GRIF:

A STORY OF COLONIAL LIFE,

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS ON THE SNOW," &c.,

WITH

FRONTISPICE BY N. CHEVALIER.

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DEDICATION.

In commencing to write this story, the Author was animated by the belief that its dedication to his Mother would afford her great pleasure; but he has, while writing, learned that Death has forbidden the fulfilment of his cherished project. Although the Author cannot commend his work to the partial love which would, he believes, have ensured for him praises of which a son might have been proud, he can, with reverence, dedicate it to

THE MEMORY
OF A
BELOVED MOTHER.
PREFACE.

The Author concluded his preface to his last year's Christmas Story—"Shadows on the Snow"—with the words, "May we meet again!" The generous encouragement which that book met with from the press and from the public, has stimulated him to fresh efforts, the result of which is contained in the following pages. The design of the story of "Grif" differs materially from that of "Shadows on the Snow." It possesses none of the purely imaginative features which characterised the Author's previous Christmas Story; but he hopes that it will not, on that account, be less welcome to the general reader.
Without further preface, the Author leaves his book in the hands of his readers. In years to come, when the Colonies have a literature of their own—a literature worthy of their material advancement—he will be glad to think that he has taken a humble part in its development.

Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand.

Christmas, 1866.
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GRIF.

CHAPTER I.

GRIF RELATES SOME OF HIS EXPERIENCES.

In one of the most thickly-populated parts of Melbourne city, where poverty and vice struggle for breathing-space, and where narrow lanes and filthy thoroughfares jostle each other, savagely, there stands, surrounded by a hundred miserable hovels, a gloomy house, which might be likened to a sullen tyrant, frowning down a crowd of abject, poverty-stricken slaves. From its appearance it might have been built a century ago: decay and rottenness were apparent from roof to base: but in reality, it was barely a dozen years old. It had lived a wicked and depraved life had this house, which might account for its premature decay. It looked like a hoary old sinner, and in every wrinkle of its weatherboard casing was hidden a story which would make respectability shudder. There are, in every large city, dilapidated or decayed houses of this description, which we avoid, and pass by quickly, as we do drunken men in the streets.

In one of the apartments of this house, on a dismally wet night, were two inmates, crouched before a fire as miserable as the night. Down the rickety chimney
the wind whistled as if in mockery, and the rain-drops fell upon the embers, hissing damp misery into the eyes of the two human beings, who sat before the fire, bearing their burden quietly, if not patiently.

They were a strange couple. The one, a fair young girl, with a face so mild and sweet, that the beholder, looking upon it when in repose, felt gladdened by the sight. A sweet, fair young face; a face to love. A look of sadness was in her dark brown eyes, and on the fringes, which half veiled their beauty, were traces of tears. The other, a stunted, ragged boy; with pock-marked face; with bold and brazen eyes; with a vicious smile too often playing about his lips. His hand was supporting his cheek; hers was lying idly upon her knee. The fitful glare of the scanty fire threw light upon both: and to look upon the one, so small and white, with the blue veins so delicately traced; and upon the other, so rough and horny, with every sinew speaking of muscular strength; made one wonder by what mystery of life the two had come into companionship. That the present was no chance meeting, and that there existed a freemasonry between them, were proven by his sidling close to her, and peering up at her face for a few moments, in silence. That he met with no responsive look evidently troubled him, as was shewn by the unquiet glances he threw at her, furtively. He shifted himself uneasily upon his seat, and presently asked,

"Wot are yer thinkin' of, Ally?"

"I am thinking of my life," she answered, dreamily, without raising her eyes; "I am trying to see the end of it."
"Wot's the use of botherin'?" the boy exclaimed.
"Thinkin' won't alter it."
"So it seems," she said, sadly; "my head aches with the whirl."
"You oughtn't to be un'appy, Ally," the boy said; "You're very good-looking and very young."
"Yes, I am very young," she sighed. "How old are you, Grif?"
"Blest if I know," Grif replied, with a grin. "I aint agoin' to bother. I'm old enough, I am!"
"Do you remember your father, Grif?" she asked.
"Don't I?" responded Grif. "He was a rum un, he was. Usen't he to wollop us, neither!"

And, lost in the recollection, Grif rubbed his back, sympathetically.

"And your mother?" asked the girl.
"Never seed her," he replied, shortly.

And thereafter they fell into silence for a while. But the boy's memory had been stirred by her questions, and he presently spoke again:

"You see, Ally," he said; "father was a old 'and, and a horfle bad un he was. He was worse nor me—oh, ever so much; but then of course," he added, apologetically, "he was a sight older, and he used to lush—my eye! he could lush, could father! Well, wen he was pretty well screwed, he used to lay into us, Dick and me, and kick us out of the 'ouse. Then Dick and me used to fight, for Dick wanted to lay in to me too, and I wasn't goin' to stand that. We never got nothin' to eat unless we took it. And one day I was trottled up afore the beak, for takin' a pie out of a confetchoner's. They didn't get the pie,
though; I eat that. The beak he guv me a week for that pie, and wosn't I precious pleased at it! I wos sorry when they turned me out, for all that week I got enough to eat and drink. I arksed the cove to let me stop in another week, so that I might be reformed, as the beak sed, but he only larfed at me, and turned me out. Wen I got home, father, he ses, 'Where 'ave you bin, Griff?' And I tells him, I've bin to quod. 'Wot for?' he arks. 'For taking a pie,' I ses. Blest if I didn't get the worst wollopin' I ever 'ad! 'You've bin and disgraced yer family,' he sed; 'git out of my sight, you warmint; I wos never in quod for stealin' a pie!' And with that he shies a bottle at my 'ed. I caught it, but there was nothin' in it! I wos very savage for that wollopin'! Wot's disgrace to one's family, thinks I, wen a cove wants grub! I was awful 'ungry, as well as savage; so I makes for the confetchoner's, and takes another pie. I bolted the pie quick, for I knew they would be down on me; and I was trotted up afore the beak agin, and he guv me a month. Wosn't I jolly glad! Wen I cum out of quod, father had cut off to the diggins; and as I wanted to git into quod agin, I went to the confetchoner's, and took another pie. The beak, wosn't he flabbergasted! 'Wot?' he ses, 'ave you bin and stole another pie!' and then he looks so puzzled that I couldn't help larfin'. 'Wot do you go and do it for?' ses he. 'Cos I'm 'ungry, your Washup,' ses I. I was five times in quod for takin' pies out of that confetchoner's shop. Next time I was nabbed, though. The missus of the shop, she knew I wos jist cum out of quod, so she 'ides herself behind the door; and wen I bolts in to git
my pie, she cumns out quick, and ketches 'old of me by the scruff. 'You little warmint,' she ses; 'you sha'n't wear my life out in this 'ere way; 'ere's a pie for you;' and she 'olds out a big un. Well, you see, I was puzzled. 'If I take yer pie, missus,' I ses, 'will you let me sleep under the counter? 'Wot do yer mean?' she ses. Then I tells her that it's no use her givin' me a pie, for I 'adn't no place to sleep in; and that she'd better let me take one and give me in charge, for then I should 'ave a blanket at the lock-up. She wasn't a bad un, by no manner of means. 'Ere, my pore boy,' she ses; 'ere's a pie, and 'ere's a shillin'. Don't steal no more pies, or you'll break my 'art. You shall 'ave a shillin' a-week if you'll promise not to worry me, and wenever you want a pie I'll giv you one if you arks for it.' I don't arks her often," said Grif; "wen I'm wery 'ungry I go to the shop. She's a good old sort, she is; and I gets my shillin' a-week reglar."

"And have you not heard of your father since he went away?" asked the girl.

"No; 'cept that I was told permiskusly that he was cuttin' some rum capers up the country. They do say he was a bushranger, but I aint agoin' to bother. I was brought up very queer, I was; not like other coves. Father he never giv us no eddication; p'raps he didn't 'ave none to give. But he might have giv us grub when we wanted it."

"Yours is a hard life, Grif," the girl said, pityingly.

"Yes, it is 'ard," the boy assented; "precious 'ard, specially wen a cove can't get enough to eat. But I s'pose its all right. Wot's the use of botherin'? I
wonder," he continued, musingly, "where the rich coves
gets all their money from? If I was a swell, and 'ad lots
of tin, I'd give a pore chap like me a bob now and then.
But they're horrid stingy, Ally, is the swells; they don't
giv nothin' away for nothin'. Wen I was in quod, a
preacher chap comes and preaches to me. He sets 'issel' down
upon the bench, and reads somethin' out of a book
—a bible, you know—and arfter he'd preached for 'arf a
hour, he ses, 'Wot do yer think of that, 'nighted boy?' 'It's
wery good,' I ses; 'but I can't eat it.' 'Put yer trust above,'
he ses. 'But s'pose all the grub is down 'ere,' ses I; 'I
can't go up there and fetch it.' Then he groans, and tells
me a story about a hinfant who was found in the bull-
rushes, arfter it 'ad bin deserted, and I ups and tells him
that I've been deserted, and wy don't somebody come and
take me out of the bullrushes! Wosn't he puzzled,
neither." Grif chuckled, and then encouraged by his
companion's silence, he resumed—

"He cum agin, did the preacher cove, afore I was let
out, and he preaches a preach about charity. 'Don't you
steal no more,' he ses, 'or yer sole 'll go to morchial per-
dition. Men is charitable and good; jist you try 'em,
and give up your evil corses.' So wen I gets out of quod,
ses I to myself, I'll jist try if the preacher cove is right.
I waited till I was 'ungry, and couldn't get nothin' to eat,
without stealin' it. I could 'ave took a trotter, for the
trotter man was a drinkin' at a bar, and his basket wos
on a bench; but I wouldn't. No; I goes straight to
the swell streets, and there I sees the swells a walkin' up
and down, and liftin' their 'ats, and smilin' at the gals.
I didn't 'ave courage at first to speak to 'em, but wen
I did, send I may live! they started back as if I wos a mad dawg. You be awf, they ses, or you'll be guv in charge. Wot could a poor beggar like me do, arfter that? I dodged about, wery sorry I didn't take that trotter, wen who should I see cumin' along but the preacher chap. "'Ere's a slant!' ses I to myself. He 'ad a lady on 'is arm, and they both looked wery grand. But wen I went up to him he starts back too, and ses, 'Begawn, young repererbate!' Wen I heerd that, I sed, Charity be blowed! and I goes and finds out the trotter-man, and takes two trottters, and no one knows nothin' about it."

Before he had finished his story, the girl's thoughts had wandered again. A heavy step in the adjoining apartment roused her.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"That's Jim Pizey's foot," replied the boy; "they're up to some deep game, they are. They wos at it last night."

"Did you hear them talking about it, Grif?" she asked, earnestly.

"I did and I didn't," Grif replied. "I wos arf asleep, while they wos whisperin'. It's somethin' precious deep and dangerous, I know that; for Jim Pizey he ses, 'We can all make our fortunes, mates, in three months, if we're game. It'll be a jolly life, and I know all the moves,' ses he. Then I falls off in a doze, and presently I 'ears 'em talkin' agin, betweenwhiles, like. Jim Pizey he does most of the jaw. 'We can stick up the escort in the Black Forest,' he ses, 'and we don't want to do nothin' more, all our lives.' He's a rum un is Jim, and he never
ses nothin' unless he means it. But I say, Ally," the boy said, suddenly, "you won't peach, will you? I should git my neck broke if they was to know that I blabbled."

"Don't fear me, Grif," said the girl. "Who were there?"

"There was Jim Pizey, and Ned Rutt, and Black Sam, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman, and"—but here Grif stopped, suddenly.

"Who else, Grif?" asked the girl, laying her hand upon his arm.

"I was considerin', Ally," the boy replied, casting a furtive look at her white face, "if there was anybody else. I was arf asleep, you know."

"Was my—my husband there, Grif?" she inquired, in a voice of pain.

"Yes, he was there," the boy returned, reluctantly. "I say, Ally, wy don't yer cut away from 'im? What do you stop 'ere for?"

"Hush!" she said. "Was he speaking with them about this?"

"No, he was very quiet. They was a tryin' to persuade him to join 'em; but he wouldn't agree. They giv him lots of lush, too, and you know, Ally, he can"—but Grif pulled himself up short, dismayed and remorseful, for his companion had broken into a passionate fit of weeping.

"I didn't mean to do it, Ally," he said, sorrowfully. "Don't take on so. I'll never say it agin. I'm a hignorant beast, that's wot I am!" he exclaimed, digging his knuckles into his eyes. "I'm always a puttin' my foot in it."
"Never mind, Grif," said the girl, sobbing. "Go on. Tell me all you heard. I must know. Oh, my heart! my heart!" and her tears fell thick and fast upon his hand.

He waited until she had somewhat recovered herself, and then proceeded very slowly.

"They wos a tryin' to persuade 'im to join 'em. They tried all sorts of dodges, but they wos all no go. The Tenderhearted Oysterman, he ses, he's a soft-hearted cove, and wouldn't 'urt a fly, and if he thort there wos any violenc again' to be done, he wouldn't be the man to 'ave a 'and in it. But they couldn't get him to say Yes; and at last Jim Pizey he gets up in a horfie scot, and he ses, ' Look 'ere, mate, we've bin and let you in this 'ere scheme, and we aren't agoin' to 'ave it blown upon. You make up yer mind verry soon to jine us, or it'll be worse for you.'"

"And my husband"—

"I didn't 'ear nothin' more. I fell right off asleep, and when I woke up they wos gone."

"Grif," said the girl, "he must not join in this plot. I must keep him from crime. He has been unfortunate—led away by bad companions."

"Yes," put in Grif, "we're a precious bad lot, we are."

"But his heart is good, Grif," she continued.

"Wot does he mean by treatin' you like this, then?" interrupted Grif, indignantly. "You've got no business 'ere, you 'avent. You ought to 'ave a 'ouse of yer own, you ought."

"I can't explain; you would not understand," she
said. "Enough that he is my husband; it is sufficient that my lot is linked with his; it is sufficient that, through poverty and disgrace, I must be by his side. I can never desert him while I have life. God grant that I may save him yet!"

The boy was hushed into silence by her solemn earnestness.

"He is weak, Grif, and we are poor. It was otherwise once. Those who should assist us will not do so, unless I break the holiest tie—and so we must suffer together."

"I don't see why you should suffer," said Grif, doggedly; "you don't deserve to suffer, you don't."

"Did you ever have a friend, my poor Grif," the girl said, "whom you loved, and for whose sake you would have sacrificed even the little sweets of life you have enjoyed?"

Grif considered a moment, and then shook his head.

"Yet it is so with me," she continued; "I love him, and would give up all my hopes to keep him good. Yes, I love him; if I were parted from him, my life would be a living funeral."

"I had a dawg once," Grif said, musingly; "he wasn't much to look at, but he was wery fond of me. Rough was 'is name. Lord! the games we used to 'ave together, me and Rough! He was a teazer, he wos. Poor old Rough! One day a cove was agoin' to make a rush at me, and Rough he pounces in, and nips a piece out of the carf of 'is leg. It was the Tenderhearted Oysterman who wanted to maul me. Wosn't he savage, and didn't he squeal! I was lyin' asleep in a barrel,
that night, wen I was woke up with a scratchin'. Wen I crawled out, there was poor Rough a dyin'. He'd been pizened out of spite by the Tenderhearted Oysterman. Rough, he shoves 'is nose into my 'and, and he stretches 'issel' out. It was rainin' 'ard, and I was shiverin' cold, but wen I was certain Rough was dead, I took 'im up in my arms, and carried 'im to a churchyard, and berried 'im. Then I ses, good bye, Rough—I can't 'elp it, Ally," the boy said, bursting into a fit of tears, "he was a very good friend to me, was Rough, though he was only a dawg."

The girl laid her hand upon Grif's head, and looked pityingly at him. As their eyes met, a tender expression stole into his face, and rested there.

"I'm very sorry for you, Ally," he said. "I wish I could do somethin' to make you 'appy. It doesn't much matter for a poor beggar like me. We was always a bad lot, was father, and Dick, and me. But you—look 'ere, Ally!" he exclaimed, energetically. "If ever you want me to do anythin'—never mind what it is, so long as I know I'm a doin' of it for you; I'll do it, true and faithful, I will, so 'elp me"—Her hand upon his lips checked the oath he was about to utter. He seized the hand, and placed it over his eyes, and leant his cheek against it, as if it brought balm and comfort to him; as indeed it did. "You b'lieve me, Ally, don't you?" he continued. "I don't want you to say nothin' more than if ever I can do somethin' for you, you'll let me do it."

"I will, Grif, and I do believe you," she replied. "God help me, my poor boy, you are my only friend."

"That's it!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "That's wot I am, till I die!"
CHAPTER II.

GRIF DECLARES THAT IT'S A VERY RUM GO.

The rain pattered down, faster and faster, as the night wore on, and still those two strange companions sat, silent and undisturbed, before the fire. At intervals, sounds of altercation from without were heard, and occasionally a woman's drunken shriek, or a ruffian's muttered curse, was borne upon the angry wind. A step upon the creaking stairs would cause the girl's face to assume an expression of watchfulness. For a moment only; the next, she would relapse into dreamy listlessness. Grif had thrown himself upon the floor, at her feet. He was not asleep, but dozing. For at every movement that Alice made, he would open his eyes, and watch. He was rough, and dirty, and ugly, and a thief; but he was faithful and true. And so the hours lagged on until midnight, when a change took place.

A sudden change—a change that transformed the hitherto quiet house into a den of riotous vice and drunkenness. It seemed as though the house had been forced into by a band of ruffianly bacchanals. They came up the stairs, laughing, and singing, and screaming. A motley throng; about a dozen in all; but strangely contrasted in appearance. Men upon whose faces rascality had set its seal; women in whose eyes there struggled the modesty of youth with the depravity of shame. The men were most of them in the middle age of life; the eldest of the women could scarcely have
counted twenty winters from her birth. With the men, moleskin trousers, pea jackets, billycock hats, and dirty pipes, predominated. The women were expensively dressed; as if they sought to hide their shame by a costly harmony of colors. How strange, are the groupings we see, yet do not marvel at, in the kaleidoscope of life!

The company were in the adjoining apartment, and, through the chinks in the wall, Alice could see them flitting about. She had started to her feet when she heard them enter the house, and her trembling frame bespoke her agitation.

"Get up, Grif," she whispered, touching the boy gently with her foot. On the instant, he was standing, watchful, by her side. "Listen! Can you hear his voice?"

The boy listened attentively, and then shook his head. At this moment, a ribald jest called forth screams of laughter, and caused Alice to cover her crimsoned face, and sink tremulously into her seat. But after a short struggle with herself, she rose again, and listened anxiously.

"He must be there," she said, her hand twitching nervously at her dress. "Oh, what if I should not see him to-night! I should be powerless to save him. What if they have kept him away from me, fearing that I should turn him from them! Oh, Grif, Grif, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Hush!" Grif whispered. "You keep quiet. You pretend to be asleep, and don't let 'em 'ear yer. If any body cums in, you shut yer eyes, and breathe 'ard. I'll go in and see if he's there."
And he crept out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. Left alone, the girl sat down again by the fire, whispering to herself, "I must save him; I must save him;" as if the words were a charm. "Yes," she whispered, "I must save him from this disgrace, and then I will make one more appeal;" and so communing, she passed the next half-hour. Then Grif came in, almost noiselessly, and to her questioning look replied,

"Yes, he's there, all right."

"Is he?"—she asked, and then stopped, hesitating.

"No," Grif said, "he's 'ad wery little to drink. His arf asleep by 'isself; at one end of the room. Jim Pizey and the rest of 'em, they're there. Wot are you going to do?" he inquired, quickly, as Alice walked towards the door.

"I must go in, and bring him away," she replied, firmly.

"Look 'ere, Ally," said Grif, hoarsely, griping her arm; "don't you do it. Pizey's got the devil in 'im to-night. I know it by 'is hi. It's jist as cool and wicked as anythin'. Wen he sets 'is mind upon a thing he'll do it, or be cut to pieces. If you go in, you can't do nothin', and somethin' bad 'lappin'. Pizey 'll think you know wot you oughtn't to know. Don't you go."

"But I must save him, Grif," she said, in deep distress. "I must save him, if I die."

"Yes," Grif said, in a thick undertone, and still keeping firm hold of her arm; "that's right and proper, I dersay. But s'pose you die and don't save 'im? They won't do nothin' to-night. You can't do no good in there, Ally. Jim Pizey 'll kill yer, or beat yer senseless,
if yer go, and then what could yer do? I've seen 'im beat a woman lots of times. He's up to anythin' to-night, is Jim. I never sor 'im look like he does jist now."

"Of what use can my husband be to them, Grif?" she cried, yet suppressing her voice, so that they should not hear. "What plot of their hatching can he serve them in?"

"I don't know," Grif replied; "he can talk and look like a swell, and that's wot none of 'em can do. But I'll find out if I can, if you keep quiet. 'Ark! they're a clearin' out the gals;" and as he spoke were heard female voices and laughter, and the noise of the speakers trooping down the stairs into the miserable night. "They won't be very long together. They won't be together at all," he cried, as the door of the adjoining apartment opened, and heavy steps went down the stairs.

"But suppose my husband goes with them?" Alice cried, and tried to reach the door; but Grif restrained her.

"There's Jim Pizey's foot," he said, listening; "jist as if he was tranplin' some one down with every step. And there's Black Sam—I could tell 'im from a mob of people, for he walks as if he was goin' to tumble down every minit. And there's Ned Rutt—he's got the largest feet I ever sor. And there's the Tenderhearted Oysterman, he treads like a cat. I'll be even with 'im one day for pizinin' Rough! And there's—there's no more."

The street door was heavily slammed, and the next moment Alice's husband entered the apartment. He
was a handsome, indolent-looking man, with a reckless manner which did not become him. There were traces of dissipation upon his countenance, and his clothes were a singular mixture of rough coarseness and faded refinement. He did not notice Grif, who had stepped aside, but going to the seat which Alice had occupied, he sank into it, and plunging his fingers in his hair, gazed vacantly at the ashes in the grate. He made no sign of recognition to Alice, who had gone up to him, and encircled his neck with her white arms. As she leant over him, with her face bending to his, caressingly, it appeared, although he did not repulse her, as if there was within him some wish to avoid her, and not be conscious of her presence.

"Richard," she whispered.

But he doggedly turned his head from her, and did not reply.

"Richard," she whispered again, softly and sweetly.

"I hear you," he said, pettishly.

"Do not speak to me harshly to-night, dear," she said;

"this day six months we were married."

He shivered as he heard this, and said—

"Better for you, better for me, that we had never seen each other."

"Yes," the girl said, sadly; "perhaps it would have been. But there is no misery to me in the remembrance. I can still bless the day when we first met. Oh, Richard, do not give me cause to curse it!"

"You have cause enough for that every day, every hour," he replied, "to curse the day, and to curse me. What had you done, that I should force this misery upon you? And I am even too small-hearted to
render you the only reparation in my power—to die, and loose you from a tie which has embittered your existence."

"Hush, Richard!" she said. "Hush! my dear! All may yet be well, if you have but the courage"——

"But I have not the courage," he interrupted. "I am beaten down, crushed, nerveless. I was brought up with no teaching that existence was a thing to struggle for, and I am too old and too idle to learn the lesson now. What do such men as I in the world? Why, it has been thrown in my teeth this very night that I haven't even soul enough for revenge."

"Revenge, Richard!" she cried. "Not"——

"No, not that," he said; "nor anything that concerns you or yours. But it has been thrown in my teeth, nevertheless. And it is true. For I am a coward and a craven, if there ever lived one. I shiver when I look upon your pale face;" and turning to her suddenly, and meeting the look of patient uncomplaining love in her weary eyes, he cried, "Oh, Alice! Alice! what misery I have brought upon you!"

"Not more than I can bear, dear love," she said, "if you will be true to yourself and me. Have patience"——

"Patience!" he exclaimed. "When I think of the past, I lash myself into a torment. Will patience feed us? Will it give us a roof or a bed? Look here!" and he turned out his pockets. "Not a shilling. Fill my pockets first. Give me the means to fight with my fellow-cormorants, and I will have patience; till then, I must
fret, and fret, and drink. Have you any brandy?"

"No," she said, with a bitter sigh.

"Perhaps it is better so," he said; "I should make myself unfit to say what I have to say. I have, with difficulty I confess, kept myself sober to-night for the purpose. For this must come to an end. Coward as I am, I am not too great a coward to say, Alice, you and I must part."

"Part!" she echoed.

"Look around," he said; "this is a nice home I have provided for you; I have surrounded you with fit associates, have I not? How nobly I have performed my part of husband! How you should bless my name, revere, and love me, for the true manliness I have displayed towards you! You, by your patience and your love, have shown me the depth of my degradation."

"Not degradation, Richard!"

"Yes, degradation in its coarsest aspect. Is not this degradation?" and he pointed to Grif, who was crouching, observant, in a corner. "Come here," he said to the lad, who slouched towards him reluctantly.

"What are you?" asked Richard.

"Wot am I?" replied Grif, with a puzzled look; "I'm a pore boy—Grif."

"You're a poor boy—Grif?" the man repeated. "How do you live?"

"By eatin' and drinkin'."

"But how do you get your living?"

"I makes it as I can," answered Grif, gloomily.

"And when you can't make it?"
"Wy, then I takes it."
"That is, you are a thief?"
"Yes, I s'pose so."
"And a vagabond?"
"Yes, I s'pose so."
"And you have been in prison?"
"Yes, I've been in quod, I 'ave," said Grif, feeling, for the first time in his life, slightly ashamed of the fact.
"And you say," Richard said, bitterly, as the boy slunk back to his corner, "that this is not degradation!"

She hid her face in her hands, but did not reply.
"I was once a good arithmetician," he continued.
"Let us see what figures there are in the sum of our acquaintance, and what they amount to."
"Of what use is it to recal the past, Richard?"
"It may show us how to act in the future. Besides, I have a strange feeling on me to-night, having met with an adventure which I will presently relate. Listen. When I first saw you, you know what I was—a careless ne'er-do-well, with no thought of the morrow. You did not know this then, but you know it now. It is the curse of my life that I was brought up with expectations. How many possibly useful, if not good, men have been wrecked on that same rock of expectations! Upon the strength of "expectations," I was reared into an idle incapable. And this I was when you first knew me. I had an income then—small, it is true, but sufficient; or if it was not, I got into debt, upon the strength of my expectations, which were soon to yield to me a life's resting-place. You know what happened. One day
there came a letter, and I learned that, in a commercial crash at home, my income and my expectations had gone to limbo. The news did not hurt me much, Alice, for I was in love—nay, keep your place, and do not look at me while I am speaking, for I am not worthy of the love I sought and gained. For I said, this girl will be rich, and her wealth will compensate for what I have lost. Yet I was not entirely calculating, for your pure nature won upon me. The thought that your father was wealthy, and that you would make a good match for me, was soon lost in the love I felt for you. Well, Alice, I won your love, and could not bear to part with you. I had to do something to live; and so that I might be near you, I accepted the post of tutor offered me by your father. I accepted this to be near you—it was happiness enough for the time, and I thought but little of the future. Happy, then, in the present, I had no thought of the passing time, until the day arrived when your father wished to force you into a marriage with a man, ignorant, brutal, mean, and vulgar—but rich. You came to me in your distress—Good God!” he exclaimed, passionately, “shall I ever forget the night on which you came to me, and asked for help and for advice? The broad plains, bathed in silver light, stretched out for miles before us. The branches of the old gum trees glistened with white smiles in the face of the moon—we were encompassed with a peaceful glory. You stood before me, sad and trembling, and the love that had made my heart a garden rushed to my lips”—he stopped suddenly, looked round, and smiled bitterly. Then he continued—“The next day we fled, and at the first town
we reached we were married. We appealed to your father—you know how he met our appeals. The last time I went, at your request, to his house, he set his dogs upon me”——

"Richard! Richard!" she cried, entreatingly, "Do not recal that time. Be silent for awhile and calm yourself."

"I will go on to the end. We came to Melbourne. Brought up to no trade or profession, and naturally idle, I could get nothing to do. Day by day we have sank lower and lower. People look on me with suspicion. I am fit for nothing in this colony. I was born a gentleman, and I live the life of a dog; and I have'dragged you, who never before knew want, down with me. With no friends, no influence to back me, we might starve and rot. What wonder that I took to drink! The disgust with which I used to contemplate the victims of that curse recoils now upon myself, and I despise and abhor myself for what I am! How I came into acquaintance-ship with those who are my present associates I cannot recal. By what fatality I brought you here, I know not. I suppose it was because we were poor, and I could not afford to buy you better lodging. Now attend to me—but stay, that boy is listening."

"He is a friend, Richard," said Alice.

"Yes," said Grif, "I am a friend—that's wot I am. Never you mind me—I aint agoin' to peach. I'd do anythin' to 'elp 'er, I would—sooner than 'urt 'er, I'd be chopped up first. Lord! you talk better than the preacher cove?"

"Very well. Now attend. These men want me to
join them in their devilish plots. I will not do so, if I can help it. But if I stop here much longer, they will drive me to it. And so I shall go away from you and from them. I will go to the diggings, and try my luck there.”

“Leaving me here?”

“Leaving you here, but not in this house. You have two or three articles of jewellery left. I will sell them—the watch I gave you will fetch ten pounds—and you will be able to live in a more respectable house than this for a few weeks until you hear from me.”

“How will you go?”

“I shall walk—I cannot afford to ride. But I have not concluded yet. I have something to tell you, which may alter our plans, so far as you are concerned. I have a message for you, which I must deliver word for word.”

“A message! for me!”

“I saw your father this evening”—–

“In town!” she exclaimed.

“In town. I do not know for what purpose he is here, nor do I care.”

“Oh, Richard,” cried the girl; “you did not quarrel with him?”

“No,” he replied; “I spoke to him respectfully. I told him we were here, in want. I begged him to assist us. I told him I was willing to do anything—that I would take any situation. This was his answer. ‘You married my daughter for my money. You are a worthless, idle, scoundrel, and I will not help you. If you so much regret the condition to which you have brought my daughter, divorce yourself from her’”—–
"No—no—Richard!"

"Those were his words. 'Divorce yourself from her, and I will take her back. When you come to me to consent to this, I will give you money. Till then, you may starve. I am a hard man, as you know, obstinate and self-willed. Rather than you should have one shilling of the money you traded for when you married my daughter, I would fling it all in the sea. Tell my daughter this. She knows me well enough to be sure I shall not alter when once I resolve.' These are his words, word for word. What is your answer?"

"What do you think it is?" she asked, sadly.

"I don’t know," he said, doggedly, turning his face from her; "I know what mine would be."

"What would it be?"

"I should say this" (he did not look at her while he spoke)—"You, Richard Handfield, scapegrace, fortune-hunter, vagabond (any of these surnames would be sufficiently truthful), came to me, a young simple girl, and played the lover to me, without the knowledge of my father, for the sake of my father’s money. You knew that I, a young simple girl, bred upon the plains, and amidst rough men, would be certain to be well affected towards you—would almost be certain to fall in love with you, for the false gloss you parade to the world, and for the refinement of manner which those employed about my father’s station did not possess. You played for my heart, and you won it. But you won me without my money, for you were disappointed in your calculations. And now that I know you for what you are, and now that I have been sufficiently punished for my folly, in
the misery you have brought upon me, I shall go back to the home from which I fled, and endeavor to forget the shame with which you have surrounded me."

"Do you think that should be my answer, Richard?"

He had not once looked at her while he spoke, and now as she addressed him, with an indescribable sadness in her voice, he did not reply. For full five minutes, there was silence in the room. Then the grief which filled her heart could no longer be suppressed, and short broken gasps escaped her.

"Richard!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Alice."

"Have you not more faith in me than this? As I would die to keep you good, so I should die without your love! What matters poverty? We are not the only ones in the world whose lot is hard to bear! Be true to me, Richard, so that I may be true to myself and to you. You do not believe that this would be my answer!"

He turned and clasped her in his arms, and pressed her pure heart to his. Her fervent love had triumphed; and as he kissed away her tears, he felt, indeed, that wifely purity is man's best shield from evil.

"You shall do what you have said, Richard. But not to-morrow. Wait but one day longer; and if I then say to you—'Go,' you shall go. I have a reason for this, but I must not tell you what it is. Do you consent?"

"Yes, love."

"Brighter days will dawn upon us. I am happier now than I have been for a long, long time. And oh, my dear—bend your head closer, Richard—there may come a little child to need our care"—
The light had gone out, and the room was in darkness. But mean and disreputable as it was, a good woman's unselfish love sanctified it, and made it holy!

"It's a wery rum go," muttered Grif to himself, as he groped his way down the dark stairs; "a wery rum go. If I was 'er, I should do as he told 'er. But lord! she don't care for 'erself, she don't. She's too good for 'im by ever so many chalks, that's wot she is."

Grif was making his way to the cellar. It was his chronic condition never to know, when he rose in the morning, where he was going to sleep at night. It all depended upon where he found himself when he made up his mind to retire to rest. Arrived at the cellar, he groped about for awhile.

"I wish I 'ad a match," he muttered; "there was a empty packing-case somewhere about 'ere. O, 'ere it is; its 'ardly long enough, but I can double myself up;" thus soliloquising, he crept into it. "Now then," he said, as he lifted the cover of the packing-case on to the top, popping his head down quickly to avoid a bump, "that's warm and comfortable, that is. It'd be warmer, though, if I'd Rough 'ere. If ever I can cry quits with the Tenderhearted Oysterman for pizinin' 'im, I'll do it, I will, so 'elp me"——

This time there was no one by to check the oath, so he uttered it emphatically, and fell asleep.
CHAPTER III.

THE CONJUGALL NUTTALLS.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Nicholas Nuttall, apostrophising a figure of Time, which, with a very long beard and a very long scythe, looked down upon him from the mantel-shelf; "upon my word, old daddy, you're a wonder. You are," he continued, shaking his head at the figure; "there's no getting over you. You grow us up, you mow us down; you turn our hair black, you turn it white; you make us strong, you make us feeble; and we laugh at you, and wheeze at you, until the day comes when we can laugh and wheeze no more. Dear! dear! dear! To think that it should be thirty years since I saw him; that I should come out here, never thinking of him—we decided twenty years ago that he was dead—and that after being here only a month, I should hear of him in such a wonderful manner. So amazingly rich, too. What a handsome fellow he was, to be sure! I wonder if he is much altered. I wonder if he ever thinks of old times. I shall know him again, for certain, directly I clap eyes on him. He must have got grey by this time, though. Dear! dear! dear!"

And Mr. Nicholas Nuttall fell to musing over thirty years ago, fishing up from that deep well a hundred trifles, which brought pleasant ripples to his face. They had been buried so long that it might have been excused them had they been rusted; but they were not so. They came up quite bright, at his bidding, and smiled in his
face. They twinkled in his eyes, those memories, and made him young again. In the glowing wood fire, rose up the pictures of his past life; his boyhood's home; his friends and playmates; days which contained some tender remembrance, which even now made his heart throb with pleasure; a woodland walk made into a loving remembrance by a simple pressure of a hand; faces, young as when he knew them; eyes which faded as he gazed at them; a short holiday, dotted with stars; hopes, ambitions, day-dreams: all passed before him, phantasmagorically, as he looked into the glowing wood fire. The flowers in the garden of youth were blooming once again in the life of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall.

But his reverie was soon disturbed. For the partner of his bosom, Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, suddenly bouncing into the room, and seating herself, demonstratively, in her own particular arm-chair, on the opposite side of the fire, puffed away his dreams in a trice.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was a small woman. Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was a large man. Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, divested of her crinolines and flounces and other feminine vanities, in which she indulged inordinately, was a very baby by the side of her spouse. In fact the contrast, to an impartial observer, would have been ridiculous. Her condition, when feathered, was that of an extremely ruffled hen, strutting about in offended majesty, in defiance of the whole poultry race. Un-feather her, and, figuratively speaking, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall could have put Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall into his pocket—like a doll.

Yet if there ever was a man hopelessly under petticoat
government; if there ever was a man, completely and entirely subjugated; if there ever was a man, prone and vanquished beneath woman's merciless thumb: that man was the husband of Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall. It is a singular fact, but one which may be easily ascertained by any individual who takes an interest in studying the physiology of marital life, that when a very small man espouses a very large woman, he is, by tacit consent, the king of the castle; it is an important unexpressed portion of the marriage obligation; and that, when a very small woman espouses a very large man, she rules him with a rod of iron, tames him, subjugates him, so to speak, until at length he can scarcely call his soul his own.

This was the case with the conjugality of the Nuttals. As was proven by the demeanor of the male portion of the bond. For no sooner had the feminine half (*plus*) seated herself opposite the masculine half (*minus*) than the face of Mr. Nicholas Nuttall assumed an expression of the most complete and perfect submission.

"I'm sure I don't know what to do, Mr. Nuttall," preambled that gentleman's certainly better half; "this place will be the death of me, I'm certain. What crime I have committed that you should drag me out here, away from all my friends and relations, and all that sort of thing, I don't know. I suppose its a punishment for something dreadful, though I'm as unconscious as the babe unborn what it can be. But what I say is, I won't stand it, and I wish I had never been married!"

Considering that Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall had been married for twenty-five years, it was certainly rather late in the day for her to give utterance to such a wish. But
as Mr. Nuttall had been told the same thing about six
times a day, on an average, since his honeymoon, he re-
ceived it upon the present occasion with equanimity.
The first time he heard it, it was a shock to him; but
since that time he had become resigned. So he merely
put in an expostulatory "My dear"—being perfectly
well aware that he would not be allowed to get any
further.

"Don't my dear me," interrupted Mrs. Nuttall, as he
expected; he would have been puzzled what to say if she
had not taken up the cue. "I'm tired of your my-
dearing and my-loving. What I say, once for all, is,
that I won't stand it."

Mr. Nuttall did not reply.

"There's Mary Plummer," continued his lady; "yes,
you may smile, sir, and insult me to my face; I went to
school with her, and I knew how she would turn
out; I wish you had her for your wife. The way she
brings up her family is disgraceful; the girls are as untidy
as can be. You should see the bedrooms in the middle
of the day! And yet her husband indulges her in every-
thing. She had three new bonnets last summer, and you
begrudged me one, and said that my old one would do,
with fresh trimming. He is something like a husband
should be. He didn't drag his wife away from her home,
after she had slaved for him all her life, and bring her
out to a place where everything is topsy turvey, and ten
times the price that it is anywhere else, and where people
who are not fit for domestics are put over your heads.
He didn't do this. Not he. He knows his duty as a
husband and the father of a family, better."
Nicholas shrugged his shoulders. He did not know what else to do.

"Of course," exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall. "Shrug your shoulders. A pretty thing for a man to do at such a time!"

"My dear Maria," he commenced again, despairingly.

"Will you let me speak, sir? You want to wear me into an early grave, I know you do. The way we poor women are put upon is shameful. But I'll not stand it, Nicholas. You had a design in bringing me out to this dreadful country, and I will not stand it. What did you bring me here for, Mr. Nuttall? Can you answer me that? Of course you can't. I'm sure the sufferings I endured on board that dreadful ship would have melted a heart of stone—but you've got no heart, Mr. Nuttall. I haven't been tied to you all these years without finding that out. Mamma always told me"

"Don't drag mamma in again, Maria," said Mr. Nuttall, in a disgusted voice. "She's been dead these fifteen years; it's time you let her rest."

