

HENRY WOOD

THE

CHANNINGS

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Mrs. Henry Wood

The Channings: A Story

CHAPTER I. – THE INKED SURPLICE

The sweet bells of Helstonleigh Cathedral were ringing out in the summer's afternoon. Groups of people lined the streets, in greater number than the ordinary business of the day would have brought forth; some pacing with idle steps, some halting to talk with one another, some looking in silence towards a certain point, as far as the eye could reach; all waiting in expectation.

It was the first day of Helstonleigh Assizes; that is, the day on which the courts of law began their sittings. Generally speaking, the commission was opened at Helstonleigh on a Saturday; but for some convenience in the arrangements of the circuit, it was fixed this time for Wednesday; and when those cathedral bells burst forth, they gave signal that the judges had arrived and were entering the sheriff's carriage, which had gone out to meet them.

A fine sight, carrying in it much of majesty, was the procession, as it passed through the streets with its slow and stately steps; and although Helstonleigh saw it twice a year, it looked at it with gratified eyes still, and made the day into a sort of holiday. The trumpeters rode first, blowing the proud note of advance, and the long line of well-mounted javelin men came next, two abreast; their attire that of the livery of the high sheriff's family, and their javelins held in rest. Sundry officials followed, and the governor of the county gaol sat in an open carriage, his long white wand raised in the air. Then appeared the handsome, closed equipage of the sheriff, its four horses, caparisoned with silver, pawing the ground, for they chafed at the slow pace to which they were restrained. In it, in their scarlet robes and flowing wigs, carrying awe to many a young spectator, sat the judges. The high sheriff sat opposite to them, his chaplain by his side, in his gown and bands. A crowd of gentlemen, friends of the sheriff, followed on horseback; and a mob of ragamuffins brought up the rear.

To the assize courts the procession took its way, and there the short business of opening the commission was gone through, when the judges re-entered the carriage to proceed to the cathedral, having been joined by the mayor and corporation. The sweet bells of Helstonleigh were still ringing out, not to welcome the judges to the city now, but as an invitation to them to come and worship God. Within the grand entrance of the cathedral, waiting to receive the judges, stood the Dean of Helstonleigh, two or three of the chapter, two of the minor canons, and the king's scholars and choristers, all in their white robes. The bells ceased; the fine organ pealed out—and there are few finer organs in England than that of Helstonleigh—the vergers with their silver maces, and the decrepit old bedesmen in their black gowns, led the way to the choir, the long scarlet trains of the judges held up behind: and places were found for all.

The Rev. John Pye began the service; it was his week for chanting. He was one of the senior minor canons, and head-master of the college school. At the desk opposite to him sat the Rev. William Yorke, a young man who had only just gained his minor canonry.

The service went on smoothly until the commencement of the anthem. In one sense it went on smoothly to the end, for no person present, not even the judges themselves, could see that anything was wrong. Mr. Pye was what was called "chanter" to the cathedral, which meant that it was he who had the privilege of selecting the music for the chants and other portions of the service, when the dean did not do so himself. The anthem he had put up for this occasion was a very good one, taken from the Psalms of David. It commenced with a treble solo; it was, moreover, an especial favourite of Mr. Pye's; and he complacently disposed himself to listen.

But no sooner was the symphony over, no sooner had the first notes of the chorister sounded on Mr. Pye's ear, than his face slightly flushed, and he lifted his head with a sharp, quick gesture.

That was not the voice which ought to have sung this fine anthem; that was a cracked, *passée* voice, belonging to the senior chorister, a young gentleman of seventeen, who was going out of the choir at Michaelmas. He had done good service for the choir in his day, but his voice was breaking now; and the last time he had attempted a solo, the bishop (who interfered most rarely with the executive of the cathedral; and, indeed, it was not his province to do so) had spoken himself to Mr. Pye on the conclusion of the service, and said the boy ought not to be allowed to sing alone again.

Mr. Pye bent his head forward to catch a glimpse of the choristers, five of whom sat on his side of the choir, the *decani*; five on the opposite, or *cantori* side. So far as he could see, the boy, Stephen Bywater, who ought to have taken the anthem, was not in his place. There appeared to be only four of them; but the senior boy with his clean, starched surplice, partially hid those below him. Mr. Pye wondered where his eyes could have been, not to have noticed the boy's absence when they had all been gathered round the entrance, waiting for the judges.

Had Mr. Pye's attention not been fully engrossed with his book, as the service had gone on, he might have seen the boy opposite to him; for there sat Bywater, before the bench of king's scholars, and right in front of Mr. Pye. Mr. Pye's glance fell upon him now, and he could scarcely believe it. He rubbed his eyes, and looked, and rubbed again. Bywater there! and without his surplice! braving, as it were, the head-master! What could he possibly mean by this act of insubordination? Why was he not in his place in the school? Why was he mixing with the congregation? But Mr. Pye could as yet obtain no solution to the mystery.

The anthem came to an end; the dean had bent his brow at the solo, but it did no good; and, the prayers over, the sheriff's chaplain ascended to the pulpit to preach the sermon. He selected his text from St. John's Gospel: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In the course of his sermon he pointed out that the unhappy prisoners in the gaol, awaiting the summons to answer before an earthly tribunal for the evil deeds they had committed, had been led into their present miserable condition by the seductions of the flesh. They had fallen into sin, he went on, by the indulgence of their passions; they had placed no restraint upon their animal appetites and guilty pleasures; they had sunk gradually into crime, and had now to meet the penalty of the law. But did no blame, he asked, attach to those who had remained indifferent to their downward course; who had never stretched forth a friendly hand to rescue them from destruction; who had made no effort to teach and guide in the ways of truth and righteousness these outcasts of society? Were we, he demanded, at liberty to ignore our responsibility by asking in the words of earth's first criminal, "Am I my brother's keeper?" No; it was at once our duty and our privilege to engage in the noble work of man's reformation—to raise the fallen—to seek out the lost, and to restore the outcast; and this, he argued, could only be accomplished by a widely-disseminated knowledge of God's truth, by patient, self-denying labour in God's work, and by a devout dependence on God's Holy Spirit.

At the conclusion of the service the head-master proceeded to the vestry, where the minor canons, choristers, and lay-clerks kept their surplices. Not the dean and chapter; they robed in the chapter-house: and the king's scholars put on their surplices in the schoolroom. The choristers followed Mr. Pye to the vestry, Bywater entering with them. The boys grouped themselves together: they were expecting—to use their own expression—a row.

"Bywater, what is the meaning of this conduct?" was the master's stern demand.

"I had no surplice, sir," was Bywater's answer—a saucy-looking boy with a red face, who had a propensity for getting into "rows," and, consequently, into punishment.

"No surplice!" repeated Mr. Pye—for the like excuse had never been offered by a college boy before. "What do you mean?"

"We were ordered to wear clean surplices this afternoon. I brought mine to college this morning; I left it here in the vestry, and took the dirty one home. Well, sir, when I came to put it on this afternoon, it was gone."

"How could it have gone? Nonsense, sir! Who would touch your surplice?"

“But I could *not* find it, sir,” repeated Bywater. “The choristers know I couldn’t; and they left me hunting for it when they went into the hall to receive the judges. I could not go into my stall, sir, and sing the anthem without my surplice.”

“Hurst had no business to sing it,” was the vexed rejoinder of the master. “You know your voice is gone, Hurst. You should have gone up to the organist, stated the case, and had another anthem put up.”

“But, sir, I was expecting Bywater in every minute. I thought he’d be sure to find his surplice somewhere,” was Hurst’s defence. “And when he did not come, and it grew too late to do anything, I thought it better to take the anthem myself than to give it to a junior, who would be safe to have made a mess of it. Better for the judges and other strangers to hear a faded voice in Helstonleigh Cathedral, than to hear bad singing.”

The master did not speak. So far, Hurst’s argument had reason in it.

“And—I beg your pardon for what I am about to say, sir,” Hurst went on: “but I hope you will allow me to assure you beforehand, that neither I, nor my juniors under me, have had a hand in this affair. Bywater has just told me that the surplice is found, and how; and blame is sure to be cast upon us; but I declare that not one of us has been in the mischief.”

Mr. Pye opened his eyes. “What now?” he asked. “What is the mischief?”

“I found the surplice afterwards, sir,” Bywater said. “This is it.”

He spoke meaningly, as if preparing them for a surprise, and pointed to a corner of the vestry. There lay a clean, but tumbled surplice, half soaked in ink. The head-master and Mr. Yorke, lay-clerks and choristers, all gathered round, and stared in amazement.

“They shall pay me the worth of the surplice,” spoke Bywater, an angry shade crossing his usually good-tempered face.

“And have a double flogging into the bargain,” exclaimed the master. “Who has done this?”

“It looks as though it had been rabbled up for the purpose,” cried Hurst, in schoolboy phraseology, bending down and touching it gingerly with his finger. “The ink has been poured on to it.”

“Where did you find it?” sharply demanded the master—not that he was angry with the boys before him, but he felt angry that the thing should have taken place.

“I found it behind the screen, sir,” replied Bywater. “I thought I’d look there, as a last resource, and there it was. I should think nobody has been behind that screen for a twelvemonth past, for it’s over ankles in dust there.”

“And you know nothing of it, Hurst?”

“Nothing whatever, sir,” was the reply of the senior chorister, spoken earnestly. “When Bywater whispered to me what had occurred, I set it down as the work of one of the choristers, and I taxed them with it. But they all denied it strenuously, and I believe they spoke the truth. I put them on their honour.”

The head-master peered at the choristers. Innocence was in every face—not guilt; and he, with Hurst, believed he must look elsewhere for the culprit. That it had been done by a college boy there could be no doubt whatever; either out of spite to Bywater, or from pure love of mischief. The king’s scholars had no business in the vestry; but just at this period the cathedral was undergoing repair, and they could enter, if so minded, at any time of the day, the doors being left open for the convenience of the workmen.

The master turned out of the vestry. The cathedral was emptied of its crowd, leaving nothing but the dust to tell of what had been, and the bells once more went pealing forth over the city. Mr. Pye crossed the nave, and quitted the cathedral by the cloister door, followed by the choristers. The schoolroom, once the large refectory of the monks in monkish days, was on the opposite side of the cloisters; a large room, which you gained by steps, and whose high windows were many feet from the ground. Could you have climbed to those windows, and looked from them, you would have beheld

a fair scene. A clear river wound under the cathedral walls; beyond its green banks were greener meadows, stretching out in the distance; far-famed, beautiful hills bounded the horizon. Close by, were the prebendal houses; some built of red stone, some covered with ivy, all venerable with age. Pleasant gardens surrounded most of them, and dark old elms towered aloft, sheltering the rooks, which seemed as old as the trees.

The king's scholars were in the schoolroom, cramming their surplices into bags, or preparing to walk home with them thrown upon their arms, and making enough hubbub to alarm the rooks. It dropped to a dead calm at sight of the master. On holidays—and this was one—it was not usual for the masters to enter the school after service. The school was founded by royal charter—its number limited to forty boys, who were called king's scholars, ten of whom, those whose voices were the best, were chosen choristers. The master marched to his desk, and made a sign for the boys to approach, addressing himself to the senior boy.

"Gaunt, some mischief has been done in the vestry, touching Bywater's surplice. Do you know anything of it?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. And Gaunt was one who scorned to tell a lie.

The master ranged his eyes round the circle. "Who does?"

There was no reply. The boys looked at one another, a sort of stolid surprise for the most part predominating. Mr. Pye resumed:

"Bywater tells me that he left his clean surplice in the vestry this morning. This afternoon it was found thrown behind the screen, tumbled together, beyond all doubt purposely, and partially covered with ink. I ask, who has done this?"

"I have not, sir," burst forth from most of the boys simultaneously. The seniors, of whom there were three besides Gaunt, remained silent. But this was nothing unusual; for the seniors, unless expressly questioned or taxed with a fault, did not accustom themselves to a voluntary denial.

"I can only think this has been the result of accident," continued the head-master. "It is incredible to suppose any one of you would wantonly destroy a surplice. If so, let that boy, whoever he may have been, speak up honourably, and I will forgive him. I conclude that the ink must have been spilt upon it, I say accidentally, and that he then, in his consternation, tumbled the surplice together, and threw it out of sight behind the screen. It had been more straightforward, more in accordance with what I wish you all to be—boys of thorough truth and honour—had he candidly confessed it. But the fear of the moment may have frightened his better judgment away. Let him acknowledge it now, and I will forgive him; though of course he must pay Bywater for another surplice."

A dead silence.

"Do you hear, boys?" the master sternly asked.

No answer from any one; nothing but continued silence. The master rose, and his countenance assumed its most severe expression.

"Hear further, boys. That it is one of you, I am convinced; and your refusing to speak compels me to fear that it was *not* an accident, but a premeditated, wicked act. I now warn you, whoever did it, that if I can discover the author or authors, he or they shall be punished with the utmost severity, short of expulsion, that is allowed by the rules of the school. Seniors, I call for your aid in this. Look to it."

The master left the schoolroom, and Babel broke loose—questioning, denying, protesting, one of another. Bywater was surrounded.

"Won't there be a stunning flogging? Bywater, who did it? Do you know?"

Bywater sat himself astride over the end of a bench, and nodded. The senior boy turned to him, some slight surprise in his look and tone.

"Do you know, Bywater?"

"Pretty well, Gaunt. There are two fellows in this school, one's at your desk, one's at the second desk, and I believe they'd either of them do me a nasty turn if they could. It was one of them."

"Who do you mean?" asked Gaunt eagerly.

Bywater laughed. "Thank you. If I tell now, it may defeat the ends of justice, as the newspapers say. I'll wait till I am sure—and then, let him look to himself. I won't spare him, and I don't fancy Pye will."

"You'll never find out, if you don't find out at once, Bywater," cried Hurst.

"Shan't I? You'll see," was the significant answer. "It's some distance from here to the vestry of the cathedral, and a fellow could scarcely steal there and steal back without being seen by somebody. It was done stealthily, mark you; and when folks go on stealthy errands they are safe to be met."

Before he had finished speaking, a gentlemanly-looking boy of about twelve, with delicate features, a damask flush on his face, and wavy auburn hair, sprang up with a start. "Why!" he exclaimed, "I saw—" And there he came to a sudden halt, and the flush on his cheek grew deeper, and then faded again. It was a face of exceeding beauty, refined almost as a girl's, and it had gained for him in the school the *sobriquet* of "Miss."

"What's the matter with you, Miss Charley?"

"Oh, nothing, Bywater."

"Charley Channing," exclaimed Gaunt, "do you know who did it?"

"If I did, Gaunt, I should not tell," was the fearless answer.

"Do you know, Charley?" cried Tom Channing, who was one of the seniors of the school.

"Where's the good of asking that wretched little muff?" burst forth Gerald Yorke. "He's only a girl. How do you know it was not one of the lay-clerks, Bywater? They carry ink in their pockets, I'll lay. Or any of the masons might have gone into the vestry, for the matter of that."

"It wasn't a lay-clerk, and it wasn't a mason," stoically nodded Bywater. "It was a college boy. And I shall lay my finger upon him as soon as I am a little bit surer than I am. I am three parts sure now."

"If Charley Channing does not suspect somebody, I'm not here," exclaimed Hurst, who had closely watched the movement alluded to; and he brought his hand down fiercely on the desk as he spoke. "Come, Miss Channing, just shell out what you know; it's a shame the choristers should lie under such a ban: and of course we *shall* do so, with Pye."

"You be quiet, Hurst, and let Miss Charley alone," drawled Bywater. "I don't want him, or anybody else to get pummelled to powder; I'll find it out for myself, I say. Won't my old aunt be in a way though, when she sees the surplice, and finds she has another to make! I say, Hurst, didn't you croak out that solo! Their lordships in the wigs will be soliciting your photograph as a keepsake."

"I hope they'll set it in diamonds," retorted Hurst.

The boys began to file out, putting on their trenchers, as they clattered down the steps. Charley Channing sat himself down in the cloisters on a pile of books, as if willing that the rest should pass out before him. His brother saw him sitting there, and came up to him, speaking in an undertone.

"Charley, you know the rules of the school: one boy must not tell of another. As Bywater says, you'd get pummelled to powder."

"Look here, Tom. I tell you—"

"Hold your tongue, boy!" sharply cried Tom Channing. "Do you forget that I am a senior? You heard the master's words. We know no brothers in school life, you must remember."

Charley laughed. "Tom, you think I am a child, I believe. I didn't enter the school yesterday. All I was going to tell you was this: I don't know any more than you who inked the surplice; and suspicion goes for nothing."

"All right," said Tom Channing, as he flew after the rest; and Charley sat on, and fell into a reverie.

The senior boy of the school, you have heard, was Gaunt. The other three seniors, Tom Channing, Harry Huntley, and Gerald Yorke, possessed a considerable amount of power; but nothing equal to that vested in Gaunt. They had all three entered the school on the same day, and had kept pace with each other as they worked their way up in it, consequently not one could be said to hold

priority; and when Gaunt should quit the school at the following Michaelmas, one of the three would become senior. Which, you may wish to ask? Ah, we don't know that, yet.

Charley Channing—a truthful, good boy, full of integrity, kind and loving by nature, and a universal favourite—sat tilted on the books. He was wishing with all his heart that he had not seen something which he had seen that day. He had been going through the cloisters in the afternoon, about the time that all Helstonleigh, college boys included, were in the streets watching for the sheriff's procession, when he saw one of the seniors steal (Bywater had been happy in the epithet) out of the cathedral into the quiet cloisters, peer about him, and then throw a broken ink-bottle into the graveyard which the cloisters enclosed. The boy stole away without perceiving Charley; and there sat Charley now, trying to persuade himself by some ingenious sophistry—which, however, he knew *was* sophistry—that the senior might not have been the one in the mischief; that the ink-bottle might have been on legitimate duty, and that he threw it from him because it was broken. Charles Channing did not like these unpleasant secrets. There was in the school a code of honour—the boys called it so—that one should not tell of another; and if the head-master ever went the length of calling the seniors to his aid, those seniors deemed themselves compelled to declare it, if the fault became known to them. Hence Tom Channing's hasty arrest of his brother's words.

"I wonder if I could see the ink-bottle there?" quoth Charles to himself. Rising from the books he ran through the cloisters to a certain part, and there, by a dexterous spring, perched himself on to the frame of the open mullioned windows. The gravestones lay pretty thick in the square, enclosed yard, the long, dank grass growing around them; but there appeared to be no trace of an ink-bottle.

"What on earth are you mounted up there for? Come down instantly. You know the row there has been about the walls getting defaced."

The speaker was Gerald Yorke, who had come up silently. Openly disobey him, young Channing dared not, for the seniors exacted obedience in school and out of it. "I'll get down directly, sir. I am not hurting the wall."

"What are you looking at? What is there to see?" demanded Yorke.

"Nothing particular. I was looking for what I can't see," pointedly returned Charley.

"Look here, Miss Channing; I don't quite understand you to-day. You were excessively mysterious in school, just now, over that surplice affair. Who's to know you were not in the mess yourself?"

"I think you might know it," returned Charley, as he jumped down. "It was more likely to have been you than I."

Yorke laid hold of him, clutching his jacket with a firm grasp. "You insolent young jackanapes! Now! what do you mean? You don't stir from here till you tell me."

"I'll tell you, Mr. Yorke; I'd rather tell," cried the boy, sinking his voice to a whisper. "I was here when you came peeping out of the college doors this afternoon, and I saw you come up to this niche, and fling away an ink-bottle."

Yorke's face flushed scarlet. He was a tall, strong fellow, with a pale complexion, thick, projecting lips, and black hair, promising fair to make a Hercules—but all the Yorkes were finely framed. He gave young Channing a taste of his strength; the boy, when shaken, was in his hands as a very reed. "You miserable imp! Do you know who is said to be the father of lies?"

"Let me alone, sir. It's no lie, and you know it's not. But I promise you on my honour that I won't split. I'll keep it in close; always, if I can. The worst of me is, I bring things out sometimes without thought," he added ingenuously. "I know I do; but I'll try and keep in this. You needn't be in a passion, Yorke; I couldn't help seeing what I did. It wasn't my fault."

Yorke's face had grown purple with anger. "Charles Channing, if you don't unsay what you have said, I'll beat you to within an inch of your life."

"I can't unsay it," was the answer.

“You can’t!” reiterated Yorke, grasping him as a hawk would a pigeon. “How dare you brave me to my presence? Unsay the lie you have told.”

“I am in God’s presence, Yorke, as well as in yours,” cried the boy, reverently; “and I will not tell a lie.”

“Then take your whacking! I’ll teach you what it is to invent fabrications! I’ll put you up for—”

Yorke’s tongue and hands stopped. Turning out of the private cloister-entrance of the deanery, right upon them, had come Dr. Gardner, one of the prebendaries. He cast a displeased glance at Yorke, not speaking; and little Channing, touching his trencher to the doctor, flew to the place where he had left his books, caught them up, and ran out of the cloisters towards home.

CHAPTER II. – BAD NEWS

The ground near the cathedral, occupied by the deanery and the prebendal residences, was called the Boundaries. There were a few other houses in it, chiefly of a moderate size, inhabited by private families. Across the open gravel walk, in front of the south cloister entrance, was the house appropriated to the headmaster; and the Channings lived in a smaller one, nearly on the confines of the Boundaries. A portico led into it, and there was a sitting-room on either side the hall. Charley entered; and was going, full dash, across the hall to a small room where the boys studied, singing at the top of his voice, when the old servant of the family, Judith, an antiquated body, in a snow-white mob-cap and check apron, met him, and seized his arm.

“Hush, child! There’s ill news in the house.”

Charley dropped his voice to an awe-struck whisper. “What is it, Judith? Is papa worse?”

“Child! there’s illness of mind as well as of body. I didn’t say sickness; I said ill news. I don’t rightly understand it; the mistress said a word to me, and I guessed the rest. And it was me that took in the letter! *Me!* I wish I had put it in my kitchen fire first!”

“Is it—Judith, is it news of the—the cause? Is it over?”

“It’s over, as I gathered. ‘Twas a London letter, and it came by the afternoon post. All the poor master’s hopes and dependencies for years have been wrested from him. And if they’d give me my way, I’d prosecute them postmen for bringing such ill luck to a body’s door.”

Charles stood something like a statue, the bright, sensitive colour deserting his cheek. One of those causes, *Might versus Right*, of which there are so many in the world, had been pending in the Channing family for years and years. It included a considerable amount of money, which ought, long ago, to have devolved peaceably to Mr. Channing; but *Might* was against him, and *Might* threw it into Chancery. The decision of the Vice-Chancellor had been given for Mr. Channing, upon which *Might*, in his overbearing power, carried it to a higher tribunal. Possibly the final decision, from which there could be no appeal, had now come.

“Judith,” Charles asked, after a pause, “did you hear whether—whether the letter—I mean the news—had anything to do with the Lord Chancellor?”

“Oh, bother the Lord Chancellor!” was Judith’s response. “It had to do with somebody that’s an enemy to your poor papa. I know that much. Who’s this?”

The hall door had opened, and Judith and Charles turned towards it. A gay, bright-featured young man of three and twenty entered, tall and handsome, as it was in the nature of the Channings to be. He was the eldest son of the family, James; or, as he was invariably styled, Hamish. He rose six foot two in his stockings, was well made, and upright. In grace and strength of frame the Yorkes and the Channings stood A1 in Helstonleigh.

“Now, then! What are you two concocting? Is he coming over you again to let him make more toffy, Judy, and burn out the bottom of another saucepan?”

“Hamish, Judy says there’s bad news come in by the London post. I am afraid the Lord Chancellor has given judgment—given it against us.”

The careless smile, the half-mocking, expression left the lips of Hamish. He glanced from Judith to Charles, from Charles to Judith. “Is it sure?” he breathed.

“It’s sure that it’s awful news of some sort,” returned Judith; “and the mistress said to me that all was over now. They be all in there, but you two,” pointing with her finger to the parlour on the left of the hall; “and you had better go in to them. Master Hamish—”

“Well?” returned Hamish, in a tone of abstraction.

“You must every one of you just make the best of it, and comfort the poor master. You are young and strong; while he—you know what *he* is. You, in special, Master Hamish, for you’re the eldest born, and were the first of ‘em that I ever nursed upon my knee.”

“Of course—of course,” he hastily replied. “But, oh, Judith! you don’t know half the ill this must bring upon us! Come along, Charley; let us hear the worst.”

Laying his arm with an affectionate gesture round the boy’s neck, Hamish drew him towards the parlour. It was a square, light, cheerful room. Not the best room: that was on the other side the hall. On a sofa, underneath the window, reclined Mr. Channing, his head and shoulders partly raised by cushions. His illness had continued long, and now, it was feared, had become chronic. A remarkably fine specimen of manhood he must have been in his day, his countenance one of thoughtful goodness, pleasant to look upon. Arthur, the second son, had inherited its thoughtfulness, its expression of goodness; James, its beauty; but there was a great likeness between all the four sons. Arthur, only nineteen, was nearly as tall as his brother. He stood bending over the arm of his father’s sofa. Tom, looking very blank and cross, sat at the table, his elbows leaning on it. Mrs. Channing’s pale, sweet face was bent towards her daughter’s, Constance, a graceful girl of one and twenty; and Annabel, a troublesome young lady of nearly fourteen, was surreptitiously giving twitches to Tom’s hair.

Arthur moved from the place next his father when Hamish entered, as if yielding him the right to stand there. A more united family it would be impossible to find. The brothers and sisters loved each other dearly, and Hamish they almost revered—excepting Annabel. Plenty of love the child possessed; but of reverence, little. With his gay good humour, and his indulgent, merry-hearted spirit, Hamish Channing was one to earn love as his right, somewhat thoughtless though he was. Thoroughly well, in the highest sense of the term, had the Channings been reared. Not of their own wisdom had Mr. and Mrs. Channing trained their children.

“What’s the matter, sir?” asked Hamish, smoothing his brow, and suffering the hopeful smile to return to his lips. “Judith says some outrageous luck has arrived; come express, by post.”

“Joke while you may, Hamish,” interposed Mrs. Channing, in a low voice; “I shrink from telling it you. Can you not guess the news?”

Hamish looked round at each, individually, with his sunny smile, and then let it rest upon his mother. “The very worst I can guess is not so bad. We are all here in our accustomed health. Had we sent Annabel up in that new balloon they are advertising, I might fancy it had capsized with her—as it *will* some day. Annabel, never you be persuaded to mount the air in that fashion.”

“Hamish! Hamish!” gently reproved Mrs. Channing. But perhaps she discerned the motive which actuated him. Annabel clapped her hands. She would have thought it great fun to go up in a balloon.

“Well, mother, the worst tidings that the whole world could bring upon us cannot, I say, be very dreadful, while we can discuss them as we are doing now,” said Hamish. “I suppose the Lord Chancellor has pronounced against us?”

“Irrevocably. The suit is for ever at an end, and we have lost it.”

“Hamish is right,” interrupted Mr. Channing. “When the letter arrived, I was for a short time overwhelmed. But I begin to see it already in a less desponding light; and by to-morrow I dare say I shall be cheerful over it. One blessed thing—children, I say advisedly, a ‘blessed’ thing—the worry will be over.”

Charley lifted his head. “The worry, papa?”

“Ay, my boy. The agitation—the perpetual excitement—the sickening suspense—the yearning for the end. You cannot understand this, Charley; you can none of you picture it, as it has been, for me. Could I have gone abroad, as other men, it would have shaken itself off amidst the bustle of the world, and have pressed upon me only at odd times and seasons. But here have I lain; suspense my constant companion. It was not right, to allow the anxiety so to work upon me: but I could not help it; I really could not.”

“We shall manage to do without it, papa,” said Arthur.

“Yes; after a bit, we shall manage very well. The worst is, we are behindhand in our payments; for you know how surely I counted upon this. It ought to have been mine; it was mine by full right

of justice, though it now seems that the law was against me. It is a great affliction; but it is one of those which may be borne with an open brow.”

“What do you mean, papa?”

“Afflictions are of two kinds. The one we bring upon ourselves, through our own misconduct; the other is laid upon us by God for our own advantage. Yes, my boys, we receive many blessings in disguise. Trouble of this sort will only serve to draw out your manly energies, to make you engage vigorously in the business of life, to strengthen your self-dependence and your trust in God. This calamity of the lost lawsuit we must all meet bravely. One mercy, at any rate, the news has brought with it.”

