busted hisself, in goin' to the top o' Mont Blang an' Monty Rosa, an' all the other Monty—thingumbobs about but he's agoin' off to day with that queer fish Laycrwa to hunt some where up above the clouds—in among the stars, I fancy—for shamwas."

"Indeed!" said Susan, with a neat little laugh.

"Yes, indeed. He's mountain-mad—mad as a Swiss March hare, if not madder—By the way, Susan, wot d'ee think o' the French?"

Gillie propounded this question with the air of a philosopher.

"D'you mean French people?"

"No; I means the French lingo, as my friend Cappen Wopper calls it."

"Well, I can't say that I have thought much about it yet. Missis keeps me so busy that I haven't time."

"Ah!" said Gillie, "you're wastin' of precious oppoortoonities, Susan. I've bin a-studdyin' of that lingo myself, now, for three weeks—off and on."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Susan, with an amused glance, "and what do YOU think of it?"

"Think of it! I think it's the most outrageous stuff as ever was. The man who first invented it must 'ave 'ad p'ralersis o' the brain, besides a bad cold in 'is 'ead, for most o' the enns an' gees come tumblin' through the nose, but only git half out after all, as if the speaker was afraid to let 'em go, lest he shouldn't git hold of 'em again. There's that there mountain, now. They can't call it Mont Blang, with a good strong out—an'—out bang, like a Briton would do, but they catches hold o' the gee when it's got about as far as the bridge o' the nose, half throttles it and shoves it right back, so that you can scarce hear it at all. An' the best joke is, there ain't no gee in the word at all!"

"No?" said Susan, in surprise.

"No," repeated Gillie. "I've bin studdyin' the spellin' o' the words in shop-winders an' posters, an', would you b'lieve it, they end the word Blang with a C."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes I do; an' how d'ee think they spell the name o' that feller Laycrwa?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Susan.

"They spells it," returned Gillie, with a solemn look, "L-e-c-r-o-i-x. Now, if I had spelt it that way, I'd have pronounced it Laycroiks. Wouldn't you?"

"Well, yes, I think I should," said Susan.

"It seems to me," continued Gillie, "that they goes on the plan of spellin' one way an' purnouncin' another—always takin' care to choose the most difficult way, an' the most unnatt'ral, so that a feller has no chance to come near it except by corkin' up one nostril tight, an' borin' a small extra hole in the other about half-way up. If you was to mix a sneeze with what you said, an' paid little or no attention to the sense, p'raps it would be French—but I ain't sure. I only wish you heard Cappen Wopper hoistin' French out of hisself as if he was a wessel short-handed, an' every word was a heavy bale. He's werry shy about it, is the Cappen, an' wouldn't for the world say a word if he thought any one was near; but when he thinks he's alone with Antoine—that's our guide, you know—he sometimes lets fly a broadside o' French that well-nigh takes my breath away."

The urchin broke into a laugh here at the memory of the Captain's efforts to master what he styled a furrin' tongue, but Susan checked him by saying silyly, "How could you know, Gillie, if the Captain was ALONE with Antoine?"

"Oh, don't you know," replied Gillie, trying to recover his gravity, "the Cappen he's wery fond o' me, and I

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like to gratify his feelin's by keepin' near him. Sometimes I keep so near—under the shadow of his huge calf d'ee see—that he don't observe me on lookin' round; an', thinkin' he's all alone, lets fly his French broadsides in a way that a'most sends Antoine on his beam—ends. But Antoine is tough, he is. He gin'rally says, 'I not un'r'stan' English ver' well,' shakes his head an' grins, but the Cappen never listens to his answers, bein' too busy loadin' and primin' for another broadside."

The man to whom he referred cut short the conversation at this point by shouting down the stair:—

"Hallo! Gillie, you powder—monkey, where are my shoes?"

"Here they are, Cappen, all ready; fit to do dooty as a lookin'—glass to shave yerself," cried the "powder—monkey," leaping up and leaving the room abruptly.

Gillie's opinion in regard to the madness of Lewis was shared by several of his friends above stairs. Doctor Lawrence, especially, felt much anxiety about him, having overheard one or two conversations held by the guides on the subject of the young Englishman's recklessness.

"Really, Lewis," said the Doctor, on one occasion, "you MUST listen to a lecture from me, because you are in a measure under my charge."

"I'm all attention, sir," said Lewis meekly, as he sat down on the edge of his bed and folded his hands in his lap.

"Well then, to begin," said the Doctor, with a half—serious smile, "I won't trouble you with my own opinion, to which you attach no weight—"

"Pardon me, Lawrence, I attach great weight to it—or, rather, it has so much weight that I can scarcely bear it."

"Just so, and therefore you shan't have it. But you must admit that the opinion of a good guide is worth something. Now, I heard Antoine Grennon the other day laying down some unquestionable principles to the Professor—"

"What! lecturing the Professor?" interrupted Lewis, "how very presumptuous."

"He said," continued the Doctor, "that the dangers connected with the ascent of these Swiss mountains are REAL, and, unless properly provided against, may become terrible, if not fatal. He instanced your own tendency to go roving about among the glaciers ALONE. With a comrade or a guide attached to you by a rope there is no danger worth speaking of, but it must be as clear to you as it is to me that it when out on the mountains alone, you step on a snow—covered crevasse and break through, your instant death is inevitable."

"Yes, but," objected Lewis, with that unwilling ness to be convinced which is one of the chief characteristics of youth, "I always walk, when ALONE on the glaciers, with the utmost caution, sounding the snow in front of me with the long handle of my axe at every step as I go."

"If the guides do not find this always a sufficient protection for themselves, by what amazing power of self—sufficiency do you persuade yourself that it is sufficient for YOU?" demanded Lawrence.

"Your question suffices, Doctor," said Lewis, laughing; "go on with your lecture, I'm all attention and, and humility."

"Not my lecture," retorted Lawrence, "the guide's. He was very strong, I assure you, on the subject of men going on the high glaciers WITHOUT A ROPE, or, which comes to the same thing, ALONE, and he was not less severe on those who are so foolhardy, or so ignorant, as to cross steep slopes of ice on new—fallen snow. Nothing is easier, the new snow affording such good foothold, as you told us the other day when describing your adventures under the cliffs of Monte Rosa, and yet nothing is more dangerous, says Antoine, for if the snow were to slip, as it is very apt to do, you would be smothered in it, or swept into a crevasse by it. Lives are lost in the Alps EVERY YEAR, I am told, owing to indifference to these two points. The guides say—and their opinions are corroborated by men of science and Alpine experience—that it is dangerous to meddle with any slope exceeding 30 degrees for several days after a heavy fall, and yet it is certain that slopes exceeding this angle are traversed annually by travellers who are ignorant, or reckless, or both. Did you not say that the slope which you crossed the other day was a steeper angle than this, and the snow on it not more than twenty—four hours' old?"

"Guilty!" exclaimed Lewis, with a sigh.

"I condemn you, then," said Lawrence, with a smile, "to a continuation of this lecture, and, be assured, the punishment is much lighter than you deserve. Listen:—There are three unavoidable dangers in Alpine climbing—"

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“Please don't be long on each head,” pleaded Lewis, throwing himself back in his bed, while his friend placed the point of each finger of his right hand on a corresponding point of the left, and crossed his legs.

“I won't. I shall be brief—brief as your life is likely to be if you don't attend to me. The three dangers are, as I have said, unavoidable; but two of them may be guarded against; the other cannot. First, there is danger from FALLING ROCKS. This danger may be styled positive. It hangs over the head like the sword of Damocles. There is no avoiding it except by not climbing at all, for boulders and ice-blocks are perched here, and there, and everywhere, and no one can tell the moment when they shall fall. Secondly, there is danger from crevasses—the danger of tumbling into one when crossing a bridge of snow, and the danger of breaking through a crust of snow which conceals one. This may be called a negative danger. It is reduced to almost nothing if you are tied to your comrade by a rope, and if the leader sounds with his staff as he walks along; but it changes from a negative to a positive danger to the man who is so mad as to go out ALONE. Thirdly, there is danger from new snow on steep slopes, which is positive if you step on it when recently fallen, and when the slope is very steep; but is negative when you allow sufficient time for it to harden. While, however, it is certain that many deaths occur from these three dangers being neglected, it is equally true that the largest number of accidents which occur in the Alps arise chiefly from momentary indiscretions, from false steps, the result of carelessness or self-confidence, and from men attempting to do what is beyond their powers. Men who are too old for such fatigue, and men who, though young, are not sufficiently strong, usually come to grief. I close my lecture with a quotation from the writings of a celebrated mountaineer — ‘In all cases the man rather than the mountain is at fault.’”

“There is truth in what you say,” observed Lewis, rising, with a yawn.

“Nay, but,” returned his friend, seriously, “your mother, who is made very anxious by your reckless expeditions, begged me to impress these truths on you. Will you promise me, like a good fellow, to consider them?”

“I promise,” said Lewis, becoming serious in his turn, and taking his friend's hand; “but you must not expect sudden perfection to be exemplified in me.—Come, let's go have a talk with Le Croix about his projected expedition after the chamois.”

Up in the mountains now,—above some of the clouds undoubtedly, almost 'mong the stars, as Gillie put it,—Lewis wanders in company with Baptist Le Croix, half-forgetful of his promise to Lawrence. Below them lies a world of hills and valleys; above towers a fairy-land of ice, cliff, and cloud. No human habitation is near. The only indications of man's existence are so faint, and so far off in the plains below, that houses are barely visible, and villages look like toys. A sea of cloud floats beneath them, and it is only through gaps in this sea that the terrestrial world is seen. Piercing through it are the more prominent of the Alpine peaks—the dark tremendous obelisk of the Matterhorn towering in one direction, the not less tremendous and far grander head of Mont Blanc looming in another. The sun shines brightly over all, piercing and rendering semi-transparent some of the clouds, gilding the edges and deepening the shadows of others.

“Do you see anything, Le Croix?” asked Lewis, as he reclined on a narrow ledge of rock recovering breath after a fatiguing climb, while his comrade peered intently through a telescope into the recesses of a dark mountain gorge that lay a little below them.

For some moments the hunter made no reply. Presently he closed the glass, and, with an air of satisfaction, said, “Chamois!”

“Where?” asked Lewis, rising eagerly and taking the glass.

Le Croix carefully pointed out the spot but no effort on the part of the inexperienced youth could bring anything resembling the light and graceful form of a chamois into the field of vision.

“Never mind, Le Croix,” he said, quickly returning the glass and picking up his rifle; “come along, let's have at them.”

“Softly,” returned the hunter; “we must get well to leeward of them before we can venture to approach.”

“Lead where you will; you'll find me a quiet and unquestioning follower.”

The hunter at once turned, and, descending the mountain by a precipice which was so steep that they had in some places to drop from ledge to ledge, at last gained a position where the light air, that floated but scarce moved the clouds, came direct from the spot where the chamois lay. He then turned and made straight towards them. As they advanced the ground became more rugged and precipitous, so that their progress was unavoidably slow, and rendered more so by the necessity that lay on them of approaching their game without noise.

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When they had reached a spot where a sheer precipice appeared to render further progress impossible, the hunter stopped and said in a low tone, "Look, they are too far off; a bullet could not reach them."

Lewis craned his neck over the cliff, and saw the chamois grazing quietly on a small patch of green that lay among brown rocks below.

"What's to be done?" he asked anxiously. "Couldn't we try a long shot?"

"Useless. Your eyes are inexperienced. The distance is greater than you think."

"What, then, shall we do?"

Le Croix did not answer. He appeared to be revolving some plan in his mind. Turning at last to his companion, he said,—

"I counsel that you remain here. It is a place near to which they must pass if driven by some one from below. I will descend."

"But how descend?" asked Lewis. "I see no path by which even a goat could get down."

"Leave that to me," replied the hunter. "Keep perfectly still till you see them within range. Have your rifle ready; do not fire in haste; there will be time for a slow and sure aim. Most bad hunters owe their ill-luck to haste."

With this advice Le Croix crept quietly round a projecting rock, and, dropping apparently over the precipice, disappeared.

Solitude is suggestive. As long as his companion was with him, Lewis felt careless and easy in mind, but now that he was left alone in one of the wildest and grandest scenes he had yet beheld, he became solemnised, and could not help feeling, that without his guide he would be very helpless in such a place. Being alone in the mountains was not indeed new to him. As we have already said, he had acquired the character of being much too reckless in wandering about by himself; but there was a vast difference between going alone over ground which he had traversed several times with guides in the immediate neighbourhood of Chamouni, and being left in a region to which he had been conducted by paths so intricate, tortuous, and difficult, that the mere effort to trace back in memory even the last few miles of the route confused him.

There was a mysterious stillness, too, about everything around him; and the fogs, which floated in heavy masses above and below, gave a character of changeful wildness to the scenery.

"What a place to get lost in and benighted!" he thought. Then his mind, with that curious capacity for sudden flight, which is one of the chief characteristics of thought, leaped down the precipices, up which he had toiled so slowly, sped away over hill and dale, and landed him in Chamouni at the feet of Nita Horetzki. Once there, he had no desire to move. He kept looking steadily in her pretty face, speculated as to the nature of the charm that rendered it so sweet, wondered what was the cause of the lines of care that at times rippled her smooth white brow, longed to become the sharer of her grief, and her comforter, and pondered the improbability of his ever being in a position to call her Nita—darling Nita—sweetest Nita—exquisite Nita! He was still engaged in creating adjectives at Chamouni when he was brought suddenly back to the Alpine heights by the sound of a shot. It was repeated in a hundred echoes by the surrounding cliffs, as he seized his rifle and gazed over the precipice.

A puff of smoke, hanging like a cloudlet, guided his eyes. Not far in front of it he saw the fawn-like form of a chamois stretched in death upon the ground, while two others were seen bounding with amazing precision and elasticity over the rocks towards him.

He turned at once to an opening among the rocks at his right, for, even to his unpractised eye, it was obviously impossible that anything without wings could approach him in front or at his left.

Coolness and promptitude were characteristics of the youth; so that he sat crouching with the rifle, resting in the palm of his left hand, over one knee, as motionless as if he had been chiselled from the rock against which he leaned; but his natural coolness of deportment could not prevent, though it concealed, a throbbing of anxiety lest the game should pass out of reach, or behind rocks, which would prevent his seeing it. For an instant he half-rose, intending to rush to some more commanding elevation, but remembering the parting advice of Le Croix, he sank down again and remained steady.

Scarcely had he done so when the clatter of bounding hoofs was heard. He knew well that the open space, across which he now felt sure the chamois must pass, was only broad enough to afford the briefest possible time for an aim. He raised the rifle more than half-way to the shoulder. Another instant and a chamois appeared like an arrow shooting athwart the hill-side before him. He fired, and missed! The bullet, however, which had been

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destined for the heart of the first animal, was caught in the brain of that which followed. It sprang high into the air, and, rolling over several times, lay stretched at full length on the rocks.

We need not pause to describe the rejoicing of the young sportsman over his first chamois, or to detail Lecroix's complimentary observations thereon.

Having deposited their game in a place of safety, the hunter suggested that, as there was no chance of their seeing any more in that locality, it would be well to devote the remainder of the day to exploring the higher slopes of a neighbouring glacier, for, familiar as he was with all the grander features of the region, there were some of the minuter details, he said, with which he was unacquainted.

Lewis was a little surprised at the proposal, but, being quite satisfied with his success, and not unwilling to join in anything that smacked of exploration, he readily assented; and, ere long, the two aspiring spirits were high above the spot where the chamois had fallen, and struggling with the difficulties of couloir and crevasse.

Before quitting the lower ground, they had deposited their game and rifles in a cave well known to Le Croix, in which they intended to pass the night, and they now advanced armed only with their long-handled Alpine hatchets, without which implements it is impossible to travel over glaciers.

Being both of them strong in wind and limb, they did not pause often to rest, though Lewis occasionally called a momentary halt to enjoy the magnificent prospect. During one of these pauses a dark object was seen moving over the ice far below them.

Le Croix pointed to it, and said that it approached them.

"What is it—a crow?" asked Lewis.

"More like a man; but it is neither," returned the hunter, adjusting his telescope; "yes, it is, as I fancied, a chamois."

"Then it cannot have seen us," said Lewis, "else it would not approach."

"Nay, it approaches because it has seen us. It mistakes us for relatives. Let us sit down to deceive it a little."

They crouched beside a piece of ice, and the chamois advanced, until its pretty form became recognisable by the naked eye. Its motions, however, were irregular. It was evidently timid. Sometimes it came on at full gallop, then paused to look, and uttered a loud piping sound, advancing a few paces with caution, and pausing to gaze again. Le Croix replied with an imitative whistle to its call. It immediately bounded forward with pleasure, but soon again hesitated, and stopped. At last it seemed to become aware of its mistake, for, turning at a tangent, it scoured away over the ice like wind swooping down from the mountain-summits, bounded over the crevasses like an india-rubber ball, and was quickly out of sight.

While gazing with profound interest at this graceful creature, the explorers were not at first aware that a dark mass of inky cloud was rapidly bearing down on them, and that one of those wild storms which sweep frequently over the high Alps seemed to be gathering.

"We must make haste, if we would gain the shelter of our cave," said Le Croix, rising.

As he spoke, a low rumbling sound was heard behind them. They turned just in time to see a small avalanche of rocks hopping down the cliffs towards them. It was so far off, and looked such an innocent rolling of pebbles, that Lewis regarded it as an insignificant phenomenon. His companion formed a better estimate of its character, but being at least five hundred yards to one side of the couloir or snow-slope, down which it rushed, he judged that they were safe. He was mistaken. Some of the largest stones flew past quite near them, several striking the glacier as they passed, and sending clouds of ice-dust over them, and one, as large as a hogshead, bounding, with awful force, straight over their heads.

They turned instantly to hasten from so dangerous a spot, but were arrested by another and much louder rumbling sound.

"Quick, fly, Monsieur!" exclaimed Le Croix, setting his young companion the example.

Truly there was cause for haste. A sub-glacial lake among the heights above had burst its icy barriers, and, down the same couloir from which the smaller avalanche had sprung, a very ocean of boulders, mud, ice, and DEBRIS came crashing and roaring with a noise like the loudest thunder, with this difference, that there was no intermission of the roar for full quarter of an hour; only, at frequent intervals, a series of pre-eminent peals were heard, when boulders, from six to ten feet in diameter, met with obstacles, and dashed them aside, or broke themselves into atoms.

Our hunters fled for their lives, and barely gained the shelter of a giant boulder, when the skirts of the hideous

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torrent roared past leaped over an ice-cliff, and was swallowed up by the insatiable crevasses of the glacier below. For several minutes after they had reached, and stood panting in, a position of safety, they listened to the thunderous roar of Alpine artillery, until it died slowly away—as if unwillingly—in the light pattering of pebbles.

Gratitude to the Almighty for deliverance from a great danger was the strongest feeling in the heart of the chamois-hunter. Profound astonishment and joy at having witnessed such an amazing sight, quickened the pulse of Lewis.

“That was a narrow escape, Le Croix?”

“It was. I never see such a sight without a shudder, because I lost a brother in such an avalanche. It was on the slopes of the Jungfrau. He was literally broken to fragments by it.”

Lewis expressed sympathy, and his feelings were somewhat solemnised by the graphic recital of the details of the sad incident with which the hunter entertained him, as they descended the mountain rapidly.

In order to escape an impending storm, which was evidently brewing in the clouds above, Lewis suggested that they should diverge from the route by which they had ascended, and attempt a short cut by a steeper part of the mountains.

Le Croix looked round and pondered. “I don't like diverging into unknown parts when in a hurry, and with the day far spent,” he said. “One never knows when a sheer precipice will shut up the way in places like this.”

The youth, however, was confident, and the man of experience was too amiable and yielding. There was also urgent reason for haste. It was therefore decided that the steeper slopes should be attempted.

They began with a glissade. A very steep snow-slope happened to be close at hand. It stretched uninterruptedly down several hundred feet to one of the terraces, into which the precipitous mountainside at that place was cut.

“Will you try?” asked Le Croix, looking doubtfully at his companion.

“Of course I will,” replied Lewis, shortly. “Where you choose to go I will follow.”

“Have you ever done such work before?”

“Yes, often, though never on quite so steep or long a slope.”

Le Croix was apparently satisfied. He sat down on the summit of the slope, fixed the spiked end of his axe in the snow, resting heavily on the handle, in order to check his descent, and hitched himself forward.

“Keep steady and don't roll over,” he cried, as he shot away. The snow rose and trailed like a white tail behind him. His speed increased almost to that of an avalanche, and in a few seconds he was at the bottom.

Lewis seated himself in precisely the same manner, but overbalanced himself when halfway down, swung round, lost self-command, let slip his axe, and finally went head over heels, with legs and arms flying wildly.

Le Croix, half-expecting something of the kind, was prepared. He had re-ascended the slope a short way, and received the human avalanche on his right shoulder, was knocked down violently as a matter of course, and the two went spinning in a heap together to the bottom.

“Not hurt, I hope?” cried Lewis, jumping up and looking at his comrade with some anxiety.

“No, Monsieur,” replied Le Croix, quietly, as he shook the snow from his garments—“And you?”

“Oh! I'm all right. That was a splendid beginning. We shall get down to our cave in no time at this rate.”

The hunter shook his head. “It is not all glissading,” he said, as they continued the descent by clambering down the face of a precipice.

Some thousands of feet below them lay the tortuous surface of a glacier, on which they hoped to be able to walk towards their intended night-bivouac, but the cliffs leading to this grew steeper as they proceeded. Some hours' work was before them ere the glacier could be reached, and the day was already drawing towards its close. A feeling of anxiety kept them both silent as they pushed on with the utmost possible speed, save when it was necessary for one to direct the other as to his foothold.

