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THE TWO LAWYERS.

CHAPTER I.

ON the beach, near the junction of the Main South Road and Sod Town, in the township of Timaru, N.Z., there stands a two-story wooden building of some fourteen rooms. It is surrounded by a beautiful garden, in which there is evidence of refined taste displayed. The house wears a mournful aspect, as well it might, for its late owner, Charles Lunny Perryman, had breathed his last on the previous evening. The groom and gardener are standing together talking at the stable door; they show more signs of sorrow than are usually depicted on the faces of any of our employés when we are in trouble.

"So he leaves," says John the groom, "all his affairs, I hear, in perfect order."

"So they say," returned Jackson. "He did everything properly ever since I have known him, and his last act has been in keeping with his previous ones, for I never knew or worked for one anyway like him."

"Nor I," returned John; "but I suppose Mr Frank will now carry on his father's practice, for you know he was called to the bar last January, but as yet he has not done any Court business, though he intended relieving his father for his proposed trip to Sydney."

"Yes, so I believe. The son, too, is a thorough specimen of an English gentleman, and will, I am sure, soon be liked as well in the profession as was his father."

"Yes, he must, for who could ever know father or son without liking them. I know I could not from the very first, for they were always so very good and kind, and never said a word to make you feel hurt—not even when one was wrong."

"I wonder now if Mr Frank will keep things on as usual, for I suppose he will at once take affairs in hand, as I believe the principal part is left to him by the will."

"Of that we shall know soon enough; but there is one thing very certain, we shall never have a better master than our late one. All I say is, I am very sorry he is gone, for I have learnt to know now when I've got hold of a good thing, and consequently do not wish to run the risk of any change."

We will now enter the house and see who are the sorrowers, for there are three—Mrs Perryman, Frank, and Maud. Mrs Perryman is a fine specimen of an English lady. She is above the medium height, and her regular, clear cut features show that in her youth she must have been a handsome woman; but a close observer would at once pronounce her too trusting, and also to lack firmness. Maud is a very handsome girl, for she has inherited her mother's good looks, while she was, unlike her, possessed of much firmness and determination of purpose, and could look a difficulty straight in the face, and do all in her power to overcome it. It is necessary that Frank should be described more carefully, as my story has most to do with him. He is scarcely up to the medium height, being about five feet seven, and of stout build. In complexion fair, large full eyes, broad and intellectual forehead, the nose nearly straight and inclined to be Roman, the mouth rather small—in fact, too small for a man, for it showed want of decision. As a man of business, he was much liked for his straightforward manly

way, and nobody could accuse him of having broken faith with anyone.

"Maud, my dear," said Mrs Perryman, "I am sure I do not know what we shall do without your poor dear father. I feel I shall not long survive his loss."

"You must keep up, mother dear; you know we must all go sooner or later, and we have this solace, that our dear father was a good man when alive, and has, thank God, left his family well provided for."

"Oh, Maud, how can you, under the circumstances, think at all about money matters? I do not know I am sure; I would sooner he were here, if we had not a shilling."

"Mother," said Frank, "we must all bow to the decree of Him above, who deemed it best to take our father from us; for it is, to my way of thinking, a sin to dispute which is right or otherwise. He was, as Maud has just said, a good father and husband, and also a good man; for I verily believe that he tried to keep the one commandment of all others—'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you'; and he who holds to that must be good. It is true he very seldom went to church, for you know he did not like the mere display of religion; and further, he considered there was too much hypocrisy with the majority of church-goers. I only trust I may be as good a man. And after all, are we not taught to believe that he is better off? so we should not, under the circumstances, wish him back. Of course we all wish he was not gone, as is but natural; but I see no more reason to repine over the leaving than the coming into the world."

"Ah, Frank," said Mrs Perryman, "you are so much wiser than I, and your father has been with you so much of late that he has imbued you with his good and sensible notions; and, now you speak as you do, I feel much comforted, for of course Maud and I will have you to cheer us up when we are down-hearted, and you will not think of marrying, Frank, will you?"

"Marrying, mother; I have no such thought—in fact, at present I know no lady who would exactly suit me, so you may rest contented there is no probability of my doing otherwise than as you wish."

"Oh, I am so thankful, Frank, and will now leave you for the present, for I must have just a few minutes to myself;" and with this Mrs Perryman left the room.

"Frank," said Maud, "of course, you will continue your father's practice."

"Oh, yes, to be sure I shall; I wish I had had a little more experience, but of course we must abide by the decision of Him above, and never complain."

The housemaid now entered and left a tray, on which were two cards with the names of Mr and Miss Hobart.

"Who are these people, Frank?" asked Maud. "I don't remember hearing of them before."

"They are the new solicitor and his sister, who have not long arrived from Victoria," answered Frank. "I have met Hobart, and asked him to call; but I suppose when he called and found that our dear father was dead, he just left cards, intending to call again."

"Have you seen the sister, Frank?"

"No, Maud, I have not; but they say she is very pretty."

"And what is Mr Hobart like, Frank? Tell me all about him."

"Well then, he is about two inches taller than myself, of rather spare build, hair of a sandy hue, complexion rather florid, the eyes of a dark grey colour, but never does he seem to look you straight in the face, for when you look at him, his eyes seem to wander in another direction; his nose is neither Roman, aquiline, or Grecian, but simply straight up and down; his

forehead is not what you would call a good one, as it declines too much, and tapers off at each side ; the jaw, too, is far too massive, and gives him too much of a bull-dog look. But looks are not to be considered much, as I think him a very nice fellow, and for one reason more than all—he is poor, and he tells you so, for he told me when we had our first chat. He seems, too, to be very candid in his style, and makes you feel as though you had known him ever so long—in fact, you do not seem anyway strange with him after the first five minutes."

"Has he commenced practice yet, Frank?"

"Oh, yes ; but I am told he is too poor to furnish his office. Whale, our head clerk, says that his only seat is a red box, which has on some previous occasion contained spirits! And as to what his table is, Whale says he does not know, as it is completely covered with green baize."

"His must certainly look a very stylish law office ; one would think he would feel ashamed of such furniture."

"On the contrary, he does not seem so, for Whale says he often refers to it, and says that if he can ever find sufficient business, he will buy or have a table and chair made ; 'and,' he continued, 'it will be soon enough to get chairs for clients when I have any, but so far none have turned up.'"

"He must be rather a remarkable man," said Maud. "I almost wish to see him, to hear if he will tell me he is poor. Is he married, Frank?"

"Yes, so I am informed ; but so far his wife has not arrived. She no doubt either awaits his success, or possibly funds to bring her over."

"Poor fellow, I am so sorry for him. What a strange thing that he should be so badly off. Does he drink, or gamble, or how can any solicitor be poor? I thought there never were poor solicitors. How do you account for it, Frank?"

"Well, possibly he has not long passed the bar, and his friends may not be able to help him in any way."

"Ah, true; there may be many reasons one never thinks of until circumstances force them upon us, Frank. When is our poor father's funeral arranged to take place?"

"The day after to-morrow, and the same day his will will be read, and the day after I think I shall try and induce mother and yourself to take a trip to Dunedin, and you can both then if you wish, stay there a week or two, and I will return alone. It will then not be so severe on either mother or you to come home again. What do you think, Maud?"

"What do I think, Frank? I think you are all generosity. You think only of us and never of yourself, for I know you will grieve for the loss of father as much as, or more than any of us; and yet you look after us and neglect yourself, for you will have his memory ever before you when you are always in the house and in the office, where you have been so used to see him."

"True enough, dear Maud, so far; but then, you know, I shall have my business to occupy my thoughts, for of course it must be looked after."

"I know, Frank, that is all very well; but cannot Whale and the other clerks do all that without you, so that you also can stay in Dunedin with us? You require change as much or more than any of us, for you have worked very hard lately—in fact, too hard, for you have been studying very closely; and when our dear father lived you were ever by his side, to the very last moment."

"I did no more than I should have done, and very little at that. But now it is imperative that I should stick close to my work, for my father's last request was that I would do all I possibly could to keep the business together, as he would have liked me to earn a name for myself. And further, you know I must do so for your sake, for I shall have to study very hard

before I can be as proficient as our dear father; and while I am young I must not lose time. So, dear Maud, I must as a favour ask you not to press me, for if our mother gets the notion into her head, we shall never satisfy her without; while, if she does not think of it, she will take our suggestion as a matter of course."

"Very well, Frank, if you wish it shall be so; but I feel you are too generous."

"We will not talk about generosity just yet, Maud, for my generosity is as much for self as otherwise, as I am most anxious to do and keep our poor father's last wish."

* * * * * *

It is the day of the funeral, and the last rites have been performed for the deceased gentleman. Mrs Perryman has retired to rest, as she declared she was quite worn out and could not endure the hearing of the will read, much as Frank and Maud tried to persuade her that she should be present. They are all assembled in the drawing-room, a very spacious apartment, the walls of which are panelled up to the height of 4ft. 6in., and above there are placed specimens of Egyptian statuary, life-size. This gives the room the appearance of a small public hall rather than the drawing-room of a gentleman; but Perryman senior was always considered very eccentric, and had often declared he would not have his house like any other person's. At the one end of the room sits Mr J. G. Frierland, a brother solicitor and an old friend of the late Mr Perryman; he is there to perform the last office to the dead, viz., the reading of the will. Next to him on the right sits Frank, who seems much cast down; next to him again, Maud, who is in tears, for she always manages to keep up best when alone with her brother and mother. The servants are all assembled, for the old gentleman has forgotten none, and unlike most cases of the sort there is no jealousy,

neither Maud nor Frank seeming to trouble how much there is left to anyone else. In the corner of the room, on the right hand of Frank, sits a young lady whom we have not so far observed. She sits in the deep shadow, and is almost out of sight, but we will try and describe her. She is about twenty-one years of age, and her graceful figure more realises the ideal of some famed sculptor than what we generally find in nature. The face, were it not for the wealth of fair hair, the expressive eyes, would not be considered beautiful; still there is something winning about her, and the more one looks the more one must incline to say she has a sweet face. Her face is emblematical of her disposition, for she is indeed a true and whole-hearted girl She appears as we now see her the saddest of all the inmates, but no tear escapes her. She looks in the direction of Frank when she can do so unobserved, and seems to regard him with the fondness of a mother or sister; she appears to try and guard her looks as much as possible, when observed does not seem to notice him at all. She is at present staying as companion to Maud Perryman, for she is an old friend, her sister having been Maud's first governess.

"Now," said Mr Frierland, in a deep, low voice, "if you are ready, I will read the last will and testament of my late dear friend, Charles Lunny Perryman." All being still he commences.

Last Will and Testament of Charles Lunny Perryman, late of Timaru, in the Provincial District of Canterbury, and Colony of New Zealand, and formerly of Hammersmith, London, Barrister and Solicitor.

I, CHARLES L. PERRYMAN, &c., &c., give and bequeath to my dearly beloved wife, Maud Elizabeth, my dwelling house and land, situate at the junction of Main South Road and North Road, Timaru, aforesaid; also all furniture and effects therein; also my farm land of 380 acres (more or less) situate at Salt Water Creek, Timaru, aforesaid, and further, the sum of £5000 now lying in deposit account at the Bank of New Zealand, Timaru.

To my son, Frank William, I give and bequeath all that property in Main South Road, and known as Perryman's Buildings, being section —— r.s. —— ; also all my library, furniture, and effects in and upon the said premises, and further, the sum of £3000, now lying to credit in deposit account in the Bank of New Zealand, Timaru ; and further, the business and goodwill of same, and my blessing.

To Maud, my only daughter, I give and bequeath the annual sum of £400 ; or, in the event of her marrying, the principal, should she so desire it, from which the said annuity is derived, and my blessing.

To Louisa Branscombe, my daughter Maud's companion, I give and bequeath the sum of £1000, and my best wishes for her future welfare, knowing as I do that she is deserving of the best that can befal her.

To each of my household servants I give and bequeath the sum of £50, or a freehold section to that value, at each one's option.

I now having completed this my last will and testament, which is all done by my own hand, also appoint James George Frierland as the sole executor of this my last act and deed.

As witness my hand, &c., &c.

CHARLES L. PERRYMAN.

There is silence in the room when the reading of the will is finished, but now from out of the corner there is a sigh, and then when all turn to look from whence it comes, poor Louie, as she is called in the house, gives another short sigh, and before anyone can go over to her, she falls in a dead faint. This of course prevented any show of emotion from anyone else, as all were now busy in attending to her wants. Maud was the first to pick her up, at least to kneel and clasp her round the neck, saying as she did so, "Oh, my poor Louie, do look up, or I shall fear you are dead, and shall be lost without you." By this time water was brought, and after a quantity had been applied, and her hands gently rubbed by Frank, she gradually opened her eyes, and in a very few minutes was herself again.

"Oh, Maud, Miss Perryman, I beg pardon, I hope you will forgive me for making such a display of my feelings, but I

really could not help it when I thought how good and kind your father always was to me when alive, and further, how kind he is to me at parting. Oh, what a pity, dear Maud, that such kind-hearted people ever die when the world is so much in want of them."

"True, dear Louie, but do not remind me too much of that, or you will make me give way too."

"I will try, Maud, to remember in future; but you will pardon me this time, for you know how foolish and fretful I am."

"I know you, Louie, you are all good intentions, and that is all I wish to know; but we must away to our own rooms. I see Mr Frierland and Frank in close converse, so if we stay here we may interrupt them, and as it is probably business they are discussing, we will avoid disturbing them." With this the two young ladies left the room.

"I do not like the look of the man, Frank," are the first words said, after the two ladies have got clear of the room. "You know it is wrong to express our likes and dislikes without having a knowledge, but I can't help it. That free and easy style is to me only put on for the occasion, and when he tells one how poor he is, depend upon it there is some reason for his being so, as well as method in him telling every one. There can, however, be no reasonable excuse, for he has been a barrister now over five years, and with his ability depend upon it there is a screw loose somewhere."

"How beautiful his sister is," Frank replies, in a mechanical manner, "and how unlike him."

"Yes, Miss Hobart is certainly a fine-looking woman, and to me she looks too good to belong to the same family."

"There now you are going too far, Frierland. She is not like him in feature, I admit, but then it does not always follow that

brother and sister are to be alike in looks, or even in disposition."

"I never saw two of *one family* who were not in some way alike but that there existed a mystery, Frank, and I have, as you know, studied phrenology very hard, and I cannot see any similarity whatever between Hobart and his sister. Hobart to me seems—if you have his head out of sight and only judge him by his acts and deeds so far as we know him—to be a genial good-hearted, confiding fellow; but when I look at his head I can see the cool, calculating, hard man of the world, and even worse faults than that. But I will say no more now, Frank, only be on your guard with him, and although you treat him with all friendliness, keep what I have just told you in sight if you have any business transactions with him."

"Thanks, Frierland, I will, but I must say I think you are mistaken this time."

"I only trust I am, Frank, but you will do well to take notice of what I say."

"Of that you may rest assured, for I know you tell me for my personal good, and I will observe things."

"Well, Frank, I must leave you now, for the next coach to Christchurch, as you know, goes early to-morrow morning, and I wish, as I told you, to have a look at my Temuka property to-day, so if you will make my excuses to your mother and the young ladies I will get away at once; and, Frank, by the way, you have a perfect *gem* of a girl in that Miss Branscombe, or my phrenological study has been time wasted."

"Yes, she is a good girl, I think," answered Frank.

"A good girl; she is one of the best I ever saw, or I am a Dutchman," replied Frierland. "But for the present, good-bye, Frank, and all I have told you to-day try and observe, and time will tell." Time, yes time, the revealer alone of great events,

will show how far Mr J. G. Frierland is right, and how far wrong. Hitherto in his calculations on phrenology he has been very near the mark, but in this case we will see, and to do so we must now turn to another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

"John Hobart, Solicitor and Notary Public," is now written in large letters over the window of one of the offices in Frank Perryman's building, for Mr Hobart has become so intimate with Frank that he has gone as far as to let him have an office, and further, often places work in Hobart's hands, for Frank has inherited a fine practice from his father, and can easily afford to be a little generous. We will now walk in to Frank's office and see what is going on. He is sitting behind an ordinary office table, and on his left hand is Mr Hobart. It is between four and five o'clock p.m., and all the bustle of the day's business is over.

"Well, Frank, you are indeed a lucky man," says Hobart, "to have all this thrown at you, as it were. How very different from my lot. When I had passed my last examination, and was prepared for practice, I was the lawful possessor of the sum of 2s 6d, for I had expended all else, and my father was not then in a position to help me in any way. And do you know, Frank, I have never since had any luck, for as soon as I think I am fairly started, I find myself again a loser in some way, and again I am thrown back; but an old crone in Tasmania once told me that all that had happened would happen—that in the present year I should have the most complete success; so, as the past has come true, I only trust the future may."

"I am sure I trust it may, Hobart, and I shall be only too glad if at any time I can in any way assist you. You may be sure I shall, for since I have known you, although it is certainly but a very short time, still I feel as though we had be acquainted from my childhood, so familiar do I feel with you."

"And I, Perryman, feel similarly towards you; in fact when I first saw you I was under the impression I had known you before. By the way, I see it is five o'clock. I go home now, but if you have no particular place to go to-night I wish you would give me a call. Of course you know my quarters are not at all luxurious, but if you will do us the honour, we shall be glad to see you, for there will be no one there but Clara and myself."

"I shall have much pleasure in looking in if you will not think me intruding," said Frank.

"Not at all, my boy; I know I shall not, and Clara has asked me several times why you do not come up, as she has so few acquaintances here." Frank's cheek blushed visibly at this, and it was very apparent that Hobart observed it.

"I shall then come up to-night," said Frank; "so if you are going now I will walk along with you, for, I presume, you are on your way home."

"Yes, I shall go home now, and before you arrive to-night I shall draft that lease which I have undertaken for you."

"My dear Hobart," said Frank, taking his arm, "you are foolish to bother your head about that to-night, for you can do it at your leisure, and, as you know, if you do require any pecuniary assistance, why, allow me to assist you, as I have before offered to do."

"Frank, as I said before, I am more thankful to you than I can find words to express; but also, as I told you, I will now lay a foundation, and before I use money in any way I will earn it, and then any progress I make I shall be sure of,

for I shall know at least that I owe nothing, and what little I do I will not be working a dead horse."

"I admire your principle, but if you look on things in that light take what I offer you as a gift, for I assure you you are only too welcome."

"Of that I am assured. Thanks all the same for your kind and generous offer, but I have made up my mind, Frank, and if in any business way you can assist me I shall deem it the greatest favour, but I will not take any loan; or, in fact, anything but what I earn."

"Your independence of spirit cannot but be admired, Hobart, and with your principles you are sure of success sooner or later. I shall deem it my duty to render you any other little assistance that lies in my power; and now as I see I am at my gate I will, unless you will come in and have dinner with me, bid you adieu until I see you this evening."

"Until this evening then let it be, and so for the present, adieu," and Hobart, waving his hand, walked on, evidently deep in thought.

When he arrived at home—where he lived or boarded, I should say, for the house and all its contents were the property of the landlord, who resided in a two-roomed place at the rear—just as Hobart was about to enter, the door was opened from the inside and he was met by Clara, his supposed sister, but of this relationship the reader will soon have a very different opinion.

"Ah, John," she exclaims, "I am so glad you have arrived, for I began to think you were never coming."

But here I will pause, and before going further will try and paint for the reader the features of the so-called Miss Hobart. She is in height rather above the usual stature of women, her figure is so perfect that it would alone be sufficiet to make almost any man fall in love with her at first sight; but if her figure

make one admire her, what will her features do? In some cases they may drive one to the highest pitch of joy; or again, under other circumstances, they are enough to drive one mad. But I must let my readers know more and have their own opinion. The nose is of that Grecian type one so very seldom sees; the mouth, which is not to say small, but so beautifully cut, the upper lip slightly curling at each extremity, and the centre slightly rising and forming, as it were, into ripe fruit, so beautifully red is it; the chin seems to be one taper from the forehead down, and in its centre there is the prettiest of dimple; the eyes are in themselves quite enough beauty for any one face, so wonderfully expressive are they, shining like two of the brightest orbs one ever beheld; the complexion, too, is perfection, while on each cheek is a beautiful bright colour that rivals the loveliest of pink roses; the eyelashes are long, and seem always to be drooping, and the eyebrows constitute the only fault (if fault you could call it), for they are, perhaps, too full; the hair is of a very bright auburn, in fact between what vulgar people call red and auburn; her hands are of the smallest you can imagine, with the prettiest of taper fingers.

"And so you missed me for once then, Clara; well, I am both glad and sorry—glad you missed me, and sorry I kept you waiting, but I could not help it, as I stayed talking to that young fool, Frank Perryman; but you know he may, in fact shall be, so useful to me that I must tolerate him at least for the present, but when he has served my purpose he may go to——"

"Stay, John," she said, "be like me and all else."

"No, Clara, not *you*, for apart from all my motives of self-aggrandisement, I love you, though I know I am often too cruel, but the *die* is cast—I am powerless to prevent the issue of events."

"But, John, when will this cease; will it go on for ever, or will there be an end to it before death parts us? You know you

have now promised me on each occasion that a similar affair has happened that it is the last one, but what do I find? I find you again take to the old evil, and all my hopes of returning home are gone, and you are again a beggar—for I can call it by no other name."

"Clara, do not upbraid me now, for I promise you most solemnly that this time I have success before me, and with your aid I will grasp it. Stay," he continued, as she was about to speak, "Frank Perryman will visit us to-night, and already he is in love with you I know — I am sure of it. You must encourage him, aye make him believe you return his love, and then ere long I shall be one of the most respectable firm of Perryman and Hobart—for you know his father has earned for him a name which he, fool that he is, will not long keep."

"Oh, John, have I again to lure on perhaps to some evil this poor young fellow who is, from what you have told me, the very hope of both his aged mother and young sister. Oh, God, why am I not spared this new *sin?*"

"Clara, it must be done, or ——"

"Stay, John, for mercy sake say not that again, for you have said it often enough within the last two years—you might have some mercy."

"Then why do you drive me to it, am I not all kindness but when you provoke me?" And as John Hobart said this he looked a perfect fiend, his eyes seemed to glare almost out of his head. He now walks from the room into the back part of the house, and Clara stands like one in a dream.

"Father, dear father," she exclaims, "how much have I suffered for you now, and still how much more am I to suffer? It would indeed be merciful were one or both of us to die; but, alas, we never die when we would most like to do so. And yet sometimes I feel I love life and this man, whom I should hate

as woman never hated man yet. For has he not been to me my greatest enemy, and have I any room to hope he will be anything else to the end of time; and yet how nice he can be when it pleases him; so much so that no one could help liking, if not loving him. But he comes. I must not let him see I am dreaming, as he terms it, or there will be another display of temper."

"Ah, Clara, am I not a bear sometimes to you? Yes I know I am, but it will soon be over now, and then you shall see much of real happiness. Kiss, dearest, and be friends," and as he stoops and kisses the sweet face, which it seems pollution for him to touch, there seems to be a return of the kiss, which is only given when there exists some love.

"I will not again vex you, John, if I can help it; so if you are ready we will now have dinner, as I wish to dress before Mr Perryman arrives."

While they are partaking of their dinner we will accompany Frank home. He enters the house by the front or hall door, never expecting to meet either his sister or mother, as they have both been away in Dunedin. But just as he is going to his own room a light step creeps up behind him and throwing her arms around his neck kisses him before he knows who it is or where she comes from. He turns, and to his joy sees his sister Maud.

"Why, Maud, when and how did you get home? I never expected to see you to-night."

"Well, Frank, we all three came home in the steamboat which is now lying in the roadstead. We called at your office but found you were gone, and just at the moment Mr Tumman's buggy came up with himself driving, and he offered to drive us up, which offer we gladly accepted, and here we are."

"Well, I am glad you are home again, for truth to tell I have missed you much; but I am sorry to say I have made an ap-

pointment out to-night, so I shall not be able to stay at home with you."

"Oh, never mind that, Frank, you will not be out late I know, so I shall stay up and have a chat after your return. Ma," said Maud, a moment after, "Frank is home, but he has an appointment out after dinner, so we shall not see much of him to-night."

"Is he well now?" asked Louisa, who had also been with them on their trip.

"Yes, Loo, he appears to be well, thanks; and, in fact, as you know, in this respect he is very fortunate, for he enjoys the best health." They now all adjourn to dinner, for Frank has joined them, and I must leave them and ask the reader to go back with me to another and very different scene.

CHAPTER III.

It is midnight, and the moon is just beginning to peep from behind the hills, for it is but rising. The night looks as though it was going to be stormy, for every now and then the masses of cloud which are to be seen drift on, and for the time completely obscure the little light from the moon. The place is between two very high hills, and in the distance can be seen dense thickets of timber. On the edge of the nearest of these stands a mean-looking hut of only two rooms, and from the window of one of these two rooms comes a light which shines but faintly. Occasional gusts of wind are the only sounds to be heard, save the occasional cry of the curlew and the plover. We will look in and see the interior of the dreary-looking hut, which, although very rude in its construction, shows an unmistakeable display of feminine taste. The room which is entered from the front door is small indeed, but its interior is very unlike what one would expect to find in such an outlandish

place. In one corner stands a neat and clean-looking bed, made on a stretcher; under the window there is a table made from four round poles driven into the ground, the top of them being covered with slabs which have been so neatly dressed with an adze or some such tool that they look rather as though they had been planed and polished; in the gable end of the building is built a large colonial fire-place—colonial, I say, for I don't think any other part of the world has such rude-looking chimneys. The fire-place is nearly the whole width of the building, and on the night in question there burns a large wood fire; the walls of the room have been neatly papered with pictures from illustrated papers—cuts from the *Young Ladies' Journal*, &c., &c.—but all so neatly arranged that much taste must have been expended on them; on each side of the fire stands a three-legged stool fashioned after the same manner as the table; in one corner of the hut is fixed a triangular bookshelf, made with three pieces of boards—each corner of these having a hole bored through, and cord running from hole to hole and corner to corner, which is knotted about twelve inches apart, and so forms a bookshelf. These shelves are also papered with a light-brown wrapping paper, which has been varnished with what is termed "colonial varnish"—made from a little of any kind of spirit, and mixed with some of the gum which is very plentiful in Victoria and Tasmania. There is also in the room, in the opposite corner, another smaller row of shelves, on which are placed the crockery and some cooking utensils. The floor is of earth, but has been so carefully watered and kept that it is very hard and solid; around the fire the floor is whitewashed, as is also the whole of the interior of the fire-place. On one of the stools which are mentioned as standing beside the fire, sits a man of at least forty years. He is dressed in clothing of the cheapest, but all he wears is as neat and clean as possible. He is in features a good-looking old man, but he seems to have something continually on his mind. His general appearance is that of a man of culture; his hair is turning grey, and this gives him a much more aged appearance than he would

otherwise have; he is above the medium height, and has been good-looking. As he sits looking steadily into the fire, he hears a footstep, at which he exclaims, "At last she comes!" The door opens, and there appears a girl whom the reader will doubtless soon recognise. The old man draws from his pocket an old English watch, and, looking at it, says, "Clara, my girl, whatever induced you to stay so late? It is now ten past twelve."

"I did not think, papa, it was so late as that, or I would have hurried, but just as I was leaving the town I met Mr Hobart, and he came along with me, and perhaps we did not come as quickly as we might; but you must forgive me this time." As she spoke her face, which was sweetness itself, seemed to be illuminated with some joyful news. The father, for such he was, did not seem to join her in the pleasurable thoughts, for at the mention of Hobart's name he frowned, and looked anything but pleased.

"Mr Hobart, eh?" he replied; "so he saw you home, my girl, did he?"

"Yes, father, and he is now waiting outside to speak to you, for he would not come in, as he said he wanted to remain there and speak to you alone, if you would join him for a few minutes. Don't keep him, papa, it is so late."

"No, my girl, I will not keep him, nor shall I be long; so you may wait up for me, as I wish to speak to you before you go to bed."

With this, Matthew Grant, for such was his name, rose, took his hat from a nail, and walked outside, where he was at once joined by John Hobart.

"Good evening, Matthew; it is rather late to disturb you, I know, but I will not keep you very long." The two now walked on together for some minutes, John Hobart doing all

the talking. Suddenly, old Matthew said, "Hold, friend; what would you ask of me next? I would sooner she were dead, or married to one of the idiots of the town than such. Go, John Hobart, and do your best and your worst, but if you ever make such a proposal to me again, one of us will not live to see the light of another day, of that I promise you. You are," he continued, "a true specimen of what your father was, and you, above all other men, are allowed to be a member of the bar! Oh, how much must it degenerate, sooner or later, through you; of that I am but too certain."

"Very well," exclaims Hobart, "we will see if you dare not only insult me personally, but also violate the memory of my dead father. Look to yourself, Grant, and also your daughter!"

"Aye, Hobart, I can easily do that. I know how much you would do if you could, but I fear you not; I shall never do aught to place myself in your power—for I know I may expect no mercy."

The old man now staggered rather than walked to the humble hut. Clara, as he had requested, was sitting waiting for him. He took the spare stool, and for some minutes he spoke not, and Clara did not disturb him; he looked flushed and excited.

"Clara," at last he said, "are you fond of that man who was here just now? Tell the truth, my girl, as you have always done. Are you fond of, or do you love John Hobart?"

The poor girl started at the abruptness of the question and for a second or two looked confused, indeed, almost frightened. She gradually recovered herself, and at last said, "Father, I will tell you no untruth. I do like John sometimes; then again at other times I like him less. But he seems always to have a power over me, for when he so wishes it I am almost become his slave; but this does not occur often."

"Well, my girl, I only regret that he is not what he should be, then I should be pleased to speak to you differently than I must now; but, my girl, there are some things I must say to you; in fact, there are many things that should be said, and as I am now on the subject I will go on. You must not, Clara, under any circumstances, think more of John Hobart. There exist the best reasons possible for you to discontinue altogether even your acquaintance with him."

"Father, why is this? Only this evening he proposed to me, and you have seen me with him repeatedly, and never until now even objected to what was going on. He is in a position far above me—for of course I know my actual standing in society. The subject is one that I would not willingly refer to; but when you speak to me as you have just done, it seems so incredible that I feel inclined to say many things that I would not think of otherwise."

"Clara," exclaimed the old man, "pray do not you, above all others, remind me that I am Matthew Grant, the convict, for it is too much to listen to from the child I love as I love my life; aye, more, for gladly would I part with the one to secure the happiness of the other. But I have no desire to parade my virtue, whether I possess it or not, and I had no intention of making any mention of it when I first spoke to you this evening—so, enough of that. What I wish to speak to you about is John Hobart and my past life, of which you know nothing; and further, of Hobart senior, and the reasons why you should think nothing of his son, for you can never be more to him than you are now; but enough of that."

Clara was in tears, but she now, at the last words, held up her head and gave her father a look which was full of enquiry, but she spoke not, her heart was too full to ask any questions. She had learned to love John Hobart, and to love him too well.

"I will explain all to you, Clara," he said, "but let me tell

you what I choose first. I would ten thousand times sooner spare you the pain of telling you at all; but that it must be, for it is the inevitable."

"Father, oh father," sobbed the poor girl, "why did you not tell me sooner that it must not be? Then I could have endured it; but now I know not what to say, neither do I know your reasons for speaking as you do, but I fear you have reason or you would not speak. I trust there may be some chance of an explanation putting all matters right."

"There is no chance of an explanation, nor will he ever offer one, for he knows I know too much. I almost wish I did not, for secrets are always a burden to one. But now, my child, if you will be patient I will relate to you some of my past life, and in time come to what I have to say about him; and when I have finished you will no doubt be able to look at things in a different light."

"As you will, father; I will do my best to follow you in all things, for whatever you may be in other respects, I have no reason to complain."

"Well, Clara, you know of course that thirteen years ago this very month, and on the 21st, whenever that may be, I was tried in England and found guilty of concealing or having concealed in my house a quantity of plate and other valuables belonging to one Mr Lurtonshaw, in whose employ as Estate Agent I had been for some eight years. My position with him was one of trust, and I have no doubt all who thought and believed me guilty felt no mercy for me whatever, as they concluded that I fully deserved all I got. But I thank God now as I did then, that I am innocent, and but the victim of one of the basest plots that ever was laid for man. I must not anticipate in relating the events, but proceed. The first I ever knew was one evening your mother and I had just finished tea, and you, then only four years old, had kissed me and gone to bed, when your poor mother rose to answer a knock at the front door.

She hurried back to tell me that Constable Brown, of the village of Crawford, Kent, wanted to see me. 'Wants to see me,' I answered, 'what does he want of me?' 'I cannot say,' she replied, and I arose and went into the front room.

"'Good evening, Grant,' said Constable Brown; 'I regret having a very unpleasant duty to perform, but you know some one must do it.'

"'Quite so,' I replied, never fearing for one instant that what he said had any ill omen for me; 'pray say what you have come about, do not mind me.'

"With this the Constable went again to the door and called his friend, who turned out to be a detective from London. When they both returned, Brown said: 'Now, Grant, we have a search warrant to look for some property that has gone astray from your employer's, so, if you will be advised by me, you will not put any obstacles in our way.'

"'I shall not,' I replied, 'for I know you will not find anything here that should not be.' With this they commenced their work. Your mother, Clara, was greatly troubled, declaring all the time that she knew there must be some villainy at work. I, never suspecting anything, told her to fear not, as they would soon satisfy themselves and go. We had so far followed the constables round, and they now, having finished all on the floor we were on, asked me for the key of the coal-cellar and kitchen, which were both down-stairs. The kitchen communicated with the floor we were on by a flight of stone steps, and the coal-cellar was off the kitchen and always locked, and the key was usually hung up behind the kitchen door. We now descended the kitchen stair, and after searching it they asked for the key of the coal-cellar, which I at once went to get from behind the door, but to my surprise I found it gone.

"Brown now said, 'If you have it, Grant, you had better give it up, for we cannot leave without completing our search.'

"I assured him I had not got it, and further that I knew not where it was; but I added, I suppose the servant girl, who is away on a short visit to her friends at the Castle, must have it with her.

"'Then,' said Brown, 'we had better break open the door.'

"'Don't do that,' I said, 'as we shall soon be able to get the key.' 'I cannot wait here,' said Brown, 'so here goes,' and, turning to the detective, he said, 'give us a lift.'

"I again (as I saw after very foolishly) asked him to wait; but they now seemed more determined than ever, for, with this, they at once tried to force the door.

"After trying several times, they then asked me to assist them, when I again asked them to wait and I would soon get the key.

"At this Brown said, 'Now, Grant, I can see you know what we want is here, and you are obstructing us; so if you do not at once lend us a hand, I shall use this in evidence against you.'

"I replied to this most indignantly, and told them if they thought so they had better prove it, and that I would not lend them any further assistance. With this I left the kitchen, and went up stairs, feeling in anything but an enviable frame of mind. I had been there but a few seconds when I heard your mother coming up stairs, and the others after her. They all managed to get to where I was in our bed-room about the same time.

"'They have found the things,' said your mother, and as she said so she sat down almost powerless, for of course she knew that something was wrong.

"Brown now said, 'Grant, I shall, much as I regret it, have to arrest you for having the stolen property in your possession, and I shall also have to search further to see if I can find anything more here.'

"'Do what you please,' I replied, for I knew not what to say.

"They now commenced again to look about the room, and the first thing they found was a key lying on the dressing-table. The London detective asked me what door it belonged to. I looked, and to my horror saw that it was the key of the coal cellar we had been looking for. 'It is,' I replied, 'the key we have been looking for.'"

"'Oh, oh,' said they both in a breath. 'I shall go and try it,' said the London man, which he did, soon returning, saying it was the key of the cellar.

"I was now taken to the station-house, and of course the rest, which you know, soon followed, as the circumstantial evidence was so strong. There did not, I could see, remain a doubt as to my guilt, and I alone, as I thought then, knew how innocent I was. My master came once to see me, stating his regret at my folly, having the comfortable home I had. I, of course, declared my innocence, and begged of him to believe me; but I could see my words had no effect upon him. In due course I was found guilty, and sentenced to be transported for life. Your poor mother managed to be at the court on the day of the trial, and when I received my sentence she was so overcome that she fainted, and of course was insensible to what followed. The judge, in passing sentence, gave me a terrible reckoning up, and told me that I might consider myself fortunate that I did not suffer for my crime with my life, for the law allowed such a crime could be so punished, but that in consideration of the jury recommending me to mercy (for some unaccountable reason, as he could see no extenuating circumstances in the case); but he had taken their recommendation into consideration, and trusted it would in my after life be a warning to me. I was allowed to see your poor mother once more before I was removed, and I shall never forget that interview, for she, poor darling, (here Grant nearly broke down) certainly seemed afraid

to leave me lest some new harm should befal me. She at last was fairly pushed away from the room where she saw me, but not before she had promised me most solemnly that she would ere long manage by some means or other to join me. I arrived here after a most miserable passage, and by the same ship came the father of John Hobart. He is dead now, so I do not wish to say much of him; but nothing that I or any other person could say would be to his credit, for he was one of the most heartless scoundrels I ever met. He was always in trouble, and he liked to get others into trouble too. On the voyage he tried to incite the other convicts to rebel, mutiny, take possession of the ship, murder all the officers and crew, and sail for some other port and commence operations as pirates. He found he could not get any one to join him. There were two other poor fellows, who I am inclined to think were unjustly there, tried to dissuade him from such an attempt; in fact talked so much against his project to the others that I think to that fact alone is due his non-success. Against these two he laid information to the officers, and swore that they, and they alone, were the instigators of the plot. However, he luckily found no support in his evidence, so the case fell through, or the unfortunate fellows would in all probability have suffered death. This is the kind of man the father was; and, from what I will tell you later on, you will, I think, conclude that the son is no better. But before I come to his part of the story I will finish my own. Your mother managed after the first eighteen months of my time had expired to get a passage out here, but so far was she debilitated that she only lived to finish the year, as she landed on the third day of December and died on the first day of January. From her I learnt to know how I had been made the victim of a plot; but as we had no substantial evidence to corroborate our own knowledge of the villainy of another, I had to submit to my lot. I know it must be painful for you to hear the facts, but still I think, Clara, you should know them, for it will give you an idea of the villainy some men will be guilty of to gain their end. Your mother was the daughter of

a fairly well-to-do tenant farmer, and before my marriage with her she had proposals made to her by my employer, Mr Lurton-shaw. These proposals she rejected with scorn, as would every honest girl; but he, thinking his position exalted, thought she would look upon them differently. However, to be brief, she would not listen any more to his temptings, and threatened to tell her father the nature of his proposals if he did not desist. About this time I had taken service under him as his agent, and as he was possessed of considerable property my position was envied by many. I was allowed the very house where I removed from to come here, and was also allowed other little pickings, which made my position comfortable enough. I at first kept a servant, who acted as housekeeper for me, and shortly after I had lived there I met and became attached to your mother, and we were looked upon by the villagers as engaged, and in fact such was in reality the case. No sooner did this come to the ears of my employer, than he again made overtures to her, and this time when she rejected him he became so passionately jealous that he even proposed marriage; but this she, as before, declined, telling him she was engaged to be married to me, and that she intended to fulfil her engagement. He then became furious, and swore that should she ever marry me she would live to regret it. His threats were unheeded, and in due course we became man and wife. Shortly after this he decided to visit other parts of the world, and for nearly three years we neither saw nor heard anything of him. I knew nothing of what I have told you until after, for your mother always feared to inform me, lest I might do something that I should live to regret. After his return (you were then a child of one year) he, it seems, made proposals again to your mother, of ccurse of an improper nature, and when she threatened to tell me of his conduct he declared he would ruin both of us if she did. Things went on in this way for some time—he, whenever chance offered, renewing his suit, and at last it would appear that he decided on taking other steps, for the next event that happened was my arrest. Now so great was his villainy that even while I was

lying in prison awaiting my trial, he again urged his suit, and further promised that if your mother would consent that he would not appear against me. But neither threats nor entreaties prevailed with her, and he evidently then came to the conclusion that it would be different when I was away. After my removal from the country, he offered her the position of housekeeper, and in fact tried to attain his ends, but to no purpose; and at last, as I tell you, your unfortunate and broken-hearted mother arrived at the port of Hobart Town in such a weak state that she only lived to tell me what I have just narrated to you. I have told you this, Clara, not for any motives of self-aggrandisement, but simply to let you know that by all the rights we hold most sacred, you are of better parents than he of whom we have just been speaking. And now I will tell you, Clara, of John Hobart."

"Father," said Clara, "what became of Mr Lurtonshaw? Surely he does not live to enjoy health and happiness, and you are to suffer on here till God alone knows when."

"No, Clara, no; he did not live on to exult over my downfall, for scarcely had your mother landed here when we received news that some ten days after she left home he was thrown from his horse when out hunting, and was picked up quite dead, the fall having broken his neck."

"Oh, father, what a sin it seems that he was not allowed to live to repent, and clear you of this awful charge, for I suppose there are no others living who are ever likely to do so."

"Not so far as I know, but of course I am ignorant who were implicated."

"Father," said Clara, rising and crossing over to him, and placing both her hands upon his neck, "how you have suffered, and I, too, with the rest of the world, have always concluded you were guilty. Oh, father, say you forgive me, for how much do I feel that I require forgiveness."

"My child, you are forgiven before you ask, if any forgiveness is needed; but such is not the case. You could never think otherwise than that I was guilty, for you had none to tell you, nor have I spoken of my suspicions to anybody, for I always deemed it best to wait patiently, and if at any time good news should arrive, it will be all the more acceptable."

"And mother, too," sobbed Clara, "oh, how terribly were you treated for your truth and honesty; but it is only another illustration of the sinful ways of this world."

"Do not cry, my child," said Matthew, "there may be many better days in store for you."

"I wish not, father, for happy days. Why should I ever deem myself worthy of them when you and mother have suffered so much. Oh, how I wish I had been old enough to bear part of the punishment. No, father, I am willing to do and suffer now for you, for why should I too not take my share."

"Clara, my girl, you are young, and must not talk about suffering. It is to be hoped you may have all happiness, for we have had enough of the other for all."

"Father, from this day, believe me, I shall never shrink from aught I can do to save you trouble or pain. Have you not suffered for others, and have I not been guilty of a great sin in believing you as guilty as others did, without asking you."

"Enough, Clara; I must now pass on to the more important part of my story. There is some more to relate which to me is worse than anything that I have told you so far."

"Then, father, I would ask of you one more act of generosity. Will you allow me until to-morrow evening before you say more, for I feel that I have heard enough for one day?"

"As you will, my child, it shall wait. One day can make little or no difference."

Little did Matthew Grant know how much trouble this trifling delay would cause to her who was dearer to him than life itself. But it is beyond the power of man to see into futurity, or Grant would never have agreed to the request of his daughter. To slightly alter the words of the greatest of authors—there is a tide in the affairs of man, which if not taken at the flood, leads him to the very devil.

CHAPTER IV.

The castle of the late Lurtonshaw, whom Matthew Grant had so much reason to hate, is situated in Crawford, Kent, and thither I must ask my readers to accompany me. Another of the same name is now the possessor of the estate, but this time a better and wiser man. The servants are, in nearly every case, the same who occupied their positions in the time of the late squire, for the successor has considered all things, and out of respect to the memory of his deceased relative he has endeavoured to keep all the old servitors, and also all the old tenants. He has long since earned a name for liberality and consideration for all around him. The part of the castle with which we have to do is in the servants' quarters, a small but very comfortably-furnished room, in which are placed two beds. Both of these seem to be in use, and now at eleven in the morning one of them is occupied by a woman of about 38 years, who has all the appearance of having but a short time to remain in this world. She is extremely restive, and every now and then moves and exclaims, "Has he come yet?" to an old motherly-looking woman who sits at the bed-side trying to comfort the patient with an occasional kind word.

"No, Agnes, he has not come yet; but he will be here soon, and then you will be comforted. Keep of good heart, my child."

"Mrs Ferris," observes the invalid, "the doctor said I could not live, you know, so that I ought to ease my conscience; don't you think I ought?"

"Yes, my child," answers the old dame; "but do not get uneasy. He will soon be here, and then you will feel better when you have spoken to him, for he will soon explain away all your trouble."

"No, Mrs Ferris, he cannot explain it away, no one can do that. Oh, I have been so wicked. Thirteen long years, but how I have suffered at times; and then, you know, she often comes to see me. Ah, she looks so reproachfully at me, too, but I could not help it, Mrs Ferris, for I too loved him, and I was fool enough to think that doing wrong would help me to get him."

"Now, like a good child, don't excite yourself, it will only make you worse. Keep quiet, as I must leave you now for two or three minutes, and we'll give you some beef tea and you will feel stronger."

"Neither beef tea nor anything else will make be better, Mrs Ferris. Oh, no, the only thing that will cure me is death. I know it now. I might have lived and been better; but I was selfish, and he, too, tempted me, for he promised gold and revenge, and I grasped at both; and now—now——."

With this she lay quite still, and the nurse, thinking she was but a little light-headed, left her to go to the kitchen and prepare some food for the invalid.

"How is your patient now?" asks Mr Lurtonshaw, who meets the nurse just as she is leaving the door. He has just come along the passage with the sole intention of asking after the sick one.

"Thanks, sir, she is very low; the doctor thinks she will not last another twenty-four hours. She is very feverish now and again, and sometimes I think she is delirious, for she talks inces-

santly about being wicked, and also says something about being tempted thirteen long years ago. She asked the doctor, when he told her she would die, to send over the minister, for she said she could not die until she had said what she had to say."

"Poor girl," he answered, "I will see to this;" and he left the nurse, proceeded at once to the butler's pantry, and requested him to see that the groom was sent over to the parsonage to fetch Mr Cruikstan, the Church of England clergyman.

While the groom is away on his errand, we will return to the sick room.

Mrs Ferris has just come back to her charge, who looks up and says impatiently, "Not come yet, Mrs Ferris? What a time he is."

"He will soon be here now, child. Keep quiet, and you will be better soon. Try and take this, it will do you good."

"No, thanks, I do not want it; but, Mrs Ferris, I am not as you told master, delirious. I heard you, but I am not; no, I must keep sensible a little longer, for I have much to do yet. Master is a good man! I only wish my last master had been as good, and then——"

At this the door gently opens, and Mr Lurtonshaw, after faintly knocking, walks quietly in.

"How is she, nurse? Better I hope."

"No, sir," the invalid replies, "I shall never be better, only in mind. But how I do long to do justice; and, sir, to do that I must say something of your late relative. You will forgive me, sir—say you will forgive me, for you know it must be said."

"I shall be only too glad for you to do any one justice, as I think you know," was Mr Lurtonshaw's answer, and as he spoke the footman announced Mr Cruikstan's arrival.

"Show him this way! Show him this way"! says Mr Lurton-

shaw, and almost immediately Mr Cruikstan enters the room, and after shaking hands and enquiring after the health of the host, which he evidently considered of more moment than that of the invalid.

