CHARLES KINGSLEY

TWO YEARS AGO, VOLUME I

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTORY

It may seem a somewhat Irish method of beginning the story of "Two Years Ago" by a scene which happened but a month since. And yet, will not the story be on that very account a better type of many a man's own experiences! How few of us had learnt the meaning of "Two Years Ago," until this late quiet autumn time; and till Christmas, too, with its gaps in the old ring of friendly faces, never to be filled up again on earth, began to teach us somewhat of its lesson.

Two years ago, while pestilence was hovering over us and ours; while the battle-roar was ringing in our ears; who had time to think, to ask what all that meant; to seek for the deep lesson which we knew must lie beneath? Two years ago was the time for work; for men to do with all their might whatsoever their hands found to do. But now the storm has lulled once more; the air has cleared awhile, and we can talk calmly over all the wonders of that sudden, strange, and sad "Two years ago."

So felt, at least, two friends who went down, just one week before Christmas-day, to Whitbury, in Berkshire. Two years ago had come to one of them, as to thousands more, the crisis of his

life; and he was talking of it with his companion; and was on his way, too, to learn more of that story, which this book contains, and in which he had borne his part.

They were both of them men who would at first sight interest a stranger. The shorter of the two he might have seen before—at picture sales, Royal Academy meetings, dinner parties, evening parties, anywhere and everywhere, in town; for Claude Mellot is a general favourite, and a general guest.

He is a tiny, delicate-featured man, with a look of half-lazy enthusiasm about his beautiful face, which reminds you much of Shelley's portrait; only he has what Shelley had not, clustering auburn curls, and a rich brown beard, soft as silk. You set him down at once as a man of delicate susceptibility, sweetness, thoughtfulness; probably (as he actually is) an artist.

His companion is a man of statelier stamp, tall, dark, and handsome, with a very large forehead; if the face has a fault, it is that the mouth is too small; that, and the expression of face too, and the tone of voice, seem to indicate over-refinement, possibly a too aristocratic exclusiveness. He is dressed like a very fine gentleman indeed, and looks and talks like one. Aristocrat, however, in the common sense of the word, he is not; for he is a native of the Model Republic, and sleeping-partner in a great New York merchant firm.

He is chatting away to Claude Mellot, the artist, about Frémont's election; and on that point seems to be earnest enough, though patient and moderate.

"My dear Claude, our loss is gain. The delay of the next four years was really necessary, that we might consolidate our party. And I leave you to judge, if it has grown to its present size in but a few months, what dimensions it will have attained before the next election. We require the delay, too, to discover who are our really best men; not merely as orators, but as workers; and you English ought to know better than any nation, that the latter class of men are those whom the world most needs—that though Aaron may be an altogether inspired preacher, yet it is only slow-tongued practical Moses, whose spokesman he is, who can deliver Israel from their taskmasters. Besides, my dear fellow, we really want the next four years—'tell it not in Gath'—to look about us and see what is to be done. Your wisest Englishmen justly complain of us, that our 'platform' is as yet a merely negative one; that we define what the South shall not do, but not what the North shall. Ere four years be over, we will have a 'positive platform,' at which you shall have no cause to grumble."

"I still think with Marie, that your 'positive platform' is already made for you, plain as the sun in heaven, as the lightnings of Sinai. Free those slaves at once and utterly!"

"Impatient idealist! By what means? By law, or by force? Leave us to draw a *cordon sanitaire* round the tainted States, and leave the system to die a natural death, as it rapidly will if it be prevented from enlarging its field. Don't fancy that a dream of mine. None know it better than the Southerners themselves. What makes them ready just now to risk honour, justice, even

the common law of nations and humanity, in the struggle for new slave territory? What but the consciousness that without virgin soil, which will yield rapid and enormous profit to slave labour, they and their institution must be ruined!"

"The more reason for accelerating so desirable a consummation, by freeing the slaves at once."

"Humph!" said Stangrave with a smile. "Who so cruel at times as your too benevolent philanthropist? Did you ever count the meaning of those words? Disruption of the Union, an invasion of the South by the North; and an internecine war, aggravated by the horrors of a general rising of the slaves, and such scenes as Hayti beheld sixty years ago. If you have ever read them, you will pause ere you determine to repeat them on a vaster scale."

"It is dreadful, Heaven knows, even in thought! But, Stangrave, can any moderation on your part ward it off? Where there is crime, there is vengeance; and without shedding of blood is no remission of sin."

"God knows! It may be true: but God forbid that I should ever do aught to hasten what may come. Oh, Claude, do you fancy that I, of all men, do not feel at moments the thirst for brute vengeance?"

Claude was silent.

"Judge for yourself, you who know all—what man among us Northerners can feel, as I do, what those hapless men may have deserved?—I who have day and night before me the brand of their cruelty, filling my heart with fire? I need all my strength,

all my reason, at times to say to myself, as I say to others—'Are not these slaveholders men of like passions with yourself? What have they done which you would not have done in their place?' I have never read that key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. I will not even read this Dred, admirable as I believe it to be."

"Why should you?" said Claude. "Have you not a key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, more pathetic than any word of man's or woman's?"

"But I do not mean that! I will not read them, because I have the key to them in my own heart, Claude: because conscience has taught me to feel for the Southerner as a brother, who is but what I might have been; and to sigh over his misdirected courage and energy, not with hatred, not with contempt: but with pity, all the more intense the more he scorns that pity; to long, not merely for the slaves' sake, but for the masters' sake, to see them—the once chivalrous gentlemen of the South—delivered from the meshes of a net which they did not spread for themselves, but which was round their feet, and round their fathers', from the day that they were born. You ask me to destroy these men. I long to save them from their certain doom!"

"You are right, and a better Christian than I am, I believe. Certainly they do need pity, if any sinners do; for slavery seems to be—to judge from Mr. Brooks's triumph—a great moral curse, and a heavier degradation to the slaveholder himself, than it can ever be to the slave."

"Then I would free them from that curse, that degradation.

If the negro asks, 'Am I not a man and a brother?' have they no right to ask it also? Shall I, pretending to love my country, venture on any rash step which may shut out the whole Southern white population from their share in my country's future glory? No; have but patience with us, you comfortable liberals of the Old World, who find freedom ready made to your hands, and we will pay you all. Remember, we are but children yet; our sins are the sins of youth,—greediness, intemperance, petulance, self-conceit. When we are purged from our youthful sins, England will not be ashamed of her child."

"Ashamed of you? I often wish I could make Americans understand the feeling of England to you—the honest pride, as of a mother who has brought into the world the biggest baby that ever this earth beheld, and is rather proud of its stamping about and beating her in its pretty pets. Only the old lady does get a little cross when she hears you talk of the wrongs which you have endured from her, and teaching your children to hate us as their ancient oppressors, on the ground of a foolish war, of which every Englishman is utterly ashamed, and in the result of which he glories really as much as you do."

"Don't talk of 'you,' Claude! You know well what I think on that point. Never did one nation make the *amende honorable* to another more fully and nobly than you have to us; and those who try to keep up the quarrel are—I won't say what. But the truth is, Claude, we have had no real sorrows; and therefore we can afford to play with imaginary ones. God grant that we may not

have our real ones—that we may not have to drink of the cup of which our great mother drank two years ago!"

"It was a wholesome bitter for us; and it may be so for you likewise: but we will have no sad forebodings on the eve of the blessed Christmas-tide. He lives, He loves, He reigns; and all is well, for we are His, and He is ours."

"Ah," said Stangrave, "when Emerson sneered at you English for believing your Old Testament, he little thought that that was the lesson which it had taught you; and that that same lesson was the root of all your greatness. That that belief in God's being, in some mysterious way, the living King of England and of Christendom, has been the very idea which has kept you in peace and safety, now for many a hundred years, moving slowly on from good to better, not without many backslidings and many shortcomings, but still finding out, quickly enough, when you were on the wrong road, and not ashamed to retrace your steps, and to *reform*, as brave strong men should dare to do; a people who have been for many an age in the vanguard of all the nations, and the champions of sure and solid progress throughout the world; because what is new among you is not patched artificially on to the old, but grows organically out of it, with a growth like that of your own English oak, whose every new-year's leaf-crop is fed by roots which burrow deep in many a buried generation, and the rich soil of full a thousand years."

"Stay!" said the little artist. "We are quite conceited enough already, without your eloquent adulation, sir! But there is a

truth in your words. There is a better spirit roused among us, and that not merely of two years ago. I knew this part of the country well in 1846-7-8, and since then, I can bear witness, a spirit of self-reform has been awakened round here, in many a heart which I thought once utterly frivolous. I find, in every circle of every class, men and women asking to be taught their duty, that they may go and do it; I find everywhere schools, libraries, and mechanics' institutes springing up: and rich and poor meeting together more and more in the faith that God has made them all. As for the outward and material improvements —you know as well as I, that since free trade and emigration, the labourers confess themselves better off than they have been for fifty years; and though you will not see in the chalk counties that rapid and enormous agricultural improvement which you will in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, or the Lothians, yet you shall see enough to-day to settle for you the question whether we old-country folk are in a state of decadence and decay. *Par exemple*—"

And Claude pointed to the clean large fields, with their neat close-clipt hedge-rows, among which here and there stood cottages, more than three-fourths of them new.

"Those well-drained fallow fields, ten years ago, were poor clay pastures, fetlock deep in mire six months in the year, and accursed in the eyes of my poor dear old friend, Squire Lavington; because they were so full of old moles'-nests, that they threw all horses down. I am no farmer: but they seem surely to be somewhat altered since then."

As he spoke, they turned off the main line of the rolling clays toward the foot of the chalk hills, and began to brush through short cuttings of blue gault and "green sand," so called by geologists, because its usual colours are bright brown, snow-white, and crimson.

Soon they get glimpses of broad silver Whit, as she slides, with divided streams, through bright water-meadows, and stately groves of poplar, and abele, and pine; while, far aloft upon the left, the downs rise steep, crowned with black fir spinnies, and dotted with dark box and juniper.

Soon they pass old Whitford Priory, with its numberless gables, nestling amid mighty elms, and the Nunpool flashing and roaring as of old, and the broad shallow below sparkling and laughing in the low, but bright December sun.

"So slides on the noble river, for ever changing, and yet for ever the same—always fulfilling its errand, which yet is never fulfilled," said Stangrave,—he was given to half-mystic utterances, and hankerings after Pagan mythology, learnt in the days when he worshipped Emerson, and tried (but unsuccessfully) to worship Margaret Fuller Ossoli,—"Those old Greeks had a deep insight into nature, when they gave to each river not merely a name, but a semi-human personality, a river-god of its own. It may be but a collection of ever-changing atoms of water;—what is your body but a similar collection of atoms, decaying and renewing every moment? Yet you are a person; and is not the river, too, a person—a live thing? It

has an individual countenance which you love, which you would recognise again, meet it where you will; it marks the whole landscape; it determines probably the geography and the society of a whole district. It draws you, too, to itself by an indefinable mesmeric attraction. If you stop in a strange place, the first instinct of your idle half-hour is, to lounge by the river. It is a person to you; you call it—Scotchmen do, at least—she, and not it. How do you know that you are not philosophically correct, and that the river has a spirit as well as you?"

"Humph!" said Claude, who talks mysticism himself by the hour, but snubs it in every one else. "It has trout, at least; and they stand, I suppose, for its soul, as the raisins did for those of Jean Paul's gingerbread bride and bridegroom and peradventure baby."

"Oh you materialist English! sporting-mad all of you, from the duke who shooteth stags to the clod who poacheth rabbits!"

"And who therefore can fight Russians at Inkermann, duke and clod alike, and side by side; never better (says the chronicler of old) than in their first battle. I can neither fight nor fish, and on the whole agree with you: but I think it proper to be as English as I can in the presence of an American."

A whistle—a creak—a jar; and they stop at the little Whitford station, where a cicerone for the vale, far better than Claude was, made his appearance, in the person of Mark Armsworth, banker, railway director, and *de facto* king of Whitbury town, long since elected by universal suffrage (his own vote included)

as permanent *locum tenens* of her gracious Majesty.

He hails Claude cheerfully from the platform, as he waddles about, with a face as of the rising sun, radiant with good fun, good humour, good deeds, good news, and good living. His coat was scarlet once; but purple now. His leathers and boots were doubtless clean this morning; but are now afflicted with elephantiasis, being three inches deep in solid mud, which his old groom is scraping off as fast as he can. His cap is duntled in; his back bears fresh stains of peat; a gentle rain distils from the few angles of his person, and bedews the platform; for Mark Armsworth has "been in Whit" to-day.

All porters and guards touch their hats to him; the station-master rushes up and down frantically, shouting, "Where are those horse-boxes? Now then, look alive!" for Mark is chairman of the line, and everybody's friend beside; and as he stands there being scraped, he finds time to inquire after every one of the officials by turns, and after their wives, children, and sweethearts beside.

"What a fine specimen of your English squire!" says Stangrave.

"He is no squire; he is the Whitbury banker, of whom I told you."

"Armsworth!" said Stangrave, looking at the old man with interest.

"Mark Armsworth himself. He is acting as squire, though, now; for he has hunted the Whitford Priors ever since poor old

Lavington's death."

"Now then—those horse-boxes!"…

"Very sorry, sir; I telegraphed up, but we could get but one down."

"Put the horses into that, then; and there's an empty carriage! Jack, put the hounds into it, and they shall all go second class, as sure as I'm chairman!"

The grinning porters hand the strange passengers in, while Mark counts the couples with his whip-point,—

"Ravager—Roysterer; Melody—Gay-lass; all right. Why, where's that old thief of a Goodman?"

"Went over a gate as soon as he saw the couples; and wouldn't come in at any price, sir," says the huntsman. "Gone home by himself, I expect."

"Goodman, Goodman, boy!" And forthwith out of the station-room slips the noble old hound, grey-nosed, grey-eyebrowed, who has hidden, for purposes of his own, till he sees all the rest safe locked in.

Up he goes to Mark, and begins wriggling against his knees, and looking up as only dogs can. "Oh, want to go first-class with me, eh? Jump in, then!" And in jumps the hound, and Mark struggles after him.

"Hillo, sir! Come out! Here are your betters here before you," as he sees Stangrave, and a fat old lady in the opposite corner.

"Oh, no; let the dog stay!" says Stangrave.

"I shall wet you, sir, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no."

And Mark settles himself, puffing, with the hound's head on his knees, and begins talking fast and loud.

"Well, Mr. Mellot, you're a stranger here. Haven't seen you since poor Miss Honour died. Ah, sweet angel she was! Thought my Mary would never get over it. She's just such another, though I say it, barring the beauty. Goodman, boy! You recollect old Goodman, son of Galloper, that the old squire gave our old squire?"

Claude, of course, knows—as all do who know those parts—who The Old Squire is; long may he live, patriarch of the chase! The genealogy he does not.

"Ah, well—Miss Honour took to the pup, and used to walk him out; and a prince of a hound he is; so now he's old we let him have his own way, for her sake; and nobody'll ever bully *you*, will they, Goodman, my boy?"

"I want to introduce you to a friend of mine."

"Proud to know any friend of yours, sir."

"Mr. Stangrave—Mr. Armsworth. Mr. Stangrave is an American gentleman, who is anxious to see Whitbury and the neighbourhood."

"Well, I shall be happy to show it him, then—can't have a better guide, though I say it—know everything by this time, and everybody, man, woman, and child, as I hope Mr. Stangrave'll find when he gets to know old Mark."

"You must not speak of getting to know you, my dear sir; I

know you intimately already, I assure you; and more, am under very deep obligations to you, which, I regret to say, I can only repay by thanks."