“What is that?” asked Mrs. Channing, lifting her sad face.

“When I have glanced to the possibility of the decision being against me, I have wondered *how* I should pay its long and heavy costs; whether our home must not be broken up to do it, and ourselves turned out upon the world. But the costs are not to fall upon me; all are to be paid out of the estate.”

“That’s good news!” ejaculated Hamish, his face radiant, as he nodded around.

“My darling boys,” resumed Mr. Channing, “you must all work and do your best. I had thought this money would have made things easier for you; but it is not to be. Not that I would have a boy of mine cherish for a moment the sad and vain dream which some do—that of living in idleness. God has sent us all into the world to work; some with their hands, some with their heads; all according to their abilities and their station. You will not be the worse off,” Mr. Channing added with a smile, “for working a little harder than you once thought would be necessary.”

“Perhaps the money may come to us, after all, by some miracle,” suggested Charley.

“No,” replied Mr. Channing. “It has wholly gone from us. It is as much lost to us as though we had never possessed a claim to it.”

It was even so. This decision of the Lord Chancellor had taken it from the Channing family for ever.

“Never mind!” cried Tom, throwing up his trencher, which he had carelessly carried into the room with him. “As papa says, we have our hands and brains: and they often win the race against money in the long run.”

Yes. The boys had active hands and healthy brains—no despicable inheritance, when added to a firm faith in God, and an ardent wish to use, and not misuse, the talents given to them.

CHAPTER III. – CONSTANCE CHANNING

How true is the old proverb—"Man proposes but God disposes!" God's ways are not as our ways. His dealings with us are often mysterious. Happy those, who can detect His hand in all the varied chances and changes of the world.

I am not sure that we can quite picture to ourselves the life that had been Mr. Channing's. Of gentle birth, and reared to no profession, the inheritance which ought to have come to him was looked upon as a sufficient independence. That it would come to him, had never been doubted by himself or by others; and it was only at the very moment when he thought he was going to take possession of it, that some enemy set up a claim and threw it into Chancery. You may object to the word "enemy," but it could certainly not be looked upon as the act of a friend. By every right, in all justice, it belonged to James Channing; but he who put in his claim, taking advantage of a quibble of law, was a rich man and a mighty one. I should not like to take possession of another's money in such a manner. The good, old-fashioned, wholesome fear would be upon me, that it would bring no good either to me or mine.

James Channing never supposed but that the money would be his some time. Meanwhile he sought and obtained employment to occupy his days; to bring "grist to the mill," until the patrimony should come. Hoping, hoping, hoping on; hope and disappointment, hope and disappointment—there was nothing else for years and years; and you know who has said, that "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." There have been many such cases in the world, but I question, I say, if we can quite realize them. However, the end had come—the certainty of disappointment; and Mr. Channing was already beginning to be thankful that suspense, at any rate, was over.

He was the head of an office—or it may be more correct to say the head of the Helstonleigh branch of it, for the establishment was a London one—a large, important concern, including various departments of Insurance. Hamish was in the same office; and since Mr. Channing's rheumatism had become chronic, it was Hamish who chiefly transacted the business of the office, generally bringing home the books when he left, and going over them in the evening with his father. Thus the work was effectually transacted, and Mr. Channing retained his salary. The directors were contented that it should be so, for Mr. Channing possessed their thorough respect and esteem.

After the ill news was communicated to them, the boys left the parlour, and assembled in a group in the study, at the back of the house, to talk it over. Constance was with them, but they would not admit Annabel. A shady, pleasant, untidy room was that study, opening to a cool, shady garden. It had oil-cloth on the floor instead of carpeting, and books and playthings were strewed about it.

"What an awful shame that there should be so much injustice in the world!" spoke passionate Tom, flinging his Euripides on the table.

"But for one thing, I should be rather glad the worry's over," cried Hamish. "We know the worst now—that we have only ourselves to trust to."

"Our hands and brains, as Tom said," remarked Charley. "What is the 'one thing' that you mean, Hamish?"

Hamish seized Charley by the waist, lifted him up, and let him drop again. "It is what does not concern little boys to know: and I don't see why you should be in here with us, young sir, any more than Annabel."

"A presentiment that this would be the ending has been upon me for some time," broke in the gentle voice of Constance. "In my own mind I have kept laying out plans for us all. You see, it is not as though we should enjoy the full income that we have hitherto had."

"What's that, Constance?" asked Tom hotly. "The decision does not touch papa's salary; and you heard him say that the costs were to be paid out of the estate. A pretty thing it would be if any big-wigged Lord Chancellor could take away the money that a man works hard for!"

“Hasty, as usual, Tom,” she said with a smile. “You know—we all know—that, counting fully upon this money, papa is behindhand in his payments. They must be paid off now in the best way that may be found: and it will take so much from his income. It will make no difference to you, Tom; all you can do, is to try on heartily for the seniorship and the exhibition.”

“Oh, won’t it make a difference to me, though!” retorted Tom. “And suppose I don’t gain it, Constance?”

“Then you will have to work all the harder, Tom, in some other walk of life. Failing the exhibition, of course there will be no chance of your going up to the university; and you must give up the hope of entering the Church. The worst off—the one upon whom this disappointment must fall the hardest—will be Arthur.”

Arthur Channing—astride on the arm of the old-fashioned sofa—lifted his large deep blue eyes to Constance with a flash of intelligence: it seemed to say, that she only spoke of what he already knew. He had been silent hitherto; he was of a silent nature: a quiet, loving, tender nature: while the rest spoke, he was content to think.

“Ay, that it will!” exclaimed Hamish. “What will become of your articles now, Arthur?”

It should be explained that Arthur had entered the office of Mr. Galloway, who was a proctor, and also was steward to the Dean and Chapter. Arthur was only a subordinate in it, a clerk receiving pay—and very short pay, too; but it was intended that he should enter upon his articles as soon as this money that should be theirs enabled Mr. Channing to pay for them. Hamish might well ask what would become of his articles now!

“I can’t see a single step before me,” cried Arthur. “Except that I must stay on as I am, a paid clerk.”

“What rubbish, Arthur!” flashed Tom, who possessed a considerable share of temper when it was roused. “As if you, Arthur Channing, could remain a paid clerk at Galloway’s! Why, you’d be on a level with Jenkins—old Jenkins’s son. Roland Yorke *would* look down on you then; more than he does now. And that need not be!”

The sensitive crimson dyed Arthur’s fair open brow. Of all the failings that he found it most difficult to subdue in his own heart, pride bore the greatest share. From the moment the ill news had come to his father, the boy felt that he should have to do fierce battle with his pride; that there was ever-recurring mortification laid up in store for it. “But I *can* battle with it,” he bravely whispered to himself: “and I will do it, God helping me.”

“I may whistle for my new cricket-bat and stumps now,” grumbled Tom.

“And I wonder when I shall have my new clothes?” added Charley.

“How selfish we all are!” broke forth Arthur.

“Selfish?” chafed Tom.

“Yes, selfish. Here we are, croaking over our petty disappointments, and forgetting the worst share that falls upon papa. Failing this money, how will he go to the German baths?”

A pause of consternation. In their own grievances the boys had lost sight of the hope which had recently been shared by them all. An eminent physician, passing through Helstonleigh, had seen Mr. Channing, and given his opinion that if he would visit certain medicinal spas in Germany, health might be restored to him. When the cause should be terminated in their favour, Mr. Channing had intended to set out. But now it was given against him; and hope of setting out had gone with it.

“I wish I could carry him on my back to Germany, and work to keep him while he stayed there!” impulsively spoke Tom. “Wretchedly selfish we have been, to dwell on our disappointments, by the side of papa’s. I wish I was older.”

Constance was standing against the window. She was of middle height, thoroughly ladylike and graceful; her features fair and beautiful, and her dark-blue eyes and smooth white brow wonderfully like Arthur’s. She wore a muslin dress with a delicate pink sprig upon it, the lace of its open sleeves

falling on her pretty white hands, which were playing unconsciously with a spray of jessamine, while she listened to her brothers as each spoke.

“Tom,” she interposed, in answer to the last remark, “it is of no use wishing for impossibilities. We must look steadfastly at things as they exist, and see what is the best that can be made of them. All that you and Charles can do is to work well on at your studies—Annabel the same; and it is to be hoped this blow will take some of her thoughtlessness out of her. Hamish, and Arthur, and I, must try and be more active than we have been.”

“You!” echoed Arthur. “Why, what can you do, Constance?”

A soft blush rose to her cheeks. “I tell you that I have seemed to anticipate this,” she said, “and my mind has busied itself with plans and projects. I shall look out for a situation as daily governess.”

A groan of anger burst from Tom. His quick temper, and Arthur’s pride, alike rose up and resented the words. “A daily governess! It is only another name for a servant. Fine, that would be, for Miss Channing!”

Constance laughed. “Oh, Tom! there are worse misfortunes at sea. I would go out wholly, but that papa would not like to spare me, and I must take Annabel for music and other things of an evening. Don’t look cross. It is an excellent thought; and I shall not mind it.”

“What will mamma say?” asked Tom, ironically. “You just ask her!”

“Mamma knows,” replied Constance. “Mamma has had her fears about the termination of the lawsuit, just as I have. Ah! while you boys were laughing and joking, and pursuing your sports or your studies of a night, I and mamma would be talking over the shadowed future. I told mamma that if the time and the necessity came for turning my education and talents to account, I should do it with a willing heart; and mamma, being rather more sensible than her impetuous son Tom, cordially approved.”

Tom made a paper bullet and flung it at Constance, his honest eyes half laughing.

“So should I approve,” said Hamish. “It is a case, taking into consideration my father’s state, in which all of us should help who are able. Of course, were you boys grown up and getting money, Constance *should* be exempt from aiding and abetting; but as it is, it is different. There will be no disgrace in her becoming a governess; and Helstonleigh will never think it so. She is a lady always, and so she would be if she were to turn to and wash up dishes. The only doubt is—”

He stopped, and looked hesitatingly at Constance. As if penetrating his meaning, her eyes fell before his.

“—Whether Yorke will like it,” went on Hamish, as though he had not halted in his sentence. And the pretty blush in Constance Channing’s face deepened to a glowing crimson. Tom made a whole heap of bullets at once, and showered them on to her.

“So Hamish—be quiet, Tom!—you may inquire all over Helstonleigh to-morrow, whether any one wants a governess; a well-trained young lady of twenty-one, who can play, sing, and paint, speak really good English, and decent French, and has a smattering of German,” rattled on Constance, as if to cover her blushes. “I shall ask forty guineas a year. Do you think I shall get it?”

“I think you ought to ask eighty,” said Arthur.

“So I would, if I were thirty-one instead of twenty-one,” said Constance. “Oh dear! here am I, laughing and joking over it, but it is a serious thing to undertake—the instruction of the young. I hope I shall be enabled to do my duty in it. What’s that?”

It was a merry, mocking laugh, which came from the outside of the window, and then a head of auburn hair, wild and entangled, was pushed up, and in burst Annabel, her saucy dark eyes dancing with delight.

“You locked me out, but I have been outside the window and heard it all,” cried she, dancing before them in the most provoking manner. “Arthur can only be a paid clerk, and Constance is going to be a governess and get forty guineas a year, and if Tom doesn’t gain his exhibition he must turn bell-ringer to the college, for papa can’t pay for him at the university now!”

“What do you deserve, you wicked little picture of deceit?” demanded Hamish. “Do you forget the old story of the listener who lost his ears?”

“I always do listen whenever I can, and I always will,” avowed Annabel. “I have warned you so a hundred times over, and now I warn you again. I wish Tom *would* turn bell-ringer! I’d make him ring a peal that should astonish Helstonleigh, the day Constance goes out as governess. Shan’t I have a fine time of it! It’s lessons for me now, morning, noon, and night,—she’s always worrying me; but, once let us get her back turned, and I shall have whole holiday! She may think I’ll do my lessons with her at night; but I won’t!”

The boys began to chase her round the table. She was almost a match for all four—a troublesome, indulged, sunny-hearted child, who delighted in committing faults, that she might have the pleasure of avowing them. She flew out into the garden, first knocking over Constance’s paint-box, and some of them went after her.

At that moment Mr. Yorke came in. You have seen him once before, in his place in Helstonleigh Cathedral: a tall, slender man, with pale, well-formed features, and an attractive smile. His dark eyes rested on Constance as he entered, and once more the brilliant colour lighted up her face. When prospects should be a little better—that is, when Mr. Yorke should have a sufficient living bestowed upon him—Constance was to become his wife. His stipend from the minor canonry was at present trifling.

“Judith met me in the hall as I was going into the parlour, and told me I had better come here,” he observed. “She said bad news had arrived for Mr. Channing.”

“Yes,” answered Hamish. “The lawsuit is lost.”

“Lost!” echoed Mr. Yorke.

“Irrevocably. We were discussing ways and means amongst ourselves,” said Hamish, “for of course this changes our prospects materially.”

“And Constance is going out as a governess, if she can find any one to take her, and Arthur is to plod on with Joe Jenkins, and Tom means to apply for the post of bell-ringer to the cathedral,” interposed the incorrigible Annabel, who had once more darted in, and heard the last words. “Can you recommend Constance to a situation, Mr. Yorke?”

He treated the information lightly; laughed at and with Annabel; but Constance noticed that a flush crossed his brow, and that he quitted the subject.

“Has the inked surplice been found out, Tom,—I mean the culprit?”

“Not yet, Mr. Yorke.”

“Charles, you can tell me who it was, I hear?”

There was a startled glance for a moment in Charles’s eye, as he looked up at Mr. Yorke, and an unconscious meaning in his tone.

“Why, do *you* know who it was, sir?”

“Not I,” said Mr. Yorke. “I know that, whoever it may have been deserves a sound flogging, if he did it willfully.”

“Then, sir, why do you suppose I know?”

“I met Hurst just now, and he stopped me with the news that he was sure Charley Channing could put his hand upon the offender, if he chose to do it. It was not yourself, was it Charley?”

Mr. Yorke laughed as he asked the question. Charley laughed also, but in a constrained manner. Meanwhile the others, to whom the topic had been as Sanscrit, demanded an explanation, which Mr. Yorke gave, so far as he was cognizant of the facts.

“What a shame to spoil a surplice! Have you cause to suspect any particular boy, Charley?” demanded Hamish.

“Don’t ask him in my presence,” interrupted Tom in the same hurried manner that he had used in the cloisters. “I should be compelled in honour to inform the master, and Charley would have his life thrashed out of him by the school.”

“Don’t *you* ask me, either, Mr. Yorke,” said Charles; and the tone of his voice, still unconsciously to himself, bore a strange serious earnestness.

“Why not?” returned Mr. Yorke. “I am not a senior of the college school, and under obedience to its head-master.”

“If you are all to stop in this room, I and Tom shall never get our lessons done,” was all the reply made by Charles, as he drew a chair to the table and opened his exercise books.

“And I never could afford that,” cried Tom, following his example, and looking out the books he required. “It won’t do to let Huntley and Yorke get ahead of me.”

“Trying for the seniorship as strenuously as ever, Tom?” asked Mr. Yorke.

“Of course I am,” replied Tom Channing, lifting his eyes in slight surprise. “And I hope to get it.”

“Which of the three stands the best chance?”

“Well,” said Tom, “it will be about a neck-and-neck race between us. My name stands first on the rolls of the school; therefore, were our merits equal, in strict justice it ought to be given to me. But the master could pass me over if he pleased, and decide upon either of the other two.”

“Which of those two stands first on the rolls?”

“Harry Huntley. Yorke is the last. But that does not count for much, you know, Mr. Yorke, as we all entered together. They enrolled us as our initial letters stood in the alphabet.”

“It will turn wholly upon your scholastic merits, then? I hear—but Helstonleigh is famous for its gossip—that in past times it has frequently gone by favour.”

“So it has,” said Tom Channing, throwing back his head with a whole world of indignation in the action. “Eligible boys have been passed over, and the most incapable dolt set up above them; all because his friends were in a good position, and hand-in-glove with the head-master. I don’t mean Pye, you know; before he came. It’s said the last case was so flagrant that it came to the ears of the dean, and he interfered and forbade favour for the future. At any rate, there’s an impression running through the school that merit and conduct, taken together, will be allowed fair play.”

“Conduct?” echoed Arthur Channing.

Tom nodded:—“Conduct is to be brought in, this time. One day, when the first desk fell into a row with the head-master, through some mischief we had gone into out of school, he asked us if we were aware that our conduct, as it might be good or ill, might gain or lose us the seniorship. Yorke, who is bold enough, you know, for ten, remarked that that was a new dodge, and the master overheard the words, and said, Yes, he was happy to say there were many new ‘dodges’ he had seen fit to introduce, which he trusted might tend to make the school different from what it had been. Of course we had the laugh at Yorke; but the master took no more notice of it. Since then, I assure you, Mr. Yorke, our behaviour has been a pattern for young ladies—mine, and Huntley’s, and Yorke’s. We don’t care to lose a chance.”

Tom Channing nodded sagaciously as he concluded, and they left the room to him and Charles.

CHAPTER IV. – NO HOLIDAY TO-DAY

“Now, Constance, that we have a moment alone, what is this about you?” began Mr. Yorke, as they stood together in the garden.

“Annabel said the truth—that I do think of going out as daily governess,” she replied, bending over a carnation to hide the blush which rose to her cheeks, a very rival to the blushing flower. “It is a great misfortune that has fallen upon us—at least we can only look at it in that light at present, and will, beyond doubt, be productive of some embarrassment. Do you not see, William, that it is incumbent upon us all to endeavour to lighten this embarrassment, those of us who can do so? I must assume my share of the burden.”

Mr. Yorke was silent. Constance took it for granted that he was displeased. He was of an excellent family, and she supposed he disliked the step she was about to take—deemed it would be derogatory to his future wife.

“Have you fully made up your mind?” he at length asked.

“Yes. I have talked it over with mamma—for indeed she and I both seem to have anticipated this—and she thinks with me, that it is what I ought to do. William, how could I reconcile it to my conscience not to help?” she continued. “Think of papa! think of his strait! It appears to be a plain duty thrown in my path.”

“By yourself, Constance?”

“Not by myself,” she whispered, lifting for a moment her large blue eyes. “Oh, William, William, do not be displeased with me! do not forbid it! It is honourable to work—it is right to do what we can. Strive to see it in the right light.”

“Let that carnation alone, Constance; give your attention to me. What if I do forbid it?”

She walked a little forward, leaving the carnation bed, and halted under the shade of the dark cedar tree, her heart and colour alike fading. Mr. Yorke followed and stood before her.

“William, I must do my duty. There is no other way open to me, by which I can earn something to help in this time of need, except that of becoming a governess. Many a lady, better born than I, has done it before me.”

“A daily governess, I think you said?”

“Papa could not spare me to go out altogether; Annabel could not spare me either; and—”

“I would not spare you,” he struck in, filling up her pause. “Was that what you were about to say, Constance?”

The rosy hue stole over her face again, and a sweet smile to her lips: “Oh, William, if you will only sanction it! I shall go about it then with the lightest heart!”

He looked at her with an expression she did not understand, and shook his head. Constance thought it a negative shake, and her hopes fell again. “You did not answer my question,” said Mr. Yorke. “What if I forbid it?”

“But it seems to be my duty,” she urged from between her pale and parted lips.

“Constance, that is no answer.”

“Oh, do not, do not! William, do not you throw this temptation in my way—that of choosing between yourself and a plain duty that lies before me.”

“The temptation, as you call it, must be for a later consideration. Why will you not answer me? What would be your course if I forbade it?”

“I do not know. But, Oh, William, if you gave me up—”

She could not continue. She turned away to hide her face from Mr. Yorke. He followed and obtained forcible view of it. It was wet with tears.

“Nay, but I did not mean to carry it so far as to cause you real grief, my dearest,” he said, in a changed tone. “Though you brought it on yourself,” he added, laughing, as he bent his face down.

“How did I bring it on myself?”

“By doubting me. I saw you doubted me at the first, when Annabel spoke of it in the study. Constance, if you, possessed as you are of great acquirements, refused from any notion of false pride, to exert them for your family in a time of need, I should say you were little fitted for the wife of one whose whole duty it must be to do his Master’s work.”

“You will sanction the measure then?” she rejoined, her countenance lighting up.

“How could you doubt me? I wish I could make a home at once to take you to; but as you must remain in this a little longer, it is only fair that you should contribute to its maintenance. We all have to bend to circumstances. I shall not love my wife the less, because she has had the courage to turn her talents to account. What could you be thinking of, child?”

“Forgive me, William,” she softly pleaded. “But you looked so grave and were so silent.”

Mr. Yorke smiled. “The truth is, Constance, I was turning in my mind whether I could not help to place you, and pondering the advantages and disadvantages of a situation I know of. Lady Augusta is looking out for a daily governess.”

“Is she?” exclaimed Constance. “I wonder whether—I—should suit her?”

Constance spoke hesitatingly. The thought which had flashed over her own mind was, whether Lady Augusta Yorke could afford to pay her sufficient remuneration. Probably the same doubt had made one of the “disadvantages” hinted at by Mr. Yorke.

“I called there yesterday, and interrupted a ‘scene’ between Lady Augusta and Miss Caroline,” he said. “Unseemly anger on my lady’s part, and rebellion on Carry’s, forming, as usual, its chief features.”

“But Lady Augusta is so indulgent to her children!” interrupted Constance.

“Perniciously indulgent, generally; and when the effects break out in insolence and disobedience, then there ensues a scene. If you go there you will witness them occasionally, and I assure you they are not edifying. You must endeavour to train the girls to something better than they have been trained to yet, Constance.”

“If I do go.”

“I knew how long it would last, Lady Augusta’s instructing them herself,” resumed Mr. Yorke. “It is not a month since the governess left.”

“Why does she wish to take a daily governess instead of one in the house?”

“*Why* Lady Augusta does a thing, is scarcely ever to be accounted for, by herself or by any one else!” replied Mr. Yorke. “Some convenience, or inconvenience, she mentioned to me, about sleeping arrangements. Shall I ascertain particulars for you, Constance; touching salary and other matters?”

“If you please. Papa is somewhat fastidious; but he could not object to my going there; and its being so very near our own house would be a great point of—”

“Constance!” interrupted a voice at this juncture. “Is Mr. Yorke there?”

“He is here, mamma,” replied Constance, walking forward to Mrs. Channing, Mr. Yorke attending her.

“I thought I heard you enter,” she said, as Mr. Yorke took her hand. “Mr. Channing will be pleased to see you, if you will come in and chat with him. The children have told you the tidings. It is a great blow to their prospects.”

“But they seem determined to bear it bravely,” he answered, in a hearty tone. “You may be proud to have such children, Mrs. Channing.”

“Not proud,” she softly said. “Thankful!”

“True. I am obliged to you for correcting me,” was the clergyman’s ingenuous answer, as he walked, with Mrs. Channing, across the hall. Constance halted, for Judith came out of the kitchen, and spoke in a whisper.

“And what’s the right and the wrong of it, Miss Constance? *Is* the money gone?”

“Gone entirely, Judith. Gone for good.”

“For good!” groaned Judith; “I should say for ill. Why does the Queen let there be a Lord Chancellor?”

“It is not the Lord Chancellor’s fault, Judith. He only administers the law.”

“Why couldn’t he just as well have given it *for* your papa, as against him?”

“I suppose he considers that the law is on the other side,” sighed Constance.

Judith, with a pettish movement, returned to her kitchen; and at that moment Hamish came downstairs. He had changed his dress, and had a pair of new white gloves in his hand.

“Are you going out to-night, Hamish?”

There was a stress on the word “to-night,” and Hamish marked it. “I promised, you know, Constance. And my staying away would do no good; it could not improve things. Fare you well, my pretty sister. Tell mamma I shall be home by eleven.”

“It’ll be a sad cut-down for ‘em all,” muttered Judith, gazing at Hamish round the kitchen door-post. “Where he’ll find money for his white gloves and things now, is beyond my telling, the darling boy! If I could but get to that Lord Chancellor!”

Had you possessed the privilege of living in Helstonleigh at the time of which this story treats—and I can assure you you might live in a less privileged city—it is possible that, on the morning following the above events, your peaceful slumbers might have been rudely broken by a noise, loud enough to waken the seven sleepers of Ephesus.

Before seven o’clock, the whole school, choristers and king’s scholars, assembled in the cloisters. But, instead of entering the schoolroom for early school, they formed themselves into a dense mass (if you ever saw schoolboys march otherwise, I have not), and, treading on each other’s heels, proceeded through the town to the lodgings of the judges, in pursuance of a time-honoured custom. There the head-boy sent in his name to the very chamber of the Lord Chief Justice, who happened this time to have come to the Helstonleigh circuit. “Mr. Gaunt, senior of the college school”—craving holiday for himself, and the whole fry who had attended him.

“College boys!” cried his lordship, winking and blinking, as other less majestic mortals do when awakened suddenly out of their morning sleep.

“Yes, my lord,” replied the servant. “All the school’s come up; such a lot of ‘em! It’s the holiday they are asking for.”

“Oh, ah, I recollect,” cried his lordship—for it was not the first time he had been to Helstonleigh. “Give one of my cards to the senior boy, Roberts. My compliments to the head-master, and I beg he will grant the boys a holiday.”

Roberts did as he was bid—he also had been to Helstonleigh before with his master—and delivered the card and message to Gaunt. The consequence of which was, the school tore through the streets in triumph, shouting “Holiday!” in tones to be heard a mile off, and bringing people in white garments, from their beds to the windows. The least they feared was, that the town had taken fire.

Back to the house of the head-master for the pantomime to be played through. This usually was (for the master, as wise on the subject as they were, would lie that morning in bed) to send the master’s servant into his room with the card and the message; upon which permission for the holiday would come out, and the boys would disperse, exercising their legs and lungs. No such luck, however, on this morning. The servant met them at the door, and grinned dreadfully at the crowd.

“Won’t you catch it, gentlemen! The head-master’s gone into school, and is waiting for you; marking you all late, of course.”

“Gone into school!” repeated Gaunt, haughtily, resenting the familiarity, as well as the information. “What do you mean?”

“Why, I just mean that, sir,” was the reply, upon which Gaunt felt uncommonly inclined to knock him down. But the man had a propensity for grinning, and was sure to exercise it on all possible occasions. “There’s some row up, and you are not to have holiday,” continued the servant; “the master said last night I was to call him this morning as usual.”

At this unexpected reply, the boys slunk away to the college schoolroom, their buoyant spirits sunk down to dust and ashes—figuratively speaking. They could not understand it; they had not the most distant idea what their offence could have been. Gaunt entered, and the rest trooped in after him. The head-master sat at his desk in stern state: the other masters were in their places. “What is the meaning of this insubordination?” the master sharply demanded, addressing Gaunt. “You are three-quarters of an hour behind your time.”

“We have been up to the judges, as usual, for holiday, sir,” replied Gaunt, in a tone of deprecation. “His lordship sends his card and compliments to you, and—”

“Holiday!” interrupted the master. “Holiday!” he repeated, with emphasis, as if disbelieving his own ears. “Do you consider that the school deserves it? A pretty senior you must be, if you do.”

“What has the school done, sir?” respectfully asked Gaunt.

“Your memory must be conveniently short,” chafed the master. “Have you forgotten the inked surplice?”

Gaunt paused. “But that was not the act of the whole school, sir. It was probably the act of only one.”

“But, so long as that one does not confess, the whole school must bear it,” returned the master, looking round on the assembly. “Boys, understand me. It is not for the fault itself—that may have been, as I said yesterday, the result of accident; but it is the concealment of the fault that makes me angry. Will you confess now?—he who did it?”

No; the appeal brought forth no further result than the other had done. The master continued:

“You may think—I speak now to the guilty boy, and let him take these words to himself—that you were quite alone when you did it; that no eye was watching. But let me remind you that the eye of God was upon you. What you refuse to tell, He can bring to light, if it shall so please Him, in His own wonderful way, His own good time. There will be no holiday to-day. Prayers.”

The boys fell into their places, and stood with hanging heads, something like rebellion working in every breast. At breakfast-time they were dismissed, and gathered in the cloisters to give vent to their sentiments.

“Isn’t it a stunning shame?” cried hot Tom Channing. “The school ought not to suffer for the fault of one boy. The master has no right—”

“The fault lies in the boy, not in the master,” interrupted Gaunt. “A sneak! a coward! If he has a spark of manly honour in him, he’ll speak up now.”

