Fenn George Manville

The Rosery Folk

George Fenn

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Fenn G.

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Содержание

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Volume One – Chapter One.
Sir James Scarlett's garden

"Pray speak gently, dear."

"Speak gently! how can a man speak gently? The things are of no value, but it worries me, I've taken such pains with them, through the cold weather, to bring them on."

"You have, Sir James, you have, sir; and I never let the fire go out once."

"No: but you've let the grapes go out, confound you! and if I find that you have been dishonest _ "

"Oh! but I'm sure, dear, that he would not be."

"Thank you kindly, my lady," said John Monnick, the old gardener, taking off his hat and wiping his streaming brow with his arm, as he stood bent and dejected, leaning upon his spade, with every line in his countenance puckered and drawn with trouble, and a helpless look of appeal in his eyes. "No, my lady, I wouldn't let these here old hands take to picking and stealing, and many's the trouble I've been in with Fanny and Martha and the others because I was so particular even to a gooseberry."

"There, dear, I told you so!"

"But the grapes are gone," cried Sir James Scarlett angrily. "Who could have taken them?"

"That's what puzzles me, Master James, it do indeed. I did get into temptation once, and took something, but it's been a lesson to me; and I said then, never no more, with the Lord's help, and never no more, sir, it's true, never up to now."

"Then you confess you did steal some fruit once?"

"Yes, Master James, I confess it, sir, and a deal I've thought about it since; and I've come to think from much reading, sir, that though this here garden wasn't planted eastward in Eden it's a very beautiful place; all the neighbours say, sir, that there ain't a more beautiful little place for miles round, and Lady Martlett's folk's about wild at our growing such better fruit and flowers."

"Oh, yes! I know all about that, but what has that to do with your confession?"

"Everything, if you please, Master James, for how could there be a beautiful garden even now without temptation coming into it, same as it did when that there apple, as brought all the sin into the world, was picked and eat?"

"There, that will do, Monnick; now speak out."

"I will, sir and my lady, and ask your pardon humbly and get it off my mind. It were five year ago, sir, and just after you'd took the place, and I'd come up from old master's, sir."

"Five years ago, John?" said Lady Scarlett smiling.

"Yes, my lady, five year, and it'll be six at Michaelmas, and it wasn't over an apple but over one o' them Willyum pears, as growd on that cup-shaped tree down side the south walk."

"And you cleared that, did you?" said Sir James grimly.

"Nay, sir, I didn't; it were only one of 'em as had hung till it were dead-ripe, and then fell as soon as the sun came on it hot, and there it lay under the tree, with its rosy green and yellow side, and a big crack acrost it like a hopen mouth asking me to taste how good it was."

"And did you, John?" said Lady Scarlett, passing her arm through her husband's, and pressing it quietly.

"Did I, my lady? I was mowing that there great walk and I went by it three or four times, but the grass there was dry and wiry and would not cut, and I had to go over it again and again, and the

more I tried to resist the temptation the more it wouldn't flee before me, but kept on a-drawing and a-drawing of me till at last I dropped my scythe and rubber and ran right away, I did, Sir James and my lady, I did indeed."

"And left the pear?" said Sir James.

The old man shook his grey head sadly.

"I was obliged to go and fetch my scythe and rubber, master. I might ha' left 'em till night, but that was the temptation on it a drawing of me till I went back, meaning to shut my eyes and snatch up the scythe and come away. But lor', my lady, you know how weak we sinful mortals be. I tried hard but my eyes would open, and so as I see that pear, I made a snatch at it, meaning to run with it right into the house at once."

"And you did not, John?" said Lady Scarlett.

"No, ma'am, my lady," said the old man sadly. "I got my finger all over juiced and I sucked it and that did for me. The taste of the sin was so good, Sir James, that I did eat that pear, thinking no one would know, and it's lay heavy on my heart ever since."

"And what about the grapes?" said Sir James.

"I don't, know, sir; I didn't know they were gone till you see it. That was the on'y time, sir, as ever I dared to take any of the fruit, and I wish as I could turn myself inside out to show you how clean my heart is, sir, of ever doing you a wrong all 'cept that there pear, which has, as I said afore, lay heavy on my chesty ever since."

"Well, there: I don't think you took the grapes, Monnick; but it's very vexatious: I meant to send them to Lady Martlett. You must keep a good look out."

"Thank you kindly, sir, and I will keep a look out, too. And you don't think I'd rob you, my lady?"

"Indeed I don't, John," cried Lady Scarlett, who was divided between a desire to laugh and sorrow for the faithful old fellow's trouble.

"God bless your dear, sweet, kind face, my lady, and bless you too, Sir James," said the old fellow, taking off his ragged straw hat and standing bare-headed, "I wouldn't rob you of a leaf."

The three then separated, Sir James Scarlett and his sweet young wife going towards the glass-houses, and old John Monnick shouldering his spade and watching them for a few moments before going down towards another part of the garden.

"Eh, but they're a handsome pair," he muttered. "He's a bit masterful, but he's got a good heart, and she's an angel, like a pear-tree growed by the water side, she is, bless her! and if I get hold of him as took them grapes I'll – "

He gave the little box edging a blow with the flat of the spade, with the effect that a great snail rolled out on to the path, and suffered death beneath the old gardener's heel, being crushed and ground into the gravel with savage earnestness.

"That I will," said the old fellow, and then he walked away, meeting before he had gone many yards a tall, dark, grave-looking man of about thirty, coming slowly along the path reading. He was scrupulously attired in glossy black with tie to match, grey check trousers, and faultless shirt front, while his hat was of the most glossy. The hands that held the volume were white and carefully kept, while the expression of the man's face was that of some calm, thoughtful student, who passed the greater portion of his life with books, not men.

"Ah, gardener," he said softly, and his voice was very rich and deep, "what a lovely day! Your garden looks exquisite. I hope you are quite well."

"Tidy, sir, thank you kindly, tidy; and, yes, the garden do look well just now, if we could keep out the thieves."

"Ah! yes, the birds, and slugs, and snails, and insects," said the other with a soft, grave smile; "but we must not forget, gardener, that these poor things do not comprehend the difference between

right and wrong. The fair fruits of the earth are growing in their path, and they do not understand why they may not freely eat."

"No, sir, of course not," said Monnick, giving his ear a vicious rub, "but they has to pay for it precious dear when they are ketched."

"Yes, gardener, yes, poor things," said the other, letting his head sink sidewise; and shutting his book upon one finger he crossed his wrists so that the work hung lightly from his shapely hand, while his eyes half-closed and a dreamy, thoughtful look came upon his face.

"It's a deal o' mischief they do, sir, like plagues of Egyp' they'd be if they weren't stopped."

"All, yes, gardener," said the other contemplatively, "but it often strikes me as being one of the darker sides of horticultural pursuits, that the gardener's way is by a path of blood."

John Monnick pushed his old straw hat a little on one side and stared.

"I saw traps down by the wood to catch the soft velvet mole, a wire by a hole in the fence to take the harmless rabbit."

"Harmless, sir? He took the hearts out of a row of young cauliflowers all in one night."

"Ah, yes, but he sinned in ignorance. Then you are always destroying life. That implement you hold pierces the ground and cuts in two the burrowing worm. There was a scent of pungent fumes in the greenhouse and myriads of tiny flies lay scattered in the pots dead from the poisonous smoke. You crush the snail and slug, the beetle, and the grub. The birds are often shot. Yes, yes, I think I'm right; your path is marked by blood, but this place is very bright and beautiful, gardener."

"Yes, sir, it is," said Monnick, changing his spade to the other hand so as to tilt his straw hat the other way.

"It is a privilege to come down upon this glowing summer day, from the smoke and noise and crowd of London streets."

"Ay, sir, it must be," said the old man. "I often pity you as lives there. I was never there but once and never want to go again."

"And I envy you, gardener," said the speaker with a sigh, and raising his book he opened it, smiled sadly, nodded, and walked on.

"And he might do that in London town," muttered the old man. "Looks well! of course it does; but what's the use of looking at all my bedding plants through a book?"

"Ah!" he said as he went on, "it's all very tine, but where would the niceness be if we didn't kill the snails? Master don't buy coke to heat the greenhouse to breed green fly and thrip, and as to the worms, and slugs, and grubs, there's room enough in the whole wide world without their coming here, he's a very nice smooth-spoken gent he is, and can't have ever cut a worm in two with digging in his blessed life; but somehow he's too fine for me. I wonder what his mother were like now, to have such a son. Let's see, master's mother's sister I think she were. Ah! people's like plants, they've sports and wariations from the payrent stock; but if I wanted to produce the finest specimen of human kind I wouldn't graft on he."

Volume One – Chapter Two.
Down from Town

Little more than an hour before his words with the old gardener, Sir James was in his dingy office in Leadenhall Street, where, young as he was, through succession to his father, he stood head of a large shipping business. He had been waiting for his cousin, Arthur Prayle, who was invited to spend a few days with him in the country. Then a cab was taken, the train caught, and in an hour they were whirled down to a station in Berkshire, where, in light, simple, summer dress, looking bright and attractive as the country round, sat Lady Scarlett, eagerly watching the platform from her seat in the little phaeton drawn by two handsome cobs, who tossed their heads impatiently, and threw the white foam from their well-champed, brightly polished bits, to the bespecklement of the smart groom's hat and coat. Her face brightened as she caught sight of her husband, and fell a little as she saw that he was followed by his cousin, Arthur Prayle; but she smiled sweetly at their visitor, and held out her hand to him as he came up and raised his hat.

"I've brought Arthur down to get rid of the soot, Kitty," cried Scarlett heartily. "See how solemn he looks."

"I am very glad to see him," said Kate Scarlett, smiling, and colouring slightly.

"There, jump up beside Kitty, old man," continued Scarlett. "She'll soon rattle us home."

"No, no, dear; you'll drive."