Mrs. Nuttall immediately dissolved into tears, and Mr. Nuttall shifted himself upon his chair, as if he was sitting upon pins and needles.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir," she sobbed, "to speak to me in that way of my mamma. If she has been dead fifteen years I have not forgotten that I was her favorite daughter. Mamma always told me you did not care for me, and warned me against you. You want to make me forget what I was going to say, but you shan't. No, sir, I say again that the sufferings I endured on board that dreadful ship ought to have
melted a heart of stone. What with walking with one leg longer than the other for three months, I'm sure I shall never be able to walk straight again. I often wondered when I woke up in a fright in the middle of the night, and found myself standing on my head in that horrible bunk, what I had done to meet with such treatment from you. Such a wife as I have been, too!"

In desperation, and utter absence of mind, Mr. Nuttall took out his cigar case.

"No, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall. "No, sir! not in the parlor! If you want to smoke, go into the street. But you shall not smoke in the parlor. Thank heaven, I have not come to that! You have picked up enough filthy habits in this country, but I tell you again you shall not insult me to my face. And very nice your breath will smell to-night in the midst of your gay company. Not that they would care much, I dare say. Nice ideas they must have of the decencies of polite society!"

Mr. Nuttall sighed.

"There's Jane," observed Mrs. Nuttall, approaching one of her grievances; "the best servant I ever had. At home she was quite satisfied with ten pounds a-year; and now, after our paying her passage out, she says she can't stop unless her wages are raised to—how much do you think, Nicholas?"

"I am sure I don't know, Maria," he replied, meekly, but brightening up a little at this appeal.

"To thirty pounds. Thir-ty pounds," said Mrs. Nuttall, elongating the numeral. "Do you know how you are going to meet these frightful expenses? I'm sure I
don't. But mind, Nicholas, if we come to ruin, don't blame me for it. I told you all along what would be the result of your dragging us to the colonies. I pray that I may be mistaken; but I have never been mistaken yet, and you know it;” and Mrs. Nuttall spread out her skirts (she was always spreading out her skirts, as if she could not make enough of herself) complacently.

Mr. Nuttall knew perfectly well that it was only the incessant nagging of his better half that had brought them out to the colony; but he made no remark upon the point, and sat as still as a mouse, gazing humbly upon the household prophet.

“Thirty pounds a-year for a servant-of-all-work!” continued the lady. “Preposterous! The best thing we can do, if that's the way they're paid, is all of us to go out as servants-of-all-work, and lay by a provision for the children.”

A vision of himself, in feminine attire, floor-scrubbing on his knees, flitted across the disturbed mind of Mr. Nuttall.

“She must have the money, I suppose. I know who has put her up to it; it is either the baker's or the butcher's man. The two noodles are hankering after her, and she encourages them. I saw the pair of them at the back-gate last night, and she was flirting with them nicely. You must give information to the police, Nicholas, and have them locked up.”

“Locked up!” exclaimed Mr. Nuttall.

“Certainly. Do you think the police would allow such goings-on at home? If she goes away, and gets married, I shall be in a nice situation. It would be like
losing my right hand. I tell you what this place is, Mr. Nuttall—it's demoralising, that's what it is."

"There's as good fish in the sea, Maria," observed Mr. Nuttall——

"No, there isn't," said Mrs. Nuttall, snapping him up so sharply that he gave a sudden jump. "I don't believe in your proverbs, I suppose you will say that of me when I am dead and gone. You are a nice affectionate lot, you men!" and she elevated her nose at an alarming angle. "Then can you tell me what to wear this evening, Mr. Nuttall? I don't know, in this outlandish colony, whether we are expected to dress ourselves like christians or aboriginals."

"The last would certainly be inexpensive, but it would scarcely be decent, Maria," remarked Mr. Nuttall, sily.

"That may be very witty, Mr. Nuttall," responded his lady, loftily; "but it is hardly an observation a man should make to his own wife. Though for what you care about your wife's feelings I would not give that," and she snapped her fingers, disdainfully.

From long and sad experience, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall had learned the wisdom of saying as little as possible upon such occasions as the present. Indeed, he would sometimes lose all consciousness of what was passing, or would find himself regarding it as an unquiet dream from which he would presently awake. But Mrs. Nuttall was always equal to the occasion; and now, as she observed him relapsing into a dreamy state of inattention, she cried, sharply,

"Nicholas!"
"Yes, my dear," he responded, with a jump, as if half a dozen needles had been smartly thrust into a tender part.

"Are you attending to me?"

"Certainly, my dear," he replied, briskly.

"Then why do you not answer me?"

"What do you wish to know?" he inquired, submissively.

"What do I wish to know? I wish you to direct me as you ought to do, as the father of your family, and the head of your household. You know I am only too willing to obey you."

"You're very good," he murmured.

"What am I to wear this evening?" she asked.

"Your usual good taste, Maria," he commenced——

"Oh, bother my good taste," she interrupted. "You know that we are to meet your brother to-night, and I am only anxious to do you credit. Not that I shan't be a perfect fright, for I haven't a dress fit to put on my back. If I wasn't such a good contriver, we should look more like paupers than respectable people."

"What's the use of talking in that way? You always have what you want."

"Of course. These are the thanks a slaving wife gets for stinting herself of the commonest necessaries. My black silk has been turned three times already; and my pearl grey—you ought to know what a state that is in, for you spilt the port wine over it yourself. Is your brother very rich, Nicholas?"

"They say so, Maria; he has got stations, and thousands of sheep and cattle. He is a squatter, you know."
"A what?" she screamed.

"A squatter."

"What a dreadful thing!" she exclaimed. "What a shocking calamity! Is he always squatting, Nicholas?"

"My dear!" said Nicholas, amazed.

"Not that it matters much," she continued, not heeding him; "he may squat as long as he likes, if he has plenty of money, and assists you as a brother should. Thank heaven! none of my relations ever squatted. Has he been squatting long, Nicholas?"

"For ever so many years," he replied.

"What a disagreeable position! Why, his legs must be quite round. You ought to thank your stars that you have a wife who doesn't squat"——

But observing a furtive smile playing round her husband's lips, she rose, majestically, and said,

"I shall not waste my conversation upon you any longer. I suppose the cab will be here at half-past nine o'clock; everybody else, of course, will go in their own carriages." (Here she took out her watch, and consulted it.) "Bless my soul! it is nearly seven o'clock now. I have barely three hours to dress!"

And she whisked out of the room, leaving Mr Nuttall, nothing loth, to resume his musings.
CHAPTER IV.

THE GREAT MERCHANT ENTERTAINS HIS FRIENDS AT DINNER.

On the same evening, and at about the same hour, of the occurrence of the foregoing matrimonial dialogue, Mr. Zachariah Blemish entertained his friends at dinner. Mr. Zachariah Blemish was a merchant and a philanthropist; he was also a gentleman of an imposing mien, and of a portly appearance. Some of his detractors (and what man lives who has them not?) said that he paddled, and that the manly bosom which throbbed to the beats of his patriotic heart was composed chiefly of cotton. If this was the worst that could be said against him, Zachariah Blemish could look the world in the face without blushing. True or untrue, he did look, unmoved, in the world's face, and if either felt abashed in the presence of the other, it was the world, and not Blemish. For was he not an ornament to the world, and did not the world feel and acknowledge it? As he walked along the streets, people fell aside and made way for him, deferentially. They looked after him, and pointed him out to strangers as the Great Mr. Blemish; and it was told of one family that, when the children were put to bed at night, they were taught to say, "God bless papa and mamma, and Good Mr. Blemish." His snowy shirt front, viewed from a distance, was a sight to look upon, and, upon a nearer acquaintance, dazzled one with its pure whiteness. At church he was the most
devout of men, and the congregation wondered how so much greatness and so much meekness could be found in the breast of any one human being. There was not a crease in his face; it was fat, and smooth, and ruddy; it looked like the blessed face of a large cherubim; and it said as plainly as face could say, "Here dwell content, and peace, and prosperity, and benevolence." He was Chairman of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals; President of the Moral Boot Blacking Boys Reformatory; Perpetual Grand Master of the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice; the highest dignitary in the Association of Universal Philanthropists; and a leading member of the Fellowship of Murray Cods. He subscribed to all the charities; with a condescending humility he allowed his name to appear regularly upon all committees for religious and benevolent purposes, and would himself go round with lists to collect subscriptions. Here his power was enormous. Such a thing as a refusal was not thought of. People wrote their names upon his list, in the firm belief that twenty shillings invested in benevolence with Zachariah Blemish returned a much larger rate of interest than if invested with any other collector. Once, and once only, was he known to be unsuccessful. He asked a mechanic for a subscription to the funds of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and the man refused him, in somewhat rough terms, saying that the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals was a Band of Humbugs. Blemish gazed mildly at the man for a few moments, and turned away without a word. The following day he displayed an anonymous letter, in which the writer, signing himself
"Repentant," enclosed one pound three shillings and sixpence as the contribution of a working man towards the funds of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and a fervent wish was expressed in the letter that the Band would meet with the success it deserved. There was no doubt that it was the mechanic who sent it. Such was the goodness of Blemish, and the moral power of his eye!

On this evening he was seated at the head of his table, round which were ranged some dozen guests of undoubted respectability. He was supported on his right by a member of the Upper House; he was supported on his left by a member of the Lower House. One of the leading members of the Government was talking oracularly to one of the leading merchants of the city; and one of the leading lawyers was laying down the law to one of the leading physicians. And only three chairs off was Mr. David Dibbs, eating his dinner like a common mortal. Like a common mortal? Like the commonest of common mortals! He might have been a bricklayer for any difference observable between them. For he gobbled his food did Mr. David Dibbs, and he slobered his soup did Mr. David Dibbs, and his chops were greasy, and his hands were not nice looking, and, altogether, he did not present an agreeable appearance. But was he not the possessor of half a dozen stations, each with scores of miles of water frontage, and was not his income thirty thousand pounds a-year? Oh, golden calf! nestle in my bosom, and throw your glittering veil over my ignorance, and meanness, and stupidity—give me thirty thousand pounds a-year, that people may fall down and worship me!
The other guests were not a whit less respectable. Each of them, in his own particular person, represented Wealth or Position. Could it for one moment be imagined that the guests of Mr Zachariah Blemish were selected for the purpose of throwing a halo of respectability round the person of their host, and that they were one and all administering to, and serving, his interest? If so, the guests were unconscious of it; but it might not have been less a fact that he made them all return, in one shape or another, good interest for the hospitality he so freely lavished upon them. This evening he was giving a dinner party to his male friends; and later in the night Mrs Zachariah Blemish would receive her guests and entertain them.

The gentlemen are over their wine, and are conversing freely. Politics, scandal, the state of the colony, and many other subjects, are discussed with animation. Sometimes the conversation is general, then it breaks up into sections; and occasionally it grows personal.

"It is a curious story," said the leading physician, addressing the leading limb of the law. "He was always reported to be very wealthy. No one knows more of his early career than that, when the diggings first broke out, he was a Cheap Jack, as they call them, trading at all the new rushes. He would buy tents, picks, shovels, tubs, anything, from the diggers, who were madly running from one place to another. He would buy them for a song, for the diggers could not carry these things about with them, and they were glad to get rid of them at any price. When he sold them he made enormous profits, and by these means he was supposed to
have amassed a great fortune. Then he speculated largely in sheep and cattle, and got to be looked upon as a sort of banker. Many men deposited their savings with him, and as he did not pay any interest for the money, and traded with it, there is no doubt as to the profitable nature of his operations. The great peculiarity about him was that his face, from beneath his eyes, was completely hidden in bushy, brown, curly hair. He had been heard to say that he had never shaved. Well, one night, at past eleven o'clock, he knocked up a storekeeper at the diggings, and bought a razor and strop, a pair of scissors, a pair of moleskin trousers, a pair of watertight boots, and a blue serge shirt. In the course of conversation with the storekeeper, and while he was selecting the articles, he said that they were for a man whom he had engaged as a shepherd, and who was starting away at daybreak the following morning. That was the last indisputable occurrence that was known in connection with him. For the next day he disappeared, and was not heard of again. For a day or two no notice was taken of his absence, but after that, depositors and others began to get uneasy, and rumor invented a hundred different stories about him. A detective, who knew him intimately, said that he was standing at the pit entrance of the Theatre Royal when a man passed in, the glitter of whose eyes attracted the detective's attention strangely. He could not recall the man's face, which was clean shaven, and he thought no more about it at the time. The missing man was traced to Melbourne, but no further. Some three or four weeks after his disappearance, the body of a drowned man was found in a river in
New South Wales, and from certain marks about it, it was supposed to be that of our missing friend. The inquest was adjourned to allow time for the production of evidence from Victoria, and twelve medical men, all of whom knew the missing party, were subpoenaed, for the purpose of identifying him, or otherwise. The body was much decomposed, but some of the witnesses said that they would know if it was the missing man by the peculiar shape of one of his toes. The singularity of the affair lies in this. Six of the witnesses swore that it was the missing man, and six of them swore that it was not. Both sides were very positive. Six months after the inquest, a story was current that he had been seen at Texas, which story was shortly afterwards followed up by another, that he was shot in a tavern in some part of South America. Then came other reports that he was living in great magnificence in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. But to this day the mystery is not cleared up, and probably never will be."

"And the depositor's money?" asked the lawyer.

"Was never heard of. Vanished. If he was drowned he did not like to part with it, perhaps, and he took it into the other world with him."

Everybody at the table was much interested in the story, and, at its conclusion, there was a lull in the conversation.

"I have got," said Mr. Blemish, addressing a gentleman of about sixty years of age, whose face was covered with iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache, "a great surprise for you to-night."

From some unexplained cause, the gentleman addressed
looked suddenly and excitedly into the face of his host, and exclaimed, in a quick, nervous voice—

"A surprise!"

"Yes, and I hope a pleasant one."

"What surprise?" he asked, in the same agitated manner.

"Nay," returned Mr. Blemish, gently, "it will not be a surprise if I tell you beforehand."

The flush that had risen to that portion of the gentleman’s face which the iron-grey whiskers, beard, and moustache, allowed to be seen, slowly died away, and was replaced by a whitish-grey tint, which almost made him look like the ghost of some antique warrior. Taking out his pocket-book, he wrote upon a leaf, "I shall take it as a particular favour if you will let me know what is the surprise you have in store for me; I have urgent reasons for asking;" then passed it, folded, to his host. Mr. Blemish read it, smiled, and wrote beneath, in reply, "Do you remember your brother?" and repassed the paper to his guest.

"Brother!" exclaimed that gentleman, in a voice betokening that, although he was considerably astonished, he was also considerably relieved.

All the guests turned their faces simultaneously towards the speaker, with the exception of one young gentleman, who wore Dundreary whiskers, and whose hair was scrupulously parted in the middle. This young gentleman, whose name was Tuffett, and who was Something in the Civil Service, languidly turned his head, as if the machinery within was weak, and required gentle treatment, and languidly ejaculated, "Ber-wer-other!" as if it was a word of four syllables.
“Yes,” said Mr. Blemish, “your brother Nicholas.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Mr. Mathew Nuttall; whereat the Something in the Civil Service ejaculated, “Ger-wa-cious per-wow-ers!” and the rest of the guests stared harder than ever. Excepting Mr. David Dibbs, who was not disposed to be too long diverted from the serious occupation of eating and drinking. For Mr. David Dibbs lived to eat; he did not eat to live.

It is a shock to a man to be wrenched without forewarning from the groove in which his life has been gliding for the last twenty years. For fully that time Mr. Mathew Nuttall, engrossed in his own pursuits and his own cares, had never once thought of his brother; and now, at the very mention of his name, memories, long-buried and forgotten, floated upon his mind like the sudden rising of a ghostly tide.

“Yes,” said Mr. Zachariah Blemish, “I learned by accident that he has but lately arrived in the Colony. Singularly enough, he had a letter of introduction to me from some of my people at home, and Mrs. Blemish, out of respect to you, invited him this evening to meet you.”

“I shall be very glad to see Nicholas,” said Mr. Mathew Nuttall, slowly and thoughtfully; and then the conversation became more general.

“Haw—haw—I haw—had a ber-wer-other—haw—once,” remarked the Something in the Civil Service, “but—haw—haw—he died. Haw—haw—Ster-wer-ange coincidence! Very!” and the Something in the Civil Service played with his handsome moustache, reflectively. No one at the table thinking fit to comment upon this observation, the Something in the Civil Service relapsed into his chronic state of vacuity.
"Sheep are rising in the market, are they not, Mr. Dibbs?" asked the Member of the Upper House.

"It's time they was," replied the great squatter, his mouth full of pine-apple.

"The people are complaining loudly of the price of beef," observed the Member of the Lower House, who was strongly suspected of democratic tendencies.

"They're always a-growling," said Mr. David Dibbs, who, having swallowed his pine-apple, was enabled to speak with greater clearness. "They don't know what they want, don't the people. It ought to be double the price. My motto all'as has been, Live and Let Live. They lay the blame on us squatters; but it's the butchers as sticks it on."

"Did you read in the papers that Mr. Froth said at the Eastern Market last night that the squatters were the ruin of the country?" asked the member of the Lower House.

"Mr. Froth wants his head punched," said Mr. Dibbs, elegantly, "and I wouldn't mind a-doing of it for him."

"The fact of it is, Sir," said the member of the Upper House, "the people, as you call them, are a lazy, discontented set. Manhood suffrage has done it all. No man ought to have a vote who has not a property qualification."

"Quite right, sir," said Mr. Dibbs; "a glass of wine?"

"With pleasure. For, Sir, what is the result?" (This oracularly, as if he was addressing the House.) "These men, who have no property, but have a vote, exercise a pressure upon property detrimental to the interests of gentlemen who have property. What has property to do
with them, or what have they to do with property? When they have property, let them speak; until then, let them be silent, and not interfere with what does not concern them."

"Th'ems my sentiments," nodded Mr. Dibbs, approvingly.

"To what, Sir, is this state of things to be attributed?" continued the orator. "The answer is plain. It is to be attributed to the unfortunate state of independence in which the working man finds himself in these Colonies. The working classes all over the world, Sir, are democratic, often dangerously democratic. But in such a country as England, they are kept in their proper position by a sense of dependence. Sir, when the working man lands upon these shores, this spirit of dependence vanishes. Speaking vulgarly, Sir, he says within himself, Jack's as good as his master; and acting up to the spirit of that old adage (the author of it, Sir, ought to have been put into the pillory)—acting, I say again, Sir, up to the spirit of that adage, he aims a blow at the interests of all of us who have property in the Colony. This must be put a stop to, Sir. It is incumbent upon us, who are loyal subjects, to put a stop to it—as loyal subjects I say, Sir, for we all know what is the meaning of democracy. It behoves all of us who have settled interests in the colony to look sharply about us. We must, if necessary, band together for the protection of our own interests; and above all, we must stick to the Constitution."

"Quite right again, sir," assented Mr. Dibbs, whose only idea of the Constitution was thirty thousand pounds a-year for himself.
"Haw—haw—I have—haw—observed," said the Something in the Civil Service, "that the—haw—spew-wiwit—haw—of innovation is—haw—I may say going it. There—haw—haw—is a difficulty—haw—in telling the—haw—back of a—haw—gentleman from the—haw—back of a ter-wer-adesman."

Although none of the guests replied to this observation, all, with the exception of one, appeared to think that something was very wrong somewhere, and that the country was in a most distressing condition. Mr Zachariah Blemish was the only person at the table who ventured to remark that we are young, gentlemen, we are young, and have plenty of time before us for improvement. In all new colonies evils would creep in. We have a fine estate in our hands, gentlemen; one of the finest estates in the world; and all it wants is proper management. Certainly the state of commercial morality is very bad—

Ah, here was a theme! Commercial morality! The guests grew eloquent upon it. The member of the Upper House said it was deplorable; the member of the Lower House said it was disgraceful; the leading physician said it was frightful; the leading lawyer said it was unparalleled; Mr. Dibbs said it was beastly; and they all raised their hands and their eyes, and shook their heads, as much as to say "Is it not dreadful that we who are immaculate, who are undefiled, should live in the midst of such a state of things, without being able to remedy the evil?" But the most impressive of all was Mr. Zachariah Blemish; and as a merchant of the highest standing, his words were listened to with deep attention.
Yes (he said), commercial morality was at its lowest ebb. The spirit of over-speculation among traders was something frightful to contemplate, and disastrous results were sure to follow. It was all occasioned by the easiness with which men got credit—men who commenced with nothing, who had nothing, with the exception of self-assurance, and who speculated recklessly, with the knowledge that when the crash came—and come it must, sooner or later, with such-like speculators—their creditors would only be too glad to take five shillings in the pound; would feel delighted at seven shillings and sixpence; would congratulate themselves at ten shillings; and then, after giving a full release, would actually do business again, upon terms, with the very man who had robbed them. A check must be put to this spirit of reckless speculation, and he himself had some idea of initiating a movement in furtherance of the desired result. All that was required was that merchants should be true to themselves and to their own interests, and the country would soon recover from its present depressed condition.

And after the utterance of these platitudes, Mr. Zachariah Blemish stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets and looked round upon his guests, who, one and all, bowed down to the spirit of honor and integrity shining in the face of their merchant host!
CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The house of Mr. Zachariah Blemish looked out upon the sea. It was a magnificent mansion, worthy of the greatness of its inmate, and was the resort of the most fashionable as well as the most influential residents of Melbourne and its charming suburbs. It was a square building, with a balcony round three of its sides—a broad, spacious balcony, on which the guests could promenade, and talk politics, or love, or philosophy, as suited them. It was grand, on a quiet night, to sit thereon, and watch the moon rising from the sea; it was grand to watch the sea itself, cradled in the arms of night, while myriad cloud-shadows floated on its breast, and flashed into lines of snow-fringed light with the rising and the falling of the waves.

Lights were gleaming in the windows and round the balcony, and the house was pleasant with the buzz of conversation, and soft laughter, and sweet music. The party seemed altogether a very delightful one; for a smile was on every lip, and distilled honey dropped from every tongue, while the presiding genius of the establishment was benign and affable, and moved among his guests, like Jove dispensing agreeability.

The brothers Nuttall had met in the ball-room. The only words they exchanged were, "Mathew!" "Nicholas!" and then, after a long pressure of the hand, they
adjourned to the balcony, where their conversation would be more private than in the house.

They felt somewhat awkward; the days they had passed together might have belonged to another life, so long gone-by did that time seem. The bridge between their boyhood and their old age had crumbled down, and the fragments had been almost quite washed away by the stream of time. Still, some memory of the old affection was stirred into life by the meeting, and they both felt softened and saddened as their hands lay in each other's clasp.

They paced the balcony in silence at first. Then the elder, Mathew, asked some stray question as to the old places he used to frequent, and smiled and pondered wondrously as he heard of the changes that had taken place.

"Yet it is not to be wondered at," he said, answering his thought; "we have changed more than they."

"Yes, we are old men now," responded his brother. "This is a strange meeting, Mat, and in a new world, too."

"Are you rich, Nicholas?" asked the elder brother.

"No," was the reply.

"Any fixed plans of what you are going to do?"

"No—a dozen things have occurred to me, but, to tell you the truth, I am puzzled. Everything here appears to be so—so go-ahead," he said, after hesitating for a term, "that I am bewildered somewhat. Then, there is Mrs. Nuttall."

"Mrs. Nuttall!"

"Yes," replied Nicholas, smiling; "my wife. I will
introduce you presently. She will be agreeably surprised at your appearance," and he chuckled to himself as he thought of his wife's notions of squatting. "Then there are the children"—

"How many?"

"Two only. A boy and a girl."

"Age?"

"Boy twelve, girl sixteen," said Nicholas, suiting his replies to his brother's curt queries. "She is here to-night. I should wish you to see my Marian soon. You will like her."

"Marian! That was our mother's name."

Then there was a silence, and, as they stood on the balcony, looking out upon the ocean, the snow-fringed waves might have been bringing back to them the time that seemed to belong to another life.

"Stay here a moment, Mat," said Nicholas; "I will fetch her."

And going into the house, he returned with a beautiful girl, whose face was rosy with youth and health, and whose eyes beamed with pleasure. Her graceful person and her soft white dress made her a pretty figure in the scene.

"Marian, my dear, your uncle."

He turned, and took her hand, and made a movement, as if about to kiss her. But he restrained himself with a sudden impulse.

"This is her first ball, Mat," said Nicholas, with an affectionate look at his daughter. "Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, so much, papa!"
As she spoke, her uncle dropped her hand, and faced the sea. She was moving away towards her partner, who was waiting for her, when her uncle wheeled round, and said, as if the words were forced out of him—

"Kiss me, child."

She raised her face to his, and he bent down and kissed her, then pushed her lightly towards her partner.

"She is a dear good girl, Mat," said Nicholas; "and the greatest blessing I have; that is," he added not at all enthusiastically, "next to Mrs Nuttall, of course. By the bye, Mat—how careless of me, to be sure, perhaps you have a family of your own. Are you married?"

"Nicholas," said his brother, not answering the question; "do you remember my character as a boy?"

"Quite well, Mat. Eager, pushing, brave, and determined."

"Very determined, Nicholas."

"Very determined. I often wish I had your determination of character. Old Mr Gray, our schoolmaster—you remember him, Mat?—used to say your determination was so determined, that it was nothing less than obstinacy. I heard him say of you one day, when Mat Nuttall makes up his mind to do a thing, he'll do it, whether it be good or bad, and whatever may be the result. He said it was not a good trait—but he was mistaken, Mat, for you are rich, and prosperous."

"I am rich and prosperous, as the world goes; but let that pass. I am not a whit less determined now than I was when a boy. Old Mr Gray was right. I am not to be turned from a determined purpose, whether I think I am right or wrong. Now, I have made up my mind to
do what is in my power, so far as prudence goes, to advance your fortunes. But when I say to you, you must not do such and such a thing, I expect you not to do it. You are attending to me.”

“Yes.”

“I am glad to have seen you—I am glad to have seen your—your Marian. But there is one subject which must never be mentioned between us. I have no wife, I have no family. Tell Mrs. Nuttall this, and spare me any questions from her. Tell her and your”—(and here the same indecision expressed itself when he spoke of his brother’s daughter)—“your Marian, that I am wifeless and childless. I must not be questioned upon the point. I have made up my mind not to be. I will not allow it to be referred to, or hinted at.”

He spoke with distinctness, and yet with a strange hurriedness, as if he wished to be done quickly with the subject.

“You see those two figures yonder,” he said, pointing to where the shadows of two persons could be seen upon the sea shore.

“Yes, Mat, I can see them, although my eyes are not so good as they were.”

“Suppose those two should walk out upon the sea, and sink, and sink, and be lost to the world—you can suppose it?”

“I can suppose it, Mat,” said his brother, wonderingly.

“Suppose they are walking out upon the sea, and that they are taking this subject with them, and that it sinks with them, and is heard of no more. See” (and he
waved his hand as the two figures disappeared), "they are gone, and the subject is gone, and they are lost to us for ever. And there is an end to them and to it. You understand me, Nicholas?"

"I understand you, Mat."

"Very well. We will go in now, and you shall introduce me to your wife."

Meanwhile, the two persons, whose shadows the brothers had noticed, were pacing the shore. The tide was running out, and each receding wave was rippled with soft touches of melody floating from the brilliantly lighted mansion.

"They're very jolly in there, Ally," said Grif; "there's lots of swells, with their white chokers, and lots of gals lookin' very sweet and nice."

"They are happier than we are, Grif," said the girl.

"I should think they was—they'd be precious fools if they wasn't. I got a squint at the kitchen—there's ducks, and geese, and turkeys, and jellies painted all sorts of colors, and sugar cakes—such a spread! I wish we'd some of it 'ere. They ought to be 'appy with such lots to eat. I tell yer wot, Ally; if I thought I was agoin' to be 'ung, I wouldn't mind it a bit if they'd put me down in that there kitchen, just as it is now, for about three 'ours. Wouldn't I go it!" Grif's eyes glistened at the bare anticipation.

"I want you to take a letter for me to that house," said Alice; "you don't mind?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll jist do anythin' as you tells me, Ally."

"You can't read."
"I can spell large letters on the walls. I never bothered about nothin' else."

"Do exactly as I tell you," said Alice, giving him a letter. "Go to the house, and ask if the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed is within. If they say he is, tell them that this letter is to be given to him at once—it is very important.

She spoke in short broken gasps, and stayed her speech to recover her breath.

"Don't cry, Ally," said Grif; "am I to arks to see the genelmen?"

"No. You can give the letter to any of the servants; then go away, and keep out of sight. If you see a gentleman speaking with me, do not disturb us, but when he is gone, and I am alone, come to me, and we will go home."

Her voice was very desolate as she spoke the last word. Grif gave a nod of comprehension, and walked to the house, while the girl strained her eyes thitherward in eager watchfulness. The night was changing now; a low wail of wind came across the sea, striking a colder chill of desolation to her heart. She shivered, and wrapped her shawl more closely about her. But for this movement she might have been an image of Sadness, so drear and lonely did she appear as she stood upon the glistening sands. A form wending its way towards her, caused her to shrink, and then to stretch forth her arms as if in supplication; but she did not stir from the spot.

"Is it you who wish to speak with me?"

"Father!"

"Alice!"
The sudden surprise robbed his voice of its sternness. He recoiled a step from her as she addressed him, and his face grew pale; but if the next moment the moon had shone upon it, no trace of emotion would have been there observable.

"Why did you address a note to me in a strange hand?" he asked.

"I thought you would not have come if you recognised my writing," she answered, sadly.

"What do you out at this time of night, and alone?"

"I am not alone, father," she said, glancing to where Grif was crouching, a hundred yards away.

"What! Is your husband here?" he exclaimed, with suppressed passion, following her look.

"No, sir; he does not know I have come; if he had known"

"He would have kept you away; it would have been wise in him."

"Father, have you no pity?"

"What do you want of me?"

"Help and forgiveness."

"I will give you both. You can come to my home, and I will receive you as my daughter."

"And my husband"

"I will have nought to do with him. I give you once again your choice. You are my daughter, or his wife. You cannot and shall not be both. As this is the first, so it shall be the last time I will see you upon the subject. You shall juggle me no more with false writing. The day you ran away from your home, from me who was hoarding and saving for you, I resolved to shut you
from my heart as long as you were tied to that scheming scapegrace. You know how constant I can be when I resolve."

"Alas! I know."

"So I have resolved on this, and no power on earth can change me. He stole you from me. He came to my house, and, with his fine gentleman's airs, robbed me of the one object of my life. What! shall a father toil and scheme for a lifetime, and set his heart upon a thing, and be foiled in a day by a supercilious cheat! What does a child owe a father? Obedience. You owed me that—but a small return for all I had lavished upon you, but a small return for the fortune I was amassing for you. Did I ask you for anything else? What was this, for a father to ask a daughter, that she should play the traitor to him?"

"Father, have pity!"

"You have thwarted the scheme of my life. But what was my strongest wish when it clashed with your girlish fancy? Listen. Do you know what I suffered when I first came into this colony? I suffered privation, hunger, misery, raging thirst, over and over again. I have walked, with blistered feet, hundreds and thousands of miles; I have labored with my axe till I was faint with fatigue; I have hidden from Blacks in fear of my life; I have been left for dead upon the burning plains; I have been lost in the bush until my whole being was one great despair! Was this a pleasant life to lead, and did I deserve no recompense? Was life so sweet to me, with these burdens, that I should enjoy it in the then present? I had a child—a daughter. But for her I
might have grown into a wild man of the bush, and
growled at the world and at humanity. I resolved to
grow rich, and to make her rich. I toiled, I slaved, I
schemed for her. I had an object, and life was less
bitter than before. I said, my daughter shall be the
envy of those who knew me poor; she shall marry riches,
and grow into fashion and into power from the force of
her father's and her husband's money. She shall be
called the rich squatter's daughter, and her children shall
be educated to rule the State. I knew well then, and
know well now, the power of gold; it could do all this
for me, and more. There is no aristocracy in this colony
but the aristocracy of wealth; money is the god all wor-
ship here. It ennobles the mean, it dignifies the vulgar.
It is all powerful. See what it does for me. What
fascinations, what graces, what virtues, do I possess,
that people should cringe to me and adulate me? And
as they idolise me, a man of money, for my wealth, so I
idolise my wealth for what it makes me,"

As he spoke from the vile selfishness of his heart, did
the wailing wind, sighing mournfully around him, suggest
to his mind no more precious thing in the world than gold?
Did the pale stars and the restless waves teach no lesson
that such an egotist might learn, and be the better for
the learning? Did they tell no story from which he
might have learned a noble creed, had he but listened
to their teaching? No! he felt not their influence. He
lived only in himself. Nature, for him, might not have
been, if he could have existed without her. She gave
him nothing that he should be grateful for; what he
received all others received. And so he beheld the
swelling waves, and heard the wailing wind, and looked up to the glimmering stars, with indifference. What was the glory of the heavens to him or to his life? A handful of gold and a sightful of stars! Was not the gold, which bought him human worship, more precious to him than all?

"Oh, father!" murmured Alice; "money is not everything."

"Money is everything," he replied; "everything to me. Can you undo, with a word, the study of my life? What did you owe me for the future I was working out for you? You owed me a child's duty, obedience. It was no unhappy lot I had mapped out for you. You have robbed me of the only reward I coveted for my life's labor. But why do I waste my time here?" and he made a movement toward the house.

"Stop, for pity's sake," Alice cried, stretching forth her arms; "stop and hear me."

"Speak on," he said, between his clenched teeth. There was no hope in his voice; it was hard and bitter.

"I came to-night, sir," Alice said, humbly bowing her head, and forcing back her tears, "to appeal to you for the first and last time. You may send me away, unhappy and broken hearted—indeed, I am that already—but oh, sir! reflect before you do so, and let your better feelings guide you. Ah, sir! are all your thoughts about yourself and your money, and have you no thought of me? I do not know a parent's feelings, but soon"—and here her voice faltered—"soon I may become a mother—forgive me, sir, these tears—I try to conquer them, but they are too strong for me"—(she paused for a few
moments, and then continued.) "What sympathy, sir, could you expect me, a simple girl, to have with your aspirations? I knew them not, and if you had confided them to me, I should not have understood them"——

"Have you come to tutor me, girl?" he asked, coldly.

"No, sir. If my distress and my misery have no weight with you, what can my poor words do? My husband—forgive me—I must speak of him."

"Go on."

"My husband, to whose fate and lot I am linked for ever—for ever," she repeated, firmly, "is willing to work for me, is contented to keep me, poor and friendless as I am. But he needs help. Give it him; give it me, and I will trouble you no more. I will be content, so that you assist us to live. You can do so, sir—you will not miss it. I cannot undo the past."

"Would you, if you could?" he questioned.

"For pity's sake, sir, do not ask me."

"Would you, if you could?" he repeated, relentlessly.

"Then, sir, as you insist," she returned, "I reply, as is my duty, No. He is my husband, and my future life is linked with his."

"Have you done?"

"I have but little more to say, sir. I feel from your voice that there is scant hope for me! But oh, sir, before you turn from me, think of what my future may be if you remain inexorable. You, who have undergone privations in your early life, know what a stern master is necessity. As yet, my husband is saved from crime"——

"Is this your last argument?" he interrupted. "It has no weight with me. You cannot more disgrace me
than you have already done. Here let this end. I am inexorable."

His voice, stern and unforgiving, carried conviction with it.

"Heaven help me!" she exclaimed, sadly. "Then we must trust to chance." And she turned from him, weeping.

There was a pause, and then he said, "I will not leave you entirely unsatisfied. It is money, I suppose, you want. Here are fifty pounds. It is the last you will ever receive from me while he and you are together. Good night."

She raised her arms, imploringly, but he was making towards the house. He saw not the entreat ing action, nor did he hear the low wailing sobs which broke from her as he walked away. A sad contrast was her drooping figure upon the lonely sands to the glad life that moved in the merchant's house! A sad accompaniment were her sobs to the strains of music and the sounds of light laughter with which they mingled! The guests within were joyous, while she, who should have been his one joy, stood desolate on the shore. But despite her misery, there was hope deep within her heart—hope of a happy future yet with the man with whose lot her's was linked. Her father had cast her off; but love remained; love strong and abiding. How great the contrast! A good woman's love, and a hard man's greed of gold. Which triumphs here?
CHAPTER VI.

GRIF IS SET UP IN LIFE AS A MORAL SHOEBLACK.

Grif, although but a poor and humble member of the human family, was as gregariously inclined as the rest of his species, and loved, when opportunity offered, to associate with his fellows. The circumstance of birth had placed him upon the lowest rung of the social ladder, and being grovelling by nature, he had no thought of striving upwards, and was always prowling about, like a hungry dog searching for a bone. Being gregariously inclined, he was to be depended upon as an item in a mob. The object of a gathering of people was not a thing to be considered—politics, religion, amusement, were all one to him. If he but chanced to come across a throng, he added one more to the number, from sheer force of habit. Thus, he was a passive auditor of street preachers of every denomination, and, being in the habit of standing quite still, with his hands in his pockets, and his mouth open, he grew to be looked upon as a godsend by the orators, who spoke at him, and scoffed at him, and humbled him, and hurled anathemas upon his head, as representing a class entirely devoid of godliness. They twisted his moral nature, and picked at it, and pulled it to pieces, and grew eloquent upon it. They said—Look at his rags, look at his dirt, look at the ignorance written in his countenance. They told him to repent if he wished to be saved from damnation; and they prayed for him, and wept for him so earnestly, that sometimes he experienced
a dull wonder that the earth did not open and swallow him, he felt so utterly and thoroughly bad. And yet, with an unconscious exercise of philosophy, he bore his lot uncomplainingly, and walked in the gutter (not feeling himself good enough to indulge in the pavement) without a murmur. Grif did not object to gutters; he had formed their acquaintance in his earliest infancy, and time and association; had almost endeared them to him. Everything in the world is comparative; pleasure, pain, success, disappointment, act in different ways upon different people: the effect depends upon constitution and education. So dirt and cleanliness are differently regarded by different classes of society. To a well-regulated mind the spectacle of Grif walking in a narrow street, and picking his steps carefully along the gutter, would have caused a sensation of wondering disgust; and a pair of well-polished wellington boots might naturally have objected to come into contact with the dirty broken bluchers in which Grif’s feet slipped-slopped constantly. But, in the eyes of Grif, dirty boots were no disgrace; he felt not the shame of them. From the moment he came into possession of a second-hand pair (he had never known the respectable bliss of a new tight-fitting boot, pressing on corn or bunion), they were dragged down to his own level, and forfeited their position in society. They may have been occasionally scraped, but they were never polished; and so they lost their respectability, and became depraved and degraded, and their seams and sole were eaten into with mud and dirt, until they gave up the ghost in the boot world, and trod the earth no more.
Grif's mind was disturbed, as might be gathered from his mutterings. "I desay she's right," he muttered; "it's wrong to steal, she ses; but wot's a cove to do? Git a sitiuation. That's all wery good, but who'd 'ave me?" and he looked down upon his boots, not with disgust, but with distrust, and stepped out of the gutter on to the pavement. "I don't want to steal; I only wants my grub and a blanket. If any swell 'd give 'em to me, it 'd be all right. But where's the swell? Where am I to find 'im? She ses I might git a billet as a errand boy. I wonder if any of the shops 'd 'ave me! I'll try at all ewents. I promised 'er I would, and I ain't agoin' to deceive 'er!"

