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THE WYVERN MYSTERY.

A Novel.

By J. S. LE FANU,

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE SILAS," "GUY DEVERELL," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE WYVERN MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

SPEECH RETURNS.

The dreaded day came and passed, and Charles Fairfield was not dead, but better. The fever was abating, but never did the vital spark burn lower in living man. Seeing that life was so low in his patient, that there was nothing between it and death, the doctor ordered certain measures to be taken.

"The fever is going, you see, but his strength is not coming, nor won't for a while. It's a very nice thing, I can tell you, to bring him to land with such fine tackle. I've brought a salmon ten pound weight into my net with a bit of a trout rod as light as a rush almost. But this is nicer play—not, mind you, that I'd have you in the dumps, ma'am, but it will be necessary to watch him as a cat would a mouse. Now, you'll have on the table by his bed three bottles—decanted all, and ready for use instantaneously. Beside that claret you'll have a bottle of port, and you must also have a bottle of brandy. He'll be always at his tricks, going to faint, and you mustn't let him. Because, ma'am, it might not be easy to get him out of such a faint, and a faint is death, ma'am, if it lasts long enough. Now, you're not to be frightened."

"Oh, no, Doctor Willett."

"No, *that* would not do neither; but I want you clearly to see the importance of it. Let him have the claret to his lips constantly—in a tumbler, mind—you can't give him too much; and whenever you see him look faint, you must reinforce that with port; and no mincing of matters—none of your half measures. I'd rather you made him drunk three times a day than run the least risk once of the other thing; and if the port doesn't get him up quick enough, you must fire away with the brandy; and don't spare it—don't be afraid—we'll get him round, in time, with jellies and other good things; but life must be maintained in the meanwhile any way—every way—whatever way we can. So mind, *three*—claret, port, brandy."

He held up three fingers as he named them, touching them in succession.

"That's a fire it's better should burn a bit too fiercely for an hour than sink too low for a second; once out, out for ever."

"Thanks, Doctor Willett, I understand quite; and you'll be here to-morrow, won't you, at the usual hour?"

"Certainly, ma'am, and it's high time you should begin to take a little care of yourself; you must, indeed, or you'll rue it; you're too much on your feet, and you have had no rest night or day, and it's quite necessary you should, unless you mean to put yourself out of the world, which would not do at all. We can't spare you, ma'am, we can't indeed—a deal too valuable."

For some time Charles Fairfield continued in very much the same state. At the end of three or four days he signed faintly to Alice, who was in the room, with her large soft eyes gazing on the invalid, whenever she could look unperceived. She got up gently and came close to him.

"Yes, darling," and she lowered her head that he might speak more easily.

Charles whispered—

"Quite well?"

"You feel quite well? Thank God," she answered, her large eyes filling with tears.

"Not I—you," he whispered, with querulous impatience; "ain't you?"

"Quite, darling."

His fine blue Fairfield eyes were raised to her face.

With a short sigh, he whispered,—

"I'm glad."

She stooped gently and kissed his thin cheek.

"I've been dreaming so much," he whispered. "Will you tell me exactly what happened—just before my illness—something happened here?"

In a low murmur she told him.

When she stopped he waited as if expecting more, and then he whispered—

"I thought so—yes."

And he sighed heavily.

"You're tired, darling," she said; "you must take a little wine."

"I hate it," he whispered—"tired of it."

"But, darling, the doctor says you must—and—for my sake won't you?"

The faintest possible smile lighted his pale face.

"Kind," he whispered.

And when she placed the glass of claret to his lips he sipped a little and turned away his head languidly.

"Enough. Bring me my dressing-case," he whispered.

She did so.

"The key was in my purse, I think. Open it, Ally."

She found the key and unlocked that inlaid box.

"Underneath there are two or three letters in a big envelope. Keep them for me; don't part with them," he whispered.

She lifted a long envelope containing some papers, and the faintest nod indicated that they were what he sought.

"Keep it safe. Put the case away."

When she came back, looking at her, he raised his eyebrows ever so little, and moved his head. She understood his sign and stooped again to listen.

"She mustn't be prosecuted, she's mad—Ally, mind."

"Darling, whatever you wish."

"Good, Ally; that's enough."

There was a little pause.

"You did not take enough claret, darling Ry. Won't you take a little more for your poor little Ally?" whispered she anxiously.

"I'm very well, darling; by-and-by sleep; is better."

So he laid his cheek closer to the pillow and closed his eyes, and Alice Fairfield stole on tiptoe to her chair, and with another look at him and a deep sigh, she sat down and took her work.

Silent was the room, except for the low breathing of the invalid. Half an hour passed, and Alice stole softly to the bedside. He was awake, and said faintly,—

"Was it your mother?"

"Who, darling?"

"Talking."

"No one was talking, darling."

"I saw her; I thought I heard—*not* her—someone talking."

"No, darling Ry, nothing."

"Dreams; yes," he murmured, and was quiet again.

Sad and ominous seemed those little wanderings. But such things are common in sickness. It was simply weakness.

In a little time she came over softly, and sat down by his pillow.

"I was looking down, Ally," he whispered.

"I'll get it, darling. Something on the floor, is it?" she asked, looking down.

"No, down to my feet; it's very long—stretched."

"Are your feet warm, darling?"

"Quite," and he sighed and closed his eyes.

She continued sitting by his pillow.

"When Willie died, my brother, I was just fifteen."

Then came a pause.

"Willie was the handsomest," he murmured on.

"Willie was elder—nineteen, very tall. Handsome Willie, he liked me the best. I cried a deal that day. I used to cry alone, every day in the orchard, or by the river. He's in the churchyard at Wyvern. I wonder shall I see it any more. There was rain the day of the funeral, they say it is lucky. It was a long coffin, the Fairfields you know——"

"Darling Ry, you are talking too much, it will tire you; take ever so little claret, to please your poor little Ally."

This time he did quite quietly, and then closed his eyes, and dozed.

CHAPTER II.

HARRY DRINKS A GLASS AND SPILLS A GLASS.

About an hour after, old Dulcibella came to the door and knocked. Charles Fairfield had slept a little, and was again awake. Into that still darkened room she came to whisper her message.

"Mr. Harry's come, and he's downstairs, and he'd like to see you, and he wanted to know whether he could see the master."

"I'll go down and see him; say I'll see him with pleasure," said Alice. "Harry is here, darling," she said gently, drawing near to the patient, "but you can't see him, of course."

"I must," whispered the invalid peremptorily.

"Darling, are you well enough? I'm sure you ought not. If the doctor were here he would not allow it. Don't think of it, darling Ry, and he'll come again in a few days, when you are stronger."

"It will do me good," whispered Charles. "Bring him—you tire me; *wait, she* can tell him. I'll see him alone; go, go, Ally, go."

She would have remonstrated, but she saw that in his flushed and irritated looks, which warned her against opposing him further.

"You are to go down, Dulcibella, and bring Mr. Harry to the room to see your master; and Dulcibella, like a dear good creature, won't you tell him how weak Master Charles is?" she urged, following her to the lobby, "and beg of him not to stay long."

In a minute or two more the clank of Harry Fairfield's boot was heard on the stair. He pushed open the door, and stepped in.

"Hullo! Charlie—dark enough to blind a horse here—all right, now. I hear you'll be on your legs again—I can't see you, upon my soul, not a stim a'most—before you see three Sundays—you mustn't be tiring yourself. I'm not talking too loud, eh? Would you mind an inch or two more of the shutter open?"

"No," said Charles, faintly. "A little."

"There, that isn't much. I'm beginning to see a bit now. You've had a stiff bout this time, Charlie, 'twasn't typhus, nothing infectious, chiefly the upper story; but you had a squeak for it, my lad. I'd 'a came over to look after you but my hands was too full."

"No good, Harry; could not have spoken, or seen you. Better now."

"A bit shaky still," said Harry, lowering his voice. "You'll get o'er that, though, fast enough. Keeping your spirits up, I see," and Harry winked at the decanters. "Summat better than that rot-gut claret, too. This is the stuff to put life in you. Port, yes." He filled his brother's glass, smelled to it, and drank it off. "So it is, and right good port. I'll drink your health, Charlie," he added, playfully filling his glass again.

"I'm glad you came, Harry, I feel better," said the invalid, and he extended his thin hand upon the bed to his brother.

"Hoot! of course you do," said Harry, looking hard at him, for he was growing accustomed to the imperfect light. "You'll do very well, and Alice, I hear, is quite well also. And so you've had a visit from the old soldier, and a bit of a row, eh?"

"Very bad, Harry. Oh! God help me," moaned Charles.

"She ain't pretty, and she ain't pleasant—bad without and worse within, like a collier's sack," said Harry, with a disgusted grimace, lifting his eyebrows and shaking his head.

"She's headlong and headstrong, and so there has been bad work. I don't know what's to be done."

"The best thing to be done's to let her alone," said Harry. "They've put her up at Hatherton, I hear."

"That's one thing," murmured Charles, with a great sigh. "I'm a heart-broken man, Harry."

"That's easy mended. Don't prosecute, that's all. Get out o' the country when you're well enough, and they must let her go, and maybe the lesson won't do her no great harm."

"I'm glad I have you to talk to," murmured Charles, with another great sigh. "I can't get it out of my head. You'll help me, Harry?"

"All I can—'taint much."

"And, Harry, there's a thing that troubles me." He paused, it seemed, exhausted.

"Don't mind it now, you're tirin' yourself. Drink a glass o' this."

And he filled the glass from which he had been drinking his port.

"No, I hate wine," he answered. "No, no, by-and-by, perhaps."

"You know best," he acquiesced. "I suppose I must drink it myself," which necessity he complied with accordingly. "I heard the news, you know, and I'd a come sooner but I'm taking an action next 'sizes on a warranty about the grey filly against that d——d rogue, Farmer Lundy, and had to be off t'other side o' Wyvern wi' the lawyer. 'Taint easy to hold your own wi' the cheatin' chaps that's going now, I can tell ye."

"I'm no good to talk now, Harry. You'll find me better next time, only, Harry, mind, remember, I mayn't be long for this world, and—I give you my honour—I swear, in the presence of God, who'll judge me, I never was married to Bertha. It's a lie. I knew she'd give me trouble some day; but it's a lie. Alice is my wife. I never had a wife but Alice, by G—Almighty! That other's a lie. Don't you know it's a lie, Harry?"

"Don't be botherin' yourself about that now," said Harry, coldly, with rather a sullen countenance, looking askance through the open space in the window shutter to the distant horizon. "Long heads, my lad, and lawyers lear for the quips and cranks o' law. What should I know?"

"Harry, I know you love me; you won't let wrong be believed," said Charles Fairfield, in a voice suddenly stronger than he had spoken in before.

"I won't let wrong be believed," he answered coolly, perhaps sulkily; and he looked at him steadily for a little with his mouth sullenly open.

"You know, Harry," he pleaded, "there's a little child coming: it would not do to wrong it. Oh! Harry, don't you love your poor, only brother."

Harry looked as if he was going to say something saucy, but instead of that, he broke into a short laugh.

"Upon my soul, Charlie, a fellow'd think you took me for an affidavit-man. When did I ever tell now't but the truth? Sich rot! A chap like me, that's faulted always for bein' too blunt and plain-spoken, and as for likin', I'd like to know what else brings me here. Of course I don't say I love anyone, all out, as well as Harry Fairfield. You're my brother, and I stand by you according; but as I said before, I love my shirt very well, but I like my skin better. Hey! And that's all fair."

"All fair, Harry—I'll—I'll talk no more now, Harry. I'll lie down for a little, and we'll meet again."

Harry was again looking through the space of the open shutter, and he yawned. He was thinking of taking his leave.

In this "brown study" he was interrupted by a sound. It was like the beginning of a little laugh. He looked at Charlie, who had uttered it; his thin hand was extended toward the little table at the bedside, and his long arm in its shirt-sleeve. His eyes were open, but his face was changed. Harry had seen death often enough to recognise it. With a dreadful start, he was on his feet, and had seized his brother by the shoulder.

"Charlie, man,—Charlie! look at me—my God!" and he seized the brandy bottle and poured ever so much into the open lips. It flowed over from the corners of the mouth, over cheek and chin; the throat swallowed not; the eyes stared their

earnest stare, unchanging into immeasurable distance. Charles Fairfield was among the Fairfields of other times; hope and fear, the troubles and the dream, ended.

CHAPTER III.

HOME TO WYVERN.

When a sick man dies he leaves his bed and his physic. His best friend asks him not to stay, and sweetheart and kindred concur in putting him out of doors, to lie in a bed of clay, under the sky, come frost, or storm, or rain; a dumb outcast from fireside, tankard, and even the talk of others.

Tall Charles Fairfield, of the blue eyes, was, in due course, robed in his strange white suit, boxed up and screwed down, with a plated inscription over his cold breast, recounting his Christian and surnames, and the tale of his years.

If from that serene slumber, he could have been called again, the loud and exceeding bitter cry, the wild farewell of his poor little Ally, would have wakened him; but her loving Ry, her hero, slept on, with the unearthly light on his face till the coffin-lid hid it, and in the morning the athlete passed downstairs on men's shoulders, and was slid reverently into a hearse, and went away to old Wyvern churchyard.

At ten o'clock in the morning, Charlie Fairfield was on the ground. Was old Squire Harry there to meet his son, and follow his coffin to the aisle of the ancient little church, and thence to his place in the churchyard?

Not he.

"Serve him right," said the Squire, when he heard it. "I'm d——d if he'll lie in our vault; let him go to Parson Maybell, yonder, under the trees; *I*'ll not have him."

So Charles Fairfield is buried there under the drip of those melancholy old trees, close by the gentle vicar and his good and pretty wife, over whom the grass has grown long, and the leaves of twenty summers have bloomed and fallen, and whose forlorn and beautiful little child was to be his bride, and is now his widow.

Harry Fairfield was there, with the undertaker's black cloak over his well-knit Fairfield shoulders. He nodded to this friend and that in the crowd, gruffly. His face was lowering with thought, his eyes cast down, and sometimes raised in an abstracted glare to the face of some unobserved bystander for a few moments. Conspicuous above other uncovered heads was his. The tall stature, and statuesque proportions of his race would have marked him without the black mantle for the kinsman of the dead Fairfield.

Up to Wyvern House, after the funeral was over, went Harry. The old man, his hat in his hand, was bareheaded, on the steps; as he approached he nodded to his last remaining son. Three were gone now. A faint sunlight glinted on his old features; a chill northern air stirred his white locks. A gloomy, but noble image of winter the gaunt old man presented.

"Well, that's over; there's the lad buried?"

"Just where you wished, sir, near Vicar Maybell's grave, under the trees."

The old Squire grunted an assent.

"The neighbours was there, I dare say?"

"Yes, sir, *all*—I think."

"I shouldn't wonder—they liked Charlie—they did. He's buried up there alone—well, he deserved it. Was Dobbs there, from Craybourne? He was good to Dobbs. He gave that fellow twenty pun' once, like a big fool, when Dobbs was druv to the wall, the time he lost his cattle; *he* was there?"

"Yes, I saw Dobbs there, sir, he was crying."

"More fool Dobbs—more fool he," said the Squire, and then came a short pause; "cryin' was he?"

"Yes, sir."

"He's a big fool—Dobbs is a fool."

"A man cryin' always looks a fool, the rum faces they makes when they're blubbin'," observed Harry. "Some o' the Wykeford folk was there—Rodney was at his funeral."

"Rodney? He didn't like a bone in his skin. Rodney's a bad dog. What brought Rodney to *my* son's funeral?"

"He's took up wi' them preachin' folk at Wykeford, I'm told, and he came down, I 'spose, to show the swaddlers what a forgivin', charitable chap he is. Before he put on his hat, he come over and put out his hand to me."

"And ye took it! ye know ye took it."

"Well, the folk was lookin' on, and he took me so short," said Harry.

"Charlie wouldn't 'a done that; he wouldn't 'a took his hand over your grave; but you're not like us—never was; you were cut out for a lawyer, I think."

"Well, the folk would 'a talked, ye know, sir."

"Talked, sir, would they?" retorted the Squire, with an angry leer, "I never cared the crack o' a cart-whip what the folk talked—let 'em talk, d—- 'em. And ye had no gloves, Dickon says, nor nothin', buried like a dog 'a most, up in a corner there."

"Ye told me not to lay out a shillin' sir," said Harry.

"If I did I did, but angry folk don't always mean all they says; no matter, we're done wi' it now—it's over. He was worth ye all," broke out the Squire passionately; "I could 'a liked him, if he had 'a liked me—if he had 'a let me, but he didn't, and—there it is."

So the Squire walked on a little hastily, which was his way when he chose to be alone, down the steps with gaunt, stumbling gait, and slowly away into the tall woods close by, and in that ancestral shadow disappeared.

Future—present—past. The future—mist, a tint, and shadow. The cloud on which fear and hope project their airy phantoms, living in imagination, and peopled by romance—a dream of dreams. The present only we possess man's momentary dominion, plastic under his hand as the clay under the potter's—always a moment of the present in our absolute power—always that fleeting, plastic moment speeding into the past—immutable, eternal. The metal flows molten by, and then chills and fixes for ever. So with the life of man—so with the spirit of man. Work while it is called day. The moment fixes the retrospect, and death the character, for ever. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. The proud man looks on the past he has made. The hammer of Thor can't break it; the fire that is not quenched can't melt it. His thoughtless handiwork will be the same for ever.

Old Squire Harry did not talk any more about Charlie. About a month after this he sent to Craybourne to say that Dobbs must come up to Wyvern. Dobbs' heart failed him when he heard it. Everyone was afraid of old Squire Harry, for in his anger he regarded neither his own interest nor other men's safety.

"Ho, Dobbs! you're not fit for Craybourne, the farm's too much for you, and I've nothing else to gi'e ye." Dobbs' heart quailed at these words. "You're a fool, Dobbs—you're a fool—you're not equal to it, man. I wonder you didn't complain o' your rent. It's too much—too high by half. I told Cresswell to let you off every rent day a good penn'orth, for future, and don't you talk about it to no one, 'twould stop that." He laid his hand on Dobbs' shoulder, and looked not unkindly in his face.

And then he turned and walked away, and Dobbs knew that his audience was over.

And the old Squire was growing older, and grass and weeds were growing apace over handsome Charlie Fairfield's grave in Wyvern. But the old man never sent to Carwell Grange, nor asked questions about Alice. That wound was not healed, as death heals some.

Harry came, but Alice was ill, and could not see him. Lady Wyndale came, and her she saw, and that good-natured kinswoman made her promise that she would come and live with her so soon as she was well enough to leave the Grange.

And Alice lay still in her bed, as the doctor commanded, and her heart seemed breaking. The summer would return, but

Ry would never come again. The years would come and pass—how were they to be got over? And, oh! the poor little thing that was coming!—what a sad welcome! It would break her heart to look at it. "Oh, Ry, Ry, Ry, my darling!"

So the morning broke and evening closed, and her great eyes were wet with tears—"the rain it raineth every day."

CHAPTER IV.

A TWILIGHT VISIT.

In the evening Tom had looked in at his usual hour, and was recruiting himself with his big mug of beer and lump of bread and cheese at the kitchen table, and now the keen edge of appetite removed, he was talking agreeably. This was what he called his supper. The flush of sunset on the sky was fading into twilight, and Tom was chatting with old Mildred Tarnley.

"Who'd think it was only three weeks since the funeral?" said Tom— "three weeks to-morrow."

"Ay, to-morrow. 'Twas a Thursday, I mind, by the little boy comin' from Gryce's mill, for the laundress's money, by noon. Two months ago, to look at him, you'd a' said there was forty years' life in him; but death keeps no calendar, they say. I wonder Harry Fairfield isn't here oftener. Though she might not talk wi' him nor see him, the sound o' his voice in the house would do her good—his own brother, you know."

"Dead men, 'tis an old sayin', is kin to none," said Tom. "They goes their own gate, and so does the livin'."

"There's that woman in jail. What's to be done wi' her, and who's to talk wi' the lawyer folk?" said Mildred.

"Ill luck came wi' her to Carwell," said Tom. "Pity he ever set eyes on her; but chances will be, and how can cat help it if maid be a fool? I don't know nothin o' that business, but in this world nout for nout is the most of our wages, and I take it folks knows what they are about, more or less."

Mildred Tarnley sniffed at this oracular speech, and turned up her nose, and went over to the dresser and arranged some matters there.

"The days is shortening apace. My old eyes can scarce see over here without a candle," she said, returning. "But there's a many a thing to be settled in this house, I'm thinkin'."

Tom nodded an acquiescence, and stood up and stretched himself, and looked up to the darkening sky.

"The crows is home in Carwell Wood; 'twill be time to be turning keys and drawing of bolts," said Tom. "Ay, many a thing 'll want settlin', I doubt, down here, and who's to do it?"

"Ay, who's to do it?" repeated Mildred. "I tell ye, Tom, there's many a thing—*too* many a thing—more than ye wot of—enough to bring him out o' his grave, Tom—as I've heered stories, many a one, wi' less reason."

As she ceased, a clink of a horseshoe was heard in the little yard without, and a tall figure leading a horse, as Charles Fairfield used often to do, on his late returns to his home, looked in at the window— in that uncertain twilight, in stature, attitude, and, as well as she could see, in face, so much resembling the deceased master of Carwell Grange, that Mrs. Tarnley gasped,—

"My good Lord! Who's that?"

Something of the same momentary alarm puzzled Tom, who frowned wildly at it, with his fists clenched beside him.

It was Harry Fairfield, who exhibited, as sometimes happens in certain lights and moments, a family resemblance, which had never struck those most familiar with his appearance.

"Lawk, it's Mr. Harry; run out, Tom, and take his nag, will ye?"

Out went Tom, and in came Harry Fairfield. He looked about him. He did not smile facetiously and nod, and take old Mildred's dubious hand, as he was wont, and crack a joke, not always very welcome or very pleasant, to the tune of

> "Nobody coming to marry me—
> Nobody coming to woo."

On the contrary, he looked as if he saw nothing there but walls and twilight, and as heavy laden with gloomy thoughts as

the troubled ghost she had imagined.

"How is Miss Ally? how is your mistress?" at last he inquired abruptly. "Only middling?"

"Ailing, sir," answered Mildred, dryly.

"Tell her I'm here, will ye? and has something to tell her and talk over, and will make it as short as I can. Tell her I'd a come earlier, but couldn't, for the sessions at Wykeford, and dined wi' a neighbour in the town; and say I mayn't be able to come for a good while again. Is she up?"

"No, sir, the doctor keeps her still to her bed."

"Well, old Dulcey Crane's there; ain't she?"

"Ay, sir, and Lilly Dogger, too. Little good the slut's to me these days."

Harry was trying to read his watch at the darkened window.

"Tell her all that—quick, for time flies," said Harry.

Harry Fairfield remained in the kitchen while old Mildred did his message, and she speedily returned to say that Alice was sitting up by the fire, and would see him.

Up the dim stairs went Harry. He had not been up there since the day he saw the undertakers at Charlie's coffin, and had his last peep at his darkening face. Up he strode with his hand on the banister, and old Mildred gliding before him like a shadow. She knocked at the door. It was not that of the room which they had occupied, where poor Charles Fairfield had died, but the adjoining one, hurriedly arranged, with such extemporized comforts as the primitive people of the household could manage—homely enough, but not desolate, it looked.

Opening the door, she said—"Here's Master Harry, ma'am, a-comin' to see you."

Harry was already in the room. There were candles lighted on a little table near the bed, although the shutters were still open, and the faint twilight mingling with the light of the candles made a sort of purple halo. Alice was sitting in a great chair by the fire in her dressing-gown, pale, and looking very ill. She did not speak; she extended her hand.

