

HENRY WOOD

MILDRED

ARKELL, VOL.

2 (OF 3)

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Mildred Arkell. Vol. 2 (of 3)

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Mrs. Henry Wood

Mildred Arkell: A Novel. Vol. 2 (of 3)

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOL-BOY'S LOVE

A brilliant evening in July. The sun had been blazing all day with intense force, glittering on the white pavement of the streets, scorching the dry and thirsty earth; and it was not until his beams shone from the very verge of the horizon that the gay butterflies of humanity ventured to come forth.

Groups were wending their way to the Bishop's Garden: not the private garden of the respected prelate who reigned over the diocese of Westerbury, but a semi-public garden-promenade called by that name. In the years long gone by, a bishop of Westerbury caused a piece of waste land belonging to the grounds of his palace to be laid out as an ornamental garden. Broad sunny walks for the cold of winter, shady winding ones for the heat of summer, shrubberies and trees, flower-beds and grass-plots, miniature rocks and a fountain, were severally formed there; and then the bishop threw it open to the public, and it had ever since gone by the name of the Bishop's Garden. Not to the public indiscriminately—only to those of superior degree; the catering for the recreation of the public indiscriminately had not come into fashion then. It had always lain especially under the patronage of the residents of the grounds, and they took care—or the Cerberus of a gatekeeper did for them—that no inferior person should dare venture within yards of it: a tradesman might not so much as put his nose through the iron railings to take a peep in.

The garden was getting full when a college boy—he might be known by his trencher—passed the gate with a slow step. A party had just gone in whose movements his eyes had eagerly followed, but he was not near enough to speak. As he looked after them wistfully, his eye caught something glittering on the ground, and he stooped and picked it up. It was a small locket of gold, bearing the initials "G. B."

He knew to whom it belonged. He would have given half his remaining life, as it seemed, to go in and restore it to its owner. But that might not be; for the college boys, whether king's scholars or private pupils, were rigorously excluded by custom from the Bishop's Garden. And Williams, the gatekeeper, was stealing up then.

He was tall of his age, looking about sixteen, though he was not quite so much; tall enough to lean over the iron railings, which he did with intense eagerness; and never did woman's face betray more beauty, whether of form or colouring, than did his.

It was Henry Arkell. For the years have gone on, and the lovely boy of ten or eleven, has grown into this handsome youth. Other people and other things have grown with him.

"Now then! What be you doing here? You just please to take yourself off, young gentleman."

He quitted the railings in obedience; the college boys never thought of disputing the orders of the gatekeeper. Stepping backwards with a sort of spring, he stepped upon the foot of some one who was approaching the gate.

"Take care, Arkell."

He turned hastily and raised his trencher. The speaker was the good-natured Bishop of Westerbury; his widowed daughter on his arm.

"I beg your lordship's pardon."

"Too intent to see me, eh! You were gazing into the garden as if you longed to be there."

"I was looking for Miss Beauclerc, sir; I thought she might be coming near the gate. I have just picked up this, which she must have dropped going in."

"How do you know it is Miss Beauclerc's?" cried the bishop, glancing at the gold locket.

"I know it's hers, sir; and her initials are on it." But Henry turned his face out of sight, as he spoke. And lest any critic should set up a cavil at the bishop being addressed as "sir," it may be as well to mention that it was the custom with the college boys. Very few of them could bring their shy lips to utter any other title.

"Go in and give it to Miss Beauclerc, if it is hers," cried the bishop.

"The gatekeeper will not let me," said Henry, with a smile. "He tells us all that it is as much as his place is worth to admit a college boy."

"They ain't fit for such a place as this, nohow, my lord," spoke up the keeper. "Once let 'em in, and they'd be for playing at hare and hounds over the flower-beds."

"Nonsense!" said the bishop. "I don't see what harm there would be in admitting the seniors. You need not be so over-strict, Williams. Come in with me, Arkell, if you wish to find Miss Beauclerc; and come in whenever you like. Do you hear, Williams, I give this young gentleman the *entrée* of the garden."

The bishop laid his hand on Henry's shoulder, and they walked in together, all three, his daughter on his other side. Many a surprised eye-glass was lifted; many an indignant eye regarded them.

Never yet had a college boy—St. John always excepted—ventured within the pale of that guarded place. And if the bishop and his daughter had appeared accompanied by a fiery serpent, it could not have caused more inward commotion. But nobody dared betray it: the bishop was the bishop, and not to be interfered with.

"There's Miss Beauclerc, my lad."

And in a few minutes—Henry could not tell how, in his mind's tumultuous confusion—Georgina Beauclerc had turned into a side walk with him, and they were alone. Georgina was the same Georgina as ever—impulsive, wilful, and daringly independent. Everybody paid court to the dean's daughter.

"Did you drop this in coming in, Miss Beauclerc?"

"My locket! Of course I must have dropped it. Harry, I would not have lost it for the world."

His sensitive cheek wore a crimson flush at the words. *He* had given it to her on her last birthday, when she was eighteen. As she took it from him, their fingers touched. That touch thrilled through his veins, while hers were unconscious, or at best heedless of the contact.

It was the not uncommon tale; the tale that has been enacted many times in life, and which Lord Byron has made familiar to us as being his own heart's history—

"The maid was on the eve of womanhood:
The boy had fewer summers; but his heart had far outgrown his years:
And to his sight there was but one fair face on earth,
And that was shining on him."

It has been intimated that Georgina Beauclerc had inherited the dean's innate taste for what is called beauty, both human and statuesque. In the dean it was very marked. This, it may have been, that first drew forth her regard for Henry Arkell. Certain it was, she saw him frequently, and took no pains to disguise her admiration. He was a great favourite of the dean's—was often invited to the deanery. That he was no common boy, in nature, mind, or form, was apparent to the dean, as it was to many others, and Dr. Beauclerc evinced his regard openly. Georgina did the same. At first she had merely liked to patronize the young college boy; rather to domineer over him, looking upon him as a child in comparison with herself. But as they grew older, the difference in their years became less marked, and now they appeared nearly of the same age, for he looked older than he was, and Georgina younger. She was very pretty, with her large, rich blue eyes, and her small, fair features.

He had grown to love her; to love her with that impassioned love, which, pure and refined though it is, can only bring unhappiness. What did he think could be the ending? Did he reflect that it was utter madness in *him* to love the dean's daughter? It was nothing less than madness; and there were odd moments when the truth, that it was so, rose up in his mind, turning his whole soul to faintness.

And she, Georgina Beauclerc? She liked Henry Arkell very much indeed; she took pleasure in being with him, in talking with him, in *flirting* with him; she was conscious of a degree of pride when the handsome boy walked, as now, by her side; she encouraged his too-evident admiration for her; *but she did not love him*. She loved another too deeply to have any love left for him.

And she was so utterly careless of consequences. Had it been suggested to Miss Beauclerc that she was doing a wrong thing, bordering upon a wicked one, in thus trifling with that school-boy's heart, she would have laughed in very glee, and thought it fun. Though she must have known, if she ever took the trouble to glance forward, that in the years to come, did things continue as they were now, and Henry Arkell told his love to the ear, as well as to the eye and heart, the explosion must have place, and he would know how he had been deceived. What would her excuse be? that she liked him; that she liked his companionship; that she could not afford to reject his admiration? The gratification of the present moment was paramount with Georgina.

But what was Mrs. Beauclerc about, to suffer this? Mrs. Beauclerc! Had her daughter flirted with the whole forty king's scholars on a string, and the head master's private pupils to boot, she would never have seen it; no, nor understood it if pointed out to her. Her daughter was Miss Beauclerc, a young lady of high degree, and the college boys were inferior young animals with whom it was utterly impossible Georgina could possess anything in common.

"But how did you get in here, Harry?" began Miss Beauclerc, slipping the locket on her chain. "Has crusty old Williams gone to sleep this evening?"

"The bishop brought me in. He has given Williams orders that I am to be admitted here."

"Has he? What a glorious fellow! I'll give him ten kisses for that, as I used to do when I was a little girl. And now, pray, what became of you this afternoon? You said you should be in the cloisters."

"I know. I could not get out. I was doing Greek with my father."

"Doing Greek! It's always that. 'Doing Greek,' or 'doing Latin,' it's nothing else with you everlastingly. What a wretched pedant you'll be, Harry Arkell!"

"Never, I hope. But you know I *must* study; I have only my talents to depend upon for advancement in life; and my father, his heart is set on seeing me a bril—a good scholar."

"You are a brilliant scholar already," grumbled Georgina, bringing out the word which his modesty had left unspoken. "There's no reason why you should be at your books morning, noon, and night. I always said Mr. Peter Arkell was a martinet from the first hour he came to drill literature into me. Which he couldn't accomplish."

"The school meets in a week or two, you know, and—"

"Tiresome young reptiles!" interjected Miss Beauclerc. "We are quieter without them."

"And I must make the best use of my holidays for study," continued Henry. "They wish me to get to Oxford early."

"Goodness me! you might go now, if that's what you mean; you know enough. Harry, I do hope when you are ordained you'll get some high preferment."

"Such luck is not for me, Miss Beauclerc. I may never get beyond a curacy; or at most a minor canonry."

"Nonsense, and double nonsense! With the influential friends you may count even now! You know that everybody makes much of you. I should like to see you dean of this cathedral."

"And you—" Henry stopped in time. A tempting vision had mentally arisen, and for the moment led him out of himself. Did Georgina scent the treason, all but uttered? She resumed volubly, hastily—

"I have a great mind to tell you something; I think I will. But don't you let it go farther, Henry, for it is a secret as yet. There's going to be a school examination."

"No!" exclaimed Henry, some consternation in his tone.

"Why! are you afraid of it?"

"I am not. But I was thinking how very unfit the school is to stand it. What will Mr. Wilberforce say?"

"There's the fun," cried Georgina in glee. "When I heard papa talking of this, I said it would drive the head master's senses upside down. The dean and chapter are going to introduce all sorts of improvements into the school."

"What can have set them on to it!" exclaimed Henry, unable to recover his surprise and concern.

