VARIOUS

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Содержание

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"WE ARE ALL LOW PEOPLE THERE."

A TALE OF THE ASSIZES

IN TWO CHAPTERS

CHAPTER THE FIRST

Some time ago, business of an important character carried me to the beautiful and populous city of ——. I remember to have visited it when I was a child, in the company of a doating mother, who breathed her last there; and the place, associated with that circumstance, had ever afterwards been the gloomiest spot in the county of my birth. A calamity such as that to which I have alluded leaves no *half* impressions. It stamps itself deep, deep in the human heart; and a change, scarcely less than organic, for good or ill, is wrought there. Agreeably with this fact, the scene itself of the event becomes at once, to the survivor, either hallowed and beloved, or hated and avoided. Not that natural beauty or deformity has any thing to do in the production of such feelings. They have a mysterious origin, and are, in truth, not to be accounted for or explained. A father sees the hope and joy of his manhood deposited amongst the gardens of the soil, and from that moment the fruitful fields and unobstructed sky are things he cannot gaze upon; whilst the brother, who has lived in the court or alley of a crowded city with the sister of his infancy, and has buried her, with his burning tears, in the dense churchyard of the denser street, clings to the neighbourhood, close and unhealthy though it be, with a love that renders it for him the brightest and the dearest nook of earth. He cannot quit it, and be at peace. Causes that seem alike, are not always so in their effects. For my

own part, for years after the first bitter lesson of my life became connected with that city, I could not think of it without pain, or hear its name spoken without suffering a depression of spirits, as difficult to throw off as are the heavy clouds that follow in the track, and hide the little light of a December sun. At school, I remember well how grievously I wept upon the map on which I first saw the word written, and how completely I expunged the characters from the paper, forbidding my eyes to glance even to the county from which I had erased them. Time passes, hardening the heart as it rolls over it, and we afford to laugh at the strong feelings and extravagant views of our youth. It is well, perhaps, that we do so; and yet on that subject a word or two of profitable matter might be offered, which shall be withholden now. For many years I have battled through the world, an orphan, on my own account; and it is not surprising that the vehemence of my early days should have gradually sobered down before the stern realities that have at every step encountered me. Long before I received the unwelcome intelligence, that it was literally incumbent upon me to revisit the spot of my beloved mother's dissolution, the mention of its name had ceased to evoke any violent emotion, or to affect me as of old. I say *unwelcome*, because, notwithstanding the stoicism of which I boast, I felt quite uncomfortable enough to write to my correspondent by the return of post, urging him to make one more endeavour to complete my business without my aid, and to spare, if possible, my personal attendance. I gave no reason for this wish. I did

not choose to tell a falsehood, and I had hardly honesty to acknowledge, even to myself—the truth. I failed, however, in my application, and with any but a cheerful mind, I quitted London on my journey. Thirty years before I had travelled to —— in a stupendous machine, of which now I recollect only that it seemed to take years out of my little life in arriving at its destination, and that, on its broad, substantial rear, it bore the effigy of "*an ancient Briton*." Locomotion then, like me, was in a state of infancy. On the occasion of my second visit to the city, I had hardly time to wonder at the velocity with which I was borne along. Distance was annihilated. The two hundred miles over which *the ancient Briton* had wearisomely laboured, were reduced to twenty, and before I could satisfy myself that our journey was more than begun, my horseless coach, and fifty more besides, had actually gone over them. I experienced a nervous palpitation at the heart as I proceeded from the outskirts of the city, and grew more and more fidgety the nearer I approached the din and noise of the prosperous seat of business. I could not account for the feeling, until I detected myself walking as briskly as I could, with my eyes fixed hard upon the ground, as though afraid to glance upon a street, a house, an object which could recall the past, or carry me back to the first dark days of life. Then it was that I summoned courage, and, with a desperate effort to crush the morbid sensibility, raised myself to my full height, gazed around me, and awoke, effectually and for ever, from my dream. The city was not the same. The well-remembered thoroughfares

were gone; their names extinct, and superseded by others more euphonic; the buildings, which I had carried in my mind as in a book—the thought of meeting which had given me so much pain, had been removed—destroyed, and not a brick remained which I could call a friend, or offer one warm tear, in testimony of old acquaintance. A noble street, a line of palaces—merchants' palaces—had taken to itself the room of twenty narrow ways, that, in the good old times, had met and crossed in close, but questionable, friendship. Bright stone, that in the sunlight shone brighter than itself, flanked every broad and stately avenue, denoting wealth and high commercial dignity. Every venerable association was swept away, and nothing remained of the long-cherished and always unsightly picture, but the faint shadow in my own brain—growing fainter now with every moment, and which the unexpected scene and new excitement were not slow to obliterate altogether. I breathed more freely as I went my way, and reached my agent's house at length, lighter of heart than I had been for hours before. Mr Treherne was a man of business, and a prosperous one too, or surely he had no right to place before the dozen corpulent gentlemen whom I met on my arrival—a dinner, towards which the viscera of princes might have turned without ruffling a fold of their intestinal dignity. I partook of the feast—that is to say, I sat at the groaning table, and, like a cautious and dyspeptic man, I eat roast beef—*toujours* roast beef, and nothing else—appeased my thirst with grateful claret, and retired at last to wholesome sleep and quiet dreams. Not

so the corpulent guests. It may be to my dyspeptic habit, which enables me to be virtuous at a trifling cost, and to nothing loftier, that I am bound to attribute the feeling with which I invariably sit down to feasting; be this the fact or not, I confess that a sense of shame, uneasiness, and dislike, renders an affair of this kind to me the most irksome and unpleasant of enjoyments. The eagerness of appetite that one can fairly see in the watery and sensual eyes of men to whom *eating* has become the aim and joy of their existence—the absorption of every faculty in the gluttonous pursuit—the animal indulgence and delight—these are sickening; then the deliberate and cold-blooded torture of the creatures whose marrowy bones are *crunched* by the epicure, without a thought of the suffering that preceded his intensely pleasurable emotions, and the bare mention of which, in this narrative, is almost more than sufficient, then, worst of all, the wilful prodigality and waste—the wickedness of casting to the dogs the healthy food for which whole families, widows, and beggared orphans are pining in the neighbouring street—the guilty indifference of him who finds the wealth for the profusion, and the impudent recklessness of the underling who abuses it. Such are a few of the causes which concur in giving to the finest banquet I have seen an aspect not more odious than humiliating; and here I dwell upon the fact, because the incident which I shall shortly bring before the reader's eye, served to confirm the feelings which I entertain on this subject, and presented an instructive contrast to the splendid entertainment which greeted

my immediate arrival.

I slept at the house of Mr Treherne, and, on the following morning, was an early riser. I strolled through the city, and, returning home, found my active friend seated at his breakfast-table, with a host of papers, and a packet of newly-arrived letters before him. The dinner was no more like the breakfast, than was my friend in the midst of his guests like my friend alone with his papers. His meal consisted of one slice of dry toast, and one cup of tea, already cold. The face that was all smile and relaxation of muscle on the preceding evening, was solemn and composed. You might have ventured to assert that tea and toast were that man's most stimulating diet, and that the pleasures of the counting-house were the highest this world could afford him. I, however, had passed the evening with him, and was better informed. Mr Treherne requested me to ring the bell. I did so, and his servant speedily appeared with a tray of garnished dainties, of which I was invited to partake, with many expressions of kindness uttered by my man-of-business, without a look at me, or a movement of his mind and eye from the pile of paper with which he was busy. In the course of half an hour, I had brought my repast to a close, and Mr Treherne was primed for the conflict of the day. His engagements did not permit him to give me his assistance in my own matters until the following morning. He begged me to excuse him until dinner-time—to make myself perfectly at home—to wile away an hour or so in his library—and, when I got tired of that, to take what amusement I could

amongst the lions of the town—offering which advice, he quitted me and his house with a head much more heavily laden, I am sure, than any that ever groaned beneath the hard and aching knot. Would that the labourer could be taught to think so!

After having passed an unsatisfactory hour in Mr Treherne's library, in which the only books which I cared to look at were very wisely locked up, on account of their rich binding, too beautiful to be touched, I sauntered once more through the broad streets of the city, and, in my solitary walk, philosophized upon the busy spirit of trade which pervaded them. It is at such a time and place that the quiet and observant mind is startled by the stern and settled appearance of reality and continuance which all things take. If the world were the abiding-place of man, and life eternity, such earnestness, such vigour, such intensity of purpose and of action as I saw stamped upon the harassed brows of men, would be in harmony with such a scene and destination. HERE such concentration of the glorious energies of man is mockery, delusion, and robs the human soul of—who shall say how much? Look at the stream of life pouring through the streets of commerce, from morn till night, and mark the young and old—yes, the youngest and the oldest—and discover, if you can, the expression of any thought but that of traffic and of gain, as if the aim and end of living were summed up in these. And are they? Yes, if we may trust the evidence of age, of him who creeps and totters on his way, who has told his threescore years and ten, and on the threshold of eternity has

found the vanity of all things. Oh, look at him, and learn how hard it is, even at the door of death, to FEEL the mutability and nothingness of earth! Palsied he is, yet to the Exchange he daily hies, and his dull eye glistens on the mart—his ear is greedy for the sounds that come too tardily—his quick and treble voice is loud amongst the loudest. He is as quick to apprehend, as eager now to learn, as ravenous for gain, as when he trusted first an untried world. If life be truly but a shadow, and mortals but the actors in the vision, is it not marvellous that age, and wisdom, and experience build and fasten there as on a rock? Such thoughts as these engaged my mind, as I pursued my way alone, unoccupied, amongst the labouring multitude, and cast a melancholy hue on things that, to the eye external, looked bright, beautiful, and enduring. I was arrested in my meditations at length by a crowd of persons—men, women, and children—who thronged about the entrance of a spacious, well-built edifice. They were for the most part in rags, and their looks betrayed them for poor and reckless creatures all. They presented so singular a feature of the scene, contrasted so disagreeably with the solid richness and perfect finish of the building, that I stopped involuntarily, and enquired into the cause of their attendance. Before I could obtain an answer, a well-dressed and better-fed official came suddenly to the door, and bawled the name of one poor wretch, who answered it immediately, stepped from the crowd, and followed the appellant, as the latter vanished quickly from the door again. A remark which, at the same moment, escaped another of the

group, told me that I stood before the sessions'-house, and that a man, well known to most of them, was now upon trial for his life. He was a murderer—and the questionable-looking gentleman who had been invited to appear in court, had travelled many miles on foot, to give the criminal the benefit of his good word. He was the witness for the defence, and came to speak to *character*! My curiosity was excited, and I was determined to see the end of the proceeding. It is the custom to pay for every thing in happy England. I was charged *box-price* for my admittance, and was provided with as good a seat as I could wish, amongst the *élite* of the assembly. Quick as I had been, I was already too late. There was a bustle and buzz in the court, that denoted the trial to be at an end. Indeed, it had been so previously to the appearance of the devoted witness, whose presence had served only to confirm the evidence, which had been most damnatory and conclusive. The judge still sat upon the bench, and, having once perceived him, it was not easy to withdraw my gaze again. "The man is surely guilty," said I to myself, "who is pronounced so, when that judge has summed up the evidence against him." I had never in my life beheld so much benignity and gentleness—so much of truth, ingenuousness, and pure humanity, stamped on a face before. There was the fascination of the serpent there; and the longer I looked, the more pleasing became the countenance, and the longer I wished to protract my observation and delight. He was a middle-aged man—for a judge, he might be called young. His form was manly—his head massive—his forehead glorious and

intellectual. His features were finely formed; but it was not these that seized my admiration, and, if I dare so express myself, my actual love, with the first brief glance. The EXPRESSION of the face, which I have already attempted faintly to describe, was its charm. Such an utter, such a refreshing absence of all earthiness —such purity and calmness of soul—such mental sweetness as it bespoke! When I first directed my eye to him, it seemed as if his thoughts were abstracted from the comparatively noisy scene over which he presided—busy it might be, in reviewing the charge which he had delivered to the jury, and upon the credit of which the miserable culprit had been doomed to die. I do not exaggerate when I assert, that at this moment—during this short reverie—his face, which I had never seen before, seemed, by a miracle, as familiar to me as my own—a fact which I afterwards explained, by discovering the closest resemblance between it and a painting of our Saviour, one of the finest works of art, the production of the greatest genius of his time, and a portrait which is imprinted on my memory and heart by its beauty, and by repeated and repeated examination. The touching expressiveness of the countenance would not have accorded with the stern office of the judge, had not its softness been relieved by a bold outline of feature, and exalted by the massy formation of the head itself. These were sufficient to command respect—*that* made its way quickly to the heart. An opportunity was soon afforded me to obtain some information in respect of him. I was not surprised to hear that his name and blood were closely connected with those

of a brilliant poet and philosopher, and that his own genius and attainments were of the highest character. I was hardly prepared to find that his knowledge as a lawyer was profound, and that he was esteemed erudite amongst the most learned of his order. My attention was called reluctantly from the judge to the second case of the day, which now came for adjudication. The court was hushed as a ruffian and monster walked sullenly into the dock, charged with the perpetration of the most horrible offences. I turned instinctively from the prisoner to the judge again. The latter sat with his attention fixed, his elbow resting on a desk, his head supported by his hand. Nothing could be finer than the sight. Oh! I would have given much for the ability to convey to paper a lasting copy of that countenance—a memorial for my life, to cling to in my hours of weakness and despondency, and to take strength and consolation from the spectacle of that intelligence, that meekness and chastity of soul, thus allied and linked to our humanity.