"Came to see you, Ally. Troublesome world; but you must look up a bit, you know. Troubles are but trials, they say, and can't last for ever; so don't you be frettin' yourself out o' the world, lass, and makin' more food for worms."

And with this consolation he shook her hand.

"I would have seen you, Harry, when you called before—it was very kind of you—but I could not. I am better now, thank God. I can't believe it still, sometimes," and her eyes filled with tears—

"Well, well, well," said Harry, "where's the good o' cryin'; cryin' won't bring him back, you know. There, there. And I want to say a word to you about that woman that's in jail, you know. 'Tis right you should know everything. He should a told you more about that, don't you see, else ye might put your foot in it."

Paler still turned Alice at these words.

"Tell them to go in there," said he in a lower tone, indicating with his thumb over his shoulder, a sort of recess at the far end of the room, in which stood a table with some work on it.

At a word from Alice old Dulcibella called Lilly Dogger into that distant "alcove," as Mildred termed it.

"It's about that woman," he continued, in a very low tone, "about that one—Bertha. That woman, you know, that's in Hatherton Jail, you remember. There's no good prosecuting that one. Poor Charles wouldn't have allowed it at no price."

"He said so. I wouldn't for the world," she answered very faintly.

"No, of course; he wished it, and we'd like to see his wishes complied with, poor fellow, now he's gone," acquiesced Harry with alacrity. "And you know about her?" he added, in a *very* low tone.

"Oh no, no, Harry; no, please," she answered imploringly.

"Well, it wouldn't do for you, you know, to be gettin' up in the witness-box at the 'sizes to hang her, ye know."

"Oh dear, Harry; no, I never could have thought of it."

"Well, you are not bound, luckily; nor no one. I saw Rodney to-day about it; there's no recognizances—he only took the informations—and I said you wouldn't prosecute; nor *I* won't, *I'm* sure; and the crown won't take it up, and so it will fall through, and end quietly—the best way for you; for, as I told him, you're not in health to go down there to be battlin' wi' lawyers, and all sorts; 'twould never answer *you*, ye know. So here's a slip o' paper I wrote, and I told him I knew you'd sign it—only sayin' you have no notion of prosecutin' that woman, nor moving more in the matter."

He placed it in her hand.

"I'm sure it's quite right; it's just what I mean. Thank you, Harry; you're very good."

"Get the ink and pen," said Harry aloud to Dulcibella.

"'Tis downstairs," answered she. "I'll fetch it."

And Dulcibella withdrew. Harry was poking about the shelves and the chimney-piece.

"This is ink," said he, "ain't it?" So it was, and a pen. "I think it will write—try it, Ally."

So it was signed; and he had fairly described its tenor and effect to his widowed sister-in-law.

"I'll see Rodney this evening and show him this, to prevent his bothering you here about it. And," he almost whispered, "you know about that woman? or you don't—do you?"

Her lips moved, but he could hear no words.

"She was once a fine woman—ye wouldn't think—a devilish fine woman, I can tell you; and she says—ye know 'twas more than likin'—she says she has the whip hand o' ye—first come, first served. She's talkin o' law, and all that. She says—but it won't make no odds now, you know, what she says—well, she says she was his wife."

"Oh, God!—it's a lie," whispered the poor lady, with white lips, and staring at him with darkening eyes.

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't," he answered. "But it don't much matter now; and I daresay we'll hear nothing about it, and dead men's past fooling, ye know. Good night, Ally, and God bless you; and take care o' yourself, and don't be crying your eyes out like that. And I'll come again as soon as I can; and any business, you know, or anything, I'll be always ready to do for you—and good night, Ally, and mind all I said."

Since those terrible words of his were spoken she had not heard a syllable. He took her icy hand. He looked for a puzzled moment in her clouded eyes, and nodded, and he called to the little girl in the adjoining room.

"I'm going now, child, and do you look after your mistress."

By a coincidence or association—something suggested by Harry Fairfield's looks, was it?—old Mildred Tarnley's head was full of the Dutchwoman when Dulcibella came into the kitchen.

"You took out the ink, Tom, when you was weighin' them oats to-day," said she, and out went Tom in search of that always errant and mitching article.

"I was sayin' to Tom as ye came in, Mrs. Crane, how I hoped to see that one in her place. I think I'd walk to Hatherton and back to see her hanged, the false jade, wi' her knife, and her puce pelisse, and her divilry. Old witch!"

"Lawk, Mrs. Tarnley, how can ye?"

"Well, now Master Charles is under the mould, I wouldn't spare her. What for shouldn't Mrs. Fairfield make her pay for the pipe she danced to. It's her turn now—

'When you are anvil, hold you still,

When you are hammer, strike your fill.'

And if I was Mrs. Fairfield, *maybe* I wouldn't make her smoke for all."

"I think my lady will do just what poor Master Charles wished, and I know nothing about the woman," said Dulcibella, "only they all say she's not right in her head, Mrs. Tarnley, and I don't think she'll slight his last word, and punish the woman; 'twould be the same as sacrilege a'most; and what of her? Much matter about a wooden platter! and its ill burning the house to frighten the mice."

Harry Fairfield here sauntered into the kitchen, rolling unspoken thoughts in his mind. The conversation subsided at his approach; Dulcibella made her courtesy and withdrew, and said he to Tom, who was entering with the ink-bottle,—

"Tom, run out, will ye, and get my nag ready for the road; I'll be off this minute."

Tom departed promptly.

"Well, Mildred," said he, eyeing her darkly from the corners of his eyes, "sorrow comes unsent for."

"Ay, sure, she's breakin' her heart, poor thing."

"'Twon't break, I warrant, for all that," he answered; "sorrow for a husband they say is a pain in the elbow, sharp and short."

"All along o' that ugly Dutch beast. 'Twas an ill wind carried her to Carwell," said Mildred.

He shut his eyes and shook his head.

"That couldn't do nowhere," said he,—

"'Two cats and one mouse,
Two wives in one house.'"

"Master Charles was no such fool. What for should he ever a' married such as that? I couldn't believe no such thing," said Mrs. Tarnley, sharply.

"'Two dogs at one bone,
Can never agree in one,'"

repeated Harry, oracularly. "There's no need, mind, to set folks' tongues a ringin', nor much good in tryin' to hide the matter, for her people won't never let it rest, I lay ye what ye please,—never. 'Twill be strange news up at Wyvern, but I'm afeard she'll prove it only too ready; 'twill shame us finely."

"Well, let them talk—'As the bell clinks, so the fool thinks'—and who the worse. I don't believe it no how. He never would ha' brought down the Fairfields to that, and if he had, he could not ha' brought the poor young creature upstairs into such trouble and shame. I won't believe it of him till it's proved."

"I hope they may never prove it. But what can we do? You and I know how they lived here, and I have heard her call him husband as often as I have fingers and toes, but, bless ye, we'll hold our tongues—you will, eh? won't ye, Mildred? ye musn't be talkin'."

"Talkin'! I ha' nout to talk about. Fudge! man, I don't believe it—'tis a d——d lie, from top to bottom."

"I hope so," said he.

"A shameless liar she was, the blackest I ever heard talk."

"Best let sleepin' dogs be," said he.

There was some silver loose in his trousers' pocket, and he was fumbling with it, and looking hard at Mildred as he spoke to her. Sometimes, between his finger and thumb, he held the shilling—sometimes the half-crown. He was mentally deciding which to part with, and it ended by his presenting Mildred with the shilling, and recommending her to

apply this splendid "tip" to the purchase of tea.

Some people experience a glow after they have done a great benevolence; as he walked into the stable-yard, Harry experienced a sensation, but it wasn't a glow, a chill rather. Remembering the oblique look with which she eyed the silver coin in her dark palm, and her scant thanks, he was thinking what a beast he was to part with his money so lightly.

Mildred Tarnley cynically muttered to herself in the kitchen,—

> "'Farewell frost,
> Nothing got nor nothing lost.'

Here's a gift! Bless him! I mind the time a Fairfield would a' been ashamed to give an old servant such a vails. Hoot! what's the world a comin' to? 'Tis time we was a goin'. But Master Harry was ever the same—a thrifty lad he was, that looked after his pennies sharply," said old Mildred Tarnley, scornfully; and she dropped the coin disdainfully into a little tin porringer that stood on the dresser.

And Tom came in, and the doors were made sure, and Mildred Tarnley made her modest cup of tea, and all was subsiding for the night.

But Harry's words had stricken Alice Fairfield. Perhaps those viewless arrows oftener kill than people think of. Up in her homely room Alice now lay very ill indeed.

CHAPTER V.

THE HEIR OF THE FAIRFIELDS.

At dead of night Alice was very ill, and Tom was called up to ride across Cressley Common for the Wykeford doctor. Worse and worse she grew. In this unknown danger—without the support of a husband's love or consolation—"the pains of hell gat hold of her," the fear of death was upon her. Glad was she in her lonely terrors to hear the friendly voice of Doctor Willett as he came up the stairs, with a heavy, booted step, in hurried conversation with old Dulcibella Crane, who had gone down to meet him on hearing the sound of his arrival.

In lower tones the doctor put his questions when he had arrived in his patient's room, and his manner became stern, and his measures prompt, and it was plain that he was very much alarmed.

Alice Fairfield was in danger—in so great danger that he would have called in the Hatherton doctor, or any other, to share his responsibility, if the horse which Tom drove had not had as much as he could do that night in the long trot—and partly canter—to Wykeford and back again to the Grange.

Alice's danger increased, and her state became so alarming that the doctor was afraid to leave his patient, and stayed that night at the Grange.

In the morning he sent Tom to Hatherton with a summons for his brother physician, and now this quaint household grew thoroughly alarmed.

The lady was past the effort of speaking, almost of thinking, and lay like a white image in her bed. Old Dulcibella happily had charge of the money, not much, which Alice had for present use; so the doctors had their fees, and were gone, and Doctor Willett, of Wykeford, was to come again in the evening, leaving his patient, as he said, quieter, but still in a very precarious state.

When the Wykeford doctor returned he found her again too ill to think of leaving her. At midnight Tom was obliged to mount, and ride away to Hatherton for the other doctor.

Before the Hatherton doctor had reached the Grange, however, a tiny voice was crying there—a little spirit had come, a scion of the Fairfield race.

Mrs. Tarnley wrote to Harry Fairfield to Wyvern to announce the event, which she did thus:—

"SIR,

"Master Harey, it has came a sirprise. Missis is this mornin' gev burth to a boy and air; babe is well, but Missis Fairfield low and dangerous.

"Your servant,

"MILDRED TARNLEY."

Dulcibella, without consulting Mildred, any more than Mildred did her, wrote also a letter, gentler and more gracious, but certainly no better spelled. When these reached Wyvern, Harry was from home.

It was not till four days had passed that Harry Fairfield arrived in the afternoon.

He had thrown his horse's bridle to Tom in the stable yard, and appeared suddenly before Mildred Tarnley in the kitchen door.

"Well, how's the lady in the straw?" inquired Harry, looking uncomfortable, but smiling his best. "How is Miss Alice?"

"Mrs. Fairfield's very bad, and the doctor han't much hopes of her. She lies at God's mercy, sir."

"She'll be better, you'll find. She'll be all right soon. And when was it—you put no date to your note?"

"On Friday, I think. We're so put about here I scarce know one day from t'other."

"She'll be better. Is anyone here with her?"

"A nurse from Hatherton."

"No one else? I thought Lady Wyndale might a' come."

"I was goin' to send over there, but Doctor Willett said no."

"Did he? Why?"

"Not yet a bit; he says she'd be in his way and no use, and maybe worrit her into a fever."

"Very like," said Harry; "and how's the boy—isn't it a boy?"

"Boy—yes, sir, a fine thumpin' baby—and like to do well, and will prove, belike, a true, open-handed Fairfield, and a brave Squire o' Wyvern."

"Well, that's as it may be. I'll not trouble him. I have more than enough to my share as it is—and there's some things that's better never than late, and I'll live and die a bachelor. I've more years than my teeth shows."

And Harry smiled and showed his fine teeth.

"There's Fairfields has took a wife later than you," said she, eyeing him darkly.

"Too wise, old girl. You'll not catch me at that work. Wives is like Flanders' mares, as the Squire says, fairest afar off."

"Hey?" snarled old Mildred, with a prolonged note.

"No, lass, I don't want, nohow, to be Squire o' Wyvern—there's more pains than gains in it; always one thing or t'other wrong—one begs and t'other robs, and ten cusses to one blessin'. I don't want folks to say o' me as they does of some—Harry's a hog, and does no good till he dies."

"Folk do like an estate, though," said Mildred, with another shrewd look.

"Ay, if all's straight and clear, but I don't like debts and bother, and I a' seen how the old boy's worried that way till he's fit to drown himself in the pond. I can do something, buyin' or sellin'; and little and often, you know, fills the purse."

Mildred was silent.

"They do say—I mean, I knows it for certain, there is a screw loose—and you know where, I think—but how can I help that? The Dutchwoman, I know, can prove her marriage to poor Charlie, but never you blab—no more will I. There was no child o' that marriage—neither chick nor child, so, bein' as she is, 'tis little to her how that sow's handled. 'Twould be a pity poor Charlie's son should lose his own; and ye may tell Alice I'm glad there's a boy, and that she'll ha' no trouble from me, but all the help I can, and that's a fact, and that's God's truth."

"Well, well, that *is* queer!—I never heard man speak as you speak."

There was a cynical incredulity in Mildred Tarnley's tone.

"Listen, now—here we be alone, eh?" said he, looking round.

"Ye may say so," she said, with a discontented emphasis.

"I'd tell you a thing in a minute, old Tarnley, only they say old vessels must leak. Will you be staunch? Will ye hold your tongue on't if I tell you a thing?"

"Ay," said Mildred.

"Because one barking dog sets all the street a barking, ye know," he added.

"Ye know me well, Master Harry. I could hold my tongue always when there was need."

"And that's the reason I'm going to talk to you," said Harry, "and no one knows it, mind, but yourself, and if it gets out I'll

know who to blame."

"'Twon't get out for me," said Mildred, looking hard at him.

"One devil drubs another, they say, and if the young Squire upstairs has a foot in the mud I've one in the mire," said Harry. "If his hat has a hole, my shoe has another. And 'tis a bad bargain where both are losers."

"Well, I can't see it nohow. I don't know what you're drivin' at; but I think you're no fool, Master Harry; ye never was that, and it's a cunning part, I've heered, to play the fool well."

And Harry did look very cunning as she cited this saw, and for a moment also a little put out. But he quickly resumed, and staring in her face surlily, said he,—

"Well, I *am* cunnin'; I hope I am; and you're a little bit that way yourself, old Mildred; no fool, anyhow, that ever I could see."

"Crafty I may be, I ha' lived years and seen folk enough to make me, but my heart weren't set never on pelf.

> 'A thousand pounds and a bottle of hay
> Is all one at doom's-day.'"

"So it is," said he, "but there's a good many days 'twixt this and doom's-day yet and money 'll do more than my lord's letter, any place, and I'll not deny I'd like Wyvern well enough if my hand was free to lay on it. But I a' thought it well over, and it wouldn't fit me nohow. I can't."

"Ye're the first Fairfield I ever heered say that Wyvern wouldn't fit him," said she.

"Is that beer in the jug?" he asked, nodding toward a brown jug that stood on the dresser.

"Yes, sir. Would ye like a drink?"

"Ay, if it baint stale."

"Fresh drew, just as you was coming in, sir," said she, setting it down on the table. "I'll fetch ye a glass."

"Never mind a glass, a rantin' dog like me can drink out of a well-bucket, much less a brown jug," and clutching it carelessly by the handle he quaffed as long and deep a draught as his ancestor and namesake might after his exhausting flight from Worcester a couple of hundred years before.

"You are puzzled, old girl, and don't know whether I be in jest or earnest. But, good or bad, wives must be had—you know, and you never heard of a Fairfield yet that was lucky in a wife, or hadn't a screw loose sometime about they sort o' cattle; and ye're an old servant, Mildred, and though you be a bit testy, you're true, and I may tell ye things I wouldn't tell no one, not the Governor, not my little finger; I'd burn my shirt if it knew; and ye won't tell no one, upon your soul, and as ye hope to be saved?"

"I can keep counsel, I'm good at that," said Mildred.

"Well, I need not say no more than this: there's them that's quiet enough now, and will be, that if they thought I was Squire o' Wyvern I'd make the world too hot to hold me. I'd rather be Harry Fairfield at fair and market than archbishop of hell, I can tell ye, havin' no likin' for fine titles and honour, and glory, wi' a tethered leg and a sore heart; better to go your own gait, and eat your mouthful where ye find it, than go in gold wi' a broken back, that's all, and that's truth. If 'twas otherwise I'd be down in the mouth, I can tell you, about the young gen-man upstairs, and I'd a' liked his birthday no better than a shepherd loves a bright Candlemas; but as it is—no matter, 'tis better to me than a pot o' gold, and I drink the little chap's health, and I wish she had a sieve full o' them, and that's God's truth, as I stand here," and Harry backed the declaration with an oath.

"Well, I believe you, Harry," said Mildred.

"And I'm glad o't," she added after a pause.

"I'm very glad—there has been ill blood o'er much in the family," she resumed; "it's time there should be peace and

brotherhood, God knows—and—I'm glad to hear you speak like that, sir."

And, so saying, she extended her dark, hard palm to him, and he took it, and laughed.

"Every man knows where his own shoe pinches," said he; "'tis a shrewish world, old girl, and there's warts and chilblains where no one guesses, but things won't be for ever; 'tis a long lane, ye know, that has no turning, and the burr won't stick always."

"Ay, ay, Master Harry, as I've heard the old folks say, 'Be the day never so long, at last cometh even-song.'"

"And how is the lady herself?" said he.

"As bad as can be, a'most," answered Mildred.

"Who says so?" he asked.

"The doctor; he has no opinion of her, I'm afeared, poor little thing."

"The doctor—does he?—but is he any good?"

"It's Doctor Willett of Wykeford. He's thought a deal of by most folk down here. I don't know, I'm sure, but he seems very nice about her, I think, and kind, and looks after the baby too."

"That's right; I'm glad o' that. I'd pay something myself rather than it should be neglected; and what does he say o' the boy?"

"Doin' very well—nothin' against him; but, you know, 'tis only a few days, and o'er soon to judge yet a bit."

"I wonder could she see me for a minute?"

"Hoot, man! How came that in your head? Why, the room's dark, and she never speaks above a whisper, and not five words then, and only, may be, thrice in a day. Ye don't know what way she is; 'tis just the turn o' a halfpenny whether she'll live till mornin'."

"That's bad. I didn't think she could be that bad," said he.

"She is, then."

"'Twould do her no harm to know that there's some rent—about thirty pounds—due from Riddleswake. I'll give Tom a bit of a note to Farmer Wycraft, and he'll pay it. It's settled to her for her life—I know that—and she'll be wantin' money; and see you that the child wants nothing. I have lots o' reasons why that child should do well. This ain't bad beer, I can tell you. Another mug of it wouldn't hurt me, and if you can make me out a mouthful of anything; I'm beastly hungry."

A bit of cold corned beef, some cheese, and a loaf Mildred Tarnley produced, and Harry made a hearty meal in the kitchen, not disturbing that engrossing business by conversation, while old Mildred went to and fro, into the scullery and back again, and busied herself about her saucepans and dishes.

"Now get me a pen and ink and a bit o' paper. There's no one in the house will be the worse of a little money, and I'll write that note." And so he did, and handed it to Mildred with the air of a prince who was bestowing a gift.

"*There!* That will make the mare go for a while longer; and, look ye, where's old Dulcibella Crane? I'd like to shake hands wi' her before I go."

"Upstairs, wi' her mistress."

"Tell her to come down and see me for a minute; and mind, old Tarnley, ye must write to me often—to-morrow and next day—and—where's my hat?—on my head, by Jove—and so on; for if anything should happen—if little Alice should founder, you know—there should be some one, when she's off the hooks, to look after things a bit; and the Governor won't do nothing—put that out o' yer head—and 'twill all fall on my shoulders; and send her down to me—old Dulcibella Crane, I mean—for I'm going, and unless I'm wanted I mayn't see ye here for many a day."

Thus charged, Mildred Tarnley went away, and in a few minutes old Dulcibella appeared.

From her, after he had examined her as to the state of the lady upstairs, and of her baby, he exacted the same promise as that which Mildred had made him—a promise to write often to Wyvern.

He did not mind making her the same odd confidence which he had made to Mildred. There was no need, he thought, for Dulcibella was soft-hearted, and somewhat soft-headed, too, and by no means given to suspicion; and as she had not the evil that attends shrewdness, neither had she the reliability, and she was too much given to talking, and his secret would then become more public than he cared to make it.

"And tell the mistress I wish her joy, do you mind, and I'd like to stand godfather to the boy whenever the christenin' is, and to put me to any work she thinks I'm fit for; and tell her I wrote about a handful o' rent that's coming to her; and good-bye, and take care o' yourself; and who's nursin' the baby?"

"We feeds it wi' goat's milk and sich like, by direction of the doctor. Wouldn't ye like to see it?"

"Not this time—I'm off—but—who's taking charge of him?"

"Among us the poor little darling is, but mostly me."

"Well, that's right, and look after it well, and I'll give ye a bit o' money when—when it's on a little, and don't forget to write; and ye needn't say nout to old Mildred, for she's goin' to write too, and might take huff if she knew that you was writin' also, do you see?"

"Yes, Master Harry, surely none shall know, and I'm thinkin' ye *would* like to see it, and it won't be nothin' the worse, ye'll find, and it *is* such a darlin'."

"And so like its poor papa that's gone, eh? But I haven't no time, dear, this bout, and you may give his worship my kind regards, and tell him the more he thrives the better I'm pleased, and old chimnies won't stand for ever, and he won't be long kept out of his own, and I'll keep them aloof that would make or meddle or mar, and good-bye, old Dulcie Crane, and mind what I said."

And clapping her on the shoulder with his strong hand, he smiled after his fashion, and wagged his head and strode into the yard, mounted his horse, and was soon far away on the road from Carwell Grange.

CHAPTER VI.

BERTHA VELDERKAUST.

Harry Fairfield, when, crossing Cressley Common, he reached the road that diverges eastward, took that turn, and rode towards Hatherton.

Surly enough he looked when he slackened his pace to a walk at the foot of the long low hill that interposes between the common and that town.

He had a short pipe in his pocket, with a big bowl, and a metal cover to it, into which he stuffed some pinches of tobacco —a shilling went a good way in that sort of smoking, and Harry was economical—and soon his pipe was in full play.

This narcotic helped his cogitative powers, and he had a good deal to think about. He was going to see his old friend Bertha Velderkaust, in her new situation, and he was considering how best to approach her.

From such ruminations—too vague and irregular to be reduced to logical sequence and arrangement—there arise, nevertheless, conclusions by no means unimportant, and quite distinct enough. By this time he had smoked his pipe out, and looked down from the summit of this rising ground upon the pretty town spreading among the trees, with its old tower and steeple, its court-house, its parsonage, and that high-walled stronghold on the right, in which the object of his visit was at present secluded.

When, having complied with all formalities, he obtained an entrance, and obtained permission to visit that person, it was her pleasure to keep him waiting for some time for his audience. Harry grew cross and impatient, the more so as he heard that she had a friend with her, drinking tea, and reading the newspaper to her.

As Harry Fairfield was one of those persons who are averse to sacrificing themselves without a good consideration, the reader will conclude that his object was not altogether to serve the "old soldier." If it had been only that, I think he would have left the town of Hatherton *re infecta*. As it was, he waited, and at last was admitted.

