

SETTLING DAY.

A Story of the Time,

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

TOM TAYLOR, Esq.

(MEMBER OF THE DRAMATIC AUTHORS' SOCIETY.)

AUTHOR OF

Ticket of Leave of Man, Henry Dunbar, Babes in Wood, The Fool's Revenge, Nine Points of the Law, The House or the Home ? The Contested Election, An Unequal Match, Victims, Still Waters Run Deep, Going to the Bad, A Nice Firm, A Blighted Being, To Oblige Benson, A Trip to Kissengen, Diogenes and his Lantern, The Philosopher's Stone, The Vicar of Wakefield, To Parents and Guardians, Prince Dorus, Payable on Demand, etc., etc., etc.; and one of the Authors of Masks and Faces, Plot and Passion, Slave Life, Two Loves and a Life, The King's Rival, Retribution, Sister's Penance, etc., etc., etc.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
89, STRAND, LONDON.

227005

*First Performed at the Royal Olympic Theatre, (under the management of Mr. Horace Wigan)
on Saturday, March 4th, 1865, a New and Original Play, in Five Acts, by Tom Taylor Esq.,
called*

2

SETTLING DAY.

S E T T L I N G D A Y *

A STORY OF THE TIME.

The New Scenery by Mr. HAWES CRAVEN.

The Properties by Mr. LIGHTFOOT.

The Machinery by Mr. CHAPMAN.
The whole Produced under the Direction of Mr. HORACE WIGAN.

MARKLAND	{	Partners in a West-end Bank	(Nephew of Meiklam)	(A Young Man of Fortune)	(his Guardian—an Attorney)	(a Companies'-Promoter)	Stock Brokers	{	Mr. H. NEVILLE.						
MEIKLAM									Mr. H. HORACE WIGAN.						
FRANK MEIKLAM	{							{	Mr. G. VINCENT.						
HARRINGTON									Mr. C. COGHIAN,						
MOLESWORTH	{							{	Mr. MACLEAN.						
ROCKETT									Mr. R. SOUTAR.						
LAXTON	{							{	Mr. H. COOPER.						
FERMOR									Mr. D. EVANS.						
SCRATCHELL	{							{	Mr. ANDREWS.						
GLOVER (a Footman)									Mr. H. RIVERS.						
MARTIN (a Clerk)															
CLERKS, MEN OF BUSINESS, GUESTS, SERVANTS, &c.															

X7909593

SETTLING DAY.

MRS. MARKLAND (a Young Bride) Miss KATE TERRY.
MISS HARGRAVE (her Sister) Miss LYDIA FOOTE.
MRS. VERNON Mrs. L. MURRAY. MISS VERNON, Miss DACY.
CRESSWELL (Mrs. Markland's Maid) Miss SCHAVEY.

TIME - - - THE PRESENT DAY.

Scene—LONDON AND THE SUBURBS.

Act 1.—A THOME.

Scene—MORNING ROOM IN MARKLAND'S VILLA ON THE THAMES.

Act 2.—IN THE CITY.

Scene—Stockbroker's Office, with View of Capel Court & Entrance of the Stock Exchange.

Act 3.—BEHIND THE SCENES.

Scene—A WEST-END BANK PARLOUR.

Act 4.—THE BIRTHDAY EVENING.

Scene—Reception Room in Markland's Villa,

Act 5.—THE RIVER TRACK.

Scene—The Grounds of Markland's Villa, with the River and
DISTANT VIEW OF LONDON, BY MOONLIGHT.

SETTLING DAY.

ACT I.

AT HOME.

SCENE.—*A drawing-room in Markland's Villa, Putney, luxuriously and elegantly furnished. Communicating with it c., at back, a spacious conservatory ornamented with statuary and filled with exotics in the most gorgeous beauty of foliage and flower. Doors r. and l. range of French windows r., commanding view of grounds and the river; fire-place r. 3 e., under c. window.*

GLOVER—*a footman—and CRESSWELL discovered as in eager conversation, he remonstrating, she insisting.*

GLOVER. Well, but I can't tell one gent missus is at home and another she ain't.

CRESS. It ain't our business, Glover, to make messages fit; them's my orders.

GLOVER. (*looking out of window r.*) Well, but there's Mr. Meiklam got off already. There's one o' the gardener's boys holding his mare, and a nice looking tit she is.

CRESS. Just like his impudence—Mr. Harrington ain't half as free, and he's twice as welcome.

FRANK MEIKLAM. (*heard outside r. u. e.*) Walk her about quietly, my lad.

Enter FRANK, from window R. U. E.

Oh, Mrs. Markland's maid, I think. (CRESSWELL curtsies)
(to FOOTMAN) You took in my card?

GLOVER. Yes, sir. (aside to CRESSWELL) You'd better do it.
(exit L. 3 E.)

CRESS. (hastily) Mrs. Markland's compliments, sir, and she's sorry she's particularly engaged.

FRANK, (sits R.) Oh, very well, *en attendant*—Miss Hargreave will do.

CRESS. (aside) Do, indeed! I should think she would. Well, *he've* come in hisself. I'll *ask* in the other.

(exit R. U. E.)

FRANK. (writing at table R., and speaking as he writes) Say if Miss Hargreave will give me five minutes—(looks up) Eh! the girl's gone—cool, but these ladies' maids are about the coolest lot—

Re-enter CRESSWELL, showing in HARRINGTON, R. U. E.

FRANK. (rising and taking stage L.) How do, Harrington?

HARRING. (stiffly, coming down R.) Good morning.

FRANK. (to CRESSWELL) Say if Miss Hargreave will give me five minutes—

CRESS. Miss Hargreave's compliments, sir, and she's particularly engaged too.

FRANK. You know that's a crammer, you little—(coming up to her insolently.)

CRESS. Sir! (indignantly) Well, I'm sure! (he puts his hand to his pocket) No, sir, I'll trouble you to keep yourself to yourself and your money too.

FRANK. Oh, very well, Mrs. Captain Grand. Here, take this to your mistress, and say I'm in the drawing-room (gives her envelope with opera-box ticket, on which he has been writing). Deuced overbearing that style of young woman!

HARRING. Yes, they can generally give as good as they get.

FRANK. (looking out of window R.) Nice horse that in your brougham. I like your turn out, it's so quiet.

HARRING. Ah, I prefer things quiet. (pause.)

FRANK. Elegant house Markland's got here. (*no answer*) Capital style about everything in the place.

HARRING. (*aside*) Except one of the visitors.

FRANK. Waiting for Markland?

HARRING. No.

FRANK. I thought you might be; he used to have no end of fellows always waiting for him before his marriage; since then he has been so awfully spoony on his wife he seems to have cut the shop altogether.

HARRING. The shop?

FRANK. The bank, I mean. Well, I don't wonder: both Mrs. Markland and her sister are girls to knock a fellow over—rather. I've just sent them in a bone for the opera. Miss Hargreave's wild about "Faust" and Patti. (*lounges on couch L.*) Go much to the opera?

HARRING. I've a stall for the Thursdays and Saturdays.

FRANK. Ah, not for Tuesdays? Sorry I can't offer you a place, but four's one too many.

HARRING. I quite agree with you. (*strolls up—aside*) Snob!

Re-enter CRESSWELL, L. U. E., with envelope.

CRESS. Missus's compliments, (*maliciously*) she's sorry she's engaged for Tuesday. (*returning envelope to FRANK.*)

FRANK. (*annoyed*) Oh!

CRESS. And she's particularly sorry she can't have the pleasure of seeing you this morning. (*to HARRINGTON*) I was to say, sir, if you would have the plant you've brought put into the conservatory missus will see you as soon as she can.

FRANK. Upon my word that's coolish—(*tearing up envelope*) isn't it?

HARRING. Perhaps Mrs. Markland agrees with you that four's one too many.

FRANK. (*going up*) Ah, very good. (*stopping and speaking out of window R., angrily*) What do you mean by letting my mare stand still, you blockhead? (*going up for hat*) Good morning. (*to HARRINGTON.*)

HARRING. (*drily*) Good morning. (*at window r.*) Take that gardenia out of my brougham carefully—thank you.

FRANK. (*coming down with hat*) Oh, that's your plant. Is it?

HARRING. (*out of window r.*) Gently, my man. Yes, I brought it for Mrs. Markland, she wanted one for her fête to-night.

FRANK. (*aside*) So, a fête to-night and I'm not asked, (*to HARRINGTON*) Ah, yes; shall you be here?

HARRING. Yes—shall you?

FRANK. I hardly know. I've so many engagements.

(*aside*) Stuck up beggar! (*putting on his gloves angrily*) Well, he's on the right side of the ropes this morning.

(*pausing*) I wonder if Belle—no, it's all her sister's doing. If I don't make her pay for this yet.

(*exit r. u. window.*)

(*Two Footmen enter r. 2 e., carrying gardenia—they go towards conservatory c.*)

Enter MISS HARGREAVE, D. L. U. E.

MISS H. (*meeting SERVANTS*) The new gardenia—oh, stop, Glover, do stop, and let me look at it. What a lovely plant!

HARRING. (*going up*) And it's as sweet as it's beautiful, Miss Hargreave.

MISS H. Oh, Mr. Harrington, Florry will be so delighted—not Mr. Markland, though—he was talking of driving to Veitch's to secure this new beauty; he had set his heart on having it at Florry's party to-night. You know it's her birthday.

HARRING. Yes, a bride's birthday should be marked with flowers.

MISS H. Especially so happy a bride as Florry: only two-and-twenty, and the world lying before her in the triple sunshine of youth, love, and prosperity! May she have many birthdays as bright as this.

HARRING. Why, Miss Hargreave, you talk like a matron instead of a young lady of nineteen.

MISS H. Nineteen! why I was one-and-twenty last

month, but nobody thought of marking *my* birthday with flowers.

HARRING. I wish I had known of it.

MISS H. An old woman may be excused for keeping these anniversaries in the background.

HARRING. An old woman?

MISS H. Yes, I'm my own mistress now, and I feel so grave and steady.

HARRING. Why one would fancy *you* were the chaperone, and Mrs. Markland under your wing.

MISS H. Oh, Florry's not half such a woman of business as I am. I understand accounts and trusts and separate uses. I even think I could draw my own dividends.

HARRING. Now you're joking—I hope you're joking.

MISS H. Joking? Is a woman who can draw her own dividends such an appalling phenomenon?

HARRING. Well, you see I've a notion, somehow, a woman has no business to know anything about money—except how to spend it, of course.

MISS H. I hope, when *you* marry, your wife won't make you change your theory.

HARRING. My wife! Ah, Miss Hargreave, if I only durst—I've caught the honeymoon fever in this house—the sight of Markland's happiness is enough to make any bachelor throw himself right—

MISS H. Into the Thames?

HARRING. No, into matrimony; seriously, Miss Hargreave, can you conceive a happier man than your brother-in-law—born to wealth, respect out of doors, and affection within, the present all sunshine, the future all promise! What has he done to deserve it?

MISS H. He had the good luck to be born heir to an old established bank business, and the good taste to fall in love with my sister.

HARRING. Oh, Miss Hargreave, if I could follow his example!

MISS H. What, you fall in love with Florry, too?

HARRING. No, but with — (MR. AND MRS. MARK-

LAND heard outside in the conservatory, c., in playful contest.)

MARK. I tell you, Florry, I daren't keep them waiting any longer. (*they appear in conservatory, he dragged along by her.*)

MRS. M. Then I dare, and I'm absolute to-day ! You're my prisoner. (*holding his hands in hers, and down, R. C.*)

MARK. Look here, Harrington, this is what you'll come to some day.

HARRING. I hope so, heartily. I'm quite ready. (*holding out his hands to Miss Hargreave*) Miss Hargreave, will you put on the handcuffs ?

MRS. M. Oh, Mr. Harrington, if you knew the trouble I've had to secure this truant. I've caught him flying, between a directorate and a deputation, and dragged him here in triumph to see the beautiful gardenia you've brought me.

MARK. It's too bad, Harrington, forestalling one in this way.

MRS. M. Serves you right, sir, for forgetting your wife's birthday presents to attend to your business.

MARK. Why, you unreasonable little woman, I haven't given a day to the bank since we were married.

MRS. M. No, but you're going to ; and what right have you to make appointments here, where your only business ought to be spoiling me ?

MARK. I appeal to you, Harrington, if I haven't done that piece of business handsomely. I've been six months about it, but I've done it.

MRS. M. No, no, no ; if ever there was an ill-used wife I am one.

MARK. Prove it.

MRS. M. In the first place, I'm never contradicted—I appeal to Belle, if he don't let me have my own way in everything.

MISS H. He's incorrigible.

MARK. I plead guilty, but I'll never do it again.

MRS. M. And then I'm not allowed to have any little whims and fancies ; am I, Belle ?

MISS H. No; your husband in the most cruel way insists on anticipating them all.

MARK. I'll say no to everything you propose for the next month.

MRS. M. But worse than all, I've a rival.

HARRING. A rival!

MARK. The deuce you have!

MRS. M. Yes, an old love. Her initials are L. S. D. I thought the connection was broken off, but he's going back to her. He'll spend more of his time on L. S. D. now than he does on poor F. M.

MARK. (r.) Ah, Florry, business is a hard master. I never knew how hard till I left him for love, and the delicious dream of the last half year—

MRS. M. Dream! he calls our married life a dream—I said I was cruelly treated.

MARK. And could anything but a dream be so delightful? (*this should be spoken in a tone of dreamy but enthusiastic reminiscence, warming into tenderness as the speech proceeds.*) Among the wonders of the Alps, to feel the savage sublimity of nature heightened by the sense of love and trust, as I turned from peak and glacier to the wife who nestled at my side! Under the cloudless Italian sky, to visit the marvels of art in the famous cities of the past, and feel their desolation the more keenly for its contrast with the young life that was given to my charge, the pure joy reflected in the face that looked up to mine! But all that is over now.

MRS. M. (*tenderly nestling to his side*) The dream, perhaps, but not the double life and the reflected joy.

MARK. They will shine all the brighter for a sombre background of business. But I promise to lock up L. S. D. in the bank parlour. Let's hope she won't get through the keyhole.

MRS. M. Amen! But do you know, Harry, I sometimes have such a wicked wish.

MARK. You!

MRS. M. Yes, I sometimes wish that we could be —

MARK. Be what?

MRS. M. Just a little ruined!

MARK. (*startled*) Ruined! don't talk nonsense, Florry.

MRS. M. Because then I fancy I might show you the real good of a wife. As it is I seem little better than a spoiled child to be dressed up and made much of. I'm no earthly use—what can I do?

MARK. Be happy, my darling, and make me happy in that happiness. Bring that bright and trustful face to welcome me when I return worn and weary from my day's work at the gold diggings. If you only knew what strength, what comfort I shall find in it. But don't pray for ruin even in jest. (*very earnestly*)

Enter FOOTMAN with card, l. 2 e.

MARK. Molesworth!

HARRING. (*rising*) My guardian! Miss Hargreave, I wish you'd show me your aviary, I'm so fond of small birds.

MISS H. And I'm a great bird-tamer—my prisoners are so fond of me.

HARRING. I should think so. (*they go up c.*)

MISS H. You'll find us in the conservatory, Florry.

MARK. (*looking at card, reads*) "Two words on business." Mayn't I? (*playfully to his wife*.)

MRS. M. Let me see—well, yes; prisoner *may* be allowed to see his attorney. (*exit SERVANT l. d.*)

(*going up c.*) I must find a place for this beautiful plant.

(*to MARKLAND*) Mind, only "two words"—and remember—"the warder has her eye on you." (*kisses him and exit c.*)

Enter MOLESWORTH, l. 3 e.

MOLES. Excuse my breaking in on you here, but the fact is I'm kept so busy with other people's affairs I find it difficult to get a moment for my own.

MARK. Pretty much my case, now I'm going back into harness. I've a deputation waiting for me in the breakfast room. It's about the vacant seat for Cashiobury. They insist on having a monied man, and flatter them-

selves I'm ready to drop £2,000 for the honour of writing myself M.P.

MOLES. Don't have anything to say to them. I can get it done for you at half the money. Egad ! I'm just in time it seems. (*takes letter from his pocket*) Here's old Hookham, that we've been agent for since the time of legal memory, writes to me from Closeborough begging me to offer *you* the seat as "a man of the right sort."

MARK. Does that mean Whig or Tory ?

MOLES. Oh, the constituency is not particular about the colour of your ribbons, so that it sees the colour of your money. It's the snuggest, quietest, most eligible thing, in a small way, in the Parliamentary market; constituency under four hundred, and only fifty stand out for cash. Hookham's got the seat in his pocket—say the word, I'll send you down, and he'll return you, like a good bill, duly stamped and lettered M.P.

MARK. You're very kind. This is the third borough I've had offered me this week ; I hear people talk about the difficulty of getting a seat—my difficulty's to keep out of one.

MOLES. Ah, you're the sort of man a British constituency fastens on.

MARK. Yes, your deputation leech especially. Translated into their tongue, a man of the right sort, means a man who will spend money. They've a stupid notion all bankers are rich.

MOLES. As if all were gold that glitters. (*laughing*) But all this is your business—I want to speak to you about my own. You know Harrington has just come of age ?

