ORLEY FARM

by

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[Illustration: ORLEY FARM. (Frontispiece)]

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VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE GREAT ORLEY FARM CASE.

It is not true that a rose by any other name will smell as sweet.

Were it true, I should call this story "The Great Orley Farm Case."

But who would ask for the ninth number of a serial work burthened

with so very uncouth an appellation? Thence, and therefore,--Orley

Farm.

I say so much at commencing in order that I may have an opportunity

of explaining that this book of mine will not be devoted in any

special way to rural delights. The name might lead to the idea that

new precepts were to be given, in the pleasant guise of a novel, as

to cream-cheeses, pigs with small bones, wheat sown in drills, or

artificial manure. No such aspirations are mine. I make no attempts

in that line, and declare at once that agriculturists will gain

nothing from my present performance. Orley Farm, my readers, will be

our scene during a portion of our present sojourn together, but the

name has been chosen as having been intimately connected with certain

legal questions which made a considerable stir in our courts of law.

It was twenty years before the date at which this story will be

supposed to commence that the name of Orley Farm first became known

to the wearers of the long robe. At that time had died an old

gentleman, Sir Joseph Mason, who left behind him a landed estate in

Yorkshire of considerable extent and value. This he bequeathed, in a

proper way, to his eldest son, the Joseph Mason, Esq., of our date.

Sir Joseph had been a London merchant; had made his own money, having

commenced the world, no doubt, with half a crown; had become, in

turn, alderman, mayor, and knight; and in the fulness of time was

gathered to his fathers. He had purchased this estate in Yorkshire

late in life--we may as well become acquainted with the name, Groby

Park--and his eldest son had lived there with such enjoyment of the

privileges of an English country gentleman as he had been able to

master for himself. Sir Joseph had also had three daughters, full

sisters of Joseph of Groby, whom he endowed sufficiently and gave

over to three respective loving husbands. And then shortly before his

death, three years or so, Sir Joseph had married a second wife, a

lady forty-five years his junior, and by her he also left one son, an

infant only two years old when he died.

For many years this prosperous gentleman had lived at a small country

house, some five-and-twenty miles from London, called Orley Farm.

This had been his first purchase of land, and he had never given up

his residence there, although his wealth would have entitled him to

the enjoyment of a larger establishment. On the birth of his youngest

son, at which time his eldest was nearly forty years old, he made

certain moderate provision for the infant, as he had already made

moderate provision for his young wife; but it was then clearly

understood by the eldest son that Orley Farm was to go with the Groby

Park estate to him as the heir. When, however, Sir Joseph died, a

codicil to his will, executed with due legal formalities, bequeathed

Orley Farm to his youngest son, little Lucius Mason.

Then commenced those legal proceedings which at last developed

themselves into the great Orley Farm Case. The eldest son contested

the validity of the codicil; and indeed there were some grounds

on which it appeared feasible that he should do so. This codicil

not only left Orley Farm away from him to baby Lucius, but also

interfered in another respect with the previous will. It devised a

sum of two thousand pounds to a certain Miriam Usbech, the daughter

of one Jonathan Usbech who was himself the attorney who had attended

upon Sir Joseph for the making out of this very will, and also of

this very codicil. This sum of two thousand pounds was not, it is

true, left away from the surviving Joseph, but was to be produced out

of certain personal property which had been left by the first will to

the widow. And then old Jonathan Usbech had died, while Sir Joseph

Mason was still living.

All the circumstances of the trial need not be detailed here. It was

clearly proved that Sir Joseph had during his whole life expressed

his intention of leaving Orley Farm to his eldest son; that he was a

man void of mystery, and not given to secrets in his money matters,

and one very little likely to change his opinion on such subjects. It

was proved that old Jonathan Usbech at the time in which the will was

made was in very bad circumstances, both as regards money and health.

His business had once not been bad, but he had eaten and drunk it,

and at this period was feeble and penniless, overwhelmed both by gout

and debt. He had for many years been much employed by Sir Joseph in

money matters, and it was known that he was so employed almost up to

the day of his death. The question was whether he had been employed

to make this codicil.

The body of the will was in the handwriting of the widow, as was also

the codicil. It was stated by her at the trial that the words were

dictated to her by Usbech in her husband's hearing, and that the

document was then signed by her husband in the presence of them both,

and also in the presence of two other persons--a young man employed

by her husband as a clerk, and by a servant-maid. These two last,

together with Mr. Usbech, were the three witnesses whose names

appeared in the codicil. There had been no secrets between Lady Mason

and her husband as to his will. She had always, she said, endeavoured

to induce him to leave Orley Farm to her child from the day of the

child's birth, and had at last succeeded. In agreeing to this Sir

Joseph had explained to her, somewhat angrily, that he wished to

provide for Usbech's daughter, and that now he would do so out of

moneys previously intended for her, the widow, and not out of the

estate which would go to his eldest son. To this she had assented

without a word, and had written the codicil in accordance with the

lawyer's dictation, he, the lawyer, suffering at the time from gout

in his hand. Among other things Lady Mason proved that on the date of

the signatures Mr. Usbech had been with Sir Joseph for sundry hours.

Then the young clerk was examined. He had, he said, witnessed in

his time four, ten, twenty, and, under pressure, he confessed to

as many as a hundred and twenty business signatures on the part of

his employer, Sir Joseph. He thought he had witnessed a hundred

and twenty, but would take his oath he had not witnessed a hundred

and twenty-one. He did remember witnessing a signature of his

master about the time specified by the date of the codicil, and he

remembered the maid-servant also signing at the same time. Mr. Usbech

was then present; but he did not remember Mr. Usbech having the

pen in his hand. Mr. Usbech, he knew, could not write at that time,

because of the gout; but he might, no doubt, have written as much

as his own name. He swore to both the signatures--his own and his

master's; and in cross-examination swore that he thought it probable

that they might be forgeries. On re-examination he was confident that

his own name, as there appearing, had been written by himself; but

on re-cross-examination, he felt sure that there was something wrong.

It ended in the judge informing him that his word was worth nothing,

which was hard enough on the poor young man, seeing that he had done

his best to tell all that he remembered. Then the servant-girl came

into the witness-box. She was sure it was her own handwriting. She

remembered being called in to write her name, and seeing the master

write his. It had all been explained to her at the time, but she

admitted that she had not understood the explanation. She had also

seen the clerk write his name, but she was not sure that she had seen

Mr. Usbech write. Mr. Usbech had had a pen in his hand; she was sure

of that.

The last witness was Miriam Usbech, then a very pretty, simple girl

of seventeen. Her father had told her once that he hoped Sir Joseph

would make provision for her. This had been shortly before her

father's death. At her father's death she had been sent for to Orley

Farm, and had remained there till Sir Joseph died. She had always

regarded Sir Joseph and Lady Mason as her best friends. She had known

Sir Joseph all her life, and did not think it unnatural that he

should provide for her. She had heard her father say more than once

that Lady Mason would never rest till the old gentleman had settled

Orley Farm upon her son.

Not half the evidence taken has been given here, but enough probably

for our purposes. The will and codicil were confirmed, and Lady Mason

continued to live at the farm. Her evidence was supposed to have been

excellently given, and to have been conclusive. She had seen the

signature, and written the codicil, and could explain the motive. She

was a woman of high character, of great talent, and of repute in the

neighbourhood; and, as the judge remarked, there could be no possible

reason for doubting her word. Nothing also could be simpler or

prettier than the evidence of Miriam Usbech, as to whose fate and

destiny people at the time expressed much sympathy. That stupid young

clerk was responsible for the only weak part of the matter; but if

he proved nothing on one side, neither did he prove anything on the

other.

This was the commencement of the great Orley Farm Case, and having

been then decided in favour of the infant it was allowed to slumber

for nearly twenty years. The codicil was confirmed, and Lady Mason

remained undisturbed in possession of the house, acting as guardian

for her child till he came of age, and indeed for some time beyond

that epoch. In the course of a page or two I shall beg my readers to

allow me to introduce this lady to their acquaintance.

Miriam Usbech, of whom also we shall see something, remained at the

farm under Lady Mason's care till she married a young attorney, who

in process of time succeeded to such business as her father left

behind him. She suffered some troubles in life before she settled

down in the neighbouring country town as Mrs. Dockwrath, for she had

had another lover, the stupid young clerk who had so villainously

broken down in his evidence; and to this other lover, whom she had

been unable to bring herself to accept, Lady Mason had given her

favour and assistance. Poor Miriam was at that time a soft, mild-eyed

girl, easy to be led, one would have said; but in this matter Lady

Mason could not lead her. It was in vain to tell her that the

character of young Dockwrath did not stand high, and that young

Kenneby, the clerk, should be promoted to all manner of good things.

Soft and mild-eyed as Miriam was, Love was still the lord of all. In

this matter she would not be persuaded; and eventually she gave her

two thousand pounds to Samuel Dockwrath, the young attorney with the

questionable character.

This led to no breach between her and her patroness. Lady Mason,

wishing to do the best for her young friend, had favoured John

Kenneby, but she was not a woman at all likely to quarrel on such a

ground as this. "Well, Miriam," she had said, "you must judge for

yourself, of course, in such a matter as this. You know my regard for

you."

"Oh yes, ma'am," said Miriam, eagerly.

"And I shall always be glad to promote your welfare as Mrs.

Dockwrath, if possible. I can only say that I should have had more

satisfaction in attempting to do so for you as Mrs. Kenneby." But,

in spite of the seeming coldness of these words, Lady Mason had

been constant to her friend for many years, and had attended to her

with more or less active kindness in all the sorrows arising from

an annual baby and two sets of twins--a progeny which before the

commencement of my tale reached the serious number of sixteen, all

living.

Among other solid benefits conferred by Lady Mason had been the

letting to Mr. Dockwrath of certain two fields, lying at the

extremity of the farm property, and quite adjacent to the town of

Hamworth in which old Mr. Usbech had resided. These had been let by

the year, at a rent not considered to be too high at that period, and

which had certainly become much lower in proportion to the value of

the land, as the town of Hamworth had increased. On these fields Mr.

Dockwrath expended some money, though probably not so much as he

averred; and when noticed to give them up at the period of young

Mason's coming of age, expressed himself terribly aggrieved.

"Surely, Mr. Dockwrath, you are very ungrateful," Lady Mason had said

to him. But he had answered her with disrespectful words; and hence

had arisen an actual breach between her and poor Miriam's husband. "I

must say, Miriam, that Mr. Dockwrath is unreasonable," Lady Mason had

said. And what could a poor wife answer? "Oh! Lady Mason, pray let

it bide a time till it all comes right." But it never did come right;

and the affair of those two fields created the great Orley Farm Case,

which it will be our business to unravel.

And now a word or two as to this Orley Farm. In the first place let

it be understood that the estate consisted of two farms. One, called

the Old Farm, was let to an old farmer named Greenwood, and had been

let to him and to his father for many years antecedent to the days

of the Masons. Mr. Greenwood held about three hundred acres of land,

paying with admirable punctuality over four hundred a year in rent,

and was regarded by all the Orley people as an institution on the

property. Then there was the farm-house and the land attached to it.

This was the residence in which Sir Joseph had lived, keeping in

his own hands this portion of the property. When first inhabited by

him the house was not fitted for more than the requirements of an

ordinary farmer, but he had gradually added to it and ornamented

it till it was commodious, irregular, picturesque, and straggling.

When he died, and during the occupation of his widow, it consisted

of three buildings of various heights, attached to each other,

and standing in a row. The lower contained a large kitchen, which

had been the living-room of the farm-house, and was surrounded

by bake-house, laundry, dairy, and servants' room, all of fair

dimensions. It was two stories high, but the rooms were low, and the

roof steep and covered with tiles. The next portion had been added by

Sir Joseph, then Mr. Mason, when he first thought of living at the

place. This also was tiled, and the rooms were nearly as low; but

there were three stories, and the building therefore was considerably

higher. For five-and-twenty years the farm-house, so arranged, had

sufficed for the common wants of Sir Joseph and his family; but when

he determined to give up his establishment in the City, he added on

another step to the house at Orley Farm. On this occasion he built

a good dining-room, with a drawing-room over it, and bed-room over

that; and this portion of the edifice was slated.

The whole stood in one line fronting on to a large lawn which fell

steeply away from the house into an orchard at the bottom. This

lawn was cut in terraces, and here and there upon it there stood

apple-trees of ancient growth; for here had been the garden of the

old farm-house. They were large, straggling trees, such as do not

delight the eyes of modern gardeners; but they produced fruit by the

bushel, very sweet to the palate, though probably not so perfectly

round, and large, and handsome as those which the horticultural skill

of the present day requires. The face of the house from one end to

the other was covered with vines and passion-flowers, for the aspect

was due south; and as the whole of the later addition was faced by

a verandah, which also, as regarded the ground-floor, ran along the

middle building, the place in summer was pretty enough. As I have

said before, it was irregular and straggling, but at the same time

roomy and picturesque. Such was Orley Farm-house.

There were about two hundred acres of land attached to it, together

with a large old-fashioned farm-yard, standing not so far from the

house as most gentlemen farmers might perhaps desire. The farm

buildings, however, were well hidden, for Sir Joseph, though he would

at no time go to the expense of constructing all anew, had spent more

money than such a proceeding would have cost him doctoring existing

evils and ornamenting the standing edifices. In doing this he had

extended the walls of a brewhouse, and covered them with creepers, so

as to shut out from the hall door the approach to the farm-yard, and

had put up a quarter of a mile of high ornamental paling for the same

purpose. He had planted an extensive shrubbery along the brow of the

hill at one side of the house, had built summer-houses, and sunk a

ha-ha fence below the orchard, and had contrived to give to the place

the unmistakable appearance of an English gentleman's country-house.

Nevertheless, Sir Joseph had never bestowed upon his estate, nor had

it ever deserved, a more grandiloquent name than that which it had

possessed of old.

Orley Farm-house itself is somewhat more than a mile distant from

the town of Hamworth, but the land runs in the direction of the

town, not skirting the high road, but stretching behind the cottages

which stand along the pathway; and it terminates in those two fields

respecting which Mr. Dockwrath the attorney became so irrationally

angry at the period of which we are now immediately about to treat.

These fields lie on the steep slope of Hamworth Hill, and through

them runs the public path from the hamlet of Roxeth up to Hamworth

church; for, as all the world knows, Hamworth church stands high, and

is a landmark to the world for miles and miles around.

Within a circuit of thirty miles from London no land lies more

beautifully circumstanced with regard to scenery than the country

about Hamworth; and its most perfect loveliness commences just

beyond the slopes of Orley Farm. There is a little village called

Coldharbour, consisting of some half-dozen cottages, situated

immediately outside Lady Mason's gate,--and it may as well be stated

here that this gate is but three hundred yards from the house, and is

guarded by no lodge. This village stands at the foot of Cleeve Hill.

The land hereabouts ceases to be fertile, and breaks away into heath

and common ground. Round the foot of the hill there are extensive

woods, all of which belong to Sir Peregrine Orme, the lord of the

manor. Sir Peregrine is not a rich man, not rich, that is, it being

borne in mind that he is a baronet, that he represented his county in

parliament for three or four sessions, and that his ancestors have

owned The Cleeve estate for the last four hundred years; but he is by

general repute the greatest man in these parts. We may expect to hear

more of him also as the story makes its way.

I know many spots in England and in other lands, world-famous in

regard to scenery, which to my eyes are hardly equal to Cleeve Hill.

From the top of it you are told that you may see into seven counties;

but to me that privilege never possessed any value. I should not

care to see into seventeen counties, unless the country which spread

itself before my view was fair and lovely. The country which is so

seen from Cleeve Hill is exquisitely fair and lovely;--very fair,

with glorious fields of unsurpassed fertility, and lovely with oak

woods and brown open heaths which stretch away, hill after hill, down

towards the southern coast. I could greedily fill a long chapter with

the well-loved glories of Cleeve Hill; but it may be that we must

press its heather with our feet more than once in the course of our

present task, and if so, it will be well to leave something for those

coming visits.

"Ungrateful! I'll let her know whether I owe her any gratitude.

Haven't I paid her her rent every half-year as it came due? what more

would she have? Ungrateful, indeed! She is one of those women who

think that you ought to go down on your knees to them if they only

speak civilly to you. I'll let her know whether I'm ungrateful."