“As it has come to this, I say Charley Channing should be made to declare what he knows,” said one. “He saw it done!”

“Who says he did?” quickly asked Tom Channing.

“Some one said so; and that he was afraid to tell.”

Gaunt lifted his finger, and made a sign to Charles to approach. “Now, boy”—as the latter obeyed—“you will answer *me*, remember. The master has called the seniors to his aid, and I order you to speak. Did you see this mischief done?”

“No, I did not!” fearlessly replied little Channing.

“If he doesn’t know, he suspects,” persisted Hurst. “Come, Miss Channing.”

“We don’t declare things upon suspicion, do we, Mr. Gaunt?” appealed Charles. “I may suspect one; Hurst may suspect another; Bywater said he suspected two; the whole school may be suspicious, one of another. Where’s the use of that?”

“It is of no use,” decided Gaunt. “You say you did not see the surplice damaged?”

“I did not; upon my word of honour.”

“That’s enough,” said Gaunt. “Depend upon it, the fellow, while he was at it, took precious good precautions against being seen. When he gets found out, he had better not come within reach of the seniors; I warn him of that: they might not leave him a head on his shoulders, or a tooth in his mouth.”

“Suppose it should turn out to have been a senior, Mr. Gaunt?” spoke Bywater.

“Suppose you should turn out to be an everlasting big donkey?” retorted the senior boy.

CHAPTER V. – ROLAND YORKE

Just without the Boundaries, in a wide, quiet street, called Close Street, was the office of Richard Galloway, Esquire, Proctor, and Steward to the Dean and Chapter. Excepting for this solitary office, the street consisted of private houses, and it was one of the approaches to the cathedral, though not the chief one. Mr. Galloway was a bachelor; a short, stout man, shaped like a cask, with a fat, round face, round, open, grey eyes—that always looked as if their owner was in a state of wonder—and a little round mouth. But he was a shrewd man and a capable; he was also, in his way, a dandy; dressed scrupulously in the fashion, with delicate shirt fronts and snow-white wristbands; and for the last twenty-five years, at least, had been a mark for all the single ladies of Helstonleigh to set their caps at.

Of beauty, Mr. Galloway could boast little; but of his hair he was moderately vain: a very good head of hair it was, and curled naturally. But hair, let it be luxuriant enough to excite the admiration of a whole army of coiffeurs, is, like other things in this sublunary world of ours, subject to change; it will not last for ever; and Mr. Galloway's, from a fine and glossy brown, turned, as years went on, to sober grey—nay, almost to white. He did not particularly admire the change, but he had to submit to it. Nature is stronger than we are. A friend hinted that it might be “dyed.” Mr. Galloway resented the suggestion: anything false was abhorrent to him. When, however, after an illness, his hair began to fall off alarmingly, he thought it no harm to use a certain specific, emanating from one of her Majesty's physicians; extensively set forth and patronized as an undoubted remedy for hair that was falling off. Mr. Galloway used it extensively in his fear, for he had an equal dread both of baldness and wigs. The lotion not only had the desired effect, but it had more: the hair grew on again luxuriantly, and its whiteness turned into the finest flaxen you ever saw; a light delicate flaxen, exactly like the curls you see upon the heads of blue-eyed wax dolls. This is a fact: and whether Mr. Galloway liked it, or not, he had to put up with it. Many would not be persuaded but that he had used some delicate dye, hitherto unknown to science; and the suspicion vexed Mr. Galloway. Behold him, therefore, with a perfect shower of smooth, fair curls upon his head, equal to any young beau.

It was in this gentleman's office that Arthur Channing had been placed, with a view to his becoming ultimately a proctor. To article him to Mr. Galloway would take a good round sum of money; and this had been put off until the termination of the suit, when Mr. Channing had looked forward to being at his ease, in a pecuniary point of view. There were two others in the same office. The one was Roland Yorke, who was articulated; the other was Joseph Jenkins, a thin, spare, humble man of nine and thirty, who had served Mr. Galloway for nearly twenty years, earning twenty-five shillings a week. He was a son of old Jenkins, the bedesman, and his wife kept a small hosiery shop in High Street. Roland Yorke was, of course, not paid; on the contrary, he had paid pretty smartly to Mr. Galloway for the privilege of being initiated into the mysteries belonging to a proctor. Arthur Channing may be said to have occupied a position in the office midway between the two. He was to *become* on the footing of Roland Yorke; but meanwhile, he received a small weekly sum in remuneration of his services, as Joe Jenkins did. Roland Yorke, in his proud moods, looked down upon him as a paid clerk; Mr. Jenkins looked up to him as a gentleman. It was a somewhat anomalous position; but Arthur had held his own bravely up in it until this blow came, looking forward to a brighter time.

In the years gone by, one of the stalls in Helstonleigh Cathedral was held by the Reverend Dr. Yorke: he had also some time filled the office of sub-dean. He had married, imprudently, the daughter of an Irish peer, a pretty, good-tempered girl, who was as fond of extravagance as she was devoid of means to support it. She had not a shilling in the world; it was even said that the bills for her trousseau came in afterwards to Dr. Yorke: but people, you know, are given to scandal. Want

of fortune had been nothing, had Lady Augusta only possessed ordinary prudence; but she spent the doctor's money faster than he received it.

In the course of years Dr. Yorke died, leaving eight children, and slender means for them. There were six boys and two girls. Lady Augusta went to reside in a cheap and roomy house (somewhat dilapidated) in the Boundaries, close to her old prebendal residence, and scrambled on in her careless, spending fashion, never out of debt. She retained their old barouche, and *would* retain it, and was a great deal too fond of ordering horses from the livery stables and driving out in state. Gifted with excellent qualities had her children been born; but of training, in the highest sense of the word, she had given them none. George, the eldest, had a commission, and was away with his regiment. Roland, the second, had been designed for the Church, but no persuasion could induce him to be sufficiently attentive to his studies to qualify himself for it; he was therefore placed with Mr. Galloway, and the Church honours were now intended for Gerald. The fourth son, Theodore, was also in the college school, a junior. Next came two girls, Caroline and Fanny, and there were two little boys still younger.

Haughty, self-willed, but of sufficiently honourable nature, were the Yorkes. If Lady Augusta had only toiled to foster the good, and eradicate the evil, they would have grown up to bless her. Good soil was there to work upon, as there was in the Channings; but, in the case of the Yorkes, it was allowed to run to waste, or to generate weeds. In short, to do as it pleased.

A noisy, scrambling, uncomfortable sort of home was that of the Yorkes; the boys sometimes contending one with another, Lady Augusta often quarrelling with all. The home of the Channings was ever full of love, calm, and peace. Can you guess where the difference lay?

On the morning when the college boys had gone up to crave holiday of the judges, and had not obtained it—at least not from the head-master—Arthur Channing proceeded, as usual, to Mr. Galloway's, after breakfast. Seated at a desk, in his place, writing—he seemed to be ever seated there—was Mr. Jenkins. He lifted his head when Arthur entered, with a “Good morning, sir,” and then dropped it again over his copying.

“Good morning,” replied Arthur. And at that moment Mr. Galloway—his flaxen curls in full flow upon his head, something like rings—came forth from his private room. “Good morning, sir,” Arthur added, to his master.

Mr. Galloway nodded a reply to the salutation. “Have you seen anything of Yorke?” he asked. “I want that deed that he's about finished as soon as possible.”

“He will not be an instant,” said Arthur. “I saw him coming up the street.”

Roland Yorke bustled in; a dark young man of twenty-one, with large but fine features, and a countenance expressive of indecision.

“Come, Mr. Yorke, you promised to be here early to-day. You know that deed is being waited for.”

“So I am early, sir,” returned Roland.

“Early! for *you* perhaps,” grunted Mr. Galloway. “Get to it at once.”

Roland Yorke unlocked a drawer, collected sundry parchments together, and sat down to his desk. He and Arthur had their places side by side. Mr. Galloway stood at a table, and began sorting some papers that were upon it.

“How is Mr. Channing this morning, Arthur?”

“Much as usual, thank you, sir. Certain news, which arrived last night, has not tended to cheer him.”

“It is true, then?” remarked Mr. Galloway. “I heard a rumour of it.”

“Oh, it's true enough,” said Arthur. “It is in all the morning papers.”

“Well, there never was a more unjust decision!” emphatically spoke Mr. Galloway. “Mark you, I am not reflecting on the Lord Chancellor's judgment. I have always said that there were one or two nasty points in that suit, which the law might get hold of; but I know the whole cause by heart, from

beginning to end; and that money was as much your father's, as this coat, that I have on, is mine. Tell him I'll come in one of these fine evenings, and abuse the injustice of our laws with him,—will you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Arthur.

"What's this row in the college school about a destroyed surplice, and the boys not getting their holiday through it?" resumed Mr. Galloway.

"Oh, are they not savage!" struck in Roland Yorke. "The first thing Tod did, when he came home to breakfast, was to fling over his bowl of coffee, he was in such a passion. Lady Augusta—she came down to breakfast this morning, for a wonder—boxed his ears, and ordered him to drink water; but he went into the kitchen, and made a lot of chocolate for himself."

"What are the particulars? How was it done? I cannot understand it at all," said Mr. Galloway.

"Bywater left his clean surplice yesterday in the vestry, and some one threw ink over it—half soaked it in ink, so the choristers told Tom," answered Arthur Channing. "In the afternoon—they had service late, you know, sir, waiting for the judges—Bywater was not in his place to sing the anthem, and Hurst sang it, and it put the master out very much."

"Put him out all the more that he has no one to punish for it," laughed Roland Yorke. "Of course Bywater couldn't appear in his stall, and sing the anthem, if he had no surplice to put on; and the master couldn't tan him for not doing it. I know this, if it had happened while I was in the college school, I'd just have skinned some of the fellows alive, but what I'd have made them confess."

"Suppose you had skinned the wrong party?" cynically observed Mr. Galloway. "You are too hasty with your tongue, Roland Yorke. My nephew, Mark, ran in just now to tell me of the holiday being denied, and that was the first I had heard of the affair. Mark thinks one of the seniors was in it; not Gaunt."

Arthur Channing and Roland Yorke both looked up with a sharp, quick gesture. Gaunt excepted, the only senior, besides their respective brothers, was Harry Huntley.

"It is not likely, sir," said Arthur.

"A senior do it!" scoffed Roland Yorke. "What a young idiot Mark Galloway must be, to think that!"

"Mark does not seem to think much about it on his own account," said Mr. Galloway. "He said Bywater thought so, from some cause or other; and has offered to bet the whole school that it will turn out to be a senior."

"Does he, though!" cried Yorke, looking puzzled. "Bywater's a cautious fellow with his money; he never bets at random. I say, sir, what else did Galloway tell you?"

"That was all," replied Mr. Galloway. And if you wonder at a staid old proctor chattering about this desultory news with his clerks in business hours, it may be explained to you that Mr. Galloway took the greatest possible interest, almost a boyish interest, in the college school. It was where he had been educated himself, where his nephews were being educated; he was on intimate terms with its masters; knew every boy in it to speak to; saw them troop past his house daily in their progress to and fro; watched them in their surplices in a Sunday, during morning and afternoon service; was cognizant of their advancement, their shortcomings, their merits, and their scrapes: in fact, the head-master could not take a greater interest in the doings of the collegiate school, than did Mr. Galloway. Whether of work, or whether of gossip, his ears were ever open to listen to its records. Besides, they were not so overburdened with work in that office, but that there was ample time for discussing any news that might be agreeable to its master. His work was light; his returns were heavy; his stewardship alone brought him in several hundreds a year.

"The Reverend Mr. Pye seems uncommonly annoyed about it, sir," Mr. Jenkins ventured to put in. To interrupt, or take part in any conversation, was not usual with him, unless he could communicate little tit-bits of information touching the passing topic. "You are aware that Mr. Harper, the lay-clerk, lodges at our house, sir. Well, Mr. Pye came round last night, especially to question him about it."

"What could Harper tell?" asked Mr. Galloway.

“He could not tell anything; except that he would answer for the lay-clerks knowing nothing of the transaction. The master said he never supposed the lay-clerks did know anything of it, but he had his reasons for putting the question. He had been to the masons, too, who are repairing the cathedral; and they declared to the master, one and all, that they had not been into the vestry yesterday, or even round to that side of the college where the vestry is situated.”

“Why should the master take it up so pertinaciously?” wondered Roland Yorke.

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir. He was like one in a fever, so excited over it, Harper said.”

“Did he talk to you about it, Jenkins?” asked Mr. Galloway.

“I did not see him, sir; it was Harper told me afterwards,” was the reply of Jenkins, as he subsided to his writing again.

Just at this juncture, who should come in view of the window but the head-master himself. He was passing it with a quick step, when out flew Mr. Galloway, and caught him by the button. Roland Yorke, who was ever glad of a pretext for idleness, rose from his stool, and pushed his nose close up to the nearest pane, to listen to any colloquy that might ensue; but, the window being open, he might have heard without leaving his seat.

“I hear the boys have not a holiday to-day, Pye,” began Mr. Galloway.

“No, that they have not,” emphatically pronounced the master; “and, if they go on as they seem to be going on now, I’ll keep them without it for a twelvemonth. I believe the inking of that surplice was a concocted plan, look you, Galloway, to—”

“To what?” asked Mr. Galloway, for the master stopped short.

“Never mind, just yet. I have my strong suspicions as to the guilty boy, and I am doing what I can to convert them into proofs. If it be as I suspect now, I shall expel him.”

“But what could it have been done for?” debated Mr. Galloway. “There’s no point in the thing, that I can see, to ink and damage a surplice. If the boy to whom it belonged had been inked, one might not have wondered so much.”

“I’ll ‘point him,’” cried the master, “if I catch the right one.”

“Could it have been one of the seniors?” returned the proctor, all his strong interest awakened.

“It was one who ought to have known better,” evasively returned the master. “I can’t stop to talk now, Galloway. I have an errand to do, and must be back to duty at ten.”

He marched off quickly, and Mr. Galloway came indoors again. “Is that the way you get on with your business, Mr. Yorke?”

Yorke clattered to his desk. “I’ll get on with it, sir. I was listening to what the master said.”

“It does not concern you, what he said. It was not one of your brothers who did it, I suppose?”

“No, that it was not,” haughtily spoke Roland Yorke, drawing up his head with a proud, fierce gesture.

Mr. Galloway withdrew to his private room, and for a few minutes silence supervened—nothing was to be heard but the scratching of pens. But Roland Yorke, who had a great antipathy to steady work, and as great a love for his own tongue, soon began again.

“I say, Channing, what an awful blow the dropping of that expected money must be for you fellows! I’m blest if I didn’t dream of it last night! If it spoilt my rest, what must it have done by yours!”

“Why! how could you have heard of it last night?” exclaimed Arthur, in surprise. “I don’t think a soul came to our house to hear the news, except Mr. Yorke; and you were not likely to see him. He left late. It is in every one’s mouth this morning.”

“I had it from Hamish. He came to the party at the Knivetts’. Didn’t Hamish get taken in!” laughed Roland. “He understood it was quite a ladies’ affair, and loomed in, dressed up to the nines, and there he found only a bachelor gathering of Dick’s. Hamish was disappointed, I think; he fancied he was going to meet Ellen Huntley; and glum enough he looked—”

“He had only just heard of the loss,” interrupted Arthur. “Enough to make him look glum.”

“Rubbish! It wasn’t that. He announced at once that the money was gone for good and all, and laughed over it, and said there were worse disasters at sea. Knivett said he never saw a fellow carry ill news off with so high a hand. Had he been proclaiming the accession of a fortune, instead of the loss of one, he could not have been more carelessly cheerful. Channing, what on earth shall you do about your articles?”

A question that caused the greatest pain, especially when put by Roland Yorke; and Arthur’s sensitive face flushed.

“You’ll have to stop as a paid clerk for interminable years! Jenkins, you’ll have him for your bosom companion, if you look sharp and make friends,” cried Roland, laughing loudly.

“No, sir, I don’t think Mr. Arthur Channing is likely to become a paid clerk,” said Jenkins.

“Not likely to become a paid clerk! why, he *is* one. If he is not one, I’d like to know who is. Channing, you know you are nothing else.”

“I may be something else in time,” quietly replied Arthur, who knew how to control his rebellious spirit.

“I say, what a rum go it is about that surplice!” exclaimed Roland Yorke, dashing into another topic. “It’s not exactly the mischief itself that’s rum, but the master seem to be making so much stir and mystery over it! And then the hint at the seniors! They must mean Huntley.”

“I don’t know who they *mean*,” said Arthur, “but I am sure Huntley never did it. He is too open, too honourable—”

“And do you pretend to say that Tom Channing and my brother Ger are not honourable?” fiercely interrupted Roland Yorke.

“There you go, Yorke; jumping to conclusions! It is not to be credited that any one of the seniors did it: still less, if they had done it, that they would not acknowledge it. They are all boys of truth and honour, so far as I believe. Huntley, I am sure, is.”

“And of Tom, also, I conclude you feel sure?”

“Yes, I do.”

“And I am sure of Ger Yorke. So, if the master is directing his suspicion to the seniors, he’ll get floored. It’s odd what can have turned it upon them.”

“I don’t think the master suspects the seniors,” said Arthur. “He called them to his aid.”

“You heard what he just now said to Galloway. Jenkins, there is a knock at the door.”

Jenkins went to open it. He came back, and said Mr. Yorke was wanted.

Roland lazily proceeded to the outer passage, and, when he saw who was standing there, he put himself into a passion. “What do you mean by presuming to come to me here?” he haughtily asked.

“Well, sir, perhaps you’ll tell me where I am to come, so as to get to see you?” civilly replied the applicant, one who bore the appearance of a tradesman. “It seems it’s of no use going to your house; if I went ten times a day, I should get the same answer—that you are not at home.”

“Just take yourself off,” said Roland.

“Not till you pay me; or tell me for certain when you will pay me, and keep your promise. I want my money, sir, and I must have it.”

“We want a great many things that we can’t get,” returned Roland, in a provokingly light tone. “I’ll pay you as soon as I can, man; you needn’t be afraid.”

“I’m not exactly afraid,” spoke the man. “I suppose if it came to it, Lady Augusta would see that I had the money.”

“You hold your tongue about Lady Augusta. What’s Lady Augusta to you? Any odds and ends that I may owe, have nothing to do with Lady Augusta. Look here, Simms, I’ll pay you next week.”

“You have said that so many times, Mr. Yorke.”

“At any rate, I’ll pay you part of it next week, if I can’t the whole. I will, upon my honour. There! now you know that I shall keep my word.”

Apparently satisfied, the man departed, and Roland lounged into the office again with the same idle movements that he had left it.

“It was that confounded Simms,” grumbled he. “Jenkins, why did you say I was in?”

“You did not tell me to say the contrary, sir. He came yesterday, but you were out then.”

“What does he want?” asked Arthur.

“Wanted me to pay him a trifle I owe; but it’s not convenient to do it till next week. What an Eden this lower world might be, if debt had never been invented!”

“You need not get into debt,” said Arthur. “It is not compulsory.”

“One *might* build a mud hut outside the town walls, and shut one’s self up in it, and eat herbs for dinner, and sleep upon rushes, and turn hermit for good!” retorted Roland. “*You* need not talk about debt, Channing.”

“I don’t owe much,” said Arthur, noting the significance of Yorke’s concluding sentence.

“If you don’t, some one else does.”

“Who?”

“Ask Hamish.”

Arthur went on writing with a sinking heart. There was an undercurrent of fear running within him—had been for some time—that Hamish did owe money on his own private score. But this allusion to it was not pleasant.

“How much do you owe?” went on Roland.

“Oh, a twenty-pound note would pay my debts, and leave me something out of it,” said Arthur, in a joking tone. The fact was, that he did not owe a shilling to any one. “Jenkins, do you know what I am to set about next?” he continued; “I have filled in this lease.”

Jenkins was beginning to look amidst some papers at his elbow, in answer to the appeal; but at that moment Mr. Galloway entered, and despatched Arthur to get a cheque cashed at the bank.

CHAPTER VI. – LADY AUGUSTA YORKE AT HOME

“If you don’t put away that trash, Caroline, and go upstairs and practise, I’ll make you go! Strewing the table in that manner! Look what a pickle the room is in!”

The words came from Lady Augusta Yorke, a tall, dark woman, with high cheek-bones; and they were spoken at a height that might not have been deemed orthodox at court. Miss Caroline Yorke, a young demoiselle, with a “net” that was more frequently off her head than on it, slip-shod shoes, and untidy stockings, had placed a quantity of mulberry leaves on the centre table, and a silkworm on each leaf. She leisurely proceeded with her work, bringing forth more silkworms from her paper trays, paying not the least attention to her mother. Lady Augusta advanced, and treated her to a slight tap on the ear, her favourite mode of correcting her children.

“Now, mamma! What’s that for?”

“Do you hear me, you disobedient child? I will have this rubbish put away, I say. Goodness, Martha! don’t bring any one in here!” broke off Lady Augusta, as a maid appeared, showing in a visitor. “Oh, it is you, William! I don’t mind you. Come in.”

It was the Reverend William Yorke who entered. He was not altogether a favourite of Lady Augusta’s. Though only distantly related to her late husband, he yet bore the name of Yorke; and when he came to Helstonleigh (for he was not a native of the place), and became a candidate for a vacant minor canonry, Lady Augusta’s pride had taken fire. The minor canons were looked upon by the exclusives of the cathedral as holding a very inferior position amidst the clergy, and she resented that one belonging to her should descend to set up his place amongst them.

Mr. Yorke shook hands with Lady Augusta, and then turned to look at the leaves and silkworms. “Are you doing that for ornament, Caroline?”

“Ornament!” wrathfully cried Lady Augusta. “She is doing it to waste time, and to provoke me.”

“No, I am not, mamma,” denied Miss Caroline. “My poor silkworms never have anything but lettuce leaves. Tod brought these for me from the bishop’s garden, and I am looking at the silkworms enjoying the change.”

“Tod is in hot water,” remarked Mr. Yorke. “He was fighting with another boy as I came through the cloisters.”

“Then he’ll come home with his clothes torn, as he did the last time he fought!” exclaimed Lady Augusta, in consternation. “I think no one ever had such a set of children as mine!” she peevishly continued. “The boys boisterous as so many wild animals, and the girls enough to drive one crazy, with their idle, disobedient ways. Look at this room, William! encumbered from one end to the other! things thrown out of hand by Caroline and Fanny! As to lessons, they never open one. For three days I have never ceased telling Caroline to go and practise, and she has not attempted to obey me! I shall go out of my mind with one thing or another; I know I shall! Nice dunces they’ll grow up.”

“Go and practise now, Caroline,” said Mr. Yorke. “I will put your silkworms up for you.”

Caroline pouted. “I hate practising.”

He laid his hand gently upon her, gazing at her with his dark, pleasant eyes, reproachful now; “But you do not hate obeying your mamma? You must never let it come to that, Caroline.”

She suffered him to lead her to the door, went docilely enough to the drawing-room, and sat down to the piano. Oh, for a little better training for those children! Mr. Yorke began placing the silkworms in the trays, and Lady Augusta went on grumbling.

“It is a dreadful fate—to be left a widow with a heap of unruly children who will not be controlled! I must find a governess for the girls, and then I shall be free from them for a few hours in the day. I thought I would try and save the money, and teach them myself; but I might just as well attempt to teach so many little wild Indians! I am not fitted for teaching; it is beyond me. Don’t you think you could hear of a governess, William? You go about so much.”

"I have heard of one since I saw you yesterday," he replied. "A young lady, whom you know, is anxious to take a situation, and I think she might suit you."

"Whom I know?" cried Lady Augusta. "Who is it?"

"Miss Channing."

Lady Augusta looked up in astonishment. "Is *she* going out as governess? That comes of losing this lawsuit. She has lost no time in the decision."

"When an unpalatable step has to be taken, the sooner it is set about, the less will be the cost," remarked Mr. Yorke.

"Unpalatable! you may well say that. This will be the climax, will it not, William?"

"Climax of what?"

"Of all the unpleasantness that has attended your engagement with Miss Channing—"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Augusta," was the interruption of Mr. Yorke. "No unpleasantness whatever has attended my engagement with Miss Channing."

"I think so, for I consider her beneath you; and, therefore, that it is nothing but unpleasant from beginning to end. The Channings are very well in their way, but they are not equal to the Yorkes. You might make this a pretext for giving her up."

Mr. Yorke laughed. "I think her all the more worthy of me. The only question that is apt to arise within me is, whether I am worthy of her. As we shall never agree upon this point, Lady Augusta, it may not be worth while to discuss it. About the other thing? I believe she would make an admirable governess for Caroline and Fanny, if you could obtain her."

"Oh, I dare say she would do *that*. She is a lady, and has been well educated. Would she want a large salary?"

"Forty guineas a year, to begin with."

Lady Augusta interrupted him with a scream. "I never could give half of it! I am sure I never could. What with housekeeping expenses, and milliners' bills, and visiting, and the boys everlastingly dragging money out of me, I have scarcely anything to spare for education."

"Yet it is more essential than all the rest. Your income, properly apportioned, would afford—"

Another scream from Lady Augusta. Her son Theodore—Tod, familiarly—burst into the room, jacketless, his hair entangled, blood upon his face, and his shirt-sleeves in shreds.

"You rebellious, wicked fright of a boy!" was the salutation of my lady, when she could recover breath.

"Oh, it's nothing, mamma. Don't bother," replied Master Tod, waving her off. "I have been going into Pierce, senior, and have polished him off with a jolly good licking. He won't get me into a row again, I'll bet."

"What row did he get you into?"

"He's a nasty, sneaking tattler, and he took and told something to Gaunt, and Gaunt put me up for punishment, and I had a caning from old Pye. I vowed I'd pay Pierce out for it, and I have done it, though he is a sight bigger than me."

"What was it about?" inquired Mr. Yorke. "The damaged surplice?"

"Damaged surplice be hanged!" politely retorted the young gentleman, who, in gaining the victory, appeared to have lost his temper. "It was something concerning our lessons at the third desk, if you must know."

"You might be civil, Tod," said Lady Augusta. "Look at your shirt! Who, do you suppose, is going to mend that?"

"It can go unmended," responded Master Tod. "I wish it was the fashion to go without clothes! They are always getting torn."

"I wish it was!" heartily responded my lady.

That same evening, in returning to her house from a visit, Constance Channing encountered Mr. Yorke. He turned to walk with her to the door.

"I intended to call this afternoon, Constance, but was prevented from doing so," he observed. "I have spoken to Lady Augusta."

"Well?" she answered with a smile and a blush.

"She would be very glad of *you*; but the difficulty, at first, appeared to be about salary. However, I pointed out a few home truths, and she admitted that if the girls were to be educated, she supposed she must pay for it. She will give you forty guineas a year; but you are to call upon her and settle other details. To-morrow, if it should be convenient to you."

Constance clasped her hands. "I am so pleased!" she exclaimed, in a low tone.

"So am I," said Mr. Yorke. "I would rather you went to Lady Augusta's than to a stranger's. And do, Constance, try and make those poor girls more what they ought to be."

"That I shall try, you may be sure, William. Are you not coming in?"

"No," said Mr. Yorke, who had held out his hand on reaching the door. He was pretty constant in his evening visits to the Channings, but he had made an engagement for this one with a brother clergyman.

Constance entered. She looked in the study for her brothers, but only Arthur was there. He was leaning his elbow upon the table in a thoughtful mood.

"Where are they all?" inquired Constance.

"Tom and Charles have gone to the cricket match. I don't think Hamish has come in."

"Why did you not go to cricket also?"

"I don't know," said Arthur. "I did not feel much inclination for cricket this evening."

"You looked depressed, Arthur, but I have some good news for you," Constance said, bending over him with a bright smile. "It is settled about my going out, and I am to have forty guineas a year. Guess where it is to?"

Arthur threw his arm round Constance, and they stood together, looking at the trailing honeysuckle just outside the window. "Tell me, darling."

"It is to Lady Augusta's. William has been talking to her, and she would like to have me. Does it not seem lucky to find it so soon?"

"*Lucky*, Constance?"

"Ah, well! you know what I think, Arthur, though I did say 'lucky,'" returned Constance. "I know it is God who is helping us."