"Obligation to me, my dear sir?"

"Indeed I am: I will tell you all when we are alone." And Stangrave glanced at the fat old woman, who seemed to be listening intently.

"Oh, never mind her," says Armsworth; "deaf as a post: very good woman, but so deaf—ought to speak to her, though"—and, reaching across, to the infinite amusement of his companions, he roared in the fat woman's face, with a voice as of a speaking-trumpet—"Glad to see you, Mrs. Grove! Got those dividends ready for you next time you come into town."

"Yah!" screamed the hapless woman, who (as the rest saw) heard perfectly well. "What do you mean, frightening a lady in that way? Deaf, indeed!"

"Why," roared Mark again, "ain't you Mrs. Grove, of Drytown Dirtywater?"

"No, nor no acquaintance! What business is it of your'n, sir, to go hollering in ladies' faces at your age?"

"Well:—but I'll swear if you ain't her, you're somebody else. I know you as well as the town clock"

"Me? If you must know, sir, I'm Mrs. Pettigrew's mother, the Linendraper's establishment, sir; a-going down for Christmas, sir!"

"Humph!" says Mark: "you see—was sure I knew her—know

everybody here. As I said, if she wasn't Mrs. Grove, she was somebody else. Ever in these parts before?"

"Never: but I have heard a good deal of them; and very much charmed with them I am. I have seldom seen a more distinctive specimen of English scenery."

"And how you are improving round here!" said Claude, who knew Mark's weak points, and wanted to draw him out. "Your homesteads seem all new; three fields have been thrown into one, I fancy, over half the farms."

Mark broke out at once on his favourite topic,—"I believe you! I'm making the mare go here in Whitford, without the money too, sometimes. I'm steward now, bailiff—ha! ha! these four years past—to Mrs. Lavington's Irish husband; I wanted him to have a regular agent, a canny Scot, or Yorkshireman. Faith, the poor man couldn't afford it, and so fell back on old Mark. Paddy loves a job, you know. So I've the votes and the fishing, and send him his rents, and manage all the rest pretty much, my own way."

When the name of Lavington was mentioned, Mark observed Stangrave start; and an expression passed over his face difficult to be defined—it seemed to Mark mingled pride and shame. He turned to Claude, and said, in a low voice, but loud enough for Mark to hear,—

"Lavington? Is this their country also? As I am going to visit the graves of my ancestors, I suppose I ought to visit those of hers."

Mark caught the words which he was not intended to.

"Eh? Sir, do you belong to these parts?"

"My family, I believe, lived in the neighbourhood of Whitbury, at a place called Stangrave-end."

"To be sure! Old farm-house now; fine old oak carving in it, though; fine old family it must have been; church full of their monuments. Hum,—ha! Well! that's pleasant, now! I've often heard there were good old families away there in New England; never thought that there were Whitbury people among them. Hum—well! the world's not so big as people think, after all. And you spoke of the Lavingtons? They are great folks here—or were —" He was going to rattle on: but he saw a pained expression on both the travellers' faces, and Stangrave stopped him, somewhat drily—

"I know nothing of them, I assure you, or they of me. Your country here is certainly charming, and shows little of those signs of decay which some people in America impute to it."

"Decay!" Mark went off at score. "Decay be hanged? There's life in the old dog yet, sir! and dead pigs are looking up since free trade and emigration. Cheap bread and high wages now: and instead of lands going out of cultivation, as they threatened—bosh! there's a greater breadth down in wheat in the vale now than there ever was; and look at the roots. Farmers must farm now, or sink; and by George! they are farming, like sensible fellows: and a fig for that old turnip ghost of Protection! There was a fellow came down from the Carlton—you know what that is!" Stangrave bowed, and smiled assent. "From the Carlton, sir, two

years since, and tried it on, till he fell in with old Mark. I told him a thing or two; among the rest, told him to his face that he was a liar; for he wanted to make farmers believe they were ruined, when he knew they were not; and that he'd get 'em back Protection, when he knew that he couldn't—and, what's more, he didn't mean to. So he cut up rough, and wanted to call me out."

"Did you go?" asked Stangrave, who was fast becoming amused with his man, "I told him that that wasn't my line, unless he'd try Eley's greens at forty yards; and then I was his man: but if he laid a finger on me, I'd give him as sound a horsewhipping, old as I am, as ever man had in his life. And so I would." And Mark looked complacently at his own broad shoulders. "And since then, my lord and I have had it all our own way; and Minchampstead and Co. is the only firm in the vale."

"What's become of a Lord Vieuxbois, who used to live somewhere hereabouts? I used to meet him at Rome."

"Rome?" said Mark solemnly. "Yes; he was too fond of Rome, awhile back: can't see what people want running into foreign parts to look at those poor idolators, and their Punch and Judy plays. Pray for 'em, and keep clear of them, is the best rule:—but he has married my lord's youngest daughter; and three pretty children he has,—ducks of children. Always comes to see me in my shop, when he drives into town. Oh!—he's doing pretty well.—One of these new between-the-stools, Peelites they call them—hope they'll be as good as the name. However, he's a freetrader, because he can't help it. So we have his votes; and as to

his Conservatism, let him conserve hips and haws if he chooses, like a 'pothecary. After all, why pull down anything, before it's tumbling on your head? By the by, sir, as you're a man of money, there's that Stangrave-end farm in the market now. Pretty little investment,—I'd see that you got it cheap; and my lord wouldn't bid against you, of course, as you're a liberal—all Americans, are, I suppose. And so you'd oblige us, as well as yourself, for it would give us another vote for the county."

"Upon my word, you tempt me; but I do not think that this is just the moment for an American to desert his own country, and settle in England. I should not be here now, had I not this autumn done all I could for America in America, and so crossed the sea to serve her, if possible, in England."

"Well, perhaps not; especially if you're a Frémonter."

"I am, I assure you."

"Thought as much, by your looks. Don't see what else an honest man can be just now."

Stangrave laughed. "I hope every one thinks so in England."

"Trust us for that, sir! We know a man when we see him here; I hope they'll do the same across the water."

There was silence for a minute or two; and then Mark began again.

"Look!—there's the farm; that's my lord's. I should like to show you the short-horns there, sir!—all my Lord Ducie's and Sir Edward Knightley's stock; bought a bull-calf of him the other day myself for a cool hundred, old fool that I am. Never mind,

spreads the breed. And here are mills—four pair of new stones. Old Whit don't know herself again. But I dare say they look small enough to you, sir, after your American water-power."

"What of that? It is just as honourable in you to make the most of a small river, as in us to make the most of a large one."

"You speak like a book, sir. By the by, if you think of taking home a calf or two, to improve your New England breed—there are a good many gone across the sea in the last few years—I think we could find you three or four beauties, not so very dear, considering the blood."

"Thanks; but I really am no farmer."

"Well—no offence, I hope: but I am like your Yankees in one thing, you see;—always have an eye to a bit of business. If I didn't, I shouldn't be here now."

"How very tasteful!—our own American shrubs! what a pity that they are not in flower! What is this," asked Stangrave,—"one of your noblemen's parks?"

And they began to run through the cutting in Minchampstead Park, where the owner has concealed the banks of the rail for nearly half a mile, in a thicket of azaleas, rhododendrons, and clambering roses.

"All!—isn't it pretty? His lordship let us have the land for a song; only bargained that we should keep low, not to spoil his view; and so we did; and he's planted our cutting for us. I call that a present to the county, and a very pretty one too! Ah, give me these new brooms that sweep clean!"

"Your old brooms, like Lord Vieuxbois, were new brooms once, and swept well enough five hundred years ago," said Stangrave, who had that filial reverence for English antiquity which sits so gracefully upon many highly educated and far-sighted Americans.

"Worn to the stumps, now, too many of them, sir; and want new-hething, as our broom-squires would say; and I doubt whether most of them are worth the cost of a fresh bind. Not that I can say that of the young lord. He's foremost in all that's good, if he had but money; and when he hasn't, he gives brains. Gave a lecture, in our institute at Whitford, last winter, on the four great Poets. Shot over my head a little, and other people's too: but my Mary—my daughter, sir, thought it beautiful; and there's nothing that she don't know."

"It is very hopeful, to see your aristocracy joining in the general movement, and bringing their taste and knowledge to bear on the lower classes."

"Yes, sir! We're going all right now, in the old country. Only have to steer straight, and not put on too much steam. But give me the new-comers, after all. They may be close men of business;—how else could one live? But when it comes to giving, I'll back them against the old ones for generosity, or taste either. They've their proper pride, when they get hold of the land; and they like to show it, and quite right they. You must see my little place too. It's not in such bad order, though I say it, and am but a country banker: but I'll back my flowers against half the squires round—

my Mary's, that is—and my fruit too.—See, there! There's my lord's new schools, and his model cottages, with more comforts in them, saving the size, than my father's house had; and there's his barrack, as he calls it, for the unmarried men—reading-room, and dining-room, in common; and a library of books, and a sleeping-room for each."

"It seems strange to complain of prosperity," said Stangrave; "but I sometimes regret that in America there is so little room for the very highest virtues; all are so well off, that one never needs to give; and what a man does here for others, they do for themselves."

"So much the better for them. There are other ways of being generous besides putting your hand in your pocket, sir! By Jove! there'll be room enough (if you'll excuse me) for an American to do fine things, as long as those poor negro slaves—"

"I know it; I know it," said Stangrave, in the tone of a man who had already made up his mind on a painful subject, and wished to hear no more of it. "You will excuse me; but I am come here to learn what I can of England. Of my own country I know enough, I trust, to do my duty in it when I return."

Mark was silent, seeing that he had touched a tender place; and pointed out one object of interest after another, as they ran through the flat park, past the great house with its Doric façade, which the eighteenth century had raised above the quiet cell of the Minchampstead recluses.

"It is very ugly," said Stangrave; and truly.

"Comfortable enough, though; and, as somebody said, people live inside their houses, and not outside 'em. You should see the pictures there, though, while you're in the country. I can show you one or two, too, I hope. Never grudge money for good pictures. The pleasantest furniture in the world, as long as you keep them; and if you're tired of them, always fetch double their price."

After Minchampstead, the rail leaves the sands and clays, and turns up between the chalk hills, along the barge river which it has rendered useless, save as a supernumerary trout-stream; and then along Whit, now flowing clearer and clearer, as we approach its springs amid the lofty clowns. On through more water-meadows, and rows of pollard willow, and peat-pits crested with tall golden reeds, and still dykes,—each in summer a floating flower-bed; while Stangrave looks out of the window, his face lighting up with curiosity.

"How perfectly English! At least, how perfectly un-American! It is just Tennyson's beautiful dream—"

> 'On either side the river lie
> Long fields, of barley and of rye,
> Which clothe the wold and meet the sky,
> And through the field the stream runs by,
> To many towered Camelot.'

"Why, what is this?" as they stop again at a station, where the board bears, in large letters, "Shalott."

"Shalott? Where are the 'Four grey walls, and four grey

towers,' which overlook a space of flowers?"

There, upon the little island, are the castle-ruins, now converted into a useful bone-mill. "And the lady?—is that she?"

It was only the miller's daughter, fresh from a boarding-school, gardening in a broad straw-hat.

"At least," said Claude, "she is tending far prettier flowers than ever the lady saw; while the lady herself, instead of weaving and dreaming, is reading Miss Young's novels, and becoming all the wiser thereby, and teaching poor children in Hemmelford National School."

"And where is her fairy knight," asked Stangrave, "whom one half hopes to see riding down from that grand old house which sulks there above among the beech-woods as if frowning on all the change and civilisation below!"

"You do old Sidricstone injustice. Vieuxbois descends from thence, now-a-days, to lecture at mechanics' institutes, instead of the fairy knight, toiling along in the blazing summer weather, sweating in burning metal, like poor Perillus in his own bull."

"Then the fairy knight is extinct in England!" asked Stangrave, smiling.

"No man less; only he (not Vieuxbois, but his younger brother) has found a wide-awake cooler than an iron kettle, and travels by rail when he is at home; and when he was in the Crimea, rode a shaggy pony, and smoked cavendish all through the battle of Inkermann."

"He showed himself the old Sir Lancelot there," said

Stangrave,

"He did. Wherefore the lady married him when the Guards came home; and he will breed prize pigs; and sit at the board of guardians; and take in the Times; clothed, and in his right mind; for the old Berserk spirit is gone out of him; and he is become respectable, in a respectable age, and is nevertheless just as brave a fellow as ever."

"And so all things are changed, except the river; where still—

> 'Willows whiten, aspens quiver.
> Little breezes dash and shiver
> On the stream that runneth ever.'"

"And," said Claude, smiling, "the descendants of mediaeval trout snap at the descendants of mediaeval flies, spinning about upon just the same sized and coloured wings on which their forefathers spun a thousand years ago; having become, in all that while, neither bigger nor wiser."

"But is it not a grand thought," asked Stangrave,—"the silence and permanence of nature amid the perpetual flux and noise of human life?—a grand thought that one generation goeth and another cometh, and the earth abideth for ever?"

"At least it is so much the worse for the poor old earth, if her doom is to stand still, while man improves and progresses from age to age."

"May I ask one question, sir?" said Stangrave, who saw that their conversation was puzzling their jolly companion. "Have you

heard any news yet of Mr. Thurnall!"

Mark looked him full in the face.

"Do you know him?"

"I did, in past years, most intimately."

"Then you knew the finest fellow, sir, that ever walked mortal earth."

"I have discovered that, sir, as well as you. I am under obligations to that man which my heart's blood will not repay. I shall make no secret of telling you what they are at a fit time."

Mark held out his broad red hand, and grasped Stangrave's till the joints cracked: his face grew as red as a turkey-cock's; his eyes filled with tears.

"His father must hear that! Hang it; his father must hear that! And Grace too!"

"Grace!" said Claude: "and is she with you?"

"With the old man, the angel! tending him night and day."

"And as beautiful as ever?"

"Sir!" said Mark solemnly, "when any one's soul is as beautiful as hers is, one never thinks about her face."

"Who is Grace?" asked Stangrave.

"A saint and a heroine!" said Claude. "You shall know all; for you ought to know. But you have no news of Tom; and I have none either. I am losing all hope now."

"I'm not, sir!" said Mark fiercely. "Sir, that boy's not dead; he can't be. He has more lives than a cat, and if you know anything of him, you ought to know that."

"I have good reason to know it, none more: but—"

"But, sir! But what? Harm come to him, sir? The Lord wouldn't harm him for his father's sake; and as for the devil!—I tell you, sir, if he tried to fly away with him, he'd have to drop him before he'd gone a mile!" And Mark began blowing his nose violently, and getting so red that he seemed on the point of going into a fit.

"Tell you what it is, gentlemen," said he at last, "you come and stay with me, and see his father. It will comfort the old man—and—and comfort me too; for I get down-hearted about him at times."

"Strange attraction there was about that man," says Stangrave, *sotto voce* to Claude.

"He was like a son to him—"

"Now, gentlemen. Mr. Mellot, you don't hunt?"

"No, thank you," said Claude.

"Mr. Stangrave does, I'll warrant."

"I have at various times, both in England and in Virginia."

"Ah! Do they keep up the real sport there, eh? Well that's the best thing I've heard of them, sir!—My horses are yours!—A friend of that boy, sir, is welcome to lame the whole lot, and I won't grumble. Three days a week, sir. Breakfast at eight, dinner at 5.30—none of your late London hours for me, sir; and after it the best bottle of port, though I say it, short of my friend S–'s, at Reading."

"You must accept," whispered Claude, "or he will be angry."

So Stangrave accepted; and all the more readily because he wanted to hear from the good banker many things about the lost Tom Thurnall.