"I am well, thank you; but there is one here unwell both in body and in mind, who wants your attention, I think, at once."

"Certainly," returned Cruikstan, rather piqued at Mr Lurtonshaw's tone; but he at once crossed over to the bed-side.

"I think, nurse, you and I had better now retire," said Mr Lurtonshaw.

"Not you, sir. I want you to do me one more kindness before you go, if you will," asks the invalid. "The nurse may go, if you wish, sir, but not you, please."

"Very well, then. Nurse, if you will leave us for a little we will call you if necessary"

"Now, my girl," said Mr Cruikstan, "what can I do for you? As you wished Mr Lurtonshaw to stay, I suppose you have something to tell me. Is it so?"

"Yes, sir, I have much to say, both to my own and another's shame. But it is only right that justice should at last be done to an innocent man who was thirteen years ago transported for life, and all through me."

"Thirteen years," both the listeners exclaimed in a breath; "What can you mean?"

"I mean," answered the invalid, "that Matthew Grant, now a convict on Van Dieman's Land, is as innocent as either of you; and that my late master, Mr Lurtonshaw, and I put the stolen property on his premises to procure his conviction."

"Good gracious, can this be?" exclaimed the minister.

"Had we not better have pen and ink brought," added Mr Lurtonshaw. "This, I think, must be taken down."

"Yes, sir, it certainly must; and a magistrate will, I presume, be also necessary," answered Cruikstan; and Mr Lurtonshaw left the room to give the necessary orders.

"Now," said the squire in his return to the chamber, with the writing materials in his hands, "we had, I think, better take down what she has to say, so that when the magistrate arrives we can read it over to her, and he can attest."

"Certainly, sir," said Cruikstan; "you are far more clear on the matter than I. I feel overcome, for, I am sure, you would prevent, if possible, your relative's name being brought up again."

"There are those living, Mr Cruikstan, who demand our immediate attention; let justice first be done to them. So far as we can see, a great crime has been committed, and it is our duty to proceed with the matter in hand, instead of wasting idle words in lamentation over the dead, who would, if living, be now suffering the penalty his villainy merited."

"Certainly, sir; I did but speak out of consideration for your relative."

"And unfortunately," answered Mr Lurtonshaw, "I see no reason, I regret to say, for any commiseration in the matter."

Mr Cruikstan now seemed fairly silenced, for he at once proceeded with the writing materials to the bed-side, saying, "Now, if you will state all you have to tell slowly, I will take it down, and then justice to the innocent can be done."

CHAPTER V.

The residence of John Hobart is not in the least aristocratic; in fact Timaru at the time of which I am writing did not possess many aristocratic residences, for it was then in its infancy. However, he had a room which answered the purpose of dining-room, drawing-room, sitting-room—indeed the room in question was used for all, or nearly all, purposes. Dinner has just been removed, and John Hobart and Clara await the arrival of their expected guest. They have not long to wait, for he is too impatient to look once more upon Clara's face and form, with which he has become infatuated, not to be punctual.

"John," said Clara, "will my poor father ever be allowed to leave Tasmania, think you?"

"I fear not," said Hobart. "You know he was first of all sentenced for life, and of course the new charge against him, which, although they could not proceed with because they never got my evidence, they yet hold it as a black mark against him."

"But, John, I assure you he was not guilty the first time; for the very last night you were at our hut he told me all the particulars."

"I know not, Clara, if he were guilty or not of the first offence with which he was charged. I do know, however, that the one he committed the day we left, I could prove against him; but you saved him by your compliance with my request."

"Oh, that he could know, poor old man, why I left as I did, then I should feel somewhat comforted; but for him never to know—oh, it is bitter indeed!"

"But, girl, why do you for ever harp on this one subject? Am I not kind to you? are you not respected as my sister? and

have you not saved your father from the gallows? What more do you wish? You say you felt deeply indebted to your father, now you have repaid him; in fact made him your debtor."

"I made him my debtor? No, I have not—not even were I to part with life for him; for, say what you will, John Hobart, I shall never believe you about my father's last act of crime, were you to prove it against him."

"As you will, I care not. Do you but complete my arrangement with Frank Perryman, and then you may, if you choose, return to your much-injured parent."

"But, John, what have I not to do that is fiendish to accomplish what you desire? I have to lure this young man by my falseness, to induce him to give me his love under the pretence that I care for him, when I must in return but trample his affections under foot."

"You need do nothing of the kind. If you think so much of this boy greenhorn, why, after I have accomplished my purpose, you can marry him by all means."

"What, ruin him first then marry him so that he may have the object of his hate, as I must be when the knowledge comes, to curse and loathe. Why am I to be thus your tool for ever? What wrong have I ever done you, John, that you should not show me some consideration?"

"If you do not like to do as I ask you, don't. We will allow the matter to drop then, and to-morrow's post shall take my evidence, which will convict your father; and then, when you have relieved yourself of the trouble of watching over him, you can undertake to nurse Frank Perryman, as I see you are evidently desirous of doing."

"John, oh, John, talk not of evidence. I will do all I can, but spare me if possible, for the thing is detestable."

"Very well, that's settled; but now leave me for a few minutes, as I see Perryman near the house. You can let us have ten minutes together before you return."

Clara now left the room, and John Hobart rose and opened the door to meet and welcome his guest.

"I am glad you have arrived, Perryman, for I began to think you regretted your promise, and would not come; and, do you know, I have become accustomed to look upon your visits as my only pleasure. Pray, be seated; Clara will join us shortly, and in the meantime I shall have a cigar. Will you join me, Frank?"

"With pleasure, if the smoke will not annoy your sister when she returns."

"Not in the least; she is so used to it that she rather likes it than otherwise."

They now both smoke on in silence for some time, each of them busy with their thoughts; the one plotting and designing, the other thinking of how he can do what is right, and trying at all times to benefit his fellow-man. Each of these men take different walks in life; the one loves to commit everlasting sin, the other ever trying to do good.

"Mr Hobart," says Frank, "why not obtain a more suitable house than this one? for I am sure Miss Hobart must be very uncomfortable here."

"Frank, as I said before, I shall live only up to my means, which at present do not admit of my increasing my expenditure. When I am in a position to do so, I shall."

Clara now entered the room, and, after asking after Frank's health, took a seat beside him.

"You must come and see my sister Maud, Miss Hobart. I am sure you will get on famously together."

"I shall be most happy to do so, Mr Perryman, whenever your sister returns."

"She has returned this evening from Dunedin, so if you will allow me I shall say you will call to-morrow."

"Very good, then, I will do so with pleasure."

"And," said Frank, "you may as well come early; and Hobart, you and I can join the party at dinner. What say you?"

"I shall be only too happy, Frank."

At this juncture a knock was heard at the front door, which Hobart answered, and on his return to the room said that business would call him away for some little time, but he would be back as soon as possible.

Frank and Clara were now left alone. For some seconds neither of them spoke, both seemed to be busy with their own thoughts. Clara, no doubt, in her heart, was thinking if it would not be better to make Frank cognisant with her case, and ask his assistance. Well would it have been for him and her had she done so. And Frank, what is he thinking of as he sits, never taking his eyes off the face he has now learned to love? He is thinking and wondering how she will hear what he has decided to say; whether she will reject him, or if she will take the proposal kindly, and merely take time to consider. However, he has evidently made up his mind, for he takes one more fond look, and then taking her hand, which lies listlessly in her lap, he says:—

"Miss Hobart, if what I am going to say appears too premature on my part, or otherwise does not accord with your views, be not angry with me, but believe me that all I may say or offer is said or offered to you in hopes of it being for our mutual good. I have, Miss Hobart, learned to love you, and I trust you will allow me to try by my future acts to show that I am worthy of your love; in fact, to allow me to try and induce you to re-

ciprocate my feelings. I know, Miss Hobart, I am not one of the brightest of men, and you may have met many in your travels who are more clever, or who appear to be so; but, believe me, if you will allow me, I will show in the time to come that I am, at least by my honesty of purpose, worthy of your affection. Be in no hurry, dear Miss Hobart, in giving me your reply, for although I am most anxious for your answer, I will patiently wait—only give me permission to see you sometimes, and I will try to be satisfied."

"Mr Perryman," says Clara, with her eyes cast down and a very confused look upon her face, "believe me, I am not, I assure you, worthy of the very generous offer you have made me. But in any case, as you have kindly allowed me time, I will, as soon as possible, consider your offer and give you my answer."

"Thanks, Miss Hobart, many thanks; and you will call and see my sister Maud to-morrow."

"Yes, Mr Perryman, I shall; but I trust you have carefully considered all things before you made me this generous offer."

"Considered! Dear Clara—pardon me for the familiarity—yes, I have considered, and know that I love you, and that is all I want to know. And now, as your brother is away, perhaps I had better leave the matter where it is, and as he will shortly return, I will retire, in order that you may mention the subject to him. When I see him to-morrow I will speak to him, and learn if he has any objection."

Frank then rose, and after wishing Clara good night, with many very warm pressures of the hand, and a look on his face that plainly said how much he would like to fold her in his arms, took his departure.

He had scarcely got clear of the front gate when John Hobart, from the room next the one he had just left, came into Clara s.

"Well done, Clara, my girl, you said just enough, and not a word too much; but I almost regret that you have promised to visit his sister, as he may get you to make promises too soon. We must be careful, however, and then all will be well."

"John, I do wish you would do this work without my interference. How I do hate to act the deceitful part you have given me to play."

"I care not what you like or dislike. It must be done, and you must do your share. Our arrangements now are mutual, and we must both either sink or swim."

"Would to God I would sink at once into oblivion, and so end my miserable career."

"And how about the career of Matthew Grant. What do you propose to do with that—sink that also?"

Clara at this drew herself up to her full height, her eyes flashing, and her breast heaving, and said fiercely: "John Hobart, dare you threaten to injure one hair of the head of him, so surely will that hour be your last or mine. You continually hold that as a threat over me, and on every occasion that we refer to our arrangements you, like the coward you are, you try intimidation. Now, once for all, I give you promise for promise, I will aid you to do your accursed work, in consideration of your promise to protect and befriend him. Let this suffice, without you referring to it again; but in no case will I ever see or know you to injure him without having full and ample revenge. So help me, God!" With this she sailed majestically from the room, and John Hobart was too much surprised, in fact frightened, to attempt to stop her.

"So ho, my lady, you will! Ah, by Jove, but you must be held in hand a little better; and yet I think it will be almost better to coax you, but we shall see. I shall certainly do what I think the best. I am now twenty-nine years of age, and ever since I have been a man I have made signal failures, for the want of

policy and a little soft soap. But, never again, oh! no, not if I quite know what I am doing. I shall ever in future hold a candle to the devil, for I see others succeed through following this course, and why should not I?"

CHAPTER VI.

We must now return to Van Dieman's Land, and poor Matthew Grant, in order to give some explanation as to how Hobart got Clara away.

On the morning following the night on which Grant imparted to Clara the story of his troubles in England, the old man, as usual went to his daily employment, for he was an assigned hand to one of the holders of a sheep run. Now, it so happened that he was sent early that morning to do some business in Launceston, which would take him all that day and part of the next. The same evening a barque was to sail from Hobart Town to Melbourne, and Hobart, being aware of these circumstances decided to take advantage thereof. Accordingly, about 9 a.m., he made his way to the hut of Matthew Grant, where, of course, he found Clara alone.

After the usual exchange of words, Hobart said, "Clara, you know I love you, for I have oftimes told you. You know also that I would at any time do anything to save you, and now I am in a dilemma. Your father and I last night had a few words when I pressed my suit for you, but still I did not think there existed any animus between us. I was mistaken, however, for early this morning he came over to my place of business, and luckily there was no one in the front office. He made his way straight through to the office I always occupy, but unfortunately I was not there. Our chief, Mr Lorridge, was sitting at my table correcting some lease proofs, and your father with one bound, evidently thinking it was me, struck him from behind,

before I could interfere. I came in just at the time he knocked him senseless at my feet. When he discovered his mistake he seemed perfectly powerless, so I said to him, 'Fly, Matthew, go home, and to your work us usual, and I will not divulge to a soul what has occurred; and if I should ever again seem to you other than a friend think how I am saving you now.' Your father clasped me by the hand and thanked me as well as he could, and then departed. When Mr Lorridge shortly after came round he asked who it was that had assaulted him. I tried to make him believe I did not know, and at this he became more excited, and asked if anyone had been seen to leave the office. But no one had, and Lorridge even then went so far as to assert his belief I was the guilty party. I, of course, at once denied all knowledge, and in consequence we had rather a stormy time. However, to be brief, we decided to part, and I am now deprived of my chance of succeeding to a partnership. All this has happened to me from my saving your father; and just, too, as I have been called to the Bar."

"Oh, John," Clara said, "how shall I ever thank you for this great sacrifice? Only ask of me anything, and you shall not ask in vain."

"If you really mean what you say," answered the crafty John, "fly with me and be mine. A barque now lies at the pier at Hobart Town; we can secure a passage by her, and when we reach Melbourne we can be married, and you shall never regret your step."

"Oh, John, I know not what to do; why not go on yourself, and leave me to explain and follow you?"

"I will not stir one step without you, Clara. You know how I love you, and what a sacrifice I have made for you and yours. Say, will you fly or no?"

"Oh, John, how you try me. I know how much I wish to show my gratitude. Then, again, oh! how I long to stay and assure my father that I go to save him."

"If you wish to do as you say, write a brief note just simply telling him that you go to save him, and that you will let him know more from you when you reach your first destination. Do this, and you save him, stay, and I too stay; and before I can again enter any office here I must explain my conduct, and if I do so your father will be taken, tried, and with his former conviction he will assuredly be hanged. Your father will understand all, and will never blame you. Choose between the two, Clara, and at once."

The poor girl, believing all, thought for a few brief seconds, and then exclaimed: "John, I will, and if I do wrong may God forgive me."

The rest is soon told. Before they came to Timaru they went to Melbourne; but John Hobart never intended to marry the unfortunate girl, for he knew that he dare not—the reason will be explained hereafter. After a life of poverty and other degradation for two years, they wandered through Victoria, and ultimately wended their way to where the reader first met them. It need not be said that the tale Hobart told Clara about her father was but the concoction of his subtle brain, for no such scene ever occurred. The truth was that Hobart, after leaving Clara and her father on the memorable night, paid a visit to one of the low gaming hells, which are very plentiful in both Hobart Town and Tasmania. Here he played until he not only lost all his own money, but also some belonging to the firm by whom he was employed; and, instead of going to the office in the morning as usual, he sent a note saying he was confined to his bed by illness, and would not be able to attend. As the reader knows, he never went again, but under an assumed name left the Colony. Had poor Clara known all this, her lot might have been much happier. But such is life! In the time to come John Hobart may find some thorns in the bed which he now thinks he is going to make of roses.

CHAPTER VII.

Frank daily became more in love with Clara, and so far he had never been able to get Hobart to speak on the subject of his courtship. However, one day, some time after the events already narrated, he decided to come to the point with him without further delay, as the suspense was becoming too heavy a load, and he accordingly called upon Hobart, and found him at his office.

After the usual friendly greeting between them, Frank said: "Hobart, no doubt you have long since observed that I have become very much attached to your sister, Miss Hobart. You are doubtless also aware that I have made proposals to her, which she has taken time to consider, and I have on several occasions been about to address you on the subject, but something has always occurred to put the matter off. To-day I decided to see you and hear from you, as your sister's guardian, if you had any objections to my paying my addresses."

During the time Frank had been speaking a fixed expression had pervaded Hobart's face, which was sternness itself; and after Frank had ceased, it was some seconds before Hobart's gaze was taken off some object on the table. At last, he no doubt having decided what to say, with the mysterious expression of face, answered as follows:—

"Mr Perryman, your proposal has both made me pleased and sorry—pleased at the honour you do both my sister and myself, and sorry that I cannot at once say to you 'go in, Frank, and win.' This of course," he continued, "requires some explanation, which is due to you, and you shall have it. You are aware that my present practice is a very precarious one, in fact the little I have at times done for you is the principal part of it. Now,

Clara and myself from our childhood have been very much attached to each other, hence our coming here together. Further, I must tell you that before the death of our father he made me promise one thing—it was an absurd promise, I admit, but Clara thinks otherwise, hence the difficulty. That promise was that if ever we left our native place I should in no case advise or even allow Clara to enter into matrimony unless I had first decided to settle down myself, so that we should always be near to each other in time of any of the little difficulties this world is full of—that we might give to each other any assistance and advice we could."

"A most praiseworthy resolve," said Frank, delighted as he thought at the small difficulty in his way.

"I don't know so much about that," said Hobart, "but I am rather peculiar in my endeavour to carry out the wishes of my parents, in fact I always was. Now I must, Mr Perryman, to be honest with you, tell you that Clara has told me of your very generous proposal, and asked my advice how to act. I told her I certainly thought she would do well to consider your proposal favourably; but she replied, 'Will you settle here yourself, John?' I of course did not know if I could find a sufficient living here, so I replied that I should were I to see my way clear to do so, but not otherwise. Clara, Mr Perryman, is one of those girls who would as soon think of doing anything rather than break a promise, especially if made to some one deceased, and before she answered me I knew well, although I wished otherwise, what her answer would be. 'John,' she replied, 'I would sooner never marry, no matter under what circumstances, even were we to go on together poor if need be, rather than break the promise made to our dear father.' She said, Mr Perryman, much more than this, and what she said convinced me she would be very loth to leave here now; but in justice to her I think I should not repeat it."

"Not by any means, my dear Hobart, your resolve and your

sister's does you both credit; but I think there are many ways of getting over the difficulty. So, with your permission, I will leave the matter now as it stands, and to-morrow I will speak to you, and then perhaps you may change your mind about whether it will suit you to settle here; so, until to-morrow, Hobart, adieu."

As soon as Frank left the office John Hobart rose, and taking from his pocket a coin, he tossed it in the air, saying before it fell to the ground, heads I win, and sure enough when the coin dropped it proved to be a head. "Ah, my lucky star is now in the ascendant, not long now to wait; but still I must be careful, he must not see too much of Clara yet.' Women are not to be relied on too much. No, as he is to come to-morrow I will take every care that to-day at least I guard my secret of success. Oh, man, man, man, what a fool you make of yourself when there is a woman in the case."

John Hobart now seemed highly satisfied with what he had done, and, taking his hat, left the office, and was soon home again; and, as he had said, he took good care for that day at least that Frank Perryman should not see Clara alone.

* * * * * *

"And what do you think of Miss Hobart?" asked Maud of Louisa Branscombe, a few days after the first visit paid by that young lady to the Perrymans.

"I like her," answered Louie, "much better than I like her brother, and yet I have no reason for disliking the man further than I had a dream about him and Frank the evening after I first saw him."

"What a suspicious little donkey you are, Louie, just because you dreamt of Hobart and Frank. I suppose you thought that Frank was a child, and he a bogie, and of course Frank got frightened and ran away."

"Maud, how you do run on. I dreamt a very disagreeable dream, and I can't help thinking there is something in it; for Frank seems to be always with them."

"Oh, little green eye, jealous. Tell me now what you did dream, and let me judge too."

"I am not jealous, for I have no right to be so; but I am sure I always feel deeply interested in your welfare, and if I do seem foolish in doing so I am sorry, for I cannot help it."

"You are not foolish, Louie, I know. In fact, I am but joking all the time, and you are in earnest. But tell me, Louie, what did you dream, for I am interested in such things, and be lieve in them."

"Well, you know, Maud, it is doubtless all folly, but I will tell you. I thought I saw Frank and Mr Hobart walking along a beautiful field side by side, and suddenly I thought I saw the latter assume the form of a tremendous snake, and Frank then tried to get away, but the more he tried the more he seemed to be fascinated by the snake. Then I fancied I saw the snake at last gradually coil around Frank until he was perfectly powerless. I then thought I could endure it no longer, and rushing up to them I lifted a stick to strike, and just then the snake dropped, and Frank stood over it as if he had mastered it. I then awoke with a fright, and since then whenever I see Mr Hobart I think of the snake."

"It is certainly a most peculiar dream, Louie, and perhaps we may see some reason to look at Mr Hobart differently to what we have done so far. Frank seems to be much attached to Miss Hobart, considering we have only known them six months."

Louie, at Maud's mention of Frank's attachment, changed colour, but she said nothing.

"I rather like Clara Hobart," went on Maud, "I think she is quite unlike her brother, and she is also much more serious for her age than most girls one meets."

"Yes, I think so also; in fact I rather like her myself, and if it were not for her brother, I feel I should like her much more."

"It is very unlike you, dear Louie, to allow prejudice to carry you so far."

"I know and repent it at the same time; but I cannot overcome the feeling, try as I may."

"Hullo, chatterboxes!" exclaims Frank, from the other end of the room, for he has entered and heard part of their conversation, unobserved by them.

"Why, Frank," said Maud, "what in the world brings you home so soon. Tell us all about it, for there must be a reason."

"Very well, little one, as you wish to know I will, and then you must tell me your opinion of what I have done."

"Go on then," says Maud, "and do not keep us in suspense. If you about to be married, Frank, we are most anxious to know to whom, so that we may sympathise with her, for she will deserve our pity."

Frank and Maud both laughed at this joke, but Louie only said: "Oh, Maud, how can you talk so on such a serious subject?"

"Well," said Frank, after their mirth had subsided, "I will tell you. I am married, but not the married you think of, but to a partner. In fact, to enlighten you, John Hobart and I are now in business together."

This announcement seemed to fall very heavily on the ears of both his listeners. Neither of them spoke, but each turned and gave the other a look full of significance, for now their previous conversation about the dream occurred to both of them.

"Why, Louie and Maud, how silent you are; not a word even to wish me luck in my new venture."

"I am sure we both wish you every success," said Maud, "but your news is so unexpected that it took us by surprise. Of course, Frank, the arrangement will suit you, or you would have not done it.

"Oh, yes, the advantage is mutual, Hobart, not having a sufficient practice of his own gladly, accepts, and I get the benefit of his experience, and each is satisfied."

Louie now rose, and excusing herself, left the room.

"Frank," asked Maud, as soon as Miss Brauscombe was out of hearing, "Do you observe any alteration in Louie lately?"

"No, I cannot say I do, and yet now I remember she does not seem to be as jolly as she used to be."

"That is what I notice, too, but I do not know of any reason for it, and I am getting rather uneasy about her. She is such a good, kind girl, I hate to see her otherwise than happy."

"I will, after what you have told me, Maud, observe things more closely; and, in fact, the first time an opportunity occurs, I will speak to her on the subject. I must leave you again, but I shall soon have finished what little more I have to do, and then I will return."

CHAPTER VIII.

"She sleeps, I think," says Cruikstan. "No, she but seems to lie in thought."

"I trust we are in time," answers Mr Lurtoushaw, "for it must have been a terrible thing to be sent out for thirteen years, and yet innocent."

"Yes, now I have it," exclaims the invalid, "write quick lest it be too late."

"I am now ready," says Cruikstan, "I will write and follow you, if you go on."

"Well," she said, "my name is known here as Agnes Frayner, but that is really only assumed—my proper name is Agnes Hobart, and my father was sent to Van Dieman's Land in the same ship as was Matthew Grant, but unlike him he was guilty." Here the invalid stayed for a second or two to take breath.

"Matthew Grant, after he became agent for Mr Lurtonshaw, employed me as housekeeper, and, I regret to say, was a kind master, for his kindness made me fond of him, and when I saw he was married to another my jealousy knew no bounds. I decided to try and obtain service in Mr Lurtonshaw's house. When I told the squire this he asked me why I wanted to change, and my answer must have told tales, for I merely said I did not like the place. 'Look you,' said he, 'stay where you are, I may want you to assist me to do something, and if I do you shall be paid, and further, you shall have a better situation.' For a long time nothing was done, but one day he came to me and told me to ask for a few hours' leave to go home. Before I went he gave me things which were to be put into the coal cellar, and the key, instead of being hung up in its usual place, was to be placed in

Grant's bedroom. This I did, and then I got myself out of sight and waited. Later on I saw the police take him away, and I was then nearly spoiling all, for I almost rushed up to the police and told them everything. In fact, I was in the act of doing so when I caught sight of his wife, and then I hardened again; and after, when I regretted what I had done, my master told me I could not alter matters unless it was that I could get sent out with him myself." The dying woman ceased speaking, and for fully fifteen minutes she was unable to utter a word, and then the magistate arrived.

"Have you any more to say?" asked Mr Cruikstan.

"Nothing that you wish to know. Matthew Grant is innocent, I know, and will swear it."

When the document was read over to her in the magistrate's presence, and she was asked if all was right, she answered, "Quite; let me sign ere it be too late." There was now a nervous twitching about the mouth, and she trembled visibly all over.

"Quick," said Mr Lurtonshaw, "or we may be too late."

Mr Lurtonshaw now gently aided her to rise, and the pen being placed in her hands, the woman tried to sign, but for some seconds she was quite unable to do so. Suddenly she grasped the pen in a bold hand and wrote, "Agnes Hobart, better known as Agnes Frayner, the only daughter of James Hobart, convicted and sent to Van Dieman's Land in the year of ——, and sister to John Hobart, now, I believe, a solicitor in practice in Hobart Town." She had just finished this, when the pen dropped from her fingers, and with one "God help me," she fell back quite dead.

"May God help you, indeed," repeated Mr Lurtonshaw, "for a more cruel crime I never heard of."

The document was now duly attested by the attending magistrate, and the same day forwarded to the solicitor for the Lurtonshaw family, so that a pardon might be procured as soon as pos-

sible for the unfortunate Matthew Grant. How little did he, poor fellow, ever dream of such proceedings now going on; well would it have comforted him. But time must elapse, and many strange events occur before he can learn what has taken place. So far, the wicked prosper; but the time will come when all shall have their day, and until then we will leave the evil-doers to the tender mercy of their consciences. Did John Hobart ever trouble himself about conscience pangs? did he possess a conscience at all? or did anything ever trouble him? Yes, one thing did often come across his mind, and then he was troubled indeed!

* * * * * *

The firm of Perryman and Hobart is now in full swing; the junior partner bids fair to further outdo his senior. The place has been arranged, and each of the partners has a separate office, now side by side, on the same floor. We will just look in on John Hobart and see how his new success in life pleases him. The clerk has returned from the Post Office, and as a mail is just in from Hobart Town, a very seldom occurrence in those days, John Hobart is all impatience to hear the news. Not that he expects any letters, for he knows better than to let anyone there know his whereabouts; but he wants to see the newspaper, and, as it has just arrived, he opens it and reads. Suddenly he exclaims: "Great God, but this is something I never expected." The paper drops on the table, and Hobart sits in profound thought. The cause of this excitement is to be found in a local in the newspaper, which reads as follows:—

Another example of the danger of giving too much credence to circumstantial evidence has come under our notice. Some fifteen years ago, one Matthew Grant was found guilty at the Kent Assizes of being in possession of stolen property, and sentenced to transportation for life. The chain of evidence seemed to be complete, albeit it was of a purely circumstantial kind; but facts have since come to light that show completely that Grant was un-

justly convicted. News has arrived from England that one Agnes Hobart, when on her death bed, confessed that she had, from motives of revenge, placed the stolen property in Grant's house where it was found, and thus secured the downfall of an innocent man. The woman Hobart was the daughter of a convict formerly of this island, but now deceased, and sister to a gentleman of the same name who some two years ago left here very suddenly, having helped himself liberally from the cash-box of his employers, the well-known and highly-respected firm of solicitors, Messrs Torridge and Torridge. It would almost seem that the Hobart family were fated to cause trouble to Grant, as it is supposed that the latter's daughter was induced to accompany the swindling attorney's clerk. A free pardon has been accorded to the poor unfortunate man—who has for so long been suffering for the sins of another, and a subscription-list now lies at our office in order to provide the necessary funds to defray the expenses of Matthew Grant, who has determined to seek his daughter and the villain who has tempted her from her father's side. This is certainly one of the most deserving cases that has ever come under our notice, and we feel sure that our citizens will respond heartily to the call made on their liberality.

"So," muttered Hobart, "that accursed sister of mine has indeed done me a kind action. I wish her tongue had been drawn from her mouth ere she made such a confession. And just as I am grasping success, too; but I will even now secure it, let what will come. Aye, let Matthew Grant ever find me, and then"—and the speaker dropped into a deep reverie.

Five o'clock came, and still John Hobart sat in the same position. Perryman and all the clerks save one had left, and he was patiently waiting for his new master to come out of his office in order that he might close up and go home. Hobart not coming, the clerk taps gently at the office door, but as there it no answer he softly turns the handle, looks in, and sees Hobart sitting there like one in a dream, with the tell-tale paper before him. He does not know that anyone has knocked, or that the door has been opened, so intent is he on his plans for the future.

The clerk withdraws as stealthily as he has entered, and when he is alone, he mutters to himself, "So far, John Hobart,

the convict's son, you do not remember me. How long would I remain in your service if you did know?—about as long as it would take to pay me off. So far, however, I have disguised myself well; but what can take such an effect on the heartless John is something worth finding out. If I could but discover it I should be sure of one of two things—either that I could keep my billet as long as I liked, or until John Hobart murdered me, which, I know, would not trouble him much more than it will trouble him to plunder Frank Perryman of all he possesses in this world. However, I will wait. I often promised myself revenge on the father, but he died and defrauded me. You, John Hobart, will do as well, for I hate your accursed race."

Hearing a movement within the room, Mr Felix Fixer, for that is the clerk's name, retires rapidly into the office of the ledger-keeper, the door of which faces Hobart's room, and waits. Almost immediately John Hobart walks out like one in a dream, descends the stairs, and out into the street. The instant he has disappeared, Mr Fixer glides gently into the room, and in two minutes more is in the street with the much-coveted paper in his possession, for John Hobart has allowed his thoughts to carry him away, so that he forgot this dangerous piece of evidence against him. Scarcely had Felix Fixer gone up the street, in the reverse direction to that taken by Hobart, when he looks back and sees his new employer again at the office-door. When he finds the door locked and the key gone he turns once more and goes home in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

Clara meets him at the door, and asks what has kept him so long.

"Business, business," he answers in his most curt manner.

"John, Frank Perryman called, and do you know I felt ashamed to see him, for what can I say if he repeats his proposal?"

"Say? Why, tell him your affections are otherwise engaged. What could you say better?"

"Oh, John, how can I say that after what has passed? What will he ever think of me?"

"Think of you! What care I what he thinks of you. Perhaps you would like to marry the pup, eh?"

"Anything would be better than treating him as you half suggest."

"Oh, it would, no doubt; but I tell you I would sooner see you lying dead at my feet than the wife of another. So think you what you like, but once for all understand me."

"John Hobart, what is wrong that you speak to me in this way? Have I not aided you in your schemes, and now you treat me thus. When I ask you a simple question, you behave to me as though I were the very dirt under your feet. Let us understand each other, for though I may be submissive, I am not to be treated thus with impunity."

"What mean you? Do you dare defy me openly? Very well, Clara Grant, we will see! You have, perhaps, allowed yourself to fall in love with this boy greenborn, and now perhaps you think to marry him. But, may I ask you, what name do you propose to take at the interesting ceremony. The name of Hobart, I presume. I can tell you that if you ever dream of such a thing you will find out your mistake.

Clara rose, and turning full on Hobart said, not passionately but firmly: "John Hobart, for over two years I have been to you all you could wish. I have been literally your slave, in adversity more especially. Now that you think yourself in affluence, you evidently fancy you can say and do as you like; but if I have been weak, aye, too weak by far to you, I had always a worthy object in view. There is a limit, however, to all things, John Hobart; and you have reached it. No longer will I serve

you as I have done; no, not to save a kingdom. I will henceforth look to myself and mine; and do you likewise;" and without another word she left the room.

The dinner was on the table, for it was past the usual time for the meal, but it remained untouched. Hobart walked up and down the small room like a caged hyena, and at each turn he glared at himself in the mirror over the mantlepiece. Each minute he thought Clara would return, but she came not, and at last, out of patience and out of temper, he rung and asked to have Miss Hobart sent to him.

"She is out, sir," answers the maid of all work.

"When did she go out?"

"Directly she left this room, sir, she put on her hat, and I have not seen her since."

"When she returns, send her to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Fool that I am," he exclaims. "Each day do I resolve to use policy and discretion, and each day do I do the reverse. But when she speaks of Perryman, I know I am mad, for how can I surrender her to another. No, ten thousand times no; for, with all my faults, I love her, and yet I dare not marry her." Here the heartless fiend, libertine that he was, dropped on the couch, and gave way to sobs and even tears.

CHAPTER IX.

Felix Fixer watched Hobart at the office door, and when he saw him leave proceeded to his humble lodging. The first thing he did on his arrival was to go straight to his room, draw from his pocket the much-coveted paper, and carefully scan its contents, until he came to the local which had so affected Hobart.

"Ah, ah!" he exclaims, when he has completed reading this, "it is too much joy. Oh, how I will have it, John Hobart. Aye, now I think I know enough to let my whiskers grow, and then, John Hobart, you will perhaps recognise the verger of the church you were so anxious to visit one morning, but which, I now presume, you are sorry you ever saw. Poor old Grant, too; ah, but the country warms for you, John Hobart! Now, how would a few lines to Grant go? It would save the old fellow ever so much trouble; but why should I trouble about him. I would not injure him, to be sure; but at present I have my own fish to fry, and when I have done some one else can have a turn at the pan. Yes, I will now have revenge, or, John Hobart, you shall go halves; yes, fair halves, nothing less. Ah, ah! this in itself will be revenge for me, for how will he take it? Oh, I know."

After this chuckle, Felix Fixer carefully folded the paper again, and returned it to his breast pocket; then he ascended the stairs, and sat down to tea, for he could not afford dinner at six. The frugal meal concluded, he went again to the office of Perryman and Hobart; and, entering the office of the number furthest back, so that the light would not be seen, he sat down at the

table, and studied carefully for fully two hours, after which he arose, selected a sheet of note-paper, and wrote as follows:—

To JOHN HOBART, ESQ.,
Timaru.

SIR,—I have borrowed the newspaper you yesterday received from Hobart Town. I will, whenever you like, return it; but before I do I may as well let you know who I am. You will doubtless remember the verger of the church where you were married in 18——. My proper name is Felix Fixer, under which name I now sail; but I was not known by such when I had the extreme felicity of witnessing your nuptials with your employer's daughter (a most unsuitable marriage). I may state that when I witnessed your signature, I foolishly, as I thought, appended my right name, and for this my services were disposed of when the Rev. —— found it out. For this, sir, I think I am deserving of some slight consideration at your hands. I shall send a note stating that I am too unwell to attend to business, but whenever you wish to see me I can attend. Your junior hand knows where I reside.—I am, &c.,

FELIX FIXER.

After carefully scaling up this note, Mr Fixer addressed it to "John Hobart, Esq., Barrister, &c., Timaru," marked it "private," and left it on Hobart's office table.

"Now," said he, "I must arrange for the sending of the key;" and, this business being done to his satisfaction, Mr Fixer walked quietly home, where, for the present, we will leave him, and look up some of the other personages.

* * * * * *

And Frank Perryman, how does he prepare himself for the shocks which, sooner or later, must come? He does not prepare himself at all; as why should he? Is he not in blissful ignorance of the troubles that are impending? He thinks of Clara; but away from her the world has no charms. He sees but the lovable girl whom he has learnt to adore; and nothing does he see to create within his honest heart the least fear but that all

will go well with him in this, as it has, so far, in all else. Ah, it is too true, that it requires all kinds of people to make a world. Frank has not now visited Clara for days; in fact, but little has he seen her since the deed of partnership was signed between himself and Hobart; for she, poor girl, being far more honest than the man she has to associate with, avoids Frank as much as possible. Still he suspects nothing, for with the just all are just. There is, indeed, to him no cause for suspicion. Has he not taken Hobart into partnership solely to enable him to remain in Timaru, that there may be no obstacle to his union with Clara? And how could he ever dream that any other difficulty would arise? But the honest Frank is soon to be rudely awakened from his dream of blissful, confiding ignorance. Louisa Branscombe, too, has her burden to bear. She prays that her fears are groundless; that Frank does not love this beautiful girl, who, in reality, no one here seems to know anything about, save that she is Clara Hobart.

"What is it to me," Louie says to herself, "if he does love and even marry her; it is no concern of mine. What right ever had I to think of him? He never gave me encouragement, and why should he? Am I not Maud Perryman's companion, almost a servant; and yet what dreams do I indulge in! But I must awaken from them; I must not allow my mind to be occupied by such thoughts."

"Ah, at it again, are you?" says Maud, who now enters Louie's room without announcing herself, and finds her deep in thought; so deep, in fact, that until Maud speaks she knows not that she is there. "Why, Louie, you are getting a regular little dreamer. What in the world ails you? You must certainly be in love."

"In love!" echoes Miss Branscombe; but she does not deny the impeachment, and a tell-tale blush spreads over her face.

"Yes, Louie, I really believe you are in love; but whoever can it be? Why not tell me? You know I would keep your secret; and it is such relief to have someone to confide in."

"Well, Maud, if, as you say, I am in love, then I have no right to be; so I ought not to make a confidant of you, for you would then think me as foolish as I must think myself."

"'As you must think yourself,' you say; but you do not say, as you do think yourself."

"Maud, do not ask me. I have nothing to tell you; nothing, at least, worth speaking about. Some day, perhaps, I may think otherwise; if so, you shall know all about it."

"As you will, Louie; but in running on so fast I almost forgot the piece of news I have for you, which, I am sure, will delight you. Frank wants me to get up a party to commemorate my nineteenth birthday—and I have promised to set to work. So I want you to help me, if you will."

"Of course I will. What shall I do towards it?"

"Well, you know, the first thing to be done will be to send out invitations; and as you write so much better than I do, that part of the business shall be allotted to you. Here is a list Frank that I have made, so if you write to each of them, I will get Frank to see to their delivery. Now I must away and look after something else."

The following morning Frank was as full of the proposed party as was Maud, and the first thing he did was to go straight to Hobart's room to give him the invitation for himself and his sister Clara. He knocked, and on entering found Hobart seated at his table evidently deep in thought. The letter of Felix Fixer was in his hands, and his feelings can be more easily imagined than described.

"I brought you invitations for Maud's birthday party," said Frank. "Of course yourself and Miss Hobart will come.

Hobart started from his reverie at the sound of his partner's voice, but managed to conceal his agitation sufficiently to answer:

"I shall, I am sure, be delighted, and so will Clara, if she recovers ; but at present she is very unwell indeed."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Frank." "I trust she will soon be better. I must let Maud know, that she may call and see her."

"To-day, Frank, I am sure she would prefer to be alone, for the doctor said she was not to be disturbed in any case."

With this Frank withdrew, and Mr John Hobart was left again to the perusal of Felix Fixer's letter. "I wonder what this infernal villain wants of me. Money, of course. Ah, well, I suppose I must give him a little and ship him off. I would far sooner give him a dose of this," and Hobart drew a small round phial from his pocket, labelled "Poison," which he replaced immediately. "And he to be the only living witness, save Grant. My little troubles seem again to accumulate ; but, thanks to my endeavours, so far I am in a position now to meet and defy them. I will let Mr Fixer wait a little, and perhaps he may become more reasonable. No doubt he thinks I shall send for him at once ; if so, he is wrong. I know my man ; he will keep, and further, he won't let out my secrets—he knows that is his only chance of making anything out of me."

John Hobart tried to satisfy himself that he was safe, but he was far from successful in his efforts. All who saw him on this day got but short answers, and the clerks, one and all, declared he must be in bad health ; while Frank came to the conclusion that it was simply on account of his sister's illness. Three days passed, and still Hobart did not recover his temper ; his face, too, was pale and haggard, and it was evident that his health was suffering. Early on the third day he complained of not feeling up to the mark, and consequently left business early and went home.

Clara, after the stormy interview narrated in the last chapter, had, of course, returned to the house, as do all people who are

situated as she was ; but from that day she had taken all her meals alone in her room, and refused to see anyone. She told the servant that she wished to remain undisturbed on the afternoon in question. Hobart looked anxiously to see her, but she did not show herself. At last, tired of waiting, he sent the servant to say that if his sister was well enough he would like to see her, if only for a few minutes. The reply soon came ; in fact, from where he stood he heard Clara say : "Tell Mr Hobart that I would rather not see anyone to-day."

These words infuriated him, and he strided up and down the room like a caged wild beast until he was interrupted by a knock at the front door, and the servant announces Mr Whale, the head clerk from Perryman and Hobart.

"Pardon me, Mr Hobart," said the new-comer ; "but after you left to day this letter came, and as it was marked private and important, I took the liberty of bringing it to you, as I had heard you had left the office for the day."

"I am obliged to you, Whale," Hobart said, as he took the letter, opened it, and commenced to read. The clerk, after wishing his employer good day, a salutation that passed unheeded, left the house. The letter, the contents of which did not apparently increase Mr Hobart's good temper, ran as follows :—

J. HOBART, ESQ.,
Barrister, &c., &c., &c., Timaru.

SIR,—I have waited three days expecting to hear from you, but I shall not wait three more. You forget that I have a desire to settle an old account, as well or more than any pecuniary motive. I shall be quite well to-morrow, after which I shall again commence my duties.

FELIX FIXER.

"Curse the fellow. He shall not again 'commence his duties' in my office, for I know not what I should do if he did. That accursed marriage is worse than all. Why I ever was so mad I know not, and yet there were reasons to suppose it would turn out

very differently to what it did. Still, I am glad she is not with me for every day I feel more unable to do without Clara; and now I have found that out, I am fearful lest I shall lose her. It cannot be that she cares for Frank Perryman, and yet I must have been a fool not to think twice before I commenced this project of mine; and now I have evidently allowed her to see my weak point, and was there ever a woman who would not take advantage of that. How I long to see and speak to her once more. Why the devil does she not see me? then I could attend to other matters; but if this continues everything will be neglected. I must, and will see her, if only to ask her forgiveness. Would not that be another foolish act? Yet—yet"—and John Hobart walked up and down the room, agitated beyond measure. Within his breast there raged the most conflicting thoughts. First, for one second, he would think of Clara; and at times he almost made up his mind to risk all and marry her; then his thoughts would drift on to Felix Fixer, and he would plan how to dispose of him; and then again, like an avenging angel, would appear the face of Matthew Grant, and he would become entirely lost in the confusion. At last he moves rapidly towards the door of Clara's room, and knocks. He waits some seconds for an answer, and none coming he knocks again.

At last Clara says: "I think the servant told you I would rather not see any person to-day. I shall thank you to show some slight consideration for my wishes."

"Clara, for God's sake, speak to me, if but for one minute, that I may ask and obtain forgiveness from you."

"To-morrow I will see you, and hear all you have to say. To-day I wish to be alone."

"Clara, see me, if but for five minutes. I am much troubled about other business, and if you will set my mind at rest concerning yourself, I shall be better able to cope with matters which, at present, I feel quite unequal to."

"Hitherto I have shown you every consideration, and what return have I had? Hard and cruel words. In trouble, more especially, I have considered you; but now prosperity has arrived you tell me but too plainly that you can do without me."

"Clara, for mercy's sake come and speak to me. I will explain, and if but to say you forgive me this time, and in future, believe me, you shall not have cause to complain."

"If you are anxious I should see you now, I will join you shortly in the dining-room," answers Clara, after a pause.

At these words a smile of delight illumines the face of John Hobart, and he has the appearance of a young man who has received encouragement from his mistress. He knows that he is no longer master in this case, and returns to the dining-room all impatient for her coming.

He has not long to wait, as in less than ten minutes Clara joins him. She is dressed in her morning wrapper, her hair in a neglected state; the colour has partly left her cheeks, which are usually of a delicately-tinted pink, and her eyes show signs of recent tears. Indeed, there is a pathos in her appearance that must affect any but the most heartless man, for she looks gentleness itself.

"Clara, my own darling," exclaims John Hobart, trying to take her hand, which she withdraws, "why do you treat me thus?"

"Can you ask me why? Does not your conscience, if you have one, smite you? How could you ever expect me to show the consideration I do by granting you even this short interview? Have you forgotten our last meeting? If so, I assure I do not, and never can, forget it."

"Clara, the past is gone—let it be burried. What I have done or said, I regret; only say you forgive me, and then I can look to other things, which, at present require my full attention."

"If you want my forgiveness, you have it. Forgive you I will freely; but forget I cannot. I cannot," she continued, "stay longer now to talk; to-morrow I will see you, and then there are many things which I must say, for it is necessary we should understand each other." With this she left the room, and although he called upon her to return she heeded him not, and for that day he had seen the last of her. During the next half-hour he walked up and down the room in an excited manner, until at last the note of Felix Fixer, which was upon the table, called his attention to other matters.

"What a doting fool I am growing; I leave everything lying about for any idiot to look at. I must attend to this man at once." Having summoned the servant to inform her that he would not require dinner, and instructed her to attend to her mistresss' wants, Hobart took from a sideboard writing materials, and penned to Felix Fixer the following note, which he despatched at once:—

MR FELIX FIXER, Timaru.

DEAR SIR,—In reply to yours of this day, as your business has the semblance of importance, I shall be at my office this evening at eight p.m., when I shall be ready to attend to your requirements.—I am, &c.,

JOHN HOBART.

Eight o'clock has come, and Messrs Hobart and Fixer are seated in the office of the former gentleman. Both these worthies are looking steadily at each other, and it is evident that the lawyer is by no means at his ease.

"So, Mr Hobart," commences, "you took the liberty of abstracting a newspaper of mine, and now you write me threatening letters. I have granted you this interview to hear what you have to say, and what you want; for, I presume, you have some slight favour to ask."

"Mr Hobart, I have no favour to ask; but I have a demand to make; and, as I know your liberality, I am fairly certain you will grant it."

Hobart, at this speech, bit his lip with vexation ; but he made no other sign of the annoyance he felt.

"Proceed, Mr Fixer, to make the demand, as you choose to term it ; and if I must pay you to keep quiet, why the sooner we settle up the better."

"First, then, Mr John Hobart, as my memory is slightly defective, I always think other people's are the same ; and I would therefore like to know, sir, if you remember me."

"I remember you as much as I wish to."

"Do you not remember ? No, I can see you do not ! Can you call to mind a little promise made to me on the occasion of your wedding ? I sympathise with you for having a bad memory, for I know how detrimental it is ; but never mind, as you have doubtless forgotten, it matters not."

Again an angry flash from Hobart, but he sits still, and says : "Now, Mr Fixer, what can I do for you ? If you want twenty, or even fifty pounds, to take you away from New Zealand, say so, and I will lend you that sum."

"Well, Mr Hobart, you are kindness itself ; but do you know this climate, bad as it is, agrees with me splendidly, and I have no idea of leaving it ; in fact, what I did think of doing was to go into some little business here or hereabouts."

Hobart, at this, half rose from his seat ; but again sat down, as he thought it best.