These words were spoken by angry Mr. Samuel Dockwrath to his wife, as

he stood up before his parlour-fire after breakfast, and the woman to

whom he referred was Lady Mason. Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was very angry

as he so spoke, or at any rate he seemed to be so. There are men who

take a delight in abusing those special friends whom their wives

best love, and Mr. Dockwrath was one of these. He had never given

his cordial consent to the intercourse which had hitherto existed

between the lady of Orley Farm and his household, although he had not

declined the substantial benefits which had accompanied it. His pride

had rebelled against the feeling of patronage, though his interest

had submitted to the advantages thence derived. A family of sixteen

children is a heavy burden for a country attorney with a small

practice, even though his wife may have had a fortune of two thousand

pounds; and thus Mr. Dockwrath, though he had never himself loved

Lady Mason, had permitted his wife to accept all those numberless

kindnesses which a lady with comfortable means and no children is

always able to bestow on a favoured neighbour who has few means and

many children. Indeed, he himself had accepted a great favour with

reference to the holding of those two fields, and had acknowledged as

much when first he took them into his hands some sixteen or seventeen

years back. But all that was forgotten now; and having held them for

so long a period, he bitterly felt the loss, and resolved that it

would ill become him as a man and an attorney to allow so deep an

injury to pass unnoticed. It may be, moreover, that Mr. Dockwrath was

now doing somewhat better in the world than formerly, and that he

could afford to give up Lady Mason, and to demand also that his wife

should give her up. Those trumpery presents from Orley Farm were very

well while he was struggling for bare bread, but now, now that he had

turned the corner,--now that by his divine art and mystery of law

he had managed to become master of that beautiful result of British

perseverance, a balance at his banker's, he could afford to indulge

his natural antipathy to a lady who had endeavoured in early life

to divert from him the little fortune which had started him in the

world.

Miriam Dockwrath, as she sat on this morning, listening to her

husband's anger, with a sick little girl on her knee, and four or

five others clustering round her, half covered with their matutinal

bread and milk, was mild-eyed and soft as ever. Hers was a nature in

which softness would ever prevail;--softness, and that tenderness of

heart, always leaning, and sometimes almost crouching, of which a

mild eye is the outward sign. But her comeliness and prettiness were

gone. Female beauty of the sterner, grander sort may support the

burden of sixteen children, all living,--and still survive. I have

known it to do so, and to survive with much of its youthful glory.

But that mild-eyed, soft, round, plumpy prettiness gives way beneath

such a weight as that: years alone tell on it quickly; but children

and limited means combined with years leave to it hardly a chance.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said the poor woman, worn with her many

cares.

"Sorry; yes, and I'll make her sorry, the proud minx. There's an old

saying, that those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."

"But, Samuel, I don't think she means to be doing you any harm. You

know she always did say-- Don't, Bessy; how can you put your fingers

into the basin in that way?"

"Sam has taken my spoon away, mamma."

"I'll let her know whether she's doing any harm or no. And what

signifies what was said sixteen years ago? Has she anything to show

in writing? As far as I know, nothing of the kind was said."

"Oh, I remember it, Samuel; I do indeed!"

"Let me tell you then that you had better not try to remember

anything about it. If you ain't quiet, Bob, I'll make you, pretty

quick; d'ye hear that? The fact is, your memory is not worth a curse.

Where are you to get milk for all those children, do you think, when

the fields are gone?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, Samuel."

"Sorry; yes, and somebody else shall be sorry too. And look here,

Miriam, I won't have you going up to Orley Farm on any pretence

whatever; do you hear that?" and then, having given that imperative

command to his wife and slave, the lord and master of that

establishment walked forth into his office.

On the whole Miriam Usbech might have done better had she followed

the advice of her patroness in early life, and married the stupid

clerk.

CHAPTER II.

LADY MASON AND HER SON.

I trust that it is already perceived by all persistent novel readers

that very much of the interest of this tale will be centred in the

person of Lady Mason. Such educated persons, however, will probably

be aware that she is not intended to be the heroine. The heroine, so

called, must by a certain fixed law be young and marriageable. Some

such heroine in some future number shall be forthcoming, with as

much of the heroic about her as may be found convenient; but for the

present let it be understood that the person and character of Lady

Mason is as important to us as can be those of any young lady, let

her be ever so gracious or ever so beautiful.

In giving the details of her history, I do not know that I need go

back beyond her grandfather and grandmother, who were thoroughly

respectable people in the hardware line; I speak of those relatives

by the father's side. Her own parents had risen in the world,--had

risen from retail to wholesale, and considered themselves for a

long period of years to be good representatives of the commercial

energy and prosperity of Great Britain. But a fall had come upon

them,--as a fall does come very often to our excellent commercial

representatives--and Mr. Johnson was in the "Gazette." It would be

long to tell how old Sir Joseph Mason was concerned in these affairs,

how he acted as the principal assignee, and how ultimately he took

to his bosom as his portion of the assets of the estate, young Mary

Johnson, and made her his wife and mistress of Orley Farm. Of the

family of the Johnsons there were but three others, the father, the

mother, and a brother. The father did not survive the disgrace of his

bankruptcy, and the mother in process of time settled herself with

her son in one of the Lancashire manufacturing towns, where John

Johnson raised his head in business to some moderate altitude, Sir

Joseph having afforded much valuable assistance. There for the

present we will leave them.

I do not think that Sir Joseph ever repented of the perilous deed he

did in marrying that young wife. His home for many years had been

desolate and solitary; his children had gone from him, and did not

come to visit him very frequently in his poor home at the farm. They

had become grander people than him, had been gifted with aspiring

minds, and in every turn and twist which they took, looked to do

something towards washing themselves clean from the dirt of the

counting-house. This was specially the case with Sir Joseph's son, to

whom the father had made over lands and money sufficient to enable

him to come before the world as a country gentleman with a coat of

arms on his coach-panel. It would be inconvenient for us to run off

to Groby Park at the present moment, and I will therefore say no more

just now as to Joseph junior, but will explain that Joseph senior was

not made angry by this neglect. He was a grave, quiet, rational man,

not however devoid of some folly; as indeed what rational man is so

devoid? He was burdened with an ambition to establish a family as the

result of his success in life; and having put forth his son into the

world with these views, was content that that son should act upon

them persistently. Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park, in Yorkshire,

was now a county magistrate, and had made some way towards a footing

in the county society around him. With these hopes, and ambition such

as this, it was probably not expedient that he should spend much of

his time at Orley Farm. The three daughters were circumstanced much

in the same way: they had all married gentlemen, and were bent on

rising in the world; moreover, the steadfast resolution of purpose

which characterised their father was known by them all,--and by

their husbands: they had received their fortunes, with some settled

contingencies to be forthcoming on their father's demise; why, then,

trouble the old gentleman at Orley Farm?

Under such circumstances the old gentleman married his young

wife,--to the great disgust of his four children. They of course

declared to each other, corresponding among themselves by letter,

that the old gentleman had positively disgraced himself. It was

impossible that they should make any visits whatever to Orley Farm

while such a mistress of the house was there;--and the daughters did

make no such visits. Joseph, the son, whose monetary connection with

his father was as yet by no means fixed and settled in its nature,

did make one such visit, and then received his father's assurance--so

at least he afterwards said and swore--that this marriage should by

no means interfere with the expected inheritance of the Orley Farm

acres. But at that time no young son had been born,--nor, probably,

was any such young son expected.

The farm-house became a much brighter abode for the old man, for the

few years which were left to him, after he had brought his young

wife home. She was quiet, sensible, clever, and unremitting in her

attention. She burthened him with no requests for gay society, and

took his home as she found it, making the best of it for herself, and

making it for him much better than he had ever hitherto known it. His

own children had always looked down upon him, regarding him merely

as a coffer from whence money might be had; and he, though he had

never resented this contempt, had in a certain measure been aware of

it. But there was no such feeling shown by his wife. She took the

benefits which he gave her graciously and thankfully, and gave back

to him in return, certainly her care and time, and apparently her

love. For herself, in the way of wealth and money, she never asked

for anything.

And then the baby had come, young Lucius Mason, and there was of

course great joy at Orley Farm. The old father felt that the world

had begun again for him, very delightfully, and was more than ever

satisfied with his wisdom in regard to that marriage. But the very

genteel progeny of his early youth were more than ever dissatisfied,

and in their letters among themselves dealt forth harder and still

harder words upon poor Sir Joseph. What terrible things might he not

be expected to do now that his dotage was coming on? Those three

married ladies had no selfish fears--so at least they declared, but

they united in imploring their brother to look after his interests at

Orley Farm. How dreadfully would the young heir of Groby be curtailed

in his dignities and seignories if it should be found at the last day

that Orley Farm was not to be written in his rent-roll!

And then, while they were yet bethinking themselves how they might

best bestir themselves, news arrived that Sir Joseph had suddenly

died. Sir Joseph was dead, and the will when read contained a codicil

by which that young brat was made the heir to the Orley Farm estate.

I have said that Lady Mason during her married life had never asked

of her husband anything for herself; but in the law proceedings which

were consequent upon Sir Joseph's death, it became abundantly evident

that she had asked him for much for her son,--and that she had been

specific in her requests, urging him to make a second heir, and to

settle Orley Farm upon her own boy, Lucius. She herself stated that

she had never done this except in the presence of a third person. She

had often done so in the presence of Mr. Usbech the attorney,--as to

which Mr. Usbech was not alive to testify; and she had also done so

more than once in the presence of Mr. Furnival, a barrister,--as to

which Mr. Furnival, being alive, did testify--very strongly.

As to that contest nothing further need now be said. It resulted in

the favour of young Lucius Mason, and therefore, also, in the favour

of the widow;--in the favour moreover of Miriam Usbech, and thus

ultimately in the favour of Mr. Samuel Dockwrath, who is now showing

himself to be so signally ungrateful. Joseph Mason, however, retired

from the battle nothing convinced. His father, he said, had been

an old fool, an ass, an idiot, a vulgar, ignorant fool; but he was

not a man to break his word. That signature to the codicil might be

his or might not. If his, it had been obtained by fraud. What could

be easier than to cheat an old doting fool? Many men agreed with

Joseph Mason, thinking that Usbech the attorney had perpetrated this

villainy on behalf of his daughter; but Joseph Mason would believe,

or say that he believed--a belief in which none but his sisters

joined him,--that Lady Mason herself had been the villain. He was

minded to press the case on to a Court of Appeal, up even to the

House of Lords; but he was advised that in doing so he would spend

more money than Orley Farm was worth, and that he would, almost to a

certainty, spend it in vain. Under this advice he cursed the laws of

his country, and withdrew to Groby Park.

Lady Mason had earned the respect of all those around her by the way

in which she bore herself in the painful days of the trial, and also

in those of her success,--especially also by the manner in which she

gave her evidence. And thus, though she had not been much noticed

by her neighbours during the short period of her married life, she

was visited as a widow by many of the more respectable people round

Hamworth. In all this she showed no feeling of triumph; she never

abused her husband's relatives, or spoke much of the harsh manner

in which she had been used. Indeed, she was not given to talk about

her own personal affairs; and although, as I have said, many of her

neighbours visited her, she did not lay herself out for society. She

accepted and returned their attention, but for the most part seemed

to be willing that the matter should so rest. The people around by

degrees came to know her ways, they spoke to her when they met her,

and occasionally went through the ceremony of a morning call; but did

not ask her to their tea-parties, and did not expect to see her at

picnic and archery meetings.

Among those who took her by the hand in the time of her great trouble

was Sir Peregrine Orme of The Cleeve,--for such was the name which

had belonged time out of mind to his old mansion and park. Sir

Peregrine was a gentleman now over seventy years of age, whose family

consisted of the widow of his only son, and the only son of that

widow, who was of course the heir to his estate and title. Sir

Peregrine was an excellent old man, as I trust may hereafter be

acknowledged; but his regard for Lady Mason was perhaps in the first

instance fostered by his extreme dislike to her stepson, Joseph Mason

of Groby. Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby was quite as rich a man as Sir

Peregrine, and owned an estate which was nearly as large as The

Cleeve property; but Sir Peregrine would not allow that he was a

gentleman, or that he could by any possible transformation become

one. He had not probably ever said so in direct words to any of the

Mason family, but his opinion on the matter had in some way worked

its way down to Yorkshire, and therefore there was no love to spare

between these two county magistrates. There had been a slight

acquaintance between Sir Peregrine and Sir Joseph; but the ladies of

the two families had never met till after the death of the latter.

Then, while that trial was still pending, Mrs. Orme had come forward

at the instigation of her father-in-law, and by degrees there had

grown up an intimacy between the two widows. When the first offers

of assistance were made and accepted, Sir Peregrine no doubt did

not at all dream of any such result as this. His family pride, and

especially the pride which he took in his widowed daughter-in-law,

would probably have been shocked by such a surmise; but,

nevertheless, he had seen the friendship grow and increase without

alarm. He himself had become attached to Lady Mason, and had

gradually learned to excuse in her that want of gentle blood and

early breeding which as a rule he regarded as necessary to a

gentleman, and from which alone, as he thought, could spring many of

those excellences which go to form the character of a lady.

It may therefore be asserted that Lady Mason's widowed life was

successful. That it was prudent and well conducted no one could

doubt. Her neighbours of course did say of her that she would not

drink tea with Mrs. Arkwright of Mount Pleasant villa because she was

allowed the privilege of entering Sir Peregrine's drawing-room; but

such little scandal as this was a matter of course. Let one live

according to any possible or impossible rule, yet some offence will

be given in some quarter. Those who knew anything of Lady Mason's

private life were aware that she did not encroach on Sir Peregrine's

hospitality. She was not at The Cleeve as much as circumstances would

have justified, and at one time by no means so much as Mrs. Orme

would have desired.

In person she was tall and comely. When Sir Joseph had brought her

to his house she had been very fair,--tall, slight, fair, and very

quiet,--not possessing that loveliness which is generally most

attractive to men, because the beauty of which she might boast

depended on form rather than on the brightness of her eye, or the

softness of her cheek and lips. Her face too, even at that age,

seldom betrayed emotion, and never showed signs either of anger or of

joy. Her forehead was high, and though somewhat narrow, nevertheless

gave evidence of considerable mental faculties; nor was the evidence

false, for those who came to know Lady Mason well, were always ready

to acknowledge that she was a woman of no ordinary power. Her eyes

were large and well formed, but somewhat cold. Her nose was long and

regular. Her mouth also was very regular, and her teeth perfectly

beautiful; but her lips were straight and thin. It would sometimes

seem that she was all teeth, and yet it is certain that she never

made an effort to show them. The great fault of her face was in

her chin, which was too small and sharp, thus giving on occasions

something of meanness to her countenance. She was now forty-seven

years of age, and had a son who had reached man's estate; and yet

perhaps she had more of woman's beauty at this present time than

when she stood at the altar with Sir Joseph Mason. The quietness and

repose of her manner suited her years and her position; age had given

fulness to her tall form; and the habitual sadness of her countenance

was in fair accordance with her condition and character. And yet

she was not really sad,--at least so said those who knew her. The

melancholy was in her face rather than in her character, which was

full of energy,--if energy may be quiet as well as assured and

constant.

Of course she had been accused a dozen times of matrimonial

prospects. What handsome widow is not so accused? The world of

Hamworth had been very certain at one time that she was intent on

marrying Sir Peregrine Orme. But she had not married, and I think I

may say on her behalf that she had never thought of marrying. Indeed,

one cannot see how such a woman could make any effort in that line.

It was impossible to conceive that a lady so staid in her manner

should be guilty of flirting; nor was there any man within ten miles

of Hamworth who would have dared to make the attempt. Women for the

most part are prone to love-making--as nature has intended that they

should be; but there are women from whom all such follies seem to be

as distant as skittles and beer are distant from the dignity of the

Lord Chancellor. Such a woman was Lady Mason.

At this time--the time which is about to exist for us as the period

at which our narrative will begin--Lucius Mason was over twenty-two

years old, and was living at the farm. He had spent the last three or

four years of his life in Germany, where his mother had visited him

every year, and had now come home intending to be the master of his

own destiny. His mother's care for him during his boyhood, and up to

the time at which he became of age, had been almost elaborate in its

thoughtfulness. She had consulted Sir Peregrine as to his school, and

Sir Peregrine, looking to the fact of the lad's own property, and

also to the fact, known by him, of Lady Mason's means for such a

purpose, had recommended Harrow. But the mother had hesitated, had

gently discussed the matter, and had at last persuaded the baronet

that such a step would be injudicious. The boy was sent to a private

school of a high character, and Sir Peregrine was sure that he had

been so sent at his own advice. "Looking at the peculiar position of

his mother," said Sir Peregrine to his young daughter-in-law, "at her

very peculiar position, and that of his relatives, I think it will be

better that he should not appear to assume anything early in life;

nothing can be better conducted than Mr. Crabfield's establishment,

and after much consideration I have had no hesitation in recommending

her to send her son to him." And thus Lucius Mason had been sent to

Mr. Crabfield, but I do not think that the idea originated with Sir

Peregrine.