It was instructive to look alternately at the criminal and at him who must award his punishment. There they were, both men—both the children of a universal Father—both sons of immortality. Yet one so unlike his species, so deeply sunken in his state, so hideous and hateful as to be disowned by man, and ranked with fiercest brutes; the other, as far removed, by excellence, from the majority of mankind, and as near the angels and their ineffable joy as the dull earth will let him. Say what we will, the gifts of Heaven are inscrutable as mysterious, and

education gives no clue to them. The business of the hour went on, and my attention was soon wholly taken up in the development of the gigantic guilt of the wretched culprit before me. I could not have conceived of such atrocity as I heard brought home to him, and to which, miserable man! he listened, now with a smile, now with perfect unconcern, as crime after crime was exhibited and proved. His history was a fearful one even from his boyhood; but of many offences of which he was publicly known to be guilty, one of the latest and most shocking was selected, and on this he was arraigned. It appeared that for the last few years he had cohabited with a female of the most disreputable character. The issue of this connexion was a weakly child, who, at the age of two years, was removed from her dissolute parents through the kindness of a benevolent lady in the neighbourhood, and placed in the care of humble but honest villagers at some distance from them. The child improved in health and, it is unnecessary to add, in morals. No enquiry or application was made for her by the pair until she had entered her fifth year, and then suddenly the prisoner demanded her instant restoration. The charitable lady was alarmed for the safety of her *protegée*, and, with a liberal price, bought off the father's natural desire. He duly gave a receipt for the sum thus paid him, and engaged to see the child no more. The next morning he stole the girl from the labourer's cottage. He was seen loitering about the hut before day-break, and the shrieks of the victim were heard plainly at a considerable distance from the spot where he had first seized

her. Constables were dispatched to his den. It was shut up, and, being forced open, was found deserted, and stripped of every thing. He was hunted over the county, but not discovered. He had retired to haunts which baffled the detective skill of the most experienced and alert. This is the first act of the tragedy. It will be necessary to stain these pages by a description of the last. The child became more and more unhappy under the roof of her persecutors, as they soon proved themselves to be. She was taught to beg and to steal, and was taken into the highways by her mother, who watched near her, whilst, with streaming eyes, the unhappy creature now lied for alms, now pilfered from the village. Constant tramping, ill treatment, and the wear and tear of spirit which the new mode of existence effected, soon reduced the child to its former state of ill health and helplessness. She pined, and with her sickness came want and hunger to the hut. The father, affecting to disbelieve, and not listening to the sad creature's complaint, still dismissed her abroad, and when she could not walk, compelled the mother to carry her to the public road, and there to leave her in her agony, the more effectually to secure the sympathy of passengers. Even this opportunity was not long afforded him. The child grew weaker, and was at length unable to move. He plied her with menaces and oaths, and, last of all, deliberately threatened to murder her, if she did not rise and procure bread for all of them. She had, alas! no longer power to comply with his request, and—merciful Heaven! —the fiend, in a moment of unbridled passion, made good his

fearful promise. With one blow of a hatchet—alas! it needed not a hard one—*he destroyed her*. I caught the judge's eye as this announcement was made. It quivered, and his countenance was pale. I wished to see the monster *too*, but my heart failed me, and my blood boiled with indignation, and I could not turn to him. The short account which I have given here does bare justice to the evidence which came thick and full against the prisoner, leaving upon the minds of none the remotest doubt of his fearful criminality. The mother, and a beggar who had passed the night in the hut when the murder was perpetrated, were the principal witnesses against the infanticide, and their depositions could not be shaken. I waited with anxiety and great irritability for the sentence which should remove the prisoner from the bar. The earth seemed polluted as long as he breathed upon it; he could not be too quickly withdrawn, and hidden for ever in the grave. The case for the prosecution being closed, a young barrister arose, and there was a perfect stillness in the court. My curiosity to know what this gentleman could possibly urge on behalf of his client was extreme. To me "the probation bore no hinge, nor loop to ban a doubt on." But the smoothfaced counsellor, whose modesty had no reference to his years, seemed in no way burdened by the weight of his responsibility, nor to view his position as one of difficulty and risk. He stood, cool and erect, in the silence of the assembly, and with a self-satisfied *smile* he proceeded to address the judge. Yes, he laughed, and he had heard that heart-breaking recital; and the life of the man

for whom he pleaded was hardly worth a pin's fee. The words of the poet rushed involuntarily to my mind. "Heaven!" I mentally exclaimed, "*Has this fellow no feeling of his business—he sings at grave-making*!" He made no allusion to the evidence which had been adduced, but he spoke of INFORMALITY. I trembled with alarm and anger. I had often heard and read of justice defeated by such a trick of trade; but I prayed that such dishonour and public shame might not await her now. Informality! Surely we had heard of the cold-blooded cruelty, the slow and exquisite torture, the final deathblow; there was no informality in these; the man had not denied his guilt, his defender did not seek to palliate it. Away with the juggle, it cannot avail you here! But in spite of my feverish security, the shrewd lawyer—well might he smile and chuckle at his skill—proceeded calmly to assert the prisoner's right to his immediate *discharge! There was a flaw in the declaration, and the indictment was invalid*. And thus he proved it. The man was charged with murdering his child—described as his, and bearing his own name. Now, the deceased was illegitimate, and should have borne its mother's name. He appealed to his lordship on the bench, and demanded for his client the benefit which law allowed him. You might have heard the faintest whisper in the court, so suspended and so kept back was every drop of human breath, whilst every eye was fixed upon the judge. The latter spoke. "*The exception was conclusive; the prisoner must be discharged*." I could not conceive it possible. What were truth, equity, morality—Nothing? And was murder

innocence, if a quibble made it so? The jailer approached the monster, and whispered into his ear that he was now at liberty. He held down his head stupidly to receive the words, and he drew it back again, incredulous and astounded. Oh, what a secret he had learned for future government and conduct! What a friend and abettor, in his fight against mankind, had he found in the law of his land! I was maddened when I saw him depart from the well-secured bar in which he had been placed for trial. There he had looked the thing he was—a tiger caught, and fastened in his den. Could it do less than chill the blood, and make the heart grow sick and faint, to see the bolts drawn back—the monster loosed again, and turned unchained, untamed, fiercer than ever, into life again? Legislators, be merciful to humanity, and cease to embolden and incite these beasts of prey! Melancholy as the above recital is, it is to be considered rather as an episode in this narration, than as the proper subject of it. Had my morning's adventure finished with this disgraceful acquittal, the reader would not have been troubled with the perusal of these pages. My vexation would have been confined to my own breast, and I should have nourished my discontent in silence. The scene which immediately followed the dismissal of the murderer, is that to which I have chiefly to beg attention. It led to an acquaintance, for which I was unprepared —enabled me to do an act of charity, for which I shall ever thank God who gave me the power—and disclosed a character and a history to which the intelligent and kind-hearted may well afford the tribute of their sympathy. It was by way of contrast and relief,

I presume, that the authorities had contrived that the next trial should hardly call upon the time and trouble of the court. It was a case, in fact, which ought to have been months before summarily disposed of by the committing magistrate, and one of those too frequently visited with undue severity, whilst offences of a deeper dye escape unpunished, or, worse still, are washed away in *gold*. A poor man had stolen from a baker's shop a loaf of bread. *The clerk of the arraigns*, as I believe he is called, involved this simple charge in many words, and took much time to state it but when he had finished his oration, I could discover nothing more or less than the bare fact. A few minutes before the appearance of the delinquent, I remarked a great bustle in the neighbourhood of the young barrister already spoken of. A stout fresh-coloured man had taken a seat behind him with two thinner men, his companions, and they were all in earnest conversation. The stout man was the prosecutor—his companions were his witnesses —and the youthful counsellor was, on this occasion, retained *against* the prisoner. I must confess that, for the moment, I had a fiendish delight in finding the legal gentleman in his present position. "It well becomes the man," thought I, "through whose instrumentality that monster has been set free, to fall with all his weight of eloquence and legal subtlety upon this poor criminal." If he smiled before, he was in earnest now. He frowned, and closed his lips with much solemnity, and every look bespoke the importance of the interests committed to his charge.—A beggar! —and to steal a loaf of bread! Ay, ay! society must be protected

—our houses and our homes must be defended. Anarchy must be strangled in its birth. Such thoughts as these I read upon the brow of youthful wisdom. Ever and anon, a good point in the case struck forcibly the lusty prosecutor, who communicated it forthwith to his adviser. *He* listened most attentively, and shook his head, as who should say "Leave that to me—we have him on the hip." The witnesses grew busy in comparing notes, and nothing now was wanting but the great offender—the fly who must be crushed upon the wheel—and he appeared. Reader, you have seen many such. You have not lived in the crowded thoroughfares of an overgrown city, where every grade of poverty and wealth, of vice and virtue, meet the eye, mingling as they pass along—where splendid royalty is carried quicker than the clouds adown the road which palsied hunger scarce can cross for lack of strength—where lovely forms, and faces pure as angels' in their innocent expression, are met and tainted on the path by unwomanly immodesty and bare licentiousness—amongst such common sights you have not dwelt, and not observed some face pale and wasted from disease, and want, and sorrow, not one, but all, and all uniting to assail the weakly citadel of flesh, and to reduce it to the earth from which it sprung. Such a countenance was here—forlorn—emaciated—careworn—every vestige of human joy long since removed from it, and every indication of real misery too deeply marked to admit a thought of simulation or pretence. The eye of the man was vacant. He obeyed the turnkey listlessly, when that functionary, with

a patronizing air, directed him to the situation in the dock in which he was required to stand, and did not raise his head to look around him. A sadder picture of the subdued, crushed heart, had never been. Punishment! alack, what punishment could be inflicted now on him, who, in the school of suffering, had grown insensible to torture? Notwithstanding his rags, and the prejudice arising from his degraded condition, there was something in his look and movements which struck me, and secured my pity. He was very ill, and had not been placed many minutes before the judge, when he tottered and grew faint. The turnkey assisted the poor fellow to a chair, and placed in his hands, with a rough but natural kindness, which I shall not easily forget, a bunch of sweet-smelling marjoram. The acknowledgement which the miserable creature attempted to make for the seasonable aid, convinced me that he was something better than he seemed. A shy and half-formed bow—the impulse of a heart and mind once cultivated, though covered now with weeds and noxious growths—redeemed him from the common herd of thieves. In the calendar his age was stated to be thirty-five. Double it, and that face will warrant you in your belief. Desirous as I was to know the circumstances which had led the man to the commission of his offence, it was not without intense satisfaction that I heard him, at the commencement of the proceedings, in his thin tremulous voice, plead *guilty* to the charge. There was such rage painted on the broad face of the prosecutor, such disappointment written in the thinner visage of the counsellor,

such indignation and astonishment in those of the witnesses, that you might have supposed those gentlemen were interested only in the establishment of the prisoner's innocence, and were anxious only for his acquittal. For their sakes was gratified at what I hoped would prove the abrupt conclusion of the case. The prisoner had spoken; his head again hung down despondingly—his eyes, gazing at nothing, were fixed upon the ground; the turnkey whispered to him that it was time to retire—he was about to obey, when the judge's voice was heard, and it detained him.

"Is the prisoner known?" enquired his lordship.

The counsellor rose *instanter*.

"Oh, very well, my lud—an old hand, my lud—one of the pests of his parish."

"Is this his first offence?"

The barrister poked his ear close to the mouth of the prosecutor before he answered.

"By no means, my lud—he has been frequently convicted."

"For the like offence?" enquired the Judge.

Again the ear and mouth were in juxtaposition.

"We believe so, my lud—we believe so," replied the smart barrister; "but we cannot speak positively."

The culprit raised his leaden eye, and turned his sad look towards the judge, his best friend there.

"For BEGGARY, my lord," he uttered, almost solemnly.

"Does any body know you, prisoner?" asked my lord. "Can any one speak to your previous character?"

The deserted one looked around the court languidly enough, and shook his head, but, at the same instant there was a rustling amongst the crowd of auditors, and a general movement, such as follows the breaking up of a compact mass of men when one is striving to pass through it.

"Si-*lence*!" exclaimed a sonorous voice, belonging to a punchy body, a tall wand, and a black bombasin gown; and immediately afterwards, "a friend of the prisoner's, my lord. Get into that box—speak loud—look at his lordship. Si-*lence*!"

The individual who caused this little excitement, and who now ascended the witness's tribune, was a labouring man. He held a paper cap in his hand, and wore a jacket of flannel. The prisoner glanced at him without seeming to recognize his friend, whilst the eyes of the young lawyer actually glistened at the opportunity which had come at last for the display of his skill.

"What are you, my man?" said the judge in a tone of kindness.

"A journeyman carpenter, please your worship."

"You must say *my lord*—say *my lord*," interposed the bombasin gown.

"Speak out. Si-*lence*!"

"Where do you live?"

"Friar's Place—please you, my lord." The bombasin smiled pitifully at the ignorance of the witness, and said no more.

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"About ten weeks ago—please you, my lord, I was hired by the landlord—"

"Answer his lordship, sir," exclaimed the counsel for the prosecution in a tone of thunder. "Never mind the landlord. Do you know the prisoner?"

"Why, I was a saying, please you, my lord, about ten weeks ago I was hired by the landlord—"

"Answer directly, sir," continued the animated barrister—"or take the consequences. Do you know the prisoner?"

"Let him tell his story his own way, Mr Nailhim," interposed his lordship blandly. "We shall sooner get to the end of it."

Mr Nailhim bowed to the opinion of the court, and sat down.

"Now, my man," said his lordship, "as quickly as you can, tell me whatever you know of the prisoner."

"About ten weeks ago—please you, my lord," began the journey-man *de novo*, "I was hired by the landlord of them houses as is sitiwated where Mr Warton lives—" (The bombasin looked at the witness with profound contempt, and well he might! The idea of calling a prisoner at the bar *Mr*—stupendous ignorance!) "and I see'd him day arter day, and nobody was put to it as bad as he was. He has got a wife and three children, and I know he worked as hard as he could whilst he was able; but when he got ill he couldn't, and he was druv to it. I have often taken a loaf of bread to him, and all I wish is, he had stolen one of mine behind my back instead of the baker's. I shouldn't have come agin him, poor fellow! and I am sure he wouldn't have done it if his young uns hadn't been starving. I never see'd him before that time, but I could take my affidavy he's an industrious and

honest man, and as sober, please you, my lord, as a judge."

At this last piece of irreverence, the man with the staff stood perfectly still, lost as it seemed, in wonder at the hardihood of him who could so speak.

"Have you any thing more to say?" asked his lordship.

The carpenter hesitated for a second or two, and then acknowledged that he had not; and, such being the case, it seemed hardly necessary for Mr Nailhim to prolong his examination. But that gentleman thought otherwise. He rose, adjusted his gown, and looked not only *at* the witness, but through and through him.

