АРТУР КОНАН ДОЙЛ

THE FIRM OF GIRDLESTONE

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Дойл А.

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Содержание

Arthur Conan Doyle
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PREFACE

I cannot let this small romance go to press without prefacing it with a word of cordial thanks to Mr. P. G. Houlgrave, of 28, Millman Street, Bedford Row. To this gentleman I owe the accuracy of my African chapters, and I am much indebted to him for the copious details with which he furnished me.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

CHAPTER I.
MR. JOHN HARSTON KEEPS AN APPOINTMENT

The approach to the offices of Girdlestone and Co. was not a very dignified one, nor would the uninitiated who traversed it form any conception of the commercial prosperity of the firm in question. Close to the corner of a broad and busy street, within a couple of hundred yards of Fenchurch Street Station, a narrow doorway opens into a long whitewashed passage. On one side of this is a brass plate with the inscription "Girdlestone and Co., African Merchants," and above it a curious hieroglyphic supposed to represent a human hand in the act of pointing. Following the guidance of this somewhat ghostly emblem, the wayfarer finds himself in a small square yard surrounded by doors, upon one of which the name of the firm reappears in large white letters, with the word "Push" printed beneath it. If he follows this laconic invitation he will make his way into a long, low apartment, which is the counting-house of the African traders.

On the afternoon of which we speak things were quiet at the offices. The line of pigeon-holes in the wire curtain was deserted by the public, though the linoleum-covered floor bore abundant traces of a busy morning. Misty London light shone hazily through the glazed windows and cast dark shadows in the corners. On a high perch in the background a weary-faced, elderly man, with muttering lips and tapping fingers, cast up endless lines of figures. Beneath him, in front of two long shining mahogany desks, half a score of young men, with bent heads and stooping shoulders, appeared to be riding furiously, neck and neck, in the race of life. Any *habitue* of a London office might have deduced from their relentless energy and incorruptible diligence that they were under the eyes of some member of the firm.

The member in question was a broad-shouldered, bull-necked young man, who leaned against the marble mantel-piece, turning over the pages of an almanac, and taking from time to time a stealthy peep over the top of it at the toilers around him. Command was imprinted in every line of his strong, square-set face and erect, powerful frame. Above the medium size, with a vast spread of shoulder, a broad aggressive jaw, and bright bold glance, his whole pose and expression spoke of resolution pushed to the verge of obstinacy. There was something classical in the regular olive-tinted features and black, crisp, curling hair fitting tightly to the well-rounded head. Yet, though classical, there was an absence of spirituality. It was rather the profile of one of those Roman emperors, splendid in its animal strength, but lacking those subtle softnesses of eye and mouth which speak of an inner life. The heavy gold chain across the waistcoat and the bright stone which blazed upon the finger were the natural complement of the sensuous lip and curving chin. Such was Ezra, only child of John Girdlestone, and heir to the whole of his vast business. Little wonder that those who had an eye to the future bent over their ledgers and worked with a vigour calculated to attract the attention of the junior partner, and to impress him with a due sense of their enthusiastic regard for the interests of the firm.

It was speedily apparent, however, that the young gentleman's estimate of their services was not entirely based upon their present performance. With his eyes still fixed upon the almanac and a sardonic smile upon his dark face, he uttered a single word —

"Parker!"

A flaxen-haired clerk, perched at the further end of the high glistening desk, gave a violent start, and looked up with a scared face.

"Well, Parker, who won?" asked the junior partner.

"Won, sir!" the youth stammered.

"Yes, who won?" repeated his employer.

"I hardly understand you, sir," the clerk said, growing very red and confused.

"Oh yes, you do, Parker," young Girdlestone remarked, tapping his almanac sharply with the paper-knife. "You were playing odd man out with Robson and Perkins when I came in from lunch. As I presume you were at it all the time I was away, I have a natural curiosity to know who won."

The three unhappy clerks fixed their eyes upon their ledgers to avoid the sarcastic gaze of their employer. He went on in the same quiet tones —

"You gentlemen draw about thirty shillings a week from the firm. I believe I am right in my figures, Mr. Gilray?" addressing the senior clerk seated at the high solitary desk apart from the others. "Yes, I thought so. Now, odd man out is, no doubt, a very harmless and fascinating game, but you can hardly expect us to encourage it so far as to pay so much an hour for the privilege of having it played in our counting-house. I shall therefore recommend my father to deduct five shillings from the sum which each of you will receive upon Saturday. That will cover the time which you have devoted to your own amusements during the week."

He paused, and the three culprits were beginning to cool down and congratulate themselves, when he began again.

"You will see, Mr. Gilray, that this deduction is made," he said, "and at the same time I beg that you will deduct ten shillings from your own salary, since, as senior clerk, the responsibility of keeping order in this room in the absence of your employers rests with you, and you appear to have neglected it. I trust you will look to this, Mr. Gilray."

"Yes, sir," the senior clerk answered meekly. He was an elderly man with a large family, and the lost ten shillings would make a difference to the Sunday dinner. There was nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable, and his little pinched face assumed an expression of gentle resignation. How to keep his ten young subordinates in order, however, was a problem which vexed him sorely.

The junior partner was silent, and the remaining clerks were working uneasily, not exactly knowing whether they might not presently be included in the indictment. Their fears were terminated, however, by the sharp sound of a table-gong and the appearance of a boy with the announcement that Mr. Girdlestone would like a moment's conversation with Mr. Ezra. The latter gave a keen glance at his subjects and withdrew into the back office, a disappearance which was hailed by ten pens being thrown into the air and deftly caught again, while as many derisive and triumphant young men mocked at the imploring efforts of old Gilray in the interests of law and order.

The sanctum of Mr. John Girdlestone was approached by two doors, one of oak with ground-glass panels, and the other covered with green baize. The room itself was small, but lofty, and the walls were ornamented by numerous sections of ships stuck upon long flat boards, very much as the remains of fossil fish are exhibited in museums, together with maps, charts, photographs, and lists of sailings innumerable. Above the fire-place was a large water-colour painting of the barque *Belinda* as she appeared when on a reef to the north of Cape Palmas. An inscription beneath this work of art announced that it had been painted by the second officer and presented by him to the head of the firm. It was generally rumoured that the merchants had lost heavily over this disaster, and there were some who quoted it as an instance of Girdlestone's habitual strength of mind that he should decorate his wall with so melancholy a souvenir. This view of the matter did not appear to commend itself to a flippant member of Lloyd's agency, who contrived to intimate, by a dexterous use of his left eyelid and right forefinger, that the vessel may not have been so much under-insured, nor the loss to the firm so enormous as was commonly reported.

John Girdlestone, as he sat at his square office-table waiting for his son, was undeniably a remarkable-looking man. For good or for evil no weak character lay beneath that hard angular face, with the strongly marked features and deep-set eyes. He was clean shaven, save for an iron-grey fringe of ragged whisker under each ear, which blended with the grizzled hair above. So self-contained, hard-set, and immutable was his expression that it was impossible to read anything from it except sternness and resolution, qualities which are as likely to be associated with the highest natures as with the most dangerous. It may have been on account of this ambiguity of expression that the world's

estimate of the old merchant was a very varying one. He was known to be a fanatic in religion, a purist in morals, and a man of the strictest commercial integrity. Yet there were some few who looked askance at him, and none, save one, who could apply the word "friend" to him.

He rose and stood with his back to the fire-place as his son entered. He was so tall that he towered above the younger man, but the latter's square and compact frame made him, apart from the difference of age, the stronger man.

The young man had dropped the air of sarcasm which he found was most effective with the clerks, and had resumed his natural manner, which was harsh and brusque.

"What's up!" he asked, dropping back into a chair, and jingling the loose coins in his trouser pockets.

"I have had news of the *Black Eagle*," his father answered. "She is reported from Madeira."

"Ah!" cried the junior partner eagerly. "What luck?"

"She is full, or nearly so, according to Captain Hamilton Miggs' report."

"I wonder Miggs was able to send a report at all, and I wonder still more that you should put any faith in it," his son said impatiently. "The fellow is never sober."

"Miggs is a good seaman, and popular on the coast. He may indulge at times, but we all have our failings. Here is the list as vouched for by our agent. 'Six hundred barrels of palm oil' – "

"Oil is down to-day," the other interrupted.

"It will rise before the *Black Eagle* arrives," the merchant rejoined confidently. "Then he has palm nuts in bulk, gum, ebony, skins, cochineal, and ivory."

The young man gave a whistle of satisfaction. "Not bad for old Miggs!" he said. "Ivory is at a fancy figure."

"We are sorely in need of a few good voyages," Girdlestone remarked, "for things have been very slack of late. There is one very sad piece of intelligence here which takes away the satisfaction which we might otherwise feel. Three of the crew have died of fever. He does not mention the names."

"The devil!" said Ezra. "We know very well what that means. Three women, each with an armful of brats, besieging the office and clamouring for a pension. Why are seamen such improvident dogs?"

His father held up his white hand deprecatingly. "I wish," he said, "that you would treat these subjects with more reverence. What could be sadder than that the bread-winner of a family should be cut off? It has grieved me more than I can tell."

"Then you intend to pension the wives?" Ezra said, with a sly smile.

"By no means," his father returned with decision. "Girdlestone and Co. are not an insurance office. The labourer is worthy of his hire, but when his work in this world is over, his family must fall back upon what has been saved by his industry and thrift. It would be a dangerous precedent for us to allow pensions to the wives of these sailors, for it would deprive the others of all motive for laying their money by, and would indirectly encourage vice and dissipation."

Ezra laughed, and continued to rattle his silver and keys.

"It is not upon this matter that I desired to speak to you," Girdlestone continued. "It has, however, always been my practice to prefer matters of business to private affairs, however pressing. John Harston is said to be dying, and he has sent a message to me saying that he wishes to see me. It is inconvenient for me to leave the office, but I feel that it is my Christian duty to obey such a summons. I wish you, therefore, to look after things until I return."

"I can hardly believe that the news is true," Ezra said, in astonishment. "There must be some mistake. Why, I spoke to him on 'Change last Monday."

"It is very sudden," his father answered, taking his broad-brimmed hat from a peg. "There is no doubt about the fact, however. The doctor says that there is very little hope that he will survive until evening. It is a case of malignant typhoid."

"You are very old friends?" Ezra remarked, looking thoughtfully at his father.

"I have known him since we were boys together," the other replied, with a slight dry cough, which was the highest note of his limited emotional gamut. "Your mother, Ezra, died upon the very day that Harston's wife gave birth to this daughter of his, seventeen years ago. Mrs. Harston only survived a few days. I have heard him say that, perhaps, we should also go together. We are in the hands of a higher Power, however, and it seems that one shall be taken and another left."

"How will the money go if the doctors are right?" Ezra asked keenly.

"Every penny to the girl. She will be an heiress. There are no other relations that I know of, except the Dimsdales, and they have a fair fortune of their own. But I must go."

"By the way, malignant typhoid is very catching, is it not?"

"So they say," the merchant said quietly, and strode off through the counting-house.

Ezra Girdlestone remained behind, stretching his legs In front of the empty grate. "The governor is a hard nail," he soliloquized, as he stared down at the shining steel bars. "Depend upon it, though, he feels this more than he shows. Why, it's the only friend he ever had in the world – or ever will have, in all probability. However, it's no business of mine," with which comforting reflection he began to whistle as he turned over the pages of the private day-book of the firm.

It is possible that his son's surmise was right, and that the gaunt, unemotional African merchant felt an unwonted heartache as he hailed a hansom and drove out to his friend's house at Fulham. He and Harston had been charity schoolboys together, had roughed it together, risen together, and prospered together. When John Girdlestone was a raw-boned lad and Harston a chubby-faced urchin, the latter had come to look upon the other as his champion and guide. There are some minds which are parasitic in their nature. Alone they have little vitality, but they love to settle upon some stronger intellect, from which they may borrow their emotions and conclusions at second-hand. A strong, vigorous brain collects around it in time many others, whose mental processes are a feeble imitation of its own. Thus it came to pass that, as the years rolled on, Harston learned to lean more and more upon his old school-fellow, grafting many of his stern peculiarities upon his own simple vacuous nature, until he became a strange parody of the original. To him Girdlestone was the ideal man, Girdlestone's ways the correct ways, and Girdlestone's opinions the weightiest of all opinions. Forty years of this undeviating fidelity must, however he might conceal it, have made an impression upon the feelings of the elder man.

Harston, by incessant attention to business and extreme parsimony, had succeeded in founding an export trading concern. In this he had followed the example of his friend. There was no fear of their interests ever coming into collision, as his operations were confined to the Mediterranean. The firm grew and prospered, until Harston began to be looked upon as a warm man in the City circles. His only child was Kate, a girl of seventeen. There were no other near relatives, save Dr. Dimsdale, a prosperous West-end physician. No wonder that Ezra Girdlestone's active business mind, and perhaps that of his father too, should speculate as to the disposal of the fortune of the dying man.

Girdlestone pushed open the iron gate and strode down the gravel walk which led to his friend's house. A bright autumn sun shining out of a cloudless heaven bathed the green lawn and the many-coloured flower-beds in its golden light. The air, the leaves, the birds, all spoke of life. It was hard to think that death was closing its grip upon him who owned them all. A plump little gentleman in black was just descending the steps.

"Well, doctor," the merchant asked, "how is your patient?"

"You've not come with the intention of seeing him, have you?" the doctor asked, glancing up with some curiosity at the grey face and overhanging eyebrows of the merchant.

"Yes, I am going up to him now."

"It is a most virulent case of typhoid. He may die in an hour or he may live until nightfall, but nothing can save him. He will hardly recognize you, I fear, and you can do him no good. It is most infectious, and you are incurring a needless danger. I should strongly recommend you not to go."

"Why, you've only just come down from him yourself, doctor."

"Ah, I'm there in the way of duty."

"So am I," said the visitor decisively, and passing up the stone steps of the entrance strode into the hall. There was a large sitting-room upon the ground floor, through the open door of which the visitor saw a sight which arrested him for a moment. A young girl was sitting in a recess near the window, with her lithe, supple figure bent forward, and her hands clasped at the back of her head, while her elbows rested upon a small table in front of her. Her superb brown hair fell in a thick wave on either side over her white round arms, and the graceful curve of her beautiful neck might have furnished a sculptor with a study for a mourning Madonna. The doctor had just broken his sad tidings to her, and she was still in the first paroxysm of her grief – a grief too acute, as was evident even to the unsentimental mind of the merchant, to allow of any attempt at consolation. A greyhound appeared to think differently, for he had placed his fore-paws upon his young mistress's lap, and was attempting to thrust his lean muzzle between her arms and to lick her face in token of canine sympathy. The merchant paused irresolutely for a moment, and then ascending the broad staircase he pushed open the door of Harston's room and entered.

The blinds were drawn down and the chamber was very dark. A pungent whiff of disinfectants issued from it, mingled with the dank, heavy smell of disease. The bed was in a far corner. Without seeing him, Girdlestone could hear the fast laboured breathing of the invalid. A trimly dressed nurse who had been sitting by the bedside rose, and, recognizing the visitor, whispered a few words to him and left the room. He pulled the cord of the Venetian blind so as to admit a few rays of daylight. The great chamber looked dreary and bare, as carpet and hangings had been removed to lessen the chance of future infection. John Girdlestone stepped softly across to the bedside and sat down by his dying friend.

The sufferer was lying on his back, apparently unconscious of all around him. His glazed eyes were turned upwards towards the ceiling, and his parched lips were parted, while the breath came in quick, spasmodic gasps. Even the unskilled eye of the merchant could tell that the angel of death was hovering very near him. With an ungainly attempt at tenderness, which had something pathetic in it, he moistened a sponge and passed it over the sick man's feverish brow. The latter turned his restless head round, and a gleam of recognition and gratitude came into his eyes.

"I knew that you would come," he said.

"Yes. I came the moment that I got your message."

"I am glad that you are here," the sufferer continued with a sigh of relief. From the brightened expression upon his pinched face, it seemed as if, even now in the jaws of death, he leaned upon his old schoolfellow and looked to him for assistance. He put a wasted hand above the counterpane and laid it upon Girdlestone's.

"I wish to speak to you, John," he said. "I am very weak. Can you hear what I say?"

"Yes, I hear you."

"Give me a spoonful from that bottle. It clears my mind for a time.

I have been making my will, John."

"Yes," said the merchant, replacing the medicine bottle.

"The lawyer made it this morning. Stoop your head and you will hear me better. I have less than fifty thousand. I should have done better had I retired years ago."

"I told you so," the other broke in gruffly.

"You did – you did. But I acted for the best. Forty thousand I leave to my dear daughter Kate."

A look of interest came over Girdlestone's face. "And the balance?" he asked.

"I leave that to be equally divided among the various London institutions for educating the poor. We were both poor boys ourselves, John, and we know the value of such schools."

Girdlestone looked perhaps a trifle disappointed. The sick man went on very slowly and painfully —

"My daughter will have forty thousand pounds. But it is so tied up that she can neither touch it herself nor enable any one else to do so until she is of age. She has no friends, John, and no relations, save only my cousin, Dr. George Dimsdale. Never was a girl left more lonely and unprotected. Take her, I beg of you, and bring her up under your own eye. Treat her as though she were your child. Guard her above all from those who would wreck her young life in order to share her fortune. Do this, old friend, and make me happy on my deathbed."

The merchant made no answer. His heavy eyebrows were drawn down, and his forehead all puckered with thought.

"You are the one man," continued the sufferer, "whom I know to be just and upright. Give me the water, for my mouth is dry. Should, which God forbid, my dear girl perish before she marries, then – " His breath failed him for a moment, and he paused to recover it.

"Well, what then?"

"Then, old friend, her fortune reverts to you, for there is none who will use it so well. Those are the terms of the will. But you will guard her and care for her, as I would myself. She is a tender plant, John, too weak to grow alone. Promise me that you will do right by her – promise it?"

"I do promise it," John Girdlestone answered in a deep voice. He was standing up now, and leaning over to catch the words of the dying man.

Harston was sinking rapidly. With a feeble motion he pointed to a brown-backed volume upon the table.

"Take up the book," he said.

The merchant picked it up.

"Now, repeat after me, I swear and solemnly pledge myself – "

"I swear and solemnly pledge myself —

"To treasure and guard as if she were my own – " came the tremulous voice from the bed.

"To treasure and guard as if she were my own – " in the deep bass of the merchant.