But Grif was not to be successful. He walked into scores of shops and places of business with the timid yet half defiant inquiry, "Do yer want a errand boy?" and was sometimes roughly, sometimes ignominiously, turned out. He was not a savoury-looking boy, and did not bear upon his outward appearance any recommendation to the situation he was soliciting. His boots were muddy, his clothes were ragged, his skin was dirty, his hair was matted. He did not add another word to the query, "Do yer want a errand boy?" and he did not at all take it in bad part that he was treated with contumely. Indeed, if such a state of mind can be conceived, he was absolutely exultant at each rebuff. "I told 'er so," he would mutter to himself, triumphantly; "who'd 'ave anythin' to do with a beggar like me? But I promised 'er I'd try, and I ain't agoin' to deceive her." Once or twice he was surlily spoken to by the policemen. Readers who
are not acquainted with colonial life, must not suppose that the police, or that other "institutions," differ in any essential in the colonies from those of other older countries. The colonies are certainly new, but they do not commence their career at the year One, but at the year Eighteen Hundred and Odd. There is just about the same comparative amount of vice and virtue, goodness and wickedness, ruffianism and kind-heartedness, as is to be met with in any other part of the world. Those who say otherwise, and cause others to think otherwise, are in the wrong. There are in the colonies just as much unkindness and uncharitableness, just as much charity and benevolence, just as much ignorance, just as much noble-mindedness, as can be found amongst masses of human creatures anywhere. It is true that men get into false positions oftener than in the old country, but that is scarcely to be wondered at. Those readers will therefore please not to wonder that Grif should be looked upon in precisely the same light as he would be looked upon if he was prowling about London streets. To the Melbourne constable, he was just what a ragged pilfering boy would be to a London constable. It did not much affect him. He was accustomed to be buffeted, and cuffed, and maltreated. The world had given him nothing but hard knocks since his birth, and he took them without murmuring. He grinned and dodged about when the conservators of public peace spoke harshly to him. But he had a promise to perform; and he had resolved to perform it conscientiously. So it happened that he stood at the door of the great place of business of Mr. Zachariah Blemish, with the intention of asking for
the situation of an errand boy. The green baize folding
doors somewhat daunted him; but, hesitating for one
moment only, he pushed them open and entered. It
chanced that, exactly upon his entrance, Zachariah
Blemish came out of his own particular private room for
the purpose of putting a question to one of his clerks,
and that the great Blemish and the small Grif stood face
to face. It was a marvellous contrast. The great
Blemish, clean and polished, smooth-shaved and glossy;
the small Grif, dirty and ragged, with the incipient
stubble of manhood upon his chin and cheeks. For
Nature is impartial in her supply of beard and whiskers.
Money will not buy them, nor will grease produce them,
though it be puffed and perfumed. The rich great
Blemish, then, looked down upon the poor little Grif.
For a moment, the great man's breath was taken away
at the sight. In his counting-house, sanctified by the
visits of Members of Parliament, of Ministers, and of
merchants of the highest standing; in sight of his
books, wherein were entered records of transactions
amounting to thousands of pounds; the appearance of a
ragged boy, and such a ragged boy, was, to speak of it in
the mildest terms, an anomaly.

"What do you do here?" asked Blemish.

"Do yer want a errand boy?" asked Grif, in return.

"A what?" enquired Blemish, sharply.

"A errand boy," replied Grif, calmly.

At this juncture, a policeman, who had watched Grif
enter the office, and who was sycophantishly disposed to
protect the interests of wealth and position, popped his
head in at the door, and touching his hat, begged Mr.
Blemish's pardon, but the boy was a thief, and he thought he was up to no good.

"Umph!" said Mr. Blemish. "He looks like it. But thank you, policeman," this with a stately affability; "I do not think you will be wanted."

Whereupon the policeman touched his hat again, and vanished.

"Come this way," said Mr. Blemish to Grif, who, considerably astonished that he had not been given into custody, followed the great man into his private room. There he found himself in the presence of two other gentlemen, Mr. Mathew Nuttall, and Mr. David Dibbs.

"Now then," said Mr. Blemish, when Grif had disposed himself before the great merchant like a criminal; "what do you mean by coming into my place of business?"

"I wants a situwation as a errand boy," replied Grif.

"The policeman says you are a thief," interrogated Mr. Blemish; "what do you say to that?"

"Nothin'," replied Grif, shortly.

"You are a thief, then?"

"When I can't get nothin' to eat for nothin', I takes it," returned Grif, uncompromisingly; "I ain't a-goin' to starve."

"Starve!" exclaimed Mr. Blemish, lifting up his hands in pious wonderment. "Starve! In this land of plenty!"

"It ain't a land of plenty to me; I wish it wos."

"Really," observed Mr. Blemish, to surrounding space, "the unblushing manner in which such ragamuffins as this gives the lie to political economists, is positively frightful. Do you believe in statistics, boy?"
"I don't believe in nothin'," said Grif.

"Did you expect a situation here?" inquired Mr. Blemish, looking down upon the lad, as if wondering what business he had in the world.

"No."

"Why did you come then?"

"I promised 'er to try, though I told 'er it wasn't no use."

"Who is 'er?" inquired one of the gentlemen.

Grif gave a great start at the voice, and threw a sudden sharp look at the questioner's face.

"Who is 'er?" repeated the gentleman.

"She's a lady, that's wot she is."

"Upon my word," remarked Mr. Blemish, blandly, "I did not know that vagabonds like you associated with ladies. This boy is evidently an original."

"Don't you call no names," said Grif. "If you don't want a errand boy, say so, and send me away."

"Better and better," observed Mr. Blemish, composedly. "Now, this is something in my way, although I am not aware that I have met with such a character before to-day. Why did you start when this gentleman spoke to you?"

"I thort I knew 'is voice," returned Grif.

"And do you know it? Have you had the pleasure of this gentleman's acquaintance?" this said so pleasantly that both the gentlemen smiled.

"Never seed the genelmen afore, as I knows on," said Grif, evasively.

"What do you do for a living?" asked Mr. Blemish.

"Nothin' particerler."
"And you find it very hard work, I have no doubt," observed the gentleman who had spoken before.

"Yes, I do; very 'ard," replied Grif, literally, with another sharp look at the speaker; and then, with sudden exasperation, he exclaimed, "Wot's the use of badgerin' me? You ain't goin' to do nothin' for me. Why don't you let me go?"

"Come," said Mr. David Dibbs, who had, up to this time, taken no part in the dialogue, "I tell you what it is, young feller. You keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll commit you on the spot. I'm a magistrate, that's what I am, and I'll give you a month as sure as eggs is eggs, if you don't mind what you're up to."

"I don't care!" responded Grif, recklessly; "I ain't goin' to be badgered."

"You don't care!" exclaimed Mr. David Dibbs, turning as red as a turkey-cock. "Send for the policeman, Blemish. I'll have him put in gaol, and flogged! Is a magistrate to be sauced in this here way?"

"Nay, nay, Mr Dibbs," said Mr. Blemish, soothingly; "you have every right to be angry, but let me deal with the boy, I beg. Now, suppose," he said, addressing Grif, impressively, "suppose I were to take it into my head (I haven't any such idea, mind you) to give you a situation as errand boy, what remuneration would you require in return?"

"Wot wot?" asked Grif?

"What remuneration—what salary—how much a week would you expect?"

"I don't expect nothin' a week," answered Grif; "I
only wants my grub and a blanket. But if yer ain't got no sich idea, wot's the good of keeping me 'ere?"

"Of course you know nothing of religion?"

"I've been preached to," responded Grif, "till I'm sick of it."

"This boy interests me," remarked Mr. Blemish, speaking to society in general; "I should like to make an experiment with him. Who knows but that we might save his soul!"

"You can't do that," said Grif, moodily.

"Can't save your soul!"

"No; preacher chap sed it 'd go to morchel perdition; and I s'pose he knows."

Mr. Blemish raised his eyes to the ceiling, and an expression of sublime pity stole over his countenance. Grif edged closer to the door, as if anxious to be dismissed.

"This is a spectacle for humanity," said Mr. Blemish, waving his hands to the walls, as if inviting the attention of the world to his remarks. "This is a new specimen of the species, Man. Shall we let it go, or shall we reform it? What is our duty? It has eyes, it has speech, it has hands, and it walks like a biped. I am amazed!"

"What are you amazed at?" inquired Mr. David Dibbs. "I've seen hundreds of boys like this here one—he ain't any different to the rest. They're a bad, wicious lot."

Grif assented to the last remark by a nod.

"You may have seen hundreds of boys like this one, but I do not think—I really do not think—that I have
ever seen one so bad. But our duty is clear. Listen to me"—this to Grif, with a forefinger warningly held up; "I am going to give you a chance of reforming."

"All right; I'm agreeable," said Grif, in a tone that betokened utter indifference of the matter.

"In my capacity as President of the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory, I will provide you with a boot stand, a set of brushes, and a pot of the best blacking. You can polish boots."

"I've only got to rub at 'em, I s'pose," said Grif, wishing his own feet, with their dirty bluchers, would fly off his legs.

"You can take up your stand at once. What do you say? Are you willing to be honest?"

"I'm willin' enough," replied Grif; "I only wants my grub and a blanket. It don't matter to me how I gets 'em, so long as I do get 'em."

"Very well," and Mr. Blemish touched the bell, which on the instant brought a clerk, to whom he gave instructions. "Go with this young man, and he will provide you with everything that is necessary, and come to-night to the meeting of the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory. Do you know why it is called the Moral Boot Blacking Boys' Reformatory?"

"No."

"Because all the boys are moral. If they are not moral when they are admitted, they are made moral. So mind that you're moral. The more moral you are, the better you will get on."

"I'll be wery moral, I will," promised Grif.

"Now you can go; I shall keep my eye on you, and
watch how you conduct yourself;" and then Mr. Blemish straightened himself, and swelled and puffed, as who should say, "I have done a noble and a moral action, and now I can transact my business with an easy conscience."

Grif, finding himself set up in life as a moral shoeblack, felt uncomfortably strange as he stood behind his stand in one of the Melbourne streets. He had been provided with a set of brushes, and a pot of the best blacking, and the look with which he surveyed his stock-in-trade was a very puzzled one. For an hour no customer came. Thinking that the state of his own boots was not a recommendation to business, he set to work brushing and polishing them up. It is amazing what a difference a well-polished pair of boots makes in one's appearance. As he surveyed his shining leathers, Grif felt that an important change had taken place in his prospects. He was already a respectable member of society. But still no customer came. He was a shrewd lad, and, thinking to tempt the passers-by, he took off his boots, and placed them upon his stand, and courted custom with bare feet. In vain. Most of those who passed took no heed of him; a few looked at him, and smiled—some in pity, some in derision. It was like standing in the pillory. He turned hot and cold, and flushed and paled, by turns. In truth, it was no enviable task for Grif, who had been a Bedouin of the bye-ways all his life, to stand stock-still, as if proclaiming that he was ashamed of his past life, and begged to be admitted into the ranks of honest respectability. Besides, he was hungry, and gnawing sensations within made him restless.
and unhappy. But Grif behaved bravely. He did not flinch from his post. Presently an incident occurred. Two men, whom he recognised at once as Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman, stopped before him.

"May I be poisoned," said Jim to his companion, surveying Grif with a scornful look; "if the young prig ain't turned respectable."

Grif was so indignant at the imputation that he was about to deny it, when Jim Pizey spoke again.

"And how much, sir," he asked, "would you charge to clean my boots?"

"Sixpence."

"And my mate's?"

"Sixpence."

"Strike me dumb!" exclaimed the Tenderhearted Oysterman, as if possessed with a sudden idea. "Will you take sixpence for cleaning the two pair?"

Grif, wishing to begin business, said, "Yes."

"Well, fire away, then," said the Tenderhearted Oysterman, putting up his foot; "and shine 'em up well, or we'll give you in charge for keeping a bootstand under false pretences."

Thus exhorted, Grif brushed and spat, and spat and brushed, until the men could look down and see their villainous faces reflected in their boots. The job being done—

"Strike me deaf!" exclaimed the Tenderhearted Oysterman, feeling in his pockets. "I haven't got a mag about me. Ask me for the tanner the next time you see me."
“Jist you stamp up now!” cried Grif, almost crying with vexation, “or it'll be worse for yer.”

“Strike me blind!” exclaimed the Tenderhearted Oysterman. “If the young prig ain’t getting bumptious.”

Here he gave the stand a kick, and sent the blacking-bottle, the brushes, and Grif’s boots, rolling in the gutter, and, while Grif was busy picking them up, the two worthies slunk off, laughing.

This was not an encouraging beginning, and dark doubts entered Grif’s mind as to whether he really had made a change for the better.

“Wot’s the use of bein’ moral,” he grumbled, as he re-arranged his stand, “if this is the way I’m served? I’m precious ’ungry. I wish I was near the confecshoners. I’d go and arks for a pie. But I’ll see it out. I promised Ally I would, and I will. Hallo! what do you want?”

This was addressed to a boy, if possible dirtier and more ragged than Grif himself. Indeed, dirt and this boy had become so inseparable that he was known by the simple but expressive name of Dirty Bob. Now, Dirty Bob had seen Grif take up his stand, and had disdainfully watched him wait for customers. In Dirty Bob’s eyes, Grif was a renegade, a sneak, for setting up as a shoeblack. And he determined to show his disdain in his own particular way. He possessed only one sixpence in the world, but this he resolved to spend luxuriously.

“Oh, it's you, Dirty Bob, is it?” said Grif.

“Yes, it's me,” responded Dirty Bob, loftily.

“Wot do yer want?” asked Grif.

“Wot do I want?” echoed Dirty Bob. “Wy, you’re a bootblack, ain't yer?”
“Yes,” replied Grif, with dignity. “I’m a moral shoeblack now.”

“Ho! crikey!” exclaimed Dirty Bob. “Wot do yer call yerself?”

“I’m a moral shoeblack,” repeated Grif, feeling somewhat shamefaced.

“Ere’s a go!” cried Dirty Bob. “A moral shoeblack, are yer? Well, then, clean my boots, and mind yer clean ‘em morally;” and he flopped upon the stand a foot encased in a boot in the very last stage of decay.

In Grif’s eyes, this was a humiliation, and he felt half inclined to pitch into Dirty Bob; but the thought that by so doing he might injure his character as a moral shoeblack, restrained him.

“Now then,” exclaimed Dirty Bob; “wot are yer waitin’ for? Clean my boots, d’yer ’ear! Wot are yer blockin’ up the street for if yer won’t clean a genelman’s boots when yer told?”

“Where’s yer tanner?” asked Grif, gloomily.

“Ere it is,” replied Dirty Bob, producing it. “It’s a good un. It’s the only one I got, but I’m goin’ to spend it ’spectably and genteelly. Brush away.”

After a little uncomfortable communing, Grif spat upon his brush, and commenced to rub, submitting silently to the scornful observations of Dirty Bob.

“I say, sir,” observed Dirty Bob (and be it here remarked that the “sir” was a nettle which stung Grif sharply); “I say, sir, do yer want a ’prentice?”

“I don’t want none of yer cheek,” said Grif, rubbing so smartly that he almost rubbed off the upper leather; “that’s what I don’t want. So yer’d better ’old yer jaw.”
“I beg yer pardon, sir,” said Dirty Bob, meekly. “I forgot that I wos speakin’ to one of the Hupper Class. And ho! sir!” he exclaimed, in a tone of anguish. “Don’t tell the perlce, or they’d put me in quod for cheekin’ a moral shoeblack.”

“There; yer boots are done,” ejaculated the disgusted Grif; “where’s the tanner?”

“Don’t yer think, sir,” said Dirty Bob, surveying his boots, “that one on ’em is a little more polished than t’other. Would you please make ’em even, and give this cove another rub?”

Grif commenced again rubbing, viciously.

“Ho! don’t rub so ’ard, sir!” exclaimed Dirty Bob.

“I was brought up very tender, I wos, and I’ve got a wopping corn on my big toe. Thankey, sir. ’Ere’s the tanner, and wen ye’re Lord Mayor, don’t forget Dirty Bob!”

And he walked off, whistling. It was late in the day now, so Grif shouldered his stand, and walked away. His heart was not very light, for the first sixpence he had honestly earned in his life had been earned with a sense of bitter humiliation.
CHAPTER VII.

OLD FICK.

Old Flick’s dwelling-place was in a narrow thoroughfare—so narrow, that Old Flick might have shaken hands with his neighbor on the opposite side of the way without moving from his own side of the pavement. Not that he ever tried the experiment, for Old Flick was not given to the shaking of hands, and was as secret and close as the grave. The thoroughfare was a misnomer; for if you walked about twenty yards beyond old Flick’s dwelling-place, you came, to your great discomfiture, plump upon the dead wall of a building, which checked all further progress. Many deluded pedestrians, who had strolled into the place, curious to know whither it led, had been compelled to retire in dudgeon. A clever speculator had purchased the land round about Old Flick’s dwelling, and had cut it up, and mapped it out, and built upon it, with so much ingenuity, that when he came to Old Flick’s Thoroughfare, which was the last built upon, he, to his exceeding surprise, found himself blocked in; and, rushing to his plans, discovered that he had given himself a few feet of land more upon paper than he actually possessed upon earth. But he derived consolation from the thought that he had accomplished his object, which was, to build as many tenements as he could crowd upon his land, and to allow as little walking and breathing space as possible to his tenantry. This result being successfully attained, he took a first-class
passage home, and retired to Bermondsey, where he lives to the present day upon the results of his ingenuity, and talks continually, in grandiloquent strains, of his estates in Victoria.

Old Flick's Thoroughfare, as it had grown to be called, boasted of about two feet of pavement and six feet of road, and contained sixteen tenements—eight on each side. In the owner's plan of the estate, which decorated the walls of his parlor in Bermondsey, it was represented as a magnificent street, lined on each side with handsome edifices, four storeys high, and crowded with carriages and pedestrians of the most fashionable character; whereas, in truth, the tenements were each composed of but one storey, and there was scarcely room in the road to wheel a barrow. Over the portico of Old Flick's dwelling was the inscription:—

OLD FLICK'S
ALL-SORTS STORE.

WHOLESALE, RETAIL, AND FOR EXPORTATION.

For be it here remarked, it is the fashion of most small traders in the colonies to sell everything, down to oranges and gingerbread, "wholesale, retail, and for exportation." It is an idiosyncrasy peculiar to the class. In the windows of Old Flick's All Sorts Store was heaped the most worthless collection of worthless articles that could possibly be compressed within so small a space. Blunt saws, dirty pannikins, broken crockery, worn-out dog collars, no-bladed penknives, empty ink bottles, rust-eaten picks and shovels, a few torn books, the broken works of two or three clocks and watches, with a multitude of other utterly incongruous things, were tumbled
indiscriminately upon each other. One pane was occupied with an announcement that "Doctor Flick prescribed for, and cured every disorder incidental to the human frame, at the lowest possible rates;" and in another pane appeared the announcement that Old Flick was a land and estate agent, and collected rents and debts, and acted as the confidential adviser of all persons in trouble and difficulty, and that secrecy and dispatch might be relied upon. As a proof that he was ready for consultation or active business, Old Flick, with his palsied frame and blear eyes, might be seen, half the day, standing in ragged slippers, at his door, on the watch for customers. He might not inaptly have been likened to an ugly spider on the look-out for flies.

The origin of Old Flick was wrapped in mystery. Nothing further was known of him, than that he had sprung up suddenly in Canvas Town, and that, when that motley delectability was swept away, he had migrated to the blind alley to which he gave his name, and which had just then been formed by the operations of the Bermondsey speculator. Even in Canvas Town, where probably was assembled the most incongruous mass of human beings ever congregated together; where thief and gentleman slept with but the division of a strip of calico between them, and where ladies cooked their family meals, and washed their family clothes, in the open thoroughfare—even there, Old Flick was a mystery. He was a tall, thin, stooping man, with an unwholesome-looking face, always stubbled and dirty. He was sixty years of age, or thereabouts, and he was so shaky that he could scarcely hold a glass to his lips without
spilling half its contents. He said it was ague; others said it was rum. At the time of his introduction to the reader, he was standing at his door, as usual, in his ragged slippers, with his bleary eyes looking frequently over his shoulder to the room at the back of his store. While thus engaged, he was accosted by an untidy-looking girl, with her hair hanging over her shoulders, and bearing a look of decided dissipation in her face, yet with sufficient traces of beauty in it to attract attention.

"Hallo! Old Flick! Who is inside?"

"No one, Milly," he answered.

"What a liar you are, Flick!" said Milly. "Jim's inside, and you know it."

"Jim isn't inside," he returned. "You're drunk."

"That's another lie," said Milly. "I say, Old Flick, I never saw you blush. Tell the truth for once, and set your face on fire."

Old Flick looked venomously at the girl, but she only laughed at him in return.

"Go in, and tell Jim I want to speak to him," she said.

"I have told you he isn't there," responded Old Flick.

"All right. Then I'll sit here and wait for him;" and she sat down on the pavement in front of the store. Old Flick was in despair. He glared at her, and swore at her.

"Get up, you she-devil," he quavered, in a voice shaking with passion.

"I shan't. If you call me names, I'll pull your whiskers out." And then she sang a verse of a song,
declaring that she was good-tempered and free, and ending with, "and I don't care a single pin what the world thinks of me."

"Go away, Milly," said Old Flick coaxingly; "go away, there's a dear! You'll have the peelers on you, and if Jim hears you"—

"Oh, he is in there, is he!" exclaimed Milly, rising to her feet.

"Yes, but it's more than my life's worth to disturb him. Go away, quietly, there's a dear!"

"All right," she said; "just you tell him, when you go in, to come home soon. I didn't want to see him, you old fool. I only wanted to know where he was. Oh, what a liar you are, Flick!"

And giving him a playful pinch on his withered cheek, she walked away, singing.

In the back room of old Flick's dwelling was assembled a quartette, each member of which bore upon his face a certificate for the gallows. It was composed of Jim Pizey, Black Sam, Ned Rutt, and the Tenderhearted Oysterman. Spirits and glasses were on the table, and the room was filled with smoke.

"That's arranged then," said Jim Pizey; "we meet at Gisborne this day fortnight. And mind, if any of us comes across that young skunk, Dick Handfield, he's not to be let go."

"Where's that milk-faced woman of his got to, I wonder," said Ned Rutt; "I'd work it out of her if I knew where she was."

"Strike me blind!" exclaimed the Tenderhearted Oysterman. "You don't mean to say you'd hit a woman!"
"I'd wring her neck for her," said Ned Rutt, sneering. "You wouldn't hurt a woman, of course, Oysterman."

"Strike me dizzy!" exclaimed the Oysterman. "Hurt a woman! I wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Come here, Old Flick," shouted Jim Pizey, striking the table violently, and putting an end to the discussion, "Come here, you shaking old villain, and let's settle up with you."

Which settling-up caused a great deal of whining on the part of Old Flick, and a great deal of cursing on the part of the quartette.

"Milly's been here, Jim," said Old Flick, when the settling was arranged, and Ned Rutt and Black Sam had departed. "She kicked up a nice row. I had as much as I could do to prevent her coming in."

"I'd have split her head open if she had," said Pizey, savagely. "She'll be whimpering nicely, when she knows I'm going away. But never mind her. Just listen to what I say, Flick, and don't miss a word."

With their heads close together, Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman laid bare their scheme. It was complete in its villainousness. Sticking-up, burglary, murder—they would stop short at nothing.

"It sounds very well, Jim," said Old Flick. "But I've heard such lots of these schemes, and they've all ended in smoke."

"And why?" asked Jim Pizey, with passion. "Why have they all ended in smoke? Because, when everything has been cut and dried, some white-livered thief grew squeamish, and backed out of it! or because the infernal cowards have turned dainty at the sight of a
drop of blood, and didn't have heart enough among the lot of 'em to kill a man! But this sha'n't end so—if any man turns tail when I am leading, I'll give him six barrels, one after another; he shall never turn tail again. We've got the right lot this time; there are four of us down here, and I can reckon upon four up the country. When we've got them altogether, we'll stick up the escort perhaps. I'll take care we won't bungle over it. We'll kill every damned trooper among 'em."

"But we won't hurt 'em, Flick," said the Tender-hearted Oysterman. "If I thought we should hurt the poor coves, I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

"There sha'n't be many left to blab about it," said Jim. "How would you like to have your hands in the gold-boxes, Flick, and run the dust through your fingers, eh?" Old Flick's eyes glistened, and his fingers twitched, as if they were already playing with the precious dust. "How would you like to buy it at so much a pannikinful, eh, Flick? That's the way lots of it was sold after the Nelson was stuck up in Hobson's Bay."

"Ah," said Old Flick, pensively, "that was a smart trick, that was. But then men had pluck in them."

"It's all very well to say that," grumbled Jim; "I could find men with lots of pluck, but there are no opportunities, worse luck!"

"Only think," said Old Flick, gloating upon the subject; "the dark night; the ship ready for sea, and going to sail the next day; all the gold on board; the captain and officers on shore, boozing. I can see it all. The ship lies snugly at anchor; a boat, with muffled
ears, comes quietly to the side; half a dozen plucky men glide up like snakes on to the deck. Down goes the watch, gagged and bound in no time. The iron boxes, filled with gold—a hundred thousand ounces—are lowered into the boat, and in a few minutes the brave fellows are pulling back to the shore, made for life." And Old Flick's villainous face brightened, and his eyes glistened.

"Made for life!" sneered Jim. "Not they. They were robbed right and left by such villains as yourself. I could lay my hands on a man in this town who would only put down a hundred sovereigns for every pannikin of gold-dust he bought. Full measure, too!"

"That's the way they do us poor hard-working coves," grumbled the Oysterman. "Why, every one of them pannikins was worth a thousand pounds. He ought to be had up for embezzlement."

And thus conversing, they sat together until late in the night, hatching their villainous schemes; and when they departed, Old Flick chuckled, and rubbed his hands, and with one leg, and nearly the whole of the other, in the grave, he indulged in anticipations of a glowing future, as he drank his rum and water.
CHAPTER VIII.

POOR MILLY.

A hot, scorching day. The winds, having travelled over hundreds of miles of arid plain and smoking bush, floated into Melbourne, laden with blazing heat. The sky glared down whitely, and the blinding sun scorched up moisture and vegetation with its eye of fire. The very clouds were white with heat, and to look up at them made one dizzy. In the city, mankind pantèd with thirst and fatigue, and, regardless of consequences, revelled, inordinately and greedily, in ices and cool drinks. Womankind retreated to cellars and shady nooks, and divesting itself of superfluous attire, indulged, gratefully, in water melons; and mankind, coming home wearied and parched, joined womankind in her retreat, and lay at her feet, tamely. Dogkind pantèd, and lolled out its tongue, distressfully: but though it wandered in despair through the streets, it found no relieving moisture in kennel or gutter; and being, by its constitution and laws, debarred from the luxury of ices and cool drinks, it endured agonies of silent suffering. Clerks fell asleep over their ledgers, and storekeepers grew dozy behind their desks. At the seaside the very waves were too wearied to roll, and lay, supine, beneath the dreadful glare of the sun. The beaches were deserted: not even a crab was to be seen. In the country, the bush smoked and blazed, and wretched oxen strained at their chains, and did their
half-a-mile an hour in dire distress. With suffering
noses almost touching the ground, they smelt in vain
along the earth for liquid life. The drivers, with their
cabbage-tree hats slouched over their eyes, were too lazy
to crack their whips, and too fatigued to swear loudly at
their cattle; but, determined not to be cheated of their
privilege, they growled and cursed in voices almost in-
 audible. The leafless trees smoked beneath the glare of
the sun, and stretched their bare branches to the sky as
if for pity, but got none. On the goldfields, diggers
stripped to their shirts, and were glad to plunge into
cool drives and to hide themselves, with bottles of lager
beer or billies of cold tea by their side; those who could
find no such shelter threw themselves upon their
stretchers, and longed eagerly for the night. Every-
where, business, except where bare-armed men or mus-
lin-clad barmaids served long drinks to thirsty souls, was
at a standstill. Merchants were too lazy to haggle.
Percentages were forgotten, and invoices disregarded.
Even Zachariah Blenish dressed in white linen from the
top of his head to the sole of his foot, and looking, with
his rubicund face, like a white and pink saint, ready and
fit to fly heavenward, lolled idly in his sanctum, and
refreshed himself with hock and seltzer water. The con-
jugal Nuttalls were in the deepest misery. The head of
the family, Nicholas Nuttall, was in his dressing room,
pouring jugsful of cold water over his head, as if he was
afraid of its taking fire; and, directing his eyes to the
bed, beheld thereupon the partner of his bosom, whose
face was puffed up with mosquito bites, and who, glaring
reproachfully at her husband, said as plainly as eloquent
looks could speak, Fiend! behold your handiwork
Walls and pavement were smoking; and all nature
excepting the flies and the fishes, was in a state of
misery. The blazing wind was comparable to nothing
but the blast from a fiercely-heated furnace, and high
and low succumbed to its power.

High and low! Aye, even down to Old Flick, who,
in the back-room of his All Sorts Store, in Old Flick's
Thoroughfare, gasped, and growled, and cursed, as he
drank his rum and water. Old Flick was attired in
shirt, trousers, and slippers. Nothing more. His shirt
was open at the bosom, thereby displaying a sinewy
chest, covered with dirty grey hair; and was tucked up
to the shoulders, shewing his lean and bony arms. He
was not a pleasant object to look upon, with his strag-
gling hair, and his blotched face, and his bloodshot,
bleary eyes. One might have wondered, while looking
upon him, Was this man ever a child, and was he ever
blessed with a mother's love? One might have so won-
dered, and, doubting, might have been pardoned for the
doubt. For, indeed, he looked terribly sinful and de-
praved: a very blot upon humanity. Sitting, and
drinking, and growling, he became conscious of a shadow
before him, and looking up, and seeing the girl Milly,
who had just entered the door, he made a motion as if
he would like to spring upon her. She, too, was not
pleasant to look upon; for she also had been drinking,
and her eyes were bloodshot. Her hair was hanging
loosely about her face, and she had a reckless and defiant
manner which almost unwomanised her.

"What do you want?" growled Old Flick.
"I want money, you old sinner," cried Milly, with a
kind of drunken scream.

"You're a pretty article to want money," said Old
Flick, with a sneer. "Go and earn it."

"Don't say that again, Flick," said the girl, with a
threatening look, "or I'll tear your liver out. Oh, I
don't care for your looks! What do you think I've got
in me to-day?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," he replied.

"I've got the devil in me," she cried; "mind how
you let it loose. Where's that letter you got from
Jim?"

"I've burnt it."

"You're a liar!" she screamed. "You're a liar, a
liar, a liar!"

"You're drunk, you hag!" he exclaimed, in a voice
thick with passion. "If you don't go away, I'll set the
police on you."

"Do!" she replied, laughing scornfully. "And I'll
tell them who you are in league with. Who do you
think they will believe? You or me? You'll set the
peelers on me, will you? You worn-out parcel of bones,
it's more than your soul's worth—though that's not
worth much. I'll tell them that you are in league with
two of the cursedest scoundrels in the colony. And I'll
prove it too. You shall go out of here into quod, and
out of quod into hell, old Flick! You'll set the peelers
on me, will you? Shall I call 'em in?" and she moved
towards the door.

He threw one of his evil looks upon her, and, in his
shaking voice, told her to stay where she was.
"Give me some drink," exclaimed Milly, taking the bottle as she spoke, and drinking from it. "Do you know what I am going to do, Flick?" she asked, her mood suddenly changing. "I'm going to kill myself with drink."

"All the better," he growled.

"Right you are!" she returned, recklessly. "I'm tired of my life. It's time I was dead. Look here, Flick; if you don't tell me where Jim is, I'll set the place about your ears."

"I don't know," he whined; "how should I know? What's the use of asking me where he is? I know nothing about him."

"You grey-headed old rip, ain't you afraid that your lies will choke you? Ain't you afraid of dying? What an old sinner you are! Do you ever think of the worms creeping over your ugly carcase, and gloating over you when you are in your grave? Do you ever think of the cold slimy earth falling on your face through the coffin, and sucking all the hope out of you, even after you are dead? Ain't you afraid when you think of it? I am! I am!" she exclaimed, with a shuddering shriek; "or I should have killed myself long ago."

The drunken old man's face twitched with terror as she spoke these dreadful words, and he whined piteously, "Don't, Milly, there's a good girl. Talk of something pleasant."

"If I wasn't afraid of that," she continued, "I should have been out of it long before now. I bought some poison one day, and was very near taking it. But I got such a fit of shaking all at once, that I threw it on the
floor; and stamped on it, and ran away, mad with fright. Did you ever try to take poison, Flick? Pour it in a glass, and look at it for a moment, and you see a lot of devils glaring at you and clutching at you, and you feel a lot of creeping things dancing in your brain, and stirring in your hair, and tingling at your fingers' ends!"

Old Flick shook with fear now, and not with ague. "Don't talk like that Milly," he cried again, looking fearsomely about him; "do talk of something pleasant."

"Something pleasant!" Milly exclaimed. "What have I got pleasant to talk about, you miserable old fool? I wish the sun would burst through the ceiling, and strike me dead;" and she threw her hair from her face, and looked up wildly. "Do you know, Flick, I think something is going to happen to me? My head is whirling about strangely. I've got an old father and mother at home, and I've been thinking of them at odd times, all the day. Father is an old man—a basket-maker—and I can see him as plainly as I see you, sitting down in our little room, weaving the canes, and thinking of me. Yes, I can see him thinking of me. He used to stroke my hair and my face, and call me his pretty Milly. And what do you think he is doing now, Flick? He is looking at me, and crying, and I am lying dead in a basket cradle, with flowers all about me. But he never looked after me; he used to let me do as I liked."

"Why don't you go home to him?" growled Old Flick?"

"Home!" she exclaimed. "Home! As I am! What would they say of me, I wonder? No; thank
God, they think me dead. But there! I don’t want to think of them, and they still keep coming up;” and she passed her hands over her face, confusedly.

“What’s the matter, Milly?” Old Flick said, soothingly. “What’s made you like this?”

“Drink!” she cried. “Drink and thought. And the more I think, the more my head is filled with awful fancies. Why did Jim go away from me? What right had he to leave me alone by myself? When I was like this he used to beat me, and it did me good;” and here she began to cry. But, seeing that Flick was about to speak, she said, “Stop a minute. I haven’t done yet. I must work myself out first, and then I shall be all right. How long is it since you were a boy, Flick?”

“I don’t remember,” he muttered.

“That’s what I don’t want to do, Flick; but I can’t help it. It isn’t so long ago since I was a little girl, and I can’t help remembering. Oh, if I could forget! if I could forget!” And throwing herself upon the ground, she sighed, and trembled, and sobbed; and then, as if angry with herself, she bit her white lips, and tried to suppress her passion.

“Now then, you are more quiet,” said Old Flick, after a little while. “Get up, Milly, like a good girl, and go home.”

“I’m not a good girl; I’m a bad woman; and,” she said, folding her arms resolutely, “I’m not going to stir until you give me what I want, and tell me what I want to know.”

“I’ve got no money, Milly,” whined Old Flick, “and I can’t tell you anything you don’t know.”
"Didn't Jim say, before he left, that you were to give me money when I wanted it?"

"Yes, but he hasn't sent me any, and I've no more to give."

"What was in that letter Jim sent you? Don't deny that you got one, Flick, for I saw the man bring it to you. What was in it?"

"There was nothing in it, Milly, upon my—my honor, and I burnt it."

"All right," Milly said, quietly, rising. "I suppose there was nothing in it, as you say, for you never tell a lie; and I suppose you burnt it, for you never tell a lie; and I suppose you haven't got any money, for you never tell a lie. That's right, ain't it?"

"Yes, that's right," he exclaimed, sulkily.

"And can you tell me," said Milly, "what's to become of Jim's baby—for it is Jim's, you know. How am I to keep it?"

"How do I know what's to become of it?" asked Old Flick, in return.

"I think I'll go and kill it," Milly said, composedly.

"Milly!" cried Old Flick, catching her arm.

"Let me go. You don't think I meant it, do you? I haven't come to that yet. No, I won't kill it. I'll do something better;" and without another word, Milly walked away.

"A good job she's gone," muttered Old Flick. "I must tell Jim about her. She's getting mischievous. What a turn she gave me when she talked about killing the baby! I am glad she's gone,;" and here, in self-congratulation, Old Flick drank some more rum and water,
and, raising his eyes, exclaimed—"The devil take the cat! here she is again!"

And there she was again, sure enough, with her baby in her arms.

"Now, then, Old Flick," she said, "when Jim went away, he told me you would give me money as I wanted it, so long as I didn't ask for too much. I haven't asked for too much, have I? You precious old flint, you've taken good care of that. You've screwed me down so tight that I've been obliged to pawn every blessed thing I could lay hands on; and now I haven't a mag left, and I've got nothing more to pawn."

"You've plenty of money to get drunk with, anyhow," said Old Flick, with a growl.

"The drink was shouted to me. People'll give me lush, but they won't give me bread. Can you tell me how I am to keep Jim's baby?"

"How do I know? I suppose you can get your own living."

She gave him another threatening look, and then she asked—

"Are you going to give me some money?"

"I haven't got any."

"Very well. Then, as I can't keep Jim's baby, and as you are in partnership with Jim, you'd better keep it yourself;" and she laid the baby on the table, where it sprawled contentedly amongst the bottles and glasses.

"What do you mean?" demanded Old Flick, in considerable alarm.

"What do I mean? Just this—I'm going to leave the baby here. It'll be a nice companion for you, and
you can bring it up your own way. What a blessed father you'll make!"

"Are you mad?" cried Old Flick, with a rueful look at the baby."

"Not a bit of it. I've often thought what a pity it is you haven't got a lot of young Flicks of your own. Never mind. Here's one you can try your hand upon."

"Take the brat away!" exclaimed Old Flick.

"Will you give me some money?"

"No," he snarled.

"Then here's your baby," Milly said; and taking the child from the table, she placed it dexterously in Old Flick's arms, and moved towards the door.

"Come back, you infernal jade," roared Old Flick, looking disgustedly at his burden. "Come back, and I'll give you what you want."

"How much, now?" asked Milly, with a drunken laugh, standing by the half-open door.

Old Flick fumbled in his pockets, and, with much difficulty, produced three half-crowns.

"Seven and six," he said.

"Baby 'll cost you more than that the first week," said Milly. "Then, how am I to live? 'Tain't half enough."

"I shall be ruined," cried Old Flick, tearing at his grey locks in a delirium of drunken despair; "you'll ruin me, you jade."

"Say two pounds," suggested Milly, regardless of his appeal; "and out with it quick, or I'm off. Now, then, before I count three. One"

"Milly, dear, say a pound," implored Old Flick.

"Two"
"Thirty bob!" screamed Old Flick, in anguish.
"Three. I'm off."
"Stop, stop!" roared Old Flick; "here's the money, and I wish you'd kill yourself with it."
"And what did Jim say about me in the letter?" asked Milly, coming back.
"Say about you? Let me think." And Old Flick, as he counted out a pound's worth of silver, pretended to consider deeply. "Not a word. Oh, yes, he did; he sent his love to you. You'll find that right, Milly."
"All right," said Milly, pocketing the money carelessly. "You know, Flick, if you'd like to keep the baby——
"Take it away—take it away!" cried Old Flick, "and curse you, the pair of you," he added, in an undertone, as Milly walked off with the child. "Phew! what with her, and what with the heat, I'm melting away. How cantankerous she was about that letter! She'd have gone mad if she'd seen it. I must burn it; it isn't safe to keep; but I must copy the address first. The devil take the sun—it's enough to scorch me to a cinder!"
As a counteractive, Old Flick applied himself industriously to his rum and water, which he swallowed with a running accompaniment of oaths and curses. Now, as too much rum and water will make a man drunk, and as Old Flick had drunk a great deal too much rum and water, and still continued drinking it, he soon got very drunk indeed—so drunk, that he began to cry, and to beat his breast, and to tear his hair, and to shake so, that the table trembled when he leant upon it.
"To scorch one to a cinder," he mumbled, pursuing
his previous remark. "Supposing it should come, and scorch me to a cinder. I'm a very old man—a very old man!" he whined, looking up piteously. "What did she mean by asking me if I had ever tried to take poison? What did she mean by the devils in the glass? Ugh! I can see them glaring at me!"—and Old Flick staggered to his feet in terror, and then dropped down in a drunken swoon.