* * * * *

"Here we are," cries Mark. "Now, you must excuse me: see to yourselves. I see to the puppies. Dinner at 5.30, mind! Come along, Goodman, boy!"

"Is this Whitbury?" asks Stangrave.

It was Whitbury, indeed. Pleasant old town, which slopes down the hill-side to the old church,—just "restored," though by Lords Minchampstead and Vieuxbois, not without Mark Armsworth's help, to its ancient beauty of grey flint and white clunch chequer-work, and quaint wooden spire. Pleasant churchyard round it, where the dead lie looking up to the bright southern sun, among huge black yews, upon their knoll of white chalk above the ancient stream. Pleasant white wooden bridge, with its row of urchins dropping flints upon the noses of elephantine trout, or fishing over the rail with crooked pins, while hapless gudgeon come dangling upward between stream and sky, with a look of sheepish surprise and shame, as of a school-boy caught stealing apples, in their foolish visages. Pleasant new national schools at the bridge end, whither the urchins scamper at the sound of the two o'clock bell. Though it be an ugly pile enough of bright red brick, it is doing its work, as Whitbury

folk know well by now. Pleasant, too, though still more ugly, those long red arms of new houses which Whitbury is stretching out along its fine turnpikes,—especially up to the railway station beyond the bridge, and to the smart new hotel, which hopes (but hopes in vain) to outrival the ancient "Angler's Rest." Away thither, and not to the Railway Hotel, they trundle in a fly—leaving Mark Armsworth all but angry because they will not sleep, as well as breakfast, lunch, and dine with him daily,—and settle in the good old inn, with its three white gables overhanging the pavement, and its long lattice window buried deep beneath them, like—so Stangrave says—to a shrewd kindly eye under a bland white forehead.

No, good old inn; not such shall be thy fate, as long as trout are trout, and men have wit to catch them. For art thou not a sacred house? Art thou not consecrate to the Whitbury brotherhood of anglers! Is not the wainscot of that long low parlour inscribed with many a famous name? Are not its walls hung with many a famous countenance? Has not its oak-ribbed ceiling rung, for now a hundred years, to the laughter of painters, sculptors, grave divines (unbending at least there), great lawyers, statesmen, wits, even of Foote and Quin themselves; while the sleek landlord wiped the cobwebs off another magnum of that grand old port, and took in all the wisdom with a quiet twinkle of his sleepy eye? He rests now, good old man, among the yews beside his forefathers; and on his tomb his lengthy epitaph, writ by himself; for Barker was a poet in his way.

Some people hold the same epitaph to be irreverent, because in a list of Barker's many blessings occurs the profane word "trout:" but those trout, and the custom which they brought him, had made the old man's life comfortable, and enabled him to leave a competence for his children; and why should not a man honestly thank Heaven for that which he knows has done him good, even though it be but fish?

He is gone: but the Whit is not, nor the Whitbury club; nor will, while old Mark Armsworth is king in Whitbury, and sits every evening in the Mayfly season at the table head, retailing good stones of the great anglers of his youth,—names which you, reader, have heard many a time,—and who could do many things besides handling a blow-line. But though the club is not what it was fifty years ago,—before Norway and Scotland became easy of access,—yet it is still an important institution of the town, to the members whereof all good subjects touch their hats; for does not the club bring into the town good money, and take out again only fish, which cost nothing in the breeding? Did not the club present the Town-hall with a portrait of the renowned fishing Sculptor? and did it not (only stipulating that the school should be built beyond the bridge to avoid noise) give fifty pounds to the said school but five years ago, in addition to Mark's own hundred?

But enough of this:—only may the Whitbury club, in recompense for my thus handing them down to immortality, give me another day next year, as they gave me this: and may the

Mayfly be strong on, and a south-west gale blowing!

In the course of the next week, in many a conversation, the three men compared notes as to the events of two years ago; and each supplied the other with new facts, which shall be duly set forth in this tale, saving and excepting, of course, the real reason why everybody did everything. For—as everybody knows who has watched life—the true springs of all human action are generally those which fools will not see, which wise men will not mention; so that, in order to present a readable tragedy of Hamlet, you must always "omit the part of Hamlet,"—and probably the ghost and the queen into the bargain.

CHAPTER I.
POETRY AND PROSE

Now, to tell my story—if not as it ought to be told, at least as I can tell it,—I must go back sixteen years,—to the days when Whitbury boasted of forty coaches per diem, instead of one railway,—and set forth how, in its southern suburb, there stood two pleasant houses side by side, with their gardens sloping down to the Whit, and parted from each other only by the high brick fruit-wall, through which there used to be a door of communication; for the two occupiers were fast friends. In one of these two houses, sixteen years ago, lived our friend Mark Armsworth, banker, solicitor, land-agent, churchwarden, guardian of the poor, justice of the peace,—in a word, viceroy of Whitbury town, and far more potent therein than her gracious majesty Queen Victoria. In the other, lived Edward Thurnall, esquire, doctor of medicine, and consulting physician of all the country round. These two men were as brothers; and had been as brothers for now twenty years, though no two men could be more different, save in the two common virtues which bound them to each other; and that was, that they both were honest and kind-hearted men. What Mark's character was, and is, I have already shown, and enough of it, I hope, to make my readers like the good old banker: as for Doctor Thurnall, a purer or

gentler soul never entered a sick-room, with patient wisdom in his brain, and patient tenderness in his heart. Beloved and trusted by rich and poor, he had made to himself a practice large enough to enable him to settle two sons well in his own profession; the third and youngest was still in Whitbury. He was something of a geologist, too, and a botanist, and an antiquarian; and Mark Armsworth, who knew, and knows still, nothing of science, looked up to the Doctor as an inspired sage, quoted him, defended his opinion, right or wrong, and thrust him forward at public meetings, and in all places and seasons, much to the modest Doctor's discomfiture.

The good Doctor was sitting in his study on the morning on which my tale begins; having just finished his breakfast, and settled to his microscope in the bay-window opening on the lawn.

A beautiful October morning it was; one of those in which Dame Nature, healthily tired with the revelry of summer, is composing herself, with a quiet satisfied smile, for her winter's sleep. Sheets of dappled cloud were sliding slowly from the west; long bars of hazy blue hung over the southern chalk downs which gleamed pearly grey beneath the low south-eastern sun. In the vale below, soft white flakes of mist still hung over the water meadows, and barred the dark trunks of the huge elms and poplars, whose fast-yellowing leaves came showering down at the very rustle of the western breeze, spotting the grass below. The river swirled along, glassy no more, but dingy grey with autumn rains and rotten leaves. All beyond the garden told of autumn;

bright and peaceful, even in decay: but up the sunny slope of the garden itself, and to the very window sill, summer still lingered. The beds of red verbena and geranium were still brilliant, though choked with fallen leaves of acacia and plane; the canary plant, still untouched by frost, twined its delicate green leaves, and more delicate yellow blossoms, through the crimson lacework of the Virginia-creeper; and the great yellow noisette swung its long canes across the window, filling all the air with fruity fragrance.

And the good Doctor, lifting his eyes from his microscope, looked out upon it all with a quiet satisfaction, and though his lips did not move, his eyes seemed to be thanking God for it all; and thanking Him, too, perhaps, that he was still permitted to gaze upon that fair world outside. For as he gazed, he started, as if with sudden pain, and passed his hand across his eyes, with something like a sigh, and then looked at the microscope no more, but sat, seemingly absorbed in thought, while upon his delicate toil-worn features, and high, bland, unwrinkled forehead, and the few soft grey locks which not time—for he was scarcely fifty-five—but long labour of brain, had spared to him, there lay a hopeful calm, as of a man who had nigh done his work, and felt that he had not altogether done it ill;—an autumnal calm, resigned, yet full of cheerfulness, which harmonised fitly with the quiet beauty of the decaying landscape before him.

"I say, daddy, you must drop that microscope, and put on your shade. You are ruining those dear old eyes of yours again, in spite of what Alexander told you."

The Doctor took up the green shade which lay beside him, and replaced it with a sigh and a smile.

"I must use the old things now and then, till you can take my place at the microscope, Tom; or till we have, as we ought to have, a first-rate analytical chemist settled in every county-town, and paid, in part at least, out of the county rates."

The "Tom" who had spoken was one of two youths of eighteen, who stood in opposite corners of the bay-window, gazing out upon the landscape, but evidently with thoughts as different as were their complexions.

Tom was of that bull-terrier type so common in England; sturdy, and yet not coarse; middle-sized, deep-chested, broad-shouldered; with small, well-knit hands and feet, large jaw, bright grey eyes, crisp brown hair, a heavy projecting brow; his face full of shrewdness and good-nature, and of humour withal, which might be at whiles a little saucy and sarcastic, to judge from the glances which he sent forth from the corners of his wicked eyes at his companion on the other side of the window. He was evidently prepared for a day's shooting, in velveteen jacket and leather gaiters, and stood feeling about in his pockets to see whether he had forgotten any of his tackle, and muttering to himself amid his whistling,—"Capital day. How the birds will lie. Where on earth is old Mark? Why must he wait to smoke his cigar after breakfast? Couldn't he have had it in the trap, the blessed old chimney that he is?"

The other lad was somewhat taller than Tom, awkwardly and

plainly dressed, but with a highly-developed Byronic turn-down collar, and long black curling locks. He was certainly handsome, as far as the form of his features and brow; and would have been very handsome, but for the bad complexion which at his age so often accompanies a sedentary life, and a melancholic temper. One glance at his face was sufficient to tell that he was moody, shy, restless, perhaps discontented, perhaps ambitious and vain. He held in his hand a volume of Percy's Reliques, which he had just taken down from Thurnall's shelves; yet he was looking not at it, but at the landscape. Nevertheless, as he looked, one might have seen that he was thinking not so much of it as of his own thoughts about it. His eye, which was very large, dark, and beautiful, with heavy lids and long lashes, had that dreamy look so common among men of the poetic temperament; conscious of thought, if not conscious of self; and as his face kindled, and his lips moved more and more earnestly, he began muttering to himself half-aloud, till Tom Thurnall burst into an open laugh.

"There's Jack at it again! making poetry, I'll bet my head to a China orange."

"And why not?" said his father, looking up quietly, but reprovingly, as Jack winced and blushed, and a dark shade of impatience passed across his face.

"Oh! it's no concern of mine. Let everybody please themselves. The country looks very pretty, no doubt, I can tell that; only my notion is, that a wise man ought to go out and enjoy it—as I am going to do—with a gun on his shoulder, instead of

poking at home like a yard-dog, and behowling oneself in po-o-oetry;" and Tom lifted up his voice into a doleful mastiff's howl.

"Then be as good as your word, Tom, and let every one please themselves," said the Doctor; but the dark youth broke out in sudden passion.

"Mr. Thomas Thurnall! I will not endure this! Why are you always making me your butt,—insulting me, sir, even in your father's house? You do not understand me; and I do not care to understand you. If my presence is disagreeable to you, I can easily relieve you of it!" and the dark youth turned to go away like Naaman, in a rage.

"Stop, John," said the Doctor. "I think it would be the more courteous plan for Tom to relieve you of his presence. Go and find Mark, Tom; and please to remember that John Briggs is my guest, and that I will not allow any rudeness to him in my house."

"I'll go, daddy, to the world's end, if you like, provided you won't ask me to write poetry. But Jack takes offence so soon. Give us your hand, old tinder-box! I meant no harm, and you know it."

John Briggs took the proffered hand sulkily enough; and Tom went out of the glass door, whistling as merry as a cricket.

"My dear boy," said the Doctor, when they were alone, "you must try to curb this temper of yours. Don't be angry with me, but—"

"I should be an ungrateful brute if I was, sir. I can bear anything from you. I ought to, for I owe everything to you; but—"

"But, my dear boy—'better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.'"

John Briggs tapped his foot on the ground impatiently. "I cannot help it, sir. It will drive me mad, I think at times,—this contrast between what I might be, and what I am, I can bear it no longer—mixing medicines here, when I might be educating myself, distinguishing myself—for I can do it; have you not said as much yourself to me again and again?"

"I have, of course; but—"

"But, sir, only hear me. It is in vain to ask me to command my temper while I stay here. I am not fit for this work; not fit for the dull country. I am not appreciated, not understood; and I shall never be, till I can get to London,—till I can find congenial spirits, and take my rightful place in the great parliament of mind. I am Pegasus in harness, here!" cried the vain, discontented youth. "Let me but once get there,—amid art, civilisation, intellect, and the company of men like that old Mermaid Club, to hear and to answer—

> 'words,
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As one had put his whole soul in a jest;'—

and then you shall see whether Pegasus has not wings, and can use them too!" And he stopped suddenly, choking with emotion, his nostril and chest dilating, his foot stamping impatiently on the ground.

The Doctor watched him with a sad smile.

"Do you remember the devil's temptation of our Lord—'Cast thyself down from hence; for, it is written, He shall give His angels charge over thee?"

"I do; but what has that to do with me?"

"Throw away the safe station in which God has certainly put you, to seek, by some desperate venture, a new, and, as you fancy, a grander one for yourself? Look out of that window, lad; is there not poetry enough, beauty and glory enough, in that sky, those fields,—ay, in every fallen leaf,—to employ all your powers, considerable as I believe them to be? Why spurn the pure, quiet, country life, in which such men as Wordsworth have been content to live and grow old?"

The boy shook his head like an impatient horse. "Too slow—too slow for me, to wait and wait, as Wordsworth did, through long years of obscurity, misconception, ridicule. No. What I have, I must have at once; and, if it must be, die like Chatterton—if only, like Chatterton, I can have my little day of success, and make the world confess that another priest of the beautiful has arisen among men."

Now, it can scarcely be denied, that the good Doctor was guilty of a certain amount of weakness in listening patiently to all this rant. Not that the rant was very blamable in a lad of eighteen; for have we not all, while we are going through our course of Shelley, talked very much the same abominable stuff, and thought ourselves the grandest fellows upon earth on account

of that very length of ear which was patent to all the world save our precious selves; blinded by our self-conceit, and wondering in wrath why everybody was laughing at us? But the truth is, the Doctor was easy and indulgent to a fault, and dreaded nothing so much, save telling a lie, as hurting people's feelings; besides, as the acknowledged wise man of Whitbury, he was a little proud of playing the Maecenas; and he had, and not unjustly, a high, opinion of John Briggs's powers. So he had lent him books, corrected his taste in many matters, and, by dint of petting and humouring, had kept the wayward youth half-a-dozen times from running away from his father, who was an apothecary in the town, and from the general practitioner, Mr. Bolus, under whom John Briggs fulfilled the office of co-assistant with Tom Thurnall. Plenty of trouble had both the lads given the Doctor in the last five years, but of very different kinds, Tom, though he was in everlasting hot water, as the most incorrigible scapegrace for ten miles round, contrived to confine his naughtiness strictly to play-hours, while he learnt everything which was to be learnt with marvellous quickness, and so utterly fulfilled the ideal of a bottle-boy (for of him, too, as of all things, I presume, an ideal exists eternally in the supra-sensual Platonic universe), that Bolus told his father,—"In hours, sir, he takes care of my business as well as I could myself; but out of hours, sir, I believe he is possessed by seven devils."

John Briggs, on the other hand, sinned in the very opposite direction. Too proud to learn his business, and too proud also

to play the scapegrace as Tom did, he neglected alike work and amusement, for lazy mooning over books, and the dreams which books called up. He made perpetual mistakes in the shop; and then considered himself insulted by an "inferior spirit," if poor Bolus called him to account for it. Indeed, had it not been for many applications of that "precious oil of unity," with which the good Doctor daily anointed the creaking wheels of Whitbury society, John Briggs and his master would have long ago "broken out of gear," and parted company in mutual wrath and fury. And now, indeed, the critical moment seemed come at last; for the lad began afresh to declare his deliberate intention of going to London to seek his fortune, in spite of parents and all the world.