This lady, Bertha Velderkaust, chose to be known among her neighbours in misfortune as Madame Bertha Fairfield of Wyvern, which style and title she preferred to that by which she had been committed to the safe keeping of the gaoler.

When Harry Fairfield stepped into her small apartment he found her dressed and bedizened in a way that a little surprised him.

She had on a sky-blue satin dress, caught up at one side with a bunch of artificial flowers. She had a lace scarf and a lace coiffure lying flat across her head, with a miniature coronet of Roman pearl in the centre, and lappets depending at each side. She had a double necklace of enormous Roman pearls about her throat, and a pair of pink velvet slippers, embroidered with beads and bugles, and this tawdry figure sat on the side of her truckle bed to receive him, with the air of a princess in a pantomime. She accumulated her finery in this way, I think, for the purpose of impressing the people about the prison with a due sense of her position and importance. It may not have been quite without its effect.

"Hullo! madame, I came to tell you some news," said he, as soon as the door was closed. "But, by the makins! you 'most took my breath away at first sight o' ye."

"Pity to have so nice a man breathless—deplorable pity!"—or *biddy*, as she pronounced it. "Suppose you go away. I did not ask you to come and get your breath again in the air of my place."

"What place may that be—not Hoxton Old Town, hey?"

"Not at all—Wyvern, dear child?" she said, with a quiet sneer.

"Oh, thank ye—yes—well I will, I think, take a mouthful there as you are so good."

As he concluded this speech Master Harry put out his tongue at the blind lady with a grimace that was outrageous.

"I'll hide my name no longer," she said, "I'm Mrs. Fairfield of Wyvern."

"That's as it may be," he answered, serenely.

"I say, I'm Mrs. Fairfield of Wyvern," repeated she.

"Boo!" answered Harry.

"Beast! By that noise what do you mean?"

"I'll tell ye, by-and-by. Come, you mustn't be cross, it wastes time."

"More time than we know what to do with in this house," she sneered.

"Well, that's true for some, I'll not deny; but there's some as is pretty well worked I hear—eh?—and so long as we baint, we may endure the leisure, for as bad as that is, business here, I'm told, is a deal worse," and Harry laughed.

"Pleasant was my Harry always," again sneered the lady.

"And ye heard of poor Charlie, of course?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. Everyone is not like you. I did hear. I don't thank you," she answered, tartly, and turned her pale, malignant face toward him.

"But, dear girl, I could not. There was difficulties, eyes a-watchin' on all hands, and ears cocked, and I knew you could not be long without knowing. So you heard; but mayhap you haven't heard this—there's a child born o' that marriage."

"Marriage!" and with an oath the big Dutchwoman burst into a discordant laugh.

For a moment Harry was alarmed, but the laugh was not hysterical—purely emotional, and an escape for pent-up scorn and fury.

"Well, any how there's a child—a boy—and a fine hale little chap, wi' a big bald head and a bawlin' mouth as ever a mother hugged—the darlin'."

"Well, let the brat lie on the dung heap, you'll not lift him," said the lady.

"I'll not meddle or make. I'm not over-hot about Wyvern. I'd rather have a pocket full o' money than a house full o' debts any day; and anyhow there he is, the four bones that's to walk off with my share o't."

"I should have got mourning," said Bertha Velderkaust, speaking from some hidden train of thought.

"Bah! No one to see you here," said Harry.

"If I had money or credit, I'd have got it," she said.

"That's very affectionate of you," said Harry; "but why do you dress like that—why do you dress like the lady wi' the glass slipper, Cinderella, at the king's ball, in the story book?"

"I should dress, you think, like Cinderella over the coal-scuttle?"

"Well, I wouldn't set the folk a laughing when I was in no laughing humour myself—not that it makes much odds, and I do suppose it don't matter—not it."

"It does matter something, perhaps, and perhaps nothing; but I know who I am, and I won't let myself down," said she. "I don't want to lose myself among these people; I'll keep myself distinct. I'm too high to put my foot in the mud."

"Too high to put your foot in the mud—too high to put your foot on the pavement," said Harry, mischievously, with his eyes on this impulsive lady, and hitching his chair off a little to secure a fair start. "You'll be too high, I'm thinkin', to get your foot to ground at all, one o' these days, if you don't look sharp. It's too high a flight, I'm told, to touch *terra firma* wi' the top o' your toe—the gallows, I mean—and that's what you're coming to quick. I'm afeard."

As Harry concluded, he stood up, intending to get out, if possible, without the indignity of coming to hand-grips with a woman.

The Herculean lady, in sky-blue satin and Roman pearls, leaned forward with sharpened features, but neither extended her arm nor attempted to rise. Then she sighed deeply, and leaned with her shoulders to the wall.

"Off in a coach for this bout," thought Harry.

"Thank you, kind lad, always the same," she sneered, quietly. "You wish it, no doubt, but, no, you don't think it. I know better."

"Why the devil should I wish you hanged, Bertha? Don't be a fool; you're not in my way, and never can be. There's that boy, and, for reasons of my own, I'm glad he is—I'm *glad* he's where he is—and Wyvern will be for him and not for me—never!"

"Harry, dear, you know quite well," she drawled, softly, with a titter, "you'll poison that boy if you can."

"You lie!" said Harry, turning scarlet, and then as suddenly pale. "You *lie*!—and so that's answered."

Here followed a silence. The woman was not angry, but she tittered again and nodded her head.

"Wyvern's out o' my head. I never cared about it. I had my own reasons. I never did," he swore, furiously, striking his hand on the table. "And I won't see that boy ruined—my flesh and blood—my own nephew. No, no, Bertha, that would never do; the boy must have his own. I'll see you made comfortable, but that lay won't do—you'll find it won't pay nohow."

"Speak out, man—what do you mean?" said Bertha.

"Come, come, come, Bertha, you're no fool," wheedled he; "there isn't a sounder head from this to London; and though you be a bit hot-headed, you're not as bad as you'd have us believe—'taint the worst, always, that has an o'er-hasty hand. Why, bless ye, girl, I'd be sorry ye were hurt, and I'll help to get ye out o' this, without scathe or scorn, if you'll let me."

"Well, come; what's in your mind, Harry Vairfield?" she asked.

"I tell ye what it is, it can do you no good, no how, bein' hard on that boy, and I know, and you know, you never were married to poor Charlie."

"You lie!" cried the lady, bitterly. So they were quits on the point of honour.

"Now, Bertha, lass, come now—reason, reason; don't you be in a hurry, and just listen to reason, and I'll make it better to you than fifty marriages."

"Don't you think I have no advice—I've engaged Mr. Wynell, the best attorney in Hatherton; I know what I'm about."

"The better you know it, the better I'm pleased; but the lawyerfolk likes always a bit of a row—they seldom cries kiss and be friends until their hands be well greased, and their clients has a bellyful o' law; therefore it's better that friends should put their heads together and agree before it comes to that sort o' milling, and I tell ye, ye shall be cared for; *I*'ll see to it, if you don't be kickin' up no rows about nothing."

She laughed a quiet, scornful laugh.

"Oh ho! Master Harry, poor little fellow! he's frightened, is he?"

"You're damnably mistaken," said he. "Frightened, indeed! I'll see whose frightened: I know there was no marriage—I *know* it, and it won't do tryin' it on me, you'll just get yourself into the wrong box; where's the use of runnin' your head into a cotton bag?"

"Cotton bag your own head. Who's to do it?"

"They'll be clumsy fingers that can't tie that knot, lass. Come, you're a clever girl, you're not to be talking—not like a fool. I know everything about it. If you try that on, it will turn out bad. 'Taint easy to green Harry Fairfield; I don't think he was ever yet fooled by a lass but where he chose to be fooled, and it's pretty well allowed there's no use trying to bully him."

"I ought to like you, if all that be so," said she, "for you are very like my own self."

"I'm not tryin' to bully you, girl, nor to sell ye neither; ye were always a bit rash, and too ready wi' your hand; but them's not the worst folk goin'. We Fairfields has a touch o' it, and we shouldn't be o'er hard on quick-tempered folk like that. There was no lass that ever I met, gentle or simple, that could match ye for good looks and pleasant talk, and ye dress so beautiful, and if ye had but your eyes this minute, you'd have who ye liked at your feet."

And Harry Fairfield repeated this view of her charms with an oath.

"If ifs and ans were pots and pans," repeated the lady with a sigh of gratification, and with that foreign accent and peculiar drawl which made the homely proverb sound particularly odd; "I forget the end—there would be no use in tinkers, I think."

"Well said, Bertha! but there's none like ye, not one, this minute, so handsome," exclaims he.

"Not that chit down at Carwell Grange, I dare say—eh?"

"Alice! Not fit to stand behind your chair. If ye could but see her, and just look in the glass, ye'd answer that question yourself," he replied.

"There it is again—*if* I could look in the glass—it is fourteen years since I did that—*if* I could see that fool of a girl—if—if—*if*!" she said with an irrepressible simper—"the old proverb again—ifs and ans were pots and pans—'twas old Mistress Tarnley used to say that—a d——d old witch she always was," she broke out, parenthetically, "and should be broke alive on the wheel."

"Bang away wi' the devil's broomstick, and break her to smash for me," said Harry. "But I'd sooner talk o' yourself. Hang me, if you ever looked better—there's no such figure; and, by the law, it's looking up—it *is*—better and better every day. I like a tall lass, but ye beat them all, by the law, and ye shows off a dress so grandly."

"Now don't think, foolish thing, I like compliments—in at one ear and out of the other," she said, with the same smirk, shaking her great head.

"Hoot, lass! Compliments, indeed! Why should I? Only this, that knowing you so long I just blurts out everything that comes uppermost, and it's a pity ye shouldn't have money to dress as ye should."

"I never had that," said the lady.

"Never—I know that well—and if ye won't be said by me, ye'll have less," said Harry.

"I don't think you know much about it," said Bertha, serenely.

"Now, Bertha, child, you mustn't keep contradictin' me. I do know a deal about it—*everything*. There was no marriage, *never*."

"As long as Charlie lived, ye never said that—you always backed me."

"I'm not going to tell lies for no one," said he, sulkily.

"Not going! Why you have been lying all your life—you'd lie for a shilling any day—all lies, you mean, miserly liar."

"Come, Bertha, draw it mild, won't ye? Did you never hear say o' the Fairfields that they were a quick-tempered folk? and it's an old saying, don't knock a mad horse over the head."

"It's true all I said," she laughed; "and that's why it stings."

"And did ye never hear that true jests breed bad blood?" he laughed. "But no matter, I'm not a bit riled, and I won't. I like ye better for speaking out; I hate that meally-mouthed talk that fine-spoken folk goes on wi'. I likes a bit of a rub now and then; if ye were too civil I couldn't speak my own mind neither, and that would never do."

"Get along with ye. Have you any more to say?"

"Shall I say it out, plain and short, and will ye hear it through?" he asked.

"Ay."

"Well, here it is; if ye don't sign that I think ye'll be hanged."

"No, you don't," she said, more quietly.

"I do, by —— ," he swore.

"No, you don't," she repeated, in the same tone, "who is to do it? Charlie's gone, and vilely as he used me, he never would have done that; and Alice won't, she told you so. I'm better informed, I believe, than you fancied. So don't you suppose I am at all anxious."

"I wanted to take you off in a coach, and you won't let me," said he.

"Thanks, simple Harry," she sneered.

"And I'm coming this day week, and then it will be within ten days o' the 'sizes."

"And I'll be discharged; and I'll bring separate actions against every soul that had a hand in putting me here. Ask my attorney," said the lady, with a pale angry simper.

"And Judge Risk is coming down, and you'd better ask your attorney, as you talk of him, whether he's a hangin' judge or no."

"Cunning beast! all won't do," she said, sarcastically.

"Well, Bertha, this day week I'll be here, and this day week will be your last chance, for things will begin that day, and no one can stop them."

"Lord have mercy upon us!" she whined, with an ugly mockery and an upturning of her sightless eyes.

"You may be saying something like that in the press-room yet, if you won't take the trouble to think in earnest before it's too late. Now, listen, once for all, for it's the last words I'll say. That's all true you say: Charlie's gone, and if he was here, instead of in kingdom come, 'twould 'a been all one, for he wouldn't never a moved a hand in the matter, nor 'a suffered it; and as for Alice, she won't neither. But if you don't sign that paper by this day week, and make no bones about it,"—here he swore a hard oath,—"blind as you be, I'll open your eyes—and I'll prosecute the indictment myself. Good-bye, ma'am, and *think* between this and then."

Harry Fairfield strode from the room, and was still full of the grim emotion which had animated the close of his interview, when he reached the little inn at which but a few weeks before his brother Charles had stabled his horse, when making his last visit to Hatherton.

CHAPTER VII.

SERGEANT-MAJOR ARCHDALE.

Harry Fairfield was a captain in his county militia. It was right that the House of Fairfield should be represented in that corps. Charlie, who was of an easy compliant temper, would have taken the commission and the light duties, if that dignity had been put upon him. But Harry chose it. It extended his acquaintance, added to his opportunities of selling his horses, and opened some houses, small and great, to him, in a neighbourly fashion, when making his circuits to fair and market. He knew something of games, too, and was shrewd at whist and draughts, and held a sure cue at billiards. On the whole, his commission turned him in something in the course of a year.

It was upon some regimental business that Sergeant-Major Archdale was awaiting his return at Wyvern.

Harry Fairfield, as it happened, was thinking of the Sergeant as he rode into the yard in gloomy rumination.

"Well, Archdale, what's the news?" said he, as he dismounted.

The news was not a great deal. After he had heard it Harry paused for a time, and said he,—

"Quite well, Archdale, I hope?"

"Well, sir, I thank you."

Again Harry paused.

"How did you come, Archdale."

"Walked, sir."

"Walked, oh! very well."

Here was another pause.

"Archdale, you must go in. Here, Clinton, get some luncheon for Sergeant-Major Archdale. A drink of beer and a mouthful won't do you no harm; and, Archdale, before you go let me know; I may have a word, and I'll say it walking down the avenue. Get Mr. Archdale some luncheon, Clinton, and some sherry."

"I thank you, sir," said the Sergeant-Major. "'Tis more like a supper for me; I've had my dinner, sir, some time."

And with a stiff military step the Sergeant followed Clinton into the house.

The Sergeant-Major was above the middle size, and stout of body, which made him look shorter. His hair was closely cut, and of a pale blue iron gray. His face was rather pale, and smooth as marble; full and long, with a blue chin, and a sort of light upon his fixed lineaments, not exactly a smile, but a light that was treacherous and cruel. For the rest his military coat, which was of the old-fashioned cut, and his shako, with all the brasses belonging to them, and his Wellington boots, were natty and brilliant, and altogether unexceptionable, and a more perfectly respectable looking man you could not have found in his rank of life in the country.

Without a word, with a creak in his boots, he marched slowly in, with inflexible countenance, after Clinton.

The Squire met Harry in the hall.

"Hollo! it's a week a most since I set eyes on ye—ye'll look out some other place for that mad filly ye bought of Jim Hardress: she's broke a boy's arm this morning in the stable; *I*'ll not look after him, I promise ye; 'tis your affair, mind, and you better look sharp, and delay may cost ye money. Ye're over clever. The devil owes ye a cake this many a day, and he's a busy bishop, and he'll pay ye a loaf yet, I promise you. She shan't be kicking my men—and she bites the manger besides. Get her away, mind, or, by my soul, I'll sell her for the damage."

So old Squire Harry stalked on, and the last scion of his stock grinned after him, sulkily, and snarled something between his teeth, so soon as he was quite out of hearing.

"Who's arm's broke, Dick, or is it all a d——d lie o' the Governor's?" inquired Harry of a servant who happened to be passing at that moment.

"Well, yes, sir, Jim Slade's arm was broke in the stable. 'Twas a kick, sir."

"What kicked him?"

"The new horse that came in on Thursday, sir."

"*Mare*, ye mean. Why that thing's a reg'lar lamb; she never kicked no one. A child might play wi' her. More like 'twas the Governor kicked him. And what did he do wi' his arm?"

"The doctor, down in the town, set it, and bound it up wi' splints, sir."

"Well, *I* didn't tell him, mind that—I wasn't here, ye know—good-natured of the doctor, I'll not deny, but he shan't be sending in no bills to me. And how's Jim since—gettin' on nicely, I'll swear."

"I don't know, sir; I didn't see him since."

"Hoot! then, it's all right, I warrant ye, and ye can tell old Slade, if he likes it, I'll get him a bit of a writin' to the hospital for Jim; but it won't be nothin'—not a bit."

And with this economical arrangement, Harry dismissed the subject for the present, and took his stand upon the hall-door steps, and smoked his pipe, awaiting the close of Sergeant-Major Archdale's repast.

The long shadows and lights of golden sunset faded before the guest appeared, and twilight and the moths were abroad.

Almost as the servant informed Harry Fairfield that Mr. Archdale was coming round to the hall-door to receive his commands, the Sergeant-Major appeared in front of the house, and Harry Fairfield stepped down to the court and was received by the militia-man with a military salute.

"I'll walk a bit wi' you, Archdale; I want a word about another matter—not regimental business. We'll walk down towards the gate."

Stiffly and silently the Sergeant-Major marched beside the smoking gentleman, who having got a little way from the house, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and dropped it into his pocket.

"That militia sogerin' is beggarly pay for a man like you, Archdale; and I'll want a clever fellow, by-and-by—for when the Squire goes off the hooks, and that can't be a long way off—I'll have a deal o' trouble lookin' after things; for there's a young chap to succeed, and a plaguy long minority 'twill be, and one way or another the trouble will fall to my share, bein' uncle, ye see, to the little fellow. Am I making it plain what I mean?"

"Quite plain, sir," said the cold voice of the Sergeant-Major.

"Well, there's the property down at Warhampton, a devilish wide stretch o' land for the rental. There's good shootin' there, and two keepers, but I doubt they makes away wi' the game, and *they* want lookin' after; and there's the old park o' Warhampton—ye know that part o' the country?"

"Yes, sir, well."

"I know you do. Well, it should turn in a good penny more than the Governor gets. I can't bring it home to them, but I know what I think. Where the horse lies down, the hair will be foun', and I doubt the park-book's doctored. There'll be a sort o' steward wanted there, d'ye see. D'ye know Noulton farm?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's a nice thing, a snug house, and as many acres as you'd want to begin wi'; the tenant's going after harvest—you'd be the very man for't, and I'll tell them I'll do all I can to serve my nephew, but I must live myself too. I've nout but my time and my wits to turn a penny by, and if I try to manage for him I'll want the best help I can get, d'ye see? and *you're* the man I want; I've got no end o' a character o' ye, for honesty and steadiness and the like; and ye're a fellow can use his eyes, and hold his tongue; and ye'd have the farm and the house—ye know them—rent free; and the grazing of

three cows on the common, and it's none o' your overstocked, bare commons, but as sweet a bit o' grass as ye'd find in the kingdom; and ye shall a' fifty pounds a year beside; and the farm's nigh forty acres, and it's worth close on a hundred more. And—if ye do all we want well, and I'm sure you will—I'll never lose sight o' ye while grass grows and you and me lives."

"I thank you, sir," said the cold, clear voice of Archdale.

"And there's a little bit of a secret—I wouldn't tell another—about myself, Archdale. I'll tell *you*, though," said Harry, lowering his voice.

"Yes, sir," said Archdale, in the same cold stern way, which irritated Harry.

"Well, I'm not talking, mind, to Sergeant-Major Archdale, if you like the other thing, at Noulton, best."

"Noulton best, sir, certainly; thank you."

"But to Mr. Archdale of Noulton, and steward of Warhampton, mind ye, and 'twill be settled next harvest."

"I thank you, sir."

"Don't walk so quick, we're gettin' over the ground too fast. Well, there's a thing you'll have to keep dark for me."

"You'll find me confidential, sir; my superior officers did."

"I know that well—I know you, Archdale, and that is why I chose you out o' a thousand, and it's a confidential fellow—d ——d confidential—I want, for the country's all one as the town for talk, and tongues will keep goin' like the bells on a sheep-walk, and there's many a bit o' nonsense, that's no great odds when all's told, that a chap wouldn't like to have made the laugh or the talk o' the country side."

"Yes, sir," said the inflexible Sergeant-Major.

"You held the same rank in the line, Sergeant-Major, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said the Sergeant-Major, and saluted from habit.

"I thought so, and that says a deal for you, Mr. Archdale; and I remember one of your papers says you were the youngest sergeant ever made in your regiment?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that says a lot too, and a very responsible office that is. Egad, from all I 'a seen, I'd say the sergeants has more to do with the state of a regiment than all the other officers, commissioned or non-commissioned, put together."

"There's a good deal depends on 'em, sir."

"You keep to yourself, Archdale; that's the way to rise."

"I was a man of few acquaintances, sir, and confidential with my superior officers, and few words, but I meant 'em, sir, and made the men do their duty."

"That's the man for my money," said Harry. "Will ye be ready for Noulton Farm by the middle o' next month?"

"Yes, sir, I expect."

"I'll settle that for ye, then, and the pay and the commonage. I'll settle that wi' my father to-morrow, and we'll get the writings drawn."

"I thank you, sir."

"And, wait a bit. I told you," said Harry, perhaps a very little embarrassed, "there's another little thing you must manage for me."

"Yes, sir."

He almost wished Mr. Archdale to ask questions and raise difficulties. This icy surface, beneath which he saw nothing, began to embarrass him.

"Every fellow's a fool once or twice in his life, you know, Archdale; and that's the way rogues makes money, and honest chaps is sold—

'No fools at the fair,
No sale for bad ware,'

you know?"

He looked for sympathy in the face of the Sergeant-Major, but he found there neither sympathy nor ridicule, but a serene, dignified, supercilious composure.

"Well, I'm not married, and more's the pity," he said, affecting a kind of jocularity, uneasily; "but among 'em they've made me a present of a brat they calls my son, and I must just put him to nurse and provide for him, I do suppose; and keep all quiet, and ye'll look out some decent poor body that lives lonely and won't ask no questions nor give no trouble, but be content wi' a trifle, and I'll gi'e't to you every quarter for her, and she'll never hear my name, mind, nor be the wiser who owns it or where it came from. I'd rayther she thought 'twas a poor body's—if they think a fellow's well-to-do it makes 'em unreasonable, and that's the reason I pitched on you, Archdale, because ye're a man o' sense, and won't be talkin' like the pratin' fools that's goin'—and is it settled? is it a bargain?"

"Yes, sir, I thank you, quite," said Archdale.

"Well, then, ye shall hear from me by the end o' the week, and not a word, mind—till all's signed and sealed—about Noulton Farm, and about t'other thing—*never*. The stars is comin' out bright, and the sunset did ye mind; we'll 'a frost to-night; it's come dark very sudden; sharp air."

He paused, but the non-commissioned officer did not venture a kindred remark, even an acquiescence in these meteorological speculations.

"And I heard the other day you made an organ for Mr. Arden. Is it true?" said Harry, suddenly.

"Just a small thing, three stops, sir—diapason, principal, and dulciana."

"Well, I don't know nothing myself about such gear, except to hear the old organ o' Wyvern o' Sundays. But it's clever o' you. How did ye learn?"

"'Prenticed, sir, two years to an organ builder in Westminster—Mr. Lomas—and he died, and I was put to the army," said Archdale.

"Well, I may give ye a lift that way too. They were talkin' of an organ for Warhampton Church. We'll see. I'll not forget."

"I thank you, sir," repeated Archdale. "Any more commands for me, sir?"

Mr. Archdale stood stiffly at the gate, drawn up, as it were, at right angles to Harry Fairfield.