On gaining each successive ledge of the terraced hill-side, they walked along it in the hope of reaching better ground, or another snow-slope; but each ledge ended in a precipice, so that there was no resource left but to scramble down to the ledge below to find a similar disappointment. The slopes also increased, rather than decreased, in steepness, yet so gradually, that the mountaineers at last went dropping from point to point down the sheer cliffs without fully realising the danger of their position. At a certain point they came to the head of a slope so steep, that the snow had been unable to lie on it, and it was impossible to glissade on the pure ice. It was quite possible, however, to cut foot-holes down. Le Croix had with him a stout Manilla rope of about three hundred

feet in length. With this tied round his waist, and Lewis, firmly planted, holding on to it, he commenced the staircase. Two blows sufficed for each step, yet two hours were consumed before the work was finished. Re-ascending, he tied the rope round Lewis, and thus enabled him to descend with a degree of confidence which he could not have felt if unattached. Le Croix himself descended without this moral support, but, being as sure-footed as a chamois, it mattered little.

Pretty well exhausted by their exertions, they now found themselves at the summit of a precipice so perpendicular and unbroken, that a single glance sufficed to convince them of the utter impossibility of further descent in that quarter. The ledge on which they stood was not more than three feet broad. Below them the glacier appeared in the fading light to be as far off as ever. Above, the cliffs frowned like inaccessible battlements. They were indeed like flies clinging to a wall, and, to add to their difficulties, the storm which had threatened now began in earnest.

A cloud as black as pitch hung in front of them. Suddenly, from its heart, there gushed a blinding flash of lightning, followed, almost without interval, by a crash of thunder. The echoes took up the sounds, hurling them back and forward among the cliffs as if cyclopean mountain spirits were playing tennis with boulders. Rain also descended in torrents, and for some time the whole scene became as dark as if overspread with the wing of night.

Crouching under a slight projection of rock, the explorers remained until the first fury of the squall was over. Fortunately, it was as short-lived as violent, but its effects were disagreeable, for cataracts now poured on them as they hurried along the top of the precipice vainly looking for a way of escape. At last, on coming to one of those checks which had so often met them that day, Le Croix turned and said,—

“There is no help for it, Monsieur, we must spend the night here.”

“Here!” exclaimed Lewis, glancing at the cliffs above and the gulf below.

“It is not a pleasant resting-place,” replied the hunter, with a sad smile, “but we cannot go on. It will be quite dark in half an hour, when an effort to advance would insure our destruction. The little light that remains must be spent in seeking out a place to lie on.”

The two men, who were thrown thus together in such perilous circumstances, were possessed of more than average courage, yet it would be false to say that fear found no place in their breasts. On the contrary, each confessed to the other the following day that his heart had sunk within him as he thought of the tremendous cliffs against which they were stuck, with descent and ascent equally impossible, a narrow ledge on the precipice-edge for their bed, and a long, wild night before them. Cowardice does not consist in simple fear. It consists in the fear of trifles; in unreasonable fear, and in such fear as incapacitates a man for action. The situation of our explorers was not one of slight danger. They had the best of reason for anxiety, because they knew not whether escape, even in daylight, were possible. As to incapacity for action, the best proof that fear had not brought them to that condition lay in the fact, that they set about preparations for spending the night with a degree of vigour amounting almost to cheerfulness.

After the most careful survey, only one spot was found wider than the rest of the ledge, and it was not more than four feet wide, the difference being caused by a slight hollow under the rock, which thus might overhang them—one of them at least—and form a sensation of canopy. At its best, a bed only four feet wide is esteemed narrow enough for one, and quite inadequate for two, but when it is considered that the bed now selected was of hard granite, rather round-backed than flat, with a sheer precipice descending a thousand feet, more or less, on one side of it, and a slope in that direction, there will be no difficulty in conceiving something of the state of mind in which Lewis Stoutley and Baptist Le Croix lay down to repose till morning in wet garments, with the thermometer somewhere between thirty-two and zero, Fahrenheit.

To prevent their rolling off the ledge when asleep, they built on the edge of the cliff a wall of the largest loose stones they could find. It was but an imaginary protection at best, for the slightest push sent some of the stones toppling over, and it necessarily curtailed the available space. No provisions, save one small piece of bread, had been brought, as they had intended returning to their cave to feast luxuriously. Having eaten the bread, they prepared to lie down.

It was agreed that only one at a time should sleep; the other was to remain awake, to prevent the sleeper from inadvertently moving. It was also arranged, that he whose turn it was to sleep should lie on the inner side. But here arose a difference. Le Croix insisted that Lewis should have the first sleep. Lewis, on the other hand, declared that he was not sleepy; that the attempt to sleep would only waste the time of both, and that therefore Le

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Croix should have the first.

The contention was pretty sharp for a time, but the obstinacy of the Englishman prevailed. The hunter gave in, and at once lay down straight out with his face to the cliff, and as close to it as he could squeeze. Lewis immediately lay down outside of him, and, throwing one arm over his Lecroix's broad chest gave him a half-jocular hug that a bear might have enjoyed, and told him to go to sleep. In doing this he dislodged a stone from the outer wall, which went clattering down into the dark gulf.

Almost immediately the deep, regular breathing of the wearied hunter told that he was already in the land of Nod.

It was a strange, romantic position; and Lewis rejoiced, in the midst of his anxieties, as he lay there wakefully guarding the chamois-hunter while he slept. It appeared to Lewis that his companion felt the need of a guardian, for he grasped with both hands the arm which he had thrown round him.

How greatly he wished that his friends at Chamouni could have even a faint conception of his position that night! What would Lawrence have thought of it? And the Captain,—how would HE have conducted himself in the circumstances? His mother, Emma, the Count, Antoine, Gillie, Susan —every one had a share in his thoughts, as he lay wakeful and watching on the giddy ledge—and Nita, as a great under-current like the sub-glacial rivers, kept flowing continually, and twining herself through all. Mingled with these thoughts was the sound of avalanches, which ever and anon broke in upon the still night with a muttering like distant thunder, or with a startling roar as masses of ice tottered over the brinks of the cascades, or boulders loosened by the recent rain lost their hold and involved a host of smaller fry in their fall. Twining and tying these thoughts together into a wild entanglement quite in keeping with the place, the youth never for one moment lost the sense of an ever present and imminent danger—he scarce knew what—and the necessity for watchfulness. This feeling culminated when he beheld Nita Horetzki suddenly appear standing close above him on a most dangerous-looking ledge of rock!

Uttering a loud cry of alarm he sought to start up, and in so doing sent three-quarters of the protecting wall down the precipice with an appalling rush and rumble. Unquestionably he would have followed it if he had not been held by the wrist as if by a vice!

“Hallo! take care, Monsieur,” cried Le Croix, in a quick anxious tone, still holding tightly to his companion's arm.

“Why! what? Le Croix—I saw—I—I—saw—Well, well—I do really believe I have been—I'm ashamed to say—”

“Yes, Monsieur, you've been asleep,” said the hunter, with a quiet laugh, gently letting go his hold of the arm as he became fully persuaded that Lewis was by that time quite awake and able to take care of himself.

“Have you been asleep too?” asked Lewis.

“Truly, no!” replied the hunter, rising with care, “but you have had full three hours of it, so it's my turn now.”

“You don't say so!” exclaimed Lewis.

“Indeed I do; and now, please, get next the cliff and let me lie outside, so that I may rest with an easy mind.”

Lewis opposed him no longer. He rose, and they both stood up to stamp their feet and belabour their chests for some time—the cold at such a height being intense, while their wet garments and want of covering rendered them peculiarly unfitted to withstand it. The effort was not very successful. The darkness of the night, the narrowness of their ledge, and the sleepiness of their spirits rendering extreme caution necessary.

At last the languid blood began to flow; a moderate degree of warmth was restored, and, lying down again side by side in the new position, the hunter and the student sought and found repose.

Chapter XVII. DANGER AND DEATH ON THE GLACIER.

Daylight—blessed daylight! How often longed for by the sick and weary! How imperfectly appreciated by those whose chief thoughts and experiences of night are fitly expressed by the couplet:—

“Bed, bed, delicious bed,
Haven of rest for the weary head.”

Daylight came at last, to the intense relief of poor Lewis, who had become restless as the interminable night wore on, and the cold seemed to penetrate to his very marrow. Although unable to sleep, however, he lay perfectly still, being anxious not to interrupt the rest of his companion. But Le Croix, like the other, did not sleep soundly; he awoke several times, and, towards morning, began to dream and mutter short sentences.

At first Lewis paid no attention to this, but at length, becoming weary of his own thoughts, he set himself with a half-amused feeling to listen. The amusement gave place to surprise and to a touch of sadness when he found that the word ‘gold’ frequently dropped from the sleeper’s lips.

“Can it be,” he thought, “that this poor fellow is really what they say, a half-crazed gold-hunter? I hope not. It seems nonsensical. I never heard of there being gold in these mountains. Yet it may be so, and too much longing after gold is said to turn people crazy. I shouldn’t wonder if it did.”

Thoughts are proverbial wanderers, and of a wayward spirit, and not easy of restraint. They are often very honest too, and refuse to flatter. As the youth lay on his back gazing dreamily from that giddy height on the first faint tinge of light that suffused the eastern sky, his thoughts rambled on in the same channel.

“Strange, that a chamois-hunter should become a gold-hunter. How much more respectable the former occupation, and yet how many gold-hunters there are in the world! Gamblers are gold-hunters; and I was a gambler once! Aha! Mr. Lewis, the cap once fitted you! Fitted, did I say? It fits still. Have I not been playing billiards every night nearly since I came here, despite Captain Wopper’s warnings and the lesson I got from poor Leven? Poor Leven indeed! it’s little gold that he has, and I robbed him. However, I paid him back, that’s one comfort, and my stakes now are mere trifles—just enough to give interest to the game. Yet, shame on you, Lewie; can’t you take interest in a game for its own sake? The smallest coin staked involves the spirit of gambling. You shouldn’t do it, my boy, you know that well enough, if you’d only let your conscience speak out. And Nita seems not to like it too—ah, Nita! She’s as good as gold—as good! ten million times better than the finest gold. I wonder why that queer careworn look comes over her angel face when she hears me say that I’ve been having a game of billiards? I might whisper some flattering things to myself in reference to this, were it not that she seems just as much put out when any one else talks about it. Ah, Nita!”

It is unnecessary to follow the youth’s thoughts further, for, having got upon Nita, they immediately ceased their wayward wandering practices and remained fixed on that theme.

Soon afterwards, the light being sufficient the mountaineers rose and continued their descent which was accomplished after much toil and trouble, and they proceeded at a quick pace over the glacier towards the place where the chamois had been left the previous day.

“Why are you so fond of gold, Le Croix?” said Lewis, abruptly, and in a half-jesting tone, as they walked along.

The hunter’s countenance flushed deeply, and he turned with a look of severity towards his companion.

“Who said that I was fond of it?”

“A very good friend of mine,” replied Lewis, with a light laugh.

“He can be no friend of mine,” returned the hunter, with contracted brows.

“I’m not so sure of that,” said the other; “at least if you count YOURSELF a friend. You whispered so much about gold in your dreams this morning that I came to the conclusion you were rather fond of it.”

The expression of the hunter changed completely. There seemed to be a struggle between indignation and sorrow in his breast as he stopped, and, facing his companion, said, with vehemence—

“Monsieur, I do not count MYSELF a friend. I have ever found SELF to be my greatest enemy. The good God knows how hard I have fought against self for years, and how often—oh, how often—I have been beaten down and overcome. God help me. It is a weary struggle.”

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Lecroix's countenance and tones changed as rapidly as the cloud-forms on his own mountain peaks. His last words were uttered with the deepest pathos, and his now pale face was turned upward, as if he sought for hope from a source higher than the "everlasting hills." Lewis was amazed at the sudden burst of feeling in one who was unusually quiet and sedate, and stood looking at him in silence.

"Young man," resumed the hunter, in a calmer tone, laying his large brown hand impressively on the youth's shoulder, "you have heard aright. I have loved gold too much. If I had resisted the temptation at the first I might have escaped, but I SHALL yet be saved, ay, despite of self, for there is a Saviour! For years I have sought for gold among these mountains. They tell me it is to be found there, but I have never found it. To-day I intended to have visited yonder yellow cliffs high up on the shoulder of the pass. Do you see them?"

He pointed eagerly, and a strange gleam was in his blue eyes as he went on to say rapidly, and without waiting for an answer—

"I have not yet been up there. It looks a likely place—a very likely place—but your words have turned me from my purpose. The evil spirit is gone for to-day—perhaps for ever. Come," he added, in a tone of firm determination, "we will cross this crevasse and hasten down to the cave."

He wrenched himself round while he spoke, as if the hand of some invisible spirit had been holding him, and hurried quickly towards a wide crevasse which crossed their path at that place.

"Had we not better tie ourselves together before attempting it?" suggested Lewis, hastening after him.

Le Croix did not answer, but quickened his pace to a run.

"Not there!" exclaimed Lewis, in sudden alarm. "It is almost too wide for a leap, and the snow on the other side overhangs. Stop! for God's sake—not there!"

He rushed forward, but was too late. Le Croix was already on the brink of the chasm; next moment, with a tremendous bound, he cleared it, and alighted on the snow beyond. His weight snapped off the mass, his arms were thrown wildly aloft, and, with a shout, rather than a cry, he fell headlong into the dark abyss!

Horror-stricken, unable to move or cry out Lewis stood on the edge. From far down in the blue depths of the crevasse there arose a terrible sound, as if of a heavy blow. It was followed by the familiar rattling of masses of falling ice, which seemed to die away in the profound heart of the glacier.

The "weary struggle" had come to an end at last. The chamois-hunter had found a tomb, like too many, alas! of his bold-hearted countrymen, among those great fields of ice, over which he had so often sped with sure foot and cool head in days gone by.

Lewis was as thoroughly convinced that his late comrade was dead, as if he had seen his mangled corpse before him, but with a sort of passionate unbelief he refused to admit the fact. He stood perfectly motionless, as if transfixed and frozen, in the act of bending over the crevasse. He listened intently and long for a sound which yet he knew could never come. An oppressive, sickening silence reigned around him, which he suddenly broke with a great and terrible cry, as, recovering from his stupor, he hurried wildly to and fro, seeking for some slope by which he might descend to the rescue of his friend.

Vainly he sought. Both walls of the crevasse were sheer precipices of clear ice. At one spot, indeed, he found a short slope, and, madly seizing his axe, he cut foot-holds down it, descending, quite regardless of danger, until the slope became too perpendicular to admit of farther progress. Struck then with alarm for himself, he returned cautiously to the top, while beads of cold perspiration stood on his pale brow. A few minutes more, and he became sufficiently calm to realise the fact that poor Le Croix was indeed beyond all hope. As the truth was forced into his heart he covered his face with his hands and wept bitterly.

It was long ere the passionate burst of feeling subsided. Lewis was very impressionable, and his young heart recoiled in agony from such a shock. Although the hunter had been to him nothing but a pleasant guide, he now felt as if he had lost a friend. When his mind was capable of connected thought he dwelt on the unfortunate man's kindly, modest, and bold disposition, and especially on the incidents of the previous night, when they two had lain side by side like brothers on their hard couch.

At last he rose, and, with a feeling of dead weight crushing his spirit began to think of continuing his descent. He felt that, although there was no hope of rescuing life, still no time should be lost in rousing the guides of Chamouni and recovering, if possible, the remains.

Other thoughts now came upon him with a rush. He was still high up among the great cliffs, and alone! The vale of Chamouni was still far distant, and he was bewildered as to his route, for, in whatever direction he turned,

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nothing met his eye save wildly-riven glaciers or jagged cliffs and peaks. He stood in the midst of a scene of savage grandeur, which corresponded somewhat with his feelings.

His knowledge of ice-craft, if we may use the expression, was by that time considerable, but he felt that it was not sufficient for the work that lay before him; besides, what knowledge he possessed could not make up for the want of a companion and a rope, while, to add to his distress, weakness, resulting partly from hunger, began to tell on him.

Perhaps it was well that such thoughts interfered with those that unmanned him, for they served to rouse his spirit and nerve him to exertion. Feeling that his life, under God, depended on the wisdom, vigour, and promptitude of his actions during the next few hours, he raised his eyes upward for a moment, and, perhaps for the first time in his life, asked help and guidance of his Creator, with the feeling strong upon him that help and guidance were sorely needed.

Almost at the commencement of his descent an event occurred which taught him the necessity of extreme caution. This was the slipping of his axe. He had left the fatal crevasse only a few hundred yards behind him, when he came to a fracture in the ice that rendered it impossible to advance in that direction any longer; he therefore turned aside, but was met by a snow slope which terminated in another yawning crevasse. While standing on the top of this, endeavouring to make up his mind as to the best route to be followed, he chanced to swing his axe carelessly and let it fall. Instantly it turned over the edge, and shot like an arrow down the slope. He was ice-man enough to know that the loss of his axe in such circumstances was equivalent to the signing of his death-warrant and his face flushed with the gush of feeling that resulted from the accident. Fortunately, the head of the weapon caught on a lamp of ice just at the edge of the crevasse, and the handle hung over it. Something akin to desperation now took possession of the youth. The slope WAS far too steep to slide down. Not having his axe, it was impossible to cut the necessary steps. In any case it was excessively dangerous, for, although the snow was not new, it lay on such an incline that the least weight on it might set it in motion, in which case inevitable death would have been the result. The case was too critical to admit of delay or thought. At all hazards the axe must be recovered. He therefore lay down with his face to the slope, and began to kick foot-holds with the toe of his boots. It was exceedingly slow and laborious work, for he dared not to kick with all his force, lest he should lose his balance, and, indeed, he only retained it by thrusting both arms firmly into the upper holes and fixing one foot deep in a lower hole, while with the other he cautiously kicked each new step in succession. At last, after toiling steadily thus for two hours, he regained his axe.

The grip with which he seized the handle, and the tender feeling with which he afterwards laid it on his shoulder, created in him a new idea as to the strange affection with which man can be brought to regard inanimate objects, and the fervency with which he condemned his former flippancy, and vowed never more to go out on the high Alps alone, formed a striking commentary on the adage, "Experience teaches fools!"

For some time after this Lewis advanced with both speed and caution. At each point of vantage that he reached he made a rapid and careful survey of all the ground before him, decided on the exact route which he should take, as far as the eye could range, and then refused every temptation to deviate from it save when insurmountable obstacles presented themselves in the shape of unbridged crevasses or sheer ice-precipices. Such obstacles were painfully numerous, but by indomitable perseverance, and sometimes by a desperate venture, he overcame them.

Once he got involved in a succession of crevasses which ran into each other, so that he found himself at last walking on the edge of a wedge of ice not a foot broad, with unfathomable abysses on either side. The wedge terminated at last in a thin edge with a deep crevasse beyond. He was about to retrace his steps—for the tenth time in that place—when it struck him that if he could only reach the other side of the crevasse on his right, he might gain a level patch of ice that appeared to communicate with the sounder part of the glacier beyond. He paused and drew his breath. It was not much of a leap. In ordinary circumstances he could have bounded over it like a chamois, but he was weak now from hunger and fatigue; besides which, the wedge on which he stood was rotten, and might yield to his bound, while the opposite edge seemed insecure and might fail him, like the mass that had proved fatal to Le Croix.

He felt the venture to be desperate, but the way before him was yet very long, and the day was declining. Screwing up his courage he sprang over, and a powerful shudder shook his frame when he alighted safe on the other side.

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Farther down the glacier he came to a level stretch, and began to walk with greater speed, neglecting for a little the precaution of driving the end of his axe-handle into the snow in front at each step. The result was, that he stepped suddenly on the snow that concealed a narrow crevasse. It sank at once, sending something like a galvanic shock through his frame. The shock effected what his tired muscles might have failed to accomplish. It caused him to fling himself backward with cat-like agility, and thus he escaped narrowly. It is needless to say that thereafter he proceeded with a degree of care and caution that might have done credit even to a trained mountaineer.

At last Lewis found it necessary to quit the glacier and scale the mountains by way of a pass which led into the gorge from which he hoped to reach the vale of Chamouni. He was in great perplexity here, for, the aspect of the country being unfamiliar to his eye, he feared that he must have lost his way. Nothing but decision, however, and prompt action could serve him now. To have vacillated or retraced part of his steps, would have involved his spending a second night among the icy solitudes without shelter; and this he felt, fatigued and fasting as he was, would have been quite beyond his powers of endurance. He therefore crossed the bergschrund, or crevasse between the glacier and the cliffs, on a snow-bridge, faced the mountain-side once more, and, toiling upwards, reached the summit of the pass a little before sunset. Fortunately the weather continued fine, and the country below appeared much less rugged than that over which he had passed, but he had not yet got clear of difficulties. Just below him lay the longest ice-slope, or couloir, he had hitherto encountered. The snow had been completely swept off its surface, and it bore evidence of being the channel down which rushed the boulders and obelisks of ice that strewed the plain below. To reach that plain by any other route would have involved a circuit of unknown extent. The risk was great but the danger of delay was greater. He swung the heavy axe round his head, and began at once the tedious process of cutting steps. Being an apt scholar, he had profited well from the lessons taught by Le Croix and others. Quick, yet measured and firm, was each stroke. A forced calmness rested on his face, for, while the ice-blocks above, apparently nodding to their fall, warned him to make haste, the fear of slipping a foot, or losing balance, compelled him to be very cautious. In such a case, a rope round the waist and a friend above would have been of inestimable value.