It was late in the afternoon now, and people breathed more freely. A slight but refreshing breeze had set in from the sea, and the air grew cooler, much to the satisfaction of everybody, and to none more so than to Grif, whose sufferings during the day had caused him to fret exceedingly. Grif was not a fortunate lad. Fate seemed to be against him. He had not prospered as a moral shoebblack. He had attended some meetings of the Moral Bootblacking Boys' Reformatory, and had heard a great deal about morality; and, albeit he would have been considerably perplexed if he had been asked to define the meaning of the word, it could not but be presumed that he had been much edified by the moral essays and exhortations to which he had listened. And yet his mental condition, when he came away from these meetings, was one of perplexity. He could not see the connection between morality and a bellyful of food. "It's all very well," he would mutter, "for them coves who's got lots to eat and drink, to talk about morality; but wot good does it do me?" Then he would go home, and argue the matter with Alice. Alice was his good angel. She kept him from crime. Ill as she could
afford it, poor girl, she fed him often, although every day her means grew less and less, and Hunger, with its white eyes and despairing face, crept nearer and nearer at every turn of the hour-glass. For her lot was hard to bear. She had received but two letters from her husband since his departure to the goldfields. They were both written in a very desponding mood—the last especially so. There are some men who cannot fight with the world—who cannot battle with misfortune. The first blow floors them, and they lie helpless, and make no effort to rise. There are others who, at every knock-down blow, jump up again, hurt but not killed, and who, to speak metaphorically, square up at misfortune with courage and vigor. Richard Handfield was one of the former, and, because he did not find a rich patch of gold at the bottom of the first hole he sunk, he whimpered at Fate, and did not care to try again. All Alice could glean from his letters was, that misfortune pursued him, and mocked at his efforts. In truth, the fault lay in himself. He was naturally indolent, and if he had known how to work, he would scarcely have cared to do so. There are thousands of men of this type in the world.

Alice often fed Grif, and, by her good influence, kept him honest. But Grif, although uncultured, had quick instincts and a noble heart, and he knew that Alice could ill afford to spare him what she did. Often, when he was hungry; often, when he had stood about all the day patiently, without earning a sixpence, he had refrained from going to her, and had gone, hungry, to sleep. At other times he would wait until he knew
Alice had finished her poor meal, and then, in answer to her inquiry as to whether he had had his tea, would say that he had had a jolly good tuck-out, and would make his mouth water by particularising what he had eaten.

On this afternoon Grif was particularly miserable. He had suffered much during the day from the heat, and although he had had plenty of cold water to drink, it must be admitted that that was but poor satisfaction to a hungry boy. He would have gone to his pie-shop, but the old woman had been gathered to her foremothers, and the pie-shop had passed into other hands. Grif had stood behind his boot-stand all the day, broiling in the sun. No passer-by had been mad enough to stay blistering for a quarter of an hour in the heat, while his boots were being blackened. And, when evening came, it found Grif faint, and weary, and unhappy. The tears actually welled into his eyes as the sense of his forlorn condition came upon him. He could not stand it any longer.

"I won't go to Ally," he muttered. "I'll die first. She stinted herself last night, and didn't 'ave enough to eat because I was there. I know wot I'll do. I'll go to Old Flick's, and sell my stand and brushes. He'll give me a bob for 'em, I dessay. Ally won't like it wen she 'ears it, but I can't 'elp it; I'm dreadful 'ungry."

Then the thought came upon him that he had no right to sell the stand and brushes. They were the property of the Reformatory.

"I don't care," he said. "I've been moral long enough. It ain't a bit of good. I ain't agoin' to g
starve. If they find it out, they can put me in quod again, that's all. I s'pose I am a bad lot, and I shall never be no good. How can I be good wen I 'aven't got nothin' to eat?"

Thus philosophising, Grif shouldered his stand, and wended his way towards Old Flick's Thoroughfare.

When Milly walked out of Old Flick's store, she walked out with the full determination of returning and possessing herself of the letter he had received from Jim Pizey, and which she was certain the old man had not destroyed. She had two reasons for her determination. One was a woman's reason—she had made up her mind to have it, and have it she would. A woman's logic is not always logical. The other reason was; that she was convinced there was something in the letter concerning herself. Ruffian as Jim Pizey undoubtedly was, she had an affection for him, and she felt hurt that he had sent her no word since his departure. There was nothing strange in this affection. She had no one else to cling to. He had beaten her and ill-treated her over and over again, and yet she clung to him. There is no human being in the world who is so complete an isolation as not to have a love for something; and the unfortunate class to which Milly belonged is no exception to this rule, for it is capable of strong, if misguided, affection.

To fortify herself for her task, Milly, after she had lulled her baby to sleep, adjourned to the bar of a public house, where she told how she had done Old Flick, and where she spent the greater portion of the two pounds in treating her associates to drink. Having soon made
herself most thoroughly and desperately drunk, she set off staggering, but very earnest, towards Old Flick’s All sorts Store. Her mind was in a dangerous state of tension. She was almost blind from the fumes of the spirits she had taken, and everything swam before her; but she swung onwards, trolling out snatchers of songs, and laughing and talking to herself incoherently. She did not attract much attention. A woman drunk was no novelty in that neighborhood—indeed, her state was chronic to the locality; and she was allowed to proceed unmolested—some few people turning to look after her, but most avoiding her. She had not far to go, and, arrived at her destination, she staggered in at the door, and sinking into a seat, gazed confusedly about her. Brushing her hair from her face, she looked round in vain for Old Flick.

“Now then, Flick,” she said, almost inarticulately, “it’s no use hiding away. Lord! how my head swims! Come out and give me the letter!”

She waited for an answer, but received none, for Old Flick was deep in his drunken swoon upon the floor.

“Are you coming out, you old sinner?” she asked, looking vaguely about her. “I will have the letter—I will! I will! I will! I’ll tear your hair out of your head if you don’t give it to me.”

She felt dizzy and confused, and seeing a bucket filled with water in the corner, she staggered instinctively towards it, and, tumbling down by its side, plunged her face into it. It was deliciously cool; she kept her face in it, until she almost lost her breath, and then raising the bucket, she poured the water over her
head. It refreshed, if it did not sober her. But a moment afterwards, as she seized her hair to wring the water from it, she shivered, and turned cold as ice; and then flushed into a burning heat. Wiping her face with her dress, Milly, for the first time, observed Old Flick lying upon the floor. Her eagerness to obtain possession of the letter appeared to desert her for a time. She sat still, shivering, and burst out into a strange wild laugh.

“What’s the matter with me?” she murmured. “I never felt like this before. Get up, Old Flick,” she said, softly, to herself, and with no idea of addressing the old man. “Get up, Old Flick.”

She repeated these words, almost in a whisper, twenty times, at least, in a wondering kind of voice. Then she sang them, softly, over and again, in a vacant, meaningless manner.

“Get up, Old Flick, and give me the letter,” and these last words bringing to her mind the object she had in view, she crept towards the prostrate man, and felt in his pockets.

“Here’s Jim’s letter,” she said. But she made no effort to read it. Clutching it in her hand, she threw the damp hair back from her forehead, and looked shudderingly round the room. Her skin was blazing, and there was an awful brilliancy in her eyes as she glared around.

“Oh, my head! my head!” she moaned, and then she commenced again singing softly to herself, her voice breaking occasionally into a kind of wail. She continued in this state for some time, and made no sign of recognition of Old Flick when, after a series of growls, he sat up
on the floor. He gazed at her with stupified amazement, and he growled, as he looked down at the pool of water in which he had been lying. As he raised his eyes, she caught his look, and introduced his name into the meaningless words she was singing.

"Milly!" he cried, half frightened; but she showed no consciousness of him. "She's going mad, I believe," he muttered. "What the devil shall I do? Get up, Milly, there's a dear, and go home."

But she was deaf to all his entreaties, and presently she began to scream.

"There, Old Flick!" she cried. "Do you see the spiders creeping up the wall? Keep away—keep away!" she screamed, clutching at the old man. "They'll drop down upon us. That's right, Jim. Crush 'em—smash 'em! Ugh! You can't kill 'em half quick enough. Do you see that big one leering down? That's Old Flick. Smash him, Jim. Ugh! you devils; keep off. They're dropping from the ceiling upon me!" and she writhed upon the floor, and shuddered and moaned distressfully.

At this moment Grif, with his boot-stand on his shoulder, and his brushes under his arm, entered the store. Receiving no answer to his taps upon the counter, he peeped into the back room, and saw Milly tearing madly at her dress, and Old Flick looking on helplessly, in an agony of terror.

"Wot's up?" inquired Grif.

Old Flick rose instantly, and he clung to Grif as though the lad was an anchor of hope.

"Don't grip so 'ard, Flick," cried Grif, who, being
faint with hunger, scarcely had strength to shake the old
man off.

"Milly's going mad, I think," said Old Flick. "Take
her home, Grif, take her home."

"How am I to take 'er 'ome?" asked Grif, looking
at Milly. She had covered her face with her hands, and
was in a terrible fit of trembling. As Grif asked the
question, he caught sight of a loaf of bread in the cup-
board, the door of which was half open. Not even pity
for the girl could overcome his natural sensations of
hunger. The gnawing within was more powerful than
pity. "Wot'll yer give me if I take 'er away?" he
inquired, eyeing the loaf yearningly.

"Anything—anything—that is, anything in reason,"
quavered Old Flick, qualifying his answer. "And if
she ever darkens my door again," he muttered, "I'll
have her dragged to the lockup, as sure as my name's
Flick."

Man is a bargaining animal. Despite his hunger,
Grif pretended to consider for a few moments.

"I'll take 'er away," he said, slowly, "if yer'll give me
that loaf of bread"—and he moved wistfully towards
the cupboard—"and this tin of sardines"—

"Yes—yes," assented Old Flick, eagerly, taking the
food from the cupboard.

"And five bob for this stand and set of brushes,"
concluded Grif.

"Two and six, Grif—take two and six," implored
Flick; "Don't rob an old man."

Grif shook his head.

"Say four bob," he said, "and it's a bargain."
Old Flick hastily produced four shillings, and gave them to Grif, who deposited upon the table his vouchers to respectability, and felt that, from that moment, he had lost his character as a moral shoeblack, and was once more a vagrant and a thief. The next thing Grif did, was to tear a piece out of the loaf, and wolfishly devour it. Theoretical philanthropists might have learned a useful lesson if they had witnessed the ravenous eagerness with which Grif swallowed the stale dry bread. Old Flick was neither a theoretical nor a practical philanthropist, and he viewed the proceeding with a feeling of impatience, urging Grif to take Milly away quickly. It was not a difficult task—indeed it was so easily accomplished, that Flick felt considerable remorse at the price he had paid for it. Milly’s fit was over for a while, and she rose almost passively as Grif took her hand. She trembled violently as they walked to her poor lodgings; and when she got to her room, she threw herself upon the bed, and moaned and cried deliriously. She had placed the letter she stole from Old Flick in the bosom of her dress, and she kept her hand over it as if to guard it.

“She’s hot fle bad,” mused Grif, who had seated himself on a stool at the foot of the bed, and was busily employed eating the bread and sardines. “I wonder if she knows me. Milly!”

But the girl made no reply, and tossed about on the bed, moaning piteously.

“Milly!” he cried again, shaking her, and attempting to raise her. “Send I may live! if she ain’t like a ball of fire! And she’s all wet, too. Wot did you say, Milly? Say that again.”
She was murmuring to herself now.

"Go home!" she said. "Why don't I go home, he asked? What would they think of me? Don't come near me, father! Keep away; I'm not your Milly—she's dead, long ago—dead! dead! dead! Do you see that sheet of water?" and she half rose from the bed, and clutched Grif by the shoulder. "Father's standing on the other side. What an awful way off he is! He looks like a ghost. Does the water stretch into the next world, I wonder! There it is—miles, and miles, and miles of it—and look—just over the hill, where it flows out of the world, there's father and mother, and they're looking at me, and crying, and I am sinking down, down! I'm choking—take me out! take me out! Now I'm in my coffin. They're nailing me down. Don't shut out the light; everything is black: now it's red. Keep the worms away! Ugh! you creeping devils! I can't breathe!" and she struggled madly with Grif, who was holding her down. It was as much as his strength could accomplish, and presently she grew calmer.

"I can't leave 'er like this," said Grif to himself, in perplexity. "She's very ill, and she'll do 'erself a mischief, if she ain't took care on. She's quiet now. I'll run and fetch a doctor."

And acting on the impulse, Grif, first taking the baby from the bed, and placing it upon the floor in a corner of the room, ran quickly to an apothecary's shop hard by. It happened fortunately that a doctor was in the shop at the time, giving some directions for a prescription. He listened to Grif's story, and, without a mo-
ment’s hesitation, accompanied Grif to Milly’s lodgings. He looked very grave as he placed his hand upon Milly’s burning forehead, and felt her pulse.

“She is seriously ill,” observed the doctor. “If the poor girl has any friends, they should be here. She wants care and nursing, although even they will not save her, I fear. A female friend should be with her all the night. Come with me, boy, and I will give you some medicine.”

In silence, Grif followed the doctor to the apothecary’s shop, and in silence he received the medicine which the doctor himself made up.

“You can read?” said the doctor.

“I knows some of the letters,” replied Grif, “wen they’re stuck upon the wall wery large.”

“Ah!” mused the doctor, looking with curiosity at Grif. “Give her a wineglassful of this medicine every hour; but don’t wake her to give it, if she is sleeping quietly. I will call again in the morning to see how she is getting on.”

“Is she wery bad?” inquired Grif.

“Very,” laconically replied the doctor.

Grif was on the point of quitting the shop, when the thought occurred to him that the doctor ought to be paid. Taking from his pocket the four shillings, for which he had sold his boot-stand and brushes, he placed them on the counter, immediately beneath the doctor’s nose.

“What is this for, my lad?” asked the doctor.

Struck with a sense of the insufficiency of the remuneration, Grif said, apologetically, “I ain’t got another
mag about me, sir. I'll bring you some more when I gets it."

"Confound you, you young scamp!" exclaimed the doctor, in a fiery manner. "Do you think I have no humanity? Take your four shillings away, and here are ten more to add to them. Run off, and give the girl her medicine, and mind she has some one with her during the night;" and he pushed the boy hastily out of the shop.

When Grif returned to Milly, he found her still lying on the bed. He spoke to her, but she did not reply to him. She was not asleep; her eyes were staring round the room, and her cheeks were burning with an unnatural fire. He moistened her parched lips with water, and tried to make her take the medicine, but she pushed him away, fretfully, and turned from him.

"Wot's to be done," asked Grif of himself, in serious perplexity. "The doctor chap says she ought to 'ave some one with 'er. I can't get 'er to take 'er physic." Then, struck with a sudden idea, he said, "I'll go and arks Ally."

No sooner said than done. Yet, when he arrived at Alice's lodgings, he hesitated. His instinct told him of the bar which separated so good a woman as Alice from so shameless a one as Milly; still, Milly must not be deserted—above all, she must not be left long by herself. "She'll kill 'erself, p'rhaps," he said, "and the kid too. I'll tell Ally straight out."

Which he did. There was no need to entreat her help. Her bonnet and shawl were on before he had concluded his story.
"But she's a bad girl, Ally," said Grif; "a reg'lar bad un."

"God help her!" said Alice. "She is in the more need of assistance. And the poor baby, too! Come, Grif."

And very soon our Alice was in the sick girl's room, attending on her, and nursing her with a good woman's loving zeal. No thought of the difference in their social positions interfered with the performance of what Alice deemed to be a duty. She undressed Milly, and placed her in the bed; and, raising the poor girl's head on her bosom, she gave her the medicine, which Milly swallowed without resistance. Then Alice tidied up the room, and hushed the baby to sleep by the mother's side. She almost forgot her own grief in the sad spectacle before her, and the tears came to her eyes out of very pity, as she sat beside the sick girl's bed.

"Will you stop 'ere all night, Ally?" asked Grif, who had retired from the room, and who now entered at a signal from Alice.

"Yes, until the doctor comes in the morning."

"She's a hangel, that's wot she is," soliloquised Grif, retreating to a corner, and squatting himself upon the floor, "and I'm 'er friend. She sed so 'erself. I'd die for 'er if she wanted it. I wonder if there ever was anybody 'arf so good as 'er.

When Alice was undressing Milly, she observed the letter which lay concealed in the bosom of Milly's dress; but, unconscious of all else, the sick girl clutched the paper tightly in her hand, and, seeing her desire to retain it, Alice made no effort to take it from her. Many hours passed, and still Alice sat patiently by Milly's
side. During this time Milly was delirious, and raved and spoke words which caused Alice to shudder. But pity for the poor girl's condition overcame every repugnant feeling, and she nursed Milly tenderly and gently, as if she were, indeed, a good and virtuous, instead of an erring, sister. Shortly after midnight, the moon being nearly at its full, Milly turned her eyes to Alice's face, and asked, in a weak, wondering voice—

"Who are you?"

"I am your friend, Milly," replied Alice. "Do you feel better?"

"Yes, I feel better." The words came from her lips slowly, and with an effort. "Give me your hand."

Alice placed her hand in Milly's, and the sick girl raised it to her lips, and to her forehead.

"Who sent you here?"

"No one. Grif told me you were ill, and I came to nurse you."

"I never saw you before. Good God!" Milly exclaimed, feeling Alice's wedding-ring. "Are you married?"

"Yes."

"And you come to nurse me? Do you know what I am?" and she raised herself in the bed, and her eyes appeared to dilate with horror as she looked round the walls of the room.

"Hush, my dear! Lie down."

"What is this?" Milly cried, seizing Alice by the arm, and trembling violently. "Everything is fading from my sight. Don't let me go! Hold me—hold me! My heart is fainting—dying!" And a wild shriek
issuing from her lips, as she fell back powerless in the bed, roused Grif from his slumber, and caused him to start to his feet.

A great change had come over Milly. Her face had grown pinched and white, her hands were clammy, and a wild despairing look in her eyes made them awful to look upon. Alice needed all her courage to keep herself from swooning.

"Has she any friends, Grif?" she asked.

"None as I knows on," replied Grif. "Do yer know who she is? She's Jim Pizey's woman. She's going off."

She was going off, but her ears had caught Jim Pizey's name.

"Yes, Jim Pizey," she said; "why did you go away, and leave me to starve, and drink myself to death? Look at me—I am dying. Oh God! I am dying; and you have killed me. I don't want to die. I'm not fit to die. Here's Old Flick come to choke me. Keep off; you devil; take your fingers from me! That's right, Jim—strangle him, squeeze the life out of him! I could do it myself, but I am dying. Lord help me! I am dying!"

"Grif," whispered Alice, "was not Jim Pizey the man who tempted my husband to crime?"

Grif nodded, but Milly's wandering speech prevented the continuance of the subject.

"There's mother and father again," she said; "they're always haunting me. I am glad they have come to wish me good bye before I die. I have been a bad daughter to them—a bad daughter—a bad daughter. I'm punished
for it now. Forgive me, daddy. See! there's my little sister; she died yesterday. How sad she looks in her shroud. She was prettier than me. I slept with her the night before she died, and she told me to be always good. I say, Jim, don't you think little Cis is prettier than me—she's better than me. I should like father to make me a basket coffin. Where's baby?"

Alice placed the child in her arms, and as Milly pressed it to her breast, the haggard look in her face almost quite passed away. She was very young—scarcey nineteen years of age; yet it was better for her to die, young as she was, than live her life of shame.

"Do you know where there's a clergyman, Grif?" asked Alice.

"No; wot for?"

"Do you not see, Grif, that she is dying? I wish there was a clergyman here."

"I don't want a clergyman," gasped Milly. "Yes, my dear, I am quite sensible now. I don't want a clergyman. Your good face is better than all. Will you kiss me?"

Alice bent down and kissed her.

"Don't cry for me. I wonder why you should be here; for, you know, I am a bad girl, and you are a respectable woman. Give me a little drink—my throat is so dry. Oh, what a wicked life I have led! Will God forgive me, do you think?"

"Yes, dear Milly," said Alice, weeping. "God will forgive you if you ask Him."

"I do ask Him," said Milly, earnestly, but very slowly, for her voice was failing her. "Fold my hands, dear. I do ask Him, humbly. Forgive me, God!"
There was solemn silence in the room. Alice, kneeling by the bed, checked her sobs, and watched every movement in the face of the dying girl. Grif, bare-headed, stood by, in awe; his eyes were not crying, but his heart was. For Grif was very troubled. He had never prayed to God, and here in the quiet night, in the dread presence of death, the thought of his own utter wickedness and unworthiness filled him with gloom. He crept down on his knees, and lifting his hands, as if to a visible presence, he said—"Forgive me, God!" and then trembled, and cried softly to himself.

"Yes, mine has been a wicked life," said Milly; "but what could I do? What is your name, dear?"

"Alice."

"Alice. May I call you Alice? Thank you. You are like a good angel standing by my bed. What could I do? I was persuaded to run away from my home by a young man, three years ago. We came out here, and he left me. What could I do? Is all the sin mine, Alice? I was led away. It was not all my fault. Oh, my dear! You are a married woman, and respectable; you don't know the sufferings we poor girls endure!"

Ah! poor Alice! she thought of herself and of her own sad lot, and laid her cheek close by the side of Milly's.

"How good you are, Alice! What will become of baby when I am gone? Never mind, it will be better without me. See here, Alice—take this letter, and by and bye"—she could not control her shudders as she said these words, and gave Alice the letter she had stolen from Old Flick—"read it. It is from Jim Pizey
—he is a bad, wicked man, but I was living with him. If you can find out in it where he is, let him know that I am dead. Will you? Promise me you will. I have no one else to ask."

"I promise, Milly."

"God bless you. Ask him to give baby to some respectable people to keep, and never to come near it—do you hear me?—never to come near it. He is baby's father, but he must never come near it, or she will be bad like me. How dark it is! Is the moon shining, Alice?"

"Yes, Milly, it is at its full."

"Open the window, dear, and let it shine upon me. Thank you. I can see it—there is a ladder of light to it from my bed. There are figures moving about in the light—I see your shadow in it, Alice, with your dear eyes. Oh, God bless you! my dear, for being by my side. Kiss me again. Good bye. Is that Grif? Good bye, Grif."

"Good bye, Milly," said Grif, in a choking voice.

"And now, my dear, fold my hands once more. Forgive me, God!"

A rippling smile passed over Milly's face, and in that smile she died. The light from the silver moon might have kissed away her life, she yielded it up so peacefully.

For half an hour no sound disturbed the silence. Then Alice, after covering the face of the dead girl, opened the letter. She read, and as she read, her eyes dilated with horror, her whole form collapsed, and with a shuddering scream, she sank into Grif's arms. The
next instant she, by a strong effort, recovered herself, and reading a few more lines, she cried, in such a voice of anguish, that Grif's knees trembled and his face turned ashen white.

"Oh, Grif! Grif! my heart is broken!"

"Wot is it, Ally? Are you ill?"

"Listen to me, Grif," said Alice, rapidly, and in a voice of strong emotion. "The crisis of my life has come. You said once that you would help me if you could"——

"And so I will!" cried the boy. "With my life! So 'elp me God!"

"This is a letter from Jim Pizey, that poor girl's associate. In it he details his devilish schemes. He discloses how he and his vile associates are going to rob Highlay station"——

"Yes, Ally, yes," said Grif, eagerly, as Alice paused to recover her breath.

"That is my father's station, Grif. My father is displeased with me, and that is the reason I am poor. He is rich—he always keeps large sums of money in his house; and these men are going to rob him—perhaps murder him."

"Jim Pizey don't stick at nothin'," put in Grif, rapidly. "I've 'eerd 'im talk of Highlay, but I didn't know it was yer father's. Let's go and tell the peelers."

"I cannot! I dare not!" cried Alice. "For, oh, Grif! Grif! they have entrapped my husband, who knows where my father keeps his gold. They have entrapped him in the gang, and they are on the road to rob and murder my father."
"Wot can we do?"

"We must get up there somehow. We must walk, if we cannot ride. We must beg upon the road, Grif. They intend to wait—thank God! we may be in time. They intend to wait, the letter says, until my father has got in his house a very large sum, with which he is about to purchase a new station. It is the whim of the seller that he should be paid in gold. We may be in time. Oh! thou beneficent Lord!" exclaimed the girl, as, falling upon her knees, she raised her streaming eyes to the bright heavens, which shone upon her through the open window, "grant my prayer! Let me save my husband from this dread crime, and then let me die!"

A silence, as of death, was in the chamber. The glory of the moon shone full upon the upturned face of Alice, quivering with a strong agony, and upon the death-couch of poor Milly, whose life of shame was ended.

"You will come with me Grif," said Alice, presently.

"Are you ready, Ally?" asked Grif, in return. He had been quietly packing up the remains of his bread and sardines in a pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes. Come." And with one last look—a look of blended pity and despair—at the form of the dead girl, Alice took Grif's hand, and went out with him into the open.
CHAPTER IX.

A BANQUET IS GIVEN TO THE MORAL MERCHANT.

The world is full of shams. As civilization advances, shams increase and multiply; indeed, they multiply so fast that human nature in the nineteenth century might be likened to a pie, with very little room inside for the fruit, so thick is the crust of shams with which it is overlaid. And as a chief lieutenant of shams—as a sham which takes precedence from its barefaced monstrosity—may be ranked the toast of Our Guest, or Our Host, proposed at public dinners and entertainments. The unblushing fibs that are told in the speeches are dreadful to contemplate. Surely, some day a fearful retribution will fall upon that man who is in the habit of rising when the dessert is on the table, and endowing Messrs. Smith, Brown, Jones, and Robertson with every virtue under the sun, and who unctuously dilates upon their sublimities, their virtues, and their goodneces. Beware! thou weak and false platitudinarian! Think not to escape thy fate, because the word which describes thee is not to be found in the dictionary. Beware! and reform thy evil courses ere it be too late!

It is not to be supposed that any such thoughts as these entered the mind of Mr. Zachariah Blemish, as he sat on the right hand of the chairman at a grand public dinner given in his (Blemish’s) honor. For public enthusiasm with regard to this great and good man had risen to such a pitch that, to speak vulgarly, it must
have had vent, or it would have burst. Therefore, it was
resolved to give Mr. Zachariah Blemish a banquet; and
more than two hundred gentlemen, representing wealth
and position, sat down, and ate and guzzled to do him
honor. The guest himself ate sparingly, but, as in duty
bound, took wine with everybody. The Honorable
Mr. Peter Puff was in the chair; another Honorable
undertook the Vice; and a Bishop said grace before
meat. Fish of river and sea, game of forest, fruit
of hothouse, were cunningly served up in every pos-
sible variety in honor of Blemish. For long weeks,
celebrated cooks had ransacked their brains to invent
new dishes, and every one admitted, when the dessert
was laid, and the wine was passing, that the result
produced was glorious, and worthy of the occasion.

Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—rattle! Gentle-
men, Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen!
Proposed with patriotic enthusiasm. The Queen!
Each gentlemen, standing, drains his glass, and sits
down again with becoming solemnity. Buzz of con-
versation. Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—
rattle! Gentlemen, His Royal Highness the Prince of
Wales, and the rest of the Royal Family; may he and
they, etc., etc., etc. Enthusiasm and general geniality.
Thump—thump—thump! Rattle—rattle—rattle! Gen-
tlemen, His Excellency the Governor! With ap-
propriate funkeyism. As Her Most Gracious Majesty's
Representative—most important and flourishing portion
of Her Most Gracious Majesty's dominions—upon which
the sun never sets—and so on—and so on; with The
Army and Navy, The Clergy, etc., until the impor-
tant moment arrives when the toast of the evening is to be proposed.

"Gentlemen, are your glasses charged?"

"All charged in the East," responds an indiscreet Freemason, and then there is a shifting and shuffling, until the Honorable Mr. Peter Puff rises. He looks round upon the guests, blows his nose, lifts his glass, puts it down again, coughs, and proceeds to speak.

"Gentlemen, it is now my proud task to perform a duty, which is no less a duty than it is a pleasure. (Hear, hear.) I wish that it had fallen to the lot of some more eloquent speaker than myself—(No, no!)—to propose the toast of the evening, but being asked to preside on this memorable occasion, I felt that I should have been wanting in respect to myself, and in respect to the gentleman who sits upon my right hand, if I had not at once joyfully and gratefully accepted the honorable position. Gentlemen, some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. (Considerable doubt here intrudes itself into the minds of fifty per cent. of the guests, whether this is an original observation or a quotation.) Gentlemen, I have, in this instance, had greatness thrust upon me; for no one can doubt that the devolution upon me to propose the toast I am about to propose, reflects honor and greatness upon—upon the proposer. We have amongst us this evening, a gentlemen—(here every one looks at Mr. Zachariah Blemish, who looks up to the ceiling, as if wondering who is the gentleman about to be referred to)—a gentleman whose undeviating rectitude, whose integrity, whose moral character
whose wealth, whose position, are not only creditable and honorable to himself, but creditable and honorable to the city, which he has made his dwelling-place. (Hear, hear.) We might say, with Hamlet, that in this gentleman (in a moral sense), may be seen a combination and a form indeed, where every god doth seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man. (Great rattling of glasses and thumping of knives; Mr. Zachariah Blemish looks curiously and unconsciously interested, as if still wondering who is the individual indicated; and the honorable Mr. Peter Puff gives a sigh of relief, having delivered himself correctly of a quotation which he had taken great pains the day before to learn by heart.) Need I say, gentlemen, that I refer to our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish? (Prolonged applause; the thumping and rattling are terrific.) Gentlemen, we all know him (Cries of “We do!”) and we are all proud to know him (Cries of “We are!”) Say that we knew him only as Chairman of the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals, and he is entitled to our approval; say that we know him only as President of the Moral Bootblacking Boys’ Reformatory, and he is entitled to our respect; say that we know him only as the Perpetual Grand Master of the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice, and he is entitled to our esteem; say that we know him only as the head of the Association of Universal Philanthropists, and he is entitled to our admiration; say that we know him only as a leading member of the Fellowship of Murray Cod’s, and he is entitled to our veneration. But say that we know him as all these combined, and as a merchant of in-
tegrity, and as a gentleman of honor, and words fail us in speaking of him. Gentlemen, words fail me when I speak of him. Far better for me to stay my speech, and leave what is unsaid to your discrimination and your intelligence. Suffice it for me to say that I am proud to know him, and that I am proud of this opportunity of expressing my sentiments. With these few remarks—inadequate as they are to the occasion—I conclude, and propose the health of our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish—in bumpers!"

Hurrah! In bumpers! Our guest, Mr. Zachariah Blemish! No heel taps! Three cheers for Mr. Zachariah Blemish! with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Three cheers for Mrs. Zachariah Blemish! Three cheers for the little Blemishes (which fell flat, for the little Blemishes were in futuro). For he's a jolly good fellow—for he's a jolly good fellow—for he's a jolly good fellow—which nobody can deny—with a hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! And a little one in.— hurrah!

All which being enthusiastically performed, the guests sat down with the consciousness of having nobly done their duty.

Mr. Zachariah Blemish, in a voice which trembled with emotion, rose to thank the gentlemen who had so enthusiastically responded to the toast of his health.

"Mr. Chairman, Vice-chairman, and Gentlemen," he said, "this is the happiest moment of my life. When I look around and see the leading members of every profession and every important interest in the Colony, and when I consider that they are assembled here to render
a tribute of respect to so unworthy an object as myself (cries of "No, no!")—yes, I repeat, so unworthy an object as myself, I am lost in wonder as to what I have done to entitle me to such an honor. I am conscious, gentlemen, of having only performed my duty. It is no very hard task, and yet it is not always done. As a merchant, as a citizen, and as a public man, this has been my endeavor. In the performance of my duty I may have done some little good. (Cries of "A great deal.") You are kind enough to say so. The good I have done reflects but small credit upon myself; for it has been, as I may say, evoked by my position as a not inconsiderable merchant in this city. Gentlemen, I am proud of my position as a merchant; and never in my hands shall commerce be degraded—never in my hands shall the spirit of fair and honest dealing which characterises the British nation be abused. (Thumps and rattles.) I am naturally much affected by this demonstration. You will excuse me if my emotion overcomes me, and you will pardon the little incoherences you may detect in my speech. It is usual on such occasions as these to give a brief resumé of the movements and acts of the individual upon whom is conferred an honor like the present; and I, with your permission, will touch upon one or two little matters in which I have taken a somewhat prominent position. Our worthy chairman, my friend, the Honorable Mr. Peter Puff—(a beaming smile from that individual)—has mentioned the names of a few societies and associations with which I am connected. You all know, gentlemen, the difficulties with which the formation of the United Band of Temperance Aborigi-
nals was attended. When the white man first set his foot upon these shores, he found the native savage wallowing in ignorance and immorality. Although attempts have been made to throw a doubt upon their practice of cannibalism, we are all perfectly well aware that the Australian aboriginals were in the habit of eating and enjoying one another. Their predilection for plump infants is well known. (Laughter.) Then again, they were given to habits of intemperance, and would sacrifice anything for a pint of rum. What was the duty of a christian and a citizen when these things became known? To reform the savage. For this purpose the United Band of Temperance Aboriginals was formed, and I am proud to be able to state my opinion, founded upon statistics, that in the course of fifty years from the present time, not a single intoxicated aboriginal will be found in the length and breadth of the colony. (Loud applause.)

As for the Society for the Total Suppression of Vice, we do our best. Vice is not yet totally suppressed; but we look forward to the time when we shall view (perhaps in the spirit) the successful accomplishment of the work we have initiated in the flesh. The operations of the Moral Bootblacking Boys' Reformatory, of which I am President, are well known. The institution of boot-stands in the streets of Melbourne has been attended with inconceivable blessings. A large number of boys, who did not even know the meaning of morality, have been made moral through the influence of boot-stands. You will scarcely believe, gentlemen, that one lad, who had never before worked at any honest employment, actually told me that his soul would go to immortal perdition, and
could not be saved. The saving of this lad’s soul dates from the moment when he received from the Reformatory a set of blacking brushes and a boot-stand; and he may now be seen, daily, in the streets, waiting for customers. (Cheers.) What shall I say, gentlemen, of the Murray Cod? You are acquainted with the gigantic difficulties with which we had to contend, and which we have successfully overcome. In our hearts, gentlemen, we are all Murray Codians. The energy which the Murray Cod threw into their task reflects credit upon the colony—(here the Honorable Mr. Peter Puff whispers to the speaker)—and I am informed by our honorable Chairman, that on this very dinner table was placed a Murray cod which was not caught in the River Murray. (Frantic applause.) I look upon the cod placed upon the dinner table this evening as a mark of respect paid to me for my efforts in its cause; and looking upon it in that light I am naturally much affected. Gentlemen, here I pause. The remembrance of this happy evening will always be with me. You have imposed upon me a debt of gratitude, which is the only debt, gentlemen, which I doubt of ever being able to pay. Heaven bless you!”

In the next morning’s papers appeared glowing accounts of the dinner, and verbatim reports of Mr. Blemish’s speech. But if the reporters, while they were transcribing their shorthand notes, could have seen the object of the night’s adulation, they might have been puzzled to account for the singular change that had come over his appearance. For, say it was two o’clock in the morning when they sent away the printer’s devil
with the last slip, at that very hour Mr. Zachariah Blemish was locked in the private room of his mansion near the sea, his table strewn with papers and documents and his head resting wearily on his hands. Surely that was not the face of Mr. Zachariah Blemish: its freshness and roundness had departed from it; it looked positively thin and haggard. Did the great Blemish possess a skeleton, and was it even now staring him in the face in his own sanctum? It looked uncommonly like it. Or, perhaps, the triumph of the evening had been too much for him, and he was thinking of his own unworthiness. Under any circumstances, it was well for Mr. Zachariah Blemish that he kept such expressions as his face then wore for his own private use, and that he did not exhibit them in public.

It was about two o'clock in the morning, also, that Mr. Nicholas Nuttall was wending his way, somewhat unsteadily, homeward. He had been at the Blemish banquet, and had lingered until the very last moment. Then he had been cajoled into joining half a dozen gay fellows, in "just another glass," which just another glass having been submitted to a multiplication process, rendered him a decidedly unfit companion for a lady with such a strong sense of the proprieties as Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall. Some notion of this sort floated across his mind, and produced therein considerable disturbance, inasmuch as he stopped suddenly in the midst of the chorus—"We won't go home till morning," which was being trolled out by himself and a couple of young gentlemen, who had volunteered to see him home, and shook his head gravely and reproachfully.
“Ni—hic!—cholas Nuttall!” he observed, leaning his back against a lamp-post, “Ni—hic!—cholas Nuttall, you are a wretch.”

The two young gentlemen, one of whom was the Something in the Civil Service, and the other, Something in the Military, graciously acquiesced in Mr. Nuttall’s proposition.

“My wife!—hic—gentlemen,” observed Mr. Nuttall, blinking at the gaslight—“my wife—hic!—is probably waiting up forme” (he said this with a rush), “for the purpose—for the purpose, gentlemen, of giving me a—C—hic!—Candle lecture.”

The two Somethings, who had been induced to see Mr. Nuttall home solely because he had a pretty daughter, endeavored to get him to walk on.

“Haw—haw—hic!” said the Something in the Civil Service. “Come home—haw—old fellow!”

“Home!” scornfully exclaimed Mr. Nicholas Nuttall, and regarding the Something in the Civil Service with an expression of deep disdain. “Home!—hic!—do you know what home is—hic! Home is a—hic!—place where you’re badgered—hic!—and nagged—hic!—and worried. I wish you were married to Mrs. Nuttall!”

Here Mr. Nuttall began to cry, and called himself a villain, and a destroyer of domestic hearths. He allowed himself, however, to be prevailed upon to resume his homeward course, and in a very miserable condition he arrived at his street door.

“Gentlemen!” he then said, “my wife—hic!—does not not allow me a latch—hic!—key. Pull the bell. When you are married—hic!—have a latch key put
down—hic!—in the settlements. This—hic!—is the advice of a miserable wretch."

The sound of steps along the passage drove Mr. Nuttall into a condition of abject despair. "Don't go—hic!" he exclaimed, affectionately clinging to his companions. "Don't go—hic!—come in and have a glass—toddy."
The person who was unfastening the door, had evidently heard strange voices, for the door was suddenly thrown open, and a glimpse of a white night gown beating a hasty retreat, flitted across the vision of the three inebriates.

"Come in," said Mr. Nuttall, with a mingled feeling of exultation and dismay; for he knew that the figure in white was the figure of the wife of his bosom "Hic!—come in, and we'll make a night of it."

But when they got in, they were doomed to disappointment. The cupboards were locked, and not a bottle or a glass could be found. The Something in the Civil Service and the Something in the Military were therefore compelled to beat a retreat. Left to himself, Mr. Nicholas Nuttall sank into a chair. He was in the enemy's camp, and he felt that there was no hope for him. With his head sunk upon his bosom, he waited doggedly for the blow.