"To live on here, and never to rise, perhaps, above the post of correspondent to a country newspaper!—To publish a volume of poems by subscription and have to go round, hat in hand, begging five shillings' worth of patronage from every stupid country squire—intolerable! I must go! Shakespeare was never Shakespeare till he fled from miserable Stratford, to become at once the friend of Sidney and Southampton."

"But John Briggs will be John Briggs still, if he went to the moon," shouted Tom Thurnall, who had just come up to the window. "I advise you to change that name of yours, Jack, to Sidney, or Percy, or Walker if you like; anything but the illustrious surname of Briggs the poisoner!"

"What do you mean, sir!" thundered John, while the Doctor himself jumped up; for Tom was red with rage.

"What is this, Tom!"

"What's that?" screamed Tom, bursting, in spite of his passion into roars of laughter. "What's that?"—and he held out a phial "Smell it! taste it! Oh, if I had but a gallon of it to pour down your throat! That's what you brought Mark Armsworth last night, instead of his cough mixture, while your brains were wool-gathering after poetry!"

"What is it?" gasped John Briggs.

"Miss Twiddle's black dose;—strong enough to rive the gizard out of an old cock!"

"It's not!"

"It is!" roared Mark Armsworth from behind as he rushed in, in shooting-jacket and gaiters, his red face redder with fury, his red whiskers standing on end with wrath like a tiger's, his left hand upon his hapless hypogastric region, his right brandishing an empty glass, which smelt strongly of brandy and water. "It is! And you've given me the cholera, and spoilt my day's shooting; and if I don't serve you out for it there's no law in England!"

"And spoilt my day's shooting, too; the last I shall get before I'm off to Paris! To have a day in Lord Minchampstead's preserves, and to be baulked of it in this way!"

John Briggs stood as one astonied.

"If I don't serve you out for this!" shouted Mark.

"If I don't serve you out for it! You shall never hear the last of it!" shouted Tom. "I'll take to writing, after all I'll put it in the papers. I'll make the name of Briggs the poisoner an abomination

in the land."

John Briggs turned and fled.

"Well!" said Mark, "I must spend my morning at home, I suppose. So I shall just sit and chat with you, Doctor."

"And I shall go and play with Molly," said Tom, and walked off to Armsworth's garden.

"I don't care for myself so much," said Mark; "but I'm sorry the boy's lost his last day's shooting."

"Oh, you will be well enough by noon, and can go then; and as for the boy, it is just as well for him not to grow too fond of sports in which he can never indulge."

"Never indulge? Why not? He vows he'll go to the Rocky Mountains, and shoot a grizzly bear; and he'll do it."

"He has a great deal to do before that, poor fellow; and a great deal to learn."

"And he'll learn it. You're always down-hearted about the boy, Doctor."

"I can't help feeling the parting with him: and for Paris, too:—such a seat of temptation. But it is his own choice; and, after all, he must see temptation, wherever he goes."

"Bless the man! if a boy means to go to the bad, he'll go just as easily in Whitbury as in Paris. Give the lad his head, and never fear; he'll fall on his legs like a cat, I'll warrant him, whatever happens. He's as steady as old Time, I tell you; there's a grey head on green shoulders there."

"Steady?" said the Doctor, with a smile and a shrug.

"Steady, I tell you at heart; as prudent as you or I; and never lost you a farthing, that you know. Hang good boys! give me one who knows how to be naughty in the right place; I wouldn't give sixpence for a good boy; I never was one myself, and have no faith in them. Give me the lad who has more steam up than he knows what to do with, and must needs blow off a little in larks. When once he settles down on the rail, it'll send him along as steady as a luggage train. Did you never hear a locomotive puffing and roaring before it gets under way? well, that's what your boy is doing. Look at him now, with my poor little Molly."

Tom was cantering about the garden with a little weakly child of eight in his arms. The little thing was looking up in his face with delight, screaming at his jokes.

"You are right, Mark: the boy's heart cannot be in the wrong place while he is so fond of little children."

"Poor Molly! How she'll miss him! Do you think she'll ever walk, Doctor?"

"I do indeed."

"Hum! ah! well! if she grows up, Doctor, and don't go to join her poor dear mother up there, I don't know that I'd wish her a better husband than your boy."

"It would be a poor enough match for her."

"Tut! she'll have the money, and he the brains. Mark my words, Doctor, that boy'll be a credit to you; he'll make a noise in the world, or I know nothing. And if his fancy holds seven years hence, and he wants still to turn traveller, let him. If he's minded

to go round the world, I'll back him to go, somehow or other, or I'll eat my head, Ned Thurnall!"

The Doctor acquiesced in this hopeful theory, partly to save an argument; for Mark's reverence for his opinion was confined to scientific matters; and he made up to his own self-respect by patronising the Doctor, and, indeed, taking him sometimes pretty sharply to task on practical matters.

"Best fellow alive is Thurnall; but not a man of business, poor fellow. None of your geniuses are. Don't know what he'd do without me."

So Tom carried Mary about all the morning, and went to Minchampstead in the afternoon, and got three hours' good shooting; but in the evening he vanished; and his father went into Armsworth's to look for him.

"Why do you want to know where he is?" replied Mark, looking sly. "However, as you can't stop him now, I'll tell you. He is just about this time sewing up Briggs's coat-sleeves, putting copperas into his water jug, and powdered galls on his towel, and making various other little returns for this morning's favour."

"I dislike practical jokes."

"So do I; especially when they come in the form of a black dose. Sit down, old boy, and we'll have a game at cribbage."

In a few minutes Tom came in—"Here's a good riddance. The poisoner has fabricated his pilgrim's staff, to speak scientifically, and perambulated his calcareous strata."

"What!"

"Cut his stick, and walked his chalks; and is off to London."

"Poor boy," said the Doctor, much distressed.

"Don't cry, daddy; you can't bring him back again. He's been gone these four hours. I went to his room, at Bolus's, about a little business, and saw at once that he had packed up, and carried off all he could. And, looking about, I found a letter directed to his father. So to his father I took it; and really I was sorry for the poor people. I left them all crying in chorus."

"I must go to them at once;" and up rose the Doctor.

"He's not worth the trouble you take for him—the addle-headed, ill-tempered coxcomb," said Mark. "But it's just like your soft-heartedness. Tom, sit down, and finish the game with me."

So vanished from Whitbury, with all his aspirations, poor John Briggs; and save an occasional letter to his parents, telling them that he was alive and well, no one heard anything of him for many a year. The Doctor tried to find him out in London, again and again; but without success. His letters had no address upon them, and no clue to his whereabouts could be found.

And Tom Thurnall went to Paris, and became the best pistol-shot and billiard-player in the Quartier Latin; and then went to St. Mumpsimus's Hospital in London, and became the best boxer therein, and captain of the eight-oar, besides winning prizes and certificates without end, and becoming in due time the most popular house-surgeon in the hospital: but nothing could keep him permanently at home. Stay drudging in London he would

not. Settle down in a country practice he would not. Cost his father a farthing he would not. So he started forth into the wide world with nothing but his wits and his science, as anatomical professor to a new college in some South American republic. Unfortunately, when he got there, he found that the annual revolution had just taken place, and that the party who had founded the college had been all shot the week before. Whereat he whistled, and started off again, no man knew whither.

"Having got round half the world, daddy," he wrote home, "it's hard if I don't get round the other half. So don't expect me till you see me; and take care of your dear old eyes."

With which he vanished into infinite space, and was only heard of by occasional letters dated from the Rocky Mountains (where he did shoot a grizzly bear), the Spanish West Indies, Otahiti, Singapore, the Falkland Islands, and all manner of unexpected places; sending home valuable notes (sometimes accompanied by valuable specimens), zoological and botanical; and informing his father that he was doing very well; that work was plentiful, and that he always found two fresh jobs before he had finished one old one.

His eldest brother, John, died meanwhile. His second brother, William, was in good general practice in Manchester. His father's connections supported him comfortably; and if the old Doctor ever longed for Tom to come home, he never hinted it to the wanderer, but bade him go on and prosper, and become (which he gave high promise of becoming) a distinguished man of

science. Nevertheless the old man's heart sank at last, when month after month, and at last two full years, had passed without any letter from Tom.

At last, when full four years were past and gone since Tom started for South America, he descended from the box of the day-mail, with a serene and healthful countenance; and with no more look of interest in his face than if he had been away on a two days' visit, shouldered his carpet-bag, and started for his father's house. He stopped, however; as there appeared from the inside of the mail a face which he must surely know. A second look told him that it was none other than John Briggs. But how altered! He had grown up into a very handsome man,—tall and delicate-featured, with long black curls, and a black moustache. There was a slight stoop about his shoulders, as of a man accustomed to too much sitting and writing; and he carried an eye-glass, whether for fashion's sake, or for his eyes' sake, was uncertain. He was wrapt in a long Spanish cloak, new and good; wore well-cut trousers, and (what Tom, of course, examined carefully) French boots, very neat, and very thin. Moreover, he had lavender kid-gloves on. Tom looked and wondered, and walked half round him, sniffing like a dog when he examines into the character of a fellow dog.

"Hum!—his mark seems to be at present P.P.—prosperous party: so there can be no harm in renewing our acquaintance. What trade on earth does he live by, though? Editor of a newspaper? or keeper of a gambling-table? Begging his pardon,

he looks a good deal more like the latter than the former. However—"

And he walked up and offered his hand, with "How d'e do, Briggs? Who would have thought of our falling from the skies against each other in this fashion?"

Mr. Briggs hesitated a moment, and then took coldly the offered hand.

"Excuse me; but the circumstances of my visit here are too painful to allow me to wish for society."

And Mr. Briggs withdrew, evidently glad to escape.

"Has he vampoosed with the contents of a till, that he wishes so for solitude?" asked Tom; and, shouldering his carpet-bag a second time, with a grim inward laugh, he went to his father's house, and hung up his hat in the hall, just as if he had come in from a walk, and walked into the study; and not finding the old man, stepped through the garden to Mark Armsworth's, and in at the drawing-room window, frightening out of her wits a short, pale, ugly girl of seventeen, whom he discovered to be his old playfellow, Mary. However, she soon recovered her equanimity: he certainly never lost his.

"How d'e do, darling? How you are grown! and how well you look! How's your father? I hadn't anything particular to do, so I thought I'd come home and see you all, and get some fishing."

And Mary, who had longed to throw her arms round his neck, as of old, and was restrained by the thought that she was grown a great girl now, called in her father, and all the household; and

after a while the old Doctor came home, and the fatted calf was killed, and all made merry over the return of this altogether unrepentant prodigal son, who, whether from affectation, or from that blunted sensibility which often comes by continual change and wandering, took all their affection and delight with the most provoking coolness.

Nevertheless, though his feelings were not "demonstrative," as fine ladies say now-a-days, he evidently had some left in some corner of his heart; for after the fatted calf was eaten, and they were all settled in the Doctor's study, it came out that his carpet-bag contained little but presents, and those valuable ones—rare minerals from the Ural for his father; a pair of Circassian pistols for Mark; and for little Mary, to her astonishment, a Russian malachite bracelet, at which Mary's eyes opened wide, and old Mark said—

"Pretty fellow you are, to go fooling your money away like that. What did that gimcrack cost, pray, sir?"

"That is no concern of yours, sir, or mine either; for I didn't pay for it."

"Oh!" said Mary, doubtingly.

"No, Mary. I killed a giant, who was carrying off a beautiful princess; and this, you see, he wore as a ring on one of his fingers: so I thought it would just suit your wrist."

"Oh, Tom—Mr. Thurnall—what nonsense!"

"Come, come," said his father: "instead of telling us these sort of stories, you ought to give an account of yourself, as you seem

quite to forget that we have not heard from you for more than two years."

"Whew! I wrote," said Tom, "whenever I could. However, you can have all my letters in one now."

So they sat round the fire, and Tom gave an account of himself; while his father marked with pride that the young man had grown and strengthened in body and in mind; and that under that nonchalant, almost cynical outside, the heart still beat honest and kindly. For before Tom began, he would needs draw his chair closer to his father's, and half-whispered to him,—

"This is very jolly. I can't be sentimental, you know. Knocking about the world has beat all that out of me: but it is very comfortable, after all, to find oneself with a dear old daddy and a good coal fire."

"Which of the two could you best do without?"

"Well, one takes things as one finds them. It don't do to look too deeply into one's feelings. Like chemicals, the more you analyse them, the worse they smell."

So Tom began his story.

"You heard from me at Bombay; after I'd been up to the Himalaya with an old Mumpsimus friend?"

"Yes."

"Well, I worked my way to Suez on board a ship whose doctor had fallen ill; and then I must needs see a little of Egypt; and there robbed was I, and nearly murdered, too; but I take a good deal of killing."

"I'll warrant you do," said Mark, looking at him with pride.

"So I begged my way to Cairo; and there I picked up a Yankee —a New Yorker, made of money, who had a yacht at Alexandria, and travelled *en prince*; and nothing would serve him but I must go with him to Constantinople; but there he and I quarrelled— more fools, both of us! I wrote to you from Constantinople."

"We never got the letter."

"I can't help that; I wrote. But there I was on the wide world again. So I took up with a Russian prince, whom I met at a gambling-table in Pera,—a mere boy, but such a plucky one,— and went with him to Circassia, and up to Astrakhan, and on to the Kirghis steppes; and there I did see snakes."

"Snakes?" says Mary. "I should have thought you had seen plenty in India already."

"Yes, Mary! but these were snakes spiritual and metaphorical. For, poking about where we had no business, Mary, the Tartars caught us, and tied us to their horses' tails, after giving me this scar across the cheek, and taught us to drink mares' milk, and to do a good deal of dirty work beside. So there we stayed with them six months, and observed their manners, which were none, and their customs, which were disgusting, as the midshipman said in his diary; and had the honour of visiting a pleasant little place in No-man's Land, called Khiva, which you may find in your atlas, Mary; and of very nearly being sold for slaves into Persia, which would not have been pleasant; and at last, Mary, we ran away—or rather, rode away, on two razor-backed Calmuc

ponies, and got back to Russia, *viâ* Orenberg,—for which consult your atlas again; so the young prince was restored to the bosom of his afflicted family; and a good deal of trouble I had to get him safe there, for the poor boy's health gave way. They wanted me to stay with them, and offered to make my fortune."

"I'm so glad you didn't," said Mary.

"Well—I wanted to see little Mary again, and two worthy old gentlemen beside, you see. However, those Russians are generous enough. They filled my pockets, and heaped me with presents; that bracelet among them. What's more, Mary, I've been introduced to old Nick himself, and can testify, from personal experience, to the correctness of Shakspeare's opinion that the prince of darkness is a gentleman."

"And now you are going to stay at home?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, if you'll take me in, daddy, I'll send for my traps from London, and stay a month or so."

"A month!" cried the forlorn father.

"Well, daddy, you see, there is a chance of more fighting in Mexico, and I shall see such practice there; beside meeting old friends who were with me in Texas. And—and I've got a little commission, too, down in Georgia, that I should like to go and do."

"What is that?"

"Well,—it's a long story and a sad one: but there was a poor Yankee surgeon with the army in Circassia—a Southerner, and a very good fellow; and he had taken a fancy to some coloured

girl at home—poor fellow, he used to go half mad about her sometimes, when he was talking to me, for fear she should have been sold—sent to the New Orleans market, or some other devilry; and what could I say to comfort him? Well, he got his mittimus by one of Schamyl's bullets; and when he was dying, he made me promise (I hadn't the heart to refuse) to take all his savings, which he had been hoarding for years for no other purpose, and see if I couldn't buy the girl, and get her away to Canada. I was a fool for promising. It was no concern of mine; but the poor fellow wouldn't die in peace else. So what must be, must."

