

HENRY WOOD

MILDRED

ARKELL, VOL.

3 (OF 3)

Henry Wood

Mildred Arkell. Vol. 3 (of 3)

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Mrs. Henry Wood

Mildred Arkell: A Novel. Vol. 3 (of 3)

CHAPTER I.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND—A SURPRISE

It happened on that same second of December that Mr. Littelby took his place for the first time as conductor of the business of Mynn and Mynn. He had arrived at Eckford the previous day, as per agreement, but was not installed formally in the office until this. Old Mynn, not in his gout now, had come down early, and was brisk and lively; George Mynn was also there.

He was an admitted solicitor just as much as were Mynn and Mynn; he was to be their confidential *locum tenens*; the whole management and conduct of affairs was, during their absence, to fall upon him; he was, in point of fact, to be practically a principal, not a clerk, and at the end of a year, if all went well, he was to be allowed a share in the business, and the firm would be Mynn, Mynn, and Littelby.

It was not, then, to be wondered at, that the chief of the work this day was the inducting him into the particulars of the various cases that Mynn and Mynn happened to have on hand, more especially those that were to come on for trial at the Westerbury assizes, and would require much attention beforehand. They were shut up betimes, the three, in the small room that would in future be Mr. Littelby's—a room which had hitherto been nobody's in particular, for the premises were commodious, but which Mr. Richards had been in the habit of appropriating as his own, not for office purposes, but for private uses. Quite a cargo of articles belonging to Mr. Richards had been there: coats, parcels, pipes, letters, and various other items too numerous to mention. On the previous day, Richards had received a summary mandate to "clear it out," as it was about to be put in order for the use of Mr. Littelby. Mr. Richards had obeyed in much dudgeon, and his good feeling towards the new manager—his master in future—was not improved. It had not been friendly previously, for Mr. Richards had a vague idea that his way would not be quite so much his own as it had been.

He sat now at his desk in the public office, into which clients plunged down two steps from the landing on the first flight of stairs, as if they had been going into a well. His subordinate, a steady young man named Pope, who was browbeaten by Richards every hour of his life, sat at a small desk apart. Mr. Richards, ostensibly occupied in the perusal of some formidable-looking parchment, was, in reality, biting his nails and frowning, and inwardly wishing he could bring the ceiling down on Mr. Littelby's head, shut up in that adjoining apartment; and could he have invented a decent excuse for sending out Pope, in the teeth of the intimation Mr. George Mynn had just given, that Pope was to stop in, for he should want him, Mr. Richards would have had his own ear to the keyhole of the door.

Mr. Littelby and Mr. Mynn sat at the square table, some separate bundles of papers before them, tied up with red string; Mr. George Mynn stood with his back to the fire. Never was there a keener or a better man of business than Mynn the elder, when his state of health allowed him a respite from pain. He had been well for two or three weeks now, and the office found the benefit of it. *He* was the one to explain matters to Mr. Littelby; Mr. George only put in a word here and there. In due course they came to a small bundle of papers labelled "Carr," and Mr. Mynn, in his rapid, clear, concise manner, gave an outline of the case. Before he had said many words, Mr. Littelby raised his head, his face betokening interest, and some surprise.

"But I thought the Carr case was at an end," he observed. "At least, I supposed it would naturally be so."

"Oh dear no," said old Mynn; "it's coming on for trial at the assizes—that is, if the other side are so foolish as to go on to action. I don't myself think they will be."

"The other side? You mean the widow of Robert Carr the clergyman?" asked Mr. Littelby, scarcely thinking, however, that Mr. Mynn could mean it.

"The widow and the brother—yes. Fauntleroy, of Westerbury, acts for them. But he'll never, as I believe, bring so utterly lame a case into court."

Mr. Littelby wondered what his new chief could mean; he did not understand at all.

"I should have supposed the case would have been brought to an end by you," he observed. "From the moment that the marriage was discovered to have taken place, your clients, the Carrs of Eckford, virtually lost their cause."

"But the marriage has not been discovered to have taken place," said Mr. Mynn.

"Yes, it has. Is it possible that you have not had intimation of it from Mr. Fauntleroy?"

Mr. Mynn paused a moment. Mr. George, who had been looking at his boots, raised his head to listen.

"Where was it discovered?—who discovered it?" asked Mr. Mynn, with the air of a man who does not believe what is being said to him.

"The widow, young Mrs. Carr, found the notice of it. In searching her late father-in-law's desk, she discovered a letter written by him to his son. It was the week subsequent to her husband's death. The letter had slipped between the leaves of an old blotting-book, and lain there unsuspected. While poor Robert Carr the clergyman was wearing away his last days of life in those fruitless searchings of the London churches, he little thought how his own carelessness had forced it upon him. He examined this very desk when his father died, for any papers there might be in it, and must have examined it imperfectly, for there the letter must have been."

"But what was in the letter?" asked George Mynn, speaking for the first time since the topic arose.

"It stated that he had married the young lady who went away with him, Martha Ann Hughes, on the morning they left Westerbury—married her at her own parish church, St.—St.—I forget the name."

"Her parish church was St. James the Less," said Mr. Mynn, speaking very fast.

"Yes, that was it; I remember now. It struck me at the time as being a somewhat uncommon appellation. That is where the marriage took place, on the morning they left Westerbury."

Mr. Mynn sat down; he had need of some rest to recover his consternation. Mr. George never spoke: he said afterwards, that the thought flashed upon him, he could not tell how or why, that the letter was a fraud.

"How did you know of this?" was Mr. Mynn's first question.

Mr. Littelby related how: that Mrs. Carr had informed him of it at the time of the discovery: and, it may be observed, that he was unconscious of breaking any faith in repeating it. Mrs. Carr, attaching little importance to Mr. Fauntleroy's request of keeping it to herself, had either forgotten or neglected to caution Mr. Littelby, to whom it had at once been told. Mr. Littelby, on his part, had never supposed but the discovery had been made known to Mynn and Mynn and the Carrs of Eckford, by Mr. Fauntleroy, and that the litigation had thus been brought to an end.

"And you say this is known to Mr. Fauntleroy?" asked old Mynn.

"Certainly. Mrs. Carr forwarded the letter to him the very hour she discovered it."

"Then what can possess the man not to have sent us notice of it?" he exclaimed. "He'd never be guilty of the child's play of concealing this knowledge until the cause was before the court, and then bringing it forward as a settler! Fauntleroy's sharp in practice; but he'd hardly do this."

"Is it certain that the marriage did take place there?" quietly put in Mr. George Mynn.

They both looked at him; his quiet tone was so full of significance: and Mr. Mynn had to turn round in his chair to do it.

"It appears to me to be a very curious story," continued the younger man. "What sort of a woman is this Mrs. Carr?"

A pause. "You are not thinking that she is capable of—of—concocting any fraud, are you?" cried Mr. Littelby.

"I should be sorry to say it. I only say the thing wears a curious appearance."

"She is entirely incapable of it," returned Mr. Littelby, warmly. "She is quite a young girl, although she has been a wife and mother. Besides, the letter, remember, only stated where the marriage took place, and where its record might be found. I remember she told me that the words in the letter were, that the marriage would be found duly entered in the register."

Mr. Mynn was leaning back in his chair; his hands in his waistcoat pockets, his eyes half closed in thought.

"Did you see this letter, Mr. Littelby?" he inquired, rousing himself.

"No. Mrs. Carr had sent it off to Mr. Fauntleroy. She told me its contents, I daresay nearly word for word."

"Because I really do not think the marriage could have taken place as described. It would inevitably have been known if it had: some persons, surely, would have seen them go into the church; and the parson and clerk must have been cognisant of it! How was it that these people kept the secret? Besides, the parties were away from the town by eight o'clock, or thereabouts."

"I don't know anything about the details," said Mr. Littelby; "but I do know that the letter, stating what I have told you, was found by Mrs. Carr, and that she implicitly believes in it. Would the letter be likely to assert a thing that a minute's time could disprove? If the record of the marriage is not on the register of St. James the Less, to what end state that it is?"

"If this letter stated what you say, Mr. Littelby, rely upon it that the record is there. There have been such things known, mind you"—and old Mynn lowered his voice as he spoke—"as frauds committed on registers; false entries made. And they have passed for genuine, too, to unsuspecting eyes. But, if this is one, it won't pass so with me," he added, rising. "Not a man in the three kingdoms has a keener eye than mine."

"It is impossible that a false entry can have been made in the register!" exclaimed Mr. Littelby, speaking slowly, as if debating the question in his own mind.

"We shall see. I assure you I consider it equally impossible for the marriage to have taken place, as stated, without detection."

"But—assuming your suspicion to be correct—who can have been wicked enough to insert the entry?" cried Mr. Littelby.

"That, I can't tell. The entry of the marriage would take the property from our clients, the Carrs of Eckford, therefore they are exempt from the suspicion. I wonder," continued Mr. Mynn in a half-secret tone, "whether that young clergyman got access to the register when he was down here?"

"That young clergyman was honest as the day," emphatically interrupted Mr. Littelby. "I could answer for his truth and honour with my life. The finding of that letter would have sent him to his grave easier than he went to it."

"There's another brother, is there not?"

"Yes. But he is in Holland, looking after the home affairs, which are also complicated. He has not been here at all since his father's death."

"Ah, one doesn't know," said old Mynn, glancing at his watch. "Hundreds of miles have intervened, before now, between a committed fraud and its plotter. Well, we will say no more at present. I'll tell you more when I have had a look at this register. It will not deceive *me*."

"Are you going over now?" asked Mr. George.

"At once," replied old Mynn, with decision; "and I'll bring you back my report and my opinion as soon as may be."

But Mr. Mynn was away considerably longer than there appeared any need that he should be. When he did arrive he explained that his delay arose from the effectual and thorough searching of the register.

"I don't know what could have been the meaning or the use of that letter you told us of, Mr. Littelby," he said, as he took off his coat; "there is no entry of the marriage in the church register of St. James the Less."

"No entry of it!"

"None whatever."