"Mr Fixer," he said, "I have neither the time nor the inclination to remain bandying words. If you will state what you require, I will say yes or no."

"Of that, Mr Hobart, I am quite sure. I know you are far too straightforward to do otherwise, always allowing, of course, that your memory does not fail you. Bad thing, sir, to have a defective memory."

"Fiend," cries Hobart, grasping the ebony ruler which was lying on the table, and turning towards Fixer with the evident intention of striking him; but he stays himself suddenly, and turns very pale.

"These are nice little fixings, Mr Hobart, are they not?" observes Fixer coolly, turning over as he speaks a six-chamber revolver.

Hobart drops the ruler, and again resumes his chair, looking very much as if this time he had met his match.

"Will you come to business, if you have any such intention? If not, we but waste time."

"Well, Mr Hobart, I should be as tired of that game as I think anyone; for, do you know, for many years I have done nothing else. Yes, Mr Hobart, we will come to business, as I can see plainly that you do not reciprocate my feelings; for, I assure you, I enjoy your company exceedingly."

"Why do you not say what you want? Do you think I have nothing else to do but wait for you to speak?"

"Well, Mr Hobart, I will come to what you require. What I now want is simply—say, £50, for my present requirements, with which sum I will take a business-trip and make some arrangements which are necessary. And by that time my whiskers will have grown; and as my stay here has been so short, no one will recognise me, and I then shall let you know what my other plans are. At present, however, as I look on you as my junior partner, I do not deem it necessary to give you further particulars; except that if I refer any business houses to you, you will be sure to speak well of me, for it is to your own advantage. I assure you that the spec is a good one, as I shall satisfy you."

"Give you fifty pounds to squander, with the full knowledge that you will return for more. Man, what do you take me for? and from where, in heaven's name, do you imagine I derive

my income, that you expect me to throw away my money in this manner ?"

"I will answer all your queries, Mr Hobart ; but, whatever you do, keep cool. I find nothing affects my memory more than loss of temper. But to the point : First, you ask me what I take you for. I take you, John Hobart, to be a sharp, shrewd man of the world ; you have defects, as who has not. Further, you ask me where do I imagine you derive your income from. Now, this is an absurd question for you to ask, because if I speak plain my opinion will not be pleasant for you to hear ; but, as you wish it, I will tell you. I think your present income is derived under false pretences, a crime punishable by law. But, of course, you sail so close to the wind, that it is rather difficult to tell on which side of the line you are."

"If you only came here to try and provoke me, we had better end the interview, for it cannot have any desirable termination."

"I have no desire to do anything of the sort ; but you asked me a question, and do you know I am imbibing from you your straightforward ways, and of course, I answer your question pure and simple. With some people it would, I know, be foolish ; but not so with a man of your knowledge and integrity, for I am aware how you admire plain sailing."

Hobart all this time sat, or rather rolled about in his chair. To do him justice, he was not a coward ; and he knew, of course, that empty handed he was no match for the man before him, armed as he was. At times he could scarcely hold himself in check, for Fixer had evidently intended to rouse him. He most certainly had succeeded.

"You are, I think, Mr Hobart, slightly out of sorts about other matters to-night. Perhaps it would be as well for you either to let me have the cheque I now require, or to-morrow I can call and see you ; but it must be in the morning, for other affairs will occupy me until the time the next boat leaves Dunedin."

"You have evidently made up your mind that I shall accede to your request, but you give no reason for your supposition."

"There you go again, Mr Hobart. One minute you are so very serious, and the next you are joking. Not give you any reason? Well, this is amusing—very amusing indeed;" and Mr Felix Fixer laughed immoderately. When his mirth had subsided he again turned to Hobart, and said: "Pardon me, sir, I know I am most presumptuous to use such familiarity with you; but you know that comes of my bringing up, for I was reared by poor and not over honest parents; whereas you, Mr Hobart, were reared in the lap of luxury, and consequently I should consider these things. But I always was a fool, sir. I can remember when at school what a job our schoolmaster had in trying to teach me how to construe the verb 'to be;' but to this day I know not its meaning, but I suppose it has something to do with *being sensible*."

"You seem determined to keep up your jesting tone, so I suppose I need not waste time with you further."

"Mr Hobart, you need waste no time, sir. You know what I require; you know also if it will suit you to keep my mouth shut. I now want fifty pounds, and nothing less. This money I have not any intention of wasting, far from it, and this may possibly be all I may ever ask you for. That, of course, depends on circumstances; but I shall in all probability ask you to endorse a bill or two, which, if you do, will be to our mutual advantage, as I shall in our dealings be perfectly *square*. The spec which I am about to enter into will, *I am certain, pay*, so you will in no case run further risk. Of course, so long as you keep as I know you like to be, honest, sir, honest."

"I will give you a cheque for fifty pounds, and may the ship that takes you away sink with you."

"Mr Hobart, do you not think it would be unjust for any ship to sink with me now? Many times before I hoped for such an event to take place, but then adversity hemmed me in on all sides.

Now I see nothing but a bright field of prosperity before me, and so many things to do, and none of them done. No, sir, I certainly think you unjust to make such a wish ; but, there, it is only another of your little jokes."

Hobart having filled in and signed the cheque for fifty pounds, he said, as he handed it to Fixer : " Had you not better give me an acknowledgment for that."

" I shall credit your account, Mr Hobart, in the books of the firm ; so you will be allowed interest on that amount as from to-day."

" Then," said Hobart, rising : " I presume, as you have obtained what you demanded, we have finished—at least for the present."

" Well, yes ; but there is another little favour I would ask of you, for you know it is to our joint interests. Perryman is well acquainted with certain business firms, both in Adelaide and Sydney ; now you could easily procure for me letters of introduction from him, and this would save me an immense amount of trouble."

"Letters of introduction ! How can I tell the use you intend to make of these letters if I get them for you."

" Mr Hobart, I shall not disgrace the firm of Perryman and Hobart ; of that be sure. So far in my dealings I have kept near the line you have always steered clear of, but now the company I am like to keep when the partnership is in full swing will prevent my doing anything shady until I return. I will now, sir, as it grows late, wish you good night. If the letters do not reach me before 12 o'clock to-morrow I will call on you for them."

With this Mr Felix Fixer left Mr Hobart, and gently wending his way down-stairs was soon out of sight.

Shortly after Hobart also descended the stairs, and letting himself out walked quietly towards home. Anyone who had

seen him a month previous would scarcely believe him to be the same person, for as he walked along he stooped as though in pain; and so intent was he on the past, present, and future, that he never once on his homeward walk took his eyes from the ground.

CHAPTER X.

We left Grant, as usual, at his daily labour; but on the last occasion of referring to him he had been sent by his employer on a journey, which took him nearly the whole of two days. He had so often been away that it created no uneasy feeling in his mind; for, so far as Clara was concerned, he had the fullest confidence in her, and never for a single minute did he apprehend any harm befalling her. He knew well by proof what kind of man Hobart was, but he did not dream of his being about to leave the Colony; and he was under the impression that he would not attempt anything while there, as, of course, he knew the secrets of his marriage, information that he fully estimated the value of. However, on the second day he completed his business, and, after having returned to his employer, made his way straight to his home, full of the joyful thoughts of again meeting his only child. Was she not his only joy and hope in this world? and, after so much undeserved punishment, she was his only consolation. In due course he reached his hut, and, to his surprise and horror, found it empty, and nothing to guide him to her he sought—only the note, which was worth less than nothing, for it simply said: "Father, I go to save you." To save him; and from what? This was to him, of course, unintelligible. He knew he had been guilty of no wrong, and for hours the unfortunate old man sat immersed in thought.

"Will she ever return?" he at times asked himself; but there was nothing to give any idea of an answer, and it was far

into the night before he roused himself, and when he did it was to rush out of his now lonely hut and wander, he knew not and cared not where. He seemed to solace himself with the idea that he was seeking for her, his only hope, his only joy, but no sign did he see or hear. On, on, he wandered; the country through which he walked was thickly timbered, and he had long since left the paths; but he still kept on. At every sound he would turn and run, until at last, fairly worn out with the fatigue of the day and the night, he sank upon the ground, powerless. How long he remained there he knew not, but he must have slept, for when he came to himself he was in an unknown spot. At last, with difficulty, he rose, for he was stiff from the exertion of the previous night.

The sun was shining brightly, and seemed to mock his soreness of heart. After a time he attempted to retrace his steps; but look and search as he would he could find no paths or other indication to guide him. In this state he rambled on, ever hoping to find some signs of civilisation, but none came. After a time thirst began to tell upon him, for it was now long past mid-day. He thought of the anxiety of his employer; this was to him a new trouble, for he feared it would be thought that he had endeavoured to make his escape. In this state of mind he sat for a time; and then, again, he would start to his feet and try to run. His strength, however, was fast failing him, and several times in his endeavour he stumbled and fell. Evening arrived, and with it hunger, which, until now, had never been thought of by him, for other subjects had occupied his thoughts.

"Clara, Clara, my girl, come to me!" he cries out in anguish-stricken tones, "I will not be angry with you. Come, if only to let me tell you of him, the villain. Ah, she will not come; she has ceased to love her poor old father."

Onwards he staggers rather than walks, for he knows not whither he is going. His senses, too, are fast leaving him; and

in this at least there is mercy, for he will soon know no more of his troubles. Presently he stops and exclaims, "Ah, God, Thou art a just God, for now I see paradise. Yes, 'tis paradise, the fields are bright and green, and the crops look beautiful, and the sun shines bright." As he says this he staggers and falls, and all is still. The sun gradually goes down, and presently the moon peeps from behind the hills, the night birds warble their song; but there is no sign of civilisation, and far away into the night all is quiet.

* * * * * *

The Perrymans are busy with preparations for Maud's birthday party, which is to take place on the Friday. Miss Hobart, by her brother's account, is still quite unfit to go out to any such gathering; and Frank is the most anxious of all parties concerning her health. Each morning immediately on Hobart's arrival does Frank ask after her, and on every occasion does Hobart feel as though he would like to return some evasive reply, if he dared to do so. Maud, too, shows kind solicitude for Clara's convalescence; each day she either goes to see her or sends her enquiries. It is now Wednesday, and Maud and Louie have just returned from visiting Clara. They are all seated in the drawing-room at Perryman's; Mrs Perryman is also there, when Frank returns. "Oh, Frank," says Maud, "I have been to see Clara Hobart, at least Louie and I, and she states she is nearly sure she will not be able to accompany her brother to my party."

Frank at this piece of news looks anything but pleased, for has he not been the means of getting up the party, so that for a few brief seconds, or perhaps longer, he may be able to enjoy Clara's company, as ever since the signing of the deed Clara seems to be either away or ill.

"I am sure I am sorry," says Frank, "for I should have liked to see her very much; but, of course, if she cannot come we

must live in bopes of seeing her on some future occasion. Does she look very bad, Maud ?"

"Well, no, Frank; I can scarcely notice any difference, with the exception that she is much paler."

"Does she seem cheerful? and to have all she requires?"

"No, she certainly does not seem cheerful, Frank; but as to whether she has all she requires, I, of course, cannot tell that."

"How would it do, Maud, considering Hobart's scruples about living above his income, and all that, to invite her to come and stay here for a week or so? You can ask her, you know, as from yourself and mother."

"Well, Frank, I do not know. What think you, mother?"

"Well, my dears, this house always was very healthy until your poor father died, but I have lost confidence in it ever since; but, of course, Frank, if you would like Miss Hobart to come and live here, I will ask her."

Frank at this speech first half-laughed, and then coloured visibly, and said: "I don't know, mother, that I have any particular wish for her to come here, more than that I think we should, as friends, be as considerate for her welfare as possible, as it would not inconvenience us at all."

"No," said Mrs Perryman, "it certainly would not inconvenience us. We have plenty of room; and then, you know, there is that garret up-stairs if she likes solitude."

This caused a general laugh, but Frank soon looked serious again, and said: "Then, mother, will you call on her as soon as possible, and I will speak to Hobart in the meantime."

* * * * * *

The day after the interview between Fixer and Hobart, Clara rises, as usual; and before Hobart leaves the house, after each

having taken breakfast in their own rooms, she sends him word not to leave before she sees him. Hobart, at this news, is in ecstacies, and walks up and down the room impatient for her coming. Presently she enters, and he rushes to meet her, endeavouring to take her hand, which she withdraws, saying as she does so: "I think, Mr Hobart, that is quite unnecessary. When your conduct alters entirely, then I shall be able to understand your change in this respect. I have seen you this morning because the present system of deception is so very distasteful to me that I have decided to make some alteration, and hence this interview."

"Clara, why do you persist in this course with me? You know, you must know, that I love you. I admit that I have, at times, been harsh; but then there are many reasons lately for my not being as gentle to you as I would wish. I have admitted my fault; and when, as now, I ask your forgiveness, why do you withhold it?"

"You say you love me; that I must know you love me. Now, how could I ever come to such a conclusion, Mr John Hobart? My views on this subject are evidently very different to yours. I speak from experience. I have loved, and do love, my father. I would gladly die to-morrow were it but to save him pain; in fact, I have already done more for him. But to associate cruel treatment with love, under the guise of outside annoyances, is too absurd. I have," she continued, "loved you; why, I know not. But when I attended your every wish that was to me more than a command—because it was impossible to disobey the object of my love. No, John Hobart, talk not to me of love, for I have learnt too well to know the meaning you attach to that word."

"Clara, dear Clara," he replied, "then all I can say in extenuation—for your arguments are too conclusive to gainsay—is that hitherto I have not loved; that I but deluded myself with the idea; but now, Clara, I do love; and, to prove it by your

own words, ask of me anything, and you shall see that I, too, can make sacrifice."

"I have not come here to make requests; at least, I do not look upon my purpose in that light. What I came for was to say that I can no longer occupy the position I have formerly; and as my staying here will necessitate my doing so, I have, therefore, decided that it is better I should go."

"Go, Clara? Where? Go from me? Say not so, for without you, brute as I have been, I could not, would not, care to live. I will do aught you may ask of me; but talk not of leaving me."

"John Hobart, you speak of sacrifices, and you ask me not to go; on one condition I will stay."

"Name it, and if practicable, it shall be done."

"'Tis most practicable. You and I, for I wish not to screen myself, have been both base and mean to one of the most generous-hearted of men—I mean Frank Perryman. Now," Clara continued, "what I ask of you is to tell him all, either yourself or in my presence. The latter I prefer—and, with me, ask him to forgive us. He may, nay, will scorn me; for how could he do aught else? but I shall, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that in this respect I shall sin no more."

At the mention of the name of Perryman all the base part in this man's nature arose in conflict, his cheek paled, and his eyes flashed; and again for the time he was the very impersonation of evil. But before her, as she spoke, he cowed again, for he had lost all control over himself; and, approaching her, he said: "Clara, spare me this. 'Tis too much to ask one's rival for forgiveness."

"Spare you!" she replies, "why should you or I be spared, when to spare us means to sacrifice him? No, John Hobart, it must be so. If you will not do it, you prove yourself again what you have too often before; but I will, and must."

Hobart knew that Clara would do as she had spoken, and that he had no power to prevent her carrying out her purpose.

"Clara," he said, "I know not if madness be coming upon me, and I care not; but if you will not stay otherwise, I will marry you, and then—and then—I will defy all."

"Too late," she replied, "too late. Earlier in the day, John Hobart, this would have been to me good news; but not now. I must henceforth suffer, as others who are better have done" As she ceased speaking her bosom heaved; and, half sitting, half falling on the sofa, she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed aloud.

Hobart started towards her, but at the sound of his footfall she turned a face upon him full of indignation and scorn.

"Clara," he cries, "if I tell him, will you then forgive, and marry me?"

"Forgive you? I have already done that; but marry you, I will never. I will try to be to you as nearly a sister as possible; but any more, do not ask of me. To-morrow if you do not make the confession I ask of you, I shall. My future movements will be guided by circumstances."

"Will nothing else satisfy you?" he asked. "Must I do the very thing which of all others I would sooner not do? Oh, it is bitter, but now do I know that at least I deserve all."

"Aye, we both deserve all, for we are equally to blame; but we can make reparation, and it must be. Go now, John Hobart; I will give you until this time to-morrow to decide; but then if you will not do as I ask, I must, at least, perform my part." With these words, she arose and left the room, taking no heed of the endearing epithets showered upon her, save that when she had reached the door of her chamber she turned and said:

"The past, John Hobart, cannot with me ever return or be effaced."

CHAPTER XI.

We will now take the reader again to the woods of Van Dieman's Land. The sun has just risen, the birds are beginning to chirp, and as they soar upwards they see the figure of a man, who lies, to all appearance, dead. With the curiosity of the feathered tribe, they view the form of the apparently lifeless body; but he stirs not. The sun gradually rises, and the day is alive with all the natives of the woods, but still the man remains motionless. Suddenly he moves, then tries to rise, but sinks again, for his strength seems to be entirely gone. He mutters to himself, but his thoughts seem to keep on one subject. "Clara," he says, your mother is coming. Yes, she comes. What a long time she has been away. She will not know you now; you have grown, my girl—yes, almost out of recollection. But she will know you; yes, who could ever forget Clara? my Clara! my only comfort for so many weary years. You would not listen to him; I knew you would not. No, John Hobart, you cannot deceive her. Go villain, go to your wife, Mary Torridge, the unwilling bride, whom you gained by stratagem, only to lose her. How she rejected you with scorn! I saw it, although an unwilling witness. I knew not what your intention was, and you deceived us all—even the parson, and Felix, too, the knowing one. Ah, ah! but did she not tell you, John, that you had put a stone round your own neck, which you would live to curse? How true 'twill come, and then she, too, will be avenged." So went on Matthew Grant muttering to himself in this wise. Several times he attempts to rise, but his limbs refuse their office, and he sinks upon the ground, and again all is still.

After a time the murmur of voices is heard in the distance; the birds flutter in the trees, and again the lonely bush seems all astir. The voices approach rapidly, and the tramp as of

many feet is heard. On, on, they come, looking behind every huge tree, for they think that he whom they are seeking is secreted in some secluded spot. Suddenly the recumbent figure rises into a sitting position, and calls aloud: "Clara, my girl, 'tis time to rise; 'tis long past sunrise, and I must away."

At the sound the men halt and listen, and then resume their search, but as they are unable to find anything, they conclude that what they had heard was only the result of their imagination. Suddenly again, almost in their midst, comes that voice, "I am not guilty;" and the seekers look before them where lies the figure of Matthew Grant.

The first who goes to his side is the overseer of the division to which Grant belongs, and he exclaims in a self-satisfied tone, "I knew he had not bolted. Come, get up, my man." He does not move, however, but mutters, "Tell her to come—I am not cross."

"Poor old fellow," several exclaim in a breath, "he has lost his reason."

"Or does he sham?" asks another.

"Sham! Not he," says the first comer; "he doesn't know how to do that. I knew as soon as he was first reported missing, and that note was found crumpled up outside his hut, that he had only wandered away in hopes of finding his daughter. The ungrateful girl, to leave the poor old fellow, when he was always so kind to her. This comes of giving them too much of their own way."

"Come come," says one, who seems to be in command, "we must not waste time. Let us prepare a litter, and try to save his life if possible."

With this two long saplings are found, and several smaller sticks are laid across them, and at each corner they are tied with some strips of stringy bark, and so an Australian litter is formed. Grant is now lifted as gently as such men know how

to lift a prisoner; for they, at least, do think a prisoner is no longer a man—they take into consideration the fact that there are some cases of victimised innocence. Two men now take up the litter, one at each end, and they march forward for some time in silence.

Presently old Matthew again tries to rise, but his strength is not equal to it; and again he mutters, "Yes, John Hobart, I will see you some day; when you try to cast the stone from off your neck, you will possibly try to hang another there, for you are villain enough. But if you do, beware, John, for the first stone may choke you. And you tried to take my Clara, too. Ah, but you could not. She would not leave her poor old father. No, she will stay and comfort me; but sooner or later I will come and see you, John, and will also tell Clara at once to whom you are married; and then, John, what will she think of you when she knows how you obtained a wife?"

"I say, Kilgour," says one of the carriers, "he is quite gone. He talks of nothing but her and Hobart. They must be a nice couple—he to induce her to leave, and she to go from the poor old fellow."

"Aye," said Kilgour, "blood will tell. What could you expect from the offspring of two lifers?"

"True," said the first speaker; "but what does he mean by speaking of Hobart's wife?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I never heard he had one. But with this class of people, you or me never knows. They keep their affairs in their own class."

"True, but Hobart is not one of their class; he is a solicitor, and never was a prisoner."

"I know that, but his father was; and you know what they say about 'bred in the bone, &c.'"

This seemed to be conclusive, and they accepted the arguments of the latter speaker.

"The old fellow has been here a long time now," says another. "Is he a lifer? What was it for?"

"Yes," says Kilgour, "he has been here about fifteen years. He was sent out for receiving and, I think, stealing as well. It was, I am told, a bad case; a man that he was employed by had promoted and given him about the best billet on his estate (for he was a gentleman), and then the ungrateful fool stole, and was very near being hanged. His wife followed him out, but she died."

"Yes," mutters again the old man, "it was all put there for spite, and I could not prove otherwise, and they lagged me. But some day, yes some day——"

"Yes, some day," laughed one of the crowd, "some day, old fellow, and I think before long you will get a selection of your own."

This seemed to be considered a good joke by all, for they laughed and marched on. About four in the afternoon they reached head-quarters, reported their search to the assistant-superintendent, and took old Grant to the hospital. The doctor carefully examined Grant, and questioned the party who had found him. Then, as Grant rallied again, he asked him questions, but his replies were so at variance that the doctor pronounced him hopelessly mad. "There is," he said, "nothing ailing him bodily, beyond the fact that he has lost strength from want of food. He is not even feverish, and is quite harmless. But I don't think there is any chance of his sanity returning."

So Matthew, when he recovered his bodily health, became a wanderer about the divisions. He was perfectly harmless, and would sit for hours by himself and talk as though Clara was with him, for he never seemed to let her out of his memory. In this state things remained for long, and in all probability would have

continued so until death had relieved the unfortunate man, but for an event happening to which he owed the return of his sanity. The medical man who had examined him when he was first found was one of the old school, who when they conclude a case is hopeless, never again try a remedy. Dr. Featherstone had been in the service for many years, first as an army doctor, and afterwards in the penal department. He at last decided to resign and return home, for he was at this time entitled to a pension. Accordingly he went, and in his place came a man of about twenty-nine years of age—one of the new school, whose motto is "kill or cure," and being fresh from his home studies, he was anxious to put some of his ideas to the test. He had been there some ten days or more when he observed Grant one morning going his rounds as usual, and asked his dispenser what was the matter, and was supplied with a full account of the affair.

"Did Dr. Featherstone never try to cure this man in any way?" he asked the dispenser.

"No, sir; he pronounced him hopelessly insane the day he was brought in, and nothing was ever done after."

"And is this hut you speak of still standing?"

"Yes, sir, and the furniture remains nearly the same, if not quite, as when he left it."

"Then," said the surgeon, "one day this week, if I am not mistaken, we will restore the old man's sanity. It is quite time the old regime of medical men should be replaced; they are a pack of old fools."

The dispenser felt quite shocked that his superior should speak so of their late doctor, whom he had always thought infallible, but he said nothing; and, the third day after this conversation, Dr. Brintor told him to get two or three of the old hands together and take Grant to the place where he had been found, and then lead him back to his hut.

Accordingly the instructions were carried out, and long before they reached the hut Dr. Brintor awaited them. As they neared the hut there was a visible alteration in Grant; he looked around him more, and seemed to take notice of the surroundings. When they neared the hut Grant was allowed to walk on, while rest of the party remained behind. He went into the place as of old, looked round, and called "Clara!" Then he stood as though in thought; suddenly he placed his hand on his forehead as though trying to remember; presently he mutters: "Yes, the note—I remembered to preserve. Ah! from what? Yes, out in the night; yes. Now I remember all. She went to save me from—no, this I cannot remember," and suddenly turning to the doctor he says, "Do you know, sir, what she went to save me from?"

"Of course I do," replied the doctor; "she went to try and save you from dying in prison."

"Noble girl; but I fear, sir, she will not succeed, although, as I told her, I was innocent. What do you think of it—do you think there is any chance?"

"While there is life there is hope. Have patience for her return, and then you will know more."

"True," replied Grant, "I must have patience; but I seem to forget something. I wonder what I forget."

"You have been ill; that has no doubt affected your memory. You are nearly well now, but you must not ask questions or you may fall ill again. Have patience, and when you want to know anything ask me, but no one else."

"But, sir, I do not know or remember you. Who are you, if you please?"

"I am Dr. Brintor, who took the place of Dr. Featherstone."

"Ah, yes, I remember him. When did he go? I don't think I have seen him lately."

"No, he has been gone some time; but we must go back to quarters now. Mind, you must not ask any one questions excepting of me; don't forget."

They returned to quarters, and the man that had some few hours before been looked upon as a hopeless idiot was now as sane, or nearly so, as ever.

Some few days after this, under the pretence of keeping him in to gain strength, Grant was sent back to his old employer, and was allowed to retake possession of his hut. So things went on month after month, and when no signs came of Clara returning he became most anxious and uneasy, and at last, to save his reason, it became imperative to tell the truth. At this the old man became almost frantic, and for days his mind seemed giving way, and he gradually sank in health so that his life was despaired of. Gradually he became weaker, and the doctor gave it as his opinion that the poor old fellow would eventually sink under his troubles. Matters were in this state when the news came of the confession and his free pardon, which Hobart and Fixer had read. This news made a great alteration in the old fellow, and in a very short time he again began to recover, for he buoyed himself up with the hope of finding his daughter. Slowly but surely he came round; and, the press having caused great interest to be taken in his past misfortunes, subscriptions came in so freely that at the expiration of six weeks, when he was pronounced well enough to travel, there was collected for him nearly £100, and with this he concluded he could easily find Clara.

The day, the joyful day for the unfortunate man, at length arrived, and the boat in which he had taken passage for Melbourne stood at the Hobartown pier. Many of the free population who had known Matthew Grant came to see him off, and many a cordial shake of the hand and kind wish did he receive from those around. In this new joy and excitement, for the time at least, he forgot his past and present troubles. There were many down at the wharf on this occasion; in fact, so unusual an

occurrence was it, that there were hundreds to witness his departure. Now in all this bustle and excitement there is to be seen a man of mature years, who looks around him in a suspicious manner. He does not wear the convict dress, but there is a nervousness about him that would attract anyone's attention who was not looking at other matters. Carefully does he look around, and suddenly, when all are busy with other things, he seizes a box of fruit which lies on the wharf, and which is to go on board, and rushes on, deposits it with the others, and then mingles again with the crowd. After a little time he descends the cabin steps and there he remains until the whistle blows and the steamer's paddles are heard. He too, like Grant, knows, at least for a time, he is free. Yes, an escaped convict is on board, without a shilling. But what cares he for money—he knows but the value of one thing, LIBERTY, and this he now concludes he has obtained. On, on steams the boat, and when the time arrives for tickets to be examined, the escaped man goes aft, descends the hold which happens to be open, and for the remainder of the voyage, four whole days, he is not seen. No food does he taste except the fruit stored below, but of this he eats his full. In those days there was no telegraph, and all his fear is that another boat will follow ; but fortune favours him, and without further adventure the vessel arrives safely at the Sandridge pier, Melbourne. With the crowd the convict mingles, and now he feels sure of his freedom. Yes, after ten years in Van Dieman's Land, and a probable twenty more—for he is a hardy man, and his sentence was for life, and in those days it was a little matter that gave an unfortunate man that sentence—but from the probable twenty he escapes, and for the time he goes amid the crowd and we see him no more.

Grant now soon makes his way to the Sandridge railway station, takes a ticket, and in a very few minutes is landed in the city of Melbourne. What were his feelings at finding himself in such a place, and after such a number of years? For my part, I feel how unequal I am to the task of describing his emotions. First, he sees the throng of people—to him so un-

usual a sight—and hears the hum of voices, the cry of the newsboy; but he walks on and forgets for the time the object of his search; in fact, he only revels in the enjoyment of his lately-found liberty. What delight there exists to him in such knowledge. How long has he waited and yearned for what be has now obtained? How long has he hoped without any reason for so doing? And now, when he least expected, indeed long after all hope was dead within him, he finds himself free; and not only free, but acquitted of all blame. Every time he realises the truth he feels overjoyed. This new experience raises him to the seventh heaven of delight, and as he experiences the joy of such freedom, on, on he walks, heedless of the direction he takes; for why should he care? Can he not at any moment turn and retrace his steps, which are no longer bound to keep in certain precincts? He has strolled on for fully three hours, when be is aroused by hearing the newsboy crying the evening paper, and announcing the escape of a convict. Eagerly he purchases a paper, scans its contents, and there he finds that the same steamer which had brought him has carried the runaway. The missing man is known to him, and he is aware that should he see him he would recognise him. The full description of the convict is given, and nearly every detail of the description would apply to himself, although he does not notice that. Deep in thought, he still rambles on, wondering within himself if the unfortunate man will be lucky enough to avoid detection in the crowded thoroughfares of Melbourne, for he has too much sympathy to desire to aid in his arrest; and while thinking on in this strain, he is quite unaware of the fact that a man follows him, eagerly watching to see if he looks as though to find the runaway. Presently, having made up his mind that such is not the case, he overtakes Grant, and before the latter can turn round he is addressed in the following words:—"Well, Matthew, would you know me were you to see me?"

Grant, at the sound of a familiar voice, turns and sees before him a man whose features he fancies he has seen before, but yet he cannot call to mind who he is.

"So you do not recognise me. I am glad of that. I thought I could hide my identity."

"John Whittler, as I live," answers Grant; "I am glad to see you—glad because I know you are safe. And then again I am sorry you have not managed to put a greater distance between you and those who will be hot in pursuit."

"I know, Grant, you are glad—for I am certain you would not aid them to overtake me, although you are not one of my sort, for you always were of a better lot. But you are of the humane kind, and would not wish to see me back in that hell's hole again."

"No, John, that I would not; for no matter what you have been, you were not like some in the hole we have just come from. I do believe you will, if you are allowed, try and do better."

"Aye, Grant, that I will, and I only long to get out of this place, and reach the goldfields, and then I shall feel safer."

"Why do you lose time? Every hour you are here increases your danger; in fact, your talking to me is far from wise, for I am most assuredly known."

"I only wait to get a few shillings to take me on, for so far I have nothing. The disguise I have I got from one of our, or rather my, sort; but money he could not give me, for he had none. To-night I hope to get a little, and then I will start."

"I am but poor myself," said Grant, "for what little I possess I have an all-important use for. But still I would like to do you a good turn; and if you will promise me, if I give you some of what little I have, that you will away at once, I can only say you are welcome."

As Grant said this he put his hand into his pocket and brought forth three bright sovereigns.

"Grant," said Whittler, "I had no thought of this when I accosted you; but if you will so far befriend me, and I should ever find an opportunity to repay you, I shall do so as willingly as I know you give me this."

"I care not about repayment; we are, or have been, brothers in adversity; and although I am aware I am aiding you to evade the law, yet all I ask in return for this is that in future you may try and do better. Should you ever be in a position to aid another, do so with this amount, and leave this city at once. These are the only conditions I impose."

So saying, Grant placed the money in the hand of John Whittler.

"Matthew Grant," said Whittler, catching him by the hand, "for ten long years I have never had occasion to look on any one but as an enemy; for you know what they are where we have just come from, and can therefore feel and know a little of what I now would say. I cannot find words to say what I want, but I only trust that the day may come when I can show I am not quite so bad as not to remember this act. Good-bye, Grant, and may you never regret this one kind act."

"Good-bye, Whittler; clear away as quickly as possible is my advice to you."

So they parted. Grant now decided it was getting time for him to seek some place where he could put up, which, until now, he had not thought of. He accordingly, as he concluded he had strayed a considerable distance, started to walk briskly; and so for a short space we will leave him and follow John Whittler.

On his leaving Grant he at once decided to make what haste he could to get clear of the city, but he had not gone far when he observed he was closely watched, and he soon came to the conclusion that the detectives were on his track.

"Now," he thought, "I am again in the hands of the philis-

tines if I do not effect my escape by some fraud or other. How shall I do it? Shall I?" he mutters. "Yes, why not? It will be but a few days; but to me it would be life. I must, and will escape, so here goes."

With this he crosses the street, and walks towards the man, who, he concluded, had been following him. When he is face to face with the stranger, he says: "Can you tell me how far I am from a police station? or where can I find a policeman?"

"Why do you ask?" enquires the individual.

"Because I wish to do an act of justice. I want an answer before it is too late; so, if you can tell me, do so, and at once."

"Well, then, I am a detective. Now, what would you?"

"Good," says Whittler, "did you meet or see that man that I have just left?"

"Yes," answers the detective, all excitement.

"Well," replied he, "that man is John Whittler, just escaped from Van Dieman's Land. Quick and arrest him, and I will call in casually and identify him, for I am Matthew Grant, just pardoned, and from there."

"Well, fool that I have been," says the detective, "for I had followed you, and took you for him."

"Well, lose no time now, but away. I will pass by in about an hour, and then, if you like, you can call me, and even arrest me. I can identify him, but I would not like it known that I gave information."

The detective was decided by the style of the man and his assurance; and, further, fearing he might lose the right one, started off in full pursuit of Grant, whom he soon overtakes; while Mr John Whittler, in less time than it took to convey Grant to the lock-up, was on his way along the Keilor Plains,

and in the direction of Bendigo. Grant, to save the man who had just betrayed him to the police, refused, for the present at least, to say a word.

CHAPTER XII.

Once more we will, with the reader's permission, return to Timaru. The party which was held at Frank Perryman's came off as was intended; but Clara, steadfast in her determination to sin no more in this direction, did not go, and on this ground John Hobart refused to leave her while in ill health. It is needless to say that Frank did not enjoy the party as he would have done had Clara been well enough to attend, but still, as it could not be avoided, he had again to endure disappointment, and wait.

So, day after day, in fact, month after month, went by, and still Clara remained almost in seclusion, for she feared to do otherwise. Of course she knew not of her father's release; and for his sake she decided to remain in the same house with her supposed brother. In truth, she believed there existed some hold on her father by Hobart. She braved everything when her temper was roused; and she now held the mastery of Hobart, but she kept to herself, and allowed him to do likewise, and waited. They had removed to a more commodious house, where she enjoyed more comforts; but she prevented Hobart from thawing the coolness that existed between them. Often did he implore her to forget the past, and be to him as before, but she refused to accede to the request.

Things went on in this way until one day, to John Hobart's annoyance, Mr Felix Fixer, again appeared on the scene, and on the third day after his arrival he sent to Hobart the following brief letter.

JOHN HOBART, ESQ., Timaru.

DEAR SIR,—You will doubtless be glad to hear of my return. I shall be most happy to see you as soon as you can make it convenient, either at your office or at your house. Kindly notify which you prefer; but don't lay this note by, or your defective memory may cause you to forget to reply. I have business of the greatest importance to speak upon—Yours faithfully,

FELIX FIXER.

Hobart was not aware of the return of Fixer until this note was found by him placed on his office table on the fourth morning after his return.

"Curse the fellow," he exclaimed, "what does he want now? More money of course. I had better give Perryman up to him, and take what I can and go, for I shall know no peace now unless I can make some terms with him, and so get rid of him. If I could"—here he paused, and a sinister expression came over his face that bode no good to Fixer. "Yes," he went on, "I might as well do that if a chance offered, for I have now raised myself above suspicion. But he knows too much, and is always on the allert. Still, perhaps, 'twill be better to see him, and then—then——."

Hobart lapses into deep thought. Several times has some one knocked at his office door, but he either does not or will not hear them.

"A stone around my neck, she said," he mutters; "ah, little I thought how true. If I could, though, put one around hers, and cast her into the sea, I would then defy all; for then, Clara Grant, you shall marry me in spite of everything. But I must not waste time dreaming thus; I must look matters straight in the face, and then I may possibly cope with them; but if I drivel on like this, I shall spoil all, and leave here as I came, a beggar."

Opening his private bureau, he deposits therein Fixer's

letter, takes some plain paper, and writes, in a feigned hand, the following note:—

MR FIXER, Timaru.

DEAR SIR,—I shall be at liberty to-night at my office at 8 o'clock when I shall be able to see you.—Yours, in haste.

The letter he, either from forgetfulness or with intention, does not sign, but seals and folds it up, and addresses the envelope.

And now for a short space we will take a peep at Mr Fixer, and see how he looks after his trip. He sits as we see him in an easy chair before a bright wood fire; for he has, since his return, taken a furnished cottage, and has an elderly woman for his housekeeper. No one would take him for the same person, for in the three months that have elapsed his whiskers have so grown that they completely cover his face, which before was cleanly shaved, except the moustache, and this is now removed. So much does it alter him that his most intimate friend would pass him in the street. As he sits before the fire, Hobart's letter is brought in by the housekeeper, who at once retires; and Fixer, with a smile of satisfaction, opens the envelope, saying as he does so, "You are learning better manners, John Hobart. Now, this is something like. Hulloa! What is this?" he exclaims in surprise, "the letter is written in a feigned hand, and not signed. So ho, my boy, you mean mischief, do you! Well, we shall see. I am glad I provided myself for an occasion like the present. Oh, yes, John, I shall be there, for I know how glad you will be to see me."

At 8 o'clock on the evening in question Hobart is the first to enter his office door, and standing in the shadow on the opposite side is Felix Fixer, waiting and watching. After a little he too walks over; and, after knocking and getting no reply turns the handle, and the door yields to the touch, and he enters. Scarcely has he closed the door after him, when there descends on

his head a blow that is well directed; but, strange to say, instead of succumbing to the attack made upon him, Felix Fixer turns sharply, much to the surprise of John Hobart, and with a well-directed blow he fells him to the ground.

"Take that, John Hobart; and the next time you try to deprive me of my life, do not put me on my guard, as you did this time."

"Ah, curse you," returns Hobart; "were you not the fiend himself you could never have withstood such a blow."

"Never mind what I could have withstood. Get up, fool, and wipe the blood from your face, and precede me up-stairs, for I came here to do business, and I shall do it before I leave. You also came here to do business, but you tried, and signally failed. I shall not!"

"Tell me what you want, that I may settle accounts with you, and then let me alone. Why do you not finish in one act instead of prolonging my misery."

"Ha! ha! ha! Finish you, like you tried to finish me. No, that I will leave for the hangman, John. That's not the way I go to work; in fact, you are to me the goose that lays the golden eggs, and I must nurse you lest you catch the croop and die. You don't know how anxious I am about you."

"Aye, jeer on. Some day it will be my turn."

"Your turn!" says Fixer. "I think you have had your turn. Do you not live now like a lord, when you should be treated like the criminal that you are? Have you not deprived the unfortunate girl of her actual freedom under threats? And her father, what have you done for him? Made the unfortunate man miserable for life. How he must like you and your dear sister; and then you speak about your turn—yes, you shall have it. I fancy I see what a time you will have when Grant arrives, and perhaps, Mary Torridge too. Get up, man, instantly, or I shall

forget you are the viper you are by crushing out your life, and so get myself into trouble for you, who are not worth one minute's thought. Precede me to your room, and should you make another attempt on me I will finish you, and so save the hangman."

Hobart was so overcome that he at once arose and ascended the stairs, Fixer following immediately behind.

When they arrived inside the office, Fixer, motioning to a chair, told his companion roughly to be seated, and, turning, closed and locked the door. He now, with a bull's-eye lamp, which he had brought with him, lighted the room; and, drawing up one chair, placed the lamp upon another; and, taking out his revolver, examined, and returned it to his pocket.

"Now, John Hobart, try and be wise, and let us to business. I came here for a purpose; and, mind you, it is for your interest as well as mine that I succeed. I am quite prepared to treat you fairly, so try and subdue your villainous nature, and listen to reason. If I do well, so do you; if I do not, you shall not; so if you will for once try and be fair, you will find that I can display honesty among thieves."

"I will be reasonable; but why be so coarse in your remarks, and make such hideous comparisons?"

"What else could either of us be compared to? Do we not both hope to rise by the fall of another? Aye, by the fall of a regiment if necessary. For my part, I want success, and I am honest enough to admit that I am not very particular how I attain it. Yet I feel assured I am more conscientious than you, so don't try to deceive both yourself and me."

"What do you want? State the amount, and if it is in my power to give it you, and so settle the matter, I will agree."

"I do not, as I told you, want any amount. I do not, in fact, want money, and possibly never shall from you or the firm;

but from both do I want assistance, and should my venture be successful, you shall share the proceeds. Further, I will use all discretion, and hear your advice at all times, so that you may never be working in the dark."

"You do not enlighten me as to your plans, but keep me in the dark; in fact, you too often treat me as a child by your jeering and sarcastic manner."

While Hobart spoke he had been weighing in his mind all that Fixer had just said; and, knowing as he did that he was a man of the world, and a man of business, his gambler's spirit rose within him; and he felt, in truth, as anxious to hear Fixer further as Fixer was to speak. He felt sure that he had some bold speculation to propose, and he himself was as anxious for such as his confederate; for was he not in daily dread of Grant turning up and destroying all his plans? With Clara, too, he felt a change would be for the better; for did he not half fear that her arguments in favour of Frank Perryman were but the foreruners of love, and this he dreaded more than all. Were she to love none else he could endure things in their present state, but any change in her feelings would materially alter the matter. He had concluded, too, in his own mind, that Fixer was one too many for him, and still he believed as much in his honesty towards himself as a man like Hobart could believe in anyone; so that at this stage he had decided to hear and reason with him, and do what he considered best.

"Then," said Fixer, in reply to Hobart's last remarks, "I will now treat you as a man; in fact, possibly better than you deserve. I have no desire to say aught that offends you, as we can do better by agreeing than otherwise. Now, to proceed, I have been, since I left here, to the other colonies, for I had some little money besides the amount I had received from you. I have, at the other places, made arrangements to ship there direct certain produce from here, and what I now wish to do is to start the thing. At first I know I shall for a certainty

have difficulties to contend with, but with you to aid me they can be easily overcome. I shall then soon be in a position to do a large business on my name alone, for you will be able to say all that is required to make my credit good. As our business progresses (*ours* I say advisedly, for you shall have your share of the profits) we can further speculate on our names and our *paper*—a useful thing if properly handled. In fact, by degrees the firm will develop into a sort of mercantile arrangement; we can, in a short time, ship even with our own ships direct to other ports, and take advantage of the different markets to finance during the intervals."

"All that sounds well enough; but how are you to start such an affair without much capital?"

"I am coming to that. You must, if you like mind, place a certain sum at first in my hands, to open up the business. This money you can draw back almost immediately; for my, or rather *our*, banker need not know that the capital is not expended in the purchase of grain, wool, ships, or what not. Further, I can refer, or cause my banker to refer, to you; you can satisfy all his doubts by saying you are intimately acquainted with my business affairs, and that before long I shall have the command of large sums of money; and, as an assurance of this, I can draw on your firm for a sum by bill of exchange, which you accept without demur. Of course, for this bill I shall at once make provision; and, further, you will, by these means, be always better off than now, for if aught occurrs between yourself and Perryman you will soon be in a position to defy all here."

"You ask," said Hobart, evidently puzzled, "for a bill from the firm. How do I know, in the first place, you will not take the proceeds and clear with it? Besides this, how do I know what Perryman may say when I ask his consent to such a speculation on my account?"

"Hobart, you are a child. Why should I clear with the proceeds of this bill, when by remaining I have every reason to sup-

pose I shall do better? In fact, I feel certain I shall soon raise myself to independence, for the business is required here much, and will I am sure prosper if properly handled. As to your second absurd query, why should you ever let Perryman know a word about the bill, which you can accept yourself in the name of the firm? Should our little dodge ever be discovered, it is doubtful if Perryman would raise any objection; and if he did you could so smooth the thing over that nothing would come of it. In fact, by taking up the bill all would be well, and he could only say that in future you must not draw on the firm."

"I begin to understand you; but I know little about bills, further than that they become due so many months after date."

"Such matters as these I do know and understand, so you can leave that to me. All you have to do is to try and be fair, and in Felix Fixer you will find as great a friend as ever you will find in him an enemy if you do wrong. I will now leave you; and when I wish to see you next, I shall call upon you in the daytime, and then we can make or complete any further arrangements. I shall also secure suitable premises to carry on business for the present, and do not intend to do anything of much importance without your being made cognisant of it. So now, I trust you will see the advisability of checking any further desire you may have to take my life, as you did to-night. You would certainly have succeeded but for this hat, which, as you see, is blow-proof." As Fixer said this he, with difficulty, took off his hat, which had bearings coming from the crown down on to his shoulders; and in consequence, as the bearings were spring steel, the blow only forced them down on to the shoulder, but in no way hurt the head of the wearer.

"I am still further protected against your attacks," Fixer added, "as I concluded you meant mischief. Let me tell you also that should you ever succeed in your endeavours you will but ruin yourself; for I have now deposited, in case anything of that nature occurrs to me, letters to Frank Perryman, Clara, and

Mary Hobart, which tell them all. I have likewise written to Matthew Graut, and all these epistles will be delivered to the persons addressed should any mishap occur to me, and they will know all, for I have said everything that can be said. Bear all I say in mind, and until we meet again I will bid you good evening."

For long after Fixer's departure Hobart sat in his office ruminating over all that had been said. "If his plan only work, I see success beyond my expectations," he thought, "and why should it not. He is, without doubt, clever in business, and I will try and look on things in a different light. His own interests, too, are mine; but what will Frank say if he finds us out? Bah! what care I? Can I not handle him in any case? In fact, I must, in spite of all obstacles, succeed."

A few minutes after John Hobart was on his way home, and as he walked along he was in quite a different frame of mind from what he was when he had left his house a few hours before. The success of Fixer's schemes was as much importance to him as to Fixer himself—thus is a man's mind turned completely round by a little gentle persuasion. Hobart had washed the blood stains off his face, which were the result of Fixer's blow; but knew that on the morrow, at least, he would not be able to show himself at the office, as he was marked in a manner that would not look desirable for one of his profession.

CHAPTER XIII.

Leaving things as they are in the Hobart family for the present, we will return to Matthew Grant, whom we left in the police cell. When he was alone his mind began to dwell on his search for Clara. He felt certain he would not have tc remain long in custody, as he could soon convince them that he was not John Whittler. The following morning Grant was taken before the magistrate, and, to his surprise, he heard the detective recount how he had been informed by one Grant a pardoned convict, from Van Dieman's Land, that the prisoner was the man they sought. The detective asked for a remand, on the ground that he would obtain further evidence from Hobart Town, or would find the man who had given the information, to give the required evidence against the prisoner. Grant here stated that he was indeed the Matthew Grant who had been pardoned; but the magistrate took no notice of this, and he was accordingly remanded. For fourteen long days Grant lay awaiting further evidence, and at last, to his delight, a warder arrived, who at once declared him to be Matthew Grant, and not John Whittler; and he was accordingly discharged.