What a pity it is that very small women do not wear crinoline beneath their night dresses—it would add to their dignity. Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall, in her nightgown, looked ridiculously diminutive; but her moral power was tremendous. Mr. Nuttall felt its effects the instant she made her appearance; and he shivered. When she seated herself opposite to him, he had not the courage to raise his head.
"So, sir," she said, "this is a nice time to come home?"

Nicholas murmured something about its being a very nice time.

"A nice time indeed," she said, "to keep your lawful wife out of her bed, and to bring tipsy companions home to destroy her peace and comfort."

"Why did you lock up all the de—hic!—canteras?" asked Nicholas.

"Because I knew the state you would come home in," returned his spouse; "and I have some regard for your health, little as you deserve it,"

"You've no right, Mrs. Nuttall, to make me look—hic!—ridiculous in the eyes of my friends."

"Ridiculous!" said Mrs. Nuttall, with lofty sarcasm. "As if you don't make yourself look ridiculous enough without my help. You may outrage my feelings as much as you like, sir, but you shall not turn the parlor into a tap-room."

"The two young gentlemen who came home with me are very respec—hic!—table."

"Don't tell me, Mr. Nuttall," said Mrs. Nuttall; "they can't be respectable, and I am certain they are not married men."

"Lucky dogs!" murmured Nicholas.

"That's right, Mr. Nuttall; insult me. You know I am a woman, and cannot defend myself. Oh, I wish I had been a man!"

"Hic!—I wish you had, my dear."

"And this," said Mrs. Nuttall, the frills of her night-cap fluttering in sympathy with her agitation, "this is
the reward a slaving wife gets from a brute of a husband for sitting up for him patiently all the night, while he is eating and drinking with his friends, and making a beast of himself!"

"Why didn't you—hic!—go to bed?"

"Bed! when I was eaten up with anxiety at your absence, and when I heard noises at the back of the house as if some one was breaking into it. I am sure that burglars were trying to get into the house to-night, Mr. Nuttall, and I shouldn't wonder if they were hiding somewhere now."

"Pooh—pooh! Nonsense—hic!"

"Of course. Pooh, pooh, nonsense! How many of you to say that! But what would you care if we were all murdered in our beds? What would you care, I say"—

"Not a bit," murmured Nicholas, recklessly.

"And this man I married!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, in a horror-struck voice, appealing to the chairs and tables. "This is the man I sacrificed myself for. This is the man I sit up for night after night, while he is dissipating and destroying the happiness of his family!"

"Don't be stupid—hic!—Maria!" said Mr. Nuttall, rising, and staggering to the door. "I am going to bed. Where's the door handle? You haven't locked that up, have you?"

Mrs. Nuttall made no reply, but walked after him, statelily, with the chamber candlestick in her hand.

"A nice example you are to your children," she said, when she got between the sheets; "a nice example. I wonder you don't want to come to bed with your boots on! Oh, if I had known this before I was married"—
"It's too late now, Maria," observed Mr. Nuttall, maliciously, tugging at his boots.

"That's right," sobbed the lady. "Taunt me with my folly! But I deserve it. I brought it all on myself. Mamma warned me of the consequences, when I told her that I had accepted you; but I wouldn't listen to her, and now I am justly punished. Oh! Turn your head the other way. How you smell of tobacco! Take my word for it, mamma said, if you marry that ninny, you will repent it all your life." Here Mrs. Nuttall jumped up suddenly in the bed, and said, "Mr. Nuttall, I am certain there is some one trying to break into the back of the house."

"I don't care," murmured Nicholas, digging his head into his pillow. "He won't find much to eat and drink, that's one comfort."

"And do you mean to tell me that you are going to lie snoring there?"—

"I'm not snoring; you won't let me."

"while robbers are breaking into the house? Get up and see if there is any one there, or I shan't be able to sleep a wink all the night."

"Get up yourself, and see," suggested Nicholas, drowsily.

"Is it possible," indignantly continued Mrs. Nuttall, "that any man can be so unmanly! Nicholas! Do you hear me?"

"Don't bother; let me go to sleep."

"Sleep! while robbers are breaking into the house? No, never, Nicholas, never! I know my duty as a wife, and as the mother of a family, better."
In an agony of desperation, Nicholas sprang up like a Jack-in-a-box, and drove his fist fiercely into his pillow half-a-dozen times, and then fell back exhausted.

"Very pretty!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, sarcastically.

"Very pretty, indeed! I wonder you don't beat me. You're brute enough for anything."

Nicholas groaned.

"I suppose your head aches, Mr. Nuttall, that you groan so dismally. I'm sure I don't wonder at it, from the state you are in; and here you come home, and never tell me a word about the dinner, although you know I am dying with anxiety to hear all about it."

"It was a very nice dinner," said Mr. Nuttall.

"And how many people were there, Nicholas?"

"A room full."

"No, Nicholas, you shan't evade me in that manner. How do I know what sized room it was—it might hold twenty, or it might hold a thousand—how many sat down to dinner?"

"A hundred—a hundred and fifty—two hundred—two hundred and fifty," said Mr. Nuttall, vaguely.

"Was your brother there, Nicholas?"

"No."

"Did Mr. Blemish make a speech?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"All sort of things."

"Nicholas, you will break my heart. Tell me instantly, what did Mr. Blemish say?"

Instead of replying, Mr. Nuttall groaned, and screwed himself up tight in the bed-clothes.
"That's right," said Mrs. Nuttall, tugging at the sheets. "I'd take up the whole bed, if I were you!" Mr. Nuttall partially unscrewed himself. "I'm much obliged, I'm sure. And now, Nicholas, answer me one question. Are we and the dear children going up to your brother's station to spend Christmas?"

"Will you let me go to sleep if I say yes?"

"Of course I will, Nicholas. It's what I have been trying to get out of you all night."

"Well, yes, then. Good-night."

"Good-night, Nicholas," murmured his spouse.

After a short pause, and just as Mr. Nuttall was on the turning point between waking and sleeping, she said:

"Nicholas, dear."

"Well," he groaned.

"I shall want a new bonnet, and so will Marian. Our old ones are quite shabby."

"Go and buy them," he murmured.

"You're a dear soul, Nicholas. Good-night. Say good-night, dear."

"Oh, good-night."

And sleep then descended upon the conjugal Nuttalls.
CHAPTER X.
THE "WELSHER'S" STORY.

Far and wide, through the length and breadth of Victoria, over its borders into New South Wales, and over the seas to neighboring Colonies, floated marvellous stories of the New Rush. Ears burned, eyes glistened, and fingers tingled at the news. Men, separated from the spot by hundreds of miles of land, by thousands of miles of ocean, made frantic arrangements to fly thither incontinently. The hearts of those in Great Britain who contemplated emigration beat faster at the news by the Overland Mail; and the tongues of the Celestials who meant to move from China to Victoria chattered and wagged at a fearful rate when rumors of the big nuggets reached them. Merchants grew exultant as they thought of shipments on the road, and reckoned up the profits beforehand. Servants threw up their situations; family men broke up their homes; and tradesmen wound up their businesses at any sacrifice. Cherished ambitions, life-dreams approaching to fruition, ties of affection and friendship, calm, peaceful ways of living, were all forgotten and forsaken in the fever of gold-greed.

The Colony itself was in a ferment, and night and day the roads to the locality of the New Rush were thronged with eager pedestrians. Scraps of news about prospecting claims, picked up, heaven only knew how, flew from mouth to mouth. They lost nothing in the
transmission; for pennyweights were magnified to ounces, ounces to pounds. Troops of sturdy diggers, their heavy swags upon their backs, and their tin billies and pannikins buckled to their waists, marched on bravely and cheerfully, and felt not fatigue. Truly have such men been called the bone and sinew of the Colony. For thorough manliness, for sturdy courage, for indomitable perseverance, they are scarcely to be paralleled in the world's history. Strings of shambling Chinamen, with their pigtails and sallow faces, dressed in half-barbaric and half-modern costume, and bearing on their shoulders poles, upon which were slung their boots, picks, shovels, and cradles, were also there, toiling patiently along to the El Dorado, and receiving with good humor the badinage of the Saxon and the Celt. They did not travel as swiftly as the Europeans; but, like the tortoise, they were slow and sure, and were not unlikely to win the race. Drays creaked and groaned beneath the weight of bags of flour and cases of spirits, sent off to the New Rush by watchful speculators. Many were the perils the goods encountered, on sidlings, and in gullies and creeks; and many were the accidents, most of them, however serious, having some ludicrous features. Here might be seen a wagon, piled up with diggers' swags, chiefly Chinamen's, a few of the owners being perched on the top, while the remainder trudged patiently along in the dust. There, a troupe of Nigger serenaders, with bones and banjos, their faces already blackened for the amusement of the wandering hordes. Here, a couple of drays, in which were packed cases of type and printing press for
the starting of a newspaper in the bush! There, a travelling theatre, consisting of a huge tent with all the paraphernalia of scenery and dresses: the leading tragedian (descended to dull earth), played the part of driver for the nonce, entertaining his cattle with morsels of morality from Hamlet or Macbeth; while the low comedy man, his face woefully begrimed with dust, tramped sturdily along, bearing upon his shoulders the infant prodigy of the company. Day after day the roads were thronged with workers from all parts of the colony, and when night came, trees were cut down and fired, horses and oxen were turned loose, water was fetched from adjacent creeks, tea was prepared, and pipes were lighted, and tents and mi-mis hastily thrown up, beneath which the nomades rested their weary limbs, hopefully and cheerfully. It was a pretty sight to see the fires glancing out along the miles of dusky bush, and it was pleasant to feel the sense of rest which had fallen upon the busy plaine. The tinkling bells attached to the necks of hobbled horses sounded musically on the air, and from silver-toned flutinas, in the hands of rough-bearded men, sounded Home, sweet Home, and many other airs as touching, the strains of which lingered lovingly about the trees, whose dark forms were glanced with light from a clear and brilliant moon.

Amongst those who were attracted to the promised land by the news of the wonderful discoveries was Richard Handfield. He had picked up as a mate an old digger, whose Herculean frame appeared fit to bear any amount of fatigue—a man known as the Welsher, simply because he was a Welshman. He was a simple,
kind-hearted creature, always ready to do a good turn, and not always able to avoid being imposed upon. He was fond of nursing children, and drawing water, and chopping wood, to lighten the labors of the women who were fortunate enough to be living in his neighborhood. He was a lucky digger, and he scattered his gold about freely. He had been in the Colonies since his youth, and for a great portion of his time he had been a bullock-driver. One might have thought that this would have been sufficient to make him cruel and hard-hearted; but the contrary was the case. He swore at his bullocks like other bullock-drivers, but he did not lash them. Even when he swore at them, the poor oxen seemed to know that he was not unkindly; and if such a feeling as gratitude be inherent in bullock nature, it must surely have been evoked in the Welsher's oxen, for he regarded with pity a sore shoulder or a wound, and would apply such simple remedies as he was acquainted with to ease the pain. And yet, gentle as he was by nature, loved as he was by all his acquaintances, there was a stain upon him which could never, in this world, be wiped out. He had been convicted of some offence in the home country, and had been sentenced to life transportation. He did not often refer to this portion of his career, although when the subject had arisen, he had solemnly and consistently protested his innocence. He never travelled without his concertina, from which he extracted the most exquisite music. But his greatest treasure was an old Welsh Bible, which had been his mother's, and no night passed without his reading a chapter from it. He was fond of his glass, was the
Welsher, and sometimes he took more than was good for him. On such occasions, he would retire to some secluded spot, and, bareheaded, preach to the hills in red-hot Welsh. It was a thing to remember was the sight of this gaunt, strong man flinging his arms wildly about in his enthusiasm, while the impassioned gutturals rolled fast and furious from his throat. Those who knew him never interfered with him when he was in such ecstasies; he was perfectly harmless, and on the succeeding morning was always up with the sun, ready for work.

Richard Handfield was fortunate in picking up the Welsher for a mate; for Richard was an idle fellow, while the Welsher buckled to his work with overwilling zeal. When their day's walking was done, and a suitable place had been found to camp in, it was the Welsher who felled the tree, and the Welsher who fetched the water from the creek, and the Welsher whose ready hands extemporised a sleeping-place; while all that Richard did was to gather a few dry branches and to make the tea. Even this he did unwillingly and grumblingly, and he repined at what he thought his hard lot. He had never been used to work, and, although he and the Welsher had walked but twenty-five miles that day, his feet were blistered, and he was very sore and weary. The Welsher, whose limbs were hardened by constant exposure and years of toil, felt as fresh as when he started in the morning, and could have walked another twenty-five miles with ease. But, anxious as he was to arrive quickly at the new diggings, he did not grumble at the short day's journey, and, when tea was over, he sat down, pipe in mouth, with perfect contentedness.
"I always thought gold would be found in that quarter," said the Welsher. "I passed over the flat six years ago, and I almost fancied I could see the gold at the bottom."

"I should have tried it," said Richard.

"I was bringing a load of wool down to Melbourne at the time, and I was single-handed. Besides, it's a thousand chances to one if I had hit upon a lead. A rich gold-field gets scratched over a hundred times before it's found out. No gold-field ever is any good, or ever proves itself very rich, until a big rush sets into it."

The conversation not being continued, the Welsher took his concertina from his swag, and played some simple melodies. Attracted by the sounds, a party of diggers, camping not many yards away, strolled towards the spot, and stood about the Welsher in easy attitudes, listening to his music. At the conclusion of a little piece of delicious extemporising, one of the party asked the Welsher to play "Shades of Evening," which he did very sweetly; and then the same man said, "Play 'Alice Gray,' mate." It was an especially favorite air with the Welsher, and he played it with much feeling. As the last note died softly away, the diggers strolled back to their camping-place.

"I wish I was like you, Welsher," said Richard.

"Like me!" the Welsher exclaimed, in simple surprise.

"Yes; you haven't a care. No wife, no children, no ambition. Give you your pipe and your concertina, and you are happy and contented."

The Welsher sighed, and said, "And you?"
"I am the most miserable dog in the world. I wish I had never been born."

"There's no use in wishing that, mate. The best way is, to make the best of it."

"That's all very well for you. You have led a hard, rough life, and are used to it. I wish I had been brought up like you. It would have been all the better for me."

The Welsher sighed again, but did not reply.

"I was brought up as a gentleman," continued Richard, following the current of his own selfish thoughts, "and just at my age, when I ought to be enjoying life, I have to sweat for my living. You would not think of it so lightly if you were married"

"I think it would make life all the sweeter," said the Welsher, simply.

"You think!" exclaimed Richard, so disdainfully that any man but the Welsher would have fired up.

"What do you know of marriage and its responsibilities?"

"Nothing," sighed the Welsher.

"What do you know of the weight it is upon a man, what a clog it is upon him when he is in misfortune; how it frets him, and worries him, and drives him almost mad? Why, I doubt if you have ever been in love!"

"I don't think I have."

"Well, then," said Richard, impatiently, "what's the use of talking about it?"

"Not much; yet I've sometimes wished that my life had been different. I've sometimes wished that I
had a woman to love me, and children to bring up. I've often thought, What use am I, rough and strong as I am, in the world? I have been sinful enough at times to envy my mates who had wives and children; and, as I've laid myself down upon my stretcher, have wished that I could hear the prattle of children about my pillow. Foolish of me, no doubt."

"Better to be without them. You have no cares, and no one but yourself to look after. Why, look here. I have a wife whom I married for love—her father is a wealthy hunks, but he discarded her for marrying me. What is the result? Misfortune pursued me, and we are both miserable. Would it not have been better that we had never met? Of course it would. So you may thank your stars that you haven't a wife to drag your thoughts down to desperation point, as my wife does mine."

"Isn't she a good wife?"

"Fifty thousand times too good for me."

The Welsher refilled his pipe, and, after puffing for a few moments, said—

"What one man sighs for, another man groans at. Of course it's absurd for such a rough and ready chap as me to say that if I had a wife fifty thousand times too good for me, I should look upon her as a blessing. I've never had much experience of women. The only woman I ever loved was my old mother; but, although I daresay I am ignorant enough with regard to woman-kind, I often think that the world is like a garden, and that the women and children are the flowers in it."

"Is the world like a garden to you?" asked Richard.
"I have heard that you have had pretty hard lines in it, too."

"So I have. But, you see, it is not my fault. I might make things worse for myself, but I don't know how I could make them better. If you like, I will tell you my story. It isn't very long, and I don't suppose it is very interesting. But I feel as if I should like to tell it to-night."

"All right, Welsher," said Richard, patronisingly. "I'm listening."

"I was born in North Wales," commenced the Welsher, "near the Valley of Clwyd, in Denbighshire, and I passed my days at home in idleness. My father died when I was very young, and I cannot remember him. My mother was a little dark-skinned woman. I can see her now in her widow's weeds: she never left them off from the time of my father's death. I got some little education from an old clergyman, but not much, for I was too fond of roaming over the hills and valleys, to pay attention to study. You can tell, from my accent, that I am Welsh born. My dear mother was very proud of her descent, and, like most old Welsh families, her's had a pedigree which she could trace back many centuries, and which connected us with a royal line. My father left some property, which brought in about forty pounds a year. Upon this we lived, and we were looked upon as quite rich people. There were three of us at home—my mother, my sister, and myself. We were the family. When I say I passed my days in idleness, I mean that I was brought up to no trade, and did not work for money. But I found the days quite
short enough. I fished, and hunted, and made excursions to the neighboring mountains. One day, when I was returning from Moel-Famau, I fell in with a gentleman, who told me he was making a pedestrian tour for pleasure. We got into conversation together, and he walked with me until we came to my mother's house. I was pleased with him, and I invited him to our evening meal. He made himself very agreeable, and we offered him a bed for the night. The chance acquaintance ripened into intimacy, and he stayed with us some time. Lake and woodland round about the Valley of Clwyd are magnificent. He was delighted with the scenery, and, being an artist, he was desirous of taking away with him some sketches of what he called a paradise upon earth. So, he with his sketch-book, and I with my gun and my rod, would go in search of pretty bits of scenery, and he would sketch while I shot or fished. We were away from home sometimes for two or three days. We climbed Snowdon together, and caught otters on the banks of shy streams, which seemed to be trying to hide themselves from our sight. Many weeks passed in this manner, and we became much attached to one another—that is, I became much attached to him. We were all fond of him; I, because I had never had a friend; my mother, because he would indulge her in her pet pride of royal descent (he would talk with her for hours about ancient Wales and its noble kings); and my sister—half a minute, mate, my pipe's out.”

He paused to relight it, and continued:

“My sister liked him too well, although I did not suspect it at the time. We took no notice of their being
often together, for you see he was our own guest, and no suspicion of wrong entered our minds. Even when the time drew near that he must depart, I did not think it strange that my sister should look grieved at his going from us. We all felt sorry—he had so enlivened our quiet home with his gay manners and conversation, that it was impossible he could have been easily forgotten. I accompanied him many miles on his road, and with expressions of friendship we parted. For some days after his departure, the sunshine of our home seemed to have disappeared; but little by little it came back, and our quiet life was resumed. But not for long—for one day my sister was missing, and all our anxious searchings and inquiries brought us no tidings of her. My mother was distracted, and I thought at the time it would be her death. A few weeks after my sister's disappearance, a letter came from her, asking our forgiveness for her flight, and saying that she hoped soon to visit us, a happy wife. She made no allusion to any person in the letter, but a mother's loving perception detected the sad strain in which it was written; and many were the bitter tears she wept over the letter. I looked at the postmark on the envelope, Wenlock, and resolved to go to Shropshire to try and find my sister. No dishonor had ever fallen on our family, and although no word of the fear which haunted us both passed between my mother and myself, I saw and knew the dread which possessed her. I went to Wenlock. I did not think, as I left my home, with a look at my gun and my fishing-tackle, that I should never see them again, and that the Valley of Clwyd would receive me no
more. The day after my arrival at Wenlock, I met the man, whose name was Hardy, who had made our home so bright while he stopped with us. Then, when I saw him, the suspicion that had entered my mind that he was connected with my sister's flight, flashed into conviction. I questioned him, but he denied all knowledge of her. It needed not the unquiet look or the hesitating speech, to convince me that he lied. He did lie, as I knew. It was not long before I found my sister, and learned from her lips the shame that had fallen upon our family. She was punished enough already for her sin; I could see that in her haggard face. But I determined to seek my false friend, and to force him to make reparation. He received me civilly enough, but almost laughed in my face when I asked him to marry my sister. I spoke of the honor of our family, and begged him not to tarnish it; I recalled to his mind the welcome and the hospitality he, a stranger, had received at our hands; I spoke of my mother, and of the blow it would be to her; but he only sneered at me, and with his specious tongue tried to put me off. I was hot, and he was cool, and when he left me, I was goaded almost into madness. It appeared to me incredible that hospitality should be so violated. That night, after I had once more visited my sister, I determined to see this man again, and to appeal more strongly, if I could, to his sense of honor. And if he does not marry her, I thought, I will kill him! For what reason I do not know, for I was strong enough for anything, I put a pistol into my pocket. It was late in the night when I went to his residence. The doors were closed, but at the back of the house I saw a light shin-
ing in a window, and a shadow which I could swear was his upon the blind. I soon climbed over the low wall which enclosed the garden, and then I scrambled up to the window, and dashed into the room. He was half undressed, and his face turned very white when he saw me. My words were few: I told him I was determined not to submit to dishonor. He would have called out, but I presented my pistol, and swore I would shoot him if he raised his voice. He knew that I would keep my word, and he promised me that he would marry my sister on the morrow. I held out my hand to him, and he shook it. We spent a few minutes in friendly talk, and then, with a light heart, I prepared to leave the house the way I had entered it. But no sooner had I got my leg over the window-sill, than he rushed to the door, and throwing it open, called loudly for assistance. I was bewildered. The pistol I had brought with me dropped to the ground. I jumped into the room again, which in an instant was filled with people, and the next moment I was seized and dragged off to prison on a charge of burglary. The case was quite clear: my presence in the room, the smashed window-panes, the pistol which was proved to be mine, made up a chain of evidence too strong, of course, to admit of doubt, and I was sentenced to transportation for life."

The Welsher paused for a few moments, and puffed away at his pipe before he resumed.

"While I was lying in prison, my sister died. Three days before the ship sailed which was to convey me from my country, my mother came to see me. Poor thing! she had almost lost her reason. She wept over me,
gave me this little Welsh Bible, which I have never parted with, and which shall be buried with me when I am dead. Then she was taken away, and I never saw or heard of her again. I was chained by the leg to a fellow-convict, and put on board ship. We were eight months getting to Botany Bay. The ship was a leaky old tub. The Government in those days picked out the rottenest vessels it could get to convey the convicts from their native shores. The filth and dirt of the ship were something horrible. The water was poisonous; the food was disgusting. A plan was mooted among the convicts to murder the officers, and seize the ship; but it was discovered, and half-a-dozen men were shot and thrown overboard. After that we were kept nearly the whole of the time under closed hatches. How that old tub creaked and strained! Many a time I thought we were going down, and I prayed that the vessel might be dashed to pieces, and make an end of us. But no such luck befell me. We got to our destination safely enough, and were set to work. Some of the convicts in our ship did well. The man I was chained to during the voyage is now a millionaire. He bought some land in Sydney with his savings, and sold it at twenty thousand pounds an acre. I was never very fortunate. I got my ticket-of-leave, and worked for myself, chiefly at bullock-driving. I could tell you some queer anecdotes of colonial life in those days. Bushranging was all the go, and it wasn't safe to travel a hundred miles with anything valuable about you. I remember once, as I was coming into Sydney with my dray, seeing a buggy, without a horse, standing on the road. When I got up
to it, there was a man inside, stark naked. He had been stuck up by bushrangers, and they had stripped him of every bit of clothing, down to his socks. They had torn from the buggy everything that he might have converted into a covering: otherwise, they did not ill-treat him. I have been a shepherd, too, and have lived by myself for months and months, without seeing the face of a single human creature. It is a trying life. I have known men grow into a state of incurable idiocy after a few months solitariness. It is not disagreeable at first; one takes a pride in the sheep, and enjoys the sense of independence which is the great feature in a shepherd's life; but, after a time, it is awful. To sit, night after night, with no soul to speak to, with nothing to read, with nothing to do but to smoke and think— it is no wonder that men go mad. The wonder is, that so many escape with reason. I remember a narrow brush I had with the Natives. I remember it with pleasure, for even the sight of a savage, although he was eager to kill me, was a relief. I had missed some sheep, at odd times, within two or three weeks. I was actually pleased when I first made the discovery, for it gave me something new to think of. One night, I determined to watch; and, sure enough I came upon the Natives, carrying off half-a-dozen or so of the fattest sheep. I did not see them sooner than they saw me, and I had to run for it. I had provided for such a contingency, and when I arrived, almost breathless, at the hut, I made all fast in a twinkling, and prepared to receive them. They came up pretty fast at my heels, but I saluted them with three barrels from my six-shooter; and all but two retreated,
yelling, faster than they came. The hut was rather queerly built, just in a nook of some overhanging rocks, and there was only the front of it exposed. This was an advantage to me, for the savages could not get at me at the back. I watched their dusky forms in the distance with absolute pleasure. It must have been quite four months since I had seen anything in the shape of a man, and though I saw him now in the shape of a deadly foe, it was better than living any longer the devil's life of solitude. Besides, I did not care much for them. If they had fought fair, I could have kept them off as long as my powder lasted. But they don't fight fair. The noble savage will take any mean advantage he can of an enemy. They are a skulking, idle, dirty lot of thieves. They came to the attack three times, and each time I received them with my six-shooter, and sent them scampering back. Then they made preparations for doing what I expected, and what I was prepared for. They collected all the dead timber and dry brushwood they could lay hands on, and threw it before my hut, topping it with a lot of green branches. They were going to smoke me out. But I was ready for them. My hut, built in the cleft of a mass of rock, concealed a great fissure at the rear. In fact, the fissure served as a sort of tunnel; I had worked at it for a long while, and had dug along the natural tunnel until I came to an outlet. This outlet I had filled up carelessly, with loose pieces of rock, so that no one unacquainted with the secret would have suspected that it was a place of concealment. When the savages in front of the hut set fire to
the pile of wood, which they did by throwing lighted branches into it from a distance, I crawled through the tunnel. A feeling did come over me, that if the savages knew of this retreat, they would be sure to guard it, and it would be all up with me; and when I got to the outlet, I was a bit curious to know if I should see any black skins knocking about. Luckily for me, there were none, and I crept away. I did not have much time to lose, for I knew that they would rush the hut before it was half burnt, and would discover the tunnel; so I only crept slowly along until I thought I was out of sight of them, and then I scudded off. I ran a good many miles that night, and I thought I was pretty clear of them. But the next day, when I was within eight or ten miles of the station I was making for, I saw three of the black devils racing after me, with their skinny legs. They haven't much superfluous flesh about them, haven't the blacks. They are all skin, bone, and muscle. They had tracked me the whole way, nearly thirty miles, and when they caught sight of me, they set up a hullabaloo of delight. I was pretty tired at the time, but the sight of them put fresh life into me, and I ran my fastest. But they were too much for me. I saw one of them disappear round a clump of timber for the purpose of cutting me off, while the other two followed straight after me. I soon came to where there was a bend in the track, and just as I turned it, the first one sprang out of the timber. He was within two hundred yards of me, and when he saw me he raised his boomerang, and sent it whizzing into the air. Quick as lightning, for I knew how true those savages could aim, I turned, and
ran towards the other two. Seeing this, and knowing that I had turned upon them to escape the boomerang, they stopped short, suddenly, and threw their spears at me. I felt that there was nothing for it but fight. I had my revolver in my hand, loaded in its six barrels. One of their spears grazed my cheek as I flew along, and when I got close enough, I sent a bullet into the nearest one which dropped him. Then, with a sudden rush, I closed with his companion. I had not climbed the Welsh hills in my young days for nothing. The hardy life I had spent served me now; and, as I flung my arms round the dirty savage, I knew that I could master him in the end. But, in the meantime, the one who had thrown the boomerang was after me with raised spear. He did not dare to throw it, for fear of hitting his comrade; for we were by this time upon the ground, locked in each other's arms, and rolling over one another, enveloped in a thick cloud of dust. Throughout the struggle, I kept my revolver in my hand, but had no opportunity of using it. My finger was on the trigger, and, in the scuffle, I must unconsciously have pressed upon it; for, to my surprise, it suddenly went off. For a moment I thought I was hit; but presently the clasp of the savage with whom I was struggling relaxed, and he rolled back, dead. The one who had thrown the boomerang took to his heels upon hearing the report. When I rose, and got away from the dust, I could see him scampering off. I did not care to follow him. I made my way as quickly as I could to the station; and so ended my shepherd's life. After that, I turned bullock-driver. That is a dreary life enough, but it's
better than being a shepherd; it's more humanising. You get a chance, now and again, of giving a lift to a poor fellow, and that does a man good, you know. I remember, one morning, missing two of my bullocks. I did not find them till pretty late in the day. I was glad enough when I heard the tinkle of their bells I can tell you; and as I was following the sound, I came upon a man lying in the bush. At first, I thought he was dead; but I felt his heart beat—very faintly, though, I carried him to the dray, and after a good deal of trouble, I brought him to. He had lost his way in the bush, and had wandered about without food for three days, until, what with hunger and despair, he had lost his senses. If my bullocks hadn't strayed, it would have been all over with him, for he couldn't have lasted another day. So what I looked upon at first as precious hard, turned out to be a piece of real good fortune. When the goldfields were discovered, I turned to gold-digging; and, between that and bullock-driving, I have since spent all my time. It isn't a very attractive story, mine, is it mate? I don't think I ever had an ambition, and my life was over when I was transported. I have often thought that if I were to meet the false friend who wrecked my life, and who destroyed the happiness of my family, I should kill him. But there is no chance of our ever meeting. I am not the only innocent convict in the Colonies. I know some who were transported for life, for less crimes than mine—perfectly innocent men, who are living victims of what is called justice. If I had happened to stroll a different way the day I met that false friend, my life might
have been very different. I might have married, and had children, and been a happy man. I wonder if, by and by, those who suffer unjustly are recompensed in any way?"

"You are a queer fellow, Welsher," said Richard Handfield. "If I were you, and had been treated as you have been treated, I should have turned desperate, I think. By what right are men oppressed and hunted down? Say I owe a duty to society; does not society owe a duty to me? Just think for one moment of what I have suffered"

"Of course," said the Welsher; "I do not mean to say I have as much to complain of as you. You were educated and brought up in luxury"

"That's where it is. If I had been brought up as roughly as yourself, I might take the same view of misfortune."

"Certainly," said the Welsher, but in a voice which struck somewhat strangely upon his companion's ears. "There's no comparison between the hardship of our lives. But it is time to turn in. We must be up with the sun. Good night."

And then they prepared for their night's rest. Before falling asleep Richard glanced at the Welsher, and saw him, with an earnest expression on his face, reading, by the light of the moon, a chapter from his mother's old Welsh Bible.
CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW RUSH.

Early in the morning, the plains were busy with moving life. "Take up thy bed and walk," was literally illustrated by thousands of eager men. Log fires were blazing, chops and steaks were frizzling, and boiling tea was impatiently bubbling in the queerest of utensils. Scant time was given to breakfast; scantier time was employed in rolling up blankets; and less time still was occupied in throwing heavy swags over broad backs, and starting on the march to the promised land. But one operation all performed, and all took time in performing. When everything was adjusted, a black stump of a pipe was carefully produced, carefully loaded, and carefully lighted by the aid of a burning branch. Then, refreshed by their first pipe, the venturers whistled away dull care, and "stumped it" at the rate of four miles an hour. It was a lovely summer morning. The sun was rising over a snow-capped range, which reared its head in the distance, a picture of beauty. As the warm rays fell upon the face of the moss-clad giant, rills of sparkling snowdrops gemmed it with myriad silver tears. It was a marvellous picture. But few stayed to pay it tribute. Among the few, a ragged German, upon whose shoulders were placed all his worldly treasure—a tent, a couple of blankets, and a flat-faced, stolid-looking little boy, who, as his father pointed to the range, crowed and clapped his hands at the glorious sight.
When evening came, and they were within twenty miles of the New Rush, Richard Handfield and the Welsher halted at a wayside inn, which had been hastily run up, and which was dignified by the title of the Amphitheatre Hotel. It was the only building for miles around, and stood in the midst of an amphitheatre of hills. The inn was crowded. Men were recklessly squandering their money in a state of the wildest excitement. It was said that the proprietors were taking a couple of hundred pounds a day. At ten o'clock at night, Richard and his mate were standing by the door of the Amphitheatre Hotel. The riotous noise within the hotel precluded all idea of sleep; so they stood there, looking at the moon, whose brightness was hardly dimmed by a screen of light-floating clouds, and talking over the chances of their being able to get a claim upon the "lead" at the New Rush. What is that in the distance? A white object. Moving? Yes, and moving fast. Running, racing, like one demented. White trowsers, white guernsey, bare arms, and bare head—running like mad, under the white face of the moon. Who can he be? Where has he come from? Is he mad? All the inmates of the calico hotel come out to the door, waiting for the racer. And here he is, panting, his strong chest heaving, his brawny arms waving, his blue eyes glaring! "Well, mate, what's the row? What's up?" Without returning any answer to these questions, the racing individual points in the direction of the New Rush, whence he has come, and gasps out, "There—got a claim—heaps of gold—saw a bucketful dug up just before I left—off to fetch my
mates!" And off he is, without—wonder of wonders! stopping to drink. There he goes, racing off to fetch his mates: a large white speck dotting the plain beyond—a small white speck—a smaller white speck—an infinitesimal white speck—no speck at all! Meanwhile, the conversation has become very animated. They all thought so—that was the real El Dorado—they had been waiting for it for a long while, and here it was at last. Anecdotes are related as authentic, of fortunes made in a week, in a day, in an hour. Goodness knows how the information has been obtained, but suddenly those men are relating to one another wonderful accounts of thousands of ounces obtained by single individuals at the New Rush, although, before the arrival of the racing individual, they did not appear to know very much about the new field. Gradually the conversation dies out, and the diggers retire to their rest. Nothing disturbs the stillness of the night. The scene is so lovely that it might serve for the kingdom of Dreamland. On the top of you lofty mountain stands an old castle, wrapped about, grim shadow as it is, by the soft moonlight. Near it, each rugged rock and stone assumes a living shape. Why creep they away so stealthily? Are they rock or human? Psha! They are but two diggers, who, excited by the news, have given up all thoughts of sleep, and are stealing away to the New Rush, so that they may not be too late for the chance of digging up a bucketful of gold!

At noon on the following day, Richard and the Welsher arrived on the ground. There were thousands of diggers there, and a long street of calico stores was already
erected to supply their wants. As the new arrivals poured in, they had to traverse this street, which commenced at the mouth of the main road, so that it presented a very animated appearance, and was always thronged. Flags of all nations, and flags of no nations, were waving over the stores, many of which rejoiced in high sounding titles. There were the Great Wonder, the Little Wonder, the Wonder of the World, and a great quantity of other Wonders. There were the Monster Emporium (which, properly, would represent an Emporium for Monsters); the Blue Store, and the Red Store (which were impositions, for they were built of unbleached calico); and the Bee Hive, which looked like one, for it was crowded with customers. There was the Right Man in the Right Place, which was the sign of a stationer's store, where old newspapers were being sold at exhorbitant prices, and where you had to pay half-a-crown for two sheets of notepaper, two envelopes, and a pen. This store was also a kind of post-office, where you might deposit letters on payment of one shilling each, and receive them, if there were any to receive, at the same price. There were half-a-dozen auctioneers, going, going, going, with all their might. There were scores of draymen unloading their drays, and blocking up the road with cases. There was a horse sale-yard, where horses were being galloped madly up and down, to the infinite risk of life and limb; and wherein the salesman talked the most outrageous nonsense, and told the most outrageous fibs, as to the wonderful qualities of the cattle he was anxious to dispose of. There were scores of hotels and restaurants for the accommodation of the
natives of almost every nation under the sun. There were the Hibernian, the Spanish, the French, the American, and a host of others. Those who could not find their native clime indicated on the broad strips of calico in front of the stores, might console themselves at the All Nations; while philanthropists might rest their weary limbs at the Live and Let Live.

Forcing their way through the bustling crowd, Richard Handfield and the Welsher soon reached the end of the straggling street of stores, and came upon the diggings. These were situated upon a great plain, which was dotted with strong sun-burnt men, straining at windlasses. Round some of the claims, small knots of diggers were congregated, waiting eagerly for the “prospect.” One claim had just been bottomed on the “lead,” and great excitement was produced by the statement that the first bucketful of stuff had yielded a prospect of twelve pennyweights of gold. There was no chance of getting a claim near the spot, for the ground was marked out for a mile around, so the newcomers had to walk on until they came to a less busy part of the plain. A claim was there soon measured and marked out with pegs, and the orthodox custom of sticking the pick in the centre was duly performed. Then Richard and his mate went in search of a spot to put up their tent, and before evening their house was built and their work commenced.

Night was a busy time in the township. The bars of the calico restaurants and hotels were crowded, and money was lavishly squandered in the dancing saloons and concert rooms, with which the township abounded.
The fever excitement of a new rush is most intense: men grow frantic from mere contagion. There was one free-and-easy concert room, crammed with diggers, who shouted out the choruses to the songs, and who smoked and drank amidst a very babel of riot and noise. One man, a little excitable Frenchman, had drunk himself into a state of madness. He called for a dozen of champagne, and, knocking the necks off half the bottles, poured the wine upon the ground; and three minutes afterwards, in a wild delirium, he lighted his pipe with a five pound note.

So days and weeks passed, and every day and every week the goldfield grew and grew, until it extended over many miles. Hills and gullies were prospected and rushed, and in some instances were deserted almost as soon as rushed. Meanwhile, the Welsher and Richard Handfield had hit upon a tolerably good claim, and were working at it steadily and hopefully. There were three in the party now. They had taken a new mate, whose name was Steve—Honest Steve, he said he was called. At times, the face of Honest Steve puzzled Richard Handfield; he fancied he had seen it before, but he could not recollect where. He once or twice mentioned this casually, but Honest Steve was certain they had never met; and so the three kept together until the claim was worked out.
CHAPTER XII.

THE WELSHMAN READS HIS LAST CHAPTER IN THE OLD WELSH BIBLE.

In a small blind gully, rejoicing in the name of Breakneck, to which there had once been a slight rush, but which was now almost deserted, there still remained a solitary tent. It attracted no particular attention. It was no unusual thing for diggers to put up their tents in out-of-the-way places, some distance from the claims they were working; and no comment was caused by the circumstance that but very lately this tent had been sold for a trifle to new comers. Breakneck Gully had been so named because, to get to it, one had to descend a range of precipitous hills, with here and there dense clumps of bush and timber, leading into treacherous hollows. The gully was about four miles from the main rush, and had the advantage of being very secluded. When it was first discovered, great hopes were entertained that some rich patches of gold would be found there; but, although the ground had been pretty well turned over, none of the claims yielded more than tucker, and it was soon deserted for more auriferous localities.

One evening, a short time after the Welsher's claim had been worked out, four men were busy within this solitary tent. They might have been ordinary diggers, preparing for supper and their night's rest. They were dressed in the regular digger's costume, and tub, cradle, and tin-dishes, huddled into a corner, would
have been considered sufficiently indicative of the nature of their pursuits. Yet there was about them a manner which did not favor the hypothesis of their being honest workers of the soil. They had an evil look upon their faces: they moved about the tent stealthily and suspiciously; and there was a somewhat too ostentatious display of firearms. Indeed, they were none other than Jim Pizey and his gang.

