Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

Toilers of Babylon: A Novel

Benjamin Farjeon

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Farjeon B.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

The horse was very old, the caravan very dilapidated. As it was dragged slowly along the country roads it shook and creaked and wheezed, protesting, as it were, that it had performed its duty in life and that its long labors justly entitled it to permanent repose. The horse, with its burden behind it, had long ago given over complaining, and, although its plight was no less woful, was demonstrative only through physical compulsion. With drooping head, lustreless eyes, and laboring breath, it plodded on, with many a longing look at tempting morsels out of its reach.

At the present moment it was at rest, released from the shafts, and partaking of a spare meal, humanly provided, eking it out with sweet tid-bits, not too abundant, munched from the fragrant earth. Sitting on the ground at the back of the caravan was a man with a book in his hand, which sometimes he read with the air of one who was in the company of an old and beloved friend; at other times he gazed around with pensive delight upon the beauties of nature, which in no part of the world find more exquisite representation than in the county of Surrey. In the rear of the caravan were lovely stretches of woodland, through vistas of which visions of cathedral aisles could be seen by the poetical eye. Across the narrow road was a scene which brought to the man's mind some lines in the book he held. Turning over its pages, he called out, in a voice not strong, but clear:

"William Browne might have camped on this very spot, Nansie, and drawn its picture. The resemblance is wonderful." Then he read from the book:

"'Here the curious cutting of a hedge,
There, by a pond, the trimming of the sedge;
Here the fine setting of well-shading trees,
The walks there mounting up by small degrees;
The gravel and the green so equal lie,
They, with the rest, drawing on your lingering eye.
Here the sweet smells that do perfume the air,
Arising from the infinite repair
Of odoriferous buds; and herbs of price,
As if it were another paradise,
So please the smelling sense that you are fain,
Where you last walked, to turn and walk again.
There the small birds with their harmonious notes
Sing to a spring that smileth as it floats.'"

A practical flight of wooden steps at the back of the caravan afforded means of getting in and out, and when the man began to speak aloud a young woman issued from the interior of the conveyance, and stood upon the top of the little ladder, listening to his words.

"It is very beautiful, father," she said. "To think that it was written nearly three hundred years ago!"

"Yes, Nansie, in the days of Shakespeare; and it might be to-day. That is the marvel of it."

He fell to his book again, and Nansie, who held a teapot in her hand, beat a retreat and resumed her domestic duties.

A peculiar feature of the caravan was that it was commercially empty. In times gone by it had been used for trading and speculative purposes, by gypsies, by enterprising travellers, by venders of basketware, by dealers in birds. It had served as mart and dwelling-house, and had played its part in numberless fairs when they were in fashion. Now it contained nothing marketable, and bore about it no sign to denote that its denizens were travelling for profit; but that, even in its old age, it was being put to pleasant use was proved by the smoke curling from the little chimney projecting through the roof.

In due time Nansie reappeared, bearing two loose boards which she laid upon a pair of low trestles, spreading over them a white cloth. Upon this improvised table she set a smoking teapot, milk and sugar, and a plate of bread-and-butter, cut reasonably thick.

"Tea is ready, father."

She ate with an appetite. Her father ate more daintily. Before putting the food into his mouth he cut it into devices of fish and bird, which he then proceeded to slice and carve, evidently adding thereby to his enjoyment of the humble fare. And yet through all, whether he ate or read or mused, there was about him a conspicuous air of melancholy.

It was the evening hour, and the season was spring. It was a warmer spring than usual; there was a taste of summer in the air. They ate in silence, until the man remarked:

"You did not hear the nightingale last night?"

"No, father."

"It sang for hours, Nansie."

She nodded, and said: "I wish you could sleep as soundly as I do, father."

"I used to in my young days, and must be content. I am glad you sleep well. You have other wishes."

"Yes," said Nansie, calmly.

"You have a fine trick of composure, Nansie. What stirs within does not always find outward expression."

"I take after you, father," said Nansie, in an affectionate tone. "I have you to thank for all that is good in me."

"It is a pleasant hearing, but it cuts both ways. Do not your other wishes trouble you?"

"A little; but everything will come right."

"A comfortable philosophy, my dear child; but womanly."

"It was mother's," said Nansie. "I caught it from her."

"I know; and I could never make the dear mother understand that it was inadequate for the practical purposes of life. Eventually we may be satisfied that everything will come right, but before the end is reached there are many turnings. The mischief of it is" – and there was now in his face as he turned it more fully towards her an expression both whimsical and sad-"that we carpet the turning we wish to take with flowers of fancy which, as we proceed, fade utterly away. That is a human experience."

"I am human," said Nansie, and she pressed her young face to his.

"I could laugh and I could weep," he said, responding fondly to her caress. "In truth, my dear child, you perplex me."

"Or," suggested Nansie, "is it you who are perplexing yourself?"

He shrugged his shoulders affectionately, and did not reply.

The young woman was fair and beautiful. Though cast in a delicate mould, she was strong and redolent of health. Her face was slightly browned, and harmonized with her brown hair and brown eyes, the light in which was bright and tender. The man looked old, but was barely forty-five, and on his face were signs of suffering, patiently borne. They were dressed like persons in humble life, but with a certain refinement, observable more in the woman than in the man. For five evenings they had tarried on this spot. Each morning they had harnessed the horse to the caravan, and had journeyed

slowly and aimlessly onward till noon, and then had turned back towards their camping-ground, which lay in the shadow of the beautiful Surrey woods, at a sufficient distance from the narrow road to escape casual observation. The right of doing so probably did not belong to the wayfarers, and this had disturbed the man somewhat, but he had fixed upon the spot for a particular purpose, and up to this evening had not been interfered with.

"At what hour last night," said Nansie, presently, "did you hear the nightingale?"

"It must have been near midnight," replied her father. "At the same time to-night it will sing again. Have you finished your tea?"

"Yes, father."

"Then go again to the post-office, and see if there is a letter for me. I am growing anxious at not receiving one. You need not stop to clear these things; I will put them away."

She rose and stood for a moment with her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. He drew her face down to his, and kissed her. With a bright nod she left him, carrying with her a written order authorizing the delivery of any letters which might be lying in the post-office for her father.

Godalming, the town for which she was bound, was within a mile, and she stepped out briskly. But when she was about midway, and no one was in sight, she made a little detour into the woods, and drew from her bosom a picture. It was the portrait of a young man, and she gazed fondly at it, and kissed it as fondly. Then she drew forth a letter, and read it and pressed it to her lips; after which she replaced the letter and the portrait, and proceeded on her errand. Her thoughts may be thus fashioned into words:

"I wrote to him yesterday, and I sent him a telegram in the evening, knowing we should be here to-day. He may be absent. I hope not; I hope he has received both. Will he write, or will he come? Will he be angry that I have accompanied my father? At all events he knows, and he is never unjust. Ah! if he were here with us, how happy I should be! I love him, I love him, I love him!"

She blew a kiss into the air.

In less than half an hour she was in the Godalming post-office, making her inquiry.

"Mr. James Loveday," said the female clerk, looking at the order handed to her by Nansie-she was familiar with it, having seen it on each of the three previous days. "Yes, there is, I think."

She sorted some letters and handed one to Nansie, who, after hesitating a little, asked:

"Is there a letter for Miss Loveday?

"Are you Miss Loveday?"

"Yes."

"No, there are none."

"Or for Miss Nansie Loveday? N-a-n-s-i-e."

"That's a curious way to spell Nancy," said the clerk. "No, there are none."

Nansie lingered.

"Or for Manners?" she asked, with singular timidity and bashfulness.

"Mrs. or Miss?" inquired the clerk.

Nansie's face and neck were scarlet as she replied: "Mrs."

"None for that name," said the clerk.

She lingered still, and said, with a kind of pathetic imploring: "Would a telegram be received here if addressed to the post-office till called for?"

"Yes."

"I sent one yesterday, and expected an answer. Is there any for either name?"

"No."

"Thank you," said Nansie, and walked out of the office, and set her face towards the caravan.

The female clerk looked after her sympathizingly. There was a love note in her voice, and the post-office girl had a little sweethearting of her own on hand.

CHAPTER II

Nansie walked on, turning the letter in her hand, and glancing at it occasionally. The writing was strange to her, and on the envelope was the London post-mark. When, at the end of twenty minutes, she stood by her father's side, he was asleep.

"Father!" she said, bending over him.

He opened his eyes instantly, and smiled at her.

"Ah, Nansie, it is you. I drop off constantly now, on the smallest provocation from silence or solitude. But it can scarcely be called sleep; I am conscious of all that is going on around me." He observed the letter in her hand, and he said, eagerly, "You have one!" and took it from her. "Yes, it is from my brother Joseph; I was beginning to fear that he was dead."

He opened the letter and read it, and then remained a little while in thought. Presently he resumed the conversation.

"You saw your uncle once, Nansie. Have you a recollection of him?"

"Hardly any, father. How old could I have been when mother took me to see him? Not more than four or five, I think. I had a white dress and a blue sash, and I took him a bunch of flowers. He gave me some sweetmeats, I remember, and a shilling. But I have no recollection of his face. He lived in London, in a street off Whitechapel; that I know."

"He lives there now. Your mother never spoke to you of him?"

"Never."

"You should be made acquainted with the story, Nansie, while I am here to relate it."

She stopped the current of his speech.

"Father, these last three or four weeks you have dropped hints which make me very anxious; they weigh heavily upon me. I know you are not well, but you harp upon it as if it were a serious illness. Tell me, father."

They were sitting side by side now, and he was smoothing her hair with his hand.

"I am far from well, Nansie."

She interrupted him again, and now spoke with tremulous impetuosity.

"You should take advice, father. You should go to a doctor."

"There are reasons why I do not do so. First, Nansie, I have no money. Figuratively speaking, twopence ha'penny is all my fortune. To be exact, twenty-three shillings represents my worldly wealth. I am afraid I have been unwise, and yet I do not see what else I could have done. This Quixotic wandering of ours-I own it, it *is* Quixotic-was in a certain measure forced upon me. Poor old Fleming, who owed me money, bequeathed his horse and caravan to me, his only creditor, and then he died. Had he left behind him wife or child I should have transferred to them this delightfully awkward property. Satisfying myself that it was legally and morally mine, the idea entered my head that a wandering tour through our lovely country lanes would invigorate me, would put new life into me. And for a companion, who more sweet than my own dear Nansie!"

"There was another reason, father," said Nansie, gravely.

"There was another reason," said Mr. Loveday, apprehensively. "I am coming to it. It would have been useless to consult physicians. I have consulted them again and again, and the result was always the same. A fever? Yes, there would be a fair chance of curing it. A toothache, a cold in the head, a chill? Yes, they could prescribe for those ills-but not for mine. It is my old heart-complaint, of which I have been repeatedly warned. When I was a lad it was thought I should not grow to manhood, but I did, as you see, and married your mother, and have by my side a dear child to cheer and comfort me. It is well to be prepared- Why, Nansie, crying?"

"I cannot help it, father, you speak so solemnly." She conquered her agitation and said: "That is not the reason I mean. There is another."

"Concerning myself, Nansie?"

"Concerning me, father."

"You wish me to speak of it?"

"It will be best."

"So be it. I have not been always with you, Nansie, to guide and counsel you. Worldly circumstances would not permit me. I have cause to reproach myself. Had I been a carpenter or a bootmaker I might have been better able to fulfil my duties."

"No one can reproach you, father; and I, who love you with my heart and soul, less than any in the world."

"I thank you, child, and am grateful. At all events, something was done; I fitted you for the sphere of a private governess, and you obtained a situation. From time to time I came to see you, and you seemed to be happy."

"I was happy, father."

"You filled the situation two years, and then the sudden removal to another country of the family in which you were employed deprived you of it, and threw you upon the world. You did not inform me of this at the time, Nansie."

"You had troubles and struggles of your own, father, and I did not wish to harass you."

"Your endeavors to obtain another situation were unsuccessful; the gentleman who engaged you as governess to his children went away in your debt; you were almost at the end of your resources. Of all this I was ignorant until a few weeks since when I came to see you. Then and then only did I learn what had occurred; then and then only did I realize the dangerous position in which you were placed; then and then only did I discover that your affections were engaged to a gentleman whose father is a man of great wealth. My duty was clear; I had come into possession of this legacy, and it seemed to afford a favorable opportunity for the distraction of an unhealthy fancy- You place your hand on my arm; you wish to speak."

"No, father, no," said Nansie, struggling with her feelings; in the gathering dusk her father could not see the play of emotion in her features; and, indeed, during this latter recital she kept her face averted from him; "I am not yet at liberty to do so. Go on."

"For the distraction of an unhealthy fancy," he resumed, "which might grow into a disease-which might wreck the happiness of a life most dear to me, I called upon you by the tie which binds and unites us-I am not wrong, dear child, in saying it unites us?"

"No, my dear father, it unites us now and ever."

"My child!' I called upon you to accompany me in my wanderings, and you consented. I think I have stated it fairly Nansie?"

"Quite fairly, father."

"Have you anything new to say about it?"

"Nothing, except" – and a delicious smile played upon her lips-"except that I love Kingsley."

"That is not new," he said, in a tone of whimsical reproach; "it is old. You have told me that before."

"It is always new to me, father. And there is something else I *must* say."

"Say it, Nansie."

"Kingsley loves me."

"Neither is that new. Apart from this I sometimes have an odd idea that you have a secret which you are keeping from me."

"If I said I had, it would be half revealing it. Father, time will show."

"That is a wiser philosophy than that 'Everything will come right.' Time does and will show. Shall I now relate the story of your uncle?"

"If you please, father."

"It will not take me long. Your mother, my dear Nansie, had two ardent lovers, your father and your uncle."

"That was sad."

"These are strokes of fate not to be avoided, and love, which unites, sometimes severs. It severed me and my brother, and neither he nor I, nor your mother, Nansie, was to blame for it. In youth we had a great affection for each other, although our characters were dissimilar. Our father was a poor gentleman-our family boat never floated into a golden stream-and he gave us as good an education as we could have gained in schools And colleges. He had a taste for books, and he cultivated the taste in us, his only children. He had ideas, too, and to be in his company was an entertainment. When he died he left each of us a little money, not more than a hundred pounds apiece, with which we were to seek our fortunes. We remained together, and in this association we became acquainted with your mother. By that time I had grown into a dreamer, and, I am afraid, a vagrant; your uncle was a dreamer also, but his visions were not entirely Utopian, and he was less of a Bohemian than I. He loved your mother passionately, and by force of fate we were rivals. We both tried our fortunes with her; it was not a case of one supplanting the other, but fair play on both sides; he failed and I succeeded. Your mother was a sweet and beautiful lady, and how I won her I know not."

"Father," whispered Nansie, "you have a silver tongue and the heart of a man. That is how you won my mother."

"Well, well, child, I should be past these flatteries, but as you said of yourself a while ago, I am human. My brother, learning that he had lost what he would have given the world to gain, cut himself adrift from us. He would not listen to reason, and I do not wonder at it. When was love really reasonable? What he did he did with determination, and all my implorings could not move him. He vowed that he and I should evermore be strangers, and so departed, and from that day we have not met. After my marriage I wrote to him from time to time, but he never replied to one of my letters. It was only when you and your mother returned from the visit you paid him that I learned he kept a bookshop in the East of London. I see his handwriting now for the first time in twenty years. Your mother and I constantly spoke about him; he possessed many admirable qualities; but, were I pushed to it, I should find it very difficult to say into what kind of a man he would grow, except that he would be constant and steadfast in his opinions. It was in the hope that he would soften towards me that, when you were a child, I sent you with your mother to see him. I see you now as you recalled yourself, in your little, white dress and blue sash, with the bunch of flowers you were to present to him. These are a part of a woman's innocently cunning ways, and I know it was in your dear mother's heart that, through you, your uncle should be won over to us. But the hopes in which we indulged were not realized. Your uncle was true to his word. It used to be said of him as a boy that he would die rather than break it-in which, when it becomes fixed in an earnest nature, there is sometimes a touch of folly or injustice-and I can recall many small incidents as a proof of his possession of this quality."