Now, fully awake to the difficulties of his search, the liberated man started on his weary travel. During the following days he searched for the name of Hobart, but no trace of his whereabouts could he find, further than that one of the name had left there nearly two years before, but for what part no one could tell him. First he caused advertisements to be inserted in both the Melbourne and up-country papers, but no news came. After remaining there for nearly a month, he decided to leave the city, and for days he walked on asking of all he met for information; but none came to him, and at times he looked upon his search as so little likely to succeed that he

almost lost all hope. He had now journeyed on as far as the Dunolly diggings. The gold fever was then at its height, and the desire for acquiring wealth seemed to possess all; but for Grant, it had no charms. To him gold, or aught else, without Clara, was as useless dross, and he at times feared that before he could find any trace of her all his little capital would be gone. Still he persevered, and so anxious was he for information, that he would listen and ask questions of any whom he thought likely to give him a clue. On the evening of the fifth day after his arrival in Dunolly, Grant sat down, quite weary and footsore, for he had, during his stay, visited nearly every house on the diggings. The place in which he was seated was a public room, and many other people were there taking their evening glass.

"Well, Matthew," said one man, evidently a digger, "have you heard any word yet of your daughter?"

"No, I am sorry to say, I can find no tidings of her, and I know not where to look next."

"Well, I think you had better turn to and look for a fortune, for it seems easier to find than she."

"I care not for fortune without her, and while I have a shilling left I will look. When I must work of course I must."

The man addressed looked at Grant as though to take stock of him, and then said: "Why not take a trip over to Bendigo. She may be there."

"How far is that away?" asked Grant.

"Some forty miles. You can walk there in a day."

'Can you tell me the way, as I may as well try that place as stay here?"

"Oh yes," replied the man; "you take the road that leads from the back of this house, and as you go along ask anyone you meet the way to Jones's Creek and they will tell you."

"Thanks," replied Grant; "I will start early, so that I may get through;" and with this the man wished him a good night, and departed.

Early on the following morning saw Grant again on the "wallaby track," as tramping was termed in those days; and before eight o'clock he had arrived at Jones's Creek. Now Jones's Creek was one of those lonely places where the timber grows so thickly that it was an easy matter for a man, or men, to hide behind the trees. The old man walked on till he came to a turn of the road, where, for the time, the sight of the track both before and behind him was lost to view—the timber at this point being thicker than usual. As he had eaten but little breakfast before he started, he stopped on the roadside, sat down on a fallen tree, and took from a small bundle which he carried in his hand a piece of bread and meat, and commenced eating his snack. He had sat there for some few minutes, still deep in thought, when there crept up from behind a man carefully and stealthily, carrying in his right hand a formidable-looking stick. He had now reached a huge tree, which stood two or three feet behind where Grant was seated, all unconscious of any danger. The man listened, to assure himself that no one was approaching, and then, carefully lifting his stick high over his head, he approached two steps nearer Grant, and brought his weapon down on the head of the unfortunate man. The victim of this murderous onslaught fell with a dull thud senseless on the earth, and then all was still again. In less time than it takes to tell, the pockets were rifled, and nearly seventy pounds in bright gold were soon in possession of the robber.

"Ah," he muttered, "I thought from the way you spoke old chap, that you were not short. Now, perhaps, you will go in search of fortune instead of wandering about looking for daughters;" and having satisfied himself that he had all Grant's possessions, the fellow made off, and left the unfortunate man lying there to live or die.

About an hour later two more swaggers came along from Sandy Creek, bound for Dunolly. We will accompany them a a little, and listen to their conversation.

"A queer road this, Jim; we must be near the spot where the Dunlop O'Neil murder was committed."

"Yes," answers the other, "we are just now quite near to it. Seems as though these places were made for that sort of thing. Look how thick the timber is here; why there might be a regiment of soldiers within twenty yards, and until they pounced on you you would never know they were there."

"Yes, by Jove, I should not care about travelling here now alone. God knows how many are murdered that nothing is ever heard of."

"Yes, you are right; but one hears of plenty as it is. But it seems to be always the same on a goldfield."

The two companions are just taking the turn of the road where old Grant was lying, and just as they turn the corner the one addressed as Jim calls out, "Hullo, another case. Talk of the devil, they say, and you see his works."

"Poor old fellow, quite dead, I think, from the loss of blood. Robbery, you see; his pockets are turned inside out."

Jim, throwing off his swag, kneels down, and places his hand over old Grant's heart, saying as he does so, "No, George, he is alive yet, but what a smash he has had on the head. Poor old man, struck down, as he must have been, eating his breakfast. Give me a drop of that P.B., and we will try and bring him round. Curse such a cowardly wretch. If I ever should know who did this, by the piper that played before Moses, but I would make him remember Jim Meredith."

The brandy was now forced down Grant's throat, and in a very few minutes he showed signs of returning consciousness.

It was fully an hour before Grant could be made to understand the position of affairs, and when he did so he gave vent to the most pitiable cries of anguish.

"Oh, God," he exclaimed. "Am I to be ever pursued by evil fortune? I have been made the victim of plotters and murderers; and now, Clara, I shall never be able to find you," and the poor heart-broken old man burst into tears.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Meredith, "things always look blackest before the dawn. Who knows but that this may be the means of your finding her you seek."

"I thank you for trying to make me look on things in a favourable light," replied Grant, "but you know not what I have suffered. It has always looked blackest with me, but of that I need not speak now. I know not how I am to gain a livelihood, for my life has been wasted, and I know nothing of what would now be useful to me."

"Look here," said George, who until now had said nothing; "I suppose you can work; so if Jim here likes you can come along with us for a bit anyhow, and share with us. You will live, if nothing else."

"True," said Jim, "we intend pitching our tent on Gooseberry's Hill, at Dunolly, as I hear they are getting a little gold there; and as for blankets, I have nearly enough of them for both of us, so we shall have no difficulty in managing."

Grant rose, feeling very weak from loss of blood, and, turning to newly-found friends, said: "I thank you for your kindness, and will accept your generous offer. For this day, at least, I will remain, and if after we have had a talk you are still inclined to help me on by letting me work with you, and so learn how to dig, I will stay longer."

They both now agreed to this, and the three turned their steps again towards Dunolly. The first thing to do on arrival was

to give information to the police; but in those days these officials had enough to do to attend to the robberies that were always being committed, without bothering themselves concerning people they knew nothing of.

The evening of the same day saw the tent of the trio erected on Goosberry Hill, three colonial stretchers were built, and Grant was initiated into the ways of living on the goldfields.

The following morning they marked out two claims, one to be sunk at once, the other to be shepherded until such time as they saw how the lead went. This was the only work they did on that day, except putting things in order a little, and in the evening when they were all assembled in the tent, Grant said: "Now, George and Meredith, as you have been kind enough to offer me your assistance, I think a little explanation is due to you as to who and what I am."

"Explanation," they both cried out, laughing. "On the diggings? I wonder you don't want to produce testimonials."

"I do not mean, as far as that goes," returned Grant; but I want to tell you something, and I must tell it to you. If, after I have done so you feel as now, all the better; if not, why I have done you no harm, and can go."

"Well," said George, who was evidently not much of a spokesman, "I don't think it any business of ours to know your business; but if you want to confess, I don't think Jim will object, and I know I shan't."

Grant, without further preface proceeded to impart to his two mates the story of his suffering on Van Diemun's Land, with which our readers are already acquainted; and, having concluded his narrative, he said: "Now, you know what I have been, and if you will still accept me as a mate, all that I can say is that I shall be grateful; if you will not, I must, of course, try what I can do for myself."

"Why should we not take you?" said both, and Jim added, "All I say is, —— the man who would turn his back on one who had been in gaol under these circumstances. No, we are not of that kind, Matthew; we will work together, and if we can help you to find your girl we will."

"Well," said George, "them lawyers are a bad lot. Poor old father used to tell me that if I ever disagreed with anyone, never to get a lawyer to settle the matter, for he will take something from both and keep it for himself."

"And I think him right," said Jim; "but this Hobart must belong to a good family—you must have a kindly feeling towards his family, Grant."

"I have not much ill-feeling towards him now. If I could only find my daughter, I would freely forgive all."

"For my part," said Jim, "I would have two objects; one to find her, and the other to take satisfaction."

"I trust," said Grant, "we may get some gold, and then I shall try again; and so I am afraid I shall go on until worn out, I shall die, and without again setting eyes on my Clara."

"Never fear," responded George, "providence will yet befriend you, and most likely when you least expect it."

"I should like," said Jim, "to find some trace of the man that knocked you on the head before we found you. Have you any suspicions of anyone?"

"None," answered Grant; whom could I suspect?"

"True; but did anyone that you met since you came here question you concerning your future movements."

"Well, no; but stay, yes—the night before I started a man in the Commercial did ask why I did not try my hand at making a fortune, instead of wasting time looking for my daughter."

"And what answer did you make him ?"

"I merely said I should keep on looking as long as I had a shilling left."

"And what then ?" queried Jim.

"He asked me why I did not try Bendigo, and I enquired of him how far that was away. He told me forty miles."

"Yes, yes ; and what further did he say," asked Jim impatiently.

"I said I thought I would go, and he informed me what direction I should take ; and advised me first to enquire the way to Jones's Creek, and then on from there."

"Jones's Creek? Why, that was where we found you. Depend upon it, that fellow knew something of your being robbed, if he did not actually commit the assault. Would you know him again, do you think ?"

"Yes, of that I am sure, for he was the only stranger that I spoke to about my search ; and he seemed, now I come to think of it, to be very inquisitive."

"Well, look here, if you should ever see him again find out who and what he is, and tell me."

"I think the publican could tell me, for I saw the man I refer to in the hotel every day while I was staying there."

"We will walk over there some evening and have a look at them. If we find him there we can see whether we cannot unravel the mystery, for I should like to give a scoundrel like that his deserts. We must push on here, however, for a time, and try to get our claim bottomed."

For about a fortnight the party worked on hard in hopes of bottoming, and at last the day arrived when they were so nearly attaining their end that many of the miners from the adjoining claims gathered round, asking questions as to when they expected

to strike the lead. There is always a large class of men on the diggings who do little else but shepherd their claims until the adjoining one bottoms, and then, if the prospect turns out well, they too sink or sell ; but, if not, they abandon their claims and try their luck elsewhere. As the day wore on, each of the party became most anxious for the result, but still the bottom seemed most provokingly far off, and night closed in without their knowing if they had bottomed another duffer or otherwise. Early on the following morning they again started to work. Jim was the first to descend the claim, and he had scarcely got down when he called out, "Someone has tried to bottom for us during the night, but they have been disappointed."

Such was indeed the case ; some of the vagrant class of miners who infest the goldfields having attempted to bottom, with the intention of course of seeing what they could get, and also of using the information for their own benefit. One of the party worked on until near mid-day before the much-wished-for washdirt was found. At least Meredith called out from the bottom, "It's come at last, mates ; the next bucket after this will be a prospect."

Eagerly did they stand around when the looked-for dish came to be panned off, and many were the eager faces of the miners from the adjoining claims. Slowly but surely does the washdirt work down in the pan, and eagerly as the mob—for there were a large number of men round the hole now—await the first swill around of the water after the pan is nearly empty of earth ; but at last it comes. Jim carefully shakes down the prospect into the bottom, and then round goes the water, and there at the bottom is seen but one bright speck, and they and all else know that another "duffer" has been bottomed. Many more prospects are tried, but all to the same purpose, and by nightfall not only this claim but many of the adjoining ones are deserted, for the miners in those days rarely went any further if the neighbouring claim turned out a duffer. Poor old Grant, he felt this twice as much as either of his mates, for was there ever a new miner that did not

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expect to make a fortune at the first attempt. This was to all a disappointment, but to Jim and Meredith not nearly so much as to Grant, for they had before this both had good and bad luck, and could consequently better endure the disappointment.

"Well," said Jim after tea, which poor Grant could not touch, "I suppose we had better try another a little further down the lead. I saw a bit of ground just in the little kind of gully that I should like to try, for it seems a likely kind of place. What say you, mates?"

"Just as you like," says George, while Grant wisely leaves these matters to them, as he knows too little to express an opinion.

"Well then, to-morrow morning I shall run down before breakfast and if it is not already taken mark the ground out, and then we can remove nearer and start fair."

Matthew Grant now sat like one completely cast down. Until now he had buoyed himself up with the hope of getting something from his new venture; but now this, like all else, had proved a failure.

"You do not look very lively to-night, Matthew," said George; "you did not expect to make a fortune the first start, did you? Better luck next time."

"I fear my luck is never going to turn—always the same, bad, bad, bad."

"That be blowed," says Jim. "You had good luck when that girl died who was a bit spooney on you, for she got you out of that difficulty."

"True; but I might as well have remained there I think, for I seem bringing bad luck with me."

"That's all rot. Come, cheer up; let's take a stroll into town, and then we can have a look in at the Commercial, and

see if that chap's there, for I want to see him if he is. Come on, George."

"All right, I'm on for anything."

"I really would sooner stay at home," said Grant. You know I have no money to spend, and I owe you both enough as it is."

"Don't say anything about that," returned George; "fair dues amongst mates. When one has money you know both have, and the other way round."

"You must come, Matthew, as I want to see this suspected individual, if possible," says Jim.

Grant thus pressed, very reluctantly joins them, and in time they find themselves down at the Commercial Hotel. The man they are looking for, however, is not there—at least they do not see him.

After a time, as they sit over a glass of ale, a man apparently drunk strolls into the room where they are sitting, and as soon as he does so, recognises Grant."

"Hallo, old un; back again? Did you find her? Have a drink. When did you come?"

"I have not been away yet," answers Grant.

"That be hanged," the man says, and then seeming to recover himself he adds: "but you told me you would go, did you not? But let's have a drink. What are you going to have? Your mates too, will they join us?"

"Yes," says Jim, who had been looking attentively at the stranger, "we will have a drink, of course. I suppose you have been luckier than we have, and bottomed a good claim. We have just bottomed a duffer."

"Me? Oh, yes; good claim—rather. I'm a lucky devil, always was."

The drinks were now called for, and when brought the man appeared to search very diligently for the money in one of his pockets, but he was evidently unsuccessful. At last, turning to the barman he said: "I haven't got any money left just now; I'll give it you by-and by."

"That'll do; you fork out some of these sovereigns you've got in this pocket," and with that the barman struck the pocket, and sure enough the jingle of gold was heard. However, he whispered something to the barman, who simply nodded his head; and shortly after, under the pretence of going out to procure some money, the man himself went out.

"Is that the party?" asked Jim of Grant as soon as the three friends were alone.

"Yes, that is the man you asked me about."

"And that is the man," said Jim, "that knocked you on the head. I'll see if I can't meet him yet."

"And so will I," said George, "for I'd just about as soon serve him out as anyone I know of."

"Did you hear what the barman said about sovereigns?" asked Jim. "He's got your money right enough."

"Well, if he has perhaps it is all for the best. It seems I am never to have any pleasure, so it does not matter if he did rob me."

"What, let off a rascal like that? How much did he care whether he killed you or not? Never mind, Matthew, better luck next claim. I am always lucky when I select; George chose our last."

"Let's get home," says George, and so the party again pass through the bar, which is now quite crowded by people, most of whom are drunk, or partly so. In their midst they catch sight of the man who has but lately left them. He seems to be more

sober now, but at first he does not notice them; when he does, however, he pretends not to see them, and continues his conversation with one who is evidently a stranger, as he is plying his interlocutor with questions.

The next morning, as agreed, Jim rises early, and in less than an hour returns to the tent, and tells his mates that he had pegged out the claims; and the same day saw them again shifted, and all ready for work. After supper, about the time that they usually had their evening's chat, George went outside the tent door. Although he was expected each minute to return he did not, and after a time they concluded he had gone on some errand of his own, and consequently did not bother further. Jim and Grant remained sitting alone talking of the past, present, and their hopes of the future.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is necessary we should now return to Timaru and see how things there are going. We left John Hobart in high spirits, with the prospect of the mercantile spec foreshadowed to him by Fixer turning out well. How often does it happen in everyday life, that men when entering on a new venture do so with the best possible intentions, and long after they stick steadfastly to their first resolve, but success may turn them from their original course. A man goes into a speculation with the firm resolution that if he should succeed in this he will be satisfied; but in the majority of cases he proves the truth of the old saying that no one can ever have all he wants.

Now Felix Fixer was a man of undoubted ability—although the reader may wonder that he was ever a verger or a lawyer's clerk. Circumstances very materially alter cases, and Felix had one fault, but that fault was a very great one. He was a little

too clever, and in consequence people with whom he had most to mingle were afraid of him. Not that any act of dishonesty had ever been known of him, but those who were acquainted with the man saw his ability, and from his free way of speaking he let others too much into his secrets; whereas, had he acted more the byprocite, he would have obtained greater success. In this respect he had, however, one redeeming trait, if it can be so termed, and that was that he would not pretend to believe what he did not, and so far on in life it had been his misfortune. In fact, until he first met John Hobart he had never tried to deceive anyone. That very accomplished individual had indeed given him the first lesson in deceit, but so far he had never profited by it. Hitherto he had lived an independent life, inasmuch as he would not conceal his views, no matter how detrimental he knew it to be to express them, and if he set out a certain course for himself no one could induce him to alter it, no matter what interest was at stake. Many good chances had he lost, but still year after year did he go on in his persistence, always avering that man should be free and independent, and if he lost his independence he was no longer fit to be termed a man. Although never successful in climbing the ladder of fortune, for he had never got over the first step, and had he done so little short of a miracle would have prevented him having a speedy ascent; he had, so far, lived in accordance with his own views. After leaving the position of verger which he held in Hobart Town, he had undergone many privations, and bit by bit his feeling of independence had given way to one of avarice. He had watched the conduct of others, and had gradually decided that when next fortune came within his grasp, at all hazards he would hold on. It was in this frame of mind we found him the first time we saw him in the office of Perryman and Hobart. Now, one week later than the last interview between himself and Hobart, saw him on the morning in question scrupulously attired. He was viewing himself in the mirror at his villa, as he choose to cal it; his moustache was cleanly shaved, and his general attire was the perfection of neatness.

"Yes," he says, "I certainly think I shall do. Now, my gloves. Ah, that is better—now, my papers. Yes, I think, Mr Banker, I shall be able to do the first most essential thing. I shall create a good impression, and after that the other creations must depend on this."

As he said this he accompanied the words by tapping his forehead, and lifted from the glass-stand a pair of gold-mounted glasses attached to a black ribbon round his neck, and I think if the reader could see Mr Felix Fixer they would undoubtedly agree that the first step with reference to appearauces was attained. He looks as he now stands—with his long English walking coat, black pants, white vest, cloth button boots, neat black watch ribbon, and last, but not least, black bell-topper hat and umbrella—a man of business, and of means. As he is about to hold his interview with the banker *re* the opening of his account, we will accompany and see how he fares.

Entering the Bank of ——, he takes from his card-case a card, which he hands to the accountant, asks him to have it sent in to the manager with a request for an interview. Mr Fixer adds that if the present time is not convenient he will look in during the afternoon, as business will prevent his making a long stay.

In a very short time he is requested to step into the manager's room, and very soon he finds himself in the company of Mr Clinker.

"Mr Fixer, I presume," says the manager.

"That is my name, and I have called to see you with reference to my opening an account"

"Please be seated," says Mr Clinker.

"You intend, I presume, entering into some speculation," observes the manager, when Fixer is seated.

"Well, I am about to establish a business here, which I am of opinion is required; but I should like to hear your views, as, of course, you must know Mr ——."

"Clinker, sir, Clinker."

"Yes, to be sure. As I was about to say, Mr Clinker, I shall value your opinion far more than anyone's here, for your knowledge must be great."

"I shall be glad to give you my opinion, Mr Fixer, I assure you;" and Mr Clinker looked very much pleased, for he had but a very short time been raised to the position he now held, and his visitor's style pleased him exceedingly.

"Then, to be as brief as possible, I contemplate establishing a sort of mercantile affair, to consist principally in dealing in grain, wool, hides, and other produce, and of course the other lines which belong to this class of business. Also, I intend to import largely in lines which I find most suitable, so that the vessels which we propose to charter may have freight each way, and what helps to open up the business for one line will in time lead to others, and so on."

"A very admirable idea," said Mr Clinker. "I am of opinion that such a business will be highly successful in a young country like this."

"Thanks for your opinion, sir; you must know so well the requirements here. I shall," said Fixer, "refer you to my solicitors, Messrs Perryman and Hobart, as they are the only people here, so far, whom I have had occasion to call on."

"A very good firm, sir," said Mr Clinker. "I knew the elder Perryman before his decease; a very fine man."

"Oh, indeed. I will make a deposit to-day," said Fixer; "and if I should have occasion to draw further for our first shipments which are to arrive, Perryman and Hobart, as they will

have my capital coming through their hands, will probably be sufficient reference."

"Certainly, Mr Fixer; their paper sir, is as good as money, and I shall negotiate it for you with pleasure."

"Then, again thanking you, I must leave you, as business at starting is very pressing, and requires all my attention. You will call and see Messrs Perryman and Hobart, sir, I trust, to satisfy yourself."

"Certainly, Mr Fixer, if you wish it, but otherwise I should have left it for the present."

"I would sooner you call, sir; or I will ask one of the firm to look over."

"Not at all necesary. I will see to it to-day, sir, without fail."

And Mr Fixer, having said but little, although that little was to the point, attained the first end he wished for—he had created a good impression.

"Now, Mr Clinker," says the crafty Felix to himself when he leaves the bank, "will call and see Hobart to-day, for Perryman, being away, he cannot see him. Hobart soon, yes very soon, must talk to Perryman about me, and then we can make assurance doubly sure."

Mr Clinker's opinion of his new client is expressed in the following words:—"A nice gentlemanly fellow this, and I'll be bound rich; yes, rich. Charter vessels? This means money I like his style much; he speaks so sensibly, and yet says no more than is necessary."

So Mr Fixer had now made his first deposit, and the amount quite drained Hobart's resources for the present; but were they not soon to make money—yes, plenty of money? Will

they know when to stop, and where? That is a question time alone will solve.

One month later saw the firm of Messrs Fixer and Co. in full swing; that is, they were known to the public. Mr Clinker, when asked, spoke highly of the firm, but could not say who represented the "Co." He felt certain, however, they were either an English or a Victorian firm. Mr Fixer, the head of the firm, he spoke of as being a most worthy man, highly recommended; and, so far, the concern promised to prosper. The first shipment arrived, and, with the deposit of Messrs Perryman and Hobart's bill of exchange, all claims were met. Everything went well; the lines selected by Fixer proved a good speculation—and, with the proceeds, grain, wool, and other like produce, were bought, and this lot was paid for in cash, as Mr Fixer declined to transact the first business on any other terms, as he considered that course the soundest, at least so he told those with whom he came in contact; and before the first three months of the existence of the firm, so much confidence had it inspired that they could have chartered ship after ship solely on the bills of exchange of Fixer and Co. Gradually did the business increase in magnitude until Mr John Hobart's delight knew no bounds, the credit of the firm became so good that he often wanted to rush into other specs; but from this he was held in check by Fixer, who used all his discretionary power.

CHAPTER XV.

The residence of John Hobart now is all that can be desired —standing as it did on an eminence on the north road, with grounds well and tastefully laid off. Clara and he seemed to be on the same footing. She seemed never to thaw in the least, and was always complaining of ill health. Often when Frank Perryman called to see her, and again pressed his suit, she would always ask for time, pleading as an excuse the death of one of her parents; and Frank never doubted for one second that it was all true. He waited patiently, and sometimes would be more urgent, and on these occasions she would affect indisposition, and retire. Always after this occurred she would, on these grounds, keep out of his way as much as possible, and this made him more reticent the next time. Maud often called to see Clara, and always tried to induce her to visit them oftener, but she but rarely complied. Louisa Branscombe, too, sometimes accompanied Maud, but not always, for she had awakened to the knowledge that Frank loved this fair girl; and she was too noble-minded to show any resentment, although she could not help feeling envious, as in her mind no one was good enough for Frank.

One evening, after John and Clara had concluded their dinner, the former said: "Clara, I should like you to stay here for a time, as Mr Fixer will call, and I know a conversation with you is pleasant to him, and it is as well to gratify him so far."

"Very well, I will for a time. He is one of those sensible old gentlemen I like to talk to. He seems always so considerate and kind."

"Yes," answered John, "I, too, like him now. I confess I did not at one time, but circumstances alter cases."

The speakers were interrupted by the announcement that Mr Fixer had arrived, and Hobart rose to greet him.

"Ah, how do you do, Fixer? I am glad you came, for I should have been lonely here alone. Miss Hobart is so seldom well enough to remain up."

"And how are you, Miss Hobart, to-night? You look better, I fancy; you should try and think so yourself. You know that is half the battle."

"I am about the same, Mr Fixer, thanks. I will try and take your advice, but I fear the result will not be beneficial in my case."

"Never say so; you should not be faint-hearted. It is really the worst disease of all. I often feel weary myself, but I always conclude I shall be all right again after dinner, or a sleep."

"But you are a philosopher, Fixer," remarks Hobart, "and that materially alters the case."

"Well, I do try to mix and use it as salt; but I feel often the want of more of it."

"What a strange simile, to liken salt to philosophy," says Clara.

"True," said Fixer; "but you know, Miss Hobart, after we grow old we grow peculiar also in our notions."

"That is not your case in many respects, Mr. Fixer. I think it is rather the reverse."

"I thank you for the compliment I assure you, my dear Miss Hobart."

"I did not intend it as a compliment, Mr. Fixer, I assure you. I speak the truth, and never flatter—at least knowingly."

"Then I must feel doubly flattered, for you know in my own opinion I do not deserve it. With your permission, however, we will talk of a more worthy subject than your humble servant. Have you," he continued, "seen the new arrivals? Of course you will, if you have not already, as I hear they are enormously rich, and the daughter is beauty itself. I mean the Parks."

"No," answered Clara, "I have not before heard of them. When did they arrive, and do they stay, or are they on a visit?"

"They are, so I hear, an American family from New Orleans. The old people are both in declining health, and have been advised to come to New Zealand for change, and so far they are so pleased that they intend settling. I have met Mr. Parks, in fact he has been to me about an investment, and I rather like him. Of course he is very American, and not so polished as most of our purse-proud Englishmen; but for my part I like him none the less for that."

"Always railing against your own kind, Mr. Fixer. If you were a young man, I should say you were eternally fishing for compliments."

"Now, Miss Hobart, you are too severe. I have mixed with polished people for so long, who never call a spade a spade, but get some other name for it, that when I am with this class I do not see their defects; however, I no sooner meet men of a different kind than I think myself how much pleasanter it is to converse with people who speak as they feel. I know a man must be rich now-a-days to adopt this course, for should a poor one do so he would never rise in the world."

"You judge the world harshly I think, Mr. Fixer, and you do not, from what you say, encourage one to adopt the course that is to my way of thinking the right one."

"I do not know if it be a harsh judgment, but I regret that I cannot speak otherwise. Besides, you know, none of us are competent to judge, we can only pass our opinion."

"And when did this family of which you speak arrive, and where do they at present reside?" asked Clara.

"At present, I believe, they are in town; but I hear they intend looking out for a suitable suburban residence."

"Why, Mr Fixer, what is Timaru itself but a suburb? You surely do not class it as a town. Why only the other day, when walking on the beach I saw an odd-looking man who seemed to me to be a sailor, building a sort of a mud house; and when I asked Miss Perryman what she called the place that was being built, she told me it was the magistrate who was engaged in erecting the place. Now, fancy a magistrate in any civilised country building a mud whare, as she called it."

"You are harsh on Timaru and the gentleman in question; but you must, or should, admire such industry."

"I should think you did, for from what you said just now, I should imagine it would be difficult for that *gentleman* to call a spade aught but a spade."

At this, both Fixer and Hobart, who had only played the part of listener so far, laughed, and Clara, too, joined, which, of late, had been a very unusual thing with her; and so much did it please Hobart that he felt quite grateful to Fixer for amusing her, and resolved to ask him up oftener, as, of course, there could be no reason for jealousy in his case.

"Then you saw Mr Bluff," said Fixer; "or, as he is termed, "'Bluff Billie.'"

"What a strange name; however did he get that?"

"From his bluff style, and from his name, of course. Did you not speak to him?"

"Oh yes, Miss Perryman and I went over, she introduced me, he shook hands with us, and quite spoiled my glove, for he had been carrying the great squares of earth himself."

"He certainly is an original character, but not a bad old fellow by any means. What do you think, Hobart ?"

"There are worse. I at first did not get on with him at all ; but I upset him in law two or three times, and now he swears by me."

"But you have not told me what Mr Bluff said to you, Miss Hobart ; and you know we are interested."

"Well, the first utterance he made was a kind of grunt, and then he said : 'Can't get no men to work here, ladies, so you have to yourself—rough country ; getting used to it now, been here a good many years.' We passed on, and directly after we heard some boys who came along say, 'Hallo, there's old dry-skin building another whare.'"

The time had been passing very rapidly, and Miss Hobart showed signs of weariness ; very soon she rose from her seat, and bidding her companions good night, left the room.

"I think," said Hobart, when the two were alone, "we may as well have a cigar now and some of that old whisky you recommended me, Fixer, and I must do you the justice to say it is good."

"Very good whisky," said Fixer, in an absent way. "I say," he continued, "I think you are awfully selfish towards Clara. Why don't you let her marry Perryman, and then if anything did go wrong, we should at least have a little more to stand on ? But now, you know, if old Grant should turn up, although we are in a good way, does it not occur to you that we should be somewhat in a fix ?"

"Fixer, why do you ask me this ? You know I cannot bring myself to it ; and, apart from that, she would not marry him."

"Of course I don't know that she would, but I certainly think it likely ; and your present course will, sooner or later, spoil all·

You know, Hobart, now our interests are mutual, otherwise I would not speak."

"As a favour, Fixer, do not recur to this subject; for so far am I from viewing such a proposal favourably, that I would risk all and marry her myself to-morrow."

"The devil you would," said Fixer; "in this case, I will say no more."

"Now, look here, Fixer, what I wish to speak about is this: You know what I was saying to you respecting that land speculation; now, we can buy that block of land for £20,000, £1000 cash, the balance on bills—a kind of trading, by the way, that I am beginning to understand better, thanks to you. What I am about to propose is this, the land has been offered to me—of course, in the name of the firm of Perryman and Hobart. Well, suppose I were to decline, but refer our clients to you; you could purchase, I could endorse the bills. We could cut up the land, sell it in small sections; and, in all probability, before the bills matured double our money."

"Looks remarkably nice on paper," said Fixer, "but for my part I like it to remain there. I am not so sanguine about it as you, and don't care to touch it."

"Fixer, I think this most unfair of you. You know you have never suggested a spec to me, and recommended it, but what I have at once consented, and now the first that I propose, you throw cold water on."

"I do nothing of the kind, Hobart; I always admit that each of us has an equal right to accept or reject the proposal of the other. You know just as well as I that we are doing far beyond our expectations so far; and what I say is, why hazard all this for any other thing which may upset the whole?"

"There is not, as far as I can see, any probability of our

doing that. You take too narrow-minded a view of the matter, because the proposal comes from me, and for nothing else."

"Hobart, I would sooner go into the thing on that account than any other, but I cannot see how it is to turn out right. Suppose that these bills become due before we can sell, which is our only chance to save ourselves and make a profit. Perryman, of course, knows then that you have used his name for £19,000, and all our chance is over here; in fact, all his money is drawn from the firm. Then, again, our credit is done when it is discovered the use we have made of it. No, you take my advice, Hobart; reconsider the matter, and you will think as I do."

"I shall not alter my opinion, Fixer; but I trust you will, and then you will say I am right. Leave it for a day or two, and let me know your ultimatum."

"Then we will, as you suggest, for the present let the matter stand for consideration," says Fixer. "But it is getting very late, and I have much to do to-morrow, Hobart, so I will go." And, so saying, the two members of the firm of Fixer and Co. parted.

CHAPTER XVI.

We must again return to Gooseberry Hill, Dunolly, Victoria. We left Jim and Grant in their tent, talking of things generally; where George had gone they knew not. There is no necessity, however, for the reader to remain in ignorance, and we will now follow him, for he evidently has something in view. Before starting he carefully examines his revolver, an essential weapon for every miner in the days of which I write. Having satisfied himself that all is right in this respect, off he goes, and makes direct for the Commercial Hotel. For an hour

or two he walks around, talking first to one and then another, until it begins to grow late. Still he stays on, seemingly to have no particular object in view, but that of killing time. Now it is necessary we should say a word or two respecting George. He is a man of very few words, and it takes a great deal to draw those few from him. A man of great determination, he always keeps his resolves to himself; but when once he has made up his mind he is very hard to dissuade from his intention. On the morning of the finding of Grant insensible, he determined if a chance should ever occur, to fully satisfy his feeling of hatred against the man who had attacked and robbed poor old Grant in such a cowardly manner. He was not one to display his virtues, but a better hearted man it would have been difficult to find. Gladly would he have shared his last crust with Grant, or any other mate it might be his fortune to come across; and this night, as he felt convinced that the man Grant had shown them was guilty, he went out for the sole purpose of seeing and hearing what he could about the matter. It began to grow late, but the man he sought had not turned up, and, strange to say, the crowd in the bar began to decrease. This was very unusual, for as it grew late the attendance generally grew larger and rowdier. There were, indeed, so few about that George half determined to go home and leave the matter for some future occasion.

Just as he had made up his mind to return, however, the barman remarked, "Very dark to-night, Mister; haven't seen business so bad for a long time. Come, I'll give you a grab for two beers."

George accepted the invitation; and, after the beer had been served, took advantage of the opportunity to ask the barman some questions.

"You remember the man that shouted for us last night. Who is he? I fancy I have met him before somewhere, but I can't think where."

"I don't know what he is, but I don't think very much of him. I never knew him do any work, but he always has plenty of money. Both me and the boss have often wondered where it comes from. He never seems to have a mate, so that I don't think he can be a miner, as the ground hereabouts is too deep for anyone to work single-handed."

"True," said George, "what is his name? I may remember him if I hear it."

"The only name I know him by is Ted Scrag."

"Then it's not the same," answered George. "Let's have another glass, and then I'll be off, as it's growing late."

This drink being served, for some minutes they still stood talking; when, just as George said he must be off, a man passed the door, staggering along very drunk."

"Hullo," exclaimed the barman, "he's getting through his money pretty quick. He's one of the party who got the twenty-pound nugget. I shouldn't be surprised to hear of his being found in the morning minus, for there are a great many robberies just now; but still you see men will roll about after dark drunk."

"That's right enough," replied George, "and they have only themselves to blame if they fall into the hands of the philistines. But I must get home, or my mates will be coming out to look for me;" and, wishing the barman good night, George went off.

He had just reached the door, when he saw the very man he had been looking for, attentively watching the drunken miner, who had gone on up the road slowly.

"Ah, perhaps I may find you out when I least expected," thought George, and instead of going out into the light he waited in the shadow and watched. Almost directly he saw Ted

Scrag start off up the road, first looking round to see if he was observed. The man on ahead had now turned off the main road into one of the pathways that lead between the claims; and, as perhaps the reader does not know what sort of place it is, a little explanation may be necessary. Imagine, then, a number of holes sunk in many places very close together, with the earth in nearly all cases banked up around them; while in others the earth had either been carted away or into another claim, leaving the one from which it came quite open, so that anyone could walk right into it. The reader will probably better understand it if he imagines a lot of wells, some with the earth around them, and others without, in depth varying from forty to sixty feet—the wash-dirt being found at different depths.

Into one of the many tracks which wind in and out of these claims went the drunken man, and after him followed Scrag, while George brought up the rear. As the ground here was very soft, it was an easy matter to follow without being heard. Scrag gradually gained on the other, as also did George, for now that he saw a chance of catching him in the very act, he was most anxious. On went all three, neither of the two foremost thinking of danger; in fact, one was too far gone in drink. For fully half a mile or more did the three men keep behind each other, until they came to a sharp turn in the road when, with a sudden spring forward, Mr Scrag pounced upon his man, and with one blow of his fist felled him to the ground. Scarcely, however, had he done so, when George also made a bound; but Scrag, being more on the alert than the man he pursued, had turned round suddenly, and met the new comer face to face. Seeing that he had in him an enemy to encounter, Scrag at once put himself on the defensive, and, being more used to such positions, he struck out as quick as lightning and before George could guard it off he received a blow which well nigh felled him too. Drawing himself up, he firmly resolved, that if Mr Scrag managed to get another in he too would deliver one, so he carefully advanced, and as he did so the other re-

treated for some yards. George soon became exasperated, and with a rush let out from the shoulder, but scarcely had he done so than he was conscious of some one approaching from the other direction, and immediately he was struck from behind, and he was brought with a crash to the ground. As he fell he was conscious of a noise, and then, as of something falling with a thud and a splash, and, rising as quickly as possible lest his adversary should be upon him, he looked around, but nobody could he see save the man who had been knocked down first and the heaps of dirt around the claims. Then he remembered the noise he had heard, and he went cautiously forward and looked, but no sign could he see. He was about to take another step forward, but a kind of instinct kept him back, and there, gaping under his very feet, was a shaft at least forty feet deep, with ten feet of water at the bottom. Quick as thought he realised what had been the fate of his antagonist. Lying down he listens for one, two, three seconds, and there comes from out of that hole the sound as of a man rising to the surface of water, and then down again perhaps to rise no more. George runs for help, but long before it can be procured it is too late, and when at last they do get rope and windlass to work and bring him to the surface, they find that the man who but a few minutes before was so ready to take life is now himself quite dead. Yes, Ted Scrag has done his last robbery.

George, after giving all particulars, manages, with the aid of the others, to get the man away who is the cause of the whole affair, and proceeds home, where he arrives just in time to find Jim and Matthew about to start out to look for him, as it is now two o'clock.

"Hullo, George, where have you been? We were under the impression you were lost or robbed."

"Well, I was about as near being lost," replied he, "as I ever was. I met and squared accounts with your old friend, Ted Scrag, Grant."

"Ted Scrag? I do not know such a person."

"Not by that name, probably; but you know the man that robbed you, or the one we suspected?"

"Oh, yes," they both reply.

"Well," was the answer, "he will rob no more;" and George told his mates what had occurred.

"Poor fellow," said Matthew; "gone without a chance of repentance. I feel sorry for him."

"I cannot say I feel sorry for him," observed Jim, "but perhaps it would have been but humane to have let him have a chance to reform. And yet he rushed upon his doom; for had his intentions not been dishonest, you would not have seen him to-night, and then this event would not have happened."

The usual course was adopted with reference to the body of Scrag. The evidence of George was taken, and also what the other could remember; but no blame was attached to the former, and so the matter ended. Another, who was perhaps reared in hopes of a better fate, was consigned to his last resting-place, unwept and unmourned!

With the trio, things went on as before. Slowly their claim went down, and again Grant's hopes rose within him. Around them all was bustle and activity, for another claim close at hand had struck good gold, and nearly every miner around them was doing well.

On the morning of the thirteenth day after their removal, all three were in high hopes of bottoming on this day either a golden claim, with the alternative of a duffer. As the day wore on so their excitement increased; and about three o'clock in the afternoon, Jim, who had claimed the privilege of bottoming the claim which he had marked out, called out from below:—
"Look Matthew, a prospect on the top of this bucket!"

Grant, full of the fever, again plied the windlass, and sure enough, when the bucket rose to the surface, there he saw one of the most pleasing sights that for years he had ever beheld. Lying right on top of the bucket of washdirt was a beautiful nugget, which proved to weigh about three pounds weight, and to be worth more than £140. They of course tried the prospect in the bucket, but, strange to say, not anything further payable could they find; and after spending four more days they had to desert their claim, and be satisfied with their find. This cheered old Matthew very considerably, and hopes of again finding Clara were renewed. On the evening after having abandoned their claim there came accounts of the find of good gold on the Inglewood rush; and George, who was down town at the time, took home the news.

"Well, mates," said Jim, "the best thing we can do is to pack up and start off at once, as it is questionable if there will be a claim by to-morrow left. Nearly all Dunolly will go either by the first coach or the next day. From Bendigo, too, and all the places nearer still, will be there."

"Will they walk?" asked Grant. "How far, then, are we from the place?"

"Just 30 miles; so we shall get there pretty early in the morning, and look out for a start. Luckily the sinking is very shallow, and we can each of us mark out a claim; and if one does not strike it, perhaps another will."

Now, as these three sat at their tent door discussing the advisability of leaving, the miners' tents all around were being struck, for the news of a new rush in these days spread like wild-fire, and very little time elapsed before the old claims were deserted. Often do miners, in the excitement, leave good claims to rush off perhaps to work for months and get nothing. But such is life on the goldfields!

"To be, or not to be?" asked Jim, who usually acted as spokesman.

"I don't see much use in staying here," replied George, "as we have no claim to stick to. What do you think, Matthew?"

"You know best," was the answer. "I will do as you two agree."

"Then, I say with you, Jim; let's be off."

In less than an hour from the time of their getting the news they are again on the wallaby track, and before and behind them went crowds for the same destination, much to the annoyance of storekeepers and hotelkeepers. The whole of the way was lined with swagmen, all pushing on—all with bright notions of what great finds they were going to make when they arrived. Each one firmly believed he was going to hit upon the richest claim on the rush.

The place they had left was, at five o'clock, literally covered with tents, and at seven scarcely a tent was to be seen. Puddling tubs, cradles, cooking utensils, and all the paraphernalia of a rush were left behind; for every miner thinks when he hears of a new rush that he is certain to make his pile there, and generally their tents and bedding are enough to carry, and what else they possess is left behind. This is not, however, the invariable rule, for before now I have seen a miner carrying away his cradle; but these cases are exceptional, and only occur when the owners are excessively mean. Then they try to take away everything that is worth a shilling; but this class is not numerous on the diggings. The majority of miners are an easy-going lot, more especially on alluvial diggings; for to-day they are beggars, and to-morrow they are as rich as Jews.

When the party left Goosberry Hill it was about seven o'clock in the evening, for full and authentic news came in by the coach, which arrived at five. It was no lonely walk through Jones's Creek this time, but old Matthew expressed a wish that he would never set eyes on the place again. There were now along with the

trio three other mates from an adjoining claim, and for company the party all walked on together.

"Shall I tell you a little account, boys, of my first trip up to old Bendigo in '49?" says one, who was well known to all, and a very old Victorian miner.

"Aye, do," replied all; "to tell of old times will serve to pass away the time."

"Very well, then, it will serve for that purpose, if nothing more. ome of you may disbelieve me, but I advise you not to tell me so until I've finished, or you won't hear the balance."

"All right, Jack," says one of his old mates, "we will let you run to the end of your cable before we pull you up."