Very beautiful, very touching, was the simple trustfulness reposed in God, by Constance and Arthur Channing. The good seed had been sown on good ground, and was bringing forth its fruit.

"I was deep in a reverie when you interrupted me, Constance," Arthur resumed. "Something seems to whisper to me that this loss, which we regard as a great misfortune, may turn out for good in the end."

"In the end! It may have come for our good now," said Constance. "Perhaps I wanted my pride lowered," she laughed; "and this has come to do it, and is despatching me out, a meek governess."

"Perhaps we all wanted it," cried Arthur, meaningly. "There are other bad habits it may stop, besides pride." He was thinking of Hamish and his propensity for spending. "Forty guineas you are to have?"

"Yes," said Constance. "Arthur, do you know a scheme that I have in my head? I have been thinking of it all day."

"What is it? Stay! here is some one coming in. It is Hamish."

Hamish entered with the account-books under his arm, preparatory to going over them with his father. Constance drew him to her.

"Hamish, I have a plan in my head, if we can only carry it out. I am going to tell it you."

"One that will set the river on fire?" cried gay, laughing Hamish.

"If we—you and I, and Arthur—can only manage to earn enough money, and if we can observe strict economy at home, who knows but we may send papa to the German baths yet?"

A cloud came over Hamish's face, and his smile faded. "I don't see how *that* is to be done."

"But you have not heard of my good luck. I am going to Lady Augusta's, and am to have forty guineas a year. Now, if you and Arthur will help, it may be easy. Oh, Hamish, it would be worth any effort—any struggle. Think how it would be rewarded. Papa restored to health! to freedom from pain!"

A look of positive pain seated itself on Hamish's brow. "Yes," he sighed, "I wish it could be done."

"But you do not speak hopefully."

"Because, if I must tell you the truth, I do not feel hopefully. I fear we could not do it: at least until things are brighter."

"If we do our very best, we might receive great help, Hamish."

"What help?" he asked.

"God's help," she whispered.

Hamish smiled. He had not yet learnt what Constance had. Besides, Hamish was just then in a little trouble on his own account: he knew very well that *his* funds were wanted in another quarter.

"Constance, dear, do not look at me so wistfully. I will try with all my might and main, to help my father; but I fear I cannot do anything yet. I mean to draw in my expenses," he went on, laughing: "to live like any old screw of a miser, and never squander a halfpenny where a farthing will suffice."

He took his books and went in to Mr. Channing. Constance began training the honeysuckle, her mind busy, and a verse of Holy Writ running through it—"Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass."

"Ay!" she murmured, glancing upwards at the blue evening sky: "our whole, whole trust in patient reliance; and whatsoever is best for us will be ours."

Annabel stole up to Constance, and entwined her arms caressingly round her. Constance turned, and parted the child's hair upon her forehead with a gentle hand.

"Am I to find a little rebel in you, Annabel? Will you not try and make things smooth for me?"

"Oh, Constance, dear!" was the whispered answer: "it was only my fun last night, when I said you should not take me for lessons in an evening. I will study all day by myself, and get my lessons quite ready for you, so as to give you no trouble in the evening. Would you like to hear me my music now?"

Constance bent to kiss her. "No, dear child; there is no necessity for my taking you in an evening, until my days shall be occupied at Lady Augusta Yorke's."

CHAPTER VII. – MR. KETCH

Mrs. Channing sat with her children. Breakfast was over, and she had the Bible open before her. Never, since their earliest years of understanding, had she failed to assemble them together for a few minutes' reading, morning and evening. Not for too long at once; she knew the value of *not tiring* young children, when she was leading them to feel an interest in sacred things. She would take Hamish, a little fellow of three years old, upon her knee, read to him a short Bible story, suited to his age, and then talk to him. Talk to him in a soft, loving, gentle tone, of God, of Jesus, of heaven; of his duties in this world; of what he must do to attain to everlasting peace in the next. Day by day, step by step, untiringly, unceasingly, had she thus laboured, to awaken good in the child's heart, to train it to holiness, to fill it with love of God. As the other children came on in years, she, in like manner, took them. From simple Bible stories to more advanced Bible stories, and thence to the Bible itself; with other books at times and seasons: a little reading, a little conversation, Gospel truths impressed upon them from her earnest lips. Be you very sure that where this great duty of all duties is left unfulfilled by a mother, a child is not brought up as it ought to be. Win your child towards heaven in his early years, and he will not forget it when he is old.

It will be as a very shield, compassing him about through life. He may wander astray—there is no telling—in the heyday of his hot-blooded youth, for the world's temptations are as a running fire, scorching all that venture into its heat; but the good foundation has been laid, and the earnest, incessant prayers have gone up, and he will find his way home again.

Mrs. Channing closed the Bible, and spoke, as usual. It was all that teaching should be. Good lessons as to this world; loving pictures of that to come. She had contrived to impress them, not with the too popular notion that heaven was a far-off place up in the skies some vague, millions of miles away, and to which we might be millions of years off; but that it was very near to them: that God was ever present with them; and that Death, when he came, should be looked upon as a friend, not an enemy. Hamish was three and twenty years old now, and he loved those minutes of instruction as he had done when a child. They had borne their fruit for him, and for all: though not, perhaps, in an equal degree.

The reading over, and the conversation over, she gave the book to Constance to put away, and the boys rose, and prepared to enter upon their several occupations. It was not the beginning of the day for Tom and Charles, for they had been already to early school.

"Is papa so very much worse to-day, mamma?" asked Tom.

"I did not say he was worse, Tom," replied Mrs. Channing. "I said he had passed a restless night, and felt tired and weak."

"Thinking over that confounded lawsuit," cried hot, thoughtless Tom.

"Thomas!" reproved Mrs. Channing.

"I beg your pardon, mamma. Unorthodox words are the fashion in school, and one catches them up. I forget myself when I repeat them before you."

"To repeat them before me is no worse than repeating them behind me, Tom."

Tom laughed. "Very true, mamma. It was not a logical excuse. But I am sure the news, brought to us by the mail on Wednesday night, is enough to put a saint out of temper. Had there been anything unjust in it, had the money not been rightly ours, it would have been different; but to be deprived of what is legally our own—"

"Not legally—as it turns out," struck in Hamish.

"Justly, then," said Tom. "It's too bad—especially as we don't know what we shall do without it."

"Tom, you are not to look at the dark side of things," cried Constance, in a pretty, wilful, commanding manner. "We shall do very well without it: it remains to be proved whether we shall not do better than with it."

“Children, I wish to say a word to you upon this subject,” said Mrs. Channing. “When the news arrived, I was, you know, almost overwhelmed by it; not seeing, as Tom says, what we were to do without the money. In the full shock of the disappointment, it wore for me its worst aspect; a far more sombre one than the case really merited. But, now that I have had time to see it in its true light, my disappointment has subsided. I consider that we took a completely wrong view of it. Had the decision deprived us of the income we enjoy, then indeed it would have been grievous; but in reality it deprives us of nothing. Not one single privilege that we possessed before, does it take from us; not a single outlay will it cost us. We looked to this money to do many things with; but its not coming renders us no worse off than we were. Expecting it has caused us to get behindhand with our bills, which we must gradually pay off in the best way we can; it takes from us the power to article Arthur, and it straitens us in many ways, for, as you grow up, you grow more expensive. This is the extent of the ill, except—”

“Oh, mamma, you forget! The worst ill of all is, that papa cannot now go to Germany.”

“I was about to say that, Arthur. But other means for his going thither may be found. Understand me, my dears: I do not see any means, or chance of means, at present: you must not fancy that; but it is possible that they may arise with the time of need. One service, at any rate, the decision has rendered me.”

“Service?” echoed Tom.

“Yes,” smiled Mrs. Channing. “It has proved to me that my children are loving and dutiful. Instead of repining, as some might, they are already seeking how they may make up, themselves, for the money that has not come. And Constance begins it.”

“Don’t fear us, mother,” cried Hamish, with his sunny smile. “We will be of more use to you yet than the money would have been.”

They dispersed—Hamish to his office, Arthur to Mr. Galloway’s, Tom and Charles to the cloisters, that famous playground of the college school. Stolen pleasures, it is said, are sweetest; and, just because there had been a stir lately amongst the cathedral clergy, touching the desirability of forbidding the cloisters to the boys for play, so much the more eager were they to frequent them.

As Arthur was going down Close Street, he encountered Mr. Williams, the cathedral organist, striding along with a roll of music in his hand. He was Arthur’s music-master. When Arthur Channing was in the choir, a college schoolboy, he had displayed considerable taste for music; and it was decided that he should learn the organ. He had continued to take lessons after he left the choir, and did so still.

“I was thinking of coming round to speak to you to-day, Mr. Williams.”

“What about?” asked the organist. “Anything pressing?”

“Well, you have heard, of course, that that suit is given against us, so I don’t mean to continue the organ. They have said nothing to me at home; but it is of no use spending money that might be saved. But I see you are in too great a hurry, to stay to talk now.”

“Hurry! I am hurried off my legs,” cried the organist. “If a dozen or two of my pupils would give up learning, as you talk of doing, I should only be obliged to them. I have more work than I can attend to. And now Jupp must go and lay himself up, and I have the services to attend myself, morning and afternoon!”

Mr. Jupp was assistant-organist. An apprentice to Mr. Williams, but just out of his time.

“What’s the matter with Jupp?” asked Arthur.

“A little bit of fever, and a great deal of laziness,” responded Mr. Williams. “He is the laziest fellow alive. Since his uncle died, and that money came to him, he doesn’t care a straw how things go. He was copyist to the cathedral, and he gave that up last week. I have asked Sandon, the lay-clerk, if he will take the copying, but he declines. He is another lazy one.”

The organist hurried off. Arthur strove to detain him for another word or two, but it was of no use. So he continued his way to Mr. Galloway’s.

Busy enough were his thoughts there. His fingers were occupied with writing, but his mind went roaming without leave. This post of copyist of music to the cathedral, which appeared to be going begging; why should not he undertake it, if Mr. Williams would give it to him? He was quite able to do so, and though he very much disliked music-copying, that was nothing: he was not going to set up dislikes, and humour them. He had only a vague idea what might be the remuneration; ten, or twelve, or fifteen pounds a year, he fancied it might bring in. Better that, than nothing; it would be a beginning to follow in the wake that Constance had commenced; and he could do it of an evening, or at other odd times. "I won't lose an hour in asking for it," thought Arthur.

At one o'clock, when he was released from the office, he ran through the Boundaries to the cloisters, intending to pass through them on his way to the house of the organist, that being rather a nearer road to it, than if he had gone round the town. The sound of the organ, however, struck upon his ear, causing him to assume that it was the organist who was playing. Arthur tried the cathedral door, found it open, and went in.

It was Mr. Williams. He had been trying some new music, and rose from the organ as Arthur reached the top of the stairs, no very pleasant expression on his countenance.

"What is the matter?" asked Arthur, perceiving that something had put him out.

"I hate ingratitude," responded Mr. Williams. "Jenkins," he called out to the old bedesman, who had been blowing for him, "you may go to your dinner; I shan't want you any more now."

Old Jenkins hobbled down from the organ-loft, and Mr. Williams continued to Arthur:

"Would you believe that Jupp has withdrawn himself utterly?"

"From the college?" exclaimed Arthur.

"From the college, and from me. His father comes to me, an hour ago, and says he is sure Jupp's in a bad state of health, and he intends to send him to his relatives in the Scotch mountains for some months, to try and brace him up. Not a word of apology, for leaving me at a pinch."

"It will be very inconvenient for you," said Arthur. "I suppose that new apprentice of yours is of no use yet for the services?"

"Use!" irascibly retorted Mr. Williams, "he could not play a psalm if it were to save his life. I depended upon Jupp. It was an understood thing that he should remain with me as assistant; had it not been, I should have taken good care to bring somebody on to replace him. As to attending the services on week-days myself, it is next door to an impossibility. If I do, my teaching will be ruined."

"I wish I was at liberty," said Arthur; "I would take them for you."

"Look here, Channing," said the organist. "Since I had this information of old Jupp's, my brain has been worrying itself pretty well, as you may imagine. Now, there's no one I would rather trust to take the week-day services than you, for you are fully capable, and I have trained you into my own style of playing: I never could get Jupp entirely into it; he is too fond of noise and flourishes. It has struck me that perhaps Mr. Galloway might spare you: his office is not overdone with work, and I would make it worth your while."

Arthur, somewhat bewildered at the proposal, sat down on one of the stools, and stared.

"You will not be offended at my saying this. I speak in consequence of your telling me, this morning, you could not afford to go on with your lessons," continued the organist. "But for that, I should not have thought of proposing such a thing to you. What capital practice it would be for you, too!"

"The best proof to convince you I am not offended, is to tell you what brings me here now," said Arthur in a cordial tone. "I understood, this morning, that you were at a loss for some one to undertake the copying of the cathedral music: I have come to ask you to give it to me."

"You may have it, and welcome," said Mr. Williams. "That's nothing; I want to know about the services."

"It would take me an hour, morning and afternoon, from the office," debated Arthur. "I wonder whether Mr. Galloway would let me go an hour earlier and stay an hour later to make up for it?"

“You can put the question to him. I dare say he will: especially as he is on terms of friendship with your father. I would give you—let me see,” deliberated the organist, falling into a musing attitude—“twelve pounds a quarter. Say fifty pounds a year; if you stay with me so long. And you should have nothing to do with the choristers: I’d practise them myself.”

Arthur’s face flushed. It was a great temptation: and the question flashed into his mind whether it would not be well to leave Mr. Galloway’s, as his prospects there appeared to be blighted, and embrace this, if that gentleman declined to allow him the necessary hours of absence. Fifty pounds a year! “And,” he spoke unconsciously aloud, “there would be the copying besides.”

“Oh, that’s not much,” cried the organist. “That’s paid by the sheet.”

“I should like it excessively!” exclaimed Arthur.

“Well, just turn it over in your mind. But you must let me know at once, Channing; by to-morrow at the latest. If you cannot take it, I must find some one else.”

Arthur Channing went out of the cathedral, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels. “Constance said that God would help us!” was his grateful thought.

Such a whirlwind of noise! Arthur, when he reached the cloisters, found himself in the midst of the college boys, who were just let out of school. Leaping, shouting, pushing, scuffling, playing, contending! Arthur had not so very long ago been a college boy himself, and enjoyed the fun.

“How are you, old fellows—jolly?”

They gathered around him. Arthur was a favourite with them; had been always, when he was in the school. The elder boys loftily commanded off the juniors, who had to retire to a respectful distance.

“I say, Channing, there’s the stunningest go!” began Bywater, dancing a triumphant hornpipe. “You know Jupp? Well, he has been and sent in word to Williams that he is going to die, or something of that sort, and it’s necessary he should be off on the spree, to get himself well again. Old Jupp came this morning, just as college was over, and said it: and Williams is in the jolliest rage; going to be left without any one to take the organ. It will just pay him out, for being such a tyrant to us choristers.”

“Perhaps I am going to take it,” returned Arthur.

“You?—what a cram!”

“It is not, indeed,” said Arthur. “I shall take it if I can get leave from Mr. Galloway. Williams has just asked me.”

“Is that true, Arthur?” burst forth Tom Channing, elbowing his way to the front.

“Now, Tom, should I say it if it were not true? I only hope Mr. Galloway will throw no difficulty in my way.”

“And do you mean to say that you are going to be cock over us choristers?” asked Bywater.

“No, thank you,” laughed Arthur. “Mr. Williams will best fill that honour. Bywater, has the mystery of the inked surplice come to light?”

“No, and be shot to it! The master’s in a regular way over it, though, and—”

“And what do you think?” eagerly interrupted Tod Yorke, whose face was ornamented with several shades of colour, blue, green, and yellow, the result of the previous day’s pugilistic encounter: “my brother Roland heard the master say he suspected one of the seniors.”

Arthur Channing looked inquiringly at Gaunt. The latter tossed his head haughtily. “Roland Yorke must have made some mistake,” he observed to Arthur. “It is perfectly out of the question that the master can suspect a senior. I can’t imagine where the school could have picked up the notion.”

Gaunt was standing with Arthur, as he spoke, and the three seniors, Channing, Huntley, and Yorke, happened to be in a line facing them. Arthur regarded them one by one. “You don’t look very like committing such a thing as that, any one of you,” he laughed. “It is curious where the notion can have come from.”

“Such absurdity!” ejaculated Gerald Yorke. “As if it were likely Pye would suspect one of us seniors! It’s not credible.”

“Not at all credible that you would do it,” said Arthur. “Had it been the result of accident, of course you would have hastened to declare it, any one of you three.”

As Arthur spoke, he involuntarily turned his eyes on the sea of faces behind the three seniors, as if searching for signs in some countenance among them, by which he might recognize the culprit.

“My goodness!” uttered the senior boy, to Arthur. “Had any one of those three done such a thing—accident or no accident—and not declared it, he’d get his name struck off the rolls. A junior may be pardoned for things that a senior cannot.”

“Besides, there’d be the losing his chance of the seniorship, and of the exhibition,” cried one from the throng of boys in the rear.

“How are you progressing for the seniorship?” asked Arthur, of the three. “Which of you stands the best chance?”

“I think Channing does,” freely spoke up Harry Huntley.

“Why?”

“Because our progress is so equal that I don’t think one will get ahead of another, so that the choice cannot be made that way; and Channing’s name stands first on the rolls.”

“Who is to know if they’ll give us fair play and no humbug?” said Tom Channing.

“If they do, it will be what they have never given yet!” exclaimed Stephen Bywater. “Kissing goes by favour.”

“Ah, but I heard that the dean—”

At this moment a boy dashed into the throng, scattering it right and left. “Where are your eyes?” he whispered.

Close upon them was the dean. Arm in arm with him, in his hat and apron, walked the Bishop of Helstonleigh. The boys stood aside and took off their trenchers. The dean merely raised his hand in response to the salutation—he appeared to be deep in thought; but the bishop nodded freely among them.

“I heard that the dean found fault, the last time the exhibition fell, and said favour should never be shown again, so long as he was Dean of Helstonleigh,” said Harry Huntley, when the clergy were beyond hearing, continuing the sentence he had been interrupted in. “I say that, with fair play, it will be Channing’s; failing Channing, it will be mine; failing me, it will be Yorke’s.”

“Now, then!” retorted Gerald Yorke. “Why should you have the chance before me, pray?”

Huntley laughed. “Only that my name heads yours on the rolls.”

Once in three years there fell an exhibition for Helstonleigh College school, to send a boy to Oxford. It would be due the following Easter. Gaunt declined to compete for it; he would leave the school at Michaelmas; and it was a pretty generally understood thing that whichever of the three mentioned boys should be appointed senior in his place, would be presented with the exhibition. Channing and Yorke most ardently desired to gain it; both of them from the same motive—want of funds at home to take them to the university. If Tom Channing did not gain it, he was making up his mind to pocket pride, and go as a servitor. Yorke would not have done such a thing for the world; all the proud Yorke blood would be up in arms, at one of their name appearing as a servitor at Oxford. No. If Gerald Yorke should lose the exhibition, Lady Augusta must manage to screw out funds to send him. He and Tom Channing were alike designed for the Church. Harry Huntley had no such need: the son of a gentleman of good property, the exhibition was of little moment to him, in a pecuniary point of view; indeed, a doubt had been whispered amongst the boys, whether Mr. Huntley would allow Harry to take advantage of it, if he did gain it, for he was a liberal-minded and just man. Harry, of course, desired to be the successful one, for fame’s sake, just as ardently as did Channing and Yorke.

“I’m blessed if here isn’t that renowned functionary, Jack Ketch!”

The exclamation came from young Galloway. Limping in at one of the cloister doors, came the cloister porter, a surly man of sixty, whose temper was not improved by periodical attacks of lumbago. He and the college boys were open enemies. The porter would have rejoiced in denying

them the cloisters altogether; and nothing had gladdened his grim old heart like the discussion which was said to have taken place between the dean and chapter, concerning the propriety of shutting out the boys and their noise from the cloisters, as a playground. He bore an unfortunate name—Ketch—and the boys, you may be very sure, did not fail to take advantage of it, joining to it sundry embellishments, more pointed than polite.

He came up, a ragged gig-whip in his hand, which he was fond of smacking round the throng of boys. He had never yet ventured to touch one of them, and perhaps it was just as well for him that he had not.

“Now, you boys! be off, with your hullabaloo! Is this a decent noise to make around gentlefolks’ doors? You don’t know, may be, as Dr. Burrows is in town.”

Dr. Burrows happened to live in a house which had a door opening to the cloisters. The boys retorted. The worst they gave Mr. Ketch was “chaff;” but his temper could bear anything better than that, especially if it was administered by the senior boy.

“Dear me, who’s this?” began Gaunt, in a tone of ultra politeness. “Boys, do you see this gentleman who condescends to accost us? I really believe it is Sir John Ketch. What’s that in his hand?—a piece of rope? Surely, Mr. Ketch, you have not been turning off that unfortunate prisoner who was condemned yesterday? Rather hasty work, sir; was it not?”

Mr. Ketch foamed. “I tell you what it is, sir. You be the senior boy, and, instead of restraining these wicked young reptiles, you edges ‘em on! Take care, young gent, as I don’t complain of you to the dean. Seniors have been hoisted afore now.”

“Have they, really? Well, you ought to know, Mr. Calcraft. There’s the dean, just gone out of the cloisters; if you make haste, Calcraft, you’ll catch him up. Put your best foot foremost, and ask him if he won’t report Mr. Gaunt for punishment.”

The porter could have danced with rage; and his whip was smacking ominously. He did not dare advance it too near the circle when the senior boy was present, or indeed, when any of the elder boys were.

“How’s your lumbago, Mr. Ketch?” demanded Stephen Bywater. “I’d advise you to get rid of that, before the next time you go on duty; it might be in your way, you know. Never was such a thing heard of, as for the chief toppler-off of the three kingdoms to be disabled in his limbs! What *would* you do? I’m afraid you’d be obliged to resign your post, and sink into private life.”

“Now I just vow to goodness, as I’ll do all I can to get these cloisters took from you boys,” shrieked old Ketch, clasping his hands together. “There’s insults as flesh and blood can’t stand; and, as sure as I’m living, I’ll pay you out for it.”

He turned tail and hobbled off, as he spoke, and the boys raised “three groans for Jack Ketch,” and then rushed away by the other entrance to their own dinners. The fact was, the porter had brought ill will upon himself, through his cross-grained temper. He had no right whatever to interfere between the boys and the cloisters; it was not his place to do so. The king’s scholars knew this; and, being spirited king’s scholars, as they were, would not stand it.

“Tom,” said Arthur Channing, “don’t say anything at home about the organ. Wait and see if I get it, first. Charley did not hear; he was ordered off with the juniors.”

CHAPTER VIII. – THE ASSISTANT-ORGANIST

Things often seem to go by the rule of contrary. Arthur returned to the office at two o'clock, brimful of the favour he was going to solicit of Mr. Galloway; but he encountered present disappointment. For the first time for many weeks, Mr. Galloway did not make his appearance in the office at all; he was out the whole of the afternoon. Roland Yorke, to whom Arthur confided the plan, ridiculed it.

"Catch me taking such a task upon myself! If I could play the organ like a Mendelssohn, and send the folks into ecstasies, I'd never saddle myself with the worry of doing it morning and afternoon. You'll soon be sick of the bargain, Channing."

"I should never be sick of it, if I did it for nothing: I am too fond of music for that. And it will be a very easy way of earning money."

"Not so easy as making your mother stump up," was the reply. And if your refinement turns from the expression, my good reader, I am sorry you should have to read it; but it is what Mr. Roland Yorke *said*. "I had a regular scene with Lady Augusta this morning. It's the most unreasonable thing in the world, you know, Channing, for her to think I can live without money, and so I told her—said I must and would have it, in fact."

"Did you get it?"

"Of course I did. I wanted to pay Simms, and one or two more trifles that were pressing; I was not going to have the fellow here after me again. I wish such a thing as money had never been invented!"

"You may as well wish we could live without eating."

"So I do, sometimes—when I go home, expecting a good dinner, and there's only some horrid cold stuff upon the table. There never was a worse housekeeper than Lady Augusta. It's my belief, our servants must live like fighting cocks; for I am sure the bills are heavy enough, and *we* don't get the benefit of them."

"What made you so late this afternoon?" asked Arthur.

"I went round to pay Simms, for one thing; and then I called in upon Hamish, and stayed talking with him. Wasn't he in a sea of envy when I told him I had been scoring off that Simms! He wished he could do the same."

"Hamish does not owe anything to Simms!" cried Arthur, with hasty retort.

"Doesn't he?" laughed Roland Yorke. "That's all you know about it. Ask him yourself."

"If you please, sir," interposed Mr. Jenkins, at this juncture, "I shall soon be waiting for that paper. Mr. Galloway directed me to send it off by post."

"Bother the paper!" returned Roland; but, nevertheless, he applied himself to complete it. He was in the habit of discoursing upon private topics before Jenkins without any reserve, regarding him as a perfect nonentity.

When Arthur went home in the evening, he found Mr. Galloway sitting with his father. "Well," cried the proctor, as Arthur entered, "and who has been at the office this afternoon?"

"No one in particular, sir. Oh yes, there was, though—I forgot. The dean looked in, and wanted to see you."

"What did he want?"

"He did not say, sir. He told Jenkins it would do another time." Arthur left his father and Mr. Galloway together. He did not broach the subject that was uppermost in his heart. Gifted with rare delicacy of feeling, he would not speak to Mr. Galloway until he could see him alone. To prefer the request in his father's presence might have caused Mr. Galloway more trouble in refusing it.

"I can't think what has happened to Arthur this evening!" exclaimed one of them. "His spirits are up to fever heat. Tell us what it is, Arthur?"

Arthur laughed. "I hope they will not be lowered to freezing point within the next hour; that's all."

When he heard Mr. Galloway leaving, he hastened after him, and overtook him in the Boundaries.

"I wanted to say a few words to you, sir, if you please?"

"Say on," said Mr. Galloway. "Why did you not say them indoors?"

"I scarcely know how I shall say them now, sir; for it is a very great favour that I have to ask you, and you may be angry, perhaps, at my thinking you might grant it."

"You want a holiday, I suppose?"

"Oh no, sir; nothing of that sort. I want—"

"Well?" cried Mr. Galloway, surprised at his hesitation; but now that the moment of preferring the request had come, Arthur shrank from doing it.

"Could you allow me, sir—would it make very much difference—to allow me—to come to the office an hour earlier, and remain in it an hour later?" stammered Arthur.

"What for?" exclaimed Mr. Galloway, with marked surprise.

"I have had an offer made me, sir, to take the cathedral organ at week-day service. I should very much like to accept it, if it could be managed."

"Why, where's Jupp?" uttered Mr. Galloway.

"Jupp has resigned. He is ill, and is going out for his health. I'll tell you how it all happened," went on Arthur, losing diffidence now that he was fairly launched upon his subject. "Of course, this failure of the suit makes a great difference to our prospects at home; it renders it incumbent upon us to do what we can to help—"

"Why does it?" interrupted Mr. Galloway. "It may make a difference to your future ease, but it makes none to your present means."

"There is money wanted in many ways, sir; a favourable termination to the suit was counted upon so certainly. For one thing, it is necessary that my father should try the German baths."

"Of course, he must try them," cried Mr. Galloway.

"But it will cost money, sir," deprecated Arthur. "Altogether, we have determined to do what we can. Constance has set us the example, by engaging herself as daily governess at Lady Augusta's. She goes on Monday."

"Very commendable of her," observed the proctor, who loved a gossip like any old woman. "I hope she'll not let those two unruly girls worry her to death."

"And I was casting about in my mind, this morning, what I could do to help, when I met the organist," proceeded Arthur. "He chanced to say that he could find no one to take the music copying. Well, sir, I thought it over, and at one o'clock I went to ask him to give it to me. I found him at the organ, in a state of vexation. Jupp had resigned his post, and Mr. Williams had no one to replace him. The long and the short of it is, sir, that he offered it to me."

"And did you accept it?" crossly responded Mr. Galloway.

"Of course I could not do that, sir, until I had spoken to you. If it were possible that I could make up the two hours to you, I should be very glad to take it."

"And do it for nothing, I suppose?"

"Oh no. He would give me fifty pounds a year. And there would be the copying besides."