"No, nothing, Archdale. I'm glad the thing suits you, and it may lie in my way yet to make them better than you think for. Good night, Archdale; good night, Sergeant-Major."

"Good night, sir."

And Archdale wheeled to his left, and with his back toward the village of Wyvern, marched away at so stiff and regular a quick march that you could have fancied the accompaniment of the drums and fifes.

Harry stood at the iron gate, one half of which was open, and he kicked a stone listlessly into the road, and leaning on the old iron arabesques, he looked long after that portly figure receding in distance and melting in twilight.

"Night's the mother o' thought, I've heard say," said Harry, rousing himself, and swinging the great valve into its place with a clang. "But thought won't do to dine on. Hollo! Gate! gate! Jorrocks, anyone," he shouted. "Lock the gate, some of you, and make all sure for the night."

And with these orders to Jorrocks, he marched back under the ancestral trees to the old hall of Wyvern. Who was to keep the hearth of the Fairfields aglow? The light of the old Squire's life was flaring low in the socket, a tiny taper was just lighted in darksome Carwell, and Harry Fairfield—was he ever to take his turn and illuminate the Wyvern world?

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALK WITH THE SQUIRE.

Harry proved how hungry he was by eating a huge dinner. He had the old dining-room to himself, and sipped his brandy and water there by a pleasant fire of coal and spluttering wood. With a button or two undone, he gazed drowsily into the fire, with his head thrown back and his eyes nearly closed; and the warmth of the fire and the glow of the alcohol flushed his cheeks and his nose and his forehead to a brilliant crimson.

Harry had had a hard day's riding. Some agitations, great variety of air, and now, as we have seen, a hearty dinner and many glasses of brandy and water, and a hot fire before him. Naturally he fell asleep.

He dreamed that the old Squire was dead and buried. He forgot all about the little boy at Carwell, and fancied that he, Harry Fairfield, draped in the black mantle with which the demure undertaker hangs the mourners in chief, had returned from the funeral, and was seated in the old "oak parlour," just in all other respects as he actually was. As he sat there, Master of Wyvern at last, and listening, he thought, to the rough tick of the old clock in the hall, old Tom Ward seemed to him to bounce in, his mulberry-coloured face turned the colour of custard, his mouth agape, and his eyes starting out of their sockets. "Get up, Master Harry," the old servant seemed to say, in a woundy tremor, "for may the devil fetch me if here baint the old master back again, and he's in the blue room callin' for ye."

"Ye lie!" gasped Harry, waking up in a horror.

"Come, ye, quick, Master Harry, for when the Squire calls it's ill tarrying," said now the real voice of Tom Ward.

"Where?"

"In the blue chamber."

"Where—where am I?" said Harry, now on his feet and looking at Tom Ward. "By jingo, Tom, I believe I was dreaming. You gave me a hell of a fright, and is he there really? Very well."

And Harry walked in and found the old Squire of Wyvern standing with his back to the fire, tall, gaunt, and flushed, and his eyes looking large with the glassy sheen of age.

"Well, why didn't ye tell me the news, ye fool?" said the Squire, as he entered. "D—n ye, if it hadn't a bin for Tom Ward I shouldn't a heerd nout o' the matter. So there's a brat down in Carwell Grange—ha, ha,—marriage is honourable, I've heerd tell, but housekeepin's costly. 'Tis the old tune on the bagpipe. That's the way to beggar's bush. When marriage gets into the saddle repentance gets up at the crupper. Why the devil didn't ye tell me the news? Why didn't ye tell me, ye d—d wether-head?"

"So I would 'a told ye to-night, but I fell asleep after dinner. It's true enough, though, and there's doctors, and nurses, and caudles, and all sorts."

"Well for Charlie he's out of the way—dead mice feels no cold, you know, and she's a bad un—Alice Maybell's a bad un. The vicar was a thankless loon, and she's took after him. She went her own gait, and much good it did her. Sweetheart and honey bird keeps no house, and the devil's bread is half bran. She'll learn a lesson now. I was too good to that huzzy. Put another man's child in your bosom, they say, and he'll creep out at your sleeves. She's never a friend now. She's lost Charlie and she's lost me. Well might the cat wink when both her eyes were out. She'd like well enough to be back here again in Wyvern—d—n her. She knows who was her best friend by this time. Right well pleased wi' herself, I'll be bound, the day she gi'ed us the slip and ran off with the fool Charlie—down in the mouth, I warrant her now, the jade. I dare say the parson's down at the Grange every day to pray wi' my lady and talk o' resignation. When all their rogueries breaks down they take to cantin' and psalm singin', and turns up their eyes, the limmers, and cries the Lord's will be done. Welcome death, quoth the rat, when the trap fell. Much thanks to 'em for takin' what they can't help. Well, she's a bad un—a black-hearted, treacherous lass she proved, and Charlie was a soft fellow and a mad fellow, and so his day's over, and I was just a daft old fool, and treated accordin'. But time and thought tames all, and we shall all lie alike in our graves."

"And what's the boy like?" the old man resumed. "Is he like Charlie?"

"He was asleep, and the room dark, so there was no good trying to see him," said Harry, inventing an excuse.

"Not a bit, dark or light, not a bit; he's Ally's son, and good won't grow from that stock—never. As the old bird crows, so crows the young, and that foreign madam, I hear, swears she was married first to poor Charlie, and what's that to me? —not that spoonful of punch. She's up in limbo, and if her story be true, why then that boy of Ally's ain't in the runnin', and his mother, bless her heart, needn't trouble her head about Wyvern, nor be wishin' the old Squire, that was good to her, under the sod, to make way for her son, and then there's you to step in and claim my shoes, and my chair, and cellar key, and then Madam—what's her name—Van Trump, or something, will out wi' a bantling, I take it, and you'll all fight it out, up and down—kick, throttle and bite—in the Court of Chancery, or where ye can, and what is't to me who wins or who loses? Not that bit o' lemon-peel, and if you think I'm a going to spend a handful o' money in law to clear up a matter that don't concern me, no more than the cat's whisker, you're a long way out in your reckonin'—be me soul ye are, for I'll not back none o' ye, and I won't sport a shillin'—and I don't care a d—n. Ye'll fight the battle o'er my grave, and ye'll take Wyvern who can, and 'twill cost ye all round a pretty penny. Ye'll be sellin' your shirts and your smocks, and ye're pretty well in for it, and ye can't draw back. Well lathered is half shaved, and it won't break my heart, I promise you."

And the old man chuckled and hooted, and wagged his head fiercely as he declaimed, in his own way, upon the row that was coming.

"Don't ye spare one another for my sake. Take Wyvern who can. I'll keep my hands in my pockets, I promise ye. What have I to do wi' other folk's windmills?"

So the old Squire stormed on more serenely than he had done for a long time.

"Make another tankard o' that thing, Tom; make a big one and brew it well, and fetch a rummer for yourself, lad."

"Beggar's breed for rich men to feed," resumed the Squire. "A son at the Grange o' Carwell, no less! Well, I 'a taken enough, and too much, on my shoulders in my day, and 'tis often the least boy carries the biggest fiddle. She's a sly lass—Alice. She'll find fools enough to help her. I 'a done wi' her—she's a bad un. Look at that harpsichord thing there she used to play on," he pointed to the piano. "I got that down from Lunnon for her to jingle tunes at as long as she liked, and I'd a had it smashed up and pitched in the river, only 'twould a made her think I cared enough about her to take that trouble about her lumber. She turned her back on me when she liked, and I'll not turn my face on her when she lists. A graceless huzzy she was and is, and grace lasts but beauty blasts, and so let it be for me. That's enough. I take it there's no more to tell. So take ye a candle if ye're sleepy, man, no use dawdlin' sluggard's guise, loath to bed, and loath to rise," and so, with a gruff nod he dismissed him, and in came Tom Ward with the punch, before very long.

"That's good, Tom; that'll warm yer ribs. How long a' you been here? Wyvern always, but a long time in the house, Tom, a long time wi' the family. 'Tis sixty years ago, Tom. I remember you in our livery, Isabel and Blue—them's the old colours. They don't know the name now—*salmon*, they calls it. We 'a seen Christmas pretty often in the old house. We'll not see many more, I'm thinking. The tale's nigh done. 'Twasn't bad times wi' ye here, Tom; we can't complain; we 'a had our share, and after cheese comes nothing, as the old folks used to say. Take the rummer and sit ye down by the door, Tom. There's Master Harry. I'd rather ha' a glass wi' you, Tom, than a dozen wi' him, a d—d pippin'-squeezing rascal. Tom, ain't he a sneak, and no Fairfield, Tom, ain't he, ain't he, d—- ye?"

"I won't say that all out, sir. He's a tall, handsome lad, and Master Harry can sit down and drink his share like a man."

"Like a beast, ye mean. He never tells ye a pleasant story, nor laughs like a man, and what liquor he swallows, it goes into a bad skin, Tom. He's not hot and hearty in his cups, like a Fairfield; he has no good nature, Tom; he's so close-fisted and cunnin'. I hate them fellows that can't buy at the market and sell at the fair, and drink when he's drinkin'; d—- him, he's always a watching to *do* ye, just like his mother; a screw she was, and her son's like her, crooked to sell, and crooked to buy. I hate him sober, Tom, and I hate him drunk. Bring your glass here, old lad; a choice mug-full ye've brewed to-night. Hold it straight, you fool!

"What was I sayin'? The old things is out o' date, Tom; the world's changin', and 'tain't in nature, Tom, to teach old dogs tricks. I do suppose there's fun goin', though I don't see it, and the old folks beginning to be in the way, as they were always, and things won't change for us. We were brave lads, we Fairfields, but there's no one to come now. There won't be no one after me in Wyvern house. To the wrestlin' on Wyvern Fair Green, when I was a boy, I mind the time when lords and ladies id come ridin' down for twenty miles round, and all the old stock o' the country, some on horseback, and some in coaches, and silks and satins, to see the belt played for and single-stick and quarter-staves. They were manly

times, Tom, and a Fairfield ever first in the field, and—what year is this? ay, I was twenty the week before that day—'tis sixty-four years ago—when I threw Dick Dutton over my shoulder and broke his collar-bone, and Dutton was counted the best man they ever brought down here, and Meg Weeks—ye'll mind Meg Weeks wi' the hazel eyes—was lookin' on; and the wrestlin's gone, and not a man left in the country round that could tell a quarter-staff from a flail; and when I'm gone to my place in the churchyard, there's not a Fairfield in Wyvern no longer, for I don't count Harry one, he's not a Fairfield, by no chance, and never was. Charlie had it in him, handsome Charlie. I seen many a turn in him like me, I did; and that Captain Jolliffe's died only t'other day that he shot in the arm at Tewkesbury only twenty years ago, for sayin' a wry word o' me; old Morton read it yesterday, he says, in the Lun'on paper. But it's all over wi' Charlie, and—stand up, Tom, and fill yer glass, and we'll drink to him."

Old Tom Ward was the first to speak after.

"Hot blood and proud, sir, and a bit wild, when he was young; more than that, there's nout to be said by any. A brave lad, sir, and the good naturedest I ever see. He shouldn't be buried where he is, alone. I don't like that nohow. He wouldn't a done so by you, Squire; he liked ye well; he liked everyone that was ever kind to him. I mind how he cried after poor Master Willie. They two was very like and loving. Master Willie was tall, like him, and handsome."

"Don't ye be talkin' o' them at all, ye fool," broke in the Squire, violently, "stop that and hold your tongue, Tom. D—you, do you think I'm foolish? Light my candle, and get ye to bed, the tankard's out; get ye to bed, ye d—d old fool," and he shook the old servant hard by the hand as he spoke.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY FAIRFIELD GROWS UNEASY.

A few days later Harry Fairfield rode from Wyvern into the picturesque little town of Wykeford, and passing the steep, narrow bridge, pulled up near the church, at the door of Dr. Willett. Harry had something to say to the doctor, but, like a good diplomatist, that shrewd dealer in horses preferred letting the doctor talk a bit on his own account first.

He found him in slippers and dressing-gown, clipping the evergreens that grew in front of his house, the hour of his forenoon excursion not having yet arrived.

"Woodman, spare that tree," said Harry, quoting a popular song, facetiously.

The doctor looked up.

"And how is Doctor Willett this morning?" said Harry.

"Oh! oh! Is that you?" said the doctor, straightening his back with a little effort, for he had been stooping to his task, and old backs don't unbend in a moment.

"Quite well, thank you—so are you, I see."

"Can't complain."

"And how's the old Squire?" said the doctor.

"How's the old house?" answered Harry: "staunch and straight, and like to stand for ever. I see no change in him. And all well over at Carwell?"

"Far from it," said the doctor.

"And who's sick?"

"The poor young mother—very ill indeed," said he—"nervous, low, and feverish, she has been, and yesterday, when I saw her, it was plainly fever—quite declared."

"What sort of fever?" asked Harry.

"Well, the nerves are very much engaged," began the doctor—

"Take care it ain't typhus," said Harry. "The baby ha'n't got it, I hope?"

"No, the child's all safe."

"There's typhus down at Gryce's mill, and a child in scarlatina in the glen, I hear."

"Is there? ha! It has been going a good deal at that side, I'm told," said Dr. Willett. "There's Lady Wyndale at Oulton—very good-natured she seems to be—wouldn't she take the child and nurse it for a while? It's a nice place, well enclosed, and lies high—nothing likely to get in there. I attended a patient there in dropsy, once, when it was let, and the Wyndales away in India."

"Ay, she's good-natured; she'd have the mother and child together, with a welcome, but she says she won't take no one's babby to nurse away from its people, and she's right, I think, so the young chap must stand his ground, and bide the fortune o' war, you know. What time shall you be there to-day?" he inquired.

"Three o'clock."

"Very well, then, I'll be passin' at the mill end o' the glen about that time, and I'll ride up, and look in, just to hear what you have to say, and I'll get home by Cressley Common. It will do me as well as t'other way. I turned aside a bit to reach you, and hear the news, and I must be joggin' again. Good-bye, doctor. Is your church clock right?" said Harry, looking up at the old tower and pulling out his watch to compare.

"'The clock goes as it pleaseth the clerk,' the old saw tells us, but we all go by the clock here, and it does keep right good time," said old Dr. Willett, with his hand over his eyes, reading its golden hands and figures, as Harry was.

"Well, then, doctor, good-bye, and God bless ye," said Harry, and away he rode, without hearing the doctor's farewell.

At Carwell Grange, at three o'clock, there was the gloom and silence of a sick house.

The tiptoe tread of old Dulcibella, and her whisperings at the door, were scarcely audible, and now and then a weary moan was heard in the darkened room, and the wail and squall of a little child from another room not far off.

Old Mildred Tarnley had undertaken the charge of the child, while Dulcibella, with the aid of a neighbour brought in for the occasion, took charge of the sick lady.

Before three o'clock came, to the surprise of this sad household, Harry Fairfield arrived. He did not come riding; he arrived in a tax-cart. He had got through more real work that day than many men who were earning their bread by their labour.

"Give this one a feed, Tom, and how's all here?" said he, throwing the apron off and jumping down.

"Bad enough, I'm afraid, sir."

"*Worse?*"

"I don't know, sir, till the doctor comes; but can't be no better, for I heard Mrs. Crane say she didn't close an eye all night."

"I hope they're not forgetting the child in the hurry?" said Harry.

"Mrs. Tarnley and Lilly Dogger looks after it, turn about."

"That wouldn't do nohow, you know," said Harry—"and give her a good feed, Tom, good dog, good bone. She came at a good lick, I can tell you, up the glen. The doctor will be here soon."

"Ay, sir."

"Well, I'll stay till I hear what he says; and there's sickness in Carwell Glen here, I'm told."

"I dessay, sir, there's a good deal going, I hear."

"Ye needn't take her out of the shafts, Tom. Fix her head in a halter by the gate—in the ring there, if ye have a nose-bag at hand—and come in here. She's as quiet as a lamb; I want to talk to you a bit. I'm goin' to buy two or three fillies, and think of any you may have seen down about here. Old Tarnley's in the kitchen now, is she?"

"I think she is, sir."

"Well, think of them fillies if you can; there's business to be done if I can get 'em to suit."

So in marched Harry, and tapped at the kitchen window, and nodded and smiled to Mrs. Tarnley.

"So you're all sick down here, I'm told; but sickness is better than sadness. That's all I can say, lass," said Harry, pacing, much in his usual way, into the kitchen, and clapping his big hand down on Mildred's shoulder.

"Sick, sore, and *sorry* we be, sir. Your brother's not that long buried that there should be no sadness in the Grange, his own house that was, and his widow's that is—sickness may well be better than sadness, but 'taint turn about wi' them here, but one and 'tother, both together. And that slut upstairs, Miss Dogger, if you please, out of the scullery into the bed-chamber, she's no more use to me than the cock at the top o' Carwell steeple. I never knew such times in Carwell Grange; I'm wore off my old feet—I can't stan' it long, and I wish twenty times in a day I was quiet at last in my grave."

"A gruntin' horse and a grumblin' wife, they say, lasts long. Never you fear, you won't die this time, old girl, and I wouldn't know the Grange if *you* wasn't here. 'Twill all be right again soon, I warrant—no wind blows long at the highest, ye know, and we'll hear what the doctor says just now."

"Hoot! what can the doctor say but just the old thing. The leech to the physic and God to the cure, and death will do as God allows, and sickness shows us what we are, and all fears the grave as the child does the dark. I don't know much good he's doin', or much he did for Master Charles—not but he's as good as another, and better than many a one, maybe—but he costs a deal o' money, and only Lady Wyndale came over here yesterday—poorly though she is, and not able to get out o' her coach—and saw Mrs. Crane, and lent a fifty-pun note to keep all straight till the young lady, please God, may be able to look about her, and see after 'em herself, we'd a bin at a sore pinch before the week was out. Pity's good, but help's better. 'Tis well in this miserly world there's a kind one left here and there, that wouldn't let kindred want in the midst of plenty. There's Squire Harry o' Wyvern, and his own little grandson lyin' up in the cradle there, and look at you, Master Harry. I wonder you hadn't the thought."

Harry laughed, perhaps, the least degree awkwardly.

"Why, chick-a-biddy—" began Harry.

"I'm none o' yer chick-a-biddies. I'm old Mildred Tarnley, o' the Grange o' Carwell, that's in the service o' the family—her and hers—many a long year, and I speaks my mind, and I shouldn't like the family to be talked of as it will for meanness. If there's a want o' money here in times of sickness, 'tis a shame!"

"Well, ye know there's no want, but the Governor's riled just now, and he'll come round again; and as for me, I'm as poor a dog as is in the parish. Take me and turn me round and round, and what more am I than just a poor devil that lives by horses, and not always the price of a pot o' stout in my pocket—

> 'Four farthings and a thimble,
> Makes the tailor's pocket jingle.'

Your tongue's a bit too hard, Mildred; but ye mean well, and there's kindness at the bottom o' the mug, though the brew be bitter."

"I think I hear the doctor," said Mildred, placing her palm behind her ear and listening.

"Ay," said Harry; "I hear him talkin'."

And forth he strode to meet him.

Before he went up Harry and the doctor talked together for a little in the panelled sitting-room, with which we are familiar.

"I'm sure to see you here, eh?"

"Before I go? Yes. I shall look in here."

"All right," said Harry, and the doctor walked up the stairs on his exploration.

CHAPTER X.

A DRIVE TO TWYFORD.

In less than ten minutes the doctor came down.

"Well?" said Harry, over his shoulder, turning briskly from the window.

"No material change," replied the doctor. "It's not a case in which medicine can do much. The most cheering thing about it is that her strength has not given way, but you know it is an anxious case—a *very* anxious case."

"I hope they are taking care of the child. Old Dulcibella Crane would be a deal better for that sort of thing than that dry old cake, Mildred Tarnley. But then Ally would half break her heart if ye took old Dulcibella from her, always used to her, you know. And what's best to be done? It would be bad enough to lose poor Ally, but it would be worse to lose the boy, for though I'm willing to take my share of work for the family, there's one thing I won't do, and that's to marry. I'm past the time, and d—- me if I'd take half England and do it. I'd like to manage and nurse the estate for him, and be paid of course, like other fellows, and that's what would fit my knuckle. But, by Jove, if they kill that boy among them there will be no one to maintain the old name of Wyvern; and kill him they will, if they leave him in the hard hands of that wiry old girl, Mildred Tarnley. She's a cast-iron old maid, with the devil's temper, and she has a dozen other things to mind beside, and I know the child will die, and I don't know anything to advise, d—- me if I do."

"The house is in confusion, and very little attention for the child, certainly," said Doctor Willett.

"And that d—d scarlatina, beyond a doubt, is in the glen there."

The old doctor shrugged and shook his head.

"I talked to the Governor a bit," said Harry, "thinking he might have the child over to Wyvern, where it would be safe and well looked after, but he hates the whole lot. You know it was a stolen match, and it's no use trying in that quarter. You're going now, and I'll walk a little bit beside you; maybe you'll think of something, and I haven't no money, ye may guess, to throw away; but rather than the child shouldn't thrive I'd make out what would answer."

"That's very kind of you, sir," said Doctor Willett, looking at him, admiringly. "They certainly have their hands pretty full here, and a little neglect sometimes goes a long way with a child."

So they walked out together, talking, and when the doctor got on his horse Harry walked beside him part of the way towards Cressley Common.

When he came back to the Grange Harry asked to see old Dulcibella, and he told her, standing on the lobby and talking in whispers,

"The doctor says she's not able to understand anything as she is at present."

"Well, ye know she's wanderin' just now, but she may clear up a bit for a while, by-and-by."

"Well, the doctor says she's not to be told a word that can fret her, and particularly about the child, for he says this is no place for it, and he won't be answerable for its life if it's left longer here, and there's scarlatina and fever all round, and ye have as much as ye can well manage here already, so few as there is, without nursing children; and Doctor Willett says he'll have it well attended to by a person near Wykeford, and I'll bring old Mildred over with it to the place this evening, and we'll get it out o' reach o' the sickness that's goin'."

"Please God!" said Dulcibella, after a pause.

"Amen," added Harry, and walked down whistling low, with his hands in his pockets, to tell the same story to old Mildred Tarnley.

"'Tis a pity," she said, darkly, "the child should be sent away from its home."

"Especially with scarlet fever and typhus all round," said Harry.

"And away from its mother," she continued.

"Much good its mother is to it."

"Just now she mayn't be able to do much."

"Oh! but she can though," interrupted Harry, "she may give it the fever she's got, whatever that is."

"Well, I can't say nothin' else but it's a pity the child should be took away from its natural home, and its own mother," repeated Mrs. Tarnley.

"And who's takin' care o't *now*?" demanded Harry.

"Lilly Dogger," answered she.

"Lilly Dogger! just so; the slut! you said yourself, to-day, you wouldn't trust a kitten with!"

Mrs. Tarnley couldn't deny it. She sniffed and tossed up her chin a little.

"Ye forget, lass, 'twas never a Wyvern fashion nursin' the babbies at home. *I* wasn't, nor Charlie, poor fellow! nor Willie, nor none of us. 'Twas a sayin' with the old folk, and often ye heered it, 'one year a nurse, and seven year the worse;' and we all was tall, well-thriven lads, and lives long, without fever or broken bones or the like, floors us untimely; and, anyhow, the doctor says, so it must be. There's no one here, wi' all this sickness in the house, has time to look after it, and the child will just come to grief unless his orders be followed. So stick on your bonnet and roll up the young chap in blankets, and I'll drive ye over to the place he says. It brings me a bit out o' my way, but kith and kin, ye know; and I told the doctor if he went to any expense, I'd be answerable to him myself, and I'll gi'e ye a pound for good luck. So ye see I'm not sich a screw all out as ye took me for."