MARK. Yes.

MOLES. I've received £40,000 of his money—the proceeds of a paid-off mortgage. I want to have it ready for him. I thought of leaving it with you for the present at call.

MARK. You must ask Meiklam. I've been a sleeping partner for the last six months. I should think we've quite as much in our hands as we know what to do with in the present state of the market. Hadn't you better buy exchequer bills or consols ?

MOLES. What! in the face of the heavy fall? I'd rather leave the money in your hands till I pay it over, so if you'll give me a lift as far as Lincoln's Inn; I must look in there, and you can take me to the bank at once.

Enter MRS. MARKLAND, c.

MARK. But this deputation—I ought to see them.

MOLES. Throw them over. Closeborough's decidedly a better investment—only half the price, and the seat's as safe as your own bank.

MARK. (*laughs*) I'll give these Cashiobury fellows their congé at once, and knock off an address to the free and independent electors of Closeborough for you to send to Hookham—five minutes will do it. (*going r.*) But mind, not a word to my wife about the new seat. (*exit r. 1 e.*

MRS. M. (*comes down on l. of MOLESWORTH, shaking her finger playfully in his face*) Oh, you wicked elderly man, conspiring with my prisoner!

MOLES. I'm an attorney—all my communications are privileged.

MRS. M. You! a married man, with a grey head and a grown up family, to tempt my husband with a seat in parliament, and before we've been six months married!

MOLES. I admit it's not fair to the constituency.

MRS. M. Not fair to the constituency! Is it fair to his wife, sir? Now he's come back to work, business will rob me of him all day, and you would have politics take him from me all night! Every British wife who loves her husband is bound to hate the House of Commons.

MOLES. For the first six months of matrimony: after that, a good many come to agree with their husbands, that the House is the most agreeable club in London.

MRS. M. Yes, that's what comes of late hours, unlimited command of latch-keys, and male gossip in the smoking-room. Oh, I've studied the constitution of my country—I know what goes on inside Mr. Barry's pie-crust. They pretend to make laws, but they're really laying their heads together against their poor unoffending wives. I say the House of Commons will be a bane to society, until

you make a large gallery for the ladies, and prevent every husband from opening his lips, till he catches his wife's eye as well as the speaker's. Oh, what capital whippers in we should make!

MOLES. And what a pleasant berth the prime minister's would be, trying to keep his supporters' wives in good humour, instead of their lords and masters.

MRS. M. Now remember, if you dare to aid and abet my husband in getting into parliament I shall let down my back hair, go distracted, and haunt Lincoln's Inn Fields in a black bombazine and a poke bonnet to lay my broken heart every morning at your door.

MOLES They say a good many attorneys' doors are paved with that sort of thing already ; but I'm a family solicitor ; we don't break hearts in our branch of the profession—but I musn't keep your husband waiting.

(exit R. 1 E.)

Enter FOOTMAN, L. 2 E., with card, which he gives to MRS. MARKLAND.

MRS. M. Mrs. Vernon !

FOOTMAN. She asked if you were at home, ma'am.

MRS. M. What a bore ! I suppose I must see her—say I'm at home. (exit SERVANT L.) She wished to catch Harry for her own daughter, but he had too much taste, and now she insists on petting me—but I don't like being petted, except by some people. She purrs over me so sweetly, I can't help expecting that some day she'll turn round and scratch.

Enter SERVANT, L. 3 E.

SERVANT. (announcing) Mrs. Vernon.

Enter MRS. VERNON, D. L. 3 E.

MRS. V. I never saw your conservatory in such beauty. (coming down) Nor you either, you darling. (embracing her) You certainly are the prettiest mistress of the prettiest house !

MRS. M. I'm so glad you admire it. (they sit.)

MRS. V. (L. C.) And all, thanks to your perfect taste. Mr. Markland has the good sense to leave the reins in your hands, I see—the husband to make the money, the wife to spend it: that's exactly my notion of the division of labour! And how lovely you are looking! You mustn't mind an old woman saying what she thinks. And so you are still very happy, eh?

MRS. M. (R. C.) I should be the most ungrateful woman, if I wasn't. Oh, Mrs. Vernon, if you knew how good he is, how tender, how thoughtful.

MRS. V. And you haven't felt the change from honey lunacy to the sober realities of married life *too* great a contrast?

MRS. M. Oh, there has been no change as yet.

MRS. V. Then it will be all the worse when it does come. I suppose he's returned to work now?

MRS. M. Yes, and I'm so sorry.

MRS. V. Ah, my dear, trust an old woman, one who has seen something of the world. Thank your stars you've married a man of business.

MRS. M. What, to be separated from him all day long, and to know that when he's away his head is full—not of me—but of horrid money matters!

MRS. V. Keeps him out of mischief, my dear. Men will be men! Wives are all very well, but they **mustn't** expect to fill up all a man's thoughts. Besides, he can't afford to neglect business: the bank must be looked after—with their enormous transactions there's a constant risk.

MRS. M. But you don't suppose my husband has any cause for anxiety? I should be wretched if I thought so: as it is, I often wish he would give up the bank.

MRS. V. What would become of his pretty house, his pretty grounds, and his pretty wife, and her pretty dresses, and carriages, and horses if he did? Instead of wishing him to give up money-making *you* ought to learn to like it.

MRS. M. Oh, I never could do that.

MRS. V. I thought as you do once, but I've changed

my mind now. Why, my dear, the first thing I look at in the *Times* is the City Article, and the drive I most enjoy is to my broker's.

MRS. M. Oh, Mrs. Vernon, now you're joking with me.

MRS. V. Fact, I assure you. A woman at my time of life must have an object. I've been disappointed in my hopes of settling my poor child: I don't care for books; I've no turn for religion, so I've taken to speculation: you can't think how amusing it is.

MRS. M. But isn't it wrong for a woman to know anything about such matters?

MRS. V. So the men say: they want to keep the money-making to themselves, like their clubs and cigars, and Greenwich dinners.

MRS. M. I always fancied the city the dullest place, and money-making the dreariest drudgery.

MRS. V. Dull? Dreary? You little goose! 'Tis life in its very essence—all the excitement of passion without its punishment, and all the delight of gambling stripped of its disreputableness. (*rising*) I've a great mind to carry you off in my brougham to my broker's this morning, and give you an insight into the sort of thing your husband will have to spend his life amongst.

MRS. M. (*rising*) Oh, what fun! To surprise Harry with my city experiences—and then I should like to astonish Belle, too—she gives herself such airs on the strength of her knowledge of business. It would sound so imposing, (*with mock importance*) "When I was with Mrs. Vernon, at her broker's."

MRS. V. No, no, my love, that would never do; very great ladies and very proper ladies go into the city, but they never tell. Not a word to your husband or your sister, or anybody else, promise me.

MRS. M. Of course I will! There, solemnly!

MRS. V. I've a call or two to make; get your things on and I'll be back for you by the time you're ready.

MRS. M. I shan't be ten minutes; it will be such an adventure, and I promised to pick Harry up at the bank

this afternoon. (*with mirthful mystery*) There's a birthday present in petto, but I'm supposed to know nothing about it.

MRS. V. You sly little puss ! *Au revoir* then. Kindest regards to your husband. (MRS. MARKLAND rings bell, R. Aside) No clouds yet ! They really do seem happy. Well, we shall see how long it will last. (*turns, and very gushingly*) Good-bye, you dear ! (exit, L. 3 E.)

MRS. M. After all Harry must be right : she *does* seem very fond of me : I was wrong to distrust her.

Enter MARKLAND and MOLESWORTH, R. 1 E.

MARK. Now, Florry, kiss me, and call me a good boy.

MRS. M. Not till I know why.

MARK. I've thrown over the Cashiobury deputation, the very thing you asked me to do.

MRS. M. Because I asked you ?

MARK. Oh, you unbelieving woman ! What but your wish would have induced me to refuse the offer of a safe seat ?

MRS. M. The offer of a safer seat, at half the money. Ah, didn't I say the warder had her eye on you, and her ear too ? But it's no use. I've opened Mr. Molesworth's eyes to his own guilt. He'll look out for another victim, won't you, Mr. Molesworth ? Now there's your ward, Mr. Harrington.

MARK. Pooh, he's too young. Then he hasn't that sheet anchor of the British legislator—a wife.

MRS. M. But he soon will have, if I've eyes in my head. Oh, Harry, I'm so happy, do you know—but no, it's Belle's secret. Do go and offer Harrington the seat, Mr. Molesworth, you'll find him in the conservatory.

MOLES. (*crustily*) Oh, he's here, is he ? Silly fellow !

MRS. M. Silly fellow ! What, for calling on us ?

MOLES. No, that's sensible, but I'm very angry with him.

MRS. M. Angry.

MOLES. He's been dabbling on the Stock Exchange, and what's worse he's burnt his fingers severely.

MRS. M. Let him thank his stars for that.

MOLES. What, for losing seven hundred pounds?

MARK. Better lose seven thousand in his first venture, than win ten times the money. Losing may disgust and deter, but winning is honey on the edge of the poisoned cup. The sweetness once tasted, let who will warn against the bitterness, the death that lies at the bottom. (*passionately*) Ah, Molesworth, if you love Harrington, thank heaven in your prayers to-night that his first venture has been a losing one.

MRS. M. (*coming c.*) Ah, how I wish all young men had such a counsellor, Mr. Molesworth.

MARK. Ah, it's easy to advise.

MRS. M. But your advice is backed up by practice.

MARK. (*to MOLESWORTH*) She's the most unblushing flatterer —

MRS. M. And pray who sets me the example, sir? (*to MOLESWORTH*) But I won't have any quarrel on my birthday that I can make up, so come, let me reconcile you and Harrington.

MOLES. Oh, the foolish lad knows my way.

MRS. M. Yes, that you're the most dreadful bear. If you had seen his alarm when you were announced. I left him in the conservatory with Belle. We'll pounce on him, the old bear and the young—what? (*playfully to MARKLAND*.)

MARK. Monkey!

MRS. M. (*ruefully*) Oh, Harry, if you must go to the Zoological Gardens for a comparison, do find a prettier one. Come, Mr. Molesworth, now ain't I an ill-used wife?

(*exeunt MOLESWORTH and MRS. MARKLAND, c.*

MARK. Bless her bright face, it is something worth living for to feel and minister to such happiness.

Enter FOOTMAN, d. l. 3 e.

A gent, sir, won't give his name, says he comes by appointment.

MARK. (*looking at his watch*) Appointment! I made no appointment after eleven.

Enter ROCKET, L. D. 3 E.

ROCKET. Oh, dear yes, you did. My name is Rocket; I'm an old friend of your partner's; this is the first time I've had the pleasure of *seeing* you, but we are no strangers.

MARK. I really don't remember —

ROCK. (*interrupting*) Not remember? Oh dear me, yes, you do; just run your mind over the most brilliant ideas, financial, engineering, social or speculative, that have come under your eye lately in the shape of prospectuses —mostly provisional.

MARK. Oh, I remember now, Mr. Rocket, the companies' promoter, one of those daring pioneers on the frontiers of speculation, who go out with a project for their pick, and the wide world of noodledom for their gold diggings.

ROCKET. Ha, ha! (*laughing goodhumouredly*) I knew we knew each other; money and mind are bound to know each other in these go-ahead times. Mind, as I often say to my directors, mind is the steam, money is the locomotive. Without steam what's the engine? Inert iron. Without the engine what is steam? Vapour in vacuo; but bring 'em *together*, and what are they—the force that re-moulds the world!

MARK. And occasionally bursts its boilers in the process.

ROCKET. Yes, accidents will happen, but we ought to congratulate ourselves, my dear sir —

MARK. On escaping the smash?

ROCKET. Or having lived to see the triumph of the miracle-working power of co-operative capital.

MARK. Yes, associated capital is a great force, though some of you projectors seem to think that, in fact, as on paper, hundreds may be turned into millions merely by the addition of noughts.

ROCKET. Ha, ha, it's the order of nature. What is mankind but a joint stock company of mites —

MARK. (*interrupting*) Limited by time and space. But I think you said you came by appointment.

ROCKET. Yes, my own appointment,—by letter, yesterday afternoon. I sent a commissionnaire with it to the bank—you didn't get it?

MARK. (*dryly*) No!

ROCKET. Then it must have been late, or perhaps, the fellow didn't deliver it. I must send to the barracks to inquire. These irregularities, if repeated, will be fatal to the corps. By the way, I was the first to suggest a company for the employment of our wounded soldiers,—unluckily that was before we had any wounded soldiers to employ. Then came the war and the wounded soldiers, and, as usual, somebody else snapped up my idea. It's been my fate to be robbed of my ideas. The perambulator, sir, was my idea, but while I was organising a great international perambulator company, an outsider stepped in with an inferior article and run me off the road. Ah, sir, I ought to have gone down to posterity in my own perambulator, and children yet unborn should have blessed my name. However, as I was saying, I made an appointment with you. Here I am and here you are, and now my dear sir, (*pointing to chair*) "a nous deux," as the French say!

MARK. (*ringing bell, r.*) Excuse me, Mr. Rocket "a vous seul," as the French say. I've a particular engagement and as this appointment is of your own making you will the more easily understand my declining it.

Enter FOOTMAN, l. 3 e.

ROCKET. (*seated l. c.*) One moment! (*to SERVANT*) Never mind, my man, it was to open the door for me, but I'll let myself out. (*to MARKLAND*) Send him away; we can't talk confidentially with a third party in the room.

MARK. Well, this is the coolest hand! (*motions to SERVANT, who exits l. 3 e.*) Now, sir, as we are relieved of the presence of a third party, will you allow me to tell you that this is a gross intrusion of yours?

ROCKET. I know it, my dear sir, I blush for it, but I must do it. I've a mission—a sacred mission to bring together mind and money. If mind is forced to intrude

itself upon money, so much the worse for mind. If money loses its temper with mind, so much the worse for money.

MARK. (*standing r.*) And if money takes the liberty of showing mind the door, and mind won't take the hint—

ROCKET. (*interrupting*) Money is sure to repent of being hasty! I won't detain you ten minutes. (*persuasively to MARKLAND*) We are both men of business. I have several fortunes to offer, (*taking out prospectuses*) and I've come to give you the choice of them. Here are six of my Directorates—provisional—competing for the honour of offering you a chair. (*points to chair, r.*)

MARK. Mr. Rocket, do you take me for what in City slang is called a guinea-pig, one of those easy-going gentlemen who sell their names for a director's fee and a director's patronage?

ROCKET. Quite the reverse, my dear sir,—now don't be hasty. (*motions MARKLAND to take chair—he sits R. C.*) Here's a magnificent thing—"the Metropolitan Cold Water Heating and Oxygenated Respiration Company." Let me develope the idea. Of course, you're aware of the apprehension entertained by scientific men of the approaching exhaustion of our coal fields or carbonaceous strata. You are no doubt familiar with the chemical composition of water—one part of hydrogen to eight of oxygen—the former, one of the most inflammable heating bodies in nature, the latter the great life-giving element of the air we breathe. I start from two great data—the importance of dispensing with coal, and the value of pure air to the animal economy. My scheme is to decompose the water of our noble metropolitan river by powerful voltaic action—to employ the oxygen thus set free for the vitalizing of the London atmosphere, and to convert the hydrogen to the unpretending, but highly important, purposes of house warming.

MARK. Literally setting the Thames on fire? But how's London to manage without the river?

ROCKET. Ah, there comes in my supplementary scheme—"The Grand Thames Valley Surface Drainage Com-

pany," for creating a new Thames, of twice the volume, and ten times the purity, of its predecessor. Stupendous idea, isn't it?

MARK. (*dryly*) Colossal! but I think I can improve upon it. Suppose after London has breathed all the oxygen and burnt all the hydrogen in the river, we were to collect the results, and start another company to re-compose poor old Father Thames on the spot.

ROCKET. Ecod, there's something in that?

MARK. It would be only keeping the old boy out of his bed for a week or two—and we might have it made, in the interval. But seriously, Mr. Rocket, you seem to forget that I am a banker; my business is safe investment not rash adventure—I have a horror of speculation.

ROCKET. My dear sir, don't disclaim one of the finest attributes of our nature!

MARK. No, if I did take to blowing bubbles, they should be soap, not speculation ones. Allow me to wish you a good morning.

ROCKET. You abuse speculation—when your house has been backing up the Great Rocky-mountain Trunk line so heavily? You have backed it, haven't you?

MARK. Really, Mr. Rocket, I'm not aware our house owes you an account of its investments.

ROCKET. Oh, I merely repeat what's whispered in the City.

MARK. The persons who repeat such whispers are as bad as those who originate them.

ROCKET. Why, you see Rocky-mountain Trunks are at a discount; and in these cases people will ask who's likely to be hard hit.

MARK. (*angrily*) Do you think, because I've listened patiently to your fantastic schemes, that I will sit patiently to hear the credit of our house blown upon, even by so loose a tongue as yours, sir?

ROCKET. I withdraw my observation. But I certainly fancied from what I heard in Warnford Court yesterday, that Markland and Meiklam had no objection to a leetle snug speculation.