"Now, young man," said he, "what is your name?"

"John Mallett, sir," replied the carpenter.

"John Mallett. Very well. Now, John Mallett, who advised you to come here to-day? Take care what you are about, John Mallett."

The carpenter, without a moment's hesitation, answered that his "old woman had advised him; and very good advice it was, he thought."

"Never mind your thoughts, sir. You don't come here to think. Where do you live?"

The witness answered.

"You have not lived long there, I believe?"

"Not quite a fortnight, sir."

"You left your last lodging in a hurry too, I think, John Mallett?"

"Rather so, sir," answered Innocence itself, little dreaming of effects and consequences.

"A little trouble, eh, John Mallett?"

"Mighty deal your lordship, ah, ah, ah!" replied the witness quite jocosely, and beginning to enjoy the sport.

"Don't laugh here, sir, but can you tell us what you were doing, sir, last Christmas four years?"

Of course he could not—and Mr Nailhim knew it, or he never would have put the question; and the unlucky witness grew so confused in his attempt to find the matter out, and, in his guesses, so confounded one Christmas with another, that first he blushed, and then he spoke, and then he checked himself, and spoke again, just contradicting what he said before, and looked at length as like a guilty man as any in the jail. Lest the effect upon the court might still be incomplete, the wily Nailhim, in the height of Mallett's trouble, threw, furtively and knowingly, a glance towards the jury, and smiled upon them so familiarly, that any lingering doubt must instantly have given way. They agreed unanimously with Nailhim. A greater scoundrel never lived than this John Mallett. The counsellor perceived his victory, and spoke.

"Go down, sir, instantly," said he, "and take care how you show your face up there again. I have nothing more to say, my lud."

And down John Mallett went, his friend and he much worse for his intentions.

"And now this mighty case is closed!" thought I. "What will they do to such a wretch!" I was disappointed. The good judge was determined not to forsake the man, and he once more addressed him.

"Prisoner," said he, "what induced you to commit this act?"

The prisoner again turned his desponding eye upwards, and answered, as before—

"Beggary, my lord."

"What are you?"

"Nothing, my lord—any thing."

"Have you no trade?"

"No, my lord."

"What do your wife and children do?"

"They are helpless, my lord, and they starve with me."

"Does no one know you in your neighbourhood?"

"No one, my lord. I am a stranger there. *We are all low people there*, my lord."

There was something so truly humble and plaintive in the tone with which these words were spoken, and the eyes of the afflicted man filled so suddenly with tears as he uttered them, that I became affected in a manner which I now find it difficult to describe. My blood seemed to chill, and my heart to rush into my throat. I am ashamed to say that my own eyes were as moist as the prisoner's. I resolved from that moment to become his friend, and to enquire into his circumstances and character, as soon as the present proceedings were at an end.

"How long has the prisoner been confined already?"

"Something like three months, my lud," answered the barrister cavalierly as if months were minutes.

"It is punishment enough," said the judge—"let him be discharged now. Prisoner, you are discharged—you must endeavour to get employment. If you are ill, apply to your parish; there is no excuse for stealing—none whatever. You are at liberty now."

The information did not seem to carry much delight to the heart of him whom it was intended to benefit. He rose from his chair, bowed to his lordship, and then followed the turnkey, in whose expression of countenance and attentions there was certainly a marked alteration since the wind had set in favourably from the bench. The man departed. Moved by a natural impulse, I likewise quitted the court the instant afterwards, enquired of one of the officials the way of egress for discharged prisoners, and betook myself there without delay. What my object was I cannot now, as I could not then, define. I certainly did not intend to accost the poor fellow, or to commit myself in any way with him, for the present, at all events. Yet there I was, and I could not move from the spot, however useless or absurd my presence there might be. It was a small low door, with broad nails beaten into it, through which the liberated passed, as they stepped from gloom and despair, into freedom and the unshackled light of heaven. I was not then in a mood to trust myself to the consideration of the various and mingled feelings with which men from time to time,

and after months of hopelessness and pain, must have bounded from that barrier, into the joy of liberty and life. My feelings had become in some way mastered by what I had seen, and all about my heart was disturbance and unseemly effeminacy. There was only one individual, besides myself, walking in the narrow court-yard, which, but for our footsteps, would have been as silent as a grave. This was a woman—a beggar—carrying, as usual, a child, that drew less sustenance than sorrow from the mother's breast. She was in rags, but she looked clean, and she might once have been beautiful; but settled trouble and privation had pressed upon her hollow eye—had feasted on her bloomy skin. I could not tell her age. With a glance I saw that she was old in suffering. And what was her business here? For whom did *she* wait? Was it for the father of that child?—and was she so satisfied of her partner's innocence, and the justice of mankind, that here she lingered to receive him, assured of meeting him again? What was his crime?—his character?—her history? I would have given much to know, indeed, I was about to question her, when I was startled and detained by the drawing of a bolt—the opening of the door—and the appearance of the very man whom I had come to see. He did not perceive me. He perceived nothing but the mother and the child—*his* wife and *his* child. She ran to him, and sobbed on his bosom. He said nothing. He was calm—composed; but he took the child gently from her arms, carried the little thing himself to give her ease, and walked on. She at his side, weeping ever; but he silent, and not suffering himself to speak, save when a word

of tenderness could lull the hungry child, who cried for what the mother might not yield her. Still without a specific object, I followed the pair, and passed with them into the most ancient and least reputable quarter of the city. They trudged from street to street, through squalid courts and lanes, until I questioned the propriety of proceeding, and the likelihood of my ever getting home again. At length, however, they stopped. It was a close, narrow, densely peopled lane in which they halted. The road was thick with mud and filth; the pavement and the doorways of the houses were filled with ill-clad sickly children, the houses themselves looked forbidding and unclean. The bread-stealer and his wife were recognised by half a dozen coarse women, who, half intoxicated, thronged the entrance to the house opposite to that in which they lodged, and a significant laugh and nod of the head were the greetings with which they received the released one back again. There was little heart or sympathy in the movement, and the wretched couple understood it so. The woman had dried her tears—both held down their heads—even there—for shame, and both crawled into the hole in which, for their children's sake, they *lived*, and were content to find their home. Now, then, it was time to retrace my steps. It was, but I could not move from the spot—that is, not retreat from it, as yet. There was something to do. My conscience cried aloud to me, and, thank God, was clamorous till I grew human and obedient. I entered the house. A child was sitting at the foot of the stairs, her face and arms begrimed—her black hair hanging to her back

foul with disease and dirt. She was about nine years old; but evil knowledge, cunning duplicity, and the rest, were glaring in her precocious face. She clasped her knees with her extended hands, and swinging backwards and forwards, sang, in a loud and impudent voice, the burden of an obscene song. I asked this creature if a man named Warton dwelt there. She ceased her song, and commenced whistling—then stared me full in the face and burst into loud laughter.

"What will you give if I tell you?" said she, with a bold grin. "Will you stand a glass of gin?"

I shuddered. At the same moment I heard a loud coughing, and the voice of the man himself overhead. I ascended the stairs, and, as I did so, the girl began her song again, as if she had suffered no interruption. I gathered from a crone whom I encountered at the top of the first flight of steps, that the person of whom I was in quest lived with his family in the back room of the highest floor; and thither, with unfailing courage, I proceeded. I arrived at the door, knocked at it briskly without a moment's hesitation, and recognized the deep and now well-known tones of Warton in the voice desiring men to enter. The room was very small, and had no article of furniture except a table and two chairs. Some straw was strewn in a corner of the room, and two children were lying asleep upon it, their only covering being a few patches of worn-out carpet. Another layer was in the opposite corner, similarly provided with clothing. This was the parents' bed. I was too confused, and too anxious to avoid giving offence, to make

a closer observation. The man and his wife were sitting together when I entered. The former had still the infant in his arms, and he rose to receive me with an air of good breeding and politeness, that staggered me from the contrast it afforded with his miserable condition—his frightful poverty.

"I have to ask your pardon," said I, "for this intrusion, but your name is Warton, I believe?"

"It is, sir," he replied—and the eyes of the wife glistened again, as she gathered hope and comfort from my unexpected visit. She trembled as she looked at me, and the tears gushed forth again.

("These are not bad people, I will swear it," I said to myself, as I marked her, and I took confidence from the conviction, and went on.)

"I have come to you," said I, "straight from the sessions'-house, where, by accident, I was present during your short trial. I wish to be of a little service to you. I am not a rich man, and my means do not enable me to do as much as I would desire; but I can relieve your immediate want, and perhaps do something more for you hereafter, if I find you are deserving of assistance."

"You are very kind, sir," answered the man, "and I am very grateful to you. We are strangers to you, sir, but I trust these (pointing to his wife and children) *may* deserve your bounty. For myself—"

"Hush, dear!" said his wife, with a gentleness and accent that confounded me. *Low* people! why, with full stomachs, decent

clothing, and a few pounds, they might with every propriety have been ushered at once into a drawing-room.

"Poor Warton is very ill, sir," continued the wife, "and much suffering has robbed him of his peace of mind. I am sure, sir, we shall be truly grateful for your help. We need it, sir, Heaven knows, and he is not undeserving—no, let them say what they will."

I believed it in my heart, but I would not say so without less partial evidence.

"Well," I continued, "we will talk of this by and by. I am determined to make a strict enquiry, for your own sakes as well as my own. But you are starving now, it seems, and I sha'n't enquire whether you deserve a loaf of bread. Here," said I, giving, them a sovereign, "get something to eat, for God's sake, and put a little colour, if you can, into those little faces when they wake again."

The man started suddenly from his chair, and walked quickly to the window. His wife followed him, alarmed, and took the infant from his arms, whilst he himself pressed his hand to his heart, as though he would prevent its bursting. His face grew deathly pale. The female watched him earnestly, and the hitherto silent and morose man, convulsed by excess of feeling, quivered in every limb, whilst he said with difficulty—

"Anna, I shall die—I am suffocated—air—air—my heart beats like a hammer."

I threw the window open, and the man drooped on the sill, and wept fearfully.

"What does this mean?" I asked, speaking in a low tone to the wife.

"Your sudden kindness, sir. He is not able to bear it. He is proof against cruelty and persecution—he has grown reckless to them, but constant illness has made him so weak, that any thing unusual quite overcomes him."

"Well, there, take the money, and get some food as quickly as you can. I will not wait to distress him now. I will call again to-morrow; he will be quieter then, and we'll see what can be done for you. Those children must be cold. Have you no blankets?"

"None, sir. We have nothing in the world. What, you see here, even to the straw, belongs, to the landlord of the house, who has been charitable enough to give us shelter."

"Well, never mind—don't despond—don't give way—keep the poor fellow's sprits up. Here's another crown. Let him have a glass of wine, it will strengthen him; and do you take a glass too. I shall see you again to-morrow. There, good-by."

And, fool and woman that I was, on I went, and stood for some minutes, ashamed of myself, in the passage below, because, forsooth, I had been talking and exciting myself until my eyes had filled uncomfortably with water.

It was impossible for me to go to sleep again until I had purchased blankets for these people, and so I resolved at once to get them. I was leaving the house for that purpose, when a porter with a bundle entered it.

"Whom do you want, my man?" said I.

"One Warton, sir", said he.

"Top of the house," said I again—"back room—to the right. What have you got there?"

"Some sheets and blankets, sir."

"From whom?"

"My master sir, here's his card."

It was the card of an upholsterer living within a short distance of where I stood. I directed the porter again, and forthwith sallied to the man of furniture. Here I learnt that I had been forestalled by an individual as zealous in the cause of poor Warton as myself. I was glad of this, for I knew very well, in doing any little piece of duty, how apt our dirty vanity is to puff us up, and to make us assume so much more than we have any title to; and it is nothing short of relief to be able to extinguish this said vanity in the broad light of other men's benevolence. The upholsterer, however, could not inform me who this generous man was, or how he had been made aware of Warton's indigence. It appears that he had called only a few minutes before I arrived, and had requested that the articles which he purchased should be sent, without a moment's delay, to the address which he gave. He waited in the shop until the porter quitted it, and then departed, having, at the request of the upholsterer, who was curious for the name of his customer, described himself in the day-book as Mr Jones. "He was not a gentleman," said the man of business, "certainly not, and he didn't look like a tradesman. I should say," he added, "that he was a gentleman's butler, for he was mighty

consequential, ordered every body about, and wanted me to take off discount."

My mind being made easy in respect of the blankets, I had nothing to do but to return, as diligently as I could, to the house of my friend, Mr Treherne. I reached his dwelling in time to prepare for dinner, at which repast, as on the previous evening, I encountered a few select friends and opulent business men. These were a different set. Before joining them, Treherne had given me to understand that they were all very wealthy, and very liberal in their politics, and before quitting them I heartily believed him. There was a great deal of talk during dinner, and, as the newspapers say, after the cloth was removed, on the aspect of affairs in general. The corn-laws were discussed, the condition of the Irish was lamented, the landed gentry were abused, the Church was threatened, the Tories were alluded to as the enemies of mankind and the locusts of the earth; whilst the people, the poor, the labouring classes, the masses, and whatever was comprised within these terms, had their warmest sympathy and approbation. My habits are somewhat retired, and I mix now little with men. I can conscientiously affirm, that I never in my life heard finer sentiments or deeper philanthropy than I did on this occasion from the guests of my friend, and with what pleasure I need not say, when it suddenly occurred to me to call upon them for a subscription on behalf of the starving family whom I had met that day.

"You must take care, my dear sir," said a gentleman, before I

had half finished my story, (he might be called the leader of the opposition from the precedence which he took in the company in opposing all existing institutions,)—"You must, indeed; you are a stranger here. You must not believe all you hear. These fellows will trump up any tale. I know them of old. Don't you be taken in. Take my word—it's a man's own fault if he comes to want. Depend upon it."

"So it is—so it is; that's very true," responded half-a-dozen gentlemen with large bellies, sipping claret as they spoke.

"I do not think, gentlemen," I answered, "that I am imposed upon in this case."

"Ah, ah!" said many Liberals at once, shaking their heads in pity at my simplicity.

"At all events," I added, "you'll not refuse a little aid."