"The spelling, I think," said Georgina, pursing up her pretty mouth. "Jocelyn—and he'll be the senior boy this next half, you know—wrote a letter to his aunt; she rents her house and land under old Meddler, and knows the Meddlers—visits them, in fact. What should she do but take the letter to old Meddler, and asked him whether it was not a disgrace to any civilized community. Old Meddler kept the letter and brought it here, when he came into residence last week, and showed it to papa. There were not ten words spelt right in it. Altogether, there's going to be something or other done. But I'm sure you need not look so concerned over it, Henry Arkell; you are safe."

"I am safe. Yes, thanks to my father, I have enjoyed great advantages. But I am thinking of the others."

"Serve them right! They are a lazy set. Papa said, 'I should think Henry Arkell does not write like this!' I could have answered that, you know, had I chosen to bring out some of your letters."

There was a pause of silence. The tone had been significant, and his poor heart was beating wildly. "What a lovely rose!" he exclaimed, when the silence had become painful. "I wish I dare pluck it!"

"Dare! Nonsense! Pluck it if you wish."

"I thought it was forbidden to touch the flowers here!"

"So it is," said Georgina, snapping off the rose, one of the variegated species, and a great beauty. "But I do as I please. I would pluck all the flowers in the garden for two pins, just to see the old gardener's dismay."

"What would the visitors say to you?"

"Bow to me, and wish they dare perform such feats. Pshaw! I am the dean's daughter. Here, Harry, I will make you a present of it."

She threw the rose into his hand as she spoke, and she saw what the gift was to him.

"What shall you do with it, Harry?"

"Had I plucked the rose myself, I should have given it to my mother. I shall keep it now—keep it for ever. I may not," he added, lowering his tone, and speaking, as it were, to himself, "part with your gifts."

Georgina laughed lightly, an *encouraging* laugh.

Oh! it was wrong; wrong of her to act so. They reached the end of the shady walk and turned again.

"How long are you going to remain in that precious choir?" resumed Georgina, "wasting your time for the public benefit."

"Mr. St. John put the very same question to me this morning. He—"

"Mr. St. John!" she interrupted, in startling, nay, wild impulse, and her face became one glow of excitement. "But what do you mean?" she added, subsiding into calmness as recollection returned to her. "He is not in Westerbury."

The words, the emotion, told their own tale; and their true meaning flashed upon his brain. It was an era in the unhappy boy's life. How was it that he had been blind all these years?

"You take a strange interest in him, Miss Beauclerc," and there seemed to be no life left in his pale face, as he turned to her with the question.

"For another's sake," she evasively answered. "I told you some time ago Frederick St. John was in love with *her*."

He knew to whom she alluded. "Do you think it *likely* that he is, Miss Beauclerc?"

"If he's not in love with herself, he is in love with her beauty," said Georgina, with a laugh. "But you know what the popular belief is—that the heir of the St. Johns, whatever he may do with his love, may only give his hand to his cousin, Lady Anne."

"I hope it is so. She is the nicest girl, and he deserves a good wife. I used to sing duets with her when she was last at the Palmery."

"Oh!" said Georgina, turning her pretty nose into the air, "and so you fell in love with her."

"No," replied Henry; "my love was not mine to give."

Another pause. Georgina snatched a second flower—a carnation this time—and began pulling it to pieces.

"I suppose you heard from him this morning?"

"Yes."

"And where is he now?"

"In Spain. But he talks of coming home."

He stole a glance at her; at the loving light that shone in her bright blue eyes; at the soft glow, red as the carnation she was despoiling, on her conscious cheek. *Why* did he not read the signs in all their full meaning? Why did hope struggle with the conviction that would have arisen in his heart?

"Have you his letter?"

"Yes; you can read it if you like. There are no secrets. I have told him that Miss Beauclerc was fond of looking at his letters. He is enthusiastic, as usual, on the subject of pictures."

She closed her hand upon the foreign-looking letter which he took from his jacket pocket to give to her. "I will take it home with me, and return it to you to-morrow; I can't read it now. And, Harry, I am going back to my party, or perhaps they'll be setting the crier to work. Mind you don't breathe a word of that school examination: it would not do. But I tell things to you that I'd not tell to anybody else in the world."

She ran away up a side path, and Henry made his way to the more frequented part of the garden. It happened that he found himself again with the bishop; and the prelate laid his hand, as before, on the shoulder of the handsome boy, and kept him at his side.

Mrs. Peter Arkell had not grown better with years; on the contrary, the weakness in the back was greater, and her health in other ways began to fail. A residence of some weeks at the sea-side was deemed essential for her; absolutely necessary, said her medical attendant, Mr. Lane: and indeed it was not much less necessary for Peter Arkell himself, who was always ill now. His state of health told heavily upon them. He had been obliged to give up a great portion of his teaching; and but for his ever-ready friend and relative, Mr. Arkell, whose hand was always open, and for certain five-pound notes that came sometimes in Mildred's letters, Peter had not the remotest idea how he should have got along. This going to the sea-side would have been quite out of the question, but that they had met with a fortunate chance of letting their house for two months, to a family desirous of coming to Westerbury. Lucy, of course, would go with them; but the question was—what was to be done with Henry? Travice Arkell, in his impulsive good nature, said he must stop with them, and Mr. Arkell confirmed it. Henry supposed he must, but he felt sure it would not be palatable to Mrs. Arkell.

Travice Arkell was in partnership with his father now. At the time of his leaving school there had been a visible improvement in the prospects of the manufacturers, and Mr. Arkell yielded to his son's wish to join him, and hoped that the good times were coming back again. But the improvement had not lasted long; and Mr. Arkell was wont to say that Travice had cast in his lot with a sinking ship. The designation of the firm had never been altered; it was still "George Arkell and Son." Times fluctuated very much. Just now again there was a slight improvement; and altogether Mr. Arkell was still upon the balance, to give up business or not to give it up, as he had been for so many years.

Henry walked home from the Bishop's Garden, with the strange emotion displayed by Georgina Beauclerc, at the mention of Mr. St. John, telling upon his memory and his heart. Lucy met him at the door, her sweet face radiant.

"Oh, Henry! such news! News in two ways. I don't know which to tell you first. One part concerns you."

"Tell me that first, then," said he, laughing.

"You are not to be at Mr. Arkell's while we are away. You are to be at—guess where."

"I can't guess at all. I don't know anybody who'd have me."

"At the master's."

His eye lightened as he looked up.

"Am I? I am so glad! Is it true, Lucy?"

"It is quite true. Mr. Wilberforce saw mamma at the window, and came in to ask her how she was, and when she went, and all that. Mamma said how puzzled she had been what to do with you, but it was decided now you were to go to Mr. Arkell's. So then the master said he thought you had better go to him, and he should be most happy to invite you there for the time, no matter how long we remained away; and when mamma attempted to say something about the great kindness, he interrupted her, saying you had always been so good a pupil, and given him so little trouble, and did him altogether so much credit, that he should consider the obligation was on his side. So it is quite decided, Harry, and you are to go there."

"That's good news, then. And what's the other, Lucy?"

"Ah! the other concerns me. It is good, too."

"Are you going to be married?"

The question was but spoken in jest, and Henry wondered to see his sister's face change; but she only shook her head and laughed.

"Eva Prattleton is to accompany us to the sea-side."

"Eva Prattleton!"

"Mr. Prattleton came in just after the master left," resumed Lucy. "He said he had come with a petition: would mamma take charge of Eva to the sea-side, and let her go with us? He had intended—you know we heard of it, Harry—to take his two daughters to Switzerland this summer for a treat; but he begins to fear that Eva will not be equal to the travelling, for she's not strong, and a little thing fatigues her; and he thinks a month or two of quiet at the sea-side would do her more good. So *that's* arranged as well as the other."

"And what will Mary do?"

"Oh, she goes to Switzerland with her papa. He has not given up his journey. The two boys are to stay at home, and George Prattleton's to take care of them."

Henry laughed. The idea of Mr. George Prattleton's taking care of the boys struck him as being something ludicrous.

"But what do you think mamma says?" added Lucy, dropping her voice. "The terms hinted at by Mr. Prattleton for Eva were so liberal, that mamma feels sure he is doing this as much to make our sojourn there more easy to us, as for Eva's benefit; though she is not well, of course, and never has been since her mother's death; the grief then seemed to take such a hold upon her. How kind to us the Prattletons have always been!"

Henry mentally echoed the words—for they were true ones—all unconscious that a time was quickly approaching when he should have to repay this kindness with something very like ingratitude.

CHAPTER II.

THE TOUR OF DAVID DUNDYKE, ESQUIRE

Perhaps of all the changes time had wrought, in those connected with our history, not one was more remarkable than that in Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke, in regard to their position in the world. They had changed in themselves of course; we all change; and were now middle-aged people of some five-and-forty years: Mr. Dundyke being red and portly; his wife, thin and meek as ever.

Little by little, step by step, had David Dundyke risen in the world. There had come a day when he was made a fourth partner in that famous tea-importing house, with which he had been so long connected. He was now the third partner, and his income was a large one. There had also come a day when he was elected a common councilman (I am not sure but this has been previously mentioned), and now the old longing, the height of his ambition, was really and truly dawning upon him. In the approaching autumn he was to be proposed for sheriff; and *that*, as we all know, leads in time to the civic chair.

You will readily understand that it was not at all consistent for a partner in a wealthy tea house, and a common councilman rising into note and attending the civic feasts, to remain the tenant of two humble rooms. Mr. Dundyke had made a change long ago. He and his wife, clinging still to apartments, as being less trouble, and also less expense on the whole, had moved into handsome ones; and there they remained for some years. But the prospect of the shrievalty demanded something more; and latterly Mr. Dundyke had taken a handsome villa at Brixton, had furnished it well, and set himself up there with two maid servants and a footman. In some degree his old miserly habits were on him still, and he rarely spent where he could save, or launched into any extravagance unless he had an end in view in doing it; but he had never very much loved money for its own sake alone, only as means to an end.

His great care, now that the glorious end was near, was to blazon forth his importance. He wanted the world (*his* little world) to forget what he had been; to forget the pinching and saving, the poor way of living, the red-herring dinners, and the past in general. He did what he could to blot out the past in the present. He looked out for correspondents to address him as "esquire;" and he took to wear a ring with a crest upon it.