MARK. (*with rising indignation*) Then you fancied wrong, sir, and you may quote my contradiction to the next city gossip who takes liberties with our firm. (*rings bell, R.*) Markland and Meiklam have nothing to say to schemes or schemers. Leave my house, sir!

Enter SERVANT, L. 3 E.

ROCKET. You'll be sorry for this, Mr. Markland, and when the Great Metropolitan Cold Water Heating and Oxygenated Respiration Company is in its blaze of triumph, you'll regret this morning's work. It'll be too late then, Mr. Markland. (*SERVANT holds door open, L.*) I'm going, young man! (*turns*) By the way I never mentioned my Anglo Indian Steam-Ginning Company—(*checked by MARKLAND, who pauses in his angry walk*) Oh, don't be alarmed, I'm not the man to force anything on anybody. You're decided finally about "The Great Metropolitan?" (*MARKLAND approaches almost fiercely*) Oh, very well, very well! Good morning!

(*exit cheerfully but precipitately, D. L. 3 E., followed by SERVANT.*

MARK. At last! I couldn't have controlled my boot five minutes longer. The impudent charlatan, to mix my name up with questionable speculations! I must take measures to trace these reports home. I've returned just in time. (*changing his tone*) Yet perhaps the worst thing one can do with such stories is to notice them.

Enter SERVANT, L. 3 E.

SERVANT. Mr. Meiklam, sir.

MARK. Show him in directly. Meiklam must know of these rumours. He should have warned me they were afloat. He has had *carte blanche*, almost, since my marriage. However, I assume the reins after to-day.

Enter MEIKLAM, L. 3 E., rather sanctimonious in appearance, cool, fresh, and collected.

MARK. (R.) Well?

MEIK. (L.) Very well, thank heaven! a beautiful

morning. We ought to be very thankful. I quite enjoyed my little walk over the bridge. You seem feverish.

MARK. Feverish? No, only a little excited.

MEIK. Excited! That's not business like.

MARK. I've just had a fellow here—a promoter—Rocket.

MEIK. (*looking at card*) I know the person.

MARK. And he has dared, on the strength of some idle gossip, to mix our name up with questionable speculations. I couldn't contradict him as explicitly as I should have liked to do.

MEIK. So you got into a passion. (*sits L. c.*) It's not a bad plan. I wish I was more easily excited sometimes.

MARK. It was foolish, I admit I suppose, my father's grave did utter forth a voice?

MEIK. Ah, your excellent father—what would he have thought of these days of limited liability and unlimited speculation! He was caution personified.

MARK. Say integrity.

MEIK. The most upright of men, and the most punctual of bankers. What would he have thought if anyone had told him of his son taking half a year's honeymoon instead of returning to the bank like a short bill, one month after date.

MARK. I'm afraid I've thrown a great deal on your shoulders.

MEIK. Particularly as you were moving about so much, and in such out-of-the-way places. It was impossible to keep you even informed of operations, much less to consult you about them. But youth *will* be youth. I made allowances.

MARK. I must make up for it now by working double tides. I'm glad you've called: you can give me a bird's eye view of the last six months' operations, as we drive into town. (*rises.*)

MEIK. I thought it was as well to see you, as some little explanation might be necessary, which had better take place here than in the bank parlour.

MARK. Quite right. It would never do to expose my ignorance before old Scratchell. (*sits.*)

MEIK. Exactly, and then if there *should* be any item of information not quite so pleasant as the rest—you see you are so excitable.

MARK. You have no bad news, I hope?

MEIK. Bad news is a relative term. In such times as we have had you could hardly expect our money matters to go on as smoothly as your honeymoon.

MARK. Don't beat about the bush. Let me know the worst. Though I could have wished you had chosen any day but this for bad news. It's my wife's birthday.

MEIK. Ah! it is settling day for the foreign account too, unluckily.

MARK. And likely to be a bad settlement for the bulls, Molesworth tells me. Happily we have not much to do with that.

MEIK. Excuse me. We have a good deal more to do with it than I could wish.

MARK. What do you mean? You've not been operating on your own account?

MEIK. Oh dear no, but I thought it expedient in the exercise of the discretion you left me—and trusting to the best private information—to try and recoup ourselves by winnings in foreign stock, for some rather heavy losses in foreign shares.

MARK. Shares, stocks! Speak out—you've been speculating and losing by your speculations.

MEIK. Only when I was unfortunate in our investments. Wildman and Waters, the great contractors for foreign lines, opened a heavy account with us soon after you left. Their references were first-rate, their transactions enormous. Unluckily their capital wasn't quite on the scale of their transactions. They found it difficult to meet some heavy bills, owing to the unsettled state of the American market. They applied to me for temporary assistance—

MARK. And you gave it!

MEIK. I was always of a confiding turn, and they offered ten per cent. for the accommodation. The difficulty recurred—of course I couldn't think of losing our first advances, so I extended their credit. c

MARK. Good heavens! Then Rocket may have spoken the truth.

MEIK. I shouldn't think it likely.

MARK. He said these men are desperately involved.

MEIK. Unfortunately that is true.

MARK. And their credit with us?

MEIK. (*unctuously*) They have taken large advantage of my disposition to trust my fellow men.

MARK. What is the total of our liabilities on their paper?

MEIK. About £250,000!

MARK. (*rising*) Meiklam!

MEIK. Excluding the odd hundreds; that's about it.

MARK. How came it you never told me this?

MEIK. How could I, when you *would* go to such out-of-the-way places?

MARK. Why it will swallow nearly every farthing of my private fortune!

MEIK. Unfortunately I have not *that* resource. Of course, the house couldn't submit to such a loss, so after an unsuccessful venture or two in the produce-market—that produce-market is *so* unprincipled—I tried foreign stocks.

MARK. When was this?

MEIK. Two accounts ago. Both settlements were against us, so I continued.

MARK. Why did you not tell me the worst after the first account?

MEIK. I hoped the next account would make the worst better—but it hasn't. I couldn't in justice to the house allow matters to remain in such an unsatisfactory position.

MARK. In fact you knew, that now I was returning to business, an explanation could no longer be evaded.

MEIK. That is a disagreeable way of putting it.

MARK. It is the truth. The amount of your last losses depends on to-day's settlement.

MEIK. Yes: we must see our brokers at once. The account closes at 12. It's nearly that now.

MARK. (*stopping him and looking him in the face*)

Meiklam, do you know I was warned against you, before I took you into partnership?

MEIK. I dare say ; the world is so censorious, and my daily walk was a reproach to many.

MARK. They said you were one of those masked depredators who make piety their picklock, and cant their chloroform. I did not believe them. I have been too credulous, and I see now I may have to atone terribly for my too ready trust. May heaven forgive you if, as I sadly fear, you have brought ruin on me and mine!

MEIK. Ruin ! Surely I needn't impress upon you the immense difference between insolvency and ruin.

MARK. I can't see it.

MEIK. That's just what I complain of. Insolvency is not being able to pay—ruin is being *known* not to be able. That, I am happy to say, we are as far from as ever. If you would only put a good face on things ! Confidence, my dear Markland—confidence is the soul of business !

MARK. What you would call confidence I should call lying.

MEIK. It doesn't make things better to give them ugly names. So order your brougham, and on our way to the City I'll explain to you a little operation of my own, which I hope may set us straight yet.

MARK. Hush ! my wife !—not a word before her.

Enter MRS. MARKLAND, *from D. L. U. E., and MOLESWORTH comes down from conservatory, c.*

Mrs. M. Good morning, Mr. Meiklam. (MOLESWORTH and MEIKLAM shake hands) It's no use, Harry, Mr. Molesworth can't find Harrington. He says he and Belle have both disappeared in the grounds.

MOLES. It's just as well : she would have spiked my guns. I have an appointment with the youngster, and when I do get within lecturing range—but come, Markland, I shall be late at Lincoln's Inn.

MARK. Very sorry, but here's] my partner laid hands on me.

MEIK. Oh, I wouldn't for worlds—

MOLES. Not the least consequence—drop me at the first cab-stand. (*MEIKLAM and MOLESWORTH retire up.*)

MARK. But you're going out, darling?

MRS. M. Yes, Mrs. Vernon has promised to take me a drive.

MARK. That's right. Be very happy till I return. Come. (*to MEIKLAM.*)

MEIK. Good-bye, Mrs. Markland; you have a perfect paradise here.

MRS. M. Minus the serpent, I hope.

MARK (*aside*) No; he's there too. Come, I say. (*impatiently, going L. 3 E.*)

MRS. M. Harry! (*ruefully*) You're going without giving me a kiss.

MARK. (*returning*) My own darling,—heaven bless and protect you. (*kisses her affectionately, and exit D. L. 3 E.*)

MRS. M. Till you come back! I don't want any protector when *you* are here.

MEIK. (*reprovingly*) Hush, my dear Mrs. Markland, I'm afraid that's rather an unchristian sentiment.

(*exit MEIKLAM, followed by MOLESWORTH, L. 3 E.*)

MRS. M. I don't like the feel of that man's hand, it is like touching an earth worm—I'm certain he's a hypocrite, yet my husband trusts him. Dear Harry! he looked pale and anxious. I hope Mr. Meiklam hasn't been worrying him.

Enter MRS. VERNON, D. 3 L.

MRS. V. Now darling, ready? Oh, yes, that is quite a lovely bonnet too!

MRS. M. I'm so glad you like it. (*looks in the glass*) Now to face my rival, L. S. D. (*coquettishly*) After all, I don't think I feel so much afraid of her.

(*go up together c.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

IN THE CITY.

SCENE—*The broker's office of Fermor and Laxton, stock-brokers, looking into Capel Court. Along the R. from the back to the first entrance, stand three clerks' desks, set across from R. to L., within a mahogany partition with rails at the top. At the ends of the partition, nearest to and farthest from the audience, and thus opposite the first and third of these desks, are slabs for writing at, with pads, pens, and ink. Rows of pegs on walls with stock receipts attached, and papers in bundles, and in partition pigeon-holes for delivering and receiving stock papers, cheques, &c. Entrance to the office, R. 1 E., by glazed door. Umbrella stand and mat near it. At the back, in flat, a large window, transparent, commanding a view of Capel Court, and the entrance door of the Stock Exchange, so that when door is open the Stock Exchange Porter is seen in his place, and groups near him. L. 3 and 1 E., the doors communicating (L. 3 E.) with Fermor's private room, and (L. 1 E.) with Laxton's. Fixed upon the wall, between the two doors, is a clock. c., half-way up the stage, a handsome stove. Chairs R. and L. of the window, and on either side of door into private room. A screen, folded, standing against the wall between the two doors. As the curtain rises the business of the office is seen in full activity. A CLIENT is writing out cheque at the first slab, another CLIENT is transacting business at the upper pigeon-hole, another is handing in a bundle of stock receipts to one of the Clerks who has come out of the partition to examine them. Four Clerks are writing or running to and fro with books inside the partition. FERMOR is conversing with a person who carries prospectuses at the door of his private room. PROSPECTUS-MONGER leaves him when curtain rises, both coming down. FERMOR has a list in his hand.*

PROSPECTUS-MONGER. Then you say "no" definitely, Mr. Fermor?

FERMOR. Decidedly—good morning. (*exit PROSPECTUS-MONGER, R. 1 E., taking umbrella*) Mr. Martin, (*reading off from his list*) three hundred Venezulans, for money, fifty Confederates, forty Buenos Ayres sixes, (*exit CUSTOMER, R. 1 E., who was at lower pigeon-hole, having paid a cheque*) six hundred Spanish New Deferreds, for next account.

1st CLERK. (*coming out with his hat on, and with his note-book in which he has made the entry*) Yes, sir.

(*exit MARTIN*

FERMOR. How are Buffalo and Lake Hurons?

2nd CLERK. Last business done at five, sir. (*FERMOR makes a note.*)

FERMOR. We've an order for sixty when they touch four three-eights. (*exit CLIENT who was at upper pigeon-hole*) Did you see Mr. Laxton in the house?

2nd CLERK. He hadn't come when I looked in last.

FERMOR. (*looking at his watch*) He's late this morning, (*exit CUSTOMER, R. 1 E., who was with CLERK near stove, CLERK re-enters partition*) even for him. (*to himself*) Have you made up Mr. Meiklam's account for the settlement?

2nd CLERK. Meiklam senior? There it is, sir. (*delivers it from lower pigeon-hole, FERMOR takes it.*)

FERMOR. (*shaking his head as he looks at it*) A heavy figure on the wrong side. Go and see if Mr. Laxton's in the house, and beg him to step over as soon as possible.

(*exit 2nd CLERK, R. 1 E.*

Enter a brother BROKER, who just shows his head at the door, R. 1 E.

BROKER. Got any money?

FERMOR. How much?

BROKER. Three—till to-morrow.

FERMOR. Cheque, Mr. Martin! (*BROKER goes to lower pigeon-hole and waits till a cheque is handed out to him—FERMOR takes it as he passes, reads and calls*) Three fifteen!

Enter CLIENT with stock receipts, CLIENT passes up to lower pigeon-hole and waits till No. 1 gets cheque and exit, then puts in his receipt and waits.

Enter MOLESWORTH, R. 1 E.

MOLES. Mr. Fermor.

FERMOR. (comes down) Ah, Mr. Molesworth! We don't often see you in the city, sir.

MOLES. Not so near Capel-court, at all events; I seldom get even so far as Garraway's.

FERMOR. (rubbing his hands cheerfully) Can we do anything for you to-day? It's a capital time for buying in: consols must go up with this fine harvest weather.

MOLES. No thank you, these are not times to put up with $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., even at 88. I've called by appointment with my ward, Harrington, to see about settling for him, silly fellow; I wish he'd kept as clear of the Stock Exchange as I have.

FERMOR. Boys will be boys—they must pay for their experience. (to clerk within partition) Mr. Harrington's account, Jackson. But that's Laxton's affair. He takes the fast men. I only transact for our steady customers. People must have occupation for their minds and their money.

MOLES. And gambling grows respectable, I suppose, when it's called business.

FERMOR. Gambling! Oh, don't say that, Mr. Molesworth. Whatever Laxton's may be, mine is quite an investing connection.

Enter CUSTOMER R. 1 E.

CUSTOMER. Mr. Fermor?

FERMOR. Walk into my private room, sir. (exit CUSTOMER to FERMOR's room L. U. E.) If you'll take a chair and the *Times* for a moment 'till Laxton comes in—I've sent over to the house for him. (exit L. 2 E.)

MOLES. Don't mind me. (sits L.) It will be all the worse for Master Harrington when he does come. (sits and takes paper.)

Enter ROCKET, very eager, with a bundle of prospectuses in hand.

ROCKET. Mr. Laxton within?

CLERK. No, sir.

ROCKET. Then I want to see Mr. Fermor. (*affecting to look at his watch*) I've an appointment.

CLERK. He's engaged, sir; if you'll wait a moment.

ROCKET. Very unlucky, my minutes are half-crowns. If you'd just let these prospectuses lie about. (*puts prospectuses down here and there*) Sow broadcast and something may come up. Ah! (*recognising MOLESWORTH*) my dear Mr. Molesworth—(*cordially*) this is a most fortunate *rencontre*.

MOLES. (*looking up surprised*) Sir!

ROCKET. Rocket, my dear sir; *you know*. (*gives card*) Tom Rocket! Three times last week I called upon you to transact the legal business of a few first-class companies which I amuse myself by promoting.

MOLES. Ah, I understand: I don't do that style of business, sir. (*resumes his paper*.)

ROCKET. That style of business, my dear sir! That is, not the ordinary bubble company scheme business—of course you do not, or *I* should not have come to you, I promise you: but the style of business which I have the honour to introduce to you is *not that* style of business. First and foremost here is the New Patent Traction Company, for applying the immense latent powers of the Trinidad oil wells to the acceleration of British traffic. I've the banker's name and the solicitor's still open. Of the solicitor's berth I mean to give you the refusal.

MOLES. That you can have at once.

ROCKET. The name? Thank you.

MOLES. No, the refusal.

ROCKET. (*pausing, pen in hand*) Don't be hasty, my dear sir! I can't afford to be hasty: I'm obliged to be so particular. You see I had filled up the banker's name with a first-class house. (*shows prospectus*.)

MOLES. I see, Markland and Meiklam.

ROCKET. Reputed A 1—reputed—but you will observe I have struck my pen through the name.

MOLES. So I see—I'll thank you to do as much for mine. I suppose, like me, they gave you a refusal.

ROCKET. No, sir, I gave them one. The bank that is associated with any company of mine must be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Now M. and M., between ourselves are—in the language of the City—fishy.

MOLES. Take care, sir, or you may be exposing yourself to an action of defamation.

ROCKET. Pooh, my dear sir, I'm obliged to be familiar with everything that is shaky in the money world.

MOLES. I can easily understand that.

ROCKET. And do you mean to tell me that a bank which is mixed up with one of the most desperate concerns in the market—Rocky-mountain Grand Trunks —

MOLES. Why you don't mean to say that Markland and Meiklam have to do with that bankrupt speculation?

ROCKET. If you're interested in their solvency, make inquiries, my dear sir, satisfy yourself, only don't mention my name. (*going up to CLERK*) Would you remind Mr. Fermor I'm waiting, and take him this? (*writes at slab*.)