"Aye, aye, my lads, I'm off. It was in the early part of forty-nine when I landed at Port Philip, and having a pound or two—a very unusual thing for new arrivals in those days, I can assure you, but so it was—I decided to get on up to the goldfields as quick as possible. I looked around to find some others of the same mind as myself, and I soon found five others who were willing; and they said they knew a carrier who was going that way, and would show us the road, and, for a slight consideration, take our swags up for us. Now, I must tell you, boys, I did not know the meaning of a swag; but, wishing to keep my ignorance dark, I, with the others, agreed to pay the carter two pounds to carry our swags. Beyond the suit of clothes I wore, and a change of underclothing, I had nothing to carry, for I knew nothing about blankets being required; in fact, when I first saw a man carrying a swag I concluded he was a dressy sort of a chap, and that he had rolled his clothes up in a blanket to keep them clean and dry. However, the day for our start arrived, and to my surprise I saw all but myself put swags in the dray, and I thought at the time that I had got hold of a lot of lawyers' clerks or drapers, for, thinks I, they all have plenty of clothes. The time for starting came, and all having put their lot into the dray but me, the drayman asked

me if I was going. 'Well, think I am,' says I. 'Then,' says he, 'why the devil don't you put your swag in. I ain't agoing to stay here all day.' 'I don't want you to stay,' I replied, 'I'm all ready.' 'But,' says he, 'you paid me for taking a swag, and why didn't you have it here, and not detain me?' 'I don't want to detain you, but the fact is when I paid you to take my swag I didn't know what a swag was, but thought it meant something to eat on the road.' 'Here's a greenhorn,' says the draymau, 'don't know what a swag is,' and of course the whole lot had jolly good laughs at my expense. 'Well,' says the man, 'ain't you going to take no blankets to sleep on.' 'Can't I sleep in a bed of a night?' I asked. 'Yes,' he replied, 'if you can find one, but if you do I'm mistaken.' This was news to me, for so far I thought I should put up at a hotel each night, but I was soon to know better. However, I hurried off and got blankets, and soon after we were all on the road over the Keilor plains. We went on all right until we came on the evening of the third day to the Black Forest. I shall ever remember that same Black Forest. We camped as usual, and, all hands, after having a pitch about what we would do when we had made our piles, prepared our beds and turned in. We slept for about two hours, and then all hands were awake to the fact that if we did not get up we should have to swim for it. The rain came down as though it were out of a water spout, and in no time everybody was wet to the skin. We had to remain until the morning, as there was no place of shelter, and, like so many crows, we sat on and waited. At last the day began to dawn, but to light a fire was an impossibility—everything was too wet. 'Let's get on, for God's sake,' says one of the five; 'where are the horses?' They had been hobbled and turned loose the night before, and after that they had been fed. The driver began to look around for them, and we all waited—not patiently you may bet; but we waited. After an hour we learnt that the horses could not be found, and the driver thought they were planted. Here was a nice fix, for it rained incessantly. We all decided to go out with the driver, leaving one to take care of the dray, and to cooey if the others could not find

it. This job fell to my lot, as I suppose I seemed too green to go out, so away they all went, and left me behind. They had been gone about an hour, and I was walking backwards and forwards, trying to get warm, when suddenly as though they came from the clouds three men mounted on horseback appeared on the scene. All wore masks, and the first thing which I could understand was that I was told to 'bail up.' 'Bail up,' says I, 'what do you mean?' 'I'll —— soon show you,' says one, and off his horse he got, and giving the reins to his mate, he advanced to me and levelled at me a six-barrelled revolver, calling out to me, 'Your money or your life.' I knew now what he meant, and replied, 'Yes, sir, you can have my money but don't shoot, for God's sake.' 'Put up your arms,' says he; and now he came over, and after telling me, if I stirred I would be a dead un,' he soon rifled my pockets, took from me thirty sovereigns, some silver, and my watch and chain—in fact, everything I had. After looking at the things and money, he threw back the silver, some fifteen shillings. 'Now come this way, he roared, and I was taken some fifty yards off, and securely tied to a tree. I begged and prayed of him to let me go, and that I would say nothing; but my prayers were all in vain, for his only reply was, 'Shut up you —— fool,' and with that he left me to die as I thought; but, of course, I didn't. However, I could hear from where I was that they were ransacking the dray, but that I was powerless to prevent; and soon again all was quiet, and I concluded they were off. But to the misfortune of the one who had tied me, this was not the case, for just then back he came and asked me how long my mates had been gone, and if I knew which way. I told him about an hour, but where I could not say. 'Now look, young fellow,' says he, 'if you don't look sharp and tell me I'll let daylight through you.' I assured him I did not know, but he only answered, 'Look here, young fellow, if you don't tell me in two minutes, I'll fire,' and as he concluded he pulled out my watch with one hand, and with the other he levelled his revolver again at my head, saying, 'Now, you'd better tell me or say your prayers at once.' I started again to tell him I did not

know, but he stopped me by his threats, declaring that if I didn't tell him I had better say my prayers or I should be a dead 'un before I could count 120. I can assure you I cursed my unlucky stars that I had been left behind to look after the dray, and then I thought as quick as lightning of all my boyhood days, my poor old mother and father's last words to me, advising me not to come to so wild a country; and I can tell you I felt how sorry I was I had ever left home; I thought, too, how they at home would be longing to hear from me, and wondering if I were still alive, for no one would ever be able to tell them how I was murdered, as no one knew my name. I never before then realised how valuable life was. I felt I would give the world if I only had it, but still the fact of the time going on was apparent to me; and again I turned to the bushranger and began to plead, but the only answer I got was, 'If you don't hold your —— tongue I'll not let you finish the two minutes.' So I held my peace, expecting each moment to be my last. Everything seemed to swim with me. I fancied I could see my mother, father, and all my home friends looking at me, and that none would hold out a hand to save me. 'Time's up,' cried the man. 'Will you tell?' 'I can't,' I answered. Shutting my eyes, I awaited the fatal shot. No sooner had I done so than I heard two loud reports, and I forgot all, and of course became senseless. After I time I came round, and found the waggoner holding my head in his arms and his first words were, 'Oh, you need not be afraid they will return; they've had enough.' I soon recovered my senses, and asked them if I was much hurt. 'I don't think so,' said the drayman, 'but the man there who tied you won't tell us why he did it.' There was a general laugh at this; and looking round I saw lying on the ground, just where he had been standing, the man who had bailed me up, quite dead. A few words sufficed to explain. They had all come back from their search for the horses without finding them, and luckily they returned without being observed. When near where I was, they heard the bushranger speak to me, and two of them, lest they

should shoot me, had, just at the minute when I closed my eyes, taken aim and fired, either one or both of their bullets proving fatal, for the man fell and never spoke. The other two bushrangers came to the assistance of their confederate, and a few more shots were fired; but as our party were protected by the trees they had all the best of it, and both of the bushrangers were seen to reel in their saddles and then make off. The man who was killed, luckily for me, had my money, which of course I got back, together with my watch and chain. 'This is an awkward thing,' I said to the driver; 'we shall all have to go back to Melbourne now.' 'What for?' he asked. 'Why,' I said, 'with the account of this affair, and for the inquest.' 'The devil we will,' says he; 'I will soon show you what we will do with him;' and before long the body was taken down to the road and actually tied up to a tree, as a warning to others of his class. The mask was left upon him, but that very night his mates must have come for him, as in the morning he was not there. However, it was night before we got our horses, and again we had to camp in our wet clothes, and without a fire. Next morning was as wet as ever, and not for a single minute had it ever left off raining. The driver expressed his fears that the roads would be impassable, but we got the horses in and made a start. We had not gone more than half-a-mile when the axle sank up to the bed in the road, and there we were in another fix. I wondered what we should do, and asked the driver, who answered that we must unload. This we did as soon as possible, but as the dray was loaded with flour and general stores it took some time. At last it was empty, and after some further trouble in lifting and pulling we got it out. We had to carry our goods back again to the dray and reload, and before the dray had gone another hundred yards it again sank up to the axle bed, and we were as bad off as before. I again asked here if we must unload, but the driver said he did not see that there was any use in it, and so we waited on. In the afternoon another dray came along, and that was served the same as we were, and had to remain at a stand-still. We all put in another night—still raining. Ah, that Black Forest

is a nice place!—rain, rain, rain; it never seemed to leave off. However, we waited there until there were twelve drays besides ours all stuck, and then it was agreed amongst them that as many horses as could should be yoked to one team at the time, and so on until all were out; but before we got clear we had spent five days in the Black Forest, and we did not arrive at old Bendigo before eleven days had passed since our starting."

"And not made your fortune yet, Jack?" asks one.

"I have," replied he, "made my fortune; at least, up as high as ten thousand and down to two thousand, five times. Twice have I been back Home, but could not rest there; it was rather nice just for the trip, you know, but the longing desire to get back to freedom (as I termed it) was ever upon me, and back I always came, and here I am the same as any of you, pushing on in the same hope of a good claim as ever; in fact, I think I am now as sanguine of success as I was in the early days."

"Why don't you take care of your money, Jack?" asked one of his mates.

"Well, you see, I do, as I think, take care of it. Of course, I can't help speculating a little, and that is how it generally goes. Now, when I first went home, I thought I should be able to buy up old England in sharpness, but I soon found out my mistake. I went into specs there, but the Londoners knew too much for me by a lot; in fact, I was a child in their hands, so easily did they put me through. And yet," he continued, "they speak at Home of us out here as though we were all a set of bush-rangers. Now, the first time I went Home and told people where I had been, I was looked at with as much curiosity as if I had committed ever so many crimes, and was only out for an hour or two. I verily believe that people used to look at my teeth when I spoke to see if they could see the hair growing."

"Very good for you, Jack. Don't you think you are cramming us nicely now about the old country."

"I don't think anything of the kind. I am only telling you the truth, so you may believe me or not, just as you think fit."

About midnight the party camped, lit their fires, and dined off what they had with them. Many people passed, for Dunolly had become literally deserted; indeed, on the following morning some of the stores were being pulled down and removed. However, about eight o'clock, a.m., the well-known Potter's Hill was reached. Some thousands had arrived there before them, but still all the three managed to get claims. Then came the usual job of tent-building. Poles had to be got for the tent, and also for the bunks; but this was an easy job on Inglewood, for the mallee scrub and bush went so far into the town that, before they could make a street, the mallee—or, as it was termed there, tea-tree—scrub had to be cut away or burnt. So dense was it that, were anyone to go back in it, and not know how to work by the sun, it would be a mere matter of chance if they ever got out alive. This was the only place in my travels, in Victoria and elsewhere, that I ever saw what was termed "manna," but here it was in abundance. I do not mean to say that it rained manna, as it is said to have done for the children of Israel in the wilderness, but still there was plenty, and many a good feed have I had of it. This manna was to be found on the leaves of the mallee scrub, and all you had to do was to take hold of each leaf and slip it between your fingers, and the delicious food would easily come off in your hand. I have often heard arguments about the story of people being fed upon it, as narrated in the Scriptures, and have heard many doubts expressed; but one thing I can say, that, even as a boy, I would sooner have had manna than the choicest fruit. In appearance, it was like small spots of snow on the leaves, and the minute you put it into your mouth it would melt like sugar.

The morning after the arrival of our party they all made a start, and as the ground on Potter's Hill was but from six to ten feet, it was an easy matter to bottom, and find whether your

claim was a duffer or not in a day. The three partners—for such they still were—worked on, and before night they had each bottomed and got payable gold,—that is, obtained about from 2dwts. to the tub up to half-an-ounce. This was not considered rich in those days. The three worked on, and each week saw an increase in their little store of ready money.

CHAPTER XVII.

"And so, Frank, Hobart gives a party on the 23rd."

"Yes," replied Frank; "of course, you will go, Maud."

"Oh, yes, both I and Louie have promised Miss Hobart that we will; but we must look sharp, as the affair comes off in three days' time. Rather a strange notion for Hobart, is it not, Frank?"

"Well, you know, Maud, he is very careful lest he should go beyond his means; that is, I think, the only reason he has never given a party before."

"Beyond his means! What nonsense. Why, he has now been in business with you for over two years."

"Yes, about that, Maud; but I do not blame him for being careful. You know he admits that he has no expectations from his relatives."

"Frank, where are his relatives? I have never heard him make any reference to them, nor Clara either."

"Well, you rather puzzle me there. I believe they are either in Victoria or England, but I really do not know which. As he gave me always to understand they were poor, I have

been most careful not to broach the question, out of consideration for his feelings on the subject. Since he has been so successful here—for outside of our practice he has speculated and done well—I don't think he likes his poor relations referred to."

"Frank, I don't see any disgrace in poverty; and if Mr Hobart is ashamed of his connections on those grounds, I do not think it any credit to him."

"I am not applauding his conduct, Maud. I quite agree with you that poverty is no disgrace, but it is undoubtedly very inconvenient."

"That may be. For my part I have been lucky enough never to have experienced it; but I feel sure of one thing, that it would never make me keep my friends so much in the background. But, Frank, is not Mr Fixer a relative of his?'

"Not that I am aware of."

"Who is he, Frank? Where does he come from? Don't you remember you once had a clerk of the same name?"

"He is the head of the firm of Fixer and Co., grain merchants, &c.; anything further in this respect I cannot tell you, I believe him to be rich, and a gentleman; but as to where he comes from I cannot tell you. I have no doubt he will at any time you ask him inform you, as he is noted for his straightforward way, and his desire to give people any information they ask or require of him. I do remember, now that you speak of it, that I had a clerk of the same name, but he was a much younger man, and he had no whiskers. I never thought of it before, or I should have told him; it may be a relative. I will when next I see him casually mention the fact."

"You need not fear his being ashamed of anyone belonging to him being poor. He is not of that sort, I am sure. I quite like the old fellow," said Maud.

"Well, I trust you and Louie will be ready, and not disappoint them as Hobart did us. If you want anything sent to Dunedin you had better tell me now, for a boat leaves here to-day, so you will have a good chance."

"No, thank you; we do not want anything, and we will not disappoint them."

"That's right," said Frank, and with this he left for his office.

"I do wish," said Louie, who had entered just as Frank had left, "that I had not promised to go to Mr Hobart's party, for I don't want to go, Maud. Do you think they would think it strange if I did not?"

"Oh Louie, don't mention such a thing, for goodness sake. Frank only just this minute said he trusted we would not disappoint them as Hobart did us. What in the world do you want to remain away for?"

"I do not know that I have any particular reason, but still I would not go if I thought I could avoid it."

"Oh, you are full of such notions, Louie. Forget them and go; you will be sure to say after that you were glad you went."

"Have you any idea who are to be there?"

"No, I have not; but I'll tell you what, Louie, we can call in to see Clara to-day, and she is almost certain if we mention the subject to show us the invitation list. What say you, Louie, shall we?"

"As you like, Maud; you know I am quite willing at any time to follow your suggestions."

"Louie, I often wish, just for a change, that you would say no when I say yes, so that we could have an argument, if only to vary the monotony of things."

At this both laughed, and left to prepare for the afternoon call on Clara.

Later in the day, as agreed, the two called at the residence of Hobart, and were received by Clara. She looked much better than when last we saw her, for the circumstances of her case had so far become to her somewhat of the past, and she had hardened herself to the painful reminiscences of her former troubles. She has often written to her father, but as the letters have in all cases been entrusted to Hobart to post, it is needless to say none have reached their destination. After scanning their contents, he has always destroyed them, and so Clara has for the last two years fretted continually over it. But in her case, as in many others, time if nothing else brings relief, and now she has partly come to the conclusion that her father must be dead or he would have written. Several times has she asked Hobart to write the authorities about him, and on each occasion he had promised. Of course he knows too well that Grant, at least, has obtained his liberty, but he is quite ignorant as to his present whereabouts ; although in his heart he sincerely hopes that his victim is dead. And Clara, although she knows Hobart to be what he is, never suspects him of opening her letters, for she has so much honesty in her own disposition that she cannot conceive that he can be so bad at heart as he is. She has strictly kept her word since the last altercation they had, on which occasion she said she would, at least in the eyes of the world, be to him as a sister, but nothing further. Often does he try in vain to dissuade her, and her refusals only seem to make him more in love with her, and frequently has he repeated his offer to risk all and marry her ; to this she has turned a deaf ear, for in her heart she has decided that should she ever find her father she will devote her time while he lives to him. Gradually have her hopes of finding him diminished, but she still clings to the hope that he lives, and that sooner or later she will be with him to comfort him in his declining years. She often thinks of the story he had told her of his being convicted

innocently, and she trust that he will yet be proved to have been guiltless. The fact of his never answering her letters she knows not how to understand, and in reply to her many questions Hobart leads her to believe that the reason why her letters remain unnoticed is that the authorities have not delivered them, as a punishment against him for the suspected charge of having assaulted Mr Torridge. And so she is in two minds; sometimes she believes her father dead, and again she lives in hopes that he will eventually turn up, or that she will at least hear of or from him. She has further decided, when the chance occurs, that she will return to Hobart Town herself, and look for him; but at present she fears Hobart should she hint at this, for she dreads such another scene as the one last recorded. This is the state of mind in which we find her when Maud and Louie are announced.

She receives her visitors in her usual kindly manner, and, after the ordinary exchange of compliment, Maud asks: "Shall we meet any strangers at your party?"

"I think not; but stay, I forgot. The Parks, Mr and Miss Parks, are invited. I suppose you know them."

"I have seen them once or twice, and rather like the look of the old gentleman."

"Yes, so do I. He ought to be a John Bull, from his style of speaking, I think; but I will show you who are invited, and then you will see for yourselves."

The list was now brought, and Maud and Louie saw the names of those coming, and when she came to Fixer's she exclaims, "Mr Fixer, I see."

"Yes," replied Clara, "you like him, of course; I do, very much."

"Well, yes, I rather like his style; he is one of those one can feel at home with."

"That is what I always say; and he is such an intimate friend of Mr Hobart's. I like him because he seems unlike other men one meets in his position. There is no bombast about him and in speaking of himself he never tries to appear what he is not."

"Mr Fixer should feel proud of such a champion."

"I do not think I deserve that name, for I only speak of him as I think I should. I know that I enjoy his company, what little I have of it; and he has taught me how to look at things in a philosophical light, which is to me something new, and until I met and conversed with him the actual meaning of the word was unknown to me."

"I think," said Maud, "that adversity alone teaches one the beauty of philosophy."

"I quite agree with you; at least one realises its beauties more under such circumstances."

"I should not think you have as yet seen much of the reverse side of nature."

"Quite a matter of opinion, Maud," sighed Clara; "I fancy I have seen quite enough. Remember all is not gold that glitters."

"What an old sage you are growing, Clara; one would think you had heaps of trouble before you. I suppose your illness has made you think more than you would have done otherwise; but I suppose you will forget all about philosophy on the twenty-third."

"I trust I shall be in good spirits."

"Do you know, Clara, you and Louie here would get on splendidly together? You could both be serious all day, and always be inclined to lament that you were alive."

"You have been poking fun at me all this time, and now I

see you are trying to bring Louie into it. We must rebel, and not let her have her own way, Louie."

"That's just what I often wish her to do; but I can't get her to do it, no matter how I try to provoke her."

"Now, Miss Perryman," replied Louie, "you are exaggerating. You have, I will admit, said you wished I would oppose you more; but why should I? You do not go far enough wrong for me to object; if you did I assure you I would not be slow to oppose you."

"I shall bring you both out directly," answered Maud, laughingly, "and then I shall have to look out, I can see. If I find I cannot get the best of you both I can run away, and then I shall prove that discretion is the better part of valour. At any rate, I can flatter myself on being successful to-day, for I have a little, although, I admit, a very little, roused you. Miss Hobart looks quite animated."

"I am glad if I do, for I am sure that will be something new to me."

"In that case I should come oftener, as I like to rouse people out of their lethargy."

"I should like you to come," replied Clara. "I often wish to see you."

"Then we will enter into a compact; you come often to see me, and I will return the compliment."

"After the party I will try, but until then I shall be fully occupied."

"Agreed; and now for fear of detaining you we will go, unless Louie here would like to stay and be serious with you. I know you would drop into that strain," said Maud, laughing, and after wishing Clara farewell the two visitors departed.

They had no sooner gone than Clara dropped again into her pensive mood. "Ah, how I long to be myself, and yet how can I? I feel I am an imposition, for I know I am not what people think me. How gladly would I be honest, if I only dared. I know not what the result would be, but I feel inclined to confess all to Frank Perryman, and then he would scorn me as I deserve. Yet, if my poor father still lives, he would suffer, and he alone; as for me, it does not matter much. Sometimes I am almost inclined to risk all. He is generous. Hobart owes his present position to him. And how was it obtained, but by my falseness, or perhaps I may say my want of determination to follow an honest course. Oh, how I hate myself; and yet I did it not for any end of my own. I would gladly change places with the lowest menial in this town to possess that peace of mind which I never have, and perhaps never will. Oh, God, do, I pray thee, extend some mercy, for though it may be rebellious of me, I feel I do not deserve all this;" and, sinking on a couch, Clara wept bitterly, and some ten minutes later so Hobart found her.

"Why, Clara, what is all this weeping about?"

"Does your own conscience not answer you when you ask the question? How have I suffered, and for what? Is it because I am true to my vow to protect and defend my poor heartbroken father that I am to be a living lie? that I cannot look an honest girl in the face for very shame? And you, who should be the last to speak, ask me why I weep. John Hobart, I wonder you ever look Frank Perryman in the face."

"Oh, this is it, is it? Still the same cry. What would you have me do? I offered to make all the amends to you in my power, and still you upbraid me at every turn, and are continually as I now find you, and refuse my offers."

"I refuse your offers, and why? Have you ever done aught to merit my respect? No; you kept me, still keep me

here by threats to injure the only being I love, and then you wonder I do not treat you otherwise. No, John Hobart, I will never do as you ask. Yet will I make a sacrifice, if you will do likewise. You say you love me."

"Aye, God knows I do."

"Well, on one condition will I marry you—more, I will be to you a very slave,—and what I ask shall not be for myself, as you shall judge."

On hearing these words John Hobart's eyes glittered with delight; but again his face changes, for he now dreads what is coming. She heeds not his looks, however, but goes on, the colour mantling to the roots of her hair, making her in his eyes more beautiful than ever she seemed before.

When she has somewhat calmed down, Clara says, slowly and distinctly: "I will marry you, John Hobart, but first you must be present and hear me tell Frank Perryman how we have deceived him, and for what reason. You must ask his forgiveness, and you must return to him all your ill-gotten gains made from this deception. When you are once more the poor and needy John Hobart you were, I will marry you. Now, ask yourself if I want anything for myself—nothing but an easy conscience, of which you have long since robbed me."

As she finished speaking, she stood there the picture of resolution, but she scarcely looked at her companion, and when she did, it was with an expression of scorn upon her face.

"Clara, why do you ask me to make this unnecessary sacrifice? Married without money, and situated as we should be were I to make the confession you ask, what would become of us? We must assuredly leave here, and where should we go? If you are willing, we will marry, and fly with all we have to another country; but to stay here is impossible."

"And commit some further crimes! Perhaps rob Mr

Perryman further, so as to give him still more reason to curse and loathe my memory. But for me none of this would ever have occurred, and still you speak to me of love, and hesitate to make this sacrifice. Well, I knew before I offered that you would part with everything—ties the most sacred—rather than part with your filthy lucre; and still, I ask, if God is just and merciful, how much mercy has he extended to me in keeping your vile passions uppermost, so that you will not agree to do justice. To be allied to you, John Hobart! oh, how I should hate life itself while I prolonged it with you. Go from my sight! You can never realise how I loathe and despise you, mean and contemptible coward that you are. Go and hide yourself, for your very presence is contamination!"

"Clara, cruel girl!" said he, looking down, for he was afraid to meet her eyes, which he knew were fixed upon him; "I may, I know, appear to you in an unfavourable light, but will you ask yourself, why I have done all this wrong? 'Twas for love of you, and nought else."

"Then, if you have done so much wrong for me, it will be but little indeed to do *one* right, for by that one act you will obtain what you would make me believe you most covet."

To this he attempted no reply, but stood deep in thought. At first he was inclined to be honest, and say "No"; then again he even thought of making the sacrifice Clara asked, for whenever he thought of Frank he feared lest she should cherish for him some feelings of love, and he felt he would rather do anything than risk parting with her. Then the face of Mary Torridge would appear, and even John Hobart's conscience smote him for the time, heartless as he was; and turning again to Clara, he said—

"You know not all, nor can I tell you all; but if you knew how much I loved you, you would show some mercy."

"When you show mercy you can reasonably expect a return from me, and you shall receive it; but first extend it yourself, and then trust to others as they have had to trust to you. Until then, I pray I may have strength to do some right;" and so saying, Clara left the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The evening of the 23rd has arrived, and so have most of the guests at Hobart's house. Maud, Louie, and Frank are there, and on Frank's face there is a look of determination but seldom to be seen. The Parks have also arrived, and the old gentleman has soon made himself quite at home, and has been inspecting the apartments beyond those set aside for the visitors. The ladies, with one exception, are dressed as gaily as ladies usually are on such occasions; the exception is Clara. She is attired in a tight-fitting plain black silk, with no ornament save that she wears round her neck and wrists a little white lace. The dress seems so unlike the style of crinolines worn in those days that the slight figure shows doubly to advantage. Her face looks as beautiful as ever, but there is to-night a rather sad expression on her countenance. Miss Park is dressed in blue silk; but the ever-worn crinoline contrasts unfavourably with the quiet apparel of Clara. Louie is also very plainly dressed, and resembles Clara in more ways than one; and Maud remarks, "See, Louie, you not only copy Miss Hobart in ways, but in dress."

"How could I copy her in dress, Maud, when I did not know what she was going to wear? Besides, you know, I never like loud colours, or anything approaching them."

"I wish I had thought of it," said Maud; "for the sake of contrast I would have had a magenta."

"Oh, Maud, you only jest. I know you do not mean anything of the kind; and as to myself, you know I prefer all things the reverse of gay."

"Yes, and if you ever marry, Louie, the unfortunate victim of your designs will be melancholy mad before he knows where he is, unless you alter."

"I am not likely to marry, so there will be no occasion to sympathise with anyone."

"Tut, nonsense, Louie, don't talk like that. You know I am only jesting; but don't say you will not marry, for when Mr Right comes, he will say and you perform accordingly. But let's look Clara up now; she has done receiving, and we will ask her why she did not go quite into mourning. Not but what I consider she looks the belle of the room."

"She does look pretty; and what an improvement it makes not wearing the crinoline. I declare I will try the experiment to-morrow."

"And so will I, Louie, and so will we all. But here comes Clara; let's ask her. We were actually coming to ask you," says Maud to Miss Hobart, "why you went so far from your usual rule in dressing so gaily to-night. Do you know, Clara, you eclipse everyone here."

"Thanks for the compliment; but I think the gentlemen here do not deserve any for allowing two young ladies to roam about criticising and making sarcastic remarks on poor me. I must look into this, and rate them soundly for their inattention."

"Kindly do nothing of the sort; as it is we are not bored, but if you do what you threaten, we shall probably be worse

than imprisoned for the balance of the evening, while they will think they are conferring on us the greatest of favours by giving us their company. We will dance with them all in good time, but in between the dances we ask a little freedom; and Louie here, you know, will want half-an-hour for thinking presently."

"I certainly am of opinion, Louie, you and I must range ourselves against Maud, for she never lets a chance by of acquainting us with the fact that our ways and movements are observed."

"Gossiping again, I do declare," said Frank, who just then joined the trio. "I think, Miss Hobart, there is now to be the 'Lancers.' May I have the pleasure?"

"Certainly," said Clara; and at the same time two gentlemen came and carried off Maud and Louie, and the sets were almost directly formed.

Now it so happened that Louie and her partner, and Clara, and Frank, were in the same set, and every interval of the music Frank took advantage to whisper, or half-whisper, to Clara something tending to tell her what was uppermost in his thoughts. He was most assiduous in his attentions, considering her every wish; and just as the set broke up he said, loud enough for Louie to hear, "Clara, will you grant me a few minutes to-night before we part; now, if possible—if not, later on."

"Later on," she replied, "not just now;" and within her heart there was a fluttering which, under more favourable circumstances, would have soon blossomed into love.

As to Frank, he was impatience itself. He longed to tell her again how much he loved her, and to beg of her a favourable reply. And Louie, poor Louie, what did she experience when she too heard his request, and saw with what impatience he

waited her reply? She wished to be away from the world, and this part of it in particular, but she feared Maud's displeasure too much to talk as yet of going home—in fact, until she went, many times during the evening, when asked questions, her thoughts so ran on what she had heard that, mechanically, she replied, "Later on, but not now." So dance after dance went by and she found no pleasure, for she had learned to love Frank Perryman, and now she saw that she loved one who had no eyes for her. She was aware he could not reciprocate her passion, and so much did she allow the matter to trouble her, that just after a quadrille she tottered, rather than walked, out on to the verandah, past the conservatory, and beyond the bay window, under which there was a garden stool, and on this she rather fell than sat. The position of the bay window prevented her being seen, and so dizzy and faint did she become that she felt quite unable to move for the present.

Frank, as soon as the dance is over, approaches Clara, and requests her to grant him only a minute or two, urging as a further plea that she was so far tired from the effects of the dance that a little quiet would do her good. "Do you know," he adds, "you looked so pale before this dance that I feared you were going to be ill again; but now I see you look better—the excitement of the dance has done you good. Let us pass through on to the verandah. Stay, let me get you a wrapper, lest the night air affect you;" and with this Frank returned to her chair and brought her shawl, which he carefully wrapped round her, placing it carefully over her, and they both passed through the Venetian windows out on to the verandah.

The night was beautifully starlit, and the fragrance from the conservatory made the garden and its surroundings a fit place to talk of what was at this moment uppermost in Frank's mind. Clara, however, knew what was coming, and dreaded it as a child dreads the cane, but she knew not how to stay him. Indeed, if she did not love, she had so much respect and sympathy for him that she scarcely felt inclined to refuse.

She experiences again the fluttering sensation, but she inwardly decides she must check any such feeling, and with his first words comes her resolution to be again honest, to him at least.

"Clara," he begins, "you know why I asked you for this interview, for I have already told you how I have loved, and I love you still. But for the pleasure of again telling you this, what I say are only superfluous words."

"Stay, we may be overheard, let us pass on. By the window there is a garden seat; I have much to say, and would say it all without interruption. Let us go from here, and you shall know me for what I am; and then you at least will be spared more deception."

"Clara, what mean you? Your words fill me with alarm, and yet I fear not aught from you. Tell me you are only joking with me, trying my love. I assure you you will find it true to the last."

"Alas! I know too well its truth, and regret I cannot show myself worthy of it. But such is the case."

"Stay, dear one; tell me not further, but say 'yes' to my oft-repeated request, and let all else be buried in oblivion."

"Mr Perryman, hear me before you say more. I know—have felt for ever so long—that the strain on my mind has been too great; try it not further now, but hear all I have to tell you, and then if one speck of compassion for me remains within you, be generous, as you always have been, and say you forgive me. If you do not—if you even curse me,—I know it is but my deserts, and I will for ever pray that some day, when the memory of this night has partly been obliterated, you will have sufficient compassiou, and say you have forgiven."

"Freely do I forgive you beforehand, if there is aught to forgive; but I know you only delude yourself. As you wish it, however, I will hear you, then all will, I am certain, be well."

Clara sat like one stupefied, for every word which he uttered was to her a fresh pang; for did it not show her the goodness of his nature. And how was she about to pierce the heart which was full of nothing but kindness itself. However, nerving herself for the task which she knew now more than ever must be accomplished, she went on:—

"I have to tax your patience, Mr Perryman, for I have much to say, and I ask of you as a favour to hear me out. I know I shall, long before I finish, make you feel how you hate me, and perhaps 'twill be better for you to do so. It will be merciful to you at least, for you alone are to be considered." She now went on, and told him word for word all that had passed;—how her father had told her his tale of misfortune; how Hobart had come to their humble hut, and the after events, until he was as well acquainted with her sad history as is the reader. Poor Frank sat like one in a dream. At times, when her relation of the facts showed how she had suffered, and all for her father's sake, he would look at her with eyes full of pity and love, and oft did he feel inclined to be more generous and clasp her in his arms, and declare that in spite of all he would never give her up; but he checked himself. She told him how she had feared before to inform him of the truth lest harm should befall her father. Now that she had told him all, she would further ask his clemency towards her father; that until she could find out what had become of him, Frank would forbear letting Hobart know what he had learnt.

"I ask you not," she said, "to consider me; but my poor father has suffered so much that it would be a sin that the wrong-doing of others should cause him more sorrow. And now," she adds, "how you will hate me; but at least you will not then think of me as you now do, and in this you will be receiving more of what you deserve."

"Hate you, Clara? No, my poor girl, how can I hate

you; what have you done but obeyed him you feared to offend, lest the man you loved, as a child should love her parent, should suffer. No, I will try and prove myself more equal to the occasion; I will, as you ask, for the time at least, forbear to say or do aught that will let him, the mean and cowardly scoundrel that he is, know of what you tell me. You say you have written to your father, but have received no reply, and that you gave him the letters to post. Clara, I do not believe one of your letters ever went further than John Hobart; but this also will I find out, and sooner or later you and I will have that satisfaction which I think in this case is due to both of us."

"Oh, how your words cheer me. You think my father still lives then, and that I shall again hear of him?"

"Indeed I do; and further, from what you tell me, I think the fact of your father assaulting Mr Torridge is a lie told by John Hobart to further his own ends, although of course this is pure speculation."

"Oh, thank you for those words. I never could believe myself that he would be guilty of such a crime; but what could I do? I thought all I did was for the best, and now I begin to see that I am to blame for not seeing and hearing more." And here Clara, heart-broken first with what she had had to inflict on him who had proved so noble, and after, at the suggestions of Frank that he was not guilty of this last accusation, broke into the most passionate sobs.

"Do not weep, Clara," said Frank, taking her hand, which she did not withdraw; "I will aid you. Look on me as your friend; aye, look on me as before, for God knows I do love you. Give me but the right, and even now, in spite of everyone, I will clear this accursed mystery."

"Stay, Mr Perryman," she said, withdrawing her hand, "you must not, I pray, speak to me of love. I am in no way

worthy of you. I asked you for forgiveness. Give me this; your love, I know, should not be mine. Some day you will find one more worthy of it; and as for me, if you can give me your compassion, it is all I ask."

"Clara, you have told me all; am I not cool, and do I not know fully what I am saying? and now, before God, our only witness, do I tell you I will marry you, and then I shall have a further right to defend you. Mind you, I make this no condition, for equally will I aid you were you to reject me with scorn."

"I reject you with scorn! You alone have that right. But marry you I cannot. 'Tis not because I love another, for I do not; but were I to marry you, I should for ever feel that I had taken advantage of your passion, and that sooner or later you would hate me for it. No, Mr Perryman, ask me not to assist you in what is against your own interests. Aid me, if you will, and I shall be for ever your debtor; and should I find my father, the remainder of my life shall be devoted to him to atone for the wrong that has been caused through my rashness."

"I will not press you now for an answer. Think of what I have said, and in the meantime I will take such steps with reference to the finding of your father that I think best. But to Hobart no word shall escape me, much as I loathe and despise him."

"Oh, how can I ever thank you for your kindness? I know only one way, and that is to be honest. Do not ask me to take time to consider your offer, for I tell you I will never marry. Had things been different, then the case might have been altered; but not now."

"Then you would make your future life miserable, when you might make both our lives so different."

"In this you delude yourself. For a time I might make you happy, but only while your infatuation lasted. Then your feelings will change, and as for me it matters not. I am to fulfil a certain part, and when that is performed I shall be satisfied. Press me not further, but act at once in respect to my father, for the continual strain on my powers of endurance may prove too much for me. Do this for me, and I shall for ever bless and pray for you. And now, as we shall be missed, let us return. The less comment the better, at least for the present."

Frank reluctantly gave in much against his will, but Clara was determined, and so once more they returned to the room.

Hobart was the first to observe their entrance, and his look at Frank was not one that betokened kindness of heart. As to Clara, at her he looked as though he would like to take her away from the place immediately, so jealous was he lest anyone should ever look at her. She was pale too, for the subject of the late conversation had stirred within her all that was nearest to her heart; but her firmness of mind bore her up, or she must have given way to her feelings.

"Frank," said Maud, some few minutes later, "have you seen Louie? I have been looking for her everywhere, but cannot find or hear where she is."

"No, Maud, I have not. When did you see her last?"

"More than an hour ago."

"I will find Clara, and ask her," said Frank.

"I have just done so, and she doesn't know where she is."

"It is strange," said Frank; "she may have felt unwell, and returned home."

"She would not do so without saying a word. Besides, her hat and other things are here, so I must hunt further."

Maud accordingly left Frank, who was busy with his own thoughts, or he would have offered his assistance to search for Louie. Before asking her brother, Maud had been all through the house, and she now went out to the verandah, and not finding her there, she gently called "Louie." Still no answer, so she went further out on the small lawn before the house, and which went also down one side. Here she looked about, but not a sign of Louie could be seen, when suddenly turning to go toward the eastern corner she caught sight of what appeared to be a form rising off the grass round the corner where Clara and Frank had just left.

"What, is that you, Louie?" cried out Maud. "Why, whatever is wrong with you? I have hunted everywhere."

"Oh, Maud, I have been so unwell. I must have fainted, for I came out to get the air; and from that time I know not what has happened. When I again came to I had not strength to rise."

"My poor Louie," said Maud, kneeling at her side, and and taking her head and placing it gently on her lap; "and I was so thoughtless that I did not miss you for ever so long."

"You were not thoughtless, Maud. Why should you ever think anything was wrong? I should have known better than to give way, for that had doubtless much to do with it."

"I should like to know how anyone could help giving way when they fainted. Can you get up, Louie? Let me put this wrapper around you"; and Maud took from off her own shoulders a cape and placed it around Louie.

"Maud," said Louie, "will you promise me one thing? A favour indeed, but one easily granted."

"Certainly I will, Louie; what is it?"

"Don't tell Frank; or anyone, in fact, of this, for it will seem so strange to them. Will you promise me this, Maud?"

"Of course I will promise. If they ask I will merely say I found you all right, and no more."

"Oh, thank you, Maud; I am so grateful. I would not like anyone to know how foolish I have been."

"All right; only don't call it foolish, for I cannot see anything foolish about it. Let us go in now, or they will be looking out for both of us"; and so the two ladies entered the drawing-room, and, as a dance has just started, nobody noticed them.

Little did Maud ever dream why Louie was so earnest lest she should tell Frank. Had she not unwillingly heard all, or nearly all, that had passed between the man she loved and Clara? Yes, she had heard all, but she could not help it. Being seated in the garden, when Frank and Clara were together, Louie rose to go lest she should hear more, but agitated, and pierced to the heart by what she had unwittingly listened to, she had only reached where Maud found her when she felt so overcome that she must have experienced a slight faint. For some seconds she knew not what was said, then again she heard Clara say, "I cannot marry you"; and this was so sweet after hearing the other, that she was too fascinated to move. For some seconds she sat on. Then when she heard Clara relate her misfortunes, compassion for the miserable woman filled her heart. She felt that willingly would she, were it in her power, give Frank up to Clara, for she, in her wholeness of heart, forgot her own troubles when she saw the magnitude of another's compared to her own. Then she realised that she was in the position of an evesdropper, and shame came upon her; but what could she do? To move now would be certain discovery, and then what would Frank and Clara think of her to find her, as it would seem to them, in the very act of listening. No, she must remain on, and to do so was to hear and realise how much and how nobly Clara decided to forfeit—all, even the man she loved, for Louie thought she must love Frank—to follow, as she

thought, her path of duty and atonement. Louie saw no wrong that Clara had done. Every word that Clara uttered sunk deep into the true and tender heart of the unknown witness to this midnight confession; and she, too, resolved that the secret should be as safe as ever; and she also resolved that if it ever came within her power to aid Clara, she would do so. So Clara, who thought to make one at least hate her, had really secured possibly two of the best and truest friends she ever had.

And what was occurring in another part of this house on this occasion, which seemed to be nought but adventure, we will see.

In the card-room sit Mr Parks, Mrs Perryman, and two others of similar age, a musing themselves with the usual game of whist, for half-crown points and shilling tricks; and in another room further back stand Mr Felix Fixer and John Hobart.

"Why, Hobart," Fixer is just saying, "do you not be more cautious in your movements? You have been flirting all the night with this Miss Parks. You know that you will only rouse the jealousy of Clara, and then she may upset everything."

"I tell you that it is impossible for me to make her so."

"And I tell you that you do not know woman if you say that, for they get jealous even when they are not in love."

"Your fears are quite uncalled for, Fixer. Besides, I want to make her so if I can, and if not I may find it very convenient to marry this £50,000 heiress."

"John Hobart, are you mad? When you talk to me of marrying, do you forget the place I occupied some years ago?"

"Fixer, your interests are mine, and *vice versa*. I shall in this affair use my own discretion, and I advise you not to interfere with me, as I don't intend to stand that sort of thing."

"Your memory must be getting very defective. I must brush it up"; and with these words Fixer left him.

Somewhat later on in the night, or rather morning, after Maud and Louie had sung a duet, the former appealed to Fixer to decide if she was not entitled to make a call upon a gentleman present for a song.

"Most decidedly," said the polite Fixer, "and I shall see that the gentleman complies; not that there is any fear of anyone here refusing you, for who could?"

"Then," said Maud, "I shall call upon Mr Felix Fixer for the next song, and I am sure you will be as good as your word."

This appeal caused a hearty laugh at the victim's expense; but Mr Fixer was equal to this, as he was to all else.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I must certainly throw myself upon your generosity, so far as complying with Miss Perryman's request as made; but if you will allow me to modify, I will then be quite as good as my word. I assure you, I never sing."

"Oh, nonsense," said Maud, "you are trying to shirk."

"Not at all, but hear me out. I cannot, as I just said, sing; but I am quite willing to contribute my mite for the entertainment of those present, in the following manner:— As I cannot sing, I shall be allowed to relate a little incident which came under my personal observation; in fact, to which I was unknowingly a witness. Say, Miss Perryman, will you allow me to proceed?"

"Well, Mr Fixer, as you do everything which you attempt so well, I suppose, in fact feel sure, you will do justice to this, and, unless the company object, we will hear you."

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, what say you?"

"Go on, by all means," was the general cry, in which Hobart, who had now taken a seat beside Fixer, joined.

"Thanks," said Fixer, "I will. To commence, I must tell you I was an unknowing witness to what I am about to relate, so I trust you will exonerate me from all blame."

"Certainly," was the general response. "Go on; go on."

"Very good then, to commence ——."

"You said that before," observed Maud, in her usual lively manner, "pray not so many reiterations."

"I apologise," said Fixer, "and will now resume. It was about the year ——, but the exact date matters not, that I had occasion to know one John Hobson"; and Felix paused on the first syllable of the name, which caused Hobart to look sharply round. "This Hobson was not what you would call a conscientious kind of man, but of that I will leave you to judge. He was, at the time I speak of, a kind of—well, what shall I call him? For the sake of illustration, we will say he was a lawyer. You do not object, Mr Hobart?"

"Not I," said Hobart, but it seemed a long time coming.

"Very well, then, we will say John Hobart—Hobson, I beg your pardon, was a lawyer, and that there was a certain young lady of excellent position and birth whom he had decided, in his mind no doubt, would be a very good match for him, as she was possessed of considerable 'siller,' as the Scotch say. Now he made advances to this Mary Torridgent."

A long drawl again on the Torr caused Hobart to whisper, "For God's sake, stop, and I will for ever hear you and consider you more."

Fixer, however, took no notice, but went on. "But she rejected him, and would not hear him at all. Now this John Hobson being of a determined turn of mind—at least when

he had only a woman to deal with—decided she should marry him if she wished to or not; and so he went to a certain Wesleyan minister, who was remarkably deaf, and, after much trouble, explained to him that he was to be married to this Mary Torridgent, and that they would come on a certain day and go through the ceremony. At the same time he informed the minister that the young lady, who was just of age, did not want her parents to know, and that she required the affair over as quickly as possible. After this he saw the verger, and told him also of his marriage, asked him to have all in readiness, and as his master was so deaf, to help things on as quickly as he could, so that the pair could get away as soon as possible. Further, he promised the verger, who, by the bye, was a very needy man, that if all came right he should have five pounds for himself. After this he went to another young lady, and asked her if she would officiate as bridesmaid; and when she had agreed, he went to Mary Torridgent, and said that as she would not marry him, he had determined to wed another, and asked her to act as bridesmaid, and thus show she had no ill-will towards him. She consented to this, and all was ready for the Thursday."

"But," said Maud, "you have, so far, not got a bride."

"All in good time, my young lady ——." Hobart here, looking very pale and agitated, whispered to Fixer, "For heaven's sake stop, or I must leave."

Fixer took no notice, but went on. "You will soon hear if you listen. The morning on which the ceremony was to take place at last arrived, and sure enough there were the two who had promised to be bridesmaids, and also the bridegroom. Now each of the two bridesmaids had been severally informed by Hobson that the other one was to be the bride; and no sooner did they both arrive than the minister, who wished them to see he understood what he was doing, if he could not hear, proceeded to place both young ladies in their places, and also the

bridegroom; and, after this was done, the ceremony proceeded, and in due course he pronounced, in his snuffling style of speaking, Mary Torridgent and John Hobart—I beg your pardon again for the mistake—Hobson I should have said."

"At this, Hobart, who sat quite close to the speaker, tried to rise, but Fixer, ready for this emergency, seized him by the coat-tails, and held him fast to his seat.

"The bridegroom now caught hold of the hand of Miss Torridgent, and placed the ring on in the usual manner. At this she exclaimed, 'Why do you put the ring on my finger?' and he answered in a whisper that it was customary in this church to do so, but that it would be taken off again directly. As the young lady had never seen such a ceremony before, she said nothing. Now came the signing of the register, and in doing this the bridegroom adroitly covered the name when he signed, and then told Miss Torridgent to put her signature as witness, which she did. Then the actual witness signed, and sure enough the lady and the suitor whom she had rejected were declared man and wife. The verger and I signed also as witnesses, and all seemed complete until the old and deaf minister, turning to the so-called pair, commenced his congratulations.

"At this the bride seemed to have awakened to her actual position, and asked, 'But why congratulate me? I have not married this man.'

"'Aye, miss, most assuredly you have.'

"'No, sir,' she cried, weeping as though her heart would break, 'I came but to be bridesmaid for this couple, and not to get married myself.'

"'Then, madam, I have been imposed upon; for this gentleman most assuredly told me it was to you he was to be married, and no one else.'"

"Oh," said Maud, "what a piece of villainy; surely no one

could ever perform such a part. But I interrupt you; pray go on."

"My gracious," exclaimed the New Orleans planter, "but this beats all I ever heard of. You surely invented this, Mr Fixer, to get out of your song."

"Horrible," exclaimed Mrs Perryman; "if that clergyman had any goodness in him he would most certainly undo what he had done."

At this all laughed, although they were very much impressed with Fixer's story; and Frank said—

"Unfortunately for the young lady that could not be done, mother."

"Ah, my dear," she answered, "if it were my daughter it should be done, for I would take her from the heartless scoundrel."

"Well," said Maud, "all I have to say is, I wish we had him here between us, we would pull his hair, if nothing else."

"That we would," echoed every lady present.

"However," said Fixer, "before you cut this gentleman up any smaller, I will tell what little there remains to be told. The bridegroom spoke to the girl he had married and told her he loved her, and this was his excuse for doing what he had done. 'Then,' she replied, her eyes flashing with scorn (I fancy I see her now; she looked beautiful as she stood and confronted him she was married to and the minister), 'you have either together, or separately, been guilty of one of the basest plots ever concocted, and, cowards that you are, you have plotted against a woman because you no doubt thought her an easy prey for your villanies. But you shall see; aye, most assuredly shall, you both see. You,' she added, turning to Hobson, shall live to regret this; aye, a very stone will I prove to you,

tied round your neck with your own hand, and the time will come when you shall curse the day you ever put it there, but it shall not be cast off. No, never; while I live you shall live to know what it is to have a wife and yet no wife, for I will at least debar you from taking another, even if I have to travel to the other end of the world to let people know who and what you are. And you,' she said, speaking to the minister, 'I will expose you, and let the world know to what such men will stoop for money. Aye, you are like your kind; but you are old and infirm, and might have felt pity on one who is young enough to be your granddaughter, and who never harmed you;' and here the poor girl gave way, and wept like a child."

"And what did the villain of the piece do now?" asked Maud. Oh, the rascal, I hate to think of him."

"He said nothing, but looked on; and, after a time, he turned to the bride, who still wept, saying, 'Come, let us away.' 'Away? Yes, John Hobson, you had better away, lest I save the hangman his work. Go from me! Sooner ten thousand times would I be dead than mate with you for one single hour. No, leave me, and sooner or later you shall live to regret this step as much as I do now. It is true you punish me; but the day will come. Yes, as sure as we all live, the day will come.' And with this she bounded away from the church before the poor old minister could say one word, although the tears were streaming down his face, and several times he had essayed to speak, but the words seemed to stop in his throat. I was so disgusted with what I had seen that I left the church, and the lady I have never seen since. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have told my story, and I trust you are satisfied."

"Why, I do believe," said Maud, "your story has impressed Mr Hobart more than any of us. He looks quite ill!"

"Ah, Mr Hobart," observed Mrs Perryman, "it is a credit to you to show such feelings. I have been crying myself, and I

am not ashamed to own it." And as she spoke she wiped away from her face the tears which had been running down her cheeks.

"I do not feel well, by any means," said Hobart, "nor have I for some hour or more. Of course I know Fixer's story is but fiction, so that has not so much impressed me."

"But," said Louie, speaking for the first time, "Mr Fixer said it was true; did you not?"

"Yes, Miss Branscombe, quite true."

"Oh, I am so sorry; I did so hope it was but as Mr Hobart seemed so certain it was—fiction. I thought you might have been drawing on your imagination."

"Well, Mr Fixer," said Miss Parks, "if ever I am again at a party, and you propose to tell a story, I shall certainly advise the company to prevent you giving one like this. I feel uncomfortable to think there ever was such a man. Why, anyone to act in this way you have described must be a very Satan."

"I am always in trouble," remarked Fixer; "but if you will forgive me this time, ladies, I'll never err again in the same direction."

"Well," said Maud, "tell us what followed. Did the lady go again back to her parents, or away with her husband?—for, of course, such he was by law, if by no other right."

"I believe she returned home; and I know she spoke no further to Hobson."

"Quite right," replied Maud; "but to complete the story after the usual style of fiction you ought to tell us how he started after his bride, but in crossing some river the boat, from some unforseen circumstance or other, capsized, and he was drowned, and then we should all feel satisfied."