In this very month of July, when you saw Henry Arkell and the dean's daughter walking in the Bishop's Garden—and a very hot July it was—Mr. Dundyke came to the decision of taking a tour. What first put it into his unfortunate head to do so, his wife never knew; though she asked herself the question afterwards many and many a time. He debated the point with himself, to go or not to go, some little while; balancing the advantages against the drawbacks. On the one hand, it would cost time and money; on the other, it would certainly be another stepping-stone in his advancing greatness, the more especially if he could get the *Post* or some other fashionable organ to announce the departure of "David Dundyke, Esquire, and Lady, on a Continental tour."

One sultry afternoon, when Mrs. Dundyke was sewing in her own sitting-room, he returned home somewhat earlier than usual.

"My mind is made up, Mrs. Dundyke," he said, before he had had time to look round, as he came in, wiping his hot brows. "I told you I thought I should go that tour; and I mean to start as soon as we have fixed upon our route. It must be somewhere foreign."

Mr. Dundyke's intellectual improvement had not advanced in an equal ratio with his fortunes; he called tour tower, and route rout. Indeed, he spoke almost exactly as he used to speak.

"Foreign!" echoed Mrs. Dundyke, somewhat aghast. Her geographical knowledge had always been imperfect and confused; the retired life she led, occupied solely in domestic affairs, had not

tended to enlarge it; and the word "foreign" suggested to her mind extremely remote parts of the globe—the two poles and Cape Horn. "Foreign?"

"One can't travel anywhere now that's not foreign, Betsey," returned Mr. Dundyke, testily. "One can't humdrum up and down England in a stage-coach, as one used to do."

"True; but you said foreign. You don't mean America—or China—or any of those parts, do you, David?"

"It's never of no use talking to you about anything, Mrs. D.," said the common-councilman, in wrath. "Chinar! Why, it would be a life-journey! I shall go to Geneva."

"But, David, is not that very far?" she asked. "Where is it? Over in Greece, or Turkey, or some of those places."

"It is in Switzerland, Mrs. D. The tip-top quality go to it, and I mean to go. It will cost a good deal, I know; but I can stand that."

"And how shall we manage to talk Swiss?"

"There is no Swiss," answered Mr. Dundyke. "The language spoke there is French; the guide-book says so."

"It will be the same to us, David," she mildly said; "we cannot speak French."

"I know that 'we' means 'yes,' and 'no' means 'no.' We shall rub on well enough with that. So get all my stockings and shirts seen to, Betsey, and your own things; for the day after to-morrow I shall be off."

His wife looked up, not believing in the haste. But it proved true, nevertheless; for Mr. Dundyke had a motive in it. On the morning but one after, an excursion opposition steamer was advertised to start for Boulogne—fares, half-a-crown; return-tickets, four shillings. Of course David Dundyke could not let so favourable an opportunity slip; he still saved where he could.

Accordingly, on the said morning, which was very squally, they found themselves on the crowded boat. Such a sight! such a motley freight! Half London, as it seemed, had been attracted by the cheapness; but it was by no means a fashionable assemblage, nor yet a refined one.

"I hear somebody saying we shall have it rough, David," whispered Mrs. Dundyke, as they sat side by side, and the vessel passed Greenwich. "I hope we shall not be sea-sick."

"Pooh! sea-sick! we shan't be sea-sick!" imperiously cried the sheriff in prospective, as he turned his ring, now assumed for good, to the front of all beholders. "I don't believe in sea-sickness for my part. We did not feel sick when we went to Gravesend; you remember that, don't you, Betsey? It is more brag than anything else with people, talking about sea-sickness, that's my belief; a genteel way of letting out that they can afford to be travellers."

Excepting that one trip to Gravesend, of which he spoke, neither he nor his wife had ever been on the water in their lives. Neither of them had seen the sea. They had possessed really no inclination to stir from home; and *saving* had been, the ruling motive in David Dundyke's life.

The steamer went on. The river itself growing rough at Gravesend, the dead-lights were put in; and as they got nearer to the sea, the wind was freshening to a gale. Oh, the good steamer! will she ever live through it? The unbelieving common-councilman, to his horror and dismay, found sea-sickness was not a *brag*. He lay on the floor of the cabin, groaning, and moaning, and bewailing his ill fate in having come to sea.

"Heaven forgive me for having thought of this foreign tour! Steward! He stops up with them outsiders on deck! Heavens! Steward! Call him, somebody! Tell him it's for a common-councilman!"

Mrs. Dundyke was in the ladies' cabin—very ill, but very quiet. A dandy-looking man, impervious to the miseries of the passage, who had nothing to do but gape and yawn, took a sudden look in, by way of gratifying his curiosity, and, having done so, withdrew again—not, however, before one of the lady passengers had marked him. She took him for the captain.

"Capting! capting!" she called out; "if you please is that the capting?"

"Which?—where?" asked the steward's boy, to whom the question was addressed, turning round with a glass of brandy-and-water in his hand, which he was presenting to another lady, groaning up aloft in a berth.

"He came in at the door; he have got on tan kid gloves and shiny boots."

"*That* the captain!" cried the boy, gratified beyond everything at the lady's notion of a captain's rigging. "No, ma'am, he's up on deck."

"Just call the captain here, will you?" resumed the lady; "I know we are going down. I'm never ill aboard these horrid boats; but I'm worse, I'm dreadful timid."

"There ain't no danger, ma'am," said the boy.

"I know there *is* danger, and I know we are a going to be emerged to the bottom. If you'll call the capting down here, boy, I'll give you sixpence; and if you don't call him, I'll have you punished for insolence."

"Call him directly, ma'am," said the boy, rushing off with alacrity.

"I am the captain," exclaimed a rough voice, proceeding from a rough head, poking itself down the companion ladder; "what's wanted of me?"

"Oh! capting, we are going to the fishes fast! and some of us is dead of fright already. The vessel'll be in pieces presently! see how she rolls and pitches! and there's the sea dashing over the decks and against them boards at the windows, such as I never heard it; and all that awful crashing and cording, what is it?"

"There ain't no danger," shortly answered the commander, mentally vowing to punch the boy's head for calling him for nothing.

"Can't you put back, and land us somewhere, or take us into smooth water?" implored the petitioner; "we'd subscribe for a reward for you, capting, sir."

"Oh, yes, yes," echoed a faint chorus of voices; "any reward."

"There's no danger whatever, I tell ye, ladies," repeated the exasperated captain. "When we've got round this bit of headland, we shall have the wind at our stern, and go ahead as if the dickens druv us."

With this consolatory information, the rough head turned round and vanished. The grinning boy came out of a corner where he had hid himself, and appealed to the lady for his promised sixpence.

"I know we are going down!" she cried, as she fumbled in her bag for one. "That capting ought to lose his place for saying there's no danger; to me it's apparent to be seen. If he'd any humanity in him, he'd put back and land us somewhere, if 'twas only on the naked shore. Good mercy! what a lurch!—and now we're going to t'other side. No danger indeed! And all my valuable luggage aboard: my silk gownds, and my shawls, and my new lace mantle! Good gracious, ma'am, don't pitch out of your berth! you'll fall atop of me. Can't you hold on? What were hands made for?"

Some hours more yet, and then the steward, who had been whisking and whirling like one possessed, now on deck, now in the cabins, and now in his own especial sanctum, amid his tin jugs and his broken crockery, came whirling in once more to the large cabin, and said they were at the mouth of Boulogne harbour. "Just one pitch more, ladies and gentlemen—there it is—and now we are in the port, safe and sound."

"Don't talk to me about being in," cried poor Mr. Dundyke, from his place on the floor, not quite sure yet whether he was dead or alive, but rather believing he'd prefer to be the former. "Please don't step upon me, anybody. I couldn't stir yet."

All minor disasters of the journey overcome, the travellers reached Paris in safety. So far, Mr. Dundyke had found no occasion to rub on with his "we" and "no," for he encountered very few people who were not able to speak, or at least understand, a little English. But when they quitted Paris—and they remained in it but two days—then their difficulties commenced; and many were the distresses, and furious the fits of anger, of the common-councilman. It pleased Mr. Dundyke to travel by diligence on cross-country roads, rather than take the rail to Lyons—of which rail, and of

all rails, he had a sort of superstitious dread—but this he found easy to do, though it caused him to be somewhat longer on the road. Here his tongue was at fault. He wanted to know the names of the towns and villages they passed through, the meaning of any puzzling object of wonder he saw on his way, and he could not ask; or, rather, he did ask repeatedly, but the answers conveyed to his ears only an unmeaning sound. It vexed him excessively.

"I don't think they understand you, David," Mrs. Dundyke said to him one day.

"And how should they understand, speaking nothing but heathen gibberish?" he returned. "It's enough to make a saint swear."

Another source of annoyance was the living. Those who have travelled by diligence in the more remote parts of France, and sat down to the tables-d'hôte at the road-side inns where the diligence halted, and remember the scrambling haste observed, may imagine the distresses of Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke. In common with their countrymen in general, they partook strongly of the national horror of frog-eating, and also of the national conviction that that delicate animal furnished the component parts of at least every second dish served up in France: so that it was little short of martyrdom to be planted down to a dinner, where half the dishes, for all the information they gave to the eye, might be composed of frogs, or something equally obnoxious. There would be the bouilli first, but Mr. Dundyke, try as he would, could not swallow it, although he had once dined on red-herrings; and there would be a couple of skinny chickens, drying on a dish of watercress, but before *he* could hope, in his English deliberation, to get at them, they were snapped up and devoured. Few men liked good living better than David Dundyke,—how else would he have been fit to become one of the renowned metropolitan body-corporate?—and when it was to be had at anybody else's cost, none enjoyed it more. At these tables-d'hôte, eat or not eat, he had to pay, and bitter and frequent were the heartburnings at throwing away his good money, yet rising up with an empty stomach. Not a tenth part of the cravings of hunger did he and his wife ever satisfy at these miserable tables-d'hôte. The very idea of but the minutest portion of a frog's leg going into their mouths, was more repulsive to their minds than that shuddering reminiscence of the steam-packet; and, what with this dread, and their inability to ask questions, Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke were nearly starved.

One day in particular it was very sad. They had halted at an inn in a good-sized town, not very far distant from Lyons. While the soup and bouilli were being devoured, the two unfortunates ate a stray radish or two, when up bustled the waiter with a funny-looking dish, its contents wonderfully like what a roast-beef eater might suppose cooked frogs to be, and presented it to Mr. Dundyke.