When about two-thirds of the way down, the exhausted youth was forced to stop for a few seconds to rest. Just then several pieces of ice, the size of a man's head, rushed down the couloir and dashed close past him. They served to show the usual direction of an avalanche. Fearing they were the prelude to something worse, he quickly cut his way to the side of the couloir. He was not a moment too soon. Glancing up in alarm, he saw the foundations of one of the largest ice-masses give way. The top bent over slowly at first, then fell forward with a crash and broke into smaller fragments, which dashed like lightning down the slope, leaping from side to side, and carrying huge rocks and masses of DEBRIS to the plain with horrible din.

Poor Lewis felt his spirit and his body shrink. He had, however, chosen his position well. Nothing save a cloud of dust and snow reached him, but the part of the slope down which he had passed was swept clean as with the besom of destruction. It was an awful ordeal for one so young and inexperienced, for the risk had to be encountered again. "The sooner the better," thought he, and immediately swayed aloft his axe again, lifting, as he did so, his heart to his Maker for the second time that day. A few minutes more, and he stood at the foot of the couloir.

Without a moment's pause he hurried on, and finally reached the lower slopes of the mountains. Here, to his inexpressible joy and thankfulness, he fell in with a sheep-track, and, following it up, was soon on the high-road of the valley. But it was not till far on in the night that he reached Chamouni, scarce able to drag himself along.

He went straight to the Bureau of Guides, where a profound sensation was created by the sad tidings which he brought. Antoine Grennon happened to be there, and to him Lewis told his sad tale, at the same time eagerly suggesting that an immediate search should be made for the body, and offering to go back at once to guide them to the scene of the accident. Antoine looked earnestly in the youth's face.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, shaking his head, "you are not fit to guide any one to-night. Besides, I know the place well. If poor Le Croix has fallen into that crevasse, he is now past all human aid."

"But why not start at once?" said Lewis, anxiously, "if there is but the merest vestige of a chance—"

"There is no chance, Monsieur, if your description is correct; besides, no man could find the spot in a dark night. But rest assured that we will not fail to do our duty to our comrade. A party will start off within an hour, proceed as far as is possible during the night, and, at the first gleam of day, we will push up the mountains. We

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need no one to guide us, but you need rest. Go, in the morning you may be able to follow us.”

We need scarcely say that the search was unavailing. The body of the unfortunate hunter was never recovered. In all probability it still lies entombed in the ice of the great glacier.

Chapter XVIII. A MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

"Is Nita unwell, Emma?" asked Lewis early one morning, not long after the sad event narrated in the last chapter.

"I think not. She is merely depressed, as we all are, by the melancholy death of poor Le Croix."

"I can well believe it," returned Lewis. "Nevertheless, it seems to me that her careworn expression and deep despondency cannot be accounted for by that event."

"You know that her father left last week very suddenly," said Emma. "Perhaps there may be domestic affairs that weigh heavily on her. I know not, for she never refers to her family or kindred. The only time I ventured to do so she appeared unhappy, and quickly changed the subject."

The cousins were sauntering near their hotel and observed Dr. Lawrence hurry from the front door.

"Hallo! Lawrence," called out Lewis.

"Ah! the very man I want," exclaimed the Doctor, hastening to join them, "do you know that Miss Horetzki is ill?"

"How strange that we should just this moment have referred to her looking ill! Not seriously ill, I trust," said Emma, with a troubled look in her sympathetic eyes.

"I hope not, but her case puzzles me more than any that I have yet met with. I fancy it may be the result of an overstrained nervous system, but there appears no present cause for that. She evidently possesses a vigorous constitution, and every one here is kind to her—her father particularly so. Even if she were in love, which she doesn't seem to be (a faint twinkle in the Doctor's eye here), that would not account for her condition."

"I can't help thinking," observed Lewis, with a troubled look, "that her father is somehow the cause of her careworn looks. No doubt he is very kind to her in public, but may there not be a very different state of things behind the scenes?"

"I think not. The Count's temper is gentle, and his sentiments are good. If he were irascible there might be something behind the scenes, for when restraint is removed and temper gets headway, good principles may check but cannot always prevent unkindness. Now, Emma, I have sought you and Lewis to ask for counsel. I do not say that Nita is seriously ill, but she is ill enough to cause those who love her—as I know you do—some anxiety. It is very evident to me, from what she says, that she eagerly desires her father to be with her, and yet when I suggest that he should be sent for, she nervously declines to entertain the proposal. If this strange state of mind is allowed to go on, it will aggravate the feverish attack from which she now suffers. I wish, therefore, to send for the Count without letting her know. Do you think this a wise step?"

"Undoubtedly; but why ask such a question of me?" said Emma, with a look of surprise.

"First, because you are Nita's friend—not perhaps, a friend of long standing, but, if I mistake not, a very loving one; and, secondly, as well as chiefly, because I want you to find out from her where her father is at present, and let me know."

"There is something disagreeably underhand in such a proceeding," objected Emma.

"You know that a doctor is, or ought to be, considered a sort of pope," returned Lawrence. "I absolve you from all guilt by assuring you that there is urgent need for pursuing the course I suggest."

"Well, I will at all events do what I can to help you," said Emma. "Shall I find her in her own room?"

"Yes, in bed, attended, with Mrs. Stoutley's permission, by Susan Quick. Get rid of the maid before entering on the subject."

In a few minutes Emma returned to the Doctor, who still walked up and down in earnest conversation with Lewis. She had succeeded, she said, in persuading Nita to let her father be sent for, and the place to which he had gone for a few days was Saxon, in the Rhone valley. The Count's address had also been obtained, but Nita had stipulated that the messenger should on no account disturb her father by entering the house, but should send for him and wait outside.

"Strange prohibition!" exclaimed Lawrence. "However, we must send off a messenger without delay."

"Stay," said Lewis, detaining his friend; "there seems to be delicacy as well as mystery connected with this matter, you must therefore allow me to be the messenger."

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Lawrence had no objection to the proposal, and in less than an hour Lewis, guided by Antoine Grennon, was on the road to Martigny by way of the celebrated pass of the Tete-Noire.

The guide was one of Nature's gentlemen. Although low in the social scale, and trained in a rugged school, he possessed that innate refinement of sentiment and feeling—a gift of God sometimes transmitted through a gentle mother—which makes a true gentleman. Among men of the upper ranks this refinement of soul may be counterfeited by the superficial polish of manners; among those who stand lower in the social scale it cannot be counterfeited at all, but still less can it be concealed. As broadcloth can neither make nor mar a true gentleman, so fustian cannot hide one. If Antoine Grennon had been bred “at Court,” and arrayed in sumptuous apparel, he could not have been more considerate than he was of the feelings and wishes of others, or more gentle, yet manly, in his demeanour.

If, on an excursion, you wished to proceed in a certain direction, Antoine never suggested that you should go in another, unless there were insurmountable difficulties in the way. If you chanced to grow weary, you could not have asked Antoine to carry your top-coat, because he would have observed your condition and anticipated your wishes. If you had been inclined to talk he would have chatted away by the hour on every subject that came within the range of his knowledge, and if you had taken him beyond his depth, he would have listened by the hour with profound respect, obviously pleased, and attempting to understand you. Yet he would not have “bored” you. He possessed great tact. He would have allowed you to lead the conversation, and when you ceased to do so he would have stopped. He never looked sulky or displeased. He never said unkind things, though he often said and did kind ones, and, with all that, was as independent in his opinions as the whistling wind among his native glaciers. In fact he was a prince among guides, and a pre-eminently unselfish man.

Heigho! if all the world—you and I, reader, included—bore a stronger resemblance to Antoine Grennon, we should have happy times of it. Well, well, don't let us sigh despairingly because of our inability to come up to the mark. It is some comfort that there are not a few such men about us to look up to as exemplars. We know several such, both men and women, among our own friends. Let's be thankful for them. It does us good to think of them!

From what we have said, the reader will not be surprised to hear that, after the first words of morning salutation, Lewis Stoutley walked smartly along the high road leading up the valley of Chamouni in perfect silence, with Antoine trudging like a mute by his side.

Lewis was too busy with his thoughts to speak at first. Nita's illness, and the mystery connected somehow with the Count, afforded food not only for meditation, but anxiety, and it was not until the town lay far behind them that he looked at his guide, and said:—

“The route over the Tete-Noire is very grand, I am told?”

“Very grand, Monsieur—magnificent!”

“You are well acquainted with it, doubtless?”

“Yes; I have passed over it hundreds of times. Does Monsieur intend to make a divergence to the Col de Balme?”

“No; I have urgent business on hand, and must push on to catch the railway. Would the divergence you speak of take up much time? Is the Col de Balme worth going out of one's way to see?”

“It is well worthy of a visit,” said the guide, replying to the last query first, “as you can there have a completely uninterrupted view— one of the very finest views of Mont Blanc, and all its surroundings. The time required for the divergence is little more than two hours; with Monsieur's walking powers perhaps not so much; besides, there is plenty of time, as we shall reach Martigny much too soon for the train.”

“In that case we shall make the detour,” said Lewis. “Are the roads difficult?”

“No; quite easy. It is well that Monsieur dispensed with a mule, as we shall be more independent; and a mule is not so quick in its progress as an active man.”

While they chatted thus, walking at a quick pace up the valley, Antoine, observing that his young charge was now in a conversational frame of mind, commented on the magnificent scenery, and drew attention to points of interest as they came into view.

Their route at first lay in the low ground by the banks of the river Arve, which rushed along, wild and muddy, as if rejoicing in its escape from the superincumbent glaciers that gave it birth. The great peaks of the Mont Blanc range hemmed them in on the right, the slopes of the Brevent on the left. Passing the village of Argentiere with rapid strides, and pausing but a few moments to look at the vast glacier of the same name which pours into the

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valley the ice-floods gendered among the heights around the Aiguille Verte and the Aiguille du Chardonnet, which rise respectively to a height of above 13,400 and 12,500 feet they reached the point where the Tete-Noire route diverged to the left at that time, in the form of a mere bridle-path, and pushed forward towards the Col, or pass.

On the way, Antoine pointed out heaps of slabs of black slate. These, he said, were collected by the peasants, who, in spring, covered their snow-clad fields with them; the sun, heating the slabs, caused the snow beneath to melt rapidly; and thus, by a very simple touch of art, they managed to wrest from Nature several weeks that would otherwise have been lost!

As they rose into the higher grounds, heaps and rude pillars of stone were observed. These were the landmarks which guided travellers through that region when it was clad in its wintry robe of deep snow, and all paths obliterated.

At last they stood on the Col de Balme. There was a solitary inn there, but Antoine turned aside from it and led his companion a mile or so to one side, to a white stone, which marked the boundary between Switzerland and France.

It is vain to attempt in words a description of scenes of grandeur. Ink, at the best, is impotent in such matters; even paint fails to give an adequate idea. We can do no more than run over a list of names. From this commanding point of view Mont Blanc is visible in all his majesty—vast, boundless, solemn, incomprehensible—with his Aiguilles de Tour, d'Argentiere, Verte, du Dru, de Charmoz, du Midi, etc., around him; his white head in the clouds, his glacial drapery rolling into the vale of Chamouni, his rocks and his pine-clad slopes toned down by distance into fine shadows. On the other side of the vale rise the steeps of the Aiguilles Rouges and the Brevent. To the north towers the Croix de Fer, and to the north-east is seen the entire chain of the Bernese Alps, rising like a mighty white leviathan, with a bristling back of pinnacles.

Splendid though the view was, however, Lewis did not for a moment forget his mission. Allowing himself only a few minutes to drink it in, he hastened back to the Tete-Noire path, and soon found himself traversing a widely different scene. On the Col he had, as it were, stood aloof, and looked abroad on a vast and glorious region; now, he was involved in its rocky, ridgy, woody details. Here and there long vistas opened up to view, but, for the most part, his vision was circumscribed by towering cliffs and deep ravines. Sometimes he was down in the bottom of mountain valleys, at other times walking on ledges so high on the precipice-faces, that cottages in the vales below seemed little bigger than sheep. Now the country was wooded and soft; anon it was barren and rocky, but never tame or uninteresting.

At one place, where the narrow gorge was strewn with huge boulders, Antoine pointed out a spot where two Swiss youths had been overwhelmed by an avalanche. It had come down from the red gorges of the Aiguilles Rouges, at a spot where the vale, or pass, was comparatively wide. Perhaps its width had induced the hapless lads to believe themselves quite safe from anything descending on the other side of the valley. If so, they were mistaken; the dreadful rush of rock and wrack swept the entire plain, and buried them in the ruin.

Towards evening the travellers reached Martigny in good time for the train, which speedily conveyed them to Saxon.

This town is the only one in Switzerland—the only one, indeed, in Europe with the exception of Monaco—which possesses that great blight on civilisation, a public gambling-table. That the blight is an unusually terrible one may be assumed from the fact that every civilised European nation has found it absolutely necessary to put such places down with a strong hand.

At the time Lewis Stoutley visited the town, however, it was not so singular in its infamy as it now is. He was ignorant of everything about the place save its name. Going straight to the first hotel that presented itself, he inquired for the Count Horetzki. The Count he was told, did not reside there; perhaps he was at the Casino.

To the Casino Lewis went at once. It was an elegant Swiss building, the promenade of which was crowded with visitors. The strains of music fell sweetly on the youth's ear as he approached.

Leaving Antoine outside, he entered, and repeated his inquiries for the Count.

They did not know the Count, was the reply, but if Monsieur would enter the rooms perhaps he might find him.

Lewis, remembering the expressed desire of Nita, hesitated, but as no one seemed inclined to attend to his inquiries, beyond a civil reply that nothing was known about the Count he entered, not a little surprised at the

difficulty thrown in his way.

The appearance of the salon into which he was ushered at once explained the difficulty, and at the same time sent a sudden gleam of light into his mind. Crowds of ladies and gentlemen—some eager, some anxious, others flippant or dogged, and a good many quite calm and cool—surrounded the brilliantly-lighted gaming tables. Every one seemed to mind only his own business, and each man's business may be said to have been the fleecing of his neighbour to the utmost of his power—not by means of skill or wisdom, but by means of mere chance, and through the medium of professional gamblers and rouge-et-noir.

With a strange fluttering at his heart, for he remembered his own weakness, Lewis hurried forward and glanced quickly at the players. Almost the first face he saw was that of the Count. But what a changed countenance! Instead of the usual placid smile, and good-humoured though sad expression about the eyes, there was a terrible look of intense fixed anxiety, with deep-knotted lines on his brow, and a horribly drawn look about the mouth.

“Make your play, gentlemen,” said the presiding genius of the tables, as he spun round the board on the action of which so much depended.

The Count had already laid his stake on the table, and clutched his rake with such violence as almost to snap the handle.

Other players had also placed their stakes, some with cool calculating precision, a few with nervous uncertainty, many with apparent indifference. With the exception of the Count and a lady near him, however, there was little of what might indicate very strong feeling on any countenance. One young and pretty girl, after placing her little pile of silver, stood awaiting the result with calm indifference—possibly assumed. Whatever might be the thoughts or feelings of the players, there was nothing but business-like gravity stamped on the countenances of the four men who presided over the revolving board, each with neatly-arranged rows of silver five-franc pieces in front of him, and a wooden rake lying ready to hand. Each player also had a rake, with which he or she pushed the coins staked upon a certain space of the table, or on one of the dividing lines, which gave at least a varied, if not a better, chance.

The process of play was short and sharp. For a few seconds the board spun, the players continuing to place, or increase, or modify the arrangement of the stakes up to nearly the last moment. As the board revolved more slowly a pea fell into a hole—red or black—and upon this the fate of each hung. A notable event, truly, on which untold millions of money have changed hands, innumerable lives have been sacrificed, and unspeakable misery and crime produced in days gone by!

The decision of the pea—if we may so express it—was quietly stated, and to an ignorant spectator it seemed as if the guardians of the table raked all the stakes into their own maws. But here and there, like white rocks in a dark sea, several little piles were left untouched. To the owners of these a number of silver pieces were tossed—tossed so deftly that we might almost say it rained silver on those regions of the table. No wizard of legerdemain ever equalled the sleight of hand with which these men pitched, reckoned, manipulated, and raked in silver pieces!

The Count's pile remained untouched, and a bright flush suffused his hitherto pale cheeks while the silver rain was falling on his square, but to the surprise of Lewis, he did not rake it towards him as did the others. He left the increased amount on exactly the same spot, merely drawing it gently together with his rake. As he did so the knotted haggard look returned to his once again bloodless brow and face. Not less precise and silent were his companions. The board again spun round; the inexorable pea fell; the raking and raining were repeated, and again the Count's stake lay glittering before him. His eyes glittered even more brightly than the silver. Lewis concluded that he must have been brought down to desperate poverty, and meant to recover himself by desperate means, for he left the whole stake again on the same spot.

This time the pea fell into black. The colour was symbolic of the Count's feelings, for next moment the silver heap was raked from before him, along with other heaps, as if nothing unusual had happened; and, in truth, nothing had. Wholesale ruin and robbery was the daily occupation there!

For a few seconds the Count gazed at the blank space before him with an expression of stony unbelief; then springing suddenly to his feet, he spurned his chair from him and rushed from the room. So quick was the movement, that he had reached the door and passed out before Lewis could stop him.

Springing after him with a feeling of great alarm, the youth dashed across the entrance-hall, but turned in the

wrong direction. Being put right by a porter, he leaped through the doorway and looked for Antoine, who, he knew, must have seen the Count pass, but Antoine was not there.

As he quickly questioned one who stood near, he thought he saw a man running among the adjacent shrubbery. He could not be sure, the night being dark, but he promptly ran after him. On dashing round a turn in the gravel-walk, he found two men engaged in what appeared to be a deadly struggle. Suddenly the place was illumined by a red flash, a loud report followed, and one of the two fell.

"Ah! Monsieur," exclaimed Antoine, as Lewis came forward, "aid me here; he is not hurt, I think."

"Hurt! Do you mean that he tried to shoot himself?"

"He had not time to try, but I'm quite sure that he meant to," said Antoine; "so I ran after him and caught his hand. The pistol exploded in the struggle."

As the guide spoke, the Count rose slowly. The star-light was faint, but it sufficed to show that the stony look of despair was gone, and that the gentle expression, natural to him, had returned. He was deadly pale, and bowed his head as one overwhelmed with shame.

"Oh pardon, Monsieur!" exclaimed poor Antoine, as he thought of the roughness with which he had been compelled to treat him. "I did not mean to throw you."

"You did not throw me, friend. I tripped and fell," replied the Count, in a low, husky voice. "Mr. Stoutley," he added, turning to Lewis, "by what mischance you came here I know not but I trust that you were not—were not—present. I mean—do you know the cause of my conduct—this—"

He stopped abruptly.

"My dear sir," said Lewis, in a low, kind voice, at the same time grasping the Count's hand, and leading him aside, "I was in the rooms; I saw you there; but believe me when I assure you, that no feeling but that of sympathy can touch the heart of one who has been involved in the meshes of the same net."

The Count's manner changed instantly. He returned the grasp of the young man, and looked eagerly in his face, as he repeated—

"HAS been involved! How, then, did you escape?"

"I'm not sure that I HAVE escaped," answered Lewis, sadly.

"Not sure! Oh, young man, MAKE sure. Give no rest to your soul till you are quite sure. It is a dreadful net—terrible! When once wrapped tightly round one there is no escape—no escape. In this it resembles its sister passion—the love of strong drink."

The Count spoke with such deep pathos, and in tones so utterly hopeless, that Lewis's ready sympathies were touched, and he would have given anything to be able to comfort his friend, but never before having been called upon to act as a comforter, he felt sorely perplexed.

"Call it not a passion," he said. "The love of gaming, as of drink, is a disease; and a disease may be cured—has been cured, even when desperate."

The Count shook his head.

"You speak in ignorance, Mr. Stoutley. You know nothing of the struggles I have made. It is impossible."

"With God ALL things are possible," replied Lewis, quoting, almost to his own surprise, a text of Scripture. "But forgive my delay," he added; "I came here on purpose to look for you. Your daughter Nita is ill—not seriously ill, I believe," he said, on observing the Count's startled look, "but ill enough to warrant your being sent for."

"I know—I know," cried the Count, with a troubled look, as he passed his hand across his brow. "I might have expected it. She cannot sustain the misery I have brought on her. Oh! why was I prevented from freeing her from such a father. Is she very ill? Did she send for me? Did she tell you what I am?"

The excited manner and wild aspect of the gambler, more than the words, told of a mind almost, if not altogether, unhinged. Observing this with some anxiety, Lewis tried to soothe him. While leading him to an hotel, he explained the nature of Nita's attack as well as he could, and said that she had not only refrained from saying anything about her father, but that she seemed excessively unwilling to reveal the name of the place to which he had gone, or to send for him.

"No one knows anything unfavourable about Count Horetzki," said Lewis, in a gentle tone, "save his fellow-sinner, who now assures him of his sincere regard. As for Antoine Grennon, he is a wise, and can be a silent, man. No brother could be more tender of the feelings of others than he. Come, you will consent to be my

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guest to-night. You are unwell; I shall be your amateur physician. My treatment and a night of rest will put you all right, and to-morrow, by break of day, we will hie back to Chamouni over the Tete-Noire.”

Chapter XIX. MOUNTAINEERING IN GENERAL.

A week passed away, during which Nita was confined to bed, and the Count waited on her with the most tender solicitude. As their meals were sent to their rooms, it was not necessary for the latter to appear in the SALLE-A-MANGER or the SALON. He kept himself carefully out of sight, and intelligence of the invalid's progress was carried to their friends by Susan Quick, who was allowed to remain as sick-nurse, and who rejoiced in filling that office to one so amiable and uncomplaining as Nita.

Of course, Lewis was almost irresistibly tempted to talk with Susan about her charge, but he felt the impropriety of such a proceeding, and refrained. Not so Gillie White. That sapient blue spider, sitting in his wonted chair, resplendent with brass buttons and brazen impudence, availed himself of every opportunity to perform an operation which he styled "pumping;" but Susan, although ready enough to converse freely on things in general, was judicious in regard to things particular. Whatever might have passed in the sick-room, the pumping only brought up such facts as that the Count was a splendid nurse as well as a loving father, and that he and his daughter were tenderly attached to each other.