MOLES. (*coming forward*) And I left orders to pay in that forty thousand this morning, and they've Harrington's securities in their hands too, to more than that amount! This fellow's news takes my breath away! Mine's quite a family connection. I'm a mere baby in this world of speculation. But it can't be true. He gets his livelihood by lying. (*exit CLERK into FERMOR's room, with note, l. 3 e.*) Still there can be no harm in inquiry. This may be very important to me, sir. Can you prove what you have said?

ROCKET. With the greatest ease—if it were worth my while.

MOLES. It shall be.

ROCKET. Confidence respected, of course?

MOLES. Naturally, — a privileged communication. When and where will you meet me with proofs?

ROCKET. At your office at three.

Re-enter CLERK, from FERMOR's room L, 2 E.

CLERK. Mr. Fermor says he's engaged, sir.

Enter HARRINGTON, R. 1 E.

HARRING. Mr. Laxton?

CLERK. He'll be in directly, sir.

MOLES. Here's my scapegrace—not a word to him of this till his money's safe. So, sir —

HARRING. (*coming forward, seeing MOLESWORTH*) I hope I haven't kept you waiting, sir.

MOLES. You have, sir, but I can charge for that. What you can't pay me for is the anxiety, the pain you have given me by your folly—your gambling.

HARRING. Gambling, sir?

MOLES. Yes, sir, gambling. When you risk your money on a chance you can't control, I don't see that it matters much whether it's on the turn of a die, or the see-saw of a time-bargain.

HARRING. Well, but, sir, you always said you wished I had some business—I wasn't brought up to any. Time-bargains wanted no training. Lots of fellows I knew were going in for them, so I went in too. I thought it was rather the steady thing than not.

MOLES. And you've lost £700!

HARRING. No end of fellows at the club have made lots of money at this work.

MOLES. Did you ask about the losers?

HARRING. (*ruefully*) I suppose they kept dark.

ROCKET. (*coming forward*) Excuse my interrupting you, but as I gather that this gentleman *has* money, and wants occupation, suppose I provided him with light and remunerative employment as a director of my companies—fee a guinea a meeting,—*entre nous*, no difficulty about qualification—I think I've a seat or two still open on the Hydrostatic Plank.

MOLES. Thank you; at present he's only gulling himself—as one of your directors, he might be gulling the public.

ROCKET. Gulling? Oh, sir, there are few gulls have

been more cruelly plucked than I was. Yes, my young friend, you see before you a sad warning. I started in life with a nice little fortune—I speculated for the account as you've been doing —

MOLES. And lost, as he's been doing ?

ROCKET. (*sadly*) No, that was the devil of it. I won ; and then I went on and lost, and then I won again, and so up and down, bull and bear, till between the brutes I was plucked of every feather, and waddled out of the house a lame duck !

MOLES. (*to HARRINGTON*) You see, sir ?

ROCKET. (*gradually recovering his elasticity*) And then I discovered my true vocation. The rapid *coup d'œil*—the sanguine temperament—that had me a rash speculator, turned in the channel of promotion, produced the brilliant inventor, the energetic fosterer of great ideas, the influential medium between floating capital and industrial enterprise whom you see before you. Avoid speculation, my young friend, and invest your money in well-considered undertakings. Here are a few of mine to choose from. (*taking out prospectuses.*)

MOLES. Mr. Rocket, if this young gentleman is bent on going to the dogs, at least allow him to find his own way to the kennel.

Enter CUSTOMER, from Fermor's room, and goes off, R. 1 E., the moment Fermor's door is opened ROCKET dashes at it as FERMOR appears at the door.

ROCKET. Ah, Mr. Fermor ! Ten minutes, my dear sir. Good morning (*to MOLESWORTH and HARRINGTON*) —you may as well keep those prospectuses. You can lay them on your club table: pleasant and profitable reading —calculated to inspire a taste for investment, and a wholesome horror of speculation.

(exit ROCKET into Fermor's room.

MOLES. Now does that fellow really believe in himself, or only wish to make us believe in him ? Of all the knotty points I come across, there's none so difficult as to determine, in these cases, the exact proportions of knave and fool. (*takes a pinch of snuff.*)

Enter LAXTON and FRANK MEIKLAM, in animated conversation, R. 1 E.

LAXTON. Well, but look here, Franky, the Nobbler can't stand up to him for six rounds.

FRANK. I bet you a hat on the event.

LAXTON. Done with you, sir. Ah, Harrington. (FRANK goes up familiarly to HARRINGTON, who acknowledges his greeting stiffly) And Mr. Molesworth! Who would have thought of seeing *you* in Capel Court.

MOLES. Thank you, I've called about this gentleman's account: good morning, Mr. Meiklam.

FRANK. Quite gives us a touch of the respectable, sir, to have *you* among us.

LAXTON. Speak for yourself, Franky. Give me Mr. Harrington's account, Martin, and (referring to list) book eighty Lundys, fifty Cachars, thirty Mariquitas, and hundred Great Souths to Mr. Meiklam. (L., up at pigeon-hole.)

FRANK. Mr. Frank Meiklam, Martin. The old boy's got an account here, too, and I don't want any mistake.

MOLES. Your transactions seem extensive, young gentleman, for a bank clerk.

FRANK. Clerk? Oh, I'm like the Emperor of the French, the nephew of my uncle. I mean to be a partner one of these days if I find it worth my while, so, till the old boy proposes it, I do a little private business on my own account—in the City Punting Club as I call it. Jack here's my coxswain, to steer me well on the flats.

MOLES. Steer you clear of them, I suppose you mean?

FRANK. No, no, sir, in Capel Court punting a good shallow flat is the very thing we look out for—a green soft place to shoot stock that won't float; that's our little game, sir.

MOLES. (*sternly*) And is your uncle aware of this little game of yours?

FRANK. He's too wide awake to ask questions. He treats me with confidence, and takes it out in affection.

MOLES. (*dryly*) Hard to say which has the best of the bargain!

LAXTON. (*coming down*) Here's Mr. Harrington's account, seven hundred and fifty on the wrong side.

FRANK. Fishy!

MOLES. (*putting up account*) I'll send you a cheque for it.

LAXTON. And here you are, Mr. Franky, three hundred to the good.

FRANK. Not bad for a fortnight's work in fancy lots, eh, Mr. Molesworth? Keeps a fellow in gloves. Ah, Harrington, my boy, you should let me tool you through the market. (*LAXTON goes into Clerks' partition, R.*)

MOLES. Thank you, he's going to leave the punting club.

FRANK. If he can't handle his pole better, it's just as well.

MOLES. Let me give you a bit of advice.

FRANK. You won't charge six-and-eightpence for it?

MOLES. No!

FRANK. And you won't expect me to take it?

MOLES. I'm afraid not.

FRANK. Then you may give it me.

MOLES. You'd better leave the punting club too.

FRANK. I say, Jack! (*over his shoulder to LAXTON*) Here's Mr. Molesworth wants me to go in for steady, sober, mill-horse money-grubbing—No thank you, Mr. Molesworth, they breed a faster style of animal now, sir, than they did in your day. We start for the Great Metropolitan Stakes, across country—plough or pasture, bull finch or post and rail, water or timber—harden your heart, hustle your horse, and never say die! It's pace that wins, and pluck that carries you over.

HARRING. (*aside, turning in disgust*) What an ineffable snob!

MOLES. Mercy on us! This boy takes my breath away! I feel like a fossil in a cutting, with the express dashing by.

FRANK. Of course, I mean to pull up when I've made a pot—marry and come the respectable dodge.

MOLES. (*drily*) You're wife'll be a very enviable woman.

FRANK. Yes, I don't think she'll have a bad bargain—I've the party in my eye. She's a friend of yours, by-the-bye, and if you like to be one of my references to character—

MOLES. I never commit myself—

FRANK. Not that I think Miss Hargreave will want references.

HARRING. (*coming down*) I think, Mr. Meiklam, the less ladies' names are mentioned the better.

FRANK. Oh, Jack's tiled. By the way, *you* know Miss Hargreave?

HARRING. Yes, and for that reason I must insist on her name not being made so free with in a place like this.

FRANK. (*sneeringly*) Her name's as safe in *my* hands as in *yours*, I should think. (*turning, catches sight through glazed door*) Hallo! that's Markland's brougham—our governor's, by Jingo! They musn't catch me here. Don't peach, Mr. Molesworth. (*exit hastily with LAXTON into Laxton's room, l. 3 e.*)

MOLES. (*aside and suspiciously*) Brokers should go to bankers, not bankers come to brokers—it looks ugly!

Enter MARKLAND and MEIKLAM, r. 1 e.

MARK. (*impetuously*) Mr. Fermor?

CLERK. Name, sir?

(MEIKLAM *wipes his feet very carefully on mat*.)

MARK. (*writes at slab and folds up paper*) Give him that.

MEIK. How this city mud sticks—merely walking across the pavement—yet one gets one's boots soiled!

MARK. Hardly worth while being so particular about your boots, when your hands—

MEIK. (*coughs significantly*) Ah, Mr. Molesworth—and my young friend, Mr. Harrington!

MARK. (*embarrassed*) Molesworth, you here?

MOLES. If you'd told me you were coming, you might have brought me.

MARK. So I might, but I had no idea when you called at Putney—

MEIK. (*slyly*) Investing—I suppose—for a client?

MOLES. And you, no doubt, for a customer. We have both kept our secret. I had fancied the etiquette was for the brokers to come to the bank parlours.

MEIK. As a general rule, but there *are* exceptions.

MOLES. (*dryly*) So I see.

MARK. (*interrupting*) By the way, I want you to write to your friend Hookham: on second thoughts I think I'd better decline the borough.

MOLES. Indeed.

MEIK. Oh, I'm so sorry! Ah, Mr. Molesworth, the House of Commons is the true arena for the British capitalist. If I had had Markland's early advantages—but I'm a self-made man! (*humblly*) I hope I have made the best of the talent entrusted to me.

MOLES. The world gives you full credit for it, Meiklam.

MARK. (*with feverish gaiety*) Of course you're both coming to us to-night: we shall be such a gay party—ball and concert, and fireworks on the lawn, and Gunter only knows what a supper! It's my wife's birthday, you know.

MOLES. I'll try and look in. Good morning. Come, George. (X's R.)

HARRING. (*shaking hands with MARKLAND*) Of course you may count on me. I've engaged Miss Hargreave for the first *deux temps*, this morning. (*follows MOLESWORTH*.)

MEIK. Ah, young man, may you learn to employ your season of youth more profitably!

MOLES. Amen to your little sermon, Mr. Meiklam there's nothing like preaching by example.

(*Exeunt MOLESWORTH and HARRINGTON, R.*)

FERMOR appears at the door of his room, L. 2 E.

FERMOR. (*to CLERK*) The file of prospectuses for 1862. I'll see you, gentlemen, as soon as I get rid of this very troublesome customer.

FERMOR retires, l. 2 E., CLERK takes in the file, l. 2 E., leaving office empty of clerks.

MARK. We're alone now.

MEIK. So we were all the drive from Putney. I was most explicit, but I couldn't get a word out of you; it was almost offensive.

MARK. Can't you guess why I was silent?

MEIK. I hope at least your thoughts were profitably employed.

MARK. I was silent, for fear I should speak my mind.

MEIK. Isn't that just what partners owe to each other?

MARK. Shall I speak now?

MEIK. If it would be any comfort to you.

MARK. I felt all the while as a lost soul might feel by the side of his destroyer. All this half year since my marriage—while I was caressing my happiness at home—you, in your desperate haste to be rich, were sowing the seeds of ruin broadcast—you flung good money after bad, till every legitimate resource was exhausted, and now you have crowned your work! Your last wild ventures yonder—(*pointing through window to Stock Exchange*)—have landed us in a loss that must bring us to the Gazette!

MEIK. (*resignedly*) This is very hard; but I will remember my privileges and try not to resent it. (*sits*.)

MARK. Resent it! Is it not true—true, every word? What was the position of the bank, when I raised you from cashier to partner, as my father had raised you from clerk to cashier? You found the firm rich, honoured, honourable. What will the world call it to-morrow?

MEIK. (*holding up his hands*) And this is the return for the employment of my talent! Mr. Markland, I would blush for you, were I not sure that, in your cooler moments, you will blush for yourself.

Re-enter CLERK from Fermor's room, l. 2 E., followed by ROCKET—FERMOR appears at the door behind him.

ROCKET. It will float, my dear sir, depend upon it, it will float. I only want my corks in the shape of six weighty directors.

FERMOR. Now, gentlemen?

ROCKET. Ah, Mr. Meiklam—Mr. Markland! (*turning to FERMOR*) Mr. Markland and I had a long and pleasant interview this morning. (*to MARKLAND, aside*) I hope you have thought better of the Associated Cold Water. (*MARKLAND shakes ROCKET off, and passes after MEIKLAM into FERMOR's room, l. 2 E.*) Cold water with a vengeance! (*to CLERK*) The governor seems mightily taken with that Hydrostatic Plank. I shall have filled up my directors, say the day after to-morrow, and by next account day I shall have touched six thousand promotion money—I let 'em off easy you see. Now for a chop at Dolly's, eh? (*feeling in portemonnaie*) I've nothing less than a fiver about me.. (*to CLERK*) I say, could you let me have one-and-six? I shall be passing this way in an hour.

CLERK. Hadn't you better make it even money, Mr. Rocket? Have a florin.

ROCKET. Thank you, perhaps I had. (*takes it, aside*) That's two chops. I say, Martin, don't forget I've a few chairs vacant, if you come across a likely director. Of course I should make it worth your while—nice little *doucours*—say twenty per chair—(*aside*) In shares, of course.

(*exit ROCKET, r. 1 E.*)

CLERK. Poor devil, he's to be pitied!

Enter MRS. VERNON and MRS. MARKLAND, R. 1 E.

MRS. V. Here we are at last. Mr. Laxton?

CLERK. In his room, ma'am.

MRS. V. Take my card. (*CLERK goes into Laxton's room, l. 3 E.*) Well, my dear, and what do you say of the city now?

MRS. M. My brain's in a whirl. Such narrow streets—such a crush of traffic—such dingy windows—and such jostling crowds—and all apparently in such a hurry!

MRS. V. Yes, my dear, they can't afford to dawdle. Some are trying to catch Time by the forelock, and you know he won't stop for any man, and others to catch Mammon by the tail, and he's a very slippery customer.

MRS. M. Surely it can't be very wholesome to breathe this air every day.

MRS. V. It's apt to give people a very dangerous

complaint—money on the brain. I've had a touch of it myself.

Re-enter CLERK, L. 3 E.

CLERK. Mr. Laxton will see you in a moment, ma'am.

MRS. V. (*to Mrs. MARKLAND*) If you'll sit down here, my love, while I'm with my broker: you may take the *Times* and peep from behind it at all that goes on.

MRS. M. Oh, pray don't be long! I begin to feel, somehow, as if I had done wrong in coming.

MRS. V. Pooh, pooh! (*Laxton's door L. 3 E., opens, LAXTON and FRANK appear, they exchange vulgar dumb show at sight of the ladies.*)

LAXTON. (*politely*) I am quite at your service, Mrs. Vernon. (*she goes in—FRANK comes down.*)

FRANK. By Jove! Mrs. Markland!

MRS. M. Mr. Meiklam!

FRANK. Well, this is an unexpected pleasure. (*goes to pigeon-hole.*)

MRS. M. Yes, I came with— (*aside*) No, I promised not to mention her name.

FRANK. (*who has got a cheque at the pigeon-hole*) Yes, you came with —?

MRS. M. Oh, it's no one you know, I think.

FRANK. Oh, then you didn't come with Markland?

MRS. M. My husband—oh, no!

FRANK. Then you were not aware—I mean he's not aware—that you are here?

MRS. M. (*confused, but recovering herself*) Really, Mr. Meiklam, this kind of cross-questioning —

FRANK. (*with offensive discretion*) Oh, Mrs. Markland, a lady's secret is perfectly safe in my hands.

MRS. M. But I have no secret, Mr. Meiklam.

FRANK. Of course if a lady likes to do a little speculation out of her pin money —

MRS. M. Pray understand, Mr. Meiklam, that I am here for nothing of the kind. (*aside*) Oh, if Mrs. Vernon would but come?

FRANK. By the way, allow me to wish you many happy returns of the day.

MRS. M. (*confused*) Thank you.

FRANK. You see I know it's your birthday—though you forgot to send me a card for the fête.

MRS. M. (*embarrassed*) I'm very sorry. I ought to have done so—pray come.

FRANK. (*going up to the slab and writing*) That means "go!" (*aside*) I won't let her off so easy. Now I call this very pleasant—almost as pleasant as cold shoulder at Putney. (*comes down*) Thank you! Look, I've filled up an invitation. "Mrs. Markland particularly requests the pleasure of Mr. Frank Meiklam's company at the Rosary, Putney, on Friday, the 25th. Dancing." I've dated it last week, that when I stick it over my mantelpiece nobody may see how you've neglected me. (*Mrs. MARKLAND signs it.*)

LAXTON. (*from the door. L. 3 E.*) Mrs. Vernon's account, Martin. (*CLERK goes in with it, L. 3 E.*)

FRANK. Now you've trusted me with your secret you put me on the footing of a friend at once.