"Kate Harston, the daughter of my deceased friend – "

"Kate Harston, the daughter of my deceased friend – "

"And as I treat her, so may my own flesh and blood treat me!"

"And as I treat her, so may my own flesh and blood treat me!"

The sick man's head fell back exhausted upon his pillow. "Thank God!" he muttered, "now I can die in peace."

"Turn your mind away from the vanities and dross of this world," John Girdlestone said sternly, "and fix it upon that which is eternal, and can never die."

"Are you going?" the invalid asked sadly, for he had taken up his hat and stick.

"Yes, I must go; I have an appointment in the City at six, which I must not miss."

"And I have an appointment which I must not miss," the dying man said with a feeble smile.

"I shall send up the nurse as I go down," Girdlestone said.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye! God bless you, John!"

The firm, strong hand of the hale man enclosed for a moment the feeble, burning one of the sufferer. Then John Girdlestone plodded heavily down the stair, and these friends of forty years' standing had said their last adieu.

The African merchant kept his appointment in the City, but long before he reached it John Harston had gone also to keep that last terrible appointment of which the messenger is death.

CHAPTER II.
CHARITY A LA MODE

It was a dull October morning in Fenchurch Street, some weeks after the events with which our story opened. The murky City air looked murkier still through the glazed office windows. Girdlestone, grim and grey, as though he were the very embodiment of the weather, stooped over his mahogany table. He had a long list in front of him, on which he was checking off, as a prelude to the day's work, the position in the market of the various speculations in which the capital of the firm was embarked. His son Ezra lounged in an easy chair opposite him, looking dishevelled and dark under the eyes, for he had been up half the night, and the Nemesis of reaction was upon him.

"Faugh!" his father ejaculated, glancing round at him with disgust.

"You have been drinking already this morning."

"I took a brandy and seltzer on the way to the office," he answered carelessly. "I needed one to steady me."

"A young fellow of your age should not want steadying. You have a strong constitution, but you must not play tricks with it. You must have been very late last night. It was nearly one before I went to bed."

"I was playing cards with Major Clutterbuck and one or two others.

We kept it up rather late."

"With Major Clutterbuck?"

"Yes."

"I don't care about your consorting so much with that man. He drinks and gambles, and does you no good. What good has he ever done himself? Take care that he does not fleece you." The merchant felt instinctively, as he glanced at the shrewd, dark face of his son, that the warning was a superfluous one.

"No fear, father," Ezra answered sulkily; "I am old enough to choose my own friends."

"Why such a friend as that?"

"I like to know men of that class. You are a successful man, father, but you – well, you can't be much help to me socially. You need some one to show you the ropes, and the major is my man. When I can stand alone, I'll soon let him know it."

"Well, go your own way," said Girdlestone shortly. Hard to all the world, he was soft only in this one direction. From childhood every discussion between father and son had ended with the same words.

"It is business time," he resumed. "Let us confine ourselves to business. I see that Illinois were at 112 yesterday."

"They are at 113 this morning."

"What! have you been on 'Change already?"

"Yes, I dropped in there on my way to the office. I would hold on to those. They will go up for some days yet."

The senior partner made a pencil note on the margin of the list.

"We'll hold on to the cotton we have," he said.

"No, sell out at once," Ezra answered with decision, "I saw young Featherstone, of Liverpool, last night, or rather this morning. It was hard to make head or tail of what the fool said, but he let fall enough to show that there was likely to be a drop."

Girdlestone made another mark upon the paper. He never questioned his son's decisions now, for long experience had shown him that they were never formed without solid grounds. "Take this

list, Ezra," he said, handing him the paper, "and run your eye over it. If you see anything that wants changing, mark it."

"I'll do it in the counting-house," his son answered. "I can keep my eye on those lazy scamps of clerks. Gilray has no idea of keeping them in order."

As he went out he cannoned against an elderly gentleman in a white waistcoat, who was being shown in, and who ricochetted off him into the office, where he shook hands heartily with the elder Girdlestone. It was evident from the laboured cordiality of the latter's greeting that the new-comer was a man of some importance. He was, indeed, none other than the well-known philanthropist, Mr. Jefferson Edwards, M.P. for Middlehurst, whose name upon a bill was hardly second to that of Rothschild.

"How do, Girdlestone, how do?" he exclaimed, mopping his face with his handkerchief. He was a fussy little man, with a brusque, nervous manner. "Hard at it as usual, eh? Always pegging away. Wonderful man. Ha, ha! Wonderful!"

"You look warm," the merchant answered, rubbing his hands. "Let me offer you some claret. I have some in the cupboard."

"No, thank you," the visitor answered, staring across at the head of the firm as though he were some botanical curiosity. "Extraordinary fellow. 'Iron' Girdlestone, they call you in the City. A good name, too – ha! ha! – an excellent name. Iron-grey, you know, and hard to look at, but soft here, my dear sir, soft here." The little man tapped him with his walking-stick over the cardiac region and laughed boisterously, while his grim companion smiled slightly and bowed to the compliment.

"I've come here begging," said Mr. Jefferson Edwards, producing a portentous-looking roll of paper from an inner pocket. "Know I've come to the right place for charity. The Aboriginal Evolution Society, my dear boy. All it wants are a few hundreds to float it off. Noble aim, Girdlestone – glorious object."

"What *is* the object?" the merchant asked.

"Well, the evolution of the aborigines," Edwards answered in some confusion. "Sort of practical Darwinism. Evolve 'em into higher types, and turn 'em all white in time. Professor Wilder gave us a lecture about it. I'll send you round a *Times* with the account. Spoke about their thumbs. They can't cross them over their palms, and they have rudimentary tails, or had until they were educated off them. They wore all the hair off their backs by leaning against trees. Marvellous things! All they want is a little money."

"It seems to be a praiseworthy object," the merchant said gravely.

"I knew that you would think so!" cried the little philanthropist enthusiastically. "Of course, bartering as you do with aboriginal races, their development and evolution is a matter of the deepest importance to you. If a man came down to barter with you who had a rudimentary tail and couldn't bend his thumb – well, it wouldn't be pleasant, you know. Our idea is to elevate them in the scale of humanity and to refine their tastes. Hewett, of the Royal Society, went to report on the matter a year or so back, and some rather painful incident occurred. I believe Hewett met with some mishap – in fact, they go the length of saying that he was eaten. So you see we've had our martyrs, my dear friend, and the least that we can do who stay at home at ease is to support a good cause to the best of our ability."

"Whose names have you got?" asked the merchant.

"Let's see," Jefferson Edwards said, unfolding his list. "Spriggs, ten;

Morton, ten; Wigglesworth, five; Hawkins, ten; Indermann, fifteen;

Jones, five; and a good many smaller amounts."

"What is the highest as yet?"

"Indermann, the tobacco importer, has given fifteen."

"It is a good cause," Mr. Girdlestone said, dipping his pen into the ink-bottle. "'He that giveth' – you know what the good old Book says. Of course a list of the donations will be printed and circulated?"

"Most certainly."

"Here is my cheque for twenty-five pounds. I am proud to have had this opportunity of contributing towards the regeneration of those poor souls whom Providence has placed in a lower sphere than myself."

"Girdlestone," said the member of Parliament with emotion, as he pocketed the cheque, "you are a good man. I shall not forget this, my friend; I shall never forget it."

"Wealth has its duties, and charity is among them," Girdlestone answered with unction, shaking the philanthropist's extended hand. "Good-bye, my dear sir. Pray let me know if our efforts are attended with any success. Should more money be needed, you know one who may be relied on."

There was a sardonic smile upon the hard face of the senior partner as he closed the door behind his visitor. "It's a legitimate investment," he muttered to himself as he resumed his seat. "What with his Parliamentary interest and his financial power, it's a very legitimate investment. It looks well on the list, too, and inspires confidence. I think the money is well spent."

Ezra had bowed politely as the great man passed through the office, and

Gilray, the wizened senior clerk, opened the outer door. Jefferson

Edwards turned as he passed him and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Lucky fellow," he said in his jerky way. "Good employer – model to follow – great man. Watch him, mark him, imitate him – that's the way to get on. Can't go wrong," and he trotted down the street in search of fresh contributions towards his latest fad.

CHAPTER III.
THOMAS GILRAY MAKES AN INVESTMENT

The shambling little clerk was still standing at the door watching the retreating figure of the millionaire, and mentally splicing together his fragmentary remarks into a symmetrical piece of advice which might be carried home and digested at leisure, when his attention was attracted to a pale-faced woman, with a child in her arms, who was hanging about the entrance. She looked up at the clerk in a wistful way, as if anxious to address him and yet afraid to do so. Then noting, perhaps, some gleam of kindness in his yellow wrinkled face, she came across to him.

"D'ye think I could see Muster Girdlestone, sir," she asked, with a curtsey; "or, maybe, you're Mr. Girdlestone yourself?" The woman was wretchedly dressed, and her eyelids were swollen and red as from long crying.

"Mr. Girdlestone is in his room," said the head clerk kindly. "I have no doubt that he will see you if you will wait for a moment." Had he been speaking to the grandest of the be-silked and be-feathered dames who occasionally frequented the office; he could not have spoken with greater courtesy. Verily in these days the spirit of true chivalry has filtered down from the surface and has found a lodgment in strange places.

The merchant looked with a surprised and suspicious eye at his visitor when she was ushered in. "Take a seat, my good woman," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Please, Mr. Girdlestone, I'm Mrs. Hudson," she answered, seating herself in a timid way upon the extreme edge of a chair. She was weary and footsore, for she had carried the baby up from Stepney that morning.

"Hudson – Hudson – can't remember the name," said Girdlestone, shaking his head reflectively.

"Jim Hudson as was, sir, he was my husband, the bo'sun for many a year o' your ship the *Black Eagle*. He went out to try and earn a bit for me and the child, sir, but he's dead o' fever, poor dear, and lying in Bonny river, wi' a cannon ball at his feet, as the carpenter himself told me who sewed him up, and I wish I was dead and with him, so I do." She began sobbing in her shawl and moaning, while the child, suddenly awakened by the sound, rubbed its eyes with its wrinkled mottled hands, and then proceeded to take stock of Mr. Girdlestone and his office with the critical philosophy of infancy.

"Calm yourself, my good woman, calm yourself," said the senior partner. He perceived that the evil prophesied by his son had come upon him, and he made a mental note of this fresh instance of Ezra's powers of foresight.

"It was hard, so it was," said Mrs. Hudson, drying her eyes, but still giving vent to an occasional tempestuous sob. "I heard as the *Black Eagle* was comin' up the river, so I spent all I had in my pocket in makin' Jim a nice little supper – ham an' eggs, which was always his favourite, an' a pint o' bitter, an' a quartern o' whiskey that he could take hot after, bein' naturally o' a cold turn, and him comin' from a warm country, too. Then out I goes, and down the river, until I sees the *Black Eagle* a-comin' up wi' a tug in front of her. Well I knowed the two streaks o' white paint, let alone the screechin' o' the parrots which I could hear from the bank. I could see the heads o' some of the men peepin' over the side, so I waves my handkercher, and one o' them he waves back. 'Trust Jim for knowin' his little wife,' says I, proud like to myself, and I runs round to where I knew as they'd dock her. What with me being that excited that I couldn't rightly see where I was going, and what with the crowd, for the men was comin' from work, I didn't get there till the ship was alongside. Then I jumps aboard, and the first man I seed was Sandy McPherson, who I knowed when we lived in Binnacle Lane. 'Where's Jim?' I cried, running forward, eager like, to the forecastle, but he caught me by the arm as I passed him. 'Steady, lass, steady!' Then I looked up at him, and his face was very grave, and my knees got kind o' weak. 'Where's Jim?' says I. 'Don't ask,' says he. 'Where is he, Sandy?' I screeches; and then, 'Don't say the

word, Sandy, don't you say it.' But, Lor' bless ye, sir, it didn't much matter what he said nor what he didn't, for I knowed all, an' down I flops on the deck in a dead faint. The mate, he took me home in a cab, and when I come to there was the supper lying, sir, and the beer, and the things a-shinin', and all so cosy, an' the child askin' where her father was, for I told her he'd bring her some things from Africa. Then, to think of him a-lyin' dead in Bonny river, why, sir, it nigh broke my heart."

"A sore affliction," the merchant said, shaking his grizzled head. "A sad visitation. But these things are sent to try us, Mrs. Hudson. They are warnings to us not to fix our thoughts too much upon the dross of this world, but to have higher aims and more durable aspirations. We are poor short-sighted creatures, the best of us, and often mistake evil for good. What seems so sad to-day may, if taken in a proper spirit, be looked back upon as a starting-point from which all the good of your life has come."

"Bless you, sir!" said the widow, still furtively rubbing her eyes with the corner of her little shawl. "You're a real kind gentleman. It does me good to hear you talk."

"We have all our burdens and misfortunes," continued the senior partner. "Some have more, some have less. To-day is your turn, to-morrow it may be mine. But let us struggle on to the great goal, and the weight of our burden need never cause us to sink by the wayside. And now I must wish you a very good morning, Mrs. Hudson. Believe me, you have my hearty sympathy."

The woman rose and then stood irresolute for a moment, as though there was something which she still wished to mention.

"When will I be able to draw Jim's back pay, sir?" she asked nervously. "I have pawned nigh everything in the house, and the child and me is weak from want of food."

"Your husband's back pay," the merchant said, taking down a ledger from the shelf and turning rapidly over the leaves. "I think that you are under a delusion, Mrs. Hudson. Let me see – Dawson, Duffield, Everard, Francis, Gregory, Gunter, Hardy. Ah, here it is – Hudson, boatswain of the *Black Eagle*. The wages which he received amounted, I see, to five pounds a month. The voyage lasted eight months, but the ship had only been out two months and a half when your husband died."

"That's true, sir," the widow said, with an anxious look at the long line of figures in the ledger.

"Of course, the contract ended at his death, so the firm owed him twelve pounds ten at that date. But I perceive from my books that you have been drawing half-pay during the whole eight months. You have accordingly had twenty pounds from the firm, and are therefore in its debt to the amount of seven pounds ten shillings. We'll say nothing of that at present," the senior partner concluded with a magnificent air. "When you are a little better off you can make good the balance, but really you can hardly expect us to assist you any further at present."

"But, sir, we have nothing," Mrs. Hudson sobbed.

"It is deplorable, most deplorable. But we are not the people to apply to. Your own good sense will tell you that, now that I have explained it to you. Good morning. I wish you good fortune, and hope you will let us know from time to time how you go on. We always take a keen interest in the families of those who serve us." Mr. Girdlestone opened the door, and the heart-sick little woman staggered away across the office, still bearing her heavy child.

When she got into the open air she stared around her like one dazed. The senior clerk looked anxiously at her as he stood at the open door. Then he glanced back into the office. Ezra Girdlestone was deep in some accounts, and his brother clerks were all absorbed in their work. He stole up to the woman, with an apologetic smile, slipped something into her hand, and then hurried back into the office with an austere look upon his face, as if his whole mind were absorbed in the affairs of the firm. There are speculations above the ken of business men. Perhaps, Thomas Gilray, that ill-spared half-crown of yours may bring in better interest than the five-and-twenty pounds of your employer.

CHAPTER IV.
CAPTAIN HAMILTON MIGGS OF THE "BLACK EAGLE."

The head of the firm had hardly recovered his mental serenity after the painful duty of explaining her financial position to the Widow Hudson, when his quick ear caught the sound of a heavy footstep in the counting-house. A gruff voice was audible at the same time, which demanded in rather more energetic language than was usually employed in that orderly establishment, whether the principal was to be seen or not. The answer was evidently in the affirmative, for the lumbering tread came rapidly nearer, and a powerful double knock announced that the visitor was at the other side of the door.

"Come in," cried Mr. Girdlestone, laying down his pen.

This invitation was so far complied with that the handle turned, and the door revolved slowly upon its hinges. Nothing more substantial than a strong smell of spirituous liquors, however, entered the apartment.

"Come in," the merchant repeated impatiently.

At this second mandate a great tangled mass of black hair was slowly protruded round the angle of the door. Then a copper-coloured forehead appeared, with a couple of very shaggy eyebrows and eventually a pair of eyes, which protruded from their sockets and looked yellow and unhealthy. These took a long look, first at the senior partner and then at his surroundings, after which, as if reassured by the inspection, the remainder of the face appeared – a flat nose, a large mouth with a lower lip which hung down and exposed a line of tobacco-stained teeth, and finally a thick black beard which bristled straight out from the chin, and bore abundant traces of an egg having formed part of its owner's morning meal. The head having appeared, the body soon followed it, though all in the same anaconda-like style of progression, until the individual stood revealed. He was a stoutly-built sea-faring man, dressed in a pea jacket and blue trousers and holding his tarpaulin hat in his hand. With a rough scrape and a most unpleasant leer he advanced towards the merchant, a tattoed and hairy hand outstretched in sign of greeting.

"Why, captain," said the head of the firm, rising and grasping the other's hand with effusion, "I am glad to see you back safe and well."

"Glad to see ye, sir – glad to see ye."

His voice was thick and husky, and there was an indecision about his gait as though he had been drinking heavily. "I came in sort o' cautious," he continued, "'cause I didn't know who might be about. When you and me speaks together we likes to speak alone, you bet."

The merchant raised his bushy eyebrows a little, as though he did not relish the idea of mutual confidences suggested by his companion's remark. "Hadn't you better take a seat?" he said.

The other took a cane-bottomed chair and carried it into the extreme corner of the office. Then having looked steadily at the wall behind him, and rapped it with his knuckles, he sat down, still throwing an occasional apprehensive glance over his shoulder. "I've got a touch of the jumps," he remarked apologetically to his employer. "I likes to *know* as there ain't no one behind me."

"You should give up this shocking habit of drinking," Mr. Girdlestone said seriously. "It is a waste of the best gifts with which Providence has endowed us. You are the worse for it both in this world and in the next."

Captain Hamilton Miggs did not seem to be at all impressed by this very sensible piece of advice. On the contrary, he chuckled boisterously to himself, and, slapping his thigh, expressed his opinion that his employer was a "rum 'un" – a conviction which he repeated to himself several times with various symptoms of admiration.

"Well, well," Girdlestone said, after a short pause, "boys will be boys, and sailors, I suppose, will be sailors. After eight months of anxiety and toil, ending in success, captain – I am proud to be able to say the words – some little licence must be allowed. I do not judge others by the same hard and fast lines by which I regulate my own conduct."