"What! In these lavender kids, and in this coat!" cried Scarlett laughingly. "No, thanks. – Jump in, Arthur. That's right. I'm up. – Let 'em go, Tom. – Now, my beauties."

The handsome little pair of cobs shook their heads, and started off at a rapid trot, the groom catching the side of the phaeton as it passed him, and mounting beside his master in the seat behind; when the brisk, sweet, summer air seemed to bring a little colour into the cheeks of Arthur Prayle, and a great deal into those of Lady Scarlett, as she guided the spirited little pair along the dusty road, and then in between the long stretches of fir-wood, whence came delicious warm breathings of that lemony aromatic scent of the growing pines brought forth by the mid-day sun.

"There, my lad, that's better than sitting in chambers," cried Scarlett. "Fellows pooh-pooh me for living out here. It is living, my boy. It's dying, to shut yourself up in town."

"Ah, yes," said Prayle with a sigh; "it is very delicious."

"Delicious I should think it is," cried Scarlett eagerly; and he stood up behind his wife, holding on by the back seat, as fine and manly a specimen of humanity as could be found in a day's march. He was fashionably dressed, tightly buttoned up, and had the orthodox flower in his button-hole; but his bronzed face and fresh look told of country-life; and down in Berkshire, the staid solemnity of his London ways was cast aside for a buoyant youthfulness that made his sedate cousin turn slightly to gaze at him through his half-closed eyes.

"Give them their heads, Kitty," cried Scarlett, as they approached a hill; and, as they heard the order, the cobs gave their crests a toss, and broke into a canter, breasting the hill, and keeping up the speed to the very top, where they were checked for the descent upon the other side.

"There you are, old fellow," cried Scarlett. "There's the river winding among the patches of grove and meadow. There's the Rosery; you can catch it beautifully now. Do you see how the creeper has gone up the chimney-stack? No, of course you can't from here. – Gently, my beauties; steady, steady, little rascals. Don't pull your mistress's arms out by the roots."

"A lovely view indeed, James," said the visitor. "It seems more beautiful every time I come."

"Oh, every place looks at its best now," said Scarlett heartily. "I say, I've got down a new boat; we must have a pull up to the locks. That's the sort of thing to do you good, my boy."

Prayle smiled, and shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"How long does it take you to drive from the station?" he said quietly.

"We allow five-and-twenty minutes," said Scarlett. "We shall do it in twenty to-day. I like to go fast, and these little ruffians enjoy it. They want it: they're getting too fat."

The cobs tossed their heads again at this, and tried to break into another canter.

"Steady, steady, you larky little scoundrels. – Give them a pull, Kitty. Oh, that's right; the gate's open."

They were in sight of a rustic gateway banked with masses of rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs, and through this Mrs Scarlett deftly guided the phaeton, which seemed suddenly to run more quietly along the pretty curved gravel drive, whose sides were lawn of the most velvety green; while flowers of the brightest hues filled the many beds. The grounds were extensive, though the house was small and cottage-like, with its highly-pitched gables, latticed windows, and red-brick walls covered with magnificent specimens of creeping plants. On either side of the house were pretty extensive conservatories, and glimpses of other glass-houses could be seen beyond a tall thick hedge of yew. In fact, it was just the *beau-ideal* of a pretty country-home, with a steep slope down to the river.

"Here we are, old fellow," cried Scarlett, as he leaped out and helped his wife to alight. – "Are they warm, Tom?"

"No, sir; not turned a hair, sir."

"That's right. – Now then, Arthur. Same room as you had before. Will you take anything after your ride?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Prayle; "and if you'll allow me, I'll ramble about till dinner."

"Do just what you like, old man. There are cigars and cigarettes in the study. If there's anything else you want, just ring."

"Oh, don't; pray don't," said Prayle deprecatingly. "You will spoil my visit if you make so much of me."

"Make much of you, lad? Stuff! – Good-bye, Buddy; good-bye, Jen," he cried, patting the cobs. – "Take care of them, Tom. – Beauties, aren't they, Arthur? My present to Kate. Now then, come along."

He led the visitor into the tiled hall, at every corner of which was some large *jardinière* full of flowers, and up the broad staircase to the guest-chamber, flowers being in the window even here; while the floors were covered with the softest carpets and rugs, and pictures and engravings of no little merit covered the walls.

"You have a magnificent place here, James," said the visitor, with a sigh.

"Nonsense, man. Half the beauty is Nature's own doing, aided by your humble servant, Kitty, old John Monnick, and a couple of labourers. Why, I pay less for this pretty Elizabethan cottage than I should for some brick dungeon in a West-end square. Less? Why, I don't pay half. Now, I'm going to unfig."

He nodded pleasantly at his guest, and left him alone, when a scowl came over Prayle's face, and glancing round at the well-furnished room, with its bright fittings and charming flowers in window and vase, he said in a low and bitter voice: "Why should this weak boor be rolling in wealth, while I have to pinch and spare and contrive in my dim blank chambers? The world is not fair. Oh, it is not fair!"

As he stood there in the middle of the room, a distant sound made him turn his head sharply, and he caught sight of his frowning face in the dressing-glass, when, smoothing away the wrinkles, he paid a few attentions to his personal appearance, and went down to stroll about the grounds.

Volume One – Chapter Three.
Fanny's Magazines

"Have you brought my magazines, William?" said a bright-faced, eager girl, with no slight pretensions to good looks, as she stood there in her neat, dark, closely fitting dress with white apron, collar and cuffs, and natty muslin cap with black ribbon, looking the very model of the neat-handed Phyllis many people think so satisfactory for a parlour-maid. The William addressed was a broad-shouldered, heavy-looking young man of three or four and thirty, dressed in brown velveteen coat and vest, and drab cord trousers. He was very cleanly shaved; his fair crisp hair closely cut; and he had evidently been paying a great deal of attention to his heavy boots. There was a sprig of southernwood in his button-hole, a smaller sprig in his mouth; and he held in one hand his soft felt hat, in the other, one of those ash, quarter-staff-looking implements, with a tiny spade at the end, known to farmers as a thistle-spud – a companion that served him as walking-stick and a means of getting rid of the obnoxious weeds about his little farm. For Brother William, otherwise William Cressy, farmed the twenty acres that had been held by his ancestors for the past two hundred years, and it was his custom to walk over every Saturday to see how his sister Fanny was getting on, the said young lady having been in service at the Rosery ever since Sir James Scarlett's marriage, he always timed his visit so that he should get there just before Martha set out the tea-things, and from regular usage Martha always placed an extra cup – extra large as well, for Brother William, who afterwards stayed until supper, and then declared, in a tone quite of remonstrance, "Well, I must go now," as if he had been all along pressed to stay, whereas he had scarcely spoken all the time, and been hardly spoken to, but had sat stolidly in an armed Windsor chair staring at Martha, the housemaid, as she darned, stockings, a whole basket full, with the light making a broad path upon her carefully smoothed and glossy hair.

"Yes; here they be," said Brother William, solemnly drawing a couple of the most romantic and highly flavoured of the penny weeklies of the day from his breast-pocket, and opening and smoothing them out, so as to display to the best advantage the woodcuts on the front pages of each, where, remarkably similar in style, a very undulatory young lady in evening dress was listening to the attentions of a small-headed, square-shouldered gentleman of impossible height, with an enormous moustache, worn probably to make up for his paucity of cranial hair. "Yes; here they be; and I don't think much of 'em either."

"No! what do you know about them?" said the girl sharply. "If it had been the *Farmer's Friend*, with its rubbish about crops and horseballs and drenches, you would say it was good reading."

"Mebbe," said Brother William, placing his soft hat very carefully upon the rounded knob of his thistle staff, and standing it up in a corner of the room adjoining the kitchen. "Mebbe, Fanny, my lass; but I don't see what good it's going to do you reading 'bout dooks and lords a-marrying housemaids, as they don't never do – do they, Martha?"

"I never knew of such a thing, Mr Cressy," said Martha in a quiet demure way. "I did once hear of a gentleman marrying his cook."

"Yes," said Brother William solemnly, "I think I did hear of such a thing as that, and that might be sensible; but in them magazines they never marry the cooks – it's always the housemaids – and Fanny's getting her head full of such stuff."

"You mind your own business, William, and let me mind mine, if you please," said the young lady warmly.

"Oh, all right, my dear; only, I'm your brother, you know," said the young man, hitching himself more comfortably into his chair. "Got company, I see."

"How did you know?" cried Fanny.

"I was over at the station delivering my bit o' wheat, when Sir James come in with that Mr Prayle. I don't think much of him."

"And pray, why not?"

"Dunno. Seems too smooth and underhanded like. I didn't take to him when he come round my farm."

"You're a very foolish, prejudiced fellow, William," said Fanny warmly; and she whisked herself out of the room.

"That's what mother used to say," said Brother William, thoughtfully rubbing his broad palms to and fro along the polished arms of the chair. "She used to say: 'Wilyum, my boy, thou'rt prejudiced;' and I s'pose I am. That sort o' thing is in a man's natur', and can only be bred out in time. – Is tea 'most ready, Martha Betts?"

Martha replied by filling up the teapot, and proceeding to cut some bread and butter, of both of which refreshing kinds of nutriment Brother William partook largely upon the return of his sister, who soon after hurried away to attend to her duties, that being with her a busy night.

Volume One – Chapter Four.
"Jack."

To "unfig," with Sir James Scarlett, meant to thoroughly change his London garments for an easy suit of flannels, such as he used for boating and gardening, the latter pursuit being one of which he was passionately fond. He had begun by having a professed gardener, and ended by being his own head. For the sharp professed gardener seemed to be imbued with the idea that the grounds and glass-houses of the Rosery were his special property, out of whose abundance he grudgingly allowed his master a few cut flowers, an occasional cucumber, now and then a melon, and at times a bunch of grapes, and a nectarine or peach.

But that régime had to come to an end.