Mr. Littelby did not at once speak: many thoughts were crowding upon his mind. He and old Mynn were standing now, and George Mynn was sitting with his elbow on the table, and his aching head leaning on his hand. The least excitement out of common, sometimes only the sitting for a day in the close office, would bring on these intolerable headaches.

"I have searched effectually—and I don't suppose the old clerk of the church blessed me for keeping him there—and I am prepared to take an affidavit, if necessary, that no such marriage is recorded in the book," continued the elder lawyer. "What could have been the aim or object of that letter, I cannot fathom."

"Mr. Carr will not come into the money, then?" said Mr. Littelby.

"Of course not, so far as things look at present. I thought it was very strange, if such a thing had been there, that Fauntleroy did not let it be known," he emphatically added.

"You are sure you have fully searched?"

"Mr. Littelby, I have fully searched," was the reply; and the lawyer was not pleased at being asked the question after what he had said. "There is no such marriage entered there; and rely upon it no such marriage ever was entered there. I might go farther and say, with safety in my opinion, that there never was such marriage entered anywhere."

"Then why should Robert Carr, the elder, have written the letter?"

"*Did* he write it? It may be a question."

"No, he never wrote it," interposed George Mynn, looking up. "There was some wicked plot concocted—I don't say by whom, and I can't say it—of which this letter was the prologue. Perhaps the epilogue—the insertion of the marriage in the register—was frustrated; possibly this letter was found before its time, and the despatching it to Mr. Fauntleroy marred the whole. How can we say?"

"We can't say," returned old Mynn. "One thing I can say and affirm—that there's no record; and had the letter been a genuine one, the entry would be there now."

"I wonder if Mr. Fauntleroy believes the entry to be there?" cried Mr. Littelby. "I am nearly sure that he has not given notice of the contrary to Mrs. Carr. She would have told me if he had."

"If Fauntleroy has been so foolish as to take the information in the letter for granted, without sending to see the register, he must put up with the consequences," said old Mynn; "I shall not enlighten him."

He spoke as he felt—cross. Mr. Mynn was not pleased at having spent the best part of the day over what he had found to be a fool's errand; neither did he like to have been startled unnecessarily. He sat down and drew the papers before him, saying something to the effect that perhaps they could attend to their legitimate business, now that the other was disposed of. Mr. Littelby caught the cue, and resolved to say no more in that office of Carr *versus* Carr.

And so, it was a sort of diamond cut diamond. Mr. Fauntleroy had said nothing to Mynn and Mynn of his private information; and Mynn and Mynn would say nothing to Mr. Fauntleroy of theirs.

Christmas drew on. Mrs. Dundyke, alone now, for Mr. Carr had gone back to Holland, was seated one afternoon by her drawing-room fire, in the twilight, musing very sadly on the past. The servants were at tea in the kitchen, and one of them had just been up to ask her mistress if she would take a cup, as she sometimes did before her late dinner, and had gone down again, leaving unintentionally the room door unlatched.

As the girl entered the kitchen, the sound of laughter and merriment came forth to the ears of Mrs. Dundyke. It quite jarred upon her heart. How often has it occurred to us, bending under the weight of some secret trouble that goes well-nigh to break us, to envy our unconscious servants, who seem to have no care!

The kitchen door closed again, and silence supervened—a silence that soon began to make itself felt, as it will in these moments of gloom. Mrs. Dundyke was aroused from it in a remarkable manner; not violently or loudly, but still in so strange a way, that her mouth opened in consternation as she listened, and she rose noiselessly from her chair in a sort of horror.

She had distinctly heard the latch-key put into the street-door lock; just as she had heard it many a time when her husband used to come home from business in the year last gone by. She heard it turned in the lock, the peculiar click it used to give, and she heard the door quietly open and then close again, as if some one had entered. Not since they went abroad the previous July had she heard those sounds, or had the door thus been opened. There had been but that one latch-key to the door, and Mr. Dundyke, either by chance or intention, had carried it away with him in his pocket. It had been in his pocket during the whole period of their travels, and been lost with him.

What could it mean? Who had come in? Footsteps, slow, hesitating footsteps were crossing the hall; they seemed to halt at the dining-room, and were now ascending the stairs. Mrs. Dundyke was by far too practical a woman to believe in ghosts, but that anything but the ghost of her husband could open the door with that latch-key and be stealing up, was hard to believe.

"Betsey!"

If ever she felt a wish to sink into the wall, or through the floor, she felt it then. The voice which had called out the familiar home name, was her husband's voice; his, and yet not his. His, in a manner; but querulous, worn, weakened. She stood in horror, utterly bewildered, not daring to move, her arms clasping a chair for protection, she knew not from what, her eyes strained on the unlatched door. That it could be her husband returned in life, her thoughts never so much as glanced at.

He pushed open the door, and came in without any surprise in his face or greeting on his tongue; came in and went straight to the fire, and sat down in a chair before it, just as though he had not been gone away an hour—he who had once been David Dundyke. Was it David Dundyke still—*was* it? He looked thin and shabby, and his hair was cut close to his head, and he was altogether altered. Mrs. Dundyke was gazing at him with a fixed, unnatural stare, like one who has been seized with catalepsy.

He saw her standing there, and turned his head, looking at her for a full minute.

"Betsey!"

She went forward then; it *was* her husband, and in life. What the mystery could have been she did not know yet—did not glance at in that wild moment—but she fell down at his knees and clasped him to her, and wept delirious tears of joy and agony.

It seemed—when the meeting was over, and the marvelling servants had shaken hands with him, and he had been refreshed with dinner, and the time came for questions—that he could not explain much of the mystery either. He had evidently undergone some great change, physically and mentally, and it had left him the wreck of what he was, with his faculties impaired, and a hesitating speech.

More especially impaired in memory. He could recollect so little of the past; indeed, their sojourn at the hotel at Geneva seemed to have gone from his mind altogether. Mrs. Dundyke saw that he must have had some sort of brain attack; but, what, she could not tell.

"David, where have you been all this while?" she said, soothingly, as he lay on the sofa she had drawn to the fire, and she sat on a stool beneath and clasped his hand.

"All this while? I came back directly."

She paused. "Came back from where?"

"From the bed."

"The bed!" she repeated; and her heart beat with a sick faintness as she felt, for the twentieth time, that henceforth he could only be questioned as a child. "From the bed you lay in when you were ill?"

"Yes."

"Were you ill long?"

"No. I lay in it after I got well: my head and my legs were not strong. They turned. It was the bed in the kitchen with the large white pillows. They slept in the back room."

"Who did?"

"Paul and Marie. She's his wife."

"Did they take care of you?"

"Yes, they took care of me. Little Paul used to fetch the water. He's seven."

"Do you remember—" (she spoke the words with trembling, lest the name should excite him) "Mr. Hardcastle?"

It did in some degree. He lay looking at his wife, his face and thoughts working. "Hardcastle! It was him that—that—was with me when I fell down."

"Where did you fall?" she asked, as quietly as she could.

"In the sun. We walked a long, long way, and he gave me something to drink out of a bottle, and I was giddy, and he told me to go to sleep."

"Did he stay with you?"

Mr. Dundyke stared as though he did not understand the question.

"I went giddy. He took my pocket-book; he took out the letters, and put it back to me again. Paul found it. I went to sleep in the sun."

"When did Paul find it?"

David Dundyke appeared unable to comprehend the "when." "In his cart," he said; "he found me too."

"David, dear, try and recollect; did Paul take you to his cottage?"

David looked puzzled, and then nodded his head several times, as if wishing to convince himself of the fact.

"And I suppose you were ill there?"

"I suppose I was ill there; they said so. Marie spoke English; she had been at—at—at sea."

This was not very perspicuous, but Mrs. Dundyke did not care for minor details.

"How did you come home?" she asked. And she glanced suddenly down at his boots; an idea presenting itself to her, that she might see them worn and travel-stained. But they were not. They were the same boots that he had on that last morning in Geneva, and they appeared to have been little worn.

"How did I come home?" he repeated. "I came. Marie said I was well enough. Paul changed the note."

"What note?" she asked.

"The note from England. He didn't see that when he took the others."

"He" evidently meant Mr. Hardcastle. She began to comprehend a little, and put her questions accordingly.

"Mr. Hardcastle must have robbed you, David."

"Mr. Hardcastle robbed me."

She found he had a habit of repeating her words. She had noticed the same peculiarity before, in cases of decaying intellect.

"The bank note that he did not find was the one you had written for over and above what you wanted. Why did you write for it, David?"

This was a back question, and it took a great many others before David could answer. "He might have wanted to borrow more," he said at length; "I'd have lent him all then."

Poor man! That he should have had such blind faith in Mr. Hardcastle as to send for money in case he should "want to borrow more!" Mrs. Dundyke had taken this view of the case from the first.

"You don't believe in him now, David?"

"I don't believe in him now. He has got my bank notes; and he left me in the sun. Paul, put me in the cart when it came by."

"David, why did you not write to me?"

David stared. "I came," he said. And she found afterwards, that he could not write; she was to find that he never attempted to write again.

"Did you send to Geneva?—to me?"

"To Geneva?—to me?"

"To me—me, David; not to you. Did you send to Geneva?"

He shook his head, evidently not knowing what she meant, and seemed to think. Mrs. Dundyke felt nearly sure that he must have lain long insensible, for weeks, perhaps months; that is, not sufficiently conscious to understand or remember; and that when he grew better, Geneva and its doings had faded from his remembrance.

"How did you come home, David?" she asked again. "Did you come alone?"

"Did you come alone—yes, in the diligences, and rail, and sea. I told them all to take me to England; Paul got the money for me; he took the note and brought it back."

Paul had changed it into French money; that must be the meaning of it. Mr. Dundyke put his hand in his pocket and pulled out sundry five-franc pieces.

"Marie's got some. I gave her half."

Mrs. Dundyke hoped it was so. She could hardly understand yet, how he could have found his way home alone; even with the help of "I told them all to take me to England."

"David!" she whispered, "David! I don't know how I shall ever be thankful enough to God!"