This admirable sentiment also failed to elicit any response from the obdurate Miggs, except the same manifestations of mirth and the same audible aside as to the peculiarities of his master's character.

"I must congratulate you on your cargo, and wish you the same luck for your next voyage," the merchant continued.

"Ivory, an' gold dust, an' skins, an' resin, an' cochineal, an' gums, an' ebony, an' rice, an' tobacco, an' fruits, an' nuts in bulk. If there's a better cargo about, I'd like to see it," the sailor said defiantly.

"An excellent cargo, captain; very good indeed. Three of your men died,

I believe?"

"Ay, three of the lubbers went under. Two o' fever and one o' snake-bite. It licks me what sailors are comin' to in these days. When I was afore the mast we'd ha' been ashamed to die o' a trifle like that. Look at me. I've been down wi' coast fever sixteen times, and I've had yellow jack an' dysentery, an' I've been bit by the black cobra in the Andamans. I've had cholera, too. It broke out in a brig when I was in the Sandwich Island trade, and I was shipmates wi' seven dead out o' a crew o' ten. But I ain't none the worse for it – no, nor never will be. But I say, gov'nor, hain't you got a drop of something about the office?"

The senior partner rose, and taking a bottle from the cupboard filled out a stiff glass of rum. The sailor drank it off eagerly, and laid down the empty tumbler with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Say, now," he said, with an unpleasant confidential leer, "weren't you surprised to see us come back – eh? Straight now, between man and man?"

"The old ship hangs together well, and has lots of work in her yet," the merchant answered.

"Lots of work! God's truth, I thought she was gone in the bay! We'd a dirty night with a gale from the west-sou'-west, an' had been goin' by dead reckonin' for three days, so we weren't over and above sure o' ourselves. She wasn't much of a sea-going craft when we left England, but the sun had fried all the pitch out o' her seams, and you might ha' put your finger through some of them. Two days an' a night we were at the pumps, for she leaked like a sieve. We lost the fore topsail, blown clean out o' the ringbolts. I never thought to see Lunnon again."

"If she could weather a gale like that she could make another voyage."

"She could start on another," the sailor said gloomily, "but as like as not she'd never see the end o't."

"Come, come, you're not quite yourself this morning, Miggs. We value you as a dashing, fearless fellow – let me fill your glass again – who doesn't fear a little risk where there's something to be gained. You'll lose your good name if you go on like that."

"She's in a terrible bad way," the captain insisted. "You'll have to do something before she can go."

"What shall we have to do?"

"Dry dock her and give her a thorough overhaul. She might sink before she got out o' the Channel if she went as she is just now."

"Very well," the merchant said coldly. "If you insist on it, it must be done. But, of course, it would make a great difference in your salary."

"Eh?"

"You are at present getting fifteen pounds a month, and five per cent. commission. These are exceptional terms in consideration of any risk that you may run. We shall dry dock the *Black Eagle*, and your salary is now ten pounds a month and two and a half commission."

"Belay, there, belay!" the sailor shouted. His coppery face was a shade darker than usual, and his bilious eyes had a venomous gleam in them. "Don't you beat me down, curse you!" he hissed, advancing to the table and leaning his hands upon it while he pushed his angry face forward until it was within a foot of that of the merchant. "Don't you try that game on, mate, for I am a free-born British seaman, and I am under the thumb of no man."

"You're drunk," said the senior partner. "Sit down!"

"You'd reduce my screw, would ye?" roared Captain Hamilton Miggs, working himself into a fury. "Me that has worked for ye, and slaved for ye, and risked my life for ye. You try it on, guv'nor; just you try it on! Suppose I let out that little story o' the painting out o' the marks – where would the firm of Girdlestone be then! I guess you'd rather double my wage than have that yarn goin' about."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? You don't know what I mean, do you? Of course not.

It wasn't you as set us on to go at night and paint out the Government

Plimsoll marks and then paint 'em in again higher up, so as to be able to overload. That wasn't you, was it?"

"Do you mean to assert that it was?"

"In course I do," thundered the angry seaman.

The senior partner struck the gong which stood upon the table.

"Gilray," he said quietly, "go out and bring in a policeman."

Captain Hamilton Miggs seemed to be somewhat startled by this sudden move of his antagonist. "Steady your helm, governor," he said. "What are ye up to now?"

"I'm going to give you in charge."

"What for?"

"For intimidation and using threatening language, and endeavouring to extort money under false pretences."

"There's no witnesses," the sailor said in a half-cringing, half-defiant manner.

"Oh yes, there are," Ezra Girdlestone remarked, coming into the room. He had been standing between the two doors which led to the counting-house, and had overheard the latter portion of the conversation. "Don't let me interrupt you. You were saying that you would blacken my father's character unless he increased your salary."

"I didn't mean no harm," said Captain Hamilton Miggs, glancing nervously from the one to the other. He had been fairly well known to the law in his younger days, and had no desire to renew the acquaintance.

"Who painted out those Plimsoll marks?" asked the merchant.

"It was me."

"Did any one suggest it to you?"

"No."

"Shall I send in the policeman, sir?" asked Gilray, opening the door.

"Ask him to wait for a moment," Girdlestone answered.

"And now, captain, to return to the original point, shall we dry dock the *Black Eagle* and reduce the salary, or do you see your way to going back in her on the same terms?"

"I'll go back and be damned to it!" said the captain recklessly, plunging his hands into the pockets of his pea jacket and plumping back into his chair.

"That's right," his grim employer remarked approvingly.

"But swearing is a most sinful practice. Send the policeman away,

Ezra."

The young man went out with an amused smile, and the two were left together again.

"You'll not be able to pass the Government inspector unless you do something to her," the seaman said after a long pause, during which he brooded over his wrongs.

"Of course we shall do something. The firm is not mean, though it avoids unnecessary expense. We'll put a coat of paint on her, and some pitch, and do up the rigging. She's a stout old craft, and with one of the smartest sailors afloat in command of her – for we always give you credit for being that – she'll run many a voyage yet."

"I'm paid for the risk, guv'nor, as you said just now," the sailor remarked. "But don't it seem kind o' hard on them as isn't – on the mates an' the hands?"

"There is always a risk, my dear captain. There is nothing in the world without risk. You remember what is said about those who go down to the sea in ships. They see the wonders of the deep, and in return they incur some little danger. My house in Eccleston Square might be shaken down by an earthquake, or a gale might blow in the walls, but I'm not always brooding over the chance of it. There's no use your taking it for granted that some misfortune will happen to the *Black Eagle*."

The sailor was silenced, but not convinced by his employer's logic. "Well, well," he said sulkily, "I am going, so there's an end of it, and there's no good in having any more palaver about it. You have your object in running rotten ships, and you make it worth my while to take my chances in them. I'm suited, and you're suited, so there's no more to be said."

"That's right. Have some more rum?"

"No, not a spot."

"Why not?"

"Because I likes to keep my head pretty clear when I'm a-talkin' to you, Muster Girdlestone. Out o' your office I'll drink to further orders, but I won't do business and muddle myself at the same time. When d'ye want me to start?"

"When she's unloaded and loaded up again. Three weeks or a month yet. I expect that Spender will have come in with the *Maid of Athens* by that time."

"Unless some accident happens on the way," said Captain Hamilton Miggs, with his old leer. "He was at Sierra Leone when we came up the coast. I couldn't put in there, for the swabs have got a warrant out ag'in me for putting a charge o' shot into a nigger."

"That was a wicked action – very wrong, indeed," the merchant said gravely. "You must consider the interests of the firm, Miggs. We can't afford to have a good port blocked against our ships in this fashion. Did they serve this writ on you?"

"Another nigger brought it aboard."

"Did you read it?"

"No; I threw it overboard."

"And what became of the negro?"

"Well," said Miggs with a grin, "when I threw the writ overboard he happened to be a-holdin' on to it. So, ye see, he went over, too. Then I up anchor and scooted."

"There are sharks about there?"

"A few."

"Really, Miggs," the merchant said, "you must restrain your sinful passions. You have broken the fifth commandment, and closed the trade of Freetown to the *Black Eagle*."

"It never was worth a rap," the sailor answered. "I wouldn't give a cuss for any of the British settlements. Give me real niggers, chaps as knows nothing of law or civilizing, or any rot of the sort. I can pull along with them.

"I have often wondered how you managed it," Girdlestone said curiously. "You succeed in picking up a cargo where the steadiest and best men can't get as much as a bag of nuts. How do you work it?"

"There's many would like to know that," Miggs answered, with an expressive wink.

"It is a secret, then?"

"Well, it ain't a secret to you, 'cause you ain't a skipper, and it don't matter if you knows it or not. I don't want to have 'em all at the same game."

"How is it, then?"

"I'll tell ye," said Miggs. He seemed to have recovered his serenity by this time, and his eyes twinkled as he spoke of his own exploits. "I gets drunk with them. That's how I does it."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes, that's how it's worked. Lord love ye, when these fust-class certificated, second-cousin-to-an-earl merchant skippers comes out they move about among the chiefs and talks down to them as if they was tin Methuselahs on wheels. The Almighty's great coat wouldn't make a waistcoat for some o' these blokes. Now when I gets among 'em I has 'em all into the cabin, though they're black an' naked, an' the smell ain't over an' above pleasant. Then I out with the rum and it's 'help yourself an' pass the bottle.' Pretty soon, d'ye see, their tongues get loosened, and as I lie low an' keep dark I gets a pretty good idea o' what's in the market. Then when I knows what's to be got, it's queer if I don't manage to get it. Besides, they like a little notice, just as Christians does, and they remembers me because I treat them well."

"An excellent plan, Miggs – a capital plan!" said the senior partner.

"You are an invaluable servant."

"Well," the captain said, rising from his chair, "I'm getting a great deal too dry with all this palaver. I don't mind gettin' drunk with nigger chiefs, but I'm darned if I'll – " He paused, but the grim smile on his companion's face showed that he appreciated the compliment.

"I say," he continued, giving his employer a confidential nudge with his elbow, "suppose we'd gone down in the bay this last time, you'd ha' been a bit out in your reckoning – eh, what?"

"Why so?"

"Well, we were over-insured on our outward passage. An accident then might ha' put thousands in your pocket, I know. Coming back, though, the cargo was worth more than the insurance, I reckon. You'd ha' been out o' pocket if we'd foundered. It would ha' been a case o' the engineer hoisted on his own Peter, as Shakspere says."

"We take our chance of these things," the merchant said with dignity.

"Well, good morning, guv'nor," Captain Hamilton Miggs said brusquely. "When you wants me you can lay your hands on me at the old crib, the *Cock and Cowslip*, Rotherhithe."

As he passed out through the office, Ezra rejoined his father.

"He's a curious chap," he remarked, jerking his head in the direction which Miggs had taken. "I heard him bellowing like a bull, so I thought I had best listen to what he had to say. He's a useful servant, though."

"The fellow's half a savage himself," his father said. "He's in his element among them. That's why he gets on so well with them."

"He doesn't seem much the worse for the climate, either."

"His body does not, but his soul, Ezra, his soul? However, to return to business. I wish you to see the underwriters and pay the premium of the *Black Eagle*. If you see your way to it, increase the policy; but do it carefully, Ezra, and with tact. She will start about the time of the equinoctial gales. If anything *should* happen to her, it would be as well that the firm should have a margin on the right side."

CHAPTER V.
MODERN ATHENIANS

Edinburgh University may call herself with grim jocoseness the "alma mater" of her students, but if she be a mother at all she is one of a very heroic and Spartan cast, who conceals her maternal affection with remarkable success. The only signs of interest which she ever designs to evince towards her alumni are upon those not infrequent occasions when guineas are to be demanded from them. Then one is surprised to find how carefully the old hen has counted her chickens, and how promptly the demand is conveyed to each one of the thousands throughout the empire who, in spite of neglect, cherish a sneaking kindness for their old college. There is symbolism in the very look of her, square and massive, grim and grey, with never a pillar or carving to break the dead monotony of the great stone walls. She is learned, she is practical, and she is useful. There is little sentiment or romance in her composition, however, and in this she does but conform to the instincts of the nation of which she is the youngest but the most flourishing teacher.

A lad coming up to an English University finds himself In an enlarged and enlightened public school. If he has passed through Harrow and Eton there is no very abrupt transition between the life which he has led in the sixth form and that which he finds awaiting him on the banks of the Cam and the Isis. Certain rooms are found for him which have been inhabited by generations of students in the past, and will be by as many in the future. His religion is cared for, and he is expected to put in an appearance at hall and at chapel. He must be within bounds at a fixed time. If he behave indecorously he is liable to be pounced upon and reported by special officials, and a code of punishments is hung perpetually over his head. In return for all this his University takes a keen interest in him. She pats him on the back if he succeeds. Prizes and scholarships, and fine fat fellowships are thrown plentifully in his way if he will gird up his loins and aspire to them.

There is nothing of this in a Scotch University. The young aspirant pays his pound, and finds himself a student. After that he may do absolutely what he will. There are certain classes going on at certain hours, which he may attend if he choose. If not, he may stay away without the slightest remonstrance from the college. As to religion, he may worship the sun, or have a private fetish of his own upon the mantelpiece of his lodgings for all that the University cares. He may live where he likes, he may keep what hours he chooses, and he is at liberty to break every commandment in the decalogue as long as he behaves himself with some approach to decency within the academical precincts. In every way he is absolutely his own master. Examinations are periodically held, at which he may appear or not, as he chooses. The University is a great unsympathetic machine, taking in a stream of raw-boned cartilaginous youths at one end, and turning them out at the other as learned divines, astute lawyers, and skilful medical men. Of every thousand of the raw material about six hundred emerge at the other side. The remainder are broken in the process.

The merits and faults of this Scotch system are alike evident. Left entirely to his own devices in a far from moral city, many a lad falls at the very starting-point of his life's race, never to rise again. Many become idlers or take to drink, while others, after wasting time and money which they could ill afford, leave the college with nothing learned save vice. On the other hand, those whose manliness and good sense keep them straight have gone through a training which lasts them for life. They have been tried, and have not been found wanting. They have learned self-reliance, confidence, and, in a word, have become men of the world while their *confreres* in England are still magnified schoolboys.

High up in a third flat in Howe Street one, Thomas Dimsdale, was going through his period of probation in a little bedroom and a large sitting-room, which latter, "more studentium," served the purpose of dining-room, parlour, and study. A dingy sideboard, with four still more dingy chairs and an archaeological sofa, made up the whole of the furniture, with the exception of a circular mahogany

centre-table, littered with note-books and papers. Above the mantelpiece was a fly-blown mirror with innumerable cards and notices projecting in a fringe all around, and a pair of pipe racks flanking it on either side. Along the centre of the side-board, arranged with suspicious neatness, as though seldom disturbed, stood a line of solemn books, Holden's *Osteology*, Quain's *Anatomy*, Kirkes' *Physiology*, and Huxley's *Invertebrata*, together with a disarticulated human skull. On one side of the fireplace two thigh bones were stacked; on the other a pair of foils, two basket-hilted single-sticks, and a set of boxing-gloves. On a shelf in a convenient niche was a small stock of general literature, which appeared to have been considerably more thumbed than the works upon medicine. Thackeray's *Esmond* and Meredith's *Richard Feveret* rubbed covers with Irving's *Conquest of Granada* and a tattered line of paper-covered novels. Over the sideboard was a framed photograph of the Edinburgh University Football Fifteen, and opposite it a smaller one of Dimsdale himself, clad in the scantiest of garb, as he appeared after winning the half-mile at the Inter-University Handicap. A large silver goblet, the trophy of that occasion, stood underneath upon a bracket. Such was the student's chamber upon the morning in question, save that in a roomy arm-chair in the corner the young gentleman himself was languidly reclining, with a short wooden pipe in his mouth, and his feet perched up upon the side of the table.

Grey-eyed, yellow-haired, broad in the chest and narrow in the loins, with the strength of a bullock and the graceful activity of a stag, it would be hard to find a finer specimen of young British manhood. The long, fine curves of the limbs, and the easy pose of the round, strong head upon the thick, muscular neck, might have served as a model to an Athenian sculptor. There was nothing in the face, however, to recall the regular beauty of the East. It was Anglo-Saxon to the last feature, with its honest breadth between the eyes and its nascent moustache, a shade lighter in colour than the sun-burned skin. Shy, and yet strong; plain, and yet pleasing; it was the face of a type of man who has little to say for himself in this world, and says that little badly, but who has done more than all the talkers and the writers to ring this planet round with a crimson girdle of British possessions.

"Wonder whether Jack Garraway is ready!" he murmured, throwing down the *Scotsman*, and staring up at the roof. "It's nearly eleven o'clock."

He rose with a yawn, picked up the poker, stood upon the chair, and banged three times upon the ceiling. Three muffled taps responded from the room above. Dimsdale stepped down and began slowly to discard his coat and his waistcoat. As he did so there was a quick, active step upon the stair, and a lean, wiry-looking, middle-sized young fellow stepped into the room. With a nod of greeting he pushed the table over to one side, threw off his two upper garments, and pulled on a pair of the boxing-gloves from the corner. Dimsdale had already done the same, and was standing, a model of manly grace and strength, in the centre of the room.

"Practice your lead, Jack. About here." He tapped the centre of his forehead with his swollen gauntlet.

His companion poised himself for a moment, and then, lashing out with his left hand, came home with a heavy thud on the place indicated. Dimsdale smiled gently and shook his head.

"It won't do," he said.

"I hit my hardest," the other answered apologetically.

"It won't do. Try again."

The visitor repeated the blow with all the force that he could command.

Dimsdale shook his head again despondently. "You don't seem to catch it," he said. "It's like this." He leaned forward, there was the sound of a sharp clip, and the novice shot across the room with a force that nearly sent his skull through the panel of the door.

"That's it," said Dimsdale mildly.

"Oh, it is, is it?" the other responded, rubbing his head.

"It's deucedly interesting, but I think I would understand it better if

I saw you do it to some one else. It is something between the explosion of a powder magazine and a natural convulsion."

His instructor smiled grimly. "That's the only way to learn," he said. "Now we shall have three minutes of give-and-take, and so ends the morning lesson."