"What's this?" inquired Mr. Dundyke, delicately adventuring the tip of a fork towards the suspicious-looking compound, by way of indicating the nature of his question.

"Plait-il, monsieur?"

"This, *this*," rapping the edge of the dish with the fork; "what is it made of? what do you call it?"

"Une fricassée de petits pigeons, à l'oseille, monsieur," replied the discerning waiter.

Poor Mr. Dundyke pushed the dish away from him with a groan. "Une fricassée de petits pigeons, à l'oseille" in French, might be "Stewed frogs" in English.

"What was all that green mess in the dish?" asked his wife.

"The saints know," groaned the common-councilman. "Perhaps it's the fashion here to cook frogs in their own rushes."

Up came the waiter with another dish, that attentive functionary observing that the Monsieur Anglais ate nothing. A solid piece of meat, with little white ends sticking out of it, rising out of another bed of green. "Oseille" is much favoured in these parts of France.

"Whatever's this?" ejaculated the common-councilman, eyeing the dish with wondering suspicion. "It's as much like a porkipine as anything I ever saw. What d'ye call it?" rapping the edge of the dish as before.

"Foie-de-veau lardé, à l'oseille, monsieur."

The common-councilman was as wise as before, and sat staring at it.

"It can't be frogs, David, this can't," suggested Mrs. Dundyke, "it is too large and solid; and I don't think it's any foreign animal. It looks to me like veal. Veal, waiter?" she asked, appealingly.

"Oui, madame," was the answer, at a venture.

"And the green stuff round it is spinach, of course. Veal and spinach, my dear."

"That's good, that is, veal and spinach. I'll try it," said Mr. Dundyke.

He helped himself plentifully, and, pushing the dish to his wife, voraciously took the first mouthful, for he was fearfully hungry.

It was a rash proceeding. What in the world had he got hold of! Veal and spinach!—Heaven protect him from poison! It was some horrible, soft compound, sharp and sour; it turned him sick at once, and set his teeth on edge. He became very pale, and called faintly for the waiter.

But the *garçon* had long ago whisked off to other parts of the room, and there was Mr. Dundyke obliged to sit with that nauseous mystery underneath his very nose.

"Waiter!" he roared out at length, with all the outraged dignity of a common-councilman, "I say, waiter! For the love of goodness take this away: it's only fit for pigs. There's a dish there, with two little ducks upon it, and some carrots round 'em—French ducks I suppose they are: an Englishman might shut up shop if *he* placed such on his table. Bring it here."

"Plait-il, monsieur?"

"Them ducks—there—at the top, by the pickled cowcubers. I'll take one."

The waiter ranged his perplexed eyes round and round the table. "Pardon, monsieur, plait-il?"

"I think you are an idiot, I do!" roared out Mr. Dundyke, unable to keep both his hunger and his temper. "That dish of ducks, I said, and it is being seized upon! They are tearing them to pieces! they are gone! Good Heavens! are we to famish like this?"

The waiter, in despair, laid hold of a slice of melon in one hand and the salt and pepper in the other, and presented them.

"The man *is* an idiot!" decided the exasperated Englishman. "What does he mean by offering me melon for dinner, and salt and pepper to season it?—that's like their putting sugar to their peas! I want something that I can eat," he cried, piteously.

"Qu'est-ce que c'est que je peux vous offrir, monsieur?" asked the agonized *garçon*.

"Don't you see we want something to eat," retorted the gentleman; "this lady and myself? We can't touch any of the trash on the table. Get us some mutton chops cooked."

"Pardon, monsieur, plait-il?"

"Some—mut—ton—chops," repeated the common-councilman, very deliberately, thinking that the slower he spoke, the better he should be understood. "And let 'em look sharp about it."

The waiter sighed and shrugged, and, after pushing the bread and butter and young onions within reach, moved away, giving up the matter as a hopeless job.

"Let's peg away at this till the chops come," cried Mr. Dundyke. And in the fallacious hope that the chops *were* coming, did the unconscious couple "peg" away till the driver clacked his long whip, and summoned his passengers to resume their seats in the diligence.

"I have had nothing to eat," screamed Mr. Dundyke. "They are doing me some mutton chops. I can't go yet."

"Deux diners, quatre francs, une bouteille de vin, trente sous," said the waiter in Mr. Dundyke's ear. "Fait cinq francs, cinquante, monsieur."

"Fetch my mutton chops," he implored; "we can't go without them: we can eat them in the diligence."

"Allons! dépêchons-nous, messieurs et dames," interrupted the conductor, looking in, impatiently. "Prenez vos places. Nous sommes en retard."

"They are swindlers, every soul of them, in this country," raved the common-councilman, passionately throwing down the money, when he could be made to comprehend its amount, and that there were no chops to come. "How dare you be so dishonest as charge for dinners we don't eat."

"I am faint now for the want of something," bewailed poor Mrs. Dundyke.

"If ever I am caught out of Old England again," he sobbed, climbing to his place in the diligence,
"I'll give 'em leave to make a Frenchman of me, that's all."

CHAPTER III. A MEETING AT GRENOBLE

They arrived at Lyons; but here Mr. Dundyke's total ignorance of the language led him into innumerable misapprehensions and mishaps, not the least of which was his going from Lyons to Grenoble, thinking all the time that he was on the shortest and most direct road to Switzerland. This was in consequence of his rubbing on with "we" and "no." They had arrived at Lyons late in the evening, and after a night's rest, Mr. Dundyke found his way to the coach-office, to take places on to Switzerland. There happened to be standing before the office door a huge diligence, with the word "Grenoble" painted on it.

"I want to engage a place in a diligence; two places; direct for Switzerland," began Mr. Dundyke; "in a diligence like that," pointing to the great machine.

"You spoke French, von littel, sare?" asked the clerk, who could himself speak a very little imperfect English.

"We," cried Mr. Dundyke, eagerly, not choosing to betray his ignorance.

Accordingly, the official proceeded to jabber on in French, and Mr. Dundyke answered at intervals of hazard "we" and "no."

"Vous désirez aller à Grenoble, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?" remarked the clerk.

"We," cried out Mr. Dundyke at random.

"Combien de places, monsieur?"

"We," repeated the gentleman again.

"I do demande of the monsieur how few of place?" said the official, suspecting his French was not understood quite so well as it might be.

"Two places for Switzerland," answered Mr. Dundyke. "I'm going on to Geneva, in a diligence like that."

"C'est ça. The monsieur desire to go to Gren-haub; et encore jusqu'à Genève—on to Geneva."

"We," rapturously responded the common-councilman.

"I do comprends. Two place in the Gren-haub diligence. Vill the monsieur go by dat von?" pointing to the one at the door. "She do go in de half hour."

"Not that one," retorted Mr. Dundyke, impatient at the clerk's obscure English. "I said in one like that, later."

"Yes, sare, I comprends now. You would partir by anoder von like her, the next one that parts. Vill you dat I retienne two place for Gren-haub?"

"We, we," responded Mr. Dundyke. "Two places. My wife's with me, Mrs. D.: I'm a common-councilman, sir, at home. Two places for Gren-haub. Corner ones, mind: in the interior."

"C'est bien, monsieur. She goes à six of de hours."

"She! Who?"

"The diligence, I do say."

"Oh," said the common-councilman to himself, "they call coaches 'she's' in this country. I wonder what they call women. Six hours you say we shall take going."

"Oui, monsieur," answered the clerk, without quite understanding the question, "il faut venir à six heures."

"And when does it start?"

"What you ask, sare?"

"*She*—the diligence—at what o'clock does it start for Gren-haub?"

"I do tell de sare at de six of de hours dis evening."

"We'll be here a quarter afore it then: never was late for anything in my life. Gren-haub's a little place, I suppose, sir, as it's not in my guide-book?"

"Comme ça," said the clerk, shrugging his shoulders. "She's not von Lyon."

"Who's she?" exclaimed the bewildered Mr. Dundyke; "who's not a lion?"

"Gren-haub, sare. I thought you did ask about her."

"The asses that these French make of themselves when they attempt to converse in English!" ejaculated the common-councilman. "Who's to understand him?"

He turned away, and went back to the hotel in glee, dreadfully unconscious that he had booked himself for Grenoble, and imagining that Gren-haub (as the word Grenoble in the Frenchman's mouth sounded to his English ears) must be the first town on the Swiss frontiers. "It's an awkward hour, though, to get in at," he deliberated: "six hours, that fellow said we should be, going: that will make it twelve at night when we get to the place. Things are absurdly managed in this country." This was another mistake of his: the anticipated six hours necessary, as he fancied, to convey him from Lyons to "Gren-haub," would prove at least sixteen.

At the appointed hour Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke took their seats in the diligence, which began its journey and went merrily on; at least as merrily as a French diligence, of the average weight and size, can be expected to go. Mr. Dundyke was merry, too, for him; for he had fortified himself with a famous dinner before starting: none of your frogs and rushes and "oseille," but rosbif saignant, and pommes de terre au naturel, specially ordered. Both the travellers had done it ample justice, and seasoned it with some hot brandy-and-water; Mr. Dundyke taking two glasses and making his wife take one. Therefore it was not surprising that both should sink, about nine o'clock, into a sound sleep. They had that compartment of the coach, called the intérieur, to themselves, and could recline almost at full length; and so comfortable were they, that all the various changing of horses and clackings of the whip failed to arouse them.

Not until six o'clock in the morning did Mr. Dundyke open his eyes, and then only partially. He was in the midst of the most delicious dream—riding in that coveted coach, all gilt and gingerbread, on a certain 9th of November to come, moving in stately dignity through Cheapside, amidst the plaudits of little boys, the crowding of windows, and the arduous exertions of policemen to preserve order in the admiring mob; sitting with the mace and sword-bearer beside him, *his* mace and sword-bearer! Mr. Dundyke had been pleased that his sleep, with such a dream, had lasted for ever, and he unwillingly aroused himself to reality.

It was broad daylight; the sun was shining with all the glorious beauty of a summer morning, shining right into the diligence, and roasting the face of the common-councilman. He rubbed his eyes and wondered where he was. Recollection began to whisper that when he had gone to sleep the previous evening it was dusk, and that ere that dusk had well subsided into the darkness of midnight he had expected to be at his destination, "Gren-haub;" whereas—was he asleep still, and dreaming it?—or was it really morning, and he still in the diligence?—or had some unexampled phenomenon of nature caused the sun to shine out at midnight? What was it? In the greatest perturbation he tore his watch from his pocket, and found it was five minutes past six; but he knew that he was rather slower than French time.