"I'd like some porter."

It was a contrast that grated on her ear; the animal want following without break on the spiritual aspiration. She was soon to find that any finer feeling he might ever have possessed, had gone with his mind. He could eat and drink still, and understand that; but there was something wrong with the brain.

"How did you come down here to-night, David?"

"How did I come down here to-night? There was the omnibus."

The questions began to pain her. "He is fatigued," she thought; "perhaps he will answer better to-morrow." The porter was brought to him, and he fell asleep immediately after drinking it. She rose from her low seat, and sat down in a chair opposite to him.

It was like a dream; and Mrs. Dundyke all but pinched herself to see whether she was awake or asleep. She believed that she could tell pretty accurately what the past had been. Mr. Hardcastle had followed her husband to the side of the lake that morning, had in some way induced him to go away from it; had taken him a long, long way into the cross country—and it must have been at that time that the Swiss peasant, who gave his testimony at Geneva, had seen them. At the proper opportunity, Mr. Hardcastle must have, perhaps, given him some stupefying drink, and then robbed him and left him; but Mrs. Dundyke inclined to the opinion that the man must have believed Mr. Dundyke insensible, or he surely would never have allowed him to see him take the notes. He must then have lain, it was hard to say how long, before Paul found him; and the lying thus in the sun probably induced the fit, or sun-stroke, or brain fever, whatever it was, that attacked him. He spoke of a cart: and she concluded that Paul must have been many miles out of the route of his home, or else the search instituted would surely have found him, had he been within a few miles of Geneva. Why these people had kept him, had not declared him to the nearest authorities, it was hard to say. They might have kept him from benevolent motives; or might have seen the bank note in his pocket-book, and kept him from motives of worldly interest. However it might be, they had shown themselves worthy Christian people, and she should ever be deeply grateful. *He* had evidently no idea of the flight of time since; perhaps—

"What do you wear that for?"

He was lying with his eyes open, and pointing to the widow's cap. She rose and bent over him, as she answered—

"David! David, dear! we have been mourning you as dead."

"Mourning me as dead! I am not dead."

No, he was not dead, and she was shedding happy tears for it, as she threw the cap off from the braids of her still luxuriant hair.

As well, perhaps, almost that he had been dead! for the best part of his life, the mind's life, was over. No more intellect; no more business for him in Fenchurch-street; no more ambitious aspirations after the civic chair!—it was all over for ever for poor David Dundyke.

But he had come home. He who was supposed to be lying dead—murdered—had come home. It was a strange fact to go forth to the world: one amidst the extraordinary tales that now and then arise to startle it almost into disbelief.

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBTFUL SEARCH

On the 3rd of February the college boys reassembled for school, after the Christmas holidays. Rather explosive were the choristers at times at getting no holidays—as they were pleased to regard it; for they had to attend the cathedral twice daily always. Strictly speaking, the boys had assembled on the previous day, the 2nd of February, and those who lived at a distance, or had been away visiting, had to be back for that day. It is Candlemas Day, as everybody knows, and a saint's day; and on saints' days the king's scholars had to attend the services.

On the 3rd the duties of the school began, and at seven in the morning the boys were clattering up the steps. It was not a propitious morning: snow and sleet doing battle, one against the other. Jocelyn had left, and the eldest of the two Prattletons had succeeded him as senior. Cookesley was second senior, Lewis third, and the eldest of the Aultanes was fourth.

The boys were not assembling in any great amount of good feeling. Lewis, who with his brother had passed the holidays at the house of the late Marmaduke Carr, and consequently had been in Westerbury, did not forget the grudge he owed to Henry Arkell. It had been Mr. Lewis's pleasure to spend his leisure-hours (time, possibly, hanging somewhat heavily on his hands) in haunting the precincts of the cathedral. Morning, noon, and night had he been seen there; now hovering like a ghost in one of the cloister quadrants, now playing at solitary pitch-and-toss in the grounds, and now taking rather slow, meditative steps past the deanery. He had thus made himself aware that Henry Arkell and Miss Beauclerc not unfrequently met; whether by accident or design on the young lady's part, she best knew. Four times each day had Henry Arkell to be in the grounds and cloisters on his way to and from college; and, at the very least, on two of those occasions, Miss Beauclerc would happen to be passing. She always stopped. Lewis had seen him sometimes walking on with only a lift of the trencher, and Miss Beauclerc would not have it, but stopped as usual. There was no whispering, there were apparently few secrets; the talking was open and full of gaiety on the young lady's part, if her laughter was anything to judge by; but Lewis was not the less savage. When *he* met her, she would say indifferently, "How d'ye do, Lewis?" and pass on. Once, Lewis presumed to stop her with some item of news that ought to have proved interesting, but Miss Beauclerc scarcely listened, made some careless remark in answer, and continued her way: the next minute she met Henry Arkell, and stayed with *him*. That Lewis was in love with the dean's daughter, he knew to his sorrow. How worse than foolish it had been on his part to suffer himself to fall in love with her, we might say, but that this passion comes to us without our will. Lewis believed that she loved Henry Arkell; he believed that but for Henry Arkell being in the field, some favour might be shown to him; and he had gone on hating him with a fierce and bitter hatred. One day, Henry had come springing down the steps of the cathedral, and encountered Miss Beauclerc close to him. They stood there on the red flagstones of the cloisters, no gravestone being in that particular spot, Georgina laughing and talking as usual. Lewis was in the opposite quadrant of the cloisters, peeping across stealthily, and a devout wish crossed his heart that Arkell was buried on the spot where he then stood. Lewis was fated not to forget that wish.

How he watched, day after day, none save himself saw or knew. He was training for an admirable detective in plain clothes. He suspected there had been some coolness between Henry and Miss Beauclerc, and that she was labouring to dispel it; he knew that Arkell did not go to the deanery so much as formerly, and he heard Miss Beauclerc reproach him for it. Lewis had given half his life for such a reproach from her lips to be addressed to him.

There were so many things for which he hated Henry Arkell! There was his great progress in his studies, there was the brilliant examination he had undergone, and there was the gold medal. Could Lewis have conveniently got at that medal, it had soon been melted down. He had also taken up an

angry feeling to Arkell on account of the doings of that past November night—the locking up in the church of St. James the Less. Lewis had grown to nourish a very strange notion in regard to it. After puzzling his brain to torment, as to how Arkell *could* have got out, and finding no solution, he arrived at length at the conclusion that he had never been in. He must have left the church previously, Lewis believed, and he had locked up an empty church. It is true he had thought he heard the organ going, but he fully supposed now that he heard it only in fancy. Arkell's silence on the point contributed to this idea: it was entirely beyond Lewis's creed to suppose a fellow could have such a trick played him and not complain of it. Arkell had never given forth token of cognisance from that hour to this, and Lewis assumed he had not been in.

It very much augmented his ill feeling, especially when he remembered his own night of horrible anticipation. Mr. Lewis had come to the final conclusion that Arkell had been "out on the spree;" and but for a vague fear that his own share in the night's events might be dragged to light, he would certainly have contrived that it should reach the ears of Mr. Wilberforce. He and his brother were to be for another half year boarders at the master's house. Cookesley acted there as senior; the senior boy, Prattleton, living at home.

The boys trooped into the schoolroom, and Prattleton stood with the roll in his hand. Lewis had not joined on the previous day; he had obtained grace until this, for he wanted to spend it at Eckford. As he came in now, he made rather a parade of shaking hands with Prattleton, and wishing him joy of his honours. Most of the boys liked to begin by being in favour with a new senior, however they might be fated to end, and Lewis and Prattleton were great personal friends—it may be said confidants. Lewis had partially trusted Prattleton with the secret of his love for Miss Beauclerc; and he had fully entrusted him with his hatred of Henry Arkell. Scarcely a minute were they together at any time, but Lewis was speaking against Arkell; telling this against him, telling that. Constant dropping will wear away a stone; and Prattleton listened until he was in a degree imbued with the same feeling. Personally, he had no dislike to Arkell himself; but, incited by Lewis, he was quite willing to do him any ill turn privately.

The roll was called over when Henry Arkell entered. He put down a load of books he carried, and went up to Prattleton to shake hands, as Lewis had done; being a chorister, he had not gone into the schoolroom on the previous day; and he wished him all good luck.

"I am sorry to have to mark you late on the first morning, Arkell," Prattleton quietly said as he shook hands with him. "The school has a superstition, you know—that anyone late on the first morning will be so, as a rule, through the half."

"I know," answered Henry. "It is no fault of mine. Mr. Wilberforce desired me to tell you that he detained me, therefore I am to be marked as having been present."

"Did he detain you?"

"For ten minutes at least. I met him as I was coming in, and he caused me to go back with him to his house and bring in these books. He then gave me the message to you."

"All right," said Prattleton, cheerfully: and he erased the cross against Arkell's name, and marked him as present.

Even this little incident exasperated Lewis. His ill feeling rendered him unjust. No other boy, that he could remember, had been marked as present, not being so. He was beginning to say something sarcastic upon the point, when the entrance of the master himself shut up his tongue for the present.

But we cannot stop with the college boys just now.

On this same day, later, when the sun, had there been any sun to see, was nearing the meridian, Lawyer Fauntleroy sat in his private office, deep in business. Not a more clever lawyer than he throughout the town of Westerbury; and to such men business flocks in. His table stood at a right angle with the fireplace, and the blazing fire burning there, threw its heat upon his face, and his feet rested on a soft thick mat of wool. Mr. Fauntleroy, no longer young, was growing fonder and fonder of the comforts of life, and he sat there cosily, heedless of the hail that beat on the window without.

The door softly opened, and a clerk came in. It was Kenneth. "Are you at home, sir?"

Mr. Fauntleroy glanced up from the parchment he was bending over—a yellow-looking deed, and his brow looked forth displeasure. "I told you I did not care to be interrupted this morning, Kenneth, unless it was for anything very particular. Who is it?"

"A lady, sir. 'Mrs. Carr' was the name she gave in."