While this little scene was being enacted in the lodgings of the student, a very stout little elderly man was walking slowly down Howe Street, glancing up at the numbers upon the doors. He was square and deep and broad, like a bottle of Geneva, with a large ruddy face and a pair of bright black eyes, which were shrewd and critical, and yet had a merry twinkle of eternal boyishness in their depths. Bushy side whiskers, shot with grey, flanked his rubicund visage, and he threw out his feet as he walked with the air of a man who is on good terms with himself and with every one around him.

At No.13 he stopped and rapped loudly upon the door with the head of his metal-headed stick. "Mrs. McTavish?" he asked, as a hard-lined, angular woman responded to his summons.

"That's me, sir."

"Mr. Dimsdale lives with you, I believe?"

"Third floor front, sir."

"Is he in?"

Suspicion shone in the woman's eyes. "Was it aboot a bill?" she asked.

"A bill, my good woman! No, no, nothing of the kind. Dr. Dimsdale is my name. I am the lad's father – just come up from London to see him. I hope he has not been overworking himself?"

A ghost of a smile played about the woman's face. "I think not, sir," she answered.

"I almost wish I had come round in the afternoon," said the visitor, standing with his thick legs astride upon the door-mat. "It seems a pity to break his chain of thought. The morning is his time for study."

"Houts! I wouldna' fash aboot that."

"Well! well! The third floor, you say. He did not expect me so early,

I shall surprise the dear boy at his work."

The landlady stood listening expectantly in the passage. The sturdy little man plodded heavily up the first flight of stairs. He paused on the landing.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Some one is beating carpets. How can they expect poor Tom to read?"

At the second landing the noise was much louder. "It must be a dancing school," conjectured the doctor.

When he reached his son's door, however, there could no longer be any doubt as to whence the sounds proceeded. There was the stamp and shuffle of feet, the hissing of in-drawn breath, and an occasional soft thud, as if some one were butting his head against a bale of wool. "It's epilepsy," gasped the doctor, and turning the handle he rushed into the room.

One hurried glance showed him the struggle which was going on. There was no time to note details. Some maniac was assaulting his Tom. He sprang at the man, seized him round the waist, dragged him to the ground, and seated himself upon him. "Now tie his hands," he said complacently, as he balanced himself upon the writhing figure.

CHAPTER VI.
A RECTORIAL ELECTION

It took some little time before his son, who was half-choked with laughter, could explain to the energetic doctor that the gentleman upon whom he was perched was not a dangerous lunatic, but, on the contrary, a very harmless and innocent member of society. When at last it was made clear to him, the doctor released his prisoner and was profuse in his apologies.

"This is my father, Garraway," said Dimsdale. "I hardly expected him so early."

"I must offer you a thousand apologies, sir. The fact is that I am rather short-sighted, and had no time to put my glasses on. It seemed to me to be a most dangerous scuffle."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Garraway, with great good humour.

"And you, Tom, you rogue, is this the way you spend your mornings? I expected to find you deep in your books. I told your landlady that I hardly liked to come up for fear of disturbing you at your work. You go up for your first professional in a few weeks, I understand?"

"That will be all right, dad," said his son demurely. "Garraway and I usually take a little exercise of this sort as a preliminary to the labours of the day. Try this armchair and have a cigarette."

The doctor's eye fell upon the medical works and the disarticulated skull, and his ill-humour departed.

"You have your tools close at hand, I see," he remarked.

"Yes, dad, all ready."

"Those bones bring back old memories to me. I am rusty in my anatomy, but I dare say I could stump you yet. Let me see now. What are the different foramina of the sphenoid bone, and what structures pass through them? Eh?"

"Coming!" yelled his son. "Coming!" and dashed out of the room.

"I didn't hear any one call," observed the doctor.

"Didn't you, sir?" said Garraway, pulling on his coat. "I thought I heard a noise."

"You read with my son, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then perhaps you can tell me what the structures are which pass through the foramina of the sphenoid?"

"Oh yes, sir. There is the – All right, Tom, all right! Excuse me, sir! He is calling me;" and Garraway vanished as precipitately as his friend had done. The doctor sat alone, puffing at his cigarette, and brooding over his own dullness of hearing.

Presently the two students returned, looking just a little shame-faced, and plunged instantly into wild talk about the weather, the town, and the University – anything and everything except the sphenoid bone.

"You have come in good time to see something of University life," said young Dimsdale. "To-day we elect our new Lord Rector. Garraway and I will take you down and show you the sights."

"I have often wished to see something of it," his father answered. "I was apprenticed to my profession, Mr. Garraway, in the old-fashioned way, and had few opportunities of attending college."

"Indeed, sir."

"But I can imagine it all. What can be more charming than the sight of a community of young men all striving after knowledge, and emulating each other in the ardour of their studies? Not that I would grudge them recreation. I can fancy them strolling in bands round the classic precincts of their venerable University, and amusing themselves by discussing the rival theories of physiologists or the latest additions to the pharmacopoeia."

Garraway had listened with becoming gravity to the commencement of this speech, but at the last sentence he choked and vanished for the second time out of the room.

"Your friend seems amused," remarked Dr. Dimsdale mildly.

"Yes. He gets taken like that sometimes," said his son. "His brothers are just the same. I have hardly had a chance yet to say how glad I am to see you, dad."

"And I to see you, my dear boy. Your mother and Kate come up by the night train. I have private rooms at the hotel."

"Kate Harston! I can only remember her as a little quiet girl with long brown hair. That was six years ago. She promised to be pretty."

"Then she has fulfilled her promise. But you shall judge that for yourself. She is the ward of John Girdlestone, the African merchant, but we are the only relations she has upon earth. Her father was my second cousin. She spends a good deal of her time now with us at Phillimore Gardens – as much as her guardian will allow. He prefers to have her under his own roof, and I don't blame him, for she is like a ray of sunshine in the house. It was like drawing his teeth to get him to consent to this little holiday, but I stuck at it until I wearied him out – fairly wearied him out." The little doctor chuckled at the thought of his victory, and stretched out his thick legs towards the fire.

"This examination will prevent me from being with you as much as I wish."

"That's right, my boy; let nothing interfere with your work."

"Still, I think I am pretty safe. I am glad they have come now, for next Wednesday is the international football match. Garraway and I are the two Scotch half-backs. You must all come down and see it."

"I'll tell you what, Dimsdale," said Garraway, reappearing in the doorway, "if we don't hurry up we shall see nothing of the election. It is close on twelve."

"I am all ready," cried Dr. Dimsdale, jumping to his feet and buttoning his coat.

"Let us be off, then," said his son; and picking up hats and sticks they clattered off down the lodging-house stairs.

A rectorial election is a peculiarly Scotch institution, and, however it may strike the impartial observer, it is regarded by the students themselves as a rite of extreme solemnity and importance from which grave issues may depend. To hear the speeches and addresses of rival orators one would suppose that the integrity of the constitution and the very existence of the empire hung upon the return of their special nominee. Two candidates are chosen from the most eminent of either party and a day is fixed for the polling. Every undergraduate has a vote, but the professors have no voice in the matter. As the duties are nominal and the position honourable, there is never any lack of distinguished aspirants for a vacancy. Occasionally some well-known literary or scientific man is invited to become a candidate, but as a rule the election is fought upon strictly political lines, with all the old-fashioned accompaniments of a Parliamentary contest.

For months before the great day there is bustle and stir. Secret committees meet, rules are formulated, and insidious agents prowl about with an eye to the political training of those who have not yet nailed their colours to any particular mast. Then comes a grand meeting of the Liberal Students' Association, which is trumped by a dinner of the Undergraduates' Conservative Society. The campaign is then in full swing. Great boards appear at the University gates, on which pithy satires against one or other candidate, parodies on songs, quotations from their speeches, and gaudily painted cartoons are posted. Those who are supposed to be able to feel the pulse of the University move about with the weight of much knowledge upon their brows, throwing out hints as to the probable majority one way or the other. Some profess to know it to a nicety. Others shake their heads and remark vaguely that there is not much to choose either way. So week after week goes by, until the excitement reaches a climax when the date of the election comes round.

There was no need upon that day for Dr. Dimsdale or any other stranger in the town to ask his way to the University, for the whooping and yelling which proceeded from that usually decorous

building might have been heard from Prince's Street to Newington. In front of the gates was a dense crowd of townspeople peering through into the quadrangle, and deriving much entertainment from the movements of the lively young gentlemen within. Large numbers of the more peaceable undergraduates stood about under the arches, and these quickly made a way for the newcomers, for both Garraway and Dimsdale as noted athletes commanded a respect among their fellow-students which medallists and honours men might look for in vain.

The broad open quadrangle, and all the numerous balconies and terraces which surround it, were crowded with an excited mob of students. The whole three thousand odd electors who stand upon the college rolls appeared to be present, and the noise which they were making would have reflected credit on treble their number. The dense crowd surged and seethed without pause or rest. Now and again some orator would be hoisted up on the shoulders of his fellows, when an oscillation of the crowd would remove his supporters and down he would come, only to be succeeded by another at some other part of the assembly. The name of either candidate would produce roars of applause and equally vigorous howls of execration. Those who were lucky enough to be in the balconies above hurled down missiles on the crowd beneath – peas, eggs, potatoes, and bags of flour or of sulphur; while those below, wherever they found room to swing an arm, returned the fusillade with interest. The doctor's views of academical serenity and the high converse of pallid students vanished into thin air as he gazed upon the mad tumultuous scene. Yet, in spite of his fifty years, he laughed as heartily as any boy at the wild pranks of the young politicians, and the ruin which was wrought upon broad-cloth coat and shooting jacket by the hail of unsavoury projectiles.

The crowd was most dense and most noisy in front of the class-room in which the counting of the votes was going forward. At one the result was to be announced, and as the long hand of the great clock crept towards the hour, a hush of expectation fell upon the assembly. The brazen clang broke harshly out, and at the same moment the folding doors were flung open, and a knot of men rushed out into the crowd, who swirled and eddied round them. The centre of the throng was violently agitated, and the whole mass of people swayed outwards and inwards. For a minute or two the excited combatants seethed and struggled without a clue as to the cause of the commotion. Then the corner of a large placard was elevated above the heads of the rioters, on which was visible the word "Liberal" in great letters, but before it could be raised further it was torn down, and the struggle became fiercer than ever. Up came the placard again – the other corner this time – with the word "Majority" upon it, and then immediately vanished as before. Enough had been seen, however, to show which way the victory had gone, and shouts of triumph arose everywhere, with waving of hats and clatter of sticks. Meanwhile, in the centre the two parties fought round the placard, and the commotion began to cover a wider area, as either side was reinforced by fresh supporters. One gigantic Liberal seized the board, and held it aloft for a moment, so that it could be seen in its entirety by the whole multitude:

LIBERAL MAJORITY, 241.

But his triumph was short-lived. A stick descended upon his head, his heels were tripped up, and he and his placard rolled upon the ground together. The victors succeeded, however, in forcing their way to the extreme end of the quadrangle, where, as every Edinburgh man knows, the full-length statue of Sir David Brewster looks down upon the classic ground which he loved so well. An audacious Radical swarmed up upon the pedestal and balanced the obnoxious notice on the marble arms of the professor. Thus converted into a political partisan, the revered inventor of the kaleidoscope became the centre of a furious struggle, the vanquished politicians making the most desperate efforts to destroy the symbol of their opponents' victory, while the others offered an equally vigorous resistance to their attacks. The struggle was still proceeding when Dimsdale removed his father, for it was impossible to say what form the riot might assume.

"What Goths! what barbarians!" cried the little doctor, as they walked down the Bridges. "And this is my dream of refined quiet and studious repose!"

"They are not always like that, sir," said his son apologetically.

"They were certainly a little jolly to-day."

"A little jolly!" cried the doctor. "You rogue, Tom. I believe if I had not been there you would have been their ringleader."

He glanced from one to the other, and it was so evident from the expression of their faces that he had just hit the mark, that he burst into a great guffaw of laughter, in which, after a moment's hesitation, his two young companions heartily joined.

CHAPTER VII.
ENGLAND VERSUS SCOTLAND

The rectorial election had come and had gone, but another great event had taken its place. It was the day of the England and Scotland Rugby match.

Better weather could not have been desired. The morning had been hazy, but as the sun shone out the fog had gradually risen, until now there remained but a suspicion of it, floating like a plume, above the frowning walls of Edinburgh Castle, and twining a fairy wreath round the unfinished columns of the national monument upon the Calton Hill. The broad stretch of the Prince's Street Gardens, which occupy the valley between the old town and the new, looked green and spring-like, and their fountains sparkled merrily in the sunshine. Their wide expanse, well-trimmed and bepathed, formed a strange contrast to the rugged piles of grim old houses which bounded them upon the other side and the massive grandeur of the great hill beyond, which lies like a crouching lion keeping watch and ward, day and night, over the ancient capital of the Scottish kings. Travellers who have searched the whole world round have found no fairer view.

So thought three of the genus who were ensconced that forenoon in the bow windows of the *Royal Hotel* and gazed across the bright green valley at the dull historical background beyond. One we already know, a stoutish gentleman, ruddy-faced and black-eyed, with check trousers, light waistcoat and heavy chain, legs widely parted, his hands in his pockets, and on his face that expression of irreverent and critical approval with which the travelled Briton usually regards the works of nature. By his side was a young lady in a tight-fitting travelling dress, with trim leather belt and snow-white collar and cuffs. There was no criticism in her sweet face, now flushed with excitement – nothing but unqualified wonder and admiration at the beautiful scene before her. An elderly placid-faced woman sat in a basket chair in the recess, and looked up with quiet loving eyes at the swift play of emotions which swept over the girl's eager features.

"Oh, Uncle George," she cried, "it is really too heavenly. I cannot realize that we are free. I can't help fearing that it is all a dream, and that I shall wake up to find myself pouring out Ezra Girdlestone's coffee, or listening to Mr. Girdlestone as he reads the morning quotations."

The elder woman stroked the girl's hand caressingly with her soft, motherly palm. "Don't think about it," she murmured.

"No, don't think about it," echoed the doctor. "My wife is quite right. Don't think about it. But, dear me, what a job I had to persuade your guardian to let you go. I should have given it up in despair – I really should – if I had not known that you had set your heart upon it."

"Oh, how good you both are to me!" cried the girl, in a pretty little gush of gratitude.

"Pooh, pooh, Kate! But as to Girdlestone, he is perfectly right. If I had you I should keep you fast to myself, I promise you. Eh, Matilda?"

"That we would, George."

"Perfect tyrants, both of us. Eh, Matilda?"

"Yes, George."

"I am afraid that I am not very useful in a household," said the girl. "I was too young to look after things for poor papa. Mr. Girdlestone, of course, has a housekeeper of his own. I read the *Financial News* to him after dinner every day, and I know all about stock and Consols and those American railways which are perpetually rising and falling. One of them went wrong last week, and Ezra swore, and Mr. Girdlestone said that the Lord chastens those whom He loves. He did not seem to like being chastened a bit though. But how delightful this is! It is like living in another world."

The girl was a pretty figure as she stood in the window, tall, lithe, and graceful, with the long soft curves of budding womanhood. Her face was sweet rather than beautiful, but an artist would have

revelled in the delicate strength of the softly rounded chin, and the quick bright play of her expression. Her hair, of a deep rich brown, with a bronze shimmer where a sunbeam lay athwart it, swept back in those thick luxuriant coils which are the unfailing index of a strong womanly nature. Her deep blue eyes danced with life and light, while her slightly *retrousse* nose and her sensitive smiling mouth all spoke of gentle good humour. From her sunny face to the dainty little shoe which peeped from under the trim black skirt, she was an eminently pleasant object to look upon. So thought the passers-by as they glanced up at the great bow window, and so, too, thought a young gentleman who had driven up to the hotel door, and who now bounded up the steps and into the room. He was enveloped in a long shaggy ulster, which stretched down to his ankles, and he wore a velvet cap trimmed with silver stuck carelessly on the back of his powerful yellow curled head.

"Here is the boy!" cried his mother gaily.

"How are you, mam dear?" he cried, stooping over her to kiss her. "How are you, dad? Good morning, Cousin Kate. You must come down and wish us luck. What a blessing that it is pretty warm. It is miserable for the spectators when there is an east wind. What do you think of it, dad?"

"I think you are an unnatural young renegade to play against your mother country," said the sturdy doctor.

"Oh, come, dad! I was born in Scotland, and I belong to a Scotch club.

Surely that is good enough."

"I hope you lose, then."

"We are very likely to. Atkinson, of the West of Scotland, has strained his leg, and we shall have to play Blair, of the Institution, at full back – not so good a man by a long way. The odds are five to four on the English this morning. They are said to be the very strongest lot that ever played in an International match. I have brought a cab with me, so the moment you are ready we can start."

There were others besides the students who were excited about the coming struggle. All Edinburgh was in a ferment. Football is, and always has been, the national game of Scotland among those who affect violent exercise, while golf takes its place with the more sedately inclined. There is no game so fitted to appeal to a hardy and active people as that composite exercise prescribed by the Rugby Union, in which fifteen men pit strength, speed, endurance, and every manly attribute they possess in a prolonged struggle against fifteen antagonists. There is no room for mere knack or trickery. It is a fierce personal contest in which the ball is the central rallying point. That ball may be kicked, pushed, or carried; it may be forced onwards in any conceivable manner towards the enemy's goal. The fleet of foot may seize it and by superior speed thread their way through the ranks of their opponents. The heavy of frame may crush down all opposition by dead weight. The hardiest and most enduring must win.

Even matches between prominent local clubs excite much interest in Edinburgh and attract crowds of spectators. How much more then when the pick of the manhood of Scotland were to try their strength against the very cream of the players from the South of the Tweed. The roads which converged on the Raeburn Place Grounds, on which the match was to be played, were dark with thousands all wending their way in one direction. So thick was the moving mass that the carriage of the Dimsdale party had to go at a walk for the latter half of the journey, In spite of the objurgations of the driver, who, as a patriot, felt the responsibility which rested upon him in having one of the team in his charge, and the necessity there was for delivering him up by the appointed time. Many in the crowd recognized the young fellow and waved their hands to him or called out a few words of encouragement. Miss Kate Harston and even the doctor began to reflect some of the interest and excitement which showed itself on every face around them. The youth alone seemed to be unaffected by the general enthusiasm, and spent the time in endeavouring to explain the principles of the game to his fair companion, whose ignorance of it was comprehensive and astounding.