A fine hubbub ensued. Mr. Dundyke startled his wife up in such a fright, that he nearly sent her into fits: he roared out to the coachman, he called for the conductor: he shook the doors, he knocked at the windows: he caused the utmost consternation amongst the quiet passengers in the rotonde and banquette, and woke up a deaf old gentleman in the coupé, who all thought he had gone suddenly mad. The diligence was stopped in haste, and out of the door rushed Mr. Dundyke.

"Where were they taking him to? Why had they not left him at Gren-haub? Did they know he was a common-councilman of the great city of London, a brother of the Lord Mayor and aldermen? How dared they run away with him and his wife in that style? *Where* were they carrying him to?"

Were they going to smuggle him off to Turkey or any of them heathen places to sell him for a slave? They must turn round forthwith, and drive him back to Gren-haub."

All this, and a great deal more of it, delivered in the English tongue and interspersed with not a few English expletives, was as Greek to the astonished lookers-on; and when they had sufficiently exercised their curiosity and stared at the enraged speaker, standing there without his hat, stamping his feet in the dust, and gesticulating more like a Frenchman than a stout specimen of John Bull, they all let loose their tongues together, in a jargon equally incomprehensible to the distressed Englishman. In vain did Mr. Dundyke urge their return to "Gren-haub," now with angry fury, now with tears, now with promises of reward; in vain the other side demanded to know what was the matter, and tried to coax him into the diligence. Not a word could one party understand of the other.

"Montez, monsieur; montez, mon pauvre monsieur. Dieu! qu'est-ce qu'il a? Montez, donc!"

Not a bit of it. Mr. Dundyke would not have mounted till now, save by main force. It took the conductor and three passengers to push and condole him in; and indeed they never would have accomplished it, but for the sudden dread that flashed over his mind of what would become of him if he were left there in the road, hatless, hopeless, and Frenchless, while his wife and his luggage and the diligence went on to unknown regions. Some of those passengers, if you could come across them now, would give you a dolorous history of the pauvre monsieur Anglais who went raving mad one summer's morning in the diligence.

There was little haste or punctuality in those old days of French posting—driver, conductor, passengers, and horses all liking to take their own leisure; and it was not far off twelve o'clock at noon, six hours after the morning's incomprehensible scene, and eighteen from the time of departure from Lyons, that the lazy old diligence reached its destination, and Mr. Dundyke discovered that he was in Grenoble. How he would ever have found his way out of it, and on the road to Switzerland, must be a question, had not an Englishman, a young man, apparently in delicate health, who was sojourning in the town, fortunately chanced to be in the diligence yard, and heard Mr. Dundyke's fruitless exclamations and appeals, as he alighted.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the stranger, stepping forward. "I perceive we are countrymen."

Overjoyed at hearing once more his own language, the unhappy traveller seized the Englishman's hand with a rush of delight, and explained the prolonged torture he had gone through, and the doubt and dilemma he was still in—at least as well as he could explain what was to him still a mystery. "The savages cannot understand me," he concluded politely, "and of course I cannot be expected to understand them."

Neither could the stranger understand just at first; but with the conductor's tale on one side and Mr. Dundyke's on the other, he made out the difficulty, and set things straight for him, and went with him to the diligence office. No coach started for Chambéry, by which route they must now proceed, till the next morning at nine, so the stranger took two places for them in that.

"I'm under eternal obligations to you, sir," exclaimed the relieved traveller, "and if ever I should have it in my power to repay you, be sure you count on me. It's a common-councilman, sir, that you have assisted; that's what I am at home, and I'm going on to be Lord Mayor. You shall have a card for my inauguration dinner, sir, if you are within fifty miles of me. You will tell me your name, and where you live?"

"My name is Robert Carr," said the stranger. "I am a clergyman. I am from Holland."

The name struck on a chord of Mrs. Dundyke's memory. It took her back to the time when she was Betsey Travice, and on a certain visit at Westerbury. Though not in the habit of putting herself forward when in her husband's company, she turned impulsively to the stranger now.

"Have you relations at Westerbury, sir? Was your mother's name Hughes?"

"Yes," he said, looking very much surprised. "Both my father and mother were from Westerbury. I have a grandfather, I believe, living there still. My mother is dead."

"How very strange!" she exclaimed. "Can you come in this evening to us at the hotel for half-an-hour?"

"I would, with pleasure, but I leave Grenoble this afternoon," was the young clergyman's answer. "Can I do anything for you in London?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Dundyke. "But my husband has given you our address; and if you will call and see us when we get home—"

"And you'll meet with a hearty welcome, sir," interrupted the common-councilman, shaking his hand heartily. "I'm more indebted to you this day than I care to speak."

Mrs. Dundyke watched him out of the yard. He might be about four-and-twenty; and was of middle height and slightly made, and he walked away coughing, with his hand upon his chest.

"David," she said to her husband, "I do think he must be a relative of yours! The Hughes's of Westerbury were related in some way to your mother."

"I'm sure I don't know," said David Dundyke. "I think I have heard her talk about them, but I am not sure. Any way I'm obliged to *him*; and mind, Betsey, if he does come to see us in London, I'll give him a right good dinner."

Ah, how little! how little do we foresee even a week or two before us! Never in this world would those two meet again.

And Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke proceeded under convoy to the Hôtel des Trois Dauphins, and made themselves as comfortable for the night as circumstances and the stinging gnats permitted.

Arriving at Geneva without further let or hindrance, David Dundyke, Esquire, and his wife, put up at the Hôtel des Bergues. And on the morning afterwards, when Mrs. Dundyke had dressed herself and looked about her, she felt like a fish out of water. The size of the hotel, the style pervading it, the inmates she caught chance glimpses of in the corridors, were all so different from anything poor humble Betsey Dundyke had been brought into contact with, that she began to feel her inferiority. And yet she looked like a lady, in her good and neat dress, and her simple cap half covering her fair and still luxuriant hair. Her face was red, tanned with the journey; but it was a pleasing and a nice face yet to look upon.

They descended to the great *salle* a little before ten. Many groups were breakfasting there at the long tables; most of them English, as might be heard by their snatches of quiet conversation. Some of them possessed an air of distinction and refinement that bespoke their standing in society. An English servant came in once and accosted his master as "my lord;" and a plain little body in a black silk gown and white net cap, was once spoken to as "Lady Jane." Mr. Dundyke had never, to the best of his knowledge, been in a room with a lord before; had never but once set eyes on a Lady Jane; and that was King Henry the Eighth's wife in waxwork; and, alive to his own importance though the common-councilman was, he felt unpleasantly out of place amidst them. In spite of his ambition his nature was a modest one.

Scarcely had he and his wife begun breakfast, when a lady and gentleman came in and took the seats next to him. The stranger was a tall, dark, rather handsome man; taller than Mr. Dundyke, who was by no means undersized, and approaching within three or four years to the same age. But while the common councilman was beginning to get rather round and puffy, just as an embryo alderman is expected to be, the stranger's form was remarkable for wiry strength and muscle: in a tussle for life or death, mark you, reader, the one would be a very child in the handling of the other.

Mr. Dundyke moved his chair a little to give more room, as they sat down, and the gentleman acknowledged it with a slight bow of courtesy. He spoke soon after.

"If you are not using that newspaper, sir," pointing to one that lay near Mr. Dundyke, "may I trouble you for it?"

"No use to me, sir," said the common-councilman, passing the journal. "I understand French pretty well when it's spoke, but am scarcely scholar enough in the language to read it."

"Ah, indeed," replied the stranger. "This, however, is German," he continued, as he opened the paper.

"Oh—well—they look sufficiently alike in print," observed the common-councilman. "Slap-up hotel, this seems, sir."

"Comfortable," returned the stranger, carelessly. "You are a recent arrival, I think."

"Got here last night, sir, by the diligence. We are travelling on pleasure; taking a holiday."

"There's nothing like an occasional holiday, a temporary relaxation from the cares of business," remarked the stranger, scanning covertly Mr. Dundyke. "As I often say."

"I am delighted to hear you say it, sir," exclaimed the common-councilman, hastily assuming a fact, from the words, which probably the speaker never thought to convey. "I am in business myself, sir, and this is the first holiday from it I have ever took: I gather that you are the same. Nothing so respectable as commercial pursuits: a London merchant, sir, stands as a prince of the world."

"Respectable and satisfactory both," joined in the stranger. "What branch of commerce—if you don't deem me impertinent—may you happen to pursue?"

"I'm a partner in a wholesale tea-house, sir," cried Mr. Dundyke, flourishing his hand and his ring for the stranger's benefit. "Our establishment is one of the oldest and wealthiest in Fenchurch-street; known all over the world, sir, and across the seas from here to Chinar. And as respected as it is known."

"Sir, allow me to shake hands with you," exclaimed the stranger, warmly. "To be a member of such a house does you honour."

"And I am a common-councilman," continued Mr. Dundyke, his revelations increasing with his satisfaction, "rising on fast to be an alderman and Lord Mayor. No paltry dignity that, sir, to be chief magistrate of the city of London, and ride to court in a gold and scarlet dress, and brodered ruffles! I suspect we have got some lords round about us here," dropping his voice to a still lower key, "but I'm blest, sir, if I'd change my prospects with any of them. I'm to be put up for sheriff in October."

"Ah," said the stranger, casting his deep black eyes around, "young scions with more debts than brains, long pedigrees and short purses, dealers in post obits and the like—*they* can't be put in comparison with a Lord Mayor of London."

"And what line are you in, sir?" resumed the gratified Lord Mayor in prospective. "From our great city, of course?"

The stranger nodded, but, before he answered, he finished his second *cotelette*, poured out some wine—for his breakfast disdained the more effeminate luxuries of tea and coffee—popped a piece of ice in, and drank it. "Have you heard of the house of Hardcastle and Co.?" he asked, in a tone meant only for Mr. Dundyke's ear.

"The East India merchants?" exclaimed the latter.

The stranger nodded again.

"Of course I have heard of them: who has not? A firm of incalculable influence, sir; could buy up half London. What of them?"

"Do you know the partners personally?"