"Hang the fellow, Kitty!" cried Scarlett one day; "he bullies poor old Monnick, and snubs me, and I feel as if I were nobody but the paymaster. It won't do. What's the good of living in the country with such a garden as this, if one can't have abundance of fruit and flowers for one's friends?"

"It does seem too bad, certainly, dear," she replied. "I don't get half the flowers I should like."

The result was that the professed gardener left, saying that he wanted to be where the master was a gentleman, and not one who meddled in the garden like a jobbing hand. Furthermore, he prophesied that the Rosery would go to ruin now; and when it did not go to ruin, but under its master's own management put forth such flowers and fruit as the place had never seen before, the dethroned monarch declared that it was scandalous for one who called himself a gentleman to suck a poor fellow's brains and then turn him out like a dog.

Unfigged, Sir James Scarlett hurried out into the garden with his young partner, and for a good hour was busy seeing how much certain plants had grown since the previous evening. Then there was an adjournment to the grape-house, where the great black Hambros grew so well and in such abundance, without artificial heat; and here, about half an hour later, a very keen-looking, plainly-dressed man heard the sound of singing as he walked down the path from the house. He paused and listened, with a pleasant smile coming upon his earnest lace, and as he stood attent, a judge of humankind who had gazed upon his broad shoulders and lithe strong limbs, and the sharp intelligent look in his face, would have said that Nature had meant him for a handsome man, but had altered her mind to make him look like one of the clever ones of earth. He laughed, and after listening for a minute, went on softly and stood in the doorway, looking up. The large house with its span roof was covered with the sweetly scented leaves of the young vine growth, and everywhere hung pendent bunches in their immature state, with grapes no larger than so many peas. It was not upon these that the visitor's eyes were fixed, but upon a stout plank stretching from one iron tie of the grape-house to another; for, perched upon this plank, to whose height approach was gained by a pair of steps, sat the owners of the place, with heads thrown back, holding each a bunch of grapes with one hand, a pair of pointed scissors with the other, which clicked as they snipped away, thinning out the superabundant berries, which kept on falling, and making a noise like the *avant-garde* of a gentle hailstorm on a summer's day. As they snipped, the grape-thinners sang verse after verse, throwing plenty of soul into the harmony which was formed by a pleasant soprano and a deep tenor voice.

The visitor stood for fully five minutes, watching and laughing silently, before he said aloud: "What a place this is for birds!"

Lady Scarlett started; her scissors fell tinkling upon the tiled floor, and her face followed suit with her name.

"Why, Jack!" shouted Scarlett, leaping off the board, and then holding it tightly as his wife uttered a cry of alarm. – "All right, dear; you shan't fall. There, let me help you down."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Scarlett," said the visitor apologetically. "It was very thoughtless of me. I am sorry."

"O Jack, old fellow, Kitty don't mind. It was only meant for a bit of fun. But how did you get down?"

"Train, and walked over, of course."

"I *am* glad to see you," said Scarlett. "Why didn't you say you were coming, and meet me at the station?"

"Didn't know I was coming till the last moment. – Will you give me a bit of dinner, Lady Scarlett?"

"Will we give you a bit of dinner?" cried Sir James. "Just hark at him! There come along; never mind the grapes. I say, how's the practice – improving?"

"Pooh! No. I shall never get on. I can't stick to their old humdrum ways. I want to go forward and take advantage of the increased light science gives us, and consequently they say I'm unorthodox, and the fellows about my place won't meet me in consultation."

"Well, you always were a bit of a quack, old boy," said Scarlett laughing.

"Always, always. I accept the soft impeachment. But is a man to run the chariot of his life down in the deeply worn ruts made by his ancestors? I say, let us keep to the rut when it is true and good; but let us try and make new, hard, sensible tracks where we can improve upon the old. It is my honest conviction that in the noble practice of medicine a man may – ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Just look at your husband's face, Lady Scarlett," cried their visitor, bursting into a hearty, uncontrollable fit of honest, contagious laughter.

"My face!" said Sir James. "Why, of course I hurry back home for country enjoyment, and you begin a confounded lecture on medical science. I'm quite well, thank you, doctor, and won't put out my tongue."

"Well? Yes, you always are well," said the other. – "I never saw such a man as your husband, Lady Scarlett; he is disgustingly robust and hearty. Such men ought to be forced to take some complaint. Why, if there were many of them, my profession would become bankrupt."

"You must be faint after your walk, Doctor Scales," said Lady Scarlett. "Come in and have a cup of tea and a biscuit; it is some time yet to dinner."

"Thanks. But may I choose for myself?"

"Of course."

"Then I have a lively recollection of a lady with whom I fell in love last time I was here."

"A lady – fell in love?"

"Yes. Let me see," said the visitor. "She is pretty well photographed upon my brain."

"I say, Jack, old boy, what do you mean?" cried Scarlett.

"By your leave, sir," said the doctor, waving one strong brown hand. "Let me see; she had large, full, lustrous, beaming eyes, which dwelt upon me kindly; her breath was odorous of the balmy meads – "

"Why, the fellow's going to do a sonnet," cried Scarlett. But the doctor paid no heed, and went on.

"Her lips were dewy, her mousy skin was glossy, her black horns curved, and as she ruminating stood – "

"Why, he means Dolly," cried Lady Scarlett clapping her hands – "Jersey Dolly. – A glass of new milk, Doctor Scales?"

"The very culmination of my wishes, madam," said the doctor, nodding.

"Then why couldn't you say so in plain English?" cried Scarlett, clapping him on the shoulder. "What a fellow you are, Jack! I say, if you get talking in such a metaphorical manner about salts and senna and indigestion I don't wonder at the profession being dead against you."

"Would you like to come round to the dairy, Doctor Scales?" said Lady Scarlett.

"I'd rather go there than into the grandest palace in the world."

"Then come alone," cried Scarlett thrusting his arm through that of his old schoolfellow; and the little party went down a walk, through an opening in a laurel hedge, and entered a thickly thatched, shady, red-brick building, with ruddy-tiled floor, and there, in front of them was a row of shallow glistening tins, brimming with rich milk, whose top was thick with yellow cream.

"Hah! how deliciously cool and fresh!" cried the doctor, as his eye ranged over the white chum and marble slabs. "Some men are wonderfully proud of their wine-cellars, but at a time like this I feel as if I would rather own a dairy and keep cows."

"Now then, Kitty, give him his draught," said Scarlett.

"Yes, just one glass," cried the doctor; "and here we are," he said, pausing before a great shallow tin, beyond which was freshly chalked the word "Dolly." "This is the well in the pleasant oasis from which I'd drink."

"Give him some quickly, Kitty," cried Scarlett; "his metaphors will make me ill."

"Then my visit will not have been in vain," cried the doctor merrily. Then he ejaculated, "Hah!" very softly, and closed his eyes as he partook of the sweet rich draught, set down the glass, and after wiping his lips, exclaimed:

"'Serenely calm, the epicure may say' – "

"O yes; I know," said Sir James, catching him up. "'Fate cannot harm me – I have dined to-day.' But you have not dined yet, old fellow; and you shall have such a salad! My own growing; Kitty's making. Come along now, and let's look round. Prayle's here."

"Is he?" said the doctor, raising his eye-brows slightly, and his tone seemed to say: "I'm sorry to hear it."

"Yes, poor fellow; he's working too hard, and I brought him down to stay a bit. Now you've come, and we'll have – "

"No, no; I must get back. None of your unmanly temptations. I'm going to catch the last up-train to-night."

"One of your patients in a dangerous state, I suppose?" said Scarlett, with a humorous glance at his wife.

"No: worse luck! I've no patients waiting for me. I say, old fellow, you haven't a rich old countess about here – baroness would do – one who suffers from chronic spleen, as the French call it? Get me called in there, you know, and make me her confidential attendant."

"Why, there's Lady Martlett," said Scarlett, with another glance at his wife which plainly said: "Hold your tongue, dear."

"Widow lady. Just the body. I dare say she'll be here before long."

"Oh, but I'm off back to-night."

"Are you?" said Scarlett, – "Kitty, my dear, Jack Scales is your prisoner. You are the châtelaine here, and as your superior, I order you to render him up to me safe and sound for transport back to town this day month. Why, Jack, you promised to help me drain the pond. We'll do it now you're down."

"Oh, nonsense; I must go back."

"Yes; that's what all prisoners say or think," said Scarlett, laughing – "Don't be too hard upon the poor fellow, dear. He may have as much milk as he likes. Soften his confinement as pleasantly us you can. – Excuse me, Jack. There's Prayle."

He nodded, and went off down one of the paths, and his departure seemed to have taken with it some of the freedom and ease of the conversation that had been carried on; the doctor's manner becoming colder, and the bright girlish look fading out of Lady Scarlett's face.

"This is very, very kind of you both," said the doctor, turning to her; "but I really ought not to stay."

"James will be quite hurt, I am sure, if you do not," she answered. "He thinks so much of you."

"I'm glad of it," said the doctor earnestly; and Lady Scarlett's face brightened a little. "He's one of the most frank and open-hearted fellows in the world. It's one of the bright streaks in my career that we have always remained friends. Really I envy him his home here, though I fear that I should be out of place in such a country-life."

"I do not think you would, Doctor Scales," said his hostess, "but of course he is busy the greater part of his time in town, and that makes the change so nice."

"But you?" said the doctor. "Do you not find it dull when he is away?"

"I? I find it dull?" she cried, with a girlish laugh. "Oh dear, no. I did for the first month, but you have no idea how busy I am. James has made me such a gardener; and I superintend. Come and see my poultry and the cows."

"To be sure I will," said the doctor more warmly, as they walked on towards a fence which separated them from a meadow running down to the river, where three soft fawn-coloured Jersey cows were grazing, each of which raised its head slowly, and came up, munching the sweet grass, to put its deer-like head over the fence to feel the touch of its mistress's hand.

"Are they not beauties?" cried Lady Scarlett. "There's your friend Dolly," she continued. "She won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid," said the doctor, smiling; and then a visit was paid to where the poultry came rushing up to be fed, and then follow their mistress; while the pigeons hovered about, and one more venturesome than the others settled upon her head.