"And perhaps it will be as well," added the baronet, "that he and

Perry should not be together at school, though I have no objection to

their meeting in the holidays. Mr. Crabfield's vacations are always

timed to suit the Harrow holidays." The Perry here mentioned was the

grandson of Sir Peregrine--the young Peregrine who in coming days was

to be the future lord of The Cleeve. When Lucius Mason was modestly

sent to Mr. Crabfield's establishment at Great Marlow, young

Peregrine Orme, with his prouder hopes, commenced his career at the

public school.

Mr. Crabfield did his duty by Lucius Mason, and sent him home at

seventeen a handsome, well-mannered lad, tall and comely to the

eye, with soft brown whiskers sprouting on his cheek, well grounded

in Greek, Latin, and Euclid, grounded also in French and Italian,

and possessing many more acquirements than he would have learned

at Harrow. But added to these, or rather consequent on them, was

a conceit which public-school education would not have created.

When their mothers compared them in the holidays, not openly with

outspoken words, but silently in their hearts, Lucius Mason was found

by each to be the superior both in manners and knowledge; but each

acknowledged also that there was more of ingenuous boyhood about

Peregrine Orme.

Peregrine Orme was a year the younger, and therefore his comparative

deficiencies were not the cause of any intense sorrow at The Cleeve;

but his grandfather would probably have been better satisfied--and

perhaps also so would his mother--had he been less addicted to the

catching of rats, and better inclined towards Miss Edgeworth's novels

and Shakespeare's plays, which were earnestly recommended to him by

the lady and the gentleman. But boys generally are fond of rats, and

very frequently are not fond of reading; and therefore, all this

having been duly considered, there was not much deep sorrow in those

days at The Cleeve as to the boyhood of the heir.

But there was great pride at Orley Farm, although that pride was

shown openly to no one. Lady Mason in her visits at The Cleeve said

but little as to her son's present excellences. As to his future

career in life she did say much both to Sir Peregrine and to Mrs.

Orme, asking the council of the one and expressing her fears to the

other; and then, Sir Peregrine having given his consent, she sent the

lad to Germany.

He was allowed to come of age without any special signs of manhood,

or aught of the glory of property; although, in his case, that coming

of age did put him into absolute possession of his inheritance. On

that day, had he been so minded, he could have turned his mother out

of the farm-house, and taken exclusive possession of the estate; but

he did in fact remain in Germany for a year beyond this period, and

returned to Orley Farm only in time to be present at the celebration

of the twenty-first birthday of his friend Peregrine Orme. This

ceremony, as may be surmised, was by no means slurred over without

due rejoicing. The heir at the time was at Christchurch; but at such

a period a slight interruption to his studies was not to be lamented.

There had been Sir Peregrine Ormes in those parts ever since the days

of James I; and indeed in days long antecedent to those there had

been knights bearing that name, some of whom had been honourably

beheaded for treason, others imprisoned for heresy; and one made

away with on account of a supposed royal amour,--to the great

glorification of all his descendants. Looking to the antecedents of

the family, it was only proper that the coming of age of the heir

should be duly celebrated; but Lucius Mason had had no antecedents;

no great-great-grandfather of his had knelt at the feet of an

improper princess; and therefore Lady Mason, though she had been at

The Cleeve, had not mentioned the fact that on that very day her son

had become a man. But when Peregrine Orme became a man--though still

in his manhood too much devoted to rats--she gloried greatly in her

quiet way, and whispered a hope into the baronet's ear that the young

heir would not imitate the ambition of his ancestor. "No, by Jove! it

would not do now at all," said Sir Peregrine, by no means displeased

at the allusion.

And then that question as to the future life of Lucius Mason became

one of great importance, and it was necessary to consult, not only

Sir Peregrine Orme, but the young man himself. His mother had

suggested to him first the law: the great Mr. Furnival, formerly of

the home circuit, but now practising only in London, was her very

special friend, and would give her and her son all possible aid in

this direction. And what living man could give better aid than the

great Mr. Furnival? But Lucius Mason would have none of the law. This

resolve he pronounced very clearly while yet in Germany, whither his

mother visited him, bearing with her a long letter written by the

great Mr. Furnival himself. But nevertheless young Mason would have

none of the law. "I have an idea," he said, "that lawyers are all

liars." Whereupon his mother rebuked him for his conceited ignorance

and want of charity; but she did not gain her point.

She had, however, another string to her bow. As he objected to be a

lawyer, he might become a civil engineer. Circumstances had made Sir

Peregrine Orme very intimate with the great Mr. Brown. Indeed, Mr.

Brown was under great obligations to Sir Peregrine, and Sir Peregrine

had promised to use his influence. But Lucius Mason said that civil

engineers were only tradesmen of an upper class, tradesmen with

intellects; and he, he said, wished to use his intellect, but he did

not choose to be a tradesman. His mother rebuked him again, as well

he deserved that she should,--and then asked him of what profession

he himself had thought. "Philology," said he; "or as a profession,

perhaps literature. I shall devote myself to philology and the races

of man. Nothing considerable has been done with them as a combined

pursuit." And with these views he returned home--while Peregrine Orme

at Oxford was still addicted to the hunting of rats.

But with philology and the races of man he consented to combine the

pursuit of agriculture. When his mother found that he wished to take

up his abode in his own house, she by no means opposed him, and

suggested that, as such was his intention, he himself should farm his

own land. He was very ready to do this, and had she not represented

that such a step was in every way impolitic, he would willingly have

requested Mr. Greenwood of the Old Farm to look elsewhere, and have

spread himself and his energies over the whole domain. As it was he

contented himself with desiring that Mr. Dockwrath would vacate his

small holding, and as he was imperative as to that his mother gave

way without making it the cause of a battle. She would willingly have

left Mr. Dockwrath in possession, and did say a word or two as to the

milk necessary for those sixteen children. But Lucius Mason was ducal

in his ideas, and intimated an opinion that he had a right to do what

he liked with his own. Had not Mr. Dockwrath been told, when the

fields were surrendered to him as a favour, that he would only have

them in possession till the heir should come of age? Mr. Dockwrath

had been so told; but tellings such as these are easily forgotten by

men with sixteen children. And thus Mr. Mason became an agriculturist

with special scientific views as to chemistry, and a philologist

with the object of making that pursuit bear upon his studies with

reference to the races of man. He was convinced that by certain

admixtures of ammonia and earths he could produce cereal results

hitherto unknown to the farming world, and that by tracing out the

roots of words he could trace also the wanderings of man since the

expulsion of Adam from the garden. As to the latter question his

mother was not inclined to contradict him. Seeing that he would sit

at the feet neither of Mr. Furnival nor of Mr. Brown, she had no

objection to the races of man. She could endure to be talked to about

the Oceanic Mongolidae and the Iapetidae of the Indo-Germanic class,

and had perhaps her own ideas that such matters, though somewhat

foggy, were better than rats. But when he came to the other subject,

and informed her that the properly plentiful feeding of the world

was only kept waiting for the chemists, she certainly did have her

fears. Chemical agriculture is expensive; and though the results may

possibly be remunerative, still, while we are thus kept waiting by

the backwardness of the chemists, there must be much risk in making

any serious expenditure with such views.

"Mother," he said, when he had now been at home about three months,

and when the fiat for the expulsion of Samuel Dockwrath had already

gone forth, "I shall go to Liverpool to-morrow."

"To Liverpool, Lucius?"

"Yes. That guano which I got from Walker is adulterated. I have

analyzed it, and find that it does not contain above thirty-two and a

half hundredths of--of that which it ought to hold in a proportion of

seventy-five per cent. of the whole."

"Does it not?"

"No; and it is impossible to obtain results while one is working with

such fictitious materials. Look at that bit of grass at the bottom of

Greenwood's Hill."

"The fifteen-acre field? Why, Lucius, we always had the heaviest

crops of hay in the parish off that meadow."

"That's all very well, mother; but you have never tried,--nobody

about here ever has tried, what the land can really produce. I will

throw that and the three fields beyond it into one; I will get

Greenwood to let me have that bit of the hill-side, giving him

compensation of course--"

"And then Dockwrath would want compensation."

"Dockwrath is an impertinent rascal, and I shall take an opportunity

of telling him so. But as I was saying, I will throw those seventy

acres together, and then I will try what will be the relative effects

of guano and the patent blood, But I must have real guano, and so I

shall go to Liverpool."

"I think I would wait a little, Lucius. It is almost too late for any

change of that kind this year."

"Wait! Yes, and what has come of waiting? We don't wait at all in

doubling our population every thirty-three years; but when we come

to the feeding of them we are always for waiting. It is that waiting

which has reduced the intellectual development of one half of the

human race to its present terribly low state--or rather prevented its

rising in a degree proportionate to the increase of the population.

No more waiting for me, mother, if I can help it."

"But, Lucius, should not such new attempts as that be made by men

with large capital?" said the mother.

"Capital is a bugbear," said the son, speaking on this matter quite

\_ex cathedrÃ¢\_, as no doubt he was entitled to do by his extensive

reading at a German university--"capital is a bugbear. The capital

that is really wanting is thought, mind, combination, knowledge."

"But, Lucius--"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say, mother. I don't boast that

I possess all these things; but I do say that I will endeavour to

obtain them."

"I have no doubt you will; but should not that come first?"

"That is waiting again. We all know as much as this, that good manure

will give good crops if the sun be allowed full play upon the land,

and nothing but the crop be allowed to grow. That is what I shall

attempt at first, and there can be no great danger in that." And so

he went to Liverpool.

Lady Mason during his absence began to regret that she had not left

him in the undisturbed and inexpensive possession of the Mongolidae

and the Iapetidae. His rent from the estate, including that which she

would have paid him as tenant of the smaller farm, would have enabled

him to live with all comfort; and, if such had been his taste, he

might have become a philosophical student, and lived respectably

without adding anything to his income by the sweat of his brow. But

now the matter was likely to become serious enough. For a gentleman

farmer determined to wait no longer for the chemists, whatever might

be the results, an immediate profitable return per acre could not be

expected as one of them. Any rent from that smaller farm would now

be out of the question, and it would be well if the payments made

so punctually by old Mr. Greenwood were not also swallowed up in

the search after unadulterated guano. Who could tell whether in

the pursuit of science he might not insist on chartering a vessel,

himself, for the Peruvian coast?

CHAPTER III.

THE CLEEVE.

I have said that Sir Peregrine Orme was not a rich man, meaning

thereby that he was not a rich man considering his acknowledged

position in the county. Such men not uncommonly have their tens,

twelves, and twenty thousands a year; but Sir Peregrine's estate

did not give him above three or four. He was lord of the manor of

Hamworth, and possessed seignorial rights, or rather the skeleton and

remembrance of such rights with reference to a very large district of

country; but his actual property--that from which he still received

the substantial benefits of ownership--was not so large as those

of some of his neighbours. There was, however, no place within the

county which was so beautifully situated as The Cleeve, or which had

about it so many of the attractions of age. The house itself had been

built at two periods,--a new set of rooms having been added to the

remains of the old Elizabethan structure in the time of Charles II.

It had not about it anything that was peculiarly grand or imposing,

nor were the rooms large or even commodious; but everything was old,

venerable, and picturesque. Both the dining-room and the library were

panelled with black wainscoating; and though the drawing-rooms were

papered, the tall, elaborately-worked wooden chimney-pieces still

stood in them, and a wooden band or belt round the rooms showed that

the panels were still there, although hidden by the modern paper.

But it was for the beauty and wildness of its grounds that The Cleeve

was remarkable. The land fell here and there into narrow, wild

ravines and woody crevices. The soil of the park was not rich, and

could give but little assistance to the chemists in supplying the

plentiful food expected by Mr. Mason for the coming multitudes of the

world; it produced in some parts heather instead of grass, and was

as wild and unprofitable as Cleeve Common, which stretched for miles

outside the park palings; but it seemed admirably adapted for deer

and for the maintenance of half-decayed venerable oaks. Young timber

also throve well about the place, and in this respect Sir Peregrine

was a careful landlord. There ran a river through the park,--the

River Cleeve, from which the place and parish are said to have

taken their names;--a river, or rather a stream, very narrow and

inconsiderable as to its volume of water, but which passed for some

two miles through so narrow a passage as to give to it the appearance

of a cleft or fissure in the rocks. The water tumbled over stones

through this entire course, making it seem to be fordable almost

everywhere without danger of wet feet; but in truth there was hardly

a spot at which it could be crossed without a bold leap from rock to

rock. Narrow as was the aperture through which the water had cut its

way, nevertheless a path had been contrived now on one side of the

stream and now on the other, crossing it here and there by slight

hanging wooden bridges. The air here was always damp with spray, and

the rocks on both sides were covered with long mosses, as were also

the overhanging boughs of the old trees. This place was the glory

of The Cleeve, and as far as picturesque beauty goes it was very

glorious. There was a spot in the river from whence a steep path led

down from the park to the water, and at this spot the deer would come

to drink. I know nothing more beautiful than this sight, when three

or four of them could be so seen from one of the wooden bridges

towards the hour of sunset in the autumn.

Sir Peregrine himself at this time was an old man, having passed his

seventieth year. He was a fine, handsome English gentleman with white

hair, keen gray eyes, a nose slightly aquiline, and lips now too

closely pressed together in consequence of the havoc which time had

made among his teeth. He was tall, but had lost something of his

height from stooping,--was slight in his form, but well made, and

vain of the smallness of his feet and the whiteness of his hands. He

was generous, quick tempered, and opinionated; generally very mild to

those who would agree with him and submit to him, but intolerant of

contradiction, and conceited as to his experience of the world and

the wisdom which he had thence derived. To those who were manifestly

his inferiors he was affable, to his recognised equals he was

courteous, to women he was almost always gentle;--but to men who

claimed an equality which he would not acknowledge, he could make

himself particularly disagreeable. In judging the position which a

man should hold in the world, Sir Peregrine was very resolute in

ignoring all claims made by wealth alone. Even property in land could

not in his eyes create a gentleman. A gentleman, according to his

ideas, should at any rate have great-grandfathers capable of being

traced in the world's history; and the greater the number of such,

and the more easily traceable they might be on the world's surface,

the more unquestionable would be the status of the claimant in

question. Such being the case, it may be imagined that Joseph Mason,

Esq., of Groby Park did not rank high in the estimation of Sir

Peregrine Orme.

I have said that Sir Peregrine was fond of his own opinion; but

nevertheless he was a man whom it was by no means difficult to lead.

In the first place he was singularly devoid of suspicion. The word of

a man or of a woman was to him always credible, until full proof had

come home to him that it was utterly unworthy of credit. After that

such a man or woman might as well spare all speech as regards the

hope of any effect on the mind of Sir Peregrine Orme. He did not

easily believe a fellow-creature to be a liar, but a liar to him once

was a liar always. And then he was amenable to flattery, and few that

are so are proof against the leading-strings of their flatterers. All

this was well understood of Sir Peregrine by those about him. His

gardener, his groom, and his woodman all knew his foibles. They all

loved him, respected him, and worked for him faithfully; but each of

them had his own way in his own branch.

And there was another person at The Cleeve who took into her own

hands a considerable share of the management and leading of Sir

Peregrine, though, in truth, she made no efforts in that direction.

This was Mrs. Orme, the widow of his only child, and the mother of

his heir. Mrs. Orme was a younger woman than Mrs. Mason of Orley Farm

by nearly five years, though her son was but twelve months junior to

Lucius Mason. She had been the daughter of a brother baronet, whose

family was nearly as old as that of the Ormes; and therefore, though

she had come penniless to her husband, Sir Peregrine had considered

that his son had married well. She had been a great beauty, very

small in size and delicate of limb, fair haired, with soft blue

wondering eyes, and a dimpled cheek. Such she had been when young

Peregrine Orme brought her home to The Cleeve, and the bride at once

became the darling of her father-in-law. One year she had owned

of married joy, and then all the happiness of the family had been

utterly destroyed, and for the few following years there had been no

sadder household in all the country-side than that of Sir Peregrine

Orme. His son, his only son, the pride of all who knew him, the hope

of his political party in the county, the brightest among the bright

ones of the day for whom the world was just opening her richest

treasures, fell from his horse as he was crossing into a road, and

his lifeless body was brought home to The Cleeve.

All this happened now twenty years since, but the widow still wears

the colours of mourning. Of her also the world of course said that

she would soon console herself with a second love; but she too has

given the world the lie. From that day to the present she has never

left the house of her father-in-law; she has been a true child to

him, and she has enjoyed all a child's privileges. There has been

but little favour for any one at The Cleeve who has been considered

by the baronet to disregard the wishes of the mistress of the

establishment. Any word from her has been law to him, and he has of

course expected also that her word should be law to others. He has

yielded to her in all things, and attended to her will as though she

were a little queen, recognizing in her feminine weakness a sovereign

power, as some men can and do; and having thus for years indulged

himself in a quixotic gallantry to the lady of his household, he has

demanded of others that they also should bow the knee.