"That's a great deal!" cried Mr. Galloway. "It appears to me to be good pay," replied Arthur. "But he would lose a great deal more than that, if he had to attend the cathedral himself. He said it would ruin his teaching."

"Ah! self-interest—two for himself and one for you!" ejaculated the proctor. "What does Mr. Channing say?"

"I have said nothing at home. It was of no use telling them, until I had spoken to you. Now that my prospects are gone—"

“What prospects?” interrupted Mr. Galloway.

“My articles to you, sir. Of course there’s no chance of that now.”

Mr. Galloway grunted. “The ruin that Chancery suits work! Mark you, Arthur Channing, this is such a thing as was never asked a proctor before—leave of absence for two hours in the best part of the day! If I grant it, it will be out of the great friendship I bear your father.”

“Oh, sir! I shall never forget the obligation.”

“Take care you don’t. You must come and work for two hours before breakfast in a morning.”

“Willingly—readily!” exclaimed Arthur Channing, his face glowing. “Then may I really tell Mr. Williams that I can accept it?”

“If I don’t say yes, I suppose you’d magnify me into a sullen old bear, as bad as Ketch, the porter. You may accept it. Stop!” thundered Mr. Galloway, coming to a dead standstill.

Arthur was startled. “What now, sir?”

“Are you to be instructor to those random animals, the choristers?”

“Oh no: I shall have nothing to do with that.”

“Very good. If you *had* taken to them, I should have recommended you to guard against such a specimen of singing as was displayed the other day before the judges.”

Arthur laughed; spoke a word of heartfelt thanks; and took his way off-hand to the residence of the organist as light as any bird.

“I have obtained leave, Mr. Williams; I may take your offer!” he exclaimed with scant ceremony, when he found himself in that gentleman’s presence, who was at tea with his wife. “Mr. Galloway has authorized me to accept it. How do you do, Mrs. Williams?”

“That’s a great weight off my mind, then!” cried the organist. “I set that dolt of an apprentice of mine to play the folks out of college, this afternoon, when service was over, and—of all performances! Six mistakes he made in three bars, and broke down at last. I could have boxed his ears. The dean was standing below when I went down. ‘Who was that playing, Mr. Williams?’ he demanded. So, I told him about Jupp’s ill-behaviour in leaving me, and that I had offered the place to you. ‘But is Channing quite competent?’ cried he—for you know what a fine ear for music the dean has:—‘besides,’ he added, ‘is he not at Galloway’s?’ I said we hoped Mr. Galloway would spare you, and that I would answer for your competency. So, mind, Channing, you must put on the steam, and not disgrace my guarantee. I don’t mean the steam of *noise*, or that you should go through the service with all the stops out.”

Arthur laughed; and, declining the invitation to remain and take tea, he went out. He was anxious to declare the news at home. A few steps on his road, he overtook Hamish.

“Where do you spring from?” exclaimed Hamish, passing his arm within Arthur’s.

“From concluding an agreement that will bring me in fifty pounds a year,” said Arthur.

“Gammon, Master Arthur!”

“It is *not* gammon, Hamish. It is sober truth.”

Hamish turned and looked at him, aroused by something in the tone. “And what are you to do for it?”

“Just pass a couple of hours a day, delighting my own ears and heart. Do you remember what Constance said, last night? Hamish, it is *wonderful*, that this help should so soon have come to me!”

“Stay! Where are you going?” interrupted Hamish, as Arthur was turning into a side-street.

“This is the nearest way home.”

“I had rather not go that way.”

“Why?” exclaimed Arthur, in surprise. “Hamish, how funny you look! What is the matter?”

“Must I tell you? It is for your ear alone, mind. There’s a certain tradesman’s house down there that I’d rather not pass; he has a habit of coming out and dunning me. Do you remember Mr. Dick Swiveller?”

Hamish laughed gaily. He would have laughed on his road to prison: it was in his nature. But Arthur seemed to take a leap from his high ropes. "Is it Simms?" he breathed.

"No, it is not Simms. Who has been telling you anything about Simms, Arthur? It is not so very much that I owe Simms. What is this good luck of yours?"

Arthur did not immediately reply. A dark shadow had fallen upon his spirit, as a forerunner of evil.

CHAPTER IX. – HAMISH’S CANDLES

Old Judith sat in her kitchen. Her hands were clasped upon her knees, and her head was bent in thought. Rare indeed was it to catch Judith indulging in a moment’s idleness. She appeared to be holding soliloquy with herself.

“It’s the most incomprehensible thing in the world! I have heard of ghosts—and, talking about ghosts, that child was in a tremor, last night, again—I’m sure he was. Brave little heart! he goes up to bed in the dark on purpose to break himself of the fear. I went in for them shirts missis told me of, and he started like anything, and his face turned white. He hadn’t heard me till I was in the room; I’d no candle, and ‘twas enough to startle him. ‘Oh, is it you, Judith?’ said he, quietly, making believe to be as indifferent as may be. I struck a light, for I couldn’t find the shirts, and then I saw his white face. He can’t overget the fear: ‘twas implanted in him in babyhood: and I only wish I could get that wicked girl punished as I’d punish her, for it was her work. But about the t’other? I have heard of ghosts walking—though, thank goodness, I’m not frightened at ‘em, like the child is!—but for a young man to go upstairs, night after night, pretending to go to rest, and sitting up till morning light, is what I never did hear on. If it was once in a way, ‘twould be a different thing; but it’s always. I’m sure it’s pretty nigh a year since—”

“Why, Judith, you are in a brown study!”

The interruption came from Constance, who had entered the kitchen to give an order. Judith looked up.

“I’m in a peck of trouble, Miss Constance. And the worst is, I don’t know whether to tell about it, or to keep it in. He’d not like it to get to the missis’s ears, I know: but then, you see, perhaps I ought to tell her—for his sake.”

Constance smiled. “Would you like to tell me, instead of mamma? Charley has been at some mischief again, among the saucepans? Burnt out more bottoms, perhaps?”

“Not he, the darling!” resentfully rejoined Judith. “The burning out of that one was enough for him. I’m sure he took contrition to himself, as if it had been made of gold.”

“What is it, then?”

“Well,” said Judith, looking round, as if fearing the walls would hear, and speaking mysteriously, “it’s about Mr. Hamish. I don’t know but I *will* tell you, Miss Constance, and it’ll be, so far, a weight off my mind. I was just saying to myself that I had heard of ghosts walking, but what Mr. Hamish does every blessed night, I never did hear of, in all my born days.”

Constance felt a little startled. “What does he do?” she hastily asked.

“You know, Miss Constance, my bedroom’s overhead, above the kitchen here, and, being built out on the side, I can see the windows at the back of the house from it—as we can see ‘em from this kitchen window, for the matter of that, if we put our heads out. About a twelvemonth ago—I’m sure its not far short of it—I took to notice that the light in Mr. Hamish’s chamber wasn’t put out so soon as it was in the other rooms. So, one night, when I was half-crazy with that face-ache—you remember my having it, Miss Constance?—and knew I shouldn’t get to sleep, if I lay down, I thought I’d just see how long he kept it in. Would you believe, Miss Constance, that at three o’clock in the morning his light was still burning?”

“Well,” said Constance, feeling the tale was not half told.

“I thought, what on earth could he be after? I might have feared that he had got into bed and left it alight by mistake, but that I saw his shadow once or twice pass the blind. Well, I didn’t say a word to him next day, I thought he might not like it: but my mind wouldn’t be easy, and I looked out again, and I found that, night after night, that light was in. Miss Constance, I thought I’d trick him: so I took care to put just about an inch of candle in his bed candlestick, and no more: but, law bless me! when folks is bent on forbidden things, it is not candle-ends that will stop ‘em!”

"I suppose you mean that the light burnt still, in spite of your inch of candle?" said Constance.

"It just did," returned Judith. "He gets into my kitchen and robs my candle-box, I thought to myself. So I counted my candles and marked 'em; and I found I was wrong, for they wasn't touched. But one day, when I was putting his cupboard to rights, I came upon a paper right at the back. Two great big composite candles it had in it, and another half burnt away. Oh, this is where you keep your store, my young master, is it? I thought. They were them big round things, which seems never to burn to an end, three to the pound."

Constance made no reply. Judith gathered breath, and continued:

"I took upon myself to speak to him. I told him it wasn't well for anybody's health, to sit up at night, in that fashion; not counting the danger he ran of setting the house on fire and burning us all to cinders in our beds. He laughed—you know his way, Miss Constance—and said he'd take care of his health and of the house, and I was just to make myself easy and hold my tongue, and that *I* need not be uneasy about fire, for I could open my window and drop into the rain-water barrel, and there I should be safe. But, in spite of his joking tone, there ran through it a sound of command; and, from that hour to this, I have never opened my lips about it to anybody living."

"And he burns the light still?"

"Except Saturday and Sunday nights, it's always alight, longer or shorter. Them two nights, he gets into bed respectable, as the rest of the house do. You have noticed, Miss Constance, that, the evenings he is not out, he'll go up to his chamber by half-past nine or ten?"

"Frequently," assented Constance. "As soon as the reading is over, he will wish us good night."

"Well, them nights, when he goes up early, he puts his light out sooner—by twelve, or by half-past, or by one; but when he spends his evenings out, not getting home until eleven, he'll have it burning till two or three in the morning."

"What can he sit up for?" involuntarily exclaimed Constance.

"I don't know, unless it is that the work at the office is too heavy for him," said Judith. "He has his own work to do there, and master's as well."

"It is not at all heavy," said Constance. "There is an additional clerk since papa's illness, you know. It cannot be that."

"It has to do with the office-books, for certain," returned Judith. "Why else is he so particular in taking 'em into his room every night?"

"He takes—them—for safety," spoke Constance, in a very hesitating manner, as if not feeling perfectly assured of the grounds for her assertion.

"Maybe," sniffed Judith, in disbelief. "It can't be that he sits up to read," she resumed. "Nobody in their senses would do that. Reading may be pleasant to some folks, especially them story-books; but sleep is pleasanter. This last two or three blessed nights, since that ill news come to make us miserable, I question if he has gone to bed at all, for his candle has only been put out when daylight came to shame it."

"But, Judith, how do you know all this?" exclaimed Constance, after a few minutes' reflection. "You surely don't sit up to watch the light?"

"Pretty fit I should be for my work in the morning, if I did! No, Miss Constance. I moved my bed round to the other corner, so as I could see his window as I lay in it; and I have got myself into a habit of waking up at all hours and looking. Truth to say, I'm not easy: fire is sooner set alight than put out: and if there's the water-butt for me to drop into, there ain't water-butts for the rest of the house."

"Very true," murmured Constance, speaking as if she were in reflection.

"Nobody knows the worry this has been upon my mind," resumed Judith. "Every night when I have seen his window alight, I have said to myself, 'I'll tell my mistress of this when morning comes;' but, when the morning has come, my resolution has failed me. It might worry her, and anger Mr. Hamish, and do no good after all. If he really has not time for his books in the day, why he must do

‘em at night, I suppose; it would never do for him to fall off, and let the master’s means drop through. What ought to be done, Miss Constance?”

“I really do not know, Judith,” replied Constance. “You must let me think about it.”

She fell into an unpleasant reverie. The most feasible solution she could come to, was the one adopted by Judith—that Hamish passed his nights at the books. If so, how sadly he must idle away his time in the day! Did he give his hours up to nonsense and pleasure? And how could he contrive to hide his shortcomings from Mr. Channing? Constance was not sure whether the books went regularly under the actual inspection of Mr. Channing, or whether Hamish went over them aloud. If only the latter, could the faults be concealed? She knew nothing of book-keeping, and was unable to say. Leaving her to puzzle over the matter, we will return to Hamish himself.

We left him in the last chapter, you may remember, objecting to go down a certain side-street which would have cut off a short distance of their road; his excuse to Arthur being, that a troublesome creditor of his lived in it. The plea was a true one. Not to make a mystery of it, it may as well be acknowledged that Hamish had contracted some debts, and that he found it difficult to pay them. They were not many, and a moderate sum would have settled them; but that moderate sum Hamish did not possess. Let us give him his due. But that he had fully counted upon a time of wealth being close at hand, it is probable that he never would have contracted them. When Hamish erred, it was invariably from thoughtlessness—from carelessness—never from deliberate intention.

Arthur, of course, turned from the objectionable street, and continued his straightforward course. They were frequently hindered; the streets were always crowded at assize time, and acquaintances continually stopped them. Amongst others, they met Roland Yorke.

“Are you coming round to Cator’s, to-night?” he asked of Hamish.

“Not I,” returned Hamish, with his usual gay laugh. “I am going to draw in my expenses, and settle down into a miser.”

“Moonshine!” cried Roland.

“Is it moonshine, though? It is just a little bit of serious fact, Yorke. When lord chancellors turn against us and dash our hopes, we can’t go on as though the exchequer had no bottom to it.”

“It will cost you nothing to come to Cator’s. He is expecting one or two fellows, and has laid in a prime lot of Manillas.”

“Evening visiting costs a great deal, one way or another,” returned Hamish, “and I intend to drop most of mine for the present. You needn’t stare so, Yorke.”

“I am staring at you. Drop evening visiting! Any one, dropping that, may expect to be in a lunatic asylum in six months.”

“What a prospect for me!” laughed Hamish.

“Will you come to Cator’s?”

“No, thank you.”

“Then you are a muff!” retorted Roland, as he went on.

It was dusk when they reached the cathedral.

“I wonder whether the cloisters are still open!” Arthur exclaimed.

“It will not take a minute to ascertain,” said Hamish. “If not, we must go round.”

They found the cloisters still unclosed, and passed in. Gloomy and sombre were they at that evening hour. So sombre that, in proceeding along the west quadrangle, the two young men positively started, when some dark figure glided from within a niche, and stood in their way.

“Whose ghost are you?” cried Hamish.

A short covert whistle of surprise answered him. “You here!” cried the figure, in a tone of excessive disappointment. “What brings you in the cloisters so late?”

Hamish dextrously wound him towards what little light was cast from the graveyard, and discerned the features of Hurst. Half a dozen more figures brought themselves out of the niches—Stephen Bywater, young Galloway, Tod Yorke, Harrison, Hall, and Berkeley.

“Let me alone, Mr. Hamish Channing. Hush! Don’t make a row.”

“What mischief is going on, Hurst?” asked Hamish.

“Well, whatever it may have been, it strikes me you have stopped it,” was Hurst’s reply. “I say, wasn’t there the Boundaries for you to go through, without coming bothering into the cloisters?”

“I am sorry to have spoiled sport,” laughed Hamish. “I should not have liked it done to me when I was a college boy. Let us know what the treason was.”

“You won’t tell!”

“No; if it is nothing very bad. Honour bright.”

“Stop a bit, Hurst,” hastily interposed Bywater. “There’s no knowing what he may think ‘very bad.’ Give generals, not particulars. Here the fellow comes, I do believe!”

“It was only a trick we were going to play old Ketch,” whispered Hurst. “Come out quickly; better that he should not hear us, or it may spoil sport for another time. Gently, boys!”

Hurst and the rest stole round the cloisters, and out at the south door. Hamish and Arthur followed, more leisurely, and less silently. Ketch came up.

“Who’s this here, a-haunting the cloisters at this time o’ night? Who be you, I ask?”

“The cloisters are free until they are closed, Ketch,” cried Hamish.

“Nobody haven’t no right to pass through ‘em at this hour, except the clergy theirselves,” grumbled the porter. “We shall have them boys a-playing in ‘em at dark, next.”

“You should close them earlier, if you want to keep them empty,” returned Hamish. “Why don’t you close them at three in the afternoon?”

The porter growled. He knew that he did not dare to close them before dusk, almost dark, and he knew that Hamish knew it too; and therefore he looked upon the remark as a quiet bit of sarcasm. “I wish the dean ‘ud give me leave to shut them boys out of ‘em,” he exclaimed. “It ‘ud be a jovial day for me!”

Hamish and Arthur passed out, wishing him good night. He did not reply to it, but banged the gate on their heels, locked it, and turned to retrace his steps through the cloisters. The college boys, who had hidden themselves from his view, came forward again.

“He has got off scot-free to-night, but perhaps he won’t do so to-morrow,” cried Bywater.

“Were you going to set upon him?” asked Arthur.

“We were not going to put a finger upon him; I give you my word, we were not,” said Hurst.

“What, then, were you going to do?”

But the boys would not be caught. “It might stop fun, you know, Mr. Hamish. You might get telling your brother Tom; and Tom might let it out to Gaunt; and Gaunt might turn crusty and forbid it. We were going to serve the fellow out; but not to touch him or to hurt him; and that’s enough.”

“As you please,” said Hamish. “He is a surly old fellow.”

“He is an old brute! he’s a dog in a kennel! he deserves hanging!” burst from the throng of boys.

“What do you think he went and did this afternoon?” added Hurst to the two Channings. “He sneaked up to the dean with a wretched complaint of us boys, which hadn’t a word of truth in it; not a syllable, I assure you. He did it only because Gaunt had put him in a temper at one o’clock. The dean did not listen to him, that’s one good thing. How *jolly* he’d have been, just at this moment, if you two had not come up! Wouldn’t he, boys?”

The boys burst into a laugh; roar upon roar, peal upon peal; shrieking and holding their sides, till the very Boundaries echoed again. Laughing is infectious, and Hamish and Arthur shrieked out with them, not knowing in the least what they were laughing at.

But Arthur was heavy at heart in the midst of it. “Do you owe much money, Hamish?” he inquired, after they had left the boys, and were walking soberly along, under the quiet elm-trees.

“More than I can pay, old fellow, just at present,” was the answer.

“But is it *much*, Hamish?”

“No, it is not much, taking it in the abstract. Quite a trifling sum.”

Arthur caught at the word “trifling;” it seemed to dissipate his fears. Had he been alarming himself for nothing! “Is it ten pounds, Hamish?”

“Ten pounds!” repeated Hamish, in a tone of mockery. “That would be little indeed.”

“Is it fifty?”

“I dare say it may be. A pound here and a pound there, and a few pounds elsewhere—yes, taking it altogether, I expect it would be fifty.”

“And how much more?” thought Arthur to himself. “You said it was a trifling sum, Hamish!”

“Well, fifty pounds is not a large sum. Though, of course, we estimate sums, like other things, by comparison. You can understand now, why I was not sanguine with regard to Constance’s hopeful project of helping my father to get to the German baths. I, the eldest, who ought to be the first to assist in it, am the least likely to do so. I don’t know how I managed to get into debt,” mused Hamish. “It came upon me imperceptibly; it did, indeed. I depended so entirely upon that money falling to us, that I grew careless, and would often order things which I was not in need of. Arthur, since that news came, I have felt overwhelmed with worry and botheration.”

“I wish you were free!”

“If wishes were horses, we should all be on horseback. How debts grow upon you!” Hamish continued, changing his light tone for a graver one. “Until within the last day or two, when I have thought it necessary to take stock of outstanding claims, I had no idea I owed half so much.”

“What shall you do about it?”

“That is more easily asked than answered. My own funds are forestalled for some time to come. And, the worst is, that, now this suit is known to have terminated against us, people are not so willing to wait as they were before. I have had no end of them after me to-day.”

“How shall you contrive to satisfy them?”

“Satisfy them in some way, I must.”

“But how, I ask, Hamish?”

“Rob some bank or other,” replied Hamish, in his off-hand, joking way.

“Shall you speak to my father?”

“Where’s the use?” returned Hamish. “He cannot help me just now; he is straitened enough himself.”

“He might help you with advice. His experience is larger than yours, his judgment better. ‘In the multitude of counsellors there is safety,’ you know, Hamish.”

“I have made up my mind to say nothing to my father. If he could assist me, I would disclose all to him: as it is, it would only be inflicting upon him unnecessary pain. Understand, Arthur, what I have said to you is in confidence: you must not speak of it to him.”

“Of course not. I should not think of interfering between you and him. I wish I could help you!”

“I wish you could, old fellow. But you need not look so serious.”

“How you can be so gay and careless over it, I cannot imagine,” said Arthur.

Hamish laughed. “If there’s only a little patch of sunshine as large as a man’s hand, I am sure to see it and trust to it.”

“Is there any sunshine in this?”

“A little bit: and I hope it will help me out of it. I am sure I was born with a large share of hope in my composition.”

“Show me the bit of sunshine, Hamish.”

“I can’t do that,” was the answer. “I fear it is not so much actual sunshine that’s to be seen yet—only its reflection. You could not see it at all, Arthur; but I, as I tell you, am extravagantly hopeful.”

The same ever-gay tone, the same pleasant smile, accompanied the words. And yet, at that moment, instead of walking straightforward into the open space beyond the elm-trees, as Arthur did, Hamish withdrew his arm from his brother’s, and halted under their shade, peering cautiously around. They were then within view of their own door.

“What are you looking at?”

“To make sure that the coast is clear. I heard to-day—Arthur, I know that I shall shock you—that a fellow had taken out a writ against me. I don’t want to get it served, if I can help it.”

Arthur was indeed shocked. “Oh, Hamish!” was all he uttered. But the tone betrayed a strange amount of pain mingled with reproach.

“You must not think ill of me. I declare that I have been led into this scrape blindfolded, as may be said. I never dreamt I was getting into it. I am not reckless by nature; and, but for the expectation of that money, I should be as free now as you are.”

Thought upon thought was crowding into Arthur’s mind. He did not speak.

“I cannot charge myself with any foolish or unnecessary expenditure,” Hamish resumed. “And,” he added in a deeper tone, “my worst enemy will not accuse me of rashly incurring debts to gratify my own pleasures. I do not get into mischief. Were I addicted to drinking, or to gambling, my debts might have been ten times what they are.”

“They are enough, it seems,” said Arthur. But he spoke the words in sadness, not in a spirit of reproof.

“Arthur, they may prove of the greatest service, in teaching me caution for the future. Perhaps I wanted the lesson. Let me once get out of this hash, and I will take pretty good care not to fall into another.”

“If you only can get out of it.”

“Oh, I shall do it, somehow; never fear. Let us go on, there seems to be no one about.”

CHAPTER X. – A FALSE ALARM

They reached home unmolested. Arthur went straight to Mr. Channing, who was lying, as usual, on his sofa, and bent over him with a smile, sweet and hopeful as that of Hamish.

“Father, may I gain fifty pounds a year, if I can do it, without detriment to my place at Mr. Galloway’s?”

“What do you say, my boy?”

“Would you have any objection to my taking the organ at college on week days? Mr. Williams has offered it to me.”

Mr. Channing turned his head and looked at him. He did not understand. “You could not take it, Arthur; you could not be absent from the office; and young Jupp takes the organ. What is it that you are talking of?”

Arthur explained in his quiet manner, a glad light shining in his eyes. Jupp had left the college for good; Mr. Williams had offered the place to him, and Mr. Galloway had authorized him to accept it. He should only have to go to the office for two hours before breakfast in a morning, to make up for the two lost in the day.

“My brave boy!” exclaimed Mr. Channing, making prisoner of his hand. “I said this untoward loss of the suit might turn out to be a blessing in disguise. And so it will; it is bringing forth the sterling love of my children. You are doing this for me, Arthur.”

“Doing it a great deal for myself, papa. You do not know the gratification it will be to me, those two hours’ play daily!”

“I understand, my dear—understand it all!”

“Especially as—” Arthur came to a sudden stop.

“Especially as what?” asked Mr. Channing.

“As I had thought of giving up taking lessons,” Arthur hastily added, not going deeper into explanations. “I play quite well enough, now, to cease learning. Mr. Williams said one day, that, with practice, I might soon equal him.”

“I wonder what those parents do, Arthur, who own ungrateful or rebellious children!” Mr. Channing exclaimed, after a pause of thought. “The world is full of trouble; and it is of many kinds, and takes various phases; but if we can only be happy in our children, all other trouble may pass lightly over us, as a summer cloud. I thank God that my children have never brought home to me an hour’s care. How merciful He has been to me!”

Arthur’s thoughts reverted to Hamish and *his* trouble. He felt thankful, then, that it was hid from Mr. Channing.

“I have already accepted the place, papa. I knew I might count upon your consent.”

“Upon my warm approbation. My son, do your best at your task. And,” Mr. Channing added, sinking his voice to a whisper, “when the choristers peal out their hymn of praise to God, during these sacred services, let *your* heart ascend with it in fervent praise and thanksgiving. Too many go through these services in a matter-of-course spirit, their heart far away. Do not you.”

Hamish at this moment came in, carrying the books. “Are you ready, sir? There’s not much to do, this evening.”

“Ready at any time, Hamish.”

Hamish laid the books before him on the table, and sat down. Arthur left the room. Mr. Channing liked to be alone with Hamish when the accounts were being gone over.

Mrs. Channing was in the drawing-room, some of the children with her. Arthur entered. “Mrs. Channing,” cried he, with mock ceremony, “allow me to introduce you to the assistant-organist of the cathedral.”

She smiled, supposing it to be some joke. “Very well, sir. He can come in!”

“He is in, ma’am. It is myself.”

“Is young Mr. Jupp there?” she asked; for he sometimes came home with Arthur.

“Young Mr. Jupp has disappeared from public life, and I am appointed in his place. It is quite true.”

“Arthur!” she remonstrated.

“Mamma, indeed it is true. Mr. Williams has made me the offer, and Mr. Galloway has consented to allow me time to attend the week-day services; and papa is glad of it, and I hope you will be glad also.”

“I have known of it since this morning,” spoke Tom, with an assumption of easy consequence; while Mrs. Channing was recovering her senses, which had been nearly frightened away. “Arthur, I hope Williams intends to pay you?”

“Fifty pounds a year, And the copying besides.”

“Is it true, Arthur?” breathlessly exclaimed Mrs. Channing.

“I have told you that it is, mother mine. Jupp has resigned, and I am assistant-organist.”

Annabel danced round him in an ecstasy of delight. Not at his success—success or failure did not much trouble Annabel—but she thought there might be a prospect of some fun in store for herself. “Arthur, you’ll let me come into the cathedral and blow for you?”

“You little stupid!” cried Tom. “Much good you could do at blowing! A girl blowing the college organ! That’s rich! Better let Williams catch you there! She’d actually go, I believe!”

“It is not your business, Tom; it is Arthur’s,” retorted Annabel, with flushed cheeks. “Mamma, can’t you teach Tom to interfere with himself, and not with me?”

“I would rather teach Annabel to be a young lady, and not a tomboy,” said Mrs. Channing. “You may as well wish to be allowed to ring the college bells, as blow the organ, child.”

“I should like that,” said Annabel. “Oh, what fun, if the rope went up with me!”

Mrs. Channing turned a reproving glance on her, and resumed her conversation with Arthur. “Why did you not tell me before, my boy? It was too good news to keep to yourself. How long has it been in contemplation?”

“Dear mamma, only to-day. It was only this morning that Jupp resigned.”

“Only to-day! It must have been decided very hastily, then, for a measure of that sort.”

“Mr. Williams was so put to it that he took care to lose no time. He spoke to me at one o’clock. I had gone to him to the cathedral, asking for the copying, which I heard was going begging, and he broached the other subject, on the spur of the moment, as it seemed to me. Nothing could be decided until I had seen Mr. Galloway, and I spoke to him after he left here, this afternoon. He will allow me to be absent from the office an hour, morning and afternoon, on condition that I attend for two hours before breakfast.”

“But, Arthur, you will have a great deal upon your hands.”

“Not any too much. It will keep me out of mischief.”

“When shall you find time to do the copying?”

“In an evening, I suppose. I shall find plenty of time.”

As Hamish had observed, there was little to do at the books, that evening, and he soon left the parlour. Constance happened to be in the hall as he crossed it, on his way to his bedroom. Judith, who appeared to have been on the watch, came gliding from the half-opened kitchen door and approached Constance, looking after Hamish as he went up the stairs.

“Do you see, Miss Constance?” she whispered. “He is carrying the books up with him, as usual!”

At this juncture, Hamish turned round to speak to his sister. “Constance, I don’t want any supper to-night, tell my mother. You can call me when it is time for the reading.”

“And he is going to set on at ‘em, now, and he’ll be at ‘em till morning light!” continued Judith’s whisper. “And he’ll drop off into his grave with decline!—‘taint in the nature of a young man to do without sleep—and that’ll be the ending! And he’ll burn himself up first, and all the house with him.”

“I think I will go and speak to him,” debated Constance.

“I should,” advised Judith. “The worst is, if the books must be done, why, they must; and I don’t see that there is any help for it.”