"Oh, go! go!" said Mary. "You will let him go, Doctor Thurnall, and see the poor girl free? Think how dreadful it must be to be a slave."

"I will, my little Miss Mary; and for more reasons than you think of.

Little do you know how dreadful it is to be a slave."

"Hum!" said Mark Armsworth. "That's a queer story. Tom, have you got the poor fellow's money? Didn't lose it when you were taken by those Tartars?"

"Not I. I wasn't so green as to carry it with me. It ought to have been in England six months ago. My only fear is, it's not enough."

"Hum!" said Mark. "How much more do you think you'll want?"

"Heaven knows. There is a thousand dollars; but if she be half as beautiful as poor Wyse used to swear she was, I may want

more than double that."

"If you do, pay it, and I'll pay you again. No, by George!" said Mark, "no one shall say that while Mark Armsworth had a balance at his bankers' he let a poor girl—" and, recollecting Mary's presence, he finished his sentence by sundry stamps and thumps on the table.

"You would soon exhaust your balance, if you set to work to free all poor girls who are in the same case in Georgia," said the Doctor.

"Well, what of that? Them I don't know of, and so I ain't responsible for them; but this one I do know of, and so—there, I can't argue; but, Tom, if you want the money, you know where to find it."

"Very good. By the by—I forgot it till this moment—who should come down in the coach with me but the lost John Briggs."

"He is come too late, then," said the Doctor. "His poor father died this morning."

"Ah! then Briggs knew that he was ill? That explains the Manfredic mystery and gloom with which he greeted me."

"I cannot tell. He has written from time to time, but he has never given any address; so that no one could write in return."

"He may have known. He looked very downcast. Perhaps that explains his cutting me dead."

"Cut you?" cried Mark. "I dare say he's been doing something he's ashamed of, and don't want to be recognised. That fellow has been after no good all this while, I'll warrant. I always say he's

connected with the swell mob, or croupier at a gambling-table, or something of that kind. Don't you think it's likely, now?"

Mark was in the habit of so saying for the purpose of tormenting the Doctor, who held stoutly to his old belief, that John Briggs was a very clever man, and would turn up some day as a distinguished literary character.

"Well," said Tom, "honest or not, he's thriving; came down inside the coach, dressed in the distinguished foreigner style, with lavender kid gloves, and French boots."

"Just like a swell pickpocket," said Mark. "I always told you so, Thurnall."

"He had the old Byron collar, and Raphael hair, though."

"Nasty, effeminate, un-English foppery," grumbled Mark; "so he may be in the scribbling line after all."

"I'll go and see if I can find him," quoth the Doctor.

"Bother you," said Mark, "always running out o' nights after somebody else's business, instead of having a jolly evening. You stay, Tom, like a sensible fellow, and tell me and Mary some more travellers' lies. Had much sporting, boy?"

"Hum! I've shot and hunted every beast, I think, shootable and huntable, from a humming-bird to an elephant; and I had some splendid fishing in Canada; but, after all, give me a Whitbury trout, on a single-handed Chevalier. We'll at them to-morrow, Mr. Armsworth."

"We will, my boy! never so many fish in the river as this year, or in season so early."

The good Doctor returned; but with no news which could throw light on the history of the now mysterious Mr. John Briggs. He had locked himself into the room with his father's corpse, evidently in great excitement and grief; spent several hours in walking up and down there alone; and had then gone to an attorney in the town, and settled everything about the funeral "in the handsomest way," said the man of law; "and was quite the gentleman in his manner, but not much of a man of business; never had even thought of looking for his father's will; and was quite surprised when I told him that there ought to be a fair sum —eight hundred or a thousand, perhaps, to come in to him, if the stock and business were properly disposed of. So he went off to London by the evening mail, and told me to address him to the post-office in some street off the Strand. Queer business, sir, isn't it?"

John Briggs did not reappear till a few minutes before his father's funeral, witnessed the ceremony evidently with great sorrow, bowed off silently all who attempted to speak to him, and returned to London by the next coach—leaving matter for much babble among all Whitbury gossips. One thing at least was plain, that he wished to be forgotten in his native town; and forgotten he was, in due course of time.

Tom Thurnall stayed his month at home, and then went to America; whence he wrote home, in about six months, a letter, of which only one paragraph need interest us,

"Tell Mark I have no need for his dollars. I have done the deed;

and, thanks to the underground railway, done it nearly gratis; which was both cheaper than buying her, and infinitely better for me; so that she has all poor Wyse's dollars to start with afresh in Canada. I write this from New York. I could accompany her no farther; for I must get back to the South in time for the Mexican expedition."

Then came a long and anxious silence; and then a letter, not from Mexico but from California,—one out of several which had been posted; and then letters, more regularly from Australia. Sickened with Californian life, he had crossed the Pacific once more, and was hard at work in the diggings, doctoring and gold-finding by turns.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss," said his father.

"He has the pluck of a hound, and the cunning of a fox," said Mark; "and he'll be a credit to you yet."

And Mary prayed every morning and night for her old playfellow; and so the years slipped on till the autumn of 1853.

As no one has heard of Tom now for eight months and more (the pulse of Australian postage being of a somewhat intermittent type), we may as well go and look for him.

A sheet of dark rolling ground, quarried into a gigantic rabbit burrow, with hundreds of tents and huts dotted about among the heaps of rubbish; dark evergreen forests in the distance, and, above all, the great volcanic mountain of Buninyong towering far aloft—these are the "Black Hills of Ballarat;" and that windlass at that shaft's mouth belongs in part to Thomas Thurnall.

At the windlass are standing two men, whom we may have seen in past years, self-satisfied in countenance, and spotless in array, sauntering down Piccadilly any July afternoon, or lounging in Haggis's stable-yard at Cambridge any autumn morning. Alas! how changed from the fast young undergraduates, with powers of enjoyment only equalled by their powers of running into debt, are those two black-bearded and mud-bespattered ruffians, who once were Smith and Brown of Trinity. Yet who need pity them, as long as they have stouter limbs, healthier stomachs, and clearer consciences, than they have had since they left Eton at seventeen? Would Smith have been a happier man as a briefless barrister in a dingy Inn of Law, peeping now and then into third-rate London society, and scribbling for the daily press! Would Brown have been a happier man had he been forced into those holy orders for which he never felt the least vocation, to pay off his college debts out of his curate's income, and settle down on his lees, at last, in the family living of Nomansland-cum-Clayhole, and support a wife and five children on five hundred a-year, exclusive of rates and taxes? Let them dig, and be men.

The windlass rattles and the rope goes down. A shout from the bottom of the shaft proclaims all right; and in due time, sitting in the noose of the rope, up comes Thomas Thurnall, bare-footed and bare-headed, in flannel trousers and red jersey, begrimed with slush and mud; with a mahogany face, a brick-red neck, and a huge brown beard, looking, to use his own expression, "as jolly as a sandboy."

"A letter for you, Doctor, from Europe."

Tom takes it, and his countenance falls; for it is black-edged and black-sealed. The handwriting is Mary Armsworth's.

"I suppose the old lady who is going to leave me a fortune is dead," says he drily, and turns away to read.

"Bad luck, I suppose," he says to himself, "I have not had any for full six months, so I suppose it is time for Dame Fortune to give me a sly stab again. I only hope it is not my father; for, begging the Dame's pardon, I can bear any trick of hers but that." And he sets his teeth doggedly, and reads.

"My dear Mr. Thurnall,—My father would have written himself, but he thought, I don't know why, that I could tell you better than he. Your father is quite well in health,"—Thurnall breathes freely again—"but he has had heavy trials since your poor brother William's death."

Tom opens his eyes and sets his teeth more firmly. "Willy dead? I suppose there is a letter lost: better so; better to have the whole list of troubles together, and so get them sooner over. Poor Will!"

"Your father caught the scarlet fever from him, while he was attending him, and was very ill after he came back. He is quite well again now; but if I must tell you the truth, the disease has affected his eyes. You know how weak they always were, and how much worse they have grown of late years; and the doctors are afraid that he has little chance of recovering the sight, at least of the left eye."

"Recovering? He's blind, then." And Tom set his teeth more tightly than ever. He felt a sob rise in his throat, but choked it down, shaking his head like an impatient bull.

"Wait a bit, Tom," said he to himself, "before you have it out with Dame Fortune. There's more behind, I'll warrant. News like this lies in pockets, and not in single nuggets." And he read on—

"And—for it is better you should know all—something has happened to the railroad in which he had invested so much. My father has lost money in it also; but not much: but I fear that your poor dear father is very much straitened. My father is dreadfully vexed about it, and thinks it all his fault in not having watched the matter more closely, and made your father sell out in time: and he wants your father to come and live with us: but he will not hear of it. So he has given up the old house, and taken one in Water Street, and, oh! I need not tell you that we are there every day, and that I am trying to make him as happy as I can—but what can I do? And then followed kind womanly commonplaces, which Tom hurried over with fierce impatience.

"He wants you to come home; but my father has entreated him to let you stay. You know, while we are here, he is safe; and my father begs you not to come home, if you are succeeding as well as you have been doing."

There was much more in the letter, which I need not repeat; and, after all, a short postscript, by Mark himself, followed:—

"Stay where you are, boy, and keep up heart; while I have a pound, your father shall have half of it; and you know Mark

Armsworth."

He walked away slowly into the forest. He felt that the crisis of his life was come; that he must turn his hand henceforth to quite new work; and as he went he "took stock," as it were, of his own soul, to see what point he had attained—what he could do.

Fifteen years of adventure had hardened into wrought metal a character never very ductile. Tom was now, in his own way, an altogether accomplished man of the world, who knew (at least in all companies and places where he was likely to find himself) exactly what to say, to do, to make, to seek, and to avoid. Shifty and thrifty as old Greek, or modern Scot, there were few things he could not invent, and perhaps nothing he could not endure. He had watched human nature under every disguise, from the pomp of the ambassador to the war-paint of the savage, and formed his own clear, hard, shallow, practical estimate thereof. He looked on it as his raw material, which he had to work up into subsistence and comfort for himself. He did not wish to live on men, but live by them he must; and for that purpose he must study them, and especially their weaknesses. He would not cheat them; for there was in him an innate vein of honesty, so surly and explosive, at times, as to give him much trouble. The severest part of his self-education had been the repression of his dangerous inclination to call a sham a sham on the spot, and to answer fools according to their folly. That youthful rashness, however, was now well-nigh subdued, and Tom could flatter and bully also, when it served his turn—as who cannot? Let him

that is without sin among my readers, cast the first stone. Self-conscious he was, therefore, in every word and action; not from morbid vanity, but a necessary consequence of his mode of life. He had to use men, and therefore to watch how he used them; to watch every word, gesture, tone of voice, and, in all times and places, do the fitting thing. It was hard work: but necessary for a man who stood alone and self-poised in the midst of the universe; fashioning for himself everywhere, just as far as his arm could reach, some not intolerable condition; depending on nothing but himself, and caring for little but himself and the father whom, to do him justice, he never forgot. If I wished to define Tom Thurnall by one epithet, I should call him specially an ungodly man—were it not that scriptural epithets have, now-a-days, such altogether conventional and official meanings, that one fears to convey, in using them, some notion quite foreign to the truth. Tom was certainly not one of those ungodly whom David had to deal with of old, who robbed the widow, and put the fatherless to death. His morality was as high as that of the average; his sense of honour far higher. He was generous and kind-hearted. No one ever heard him tell a lie; and he had a blunt honesty about him, half real, because he liked to be honest, and yet half affected too, because he found it pay in the long run, and because it threw off their guard the people whom he intended to make his tools. But of godliness in its true sense—of belief that any Being above cared for him, and was helping him in the daily business of life—that it was worth while asking that Being's

advice, or that any advice would be given if asked for; of any practical notion of a Heavenly Father, or a Divine education—Tom was as ignorant as thousands of respectable people who go to church every Sunday, and read good books, and believe firmly that the Pope is Antichrist. He ought to have learnt it, no doubt; for his father was a religious man: but he had not learnt it—any more than thousands learn it, who have likewise religious parents. He had been taught, of course, the common doctrines and duties of religion; but early remembrances had been rubbed out, as off a schoolboy's slate, by the mere current of new thoughts and objects, in his continual wanderings. Disappointments he had had, and dangers in plenty; but only such as rouse a brave and cheerful spirit to bolder self-reliance and invention; not those deep sorrows of the heart which leave a man helpless in the lowest pit, crying for help from without, for there is none within. He had seen men of all creeds, and had found in all alike (so he held) the many rogues, and the few honest men. All religions were, in his eyes, equally true and equally false. Superior morality was owing principally to the influences of race and climate; and devotional experiences (to judge, at least, from American camp-meetings and popish-cities) the results of a diseased nervous system.

Upon a man so hard and strong this fearful blow had fallen, and, to do him justice, he took it like a man. He wandered on and on for an hour or more, up the hills, and into the forest, talking to himself.

"Poor old Willy! I should have liked to have looked into his

honest face before he went, if only to make sure that we were good friends. I used to plague him sadly with my tricks. But what is the use of wishing for what cannot be? I recollect I had just the same feeling when John died; and yet I got over it after a time, and was as cheerful as if he were alive again, or had never lived at all. And so I shall get over this. Why should I give way to what I know will pass, and is meant to pass? It is my father I feel for. But I couldn't be there; and it is no fault of mine that I was not there. No one told me what was going to happen; and no one could know: so again,—why grieve over what can't be helped?"

And then, to give the lie to all his cool arguments, he sat down among the fern, and burst into a violent fit of crying. "Oh, my poor dear old daddy!"

Yes; beneath all the hard crust of years, that fountain of life still lay pure as when it came down from heaven—love for his father.

"Come, come, this won't do; this is not the way to take stock of my goods, either mental or worldly. I can't cry the dear old man out of this scrape."

He looked up. The sun was setting. Beneath the dark roof of evergreens the eucalyptus boles stood out, like basalt pillars, black against a background of burning flame. The flying foxes shot from tree to tree, and moths as big as sparrows whirred about the trunks, one moment black against the glare beyond, and vanishing the next, like imps of darkness, into their native gloom. There was no sound of living thing around, save the ghastly rattle

of the dead bark-tassels which swung from every tree, and far away, the faint clicking of the diggers at their work, like the rustle of a gigantic ant-hill. Was there one among them all who cared for him? who would not forget him in a week with—"Well, he was pleasant company, poor fellow," and go on digging without a sigh? What, if it were his fate to die, as he had seen many a stronger man, there in that lonely wilderness, and sleep for ever, unhonoured and unknown, beneath that awful forest roof, while his father looked for bread to others' hands?

No man was less sentimental, no man less superstitious than Thomas Thurnall; but crushed and softened—all but terrified (as who would not have been?)—by that day's news, he could not struggle against the weight of loneliness which fell upon him. For the first and last time, perhaps, in his life, he felt fear; a vague, awful dread of unseen and inevitable possibilities. Why should not calamity fall on him, wave after wave? Was it not falling on him already? Why should he not grow sick to-morrow, break his leg, his neck—why not? What guarantee had he in earth or heaven that he might not be "snuffed out silently," as he had seen hundreds already, and die and leave no sign? And there sprang up in him at once the intensest yearning after his father and the haunts of his boyhood, and the wildest dread that he should never see them. Might not his father be dead ere he could return?—if ever he did return. That twelve thousand miles of sea looked to him a gulf impassable. Oh, that he were safe at home! that he could start that moment! And for one minute a helplessness, as

of a lost child, came over him.