"Certainly, I shall," replied the leader; "it's a rule, sir. I wouldn't break through it. I act entirely upon principle! I can't encourage robbery and vagrancy. It's Quixotic."

"Quite so—quite so!" murmured the bellies.

"Besides, there's the Union; we are paying for that. Why don't these people go in? Why, they tell me they may live in luxury there!"

"He has a wife and three children—it's hard to separate, perhaps—"

"Pooh, pooh, sir!"

"Pooh, pooh!" echoed the bellies.

"And, I'll tell you what, sir," said the gentleman emphatically

in conclusion, "if you want to do good to society, you mustn't begin at the fag end of it; leave the thieves to the jailers, and the poor to the guardians. Repeal the corn-laws—give us free trade—universal suffrage—and religious liberty; that's what we want. I don't ask you to put a tax upon tallow—why do you want to put a tax upon corn? I don't ask you to pay my minister—why do you want me to pay your parson? I don't ask you—"

"Oh! don't let us hear all that over again, there's a good fellow," said Treherne, imploringly. "Curse politics. Who is for whist? The tables are ready."

The company rose to a man at the mention of whist, and took their places at the tables. I did not plead again for poor Warton; but his wretched apartment came often before my eyes in the glitter of the wax-lit room in which I stood, surrounded by profusion. His unhappy but faithful wife—his sleeping children—his own affecting expression of gratitude, occupied my mind, and soothed it. What a blessed thing it is to minister to the necessities of others! How happy I felt in the knowledge that they would sleep peacefully and well that night! I had been for some time musing in a corner of the room, when I was roused by the loud voice of the Liberal.

"Well, I tell you what, Treherne, I'll bet you five to one on the game."

"Done!" said Treherne.

"Crowns?" added the Liberal.

"Just as you like—go on—your play."

In a few minutes the game was settled. The Liberal lost his crowns, and Treherne took them. Madmen both! Half of that sum would have given a month's bread to the beggars. Did it enrich or serve the wealthy winner? No. What was it these men craved? They could part with their money freely when they chose. Was it excitement? And is none to be derived from appeasing the hunger, and securing the heartfelt prayers of the naked and the poor? I withdrew from the noisy party, and retired to my room, determined to investigate the affairs of my new acquaintances at an early hour in the morning, and effectually to help them if I could.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Mr Treherne readily acquiesced in my wish to delay the execution of our business for another day, when I made the proposition to him on our meeting the following morning at his breakfast table. He seemed so thoroughly engrossed in his own affairs, so overwhelmed with his peculiar labours, that he was, I believe, grateful to me for the reprieve. For my own part, I had engaged to afford myself a week's recreation, and I had no wish to revisit London until the last moment of my holiday had been accomplished. It is little pastime that the employments of the present day enable a man to take, who would fain retain his position, and not be elbowed out of it by the ninety and nine unprovided gentlemen who are waiting for a scramble. The race of life has grown intense—the runners are on each other's heels. Woe be to him who rests, or stays to tie his shoe-string! Our repast concluded, and Mr Treherne, again taking leave of me until dinner-time, I set out at once for the attic of my unhappy bread-stealer. What was the object of my visit? I had given him a sovereign. What did I intend further to do for him? I had, in truth, no clear conception of my purpose. The man was ill, friendless, without employment, and had "*the incumbrances*," wife and children, as the sick and unemployed invariably do have; but although these facts, coming before a man, presented a fair claim upon his purse (if he chanced to have one) to the

extent of that purse's ability, yet the demand closed legitimately here, and the hand of charity being neither grudgingly nor ostentatiously proffered, the conscience of the donor and the heart of the receiver had no reason whatever to complain. Still my conscience was not at ease, and it *did* complain whenever I hesitated and argued the propriety of engaging any further in the business of a man whom I had known only a few hours, and whose acquaintance had been made, certainly, not under the most favourable circumstances. It is a good thing to obey an instinct, if it be stimulated toward that which is honourable or good for man to do; yes, though cold deliberation will not give it sanction. It was an urging of this kind that led me on. Convinced that I had done enough for this unhappy man, I was provoked, importuned to believe that I ought to do still more. "It may be"—the words forced their way into my ears—"that the interest which has been excited in me for this family, is not the result of a mere accident. Providence may have led me to their rescue, and confided their future welfare to my conduct. *He* is an outcast—isolated amongst men—may be a worthy and deserving creature, crushed and kept down by his misfortunes. Is a trifling exertion enough to raise him, and shall I not give it to him?" Then passed before my eyes visions, the possibility of realizing which, made me blush with shame for a moment's indecision or delay. First, I pictured myself applying to my friend Pennyfeather, who lives in that dark court near the Bank of England, and sleeps in Paradise at his charming villa in Kent, and gaining through his powerful

interest a situation—say of eighty pounds per annum—for the father of the family; then visiting that incomparable and gentle lady, Mrs Pennyfeather, whose woman's heart opens to a tale of sorrow, as flowers turn their beauty to the sun, and obtaining a firm promise touching the needle-work for Mrs Warton. And then the scene changed altogether, and I was walking in the gayest spirits, whistling and singing through Camden town on my way to their snug lodgings in the vale of Hampstead heath—and the time is twilight. And first I meet the children, neatly dressed, clean, and wholesome looking, jumping and leaping about the heather at no particular sport, but in the very joy and healthiness of their young blood—and they catch sight of me, and rush to greet me, one and all. They lead me to their mother. How beautiful she has become in the subsidence of mental tumult, in quiet, grateful labour, and, more than all, in the sunlight of her husband's gradual restoration! She is busy with her needle, and her chair is at the window, so that she may watch the youngsters even whilst she works; and near her is the table, already covered with a snow-white cloth, and ready for "dear Warton" when he comes home, an hour hence, to supper. "Well, you are happy, Mrs Warton, now, I think," say I. "Yes, thanks to you, kind sir," is the reply. "We owe it all to you;" and the children, as if they understand my claim upon their love, hang about my chair;—one at my knee, looking in my face; another with my hand, pressing it, with all his little might, in his; a third inactive, but ready to urge me to prolong my stay, as soon as I should think of quitting

them. What a glow of comfort and self-respect passed through my system, as the picture, bright with life and colour, fixed itself upon my brain, stepping, as I was, into the unwholesome lane, and shrinking from the foetid atmosphere. I could hesitate no longer. I began to make my plans as I trudged up the filthy stairs. The measured tones of a voice, engaged apparently with a book, made me stop short at the attic floor. I recognised the sound, and caught the words. The mendicants were at their prayers. "The benevolent stranger" was not forgotten in the supplication, nor was he unmoved as be listened in secret to the fervent accents of his fellow man. Whilst I have no pretension to the character of a saint, I am free to confess, that amongst the fairest things of earth few look so sublime as piety, steadfast and serene, amidst the cloud and tempest of calamity. Was it so here? I had yet to learn. A striking improvement had taken place in the aspect of the room since the preceding evening. The straw was gone. Its place had been supplied by the gift of the anonymous benefactor, of whom, by the way, nothing was known, or had since been heard. The beds were already removed to an angle of the apartment—the pieces of carpet were converted into a rug for the fire place, and a chair or two were ready for visitors. Warton himself looked a hundred per cent better—his wife was all smiles, when she could refrain from tears; and the children had been too much astonished by their sumptuous fare, to be any thing but satiated, contented, happy. My vision was already half realized. When I had submitted for an inconvenient space of time

to their reiterated thanks and protestations, I put an end to further expressions of gratitude, by informing them that my stay in the city was limited—that I had no time for any thing but business, and that we must have as few *words* as possible. I wished to know in what way I could effectually serve them.

"You said, sir, yesterday," replied Warton, "that you would take no steps in our favour, until you had satisfied yourself that we, at least, deserved your bounty. Had you not said it, I should not have been happy until I had afforded you all the satisfaction in my power. Heaven knows I owe it to you! It is to you, sir—"

"Come, my good fellow, remember what I told you. No protestations. Let us come to the point."

"Thank you, sir—I will. Are you acquainted with London?"

"Tolerably well. What then?"

"You may have heard, sir, of a merchant there of the name of ——"

"Ay have I. One of our first men. Do you know him? Will he give you a character?"

"He is my uncle, sir—my mother's brother. Apply to him, and he will tell you I am a plunderer and a villain."

I looked at Mr Warton, somewhat startled by his frank communication, and waited to hear more.

"It is false—it is false!" continued the speaker emphatically. "I cannot melt a rock. I cannot penetrate a heart of stone. If I could do so, he would be otherwise."

"You surprise me!" I exclaimed.

"That I live, sir, is a miracle to myself. That I have not been destroyed by the misery which I have borne, is marvellous. A giant's strength must yield before oppression heaped upon oppression. But there, sir"—he added, pointing to his wife, and struggling for composure—"there has been my stay, my hope, my incitement; but for her—God bless her"—The wife motioned him to be silent, and he paused.

"This excitement is too much for him, is it not?" I asked. "Come, Mr Warton, you are still weak and unwell. I will not distress you now."

"I ask your pardon, sir. Three years' illness, annoyance, irritation, poverty, have made me what you see me. It has not been so always. I was vigorous and manly until the flesh gave way, and refused to bear me longer up. But I will be calm. It is very strange, sir, but even now one look from her subdues me, and restores me to myself."

"You have received a good education—have you not, Mr Warton?"

"Will you spare an hour, sir, to listen to my history?"

"I should be glad to hear it," I replied, "but it will be as well to wait, perhaps—"

I looked enquiringly at his wife.

"No, sir," resumed the man, "I am tranquil now. It is a hard task, but I have strength for it. You shall know every thing. Before you do a second act of charity, you shall hear of the trials of those whom you have saved already. You shall be satisfied."

"Well, be it so," I answered. "Proceed, and I will listen patiently."

Warton glanced at his wife, who rose immediately and quitted the room with her three children. The latter were evidently staggered by the sudden change in their circumstances, and they stared full in my face until the latest moment. Being left alone with my new acquaintance, I felt, for a short time, somewhat ill at ease; but when the poor fellow commenced his history, my attention was excited, and I soon became wholly engrossed in his recital, which proved far more strange and striking than I had any reason to expect.

Mr Warton, as well as I can remember, spoke to me as follows: —

"Knowing what you do, sir," he began, "you will smile, and hardly believe me, when I tell you that the sin of *Pride* has been my ruin. Yes, criminal as I was yesterday—beggar as I am to-day —surrounded by every sign and evidence of want, I confess it to my shame—Pride, has helped to bring me where I am—Pride, not resulting from the consciousness of blood, or the possession of dignities and wealth—but pride, founded upon nothing. I am one of three children. I had two sisters—both are dead. My father was a workhouse boy, and his parentage was unknown. I told you that I had little reason to build a self-esteem upon my family descent; yet there was a period in my life when I would have given all I had in the world for an honourable pedigree—to know that I had bounding in my veins a portion of the blood that ages

since had fallen to secure a nation's liberties, or in any way had served to perpetuate its fame. Wealth, simple wealth, I always regarded with disdain. I revered the well-born. My father was apprenticed from the workhouse to a maker of watch-springs, living in Clerkenwell; but after remaining with his master a few months, during which time he was treated with great severity, he ran away. He obtained a situation in the establishment of a silk-merchant in the city, and began life on his own account as helper to the porter of the house. My father, sir—we may speak well of the departed—had great abilities. He was a wonderful man—not so much on account of what he accomplished, (and, in his station, this was not a little,) as for what he proved himself to be, under every disadvantage that could retard a man struggling through the world, even from his infancy. His perseverance was remarkable, and he had a depth of feeling which no ill treatment or vicissitude could diminish. He must have risen amongst men; for mind is buoyant, and leaps above the grosser element. He had resolved, in his first situation, to do his duty strictly, rather to overdo than to fall short of it, and to make himself, if possible, essential to his employers. He saw, likewise, the advantage of respectful behaviour, and cheerfulness of temper. Whatever he did, he did with a good grace, and with a willingness to oblige, that secured for him the regard of those he served. He was not long in discovering, that it was impossible for him to advance far with his present amount of attainment, however sanguine he might be, and resolute in purpose. The porter's boy might lead

in time to the office of porter; but there was no material rise from this, and the emolument was, at the best, sufficient only for the necessities of life. He learned that the head of the firm himself had been originally a servant in the establishment, and had been promoted gradually from the desk, on account of his industry, trustworthiness, and skill in figures. Now, honest and industrious my father knew himself to be, but of skill in figures he had none. He determined at once to make himself a good accountant, and every leisure hour was employed thenceforward with that object. At the same time he was diligent in improving his handwriting, in storing his mind with useful information, and in preparing himself for any vacancy which might occur at the desk, when his age would justify him in offering himself to fill it. He had held his situation for three years, when an accident happened that materially helped him on. A fire broke out in his master's warehouse. The gentleman was from home, and nobody was on the premises at the time but the porter and himself, who lived and slept in the house. It was in the middle of the night. A fierce wind set in when the flames were at their highest, and, before morning, the place was a heap of ruins. In the first alarm, my father remembered that, in the counting-house, a tin box had been left by his master, which previously had always been carefully locked away in the iron chest. He was sure that it contained papers of great value, and that its loss would be severely felt. He determined to secure it, or, at the least, to make every endeavour. He succeeded, and gained the treasure almost

at the expense of life. He was not mistaken in his supposition. In the box were deposited documents of the highest importance to his master; and the latter, delighted with the boy's acuteness, and grateful for the service, was eager to remunerate him. My father made known his wishes, and his acquaintance with accounts, and in less than six months as soon, indeed, as the house was rebuilt —he had his foot on the first step of the ladder, and took his place amongst the clerks in the counting-house. Ah, sir! there is nothing like perseverance. My father knew his powers, and was the man to exert them. He worked at the desk from morning till night. He gave his heart to his business, and no time was his which could be given to that. What was the consequence? His less energetic brethren envied and hated him, but his employer esteemed and valued him. And he ascended rapidly. It is said that circumstances make the man. I doubt the truth of this. The highest order of minds controls them, moulds them to his purposes, and makes them what he will. Time and opportunity are the crutches of the timid and the helpless. In the course of a few years, my father became the youngest partner in the firm— the youngest, but the most active and the most useful. He began to accumulate. He remained in this position until he reached his thirtieth year, when he looked abroad for a companion and a home. He proposed as a suitor to the daughter of his senior partner—a vain and foolish, although a wealthy man, who had made great plans for his child, and looked for an alliance with nobility. She, a proud and handsome girl, scorned the approaches

of the silk-merchant, and wondered at his boldness. One word, sir, of her, before I follow my father in his career. Oh, the vicissitudes of life—the changes—the sudden rise—the violent fall of men! Well may the player say, 'The spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us.' They do, they do, what a spectacle for gods is man! The woman, sir this arrogant, this supercilious damsel, cradled in gold and satin, and bred in the glossy lap of luxury—died—rotted on a dunghill. Her father gained his nobleman—she, a paramour. She eloped with a marquis, who deserted her. She returned to her home, and found it shut against her. She who had feasted upon the choice morsels of abundance, must, like me, commit crime for a loaf of bread. She is carried abroad by a new protector, and strangers bear her to a pauper's grave. This was her fate, sir. But to return. In consequence of the refusal, a coolness arose between the partners. An angry word or two took place—a taunt—something too galling for my father's pride was spoken, and there was a separation. My father then commenced business on his own foundation—it is hardly necessary for me to say with success. He could not but prosper. To fail whilst reason was left him was impossibility. He soon married. His wife—my mother—was the daughter of a rich merchant. You know the name, sir. Her brother, my uncle, bears the same. I told it you just now. There could not have been a more unfortunate union. My father was full of feeling and noble impulses, intelligent, active, passionate, and required, if not his own qualities in a partner, at least a milder reflex of himself