They saw no more of Scarlett till just before dinner, when they met him with Prayle; and now it was that, after feeling warmer and more friendly towards his young hostess than he ever had felt before, the unpleasant sense of distance and of chill came back, as the doctor was shown up into his room.

"I'm afraid I'm prejudiced," he said. "She's very charming, and the natural girlish manner comes in very nicely at times; but somehow, Kate Scarlett, I never thought you were quite the wife for my old friend. – Let's play fair," he said, as he stood contemplatively wiping his hands upon a towel that smelt of the pure fresh air. "What have I to say against her?"

He remained silent for a few moments, and then said aloud: "Nothing; only that she has always seemed to distrust me, and I have distrusted her. Why, I believe we are jealous of each other's influence with poor old Jem."

He laughed as he said these words, and then went down-stairs, to find that his stay at the Rosery was to be more lively than he had anticipated, for, upon entering the drawing-room, he was introduced by Lady Scarlett to a stern-looking, grey, elderly lady as "my Aunt Sophia – Miss Raleigh," and to a rather pretty girl, "Miss Naomi Raleigh," the former of which two ladies he had to take in to dinner.

Volume One – Chapter Five.
The Doctor on Nerves

The dinner at the Rosery was all that was pleasant and desirable, saving that Doctor Scales felt rather disappointed in having to take in Aunt Sophia. He was not a ladies' man, he said, when talking of such matters, and would have been better content to have gone in alone. He was not much pleased either at being very near Mr Arthur Prayle, to whom he at once took a more decided dislike, being, as he acknowledged to himself, exceedingly ready to form antipathies, and prejudiced in the extreme.

"Ah," he said to himself, "one ought to be satisfied;" and he glanced round the prettily decorated table, and uttered a sigh of satisfaction as the sweet scents of the garden floated in through the open window. Then he uttered another similar sigh, for there were scents in the room more satisfying to a hungry man.

"Perhaps you'd like the window shut, auntie?" said Sir James.

"No, my dear; it would be a shame: the weather is so fine. – You don't think it will give me rheumatism in the shoulder, do you, doctor?"

"No, madam, certainly not," said Scales. "You are not over-heated."

"Then we will have it open," said Aunt Sophia decisively.

"Do you consider that rheumatism always comes from colds, Doctor Scales?" said Arthur Prayle, bending forward from his seat beside his hostess, and speaking in a bland smooth tone.

"That fellow's mouth seems to me as if it must be lined with black velvet," thought the doctor. "Bother him! if I believed in metempsychosis, I should say he would turn into a black Tom-cat. He purrs and sets up his back, and seems as if he must have a tail hidden away under his coat. – No, decidedly not," he said aloud. "I think people often suffer from a kind of rheumatic affection due to errors of diet."

"Dear me! how strange."

"Then we shall have Aunt Sophia laid up," said Sir James, "for she is always committing errors in diet."

"Now, James!" began the lady in protestation.

"Now, auntie, you know you'd eat a whole cucumber on the sly, if you had the chance."

"No, no, my dear; that is too bad. I confess that I do like cucumber, but not to that extent."

"Well, Naomi, I hope you are ready for plenty of boating, now you have come down," said Scarlett. "We must brown you a bit; you are too fair. – Isn't she, Jack?"

"Not a bit," said the doctor, who was enjoying his salmon. "A lady can't be too fair."

Aunt Sophia looked at him sharply; but Jack Scales's eyes had not travelled in the direction of Naomi, and when he raised them to meet Aunt Sophia's, there was a frank ingenuous look in them that disarmed a disposition on the lady's part to set up her feathers and defend her niece.

"I think young ladies ought to be fair and pretty; don't you, ma'am?"

"Ye-es; in reason," said Aunt Sophia, bridling slightly.

"I side with you, Jack," said their host, with a tender look at his wife.

"Yes," said Prayle slowly; "one naturally expects a lady to be beautiful; but, alas! how soon does beauty fade."

"Yes, if you don't take care of it," said Aunt Sophia sharply. "Unkindness is like a blight to a flower, and so is the misery of this world."

"So," said Scarlett, "the best thing is never to be unkind, auntie, and have nothing to do with misery – "

"If you can help it," said the doctor.

" – Or the doctors," said Scarlett, laughing – "always excepting Doctor Scales."

About this time, Aunt Sophia, who had been very stiff and distant, began to soften a little towards the doctor, and listened attentively, as the host seemed to be trying to draw him out.

"What are you doing now, Jack?" he said, after a glance round the table to see that all was going satisfactorily and well; while Lady Scarlett sat, flushed and timid, troubled with the cares of the house, and wondering whether her husband was satisfied with the preparations that had been made.

"Eating," said the doctor drily, "and to such an extent, that I am blushing inwardly for having such a dreadful appetite."

"I suppose," said Prayle, "that a good appetite is a sign of good health?"

"Sometimes," said the doctor. "There are morbid forms of desire for food. – What say?"

"I repeated my question," said Scarlett, laughing. "What are you doing now?"

"Well, I am devoting myself for the most part to the study of nervous diseases," said the doctor. "There seems to be more opening there than in any other branch of my profession, and unless a man goes in for a speciality, he has no chance."

"Come, Aunt Sophia," said Scarlett, merrily; "here's your opportunity. You are always complaining of your nerves."

"Of course I am," said the old lady sharply; "and no wonder."

"Well, then, why not engage Doctor Scales as your private physician, before he is snatched up?"

"All, before I'm snatched up, Miss Raleigh. Don't you have anything to do with me, madam. Follow your nephew's lead, and take to gardening – There is medicine in the scent of the newly turned earth, in the air you breathe, and in the exercise, that will do you more good than any drugs I can prescribe."

"There you are, aunt; pay up."

"Pay up? Bless the boy! what do you mean?" said Aunt Sophia.

"A guinea. Physician's fee."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Aunt Sophia. – "But I don't want to be rude to you, Doctor Scales, and I think it's worth the guinea far more than many a fee I've paid for what has done me no good."

"I've got a case in hand," said the doctor, going on with his dinner, but finding time to talk. "I've a poor creature suffering from nervous shock. Fine-looking, gentlemanly fellow as you'd wish to see, but completely off his balance."

"Bless the man! don't talk about mad people," said Aunt Sophia.

"No, ma'am, I will not. He's as sane as you are," said the doctor; "but his nerve is gone, he dare not trust himself outside the house; he cannot, do the slightest calculation – write a letter – give a decisive answer. He would not take the shortest journey, or see any one on business. In fact, though he could do all these things as well as any of us, he doesn't, and, paradoxical as it may sound, can't."

"But why not?" said Scarlett.

"Why not? Because his nerve has gone, he dare not sleep without some one in the next room. He could not bear to be in the dark. He cannot trust himself to do a single thing for fear he should do it wrong, or go anywhere lest some terrible accident should befall him."

"What a dreadful man!" cried Aunt Sophia.

"Not at all, my dear madam; he's a splendid fellow."

"It must be terrible for his poor wife, Doctor Scales."

"No, ma'am, it is not, because he has no wife; but it is very trying to his sweet sister."

"I say, hark at that," said Scarlett, merrily – "'his sweet sister.' Ahem, Jack! In confidence, eh?"

"What do you mean?" cried the doctor, as the ladies smiled.

"I say – you know – his sweet sister. Is that the immortal she?"

"What? My choice? Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha?" laughed the doctor, with enjoyable mirth. "No, no; I'm cut out for a bachelor. No wedding for me. Bah! what's a poor doctor to do with a wife! No, sir; no, sir. I'm going to preserve myself free of domestic cares for the benefit of all who may seek my aid."

"Well, for my part," said Aunt Sophia, "I think it must be a very terrible case."

"Terrible, my dear madam."

"But you will be able to cure him?"

"I hope so; but indeed that is all I can say. Such cases as this puzzle the greatest men."

"I suppose," said Arthur Prayle, in a smooth bland voice, "that you administer tonic medicines – quinine and iron and the like?"

"O yes," said the doctor grimly. "That's exactly what we do, and it doesn't cure the patient in the least."

"But you give him cold bathing and exercise, doctor?"

"O yes, Mr Prayle; cold bathing and exercise, plenty of them; but they don't do any good."

"Hah! that is singular," said Prayle thoughtfully. "Would the failure be from want of perseverance, do you think?"

"Perhaps so. One doesn't know how much to persevere, you see."

"These matters are very strange – very well worthy of consideration and study, Doctor Scales."

"Very well worthy of consideration indeed, Mr Prayle," said the doctor; and then to himself: "This fellow gives me a nervous affection in the toes."

"I trust my remarks do not worry you, Lady Scarlett?" said Prayle, in his bland way.

"O no, not at all," replied that lady. "Pray do not think we cannot appreciate a little serious talk."

Prayle smiled as he looked at the speaker – a quiet sad smile, full of thankfulness; but it seemed to trouble Lady Scarlett, who hastened to join the conversation on the other side, replying only in monosyllables afterwards to Prayle's remarks.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly, and at last the ladies rose and left the table, leaving the gentlemen to their wine, or rather to the modern substitute for the old custom – their coffee, after which they smoked their cigarettes in the veranda, and the conversation once more took a medical turn.

"I can't help thinking about that patient of yours, Jack," said Sir James. "Poor fellow! What a shocking affair!"

"Yes, it must be a terrible life," said Prayle. "Life, Arthur! it must be a sort of death," exclaimed Scarlett excitedly. "Poor fellow! What a state!"

"Well, sympathy's all very well," said the doctor, smiling in rather an amused way; "but I don't see why you need get excited about it."

"Oh, but it is horrible."

"Dreadful!" echoed Prayle.