Perhaps it had been well for him had he given that feeling vent, and, confessing himself a lost child, cried out of the darkness to a Father; but the next minute he had dashed it proudly away.

"Pretty baby I am, to get frightened, at my time of life, because I find myself in a dark wood—and the sun shining all the while as jollily as ever away there in the west! It is morning somewhere or other now, and it will be morning here again to-morrow. 'Good times and bad times, and all times pass over;'—I learnt that lesson out of old Bewick's vignettes, and it has stood me in good stead this many a year, and shall now. Die? Nonsense. I take more killing than that comes to. So for one more bout with old Dame Fortune. If she throws me again, why, I'll get up again, as I have any time these fifteen years. Mark's right. I'll stay here and work till I make a hit, or luck runs dry, and then home and settle; and, meanwhile, I'll go down to Melbourne to-morrow, and send the dear old man two hundred pounds; and then back again here, and to it again."

And with a fate-defiant smile, half bitter and half cheerful, Tom rose and went down again to his mates, and stopped their inquiries by—"What's done can't be mended, and needn't be mentioned; whining won't make me work the harder, and harder than ever I must work."

Strange it is, how mortal man, "who cometh up and is cut down like the flower," can thus harden himself into stoical security, and count on the morrow, which may never come. Yet

so it is; and, perhaps, if it were not so, no work would get done on earth,—at least by the many who know not that God is guiding them, while they fancy that they are guiding themselves.

CHAPTER II.
STILL LIFE

I must now, if I am to bring you to "Two years ago," and to my story, as it was told to me, ask you to follow me into the good old West Country, and set you down at the back of an old harbour pier; thirty feet of grey and brown boulders, spotted aloft with bright yellow lichens, and black drops of tar, polished lower down by the surge of centuries, and towards the foot of the wall roughened with crusts of barnacles, and mussel-nests in crack and cranny, and festoons of coarse dripping weed.

On a low rock at its foot, her back resting against the Cyclopean wall, sits a young woman of eight-and-twenty, soberly, almost primly dressed, with three or four tiny children clustering round her. In front of them, on a narrow spit of sand between the rocks, a dozen little girls are laughing, romping, and pattering about, turning the stones for "shannies" and "bullies," and other luckless fish left by the tide; while the party beneath the pier wall look steadfastly down into a little rock-pool at their feet,—full of the pink and green and purple cut-work of delicate weeds and coralline, and starred with great sea-dahlias, crimson and brown and grey, and with the waving snake-locks of the Cercus, pale blue, and rose-tipped like the fingers of the dawn. One delicate Medusa is sliding across the pool, by slow pantings

of its crystal bell; and on it the eyes of the whole group are fixed, —for it seems to be the subject of some story which the village schoolmistress is finishing in a sweet, half-abstracted voice,—

"And so the cruel soldier was changed into a great rough red starfish, who goes about killing the poor mussels, while nobody loves him, or cares to take his part; and the poor little girl was changed into a beautiful bright jelly-fish, like that one, who swims about all day in the pleasant sunshine, with a red cross stamped on its heart."

"Oh, mistress, what a pretty story!" cry the little ones, with tearful eyes. "And what shall we be changed to when we die?"

"If we will only be good we shall go up to Jesus, and be beautiful angels, and sing hymns. Would that it might be soon, soon; for you and me, and all!" And she draws the children, to her, and looks upward, as if longing to bear them with her aloft.

Let us leave the conversation where it is, and look into the face of the speaker, who, young as she is, has already meditated so long upon the mystery of death that it has grown lovely in her eyes.

Her figure is tall, graceful, and slight, the severity of its outlines suiting well with the severity of her dress, with the brown stuff gown and plain grey whittle. Her neck is long, almost too long: but all defects are forgotten in the first look at her face. We can see it fully, for her bonnet lies beside her on the rock.

The masque, though thin, is perfect. The brow, like that of Greek statue, looks lower than it really is, for the hair springs

from below the bend of the forehead. The brain is very long, and sweeps backward and upward in grand curves, till it attains above the ears a great expanse and height. She should be a character more able to feel than to argue; full of all a woman's veneration, devotion, love of children,—perhaps, too, of a woman's anxiety.

The nose is slightly aquiline; the sharp-cut nostrils indicate a reserve of compressed strength and passion; the mouth is delicate; the lips, which are full and somewhat heavy, not from coarseness, but rather from languor, show somewhat of both the upper and the under teeth. Her eyes are bent on the pool at her feet; so that we can see nothing of them but the large sleepy lids, fringed with lashes so long and dark that the eye looks as if it had been painted, in the Eastern fashion, with antimony; the dark lashes, dark eyebrows, dark hair, crisped (as West-country hair so often is) to its very roots, increase the almost ghostlike paleness of the face, not sallow, not snow-white, but of a clear, bloodless, waxen hue.

And now she lifts her eyes,—dark eyes, of preternatural largeness; brilliant, too, but not with the sparkle of the diamond; brilliant as deep clear wells are, in which the mellow moonlight sleeps fathom-deep between black walls of rock; and round them, and round the wide-opened lips, and arching eyebrow, and slightly wrinkled forehead, hangs an air of melancholy thought, vague doubt, almost of startled fear; then that expression passes, and the whole face collapses into a languor of patient sadness, which seems to say,—"I cannot solve the mystery. Let Him solve

it as seems good to Him."

The pier has, as usual, two stages; the upper and narrower for a public promenade, the lower and broader one for business. Two rough collier-lads, strangers to the place, are lounging on the wall above, and begin, out of mere mischief, dropping pebbles on the group below.

"Hillo! you young rascals," calls an old man lounging like them on the wall; "if you don't drop that, you're likely to get your heads broken."

"Will you do it?"

"I would thirty years ago; but I'll find a dozen in five minutes who will do it now. Here, lads! here's two Welsh vagabonds pelting our schoolmistress."

This is spoken to a group of Sea-Titans, who are sitting about on the pier-way behind him, in red caps, blue jackets, striped jerseys, bright brown trousers, and all the picturesque comfort of a fisherman's costume, superintending the mending of a boat.

Up jump half-a-dozen off the logs and baulkings, where they have been squatting, doubled up knee to nose, after the fashion of their class, and a volley of execrations, like a storm of grape, almost blows the two offenders off the wall. The bolder, however, lingers, anathematising in turn; whereon a black-bearded youth, some six feet four in height, catches up an oar, makes a sweep at the shins of the lad above his head, and brings him writhing down upon the upper pier-way, whence he walks off howling, and muttering threats of "taking the law." In vain;—there is not

a magistrate within ten miles; and custom, Lynch-law, and the coast-guard lieutenant, settle all matters in Aberalva town, and do so easily enough; for the petty crimes which fill our gaols are all unknown among those honest Vikings' sons; and any man who covets his neighbour's goods, instead of stealing them has only to go and borrow them, on condition, of course, of lending in his turn.

"What's that collier-lad hollering about, Captain Willis?" asks Mr. Tardrew, steward to Lord Scoutbush, landlord of Aberalva, as he comes up to the old man.

"Gentleman Jan cut him over, for pelting the schoolmistress below here."

"Serve him right; he'll have to cut over that curate next, I reckon."

"Oh, Mr. Tardrew, don't you talk so; the young gentleman is as kind a man as I ever saw, and comes in and out of our house like a lamb."

"Wolf in sheep's clothing," growls Tardrew.

"What d'ye think he says to me last week? Wanted to turn the schoolmistress out of her place because she went to chapel sometimes."

"I know, I know," replied Willis, in the tone of a man who wished to avoid a painful subject. "And what did you answer, then, Mr. Tardrew?"

"I told him he might if he liked; but he'd make the place too hot to hold him, if he hadn't done it already, with his bowings and

his crossings, and his chantings, and his Popish Gregories,—and tells one he's no Papist; called him Pope Gregory himself. What do we want with popes' tunes here, instead of the Old Hundredth and Martyrdom? I should like to see any Pope of the lot make a tune like them."

Captain Willis listened with a face half sad, half slily amused. He and Tardrew were old friends; being the two most notable persons in the parish, save Jones the lieutenant, Heale the doctor, and another gentleman, of whom we shall speak presently. Both of them too, were thorough-going Protestants, and though Churchmen, walked sometimes into the Brianite Chapel of an afternoon, and thought it no sin. But each took the curate's "Puseyism" in a different way, being two men as unlike each other as one could well find.

Tardrew—steward to Lord Scoutbush, the absentee landlord,—was a shrewd, hard-bitten, choleric old fellow, of the shape, colour, and consistence of a red brick; one of those English types which Mr. Emerson has so well hit off in his rather confused and contradictory "Traits:"—

"He hides virtues under vices, or, rather, under the semblance of them. It is the misshapen, hairy, Scandinavian Troll again who lifts the cart out of the mire, or threshes the corn which ten day-labourers could not end: but it is done in the dark, and with muttered maledictions. He is a churl with a soft place in his heart, whose speech is a brash of bitter waters, but who loves to help you at a pinch. He says, No; and serves you, and his thanks

disgust you." Such, was Tardrew,—a true British bulldog, who lived pretty faithfully up to his Old Testament, but had, somehow, forgotten the existence of the New.

Willis was a very different and a very much nobler person; the most perfect specimen which I ever have met (for I knew him well, and loved him) of that type of British sailor which good Captain Marryat has painted in his Masterman Ready, and painted far better than I can, even though I do so from life. A tall and graceful old man, though stooping much from lumbago and old wounds; with snow-white hair and whiskers, delicate aquiline features, the manners of a nobleman, and the heart of a child. All children knew that latter fact, and clung to him instinctively. Even "the Boys," that terrible Berserk-tribe, self-organised, self-dependent, and bound together in common iniquities and the dread of common retribution, who were in Aberalva, as all fishing towns, the torment and terror of all douce fogies, male and female,—even the Boys, I say, respected Captain Willis, so potent was the influence of his gentleness; nailed not up his shutters, nor tied fishing-lines across his doorway; tail-piped not his dog, nor sent his cat to sea on a barrel-stave; nor put live crabs into his pocket, nor dead dog-fish into his well; yea, even when judgment, too long provoked, made bare her red right hand, and the lieutenant vowed by his commission that he would send half-a-dozen of them to the treadmill, they would send up a deputation to "beg Captain Willis to beg the schoolmistress to beg them off." For between Willis and that fair young creature a friendship had

grown up, easily to be understood. Willis was one of those rare natures upon whose purity no mire can cling; who pass through the furnace, and yet not even the smell of fire has passed upon them. Bred, almost born, on board a smuggling cutter, in the old war-times; then hunting, in the old coast-blockade service, the smugglers among whom he had been trained; watching the slow horrors of the Walcheren; fighting under Collingwood and Nelson, and many another valiant Captain; lounging away years of temptation on the West-Indian station, as sailing-master of a ship-of-the-line; pensioned comfortably now for many a year in his native town, he had been always the same gentle, valiant, righteous man; sober in life, strict in duty, and simple in word; a soul as transparent as crystal, and as pure. He was the oracle of Aberalva now; and even Lieutenant Brown would ask his opinion, —non-commissioned officer though he was,—in a tone which was all the more patronising, because he stood a little in awe of the old man.

But why, when the boys wanted to be begged off, was the schoolmistress to be their advocate? Because Grace Harvey exercised, without intending anything of the kind, an almost mesmeric influence on every one in the little town. Goodness rather than talent had given her wisdom, and goodness rather than courage a power of using that wisdom, which, to those simple, superstitious folk, seemed altogether an inspiration. There was a mystery about her, too, which worked strongly on the hearts of the West-country people. She was supposed to be

at times "not right;" and wandering intellect is with them, as with many primitive peoples, an object more of awe than of pity. Her deep melancholy alternated with bursts of wild eloquence, with fantastic fables, with entreaties and warnings against sin, full of such pity and pathos that they melted, at times, the hardest hearts. A whole world of strange tales, half false, half true, had grown up around her as she grew. She was believed to spend whole nights in prayer; to speak with visitors from the other world; even to have the power of seeing into futurity. The intensity of her imagination gave rise to the belief that she had only to will, and she could see whom she would, and all that they were doing, even across the seas; her exquisite sensibility, it was whispered, made her feel every bodily suffering she witnessed, as acutely as the sufferer's self, and in the very limb in which he suffered. Her deep melancholy was believed to be caused by some dark fate—by some agonising sympathy with evil-doers; and it was sometimes said in Aberalva,—"Don't do that, for poor Grace's sake. She bears the sins of all the parish."

So it befell that Grace Harvey governed, she knew not how or why, all hearts in that wild simple fishing-town. Rough men, fighting on the quay, shook hands at Grace's bidding. Wives who could not lure their husbands from the beer-shop, sent Grace in to fetch them home, sobered by shame: and woe to the stranger who fancied that her entrance into that noisy den gave him a right to say a rough word to the fair girl! The maidens, instead of envying her beauty, made her the confidant of all their loves; for though

many a man would gladly have married her, to woo her was more than any dared; and Gentleman Jan himself, the rightful bully of the quay, as being the handsomest and biggest man for many a mile, beside owning a tidy trawler and two good mackerel-boats, had said openly, that if any man had a right to her, he supposed he had; but that he should as soon think of asking her to marry him, as of asking the moon.

But it was in the school, in the duty which lay nearest to her, that Grace's inward loveliness shone most lovely. Whatever dark cloud of melancholy lay upon her own heart, she took care that it should never overshadow one of those young innocents, whom she taught by love and ruled by love, always tender, always cheerful, even gay and playful; punishing, when she rarely punished, with tears and kisses. To make them as happy as she could in a world where there was nothing but temptation, and disappointment, and misery; to make them "fit for heaven," and then to pray that they might go thither as speedily as possible, this had been her work for now seven years; and that Manichaeism which has driven darker and harder natures to destroy young children, that they might go straight to bliss, took in her the form of outpourings of gratitude (when the first natural tears were dried), as often as one of her little lambs was "delivered out of the miseries of this sinful world." But as long as they were in the world, she was their guardian angel; and there was hardly a mother in Aberalva who did not confess her debt to Grace, not merely for her children's scholarship, but for their characters.

Frank Headley the curate, therefore, had touched altogether the wrong chord when he spoke of displacing Grace. And when, that same afternoon, he sauntered down to the pier-head, wearied with his parish work, not only did Tardrew stump away in silence as soon as he appeared, but Captain Willis's face assumed a grave and severe look, which was not often to be seen on it.

"Well, Captain Willis?" said Frank, solitary and sad; longing for a talk with someone, and not quite sure whether he was welcome.

"Well, sir?" and the old man lifted his hat, and made one of his princely bows. "You look tired, sir; I am afraid you're doing too much."

"I shall have more to do, soon," said the curate, his eye glancing towards the schoolmistress, who, disturbed by the noise above, was walking slowly up the beach, with a child holding to every finger, and every fold of her dress.

Willis saw the direction of his eye, and came at once to the point, in his gentle, straightforward fashion.

"I hear you have thoughts of taking the school from her, sir?"

"Why—indeed—I shall be very sorry; but if she will persist in going to the chapel, I cannot overlook the sin of schism."

"She takes the children to church twice a Sunday, don't she? And teaches them all that you tell her—"

"Why—yes—I have taken the religious instruction almost into my own hands now."

Willis smiled quietly.

"You'll excuse an old sailor, sir; but I think that's more than mortal man can do. There's no hour of the day but what she's teaching them something. She's telling them Bible stories now, I'll warrant, if you could hear her."

Frank made no answer.