—a woman that could appreciate his nature, encourage, help, support him; a woman, in a word, with a heart and mind, and both devoted. My mother, unfortunately for her, for all, had no sympathy for her husband—had nothing to offer him but the portion which she brought, and the hand which her father bade her give. She was a cold—must I say it?—unfeeling woman, with little thought beyond herself, her apparel, and her pleasures. I hope, sir, I shall make you understand me. It is hard to speak disparagingly of her who gave me life. Let me be careful that I do her justice. *I* bring against her no charge of vice. I believe her *not* vicious. I ever considered her too weak to be so. I would have you imagine a woman apathetic and characterless; her mental powers just equal to providing her with a becoming garment; her feelings capable, perhaps, of their full expansion if a stranger moved them with some hollow compliment upon her good taste, or, easier still, her beauty—for she was not without this dangerous gift—a lovely image, sir. I have myself, as a boy, often seen a radiance upon her countenance at such a season, when the pretty gambols of my infant sister has failed to draw one smile of approbation. The little sensibility she had waited on a paltry vanity. I may say with truth, that her children caused her no pain. By a fortunate physical constitution, she bore the burden of a mother without the pangs that usually attend a mother's state. In this respect she was considered a remarkable woman by those who deemed their judgement in such matters sound. Once in the world, her care was at an end. I have heard, sir—I have read of mother's love. I

can feel what it should be; I can guess what wonders it may work in the wayward spirit of man; for I longed and yearned for it, but it never came. My elder sister died when a child of two years. My father was then in the zenith of his prosperity, and was absorbed in his affairs; yet this loss—this heavy blow—came upon him like a thunderstroke. Many things occupied his time, but this alone his mind. Deep sighs would escape him in the active prosecution of his business, and his cheeks were suffused with tears as he sped along the city's streets, sacred only to gain and worldly commerce. He doated on his girls, and to lose one was to lose half the joy of his existence. The effect of this calamity was otherwise on my mother; and I revert to the difference in order to make clear to you their respective natures. My mother wept at the death of her child—she would not else have been a woman; but as I have seen weak watery clouds pass across the moon's surface, leaving the planet untouched and tranquil in their transit, so the thin veil of her sorrows did not disturb the palpable unconcern—the neutrality of soul that were behind. One easy flow of tears, and the claim of the departed was satisfied. In a day, the privation had ceased to be one. Here then, sir, are the seeds of a wilderness of after woe: my father, overflowing with affection, and craving, as it were, for sympathy, turning to my mother, and finding there a blank—nothing to rest upon. 'What is fortune,' says the poet, 'to a heart yearning for affection, and finding it not? Is it not as a triumphal crown to the brows of one parched with fever, and asking for one fresh, healthful draught

—*the cup of cold water*?' So it was here, and hence husband and wife became soon estranged from one another. The former, busy from hour to hour in his counting-house, had little time to spare upon his children; the latter, with all her time at her disposal, took no delight in the task. My sister and I, in our infancy, were made over to strangers; and from the hands of the nurse we were transmitted to those of the schoolmistress. When I was old enough, I was removed from my sister's school, and placed, with a select number of young gentlemen, under the care of a highly respectable master. It was here that my pride began to take root. One of my schoolfellows was the son of a general, another the son of a large landed proprietor, a third was heir to a peerage, a fourth traced his ancestors to a period when the soil was yet untrodden by a Norman foot. I was chagrined at my position —irritated—humbled, but the boys, especially those to whom I have alluded, behaved towards me with extreme kindness, and whilst I felt humbled, I did not envy them, because I loved them. I had one advantage, I was the son of a rich *merchant*, as he was called in the school, although *I* knew that title to be one of courtesy only, and I was ashamed of the little superiority which that advantage gave me. What cause for pride can there be in the possession of so much dross? You will smile, sir, when I tell you of the resolution which fixed itself in the mind of a boy scarcely in his teens. My playfellows were respected on account of the considerations which I have named. Why should I not be respected? I vowed that I would become so. And how? For what?

For nothing less, sir, than *myself*; for my own high principle and integrity of conduct. It is true, sir. There were the sons of a noble ancestry about me who would condescend to tell a falsehood, the nephew of an officer who was mean enough to borrow money and not repay it. There were many whose notions of honour were lax and unbecoming. Had I entertained them, they must have been fatal to me. Discarding them for ever, and speaking and acting on all occasions, of trifling or of serious moment, with the most jealous regard to truth and honesty, I relied upon securing for myself what my predecessors had failed to leave me—the respect of my fellow-men, and a good and honourable name. It seems a noble resolution. I repent it to this hour. It is true that I rose rapidly in the estimation of my master, and that I was regarded even with deference, as I grew up, by boys of my own age, and of better standing; but it is no less true, that, from the moment my determination was made, I became morbidly anxious for the good opinion of men, painfully alive to ridicule, and as fearful of the breath of slander or reproach as though it came loaded with the plagues of Egypt. With such an idiosyncrasy, what becomes of happiness on earth? But I tire you, sir."

"Go on, I beg of you," I answered, deeply interested in the narrative, and no less surprised at the language and manner of the speaker, both of which convinced me that he was a man of genius and of education. The whole thing was a mystery, and I was impatient for the solution and the end. "Do not fatigue yourself," I continued. "For my own part I listen with the greatest

interest."

"I remember, sir," proceeded Mr Warton, "as if it were yesterday, my first return home. It was for the midsummer holidays, and gay enough were my spirits then. All was sunshine and hope. I had not seen my parents for two years. It seemed as if twenty had passed over my father's head since our leave-taking. His hair had become blanched, and a settled frown had grown upon his brow. His forehead was full of lines and wrinkles; his lips were constantly pressed together; anger was the predominant expression of his face. The openness of countenance which had so well become him, and which inspired me even as a child with loving confidence, was chased away, and disappointment and vexation had seated themselves in its place. He relaxed for a moment when he saw me, and pressed me, even then, passionately to his arms; but the clouds soon gathered again, and asserted their right of possession. I, boylike and apprehensive, concluded that his affairs were in a disordered state. I had but one thought at the time. I prayed that misfortune, and not *dishonesty*, might appear to the world as the occasion of his difficulties. My mother looked younger than ever. She was dressed with much care, and there was a bloom upon her cheek that would have adorned a country maiden. Not a line, not a shadow of a line, was visible on her soft skin—not a tooth had departed from the ivory and well-formed set. She had retained all that was valueless, and had lost entirely and irreparably the priceless treasure of her husband's love. At supper-time, on the very first evening of

my arrival, I was made thoroughly aware of the fearful change which, in so short a time, had come over the spirit of our home. Joy, I knew, had long since fled from it—now peace had been startled, and there was discord, nothing but discord, at the hearth. My father drew his chair to the table, in the sullen and angry temper which I have told you was visible on his countenance at our meeting. It seemed at first as though he had received offence elsewhere, and was resolved to remain discomforted. I could not understand it, but I was awed by his frown, and sat in terror. In a few minutes, the flame burst forth. My father required a silver spoon. There was one within arm's reach of him. 'But why was it not *before* him?' He repeated the question again and again, until he forced an answer, which gave him no satisfaction, but provoked fresh rage. Then came insipid remonstrances from my mother, foolish argument—passionless, but not on that account less irritating, allusions to the past. There was little incitement required, and a word from her lips scarcely worth noticing was sufficient to maintain a quarrel for an hour. To a stranger, the scene would have been lamentable; to me, their child, it was sad and sickening indeed. I have no terms to express to you the fierceness of my father's anger. By degrees, he lost all mastery over himself; he used the most opprobrious epithets, and, but for me, he would have struck her. For three hours this state of things continued, and at midnight they withdrew, to retire to separate beds, and separate rooms.

"'And all this,' said my mother as she closed her door—'all

this for the sake of a paltry spoon!' Ah! poor woman, could she but have understood how guiltless of offence was that said spoon, she would have learnt the secret of her troubles; but we are not all physicians, sir, and we do not trouble ourselves concerning the *seat* of our complaint, whilst its effects are killing us with pain. It was evident that every spark of affection was extinguished in my father's breast, that his disposition was soured, and that, cause or no cause, misery must be our daily bread. I could not sleep that night, and I rose from my bed in the morning, determined to speak boldly to my father on what had taken place. I loved him—child never loved parent better—and I knew I could speak respectfully— affectionately—yes, and solemnly to him; for, God bless him—he was proud of me, and he listened with regard to my words—on account of my little education, already so superior to his own. I was better able to remonstrate with him, because I had taken no part in the contest which I had witnessed, further than placing myself between them when *his* rage seemed to have robbed him of reason.

"I stepped into his bed-room before he quitted it.

"Father"—said I.

"'What? Edgar,' he replied kindly, 'what can I do for you?'

"I had arranged in my mind the words which I proposed to utter, but they vanished suddenly, and I could do nothing but weep.

"My father, sir, was the strangest of men. Indeed, since his alienation from his wife, the most unaccountable. Rude and

violent as he could be to her—he was the tenderest, the most anxious of fathers. He turned pale as death when he saw me in tears, and entreated me to tell him what I suffered. I gained confidence from his anxiety, and spoke.

"'Father,' I said, 'you must not be angry with me for speaking boldly. Poor mother! you will kill her—you do not treat her well. I am sure nothing could justify all you said and did last night. You called her cruel names. It is not right. I am certain it is not.'

"'Edgar,' said my father, frowning as he went on, 'be silent. You are a child, and I love you. I will do any thing for your happiness. I forbid you to speak to me of your mother.'

"'But if you love me,' I answered quickly, 'you ought to love my mother, too. Oh! do, dear father—do be kind and loving to her.'

"'Edgar,' exclaimed my parent passionately, 'you are very young now—you will be older if you live, and then I can speak to you as a friend. You cannot understand me now. She has broken your father's heart—she has rendered me the most miserable of men. I would I could speak to you, dear Edgar but this tongue will perhaps be cold and immovable before you can understand the tale. I am wretched, wretched, indeed!'

"My father was overcome. He could not himself refrain from tears. I felt deeply for him, and would have given any thing to hear this secret cause of grief. But his expressions kept me silent; and I clasped his hands in pity.

"'Edgar,' he continued in a loud voice, and speaking through

his tears, 'listen to my words. They are sacred. Receive them as you would my dying syllables. You may be distant when the blow falls which divides us. Edgar, I implore you, when you become a man, to let one consideration only guide you in your selection of a partner. Mark me—only one—see that she has a heart—a *virtuous* heart—and that it be yours entire. Despise wealth—beauty—family—look to nothing but that. Would to Heaven that I had!— Edgar—your happiness—your salvation, every thing, depends upon it. I have lost all—I am crushed and ruined; but do you, dear child, learn wisdom from your father's wreck.'

"He said no more. I could not answer him, for my heart was choked. In a few minutes he bade me, in a quiet tone, retire to the breakfast room; and shortly afterwards he made his own appearance there, looking as moodily and cross when he beheld my mother, as when he had encountered her at supper on the night before.

"Now, sir, I am ashamed to confess to you—but I have asked you to hear my history—and you shall hear the truth in the teeth of shame—that all my sympathy was, from this hour, towards my father, and against my mother. It may be wrong—wicked—but I could not control the strong feeling within me. His words had left a powerful impression upon my mind. His tone, his tears—his man's tears—stamped those words with truth, and I believed him wronged. In what way I knew not—nor did I care. It was sufficient for me to hear it, as I did, from his lips, and to be told that it was not possible to reveal more. Besides, sir, I have

already intimated to you that there was little tenderness in my mother's heart for me. She was cold, indifferent, and had never had part in all my little joys and griefs. My father, even with his heavy fault—a fault almost pardoned, as I believed; by the provocation—watched my boyish steps, and rejoiced with me in my well-doing. Nothing had interest for me which was not important to him. He encouraged me in learning. He grudged no money that could be spent in my improvement—he had no joy so great as that which waited on my desire for knowledge. He had been to me a playmate, counsellor, friend, whenever his slender opportunities permitted him to escape to me; and evidences of the most devoted affection had disturbed my youthful heart with an emotion too deep for utterance in the silence and solitude of my schoolboy hours. Yes—right or wrong—by necessity—my sympathy was all for him. And to convince you, sir, that my feelings were enlisted in his cause, irrespectively of self, without the most distant view to my own interest, I have but to refer to the life which I passed under his roof, until I left it, to return, for a second time, to the enjoyments and consolations —as they were always—of my school. Although his affection for me was unbounded, it was not long before I perceived, with bitterness and trouble, that it was impossible for him to save me from the fury of a temper which he had no longer power to govern. I could read, or I believed I could, his inmost soul, and I could see the hourly struggle for forbearance and self-control. It was in vain. If his passion obtained the rein for an

instant—it was wild—away—beyond his reach—and he thought not, in the paroxysm, of the sufferer, whose smile he would not have ruffled in the season of sobriety and quiet. I did not fail again and again to remonstrate on behalf of my mother—for the scene which I have described to you became an endless one; but perceiving at length that representation added only fuel to the fire, I desisted. My lively habits soon appeared to be unsuited to the new order of things. My father would once have smiled with enjoyment at some piece of boyish mischief which now roused him to anger, and before excuse could be offered, or pardon asked—the severest chastisement—I cannot tell how severe, was inflicted on my flesh."