"I thank you, Master Harry, and I'll not deny but 'twas always the way wi' the family to send out the children to nurse."

"And what Mr. Charles would 'a done himself if he was alive, as every one of us knows; and for that reason what the lady upstairs would 'a done if she had 'a bin able to talk about anything. I'm sorry I have to drive ye over, but I'll bring ye back to-night, and ye know I couldn't drive and manage the babby, and the folk would be wonderin' when the child set up the pipes in the tax-cart, and I'd soon have the hue-and-cry behind me."

"Hoot! I wouldn't allow no such thing as let the poor little thing be druv so, all alone, like a parcel o' shop goods. No, no. The family's not come to that yet a bit, I hope," cried Mrs. Tarnley.

"Gi'e me a lump o' bread and cheese and a mug o' beer. I don't think I ever was here before without a bit and a sup, and it wouldn't be lucky, ye know, to go without enough to swear by, anyhow; but there's no hurry, mind—ye needn't be ready for a good hour to come, for Willett won't have no nurse there sooner."

Harry went out and had a talk with Tom Clinton, and smoked his pipe for half an hour; and Tom thought that the young Squire was dull and queerish, and perhaps he was not very well, for he did not eat his bread and cheese, but drank a deal more beer than usual instead.

"Bring a lot o' lolly-pops and milk, or whatever it likes best, wi' ye, to keep it quiet. I can't abide the bawlin' o' children."

Lilly Dogger, with red eyes and an inflamed nose, blubbered heart-broken, and murmured to the baby—lest old Mildred should overhear and blow her up—her leavetakings and endearments, as she held it close in her arms.

Beautiful though to us men, utterly mysterious is the feminine love of babies. Lilly Dogger had led a serene, if not a very cheerful life, at Carwell Grange up to this. But now came this parting, and her peace was shivered.

Old Mildred had now got up, with her threadbare brown cloak, and her grizzly old bonnet, and had arranged the child on her lap; so, at last, all being ready, the tax-cart was in motion.

It was late in the autumn now. The long days were over. They had dawdled away a longer time than they supposed before starting. It turned out a long drive, much longer than Mildred Tarnley had expected. The moon rose, and they had got into a part of the country with which she was not familiar.

They had driven fourteen miles or upward through a lonely and somewhat melancholy country. It was, I suppose, little better than moor, but detached groups of trees, possibly the broken and disappearing fragments of what had once been a forest, gave it a sad sort of picturesqueness.

Mildred Tarnley was not a garrulous person, and had not spent her life at Carwell Grange without learning the accomplishment of taciturnity, but she remarked and resented the gloomy silence of Master Harry, who had never once addressed a word to her since they started.

Toward the close of their journey she observed that Harry Fairfield looked frequently at his watch, and hurried the pace of the mare, and altogether seemed to grow more and more anxious. They had been obliged to pull up twice to enable her to feed the baby, who was now fast asleep.

"'Tis right," she thought, "he should look ahead and mind his driving, while we're getting on, though a word now and then would not have troubled him much. But when we stopped to feed the child there was no excuse. He got down and settled the buckle at the horse's head. He got up again, and drew the rug over his knees, and he leaned on his elbow back upon the cushion, and he never so much as asked was me or the baby alive!"

They now reached a gentle hollow, in which a shallow brook crossed the road, and some four or five habitations of an humble sort stood at either side; one under the shade of two gigantic ash trees, had a sign depending in front, being a wayside inn of the humblest dimensions.

A village this could hardly be termed; and at the near end Harry pulled up before a building a little above the rank of a cottage, old and quaint, with a large-leafed plant that, in the moonlight, looked like a vine, growing over the prop of a sort of porch that opened under the gable.

If the mare was quiet at the Grange, you may be sure that her run to Twyford had not made her less so.

Harry helped old Tarnley down, with her little charge in her arms, and led her silently into the neat little room, with tiers of delf ornaments, in brilliant colours, on the cupboard, and a Dutch clock ticking in the nook by the fire where some faggots crackled, and a candle was burning on the table in a bright brass candlestick.

Mrs. Tarnley's experienced eye surveyed the room and its belongings. She descried, moreover, a ladder stair which mounted to a loft, from whose dormant window, as she looked from her seat in the tax-cart, she had observed the light of a candle.

Very humble it undoubtedly was, but nothing could be more scrupulously clean. It had an air of decency, too, that was reassuring. There was a woman there in a cloak and bonnet, who rose as they entered and courtesied.

Harry set a lumbering arm-chair by the fire, and beckoned Tarnley to occupy it. Then he asked:

"How soon is the Warhampton 'bus expected?"

"Twenty-five minutes, please, sir," answered the woman, with another courtesy and a glance at the clock.

"That woman from Willett's is coming by the 'bus," he said gruffly, to Mildred. "'Tis a snug little place this, and as clean as a bone after a hungry dog. Would you mind," he continued, addressing the stranger or hostess, whichsoever she might be, "tellin' Archdale, if he's here, I want a word wi' him at the door?"

"He's over the way I think, sir, with the horse. I'll call him, please, sir."

So off she went.

"This is where poor Charles said he'd like to have his child nursed—Twyford; 'tis sweet air about here, considered. He was expectin' a babby, poor fellow, and he talked a deal wi' me about it the day he was took. Wouldn't ye like a bit to eat and a glass of beer, or somethin'? They have lots over the way, for as poor as it looks; and here's the pound I promised ye, lass, for luck, ye know, when we was leaving the Grange."

He drew forth the hand with which he had been fumbling in his pocket and placed the piece of gold in hers.

"Thank you, Master Harry," she said, making a little instinctive effort to rise for the purpose of executing a courtesy. But

Harry, with his hand on her shoulder, repressed it.

"Sit ye quiet, and rest yourself, after joggin' all this way; and what's that bundle?"

"The baby's things, sir."

"All right. Well, and what will ye have?"

"I feel a bit queerish, Master Harry, I thank ye. I'd rather not eat nothin' till I gets home, and I'll get my cup o' tea then."

"Not eat!"

"Nothin', sir, I thank ye, Master Harry."

"Well," said Harry, so far forth relieved, but resolved, cost what it might, to make Mildred happy on this particular occasion, "if ye won't eat, I'm hanged but ye shall drink some. I tell ye what it shall be, a jug of sherry negus. Come, ye must."

"Well, Master Harry, as so ye will have it, I'll not say ye nay," consented Mildred graciously.

Harry went himself to the little pot-house over the way, and saw this nectar brewed, and brought it over in his own hand —the tankard in one hand and the glass in the other.

"Devilish good stuff it is, Mildred, and I'm glad, old lass, I thought of it. I remember you liked that brew long ago, and much good may it do you, girl."

He was trying to be kind.

He had set it down on the table, and now, as he spoke, he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she thought she might have wronged Master Harry with his rough jests, and shrewd ways, and that he had more of the Fairfield in his nature than she had always given him credit for.

Out he went again, and talked with Archdale, who was in plain clothes, and a round hat, with a great coat buttoned up to his smooth blue chin, and a gig-whip in his hand. Archdale, as usual, was severely placid and brief, and as Harry talked with him outside, Mildred Tarnley thought she heard a step in the loft over her head, and another sound that excited her curiosity. She listened, but all was quiet again.

Harry returned in comparatively high spirits.

"Well, Mrs. Tarnley," said he, "the 'bus is a bit late, I'm thinkin', but anyhow, he can't wait," and he pointed over his shoulder at Mr. Archdale who stood at the door; "he'll drive you back again, and he knows the road as far as Cressley Common, and you can show him the rest,—and you'll want to be back again with poor Alice,—and the doctor will look in here, often in the week—almost every day—and tell you how the little chap's going on. And, see, here's a very respectable woman—what's her name?—she was here this minute, and she won't be leaving till after the 'bus comes in, and you leave her the baby, and I'll wait here till I see it in charge of the nurse that's coming from Wykeford. Come in, will ye?—not *you*—the woman, I mean. Now, Mildred, give her the baby."

The woman had a gentle, cheerful, and honest face; and looked down with the angelic light of a woman's tenderness on the sleeping face of the little baby.

"Lord, love it," she murmured, smiling. "What a darling little face!"

Mildred Tarnley looked down on it, too. She said nothing. She bit her lips hard, and her old eyes filled up with tears that welled over as she surrendered the baby, without a word, and then hastily she went out, mounted to her seat in the tax-cart, and was driven swiftly away by a companion as silent as he who had conveyed her there.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW FARES THE CHILD?

Dr. Willett called regularly at the Grange, and kind Lady Wyndale was daily there, taking the doctor's directions about jellies, wines, and such other good things as the depressed state of the patient called for, notwithstanding her fever.

In a few days more he changed this treatment. The patient, in fact, could not be got to swallow these things. Dr. Willett became more perplexed. It was not exactly gastric fever, but he thought it more resembled that flickering treacherous fire than any other fever with which he was acquainted.

There are sicknesses that will not be cured through the body. The mind diseased, which, is the parent of these impracticable maladies, of which, when people die, they are said to have died of a broken heart—disdains the apothecary's boxes and bottles—knows nothing of them. The heart-ache, of which it is no more than an unusually protracted fit, has its seat in that which no apothecary can hear, see, feel, or understand. When the immortal, and in this life, inscrutable, spirit, which is the unseen lodger, the master, of the body, sickens, all sickens. In its pain all below it writhe and wither, and the body, its ultimate expression, reflects but cannot mitigate its torment.

Dr. Willett, too, complained that the child was ill, and that it must have been ill before it left the Grange.

On this point he and Mildred Tarnley had a sharp battle.

When both parties had cooled a little he admitted that possibly the symptoms might not have been sufficiently developed to have excited the attention of an uninstructed observer.

The Grange was growing all this time more awful. Death seemed to have made his abode there, and the shadow of the hearse plumes seemed to rest upon the windows. Courage flagged, despair supervened, and Mrs. Tarnley's temper grew all but insupportable. A day in such situations seems very long, and many had passed since the baby had made his journey to Twyford. The doctor seemed desponding, and stood longer silent by his patient's bed this day than usual. His questions were briefer, and he was less communicative than usual when he was going.

Mildred Tarnley was making up her mind that the blow was inevitable, and was secretly wishing it might come soon, since come it must.

The father buried but two months since, the mother sinking into an untimely grave, and the poor little baby also dying! Was this family accursed? What a blight was this!

The doctor had said that he would return by Gryce's mill. It had been dark some time, and was now about seven o'clock. Tom was down at the forge, Dulcibella and Lilly Dogger both upstairs, and she quite alone in the kitchen. She was more uncomfortable than she had ever been before about Alice that night.

She had seen in the doctor's countenance that day, as he told her he would look in again on his return up the glen, that which had profoundly alarmed her, and now, sitting alone in this dark kitchen, she was infested by gloomy forebodings and terrible fancies.

She went upstairs to the sick lady's door. At that hour no amendment was probable, and there certainly was none. Down again she went. The idea had got into her head that the patient would die that night, and she grew nervous, and tired of listening for death-watches, and picking incipient winding-sheets off the candle. "I wonder Master Harry doesn't come here, if 'twas only to ask whether his sister was dead or alive, and why old Willett don't come. Smelt out a good supper somewhere, and he's stuffin' his gut, I'll warrant, while the poor lady's takin' the rattles."

Mildred Tarnley could stand this no longer, and she went out and down the dark road that leads to the Glen of Carwell, close by, down which, with the uselessness of impatience, she went to look for a sight of the absent doctor, and listen for the tread of his horse.

Nothing cheered by that darksome walk, and the solemn and solitary view down the Carwell road, she stood gazing down toward distant Gryce's mill, until she tired of that too, and in dismay and bitterness retraced her steps toward the Grange.

On entering the yard, she saw a man's figure approaching her from the kitchen door. She thought it was the doctor's, for a moment, but it was not, and with a "Lord! who's that?" gasped in fear that sounded like fury, she stood fixed as the old pump.

"Bah! don't you know me, woman?" said Harry Fairfield, surlily; "I have only a few minutes. Ye'll have to come wi' me in the morning over to Twyford."

"To Twyford?"

"Ay, to Twyford; and why the devil do ye leave the yard-door open; I walked into the kitchen and right up the stairs, lookin' for ye, and knocked at Ally's door. I think ye're cracked."

"And what's to fear here, down in the Grange? Hoot! If 'tweren't for form's sake we need never draw bolt from one Christmas to another."

"There was a woman found with her throat cut by the Three Pollards, between this and Hatherton, on Tuesday. If you likes it, down here, 'tis little to me. I'll come here at eight o'clock in the morning to fetch ye."

"Is the child sick?"

"Not it. It was, but it's gettin' all right; that is, if it *be* the child."

"What the de'il d'ye mean, Master Harry?"

"I was lookin' at the child this mornin', and d—- me, if I think it's the same child we left there!" said Harry.

"Why, sir—Mr. Harry, what's this?"

"I say I misdoubt it's not the same child, and ye must come over and look at it. Don't ye say a word o' the matter to no one; no more did I; if you do we'll never come to the bottom of it."

"My good Lord!" exclaimed old Mildred, turning paler, and frowning very hard.

"I won't stop. I won't eat anything. I can't delay to-night; my nag's by the bridle, there, beside the scales, and—any message to Wykeford? I'll be passing Willett's house."

"Well! well!" repeated Mildred, gaping at him still, with scarcely a breath left her, "sin is sin, be it seen or no; judgment follows. God has feet o' wool and hands o' iron."

"Sweep before your own door, lass; ye're a bit daft, bain't ye?" said Harry, with a sudden glare in his face.

"God forgive us all!"

"Amen," said Harry.

And there came a pause.

"Women and fools will be meddlin'," he resumed. "Lord love ye! For mad words, deaf ears, they say. 'Pon my soul! 'twould make a cow laugh, and if ye don't mind ye may run yer head against the wall."

"I *will* go to-morrow and look at the child," said Mildred, with sullen emphasis, clapping one lean hand down on the other.

"That's all I want ye. Come, what mischief can ye make o' that? Clear yer head!"

"There's two things shouldn't anger ye: what ye can help and what ye can't," said Mildred. "I'll go wi' ye in the mornin', Master Harry."

"That's the least we can do and the most. How's Ally?"

"Dyin', I think; she'll be gone before daybreak, I'm thinkin'."

"That's bad," said Harry.

"Good hap or ill hap, as God awards. I know nout against her."

"Poor little thing!" said Harry.

"I blame myself; but what could I do? If aught's gone wrong wi' the child, poor lady! 'tis well she were gone too."

"There's many a fellow'd knock ye on the head for less," replied Harry, with a very black look; "you women has a hintin' funkin' way wi' ye. Ye like to ladle the drippin' over a fellow's legs, and say ye meant the mutton. Can't ye speak out and say what ye mean, and get it off yer stomach, and let me know, and I'll answer it straight, like a man and a Fairfield, d ——me!"

"I'll go wi' ye to-morrow; and I take it that's what ye want."

"Well, this I'll say. If ye suppose I'd hurt that poor baby to the value of a pin's point, you're a stupider and a wickeder witch than I took ye for, and I wish poor Ally could hear me, and I'd swear to her on my knees, at her dying bed, by the Creator that made me, that I'll work for that boy as if he was my own, till I make him safe in Wyvern. And can't ye see, woman, d—- ye, that I can have but the boy's good in my mind when I ask ye to come over on such an errand to Twyford?"

"Well, I do suppose—I do suppose. Eight o'clock, and there's two feet will be cold ere then, I'm afeard."

"Don't be a fool no more, and I forgive ye, Mildred," said he, extending his hand; "and don't ye mind a lick wi' the rough side o' my tongue—'tis a way wi' us Fairfields—and there wasn't many on 'em would 'a stood to let ye rile them as ye did me. And bolt yer doors, mind; and, poor Ally! I hope she may do yet, and mind ye—eight o'clock sharp."

So Harry departed.

Mildred stood and looked after him for a time.

"There's nothin' ever goes right at the Grange," she said with a short hard sigh; "nor never did, nor never will."

And after a pause, with another sigh, she said—

"No, no; I won't think it—I couldn't think it—'taint in one o' them. They might be fickle wi' a lass, or hot tempered wi' a man, and a bit too hard wi' tongue or hand, but the like o' that—I can't believe it—never, and I wish I hadn't a' heard that. I'm most sure I heard the child cry in the loft there; I'm sorry I didn't say so then. I don't know why, and I don't know now, what it should be no more than another, but I didn't like it. It looked like summat *hid*—I can't say. But my heart misgave me."

Old Mildred walked into the house. She had other thoughts now than the poor lady upstairs. They were remorseful, though she could hardly say for what she could blame herself. Perhaps she overrated her authority, and fancied she could have prevented the baby's being taken away.

But it might be all quite right—men were so stupid about babies. A pretty hand a Fairfield man would make of a nursery! At all events the morrow would clear a great deal up.

The morning came. The doctor had looked in, and, as often happened, had surprised the lookers-on by pronouncing positively that the patient was *not* worse.

With a qualm at her heart, Mildred asked him when he had seen the child: and watched his face hard while he answered quite frankly that he had seen it the day before—that it was decidedly better, and might possibly do well.

When should he see it again?

There was nothing alarming, probably to-morrow; certainly not later than the next day. There was nothing urgent—the chances were rather in favour of its recovery, but, of course, there were the risks, and we weren't to hollo till we were out of the wood.

With this cheer Mildred was much comforted, so much re-assured that when eight o'clock came next morning and brought no Harry Fairfield, she felt rather relieved of a bore than disappointed.

Two days later Dr. Willett reported more favourably than he had yet done on Alice. His account of the boy, however, was by no means so cheery.

Harry looked in still later, and talked the matter over with Mildred.

"I thought, ye see, I might just be makin' a fool o' myself—and another o' you, so I went over there quietly next day, and I'm sure it *was* a mistake. The child's thinner a deal, and its colour gone, and it was dark a'most when I saw it, and she held the candle too low and cast a shadow from its nose, by Jove, across its face. You never see so queer a monkey as it looked, and so I held my tongue, but made over here to put our heads together and make sure o' the matter. But when I went next day and saw it in the daylight, by Jove it was all right—the child and no mistake. But it is grown awful thin and wry-faced, only you couldn't take it for any other, and the doctor sees it every second day, and I'm glad to hear that poor little Alice is getting on so well. She'll be on her legs again, in no time, I'm thinking."

After Harry had gone, Dr. Willett arrived with a very ill account of the baby.

"Dying, poor little thing. Its heart wrong, and all the organs; but you musn't tell poor Mrs. Fairfield. It may cost her her life, if she begins to fret about it, and just tell her it's quite well, for it's true, you know—it's nearer heaven, and best of all when it gets there. So tell her, when she asks, that it was sent in charge of careful people to get it out of the reach of the infection that is in the neighbourhood, and keep her mind quiet."

A few days later the news of its death arrived in the kitchen, and Lilly Dogger, who was afraid to give way to her emotions before Mrs. Tarnley, abruptly rose, and ran out, and throwing her apron over her head, broke into absolute screams of crying under the great old trees that stand by the scales.

Here there was a sad secret to disclose when the time came, and poor Alice was strong enough to bear the story.

In the meantime Harry Fairfield came and had a stormy interview with old Mildred. The doctor, he swore, didn't know his business. The women at Twyford had neglected the child. He'd see to it. He'd be a devil among the tailors. He'd open their eyes for them. He had often got fifty pounds for a less neglect of a filly. They should smoke all round for it. And there now was Wyvern without an heir, for, d—n him if he'd ever marry; he wouldn't for Saint Peter. It wouldn't do—it couldn't be, at no price; and there was old Wyvern, and never a Fairfield to see tankard filled or faggot fired in the old house.

Harry was not married, although he had insinuated some matrimonial ambiguities in his talk with old Mildred. But I believe he swore truly when he vowed that he never would marry. He had quite made up his mind on that point for some time.

For the rest, his threatenings ended in the noise they began in. In truth there was no ground for complaint, and both nurse and doctor had done their duty.

Alice recovered. I do not attempt to describe the long mourning that followed, the sweet, the bitter, and the terrible recollections that ever after tinted the image of Carwell Grange in her memory.

As soon as she could bear removal to her kind kinswoman, Lady Wyndale insisted on taking her to Oulton. After a time they travelled, and finally returned to Oulton, where they lived on together in the happiness of great and tried affection.

A difference of five-and-thirty years did not separate them any more than the interval of a generation did Naomi and Ruth. Lady Wyndale, being one of those gifted women in whom the girlish spirit burns high and bright so long as life itself continues, full of sympathy and gaiety, with a strong vein of romance, and a pleasant sense of the ridiculous, and also fine immovable affections, was to one who had suffered calamities so dire as had befallen Alice Fairfield, a more delightful companion than any of her own age could have been. For when it was needed, there was the graver charm of a long and sad experience, and there were also the grander teachings of religion, and these were not obtruded or vaunted in anywise, but, rather toned her thoughts and feelings, with their peculiar sublime and melancholy lights, in which all things are subdued and also glorified.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD SQUIRE LEAVES WYVERN.

The old folk can't go on living always. The King's messenger had called at Wyvern, and the old Squire must needs get up and go.

Sickness was a cross he had never been used to bear, and now that it was laid on his old shoulders he knew that he could not keep his feet very long.

He had the Wyvern lawyer, who did the business of the estate, up to his room, and the parson and his own son, Harry Fairfield. He made the attorney read the will, which he had told him to bring up with him, and the Squire listened as it was read slowly.

After the clergyman had gone—

"Have ye ought to say to that, son Harry?" said the old Squire.

"'Tis an old will, father," said Harry.

"It ain't," said the Squire.

"Eight years less two months," said the lawyer.

"About the age rum's fit to drink," said the old Squire. "What say ye to it—now's your time, son?"

"Priests, women, and poultry, they say, has never enough. There's bin changes since, and I don't see why Wyvern should be charged so heavy."

"There's three hundred a year to Alice, that's what ye mean!" said the old Squire.

His son was silent.

"Well, I don't owe her nothin', that's true, but I'll let it stand, mind. And Harry, lad, the day ye do a good thing there will be seven new moons."

"What was parson a whisperin' about in the window wi' ye?" he asked of the attorney after a time.

"Some claim upon the vicarage which he thought you said you meant to remit by will."

"I 'a thought upon it, and I won't. *Paternoster* built churches, and Our Father pulled 'em down. There's o'er many parsons for the churches, and o'er many churches for the people—tell him I won't."

"What the devil made you talk about that to him?" said Harry, with a dark look, when he and the attorney had got out of the room.

"My dear sir," said the lawyer, "we must be true to our clients, and beside, don't you remember the clergyman said he'd be here to-morrow at one to administer the Lord's Supper, and he'll be certain to speak of it then to our client."

At nightfall the Squire grew worse, and his head wandered.

"Tell that white-faced Vicar Maybell, there's never a one but the thankless in hell—I'll not sit under none o' his sermons—Ay, he frowns at that."

"Hey, dear!" whispered the housekeeper, gazing at him from the hearth where they were sitting.

"And who does he mean, ma'am?" asked the nurse.

"God knows—old times, I suppose," she answered.

"There's a glass broke, Tom, who's kicking up the row?" mumbled the Squire,—"Play, women, and wine undoes men, laughin'—Ay, light it, I'm very dark—Who's he, ye fool?—Joan and my lady's all one in the dark."

"That's Tom Ward he's thinkin' on?" said the nurse.

"Ay, he liked Tom ever. He wouldn't think 'twas Wyvern without Tom," answered the housekeeper.

In a little time he said more distinctly and sternly—

"The dead should do nothing.—So that's the bishop.—Ay—ay—The devil, mind ye, isn't always at one door.—If there was a good man here he'd put a clout over that face—Ye'll never do it."