"You wouldn't stop her doing that? Oh, sir," and the old man spoke with a quiet earnestness which was not without its effect, "just look at her now, like the Good Shepherd with His lambs about His feet, and think whether that's not much too pretty a sight to put an end to, in a poor sinful world like this."

"It is my duty," said Frank, hardening himself. "It pains me exceedingly, Willis;—I hope I need not tell you that."

"If I know aught of Mr. Headley's heart by his ways, you needn't indeed, sir."

"But I cannot allow it.—Her mother a class leader among these Dissenters, and one of the most active of them, too.—The school next door to her house. The preacher, of course, has influence there, and must have. How am I to instil Church principles into them, if he is counteracting me the moment my back is turned? I have made up my mind, Willis, to do nothing in a hurry. Lady-day is past, and she must go on till Midsummer; then I shall take the school into my own hands, and teach them myself, for I can pay no mistress or master; and Mr. St. Just—"

Frank checked himself as he was going to speak the truth; namely, that his sleepy old absentee rector, Lord Scoutbush's uncle, would yawn and grumble at the move, and wondering why

Frank "had not the sense to leave ill alone," would give him no manner of assistance beyond his pittance of eighty pounds a-year, and five pounds at Christmas to spend on the poor.

"Excuse me, sir, I don't doubt that you'll do your best in teaching, as you always do: but I tell you honestly, you'll get no children to teach."

"No children?"

"Their mothers know the worth of Grace too well, and the children too, sir; and they'll go to her all the same, do what you will; and never a one will enter the church door from that day forth."

"On their own heads be it!" said Frank, a little testily; "but I should not have fancied Miss Harvey the sort of person to set up herself in defiance of me."

"The more reason, sir, if you'll forgive me, for your not putting upon her."

"I do not want to put upon her or any one. I will do everything. I will—I do—work day and night for these people, Mr. Willis. I tell you, as I would my own father. I don't think I have another object on earth—if I have, I hope I shall forget it—than the parish: but Church principles I must carry out."

"Well, sir, certainly no man ever worked here as you do. If all had been like you, sir, there would not be a Dissenter here now; but excuse me, sir, the Church is a very good thing, and I keep to mine, having served under her Majesty, and her Majesty's forefathers, and learnt to obey orders, I hope; but don't you think,

sir, you're taking it as the Pharisees took the Sabbath-day?"

"How then!"

"Why, as if man was made for the Church, and not the Church for man."

"That is a shrewd thought, at least. Where did you pick it up?"

"'Tis none of my own, sir; a bit of wisdom that my maid let fall; and it has stuck to me strangely ever since."

"Your maid?"

"Yes, Grace there. I always call her my maid; having no father, poor thing, she looks up to me as one, pretty much,—the dear soul. Oh, sir! I hope you'll think over this again, before you do anything. It's done in a day: but years won't undo it again."

So Grace's sayings were quoted against him. Her power was formidable enough, if she dare use it. He was silent awhile, and then—

"Do you think she has heard of this—of my—"

"Honesty's the best policy, sir: she has; and that's the truth. You know how things get round."

"Well; and what did she say?"

"I'll tell you her very words, sir; and they were these, if you'll excuse me. 'Poor dear gentleman,' says she, 'if he thinks chapel-going so wrong, why does he dare drive folks to chapel? I wonder, every time he looks at that deep sea, he don't remember what the Lord said about it, and those who cause his little ones to offend.'"

Frank was somewhat awed. The thought was new; the application of the text, as his own scholarship taught him, even

more exact than Grace had fancied.

"Then she was not angry?"

"She, sir! You couldn't anger her if you tore her in pieces with hot pincers, as they did those old martyrs she's always telling about."

"Good-bye, Willis," said Frank, in a hopeless tone of voice, and sauntered to the pier-end, down the steps, and along the lower pier-way, burdened with many thoughts. He came up to the knot of chatting sailors. Not one of them touched his cap, or moved out of the way for him. The boat lay almost across the whole pier-way; and he stopped, awkwardly enough, for there was not room to get by.

"Will you be so kind as to let me pass?" asked he, meekly enough. But no one stirred.

"Why don't you get up, Tom?" asked one.

"I be lame."

"So be I."

"The gentleman can step over me, if he likes," said big Jan; a proposition the impossibility whereof raised a horse-laugh.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourselves, lads?" said the severe voice of Willis, from above. The men rose sulkily; and Frank hastened on, as ready to cry as ever he had been in his life. Poor fellow! he had been labouring among these people for now twelve months, as no man had ever laboured before, and he felt that he had not won the confidence of a single human being,—not even of the old women, who took his teaching for the sake of his charity,

and who scented popery, all the while, in words in which there was no popery, and in doctrines which were just the same, on the whole, as those of the dissenting preacher, simply because he would sprinkle among them certain words and phrases which had become "suspect," as party badges. His church was all but empty; the general excuse was, that it was a mile from the town: but Frank knew that that was not the true reason; that all the parish had got it into their heads that he had a leaning to popery; that he was going over to Rome; that he was probably a Jesuit in disguise.

Now, be it always remembered, Frank Headley was a good man, in every sense of the word. He had nothing, save the outside, in common with those undesirable coxcombs, who have not been bred by the High Church movement, but have taken refuge in its cracks, as they would have done forty years ago in those of the Evangelical,—youths who hide their crass ignorance and dulness under the cloak of Church infallibility, and having neither wit, manners, learning, humanity, or any other dignity whereon to stand, talk loud, *pour pis aller*, about the dignity of the priesthood. Such men Frank had met at neighbouring clerical meetings, overbearing and out-talking the elder and the wiser members; and finding that he got no good from them, had withdrawn into his parish-work, to eat his own heart, like Bellerophon of old. For Frank was a gentleman and a Christian, if ever one there was. Delicate in person, all but consumptive; graceful and refined in all his works and ways; a scholar, elegant

rather than deep, yet a scholar still; full of all love for painting, architecture, and poetry, he had come down to bury himself in this remote curacy, in the honest desire of doing good. He had been a curate in a fashionable London Church; but finding the atmosphere thereof not over wholesome to his soul, he had had the courage to throw off St. Nepomuc's, its brotherhoods, sisterhoods, and all its gorgeous and highly-organised appliances for enabling five thousand rich to take tolerable care of five hundred poor: and had fled from "the holy virgins" (as certain old ladies, who do twice their work with half their noise, call them) into the wilderness of Bethnal Green. But six months' gallant work there, with gallant men (for there are High Churchmen there who are an honour to England), brought him to death's door. The doctors commanded some soft western air. Frank, as chivalrous as a knight-errant of old, would fain have died at his post, but his mother interfered; and he could do no less than obey her. So he had taken this remote west country curacy; all the more willingly because he knew that nine-tenths of the people were Dissenters. To recover that place to the Church would be something worth living for. So he had come, and laboured late and early; and behold, he had failed utterly; and seemed farther than ever from success. He had opened, too hastily, a crusade against the Dissenters, and denounced where he should have conciliated. He had overlooked—indeed he hardly knew—the sad truth, that the mere fact of his being a clergyman was no passport to the hearts of his people. For the curate who preceded

him had been an old man, mean, ignorant, incapable, remaining there simply because nobody else would have him, and given to brandy-and-water as much as his flock.

The rector for the last fifteen years, Lord Scoutbush's uncle, was a cypher. The rector before him had notoriously earned the living by a marriage with a lady who stood in some questionable relation to Lord Scoutbush's father, and who had never had a thought above his dinner and his tithes; and all that the Aberalva fishermen knew of God or righteousness, they had learnt from the *soi-disant* disciples of John Wesley. So Frank Headley had to make up, at starting, the arrears of half-a-century of base neglect; but instead of doing so, he had contrived to awaken against himself that dogged hatred of popery which lies inarticulate and confused, but deep and firm, in the heart of the English people. Poor fellow! if he made a mistake, he suffered for it. There was hardly a sadder soul than poor Frank, as he went listlessly up the village street that afternoon, to his lodging at Captain Willis's, which he had taken because he preferred living in the village itself to occupying the comfortable rectory a mile out of town.

However we cannot set him straight;—after all, every man must perform that office for himself. So the best thing we can do, as we landed, naturally, at the pier-head, is to walk up-street after him, and see what sort of a place Aberalva is.

Beneath us, to the left hand, is the quay-pool, now lying dry, in which a dozen trawlers are lopping over on their sides, their red sails drying in the sun, the tails of the trawls hauled up to the

topmast heads; while the more handy of their owners are getting on board by ladders, to pack away the said red sails; for it will blow to night. In the long furrows which their keels have left, and in the shallow muddy pools, lie innumerable fragments of exenterated maids (not human ones, pitiful reader, but belonging to the order Pisces, and the family Raia), and some twenty non-exenterated ray-dogs and picked dogs (Anglice, dog-fish), together with a fine basking shark, at least nine feet long, out of which the kneeling Mr. George Thomas, clothed in pilot cloth patches of every hue, bright scarlet, blue and brown (not to mention a large square of white canvas which has been let into that part of his trousers which is now uppermost), is dissecting the liver for the purpose of greasing his "sheaves" with the fragrant oil thereof. The pools in general are bedded with black mud, and creamed over with oily flakes which may proceed from the tar on the vessels' sides, and may also from "decomposing animal matter," as we euphemise it now-a-days. The hot pebbles, at high-tide mark,—crowned with a long black row of herring and mackerel boats, laid up in ordinary for the present—are beautifully variegated with mackerels' heads, gurnets' fins, old hag, lobworm, and mussel-baits, and the inwards of a whole ichthyological museum; save at one spot where the Cloaca maxima and Port Esquiline of Aberalva town (small enough, considering the place holds fifteen hundred souls) murmurs from beneath a grey stone arch toward the sea, not unfraught with dead rats and cats, who, their ancient feud forgotten, combine lovingly

at last in increasing the health of the blue-trousered urchins who are sailing upon that Acherontic stream bits of board with a feather stuck in it, or of their tiny sisters who are dancing about in the dirtiest pool among the trawlers in a way which (if your respectable black coat be seen upon the pier) will elicit from one of the balconied windows above, decked with reeking shirts and linen, some such shriek as—

"Patience Penberthy, Patience Penberthy—a! You nasty, dirty, little ondecent hussy—a! What be playing in the quay-pool for—a! A pulling up your pesticoats before the quality—a!" Each exclamation being followed with that groaning grunt, with which the West-country folk, after having screamed their lungs empty through their noses, recover their breath for a fresh burst.

Never mind; it is no nosegay, certainly as a whole: but did you ever see sturdier, rosier, nobler-looking children,—rounder faces, raven hair, bright grey eyes, full of fun and tenderness? As for the dirt, that cannot harm them; poor people's children must be dirty—why not? Look on fifty yards to the left. Between two ridges of high pebble bank, some twenty yards apart, comes Alva river rushing to the sea. On the opposite ridge, a low white house, with three or four white canvas-covered boats, and a flag-staff with sloping cross-yard, betokens the coast-guard station. Beyond it rise black jagged cliffs; mile after mile of iron-bound wall; and here and there, at the glens' mouths, great banks and denes of shifting sand. In front of it, upon the beach, are half-a-dozen great green and grey heaps of Welsh limestone; behind

it, at the cliff foot, is the lime-kiln, with its white dusty heaps, and brown dusty men, its quivering mirage of hot air, its strings of patient hay-nibbling donkeys, which look as if they had just awakened out of a flour bin. Above, a green down stretches up to bright yellow furze-crofts far aloft. Behind a reedy marsh, covered with red cattle, paves the valley till it closes in; the steep sides of the hills are clothed in oak and ash covert, in which, three months ago, you could have shot more cocks in one day than you would in Berkshire in a year. Pleasant little glimpses there are, too, of grey stone farm-houses, nestling among sycamore and beech; bright-green meadows, alder-fringed; squares of rich red fallow-field, parted by lines of golden furze; all cut out with a peculiar blackness, and clearness, soft and tender withal, which betokens a climate surcharged with rain. Only in the very bosom of the valley, a soft mist hangs, increasing the sense of distance, and softening back one hill and wood behind another, till the great brown moor which backs it all seems to rise out of the empty air. For a thousand feet it ranges up, in rude sheets of brown heather, and grey cairns and screes of granite, all sharp and black-edged against the pale blue sky; and all suddenly cut off above by one long horizontal line of dark grey cloud, which seems to hang there motionless, and yet is growing to windward, and dying to leeward, for ever rushing out of the invisible into sight, and into the invisible again, at railroad speed. Out of nothing the moor rises, and into nothing it ascends,—a great dark phantom between earth and sky, boding rain and howling

tempest, and perhaps fearful wreck—for the groundswell moans and thunders on the beach behind us, louder and louder every moment.

Let us go on, and up the street, after we have scrambled through the usual labyrinth of timber-baulks, rusty anchors, boats which have been dragged, for the purpose of mending and tarring, into the very middle of the road, and old spars stowed under walls, in the vain hope that they may be of some use for something some day, and have stood the stares and welcomes of the lazy giants who are sitting about upon them, black-locked, black-bearded, with ruddy, wholesome faces, and eyes as bright as diamonds; men who are on their own ground, and know it; who will not touch their caps to you, or pull the short black pipe from between their lips as you pass, but expect you to prove yourself a gentleman, by speaking respectfully to them; which, if you do, you will find them as hearty, intelligent, brave fellows as ever walked this earth, capable of anything, from working the naval-brigade guns at Sevastopol, down to running up to … a hundred miles in a cockleshell lugger, to forestall the early mackerel market. God be with you, my brave lads, and with your children after you; for as long as you are what I have known you, Old England will rule the seas, and many a land beside!

But in going up Aberalva Street, you remark several things; first, that the houses were all white-washed yesterday, except where the snowy white is picked out by buttresses of pink and blue; next, that they all have bright green palings in front,

and bright green window-sills and frames; next, that they are all roofed with shining grey slate, and the space between the window and the pales flagged with the same; next, that where such space is not flagged, it is full of flowers and shrubs which stand the winter only in our greenhouses. The fuchsias are ten feet high, laden with ripe purple berries running over (for there are no birds to pick them off); and there in the front of the coast-guard lieutenant's house, is Cobaea scandens, covered with purple claret-glasses, as it has been ever since Christmas: for Aberalva knows no winter: and there are grown-up men in it who never put on a skate, or made a snowball in their lives. A most cleanly, bright-coloured, foreign-looking street, is that long straggling one which runs up the hill towards Penalva Court: only remark, that this cleanliness is gained by making the gutter in the middle street the common sewer of the town, and tread clear of cabbage-leaves, pilchard bones, *et id genus omne*. For Aberalva is like Paris (if the answer of a celebrated sanitary reformer to the Emperor be truly reported), "fair without but foul within."

However, the wind is blowing dull and hollow from south-west; the clouds are rolling faster and faster up from the Atlantic; the sky to westward is brassy green; the glass is falling fast; and there will be wind and rain enough to-night to sweep even Aberalva clean for the next week.

Grace Harvey sees the coming storm, as she goes slowly homewards, dismissing her little flock; and she lingers long and sadly outside her cottage door, looking out over the

fast blackening sea, and listening to the hollow thunder of the groundswell, against the back of the point which shelters Aberalva Cove.

Far away on the horizon, the masts of stately ships stand out against the sky, driving fast to the eastward with shortened sail. They, too, know what is coming; and Grace prays for them as she stands, in her wild way, with half outspoken words.