"But he has written to you at last, father?"

"Yes, Nansie."

"In a kindly spirit?"

"Yes, I am thankful to say."

"This is good. Is my uncle married?"

"No. In our last interview he vowed that he would never marry, and I doubt whether he would ever have yielded to the sentiment of love had his heart been again that way inclined. I deeply regret it. Life without love is at best a barren affair."

With a sweet look Nansie raised her dewy eyes to his. He divined what, in the darkness, he could not clearly see.

"It must be an honorable, honest, earnest love, child. You understand that?"

"I understand it, father."

"We will renew the subject another time. I am tired, and night has fallen. It is almost like summer-the sweetest spring in my remembrance. There is a fascination in shadows-spiritual suggestions and possibilities which cannot occur to the mind in sunlight. The night is dark and beautiful:

"'And silence girt the wood. No warbling tongue
Talked to the echo,
And all the upper world lay in a trance.'

"Life is a dream, dear child. May yours be a happy one!"

Then they did not speak for many minutes, and then it was Nansie's voice that was first heard.

"What did you say to my uncle in the letter you wrote to him, father?"

"I spoke to him of my illness, and of you. When your mother died I wrote informing him; but he took no notice of my letter. This time I appealed to him. I said, if anything happened to me you would be without a home. His answer is that you can find a home with him. My mind is greatly relieved. Now, my dear child, we will retire."

"I will see to the beds, father. I shall not be long."

She ascended the little flight of wooden steps, and the next moment a light from within the caravan was shining through one of the windows. This delightfully primitive dwelling-house contained three rooms or compartments. One was the kitchen, where the meals were cooked, and, in bad weather, partaken of. The other two were the sleeping-apartments of Nansie and her father. In each of these bedrooms was a window with a double sash, opening up and down.

The beds were soon ready, and then Nansie called her father. He ascended the steps, and, pulling them up after him, made them fast. Father and daughter were thus in a stronghold, as it were, safe from invasion. Before entering the castle Mr. Loveday had seen that the old horse was safe, and had tethered it by a rope to one of the wheels. Then, kissing Nansie with much tenderness, he retired to rest. He slept in the back room, Nansie in the front, and the only means of ingress and egress was the back door in Mr. Loveday's bedroom. Thus he served as a kind of watch-dog to his daughter. She, partly disrobing, sat awhile by the open window, looking out upon the shadows. She had much to think of-her father's illness, their worldly circumstances, her absent lover; but her mind was as healthy as her body, and she looked upon all things hopefully. She did not muse long; finishing her preparations for bed, she closed the windows, and slid between the sheets. She slept for an hour, and awoke; slept again for a little while, and again awoke. This was not her usual habit; as a rule she could sleep seven or eight hours at a stretch. Perhaps she was listening for the nightingale's song. It came, and she listened in delight to the bird of love calling for its mate; and as she lay awake another sound reached her ears, as of a heavy body moving softly outside. It was not the old horse. What could it be? She slipped out of bed, and listened at the door which led from her room to her father's. She heard his soft breathing; he seemed to be peacefully sleeping. Presently, as she stood in darkness, she heard a whispering voice which caused her heart to throb wild with joy.

"Nansie!"

She glided to the window and raised the lower sash.

"Kingsley!" she whispered, musically, in reply.

"You are here, my darling! I have found you!"

"Hush! Speak softly, or you will awake my father. What a time to come! How good you are!"

"I received your letter and telegram, and could not rest What a hunt I have had for you! I must speak to you, Nansie. Can't you come out?"

"Not to-night, Kingsley; it is impossible. Oh, Kingsley, how happy you have made me!"

"What else do I live for? But I must speak to you, I say. I cannot wait."

"You must-till to-morrow morning. Listen to the nightingale. Is it not sweet?"

"To-morrow morning, you say. An eternity! How am I to be sure you will not disappear before then?"

"I shall be here, in the woods, at sunrise. Could I keep away, knowing you were waiting for me? There-you make me say foolish things!"

"Give me your hand, Nansie."

She put her hand out of the window; her white arm was partly bared by the loosened sleeve. He, standing on the spoke of the wheel, took her hand and kissed it, and then did not relinquish it.

"You are well, Nansie?"

"Yes, Kingsley."

"Quite well?"

"Quite well."

"And your father?"

"He is not well, I grieve to say."

"We will make him so, you and I. But what a freak-to live like this!"

"It is delightful."

"Without me?"

"I mean now that you are here. Good-night, Kingsley."

"A moment yet. I will wait till the nightingale has finished its song."

"You foolish Kingsley! It will sing for hours."

"Nansie, I have so much to tell you!"

"And I to tell you; but this is not the time. To-morrow at sunrise."

"Yes, to-morrow at sunrise." He kissed her hand again. "Nansie, my father has arrived home."

"At last!" There was a tremor of apprehension in her voice. "Have you seen him?"

"Not yet. But he has sent for me, and I am going to him after seeing you to-morrow."

"Where will you sleep, Kingsley?"

"I have a bed at Godalming; but I am in no humor for sleep."

"Be reasonable, Kingsley, if you love me." She leaned forward, raised his hand to her lips, and kissed it. "Now are you content?"

"I should be false to you if I were to say I am. There, I have given you back your hand. Are *you* content?"

"It is yours forever and ever. Good-night, my love!"

"Good-night, my heart! To-morrow at sunrise. Mind-not a moment later! Do not close the window yet."

He managed to pluck some daisies, and he threw them up at her. She caught them, and even in the dark she could distinguish the golden tufts within their silver crowns.

"Good-night, my love," she sighed again, pressing the flowers to her lips.

"Good-night, my heart!"

She listened to the last faint echo of his footfall, and then she sought her bed, and, smiling happily, fell asleep, with the daisies on her pillow.

CHAPTER III

Between midnight and sunrise a slight shower had fallen, scarcely damping the ground, but sufficient to draw out the perfume of the young flowers. The promise of spring was fulfilled, and tender bloom peeped up in places, and in others showed itself more boldly. About the trunks of ancient trees the sweet woodruff lurked; in sunny hedges the "cuckoo buds of yellow hue" proclaimed themselves; the heart-shaped leaves of the Irish shamrock were slowly unfolding; species of wild geranium and the strangely shaped orchises were abundant, the general commonwealth being represented by myriads of golden buttercups. Nansie and Kingsley stood near a great hawthorn, not yet in full bud, but already emitting a deliciously fine fragrance born of the light rain which had fallen during the night.

"Why, Nansie," Kingsley was saying to her, "I never suspected you had gypsy blood in you."

"I have none, as you know," was her response. "It was my father's whim, for which, I dare say, if he were here and was inclined to do so, he could give you several reasons. You can guess some of them, Kingsley."

"The first and foremost is that he wished to keep us apart. He has not succeeded. I would hunt you all over the world, Nansie."

"You must not be unjust to my father," said Nansie, "He was always full of fancies, Kingsley, but never harbored a bad one; and you must remember he does not know our secret yet. I love and honor him; he is a good man."

"Or you could not have been his daughter. Full of fancies, indeed!" And Kingsley turned his head in the direction of the caravan. "Surely this is the strangest that ever entered the head of man! A gentleman and a scholar-for he is both, Nansie, and I suppose it was partly through your breeding that I was drawn to you-to go wandering through the land with his daughter, as though they belonged to the lost tribes! But there is an odd pleasantry about it that tickles one, after all."

"You would enjoy it, Kingsley," said Nansie, with a delicious laugh, nestling close to him; "it has really been delightful."

"Ah, you said that last night, and I asked you, in surprise, how it could have been, without me?"

"And I did not have wit enough to answer you properly. Think of the hour! I was scarcely half awake. And Kingsley, having the fullest trust in you, which nothing ever can shake, you would not wish me to be unhappy even when we are parted. I can think of you in a happy mood when you are not with me, if only by looking forward to the time when we shall always be together. It will be soon, will it not?"

"It must, it shall, either way," he replied; "but I do not think I was wrong in asking you to wait a little while."

"You have done everything for the best, so far as I am concerned- But for yourself!" Nansie paused and sighed.

"But for myself," he said, taking up her words, "I have done that which is happiest and best, and that which falls to the lot of few men."

"Ah, Kingsley?" she said, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"I have won a faithful heart. What more could I desire?"

"It is sweet to hear you say so; but if your father should be angry-"

"What then? We are young and strong and willing, and shall be able to manage. I have friends who will give me a helping hand, as I would give them were our places changed. New men spring up every day, Nansie; the ladder is full of them, rising higher and higher. Why should I not be one of them? Why should I not be fortunate-in money, I mean; I am content with everything else-as my father was? When he was my age he had little more than I have. See what he is now. A power, mixing with those who bear historic names. And there are others as he is. The old ranks are widening, new

men creep in, hold their heads high, and occupy positions of power and profit. The question will presently be, who are the masters? No, no, Nansie, I don't despair. I should not be worthy of you if I did. What ennobles a man? Rank? Hardly. He can prove himself worthy of it-that is all; then he may consider himself truly distinguished. Rank is mortal. Love is immortal. Ask the poets. Not that they know much better than any one else. After all, it is the heart that should be followed."

"I have followed mine," said Nansie, looking fondly at him.

She did not understand the drift of all he said, nor, indeed, did he himself, nor was he aware that his speech was of a wandering nature. He spoke enthusiastically, and sometimes he ran his fingers through his hair; and although he did this rather perplexedly, there was no indication in his manner of any want of confidence in himself or his opinions. When Nansie said she had followed her heart, he kissed her and said:

"And I followed mine; it led me here to your side, my dearest, and I am happy. This is the loveliest morning! The rain has sweetened everything-for us! You are teaching me things, Nansie. I had no idea the early morning was so beautiful. The flowers, the dew-it is wonderful. If I were a poet I should say the earth was covered with jewels."

"You are a poet, Kingsley."

"No, no; I see things through your eyes. It is you who are the poet. But I have written verses, too. The fellows say poetry doesn't pay, and you must not encourage me. We must be sensibly worldly. What some of the fellows used to say was that I was prone to be discursive, but they were not judges. Between you and me, they were a little jealous because I could talk. Well, the gift of oratory is not a bad one-I don't say I have it, but I am seldom at a loss for words. It may not be a gift-it may be an art which a man may cultivate. That brings me back to my father. He was always fond of hearing me talk. He has often said, 'Talk away, Kingsley; you shall be in the House one day.' You know what I mean by the House, Nansie? – Parliament."

"I like to hear you speak of your father, Kingsley, and that he loves you."

"He does, sincerely. He says I am to do great things, and that all his hopes are centred in me. Why do you sigh, Nansie?"

"Did I sigh, Kingsley?" she asked, with feminine duplicity. "It must be because I am overjoyed that we are together."

"Dear girl! The reason I ramble on so about my father is because I wish you to know him thoroughly. He is very practical-so am I. Sentiment does not run in our family. Only he must be humored, because everything depends upon him. He is rather proud; he has a right to be so, being a self-made man. And obstinate; so am I. You do not know all sides of me yet, Nansie. I have heard it said of a man who has raised himself by his own exertions: 'Oh, he is only a man who has made money!' Now that is an exhibition of ignorance. For a man who was once poor to become a magnate-well, there is an element of romance in it. Look at Whittington. My father was a poor boy; his parents were poor, and could not afford to give him a good education. What he knows he has learned since he became a man. That opens up the question whether it was of any use sending me to college; whether a mistake was not made in not throwing me upon the world, as he was thrown? He has spoken to me of the philosopher's stone, and said he found it when he was young. 'Make use of others,' he says, and has furnished illustrations. 'Take a thousand workingmen,' he says, 'bricklayers, stonemasons, carpenters, anything. They work a certain number of hours per day for a certain number of shillings per week. So manage that from their labor you reap a profit of half an hour a day out of each man. That is a profit of five hundred hours per day for the organizer. At eight working hours per day you thus put, roughly speaking, into your pocket the earnings of sixty men out of the thousand.' That is the way in which my father became a contractor. Bridges, canals, foreign railways, he has made them all, and has had as many as eight thousand men working for him at one time. And all out of nothing. But this is prosaic stuff. Let us talk of ourselves. Your father is ill, you said. What is the matter with him?"

"He suffers from his heart, Kingsley; I am in deep distress about him."

"Perhaps he is frightening himself unnecessarily, my dear. He must consult the best physicians. Thorough rest, freedom from anxiety, a warmer climate-leave it to me, Nansie. It is only a matter of money."

Nansie thought with sadness of the disclosure made by her father of the extent of his worldly resources, and at that moment the subject of her thoughts made his appearance. Mr. Loveday did not betray surprise at finding his daughter with Kingsley, but she blushed scarlet when she saw him, and Kingsley was not free from a certain embarrassment.

"You rose before me this morning," said Mr. Loveday to Nansie. "Have you been out long?"

"About half an hour, father," she replied.

"You have not met Mr. Manners by accident," he observed.

"No, father; Kingsley and I made the appointment last night."

"Last night! At what strange hour, then, and where?" Kingsley looked at her encouragingly, and whispered: "Be brave. I will tell him all."

This gave her courage.

"The appointment, father," she said, archly, "was made last night when the nightingale was singing."

He allowed his eyes to rest for a brief space upon hers, and he saw truth and innocence so clearly depicted therein that a deep breath escaped him, as though a weight had been lifted off his heart. But this assurance of his daughter's guilelessness was another argument against the man who, in the father's opinion, was playing upon her feelings.

"Go and prepare breakfast, Nansie," said Mr. Loveday. "I will join you presently."

"And Kingsley?" she asked. "He will also come?"

"We shall see, we shall see," said Mr. Loveday, fretfully. "He and I have much to say to each other."

"But I shall expect him," she said, kissing her father; then, with a bright look at Kingsley, she departed.

"It was the only way to get rid of her," said Mr. Loveday, with a look of displeasure at the young man. "Even a father is compelled sometimes to practise deceit in his dealings with his children."

The implied accusation in this remark was acknowledged by Kingsley in silence. Impulsive and wayward as he was, he was apt to resent an imputation reflecting upon his honor.

"But then," continued Mr. Loveday, "a father is often justified in his deceit, especially in such a case as this, when he has to deal with a young and inexperienced girl."

His manner was as unfortunate as his matter, and it was impossible to mistake his meaning; but Kingsley exhibited no resentment.

"You are bringing an accusation against me, sir," he said. "The least you can do is to set it forth in plain terms."

"I will do so. Were I disposed to be lenient-which I am not, because the welfare of my daughter is too near to my heart-I should call your conduct rash and inconsiderate. As it is, I have no hesitation in declaring it to be criminal."

"I am glad Nansie is not present to hear you, sir."

"I, also, am glad. You know as well as I do that I would not dare to speak so plainly were she here. I should have to temporize with her-in plainer terms, to use some of the arts you have used to entangle her."

"Have I used such arts to such a purpose?" asked Kingsley. He was not accustomed to be addressed in such a manner and to be misjudged so promptly. "You make me aware of it for the first time."

"Use none with me; be straightforward, if it is in your power. I am my daughter's protector, and I intend to protect her with firmness and authority." And yet as he spoke he pressed his hand to his heart, and looked before him apprehensively for a moment with the manner of a man to whom a

spiritual warning had presented itself. Firm and confident as he endeavored to make his speech, he felt his powerlessness. He was a beggar, and the shadow of death hovered over him. Nevertheless he bravely pursued what he conceived to be his duty. "I have called your conduct criminal. You have some knowledge of the world. In what other words would you describe the behavior of a young man of fashion-you see I do you justice-"

"You do not," interrupted Kingsley, "you do me a gross injustice, as you will be compelled to acknowledge before we have done."