"Well, Susan," observed Gillie, with an approving nod, "I'm glad to hear wot you say, for it's my b'lief that tender attachments is the right sort o' thing. I've got one or two myself."

"Indeed!" said Susan, "who for, I wonder?"

"W'y, for one," replied the spider, "I've had a wery tender attachment to my mother ever since that blessed time w'en I was attached to her buzzum in the rampagin' hunger of infancy. Then I've got another attachment—not quite so old, but wery strong, oh uncommon powerful—for a young lady named Susan Quick. D'you happen to know her?"

"Oh, Gillie, you're a sad boy," said Susan.

"Well, I make a pint never to contradict a 'ooman, believin' it to be dangerous," returned Gillie, "but I can't say that I FEEL sad. I'm raither jolly than otherwise."

A summons from the sick-room cut short the conversation.

During the week in question it had rained a good deal, compelling the visitors at Chamouni to pass the time in-doors with books, billiards, draughts, and chess. Towards the end of the week Lewis met the Count and discovered that he was absolutely destitute of funds—did not, in fact possess enough to defray the hotel expenses.

"Mother," said Lewis, during a private audience in her bed-chamber the same evening, "I want twenty pounds from you."

"Certainly, my boy; but why do you come to me? You know that Dr. Lawrence has charge of and manages my money. How I wish there were no such thing as money, and no need for it!"

Mrs. Stoutley finished her remark with her usual languid smile and pathetic sigh, but if her physician, Dr. Tough, had been there, he would probably have noted that mountain-air had robbed the smile of half its languor, and the sigh of nearly all its pathos. There was something like seriousness, too, in the good lady's eye. She had been impressed more than she chose to admit by the sudden death of Le Croix, whom she had frequently seen, and whose stalwart frame and grave countenance she had greatly admired. Besides this, one or two accidents had occurred since her arrival in the Swiss valley; for there never passes a season without the occurrence of accidents more or less serious in the Alps. On one occasion the news had been brought that a young lady, recently married, whose good looks had been the subject of remark more than once, was killed by falling rocks before her husband's eyes. On another occasion the spirits of the tourists were clouded by the report that a guide had fallen into a crevasse, and, though not killed, was much injured. Mrs. Stoutley chanced to meet the rescue-party returning slowly to the village, with the poor shattered frame of the fine young fellow on a stretcher. It is one thing to read of such events in the newspapers. It is another and a very different thing to be near or to witness them—to be in the actual presence of physical and mental agony. Antoine Grennon, too, had made a favourable impression on Mrs. Stoutley; and when, in passing one day his extremely humble cottage, she was invited by Antoine's exceedingly pretty wife to enter and partake of bread and milk largely impregnated with cream, which was handed to her by Antoine's excessively sweet blue-eyed daughter, the lady who had hitherto spent her life among the bright ice-pinnacles of society, was forced to admit to Emma Gray that Dr. Tough was right when he said

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there were some beautiful and precious stones to be found among the moraines of social life.

“I know that Lawrence keeps the purse,” said Lewis, “but I want your special permission to take this money, because I intend to give it away.”

“Twenty pounds is a pretty large gift, Lewis,” said his mother, raising her eyebrows. “Who is it that has touched the springs of your liberality? Not the family of poor Le Croix?”

“No; Le Croix happily leaves no family. He was an unmarried man. I must not tell you, just yet, mother. Trust me, it shall be well bestowed; besides, I ask it as a loan. It shall be refunded.”

“Don't talk of refunding money to your mother, foolish boy. Go; you may have it.”

Lewis kissed his mother's cheek and thanked her. He quickly found the Count, but experienced considerable difficulty in persuading him to accept the money. However, by delicacy of management and by assuming, as a matter of course, that it was a loan, to be repaid when convenient, he prevailed. The Count made an entry of the loan in his notebook, with Lewis's London address, and they parted with a kindly shake of the hand, little imagining that they had seen each other on earth for the last time.

On the Monday following, a superb day opened on the vale of Chamouni, such a day as, through the medium of sight and scent, is calculated to gladden the heart of man and beast. That the beasts enjoyed it was manifest from the pleasant sounds that they sent, gushing, like a hymn of thanksgiving—and who shall say it was not!—into the bright blue sky.

Birds carolled on the shrubs and in the air; cats ventured abroad with hair erect and backs curved, to exchange greetings with each other in wary defiance of dogs; kittens sprawled in the sunshine, and made frantic efforts to achieve the impossible feat of catching their own shadows, varying the pastime with more successful, though arduous, attempts at their own tails; dogs bounded and danced, chiefly on their hind legs, round their loved companion man (including woman); juvenile dogs chased, tumbled over, barked at, and gnawed each other with amiable fury, wagging their various tails with a vigour that suggested a desire to shake them off; tourist men and boys moved about with a decision that indicated the having of particular business on hand; tourist women and girls were busily engaged with baskets and botanical boxes, or flitted hither and thither in climbing costume with obtrusive alpenstocks, as though a general attack on Mont Blanc and all his satellite aiguilles were meditated.

Among these were our friends the Professor, Captain Wopper, Emma Gray, Slingsby, Lewis, and Lawrence, under the guidance of Antoine Grennon.

Strange to say they were all a little dull, notwithstanding the beauty of the weather, and the pleasant anticipation of a day on the hills—not a hard, toilsome day, with some awful Alpine summit as its aim, but what Lewis termed a jolly day, a picnicky day, to be extended into night, and to include any place, or to be cut short or extended according to whim.

The Professor was dull, because, having to leave, this was to be his last excursion; Captain Wopper was dull, because his cherished matrimonial hopes were being gradually dissipated. He could not perceive that Lawrence was falling in love with Emma, or Emma with Lawrence. The utmost exertion of sly diplomacy of which he was capable, short of straightforward advice, had failed to accomplish anything towards the desirable end. Emma was dull, because her friend Nita, although recovering, was still far from well. Slingsby was dull for the same reason, and also because he felt his passion to be hopeless. Lewis was dull because he knew Nita's circumstances to be so very sad; and Lawrence was dull because—well, we are not quite sure why HE was dull. He was rather a self-contained fellow, and couldn't be easily understood. Of the whole party, Antoine alone was NOT dull. Nothing could put him in that condition, but, seeing that the others were so, he was grave, quiet attentive.

Some of the excursionists had left at a much earlier hour. Four strapping youths, with guides, had set out for the summit of Mont Blanc; a mingled party of ladies, gentlemen, guides, and mules, were on the point of starting to visit the Mer de Glace; a delicate student, unable for long excursions, was preparing to visit with his sister, the Glacier des Bossons. Others were going, or had gone, to the source of the Arveiron, and to the Brevent, while the British peer, having previously been conducted by a new and needlessly difficult path to the top of Monte Rosa, was led off by his persecutor to attempt, by an impossible route, to scale the Matterhorn—to reach the main-truck, as Captain Wopper put it, by going down the stern-post along the keel, over the bobstay, up the flyin' jib, across the foretopmast-stay, and up the maintop-gallant halyards. This at least was Lewis Stoutley's report of the Captain's remark. We cannot answer for its correctness.

But nothing can withstand the sweet influences of fresh mountain-air and sunshine. In a short time “dull care”

was put to flight and when our party—Emma being on a mule—reached the neighbouring heights, past and future were largely forgotten in the enjoyment of the present.

Besides being sunny and bright, the day was rather cool, so that, after dismissing the mule, and taking to the glaciers and ice-slope, the air was found to be eminently suitable for walking.

"It's a bad look-out," murmured Captain Wopper, when he observed that Dr. Lawrence turned deliberately to converse with the Professor, leaving Lewis to assist Emma to alight, even although he, the Captain, had, by means of laboured contrivance and vast sagacity, brought the Doctor and the mule into close juxtaposition at the right time. However, the Captain's temperament was sanguine. He soon forgot his troubles in observing the curious position assumed by Slingsby on the first steep slope of rocky ground they had to descend, for descents as well as ascents were frequent at first.

The artist walked on all-fours, but with his back to the hill instead of his face, his feet thus being in advance.

"What sort of an outside-in fashion is that, Slingsby?" asked the Captain, when they had reached the bottom.

"It's a way I have of relieving my knees," said Slingsby; "try it."

"Thank 'ee; no," returned the Captain. "It don't suit my peccoliar build; it would throw too much of my weight amidships."

"You've no idea," said Slingsby, "what a comfort it is to a man whose knees suffer in descending. I'd rather go up twenty mountains than descend one. This plan answers only on steep places, and is but a temporary relief. Still that is something at the end of a long day."

The artist exemplified his plan at the next slope. The Captain tried it, but, as he expressed it, broke in two at the waist and rolled down the slope, to the unspeakable delight of his friends.

"I fear you will find this rather severe?" said the Professor to Emma, during a pause in a steep ascent.

"Oh no; I am remarkably strong," replied Emma, smiling. "I was in Switzerland two years ago, and am quite accustomed to mountaineering."

"Yes," remarked Lawrence, "and Miss Gray on that occasion, I am told, ascended to the top of the Dent du Midi, which you know is between ten and eleven thousand feet high; and she also, during the same season, walked from Champery to Sixt which is a good day's journey, so we need have no anxiety on her account."

Although the Doctor smiled as he spoke, he also glanced at Emma with a look of admiration. Captain Wopper noted the glance and was comforted. At luncheon, however, the Doctor seated himself so that the Professor's bulky person came between him and Emma. The Captain noted that also, and was depressed. What between elation and depression, mingled with fatigue and victuals, the Captain ultimately became recklessly jovial.

"What are yonder curious things?" asked Emma, pointing to some gigantic objects which looked at a distance like rude pillars carved by man.

"These," said the Professor, "are Nature's handiwork. You will observe that on each pillar rests a rugged capital. The capital is the cause of the pillar. It is a hard rock which originally rested on a softer bed of friable stone. The weather has worn away the soft bed, except where it has been protected by the hard stone, and thus a natural pillar has arisen—just like the ice-pillars, which are protected from the sun in the same way; only the latter are more evanescent."

Further on, the Professor drew the attention of his friends to the beautiful blue colour of the holes which their alpenstocks made in the snow. "Once," said he, "while walking on the heights of Monte Rosa, I observed this effect with great interest, and, while engaged in the investigation of the cause, got a surprise which was not altogether agreeable. Some of the paths there are on very narrow ridges, and the snow on these ridges often overhangs them. I chanced to be walking in advance of my guide at the time to which I refer, and amused myself as I went along by driving my alpenstock deep into the snow, when suddenly, to my amazement I sent the end of the staff right through the snow, and, on withdrawing it, looked down into space! I had actually walked over the ridge altogether, and was standing above an abyss some thousands of feet deep!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Emma. "You jumped off pretty quickly, I dare say."

"Nay, I walked off with extreme caution; but I confess to having felt a sort of cold shudder with which my frame had not been acquainted previously."

While they were thus conversing, a cloud passed overhead and sent down a slight shower of snow. To most of the party this was a matter of indifference, but the man of science soon changed their feelings by drawing attention to the form of the flakes. He carried a magnifying glass with him, which enabled him to show their

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wonders more distinctly. It was like a shower of frozen flowers of the most delicate and exquisite kind. Each flake was a flower with six leaves. Some of the leaves threw out lateral spines or points, like ferns, some were rounded, others arrowy, reticulated, and serrated; but, although varied in many respects, there was no variation in the number of leaves.

“What amazin' beauty in a snowflake,” exclaimed the Captain, “many a one I've seen without knowin' how splendid it was.”

“The works of God are indeed wonderful,” said the Professor, “but they must be `sought out'—examined with care—to be fully understood and appreciated.”

“Yet there are certain philosophers,” observed Lewis, “who hold that the evidence of design here and elsewhere does not at all prove the existence of God. They say that the crystals of these snow-flakes are drawn together and arrange themselves by means of natural forces.”

“They say truly,” replied the Professor, “but they seem to me to stop short in their reasoning. They appear to ignore the fact that this elemental original force of which they speak must have had a Creator. However far they may go back into mysterious and incomprehensible elements, which they choose to call `blind forces,' they do not escape the fact that matter cannot have created itself; that behind their utmost conceptions there must still be One non-created, eternal, living Being who created all, who upholds all, and whom we call God.”

Descending again from the heights in order to cross a valley and gain the opposite mountain, our rambles quitted the glacier, and, about noon, found themselves close to a lovely pine-clad knoll, the shaded slopes of which commanded an unusually fine view of rocky cliff and fringing wood, with a background of glacier and snow-flecked pinnacles.

Halting, accidentally in a row, before this spot they looked at it with interest. Suddenly the Professor stepped in front of the others, and, pointing to the knoll, said, with twinkling eyes—

“What does it suggest? Come, dux (to Slingsby, who happened to stand at the head of the line), tell me, sir, what does it suggest?”

“I know, sir!” exclaimed the Captain, who stood at the dunce's extremity of the line, holding out his fist with true schoolboy eagerness.

“It suggests,” said the artist, rolling his eyes, “a thing of beauty; and—”

“Next!” interrupted the Professor, pointing to Lawrence.

“I know, sir,” shouted the Captain.

“Hold your tongue, sir!”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“It is suggestive,” said Lawrence, “of an oasis in the desert.”

“Very poor, sir,” said the Professor, severely. “Next.”

“It suggests a cool shade on a hot day,” said Emma.

“Better, but not right. Next.”

“Please, sir, I'd rather not answer,” said Lewis, putting his forefinger in his mouth.

“You must, sir.”

“I know, sir,” interrupted Captain Wopper, shaking his fist eagerly.

“Silence, you booby!—Well, boy, what does it suggest to YOU?”

“Please, sir,” answered Lewis, “it suggests the mole on your professorial cheek.”

“Sir,” cried the Professor, sternly, “remind me to give you a severe caning to-night.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, booby, what have YOU got to say to it?”

“Wittles!” shouted the Captain.

“Right,” cried the Professor, “only it would have been better expressed had you said—Luncheon. Go up, sir; put yourself at the head of the class, and lead it to a scene of glorious festivity.”

Thus instructed, the Captain put himself at the head of the line.

“Now, then, Captain,” said Lewis, “let's have a true-blue nautical word of command—hoist yer main tops'l sky-scrapers abaft the cleat o'-the-spanker-boom, heave-the-main-deck-overboard-and-let-go-the-painter—or something o' that soft.”

“Hold on to the painter, you mean,” said Slingsby.

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“You're both wrong,” cried the Captain, “my orders are those of the immortal Nelson—`Close action, my lads—England expects every man to' —hooray!”

With a wild cheer, and waving his hat, the seaman rushed up the side of the knoll, followed by his obedient and willing crew.

In order to render the feast more complete, several members of the party had brought small private supplies to supplement the cold mutton, ham, bread, and light claret which Antoine and two porters had carried in their knapsacks. Captain Wopper had brought a supply of variously coloured abominations known in England by the name of comfits, in Scotland as sweeties. These, mixed with snow and water, he styled “iced-lemonade.” Emma tried the mixture and declared it excellent, which caused someone to remark that the expression of her face contradicted her tongue. Lewis produced a small flask full of a rich dark port-winey liquid, which he said he had brought because it had formerly been one of the most delightful beverages of his childish years. It was tasted with interest and rejected with horror, being liquorice water! Emma produced a bottle of milk, in the consumption of which she was ably assisted by the Professor, who declared that his natural spirits required no artificial stimulants. The Professor himself had not been forgetful of the general good. He had brought with him a complex copper implement, which his friends had supposed was a new species of theodolite, but which turned out to be a scientific coffee-pot, in the development of which and its purposes, as the man of science carefully explained, there was called into play some of the principles involved in the sciences of hydraulics and pneumatics, to which list Lewis added, in an under-tone, those of aquatics, ecstasies, and rheumatics. The machine was perfect, but the Professor's natural turn for practical mechanics not being equal to his knowledge of other branches of science, he failed properly to adjust a screw. This resulted in an explosion of the pot which blew its lid, as Lewis expressed it, into the north of Italy, and its contents into the fire. A second effort, using the remains of the scientific pot as an ordinary kettle, was more successful.

“You see, my friends,” said the Professor, apologetically, “it is one of the prerogatives of science that her progress cannot be hindered. Her resources and appliances are inexhaustible. When one style of experiment fails we turn at once to another and obtain our result, as I now prove to you by handing this cup of coffee to Miss Gray. You had better not sweeten it, Mademoiselle. It is quite unnecessary to make the very trite observation that in your case no sugar is required. Yes, the progress of science is slow, but it is sure. Everything must fall before it in time.”

“Ah, just so—`one down, another come on,'—that's your motto, ain't it?” said Captain Wopper, who invariably, during the meal, delivered his remarks from a cavern filled with a compound of mutton, bread, and ham. “But I say, Professor, are you spliced?”

“Spliced?” echoed the man of science.

“Ay; married, I mean.”

“Yes, I am wed,” he replied, with enthusiasm. “I have a beautiful wife in Russia, and she is good as beautiful.”

“In Roosia—eh! Well, it's a longish way off, but I'd advise you, as a friend, not to let her know that you pay such wallop'n' compliments to young English ladies. It might disagree with her, d'ye see?”

At this point the conversation and festivities were interrupted by Slingsby, who, having gone off to sketch, had seated himself on a mound within sight of his friends, in a position so doubled up and ridiculous as to call forth the remark from Lawrence, that few traits of character were more admirable and interesting than those which illustrated the utter disregard of personal appearance in true and enthusiastic devotees of art. To which Captain Wopper added that “he was a rum lot an' no mistake.”

The devotee was seen by the revellers to start once or twice and clap his hands to various pockets, as though he had forgotten his india-rubber or pen-knife. Then he was observed to drop his sketching-book and hastily slap all his pockets, as if he had forgotten fifty pieces of india-rubber and innumerable pen-knives. Finally, he sprang up and slapped himself all over wildly, yelling at the same time as if he had been a maniac.

He had inadvertently selected an ant-hill as his seat, that was all; but that was sufficient to check his devotion to art, and necessitate his retirement to a rocky defile, where he devoted himself to the study of “the nude” in his own person, and whence he returned looking imbecile and hot.

Such CONTRETEMPS, however, do not materially affect the health or spirits of the young and strong. Ere long Slingsby was following his companions with his wonted enthusiasm and devotee-like admiration of Nature

in all her varying aspects.

His enthusiasm was, however, diverted from the study of vegetable and mineral, if we may so put it, to that of animal nature, for one of the porters, who had a tendency to go poking his staff into holes and crannies of the rocks, suddenly touched a marmot. He dropped his pack and began at once to dig up earth and stones as fast as possible, assisted by his comrades; but the little creature was too sagacious for them. They came to its bed at last, and found that, while they had been busy at one end of the hole, the marmot had quietly walked out at the other, and made off.

Having pushed over the valley, and once more ascended to the regions of perpetual ice, the rambles determined to “attack”—as the phrase goes among Alpine climbers—a neighbouring summit. It was not a very high one, and Emma declared that she was not only quite able, but very anxious, to attempt it. The attempt was, therefore, made, and, after a couple of hours of pretty laborious work, accomplished. They found themselves on a pinnacle which overlooked a large portion of the ice-world around Mont Blanc. While standing there, one or two avalanches were observed, and the Professor pointed out that avalanches were not all of one character. Some, he said, were composed of rock, mud, and water; others entirely of ice; many of them were composed of these elements mixed, and others were entirely of snow.

“True, Monsieur,” observed the guide, “and the last kind is sometimes very fatal. There was one from which my wife and child had a narrow escape. They were visiting at the time a near relation who dwelt in a village in a valley not far distant from this spot. Behind the village there is a steep slope covered with pines; behind that the mountain rises still more steeply. The little forest stands between that village and destruction. But for it, avalanches would soon sweep the village away; but wood is not always a sure protector. Sometimes, when frost renders the snow crisp and dry, the trees fail to check its descent. It was so on the last night of my wife's visit. A brother was about to set off with her from the door of our relative's house, when the snow began to descend through the trees like water. It was like dry flour. There was not much noise, merely a hissing sound, but it came down in a deluge, filled all the houses, and suffocated nearly all the people in them. My brother-in-law saw it in time. He put his horse to full speed, and brought my dear wife and child away in safety, but his own father, mother, and sister were lost. We tried to reach their house the next day, but could advance through the soft snow only by taking two planks with us, and placing one before the other as we went along.”

Soon after the rambles had begun their return journey, they came to a slope which they thought might be descended by sliding or “glissading.” It was the first time that Emma had seen such work, and she felt much inclined to try it, but was dissuaded by Antoine, who led her round by an easier way. At the foot of the slope they came to a couloir, or sloping gorge, so steep that snow could not lie on it. Its surface was, therefore, hard ice. Although passable, Antoine deemed it prudent not to cross, the more so that he observed some ominous obelisks of ice impending at the top of the slope.

“Why not cross and let Emma see how we manage by cutting steps in the ice?” said Lewis.

He received a conclusive though unexpected answer from one of the obelisks above-mentioned, which fell at the moment, broke into fragments, and swept the couloir from top to bottom with incredible violence.

It is wonderful what a deal of experience is required to make foolish people wise! Within the next ten minutes this warning was forgotten, and Lewis led his cousin into a danger which almost cost the lives of three of the party.

Chapter XX. RECORDS A SERIOUS EVENT.

Our ramblers had now reached a place where a great expanse of rock surface was exposed, and the temptation to dilate on the action of glaciers proved too strong for the Professor. He therefore led those who were willing to follow to a suitable spot and pointed out the striations, flutings, and polishings of the granite, which showed that in former ages the glacier had passed there, although at that time it was far below in the valley. The polishings, he said, were caused by the ice slowly grinding over the surface of the rock, and the flutings and groovings were caused, not by the ice itself, but by stones which were embedded in its under surface, and which cut the solid granite as if with chisels.