"Keep a good look out, Ralph," said Jim Pizey to one who appeared to be stationed as a sentinel near the door. "Let us know if you hear any one coming."

"All right," was the reply.

"How much longer are we going to hang about here?" asked Ned Rutt. "I'm tired of waiting. It's my opinion we're only wasting our time."

"I don't know," said Jim Pizey. "It'll be the first time the Oysterman ever failed, if he fails now. He seems pretty confident. But I wish he would finish his job. We shall have to be away from here, anyhow, in a couple of days."

"Isn't Nuttall to have the money in his place by Christmas?"

"Yes; we shall have lots of time to get to the Station. We've got to hang on there a bit, you know. We've had cursed bad luck as yet; but we'll make up for it. I'd like to have Dick Handfield with us. He'd save us a lot of trouble, and it would prevent his peaching afterwards."

"He knew about the plant in Melbourne, didn't he?"

"Yes, but he's escaped us somehow. I wish we had
cut the skunk's damned throat for him. Directly the affair is blown, he'll know who did it, and he'll split upon us, to a certainty."

Here, the man at the door, who had been addressed as Ralph, turned his head, and said, "Hush! some one coming."

Not a word was spoken in reply, but each man grasped his weapon, and assumed an attitude of watchfulness.

"All right," presently said the sentinel. "It's the Oysterman."

And in walked, whistling, Honest Steve!

He nodded to his comrades, and, seating himself upon a stretcher, took out his pipe. Having slowly filled his pipe, and lighted it, he said,

"Well, Jim, how is it getting on?"

"How do I know?" returned Jim Pizey. "We're waiting for you to tell us that. Here we are, hanging about for you, and, for all I know, wasting our time to no purpose."

"Strike me cruel!" exclaimed the Oysterman. "Did you ever know the Oysterman bungle a job?"

"No: but you're a precious long time over this one. I'd strangle the pair of them before I'd be done by them."

"And so I will, before I'm done by them. I don't want you to tell me how to do my work, though."

"How much longer are we to wait here?"

"Mates and gentlemen," said the Oysterman, speaking very slowly, "it is my pleasing duty to inform you, as we say in Parliament, and notwithstanding the insinua-
tions thrown out by my honorable friend and mate, Jim Pizey, Esquire, that I think we may look upon the job as pretty well done."

"Stop your palaver, and tell us all about it," observed Jim Pizey.

"Well, then, mates and gentlemen," said the Oysterman—

"We've had enough of that infernal nonsense," interrupted Jim Pizey, angrily. "Can't you speak straightforward?"

"Strike me patient!" exclaimed the Oysterman. "Let a cove speak according to his education, can't you! I'll tell the story my own way, or I won't tell it at all."

"Go on then," growled Pizey.

"Well, then, to commence all over again: Mates and gentlemen, you know that I'm now an honest, hard-working digger, and mates with Dick Handfield and an infernal fool of a Welshman. When I happened promiscuously to drop across the pair of them, says I to myself, Oysterman, here's a little bit of work for you to do, and you've got to go in and do it well. There's that plant of Nuttall's at Highlay Station, says I to myself. What if the old cove should have some place to put his money in that we don't know of? Here's Dick Handfield knows every foot of the house and station. If we can get him to join us, we can make sure of the tin. We can settle him afterwards, if we like; but have him we must, if we can get hold of him. But, says I to myself, Dick Handfield is an honest young thief. He gave us the slip once before. And, says I to myself,
Dick Handfield'll get a good claim, perhaps, and I can't get no hold of him if he does, unless I come it very artful. So, mates and gentlemen, I laid a plot, invented it every bit myself, and when I tell you all about it, as I'm going to do now, I think you'll say I did come it artful, and no mistake."

The Oysterman settled himself upon his seat, in an evident state of enjoyment, and resumed:

"The first thing I thought of, mates and gentlemen, when I came across the pair of them, was that Dick Handfield mustn't suspect that he knew me. You know, mates and gentlemen, that I hadn't shaved for ten years, but I sacrificed everything for my artful plot. I shaved my chin as smooth as a bagatelle ball, and took care to keep myself pretty clean. It was such a long time since I saw my own face, that I assure you, mates and gentlemen, I hardly knew it again. But to prevent any chance of discovery, I got some acid, and burned this black mark under my eye. That was rather artful, wasn't it? And, mates and gentlemen, as it spoils my good looks, I hope you'll take it into consideration when we square up, and make me an allowance for it. Then, says I to myself, what name shall we take, Oysterman? And I hit upon Honest Steve, as one that would exactly suit me. Then I began to look about me; it didn't take me long to strike up an acquaintance with the Welsher. He's a simple kind of fool, and will believe anything. As for Dick Handfield, I knew his weakness. I only had to call him 'Sir,' and speak very respectful, and he was all right in a minute. They had just worked out their first claim, which had only kept
them in tucker. I had a claim marked out upon the lead, and I offered to take them in as mates. They jumped at the offer, like a couple of mice jumping into a trap; and after that I got more artful than ever. The long fool of a Welshman, he's a soft sort of cove, and he reads his bible every night before he goes to bed. Says I to myself, I must turn religious, I must. So I buys a Testament, and I makes it dirty and ragged, as if I had used it a good deal, and I writes my name inside the cover. One day, I leaves this Testament lying on the table—quite by accident, mates and gentlemen—and the Welshman, he comes in, and I twigs him take it up and look at my name on the cover. 'Is this yours, Steve?' he says. 'Yes,' I answers; 'how stupid of me to leave it out; I've had it for twenty years, and I wouldn't take twenty ounces for it;' and I knew that I had got him all right. Then I set on to Dick Handfield. I knew how to make him mad. I got him to talk of his being a gentleman, and what a shame it was that such a swell as him should have to work like a common digger. The Welsher, says I, he's used to it, and don't mind it, but you ought to be different. It isn't a very gentlemanly thing, I says to him, for you to have to go mates with an old lag—for the Welshman, you know, mates and gentleman, is a lag—a lifer, too. Then I got him to drink, and set him and the Welshman quarreling; and after that, mates and gentlemen, my artful job was pretty well done.'

"What are you going to make of all this?" asked Jim Pizey. "I don't see how this will get Dick Handfield to join us. And we must have him, Oyster-
man, or we shall all swing for it. He's the only one, besides Old Flick, who knows what we're up to."

"Wait till I've done," said the Oysterman, "and you'll see quick enough. I've been mates with the Welshman and Dick Handfield now for four weeks, and the claim's washed up. It has turned out pretty well—but not so well as the diggers round about think it has, which makes it all the better for us. They think we've been keeping them in the dark as to what we've got out of the claim. We haven't divided the gold yet: the Welsher's got charge of that. We're going to divide to-morrow. All the diggers know that we're going to divide to-morrow"—and here the Tender-hearted Oysterman laughed and rubbed his knees. "I've took care that they should all know it. That's coming it artful, ain't it?"

"How?" asked Jim Pizey.

"How!" repeated the Oysterman, scornfully, but dropping his voice. "Can't you see through it? The Welsher and Dick Handfield, they've been quarreling for the last two weeks, as if they'd like to cut each other's throats. I've took care of that. I told Dick Handfield that the Welsher said he was a proud, lazy fool; and I told the Welsher that I heard Dick Handfield swear, if he could get hold of the Welsh Bible, he'd pitch it into the fire. Dick Handfield, he's been drinking like mad; and this afternoon, mates and gentlemen, this afternoon, they had a regular flare-up; if they hadn't been parted, they'd have had a stand-up fight. Dick Handfield, he goes away swearing that he'll be even with the Welsher yet. And
that’s the end of my story, mates and gentlemen.”

“But what’s to come of all this?”

“Can’t you see through it yet? What would you say, if, before to-morrow morning, I was to bring you the gold the Welsher’s taking care of? There’s nearly a hundred ounces of it. What do you think I’ve been working for all this time? You be on the watch to-night, and I’ll bring you the gold, safe enough. See here, mates and gentlemen”—and he looked about him cautiously, and pulled out a knife—“this is Dick Handfield’s knife, this is; I prigged it from him this morning. What if the poor Welsher was to be found to-morrow morning dead in his stretcher? What if Dick Handfield’s knife should be found on the ground, under the stretcher, with blood on it? The quarrel between the poor Welsher and Dick Handfield remembered—the gold that was going to be divided to-morrow morning gone; eh, mates and gentlemen? Do you see now how artful I’ve been coming it? When Dick Handfield knows that they’re after him for murdering his mate—when he knows that his knife is found, covered with blood—he’ll be too glad to come with us, so as to get out of the way. Oh, you let the Oysterman alone for doing a job properly! To-morrow night, by this time, we’ll be on the road to Highlay Station, and Dick Handfield will be with us.”

“And all this will be done to-night?”

“As sure as thunder!”

“By God! Oysterman,” exclaimed Jim Pizey, “you’ve got a heart of iron!”
"Strike me merciful!" said the Tenderhearted Oysterman. "Me a heart of iron! I've got a heart as soft as a woman's! If I thought I should hurt the poor cove to-night, I'd go and give myself in charge beforehand. There's Ralph, there, if you called him hard-hearted, you wouldn't be far out. But me!"

"What do you mean?" growled Ralph.

"Mean, you flinty-hearted parent!" said the Tenderhearted Oysterman. "What's the use of your being a father! We've never heard you ask once after your offspring, Grif!"

"How's the young rip getting on?" asked Ralph, surlily.

"Very bad," replied the Oysterman; "very bad, isn't he, Jim? He's turned honest, and blacks boots in the streets for a tanner a pair. We gave him a turn, Jim and me, but we didn't pay him; I wasn't going to encourage him. He'll come to no good, won't Grif; he's a downright sneak."

"There, that's enough of him," growled Ralph; "talk of something else, can't you?"

"Here's an unnatural father for you!" exclaimed the Oysterman, looking round. "Objects to speak about his own offspring! It makes my tender heart bleed to think of his unnaturalness. Give us something to drink; I'm dry with talking. I'll stop for a couple of hours before I go back. Everything 'll be quiet then."

Brandy was produced, and the gang of ruffians sat together for some time in the dark, talking in whispers over their vile projects.
The Welsher was alone in his tent. He was lying upon his stretcher, thinking over his quarrel with Richard Handfield; thinking how sorry he was that there should have been any quarrel at all, and how he would like to make it up. He could not help reflecting how strange it was that he had never quarreled with Richard until Honest Steve had joined them. He had not been quite imposed upon by Honest Steve: he had all along entertained a doubt of that worthy's genuineness, and all his simple predilections were in favor of Richard Handfield. There were two stretchers in the tent, one belonging to Handfield, the other to himself. Honest Steve had a little tent of his own, close by. The Welsher cast many glances at the unoccupied stretcher, wishing that Handfield would come, so that the difference between them might be healed. The more he thought over the matter, the more he was convinced that an explanation would set it all right. There were many good points about Handfield, which had won upon the simple Welsher; and in his heart he did think that his mate's lot was a hard one. He had seen the picture of Alice, too, which Richard kept about him (for, with all his faults, Richard dearly loved his wife), and her sweet face seemed to elevate his mate in his eyes. And so, as he lay upon his stretcher thinking over these things, the Welsher yearned for Richard's return, that a reconciliation might be effected between them.

Richard Handfield was far from a bad man; but he was a weak man and a coward. He was vacillating, and was easily led for good or evil. Above all, he could not face
misfortune. The change in his circumstances before he married Alice, his bitter disappointment at the conduct her father had pursued towards them, and their subsequent misfortunes and poverty, had completely prostrated him. He really looked upon himself as most harshly treated: in his heart, he did not believe that any other man in the world had as much to bear as himself; and he writhed and fretted at his hard lot. The weak points in his character would scarcely have made their appearance in prosperity; but under the lash of misfortune they thrust themselves out, prickling him sorely, and causing him to appear in a very unaimable light. He was intensely weak, intensely vacillating, intensely selfish; and his utter want of moral courage was bringing him to the brink of a terrible precipice.

It was past nine o'clock in the evening when Richard, who had been drinking at some of the sly grog-shanties, came to the tent. It would have been better for him had he not come home that night. It is awful to think upon what slight threads of chance a man's destiny hangs! He had not intended to sleep that night in the Welsher's tent, but a stray remark had changed his resolution. The quarrel between the two mates had been incidentally mentioned in conversation at the shanty where Richard was drinking, and a digger jokingly observed that he supposed Richard would be afraid to sleep that night in the Welsher's tent. This remark decided him. He was not going to have the charge of cowardice brought against him. It also prevented his drinking to excess, for he determined to go home early.
When he entered, the Welsher sprang from his stretcher, and Richard started back, expecting a blow. He was much astonished when the Welsher, holding out his hand, said—

"Dick, let's shake hands. If you are sorry for the quarrel we have had, so am I. Why should we two fall out?"

Richard put out his hand, but not so readily as the Welsher.

"I'll shake hands with you, Welsher," he said; "and I'm sorry that we quarreled. But you had no right to say of me that I was a proud, lazy fool."

"I said nothing of the sort," said the Welsher. "Whatever I've said, I've said to your face. I'm not mean enough to speak against a man when his back's turned. Who told you I said so?"

"Honest Steve."

It flashed across the Welsher's mind, that they had both been deceived by Honest Steve.

"You remember my telling you my story, Dick, when we camped out?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You remember that part about my mother?"

"Yes."

"And the Bible she gave me?"

"Yes."

"All the gold in Victoria could not buy that Bible of me, Dick."

"I don't think it could, Welsher."

"And yet I was told that you swore to burn that Bible, when you could lay hands on it."
"Whoever told you so told a lie. I'm not very sober, but you can believe me."

"I do. We've both been put upon by Steve. He told me you swore this, and you may guess my blood was up."

"I should think so. But why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because Steve made me promise not to say anything about it. I suppose he made you promise the same. Shake hands again, Dick. When we've squared up, to-morrow morning, we'll break with Steve, and you and I will stick together as mates, if you like. I'll tell him my opinion of him, too."

So the two mates were friends again; and, softened by the reconciliation, they fell into confidential conversation. The Welsher was even bold enough to speak to Richard about Alice; and Richard, humbled by what had passed, did not resent his mate's remarks.

"When men and women marry," said the Welsher, "they owe a duty to each other, which I think it is sinful to forget. You have forgotten your duty, Dick. If your wife is anything like the picture you have of her, she wouldn't forget her's, I'll stake my life on it."

"She is the best woman in the world," said Richard. "If she had never seen me, it would have been better for her."

"But she did see you, and she married you, Dick, so it's not very wise to speak like that now. How long is it since you have written to her?"

"It must be five or six weeks," answered Richard. "There is no excuse for me, I know. But I had not courage."
"There is no excuse for you," said the Welsher. "I wish I had the good fortune to possess such a wife; you are not half grateful enough, Dick. Think of her, without a friend in Melbourne, waiting, waiting, waiting! Poor thing! who has she to lean upon but you? Write to her to-morrow. I tell you what we'll do, Dick? When we've divided the gold—there are more than ninety ounces—we'll put our two shares together, and we'll take your wife in mates with us. We'll divide our shares into three, and you shall send her her share with your letter."

Richard pressed his mate's hand.

"You are a good fellow, Welsher," he said. "We'll talk over it in the morning."

"No; we'll settle it now. I've got no one depending upon me. I haven't much use for my share. For the matter of that, you might have the lot. Why not go to Melbourne, and bring her here? While you're away, I can be putting up a tent for you. I'll get a good claim, too, before you return; you see if I don't."

"She would never be able to rough it, up here."

"Dick," said the Welsher. "What do you think she is doing now, in Melbourne? She must be dreadfully unhappy, away from you, although you do not deserve her. Come, now, make up your mind. This may be a turning point for you. We might get a pile claim, you know, and then you'd be all right again."

"You put new life into me, Welsher. I think I will go to Melbourne, and ask her if she'll come."

"Bravo, Dick! You shall start the day after to-morrow. She'll come, depend upon it. I'll be your friend,
Dick—your's and her's. You'll see what sort of a tent I'll have ready for you by the time you come up. That's all settled, then."

"Yes; and now I'll turn in. I've heard of a good bit of ground, and I want to be up early to have a look at it."

"All right. I shall turn in, too. Good night, Dick."

"Good night, old fellow."

Richard was soon asleep, but the Welsher lay awake for a longer time than usual, reading his mother's Bible. He had a strange sort of feeling about him. His mind was thronged with old associations. He kissed the Bible before he fell asleep; and, as consciousness was fading from him, the last thing he saw, with his inner sense of sight, was the face of his old mother, as he remembered it in his boyish days.

Everything in and around the tent was wrapped in deepest shade. The moon had not yet risen. The stars glimmered dimly in the heavens, and the wind floated by with soft sighs. Scarce the barking of a dog disturbed the stillness. Nothing but the deep breathing of strong men was heard. A solemn hush was over all. Yet there was wakeful life within the tent—wakeful life in the person of the Tenderhearted Oysterman, who, with but little trouble, had succeeded in unfastening the calico door from without. When he was inside, he softly closed the door, and crouched upon the ground, listening to the regular breathing of the sleepers. Satisfied that his entrance had not disturbed them, he took a piece of phosphorus from his pocket, and rubbed it upon the
sleeve of his serge shirt. As he held his arm up to his face, a dim, ghastly glare was reflected in his cruel eyes, and upon his cruel lips. He then took out Richard's clasp-knife, and opened it slowly, so as to avoid the click of the spring. His plans were well matured. In the event of any struggle, and of Richard's awaking, he would call out for assistance, and accuse Richard of the murder. He could easily account for his appearance in the tent, and, for the rest, Richard's knife, and the quarrel between the mates, would be sufficient evidence. He thought over all this as he crouched upon the ground, with the open knife in his hand. He slowly drew the bright blade across the phosphoric glare on his sleeve, and then suddenly rose, and bent over the sleeping form of the Welshman. The doomed man was lying upon his back, and his arm, carelessly thrown over his pillow, rested upon the old Welsh Bible. The coverings on the bed were disarranged, and the Welshman's strong, muscular chest was partially bared. If, at that awful moment, he had awakened, it would not have saved him: for the hand of the murderer was raised, and, with one strong, cruel flash, the knife was buried to the hilt in the heart of the sleeping man! A sudden start—an agonised quiver of every nerve—a choking, gasping sigh and moan—and the murdered man lay still in death. Not more still was his form than was the form of his murderer. Motionless as a statue, the Tenderhearted Oysterman stood, as if petrified. For a brief space only he so stood; for presently his muscles relaxed, and he groped under the dead man's pillow for the gold. He uttered a stifled scream as his hand came in contact with
the dead man's face; but directly afterwards, he cursed himself in silence for his folly. When he had found the gold, he turned his phosphorus-lighted sleeve towards the murdered man. He felt sick and faint, as the ghastly blue glare fell upon the Welshman's bleeding breast, and with a shudder, which he could not repress, the Tenderhearted Oysterman crept stealthily from the tent.

Pale and trembling, he halted for a few moments outside, as if for rest. He could hear nothing but the beating of his heart against his ribs; he could see nothing but the phosphorescent glare upon his arm. As though he had looked into some weirdly-illuminated mirror, in which he saw a fadeless picture of his crime, he hurriedly turned up the sleeve, and so shut out the glare. Then he walked towards Breakneck Gully. The loneliness was awful to him. As he crept slowly along—for he had to thread his way for the first mile between deserted claims, and over white hillocks of pipeclay—he listened eagerly for the barking of a dog, for any sound that would break the dreadful silence, and divert his thoughts from the deed he had committed. But no sound fell upon his ears; for him the air was full of silent horrors. Strive as he would, he could not rid himself of the fancy that the shadow of the murdered man was gliding after him as he walked along. He dared not look behind him. He almost tumbled into a hole as he quickened his steps, the sooner to reach his comrades' tent; but, recovering himself, he started back with an oath upon his coward lips, for he thought he saw the Welshman's face rise suddenly from the claim. It dis-
appeared as suddenly as his fancy had conjured it up, and he went on his way. As he came to the end of the diggings, a faint light was spreading over the verge of the horizon. The moon was rising. He was thankful for this; for the thought that he should have to walk, surrounded by black night, through the wooded range which led to Breakneck Gully, somewhat daunted him; but he would have the moon now to light him through the bush. He cursed his weakness; he cursed his folly in not having provided himself with brandy to keep up his courage. He needed it; for he could not shake off the idea of the appalling shadow gliding after him. His thoughts travelled back to the tent, and, fascinated by the horror of the last hour, he lived it over again. Once more he enters the tent, vividly recalling each minute circumstance; once more he crouches upon the ground, intent and watchful. He takes the piece of phosphorus from his pocket, and rubs it upon his sleeve—there is a blue glare across his eyes as he thinks this part of the tragedy over again—he opens the knife, softly, cautiously—he bends over the sleeping man, raises his arm and strikes! Horror! what is that? Standing directly in his path, is a tall, dark form, with gaunt arms stretched towards him. He can see its hair stir, he can hear a sobbing wail issue from its mouth. His craven heart leaps with terror; then a sickly smile of relief passes over his face, for he sees that he has been startled by a tree, its branches trembling in a gust of wind which has just swept by. All nature seemed to cry against him for the coward deed he had committed. The moon rose slowly behind a veil of mournful clouds; the stars
paled; the wind gasped and sobbed; and every leaf and branch quivered as he crept along. Once he closed his eyes, as if to shut out the terror which encompassed him; but more thickly thronged his ghastly fancies, making themselves visible. And when he looked before him once more, a shadow seemed to glide swiftly by him, and to hide itself behind a clump of timber at his right. So strong was this fancy upon him, that he took a knife from his pocket, and held it ready to strike. A sigh of relief escaped him when he had left the clump of timber at his back; but still he dared not look behind, for the awful shadow was following on his steps. Louder grew the moaning of the wind; more strongly trembled every leaf and branch; and a flash of pale lightning glancing suddenly upon his sight, almost blinded him. But not so suddenly that he did not see within it a picture of the Welshman lying upon his stretcher, with a stream of blood flowing from his breast. Then the clouds began to weep; thick clots of rain fell, like clots of blood, in his path; and he trod in them, shuddering. He was near the end of his journey now. Within fifty yards of his comrades' tent stood a solitary tree. As he passed it, the heavens opened, and he saw again the vision of the Welshman's bleeding heart, while the now fast-pouring rain seemed to coil a host of bloody symbols round about his feet!
CHAPTER XIII.

THE TENDERHEARTED OYSTERMAN TRAPS HIS GAME.

Before the rising of the sun, Richard Handfield was on his way to inspect the new ground, of which he had spoken to his mate on the previous night. When he rose, he did not strike a light, and he trod softly out of the tent, so as not to wake the Welshman. A tender feeling of regard for his mate had sprung up within him; and as he hastened along, with pick and shovel slung over his shoulder, a new happiness took possession of his heart. The reward of right-doing is very sweet, and Richard was tasting this in anticipation, for the first time in his life. To-morrow, he would start for Melbourne to join his wife. He knew that no persuasion would be required to induce her to live with him on the diggings. He felt very remorseful at his neglect of her: never, since he had known her, had he so truly appreciated her goodness. He thought of her patience, of her sufferings; and the memory of her sad, sweet face came upon him as he walked along. "She's a dear, good girl," he said to himself. "The Welshman is very right; I don't deserve her. Never mind, I'll make it up to her, now; she shall not suffer for me any more." And so, with heart and step rivalling each other in lightness, he wended his way to the new ground.

The sun was up when he retraced his steps. He had marked off a claim, and intended returning to it with his mate, after the gold had been divided, and they had broken
with Honest Steve. When within a quarter of a mile of his tent, just as he was revolving in his mind what could have been Honest Steve’s intention in setting him and the Welshman against each other, he heard the word “Murder,” spoken by one of two diggers who were coming out of a tent, a few yards before him. At the rear of the tent, there was a little straggling bush, through which Richard was walking when he heard the word. It arrested him for a moment or two. “Murdered in his bed,” the man said; “the knife sticking in him, too. Let’s run and see.” And they ran off at full speed, in the direction of the Welshman’s tent. A feeling, more of curiosity than dread, came upon Richard, and he was preparing to hasten after the two diggers, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a warning voice cried, “Hist!” in his ear. Turning, he saw the face of Honest Steve.

“Hist!” said Steve. “Turn back: all’s discovered!”

“What’s discovered?” asked Richard, looking round, bewildered.

“If they catch you,” continued Steve, not heeding the question, “they’ll lynch you; I heard them swear they’d do it, and I came away, fearful they might set on to me.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Richard, a vague terror stealing over him.

“You see,” pursued Honest Steve, “it was the knife that settled it. It wouldn’t have looked so bad, if the knife hadn’t been found sticking in him. What made you leave that behind you?”
Instinctively, Richard felt in his pockets: his knife was gone!

"Then they know you've been quarreling together"——

"Good God!" cried Richard, the full horror of his situation breaking upon him. "The Welshman"——

"It was an infernally cowardly thing for you to do," said Honest Steve, with simulated indignation.

"Do you believe"——Richard gasped out.

"Look here!" said Honest Steve. "What's the use of asking me if I believe? Who wouldn't believe, I should like to know? Here he is, found murdered in the tent this morning, your knife sticking in him, the gold gone, and you cut away"——

"But I'm going back," said Richard, in despair.

"Say your prayers first, then," said Honest Steve. "They'll hang you on the nearest tree—they've got the rope already slung. I heard one of them say that he told you last night you was afraid to go home, and that you started off in a rage directly afterwards. When you quarreled with him yesterday afternoon, you know, you said you'd be even with him."

"But we made friends last night?"

"Who knows it?"

Richard staggered, and almost fell. The question struck him like a blow. Who knew it? No one. None but the Welshman and himself knew of the reconciliation that had taken place between them. In the eyes of the world, they were still enemies. Of what use would be his simple word? He felt that the chain of evidence was too strong for him to attempt to struggle against. What
a change had come over his prospects within the last hour! The new life of happiness that had dawned upon him had faded away, and now his future was full of horror. "Fate is against me," he groaned; "what is the use of my struggling?" But in the midst of his great peril came the thought of the disgrace that would attach to his name. Alice, too; it would be her death. "I must save her from this misery," he thought; "I must save myself from this shame, if only for her sake. This is some foul plot against me. I may unravel it, if I have time. Where can I hide?" And then, with that marvellous rapidity of thought which conquers time, he reviewed, in a few brief moments, the whole of the circumstances. He felt that there was no chance of escape if he gave himself up—the net of circumstantial suspicion was too strong for him, unaided, to break through. In this most dread extremity, strong points in his character came out. His weakness and vacillation were gone, and he determined, if possible, to clear himself from the imputation of this infamous crime. But to accomplish that, he must be free. Where could he hide, for a time? As if in answer to his thought, Honest Steve said—

"See here, Dick. We're mates together, and I ain't going to desert you. You may have killed the Welshman, or you may not. I'm not going to be squeamish about that. One thing's certain—it couldn't look blacker against you. But then it looks a little black against me, too; because you know I'm not a prime favorite. If you like to come with me, I'll show you where you can hide away for a time."
"If you believe I did this deed, why do you wish to save me?" asked Richard.

"I'm coming to that. I don't do it out of love for you, don't you deceive yourself. I've got a purpose to serve. I fell in with some old mates yesterday, and I'm going to join 'em again. You can make one, if you like."

"Explain yourself."

"Let's get away from here, first. The diggers'll be about directly."

They walked for nearly an hour, Honest Steve leading the way. So well did he know the locality, that they did not encounter a single person. When they came to Breakneck Gully, and were within sight of Jim Pizey's tent—

"Do you know whose tent that is?" he asked.

"No."

"That's Jim Pizey's tent."

A light broke upon Richard, but he checked the expression of the thoughts which rushed upon his mind.

"Is Jim Pizey there?" he asked, almost calmly.

"Yes, he's there, waiting for us."

"Waiting for us!"

"Yes. That's lucky, isn't it?"

"Your voice suddenly sounds familiar to me," said Richard, turning his eyes upon Steve's face. "Who are you? Great heavens!" he exclaimed. "You are the Tenderhearted Oysterman!"

The Oysterman nodded and smiled.

"We are going to stick up Old Nuttall's station. You know the lay of the house, and we want you
to join us. You must join us. You are the only man outside our party who would be able to peach upon us. That's speaking pretty plain, isn't it?"

"Yes. Give me two minutes to reflect. Nay; you can put up your pistol. I shall not run away, with that charge of murder hanging over my head."

He turned his back to the Oysterman, and thought. He saw it all, now; the whole plot was bare before him. He remembered the anxiety of Jim Pizey, when they were in Melbourne, that he should join the gang, for the purpose of sticking up Highlay Station; he remembered the threats they used in their attempt to coerce him. The part of "Honest Steve" had been played to trap him. The Oysterman had committed the murder, and had stolen his knife for the purpose of implicating him. If he made his escape now from the gang, and was taken, he could not establish his innocence: the chain of evidence against him was complete. But if he consented to join the gang, he might gain information which would clear him from the charge. He would blind them; he would go with them to his father-in-law's station; in the next few days he would be able to get evidence of the Oysterman's guilt, and then——But he could not think out the rest. Chance might aid him. He was glad that he had not told the Oysterman that the poor Welshman and himself had discovered his treachery and lies, as "Honest Steve." If the worst befell, when they got to the station, and he had no means of establishing his innocence, he would save Alice's father; that would be one good thing done. He knew the desperate character of the men he
had to deal with, and that it behoved him to be wary. All this was thought out in less than the two minutes he had asked for.

"I will join you," he said to the Oysterman; "not because it is my inclination to do so, but because I must, as you say. It is better than being strung up by the diggers; I'll keep my life as long as I can."

"That's well said," returned the Oysterman; "but look here, mate. You go in heart and soul with us. No treachery, mind. You'll be looked after, I can tell you."

"I suppose I shall," said Richard; "but I must take my chance. It's bad enough being compelled to turn thief and bushranger, but it would be worse if I was caught. I speak as plainly as you, don't I?"

"Bravo, Dick," said the Tenderhearted Oysterman, clapping him on the shoulder; "you're more sensible than I took you for. We shall make a good haul with this job, and when it's done you can get off to America, and turn honest again, if you like. There's Jim Pizey at the door. Let's join him. We'll start, directly."
CHAPTER XIV.

THE MORAL MERCHANT CALLS A MEETING OF HIS CREDITORS.

The office of Mr. Zachariah Blemish was situated in one of the busiest and most respectable portions of the City. There was an air of business about it, which unmistakably stamped its character; its polished mahogany panels seemed to twinkle with riches. The swing-door of the office had a hard life of it—from morn till night, it creaked upon its hinges, complainingly. If ever door had occasion to growl, that door had. If ever door bemoaned its hard fate, or protested against being worked to death, that door did. Sometimes it sent forth a piteous wail; sometimes a long-sustained groan; sometimes an agonised little squeak, as much as to say, Now it's all over with me! But it wailed, and groaned, and squeaked in vain. There was no rest for it. For weeks, and months, and years, it had been flung open with ferocity, and slammed to with vindictiveness; for weeks, and months, and years, it had been pushed and banged with venomous cruelty. But it is a long lane that has no turning. A day came when it rested from its labors, and when its wails, and groans, and squeaks ceased to be heard.

It is surprising what consternation the simple closing of a door can produce. If the swing-door of the office of Mr. Zachariah Blemish had been aware of the dreadful tremor that thrilled through commercial circles on the
day that it hung quiescent on its hinges, it would have squeaked of its own accord, with fiendish satisfaction. If it could have seen the long faces of those ruthless men who had so cruelly pushed, and slammed, and banged it, it would have laughed in its baized sleeve, vindictively. But it had no means of satisfying its vindictive feelings, for it was shut out from the busy world, and a gloomy shade encompassed it.

There was great dismay in the city. The office of Mr. Zachariah Blemish shut up! What could it mean? Was it a temporary suspension, or a total smash? Why, everybody thought he was rolling in wealth. Everybody asked questions of everybody else. Quite a crowd was congregated outside the office during the whole day; and the outer door was stared at with feelings somewhat akin to awe, as if, like the Sphinx, it contained within its breast the knowledge of an awful mystery. Then came whispers of disastrous speculations, losses in sugar, losses in flour, losses in saltpetre, losses by underwriting, and losses by guaranteeing. Ships had been wrecked, stations had fallen in value, large firms in India had failed, debtors had absconded. But still, these were trifles to a man of such immense wealth as Blemish was reputed to be. And such a moral man, too!

Later in the day, it was reported that a meeting of creditors had been called, and a dark rumour was circulated that the estate would not pay a shilling in the pound. What were his liabilities? Some said fifty thousand pounds, some said a hundred thousand, some said half a million. The smaller sums were soon indignantly rejected, and the liabilities were fixed, to the satisfaction
of everybody, at half a million. Stay—not to the satisfaction of everybody; not at all to the satisfaction of his creditors, who were furious. They were a numerous class, but they were small in number compared to those who were not his creditors. With the majority, Mr. Zachariah Blemish had never been so popular as he was now. If he had made his appearance in the streets, he would have been stared at and adulated more than ever. For had he not failed for half a million of money? What a rich, unctuous sound the words had, as they were pronounced! They rolled deliciously round the tongue. Half a million of money! Enormous!

Great was the marvel how Blemish had managed to keep his state unknown and unsuspected for so long a time. For these losses had not come upon him at once. People had heard him speak, upon various occasions, of losses upon shipments here, of losses upon consignments there, of debtors absconding heavily in his debt, et cetera, et cetera; but he had spoken upon those subjects so pleasantly, that it rather enhanced his credit than otherwise. The impression conveyed was, that those losses had been sustained, but that, large as they were, they were too trifling to affect the position of such a merchant as Blemish. How had he managed to sustain his credit through all those losses, which now, it was seen, must have been enormous? Why, at the time the great banquet was given to him, he must have been hopelessly insolvent! He was certainly a marvelously clever man. He was undoubtedly a very great genius: for he had failed for half a million of money!

And Mr. Blemish himself—how did he bear the publi-
ocation of his downfall? Was he pale, anxious, nervous, humbled, crestfallen? Was he crying and fretting inwardly at his displacement from the pedestal upon which public opinion had placed him? Not at all. He was comfortably seated in one of the coziest rooms of his mansion, in handsome dressing-gown and slippers. He was smoking a fragrant Havanah cigar, and drinking iced claret, which he poured from a costly jug, a portion of one of the numerous testimonials presented to him in the course of his moral career. From where he was sitting, he could command a view of his garden, wherein were blossoming the choicest exotics. His face was as ruddy and as fat as ever—he looked like a man at peace with himself and with all the world. And yet to-morrow he was to meet a host of furious creditors, men whom he had deceived, robbed, swindled, perhaps ruined. He had given instructions that he was at home to nobody except a legal friend, and he was passing the afternoon luxuriously, and enjoying his leisure, as such a moral man as himself deserved to enjoy it.

In the evening, he had a long consultation with his lawyer, after which he retired to rest. When he rose in the morning, he indulged, as usual, in his shower bath, and, strengthened for the battle, he issued forth to meet his foes.

Such foes! Such fierce, malignant foes! They ground their teeth, they clenched their fists, they anathematised the name of Blemish. That is, when Blemish was not present; when he made his appearance amongst them, the storm, if it had not passed over, was lulled. The great merchant had, somehow or another, contrived to make
himself look a shade paler than usual. When he entered
the room, he bowed gravely to the assembled throng,
and said that it would perhaps be as well that they should
at once proceed to business. The common sense of the
proposal striking every one present, they seated them-
selves immediately round the long table, and waited in
anxious expectation; Mr. Zachariah Blemish being at
the head, supported on his right by his legal adviser,
who had before him a formidable pile of papers. After
a short pause, the great merchant said, that no one re-
gretted more than himself the occasion which had called
them together. Before requesting his legal adviser to
lay the state of affairs before the meeting, he prayed
(and here he raised his eyes devoutly to the ceiling) that
their proceedings might be conducted with Christian
toleration, and that wisdom would descend upon and
guide their deliberations. Having thus (like a clergyman
bestowing a benediction upon his flock) invoked the
blessing of Providence upon his creditors, he motioned to
his lawyer, who, after shuffling his papers in a business-
like manner, opened the ball in a dry matter-of-fact
voice.

It was not his business, he said, to make remarks
which would not be considered pertinent to the subject.
He believed that the position in which Mr. Zachariah
Blemish found himself commanded the sympathy of
every section of the community. (A few of the creditors
looked dubious.) Mr. Blemish, a gentleman, a mer-
chant, and a Christian, had, by his conduct, earned the
esteem of all with whom he had come in contact, and he
trusted to be always able to retain it. He had strug-
gled for a long time against reverses—against falling markets, against losses by defaulting debtors, but he was unable to hold out any longer. It might be asked, why he had not placed himself in the hands of his creditors before his position had become so desperate as it now was. For it was desperate; there was no denying it. The answer was simple, and easily to be understood. There were in the room many creditors who were merchants. Those men knew how the slightest rumor affected credit. Mr. Blemish was always in hopes of being able to redeem his position. There was no chance of effecting this object if his credit was impaired; and so Mr. Blemish carried on business until he was compelled to succumb. He would not detain them any longer with remarks and explanations, but would at once proceed to figures.

Which he did; disclosing in the process a very disastrous state of affairs indeed. Mr. Blemish owed over a hundred thousand pounds, and his assets, in round numbers, showed a total of some thirty-odd thousands. But in those assets there were debts that were bad; some very doubtful; many which it would take considerable trouble and expense to collect. Having fully explained everything, the lawyer sat down with the concluding remark, that Mr. Blemish placed himself unreservedly in the hands of his creditors.

First, a long pause ensued. Then, as if set in motion by a suddenly-loosened spring, everybody spoke at once. One asked the meaning of this; another the meaning of that. Indeed, they asked so many questions all at once, that the unfortunate Mr. Blemish raised his hands de-
precatingly. When the meeting, in obedience to this deprecating motion, became a little less noisy, Mr. Blemish suggested that, perhaps, it would be as well that he should retire. They would be able to discuss more freely in his absence. One of the creditors, a man with pimples covering his face, said it was a very sensible suggestion; and as many unpleasant things might possibly be said, which Mr. Blemish would not like to hear, that gentleman would act wisely by retiring. When he had closed the door behind him, Babel was let loose. The creditors stormed, and fumed, and threatened all manner of things. Some suggested that he should be arrested; others that he should be forced into the Insolvency Court, where vengeance could be wreaked upon him. There were many shades of opinion represented. All the creditors were not violent and unreasonable. There was the meek creditor, who put in mild suggestions, and who was quite ready to vote with the majority, and retire into private life afterwards—a sort of man who could be got to sign any document, one way or another, with less than half an ounce of persuasion. There was the creditor who swore frightful oaths, who banged the table, and who got red in the face; and who suggested that the insolvent should first have his nose pulled, and then be kicked down stairs. There was the foreign creditor, who fumed in imperfect English, declaring that the insolvent was "von dam rascal," and vowing in incomprehensible lingo, that Blemish had swindled him, "picked my pocket, sare," of fourteen hundred pounds, not more than a month ago. There was the silent
creditor, who did not speak, but was ready to accept any cash composition, however small; he sat very still, did the silent creditor, for he intended to call a meeting of his creditors the very next week, and he was taking mental notes of the behaviour of those present to whom he was indebted. There was the turbulent creditor, who would not be quiet, but who was starting up every other minute with some red-hot impracticable suggestion. And there was the friendly creditor, who had been quietly assured by Blemish's lawyer that he should be paid in full, pouring oil upon the troubled waters, and using all his powers of persuasion to allay the storm of angry feeling.