During the last twenty years The Cleeve has not been a gay house.

During the last ten those living there have been contented, and in

the main happy; but there has seldom been many guests in the old

hall, and Sir Peregrine has not been fond of going to other men's

feasts. He inherited the property very early in life, and then there

were on it some few encumbrances. While yet a young man he added

something to these, and now, since his own son's death, he has been

setting his house in order, that his grandson should receive the

family acres intact. Every shilling due on the property has been paid

off; and it is well that this should be so, for there is reason to

fear that the heir will want a helping hand out of some of youth's

difficulties,--perhaps once or twice before his passion for rats

gives place to a good English gentleman-like resolve to hunt twice a

week, look after his timber, and live well within his means.

The chief fault in the character of young Peregrine Orme was that

he was so young. There are men who are old at one-and-twenty,--are

quite fit for Parliament, the magistrate's bench, the care of a wife,

and even for that much sterner duty, the care of a balance at the

bankers; but there are others who at that age are still boys,--whose

inner persons and characters have not begun to clothe themselves with

the "toga virilis." I am not sure that those whose boyhoods are so

protracted have the worst of it, if in this hurrying and competitive

age they can be saved from being absolutely trampled in the dust

before they are able to do a little trampling on their own account.

Fruit that grows ripe the quickest is not the sweetest; nor when

housed and garnered will it keep the longest. For young Peregrine

there was no need of competitive struggles. The days have not yet

come, though they are no doubt coming, when "detur digniori" shall

be the rule of succession to all titles, honours, and privileges

whatsoever. Only think what a life it would give to the education of

the country in general, if any lad from seventeen to twenty-one could

go in for a vacant dukedom; and if a goodly inheritance could be

made absolutely incompatible with incorrect spelling and doubtful

proficiency in rule of three!

Luckily for Peregrine junior these days are not yet at hand, or I

fear that there would be little chance for him. While Lucius Mason

was beginning to think that the chemists might be hurried, and that

agriculture might be beneficially added to philology, our friend

Peregrine had just been rusticated, and the head of his college had

intimated to the baronet that it would be well to take the young

man's name off the college books. This accordingly had been done,

and the heir of The Cleeve was at present at home with his mother

and grandfather. What special act of grace had led to this severity

we need not inquire, but we may be sure that the frolics of which

he had been guilty had been essentially young in their nature. He

had assisted in driving a farmer's sow into the man's best parlour,

or had daubed the top of the tutor's cap with white paint, or had

perhaps given liberty to a bag full of rats in the college hall at

dinner-time. Such were the youth's academical amusements, and as they

were pursued with unremitting energy it was thought well that he

should be removed from Oxford.

Then had come the terrible question of his university bills. One

after another, half a score of them reached Sir Peregrine, and then

took place that terrible interview,--such as most young men have had

to undergo at least once,--in which he was asked how he intended to

absolve himself from the pecuniary liabilities which he had incurred.

"I am sure I don't know," said young Orme, sadly.

"But I shall be glad, sir, if you will favour me with your

intentions," said Sir Peregrine, with severity. "A gentleman does

not, I presume, send his orders to a tradesman without having some

intention of paying him for his goods."

[Illustration: SIR PEREGRINE AND HIS HEIR.]

"I intended that they should all be paid, of course."

"And how, sir? by whom?"

"Well, sir,--I suppose I intended that you should pay them;" and

the scapegrace as he spoke looked full up into the baronet's face

with his bright blue eyes,--not impudently, as though defying his

grandfather, but with a bold confidence which at once softened the

old man's heart.

Sir Peregrine turned away and walked twice the length of the library;

then, returning to the spot where the other stood, he put his hand on

his grandson's shoulder. "Well, Peregrine, I will pay them," he said.

"I have no doubt that you did so intend when you incurred them;--and

that was perhaps natural. I will pay them; but for your own sake, and

for your dear mother's sake, I hope that they are not very heavy. Can

you give me a list of all that you owe?"

Young Peregrine said that he thought he could, and sitting down at

once he made a clean breast of it. With all his foibles, follies, and

youthful ignorances, in two respects he stood on good ground. He was

neither false nor a coward. He continued to scrawl down items as long

as there were any of which he could think, and then handed over the

list in order that his grandfather might add them up. It was the

last he ever heard of the matter; and when he revisited Oxford some

twelve months afterwards, the tradesmen whom he had honoured with his

custom bowed to him as low as though he had already inherited twenty

thousand a year.

Peregrine Orme was short in stature as was his mother, and he also

had his mother's wonderfully bright blue eyes; but in other respects

he was very like his father and grandfather;--very like all the

Ormes who had lived for ages past. His hair was light; his forehead

was not large, but well formed and somewhat prominent; his nose

had something, though not much, of the eagle's beak; his mouth was

handsome in its curve, and his teeth were good, and his chin was

divided by a deep dimple. His figure was not only short, but stouter

than that of the Ormes in general. He was very strong on his legs; he

could wrestle, and box, and use the single-stick with a quickness and

precision that was the terror of all the freshmen who had come in his

way.

Mrs. Orme, his mother, no doubt thought that he was perfect. Looking

at the reflex of her own eyes in his, and seeing in his face so sweet

a portraiture of the nose and mouth and forehead of him whom she

had loved so dearly and lost so soon, she could not but think him

perfect. When she was told that the master of Lazarus had desired

that her son should be removed from his college, she had accused the

tyrant of unrelenting, persecuting tyranny; and the gentle arguments

of Sir Peregrine had no effect towards changing her ideas. On that

disagreeable matter of the bills little or nothing was said to her.

Indeed, money was a subject with which she was never troubled. Sir

Peregrine conceived that money was a man's business, and that the

softness of a woman's character should be preserved by a total

absence of all pecuniary thoughts and cares.

And then there arose at The Cleeve a question as to what should

immediately be done with the heir. He himself was by no means so well

prepared with an answer as had been his friend Lucius Mason. When

consulted by his grandfather, he said that he did not know. He would

do anything that Sir Peregrine wished. Would Sir Peregrine think

it well that he should prepare himself for the arduous duties of a

master of hounds? Sir Peregrine did not think this at all well, but

it did not appear that he himself was prepared with any immediate

proposition. Then Peregrine discussed the matter with his mother,

explaining that he had hoped at any rate to get the next winter's

hunting with the H.H.;--which letters have represented the Hamworth

Fox Hunt among sporting men for many years past. To this his mother

made no objection, expressing a hope, however, that he would go

abroad in the spring. "Home-staying youths have ever homely wits,"

she said to him, smiling on him ever so sweetly.

"That's quite true, mother," he said. "And that's why I should like

to go to Leicestershire this winter." But going to Leicestershire

this winter was out of the question.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PERILS OF YOUTH.

Going to Leicestershire was quite out of the question for young Orme

at this period of his life, but going to London unfortunately was

not so. He had become acquainted at Oxford with a gentleman of

great skill in his peculiar line of life, whose usual residence

was in the metropolis; and so great had been the attraction found

in the character and pursuits of this skilful gentleman, that our

hero had not been long at The Cleeve, after his retirement from

the university, before he visited his friend. Cowcross Street,

Smithfield, was the site of this professor's residence, the

destruction of rats in a barrel was his profession, and his name

was Carroty Bob. It is not my intention to introduce the reader to

Carroty Bob in person, as circumstances occurred about this time

which brought his intimacy with Mr. Orme to an abrupt conclusion. It

would be needless to tell how our hero was induced to back a certain

terrier, presumed to be the pride of Smithfield; how a great match

came off, second only in importance to a contest for the belt of

England; how money was lost and quarrels arose, and how Peregrine

Orme thrashed one sporting gent within an inch of his life, and

fought his way out of Carroty Bob's house at twelve o'clock at night.

The tale of the row got into the newspapers, and of course reached

The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine sent for his grandson into his study, and

insisted on knowing everything;--how much money there was to pay, and

what chance there might be of an action and damages. Of an action and

damages there did not seem to be any chance, and the amount of money

claimed was not large. Rats have this advantage, that they usually

come cheaper than race-horses; but then, as Sir Peregrine felt

sorely, they do not sound so well.

"Do you know, sir, that you are breaking your mother's heart?" said

Sir Peregrine, looking very sternly at the young man--as sternly as

he was able to look, let him do his worst.

Peregrine the younger had a very strong idea that he was not doing

anything of the kind. He had left her only a quarter of an hour

since; and though she had wept during the interview, she had forgiven

him with many caresses, and had expressed her opinion that the chief

fault had lain with Carroty Bob and those other wretched people

who had lured her dear child into their villainous den. She had

altogether failed to conceal her pride at his having fought his way

out from among them, and had ended by supplying his pocket out of

her own immediate resources. "I hope not, sir," said Peregrine the

younger, thinking over some of these things.

"But you will, sir, if you go on with this shameless career. I do not

speak of myself. I do not expect you to sacrifice your tastes for me;

but I did think that you loved your mother!"

"So I do;--and you too."

"I am not speaking about myself sir. When I think what your father

was at your age;--how nobly--" And then the baronet was stopped in

his speech, and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief. "Do you think

that your father, sir, followed such pursuits as these? Do you think

that he spent his time in the pursuit of--rats?"

"Well; I don't know; I don't think he did. But I have heard you say,

sir, that you sometimes went to cockfights when you were young."

"To cockfights! well, yes. But let me tell you, sir, that I always

went in the company of gentlemen--that is, when I did go, which was

very seldom." The baronet in some after-dinner half-hour had allowed

this secret of his youth to escape from him, imprudently.

"And I went to the house in Cowcross Street with Lord John Fitzjoly."

"The last man in all London with whom you ought to associate! But I

am not going to argue with you, sir. If you think, and will continue

to think, that the slaughtering of vermin is a proper pursuit--"

"But, sir, foxes are vermin also."

"Hold your tongue, sir, and listen to me. You know very well what

I mean, sir. If you think that--rats are a proper pursuit for a

gentleman in your sphere of life, and if all that I can say has

no effect in changing your opinion--I shall have done. I have not

many years of life before me, and when I shall be no more, you can

squander the property in any vile pursuits that may be pleasing to

you. But, sir, you shall not do it while I am living; nor, if I can

help it, shall you rob your mother of such peace of mind as is left

for her in this world. I have only one alternative for you, sir--."

Sir Peregrine did not stop to explain what might be the other branch

of this alternative. "Will you give me your word of honour as

a gentleman that you will never again concern yourself in this

disgusting pursuit?"

"Never, grandfather!" said Peregrine, solemnly.

Sir Peregrine before he answered bethought himself that any pledge

given for a whole life-time must be foolish; and he bethought himself

also that if he could wean his heir from rats for a year or so, the

taste would perish from lack of nourishment. "I will say for two

years," said Sir Peregrine, still maintaining his austere look.

"For two years!" repeated Peregrine the younger; "and this is the

fourth of October."

"Yes, sir; for two years," said the baronet, more angry than ever at

the young man's pertinacity, and yet almost amused at his grandson's

already formed resolve to go back to his occupation at the first

opportunity allowed.

"Couldn't you date it from the end of August, sir? The best of the

matches always come off in September."

"No, sir; I will not date it from any other time than the present.

Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman, for two years?"

Peregrine thought over the proposition for a minute or two in sad

anticipation of all that he was to lose, and then slowly gave his

adhesion to the terms. "Very well, sir;--for two years." And then he

took out his pocket-book and wrote in it slowly.

It was at any rate manifest that he intended to keep his word, and

that was much; so Sir Peregrine accepted the promise for what it was

worth. "And now," said he, "if you have got nothing better to do, we

will ride down to Crutchley Wood."

"I should like it of all things," said his grandson.

"Samson wants me to cut a new bridle-path through from the larches at

the top of the hill down to Crutchley Bottom; but I don't think I'll

have it done. Tell Jacob to let us have the nags; I'll ride the gray

pony. And ask your mother if she'll ride with us."

It was the manner of Sir Peregrine to forgive altogether when he did

forgive; and to commence his forgiveness in all its integrity from

the first moment of the pardon. There was nothing he disliked so

much as being on bad terms with those around him, and with none more

so than with his grandson. Peregrine well knew how to make himself

pleasant to the old man, and when duly encouraged would always do so.

And thus the family party, as they rode on this occasion through the

woods of The Cleeve, discussed oaks and larches, beech and birches,

as though there were no such animal as a rat in existence, and no

such place known as Cowcross Street.

"Well, Perry, as you and Samson are both of one mind, I suppose the

path must be made," said Sir Peregrine, as he got off his horse at

the entrance of the stable-yard, and prepared to give his feeble aid

to Mrs. Orme.

Shortly after this the following note was brought up to The Cleeve by

a messenger from Orley Farm:--

MY DEAR SIR PEREGRINE,

If you are quite disengaged at twelve o'clock to-morrow, I

will walk over to The Cleeve at that hour. Or if it would

suit you better to call here as you are riding, I would

remain within till you come. I want your kind advice on a

certain matter.

Most sincerely yours,

MARY MASON.

Thursday.

Lady Mason, when she wrote this note, was well aware that it would

not be necessary for her to go to The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine's

courtesy would not permit him to impose any trouble on a lady when

the alternative of taking that trouble on himself was given to him.

Moreover, he liked to have some object for his daily ride; he liked

to be consulted "on certain matters;" and he especially liked being

so consulted by Lady Mason. So he sent word back that he would be at

the farm at twelve on the following day, and exactly at that hour his

gray pony or cob might have been seen slowly walking up the avenue to

the farm-house.

The Cleeve was not distant from Orley Farm more than two miles by

the nearest walking-path, although it could not be driven much under

five. With any sort of carriage one was obliged to come from The

Cleeve House down to the lodge on the Hamworth and Alston road, and

then to drive through the town of Hamworth, and so back to the farm.

But in walking one would take the path along the river for nearly a

mile, thence rise up the hill to the top of Crutchley Wood, descend

through the wood to Crutchley Bottom, and, passing along the valley,

come out at the foot of Cleeve Hill, just opposite to Orley Farm

Gate. The distance for a horseman was somewhat greater, seeing that

there was not as yet any bridle-way through Crutchley Wood. Under

these circumstances the journey between the two houses was very

frequently made on foot; and for those walking from The Cleeve House

to Hamworth the nearest way was by Lady Mason's gate.

Lady Mason's drawing-room was very pretty, though it was by no means

fashionably furnished. Indeed, she eschewed fashion in all things,

and made no pretence of coming out before the world as a great lady.

She had never kept any kind of carriage, though her means, combined

with her son's income, would certainly have justified her in a

pony-chaise. Since Lucius had become master of the house he had

presented her with such a vehicle, and also with the pony and harness

complete; but as yet she had never used it, being afraid, as she said

to him with a smile, of appearing ambitious before the stern citizens

of Hamworth. "Nonsense, mother," he had replied, with a considerable

amount of young dignity in his face. "We are all entitled to those

comforts for which we can afford to pay without injury to any one. I

shall take it ill of you if I do not see you using it."

"Oh, Sir Peregrine, this is so kind of you," said Lady Mason, coming

forward to meet her friend. She was plainly dressed, without any full

exuberance of costume, and yet everything about her was neat and

pretty, and everything had been the object of feminine care. A very

plain dress may occasion as much study as the most elaborate,--and

may be quite as worthy of the study it has caused. Lady Mason, I am

inclined to think, was by no means indifferent to the subject, but

then to her belonged the great art of hiding her artifice.

"Not at all; not at all," said Sir Peregrine, taking her hand and

pressing it, as he always did. "What is the use of neighbours if they

are not neighbourly?" This was all very well from Sir Peregrine in

the existing case; but he was not a man who by any means recognised

the necessity of being civil to all who lived near him. To the great

and to the poor he was neighbourly; but it may be doubted whether

he would have thought much of Lady Mason if she had been less good

looking or less clever.

"Ah! I know how good you always are to me. But I'll tell you why I am

troubling you now. Lucius went off two days since to Liverpool."

"My grandson told me that he had left home."

"He is an excellent young man, and I am sure that I have every reason

to be thankful." Sir Peregrine, remembering the affair in Cowcross

Street, and certain other affairs of a somewhat similar nature,

thought that she had; but for all that he would not have exchanged

his own bright-eyed lad for Lucius Mason with all his virtues and all

his learning.

"And indeed I am thankful," continued the widow. "Nothing can be

better than his conduct and mode of life; but--"

"I hope he has no attraction at Liverpool, of which you disapprove."