"How other than criminal is the conduct of a young man of fashion when he makes an appointment with a pure and innocent girl such as this in which I have surprised you? What construction would the world place upon it?"

"I care little for the world, sir, where my affections are concerned."

"That is to say, that you care little for the consequences of wrong-doing. I know, I know; it is the fashion of your set."

"Upon my honor, sir," said Kingsley, warmly, "I cannot make up my mind how to take you. The attitude you have assumed rather puts me on my mettle, and though I could easily disarm you, perhaps it is as well that I should first hear you out."

"The attitude *you* assume, young gentleman, is an utterly unwarrantable one. I am speaking strongly, I admit, but I am justified by my duty as a parent."

"And yet, sir, I may have equal justice on my side."

"There can be no question of equality in this matter."

"Pardon me, sir," said Kingsley-hurt as he was, his bearing towards Nansie's father was, if not deferential, respectful-"I thought this was a matter of the affections." And, conscious of his integrity, he could not help adding: "Shall your daughter be the judge, sir, between us?"

In Mr. Loveday's eyes this was an added offence.

"It is an unworthy challenge, Mr. Manners. It is not difficult for an inexperienced girl to choose between a lover and a father. Old affections, old ties, all records of a parent's anxious care, fade into nothingness when her heart is touched by the new love." He spoke now plaintively, and he noted the sympathizing look in Kingsley's face. It inspired him with hope; his voice became more gentle, his manner more appealing. "Mr. Manners, have pity on me. Let us speak as honest man to honest man."

"Agreed, sir," said Kingsley, heartily.

"My daughter is a poor girl; I am a poor man, and have been so all my life. There is no great misfortune in this; as much happiness is to be found in the ranks of the poor as in the ranks of the rich. When, some short time since, it first came to my knowledge that my daughter entertained an affection for you, there was but one course open to me-to effect a separation between you, in the hope that time and distance might work a healthful cure, and cause her to forget you."

"But why, sir?" asked Kingsley, with smiling eyes.

"You ask why? Surely you can yourself supply the answer. There is between you a disparity which renders it impossible that any good can spring from such an affection."

"No, no, sir; not impossible. Pardon me for interrupting you."

"I, as a matter of course, can form some reasonable conception of the future that lies before my child. She is poor; she will live among the poor; it is her lot, and not a hard one. It is only temptation, it is only a longing for what is out of her reach, that is likely to spoil her life, as it has spoiled the lives of many who have not had the strength to resist. Will you help to spoil the life of a child who is very dear to me?"

"No," said Kingsley, fervently, "as Heaven is my judge, no!"

"Mr. Manners," said Mr. Loveday, holding out his hand to the young man, "you said a moment or two since that I was doing you an injustice, and that I should be compelled to acknowledge it. I acknowledge it now, and I ask your pardon. You have been simply thoughtless. The time may come when, with children of your own to protect, you will look back to this meeting with satisfaction."

"I shall always do that, sir. And now, sir, as we are on better terms, I may ask what it is you expect of me."

"That you never see my daughter more; that you give me your promise not to intrude yourself upon her, nor write to her, and in that way help her in the task that lies before her, the task of forgetfulness."

"A hard task, sir."

"It may be, and all the sweeter when it is accomplished, because of the dangers from which its performance saves her. You promise me this?"

"A moment, sir. If your daughter and I had been equal in station-which we are not; she is far above me." Being more at his ease, he relapsed now into his old manner of discursiveness. "If you knew me better you would excuse me for flying off at a tangent. It is a butterfly habit of mine, though I hope there is something of the grub in me! It may be needed by and by. If, as I was about to say, your daughter and I were equal in worldly station, both being equally poor or equally rich, and I asked you for her hand, would you refuse it to me?"

"I think not," replied Mr. Loveday. "But knowing so little of you it would be necessary that I should know more, that I should be to some extent satisfied as to your past life."

"And your inquiries in that respect being satisfactory," interrupted Kingsley, "you would not refuse?"

"My daughter's heart should decide for me."

"Let it decide for you now, sir," said Kingsley, in a tone both light and earnest. "No, do not take it amiss that I make this proposition, but listen to me a moment. Hitherto I have been pretty well thrust aside in this matter, as if I were a bit of stone, without feelings, or something very nearly resembling a monster with them. I am quite conscious that I am of an erratic disposition, flying hither and thither as the whim seizes me-almost as bad, my dear sir, as your eccentric wanderings in a caravan-but I am not at all conscious that I have any very distinct vice in me; the explanation of which may be that I lack strength of character, a proof that it is as undesirable in one man as it is desirable in another. I am not speaking in praise of myself, except perhaps in a negative way, which is not much to one's credit. Though I may tell you, sir, that I have not unfrequently been called a radical, and a radical is a personage. What I am endeavoring to express is that I have feelings, and that I should prefer rather to be happy than miserable. There is nothing unreasonable in that, I hope."

As he paused for a reply, Mr. Loveday, somewhat mystified, said: "No, there is nothing unreasonable in such a desire."

"That much being admitted," continued Kingsley, "I repeat my request that your daughter's heart should decide for you, as you would allow it to decide for you if you supposed me to be a poor man. And this sends me flying off again. My father is a rich man; I am nothing but what he makes me. If he were to turn me off, my entire worldly wealth would consist of an inconsiderable sum of six hundred pounds, the whole of which would be swallowed up in paying my debts. Give me credit for frankness, sir."

"I do. Your frankness convinces me that for your own sake, as well as for my daughter's, it is best that you and she should not meet again."

"But she expects me, sir, and in your company. I would wager that she has prepared breakfast for me- There, sir, don't turn impatiently away; it is the fault of my temperament that I can be light and serious in a breath, that I can mean much and seem to mean little. This I promise. If you will allow me to accompany you to the caravan, where your daughter is waiting for us, I will abide by your decision, to be arrived at within five short minutes after we are together, as to whether I shall remain to breakfast or bid you farewell. Come, sir, I can't speak fairer."

There was an irresistible ingenuousness in Kingsley's voice and manner, and Mr. Loveday led the way to the caravan. Breakfast was laid, and Nansie, busy within the dwelling-house on wheels, cried out in the cheerfullest of voices:

"Is that you, father?"

"Yes, Nansie," said Mr. Loveday.

"And Kingsley?"

"Yes, Nansie," said the young man. "Never mind the teapot. Come out at once; I have only five minutes' grace."

Nansie immediately ran down the little flight of wooden steps, and looked from one to the other of the men, both so dear to her.

"Nansie," said Kingsley, "I said that I would tell your father all. Forgive me; I have not done so."

"Why, Kingsley?"

"Because I left it to you."

"I may speak, then?"

"Yes."

And now there were tears in Nansie's eyes, happy tears. She approached closer to her father and took his hand.

"You said last night, father, that you thought I had a secret which I was keeping from you."

"Yes, child."

"I had; but I had given Kingsley a promise not to reveal it without his permission. I have his permission now, and I will tell it." Her bosom heaved, her lips trembled; she gazed fondly at her father.

"Well, child?"

"You will not be angry, father?"

"I do not know, Nansie."

"Father," said Nansie-her arms were round his neck, and her face half hidden on his breast-"Kingsley and I are married."

"Married!" cried Mr. Loveday, in a tone of wondering happiness.

"Yes, dear, married. Kingsley thought it best to wait until his father, who has been for some time abroad, returned home before we made it known; but I am glad that you know it earlier-glad and happy, my dear father. I wrote to Kingsley-I could not help it, father; I was afraid of losing him, we were wandering about so-and he came last night, when you were asleep. I was awake, listening to the nightingale. Kingsley being outside and I in, we could not talk comfortably together; that is how we met this morning at sunrise. You will forgive us, father, will you not?"

"Forgive you, dear child!" said Mr. Loveday, holding out his hand to Kingsley, who took it and pressed it warmly. "What can I have to forgive, seeing you and Kingsley so happy, and knowing that you have a protector? It is I who should ask forgiveness of him."

"Not at all, my dear sir, not at all," cried Kingsley, hastily. "I was to blame for allowing you to labor a moment under a misapprehension."

"My dear Nansie! my dear, dear child!" murmured the happy father. Then, turning to Kingsley: "When do you expect your father home?" As he asked the question his face became grave. He saw the difficulties in their way.

"He has arrived, sir. I had a letter from him yesterday, and I am going to him, to confess all. It was partly that, and partly because of Nansie's letter, but chiefly because I could not exist without seeing her before I went to my father, which brought me here. But, sir, my father is not the question."

"What is, then, Kingsley?" asked Mr. Loveday, still very grave.

"The question is, whether you are going to ask me to stay to breakfast with you."

Mr. Loveday brightened; there was something contagious in the young man's gay spirits.

"I invite you, Kingsley," he said.

"Thank you, sir; I am famished, Nansie."

Standing upon the wooden steps, she turned and gazed fondly at her father and her husband, and as her bright eyes shone upon them there issued from a thicket of trees a most wonderful chorus of birds. And Mr. Loveday, quoting from his favorite poet, said:

"'See, the spring
Is the earth enamelling,
And the birds on every tree
Greet the morn with melody.'"

And Nansie, going slowly into the caravan, thought that life was very sweet and the world very beautiful.

CHAPTER IV

On the evening of the following day Kingsley arrived at his father's house in London. It was situated in the centre of fashion, and had been built by the rich contractor himself upon part of a freehold which he had purchased upon terms so advantageous that, as he was in the habit of boasting, his own mansion "stood him in next to nothing," occasionally adding that he could find a purchaser for it at a day's notice for seventy-five thousand pounds. He was fond of dealing in large sums even in figures of speech, and he was to some extent justified in this habit by the circumstances of his career.

It was a wonderful career, commencing with nothing and marching into millions. A poor boy, doubly orphaned and thrown upon the world before he could stand upright, without a friend, without a penny, without shoes to his feet, he had grown somehow into a sturdy manhood, and when he was twenty years of age he stood six feet two in his stockings, and could fell an ox with his fist. Therefore, even at that humble period in his career, he was renowned among his fellows, and held a distinguished position. No man could equal him in strength; many tried and were laid low; giants travelled from afar to try conclusions with Val Manners, and all met with the same fate. Had he cared he might have developed into the greatest prizefighter the world had ever known, and have worn diamonded belts and jewelled stars, and become as a king among men. Newspapers would have heralded his doings in large type; he could have travelled in state like an ambassador; he might have exhibited himself and earned a princely income; the aristocracy would have patted his broad back, and titled ladies would have cast admiring glances at him. For this is the age of muscle as well as intellect, and a bully may take rank with Homer.

But Val Manners was not a bully, and his tastes were not for the prize-ring. He was proud of his great strength, because it gave him the mastery, and he used it upon needed occasions to maintain his position; but he did not love fighting for fighting's sake. In his early life he knew that he had biceps of steel and a constitution which defied wind and weather; but he did not know that he had a subtle brain and a talent for administration which were to lead him to eminence and enormous wealth. This knowledge dawned upon him afterwards, when he began to make successes, when he began to gauge men and understand them.

He commenced life as a bricklayer, and even as a boy his strength and fearlessness were quoted, and he found himself in demand. He did not seem to know what fear was; he could climb the shakiest and tallest of ladders, carrying wonderful weights; he could stand upon dizzy heights and look smilingly down. His possession of these qualities caused him to be selected for dangerous tasks, and he was never known to shrink from one, however perilous. All this time he earned barely sufficient to appease his enormous appetite. He received no education, but he had a native gift of figures. It was not till he reached his third decade that he could read and write. Long before that, however, his arithmetical talents had laid the foundation of his fortune. It was a fortune made partly out of stone and metal, but chiefly out of other men's labor.

Chance threw into his way a small contract. A retired pawnbroker wanted a house built in North Islington, and was not satisfied with the estimates he received from established firms. "It ought to be done for seven and a half per cent. less," said he, and he called Val Manners to his aid, having had occasion to observe the calm and skilful manner in which the young artisan went about his work. "He does the work of two men," said the pawnbroker, "and is probably paid for the work of one." He ascertained, upon inquiry, that this was the case; Val Manners, working so many hours a day, was paid so much a week. It was not that, out of boastfulness, he desired to do more work in a given time than comrades less strong and capable than himself, it was simply that he did his work honestly without regard to comparisons. The pawnbroker discovered in his first interview with Val Manners that the huge, common-looking man had a head for figures. He put the matter of his house before Val Manners, and asked him to prepare an estimate. The result was that Val Manners threw up his

situation, and became a master builder in a small way; the result also was that the pawnbroker got his house built for twelve per cent, less than the lowest of the estimates submitted to him by old-established firms.

In this first operation the brain power of Val Manners made itself manifest. He worked himself, of course, and thereby saved one man's labor; this went into his own pocket. Indeed, being stirred and excited by this higher flight into life's struggles, he worked harder than had been his usual habit, and may be said to have done the work of at least two men and a half in the building of the pawnbroker's house; and this extra money also went into his pocket. Then, again, in the selection of men but of work who applied to be taken on, he chose the strongest, and, being always on the spot, saw that he was not cheated out of a quarter of an hour by one and ten minutes by another. Thus, when the contract was finished, he was a great many days to the good, and he found that he was richer by sixty pounds than he would have been had he continued to be a servant. This set him thinking.

The pawnbroker was so satisfied with the bargain that he proposed the building of a row of houses in a poor locality. Val Manners was ready and glad, and pursued the same tactics as before, and worked harder than ever. The second contract being finished to everybody's satisfaction, Val Manners reckoned up his gains. He was master of a capital of three hundred pounds.

From this point his career was a succession of triumphs, until his capital amounted to a hundred thousand pounds. It was wonderful how his money accumulated; it grew while he slept, for he often had relays of men working for him by night as well as by day. He was a hard taskmaster, perfectly just in his dealings, keeping to his word and his engagements with unerring fidelity, but exacting from those in his employ an absolute faithfulness, the least infringement of which meant instant dismissal. It was no longer Val Manners, but Mr. Manners, the great Mr. Manners, who had plumped into the very richest part of a Tom Tiddler's ground open to every enterprising man, and picked and pocketed the plums growing therein. He did not allow himself to become bewildered by his success, but pursued his way calmly and masterfully as regarded his own undertakings, and with a vigilant watchfulness which frequently turned a probable loss into a certain profit. He undertook no more small contracts; all his business dealings were now on a vast scale, and no project was too stupendous for him to grapple with. It was not England alone that supplied his master mind with material to expend its energies upon; he sought abroad for contracts, and laid railways in deserts, built huge bridges touching the clouds, and made wonderful waterways for facilities of commerce. He became world-renowned, and the name of Manners, the great contractor, was a passport in every part of the globe.

It was to his advantage that he married young, his partner being no other than the daughter of his first patron, the pawnbroker. She was not in any sense a remarkable person, but she had an ambition to shine in society, and it was from her that Mr. Manners received the limited education which enabled him, at thirty years of age, to read and write. His ideal as to social position also grew with his wealth; but he had tact enough to understand that it was not possible for him to occupy a foremost position as a public leader. This, however, did not prevent him from building a grand house in the heart of fashionable London, nor from mixing among the best. He was not out of place there, for he had the rare wisdom of being able to hold his tongue, and never to speak assertively except upon the business with which he was familiar. On those occasions he was listened to with respect and deference, and his words had weight; he trod upon no man's corns by expressing opinions upon matters of which he had not made himself master; he was content that his works should speak for him. Eloquent, indeed, was the record which, so far as he himself was concerned, he bore about him in silence. The railroads he had constructed in savage countries, the seas he had joined, were not these matters of history? And he, whose constructive and administrative talents had compassed these difficulties, became in a sense historical. Stories were related of his great courage, of his amazing strength, of his daring and skill in moments of difficulty, putting his own shoulders to the wheel and showing his workmen how a thing was to be done. Women love the personification of strength in a man; it means power, manliness, nobility, in their eyes; and numbers gazed in admiration upon the

massive frame of the great contractor for whom no undertaking was too vast. He was a striking figure in fashionable assemblies, towering above all, and moving like a mountain through the packed crowd of male and female exquisites. He only moved when he had occasion; he had not within him that restless, fretful spirit which weakens the character of many men; as he knew the value of silence, so also did he know the value of repose. In all gatherings of men and women the art of standing still with dignity and without self-consciousness is invaluable. This art Mr. Manners possessed, so that, taking him for all in all, he was no charlatan, trading upon false pretences.