"All those gallant ships, dear Lord! and so many beautiful men in them, and so few of them ready to die; and all those gallant soldiers going to the war;—Lord, wilt thou not have mercy? Spare them for a little time before—. Is not that cruel, man-devouring sea full enough, Lord; and brave men's bones enough, strewn up and down all rocks and sands? And is not that dark place full enough, O Lord, of poor souls cut off in a moment, as my two were? Oh, not to-night, dear Lord! Do not call any one to-night—give them a day more, one chance more, poor fellows—they have had so few, and so many temptations, and, perhaps, no schooling. They go to sea so early, and young things will be young things, Lord. Spare them but one night more—and yet He did not spare my two—they had no time to repent, and have no time for ever, evermore!"

And she stands looking out over the sea; but she has lost sight of everything, save her own sad imaginations. Her eyes open wider and wider, as if before some unseen horror; the eyebrows contract upwards; the cheeks sharpen; the mouth parts; the lips draw back, showing the white teeth, as if in intensest agony. Thus

she stands long, motionless, awe-frozen, save when a shudder runs through every limb, with such a countenance as that "fair terror" of which Shelley sang—

> "Its horror and its beauty are divine;
> Upon its lips and eyelids seem to lie
> Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,
> Fiery and lucid, struggling underneath,
> The agonies of anguish and of death."

Her mother comes out from the cottage door behind, and lays her hand upon the girl's shoulder. The spell is broken; and hiding her face in her hands, Grace bursts into violent weeping.

"What are you doing, my poor child, here in the cold night air?"

"My two, mother, my two!" said she; "and all the poor souls at sea to-night!"

"You mustn't think of it. Haven't I told you not to think of it? One would lose one's wits if one did too often."

"If it is all true, mother, what else is there worth thinking of in heaven or earth?"

And Grace goes in with a dull, heavy look of utter exhaustion, bodily and mental, and quietly sets the things for supper, and goes about her cottage work as one who bears a heavy chain, but has borne it too long to let it hinder the daily drudgery of life.

Grace had reason to pray at least, for the soldiers who were going to the war. For as she prayed, the Orinoco, Ripon, and

Manilla, were steaming down Southampton Water, with the Guards on board; and but that morning little Lord Scoutbush, left behind at the depôt, had bid farewell to his best friend, opposite Buckingham Palace, while the bearskins were on the bayonet-points, with—

"Well, old fellow, you have the fun, after all, and I the work;" and had been answered with—

"Fun? there will be no fighting; and I shall only have lost my season in town."

Was there, then, no man among them that day, who

> "As the trees began to whisper, and the wind began to roll,
> Heard in the wild March morning the angels call his soul"?

* * * * *

Verily they are gone down to Hades, even many stalwart souls of heroes.

CHAPTER III.
ANYTHING BUT STILL LIFE

Penalva Court, about half a mile from the quay, is "like a house in a story;"—a house of seven gables, and those very shaky ones; a house of useless long passages, useless turrets, vast lumber attics where maids see ghosts, lofty garden and yard walls of grey stone, round which the wind and rain are lashing through the dreary darkness; low oak-ribbed ceilings; windows which once were mullioned with stone, but now with wood painted white; walls which were once oak-wainscot, but have been painted like the mullions, to the disgust of Elsley Vavasour, poet, its occupant in March 1854, who forgot that, while the oak was left dark, no man could have seen to read in the rooms a yard from the window.

He has, however, little reason to complain of the one drawing-room, where he and his wife are sitting, so pleasant has she made it look, in spite of the plainness of the furniture. A bright log-fire is burning on the hearth. There are a few good books too, and a few handsome prints; while some really valuable nick-nacks are set out, with pardonable ostentation, on a little table covered with crimson velvet. It is only cotton velvet, if you look close at it; but the things are pretty enough to catch the eye of all visitors; and Mrs. Heale, the Doctor's wife (who always calls Mrs.

Vavasour "my lady," though she does not love her), and Mrs. Trebooze, of Trebooze, always finger them over when they have any opportunity, and whisper to each other half contemptuously, —"Ah, poor thing! there's a sign that she has seen better days."

And better days, in one sense, Mrs. Vavasour has seen. I am afraid, indeed, that she has more than once regretted the morning when she ran away in a hack-cab from her brother Lord Scoutbush's house in Eaton Square, to be married to Elsley Vavasour, the gifted author of "A Soul's Agonies and other Poems." He was a lion then, with foolish women running after him, and turning his head once and for all; and Lucia St. Just was a wild Irish girl, new to London society, all feeling and romance, and literally all; for there was little real intellect underlying her passionate sensibility. So when the sensibility burnt itself out, as it generally does; and when children, and the weak health which comes with them, and the cares of a household, and money difficulties were absorbing her little powers, Elsley Vavasour began to fancy that his wife was a very commonplace person, who was fast losing even her good looks and her good temper. So, on the whole, they were not happy. Elsley was an affectionate man, and honourable to a fantastic nicety; but he was vain, capricious, over-sensitive, craving for admiration and distinction; and it was not enough for him that his wife loved him, and bore him children, kept his accounts, mended and moiled all day long for him and his; he wanted her to act the public for him exactly when he was hungry for praise; and that not the actual, but an

altogether ideal, public; to worship him as a deity, "live for him and him alone," "realise" his poetic dreams of marriage bliss, and talk sentiment with him, or listen to him talking sentiment to her, when she would much sooner be safe in bed burying all the petty cares of the day, and the pain in her back too, poor thing! in sound sleep; and so it befell that they often quarrelled and wrangled, and that they were quarrelling and wrangling this very night.

Who cares to know how it began? Who cares to hear how it went on,—the stupid, aimless skirmish of bitter words, between two people who had forgotten themselves? I believe it began with Elsley's being vexed at her springing up two or three times, fancying that she heard the children cry, while he wanted to be quiet, and sentimentalise over the roaring of the wind outside. Then—she thought of nothing but those children. Why did she not take a book and occupy her mind? To which she had her pert, though just answer, about her mind having quite enough to do to keep clothes on the children's backs, and so forth,—let who list imagine the miserable little squabble;—till she says,—"I know what has put you out so to-night; nothing but the news of my sister's coming." He answers,—"That her sister is as little to him as to any man; as welcome to come now as she has been to stay away these three years."

"Ah, it's very well to say that; but you have been a different person ever since that letter came." And so she torments him into an angry self-justification (which she takes triumphantly as

a confession) that "it is very disagreeable to have his thoughts broken in on by one who has no sympathy with him and his pursuits—and who" and at that point he wisely stops short, for he was going to throw down a very ugly gage of battle.

Thrown down or not, Lucia snatches at it.

"Ah, I understand; poor Valentia! You always hated her."

"I did not: but she is so brusque, and excited, and—"

"Be so kind as not to abuse my family. You may say what you will of me; but—"

"And what have your family done for me, pray?"

"Why, considering that we are now living rent-free in my brother's house, and—" She stops in her turn; for her pride and her prudence also will not let her tell him that Valentia has been clothing her and the children for the last three years. He is just the man to forbid her on the spot to receive any more presents, and to sacrifice her comfort to his own pride. But what she has said is quite enough to bring out a very angry answer, which she expecting, nips in the bud by—

"For goodness' sake, don't speak so loud; I don't want the servants to hear."

"I am not speaking loud"—(he has not yet opened his lips). "That is your old trick to prevent my defending myself, while you are driving one mad. How dare you taunt me with being a pensioner on your brother's bounty? I'll go up to town again and take lodgings there. I need not be beholden to any aristocrat of them all. I have my own station in the real world,—the world

of intellect; I have my own friends; I have made myself a name without his help; and I can live without his help, he shall find!"

"Which name were you speaking of?" rejoins she looking up at him, with all her native Irish humour flashing up for a moment in her naughty eyes. The next minute she would have given her hand not to have said it; for, with a very terrible word, Elsley springs to his feet and dashes out of the room.

She hears him catch up his hat and cloak, and hurry out into the rain, slamming the door behind him. She springs up to call him back, but he is gone;—and she dashes herself on the floor, and bursts into an agony of weeping over "young bliss never to return"? Not in the least. Her principal fear is, lest he should catch cold in the rain. She takes up her work again, and stitches away in the comfortable certainty that in half an hour she will have recovered her temper, and he also; that they will pass a sulky night; and to-morrow, by about mid-day, without explanation or formal reconciliation, have become as good friends as ever. "Perhaps," says she to herself, with a woman's sense of power, "if he be very much ashamed and very wet, I'll pity him and make friends to-night."

Miserable enough are these little squabbles. Why will two people, who have sworn to love and cherish each other utterly, and who, on the whole, do what they have sworn, behave to each other as they dare for very shame behave to no one else? Is it that, as every beautiful thing has its hideous antitype, this mutual shamelessness is the devil's ape of mutual confidence? Perhaps it

cannot be otherwise with beings compact of good and evil. When the veil of reserve is withdrawn from between two souls, it must be withdrawn for evil, as for good, till the two natures, which ought to seek rest, each in the other's inmost depths, may at last spring apart, confronting each other recklessly with,—"There, you see me as I am; you know the worst of me, and I of you; take me as you find me—what care I?"

Elsley and Lucia have not yet arrived at that terrible crisis: though they are on the path toward it,—the path of little carelessnesses, rudenesses, ungoverned words and tempers, and, worst of all, of that half-confidence, which is certain to avenge itself by irritation and quarrelling; for if two married people will not tell each other in love what they ought, they will be sure to tell each other in anger what they ought not. It is plain enough already that Elsley has his weak point, which must not be touched; something about "a name," which Lucia is to be expected to ignore,—as if anything which really exists could be ignored while two people live together night and day, for better for worse. Till the thorn is out, the wound will not heal; and till the matter (whatever it may be) is set right, by confession and absolution, there will be no peace for them, for they are living in a lie; and, unless it be a very little one indeed, better, perhaps, that they should go on to that terrible crisis of open defiance. It may end in disgust, hatred, madness; but it may, too, end in each falling again upon the other's bosom, and sobbing out through holy tears,—"Yes, you do know the worst of me, and yet you

love me still. This is happiness, to find oneself most loved when one most hates oneself! God, help us to confess our sins to Thee, as we have done to each other, and to begin life again like little children, struggling hand in hand out of this lowest pit, up the steep path which leads to life, and strength, and peace."

Heaven grant that it may so end! But now Elsley has gone raging out into the raging darkness; trying to prove himself to himself the most injured of men, and to hate his wife as much as possible: though the fool knows the whole time that he loves her better than anything on earth, even than that "fame," on which he tries to fatten his lean soul, snapping greedily at every scrap which falls in his way, and, in default, snapping at everybody and everything else. And little comfort it gives him. Why should it? What comfort, save in being wise and strong? And is he the wiser or stronger for being told by a reviewer that he has written fine words, or has failed in writing them; or to have silly women writing to ask for his autograph, or for leave to set his songs to music? Nay,—shocking as the question may seem,—is he the wiser and stronger man for being a poet at all, and a genius?—provided, of course, that the word genius is used in its modern meaning, of a person who can say prettier things than his neighbours. I think not. Be it as it may, away goes the poor genius; his long cloak, picturesque enough in calm weather, fluttering about uncomfortably enough, while the rain washes his long curls into swabs; out through the old garden, between storm-swept laurels, beneath dark groaning pines, and through a door

in the wall which opens into the lane.

The lane leads downward, on the right, into the village. He is in no temper to meet his fellow-creatures,—even to see the comfortable gleam through their windows, as the sailors close round the fire with wife and child; so he turns to the left, up the deep stone-banked lane, which leads towards the cliff, dark now as pitch, for it is overhung, right and left, with deep oak-wood.

It is no easy matter to proceed, though, for the wind pours down the lane as through a funnel, and the road is of slippery bare slate, worn here and there into puddles of greasy clay, and Elsley slips back half of every step, while his wrath, as he tires, oozes out of his heels. Moreover, those dark trees above him, tossing their heads impatiently against the scarcely less dark sky, strike an awe into him,—a sense of loneliness, almost of fear. An uncanny, bad night it is; and he is out on a bad errand; and he knows it, and wishes that he were home again. He does not believe, of course, in those "spirits of the storm," about whom he has so often written, any more than he does in a great deal of his fine imagery; but still in such characters as his, the sympathy between the moods of nature and those of the mind is most real and important; and Dame Nature's equinoctial night wrath is weird, gruesome, crushing, and can be faced (if it must be faced) in real comfort only when one is going on an errand of mercy, with a clear conscience, a light heart, a good cigar, and plenty of Mackintosh.

So, ere Elsley had gone a quarter of a mile, he turned back,

and resolved to go in, and take up his book once more. Perhaps Lucia might beg his pardon; and if not, why, perhaps he might beg hers. The rain was washing the spirit out of him, as it does out of a thin-coated horse.

Stay! What was that sound above the roar of the gale? a cannon?

He listened, turning his head right and left to escape the howling of the wind in his ears. A minute, and another boom rose and rang aloft. It was near, too. He almost fancied that he felt the concussion of the air.

Another, and another; and then, in the village below, he could see lights hurrying to and fro. A wreck at sea? He turned again up the lane. He had never seen a wreck. What an opportunity for a poet; and on such a night too: it would be magnificent if the moon would but come out! Just the scene, too, for his excited temper! He will work on upward, let it blow and rain as it may. He is not disappointed. Ere he has gone a hundred yards, a mass of dripping oil-skins runs full butt against him, knocking him against the bank; and, by the clank of weapons, he recognises the coast-guard watchman.

"Hillo!—who's that? Beg your pardon, sir," as the man recognises Elsley's voice.

"What is it?—what are the guns?"

"God knows, sir! Overright the Chough and Crow; on 'em, I'm afeard. There they go again!—hard up, poor souls! God help them!" and the man runs shouting down the lane.

Another gun, and another; but long ere Elsley reaches the cliff, they are silent; and nothing is to be heard but the noise of the storm, which, loud as it was below among the wood, is almost intolerable now that he is on the open down.

He struggles up the lane toward the cliff, and there pauses, gasping, under the shelter of a wall, trying to analyse that enormous mass of sound which fills his ears and brain, and flows through his heart like maddening wine. He can bear the sight of the dead grass on the cliff-edge, weary, feeble, expostulating with its old tormentor the gale; then the fierce screams of the blasts as they rush up across the layers of rock below, like hounds leaping up at their prey; and far beneath, the horrible confused battle-roar of that great leaguer of waves. He cannot see them, as he strains his eyes over the wall into the blank depth,—nothing but a confused welter and quiver of mingled air, and rain, and spray, as if the very atmosphere were writhing in the clutches of the gale: but he can hear,—what can he not hear? It would have needed a less vivid brain than Elsley's to fancy another Badajos beneath. There it all is:—the rush of columns to the breach, officers cheering them on,—pauses, breaks, wild retreats, upbraiding calls, whispering consultations, —fresh rush on rush, now here, now there,—fierce shouts above, below, behind,—shrieks of agony, choked groans and gasps of dying men,—scaling-ladders hurled down with all their rattling freight,—dull mine-explosions, ringing cannon-thunder, as the old fortress blasts back its besiegers pell-mell into the deep. It is

all there: truly enough there, at least, to madden yet more Elsley's wild angry brain, till he tries to add his shouts to the great battle-cries of land and sea, and finds them as little audible as an infant's wail.

Suddenly, far below him, a bright glimmer;—and, in a moment, a blue-light reveals the whole scene, in ghastly hues,—blue leaping breakers, blue weltering sheets of foam, blue rocks, crowded with blue figures, like ghosts, flitting to and fro upon the brink of that blue seething Phlegethon, and rushing up towards him through the air, a thousand flying blue foam-sponges, which dive over the brow of the hill and vanish, like delicate fairies fleeing before the wrath of the gale:—but where is the wreck? The blue-light cannot pierce the grey veil of mingled mist and spray which hangs to seaward; and her guns have been silent for half an hour and more.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.