"No, no; there is nothing of that kind. His attraction is--; but

perhaps I had better explain the whole matter. Lucius, you know, has

taken to farming."

"He has taken up the land which you held yourself, has he not?"

"Yes, and a little more; and he is anxious to add even to that. He is

very energetic about it, Sir Peregrine."

"Well; the life of a gentleman farmer is not a bad one; though in

his special circumstances I would certainly have recommended a

profession."

"Acting upon your advice I did urge him to go to the bar. But he has

a will of his own, and a mind altogether made up as to the line of

life which he thinks will suit him best. What I fear now is, that he

will spend more money upon experiments than he can afford."

"Experimental farming is an expensive amusement," said Sir Peregrine,

with a very serious shake of his head.

"I am afraid it is; and now he has gone to Liverpool to buy--guano,"

said the widow, feeling some little shame in coming to so

inconsiderable a conclusion after her somewhat stately prologue.

"To buy guano! Why could he not get his guano from Walker, as my man

Symonds does?"

"He says it is not good. He analyzed it, and--"

"Fiddlestick! Why didn't he order it in London, if he didn't like

Walker's. Gone to Liverpool for guano! I'll tell you what it is, Lady

Mason; if he intends to farm his land in that way, he should have a

very considerable capital at his back. It will be a long time before

he sees his money again." Sir Peregrine had been farming all his

life, and had his own ideas on the subject. He knew very well that no

gentleman, let him set to work as he might with his own land, could

do as well with it as a farmer who must make a living out of his

farming besides paying the rent;--who must do that or else have no

living; and he knew also that such operations as those which his

young friend was now about to attempt was an amusement fitted only

for the rich. It may be also that he was a little old-fashioned, and

therefore prejudiced against new combinations between agriculture and

chemistry. "He must put a stop to that kind of work very soon, Lady

Mason; he must indeed; or he will bring himself to ruin--and you with

him."

Lady Mason's face became very grave and serious. "But what can I say

to him, Sir Peregrine? In such a matter as that I am afraid that he

would not mind me. If you would not object to speaking to him?"

Sir Peregrine was graciously pleased to say that he would not object.

It was a disagreeable task, he said, that of giving advice to a young

man who was bound by no tie either to take it or even to receive it

with respect.

"You will not find him at all disrespectful; I think I can promise

that," said the frightened mother; and that matter was ended by a

promise on the part of the baronet to take the case in hand, and to

see Lucius immediately on his return from Liverpool. "He had better

come and dine at The Cleeve," said Sir Peregrine, "and we will have

it out after dinner." All of which made Lady Mason very grateful.

CHAPTER V.

SIR PEREGRINE MAKES A SECOND PROMISE.

We left Lady Mason very grateful at the end of the last chapter for

the promise made to her by Sir Peregrine with reference to her son;

but there was still a weight on Lady Mason's mind. They say that the

pith of a lady's letter is in the postscript, and it may be that that

which remained for Lady Mason to say, was after all the matter as to

which she was most anxious for assistance. "As you are here," she

said to the baronet, "would you let me mention another subject?"

"Surely," said he, again putting down his hat and riding-stick.

Sir Peregrine was not given to close observation of those around him,

or he might have seen by the heightened colour of the lady's face,

and by the slight nervous hesitation with which she began to speak,

that she was much in earnest as to this other matter. And had he been

clever in his powers of observation he might have seen also that she

was anxious to hide this feeling. "You remember the circumstances of

that terrible lawsuit?" she said, at last.

"What; as to Sir Joseph's will? Yes; I remember them well."

"I know that I shall never forget all the kindness that you showed

me," said she. "I don't know how I should have lived through it

without you and dear Mrs. Orme."

"But what about it now?"

"I fear I am going to have further trouble."

"Do you mean that the man at Groby Park is going to try the case

again? It is not possible after such a lapse of time. I am no lawyer,

but I do not think that he can do it."

"I do not know--I do not know what he intends, or whether he intends

anything; but I am sure of this,--that he will give me trouble if he

can. But I will tell you the whole story, Sir Peregrine. It is not

much, and perhaps after all may not be worth attention. You know the

attorney in Hamworth who married Miriam Usbech?"

"What, Samuel Dockwrath? Oh, yes; I know him well enough; and to tell

the truth I do not think very well of him. Is he not a tenant of

yours?"

"Not at present." And then Lady Mason explained the manner in which

the two fields had been taken out of the lawyer's hands by her son's

order.

"Ah! he was wrong there," said the baronet. "When a man has held land

so long it should not be taken away from him except under pressing

circumstances; that is if he pays his rent."

"Mr. Dockwrath did pay his rent, certainly; and now, I fear, he is

determined to do all he can to injure us."

"But what injury can Mr. Dockwrath do you?"

"I do not know, but he has gone down to Yorkshire,--to Mr. Mason's

place; I know that; and he was searching through some papers of old

Mr. Usbech's before he went. Indeed, I may say that I know as a

fact that he has gone to Mr. Mason with the hope that these law

proceedings may be brought on again."

"You know it as a fact?"

"I think I may say so."

"But, dear Lady Mason, may I ask you how you know this as a fact?"

"His wife was with me yesterday," she said, with some feeling of

shame as she disclosed the source from whence she had obtained her

information.

"And did she tell the tale against her own husband?"

"Not as meaning to say anything against him, Sir Peregrine; you

must not think so badly of her as that; nor must you think that I

would willingly obtain information in such a manner. But you must

understand that I have always been her friend; and when she found

that Mr. Dockwrath had left home on a matter in which I am so nearly

concerned, I cannot but think it natural that she should let me

know."

To this Sir Peregrine made no direct answer. He could not quite say

that he thought it was natural, nor could he give any expressed

approval of any such intercourse between Lady Mason and the

attorney's wife. He thought it would be better that Mr. Dockwrath

should be allowed to do his worst, if he had any intention of doing

evil, and that Lady Mason should pass it by without condescending to

notice the circumstance. But he made allowances for her weakness, and

did not give utterance to his disapproval in words.

"I know you think that I have done wrong," she then said, appealing

to him; and there was a tone of sorrow in her voice which went to his

heart.

"No, not wrong; I cannot say that you have done wrong. It may be a

question whether you have done wisely."

"Ah! if you only condemn my folly, I will not despair. It is probable

I may not have done wisely, seeing that I had not you to direct me.

But what shall I do now? Oh, Sir Peregrine, say that you will not

desert me if all this trouble is coming on me again!"

"No, I will not desert you, Lady Mason; you may be sure of that."

"Dearest friend!"

"But I would advise you to take no notice whatever of Mr. Dockwrath

and his proceedings. I regard him as a person entirely beneath your

notice, and if I were you I should not move at all in this matter

unless I received some legal summons which made it necessary for me

to do so. I have not the honour of any personal acquaintance with Mr.

Mason of Groby Park." It was in this way that Sir Peregrine always

designated his friend's stepson--"but if I understand the motives by

which he may probably be actuated in this or in any other matter,

I do not think it likely that he will expend money on so very

unpromising a case."

"He would do anything for vengeance."

"I doubt if he would throw away his money even for that, unless he

were very sure of his prey. And in this matter, what can he possibly

do? He has the decision of the jury against him, and at the time he

was afraid to carry the case up to a court of appeal."

"But, Sir Peregrine, it is impossible to know what documents he may

have obtained since that."

"What documents can do you any harm;--unless, indeed, there should

turn out to be a will subsequent to that under which your son

inherits the property?"

"Oh, no; there was no subsequent will."

"Of course there was not; and therefore you need not frighten

yourself. It is just possible that some attempt may be made now that

your son is of age, but I regard even that as improbable."

"And you would not advise me then to say anything to Mr. Furnival?"

"No; certainly not--unless you receive some legal notice which may

make it necessary for you to consult a lawyer. Do nothing; and if

Mrs. Dockwrath comes to you again, tell her that you are not disposed

to take any notice of her information. Mrs. Dockwrath is, I am sure,

a very good sort of woman. Indeed I have always heard so. But, if

I were you, I don't think that I should feel inclined to have much

conversation with her about my private affairs. What you tell her you

tell also to her husband." And then the baronet, having thus spoken

words of wisdom, sat silent in his arm-chair; and Lady Mason, still

looking into his face, remained silent also for a few minutes.

"I am so glad I asked you to come," she then said.

"I am delighted, if I have been of any service to you."

"Of any service! oh, Sir Peregrine, you cannot understand what it is

to live alone as I do,--for of course I cannot trouble Lucius with

these matters; nor can a man, gifted as you are, comprehend how a

woman can tremble at the very idea that those law proceedings may

possibly be repeated."

Sir Peregrine could not but remember as he looked at her that during

all those law proceedings, when an attack was made, not only on her

income but on her honesty, she had never seemed to tremble. She had

always been constant to herself, even when things appeared to be

going against her. But years passing over her head since that time

had perhaps told upon her courage.

"But I will fear nothing now, as you have promised that you will

still be my friend."

"You may be very sure of that, Lady Mason. I believe that I may

fairly boast that I do not easily abandon those whom I have once

regarded with esteem and affection; among whom Lady Mason will, I am

sure, allow me to say that she is reckoned as by no means the least."

And then taking her hand, the old gentleman bowed over it and kissed

it.

"My dearest, dearest friend!" said she; and lifting Sir Peregrine's

beautifully white hand to her lips she also kissed that. It will be

remembered that the gentleman was over seventy, and that this pretty

scene could therefore be enacted without impropriety on either side.

Sir Peregrine then went, and as he passed out of the door Lady

Mason smiled on him very sweetly. It is quite true that he was over

seventy; but nevertheless the smile of a pretty woman still had

charms for him, more especially if there was a tear in her eye the

while;--for Sir Peregrine Orme had a soft heart.

As soon as the door was closed behind him Lady Mason seated herself

in her accustomed chair, and all trace of the smile vanished from her

face. She was alone now, and could allow her countenance to be a true

index of her mind. If such was the case her heart surely was very

sad. She sat there perfectly still for nearly an hour, and during the

whole of that time there was the same look of agony on her brow. Once

or twice she rubbed her hands across her forehead, brushing back her

hair, and showing, had there been any one by to see it, that there

was many a gray lock there mixed with the brown hairs. Had there been

any one by, she would, it may be surmised, have been more careful.

There was no smile in her face now, neither was there any tear in her

eye. The one and the other emblem were equally alien to her present

mood. But there was sorrow at her heart, and deep thought in her

mind. She knew that her enemies were conspiring against her,--against

her and against her son; and what steps might she best take in order

that she might baffle them?

[Illustration: There was sorrow in her heart,

and deep thought in her mind.]

"I have got that woman on the hip now." Those were the words which

Mr. Dockwrath had uttered into his wife's ears, after two days spent

in searching through her father's papers. The poor woman had once

thought of burning all those papers--in old days before she had

become Mrs. Dockwrath. Her friend, Lady Mason, had counselled her

to do so, pointing out to her that they were troublesome, and could

by no possibility lead to profit; but she had consulted her lover,

and he had counselled her to burn nothing. "Would that she had been

guided by her friend!" she now said to herself with regard to that

old trunk, and perhaps occasionally with regard to some other things.

"I have got that woman on the hip at last!" and there had been a

gleam of satisfaction in Samuel's eye as he uttered the words which

had convinced his wife that it was not an idle threat. She knew

nothing of what the box had contained; and now, even if it had not

been kept safe from her under Samuel's private key, the contents

which were of interest had of course gone. "I have business in the

north, and shall be away for about a week," Mr. Dockwrath had said to

her on the following morning.

"Oh, very well; then I'll put up your things," she had answered in

her usual mild, sad, whining, household voice. Her voice at home was

always sad and whining, for she was overworked, and had too many

cares, and her lord was a tyrant to her rather than a husband.

"Yes, I must see Mr. Mason immediately. And look here, Miriam, I

positively insist that you do not go to Orley Farm, or hold any

intercourse whatever with Lady Mason. D'ye hear?"

Mrs. Dockwrath said that she did hear, and promised obedience. Mr.

Dockwrath probably guessed that the moment his back was turned all

would be told at the farm, and probably also had no real objection to

her doing so. Had he in truth wished to keep his proceedings secret

from Lady Mason he would not have divulged them to his wife. And then

Mr. Dockwrath did start for the north, bearing certain documents with

him; and soon after his departure Mrs. Dockwrath did pay a visit to

Orley Farm.

Lady Mason sat there perfectly still for about an hour thinking what

she would do. She had asked Sir Peregrine, and had the advantage of

his advice; but that did not weigh much with her. What she wanted

from Sir Peregrine was countenance and absolute assistance in the

day of trouble,--not advice. She had desired to renew his interest

in her favour, and to receive from him his assurance that he would

not desert her; and that she had obtained. It was of course also

necessary that she should consult him; but in turning over within her

own mind this and that line of conduct, she did not, consciously,

attach any weight to Sir Peregrine's opinion. The great question for

her to decide was this;--should she put herself and her case into the

hands of her friend Mr. Furnival now at once, or should she wait till

she had received some certain symptom of hostile proceedings? If she

did see Mr. Furnival, what could she tell him? Only this, that Mr.

Dockwrath had found some document among the papers of old Mr. Usbech,

and had gone off with the same to Groby Park in Yorkshire. What that

document might be she was as ignorant as the attorney's wife.

When the hour was ended she had made up her mind that she would do

nothing more in the matter, at any rate on that day.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMERCIAL ROOM, BULL INN, LEEDS.

Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was a little man, with sandy hair, a pale face,

and stone-blue eyes. In judging of him by appearance only and not by

the ear, one would be inclined to doubt that he could be a very sharp

attorney abroad and a very persistent tyrant at home. But when Mr.

Dockwrath began to talk, one's respect for him began to grow. He

talked well and to the point, and with a tone of voice that could

command where command was possible, persuade where persuasion was

required, mystify when mystification was needed, and express with

accuracy the tone of an obedient humble servant when servility was

thought to be expedient. We will now accompany him on his little tour

into Yorkshire.

Groby Park is about seven miles from Leeds, and as Mr. Dockwrath had

in the first instance to travel from Hamworth up to London, he did

not reach Leeds till late in the evening. It was a nasty, cold,

drizzling night, so that the beauties and marvels of the large

manufacturing town offered him no attraction, and at nine o'clock

he had seated himself before the fire in the commercial room at The

Bull, had called for a pair of public slippers, and was about to

solace all his cares with a glass of mahogany-coloured brandy and

water and a cigar. The room had no present occupant but himself, and

therefore he was able to make the most of all its comforts. He had

taken the solitary arm-chair, and had so placed himself that the gas

would fall direct from behind his head on to that day's "Leeds and

Halifax Chronicle," as soon as he should choose to devote himself to

local politics.

The waiter had looked at him with doubtful eyes when he asked to be

shown into the commercial room, feeling all but confident that such a

guest had no right to be there. He had no bulky bundles of samples,

nor any of those outward characteristics of a commercial "gent" with

which all men conversant with the rail and road are acquainted, and

which the accustomed eye of a waiter recognises at a glance. And

here it may be well to explain that ordinary travellers are in this

respect badly treated by the customs of England, or rather by the

hotel-keepers. All inn-keepers have commercial rooms, as certainly

as they have taps and bars, but all of them do not have commercial

rooms in the properly exclusive sense. A stranger, therefore, who has

asked for and obtained his mutton-chop in the commercial room of The

Dolphin, The Bear, and The George, not unnaturally asks to be shown

into the same chamber at the King's Head. But the King's Head does a

business with real commercials, and the stranger finds himself--out

of his element.

"'Mercial, sir?" said the waiter at The Bull Inn, Leeds, to Mr.

Dockwrath, in that tone of doubt which seemed to carry an answer to

his own question. But Mr. Dockwrath was not a man to be put down by

a waiter. "Yes," said he. "Didn't you hear me say so?" And then the

waiter gave way. None of those lords of the road were in the house at

the moment, and it might be that none would come that night.

Mr. Dockwrath had arrived by the 8.22 P.M. down, but the 8.45 P.M. up

from the north followed quick upon his heels, and he had hardly put

his brandy and water to his mouth before a rush and a sound of many

voices were heard in the hall. There is a great difference between

the entrance into an inn of men who are not known there and of

men who are known. The men who are not known are shy, diffident,

doubtful, and anxious to propitiate the chambermaid by great

courtesy. The men who are known are loud, jocular, and assured;--or

else, in case of deficient accommodation, loud, angry, and full of

threats. The guests who had now arrived were well known, and seemed

at present to be in the former mood. "Well, Mary, my dear, what's the

time of day with you?" said a rough, bass voice, within the hearing

of Mr. Dockwrath. "Much about the old tune, Mr. Moulder," said the

girl at the bar. "Time to look alive and keep moving. Will you have

them boxes up stairs, Mr. Kantwise?" and then there were a few words

about the luggage, and two real commercial gentlemen walked into the

room.