"Carr—Carr?" debated Mr. Fauntleroy, unable to recal any lady of the name amidst his acquaintance. "No. I have no leisure for ladies to-day."

Kenneth hesitated. "It's not likely to be the Mrs. Carr in Carr v. Carr; the lady you have had some correspondence with, is it, sir?" he waited to ask. "She is a stranger, and is dressed as a widow."

"The Mrs. Carr in Carr v. Carr!" repeated Mr. Fauntleroy. "By Jupiter, I shouldn't wonder if she's come to Westbury! But I thought she was in Holland. Show her in."

Mr. Kenneth retired, and came back with the visitor. It was Mrs. Carr. Mr. Fauntleroy pushed aside the deed before him, and rose to salute her, wondering at her extreme youth. She spoke English fluently, but with a foreign accent, and she entered at once upon the matter which had brought her to Westbury.

"A circumstance has occurred to renew the old anxiety about this cause," she said to Mr. Fauntleroy. "Should we lose it, I shall lose all I have at present to look forward to, for our affairs in Holland are more complicated than ever. It may turn out, Mr. Fauntleroy, that my share of this inheritance will be all I and my little children will have to depend upon in the world."

"But the cause is safe," returned Mr. Fauntleroy. "The paper you found and forwarded to me last October—or stay, November, wasn't it—"

"Would you be so kind as let me see that paper?" she interrupted.

Mr. Fauntleroy rose and brought forward a bundle of papers labelled "Carr." He drew out a letter, and laid it open before his visitor. It was the one you saw before; the letter written by Robert Carr the elder to his son, stating that the marriage had been solemnized at the church of St. James the Less, and that the entry of it would be found there.

"And there the marriage is entered, as I subsequently wrote you word," observed Mr. Fauntleroy. "It is singular how your husband could have overlooked that letter."

"It had slipped between the leaves of the blotting-book, or else been placed there purposely by Mr. Carr," she answered; "and my husband may not have been very particular in examining the desk, for at that time he did not know his legitimacy would be disputed. Are you sure it is in the register, sir?" she continued, some anxiety in her tone.

"Quite sure," replied Mr. Fauntleroy. "I sent to St. James's to search as soon as I got this letter, glad enough to have the clue at last; and there it was found."

"Well—it is very strange," observed Mrs. Carr, after a pause. "I will tell you what it is that has made me so anxious and brought me down. But, in the first place, I must observe that I concluded the cause was at an end. I cannot understand why the other side did not at once give up when that letter was discovered."

Knowing that *he* had kept the other side in ignorance of the letter, Mr. Fauntleroy was not very explanatory on this point. Mrs. Carr continued—

"My husband had a friend of the name of Littelby, a solicitor. He was formerly the manager of an office in London, but about two months since he left it for one in the country, Mynn and Mynn's—"

"Mynn and Mynn," interrupted Mr. Fauntleroy; "that's the firm who are conducting the case for your adversaries—the Carrs, of Eckford. Littelby? Yes, it is the name of their new man, I remember."

"Well, sir, last week Mr. Littelby was in London, and he called at Mrs. Dundyke's, where I had been staying since I came over from Holland, a fortnight before. The strangest thing has happened there! Mr. Dundyke—but you will not thank me to take up your time, perhaps, with matters that don't concern you. Mr. Littelby spoke to me upon the subject of the letter that I had found, and he

said he feared there was something wrong about it, though he could not conceive how, for that there had been no marriage, so far as could be discovered."

"He can say the moon's made of green cheese if he likes," cried Mr. Fauntleroy.

"He said that the opinion of Mynn and Mynn was, that the pretended letter had been intended as a *ruse*—a false plea, written to induce the other side to give up peaceably; but that most positively there was no truth in the statement of the marriage being in the register. Sir, I am sure Mr. Littelby must have had good cause for saying this," emphatically continued Mrs. Carr "He is a man incapable of deceit, and he wishes well to me and my children. The last advice he gave me was, not to be sanguine; for Mynn and Mynn were clever and cautious practitioners, and he knew they made sure the cause was theirs."

"Sharp men," acquiesced Mr. Fauntleroy, nodding his head with a fellow-feeling of approval; "but we have got the whip hand of them in your case, Mrs. Carr."

"I thought it better to tell you this," said she, rising. "It has made me so uneasy that I have scarcely slept since; for I know Mr. Littelby would not discourage me without cause."

"Without fancying he has cause," corrected Mr. Fauntleroy. "Be at ease, ma'am: the marriage is as certain as that oak and ash grow. Where are you staying in Westerbury?"

"In some lodgings I was recommended to in College-row," answered she, producing a card. "Perhaps you will take down the address—"

"Oh, no need for that," said Mr. Fauntleroy, glancing at it, "I know the lodgings well. Mind they don't shave you."

Mrs. Carr was shown out, and Mr. Fauntleroy called in his managing clerk. "Kenneth," said he, "let the Carr cause be completed for counsel; and when the brief's ready, I'll look over it to refresh my memory. Send Omer down to St. James the Less, to take a copy of the marriage."

"I thought Omer brought a copy," observed Mr. Kenneth.

"No; I don't think so. It will save going again if he did. Ask him."

Mr. Kenneth returned to the clerks' office. "Omer, did you bring a copy of the marriage in the case, Carr v. Carr, when you searched the register at St. James's church?" he demanded.

"No," replied Omer.

"Then why did you not?"

"I had no orders, sir. Mr. Fauntleroy only told me to look whether such an entry was there."

"Then you must go now—What's that you are about? Winter's settlement? Why, you have had time to finish that twice over."

"I have been out all the morning with that writ," pleaded Omer, "and could not get to serve it at last. Pretty well three hours I was standing in the passage next his house, waiting for him to come out, and the wind whistling my head off all the time."

Mr. Kenneth vouchsafed no response to this; but he would not disturb the clerk again from Winter's deed. He ordered another, Mr. Green, to go to St. James's church for the copy, and threw him half-a-crown to pay for it.

Young Mr. Green did not relish the mission, and thought himself barbarously used in being sent upon it, inasmuch as that he was an articled clerk and a gentleman, not a paid nobody. "Trapesing through the weather all down to that St. James's!" muttered he, as he snatched his hat and greatcoat.

It struck three o'clock before he came back. "Where's Kenneth?" asked he, when he entered.

"In the governor's room. You can go in."

Mr. Green did go in, and Mr. Kenneth broke out into anger. "You have taken your time!"

"I couldn't come quicker," was Mr. Green's reply. "I had to look all through the book. The marriage is not there."

"It is thrift to send you upon an errand," retorted Mr. Kenneth. "You have not been searching."

"I have done nothing else but search since I left. If the entry had been there, Mr. Kenneth, I should have been back in no time. It is not exactly a day to stop for pleasure in a mouldy old church that's colder than charity, or to amuse oneself in the streets."

Mr. Fauntleroy looked up from his desk. "The entry is there, Green: you have overlooked it."

"Sir, I assure you that the entry is not there," repeated Mr. Green. "I looked very carefully."

"Call in Omer," said Mr. Fauntleroy. "You saw the entry of Robert Carr's marriage to Martha Ann Hughes?" he continued, when Omer appeared.

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure of it?"

"Certainly, sir. I saw it and read it."

"You hear, Mr. Green. You have overlooked it."

"If Omer can find it there, I'll do his work for a week," retorted young Green. "I will pledge you my veracity, sir—"

"Never mind your veracity," interrupted Mr. Fauntleroy; "it is a case of oversight, not of veracity. Kenneth, you have to go down to Clark's office about that bill of costs; you may as well go on to St. James's and get the copy."

"Two half-crowns to pay instead of one, through these young fellows' negligence," grumbled Mr. Kenneth. "They charge it as many times as they open their vestry."

"What's that to him? it doesn't come out of his pocket," whispered Green to Omer, as they returned to their own room. "But if they find the Carr marriage entered there, I'll be shot in two."

"And I'll be shot in four if they don't," retorted Omer. "What a blind beetle you must have been, Green!"

Mr. Kenneth came back from his mission. He walked straight into the presence of Mr. Fauntleroy, and beckoning Omer in after him, attacked him with a storm of reproaches.

"Do you drink, Mr. Omer?"

"Drink, sir!"

"Yes, drink. Are the words not plain enough?"

"No, sir, I do not," returned Omer, in astonishment.

"Then, Mr. Omer, I tell you that you do. No man, unless he was a drunken man, could pretend to see things which have no place. When you read that entry of Robert Carr's marriage in the register, you saw double, for it never was anywhere but in your brain. There is no entry of the marriage in St. James's register," he added, turning to Mr. Fauntleroy.

Mr. Fauntleroy's mouth dropped considerably. "No entry!"

"Nothing of the sort!" continued Mr. Kenneth. "There's no name, and no marriage, and no anything—relating to Robert Carr."

"Bless my heart, what an awful error to have been drawn into!" uttered Mr. Fauntleroy, who was so entirely astounded by the news, that he, for the moment, doubted whether anything was real about him. "All the expense I have been put to will fall upon me; the widow has not a rap, certain; and to take her body in execution would bring no result, save increasing the cost. Mr. Omer, are you prepared to take these charges on yourself, for the error your carelessness has led us into? I should not have gone on paying costs myself but for that alleged entry in the register."

Mr. Omer looked something like a mass of petrification, unable to speak or move.

"But for the marriage being established—as we were led to suppose—we never should have gone on to trial. Mrs. Carr must have relinquished it," continued Mr. Fauntleroy.

"Of course we should not," chimed in the managing clerk.

"I thought there must be some flaw in the wind; I declare I did, by the other side's carrying it on, now that I find Mynn and Mynn knew of the alleged marriage," exclaimed Mr. Fauntleroy. "I shall look to you for reimbursement, Omer. And, Mr. Kenneth, you'll search out some one in his

place: we cannot retain a clerk in our office who is liable to lead us into ruinous mistakes, by asserting that black is white."

Mr. Omer was beginning to recover his senses. "Sir," he said, "you are angry with me without cause. I can be upon my oath that the marriage of Robert Carr with Martha Ann Hughes is entered there: I repeated to you, sir, the date, and the names of the witnesses: how could I have done that without reading them?"