But Constance hesitated, considerably. She did not at all like to interfere; it appeared so very much to resemble the work of a spy. Several minutes she deliberated, and then went slowly up the stairs. Knocking at Hamish’s door, she turned the handle, and would have entered. It was locked.

“Who’s there?” called out Hamish.

“Can I come in for a minute, Hamish? I want to say a word to you.”

He did not undo the door immediately. There appeared to be an opening and closing of his desk, first—a scuffle, as of things being put away. When Constance entered, she saw one of the insurance books open on the table, the pen and ink near it; the others were not to be seen. The keys were in the table lock. A conviction flashed over the mind of Constance that Judith was right, in supposing the office accounts to be the object that kept him up. “What can he do with his time in the day?” she thought.

“What is it, Constance?”

“Can you let me speak to you, Hamish?”

“If you won’t be long. I was just beginning to be busy,” he replied, taking out the keys and putting them into his pocket.

“I see you were,” she said, glancing at the ledger. “Hamish, you must not be offended with me, or think I interfere unwarrantably. I would not do it, but that I am anxious for you. Why is it that you sit up so late at night?”

There was a sudden accession of colour to his face—Constance saw it; but there was a smile as well. “How do you know I do sit up? Has Judy been telling tales?”

“Judy is uneasy about it, and she spoke to me this evening. She has visions of the house being burnt up with every one in it, and of your fatally injuring your health. I believe she would consider the latter calamity almost more grievous than the former, for you know you were always her favourite. Hamish; is there no danger of either?”

“There is not. I am too cautious for the one to happen, and, I believe, too hardy for the other. Judy is a simpleton,” he laughed; “she has her water-butt, and what more can she desire?”

“Hamish, why do you sit up? Have you not time for your work in the day?”

“No. Or else I should do it in the day. I do not sit up enough to hurt me. I have, on an average, three hours’ night-work, five days in the week; and if that can damage a strong fellow like me, call me a puny changeling.”

“You sit up much longer than that?”

“Not often. These light days, I sometimes do not sit up half so long; I get up in the morning, instead. Constance, you look grave enough for a judge!”

“And you, laughing enough to provoke me. Suppose I tell papa of this habit of yours, and get him to forbid it?”

“Then, my dear, you would work irreparable mischief,” he replied, becoming grave in his turn. “Were I to be prevented from doing as I please in my chamber in this house, I must find a room elsewhere, in which I should be my own master.”

“Hamish!”

“You oblige me to say it, Constance. You and Judy must lay your heads together upon some other grievance, for, indeed, for this particular one there is no remedy. She is an old goose, and you are a young one.”

“Is it right that we should submit to the risk of being set on fire?”

“My dear, if that is the point, I’ll have a fire-escape placed over the front door every night, and pay a couple of watchmen to act as guardians. Constance!” again dropping his tone of mockery, “you know that you may trust me better than that.”

“But, Hamish, how do you spend your time, that you cannot complete your books in the day?”

“Oh,” drawled Hamish, “ours is the laziest office! gossiping and scandal going on in it from morning till night. In the fatigue induced by that, I am not sure that I don’t take a nap, sometimes.”

Constance could not tell what to make of him. He was gazing at her with the most perplexing expression of face, looking ready to burst into a laugh.

“One last word, Hamish, for I hear Judith calling to you. Are you obliged to do this night-work?”

“I am.”

“Then I will say no more; and things must go on as it seems they have hitherto done.”

Arthur came running upstairs, and Hamish met him at the chamber door. Arthur, who appeared strangely agitated, began speaking in a half-whisper, unconscious that his sister was within. She heard every word.

“Judy says some young man wants you, Hamish! I fear it may be the fellow to serve the writ. What on earth is to be done?”

“Did Judy say I was at home?”

“Yes; and has handed him into the study, to wait. Did you not hear her calling to you?”

“I can’t—see him,” Hamish was about to say. “Yes, I will see him,” he added after a moment’s reflection. “Anything rather than have a disturbance which might come to my mother’s ears. And I suppose if he could not serve it now, he would watch for me in the morning.”

“Shall I go down first, and hear what he has to say?”

“Arthur, boy, it would do no good. I have brought this upon myself, and must battle with it. A Channing cannot turn coward!”

“But he may act with discretion,” said Arthur. “I will speak to the man, and if there’s no help for it, I’ll call you.”

Down flew Arthur, four stairs at a time. Hamish remained with his body inside his chamber door, and his head out. I conclude he was listening; and, in the confusion, he had probably totally forgotten Constance. Arthur came bounding up the stairs again, his eyes sparkling.

“A false alarm, Hamish! It’s only Martin Pope.”

“Martin Pope!” echoed Hamish, considerably relieved, for Martin Pope was an acquaintance of his, and sub-editor of one of the Helstonleigh newspapers. “Why could not Judy have opened her mouth?”

He ran down the stairs, the colour, which had left his face, returning to it. But it did not to that of Constance; hers had changed to an ashy whiteness. Arthur saw her standing there; saw that she must have heard and understood all.

“Oh, Arthur, has it come to this? Is Hamish in *that* depth of debt!”

“Hush! What brought you here, Constance?”

“What writ is it that he fears? Is there indeed one out against him?”

“I don’t know much about it. There may be one.”

She wrung her hands. “The next thing to a writ is a prison, is it not? If he should be taken, what would become of the office—of papa’s position?”

“Do not agitate yourself,” he implored. “It can do no good.”

“Nothing can do good: nothing, nothing. Oh, what trouble!”

“Constance, in the greatest trouble there is always one Refuge.”

“Yes,” she mentally thought, bursting into tears. “What, but for that shelter, would become of us in our bitter hours of trial?”

CHAPTER XI. – THE CLOISTER KEYS

It was the twenty-second day of the month, and nearly a week after the date of the last chapter. Arthur Channing sat in his place at the cathedral organ, playing the psalm for the morning; for the hour was that of divine service.

“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious: and His mercy endureth for ever!”

The boy’s whole heart went up with the words. *He* gave thanks: mercies had come upon him—upon his; and that great dread—which was turning his days to gall, his nights to sleeplessness—the arrest of Hamish, had not as yet been attempted. He felt it all as he sat there; and, in a softer voice, he echoed the sweet song of the choristers below, verse after verse as each verse rose on the air, filling the aisles of the old cathedral: how that God delivers those who cry unto Him—those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; those whose hearts fail through heaviness, who fall down and there is none to help them—He brings them out of the darkness, and breaks their bonds in sunder. They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters, who see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep; whose hearts cower at the stormy rising of the waves, and in their agony of distress cry unto Him to help them; and He hears the cry, and delivers them. He stills the angry waves, and calms the storm, and brings them into the haven where they would be; and then they are glad, because they are at rest.

“O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness: and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men!

“And again, when they are minished, and brought low: through oppression, through any plague or trouble; though He suffer them to be evil intreated through tyrants: and let them wander out of the way in the wilderness; yet helpeth He the poor out of misery: and maketh him households like a flock of sheep.

“Whoso is wise will ponder these things: and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.”

The refrain died away, the gentle echo died after it, and silence fell upon the cathedral. It was broken by the voice of the Reverend William Yorke, giving out the first lesson—a chapter in Jeremiah.

At the conclusion of the service, Arthur Channing left the college. In the cloisters he was overtaken by the choristers, who were hastening back to the schoolroom. At the same moment Ketch, the porter, passed, coming towards them from the south entrance of the cloisters. He touched his hat in his usual ungracious fashion to the dean and Dr. Gardner, who were turning into the chapter-house, carrying their trenchers, and looked the other way as he passed the boys.

Arthur caught hold of Hurst. “Have you ‘served out’ old Ketch, as you threatened?” he laughingly asked.

“Hush!” whispered Hurst. “It has not come off yet. We had an idea that an inkling of it had got abroad, so we thought it best to keep quiet for a few nights, lest the Philistines should be on the watch. But the time is fixed now, and I can tell you that it is not a hundred nights off.”

With a shower of mysterious nods and winks, Hurst rushed away and bounded up the stairs to the schoolroom. Arthur returned to Mr. Galloway’s. “It’s the awfulest shame!” burst forth Tom Channing that day at dinner (and allow me to remark, *par parenthèse*, that, in reading about schoolboys, you must be content to accept their grammar as it comes); and he brought the handle of his knife down upon the table in a passion.

“Thomas!” uttered Mr. Channing, in amazed reproof.

“Well, papa, and so it is! and the school’s going pretty near mad over it!” returned Tom, turning his crimsoned face upon his father. “Would you believe that I and Huntley are to be passed over in the chance for the seniorship, and Yorke is to have it, without reference to merit?”

“No, I do not believe it, Tom,” quietly replied Mr. Channing. “But, even were it true, it is no reason why you should break out in that unseemly manner. Did you ever know a hot temper do good to its possessor?”

“I know I am hot-tempered,” confessed Tom. “I cannot help it, papa; it was born with me.”

“Many of our failings were born with us, my boy, as I have always understood. But they are to be subdued; not indulged.”

“Papa, you must acknowledge that it is a shame if Pye has promised the seniorship to Yorke, over my head and Huntley’s,” reiterated Tom, who was apt to speak as strongly as he thought. “If he gets the seniorship, the exhibition will follow; that is an understood thing. Would it be just?”

“Why are you saying this? What have you heard?”

“Well, it is a roundabout tale,” answered Tom. “But the rumour in the school is this—and if it turns out to be true, Gerald Yorke will about get eaten up alive.”

“Is that the rumour, Tom?” said Mrs. Channing.

Tom laughed, in spite of his anger. “I had not come to the rumour, mamma. Lady Augusta and Dr. Burrows are great friends, you know; and we hear that they have been salving over Pye—”

“Gently, Tom!” put in Mr. Channing.

“Talking over Pye, then,” corrected Tom, impatient to proceed with his story; “and Pye has promised to promote Gerald Yorke to the seniorship. He—”

“Dr. Burrows has gone away again,” interrupted Annabel. “I saw him go by to-day in his travelling carriage. Judy says he has gone to his rectory; some of the deanery servants told her so.”

“You’ll get something, Annabel, if you interrupt in that fashion,” cried Tom. “Last Monday, Dr. Burrows gave a dinner-party. Pye was there, and Lady Augusta was there; and it was then they got Pye to promise it to Yorke.”

“How is it known that they did?” asked Mr. Channing.

“The boys all say it, papa. It was circulating through the school this morning like wild-fire.”

“You will never take the prize for logic, Tom. *How* did the boys hear it, I ask?”

“Through Mr. Calcraft,” replied Tom.

“Tom!”

“Mr. Ketch, then,” said Tom, correcting himself as he had done before. “Both names are a mile too good for him. Ketch came into contact with some of the boys this morning before ten-o’clock school, and, of course, they went into a wordy war—which is nothing new. Huntley was the only senior present, and Ketch was insolent to him. One of the boys told Ketch that he would not dare to be so, next year, if Huntley should be senior boy. Ketch sneered at that, and said Huntley never would be senior boy, nor Channing either, for it was already given to Yorke. The boys took his words up, ridiculing the notion of *his* knowing anything of the matter, and they did not spare their taunts. That roused his temper, and the old fellow let out all he knew. He said Lady Augusta Yorke was at Galloway’s office yesterday, boasting about it before Jenkins.”

“A roundabout tale, indeed!” remarked Mr. Channing; “and told in a somewhat roundabout manner, Tom. I should not put faith in it. Did you hear anything of this, Arthur?”

“No, sir. I know that Lady Augusta called at the office yesterday afternoon while I was at college. I don’t know anything more.”

“Huntley intends to drop across Jenkins this afternoon, and question him,” resumed Tom Channing. “There can’t be any doubt that it was he who gave the information to Ketch. If Huntley finds that Lady Augusta did assert it, the school will take the affair up.”

The boast amused Hamish. “In what manner will the school be pleased to ‘take it up?’” questioned he. “Recommend the dean to hold Mr. Pye under surveillance? Or send Lady Augusta a challenge?”

Tom Channing nodded his head mysteriously. "There is many a true word spoken in jest, Hamish. I don't know yet what we should do: we should do something. The school won't stand it tamely. The day for that one-sided sort of oppression has gone out with our grandmothers' fashions."

"It would be very wrong of the school to stand it," said Charley, throwing in his word. "If the honours are to go by sneaking favour, and not by merit, where is the use of any of us putting out our mettle?"

"You be quiet, Miss Charley! you juniors have nothing to do with it," were all the thanks the boy received from Tom.

Now the facts really were very much as Tom Channing asserted; though whether, or how far, Mr. Pye had promised, and whether Lady Augusta's boast had been a vain one, was a matter for speculation. Neither could it be surmised the part, if any, played in it by Prebendary Burrows. It was certain that Lady Augusta had, on the previous day, boasted to Mr. Galloway, in his office, that her son was to have the seniorship; that Mr. Pye had promised it to her and Dr. Burrows, at the dinner-party. She spoke of it without the least reserve, in a tone of much self-gratulation, and she laughingly told Jenkins, who was at his desk writing, that he might wish Gerald joy when he next saw him. Jenkins accepted it all as truth: it may be questioned if Mr. Galloway did, for he knew that Lady Augusta did not always weigh her words before speaking.

In the evening—this same evening, mind, after the call at the office of Lady Augusta—Mr. Jenkins proceeded towards home when he left his work. He took the road through the cloisters. As he was passing the porter's lodge, who should he see in it but his father, old Jenkins, the bedesman, holding a gossip with Ketch; and they saw him.

"If that ain't our Joe a-going past!" exclaimed the bedesman.

Joe stepped in. He was proceeding to join in the converse, when a lot of the college boys tore along, hooting and shouting, and kicking a ball about. It was kicked into the lodge, and a few compliments were thrown at the boys by the porter, before they could get the ball out again. These compliments, you may be quite sure, the boys did not fail to return with interest: Tom Channing, in particular, being charmingly polite.

"And the saucy young beast'll be the senior boy soon!" foamed Mr. Ketch, as the lot decamped. "I wish I could get him gagged, I do!"

"No, he will not," said Joe Jenkins, speaking impulsively in his superior knowledge. "Yorke is to be senior."

"How do you know that, Joe?" asked his father.

Joe replied by relating what he had heard said by the Lady Augusta that afternoon. It did not conciliate the porter in the remotest degree: he was not more favourably inclined to Gerald Yorke than he was to Tom Channing. Had he heard the school never was to have a senior again, or a junior either, that might have pleased him.

But on the following morning, when he fell into dispute with the boys in the cloisters, he spoke out his information in a spirit of triumph over Huntley. Bit by bit, angered by the boys' taunts, he repeated every word he had heard from Jenkins. The news, as it was busily circulated from one to the other, caused no slight hubbub in the school, and gave rise to that explosion of Tom Channing's at the dinner-table.

Huntley sought Jenkins, as he had said he would do, and received confirmation of the report, so far as the man's knowledge went. But Jenkins was terribly vexed that the report had got abroad through him. He determined to pay a visit to Mr. Ketch, and reproach him with his incaution.

Mr. Ketch sat in his lodge, taking his supper: bread and cheese, and a pint of ale procured at the nearest public-house. Except in the light months of summer, it was his habit to close the cloister gates before supper-time; but as Mr. Ketch liked to take that meal early—that is to say, at eight o'clock—and, as dusk, for at least four months in the year, obstinately persisted in putting itself off to a later hour, in spite of his growling, and as he might not shut up before dusk, he had no resource but to take

his supper first and lock up afterwards. The “lodge” was a quaint abode, of one room only, built in an obscure nook of the cathedral, near the grand entrance. He was pursuing his meal after his own peculiar custom: eating, drinking, and grumbling.

“It’s worse nor leather, this cheese! Selling it to a body for double-Gloucester! I’d like to double them as made it. Eight-pence a pound!—and short weight beside! I wonder there ain’t a law passed to keep down the cost o’ provisions!”

A pause, given chiefly to grunting, and Mr. Ketch resumed:—

“This bread’s rougher nor a bear’s hide! Go and ask for new, and they palms you off with stale. They’ll put a loaf a week old into the oven to hot up again, and then sell it to you for new! There ought to be a criminal code passed for hanging bakers. They’re all cheats. They mixes up alum, and bone-dust, and plaster of Paris, and—Drat that door! Who’s kicking at it now?”

No one was kicking. Some one was civilly knocking. The door was pushed slightly open, and the inoffensive face of Mr. Joseph Jenkins appeared in the aperture.

“I say, Mr. Ketch,” began he in a mild tone of deprecation, “whatever is it that you have gone and done?”

“What d’ye mean?” growled old Ketch. “Is this a way to come and set upon a gentleman in his own house? Who taught you manners, Joe Jenkins?”

“You have been repeating what I mentioned last night about Lady Augusta’s son getting the seniorship,” said Jenkins, coming in and closing the door.

“You did say it,” retorted Mr. Ketch.

“I know I did. But I did not suppose you were going to repeat it again.”

“If it was a secret, why didn’t you say so?” asked Mr. Ketch.

“It was not exactly a secret, or Lady Augusta would not have mentioned it before me,” remonstrated Joe. “But it is not the proper thing, for me to come out of Mr. Galloway’s office, and talk of anything I may have heard said in it by his friends, and then for it to get round to his ears again! Put it to yourself, Mr. Ketch, and say whether you would like it.”

“What *did* you talk of it for, then?” snarled Ketch, preparing to take a copious draught of ale.

“Because I thought you and father were safe. You might both have known better than to speak of it out of doors. There is sure to be a commotion over it.”

“Miserable beer! Brewed out of ditch-water!”

“Young Mr. Huntley came to me to-day, to know the rights and the wrongs of it—as he said,” continued Joseph. “He spoke to Mr. Galloway about it afterwards—though I must say he was kind enough not to bring in my name; only said, in a general way, that he had ‘heard’ it. He is an honourable young gentleman, is that Huntley. He vows the report shall be conveyed to the dean.”

“Serve ‘em right!” snapped the porter. “If the dean does his duty, he’ll order a general flogging for the school, all round. It’ll do ‘em good.”

“Galloway did not say much—except that he knew what he should do, were he Huntley’s or Channing’s father. Which I took to mean that, in his opinion, there ought to be an inquiry instituted.”

“And you know there ought,” said Mr. Ketch.

“I know! I’m sure I don’t know,” was the mild answer. “It is not my place to reflect upon my superiors, Mr. Ketch—to say they should do this, or they should do that. I like to reverence them, and to keep a civil tongue in my head.”

“Which is what you don’t do. If I knowed who brewed this beer I’d enter an action against him, for putting in no malt.”

“I would not have had this get about for any money!” resumed Jenkins. “Neither you nor father shall ever catch me opening my lips again.”

“Keep ‘em shut then,” growled old Ketch.

Mr. Ketch leisurely finished his supper, and the two continued talking until dusk came on—almost dark; for the porter, churl though he was, liked a visitor as well as any one—possibly as a vent

for his temper. He did not often find one who would stand it so meekly as Joe Jenkins. At length Mr. Jenkins lifted himself off the shut-up press bedstead on which he had been perched, and prepared to depart.

“Come along of me while I lock up,” said Ketch, somewhat less ungraciously than usual.

Mr. Jenkins hesitated. “My wife will be wondering what has become of me; she’ll blow me up for keeping supper waiting,” debated he, aloud. “But—well, I don’t mind going with you this once, for company’s sake,” he added in his willingness to be obliging.

The two large keys, one at each end of a string, were hung up just within the lodge door; they belonged to the two gates of the cloisters. Old Ketch took them down and went out with Jenkins, merely closing his own door; he rarely fastened it, unless he was going some distance.

Very dark were the enclosed cloisters, as they entered by the west gate. It was later than the usual hour of closing, and it was, moreover, a gloomy evening, the sky overcast. They went through the cloisters to the south gate, Ketch grumbling all the way. He locked it, and then turned back again.

Arrived about midway of the west quadrangle, the very darkest part in all the cloisters, and the most dreary, Jenkins suddenly startled his companion by declaring there was a light in the burial-ground.

“Come along!” growled Ketch. “You’ll say there’s corpse-candles there next.”

“It is only a little spark, like,” said Jenkins, halting. “I should not wonder but it is one of those pretty, innocent glowworms.”

He leaned his arms upon the mullioned frame of the open Gothic window, raised himself on tiptoe to obtain as complete a view as was possible, and pushed his head out to reconnoitre the graveyard. Mr. Ketch shuffled on; the keys, held somewhat loosely in his hand by the string, clanking together.

“Be you going to stop there all night?” he called out, when he had gone a few paces, half turning round to speak.

At that moment a somewhat startling incident occurred. The keys were whisked out of Mr. Ketch’s hand, and fell, or appeared to fall, with a clatter on the flags at his feet. He turned his anger upon Jenkins.

“Now then, you senseless calf! What did you do that for?”

“Did you speak?” asked Jenkins, taking his elbows from the distant window-frame, and approaching.

Mr. Ketch felt a little staggered. His belief had been that Jenkins had come up silently, and dashed the keys from his hand; but Jenkins, it appeared, had not left the window. However, like too many other cross-grained spirits, he persisted in venting blame upon him.

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, to play an old man such a trick?”

“I have played no trick,” said Jenkins. “I thought I saw a glowworm, and I stopped to look; but I couldn’t see it again. There’s no trick in that.”

“Ugh!” cried the porter in his wrath. “You took and clutched the keys from me, and throwed ‘em on the ground! Pick ‘em up.”

“Well, I never heard the like!” said Jenkins. “I was not within yards and yards of you. If you dropped the keys it was no fault of mine.” But, being a peaceably-inclined man, he stooped and found the keys.

The porter grunted. An inner current of conviction rose in his heart that he must undoubtedly have dropped them, though he could have declared at the time that they were mysteriously snatched from him. He seized the string firmly now, and hobbled on to the west door, abusing Jenkins all the way.

They arrived at the west door, which was gained by a narrow closed passage from the gate of entrance, as was the south door in a similar manner; and there Mr. Ketch used his eyes and his tongue considerably, for the door, instead of being open, as he had left it, was shut and locked.

“What on earth has done this?” shrieked he.

“Done what?” asked Mr. Jenkins.

“Done what!” was the irascible echo. “Be you a fool, Joe Jenkins? Don’t you see the door’s fast!”

“Unfasten it,” said Jenkins sensibly.

Mr. Ketch proceeded to do so—at least to apply one of the keys to the lock—with much fumbling. It apparently did not occur to him to wonder how the locking-up process could have been effected, considering that the key had been in his own possession.

Fumbling and fumbling, now with one key, now with the other, and then critically feeling the keys and their wards, the truth at length burst upon the unhappy man that the keys were not the right keys, and that he and Jenkins were—locked in! A profuse perspiration broke out over him.

“They *must* be the keys,” remonstrated Mr. Jenkins.

“They are *not* the keys,” shrieked Ketch. “D’ye think I don’t know my own keys, now I come to feel ‘em?”

“But they were your keys that fell down and that I picked up,” argued Jenkins, perfectly sure in his own mind that they could be no others. “There was not a fairy in the cloisters to come and change them.”

“Feel ‘em!” roared Ketch, in his despair. “These be a couple of horrid, rusty old things, that can’t have been in use since the cloisters was built. *You* have changed ‘em, you have!” he sobbed, the notion taking possession of him forcibly. “You are a-doing it to play me a infamous trick, and I’ll have you up before the dean to-morrow! I’ll shake the life out of you, I will!”

Laying summary hold of Mr. Jenkins, he began to shake him with all his feeble strength. The latter soon extricated himself, and he succeeded in impressing on the man the fallacy of his suspicion. “Don’t I want to get home to my supper and my wife? Don’t I tell you that she’ll set upon me like anything for keeping it waiting?” he meekly remonstrated. “Do I want to be locked up in these unpleasant cloisters? Give me the keys and let me try them.”

Ketch, in sheer helplessness, was fain to comply. He resigned the keys to Jenkins, and Jenkins tried them: but he was none the nearer unlocking the gate. In their increasing perplexity, they resolved to return to the place in the quadrangle where the keys had fallen—a very forlorn suggestion proceeding from Mr. Jenkins that the right keys might be lying there still, and that this rusty pair might, by some curious and unaccountable chance, have been lying there also.

They commenced their search, disputing, the one hotly, the other temperately, as to which was the exact spot. With feet and hands they hunted as well as the dark would allow them; all in vain; and Ketch gave vent to a loud burst of feeling when he realized the fact that they were positively locked up in the cloisters, beyond hope of succour, in the dark and lonely night.

CHAPTER XII. – A MISHAP TO THE BISHOP

“Fordham, I wonder whether the cloisters are closed?”

“I will see, my lord.”

The question came from the Bishop of Helstonleigh; who, as it fell out, had been to make an evening call upon the dean. The dean’s servant was now conducting his lordship down the grand staircase, on his departure. In proceeding to the palace from the deanery, to go through the cloisters cut off quite two-thirds of the distance.

Fordham left the hall, a lamp in his hand, and traversed sundry passages which brought him to the deanery garden. Crossing the garden, and treading another short passage, he came to the cloisters. The bishop had followed, lighted by Fordham, and talking affably. A very pleasant man was the Bishop of Helstonleigh, standing little upon forms and ceremonies. In frame he was nearly as active as a college boy.

“It is all right, I think, my lord,” said Fordham. “I hear the porter’s voice now in the cloisters.”

“How dark it is!” exclaimed the bishop. “Ketch must be closing late to-night. What a noise he is making!”

In point of fact, Mr. Ketch had just arrived at that agreeable moment which concluded the last chapter—the conviction that no other keys were to be found, and that he and Jenkins were fast. The tone in which he was making his sentiments known upon the calamity, was not a subdued one.

“Shall I light you round, my lord?”

“By no means—by no means. I shall be up with Ketch in a minute. He seems in a temper. Good night, Fordham.”

“Good night to your lordship.”

The servant went back to the deanery. The prelate groped his way round to the west quadrangle.

“Are you closing, Ketch?”

Mr. Ketch started as if he had been shot, and his noise dropped to a calm. Truth to say, his style of complaint had not been orthodox, or exactly suitable to the ears of his bishop. He and Jenkins both recognized the voice, and bowed low, dark though it was.

“What is the matter, Ketch? You are making enough noise.”

“Matter, my lord!” groaned Ketch. “Here’s matter enough to make a saint—saving your lordship’s presence—forget his prayers. We be locked up in the cloisters.”

“Locked up!” repeated the bishop. “What do you mean? Who is with you?”

“It is me, my lord,” said Jenkins, meekly, answering for himself. “Joseph Jenkins, my lord, at Mr. Galloway’s. I came in with the porter just for company, my lord, when he came to lock up, and we have somehow got locked in.”

The bishop demanded an explanation. It was not very easily afforded. Ketch and Jenkins talked one against the other, and when the bishop did at length understand the tale, he scarcely gave credence to it.

“It is an incomprehensible story, Ketch, that you should drop your keys, and they should be changed for others as they lay on the flags. Are you sure you brought out the right keys?”

“My lord, I *couldn’t* bring out any others,” returned Ketch, in a tone that longed to betray its resentment, and would have betrayed it to any one but a bishop. “I haven’t no others to bring, my lord. The two keys hang up on the nail always, and there ain’t another key besides in the house, except the door key.”

“Some one must have changed them previously—must have hung up these in their places,” remarked the bishop.

“But, my lord, it couldn’t be, I say,” reiterated old Ketch, almost shrieking. “I know the keys just as well as I know my own hands, and they was the right keys that I brought out. The best proof,

my lord, is, that I locked the south door fast enough; and how could I have done that with these wretched old rusty things?"

"The keys must be on the flags still," said his lordship.

"That is the only conclusion I can come to, my lord," mildly put in Jenkins. "But we cannot find them."

"And meanwhile we are locked in for the night, and here's his right reverend lordship, the bishop, locked in with us!" danced old Ketch, almost beside himself with anger. "Of course, it wouldn't matter for me and Jenkins: speaking in comparison, we are nobody; but it is a shameful indignity for my lord."

"We must try and get out, Ketch," said his lordship, in a tone that sounded as if he were more inclined to laugh than cry. "I will go back to the deanery."

Away went the bishop as quickly as the gloom allowed him, and away went the other two in his wake. Arrived at the passage which led from the cloisters to the deanery garden they groped their way to the end—only to find the door closed and locked.