"Yes," said Clara, "that would be a better finish certainly; but we must take Mr Fixer's story as it is, I suppose. And now Miss Branscombe will perhaps cheer us up with that little favourite of hers, 'Thy Voice is Near.'"

"A splendid suggestion," cried Maud; "come Louie, I will help you; you know I can." And Louie, ever willing to do as she was asked, rose, took a seat at the piano, and sang with much feeling the song Clara had asked for.

Shortly after this, as it had grown late, the party broke up, and all there dispersed; and so ended Mr Fixer's attempt to "brush up" Mr Hobart's defective memory.

CHAPTER XIX.

For some days it so happened that Fixer's business kept him from town, and consequently he did not see Hobart till the fifth day after the party. He then received from Hobart a note, asking him up to his house that evening, and accordingly he went. He was received by Hobart, as he thought, in rather a cool way; but he took no notice of that, and, seating himself, he asked after Clara's health and his own.

"Clara is fairly well," said Hobart; "better than she has been, for she seemed quite worn out after the party. To-night she has gone out for a run, and I scarcely know when she will return; but, I presume, before you leave. As for myself, I am also pretty well; but not any better for your little recital of the other evening. Why you did such a thing I cannot understand."

"Your memory, my dear Hobart, at times, fails you so very badly, that it is only fair for me to attempt to brighten it a little."

"I don't want it done in this way," returned Hobart. "I fail to see why you should interfere with me to the extent you do. I treat you very differently."

"Hobart, is it not enough to blight the prospects for ever of two of the best girls you ever knew, without adding another to the list? I am not, John Hobart, any better than any other of my kind; but I have never forgotten that both my mother and sister, God bless them! are women; and, having feelings for them, I have some for the whole sex, and would not knowingly see them wronged. If there is aught in this world that should be considered above all else it is a woman; and, thank heaven, that is my opinion, and I am not ashamed of it. I do not wish to intrude upon you, far from it; but when you talk without any justification for ruining another, I thought it best to remind you that there exists one who said once, 'You shall live to know that you have a wife, and yet have none.'"

"I don't want any more recitations of that piece. She will never turn up here; and if she did she would, if I were married, be too pleased at obtaining her own freedom to say a word that would injure me. For the less she said the better in this case, as you know."

"So far so good," answered Fixer. "I don't think she would bother herself about you; for you know there is such a thing as revenge, and were she to arrive here just about the time you were being married it would be awkward for both of us, to say the least of it."

"I am not, so far as I know, going to get married. I have not any such wish, so we will drop the subject, and turn to others."

"Conditionally, Hobart, conditionally."

"What do you mean by that remark?"

"First, that you do not try to make Miss Parks or any other

young lady fall in love with you; and, secondly, that if they should do so you will not think of injuring them in any way, nor of injuring myself by matrimony. Strange that women always prefer the worst of men, but so it is."

"You are always complimentary, and anyone who heard you talk to me would certainly think I were a big schoolboy."

"But for the fact that they do little or no wrong, while you do nothing else, the comparison would not be amiss."

"Thanks; but let us turn to business, for you will only provoke me if we talk on thus."

"Not unless you do such acts that require comment, and in that case I should take what measures I chose. As you suggest, we will now turn to business, and until you err again we will let that matter rest. What is the business you would speak of?"

"Well, Fixer, I am most anxious for the spec we were speaking of the other day, and I wish to hear your views."

"The spec you spoke of, you mean. I only heard and objected, but you talked."

"Well, never mind, Fixer; be more as you were, and talk only of the subject, and leave sarcasms out. Perhaps you would like a cigar and some whisky, and then you will be better."

With this Hobart rung, and asked for the required whisky, &c., of which Fixer partook.

"Well," said Fixer, "perhaps I do feel no worse; but still I must say I do not view your proposal in a favourable light."

"Look here, Fixer, the land is a gift at £20,000, and the terms are exceptionally easy. We can easily double on it before the last bills fall due, and then you will be as pleased as I. Come, be a little more venturesome."

"Look you, Hobart, I don't like the spec. First, the bills all fall due under six months, a very short time, and if the land does not sell, we are literally coopered; but if this is your pet scheme we will go into it and sink or swim together. If the land sells at all we are right; if the other way, we shall have to start business somewhere else, as this climate will, for a certainty, grow rapidly hot."

"No fear of that," said Hobart, elated, "I will refer Mr Lenny to you to-morrow, and so settle the matter up; and if it does not go well, I will, in any case, try and put you right at least."

"Promises, my boy—you know the rest. However, there is no need to say more; simply try and keep what promises you have made, and I shall be content. I will leave you now; give my fondest regards to Clara; fine girl, by Jove." And Mr Fixer took his departure.

John Hobart sat a long time alone, thinking first of one thing and then another. "Yes, I would marry Miss Parks were it not for him," he says to himself," for she is worth money; and I could then defy them all. If I could bring myself to think less of Clara, which no doubt I should be able to do in the event of this, she could be given a couple of hundred and let go to search for her father, and then they would, for a certainty, never find each other"; and he laughed at the joke. "Still, I do love Clara, and she keeps me at a distance, more especially since the party. Fixer, too, he often is in the way; but if I were married I could make some arrangements with him, and so have all to myself. Fool that I ever was to marry when and as I did. She has indeed been a stone around my neck; but I will cast it off, and another shall take its place. I feel now that I like Amelia Parks, and I will see more of her. The more I care for her, the easier it will be for me to wean myself from Clara, and then I shall have more peace of mind. By the way, Clara is very late. This is something new, but I must find out what is the meaning of it;

she never did this before. Since that infernal party everything seems upside down, but all will soon be well again. If nothing else, the land can be sold, and then I can draw from Fixer the money to pay the bills; or once more forget, and let Mr Frank Perryman pay. Then you too, Mr Fixer, will have to look for someone else whom you can exasperate about their 'defective memory.' Yes, a little more patience, and then ——"; and Hobart swallows another glass of whisky, lights a cigar, and continues his self-communings.

"Ha, ha! What a splendid thing to sell Fixer, if I can do it. That will be the best move of all. But Clara, ah, Clara! No, you shall not have her, Frank Perryman. No, never, not if I know it. She shall yet be mine; aye, before Amelia, Mary, or, for the matter of that, a legion of Maries." So he talked on until at last he fell to sleep, muttering; and in this state Clara found him on her return with Frank Perryman, for it was to his house she had been to spend the evening, but more to talk over, and give particulars for the finding of her father.

And so for the present things drift gently on; to some they bring peace and happiness, and to others misery and privation; but some must, in this battle of life, lose as others win; and each must accept, and if not satisfied, at least, do their best to appear so. The land, as desired by Hobart, was purchased on the following terms:—cash, £1000; and bills drawn by Messrs Fixer and Co., and endorsed by Perryman and Hobart for £19,000, bearing interest at 7 per cent. Thus was Frank Perryman's name placed to paper in this transaction alone for nineteen thousand pounds; and there is more paper afloat also bearing his name. But how true is the old adage, 'When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise"; for he knew it not, and so he was, at least so far as money matters were concerned, in blissful ignorance.

CHAPTER XX.

Frank Perryman was, above everything, a man of his word; and never did he make a promise that he did not intend to keep. Clara had been this evening to see him, to supply him with what particulars she could, and he was fairly determined to write and ask the authorities in Van Dieman's Land all particulars of Matthew Grant.

"How long do you think it will take," inquired Clara, "to get a reply?"

"Well, you know a letter first must go to Melbourne, as there is no direct mail; so, I premise, it will take two months," said Frank.

"Two months? Why, it will never pass, for now you have raised my hopes I feel more anxious for reply than I ever did for anything."

"You must have patience; the time will soon pass away, and I feel morally sure we shall get better news than you anticipate."

"I hope and trust we may; for if it is as you suppose, and my letters have never been sent, my poor father will surely be heart-broken at my neglect."

"Your apparent neglect say, rather. But be of good heart, and you know not how it will cheer you when you hear again from him and know that he is well. Further, I may be able to assist him then in some way, and make life happier."

"Oh, thanks; how can I ever show myself in any way worthy of your kindness?"

"You could do one thing, Clara, if you would, that would repay me a thousand times over."

"Stay, Mr Perryman, please, ask me not that; for, as I have told you, this can never be. Besides, how should I requite your goodness by allowing you to wed the daughter of a convict. No, Mr Perryman, think of your mother, your sister Maud, and last, but not least, your own social standing, and then you will see with me that it is impossible, even if I were inclined to be selfish enough to ask you throw all aside for me. No, I thank God I am not so far ungrateful as to allow you to make this sacrifice. As for me, I shall, as soon as I can hear that my father lives, return, and try for the future to be at least a comfort to one who hitherto has received so little, but who I know deserves so much."

"Noble, generous-hearted girl. My mother and sister would be only too happy I know to welcome you as my wife; but if you still say you wish it shall not be so, I will from this time show that I too can work to aid you disinterestedly, and will, if you bid me, never again mention the subject—at least not until I have again restored you to your father."

"Then I would ask of you this favour. I do not say that I hold out any hopes of my altering my mind, for I do not; still, if you think time will alter my determination, I would not rob you of hope, although I know full well I shall never be worthy of your love."

"You will come often and see us, at least, Clara. May I still call you Clara?"

"Why should you not do so? You have been kind to me when I most needed a friend, and if one has a right to call me Clara, surely it is you. But it is getting late, and I must return home."

"I shall at least escort you to your house, for I cannot allow you to go alone, and so late."

To this Clara offered no objection, and so they sallied forth. Little was said by either, and at last they found themselves at the residence of John Hobart, where Frank wished his companion a tender good-night and left her, and turned back again home.

He was surprised on reaching his house to find Miss Branscombe standing at the gate.

"Why, Louie, whatever keeps you up so late? Waiting for Mr. Right to come along, eh?"

"No, Frank, for me there is no such man that I know of, or if there is, I am not looking for him."

"Now, Louie, you know on this subject young ladies are allowed to fib to a certain extent, but I always thought you were the exception to that rule."

"No, Frank, I do not fib. I am waiting for no one; in fact, I forgot you were out, or I should not be here."

"Why, would you fly from me? I seem to be singularly unfortunate with ladies, Louie; can you tell me why?"

"You are not, so far as I am aware. I would not fly from you individually; but it is late, and I know I ought to have been long since in my bed."

"Come then, Louie, and we will both go in. Has Maud retired yet, or does she, too, await some midnight visitant?"

"Now, Frank, you are unjust, for you infer what you have no right to. You know Maud awaits no one."

"True, little sensitive; but you know that I am only joking, so don't be cross;" and Frank, in a brotherly way, takes Louie's arm, and they both enter the house.

She fancied for a moment that he seemed to notice her more than usually, and a gleam of happiness came across her face.

"Now you look better, Louie. Tell me what has ailed you of late; you always seem dull, as though you had the trouble of several people on your mind."

"I have nothing to tell you, Frank; you know I am not of a jovial disposition, but rather of a serious turn of mind."

"You are evading me. Come, tell me of your little trouble, and I may be able to assist you."

"There is nothing in which you can help me, or I would ask of you, for I know you would do so."

"Well, look you, Louie, if you ever do want aid or advice, come to me, for none would give it freer than I."

"I know, and thank you, Frank, as much as if I had really something to ask. But now, I will say good-night, or Maud will scold me for gossiping so late."

"Good-night, then," said Frank, "happy dreams;" and away went Louie to think for hours of how happy it would make her were she to be blest with the chance of accepting what another had so recently refused.

Did Frank ever dream how this tender-hearted girl loved him? No, not for one instant. He thought she liked him perhaps as a brother, for they had almost grown up together, but the real state of affairs he never even surmised.

Louie found Maud fast asleep, for she had no trouble. She loved her brother, mother, and also Louie—in fact, she was a general liker, and with everybody she was a great favourite; but she had no love trouble. Many of the young men who visited their house tried to court her, but she met all their advances in her usual lively way—in fact, she treated it all as a matter of fun, and she had never so far thought seriously enough of anybody to think them in love, or to wander in that direction herself. So she was doubly blest; for who is there of the millions of this

world's population who can so take the best part of this world's gifts and enjoy them, and leave the unpleasant parts for others? But such is life—we are all the victims of circumstances and our disposition, which has more to do with our joys in this troublesome world than aught else. And so Louie had troublous thoughts, because she was in love, and he she loved knew it not, and did not reciprocate; while Frank lay for hours hoping that sooner or later he would win Clara's love, and so secure his own happiness, but always determined whether or no to try and help her out of her difficulties.

And Clara, poor Clara! how she hoped and prayed for the welfare of him she could have made so happy, but would not, because she deemed herself all unworthy, and for what reason—because another had sinned against both. Away with such notions! Let the dead past bury the past; but in the bright and glorious future, if we will but make it so, let us think of this alone, and many an aching heart will be soothed, and those who may be for ever weary shall for ever be at rest.

Now, Hobart, with his rise in life, like all such men, became to his inferiors in position overbearing in his style, and as Frank Perryman gained popularity so Hobart lost—not only with the working or industrious classes, but he also disgusted the aristocrats by his continual bowing and scraping. Besides, by many he was snubbed, for not a few shady transactions were talked of as being perpetrated by him; and though he rose in his profession, and in a monetary sense, yet by the majority was he disliked and suspected. With old Parks he became an intimate friend, for the old fellow was reputed to have accumulated much money, and, according to popular opinion, by questionable means; and Hobart, who was remarkably fond of recounting his sharpness, found in the old fellow a patient listener, for the subject pleased him. It was to his taste, and so they visited and became, in the opinion of each other, great men. They would sit for hours drinking whisky and smoking

cigars, and see who could tell the best tale of sharpness, which, amongst men of any conscientious scruples, would be looked on as tricks for which they would banish the lowest menial in their employ. With these two, however, it was a congenial topic; and oftimes would Amelia and Clara, in consequence, be thrown into each other's company. Clara made no confidants beyond Frank, and Amelia had no secrets to tell. She would often speak of young men of her set when at home who aspired to her hand and fortune; but as she was in this always guided by her parents, and did not seem to have a mind of her own, she looked on the rejecting of a lover, because her father said so, as a matter of course, and it never caused her a moment's thought. It is true Clara listened to her stories, but not with any desire to hear more; she was too kind at heart to show her any coolness, and so things went on in this strain.

With Parks Hobart had been more confiding than with any other of his acquaintances, for he felt that he could trust him with certain matters. He had in many ways told him of how successful he had been in business, and he had further informed him of his interest in Fixer's venture; and the old fellow had often thought, and even hinted at, what a good match Hobart and Amelia would make, as of course Hobart said not a word of how many thousands they had floating alone on the name of Frank. The firm of Fixer and Co. had now become in the eyes of the people of South Canterbury a big concern, one whose credit was enormous, and whose capital was also large. They had long since bought, and had built ships, with which they did all their own shipping; and so far as Fixer had first predicted, the mercantile spec had been a success beyond their highest anticipations. Fixer, however, never spoke of his business unless he had a motive in doing so, and then he was too discreet to say one word too much. He gave no one his confidence, and no one knew from him aught of his business. With his employés he was a fair and just master, and was in all cases prompt in his payments to them, but always exact to a fraction.

Any promises he made to them he always kept, and at the same time his discipline was strict. Those with whom he had to deal found him extremely exact, and in all his monetary transactions he took special care to be in a position to keep his word, and so he inspired confidence. Nor was he less respected by those with whom he came in contact outside of business. His company was courted, and he was considered rich; and often would one of his most intimate friends say, "Fixer, the Co. of your firm is, I suppose, your relatives who have departed this life, and whose will was made in your favour;" to which remark he would smile in his own peculiar style, but not affirm or contradict in any way, so they believed what they chose; but this was no concern of Mr Fixer, who strictly endeavoured to mind his own business, and never tried to interfere with others. So he gradually went on, with but one object, that of furthering his own interest, and he never tried to assume to be what he was not. His household affairs were managed with economy, and what company he kept was never or rarely seen at his own house. He always feared that sooner or later Hobart would upset things by some rash act, but it must be said of him that he did all in his power to prevent any such occurrence. Frank Perryman's good opinion Fixer was most careful to obtain and keep. Not that he courted his society, but when he could by any means get it, he made the best possible use he could of the time to increase the favourable impression Perryman already had of him. Frank always spoke of Fixer as a gentleman, and considered that he was one who improved on acquaintance. He had, as he promised Maud, mentioned the fact to Fixer of his having had a clerk of his name in his employ.

"No doubt," replied Fixer, "it was one of my poor relations. Some families boast of their rich connections; I can boast of my poor ones, for we are about the poorest lot I thiuk you would find in a day's march. What was his Christian name, Perryman?"

"Felix," answered Frank, without the shade of suspicion, "and I should say about fifteen years your junior."

"Oh, Felix? then I suppose some one of my relatives must have been foolish enough to conclude one Felix was not enough in the family. For my part, I should say it was one too many."

At this last remark Frank laughed. But in his own mind he reversed what Fixer had said about poor relations, although as to the clerk he formed no opinion. And so with care and coolness, Fixer avoided prevaricating; and still when he told the truth he did it in such a way that no one thought he meant what he said, but concluded his modesty induced him to avoid parading any display, and that he was not the kind of man to boast of his aristocratic connections. Thus were all deceived; and had anyone, even Hobart, told Frank that Fixer was really the clerk formerly in their employ he would not have believed a word of it, and no one could have persuaded him. With reference to the apparent disparity in the age, this was occasioned by the fact of Fixer, when a clerk, having paid such particular attention to keeping his face so cleanly shaved that everyone was under the impression he had been unable to grow any hair at all. Formerly, too, he had taken special care to dress entirely different from now; for, as he assumed the character of a man of business, he entirely altered his style.

Now the matter of the land spec was not at all to Fixer's liking. He knew too well how land fluctuated in value; and although he was aware that, should they be lucky enough to strike the market at the right moment, it would be all well—in fact, they would probably make a hundred per cent. on the affair. Then again, if they could not do this, or perhaps were unable to sell at all, they would be literally done for—they could not meet their bills, and then Frank Perryman would learn all. In fact, it would take the whole of Hobart's share in the business, and nearly the whole of Frank's, to pay up; ruin would come, in spite of all the scheming of Fixer and Hobart. Day by day did this probability become more impressed on Fixer's mind, until it was quite a trouble to him.

The survey of the property was at once commenced, and large sums were spent in advertising, to try and work up the speculative spirit of the public before the sale came. Fair terms were to be allowed in the matter of the purchase money, and all was done by Fixer to successfully carry out Hobart's pet scheme; but how will it succeed? Ah, how many in New Zealand have asked the same question; how many built castles in the air on land speculations, some of which have fallen about their ears? Others, too, have not only built imaginary castles, but great and lofty ones which nothing will pull down, for they are a reality. Yes, many castles in New Zealand have been built out of such land speculations, which were entered into wholly and solely on bills. How will this one terminate? So far, the innocent have suffered, and the guilty been triumphant; but we shall in the future see.

CHAPTER XXI.

We left Grant and his mates, George and Jim, on the new rush at Potter's Hill, Inglewood. Day after day did poor old Matthew work on, ever in the hope of something turning up, but so far nothing had happened. The claims which they first took up were worked out, and after an equal division of profits Matthew found himself again the possessor of £70. Now, about this time an old mate of Matthew's two friends happened to come to Inglewood, and for some days he had been living with them. Between him and Matthew there seemed to be no great friendship; but for all that, he had little by little learnt that Matthew sought his daughter. Being desirous of again joining his old partners, he found Grant was in the way, and cudgelled his brains as to how he could remove him. To suggest to George or Jim anything unfair or unmanly he knew

would be useless, and for the time he could not tell what to do. Christmas had passed, and the New Year had come, and still no change. Sometimes Matthew would talk of wandering around further to look for Clara, but so far he had not done so; in fact, he had now become so attached to Jim and George, he knew not how to leave them without some clue to start upon. Of course, any sign of finding Clara would have made him leave his mates, but none came until one day the new arrival said in an absent way to George, whom he was talking to, but in Matthew's hearing, "Now I remember, I saw an advertisement in the *Bendigo Advertiser* before I came up here for one Grant. I think it was the *Bendigo Advertiser*, but I am not certain."

"You should tell Matthew," said George, "he is anxious to hear news,"

Matthew, however, did not want any further telling, but rushing into the tent, exclaimed, "Are you sure you saw such an advertisement?"

"Most decidedly; but I am not certain which paper it was in."

"Then," said Matthew, "I'm off; in fact, I think it's time I had another start, so I shall away to-day."

"Nay," said George, "stay till to-morrow's coach, or maybe you will meet another Ted Scrag on the way."

"Perhaps it will be better so;" and it was accordingly settled that Grant should start by the next day's coach and go to Bendigo, and try and find from the files of papers there the much-coveted advertisement.

"I suppose," observed the man who had supplied his information, "you will not return."

"Well," said Matthew, "if I find any news, most certainly

not; but if I am disappointed in what I go to look for, I think I shall try further."

"Well, if you think you will not return, I will buy from you your share in the plant."

"Very good," answered Matthew; and this being settled, all was ready for the morning.

Early on the next day saw Matthew on the coach, and off once more in search of Clara. At Bendigo he at once made application at the *Bendigo Advertiser* office for the paper which was supposed to contain the advertisement; but no such paper could be found, and once more the old man turned away sick at heart. His next trip was to Ballarat, which, at this time, was not the best or most civilised place one could visit; but Matthew never seemed to think of anything except the fact that he was searching for his daughter, and all else he seemed to forget. First he would get into conversation with somebody; and so anxious was he to succeed, that he would enter into particulars to anyone concerning Clara. He would describe her appearance, and even the dress she wore when last he saw her; for in the excitement he forgot how long a time had elapsed. So ready was he to give his confidence, that at last people about there took advantage of the poor old fellow, and often made him the butt of their sport.

Now one day a stranger to him came to the house where the old man had been staying; he was a noted character for devilment of all kinds, and little he cared who gave him amusement so long as he got it. The second day after the arrival of Bill the Philosopher, as he was called, decided to have a lark, as he termed it, with Matthew; and he said to the proprietor of the hotel:—

"Look here, Heggett, you tell the old fellow to ask me for his daughter, and you see we'll have a lark."

"All right," answered Heggett; and after dinner he informed Grant that as Bill the Philosopher had once been a detective, he would do well to take his advice respecting his lost daughter; and poor Matthew, ever ready to try anything, agreed to do so.

Now there lived, not far from this house in Bridge street, Ballarat, one John Hubbard, who had rather a handsome woman for a wife; and whether he had cause to doubt her honesty or no I cannot here attempt to say, but so jealous was he that he never left the house without locking the front door and taking the key with him, so that should anybody visiting the place his wife must either send or go round and see what the person wanted. Even when the milkman came, if the jug had not been put out ready, Hubbard would rave, and declare she wanted to see him for some purpose of her own; in fact, if anyone went near the house he would declare they had only come to see and speak with her. His jealousy at times nearly drove him to madness; and after office hours, for he was a solicitor's clerk, he was always at home to watch and look after his beautiful wife.

Now when Matthew went to Philosopher Bill, he said: "Sir, I hear you have once been a member of the police force, and I should therefore like to ask your advice, if you would be kind enough to give it to me."

"Oh, by all means," answered Bill; "but before you ask me about law, for I suppose you would ask about it, take my advice and have nothing to do with it—it is a bad line. Besides, if you do go to law, you may perhaps be a little better off—but there, what will it help you hereafter? From ashes we came, to ashes we shall return; that's my philosophy."

"I know," said Matthew, "that the law is a bad thing to have to do with, and I thank you for the advice; but it is not a question of law. I wish to ask you about my daughter."

"Your daughter, ah yes, a very different thing; women and

philosophy don't mix at all, they are very troublesome sometimes, I assure you."

"Well, I wish to ask you if you can advise me how to look for her. I have been searching now for ever so long, and can't hear anything of her whereabouts; and Matthew narrated to Bill how he had lost his daughter, of course simply telling him what was necessary, and no more."

"What is your daughter like?" asked Bill. "Just give me her description right through."

Matthew complied with the request; and when he had concluded, Bill remarked, "I can just tell you where your daughter is, I think. She is married to a man named Hubbard, or some name like that."

"Hobart," said Matthew, for now he felt certain he had found Clara.

"Well," said Bill, "I won't be certain about the name, but it is something like that. He's a lawyer's clerk, I believe."

"Ah," cried Matthew, "'tis her, I am certain."

"Very like," said Bill; "but keep yourself cool, for the man she is married to will not let you see her if you are not cautious."

"In spite of that," replied Matthew, "tell me quickly that I may go, for now I am sure it is my daughter."

"Be patient a little," said Bill. "You must use discretion."

"I will do anything; but only tell me quickly, for suspense is worse now than ever."

"Well, come this way and I'll point out to you the place;" and with this the two left the house and proceeded some distance down Bridge street.

"Now," said Bill, "you see yon house there. Go to the front door, and say you wish to see—what is her name?"

"Clara," said Grant, breathless with expectation.

"Yes; will you go and say you wish to see Clara, and tell him you will and must see her; but don't let him know you are her father, or he may try and prevent you."

"Oh, thanks," replied Grant, "thanks. May heaven reward you if I do not; but wait until I have seen her, and then I'll see you again."

"All in good time," was Bill's response. "I am a philosopher, so if I do not see you again I shall be just as well off."

"But you shall," said Matthew, shaking him by the hand, "and you will find that I am not ungrateful for your kindness;" and the old man hurried off.

When he arrived and knocked at the door of Mr Hubbard he was quite out of breath.

"Ah," said Hubbard, "now I'd like to know who knocks. Somebody wanting you, of course."

"I don't know who it is," said his wife, "how should I. I was not aware anyone was coming. My life's a misery."

"No doubt it is, Sarah, no doubt. Then you should not encourage fellows here; nobody wants to see me, I'll be bound, for I always tell them to call at the office."

Again Grant knocks.

"You had better see who is there, or perhaps as you are having your dinner I had better go myself."

"No doubt you would, but you shan't. You're always decked up on purpose to receive and show yourself off. Why can't you be like other women, and dress all day in the clothes you work in?"

"Well, Charles, I am sure anyone else would like their wife to look nice, but you never do. I am sick of this; I wish I were dead——"

"Or single, ha! ha! so that you could have all the country after you, no doubt; but you see you are not."

Another knock came at the door, and this time louder, for Grant could hear voices, and concluded that Clara and Hobart were together, and had determined not to see him.

"Charles, if you are not going to answer the door, why not let me go, and not keep people there all day."

"Let them knock; you know no doubt who's there, and you want to tell them I am in; but you shan't. Let them go away. No one wants to see me, for they can always do that at my place of business. They won't wait unless it is you they want to see; and then you no doubt think I'm out; but this time I am not, as you shall see."

Again rat-tat-tat comes at the door, for now Grant feels more certain than ever that the objects of his search are within, and has made up his mind that he will enter the house.

"Ah, you see how determined your lover is. Very nice game this for a married woman; you ought to be ashamed of yourself, you hussy."

"Oh, John, I do not know who is there; I assure you I don't; but go and see, and I'll never dress again until you come home for the day, if that will please you. Oh," she cried, "I am tired and sick at heart;" and she burst out in tears.

"Ah, you cry now because you know you are caught, do you; like all of your sort when you are found out, you pretend to be penitent, and weep; but I know the world too well to be deluded by you."

Another knock, this time louder than ever.

"Do you hear that? Now, what do you think of yourself? disgracing a respectable home like this;" but Sarah only sobbed on, and made no answer.

"Now you become hardened, and will not answer; but I'll see who it is that knocks, although I know it is somebody for you, and no one else."

Mr Hubbard rose and went to the door, and as soon as he had opened it he was face to face with Grant, who cried out—

"Let me see Clara for one minute; do let me see her!"

"D—n your impudence," returned Hubbard, slamming the door in Grant's face, and again locking it.

"Now, I suppose you will say no one ever comes after you, when the man actually asks to see Sarah. Oh, you shamefaced hussy! You tired of your life! I think it should be me to say this, and not you. I'll sell up and go, and then you can do as you like, but stand this I never will. What an awful thing it is to be married to one I can never trust. Fancy a man coming in the middle of the day and asking a husband to let him see Sarah. You ought to be ashamed to ever show your face again."

"John," said she, "it is some mistake, I know it is. Do ask the man again, for I know it is not me he wants."

"Ask the man again! oh, Lord! oh, Lord! After the fellow has just been enquiring for you, and calling you by your Christian name. Ask the man to explain, indeed? I'll kill him, the scoundrel, and you too. Oh, that I should ever have lived so long."

Rat-tat-tat!

"Now, will you tell me if anyone that had not been here before would be so persistent. After seeing me, he won't go

away, but stops tapping at the door, because he is aware that I am at home."

"John, does not your own sense tell you there must be some mistake ?" sobbed Sarah. "Would anyone, when they had seen that you were at home, still stop there and knock. Why not hear what he has to say ?"

"Oh yes, and still further humiliate myself. I'll do something desperate ; but no, I'll give this man who dares come and ask me for Sarah what he deserves."

John Hubbard rushed from the house, and before old Matthew knew what was coming, he was seized by the collar and thrown to the ground. Sarah rushed to the door, and, taking hold of her husband, tried in vain to persuade him to come back into the house ; but he only answered, "So you would come and see him. Well, there he is, but me you shall see no more."

Old Matthew has now risen, and seeing before him the woman who he presumes is the person he has shown so much persistence to see, he explains to her the cause of his visit, and after making somewhat of an apology, he makes off at once, but not before a considerable crowd has gathered. Many impertinent questions are asked, and Grant is jeered at the fact of his having roused the wrong people. The poor old fellow, however, heeds them not, but pushing through the mob, gets away as quickly as possible.

Bill the Philosopher has been the whole time having a hearty laugh at the expense of Matthew, who, more disheartened than ever, goes home to fret and ponder. For hours he sits in deepest thought. Where to go next he knows not, and now that he feels his persistence at Hubbard's has done harm, and has only made him the object of jest and fun to a lot of diggers.

" Why," he asks, " am I to be for ever the butt of mankind ? When people do not try to injure me they make me the object

of their mirth, and for no wrong on my part. Oh God! grant me some mercy, for how often have I prayed and asked in vain for that relief which never comes. I will leave the place, for I feel my presence here is but to create mirth for men who know not what it is to suffer. What have I ever done that I should endure all this misery? I have always had faith, but no indication of any reward."

Such is life; but in how many cases do we suffer wrongs where we know we have done nothing to deserve them, and oftimes we almost despair of ever succeeding when we are nearest the attainment of our desires. How strange and wonderful are we brought to see the divine providence, and at the time when we least expect it; in fact, too often when we least deserve it.

Now the reporter for the *Ballarat Star* was not idle on the occasion of the lark, as Mr Philosopher Bill termed it, and that evening there appeared a local setting forth how the jealous husband and zealous father had had an interview, and the game of cross purposes they had played at. Of course no names had appeared; but Mr Hubbard was delighted to find that he had this time judged his wife wrongfully; but poor old Matthew, instead of looking at the matter in the light he should have done, felt grateful for the fact being known that a father sought his daughter. He only remembered the fact that both he and Hubbard, towards whom he felt no resentment, had both made asses of themselves, and all for the want of a little explanation, or rather in consequence of his own stupidity, in not making known his wants, instead of simply asking for Clara. Often out of such an error comes good to some; but we must not be premature in our conjectures.

Matthew decided, after the local, to leave Ballarat at once; but before doing so he called—this time at the office—and saw Hubbard.

"I come," said Matthew, "to apologise for my absurd con-

duct at your house yesterday. I can now see I was but the object of a jest, for I was sent to your place ; and, I feel sure, only for the fun of seeing me make myself look as stupid as I did."

"I regret that such a misunderstanding should have occurred," said Hubbard, for he felt ashamed of the construction he had put on Grant's visit, and knew not how to excuse himself. "I trust you may soon recover your daughter."

"Alas !" said Matthew, "I fear I am never to do that. I have now wandered so long without any tidings, and I begin to lose all heart. There seems no justice to the suffering in this world."

"I do not know that," answered Hubbard ; "you may, in fact probably will, find your daughter when you least expect."

"Yes, so all say ; and, should I ever succeed, your words and everybody else's will be verified. I will now be off, and I trust yourself and Mrs Hubbard will excuse the impetuosity of an anxious father, and excuse me for having been the cause of so much unpleasantness."

"Most decidedly we will ; in fact, we do not blame you, for I was equally in fault."

"Good-bye, sir," said Matthew ; "if you should ever meet Clara Grant tell her how her father sought and prayed to find her, but in vain" ; and the poor old fellow, from the length of search and number of failures, lost all heart, and burst into tears.

"Be of good cheer, Mr Grant ; you know not how near you may be to obtaining your wish."

"Thank you, sir, thank you for your kindly words ; but I have heard them so often, they sound now like the oft-remembered thoughts of happier days" ; and, with a shake of the hand from Hubbard, he walks away.

"Poor old fellow, I wonder he does not give up the search and settle down; and what an ass I made of myself too. Clara Grant, and I, in my fury, thought he asked for Sarah. This indeed should be a lesson to me."

That same day saw Matthew again on the tamp, for his money had been growing gradually less, and he can no longer afford to ride. So he walks on for days, and the first place he puts up at is Ararat, some distance from Ballarat. Then he proceeds on to Pleasant Creek, some miles further, and from there on to Beechworth. In all of these places he makes enquiries, but to no purpose, for he hears no news of her he seeks. His money day by day dwindles away, until he sees that soon again he must work, as he cannot travel much longer before he will be absolutely penniless. Still, so long as he has a shilling, he decides that he will keep on. He has now been on the road for over three weeks since leaving Ballarat, and now the last pound has been changed; but still he leaves Beechworth, and strike out in another direction. It is just past midday, and the heat is intense; but he keeps steadily on his way. Hope has died within him, for he knows that at the next township he must abandon his search, and look for work. Presently he stops to rest and ruminate, for his thoughts are of the saddest.

"Was ever man more uncharitably used than I" he says to himself. "I have looked and searched, and all to no purpose. What justice or mercy is there in this world? 'tis but a hell, a place of preparation for a worse one, and I too may go there. And yet what have I done? I have wronged no man; I do not covet my neighbour's wealth, or desire aught that is his. No, most assuredly I cannot go to a hell which is worse than this, for I have done none of those things which cause a man to be consigned to eternal fire. Ah, I am glad I am better than my fellows in this respect, for at least I may look for happiness hereafter."

To Matthew Grant, as he thinks over these things, there

seems to answer a voice and say :—"You are rebellious ; you are not of sufficient faith ; and, worse still, you are of opinion you are better than your fellows, when such is not the case. Why do you not continue your search, and feel as you should that at the proper time you will find her you seek, and acknowledge that you, of all men, know not when it is well you should be successful. Think of this, and say not again you are fit for a better hereafter."

As these thoughts came to Matthew he felt his littleness, and how unworthy he was, for had he not been all that the voice of his own conscience had accused him of. Yes, he knew but too well that he had rebelled, and deemed himself the best judge of when he should find her he sought ; but not for one instant did he consider how many are treated as he for an all-wise purpose. He felt the pangs of repentance, and as he sat he cried aloud, "Oh, Lord, forgive me, I am sinful ; I know and feel how unworthy I am of your least gift. Why should I presume to act or think aught in a rebellious spirit, and yet how recently have I done so. But I thank Thee that Thou hast in this shown me my littleness. How unworthy am I of thy smallest mercy, and yet I have expected so much. Now will I try, and for the future I will say, 'Thy will be done ;' and let what may be thy pleasure, no more will I complain. But how I long to find her, my child, my own darling lost—aye, stolen—one ;" and the heartbroken father burst into a passionate flood of tears. "Thou shalt have none other gods but me !" rings in the wanderer's ears, and again he sobs, for this is another stab. "Oh, God," he cries, "I know not how to be in any way worthy Thy mercies. I feel I am possessed of some great evil ; cleanse me, I pray Thee, and make me clean. Grant that I may be worthy of it hereafter ; at present I know how unworthy I am, but at least from this time I will try. Clara, I must abandon you, both in my search and in my heart. I must try and show that I am worthy the mercy I crave. I know not if I shall ever attain happiness ; but whether I do or no, I shall submit and be satisfied. Yes, now do I most

solemnly declare before my God, for I feel and know He is now with me, that I will no more be of a rebellious spirit, but will be patient and await Thy will."

No sooner has he come to this conclusion than he feels relief. He still sits on with his head buried in his hands, and for the time he has forgotten all his troubles; in fact, he feels he has been for the time released of all care. He has had all trouble taken away, and now he is so happy in this feeling that he forgets that he is a wanderer, away from all friends in a strange place. This does not trouble him, and in deep thought he sits on, heedless of all save the resolve he has just made, and which he feels he will keep—aye, even to the renouncing his love for his daughter. He hears not the birds as they sing. He is almost happy to think that he has discovered his faults, and is trying to do better.

The birds warble their plaintive notes and look down on the bent form sitting beneath, but he hears them not. To him all is dead save the theme on which his thoughts run. Presently a man is to be seen approaching on horseback. He is whistling, and appears in a merry mood, but Matthew hears him not. The new comer looks as he rides along like a well-to-do farmer, or something of the kind, and as he approaches and catches sight of Matthew sitting there, he is so content and happy his heart is touched for the man who is sitting in a recumbent position, looking the very picture of misery. Still he approaches nearer and nearer, but the figure does not rise, and presently he comes up to Grant. He reins up his horse and asks, "Are you not well, old man?"

This is the first intimation Grant receives that he is not alone, and, looking up, he answers, "Thanks, I am far better than perhaps I ever was before."

"Matthew Grant!" exclaims the new comer, "is it you?" and before the answer can be given he is on his knees beside the wanderer, and, taking his hand in his own, says—

"Oh, Matthew, how much do I not owe? You remember me, surely. I know I should be ashamed to look you in the face; but I am not, for now I am prepared to show, though the last time we met I did not, that I can be grateful."

"What! can it be John Whittler? Aye, and so it is," says Matthew; "and how well you look. I am indeed glad to see you."

"Thank you, Matthew, for if you had abused me I should have deserved it; but I will atone for the past wrong now, if I can. Do I not owe all I have to you? Tell me what has happened since last we parted. Of course, I know from the papers how long you were detained in Melbourne. Stay, which way do you go? Come, if you will, home with me. I can walk, and you mount my horse, and as we travel I can listen while you tell me all."

"I will go with you," answered Grant, "for I have no destination; but do you ride and I will walk beside you, and we can exchange our adventures since last we met."

"From where have you come?" said Whittler, "you look as though you had been travelling."

"I have come just now from Beechworth, and am bound I know not whither. I have wandered in search of my daughter so long as I had money, but now that I have spent all I must again work for more."

"Matthew, I am sorry to hear you say you have no money, and yet I am glad, for it gives me the chance to do as I have ofttimes wished to do. You shall not want for money while I have any, and I have been fairly successful, thanks to you alone. But for your three sovereigns, and your reticence when I told the detective you were myself, I should still be in Van Dieman's Land; for they would most assuredly have sent me back. Now, however, I am pleased to say I am doing well, as you shall see later on; but tell me of yourself, for I am anxious to know."

Matthew here related how he had wandered round, first to one part and then another ; how he had settled in Dunolly ; how he had been robbed there ; and lastly, of Inglewood, and so on until his arrival at Ballarat ; and also of the actual reason why he left there.

" Well, Matthew," said Whittler, " you have seen considerable trouble—far more than I,—for ever since last I saw you, things have prospered with me. The day I left you I knew that, unless I made some daring move, I should again be in the hands of the law, so I decided a day or two would not make much difference to you. So I acted the rogue to you, and when I saw I was watched and followed, I laid him on to you ; and as you know, through this stratagem I escaped. Well, immediately I left the detective, I made right across the Keilor Plains, never resting until I had reached the border of the Black Forest. I knew where I was here, for I had no sooner entered than I was bailed up by three bushrangers ; but the absurdity of the thing only made me laugh, at which they questioned me, and I told them I had but just made my escape, and how. Hereupon they offered me the chance of joining them, but I declined with thanks, for I thought I had done enough work for the Government, and told them that I had tried one side of the question, and as I did not find it work I intended to try the other. They did not attempt to persuade me, but asked many questions about the other side, which, after my satisfying them, they gave me a five pound note, and wishing me luck, left me, and I proceeded on my way. This was the morning after I saw you, for I must have walked fully fifty miles ; but fear kept away fatigue, and so I did not feel the distance I had travelled. Shortly after meeting the knights of the road I came to the hotel, or shanty, in the Black Forest, where I put up for the night, and early the next day I was again on the road. This Black Forest must be a nice place, for I had not left the hotel more than two hours when I again was met by a band of bushrangers, who of course demanded my money or my life. I told them who I was, and

how situated, but the leader seemed to doubt me, for he ordered I should be searched. 'Stay,' said I, for I felt that to be doubted after confessing to being a gaol-bird seemed too much disgrace, 'I will convince you that what I say is true, and then if you don't believe me you may shoot me, for all I have is the fiver given to me by the band I met yesterday, and part with it I will not.' I had no sooner said this than I saw my folly, for in a few minutes they had divested me of my clothes, and I found myself tied to a tree. I do not suppose this would have happened if I had not been quite so cheeky; however, there I remained until late in the day, when I was let loose by a swagman who was on his way up to Castlemaine, and with him I continued the journey. He was not a bad sort of fellow, and he gave me all I required to eat and drink on the way, and when we arrived he lent me a pound. I soon got work, for things were in a good state. I stayed some two months, but as the escort passed through so often, I feared some day to be arrested, and so I came on here to Beechworth. For some time I did little enough, but after a bit I got an interest in a mine, on condition that I worked for my share. Three months we laboured as hard as only men in desperation know how to. My storekeeper and butcher at last told me I could not run up any more, so I decided to give up and work for wages. My mate persuaded me to keep on just for another week, but the storekeeper said I must pay up for any of my future wants, so I concluded to work in the claim no longer. My companions, however, told me they felt sure we should get a bit of gold if we kept on a little longer, and they offered to let me have what would do me for my actual wants. This of course decided me, and on we worked, and just one week after we struck gold. In less than a month we took out of the claim £700 a man. With my first money after so long, I decided to try and invest it with discretion, so I bought out the storekeeper whom we had been dealing with. I still held my interest in the claim, but I put on a man to work for me, and we did well. Ever since then I have continued to prosper, and as

the whole of it properly speaking belongs to you, for I should not have left Melbourne at all but for your assistance, I certainly consider I owe you so much, that now, Matthew, you shall have half the store; and I think that in this you may yet find more contentment than you have for some time."

"John," said Matthew, grasping him by the hand, "you display too much generosity, but I shall not take advantage of it. Your feelings lead you away; but if you have any employment in your store you can give me, I shall feel myself indebted to you for it."

"You shall have a share, Matthew; my feeling of gratitude has always been the same to you, so I hope you will take it, and say no more. If not, let the matter for the present remain as it is. I have, besides what is in the store, some considerable property, for I have made good use of my liberty, and what I have earned I have taken care of."

"I am glad to hear you say so, and also I am pleased to think that I did not impede your movements when I saw you in Melbourne. You have, I think, fully atoned for the offence for which you were first transported."

"Atoned, Matthew! I don't think any atonement necessary. I was only a boy when I was sentenced for life's transportation for being found in the company of two men who had stolen a sheep. Not that I was innocent, for we were all of us hungry, and we stole to appease our appetites. Still, no evidence was brought against me further than that I was in bad company, or in the company of thieves, and I was therefore charged as being accessory before or after the act. The only thing that ever bothered me was that I never heard again of my poor old parents, and now I would write and send them money, only I am afraid. Now you are here, however, I may manage it, for you can write for me. If we get a reply, then the rest is easy. But now we are near the town, and I have to

caution you that I am no longer John Whittler, Matthew, but John Tonkin, and by this name of course you will alone know me."

"Certainly," answered Matthew, "I will be careful."

The two men were now in sight of the whole of Beechworth, and in fact were in the outskirts of the town, and within half-an-hour they had reached Whittler's store, which Matthew recognised from the name of Tonkin being over the door; and in a few minutes' time they had both entered a large corrugated iron store at the south end of the town. A young man was standing behind the counter, who had all the appearance of being satisfied with the return of the proprietor.

Matthew asked John how long he had been away, and was told three weeks, Whittler adding, "I have been this time all the way to Melbourne to do business; but I did not like it, I can assure you, as I thought too much of the time I was there before, and as soon as possible I got away."

"I asked you," said Matthew, "because I have been in here once before to purchase some tobacco, and I knew you were not here at the time. Now that you say you have been absent three weeks, that makes it right, for it was but nine days ago."

"Well, now you have found me, Matthew, make yourself at home; do just as you like, and as soon as you feel disposed you can learn what is necessary about the working of the store, and then between us we can manage. Tom, the man who is at present in the shop, has been doing it more as a favour than anything else, so he will go just when we please, and you can just please yourself when you start. To-morrow I will see and look out some clothes for you I am sure will suit better than the miner's dress you now wear. I have in stock all kinds of men's clothing."

"I thank you for your kindness, John, and to-morrow I

shall be quite ready to be initiated into the work I am to perform, for I have no wish to be idle."

"There is no occasion for you to be in a hurry; you need not do anything for a week, and you can spare time to take a good look round."

"Look round, indeed! I have had quite enough of that already, for many months. No, I shall feel more comfortable when I have something to occupy my thoughts, so I will, with your permission, start in the morning."

"Very well, Matthew, let it be as you wish, and don't speak as if you were working for me, but for yourself. I shall from this time consider you as my partner."

The next day saw Matthew full of activity in the store. He was now dressed in a new tweed suit, and he looked a storekeeper all out. During the day John Tonkin, as the customers came in, introduced Matthew to them as Mr Grant, from Melbourne, his partner; and the poor old man, for the first time for many years, found himself apparently of great importance. Once again he began to feel more at rest. He also took the loss of Clara less to heart than formerly, and gradually his spirits rose, and he felt grateful for the good luck that had come to him, and he held that it was an answer to the prayer he had uttered on the road side.

"Should my daughter ever be restored to me," he would say, "she will be all the more welcome, and if she is not I will not complain, for I am now in the way at least of earning an honest living."

Matthew, indeed, never looked upon the half-share being his, although John Tonkin often wanted to have a deed of partnership drawn up, but whenever it was suggested Grant said there was plenty of time, and lawyers were best left to themselves; and so for the time things went on. The man in

the store, at the end of the week, returned to his former employment, and Matthew and John did all there was to be done in and connected with the store. The bulk of the hard work the latter took upon himself, while Matthew, who was the better adapted for the books, did that and the correspondence, and so everything progressed to the entire satisfaction of both parties. In the evening they would sit together, when alone, and talk of the place they had both left, and often recur to scenes of the past.

"Do you know, Matthew, when I left Melbourne," said John, two weeks later, as they were sitting together after the store was closed, "I scarcely knew for the first hour or two how to keep on my way. I felt how mean you must think me for having served you as I did, but as I continued to weigh the matter I concluded that the wrong I had done you could be repaired if I went on and worked. I always thought that, if ever I met you, I would give you half at least of what I had, for to you I should owe all."