When the storm had somewhat subsided, the pimple-faced man was voted to the chair, and the conversation became more reasonable. A great many present, while regretting the state of affairs, thought it would be a pity to put the estate into the Insolvency Court, where it would be eaten up with expenses. It might serve the purpose of unpleasantly exposing Mr. Blemish; but the dividend would be much decreased. Half a loaf was better than no bread. The meek creditor agreed that it would be unwise to put the estate into the Insolvency Court. Mr. Blemish owed him two thousand pounds, and he would like to get as much as he could for it. The friendly creditor judiciously favored this current of opinion; and he said, that it would perhaps be as well to ask Mr. Blemish if he had any proposition to make. Of course; why had they not thought of that before? Mr. Blemish was at once called in, and in reply to their questions, he said that there
were three courses open to the creditors. The first was
that the estate should be wound up in the Insolvency
Court; he knew, and they all knew, what would be the
result of that proceeding—a long delay, and a loss
of fifty per cent. on the realisation of the estate.
But, if they resolved upon this, he would at once file
his schedule; he was entirely in their hands. The
second course was, that the creditors should accept
an assignment in satisfaction of their claims; the
estate, judiciously administered, might turn out
better than he expected. The third course was,
their acceptance of a proposal which he was happy
to say he was in a position to make—for he was
not without friends. He had not passed his long
career in vain. There were many gentlemen who were
ready to assist him in his hour of need; and it was their
kindness and faith in his integrity which enabled him to
offer to his creditors four shillings and ninepence in the
pound, payable, half in cash, one-fourth at three months,
and one-fourth at six months, by guaranteed bills. If
this was accepted, he could still carry on business,
and if prosperity crowned his efforts, he would
make it his especial aim to pay all his creditors
twenty shillings in the pound. Mr. Blemish having
concluded, he was requested again to retire, and the
debate was resumed. But most of the creditors, as
prudent business men, felt that to accept the four and
ninepence was the very best thing they could do; and it
was ultimately proposed that Mr. Blemish should be
asked if he would increase his offer to five shillings. No,
Mr. Blemish said; he could not do it; threepence in the
pound extra would amount to more than his friends were willing to advance. A great deal of discussion and temporising ensued; until at length Mr. Blemish, upon his own responsibility, increased the offer to four shillings and tenpence half-penny. The meeting was adjourned till the following day, when the composition was accepted. The deeds of release were drawn up in a singularly short space of time (in truth, they had been prepared before the meeting), the money was paid, the bills were accepted and endorsed; and Mr. Zachariah Blemish was a free man, purged of every worldly debt.

Purged of every worldly debt. Happy man! Mr. Zachariah Blemish held his head very high indeed, that afternoon, for he did not owe a shilling in the world. Positively, not a shilling, if we except his butcher and baker, and other domestic purveyors. There is not the slightest doubt that he did not even owe a single shilling to those worthy gentlemen to whom he had referred as being willing to assist him in his hour of need, and who had such faith in his integrity. Strange, inexplicable mystery!

It was, doubtless, the high exultation produced by his being free from the thraldom of debt that induced him to stroll into a jeweler's shop, and to purchase a diamond bracelet for a hundred guineas—purchase it, and pay for it, too! This he intended as a present to his wife, to mark the commencement of his new career. It was a white day for him, and he celebrated it accordingly. What a sacrifice for a beggared man to make! A diamond bracelet for his wife on the day of his ruin! A model of a husband!
Sitting that evening in his arm chair, near the window overlooking his garden of roses, Mr. Zachariah Blemish said to his wife—

"Mrs. Blemish, I think of building another wing to the house. The architect has told me that it will not cost above a couple of thousand pounds. It will include a billiard-room, and a new dining-room, which will be a great convenience. We are a little bit cramped in our old one."

Marvel of marvels! What a man of faith was here! No sooner down than he was up again, challenging the world to come on!

The next day, his office was opened, and his clerks resumed their stools at their desks, and went on with their journalising and their posting. The swing-door recommenced its life of toil, and wailed, and groaned, and squeaked, as before. And Mr. Zachariah Blemish moved amongst his fellow men, with his usual affability. His linen was as spotless and as snowy as ever; his face was still smooth, and fat, and ruddy. And his reputation—let the truth be told—his reputation, in the eyes of the world, was as spotless as his linen. If there was any difference in the behaviour of his fellow citizens towards him, it was that they cringed and bowed to him a shade more sycophantishly than before.

Great was Blemish, the Moral Merchant!
CHAPTER XV.

ALICE AND GRIF MEET FRIENDS UPON THE ROAD.

With a dreadful fear at her heart, and her whole frame quivering under the pressure of a terrible excitement, Alice, with Grif by her side, walked swiftly on towards North Melbourne. The fatigue she had undergone the previous day seemed to have had no effect upon her. Poor Milly's death, and the letter which she still unconsciously held crushed in her hand, had strung her nerves to the highest pitch of tension. Poor Milly's death! As she thought of it, her eyes filled with pitiful tears. Her husband's danger! She shuddered at that; and she hurried on the faster. She heard a voice crying, "On! on! and save him! Delay not; you may be in time!" There are periods in life when the mind is so enthralled by an all engrossing idea, that the body is unconsciously strengthened to bear strains, that, if thought of, would appear impossible. Delicate as Alice was, she had within her now the strength of twenty women. Her first great fear had destroyed all sense of fatigue. Alice could not think of physical possibilities in presence of her devoted determination to save her husband. She must save him. "On, on!" the voice cried to her. Oh, pitiful heaven! if she should be too late! Despair almost seized her at the thought. She possessed but a few shillings, the remains of the money Richard had left her. She yearned for means to take her to her father's station; and she
looked round imploringly, as if she fancied that some good Samaritan, knowing her anxious misery, might come forward, purse in hand, to aid her.

"Have you any money, Grif?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Grif.

"How much?"

"Fourteen bob."

She had about the same amount. It would be sufficient to pay for riding a quarter of the distance, perhaps, and then—why then she would be worse off than now. Her money gone, where could she obtain the means of completing her journey? No: they must walk and their little money must be kept for food. The letter mentioned the date when her father was to complete his purchase of the station. She rapidly ran over in her mind the intervening days, and she knew that she could accomplish the journey in time, if no accident happened to her, and if her strength held out.

"Are you tired, Grif?"

"No," he answered stoutly.

"How many miles can we walk in a day?"

"Twenty, p'raps, Ally; but, lord! it'll kill you."

"I can bear anything now. I don't feel the least bit weak. You don't mind coming with me, Grif?"

"Mind? I'll walk my feet off, and not stop then, Ally, if you tell me to go on."

So they walked on until past noon, stopping only once for rest and refreshment. Alice had impressed upon Grif the necessity of economy, and their purchases during the day comprised but a small loaf, some tea and sugar, and a tin billy. There were many people on the road, but each
traveller appeared so wrapped up in his own concerns, as not to have even a glance of wonder for so strange a couple as Alice and Grif. They chose tracks some little distance from the main road, so as to escape observation as much as possible. About mid-day they came to a refreshment-tent, where many a thirsty wayfarer was solacing himself with long drinks of cider and lemonade. They were crossing at the back of this tent, while a woman was drawing water from a well. Coming up to her, Alice saw that she was a Negress—an old woman, whose hair was turning white. When Alice asked her for a draught of water, the old woman said, "Certainly, my dear;" and, regarding Alice's slender form with some curiosity, she invited her into the tent. Alice thankfully accepted the invitation, and seated herself upon a stool in the back division of the tent. This portion was used as a bedroom. It contained a very clean-looking bed, made upon canvas, which was tacked to posts of strong "quartering," driven into the ground; a snow-white quilt was spread over the bed. The walls of the room, which were simply of calico, lined with green baize, were embellished with two or three religious pictures, pinned or pasted on to the baize.

"You look tired, my dear," said the old woman.

"I am not very tired," said Alice. "I must not be tired; for we have a long distance to walk."

"You are very young, to be walking in the hot sun such a day as this," said the woman.

"Yes; but I have no choice. Come, Grif, we must go a few miles further."

But the old woman would not allow them to leave
without having eaten something. She insisted, too, on bathing Alice's feet. Alice almost wept at the kind treatment of the good old Negress; but she needed all her fortitude for her task, and she repressed her tears. After half-an-hour's rest, she rose, refreshed and inexpressibly grateful, and kissed and thanked the good woman as she bade her good-bye. They did not walk many miles further that day. Grif, with a peculiar instinct, discovered a sheltered nook where they could camp for the night. He had been thoughtful enough to fill his tin billy with water from the old woman's well, and he soon kindled a fire and made tea. After drinking some, Alice, thoroughly wearied out, fell asleep, while Grif, stretched upon the ground a short distance off, watched and slumbered by turns. It was a beautifully clear night—such a night as is only seen during the Australian summer. The soft wind swept gently over the sleeping girl, and the heavens seemed to look down upon her with kindliness.

She rose with the first flush of morning, and, strong in her purpose, she set out again upon her journey. She struggled on bravely, but she was a weak, delicate girl, and the fatigue she had already undergone was telling sadly upon her. Her limbs were weary, and her feet were very sore; and towards the afternoon she felt a deathly feeling coming over her. Her strength was giving way. The hot glare of the sun was too much for her to bear, and she sank at the foot of a tree in an almost fainting state. Grif, with a swelling heart, could scarcely keep from crying as he looked at her white face.
"I must rest a little, Grif," Alice said, faintly.
"Can you get me some water?"

Grif, knowing that the creeks were nearly all dried up, looked round despairingly. But, a hundred yards or so before him, was a bullock-dray, toiling painfully along—so painfully, that its wheels squeaked and groaned, as if for pity.

"Stop 'ere half a minit, Ally," Grif said. "I'll get some from the bullock-driver."

And, running off, he soon overtook the dray, and, almost breathless, begged for water.

"A nice thing to ask for," grumbled the driver.
"Why, it's worth more than champagne, such a day as this."

"I don't want it for myself," pleaded Grif; "but she'll die if you don't give me a little."

"She! Who?"

"My sister," said Grif, boldly. "She's bin walkin' all day, and she's dead beat."

The man cast a queer look at Grif, and, stopping his bullocks, accompanied the lad to where Alice was lying. She had fainted.

"Poor lass!" said the bullock-driver, and, stooping, he raised her head upon his knee, and sprinkled her face with the water he had brought with him. Presently she opened her eyes, and gratefully drank from the panikin he held to her lips.

"Thank you," she said. "I feel much better. I think I can walk on now."

But, when she rose to her feet again, she staggered against the tree.
"You're not strong enough to walk," said the bullock-driver, who had been regarding her with compassionate curiosity. "Which way are you going?"

Learning that their roads lay for some distance in the same direction, he offered her a ride upon the dray; and this offer being thankfully accepted, he assisted Alice to the top of the dray, where she soon fell asleep. Grif walked by the side of the bullock-driver, who frequently looked at him, as if puzzled.

"So she's your sister?" he said, at last.

"Yes," answered Grif, unhesitatingly.

"Are you in the habit of telling fibs, young man?"

Grif did not reply. He felt very grateful for the kindness the man had shown to Alice, and, for her sake, he did not wish to anger him. The driver did not pursue his inquiries, but contented himself with drawing Grif out upon other matters. When evening came, Grif helped to unyoke the oxen, which, with bells round their necks, were allowed to wander in the bush in search of food. Then they collected some brushwood, and kindled a fire. Tea being made, Alice was roused to partake of it. She thanked the man, who said—

"It is I who should be thankful. It is a long time since I sat down to tea in a lady's company. You will excuse me saying that I look upon this adventure as one of the strangest I have ever met with. It is not from an impertinent curiosity, but from a sincere desire to serve you, that I am emboldened to ask why so young a lady as yourself should be compelled (for I suppose you do not do it from choice) to undergo such fatigue!"
He paused as if expecting Alice to speak, but she did not reply.

"You may trust me," he continued; "for, although I am a bullock-driver I am a gentleman."

"I am sure of that, sir," said Alice; "your kindness is a sufficient proof."

"That may or may not be. I have lived long enough to have learned to distrust most things; especially smooth professions. But as I am a gentleman, and as bullock-driving is scarcely a gentlemanly occupation, I could have forgiven you for doubting it. You are a lady; I can see that. You are not this lad's sister?"

"Poor Grif!" said Alice, laying her hand upon his head. "He is not my brother, but he is my very dear friend."

Grif nodded, and his eyes brightened.

"It is really so strange for a gentleman to be a bullock-driver, and I have seen altogether so many queer things in these colonies, that I can easily imagine a set of circumstances (although, of course, I should most probably not guess the truth) which might place a lady in your position. You will excuse me for speaking thus, will you not?"

"Yes."

"I should like to win your confidence. If my family were to learn that I am a bullock driver, I think they would go insane, some of them, at the degradation. My parents are at home; they mourned me as dead some years since; and I am dead—to them. Are your parents living? Forgive me," he said, quickly,
as her face flushed with pain; "I did not mean to hurt you. I will ask you nothing further. But I should like to serve you, for your face reminds me of a sister whom I loved, and who died young."

"I think I could trust you, sir," said Alice; "but it would serve no purpose, for you could not assist me. I will tell you, in return for your generous speech, that both my father and my husband are living; that it is in connection with them that I am travelling with this poor lad for a companion; and that my poverty compels me to walk. Let this suffice you, I pray."

"It shall suffice me. I will not attempt to trespass upon your confidence."

"Do not think any wrong of me, sir. I am unfortunate and unhappy, but it is through no fault of mine."

"I can readily believe it. And now we will change the subject."

They sat talking in the quiet night for an hour or two. Then the shafts of the dray were roofed and hung round with the tarpaulin, and a bed of dried leaves was made for Alice. Before retiring, she beckoned Grif, and they strolled a short distance from the bullock-driver, as he lay smoking his pipe. The cool air was delicious after the dreadful heat of the day. Alice felt very grateful. Notwithstanding her one great grief, there was a feeling of devout thankfulness at her heart.

"God is very good, Grif," she said, looking up at the solemn splendor of the stars.

"Yes," the boy replied; "I s'pose He is, if you say so, Ally."

"See, now," said Alice, "how He has sent a friend
to us when we were in need. I think I should have
died, if that kind man had not assisted us."

"He's a good sort of a cove, for a bullock driver,
and no mistake," said Grif.

"Do you ever pray, Grif?"

"No; never knewed how to."

"Kneel down with me, dear Grif, and thank the
Lord for the good He has sent to us. When I think
that, but for the simple act of kindness of that good
man, I might be lying helpless, unable to pursue my
journey, my heart is full of gratitude."

They knelt down together, and Alice said a simple
prayer, Grif repeating it after her. When, after a pause,
they rose, Alice said,

"If I am in time to save my husband, I shall
bless you all my life, Grif."

"You've got no call to, Ally," said Grif, half crying.
"I'm not a bit of good, I ain't, and never shall be."

"You are a dear, true-hearted lad, and Heaven will
reward you." And stooping hurriedly, she kissed Grif's
cheek, and went to her bed of dry leaves.

Never before had Grif experienced such a delicious
sensation as stole over him at this moment. He
trembled with an exquisite pang of wondering hap-
piness, and wrapping himself in a blanket which the
bullock-driver had lent him, he lay awake for an hour,
nursing the cheek which Alice had kissed. Truly, if
she asked it, he would give her his life!
CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORY OF SILVER-HEADED JACK.

It was the fourth day of their journey. Grif was trudging along beside the weary bullocks, and Alice was sitting upon the dray, under the friendly shade of the tarpaulin. The road seemed very long to Alice; she was pining for the end of her journey; she was sick almost to death. She had dreamed the previous night that she saw her husband with a knife in his hand, standing over her father: rushing forward, with a cry of terror, to arrest his arm, she awoke in an agony of fear and trembling. Thank God! it was but a dream. But if she should be too late! The thought was horror! and she moaned, and pressed her nails into her tender palms, feeling no pain but that of her mental misery. How she envied the travellers on the coach, as it dashed along, with its six horses, at the rate of ten miles an hour—dashed along over the rough roads, winding its way through a forest of trees, until it disappeared from her sight, taking with it, as it seemed, all she had of hope, and leaving her helpless in her despair! The bullock-driver saw her distress; but he could not help her with money to enable her to travel more swiftly, for, indeed, he was poorer than herself. He was expressing his regret to her that they would have to part on the following morning, as their roads would then diverge.

"I cannot tell you," he said, "how grieved I am that
I have not been overtaken by a friend who is travelling your road, and who could have taken you within twenty miles of your journey's end. He ought to have been up with me this morning; and now it is nearly time to camp, and I don't hear any signs of him. He doesn't travel at this snail's pace, which I see is making you unhappy. He goes along bravely, does Old Jamie."

"I am very grateful to you," said Alice; "indeed, I cannot say how grateful, for you have been a friend to me, when I most needed it. I am quite strong, now, and shall be able to walk well in the morning. If I can ever repay you"——

"Tut! tut!" interrupted the bullock driver. "Repay me! It is I who am debtor, not you. I was growing into a brute, and you have made me human again. I have almost made up my mind to go home, and to meet the jeers of my friends with humility. But that's not to the point now. I wish there were fairies in the Australian woods, and that some gentle sprites would harness themselves to my friend's wagon, and drag it here with a whisk! But there are no fairies in these Antipodean wilds—nothing but lizards and—eh!" he exclaimed, as a sound of tinkling bells fell on the ear. "By Jove! there are fairies; and Queen Mab has done the trick! If that isn't Old Jamie, I'm a Dutchman."

And, almost as he spoke, there came into sight a magnificent team of six dark bays, harnessed to an American wagon. They were splendid animals, and were dressed in handsome substantial harness. The wagon was piled with cases and barrels, and the driver
was sitting in front, cracking a long whip, and shouting to his horses.

"Hi! there! hi! Get along Truelove! Now, then, Silver! Pull it up!"

Whereupon, the bullock driver sent the cracker on his whip flying in the air, till it tickled the noses of the leading bullocks, and he cried,

"Hi! there! hi! Get along Strawberry! Now, then, Lazybones! Pull it up!"

"Pull it up!" echoed the teamster, scornfully. "You may well say, pull it up! I'll pull you up, if you block the road in that way. Why, I should be ashamed of myself for a lumbering, lazy rascal, if I was you. Here am I, started two days after you, tripping up your heels in less time than it takes to say Jack Robinson! Well, if ever I take to bullock-driving, may I be"——

But here he made a full stop, and turned as red as a peony, for he caught sight of Alice in the bullock dray.

"Almost committed myself," he whispered to the bullock-driver, as they shook hands. "I didn't know you had a woman with you."

"She is a lady, Jamie," said the bullock-driver. "I am so glad you have come up, you can't tell. She is going your road, and you'll have to take her on, tomorrow morning.

"All right. If you say so, so it is. It's time we camped. I hurried on to catch you up, so that we might camp together."

They had a merry party that night. Old Jamie and Alice were friends at once, and Alice's sorrow was lessened thereby.
"Would you believe, Miss," said Jamie, when tea was over; "that this obstinate acquaintance of mine"—

"Friend, Jamie, friend," said the bullock-driver.

"Well, friend, then, as the honorable member for bullock-dray, allows me to call him—that he obstinately refuses, from a feeling of pride, to go home to his family, who would kill the fatted calf the moment they caught sight of his old phiz; and persists in remaining here in these antipodes, wasting his miserable existence as a bullock-driver!"

"Don't call names, Jamie," said the bullock-driver, "or I'll have your words taken down. Besides, I want you to tell us a story. You've been in the Colony long enough to write a book."

"I have that; but writing's not much in my line. I can talk, though, any amount. But what does the lady say?"

:"I should much like to hear you," said Alice.

"And my shock-headed friend?"

Grif grinned, and said He was agreeable to listen; he was very fond of stories, he was.

"Fire away, now," said the bullock driver. "Something that occurred to yourself; no fibs, mind."

"Very well. Did you remark," he said, addressing Alice, "that when I spoke to my horses, I called one of them Truclove, and one of them Silver! I did not christen them by those names without a reason; and, to prove this, I will, if you please, tell you a real, right-down, veritable, true story, about a mate of mine, called

**Silver-headed Jack**.

"I have seen so many strange things, since I have
been in the Colony, and have seen the Colony itself pass through so many wonderful phases, that I sometimes grow bewildered when I think of them, and am apt to confuse one thing with another. When I am walking through Melbourne streets, my memory often carries me back to the time, and that not very long ago, when what are now magnificent, broad thoroughfares, lined with substantial buildings, were but tangled bush, in which one might lose oneself without much trouble. No fairy story can excel, in its imaginative details, the rapid and wondrous changes that have passed over Victoria since the gold discovery. Where banks transact that business which enables them to pay twenty per cent.; where merchants trade and negotiate for shipments from all parts of the world; where copies of London and Paris swells promenade; and where Fashion parades from morning to night—the Aboriginal stalked but yesterday in all his dirty savagery. You might have seen plenty of them, a dozen years ago, with their boomerangs and their dirty blankets (a luxury which all did not possess), and their black eyes glittering from beneath their dark hair; you may live in Melbourne now for years, and not see a single memento of the original possessor of the soil. They are fast dying out, and by-and-by they will live only in the traditions of the country. I could tell you some stories about them that would make you whistle—I beg your pardon; I forgot that I was speaking to a lady. What I am going to tell you now, is the story of Silver-headed Jack.

"He was a mate of mine on the Echuca gold-diggings. Not silver-headed at that time, for he had the glossiest
curls I ever saw. There were three of us together: myself, Silver-headed Jack, and Serious Muggins. Serious Muggins was not his proper name, you know, but the diggers have a knack of christening each other anew when they come together, and a name, once bestowed, sticks to a fellow all over the Colony. Serious Muggins had come out with Silver-headed Jack, and had got the title because he never smiled. He and Jack had been friends and companions at home, as you will find out presently. They were both about the same age, and of the same build; but you could not well imagine a greater contrast between any two men, than the contrast between Serious Muggins and Silver-headed Jack.

"Silver-headed Jack was always smiling; Serious Muggins was always frowning. If you could have transferred the smile from the face of Silver-headed Jack to that of Serious Muggins, I believe that Muggins would have been by far the handsomer man of the two; as it was, he was by far the uglier. For face is nothing, mates; what tells, is the expression that lights it up. If you'll excuse my being poetical, I should say that the face of Silver-headed Jack was like a bright day, and the face of Serious Muggins like a dark night.

"Well, we worked together on the Echuca for nearly six months; and if bad luck ever haunted one, and stuck to one, and worried one, and wouldn't go away from one, bad luck did all that to us. I said there were three of us in a party—myself, Silver-headed Jack, and Serious Muggins; it was a mistake of mine, for there were four of us—myself, Silver-headed Jack,
Serious Muggins, and Bad Luck. We never sat down to a meal, but Bad Luck sat down with us, and didn't leave us enough to eat. We never marked out a claim, but Bad Luck got to the bottom before us, and took away the gold. We were among the first at a rush to a new flat, and we had marked out our claim, and had stuck our picks in it, when Bad Luck whispered to us that we were out of the line of the gold-lead. So we shifted our pegs, and another party took possession of our claim. We were only a few yards away from each other, and we bottomed at the same time. The other party bottomed on two ounces to the dish—we bottomed on two grains; and when I washed out the prospect, I looked up and saw Bad Luck grinning at us. If it had been a man, we would have stood up and took our revenge. As it was a spirit, we could only swear at it. Which we did, with a will.

"'Floored again,' said Silver-headed Jack, as we sat down at night to our mutton, and tea, and damper, and not much of those; 'I wonder if we shall ever get a rise? Lizzie will die an old maid, and I shall die an old bachelor, if luck doesn't change.'

"'Or she will be tired of waiting,' said Serious Muggins, 'and marry some one else.'

"'She will never do that, as you know very well,' returned Jack; 'when I write home, I will tell her what you say.'

"Serious Muggins did not reply; but a darker shade stole over his countenance.

"You may guess from this, that Silver-headed Jack was in love. He had come away from home, betrothed to a
young girl, whose face, judging from the picture he had of her, was just the face that any one might fall in love with, and be proud of. Now, let me tell you what I learned at that time, from my own observation. Serious Muggins and Silver-headed Jack had come out from the same village, had been schoolmates and companions all their lives, and were both in love with the same girl. Jack made no secret of his attachment; his friend kept his locked up in his breast.

"Yet I believe that if ever there was a man madly in love, and if ever there was a man madly jealous of the love he coveted, and which was given to another, that man was Serious Muggins. He had so possessed himself with the love he bore to her, that his lips would quiver, and every feature in his face would twitch, when he saw (as he saw daily) Silver-headed Jack take her letters from his pocket, and read them; and often, when Jack read aloud little scraps from them, he would go out of the tent abruptly, and make himself mad with drink at some grog-shanty. Silver-headed Jack could not help seeing this and taking notice of it, but he did not put the same construction upon it as I did.

"'Poor fellow!' he would say upon such occasions. 'You see, Jamie, he was in love with her too, but she wouldn't have anything to say to him. I don't wonder it preys upon him; I know it would drive me mad, if I was to lose her. It is her love for me, and the thought of our being together by-and-by, that keeps me good. God bless her!'

"I couldn't help admiring the young fellow, and wishing him success. At the time that this took place, I was
between forty and fifty years of age. Twenty years before that, I was in love, too, and with a woman that I thought then, and think now, the best, the purest in the world. Circumstances sent me to this Colony, and since then I have neither seen nor heard of her. I was not fit for her—I know that now; she was too good for me. But if heart-photographs could be taken, she might be seen on mine; and the memory of her dwells within me like a star that will light my soul to heaven.

"I never liked Serious Muggins. I always believed that if he could do Silver-headed Jack an ill turn, he would not scruple to do it; and I had observed that the effects of our ill-luck were different upon the two. Serious Muggins actually seemed pleased that we were not successful. You see, he might have argued within himself, that a rich claim would bring Silver-headed Jack nearer to the woman he himself loved. He was like the dog in the manger. I had reason to suspect him; for just before the time came for us to part company, this occurred that I am going to tell you.

"We were working a claim that was just turning out 'tucker.' There were three drives in it, and the last day I worked in them, I noticed that the pillars were firm and secure. The following morning, Serious Muggins had a spell below, and when he came up, Silver-headed Jack took his turn at the bottom. He had not been down a quarter of an hour, when I heard a great thud beneath me, and then a scream. I was working at the windlass, and Serious Muggins was chopping down a tree, a little distance off, for firewood.
I cooeyed to him, and he came running up to me with a face so scared that I couldn't help noticing it.

"'What's the matter?' he asked, trembling all over.

"'God knows,' I replied, preparing to go down; 'but I expect some part of the claim has fallen in. Lower me gently, and be careful to do exactly what I tell you, when I am at the bottom.'

"'Is Jack below?' he asked, eagerly.

"'You know he is,' I replied shortly. 'Lower away.'

"By this time, two or three other diggers had strolled to the spot, and they lent a hand. When my head was even with the top of the claim, I looked up, and the only thing that struck my notice, was the white face of Serious Muggins, and a wild, triumphant, yet half-frightened look in his eyes. I took a step in the drive in which Silver-headed Jack had been working, and called out to him. I was dreadfully frightened at receiving no answer, and creeping along slowly and cautiously, I found that one of the pillars had given way, and that Silver-headed Jack had been knocked down senseless by the falling earth. Only a part of his body was buried—his head was free. We dug him out after a little trouble, and got him safely up. Five minutes afterwards, the whole claim tumbled in. Jack was not much hurt. Beyond the shaking, and a few bruises, he had nothing the matter with him. We took away the windlass and our tools, and knocked off for the day.

"'It is very strange,' said Silver-headed Jack, as he lay resting on his back, on the stretcher; 'I never touched the pillars. I was picking away at the bottom, when, without the slightest warning, the earth tumbled
in. Did you notice anything, when you were down this morning?' he asked of Serious Muggins, who was busy making a stew for tea.

"'No,' was the reply.

"'Did you touch any of the pillars?' I asked.

"'No.'

"'I can't make it out,' I said; 'there has been no rain, and I will take my oath that when I was down yesterday, the claim was safe.'

"'What, do you think'——commenced Serious Muggins, when I interrupted him.

"'I am not going to say what I think. But I am going to say this: I think we had better part. We have had nothing but bad luck since we have been together. We can't have much worse when we are away from each other, and we may have better. So to-morrow morning, my lads, we'll dissolve partnership.'

"A curious thing happened to me that night. We all slept in one tent. It was a pretty large one. Well, I woke up in the middle of the night, and, opening my eyes, I saw Serious Muggins sitting up in his bed, and kissing a picture. I thought I saw him crying, too. I must have turned in my stretcher; for Muggins threw a quick look at me, and hurriedly put out the light. I thought a good deal of this before I fell asleep again. I did not know that he had a picture he set much store on, and I settled in my mind that it was the picture of Jack's Lizzie that Muggins was kissing, and which he must have taken from under Jack's pillow. Although I suspected Muggins, I couldn't help pitying him.

"In the morning, we dissolved partnership. I
would have liked Silver-head Jack for a mate, but he thought it a point of honor not to part from Serious Muggins. Jack did not entertain any suspicions of foul play, and I did not think I was justified in telling him my suspicions, for, after all, I might have been wrong. It was a pretty common thing for claims to tumble in from all manner of causes. So we parted, and I went away to another diggings.

"It was eighteen months before I saw either of them again. I heard of them at odd times as being now at one place and now at another, but I did not fall in with them. For my own part, during this time, I was always able to make wages, and was always in hopes of making a pile. I should think a gold digger's life is very much like a gambler's. There is the same feverish excitement about it, and although you may go on losing and losing, and wasting your time, there is always the chance of a run of luck setting in with the very next deal of the cards. At a new rush, for instance, while you are sinking your claim, your are always speculating as to what it will turn out; and when you go to sleep, you will dream, perhaps, that you have bottomed on a nugget as big as your head. Such nuggets have been found, you know. Men at starvation point one day, may be tolerably rich the next. I once gave up a claim in disgust, after working at it for two months. Some new chums took it up a few days afterwards, and went home with twelve hundred pounds a piece for a month's work. If I had driven my pick two inches further, I should have come upon as rich a patch of gold as was ever found. During these eighteen months that I did not see
Silver-headed Jack or Serious Muggins, I had only two mates. You will stare when I tell you that one of them was a woman! and a jolly good digger she was; she did as much work at the windlass as a man. Her husband was my mate, first; but he was seized with a paralytic stroke, and was in bed for a twelvemonth. So his wife, like a noble-minded brave woman as she was, worked for him by day, and nursed him by night. But he got worse instead of better, and she was advised to take him down to the Melbourne Hospital, if she wanted to save his life. When this occurred, I shifted my quarters, and fell in with my old mates. They were still working together; but they hadn’t been much more fortunate than they were when we were all mates. They had a quartz claim, now, though, which they thought was going to turn out splendidly. But a great change had come over Silver-headed Jack. He had not heard of his Lizzie for six months, and he was fretting for means to take him home, to find out the cause of her not writing. In those six months he had grown a dozen years older. I don’t think Serious Muggins was very pleased to see me, but Silver-headed Jack was, and he offered to give me a small share in the claim—an eighth it was,—if I would join them. It was a pretty fair offer, for the claim was nearly down to the reef, so I accepted it. Serious Muggins would have objected, I dare say, if he could have done so without being suspected of animosity; but the claim wanted a second man at the windlass, and he knew I was a good miner, so he was forced to put up with me. Well, one day, about three weeks after I joined them, we put in a blast and fired it; and when
the smoke cleared away, and Jack got to the bottom of
the claim, he sent up a bucketful of quartz, in which
we could see a good many specks of gold. We had
struck the reef, and it seemed to promise to turn out
well. It turned out a good deal better than we ex-
pected. The quartz was about three feet thick, and we
calculated that it would run at least six ounces to the
ton. We came upon a very rich patch, too—so rich,
that I almost danced with delight when I handled the
golden-veined lumps of stone. We raised about forty
tons of quartz, and made arrangements for having it
crushed at a machine that stood hard by. We took
some of it to the machine in sacks, and put it, with
our own hands, under the iron stampers. We didn't
leave the machine until the whole of it was crushed.
The first night we were all together watching the heavy
iron stampers, beating down with their one-two-three-
four time, and wondering what sort of a cake of gold the
forty tons would turn out. I said that I thought there
would be at least four hundred ounces.

" 'That will give me five hundred pounds for my share,'
said Silver-headed Jack. 'I shall put a good wages-man
in the claim, and go home to find out why Lizzie has not
written to me. I can't help thinking there is some
underhand work going on.'

" 'Phsa!' said Serious Muggins. 'She's tired of
waiting, and has married some one else. You don't think
a girl will wait for a man until she grows to be an old
woman, do you?'

" 'I don't know what girls will or will not do,' said
Silver-headed Jack; 'but I know that my Lizzie would
wait for me all her life. I'm almost frightened to go home, for fear of hearing that something has happened to her. The world wouldn't be worth living in, without her.'

"'Have you written to her?' I asked.

"'Yes, regularly. Only think of my working all these years, and never till now having the means to send for her, and after all not to know if she is dead or alive. Jamie,' he said to me, 'if I was to hear that she was dead, I'm sure I should go mad, or something dreadful would happen to me. You can't think think how I've set my heart on my Lizzie.'

"The crushing of that forty tons of quartz took nearly four days and four nights. They couldn't crush then as fast as they do now. Quartz crushing used to cost six pounds a ton, at that time; now, you can get it done for a pound. Well, it was all passed through the machine, and Jack and I were watching the washing out of the quicksilver. Serious Muggins had gone to the Post, to see if there were any letters (for the mail was expected), and he was to get us some supper ready by the time we came home with the gold. You may guess we kept a pretty sharp look-out upon the machine men, as they did their work; for it would have been the easiest thing in the world for them to have slipped a few pounds weight of the gold and quicksilver on one side, without our being a bit the wiser for it. There was nearly half a bucketful of the mixture. This was poured, about half a pint at a time, into a large chamois leather skin. The skin is porous, and upon being tightly squeezed, allows a large portion of the pure quicksilver
to ooze out, retaining the gold, coated, of course, with quicksilver. It was not until the men came near the bottom of the bucket that we found how rich was the quartz that had been crushed. The first few skinsful of quicksilver escaped through the chamois leather like silver-water, and there was but little gold left; but, when we came near the bottom of the bucket, we jumped for joy at finding that it was nearly all gold. After all the quicksilver was passed through the leather, the amalgam was put into a large retort, and screwed down. The retort was then put into the furnace. When it got red-hot, the quicksilver began to rise in the iron tube, which is joined to the top of the retort, and came showering down into the pail of water beneath, like a rain of silver stars. I was glad when the shower lessened; for I was half frightened that the gold was being spirited away. Then the retort was taken out of the furnace, and opened, and there lay the beautiful gold, changing, in the process of cooling, into all the colors of the rainbow. I wonder if a miser, in counting his hoardings, experiences the same kind of pleasure that I experienced when I saw that splendid cake of gold! If he does, his rusty old heart must be lighted up by a very delightful feeling. The cake weighed six hundred and twenty ounces, so that the quartz had averaged nearly sixteen ounces of gold to the ton. Not so bad that, eh? Well, Silver-headed Jack wrapped up the precious golden saucer in his pocket-handkerchief, and we made our way to the tent. I had my revolver cocked, in case of any accident, I can tell you. When we got to the tent, I noticed that Serious Muggins was very pale.
Jack opened his handkerchief, and looked at the gold triumphantly. As for me, I was running over with delight.

"'Got you at last you beauty!' I exclaimed. 'Oh, you sly coquette! What coaxing you want before you give yourself up! Jacob didn't work harder or more patiently for Laban's daughter, than we have worked for you. Only think, Jack, of this bright beauty hiding herself in the caverns of the earth, and refusing to give herself up until we plucked her out of her miserable home. Can you imagine a bright-eyed damsel, Jack, sinking into the earth, and we diving after her, until we catch her in the rock which prevents her escape? Oh, you beauty! I could kiss you!'

"You see, I am a bit of a poet.

"'I will kiss you,' said Jack, lifting the cake of gold to his lips, 'for you bring me nearer to my Lizzie. Hallo! Muggins! what's the matter?'

"'I've got bad news for you, Jack,' said Muggins.

"'What news?' asked Jack, dropping the gold, and turning quite pale.

"'About Lizzie.'

"'Well, man, go on.'

"'She's dead, Jack,' said Muggins, looking as white as Jack himself. 'The mail's in. I've got letters from home.'

"Jack didn't say a word, but dropped into his seat, trembling, and covered his face. I beckoned to Serious Muggins, and we stole out of the tent; I thought it was best to let Jack fight with his grief alone. I knew what a blow this was to him. He had not been working for
himself, but for his Lizzie; and just at the moment of
success, to hear that she was dead—it was terrible. He
was in a dreadful bad way about it. As I sat, outside
the tent, smoking, I heard him talking to himself,
strangely. We had left the cake of gold upon the
table.

"'You glittering devil,' I heard him say, 'why did
you lure me away from my Lizzie? If it hadn't been
for you, I should never have left home, and we should
have been together now. What would it have mattered
if we had been poor! Why did I fly from happiness to
you, you false cruel devil?'

"I wouldn't have him disturbed the whole of that
night. I knew all the talking in the world wouldn't
ease him. But when I saw him in the morning, I
started back in a fright. He was sitting upon the bench,
with his face resting in his hands, staring fixedly at the
cake of gold. He had evidently not moved during the
whole night, and during that night, his hair had turned
as white as silver! That was how he got to be called
Silver-headed Jack. I tried to rouse him, but the
answers he gave me were so vague and wandering, that
I began to be afraid he had gone mad. I saw at once
that he was very ill, so I ran for a doctor, who told me
that my mate had gone in strong for the brain fever.
Sure enough, he had, too. We thought he would
never have come out of it, and it's my belief, to
this day, that he never would, if one of the strangest
things hadn't happened. I should say it was six weeks
after Jack had been struck down. I had nursed him all
the time (he wouldn't let Serious Muggins come near
him), and the doctor said he couldn't last another week. How poor Jack raved while in that fever! I wonder that my hair didn't turn white through the frights he used to give me! He used to fancy Lizzie was in the tent with him, and he talked to her so naturally, sometimes waiting for her answers, that, during his pauses, I used to turn my head, half expecting to see Lizzie's white shade at my shoulder. I was sitting by the door of the tent one evening, listening to Jack's mutterings, for his tongue never seemed to stop; I was very troubled, for you see I liked Jack amazingly, and I pitted him, and could sympathise with him, for, as I told you, I have been in love myself. Of course, my pipe was in my mouth. What should we do without tobacco, I wonder? Do you know, I think tobacco prevents a good deal of mischief. What used we to say at school?—'And Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do.' But a man isn't idle when he has a pipe in his mouth; it is occupation for him. And you may laugh at me, if you please, it is elevating, too. Men don't plan murder, when they have pipes in their mouths. They've got something else to do; they've got to smoke and think—and thinking, when you're smoking, is generally good thinking. I could philosophise on this for an hour; but it's time I finished my story. I will say, however, that I look upon tobacco as a real good friend.