MRS. M. Mr. Meiklam, that's the second time you've used the word secret; be good enough not to repeat it—I have no secret to conceal from my husband—if I had, I should not choose *you* for my confidant.

FRANK. Thank you! good morning. But before I go, I think, as you are here on the sly —

MRS. M. (*rising with dignity*) Mr. Meiklam, it should be enough to protect me from such an insinuation that I am here alone.

FRANK. At least you have a protector very near at hand—your husband is in that room. (*pointing to Fermor's door*) Of course there's no harm in your being here, but I thought you might like to know. There's nothing I enjoy so much as giving my friends agreeable surprises.

(*exit FRANK, R. 1 E.*)

MRS. M. Harry in that room! Perhaps he won't like my coming here without telling him—I know so little about these things—then my promise to Mrs. Vernon! How I wish she would come, and we might slip away at once. How annoying that young Mr. Meiklam should have

found that I was here without my husband's knowledge ! There was something intolerable in the way he looked and spoke. I can't bear anyone should imagine I could have a secret from Harry, and he least of all—and why should I ? I'll tell Harry I came with a friend, but that I promised not to name her, and he won't ask, I'm sure—he will trust me, as I would trust him. We have not had one secret from each other since we married, and I hope we never shall. (*door of Fermor's room opens*) Hark ! I hear his voice. How silly to put myself in this flutter. I'll tell him at once ! No, I'll give him a surprise, and pop upon him as he comes out. Oh, it will be such fun ! (*overflowing with suppressed enjoyment and expectation she stands behind the door, which conceals her as it opens*) Here he comes !

Enter, d. l. 2 e., MARKLAND, in a state of collapse, followed by FERMOR, and MEIKLAM making an entry in his note-book—she is preparing to show herself suddenly to Markland when she sees the others.

MRS. M. He is not alone ! (*drawing back.*)

MEIK. (*reading in his note-book*) Thirty-nine thousand seven hundred and eighty, nineteen and six. You shall have a cheque, Mr. Fermor.

FERMOR. If you please, Mr. Meiklam. It's a large sum, and runs over three accounts, as you're aware.

MEIK. I hope we have not inconvenienced you. Good morning, Mr. Fermor—our cheque shall be to hand before you close for the day.

FERMOR. I thank you, Mr. Meiklam. (*cheerfully*) Now it's all over—I may tell you, gentlemen, I was a *leetle* fidgetty.

MARK. (*eagerly*) What do you mean ?

FERMOR. Unpleasant reports arising out of your connection with that unlucky American contract—not that I ever gave any belief to them.

MEIK. Of course not—pray contradict anything of the kind. Our good name, Mr. Fermor—I am speaking for Mr. Markland as well as for myself—is to us a pearl of

price (*with dignity*) and he that sullies it must be prepared for exemplary damages.

FERMOR. And serve him right too. But I've my fortnight's balance sheet to make up—I'm sure you'll excuse me, gentlemen. (returns into his room L. 2 E.)

(MRS. MARKLAND prepares to come out, but is checked by the tone of MARKLAND's voice.)

MARK. Now, sir, is the farce played out? Is it time to take off our masks and face the truth, although the truth be ruin?

(MRS. MARKLAND's expression of face should be a running comment on the dialogue which follows.)

MEIK. What do you mean by this dreadful language?

MARK. Even your ingenuity cannot longer make head against our desperate circumstances. The last fortnight's mad game has gone against you—the stakes must be paid, to-day. Where are we to find the means?

MEIK. And all this excitement for a paltry forty thousand pounds!

MARK. In our position it might as well be ten times forty, from what you have yourself shown me. We cannot raise this money: it is impossible.

MEIK. Oh, my young friend, remember Napoleon, and erase that feeble word from your vocabulary. Leave me to find the funds.

MARK. On one condition.

MEIK. You'll allow me a margin of ten per cent. above the bank rate?

MARK. That you raise them by means that will not involve *our—my* honor. If I must sink it shall be with an unstained flag still flying over the wreck as I go down.

MEIK. What a beautiful sentiment for a winding up meeting!

MARK. Yet to bring ruin home with me! To bid that grim guest sit down between me and my young wife, by the fireside that has been so bright, in her presence that is so loving and so trustful, and, till it comes, to have to keep the terrible secret even from her

who confides all to me! Oh, that I had never lived to see this day.

MEIK. (*at the door, speaking off—calling*) Turn the horse's head, my man. (*to MARKLAND*) This is flying in the face of Providence. I don't exactly see how at this moment, but I am satisfied I shall raise the money. But then I have faith—faith, my dear Markland!

(*exit MEIKLAM followed by MARKLAND, R. 1 E.—MRS. MARKLAND stands as if paralysed, tries to speak and follow her husband, but her voice fails her and she has to support herself by a chair.*)

MRS. M. Ruin—he said ruin! Ruin! and I, in my senseless security, wished for it, only this morning! I did not think what it meant then—I seem to understand it now—the black shadow falling on our happy home, and darkening our lives that seemed all sunshine. No more sun for us now! (*takes out her handkerchief, dropping her portemonnaie*) No more? has money made our happiness? or anything that money can buy or bring? He has been all to me, now is the time for me to be more to him than ever. I did not think I could love him more, but now I feel as if my love could grow and grow! I can be of use now! Oh yes, if heaven will but give me the power to comfort him, and turn the weakness of my woman's heart to strength for him to lean upon!

Enter MRS. VERNON cheerfully from Laxton's office, L. U. E.

MRS. V. Now dear, I've had a most successful settlement, and I mean to indulge myself with a new dress, so come, (*X's R.*) let's have a delightful long morning turning over the moirés at Marshall's.

MRS. M. (*turning to her with an effort*) I'm quite ready (*tries to follow her, but staggers and all but faints*); **MRS. VERNON** startled turns and supports her—*tableau.*)

ACT DROP—(*Quickly.*)

ACT III.

THE BANK PARLOUR.

SCENE.—*A handsome old-fashioned oak panelled room. Two long windows, R., with faded morone curtains, old Turkey carpet, mahogany chairs with morocco leather. In the panelling portraits of former partners. Bureau between windows, R. C., with directory, red book, and writing materials. Library table, c. Door leading to outer office, L. 2 E. Door to strong room in flat, L. C. Door in flat, R., communicating with private staircase. Old-fashioned oak fire-place in c. flat, with painting in the Jacobean style.*

MEIKLAM discovered, he has been examining the year's accounts : the bank books are beside him, one on the table, others on the floor ; he closes a book.

MEIK. A most satisfactory balance-sheet,—if all the bills entered to credit were good, and so long as the bad debts are kept out of this highly indiscreet record, (*laying his hand on book*) and confined to my little private friend here. (*tapping a small green book.*)

Enter SCRATCHELL, L. 2 E.

I've done with the books, Scratchell, and I must say they reflect infinite credit on all concerned, (*SCRATCHELL bows*) of which you are entitled to the lion's share. You will have your reward, Scratchell,—I do not mean merely in a handsome *douceur* at Christmas, but here, (*touches his heart*) and there ! (*points upwards, SCRATCHELL bows but lingers*) You have something to say to me ? Speak freely (*unctuously*)—our clerks' interests, still more our cashier's, are our own.

SCRATCH. It's about Mr. Frank, Mr. Meiklam, though it's hardly my business, perhaps —

MEIK. Speak out, Scratchell: truth is a duty we owe to ourselves, even if we did not owe it to our employers.

SCRATCH. He's sadly irregular in his attendance—out now—(*Meiklam sighs and shakes his head*) and then how out of his salary he can keep horses, and dress as he does—and what business those ladies in pink bonnets and broughams have leaving little cocked hat notes for him —

MEIK. Spare me the revolting details! My own nephew, brought up with Christian privileges, and under my own eyes! Send him to me when he comes in, Scratchell. By the way, Scratchell, any heavy payments in this morning?

SCRATCH. Yes, sir, £40,000 trust money of young Harrington's to Mr. Molesworth's account, not half an hour ago.

MEIK. (*starting, but recovering himself*) On second thoughts—you can leave the books. (*exit SCRATCHELL, l. 2 e.*) My faith never failed me! How the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb! This forty thousand will just stop the gap.

Enter MESSENGER, l. 2 e., gives card.

Rocket! It was who he dared to repeat these city scandals. I'll see him, (*exit MESSENGER, l. 2 e.*) and teach him (*sternly*) that the good name of a firm like ours is not to be calumniated with impunity.

Enter ROCKET, l. 2 e.

Harkye, Mr. Rocket, it's lucky for you you are not worth powder and shot, or I might have to bring you to legal account for daring to impugn the credit of our house, sir.

ROCKET. I, Mr. Meiklam? I only alluded to your being heavily engaged with Wildman and Waters. It would give me pleasure to deny any report to the disadvantage of an old friend.

MEIK. An old friend!

ROCKET. We were flogged through the *propria que maribus* together—and you know I advanced all the funds for our first joint speculation.

MEIK. And what of that, sir? It failed.

ROCKET. But somehow *you* came safe out of the mess. Not that I blame *you* for that—but I was able to help *you* then, and I want help sadly now.

MEIK. Pshaw, the old story!

ROCKET. No! I've a lot of things coming out, excellent things, some of them really likely to float, and if they do, safe to bring me home handsomely.

MEIK. You may spare this moonshine with me.

ROCKET. No, really, matters never were so bright with me—in prospect. But you know the labour it takes to start a thing, and, *en attendant*, I'm actually in want of a few pounds,—it seems ridiculous, but it's a fact. Mrs. Rocket and two of the babes are down in the scarlet fever, poor things, and when I ran home to look after 'em just now, I found a note from the landlord threatening to put an execution in the house. I've offered him scrip in the Hydrostatic Plank, when it comes out,—but he doesn't see it.

MEIK. And I don't see it either. Mr. Rocket, you have already made several attacks on my purse. I trust it will never be closed against the really deserving poor, but if you want assistance you had better go to some firm that is not mixed up with Wildman and Waters.

ROCKET. (*very eagerly*) I'll contradict the report to everybody I've mentioned it to, if you'll only help me this once. If you could see them at home—the children are so ill:—there's my Bob,—such a sweet fellow —

MEIK. Once for all, sir, I have nothing for you!

ROCKET. (*changing his tone*) Take care, Mr. Meiklam, you may repent this.

MEIK. A threat! Go away, sir, go away!

Enter MOLESWORTH, l. 2 E.

(*rising and crossing to MOLESWORTH*) Ah, Mr. Molesworth! I've nothing to say to *you*, Mr. Rocket!

ROCKET. But I've something to say to Mr. Molesworth. (*aside to MOLESWORTH*) I've great pleasure in handing you those proofs I promised. (*gives papers*) I say, if you

could advance me a tenner on account of my fee for the information —

MOLES. True, I promised to make it worth your while
(gives note) There!

ROCKET. Ah, ha, beef-tea and brandy *ad libitum*—
powder for the little fireworks! (to MOLESWORTH) God
bless you, sir. (to MEIKLAM) Good morning, Mr. Meik-
lam. (to MOLESWORTH) An old schoolfellow of mine, sir,
I never shall forget what I owe him. (exit L. 2 E.)

MEIK. Sorry to see that leech has fastened on you,
my dear sir. A loose, unprincipled man, Mr. Moles-
worth. I have reason to think,—it's hardly worth
mentioning, perhaps—that he has been talking rather
freely of our house.

MOLES. Well, he did drop some hints that made me
rather uncomfortable.

MEIK. I am happy to have the means of setting you
at your ease. I was just looking through the books. Here
are our balance-sheets—(*passing over sheets*)—monthly,
quarterly, half-yearly, and for the year! (MOLESWORTH
looks at them) Oh, examine them freely: I wish to have
no secrets from so valued a customer.

MOLES. I see, I see, quite regular! Egad, you may be
proud of showing such a balance, Mr. Meiklam.

MEIK. (*taking receipt from drawer of table*) And there's
our income-tax receipt! (*hands it over*) An eloquent little
document that, Mr. Molesworth, which I should not
show to everybody.

MOLES. (*looks at it*) It would be well if everybody in
Schedule D were as honest.

MEIK. I have always made it a principle to debit our-
selves to the uttermost farthing; it's a duty one owes to
one's conscience.

MOLES. To say nothing of the commissioners. Well,
this is most satisfactory, so I'll just draw a cheque for
Laxton's account against that foolish fellow, Harrington.

(*writes cheque*.)

MEIK. What, a stock-jobbing debt—ah, this is very
sad, very sad—the young men of the day, (*shakes his
head*) I fear, have not that wholesome horror of specula-
tion which in this Christian land —

MOLES. (*rising and taking his hat*) Goes on about as briskly as if the Stock Exchange had been an apostolic institution. Christianity and cash seem to get along uncommonly well together. And now to examine Rocket's proofs.

(*exit L. 2 E.*

MEIK. A worldly old man, but I think I've nipped his suspicions in the bud. (*sees green book*) He would not have liked the look of things here quite so well. I mustn't leave this lying about. (*taking out a small key, goes up to strong-room, L. C.—as he enters it, and while his back is turned, enter FRANK MEIKLAM, L. 2 E.; he sees his uncle and watches him carefully; the strong-room door being left open MEIKLAM is seen by his nephew to deposit his green ledger in a private drawer under the safe—FRANK shows by his looks and gestures the importance he attaches to all this.* As MEIKLAM locks the door and turns round his eye meets that of his nephew, he shows a momentary confusion, but it is at once repressed and uncle and nephew look at each other, each attempting to command the other's eye, but without effect—MEIKLAM comes down, R.) So, sir, you are here at last! Where have you been this morning?

FRANK. Where I had the unexpected pleasure of seeing you, sir—at Capel Court. It's very instructive down there, sir, don't you think so?

MEIK. If you go on in this way, young man, what do you expect to come to?

FRANK. A partnership!

MEIK. A partnership?

FRANK. Unless you marry and take to continuing the line of the Meiklams on your own hook. I suppose you'll prefer keeping the business in the family.

MEIK. What! admit into the house a young man of your loose life and unsettled opinions!

FRANK. Oh, as for my loose life I can soon screw that up when I've an object in going steady; and as for my "unsettled opinions" I've an opinion quite settled that "money makes the man," which I take it is about the best bankers' catechism going.

MEIK. A scoffer, too! Oh, what appeal can I make to this hardened heart!

FRANK. Anything but "preachee preachee," uncle : that won't do me any good. Treat me as the costermongers do their donkeys, tie a carrot to the end of the pole : say "If you're steady for four months, six months, a-year, you shall have a junior partnership," and then see what a model young man I'll be.

MEIK. Unhappy boy—impunity has made you bold, and you've been going downwards, downwards —

FRANK. (*saucily*) Like the cow's tail.

MEIK. Take care, sir, even my patience has its limits, and my power to protect you has been strained to the utmost. The means for your profligate expenditure, sir—how are they accounted for?

FRANK. Well, sir, it used to be billiards and a little book-making, but I'm in a far better line now—time bargains. I've won £300 the last account, sir ; I don't mind telling *you*, because then you'll understand, if I do go the pace, it's not out of the till.

Enter SCRATCHELL, with note, L. 2 E.

SCRATCH. A messenger from Mr. Markland.

MEIK. Say I'll see him. (*exit SCRATCHELL, L. 2 E.*) Sit down there, sir, (*to FRANK, sternly*) and await my return.

(*exit MEIKLAM, L. 2 E.*)

FRANK. I wonder if the old boy knows I see through him ? He's lived on hypocrisy so long that perhaps it's really a comfort to him. When he comes the extra religious, I'm sure he always has some particularly sharp practice in his eye. He'll find I'm a match for him. Here's a set of duplicate keys I had made after his. What a flat to fall asleep after dinner, with me in the room ! I've a curiosity about the contents of that little green book the old boy's so sweet on. I saw where he put it—so here goes. (*steals up and unlocks strong room, L. c. : is seen to unlock private drawer under safe and take green book from it : as he is coming out with it the door, R. c. opens, and MARKLAND enters : FRANK hastily withdraws inside strong room and closes the door cautiously from within*)

MARK. Meiklam not here ! (*down R.*) I have tried every source—every source that is honourable and

regular—without effect. We must go! It is hard! A fortune so laboriously reared! A firm so long respected—and all kicked down by one whom my father raised from nothing. I must share the blame, as I shall share the punishment.

Enter MEIKLAM, L. 2 E.

MEIKLAM. (L.) Now, sir! My nephew gone! Markland, I was just sending a line by your messenger.

MARK. On second thoughts I determined to be the bearer of my own bad news. I have failed.

MEIK. (sits) Ah, you would go about it. You are not the man for an emergency.

MARK. When the emergency is to be met by fair means, yes; when by foul ones, no! (sits R.)

MEIK. We won't bandy words. You have brought bad news; I have good news for you in return. I've found the money.

MARK. Where?

MEIK. Molesworth has paid in £40,000 in the course of the morning. Just when you were flying in the face of Providence! It should be a lesson to you!

MARK. And you mean to appropriate this payment?