Mr. Dockwrath resolved to stand upon his rights, so he did not move

his chair, but looked up over his shoulder at the new comers. The

first man who entered was short and very fat;--so fat that he could

not have seen his own knees for some considerable time past. His face

rolled with fat, as also did all his limbs. His eyes were large, and

bloodshot. He wore no beard, and therefore showed plainly the triple

bagging of his fat chin. In spite of his overwhelming fatness, there

was something in his face that was masterful and almost vicious. His

body had been overcome by eating, but not as yet his spirit--one

would be inclined to say. This was Mr. Moulder, well known on the

road as being in the grocery and spirit line; a pushing man, who

understood his business, and was well trusted by his firm in spite of

his habitual intemperance. What did the firm care whether or no he

killed himself by eating and drinking? He sold his goods, collected

his money, and made his remittances. If he got drunk at night that

was nothing to them, seeing that he always did his quota of work the

next day. But Mr. Moulder did not get drunk. His brandy and water

went into his blood, and into his eyes, and into his feet, and into

his hands,--but not into his brain.

The other was a little square man in the hardware line, of the name

of Kantwise. He disposed of fire-irons, grates, ovens, and kettles,

and was at the present moment heavily engaged in the sale of certain

newly-invented metallic tables and chairs lately brought out by the

Patent Steel Furniture Company, for which Mr. Kantwise did business.

He looked as though a skin rather too small for the purpose had been

drawn over his head and face so that his forehead and cheeks and chin

were tight and shiny. His eyes were small and green, always moving

about in his head, and were seldom used by Mr. Kantwise in the

ordinary way. At whatever he looked he looked sideways; it was not

that he did not look you in the face, but he always looked at you

with a sidelong glance, never choosing to have you straight in front

of him. And the more eager he was in conversation--the more anxious

he might be to gain his point, the more he averted his face and

looked askance; so that sometimes he would prefer to have his

antagonist almost behind his shoulder. And then as he did this, he

would thrust forward his chin, and having looked at you round the

corner till his eyes were nearly out of his head, he would close

them both and suck in his lips, and shake his head with rapid little

shakes, as though he were saying to himself, "Ah, sir! you're a bad

un, a very bad un." His nose--for I should do Mr. Kantwise injustice

if I did not mention this feature--seemed to have been compressed

almost into nothing by that skin-squeezing operation. It was long

enough, taking the measurement down the bridge, and projected

sufficiently, counting the distance from the upper lip; but it had

all the properties of a line; it possessed length without breadth.

There was nothing in it from side to side. If you essayed to pull it,

your fingers would meet. When I shall have also said that the hair

on Mr. Kantwise's head stood up erect all round to the height of two

inches, and that it was very red, I shall have been accurate enough

in his personal description.

That Mr. Moulder represented a firm good business, doing tea, coffee,

and British brandy on a well-established basis of capital and profit,

the travelling commercial world in the north of England was well

aware. No one entertained any doubt about his employers, Hubbles and

Grease of Houndsditch. Hubbles and Grease were all right, as they had

been any time for the last twenty years. But I cannot say that there

was quite so strong a confidence felt in the Patent Steel Furniture

Company generally, or in the individual operations of Mr. Kantwise

in particular. The world in Yorkshire and Lancashire was doubtful

about metallic tables, and it was thought that Mr. Kantwise was too

eloquent in their praise.

Mr. Moulder when he had entered the room, stood still, to enable

the waiter to peel off from him his greatcoat and the large shawl

with which his neck was enveloped, and Mr. Kantwise performed the

same operation for himself, carefully folding up the articles of

clothing as he took them off. Then Mr. Moulder fixed his eyes on Mr.

Dockwrath, and stared at him very hard. "Who's the party, James?" he

said to the waiter, speaking in a whisper that was plainly heard by

the attorney.

"Gen'elman by the 8.22 down," said James.

"Commercial?" asked Mr. Moulder, with angry frown.

"He says so himself, anyways," said the waiter.

"Gammon!" replied Mr. Moulder, who knew all the bearings of a

commercial man thoroughly, and could have put one together if he were

only supplied with a little bit--say the mouth, as Professor Owen

always does with the Dodoes. Mr. Moulder now began to be angry, for

he was a stickler for the rights and privileges of his class, and had

an idea that the world was not so conservative in that respect as it

should be. Mr. Dockwrath, however, was not to be frightened, so he

drew his chair a thought nearer to the fire, took a sup of brandy and

water, and prepared himself for war if war should be necessary.

"Cold evening, sir, for the time of year," said Mr. Moulder, walking

up to the fireplace, and rolling the lumps of his forehead about in

his attempt at a frown. In spite of his terrible burden of flesh, Mr.

Moulder could look angry on occasions, but he could only do so when

he was angry. He was not gifted with a command of his facial muscles.

"Yes," said Mr. Dockwrath, not taking his eyes from off the Leeds

and Halifax Chronicle. "It is coldish. Waiter, bring me a cigar."

This was very provoking, as must be confessed. Mr. Moulder had not

been prepared to take any step towards turning the gentleman out,

though doubtless he might have done so had he chosen to exercise

his prerogative. But he did expect that the gentleman would have

acknowledged the weakness of his footing, by moving himself a little

towards one side of the fire, and he did not expect that he would

have presumed to smoke without asking whether the practice was

held to be objectionable by the legal possessors of the room. Mr.

Dockwrath was free of any such pusillanimity. "Waiter," he said

again, "bring me a cigar, d'ye hear?"

The great heart of Moulder could not stand this unmoved. He had been

an accustomed visitor to that room for fifteen years, and had always

done his best to preserve the commercial code unsullied. He was now

so well known, that no one else ever presumed to take the chair

at the four o'clock commercial dinner if he were present. It was

incumbent on him to stand forward and make a fight, more especially

in the presence of Kantwise, who was by no means stanch to his order.

Kantwise would at all times have been glad to have outsiders in the

room, in order that he might puff his tables, and if possible effect

a sale;--a mode of proceeding held in much aversion by the upright,

old-fashioned, commercial mind.

"Sir," said Mr. Moulder, having become very red about the cheeks and

chin, "I and this gentleman are going to have a bit of supper, and it

ain't accustomed to smoke in commercial rooms during meals. You know

the rules no doubt if you're commercial yourself;--as I suppose you

are, seeing you in this room."

Now Mr. Moulder was wrong in his law, as he himself was very well

aware. Smoking is allowed in all commercial rooms when the dinner has

been some hour or so off the table. But then it was necessary that he

should hit the stranger in some way, and the chances were that the

stranger would know nothing about commercial law. Nor did he; so he

merely looked Mr. Moulder hard in the face. But Mr. Kantwise knew the

laws well enough, and as he saw before him a possible purchaser of

metallic tables, he came to the assistance of the attorney.

"I think you are a little wrong there, Mr. Moulder; eh; ain't you?"

said he.

"Wrong about what?" said Moulder, turning very sharply upon his

base-minded compatriot.

"Well, as to smoking. It's nine o'clock, and if the gentleman--"

"I don't care a brass farthing about the clock," said the other, "but

when I'm going to have a bit of steak with my tea, in my own room, I

chooses to have it comfortable."

"Goodness me, Mr. Moulder, how many times have I seen you sitting

there with a pipe in your mouth, and half a dozen gents eating their

teas the while in this very room? The rule of the case I take it to

be this; when--"

"Bother your rules."

"Well; it was you spoke of them."

"The question I take to be this," said Moulder, now emboldened by

the opposition he had received. "Has the gentleman any right to

be in this room at all, or has he not? Is he commercial, or is

he--miscellaneous? That's the chat, as I take it."

"You're on the square there, I must allow," said Kantwise.

"James," said Moulder, appealing with authority to the waiter, who

had remained in the room during the controversy;--and now Mr. Moulder

was determined to do his duty and vindicate his profession, let

the consequences be what they might. "James, is that gentleman

commercial, or is he not?"

It was clearly necessary now that Mr. Dockwrath himself should take

his own part, and fight his own battle. "Sir," said he, turning to

Mr. Moulder, "I think you'll find it extremely difficult to define

that word;--extremely difficult. In this enterprising country all men

are more or less commercial."

"Hear! hear!" said Mr. Kantwise.

"That's gammon," said Mr. Moulder.

"Gammon it may be," said Mr. Dockwrath, "but nevertheless it's

right in law. Taking the word in its broadest, strictest, and most

intelligible sense, I am a commercial gentleman; and as such I do

maintain that I have a full right to the accommodation of this public

room."

"That's very well put," said Mr. Kantwise.

"Waiter," thundered out Mr. Moulder, as though he imagined that that

functionary was down the yard at the taproom instead of standing

within three feet of his elbow. "Is this gent a commercial, or is he

not? Because if not,--then I'll trouble you to send Mr. Crump here.

My compliments to Mr. Crump, and I wish to see him." Now Mr. Crump

was the landlord of the Bull Inn.

"Master's just stepped out, down the street," said James.

"Why don't you answer my question, sir?" said Moulder, becoming

redder and still more red about his shirt-collars.

"The gent said as how he was 'mercial," said the poor man. "Was I to

go to contradict a gent and tell him he wasn't when he said as how he

was?"

"If you please," said Mr. Dockwrath, "we will not bring the waiter

into this discussion. I asked for the commercial room, and he did his

duty in showing me to the door of it. The fact I take to be this; in

the south of England the rules to which you refer are not kept so

strictly as in these more mercantile localities."

"I've always observed that," said Kantwise.

"I travelled for three years in Devonshire, Somersetshire, and

Wiltshire," said Moulder, "and the commercial rooms were as well kept

there as any I ever see."

"I alluded to Surrey and Kent," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"They're uncommonly miscellaneous in Surrey and Kent," said Kantwise.

"There's no doubt in the world about that."

"If the gentleman means to say that he's come in here because he

didn't know the custom of the country, I've no more to say, of

course," said Moulder. "And in that case, I, for one, shall be very

happy if the gentleman cam make himself comfortable in this room as a

stranger, and I may say guest;--paying his own shot, of course."

"And as for me, I shall be delighted," said Kantwise. "I never did

like too much exclusiveness. What's the use of bottling oneself up?

that's what I always say. Besides, there's no charity in it. We gents

as are always on the road should show a little charity to them as

ain't so well accustomed to the work."

At this allusion to charity Mr. Moulder snuffled through his nose to

show his great disgust, but he made no further answer. Mr. Dockwrath,

who was determined not to yield, but who had nothing to gain by

further fighting, bowed his head, and declared that he felt very much

obliged. Whether or no there was any touch of irony in his tone, Mr.

Moulder's ears were not fine enough to discover. So they now sat

round the fire together, the attorney still keeping his seat in the

middle. And then Mr. Moulder ordered his little bit of steak with his

tea. "With the gravy in it, James," he said, solemnly. "And a bit

of fat, and a few slices of onion, thin mind, put on raw, not with

all the taste fried out; and tell the cook if she don't do it as

it should be done, I'll be down into the kitchen and do it myself.

You'll join me, Kantwise, eh?"

"Well, I think not; I dined at three, you know."

"Dined at three! What of that? a dinner at three won't last a man for

ever. You might as well join me."

"No, I think not. Have you got such a thing as a nice red herring in

the house, James?"

"Get one round the corner, sir."

"Do, there's a good fellow; and I'll take it for a relish with my

tea. I'm not so fond of your solids three times a day. They heat the

blood too much."

"Bother," grunted Moulder; and then they went to their evening meal,

over which we will not disturb them. The steak, we may presume, was

cooked aright, as Mr. Moulder did not visit the kitchen, and Mr.

Kantwise no doubt made good play with his unsubstantial dainty, as he

spoke no further till his meal was altogether finished.

"Did you ever hear anything of that Mr. Mason who lives near

Bradford?" asked Mr. Kantwise, addressing himself to Mr. Moulder, as

soon as the things had been cleared from the table, and that latter

gentleman had been furnished with a pipe and a supply of cold

without.

"I remember his father when I was a boy," said Moulder, not troubling

himself to take his pipe from his mouth, "Mason and Martock in the

Old Jewry; very good people they were too."

"He's decently well off now, I suppose, isn't he?" said Kantwise,

turning away his face, and looking at his companion out of the

corners of his eyes.

"I suppose he is. That place there by the road-side is all his own, I

take it. Have you been at him with some of your rusty, rickety tables

and chairs?"

"Mr. Moulder, you forget that there is a gentleman here who won't

understand that you're at your jokes. I was doing business at Groby

Park, but I found the party uncommon hard to deal with."

"Didn't complete the transaction?"

"Well, no; not exactly; but I intend to call again. He's close enough

himself, is Mr. Mason. But his lady, Mrs. M.! Lord love you, Mr.

Moulder, that is a woman!"

"She is; is she? As for me, I never have none of these private

dealings. It don't suit my book at all; nor it ain't what I've been

accustomed to. If a man's wholesale, let him be wholesale." And then,

having enunciated this excellent opinion with much energy, he took a

long pull at his brandy and water.

"Very old fashioned, Mr. Moulder," said Kantwise, looking round the

corner, then shutting his eyes and shaking his head.

"May be," said Moulder, "and yet none the worse for that. I call it

hawking and peddling, that going round the country with your goods

on your back. It ain't trade." And then there was a lull in the

conversation, Mr. Kantwise, who was a very religious gentleman,

having closed his eyes, and being occupied with some internal

anathema against Mr. Moulder.

"Begging your pardon, sir, I think you were talking about one Mr.

Mason who lives in these parts," said Dockwrath.

"Exactly. Joseph Mason, Esq., of Groby Park," said Mr. Kantwise, now

turning his face upon the attorney.

"I suppose I shall be likely to find him at home to-morrow, if I

call?"

"Certainly, sir; certainly; leastwise I should say so. Any personal

acquaintance with Mr. Mason, sir? If so, I meant nothing offensive by

my allusion to the lady, sir; nothing at all, I can assure you."

"The lady's nothing to me, sir; nor the gentleman either;--only that

I have a little business with him."

"Shall be very happy to join you in a gig, sir, to-morrow, as far

as Groby Park; or fly, if more convenient. I shall only take a few

patterns with me, and they're no weight at all,--none in the least,

sir. They go on behind, and you wouldn't know it, sir." To this,

however, Mr. Dockwrath would not assent. As he wanted to see Mr.

Mason very specially, he should go early, and preferred going by

himself.

"No offence, I hope," said Mr. Kantwise.

"None in the least," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"And if you would allow me, sir, to have the pleasure of showing you

a few of my patterns, I'm sure I should be delighted." This he said

observing that Mr. Moulder was sitting over his empty glass with the

pipe in his hand, and his eyes fast closed. "I think, sir, I could

show you an article that would please you very much. You see, sir,

that new ideas are coming in every day, and wood, sir, is altogether

going out,--altogether going out as regards furniture. In another

twenty years, sir, there won't be such a thing as a wooden table

in the country, unless with some poor person that can't afford to

refurnish. Believe me, sir, iron's the thing now-a-days."

"And indian-rubber," said Dockwrath.

"Yes; indian-rubber's wonderful too. Are you in that line, sir?"

"Well; no; not exactly."

"It's not like iron, sir. You can't make a dinner-table for fourteen

people out of indian-rubber, that will shut up into a box 3-6 by

2-4 deep, and 2-6 broad. Why, sir, I can let you have a set of

drawing-room furniture for fifteen ten that you've never seen

equalled in wood for three times the money;--ornamented in the

tastiest way, sir, and fit for any lady's drawing-room or boodoor.

The ladies of quality are all getting them now for their boodoors.

There's three tables, eight chairs, easy rocking-chair, music-stand,

stool to match, and pair of stand-up screens, all gilt in real Louey

catorse; and it goes in three boxes 4-2 by 2-1 and 2-3. Think of

that, sir. For fifteen ten and the boxes in." Then there was a pause,

after which Mr. Kantwise added--"If ready money, the carriage paid."

And then he turned his head very much away, and looked back very hard

at his expected customer.

"I'm afraid the articles are not in my line," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"It's the tastiest present for a gentleman to make to his lady that

has come out since--since those sort of things have come out at

all. You'll let me show you the articles, sir. It will give me the

sincerest pleasure." And Mr. Kantwise proposed to leave the room in

order that he might introduce the three boxes in question.

"They would not be at all in my way," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"The trouble would be nothing," said Mr. Kantwise, "and it gives me

the greatest pleasure to make them known when I find any one who

can appreciate such undoubted luxuries;" and so saying Mr. Kantwise

skipped out of the room, and soon returned with James and Boots, each

of the three bearing on his shoulder a deal box nearly as big as a

coffin, all of which were deposited in different parts of the room.