The day previous to that upon which Kingsley entered his father's house, with the intention of making a clean breast of it with respect to Nansie, Mr. Manners himself had returned from Russia where he had been for five months superintending a railway contract for the Russian government, which he had brought to a successful conclusion.

CHAPTER V

Father and son greeted each other cordially, but after the undemonstrative manner of Englishmen.

"Well, father?"

"Well, Kingsley?"

Then they shook hands, and smiled and nodded at each other.

"Has everything gone off well, father?"

"Everything. The balance on the right side will be larger than I expected."

"That is better than being the other way."

"Perhaps; but I prefer matters to come out exactly as I planned them. It is altogether more satisfactory. I will tell you all about it to-night, when we must have a long talk. I have a lot of letters to attend to now."

Kingsley took the hint, and, after seeing his mother, went to his room. The first thing he did there was to take out Nansie's portrait and gaze fondly on it and kiss it. He had parted from her and her father in the morning, and had promised to write to her before he went to bed. As he had an hour now to spare, he thought he could not better employ it than in covering four sheets of paper to the girl he loved, so he sat down and enjoyed himself to his heart's content. His letter was full of the usual lover's rhapsodies, and need not here be transcribed. There was in it something better than rhapsodies, the evidence of an earnest, faithful spirit, which made it the sweetest of reading to Nansie when she received it on the following day. Kingsley mentioned that he and his father were to have a long talk together that night, and that, if he found a favorable opportunity, he would take advantage of it to make confession to his father; also if he had any good news to communicate, he might write again before he went to bed. And then, with fond and constant love and untold kisses, he was forever and ever her faithful lover, and so on, and so on. Very precious and comforting are these lovers' sweet trivialities.

Dinner over, Kingsley and his father sat together in the contractor's study, at a table upon which were wine and cigars. Mr. Manners drank always in great moderation, and did not smoke. Kingsley's habits were after a freer fashion, and his father did not disapprove. The first hour was occupied in a description by Mr. Manners of the operations in which he had been engaged in Russia, and of the difficulties which he had to surmount. He made light of these, but he was proud of his last success.

"There were mountains to cut through, Kingsley," he said, "and Russian prejudices to overcome; I hardly know which of the two was the more difficult job."

"There were dangers, father, as well as difficulties," observed Kingsley.

"Yes, there were dangers; you have heard something of them?"

"I have seen accounts in the papers from time to time. You see, father, the railway you have laid down is a step nearer to India."

"I am pleased to hear you say that, Kingsley."

"Why?" asked Kingsley, rather surprised.

"Because it shows you take an interest in politics."

"I have done that for some time past, as you know, father."

"Yes, and it pleases me. A step nearer to India. That is so, but it is no business of mine. It may," with a light touch of his finger on his son's breast, "by and by be business of yours, when you are a statesman. About the dangers? What did you read?"

"There were pestilent morasses to be bridged over or cut through, and there was great loss of life."

"Quite correct; the mortality was serious; fortunately I employed native labor."

"But it was human life, father, whether Russian or English."

"Quite true again, Kingsley."

"Holding views as I do, father," said Kingsley, "there appears to me something anomalous-that is putting it very mildly-in this last operation of yours."

Mr. Manners smiled good-humoredly, and nodded his head in pleasant approval.

"Go on, Kingsley."

"For instance, the matter of Russia's nearer approach to India being facilitated by an Englishman. Is not that anomalous?"

"No more anomalous than selling Russia a few millions of our best rifles and a few hundred millions of our best bullets."

"Would you do that?"

"I should like to get the contract."

Kingsley shifted uneasily in his chair.

"It is either right or wrong," he said.

"Being at peace with Russia, Kingsley, it is right. Of course, it would be wrong if we were at war with the country."

"But we provide it with rifles and bullets and railways beforehand."

"Quite so-in the way of business. I like a conversation such as this, Kingsley, in which there is no need for anything to be settled. As to the future before you, it doesn't matter to me which side you take, so long as you become what I hope you will be. Men like myself, sprung from the ranks and making such fortunes as I have made, generally become Conservatives. I am neither one thing nor another, and shall not attempt to dictate to you. But into this question of bullets and rifles and railways let us import a little common-sense. If that sort of trading is wrong in times of peace, every country would have to cut itself aloof from every other country, and to live as if it were shut up in a box. I can't express myself as well as you, but I dare say you understand me."

"You can always make people understand you, father," said Kingsley.

"Yes, I have always been able to do that. They respect you all the more for it." Here he laughed quite gayly. "Even in Russia, where I did not know one word of the language, I made myself understood. I saw some great people there, Kingsley, and had interviews with them. Of course, I had a man to interpret for me, but I think I could have managed even without him. Some of the great men spoke English, but not a laborer I employed did. It was no more necessary for them to know our language, than for me to know theirs. The point was that there was work to do, and that it must be done within the stipulated time. With a stern master over him the Russian is a good workman, and values his life less than an Englishman. Take the pestilential ground we had to work over. No English workman would remain there a day; the Russian shrugged his shoulders and took the risk. Now, Kingsley, we will proceed to matters more immediately concerning ourselves."

"With pleasure, father."

"As between father and son there should be as few secrets as possible. You have some knowledge of my career; it is one I have no need to be ashamed of, and I propose to commence with the story of my life, and to make you fully acquainted with the secret of my rise in the world."

Upon that Mr. Manners entered unreservedly upon his relation, and spoke of matters in respect of his successful struggles with which the reader is already familiar. It was not all new to Kingsley, but he listened patiently and admiringly.

"I think I have made it plain to you, Kingsley," said Mr. Manners, when he had finished the recital, "that I owe everything to myself. I make no boast of it, and I have no doubt there are numbers of men as capable and clever as I am, only they have either not had the courage to launch out or have missed their opportunities. Now, my lad, I am sensible of my own deficiencies; I do not deceive myself by saying that I am as good as others with whom my money places me on an equality; I am a contractor, nothing more, and every shoemaker to his last. I shall stick to mine, and make more money. If I entered Parliament, which I could do without difficulty, I should have to sit mumchance,

and play a silent part, unless something in my own particular line started up; and that would be once in a blue moon. Now taking a back seat in anything in which I am engaged would not suit me; I am accustomed to be master, and master I intend to continue to be. If I were a good speaker the matter would be different; I could carry all before me, though I am ignorant of Greek and Latin. When I was a lad I did not have what you call ambition; I took a pride in making sensible contracts which would bring me in a profit, and I crept along steadily, never dreaming that I should ever reach my present position. But the case is altered now, and I have a real ambition-not directly for myself, but for you. I have no expectation that you will disappoint me."

"I will endeavor not to do so, father."

"That is a good lad. You will be one of the richest men in the country, but I want you to be something more; I want you to be one of the most influential. I want people to say as I walk along; 'There goes the father of the prime-minister.'"

"That is looking a long way ahead," said Kingsley, considerably startled by this flight.

"Not a bit too far; it can be worked up to, and with your gifts it shall be. I have already told you that it matters little to me whether you are a Conservative, or a Liberal, or a Radical; that is your affair. If you are prime-minister and a Radical it will show that Radicalism is popular. I stop short of Socialism, mind you."

"So do I."

"Good. There is nothing nowadays that a man with a good education and a long purse cannot accomplish. I have the long purse, but not the education. I can talk sensibly enough to you here in a room, and in fairly good English, thanks to your mother and to my perseverance, but put me in the House of Commons and ask me to make a long speech upon large matters of state, and I should make a fool of myself. Therefore it is impossible *I* could ever become prime-minister."

"It is not every man who would speak so plainly and disparagingly of himself."

"Perhaps not, but I happen to know the length of my tether; I happen to know what I am fitted for and what I am not. I don't want you to suppose that I am making a sacrifice; nothing of the kind. I keep my place; you work up to yours; then I shall be perfectly satisfied. I have had this in my mind for years, and instead of making you a contractor I have made you a gentleman. That is what other fathers have done, whose beginnings have been as humble as mine. New families are springing up, my boy, to take the place of the old; you, Kingsley, shall found a family which shall become illustrious, and I shall be content to look on and say: 'This is my doing; this is my work.' We shall show these old lords what new blood can do."

"Why, father," said Kingsley, laughing despite the uneasy feeling that was creeping over him, "you are a Radical."

"Perhaps I am, but we will keep it to ourselves. Now, Kingsley, it is my method when I am going in for a big contract to master beforehand everything in connection with it. I study it again and again; I verify my figures and calculations a dozen times before I set my name to it. That is what I have done in this affair. I have mastered the whole of the details, and I know exactly what is necessary. The first thing to make sure of when a great house is to be built, a house that is to last through sunshine and storm, a house that is to stand for centuries, is the foundation. That is out of sight, but it must be firm, and strong, and substantial. I am the foundation of this house I wish to build, and I am out of sight. Good. What is fine and beautiful to the eye you will supply-that is, you and your connections, in which, for convenience, we will say your mother and I do not count."

"My connections!" exclaimed Kingsley. "Apart from you and my mother!"

"Quite so. There are families of the highest rank who would not shrink from admitting you, upon the closest terms, into their circle. Some are tottering, and fear the fall. Old estates are mortgaged up to their value, and every year makes their position worse. We, with our full purses, step in and set them right, and bury the ghosts which haunt them. There is nothing low and common about you, my

boy. You are, in appearance, manners, and education, as good as the best of them, and lady mothers will only be too glad to welcome you. The first thing you must do is to marry."

"Sir!"

"And to marry well. I have authority for saying that you can marry the daughter of a duchess. I don't wonder that you look startled. I have seen the young lady; she is nineteen years of age, and very beautiful. Of course she knows nothing of the scheme. It is for you to win her-of which I have no fears. You can make settlements upon her, Kingsley, which would satisfy the most exacting of duchesses. The family has influence, great influence, socially and politically. Married to her, with your talents, your future is assured, if you have only a fair amount of industry. I have set my heart upon it, Kingsley."

"There is the question of love, father," said Kingsley, in a low tone. It seemed to him that his father had cut the ground from under his feet.

"Quite so. There is the question of love. You will win your way to her heart, without a doubt."

CHAPTER VI

There occurred here a pause. Kingsley did not know what to say. His father was waiting for him to speak.

"No man should think of marrying," said Kingsley, presently, "unless there is love on both sides."

"There is no occasion to discuss that point," said Mr. Manners. "As you will win your way to the young lady's heart, so will she win her way to yours. Wait till you see her, and meanwhile give me your promise that you will do your best to further my wishes. I do not expect a blind compliance; you shall go to her with your eyes open, and if you do not say she is very beautiful you must be a poor judge of beauty."

"But," murmured Kingsley, "to have an affair like this cut and dried beforehand for the man who is most deeply concerned-well, father, there is something sordid and mercenary in it."

"There might be," said Mr. Manners, calmly, "if the young lady knew anything of it; but she knows nothing."

"Yet you said you spoke with authority."

"Quite so. The young lady's mother has been indirectly sounded, and I spoke the truth. Listen, Kingsley," and Mr. Manners's more serious tone increased Kingsley's discomfort. "I said I have set my heart upon the projects I have unfolded concerning your future. I have set something more than my heart upon them-I have set all my hopes upon them. You are my only child, and will be my heir if everything is right between us. You will come into an enormous fortune, greater than you have any idea of, and by its means and a suitable marriage you will rise to power. There are few men who would not jump at the proposition I have made, which, plainly explained, means your coming into everything that can make life desirable. If I were asking you to marry a lady who was ugly or had some deformity I could understand your hesitation. Do you still refuse to give me the promise I ask?"

"I cannot give it to you, father."

"Why?" demanded Mr. Manners, in a stern voice; but he did not give Kingsley time to reply. "Listen further to me before you speak." He took a pocket-book from his pocket, and drew from it a paper which he consulted. "I can make excuses for slight faults of conduct, but will not pardon an opposition which threatens to destroy the most earnest wish of my life. You are acquainted with a person of the name of Loveday."

"I have the honor of his acquaintance," said Kingsley, nerving himself for the contest which he saw impending, and considerably surprised at his father's acquaintance with the name.

"He is a person of no character," said Mr. Manners.

"He is a gentleman," interrupted Kingsley.

"That is news to me," said Mr. Manners, "and is not in accordance with the information I have received."

"Have you been playing the spy upon me?" asked Kingsley, with some warmth.

"I should require to be in two places at once to have done that. This time last week I was in Russia."

"Then you have been paying some one to watch me. By what right, father?"

"You jump too hastily at conclusions. You make a statement which is not true, and you proceed to question me upon it."

"I beg your pardon; but you must have obtained your information from some source."

"Quite so."

"Will you tell me from whom?

"I may or I may not before we part to-night. You refused to give me a promise; I refuse to give you one. I might well take offence at the imputation that I have paid a spy to watch you."

"I withdrew the imputation, father."

"The suspicion was in itself an offence. I have allowed you to go your way, Kingsley, in the belief and hope that your way and mine were one, and that you would do nothing to disgrace me."

"I have done nothing to disgrace you."

"We may take different views. As a young man you have had what is called your 'fling.' I made you a most liberal allowance-"

"For which I have always been deeply grateful, father," said Kingsley, hoping to turn the current of his father's wrath. It smote him with keen apprehension, for Nansie's sake and his own, that the anger his father displayed when he first mentioned the name of Loveday should be no longer apparent, and that Mr. Manners spoke in his usual calm and masterful voice.

"I made you a most liberal allowance," repeated Mr. Manners, "which you freely spent. I did not demur to that; it pleased me that you should be liberal and extravagant, and prove yourself the equal in fortune, as you are in education and manners, of those with whom you mixed. You committed some follies, which I overlooked-and paid for."

"It is the truth, father. I got into debt and you cleared me."

"Did I reproach you?"

"No, sir."

"If I am not mistaken-and in figures I seldom am-I paid your debts for you on three occasions."

"It is true, sir."

"And always cheerfully."

"Always, sir."

"I am not wishful to take undue credit to myself by reminding you of this; it is only that I would have you bear in mind that I have endeavored to make your life easy and pleasurable, and to do my duty by you. Nor will I make any comparison between your career as a young man and mine at the same age. I am satisfied, and I suppose you are the same."

"I think, father," said Kingsley, "that I should have been content to work as you did."

"Not as I did, because we started from different standpoints. Pounds, shillings, and pence were of great importance to me, and I used to count them very jealously. I value money now perhaps as little as you do, but I know its value better than you, and what it can buy in a large way-in the way I have already explained to you. For that reason, and for no other, it is precious to me. There are men who have risen to wealth by discreditable means; that is not my case; what I possess has been fairly worked for and fairly earned. All through my life I have acted honorably and straightforwardly."

"All through my life, father," said Kingsley, with spirit, "I shall do the same."

"Well and good. I have a special reason, Kingsley, in speaking of myself in the way I have done."

"Will you favor me with your reason, father?"

"Yes. It is to put a strong emphasis upon what you will lose if you cut yourself away from me."

"Is there any fear of that, father?" asked Kingsley, with a sinking heart.

"It will be for you, not for me, to answer that question; and it will be answered, I presume, more in acts than in words. I return to the Mr. Loveday, who is described to me as a person of no character, and whom you describe as a gentleman."

"He is one, father, believe me," said Kingsley, earnestly.