"That's true enough," returned Mr. Fauntleroy, his hopes beginning to revive.

"Here's a proof," continued the young man, taking out a worn pocket-book. "I am a bad one to remember Christian names, so I just copied the names of the witnesses here in pencil. 'Edward Blisset Hughes,' and 'Sophia Hughes,'" he added, holding it towards Mr. Fauntleroy.

"They were her brother and sister," remarked Mr. Fauntleroy, in soliloquy, looking at the pencilled marks. "Both are dead now; at least, news came of her death, and he has not been heard of for years: she married young Pycroft."

"Well, sir," argued Omer, "if these names had not been in the register, how could I have taken them down? I did not know the names before, or that there ever were such people."

The argument appeared unanswerable, and Mr. Fauntleroy looked at his head clerk. The latter was not deficient in common sense, and he was compelled to conclude that he had himself done what he had accused Mr. Green of doing—overlooked it.

"Allow me to go down at once to St. James's, sir," resumed Omer.

"I will go with you," said Mr. Fauntleroy. The truth was, he was ill at ease.

They proceeded together to St. James's church, causing old Hunt to believe that Lawyer Fauntleroy and his establishment of clerks had all gone crazy together. "Search the register three times in one day!" muttered he; "nobody has never done such a thing in the memory of man."

But neither Omer nor his master, Mr. Fauntleroy, could find any such entry in the register.

CHAPTER III. DETECTION

Afternoon school was over. Mr. Wilberforce had been some time at home, and was bestowing a sharp lecture on his son Edwin for some delinquency, when he was told that Lawyer Fauntleroy waited in his study. The master brought his anger to a summary conclusion, and went into the presence of his visitor.

"My business is not of a pleasant nature," he premised. "I must tell you in confidence, Mr. Wilberforce, that after all the doubt and discredit cast upon the affair, Robert Carr was discovered to have married that girl at St. James's—your church now—and the entry was found there."

"I know it," said Mr. Wilberforce. "I saw it in the register."

The lawyer stared. "Just repeat that, will you?" said he, putting his hand to his ear as if he were deaf.

"I heard it was to be found there, and the first time afterwards that I had occasion to make an entry in the register, I turned back to the date, out of curiosity, and read it."

"Now I am as pleased to hear you say that as if you had put me down a five-hundred pound note," cried Mr. Fauntleroy. "I daresay you'll not object, if called upon, to bear testimony that the marriage was registered there."

"The register itself will be the best testimony," observed Mr. Wilberforce.

"It would have been," said the lawyer; "but that entry has been taken out of the register."

"Taken out!" repeated Mr. Wilberforce.

"Taken out. It is not in now."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the master.

"So I said, when my clerks brought me word to-day that it was not in. The first sent, Green—you know the young dandy; it's but the other day he was in the college school—came back and said it was not there. Kenneth gave him a rowing for carelessness, and went himself. He came back and said it was not there. Then I thought it was time to go; and I went, and took Omer with me, who saw the entry in the book last November, and copied part of it. Green was right, and Kenneth was right; there is no such entry there."

"This is an incredible tale," exclaimed Mr. Wilberforce.

The old lawyer drew forward his chair, and peered into the rector's face. "There has been some devilry at work—saving your calling."

"Not saving it at all," retorted Mr. Wilberforce, as hot as when he had been practically demonstrating of what birch is made in the college schoolroom. "Devilry has been at work, in one sense or another, and nothing short of devilry, if it be as you say."

"It has not only gone, but there's no trace of it's going, or how it went. The register looks as smooth and complete as though it had never been in any hands but honest ones. But now," added the lawyer, "there's another thing that is puzzling me almost as much as the disappearance itself; and that is, how you got to know of it."

"I heard of it from Travice Arkell."

"From Travice Arkell!"

"Yes, I did. And the way I came to hear of it was rather curious," continued the master. "One of my parishioners was thought to be dying, and I was sent for in a hurry, out of early school. Mr. Prattleton generally attends these calls for me, but this poor man had expressed a wish that I myself should go to him. It was between eight and nine o'clock, and Travice Arkell was standing at their gates as I passed, reading a letter which the postman had just delivered to him. It was from Mrs. Dundyke, with whom the Carrs were stopping—"

"When was this?" interrupted Mr. Fauntleroy.

"The beginning of November. Travice Arkell stopped me to tell of the strange news that the letter conveyed to him; that a paper had been found in Robert Carr the elder's writing, stating that the marriage had taken place at St. James the Less, the morning he and Miss Hughes left Westbury, and it would be found duly entered in the register. The news appeared to me so excessively improbable, that I cautioned Travice Arkell against speaking of it, and recommended him to keep it to himself until the truth or falsehood of it should be ascertained."

"What made you give him this caution?"

"I tell you; I thought it so improbable that any such marriage should have taken place. I thought it a hoax, set afloat out of mischief, probably by the Carrs of Eckford; and I did not choose that my church, or anything in it, should be made a jest of publicly. Travice Arkell agreed with my view, and gave me his promise not to mention it. His father was away at the time."

"Where?"

"I really forget. I know he had come home only the day before from a short visit to London, and went out again, somewhere the same day. Travice said he did not expect him back that second time for some days."

"Well?" said Mr. Fauntleroy, in his blunt manner, for the master had stopped, in thought.

"Well, the next morning Travice Arkell called upon me here. He had had a second letter from Mrs. Dundyke, begging him not to mention to anyone what she had said about the marriage, for Mrs. Carr had received a hasty letter from Mr. Fauntleroy, forbidding her to speak of it to anyone. So, after all, that caution that I gave to Travice might have been an instinct."

"And do you think he had not mentioned it?"

"I feel sure that he has never allowed it to escape his lips. He has too great a regard for his aunt, Mrs. Dundyke. She feared she had done mischief, and was most anxious. On the following Sunday, when I was marrying a couple in my church before service, and had got the register out, I looked back to the date, and there, sure enough, was the marriage duly entered."

"And *you* have not spoken of it?"

"I have not. If, as you say, the marriage is no longer there, it is a most strange thing; an incredible thing. But I'll see into it."

"Somebody must see into it," returned the lawyer, as he departed. "A parish register ought to be kept as sacred as the crown jewels."

Mr. Wilberforce—a restless man when anything troubled him—started off to Clark Hunt's, disturbing that gentleman at his tea. "Hunt, follow me," said he, as he took the key from its niche, "and bring some matches and a candle with you. I want to examine the register."

"If ever I met with the like o' this!" cried Hunt, when the master had walked on. "Register, register, register! my legs is aching with the tramping back'ards and for'ards, to that vestry to-day."

He walked after Mr. Wilberforce as quickly as his lameness would allow. The latter was already in the vestry. He procured the key of the safe (kept in a secret place which no one knew of save himself, the clerk, and the Reverend Mr. Prattleton) opened it, and laid the book before him. Mr. Wilberforce knew, by the date, where the entry ought to be, where it had been, and he was not many minutes ascertaining that it was no longer there.

"Gone and left no trace, as Fauntleroy said," he whispered to himself. "How can it have been done? The leaf must have been taken out! oh yes, it's as complete a thing as ever I saw accomplished: and how is it to be proved that it's gone? This comes of their careless habit of not paging their leaves in those old days: had they been paged, the theft would have been evident. Hunt," cried he, aloud, raising his head, "this register has been tampered with."

"Law, sir, that's just what that great lawyer, Fauntleroy, wanted to persuade me on. He has been a-putting it into your head, maybe; but don't you be frightened with any such notion, sir. 'Rob

the register!' says I to him; 'no, not unless they robs me of my eyesight first. It's never touched, nor looked at,' says I, 'but when I'm here to take care on it.'"

"A leaf has been taken out. Who has had access here?"

"Not a soul has never had access to this vestry, sir, unless I have been with 'em, except yourself or Mr. Prattleton," persisted the old register keeper. "It's not possible, sir, that the book has been touched."

"Now don't argue like that, Hunt," testily returned Mr. Wilberforce, "I tell you that the register has been rifled, and it could not have been done without access being obtained to it. To whom have you entrusted the key of the church?"

"Never to nobody, save the two young college gents, what comes to play the organ," said the clerk, stoutly.

"And they could not get access to the register. Some one else must have had the key."

The old man sat down on a chair, opposite Mr. Wilberforce; placing his two hands on his knees, he stared very fixedly on vacancy. Mr. Wilberforce, who knew his countenance, fancied he was trying to recal something.

"I remember a morning, some time ago," cried he, slowly, "that one of them senior college gents—but that couldn't have had nothing to do with the register."

"What do you remember?" questioned Mr. Wilberforce.

"Your asking if anybody had had the key, put me in mind of it, sir. One of them college seniors; Lewis, it was; came to my house soon after I got up. A rare taking he seemed to be in; with fright, or something like it; and wanted me to lend him the key of the church. 'No, no, young gent,' says I, 'not without the master's orders.' He was a panting like anything, and looked as resolute as a bear, and when he heard that, he snatched the key, and tore off with it. Presently, back he comes, saying it was the wrong key and wouldn't undo the door. Mr. George Prattleton had come round then: Mr. Prattleton had told him to ask about the time fixed for a funeral—which, by token, I remember was Dame Furbery's—and he took the key from Mr. Lewis, and hung it up, and railed off at me for trusting it to the college gents. Lewis finding he couldn't get it from me, went after Mr. George Prattleton, and they came back, and Mr. George took the key from the hook to go to the church with Lewis. What it was Lewis had said to him, I don't pretend to guess, but they was both as white as corpses—as white I know, as ever was dead Dame Furbery in her coffin: which was just about then a being screwed down. After all, they hung the key up again, and didn't go into the church."

"When was this?" asked Mr. Wilberforce.