"You understand," he said, "that there are fifteen players on each side. But it would not do for the whole of these fifteen men to play in a crowd, for, in that case, if the other side forced the ball past

them, they would have nothing to fall back upon – no reserves, as it were. Therefore, as we play the game in Scotland, ten men are told off to play in a knot. They are picked for their weight, strength, and endurance. They are called the forwards, and are supposed to be always on the ball, following it everywhere, never stopping or tiring. They are opposed, of course, by the forwards of the other side. Now, immediately behind the forwards are the two quarter-backs. They should be very active fellows, good dodgers and fast runners. They never join in the very rough work, but they always follow on the outskirts of the forwards, and if the ball is forced past it is their duty to pick it up and make away with it like lightning. If they are very fast they may succeed in carrying it a long way before they are caught – 'tackled,' as we call it. It is their duty also to keep their eye on the quarter-backs of the enemy, and to tackle them if they get away. Behind them again are the two half-backs – or 'three-quarters,' as they call them in England. I am one of them. They are supposed to be fast runners too, and a good deal of the tackling comes to their lot, for a good runner of the other side can often get past the quarters, and then the halves have got to bring him down. Behind the half-backs is a single man – the back. He is the last resource when all others are past. He should be a sure and long kicker, so as to get the ball away from the goal by that means – but you are not listening."

"Oh yes, I am," said Kate. As a matter of fact the great throng and the novel sights were distracting her so much that she found it hard to attend to her companion's disquisition.

"You'll understand it quickly enough when you see it," the student remarked cheerily. "Here we are at the grounds."

As he spoke the carriage rattled through a broad gateway into a large open grassy space, with a great pavilion at one side of it and a staked enclosure about two hundred yards long and a hundred broad, with a goal-post at each end. This space was marked out by gaily coloured flags, and on every side of it, pressing against the barrier the whole way round, was an enormous crowd, twenty and thirty deep, with others occupying every piece of rising ground or coign of vantage behind them. The most moderate computation would place the number of spectators at fifteen thousand. At one side there was a line of cabs in the background, and thither the carriage of the Dimsdales drove, while Tom rushed off with his bag to the pavilion to change.

It was high time to do so, for just as the carriage took up its position a hoarse roar burst from the great multitude, and was taken up again and again. It was a welcome to the English team, which had just appeared upon the ground. There they were, clad in white knickerbockers and jerseys, with a single red rose embroidered upon their breasts; as gallant-looking a set of young fellows as the whole world could produce. Tall, square-shouldered, straight-limbed, as active as kittens and as powerful as young bullocks, it was clear that they would take a lot of beating. They were the pick of the University and London clubs, with a few players from the northern counties; not a man among them whose name was not known wherever football was played. That tall, long-legged youth is Evans, the great half-back, who is said to be able to send a drop-kick further than any of his predecessors in the annals of the game. There is Buller, the famous Cambridge quarter, only ten stone in weight, but as lithe and slippery as an eel; and Jackson, the other quarter, is just such another – hard to tackle himself, but as tenacious as a bulldog in holding an adversary. That one with the straw-coloured hair is Coles, the great forward; and there are nine lads of metal who will stand by him to-day through thick and thin. They were a formidable-looking lot, and betting, which had been five on four to them in the morning, showed symptoms of coming to five to three. In the meantime, by no means abashed at finding themselves the cynosure of so many eyes, the Englishmen proceeded to keep up their circulation by leap-frog and horse-play, for their jerseys were thin and the wind bleak.

But where were their adversaries? A few impatient moments slowly passed, and then from one corner of the ground there rose a second cheer, which rippled down the long line of onlookers and swelled into a mighty shout as the Scotchmen vaulted over the barrier into the arena. It was a nice question for connoisseurs in physical beauty as to which team had the best of it in physique. The Northerners in their blue jerseys, with a thistle upon their breasts, were a sturdy, hard-bitten lot,

averaging a couple of pounds more in weight than their opponents. The latter were, perhaps, more regularly and symmetrically built, and were pronounced by experts to be the faster team, but there was a massive, gaunt look about the Scotch forwards which promised well for their endurance. Indeed, it was on their forwards that they principally relied. The presence of three such players as Buller, Evans, and Jackson made the English exceptionally strong behind, but they had no men in front who were individually so strong and fast as Miller, Watts, or Grey. Dimsdale and Garraway, the Scotch half-backs, and Tookey, the quarter, whose blazing red head was a very oriflamme wherever the struggle waxed hottest, were the best men that the Northerners could boast of behind.

The English had won the choice of goals, and elected to play with what slight wind there was at their backs. A small thing may turn the scale between two evenly balanced teams. Evans, the captain, placed the ball in front of him upon the ground, with his men lined all along on either side, as eager as hounds in leash. Some fifty yards in front of him, about the place where the ball would drop, the blue-vested Scots gathered in a sullen crowd. There was a sharp ring from a bell, a murmur of excitement from the crowd. Evans took two quick steps forward, and the yellow ball flew swift and straight, as if it had been shot from a cannon, right into the expectant group in front of him.

For a moment there was grasping and turmoil among the Scotchmen. Then from the crowd emerged Grey, the great Glasgow forward, the ball tucked well under his arm, his head down, running like the wind, with his nine forwards in a dense clump behind him, ready to bear down all opposition, while the other five followed more slowly, covering a wider stretch of ground. He met the Englishmen who had started full cry after the ball the moment that their captain had kicked it. The first hurled himself upon him. Grey, without slackening his pace, swerved slightly, and he missed him. The second he passed in the same way, but the third caught quickly at his legs, and the Scot flew head over heels and was promptly collared. Not much use collaring him now! In the very act of falling he had thrown the ball behind him. Gordon, of Paisley, caught it and bore it on a dozen yards, when he was seized and knocked down, but not before he had bequeathed his trust to another, who struggled manfully for some paces before he too was brought to the ground. This pretty piece of "passing" had recovered for the Scotch all the advantage lost by the English kick-off, and was greeted by roars of applause from the crowd.

And now there is a "maul" or "scrimmage." Was there ever another race which did such things and called it play! Twenty young men, so blended and inextricably mixed that no one could assign the various arms and legs to their respective owners, are straining every muscle and fibre of their bodies against each other, and yet are so well balanced that the dense clump of humanity stands absolutely motionless. In the centre is an inextricable chaos where shoulders heave and heads rise and fall. At the edges are a fringe of legs – legs in an extreme state of tension – ever pawing for a firmer foothold, and apparently completely independent of the rest of their owners, whose heads and bodies have bored their way Into the *melee*. The pressure in there is tremendous, yet neither side gives an inch. Just on the skirts of the throng, with bent bodies and hands on knees, stand the cool little quarter-backs, watching the gasping giants, and also keeping a keen eye upon each other. Let the ball emerge near one of these, and he will whip it up and be ten paces off before those in the "maul" even know that it is gone. Behind them again are the halves, alert and watchful, while the back, with his hands in his pockets, has an easy consciousness that he will have plenty of warning before the ball can pass the four good men who stand between the "maul" and himself.

Now the dense throng sways a little backwards and forwards. An inch is lost and an inch is gained. The crowd roar with delight. "Mauled, Scotland!" "Mauled England!" "England!" "Scotland!" The shouting would stir the blood of the mildest mortal that ever breathed. Kate Harston stands in the carriage, rosy with excitement and enjoyment. Her heart is all with the wearers of the rose, in spite of the presence of her old play-mate in the opposite ranks. The doctor is as much delighted as the youngest man on the ground, and the cabman waves his arms and shouts in a highly indecorous fashion. The two pounds' difference in weight is beginning to tell. The English sway back a yard or

two. A blue coat emerges among the white ones. He has fought his way through, but has left the ball behind him, so he dashes round and puts his weight behind it once more. There is a last upheaval, the maul is split in two, and through the rent come the redoubtable Scotch forwards with the ball amongst them. Their solid phalanx has scattered the English like spray to right and left. There is no one in front of them, no one but a single little man, almost a boy in size and weight. Surely he cannot hope to stop the tremendous rush. The ball is a few yards in advance of the leading Scot when he springs forward at it. He seizes it an instant before his adversary, and with the same motion writhes himself free from the man's grasp. Now is the time for the crack Cambridge quarter-back to show what he is made of. The crowd yell with excitement. To right and left run the great Scotch forwards, grasping, slipping, pursuing, and right in the midst of them, as quick and as erratic as a trout in a pool, runs the calm-faced little man, dodging one, avoiding another, slipping between the fingers of two others. Surely he is caught now. No, he has passed all the forwards and emerges from the ruck of men, pelting along at a tremendous pace. He has dodged one of the Scotch quarters, and outstripped the other. "Well played, England!" shout the crowd. "Well run, Buller!" "Now, Tookey!" "Now, Dimsdale!" "Well collared, Dimsdale; well collared, indeed!" The little quarter-back had come to an end of his career, for Tom had been as quick as he and had caught him round the waist as he attempted to pass, and brought him to the ground. The cheers were hearty, for the two half-backs were the only University men in the team, and there were hundreds of students among the spectators. The good doctor coloured up with pleasure to hear his boy's name bellowed forth approvingly by a thousand excited lungs.

The play is, as all good judges said it would be, very equal. For the first forty minutes every advantage gained by either side had been promptly neutralized by a desperate effort on the part of the other. The mass of struggling players has swayed backwards and forwards, but never more than twenty or thirty yards from the centre of the ground. Neither goal had been seriously threatened as yet. The spectators fail to see how the odds laid on England are justified, but the "fancy" abide by their choice. In the second forty it is thought that the superior speed and staying power of the Southerners will tell over the heavier Scots. There seems little the matter with the latter as yet, as they stand in a group, wiping their grimy faces and discussing the state of the game; for at the end of forty minutes the goals are changed and there is a slight interval.

And now the last hour is to prove whether there are good men bred in the hungry North as any who live on more fruitful ground and beneath warmer skies. If the play was desperate before, it became even more so now. Each member of either team played as if upon him alone depended the issue of the match. Again and again Grey, Anderson, Gordon, and their redoubtable phalanx of dishevelled hard-breathing Scots broke away with the ball; but as often the English quarter and half-backs, by their superior speed, more than made up for the weakness of their forwards, and carried the struggle back into the enemy's ground. Two or three time Evans, the long-kicker, who was credited with the power of reaching the goal from almost any part of the ground, got hold of the ball, but each time before he could kick he was charged by some one of his adversaries. At last, however, his chance came. The ball trickled out of a maul into the hands of Buller, who at once turned and threw it to the half-back behind him. There was no time to reach him. He took a quick glance at the distant goal, a short run forward, and his long limb swung through the air with tremendous force. There was a dead silence of suspense among the crowd as the ball described a lofty parabola. Down it came, down, down, as straight and true as an arrow, just grazing the cross-bar and pitching on the grass beyond, and the groans of a few afflicted patriots were drowned in the hearty cheers which hailed the English goal.

But the victory was not won yet. There were ten minutes left for the Scotchmen to recover this blow or for the Englishmen to improve upon it. The Northerners played so furiously that the ball was kept down near the English goal, which was only saved by the splendid defensive play of their backs. Five minutes passed, and the Scots in turn were being pressed back. A series of brilliant runs by Buller, Jackson, and Evans took the fight into the enemy's country, and kept it there. It seemed

as if the visitors meant scoring again, when a sudden change occurred in the state of affairs. It was but three minutes off the calling of time when Tookey, one of the Scotch quarter-backs, got hold of the ball, and made a magnificent run, passing right through the opposing forwards and quarters. He was collared by Evans, but immediately threw the ball behind him. Dimsdale had followed up the quarter-back and caught the ball when it was thrown backwards. Now or never! The lad felt that he would sacrifice anything to pass the three men who stood between him and the English goal. He passed Evans like the wind before the half-back could disentangle himself from Tookey. There were but two now to oppose him. The first was the other English half-back, a broad-shouldered, powerful fellow, who rushed at him; but Tom, without attempting to avoid him, lowered his head and drove at him full tilt with such violence that both men reeled back from the collision. Dimsdale recovered himself first, however, and got past before the other had time to seize him. The goal was now not more than twenty yards off, with only one between Tom and it, though half a dozen more were in close pursuit. The English back caught him round the waist, while another from behind seized the collar of his jersey, and the three came heavily to the ground together. But the deed was done. In the very act of falling he had managed to kick the ball, which flickered feebly up into the air and just cleared the English bar. It had scarcely touched the ground upon the other side when the ringing of the great bell announced the termination of the match, though its sound was entirely drowned by the tumultuous shouting of the crowd. A thousand hats were thrown into the air, ten thousand voices joined in the roar, and meanwhile the cause of all this outcry was still sitting on the ground, smiling, it is true, but very pale, and with one of his arms dangling uselessly from his shoulder.

Well, the breaking of a collar-bone is a small price to pay for the saving of such a match as that. So thought Tom Dimsdale as he made for the pavilion, with his father keeping off the exultant crowd upon one side and Jack Garraway upon the other. The doctor butted a path through the dense half-crazy mob with a vigour which showed that his son's talents in that direction were hereditary. Within half an hour Tom was safely ensconced in the corner of the carriage, with his shoulder braced back, *secundum artem*, and his arm supported by a sling. How quietly and deftly the two women slipped a shawl here and a rug there to save him from the jarring of the carriage! It is part of the angel nature of woman that when youth and strength are maimed and helpless they appeal to her more than they can ever do in the pride and flush of their power. Here lies the compensation of the unfortunate. Kate's dark blue eyes filled with ineffable compassion as she bent over him; and he, catching sight of that expression, felt a sudden new unaccountable spring of joy bubble up in his heart, which made all previous hopes and pleasures seem vapid and meaningless. The little god shoots hard and straight when his mark is still in the golden dawn of life. All the way back he lay with his head among the cushions, dreaming of ministering angels, his whole soul steeped in quiet contentment as it dwelt upon the sweet earnest eyes which had looked so tenderly into his. It had been an eventful day with the student. He had saved his side, he had broken his collar-bone, and now, most serious of all, he had realized that he was hopelessly in love.

CHAPTER VIII.
A FIRST PROFESSIONAL

Within a few weeks of his recovery from his accident Tom Dimsdale was to go up for his first professional examination, and his father, who had now retired from practice with a fair fortune, remained in Edinburgh until that event should come off. There had been some difficulty in persuading Girdlestone to give his consent to this prolongation of his ward's leave, but the old merchant was very much engrossed with his own affairs about that time, which made him more amenable than he might otherwise have been. The two travellers continued, therefore, to reside in their Princes Street hotel, but the student held on to his lodgings in Howe Street, where he used to read during the morning and afternoon. Every evening, however, he managed to dine at the *Royal*, and would stay there until his father packed him off to his books once more. It was in vain for him to protest and to plead for another half-hour. The physician was inexorable. When the fated hour came round the unhappy youth slowly gathered together his hat, his gloves, and his stick, spreading out that operation over the greatest possible extent of time which it could by any means be made to occupy. He would then ruefully bid his kinsfolk adieu, and retire rebelliously to his books.

Very soon, however, he made a discovery. From a certain seat in the Princes Street Gardens it was possible to see the interior of the sitting-room in which the visitors remained after dinner. From the time when this fact dawned upon him, his rooms in the evening knew him no more. The gardens were locked at night, but that was a mere trifle. He used to scramble over the railings like a cat, and then, planting himself upon the particular seat, he would keep a watch upon the hotel window until the occupants of the room retired to rest. It might happen that his cousin remained invisible. Then he would return to his rooms in a highly dissatisfied state, and sit up half the night protesting against fate and smoking strong black tobacco. On the other hand, if he had the good luck to see the graceful figure of his old playfellow, he felt that that was the next best thing to being actually in her company, and departed eventually in a more contented frame of mind. Thus, when Dr. Dimsdale fondly imagined his son to be a mile away grappling with the mysteries of science, that undutiful lad was in reality perched within sixty yards of him, with his thoughts engrossed by very different matters.

Kate could not fail to understand what was going on. However young and innocent a girl may be, there is always some subtle feminine instinct which warns her that she is loved. Then first she realizes that she has passed the shadowy frontier line which divides the child-life from that of the woman. Kate felt uneasy and perplexed, and half involuntarily she changed her manner towards him.

It had been frank and sisterly; now it became more distant and constrained. He was quick to observe the change, and in private raved and raged at it. He even made the mistake of showing his pique to her, upon which she became still more retiring and conventional. Then be bemoaned himself in the sleepless watches of the night, and confided to his bed-post that in his belief such a case had never occurred before in the history of the world, and never by any chance could or would happen again. He also broke out into an eruption of bad verses, which were found by his landlady during her daily examination of his private papers, and were read aloud to a select audience of neighbours, who were all much impressed, and cackled sympathetically among themselves.

By degrees Tom developed other symptoms of the distemper which had come upon him so suddenly. He had always been remarkable for a certain towsiness of appearance and carelessness of dress which harmonized with his Bohemian habits. All this he suddenly abjured. One fine morning he paid successive visits to his tailor, his boot-maker, his hatter, and his hosier, which left all those worthy tradesmen rubbing their hands with satisfaction. About a week afterwards he emerged from his rooms in a state of gorgeousness which impressed his landlady and amazed his friends. His old

college companions hardly recognized Tom's honest phiz as it looked out above the most fashionable of coats and under the glossiest of hats.

His father was anything but edified by the change.

"I don't know what's coming over the lad, Kate," he remarked after one of his visits. "If I thought he was going to turn to a fop, by the Lord Harry I'd disown him! Don't you notice a change in him yourself?"

Kate managed to evade the question, but her bright blush might have opened the old man's eyes had he observed it. He hardly realized yet that his son really was a man, and still less did he think of John Harston's little girl as a woman. It is generally some comparative stranger who first makes that discovery and brings it home to friends and relatives.

Love has an awkward way of intruding itself at inconvenient times, but it never came more inopportunely than when it smote one who was reading for his first professional examination. During these weeks, when Tom was stumping about in boots which were two sizes too small for him, in the hope of making his muscular, well-formed foot a trifle more elegant, and was splitting gloves in a way which surprised his glover, all his energies ought by rights to have been concentrated upon the mysteries of botany, chemistry, and zoology. During the precious hours that should have been devoted to the mastering of the sub-divisions of the celenterata or the natural orders of endogenous plants, he was expending his energies in endeavouring to recall the words of the song which his cousin had sung the evening before, or to recollect the exact intonation with which she remarked to him that it had been a fine day, or some other equally momentous observation. It follows that, as the day of the examination came round, the student, in his lucid intervals, began to feel anxious for the result. He had known his work fairly well, however, at one time, and with luck he might pull through. He made an energetic attempt to compress a month's reading into a week, and when the day for the written examination came round he had recovered some of his lost ground. The papers suited him fairly well, and he felt as he left the hall that he had had better fortune than he deserved. The *viva voce* ordeal was the one, however, which he knew would be most dangerous to him, and he dreaded it accordingly.