"Well, this is a pleasant situation!" exclaimed the bishop, his tone betraying amusement as well as annoyance; and with his own prelatical hands he pummelled at the door, and shouted with his own prelatical voice. When the bishop was tired, Jenkins and Ketch began to pummel and to shout, and they pummelled and shouted till their knuckles were sore and their throats were hoarse. It was all in vain. The garden intervened between them and the deanery, and they could not be heard.

It certainly was a pretty situation, as the prelate remarked. The Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Helstonleigh, ranking about fifth, by precedence, on the episcopal bench, locked up ignominiously in the cloisters of Helstonleigh, with Ketch the porter, and Jenkins the steward's clerk; likely, so far as appearances might be trusted, to have to pass the night there! The like had never yet been heard of.

The bishop went to the south gate, and tried the keys himself: the bishop went to the west gate and tried them there; the bishop stamped about the west quadrangle, hoping to stamp upon the missing keys; but nothing came of it. Ketch and Jenkins attended him—Ketch grumbling in the most angry terms that he dared, Jenkins in humble silence.

"I really do not see what is to be done," debated the bishop, who, no doubt, wished himself well out of the dilemma, as any less exalted mortal would have done, "The doors leading into the college are sure to be closed."

"Quite sure," groaned Ketch.

"And to get into the college would not serve us, that I see," added the bishop. "We should be no better off there than here."

"Saving that we might ring the bell, my lord," suggested Jenkins, with deference.

They proceeded to the college gates. It was a forlorn hope, and one that did not serve them. The gates were locked, the doors closed behind them. No reaching the bell that way; it might as well have been a hundred miles off.

They traversed the cloisters again, and tried the door of the schoolroom. It was locked. Had it not been, the senior boy might have expected punishment from the head-master. They tried the small door leading into the residence of Dr. Burrows—fast also; that abode just now was empty. The folding doors of the chapter-house were opened easily, and they entered. But what did it avail them? There was the large, round room, lined with its books, furnished with its immense table and easy-chairs; but it was as much shut in from the hearing of the outside world as they were. The bishop came into contact with a chair, and sat down in it. Jenkins, who, as clerk to Mr. Galloway, the steward to the dean and chapter, was familiar with the chapter-house, felt his way to the spot where he knew matches were sometimes kept. He could not find any: it was the time of light evenings.

"There's just one chance, my lord," suggested Jenkins. "That the little unused door at the corner of the cloisters, leading into the body of the cathedral, may not be locked."

"Precious careless of the sextons, if it is not!" grunted Ketch.

"It is a door nobody ever thinks of going in at, my lord," returned Jenkins, as if he would apologize for the sextons' carelessness, should it be found unfastened. "If it is open, we might get to the bell."

"The sextons, proud, stuck-up gentlemen, be made up of carelessness and anything else that's bad!" groaned Ketch. "Holding up their heads above us porters!"

It was worth the trial. The bishop rose from the chair, and groped his way out of the chapter-house, the two others following.

"If it hadn't been for that Jenkins's folly, fancying he saw a light in the burying-ground, and me turning round to order him to come on, it might not have happened," grumbled Ketch, as they wound round the cloisters.

"A light in the burial-ground!" hastily repeated the bishop. "What light?"

"Oh, a corpse-candle, or some nonsense of that sort, he had his mind running on, my lord. Half the world is idiots, and Jenkins is the biggest of 'em."

"My lord," spoke poor Jenkins, deprecatingly, "I never had such a thought within me as that it was a 'corpse-candle.' I said I fancied it might be a glowworm. And I believe it was one, my lord."

"A more sensible thought than the other," observed the prelate.

Luck at last! The door was found to be unlocked. It was a low narrow door, only used on the very rare occasion of a funeral, and was situated in a shady, out-of-the-way nook, where no one ever thought of looking. "Oh, come, this is something!" cried the bishop, cheerily, as he stepped into the cathedral.

"And your lordship now sees what fine careless sextons we have got!" struck in Ketch.

"We must overlook their carelessness this time, in consideration of the service it renders us," said the bishop, in a kindly tone. "Take care of the pillars, Ketch."

"Thank ye, my lord. I'm going along with my hands held out before me, to save my head," returned Ketch.

Most likely the bishop and Jenkins were doing the same. Dexterously steering clear of the pillars, they emerged in the wide, open body of the cathedral, and bent their steps across it to the spot where hung the ropes of the bells.

The head sexton to the cathedral—whom you must not confound with a gravedigger, as you might an ordinary sexton; cathedral sextons are personages of more importance—was seated about this hour at supper in his home, close to the cathedral. Suddenly the deep-toned college bell boomed out, and the man started as if a gun had been fired at him.

"Why, that's the college bell!" he uttered to his family. And the family stared with open mouths without replying.

The college bell it certainly was, and it was striking out sharp irregular strokes, as though the ringer were not accustomed to his work. The sexton started up, in a state of the most amazed consternation.

"It is magic; it is nothing less—that the bell should be ringing out at this hour!" exclaimed he.

"Father," suggested a juvenile, "perhaps somebody's got locked up in the college." For which prevision he was rewarded with a stinging smack on the head.

"Take that, sir! D'ye think I don't know better than to lock folks up in the college? It was me, myself, as locked up this evening."

"No need to box him for that," resented the wife. "The bell *is* ringing, and I'll be bound the boy's right enough. One of them masons must have fallen asleep in the day, and has just woke up to find himself shut in. Hope he likes his berth!"

Whatever it might be, ringing the bell, whether magic or mason, of course it must be seen to; and the sexton hastened out, the cathedral keys in his hand. He bent his steps towards the front entrance, passing the cloisters, which, as he knew, would be locked at that hour. "And that bear of a Ketch won't hurry himself to unlock them," soliloquized he.

He found the front gates surrounded. The bell had struck upon the wondering ears of many living within the precincts of the cathedral, who flocked out to ascertain the reason. Amongst others, the college boys were coming up in troops.

“Now, good people, please—by your leave!” cried the sexton. “Let me get to the gates.”

They made way for the man and his ponderous keys, and entrance to the college was gained. The sexton was beginning a sharp reproof to the “mason,” and the crowd preparing a chorus to it, when they were seized with consternation, and fell back on each other’s toes. It was the Bishop of Helstonleigh, in his laced-up hat and apron, who walked forth.

The sexton humbly snatched off his hat; the college boys raised their trenchers.

“Thank you all for coming to the rescue,” said the bishop, in a pleasant tone. “It was not an agreeable situation, to be locked in the cathedral.”

“My lord,” stammered the sexton, in awe-struck dread, as to whether he had unwittingly been the culprit: “how did your lordship get locked in?”

“That is what we must inquire into,” replied the bishop.

The next to hobble out was Ketch. In his own fashion, almost ignoring the presence of the bishop, he made known the tale. It was received with ridicule. The college boys especially cast mockery upon it, and began dancing a jig when the bishop’s back was turned. “Let a couple of keys drop down, and, when picked up, you found them transmogrified into old rusty machines, made in the year one!” cried Bywater. “*That’s* very like a whale, Ketch!”

Ketch tore off to his lodge, as fast as his lumbago allowed him, calling upon the crowd to come and look at the nail where the keys always hung, except when in use, and holding out the rusty dissemblers for public view, in a furious passion.

He dashed open the door. The college boys, pushing before the crowd, and following on the bishop’s heels—who had probably his own reasons for wishing to see the solution of the affair—thronged into the lodge. “There’s the nail, my lord, and there—”

Ketch stopped, dumbfounded. On the nail, hanging by the string, as quietly as if they had hung for ages, were the cloister keys. Ketch rubbed his eyes, and stared, and rubbed again. The bishop smiled.

“I told you, Ketch, I thought you must be mistaken, in supposing you brought the proper keys out.”

Ketch burst into a wail of anger and deprecation. He had took out the right keys, and Jenkins could bear him out in the assertion. Some wicked trick had been played upon him, and the keys brought back during his absence and hung up on their hook! He’d lay his life it was the college boys!

The bishop turned his eyes on those young gentlemen. But nothing could be more innocent than their countenances, as they stood before him in their trenchers. Rather too innocent, perhaps: and the bishop’s eyes twinkled, and a half-smile crossed his lips; but he made no sign. Well would it be if all the clergy were as sweet-tempered as that Bishop of Helstonleigh!

“Well, Ketch, take care of your keys for the future,” was all he said, as he walked away. “Good night, boys.”

“Good night to your lordship,” replied the boys, once more raising their trenchers; and the crowd, outside, respectfully saluted their prelate, who returned it in kind.

“What are you waiting for, Thorpe?” the bishop demanded, when he found the sexton was still at the great gates, holding them about an inch open.

“For Jenkins, my lord,” was the reply. “Ketch said he was also locked in.”

“Certainly he was,” replied the bishop. “Has he not come forth?”

“That he has not, my lord. I have let nobody whatever out except your lordship and the porter. I have called out to him, but he does not answer, and does not come.”

“He went up into the organ-loft in search of a candle and matches,” remarked the bishop. “You had better go after him, Thorpe. He may not know that the doors are open.”

The bishop left, crossing over to the palace. Thorpe, calling one of the old bedesmen, some of whom had then come up, left him in charge of the gate, and did as he was ordered. He descended the steps, passed through the wide doors, and groped his way in the dark towards the choir.

“Jenkins!”

There was no answer.

“Jenkins!” he called out again.

Still there was no answer: except the sound of the sexton’s own voice as it echoed in the silence of the large edifice.

“Well, this is an odd go!” exclaimed Thorpe, as he leaned against a pillar and surveyed the darkness of the cathedral. “He can’t have melted away into a ghost, or dropped down into the crypt among the coffins. Jenkins, I say!”

With a word of impatience at the continued silence, the sexton returned to the entrance gates. All that could be done was to get a light and search for him.

They procured a lantern, Ketch ungraciously supplying it; and the sexton, taking two or three of the spectators with him, proceeded to the search. “He has gone to sleep in the organ-loft, that is what he has done,” cried Thorpe, making known what the bishop had said.

Alas! Jenkins had not gone to sleep. At the foot of the steps, leading to the organ-loft, they came upon him. He was lying there insensible, blood oozing from a wound in the forehead. How had it come about? What had caused it?

Meanwhile, the college boys, after driving Mr. Ketch nearly wild with their jokes and ridicule touching the mystery of the keys, were scared by the sudden appearance of the head-master. They decamped as fast as their legs could carry them, bringing themselves to an anchor at a safe distance, under shade of the friendly elm trees. Bywater stuck his back against one, and his laughter came forth in peals. Some of the rest tried to stop it, whispering caution.

“It’s of no good talking, you fellows! I can’t keep it in; I shall burst if I try. I have been at bursting point ever since I twitched the keys out of his hands in the cloisters, and threw the rusty ones down. You see I was right—that it was best for one of us to go in without our boots, and to wait. If half a dozen had gone, we should never have got away unheard.”

“I pretty nearly burst when I saw the bishop come out, instead of Ketch,” cried Tod Yorke. “Burst with fright.”

“So did a few more of us,” said Galloway. “I say, will there be a row?”

“Goodness knows! He is a kind old chap is the bishop. Better for it to have been him than the dean.”

“What was it Ketch said, about Jenkins seeing a glowworm?”

“Oh!” shrieked Bywater, holding his sides, “that was the best of all! I had taken a lucifer out of my pocket, playing with it, while they went round to the south gate, and it suddenly struck fire. I threw it over to the burial-ground: and that soft Jenkins took it for a glowworm.”

“It’s a stunning go!” emphatically concluded Mr. Tod Yorke. “The best we have had this half, yet.”

“Hush—sh—sh—sh!” whispered the boys under their breath. “There goes the master.”

CHAPTER XIII. – MAD NANCE

Mr. Galloway was in his office. Mr. Galloway was fuming and fretting at the non-arrival of his clerk, Mr. Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins was a punctual man; in fact, more than punctual: his proper time for arriving at the office was half-past nine; but the cathedral clock had rarely struck the quarter-past before Mr. Jenkins would be at his post. Almost any other morning it would not have mattered a straw to Mr. Galloway whether Jenkins was a little after or a little before his time; but on this particular morning he had especial need of him, and had come himself to the office unusually early.

One-two, three-four! chimed the quarters of the cathedral. "There it goes—half-past nine!" ejaculated Mr. Galloway. "What *does* Jenkins mean by it? He knew he was wanted early."

A sharp knock at the office door, and there entered a little dark woman, in a black bonnet and a beard. She was Mr. Jenkins's better half, and had the reputation for being considerably the grey mare.

"Good morning, Mr. Galloway. A pretty kettle of fish, this is!"

"What's the matter now?" asked Mr. Galloway, surprised at the address. "Where's Jenkins?"

"Jenkins is in bed with his head plastered up. He's the greatest booby living, and would positively have come here all the same, but I told him I'd strap him down with cords if he attempted it. A pretty object he'd have looked, staggering through the streets, with his head big enough for two, and held together with white plaster!"

"What has he done to his head?" wondered Mr. Galloway.

"Good gracious! have you not heard?" exclaimed the lady, whose mode of speech was rarely overburdened with polite words, though she meant no disrespect by it. "He got locked up in the cloisters last night with old Ketch and the bishop."

Mr. Galloway stared at her. He had been dining, the previous evening, with some friends at the other end of the town, and knew nothing of the occurrence. Had he been within hearing when the college bell tolled out at night, he would have run to ascertain the cause as eagerly as any schoolboy. "Locked up in the cloisters with old Ketch and the bishop!" he repeated, in amazement. "I do not understand."

Mrs. Jenkins proceeded to enlighten him. She gave the explanation of the strange affair of the keys, as it had been given to her by the unlucky Joe. While telling it, Arthur Channing entered, and, almost immediately afterwards, Roland Yorke.

"The bishop, of all people!" uttered Mr. Galloway. "What an untoward thing for his lordship!"

"No more untoward for him than for others," retorted the lady. "It just serves Jenkins right. What business had he to go dancing through the cloisters with old Ketch and his keys?"

"But how did Jenkins get hurt?" asked Mr. Galloway, for that particular point had not yet been touched upon.

"He is the greatest fool going, is Jenkins," was the complimentary retort of Jenkins's wife. "After he had helped to ring out the bell, he must needs go poking and groping into the organ-loft, hunting for matches or some such insane rubbish. He might have known, had he possessed any sense, that candles and matches are not likely to be there in summer-time! Why, if the organist wanted ever so much to stop in after dark, when the college is locked up for the night, he wouldn't be allowed to do it! It's only in winter, when he has to light a candle to get through the afternoon service, that they keep matches and dips up there."

"But about his head?" repeated Mr. Galloway, who was aware of the natural propensity of Mrs. Jenkins to wander from the point under discussion.

"Yes, about his head!" she wrathfully answered. "In attempting to descend the stairs again, he missed his footing, and pitched right down to the bottom of the flight. That's how his head came in for it. He wants a nurse with him always, does Jenkins, for he is no better than a child in leading-strings."

"Is he much hurt?"

“And there he’d have lain till morning, but for the bishop,” resumed Mrs. Jenkins, passing over the inquiry. “After his lordship got out, he, finding Jenkins did not come, told Thorpe to go and look for him in the organ-loft. Thorpe said he should have done nothing of the sort, but for the bishop’s order; he was just going to lock the great doors again, and there Jenkins would have been fast! They found him lying at the foot of the stairs, just inside the choir gates, with no more life in him than there is in a dead man.”

“I asked you whether he is seriously hurt, Mrs. Jenkins.”

“Pretty well. He came to his senses as they were bringing him home, and somebody ran for Hurst, the surgeon. He is better this morning.”

“But not well enough to come to business?”

“Hurst told him if he worried himself with business, or anything else to-day, he’d get brain fever as sure as a gun. He ordered him to stop in bed and keep quiet, if he could.”

“Of course he must do so,” observed Mr. Galloway.

“There is no of course in it, when men are the actors,” dissented Mrs. Jenkins. “Hurst did well to say ‘if he could,’ when ordering him to keep quiet. I’d rather have an animal ill in the house, than I’d have a man—they are ten times more reasonable. There has Jenkins been, tormenting himself ever since seven o’clock this morning about coming here; he was wanted particularly, he said. ‘Would you go if you were dead?’ I asked him; and he stood it out that if he were dead it would be a different thing. ‘Not different at all,’ I said. A nice thing it would be to have to nurse him through a brain fever!”

“I am grieved that it should have happened,” said Mr. Galloway, kindly. “Tell him from me, that we can manage very well without him. He must not venture here again, until Mr. Hurst says he may come with safety.”

“I should have told him that, to pacify him, whether you had said it or not,” candidly avowed Mrs. Jenkins. “And now I must go back home on the run. As good have no one to mind my shop as that young house-girl of ours. If a customer comes in for a pair of black stockings, she’ll take and give ‘em a white knitted nightcap. She’s as deficient of common sense as Jenkins is. Your servant, sir. Good morning, young gentlemen!”

“Here, wait a minute!” cried Mr. Galloway, as she was speeding off. “I cannot understand at all. The keys could not have been changed as they lay on the flags.”

“Neither can anybody else understand it,” returned Mrs. Jenkins. “If Jenkins was not a sober man—and he had better let me catch him being anything else!—I should say the two, him and Ketch, had had a drop too much. The bishop himself could make neither top nor tail of it. It’ll teach Jenkins not to go gallivanting again after other folk’s business!”

She finally turned away, and Mr. Galloway set himself to revolve the perplexing narrative. The more he thought, the less he was nearer doing so; like the bishop, he could make neither top nor tail of it. “It is entirely beyond belief!” he remarked to Arthur Channing; “unless Ketch took out the wrong keys!”

“And if he took out the wrong keys, how could he have locked the south door?” interrupted Roland Yorke. “I’d lay anybody five shillings that those mischievous scamps of college boys were at the bottom of it; I taxed Gerald with it, and he flew out at me for my pains. But the seniors may not have been in it. You should have heard the bell clank out last night, Mr. Galloway!”

“I suppose it brought out a few,” was Mr. Galloway’s rejoinder.

“It did that,” said Arthur Channing. “Myself for one. When I saw the bishop emerge from the college doors, I could scarcely believe my sight.”

“I’d have given half-a-crown to see him!” cried Roland Yorke. “If there’s any fun going on, it is sure to be my fate to miss it. Cator was at my house, having a cigar with me; and, though we heard the bell, we did not disturb ourselves to see what it might mean.”

“What is your opinion of last night’s work, Arthur?” asked Mr. Galloway, returning to the point.

Arthur's opinion was a very decided one, but he did not choose to say so. The meeting with the college boys at their stealthy post in the cloisters, when he and Hamish were passing through at dusk, a few nights before, coupled with the hints then thrown out of the "serving out" of Ketch, could leave little doubt as to the culprits. Arthur returned an answer, couched in general terms.

"Could it have been the college boys, think you?" debated Mr. Galloway.

"Not being a college boy, I cannot speak positively, sir," he said, laughing. "Gaunt knows nothing of it. I met him as I was going home to breakfast from my early hour's work here, and he told me he did not. There would have been no harm done, after all, but for the accident to Jenkins."

"One of you gentlemen can just step in to see Jenkins in the course of the day, and reassure him that he is not wanted," said Mr. Galloway. "I know how necessary it is to keep the mind tranquil in any fear of brain affection."

No more was said, and the occupation of the day began. A busy day was that at Mr. Galloway's, much to the chagrin of Roland Yorke, who had an unconquerable objection to doing too much. He broke out into grumblings at Arthur, when the latter came running in from his duty at college.

"I'll tell you what is, Channing; you ought not to have made the bargain to go to that bothering organ on busy days; and Galloway must have been out of his mind to let you make it. Look at the heap of work there is to do!"

"I will soon make up for the lost hour," said Arthur, setting to with a will. "Where's Mr. Galloway?"

"Gone to the bank," grumbled Roland. "And I have had to answer a dozen callers-in at least, and do all my writing besides. I wonder what possessed Jenkins to go and knock his head to powder?"

Mr. Galloway shortly returned, and sat down to write. It was a thing he rarely did; he left writing to his clerks, unless it was the writing of letters. By one o'clock the chief portion of the work was done, and Mr. Roland Yorke's spirits recovered their elasticity. He went home to dinner, as usual. Arthur preferred to remain at his post, and get on further, sending the housekeeper's little maid out for a twopenny roll, which he ate as he wrote. He was of a remarkably conscientious nature, and thought it only fair to sacrifice a little time in case of need, in return for the great favour which had been granted him by Mr. Galloway. Many of the families who had sons in the college school dined at one o'clock, as it was the most convenient hour for the boys. Growing youths are not satisfied with anything less substantial than a dinner in the middle of the day, and two dinners in a household tell heavily upon the house-keeping. The Channings did not afford two, neither did Lady Augusta Yorke; so their hour was one o'clock.

"What a muff you must be to go without your dinner!" cried Roland Yorke to Arthur, when he returned at two o'clock. "I wouldn't."

"I have had my dinner," said Arthur.

"What did you have?" cried Roland, pricking up his ears. "Did Galloway send to the hotel for roast ducks and green peas? That's what we had at home, and the peas were half-boiled, and the ducks were scorched, and cooked without stuffing. A wretched set of incapables our house turns out! and my lady does not know how to alter it. You have actually finished that deed, Channing?"

"It is finished, you see. It is surprising how much one can do in a quiet hour!"

"Is Galloway out?"

Arthur pointed with his pen to the door of Mr. Galloway's private room, to indicate that he was in it. "He is writing letters."

"I say, Channing, there's positively nothing left to do," went on Roland, casting his eyes over the desk. "Here are these leases, but they are not wanted until to-morrow. Who says we can't work in this office?"

Arthur laughed good-naturedly, to think of the small amount, out of that day's work, which had fallen to Roland's share.

Some time elapsed. Mr. Galloway came into their room from his own to consult a “Bradshaw,” which lay on the shelf, alongside Jenkins’s desk. He held in his hand a very closely-written letter. It was of large, letter-paper size, and appeared to be filled to the utmost of its four pages. While he was looking at the book, the cathedral clock chimed the three-quarters past two, and the bell rang for divine service.

“It can never be that time of day!” exclaimed Mr. Galloway, in consternation, as he took out his watch. “Sixteen minutes to three! and I am a minute slow! How has the time passed? I ought to have been at—”

Mr. Galloway brought his words to a standstill, apparently too absorbed in the railway guide to conclude them. Roland Yorke, who had a free tongue, even with his master, filled up the pause.

“Were you going out, sir?”

“Is that any business of yours, Mr. Roland? Talking won’t fill in that lease, sir.”

“The lease is not in a hurry, sir,” returned incorrigible Roland. But he held his tongue then, and bent his head over his work.

Mr. Galloway dipped his pen in the ink, and copied something from “Bradshaw” into the closely-written letter, standing at Jenkins’s desk to do it; then he passed the blotting-paper quickly over the words, and folded the letter.

“Channing,” he said, speaking very hastily, “you will see a twenty-pound bank-note on my desk, and the directed envelope of this letter; bring them here.”

Arthur went, and brought forth the envelope and bank-note. Mr. Galloway doubled the note in four and slipped it between the folds of the letter, putting both into the envelope. He had fastened it down, when a loud noise and commotion was heard in the street. Curious as are said to be antiquated maidens, Mr. Galloway rushed to the window and threw it up, his two clerks attending in his wake.

Something very fine, in a white dress, and pink and scarlet flowers on her bonnetless head, as if attired for an evening party, was whirling round the middle of the road in circles: a tall woman, who must once have been beautiful. She appeared to be whirling someone else with her, amid laughter and shrieks, and cries and groans, from the gathering mob.

“It is Mad Nance!” uttered Mr. Galloway. “Poor thing! she really ought to be in confinement.”

So every one had said for a long time, but no one bestirred themselves to place her in it. This unfortunate creature, Mad Nance, as she was called, was sufficiently harmless to be at large on sufferance, and sufficiently mad at times to put a street in an uproar. In her least sane moments she would appear, as now, in an old dimity white dress, scrupulously washed and ironed, and decorated with innumerable frills; some natural flowers, generally wild ones, in her hair. Dandelions were her favourites; she would make them into a wreath, and fasten it on, letting her entangled hair hang beneath. To-day she had contrived to pick up some geranium blossoms, scarlet and pink.

“Who has she got hold of there?” exclaimed Mr. Galloway. “He does not seem to like it.”

Arthur burst into laughter when he discovered that it was Harper, the lay-clerk. This unlucky gentleman, who had been quietly and inoffensively proceeding up Close Street on his way to service in the cathedral, was seized upon by Mad Nance by the hands. He was a thin, weak little man, a very reed in her strong grasp. She shrieked, she laughed, she danced, she flew with him round and round. He shrieked also; his hat was off, his wig was gone; and it was half the business of Mr. Harper’s life to make that wig appear as his own hair. He talked, he raved, he remonstrated; I am very much afraid that he swore. Mr. Galloway laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

The crowd was parted by an authoritative hand, and the same hand, gentle now, laid its firmness upon the woman and released the prisoner. It was Hamish Channing who had come to the rescue, suppressing his mirth as he best could while he effected it.

“I’ll have the law of her!” panted Harper, as he picked up his hat and wig. “If there’s justice to be got in Helstonleigh, she shall suffer for this! It’s a town’s shame to let her go about, molesting peaceable wayfarers, and shaking the life out of them!”

Something at a distance appeared to attract the attention of the unhappy woman, and she flew away. Hamish and Mr. Harper were left alone in the streets, the latter still exploding with wrath, and vowing all sorts of revenge.

“Put up with it quietly, Harper,” advised Hamish. “She is like a little child, not accountable for her actions.”

“That’s just like you, Mr. Hamish Channing. If they took your head off, you’d put up with it! How would you like your wig flung away in the sight of a whole street?”

“I don’t wear one,” answered Hamish, laughing. “Here’s your hat; not much damaged, apparently.”

Mr. Harper, settling his wig on his head, and composing himself as he best could, continued his way to the cathedral, turning his hat about in his hand, and closely looking at it. Hamish stepped across to Mr. Galloway’s, meeting that gentleman at the door.

“A good thing you came up as you did, Mr. Hamish. Harper will remember Mad Nance for a year to come.”

“I expect he will,” replied Hamish, laughing still. Mr. Galloway laughed also, and walked hastily down the street.

CHAPTER XIV. – KEEPING OFFICE

Hamish entered the office. Arthur and Roland Yorke had their heads stretched out of the window, and did not hear his footsteps. He advanced quietly and brought his hands down hastily upon the shoulder of each. Roland started, and knocked his head against the window-frame.

“How you startle a fellow! I thought it was Mad Nance come in to lay hands upon me.”

“She has laid hands upon enough for one day,” said Hamish. “Harper will dream of her to-night.”

“I thought Galloway would have gone into a fit, he laughed so,” cried Arthur. “As for my sides, they’ll ache for an hour.”

Roland Yorke’s lip curled with an angry expression. “My opinion agrees with Harper’s,” he said. “I think Mad Nance ought to be punished. We are none of us safe from her, if this is to be her game.”

“If you punish her to-day, she would do the same again to-morrow, were the fit to come over her,” rejoined Hamish. “It is not often she breaks out like this. The only thing is to steer clear of her.”

“Hamish has a fellow-feeling for Mad Nance,” mockingly spoke Roland Yorke.

“Yes, poor thing! for her story is a sad one. If the same grievous wrong were worked upon some of us, perhaps we might take to dancing for the benefit of the public. Talking of the public, Arthur,” continued Hamish, turning to his brother, “what became of you at dinner-time? The mother was for setting the town-crier to work.”

“I could not get home to-day. We have had double work to do, as Jenkins is away.”

Hamish tilted himself on to the edge of Mr. Jenkins’s desk, and took up the letter, apparently in absence of mind, which Mr. Galloway had left there, ready for the post. “Mr. Robert Galloway, Sea View Terrace, Ventnor, Isle of Wight,” he read aloud. “That must be Mr. Galloway’s cousin,” he remarked: “the one who has run through so much money.”

“Of course it is,” answered Roland Yorke. “Galloway pretty near keeps him: I know there’s a twenty-pound bank-note going to him in that letter. Catch me doing it if I were Galloway.”

“I wish it was going into my pocket instead,” said Hamish, balancing the letter on his fingers, as if wishing to test its weight.

“I wish the clouds would drop sovereigns! But they don’t,” said Roland Yorke.

Hamish put the letter back from whence he had taken it, and jumped off the desk. “I must be walking,” said he. “Stopping here will not do my work. If we—”

“By Jove! there’s Knivett!” uttered Roland Yorke. “Where’s he off to, so fast? I have something that I must tell him.”