Meanwhile, Lewis and Emma, having taken the opportunity to search for plants, had wandered on a little in advance, and had come to another steep slope, which was, however, covered with snow at its upper part. Below, where it became steeper, there was no snow, only pure ice, which extended downwards to an immense distance, broken only here and there by a few rocks that cropped through its surface. It terminated in a rocky gorge, which was strewn thickly with DEBRIS from above.

“Let us cross this,” said Emma, with a look of glee, for she possessed an adventurous spirit.

“We'd better not,” answered Lewis. “The slope is very steep.”

“True, O cautious cousin,” retorted Emma, with a laugh, “but it is covered here with snow that is soft and probably knee-deep. Go on it, sir, and try.”

Thus commanded, Lewis obeyed, and found that the snow was indeed knee-deep, and that there was no possibility of their either slipping or falling, unless one were unusually careless, and even in that case the soft snow would have checked anything like an involuntary glissade.

“Let me go first,” said Lewis.

“Nay, I will go first,” returned Emma, “you will follow and pick me up if I should fall.”

So saying, she stepped lightly into the snow and advanced, while her companion stood looking at her with a half-amused, half-anxious smile.

She had not made six steps, and Lewis was on the point of following, when he observed that there was a crack across the snow just above where he stood, and the whole mass began to slide. For a moment he was transfixed with horror. The next he had sprung to his cousin's side and seized her arm, shouting—

“Emma! Emma! come back. Quick! It moves.” But poor Emma could not obey. She would as soon have expected the mountain itself to give way as the huge mass of snow on which she stood. At first its motion was slow, and Lewis struggled wildly to extricate her, but in vain, for the snow avalanche gathered speed as it advanced, and in its motion not only sank them to their waists, but turned them helplessly round, thus placing Lewis farthest from the firm land. He shouted now with all the power of his lungs for help, while Emma screamed from terror.

Lawrence chanced to be nearest to them. He saw at a glance what had occurred, and dashed down the hill-side at headlong speed. A wave was driving in front of the couple, who were now embedded nearly to their armpits, while streams of snow were hissing all round them, and the mass was beginning to rush. One look sufficed to show Lawrence that rescue from the side was impossible, but, with that swift power of perception which is aroused in some natures by the urgent call to act, he observed that some yards lower down—near the place where the ice-slope began—there was a rock near to the side in the track of the avalanche, which it divided. Leaping down to this, he sprang into the sliding flood a little above it, and, with a powerful effort, caught the rock and drew himself upon it. Next moment Emma was borne past out of reach of his hand. Lawrence rushed deep into the snow and held out his alpenstock. Emma caught it. He felt himself turned irresistibly round, and a sick feeling of despair chilled his life-blood. At the same moment a powerful hand grasped his collar.

“Hold on, Monsieur,” cried Antoine, in a deep, yet encouraging voice, “I've got you safe.”

As he spoke, Emma shrieked, “I cannot hold on!”

No wonder! She had not only to resist the rushing snow, but to sustain the drag of Lewis, who, as we have said, had been carried beyond his cousin, and whose only chance now lay in his retaining hold of her arm. Ere the words had quite left her lips, Lewis was seen deliberately to let go his hold and throw up his arm—it seemed as if

waving it.

Next moment Emma was dragged on the rock, where she and her companions stood gazing in horror as their companion was swept upon the ice-slope and carried down headlong. The snow was by this time whirled onward in a sort of mist or spray, in the midst of which Lewis was seen to strike a rock with his shoulder and swing violently round, while parts of his clothing were plainly rent from his body, but the painful sight did not last long. A few seconds more and he was hurled, apparently a lifeless form, among the DEBRIS and rocks far below.

Death, in such a case, might have been expected to be instantaneous, but the very element that caused the poor youth's fall, helped to save him. During the struggle for life while clinging to Emma's arm, the check, brief though it was, sufficed to allow most of the snow to pass down before him, so that he finally fell on a comparatively soft bed; but it was clear that he had been terribly injured, and, what made matters worse, he had fallen into a deep gorge surrounded by precipices, which seemed to some of the party to render it quite impossible to reach him.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Lawrence, with intense anxiety. "He must be got at immediately. Delay of treatment in his case, even for a short time, may prove fatal."

"I know it, Monsieur," said Antoine, who had been quietly but quickly uncoiling his rope. "One of the porters and I will descend by the precipices. They are too steep for any but well-accustomed hands and feet. You, Monsieur, understand pretty well the use of the axe and rope. Cut your way down the ice-slope with Jacques. He is a steady man, and may be trusted. Run, Rollo (to the third porter), and fetch aid from Gaspard's chalet. It is the nearest. I need not say make haste."

These orders were delivered in a low, rapid voice. The men proceeded at once to obey them. At the same time Antoine and his comrade swung themselves down the cliffs, and were instantly lost to view. The young porter, whom he had named Rollo, was already going down the mountain at a smart run, and Jacques was on the ice-slope wielding his axe with ceaseless energy and effect, while Lawrence held the rope to which he was attached, and descended the rude and giddy staircase behind him.

It was a terrible time for those who were left above in a state of inaction and deep anxiety, but there was no help for it. They had to content themselves with watching the rescue, and praying for success.

It was not long before the guide and porter reached the spot where poor Lewis lay. He was not insensible, but a deadly pallor overspread his scarred face, and the position in which he lay betokened utter helplessness. He could scarcely speak, but whispered that he fancied he was not so much hurt as might have been expected, and expressed wonder at their having been so long in reaching him.

The guide spoke to him with the tenderness of a woman. He knew well how severely the poor youth was injured, and handled him very delicately while making such preliminary arrangements as were in his power. A few drops of brandy and water were administered, the poor limbs were arranged in a position of greater comfort, and the torn rags of clothing wrapped round him.

Soon they were joined by Lawrence, who merely whispered a few kind words, and proceeded at once to examine him. His chief anxiety was as to the amount of skin that had been destroyed. The examination revealed a terrible and bloody spectacle; over which we will draw a veil; yet there was reason to believe that the amount of skin torn off and abraded was not sufficient to cause death. Lawrence was comforted also by finding that no bones appeared to have been broken.

Nothing could be done in the way of attempting a removal until the return of Rollo with a litter. Fortunately this was not long of being brought, for the young porter was active and willing, and Gaspard had promptly accompanied him with men and materials for the rescue.

But it was a sad, slow, and painful process, to bear the poor youth's frame from that savage gorge, and convey him on a litter, carried by four men, over glaciers and down rugged mountain sides, even although done by tender hearts and strong hands. Everything that ingenuity could contrive was done to relieve the sufferer, and when at last, after weary hours, they reached the high-road of the valley, a carriage was found waiting. A messenger had been sent in advance to fetch it, and Mrs. Stoutley was in it.

There was something quite touching in the quiet, firm air of self-restraint with which she met the procession, and afterwards tended her poor boy; it was so unlike her old character!

The sun was setting in a field of golden glory when they carried Lewis into the hotel at Chamouni, and laid him on his bed—a mere wreck of his former self.

Chapter XXI. DOWN IN THE MORAINÉ AT LAST.

As the reader may suppose, the terrible accident to Lewis Stoutley put an end to further merry-making among our friends at Chamouni. Mrs. Stoutley would have left for England at once if that had been possible, but Lewis could not be moved for several weeks. At first indeed, fears were entertained for his life, but his constitution being good, and not having been damaged by dissipation, he rallied sooner than might have been expected, although it was evident from the beginning that complete restoration could not be looked for until many months, perhaps years, had passed away.

We need scarcely say, that the rapid improvement of his health was largely due to the tender watchful care of his mother.

Since visiting Switzerland, that excellent lady's spirit had undergone a considerable change. Without going minutely into particulars, we may say that the startling events which had occurred had been made the means of opening her spiritual eyes. It had occurred to her—she scarce knew how or why—that her Creator had a claim on her for more consideration than she had been in the habit, heretofore, of testifying by a few formalities on Sundays; that there must be some higher end and aim in life than the mere obtaining and maintaining of health, and the pursuit of pleasure; and that as there was a Saviour, whom she professed on Sundays to follow, there must be something real from which she had to be saved, as well as something real that had to be done. Sin, she knew, of course, was the evil from which everybody had to be saved; but, being a good-natured and easy-going woman, she really did not feel much troubled by sin. Little weaknesses she had, no doubt, but not half so many as other people she knew of. As to anything seriously worthy the name of sin, she did not believe she had any at all. It had never, until now, occurred to her that the treating of her best Friend, during a lifetime, with cool and systematic indifference, or with mere protestations, on Sundays, of adoration, was probably as great a sin as she could commit.

Her thoughts on these points she did not at first mention to any one, but she received great help and enlightenment, as well as comfort, from the quiet sensible talk of Dr. Lawrence, as he sat day after day, and hour after hour, at the bedside of his friend, endeavouring to cheer his spirits as well as to relieve his physical pain—for Lawrence was well fitted to do both.

He was not by any means what is styled a sermoniser. He made no apparent effort to turn conversation into religious channels. Indeed we believe that when men talk with the unrestrained freedom of true friendship, conversation needs no directing. It will naturally flow along all channels, and into all the zigzags and crevices of human thought—religion included. Lewis was in great pain and serious danger. Lawrence was a man full of the Holy Spirit and love to Jesus. Out of the fullness of his heart his mouth spoke when his friend appeared to desire such converse; but he never bored him with ANY subject—for it is possible to be a profane, as well as a religious, bore!

As soon as Lewis could turn his mind to anything, after his being brought back to the hotel, he asked earnestly after Nita Horetzki.

“She has left,” said Mrs. Stoutley.

“Left! D'you mean gone from Chamouni, mother?” exclaimed Lewis, with a start and a look of anxiety which he did not care to conceal.

“Yes, they went yesterday. Nita had recovered sufficiently to travel, and the medical man who has been attending her urged her removal without delay. She and her father seemed both very sorry to leave us, and left kind messages for you. The Count wanted much to see you, but we would not allow it.”

“Kind messages for me,” repeated Lewis, in a tone of bitterness, “what sort of messages?”

“Well, really, I cannot exactly remember,” returned Mrs. Stoutley, with a slight smile, “the kind of messages that amiable people might be expected to leave in the circumstances, you know—regret that they should have to leave us in such a sad condition, and sincere hope that you might soon recover, etc. Yes, by the way, Nita also, just at parting, expressed a hope—an earnest hope—that we might meet again. Poor dear thing, she is an extremely affectionate girl, and quite broke down when saying good-bye.”

“D'you know where they have gone to, mother?”

Rivers of Ice

“No. They mean to move about from place to place, I believe.”

“Nita said nothing about writing to you, did she?”

“Did they leave any address—a POSTE RESTANTE—anywhere, or any clew whatever as to their whereabouts?”

“None whatever.”

So then, during the weary days of suffering that he knew full well lay before him, poor Lewis had no consolatory thought in regard to Nita save in her expressed “earnest hope” that they might meet again. It was not much, but it was better than nothing. Being an ingenious as well as daring architect, Lewis built amazing structures on that slight foundation—structures which charmed his mental eyes to look upon, and which, we verily believe, tended to facilitate his recovery—so potent is the power of true love!

“Captain Wopper,” said Mrs. Stoutley one morning, towards the end of their stay in Switzerland, Lewis having been pronounced sufficiently restored to travel homeward by easy stages, “I have sent for you to ask you to do me a favour—to give me your advice—your—”

Here, to the Captain's amazement, not to say consternation, Mrs. Stoutley's voice trembled, and she burst into tears. If she had suddenly caught him by the nose, pulled his rugged face down and kissed it, he could not have been more taken aback.

“My dear madam,” he stammered, sitting down inadvertently on Mrs. Stoutley's bonnet—for it was to the good lady's private dressing-room that he had been summoned by Gillie White—“hold on! don't now, please! What ever have I done to—”

“You've done nothing, my dear Captain,” said Mrs. Stoutley, endeavouring to check her tears. “There, I'm very foolish, but I can't help it. Indeed I can't.”

In proof of the truth of this assertion she broke down again, and the Captain, moving uneasily on his chair, ground the bonnet almost to powder—it was a straw one.

“You have been a kind friend, Captain Wopper,” said Mrs. Stoutley, drying her eyes, “a very kind friend.”

“I'm glad you think so, ma'am; I've meant to be—anyhow.”

“You have, you have,” cried Mrs. Stoutley, earnestly, as she looked through her tears into the seaman's rugged countenance, “and that is my reason for venturing to ask you now to trouble yourself with—with—”

There was an alarming symptom here of a recurrence of “squally weather,” which caused the Captain to give the bonnet an “extra turn,” but she recovered herself and went on—

“With my affairs. I would not have thought of troubling you, but with poor Lewie so ill, and Dr. Lawrence being so young, and probably inexperienced in the ways of life, and Emma so innocent and helpless, and—in short I'm—hee!—that is to say—ho dear! I AM so silly, but I can't—indeed I can't—hoo-o-o!”

It blew a regular gale now, and a very rain of straw DEBRIS fell through the cane-bottomed chair on which the Captain sat, as he vainly essayed to sooth his friend by earnest, pathetic, and even tender adjurations to “clap a stopper upon that,” to “hold hard,” to “belay”, to “shut down the dead-lights of her peepers,” and such-like expressive phrases.

At length, amid many sobs, the poor lady revealed the overwhelming fact that she was a beggar; that she had actually come down to her last franc; that her man of business had flatly declined to advance her another sovereign, informing her that the Gorong mine had declared “no dividend;” that the wreck of her shattered fortune had been swallowed up by the expenses of their ill-advised trip to Switzerland, and that she had not even funds enough to pay their travelling expenses home; in short that she was a miserable boulder, at the lowest level of the terminal moraine!

To all this Captain Wopper listened in perfect silence, with a blank expression on his face that revealed nothing of the state of feeling within.

“Oh! Captain Wopper,” exclaimed the poor lady anxiously, “surely— surely YOU won't forsake me! I know that I have no claim on you beyond friendship, but you have always given us to understand that you were well off, and I merely wish to BORROW a small sum. Just enough, and no more. Perhaps I may not be able to repay you just immediately, but I hope soon; and even if it came to the worst, there is the furniture in Euston Square, and the carriage and horses.”

Poor Mrs. Stoutley! She was not aware that her man of business had already had these resources appraised, and that they no more belonged to her at that moment than if they had been part of the personal estate of the

celebrated man in the moon.

Still the Captain gazed at her in stolid silence.

"Even my personal wardrobe," proceeded Mrs. Stoutley, beginning again to weep, "I will gladly dis—"

"Avast! Madam," cried the Captain, suddenly, thrusting his right hand into his breeches-pocket, and endeavouring to drag something therefrom with a series of wrenches that would have been terribly trying to the bonnet, had its ruin not been already complete, "don't talk to me of repayment. Ain't I your—your—husband's brother's buzzum friend—Willum's old chum an' messmate? See here."

He jerked the chair (without rising) close to a table which stood at his elbow, and placed thereon a large canvas bag, much soiled, and tied round the neck with a piece of rope-yarn, which smelt of tar even at a distance. This was the Captain's purse. He carried it always in his right trouser-pocket, and it contained his gold. As for such trifling metal as silver, he carried that loose, mixed with coppers, bits of tobacco, broken pipes, and a clasp-knife, in the other pocket. He was very fond of his purse. In California he had been wont to carry nuggets in it, that simple species of exchange being the chief currency of the country at the time he was there. Some of the Californian DEBRIS had stuck to it when he had filled it, at a place of exchange in London, with Napoleons. Emptying its glittering contents upon the table, he spread it out.

"There, madam," he said, with a hearty smile, "you're welcome to all I've got about me just at this moment, and you shall have more when that's done. Don't say `not so much,' cause it ain't much, fifty pound, more or less, barrin' the nuggets, which I'll keep, as I dessay they would only worry you, and there's plenty more shot in the locker where that come from; an' don't talk about payin' back or thankin' me. You've no occasion to thank me. It's only a loan, an' I'll hold Willum, your brother-in-law, responsible. You wouldn't decline to take it from Willum, would you?"

"Indeed no; William Stout has always been so kind to us—kinder than I have deserved."

"Well, then, I'll write to Willum. I'll say to him, `Willum, my boy, here's your brother's widdy bin caught in a squall, had her sails blown to ribbons, bin throw'd on her beam-ends, and every stick torn out of her. You've got more cash, Willum, than you knows what to do with, so, hand over, send me a power of attorney (is that the thing?) or an affyday—whatever lawyer's dockiments is required—an' I'll stand by and do the needful.' An' Willum 'll write back, with that power an' brevity for which he is celebrated,—`Wopper, my lad, all right; fire away. Anything short o' ten thousand, more or less. Do yer w'ust. Yours to command, y

"Willum."

There was no resisting such arguments. Mrs. Stoutley smiled through her tears as she accepted the money. Captain Wopper rose, crammed the empty canvas bag into his pocket, and hastily retired, with portions of the bonnet attached to him.

"Susan," said Mrs. Stoutley, on the maid answering her summons, "we shall start for London tomorrow, or the day after, so, pray, set about packing up without delay."

"Very well, ma'am," replied Susan, whose eyes were riveted with an expression of surprised curiosity on the cane-bottomed chair.

"It is my bonnet Susan," said the lady, looking in the same direction with a sad smile. "Captain Wopper sat down on it by mistake. You had better remove it."

To remove it was a feat which even Susan, with all her ready wit and neatness of hand, could not have accomplished without the aid of brush and shovel. She, therefore, carried it off chair and all, to the regions below, where she and Gillie went into convulsions over it.

"Oh! Susan," exclaimed the blue spider, "wot would I not have given to have seed him a-doin' of it! Only think! The ribbons, flowers, and straw in one uniwersal mush! WOT a grindin' there must ave bin! I heer'd the Purfesser the other day talkin' of wot he calls glacier-haction—how they flutes the rocks an' grinds in a most musical way over the boulders with crushin' wiolence; but wot's glacier haction to THAT?"

Susan admitted that it was nothing; and they both returned at intervals in the packing, during the remainder of that day, to have another look at the bonnet-debris, and enjoy a fresh explosion over it.

Chapter XXII. MYSTERIOUS PROCEEDINGS OF THE CAPTAIN AND GILLIE.

We are back again in London—in Mrs. Roby's little cabin at the top of the old tenement in Grubb's Court.

Captain Wopper is there, of course. So is Mrs. Roby. Gillie White is there also, and Susan Quick. The Captain is at home. The two latter are on a visit—a social tea-party. Little Netta White, having deposited Baby White in the mud at the lowest corner of the Court for greater security, is waiting upon them—a temporary handmaiden, relieving, by means of variety, the cares of permanent nursehood. Mrs. White is up to the elbows in soap-suds, taking at least ocular and vocal charge of the babe in the mud, and her husband is—“drunk, as usual?” No—there is a change there. Good of some kind has been somewhere at work. Either knowingly or unwittingly some one has been “overcoming evil with good,” for Mrs. White's husband is down at the docks toiling hard to earn a few pence wherewith to increase the family funds. And who can tell what a terrible yet hopeful war is going on within that care-worn, sin-worn man? To toil hard with shattered health is burden enough. What must it be when, along with the outward toil, there is a constant fight with a raging watchful devil within? But the man has given that devil some desperate falls of late. Oh, how often and how long he has fought with him, and been overcome, cast down, and his armour of resolutions scattered to the winds! But he has been to see some one, or some one has been to see him, who has advised him to try another kind of armour—not his own. He knows the power of a “new affection” now. Despair was his portion not long ago. He is now animated by Hope, for the long uncared-for name of Jesus is now growing sweet to his ear. But the change has taken place recently, and he looks very weary as he toils and fights.

“Well, mother,” said Captain Wopper, “now that I've given you a full, true, an' partikler account of Switzerland, what d'ee think of it?”

“It is a strange place—very, but I don't approve of people risking their lives and breaking their limbs for the mere pleasure of getting to the top of a mountain of ice.”

“But we can't do anything in life without riskin' our lives an' breakin' our limbs more or less,” said the Captain.

“An' think o' the interests of science,” said Gillie, quoting the Professor.

Mrs. Roby shook her tall cap and remained unconvinced. To have expected the old nurse to take an enlightened view on that point would have been as unreasonable as to have looked for just views in Gillie White on the subject of conic sections.

“Why, mother, a man may break a leg or an arm in going down stairs,” said the Captain, pursuing the subject; “by the way, that reminds me to ask for Fred Leven. Didn't I hear that HE broke his arm coming up his own stair? Is it true?”

“True enough,” replied Mrs. Roby.

“Was he the worse of liquor at the time?”

“No. It was dark, and he was carrying a heavy box of something or other for his mother. Fred is a reformed man. I think the sight of your poor father, Gillie, has had something to do with it, and that night when his mother nearly died. At all events he never touches drink now, and he has got a good situation in one of the warehouses at the docks.”

“That's well,” returned the Captain, with satisfaction. “I had hopes of that young feller from the night you mention. Now, mother, I'm off. Gillie and I have some business to transact up the water. Very particular business—eh, lad?”

“Oh! wery partickler,” said Gillie, responding to his patron's glance with a powerful wink.

Expressing a hope that Susan would keep Mrs. Roby company till he returned, the Captain left the room with his usual heavy roll, and the spider followed with imitative swagger.