"Never saw any of them in my life," replied Mr. Dundyke. "They are top-sawyers, they are; a move or two above us city tea-folks. Perhaps you have the honour of being a clerk in the house, sir?"

"I am Mr. Hardcastle," observed the stranger, smiling.

"Bless my soul, sir!" cried the startled Mr. Dundyke. "I'm sure I beg pardon for my familiarity. But stop—eh—I thought—"

"Thought what?" asked the stranger, for Mr. Dundyke came to a pause.

"That Mr. Hardcastle was an old man. In fact, the impression on my mind was, that he was something like seventy."

"Pooh, my dear sir! your thoughts are running on my uncle. He has been virtually out of the firm these ten years, though his name is still retained as its head. He is just seventy. A hale, hearty

man he is too, and trots about the grounds of his mansion at Kensington as briskly as one of his own gardeners. But not a word here of who I am," continued the gentleman, pointing slightly round the room: "I am travelling quietly, you understand—*incog.*, if one may say so—travelling without form or expense, in search of a little peace and quietness. I have not a single attendant with me, nor has my wife her maid. Mrs. Hardcastle," he said, leaning back, the better to introduce his wife.

The lady bowed graciously to Mr. and Mrs. Dundyke, and the former, in his flurry to acknowledge the condescension, managed to upset the coffee-pot. Mrs. Dundyke saw a stylish woman of thirty—at least, if a great deal of dress can constitute style. She had a handsome, but deadly pale face, with bold eyes, black as her husband's.

"I feel really glad to make your acquaintance," resumed Mr. Hardcastle. "Standing aloof, as I have purposely done, from the persons of condition staying in the hotel, I had begun to find it slow."

"Sir, I am sure I'm greatly flattered," said Mr. Dundyke. "Have you been long here, sir?"

"About three weeks or a month," replied the gentleman, carelessly. "We shall soon be thinking of going."

Mr. Dundyke did indeed feel flattered, and with reason, for the firm in question was of the very first consideration, and he was overwhelmed with the honour vouchsafed him. "A Lord Mayor might be proud to know him," he exclaimed to his wife, when they got upstairs from the breakfast. "I hope he'll give me his friendship when I am in the Chair."

"I think they have the next room to ours," observed Mrs. Dundyke. "I saw the lady standing at the door there this morning, when I was peeping out, wondering which was the way down to breakfast. Is it not singular they should be travelling in this quiet way, without any signs of their wealth about them?"

"Not at all singular," said the shrewd common-councilman. "They are so overdone with grandeur at home, these rich merchants, with their servants, and state, and ceremony, that it must be a positive relief to get rid of it altogether for a time, and live like ordinary people. I can understand the feeling very well."

It was more than Mrs. Dundyke could; and though, from that morning, the great merchant and his lady took pains to cultivate the intimacy thus formed, she never took to them so cordially as her husband. He, if one may use the old saying in such a sense, fell over head and ears in love with both, but Mrs. Dundyke never could feel quite at home with either. No doubt the sense of her own inferiority of position partly caused this: *she* felt, if her husband did not, that they were no society, even abroad, for the powerful Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle. And, in her inmost heart, she did not like the lady. Her attire was ten times as costly and abundant as Mrs. Dundyke's, and she would wear more jewellery at one time than the latter had ever seen in all her life; and that was perhaps as it should be; but Mrs. Dundyke was apt to take likings and dislikings, and she could not like this lady, try as she would. She was certainly not a gentlewoman; and Mrs. Dundyke, with all her previous life's disadvantages of position, was that at heart, and could appreciate one. She decidedly wore rouge on her cheeks in an evening; she was not choice in her expressions at all times; and she was fond of wine, and did not object to brandy.

One morning Mrs. Dundyke happened to be in Mrs. Hardcastle's room, when the English waiter entered.

"My master's compliments, madam," he said, "and he hopes Mr. Hardcastle has some news for him this morning."

The lady's face went crimson, the first time Mrs. Dundyke had seen any natural colour on it, and she answered, in a haughty tone, that Mr. Hardcastle was not then in—when he was, the man could speak with him.

"For it is now a fortnight, madam, since he has daily promised to—"

"I have nothing to do with it," interrupted Mrs. Hardcastle, imperiously motioning the waiter from the room; "you must address yourself to my husband."

Mrs. Dundyke wondered what this little scene could mean. Had it been people of less known wealth than the Hardcastles, she might have thought it bore reference to the settlement—or non-settlement—of the bill. But that could scarcely happen with them.

"What are you thinking of, Betsey?" Mr. Dundyke asked her that same day, she sat so deep in thought.

"I was thinking of Mr. Hardcastle's eyes."

"Of Mr. Hardcastle's eyes!" echoed the common-councilman.

"Just then I was, David. The fact is, they puzzle me—they are always puzzling me. I feel quite certain I have seen them somewhere, or eyes exactly like them."

"They are as handsome eyes as ever I saw," was the answer.

"They may be handsome, but I don't like them. But that it is wrong to say it, I could almost say I hate them. They frighten me, David."

"That's just one of your foolish fancies," cried Mr. Dundyke, in wrath. "You are always taking them up, you know."

A day or two after this, Mr. Hardcastle came straight into the presence of Mr. Dundyke, some papers in his hand. "My dear sir," he said, "I want you to do me a favour."

The common-councilman jumped up and placed a chair for the great man, delighted at the prospect of doing *him* a favour.

"I wrote home a few days ago for them to send me a letter of credit on the bankers here. It came this morning, and just see what they have done!"

Mr. Hardcastle tossed, as he spoke, the letter of credit to Mr. Dundyke. Now the latter, shrewd man of business though he was amid his own chests of tea, knew very little of these foreign letters of credit, their forms, or their appearance. All he could make out of the present one was, that it was a sort of order to receive one hundred pounds.

"Don't you see the error?" exclaimed Mr. Hardcastle. "They have made it payable to my uncle, Stephen Hardcastle, instead of to me. *My* name's not Stephen, so it would be perfectly useless for me to present it. How the clerks came to make so foolish a mistake I cannot tell. Some one of them I suppose, in the pressure of business, managed to give unintelligible orders to the bankers, and so caused the error."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Dundyke.

"Now I want to know if you can let me have this sum. I shall write immediately to get the thing rectified, and if you can accommodate me for a few days, until the needful comes, I will then repay you with many thanks."

"But, dear me, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Dundyke,— "not but what I should be proud to do anything for you that I could, in my poor way—you don't suppose I've got a hundred pound here? Nor the half! nor the quarter of it!"

Mr. Hardcastle carelessly smiled, and played with his glittering cable watch-chain.

"I should not like to offer you what I *have* got, sir," continued the common-councilman, "but I am sure if you took it as no offence, and it would be of any temporary use to you—"

"Oh, thank you! No, it's not that," interrupted the great merchant. "Less than the hundred pounds would not be worth the trouble of borrowing. You have nothing like that sum, you say?"

Out came Mr. Dundyke's purse and pocket-book. He counted over his store, and found that, English and French money combined, he possessed twenty-two pounds, eleven shillings. The twenty pounds, notes and gold, he pushed towards Mr. Hardcastle, the odd money he returned to his pocket. "You are quite welcome, sir, for a few days, if you will condescend to make use of it."

"I feel extremely obliged to you," said Mr. Hardcastle; "I am half inclined to avail myself of your politeness. The fact is, Dundyke," he continued, confidentially, "my wife has been spending money wholesale, this last week—falling in love with a lot of useless jewellery, when she has got a

cartload of it at home. I let her have what money she wanted, counting on my speedy remittances, and, upon my word, I am nearly drained. I will write you an acknowledgment."

"Oh no, no, sir, pray don't trouble to do that," cried the confiding common-councilman, "your word would be your bond all over the world." And Mr. Hardcastle laughed pleasantly, as he gathered up the money.

"Can you let me have five francs, David," said Mrs. Dundyke, coming in soon afterwards, when her husband was alone.

"Five francs! What for?"

"To pay our washing bill. It comes to four francs something; so far as I can make out their French figures."

"I don't know that you can have it, Mrs. D."

"But why?" she inquired, meekly.

"I have just lent most of my spare cash to Mr. Hardcastle. He received a hundred pound this morning from England, but there was a stupid error in the letter of credit, and he can't touch the money till the order has been back home to be rectified."

The information set Mrs. Dundyke thinking. She had just returned from a walk, and it was in coming up the stairs that a chambermaid had met her and given her the washing-bill. Not being accustomed to French writing and accounts, she could not readily puzzle it out, and, bill in hand, had knocked at Mrs. Hardcastle's door, intending to crave that lady's assistance. Mr. Hardcastle opened it only a little way.

"Is Mrs. Hardcastle at leisure, if you please, sir?" she asked.

"No; she's not in. I'll send her to you when she comes," was his reply, as he re-closed the door. And yet Mrs. Dundyke was almost certain she saw the tip of Mrs. Hardcastle's gown, as if she were sitting in the room on the right, the door opening to the left. And she also saw distinctly the person who had been once pointed out to her as the landlord of the hotel. He was standing at the table, counting money—a note or two, it looked, and a little gold. There was food in this to employ Mrs. Dundyke's thoughts, now she knew, or supposed, that very money was her husband's. A sudden doubt whether all was right—she afterwards declared it many times—flashed across her mind. But it left her as soon as thought: left her ashamed of doubting such people as the Hardcastles, even for a moment. She remained thinking, though.

"I know these foreign posts are uncertain," she observed, arousing herself, "and it will take, I suppose, eight or ten days before Mr. Hardcastle's remittance can reach him. Suppose it should not come when he expects, or that there should be another mistake in it?"

"Well?"

"Why—as we cannot afford to remain on here an indefinite period, waiting; at least, I suppose you would not like to do so, David; I was thinking it might be better for you to write home for more money yourself, and make certain."

"Just leave me to manage my own business, Betsey, will you: I am capable, I hope," was the common-councilman's ungracious answer. Nevertheless, he adopted his wife's suggestion.

Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle continued all grace and smiles, pressing their champagne upon Mr. Dundyke and his wife at dinner, and hiring carriages, in which all the four drove out together. The common-councilman was rapidly overcoming his repugnance to a table-d'hôte, but the sumptuous one served in the hotel was very different from those he had been frightened with on his journey, and in the third week of his stay his wife had to let out all his waistcoats. The little excursions in the country he cared less for. The lovely country about Geneva was driven over again and again: Ferney, Coppet, the houses of Madame de Staël and Voltaire, all were visited, not much, it is to be feared, to the edification of the common-councilman. Thus three weeks from the time of their first arrival, passed rapidly away, and Mr. Dundyke and his wife felt they could not afford the time to linger longer in Geneva. They now only waited for the repayment of the twenty pounds from Mr. Hardcastle, and,

strange to say, that gentleman's money did not arrive. *He* could not account for it, and gave vent to a few lordly explosions each morning that the post came in and brought him no advice of it.

"I'll tell you what it is!" he suddenly observed one morning—"I'll lay a thousand pounds to a shilling they have misunderstood my instructions, and have sent the money on to Genoa, whither we are bound after leaving here!"

"What a disaster!" uttered Mr. Dundyke. "Will the money be lost, sir?"

"No fear of that: nobody can touch it but myself. But look at the inconvenience it is causing, keeping me here! And you also!"

"I cannot remain longer," said Mr. Dundyke; "my time is up, and I may not exceed it. You can give me an order to receive the 20*l.* in London, sir: it will be all the same."

"But, my good fellow, how will you provide for the expenses of your journey to London?"

"I have managed that, sir," said the common-councilman. "I wrote home for thirty pounds."

"And is it come?" asked Mr. Hardcastle, turning his eye full upon the common-councilman with the startling rapidity of a flash of lightning. Mrs. Dundyke noticed, with astonishment, the look and the eager gesture: neither ever faded from her recollection.

"They came this morning," said the common-councilman. "I have them both safe here," touching the breast-pocket of his coat. "They were in them letters you saw me receive."

On rising from breakfast, Mr. Dundyke strolled out of the hotel, and found himself on the borders of the lake. The day was fearfully hot, and he began to think a row might be pleasant. A boat and two men were at hand, waiting to be hired, and he proceeded to haggle about the price, for one of the boatmen spoke English.

"I have spent a deal of money since I have been here, one way or another," he soliloquized, "and the bill I expect will be awful. But it won't be much addition, this row—as good be hung for a sheep as a lamb—so here goes."

He stepped into the boat, anticipating an hour's enjoyment. A short while after this, Mrs. Hardcastle, accompanied by Mrs. Dundyke, came on to Rousseau's Island. Mr. Dundyke was not so far off then, but that his wife recognised him. Mr. Hardcastle was the next to come up.

"What are you looking at? Why, who's that in a boat there? Surely not Dundyke! Give me the glass."

"Yes, it is," said Mrs. Dundyke.

"Where in the name of wonder is he off to, this melting day? To drown himself?"

The ladies laughed.

"Ah! I see; he can't stand it. The men are bearing off to the side—going to land him there. They had better put back."

Mrs. Dundyke sat down underneath the poplar trees, spreading a large umbrella over her head, and took out her work. Mrs. Hardcastle was never seen to do any work, but she seated herself under the shade of the umbrella; and the gentleman, leaving them to themselves, walked back again over the suspension bridge.

CHAPTER IV. A MYSTERY

Which of the three wore the deepest tint, the darkest blue—the skies, the hills, or the lake? Each was of a different shade, but all were blue and beautiful; and on all lay the aspect of complete repose. The two ladies, in that little garden near the Hôtel des Bergues, Rousseau's Island, as it is called, and which you who have sojourned in Geneva remember well, looking out over the lake at the solitary boat bearing away towards the right, noticed that no other object broke the prospect's stillness. It was scarcely a day for a row on Geneva's lake. Not a breath of air arose to counteract the vivid heat of the August sun; hot and shadeless he poured forth his overpowering blaze; and, lovely as the lake is, favoured by nature and renowned in poetry, it was more lovely that day to look at than to glide upon.

So thought the gentleman in that solitary boat, our friend Mr. David Dundyke—or, let us give him the title he had of late aspired to, David Dundyke, Esquire. He felt, to use his own words, "piping hot;" he sat on one side of the boat, and the sun burnt his back; he changed to the other, and it blistered his face; he tried the stern, and the sun seemed to be all round him. He looked up at the Jura, with a vain longing that they might be transported from their site to where they could screen him from his hot tormentor: he turned and gazed at the Alps, and wished he could see on them a shady place, and that he was in it; but, wherever he looked and turned, the sun seemed to blind and to scorch him. Some people, clayey mortals though the best of us are, might have found poetry, or food for it, in all that lay around; but David Dundyke had no poetry in his heart, still less in his head. He glanced, with listless, half-shut eyes, at the two men who were rowing him along; and began to wonder how any men could be induced to row, that burning day, even to obtain a portion of the world's idol—money. David Dundyke cared not, not he, for the scenery around; he never cared for anything in his life that was not substantial and tangible. What was the common scenery of nature to him, since it could not add to his wealth or enhance his importance?—and that was all the matter at *his* heart. He had never looked at it all the way from London to Geneva; he did not look at that around him now. Geneva itself, its lovely surrounding villas, its picturesque lake, the glorious chain of mountains on either side, even Mont Blanc in the distance, were as nothing to him. For some days after his arrival at Geneva, the mountain had remained obstinately enshrouded in clouds; but one evening that he and his wife were walking outside the town with Mr. Hardcastle, it was pointed out to him, standing proudly forth in all its beauty; and he had stared at it with just as much interest as he would have done at the hill in Greenwich Park covered with snow. He had seen the lovely colour, the dark, brilliant blue of the Rhone's waters, as they escaped from the lake to mingle with those of the thick, turbulent Arve; and he did not care to notice the contrast in the streams. There were no associations in his mind connected with that fair azure lake, whence coursed the one; he had no curiosity as to the never-changing glaciers that were the source of the other.

But, had Mr. Dundyke's soul been wholly given up to poetry and sentiment, it would have been lost that day in the overpowering heat. He bore it as long as he could, and then suddenly told the men to bear to the right and put him on shore. This movement had been observed by Mr. Hardcastle, from the little island, as you may remember. The men, not sorry perhaps to be off the lake themselves, inured though they were to Geneva's August sun, made speedily for a shady place, and landed him.

"Ah! this is pleasant," exclaimed Mr. Dundyke, throwing himself at full length on the cool and shady grass. "It is quite Heaven, this is, after that horrid burning lake." The two boatmen laid on their oars and rested.

"How thirsty it has made me!" he resumed, "I could drink the lake dry. What a luxury some iced wine would be now! And ice is so cheap and plentiful up at the hotel yonder. Suppose I send the boat back for Mr. Hardcastle, and the two women? And tell 'em it's Paradise, sitting here, in comparison

with the hot hotel; and drop in a hint about the iced wine? He will be sure to take it, and be glad of the excuse. The women would find it rather of the ratherest for heat, coming across the lake, but charming when they got here. 'Tain't far, and their complexions are not of the spoiling sort. Mrs. D.'s ain't of no particular colour at all just now, except red; and t'other's is like chalk. Oh! let 'em risk it."

Taking out his silver pencil-case (as the men deposed to subsequently) he tore a leaf from his pocket-book, scribbled a few lines on it, and folding it, directed it to – Hardcastle, Esquire: and it had never occurred to Mr. Dundyke until that moment, and the fact struck him as a singular one, that he was ignorant of – Hardcastle, Esquire's Christian name. The men received the note and their orders, and then prepared to push off.

"We com back when we have give dis; com back for de jontilmans?" asked the one who spoke English.

"Come back! of course you are to come back," responded the common-councilman. "How am I to get home, else? But you are to bring the two ladies and the gentleman, and some ice and some wine; and to look sharp about it. Take care that the bottles don't get broke in the boat."

The men rowed away, leaving Mr. Dundyke lying there. They made good speed to the Hôtel des Bergues, according to orders, but were told that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hardcastle was in. This caused a delay of two good hours. The boatmen lingered near the door of the hotel, waiting; and at last one of the waiters bethought himself that the ladies might be on Rousseau's Island. There they were found, and Mrs. Hardcastle read the note.

"What do you say?" she asked, tossing it to Mrs. Dundyke. "Shall we go?"

"But where is Mr. Hardcastle, ma'am?"

"Who's to know? He may be gone round to meet your husband. He saw the probable spot the boat was making for. We may as well go. Perhaps they are both waiting for us. Waiter," continued Mrs. Hardcastle, in her customary imperious manner, "let some wine be placed in the boat, and plenty of ice."

Under cover of umbrellas, the two ladies were rowed across the hot lake to the place where the men had left Mr. Dundyke. But no trace of that gentleman could now be seen; and they sat down in the shade to cool their heated faces, glad of the respite. Mrs. Hardcastle helped herself to some wine and ice, and Mrs. Dundyke presently took her work out of her pocket.

"How industrious you are!" exclaimed the idle woman. "What do you say the embroidery is for? A shirt front?"

Mrs. Dundyke displayed her work. It was for a shirt-front, and the embroidery was beautiful. She was doing two of them, she said. Her husband would require them during his shrievalty.

"I'd not take such trouble for my husband, though he were made king to-morrow," exclaimed Mrs. Hardcastle.

After making that remark she took some more wine, and subsequently dropped asleep. Mrs. Dundyke, engaged in her labour of love, for she loved both the work itself and him who was to wear it, let the time slip on unconsciously. It was only when the afternoon shadows struck on her view as becoming long, when the sun had changed his place from one part of the heavens to another, that a vague feeling of alarm stole over her.

"Where *can* he be? What is the time?"

She spoke aloud. Mrs. Hardcastle started at the words, and stared to see how the day had gone on. She, Mrs. Hardcastle, was the first to call out the name of Mr. Dundyke. She called it several times, and she had a loud, coarse, harsh voice; but only echo answered her. The boatmen woke up from their slumbers, and shouted in their patois, but there came no response from Mr. Dundyke. A sickening fear, whose very intensity made her heart cold, rushed over Mrs. Dundyke. Her hands shook; the red of her face turned to pallor.

"Why, you never mean to say you are alarmed!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardcastle, looking at her in surprise.

"No—no, ma'am, not exactly alarmed," returned poor Mrs. Dundyke, half ashamed to confess to the feeling. But her quivering lips gave the lie to her words. "I do think it strange he should go away, knowing he had sent for us. I was quite easy at first, thinking he had gone to sleep somewhere, overpowered with the heat. There is no danger, I suppose, that—that—anyone could fall into the water from this spot?"