MEIK. Appropriate, my dear sir? Bankers' deposits are not ear-marked; it can be replaced as easily as taken.

MARK. How?

MEIK. Out of the next customer's deposits to the same amount.

MARK. I will not be a partner in such rascality.

MEIK. Unfortunately you are a partner already, and the world will saddle you with a joint responsibility for our operations.

MARK. True, true!

MEIK. Besides, this little cloud will soon blow over, if you will leave me to raise the wind.

MARK. Tempter! And the reaping of the whirlwind?

MEIK. Metaphors prove nothing. But I've taken your leave for granted. I've transferred that £40,000 to my private account.

MARK. Robber! (rises.)

MEIK. (*rises*) There, I'm glad you've said it! It's been on your mind all day, and you'll be better now you've got it out—I won't resent it: my faith teaches me forgiveness of injuries. (*sits*.)

MARK. Robber and hypocrite!

MEIK. Go on! and when you've done abusing me, we'll come back to business.

Enter SCRATCHELL, l. 2 e.

SCRATCH. Good morning, Mr. Markland, Mr. Molesworth would be particularly glad to see and speak with you.

Enter MOLESWORTH, followed by ROCKET, l. 2 e., and exit SCRATCHELL, l. 2 e.

MARK. Ah, my dear sir, two visits in one morning! We are highly favoured.

MOLES. Thank you. Ah, Markland, I've taken the liberty of bringing in a friend of mine.

ROCKET. I know Mr. Meiklam is always glad to see his old schoolfellow.

MOLES. You may remember, my dear Markland, I ordered that £40,000 to be paid in this morning?

MARK. Yes, against my advice, you remember.

MOLES. True, you said you would rather not have the responsibility of such a heavy amount on call. Perhaps you've changed your mind?

MARK. No, I'm more of that mind than ever. If you want to oblige me, Molesworth, you can't show it more than by drawing out this money.

MEIK. (*aside*) Is he mad?

MARK. Here's a cheque-book,—draw at once.

MEIK. Don't be in a hurry. Large interest means risky investment. My young friend here has the rashness of his years. Take an older man's advice, Mr. Molesworth, and leave your money where it is.

MARK. Take it out, I say, and do not listen to his cautious counsels.

MOLES. I don't mind mentioning it now—but you're aware of some disagreeable reports affecting your firm?

MARK. Yes, yes!

MOLES. And in the face of these reports I should have felt a delicacy in drawing out the money.

MARK. Oh, I waive that! I insist on your drawing it out—I will not be indebted even to *your* delicacy.

MOLES. Oh, make your mind easy, Mr. Meiklam has satisfied me already that there was no foundation for these city scandals.

MARK. (*with surprise*) Oh, Meiklam has satisfied you of that?

MOLES. Yes, by showing me your balance-sheet, and last income-tax receipt. My friend here has given me the choice of so many splendid investments, that the only difficulty is which to take.

ROCKET. You see, gentlemen, Mr. Molesworth at least is not blind to his own interests.

MOLES. (*having filled up cheque*) There! (*rising*) I'll take the money as I go out. Good morning. Come, Mr. Rocket. (*exit L. 2 E.*

ROCKET. (*to MEIKLAM, as he is going out*) A first instalment of my debt, Mr. Meiklam, but I've not done yet.

(*exit following MOLESWORTH*

MARK. There's one friend rescued at least.

MEIK. And to save your exaggerated susceptibilities you have precipitated, perhaps, the downfall of the firm! Why did you urge him to do this?

MARK. Because I prefer ruin to dishonour.

MEIK. Oh, that was your reason. Then listen to me; if ruin comes, dishonour will come with it, even as it is. I showed him a balance-sheet, but I did not show him *the* balance-sheet.

MARK. More villainy—I knew nothing of this.

MEIK. Have you treated me in a way to invite confidence? But will the world believe in your ignorance? Hardly, my dear sir.

MARK. Meiklam, have a care—do not trifle with the misery you have wrought (*restraining himself*) No, no, spare me, man—spare me for my wife's sake, if not my own.

MEIK. My dear young friend, I am full of commiseration for both of you. But you see we can't afford to

bring our books into the bankruptcy court. This disappointment is awkward, but it may be repaired. We have marketable securities of Harrington's for twice as much. It would be so easy to get an advance on them. They're in the safe.

MARK. I know now you have no conscience, but have you no fear of the law? Do you not see if what we have done be rash, reckless, wicked—that this would be criminal?

MEIK. (*at the strong room door*) I can't get my key into the lock! The wards have been tampered with. One moment—there's a locksmith a few doors off.

(*MEIKLAM hurries off* L. 2 E.)

MARK. Come what may, I will not consent to this new infamy. I have been weak, but my conscience is still pure. Even if the law's award and the world's opinion cover my name with infamy, I shall know my own hands are clean, and my Florry,—she at least will believe me when I tell her so.

Enter SCRATCHELL, L.

SCRATCH. Mrs. Markland and Mrs. Vernon are at the private door, sir.

MARK. Then I will go to them. (*exit SCRATCHELL, L.*) Thank heaven my wife knows nothing! May affection give me power still to wear a smile for her!

(*exit r. c. door.*)

FRANK appears from the strong-room, L. C., the door of which he relocks.

FRANK. A capital idea, my plugging the keyhole. By Jove, this is what I call payment for peeping!

(*exit r. c. door.*)

Enter MISS HARGREAVE, followed by LAXTON, L. 2 E.

MISS H. Neither my sister nor Markland here—our appointment was for three, sharp: so much for business punctuality, Mr. Laxton!

LAXTON. I wished particularly to see Mr. Meiklam, but I can't wait. It was lucky I met you, Miss Hargreave) you can give this to Mrs. Markland. (*hands portemonnaie.*)

MISS H. Her portemonnaie—how comes this in your hands?

LAXTON. She left it in our office this morning.

MISS H. My sister in your office?

LAXTON. Oh, under excellent escort—Mrs. Vernon's. We've a great many ladies among our clients, you know.

MEIKLAM appears at door, L. 2 E.

Ah, here's Meiklam at last; now to put on a leetle gentle pressure. *(exit, taking MEIKLAM with him, L. 2 E.)*

MISS H. My sister in the city—I had heard of Mrs. Vernon speculating, but Florry —

Enter MARKLAND, MRS. VERNON and MRS. MARKLAND, R. C.

MRS. V. Oh, here is Belle to the minute—everybody knows what a woman of business she is. I should enjoy staying with you so much, but I've a hundred things to do, so I must run away, *(to MARKLAND)* now I've rendered up your treasure; and while you put me in the carriage you shall give me five minutes advice about our investments. *Au revoir, sweetest!* *(to MRS. MARKLAND)* You've been the greatest darling! Good bye, you dear.

(to MISS HARGREAVE. Exeunt MARKLAND and MRS. VERNON, R. C.)

MISS H. How I hate honey-varnish! *(they sit—MRS. MARKLAND, R. of table, MISS HARGREAVE, L.)* What have you been doing all the morning?

MRS. M. Shopping.

MISS H. Nothing else?

MRS. M. *(after a pause)* Nothing particular.

MISS H. You must have been inconvenienced by the want of your purse.

MRS. M. My purse!

MISS H. *(giving it)* Yes, Mr. Laxton asked me to give it you—it seems you left it in his office this morning.

MRS. M. Hush—not a word of my having been there to my husband. Oh, Belle, I implore you.

MISS H. I thought you had no secrets.

MRS. M. I have one now, a terrible one.

MISS H. Florry, you frighten me. You have not been led into speculation by Mrs. Vernon?

MRS. M. No! no!

MISS H. Then why this anxiety to conceal your visit to Laxton and Fermor's from your husband?

MRS. M. It is because any question about that might lead to more questioning—questioning I cannot face.

MISS H. Florry! you have said too much not to speak out now. Was it anything fatal to your happiness as a wife?

MRS. M. Oh, no, he loves me as well as ever.

MISS H. Nor to his honour as a man?

MRS. M. No, thank heaven!

MISS H. These safe, what can there be so terrible?

MRS. M. What I must not reveal, and yet if I am condemned to keep it to myself!—I have not the strength to wear that iron mask!

MISS H. Florry, we were one in infancy: we have shared all the joys and sorrows of childhood, must we be less near to each other now we are women. Can you not trust me?

MRS. M. Oh. what a blessed relief it would be to open my heart to you!

MISS H. All the comfort that a sister's love and counsel can give, I would give you. But why not first seek your husband's?

MRS. M. I dare not—my secret is—(*they rise and come down*) the knowledge that ruin hangs over him by a hair.

MISS H. Ruin—merciful heaven! Ruin, over him that seemed so prosperous!

MRS. M. A debt of £40,000 to Laxton and Fermor must be paid to-day—it is impossible to raise the money.

MISS H. But is there no means, no resource? Men in their position have so many.

MRS. M. I have one hope, my own fortune, but I must have my trustees' consent. Hush!

Enter MARKLAND, r. c., down c.

MARK. Welcome, both, on your first visit to the bank parlour—its rather dingy.

MISS H. I call it a delightful old room! (*sniffs*) With such a venerable perfume about it. A compound, I should

think, of Mr. Meiklam's odour of sanctity and stale money.

MARK. I hope you enjoyed your drive.

MRS. M. Yes, (*with an effort*)—it was very pleasant.

MARK. But you are looking pale?

MRS. M. I'm a little tired, dear—shopping always gives me a headache.

MARK. Take care, remember you have a great deal before you.

MRS. M. Yes, I know I have.

MARK. The dinner first, and the fête afterwards; we must all be very gay to-night, if we never mean to be gay again.

MRS. M. You look fagged and worn, too.

MARK. Yes, it's my first day in harness. There has been a heavy arrear to make up.

MRS. M. How I wish I could help you. But I suppose a banker's wife mustn't know anything about bank affairs.

MARK. Better she should not. How long would home be home if the secrets of the prison house were brought into it?

MRS. M. I thought we had agreed to have no secrets?

MARK. None of our own, but you forget bank secrets are my partner's as well as mine.

MISS H. And these grim old gentlemen look as if whole generations of money-mysteries were locked up under their waistcoats. Oh, if these walls could speak!

MARK. They have ears, but no tongues, happily.

MISS H. But we didn't come to pry into the horrors of the bank parlour—we've a secret of our own, you know, Harry.

MARK. Yes, and you want my judgment—I'm at your service.

MRS. M. Mayn't I come?

MISS H. Oh, dear no; she's to be kept quite in the dark, isn't she Harry?

MARK. Yes, stay here till we return, darling: you won't be dull?

MRS. M. Oh, no, I shall manage to amuse myself—but don't be long, Harry.

MARK. Shall I stay with you, and leave Belle to manage her surprise alone?

MRS. M. No, no, I shall be all the better for a few minutes to myself. Go, dear. (*he kisses her and takes her hand. She looks wistfully in his face—he turns away suddenly.*)

MARK. Come, Belle.

(*exit MARKLAND and MISS HARGREAVE, R. C.*)

MRS. M. (*bursts into tears*) I could not have held out a moment longer. He will not trust me—oh, why will he not? It would be a joy even to divide the load of his suffering. But oh, if I could avert it by help of my own fortune—now is my chance to speak with Meiklam.

Enter MEIKLAM, followed by LOCKSMITH L. 2 E., and LAXTON.

MEIK. The moment I can remedy this unaccountable accident to the strong room door you may rely on having your cheque.

LAXTON. Thank you; delay is death to us, and it would not look well for you. (*exit L. 3 E.*)

MEIK. Now, my man, (*to LOCKSMITH*) that's the lock, and here's the key. Ah, Mrs. Markland, this is indeed an honour to our dingy parlour. (*goes up to LOCKSMITH.*)

MRS. M. (*salutes him coldly, aside*) How my heart recoils from this man, yet I must confide in him.

MEIK. (*to LOCKSMITH, who has opened door with key*) What! the lock all right? Very extraordinary! It wouldn't go in just now. Ah, that'll do! (*exit LOCKSMITH, L. 2 E.* (*to MRS. MARKLAND*) To what good fortune do we owe this visit? and where is Markland? (*brings down HARRINGTON's deed box from safe and puts it on table.*)

MRS. M. (*seated L. of table c.*) He has just gone with my sister on a little scheme of their own. Mr. Meiklam, are we safe from interruption here?

MEIK. Perfectly.

MRS. M. I may trust your discretion?

MEIK. Implicitly. (*sits R. of c. table.*)

MRS. M. You are one of the trustees under my marriage settlement?

MEIK. Yes, with an excellent colleague, Mr. Molesworth. You are well protected.

MRS. M. What is the amount of my fortune?

MEIK. About fifty thousand pounds, more or less.

MRS. M. I want that money put at my husband's disposal.

MEIK. Mrs. Markland!

MRS. M. I know that the firm is in difficulties—don't ask me how—that to meet these requires the immediate command of a large sum—I wish that sum advanced out of my fortune.

MEIK. Out of your fortune! Are you aware, my dear madam, what the law would call us if we consented to do this?

MRS. M. What?

MEIK. Fraudulent trustees, madam. Why we should be personally responsible for every penny of the money.

MRS. M. Oh, but my consent surely would bear you harmless. What business can a wife have with a fortune when her husband has debts requiring to be paid?

MEIK. Bless your innocent heart! Pay his debts out of your private fortune! there never was such a thing heard of.

MRS. M. Then it's time there should be. Oh, Mr. Meiklam, you have much to answer for in all this.

MEIK. Me, my dear madam! Nay, I cannot allow—

MRS. M. No matter, I do not want to reproach you, I only want you to do this for me, and use your influence to get the consent of Mr. Molesworth.

MEIK. My dear child, I admire your fine sense of probity, it is quite consonant to my own feelings. But Mr. Molesworth cannot be expected to take the same high view of the matter as you and I.

MRS. M. (rises) Then I will appeal to him.

MEIK. Take care, my dear madam, or you might really bring on the firm the ruin you are now imagining. No, no,—this is a temporary difficulty—quite an every-day affair in tight times. Next birthday, we will laugh over your fears together.

MRS. M. Oh, my husband does not think so.

MEIK. Good heavens! you haven't breathed a syllable of your fears to him?

MRS. M. No, but I have read his face.

MEIK. (*aside*) Ah, I always say married men ought to lock up their looks like a private ledger.

Re-enter MARKLAND and MISS HARGREAVE R. C.

MISS H. (*who has a jewel case in her hand*) Mystery of mysteries! Now, Fatima, what would you give for a peep?

MRS. M. I've no curiosity, have I? (*to MARKLAND*) and if I had—

MARK. Let us hope there is no blue chamber to tempt it. Is your headache better?

MRS. M. Yes, I'm quite well now.

MISS H. Sure? Let me look at you. (*takes her aside*) Have you succeeded?

MRS. M. (*aside to her*) No.

MARK. Well, Belle, your report?

MISS H. Not encouraging.

MARK. You must get home, darling, in time to lie down before dinner; you'll need all your strength and spirits for to-night—I'll put you in the carriage.

MRS. M. Won't you come home with us?

MARK. If you'll wait a few minutes: I've still some business to settle.

MISS H. I can't wait, I've no end of shopping still to do, so I'll be independent of you both and take a cab. (*aside to MRS. MARKLAND*) Don't despair yet. (*exit r. 2 E.*

MRS. M. (*to herself*) Perhaps he will tell me when we are alone. (*MARKLAND comes down and takes his wife out r. c.*)

MEIK. Time presses—we must have the money. If Laxton and Fermor go, we go with them. (*rises.*)

Re-enter MARKLAND R. C.

MEIK. Happy fellow, what a wife!

MARK. And what a fate you have made for her!

MEIK. Again this sinful despondency! I've inquired the market price of these securities—they're A 1.

MARK. (r.) Do you hear me, Meiklam? I have been your unconscious tool till now; I may be destined to become your victim; but, at last, I have resumed authority here, and I mean to assert it. You shall not touch these securities! (*laying his hand on the box.*)

MEIK. Will you tell me another way to raise the money?

MARK. I know of none; but I would not soil my conscience with this breach of trust.

MEIK. Then you prefer a stoppage?

MARK. A thousand times.

MEIK. With the consequences of exposure?

MARK. Promise me at least not to resort to these securities—till all other means have been tried.

MEIK. Willingly, but if the worst comes to the worst—

MARK. The round of wrong—crime to avert dishonour!

MEIK. I will take the responsibility—I have sources of strength you know nothing of.

Enter SCRATCHELL, l. 2 E.

SCRATCH. Mrs. Markland is waiting.

MARK. I will join her. (*exit SCRATCHELL, l. 2 E.* As he passes, his eye falls on his father's portrait) Father! (*turns away*) No, I can never face those eyes again. (*exit, r. c.*)

MEIK. (*looking at his watch*) Half-past three—the money must be found by four—all other means have been tried—there is such a thing as pushing delicacy too far. (*opens box and takes securities—FRANK appears at door, r. c., watching*) But I won't leave Markland in the dark. (*writes*) It is my duty to let him know what I've done—now it is too late to prevent it. (*rings bell.*)

Enter SCRATCHELL, l. 2 E.

Scratchell, ask the messenger to call me a Hansom, and see Mr. Markland has this note to-night.