Captain Wopper was fond of mystery. Although he had, to some extent made a confidant of the boy for whom he had taken so strong a fancy, he nevertheless usually maintained a dignified distance of demeanour towards him, and a certain amount of reticence, which, as a stern disciplinarian, he deemed to be essential. This, however, did not prevent him from indulging in occasional, not to say frequent, unbendings of disposition, which he condescended to exhibit by way of encouragement to his small PROTEGE; but these unbendings and confidences

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were always more or less shrouded in mystery. Many of them, indeed, consisted of nothing more intelligible than nods, grins, and winks.

“That'll be rather a nice cottage when it's launched,” said the Captain, pointing to a building in process of erection, which stood so close to the edge of the Thames that its being launched seemed as much a literal allusion as a metaphor.

“Raither bobbish,” assented the spider.

“Clean run fore and aft with bluff bows, like a good sea-boat,” said the Captain. “Come, let's have a look at it.”

Asking permission to enter of a workman who granted the same with, what appeared to Gillie, an unnecessarily broad grin, the Captain led the way up a spiral staircase. It bore such a strong resemblance to the familiar one of Grubb's Court that Gillie's eyes enlarged with surprise, and he looked involuntarily back for his soapy mother and the babe in the mud. There were, however, strong points of dissimilarity, inasmuch as there was no mud or filth of any kind near the new building except lime; and the stair, instead of leading like that of the Tower of Babel an interminable distance upwards, ended abruptly at the second floor. Here, however, there was a passage exactly similar to the passage leading to Mrs. Roby's cabin, save that it was well lighted, and at the end thereof was an almost exact counterpart of the cabin itself. There was the same low roof, the same little fireplace, with the space above for ornaments, and the same couple of little windows looking out upon a stretch of the noble river, from which you might have fished. There was the same colour of paint on the walls, which had been so managed as to represent the dinginess of antiquity. There was also, to all appearance, Mrs. Roby's own identical bed, with its chintz curtains. Here, however, resemblance ended, for there was none of the Grubb's Court dirt. The craft on the river were not so large or numerous, the reach being above the bridges. If you had fished you not have hooked rats or dead cats, and if you had put your head out and looked round, you would have encountered altogether a clean, airy, and respectable neighbourhood, populous enough to be quite cheery, with occasional gardens instead of mud-banks, and without interminable rows of tall chimney-pots excluding the light of heaven.

Gillie, not yet having been quite cured of his objectionable qualities, at once apostrophised his eye and Elizabeth Martin.

“As like as two peas, barrin' the dirt!”

The Captain evidently enjoyed the lad's astonishment.

“A ship-shape sort o' craft, ain't it? It wouldn't be a bad joke to buy it—eh?”

Gillie, who was rather perplexed, but too much a man of the world to disclose much of his state of mind, said that it wouldn't be a bad move for any feller who had got the blunt. “How much would it cost now?”

“A thousand pounds, more or less,” said the Captain, with discreet allowance for latitude.

“Ha! a goodish lump, no doubt.”

“I've half a mind to buy it,” continued the Captain, looking round with a satisfied smile. “It would be an amoosin' sort o' thing, now, to bring old Mrs. Roby here. The air would be fresher for her old lungs, wouldn't it?”

Gillie nodded, but was otherwise reticent.

“The stair, too, wouldn't be too high to get her down now and again, and a boat could be handy to shove her into without much exertion. For the matter of that,” said the Captain, looking out, “we might have a slide made, like a Swiss couloir, you know, and she could glissade comfortably into the boat out o' the winder. Then, there's a beam to hang her ship an' Chinee lanterns from, an' a place over the fireplace to stick her knick-knacks. What d'ee think, my lad?”

Gillie, who had begun to allow a ray of light to enter his mind, gave, as his answer, an emphatic nod and a broad grin.

The Captain replied with a nod and a wink, whereupon the other retired behind his patron, for the purpose of giving himself a quiet hug of delight, in which act, however, he was caught; the Captain being one who always, according to his own showing, kept his weather-eye open.

“W'y, what's the matter with you, boy?”

“Pains in the stummick is aggrawatin' sometimes,” answered Gillie.

“You haven't got 'em, have you?”

“Well, I can't exactly go for to say as I has,” answered Gillie, with another grin.

“Now, look 'ee here, youngster,” said the Captain, suddenly seizing the spider by his collar and trousers, and

swinging him as though about to hurl him through the window into the river, "if you go an' let your tongue wag in regard to this matter, out you go, right through the port-hole—d'ee see?"

He set the spider quietly on his legs again, who replied, with unruffled coolness—

"Mum's the word, Cappen."

Gillie had been shorn of his blue tights and brass buttons, poor Mrs. Stoutley having found it absolutely necessary, on her return home, to dismiss all her servants, dispose of all her belongings, and retire into the privacy of a poor lodging in a back street. Thus the spider had come to be suddenly thrown on the world again, but Captain Wopper had retained him, he said, as a mixture of errand-boy, cabin-boy, and powder-monkey, in which capacity he dwelt with his mother during the night and revolved like a satellite round the Captain during the day. A suit of much more appropriate pepper-and-salt had replaced the blue tights and buttons. Altogether, his TOUT-ENSEMBLE was what the Captain styled "more ship-shape."

We have said that Mrs. Stoutley and her family had made a descent in life. As poor Lewis remarked, with a sad smile, they had quitted the gay and glittering heights, and gone, like a magnificent avalanche, down into the moraine. Social, not less than physical, avalanches multiply their parts and widen their course during descent. The Stoutleys did not fall alone. A green-grocer, a shoemaker, and a baker, who had long been trembling, like human boulders, on the precipice of bankruptcy, went tumbling down along with them, and found rest in a lower part of the moraine than they had previously occupied.

"It's a sad business," said Lewis to Dr. Lawrence one morning; "and if you continue to attend me, you must do so without the most distant prospect of a fee."

"My dear fellow," returned Lawrence, "have you no such thing as gratitude in your composition?"

"Not much, and, if I had ever so much, it would be poor pay."

"Poor, indeed, if regarded as one's only source of livelihood," rejoined Lawrence, "but it is ample remuneration from a friend, whether rich or poor, and, happily, capable of being mixed with *œ.s.d.* without deterioration. In the present case, I shall be more than rejoiced to take the fee unmixed, but, whether fee'd or not fee'd, I insist on continuing attendance on a case which I have a right to consider peculiarly my own."

"It would have been a bad case, indeed, but for you," returned Lewis, a flush for a moment suffusing his pale cheek as he took his friend's hand and squeezed it. "I am thoroughly convinced, Lawrence, that God's blessing on your skill and unwearied care of me at the time of the accident is the cause of my being alive to thank you to-day. But sit down, my dear fellow, and pray postpone your professional inquiries for a little, as I have something on my mind which I wish to ask you about."

Lawrence shook his head. "Business first, pleasure afterwards," he said; "professional duties must not be postponed."

"Now," said Lewis when he had finished, "are you satisfied? Do you admit that even an unprofessional man might have seen at a glance that I am much better, and that your present draft on my gratitude is a mere swindle?"

"I admit nothing," retorted the other; "but now, what have you got to say to me?"

"I am going to make a confidant of you. Are you to be trusted?"

"Perhaps; I dare not say yes unconditionally, because I'm rather sociable and communicative, and apt to talk in my sleep."

"That will do. Your answer is sufficiently modest. I will venture. You know Captain Wopper, I mean, you are well acquainted with his character; well, that kind and eccentric man has made a proposal to my dear mother, which we do not like to accept, and which at the same time we do not quite see our way to refuse. My mother, when in great distress in Switzerland, was forced to borrow a small sum of money from him, and thought it right to justify her doing so by letting him know—what everybody, alas! may know now—that we were ruined. With that ready kindness which is his chief characteristic he at once complied. Since our return home he has, with great delicacy but much determination, insisted that we shall accept from him a regular weekly allowance until we have had time to correspond with our uncle Stout in California. 'You mustn't starve,' he said to my mother—I give you his own words—'and you'd be sure to starve if you was to try to wegitate for six months or so on atmospheric air. It'll take that time before you could get a letter from Willum, an' though your son Lewis could an' would, work like a nigger to keep your pot bilin' if he was well an' hearty, it's as plain as the nose on your own face, ma'am, that he can't work while he's as thin as a fathom of pump-water an' as weak as a babby. Now, you know—at least I can tell 'ee—that my old chum Willum is as rich as a East Injin nabob. You wouldn't believe, madam, what fortins

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some gold-diggers have made. W'y, I've seed men light their pipes with fi'-pun' notes for a mere brag out there. I've made a goodish lump o' money myself too,—a'most more than I know what to do with, an' as to Willum, I may say he's actooally rollin' in gold. He's also chockfull of regard for you and yours, ma'am. That bein' so, he's sure to send you somethin' to tide you over yer difficulties, an' he's also sure to send somethin' to Lewis to help him start fair when he gits well, and he's surest of all to send somethin' to Miss Emma for all the kind letters she's writ to him doorin' the last five or six years. Well, then, I'm Willum's buzzum friend, and, knowin' exactly what he'll say an' do in the circumstances, what more nat'ral an' proper than that Willum's chum should anticipate Willum's wishes, and advance the money—some of it at least—say three thousand pounds to start with.' Now, Lawrence," continued Lewis, "what should we do? Should we accept this offer? The good fellow has evidently made a great deal of money at the gold- fields, and no doubt speaks truly when he says he can afford to advance that sum. And we know our uncle William's character well enough, though we have never seen him, to be quite sure that he will assist my dear mother until I am able to support her. What say you?"

"Accept the offer at once," said Lawrence. "From what I have seen of the Captain, I am convinced that he is a warm friend and a genuine man. No doubt he can well afford to do what he proposes, and his opinion of William Stout's character is just, for, from what I know of him through Mrs. Roby, who knew him when he was a lad, when his life was saved by my father, he must have a kind heart."

"I have no doubt of it, Lawrence, and a grateful heart too, if I may judge from a few words that fell from Captain Wopper about your father and yourself."

"Indeed! what did he say about us?"

"I have no right to repeat observations dropped inadvertently," said Lewis, with a laugh.

"Nor to raise curiosity which you don't mean to satisfy," retorted his friend; "however, my advice is, that you accept the Captain's offer, and trust to your uncle's generosity."

Chapter XXIII. THE CAPTAIN SURPRISES HIS FRIENDS IN VARIOUS WAYS, AND IS HIMSELF BAFFLED.

Time and Tide passed on—as they are proverbially said to do—without waiting for any one. Some people in the great city, aware of this cavalier style of proceeding on the part of Time and Tide, took advantage of both, and scaled the pinnacled heights of society. Others, neglecting their opportunities, or misusing them, produced a series of avalanches more or less noteworthy, and added a few more boulders to the vast accumulations in the great social moraine.

Several of the actors in this tale were among those who, having learnt a few sharp lessons in the avalanche school, began to note and avail themselves of Time and Tide—notably, Mrs. Stoutley and her son and niece. A decided change had come over the spirit of Mrs. Stoutley's dream of life. She had at last visited the great London moraine, especially that part of it called Grubb's Court, and had already dug up a few nuggets and diamonds, one of which latter she brought to her humble home in the back street, with the design of polishing it into a good servant-maid. Its name was Netta White. Mrs. Stoutley had formerly been a spendthrift; now she was become covetous. She coveted the male diamond belonging to the same part of the moraine—once named the Spider, ALIAS the Imp—but Captain Wopper had dug up that one for himself and would not part with it. Gradually the good lady conceived and carried out the idea of digging out and rescuing a number of diamonds, considerably lower in the scale than the Netta type, training them for service, and taking pains to get them into good situations. It was hard work no doubt, but Mrs. Stoutley persevered, and was well repaid—for the Master of such labourers esteems them “worthy of their hire.” Emma assisted in the work most heartily. It was by no means new to her. She might have directed if she had chosen, but she preferred to follow.

Lewis recovered rapidly—so rapidly that he was soon able to resume his medical studies and prosecute them with vigour. No bad effects of the accident remained, yet he was an altered man—not altered in appearance or in character, but in spirit. He was still off-hand in manner, handsome in face and figure, hearty in society, but earnest and grave—very grave—in private. He pored over his books, and strove, successfully too, to master the difficulties of the healing art; but do what he would, and fight against it as he might, he was constantly distracted by a pretty face with bright sparkling eyes and a strangely sad expression coming between him and the page. He made continual inquiries after the owner of the sparkling eyes in every direction without success, and at last got into the habit when walking, of looking earnestly at people as if he expected to meet with some one. “If I had got into this state,” he sometimes said to himself, “because of being merely in love with a pretty face, I should consider myself a silly nincompoop; but it is such a terrible thing for so sweet and young a creature to be chained to a man who must in the nature of things, land her in beggary and break her heart.” Thus he deceived himself as to his main motive. Poor Lewis!

One morning Captain Wopper got up a little earlier than usual, and began a series of performances which Mrs. Roby had long ago styled “rampadgin” round his garret.

The reader may have discovered by this time that the Captain was no ordinary man. Whatever he did in connection with himself was done with almost superhuman energy and noise. Since the commencement of his residence in the garret he had unwittingly subjected the nerves of poor Mrs. Roby to such a variety of shocks, that the mere fact of her reason remaining on its throne was an unquestionable proof of a more than usually powerful constitution. It could not well be otherwise. The Captain's limbs resembled the limbs of oaks in regard to size and toughness. His spirits were far above “proof.” His organs were cathedral organs compared with the mere barrel-organs of ordinary men. On the other hand, the “cabin” in Grubb's Court was but a flimsy tenement; its plank floorings were thin, and its beams and rafters slim and somewhat loose owing to age, so that when the captain snored, which he did regularly and continuously, it was as if a mastiff had got inside a double bass and were growling hideously.

But Mrs. Roby had now got pretty well accustomed to her lodger's ways. Her nerves had become strung to the ordeal, and she even came to like the galvanic battery in which she dwelt, because of its being worked by the intimate friend of her dear William; such is the power of love—we might almost say, in this case, of reflected love! The good old lady had even become so acute in her perceptions, that, without seeing the “rampadger,” she

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knew precisely the part of his daily programme with which he happened to be engaged. Of course the snoring told its own tale with brazen-tongued clamour, and the whole tenement trembled all night long from top to bottom. Nothing but the regardless nature of the surrounding population prevented the Captain from being indicted as a nuisance; but there were other sounds that were not so easily recognised.

On the morning in question, Mrs. Roby, lying placidly in her neat white little bed, and gazing with a sweet contented face through one of her cabin windows at the bright blue sky, heard a sound as though a compound animal—hog and whale—had aroused itself and rolled over on its other side. A low whistling followed. Mrs. Roby knew that the Captain was pleasantly engaged with his thoughts—planning out the proceedings of the day. Suddenly the whistling ceased and was followed by a sonorous “how-ho!” terminating in a gasp worthy of an express locomotive. The Captain had stretched himself and Mrs. Roby smiled at her own thoughts, as well she might for they embraced the idea that a twentieth part of the force employed in that stretch would have rent in twain every tendon, muscle, sinew, and filament in her, Mrs. Roby's, body. Next, there descended on the floor overhead a sixteen-stone cannon ball, which caused—not the neighbours, but the boards and rafters to complain. The Captain was up! and succeeding sounds proved that he had had another stretch, for there was a bump in the middle of it which showed that, forgetting his stature, the careless man had hit the ceiling with his head. That was evidently a matter of no consequence.

From this point the boards and rafters continued to make unceasing complaint, now creaking uneasily as if under great provocation, anon groaning or yelling as though under insufferable torment. From the ceiling of Mrs. Roby's room numerous small bits of plaster, unable to stand it longer, fell and powdered Mrs. Roby's floor. The curtains of her little bed saved her face. There was a slushing and swishing and gasping and blowing now, which might have done credit to a school of porpoises. The Captain was washing. Something between the flapping of a main top-sail in a shifting squall and the currying of a hippopotamus indicated that the Captain was drying himself. The process was interrupted by an unusual, though not quite unknown, crash and a howl; he had overturned the wash-hand basin, and a double thump, followed by heavy dabs, told that the Captain was on his knees swabbing it up.

Next instant the Captain's head, with beard and hair in a tremendously rubbed-up condition, appeared upside down at the hatchway.

“Hallo! old girl, has she sprung a leak anywhere?”

“Nowhere,” replied Mrs. Roby, with a quiet smile. She felt the question to be unnecessary. “She,” that is, the roof above her, never did leak in such circumstances. If the Thames had suddenly flooded the garret, the Captain's energy was sufficient to have swabbed it up in time to prevent a drop reaching “the lower deck.”

Soon after this catastrophe there was a prolonged silence. The Captain was reading. Mrs. Roby shut her eyes and joined him in spirit. Thereafter the Captain's feet appeared at the trap where his head had been, and he descended with a final and tremendous crash to the floor.

“See here, mother,” he cried, with a look of delight, holding up a very soiled and crumpled letter, “that's from Willum.”

“From William,” exclaimed the old woman, eagerly; “why, when did you get it? the postman can't have been here this morning.”

“Of course he hasn't; I got it last night from the limb-o'-the-law that looks after my little matters. I came in late, and you were asleep, so I kep' it to whet yer appetite for breakfast. Now listen, you must take it first; I'll get you breakfast afterwards.”

The Captain had by this time got into the way of giving the old woman her breakfast in bed every morning.

“Go on,” said the old woman, nodding.

The Captain spread out the letter on his knee with great care, and read aloud:—

“My Dear Wopper, Got yer letter all right.

“My blissin' to the poor widdy. Help her? ov coorse I'll help her. You did right in advancin' the money, though you fell short, by a long way, when you advanced so little. Hows'ever, no matter. I gave you my last will an' testimony w'en we parted. Here's a noo un. Inside o' this, if I don't forget it before I've done, you'll find a cheque for thirteen thousand

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pounds sterling. Give three to the widdy, with my respects; give four to dear Emma Gray, with my best love and blissin'; give two to Mister Lewis, with my compliments; an' give four to young Lawrence, with my benediction, for his father's sake. As for the old 'ooman Roby, you don't need to give nothin' to her. She and I understand each other. I'LL look after her myself. I'll make her my residooary legatee, an' wotever else is needful; but, in the meantime, you may as well see that she's got all that she wants. Build her a noo house too. I'm told that Grubb's Court ain't exactly aristocratic or clean; see to that. Wotever you advance out o' yer own pocket, I'll pay back with interest. That's to begin with, tell 'em. There's more comin'. There—I'm used up wi' writin' such a long screed. I'd rather dig a twenty-futt hole in clay sile any day.—Yours to command, Willum.

“P.S.—You ain't comin' back soon—are you?”

“Now, mother, what d'ee think o' that?” said the Captain, folding the letter and putting it in his pocket.

“It's a good, kind letter—just like William,” answered the old woman.

“Well, so I'm inclined to think,” rejoined the Captain, busying himself about breakfast while he spoke; “it provides for everybody in a sort o' way, and encourages 'em to go on hopeful like—don't it strike you so? Then, you see, that's four to Miss Emma, and four to Dr. Lawrence, which would be eight, equal to four hundred a year; and that, with the practice he's gettin' into, would make it six, or thereabouts—not bad to begin with, eh?”

The Captain followed his remark with a sigh.

“What's the matter?” asked Mrs. Roby.

“Why, you remember, mother, before goin' abroad I set my heart on these two gettin' spliced; but I fear it's no go. Sometimes I think they looks fond o' one another, at other times I don't. It's a puzzler. They're both young an' good-lookin' an' good. What more would they have?”

“Perhaps they want money,” suggested the old woman. “You say Dr. Lawrence's income just now is about two hundred; well, gentlefolks find it summat difficult to keep house on that, though it's plenty for the likes of you an' me.”

“That's true. P'r'aps the Doctor is sheerin' off for fear o' draggin' a young creeter into poverty. It never struck me in that light before.”

Beaming under the influence of this hopeful view of the case, the Captain proceeded to make another move in the complicated game which he had resolved to play out and win; but this move, which he had considered one of the easiest of all, proved to be the most unfortunate, or rather unmanageable.

“Now, mother,” said he, “I mean to make a proposal to 'ee, before going out for the day, so that you may have time to think over it. This cabin o' yours ain't just the thing, you know,—rather dirty, and too high in the clouds by a long way, so I've bin an' seen a noo house on the river, not unlike this one, an' I wants you to shift your berth. What say 'ee—eh?”

To the Captain's surprise and dismay, the old woman shook her head decidedly, and no argument which he could bring to bear had the least effect on her. She had, in fact, got used to her humble old home, and attached to it, and could not bear the thought of leaving it. Having exhausted his powers of suasion in vain, he left her to think over it, and sallied forth crestfallen. However, he consoled himself with the hope that time and consideration would bring her to a right state of mind. Meanwhile he would go to the parties interested, and communicate the contents of Willum's letter.

He went first to Doctor Lawrence, who was delighted as well as pleased at what it contained. The Captain at first read only the clauses which affected his friends the Stoutleys, and said nothing about that which referred to the Doctor himself.

“So you see, Doctor, I'm off to let the Stoutleys know about this little matter, and just looked in on you in passing.”

“It was very kind of you, Captain.”

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“Not at all, by no means,” returned the Captain, pulling out a large clasp-knife, with which he proceeded carefully to pare his left thumb nail. “By the way, Doctor,” he said carelessly, “were you ever in love?”

Lawrence flushed, and cast a quick glance at his interrogator, who, however, was deeply engaged with the thumb nail.

“Well, I suppose men at my time of life,” he replied, with a laugh, “have had some—”

“Of course—of course,” interrupted the other, “but I mean that I wonder a strapping young fellow like you, with such a good practice, don't get married.”

The Doctor, who had recovered himself, laughed, and said that his good practice was chiefly among the poor, and that even if he wished to marry—or rather, if any one would have him—he would never attempt to win a girl while he had nothing better than two hundred a year and prospects to offer her.

“Then I suppose you WOULD marry if you had something better to offer,” said the Captain, finishing off the nail and shutting the clasp-knife with a snap.