"I never blamed you," answered Grant, "for you were wise to do as you did. After the years I had endured on the other side, what matter did another week or two make. When I heard what you had done, I knew the reason, and felt glad you were wise enough; but not for a moment did I bear you any ill-will."

"You are more generous to me, Matthew, than I ever deserved; for who, of the many that we meet nowadays would, in the same circumstances, have thought of me but with feelings and desires for revenge. You have shown me what charity and forgiveness are, and I trust I may prove to you that, in some small measure, I am worthy."

"You have shown that to a great extent already, John; so you need not consider yourself my debtor, for you have far more than returned what little I did for you."

Now, so wrapt up in the conducting of the business did Matthew become that, although he often thought of Clara, by degrees he became more resigned, and when the feeling of desolation did arise strong within him, he would repeat to himself what had occurred to him when lonely and friendless on the wayside—"Thou shalt have none other gods but Me;" and muttering a thanksgiving he would dismiss the thought, and day by day he became more lively and happy than for many years before.

Some four months had elapsed, and so essential had Grant become to John that the bare thought of his going away was by no means pleasing to him. The business, too, had improved, for Matthew was much liked among the miners, and many had been heard to say that Tonkin had done a good thing for himself when old Matthew joined him; for all called him old, though in age and appearance he did not appear to justify their remarks.

They are again seated in their back sitting room, as they are wont to term it, although it is their only one, and John, taking a parcel of papers just arrived from Ballarat, says, "Here Matthew, you are a better reader than I am; look over these and read out some of the news."

Matthew at once takes up the papers offered, saying as he does so, "You are a most liberal subscriber to the news-vendors, John."

"Yes," replied he, "there was a time you know when we were debarred this privilege, and now that I have the opportunity I like to enjoy myself in this little harmless way."

For an hour or more Matthew seeks the reading that he knows is most congenial to his partner's taste. At last, having apparently exhausted all the news, he looks carelessly down column after column, and all at once he starts, turns red, and then as pale as possible, and drops the paper on the floor. John,

who is sitting opposite him watching and listening, exclaims, "What ails you, Matthew, are you ill? Speak, you look like death."

But Matthew seems unable to reply, but pointing to the paper on the floor, and John snatches it up, and does so in fear, for he knows not what has alarmed Matthew. After some little time his eye alights on the following:—

IF this should meet the eye of Matthew Grant, formerly of Crayford, Kent, and since of Van Dieman's Land, and later on of Ballarat, he is requested to communicate at once to John Hubbard. News of his daughter. Anyone knowing his whereabouts will be liberally rewarded on giving the required information to

JOHN HUBBARD,
At the office of Mr. J. P. Stone
Solicitor,
Sturt Street, Ballarat.

"Why, Matthew, what in the world ails you? This is the very news you want, and now it has come you look frightened. Cheer up, man, for you may now be sure you will before long find her you seek."

"I was so overcome that I knew not how to answer you, but now I feel better, and regret that it is night instead of day, that I could see to it at once."

"Never be impatient. Good news will keep, Matthew, and if you wish, there is nothing to prevent your starting off to-morrow morning; or you can write or telegraph and hear first what Mr. Hubbard has to say."

"I am all impatience," sard Matthew. "I feel it must be news of her; and yet, after so many disappointments, I am not sanguine as I was once."

"News of her, Matthew; why, of course. The advertisement most distinctly states that there is news of your daughter.

Look!" And then Matthew, who seemed not to have perfectly understood, saw that he was indeed promised news of his daughter.

"Well, Matthew, I shall be sorry for you to be away from me for a single day; but still, if you would prefer going, go by all means—only come back as quickly as possible. As for your daughter, why, you know this is not the most civilised place in the world, but they say kind hearts make hell a paradise, and I for one, Matthew, can promise you a hearty welcome."

"I know that," said Matthew; "but for the moment I had forgotten all in thinking how unworthy I had been of any such good fortune."

"Unworthy, Matthew! I know of none more worthy than you. I never knew you to injure anyone, and why then can you say that you are not deserving of good fortune."

"I have been at all times of a rebellious spirit. I left the place where this news comes from for no other reason than that I had been made the butt and jest of other men, when, if it had not been for that very jest they had played upon me, I should in all probability never have heard of her, as this John Hubbard is the man to whose house Philosopher Bill sent me. I saw not the hand of Providence at work for my welfare, and I complained."

"Complained! I should like to know who would not under such circumstances. Providence, as you say, may be at the bottom of it, but you could not know this, and I can't see how a man can be expected to look quietly on and say, 'I know this is all for my good,' when before the good may have arrived you could easily have been dead and buried. Oh no, Matthew, that's all very well, but for my part I think you have been a submissive martyr for years, and nobody could ever blame you if you did to some extent rebel. Still, far be it from me to try and dissuade you from what you deem to be right."

"I am sorry," said Matthew, "I was not of more faith, and also more submissive to the divine will."

"Bunkum! more submissive? How could you be? Do you in reality think we *individually* are so carefully watched by tha divine Being? Not we; we are all thrown together, some to follow one course and some another; but that we are all alike answerable I cannot think. I will not argue this, however, for it is rather beyond me, but this I will say, if I do that which I believe to be right in my heart, I shall go as near the proper line as possible. It is not in my nature to show the submission you have shown, in fact I could not do it; and am I to be punished for not behaving as I cannot? When you act as you do, it is because you have no desire to do otherwise"

"Your view is wrong, John, I assure you. If we are not naturally submissive, we should certainly cultivate that virtue, and pray for it; and I am quite certain we shall not do so in vain."

"You may be right," said John, "but so far I never have. Who is answerable then for my wrongdoing, for I committed a crime without knowing I was sinning against the law."

"Your parents in the first place, John, and your godparents in the next."

"Then," returned John, "they have certainly a loophole to get out of, for I was sent out when little more than a child, and since that they have never seen me. I suppose the only way for authorities over the other side to do would be to appoint deputy godfathers and mothers over the whole of us—one good motherly and fatherly old couple could do the lot. What a heap of sins they would have to answer for at the finish! They should certainly be paid well, and be allowed a lot of latitude for their own conduct, or I should say they would not accept the responsibility of such a family."

"Speak not thus on so serious a subject, John, or I shall certainly think you know not what you say. I am not a fit person, I know, to explain to you, for I am all unworthy of

being so enlightened; but still you must remember, if we have not parents or others to guide us, we have some common sense; and further, if we know not, we can read, and so teach ourselves the difference between right and wrong."

"Very good, when we can both read and understand; but how many cases are there where people can do neither, to say nothing of those who are capable of one and not the other. But I won't pretend, Matthew, to argue, and if you believe you are right in acting as you do, continue, for in that you do according to your conscience."

"But, John, if what you say is true, people could make themselves believe, but still not do right."

"They will not make themselves so believe unless they have some authority to guide them, for it is not an easy matter by any means. As I have said, if they do and feel that they have done right, you may, I think, take it for granted they go pretty near the mark, for I hold that the conscience of man will soon let him know if he does wrong. But let us talk of something which we understand better, for this is a subject I regret I know too little of. What think you of the advertisement? Shall you go down to Ballarat, or simply write and wait?"

"Well, I know not. I am all impatience, but I shall not perhaps forward matters by going immediately. What do you think?"

"I think you would do well to first of all communicate with Hubbard, and learn more from him first. But be not too hasty; let the matter rest till the morning."

"I agree with your opinion," said Matthew, "and will leave the question open till to-morrow, and then we can talk further and decide."

The next morning John asked Matthew what he had decided to do.

"I shall certainly send and await the reply," was the answer, "for my rushing down will not help matters until I know something more definite. I don't expect to find her there, but my anxiety is hard to bold in check."

"I have no doubt it is, but I too think waiting by far the best; for if you once know where she is, you will then be better able to tell what to do, and with our present increase of business it at all times requires both of us to manage. When you learn how far you have to go, you will be the better able to make your arrangements."

"Then so it shall be," said Matthew; and accordingly a letter was at once despatched to John Hubbard, asking for full particulars.

Grant's patience was to be more tried than ever. Day by day he almost expected to see Clara walk into the store, and day by day did he expect to receive a special messenger from Hubbard, but none came. He became more impatient; ofttimes he felt the old rebellious feeling springing up as strongly as ever, although he strove to keep it down as much as possible.

"I think," said he at last, "the time will never pass. I wish I had gone, or perhaps it is only another hoax. How do I know but what some of the Philosopher Bill's sort want another lark at my expense."

"You may, I think, rest satisfied, Matthew, that there is nothing of that kind. The paper which inserted such an advertisement would want to be assured beforehand that they were right in so doing."

"I trust it may be so; for when once I am satisfied I shall feel more at rest. At present I know not how to contain myself."

"And when you do learn more particulars you will be just as restless to see her as you are now to find out where she is."

"No, I think not; but we shall soon see."

Many weary days did Matthew wait, until the time seemed as though it would never pass. For hours would he walk up and down when not otherwise busy, and watch for any indications of a messenger; but his patience was to be tried further. At last he began to despair of hearing any more, and had nearly made up his mind to start down and see Hubbard himself, for he felt he could endure suspense no longer, and he determined to find out if it were really a hoax.

"Do as you will, Matthew. As to its being a hoax, I am quite sure it is not that, but I can feel for you under the circumstances, so will not advise you either way."

"I will but wait until to-morrow's post," said Matthew, "and then I will go down myself."

So Grant tried his best to resign himself to this delay, but patience was now out of the question. As the time drew near he knew not how to contain himself, and long before the morning of the last night before the one on which he had decided to start, tossed about restlessly in his bed, and cried out, "The morning will never dawn, and even now I fear I am the object of some mistake. Yet the advertisement seems to point to me;" and then Matthew rose from his bed to seek the paper which contained the precious news, and again read it. There sure enough he saw, "formerly of Crayford Kent, then of Van Dieman's Land, and later of Ballarat." No, there could be no mistake, it must be he. Then again the thought would come that she may have known his whereabouts the whole time, perhaps was near at hand, and was now sick—perhaps dying,—and this was the only reason why she intended letting him know. So he thought on until waiting became an infliction to him. At the first peep of day he arose, and tried to busy himself in the store, but do what he would his thoughts could not be diverted. Slowly the time wore on, and gradually the day

passed off, for long before the time did he watch impatiently for the coach to pass. As luck would have it, the coach on this occasion had been delayed by the loss of a bolt, or some such accident. Five o'clock arrived, but no coach, and Matthew's powers of endurance were further tested. He returned to the store to await another day, for he knew it would be past post time.

After tea, of which he could not partake, for his anxiety had so increased, John said, "Well, Matthew, has the coach yet arrived?"

"Aye," said Matthew, "the coach has; but I suppose, after my waiting until to-morrow, I shall be again disappointed."

"I shall," said John, "just leave you for about half-an-hour, as I must go up town. I will return as quickly as possible after I have done my little business."

Now John, after leaving Matthew, made at once for the Post Office, and as he was rather intimate with one of the clerks there, he concluded he would be able to see if a letter had come for Matthew. After some little delay, sure enough he was successful, and from the clerk he got for Matthew the much-coveted letter. On the envelope he saw the name of the firm of "Stone, solicitor, Ballarat," and with all haste he hurried back to Matthew, saying, as he gave him the letter, "I did not like to let you know my hopes, for fear of my being disappointed, and it should turn out there was no letter."

To this Matthew made no reply, but with trembling fingers he tore open the envelope, and there sure enough was the joyful news.

The letter proved to be from Hubbard, and ran as follows:—

MATTHEW GRANT,

Beechworth.

Dear Sir,—I have much pleasure in being the medium of some news to you of your daughter, but as the letter which I enclose gives you a better

idea of how the circumstances of the matter have come to light, it is needless for me to go into particulars, any further than that immediately on receipt of yours I wrote to Mr Perryman, of New Zealand, and enclosed him your letter to me. I await further news from him; but should you desire to go over before his answer arrives, there can be no reason why you should not do so at once. I shall at once, on receipt of news from him, let you know.

Trusting you are well, &c.,

Believe me to remain,

Yours faithfully,

JOHN HUBBARD.

"What do you think of that, Matthew?" said his partner, after Grant had seen and read this letter.

"I think Providence, John, has been most kind to me, for I get the return of that which I most covet when I least deserve it."

"Just so; but what says this Mr Perryman?"

"Ah, I forgot, but we will see."

The letter proved to be one sent by the Editor of the paper, asking for further information concerning the paragraph telling the story of the practical joke, asking whether the jealous father's name was Matthew Grant, and if so would the person into whose hands the letter fell try and find out his whereabouts and let the writer know at once. Of course the letter gave all necessary particulars that were required for the identification of Matthew, and it was also a request that Grant should be informed that his daughter Clara was most anxious to find him. One thing was evident, and that was that the lucky discovery was entirely due to Philosopher Bill's practical joke.

"Well, Matthew, now I trust you will say that this Bill, who played you such a trick, is forgiven."

"I never felt otherwise; but what a splendid lesson this is to prove that we should be satisfied with anything that comes to us."

"Quite a matter of opinion, Matthew; for my part I think it is quite natural to growl, and, as you say, rebel."

"I trust I may never again," said Matthew, "for this is certainly a lesson for me."

"I wonder who this Perryman is. Of course he is a solicitor, but what further you do not know. Perhaps he may be now married to your daughter."

"We can but conjecture," returned Matthew, "time will show. I only trust I may, on this occasion, display that submission I should."

"You will, of course, write, for this will be your best course."

"I shall do so at once, and as soon as I receive an answer, if it is not convenient for her to come, I shall go; and this time, when I find my long lost Clara, I will try for the future to remain near her."

"I trust then she may come, Matthew, for I shall much regret your leaving me, even for ever so short a time."

"Next to my daughter, John, I would be with you; but she is now the only one that I have living belonging to me, and I feel that I shall be most happy where she is."

And so it was decided that, when the news came of Clara, if convenient, she would come to Victoria; if not, Matthew was to go and join her in New Zealand.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Well, Fixer," said Hobart, some time after all the necessary arrangements for the land sale had been made, "what sort of success do you think we shall have with reference to this land affair? Don't you think we shall double?"

"I don't like to discourage you, Hobart, for we are in together, and we both now sink or swim; but to tell you the truth, I am of opinion we shall before long be glad of a bright night and a fair wind."

"I do not understand you," answered Hobart, "explain your meaning, for I never was good at riddles."

"I don't think there is much of a riddle in that. Of course, you know as well as I that if the land does not sell, we cannot meet the bills, and then how can we remain. One of our boats, or perhaps I should say Perryman's, will have to take us away, for we shall never be able to fight it out."

"Oh, nonsense, Fixer, you always look on the worst side; and further, you know I promised you that you should be right in any case, and in this, Fixer, I shall keep my word."

"I don't see how you can say this," returned Fixer, "for you know I do not wish you to do anything of the kind you suggested the evening of the party, for two reasons."

Hobart at this changed colour very visibly, and replied, "Why do you ever refer to disagreeables when you know it is not necessary? Besides, I cannot imagine what your reasons are for speaking as you do, nor am I very anxious to find out."

"You do, I see, feel a little curious, Hobart, and as I know the way your memory serves you, I will again repeat that I do not wish you to purchase our release from difficulties at the cost of a life's misery to an innocent girl. We, collectively, are not worth half the sacrifice, and further, I do not wish you to jeopardise your own liberty in the least for me. There is no need for me to say more, as your memory will supply the rest."

During the time Fixer had been speaking, Hobart had sat like one who would spring upon him but for the fact that he knew he had his master and dared not. Whenever Fixer alluded in his cutting style to his partner's defective memory, all the evil of his nature was roused, and after Fixer had finished speaking, Hobart looked like one in a dream. He could not trust himself to speak, and for some seconds all was still.

Presently Fixer rises, and taking from his case a cigar, says, as he is about to light it, "I think, Hobart, as you seem to be enjoying yourself better without than with me, I shall wish you good night."

"I—I—beg pardon, Fixer. I was thinking. But come, let us have a glass, and for God's sake have a little more consideration for my feelings. We shall soon know now whether we are rich or otherwise, so let's be friends till the end comes."

"It is solely because I have consideration for you that I impose these conditions and for nothing else. Others deserve it, but not you and I, but still, as you suggest, we will wait."

"I know I am very anxious for the sale, but still I feel in this we must succeed. and then we shall be able to defy every. body."

"We shall soon know now," returned Fixer, "and, I fear, too soon; for the due date of the bills is but 21 days after. What with surveys and other delays the time has flown too quickly. What do you think can be done with Perryman if he

finds the matter out? Can you satisfy him sufficiently for him to take a part of the risk?"

"I can do nothing with him. Ever since that infernal party he has been another man. His conduct has been strangely different. At times he looks at me as though he were going to upbraid me, and then he seems to check himself; but he then addresses me very coolly, and says as little to me as possible. Later on he seems to try and avoid me."

"The devil he does; then something of which I know nothing must have occurred. Think you Clara has said anything?"

"No, I can trust her, I feel certain. Besides, her interests are ours."

"Of course, *if* she has not gone over to the other side. I know what women are; you never can trust them."

"Gone over? Were she to do that there would be some other signs; but on the contrary, lately she has seemed far more contented than ever."

"Then, if she has been so, you may depend something is wrong, for women are invairably cunning when they think succour is near at hand. You should be careful and try in all ways to please her, and then in the event of any mishaps we may have her aid."

"I do on all occasions try to be so, but whenever I am more attentive than usual, she checks my advances in the coollest possible manner."

"I don't like the look of thinks at all, Hobart. If by any chance that paper or a similar one has fallen into their hands we are undoubtedly undone. However, we are in together, and must watch and use caution, and if the worst comes we must do our best to meet it."

"Let us only get this sale over successfully, Fixer, and we are right."

And so things stood with Messrs Fixer and Hobart. They had already begun to find themselves in troubled waters, but little did they dream how much the other people knew, or they would have been much more disturbed than they were.

And how had Frank and Clara fared in their endeavours to find out about Matthew? By the first mail after their letter had sufficient time to go to Hobart-town and back, came the reply telling of Matthew's release; in fact a paper with the account of his discharge and Agnes Hobart's confession had also been sent to Frank. The document further stated that letters were now awaiting him from Crayford, Kent, which were supposed to come from the Castle of Lurtonshaw, for they bore that seal.

"What think you of this, Clara?" said Frank, "we are successful beyond our highest expectations."

"But how terrible, that my poor father should have so suffered in spite of his innocence."

"Worse," said Frank, "if he were guilty. So you have that consolation; and besides, we shall soon find him now, of that you may, I think, rest assured."

"We may not," she argued. "Victoria is such a wild place from what we hear that I almost fear that we are further off success than you think, Mr Perryman."

"Let us hope differently, at any rate," said Frank; but hope as they may, week after week grew into months, and still no tidings, and again Clara began to grow sad. She loathed now the sight of Hobart more than ever, for she saw the double deception he had used with her; but still, for fear that if she went she would lose Frank's help, detained her in Timaru, and she lingered on, always in hopes of news. Still it

came not, and Frank used every endeavour he could think of, but though a lawyer, he laboured in vain. He had sent to Victoria, offering to reward anyone for the finding of him they sought, but nobody seemed to think the task worth the trouble; for seeking for anyone in the digging days of Victoria was not unlike looking for a needle in a bottle of hay. Frank became quite a prey to newsvendors, for he took all the colonial papers they offered; but still the long-looked-for news seemed to be provokingly far off, and he began to tire of taking in so many journals.

One day a newsman, who had often before sold many a paper to him when others would not, called in the morning at Perryman's house—for he combined the calling of milkman with the selling of papers,—and as Frank happened to be going out at the time, the man observed he would have a fresh supply of Victorian papers that day.

"I will call, sir, and let you see a full account from the principal claims in Ballarat."

"Bother Ballarat," Frank was nearly saying, for he had lost all patience. Each time he saw Clara she would give him such beseeching looks for news that he felt ashamed to say he had none, although it was no fault of his. Checking himself, however, he told the man he would consider the matter, and went off, hoping in reality that the man would forget all about him. Later in the day the man called and left at the house a number of papers, as Frank was not at home, for him to select what he wanted.

"Frank," said Maud, when he returned, "I wonder you do not start a library, you could easily find it in papers. You must spend quite a little fortune in them, and such a queer thing for you to do, as you never looked at them before now. You seem to have imbibed quite a taste for that kind of literature. I have been reading them, and do you know, I was quite interested. The locals are so funny, and one amused me

very much. It is copied from another paper, the Bal— something, and gives an account of a man who was apparently afraid someone would run off with his wife. It appears, one day, out of a lark, some mischievous individual sent to the jealous man's house an old man who was looking for his daughter, to enquire——"

So far Frank had listened merely not to appear rude to his sister, but now he at once evinced a great interest, and said, "Well, Maud, what then?"

"Why the man, poor old fellow, went and did as directed, and asked for Clara. The husband, thinking it was the wife who was asked for, as her name was Sarah or Clara, set upon the old man and ill-treated him."

"Show me this paper, Maud," said Frank, quite excited, "quick, for I am anxious."

"Why, Frank, what ails you? You seem more excited than I ever saw you. I trust nothing is wrong."

"No Maud," answered Frank, trying to appear cool, "nothing is wrong, but I have been asked by a client to look for news, and this seems to bear upon it."

"I trust it may, Frank, as you are so interested in your client; but wait and I will show you;" and Maud left him and ran into the house. She soon reappeared, bearing the paper he waited for so anxiously, and he took it from her as soon as she returned, and began to turn it over and over. Maud came to his assistance, and pointed out the much-looked-for local.

"'Tis he, sure enough," muttered Frank to himself, and then he folded up the paper, and, taking up his hat, made at once for Hobart's house, which, being right at the other end of the small town of Timaru, took him some time to reach. Maud,

now more surprised than ever, ran in to tell Louie that her brother had certainly "lost a shingle, if not his whole roof."

"Oh, Maud," said Louie, "how can you speak so? You know it is only anxiety for his client that makes him so excited."

"Of course, Louie, I knew I should get no sympathy from you if our whole family had lost their upper story;" and she pretended to be offended.

"Nay, Maud," said Louie, "I meant no offence; you know I would as soon, aye sooner, something happened to me than to you or yours, believe me."

This speech appeared to tickle Maud's fancy, and with a laugh which made the house ring again, she rushed from the room and into the garden.

Luckily for Frank's impatience, Hobart was not at home, so he saw Clara without any delay, and, showing her the paper, said, "I think it must be him without a doubt. Do you not think with me?"

"I can only hope," she replied. "It seems probable; but are we not as far off as ever?"

"I think not. The man mentioned here, or the one that gave the report, will doubtless know the jealous man, and from him I trust we may get some news of who the other was. However, I shall write at once, and ask the Editor as a special favour to place the matter in the hands of someone who will give it his attention. People are generally ready enough to work if they see a chance of reward, and we may be luckier than we think."

"I trust we may; but what endless trouble and bother do I put you to. I shall, I fear, never be able to repay you; but if ever I can in any way, it will be the happiest moment of my life."

"Talk not of that Clara," was Frank's reply; and looking at her sweet sad face he was about to speak further, but checking himself, he merely said, "I will away now, and give this matter my earnest attention."

Clara anxiously counted the days, and tried to wait patiently, but it was hard to bear, for she had not seen, as she thought, much chance of finding her father, and her impatience knew no bounds.

"Father," she would exclaim, how I will watch over you and consider your every want, if God spares me to find you again. No deception shall again take you from me. No matter what they say or do, for the future I will devote myself to making you happy. I feel it must be my father who has been seeking me, and has only met with ill-treatment. Now he may be sick—aye, even unto death,—and I am not there to comfort and nurse him. I must, I will, hurry to him for fear of his straying off again;" and so she worried herself. Time went on slowly but surely, and day by day she grew more anxious. The colour faded from her face as the time neared; so feeble did she become, that at last she was unable to rise. Medical aid was called in, but the doctor shook his head, for he could find nothing for his skill to work upon, and all were in the greatest state of worry over Clara. Frank, too, could no longer see her, and he was afraid to send notes to cheer her lest they should fall into Hobart's hands. Day by day he became more worried, for do what he would he could not lessen his love for Clara, and now to be shut off from her altogether was worse still.

At last, to mend matters, came Hubbard's letter, but Clara was at that time so ill that Frank was not allowed to see her, and what to do he knew not. With all this trouble on his mind, he became unlike his usual self, and nobody knew the reason—at least, none but Louie. She saw and observed things, and drew her own conclusions; and although she longed to aid

Frank, she knew not how. She sometimes thought of telling Frank how much of Clara's secret was hers, and then again she feared to do this, for where is the woman to blacken herself in the eyes of the man she loves, and for the sake of another; but still she often felt half inclined to do so. Frank, too, had begun to think of Louie with more tender thoughts, for of late he had fancied she more than liked him, and out of consideration he withheld himself from asking her to be the bearer of tidings to Clara; but he argued that the news would be of service to her, and she must be informed of it at all hazards.

One day as Louie, dressed for walking, came past where he was standing, Frank said to her, "Ah, Louie, you are going visiting, I see. May I ask where you are going?"

"Certainly, Frank, I am going to see Clara; they say she is worse to-day, and the doctors seem to be able to do nothing for her. Can I take any message for you, Frank?" and as she said this she looked him full in the face, their eyes met, and she murmured "you may trust me, Frank; I know far more than I would had I had the choosing, but it can't be helped."

In that one look Frank saw too plainly that the honest, kind-hearted Louie loved him, and still she offered to be the bearer of love notes to her rival. What she said about knowing more than she wanted to know he never gave himself the trouble of guessing.

"You will do me the greatest of favours, Louie," said he, "if you will take this note. Give it to herself, and let no one see you if you can avoid it, for it is all important to her."

"I will do so, Frank, never fear, if I have to wait there until to-morrow."

"Noble, generous-hearted girl," he muttered, but she was gone and heard not one word of what he said.

Louie hurried on to Hobart's, and finding Clara alone, she

said, "Here, Miss Hobart, Clara I mean, read this, it will do for you what the doctors cannot ;" and as she finished speaking she blushed violently, for she saw she had said too much.

"How do you know that, Louie ?" asked Clara, noticing the change of colour in Miss Branscombe's face, wondering for the minute if Frank had told her anything, but immediately the thought was gone.

"Read first," Louie answered, "and then you will know, even if you despise me, for I could not help it, Clara, and I dislike deception too much not to tell you."

Clara had by this time opened and read the letter and the enclosure, which consisted of an epistle from Hubbard and also the one from her father. The instant she saw the dear familiar writing she cried out, "He lives, thank God he lives ; and I too can live now, for I feel I have something to make existence tolerable. Oh, Louie, you cannot imagine how much happiness you have brought me to-day, and throwing her arms around Louie's neck she rested there, and both mingled their tears.

After some little time Clara said, drying her eyes and turning to Louie, "But why do you weep? You surely have nothing to weep for."

"I weep," said Louie, "not because I suffer, but for joy. I feel sure you have found him you have been seeking, and I can imagine how happy you must feel."

"How did you know this much, Louie? Did he tell you ?"

"No," replied Louie, "I learnt it from your own lips, though unwittingly ; but I could not prevent hearing it."

Clara here opened her eyes in amazement, for she could not tell what Louie meant. A few words, however, sufficed to explain, and when Louie had told her companion how she had learnt her sad story, she added, "I could not help it, Clara, or I would not

have listened. I had no desire to hear what I did, for the news pained me. Until Maud came to my assistance I was unable to move, in fact for part of the time I must have lost consciousness, for I knew not what occurred."

"Poor Louie," said Clara, "I am quite sure you never listened from any desire to hear, so let that satisfy you. And then, Louie, you know all, and still you come here to-day and treat me in the kindest manner possible."

"Why should I do otherwise? You have only done wrong from the desire to benefit others. You have but sacrificed yourself for the sake of those dear to you. But retribution will surely come, Clara, and then the innocent will receive justice and the guilty will, let us hope, receive the punishment they merit."

"Well," said Clara, "it matters not to us so long as those who have been wronged obtain justice; if the guilty go unpunished, they can be left to the tender mercies of their consciences."

For several hours did Louie and Clara talk. After the letter Clara became quite animated; the pain she had previously endured seemed to have gone, and they told each other their little plans for the future. As Maud had said, their tempers were indeed alike and they felt interest in the same things. So they sat on until Louie at last remembered that Frank in all probability awaited a reply, and she accordingly rose to depart,

"Shall I take any message for you, Clara?" she asked.

"These letters, I think, had better go back, for you know I may lose them, and I would not have them fall into the enemy's hands, as I wish the shock, when it does arrive, to be complete and sudden."

Louie took the letters and hurried back. As she had expected, Frank had been patiently awaiting a reply.

"She is much better now, Frank," she said, "the news you sent did wonders. She requested me to bring these to you for safe keeping."

Frank would have questioned her further concerning her visit, but after giving back the letters she brushed past him, and before he had decided what to say, she was gone.

"How much and how little does Louie know?" he asked himself. "Why did she run away like that? I begin to see I have been unwise, as I have perhaps encouraged this sweet girl to love me, and never have I shown her any return. I am a brute, or I would consider others more and myself less; but for the future I will try and do better;" and so Frank resolved that he would endeavour to atone to Louie for his past indifference, give her more of his company, and so by degrees, in a brotherly way, break her off her attachment to him. Pious resolve, no doubt; but who is there in this world who can place himself continually in the company of one with as sweet a disposition as Louie, and not before long find the love she may have for him is far from being an objectionable passion, but on the contrary one that the best of us like to enjoy. But man ever was, and ever will be, vain of his strength. Of course, it would be wrong in its entirety to say Frank did not possess the strength of mind to do as he desired, but the issue of events will show how far he succeeded. He himself has not a fear—in fact, he firmly believes that his strength is quite equal to this, and more; but Frank Perryman, like many others, has much to learn. At present he thinks and believes that, to him, it would be impossible to love any other woman than Clara, but stronger minds than his have loved twice—aye, even more,—and why should not he?

CHAPTER XXIII.

It is a bright spring morning; the scene is Lyttelton. A steamer has just arrived, and amid the bustle and excitement of the few passengers who are landing, an aged gentleman and an invalid daughter are to be seen. The father pays his daughter every attention, but she appears to be not long for this world. She moves only with difficulty, and then with the aid of his strong arm.

"Father," she says, "I feel too weak to walk far; have we any distance to go? What a miserable looking place to come to."

"The place, Mary, certainly has not an inviting appearance, but the climate of New Zealand, you know, is considered the best. Cheer up, my daughter, you will soon get stroug again, and then you will return home and be your own self again."

"I trust I may, father, if but to please you and verify your words; but I feel that only one thing will do me good, and that seems to be as far or farther off than ever."

"You know not, Mary; we may be nearer what you desire than you even dream of. Be of good heart, and wait;" and so the pair move on slowly, while a porter attends to the luggage, and in time they arrive at Christchurch—not the Christchurch of to-day, but of nearly twenty years ago.

They are soon in comfortable quarters, and Mary Torridge—for it is she—and her father seek all the advantages of the climate of New Zealand. The medical men of Tasmania have long since looked and sought for the cause of her malady, but have been unable to discover it. Mental derangement, they

say ; but it must be admitted that this opinion is purely guess work. All else has been tried, and now, as a last resource, they recommend a change of scene and climate, and New Zealand has been the chosen spot. The Christchurch doctors have been consulted, but they, too, soon seem at fault. Her secret she has kept to herself, and when asked by those most near and dear to her the cause of the depression, she always answers, " When I find it out myself you shall know. I shall, I feel, sooner or later, but until then question me not further ;" and so they leave her to herself, concluding that she is suffering from some hallucination that only time will cure. She herself speaks of it as something to come, and they, to humour her, appear as though they understood, and wait for the issue. She has grown worse and worse, and more especially so since she has been sought in marriage by an old admirer ; and though he repeats his vows of love, and begs her to name the day, she has always put him off. The medical men at first advised that the marriage should take place, but she is fixed in her resolve, and will not agree. Everybody wonders, but none can fathom her reasons, and it is in this state we find her on her arrival in Lyttelton. Some days she is better than others, but her best state is that of being very debilitated and low in spirits. She has no idea that Hobart, the destroyer of her happiness, is so near at hand ; in fact, she has no notion whatever of his whereabouts, and he knows not of hers. He often feels disposed to write and ask the question, but to whom can he send a letter, he has no friends—by all who are acquainted with him is he despised and disliked, and as for his relations, the last one was Agnes Hobart, who by her death did Matthew an act of justice which was to set him free.

Hobart, in his self-reliance, which is strong when Fixer is not too closely concerned, feels confident of going through all difficulties, for has he not been successful so far. It is the first time in his life indeed, but this makes him feel none the less confident, for with Hobart a little success only tends to make him more

venturesome. He will, however, ere long be rudely awakened, unless, like many others before him, he is exceptionally fortunate. Fortune sometimes carries even idiots through difficulties, and perhaps it will in this instance. Of late Hobart has been a more frequent visitor at the Parks. He and the old planter sit for hours of an evening, aye, often into the morning, and together they talk of the past, and their plans for the future.

"Hobart," said Parks, the very night before the land sale, after they had imbibed a considerable quantity of whisky, "why don t you marry? No man would be likely to refuse you his daughter, for your success in life is now certain."

"Well, I have lately thought very seriously on the matter, but business, you know, so fully occupies my time that I have no leisure for anything else, but I shall surprise you some day, believe me. Should I ever make up my mind, do you know what I should prefer doing?"

"Well, no, I cannot say I do."

"Then I'll tell you; I shall propose to-day, and marry to-morrow. That's my way; no protracted courtships."

"Quite, right, Hobart, my boy, that's me to the letter. I don't believe in fooling round. In times like these a man should not waste time over such matters. Besides, you are wealthy now, you should expect—that is to say, if such things are managed in this country as they are in mine, £50,000 would be a fair marriage portion."

"Well, about that," answered Hobart, "if her people were of my sort I should not mind a thousand or two."

"Quite so. Talking of these things, I may mention that I have decided to give my daughter on her wedding day, if she considers my wishes, £50,000."

"Very liberal indeed of you, Parks;" and on Hobart's face there was a self-satisfied look, and inwardly he mutters to him-

self, "Wants me to propose, eh? So I shall—if I can get Fixer away for a day or two. The land may not sell, but if it does, I have other ways. Fixer once away until the ceremony is over, and he cannot say a word for fear of ruining himself."

"This great land sale of yours and Fixer's is to take place to-morrow, is it not? Long-headed fellow, Fixer, long-headed fellow; people here don't know you own half that affair, Hobart. Sly fellow you are to be sure," and the New Orleans planter enjoys a hearty chu kle, after having nudged Hobart in the ribs.

"I don't want them to know," replied Hobart; "no one but yourself is in that secret, and I don't intend them to tell anybody else."

"Quite safe with me, my boy. I'm always dark; I know how to mind my own business, believe me."

And so the well-matched pair talked on; for in their inmost hearts they were both intent on tricking each other. Hobart thought of marrying Miss Parks simply as a convenience, and Parks of catching Hobart because he deemed him to be far richer than he was in reality; and the wily father in return made himself appear worth untold gold, when the truth was that it would seriously bother him to give his daughter half or more than half the amount he had named.

The morning of the land sale has arrived, and Hobart does not feel altogether well, as it was in the small hours of the morning before he and Parks had finished their whisky drinking, and in fact the latter part of the conversation had been rather too muddled for them to quite remember what had been said. Fixer was about at an early hour, the same cool individual as ever, but his hopes were not of the highest. He had fairly sounded the likely buyers, but none seemed as anxious for the land as he wished to see them. The hours of the morning to Hobart seemed very long and dreary, for he wanted to see the

sale over so that he could, as he expected, boast of his gains. To Fixer the time seemed to fly, for he feared what was coming as much or more than the other wished for it. At last the hour did arrive, for time waits for no one, and there stood the auctioneer using all his persuasive powers. The first lot submitted sold fairly well, and Hobart's hopes rose higher, but the next lot after many attempts, had to be withdrawn. Lot after lot was offered, but the prices were in no case up to anything like the reserve, and long before the conclusion both Fixer and his partner Hobart were sick at heart. Yes, the firm of Fixer and Hobart had met their first reverse, and they felt it keenly. Hobart was apparently more affected than his partner, who had more control over his feelings and hid his chagrin more successfully than the other. The concourse of people at the sale was great, and many felt sorry for Fixer, as they admired his speculative spirit, but none knew how seriously it would affect him.

"Hobart," said Fixer, when the sale, which had been a most complete failure, was over, "we are undone. I knew it all along, and now it has come we must look sharp around, for there remains little time for us here."

"Never fear, Fixer, I yet have a trump card, which, if all else fail, will take us out of our difficulties."

"What is it, then? You know now it is time for action, so we must be up and doing."

"Leave it to me. We will try other means; but if those fail, I can promise you success with my scheme."

"Then you wish me not to know what you intend to do, unless you are obliged to do it."

"Precisely so."

"Very good," replied Fixer, "then we will, as you say, try all else, and should we fail I will hear what you propose."

There the matter was allowed to rest, although Fixer, to say the truth, had not much faith in Hobart's plan, but he felt disposed to so far humour him by waiting. He knew the time must be short, and he had plans for himself, should Hobart not be able to prevent their downfall; and, to do him justice, he intended to inform his partner of these, but for the present he thought it best to wait.

So far do the unrighteous generally prosper; but although they may succeed for a time, a day of reckoning surely comes, and then such men are invariably found wanting. Time with them, as with all else, went on; scheme after scheme was tried, but in each they signally failed. At last it was decided that some financing should be attempted by Fixer in Dunedin. This proposal came from Hobart, but as Fixer saw some chance of success in it, he did not offer any opposition, and the day following was fixed for his departure.

It is, however, necessary for us to turn our attention to other characters in the story. Frank Perryman had started on his new resolution in connection with Louie, and, strange as it seemed to him, he found her company much more enjoyable than he had expected. Her good common sense began to make an impression, and often after a *tête á tête* he would wonder why he felt so much pleasure in her society. This discovery especially was altogether novel to him, as he had always deemed the company of Clara so much more pleasant than any other woman's. In his chats with Louie, which had become frequent, he treated her as one to be pitied, for she had all his sympathy, and she, in speaking to him, showed so much thought and consideration for others that he could not but admire her generous heart. In speaking of Clara, which they often did, her true kindly nature showed to such advantage that he began to see how favourably she compared with other women.

"Poor Clara," she said one evening, unthinkingly, "how she has suffered, and for no wrong of her own doing."

"Clara has made you her confidant, Louie, I see, and your generous nature shows to double advantage in the kind way you sympathise with her, and try to alleviate her sufferings."

"How could I do otherwise, Frank? Who could know anything of her wrongs and prevent their heart's sympathy going out to her? None, Frank—no, none—I feel sure."

"It does you credit to say and feel so, as I can see you do. I always thought women rarely sympathised with each other, but I find there are exceptions, if it is not the rule."

"I don't think it any exception," she replied, "but some, you know, do not show it; but I, simpleton that I am, show but too plainly what I feel."

"You do not show it too plainly, Louie, for it is so creditable to your heart that it would be impossible to display it too much, if only as an example to others. No, Louie, you are too good and too true-hearted for this wicked world;" and as Frank spoke so much did he feel what he said that he became quite animated. His eyes shone to Louie as she had never seen them before, and, rising hurriedly, he said, "Good night, Louie;" and before he realised thoroughly what he was doing, he had placed his arm upon her shoulder, and, stooping low, imprinted one kiss on her glowing lips, and then he was gone.

Poor Louie blushed crimson; she knew not what this meant, it was so new; and rising, too, she hurried to her room, and, throwing herself on her bed, burst into tears. But they were not tears of sorrow, but of joy. Frank of late had been so different, she knew not what to think, and now, to kiss her; and she weeps on, shedding tears of joy. She feels for the time happy—so happy; and in her happiness we will for the present leave her.

But what does Frank do? He too rushes off, but not to his room. He seeks the garden to get the cool air, for he feels

excited. He is also ashamed of his last act, for what has he done? After seeking Louie for the purpose of healing her soreness of heart, he reopens the wounds, and, as he deems it, when he has no moral right. Why should he even dream or think of causing this girl to love or cherish an affection for him? Does he not care for another, and by what right does he now show a regard for the new love before the old is off. So he argues on with himself, and as he warms with the subject he becomes more excited and annoyed with his conduct. After a time more cool reflection comes, and then by degrees he looks at things from a different standpoint.

"Is it possible," he thinks, "for a man to be in love with two women at the same time? I feel that I still cherish an affection for Clara, yet I cannot endure the thought of losing Louie for ever;" and as this occurs to him, he walks about excitedly, wondering how it will all end.

At last Maud came running down to where he stands.

"What, Frank, have you turned star-gazer? Whatever keeps you out here so late? Really something must be wrong. Mother, unlike herself, has not fallen asleep in her chair; and just now, when I tired of telling her stories, I ran up to Louie's room, and I find the poor girl weeping as though her heart would break. What in the world have you been saying to her, Frank? If you are going to cause her pain, I shall not allow you to talk to her so much. I am not going to stand by and see my poor Louie suffer;" and for once Maud showed that she too was sensitive for the feelings of those she loved.

"Louie weeping!" exclaimed Frank. "I do not remember saying anything to cause her to weep,;" but he thought of what he had done, and in his heart he felt for her, and his grief was genuine.

After a minute or two he observed, "I would do anything

to make her happy, Maud, as I know you would. I would use my every endeavour to promote her happiness."

"Then why do you cause her to love you, which you know you do, and all the time you care for another?"

How just this rebuke was Frank knew too well, and he made no answer, but he resolved to try still further in the future to prove the truth of his words.

"Come, Maud," said he, "let us go in. If I have done wrong I did it with no evil intent, but for the future you shall not have any cause to upbraid."

"I feel and know, Frank, you would not intentionally do harm; but you must not be thoughtless, at least not where my Louie is concerned, for she is in my eyes far too precious to be trifled with. I know," she continued, "I am often frivolous myself, but not with her feelings, for she is of far too sensitive a nature to be treated like the majority of heartless mankind."

"Maud, be not harsh. I have admitted so far my wrong and promised better conduct for the future. Accept my confession and repentance, for I am as anxious for Louie's welfare as you can possibly be."

"All right, Frank, I shall soon see, and if I am not satisfied I shall speak."

"Maud, do you not surprise yourself sometimes?"

"How surprise myself? I do not understand you."

"Well, you know, you are as a rule so remarkably high spirited and jolly, in fact almost to an extreme, when suddenly you become so serious, you almost frighten one."

"I am naturally jolly, I know, and I have all the more reason to show it, because I have, thank heaven and our poor dead feather, never known cause for sorrow. I am not quite so

sensitive in one respect as some even of the other sex, and that saves me many a heart-throb; still, I am pleased to say I am to some extent matter-of-fact when put on my mettle—if I may use the expression."

"By Jove, Maud, you ought to have been born in America, and then you could ascend the platform in defence of women's rights."

"You are only jesting with me; but the women's rights platform might possibly have a worse advocate."

"So I verily believe, Maud. But it grows late, and I shall retire to bed. Go and see Louie, and say I am most sorry if I did any wrong, and that I'll not do the like again."

"Very sensible that, I am sure, when, if I conjecture rightly, I shall only do harm instead of good; better leave things as they are. I shall go up to Louie's room, but not to be so unwise as to let her think I know anything. To-morrow, if it is necessary, you can make an apology to her."

"Maud, you are a sage, I do believe. Good night, and God bless you;" and, kissing her forehead, he retired for the night.

Going to bed, however, was one thing, but sleeping another. For hours he lay awake, while conflicting thoughts ran riot in his brain. First he would think of Clara, then of Louie, and, strange to say, the latter bore the comparison well. Then he remembered Maud's words, and in his own mind he saw but too plainly they were true. But if his attentions to Louie had increased her affections for him, how had he fared? He certainly did not seem as though he had come out scathless; but as yet he did not know his own feelings. He had so far loved Clara truly and disinterestedly. She had told him many times that she could not, or would not, marry him, and when first he heard this he had taken it much to heart; but of late, when he reviewed the past, he was conscious of the fact that the matter did not trouble him quite so much as

before. He did not, however, as yet realise all this, but still he knew that Louie was always in his thoughts. No one had tried to take her away, and in this, as in many such cases, the value of the treasure was, to a great extent, overlooked, from the fact that he was aware he had only to ask and he would be accepted.

Before leaving on the following morning, Frank waited and saw Louie, and in a muddling way tried to apologise for anything he had said or done the previous night, but he found it very difficult this time to speak to-day as he had done in the past. Before he commenced he had volumes to say, but no sooner had no started, and gave one look into her loving trusting eyes, than he blushed and stammered, and could not say one half he wished to, while Louie looked and wondered at the change in him, the cause of which she could by no means conjecture. Frank started off to his office, but for the life of him he could not get rid of the idea that he had done some wrong, and his honest heart felt the self-rebuke he thought he deserved. Every hour of that day he tried to imagine some way of affording her pleasure, to make amends for the past, and long before his usual hour for leaving the office the desire was strong within him to go home, and again try to remove the weight that seemed to be upon him. He did not dream that he had learnt to love again, and that the object of his new love was Louie. Such a thing never occurred to him, and yet he felt an ardent desire to be off and set matters right.

But Louie was the reverse of unhappy; and Maud observed, long before the morning had passed away, "Why, Louie, you should cry often if it usually has so beneficial an effect on your spirits. You are twice the girl to day you were yesterday. I think we had better take a run, or drive up this afternoon and visit Clara, and let her see that sometimes you are lively at least."

After lunch the two accordingly started off to Hobart's; and so when Frank went home early, full of high hopes and good intentions, he was sorely disappointed to find both Louie and his sister away. The latter he could have spared; but he felt, he knew not why, that it was essential he should see Louie, but to do so he must wait.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The following day brought to Clara and Frank the joyful tidings that her father was then on his way, and would land at Lyttelton on the following Tuesday. Frank no sooner received this letter than he at once took Louie further into his confidence, and despatched her on the first opportunity to Clara, who received the news with great glee.

"Oh, Louie," she said, "how can I ever repay you for your kindness; oh, how true it is that all one's joy comes together. I know not how to contain myself. My dear father coming to me once more. How I long to ask and obtain his forgiveness, for I feel he will not withhold it from me;" and so she ran on, and Louie, to let her more thoroughly enjoy her happiness, as soon as possible returned home.

Yes, Matthew Grant was on his way, for, after receiving Frank's letter, which told him his daughter would sooner that he should come to her, he at once signified to Toukin that he should do as she wished and join her. "If, after I see her," he said, "she is willing to return here, I shall do so, but for fear she does not desire this, I must leave you, John, as though I am not to return."

"Then, Matthew, if you think there is a probability of your not returning, the best way will be for me to buy your share of the business; and, as I estimate the whole now to be worth £1400. I shall, if you are agreeable, give you the half of that—namely, £700."