"Then I must have been an idiot to introduce it here, where all is so calm and peaceful," said the doctor. "Fancy what a shock it would give us all if we were suddenly to hear an omnibus go blundering by. James Scarlett, you are a lucky man. You have everything a fellow could desire in this world: money, a delightful home, the best of health – "

"The best of wives," said Prayle softly. "Thank you for that, Arthur," said Scarlett, turning and smiling upon the speaker.

"Humph! Perhaps I was going to say that myself," said the doctor sourly. "Hah! you're a lucky man."

"Well, I don't grumble," said Scarlett, laughing. "You fellows come down here just when everything's at its best; but there is such a season as winter, you know."

"Of course there is, stupid!" said the doctor. "If there wasn't, who would care for fickle spring?"

"May the winter of adversity never come to your home, Cousin James," said Prayle softly: and he looked at his frank, manly young host with something like pathetic interest as he spoke.

"Thank you, old fellow, thank you. – Now, let's join the ladies."

"This fellow wants to borrow fifty pounds," growled Doctor Scales. Then after a pause – "There's that itching again in my toes."

Volume One – Chapter Six.
Doctor Scales hears a Morning Lecture

"Morning, Monnick," said the doctor, who had resigned himself to his fate, and had passed three days without attempting to escape from his pleasant prison.

"Morning, sir," said the old gardener, touching his hat.

"Sir James down yet?"

"Oh yes, sir, he's been in the peach-house this last hour."

"Has he? thanks," said the doctor, walking on in that direction, to hear his old friend's voice, directly after, humming away beneath the glass like some gigantic bee.

"Hallo, lazybones!" cried Sir James, who was busy at work with a syringe water-shooting the various insects that had affected a lodgment amongst his peach and nectarine trees.

"Lazybones; be hanged! why, it's barely five."

"Well, that's late enough this weather. I love being out early."

"Work of supererogation to tell me that, old fellow."

"So it is, Jack, and I suppose I'm a monomaniac. Fellows at the club laugh at me. They say, here you are – with plenty of money, which is true; heaps of brains – which is not; a title and a seat in the house, openings before you to get some day in the cabinet, and you go down in the country and work like a gardener. They think I'm a fool."

"Let 'em," said the doctor, grimly.

"But I am a bit of a lunatic over garden matters, and country-life, Jack."

"So much the better," said the doctor, lighting a cigar and beginning to walk up and down. "Go on with your squirting."

"Shan't! I shall follow your bad habit." And Sir James took one of his friend's cigars and began to smoke. "Pleasure and profit together," he said; "it will kill insects."

"Nice place, this," said the doctor, glancing about the large light structure, with its healthy fruit trees growing vigorously; "but I should be careful about sudden changes. Might get a cold that would affect you seriously."

"Out, croaker!" cried Sir James; "I never catch cold." And he perched himself upon a pair of steps.

"Going to preach?" said the doctor, "because if so I'll sit down."

"Then sit, for I am, sir, a charity sermon; but there will be no collection after I have done."

"Go ahead," said the doctor.

"My dear guest," said Sir James, "there is nothing pleasanter than being, through your own foresight, on the right side of the hedge. The bull may bellow and snort, and run at the unfortunates who carelessly cross the dangerous meadow, but it does not hurt you, who can calmly shout to those in danger to run here or there to save themselves from horns or hoofs. In the same way how satisfactory to float at your ease when the flood comes, and to see your neighbours floundering and splashing as they struggle to bank or tree, hardly saving themselves, while you, armed as you are with that pocket. Noah's Ark of a safety-belt, philosophically think, what a pity it is that people will not take precautions against the inevitable."

"What are you aiming at, Jemmy?" said the doctor.

"Sir," said Sir James, waving his cigar; "I take this roundabout way of approaching that most popular though slightly threadbare subject, the weather; and as I do so I cannot help, in my self-satisfied way, feeling a kind of contemptuous compassion for those who, being agriculturally or horticulturally disposed, go out metaphorically without macintosh, umbrella, or goloshes. It is in this spirit that I feel but small pity for unfortunate Pat who, knowing that Erin is so green on account of its

heavy rainfall, will persist in making the staple of his growth the highly satisfactory but tropical potato – that child of the sun which blights and rots and dies away in a humid atmosphere, the consequence of our heavy downpours of rain. 'But we must have potatoes,' say both Pat, and John Bull. True: then do as I, Ajax, the weather defier, have done: grow early sorts, which flourish, ripen, and can be housed before the setting in of the heavy autumnal rains."

"Hear, hear," said the doctor, sitting back in his wicker chair and holding his fuming cigar in the middle of a peach-tree, where some insects had effected a lodgment.

"That's right, doctor, give them a good dose," said Sir James following suit. "But to proceed. It is not *apropos* of tubers that I indulge this spring in a pleasant warm feeling of self-satisfaction, but on account of wall-fruit – the delicious plum, a bag of golden saccharine pulp, or a violet bloomed, purple-skinned mass of deliciously flavoured amber; the downy-skinned peach, with a ruddy tint like that of a bonny English maiden's cheek; the fiery stoned luscious nectarine – that vinous ambrosial fruit that ought to be eaten with the eyes closed that the soul may dream and be transported into transports of mundane bliss; item, the apricot, that bivalve of fruits which will daintily split into two halves, to enable you to drop the stone before partaking of its juicy joys. Come good season or bad season your Londoner sees the pick of these princes of the fruit world reposing in perfect trim in the market or window; but in such an autumn as the past it was melancholy to walk round one's friends' gardens – say with Tompkins or Smith or Robinson, each of whom spends a little fortune upon his grounds, over which Macduff or Macbeth or Macfarlane, or some other 'gairdner fra' the North,' tyrannically presides. The plums upon the most favoured walls were cracked, and dropped spoiled from the trees; the peaches looked white and sickly, and were spotted with decomposition; the nectarines that consented to stay on the twigs were hard and green, and where one that approached the appearance of ripeness was tasted, it was watery, flavourless, and poor."

"Watery, flavourless, and poor, is good," said the doctor. "I don't often buy wall-fruit, but if I do spend sixpence in the Central Avenue, Covent Garden, that is about the state of the purchase."

"Exactly," said Sir James eagerly, "and it is impossible to help triumphing in one's pity while one reasonably says, 'Why attempt to grow out-of-doors the tender fruits of a warmer clime in such a precarious country as ours? Or, if you must grow them, why not metaphorically provide your peaches, nectarines, apricots, and choice plums with goloshes, macintoshes, and, above all, with an umbrella?' I do, and I egotistically take my friends to see the result. Their trees are drenched, desolate, and the saturated ground beneath is strewn with rotting fruit. My trees, on the contrary, have their toes nice and warm; their bodies are surrounded by a comfortable great coat; and, above all, their delicate leaves and still more delicate blossoms are sheltered by a spreading umbrella of glass. In other words I grow them in an orchard house, and the result is that they are laden with luscious fruit."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "but this is the luxury of the rich, my boy: glass-houses are a great expense."

"By no means, Jack. If gorgeous glass palaces and Paxtonian splendour are desired, of course I have nothing to say; but the man of modest mind who likes to exercise his own ingenuity to slope some rafters from the top of a garden wall to a few posts and boards in front, and cover in the slope with the cheapest glass, may provide himself at a very trifling expense with a glazed shed, within whose artificial climate he may grow as many choice plants as he chooses, he may begin with five pounds, or go up to five hundred, as he pleases: the fruit would be the same: all that is required is shelter, ventilation, and abundance of light. The heat is provided by Nature, none other is needed – no furnaces, boilers, hot-water pipes, flues, or expensive apparatus of any kind; finally, comprehensively, nothing is necessary but a glass-roofed shed with brick or boarded sides, and, I repeat, the roughest structure will give as good fruit, perhaps as much satisfaction, as the grandest house."

"Just as poor Hodge enjoys his slice of bacon as much as you do your paté."

"Exactly, Jack," continued Sir James, who was well mounted upon his hobby, "there is no secret about the matter. The delicate fruits of the peach family, and even choicer plums, are most abundant

bearers; all they want is a suitable climate to produce their stores. That climate, save, say, once in seven or eight years, England does not afford. The troubles of these aristocrats of the garden begin very early in the year, when, according to their habit, every twig puts forth a wondrous display of crimson, pink, and delicately-tinted white bloom, just at a time when our nipping frosts of early spring are rife. The consequence is that in a few short hours the hopes of a season are blighted. In sheltered positions often, by chance, a few blossoms, as a gardener would say, set their fruit, which run the gauntlet of our fickle clime, and perhaps ripen, but more likely drop from the trees in various stages of their approach to maturity, the whole process being so disheartening that, in a season like the past, many gardeners declared that it was a hopeless effort to attempt to grow peaches and nectarines out-of-doors."

The doctor looked at his watch.

"All! it isn't breakfast time yet, Jack, and you are in for my lecture. As I was about to say, *nous avons changé tout cela*. We build our orchard house handsome or plain, according to our means, and in that shelter we have an artificial climate, such as made some gentlemen from the South of France exclaim, when visiting the gardens of the late Mr Rivers, of Sawbridgeworth, the introducer of the system, '*Ah! Monsieur Rivers, voici notre climat*!' In fact the above gentleman, in his interesting work, says: 'An orchard house in the south of England will give as nearly as possible the summer climate of Toulouse.' And this, mind, from sun heat and earth heat alone – heat which, so far from needing increase, has to be modified by abundant ventilation."

"Ah! that's what I want you to mind, old fellow," said the doctor; "you are not a plant, and I don't want you to get yourself in a state of heat under the glass here, and then expose yourself to abundant ventilation."

"Only like cooling after a Turkish bath," said Sir James.

"I don't like Turkish baths," said the doctor, "the overheating affects the nerves."

"You are always croaking about the nerves," said Sir James; "but as I was saying – "

"Oh! go on, preach the orchard house down," said the doctor, "I'll listen."

"I'm preaching it up, man," said Sir James. "Given the matter of the orchard house, then, what next? Presuming that you have taken advantage of the possession of a south or south west wall already covered with trees, and against which you have placed glass roof and simple front and ends, all else necessary is to plant the space unoccupied by nailed-up trees moderately full of little bushes and standards."