"Do gentlemen travel about the country in caravans, sleeping in them by the roadsides?"

Kingsley could not help smiling. "Not generally, father, but some men are whimsical."

"Let us keep to the point, Kingsley. According to your account we are speaking of a gentleman."

"We are," said Kingsley, somewhat nettled at this pinning down.

"Then you mean that some gentlemen are whimsical?"

"I mean that."

"In what respect is this Mr. Loveday a gentleman? Does he come of an old family?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know anything of his family?"

"Nothing."

"Is he a man of means?"

"No."

"A poor man, then?"

"Yes."

"Very poor?"

"Very poor."

"And travels about in a broken-down caravan, and you wish me to believe he is a gentleman. I would prefer to take your word, Kingsley, against that of my informant, but in this instance I cannot do so. It would be stretching the limits too far."

"We will not argue it out, father."

"Very well. But Mr. Loveday does not travel alone in this caravan; he has a person he calls his daughter with him."

"It is coming," thought Kingsley, and he set his teeth fast, and said': "His daughter, a lady, travels with him."

"So far, then, my facts are indisputable. This young woman is described to me as an artful, designing person who has used all her arts to entangle you-because you have a rich father."

"Who dares say that?" cried Kingsley, starting up with flashing eyes.

"My informant. I understand, also, that some months since she contracted secretly a disreputable marriage, and that her husband-do not interrupt me for a moment, Kingsley-has conveniently disappeared in order to give her time to bleed you, through your rich father. To go through the ceremony again would be a light matter with her."

"It is a horrible calumny," cried Kingsley, in great excitement.

"Although," pursued Mr. Manners, exhibiting no agitation in his voice or manner, "the circumstances of my own private life have not made me personally familiar with the tricks of adventuresses, I have in the course of my experiences learned sufficient of them to make me abhor them. How much deeper must be my abhorrence now when such a woman steps in between me and my son to destroy a cherished design which can only be carried out in his person! I will listen to no vindication, Kingsley. Before you arrived home to-night I had a strong hope that some mistake had been made in the information which has reached me concerning your proceedings. I was wrong; it is unhappily too true."

"You received the information from an enemy of mine."

"No, Kingsley, from a friend."

"Ah!" There was here, even in the utterance of the simple word, a singular resemblance between father and son. Kingsley's voice no longer betrayed excitement, and his manner became outwardly calm. "There is only one so-called friend who could have supplied you with the information-my cousin, Mark Inglefield."

Mr. Manners was silent.

"Was it he, sir?" asked Kingsley.

Still Mr. Manners was silent.

"I judge from your silence, sir, that Mark Inglefield is the man I have to thank."

During his silence Mr. Manners had been considering.

"I must say something here, Kingsley. I have no right to betray another man's confidence, and you no right to betray mine."

"It would be the last of my wishes, father."

"If I tell you who is my informant, will you hold it as a sacred confidence?"

It was Kingsley's turn now to consider. He was convinced that Mark Inglefield was his enemy, and by giving his father the desired promise of a sacred confidence, he would be shutting himself

off from all chance of reprisal. On the other hand, he might be mistaken; and his father might also refuse to continue the interview, which Kingsley felt could not be broken at this point; and after all, how could he hope to help himself or Nansie by a personal encounter with his cousin or by further angering his father, who, he knew only too well, was now in a dangerous mood?

"Do you insist upon my holding it as a sacred confidence, father?"

"I insist upon it," said Mr. Manners, coldly.

"I will hold it so."

"On your honor as a man? Not as a gentleman, for our views differ there."

"On my honor as a man."

"You were right," said Mr. Manners. "I received the information from your cousin, Mark Inglefield."

"As I expected. I must now relate to you, father, the circumstances of my acquaintance with Mr. Loveday and his daughter, and the manner in which my cousin Mark comes into connection with it."

"I will listen to you, Kingsley," said Mr. Manners. "Our conversation has assumed a complexion which may be productive of the most serious results to you and myself. I do not hold this out as a threat; I state a fact. I am, in my convictions, inflexible. Once I am resolved, no power on earth can move me. And do not lose sight of another thing. Mark Inglefield is your mother's nephew, and therefore your cousin. That I have given him the advantage of a university education, and that I sent you both to college at the same time, is my affair. I should have done the same by you had you been my nephew and he my son. It was always my intention to advance him in life, and it is my intention still. He is worthy of it. He is your equal in birth and attainments. Therefore speak of him with becoming respect. I shall know the exact value to place upon intemperate language in a case like this, where the passions are involved."

"I will do my best to obey you, father," said Kingsley, "but a pure reputation is at stake, and I may fail in my endeavor. It was my cousin, Mark Inglefield, who first introduced me to Miss Loveday. He spoke to me of her, as he spoke to others, in a light tone, and I do not know what it was that induced me to give ear to his boastings, although I entertained a contempt for him and a doubt of his truth. One day, while we were walking together and he was indulging with greater freedom and boisterousness than usual-though his ordinary habit was bad enough-of his acquaintanceship with Miss Loveday, it happened that we met her. He could do no less than introduce me, and I had not been in her company five minutes before I suspected that his vaporings about her were those of a base man, of one who was dead to honor. A true man is respectful and modest when he makes reference to a lady for whom he entertains an affection, and the doubts I had previously entertained of my cousin when he indulged in the outpourings of his coarse vanity were now confirmed. I followed up the introduction by courting Miss Loveday's intimacy, and she grew to respect me, to rely upon me. The more I saw of her the more I esteemed her. Never had I met a lady so pure and gentle, and it was a proud moment in my life when she asked me to protect her from my cousin's insolent advances. I spoke to him, in a manner not too gentle, I own, for my indignation was aroused, and from that time he and I were enemies. I know it now; I did not know it then. He was far too subtle for me, and I, perhaps too much in the habit of wearing my heart upon my sleeve, was, as I now discover, sadly at a disadvantage with him. He showed no anger at my supplanting him, and this should have warned me; your cold-blooded man is a dangerous animal when he becomes your enemy; but I suppose I was too deeply in love and too happy to harbor suspicion against one who had no real cause for enmity against me. Nor did I consider the consequences-not to myself but to the lady I loved-of my frequent visits and meetings with her. There is no doubt that she was compromised by them, but she was as guileless and innocent as myself, and it was not till it was forced upon me that her reputation was in my hands that I prevailed upon her to take the step which gave the lie to malicious rumor."

"And that step, Kingsley?" asked Mr. Manners.

"I married her. She is my wife."

"You think so?"

"Think so, father! What do you mean? Am I a man with reason, gifted with some standard of intelligence, that I should think-which implies a doubt-where I am sure?"

"You are a man deluded, Kingsley, as other men have been by other women. This woman has deceived you."

"No, sir, truly as I live."

"The farce would not be complete unless you protested. It is the least you can do. All that you have said confirms your cousin's story. He has not erred in one particular, except in what is excusable in him, and perhaps in you. Mischief is done, but it can be remedied. An impulsive man like yourself is no match for an artful woman."

"I will not hear the lady I love and esteem so spoken of," said Kingsley, with warmth.

To this remark Mr. Manners was about to reply with equal warmth, but he checked himself, and did not speak for a few moments. When he resumed the conversation he spoke in his usual calm tone, a tone which never failed in impressing upon his hearers a conviction of the speaker's absolute sincerity and indomitable will.

"It has happened-fortunately for others-but rarely in my life, Kingsley, that such a crisis as this has occurred; and I regret this difference in our ideas all the more because its consequences may be fatal to you and may shatter hopes upon which I have set great store. When you say to me that you will not hear me speak in such or such a manner, because it displeases you, you behave in a manner to which I am not accustomed. When you place yourself in opposition to my wishes you treat me to a new experience which I do not welcome. Were I holding this interview with any other than yourself I should have put an end to it some time since; after that there would be nothing more to be said on either side. I am not used to disappointments, but I should be able to bear them; I am rather fond of difficulties because it is a pleasure to overcome them. I am inclined to regard this difference of opinion between us as a difficulty which may be overcome without much trouble, if you are reasonable."

"It is not a difference of opinion, father," said Kingsley, moderating his tone; the interests at stake were too serious to allow him to give his indignation free play, "it is a difference as to facts, of which I, and not you, am cognizant."

"I hold to what I say, Kingsley," replied Mr. Manners. "I have received a certain statement of particulars which I choose to accept as true; you have imparted to me certain information which I do not choose to accept in the manner you wish. Setting aside for a moment all question of the young woman of whose character we have formed different estimates, I ask you, supposing you to be legally married, what is the kind of respect you have shown me, a father who has never crossed your wishes, by contracting a lifelong obligation without consulting me?"

"It was wrong, father," said Kingsley, with contrition. "I have only the excuse to make that I loved her and was eager to defend her reputation."

"It is an excuse I cannot accept. And the deliberate committal of a fault so fatally grave as this, with a full knowledge of the consequences, cannot be condoned by the weak confession, when it is too late to repair the fault, that you were wrong. There is a repentance which comes too late, Kingsley. But even that I might have forgiven had I reason to approve of your choice."

"You have but to see her, father," said Kingsley, eagerly. "Let me bring her to you! You will be as proud of her as I am; you will know then that I have not chosen unworthily."

"No," said Mr. Manners, "if I see her at all I must see her alone."

"Give me a minute or two to consider, father."

"Certainly, Kingsley."

The young man turned aside, and allowed his thoughts to travel to Nansie, and to dwell upon the beauty of her character. He knew her to be patient and long-suffering, and that she would not shrink from making a sacrifice for one she loved as she loved him; he knew also that these qualities

were allied to a spirit of independence which, while it would enable her to bear up outwardly under the pressure of a great wrong, would rather intensify than abate the anguish which would wring her soul were such a wrong forced upon her. It would be a lifelong anguish, and would rack her till her dying day. His father, with his iron will, was just the man to force the sacrifice upon her, was just the man to so prevail upon her that she might, at his persuasion, remove herself forever not only from the presence but from the knowledge of the man she loved and had vowed to love while life remained. Poor, helpless, dependent, and alone in the world-for Kingsley had an inward conviction that her father's days were numbered-to what a future would he, the man who had sworn to love and cherish her, be condemning her if he permitted his father to have his way in this matter! The crime would be his, not his father's; upon his soul would rest the sin. And then the image of Nansie rose before him, not at first sad and despondent, but bright and sweet, and full of innocent, joyous life; and in that image he saw a sunshine of happiness which he and Nansie would enjoy together if he played a true man's part in this contention. He saw also with his mind's eye the other side of the picture in the figure of a heart-broken woman brooding over the misery and the torture of life, and praying for death. This sad figure vanished, and he and Nansie were sitting together hand in hand, their hearts beating with the sacred love which sweetens and makes life holy, and she was whispering to him that her greatest joy lay in the knowledge that he was true to her.

He had shaded his eyes with his hand during this contemplation. He now removed it, and raised his eyes to his father's face.

"I cannot consent, father," he said, in a low, firm tone, "to your seeing her alone."

"You have come deliberately to that determination?" asked Mr. Manners.

"I have, father."

"It is irrevocable?"

"It is irrevocable."

"I will still not hold you to it," said Mr. Manners. "It would grieve me in the future to think that the matter was too hastily decided. You owe me some kind of obedience, some kind of duty."

"I acknowledge it, father. In all that becomes me to yield you shall have no cause of complaint against me."

"Very well. Let there be some slight pause before the final word is pronounced. Remain here a week, and give the matter a calmer and longer deliberation. Its issues are sufficiently important to make my request reasonable."

"I will do as you wish, father," said Kingsley, after a slight hesitation, "on two conditions."

"Name them."

"First, that you do not invite my cousin, Mark Inglefield, here during the time."

"I agree."

"Second, that you do not seek my wife for the purpose of relating what has passed between us."

"I agree to that also. I will not seek your-the young woman for that or for any purpose. Are you content, Kingsley?"

"Yes, father, I am content."

"As you admit that you owe me some small measure of duty and obedience, you will not object to my request that you hold no correspondence with her until the week is past."

"It is a hard request, father, but I will obey you."

"There remains, then, in this connection, but one thing in respect of your future which I think it necessary to impress upon you. As I have made my fortune by my own efforts it is mine to dispose of as I please. Comply with my wishes, and the bulk of it is yours. Oppose them, and not one shilling of it will be yours to enjoy. To this I pledge myself. And now, Kingsley, we will drop the conversation."

Kingsley had a reason for consenting to the week's delay. He had a hope that within that period his father would relent. It was a faint hope, but it seemed to him that it would be criminal to let it slip.

CHAPTER VII

On the fourth day of his probation Kingsley received a letter from Nansie. No further words upon the subject of their recent conversation had passed between him and his father; neither of them had broken faith in respect of the promises given, and everything went on in the house as usual. Mr. Manners passed the greater portion of his time in looking over specifications and making calculations for fresh contracts of magnitude; he was accustomed to attend personally to these matters, and never left anything to chance, or solely in the hands of any other man. It was not without an object that he requested Kingsley to assist him in his labors during these days. He wished his son to become sensible of what he would lose if he persisted in his opposition to his father's wishes. With this end in view he made Kingsley familiar with all the channels in which his fortune was invested. Kingsley was amazed at its extent, and was also amazed at the wisdom of his father's investments. There were no chance risks; every shilling was as safe as human judgment could make it. He owned a great deal of property in land upon which other men had built houses, and the land was situated in the most thriving and most fashionable neighborhoods; he held a vast number of government securities, and those only of the most stable governments. Companies he had avoided, their alluring prospectuses having no temptation for him. He had advanced scores of thousands of pounds upon first mortgages, and not a doubtful one among them.

"I was never a gambler," he said to Kingsley, "but I never let my money lie idle. I have the offer now of a great estate in the country, which, if all goes well, I shall buy. It is in one of the best counties, and the simple possession of it will give a man a standing in the country which would occupy all the years of a man's life to gain. A stroke of the pen will do it."

Kingsley knew what he meant when he said "if all goes well," but each kept the open expression of his thoughts to himself. On the evening before Nansie's letter arrived, Mr. Manners told Kingsley that his income was not less than sixty thousand pounds a year; and he added that he was not spending a tenth part of it.

In the solitude of his chamber Kingsley opened Nansie's letter; it had been written from day to day, only for her lover's and husband's eyes:

"My Beloved Kingsley, – It is night, and I am writing in my little room in the caravan. Father is asleep, and everything around is still and peaceful. It is the best of all time to write to you and think of you, but indeed you are never out of my thoughts. It is a beautiful night, and I have made up my mind not to go to sleep till I have heard the nightingale, so how can I employ my time better than in the way I am doing? All the day long I have been thinking of you. 'Now he is in the train,' I said, 'now he is so much nearer London, now he is in London, now he is at home and talking to his father.' Of me? I could not decide that. Perhaps you will wait till to-morrow, but I am with you in spirit, Kingsley, as you are with me. Yes, I am sure of that, and it makes me very, very happy. Kingsley is at home, in his father's house. Is he really at home? My home is with you; there is no home for me without you. How ungrateful it sounds, with my father so close to me; but I cannot help it; it is the truth. And then this caravan-can one call it a home? Though there are people, father says, who are very happy in caravans-as I should be with you; or anywhere, Kingsley. Indeed it is so; it will not matter to me so long as we are together.

"I am writing cheerfully and hopefully, am I not? And yet my father has been uneasy in his mind to-day. He has been speaking a great deal of your father, and he fears that he will not approve of our marriage. 'For your sake, Nansie,' father said, 'I wish Kingsley's father was a poor man.' Kingsley dear, I wish that too; but then your father was once as poor as we are, and perhaps that will make a difference. I hope with all my heart I have not done you wrong by marrying you; but how could I help it, loving you as I did and do, and how could I help it when you persuaded me so? Oh, my dear love, I will do all that a woman can do to make you happy! I can do no more. To me it does not matter

how we live, but will it matter to you if your father is angry and will not receive me? I cannot bear to think of it; my heart grows cold, and I stretch forth my hands imploring an angel to come and help me. But that is not needed, is it, Kingsley? and you have good reason to be angry with me, for what I have written is almost like a doubt, and to doubt you is to doubt that there is any goodness in the world. No, Kingsley, I will not doubt; it would be treason to love..