Then it would sink into mumbling, and then again grow more distinct.

At last the morning came, and the Squire so many hours nearer death, was, nevertheless, now like himself.

In due course the clergyman arrived, and the housekeeper, and serious Jim Hopper of the mill, close by, attended to make up a little congregation with whom the dying Squire was to receive that most "comfortable" Sacrament, before setting out on his long journey.

"You're distinctly a Church of England man?" inquired the clergyman gently.

"Ay, what do you take me for?"

"I make it a rule, dear sir, to inquire. I have once or twice found Presbyterians and other Dissenters among the attendants at my church at Nottingham before I came here, and I am happy to hear so clear an answer to my inquiry," said the clergyman with a gracious solemnity.

"The crow thinks her own bird fairest—go on," said Squire Harry.

After these rites were over, the Squire needed rest.

Then, after an hour or so, he called for Tom Ward.

"Well, Tom, we a' lived a long while together—here in Wyvern—you and me, and 'be the day never so long, at last cometh even' song,' as they say, and now the doctor thinks my time be come, and I sent for ye to shake hands, Tom, and bid ye good-bye."

Tom was drying his eyes hastily, and his old face was more puckered than ever.

"Yer honour was always kind to me——"

"Come, Tom, ye musn't be cryin', man. Penny in pocket's a merry companion, and I wrote ye down for somethin' in my will, and ye a' brewed me many a tankard, Tom—ye'll never brew me another—and I wouldn't go without a word and a shake by the hand."

When this was over, the nurse signed to Tom to go.

I wonder how the grim old man, with near a week's white stubble on his chin, felt as he saw Tom Ward glide away softly, with tears on his rugged cheeks. For Tom, it was the breaking up and foundering of old Wyvern in the deep. He was too old to live in the new Wyvern that was coming, mayhap.

"I'll never get the old days out o' my head, nor ever like the new, and 'twon't be long, I'm thinkin', before I follow him down the ash-tree road to Wyvern churchyard."

And so for the old Squire it came, the last day of light, and the first of death.

It was a stately funeral in the old-fashioned way. All the good old houses of the county were represented there. The neighbours, great and small, mustered; the shops in the town were all shut, and the tenants attended in masses.

This solemn feast and pageant over, the fuss subsided, and Harry entered upon his reign with a gravity becoming his new prerogative and responsibilities.

Sergeant-Major Archdale was an influential, and prosperous, and reserved minister under the new *régime*. He had a

snug berth at Warhampton, as Harry Fairfield had promised, and from that distant legation he was summoned every now and then to Wyvern, and there conferred with the Squire. I have called him Sergeant-Major, but he was so no longer. He had retired some time before from the militia and was now plain Mr. Archdale.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARJORY TREVELLIAN.

In order to throwing a light upon the nature of some of the duties of Mr. Archdale, we must convey the reader in spirit, to some little distance.

In the sequestered country, about twelve miles south of Twyford, in a pretty nook formed by a wooded hollow close by the old by-road to Warhampton, stands an antique cottage, with a loft and two little windows peeping through the very steep thatched roof and a high narrow gable—gable and wall alike streaked and crossed with those black oak beams which formed the cage into whose interstices our ancestors built their brick and plaster. The steep roof runs out over a little porch which has a bench in one side of it. Another stone bench stands under the lattice window, the woodwork of which casement, as well as the black spars crossed and morticed in the walls, and even the curved brick chimney, look shrunk and warped by time, by which, too, the hatch at the door is rounded and furrowed, and the stone seat and window stones worn into curves and hollows, and such and so venerable is the air of the structure, with its ivy-bound porch, that one might fancy it the very farm house in which Anne Hathaway passed her girlhood.

Here dwelt good Mrs. Marjory Trevellian, some fifty years old and upward, with, I think, the kindest face and pleasantest laugh in that part of the country; a widow of many years; not very happy in her marriage, and quite content with her experience of the wedded state; quiet, cheerful, very industrious; with a little farm of three acres, and a cow; spinning sometimes, knitting at others, and when she could, taking in washing, and in all things approving herself diligent, cheerful, and honest.

With this kind, cheery, honest dame lived a little boy, the son of a Mr. Henry—that was all she knew distinctly about his people. She called him her Fairy, and her Prince, and when curious people questioned her closely, she said that his father was a merchant, "unfortunate in business," as the phrase is; that he was living perhaps in concealment, and in distressed circumstances, or possibly was dead. All she could say for certain was, that she received a very small allowance for maintaining him, which was paid punctually every three months in advance, and that as to the name of the boy, his Christian name was William and his surname Henry, and that she called him her "Prince" or her "Fairy," and he called her "Granny."

She idolised this pretty boy, and he loved her with the tenderness which a child bestows upon a loving nurse, something more than filial.

The boy remembers no other home but this, and no other friend but "Granny." He was now a little past eleven. His life had been solitary, but cheerful. Was there not the pond only thirty yards away from their door-step, in which he sailed his fleet of ships, made of corks, which old Peter Durdon gave him? He was a cousin of Marjory Trevellian's, and lived in the village two miles away. He used to call every Sunday and to bring these corks in his pocket, and a bit of such lead as tea is wrapped in to make the keels of their navy. He was dressed in a blue "swallow-tailed" coat with brass buttons; his drab trousers were very short; his stockings faded sky-blue; and his shoes clumsy and clouted, and highly polished. He wore a chestnut wig of a long and lank cut, and his forehead slanted back very much, and his nose came forward, and a perpetual smile expanded his cheeks, which were as red and smooth as a ripe apple. His countenance was not wise, though very good-natured—rather silly, I'm afraid—and I think he took more interest in this sort of shipping than was quite compatible with strength of mind.

As these ships glided with thin paper sails across the pond, while Master Henry watched them in grave absorption, Peter's raptures expressed themselves in continuous peals of laughter.

These were great occasions in the solitary life of Fairy.

There were a set of big box-wood ninepins—skittles, I suppose, with balls—battered and discoloured—I never knew how they got into the cottage, but they looked a hundred years old if a day. Many a game with these on the smooth patch of sward at the other side of the pond had pleasant old Marjory with her darling.

In its seclusion this life was monastic, but not in its liberty. The boy was, on the whole, very happy.

Looking on honest Marjory as mistress of all she surveyed, it never struck him, that in the points in which her dietary

differed from his she was practising a compulsory economy. The article of meat was not often found in her bill of fare. But conscientiously she placed the little fellow's bit of broiled meat before him every day, and told him when he inquired why she had none for herself that she did not like it, and that it did not agree with her, which he accepted as undoubted truths, and wondered and regretted secretly.

On winter evenings their tea was very cosy. A wheaten cake baked on the griddle, a new-laid egg each, and a cup of tea from the many-coloured delf teapot—a good deal burnt on the side next the fire. With the door barred and the window carefully closed, the fire burning cheerfully, and their candle lighting the party—who so happy? And was there not the old Robinson Crusoe, with binding black with age, and a frontispiece showing the hero with his grave countenance and beard, his tall cap and goat-skin dress, his musket over one shoulder and his umbrella over the other, and recounting his marvellous life in the quaint old type of Queen Anne? And was there not that other literary treasure, the old folio volume of Captain Cook's, Commodore Anson's, and other seafaring worthies' voyages round or up and down the world, with no end of careful old copperplates, showing Pacific islands, curious volcanoes, flotillas of armed canoes, thick-lipped miscreants with rings in their noses and birds' tails enlivening their foreheads, and long processions of official people, priests, &c., with a small white pocket-handkerchief each by way of dress? But better far than these, which together with her Bible and Prayer-Book, constituted Marjory's library, was that good creature's inexhaustible collection of fairy tales, received traditionally and recounted *vivá voce*, and prefaced with the rhyme which even at this distance recals me to the nursery fireside with the far-off tones of a kindly voice that I shall hear no more.

> "Once upon a time there was a king and a queen,
> As many have been,
> But few I have seen,
> Except in pictures!"

And starting with this little trumpeting and summons to attention—the "oyes-oyes-oyes" and immutable prelude of an ever-varying sequel, good Marjory, the herald of ever new wonders, would tell her tale of dwarfs and castles, of godmother fairies, and malignant enchantresses, broken-hearted princes and persecuted princesses, and enchanted palaces and awful forests, till the hour came for the little fellow to get to his bed and enter the no less wonderful land of dreams.

Another person who contributed to the regular entertainment of the boy was Tom Orange.

Tom Orange called at the cottage sometimes at intervals of three months, sometimes, for perhaps half a year, on the first of every month, and was always made welcome by Marjory Trevellian, and feasted with rashers and whatever else her humble larder afforded, and on going had established a mysterious right to a shilling "tip," which he always made it a point should be an honourable secret among them.

What might be the nature of his business the little boy neither knew nor cared, but Tom Orange was in the boy's eyes the ideal and epitome of all that was enchanting, brilliant, and exhilarating.

Tom was somewhat long and lean, with a face also long and always smiling, except when it was making a grimace, an art in which he excelled almost every other blackguard I have heard of. His clothes and hat were seedy, and, for so merry a person, he was wonderfully poor.

Tom Orange's accomplishments were infinite, he could dance a hornpipe with all the well-known airs and graces of a sailor; he could protrude his mouth till it assumed a shape quite unknown to physiognomists, and with a delicate finger, turning his eyelids inside out, make the pupils of those organs quiver strangely, while he uttered a sound like the call of a jackdaw. He could sing a variety of comic songs, with refrains delivered with a volubility which distanced admiration, and made his very audience breathless, and some of these were relieved with occasional dialogue of matchless character and humour. He could swallow any number of pennies you pleased, and take them all out at different angles of his body; he could put several potatoes under his hat, and withdraw them all without touching either the hat or the potatoes. He could keep three balls always in the air together, and he could balance two chairs upon his chin.

In short, as I have said, his accomplishments were innumerable and extraordinary, and the only wonder was how so universal a genius could possibly possess so few shillings and so many seedy articles of dress.

Tom Orange, too, was great at skittles, and gave his pupil wonderful new lights.

He taught him also how to guard, stop, and strike according to the principles of "the noble art of self-defence." In fact, it would have been difficult to discover a more fascinating companion and instructor of youth. Possibly it was as well, however, that his visits were so far between, and as brief as fortune ordained them to be. It was no wonder, however, that these visits were looked for by the boy, as the return of the life and excitement of an annual fair might have been by the ingenuous youth of some other rural district.

There was but one point on which Marjory was obliged to impose a prohibition upon the child. It seemed a trifle, but in reality was a gigantic privation.

"No, darling, you mustn't talk to any other boys, nor play with them, nor go near them; if you do you'll be took away by your friends, and I'll never see you again; and what will poor Granny do then without her darling?"

And Granny's eyes filled with tears, and the boy cried and hugged her passionately, and this little agony gave place to wild affection and a glow of unspeakable delight and happiness, and was celebrated by a hot cake that evening, and new-laid eggs and a great tea, and stories to no end.

And she found her darling that night crying in his sleep, and was sure he was dreaming of leaving the old cottage, and she wakened him with kisses, herself crying.

So these two persons, notwithstanding some disparity of years, were wonderfully happy in one another's society, and if they had each their will, would have fixed things as they were, and neither grown older nor younger, but just gone on living so for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ENCHANTED GARDEN.

Marjory Trevellian was what is accounted among her class "a good scholar," and she had taught the little boy to read and write, to "say his tables," and to "cypher," as she termed the initiatory arithmetical exercises.

It was plain, however, that the boy was not abandoned to chance, but that an eye was upon him, and some friendly, if not conscientious direction, controlling his destiny.

In one of his visits Tom Orange handed her a letter, written in the same neat clerk's hand in which the short memorandum that accompanied each remittance was penned. Having read the letter she was thoughtful.

When Tom had gone away, she said—

"You are to be taught like a gentleman, as you are, my darling, and you're not to be sent to school for three or four years, and in the meantime Mr. Wharton—he's a kind, good gentleman—is to teach you for two hours every evening after the school is over. You know his house. It is about a mile away from this; just half-way on the road to the grammar school."

"But I'm to live at home, Granny, all the same?" inquired the boy in great trepidation.

"Lord love it, to be sure he is," she answered, beaming on him with great affection. "Only two hours, and every one likes Mr. Wharton, and I'm desired to go to his house to take his orders, to-morrow."

So she did, and the new order of things was established with very little disturbance of the old.

The narrow road which the boy every afternoon passed to and from Doctor Wharton's house makes, about half-way, a sudden curve. It is a wooded road, not without little ups and downs, and formidable ruts, and blocks of worn old stone, so large as to shock all the rules of modern road-making.

Upon this curve, so as nearly to front the boy's line of march, is a very old fruit garden, with a discoloured ivy-grown wall, on which are growing moss and house-leek, and here and there tufts of grass and wallflower. Over the wall are seen ancient standard plum and cherry and pear-trees, and beyond them the upper windows, and the steep, grey roof, and slender chimneys of a house as much out of date as the garden.

In the garden-wall is a tall door with worn fluted pilasters corresponding in antiquity with the rest of the building and its belongings. This stone framework has an iron door, old-fashioned and fancifully wrought into arabesques of spikes, leaves, and stars, facing the quiet road, and within this a strong wooden door.

Fruit-trees are, of course, always interesting to boys, but quite another interest mingled in the feeling with which little Willie viewed such glimpses of the old grey house and its background of dark and towering timber as his approach afforded, and he often wished, as he passed, that a hole in the wall might afford him a peep into the old garden and a glimpse of its owners. He sometimes heard their voices.

A clear, childish laugh he had heard more than once, from among the tall fruit-trees and climbing roses that over-topped the wall, and a sweet female voice also faintly prattling with the child.

One evening, as he returned from Doctor Wharton's, with his books buckled in his strap swinging from his hand, having slackened his pace as usual when he found himself under the garden wall, to his infinite delight the inner wooden door, which had always obstructed his curiosity, was open. The outer gate of iron rails and foliage was locked, but through its bars he could see at last the garden. Its trees were old and overgrown. It was wonderfully dark, with roses and other flowers glowing here and there, and one straight walk leading up to the house, and continuing the line of the narrow bridge which, at the iron door, crossed what seemed a sort of moat, whose banks were overgrown with docks and nettles. He could see part of the steps leading up to the door of the house, and a portion of one of its windows. The rest was concealed by the thick foliage, and the effect of this little glimpse was increased by the deep shadow of the foreground.

It was not very far from sunset, and the small birds were already singing among the boughs, and the deep shadow—the

antique and neglected air and the silence of the place—gave it in his romantic eyes, a character of monastic mystery and enchantment.

As he gazed straight up the dark walk towards the house, suddenly a man turned the corner of the yew hedge that met the bridge's parapet close to him, and walking straight up to the door, with a gruff look at the little boy, shut and locked the wooden door in his face.

So all was gone for the present. He knew there was no good in looking through the key-hole, for envious fortune had hung a spray of sweetbriar so as effectually to intercept the view, and nothing remained but the dingy chocolate-coloured planks before him, and the foliage and roses trembling over the old wall.

Many a time again he passed and re-passed the door without a like good hap.

At length, however, one evening he found the envious wooden door once more open, and the view again disclosed through the iron bars.

A very pretty little girl, with golden hair, was standing on tiptoe near, and with all her soul was striving to reach an apple with a stick which she held in her tiny fingers.

Seeing him she fixed her large eyes on him, and said, with an air of command—

"Come, and climb up the tree and get me that apple."

His heart beat quick—there was nothing he liked better.

"But I can't get in," he said, blushing; "the door is locked."

"Oh! I'll call mamma—she'll let you in. Don't you know mamma?"

"No, I never saw her," answered the boy.

"Wait there, and I'll fetch her."

And so she was gone.

The first flutter of his excitement was hardly over when he heard steps and voices near, and the little girl returned, holding the hand of a slight, pale lady, with a very pretty face, dressed all in black. She had the key in her hand, and smiled gently on the little boy as she approached. Her face was kind, and at once he trusted her.

"Oh! he has left the inner door open again," she said, and with a little nod and smile of welcome she opened the door, and the boy entered the garden.

Both doors were now shut.

"Look up, little boy," said the lady in black, with a very sweet voice.

She liked his face. He was a very handsome little fellow, and with an expression earnest, shy, and bright, and the indescribable character of refinement too in his face. She smiled more kindly still, and placing just the tip of her finger under his chin she said—

"You are a gentleman's son, and you are nicely dressed. What is your name?"

"My papa's name is Mr. Henry," he answered.

"And where do you go to school?"

"I don't go to school. I say lessons to Mr. Wharton—about half a mile from this."

"It is great fun, I suppose, playing with the little boys—cricket, and all that?"

"I'm not allowed to play with the little boys."

"Who forbids you?"

"My friends won't allow me."

"Who are your friends?"

"I never saw them."

"Really! and don't you live with your papa?"

"No, I live with Marjory."

"Do you mean with your mamma?"

"Oh, no. She died a long time ago."

"And is your papa rich—why aren't you with him?"

"He was rich, granny says, but he grew poor."

"And where is he now?"

"I don't know. I'm to go to school," he said, acquiring confidence the more he looked in that sweet face. "My friends will send me, in three years, granny says."

"You are a very nice little boy, and I'm sure a good little fellow. We'll have tea in a few minutes—you must stay and drink tea with us."

The little fellow held his straw hat in his hand, and was looking up in the face of the lady, whose slender fingers were laid almost caressingly on his rich brown hair as she looked down smiling, with eyes in which "the water stood." Perhaps these forlorn childhoods had a peculiar interest for her.

"And it is very polite of you taking off your hat to a lady, but put it on again, for I'm not a bit better than you; and I'll go and tell them to get tea now. Dulcibella," she called. "Dulcibella, this little friend is coming to drink tea with us, and Amy and he will play here till it comes, and don't mind getting up, sit quiet and rest yourself."

And she signed with her hand, smiling, to repress her attempt to rise.

"Well, darling, play in sight o' me, till your mamma comes back," said the rheumatic old woman, addressing the little girl; "and ye mustn't be pulling at that great rolling-stone; ye can't move it, and ye may break your pretty back trying."

With these and similar injunctions the children were abandoned to their play.

He found this pretty young lady imperious, but it was pleasant to be so commanded, and the little boy climbed trees to gather her favourite apples, and climbed the garden wall to pluck a bit of wallflower, and at last she said—

"Now, we'll play ninepins. There's the box, set them up on the walk. Yes, that's right; you *have* played; who taught you?"

"Granny."

"Has Granny ninepins?"

"Yes, ever so much bigger than these."

"Really! So Granny is rich, then?"

"I think so."

"As rich as mamma?"

"Her garden isn't so big."

"Begin, do *you*; ah, ha! you've hit one, and who plays best?"

"Tom Orange does; does your mamma know Tom Orange?"

"I dare say she does. Dulcibella, does mamma know Tom Orange?"

"No, my dear."

"No, she doesn't," echoed the little girl, "who is he?"

What, not know Tom Orange! How could that be? So he narrated on that brilliant theme.

"Tom Orange must come to tea with mamma, I'll tell her to ask him," decided the young lady.

So these little wiseacres pursued their game, and then had their tea, and in about an hour the little boy found himself trudging home, with a sudden misgiving, for the first time, as to the propriety of his having made these acquaintances without Granny's leave.

The kind voice, the beloved smile of Granny received him before the cottage door.

"Welcome, darlin', and where was my darlin', and what kept him from his old Granny?"

So they hugged and kissed, and then he related all that had happened, and asked "was it any harm, Granny?"

"Not a bit, darlin', that's a good lady, and a grand lady, and a fit companion for ye, and see how she knew the gentle blood in your pretty face; and ye *may* go, as she has asked you, to-morrow evening again, and as often as she asks ye; for it was only the little fellows that's going about without edication or manners, that your friends, and who can blame them, doesn't like ye to keep company with—and who'd blame them, seeing they're seldom out of mischief, and that's the beginning o' wickedness, and you're going, but oh! darlin', not for three long years, thank God, to a grand school where there's none but the best."

So this chance acquaintance grew, and the lady seemed to take every week a deeper interest in the fine little boy, so sensitive, generous, and intelligent, and he very often drank tea with his new friends.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD FRIEND.

I am going now to describe the occurrences of a particular evening on which my young friend drank tea at Stanlake Farm, which was the name of the house with the old garden to which I have introduced the reader.

A light shower had driven the party in from the garden, and so the boy and Amy were at their ninepins in the great hall, when, the door being open, a gentleman rode up and dismounted, placing the bridle in the hand of a groom who accompanied him.

A tall man he was, with whiskers and hair dashed with white, and a slight stoop. He strode into the hall, his hat on, and a whip still in his hand.

"Hollo! So there you are—and how is your ladyship?" said he. "Skittles, by the law! Brayvo! Two down, by Jove! I'd rather that young man took you in hand than I. And tell me—where's Ally?"

"Mamma's in the drawing-room," said the young lady, scarcely regarding his presence. "Now play, it's your turn," she said, addressing her companion.

The new arrival looked at the boy and paused till he threw the ball.

"That's devilish good too," said the stranger—"very near the nine. Eh? But a miss is as good as a mile; and I don't think he's quite as good as you—and she's in the drawing-room; which is the drawing-room?"

"Don't you know the drawing-room! Well, *there* it is," and the young lady indicated it with her finger. "My turn now."

And while the game was pursued in the hall, the visitor pushed open the drawing-room door and entered.

"And how is Miss Ally?"

"Oh, Harry! Really!"

"Myself as large as life. You don't look half pleased, Ally. But I have nout but good news for you to-day. You're something richer this week than you were last."

"What is it, Harry? Tell me what you mean?"

"So I will. You know that charge on Carwell—a hundred and forty pounds a year—well, that's dropped in. That old witch is dead—ye might 'a seen it in the newspaper, if you take in one—Bertha Velderkaust. No love lost between ye. Eh?"

"Oh, Harry! Harry! *don't*," said poor Alice, pale, and looking intensely pained.

"Well, I *won't* then; I didn't think 'twould vex you. Only you know what a head devil that was—and she's dead in the old place, Hoxton. I read the inquest in the *Times*. She was always drinkin'. I think she was a bit mad. She and the people in the back room were always quarrelling; and the father's up for that and forgery. But 'twasn't clear how it came about. Some swore she was out of her mind with drink, and pitched herself out 'o the window; and some thought it might 'a bin that chap as went in to rob her, thinkin' she was stupid; and so there was a tussle for't—she was main strong, ye know—and he chucked her out. Anyhow she got it awful, for she fell across the spikes of the area-rails, and she hung on them with three lodged in her side—the mad dog-fox, she was!"

"Oh, Harry! How shocking! Oh! pray don't!" exclaimed Alice, who looked as if she was going to faint.

"Well, she lay there, without breath enough to screech, twistin' like a worm—for three hours, it's thought."

"Oh! Harry—pray don't describe it; don't, I implore. I feel so ill."

"Well, I won't, if you say so, only she's smashed, and cold in her wooden surtout; and her charge is reverted to you, now; and I thought I'd tell ye."

"Thank you, Harry," she said very faintly.

"And when did you come here? I only heard this morning," asked Harry.

"Five weeks ago."

"Do you like it; ain't it plaguy lonesome?"

"I like the quiet—at least for a time," she answered.

"And I'm thinkin' o' gettin' married—upon my soul I am. What do you think o' that?"

"Really!"

"Sure as you're there, but it won't be none o' your love-matches.

> 'Bring something, lass, along wi' thee,
> If thou intend to live with me.'

That's my motto. Sweetheart and honey-bird keeps no house, I've heard say. I like a body that can look after things, and that would rather fund fifty pounds than spend a hundred.