Mr. Moulder in the meantime snored heavily, his head falling on to

his breast every now and again. But nevertheless he held fast by his

pipe.

Mr. Kantwise skipped about the room with wonderful agility,

unfastening the boxes, and taking out the contents, while Joe the

boots and James the waiter stood by assisting. They had never yet

seen the glories of these chairs and tables, and were therefore

not unwilling to be present. It was singular to see how ready

Mr. Kantwise was at the work, how recklessly he threw aside the

whitey-brown paper in which the various pieces of painted iron were

enveloped, and with what a practised hand he put together one article

after another. First there was a round loo-table, not quite so large

in its circumference as some people might think desirable, but,

nevertheless, a round loo-table. The pedestal with its three claws

was all together. With a knowing touch Mr. Kantwise separated the

bottom of what looked like a yellow stick, and, lo! there were three

legs, which he placed carefully on the ground. Then a small bar was

screwed on to the top, and over the bar was screwed the leaf, or

table itself, which consisted of three pieces unfolding with hinges.

These, when the screw had been duly fastened in the centre, opened

out upon the bar, and there was the table complete.

It was certainly a "tasty" article, and the pride with which Mr.

Kantwise glanced back at it was quite delightful. The top of the

table was blue, with a red bird of paradise in the middle; and the

edges of the table, to the breadth of a couple of inches, were

yellow. The pillar also was yellow, as were the three legs. "It's the

real Louey catorse," said Mr. Kantwise, stooping down to go on with

table number two, which was, as he described it, a "chess," having

the proper number of blue and light-pink squares marked upon it; but

this also had been made Louey catorse with reference to its legs and

edges. The third table was a "sofa," of proper shape, but rather

small in size. Then, one after another, he brought forth and screwed

up the chairs, stools, and sundry screens, and within a quarter of an

hour he had put up the whole set complete. The red bird of paradise

and the blue ground appeared on all, as did also the yellow legs and

edgings which gave to them their peculiarly fashionable character.

"There," said Mr. Kantwise, looking at them with fond admiration, "I

don't mind giving a personal guarantee that there's nothing equal to

that for the money either in England or in France."

"They are very nice," said Mr. Dockwrath. When a man has had produced

before him for his own and sole delectation any article or articles,

how can he avoid eulogium? Mr. Dockwrath found himself obliged to

pause, and almost feared that he should find himself obliged to buy.

"Nice! I should rather think they are," said Mr. Kantwise, becoming

triumphant,--"and for fifteen ten, delivered, boxes included. There's

nothing like iron, sir, nothing; you may take my word for that.

They're so strong, you know. Look here, sir." And then Mr. Kantwise,

taking two of the pieces of whitey-brown paper which had been laid

aside, carefully spread one on the centre of the round table, and the

other on the seat of one of the chairs. Then lightly poising himself

on his toe, he stepped on to the chair, and from thence on to the

table. In that position he skillfully brought his feet together,

so that his weight was directly on the leg, and gracefully waved

his hands over his head. James and Boots stood by admiring, with

open mouths, and Mr. Dockwrath, with his hands in his pockets, was

meditating whether he could not give the order without complying with

the terms as to ready money.

[Illustration: "There is nothing like iron, Sir; nothing."]

"Look at that for strength," said Mr. Kantwise from his exalted

position. "I don't think any lady of your acquaintance, sir, would

allow you to stand on her rosewood or mahogany loo-table. And if she

did, you would not like to adventure it yourself. But look at this

for strength," and he waved his arms abroad, still keeping his feet

skilfully together in the same exact position.

At that moment Mr. Moulder awoke. "So you've got your iron traps out,

have you?" said he. "What; you're there, are you? Upon my word I'd

sooner you than me."

"I certainly should not like to see you up here, Mr. Moulder. I doubt

whether even this table would bear five-and-twenty stone. Joe, lend

me your shoulder, there's a good fellow." And then Mr. Kantwise,

bearing very lightly on the chair, descended to the ground without

accident.

"Now, that's what I call gammon," said Moulder.

"What is gammon, Mr. Moulder?" said the other, beginning to be angry.

"It's all gammon. The chairs and tables is gammon, and so is the

stools and the screens."

"Mr. Moulder, I didn't call your tea and coffee and brandy gammon."

"You can't; and you wouldn't do any harm if you did. Hubbles and

Grease are too well known in Yorkshire for you to hurt them. But as

for all that show-off and gimcrack-work, I tell you fairly it ain't

what I call trade, and it ain't fit for a commercial room. It's

gammon, gammon, gammon! James, give me a bedcandle." And so Mr.

Moulder took himself off to bed.

"I think I'll go too," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"You'll let me put you up the set, eh?" said Mr. Kantwise.

"Well; I'll think about it," said the attorney. "I'll not just give

you an answer to-night. Good night, sir; I'm very much obliged to

you." And he too went, leaving Mr. Kantwise to repack his chairs and

tables with the assistance of James the waiter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASONS OF GROBY PARK.

Groby Park is about seven miles from Leeds, in the direction of

Bradford, and thither on the morning after the scene described in the

last chapter Mr. Dockwrath was driven in one of the gigs belonging

to the Bull Inn. The park itself is spacious, but is flat and

uninteresting, being surrounded by a thin belt of new-looking

fir-trees, and containing but very little old or handsome timber.

There are on the high road two very important lodges, between which

is a large ornamented gate, and from thence an excellent road leads

to the mansion, situated in the very middle of the domain. The house

is Greek in its style of architecture,--at least so the owner says;

and if a portico with a pediment and seven Ionic columns makes a

house Greek, the house in Groby Park undoubtedly is Greek.

Here lived Mr. and Mrs. Mason, the three Misses Mason, and

occasionally the two young Messrs. Mason; for the master of Groby

Park was blessed with five children. He himself was a big, broad,

heavy-browed man, in whose composition there was nothing of

tenderness, nothing of poetry, and nothing of taste; but I cannot say

that he was on the whole a bad man. He was just in his dealings, or

at any rate endeavoured to be so. He strove hard to do his duty as a

county magistrate against very adverse circumstances. He endeavoured

to enable his tenants and labourers to live. He was severe to his

children, and was not loved by them; but nevertheless they were dear

to him, and he endeavoured to do his duty by them. The wife of his

bosom was not a pleasant woman, but nevertheless he did his duty by

her; that is, he neither deserted her, nor beat her, nor locked her

up. I am not sure that he would not have been justified in doing one

of these three things, or even all the three; for Mrs. Mason of Groby

Park was not a pleasant woman.

But yet he was a bad man in that he could never forget and never

forgive. His mind and heart were equally harsh and hard and

inflexible. He was a man who considered that it behoved him as a man

to resent all injuries, and to have his pound of flesh in all cases.

In his inner thoughts he had ever boasted to himself that he had

paid all men all that he owed. He had, so he thought, injured no

one in any of the relations of life. His tradesmen got their money

regularly. He answered every man's letter. He exacted nothing from

any man for which he did not pay. He never ill-used a servant either

by bad language or by over-work. He never amused himself, but devoted

his whole time to duties. He would fain even have been hospitable,

could he have gotten his neighbours to come to him and have induced

his wife to put upon the table sufficient food for them to eat.

Such being his virtues, what right had any one to injure him? When he

got from his grocer adulterated coffee,--he analyzed the coffee, as

his half-brother had done the guano,--he would have flayed the man

alive if the law would have allowed him. Had he not paid the man

monthly, giving him the best price as though for the best article?

When he was taken in with a warranty for a horse, he pursued the

culprit to the uttermost. Maid-servants who would not come from their

bedrooms at six o'clock, he would himself disturb while enjoying

their stolen slumbers. From his children he exacted all titles of

respect, because he had a right to them. He wanted nothing that

belonged to any one else, but he could not endure that aught should

be kept from him which he believed to be his own. It may be imagined,

therefore, in what light he esteemed Lady Mason and her son, and how

he regarded their residence at Orley Farm, seeing that he firmly

believed that Orley Farm was his own, if all the truth were known.

I have already hinted that Mrs. Mason was not a delightful woman.

She had been a beauty, and still imagined that she had not lost all

pretension to be so considered. She spent, therefore, a considerable

portion of her day in her dressing-room, spent a great deal of money

for clothes, and gave herself sundry airs. She was a little woman

with long eyes, and regular eyelashes, with a straight nose, and thin

lips and regular teeth. Her face was oval, and her hair was brown.

It had at least once been all brown, and that which was now seen was

brown also. But, nevertheless, although she was possessed of all

these charms, you might look at her for ten days together, and on the

eleventh you would not know her if you met her in the streets.

But the appearance of Mrs. Mason was not her forte. She had been a

beauty; but if it had been her lot to be known in history, it was not

as a beauty that she would have been famous. Parsimony was her great

virtue, and a power of saving her strong point. I have said that she

spent much money in dress, and some people will perhaps think that

the two points of character are not compatible. Such people know

nothing of a true spirit of parsimony. It is from the backs and

bellies of other people that savings are made with the greatest

constancy and the most satisfactory results.

The parsimony of a mistress of a household is best displayed on

matters eatable;--on matters eatable and drinkable; for there is a

fine scope for domestic savings in tea, beer, and milk. And in such

matters chiefly did Mrs. Mason operate, going as far as she dared

towards starving even her husband. But nevertheless she would feed

herself in the middle of the day, having a roast fowl with bread

sauce in her own room. The miser who starves himself and dies without

an ounce of flesh on his bones, while his skinny head lies on a bag

of gold, is after all, respectable. There has been a grand passion

in his life, and that grandest work of man, self-denial. You cannot

altogether despise one who has clothed himself with rags and fed

himself with bone-scrapings, while broadcloth and ortolans were

within his easy reach. But there are women, wives and mothers of

families, who would give the bone-scrapings to their husbands and the

bones to their servants, while they hide the ortolans for themselves;

and would dress children in rags, while they cram chests, drawers,

and boxes with silks and satins for their own backs. Such a woman

one can thoroughly despise, and even hate; and such a woman was Mrs.

Mason of Groby Park.

I shall not trouble the reader at present with much description of

the young Masons. The eldest son was in the army, and the younger at

Cambridge, both spending much more money than their father allowed

them. Not that he, in this respect, was specially close-fisted. He

ascertained what was sufficient,--amply sufficient as he was told by

the colonel of the regiment and the tutor of the college,--and that

amount he allowed, assuring both Joseph and John that if they spent

more, they would themselves have to pay for it out of the moneys

which should enrich them in future years. But how could the sons

of such a mother be other than spendthrifts? Of course they were

extravagant; of course they spent more than they should have done;

and their father resolved that he would keep his word with them

religiously.

The daughters were much less fortunate, having no possible means of

extravagance allowed to them. Both the father and mother decided

that they should go out into the county society, and therefore their

clothing was not absolutely of rags. But any young lady who does go

into society, whether it be of county or town, will fully understand

the difference between a liberal and a stingy wardrobe. Girls with

slender provisions of millinery may be fit to go out,--quite fit in

their father's eyes; and yet all such going out may be matter of

intense pain. It is all very well for the world to say that a girl

should be happy without reference to her clothes. Show me such a

girl, and I will show you one whom I should be very sorry that a boy

of mine should choose as his sweetheart.

The three Misses Mason, as they always were called by the Groby Park

people, had been christened Diana, Creusa, and Penelope, their mother

having a passion for classic literature, which she indulged by a use

of LempriÃ¨re's dictionary. They were not especially pretty, nor were

they especially plain. They were well grown and healthy, and quite

capable of enjoying themselves in any of the amusements customary to

young ladies,--if only the opportunities were afforded them.

Mr. Dockwrath had thought it well to write to Mr. Mason, acquainting

that gentleman with his intended visit. Mr. Mason, he said to

himself, would recognise his name, and know whence he came, and under

such circumstances would be sure to see him, although the express

purpose of the proposed interview should not have been explained to

him. Such in result was exactly the case. Mr. Mason did remember the

name of Dockwrath, though he had never hitherto seen the bearer of

it; and as the letter was dated from Hamworth, he felt sufficient

interest in the matter to await at home the coming of his visitor.

"I know your name, Mr. Mason, sir, and have known it long," said Mr.

Dockwrath, seating himself in the chair which was offered to him in

the magistrate's study; "though I never had the pleasure of seeing

you before,--to my knowledge. My name is Dockwrath, sir, and I am a

solicitor. I live at Hamworth, and I married the daughter of old Mr.

Usbech, sir, whom you will remember."

Mr. Mason listened attentively as these details were uttered before

him so clearly, but he said nothing, merely bowing his head at each

separate statement. He knew all about old Usbech's daughter nearly as

well as Mr. Dockwrath did himself, but he was a man who knew how to

be silent upon occasions.

"I was too young, sir," continued Dockwrath, "when you had that trial

about Orley Farm to have anything to do with the matter myself,

but nevertheless I remember all the circumstances as though it was

yesterday. I suppose, sir, you remember them also?"

"Yes, Mr. Dockwrath, I remember them very well."

"Well, sir, my impression has always been that--" And then the

attorney stopped. It was quite his intention to speak out plainly

before Mr. Mason, but he was anxious that that gentleman should speak

out too. At any rate it might be well that he should be induced to

express some little interest in the matter.

"Your impression, you say, has always been--" said Mr. Mason,

repeating the words of his companion, and looking as ponderous and

grave as ever. His countenance, however, expressed nothing but his

usual ponderous solemnity.

"My impression always was--that there was something that had not been

as yet found out."

"What sort of thing, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"Well; some secret. I don't think that your lawyers managed the

matter well, Mr. Mason."

"You think you would have done it better, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I don't say that, Mr. Mason. I was only a lad at the time, and could

not have managed it at all. But they didn't ferret about enough. Mr.

Mason, there's a deal better evidence than any that is given by word

of mouth. A clever counsel can turn a witness pretty nearly any way

he likes, but he can't do that with little facts. He hasn't the time,

you see, to get round them. Your lawyers, sir, didn't get up the

little facts as they should have done."

"And you have got them up since, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I don't say that, Mr. Mason. You see all my interest lies in

maintaining the codicil. My wife's fortune came to her under that

deed. To be sure that's gone and spent long since, and the Lord

Chancellor with all the judges couldn't enforce restitution; but,

nevertheless, I wouldn't wish that any one should have a claim

against me on that account."

"Perhaps you will not object to say what it is that you do wish?"

"I wish to see right done, Mr. Mason; that's all. I don't think that

Lady Mason or her son have any right to the possession of that place.

I don't think that that codicil was a correct instrument; and in that

case of Mason versus Mason I don't think that you and your friends

got to the bottom of it." And then Mr. Dockwrath leaned back in his

chair with an inward determination to say nothing more, until Mr.

Mason should make some sign.

That gentleman, however, still remained ponderous and heavy, and

therefore there was a short period of silence--"And have you got to

the bottom of it since, Mr. Dockwrath?" at last he said.

"I don't say that I have," said the attorney.

"Might I ask then what it is you propose to effect by the visit with

which you have honoured me? Of course you are aware that these are

very private matters; and although I should feel myself under an

obligation to you, or to any man who might assist me to arrive at any

true facts which have hitherto been concealed, I am not disposed to

discuss the affair with a stranger on grounds of mere suspicion."

"I shouldn't have come here, Mr. Mason, at very great expense, and

personal inconvenience to myself in my profession, if I had not some

good reason for doing so. I don't think that you ever got to the

bottom of that matter, and I can't say that I have done so now; I

haven't even tried. But I tell you what, Mr. Mason; if you wish it, I

think I could put you in the way of--trying."

"My lawyers are Messrs. Round and Crook of Bedford Row. Will it not

be better that you should go to them, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"No, Mr. Mason. I don't think it will be better that I should go

to them. I know Round and Crook well, and don't mean to say a word

against them; but if I go any farther into this affair I must do

it with the principal. I am not going to cut my own throat for the

sake of mending any man's little finger. I have a family of sixteen

children, Mr. Mason, and I have to look about very sharp,--very sharp

indeed." Then there was another pause, and Mr. Dockwrath began to

perceive that Mr. Mason was not by nature an open, demonstrative, or

communicative man. If anything further was to be done, he himself

must open out a little. "The fact is, Mr. Mason, that I have come

across documents which you should have had at that trial. Round and

Crook ought to have had them, only they weren't half sharp. Why, sir,

Mr. Usbech had been your father's man of business for years upon

years, and yet they didn't half go through his papers. They turned

'em over and looked at 'em; but never thought of seeing what little

facts might be proved."