"I have not written for an hour. I have been thinking, thinking, thinking, and I should have gone on thinking, just as if I was in a waking trance, if it had not been for my father talking in his sleep. 'Nansie, Nansie!' he called, and I went in to him, but he was fast asleep, and his forehead was quite damp. I wiped it softly, but it did not wake him, and he kept on murmuring my name and yours, and calling on the angels to guard us. Dear father! we have not been a great deal together, but he loves me truly, and I think he is reproaching himself for not having been with me more. I could not love him more than I do, but I might have known him better. He is a good man, Kingsley, and I think if he had been rich he would have made a name in the world. There! I have written 'if he had been rich.' To be happy it is not necessary to be rich, is it, dear? Father says not. That is when he is awake. What did he mean by saying in his sleep: 'Money is a blessing and a curse?' Well, yes, I can understand it. It depends upon how it is used. Oh, Kingsley, I hope your father is not very rich. By my father's side was his favorite book, 'William Browne.' I took it away to my room. Before I go to bed I will put it back, for it is like meat and wine to him. More precious than those, I am sure. What are you doing at this very moment, Kingsley?

"There again. I have been in dreamland for an hour and more. And then, waking up, I read a little of 'William Browne', and took my pen in my hand to go on writing, but I did not know what to say. Kingsley, dear, the errand you have gone upon haunts me. So much do I fear that I hardly know what to think. Even my favorite saying that father does not consider wisdom, 'Everything will come right,' does not comfort me somehow. I don't know why, except it is that we are not together. Suspense is dreadful, is it not, dear? And just now everything seems in suspense. Oh, hark! The nightingale! It is an omen of joy and gladness. Thank God for all sweet sounds, for all that is sweet and good-and the world is full of sweetness and gladness. And I was reading of it in 'William Browne:'

"'But the nightingale i' th' dark
Singing, woke the mountain lark;
She records her love.
The sun hath not with his beams
Gilded yet our crystal streams,
Rising from the sea;
Mists do crown the mountain-tops,
And each pretty myrtle drops;
'Tis but newly day.'

"There, my dear love, I have copied it exactly, apostrophes and all, and it seems to bring me nearer to you. How wonderful is the gift of poetry! "Tis but newly day.' It is day in my heart. Yes, everything will come right. Good-night, dear love, with a thousand kisses. I send them from my window through the night, which soon will be day. Heaven shield you…

"Another day has passed. Oh, Kingsley, what joy and delight your dear, dear letter brought to me! Your letters are the sweetest that ever were written, that ever could be written. Heaven bless your father for being so kind to you. How glad he must have been to see you after such a long absence! I am sure he must be the best of men. But Kingsley, dear Kingsley, how shall I tell you? My dear father is worse. I know he is, although he has not complained. We sat together this evening, watching the sunset in silence. He held my hand, and sometimes he gripped it hard. It was because he was in pain, but he would not have it so. He said it was because he loved me so dearly. When the sun went

down he spoke, oh, so solemnly and beautifully, Kingsley, of the sunset of life, and said he would be perfectly happy and contented if he knew that I was safe. 'You mean safe with Kingsley, dear father,' I said. 'Yes,' he answered, 'safe with Kingsley.' Then I read your letter to him-every word, Kingsley; I was not ashamed-and it comforted him. 'He is the man I would have chosen for you, Nansie,' he said, and then he spoiled it all by adding: 'Only, only, if his father were not rich.' I reproved him gently, and said he must not doubt you, but must have in you the perfect faith that I have, and he said that I was right, and that it was only a father's fears that disturbed him. We must not blame him, dear; we are so poor, you know, and he does not know you as I do. I can write but a few lines now, I am so anxious about father. Shall I receive a letter from you to-morrow? If one does not come, I shall be sorry, of course, but only sorry, nothing more. For you and your father must have so much to talk about, and, as you told me so seriously, you must wait for a favorable opportunity before you spoke to him of me. Ah, poor me! What a worry I am! But I will make it all up to you, my dearest, in the happy days to come. Father is calling to me; I must go. I kiss you and kiss you, and indeed there are kisses on my lips for you only-and ah! for my poor, dear father. Through all time to come I am ever and ever your own loving Nansie…

"Oh, Kingsley, my dear husband, how shall I tell you? My hand trembles so that I can scarcely write the words. My father, my dear, dear father is dead!

"I look at the words I have written, and they seem to move, to live, though *he* is dead. I go from the page upon which I write to the bed upon which he is lying, and I can scarcely believe that it is true, he looks so sweet, so peaceful and calm. 'Father, father!' I call, but he does not answer me. His spirit is with God. But surely with me, too, surely with me! Oh, Kingsley, I feel as if my heart were breaking!

"I do not know when his spirit passed away. We sat up late last night, and he seemed in his usual health, but weak. He made no complaint, but he must have had a premonition of what was hastening to him, for he talked to me of the life beyond this, and dwelt upon it with hope and rapture. We sat in the dark; he would not have a light. Ah, me! I must have been blind and deaf not to have guessed that he believed his end to be approaching when he spoke so much of you, and desired me to give you his dear love and his heartfelt wishes for a bright and happy life. 'With me, father,' I whispered. 'Yes, my daughter, with you,' he answered. 'Kingsley could not be happy without you.' Ah, how glad I was to hear him say that! It proved that he had faith and confidence in you, and yet I might have been warned of what was to come by his solemn voice and by his addressing me as his daughter. He had never done so before. It was always: 'My dear,' or 'Nansie, child,' or 'My dear Nansie.' Ah, Kingsley, if you had heard what he said you could never have forgotten it. 'Life is a breath,' he said, 'a dream, and its end should be welcomed with joy, for it opens the door to a higher, holier life. Happy is the mortal who can approach that threshold with a consciousness that he has done no wrong to his fellow-creature.' And then he said that there should be no vain thirstings and yearnings for knowledge that was wisely hidden from us, but that every human being should strive to keep shining within him three stars, faith, duty, and love. I cannot now recall all that he said, but I know that his last dear conversation with me left me better than I had been, and that with all my heart and soul I thank him for his gentle teaching.

"It was past midnight when he went to bed, and I intended then to continue my letter to you, but he called to me before I commenced, and asked me to sit by his side. I did so, holding his hand, until two in the morning, and all this time he lay quite quiet and still, sometimes opening his eyes and smiling upon me. At length he said, 'Kiss me, my dear,' and I stooped and kissed him. Then he bade me go to bed, and, indeed, I was glad to obey him, Kingsley, for my eyes were closing. I awoke at my usual hour this morning, and went to him. He had not stirred. Ah, how still and beautiful he was! I spoke to him and he did not reply. I called louder, and still he did not speak. Then, smitten with a dreadful fear, I placed my hand on his heart; it was pulseless, and I knew that my dear, dear father had passed away.

"I can write no more. I have much to do, and the last duties of love will occupy every moment of my time. I shall have him taken to Godalming, where I shall be if you can come to me. If that is not

possible, I shall go after the funeral to my uncle in London, whose address you have. There you will find me. Pity me, Kingsley, and do not leave me long alone. I have only you in the world. Believe me.

"Ever your loving wife, Nansie."

Deeply shocked and grieved, Kingsley went to his father with Nansie's letter in his hand. "I want you to release me from my promise," he said.

"I never release a man from a promise given," was his father's cold reply, "and I never ask to be released from one I have made."

"You cannot refuse me," said Kingsley, whose eyes were bedewed with tears.

"I do refuse you," said Mr. Manners, sternly.

Kingsley gazed irresolutely around, but his irresolution lasted for a moment or two only. "I must go," he said, straightening himself.

"Against my will?" asked Mr. Manners.

"Yes, father, against your will, if you refuse."

"I have refused."

Kingsley was silent.

"It is what I will never forgive," said Mr. Manners.

"I cannot help it, father. There are duties which *must* be performed, and one is before me." He held out the last page of Nansie's letter, but his father thrust it aside.

"I do not wish to see it. I will not see it. It is from that woman."

"It is from my wife."

"And you are going to her?"

"I am going to her."

"If you leave my house now you never enter its doors again. If you persist in your madness I cut you out of my heart forever. I shall have no longer a son, and for evermore you and I are strangers."

"It is cruel-it is pitiful, but I must go."

"You understand the consequences of your disobedience?"

"You have made them only too plain to me, father," said Kingsley, mournfully.

"And you still persist?"

"There is no other course open to me. I am a man, not a dog."

"You are an ingrate. Go! – and never let me look upon your face again. From this moment I do not know you."

CHAPTER VIII

There are extant numerous clippings from famous writers which, coming "trippingly off the tongue," have grown into popular favor and are generally accepted as the essence of wisdom, but which will not stand the test of cold and logical analysis. Hence it is that so many familiar proverbs belie themselves. Among these popular sayings may be classed the description of life as a fitful fever. There are few men and women to whom this will apply; with the great majority of human beings life glides from one groove into another with ease and naturalness, and the most startling changes are effected without violent strain. Poor men grow rich, rich men grow poor, the lowly mount, the high slip into the downward paths, and one and all accept the reversals of position with a certain innate philosophy which makes life desirable, and often sweet, however wide the gulf which separates the present from the past. It is something to be genuinely grateful for; were it otherwise, existence would become an intolerable burden, and every waking moment would be charged with pain.

These observations are pertinent to the course of our story, in respect of which the incidents already narrated may be accepted as a kind of prologue. The scene changes to the busy East of this mighty city, the precise locality being a second-hand bookshop in Church Alley. The proprietor of this shop was Mr. Joseph Loveday, Nansie's uncle, and that the reflections upon the shiftings in life's kaleidoscope are not out of place was proved by words which fell from his lips as he sorted a pile of books which he had purchased at auction.

"Change, change, change-nothing but change. Some drop out, some remain, and time rolls on. I live, with a likelihood of living for many years; he is dying, with the certainty of death in the course of a few days. So he says in his letter, and in serious affairs he was never given to light talk. Presently he will leave the world behind him. What matters?"

The question, addressed with mingled bitterness and mournfulness to himself, aroused him from his reverie.

"It does matter," he said. "We are not exactly lumber."

He was a man of middle age, a bachelor, and he conducted his business alone, without assistance of any kind, taking down his shutters in the morning and putting them up again at night, arranging the books on his shelves within and on the stall without, and knowing where to lay his hand, almost blindfold, upon any volume which he or a customer required. In this lonely mode of carrying on his trade there were inconveniences which were beginning to tell upon him. The toilers round about were not as a rule blessed with libraries of any value, and although he was always ready to purchase any odd lots that were brought to him, he picked up very little stock in this way. The greater portion of his treasures was bought at book auctions in the West, and whenever he attended one of these sales he was under the necessity of shutting up his shop and taking the key with him. Of late he had thought seriously of employing an assistant, but the difficulty was to find one to suit both his business and his peculiarities. In his domestic arrangements he was compelled to call in assistance. He employed a charwoman twice a week, for half a day on each occasion, to clean his place and set it in order; his breakfasts, teas, and suppers he prepared himself with his own hands, and when he did not purchase his dinner at a convenient cook-shop, it was sent in to him by Mrs. Peeper, keeper of a wardrobe-shop in Church Alley. He looked older than he was, and had too early acquired a stoop from poring over books; he had blue eyes, large and shapely hands, and features furrowed with lines of thoughtfulness. When he was not called away to attend an auction or upon other business, he would be seen sitting at his counter, or upon the floor, sorting books and making lists of them, or standing at his door in slippers, wearing a loose dressing-gown and a plain skull-cap, and with a pair of spectacles resting generally above his eyebrows. His reputation extended far beyond the immediate East in which his shop was situated. In the course of his career it had been his good-fortune to light upon rare books in the odd lots he had picked up at auction, and book-hunters from afar would come

to look over his stock of treasures. On the day of his introduction to the reader he had been much exercised. There was the letter from his brother, to which he had replied in terms with which we are familiar; it had taken his thoughts to the past, and old memories had troubled his mind; domestic and business worries were also troubling him. The charwoman he had employed for years, and who was now up-stairs making a noise which annoyed him, had, during the last few weeks, generally made her appearance in a state of inebriation. He had expostulated with her upon this new and evil departure, but his remonstrances had not effected an improvement, and now, as he sat musing and sorting his books, a sudden crash in the room above caused him to start to his feet with an angry exclamation. He calmed himself instantly, having a great power of self-control, and, going to the staircase, called out:

"What is the matter, Mrs. Chizlet?"

"Only the wash'and basin, sir," replied a voice from above.

"Oh," he said.

"And the jug, sir."

"Oh."

"And the soap-dish, sir."

"Oh."

Then there was a pause and an ominous stillness.

"Have you broken anything else?" he asked.

"I didn't break 'em, sir," was the reply. "It was the cat."

"There's no cat in the house. Come down."

"In a minute, sir, when I've recovered myself."

He waited the minute, and down came the woman, with a vacant smile on her face, and a number of pieces of broken crockery in her hands, which she let fall with a crash on the floor of the shop.

"The cat, eh?"

"Yes, sir, the cat."

"Where did it come from? The sky? What is that sticking out of your pocket? The skeleton of the cat? No. A bottle. Empty, of course."

"Yes, sir, worse luck."

"Mrs. Chizlet," said Mr. Loveday, gravely, "last Friday you broke two dishes."

"Not me, sir."

"Well, the cat. This day week the cat broke all my cups and saucers. If I keep you in my service, in the course of another week there will not be a sound piece of crockery or glass in the place. Therefore I will not trouble you to come here again."

"We're all born, and none buried," said the charwoman, with a silly smile.

And having received her half-day's wage, she departed contentedly, and made her way to the nearest public-house.

Mr. Joseph Loveday gazed disconsolately around; it was not the broken crockery that annoyed him, it was the disarrangement of domestic custom. Having discharged the woman who had served him so long, it was a settled thing that she would never be employed by him again. Where could he find another who would serve him more faithfully? He detested strangers, and a break in his usual habits was a great discomfort to him. He was in a mood to exaggerate the discomfort, and in a few minutes he had magnified it considerably. It is not from the most important disasters of life, but from its pins and needles, that we draw our acutest miseries. Everything had been going wrong with Mr. Loveday lately. During the past week he had missed three books from his stall outside, and had been unable to discover the thief. Even if he had been successful in catching him he would have hesitated to prosecute him, because of the loss of time it would entail. Then, Mrs. Peeper, proprietor of the wardrobe shop, who occasionally cooked his dinners for him, had been behaving badly, keeping him waiting an hour and more, and placing before him food, so villainously cooked that he could not eat it. Some change was decidedly necessary to restore the harmony of his days. As he was debating with

himself in what way the change could be made, he raised his eyes and saw through the window a lad standing at the stall outside, turning over the leaves of a book. The age of this lad was twelve, and his name was Timothy Chance.

"I might do worse," thought Mr. Loveday. The drawback was that Timothy was a bundle of rags.

He was turning over the leaves of the book he had lifted at haphazard from the stall, but he was not reading it. Every now and then he directed a furtive glance towards the interior of the shop, in the hope, without obtruding himself, of attracting favorable attention. Hanging on his left arm was an old open-work basket, and sitting therein was a bedraggled hen. Mr. Loveday stepped to the shop door, and said:

"Well, Timothy."

"Yes, sir," said the lad, looking up with a cheerful smile, and speaking in quite respectable English, "here I am, back again, like a bad penny."

"Come in," said Mr. Loveday.