"Madman!" I exclaimed involuntarily, interrupting Warton in his narrative.

"Madman do you say, sir?" he answered quickly. "Yes, I have often thought so—and to an extent, I grant you—if it be madness to have the reason prostrate before passion. But it is profitless to define the malady. I would have you dwell, sir, on the *cause—her* fatal apathy—her indifference—*I know not what besides*—which made him what he was. You may imagine, sir, that my blood has boiled beneath the punishment—that I have burned with indignation beneath the weight of it, undeserved and cruel as it was. Oh, sir! God has visited me these many years with sore affliction. I am a forlorn, disabled, cast-off creature—nothing lives viler than the thing I have become; and yet in this dark hour I thank my Maker with an overflowing grateful heart that He tied

down my hands when they have tingled in my agony to return the father's blow. I never did—I never did."

The speaker grew more and more excited, and his voice at last failed him. I rose, and retired to the window, but he proceeded whilst my face was turned away. I know not why—but my own eyes smarted.

"Yes, sir, time after time the horrible desire to be avenged, and to give back blow for blow, has possessed me; and, as if eternal torture were to be the immediate penalty of the unnatural act, I have thrown my arms behind me, clasped hand in hand, and held them tiger-like together, until the fit was passed away. And then who could be more penitent, more sorrowful, than he! Within an hour of perpetrating this barbarity, he has met me with a look pleading for forgiveness, which I would have given him had he offended me, oh much—much more. What could he say to his child? What could his child allow him to utter? Nothing. I have kissed him; he has taken me by the hand, we have walked abroad together; and he has loaded me with gifts for the joy of our reconciliation."

Curious as I was to hear more, I deemed it expedient, for the present, to close the history. The man seemed carried away by the subject, and his cheeks were scorched with this burning flush which the unusual exertion of mind and body had summoned up. He spoke vehemently—hurriedly—at the top of his voice, and I knew not how far his agitation might carry him. I again proposed to him to abstain from fatigue, and to leave his history

unfinished for the present. He paused for a few minutes, wiped the heavy perspiration from his brow, and answered me in a calm and steady voice—

"I will transgress no more, sir. I have never spoken of these things yet—and they come before my mind too vividly—they inflame and mislead me. I ask your pardon. But let me finish now—the tale is soon told—I cannot for a second time revert to it."

"Go on," I answered, yielding once more to his wish, and in the same composed and quiet voice he *began* again.

"The first watch which I called my own, was given to me on one of these occasions. My father had requested me to execute some small commission. I forgot to do it. In his eyes the fault for a moment assumed the form of wilful disobedience. That moment was enough—he was roused—the paroxysm prevailed—and I was beaten like a dog. An hour afterwards he was persuaded that his child was not undutiful. His reason had returned to him, and, with it a load of miserable remorse. He offered me, with a tremulous hand, the bauble, which I accepted; and, as I took it, I saw a weight of sorrow tumble from his unhappy breast. This was my father, sir. A man who would have been the best of fathers—had he been permitted, as his heart directed him, to be the tenderest of husbands. I could see in my boyhood that blame attached to my mother—to what extent I did not know. I lived in the hope of hearing at some future time. That time never came. I remained at home two months, and then went back to school. I received a letter from one of my father's

clerks, who was an especial favourite of mine. It must have been about a week after my departure. It told me that my father had drooped since I quitted him. On the morning that I came away, he left his business and locked himself in my bedroom. He was shut up at least two hours there. Fifty different matters required his presence in the counting-house, and at length my friend, the clerk, disturbed him. When the door was opened he found his master, his eyes streaming with tears, intent upon a little book in which he had seen me reading many days before. Oh, it was like him, sir! Within a few days I received another letter from the same hand. My father was dangerously ill, and I was summoned home. I flew, and arrived to find him delirious. He had been seized with inflammation the day before. The fire blazed in a system that was ripe for it. The doctors were baffled. Mortification had already begun. He did not recognize me, but he spoke of me in his delirium in terms of endearment, whilst curses against my mother rolled from his unconscious lips. Three hours after my arrival he was a corpse. And such a corpse! They told me it was my father, and I believed them.

"Are *you*, sir, fatherless?" asked Warton suddenly.

I told him, and he continued. "You have felt then the lightning shock that has altered the very face of nature. Earth, before and after that event, is not the same. It never was to human being yet. It cannot be. What a secret is learnt upon that day! How tottering and insecure have become the things of life that seemed so firm and fixed! The penalty is heavy which we pay for the privilege

to be our own master. Oh, the desolation of a fatherless home! My father died, having made no will. So it was said at first—but in a few days there was another version. My mother's brother—the uncle that I spoke of—then appeared upon the stage, and was most active for his sister's interests. He had never been a friend of my father's. They had not spoken for years. I did not know why. I had never enquired—for the man was a stranger to me, and since my birth he had not crossed our threshold. My father believed that his relative had wronged him—of this I was sure—and I hated him therefore when he appeared. When my father was buried, this man produced a will. I was present when it was read—bodily present; but my heart and soul were away with him in the grave—and with him, sir, in heaven, beyond it. They told me at the conclusion of the ceremony, that my father had died worth fifty thousand pounds—that he had left my mother the bulk of his property—to my sister a fortune of ten thousand pounds, and to me the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum. But they might have talked to stone. What cared my young and inexperienced, and still bleeding heart, for particulars and sums? A crust without him was more than enough. It was more than I could swallow now—and what was *wealth* to me? My uncle, I heard afterwards, watched me as the different items were read over, and seemed pleased to observe upon my face no sign of disappointment. That he was pleased, I am certain, for he spoke kindly to me when all was over, and said that I was a good boy, and should be taken care of. "-Taken care of-!"—

and so I was—and so I am—for look about you, sir, and observe the evidences of my uncle's love. The clerk, to whom I have alluded, took an early opportunity to remind me of the nature of my father's will—and to hint to me suspicions of foul play. I readily believed him. It was not that I cared for the money. At that age I was ignorant of its value, and my little portion seemed a mine of wealth. But I wished to dislike my uncle, because he had given pain to my dear father. I avoided his presence as much as I could, and I made him feel that my aversion was hearty. We never became *friends*. We seldom spoke—and never but when obliged. He was a coarse man then—I have not seen him for many years—ungentlemanly and unfeeling in his deportment. It would have been as easy for him to alter the framework of his body as to have shown regard for the sensibilities of other men. He lived to amass. He counts his tens of thousands now—they may have been scraped together amidst the groans and shrieks of the distressed, but there they are—he has them, and he is happy. I asked, and obtained from my mother, permission to return to school. I remained there without visiting my home again for three years. My mother did not once write to me, or come to see me. I did not write to her. My expenses were paid from my income. My father's business was still conducted by my mother with her assistants, and she resided in the old house. Did I tell you that my uncle was the appointed executor of my father's will, and my guardian? He managed my affairs, and for the present I suffered him to do as he thought proper.

In the meanwhile my happiness at school was unbounded. My existence there was sweet and tranquil, like the flow of a small secluded stream. I loved my master. Ill-taught and self-neglected nearly till the time that I came under his instruction, I believed that I owed all my education to him; and whilst I thirsted for knowledge as the means of raising myself and my own mind, he supplied me with the healthful sustenance, and helped me forward with his precepts. I had neither taste nor application for the severer studies. Science was too hard and real for the warm imagination with which Providence had liberally endowed me. It was a scarecrow in the garden of knowledge, and I looked at it with fear from the sunny heights of poesy on which I basked and dreamed. History—fiction—the strains of Fletcher, Shakspeare—the lore of former worlds—these had unspeakable charms for me; and such information as they yielded, I imbibed greedily. Admiration of the beautiful creations of mind leads rapidly in ardent spirits to an emulative longing; and the desire to achieve—to a firm belief of capability. The grateful glow of love within is mistaken for the gift divine. I burned to follow in the steps of the immortal, and already believed myself inspired. Hours and days I passed in compositions, which have since helped to warm our poverty-stricken room; for they had all one destination—the fire. I shall, however, never consider the days ill-spent which were engaged in such pursuits. The pleasure was intense—the advantage, if unseen and indirect, was not insignificant. Whatever *tends* to elevate and purify, is in itself good and noble.

We cannot withdraw ourselves from the selfishness of life, and incline our souls to the wisdom of the speaking dead, and not advance—be it but one step—heavenward. And in my own case—the intellectual character was associated with all that is lofty in principle, and exalted in conduct. *Sans peur et sans reproche* was its fit motto. Falsehood and dishonesty must not attach to it. In my own mind I pictured a moral excellence which it was necessary to attain; and in my strivings for intellectual fame, *that*, as the essential accompaniment, was never once lost sight of. Pride still clung to me—and was fed throughout. I was eighteen years of age, and I desired to enter the university. I fixed upon Oxford, as holding out a better prospect of success than the sister seat of learning. I enquired what sum of money was necessary for my education there; and received for answer, that two hundred pounds a-year might carry me comfortably through, but that, with some economy and self-denial, a hundred and fifty might be sufficient. It is a curious circumstance that the very post which brought this information, brought likewise a letter from my uncle, offering, as my guardian, and at his own expense, to send me to the university. I was indignant at the proposition, and vowed, before his letter was half read, that I would rather live upon a meal a-day, than owe my bread to one whom I regarded as my father's foe. Does it not strike you, sir, as somewhat singular, that my father should make this man executor, trustee, and guardian? Men do not generally appoint their enemies to such offices. I wrote to my uncle in reply, declined coldly but respectfully

his offer, and told him my intention. Here our correspondence ended, and six months afterwards my name was on the boards of my college. I went up knowing no one, but carrying from my friend, the schoolmaster, a letter of introduction to a clergyman who had been his college friend, and who (now married and the father of one child) earned his subsistence by taking pupils. I was received by this poor but worthy man with extreme kindness. He read the character which I had brought with me, and bade me make his house my home. His hospitality was at first a great advantage to me. My slender income compelled me to exercise rigid economy—and to avoid all company. Although very poor, I have told you that I was already very proud. I would not receive a favour which I could not pay back—I would not permit the breath of slander to whisper a syllable against my name. There were hours in which no book could be read with pleasure, which no study could make light. Such were passed in delightful converse with my friend, and thus I was spared even the temptation to walk astray. I need not tell you that I had no tutor. It was a luxury I could not afford. I worked the harder, and was all the happier for the victory I had gained—such I deemed it—over my uncle. At the end of a twelve-month, I found my expenses were even within my income. It was a sweet discovery. I had paid my way. I did not owe a penny. I was respected, and no one knew my mode of life, or the amount of income that I possessed. My friend, I said, had one child. She was a daughter. During my first year's residence I had never seen her. She was away in Dorsetshire nursing a

cousin, who died at length in her arms. She returned home at the commencement of my second year, and I was introduced to her. She fell upon my solitary life like the primrose that comes alone to enliven the dull earth—a simple flower of loveliness and promise, graceful in herself—but to the gazer's eye more beautiful, no other flower being present to provoke comparison. We met often. She was an artless creature sir, and gave her love to me long, long before she knew the price of such a gift. She doated on her father, and it was a virtue that I understood. She was very fair to look at; timid as the fawn—as guileless; a creature of poetry, sent to be a dream, and to shed about her a beguiling unsubstantial brightness. All things looked practicable and easy in the light in which she moved. The difficulties of life were softened—its rewards and joys coloured and enhanced. I thought of her as a wife, and the tone of my existence was from the moment changed. If you could have seen her, sir—the angel of that quiet house—gliding about, ministering happiness—her innocent expression—her lovely form—her golden hair falling to her swelling bosom—her truthfulness and cultivated mind—you would, like me, have blessed the fortune which had brought her to your side, and revealed the treasure to your youthful heart. I told her that I loved, and her tears and maiden blushes made her own affection manifest. Her father spoke to me, bade me reflect, take counsel, and be cautious. He gave at last no opposition to our wishes—but requested that time might be allowed for trial, and my settlement in life. And so it was agreed. I prosecuted my

studies more diligently than ever, and looked with impatience for the hour when my profession (for I had gone to the university with a view to the church) and my little income would justify me in offering to my darling one a home. Did I now mourn over the inequality of my fortune? Did I upbraid the dead—accuse the living? I did not, sir. Too pleased to labour for the girl whom I had chosen—I rejoiced to owe my bread to my exertion. She then, as now—for it was her—my Anna, sir—the wreck whom you have seen—cruelly misused by poverty and grief—robbed of her beauty and her strength—the miserable outline of her former self—she then, even as now, was in all things actuated by the highest motives—a serious and religious maid. She cheered me with her smiles—her perfect patience and tranquil hope. It was to her a privilege to be united to a clergyman, and to find her earthly joy combined with usefulness and good. In our walks, I have painted the future which was never to be—the bliss we were never to experience. I have spoken of the parsonage, and its little lawn and many flowers—pictured myself at work—visiting the poor—comforting the sick—herself my dear attendant at the cottage doors, with hosts of little ones about her, whom she might call her children, and for whom she might exercise more than a mother's care. She could not listen to such promises, and not grow happier in her inexperience than reality could ever render her; and yet sighs, sighs, ominous sighs, would from the first escape her. Still for a twelvemonth our nook of earth was Paradise, and sorrow, the universal lot, was banished from