"I always thought peaches and nectarines ought to be nailed-up against walls till I saw yours," said the doctor.

"Yes; if you like to torture them into that position; but they will grow and bear better like ordinary apple-trees or pears, only asking for abundant pruning, plenty of water, and freedom from insect plagues. If you prefer so doing, you may grow them in large pots, the same as you would camellias, and ornament your dining-table with a beautiful little eighteen-inch or two-feet high Early Louise peach, an Elruge nectarine, or Moor Park apricot, bearing its dozen or so of perfectly-shaped fruit. And to the man of frugal mind this has its advantages; for every one exclaims, 'Oh, it would be a pity to pick them!' and the dessert is saved."

"My dear James, I shall never say that, I promise you."

"You're a humbug, Jack. Here we are, and all this place, asking you to run down and share some of its fruits, but you will never come. But to proceed. I think I shall write a pamphlet on this subject."

"I would," said the doctor, drily.

"I don't care for your chaff, my boy. I want to see poor people refine their ways, – working-men growing vines, old ladies with orchard houses."

"And I hope you may get it," said the doctor.

"My dear Jack," continued Sir James, "such a structure as an orchard house for a long period of the year is 'a thing of beauty,' and a walk down the central avenue, with the little trees blooming,

leafing, and fruiting, is ‘a joy, for ever’ so long. There is a large sound about that ‘central avenue,’ but, believe me, there is great pleasure to be derived if the little path be only six feet long, and this is a pleasure that can be enjoyed by the man of very humble means, who may make it profitable if he has the heart to sell his pets. Even in the simplest structure there is infinite variety to be obtained.”

“I daresay,” said the doctor. “I say, how this leaf has curled up. It has killed the insects, though.”

“So would you curl up if a giant held a red hot cigar end against your body,” said Sir James. “Do I bore you?”

“Not a bit, my dear boy; not a bit,” cried the doctor. “You do me good. Your verdant prose refreshes me, and makes me think the world is better than it is.”

“Get out. But I’ve nearly done. I say, Jack, I’m trying this on you. It’s part of a lecture I’m writing to deliver at our National School.”

“And here have I been sitting admiring your eloquence. Oh! James Scarlett, what a deceitful world is this! But there: go on, old enthusiast.”

“Some of the commonest plums,” continued Sir James, “are lovely objects when grown under glass; so are the dwarf cherries, trees which are clusters of coral from root to top, while those who have not partaken of that wonderfully beautiful fruit, the apple, when a choice American kind is grown in an orchard house, have a new sensation before them in the way of taste. The modern Continental mode of growing fruit on *cordons*, as they are termed, a simple stick, so to speak, without an extraneous branch, all being fruit spurs, enables the lover of such a form of horticulture to place an enormous number of trees beneath his glass in a very small space, as they will flourish well at a distance of two feet apart all along the back and sides, and three feet apart in the centre, while as to expense, the choicest of young trees can be purchased for from eighteenpence to half-a-crown each. In fact, if I wanted an orchard house, I would start with quite a small one, erected and stocked for a five-pound note, and if I could not raise so large a sum, I would do it for half the money with old sashes from some house-wrecker’s stock, and grow it to a better by-and-by.”

“How much did this place cost?” said the doctor.

“Five hundred,” said Sir James. “But listen to the finish, old fellow. Ajax, if he builds himself such a structure, can defy the weather – the much-abused weather, which, in spite of all that has been said, seems much the same as ever, people forgetting that they ask it to perform the same miracles of growth that it does in Eastern and Southern climes. Nature meant England to grow sloes, blackberries, and crabs, and we ask her to grow the pomegranate, the orange, and the date. She definitely says she won’t, though she does accord the fig, but in a very insipid, trashy way. Put up the glass umbrella however, and shut out her freezing winds, and she will perform wonders at our call. Our grandfathers thought they had done everything when they had planted their trees against a sheltering wall. Our fathers went farther, and gave us the idea of growing grapes and pines in a house of glass. But, the pine and grape were luxurious affairs, not to be approached by the meek, to whom these ideas are presented as facts that will add another pleasure to their lives.”

“As the celebrated Samuel Weller observed, when he had listened patiently to the Shepherd’s discourse, ‘Brayvo! Very pretty!’ But I say, I’m getting hungry.”

“Not seven yet,” said Sir James; “go and get yourself a glass of milk, and I’ll have a walk with you till breakfast time. Here, I’ll come with you now.”

“But, my dear boy, you are not coming out of this hot, moist atmosphere without first putting on a coat?”

“Stuff! Nothing hurts me, I’m used to it.”

“My dear fellow, you’ll have a bad attack some day,” said the doctor.

“Not if I know it, Jack. Get out, you old rascal, you want to run me up a bill. I’m as sound as a roach, and shall be as long as I lead my country-life. I say, I’m going to empty the pond to-day. We’ll get the water out, and then the ladies can come and see us catch the fish.”

“Us?” said the doctor, “us?”

"Yes, you shall have a landing-net at the end of a pole. You'll come?"

"Is Prayle going to be there?"

"Of course."

"Then I think I shall stay away."

"Nonsense, you prejudiced humbug. I want you to see the fun. You will come?"

"My dear James Scarlett, I do not get on at my profession, I know now why. It is from weakness of will. I see it now. You have taught me that lesson this morning. First, I find myself listening to a rigmarole about growing fruit under glass. Now I am weakly consenting to make myself as much a schoolboy as you in your verdant idyllic life."

"Then you'll come?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor grimly, "I'll come. Shall I go into the mud after eels?"

"If you like, I'll lend you a pair of old trousers. I shall."

"My dear fellow, I shall be attending you one of these days for paralysis brought on by cold; or spinal – "

"Nancy, two big glasses of new milk," cried Sir James, for they had entered the dairy. "I say, Jack, old fellow, I want to give you a little more of my natural history lecture, because it would be sure to help me on."

"I feel," said the doctor, "as if I had a soft collar round my neck, and was being led about by a chain. There, make the most of me while I'm here, you don't catch me down again."

"Don't I?" said Sir James. "Why, my dear Jack, Kitty and I have made up our minds to find you a wife."

Volume One – Chapter Seven.
Sir James Catches Cold in the Back

"And are there any fish in that muddy pond, Monnick?" said Arthur Prayle that morning after breakfast.

"Oh, sir, yes; you should see them sometimes; great fellows that come up after the bread you throw in. Are you coming to see it emptied?"

Arthur Prayle looked at his glossy black garments, and then, bowing his head, gravely said, "Yes, perhaps I shall be there," and he raised his book and went on down the garden.

His "perhaps" proved a certainty, for when the party started from the house to go across the fields he walked sedately between Aunt Sophia and Naomi, talking softly all the time till they reached the place.

It was a large pond. How large? Well, about as big as ponds generally are; and it was pretty deep. There were mysterious places beneath the overhanging willows, whose roots hung in the water, where the hooked fish rushed and entangled the lines. There was that awkward spot where the old posts, and wood, and willow poles lay with their ends in the mud, where Sir James caught the great eel that twined himself in and out, and the stout silkworm gut line parted like tinder. There was a deep hole, too, by the penstock, and various linking places where, in the silence of the night, you could hear wallowings and splashings, and now and then a loud suck or smack of the lips as a fish took something from the top of the water.

On inspection half-a-dozen brawny brown-armed men were found picking and throwing out the earth, and graving a trench in a way that would have made a military engineer long for a few hundred of such fellows to form his earthworks. Deep down they delved till they had cut and laid bare certain pipes in a huge dyke, every foot of which was suggestive of the mysteries of the pond that required so vast a trench to drain off its waters. There was a good deal of speculation rife about that pond, inasmuch as one that was drained by Sir James a couple of years before proved to hold nothing but thousands of great fat newts that swarmed over the mud like alligators in a Florida lagoon. It was said that after all perhaps a carp or two and an eel would be all that were found, but, even as the speculative remarks were made, a shoal of small roach flecked the surface, and it was certain that the result could not be *nil*.

It boots not to tell of the way those men worked, as full of interest in the job as any one else, it is enough to say that the pond head was reached at last, the new drain ready, and over the pipe a piece of wire-work placed to stay any fish from passing down; and at last the water was allowed to flow till the pond was a couple of feet lower, the roots of the bank vegetation and the willows bare, and dozens of slimy holes visible, such as would be affected by eels, water-voles, and other lovers of such snuggeries in the banks. Ragged pieces of wood stood out at all angles from the mud and water, the penstock rose up like a model in old oak of Tyburn Tree, kept for the execution of rats; and the great wooden pump, with its platform in the corner where the water-barrels were tilled, trailed its leaden pipe down into the depths like a monstrous antediluvian eel.

Not so much as a splash to tell that there was anything within the waters rushing away in a flood, down through the alders in an old marl pit hard by. More hours went on and there were no signs of fish. Mud and to spare, and the banks looking slimy and strange. Tangles of wood that had lain at the bottom for years began to show as lower sank the water, revealing pots, old boots, hurdles, and rusty iron, but still no fish of size. Then there was a shout of triumph from one of the men at the sight of a billhook some six feet from the bank, one that had been dropped in years before, when the overhanging willows were being lopped, and there was no Mercury at hand to bring it up transformed to silver or gold. The keen-edged implement was recovered, hardly the worse for its immersion, and,

as far as its owner was concerned, the game of draining the pond was worth the candle. But still no fish, and, save in the holes, the water was now only a foot deep. There were indications though, for the simple running of the water off would not have made the remainder so thick, and as some bubbles were seen to rise, one man declared that it was a “girt” eel at work. Another six inches lower, and here and there a dark line could be seen, cutting the muddy water, ploughing as it were along, while behind there came a wavy eddy, and it was evident that these dark lines were the back fins of fish swimming in the shallow pool.

“They are getting sick,” said John Monnick with a grim smile.