"No, John," answered Matthew, "I shall not so far trespass on your generosity, but I will ask simply a fair wage for the six months that I have been with you."

This John would not listen to, as he declared Matthew had been a partner since he had been with him. "Besides," he added, "would you not have lost if I had? for then I could not have paid you."

Argue as he would, however, Matthew would not hear of this, and ultimately he accepted £200, and John declared he considered that £500 was still owing to Grant, and that if he chose to return the share was still his; if not, the money should certainly be sent to him, wherever he was. John spoke honestly when he made his generous offer to Matthew, for he felt grateful to him for being instrumental in saving him from eternal, or rather life-long, misery.

There were honest expressions of regret on both sides when the two friends parted; and so, with promises to write when he had arrived in New Zealand, Matthew set out upon the voyage for Lyttelton, full of joy at the prospect of seeing his long-lost daughter. He thought not now of the past years of misery he had endured; he felt no desire for revenge against those who had so seriously wronged him, of whom only one now lived. Even this he was not aware of, for he had no word from Clara concerning Hobart. Joyfully he went on his way, with but one thought, of spending some few of his last years happily, and also in conducing to the happiness of the only being now alive whom he loved; and so for the present we must leave him,

and return to some of the other characters who are now beginning to realise what it is to sail in troubled waters.

* * * * * *

"Well, Hobart," said Fixer, some few nights after their last arrangement, "we are like the fox in the fable, we have tried nearly all our tricks but still we are far from getting over our difficulties. What do you think of your suggestion of my going to Dunedin to try a finance there, or do you prefer your own personal scheme, whatever it may be."

The speakers are at Hobart's house, and they have both been helping themselves pretty liberally from a whisky bottle which stands before them, for they now find a little fortification essential.

"Let's try the Dunedin scheme, and, should that fail, I will use my best endeavours to carry out my own arrangements."

"Very good, then; as there is a boat leaving here to-morrow, I will go by that, and should I find any chance of success I will advise you."

"I see," said Hobart, "that the Homeward Bound is still in the roadstead. I thought you told me she was ready for sea some days ago, but she doesn't seem to have started yet."

"No," replied Fixer, reflectively, "I had some idea of putting her to another use, and hence the delay."

"You will give orders for her putting to sea before you go, I suppose, to save expense."

"No, I shall let her remain," was the answer given, with such decision that Hobart said no more about the matter.

For some time they sat in silence, for each seemed to be busy

with his own thoughts. At last Fixer said, "I hope Miss Clara is well. I have not seen her for some time now; she never appears when I call. I trust she has not taken a dislike to me."

"You see her nearly as often as I do," replied Hobart. "I don't know what the devil has come to her of late, she seems to studiously avoid me. As to her being well, she is to all appearances in the best of health now, since she recovered from her indisposition of a few weeks back. When I am home without her knowing it, I often hear her singing about the house, as merry as a lark. I know I envy her very often."

"Hobart, things are far worse with us, I fear, than we think. There must be some reason for this exuberance of spirits, and whatever it may be I don't think it likely it bodes any good for either of us. Think you there is anything more between her and Perryman of late?"

"No, for he seldom sees her. His sister and Miss Branscombe call often, but he seldom comes. In fact, I almost think at times he knows more than we think, for he certainly avoids me as much as possible."

"Stormy weather, Hobart, stormy weather is approaching from all quarters. However, I was never a croaker, and do not wish to be one now. I will do my best in Dunedin, and then comes our last chance; and, should that fail, we must look out for fine weather."

"What the devil do you mean by fine weather? You are for ever at your riddles. Speak, and let me know all you infer."

"Well, Hobart, when once a climate begins to disagree with me, I invariably change my quarters. Now, the weather here of late, to say the least of it, has been very sultry, and what is more, the sky overhead indicates more heat. Under these circumstances, I think a sail round the bay, or rather *off the coast*, would be beneficial to my health. Now, can you understand what I mean by 'fine weather?'"

"You are surely croaking now. There can be no reason for such a course as that. You seem to forget I promised you my scheme should not fail, nor shall it."

"We shall see," replied Fixer, "but now, as it grows late, I shall be off. I leave in the morning early, so I will wish you adieu."

Fixer had scarcely got fairly away when Hobart, putting on his hat and overcoat, leaves the house by the front door, and, although it is very late, he makes direct for the residence of the New Orleans planter. Parks seemed to expect him, for as soon as they were both seated, he remarked, "You are later than I thought you would be."

"Well, yes, I intended to be sooner, but as Fixer visits Dunedin, or rather leaves for there, to-morrow, to arrange for the purchase of another barque or two, I had money matters to attend to to-night."

"You were quite right, Hobart, to attend to business first. I can't stand seeing a man neglect that. You must have a lot of money in the mercantile concern now."

"Well, yes, a considerable sum; but you see we have been so successful, and the profits have been very large."

"So I should say; but come, try a liquor, and then we will also attend to business. Here are some cigars just over from New Orleans; try them, they are good."

Hobart did as requested, and then, turning to his host, he said, "Well, Parks, what says the fair Amelia to my proposal; does she view it favourably?"

"As I told you, my boy, she always takes her old father's advice in everything. An obedient girl, Hobart, and I am sure she will make you a good wife. Take her, and may you be happy."

Thus had this worthy pair, who are apparently so well matched, arranged the affairs of Parks' daughter, without consulting her heart at all, although it may be doubtful if she had one, for she certainly seemed to be a fair specimen of what the daughter of such a man would be. Yes, Hobart had that very day (as he knew Fixer must soon leave for Dunedin) proposed to the father for the hand of Amelia Parks, and the old man had accepted him, conditionally of course, as he so far studied appearances as to say, "I will put the matter to her, and you shall in all probability have your answer to-night." Hobart knew the father well enough to have no fear concerning the answer of the daughter; and so matters were now settled.

"You shall have," said Parks, "£20,000 with her now, my boy, and another £30,000 within a year."

At this news Hobart showed more joy than at the mere fact of being accepted by the young lady. "Don't mention it," he replied, "the second amount when you wish. I am not in immediate want of the whole of the money, but the first part I can well find investment for. I have a good speculation in view."

"Then do you, as you proposed," said Parks, "wish the marriage to take place as soon as you suggested?"

"I have so far relied on your word," said Hobart, "as to make my arrangements to leave here for Christchurch to-morrow afternoon, and then we can complete all arrangements for the wedding taking place at 3 o'clock on Tuesday next, in that city."

"You shall not depend on me in vain. Amelia will be ready, Hobart, and I and the wife will go up and see the matter over; and then once more, as you say, to business."

Shortly after this conversation closed, and Hobart returned to his own house. He felt, as he went along, that he had done a master-stroke, for he deemed the firm saved, and, to do him

justice, he had tried to keep his word. In any affair of importance, it was perhaps the first time he had ever done so in his life.

Shortly after arriving at his house he was surprised to find Clara had not yet gone to bed.

"I am glad she has not retired, as I wish to tell her I shall be away, and I would sooner tell her now than to-morrow."

The cause of Clara's being up, had he known it, would not have increased his peace of mind, but he was ignorant that she too contemplated starting for Christchurch on the following day. She was about to speak to him on the matter; not that she feared going without an escort, but that she wished her father to arrive safely before Hobart was aware of his coming. She had no wish to extend mercy to him, but Hobart came to her rescue."

"Ah, Clara, you are up too late. You seldom risk your health by keeping out so long in the night air, but I am glad you are up on this occasion, as I wished to tell you that I shall have some business in Christchurch which will keep me there till Tuesday. I start in the morning by steamer at about eleven, for luckily there will be one call here."

At first so much did this surprise her that she was for a minute or two almost thrown off her guard; and no doubt Hobart would have perceived this had he not been so full of his own affairs.

"He going to Christchurch? Does he know," she thought, "that the one he has every cause to fear is coming? No, he cannot;" but still the thought of this news was to Clara rather startling, but she only asked—

"You will return on Tuesday?"

"Yes," he replied, "if possible. I start from there by

steamer, and go round to Dunedin. But you are evidently not anxious to know, Clara, why I go. You have of late become so indifferent as to my doings and movements, or I should have spoken to you on the subject before."

As Hobart said this the old passion for Clara was roused within him, and for the moment he reflected, "Would she now marry me and fly. I would even now sacrifice all for her, for I feel that I still love her."

"I have not had any occasion to show or make any display of my feelings on the subject. I see but little of you, and know less of your doings."

"Clara," he replied, "have you any feeling for me? Say that you have, and you may alter my course—aye, even my whole life,—for I love you still. If you say but 'yes' now, will I marry you."

"Speak not of that, for you have already had my final answer. I have but one object in life, and matrimony has nothing to do with it."

"But, Clara, I think still I can trust you, as of old. Yes, I will, even were it my ruin," said Hobart, for his love had got the better of his discretion, and he thought that perhaps some smouldering spark of affection for him still remained with her, and that perhaps were he to tell her all she would accept him. "I go to Christchurch to marry. You start; but I repeat that I am about to marry Amelia Parks; but if your decision is not irrevocable, I will yet lose her and all else for you."

She had, it is true, started when he mentioned that he was going to marry, but she felt no particle of regret, unless it was for the woman who was to become his bride. A loathing for the man who could behave in such a manner took possession of her, and she replied—"You are still a true impersonation of the mean and cowardly being you have always

been. Think not that I would divert you from the course you have chosen, unless for the purpose of saving her by acquainting her with the kind of man she is about to espouse. For this, probably, I should get no thanks; so go your way, and speedily will I go mine."

"Clara, you are always heartless to me. You know I love you, and have always loved you, and now do I not show how great is my affection when I offer to forsake her for but one word from you. Still you withhold it; aye, even when with her I gain a marriage portion of £50,000."

"Ha! ha! ha! You marry the money you should say, but as a condition you agree to give her in return your very agreeable company. You certainly become more despicable the more one has the misfortune to know you, though I long since thought you had attained the highest standard in that respect. But enough, your presence, as I told you before, is pollution. Go and marry her, and when you return you shall find that I shall not be here, lest I should forget myself and tell her then, and prove that I did wrong in not telling her before. I pity her from my heart, so help me heaven;" and as Clara finished speaking she left the room.

"No sooner had she done so than Hobart arose and paced the room. "Fool," he exclaims, "that I have always been where she is concerned. Oh, if it were all to be again, how would I cherish thy love, Clara, for daily do you show you are more than ever worthy." Here he stayed himself, for even he sometimes felt the pangs of conscience, and now he thought how she was worthy of the love of a man ten thousand times better than he was.

Taking now from a sideboard a bottle of his favourite beverage, he sought relief in this. Glass after glass he poured down his throat, but the more he drank the more he became troubled. If Mary Torridge were to arrive, he thought, what

then? But she will never come; and now, as he was almost in a drunken state, he reeled rather than walked about the room, muttering, but in an audible voice—

"Poor old Matthew—hic,—I wonder where he is, he might—hic—turn up too. And Fixer, what will he say? He—hic—can't say much, anyhow. Curse my father," he goes on, "this all comes from being the son of a convict, he imbued me with all his villainous notions; but I must do it now, old Parks would shoot me were I—hic—to say I could not marry her."

Thus John Hobart spent the last night before his nuptials. Not a very amiable state to be in, it is true; and it is to be regretted that many before of his kind have done likewise. His villainy no doubt was bred in the bone, and it will come out in the flesh."

The next day saw the bridal party on their way to the Cathedral City. Hobart did not present the best of appearances, for he now feared something would arise in the way of new difficulties. He made all sure the first thing that Fixer was away, for he feared him more than anybody. Frank he could not find early enough without going to the house, which he somehow feared to do. He left a note at the office, saying that sudden and important business had called him away for a few days, but that before a week he would return. Not a word about his marriage did he say, for he seemed to fear lest the very birds should know and fly with the news elsewhere. Frank received the note, and inwardly wished Hobart would never return, but to no one did he so express himself.

Shortly after Hobart's departure, on the same morning, Clara was on the way to Christchurch. In her case, as it was necessary for her to travel by land, the journey took two days, so that she did not arrive there until the day after Hobart. On arrival she at once went on to Port Lyttelton, for she knew there was some uncertainty about the actual day her father would arrive. She found comfortable quarters in a private

boarding-house, and awaited the boat by which Grant was to come.

Hobart, on his arrival, put up at the most fashionable place then in Christchurch, and all the necessary arrangements for the wedding were completed. At last, without any mishap, the day arrived, but on this morning Hobart looked as though he had been fairly scared. He had the previous night, in company with Parks, sat up until a late hour, and their discussions had been too liberally blended with malt whisky, for they were both now what Parks termed, when speaking of others, "good square drinkers." Not that Hobart's appearance on his bridal morn was altogether due to that; but for hours after he retired to bed he had thought incessantly, first of Clara, and then of Mary Torridge; and, do what he would, he could not for the life of him get them from his mind. At last, when sleep did come, it was not refreshing, for his dreams were very unpleasant ones. When morning came he arose and dressed with anything but bright hopes, for he could not divest himself of the fear that some misfortune would befal him. He regretted what he had told Clara now, but more than all he was sorry that she had not accepted his offer of marriage. So as the time drew on for the ceremony to be performed, he actually looked more as though he were going to be hanged than married.

However, the appointed hour at last arrived, and there assembled at the church the bride and bridegroom, Mr and Mrs Parks, and two witnesses. There were no bridesmaids, no extra costly outfit—all that the bride wore was good and neat, but such as would do for other purposes afterwards. They each took their places, and the officiating minister proceeded to read the marriage service. While this was going on, there entered the church, with many other curiosity seekers, an aged gentleman and an apparent invalid, his daughter; but as the ceremony had so far proceeded they stood in the aisle of the church, and waited to look and hear merely out of curiosity. Several times the minister looked around, his attention being attracted by the

occasional noise caused through some thoughtless new-comer; but when the question was asked, "John Hobart, do you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" there was heard a faint scream, and then again all was still.

Mary Torridge, with her father, and at his request, as he thought it would perhaps divert her mind from other matters, was among the lookers-on, and at the mention of the name of him she had so much cause to hate, she started, looked wildly around, and giving a slight scream, fell back in a faint. Her father, ever on the watch, sees and hears all, and, catching her in his arms, supports her to a seat. No sooner has he done so than she rallies, and looks towards the altar, exclaiming feebly, "Justice, oh God, at last," and tearing open her dress she takes out a massive locket which she always wears round her neck. She forces this open just as the minister has completed, and, taking out a paper, she unfolds it with great vehemence, apparently in fear lest it should be the wrong one.

"No, this is it," she exclaims aloud; and before her father dreams of what she does, Mary Torridge has risen to her feet, and advances up the aisle towards the altar. The people who are there stand back in amazement, but she heeds them not, while Mr Torridge, in a state of wonder and fear lest his daughter had lost her reason, follows her. Nobody stops her, and she forces her way right into the midst of the bridal party, who are just about to leave the church, having received the minister's blessing.

The clergyman looks up in astonishment when he sees one who is evidently a lady forcing her way toward him. Without hesitating she places herself full in front of Hobart, who at sight of her turns ghastly pale, for, in spite of the changes wrought in her by illness, he recognises her instantly. Putting up his hand as though to ward off some disagreeable vision, Hobart mutters, "Mary Torridge."

"No," she replies, in a firm voice, "not Mary Torridge, to my sorrow, but Mary Hobart."

Mr and Mrs Parks look on in wonder, while the bride-elect seems stupified, and old Mr Torridge is evidently perfectly bewildered, and fancies his poor child has gone mad. Going gently up to her, without looking at the others, he says, "Mary, come, my daughter, you are excited."

"No, father," is the reply, given in a clear voice, "I am not, but I will have justice at last. Look you," she says, "here, in the most sacred building of the Lord's, and before God and man, do I denounce John Hobart as a bigamist, and here are the proofs;" and with these words she hands to her father the paper she had so recently taken from the locket that now hangs open on her breast. "Read, let these good people see to whom they give their daughter, and then I will tell you how I married him—for I was an unwilling bride. Refute what I say, John Hobart, if you can."

The man addressed, however, only shrank back abashed, scarcely knowing what he did; while Amelia, to add to the festivities, fainted, and during the next few minutes all were engaged in restoring her to consciousness.

During the bustle, Hobart endeavours to go quietly away, but Mary Torridge sees the movement, and placing herself full in his path, she says, "Not yet, sir, not yet. I told you on the day you married me by stratagem that you should live to regret it—that I would be a very stone around your neck, which you would find cling tighter whenever you should try to cast it off; and now, thank God, I am able to keep my word. Luckily for your innocent victim, I have arrived in time to prevent you committing another sin. Father," she cried, turning to Mr Torridge, who had stood nearly the whole of this time in a half-stupefied state, "now you know why I have pined and fretted nearly my life away—why

I would not marry the man we all loved. It was because I would not let others suffer by telling them the secret I carried with me. No, I could even have gone to the grave without betraying myself; but now I feel relieved, for the weight is removed."

While she has been speaking she had addressed herself to her father, and when she turned again to confront Hobart, she found that he was gone.

"Ah," she cries aloud, "you have let him escape;" and then Parks awakes to the actual position of affairs. Turning to Mr Torridge, he says, "Would you allow me to see this document, for if this villain has done all your daughter says, I'll shoot him. Yes, by heaven, I will."

One look at the marriage certificate was sufficient to make him start off out of the church in search of Hobart, but the latter had made such good use of his time that he was nowhere to be seen.

At the last words of her father, Miss Parks, for such we must still call her, again faints, and all is in confusion in the church. Some run one way, some another; the clergyman looks perplexed, and every now and then he murmurs, *sotto voce*, "I do wish this couple had gone to another church to be married, for this will give me endless trouble." No doubt he was under the belief that no one heard him, as he added aloud, "May the Lord have mercy on the sinful."

All is excitement within the precincts of the sacred building, and the minister steps forward and delivers a short speech on the evil ways of the world and the lusts of the flesh, and then turns his attention to comforting the bereaved ones, saying, "It might have been much worse, but now justice will be done," &c., &c.

Mary Torridge seems now better than for many months, and she, in as few words as possible, tells them of her fatal mar-

riage, and how it took place. Mr Torridge declares he will have justice, but observes, with the usual legal acumen, that it will be much trouble, for the parson who performed the ceremony in Hobart Town is dead, and the witnesses will be difficult to find, but that if it is possible they certainly shall be found. So the parties concerned leave the sacred building and seek their respective places of abode; and on that very day information is laid against John Hobart for bigamy, and the officers of the law are on the alert, and have communicated with the other stations throughout the Colony.

In the meanwhile, what has become of Hobart? Immediately on leaving the church he procured a horse, and in less than half an hour he is away across the Canterbury Plains in the direction of Timaru; for invariably such as he fly to the most dangerous places. He thinks not of that, however. All he remembers now is what Fixer has said about "fair weather," and he rides on to be in time, lest he shall be left behind. On, on he rides, over one river and then another, for there are many to cross ere he can reach Timaru. He fears not the water, however, and luckily his horse proves to be a good swimmer, or the rider would have been badly off. On he goes at a reckless speed until the morning begins to dawn, and then he finds that his horse must have rest, and, striking well off the road, he takes off the saddle and lets him feed on the tussock—for there is nought else there—while he throws himself on the ground. Although he is worn out with fatigue he finds it difficult to fall asleep, but at last he succeeds. Presently he awakes with a start, crying, "Unhand me; surely you know well enough where to find me without taking me into custody;" but as he looks round he sees he has only been dreaming. How painful was the memory of that dream, when he fancies he is being pulled off to gaol for his crimes. He sits some time, thinking that now it is too late to regret what he has done—to blame himself for not taking Fixer's advice.

"Repinings are useless," said he at last, rising from the

ground, "I must away. It looks as though it were near night-fall. I must reach there before morning if I kill this horse and get another." Then he remembers that he must be careful. The police will be after him long before this, and he must not show himself.

He looks now for his beast, which he thinks he sees some distance off, and, taking up the saddle and bridle, he goes on to see. Yes, fortune favours him, it is the horse, and the faithful animal neighs as he approaches, and makes no effort to elude him, and in a few minutes he is again mounted and on his way.

It turns out, as he had conjectured, that it is near night, for soon the sun goes down, and the moon, in all her brightness, shines on him.

"One more river," he exclaims, after he had travelled some distance, "and then Timaru;" and he pushes on at a reckless speed, passes the Washdyke, and just as he is reaching the town his horse falls, throwing his rider heavily. The faithful animal has been ridden to death.

For some time Hobart lies apparently dead, but presently he moves, and gradually recovers his senses.

"Where am I?" he asks, but receiving no reply, he rises with difficulty, for the exertion of the ride has made him stiff, and he looks around him. "Ah," he mutters, "I am flying from the accursed police as my old father often did, curse him! But I must hurry on; Fixer must be found. Yet stay, I will go first to the office. My house will be watched, so I must not visit there."

It is now necessary for a short space to leave Hobart, and return to Fixer, who has come back from Dunedin, where he has been unsuccessful in raising the required funds. He is much cast down for one of his sort, but he bears up as well as possible, as he has placed some little hope in Hobart's promise,

although not much. His trust, however, is soon to be shattered. He goes straight to his own villa on his arrival, and after attending to his inner man, he asks his housekeeper, "Any news of importance, Mrs Bluff?"

"Well, sir, nought but that 'bout Mr 'Obart."

"Mr Hobart, what of him?"

"Why, sir, don't yer know as how he went to Christchurch to get married; but as how when he was agettin' done, a wife of 'is as wasn't dead walked straight in and says, ''E's mine!'"

"Good gracious, Mrs Bluff, are you sure of this?"

"Suttingly I is, sir; the police are a lookin' for 'im. I knows that, for my good man wor here and told me so."

Fixer asks no more questions, but for some time his housekeeper keeps on expatiating on the awful sin, until at last Fixer says impatiently, "That will do, Mrs Bluff, that will do."

As soon as she was gone Felix rises, and starts immediately for his office. It is close on five, and he knows that unless he hurries he cannot reach the place before his clerk goes, and he wants the key to-night more than ever. When he arrives, Pierce is just closing for the day.

"Ah, just in time, Pierce. I want you to go down and learn if Captain Davis is on board the Homeward Bound. If he is not there you must find out where he is, and let him know I wish to see him at once. You need not come back, for I will lock up myself."

As soon as the clerk was gone, Fixer took pen and paper and wrote for some time.

"Now, I wonder," he says to himself when he has finished, "if that fool will be back. Yes, for certain he will, as now he will think of what I said about a sail off the

coast. He will also go to his office, but it will be too late. This letter at any rate he shall find, if I am in time."

Fixer leaves his office, and walks as speedily as possible to Hobart's, and finding the last clerk just leaving, he asks him if what he has heard is true.

"About the marriage? Oh yes, sir, it is true enough."

"Ah, indeed," says Fixer; "however, here is a letter for him, if you will kindly put it on his table, so that he may get it as soon as he returns."

"But won't he be arrested, sir?"

"Well, if he is, he will, I presume, be bailed out, and then he will get it. If he don't, it is not my business. I promised to leave it, and there it is."

The clerk took the note, and, as requested, placed it on Hobart's table.

Fixer now returns to his office and waits, and presently Captain Davis arrives.

"Ah, Davis, I am glad you are here," says Felix, "as I want you; but not just now. Let me see; if you will look in to-night about eleven I shall then have finished what I am about, and we can talk over the affair. I would not bother you to come so late, but I shall in all probability want you to go to sea to-morrow, and as I shall perhaps be in the country when you go, I must see you to-night. Let none of your men off the ship to-night, captain, for the glass is falling, and you know how dangerous this coast is in rough weather."

"I shall take care, sir, and also be here at eleven, as you say."

"Yes, captain, at eleven."

When he is once more alone, Fixer opens his book, and for

hours he works on till he sees it is close on eleven. Putting out the light, he now leaves the office, but by the back entrance, and makes his way to his own house, which is only some two or three hundred yards off. Mrs Bluff is up awaiting his arrival, and asks if he would like something to eat before bedtime.

"No, thanks," he replies, "nor need you remain up. I shall perhaps call you early, so you had better get to bed.

Mrs Bluff did not require to be told twice, as she was only too willing to go, and in a few minutes she could be heard sending forth sounds which showed she slept soundly.

Fixer now goes to his room, and in less than ten minutes he has packed in a large seaman's bag most of his clothing. Looking around the room for some minute or two, he says, in a low voice, "Good-bye to Timaru. Some pleasant hours have I had here, but they are over now;" and taking up the bag again he leaves the house, and is soon again back in his office. He takes some ceiling wax, and he fastens up the mouth of the bag, and just as he has done so a knock is heard at the office door; and, opening it, he finds himself face to face with the skipper of the Homeward Bound.

"Captain, have you a boat ashore?" is Fixer's first question.

"No, sir, but I can have one in a few minutes."

"Well, just take that bag with you to the beach, call off a boat, and put it on board. Then return, as I wish to see you again. I am sorry to trouble you so much, as it is late, but I cannot prevent it."

"No trouble, sir," answers the captain, and off he goes with the bag.

"Now," says Fixer, "it will take him an hour to go off and back. I must finish and be on the shore when he returns, so that he will not have to come here."

Again he resumes his work, but this time he is evidently in the greatest possible hurry, and in less than half an hour he has finished.

He had been preparing a balance-sheet of the firm of Fixer and Hobart, and as he cast his eye over it, he mutters, "What a thing it is to have a fool for a partner. Two years only we have been in this together, and our net profit stands at £6958 13s 4d. Had it not been for that infernal land spec., and this last affair, which is worse still, we should have increased our business, and soon been independent. But I must not waste time. That's all right, and in justice to Perryman, who will have enough to pay, I'll leave this, and also a letter. Yes, I have that to do yet;" and again he starts and writes. When he has finished, he encloses the balance-sheet, which is headed, "Balance-sheet of Fixer and Hobart, sole members of the firm of Fixer and Co."

"Now, let me see, where can I put this letter so that they will find it in about three or four days. Ah, I have it; in the room where Pierce is working, at the back of the wool. It will take him some time to work his way that far. Now a note to tell him that I am away for a day or two. Ha! ha! a day or two!"

Fixer has soon written his letter, and, after placing it where he had intended, he says, "Now, his key which I gave him the other day will let him in;" and having put the books back in the safe, and placed the key, which had never before left his possession, in the table drawer, and he wishes the office another good-bye, as though it were animate, and is soon on his way to the beach.

It is twelve o'clock when he reaches the place, and he is just in time, as Davis is about to land.

Fixer, however stops him, and telling the captain that he would like to take a turn on the water, he sprang into the boat, and they were soon away from the shore.

No sooner were they off than Fixer called Davis on one side, saying, "Captain, take that boat on board, and lift anchor and set sail as soon as possible. We have a fair wind now, and a sea voyage will do me good."

The captain looked up with surprise, but knowing the man who spoke, the orders were obeyed, and long before morn they were right out to sea.

"What course are you making for, captain?" asked Fixer.

"For where you told me, sir, I was to take this cargo."

"Stay," said Fixer, "put on full sail and steer as direct for San Francisco as possible."

CHAPTER XXV.

Hobart hurried along, intent on getting to his offices. Had he looked up as he passed Fixer's place, he would have seen the light still burning in his office window; but he is too anxious concerning his own affairs to notice anything. He reaches his own office at last, enters the door, and goes at once to his own room, which is on the upper floor. The first thing he sees is a letter on his table, marked "Private." Hurriedly he tears it open, and reads.

"Curse you for ever," he exclaims. "Then I am indeed undone."

The letter which Hobart now throws on the table runs as follows:—

MY DEAR HOBART,—

When you receive this I shall in all probability be sailing *off this coast.* Your defective memory has again served you a scurvy trick, and that immediately that I am away from you. I feel awfully sorry that I cannot be here to assist in the celebration of your nuptials in a becoming manner; but there, you will have all the police force to do that, and as you have been so very considerate of their feelings on all occasions since your elevation in Timaru, they will be sure to think that one good turn deserves another. It was most unkind of you to let me go to Dunedin without giving me notice of your intentions, for then I could have to some little extent prepared for the voyage I am about to take, It was also too bad of your first wife to turn up just as you were getting married; she might have waited until you got the marriage portion. Poor old Parks, too; what a disappointment for him losing such a treasure of a son-in-law, to say nothing of the terrible grief Miss Parks must endure. As to Frank Perryman, I don't think he requires any sympathy, for he must be a great gainer by the whole transaction, as of course he will now have the business, and can *if he pleases* marry Clara. However, it but seldom occurs that one of your profession gets what the majority of its members deserve; so you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are the glorious exception. I have left everything in my office in perfect order, and now I will say, ta, ta. I would have waited a little longer, but you see my evidence against a partner might be required; so, on the principle of honesty amoug thieves, I go.

Yours,

FELIX FIXER.

For some time after reading this letter, Hobart walked excitedly up and down his office. "Frank Perryman marry Clara! Why does he taunt me with that too? But he shall not—not if I——" and here he paused, as if the alternative in his mind was too terrible to be spoken. "I will see Clara; aye, if the house be full of police. One more interview, and as she was always true to me in the hour of trouble she may listen to me now, though she would not when last I spoke. Ah! but I had almost forgotten the key of the safe."

Hobart at once proceeded to Perryman's room, but to his dismay he found the door was locked. For some time he used every effort to force the door, but all to no purpose, and at last he turned

away, and felt as though all the world had conspired against him. "I will go home at once," he said, "and after I have seen Clara I will retire up-country for a time, and then I must be guided by events." Descending the stairs, he reaches the street door, and is just in the act of turning to leave when, from the shadow of the next doorway steps a policeman, who, placing his hand on Hobart's shoulder, says :—

"I arrest you, John Hobart, on the charge of bigamy."

"Hands off, sir ; you can arrest without mauling me."

"I could," replied the policeman, "but as it is simply a matter of pleasing myself, I prefer letting you know your actual position. I remember you before, John Hobart ;" and before he knew what the policeman was about the villain was handcuffed.

"What, would you handcuff a peaceful individual ? You shall hear of this again," cried the prisoner indignantly.

"I will take all chance of that, Mr Hobart. But come on, I have been looking forward to the pleasure of putting you in the cell with some drunkards, who will no doubt sympathise with you," and before long Hobart found himself the inmate of H.M.'s lock-up, where we will leave him.

* * * * * *

Bad news, they say, flies apace, and there is every reason this time to believe it, for the next morning all in the small town of Timaru knew of John Hobart's incarceration, but few, if any, felt any compassion for him.

"Frank," said Maud, "what a disgraceful affair, and what a bad job for poor Clara. How unwise of him ; surely he must have been mad."

"I fear, Maud, there was method in his madness, but he never anticipated such a termination as this. As to Clara, when you know all, as you must soon, you will alter your opinion."

"I don't know, Frank; any sister must regret her brother being in such a position, no matter how bad he may be."

"John Hobart, Maud, is no relation to Clara whatever. She is but the victim of one of his vile plots, and her only feeling towards him must be one of loathing;" and as Frank finished speaking he left the room.

"Louie," said Maud later on, "I can't understand Frank this morning. What do you think he said when I spoke of this affair of Hobart's!" and Maud repeated her brother's remarks.

"Maud," said Louie, "what Frank said was quite true, and now, as you must know very soon, I may as well be your informant," and Miss Branscombe forthwith related all she knew, and all that passed between her and Clara.

"I would not have believed such a villain existed," said Maud, "and in our very midst. I shudder at the thought of it. Poor Clara! no wonder she was serious under such circumstances. Did she know he was married."

"I believe not, nor do I think she knew he went to get married, for as I told you she has gone to meet her father."

During the same day Clara and Matthew Grant returned from Christchurch. Frank met them, and begged them, under the circumstances, to accept his hospitality.

"We shall be well able to find room for you," he said, "and will do our best to make you comfortable. By the bye, Miss Grant," he continued, turning to Clara, in whose ears the name sounded strangely, "the letters you asked me to write for have arrived and are now at the office. I will bring or rather send them up to you as soon as I go down."

The meeting between Grant and Clara had been most affecting, for the poor father's joy knew no bounds, while Clara herself was too deeply moved for some time to speak; but the old man's genial kindly nature reassured her, and she had related all to him, saying as she finished, "You will forgive me, father, for leaving as I did. I verily believed you had in your passion done what he said."

"Forgive you, my child? Aye, were it ten thousand times as bad as you can deem it; but I see no wrong, you were only the victim with me of the plots of one of the basest scoundrels alive. But now justice will be done, for I saw his marriage, and knew the whole of the circumstances of it; and on the last night we were together I had intended to tell you all, but as you will no doubt remember, you asked me to leave it till the following day."

"True," said Clara, "I remember but too well. Had it not been for my waywardness all this trouble would have been spared you;" and as she thought of this tears flowed from her eyes.

"Cry not, my girl; if I have suffered, it has done me good, and but for your misfortunes I should not regret it. We shall now, please God, have some happiness, and the past will in the future teach us submission, though it has been a bitter lesson; for out of much evil often comes good."

They were engaged in talking over past events when Louie entered the room to bring Clara some letters which Frank had sent up.

"Here is one for you, father," said Clara.

"For me, my child? How does anyone know of my whereabouts?"

When the old man had mastered the contents of the letter he had received, he exclaimed, "Clara, God is good; look you,

a letter from Squire Lurtonshaw, offering me at any time I like to accept it my old position of agent;" and the poor old man, who had so often given way to tears from anguish of heart, now cried for very joy and gratitude.

There, sure enough, was the letter, which was of course dated some time back, offering to Matthew the Squire's condolence for the wrong he had suffered, as one of his kinsmen had been the instrument, and offering as some amends the situation again which he had formerly held. "You need not," the letter said, "hesitate to take it. The agent who now holds the position is the one that succeeded you, and now he only retains his position in the hopes you will return, as he has long since wished to retire."

"Father, this is indeed good news. Ought we not to be thankful for so many blessings?"

"Aye, my child, we should indeed, but God is most gracious to those who to the end are of faith;" and they both, from excess of joy, wept tears of gratitude.

With Frank and Louie things now seemed to progress well. They seemed to understand each other, and Frank often wondered why he did not as of old seek for the company of Clara, who was always with her father, comforting and cheering him when they spoke of the future. Time went on, but none of them knew or apprehended the blow that was to fall on poor Frank; but soon people began to notice Fixer's absence, and then all at once, as though a thunderbolt had descended, Fixer's letter was found by Pierce, and delivered to Frank. This explained all, for he had made a clean breast of the whole affair. His letter was full of sympathy, although he apologised for daring to offer it. Fixer said that Mr Perryman might doubt his sincerity, but he assured him nevertheless it was not feigned. "I assure you," the epistle went on, "had I not listened to Hobart in the land scheme all would have been well. Of

course, this second marriage would not have occurred had I been near to prevent it. You will doubtless remember the evening of Hobart's party. The anecdote which I related was simply to keep him in check, for he had actually dared to hint to me at the time such intentions. What I related was true in its entirety, for I was, as I said, a witness."

Poor Frank, after scanning this news, at once went home, and was met by Maud and Louie, who immediately noticed his woe-begone appearance.

"Frank," said both, "oh, what is wrong? You look so ill; what has happened?"

"Wrong," answered Frank, "alas! all is wrong, for I am ruined through that accursed Hobart."

A full explanation followed, and now it was the turn for the house of Perryman to be in grief. Frank seemed on the verge of insanity.

"I would not care," said he, "but I fear I shall not be able to pay up in full, and then the name of Perryman, on which no man could ever cast the slightest imputation, will be sullied, and all through my own carelessness."

"Frank," replied Maud, "what I have is yours; but bear up. Meet your troubles manfully, and perhaps they may not be so bad as they appear.

Frank, however, seemed to lose all heart, and would be at home to nobody. He feared the sympathy of his friends as though he were the guilty party, and the thought that he would have to meet all his liabilities troubled his mind.

Later on the same day, Louie met Frank as he was coming from the garden. The affectionate girl showed too plainly how she had taken his misfortune to heart, for her eyes were red and swollen with weeping. He noticed this instantly, and his conscience smote him.

"Louie, poor Louie," he thought, "what a fool I have been; she must love me; and now when it is too late, for I am a beggar, I feel I love her too."

"Frank," said Louie, almost in tears, "I am so sorry for you that I know not how to express myself. I wished to say that—as you know—I have—well, what I want to tell you is this: I have the money your dear father left me, and its interest, now about £1200. You are welcome to it, I assure you, and I trust you will show you believe me, and take it to help you out of this terrible calamity."

"Louie," said Frank, looking her full in the face, for there he saw more confirmation of his last reflections, "you are too good; but no, you shall not suffer for my thoughtlessness. I fear I have been very unkind to you, for I now see you love me, and have done so for a long time; and now, when it is too late, I find I love you."

Louie was so full of joy at hearing such a confession that for the time she forgot all else. She almost fell into his arms, and Frank, placing his arm around her, kissed her clear and loving face. For some seconds they stood thus, while both felt the joy of true love. Gently then she disengaged herself, and, looking up to him, she said—

"Frank, I know I love you, and how long I have done so I can't say; and now, if you do not refuse me this pleasure, you will add to my happiness, and I shall feel my love is returned. Take my money—or rather your money,—and if not as a gift, then as a loan, and some day I will take it back."

He tried hard to dissuade her from this, but he could not, and at last, to please and satisfy her, allowed her to give him an order for the amount.

"Do you know," Maud said to Frank some time after the interview just narrated, "poor old Whale, who seems as much

cut up as any of us, has been here every day, begging to see you. He has come up again. Do see him, the poor old fellow seems quite hurt when he is told you are at home to nobody. Just now, when I saw him, he said, 'Do ask him, Miss, to see me. I am no idle visitor, and you know I served your father for so long I would so like to show my gratitude for past favours.'"

"I will see him," said Frank, "although I would far sooner not; still, as he wishes it so much, and as he has been a true and honest servant, show him in, Maud."

She was only too glad to do this, and the poor old man could not have been more affected were it his own son. Maud was about to run off when she had shown him in, but he said—

"Pardon me, Miss Perryman, but I would, if your brother does not object, sooner you stayed, for what I have to say is, I am pleased, not bad news."

"Stay," said Frank, "by all means. Be seated, Whale."

"Thank you, sir, but I feel too excited to sit, for I have waited now for three whole days to tell you what I now am about to say, and I feel that I could not endure another day were I not to speak. You remember, Mr Perryman, when Mr Hobart first joined you, you were kind enough to entrust to me the drawing up of the deed of partnership."

"Yes," said Frank, "I remember."

"Well, sir, with respect to Mr Hobart, I did not like him any better scarcely than I do now, and I had my suspicions of him; for, sir, one day, when I had occasion to go to John's office on business for you, I disturbed him busy at work. I saw at a glance the paper which was before him; he had your name written all over it; and when he observed me looking, he turned it over, but he forgot to do the same with another document which bore your signature."

"Good gracious," said Frank, "practising forgery."

"Aye, sir. I have always regretted I did not tell you. But to proceed. The deed of partnership, when drawn, had a clause which is often put in, I know, but one that I feel sure you are not aware is in this one, for it set forth that one partner should not draw on or from the firm, or execute any negotiable instrument, without the consent of the other being first obtained in writing."

"Is this so?" said Frank; "then I am more than ever to blame, for I not only neglected my business in the first place, but I neglect it now by not looking after my affairs. Whale," he added, "accept my heartfelt thanks for this. I do not say I shall take full advantage of this clause, still it will save the name, and for nothing else do I care."

After both Frank and Maud had again thanked him, Whale withdrew, more overjoyed perhaps than he had ever been; for he spoke truly when he said Frank's interests were his whole thought and care.

The same day brought Frierland down from Christchurch. He had heard of this misfortune to Frank, and had come to offer his assistance and condolence. The two talked the matter over; and though Frank declared he had no intention of taking any actual advantage of the saving clause, Frierland at last obtained his consent to his doing what he could for him in the business amicably. As the bills were not yet due, the matter, by Frierland's advice, was allowed to remain *in statu quo*, although Frank was anxious to have the affair settled.

* * * * * *

THE TRIAL.

The sitting of the Supreme Court, as it so happened, was just on after Hobart's committal, so there was but little delay,

and at last the day arrived. Both Mr Parks and Mr Torridge were intent upon having nothing short of justice.

The evidence of Mary Torridge having been taken, her father was examined, to show it was useless to wait to subpœna the officiating minister, as he was long since dead. After this had been accepted by the Court, Hobart addressed his Honour and asked for dismissal, on the ground that no sufficient evidence had been adduced, as there was nothing to corroborate what the first witness had sworn to save the certificate, which he stated was not admissible being only documentary.

"But," said the Crown Solicitor, "we have another witness. Call Matthew Grant!"

"Matthew Grant!" muttered Hobart, and for some time he seemed completely cast down. His determination to brazen it out, however, returned, and after Matthew had given his evidence, which was but a corroboration of May Torridge's—or, as she should be called, Mary Hobart,—he addressed Grant as follows:—

"You were, I believe, a life transport, and but only recently obtained your discharge through some doubt, or on account of your meritorious conduct."

"I was, through the instrumentality of your sister, convicted of a crime which I was afterwards proved innocent of by her death-bed confession."

At this a murmur of approbation ran through the Court, which was silenced, and proceedings went on.

"I can, your Honour," said Torridge, "confirm the words of the last witness."

"I am perfectly satisfied," said his Honour. "Is that your case?" he asked, turning to the Crown Prosecutor.

"Yes, your Honour."

"Then, prisoner, you may make your address to the jury."

John Hobart, in a bold manner, attempted to address the Court, but gradually his bravery forsook him, for he saw the jury were against him. His principal defence was that as he had never lived with or been with his wife after their marriage, he argued that it was not binding on him; and with a few more remarks, which were simply made to flatter the jury, he finished speaking.

The jury, on being asked if they wished to retire and consider their verdict, the foreman said: "We are unanimous in our verdict, and consequently there is no necessity for retiring."

"Say then, gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner, John Hobart, guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty," was the answer, given in a clear ringing voice, and there was again a murmur of satisfaction in the Court.

"Then," said his Honour, "it only remains for me to pass sentence; and I must say I never presided on any case where there was more clear and conclusive evidence of a prisoner's guilt. Yet you, prisoner, after all the wrong you and yours have done the unfortunate witness Grant, would try and injure him further by maligning or casting a doubt even now on his character. A more hardened piece of villainy than this I never witnessed. Apart from the fact of the charge, in which I thoroughly concur with the gentlemen of the jury, you have been a member of the Bar, a profession which should be honour itself. I have one little satisfaction, if I may so term it, and that is that no longer where the British flag flies will you again disgrace a profession, the integrity of which should never be impugned. The sentence of this Court is that you be imprisoned in one of Her Majesty's gaols for five years, with hard labour,

and I regret that the law does not give me power to award to you greater punishment, for you undoubtedly deserve it."

* * * * *

"So Clara and her father are going to return to England," said Maud to her brother.

"Yes, I believe so," answered Frank, "the best possible thing for the poor old fellow. This place would only be full of reminiscences of misfortune."

The speakers were here interrupted by the servant entering to announce Mr Frierland.

"Well, Frank, I am the bearer of good news," said the new arrival. "Ah Miss Perryman, I beg your pardon, my anxiety for your brother made me overlook your presence."

"Pray do not mention it. Tell us your news, unless, indeed I am not to hear it, in which case I will retire, although I like to share my brother's good news if I may."

"I think there is not any occasion for you to leave, eh, Frank?"

"I know of none," was the answer.

"Well then, the affairs of the late mercantile firm have been gone through—a splendid scheme by the way; this Fixer must have been a born genius. The examination shows that the venture is good and sound, and all has been arranged. Messrs Drons & Son, the original owners of this land which has caused so much trouble are now, for a small consideration in addition to the thousand already received, prepared to take it back, and an order will soon be issued from the Supreme Court sanctioning the arrangement, so I will be the first, I am happy to say, to congratulate you on your return to prosperity. By the bye,

do you remember my advice to you about this Hobart? Now will you say phrenology is not to be considered ?"

"Never again," said Frank; "but you know when I took him as a partner I was but young in the business, and I overlooked all else when I considered how essential his more matured knowledge would be."

"Say no more now, Frank; it might have turned out worse than it has, that's certain."

The afternoon of the same day Frank and Louie, quite by accident of course, met in the library, where she had gone for some book. She looked now bright and happy, for the honour and wealth of the house of Perryman had been saved, and she was in high glee.

"Ah, Louie," said Frank, "you remember I took from you a loan, which I am pleased to say I am in a position to repay, and as to interest, what shall I give you for interest."

"I shall take neither principle nor interest," she replied, half pouting, for she liked not his reference to money matters so soon after what had passed between them.

"Do not look cross, Louie, for I had more to say, but now you frighten me. Shall I speak on or no ?"

"Speak! why, yes, Frank;" but I regret to say he again disappointed her, for instead of at once doing as she bid him, he took her in his arms, and with all the tenderness of his nature, whispered something which evidently atoned to some extent for his previous wrong doing. However, some half-hour later Louie ran to her room blushing with joy, and before the day was closed all knew there was to be a wedding in which Louie Branscombe and Frank Perryman were to take prominent parts.

And now, gentle reader, I have, much as I may regret it

to draw to a close, for there are many of the characters in this drama who have become real in lieu of imaginary ones to me, and I feel loth to part with them; but as the best of friends must separate sooner or later, so must we. I would prolong this story some few pages, but as I have only your approbation in view, I fear there would be a chance of my losing rather than gaining that were I to do so.

Frank and Louie were married some three months after their engagement, and a happier couple it would be hard to imagine. He often wondered why he had ever overlooked Louie as he had; but, as he said, he felt doubly happy now to know that Providence had so far watched over him in giving him one of the very best of wives. About six months after their nuptials there came by an American paper, a notice of the loss of the barque Homeward Bound. She had become a total wreck off the coast of California, and one extraordinary thing mentioned in connection with the affair was the remark of her owner, a gentleman by the name of Felix Fixer. In the coolest manner possible he exclaimed, as he stepped on board the rescuing boat, which was a trader from 'Frisco: "We brought nothing with us when we entered this world, and some of us have a very good show of having the same amount to take with us when we depart."

All hands were saved on board, but not an article of value except what the passengers wore.

"Well," said Louie, after Frank had read the account, "how like Mr Fixer to be sure. I think all was not bad of that man."

"Bad or no, little wife, his villainy, like that of most others, did him little good."

"True, Frank, there can be but one opinion, that the straight course is always the best."

Matthew Grant and Clara returned to England, where they

lived happy and contented. They often speak of their past troubles, and Matthew will sometimes remark :—

"For my part, child, I regret none of my misfortunes, for they taught me submission and my duty towards God and man."

Two years after his conviction, news came that Hobart had first gone mad, and had then, while unwatched one day, thrown himself down the prison well, and before he could be rescued he was no more. So the righteous prospered after many trials, and to the guilty the day of retribution came when they expected it not.

THE END.

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