Again the Doctor laughed, wondered why the Captain had touched on such a theme, and said that he couldn't exactly say what he might or might not do if circumstances were altered.

The Captain was baffled. However, he said that circumstances WERE altered, and, after reading over the latter part of Willum's letter, left Lawrence to digest it at his leisure.

We need not follow him on his mission. Suffice it to say that he carried no small amount of relief to the minds of Mrs. Stoutley and her household; and, thereafter, met Gillie by appointment at Charing Cross, whence he went to Kensington to see a villa, with a view to purchasing it.

At night he again essayed to move Mrs. Roby's resolution, and many a time afterwards attacked her, but always with the same result. Although, as he said, he fought like a true-blue British seaman, and gave her broadside after broadside as fast as he could load and fire, he made no impression on her whatever. She had nailed her colours to the mast and would never give in.

Chapter XXIV. IN WHICH TREMENDOUS FORCES COME TO THE CAPTAIN'S AID.

It is probable that most people can recall occasions when "circumstances" have done for them that which they have utterly failed to effect for themselves.

Some time after the failure of Captain Wopper's little plots and plans in regard to Mrs. Roby, "circumstances" favoured him—the wind shifted round, so to speak, and blew right astern. To continue our metaphor, it blew a tremendous gale, and the Captain's ends were gained at last only by the sinking of the ship!

This is how it happened. One afternoon the Captain was walking rather disconsolately down the Strand in company with his satellite—we might almost say, his confidant. The street was very crowded, insomuch that at one or two crossings they were obliged to stand a few minutes before venturing over,—not that the difficulty was great, many active men being seen to dodge among the carts, drays, vans, and busses with marvellous ease and safety, but the Captain was cautious. He was wont to say that he warn't used to sail in such crowded waters—there warn't enough o' sea room for him—he'd rather lay—to, or stand—off—an'—on for half a day than risk being run down by them shore—goin' crafts.

"Everything in life seems to go wrong at times," muttered the Captain, as he and the satellite lay—to at one of these crossings.

"Yes, it's coorious, ain't it, sir," said Gillie, "an' at other times everything seems to go right—don't it, sir?"

"True, my lad, that's a better view to take of it," returned the Captain, cheerfully, "come, we'll heave ahead."

As they were "heaving" along in silence, the rattle and noise around them being unsuited to conversation, they suddenly became aware that the ordinary din of the Strand swelled into a furious roar. Gillie was half way up a lamp-post in an instant! from which elevated position he looked down on the Captain, and said—

"A ingine!"

"What sort of a ingine, my lad?"

"A fire! hooray!" shouted Gillie, with glittering eyes and flushed countenance, "look out, Cappen, keep close 'longside o' me, under the lee o' the lamp-post. It's not a bad buffer, though never quite a sure one, bein' carried clean away sometimes by the wheels w'en there's a bad driver."

As he spoke, the most intense excitement was manifested in the crowded thoroughfare. Whips were flourished, cabmen shouted, horses reared, vehicles of all kinds scattered right and left even although there had seemed almost a "block" two seconds before. Timid foot passengers rushed into shops, bold ones mounted steps and kerb-stones, or stood on tip-toe, and the Captain, towering over the crowd, saw the gleam of brass helmets as the charioteer clove his way through the swaying mass.

There is something powerfully exciting to most minds in the sight of men rushing into violent action, especially when the action may possibly involve life and death. The natural excitement aroused in the Captain's breast was increased by the deep bass nautical roar that met his ear. Every man in the London fire-brigade is, or used to be, a picked man-of-war's-man, and the shouting necessary in such a thoroughfare to make people get out of the way was not only tremendous but unceasing. It was as though a dozen mad "bo's'ns," capped with brazen war-helmets, had been let loose on London society, through which they tore at full gallop behind three powerful horses on a hissing and smoking monster of brass and iron. A bomb shell from a twenty-five-ton gun could scarce have cut a lane more effectually. The Captain took off his hat and cheered in sympathy. The satellite almost dropped from the lamp-post with excess of feeling. The crash and roar increased, culminated, rushed past and gone in a moment.

Gillie dropped to the ground as if he had been shot, seized the Captain's hand, and attempted to drag him along. He might as well have tried to drag Vesuvius from its base, but the Captain was willing. A hansom-cab chanced to be in front of them as they dashed into the road, the driver smoking and cool as a cucumber, being used to such incidents. He held up a finger.

"Quick, in with you, Cappen!"

Gillie got behind his patron, and in attempting to expedite his movements with a push, almost sent him out at the other side.

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“After the ingine—slap!” yelled Gillie to the face which looked down through the conversation-hole in the roof, “double extra fare if you look sharp.”

The cabman was evidently a sympathetic soul. He followed in the wake of the fire-engine as well as he could; but it was a difficult process, for, while the world at large made way for IT, nobody cared a straw for HIM!

“Ain't it fun?” said Gillie, as he settled his panting little body on the cushion beside his friend and master.

“Not bad,” responded the Captain, who half laughed at the thought of being so led away by excitement and a small boy.

“I'd give up all my bright prospects of advancement in life,” continued Gillie, “to be a fireman. There's no fun goin' equal to a fire.”

“P'r'aps it don't seem quite so funny to them as is bein' burnt out,” suggested the Captain.

“Of course it don't, but that can't be helped, you know—can it, sir? What can't be cured must be endoored, as the proverb says. Get along, old fellow, don't spare his ribs—double fare, you know; we'll lose 'em if you don't.”

The latter part of the remark was shouted through the hole to the cabman, who however, pulled up instead of complying.

“It's of no use, sir,” he said, looking down at the Captain, “I've lost sight of 'em.”

Gillie was on the pavement in a moment.

“Never mind, Cappen, give him five bob, an' decline the change; come along. I see 'em go past the Bridge, so ten to one it's down about the docks somewheres—the wust place in London for a fire w'ich, of course, means the best.”

The idea of its being so afforded such unalloyed pleasure to Gillie, that he found it hard to restrain himself and accommodate his pace to that of his friend.

It soon became very evident that the fire was in truth somewhere about the docks, for not only was a dense cloud of smoke seen rising in that direction, but fire-engines began to dash from side streets everywhere, and to rush towards the smoke as if they were sentient things impatient for the fray.

The cause of such unusual vigour and accumulation of power was, that a fire anywhere about the docks is deemed pre-eminently dangerous, owing to the great and crowded warehouses being stuffed from cellars to roof-trees with combustibles. The docks, in regard to fire, form the citadel of London. If the enemy gets a footing there, he must be expelled at all hazards and at any cost.

As the Captain and his PROTEGE hurried along, they were naturally led in the direction of their home. A vague undefined fear at the same instant took possession of both, for they glanced gravely at each other without speaking, and, as if by mutual consent, began to run. Gillie had no need now to complain of his companion's pace. He had enough to do to keep up with it. There were many runners besides themselves now, for the fire was obviously near at hand, and the entire population of the streets seemed to be pressing towards it. A few steps more brought them in sight of the head of Grubb's Court. Here several fire-engines were standing in full play surrounded by a swaying mass of human beings. Still there was no sign of the precise locality of the fires for the tall houses hid everything from view save the dense cloud which overshadowed them all.

Even Captain Wopper's great strength would have been neutralised in such a crowd if it had not now been seconded by an excitement and anxiety that nothing could resist. He crushed his way through as if he had been one of the steam fire-engines, Gillie holding tight to the stout tails of his monkey jacket. Several powerful roughs came in his way, and sought to check him. The Captain had hitherto merely used his shoulders and his weight. To the roughs he applied a fist—right and left—and two went down. A few seconds brought him to the cordon of policemen. They had seen him approaching, and one placed himself in front of the Captain with the quiet air of a man who is accustomed NEVER to give way to physical force!

“I live down Grubb's Court, my man,” said the Captain, with an eager respectful air, for he was of a law-abiding spirit.

The constable stepped aside, and nodded gravely. The Captain passed the line, but Gillie was pounced upon as if he had been a mouse and the constable a cat.

“HE belongs to me,” cried the Captain, turning back on hearing Gillie's yell of despair.

The boy was released, and both flew down the Court, on the pavement of which the snake-like water-hose lay spiriting at its seams.

“It's in the cabin,” said the Captain, in a low deep voice, as he dashed into the Court, where a crowd of

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firemen were toiling with cool, quiet, yet tremendous energy. No crowd interrupted them here, save the few frantic inhabitants of the Court, who were screaming advice and doing nothing; but no attention whatever was paid to them. A foreman of the brigade stood looking calmly upwards engaged in low-toned conversation with a brother fireman, as if they were discussing theories of the picturesque and beautiful with special application to chimney-cans, clouds of smoke, and leaping tongues of fire.

Immense engine power had been brought to bear, and one of the gigantic floating-engines of the Thames had got near enough to shower tons of water over the buildings, still it was a matter of uncertainty whether the fire could be confined to the Court where it had originated.

The result of the foreman's quiet talk was that the brother-fireman suddenly seized a nozzle from a comrade, and made a dash at the door leading up to "the cabin." Flames and smoke drove him back instantly.

It was at this moment that Captain Wopper came on the scene. Without a moment's hesitation he rushed towards the same door. The foreman seized his arm.

"It's of no use, sir, you can't do it."

The Captain shook him off and sprang in. A few seconds and he rushed out choking, scorched, and with his eyes starting almost out of their sockets.

"It is of no use, sir," remonstrated the foreman, "besides, the people have all bin got out, I'm told."

"No, they 'aven't," cried Mrs. White, coming up at the moment, frantically wringing the last article of linen on which she had been professionally engaged, "Mrs. Roby's there yet."

"All right, sir," said the foreman, with that quiet comforting intonation which is peculiar to men of power, resource, and self-reliance, "come to the back. The escape will be up immediately. It couldn't get down the Court, owin' to some masonry that was piled there, and had to be sent round."

Quick to understand, the Captain followed the fireman, and reached the back of the house, on the riverside, just as the towering head of the escape emerged from a flanking alley.

"This way. The small window on the right at the top—so."

The ladder was barely placed when the Captain sprang upon it and ran up as, many a time before, he had run up the shrouds of his own vessel. A cheer from the crowd below greeted this display of activity, but it was changed into a laugh when the Captain, finding the window shut and bolted, went into the room head first, carrying frame and glass along with him! Divesting himself of the uncomfortable necklace, he looked hastily round. The smoke was pretty thick, but not sufficiently so to prevent his seeing poor Mrs. Roby lying on the floor as if she had fallen down suffocated.

"Cheer up, old lass," he cried, kneeling and raising her head tenderly.

"Is that you, Cappen?" said the old woman, in a weak voice.

"Come, we've no time to lose. Let me lift you; the place is all alight. I thought you was choked."

"Choked! oh dear, no," replied the old woman, "but I've always heard that in a fire you should keep your face close to the ground for air— Ah! gently, Cappen, dear!"

While she was speaking, the Captain was getting her tucked under his strong right arm. He could have whisked her on his shoulder in a moment, but was afraid of her poor old bones, and treated her as if she had been a fragile China tea-cup of great value.

Next moment he was out on the escape, and reached the ground amid ringing cheers. He carried her at once to the nearest place of safety, and, committing her to the care of Mrs. White, rushed back to the scene of conflagration just as they were about to remove the escape.

"Stop!" shouted the Captain, springing on it.

"There's nobody else up, is there?" cried a fireman, as the Captain ran up.

"No, nobody."

"Come down then, directly," roared the fireman, "the escape is wanted elsewhere. Come down, I say, or we'll leave you."

"You're welcome to leave me," roared the Captain, as he stepped into the window, "only hold your noise, an' mind your own business."

With a mingled feeling of amusement and indignation they hurried away with the escape. It had been urgently wanted to reach a commanding position whence to assail the fire. The order to send it was peremptory, so the Captain was left in his uncomfortable situation, with the smoke increasing around him, and the fire roaring

underneath.

The actions of our seaman were now curious as well as prompt. Taking a blanket from his old friend's bed, he spread it below the chimney-piece, and in a remarkably short time pulled down, without damaging, every object on the wall and threw it into the blanket. He then added to the heap the Chinese lantern, the Turkish scimitar, the New Zealand club, the Eastern shield, the ornamented dagger, the worsted work sampler, the sou'-wester, the oiled coat, the telescope, the framed sheet of the flags of all nations, and the small portrait of the sea-captain in his "go-to-meetin'" clothes; also the big Bible and a very small box, which latter contained Mrs. Roby's limited wardrobe. He tied all up in a tight bundle. A coil of rope hung on a peg on the wall. The bundle was fastened to the end of it and lowered to the ground, amid a fire of remarks from the crowd, which were rather caustic and humorous than complimentary.

"Gillie," shouted the Captain, "cast off the rope, lad, and look well after the property."

"Ay, ay, Cappen," replied the youth, taking up a thick cart-pin, or something of the sort, that lay near, and mounting guard.

There was another laugh, from crowd and firemen, at the nautical brevity and promptitude of Gillie.

At every large fire in London there may be seen a few firemen standing about in what an ignorant spectator might imagine to be easy indifference and idleness, but these men are not idlers. They are resting. The men who first arrive at a fire go into action with the utmost vigour, and toil until their powers are nearly—sometimes quite—exhausted. As time passes fresh men are continually arriving from the more distant stations. These go into action as they come up, thus relieving the others, who stand aloof for a time looking on, or doing easy work, and recruiting their energies. It was these men who watched the Captain's proceedings with much amusement while their comrades were doing battle with the foe.

Presently the Captain reappeared at the window and lowered a huge sea-chest. A third time he appeared with the model of a full-rigged ship in his hand. This time he let the end of the rope down, and then getting over the window, slid easily to the ground.

"You're uncommon careful o' your property," exclaimed one of the onlookers, with a broad grin.

"Taint all MY property, lad," replied the Captain, with a good-humoured nod, "most of it is a poor old 'ooman's belongings."

So saying, he got a man to carry his sea-chest, himself shouldered the bundle, Gillie was intrusted with the full-rigged model, and thus laden they left the scene followed by another laugh and a hearty cheer.

But our bluff seaman was not content with rescuing Mrs. Roby and her property. He afterwards proceeded to lend his effective aid to all who desired his assistance, and did not cease his exertions until evening, by which time the fire was happily subdued.

"She must not be moved to-night Captain," said Dr. Lawrence, for whom Gillie had been sent; "the place where she lies is doubtless far from comfortable, but I have got her to sleep, and it would be a pity to awake her. To-morrow we shall get her into more comfortable quarters."

"Could she bear movin' to-morrow, a mile or so?" asked the Captain.

"Certainly, but there is no occasion to go so far. Lodgings are to be had—"

"All right, Doctor; I've got a lodging ready for her, and will ask you to come an' have pot-luck with us before long. Gillie, my lad, you go hail a cab, and then come back to lend a hand wi' the cargo."

In a few minutes the pair were whirling towards the west end of London, and were finally landed with their "cargo" on the banks of the Thames above the bridges, near the new building which Captain Wopper had named, after its prototype, "the cabin."

To fit this up after the fashion of the old place was a comparatively short and easy work for two such handy labourers. Before they left that night it was so like its predecessor in all respects, except dirt, that both declared it to be the "identical same craft, in shape and rig, even to the little bed and curtains." Next afternoon Mrs. Roby was brought to it by Captain Wopper, in a specially easy carriage hired for the purpose.

The poor old woman had received more of a shock than she was willing to admit, and did exactly as she was bid, with many a sigh, however, at the thought of having been burnt out of the old home. She was carried up the stair in a chair by two porters, and permitted the Captain to draw a thick veil over her head to conceal, as he said, her blushes from the men. He also took particular care to draw the curtains of the bed close round her after she had been laid in it and then retired to allow her to be disrobed by Netta, who had been obtained from Mrs.

Stoutley on loan expressly for the occasion.

Much of this care to prevent her seeing the place that day, however, was unnecessary. The poor old creature was too much wearied by the short journey to look at anything. After partaking of a little tea and toast she fell into a quiet sleep, which was not broken till late on the following morning.

Her first thought on waking was the fire. Her second, the Captain. He was in the room, she knew, because he was whistling in his usual low tone while moving about the fireplace preparing breakfast. She glanced at the curtains; her own curtains certainly,—and the bed too! Much surprised, she quietly put out her thin hand and drew the curtain slightly aside. The Captain in his shirt sleeves, as usual, preparing buttered toast, the fireplace, the old kettle with the defiant spout singing away as defiantly as ever, the various photographs, pot-lids, and other ornaments above the fireplace, the two little windows commanding an extensive prospect of the sky from the spot where she lay, the full-rigged ship, the Chinese lantern hanging from the beam— everything just as it should be!

“Well, well,” thought Mrs. Roby, with a sigh of relief; “the fire must have been a dream after all! but what a vivid one!”

She coughed. The Captain was at her side instantly.

“Slept well, old girl?”

“Very well, thank you. I've had such a queer dream, d'you know?”

“Have you? Take your breakfast, mother, before tellin' it. It's all ready—there, fire away.”

“It WAS such a vivid one,” she resumed, when half through her third cup, “all about a fire, and you were in it too.”

Here she proceeded to relate her dream with the most circumstantial care. The Captain listened with patient attention till she had finished, and then said—

“It was no dream, mother. It's said that the great fire of London was a real blessin' to the city. The last fire in London will, I hope, be a blessin' to you an' me. It was real enough and terrible too, but through God's mercy you have been saved from it. I managed to save your little odds and ends too. This is the noo `cabin,' mother, that you wouldn't consent to come to. Something like the old one, ain't it?”

Mrs. Roby spoke never a word, but looked round the room in bewilderment. Taking the Captain's hand she kissed it, and gazed at him and the room until she fell asleep. Awaking again in half an hour, she finished her breakfast, asked for the old Bible, and, declaring herself content, fell straightway into her old ways and habits.

Chapter XXV. AN UNEXPECTED GEM FOUND.

Although Lewis Stoutley found it extremely difficult to pursue his studies with the profusely illustrated edition of medical works at his command, he nevertheless persevered with a degree of calm, steady resolution which might be almost styled heroic. To tear out the illustrations was impossible, for Nita's portrait was stamped on every page, compelling him to read the letterpress through it. Success, however, attended his labours, for he not only carried out the regular course, but he attached himself to the poor district of the "moraine" which had been appropriated as their own by his mother and Emma, who ministered to the bodies of the sick while they sought to bring their souls to the Good Physician. This professional work he did as a sort of amateur, being only a student under the guidance of his friend Lawrence, whose extending practice included that district. It happened also to be the district in which Mrs. Roby's new "cabin" was situated.

These labourers, in what Dr. Tough had styled the London gold fields, not only did good to the people, and to themselves in the prosecution of them, but resulted occasionally in their picking up a nugget, or a diamond, which was quite a prize. One such was found by Lewis about this time, which, although sadly dim and soiled when first discovered, proved to be such a precious and sparkling gem that he resolved to wear it himself. He and Emma one day paid a visit to the cabin, where they found old Mrs. Roby alone, and had a long chat with her, chiefly about the peculiarities of the Captain and his boy.

"By the way," said Mrs. Roby to Lewis, when they rose to go, "a poor woman was here just before you came, askin' if I knew where she could find a doctor, for her father, she said, was very ill. The two have come to live in a room near the foot of this stair, it seems, and they appear to be very poor. I could not give her Dr. Lawrence's new address, for I don't know it, so I advised her to apply to the nearest chemist. Perhaps, Mr. Lewis, you'll go yourself and see the poor man?"

"Willingly, and I shall myself call for Lawrence on my way home and send him, if necessary. Come, Emma. Perhaps this may be a case for the exercise of your philanthropy."

They soon found the place, and knocked at a low door, which was slowly opened by a middle aged woman, meanly clad and apparently very poor.

"Ah, sir, you're too late, he's dead," said the woman, in reply to Lewis's inquiry.

"O how sad!" broke from Emma's sympathetic spirit, "I am SO sorry we are too late. Did you find a doctor?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't, but the chemist gave me the address of one, so I ran back to tell the poor young thing that I'd go fetch one as quick as I could, and I found him just dying in her arms."

"In whose arms? are not you the daughter—" said Emma.

"Me, miss! oh dear, no. I'm only a neighbour."

"Has she any friends?" asked Lewis.

"None as I knows of. They are strangers here—only just came to the room. There it is," she added, stepping back and pointing to an inner door.

Lewis advanced and knocked, but received no answer. He knocked again. Still no answer. He therefore ventured to lift the latch and enter.

It was a miserable, ill-lighted room, of small size and destitute of all furniture save a truckle bed, a heap of clean straw in a corner, on which lay a black shawl, a deal chair, and a small table. Abject poverty was stamped on the whole place. On the bed lay the dead man, covered with a sheet. Beside it kneeled, or rather lay, the figure of a woman. Her dress was a soiled and rusty black. Her hair, fallen from its fastenings, hung dishevelled on her shoulders. Her arms clasped the dead form.

"My poor woman," whispered Emma, as she knelt beside her, and put a hand timidly on her shoulder.

But the woman made no answer.

"She has fainted, I think," exclaimed Emma, rising quickly and trying to raise the woman's head. Suddenly Lewis uttered a great cry, lifted the woman in his arms, and gazed wildly into her face.

"Nita!" he cried, passionately clasping her to his heart and covering the poor faded face with kisses; but Nita heard not. It seemed as if the silver chord had already snapped. Becoming suddenly aware of the impropriety as well as selfishness of his behaviour, Lewis hastily bore the inanimate form to the heap of straw, pillowed the

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small head on the old shawl, and began to chafe the hands while Emma aided him to restore consciousness. They were soon successful. Nita heaved a sigh.

“Now, Emma,” said Lewis, rising, “this is YOUR place just now, I will go and fetch something to revive her.”