Timothy gladly obeyed the summons, and entered. Placing his basket with the hen in it upon the floor, he stood respectfully before the bookseller. In classic story a goose became historical; in this modern tale, wherein heroic deeds are not heralded by clang of trumpets, it may by and by be admitted that the fowl which Timothy Chance set down deserves no less a fame.

CHAPTER IX

Poor and ragged as he was, the lad's bearing was distinguished by a bright manliness-even thus early shown-which could scarcely fail to win favor. The circumstances of his young life were singular, and deserve, and need, brief mention.

Somewhat less than twelve years before this day on which, in obedience to Mr. Loveday's summons, he entered the bookseller's shop, Mr. Loveday turned into Church Alley, after a walk he was in the habit of taking through the markets of the East where the humble folk make their purchases for the day of rest. It was therefore Saturday night, and the hour was a little past midnight. In front of the pawnbroker's shop, at the corner of Church Alley, stood the pawnbroker himself in a state of perturbation, taking a few steps this way and a few that in an uncertain, undecided fashion. His shutters were up, and the day's business was at an end. He pounced upon Mr. Loveday, whose position then, as at present, was one of authority among his neighbors, who tacitly and willingly acknowledged him to be a man of superior stamp.

"Ah, Mr. Loveday," said the pawnbroker, laying his hand on the bookseller's arm, "did you see a woman running away as you came along?"

"Not that I noticed," replied Mr. Loveday, observing that something unusual was agitating the pawnbroker.

"Or a man?" asked the pawnbroker.

"No."

"It is altogether the most extraordinary thing," said the pawnbroker, scratching his head, "the most ex-tra-or-di-na-ry. I never heard of anything like it."

"Like what?"

"Would you mind," said the pawnbroker, "stepping inside, and giving me your advice?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Loveday.

He followed the pawnbroker into the shop, and there upon the counter, in one of the divisions used by persons who came to pledge their goods or redeem them, lay an old shawl containing, as was evidenced by a gentle and regular upheaving, an animate object.

"What do you think of this?" exclaimed the pawnbroker, unfolding the shawl.

"A very fine baby," said Mr. Loveday, "though I don't pretend to be a judge-and fast asleep."

"Proving," added the pawnbroker, "that it's been well stuffed."

"Stuffed!"

"Had plenty to drink-got its belly full. That's the artfulness of it."

"The baby's artfulness?" inquired Mr. Loveday, much mystified.

"No-of the trick that's been played upon me. Put comfortably to sleep, satisfied, so that it shouldn't excite suspicion by as much as a whimper."

"But explain," said Mr. Loveday, as much in the dark as ever. "Is it your baby?"

"No, sir," replied the pawnbroker, energetically, "it is not."

"Then how comes it here?"

"That's what I'd like to know. If you'll believe me, Mr. Loveday, I'll tell you all about it-no, not all, as much I as know myself."

"Of course I'll believe you," said Mr. Loveday, his interest growing fast.

"Here am I," commenced the pawnbroker, excitedly, "all alone by myself in the shop-well, not exactly here where we stand, but in my room at the back there. Business over an hour ago-close at eleven, you know. Shutters put up, and my assistant gone home. Front door left ajar, because it's a hot night, and the gas has been flaring away. My wife and the children all asleep up-stairs; no one to disturb me. There's a bit of supper on the table. Mr. Loveday," he said, breaking off abruptly, "my wife is a most peculiar woman-a most pe-cu-li-ar woman."

"Go on with your story," said Mr. Loveday, calmly.

"Usually she stops up with me, and we have a bit of supper together, especially on Saturday nights, the busiest time of the week for me. But, as luck will have it, she doesn't feel quite the thing to-night, and she goes to bed early. There I am, then, eating my supper and making up my accounts. Everything very quiet, nothing wrong, as far as I can see. I'll take my oath, Mr. Loveday, that when my assistant wishes me good-night all the parcels are cleared away, and there's nothing left on the counters, not as much as a pin. Well, sir, I come to the end of my supper and my accounts, and feel easy in my mind. Three ha'pence wrong in the reckoning up, but it's on the right side. I put my money and books in the safe, lock it, pocket the key, fill my pipe, and get up to come to the door to have a whiff of tobacco and fresh air. I've got to pass through the shop to get to the street door, and as I come up to this counter here, this bundle stares me in the face. 'Hallo?' says I-to myself, you know-'Hallo! here's something been overlooked;' and I takes hold of the bundle, and starts back as if I was shot. I feel something moving inside. I come up to it again, and open it, and there's this baby staring me in the face-no, not staring me in the face, because it's fast asleep; but there's this baby. How would you have felt?"

"Very much astonished."

"I was flabbergasted. How did it come here? Who brought it? What's the meaning of it? While I was sitting in the back room I didn't hear a sound, but it must have been then that the street door was pushed softly open, and this-this *thing* put on my counter. If I caught the woman who did it I'd make it warm for her."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Loveday, "it is done for a joke."

"A joke!" cried the pawnbroker. "A nice joke to play a married man-and at this time of the night!"

"At all events you have lent nothing on it."

"Find me the pawnbroker," retorted the distressed man, "who *would* lend money on a baby!"

"Truly," observed Mr. Loveday, with grim suggestiveness, "flesh and blood is not at a premium in this neighborhood."

"But, Mr. Loveday," implored the pawnbroker, "what am I to do with it?"

"I can hardly advise you. You can't very well put it among your other pledges, and you can't very well throw it into the streets."

In his heart of hearts the pawnbroker, although not in the main an ill-natured man, was for the moment mad with himself for having taken Mr. Loveday into his confidence. If he had kept the matter to himself, he might, failing all other ways of getting rid of the encumbrance, have deposited it on a doorstep in such a manner and at such a time that it could not fail to come under the notice of a policeman, who, in the exercise of his duty, could not have allowed it to remain there. It was a warm night, the child was strong and healthy, and was sleeping comfortably; it could scarcely have taken cold. But this proceeding was not open to him now that Mr. Loveday was in possession of the particulars.

"They wouldn't take it in at the workhouse," said Mr. Loveday.

"Why not? They've a better right to it than I have."

"It would have to be proved that it belonged to the parish. It is such a queer story, you see."

"Do you mean to say it wouldn't be believed?"

"I can't hazard an opinion. Suppose you call your wife down, and ask her to take care of it till you find out something about it."

"What!" cried the unhappy pawnbroker, "I should have the house pulled over my ears."

Mr. Loveday shrugged his shoulders. Not that he was indifferent; the adventure was so novel that it interested him; but he could not exactly tell what could be done.

"After all," he said, "it may be as I suggested, a joke. The person who left it here will probably call for it presently. Wait awhile."

"I must, I suppose, but I shall go crazy if I'm left alone with it. Do a charity, and smoke a pipe with me."

"I don't smoke, but I'll keep you company for half an hour. Before that time the mystery may be solved."

But though they waited up till two o'clock there were no further developments. There they sat, for the most part in silence, and there lay the baby in his shawl, sleeping soundly and placidly.

At length Mr. Loveday rose and said he must go. The pawnbroker began to implore again.

"You're a single man; you've got no one to take care of but yourself; I've got six children of my own to look after. Take it home with you and give it a bed."

"No, no," said Mr. Loveday, laughing, "I couldn't think of such a thing. If I were a woman-perhaps; or if I had a female housekeeper in my house. The child needs a woman's care, and your wife is at hand."

The pawnbroker groaned. He heard a policeman's footsteps outside, and in his despair he called him in and repeated his story.

The policeman listened gravely, threw the light of his dark lantern on the sleeping child.

"I don't see what I can do," he said.

"I give it into custody," cried the pawnbroker.

"What's the charge?" asked the policeman.

The pawnbroker wrung his hands. Finally the policeman departed, recommending the pawnbroker, before he left, to follow Mr. Loveday's advice and call down his wife. Mr. Loveday also went home, and the pawnbroker was left alone with his new and startling responsibility.

"I'll call in the morning," said Mr. Loveday, "to see how you've got along with it."

When he called he learned that nothing further had been discovered. The pawnbroker had passed a disturbed and sleepless night; the pawnbroker's wife was in the worst of tempers, and declared that either she or the baby would have to leave the house. Mr. Loveday calmed her down, and then entered into a sensible consideration of the case.

"So many hours have passed," he said, "since the child was left here, that it seems more than likely that the person who placed it on your counter has no intention of redeeming the pledge. In a few days, or weeks, the matter may be traced; in the meantime something must be done. I suggest that a woman be sought who, for three or four shillings a week, will undertake the care of the child. I don't mind bearing half the expense if you will bear the other half."

The benevolent offer was eagerly accepted by the pawnbroker, whose only anxiety now was to get the baby out of his house. Before the evening a poor woman was found who consented to take charge of the helpless bundle of humanity. Having come into the neighborhood by a mysterious chance, the child was called Chance, to which, when or how could not afterwards be recalled, the Christian name of Timothy was prefixed. Endeavors were made to solve the mystery of his birth, but, in the absence of the slightest clew, nothing was discovered. For four years Mr. Loveday and the pawnbroker paid the expenses of the child's bringing up between them; then, somehow or other, Timothy Chance began to take care of himself, nursing babies bigger than himself for mothers whose quivers were too full, and getting a bit of straw to sleep on and a crust of bread to keep life in him. He was full of health and strength, and willingness, and even in those early days he developed a surprising independence which served him in good stead. As he grew in years the task of looking after himself and obtaining shelter and food became less difficult; he throve where others would have starved; if he could not get crumb he put up with crust; if he could not get straw to lie upon he put up with boards, if not boards the earth, if not a roof the sky. From time to time he disappeared from the neighborhood, went hopping in the season, attaching himself to some family bent on the same errand, took service with a tinker and went about the country, and did anything and everything to keep body and soul together. He succeeded in a good and worthy way, and the partnership of his boyish frame with a cheerful, willing spirit, was a passport wherever he went, and would have carried him all over

the world. He did well for others, and better for himself, as will be seen, although he was penniless nine days out of ten. This did not trouble him; he was healthy, strong, and happy, and had ideas-in the germ at present, and not by himself understood; but there they were, working in his fertile, healthy brain, to ripen and bear fruit one day perhaps. Such, imperfectly limned, was Timothy Chance as he stood before Mr. Loveday the bookseller.

CHAPTER X

"Just come back, Timothy?"

"Yes, sir, just come back."

"You've been away a long time?"

"Seven months, sir."

"Done any good for yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, you've got a pocketful of money, then?"

"Not a penny, sir."

"Yet you say you've done well?"

"Yes, sir. I've worked hard, and had plenty to eat, and I'm stronger than ever."

"Ah, that's what you mean by doing well?"

"Yes, sir, and I'm willinger-I mean, more willing than ever."

At this slip of language and its correction Mr. Loveday cocked up his ears, and took a longer look at the lad. Timothy met his gaze ingenuously.

"I think there's an improvement in you, Timothy."

"I hope so, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"In a lot of places, sir, but most of the time in a school."

"Oh, in a school. Doing what? Studying?"

"A little, sir," said Timothy, modestly; "but I wasn't engaged for that."

"For what, then?"

"Garden work, knife-cleaning, boot-cleaning, running of errands, making myself generally useful."

"And picking up scholarship."

"As much of it as ever I could, sir."

"There is certainly an improvement in you, Timothy. You speak more correctly than you did."

Timothy was silent, but his face flushed with pleasure.

"How did you get into the school?"

"By a bit of good-luck, sir-though it wasn't good-luck to another boy who had the place."

"What is one man's meat, Timothy, is another man's poison."

"Is it, sir?"

"So they say, and so it often happens. Go on."

"I was in Essex, sir, looking for a job. It was half-past ten in the morning."

"Carried a watch, eh?"

"No, sir, I was passing a church. But I didn't pass it. I stopped.

"What for?"

"There was a fight going on. Two boys, pegging away at each other like one o'clock. The road was muddy, and they rolled over and over in it, then got up and went at it again. When they'd had enough they ran off different ways, and I lost sight of 'em. I was walking off myself when I noticed something in the mud. It was a letter, and I picked it up and looked at it. I couldn't read the address, it had been dug into the mud so; but in a corner, in very plain writing, I saw the name of Dr. Porter. I went into a baker's shop, and asked if they knew Dr. Porter, and they said he kept a school a little way off. I asked them to show me where it was, as I thought it wouldn't be a bad thing to take the letter to him myself and ask him for a job. They showed me, and I saw Dr. Porter himself; he was in the grounds in front of the schoolhouse, and one of the boys who had been fighting was there too. I gave the doctor the letter, and asked him if it was his, and he said it was. I found out afterwards that it was

a very particular letter, and had some money in it. The boy was sent out to post it, and he got fighting and dropped it in the mud. Then the doctor said he supposed I wanted a reward, and I said no, that I wanted a job. Not to make too long a story, sir, he put a lot of questions to me, and seemed pleased with me, and he sent the fighting boy away and took me on in his place to do the rough work."

"How much a week, Timothy?" inquired Mr. Loveday.

"Two shillings a week and my keep."

"You slept there?"

"Yes, sir."

"And out of the two shillings a week for some months you saved nothing? You come back here without a penny?"

"You shall hear, sir. My clothes were pretty bad, the same as I've got on now, and I thought I'd save as much as I could, and buy a new suit. I did buy a new suit the week before last, but I didn't wear 'em for garden work. Well, sir, while I was with the doctor I was very happy. Plenty of work, but plenty to eat. He hadn't many young gentlemen to teach, and I've found out that he wasn't well off. He had a daughter, a beautiful young lady, not as old as I am, and she had a bit of garden that I used to look after for her. I took a lot of pains with her flowers, and she was so pleased that she used to give me lessons. I can write pretty well, sir."

"You can, eh? I'll try you presently. Go on with your story."

"I learnt a bit of grammar, and a bit of history, and a bit of arithmetic. It was a great bit of luck for me, but it ended badly." Timothy paused and sighed, and his face became grave. "I used to stop up late at night to study, and I picked up a lot. Dr. Porter seemed always to have a peck of trouble on him, but he helped me, too, a bit, by lending me books, and Mrs. Porter helped me as well. I was never so happy before. I bought a new suit of clothes, as I've told you, sir. Everything was going on swimmingly till last week." Timothy paused again.

"What happened then, Timothy?"

"I went to bed very late; I'd had a good hard night of it, and I had to get up very early to do something I wanted to Miss Emily's bit of garden."

"Miss Emily is the doctor's daughter?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know how long I'd been asleep, but it was dark when I woke up all of a sudden with a singing in my ears, and a lot of other sounds that I can't describe. Then I heard some one sing out 'Fire!' I'm pretty quick, sir, as a rule, and I got into my old clothes in less than no time, and ran out of the room. Sure enough, the house was on fire. Miss Emily was crying for her mother, and Dr. Porter was running about like a madman. I raced to Mrs. Porter's room, and helped to get her out, and then we stood and watched the fire burning up the house. There wasn't a drop of water except what we could get from the pump, and that came out with a dribble. A fire-engine came up when it was too late. By that time the house was a mass of flames. There wasn't one bit of furniture saved, nor a book. All their clothes were burnt, and everything they had, except what they stood upright in. My new suit of clothes went too, but I didn't think of that; I was too sorry for Miss Emily and her mother and father. We had a dreadful time, and when daylight came the whole house and everything in it was a heap of ashes. Some friends took Dr. Porter and his wife and Miss Emily away, and I hung about, almost dazed out of my senses. I saved one thing, though-this fowl here, and the basket. The next day I saw Dr. Porter. 'My lad,' he said, 'I owe you a week's wages; here's your florin; I'm a ruined man, and you must look out for another situation.' He spoke nothing but the truth, sir; he *was* ruined; he wasn't insured for a penny. I wouldn't take the florin; I told him about this fowl that I'd saved, and I asked him to let me have that instead. 'Take it and welcome,' he said, 'and your florin too.' But I wouldn't. I wanted badly to see Miss Emily to tell her how sorry I was, and to wish her good-bye, but Dr. Porter had sent her off I don't know where, so I had to come away without seeing her. That's the whole story, sir."