Certainly if swimming at the top of the water indicated sickness, a number of large fish were very sick indeed, while now that the fact was patent of there being plenty of finny creatures there, the excitement began to grow. The remaining water grew more thick, and here and there the surface was dimpled and splashed by little dark spots where shoals of small fish hurried to and fro. Then as the water grew lower still, there was a cessation of movement, the fish seemed all to have disappeared, and they might have passed down the drain for all there was to see.

“Rather a boyish pursuit,” said Prayle, who found himself close by the doctor.

“Thoroughly,” replied Scales; “puts one in mind of old school days. Never enjoyed myself so much in my life.”

Prayle smiled and turned to Naomi.

“That fellow’s ancestors must have been eels,” growled the doctor to himself. “Great Darwin! I declare myself converted.”

“Interested in it, Mr Prayle?” said Naomi, opening her large soft eyes. “Oh, yes, I like to see anything that pleases my cousin.”

“Ah!” sighed Prayle, “it seems a strange pursuit.”

“My cousin is so fond of the water,” said Naomi gently.

“He seems fond of the mud,” muttered Prayle. “Good heavens! how can a man be such a boor?”

All this while Lady Scarlett was smiling on everybody, and taking intense interest in her husband’s pursuit, seeing that the men had lunch and as much beer as they liked – which was a good deal – but they were working tremendously and as eager as their lord.

And now preparations were made. Half-a-dozen large tubs were filled with clean water; a strong landing-net was placed at hand, with a couple of buckets, and two or three of the shallow wooden baskets, known as “trucks,” or so-called “trugs.” The next proceeding was for a man to descend into the slime at the head of the pond, and commence a trench, throwing out the mud right and left till he had reached the solid bottom, and thus going on ahead to form, as it were, a ditch through the centre of the hollow, a process which hastened the flow of water and soon set the latest doubt at rest. For before long there was a scuffling and splashing of small fish, roach leaped out, and small bream kept, displaying their silvery sides. Tiny pools formed all over the bottom of the pond, each occupied by its scores of fish, while, in the principal pool, the great carp could be seen sailing slowly and sedately here and there, all singly, save in one instance, where a monster fellow swam slowly in and out with one two-thirds his size close to his side – a regular fishy Darby and Joan. Then lower sank the water, the small fish all splash and excitement, but the great carp as cool and calm as could be, retiring with the water to a pool that grew less and less until, in place of being single and in pairs, they were united into one great shoal that, if not like dogs, as John Monnick said, were certainly suggestive of the backs of so many little pigs swimming quietly to and fro. Lower still the water, and the excitement increasing.

“What a great carp!” cried the doctor. “Look at his back fin.”

“No; it is an eel!” cried Sir James; and an eel it was, slowly gliding along through what was rapidly becoming liquid mud; and in few minutes another and another, and then once more another could be seen, huge fellows nearly a yard long, and very thick and fat, going about with their long back fins above the surface, as they moved in serpentine wavy progression, seeking for some place

of refuge, and then suddenly disappearing by giving themselves a wriggle and twist, and working themselves down into the mud.

"There goes Prayle's relation. I wish he'd follow," said the doctor to himself.

"Well, Jack, what do you think of it all?" cried Sir James, whose old tweed coat was bespattered with mud.

"That I never saw a fellow less like a baronet and a member of Parliament in my life," replied Scales.

"Ah! you should have seen me at the Cape, my boy, cooking for our party; and in the far west making a brush hut. You don't know what a number of facets a fellow can show. There, pull off your coat and come and help. Let's be boys while we can."

The doctor pulled off his coat and rolled up his sleeves, and then bowing apologetically to the ladies —

"For heaven's sake," he said, "if ever you meet any patients of mine, don't say you saw me bemired like this."

"Humph!" ejaculated Aunt Sophia, whose face was an enigma.

"They would perhaps like you all the better for it, doctor," said Lady Scarlett smiling, and then turning serious as she noted the grave look on the face of her husband's friend.

She looked up directly after, and saw that Prayle was watching her, and he soon took a step forward as if about to come to her side, but she coloured slightly, and went to speak to the old gardener, whom she sent to the house upon some errand.

"An excuse," said Prayle to himself: "she invented that on the instant."

By this time the ditch through the middle was extending fast, the water pouring off, and the landing-net at work stopping fish like shoals of sprats from going towards the wire-protected drain, and these were scooped out, placed in buckets, and from thence carried to the tubs. The men worked furiously, evidently as delighted with the task as so many schoolboys, though extremely careful about getting in the mud. But time soon changed all that, for the water was now low enough for the great carp to be reached, and the smaller fry of roach and bream were left, for the present, while the men laid down planks upon the mud, and approached the hole beneath the willows, where it was known that the carp now lay. "Take care! Don't hurt them!" "Scoop 'em out wi' the trug." Order after order, as the wooden buckets were handled; one was plunged in, and shovelled out a great carp with a quarter of a pailful of liquid mud. No calm sedateness now. The monarchs of the pond had felt their latent majesty touched, and there was a tremendous splashing and plunging; the man who had scooped out the great fish was spattered with mud from head to foot; there was a plunge, and the carp was gone. The mud was forgotten now in the excitement, as fresh efforts were made, the carp were scooped out and held down by main force as they gave displays of their tremendous muscular power, and were passed up the side – great golden fellows, thick, short, and fat, clothed in a scale armour that seemed to be composed of well-worn half-sovereigns, and panting and gaping with surprise as they were safely landed.

Shouts and laughter greeted each capture of the great fellows, only one of which was as small as two pounds weight, the others running from three to five, and exhibiting a power that was marvellous in creatures of their size. Sometimes a great fellow eluded capture again and again, gliding between the hands, leaping out of the basket, and making furious efforts to escape, but only to be caught once more, till the last was secured, and attention turned to the eels.

By this time the doctor had caught the infection from his friend, and he was as forgetful of the mud and as eager in the chase as Sir James and his men; and as the big landing-net was brought into use, and the great eels that glided over the mud like serpents were chased, they showed that they could travel tail first as fast as head first, and with the greatest ease. The landing-net was held before them, and efforts made to drive them in, but generally without result, or if they were driven in, it was only for them to glide out more quickly. Hands were useless, shovels impotent, and the

chase grew exciting in the extreme, as the men plunged in their bare arms to the shoulder, and drew them from the mud again, looking; as if they had gone in, like Mrs Boffin, for fashion, and were wearing twenty-four button gloves of a gloomy hue. But lithe and strong as they were, the eels had to succumb, great two and three pound fellows, and were safely thrown out on the grass; the last of the small fish were secured, the whole of the water drained off, and nothing remained but three feet of thick mud. Nothing? Nothing but the eels that had dived in like worms. These were now attacked. The mud was stirred with poles or shovels till the lurking place of one was found, when, after a long tight, he would be secured, twisting, twining, and fighting for liberty; needing delicate handling too, for these monsters of the pond bite hard and sharp. Deep down in the mud some forced themselves, but many were dug out, and thrown or driven into places where they could be secured, and at last, wet, muddy, and weary, the owner cried *Quantum suff.*, beer for the last time was handed round, and the empty pond was left in peace.

But there was fish for dinner that night, savoury spitchcocked eels, and regal carp with wine sauce, the latter being declared by every one present, from Aunt Sophia to Prayle, to be the poorest, muddiest, most insipid dish ever placed upon a table.

It was about nine that night that just before Lady Scarlett sent a message to the study, which was half full of smoke, and while Prayle had gone for a stroll to watch the stars, as he said, making Scales look a little glum as he left the room, that Sir James cried suddenly – “Jack, old man, I’ll never brag again.”

“Why?”

“I’ve got the most awful of pains in my back, and it seems to run right up my spine. What the dickens is it? Have you been giving me a dose?”

“No,” said Scales grimly; “that comes of emptying the pond.”

“Not going to be anything, is it?”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I don’t know, but a cold will settle sometimes upon the nerves.”

“Oh! hang it, man, don’t talk about one’s nerves. Here, come along, I shall forget it. Let’s go and have some tea.”

Volume One – Chapter Eight.
Jack Scales Meets His Fate

"That's what I like in the country," said Jack Scales to himself, as he thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled down one of the garden paths. "Humph! Five o'clock, and people snoring in bed, when they might be up and out enjoying this lovely air, the sweet dewy scent of the flowers, and the clear sunshine, and be inhaling health with every breath they draw. Bah! I can't understand how people can lie in bed – in the country. There is reason in stopping in peaceful thought upon one's pillow in town till nine. – Ah, gardener, nice morning."

"Beautiful morning, sir," said John Monnick, touching his hat, and then going on with his task of carefully whetting a scythe, and sending a pleasant ringing sound out upon the sweet silence of the time.

"Grass cuts well, eh?" said the doctor.

"Yes, sir; crisp, as if there was a white frost on."

"Ah, let's try," said the doctor. "I haven't handled a scythe for a good many years now."

"No, sir; I s'pose not," said Monnick, with a half-contemptuous smile. "Mind you don't stick the pynte into the ground, sir, and don't ee cut too deep. I like to keep my lawns regular like."

"Why don't you have a machine?" said the doctor, taking the scythe, and sweeping it round with a slow measured *swish* that took off the grass and the dewy daisies to leave a velvet pile.

"Machine, sir? Oh, there's two in the potting shed; but I don't want no machines, sir. Noo-fangled things, that breaks a man's back to push 'em along. You has to put yourself in a onnat'ral-like position to work 'em, and when you've done it, the grass don't look like as if it had been mowed. – Well, you do s'prise me, sir; I didn't know as you could mow."

"Didn't you, Monnick?" said the doctor, pausing to take the piece of carpet with which the old man wiped the blade, using it, and then reaching out his hand for the long gritty whetstone, with which he proceeded to sharpen the scythe in the most business-like way. "Ah, you never know what a man can do till you try him. You see, Monnick, when I was a young fellow, I often used to cut the Rectory lawns at home."