our door. The tales which I had been accustomed to hear of the world's deceit and falsehood seemed groundless and cruel—the inventions of envious disappointed minds—whose ambition had betrayed them into hopes, too preposterous for fulfilment Happiness was on earth—did I not find her in my daily walk?—for such as were not loth to greet her with a lowly and contented spirit. I had no present care. The days were prosperous. I obtained a scholarship in my college at the end of the first year, which was worth to me at least fifty pounds per annum. This, not requiring, I saved up. I worked hard during the day—withdrew myself from all intercourse with men, and every evening was rewarded with the smiles of her for whose dear sake all labour was so easy. Oh, the tranquillity and ineffable bliss of those distant bygone days! *Bygone*, did I say? No—they exist still. Poverty—misery—persecution—such things pass away, and are in truth a dream. The troubles of yesterday vanish with the sun that set upon them—but those hours, deeply impressed upon the soul, have left their mark indelible; the intense, unspeakable joy that filled them, lingers yet, and brightens up one spot that stands alone, distinct in life. Cast when I will one single glance there, and I behold the stationary sun shine. I do so now. None feel so vigorous and well as they who are on the eve of some prostrating sickness. Dreaming of security, and as I looked about, perceiving from no side the probability or show of evil, I was in truth entangled in a maze of peril. My summer's day was at an end. The cloud had gathered—was overhead, and ready to burst

and overwhelm me. For one twelvemonth, as I have said, I felt the perfect enjoyment of life, and was blest. At the end of that period I received a letter from my uncle. It was full of tenderness and affection. The first few lines were taken up with enquiries —and immediately afterwards there came a proposition. It was to this effect. "My mother wished to retire from business; it was still a lucrative one, and she offered it to me. She undertook to leave in the firm a capital sufficiently large to carry it on, and receiving a moderate interest only for this sum, she would relinquish all other profit in favour of her son." I read the letter, and had faith in its sincerity. *As* I read it, a devil whispered delusively into my ear, and the sounds were music there, until my ruin was completed. I knew the business to be affluent and thriving. The income derived from it enabled my mother to live luxuriously. *Half the sum would afford every wished-for comfort to my Anna, and much less would enable us at once to marry.* Here was the rock on which I went to pieces—here was the giddy light that blinded me to all considerations—here was the sophistry that made all other reasoning dull and valueless. I did not stop to enquire what movement of feeling could operate so generously upon my uncle. If an unfavourable suggestion forced itself upon me, it was expelled at once; and persuasion of the purity of his motives was too easy, where my wish was father to the thought. If I remained at college, years might elapse before our union. *Now, immediately*, if I accepted this unlooked-for offer—she was mine, and a home, such as in other circumstances

I could never hope to give her, was ready for her reception! I could think of nothing else, but I beheld in the unexpected good—the outstretched hand of Providence. Full of my delight, I communicated the intelligence to Anna; but very different was its effect on her. She read the letter, and looked at me as if she wished to read the most hidden of my secret wishes.

"'What have you thought of doing, then?' she asked.

"'Accepting the proposal, Anna,' I replied, 'with your consent.'

"'Never with that,' she answered almost solemnly. 'My lips shall never bid you turn from the course which you have chosen, and to which you have been called. You do not require wealth—you have said so many times—and I am sure it is not necessary for your happiness.'

"'I think not of myself, dear Anna,' I replied. 'I have more than enough for my own wants. It is for your sake that I would accept their offer, and become richer than we can ever be if I refuse it. Our marriage now depends upon a hundred things—is distant at the best, and may never be. The moment that I consent to this arrangement, you are mine for ever.'

"'Warton,' she said, more seriously than ever, 'I am yours. You have my heart, and I have engaged to give you, when you ask it, this poor hand. In any condition of life—I am yours. But I tell you that I never can deliberately ask you to resign the hopes which we have cherished—with, as we have believed, the approbation and the blessing of our God. Your line of duty is, as I conceive it—marked. Whilst you proceed, steadily and with a simple mind—

come what may, your pillow will never be moistened with tears of remorse. If affliction and trial come—they will come as the chastening of your Father, who will give you strength to bear the load you have not cast upon yourself. But once diverge from the straight and narrow path, and who can see the end of difficulty and danger? You are unused to business, you know nothing of its forms, its ways—you are not fit for it. Your habits—your temperament are opposed to it, and you cannot enter the field as you should—to prosper. Think not of me. I wish—my happiness, and joy, and pride will be to see you a respected minister of God. I am not impatient. If we do right, our reward will come at last. Let years intervene, and my love for you will burn as steadily as now. Do not be tempted—and do not let us think that good can result—if, for my sake, you are unfaithful—*there*!' She pointed upwards as she spoke, and for a moment the sinfulness of my wishes blazed before me—startled, and silenced me. I resolved to decline my uncle's offer; yet a week elapsed, and the letter was not written. But another came from *him*. It was one of tender reproach for my long silence, and it requested an immediate answer to the munificent proposal of my mother. If I refused it, a stranger would be called upon to enjoy my rights, and the opportunity for realizing a handsome fortune would never occur again. Such were its exciting terms, and once more, perplexed by desire and doubt, I appealed to the purer judgment of my Anna.

"She wept when she came to the close of the epistle, and had not a word to say.

"'I distress you, Anna,' said I, 'by my indecision. Dry your tears, my beloved; I will hesitate no longer.'

"'I know not what to do,' she faltered; 'if you should act upon my advice, and afterwards repent, you would never forgive me. Yet, I believe from my very soul that you should flee from this temptation. But do as you will—as seems wisest and best—and trust not to a weak woman. Do what reason and principle direct, and happen what will—I will be satisfied. One thing occurs to me. Can you trust your uncle?"

I hesitated.

"'I ask,' she continued, 'because you have often spoken of him as if you could not confidently. May he not have—I judge of him only from your report—some motive for his present conduct which we cannot penetrate? It is an unkind world, and the innocent and guileless are not safe from the schemes and contrivances of the wicked. I speak at random, but I am filled with alarm for you. You are safe now—but one step may be your ruin.'

"'You are right, Anna,' I replied; 'it is too great a venture, I cannot trust this man. I will not leave the path of duty. I will refuse his offer this very night.'

"And I did so. In her presence I wrote an answer to his letter, and declined respectfully the brilliant prospect which he had placed before me. The letter was dispatched—Anna was at peace, and my own mind was satisfied.

"It was, however, not my fate to pass safely through this

fiery ordeal. Nothing but my destruction, final and entire, would satisfy my greedy persecutor—and artfully enough did he at length encompass it. In a few days, there arrived a third communication on the same subject, but from another hand. My mother became the correspondent, and she conjured me by my filial love and duty, not to disobey her. She desired to retire into privacy. She was growing old and it was time to make arrangements for another world. Her son, if he would, might enable her to carry out her pious wish—or, by his obstinate refusal, hurry her with sorrow to the grave. There was much more to this effect. Appeal upon appeal was made *there*, where she knew me to be most vulnerable, and the choice of action was not left me. To deny her longer—would be to stand convicted of disobedience, undutifulness, and all unfilial faults. From this period, I was lost. One word before I hurry to the end. I absolve my mother from all participation in the crimes of which boldly I accuse my uncle. She, poor helpless woman, was but his instrument, and believed, when she urged me, that it was with a view to my advancement and lasting benefit. I conveyed my mother's communication immediately to Anna. She made no observation on its contents—bade me seek counsel of her father; and with her eyes streaming with agonizing tears, left me to pray upon my knees for counsel and direction from on high. Her father —I could not blame him—a man who had struggled hardly for his bread as a clergyman and a scholar—and seen more of the dark shadows than the light of life—received my intelligence

with unmingled satisfaction. He charged me, as I loved his child, and valued her future welfare, to accept the princely kindness of my friends—to see them instantly, and secure my fortune whilst time and circumstances served. And then, as if to appease his own qualms of conscience, and to justify his counsel, he reasoned about the usefulness which, even to a pious mind, was permitted in the exercise of trade. Infinite was the good that I might do. Yea, more, perhaps, than if I persisted in my first design, and remained for ever a poor clergyman; I might relieve the poor even to my heart's content. What privilege so great as this! What suffering so acute as the desire to help the sick and needy with no ability to do it! 'Be sure, young man, the hand of Providence is here; it would be sinful to deny it.' O *interest—interest!—self —self*!—words of magic and of power; they rendered my poor friend blind as they did me. I listened to his advice with eagerness and delight; and though I knew that to obey it was to cast myself from security into turmoil and danger, I laboured to persuade myself that he was right, and that hesitation was now criminal. Again I saw my betrothed, and I approached her—innocent and truthful as she was—with shame and self-abasement. I repeated her father's words, and she shook her head sadly, but made no reply. What need was there of reply? Had she not already spoken?

"'Let me, at least, dear Anna, go to London,' I said, 'and implore my mother to retract this wish, unsay her words. I would rather give up the world, than take it without your cheerful

acquiescence. Your happiness is every thing to me. You shall decide for me.'

"'No, Warton,' she replied—'you and my father must decide, and may Heaven direct you both. Go to London—do as you wish. I am resigned. I am presumptuous, and may be wrong. All will be for the best. Go! God bless you and support you.'

"And I went, traitor and renegade that I was, prepared to surrender to the bitterest foe that ever hunted victim down. Believe me not, sir, when I say that any sense of filial duty actuated me in my resolve, that any feeling influenced this unsteady heart but one—The desire to call my Anna mine—the pride I felt in the consciousness of wealth—and of the power to bestow it all on her.

"My reception in London was as favourable as I could wish it. My uncle was an altered man—at least he appeared so. He met me with smiles and honied words, and made such promises of friendship and protection, that I stood before him convicted of uncharitableness and gross misconduct. I reproached myself for the old prejudices, and for the malice which I had always borne him, and attributed them all to boyish inexperience, and stubbornness. I was older now, and could see with the eyes of a man. Not only did I acquit him of all intention of wrong, but I could have fallen on my knees before him, and asked his pardon for my own offences. I wrote a long letter to Anna, and described in lively colours my own agreeable surprise, desired her to be of good heart, and to rely upon my prudence. I engaged

to write daily, to announce the progress of my mission—and to advise her of the proposed arrangements. This was my first communication. Before she could receive a second, I had put my hand to paper, and signed my death-warrant. I had irretrievably committed myself. I was living with my uncle. His wine was of the best. He could drink freely of it, and get cooler and more collected at each glass, but frequent draughts animated and inflamed my younger head. He spoke to me with kindness, and I grew confiding and loquacious. I told him of my engagement with Anna, described her beauty, extolled her virtues. He seized the golden opportunity, and reproved me gently for the little consideration which I exhibited for one so worthy of my love. It was unpardonably selfish to hesitate one instant longer. It was due to her, and to our future offspring, to make every provision for their maintenance and comfort. It was madness to overlook the advantages which my mother's offer gave. She herself, the lovely Anna, as her cares increased, would mourn over the cruel obstinacy of him who might have placed her beyond anxiety and apprehension, but who preferred to keep her poor, dependent, joyless. She was young, and spoke, doubtless, as she felt—but time would dissipate romance, and bitterly would she regret that he who professed to love her had not taken pains to prove that love more thoughtful and sincere. So he went on—and, in the height of his appeal, a visitor was announced—Mr Gilbert, an old friend, an intimate, who was immediately admitted. I was requested not to mind him, for he knew every secret of my

uncle's. The latter repeated my story, and ended with an account of my ingratitude to Anna. Mr Gilbert could scarcely speak for his astonishment. He shook his head severely, and vowed the case was quite unparalleled. I drank on—the thought of the immediate possession of my Anna flashed once powerfully and effectually across my brain, and I held out no longer. I yielded to the sweet solicitation—and was lost.

"On the following morning, Mr Gilbert arrived to breakfast. The subject was resumed. My uncle produced a paper, which he had hastily drawn up. It should be signed by all. Mr Gilbert, as a friend, could witness it. It was a rough draught, but would answer every purpose for the present. The statement was very simple. My mother left in the firm twenty thousand pounds in stock, and cash and book debts. For this I made myself responsible, and undertook to pay an interest of five per cent. All profits in the business were my own. Fool that I was, I signed the document without reflection—gave, with one movement of the pen, my liberty, my happiness, and life, into the power of one who had for years resolved to get them in his clutch. My uncle followed with his signature—then Mr Gilbert. To make all sure, however, a clerk of the former was summoned to the room, and requested to act as second witness to the deed.

"You are perfectly satisfied with the contents?' said Mr Gilbert to my uncle, when the clerk had finished.

"'Quite so,' was the answer.

"'And you, sir?' he continued, turning then to me.

"'I answered, '*Yes*,' whilst a sickening shudder crept through my blood, and the remonstrance of Anna sounded in my ears like a knell.