"Well, on this evening, I was sitting at the door of the tent, when who should I see coming along the gully where our tent was pitched, but a woman. Our tent was nearly at the foot of the gully, and, of
course, there was a hill shelving into it. I saw the woman at the first point of sight on that hill, and it almost seemed as if she came out of the sunlight. There were half-a-dozen tents scattered about, and she stopped at one of them and asked something. Imagine my surprise, when I saw the digger, to whom she had spoken, point to our tent, and when I saw her walking quickly towards me. She was a pretty, modest-looking lassie, and had a quiet, self-possessed air about her, which took me mightily. I was thinking over in my mind all sorts of things as to her, when she came up. My hair stood on end, and my knees began to shake, for I had seen the picture Silver-headed Jack set such great store on, and this lassie’s face so resembled it, that I thought I was looking at a ghost. I believe, if I hadn’t been so completely dumbfoundered, I should have run away.

“‘Does John Staveley live here?’ asked my ghost.

“John Staveley was Silver-headed Jack’s proper name.

“‘He’s living here, miss,’ said I, ‘and he’s dying here.’

“‘My God!’ she exclaimed, and as she staggered, I caught her in my arms. ‘Don’t tell me that!’

“‘Who are you?’ I asked.

“‘My name is Elizabeth Truelove,’ she answered.

“‘Jack’s Lizzie!’ I cried.

“‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Don’t tell me that he’s dying.’

“‘He’s dying because he heard that you were dead,’ I said. ‘You aren’t dead, are you?’

“‘No,’ she said, holding out her hand. A true woman’s lovcable little hand—real pleasant flesh and blood.
"'I think I can see through it,' I said, when I was convinced she wasn't a ghost. 'Jack's very ill. If anybody can save him, you can. But don't be frightened when you see him. He is much changed. His hair turned snow-white the night he heard you were dead. I've been his nurse, till now. You may as well go in and take my place.'

'She glided past me, and I walked away. I went straight to where I knew I should find Serious Muggins. He was in a concert-room, drinking with a lot of diggers. I went up to him quite coolly, and slapped his face. He started to his feet, and asked me what I meant by it?

"'You're a lying scoundrel,' I said; 'and if you don't understand what I meant by the first tap, I'll give you another.' And I gave him another—a pretty smart one, this time.

"He was bound to fight, you see. We went outside, and the diggers made a ring.

"'Now, mates,' I said, as I was tucking up my sleeves: he had stripped off his shirt. 'You all know me pretty well. I have never done a dirty action in my life, and I never mean to do one. This fellow has done the meanest thing I ever heard of. When I have polished him off, I'll tell you what it is. And then if you don't think I've done right, you can throw me in the creek, if you like.'

"Serious Muggins fought like a devil. I must do him the justice to say that he was, physically, a brave man. But he had been drinking for a good many weeks, and that told on him. I don't think I should have licked him, but for that. As it was, after an hour's hard fighting, when I was pretty well done myself, he
threw up his arms. Then, I told the diggers the trick he had played Silver-headed Jack, and how the woman he had said was dead was nursing my mate at the moment I was speaking. If Muggins hadn't been lying nearly dead on the ground, they'd have tarred and feathered him. As it was, they declared they would do so the next day. But the next day he was gone, and I never heard anything more of him. He left a rich claim behind him, and it was out of my share of that claim I bought my first team.

"When I got back to the tent, there was Lizzie True-love nursing poor Jack as tenderly—as a woman, I was going to say. That would have been a nice bull, wouldn't it? Do you know, that although she hadn't been in the tent two hours, it had got quite a different look in that short time. What a little treasure that woman is! It did me good to look at her! It appears that Muggins had intercepted all the letters; and Lizzie, uneasy at not hearing from Jack, and being sure of his constancy, had come out by herself, to learn what had become of him. That was faithful love, wasn't it? I don't think I have any occasion to tell you that Jack got well. He did get well, and he married his Lizzie after all. He gave up his own name, and took her's when they were married. But although he calls himself John Truelove, everybody else calls him Silver-headed Jack."
CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. NICHOLAS NUTTALL'S NERVES RECEIVE A SHOCK.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was in a high state of glorification. It was the day before Christmas, and she and her family were on a visit to their rich squatting relative. The promise that Alice's father had extracted from his brother Nicholas had been strictly kept. Nicholas had not told his wife that his brother had been a married man, although he himself knew it, and had, indeed, discovered that Mathew had a daughter living; but he knew his brother's character so well, that he had not ventured to speak upon the subject. For months, Mathew Nuttall had not allowed the name of his daughter to escape his lips; but, in truth, although he endeavored to disguise the fact even from himself, he was far from being happy. Since the night on which he had spoken with Alice upon the sea shore, he had not seen or heard of her. All that there was of human love in his nature he had once delighted to lavish upon her; and now that his resentment at her marriage with Richard Handfield had had time to cool, he half repented of his harshness. It might have been that, had she written to him, or directly asked his help, he would still have shut his heart against her. But her very silence pleaded for her. Like a smouldering fire, with no breeze to fan it into flame, his anger was dying out. It was but one Christmas since that his home was lighted by his daughter's smiles, and made happy by her presence.
She was a light-hearted girl then; and he remembered, though he strove to shut out the remembrance, his neighbors' looks of hearty admiration as she played the hostess at the Christmas gathering. He remembered the pride which had filled his heart at the thought that that fair and graceful girl was his daughter; he remembered that Christmas—but one year back—as the pleasantest time in his life. Now, what was he? A lonely, miserable man. And Alice! When he remembered her sad appeal to him, her pitiful voice, her drooping figure, as she stood before him on the seashore, he was filled with remorse. But for his pride, he would have gone to her and forgiven her. He constrained himself, however, to shun the expression of such feelings. Indeed he took pains to hide them from his relatives—especially from the woman portion of them: he could bear anything but pity or sympathy.

Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was in her glory. Her arrival at the station had filled her with lofty aspirations. Immediately she set her foot upon it, she, as it were, mentally took possession. The sight of the broad-stretching pasture land, dotted with sheep and cattle, afforded her ineffable satisfaction. At length, she could see realised the dream of her life. But two nights previously, she had lulled herself to sleep by chattering of her ambition.

"Nicholas, my dear," she said; "I like the look of this place so much, that I think I shall make up my mind to stop."

Accustomed as Nicholas was to the vagaries of his
better half, he could not refrain from saying, "But we are only here on a visit, Maria."

"Precisely so, Mr. Nuttall. I do not need you to tell me that. But do you think that life has not its duties?"

"What on earth do you mean, Maria?" asked Nicholas.

"Ah! You may well ask, Nicholas, for you have not been troubled much. But I thank my dear mamma for the example she set me—it strengthened me for my duties. On the day that I married you, I made up my mind to bear, with patience and resignation, whatever trials you might put upon me; and I have borne them," said the little woman, heroically, "as a wife should. Have I not, Nicholas?"

For the sake of peace, Nicholas said, "Yes, you have been a very good wife, Maria." He would like to have added, "or would have been, if you hadn't nagged so." But he dared not utter such words: he wanted to go to sleep.

"Yes, life has its duties," pursued Mrs. Nuttall; "and one of its first duties is Money."

Nicholas pricked up his ears.

"Money is, undoubtedly, one of the first," she continued. "Position is important, but I think Money is before it. Besides, Money gives Position. Therefore, I think I shall stop here."

Nicholas lay still, knowing that his wife would explain herself presently.

"I am thankful—truly thankful—that I see my children provided for. They will be spared such trials as their mother has gone through; and, as a mother who
knows what she has suffered, I rejoice. How much is your brother to give for his new station, Nicholas?"

"Twenty-two thousand pounds, Maria."

"Very good. Although, if my advice was asked, I should say, 'Put your money out at interest where there is no risk, and where you can always clap your hands upon it.' But, of course, my advice is not asked. And he is to pay down in cash—how much, my dear?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

"Very respectable. There is nothing that looks so respectable as being able to pay down, say, ten thousand pounds, when you are called upon. It is but justice to say, that it reflects distinction upon the name of Nuttall, to pay down ten thousand pounds in cash; and (putting out the question that I might express myself differently if my advice was asked) I really have not much objection to the money being laid out this way."

"It wouldn't much matter if you had, Maria. Mat knows whether an investment is good or not, and generally takes his own advice."

"Precisely so. Things are not far advanced enough for me to go to your brother, and to say, 'Brother-in-law, I do not think this is a judicious investment; let the money remain out at interest, until something better offers.' Things are not far advanced enough for that yet. When the proper time comes, I shall, of course, do so if I think it necessary."

"You don't mean to say, seriously, Maria, that you believe Mat would care a farthing rushlight for your advice on any of his speculations?"

"Setting aside the vulgar expression of a farthing
rushlight—although you you might remember, Nicholas, that we are in a country where such things are not known—I do mean to say that, when the proper time comes for me to interfere, I have no doubt that my brother-in-law will pay me more respect than you have ever done, and that he will place a proper value upon my judgment. For, I say to myself, To whom does my brother-in-law's money belong? Clearly, not to himself. If he had a family of his own, it would belong to them. But he has no family of his own, and, therefore, it belongs to us, as the next of kin. Is not that the proper phrase, Nicholas? Marian shall not be in a hurry to marry. With her prospects, she may pick and choose from the highest in the land. Ah! If I had had such prospects when I was a girl——You have no occasion to kick me, Nicholas; I will not submit to such conduct, sir."

"I didn't kick you," said Nicholas; "I only turned round."

"Another sign of good manners! Turn round, indeed! But you shall not put me out of temper to-night, Nicholas. I shall go to sleep with the happy consciousness that I have done my duty to my family, and that, by my efforts, they are at length provided for."

Two days after this conversation, the worthy lady was taking her afternoon walk, with a green silk bonnet upon her head, and a white silk parasol in her hand—which articles of feminine vanity, be it observed, were the objects of much admiration and envy on the part of a Native, known as Old Man Tommy, who, basking in the sun, was feasting his eyes upon them. Mrs. Nicholas Nuttall was not at all offended at the admiring looks of
the Aboriginal. It is surprising how lenient we can be to the defects or failings of those who minister to our vanity! In Mrs. Nuttall’s eyes, the savage was a very shrewd and estimable person, and she strolled by him two or three times, as if unconscious of him, but really to reward him for his good taste. While she was thus occupied, Marian ran up to her, almost breathless, and cried——

“Oh mamma! such a dreadful thing has happened! A stockman’s wife has lost three children—such dear children! We noticed them yesterday, you know. The men have been out all night looking for them, but have not found them. The poor woman is in such a dreadful way! She says they have lost themselves in the bush, and will starve to death. And I’ve got a message for you, and one for Old Man Tommy”——

“Me Old Man Tommy,” said the Native, rising, and throwing his dirty blanket over his shoulders.

The girl started back, half frightened.

“You no frightened Old Man Tommy?” he said. “What you want?”

“You go—find children—lost in bush—you go—join them,” and Marian pointed to a little knot of men in the distance.

“Ah!” grunted Old Man Tommy “Piccaninny lost in bush. Me go find him,” and he was walking away, when artful cupidity caused him to turn back.

“You give Old Man Tommy white money, me find piccaninny?”

“Oh, mamma!” exclaimed Marion, “give him some money. He will be sure to track them! uncle said so.”
"I'm sure I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Nuttall, indignantly. "Give money to a savage, indeed!"

"Me take hat," said Old Man Tommy, looking covetously at Mrs Nuttall's green silk bonnet. Mrs. Nuttall started back.

"There, mamma!" cried Marian. "If you don't give him money, he will take your new bonnet."

Old Man Tommy's eyes twinkled, for he understood every word that was said. Mrs. Nuttall, to preserve her bonnet, took out her purse, and extracted a shilling.

"There, bad man!" she said, dropping the coin into his skinny palm. "Now, you go."

Old Man Tommy grinned, and with a leap, he raced off at full speed.

"I'm so glad he's gone," said Marian. "All the men on the station have joined in the search. Uncle's gone, and papa, too. Uncle told me to tell you, that perhaps they would not be home to-night."

"Good gracious, Marian! You don't mean to say that we shall be left alone all the night?"

"Yes, mamma, uncle said it was very likely; and we are to see that the windows and doors are locked. I hope we shall not be left alone, mamma; for if they come back, they will have found the dear children, and I shall be so pleased."

"Well," said Mrs. Nuttall, as they walked to the house; "how your papa, at his time of life, can go poking about in the bush all the night, after a pack of children, is beyond my comprehension. But he always was a mystery to me, Marian. When you marry, I hope you will get a husband you can understand.
Your father will come back with rheumatics, as sure as his name's Nicholas!"

There was, however, nothing for it but resignation, and Mrs. Nuttall made herself as comfortable as she could, under the circumstances. Excepting herself and Marian, there was nobody in the house but the cook, whose husband had also joined the search party.

"The natural anxiety of a wife," said Mrs. Nuttall, when the candles had been lighted, "entirely destroys any idea of sleep. Suppose we have a game of cribbage, Marian."

Now, it must be confessed that cribbage was a game of which Mrs. Nuttall was profoundly ignorant. She knew that there were so many cards to be dealt to each; that two cards were to be thrown out by each for crib; and that there was a board with holes in it, and pegs to stick into the holes. She had also (without knowing exactly how they were to be applied) certain vague notions of "fifteen two," and "one for his nob." Her knowledge of the mysteries of cribbage extended no further. And it was a proof of the wonderful confidence the little woman had in herself, that, in an off-hand way, she should suggest cribbage as a means of passing the time, just as though she was mistress of the game.

They played for about an hour. It was nearly ten o'clock, and Mrs. Nuttall was growing fidgety.

"There," she said, throwing up her cards; "I'll not play any more. You're so stupid, Marian, that you can't win a game. How could your papa be so foolish as to leave us alone? Oh, dear me! Don't you hear some one moving in the house?"
"No, mamma," said Marian. "You are getting quite nervous."

"Nervous, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Nuttall, packing the cards. "I am surprised at you! Why, you are as bad as your papa! Me nervous, indeed! I should like"

The sentence was not completed. The cards dropped from her hand, and she fell back, trembling, in her chair. For at the door stood the apparition of a man, his face covered with black crape. Marian screamed and rushed into her mother's arms, where she lay almost senseless from terror.

"Don't be frightened, ladies," said the apparition; "don't be frightened. Strike me petrified! but I'm as gentle as a dove, and wouldn't hurt a chicken! Only don't you scream again, or we'll have to gag your pretty mouths. Come in Jim: the garrison's deserted."

At this invitation, another apparition, his face also covered with black crape, entered the room. Mrs. Nuttall's heart beat fast with fear, but she had courage enough to say——

"Oh, please, good gentlemen"—when the second apparition interrupted her.

"None of that gammon. We're not good gentlemen—we're bushrangers. Is there any one in the house besides yourselves?"

"No, sir," said the trembling woman, contradictorily; "only the cook."

"Where are all the men? Come—answer quickly."

As well as she was able, Mrs. Nuttall explained the cause of the men's absence.
“All right, Oysterman,” said Jim Pizey; “we’re safe enough for the next hour or two. We’ll turn the place upside down in that time. Let there be a good watch kept outside. The first thing we’ll do will be to have something to eat. Now, just you look here,” he said, addressing Mrs. Nuttall; “we ain’t going to have any of your nonsense—none of your screaming, or anything of that sort. We won’t hurt you, if you’re quiet. Do you hear? Get us something to eat—the best in the house—and some brandy. Make us a cup of tea, too. I should like to drink a cup of tea made by a lady.”

That Mrs. Nuttall should come to this! But she made the tea, and placed meat and bread upon the table, and waited upon the bushrangers, too, while they ate and drank. When they had finished their meal, Jim Pizey said—

“Now, boys, no idling. To work—to work. Come, old woman, just show us over the house. Which is the old bloke’s private room?”

But before Mrs. Nuttall could reply, a whistle was heard.

“Strike me dead!” cried the Oysterman. “That’s Ralph’s signal. The men are coming back.” At this moment a shot was fired outside, and was followed by a scream of pain. “Look here,” he said rapidly, to the women, “if you stir from this spot, by the living Lord! I’ll shoot you! Stay you here, and don’t move, for your lives!”

More shots were heard; and, cursing fiercely, the bushrangers hurried from the room, locking the door upon the terrified women.
CHAPTER XVIII.
A NIGHT OF ADVENTURES.

Alice and Grif were within a few miles of Highlay Station. That morning, the wagoner, having brought them to within twenty miles of their journey's end, had bidden them good bye and God speed! They had walked during the day, and they were now resting in a clump of bush. Alice was very pale and thin, while poor Grif was absolutely clothed with rags. He looked dusty and tired; as indeed he was, for he had walked the whole of the way. His feet were bare; and they were much blistered. But he did not complain. He had sworn to Alice that he would be faithful and true to her, and he would keep his word.

"How tired you must be, Grif," said Alice, looking at him, compassionately.

"I'm all right, Ally," said the boy. "Never you mind me. So long as you get up to the station in time, I don't care a bit."

"We are not far off. And now that we are so near, I am full of fears. Yet I should not be so, for Heaven has surely watched over us. What good friends we have met upon the way! How thankful I am! God bless the good men who helped us on the road!"

"Yes," said Grif, reflectively; "they was wery good coves, they was. I'm thinkin', Ally, that wot the preacher chap sed was right. He told me, wen I was
in quod, that men wos charitable and good; and they must be, a good many on 'em. Jist look at them two coves, the bullock-driver and the waginer. They'd got no call to 'elp us. It didn't do 'em a bit of good, as I sees, for they didn't get nothin' out of us. And there's this blanket the waginer giv us. I never got no one to giv me a blanket before."

"There are good and bad in the world, dear Grif," said Alice. "Your life has not been cast in pleasant places, nor amongst good people."

"No; they're a bad lot I've bin amongst. That's the reason I'm so bad, I s'pose."

"Ah, dear Grif," said Alice, tenderly; "if all were like you"——

"They'd be precious queer, Ally, if they wos all like me. It's a good job for them as isn't. I tell you wot it is, Ally—it wos a mistake, altogether. I oughtn't to 'ave bin born, that's where it is. I wish I never 'ad bin. I wouldn't, if I could 'ave 'elped it."

"Hush, Grif, you must not speak like this."

"I can't 'elp it, Ally," said the boy, fretfully. "If they'd come to me and sed, Now, will yer be born or not? I should 'ave sed, No, I won't!"

"It is by God's will that we are here," said Alice, with tearful eyes. "There is a better world than this."

"Is there, Ally?" asked Grif, eagerly. "Is there? The preacher cove sed there wos, but I didn't believe 'im."

"Yes, dear Grif, another world where sin and sorrow are not known."

"I wouldn't mind goin' there," said Grif, musingly,
"if it's all right. I'd rather be out of it, though, if it's like this one—that is, unless I was a swell. I wonder if my dawg Rough's there! I should like to see old Rough agin. But lord! I don't expect they'd 'ave me among 'em. I'm a reglar bad un, I am!"

"There is One above us, Grif, my dear," said Alice, resting her hand lightly on the boy's shoulder, "who knows your heart, and will reward you for your goodness. It is not your fault that you have erred."

"Not as I knows on, Ally. I never bothered about nothin' else but my grub. I'm not so bad as Jim Pizey or the Tenderhearted Oysterman. Lord! he's a horfie bad 'un, is the Oysterman—ten times worse nor me. He'd steal a sixpence out of a blind man's tray."

"I pray that our journey may end happily," said Alice, "for your sake as well as mine. You are my brother, now and always. And now, Grif, I'll rest for a couple of hours, and then we will go on to my father's house."

"All right, Ally. I'll watch, and call yer."

And, spreading the blanket over Alice, Grif retired a short distance, and lay down. He meant to keep awake, but he was overpowered by fatigue, and presently he dosed off, and then slept soundly.

What was this creeping stealthily through the bush? The form of a man, with haggard, almost despairing face; with beating heart; with hands that trembled with a convulsive agony. The form of Richard Handfield!

He had escaped from his vile companions. Strict as
was the watch they kept upon him, he had eluded them; and now he was making his way to a hut, where he knew two stockmen dwelt, to give the alarm, and so, if possible, to save Alice's father. At every step he took, he halted, his heart in his ears; for he knew well that if he was caught by the gang, life was over with him. He was thoroughly acquainted with the locality. "They will waste some time in looking for me," he thought, "and, perhaps, when they find I have escaped, they will fly from the neighborhood." He yearned to do this one right deed for Alice's sake; and, then he cared not what befell. He had no hope of clearing himself from the charge of murder, which hung over him. The Tenderhearted Oysterman had confessed to having done the deed; the whole gang knew it; and Richard had pretended to admire the devilish cunning which had thrown the suspicion of guilt upon himself.

"Oh," he groaned, as he rested for a while; "If I could but clear myself for Alice's sake! Will she believe that I am guilty of this horrible crime? If I could but see her before I die, and tell her of my innocence!"

Life had never before been so bitter and so sweet to him as it was at this time. It seemed as though he had but now realised the goodness and the purity of the woman who loved him. Never till now had he felt how much she had sacrificed for his sake. But the moments were too precious for him to linger. He dashed the bitter tears from his eyes, and crept along. But a few yards—for he saw a human form upon the ground. Who could it be? He crept up, and bending
over it—Great Heavens! Was he dreaming, or was it a phantasm of Death? The earth and sky, blended together, swam in his fading sight. Then, he could see nothing but the white face of his wife, and he sank down beside it. He lost consciousness for a few minutes, and when he recovered, he rose and looked about him with the air of one waking from a bewildering dream. Hush! she was speaking in her sleep. He knelt by her side, and listened. He heard his name and her father's mingled strangely together. He heard her entreat him not to—horror!—was it murder of which she spoke? He took her by the arm, and cried, "Alice! Alice! awake!" With a scream of terror she awoke, and seeing her husband before her, she called him by the dearest of names, and, blessing God for bringing him to her, she fell into his arms, weeping. For a brief space only did she allow herself such happiness. The full memory of her mission rushed upon her, and she extricated herself from his arms, and asked, "Oh, Richard, answer me quickly—am I too late?"

Too late for what? He did not speak the words, but she saw them expressed in his face. And then she told him, rapidly, why she had come. In as few words as she could relate the story, she told him of Milly's death, and of the letter Jim Pizey had written to Old Flick. She told him how she had started to walk from Melbourne half-an-hour after poor Milly died; of Grif's accompanying her—he had awoke, and was standing by them, and when she mentioned his name, she took his hand and kissed it; of the good friends they had met upon the road: she told him all this, almost breathlessly. But he
saw more than she told him: he saw in her care-worn face the anxiety and grief she had suffered for him—he saw in her patient, uncomplaining eyes, the perfect purity of her love—and he fell upon his knees, and, burying his face in her dress, he sobbed like a little child.

"Oh, my dear! my dear!" he cried. "How unworthy I am of your love!"

And then starting to his feet, he told her of the peril that environed him—how he had joined the gang (here he looked at Grif, and whispered to Alice that the boy's father was one of the bushrangers) only for the purpose of clearing himself from the dread charge of murder—how he had heard the Tender-hearted Oysterman confess the crime—and how he had escaped from them now, only for the purpose of saving her father.

"Thank God for that!" she exclaimed, pressing him to her faithful heart. "But, oh! Richard, how will you prove your innocence of this dreadful charge?"

"If I had a witness," he said, "one who had heard the villain confess, as he confessed to me, laughing the while, that he stole my knife, and with it did the deed, for the purpose of trapping me—if I had such a witness, my innocence would be established. Oh, Alice, if I had such a witness—for your sake, my love! my darling! whom I have surrounded with shame and misery"

"Hush! my dear! Heaven will send such a witness! I know it! I feel it!"

"I scarcely dare hope it Alice," he said; "it is known to none but to the four men in the gang. And they will not tell, for their own sakes."
"They may confess, Richard. I will appeal to them—implore them. I have a message to the man Pizey from poor Milly. I will see him, and beg of him for her sake, to clear you from the charge. Where's Grif?"

But Grif was gone. They called him, and searched for him, in vain. They could find no trace of him.

"He will come up with us," said Richard. "Alice, we dare not linger. There is a stockman's tent in the hollow. I was going there to give the alarm. Come—there may be death to your father in every moment's delay."

Keenly anxious as Alice was because of Grif's unaccountable disappearance, she felt how precious was time for the life of her father. They moved carefully away from the track, and walked through the bush as quickly as possible.

"There are few but myself who would be able to find their way here," said Richard. "But you remember, Alice, I was always fond of roaming about the station. You would scarcely believe how near to this spot is your father's house. It is only two miles, as the crow flies—I could walk straight to it, in less than half an hour. Hark! We are disturbing the crows? I used to call this Crow's Hollow. See, we are in a hollow, completely hidden by the ranges and the thick timber."

It was in truth a dismal spot, and Alice shuddered as she heard the harsh cawing of the birds. Suddenly she stopped.

"Richard," she said, "do you hear nothing?"

He listened, and shook his head. "Nothing but the crows," he said.

"It's not a crow, Richard. Listen again. A child's voice!"
And hurrying swiftly in the direction of the sound, they came upon a strange sight. Two boy-children were lying, as if dead, upon the ground, clasped in each other's arms, and one, a little girl, was covering them with her frock, which she had taken off for that purpose. She was the eldest of the three, and yet could scarcely be eight years of age. She was singing softly a child's ditty, and seeing Alice, she started up with a look of joy.

"If you please," she said, taking Alice's hand, "we've been lost in the bush, and Johnny and Billy are so hungry and tired that they've fallen asleep."

They were the stockman's three children, who had wandered from their home two days before. Alice took the girl in her arms, and the child cried as she did so, and begged for some food for Johnny and Billy.

"We've had nothing to eat, if you please," she said "for oh! such a long time. Will you please take us home?"

"Alice!" cried Richard, seizing her arm with such force as to cause her pain. "Look! We are discovered!"

Lights were moving in the bush, and the voices of men, calling to each other, were heard.

"It's Jim Fitzey and the rest, looking for me," he whispered, hoarsely, and trembling with fear—for her, not for himself. "If they find us, it is all over with us. They swore to kill me, if I attempted to escape; and you—Oh, Alice! say that you forgive me for the peril to which I have exposed you!"

"I do forgive you, Richard!" Alice said, kissing him. "Have you any weapon?"
He produced a revolver, loaded.

"Is it useless trying to escape?" she asked.

"Quite. See—they are spreading themselves out. We are lost. They have no pity, those men. Oh, my God!" he cried, in anguish. "This is worse than all!"

"If those men be the men you fear, Richard," said Alice, rapidly, her limbs trembling, and a nameless horror resting in her eyes, "swear that you will kill me! Swear it, as you hope for mercy—as you hope to meet me in Heaven, when all our misery ended!"

"I swear it, Alice!"

"My poor husband! My dear love!" and she pressed him to her breast. "Forgive us, oh Lord! for what we are about to do!"

They stood hand in hand, their faces as the faces of the dead; while the little girl, clinging to Alice's dress, looked up at her in wondering fear.

Nearer and nearer came the lights, and louder grew the voices of the men.

"Here is a shoe," one called out. "The children are somewhere near. We're on their track."

"It is my father's voice!" cried Alice, as the sound reached her ears. "Richard! We are saved! They are searching for the children we have found. Do you hear? We are saved! Father! this way! this way!"

But the last words died in her throat, and staggering forward, she fell into the arms of her father, who had hurried to the spot as she cried. He recognised his daughter, and a fear smote him, as she lay motionless in his arms, that she was dead. The remorse which fell upon him overcame his surprise at her appearance, and
even made him look upon Richard without astonishment.

"She has fainted from fatigue, sir," said Richard; "she has been sorely tried."

"Why is she here?" asked Mathew Nuttall.

"She came from Melbourne, sir, to warn you of danger which threatens you, and to save me from disgrace; but for this latter, I fear she is too late. Your house, at this moment, is surrounded by bushrangers."

"Bushrangers!" cried Mathew Nuttall; "and there are only two women in the house!"

"We are stronger than the bushrangers," said Richard. "There are but four in their party. We have no time to lose. We must make for the place without delay. See, sir, your daughter is recovering."

She opened her eyes, and looked wildly round. Seeing her father, her memory returned, and she slid from his arms, and falling upon her knees at his feet, she said, imploringly—

"Forgive me, father!"

He raised her to his breast and kissed her. The tears that welled into his eyes were tears of purification. His hard, almost unforgiving, nature was at length softened and subdued by the perfect goodness of a pure and faithful woman! He held out his hand to Richard, who took it, and said—

"We dare not linger, sir. The bushrangers may be there before us."

"True!" replied Mathew Nuttall. "Keep a good look out, men, and follow me. We'll take these villains, dead or alive. See to your pistols. Alice, keep behind with the children. Now then, On!"
CHAPTER XIX.

GRIF MAKES A DYING STATEMENT.

When Grif heard Richard Handfield tell Alice of the murder of the Welshman by the Tenderhearted Oysterman, and when he heard Alice say that Heaven would surely send a witness to prove her husband’s innocence, he crept softly away, with a suddenly-formed, but fixed, purpose in his mind. He heard Alice call to him, but he would not reply. "She wouldn’t call me if she knew wot I wos goin’ to do," he thought. "Besides, she’s got ’er ’usband, now; she don’t want me." And he walked off towards Mathew Nuttall’s house, talking and communing with himself as he went.

"She wants a witness," he said. "She’s got ’er ’usband, and she’d be all right if she ’ad a witness. It’s not a bit of good ’er comin’ all the way up ’ere, if she don’t get a witness. Wot did Dick Handfield say? If he ’ad a witness who could swear that he ’eard the Oysterman confess to stealin’ ’is knife, and murderin’ the poor cove with it, ’is innocence would be proved? Yes, that wos wot he sed. If he don’t git that witness, he’ll be took up for murder, and somethin’ dreadful ’ll ’appen to Ally. And if ’is innocence is proved, Ally would be ’appy all ’er life. That’d be very good, that would. ’Eaven ’ll send the witness, Ally sed. No, it won’t. For I’ll be the witness! ’Eaven didn’t send me! If I can git in with the gang—but they’d suspect me. I wos moral wen the Oysterman and Jim sor me in Melbourne—they
won't b'lieve I ain't moral now. How shall I manage it? I've got it!" he cried, after pondering for a few moments. "I'll say I've bin sent up by Old Flick, to tell 'em that Dick Handfield's goin' to peach upon 'em. They'll b'lieve that. Father's in the gang, too; I 'eard Dick tell Ally that; though he sed it in a whisper, and didn't want me to 'ear. I'll get father to tell me all about it. Then, I'll go and be a witness. Lord!" he mused, "wot a queer move it is! They'll kill me wen they find it out, but I don't care. It'll make Ally 'appy, and she'll like me all the better. Then there's the Oysterman! I'll cry quits with 'im, now, for pizenin' Rough! Won't he be savage!"

But any pleasure he might have derived from this last reflection was soon lost in the contemplation of his fixed purpose to serve Alice. Grif's love for her amounted almost to worship. When he told her that he would die for her, he meant, actually, that he would be glad to die, if, by his death, he could serve her. Born and reared in the midst of thieves and ruffians, no softening influence had fallen upon him until he had met Alice. She had been kind and gentle to him, who had never before received kind or gentle treatment. He could not disentangle himself from the evil associations by which he was surrounded. Once he had tried to free himself, rather to please Alice than because he realised that his then position was one of evil or degradation: but his will was weak, and he was powerless in proportion to his ignorance. The world had punished him for what he felt dimly was not his fault; but Alice had pitied him for his unfortunate position, and her sympathy fell upon
his heart, like rain upon parched land. To the world, for its harshness, he returned defiance: to Alice, for her tenderness, he gave all he had to give of love.

"I wonder if they're at the house," Grif said, as he walked along. "If they are, I 'ope they won't 'urt no one. He's a wicked devil, is Jim Pizey, though, and he'll be mad at Dick's runnin' away from 'em."

Soon he came to a fence, and, three or four hundred yards before him, he saw the home station. He crept slowly along by the side of the fence, in the direction of the house.

"I can see lights movin' about," he muttered. "There's a man outside, walkin' up and down. He's got a gun in 'is 'and, too. Yes, they're there, and he's keepin' watch. Everythin's very quiet."

By this time, Grif was within twenty yards of the house. He halted for a minute or two: he had crept slowly along in the shade of the fence, and had not been observed.

"Who's that keepin' watch?" he muttered, looking eagerly forward. "It ain't Jim Pizey, and it ain't the Oysterman. Wy, it's father! I'll go right up to 'im."

And he walked away from the fence, towards the house. As he did so, he was seen by the sentinel, who gave a shrill whistle, and cried—

"Stand!"

"It's me, father!" cried Grif, running towards him. "Don't fire! It's me—Grif!"

He had scarcely uttered the words, when he was struck down by a bullet. Confused and dizzy, he struggled to his feet, pressing his hand to his side. As he looked
round, dazed, he saw men running towards the house, and heard the sound of shots following each other rapidly.

"Who are you?" asked one of the men, seizing him roughly by the shoulder.

"Who am I?" the boy replied, looking about him in a bewilderment of deathly pain. The blood was flowing from his wound, and everything was fading from his sight, when he suddenly saw Alice. "Who am I?" he repeated. "Arks Ally! She knows. I'm Grif!"

And, with a wild shudder, he fell senseless at Alice's feet!

She threw herself beside him, and, tearing off a portion of her dress, she endeavoured to staunch his wound. By this time, the bushrangers were in full retreat, pursued by most of the men who had been engaged in the search for the children. Amongst those who stayed behind were Mathew Nuttall and his brother, and Richard Handfield. Nicholas had hurried into the house, to ascertain if his wife and daughter were safe: and he now returned with some brandy, which he put to Grif's lips. Richard, who had some little knowledge of surgery, examined the wound, and said—

"He must not be moved, Alice. He cannot live many minutes."

"Do not say that!" cried Alice, weeping bitterly. "Oh, my poor Grif! He has died for me! My poor, dear Grif!"

The brandy which Grif tasted partially restored him. Opening his eyes, and looking with a loving tenderness upon Alice's face, he pressed her hand which held his, and said, faintly—
"All right, Ally. Don't cry for me. I'd die to make you 'appy, I would. I'm 'er friend," he muttered, "and 'er brother, too. She sed so 'erself, she did."

"Are you in pain, dear Grif?" she asked.

"Not much. 'T ain't worth botherin' about. I've got somethin' to say!" he cried, trying to raise himself. "Don't let me die till I've sed wot I've got to say. Will anybody fetch a magerstrate for a poor cove? I want a magerstrate, that's wot I want."

Mathew Nuttall, who had been standing by the lad, said that he was a magistrate.

"That's the sort," Grif gasped out. "You 'ear wot I got to say, and put it down in writin'! I'm dyin', yer know. Take 'er away first," and he relinquished Alice's hand. "Stand off a bit for a minit or two, Ally, and take 'im away with yer." And he pointed to Richard Handfield. The husband and wife fell back, in wonder; but, although she could not hear what he said, Alice followed, with her eyes, every movement of the dying lad.

"Now, then," said Grif, when Alice and her husband were out of hearing. "I've got somethin' to say with my dyin' breath. Will wot I say be evidence? I arks you, as a magerstrate, will wot I say wen I'm dyin' be evidence?"

"If you swear to it, my poor boy," replied Mathew Nuttall, gently.

"I'll swear to it! All right! I'll kiss the Bible on it. That's swearin', ain't it?"

"Yes," said Mathew, whispering to Nicholas, who ran into the house, and returned with a Bible and a
writing-desk. While he was away, Grif turned his eyes to where Alice was standing, weeping, and he continued to gaze on her lovingly as he spoke.

"All right, Ally," he muttered to himself. "I'll make you 'appy. I'm the witness you want, that's wot I am."

"Now, my lad," said Mathew Nuttall. "Commence. Do not speak too fast, for you are very weak."

"Yes, I'm very weak. I'm a-dyin', yer know, and wen I've sed wot I got to say, I shan't trouble nobody no more. Fust and foremost, then, them coves as stuck up yer 'ouse was bushrangers. Put that down."

"That is down. I can write as you speak."

"Jim Pizey and the Tenderhearted Oysterman was two on 'em. I kiss the Bible, and I ses, I 'eard the Tenderhearted Oysterman say as 'ow he murdered a man—a Welshman—on the diggins, and as 'ow he stole Dick Handfield's knife to kill 'im with, so that it'd look as if Dick 'ad done it instead of 'im; and I kisses the Bible agin, and I ses as 'ow all the gang knows it wos the Tenderhearted Oysterman who done the murder, and not Dick Handfield."

"You heard the man you call the Tenderhearted Oysterman confess to the murder?"

"I 'eard 'im say he done it 'imself, with Dick Handfield's knife. I kisses the Bible on it. You've got all that down?"

"It is all written, my lad," said Mathew Nuttall, gravely.

"And I furthermore ses as 'ow Jim Pizey and the Oysterman wanted Dick Handfield, wen they wos in
Melbourne, to join 'em in stickin' up Highlay Station—everythin's goin' away? 'Old me up! Don't let me die till I'm done! The sky's a-comin' down upon me!"

The brandy was put to his lips, and he revived again; but the words now came very slowly from him.

"Were wos I?" he asked.

"They wanted Dick Handfield to join them in stick- ing up Highlay Station:"

"Yes, that's it," said Grif, his voice falling to a whisper. "And as 'ow Dick Handfield wouldn't. And as 'ow they wanted to throw the murder on 'im, out of revenge."

"Have you finished?" asked Mathew Nuttall, as the boy paused.

"Yes—I forget all the rest," muttered Grif. "Were's Ally?"

"One moment. You swear to this?"

"I kisses the Bible on it."

"Can you sign your name?"

"I can't write. I can only read large letters on the walls."

"What is your name?"

"Grif."

"But your other name?"

"I never 'ad no other. I'm Grif, that's wot I am!"

"Raise him, Nicholas, and let him put a cross, here."

The boy was raised, and the pen being held in his almost nerveless fingers, he scrawled a cross.

"Tell Ally to come," he said, as they laid him down. Alice came, and knelt by him.

"It's all right, Ally," he gasped. She had to place
her ear to his lips to catch his words. "You won't 'ave no more trouble. I've never bin no good all my life till now. Ally, dear, you sed there was another world. Is there?"

"Yes, Grif. You are going there, now."

"Shall I see you there, by and by?"

"We shall meet there, dear Grif," she answered, keeping back her tears.

"It wasn't my fault that I wasn't no good. I only wanted my grub and a blanket. If any swell 'ad a-given 'em to me, it 'd bin all right. Wy, there's Milly!" and he suddenly raised himself, and a bright expression came over his face. Alice held him in her arms, and watched the fading light in his eyes.

"And there's Rough. Rough! Rough! And the old pie-woman, too!" he cried, as his arm stole round Alice's neck. "Wot was it Milly sed the other night? Oh, I know! Forgive me, God!"

And with that supplication upon his lips, Grif closed his eyes upon the world!

Richard Handfield's innocence was proved without Grif's dying statement. The bushrangers were pursued; the Oysterman was shot dead, and the others were captured. When Jim Pizey was lying in prison, Alice visited him, and gave him Milly's message. In that poor girl's name, Alice implored him to confess who had killed the Welshman. His hard nature was softened by the thought of Alice's kindness to Milly, and by her promise to take care of Milly's baby; and, knowing that his career was over, he admitted that it was the Oyster-
man who had committed the murder with Richard Handfield's knife.

Here our story ends. If misfortune and poverty should come again to Richard, he would battle with them bravely, if only for the sake of the true woman who called him husband. But it is not likely he will be so tried, for Mathew Nuttall has been reconciled to him, and Richard and Alice live happily at Highlay.

Grif was buried near the home station. The husband and wife often visit his grave, and often speak of him, tenderly and lovingly, as of a dear and cherished friend!