"It was the very day, sir, after our cat's chaney saucer was done for; and that was done for the day after the grand audit dinner at the deanery. Master Henry Arkell, after going into the church to practise, couldn't be contented to bring the key back and hang it up, like a Christian, but must dash it on to the kitchen floor, where it split the cat's chaney saucer to pieces, and scattered the milk, a-frighting the cat, who had just got her nose in it, a'most into fits, and my missis too. Well, sir, when I opened my shutters the next morning, who should be a standing at the gate but Arkell, so I fetched him in to see the damage he had done; and it was while he was in the kitchen, a-counting the pieces, that Lewis came to the door."

"But this must have been early morning," cried Mr. Wilberforce.

"Somewhere about half after six, sir: it was half moonlight and half twilight. I remember what a bright clear morning it was for November."

"Why, at that hour both Lewis and Arkell must have been in their beds, asleep, at my house."

"Law, sir, who can answer for schoolboys, especially them big college gents? When they ought to be a-bed, they're up; and when they ought to be up, they're a-bed. They was both at my house that morning."

Mr. Wilberforce could not make much of the tale, except that two of his boarders were out when he had deemed them safe in bed; and he left the church. It was dusk then. As he was striding along, in an irascible mood, he met Henry Arkell. He touched his cap to the master, and was passing on.

"Not so fast, Mr. Arkell. I want a word with you."

Arkell stopped and stood before Mr. Wilberforce, his truthful eye and open countenance raised fearlessly.

"I gave you credit for behaving honourably, and as a gentleman ought, during the time you were residing in my house, but I find I was deceived. Who gave you leave, pray, to sneak out of it at early morning, when everybody else was in bed?"

"I never did, sir," replied Henry.

"Take care, Arkell. If there's one fault I punish more than another, it is a falsehood; and that you know. I say that you did sneak out of my house at untoward and improper hours."

"Indeed, sir, I never did," he replied with respectful earnestness.

The master raised his forefinger, and shook it at his pupil. "You were down at Hunt's one morning last November, by half-past six, perhaps earlier; you must have gone down by moonlight—Ah, I see," added the master, in an altered tone, for a change flashed over Henry Arkell's features, "conscience is accusing you of the falsehood."

"No, sir, I told no falsehood. I don't deny that I was at Hunt's one morning."

"Then how can you deny that you stole out of my house to get there? Perhaps you will explain, sir."

What was Henry Arkell to do? Explain, in the full sense of the word, he could not; but explain, in a degree, he must, for Mr. Wilberforce was not one to be trifled with. He was a perfectly ingenuous boy, both in manner and character, and Mr. Wilberforce had hitherto known him for a truthful one: indeed, he put more faith in Arkell than in all the rest of the thirty-nine king's scholars.

"Perhaps you will dare to tell me that you stopped out all night, instead of sneaking out in the morning?" pursued the master.

"Yes, sir, I did; but it was not my fault: I was kept out."

"Where were you, and who kept you out?"

"Oh, sir, if you would be so kind as not to press me—for indeed I cannot tell. I was kept out, and I could not help myself."

"I never heard so impudent an avowal from any boy in my life," proceeded Mr. Wilberforce, when he recovered his astonishment. "What was the nature of the mischief you were in? Come; I will know it."

"I was not in any mischief, sir. If I might tell the truth, you would say that I was not."

"This is most extraordinary behaviour," returned the master. "What reason have you for not telling the truth?"

"Because—because—well, sir, the reason is, that I could not speak without getting others into trouble. Indeed, sir," he earnestly added, "though I did stop out from your house all night, I did no wrong; I was in no mischief, and it was no fault of mine."

Strange perhaps to say, the master believed him: from his long experience of the boy, he could believe nothing but good of Harry Arkell, and if ever words bore the stamp of truth, his did now.

"I am in a hurry at present," said the master, "but don't flatter yourself this matter will rest."

Henry touched his cap again, and the master strode on to the residence of the Reverend Mr. Prattleton, and entered it without ceremony. Mr. Prattleton was seated with his two sons, and with George.

"Send the boys away for a minute, will you?" cried the master to his brother clergyman.

The boys went away, exceedingly glad to be sent. "You can go on with your Greek in the other room," said their father. But to that suggestion they were conveniently deaf, preferring to take an

evening gallop through some of the more obscure streets, where they knocked furiously at all the doors, and pulled out a few of the bell-wires.

"An unpleasant affair has happened, Prattleton," began the master. "The register at St. James's has been robbed."

"The register robbed!" echoed Mr. Prattleton. "Not the book taken?"

"Not the book itself. A leaf has been taken out of it."

"How?"

"We must endeavour to find out how. Hunt protests that nobody has had access to it but ourselves, save in his presence."

"I do not suppose they have," returned Mr. Prattleton. "How could they? When was it taken?"

"Sometime since the beginning of November. And there'll be a tremendous stir over it, as sure as that we are sitting here: it was wanted for—for—some trial at the next assizes," concluded the master, recollecting that Mr. Fauntleroy had cautioned him still not to speak of it. "Fauntleroy's people went to-day to take a copy of it, and found it gone; so Fauntleroy came on to me."

"You are sure it is gone?" continued Mr. Prattleton. "An entry is so easily overlooked."

"I am sure it is not in the book now: and I read it there last November."

"Well, this is an awkward thing. Have you no suspicion?—no clue?"

"Not any. Hunt was telling a tale—By the way," added Mr. Wilberforce, turning to George Prattleton, who had moved himself to a polite distance, as if not caring to hear, "you were mixed up in that. He says, that last November you and Lewis had some secret between you, about the church. Lewis went down to his house one morning by moonlight, got the key by stratagem, and brought it back, saying it was the wrong one: and you then went to the church with him, and both of you were agitated. What was it all about? What did he want in the church?"

"Oh—something had been left there, I think he said, when one of the college boys had gone in to practise. That was nothing, Mr. Wilberforce. We did not go into the church, after all."

George Prattleton spoke with eagerness, and then hastened from the room, but not before Mr. Wilberforce had caught a glimpse of his countenance.

"What is the matter with George?" whispered he.

Mr. Prattleton turned, and looked at the door by which he had gone out. "With George?" he repeated: "nothing that I know of. Why?"

"He turned as pale as my cravat: just as Hunt describes him to have been when he went into the church with Lewis. I shall begin to think there is a mystery in this."

"But not one that touches the register," said Mr. Prattleton. "I'll tell you what that mystery was, but you must not bring in me as your informant; and don't punish the boy, now it's over, Wilberforce; though it was a disgraceful and dangerous act. It seems that young Arkell—what a nice lad that is! but he comes of a good stock—went into St. James's one evening to practise, and Lewis, who owed him a grudge, stole after him and locked him in, and took back the key to Hunt's, where he broke some heirloom of the dame's, in the shape of a china saucer, Hunt and his wife taking it to be Arkell. Arkell was locked in the church all night."

"Locked in the church all night!" repeated the amazed Sir. Wilberforce. "Why the fright might have turned him—turned him—stone blind!"

"It might have turned him stone dead," rejoined Mr. Prattleton. "Lewis, it appears, got terrified for the consequences, and as soon as your servants were up, he went to Hunt's to get the key and let Arkell out. Hunt would not give it him, and Lewis appealed to George. That's what has sent George out of the room, pale, as you call it; he was afraid lest you should question him too closely, and he passed his word to Lewis not to betray him."

"What a villanous rascal!" uttered the master. "I never liked Lewis, but I would not have given him credit for this. Did George tell you?"

"Not he; he is not aware I know it. Lewis, some days afterwards, imparted the exploit to my boy, Joe. Joe, in his turn, imparted it to his brother, under a formidable injunction of secrecy, and I happened to overhear them, and became as wise as they were."

"You ought to have told me this," remarked Mr. Wilberforce, his countenance bearing its most severe expression.

"Had one of my own boys been guilty of it, I would have brought him to you and had him punished in the face of the school; but as no harm had come of it, I did not care to inform against Lewis: though I don't excuse him; it was a dastardly action."

"Well, this explains what Lewis wanted in the church, but it brings us no nearer the affair of the register. I think I shall offer a reward for the discovery."

Mr. Wilberforce proceeded home, and into the study where his boarders were assembled, some half dozen of the head boys. One of them, a great tall fellow, stood on his head on a table, his feet touching the wall. "Who's that?" uttered the master. "Is that the way you prepare your lessons, sir?"

Down clattered the head and the feet, and the gentleman stood upright on the floor. It was Lewis senior. Mr. Wilberforce took a seat, and the boys held their breath: they saw something was wrong.

"Vaughan."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you lock Henry Arkell up in St. James's Church, and compel him to pass a night there?"

Mr. Vaughan opened all the eyes he possessed.

"I, sir! I have not locked him up, sir. I don't think Arkell is locked up," added Vaughan, in the confusion of his ideas. "I saw him talking to you, sir, just now, in Wage-street."

Lewis pricked up his ears, which had turned of a fiery red; then Arkell *had* been locked in! Mr. Wilberforce sharply seized upon Vaughan's words.

"What brought you in Wage-street, pray?"

"If you please, sir," coughed Vaughan, feeling he had betrayed himself, "I only went out for an exercise book. I finished mine last night, sir, and forgot it till I went to do my Latin just now. I didn't stop anywhere a minute, sir; I ran there and back as quick as lightning. Here's the book, sir."

Believing as much of this as he chose, Mr. Wilberforce did not pursue the subject. "Then which of you gentlemen was it who did shut up Arkell?" asked he, gazing round. "Lewis, senior, what is the matter with you, that you are skulking behind? Did *you* do it?"

Lewis saw that all was up. "That canting hound has been peaching at last," quoth he to himself. "I laid a bet with Prattleton he'd do it."

"It is the most wicked and cowardly action that I believe ever disgraced the college school," continued Mr. Wilberforce, "and it depends upon how you meet it, Lewis, whether or not I shall expel you. Equivocate to me now, if you dare. Had it come to my knowledge at the time, you should have been flogged till you could not stand, and ignominiously expelled. Flogged you will be, as it is. Do you know, sir, that he might have died through it?"

Lewis hung his head, wishing Arkell had died; and then he could not have told the master.

"I think the best punishment will be, to lock you up in St. James's all the night, and see how you will like it," continued Mr. Wilberforce.