There was certainly no danger of that: and the boatmen laughed at the notion, for the bank and the water were at that place nearly on a level.

"A man might walk in if he felt so inclined," observed Mrs. Hardcastle, jestingly, "but he could scarcely enter it in any other manner. And your husband is not one to cut short his life for pleasure."

Not he, indeed! Never a man less likely to make his own quietus than plain practical David Dundyke, with his future aspirations and his harmless ambition. His wife knew that the Lord Mayor's chair, shining in the distant vista, would alone have kept him from plunging head foremost into the most tempting lake that ever bubbled in the sunlight.

"There is no marvel about it," said Mrs. Hardcastle. "The boatmen were kept two hours at the hotel, remember, before we were found, and Mr. Dundyke naturally grew tired of waiting, and went away, thinking we should not come."

"But where can he be?" cried Mrs. Dundyke. "What has he done with himself?"

"He has gone back by land. There was no other course for him, if he thought—as he no doubt did think—that the boatman had misunderstood his orders and would not return."

"But, ma'am, he does not know his way back."

"Not know it! Instinct would tell it him. He has only to keep the lake on his right, and follow his nose; he would soon be in Geneva."

It was so probable a solution of the mystery, that Mrs. Dundyke had been unreasonable not to adopt it; indeed she was glad to do it; and they got into the boat, and were rowed back again, expecting Mr. Dundyke would be at the hotel. But they did not find him there. And it was nearly five o'clock then.

"That's nothing," said Mrs. Hardcastle. "The day is so hot he would take his time walking. My husband has not been in either, it seems. Rely upon it they have met and are together; they have turned into some cool café."

The ladies went upstairs together, each into her respective chamber: it has been said that the rooms joined. But that undefined dread, amounting to a positive agony, weighed still on the spirits of Mrs. Dundyke. She could not rest. Mrs. Hardcastle was attiring herself for dinner; not so Mrs. Dundyke; she stood at the door peeping out, hoping to see her husband appear in the long corridor. While thus looking, there came, creeping up the stairs, Mr. Hardcastle, stealing along, as it seemed to Mrs. Dundyke, to shun observation, his boots white, as if he had walked much in the dusty roads, his face scratched, and one of his fingers sprained (as she learnt afterwards) and bound up with a handkerchief.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, darting forward in high excitement, "where is he? where is Mr. Dundyke? What has happened to him?"

Mr. Hardcastle stood for a moment transfixed, and, unless Mrs. Dundyke was strangely mistaken, his face changed colour. She associated no suspicion with that pallor *then*; she but thought of her own ill manners in accosting him so abruptly.

"What of your husband?" he asked, rallying himself. "I don't know anything of him. Is he not in?"

Mrs. Dundyke explained. Mrs. Hardcastle, hearing their voices, came out of her room and helped her.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Mr. Hardcastle, when he had listened, and his tone was one of indifference. "Oh, he will soon be back. If he is not in, in time for dinner, Mrs. Dundyke, you can go down with us. Don't alarm yourself."

"But have you not seen him?—not been with him?" urged poor Mrs. Dundyke.

"I have never seen him since breakfast."

"We thought you might have walked round by the shore to join him, as you saw this morning where the boat was making for," remarked Mrs. Hardcastle.

He turned savagely upon her, his eyes glaring like a tiger's.

"No, madam," he said, with concentrated passion, "none save a fool would undertake such a walk to-day. I have been in the town, executing various commissions," he added, changing his tone, and addressing Mrs. Dundyke, "and a pretty accident I had nearly met with: in avoiding a restive horse on the dusty quays, I slipped down, with my face on some flint stones."

Mrs. Dundyke would not go down to dinner, but Mrs. Hardcastle fetched her into her own room afterwards, and ordered tea brought up, and they were both very kind to her, buoying up her spirits, and laughing at her fears. Her husband had only lost his way, they urged, and would be home fast enough by morning—a rare joke they would have with him about running away, when he did come.

It was eleven o'clock when Mrs. Dundyke wished them good night, and retired to her chamber, feeling like one more dead than alive. It is probable that few of us can form any adequate idea of her sensations. But for that horrible, mysterious dread, which seemed to have come upon her without sufficient cause, the mere absence of her husband ought not so very much to have alarmed her. She felt a conviction, sure and certain, that some dreadful fate had overtaken him; and, in that dread torture of suspense, she would have given her own life up the next moment, oh, how willingly, to see him return.

She stood at the open window of her room, leaning far out of it, hoping to see him come round the corner of the street, (stay, not so much hoping as *wishing*.) foot-sore and travel-worn, having lost his way and found it again. She wondered whether anyone was still up, to let him in, if he did come; if not, she would steal downstairs herself, and work at the door fastenings until she undid them. It was with great difficulty, exercising the very utmost self-control, that she stopped where she was, that she did not go out into the streets, searching for him.

While thus thinking, Mrs. Dundyke became aware that strange sounds were proceeding from the next room, though not at first had she heeded them. A fearful quarrel appeared to be taking place between Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle, and Mrs. Dundyke drew back and closed her window in tremor. Its substance she could not hear, did not wish to hear; but wild sobs and reproaches seemed to come from the lady, and sharp words, not unmixed with oaths, from the gentleman. Twice Mrs. Dundyke heard her husband's name mentioned, or her own ("Dundyke"); and the quarrel seemed to have reference to him. One sentence of Mr. Hardcastle's came distinctly on her ear, apparently in answer to some threat or reproach; it was to the effect that Mrs. Hardcastle might leave him as soon as she pleased; might take her departure then, in the midnight hour. After awhile the anger appeared to subside, silence supervened, and Mrs. Dundyke watched through the live-long night. But her husband did not come.

With the morning Mrs. Hardcastle came to her. She said they had received letters which must cause them to depart for Genoa, where they found their remitted money had really been sent.

"But, ma'am," urged poor Mrs. Dundyke, "surely Mr. Hardcastle will not go and leave me alone in this dreadful uncertainty!"

"He intends to stay until the evening; he will not leave you a moment earlier than he is obliged. Perhaps your husband will make his appearance this morning."

In the course of the morning, Mr. Hardcastle went with the two boatmen to the place where they had landed Mr. Dundyke on the previous day, and a gentleman named by the proprietor of the hotel accompanied them; but not the slightest trace of him could be found, though some hours were spent in exploring. In the evening, by the six o'clock diligence, Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle left Geneva, the former handing to Mrs. Dundyke an order upon the house in London, Hardcastle and Co., for the twenty pounds he had borrowed of her husband. He regretted, he said, his inability to furnish her, then, with any funds she might require, but he had barely sufficient to carry himself and wife to

Genoa. If Mrs. Dundyke approved, he would, with the greatest pleasure, forward from that city any sum she chose to name; for, being known there, his credit was unlimited. Mrs. Dundyke declined his offer, with thanks: she reflected that, if her husband returned, he would have his money with him; and in the event of his mysterious absence being prolonged, she might as well write home for money as borrow it from Mr. Hardcastle at Genoa. She wondered, but did not presume to ask, how he had procured funds for his own journey, and to discharge his hotel bill, which he paid before starting.

"Keep up your spirits, Mrs. Dundyke," he cheerfully said as he shook hands with her at parting. "Depend upon it, your husband will come home, and bring some good reason for his absence; and if it were not that I am compelled—compelled by business—to go on to Genoa, I would not leave you."

She sat down as if some cold shiver had seized upon her heart. It was in her own room that this farewell was spoken; and in that one moment, as he released her hand, and his peculiar eyes rested on her in the parting, and then were lost sight of, it flashed into her mind where she had seen those eyes before. They were the eyes she had once so shrunk from at Westerbury; at least, they bore the same expression—Benjamin Carr's.

Mrs. Dundyke's pulses quickened, and she clasped her hands. For one single moment a doubt arose to her whether Mr. Hardcastle could be Mr. Hardcastle—whether he was not an impostor, Benjamin Carr, or any other, travelling under a false name; and a whole host of trifling incidents, puzzles to her hitherto, arose to her mind as if in confirmation. But the doubt did not last. That he was really anybody but the great Mr. Hardcastle—head, under his uncle, of the great house of Hardcastle and Co.—she did not believe. As to the resemblance in the eyes to those of Benjamin Carr, she concluded it must be accidental; and of Benjamin Carr's features she retained no recollection. She opened the order he had given her to receive the twenty pounds, and found it was signed "B. Hardcastle:" no Christian name in full. Mrs. Dundyke dismissed all doubts from her memory, and continued to believe implicitly in Mr. Hardcastle.

It was, perhaps, a somewhat curious coincidence—at least, you may deem it so, as events go on—that on this same evening an English clergyman should arrive at Geneva, and put up at the hotel. It was the Rev. Wheeler Prattleton, who was visiting Switzerland in pursuance of his intentions (as you once heard mention of), accompanied by his eldest daughter. The strange disappearance of Mr. Dundyke had caused some stir in the hotel, and the clergyman was told of it.

"It is an uncommon name, papa—Dundyke," observed Miss Prattleton. "Do you think it can be the Dundykes who are relatives of Mrs. Arkell's?"

"What Dundykes?" returned Mr. Prattleton, his memory on these points not so retentive as his daughter's. "Has Mrs. Arkell relatives of the name?"

"Oh, papa, you forget. Mrs. Arkell's sister is a Mrs. Dundyke. I have often heard Travice Arkell speak of her; he calls her Aunt Betsey. They live in London."

"We will ascertain, Mary," said Mr. Prattleton, his sympathies aroused. "If this lady should prove to be Mrs. Arkell's sister, we must do all we can for her."

It was very soon ascertained, for the clergyman at once sent up his card, and requested an interview with Mrs. Dundyke. Mr. Prattleton threw himself completely into the affair, and became almost painfully interested in it. He believed, as did all others, that nothing serious had occurred, but that from some unaccountable cause Mr. Dundyke remained absent—perhaps from temporary illness or accident; and every hour, as the days went on, was his return looked for. Mary Prattleton had the room vacated by the Hardcastles, Mr. Prattleton had one on the same floor; and their presence was of the very greatest comfort to poor, lonely, bereaved Mrs. Dundyke.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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