> 'A nice wife and a back door
> Hath made many a rich, man poor,'

as they say; and besides, I'm not a young fellow no longer. I'm pushin' sixty, and I should be wise. And who's the little chap that's playin' skittles wi' Amy in the hall?"

"Oh, that's such a nice little boy. His father's name is Henry, and his mother has been dead a long time. He lives with a good old woman named Marjory Trevellian. What's the matter, Harry?"

"Nothing. I beg your pardon. I was thinkin' o' something else, and I didn't hear. Tell me now, and I'll listen."

So she repeated her information, and Harry yawned and stretched his arms.

> "'For want o' company,
> Welcome trumpery,'

and I must be goin' now. I wouldn't mind drinkin' a glass o' sherry, as you're so pressing, for I've had a stiff ride, and dust's drouthy."

So Harry, having completed his visit characteristically, took his leave, and mounted his nag and rode away.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM ORANGE.

Little Miss Amy had a slight cold, and the next tea-party was put off for a day. On the evening following Harry's visit at Stanlake Farm, Marjory Trevellian being at that time absent in the village to make some frugal purchases, who should suddenly appear before the little boy's eyes, as he lifted them from his fleet upon the pond, but his friend, Tom Orange, as usual in high and delightful spirits.

Need I say how welcome Tom was? He asked in a minute or two for Marjory, and took her temporary absence with great good-humour. Tom affected chilliness, and indeed the evening was a little sharp, and proposed that they should retire to the cottage, and sit down there.

"How soon do you suppose, youngster, the old hen will come home."

"Who?"

"Marjory Daw, down the chimney."

"Oh, Granny?"

This nickname was the only pleasantry of Mr. Orange which did not quite please the boy.

Tom Orange here interpolated his performance of the jackdaw, with his eyelids turned inside out and the pupils quivering, which, although it may possibly have resembled the jackdaw of heraldry, was not an exact portraiture of the bird familiar to us in natural history; and when this was over he asked again—"How soon will she be home?"

"She walked down to the town, and I think she can't be more than about half-way back again."

"That's a mile, and three miles an hour is the best of her paces if she was runnin' for a pound o' sausages and a new cap. Heigh ho! and alas and alack-a-day. No one at home but the maid, and the maid's gone to church! I wrote her a letter the day before yesterday, and I must read it again before she comes back. Where does she keep her letters?"

"In her work-box on the shelf."

"This will be it, the wery identical fiddle!" said Tom Orange, playfully, setting it down upon the little deal table, and, opening it, he took out the little sheaf of letters from the end, and took them one by one to the window, where he took the liberty of reading them.

I think he was disappointed, for he pitched them back again into their nook in the little trunk-shaped box contemptuously.

The boy regarded Tom Orange as a friend of the family so confidential, and as a man in all respects so admirable and virtuous, that nothing appeared more desirable and natural than that excellent person's giving his attention to the domestic correspondence.

He popped the box back again in its berth. Then he treated the young gentleman to Lingo's song with the rag-tag-merry-derry perrywig and hat-band, &c., and at the conclusion of the performance admitted that he was "dry," and with a pleasant wink, and the tip of his finger pushing the end of his nose a good deal to the left, he asked him whether he could tell him where Mrs. Trevellian, who would be deeply grieved if she thought that Tom was detained for a drink till her return, kept her liquor.

"Yes, I can show you," said the boy.

"Wait a minute, my guide, my comforter, and friend," said Tom Orange; and he ascertained from the door-stone that no one was inconveniently near.

The boy was getting a tea-cup off the shelf.

"Never mind sugar, my hero, I'll sweeten it with a thought of Marjory Daw."

The boy explained, and led him into the dark nook by the hall door. Tom Orange, well pleased, moved almost on tiptoe, and looked curiously and spoke under his breath, as he groped in this twilight.

"Here it is," said the boy, frankly.

"Where?"

"Here."

"This!" said Tom, for his friend had uncovered a crock of water.

Tom Orange glared at him and at the water with grotesque surprise, and the *bona fides* of the boy and the simplicity of the situation struck Tom comically, and, exploding good-humouredly, he sat down in Marjory's chair and laughed hilariously.

Having satisfied himself by a confidential dialogue that Marjory Daw had no private bottle of comfort anywhere, this agreeable fellow so far forgot his thirst, that he did not mind drawing water from the crock, and talked on a variety of subjects to the young gentleman. In the course of this conversation he asked him two topographical questions. One was—

"Did you ever hear of a place called Carwell Grange?"

And the other resembled it.

"Did you ever hear of a place called Wyvern?"

"No."

"Think, lad. Did you never hear Mrs. Trevellian speak of Wyvern? Or of Carwell Grange?"

"No."

"Because there is the tallest mushroom you ever saw in your life growing there, and it is grown to that degree that it blocks the door so that the Squire can't get into his own house, and the mushroom is counted one of the wonders of the world, upon my little word of honour as a gentleman! And

> 'Since there's neither drink nor victuals,
> Suppose, my lord, we play at skittles?'

And if she's not back by the end of the game, tell her I had to go on to the bridge to see lame Bill Withershins, and I'll be back again this evening, I think, or in the morning at latest."

The game was played, but Marjory did not appear, and Tom Orange, entertaining his young friend with a ludicrous imitation of Bill Withershins' knock-knees, took his departure, leaving his delighted companion in the state which Moore describes as being usual

> "When the lamp that lighted
> The traveller at first goes out."

So, having watched Tom till he was quite out of sight, he returned to his neglected navy on the pond, and delivered his admirable Crichton's message to Marjory Daw on her return.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

Supper-time came, and Tom Orange did not return. Darkness closed over the old cottage, the poplar trees and the town, and the little boy said his prayers under the superintendence of worthy Marjory, and went to his bed.

He was disturbed in his sleep by voices talking in the room. He could only keep his eyes open for a little time, and he saw Tom Orange talking with mammy. He was at one side of the little table and she at another, and his head was leaning forward so as to approach uncomfortably near to the mutton-fat with a long snuff in the middle. Mammy, as he indiscriminately called "Granny," was sobbing bitterly into her apron, and sometimes with streaming eyes, speaking so low that he could not hear, to Tom Orange.

Interesting as was the scene, slumber stole him away, and when he next wakened, Tom was gone, and mammy was sitting on the bed, crying as if her heart would break. When he opened his eyes, she said,—

"Oh, darlin'! darlin'! My man—my own, own blessed man—my darlin'!" and she hugged him to her heart.

He remembered transports similar when two years ago he was very ill of a fever.

"I'm not sick, mammy, indeed; I'm quite well," and with these assurances and many caresses, he again fell asleep.

In the morning his Sunday clothes, to his wonder, were prepared for him to put on. The little old faded crimson carpet-bag, which she had always told him, to the no small content of his self-importance, was his own, stood plump and locked on the little table under the clock. His chair was close beside mammy's. She had all the delicacies he liked best for his breakfast. There was a thin little slice of fried bacon, and a new-laid egg, and a hot cake, and tea—quite a grand breakfast.

Mammy sat beside him very close. Her arm was round him. She was very pale. She tried to smile at his prattle, and her eyes filled up as often as she looked at him, or heard him speak.

Now and then he looked wonderingly in her face, and she tried to smile her old smile and nodded, and swallowed down some tea from her cup.

She made belief of eating her breakfast, but she could not.

When the wondering little man had ended his breakfast, with her old kind hands she drew him towards her.

"Sit down on my lap, my precious—my own man—my beautiful boy—my own angel bright. Oh, darlin'—darlin'—darlin'!" and she hugged the boy to her heart, and sobbed over his shoulder as if her heart was bursting.

He remembered that she cried the same way when the doctor said he was safe and sure to recover.

"Mammy," he said, kissing her, "Amy has birth-days—and I think this is my birthday—is it?"

"No, darlin'; no, no," she sobbed, kissing him. "No, my darlin', no. Oh, no, 'taint that."

She got up hastily, and brought him his little boots that she had cleaned. The boy put them on, wondering, and she laced them.

With eyes streaming she took up one of the little cork boats, which he kept on the window-stool floating in a wooden bowl.

"You'll give me one of them, darlin'—to old mammy—for a keepsake."

"Oh! yes. Choose a good one—the one with the gold paper on the pin; that one sails the best of all."

"And—and"—she cried bitterly before she could go on—"and this is the little box I'll put them in," and she picked them out of the bowl and laid them in a cardboard box, which she quickly tied round. "And this is the last day of poor mammy with her bright only darlin'—for your friends are sending for you to-day, and Mr. Archdale will be here in ten minutes,

and you're to go with him. Oh, my precious—the light o' the house—and to leave me alone."

The boy stood up, and with a cry, ran and threw his arms round her, where she stood near the clock.

"Oh! no, no, no. Oh! mammy, you wouldn't; you couldn't, you couldn't."

"Oh, darlin', you're breaking my heart. What can I do?"

"Don't let me go. Oh, mammy, don't. Oh, you couldn't, you couldn't."

"But what can I do, darlin'? Oh, darlin', what can I do?"

"I'll run away, mammy, I'll run away; and I'll come back when they're gone, and stay with you."

"Oh, God Almighty!" she cried, "here he's coming. I see him coming down the hazel road."

"Hide me, mammy; hide me in the press. Oh, mammy, mammy, you wouldn't give me to him!"

The boy had got into this large old-painted press, and coiled himself up between two shelves. There was hardly a moment to think; and yielding to the instinct of her desperate affection, and to the child's wild appeal, she locked the door, and put the key in her pocket.

She sat down. She was half stunned by her own audacity. She scarcely knew what she had done. Before she could recover herself, the door darkened, a hand crossed the hatch and opened it, and ex-Sergeant-Major Archdale entered the cottage.

In curt military fashion he announced himself, and demanded the boy.

She was looking straight in this formidable man's face, and yet it seemed as if he were vanishing from before her eyes.

"Where's the boy?" inquired the chill stern voice of the Sergeant.

It seemed to her like lifting a mountain this effort to speak. She felt as if she were freezing as she uttered the denial.

"He ain't here."

"Where is he?" demanded the Sergeant's imperturbably clear cold voice.

"He's run away," she said with an effort, and the Sergeant seemed to vanish quite away, and she thought she was on the point of fainting.

The Sergeant glanced at the breakfast table, and saw that two had taken tea together; he saw the carpet bag packed.

"H'm?" intimated Archdale, with closed lips. He looked round the cottage room, and the Sergeant sat down wonderfully composed, considering the disconcerting nature of the announcement.

The ex-Sergeant-Major had in his time commanded parties in search of deserters, and he was not a bad slaught-hound of that sort.

"He breakfasted with you?" said he, with a cool nod toward the table.

There was a momentary hesitation, and she cleared her voice and said—

"Yes."

Archdale rose and placed his fingers on the teapot.

"That's hot," said the Sergeant with the same inflexible dignity.

Marjory was awfully uneasy.

"He can't be far. Which way did he go?"

"Out by the door. I can't tell."

The ex-Sergeant-Major might have believed her the goddess of truth itself, or might have thought her the most impudent liar in England. You could not have gathered in the least from his countenance toward which view his conclusions tended.

The Sergeant's light cold grey eye glided again round the room, and there was another silence awfully trying to our good friend Marjory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MARCH TO NOULTON FARM.

"I think, ma'am, the boy's in the house. You'd best give him up, for I'll not go without him. How many rooms have you?"

"Three and a loft, sir."

The Sergeant stood up.

"I'll search the house first, ma'am, and if he's not here I'll inform the police and have him in the Hue-and-Cry; and if you have had anything to do with the boy's deserting, or had a hand in making away with him anyhow, I'll have you in gaol and punished. I must secure the door, and you can leave the house first, if you like best."

"Very well, sir," answered she.

But at this moment came a knocking and crying from within the press.

"Oh! no—'twasn't mammy; 'twas I that did it. Don't take mammy."

"You see, ma'am, you give useless trouble. Please open that door—I shall have to force it, otherwise," he added, as very pale and trembling she hesitated.

Standing as he might before his commanding officer, stiff, with his heels together, with his inflexibly serene face, full before her, he extended his hand, and said simply, "The key, ma'am."

In all human natures—the wildest and most stubborn—there is a point at which submission follows command, and there was that in the serenity of the ex-Sergeant-Major which went direct to the instinct of obedience.

It was quite idle any longer trying to conceal the boy. With a dreadful ache at her heart she put her hand in her pocket and handed him the key.

As the door opened the little boy shrank to the very back of the recess, from whence he saw the stout form of the Sergeant stooped low, as his blue, smooth fixed countenance peered narrowly into the dark. After a few seconds he seemed to discern the figure of the boy.

"Come, you sir, get out," said the commanding voice of the visitor, as the cane which he carried in his hand, paid round with wax-end for some three inches at the extremity, began switching his little legs smartly.

"Oh, sir, for the love of God!" cried Marjory, clinging to his hand. "Oh, sir, he's the gentlest little creature, and he'll do whatever he's bid, and the lovingest child in the world."

The boy had got out by this time, and looking wonderingly in the man's face, was unconsciously, with the wincing of pain, lifting his leg slightly, for the sting of the cane was quite new to him.

"If I catch you at that work again I'll give you five dozen," said his new acquaintance.

"Is this his?" said he, touching the carpet bag with his cane.

"Yes, sir, please."

He took it in his hand, and glanced at the boy—I think it was in his mind to make him carry it. But the child was slender, and the bag, conscientiously packed with everything that had ever belonged to him, was a trifle too heavy.

"Anything else?" demanded the Sergeant-Major.

"This—this, God bless him."

It was the little box with the ships.

"And this;" and she thrust the griddle cake, broken across and rolled up in brown paper, into the boy's pocket.

"And these;" and three apples she had ready, she thrust after them.

"And oh! my blessed darlin', my darlin', darlin', darlin'."

He was lifted up against her heart, folded fast, and hugging her round the neck, they kissed and cried and cried and kissed, and at last she let him down; and the Sergeant-Major, with the cane under his arm, the carpet-bag in one hand, and the boy's wrist firmly held in the other, marched out of the door.

"That's enough—don't follow, woman," said he, after they had gone about twenty yards on the path; "and I'll report you," he added with a nod which, with these pleasant words, she might take as a farewell or not as she pleased.

She stood on the little rising ground by the hawthorn tree, kissing her hands wildly after him, with streaming eyes.

"I'll be sure to see you soon. I'd walk round the world barefoot to see my pretty man again," she kept crying after him; "and I'll bring the ninepins, I'll be sure. Mammy's comin', my darlin'."

And the receding figure of the little boy was turned toward her all it could. He was gazing over his shoulder, with cheeks streaming with tears, and his little hand waving yearningly back to her until he was out of sight. And after a while she turned back, and there was their ninepins' ground, and the tarn, and her sobs quickened almost to a scream; and she sat down on the stone bench under the window—for she could not bear to enter the dark cottage—and there, in Irish phrase, she cried her fill.

In the meantime Archdale and his companion, or prisoner—which you will—pursued their march. He still held the boy's wrist, and the boy cried and sobbed gently to himself all the way.

When they came down to the little hamlet called Maple Wickets he hired a boy to carry the carpet-bag to Wunning, four miles further on, where the Warhampton 'bus passes, as everybody knows, at half-past twelve o'clock daily.

They resumed their march. The Sergeant was a serenely taciturn man. He no more thought of addressing the boy than he did of apostrophising the cane or the carpet-bag. He let him sob on, and neither snubbed nor consoled him, but carried his head serene and high, looking straight before him.

At length the novelty of the scene began to act upon the volatility of childhood.

As he walked by the Sergeant he began to prattle, at first timidly, and then more volubly.

The first instinct of the child is trust. It was a kind of consolation to the boy to talk a great deal of his home, and Tom Orange was of course mentioned with the usual inquiry, "Do you know Tom Orange?"

"Why so?"

Then followed the list of that facetious and brilliant person's accomplishments.

"And are we to go near a place called Wyvern or Carwell Grange?" asked the boy, whose memory, where his fancy was interested, was retentive.

"Why so?" again demanded the Sergeant, looking straight before him.

"Because Tom Orange told me there's the biggest mushroom in the world grown up there, and that the owner of the house can't get in, for it fills up the door."

"Tom Orange told you that?" demanded the Sergeant in the same way.

And the boy, supposing it incredulity on his part, assured him that Tom, who was truth itself, *had* told him so only yesterday.

The Sergeant said no more, and you could not have told in the least by his face that he had made a note of it and was going to "report" Tom Orange in the proper quarter. And in passing, I may mention that about three weeks later Tom Orange was peremptorily dismissed from his desultory employments under Mr. Archdale, and was sued for stealing apples from Warhampton orchard, and some minor peccadillos, and brought before the magistrates, among whom sat, as it so happened, on that occasion, Squire Fairfield of Wyvern, who was "precious hard on him," and got him in for more

than a month with hard labour. The urchin hireling with the carpet-bag trudged on in front as the Sergeant-Major had commanded.

Our little friend, with many a sobbing sigh, and a great load at his heart, yet was looking about him.

They were crossing a moor with beautiful purple heather, such as he had never seen before. The Sergeant had let go his wrist. He felt more at his ease every way.

There were little pools of water here and there which attracted the boy's attention, and made him open his box of cork boats and peep at them. He wondered how they would sail in these dark little nooks, and at last, one lying very conveniently, he paused at its margin, and took out a ship and floated it, and another, and another. How quickly seconds fly and minutes.

He was roused by the distant voice of the Sergeant-Major shouting, "Hollo, you sir, come here."

He looked up. The Sergeant was consulting his big silver watch as he stood upon a little eminence of peat.

By the time he reached him the Sergeant had replaced it, and the two or three seals and watchkey he sported were dangling at the end of his chain upon his paunch. The Sergeant was standing with his heels together and the point of his cane close to the side of his boot.

"Come to the front," said the Sergeant.

"Give up that box," said he.

The boy placed it in his hand. He uncovered it, turned over the little navy with his fingers, and then jerked the box and its contents over the heath at his side.

"Don't pick one of 'em up," said he.

"Move half a pace to the right," was his next order.

His next command was—

"Hold out your hand."

The boy looked in his face, surprised.

The Sergeant's face looked not a bit angrier or a bit kinder than usual. Perfectly serene.

"Hold out your hand, sir."

He held it out, and the cane descended with a whistling cut across his fingers. Another. The boy's face flushed with pain, and his deadened hand sunk downward. An upward blow of the cane across his knuckles accompanied the command, "Hold it up, sir," and a third cut came down.

The Sergeant was strong, and could use his wrist dexterously.

"Hold out the other;" and the same discipline was repeated.

Mingled with and above the pain which called up the three great black weals across the slender fingers of each hand, was the sense of outrage and cruelty.

The tears sprang to his eyes, and for the first time in his life he cried passionately under that double anguish.

"Walk in front," said the Sergeant, serenely.

And squeezing and wringing his trembling hands together, the still writhing little fellow marched along the path, with a bitterer sense of desolation than ever.

The bus was late at Wunning; and a lady in it, struck by the beauty and sadness of the little boy's face, said some kind words, and seemed to take to him, he thought, with a tenderness that made his heart fuller; and it was a labour almost too

great for him to keep down the rising sobs and the tears that were every moment on the point of flowing over. This good Samaritan bought a bag of what were called "Ginger-bread nuts"—quite a little store; which Archdale declined leaving at the boy's discretion. But I am bound to say that they were served out to him, from day to day, with conscientious punctuality by the Sergeant-Major, who was strictly to be depended on in all matters of property; and would not have nibbled at one of those nuts though his thin lips had watered and not a soul had been near. He must have possessed a good many valuable military virtues, or he could not, I presume, have been where he was.

Noulton Farm is a melancholy but not an ugly place. There are a great many trees about it. They stand too near the windows. The house is small and old, and there is a small garden with a thick high hedge round it.

The members of the family were few. Miss Mary Archdale was ill when they arrived. She was the only child of the ex-Sergeant, who was a widower; and the new inmate of the house heard of her with a terror founded on his awe of her silent father.

They entered a small parlour, and the boy sat down in the chair indicated by the Sergeant. That person hung his hat on a peg in the hall, and placed his cane along the chimney-piece. Then he rang the bell.

The elderly woman who was the female staff of the kitchen entered. She looked frightened, as all that household did, in their master's presence, and watched him with an alarmed eye.

"Where's Miss Mary?"

"A-spitting blood, sir, please."

"Bring in supper," said the Sergeant.

The boy sat in fear at the very corner of the table. His grief would not let him eat, and he sipped a cup of tea that was too hot, and had neither milk nor sugar enough. The Sergeant snuffed his candle, and put on a pair of plated spectacles, and looked through his weekly paper.

While he was so employed there glided into the room a very slight girl, with large eyes and a very pale face. Her hair was brown and rich.

The hand with which she held her shawl across was very thin; and in her pale face and large eyes was a timid and imploring look that struck the little boy. She looked at him and he at her silently; her sad eyes lingered on his face for a moment, and he felt that he liked her.

She took a chair very softly and sat down without saying a word.

In a little while the Sergeant laid down his paper and looked at her. Her large eyes were raised toward him with timid expectation, but she did not speak.

"Not well just now?"

"No, sir."

"You take the bottle regularly?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll be better in the morning belike."

"I'm sure I shall, sir."

He lighted a candle that stood on a side-table, and his dog Bion got up to attend him. It was a large pug-dog, gambouge-coloured, with a black nose. The boy often afterwards wished to play with Bion, and make his acquaintance. But he did not know how the attempt would be taken either by the dog or his master, and so he did not venture.

No caresses passed between the dog and the Sergeant. Each did his duty by the other, and they understood one another, I suppose, but no further signs of love appeared.

The Sergeant went out and shut the door, and the girl smiled very sweetly on the little guest, and put out her hand to welcome him.

"I'm very glad you are come here. I was very lonely. My father is gone to the workroom; he's making an organ there, and he won't come back till a quarter to nine. That's an hour and three-quarters. Do you hear—listen."

She raised her finger and looked toward the partition as she spoke, and he heard a booming of an organ through the wall.

"Tony blows the organ for him."

Tony was a little boy from the workhouse, who cleaned knives, forks, shoes, and made himself generally useful, being the second servant, the only male one in their modest establishment.

"I wish I was better, I'm so out of breath talking. We'll be very happy now. That's tuning the pipes—that one's wolving. I used to blow the bellows for him, but the doctor says I must not, and indeed I couldn't now. You must eat something and drink more tea, and we'll be great friends, shan't we?"

So they talked a great deal, she being obliged to stop often for breath, and he could see that she was very weak, and also that she stood in indescribable awe of her father. But she said, "He's a very good man, and he works very hard to earn his money, but he does not talk, and that makes people afraid of him. He won't be back here until he comes here to read the Bible and prayers at a quarter to nine."

So she talked on, but all the time in an undertone, and listening every now and then for the boom of the pipes, and the little boy opened his heart to her and wept bitterly, and she cried too, silently, as he went on, and they became very near friends. She looked as if she understood his griefs. Perhaps her own resembled them.

The old woman came in and took away the tea things, and shortly after the Sergeant entered and read the chapter and the prayers.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SILENT FAREWELL.

At Noulton Farm each day was like its brother. Inflexible hours, inflexible duties, all proceeded with a regimental punctuality. At meals not a word was spoken, and while the master of the house was in it, all conversation was carried on, even in remote rooms, in an undertone.

Our little friend used to see the workhouse boy at prayers, morning and evening, and occasionally to pass his pale disquieted face on the stairs or lobbies when his duties brought him there. They eyed one another wistfully, but dared not speak. Mr. Archdale had so ordained it.

That workhouse boy—perhaps he was inefficient, perhaps too much was expected from him—but he had the misfortune perpetually to incur—I can hardly say his master's displeasure, for the word implies something emotional, whereas nothing could be at all times more tranquil and cold than that master—but his correction.