It was a raw spring morning when his turn came to go up. His father and

Kate drove round with him to the University gates.

"Keep up your pluck, Tom," the old gentleman said. "Be cool, and have all your wits about you. Don't lose your head, whatever you do."

"I seem to have forgotten the little I ever knew," Tom said dolefully, as he trudged up the steps. As he looked back he saw Kate wave her hand to him cheerily, and it gave him fresh heart.

"We shall hope to see you at lunch time," his father shouted after him. "Mind you bring us good news." As he spoke the carriage rattled away down the Bridges, and Tom joined the knot of expectant students who were waiting at the door of the great hall.

A melancholy group they were, sallow-faced, long-visaged and dolorous, partly from the effects of a long course of study and partly from their present trepidation. It was painful to observe their attempts to appear confident and unconcerned as they glanced round the heavens, as if to observe the state of the weather, or examined with well-feigned archaeological fervour the inscriptions upon the old University walls. Most painful of all was it, when some one, plucking up courage, would venture upon a tiny joke, at which the whole company would gibber in an ostentatious way, as though to show that even in this dire pass the appreciation of humour still remained with them. At times, when any of their number alluded to the examination or detailed the questions which had been propounded to Brown or Baker the day before, the mask of unconcern would be dropped, and the whole assembly would glare eagerly and silently at the speaker. Generally on such occasions matters are made infinitely worse by some Job's comforter, who creeps about suggesting abstruse questions, and hinting that they represent some examiner's particular hobby. Such a one came to Dimsdale's elbow, and quenched the last ray of hope which lingered in the young man's bosom.

"What do you know about cacodyl?" was his impressive question.

"Cacodyl?" Tom cried aghast. "It's some sort of antediluvian reptile, isn't it?"

The questioner broke into a sickly smile. "No," he said. "It's an organic explosive chemical compound. You're sure to be asked about cacodyl. Tester's dead on it. He asks every one how it is prepared."

Tom, much perturbed at these tidings, was feverishly endeavouring to extract some little information from his companion concerning the compound, when a bell rang abruptly inside the room and a janitor with a red face and a blue slip of paper appeared at the door.

"Dillon, Dimsdale, Douglas," this functionary shouted in a very pompous voice, and three unhappy young men filed through the half-opened door into the solemn hall beyond.

The scene inside was not calculated to put them at their ease. Three tables, half a dozen yards from each other, were littered with various specimens and scientific instruments, and behind each sat two elderly gentlemen, stern-faced and critical. At one side were stuffed specimens of various small beasts, numerous skeletons and skulls, large jars containing fish and reptiles preserved in spirits of wine, jawbones with great teeth which grinned savagely at the unfortunate candidate, and numerous other zoological relics. The second table was heaped over with a blaze of gorgeous orchids and tropical plants, which looked strangely out of place in the great bleak room. A row of microscopes bristled along the edge. The third was the most appalling of all, for it was bare with the exception of several sheets of paper and a pencil. Chemistry was the most dangerous of the many traps set to ensnare the unwary student.

"Dillon – botany; Dimsdale – zoology; Douglas – chemistry," the janitor shouted once more, and the candidates moved in front of the respective tables. Tom found himself facing a great spider crab, which appeared to be regarding him with a most malignant expression upon its crustacean features. Behind the crab sat a little professor, whose projecting eyes and crooked arms gave him such a resemblance to the creature in front that the student could not help smiling.

"Sir," said a tall, clean-shaven man at the other end of the table, "be serious. This is no time for levity."

Tom's expression after that would have made the fortune of a mute.

"What is this?" asked the little professor, handing a small round object to the candidate.

"It is an echinus – a sea-urchin," Tom said triumphantly.

"Have they any circulation?" asked the other examiner.

"A water vascular system."

"Describe it."

Tom started off fluently, but it was no part of the policy of the examiners to allow him to waste the fifteen minutes allotted them in expatiating upon what he knew well. They interrupted him after a few sentences.

"How does this creature walk?" asked the crab-like one.

"By means of long tubes which it projects at pleasure."

"How do the tubes enable the creature to walk?"

"They have suckers on them."

"What are the suckers like?"

"They are round hollow discs."

"Are you sure they are round?" asked the other sharply.

"Yes," said Tom stoutly, though his ideas on the subject were rather vague."

"And how does this sucker act?" asked the taller examiner.

Tom began to feel that these two men were exhibiting a very unseemly curiosity. There seemed to be no satiating their desire for information. "It creates a vacuum," he cried desperately.

"How does it create a vacuum?"

"By the contraction of a muscular pimple in the centre," said Tom, in a moment of inspiration.

"And what makes this pimple contract?"

Tom lost his head, and was about to say "electricity," when he happily checked himself and substituted "muscular action."

"Very good," said the examiners, and the student breathed again. The taller one returned to the charge, however, with, "And this muscle – is it composed of striped fibres or non-striped?"

"Non-striped," shrieked Tom at a venture, and both examiners rubbed their hands and murmured, "Very good, indeed!" at which Tom's hair began to lie a little flatter, and he ceased to feel as if he were in a Turkish bath.

"How many teeth has a rabbit?" the tall man asked suddenly.

"I don't know," the student answered with candour.

The two looked triumphantly at one another.

"He doesn't know!" cried the goggle-eyed one decisively.

"I should recommend you to count them the next time you have one for dinner," the other remarked. As this was evidently meant for a joke, Tom had the tact to laugh, and a very gruesome and awe-inspiring laugh it was too.

Then the candidate was badgered about the pterodactyl, and concerning the difference in anatomy between a bat and a bird, and about the lamprey, and the cartilaginous fishes, and the amphioxus. All these questions he answered more or less to the satisfaction of the examiners – generally less. When at last the little bell tinkled which was the sign for candidates to move on to other tables, the taller man leaned over a list in front of him and marked down upon it the following hieroglyphic: —

"S. B. – ."

This Tom's sharp eye at once detected, and he departed well pleased, for he knew that the "S. B." meant *satis bene*, and as to the minus sign after it, it mattered little to him whether he had done rather more than well or rather less. He had passed in zoology, and that was all which concerned him at present.

CHAPTER IX.
A NASTY CROPPER

But there were pitfalls ahead. As he moved to the botany table a grey-bearded examiner waved his hand in the direction of the row of microscopes as an intimation that the student was to look through them and pronounce upon what he saw. Tom seemed to compress his whole soul into his one eye as he glared hopelessly through the tube at what appeared to him to resemble nothing so much as a sheet of ice with the marks of skates upon it.

"Come along, come along!" the examiner growled impatiently. Courtesy is conspicuous by its absence in most of the Edinburgh examinations. "You must pass on to the next one, unless you can offer an opinion."

This venerable teacher of botany, though naturally a kind-hearted man, was well known as one of the most malignant species of examiners, one of the school which considers such an ordeal in the light of a trial of strength between their pupils and themselves. In his eyes the candidate was endeavouring to pass, and his duty was to endeavour to prevent him, a result which, in a large proportion of cases, he successfully accomplished.

"Hurry on, hurry on!" he reiterated fussily.

"It's a section of a leaf," said the student.

"It's nothing of the sort," the examiner shouted exultantly. "You've made a bad mistake, sir; a very bad one, indeed. It's the spirilloe of a water plant. Move on to the next."

Tom, in much perturbation of mind, shuffled down the line and looked through the next brazen tube. "This is a preparation of stomata," he said, recognizing it from a print in his book on botany.

The professor shook his head despondingly. "You are right," he said; "pass on to the next."

The third preparation was as puzzling to the student as the first had been, and he was steeling himself to meet the inevitable when an unexpected circumstance turned the scale in his favour. It chanced that the other examiner, being somewhat less of a fossil than his *confreres*, and having still vitality enough to take an interest in things which were foreign to his subject, had recognized the student as being the young hero who had damaged himself in upholding the honour of his country. Being an ardent patriot himself his heart warmed towards Tom, and perceiving the imminent peril in which he stood he interfered in his behalf, and by a few leading questions got him on safer ground, and managed to keep him there until the little bell tinkled once more. The younger examiner showed remarkable tact in feeling his way, and keeping within the very limited area of the student's knowledge. He succeeded so well, however, that although his colleague shook his hoary head and intimated in other ways his poor opinion of the candidate's acquirements, he was forced to put down another "S. B." upon the paper in front of him. The student drew a long breath when he saw it, and marched across to the other table with a mixture of trepidation and confidence, like a jockey riding at the last and highest hurdle in a steeple-chase.

Alas! it is the last hurdle which often floors the rider, and Thomas too was doomed to find the final ordeal an insurmountable one. As he crossed the room some evil chance made him think of the gossip outside and of his allusion to the abstruse substance known as cacodyl. Once let a candidate's mind hit upon such an idea as this, and nothing will ever get it out of his thoughts. Tom felt his head buzz round, and he passed his hand over his forehead and through his curly yellow hair to steady himself. He felt a frenzied impulse as he sat down to inform the examiners that he knew very well what they were going to ask him, and that it was hopeless for him to attempt to answer it.

The leading professor was a ruddy-faced, benevolent old gentleman, with spectacles and a kindly manner. He made a few commonplace remarks to his colleagues with the good-natured

intention of giving the confused-looking student before him time to compose himself. Then, turning blandly towards him, he said in the mildest of tones —

"Have you ever rowed in a pond?"

Tom acknowledged that he had.

"Perhaps, on those occasions," the examiner continued, "you may have chanced to touch the mud at the bottom with your oar."

Tom agreed that it was possible.

"In that case you may have observed that a large bubble, or a succession of them has risen from the bottom to the surface. Now, of what gas was that bubble composed?"

The unhappy student, with the one idea always fermenting on his brain, felt that the worst had come upon him. Without a moment's hesitation or thought he expressed his conviction that the compound was cacodyl.

Never did two men look more surprised, and never did two generally grave *savants* laugh more heartily than did the two examiners when they realized what the candidate had answered. Their mirth speedily brought him back to his senses. He saw with a feeling of despair that it was marsh gas which they had expected – one of the simplest and commonest of chemical combinations. Alas! it was too late now. He knew full well that nothing could save him. With poor marks in botany and zoology, such an error in chemistry was irreparable. He did what was perhaps the best thing under the circumstances. Rising from his chair he made a respectful bow to the examiners, and walked straight out of the room – to the great astonishment of the janitor, who had never before witnessed such a breach of decorum. As the student closed the door behind him he looked back and saw that the other professors had left their respective tables and were listening to an account of the incident from one of the chemists – and a roar of laughter the moment afterwards showed that they appreciated the humour of it. His fellow-students gathered round Tom outside in the hope of sharing in the joke, but he pushed them angrily aside and strode through the midst of them and down the University steps. He knew that the story would spread fast enough without his assistance. His mind was busy too in shaping a certain resolution which he had often thought over during the last few months.

The two old people and Miss Kate Harston waited long and anxiously in their sitting-room at the hotel for some news of the absentee. The doctor had, at first, attempted a lofty cynicism and general assumption of indifference, which rapidly broke down as the time went by, until at last he was wandering round the room, drumming upon the furniture with his fingers and showing every other sign of acute impatience. The window was on the first floor, and Kate had been stationed there as a sentinel to watch the passing crowd and signal the first sign of tidings.

"Can't you see him yet?" the doctor asked for the twentieth time.

"No, dear, I don't," she answered, glancing up and down the street.

"He must be out now. He should have come straight to us. Come away from the window, my dear. We must not let the young monkey see how anxious we are about him."

Kate sat down by the old man and stroked his broad brown hand with her tender white one. "Don't be uneasy, dear," she said; "it's sure to be all right."

"Yes, he is sure to pass," the doctor answered; "but – bless my soul, who's this?"

The individual who caused this exclamation was a very broad-faced and rosy-cheeked little girl, coarsely clad, with a pile of books and a slate under her arm, who had suddenly entered the apartment.

"Please sir," said this apparition, with a bob, "I'm Sarah Jane."

"Are you, indeed?" said the doctor, with mild irony. "And what d'ye want here, Sarah Jane?"

"Please, sir, my mithar, Mrs. McTavish, asked me if I wudna' gie ye this letter frae the gentleman what's lodgin' wi' her." With these words the little mite delivered her missive and, having given another bob, departed upon her ways.

"Why," the doctor cried in astonishment, "it's directed to me and in

Tom's writing. What can be the meaning of this?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" Mrs. Dimsdale cried, with the quick perception of womanhood; "it means that he has failed."

"Impossible!" said the doctor, fumbling with nervous fingers at the envelope. "By Jove, though," he continued, as he glanced over the contents, "you're right. He has. Poor lad! he's more cut up about it than we can be, so we must not blame him."

The good physician read the letter over several times before he finally put it away in his note-book, and he did so with a thoughtful face which showed that it was of importance. As it has an influence upon the future course of our story we cannot end the chapter better than by exercising our literary privilege, and peeping over the doctor's shoulder before he has folded it up. This is the epistle *in extenso*: —

"My Dear Father,

> "You will be sorry to hear that I have failed in my exam. I am very cut up about it, because I fear that it will cause you grief and disappointment, and you deserve neither the one nor the other at my hands."
>
> "It is not an unmixed misfortune to me, because it helps me to make a request which I have long had in my mind. I wish you to allow me to give up the study of medicine and to go in for commerce. You have never made a secret of our money affairs to me, and I know that if I took my degree there would never be any necessity for me to practise. I should therefore have spent five years of my life in acquiring knowledge which would not be of any immediate use to me. I have no personal inclination towards medicine, while I have a very strong objection to simply living in the world upon money which other men have earned. I must therefore turn to some fresh pursuit for my future career, and surely it would be best that I should do so at once. What that fresh pursuit is to be I leave to your judgment. Personally, I think that if I embarked my capital in some commercial undertaking I might by sticking to my work do well. I feel too much cast down at my own failure to see you to-night, but to-morrow I hope to hear what you think from your own lips."

"TOM."

"Perhaps this failure will do no harm after all," the doctor muttered thoughtfully, as he folded up the letter and gazed out at the cold glare of the northern sunset.

CHAPTER X.
DWELLERS IN BOHEMIA

The residence of Major Tobias Clutterbuck, late of the 119th Light Infantry, was not known to any of his friends. It is true that at times he alluded in a modest way to his "little place," and even went to the length of remarking airily to new acquaintances that he hoped they would look him up any time they happened to be in his direction. As he carefully refrained, however, from ever giving the slightest indication of which direction that might be, his invitations never led to any practical results. Still they had the effect of filling the recipient with a vague sense of proffered hospitality, and occasionally led to more substantial kindness in return.

The gallant major's figure was a familiar one in the card-room of the *Rag and Bobtail*, at the bow-window of the Jeunesse Doree. Tall and pompous, with a portly frame and a puffy clean-shaven face which peered over an abnormally high collar and old-fashioned linen cravat, he stood as a very type and emblem of staid middle-aged respectability. The major's hat was always of the glossiest, the major's coat was without a wrinkle, and, in short, from the summit of the major's bald head to his bulbous finger-tips and his gouty toes, there was not a flaw which the most severe critic of deportment – even the illustrious Turveydrop himself – could have detected. Let us add that the conversation of the major was as irreproachable as his person – that he was a distinguished soldier and an accomplished traveller, with a retentive memory and a mind stuffed with the good things of a lifetime. Combine all these qualities, and one would naturally regard the major as a most desirable acquaintance.

It is painful to have to remark, however, that, self-evident as this proposition might appear, it was vehemently contradicted by some of the initiated. There were rumours concerning the major which seriously compromised his private character. Indeed, such a pitch had they reached that when that gallant officer put himself forward as a candidate for a certain select club, he had, although proposed by a lord and seconded by a baronet, been most ignominiously pilled. In public the major affected to laugh over this social failure, and to regard it as somewhat in the nature of a practical joke, but privately he was deeply incensed. One day he momentarily dropped his veil of unconcern while playing billiards with the Honourable Fungus Brown, who was generally credited with having had some hand in the major's exclusion. "Be Ged! sir," the veteran suddenly exclaimed, inflating his chest and turning his apoplectic face upon his companion, "in the old days I would have called the lot of you out, sir, every demned one, beginning with the committee and working down; I would, be George!" At which savage attack the Honourable Fungus's face grew as white as the major's was red, and he began to wish that he had been more reserved in his confidences to some of his acquaintances respecting the exclusiveness of the club in question, or at least refrained from holding up the major's pilling as a proof thereof.

The cause of this vague feeling of distrust which had gone abroad concerning the old soldier was no very easy matter to define. It is true that he was known to have a book on every race, and to have secret means of information from stud-grooms and jockeys which occasionally stood him in good stead; but this was no uncommon thing among the men with whom he consorted. Again, it is true that Major Clutterbuck was much addicted to whist, with guinea points, and to billiard matches for substantial sums, but these stimulating recreations are also habitual to many men who have led eventful lives and require a strong seasoning to make ordinary existence endurable. Perhaps one reason may have been that the major's billiard play in public varied to an extraordinary degree, so that on different occasions he had appeared to be aiming at the process termed by the initiated "getting on the money." The warm friendships, too, which the old soldier had contracted with sundry vacuous and sappy youths, who were kindly piloted by him into quasi-fashionable life and shown how and when

to spend their money, had been most uncharitably commented upon. Perhaps the vagueness about the major's private residence and the mystery which hung over him outside his clubs may also have excited prejudice against him. Still, however his detractors might malign him, they could not attempt to deny the fact that Tobias Clutterbuck was the third son of the Honourable Charles Clutterbuck, who again was the second son of the Earl of Dunross, one of the most ancient of Hibernian families. This pedigree the old soldier took care to explain to every one about him, more particularly to the sappy youths aforementioned.