Lewis wondered whether he was serious; and the perspiration ran down him at the thought. "He was not locked in all night," he said, sullenly, by way of propitiating the master. "When we went to open the church, he was gone."

"Gone! What do you mean now?"

"He had got out somehow, sir, for Hunt said he had just seen him, and when I ran back to morning school, he was in the college hall. Mr. George Prattleton advised me not to make a stir, to know how he had got out, but to let it drop."

As Lewis spoke, Mr. Wilberforce suddenly remembered that Hunt said Henry Arkell was in his kitchen, when Lewis came, frightened, and thumping for the key. It occurred to him now, for the first time, to wonder how that could have been.

"When you locked Arkell in, what did you do with the key?"

"I took it to Hunt's, sir."

"And gave it to Hunt?"

"Yes, sir. That is," added Lewis, thinking it might be as well to be correct, "I pushed it into the kitchen, where Hunt was."

"And broke Dame Hunt's saucer," retorted Mr. Wilberforce. "When did you have the key again. Speak up, sir?"

"I didn't have it again, sir," returned Lewis. "The key I took from the hook, next morning, would not fit into the lock, and I took it back. Hunt said it was the right key, and George Prattleton said it was the key; but I am sure it was not, although George Prattleton called me a fool for thinking so."

The master revolved all this in his mind, and thought it very strange. He was determined to come to the bottom of it, and despatched Vaughan to Arkell's house to fetch him. The two boys came back together, and Mr. Wilberforce, without circumlocution, addressed the latter.

"When this worthy companion of yours," waving his hand contemptuously towards Lewis, "locked you in the church, how did you get out?"

Henry Arkell glanced at Lewis, and hesitated in his answer. "I can't tell, sir."

"You can't tell!" exclaimed Mr. Wilberforce. "Did you walk out of it in your sleep? Did you get down from a window?—or through the locked door? How did you get out, I ask?"

Before there was time for any reply, the master's servant entered, and said the Rev. Mr. Prattleton was waiting to speak to the master immediately. Mr. Wilberforce, leaving the study door open, went into the opposite room. Mr. Prattleton, who stood there, came forward eagerly.

"Wilberforce, a thought has struck me, and I came in to suggest it. When the boy passed the night in the church, did he get playing with the register?"

"He would not do it; Arkell would not," spoke the master, in the first flush of thought.

"Not mischievously; but he may have got fingering anything he could lay his hands upon—and it is the most natural thing he would do, to while away the long hours. A spark may have fallen on the leaf, and—"

"How could he get a light?—or find the key of the safe?" interrupted Mr. Wilberforce.

"Schoolboys can ferret out anything, and he may have found its hiding-place. As to a light, half the boys keep matches in their pockets."

Mr. Wilberforce mused upon the suggestion till it grew into a probability. He called in Arkell, and shut the door.

"Now," said he, confronting him, "will you speak the truth to me, or will you not?"

"I have hitherto spoken the truth to you, sir," answered Arkell, in a tone of pain.

"Well; I believe you have: it would be bad for you now, if you had not. It is about that register, you know," added Mr. Wilberforce, speaking slowly, and staring at him.

There was but one candle on the table, and Henry Arkell pulled out his handkerchief and rubbed it over his face: between the handkerchief and the dim light, the master failed to detect any signs of emotion.

"Did you get fingering the register-book in St. James's, the night you were in the church?"

"No, sir, that I did not," he readily answered.

"Had you a light in the church?"

"You boys have a propensity for concealing matches in your clothes, in defiance of the risk you run," interrupted Mr. Prattleton. "Had you any that night?"

"I had no matches, and I had no light," replied Henry. "None of the boys keep matches about them except those who"—smoke, was the ominous word which had all but escaped his lips—"who are careless."

"Pray what did you do with yourself all the time?" resumed the master.

"I played the organ for a long while, and then I lay down on the singers' seat, and went to sleep."

"Now comes the point: how did you get out?"

"I can't say anything about it, sir, except that I found the door open towards morning, and I walked out."

"You must have been dreaming, and fancied it," said the master.

"No, sir, I was awake. The door was open, and I went out."

"Is that the best tale you have got to tell?"

"It is all I can tell, sir. I did get out that way."

"You may go home for the present," said Mr. Wilberforce, in anger.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Mr. Prattleton, as Arkell retired.

"I am satisfied that he is innocent as to the register; but not as to how he escaped from the church. Allowing it to be as he says—and I have always found him so strictly truthful—that he found the door open in the middle of the night, how did it come open? Who opened it? For what purpose?"

"It is an incomprehensible affair altogether," said the Rev. Mr. Prattleton. "Let us sit down and talk it over."

As Arkell left the room, Lewis, senior, appeared at the opposite door, propelling forth the fire-tongs, a note held between them.

"This is for you," cried he, rudely, to Arkell, who took the note. Lewis flung the tongs back in their place. "My hands shouldn't soil themselves by touching yours," said he.

When Arkell got out, he opened the letter under a gas-lamp, and read it as well as he could for the blots. The penmanship was Lewis, junior's.

"Mr. Arkell,—Has you have chozen to peeche to the master, like a retch has you ar, we give you notice that from this nite you will find the skool has hot has the Inphernal Regeons, a deal to hot for you. And my brother don't care a phether for the oisting he is to get, for he'll serve you worce. And if you show this dockiment to any sole, you'l be a dowble-died sneek, and we will thresh your life out of you, and then duck you in the rivor."

Henry Arkell tore the paper to bits, and ran home, laughing at the spelling. But it was a very fair specimen of the orthography of Westerbury collegiate school.

CHAPTER IV. ASSIZE SATURDAY

To attempt to describe the state of Mr. Fauntleroy would be a vain effort. It was the practice of that respected solicitor never to advance a fraction of money out of his pocket for any mortal client, unless the repayment was as safe and sure as the Bank of England. He had deemed the return so in the case of Mrs. Carr, and had really advanced a good bit of money; and now there was no marriage recorded in the register.

How had it gone out of it? Mr. Fauntleroy's first thought, in his desperation, was to suspect Mynn and Mynn, clean-handed practitioners though he knew them to be, as practitioners went, of having by some sleight of hand spirited the record away. But for the assertion of Mr. Wilberforce, that he had read it, the lawyer would have definitely concluded that it had never been there, in spite of Mr. Omer and his pencilled names. He went tearing over to Mynn and Mynn's in a fine state of excitement, could see neither Mr. Mynn nor Mr. George Mynn, hired a gig at Eckford, and drove over to Mr. Mynn's house, two miles distant. Mr. Mynn, strong in the gout, and wrapped up in flannel and cotton wool in his warm sitting-room, thought at first his professional brother had gone mad, as he listened to the tale and the implied accusation, and then expressed his absolute disbelief that any record of any such marriage had ever been there.

"You must be mad, Fauntleroy! Go and tamper with a register!—suspect us of stealing a page out of a church's register! If you were in your senses, and I had the use of my legs, I'd kick you out of my house for your impudence. I might just as well turn round and tell you, you had been robbing the archives of the Court of Chancery."

"Nobody knew of the record's being there but you, and I, and the rector," debated Mr. Fauntleroy, wiping his great face. "You say you went and saw it."

"I say I went and didn't see it," roared the afflicted man, who had a dreadful twinge just then. "It seems—if this story of yours is true—that I never heard it was there until it was gone. Don't be a simpleton, Fauntleroy."

In his heart of hearts, of course Mr. Fauntleroy did not think Mynn and Mynn had been culpable, only in his passion. His voice began to cool down to calmness.

"I'm ready to accuse the whole world, and myself into the bargain," he said. "So would you be, had you been played the trick. I wish you'd tell me quietly what you know about the matter altogether."

"That's where you should have begun," said old Mynn. "We never heard of any letter having been found, setting forth that the record of the marriage was in the register of St. James's, never thought for a moment that there had been any marriage, and I don't think it now, for the matter of that," he added, *par parenthèse*, "until the day our new manager, Littelby, took possession, and I and George were inducting him a little into our approaching assize and other causes. We came to Carr *versus* Carr, in due course, and then Littelby, evidently surprised, asked how it was that the letter despatched to you—to you, Mr. Fauntleroy, and which letter it seems you kept to yourself, and gave us no notice of—had not served to put an end to the cause. Naturally I and my brother inquired what letter Mr. Littelby alluded to, and what were its contents, and then he told us that it was a letter written by Robert Carr, of Holland, stating that the marriage had taken place at the church of St. James the Less, and that its record would be found entered on the register. My impression at the first moment was—and it was George's very strongly—that there had been nothing of the sort; no marriage, and consequently no record; but immediately a doubt arose whether any fraud had been committed by means of making a false entry in the register. I went off at once to Westbury, fully determined to detect and expose this fraud—and my eyes are pretty clear for such things—I paid my half-crown, and went with the clerk and examined the register, and found I had my journey for nothing. There

was no such record in the register—no mention whatever of the marriage. *That* is all I know of the affair, Mr. Fauntleroy."

Had Mr. Fauntleroy talked till now, he could have learnt no more. It evidently was all that his confrère knew; and he went back to Westerbury as wise as he came, and sought the house of Mr. Wilberforce. The record must have been taken out between the beginning of November and the 2nd of December, he told the master. Omer, and the master himself, had both seen it at the former time; old Mynn searched on the 2nd of December, and it was gone.

This information did not help Mr. Wilberforce in his perplexity, as to who could have tampered with it. It was impossible but that his suspicion should be directed to the night already spoken of, when Arkell was locked up in the church, and seemed to have got out in a manner so mysterious nobody knew how. Arkell adhered to his story: he had found the door open in the night, and walked out; and that was all that could be got from him. The master took him at his word. Had he pressed him much, he might have heard more; had he only given him a hint that he knew the register had been robbed, and that both trouble and injustice were likely to arise from it, he might have heard all; for Henry fully meant to keep his word with George Prattleton, and declare the truth, if a necessity arose for it. But it appeared to be the policy of both the master and Mr. Fauntleroy to keep the register out of sight and discussion altogether. Not a word of the loss was suffered to escape. Mr. Fauntleroy had probably his private reasons for this, and the rector shrank from any publicity, because the getting at the register seemed to reflect some carelessness on him and his mode of securing it.