SCRATCH. I'll take it to Putney myself—Mrs. Markland has been kind enough to invite me to the fête.

(*exit, l. 2 E.*)

MEIK. (*relocking box*) Safe bind, but not safe find

exactly—we can replace them at the next turn of the market! Now for it, I shall be just in time. (*going, l. 2 e.*

FRANK. (*putting his head in at door, r. c.*) Nailed!
(*Act drop quick.*

ACT IV.

THE BIRTHDAY FETE.

SCENE.—The stage represents an elegant drawing-room in the Rosery, decorated in white and gold, and brilliantly lighted. The centre compartment communicates by folding-doors with Markland's study. The compartments on either side are arched, and communicate with side-rooms or corridors, also brilliantly lighted and decorated with exotics and statuary. These openings are practicable, and admit of the passage of dancers: flower-stands in the angles, ottomans and light chairs. Music: as the curtain rises, the stage is occupied by a dance, and the movement of a crowded and brilliant fete is seen at its height. As the dance ceases, the couples, who have taken part in it, disperse through the different openings; among these couples are FRANK MEIKLAM and his partner, MARKLAND and MISS VERNON, MRS. VERNON and FERNOR, HARRINGTON and MRS. MARKLAND, LAXTON and MISS HARGREAVES. MARKLAND resigns MISS VERNON to her mother, and moves among the company, exchanging salutations, &c. Company disperses.

Enter Mr. HARRINGTON and Miss HARGREAVES, l. arch.

MISS H. Yonder goes Florry.

HARRING. Oh, she's very well engaged, depend on it.

MISS H. She exerts herself so to make everyone happy; she has quite a gift that way. (*sighs*)

HARRING. Ah, some people can make others happy, without exerting themselves; at least I know one who can.

MISS H. Who?

HARRING. You! You've made me supremely happy, without in the least exerting yourself.

MISS H. Oh, but galloping is a very great exertion, and I'm dreadfully tired.

HARRING. Pray sit down. (*they sit, l. c.*) I don't mean by galloping, but by simply being what you are. It depends on you, Miss Hargreave, whether—

Enter FRANK MEIKLAM, R. U. E.

FRANK. Ah, Miss Hargreave, I've been looking for you everywhere. Will you give me the pleasure of this *deux temps*?

MISS H. I am engaged.

FRANK. No. 5 then?

MISS H. I am engaged for the next eight, and I must see if I survive them before I engage myself deeper.

FRANK. At least let me take the chance of survivorship for the ninth. (*aside*) Hang that fellow, there's no getting a word with her for him. (*to HARRINGTON*) By the way, Mrs. Markland's looking for you.

HARRING. Thank you.

FRANK. I'll send her to you.

HARRING. (*drily*) Pray don't trouble yourself.

FRANK. Not the least trouble. (*aside*) I'll put a spoke in his wheel at all events, the insolent beggar.

(*exit, R. U. E.*

MISS H. I'm quite rested now. (*rises, and going*

HARRING. For pity's sake, give me a moment, Miss Hargreave. I was saying, when that fellow interrupted us, that it depends on you, whether we were to call each other partners, not for the next waltz or galop, but for life!

MISS H. Mr. Harrington! that question is too serious to be asked or answered in a ball-room!

HARRING. When may I ask it?

MISS H. When you are calmer, and I less disposed to prize my own freedom, and to think sadly of married life.

HARRING. You think sadly of married life, with your sister's happiness always before you.

MISS H. May not even happiness have its lessons? And what does it teach so much as distrust of what we are, still more of what we seem to others. Besides, I am very independent; I like to be mistress of my own acts, my own money.

HARRING. Pray don't let that horrid word be mentioned between us.

MISS H. And yet, as the world goes, what is there on which the happiness of marriage depends more?

HARRING. I don't want to go as the world goes. I think women should know nothing about money, except how to spend it.

MISS H. So you told me this morning, and I hoped your wife wouldn't hold the same theory. Were I your wife, we should not agree upon that point.

HARRING. Then, let us drop the subject. The next thing will be to claim for women the right, not merely to talk about money, but to manage it.

MISS H. Their own, I think, they ought; and I think if we had more power of the purse many households would be happier for it!

HARRING. Of course a woman's fortune should be settled on herself.

MISS H. That would not satisfy me.

HARRING. What more could you want?

MISS H. The right to dispose of it absolutely.

HARRING. No married woman ever has that. Miss Hargreave, it startles me to hear you talk so.

MISS H. I see it does, and I'm sorry for it.

HARRING. If there is one thing that seems to me unnatural in a woman it is this anxiety for independence, and in money matters above all.

MISS H. I should grieve to lose your good opinion—I feel I must make a large demand on my husband's confidence.

HARRING. At least let it come after marriage. But this kind of preliminary stipulation has an odious air of mistrust.

MISS H. Mistrust! (*rises*) Not on my part.

HARRING. I hoped that matters had reached that point

when my opinion would weigh with you. I fear I have been too hasty.

MISS H. If you think so, there is no step taken that cannot be retraced. (*music—waltz.*)

HARRING. You need not remind me of that. (*aside*) Is she trying me—or is she really as calculating as she seems?

MISS H. I see my partner for number three in search of me. (*LAXTON appears from r. arch, she goes towards him, takes his arm, they go off.*)

HARRING. Have I been blind all this time, or am I dreaming now? Is this cold bargainer for her rights the girl I have loved so truly!

Enter MRS. VERNON, R. U. E.

MRS. V. Ah, Mr. Harrington, Cecilia is sighing for her partner—poor dear, she is so impulsive—what a contrast to Miss Hargreave! Now that is a woman of business in the best sense of the word.

HARRING. Is there a good sense of the word as applied to women?

MRS. V. What? You don't think so? *Entre nous*, no more do I—but I thought in your relations with Miss Hargreave I mustn't breathe anything of the kind.

HARRING. There is nothing in my relations with Miss Hargreave to require you to modify your opinions, Mrs. Vernon.

MRS. V. Ah, how misinformed I've been—I thought it was all settled—but as it isn't I can only say I'm glad of it. A character such as yours would never have done with a cold, calculating, ambitious nature like hers. An old woman may be excused for saying that you are a prize worth any girl's ambition, especially a girl who has a keen eye for money.

HARRING. Mrs. Vernon, though I have no right to defend Miss Hargreave, still such an imputation —

MRS. V. Oh dear, no imputation whatever—but one must draw one's inferences you know. Shall we look for Cecilia? Ah, there is a child of nature—I can hardly trust her to spend even her own allowance; such a dear,

generous, simple girl ; you would like her I'm sure if you knew her—but she's so retiring. *(exit, L. U. E.)*

Enter MISS HARGREAVE and FRANK MEIKLAM, R. U. E.
It is evident they are both excited—he piqued.

MISS H. Mr. Meiklam, I have only to repeat what I have said already—I will not listen to another word on the subject.

FRANK. Two negatives are equivalent to an affirmative, you know—you've said "no" twice, mayn't I construe it into "yes?"

MISS H. This becomes very like a persecution, sir.

FRANK. Forgive me, it is my love makes me so urgent—I tell you again, I have—at least, I shall have—your sister's and brother's sanction.

MISS H. And even if you had their sanction, sir—but you must excuse me if I still think this impossible.

FRANK. Will you believe it if you hear it from their own mouths—then stay here till I can bring them to you. *(exit, R. U. E.)*

MISS H. This assurance is intolerable ; I only disliked him till to-night, now I hate him. There's George with Mrs. Vernon, I shall fare hardly between them, I'm afraid, now—there was a time when he would have defended me against the claws she carries under her velvet.

Enter MRS. MARKLAND, R.

MRS. M. So sad, Belle—and yet Harrington has just left you ? Ah, this is what I feared—the shadow of my secret is upon you already.

MISS H. Yes.

MRS. M. And not even his attentions can lighten it. (*MISS HARGREAVE turns away to conceal her distress*) Is it not terrible to have any concealment from those you love ? Now you know what I have been suffering.

MISS H. Yes, I think I do, and worse perhaps.

MRS. M. Oh, I pray not.

MISS H. Florry, in future you must not couple Harrington's name with mine as you did just now.

MRS. M. What do you mean? He loves you, you know he loves you, he has told me so.

MISS H. Not now—he has found that we do not understand each other on a very serious subject—money. He thinks me mercenary—let him think so, I will not stoop to justify myself—I see him coming this way, I cannot meet him.

(exit, R.)

MRS. M. But I must! Think her mercenary! The man who thinks that must answer his belief to me. How miserable he looks. Oh, is my happiness to be like the poison tree—blighting all that comes under its shadow!

Enter HARRINGTON, L.

HARRING. (*aside*) Her sister—I can trust her. (*to Mrs. MARKLAND*) I have much to say to you—it concerns your sister's happiness as well as my own.

MARKLAND appears with GUESTS, R.

MRS. M. Here comes my husband—let us stand up in this quadrille, we can talk then without being noticed.

(*exeunt* L., taking HARRINGTON's arm—as they go off, MARKLAND comes down, R., meeting FRANK, who comes down L.)

FRANK. A most successful ball; I've been at a great many brilliant things this season and I've seen nothing in better style—lots of flowers, plenty of light, and no end of pretty women.

MARK. Three of the four wheels a ball should run on, the fourth being plenty of white soup, very hot, and champagne, very cold—you'll find both in the supper-room.

FRANK. Thank you, I'm a dancing man.

MARK. Yonder are the dancing-rooms, don't let me detain you.

FRANK. You're very kind, but I wanted a few minutes conversation. Mr. Markland, you know all about me—

MARK. (*drily*) Yes!

FRANK. I'm not conceited, but I know I've a head on my shoulders—I've long admired Miss Hargrave, and

as I like doing things above board, I wish to ask your sanction of my addresses as her natural guardian.

MARK. I've heard you out, sir, by some effort of patience. But I find considerable difficulty in giving you an answer.

FRANK. Oh, take your time about it.

MARK. I'm afraid the more time I take about it, the more difficult the task will be. Are you aware, when you venture to make this proposal, that you only hold your place in the bank on sufferance—that had you been called to account as strictly as other clerks would have been, your irregularities might have had more serious consequences even than dismissal? Yet you, who I am astonished to see here, even as a guest —

FRANK. Here's your wife's invitation—(*shows note*)—"particularly requests"—the "particularly" underlined you see!

MARK. You dare ask me to sanction your addresses to my sister-in-law? I won't say "leave my house," but I should think you would hardly like to stay in it after what I have said to you.

FRANK. But you haven't answered my question. Will you sanction my addresses to Miss Hargreave—in two words?

MARK. In one word. No!

FRANK. Ah, I'm sorry for that; I'm quite aware the lady is her own mistress, but I understand she has determined not to marry without your approval. I don't intend to leave this house till I have it.

MARK. Sir!

FRANK. If your only objection is one of character, I don't think that ought to stand in the way between you and me.

MARK. What do you mean by this insolence?

FRANK. That if I have been looseish, you have been dishonest—that if I'm a bit of a rip, it rests with me to prove you a thief.

MARK. A thief!

FRANK. Yes, keeping fraudulent books may be simple robbery, but appropriating securities is decidedly thieving, and punishable by statute with transportation.

MARK. (*alarmed*) Hush, hush ! this is not a place—

FRANK. So I should have thought. But you began the game of disagreeable truths, and I'm only following suit. I heard every word that passed in the bank-parlour, this afternoon, between you and my venerable relative. I have but to speak to consign you to the infamy of the felon's dock—the felon's sentence—the felon's jacket.

MARK. And the price of your silence ?

FRANK. Is merely your sanction of my addresses to your sister-in-law, including, of course, the discountenancing of all rivals.

MARK. And do you think I will consent to this infamous bargain ?

FRANK. I think its about the best thing you can do. I'm very fond of her. I don't mind if half her fortune's settled on herself.

MARK. This is intolerable !

FRANK. Not so bad as the Old Bailey dock, and Pentonville to follow.

MARK. At least you will leave me some time for reflection.

FRANK. Oh, any time in reason ; but I should like an answer to-night. (*exit, L.*

MARK. Miserable man that I am ; his evidence would be my doom. But what proof is there that Meiklam has already appropriated these securities ? He promised only to resort to them, when all else failed. He may have found other resources. No, I will *not* believe it, without better proof than this villain's assertion.

Enter SCRATCHELL, L. U. E.

Well, Scratchell, I hope you are amused.

SCRATCH. A most magnificent entertainment, Mr. Markland, magnificent ! Quite dazzling—in fact, it has dazzled me. I ought to have given you this note of Mr. Meiklam's when I arrived, but really what with the rooms, and the lights, and the flowers, and the ladies—I've got a partner waiting for me now.

MARK. Don't disappoint her, pray. (*SCRATCHELL retires,*

c. *Opening note and reading)* "My dear young friend,"—*his* friend!—"Before you receive this, H's securities will be in the broker's hands. I really could not allow your scruples to imperil the existence of the firm at such a critical moment. Your affectionate old friend and partner, Ephraim Meiklam." No hope—no doubt the deed is done—I am a dishonoured man!

MRS. MARKLAND comes down from L. U. E.

MRS. M. Harry, I am so grieved; there has been a serious misunderstanding between Belle and Harrington.

MARK. Indeed—what about?

MRS. M. The root of all mischief—money. He has proposed to her.

MARK. Proposed to Belle! (*aside*) With my disgrace hanging over her head, poor girl—and this threat of Meiklam's!

MRS. M. You don't disapprove, I hope?

MARK. No, he is everything I could wish her husband, but just now there are reasons why I should wish him not to press his offer.

MRS. M. I saw Mr. Frank Meiklam with you just now. Has he anything to do with this hesitation—I know he is himself an admirer of Belle's.

MARK. He has asked me to sanction his addresses to her.

MRS. M. You have refused, of course?

MARK. No, not refused, exactly.

MRS. M. But not sanctioned, surely? Oh, Harry, consider—a man with his manners, habits, and character—

MARK. You cannot think worse of him than I do, but I can't quarrel with him at this moment; in fact, Florry, he is in possession of a secret which I dare not reveal even to you.

MRS. M. Suppose I know this terrible secret already?

MARK. Heaven forbid!

MRS. M. Do not say so. You do not know how strong I am—how much love can bear—how much love can comfort.

MARK. Do not keep me on the rack! Speak out. What do you know?

MRS. M. I was in your broker's office by accident this morning—the difficulties of the firm; it was terrible to know and not speak—but I felt it was for you to decide whether I might be trusted with such a secret.

MARK. (*aside, and turning up*) Thank heaven she knows of nothing worse than ruin.

Enter MRS. VERNON, two LADIES, and MISS HARGREAVE, L.

MRS. V. Mr. Markland, will you come and play showman to your beautiful pictures? We are a set of perfect ignoramuses, and beg to be enlightened.

MARK. That way, ladies; I am at your service. (*goes up and off with them, L.*)

MRS. M. (*beckons Miss Hargreave from the group, and comes down with her*) Belle, I have seen Harrington, he is wretched—I have promised him an explanation from you—you owe it to his deep affection for you to remove this impression.

MISS H. It is for him to own that he has misjudged me.

MRS. M. There is obstinacy in the pride that will not condescend to its own justification. For a miserable question of money would you risk the happiness of your life?

MISS H. What if the happiness of two lives should hang on this miserable question.

MRS. M. Belle, you amaze me, this persistence is unworthy of you—unbecoming—almost unwomanly.

MISS H. One cannot alter one's nature at one-and-twenty.

Enter HARRINGTON, L.—MRS. MARKLAND goes up.

HARRINGTON. Miss Hargreave, your sister insists upon it that I have misunderstood you—that an explanation—

MISS H. I am ready to hear it.

HARRINGTON. Pardon me I have nothing to explain.

MISS H. Nor have I.

HARRINGTON. I am sorry for it; I thought you had felt on reflection that the moment I was offering you my heart was ill-chosen for stipulations about money.

MISS H. I knew your prejudice against women who think of such things.

HARRING. Because when they do, in my eyes, they cease to be women. (*Mrs. MARKLAND comes forward, c.*

MRS. M. This is folly—Belle and you are playing with each other's hearts like children, at the risk of breaking them; I will not allow it. I know, Mr. Harrington, so far from being interested —

MISS H. Florry, I am here to speak and act for myself; Mr. Harrington has not misunderstood my anxiety to keep my fortune under my own control —

HARRING. (*to Mrs. MARKLAND*) And I was wrong to call her distrustful.

MISS H. But it is right he should know why I did so, because I had already found employment for my money—

HARRING. An admirable woman of business!

MISS H. Which I could not alter, and which I knew trustees under a marriage settlement would not approve.

HARRING. No doubt they object to speculative investments.

MRS. M. But, Belle, these are not considerations for such a moment.

MISS H. You must allow me to be the best judge of that.

HARRING. You hear! (*goes up, l. c.*)

MRS. M. Be warned in time, he is deeply wounded—for pity's sake do not trifle thus with his feelings.

MISS H. Trifle!

MRS. M. I cannot believe that you would seriously sacrifice his affection to your fortune.

MISS H. Harrington may misjudge me, but I should be safe from *your* reproaches, Florry. (*goes up.*)

MRS. M. Can she be indeed the selfish calculator, Harrington thinks? Oh, no! I cannot have been so mistaken in a sister.