It chanced that on the afternoon of which we speak the major was engrossed by this very subject. Standing at the head of the broad stone steps which lead up to the palatial edifice which its occupiers irreverently term the *Rag and Bobtail*, he was explaining to a bull-necked, olive-complexioned young man the series of marriages and inter-marriages which had culminated in the production of his own portly, stiff-backed figure. His companion, who was none other than Ezra Girdlestone, of the great African firm of that name, leaned against one of the pillars of the portico and listened gloomily to the major's family reminiscences, giving an occasional yawn which he made no attempt to conceal.

"It's as plain as the fingers of me hand," the old soldier said in a wheezy muffled brogue, as if he were speaking from under a feather-bed. "See here now, Girdlestone – this is Miss Letitia Snackles of Snackleton, a cousin of old Sir Joseph." The major tapped his thumb with the silver head of his walking-stick to represent the maiden Snackles. "She marries Crawford, of the Blues – one o' the Warwickshire Crawfords; that's him" – here he elevated his stubby forefinger; "and here's their three children, Jemima, Harold, and John." Up went three other fingers. "Jemima Crawford grows up, and then Charley Clutterbuck runs away with her. This other thumb o' mine will stand for that young divil Charley, and then me fingers – "

"Oh, hang your fingers," Girdlestone exclaimed with emphasis. "It's very interesting, major, but it would be more intelligible if you wrote it out."

"And so I shall, me boy!" the major cried enthusiastically, by no means abashed at the sudden interruption. "I'll draw it up on a bit o' foolscap paper. Let's see; Fenchurch Street, eh? Address to the offices, of course. Though, for that matter, 'Girdlestone, London,' would foind you. I was spakin' of ye to Sir Musgrave Moore, of the Rifles, the other day, and he knew you at once. 'Girdlestone?' says he. 'The same,' says I. 'A merchant prince?' says he. 'The same,' says I. 'I'd be proud to meet him,' says he. 'And you shall,' says I. He's the best blood of county Waterford."

"More blood than money, I suppose," the young man said, smoothing out his crisp black moustache.

"Bedad, you've about hit it there. He went to California, and came back with five and twinty thousand pounds. I met him in Liverpool the day he arrived. 'This is no good to me, Toby,' says he. 'Why not?' I asks. 'Not enough,' says he; 'just enough to unsettle me.' 'What then?' says I. 'Put it on the favourite for the St. Leger,' says he. And he did too, every pinny of it, and the horse was beat on the post by a short head. He dropped the lot in one day. A fact, sir, 'pon me honour! Came to me next day. 'Nothing left!' says he. 'Nothing?' says I. 'Only one thing,' says he. 'Suicide?' says I. 'Marriage,' says he. Within a month he was married to the second Miss Shuttleworth, who had five thou. in her own right, and five more when Lord Dungeness turns up his toes."

"Indeed?" said his companion languidly.

"Fact, 'pon me honour! By the way – ah, here comes Lord Henry Richardson. How d'ye do, Richardson, how d'ye do? Ged, I remember Richardson when he was a tow-headed boy at Clongowes, and I used to lam him with a bootjack for his cheek. Ah, yes; I was going to say – it seems a demned awkward incident – ha! ha! – ridiculous, but annoying, you know. The fact is, me boy, coming away in a hurry from me little place, I left me purse on the drawers in the bedroom, and here's Jorrocks up in the billiard-room afther challenging me to play for a tenner – but I won't without having the money in me pocket. Tobias Clutterbuck may be poor, me dear friend, but" – and here he puffed out his chest and tapped on it with his round, sponge-like fist – "he's honest, and pays debts of honour on

the nail. No, sir, there's no one can say a word against Tobias, except that he's a half-pay old fool with more heart than brains. However," he added, suddenly dropping the sentimental and coming back to the practical, "if you, me dear boy, can obloige me with the money until to-morrow morning, I'll play Jorrocks with pleasure. There's not many men that I'd ask such a favour of, and even from you I'd never accept anything more than a mere timporary convanience."

"You may stake your life on that," Ezra Girdlestone said with a sneer, looking sullenly down and tracing figures with the end of his stick on the stone steps. "You'll never get the chance. I make it a rule never to lend any one money, either for short or long periods."

"And you won't let me have this throifling accommodation?"

"No," the young man said decisively.

For a moment the major's brick-coloured, weather-beaten face assumed an even darker tint, and his small dark eyes looked out angrily from under his shaggy brows at his youthful companion. He managed to suppress the threatened explosion, however, and burst into a loud roar of laughter.

"'Pon me sowl!" he wheezed, poking the young man in the ribs with his stick, an implement which he had grasped a moment before as though he meditated putting it to a less pacific use, "you young divils of business-men are too much for poor old Tobias. Ged, sir, to think of being stuck in the mud for the want of a paltry tenner! Tommy Heathcote will laugh when he hears of it. You know Tommy of the 81st? He gave me good advice: 'Always sew a fifty-pound note into the lining of each waistcoat you've got. Then you can't go short.' Tried it once, and, be George! if me demned man-servant didn't stale that very waistcoat and sell it for six and sixpence. You're not going, are you?"

"Yes; I'm due in the City. The governor leaves at four. Good-bye.

Shall I see you to-night?"

"Card-room, as per usual," quoth the clean-shaven warrior. He looked after the retreating figure of his late companion with anything but a pleasant expression upon his face. The young man happened to glance round as he was half-way down the street, on which the major smiled after him paternally, and gave a merry flourish with his stick.

As the old soldier stood on the top of the club steps, pompous, pigeon-chested, and respectable, posing himself as though he had been placed there for the inspection of passers-by as a sample of the aristocracy within, he made several attempts to air his grievances to passing members touching the question of the expectant Jorrocks and the missing purse. Beyond, however, eliciting many sallies of wit from the younger spirits, for it was part of the major's policy to lay himself open to be a butt, his laudable perseverance was entirely thrown away. At last he gave it up in disgust, and raising his stick hailed a passing 'bus, into which he sprang, taking a searching glance round to see that no one was following him. After a drive which brought him to the other side of the City, he got out in a broad, busy thoroughfare, lined with large shops. A narrow turning from the main artery led into a long, dingy street, consisting of very high smoke-coloured houses, which ran parallel to the other, and presented as great a contrast to it as the back of a painting does to the front.

Down this sombre avenue the major strutted with all his wonted pomposity, until about half-way down he reached a tall, grim-looking house, with many notices of "apartments" glaring from the windows. The line of railings which separated this house from the street was rusty, and broken and the whole place had a flavour of mildew. The major walked briskly up the stone steps, hollowed out by the feet of generations of lodgers, and pushing open the great splotchy door, which bore upon it a brass plate indicating that the establishment was kept by a Mrs. Robins, he walked into the hall with the air of one who treads familiar ground. Up one flight of stairs, up two flights of stairs, and up three flights of stairs did he climb, until on the fourth landing he pushed open a door and found himself in a small room, which formed for the nonce the "little place" about which he was wont at the club to make depreciatory allusions, so skilfully introduced that the listener was left in doubt as to whether the major was the happy possessor of a country house and grounds, or whether he merely owned a large suburban villa. Even this modest sanctum was not entirely the major's own, as was

shown by the presence of a ruddy-faced man with a long, tawny beard, who sat on one side of the empty fire-place, puffing at a great china-bowled pipe, and comporting himself with an ease which showed that he was no casual visitor.

As the other entered, the man in the chair gave vent to a guttural grunt without removing the mouthpiece of his pipe from between his lips; and Major Clutterbuck returned the greeting with an off-handed nod. His next proceeding was to take off his glossy hat and pack it away in a hat-box. He then removed his coat, his collar, his tie, and his gaiters, with equal solicitude, and put them in a place of safety. After which he donned a long purple dressing-gown and a smoking-cap, in which garb he performed the first steps of a mazurka as a sign of the additional ease which he experienced.

"Not much to dance about either, me boy," the old soldier said, seating himself in a camp-chair and putting his feet upon another one. "Bedad, we're all on the verge. Unless luck takes a turn there's no saying what may become of us."

"We have been badder than this before now many a time," said the yellow-bearded man, in an accent which proclaimed him to be a German. "My money vill come, or you vill vin, or something vill arrive to set all things right."

"Let's hope so," the major said fervently. "It's a mercy to get out of these stiff and starched clothes; but I have to be careful of them, for me tailor – bad cess to him! – will give no credit, and there's little of the riddy knocking about. Without good clothes on me back I'd be like a sweeper without a broom."

The German nodded his intense appreciation of the fact, and puffed a great blue cloud to the ceiling. Sigismond von Baumser was a political refugee from the fatherland, who had managed to become foreign clerk in a small London firm, an occupation which just enabled him to keep body and soul together. He and the major had lodged in different rooms in another establishment until some common leaven of Bohemianism had brought them together. When circumstances had driven them out of their former abode, it had occurred to the major that by sharing his rooms with Von Baumser he would diminish his own expenses, and at the same time secure an agreeable companion, for the veteran was a sociable soul in his unofficial hours and had all the Hibernian dislike to solitude. The arrangement commended itself to the German, for he had a profound admiration for the other's versatile talents and varied experiences; so he grunted an acquiescence and the thing was done. When the major's luck was good there were brave times in the little fourth floor back. On the other hand, if any slice of good fortune came in the German's way, the major had a fair share of the prosperity. During the hard times which intervened between these gleams of opulence, the pair roughed it uncomplainingly as best they might. The major would sometimes create a fictitious splendour by dilating upon the beauties of Castle Dunross, in county Mayo, which is the headquarters of all the Clutterbucks. "We'll go and live there some day, me boy," he would say, slapping his comrade on the back. "It will be mine from the dungeons forty foot below the ground, right up, bedad, to the flagstaff from which the imblem of loyalty flaunts the breeze." At these speeches the simple-minded German used to rub his great red hands together with satisfaction, and feel as pleased as though he had actually been presented with the fee simple of the castle in question.

"Have you had your letter?" the major asked with interest, rolling a cigarette between his fingers. The German was expecting his quarterly remittance from his friends at home, and they were both anxiously awaiting it.

Von Baumser shook his head.

"Bad luck to them! they should have sent a wake ago. You should do what Jimmy Towler did. You didn't know Towler, of the Sappers? When he and I were souldiering in Canada he was vexed at the allowance which he had from ould Sir Oliver, his uncle, not turning up at the right time. 'Ged, Toby,' he says to me, 'I'll warm the old rascal up.' So he sits down and writes a letter to his uncle, in which he told him his unbusiness-like ways would be the ruin of them, and more to the same effect.

When Sir Oliver got the letter he was in such a divil's own rage, that while he was dictating a codicil to his will he tumbled off the chair in a fit, and Jimmy came in for a clean siven thousand a year."

"Dat was more dan he deserved," the German remarked. "But you – how do you stand for money?"

Major Clutterbuck took ten sovereigns out of his trouser pocket and placed them upon the table. "You know me law," he said; "I never, on any consideration, break into these. You can't sit down to play cards for high stakes with less in your purse, and if I was to change one, be George! they'd all go like a whiff o' smoke. The Lord knows when I'd get a start again then. Bar this money I've hardly a pinny."

"Nor me," said Von Baumser despondently, slapping his pockets.

"Niver mind, me boy! What's in the common purse, I wonder?"

He looked up at a little leather bag which hung from a brass nail on the wall. In flush times they were wont to deposit small sums in this, on which they might fall back in their hours of need.

"Not much, I fear," the other said, shaking his head.

"Well, now, we want something to pull us together on a dull day like this. Suppose we send out for a bottle of sparkling, eh?"

"Not enough money," the other objected.

"Well, well, let's have something cheaper. Beaune, now; Beaune's a good comforting sort of drink. What d'ye say to splitting a bottle of Beaune, and paying for it from the common purse?"

"Not enough money," the other persisted doggedly.

"Well, claret be it," sighed the major. "Maybe it's better in this sort of weather. Let us send Susan out for a bottle of claret?"

The German took down the little leather bag and turned it upside down.

A threepenny-piece and a penny rolled out. "Dat's all," he said.

"Not enough for claret."

"But there is for beer," cried the major radiantly. "Bedad, it's just the time for a quart of fourpinny. I remimber ould Gilder, when he was our chief in India, used to say that a man who got beyond enjoying beer and a clay pipe at a pinch was either an ass or a coxcomb. He smoked a clay at the mess table himself. Draper, who commanded the division, told him it was unsoldier-like. 'Unsoldier-like be demned,' he said. Ged, they nearly court-martialled the ould man for it. He got the V.C. at the Quarries, and was killed at the Redan."

A slatternly, slipshod girl answered the bell, and having received her orders and the united available funds of the two comrades, speedily returned with a brace of frothing pint pots. The major ruminated silently over his cigarette for some time, on some unpleasant subject, apparently, for his face was stem and his brows knitted. At last he broke out with an oath.

"Be George! Baumser, I can't stand that young fellow Girdlestone. I'll have to chuck him up. He's such a cold-blooded, flinty-hearted, calculating sort of a chap, that – " The remainder of the major's sentence was lost in the beer flagon.

"What for did you make him your friend, then?"

"Well," the old soldier confessed, "it seemed to me that if he wanted to fool his money away at cards or any other divilment, Tobias Clutterbuck might as well have the handling of it as any one else. Bedad, he's as cunning as a basketful of monkeys. He plays a safe game for low stakes, and never throws away a chance. Demned if I don't think I've been a loser in pocket by knowing him, while as to me character, I'm very sure I'm the worse there."

"Vat's de matter mit him?"

"What's not the matter with him. If he's agrayable he's not natural, and if he's natural he's not agrayable. I don't pretind to be a saint. I've seen some fun in me day, and hope to see some more before I die; but there are some things that I wouldn't do. If I live be cards it's all fair and aboveboard. I never play anything but games o' skill, and I reckon on me skill bringing me out on the right side,

taking one night with another through the year. Again, at billiards I may not always play me best, but that's gineralship. You don't want a whole room to know to a point what your game is. I'm the last man to preach, but, bedad, I don't like that chap, and I don't like that handsome, brazen face of his. I've spint the greater part of my life reading folks' faces, and never very far out either."

Von Baumser made no remark, and the two continued to smoke silently, with an occasional pull at their flagons.

"Besides, it's no good to me socially," the major continued. "The fellow can't keep quiet, else he might pass in a crowd; but that demned commercial instinct will show itself. If he went to heaven he'd start an agency for harps and crowns. Did I tell you what the Honourable Jack Gibbs said to me at the club? Ged, he let me have it straight! 'Buck,' he said, 'I don't mind you. You're one o' the right sort when all's said and done, but if you ever inthroduce such a chap as that to me again, I'll cut you as well as him for the future.' I'd inthroduced them to put the young spalpeen in a good humour, for, being short, as ye know, I thought it might be necessary to negotiate a loan from him."

"Vat did you say his name vas?" Von Baumser asked suddenly.

"Girdlestone."

"Is his father a Kauffmann?"

"What the divil is a Kauffmann?" the major asked impatiently. "Is it a merchant you mean?"

"Ah, a merchant. One who trades with the Afrikaner?"

"The same."

Von Baumser took a bulky pocket-book from his inside pocket, and scanned a long list of names therein. "Ah, it is the same," he cried at last triumphantly, shutting up the book and replacing it. "Girdlestone & Co., African kauf – dat is, merchants – Fenchurch Street, City."

"Those are they."

"And you say dey are rich?"

"Yes."

"Very rich?"

"Yes."

The major began to think that his companion had been imbibing in his absence, for there was an unfathomable smile upon his face, and his red beard and towsy hair seemed to bristle from some internal excitement.

"Very rich! Ho, ho! Very rich!" he laughed. "I know dem; not as friends, Gott bewahre! but I know dem and their affairs."

"What are you driving at? Let's have it. Out with it, man."

"I tell you," said the German, suddenly becoming supernaturally solemn and sawing his hand up and down in the air to emphasize his remarks, "in tree or four months, or a year at the most, there vill be no firm of Girdlestone. They are rotten, useless – whoo! He blew an imaginary feather up into the air to demonstrate the extreme fragility of the house in question.

"You're raving, Baumser," said Major Clutterbuck excitedly. "Why, man, their names are above suspicion. They are looked upon as the soundest concern in the City."

"Dat may be; dat may be," the German answered stolidly. "Vat I know, I know, and vat I say I say."

"And how d'ye know it? D'ye tell me that you know lore about it than the men on 'Change and the firms that do business with them?"

"I know vat I know, and I say vat I say," the other repeated. "Dat tobacco-man Burger is a rogue. Dere is five-and-thirty in the hundred of water in this canaster tobacco, and one must be for ever relighting."

"And you won't tell me where you heard this of the Girdlestones?"

"It vould be no good to you. It Is enough dat vat I say is certain. Let it suffice that dere are people vat are bound to tell other people all dat dey know about anything whatever."

"You don't make it over clear now," the old soldier grumbled. "You mane that these secret societies and Socialists let each other know all that comes in their way and have their own means of getting information."

"Dat may be, and dat may not be," the German answered, in the same oracular voice. "I thought, in any case, my good friend Clutterbuck, dat I vould give you vat you call in English the straight tap. It is always vell to have the straight tap."

"Thank ye, me boy," the major said heartily. "If the firm's in a bad way, either the youngster doesn't know of it, or else he's the most natural actor that ever lived. Be George! there's the tay-bell; let's get down before the bread and butther is all finished."

Mrs. Robbins was in the habit of furnishing her lodgers with an evening meal at a small sum per head. There was only a certain amount of bread and butter supplied for this, however, and those who came late were likely to find an empty platter. The two Bohemians felt that the subject was too grave a one to trifle with, so they suspended their judgment upon the Girdlestones while they clattered down to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI.
SENIOR AND JUNIOR

Although not a whisper had been heard of it in ordinary commercial circles, there was some foundation for the forecast which Von Baumser had made as to the fate of the great house of Girdlestone. For some time back matters had been going badly with the African traders. If the shrewd eyes of Major Tobias Clutterbuck were unable to detect any indications of this state of affairs in the manner or conversation of the junior partner, the reason simply was that that gentleman was entirely ignorant of the imminent danger which hung over his head. As far as he knew, the concern was as prosperous and as flourishing as it had been at the time of the death of John Harston. The momentous secret was locked in the breast of his grim old father, who bore it about with him as the Spartan lad did the fox – without a quiver or groan to indicate the care which was gnawing at his heart. Placed face to face with ruin, Girdlestone fought against it desperately, and, withal, coolly and warily, throwing away no chance and leaving no stone unturned. Above all, he exerted himself – and exerted himself successfully – to prevent any rumour of the critical position of the firm from leaking out in the city. He knew well that should that once occur nothing could save him. As the wounded buffalo is gored to death by the herd, so the crippled man of business may give up all hope when once his position is known by his fellows. At present, although Von Baumser and a few other such Ishmaelites might have an inkling from sources of their own as to how matters stood, the name of Girdlestone was still regarded by business men as the very synonym for commercial integrity and stability. If anything, there seemed to be more business in Fenchurch Street and more luxury at the residence at Eccleston Square than in former days. Only the stern-faced and silent senior partner knew how thin the veneer was which shone so deceptively upon the surface.