These awful proceedings occurred almost daily, and were conducted with the absolute uniformity which characterised the system of Noulton Farm. At eleven o'clock the cold voice of the Sergeant-Major called "Tony!" and Tony appeared, writhing and whimpering by anticipation.

"My cane," said the master, stepping into the room which he called the workshop, where the organ, half finished, stood, stop-diapason, dulciana, and the rest in deal rows, with white chips, chisels, lead, saws, and glue-pots, in industrious disorder, round. Then Tony's pale, miserable face was seen in the "parlour," and Miss Mary would look down on the floor in pale silence, and our little friend's heart would flutter over his lesson book as he saw the lank boy steal over to the chimney-piece, and take down the cane, and lingeringly disappear.

Then was heard the door of the workshop close, and then very faint the cold clear voice of the master. Then faint and slow the measured cut of the cane, and the whine of the boy rising to a long hideous yell, and "Oh, sir, dear—oh, sir, dear; oh, Mr. Archdale, oh, master, dear, oh, master, dear!" And this sometimes so protracted that Mary used to get up and walk round the room in a kind of agony whispering—"Oh, poor boy. Oh, poor Tony. Oh mercy—oh goodness. Oh! my good Lord, when will it be over!" And, sitting apart, the little boy's eyes as they followed her would fill with tears of horror.

The little fellow said lessons to Mr. Archdale. There was nothing unreasonable in their length, and his friend Mary helped him. It was well for him, however, that he was a bright little fellow, with a good memory, for the Sergeant was not a teacher to discriminate between idleness and dulness.

No one ever heard Mr. Archdale use a violent expression, or utter a curse. He was a silent, cold, orderly person, and I think the most cruel man I ever saw in my life.

He had a small active horse, and a gig, in which he drove upon his outdoor business. He had fixed days and hours for everything, except where he meditated a surprise.

One day the Sergeant-Major entered the room where the boy was reading at his lessons, and, tapping him on the shoulder, put the county newspaper into his hand; and, pointing to a paragraph, desired him to read it, and left the room.

It was a report of the proceedings against Tom Orange, and gave a rather disreputable character of that amusing person. There was a great pain at the boy's affectionate heart as he read the hard words dealt to his old friend, and worse still, the sentence. He was crying silently when the Sergeant returned. That stern man took the paper, and said in his cold terrible tones—

"You've read that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And understand it?"

"Yes, sir."

"If I find you speaking to Thomas Orange I'll tie you up in the workshop, and give you five dozen." And with this promise he serenely left him.

Children are unsuspicious of death, and our little friend, who every night used to cry in his bed silently, with a bursting heart, thinking of his mammy and old happy times, till he fell asleep in the dark, never dreamed that his poor friend Mary was dying—she, perhaps, herself did not think so any more than he, but every one else said it.

They two grew to be great friends. Each had a secret, and she trusted hers to the little friend whom God had sent her.

It was the old story—the troubled course of true love. Willie Fairlace was the hero. The Sergeant-Major had found it all out, and locked up his daughter, and treated her, it was darkly rumoured, with cruel severity.

He was proud of his daughter's beauty, and had ambitious plans, I dare say; and he got up Willie's farm, and Willie was ruined, and had enlisted and was gone.

The Sergeant-Major knew the post-office people in the village, and the lovers dared not correspond directly. But Willie's cousin, Mrs. Page, heard from him regularly, and there were long messages to Mary. His letters were little else. And *now at last* had come a friend to bear her messages to trusty Mrs. Page, and to carry his back again to Noulton Farm.

After her father had gone out, or in the evening when he was at the organ in the "workshop," and sometimes as, wrapped in her cloak, on a genial evening, she sat on the rustic seat under the great ash tree, and the solemn and plaintive tones of the distant organ floated in old church music from the open window through the trees and down the fragrant field toward the sunset sky, filling the air with grand and melancholy harmony, she would listen to that whispered message of the boy's, looking far away, and weeping, and holding the little fellow's hand, and asking him to say it over again, and telling him she felt better, and thanking him, and smiling and crying bitterly.

One evening the Sergeant was at his organ-pipes as usual. The boy as he stood in the garden at his task, watering the parched beds, heard a familiar laugh at the hedge, and the well-known refrain—

"Tag-rag-merry-derry-perrywig and hatband-hic-hoc-horum-genetivo!"

It was Tom Orange himself!

In spite of his danger the boy was delighted. He ran to the hedge, and he and Tom, in a moment more, were actually talking.

It became soon a very serious conversation. The distant booming of the organ-pipes assured him that the light grey eye and sharp ear of the Sergeant were occupied still elsewhere.

Tom Orange was broaching a dreadful conspiracy.

It was no less than that the boy should meet him at the foot of the field where the two oziers grow, at eleven o'clock, on the night following, and run away with him, and see mammy again, and come to a nice place where he should be as happy as the day is long, and mammy live with him always, and Tom look in as often as his own more important business would permit.

"I will, Tom," said the boy, wildly and very pale.

"And oh! Tom, I was so sorry about the trial, and what lies they told," said the boy, after they had talked a little longer; "and saying that you had been with gipsies, and were a poacher; and oh! Tom, is mammy quite well?"

"Yes."

"And all my ships were lost on the moor; and how is little Toozie the cat?"

"Very well; blooming—blushing."

"And, Tom, *you* are quite well?"

"Never better, as I lately told Squire Harry Fairfield; and mind ye, I'll be even yet with the old boy in there," and he

indicated the house with a jerk of his thumb.

"I don't hear the organ, Tom. Good-bye."

And Tom was off in a moment, and the boy had resumed his watering-pot. And that evening he sat down with, for the first time, a tremendous secret at his heart.

There was one grief even in the hope of his liberation. When he looked at poor Mary, and thought how lonely she would be. Oh! if poor Mary could come with him! But some time or other he and Tom would come and take her away, and she would live with him and mammy, and be one of that happy family.

She did not know what thoughts were in the boy's mind as his sad earnest eyes were fixed on her, and she smiled with a little languid nod.

But he need not have grieved his gentle heart on this account. There was not to be a seeming desertion of his friend; nor anything she could mistake for a treacherous slight.

That morning, at two o'clock, Mary died.

About ten minutes before an alarm from the old servant who slept in the room called up her father.

Her faithful little friend was on his knees sobbing beside the bed, with her wasted hand in his, as the Sergeant-Major, hastily dressed, walked in, and stood by the curtain looking down into those large deep eyes. She was conscious, though she could not speak. She saw, as she looked up her last look, a few sullen drops gather in those proud eyes, and roll down his cheeks. Perhaps the sad, wondering look with which she returned these signs of tenderness, smote him, and haunted him afterwards. There was a little motion in her right hand as if she would have liked him to take it—in sign of reconciliation—and with those faint tokens of the love that might have been, the change of death came, and the troubled little heart was still, and the image of Willie Fairlace was lost in the great darkness.

Then the little boy cried aloud wildly—

"Oh! Mary, pretty Mary. Oh! Mary, are you dead? Oh! isn't it a pity; isn't it a pity! Oh! is she dead?"

The Sergeant dried his eyes hastily. He hoped, I dare say, that no one had seen his momentary weakness. He drew a long breath. With a stern face he closed the pretty eyes that Willie Fairlace, far away now, will never forget; and closed the little mouth that never will complain, or sigh, or confess its sad tale more.

"You had better get to your room, boy. Get to your bed," said the Sergeant, not ungently laying his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You'll take cold. Give him a candle."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MARCH BY NIGHT.

The next day the Sergeant was away in his gig to Wyvern, a long journey, to report to the Squire, and obtain leave of absence from his duties for a day or two. He was to spend that night at Hatherton, there to make arrangements about the funeral.

It was a relief to all at Noulton Farm, I need hardly say, when the master of the house was away.

A very sad day it was for the boy; a day whose gloom was every now and then crossed by the thrill and fear of a great excitement.

As evening darkened he went out again to the garden in the hope of seeing Tom Orange. He would have liked that cheer at the eve of his great venture. But Tom was not there. Neither counsel nor encouragement to be heard; nothing but the song of the small birds among the leaves, and the late flowers, soon to close, peeping from among the garden plants, and the long quiet shadows of the poplars that stood so tall and still against the western sky.

The boy came in and had his lonely cup of tea in the "parlour," and a little talk with the somewhat sour and sad old servant. He was longing for the night. Yearning to see Tom's friendly face and to end his suspense.

At last the twilight was gone. The night had indeed come, and the moon shone serenely over the old gray roof and the solemn trees; over the dead and the living.

The boy lay down in his bed at the accustomed early hour. The old woman had taken away his candle and shut the door. He lay with his eyes wide open listening with a palpitating heart for every sound.

The inflexible regularity which the absent master had established in his household was in the boy's favour. He heard the servant shut and bar the outer door at the wonted hour. He saw the boy's candle in his window for a while and then put out. Tony was in his bed, and for tired Tony to lie down was generally to be asleep.

Peeping stealthily from his lattice he saw the old servant's candle glimmering redly through the window on the juniper that stood near the wall in the shadow; and soon that light also disappeared, and he knew that the old woman had gone into her room. It was half-past ten. She would be asleep in a quarter of an hour, and in another fifteen minutes his critical adventure would have commenced.

Stealthily, breathlessly, he dressed. His window looked toward the ozier trees, where Tom was to await him. It opened, lattice fashion, with a hinge.

Happily the night was still, and the process of preparing to descend perfectly noiseless. The piece of old rope that lay in the corner he had early fixed on as his instrument of escape. He made it fast to the bed-post, and began to let himself down the wall. The rope was too short, and he dangled in air from the end of it for a second or two, and then dropped to the ground. The distance of the fall, though not much, was enough to throw him from his feet, and the dog in the lock-up yard at the other side of the house began to bark angrily. For a minute the boy gave himself up.

He lay, however, perfectly still, and the barking subsided. There was no other alarm, and he stole very softly away under cover of the trees, and then faster down the slope toward the appointed oziers.

There indeed was Tom Orange in that faint light, more solemn than he ever remembered to have seen him before. Tom was thinking that the stealing away this boy might possibly turn out the most serious enterprise he had yet engaged in.

He had no notion, however, of receding, and merely telling the boy to follow him, he got into a swinging trot that tried the little fellow's endurance rather severely. I think they ran full three miles before Tom came to a halt.

Then, more like himself, he inquired how he was, and whether he thought he could go on fifteen miles more that night.

"Oh, yes, he could do anything that night. Quite well."

"Well, walk a bit that you may get breath, and then we'll run again," said Tom, and so they set forward once more.

They had now accomplished about four miles more. The little fellow was not so fresh as at starting. A drizzling rain, too, had commenced, with a cold change of wind, and altogether the mere adventure of running away was not quite so pleasant, nor even Tom's society quite so agreeable on the occasion, as he had fancied.

"You have done four out of the fifteen; you have only eleven of the fifteen before you now. You have got over seven altogether up to this. Not so bad. You're not tired, youngster?"

"Not the least."

"That's right. You're a good soldier. Now come, we'll stand close under this hedge and eat a bit."

They supped very heartily on great slices of bread and corned beef, which bore ample traces of the greens in which it had been served when hot.

"And now, boy, you must get on to Hatherton by yourself, for I'm known about here, and there's a fair there in the morning, and there will be people on the way before light. You must go a mile beyond the town, to the George public. Mrs. Gumford keeps it, and there I'll meet you." Then he detailed the route and the landmarks for the boy's guidance. "Take a drink of this," said he, pulling a soda-water bottle full of milk out of his coat pocket.

And when he had done—

"Take a mouthful of this, my hero, it will keep you warm."

And he placed a flask of brandy to the boy's lips, and made him swallow a little.

"And here's a bit more bread, if you should be hungry. Good night, and remember."

After about an hour's solitary walking, the boy began to grow alarmed. Tom's landmarks failed him, and he began to fear that he had lost his way. In half an hour more he was sure that he was quite out of his reckoning, and as his spirits sank he began to feel the cold wind and drenching rain more and more.

And now he found himself entering a town not at all answering Tom's description of Hatherton.

The little town was silent, its doors and windows shut, and all except a few old-fashioned oil-lamps dark.

After walking listlessly about—afraid to knock and ask anywhere for shelter—worn out, he sat down on a door-step. He leaned back and soon fell fast asleep.

A shake by the shoulder roused him. A policeman was stooping over him.

"I say, get up out o' that," said the imperious voice of the policeman.

The boy was not half awake; he stared at him, his big face and leather-bound chimney-pot looked like a dream.

"I say," he continued, shaking him, but not violently, "you must get up out o' that. You're not to be making yourself comfortable there all night. Come, be lively."

Comfortable! Lively!—all comparative—all a question of degrees.

The boy got up as quickly as the cold and stiffness of his joints would let him.

Very dutifully he got up, and stood drenched, pale, and shivering in the moonlight.

The policeman looked down not unkindly now, at the little wayfarer. There was something piteous, I dare say. He looked a grave, thoughtful man, of more than fifty, and he put his hand on the child's shoulder.

"Ye see, boy, that was no place to sleep in."

"No, sir, I'll never do it again, sir, please."

"You're cold; you'd get pains in your bones."

"I'll not any more, sir, please."

"Come with me, my boy, it's only a step."

He brought the boy into his house down the lane close by.

"There's a fire. You warm yourself. There's my little one in fever, so you can't stop long. Sit down, child, and warm yourself."

He gave him a drink of hot milk and a piece of bread.

"You don't get up, you know; there's no need," he added.

I think he was afraid of his pewter spoons. He kept the little fellow nearly half an hour, and he lent him an old bottomless sack to wrap about his shoulders, and charged him to bring it back in the morning. I think the man thought he might be a thief. He was a kind man—there was a balancing of great pity and suspicion.

The boy returned the sack with many thanks, in the first faint twilight of morning, and set forth again for Hatherton. It was, the fellow who directed him said, still five miles on.

At about a mile from Hatherton, cold and wet, and fearing to be too early at the George Inn, the rendezvous agreed on, the tired little fellow crept in, cold and wet, to a road-side pot-house.

At the fire of the ale-house three fellows were drinking beer. Says one who had now and then had his eye on the boy—

"That boy there has run away from school."

I cannot describe the terror with which the little fellow heard those words. The other two looked at him. One was a fat fellow in breeches and top boots, and a red cloth waistcoat, and a ruddy good-humoured face; and after a look they returned to their talk; and in a little while the lean man, who seemed to find it hard to take his eyes off him, said, "That's a runaway, that chap; we ought to tell the police and send him back to school."

"Well, that's no business of ours; can't you let him be?" said the red waistcoat.

"Come here," said the lean man, beckoning him over with his hard eye on him.

He rose and slowly approached under that dreadful command.

I can't say that there was anything malevolent in that man's face. Somewhat sharp and stern, with a lean inflexibility of duty. To the boy at this moment no face could have been imagined more terrific; his only hope was in his fat companion. He turned, I am sure, an imploring look upon him.

"Come, Irons, let the boy alone, unless ye mean to quarrel wi' me; d— me ye *shall* let him alone! And get him his breakfast of something hot, and be lively," he called to the people; "and score it up to me."

So, thanks to that good Samaritan in top boots and red waistcoat, the dejected little man pursued his way comforted.

As he walked through Hatherton he was looking into a shop window listlessly, when he distinctly saw, reflected in the plate glass, that which appalled him so that he thought he should have fainted.

It was the marble, blue-chinned face of the Sergeant-Major looking over his shoulder, with his icy gray eyes, into the same window.

He was utterly powerless to move. His great eyes were fixed on that dreadful shadow. He was actually touching his shoulder as he leaned over. Happily the Sergeant did not examine the reflection, which he would have been sure to recognise. The bird fascinated by the cold eye of a snake, and expecting momentarily, with palpitating heart, the spring of the reptile, may feel, when, withdrawing the spell, it glides harmlessly away, as the boy did when he saw that dreaded man turn away and walk with measured tread up the street. For a moment his terror was renewed, for Bion, that yellow namesake of the philosopher, recognising him, stood against the boy's leg, and scratched repeatedly, and gave him a shove with his nose, and whimpered. The boy turned quickly, and walking away the dog left him, and ran after his master, and took his place at his side.

CONCLUSION.

At the George Inn, a little way out of Hatherton, the boy, to his inexpressible delight, at last found Tom Orange.

He told Tom at once of his adventure at the shop window, and the occurrence darkened Tom's countenance. He peeped out and took a long look toward Hatherton.

"Put the horse to the fly and bring it round at once," said Tom, who put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a rather showy handful of silver.

I don't pretend to say, when Tom was out of regular employment, from what pursuits exactly he drew his revenue. They had rather improved than otherwise; but I dare say there were anxious compensations.

The boy had eaten his breakfast before he reached Hatherton. So much the better; for the apparition of the Sergeant-Major would have left him totally without appetite. As it was, he was in an agony to be gone, every moment expecting to see him approach the little inn to arrest him and Tom.

Tom Orange was uneasy, I am sure, and very fidgety till the fly came round.

"You know Squire Fairfield of Wyvern?" said the hostess, while they were waiting.

"Ay," said Tom.

"Did you hear the news?"

"What is it?"

"Shot the night before last in a row with poachers. Gentlemen should leave that sort o' work to their keepers; but they was always a fightin' wild lot, them Fairfields; and he's lyin' now a dead man—all the same—gave over by Doctor Willett and another—wi' a whole charge o' duck-shot lodged under his shoulder."

"And that's the news?" said Tom, raising his eyes and looking through the door. He had been looking down on the ground as Mrs. Gumford of the George told her story.

"There's sharp fellows poachers round there, I'm told," he said, "next time he'd a' been out himself with the keepers to take 'em dead or alive. I suppose that wouldn't answer *them*."

"'Tis a wicked world, said the lady.

"D—d wicked," said Tom. "Here's the fly."

In they got and drove off.

Tom was gloomy, and very silent.

"Tom, where are we going to?" asked the boy at last.

"All right," said Tom. "All right, my young master. You'll find it's to none but good friends. And, say now—Haven't I been a good friend to you, Master Harry, all your days, sir? Many a mile that you know nothing about has Tom Orange walked on your business, and down to the cottage and back again; and where would you or her have been if it wasn't for poor Tom Orange?"

"Yes, indeed, Tom, and I love you, Tom."

"And now, I've took you away from that fellow, and I'm told I'm likely to be hanged for it. Well, no matter."

"Oh, Tom; poor Tom! Oh! no, no, no!" and he threw his arms round Tom's neck in a paroxysm of agonised affection, and, in spite of the jolting, kissed Tom; sometimes on the cheek, on the eyebrow, on the chin, and in a great jolt violently on the rim of his hat, and it rolled over his shoulder under their feet.

"Well, that is gratifyin'," said Tom, drying his eyes. "There is some reward for *principle* after all, and if you come to be

a great man some o' these days, you'll not forget poor Tom Orange, that would have spent his last bob and spilt his heart's blood, without fee or reward, in your service."

Another explosion of friendship from the boy assured Tom of his eternal gratitude.

"Do you know this place, sir?" asked Tom, with a return of his old manner, as making a sudden turn the little carriage drove through an open gate, and up to a large old-fashioned house. A carriage was waiting at the door.

There could be no mistake. How delightful! and who was that? Mammy! at the hall door, and in an instant they were locked in one another's arms, and "Oh! the darlin'," and "Mammy, mammy, mammy!" were the only words audible, half stifled in sobs and kisses.

In a minute more there came into the hall—smiling, weeping, and with hands extended toward him, the pretty lady dressed in black, and her weeping grew into a wild cry, as coming quickly she caught him to her heart. "My darling, my child, my blessed boy, you're the image—Oh! darling, I loved you the moment I saw you, and now I know it all."

The boy was worn out. His march, including his divergence from his intended route, had not been much less than thirty miles, and all in chill and wet.

They got him to his bed and made him thoroughly comfortable, and with mammy at his bedside, and her hand, to make quite sure of her, fast in his, he fell into a deep sleep.

Alice had already heard enough to convince her of the boy's identity, but an urgent message from Harry, who was dying, determined her to go at once to Wyvern to see him, as he desired. So, leaving the boy in charge of "mammy," she was soon on her way to the old seat of the Fairfields.

If Harry had not known that he was dying, no power could ever have made him confess the story he had to tell.

There were two points on which he greatly insisted.

The first was, that believing that his brother was really married to Bertha Velderkaust, he was justified in holding that his nephew had no legal right to succeed.

The second was, that he had resolved, although he might have wavered lately a little, never to marry, and to educate the boy better than ever he was educated himself, and finally to make him heir to Wyvern, pretending him to be an illegitimate son of his own.

Whether the Sergeant-Major knew more than he was ordered or undertook to know, he never gave the smallest ground to conjecture. He stated exactly what had passed between him and Harry Fairfield. By him he was told that the child which was conveyed to Marjory Trevellian's care was his own unacknowledged son.

On the very same evening, and when old Mildred Tarnley was in the house at Twyford, was a child taken, with the seeds of consumption already active in it, from a workhouse in another part of England and placed there as the son of Charles Fairfield and Alice. It was when, contrary to all assurances, this child appeared for a few days to rally, and the situation consequent on its growing up the reputed heir to Wyvern alarmed Harry, that he went over, in his panic, to the Grange, and there opened his case, that the child at Twyford was a changeling, and not his brother's son.

When, however, the child began to sink, and its approaching death could no longer be doubtful, he became, as we have seen, once more quite clear that the baby was the same which he had taken away from Carwell Grange.

Dr. Willett's seeing the child so often at Twyford, also prevented suspicion, though illogically enough, for had they reflected they might easily have remembered that the doctor had hardly seen the child twice after its birth while at the Grange, and that, like every one else, he took its identity for granted when he saw it at Twyford.

Alice returned greatly agitated late that evening. No difficulty any longer remained, and the boy, with ample proof to sustain his claim, was accepted as the undoubted heir to Wyvern, and the representative of the ancient family of Fairfield.

The boy, Henry Fairfield, was as happy as mortal can be, henceforward. His little playmate, the pretty little girl whom Alice had adopted, who called her "mamma," and yet was the daughter of a distant cousin only, has now grown up, and

is as a girl even more beautiful than she was as a child. Henry will be of age in a few months, and they are then to be married. They now reside at Wyvern. The estate, which has long been at nurse, is now clear, and has funded money beside.

Everything promises a happy and a prosperous reign for the young Fairfield.

Mildred Tarnley, very old, is made comfortable at Carwell Grange.

Good old Dulcibella is still living, very happy, and very kind, but grown a little huffy, being perhaps a little over petted. In all other respects, the effect of years being allowed for, she is just what she always was.

Tom Orange, with a very handsome sum presented by those whom he had served, preferred Australia to the old country.

Harry Fairfield had asserted, in his vehement way, while lying in his last hours at Wyvern, that the fellow with the handkerchief over his face who shot him was, he could all but swear, his old friend Tom Orange.

Tom swore that had he lived he would have prosecuted him for slander. As it is, that eccentric genius has prospered as the proprietor of a monster tavern at Melbourne, where there is comic and sentimental singing, and some dramatic buffooneries, and excellent devilled kidneys and brandy.

Marjory Trevellian lives with the family at Wyvern, and I think if kind old Lady Wyndale were still living the consolations of Alice would be nearly full.

END OF VOL. III.

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Transcriber's Note

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

The following apparent printer's errors have been addressed.

Page 29 duplicate 'the' removed.

Page 65 'entrace' to 'entrance' 'he obtained an entrance'

Page 257 'prenciple' to 'principle' 'some reward for principle'

[End of *The Wyvern Mystery (Volume 3 of 3)* by J. S. Le Fanu]