Enter MARKLAND, l.

Harry, do you help me to bend her stubborn will.

FRANK appears watching, l. u. e.

MARK. What, still sulking? As if life had not solid

miseries enough, that we should create phantom ones—come, Harrington, Belle, this must not be. (*they come down in answer to his appeal.*)

FRANK. (*coming down, L.*) The very conjunction I was trying to bring about. (*HARRINGTON is about to retire with MISS HARGREAVE*) Pray stay, you are anything but *de trop*. (*to MARKLAND*) Will you satisfy Miss Hargreave I was not speaking without book when I said I had your sanction for my addresses to her.

MRS. M. His sanction?

MARK. I refuse it.

FRANK. Don't be too hasty. (*to MARKLAND*) Third parties present too. Hadn't you better re-consider your answer—I think you must have forgotten.

MARK. I have forgotten nothing: let them hear, I am sick of concealment: I have weighed the alternative—my misery against hers—I accept my own—and not only do I refuse my sanction, but I warn her —

FRANK. (*interrupting*) Stay, let me do the warning. (*to MRS. MARKLAND*) I warn you against your husband, (*to MISS HARGREAVE*) I warn you against your brother-in-law, as a breaker of his trust, a swindler, and a thief.

MRS. M. Liar! (*MARKLAND sinks in chair, r. c., and hides his face.*)

FRANK. Look at him!

HARRING. Coward! You shall answer this to me.

FRANK. When and where and as you please—(*significantly*) after I have given my evidence, You should thank me for bringing him to book—it is your securities they have appropriated, he and my worthy uncle together. (*to the LADIES*) But I ought to ask your pardon, such charges should be brought and proved elsewhere; I will save my proofs for the witness-box of the Old Bailey.

(*exit, L.*)

MISS H. Florry, what does this mean? your husband does not speak. Is it all a horrible dream?

MRS. M. (*sees GUESTS enter, r. and L.*) Hush, command yourself as I do. Mr. Harrington, not a word of this for mercy's sake. It is not true, of course—all can be explained, but this is no time—help me to conceal his

agitation from these people—make them begin the next dance at once. (*all the GUESTS are now well on*) Ah, Mr. Harrington, Belle has kept the next waltz open for you. (*HARRINGTON takes Miss HARGREAVE up, Mrs. MARKLAND occupies the attention of the GUESTS with forced gaiety*) Miss Vernon, here is Mr. Laxton longing for a *deux temps*; Mr. Scratchell, let me introduce you to a partner, I won't have you standing out. Mr. Fermor, you are bound to set an example to your juniors. (*finding him a partner.*)

FERMOR. (*to SCRATCHELL*) What a happy, bright creature it is!

(*GUESTS go off R. and L., with new partners.*)

MRS. M. Now we are alone. Husband, you heard what that man said?

MARK. I heard.

MRS. M. You did not give the lie to his atrocious words?

MARK. I shall have to bear their weight before the world.

MRS. M. What do you mean?

MARK. In the eyes of the world and of the law, I shall be held all he called me.

MRS. M. Oh, no, no!

MARK. I have been the tool of a villain. I must take the consequences. Yes, Florry, Markland, the fraudulent banker, the appropriator of his client's securities, will be the nine days wonder of the police reports, the mark of the finger of public scorn, the butt for the cruel pity, or contemptuous cynicism, for the very guests that crowd these rooms. Oh, where shall I find strength to face all this?

MRS. M. In the calm of your own conscience, in the faithfulness of my love.

MARK. Can you answer even for that?

MRS. M. Aye, if you can look me in the face, and with your hand in mine, thus, (*taking his hand*) say, "Wife, by the love between us, I am innocent."

MARK. And if I refused the test?

MRS. M. But you will not, I know you will not.

MARK. The wife who is to stand alone against the

world's judgment must seek strength to do so in her love alone, love that dispenses with assurance, asks not for proof, stays not to balance assertions or weigh probabilities, but says, "There is my husband, my place is at his side, in the dock, in the cell, aye, if need be, on the scaffold." Ask yourself, Florry, if your love be of that temper, and if it be—perhaps—for ever then, I know not—I may find in it a support against despair. (*exit, c.*

MRS. M. He will not give me the assurance I ask. He appeals to my love, my love alone, as if he could seek in that the stay his own conscience cannot give him. Can it be that he has trusted Meiklam so far that the step from embarrassment to crime became inevitable? Let me face the worst—were it even so, could I, in the face of the world's scorn, take his hand and say, "I will cling the closer, because all turn from you: now that respect and honour, and fair fame are gone, my love shall be to you all in all. Yes, if I know my own heart, I have the strength, and if the awful need come, I will prove it. Husband, dearest, I ask no test, I impose no condition—innocent or guilty, I am still your own. (*goes to door c., and knocks gently*) Harry, let me in, please—it is Florry, your own Florry. (*knocks louder*) I have asked myself that question, I bring you the answer. One word—one word, for pity's sake, speak to me. Still silent? I can bear this no longer. (*opens the door and finds the room empty*) Gone, the window open—what does this mean? Ah! the river! (*screams, and falls senseless—GUESTS waltz on.*)

ACT DROP.

A C T V.

SCENE.—*The River Terrace—moonlight—R., a balustrade terrace in the grounds, with steps leading to the Thames. In flat, the river, with the lights of the far off bridges, &c., twinkling in the distance, and nearer the house lighted*

up. On the r. shrubs and trees coming down upon the stage which is covered with green sward, except near the terrace, which has a pavement of encaustic tiles—stone seats along the terrace.

MARKLAND discovered seated, l. c.

MARK. Alone at last—face to face with my shame! Till to-day, honourable and happy—to-night so miserable—to-morrow, oh, what will to-morrow bring with it—detection, exposure, infamy—and my wife—ah, there is the intolerable burden, to blight this young life, which I have linked to my own, when I should have blessed it. To crush the trustful heart I have cherished till every pang I feel will strike through it like a knife. (*clock strikes twelve*) Midnight! so ends the day that dawned so brightly! Oh, what a morrow is opening for me, for her! Coward that I am to parley thus with my wretchedness, when a moment's resolution might end it. How calm the river looks in the moonlight—its dark, deep waters roll smoothly on, betraying no chafe of sand or shoal, burying all foulness under them, sweeping all waifs and strays alike to the unfathomable sea.

Enter MRS. MARKLAND, l. u. e., watching him.

Why should it not bury my shame with its other pollutions, and bear me down, a wreck of the great city, to the merciful waters of forgetfulness? (*as he approaches the steps, Mrs. MARKLAND, by a great effort, masters a scream and rapid movement towards him*) My death would cause her less misery than my life. Yes, my darling, there is love even in the act that separates us for ever.

MRS. M. (*coming forward with studied calmness*) Harry dear!

MARK. (*aside*) Too late! (*he turns*) Ah, Florry!

MRS. M. I discovered you had played truant—I'm so glad I've found you: you must not stay here by the river: the damps are dangerous: besides, you will be missed in the house. Come back with me.

MARK. Back to the mirth and music yonder? Florry, I cannot. The darkness and silence of the night cool my brain! Go you back and leave me here.

MRS. M. Is my place among that mirth and music
when you are in suffering and sorrow?

MARK. Never mind me; your absence will be observed
—go, it is my wish.

MRS. M. (*imploringly*) No, please.

MARK. (*more sternly*) Go, Florry, it is my *order*.

MRS. M. Dearest, you have not been used to speak so
to me. You are unhappy—my place is near you; you
dread the world's reproach, you must not doubt my
sympathy; you fear the desertion of your friends, then
double, triple, tenfold need of the presence of your wife.

MARK. Heaven bless you for this comfort!

MRS. M. You laid a burden on me when you left me: you bade me prove myself if I had strength to bear it—dearest, I have strength; I ask no question about your temptation or your fall—I only know that you are unhappy, and that I love you more, if that be possible, than I did before this cloud darkened our lives; there is only one thing I cannot bear, that you should not be strong enough to face the consequences of your act, be they what they may. Despair is cowardly. I could not bear to think my Harry a coward; despair is doubt of Heaven's mercy, and we know how great and free that is; despair shuts the door on repentance and makes reparation impossible, and our work henceforth must be to repent and to atone.

MARK. Oh, what is men's boasted strength to the calm
courage of a loving woman. Florry, you make a man of
me again. I will not crown the weakness of my sin by
the baser weakness, that to escape man's justice flies in
the face of Heaven.

MRS. M. That's like your own dear self—let the world
frown in condemnation or scorn, you can turn from it to
my face, and there you shall never read anything but
love.

MARK. Heaven forgive my desperate thoughts! I will
expiate my sin by endurance now, in hopes the day may
come when I shall expiate it by reparation.

Enter FRANK MEIKLAM and MISS HARGREAVE, L. U. E.

MRS. M. Belle with him!

FRANK. I guessed you had gone out to think over the situation—I have been thinking it over too : I have been too hasty.

MRS. M. I thought you could not be quite without mercy.

FRANK. You only did me justice. Mr. Markland, all that passed at the bank to-day remains a secret between us.

MARK. Is it possible ?

MRS. M. I dare scarce believe it, but if this be true, oh, how I will pray for you, and bless you.

FRANK. (*taking Miss Hargrave's hands*) A bride in hand is worth two blessings in the bush ! Don't thank me, thank your sister, Mrs. Frank Meiklam that is to be.

MRS. M. Belle !

MARK. You have consented to become his wife ?

FRANK. Why what do you suppose I had changed my mind for ? Yes, we have agreed to make each other happy. I ask no settlements, nor does she—there's only one condition, I'm to have a junior partnership.

MARK. If you join the firm, I leave it. (*to Miss Harrington*) I appreciate your generosity, but you shall not forfeit your life's happiness for me.

MISS H. Who talks of forfeiting happiness ? I have accepted Mr. Meiklam of my own free will.

MRS. M. Belle, this is mistaken self-devotion—for us, the bitterness of this hour over, we can face the worst together—but to know that your happiness, as well as my husband's good name were in his power —

MISS H. He commits himself by joining the firm.

MRS. M. To buy his silence by *your* misery.

MISS H. Misery, why we have so many tastes in common —

MARK. Belle, you amaze me.

MRS. M. Can it be my sister who talks thus ?

MISS H. Besides, he leaves me mistress of my fortune.

FRANK. Unrestrictedly. (*aside*) But no settlements.

MRS. M. Still thinking of money ?

FRANK. That's what I like in her, she's a thorough woman of business.

MARK. You promised not to marry without my sanction —I refuse it.

MISS H. It was an inconsiderate promise, and does not bind me in reason or in law.

MRS. M. Belle, for the love that was once between us —

MISS H. It is too late, I have made up my mind.

ROCKET. (*without, l.*) Hey, hallo! Mr. Markland! (*enters breathless, l. u. e.*) Ah, Mr. Markland, enjoying the delights of an *al fresco*? I should apologize for this rather abrupt intrusion on your fête—in the first place, without a card, in the second place, without a tail-coat; but I hope —

MARK. (*sternly*) Your business here, Mr. Rocket?

ROCKET. That's the tone I like: prompt, and to the point! I come as herald, harbinger, feathered Mercury, agent in advance—whatever you like that goes express pace, and brings good news —

MOLESWORTH. (*without, l.*) Rocket, hey! where are you? Do you want to break my neck?

ROCKET. There's Mr. Molesworth—not quite so fast as the Rocket. I'll throw a light on the situation. The man who meets me will always meet with his match. (*strikes match*) My new patent poluphloisboio-magnesium light, or every man his own moonshine. (*holding up match*) Signal hoisted, all right, line clear, move ahead gently, avoiding the ditches!

Enter MOLESWORTH and MEIKLAM followed by HARRINGTON, L. U. E.

MOLES. At last! (MEIKLAM bows to MR. and MRS. MARKLAND and sits on garden seat, l.) Markland, my dear Mrs. Markland, I wish you all many, many happy returns of the day.

MRS. M. You wished me that this morning. (*aside, and with a sigh*) Too soon!

MOLES. But not with half such reason. (*gives MARKLAND a paper*) Here are Harrington's securities. Luckily I had a duplicate key of the box—found it empty—started in chase, and, thanks principally to Mr. Rocket, here, rescued them just on the broker's threshold.

FRANK. (*aside*) Beaten on all my line.

MARK. At least I shall be spared the infamy of a criminal charge! But ruin is still imminent.

MEIK. Yes, this very hasty act of Mr. Molesworth's will bring down Laxton and Fermor by the run, and we shall be involved in the crash.

MISS H. No, I must tell you now. They hold my note of hand for your debt. (FRANK whistles)

MARK. Yours! How did you know?

MRS. M. I told her. Then when you left us at the Bank —

MISS H. The transfer department was closed, so I gave my note of hand and the Stock is to be transferred to-morrow.

FRANK. Stop, stop, Miss Hargreave, we did agree there were to be no settlements, but it seems you had nothing substantial to settle.

MISS H. And you nothing substantial to disclose. There has been a failure of consideration on both sides. As a woman of business, I fancy that annuls the contract.

MRS. M. Her fortune first and herself afterwards. And this is the heart we dared suspect. Bless you, Belle. But why did you not tell me what you contemplated?

MISS H. Because I knew that neither he nor you would have consented to what you were sure to call a sacrifice, but what I, as a woman of business, knew was a capital investment. I shall get five per cent. for my money, they only give me three and a half in the funds, you know.

HARRING. And you can forgive my hastiness, my distrust?

MISS H. If you can forgive my knowing at least this much about money, that it is never so well ventured as in aid of those we love.

MARK. But this is too desperate a venture. I cannot avail myself of it.

ROCKET. My dear sir, you are not so elastic as your own resources. To-night's mail has brought a large

remittance on account of Wildman and Waters, and prospect of more.

MARK. Then there is still hope; but what further confidence can there be between me and this man?

MEIK. (*groans*) Ah, if there had been but more confidence ere this!

MOLES. I'm afraid the house of Markland and Meiklam must disappear from the banker's list.

MEIK. So old established a firm, and so respectable!

MOLES. Now that *you* have consented to withdraw from it.

MEIK. Yes, I am prepared to sacrifice my prospects.

MOLES. Including the Old Bailey dock. Of course you will take with you your precious nephew here?

FRANK. Thank you; I'm perfectly ready to retire from the bank; but I distinctly decline anything like solicitude with my venerable uncle. (*turns on his heel*.)

MEIK. Unhappy boy! Now he is left to himself, what will become of him?

ROCKET. I have written off my debt now, Mr. Meiklam. I'd not have anything to say to you, sir, (*with withering contempt*) not even as a director!

(MRS. MARKLAND comes forward with Miss H. and HARRINGTON.)

MISS H. You'll still take my money. Harry, will you not?

MARK. (*to Molesworth*) Ah, Molesworth, what a lesson in self-sacrifice this noble girl has read us all.

MISS H. Sacrifice! Mr. Molesworth knows a great deal better than that.

MOLES. I know if I could slip thirty years off my back, and Mrs. Molesworth—

HARRING. Hold hard, sir. I think you'd better not go any further. You hear, sir—Belle still presses her offer.

MARK. You do not suppose I can accept it?

HARRING. Perhaps you'll be kinder to me, though I've two requests to make. First, this dear girl's hand—and then a partnership. I shall be sure to make ducks and drakes of my money, if its left in my own hands.

MISS H. You forget, sir, you will have me to look after it—there'll be one at least in the firm who will be wide awake.

MOLES. With good handling the house will right itself yet. Its not Markland and Meiklam now.

MEIK. Mr. Molesworth, I'm a worm. I'm aware I'm a worm, and I hope I feel as a worm should; but even the worm will turn, Mr. Molesworth.

MOLES. Turn, by all means—towards the entrance-gate yonder, but don't forget your undertaking goes beyond retirement from the firm. He has bound himself to leave this country.

MEIK. Yes, thank Heaven, in the new world there is an opening for piety and principle.

ROCKET. Oh, you're too smart for the Yankees.

MEIK. There's Australia.

ROCKET. What a comfort to think you'll have to pay your own passage money. But wherever he goes, I wish the land of his adoption joy of him.

MEIK. Some men might call this ruin, but I have faith—and these are the moments when faith sustains one. My faith teaches me to forgive you—yes, I forgive all!

(exit, L. 2 E.

ROCKET. (to FRANK) My young friend, don't you think you'd better get up a cab for your venerable uncle?

FRANK. Eh? ah! no! I don't see it. (going) Good night, Markland. Tata, ladies; good night!

(lights cigar, and exit jauntily, L. U. E.

MARK. With Harrington's capital in the business, this contract debt lightened, and dishonour averted, there is hope before me still. Oh, how I will toil to make it good. I know my weakness now; I will use the knowledge when the tempter suggests the first step, though it be but a hair's breadth, from the straight way of truth and honour.

MRS. M. Amen, my dearest; chastened by this suffering, and strong in this resolve, we may look forward—
(to AUDIENCE) Oh, say we may look forward without fear—even to the award on "SETTLING DAY."

Scene picture, and a broad blue curtain, with a large plume of feathers, are drawn across the stage.

CURTAIN.