Many things had contributed towards this state of affairs. The firm had been involved in a succession of misfortunes, some known to the world, and others known to no one save the elder Girdlestone. The former had been accepted with such perfect stoicism and cheerfulness that they rather increased than diminished the reputation of the concern; the latter were the more crushing, and also the more difficult to bear.

Lines of fine vessels from Liverpool and from Hamburg were running to the West Coast of Africa, and competition had cut down freightage to the lowest possible point. Where the Girdlestones had once held almost a monopoly there were now many in the field. Again, the negroes of the coast were becoming educated and had a keen eye to business, so that the old profits were no longer obtainable. The days had gone by when flint-lock guns and Manchester prints could be weighed in the balance against ivory and gold dust.

While these general causes were at work a special misfortune had befallen the house of Girdlestone. Finding that their fleet of old sailing vessels was too slow and clumsy to compete with more modern ships, they had bought in two first-rate steamers. One was the *Providence*, a fine screw vessel of twelve hundred tons, and the other was the *Evening Star*, somewhat smaller in size, but both classed A1 at Lloyd's. The former cost twenty-two thousand pounds, and the latter seventeen thousand. Now, Mr. Girdlestone had always had a weakness for petty savings, and in this instance he determined not to insure his new vessels. If the crazy old tubs, for which he had paid fancy premiums for so many years with an eye to an ultimate profit, met with no disaster, surely those new powerful clippers were safe. With their tonnage and horse-power they appeared to him to be superior to all the dangers of the deep. It chanced, however, by that strange luck which would almost make one believe that matters nautical were at the mercy of some particularly malignant demon, that as the *Evening Star* was steaming up Channel in a dense fog on her return from her second voyage, she ran right into the *Providence*, which had started that very morning from Liverpool upon her third outward trip. The

Providence was almost cut in two, and sank within five minutes, taking down the captain and six of the crew, while the *Evening Star* was so much damaged about the bows that she put into Falmouth in a sinking condition. That day's work cost the African firm more than five and thirty thousand pounds.

Other mishaps had occurred to weaken the firm, apart from their trade with the coast. The senior partner had engaged in speculation without the knowledge of his son, and the result had been disastrous. One of the Cornish tin mines in which he had sunk a large amount of money, and which had hitherto yielded him a handsome return, became suddenly exhausted, and the shares went down to zero. No firm could stand against such a run of bad luck, and the African trading company reeled before it. John Girdlestone had not said a word yet of all this to his son. As claims arose he settled them in the best manner he could, and postponed the inevitable day when he should have to give a true account of their financial position. He hoped against hope that the chapter of accidents or the arrival of some brilliant cargoes from the coast might set the concern on its legs again.

From day to day he had been expecting news of one of his vessels. At last one morning he found a telegram awaiting him at the office. He tore it eagerly open, for it bore the Madeira mark. It was from his agent, Jose Alveciras, and announced that the voyage from which he had hoped so much had been a total failure. The cargo was hardly sufficient to defray the working expenses. As the merchant read it, his head dropped over the table and he groaned aloud. Another of the props which upheld him from ruin had snapped beneath him.

There were three letters lying beside the telegram. He glanced through them, but there was no consolation in any of them. One was from a bank manager, informing him that his account was somewhat overdrawn. Another from Lloyd's Insurance Agency, pointing out that the policies on two of his vessels would lapse unless paid within a certain date. The clouds were gathering very darkly over the African firm, yet the old man bore up against misfortune with dauntless courage. He sat alone in his little room, with his head sunk upon his breast, and his thatched eye-brows drawn down over his keen grey eyes. It was clear to him that the time had come when he must enlighten his son as to the true state of their affairs. With his co-operation he might carry out a plan which had been maturing some months in his brain.

It was a hard task for the proud and austere merchant to be compelled to confess to his son that he had speculated without his knowledge in the capital of the company, and that a large part of that capital had disappeared. These speculations in many instances had promised large returns, and John Girdlestone had withdrawn money from safer concerns, and reinvested it in the hope of getting a higher rate of interest. He had done this with his eyes open to the risk, and knowing that his son was of too practical and cautious a nature to embark in such commercial gambling, he had never consulted him upon the point, nor had he made any entry of the money so invested in the accounts of the firm. Hence Ezra was entirely ignorant of the danger which hung over them, and his father saw that, in order to secure his energetic assistance in the stroke which he was contemplating, it was absolutely necessary that he should know how critical their position was.

The old man had hardly come to this conclusion when he heard the sharp footfall of his son in the outer office and the harsh tones of his voice as he addressed the clerks. A moment or two later the green baize door flew open, and the young man came in, throwing his hat and coat down on one of the chairs. It was evident that something had ruffled his temper.

"Good-morning," he said brusquely, nodding his head to his father.

"Good-morning, Ezra," the merchant answered meekly.

"What's the matter with you, father?" his son asked, looking at him keenly. "You don't look yourself, and haven't for some time back."

"Business worries, my boy, business worries," John Girdlestone answered wearily.

"It's the infernal atmosphere of this place," Ezra said impatiently. "I feel it myself sometimes. I wonder you don't start a little country seat with some grounds. Just enough to ask a fellow to shoot over, and with a good billiard board, and every convenience of that sort. It would do for us to spend

the time from Saturday to Monday, and allow us to get some fresh air into our lungs. There are plenty of men who can't afford it half as well, and yet have something of the sort. What's the use of having a good balance at your banker's, if you don't live better than your neighbours?"

"There is only one objection to it," the merchant said huskily, and with a forced laugh; "I have not got a good balance at the banker's."

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," his son said knowingly, picking up the long thin volume in which the finance of the firm was recorded and tapping it against the table.

"But the figures there are not quite correct, Ezra," his father said, still more huskily. "We have not got nearly so much as that."

"What!" roared the junior partner.

"Hush! For God's sake don't let the clerks hear you. We have not so much as that. We have very little. In fact, Ezra, we have next to nothing in the bank. It is all gone."

For a moment the young man stood motionless, glaring at his father. The expression of incredulity which had appeared on his features faded away before the earnestness of the other, and was replaced by a look of such malignant passion that it contorted his whole face.

"You fool!" he shrieked, springing forward with the book upraised as though he would have struck the old merchant. "I see it now. You have been speculating on your own hook, you cursed ass! What have you done with it?" He seized his father by the collar and shook him furiously in his wrath.

"Keep your hands off me!" the senior partner cried, wrenching himself free from his son's grasp. "I did my best with the money. How dare you address me so?"

"Did your best!" hissed Ezra, hurling the ledger down on the table with a crash. "What did you mean by speculating without my knowledge, and telling me at the same time that I knew all that was done? Hadn't I warned you a thousand times of the danger of it? You are not to be trusted with money."

"Remember, Ezra," his father said with dignity, re-seating himself in the chair from which he had risen, in order to free himself from his son's clutches, "if I lost the money, I also made it. This was a flourishing concern before you were born. If the worst comes to the worst you are only where I started. But we are far from being absolutely ruined as yet."

"To think of it!" Ezra cried, flinging himself upon the office sofa, and burying his face in his hands. "To think of all I have said of our money and our resources! What will Clutterbuck and the fellows at the club say? How can I alter the ways of life that I have learned?" Then, suddenly clenching his hands, and turning upon his father he broke out, "We must have it back, father; we *must*, by fair means or foul. You must do it, for it was you who lost it. What can we do? How long have we to do it in? Is this known in the City? Oh, I shall be ashamed to show my face on 'Change." So he rambled on, half-maddened by the pictures of the future which rose up in his mind.

"Be calm, Ezra, be calm!" his father said imploringly. "We have many chances yet if we only make the best of them. There is no use lamenting the past. I freely confess that I was wrong in using this money without your knowledge, but I did it from the best of motives. We must put our heads together now to retrieve our losses, and there are many ways in which that may be done. I want your clear common sense to help me in the matter."

"Pity you didn't apply to that before," Ezra said sulkily.

"I have suffered for not doing so," the older man answered meekly. "In considering how to rally under this grievous affliction which has come upon us, we must remember that our credit is a great resource, and one upon which we have never drawn. That gives us a broad margin to help us while we are carrying out our plans for the future."

"What will our credit be worth when this matter leaks out?"

"But it can't leak out. No one suspects it for a moment. They might imagine that we are suffering from some temporary depression of trade, but no one could possibly know the sad truth. For Heaven's sake don't you let it out!"

His son broke into an impatient oath.

A flush came into Girdlestone's sallow cheeks, and his eyes sparkled angrily.

"Be careful how you speak, Ezra. There are limits to what I will endure from you, though I make every allowance for your feelings at this sudden catastrophe, for which I acknowledge myself responsible."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and drummed his heel against the ground impatiently.

"I have more than one plan in my head," the merchant said, "by which our affairs may be re-established on their old footing. If we can once get sufficient money to satisfy our present creditors, and so tide over this run of bad luck, the current will set in the other way, and all will go well. And, first of all, there is one question, my boy, which I should like to ask you. What do you think of John Harston's daughter?"

"She's right enough," the young man answered brusquely.

"She's a good girl, Ezra – a thoroughly good girl, and a rich girl too, though her money is a small thing in my eyes compared to her virtue."

Young Girdlestone sneered. "Of course," he said impatiently. "Well, go on – what about her?"

"Just this, Ezra, that there is no girl in the world whom I should like better to receive as my daughter-in-law. Ah, you rogue! you could come round her; you know you could." The old man poked his long bony finger In the direction of his son's ribs with grim playfulness.

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" remarked the junior partner, with a very unpleasant smile.

"Yes, that is one way out of our difficulties. She has forty thousand pounds, which would be more than enough to save the firm. At the same time you would gain a charming wife."

"Yes, there are a good many girls about who might make charming wives," his son remarked dubiously. "No matrimony for me yet awhile."

"But it is absolutely necessary," his father urged.

"A very fine necessity," Ezra broke in savagely. "I am to tie myself up for life and you are to use all the money in rectifying your blunders. It's a very pretty division of labour, is that."

"The business is yours as well as mine. It is your interest to invest the money in it, for if it fails you are as completely ruined as I should be. You think you could win her if you tried?"

Ezra stroked his dark moustache complacently, and took a momentary glance at his own bold handsome features in the mirror above the fire-place. "If we are reduced to such an expedient, I think I can answer for the result," he said. "The girl's not a bad-looking one. But you said you had several plans. Let us hear some of the other ones. If the worst comes to the worst I might consent to that – on condition, of course, that I should have the whole management of the money."

"Quite so – quite so," his father said hurriedly. "That's a dear, good lad. As you say, when all other things fail we can always fall back upon that. At present I intend to raise as much money as I can upon our credit, and invest it in such a manner as to bring in a large and immediate profit."

"And how do you intend to do this?" his son asked doubtfully.

"I intend," said John Girdlestone, solemnly rising up and leaning his elbow against the mantelpiece – "I intend to make a corner in diamonds."

CHAPTER XII.
A CORNER IN DIAMONDS

John Girdlestone propounded his intention with such dignity and emphasis that he evidently expected the announcement to come as a surprise upon his son. If so, he was not disappointed, for the young man stared open-eyed.

"A corner in diamonds!" he repeated. "How will you do that?"

"You know what a corner is," his father explained. "If you buy up all the cotton, say, or sugar in the market, so as to have the whole of it in your own hands, and to be able to put your own price on it in selling it again – that is called making a corner in sugar or cotton. I intend to make a corner in diamonds."

"Of course, I know what a corner is," Ezra said impatiently. "But how on earth are you going to buy all the diamonds in? You would want the capital of a Rothschild?"

"Not so much as you think, my boy, for there are not any great amount of diamonds in the market at any one time. The yield of the South African fields regulates the price. I have had this idea in my head for some time, and have studied the details. Of course, I should not attempt to buy in all the diamonds that are in the market. A small portion of them would yield profit enough to float the firm off again."

"But if you have only a part of the supply in your hands, how are you to regulate the market value? You must come down to the prices at which other holders are selling."

"Ha! Ha! Very good! very good!" the old merchant said, shaking his head good-humouredly. "But you don't quite see my plan yet. You have not altogether grasped it. Allow me to explain it to you."

His son lay back upon the sofa with a look of resignation upon his face. Girdlestone continued to stand upon the hearth-rug and spoke very slowly and deliberately, as though giving vent to thoughts which had been long and carefully considered.

"You see, Ezra," he said, "diamonds, being a commodity of great value, of which there is never very much in the market at one time, are extremely sensitive to all sorts of influences. The value of them varies greatly from time to time. A very little thing serves to depreciate their price, and an equally small thing will send it up again."

Ezra Girdlestone grunted to show that he followed his father's remarks.

"I did some business in diamonds myself when I was a younger man, and so I had an opportunity of observing their fluctuations in the market. Now, there is one thing which invariably depreciates the price of diamonds. That is the rumour of fresh discoveries of mines in other parts of the world. The instant such a thing gets wind the value of the stones goes down wonderfully. The discovery of diamonds in Central India not long ago had that effect very markedly, and they have never recovered their value since. Do you follow me?"

An expression of interest had come over Ezra's face, and he nodded to show that he was listening.

"Now, supposing," continued the senior partner, with a smile on his thin lips, "that such a report got about. Suppose, too, that we were at this time, when the market was in a depressed condition, to invest a considerable capital in them. If these rumours of an alleged discovery turned out to be entirely unfounded, of course the value of the stones which we held would go up once more, and we might very well sell out for double or treble the sum that we invested. Don't you see the sequence of events?"

"There seems to me to be rather too much of the 'suppose' in it," remarked Ezra. "How do we know that such rumours will get about; and if they do, how do we know that they will prove to be unfounded?"

"How are we to know?" the merchant cried, wriggling his long lank body with amusement. "Why, my lad, if we spread the rumours ourselves we shall have pretty good reason to believe that they are unfounded. Eh, Ezra? Ha! ha! You see there are some brains in the old man yet."

Ezra looked at his father in considerable surprise and some admiration. "Why, damn it!" he exclaimed, "it's dishonest. I'm not sure that it's not actionable."

"Dishonest! Pooh!" The merchant snapped his fingers. "It's finesse, my boy, commercial finesse. Who's to trace it, I should like to know. I haven't worked out all the details – I want your co-operation over that – but here's a rough sketch of my plan. We send a man we can depend upon to some distant part of the world – Chimborazo, for example, or the Ural Mountains. It doesn't matter where, as long as it is out of the way. On arriving at this place our agent starts a report that he has discovered a diamond mine. We should even go the length, if he considers it necessary, of hiding a few rough stones in the earth, which he can dig up to give colour to his story. Of course the local press would be full of this. He might present one of the diamonds to the editor of the nearest paper. In course of time a pretty coloured description of the new diamond fields would find its way to London and thence to the Cape. I'll answer for it that the immediate effect is a great drop in the price of stones. We should have a second agent at the Cape diamond fields, and he would lay our money out by buying in all that he could while the panic lasted. Then, the original scare having proved to be all a mistake, the prices naturally go up once more, and we get a long figure for all that we hold. That's what I mean by making 'a corner in diamonds.' There is no room in it for any miscalculation. It is as certain as a proposition of Euclid, and as easily worked out."

"It sounds very nice," his son remarked thoughtfully. "I'm not so sure about its working, though."

"It must work well. As far as human calculation can go there is no possibility of failure. Besides, my boy, never lose sight of the fact that we shall be speculating with other people's money. We ourselves have nothing to lose, absolutely nothing."

"I am not likely to lose sight of it," said Ezra angrily, his mind coming back to his grievance.

"I reckon that we can raise from forty to fifty thousand pounds without much difficulty. My name is, as you know, as good as that of any firm in the City. For nearly forty years it has been above stain or suspicion. If we carry on our plans at once, and lay this money out judiciously, all may come right."

"It's Hobson's choice," the young man remarked. "We must try some bold

stroke of the sort. Have you chosen the right sort of men for agents?

You should have men of some standing to set such reports going.

They would have more weight then."

John Girdlestone shook his head despondingly. "How am I to get a man of any standing to do such a piece of business?" he said.

"Nothing easier," answered Ezra, with a cynical laugh. "I could pick out a score of impecunious fellows from the clubs who would be only too glad to earn a hundred or two in any way you can mention. All their talk about honour and so forth is very pretty and edifying, but it's not meant for every day use. Of course we should have to pay him."

"Them, you mean?"

"No, we should only want one man."

"How about our purchaser at the diamond fields?"

"You don't mean to say," Ezra said roughly, "that you would be so absurd as to trust any man with our money. Why, I wouldn't let the Archbishop of Canterbury out of my sight with forty thousand pounds of mine. No, I shall go myself to the diamond fields – that is, if I can trust you here alone."

"That is unkind, Ezra," said his father. "Your idea is an excellent one. I should have proposed it myself but for the discomforts and hardships of such a journey."

"There's no use doing things by halves," the young man remarked. "As to our other agent, I have the very man – Major Tobias Clutterbuck. He is a shrewd, clever fellow, and he's always hard up. Last week he wanted to borrow a tenner from me. The job would be a godsend to him, and his social rank would be a great help to our plan. I'll answer for his jumping at the idea."

"Sound him on the subject, then."

"I will."

"I am glad," said the old merchant, "that you and I have had this conversation, Ezra. The fact of my having speculated without your knowledge, and deceived you by a false ledger, has often weighed heavily upon my conscience, I assure you. It is a relief to me to have told you all."

"Drop the subject, then," Ezra said curtly. "I must put up with it, for I have no redress. The thing is done and nothing can undo it; but I consider that you have willfully wasted the money."

"Believe me, I have tried to act for the best. The good name of our firm is everything to me. I have spent my whole life in building it up, and if the day should come when it must go, I trust that I may have gone myself. There is nothing which I would not do to preserve it."

"I see they want our premiums," Ezra said, glancing at the open letter upon the table. "How is it that none of those ships go down? That would give us help."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.