"He's a clever one," muttered the old man, watching intently the rubber, as it was passed with quite a scientific touch up and down and from side to side of the long curved blade. "Man who can mow like that must, be a good doctor. I'll ask him about my 'bago."

"There, I'm going for a walk. I'm out of condition too, and mowing touches my back."

"Do it now, sir?" said the old man, smiling. "Hah! that's where it lays hold o' me in a rheumaticky sort o' way, sir. You couldn't tell me what'd be good for it, sir, could you? I've tried the iles, but it seems as if it was getting worse."

"Oh, I'll give you something, Monnick," said the doctor, laughing; "but, you know, there's a touch of old age in your complaint."

"Eh, but I'm afraid there is, sir; but thank you kindly, and you'll forgive me making so bold as to ask."

"Of course, of course. Come to me after breakfast. – And look here, I want to get on the open heathy part, among the gorse and fir-trees. Which road had I better take?"

"Well, sir, if you don't mind the wet grass, you'd best go acrost the meadows out into the lane, turn to the left past the church, take the first turning to the right, and go straight on."

"Thanks; I shall find my way. Don't forget. I daresay I can set you right." And the doctor went off at a swinging pace, crossed the meadows, where the soft-eyed cows paused to look up at him, then leaped a gate, walked down the lane, had a look at the pretty old church, embowered in trees,

and had nearly reached the open common-land, when the sharp cantering of a horse roused him from his pleasant morning reverie.

He looked round, to see that the cantering horse was ridden by a lady, whose long habit and natty felt hat set off what seemed in the distance to be a very graceful figure; while the oncoming group appeared to be advancing through an elongated telescopic frame of green leaves and drooping branches, splashed with gold and blue.

"Here's one sensible woman, at all events. What a splendid horse!" His glance was almost momentary. Then, feeling that he was staring rudely, he went on with his walk, continuing his way along the lane, and passing a gate that opened at once upon the furzy common-land.

Suddenly the horse was checked a short distance behind him, and an imperious voice called out: "Here! – hi! – my man."

John Scales, M.D., felt amused. "This is one of the haughty aristocrats we read about in books," he said to himself, as he turned and saw a handsome, imperious-looking woman of eight-and-twenty or so, beckoning to him with the handle of her whip.

"The goddess Diana in a riding-habit by Poole, and superbly mounted," muttered the doctor as he stared wonderingly. He saw that the lady's hair was dark, her cheeks slightly flushed with exorcise; that there was a glint of very white teeth between two scarlet lips; that the figure was really what he had at the first glance imagined – well formed and graceful, if slightly too matured; and his first idea was to take off his hat and stand uncovered in the presence of so much beauty; his second, as he saw the curl of the lady's upper lip, and her imperious glance, to thrust his hands lower in his pockets and return the haughty stare.

"Here, my man, come and open this gate."

As she spoke. Scales saw her pass her whip into her bridle hand, draw off a tan-coloured gauntlet glove, and a white and jewelled set of taper fingers go towards the little pocket in her saddle.

"Why, confound her impudence! she takes me for a yokel, and is going to give me a pint of beer," said the doctor to himself; and he stood as if turned into stone.

"Do you hear!" she cried again sharply, and in the tones of one accustomed to the greatest deference. "Come and open this gate."

John Scales felt his dignity touched, for he too was accustomed to the greatest deference, such as a doctor generally receives. For a moment he felt disposed to turn upon his heel and walk away; but he did not, for he burst into a hearty laugh, and walked straight up to the speaker, the latter flushing crimson with anger at the insolence, as she mentally called it, of this stranger.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "Open that gate;" and she retook her whip with her ungloved hand to point onward, while her highly bred horse pawed the ground, and snorted and tossed its mane, as if indignant too.

"How dare I, my dear?" said the doctor coolly, as he mentally determined not to be set down.

"Sir!" exclaimed the lady with a flash of her dark eyes that made the recipient think afterwards that here was the style of woman who, in the good old times, would have handed him over to her serfs. "Do you know whom you are addressing?"

"Not I," said the doctor; "unless you are some very beautiful edition in animated nature of the huntress Diana."

"Sir!"

"And if you were not such a handsome woman, I should leave you to open the gate yourself, or leap the hedge, which seems more in your way."

"How *dare* you!" she cried, utterly astounded at the speaker's words.

"How dare I?" said the doctor, smiling. "Oh, I'd dare anything now, to see those eyes sparkle and those cheeks flush. There," he continued, unfastening the gate and throwing it back; "the gate's open. *Au revoir*."

The lady seemed petrified. Then, giving her horse a sharp cut, he bounded through on to the furzy heath, and went off over the rough ground like a swallow.

The doctor stood gazing after them, half expecting to see the lady turn her head; but she rode straight on till she passed out of sight, when he refastened the gate.

"She might have given me the twopence for that pint of beer," he said mockingly. "Why, she has!" he cried, stooping and picking up a sixpence that lay upon the bare earth close to the gate-post. "Well, come, I'll keep you, my little friend, and give you back. We may meet again some day."

It was a trifling incident, but it seemed to affect the doctor a good deal, for he walked on amidst the furze and heath, seeing no golden bloom and hearing no bird-song, but giving vent every now and then to some short angry ejaculation. For he was ruffled and annoyed. He hardly knew why, unless it was at having been treated with such contemptuous disdain.

"And by a woman, too," he cried at last, stopping short, "of all creatures in the world. Confound her impudence! I should just like to prescribe for her, upon my word."

Volume One – Chapter Nine.
Aunt Sophia on Boats

The encounter completely spoiled the doctor's walk, and he turned back sooner than he had intended, meeting Aunt Sophia and Naomi Raleigh in the garden, and accompanying them in to the breakfast-table, where the incident was forgotten in the discussion that ensued respecting returns to town. Of these, Scarlett would hear nothing, for he had made his plans. He said they were to dine at five; and directly after, the boat would be ready, and they would pull up to the lock, and then float down home again by moonlight.

"Well," said Scales, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you are master here."

"No, no," replied his host; "yonder sits the master;" and he pointed to his wife.

"How many will the boat hold safely, dear?" said Lady Scarlett.

"Oh, a dozen, easily. Eighteen, if they would all sit still and not wink their eyes. We shan't be above seven, so that's all right."

"You need not expect me to go," said Aunt Sophia sharply. "I'm not going to risk my life in a boat."

"Pooh! auntie; there's no risk," cried Scarlett. "You'd better come."

"No; I shall not!" said the lady very decisively.

"Why, auntie, how absurd!" said Scarlett, passing his arm round her waist. "Now, what is the very worst that could happen?"

"Why, that boat would be sure to upset, James, and then we should all be drowned."

"Now, my dear old auntie," cried Scarlett, "the boat is not at all likely to upset; in fact I don't think we could upset her; and if she were, it does not follow that we should be drowned."

"Why, we should certainly be, boy," cried Aunt Sophia. – "Naomi, my dear, of course you have not thought of going?"

"Yes, aunt, dear; I should like to go very much," said Naomi.

"Bless the child! Why?"

"The river is lovely, aunt, with the shadows of the trees falling upon it, and their branches reflected on its surface."

"O yes; very poetical and pretty at your age, child," cried Aunt Sophia. "You never see the mud at the bottom, or think that it is wet and covered with misty fog in winter. Well, I suppose you must go."

"Really, Miss Raleigh, we will take the greatest care of her," said Prayle.

"I really should like to take the greatest care of you," muttered the doctor.

"Well, I suppose you must go, my dear," said Aunt Sophia.

"Oh, thank you, aunt!" cried the girl gleefully.

"Now, look here, James," said Aunt Sophia; "you will be very, very careful?"

"Of course, auntie."

"And you won't be dancing about in the boat or playing any tricks?"

"No – no – no," said Scarlett, at intervals. "I faithfully promise, though I do not know why."

"You don't know why, James?"

"No, auntie. I never do play tricks in a boat. No one does but a madman, or a fool. Besides, I don't want to drown my little wifie."

"Now, James, don't be absurd. Who ever thought you did?"

"No one, aunt," said Lady Scarlett. "But you will go with us, will you not?"

"No, my dear; you know how I hate the water. It is not safe."

"But James is so careful, aunt. I'd go anywhere with him."

"Of course you would, my child," said Aunt, Sophia shortly. "A wife should trust in her husband thoroughly and well."

"So should a maiden aunt in her nephew," said Scarlett, laughing. "Come, auntie, you shan't be drowned."

"Now, James, my dear, don't try to persuade me," said the lady, pulling up her black lace mittens in a peculiar, nervous, twitchy way.

"I'll undertake to do the best for you, if you are drowned, Miss Raleigh," said the doctor drily. "I'm pretty successful with such cases."

"Doctor Scales!" cried Aunt Sophia.

"Fact, my dear madam. An old friend of mine did the Royal Humane Society's business for them at the building in Hyde Park; and one very severe winter when I helped him, we really brought back to life a good many whom you might have quite given up."

"Doctor, you horrify me," cried Aunt Sophia. – "Naomi, my child, come away."

"No, no: nonsense!" cried Scarlett. "It's only Jack's joking way, auntie."

"Joke!" cried the doctor; "nonsense. The ice was unsafe; so of course the idiots insisted upon setting the police at defiance, and went on, to drown themselves as fast as they could."

"How dreadful!" said Prayle.

"Very, for the poor doctors," said Scales grimly. "I nearly rubbed my arms out of the sockets."

"Kitty, dear, you stay with Aunt Sophia, then," said Scarlett. "We won't be very long away."

"Stop!" cried Aunt Sophia sternly. "Where is it you are going?"

"Up to the lock and weir," said Scarlett. "You and Kitty can sit under the big medlar in the shade till we come back."

"The lock and weir?" cried Aunt Sophia sharply. "That's where the water comes running over through a lot of sticks, isn't it?"

"Yes, aunt, that's the place."

"And you've seen it before?"

"Scores of times, dear."

"Then why do you want to go now?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.