"I remained in London, and a week after this ceremony I entered upon my duties at the counting-house. *At the earnest recommendation of my uncle*, I carried into the business, as additional capital, the sum of money from which I had hitherto derived my income. This amounted to nearly four thousand pounds. It may seem strange to you, sir, as it does to me now, that I should so readily have adopted the statement of my uncle, and so deeply involved myself upon the strength of his simple *ipse dixit*. It was a mad-man's act, and yet there were many excuses for it at the time. I was but a boy—fresh from a life of retirement and study—unused to the ways of men—unprepared for fraud. Satisfied of my own integrity, I believed implicitly in the ingenuousness of others. I had no friend to act for me—to investigate and warn—my heart was burthened with its love, and all my thoughts were far away. The business had prospered for years, and it was conducted externally as in the days of my poor father. All was decorous and business-like, and the reputation of the house was high and unblemished. There was nothing in the appearance of things to excite suspicion—and not a breath was suggested from my own too easy and confiding nature. The father of my betrothed! was delighted at the step which I had taken. He wrote me an impassioned letter, full of praise and brilliant prophecies, none of which he lived to see fulfilled. His daughter,

he assured me, would yet be grateful to me for the firmness I had evinced, and that the blessing of Heaven must attend conduct so estimable and wise. Anna herself wrote in another strain. The act which she had so long dreaded was accomplished—it was useless to look back—she could only hope and pray for the future. She entreated me to be careful of my health, and to accustom myself gradually to my new employment. It was a consolation to behold her father so very happy, and to find me contented in my position. Nothing would give her now such satisfaction, as to be convinced that she had been wrong throughout, and that I had done well in giving up my former occupations. A month passed quickly by. The engagements of the firm were met—and its affairs were carried on as usual. No change took place. The only difference was my presence, and the appearance of my name in all the transactions of the house. I saw my mother frequently—but my uncle, by degrees, withdrew. His own affairs required his constant attention, but he provided me with help and countenance in the person of Mr Gilbert. This gentleman, in addition to the character of a bosom friend, sustained another—that of *legal adviser* to my uncle! He visited me daily, and helped me marvellously. He procured from my uncle my patrimony of four thousand pounds—drew up in return for it a release, which I executed—paid the money into my banker's hands—received my mother's dividend—inspected the accounts—advised summary proceedings against defaulters—and settled, at a certain rate, to purchase a few outstanding

debts, which it would cost some trouble and manoeuvring to get in. I could not choose but act upon advice that was at once so very friendly and professional. My inexperience, for a time, gratefully reposed in Mr Gilbert. Exactly two months after I had entered the concern, I married. Sun never rose more promisingly upon a wedding-day—a lovelier bride had never graced it. I pass over the few intoxicating weeks during which life assumes a form and hue which it never wore before—never puts forth again. The novelty of my situation—the joy I had in her possession, and in the knowledge that she was wholly mine—lived now and breathed for me—the pride with which I gazed upon her blooming beauty, and communed with her, as with a new-found better self—all combined to render one brief season a sweet delirium—an ecstatic dream. It is time to wake from it. I return to the business. I had agreed to pay my mother's dividend every quarter—and, as I told you, Mr Gilbert received the money for her. She did not live to enjoy it. A short illness removed her from a world which had never been one of sorrow to her. Her heart was adamant, and troubled waters passed over—did not enter and disturb it. All that she had became my uncle's, and he was now my creditor. I beg you, sir, to mark this. Twice had he inherited the property which should have been my own. It was about a twelvemonth after the death of my mother, that small, dark shadows appeared in the horizon, foretelling storm and tempest. At first they gave me no uneasiness, but they increased and gathered, and soon compelled me to take measures for the outbreak. I continued

to discharge my uncle's claim with undeviating regularity. Mr Gilbert sharply saw to that; but a difficulty arose at length of meeting punctually all the demands which came upon me in the way of business. This was overcome in the beginning, by enforcing payment from customers who had traded previously on a liberal credit. The evil thus temporarily repaired gave rise, however, to a greater evil. Our friends withdrew their favours, and offered them else where. This critical state of things did not improve, but caused me daily fresh alarm. Money became more scarce—the difficulty of meeting payments more imminent and harassing. It was very strange. It had not been so in my father's time; nor later, when my mother had the management of affairs. Was it my fault? What had I done amiss. Frightful thoughts began to haunt my bosom, and my sleep was broken, as a criminal's might be. One day I had a heavy sum to pay. It was on the fourth of the month—a serious day to many—and, although I had made every exertion to meet this payment, I found myself, on the very morning, at least two hundred pounds deficient. I have told you, that the credit of our house was without a spot. Its reputation stood high amongst the highest. Slander had not dared to breathe one syllable against it. To me was entrusted this precious jewel, and I was now upon the very brink of losing it. I rose from my pillow before daylight, and endeavoured to contrive a plan for my relief. Fear and excitement prevented all deliberate thought, and I walked to the counting-house confounded—almost delirious. I had taken no food. I could not break my fast until the exigency

had passed away. I was sitting in the little room, filled with dismal apprehensions, when Mr Gilbert was announced, and suddenly appeared. As suddenly I resolved to tell him of my necessity, and to ask his aid or counsel. Blushing to the forehead, I confided my situation to him, and asked what it was possible to do. He smiled in answer produced his pocket-book, and gave me, without a word; a draft upon his banker for the sum required. At that moment, sir, I felt what it was to be respited after sentence of death—to be rescued from drowning—to awaken into life from horrible and numbing dreams. I pressed the hand of my deliverer with the most affectionate zeal, and assured him of my everlasting gratitude.

"'No occasion, my dear sir,' answered Mr Gilbert. 'This is a very common case in business, and will happen to the best of men. Never hesitate to ask me when you are in need. When I have the cash, you shall command me always. Give me your IOU —that will be quite sufficient, and pay the money back when it is quite convenient.' Disinterested, most praiseworthy man! He left me, impressed with his benevolence, and with my spirit at rest. With the dismissal of my incubus, my appetite was restored. I partook of a hearty dinner, and returned home, happy as a boy again. At the end of a week, I was enabled to repay my benefactor; but, at the end of a fortnight; I was again in need of his assistance. Emboldened by his offer, I did not hesitate to apply; as freely as before he responded to my call; and I felt that I had gained a friend indeed. Men who have committed

heinous crimes, will tell you that it is the first divergence from the point of rectitude that gives them pain and anguish. The false direction once obtained, and the moral sense is blunted. So in matters of this kind. There was no blushing or palpitation when I begged a third time for a temporary loan. The occasion soon presented itself, and I asked deliberately for the sum I wanted. Mr Gilbert likewise had grown familiar with these demands; and familiarity, they say, does not heighten our politeness and respect. He had not the money by him, but he might get it, though, from a friend, he thought, if it were absolutely necessary. But then a friend is not like one's self. He must be paid for what he did. Well, for once in the way, I could afford it. I must borrow as cheaply, as I could, and give my note of hand, &c. Sir, in less than three months; I was in a mesh of difficulties, from which it was impossible to tear myself. Bill after bill had I accepted and given to this Gilbert—pounds upon pounds had he sucked from me in the way of interest; He grew greedier every hour. If I hesitated; he spoke to me of exposure—I refused, he threatened enforcement of his previous claims. And, what was worse than all, notwithstanding the heavy sums which he advanced, and for which he held securities, my affairs remained disordered, and the demand for money increased with every new supply. I could not understand it. I had not communicated with my uncle. I was afraid to do it; but I took care to pay his dividend the instant it was due. Had I omitted it, Mr Gilbert would have looked to me; for he was even more anxious than myself to keep my affairs a

secret from my uncle. It was not long before I got bewildered by the accumulated anxieties of my position. My mind was paralyzed. My days were wretched. Home had no delight for me; and neither there nor elsewhere could I find repose. Before daybreak, I quitted my bed, and until midnight, I was occupied in arranging for the engagements of the coming day. Legitimate and profitable business was neglected; lost sight of, and all my faculties were engrossed in the one great object of obtaining *money* to appease the present and the pressing importunity. In the midst of my trouble, I was thrown, for the first time, upon a bed of sickness. I was attacked with fever, but I rallied in a day or two, and was prepared once more to cast myself into the vortex from which I saw no hope or possibility of escape. It was the evening before the day on which I had determined to resume the whirl of my sickening occupation. I was in bed, and, tired with the thought that weighed upon my brain, had fallen into a temporary sleep, from which I woke too soon, to find my wife, now about to become a mother, weeping as if her heart were broken, at my side. Trouble, sir, had soured my temper, and I had ceased to be as tender as she deserved. I was base enough to speak unkindly to her.

"'You are discontented, Anna,' I exclaimed. You are not satisfied—you repent now that you married me'—I see you do.'

"'Warton,' she exclaimed, 'if you love me, leave this cruel business. Let us live upon a crust. I will work for you. I will submit to any thing to see you calm and happy. This will kill you.'

"'It will, it must!' I cried out in misery. 'I cannot help it. What is to be done?'

"'Retire from it—resign all—every thing—but save us both. This agitation—this ceaseless wear and tear—must eventually, and soon, destroy you. What, then, becomes of me?'

"'Show me, Anna, how I can do what you desire with honour. Show me the way, and I will bless you. Oh, why did I not heed your words before! Why did I suffer myself to be entrapped'—

"She stopped me in my exclamations.

"'You have promised, dear,' said she, 'never to look upon the past. You acted for the best. So did we all. It is our consolation and support. But the present is sad and mournful, and, I believe, it rests with ourselves to secure our happiness for the future. Are you content to do it?'

"'Oh, can you ask me, Anna? Tell me how I may escape without discredit—without shame and one dishonourable taint—and you take me from the depths of my despair. I see no end to this career. I am fixed to the stake, and I must burn.'

"'Listen to me, dearest. You shall write to your uncle without delay, and explain to him your wishes. You shall tell him of your difficulties frankly and unreservedly. Make known to him your state of health, and tell him firmly that you are unequal to the burden which is laid upon you. Should he insist upon a recompense for your loss, you have money of your own there—yield it to him, and these hands shall never rest until they have earned for you every shilling of it back again. Be tranquil,

resolute, cheerful, and all will yet be well, I trust—I feel it will.'

"I had once refused to act on her advice, and the consequences had been dire enough. When compliance was too late, I implicitly obeyed her. The letter was written, and an answer came as speedily as we could wish it. It was a kind reply. My uncle was sorry for my illness, and was content to take the business off my hands, if I was ready to resign it in the condition that I had found it. And this, I thanked my God with tears of joy, I was prepared to do. My personal expenses had been trifling. The amount of business done was large—my the profits had not been withdrawn. Although my sufferings had been great, and difficulties had met me which I could neither prevent nor comprehend, still reason told me that the property must have increased in value. It was with alacrity that I engaged, at my uncle's particular request, an accountant to investigate the proceedings of the house, and to pronounce upon its present state. The result of the examination could not but be most satisfactory. It did not occur to me at the time, that my uncle had deemed no accountant necessary when he heaped upon me the responsibility which I had borne so ill. It would have been but fair, methinks. A time was fixed for a meeting with my uncle, and for producing the result of the enquiry. The accountant had been closely engaged at his work for many days, and had brought it to an end only on the evening preceding the day of our appointment. He submitted his estimate to me, and you shall judge my horror when I perused it. There were many sheets

of paper, but in one line my misery was summed up. EIGHT THOUSAND POUNDS *were deficient and unaccounted for*. Yes, and my own small fortune had been included in the amount of capital. The accountant had been careful and exact—there was not a flaw in his reckoning. The glaring discrepancy stared me in the face, and pronounced my ruin. I knew not what to think or do. In accents of the most earnest supplication, I entreated the accountant to pass the night in reviewing his labours, and to afford me, if possible, the means of rescuing my name from the obloquy which, in a few hours, must attach to it. I offered him any sum of money—all that he could ask—for his pains, and he promised to comply with my request. The idea that I had been the victim of a trick, a fraud, never glanced across my mind. No, when my wretchedness permitted me to think at all, I suspected and accused no one but myself. I could imagine and believe that, inadvertently, I had committed some great error when my soul had been darkened by the daily and hourly anxieties which had followed it so long. But how to discover it? How to make my innocence apparent to the world? How to face my uncle? How to brave the taunts of men? How, above all, to meet the huge demands which soon would press and fall upon me? The tortures of hell cannot exceed in acuteness all that I suffered that long and bitter night. The accountant was waiting for me in the parlour when I left my bed. He had spent the night as I had wished him but had not found one error in his calculations. I tore the papers from his hands, and strained my eyes upon the pages to extract

the lie which existed there to damn me. It would not go—it could not be removed. I was a doomed, lost man. Whatever might be the consequence, I resolved to see my uncle, and to speak the truth. I relied upon the sympathy which I believed inherent in the nature of man. I relied upon my own integrity, and the serenity which conscious innocence should give. I met my uncle. I shall never forget that interview. He received me in his private house—in his drawing-room. We were alone. He sat at a table: his face was somewhat pale, but he was cool and undisturbed—ah, how much more so than his trembling sacrifice! I placed before him the condemning paper. It was that only that he cared to see. He looked at once to the result, and then, without a word, he turned his withering eye upon me.

"'I know it,' I cried out, not permitting him to speak. 'I know what you would say. It is a mystery, and I cannot solve it. There is a fearful error somewhere—but where I know not. I am as innocent—'

"'Innocent!' exclaimed my uncle, in a tone of bitterness, 'Well, go on, sir.'

"'Yes, innocent,' I repeated. 'Time will prove it, and make the mystery clear. My brain is now confused; but it cannot be that this gigantic error can escape me when I am calm—composed. Grant me but time.'

"'I grant nothing,' said my uncle, fiercely. 'Plunderer! I show no mercy. You would have shown me none—you would have left me in the lurch, and laughed at me as you made merry with your

stolen wealth. Mark me, sir—restore it—labour till you have made it good, or I crush you—once, and for ever.'

"I was rendered speechless by these words. I attempted to make answer; but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth—my throat grew dry and hot—my brain was dizzy, and the room swam round me. I thought of the name which I had been striving for years to build up—the honourable name which I had gained—the height from which I was about to fall—the yawning gulf below—a thousand painful thoughts rushed in one instant to my mind, and overcame me. I should have fallen to the earth, had not my heart found in my eyes a passage for its grief, and rendered me weaker than a child before a creature who had never felt the luxury of one human tear. I wept aloud and fearfully.

"'Guilt, guilt, palpable guilt!' exclaimed my uncle. 'None but the guilty weep. You do not take me by surprise, young man. I was prepared for this—I have but a word to say. Restore this money, or undertake to pay it back to me—to the last farthing of my lawful claim. Do this, and I forgive you, and forget your indiscretion. Refuse, and to-morrow you are a bankrupt and a beggar. Leave me, and take time for your decision. Come to me again this evening. If you fail—*you* may expect a visit in the morning.'

"This was said deliberately, but in a tone most expressive of sincerity. I staggered from his presence, and hurried homeward. A sickening sensation checked me as I approached my door. I could not enter it. I rushed away; and in the open fields, where

I could weep and rave unnoticed and alone, I cursed my fate, and entreated heaven to smite me with its thunders. My mind was tottering. Hours passed before I reached the house again, how, when, or by what means I arrived there, I could not tell. The servant girl who gave me admittance looked savagely upon me, as I thought. It was sorrow, and not anger, that was written in her face; but how could I discriminate? Her mistress was seriously ill. She had been alarmed by the visit of a gentleman, who waited for me in the parlour, and by my protracted absence; and her agitation had brought on the pangs of labour. A physician was now with her. Who was this gentleman? I entered the room, and there the fiend sate, white with irritation and gnawing disappointment. I started back, but he advanced to me—held my papers to my face, and pointed to one portion of them with a finger that was alive with rage and agitation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.