Meanwhile the public were aware that some internal commotion was agitating the litigants in the great cause Carr *versus* Carr. What it was, they could not penetrate. They knew that a young lady, Mrs. Carr the widow, was stopping in Westerbury, and had frequent interviews with Mr. Fauntleroy; and they saw that the renowned lawyer himself was in a state of ferment; but not a breath touching the register in any way had escaped abroad, and George Prattleton and Henry Arkell were in ignorance that there was trouble connected with it. George had ventured to put a question to the Reverend Mr. Prattleton, regarding Mr. Wilberforce's visit in connection with it, and was peremptorily ordered to mind his own business.

And the whole city, ripe for gossip and for other people's affairs, as usual, lived in a perpetual state of anticipation of the assizes, and the cause that was to come on at them.

It is probable that this blow to Mr. Fauntleroy—and he regarded it in no less a light—rendered him more severe than customary in his other affairs. On the first of March, another ten pound was due to him from Peter Arkell. The month came in, and the money was not paid; and Mr. Fauntleroy immediately threatened harsh measures: that he would sell him up for the whole of the debt. He had had judgment long ago, and therefore possessed the power to do it; and Peter Arkell went to him. But the grace he pleaded for, Mr. Fauntleroy refused longer to give; refused it coarsely and angrily; and Peter was tempted to remind him of the past. Never yet had he done so.

"Have you forgotten what I did for you?" he asked. "I saved you once from what was perhaps worse than debt."

"And what if you did?" returned the strong-minded lawyer—not to speak more plainly. "I paid you back again."

"Yes; but how? In dribblets, which did me no good. And if you did repay me, does that blot out the obligation? If any one man should be lenient to another, you ought to be so to me, Fauntleroy."

"Have I not been lenient?"

"No. It is true, you have not taken the extreme measures you threaten now, but what with the sums you have forced me to pay, the costs, the interest, I know not what all, for I have never clearly understood it, you have made my life one of worry, hardship, and distress. But for that large sum I had to pay suddenly for you I might have done differently in the world. It was my ruin; yes, I assert it, for it is the simple truth, the finding of that sum was my ruin. It took from me all hope of prosperity, and I have been obliged ever since to be a poor, struggling man."

"I paid you, I say; what d'ye mean?" roughly spoke Mr. Fauntleroy.

Peter Arkell shook his head. He had said his say, and was too gentle-minded, too timid-mannered to contend. But the interview did him no good: it only served to further anger Mr. Fauntleroy.

A few days more, and Assize Saturday came in—as it is called in the local phraseology. The judges were expected in some time in the afternoon to open court, and the town was alive with bustle and preparation. On this bright day—and it was one of the brightest March ever gave us—a final, peremptory, unmistakable missive arrived for Peter Arkell from Mr. Fauntleroy. And yet the man boasted in it of his leniency of giving him a few hours more grace; it even dared to hint that perhaps Mr. Arkell, if applied to, might save his home. But the gist of it was, that if the ten pounds were not paid that afternoon by six o'clock, at Mr. Fauntleroy's office, on Monday morning he should proceed to execution.

It was not a pleasant letter for Mrs. Peter Arkell. *She* received it. Peter was out; and she lay on the sofa in great agitation, as might be seen from the hectic on her cheeks, the unnatural brightness of her eyes. How lovely she looked as she lay there, a lace cap shading her delicate features, no description could express. The improvement so apparent in her when they returned from the sea-side had not lasted; and for the last few weeks she had faded ominously.

The cathedral clock chimed out the quarter to three, and the bell rang out for service. It had been going some time, when Henry, who had been hard at his studies in the little room that was once exclusively his father's, came in. The great likeness between mother and son was more apparent than ever, and the tall, fine boy of sixteen had lost none of his inherited beauty. It was the same exquisite face; the soft, dark eyes, the transparent complexion, the pure features. Perhaps I have dwelt more than I ought on this boy's beauty; but he is no imaginary creation; and it was of that rare order that enchains the eye and almost enforces mention whenever seen, no matter how often. It is still vivid in the remembrance of Westerbury.

"I am going now, mamma."

"You will be late, Henry."

Something in the tone of the voice struck on his ear, and he looked attentively at his mother. The signs of past emotion were not quite obliterated from her face.

"Mamma, you have been crying."

It was of no use to deny it; indeed the sudden accusation brought up fresh tears then. Painful matters had been kept as much as possible from Henry; but he could not avoid knowing of the general embarrassments: unavoidable, and, so to speak, honourable embarrassments.

"What is it now?" he urgently asked.

"Nothing new; only the old troubles over and over again. Of course, the longer they go on, the worse they get. Never mind, dear; *you* cannot mend matters, so there's no necessity for allowing them to trouble you. There is an invitation come for you from the Palmers'. I told Lucy to put the note on the mantel-piece."

He saw a letter lying there and opened it. His colour rose vividly as he read, and he turned to look at the direction. It was addressed "Mr. Peter Arkell;" but Henry had read it then.

"You see, they want you to spend Monday with them at Heath Hall, and as it will be the judges' holiday, you can get leave from college and do so."

"Mother," he interrupted—and every vestige of colour had forsaken his sensitive face—"what does this letter mean?"

Mrs. Arkell started up and clasped her hands. "Oh, Henry! what have you been reading? What has Lucy done? She has left out the wrong letter. That was not meant for you."

"Does it mean a prison for papa?" he asked, controlling his voice and manner to calmness, though his heart turned sick with fear. "You must tell me all, mother, now I have read this."

"Perhaps it does, Henry. Or else the selling up of our home. I scarcely know what myself, except that it means great distress and confusion."

He could hardly speak for consternation. But, if he understood the letter aright, a sum of ten pounds would for the present avert it. "It is not much," he said aloud to his mother.

"It is a great deal to us, Henry; more than we know where to find."

"Papa could borrow it from Mr. Arkell."

"I am sure he will not, let the consequences be what they may. I don't wonder. If you only knew, my dear, how much, how often, he has had to borrow from William Arkell—kind, generous William Arkell!—you could hardly wish him to."

"But what will be done?" he urged.

"I don't know. Unless things come to the crisis they have so long threatened. Child," she added, bursting into tears, "in spite of my firmly-seated trust, these petty anxieties are wearing me out. Every time a knock comes to the door, I shiver and tremble, lest it should be people come to ask for money which we cannot pay. Henry, you will be late."

"Plenty of time, mamma. I timed myself one day, and ran from this to the cloister entrance in two minutes and a half. Are you being pressed for much besides this?" he continued, touching the letter.

"Not very much for anything else," she replied. "That is the worst: if that were settled, I think we might manage to stave off the rest till brighter days come round. If we can but retain, our home!—several times it would have gone, but for Mr. Arkell. But I was wrong to speak of this to you," she sighed: "and I am wrong to give way, myself. It is not often that I do. God never sent a burden, but He sent strength to bear it: and we have always, hitherto, been wonderfully helped. Henry, you will surely be late."

He slowly took his elbow from the mantel-piece, where it had been leaning. "No. But if I were, it would be something new: it is not often they have to mark me late."

Kissing his mother, he walked out of the house in a dreamy mood, and with a slow step; not with the eager look and quick foot of a schoolboy, in dread of being marked late on the cathedral roll. As he let the gate swing to, behind him, and turned on his way, a hand was laid upon his shoulder. Henry looked round, and saw a tall, aristocratic man, looking down upon him. In spite of his mind's trouble, his face shone with pleasure.

"Oh, Mr. St. John! Are you in Westerbury?"

"Well, I think you have pretty good ocular demonstration of it. Harry, you have grown out of all knowledge: you will be as tall as my lanky self, if you go on like this. How is Mrs. Arkell?"

"Not any better, thank you. I am so very pleased to see you," he continued: "but I cannot stop now. The bell has been going ten minutes."

"In the choir still? Are you the senior boy?"

"Senior chorister as before, but not senior boy yet. Prattleton is senior. Jocelyn went to Oxford in January. Did you come home to-day?"

"Of course. I came in with the barristers."

"But you are not a barrister?" returned Henry, half puzzled at the words.

"I a barrister! I am nothing but my idle self, the heir of all the St. Johns. How is your friend, Miss Beauclerc?"

"She is very well," said Henry; and he turned away his head as he answered. Did St. John's heart beat at the name, as his did, he wondered.

"Harry, I must see your gold medal."

"Oh, I'll fetch it out in a minute: it is only in the parlour."

He ran in, and came out with the pretty toy hanging to its blue ribbon. Mr. St. John took it in his hand.

"The dean displayed taste," was his remark. "Westerbury cathedral on one side, and the inscription to you on the other. There; put it up, and be off. I don't want you to be marked late through me."

There was not another minute to be lost, so Henry slipped the medal into his jacket-pocket, flew away, and got on to the steps in his surplice one minute before the dean came in.

There was a bad practice prevailing in the college school, chiefly resorted to by the senior boys: it was that of pledging their goods and chattels. Watches, chains, silver pencil-cases, books, or anything else available, were taken to Rutterley, the pawnbroker's, without scruple. Of course this was not known to the masters. A tale was told of Jones tertius having taken his surplice to Rutterley's one Monday morning; and, being unable to redeem it on the Saturday, he had lain in bed all day on the Sunday, and sent word to the head master that he had sprained his ankle. On the Monday, he limped into the school, apparently in excruciating pain, to the sympathy of the masters, and intense admiration of the senior boys. Henry Arkell had never been guilty of this practice, but he was asking himself, all college time, why he should not be, for once, and so relieve the pressure at home. His gold watch, the gift of Mr. Arkell, was worth, at his own calculation, twenty pounds, and he thought there could be no difficulty in pledging it for ten. "It is not an honourable thing, I know," he reasoned with himself; "but the boys do it every day for their own pleasures, and surely I may in this dreadful strait."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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