Snatching up his hat, Roland darted at full speed out of the office, in search of one who was running at full speed also down the street. Hamish looked out, amused, at the chase; Arthur, who had called after Roland in vain, seemed vexed. “Knivett is one of the fleetest runners in Helstonleigh,” said Hamish. “Yorke will scarcely catch him up.”

“I wish Yorke would allow himself a little thought, and not act upon impulse,” exclaimed Arthur. “I cannot stop three minutes longer: and he knows that! I shall be late for college.”

He was already preparing to go there. Putting some papers in order upon his desk, and locking up others, he carried the letter for Ventnor into Mr. Galloway’s private room and placed it in the letter rack. Two others, ready for the post, were lying there. Then he went to the front door to look out for Yorke. Yorke was not to be seen.

“What a thoughtless fellow he is!” exclaimed Arthur, in his vexation. “What is to be done? Hamish, you will have to stop here.”

“Thank you! what else?” asked Hamish.

"I must be at the college, whatever betide." This was true: yet neither might the office be left vacant. Arthur grew a little flurried. "Do stay, Hamish: it will not hinder you five minutes, I dare say. Yorke is sure to be in."

Hamish came to the door, halting on its first step, and looking out over Arthur's shoulder. He drew his head in again with a sudden movement.

"Is not that old Hopper down there?" he asked, in a whisper, the tone sounding as one of fear.

Arthur turned his eyes on a shabby old man who was crossing the end of the street, and saw Hopper, the sheriff's officer. "Yes, why?"

"It is that old fellow who holds the writ. He may be on the watch for me now. I can't go out just yet, Arthur; I'll stay here till Yorke comes back again."

He returned to the office, sat down and leaned his brow upon his hand. A strange brow of care it was just then, according ill with the gay face of Hamish Channing. Arthur, waiting for no second permission, flew towards the cathedral as fast as his long legs would carry him. The dean and chapter were preparing to leave the chapter-house as he tore past it, through the cloisters. Three o'clock was striking. Arthur's heart and breath were alike panting when he gained the dark stairs. At that moment, to his excessive astonishment, the organ began to peal forth.

Seated at it was Mr. Williams; and a few words of explanation ensued. The organist said he should remain for the service, which rendered Arthur at liberty to go back again.

He was retracing his steps underneath the elm-trees in the Boundaries at a slower pace than he had recently passed them, when, in turning a corner, he came face to face with the sheriff's officer. Arthur, whose thoughts were at that moment fixed upon Hamish and his difficulties, started away from the man, with an impulse for which he could not have accounted.

"No need for you to be frightened of me, Mr. Arthur," said the man, who, in his more palmy days, before he had learnt to take more than was good for him, had been a clerk in Mr. Channing's office. "I have nothing about me that will bite you."

He laid a stress upon the "you" in both cases. Arthur understood only too well what was meant, though he would not appear to do so.

"Nor any one else, either, I hope, Hopper. A warm day, is it not!"

Hopper drew close to Arthur, not looking at him, apparently examining with hands and eyes the trunk of the elm-tree underneath which they had halted. "You tell your brother not to put himself in my way," said he, in a low tone, his lips scarcely moving. "He is in a bit of trouble, as I suppose you know."

"Yes," breathed Arthur.

"Well, I don't want to serve the writ upon him; I won't serve it unless he makes me, by throwing himself within length of my arm. If he sees me coming up one street, let him cut down another; into a shop; anywhere; I have eyes that only see when I want them to. I come prowling about here once or twice a day for show, but I come at a time when I am pretty sure he can't be seen; just gone out, or just gone in. I'd rather not harm him."

"You are not so considerate to all," said Arthur, after a pause given to revolving the words, and to wondering whether they were spoken in good faith, or with some concealed purpose. He could not decide which.

"No, I am not," pointedly returned Hopper, in answer. "There are some that I look after, sharp as a ferret looks after a rat, but I'll never do that by any son of Mr. Channing's. I can't forget the old days, sir, when your father was kind to me. He stood by me longer than my own friends did. But for him, I should have starved in that long illness I had, when the office would have me no longer. Why doesn't Mr. Hamish settle this?" he abruptly added.

"I suppose he cannot," answered Arthur.

"It is only a bagatelle at the worst, and our folks would not have gone to extremities if he had shown only a disposition to settle. I am sure that if he would go to them now, and pay down a ten-

pound note, and say, 'You shall have the rest as I can get it,' they'd withdraw proceedings; ay, even for five pounds I believe they would. Tell him to do it, Mr. Arthur; tell him I always know which way the wind blows with our people."

"I will tell him, but I fear he is very short of money just now. Five or ten pounds may be as impossible to find, sometimes, as five or ten thousand."

"Better find it than be locked up," said Hopper. "How would the office get on? Deprive him of the power of management, and it might cost Mr. Channing his place. What use is a man when he is in prison? I was in Mr. Channing's office for ten years, Mr. Arthur, and I know every trick and turn in it, though I have left it a good while. And now that I have just said this, I'll go on my way. Mind you tell him."

"Thank you," warmly replied Arthur.

"And when you have told him, please to forget that you have heard it. There's somebody's eyes peering at me over the deanery blinds. They may peer! I don't mind them; deaneries don't trouble themselves with sheriff's officers."

He glided away, and Arthur went straight to the office. Hamish was alone; he was seated at Jenkins's desk, writing a note.

"You here still, Hamish! Where's Yorke?"

"Echo answers where," replied Hamish, who appeared to have recovered his full flow of spirits. "I have seen nothing of him."

"That's Yorke all over! it is too bad."

"It would be, were this a busy afternoon with me. But what brings you back, Mr. Arthur? Have you left the organ to play itself?"

"Williams is taking it; he heard of Jenkins's accident, and thought I might not be able to get away from the office twice today, so he attended himself."

"Come, that's good-natured of Williams! A bargain's a bargain, and, having made the bargain, of course it is your own look-out that you fulfil it. Yes, it was considerate of Williams."

"Considerate for himself," laughed Arthur. "He did not come down to give me holiday, but in the fear that Mr. Galloway might prevent my attending. 'A pretty thing it would have been,' he said to me, 'had there been no organist this afternoon; it might have cost me my post.'"

"Moonshine!" said Hamish. "It might have cost him a word of reproof; nothing more."

"Helstonleigh's dean is a strict one, remember. I told Williams he might always depend upon me."

"What should you have done, pray, had I not been here to turn office-keeper?" laughed Hamish.

"Of the two duties I must have obeyed the more important one. I should have locked up the office and given the key to the housekeeper till college was over, or until Yorke returned. He deserves something for this move. Has any one called?"

"No. Arthur, I have been making free with a sheet of paper and an envelope," said Hamish, completing the note he was writing. "I suppose I am welcome to it?"

"To ten, if you want them," returned Arthur. "To whom are you writing?"

"As if I should put you *au courant* of my love-letters!" gaily answered Hamish.

How could Hamish indulge in this careless gaiety with a sword hanging over his head? It was verily a puzzle to Arthur. A light, sunny nature was Hamish Channing's. This sobering blow which had fallen on it had probably not come before it was needed. Had his bark been sailing for ever in smooth waters, he might have wasted his life, indolently basking on the calm, seductive waves. But the storm rose, the waves ran high, threatening to engulf him, and Hamish knew that his best energies must be put forth to surmount them. Never, never talk of troubles as great, unmitigated evils: to the God-fearing, the God-trusting, they are fraught with hidden love.

"Hamish, were I threatened with worry, as you are, I could not be otherwise than oppressed and serious."

“Where would be the use of that?” cried gay Hamish. “Care killed a cat. Look here, Arthur, you and your grave face! Did you ever know care do a fellow good? I never did: but a great deal of harm. I shall manage to scramble out of the pit somehow. You’ll see.” He put the note into his pocket, as he spoke, and took up his hat to depart.

“Stop an instant longer, Hamish. I have just met Hopper.”

“He did not convert you into a writ-server, I hope. I don’t think it would be legal.”

“There you are, joking again! Hamish, he has the writ, but he does not wish to serve it. You are to keep out of his way, he says, and he will not seek to put himself in yours. My father was kind to him in days gone by, and he remembers it now.”

“He’s a regular trump! I’ll send him half-a-crown in a parcel,” exclaimed Hamish.

“I wish you would hear me out. He says a ten-pound note, perhaps a five-pound note, on account, would induce ‘his people’—suppose you understand the phrase—to stay proceedings, and to give you time. He strongly advises it to be done. That’s all.”

Not only all Arthur had to say upon the point, but all he had time to say. At that moment, the barouche of Lady Augusta Yorke drove up to the door, and they both went out to it. Lady Augusta, her daughter Fanny, and Constance Channing were in it. She was on her way to attend a missionary meeting at the Guildhall, and had called for Roland, that he might escort her into the room.

“Roland is not to be found, Lady Augusta,” said Hamish, raising his hat with one of his sunny smiles. “He darted off, it is impossible to say where, thereby making me a prisoner. My brother had to attend the cathedral, and there was no one to keep office.”

“Then I think I must make a prisoner of you in turn, Mr. Hamish Channing,” graciously said Lady Augusta. “Will you accompany us?”

Hamish shook his head. “I wish I could; but I have already wasted more time than I ought to have done.”

“It will not cost you five minutes more,” urged Lady Augusta. “You shall only just take us into the hall; I will release you then, if you must be released. Three ladies never can go in alone—fancy how we should be stared at!”

Constance bent her pretty face forward. “Do, Hamish, if you can!”

He suffered himself to be persuaded, stepped into the barouche, and took his seat by Lady Augusta. As they drove away, Arthur thought the greatest ornament the carriage contained had been added to it in handsome Hamish.

A full hour Arthur worked on at his deeds and leases, and Roland Yorke never returned. Mr. Galloway came in then. “Where’s Yorke?” was his first question.

Arthur replied that he did not know; he had “stepped out” somewhere. Arthur Channing was not one to make mischief, or get another into trouble. Mr. Galloway asked no further; he probably inferred that Yorke had only just gone. He sat down at Jenkins’s desk, and began to read over a lease.

“Can I have the stamps, sir, for this deed?” Arthur presently asked.

“They are not ready. Have the letters gone to the post?”

“Not yet, sir.”

“You can take them now, then. And, Arthur, suppose you step in, as you return, and see how Jenkins is.”

“Very well, sir.” He went into Mr. Galloway’s room, and brought forth the three letters from the rack. “Is this one not to be sealed?” he inquired of Mr. Galloway, indicating the one directed to Ventnor, for it was Mr. Galloway’s invariable custom to seal letters which contained money, after they had been gummed down. “It is doubly safe,” he would say.

“Ay, to be sure,” replied Mr. Galloway. “I went off in a hurry, and did not do it. Bring me the wax.”

Arthur handed him the wax and a light. Mr. Galloway sealed the letter, stamping it with the seal hanging to his watch-chain. He then held out his hand for another of the letters, and sealed that. "And this one also?" inquired Arthur, holding out the third.

"No. You can take them now."

Arthur departed. A few paces from the door he met Roland Yorke, coming along in a white heat.

"Channing, I could not help it—I could not, upon my honour. I had to go somewhere with Knivett, and we were kept till now. Galloway's in an awful rage, I suppose?"

"He has only just come in. You had no right to play me this trick, Yorke. But for Hamish, I must have locked up the office. Don't you do it again, or Mr. Galloway may hear of it."

"It is all owing to that confounded Jenkins!" flashed Roland. "Why did he go and get his head smashed? You are a good fellow, Arthur. I'll do you a neighbourly turn, some time."

He sped into the office, and Arthur walked to the post with the letters. Coming back, he turned into Mrs. Jenkins's shop in the High Street.

Mrs. Jenkins was behind the counter. "Oh, go up! go up and see him!" she cried, in a tone of suppressed passion. "His bedroom's front, up the two-pair flight, and I'll take my affidavit that there's been fifty folks here this day to see him, if there has been one. I could sow a peck of peas on the stairs! You'll find other company up there."

Arthur groped his way up the stairs; they were dark too, coming in from the sunshine. He found the room, and entered. Jenkins lay in bed, his bandaged head upon the pillow; and, seated by his side, his apron falling, and his clerical hat held between his knees, was the Bishop of Helstonleigh.

CHAPTER XV. – A SPLASH IN THE RIVER

Amongst other facts, patent to common and uncommon sense, is the very obvious one that a man cannot be in two places at once. In like manner, no author, that I ever heard of, was able to relate two different portions of his narrative at one and the same time. Thus you will readily understand, that if I devoted the last chapter to Mr. Galloway, his clerks and their concerns generally, it could not be given to Mr. Ketch and *his* concerns; although in the strict order of time and sequence, the latter gentleman might have claimed an equal, if not a premier right.

Mr. Ketch stood in his lodge, leaning for support upon the shut-up press-bedstead, which, by day, looked like a high chest of drawers with brass handles, his eyes fixed on the keys, hanging on the opposite nail. His state of mind may be best expressed by the strong epithet, “savage.” Mr. Ketch had not a pleasant face at the best of times: it was yellow and withered; and his small bright eyes were always dropping water; and the two or three locks of hair, which he still possessed, were faded, and stood out, solitary and stiff, after the manner of those pictures you have seen of heathens who decorate their heads with upright tails. At this moment his countenance looked particularly unpleasant.

Mr. Ketch had spent part of the night and the whole of this morning revolving the previous evening’s affair of the cloisters. The more he thought of it, the less he liked it, and the surer grew his conviction that the evil had been the work of his enemies, the college boys.

“It’s as safe as day,” he wrathfully soliloquized. “There be the right keys,” nodding to the two on the wall, “and there be the wrong ones,” nodding towards an old knife-tray, into which he had angrily thrown the rusty keys, upon entering his lodge last night, accompanied by the crowd. “They meant to lock me up all night in the cloisters, the wicked cannibals! I hope the dean’ll expel ‘em! I’ll make my complaint to the head-master, I will! Drat all college schools! there’s never no good done in ‘em!”

“How are you this morning, Ketch?”

The salutation proceeded from Stephen Bywater, who, in the boisterous manner peculiar to himself and his tribe, had flung open the door without the ceremony of knocking.

“I’m none the better for seeing you,” growled Ketch.

“You need not be uncivil,” returned Bywater, with great suavity. “I am only making a morning call upon you, after the fashion of gentlefolks; the public delights to pay respect to its officials, you know. How *do* you feel after that mishap last night? We can’t think, any of us, how you came to make the mistake.”

“I’ll ‘mistake’ you!” shrieked Ketch. “I kep’ a nasty old, rusty brace o’ keys in my lodge to take out, instead o’ the right ones, didn’t I?”

“How uncommonly stupid it was of you to do so!” said Bywater, pretending to take the remark literally. “*I* would not keep a duplicate pair of keys by me—I should make sure they’d bring me to grief. What do you say? You did *not* keep duplicate keys—they were false ones! Why, that’s just what we all told you last night. The bishop told you so. He said he knew you had made a mistake, and taken out the wrong keys for the right. My belief is, that you went out without any keys at all. You left them hanging upon the nail, and you found them there. You had not got a second pair!”

“You just wait!” raved old Ketch. “I’m a-coming round to the head-master, and I’ll bring the keys with me. He’ll let you boys know whether there’s two pairs, or one. Horrid old rusty things they be; as rusty as you!”

“Who says they are rusty?”

“Who says it! They *are* rusty!” shrieked the old man. “You’d like to get me into a madhouse, you boys would, worrying me! I’ll show you whether they’re rusty! I’ll show you whether there’s a second brace o’ keys or not. I’ll show ‘em to the head-master! I’ll show ‘em to the dean! I’ll show ‘em again to his lordship the bi—What’s gone of the keys?”

The last sentence was uttered in a different tone and in apparent perplexity. With shaking hands, excited by passion, Mr. Ketch was rummaging the knife-box—an old, deep, mahogany tray, dark with age, divided by a partition—rummaging for the rusty keys. He could not find them. He searched on this side, he searched on that; he pulled out the contents, one by one: a black-handled knife, a white-handled fork, a green-handled knife with a broken point, and a brown-handled fork with one prong, which comprised his household cutlery; a small whetstone, a comb and a blacking-brush, a gimlet and a small hammer, some leather shoe-strings, three or four tallow candles, a match-box and an extinguisher, the key of his door, the bolt of his casement window, and a few other miscellanies. He could not come upon the false keys, and, finally, he made a snatch at the tray, and turned it upside down. The keys were not there.

When he had fully taken in the fact—it cost him some little time to do it—he turned his anger upon Bywater.

“You have took ‘em, you have! you have turned thief, and stole ‘em! I put ‘em here in the knife-box, and they are gone! What have you done with ‘em?”

“Come, that’s good!” exclaimed Bywater, in too genuine a tone to admit a suspicion of its truth. “I have not been near your knife-box; I have not put my foot inside the door.”

In point of fact, Bywater had not. He had stood outside, bending his head and body inwards, his hands grasping either door-post.

“What’s gone with ‘em? who ‘as took ‘em off? I’ll swear I put ‘em there, and I have never looked at ‘em nor touched ‘em since! There’s an infamous conspiracy forming against me! I’m going to be blowed up, like Guy Fawkes!”

“If you did put them there—*if*, you know—some of your friends must have taken them,” cried Bywater, in a tone midway between reason and irony.

“There haven’t a soul been nigh the place,” shrieked Ketch.

“Except the milk, and he gave me my ha’porth through the winder.”

“Hurrah!” said Bywater, throwing up his trencher. “It’s a clear case of dreams. You dreamt you had a second pair of keys, Ketch, and couldn’t get rid of the impression on awaking. Mr. Ketch, D.H., Dreamer-in-chief to Helstonleigh!”

Bywater commenced an aggravating dance. Ketch was aggravated sufficiently without it. “What d’ye call me?” he asked, in a state of concentrated temper that turned his face livid. “D?” What d’ye mean by ‘D?’ D stands for that bad sperit as is too near to you college boys; he’s among you always, like a ranging lion. It’s like your impudence to call me by his name.”

“My dear Mr. Ketch! call *you* by his name! I never thought of such a thing,” politely retorted Bywater. “You are not promoted to that honour yet. D.H., stands for Deputy-Hangman. Isn’t it affixed to the cathedral roll, kept amid the archives in the chapter-house”—John Ketch, D.H., porter to the cloisters! “I hope you don’t omit the distinguishing initials when you sign your letters?”

Ketch foamed. Bywater danced. The former could not find words. The latter found plenty.

“I say, though, Mr. Calcraft, don’t you make a similar mistake when you are going on public duty. If you were to go *there*, dreaming you had the right apparatus, and find, in the last moment, that you had brought the wrong, you don’t know what the consequences might be. The real victim might escape, rescued by the enraged crowd, and they might put the nightcap upon you, and operate upon you instead! So, be careful. We couldn’t afford to lose you. Only think, what a lot of money it would cost to put the college into mourning!”

Ketch gave a great gasp of agony, threw an iron ladle at his tormentor, which, falling short of its aim, came clanking down on the red-brick floor, and banged the door in Bywater’s face. Bywater withdrew to a short distance, under cover of the cathedral wall, and bent his body backwards and forwards with the violence of his laughter, unconscious that the Bishop of Helstonleigh was standing near him, surveying him with an exceedingly amused expression. His lordship had been an ear-witness to part of the colloquy, very much to his edification.

“What is your mirth, Bywater?”

Bywater drew himself straight, and turned round as if he had been shot. “I was only laughing, my lord,” he said, touching his trencher.

“I see you were; you will lose your breath altogether some day, if you laugh in that violent manner. What were you and Ketch quarrelling about?”

“We were not quarrelling, my lord. I was only chaff—teasing him,” rejoined Bywater, substituting one word for the other, as if fearing the first might not altogether be suited to the bishop’s ears; “and Ketch fell into a passion.”

“As he often does, I fear,” remarked his lordship. “I fancy you boys provoke him unjustifiably.”

“My lord,” said Bywater, turning his red, impudent, but honest face full upon the prelate, “I don’t deny that we do provoke him; but you can have no idea what an awful tyrant he is to us. I can’t believe any one was ever born with such a cross-grained temper. He vents it upon every one: not only upon the college boys, but upon all who come in his way. If your lordship were not the bishop,” added bold Bywater, “he would vent it upon you.”

“Would he?” said the bishop, who was a dear lover of candour, and would have excused a whole bushel of mischief, rather than one little grain of falsehood.

“Not a day passes, but he sets upon us with his tongue. He would keep us out of the cloisters; he would keep us out of our own schoolroom. He goes to the head-master with the most unfounded cram—stories, and when the master declines to notice them (for he knows Ketch of old), then he goes presumingly to the dean. If he let us alone, we should let him alone. I am not speaking this in the light of a complaint to your lordship,” Bywater added, throwing his head back. “I don’t want to get him into a row, tyrant though he is; and the college boys can hold their own against Ketch.”

“I expect they can,” significantly replied the bishop. “He would keep you out of the cloisters, would he?”

“He is aiming at it,” returned Bywater. “There never would have been a word said about our playing there, but for him. If the dean shuts us out, it will be Ketch’s doings. The college boys have played in the cloisters since the school was founded.”

“He would keep you out of the cloisters; so, by way of retaliation, you lock him into them—an uncomfortable place of abode for a night, Bywater.”

“My lord!” cried Bywater.

“Sir!” responded his lordship.

“Does your lordship think it was I who played that trick on Ketch?”

“Yes, I do—speaking of you conjointly with the school.”

Bywater’s eyes and his good-humoured countenance fell before the steady gaze of the prelate. But in the gaze there was an earnest—if Bywater could read it aright—of good feeling, of excuse for the mischief, rather than of punishment in store. The boy’s face was red enough at all times, but it turned to scarlet now. If the bishop had before suspected the share played in the affair by the college boys, it had by this time been converted into a certainty.

“Boy,” said he, “confess it if you like, be silent if you like; but do not tell me a lie.”

Bywater turned up his face again. His free, fearless eyes—free in the cause of daring, but fearless in that of truth—looked straight into those of the bishop. “I never do tell lies,” he answered. “There’s not a boy in the school punished oftener than I am; and I don’t say but I generally deserve it! but it is never for telling a lie. If I did tell them, I should slip out of many a scrape that I am punished for now.”

The bishop could read truth as well as any one—better than many—and he saw that it was being told to him now. “Which of you must be punished for this trick as ringleader?” he asked.

“I, my lord, if any one must be,” frankly avowed Bywater. “We should have let him out at ten o’clock. We never meant to keep him there all night. If I am punished, I hope your lordship will be so kind as allow it to be put down to your own account, not to Ketch’s. I should not like it to be thought

that I caught it for *him*. I heartily beg your pardon, my lord, for having been so unfortunate as to include you in the locking-up. We are all as sorry as can be, that it should have happened. I am ready to take any punishment, for that, that you may order me.”

“Ah!” said the bishop, “had you known that I was in the cloisters, your friend Ketch would have come off scot free!”

“Yes, that he would, until—”

“Until what?” asked the bishop, for Bywater had brought his words to a standstill.

“Until a more convenient night, I was going to say, my lord.”

“Well, that’s candid,” said the bishop. “Bywater,” he gravely added, “you have spoken the truth to me freely. Had you equivocated in the slightest degree, I should have punished you for the equivocation. As it is, I shall look upon this as a confidential communication, and *not* order you punishment. But we will not have any more tricks played at locking up Ketch. You understand?”

“All right, my lord. Thank you a hundred times.”

Bywater, touching his trencher, leaped off. The bishop turned to enter his palace gates, which were close by, and encountered Ketch talking to the head-master. The latter had been passing the lodge, when he was seen and pounced upon by Ketch, who thought it a good opportunity to make his complaint.

“I am as morally sure it was them, sir, as I am that I be alive.” he was saying when the bishop came up. “And I don’t know who they has dealings with; but, for certain, they have sperited away them rusty keys what did the mischief, without so much as putting one o’ their noses inside my lodge. I placed ‘em safe in the knife-box last night, and they’re gone this morning. I hope, sir, you’ll punish them as they deserve. I am nothing, of course. If they had locked me up, and kept me there till I was worn to a skeleton, it might be thought light of; but his lordship, the bishop”—bowing sideways to the prelate—“was a sufferer by their wickedness.”

“To be sure I was,” said the bishop, in a grave tone, but with a twinkle in his eye; “and therefore the complaint to Mr. Pye must be preferred by me, Ketch. We will talk of it when I have leisure,” he added to Mr. Pye, with a pleasant nod, as he went through the palace gates.

The head-master bowed to the bishop, and walked away, leaving Ketch on the growl.

Meanwhile, Bywater, flying through the cloisters, came upon Hurst, and two or three more of the conspirators. The time was between nine and ten o’clock. The boys had been home for breakfast after early school, and were now reassembling, but they did not go into school until a quarter before ten.

“He is such a glorious old trump, that bishop!” burst forth Bywater. “He knows all about it, and is not going to put us up for punishment. Let’s cut round to the palace gates and cheer him.”

“Knows that it was us!” echoed the startled boys. “How did it come out to him?” asked Hurst.

“He guessed it, I think,” said Bywater, “and he taxed me with it. So I couldn’t help myself, and told him I’d take the punishment; and he said he’d excuse us, but there was to be no locking up of Mr. Calcraft again. I’d lay a hundred guineas the bishop went in for scrapes himself, when he was a boy!” emphatically added Bywater. “I’ll be bound he thinks we only served the fellow right. Hurrah for the bishop!”

“Hurrah for the bishop!” shouted Hurst, with the other chorus of voices. “Long life to him! He’s made of the right sort of stuff! I say, though, Jenkins is the worst,” added Hurst, his note changing. “My father says he doesn’t know but what brain fever will come on.”

“Moonshine!” laughed the boys.

“Upon my word and honour, it is not. He pitched right upon his head; it might have cost him his life had he fallen upon the edge of the stone step, but they think he alighted flat. My father was round with him this morning at six o’clock.”

“Does your father know about it?”

“Not he. What next?” cried Hurst. “Should I stand before him, and take my trencher off, with a bow, and say, ‘If you please, sir, it was the college boys who served out old Ketch!’ That would be a nice joke! He said, at breakfast, this morning, that that fumbling old Ketch must have got hold of the wrong keys. ‘Of course, sir!’ answered I.”

“Oh, what do you think, though!” interrupted Bywater. “Ketch can’t find the keys. He put them into a knife-box, he says, and this morning they are gone. He intended to take them round to Pye, and I left him going rampant over the loss. Didn’t I chaff him?”

Hurst laughed. He unbuttoned the pocket of his trousers, and partially exhibited two rusty keys. “I was not going to leave them to Ketch for witnesses,” said he. “I saw him throw them into the tray last night, and I walked them out again, while he was talking to the crowd.”

“I say, Hurst, don’t be such a ninny as to keep them about you!” exclaimed Berkeley, in a fright. “Suppose Pye should go in for a search this morning, and visit our pockets? You’d floor us at once!”

“The truth is, I don’t know where to put them,” ingenuously acknowledged Hurst. “If I hid them at home, they’d be found; if I dropped them in the street, some hullabaloo might arise from it.”

“Let’s carry them back to the old-iron shop, and get the fellow to buy them back at half-price!”

“Catch him doing that! Besides, the trick is sure to get wind in the town; he might be capable of coming forward and declaring that we bought the keys at his shop.”

“Let’s throw ‘em down old Pye’s well!”

“They’d come up again in the bucket, as ghosts do!”

“Couldn’t we make a railway parcel of them, and direct it to ‘Mr. Smith, London?’”

“Two pounds to pay; to be kept till called for,” added Mark Galloway, improving upon the suggestion. “They’d put it in their fire-proof safe, and it would never come out again.”

“Throw them into the river,” said Stephen Bywater. “That’s the only safe place for them: they’d lie at the bottom for ever. We have time to do it now. Come along.”

Acting upon the impulse, as schoolboys usually do, they went galloping out of the cloisters, running against the head-master, who was entering, and nearly overturning his equilibrium. He gave them an angry word of caution; they touched their caps in reply, and somewhat slackened their speed, resuming the gallop when he was out of hearing.

Inclosing the cathedral and its precincts on the western side, was a wall, built of red stone. It was only breast high, standing on the cathedral side; but on the other side it descended several feet, to the broad path which ran along the banks of the river. The boys made for this wall and gained it, their faces hot, and their breath gone.

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