"A sad story, Timothy."

"Yes, sir, you may well say that."

"What are you going to do now?"

"That's what's puzzling me, sir." And Timothy cast a wistful look at the bookseller.

"Take this book in your hand. Open it anywhere. Now read."

Timothy opened the book, and with great fluency read from the top of the page.

"That will do," said Mr. Loveday. "You can write, you say. Sit down there; here's paper, here's a pen. Now write what I say. 'The world is filled with fools and bunglers, and a few clever men. A small proportion of these clever men grow rich, because they are that way inclined; the majority die poor, because they are not entirely sordid-minded. The fools and bunglers grow so in a small measure from inheritance, in a large measure from indolence and a lack of judicious training.' Give it to me."

He examined the paper carefully.

"Ah! Writing tolerably good. Not a bad style; improvement will come by industry. I think you have that, Timothy Chance."

"I think I have, sir."

"Three mistakes in spelling. Bunglers is not spelled b u n g e l. Inheritance is not spelled without an h and with two e's in the last syllable. Judicious is not spelled j e w. For the rest, all right. A bit of arithmetic, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be ready with your pen and paper. I buy a parcel of twenty-eight books at auction for three and sixpence; three I sell for waste-paper, sixteen at twopence each, five at threepence each, two at fourpence, and one for a shilling. What's the result?"

"You lay out three and sixpence, sir," said Timothy, almost instantaneously; he was sharp at most things, but especially sharp at figures; "and you get back five and sevenpence. Two and a penny profit."

"Quite right. Anything else?"

"The three books you sell for waste-paper will bring in something; perhaps they're big ones."

"Perhaps they're little ones. We won't reckon them. Anything else?"

"You bought twenty-eight books, sir; you only gave me twenty-seven to figure out. One short, sir."

"That was stolen, Timothy."

"Where from, sir?"

"From the stall outside."

"It couldn't have been, sir, if you had a sharp boy to attend to it for you."

"Ah! The question is, where to find that particularly sharp boy?"

"He's handy, sir, almost at your elbow." Now, although these words betokened a certain confidence and were spoken with a certain boldness, it is a fact that there was a tremor in Timothy's voice as he uttered them. The conversation between him and Mr. Loveday had been strangely in accordance with his earnest desire to be taken into Mr. Loveday's service. He had been upheld by this hope as he tramped from Essex after the schoolhouse had been burned down, and he had hurried back to London more swiftly than he would have done without it.

Mr. Loveday ruminated; Timothy Chance waited anxiously.

"I'm rather a peculiar fellow, Timothy," said Mr. Loveday, presently; "not at all unpleasant out of business, unless you quarrel with my social crotchets, and you're not old enough to do that yet, Timothy, but very strict in business matters, however trifling. That fowl of yours is beginning to crow, Timothy."

"It's all right, sir," said Timothy, in a tone of wistful expectation, "please finish."

"This strictness of mine in business matters may make me a hard master; I haven't tried my hand in that line much, as I've always attended to my shop myself, but I will not deny that I'm half inclined to engage a lad."

"Make it a whole mind, sir, and engage me."

Timothy's occasionally apt replies tickled and pleased Mr. Loveday; they betokened a kind of cleverness which he appreciated.

"As we stand now," continued Mr. Loveday, "man and boy, not master and servant, we have a mutual respect for each other."

"Thank you, sir."

"It would be a pity to weaken this feeling."

"It might be made stronger, sir."

"There are numberless things to consider. If I say, 'Up at six every morning,' up at six it would have to be."

"And should be, sir."

"If I say, 'Every day's work completely done, every day's accounts satisfactorily made up, before the next day commences,' it would have to be. That fowl of yours is crowing louder, Timothy. No shirking of work by the excuse that it doesn't belong to the duties I engage a lad for. You understand all this?"

"I understand it, sir."

"On the other hand, satisfaction given, the cart would run along smoothly. There might be a little time in the evening for study and reading; there might be sundry pleasant interludes which one can't think of right off. Eh, Timothy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had it in your mind?"

"I did, sir."

"But," said Mr. Loveday, glancing at the lad, "there is one most important question-the question of respectability."

"There's nothing against me, sir. You may inquire of everybody I've worked for."

"I mean the question of a respectable appearance. Now, Timothy, you will not have the assurance to assert that *you* present a respectable appearance?"

"Cluck! cluck! cluck?" went the fowl in the basket.

Timothy's eyes wandered dolefully over his ragged garments.

"If my new suit of clothes hadn't been burnt," he murmured-

"But they are burnt. Spilled milk, you know. The long and the short of it is, if you can obtain a decent suit of clothes, I'll give you a trial, Timothy."

"Cluck! cluck! cluck! Cluck! cluck! cluck!" from the basket. A jubilant, noisy, triumphant flourish of trumpets, to force upon the world the knowledge of a great event. Timothy knelt down, put his hand in the basket, and drew forth a new-laid egg.

"The world's mine oyster, which I with knife will ope." But surely that knife never presented itself, as it did at the present moment, in the form of a new laid-egg.

CHAPTER XI

Church Alley, in which Mr. Loveday's second-hand bookshop was situated, was not in the most squalid part of the East, wherein may be found horrible patches, in comparison with which the haunts of heathens in savage lands are a veritable paradise. It was, indeed, in close contiguity to the most respectable part of it, lying to the eastward of the famous butchers' mart, which, in the present day, is shorn of its doubtful glories. The alley was a slit in the main thoroughfare, running parallel with it, about sixty yards in length, and containing thirty-four tenements, sixteen of which were private dwellings and eighteen places of business. In the flourishing West it would have been converted into an arcade, and dignified with an imposing name drawn from royal or martial records; in the toiling East it was simply what it professed to be-an alley, very narrow, very shabby, and generally very dark. When winter fogs lay thick upon the mighty city they reached perfection by the time they floated to Church Alley and settled there. Then was the darkness truly Egyptian, and there the gloom remained, as if in proud assertion of the fitness of things, long after surrounding thoroughfares were bright. The sun rose later there and set earlier, and in freezing time it was a very heaven of slides days after surrounding space was thawing. The explanation of these unusual phenomena may be found in the circumstance that when "weather" got into Church Alley it could not easily get out. There was no roadway for horses and carts; between the rows of houses ran a footpath ten feet in width. The enterprising builder who purchased the land and designed the estate had husbanded his inches with a shrewd eye to the greatest possible number of rents to be squeezed out of them, and it must be confessed that his efforts were crowned with complete success.

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen," and this applies to weeds as well as flowers. Persons not acquainted with the intricacies of the neighborhood would have passed Church Alley without noticing it, even without being aware that there was such a thoroughfare within hail; it seemed, as it were, to shrink from notice, and to have been formed with a view to the enjoyment of the pleasures of obscurity, notwithstanding that it had at one end a public-house and a pawnbroker's shop, and at the other end a pawnbroker's shop and a public-house. These four establishments may be said to have been the archways to the paradise of Church Alley, and from the commencement to the end of the year, in rain or shine, in winter or summer, lost and wretched Peris could always be seen there, lingering at the gates. Public-houses and pawnbroker's shops are as the very breath of life in the East of London, and are important and degrading elements in the education of the dwellers therein. Children from their earliest days are familiar with them, and grow into the knowledge (which fair minds cannot dispute) that these institutions are planted there especially for their behoof. Brewers and distillers grow fat upon vice, and go smilingly through the world, conveniently blind to the fact that the richer they grow the more crowded become the ranks of those wretched ones from whose midst our prisons are filled, and whose lives are a standing reproach to humanity and civilization. It is not the fair use, but the gross abuse, of a system which is here deplored. The axe should be laid to it, despite the Moloch called vested interests, which is set up at the least remonstrance to frighten the timid. Let there be beer-shops and public-houses within limits, but it is infamous legislation which sanctions and encourages (as is to be verified to-day in slices of the East) every fifth or sixth tenement to be either one or the other. To contend, in respect of these hot-beds of vice, that the law of supply follows the law of demand, is an unblushing falsehood; they are distinctly forced upon the people by the very men who fatten upon the degradation, and who are often to be seen upon public platforms deploring the evils of which they are the creators. The sermons these moralists preach-to win votes, or to prove themselves qualified for public office, or to air their spurious philanthropy-are the bitterest of mockeries.

Between the particular public-houses and pawnbrokers' shops which flanked Church Alley were dotted other notable places of business. To wit, Mr. Joseph Loveday's second-hand bookshop,

to which we have been already introduced, a sweet-stuff shop, a cook-shop, a wardrobe-shop, and a printer's office, in which the master worked at case and press as his own journeyman. To the small boys and girls in the vicinity of Church Alley these shops were a great attraction, and they patronized them generously. The wardrobe-shop, which, like the bookshop, dealt only in second-hand goods, was as alluring to the grown-up folk of the female sex as it was to the youngsters, and longing were the eyes cast upon the faded silks and satins displayed in the dingy window. A shrewd, wise woman was Mrs. Peeper, the keeper thereof, a woman deeply and strangely versed in the desires and temptations of the lowly female heart. A woman of attainments, too, who might have won a name as a writer of fiction had her steps been led in that direction. In her shop-window would be displayed a much-worn and frayed satin dress, with a train so long as to set female mouths watering, and to this dress would be attached the legend, "From the wardrobe of her Royal Highness the P-ss of W-s." The legend set afloat would go the rounds, and girls and women would flock to gaze at the dress which had once adorned the figure of a royal princess. At another time Mrs. Peeper would arrange in her window several pairs of shoes, boots, and silk stockings, which she would announce as "Direct from B-cking-m P-l-ce;" at another time a flounced petticoat from a duchess; at other times hats, feathers, gloves, trimmings, capes, and various items of vanity, which she would cunningly bait with tempting legends to catch her fish. Mrs. Peeper might be accounted somewhat of a magician, for she filled the minds of many females with fancies which played their parts in dreams, changing charwomen into duchesses, young girls into princesses, and garrets into palaces. Mrs. Peeper seldom failed to land her fish, and the royal garments would be sold at singularly moderate prices, and, moreover, payment taken at so much per week.

Then there was the printer, Mr. Edenborough. In his window were displayed specimens of cheap printing, cards, billheads, handbills, and what not, but there were clear spaces through which the children could peep at the master printer at his work. His stock in trade consisted of one frame, containing about a dozen cases of fancy type, which, with three pairs of cases of small pica, comprised his treasures in metal; there was also a rack of large wood letter for display bills; also an old Albion press. The youngsters stared their eyes out at him as he stood before the frame, composing-stick in hand, picking up the types with that swaying motion of his body which the spectators did not know was the sign of an inferior workman, for the skilful and expert compositor, the one who has generally earned his reputation as a "whip," keeps his body still as his hands travel over the case; they stared the harder when they saw him lock up the chase in which the card or handbill was inserted; and they stared the harder still when he worked ink-roller and press, and pulled off the impressions of the job in hand. He was rather proud of his audience, and made no attempt to disperse them; their admiration was a tribute, and it sweetened his labors.

Then there was the cook-shop, in which, at stated hours of the day, hot dishes made their appearance, smoking. A great attraction, these; tantalizing perhaps, but at all events the youngsters had the smell for nothing. Sometimes a stray ha'penny from the juvenile throng found its way into the cook-shop till. Thereafter would ensue, in some convenient nook, such a feast as Caligula never enjoyed.

Then there was Mr. Sly, the proprietor of the sweet-stuff shop. Such mysteries of sweetness, sticky or otherwise, but generally sticky, were in his window, that the children, once they got there, had the greatest difficulty in tearing themselves away. Ha'pence and farthings-the latter largely predominating-burned holes in the pockets of small breeches, and invariably, unless the plum-duff of the cook-shop stopped the way, were swept into Mr. Sly's till. There was, besides, in this man's establishment a strange and overwhelming temptation which lured the children on, and filled them now with visions of ineffable happiness, and now with visions of dark despair. The exquisite feelings of Manfred were repeated again and again in the breasts of these small morsels of mortality. In a little room at the back of his shop Mr. Sly kept what was spoken of as a "dolly," which may be described as a species of roulette board, the ball-a marble-being sent spinning down a corkscrew tower till it

reached the numbers, and finally settled in its resting-place. The rule of this gambling game was the easiest imaginable, and will be understood by the words "double or quits," a system which, in its results, was painfully comprehensible to the young reprobates who patronized it. A case in point occurred at the precise time that Mr. Loveday and Timothy Chance were talking together, and what ensued may be accepted as an illustration of Mr. Sly's method of conducting that part of his business.

A juvenile of the male sex had come unexpectedly into possession of a farthing. It had not been given to him "to be good;" he had picked it up in Church Alley. He looked at it first in wonder and delight at his good luck, then he flourished it triumphantly. Forthwith he was surrounded, and far and wide the news spread that "Billy Forester had picked up a farden." This caused the meeting to be a numerous one. Before proceeding to discuss how it should be spent there was a difficulty to smooth over.

"I cried, "Arves!'" said little Bob Bracey.

"You didn't," said Billy Forester.

"I did!"

"You didn't!"

"Look 'ere; I'll fight you for it!"

"No, yer won't. It's mine, and I means to stick to it."

"What are you goin' to do with it?" was asked in a chorus.

"Spend it," said Billy.

"In course he is. The farden's Billy's, and he's goin' to spend it. We'll all 'ave a lick."

Then ensued a discussion upon ways and means.

"I think," said Billy, "I'll spend it in burnt almonds."

This caused dismay. A farthing's worth of burnt almonds among so many, Billy by right taking the lion's share, would go a very little way; the majority of Billy's comrades would not get even a "lick."

"I tell yer wot to do, Billy," said a shrewd youngster. "'Ave a spin at old Sly's dolly, and double it."

"Yes, do, Billy, and double it ag'in. Then we'll all 'ave a taste."

Why they called Mr. Sly "old Sly" cannot be explained, the vender of sweet-stuff being comparatively a young man; but it is a way poor children have.

Billy Forester was at heart a gambler.

"I'll do it," he said.

Away he marched, followed by the admiring crowd. Billy, having found a farthing, was a hero.

"Now then," said Mr. Sly as they flocked into his shop, "not so many of yer. Hallo, Billy, it's you. What do you want?"

Billy replied by crooking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Mr. Sly's back room. That the gambling had to be carried on in secrecy made it all the more tempting to the juveniles. It was supposed by many that Mr. Sly would be beheaded if the government caught him at it.

"All right," said Mr. Sly, "you and me, Billy. Now, clear out, every one of yer, or I'll shut up shop. You can wait outside for Billy."

He hustled them out like a flock of sheep, and they clustered in the alley in pleasurable expectation, waiting for Billy. Meanwhile Mr. Sly conducted the hero to the little back room.

"'Ow much for, Billy?" asked Mr. Sly.

"A farden."

"Only a farden! Well, never mind; little fish is sweet. 'And it over."

Billy parted with his farthing.

"Will you go fust, Billy?"

"No, you," said Bill.

"'Ere goes, then." Down the screw turret went the marble, spinning round and round, and when it landed Mr. Sly called, "Eight. Rather a low number that, Billy."

Billy took the marble, spitting first in his hand for luck, and put it in the hole at the top of the tower.

"Twelve," said Mr. Sly.

Billy, having won, was entitled to one half-penny's worth of sweet-stuff for his farthing. He could choose, at liberty, almond-rock, acid drops, peppermint-stick, barley-sugar, hard-bake, toffee, treacle-rock, or any other sweet condiment he preferred. He was debating what to do when the voice of Mephistopheles fell upon his ear.

"You've got a ha'porth, Billy. Make it a penn'orth. Go in and win."

Billy remembered what one in the meeting had said, "and double it ag'in." He would.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.