He stopped for one moment at the bed in passing, and lifted the sheet. There was no mistaking the handsome face of the Count even in death. It was terribly thin, but the lines of sorrow and anxiety were gone at last from the marble brow, and a look of rest pervaded the whole countenance.

On returning, Lewis found that Nita had thrown her arms round Emma's neck and was sobbing violently. She looked up as he entered, and held out her hand. “God has sent you,” she said, looking at Emma, “to save my heart from breaking.”

Lewis again knelt beside her and put her hand to his lips, but he had no power to utter a word. Presently, as the poor girl's eye fell on the bed, there was a fresh outburst of grief. “Oh, how he loved me!— and how nobly he fought!—and how gloriously he conquered!—God be praised for that!”

She spoke, or rather sobbed, in broken sentences. To distract her mind, if possible, even for a little, from her bereavement, Emma ventured to ask her how she came there, when her father became so ill, and similar questions. Little by little, in brief sentences, and with many choking words and tears, the sad story came out.

Ever since the night when her father met with Lewis at Saxon, he had firmly resisted the temptation to gamble. God had opened his ear to listen to, and his heart to receive, the Saviour. Arriving in London with the money so generously lent to them by Lewis, they took a small lodging and sought for work. God was faithful to His promises, she said; he had sent a measure of prosperity. Her father taught music, she obtained needlework. All was going well when her father became suddenly ill. Slowly but steadily he sank. The teaching had to be given up, the hours of labour with the needle increased. This, coupled with constant nursing, began to sap her own strength, but she had been enabled to hold out until her father became so ill that she dared not leave him even for a few minutes to visit the shops where she had obtained sewing-work. Then, all source of livelihood being dried up, she had been compelled to sell one by one the few articles of clothing and furniture which they had begun to accumulate about them.

“Thus,” she said, in conclusion, “we were nearly reduced to a state of destitution, but, before absolute want had been felt by us, God mercifully took my darling father home—and—and—I shall soon join him.”

“Say not so, darling,” said Emma, twining her arms round the poor stricken girl. “It may be that He has much work for you to do for Jesus HERE before He takes you home. Meanwhile, He has sent us to claim you as our very dear friend—as our sister. You must come and stay with mamma and me. We, too, have tasted something of that cup of adversity, which you have drained to the very dregs, my poor Nita, but we are comparatively well off now. Mamma will be so glad to have you. Say you will come. Won't you, dearest?”

Nita replied by lifting her eyes with a bewildered look to the bed, and again burst into a passion of uncontrollable sorrow.

Chapter XXVI. THE DENOUEMENT.

Being naturally a straightforward man, and not gifted with much power in the way of plotting and scheming, Captain Wopper began in time to discover that he had plunged his mental faculties into a disagreeable state of confusion.

"Gillie, my lad," he said, looking earnestly at his satellite while they walked one afternoon along the Bayswater road in the direction of Kensington, "it's a bad business altogether."

Gillie, not having the smallest idea what the Captain referred to, admitted that it was "wery bad indeed," but suggested that "it might be wuss."

"It's such a perplexin' state o' things," pursued the Captain, "to be always bouncin' up an' down wi' hopes, an' fears, an' disappointments, like a mad barometer, not knowin' rightly what's what or who's who."

"Uncommon perplexin'," assented Gillie. "If I was you, Cappen, I'd heave the barometer overboard along wi' the main-deck, nail yer colours to the mast, cram the rudder into the lee-scuppers, kick up your flyin'-jib-boom into the new moon, an' go down stern foremost like a man!"

"Ha!" said the Captain, with a twinkle in the corner of his "weather-eye," "not a bad notion."

"Now, my lad, I'm goin' out to my villa at Kensington to dine. There's to be company, too, an' you're to be waiter—"

"Stooard, you mean?"

"Well, yes—stooard. Now, stooard, you'll keep a good look-out, an' clap as tight a stopper on yer tongue as may be. I've got a little plot in hand, d'ee see, an' I want you to help me with it. Keep your eye in a quiet way on Dr. Lawrence and Miss Gray. I've taken a fancy that perhaps they may be in love with each other. You just let me have your opinion on that pint after dinner, but have a care that you don't show what you're up to, and, whatever you do, don't be cheeky."

"All right," said the stooard, thrusting both hands into his trouser-pockets; "I'll do my best."

While these two were slowly wending their way through Kensington Gardens, Emma Gray arrived at the Captain's villa—California Cottage, he called it—and rang the bell. The gate was opened by Netta White, who, although not much bigger than when first introduced to the reader, was incomparably more beautiful and smart. Mrs. Stoutley had reason to be proud of her.

"I did not know that YOU were to be here, Netta?" said Emma, in surprise, as she entered.

"It was a very sudden call, Miss," said Netta, with a smile. "Captain Wopper wrote a note to me, begging me to ask Mrs. Stoutley to be so good as lend me to him for a day to help at his house-warming. Here is the letter, Miss."

Emma laughed as she glanced carelessly at the epistle, but became suddenly grave, turned white, then red, and, snatching the letter from the girl's hand, gazed at it intently.

"La! Miss, is anything wrong?"

"May I keep this?" asked Emma.

"Certainly, Miss, if you wish it."

Before she could say anything more, they were interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Lawrence. With a surprised look and smile he said—

"I have been invited to dine with our friend Captain Wopper, but did not anticipate the pleasure of meeting Miss Gray here."

Emma explained that she also had been invited to dine with the Captain, along with her mother and brother, but had supposed that that was all the party, as he, the Captain, had mentioned no one else, and had been particular in begging her to come an hour before the time, for the purpose of going over his new villa with him, and giving him her private opinion of it.

"I am punctual," she added, consulting her watch; "it is just four o'clock."

"Four! Then what is the dinner hour?"

"Five," answered Emma.

"The Captain's wits must have been wool-gathering," rejoined Lawrence, with a laugh. "He told me to come

punctually at four. However, I rejoice in the mistake, as it gives me the great pleasure of assisting you to form an unprejudiced opinion of the merits of the new villa. Shall we begin with an exploration of the garden?"

Emma had no cause to blush at such an innocent proposal, nevertheless a richer colour than usual mantled on her modest little face as she fell in with the Doctor's humour and stepped out into the small piece of ground behind the house.

It was of very limited extent and, although not surrounded too closely by other villas, was nevertheless thoroughly overlooked by them, so that seclusion in that garden was impossible. Recognising this fact, a former proprietor had erected at the lower end of the garden a bower so contrived that its interior was invisible from all points except one, and that was a side door to the garden which opened on a little passage by which coals, milk, meat, and similar substances were conveyed from the front to the rear of the house.

Dr. Lawrence and Emma walked round and round the garden very slowly, conversing earnestly. Strange to say, they quite forgot the object which had taken them there. Their talk was solely of Switzerland. As it continued, the Doctor's voice deepened in tones and interest, and his fair companion's cheek deepened in colour. Suddenly they turned into the bower. As they did so, Gillie White chanced to appear at the garden door above referred to, which stood ajar. The spider's countenance was a speaking one. During the five minutes which it appeared in the doorway, it, and the body belonging to it, became powerfully eloquent. It might have conveyed to one's mind, as it were, a series of TABLEAUX VIVANTS. Gillie's first look was as if he had been struck dumb with amazement (that was Lawrence suddenly seizing one of Emma's hands in both of his and looking intently into her face). Then Gillie's look of amazement gave place to one of intense, quite touching—we might almost say sympathetic—anxiety as he placed a hand on each knee and stooped (that was the Doctor's right hand stealing round Emma's waist, and Emma shrinking from him with averted face). The urchin's visage suddenly lighted up with a blaze of triumph, and he seized his cap as if about to cheer (that was the Doctor's superior strength prevailing, and Emma's head, now turned the other way, laid on his shoulder). All at once Gillie went into quiet convulsions, grinned from ear to ear, doubled himself up, slapped his thigh inaudibly—A LA Captain Wopper—and otherwise behaved like an outrageous, yet self-restrained, maniac (that was—well, we have no right to say what THAT was). As a faithful chronicler, however, we must report that one-half minute later the stoard found Captain Wopper in the villa drawing-room, and there stated to him that it was "hall right; that he didn't need for to perplex hisself about Doctor Lawrence and Miss Hemma Gray, for that they was as good as spliced already, having been seen by him, Gillie, in the bower at the end of the garding a-blushin' and a—" Here the spider stopped short and went into another fit of convulsions—this time unrestrained.

Is it necessary to say that Captain Wopper sat at the foot of his own table that day—Mrs. Stoutley being at the head—with his rugged visage radiant and his powerful voice explosive; that he told innumerable sea-stories without point, and laughed at them without propriety; that, in the excess of his hilarity, he drank a mysterious toast to the success of all sorts of engagements, present and future; that he called Mrs. Stoutley (in joke) sister, and Emma and Lewis (also in joke) niece and neffy; that he called Doctor Lawrence neffy, too, with a pointedness and a sense of its being the richest possible joke, that covered with confusion the affianced pair; and with surprise the rest of the company; that he kicked the stoard amicably out of the room for indulging in explosions of laughter behind his chair, and recommending him, the Captain, to go it strong, and to clap on sail till he should tear the mast out of 'er, or git blowed on his beam-ends; that the stoard returned unabashed to repeat the offence unrepented; that towards the end, the Captain began a long-winded graphic story which served to show how his good friend and chum Willum Stout in Callyforny had commissioned him to buy and furnish a villa for the purpose of presenting it to a certain young lady in token of his gratitude to her for bein' such a good and faithful correspondent to him, Willum, while he was in furrin' parts; also, how he was commissioned to buy and furnish another villa and present it to a certain doctor whose father had saved him from drownin' long long ago, he would not say HOW long ago; and how that this villa, in which they was feedin', was one of the said villas, and that he found it quite unnecessary to spend any more of Willum's hard-earned gains in the purchase of the other villa, owing to circumstances which had took place in a certain bower that very day! Is it necessary, we again ask, to detail all this? We think not; therefore, we won't.

When reference was made to the bower, Emma could stand, or sit, it no longer. She rose hastily and ran blushing into the garden. Captain Wopper uttered a thunderous laugh, rose and ran after her. He found her in the bower with her face in her hands, and sat down beside her.

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“Captain Wopper,” she suddenly exclaimed, looking up and drawing a note from her pocket, “do you know this?”

“Yes, duckie,” (the Captain was quite reckless now), “it’s my last billy–doo to Netta White. I never was good at pot–hooks and hangers.”

“And do you know THIS letter?” said Emma, holding up to the seaman’s eyes her uncle William’s last letter to herself.

The Captain looked surprised, then became suddenly red and confused.

“W’y—ye—es, it’s Willum’s, ain’t it?”

“The same pot–hooks and hangers PRECISELY!” said Emma, “are they not? Oh!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms round the Captain’s neck and kissing him, “uncle William, how COULD you deceive us so?”

The Captain, to use his own expressions, was taken aback—fairly brought up all standin’.

It had never occurred to his innocent mind that he should commit himself so simply. He felt an unconquerable objection to expressions of gratitude, and perceiving, with deep foresight that such were impending, his first impulse was to rise and fly, but Emma’s kiss made him change his mind. He returned it in kind but not in degree, for it caused the bower to resound as with a pistol shot.

“Oh! wot a cracker, ain’t it just? you’re a nice man, ain’t you, to go poachin’ on other fellers—”

The Captain seized his opportunity, he broke from Emma and dashed wildly at the spider, who incontinently fled down the conduit for coals, cheering with the fury of a victorious Ashantee chief!

Chapter XXVII. THE LAST.

Humbly confessing to Emma Gray that he had no talent whatever for plotting, Captain Wopper went off with a deprecatory expression of countenance to reveal himself to Mrs. Roby. Great was his anxiety. He entered her presence like a guilty thing. If, however, his anxiety was great, his surprise and consternation were greater when she received his revelation with tears, and for some time refused to be comforted!

The workings of the human mind are wonderful. Sometimes they are, as the Captain said, bamboozling. If analysed it might have been discovered that, apart altogether from the shock of unexpectedness and the strain on her credulity, poor Mrs. Roby suffered—without clearly understanding it—from a double loss. She had learned to love Captain Wopper for his own sake, and now Captain Wopper was lost to her in William Stout! On the other hand William, her darling, her smooth-faced chubby boy, was lost to her for ever in the hairy savage Captain Wopper! It was perplexing as well as heart-rending. Captain Wopper was gone, because, properly, there was no such being in existence. William Stout was gone because he would never write to her any more, and could never more return to her from California!

It was of no use that the Captain expressed the deepest contrition for the deception he had practised, urging that he had done it “for the best;” the old woman only wept the more; but when, in desperation, the Captain hauled taut the sheets of his intellect, got well to wind’ard of the old ‘ooman an’ gave her a broadside of philosophy, he was more successful.

“Mother,” he said, earnestly, “you don’t feel easy under this breeze, ‘cause why? you’re entirely on the wrong tack. Ready about now, an’ see what a change it’ll make. Look ‘ee here. You’ve GAINED us both instead of lost us both. Here am I, Willum Stout yours to command, a trifle stouter, it may be, and hairier than I once was, not to say older, but by a long chalk better able to love the old girl who took me in, an’ befriended me when I was a reg’lar castaway, with dirty weather brewin’, an’ the rocks o’ destitootion close under my lee; and who’ll never forget your kindness, no never, so long as two timbers of the old hulk hold together. Well then, that’s the view over the starboard bulwarks. Cast your eyes over to port now. Here am I, Captain Wopper, also yours to command, strong as a horse, as fond o’ you as if you was my own mother, an’ resolved to stick by you through thick and thin to the last. So you see, you’ve got us both—Willum an’ me—me an’ Willum, both of us lovin’ you like blazes an’ lookin’ arter you like dootiful sons. A double tide of affection, so to speak, flowin’ like strong double-stout from the beer barrel out of which you originally drew me, if I may say so. Ain’t you convinced?”

Mrs. Roby WAS convinced. She gave in, and lived for many years afterwards in the full enjoyment of the double blessing which had thus fallen to her lot in the evening of her days.

And here, good reader, we might close our tale; but we cannot do so without a few parting words in reference to the various friends in whose company we have travelled so long.

Of course it is unnecessary to say, (especially to our lady readers, who were no doubt quite aware of it from the beginning), that Lawrence and Emma, Lewis and Nita, were, in the course of time, duly married. The love of their respective wives for each other induced the husbands not only to dwell in adjoining villas, but to enter into a medical co-partnery, in the prosecution of which they became professionally the deities, and, privately, the adored of a large population of invalids—with their more or less healthy friends—in the salubrious neighbourhood of Kensington. To go about “doing good” was the business, and became the second nature, of the young doctors. It was long a matter of great surprise to not a few of their friends that though Lawrence and Lewis neither smoked nor drank, they were uncommonly healthy and apparently happy! Some caustic spirits asserted that they were sure budding wings were to be found on the shoulders of the two doctors, but we are warranted in asserting, on the best authority, that on a strict examination, nothing of the kind was discovered. Need we say that Emma and Nita were pattern wives? Of course not, therefore we won’t say it. Our reticence on this point will no doubt be acceptable to those who, being themselves naughty, don’t believe in or admire “patterns,” even though these be of “heavenly things.” It is astonishing, though, what an effect their so-called “perfection” had in tightening the bonds of matrimony. Furthermore, they had immense families of sons and daughters, insomuch that it became necessary to lengthen their cords and strengthen their stakes, and “Calyforny Villa” became a mere band-box compared to the mansions which they ultimately called “home.”

Mrs. Stoutley having managed to get entirely out of HERSELF—chiefly by means of the Bible and the London gold-fields and moraines—became so amiable and so unlike her former self, and, withal, so healthy and cheery, that the two great families of Stoutley and Lawrence went to war for possession of her.

The feud at last threatened to become chronic, and was usually carried to an excess of virulence about Christmas and New Year time. In order, therefore, to the establishment of peace, Mrs. Stoutley agreed to live one-half of the year with Lewis, and the other half with Lawrence—Lewis to have the larger half as a matter of course; but she retained her cottage in Notting Hill and her maid Netta White, with the right to retire at any moment, when the exigencies of the gold-fields or the moraines demanded special attention; or when the excess of juvenile life in the mansions before mentioned became too much for her. On these occasions of retirement which, to say truth, were not very frequent, she was accompanied by Netta White—for Netta loved her mistress and clave to her as Ruth to Naomi. Being a native of the “fields,” she was an able and sympathetic guide and adviser at all times, and nothing pleased Netta better than a visit to Grubb's Court, for there she saw the blessed fruit of diamond and gold digging illustrated in the person of her own reformed father and happy mother, who had removed from their former damp rooms on the ground floor to the more salubrious apartments among the chimney pots, which had been erected on the site of the “cabin” after “the fire.” Directly below them, in somewhat more pretentious apartments, shone another rescued diamond in the person of Fred Leven. He was now the support and comfort of his old mother as well as of a pretty little young woman who had loved him even while he was a drunkard, and who, had it been otherwise decreed, would have gone on loving him and mourning over him and praying for him till he was dead. In her case, however, the mourning had been turned into joy.

In process of time Gillie White, ALIAS the spider, became a sturdy, square-set, active little man, and was promoted to the position of coachman in the family of Lewis Stoutley. Susan Quick served in the same family in the capacity of nurse for many years, and, being naturally thrown much into the society of the young coachman, was finally induced to cement the friendship which had begun in Switzerland by a wedding. This wedding, Gillie often declared to Susan, with much earnestness, was the “stunniest event that had ever occurred to him in his private capacity as a man.”

There is a proverb which asserts that “it never rains but it pours.” This proverb was verified in the experience of the various personages of our tale, for soon after the tide of fortune had turned in their favour, the first showers of success swelled into absolute cataracts of prosperity. Among other things, the Gowrong mines suddenly went right. Mrs. Stoutley's former man of business, Mr. Temple, called one day, and informed her that her shares in that splendid undertaking had been purchased, on her behalf, by a friend who had faith in the ultimate success of the mines; that the friend forbade the mention of his name; and that he, Mr. Temple, had called to pay her her dividends, and to congratulate her on her recovery of health and fortune. Dr. Tough—who, when his services were no longer required, owing to the absence of illness, had continued his visits as a jovial friend—chanced to call at the same time with Mr. Temple, and added his congratulations to those of the man of business, observing, with enthusiasm, that the air of the Swiss mountains, mixed in equal parts with that of the London diamond-fields, would cure any disease under the sun. His former patient heartily agreed with him, but said that the medicine in question was not a mere mixture but a chemical compound, containing an element higher than the mountains and deeper than the diamond-fields, without which the cure would certainly not have been effected.

Need we say that Captain Wopper stuck to Mrs. Roby and the “new cabin” to the last? Many and powerful efforts were made to induce him to bring his “mother” to dwell in Kensington, but Mrs. Roby flatly refused to move again under any suasion less powerful than that of a fire. The eldest of Lewis Stoutley's boys therefore hit on a plan for frequent and easy inter-communication. He one day suggested the idea of a boating-club to his brothers and companions. The proposal was received with wild enthusiasm. The club was established, and a boathouse, with all its nautical appurtenances, was built under the very shadow of Mrs. Roby's dwelling. A trusty “diamond” from Grubb's Court was made boat-cleaner and repairer and guardian of the keys, and Captain Wopper was created superintendent general director, chairman, honorary member, and perpetual grand master of the club, in which varied offices he continued to give unlimited satisfaction to the end of his days.

As for Slingsby, he became an aspirant to the honours of the Royal Academy, and even dreamt of the president's chair! Not being a madman, he recovered from the disease of blighted hopes, and discovered that there were other beings as well as Nita worth living for! He also became an intimate and welcome visitor at the two Kensington mansions, the walls of which were largely decorated with his productions. Whether he succeeded in

Rivers of Ice

life to the full extent of his hopes we cannot say, but we have good reason to believe that he did not entirely fail.

From time to time Lewis heard of his old guide Antoine Grennon from friends who at various periods paid a visit to the glaciers of Switzerland, and more than once, in after years, he and his family were led by that prince of guides over the old romantic and familiar ground, where things were not so much given to change as in other regions; where the ice-rivers flowed with the same aspects, the same frozen currents, eddies, and cataracts as in days gone by; where the elderly guides were replaced by youthful guides of the same type and metal—ready to breast the mountain slopes and scale the highest peaks at a moment's notice; and where Antoine's cottage stood unchanged, with a pretty and rather stout young woman usually kneeling in a tub, engaged in the destruction of linen, and a pretty little girl, who called her "mother," busy with a miniature washing of her own. The only difference being that the child called Antoine "grandfather," and appeared to regard a strapping youth who dwelt there as her sire, and a remarkably stout but handsome middle aged woman as her grandmother.

Last, but not least, the Professor claims a parting word. Little, however, is known as to the future career of the genial man of science, one of whose chief characteristics was his reverent recognition of God in conversing about His works. After returning to his home in the cold north he corresponded for some years with Dr. Lawrence, and never failed to express his warmest regard for the friends with whom he had the good fortune to meet while in Switzerland. He was particularly emphatic—we might almost say enthusiastic—in his expressions of regard for Captain Wopper, expressions and sentiments which the bold mariner heartily reciprocated, and he often stated to Mrs. Roby, over an afternoon cup of tea, his conviction that that Roosian Professor was out o' sight one of the best fellows he had ever met with, and that the remembrance of him warmed his heart to furriners in general and Roosians in particular. This remark usually had the effect of inducing Mrs. Roby to ask some question about his, the Captain's, intercourse with the Professor, which question invariably opened the flood-gates of the Captain's memory, and drew from him prolonged and innumerable "yarns" about his visit to the Continent—yarns which are too long to be set down here, for the Captain never tired of relating, and old Mrs. Roby never wearied of listening, to his memorable rambles on the snow-capped mountains, and his strange adventures among the—Rivers of Ice.

THE END.