"And these documents are with you now, here?"

"No, Mr. Mason, I am not so soft as that. I never carry about

original documents unless when ordered to prove. Copies of one or two

items I have made; not regular copies, Mr. Mason, but just a line or

two to refresh my memory." And Mr. Dockwrath took a small letter-case

out of his breast coat pocket.

By this time Mr. Mason's curiosity had been roused, and he began

to think it possible that his visitor had discovered information

which might be of importance to him. "Are you going to show me any

document?" said he.

"That's as may be," said the attorney. "I don't know as yet whether

you care to see it. I have come a long way to do you a service, and

it seems to me you are rather shy of coming forward to meet me. As I

said before, I've a very heavy family, and I'm not going to cut the

nose off my own face to put money into any other man's pocket. What

do you think my journey down here will cost me, including loss of

time, and interruption to my business?"

"Look here, Mr. Dockwrath; if you are really able to put me into

possession of any facts regarding the Orley Farm estate which I

ought to know, I will see that you are compensated for your time and

trouble. Messrs. Round and Crook--"

"I'll have nothing to do with Round and Crook. So that's settled, Mr.

Mason."

"Then, Mr. Dockwrath--"

"Half a minute, Mr. Mason. I'll have nothing to do with Round and

Crook; but as I know you to be a gentleman and a man of honour, I'll

put you in possession of what I've discovered, and leave it to you

afterwards to do what you think right about my expenses, time, and

services. You won't forget that it is a long way from Hamworth to

Groby Park. And if you should succeed--"

"If I am to look at this document, I must do so without pledging

myself to anything," said Mr. Mason, still with much solemnity. He

had great doubts as to his new acquaintance, and much feared that

he was derogating from his dignity as a county magistrate and owner

of Groby Park in holding any personal intercourse with him; but

nevertheless he could not resist the temptation. He most firmly

believed that that codicil had not expressed the genuine last will

and fair disposition of property made by his father, and it might

certainly be the case that proof of all that he believed was to be

found among the papers of the old lawyer. He hated Lady Mason with

all his power of hatred, and if there did, even yet, exist for him a

chance of upsetting her claims and ruining her before the world, he

was not the man to forego that chance.

"Well, sir, you shall see it," said Mr. Dockwrath; "or rather hear

it, for there is not much to see." And so saying he extracted from

his pocket-book a very small bit of paper.

"I should prefer to read it, if it's all the same to you, Mr.

Dockwrath. I shall understand it much better in that way."

"As you like, Mr. Mason," said the attorney, handing him the small

bit of paper. "You will understand, sir, that it's no real copy, but

only a few dates and particulars, just jotted down to assist my own

memory." The document, supported by which Mr. Dockwrath had come

down to Yorkshire, consisted of half a sheet of note paper, and the

writing upon this covered hardly the half of it. The words which Mr.

Mason read were as follows:--

Date of codicil. 14th July 18--.

Witnesses to the instrument. John Kenneby; Bridget

Bolster; Jonathan Usbech. N.B. Jonathan Usbech died before

the testator.

Mason and Martock. Deed of separation; dated 14th July

18--.

Executed at Orley Farm.

Witnesses John Kenneby; and Bridget Bolster. Deed was

prepared in the office of Jonathan Usbech, and probably

executed in his presence.

That was all that was written on the paper, and Mr. Mason read the

words to himself three times before he looked up, or said anything

concerning them. He was not a man quick at receiving new ideas into

his mind, or of understanding new points; but that which had once

become intelligible to him and been made his own, remained so always.

"Well," said he, when he read the above words for the third time.

"You don't see it, sir?" said Mr. Dockwrath.

"See what?" said Mr. Mason, still looking at the scrap of paper.

"Why; the dates, to begin with."

"I see that the dates are the same;--the 14th of July in the same

year."

"Well," said Mr. Dockwrath, looking very keenly into the magistrate's

face.

"Well," said Mr. Mason, looking over the paper at his boot.

"John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were witnesses to both the

instruments," said the attorney.

"So I see," said the magistrate.

"But I don't remember that it came out in evidence that either of

them recollected having been called on for two signatures on the same

day."

"No; there was nothing of that came out;--or was even hinted at."

"No; nothing even hinted at, Mr. Mason,--as you justly observe. That

is what I mean by saying that Round and Crook's people didn't get up

their little facts. Believe me, sir, there are men in the profession

out of London who know quite as much as Round and Crook. They ought

to have had those facts, seeing that the very copy of the document

was turned over by their hands." And Mr. Dockwrath hit the table

heavily in the warmth of his indignation against his professional

brethren. Earlier in the interview Mr. Mason would have been made

very angry by such freedom, but he was not angry now.

"Yes; they ought to have known it," said he. But he did not even yet

see the point. He merely saw that there was a point worth seeing.

"Known it! Of course they ought to have known it. Look here, Mr.

Mason! If I had it on my mind that I'd thrown over a client of mine

by such carelessness as that, I'd--I'd strike my own name off the

rolls; I would indeed. I never could look a counsel in the face

again, if I'd neglected to brief him with such facts as those. I

suppose it was carelessness; eh, Mr. Mason?"

"Oh, yes; I'm afraid so," said Mr. Mason, still rather in the dark.

"They could have had no object in keeping it back, I should say."

"No; none in life. But let us see, Mr. Dockwrath; how does it bear

upon us? The dates are the same, and the witnesses the same."

"The deed of separation is genuine. There is no doubt about that."

"Oh; you're sure of that?"

"Quite certain. I found it entered in the old office books. It was

the last of a lot of such documents executed between Mason and

Martock after the old man gave up the business. You see she was

always with him, and knew all about it."

"About the partnership deed?"

"Of course she did. She's a clever woman, Mr. Mason; very clever, and

it's almost a pity that she should come to grief. She has carried it

on so well; hasn't she?"

Mr. Mason's face now became very black. "Why," said he, "if what you

seem to allege be true, she must be a--a--a--. What do you mean, sir,

by pity?"

Mr. Dockwrath shrugged his shoulders. "It is very blue," said he,

"uncommon blue."

"She must be a swindler; a common swindler. Nay, worse than that."

"Oh, yes, a deal worse than that, Mr. Mason. And as for

common;--according to my way of thinking there's nothing at all

common about it. I look upon it as about the best got-up plant I ever

remember to have heard of. I do, indeed, Mr. Mason." The attorney

during the last ten minutes of the conversation had quite altered

his tone, understanding that he had already achieved a great part

of his object; but Mr. Mason in his intense anxiety did not observe

this. Had Mr. Dockwrath, in commencing the conversation, talked about

"plants" and "blue," Mr. Mason would probably have rung his bell for

the servant. "If it's anything, it's forgery," said Mr. Dockwrath,

looking his companion full in the face.

"I always felt sure that my father never intended to sign such a

codicil as that."

"He never did sign it, Mr. Mason."

"And,--and the witnesses!" said Mr. Mason, still not enlightened as

to the true extent of the attorney's suspicion.

"They signed the other deed; that is two of them did. There is no

doubt about that;--on that very day. They certainly did witness a

signature made by the old gentleman in his own room on that 14th of

July. The original of that document, with the date and their names,

will be forthcoming soon enough."

"Well," said Mr. Mason.

"But they did not witness two signatures."

"You think not, eh!"

"I'm sure of it. The girl Bolster would have remembered it, and would

have said so. She was sharp enough."

"Who wrote all the names then at the foot of the will?" said Mr.

Mason.

"Ah! that's the question. Who did write them? We know very well, Mr.

Mason, you and I that is, who did not. And having come to that, I

think we may give a very good guess who did."

And then they both sat silent for some three or four minutes. Mr.

Dockwrath was quite at his ease, rubbing his chin with his hand,

playing with a paper-knife which he had taken from the study

table, and waiting till it should please Mr. Mason to renew the

conversation. Mr. Mason was not at his ease, though all idea of

affecting any reserve before the attorney had left him. He was

thinking how best he might confound and destroy the woman who had

robbed him for so many years; who had defied him, got the better of

him, and put him to terrible cost; who had vexed his spirit through

his whole life, deprived him of content, and had been to him as a

thorn ever present in a festering sore. He had always believed that

she had defrauded him, but this belief had been qualified by the

unbelief of others. It might have been, he had half thought, that the

old man had signed the codicil in his dotage, having been cheated and

bullied into it by the woman. There had been no day in her life on

which he would not have ruined her, had it been in his power to do

so. But now--now, new and grander ideas were breaking in upon his

mind. Could it be possible that he might live to see her, not merely

deprived of her ill-gained money, but standing in the dock as a felon

to receive sentence for her terrible misdeeds? If that might be so,

would he not receive great compensation for all that he had suffered?

Would it not be sweet to his sense of justice that both of them

should thus at last have their own? He did not even yet understand

all that Mr. Dockwrath suspected. He did not fully perceive why the

woman was supposed to have chosen as the date of her forgery, the

date of that other genuine deed. But he did understand, he did

perceive--at least so he thought,--that new and perhaps conclusive

evidence of her villainy was at last within his reach.

"And what shall we do now, Mr. Dockwrath?" he said at last.

"Well; am I to understand that you do me the honour of asking my

advice upon that question as being your lawyer?"

This question immediately brought Mr. Mason back to business that he

did understand. "A man in my position cannot very well change his

legal advisers at a moment's notice. You must be very well aware of

that, Mr. Dockwrath. Messrs. Round and Crook--"

"Messrs. Round and Crook, sir, have neglected your business in a most

shameful manner. Let me tell you that, sir."

"Well; that's as may be. I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Dockwrath;

I'll think over this matter in quiet, and then I'll come up to town.

Perhaps when there I may expect the honour of a further visit from

you."

"And you won't mention the matter to Round and Crook?"

"I can't undertake to say that, Mr. Dockwrath. I think it will

perhaps be better that I should mention it, and then see you

afterwards."

"And how about my expenses down here?"

Just at this moment there came a light tap at the study door, and

before the master of the house could give or withhold permission

the mistress of the house entered the room. "My dear," she said, "I

didn't know that you were engaged."

"Yes, I am engaged," said the gentleman.

"Oh, I'm sure I beg pardon. Perhaps this is the gentleman from

Hamworth?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mr. Dockwrath. "I am the gentleman from Hamworth.

I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you very well, ma'am?" And

getting up from his chair he bowed politely.

"Mr. Dockwrath, Mrs. Mason," said the lady's husband, introducing

them; and then Mrs. Mason curtsied to the stranger. She too was very

anxious to know what might be the news from Hamworth.

"Mr. Dockwrath will lunch with us, my dear," said Mr. Mason. And then

the lady, on hospitable cares intent, left them again to themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. MASON'S HOT LUNCHEON.

Though Mr. Dockwrath was somewhat elated by this invitation to lunch,

he was also somewhat abashed by it. He had been far from expecting

that Mr. Mason of Groby Park would do him any such honour, and was

made aware by it of the great hold which he must have made upon the

attention of his host. But nevertheless he immediately felt that his

hands were to a certain degree tied. He, having been invited to sit

down at Mr. Mason's table, with Mrs. M. and the family,--having been

treated as though he were a gentleman, and thus being for the time

being put on a footing of equality with the county magistrate, could

not repeat that last important question: "How about my expenses down

here?" nor could he immediately go on with the grand subject in any

frame of mind which would tend to further his own interests. Having

been invited to lunch, he could not haggle with due persistency for

his share of the business in crushing Lady Mason, nor stipulate

that the whole concern should not be trusted to the management of

Round and Crook. As a source of pride this invitation to eat was

pleasant to him, but he was forced to acknowledge to himself that it

interfered with business.

Nor did Mr. Mason feel himself ready to go on with the conversation

in the manner in which it had been hitherto conducted. His mind was

full of Orley Farm and his wrongs, and he could bring himself to

think of nothing else; but he could no longer talk about it to the

attorney sitting there in his study. "Will you take a turn about the

place while the lunch is getting ready?" he said. So they took their

hats and went out into the garden.

"It is dreadful to think of," said Mr. Mason, after they had twice

walked in silence the length of a broad gravel terrace.

"What; about her ladyship?" said the attorney.

"Quite dreadful!" and Mr. Mason shuddered. "I don't think I ever

heard of anything so shocking in my life. For twenty years, Mr.

Dockwrath, think of that. Twenty years!" and his face as he spoke

became almost black with horror.

"It is very shocking," said Mr. Dockwrath; "very shocking. What on

earth will be her fate if it be proved against her? She has brought

it on herself; that is all that one can say of her."

"D---- her! d---- her!" exclaimed the other, gnashing his teeth

with concentrated wrath. "No punishment will be bad enough for her.

Hanging would not be bad enough."

"They can't hang her, Mr. Mason," said Mr. Dockwrath, almost

frightened by the violence of his companion.

"No; they have altered the laws, giving every encouragement to

forgers, villains, and perjurers. But they can give her penal

servitude for life. They must do it."

"She is not convicted yet, you know."

"D---- her!" repeated the owner of Groby Park again, as he thought of

his twenty years of loss. Eight hundred a year for twenty years had

been taken away from him; and he had been worsted before the world

after a hard fight. "D---- her!" he continued to growl between his

teeth. Mr. Dockwrath when he had first heard his companion say how

horrid and dreadful the affair was, had thought that Mr. Mason was

alluding to the condition in which the lady had placed herself by her

assumed guilt. But it was of his own condition that he was speaking.

The idea which shocked him was the thought of the treatment which he

himself had undergone. The dreadful thing at which he shuddered was

his own ill usage. As for her;--pity for her! Did a man ever pity a

rat that had eaten into his choicest dainties?

"The lunch is on the table, sir," said the Groby Park footman in the

Groby Park livery. Under the present household arrangement of Groby

Park all the servants lived on board wages. Mrs. Mason did not like

this system, though it had about it certain circumstances of economy

which recommended it to her; it interfered greatly with the stringent

aptitudes of her character and the warmest passion of her heart; it

took away from her the delicious power of serving out the servants'

food, of locking up the scraps of meat, and of charging the maids

with voracity. But, to tell the truth, Mr. Mason had been driven by

sheer necessity to take this step, as it had been found impossible to

induce his wife to give out sufficient food to enable the servants to

live and work. She knew that in not doing so she injured herself; but

she could not do it. The knife in passing through the loaf would make

the portion to be parted with less by one third than the portion to

be retained. Half a pound of salt butter would reduce itself to a

quarter of a pound. Portions of meat would become infinitesimal.

When standing with viands before her, she had not free will over her

hands. She could not bring herself to part with victuals, though she

might ruin herself by retaining them. Therefore, by the order of the

master, were the servants placed on board wages.

Mr. Dockwrath soon found himself in the dining-room, where the three

young ladies with their mamma were already seated at the table. It

was a handsome room, and the furniture was handsome; but nevertheless

it was a heavy room, and the furniture was heavy. The table was large

enough for a party of twelve, and might have borne a noble banquet;

as it was the promise was not bad, for there were three large plated

covers concealing hot viands, and in some houses lunch means only

bread and cheese.

Mr. Mason went through the form of introduction between Mr. Dockwrath

and his daughters. "That is Miss Mason, that Miss Creusa Mason, and

this Miss Penelope. John, remove the covers." And the covers were

removed, John taking them from the table with a magnificent action of

his arm which I am inclined to think was not innocent of irony. On

the dish before the master of the house,--a large dish which must I

fancy have been selected by the cook with some similar attempt at

sarcasm,--there reposed three scraps, as to the nature of which Mr.

Dockwrath, though he looked hard at them, was unable to enlighten

himself. But Mr. Mason knew them well, as he now placed his eyes on

them for the third time. They were old enemies of his, and his brow

again became black as he looked at them. The scraps in fact consisted

of two drumsticks of a fowl and some indescribable bone out of the

back of the same. The original bird had no doubt first revealed

all its glories to human eyes,--presuming the eyes of the cook to

be inhuman--in Mrs. Mason's "boodoor." Then, on the dish before

the lady, there were three other morsels, black-looking and very

suspicious to the eye, which in the course of conversation were

proclaimed to be ham,--broiled ham. Mrs. Mason would never allow

a ham in its proper shape to come into the room, because it is an

article upon which the guests are themselves supposed to operate

with the carving-knife. Lastly, on the dish before Miss Creusa there

reposed three potatoes.

The face of Mr. Mason became very black as he looked at the banquet

which was spread upon his board, and Mrs. Mason, eyeing him across

the table, saw that it was so. She was not a lady who despised such

symptoms in her lord, or disregarded in her valour the violence of

marital storms. She had quailed more than once or twice under rebuke

occasioned by her great domestic virtue, and knew that her husband,

though he might put up with much as regarded his own comfort, and

that of his children, could be very angry at injuries done to his

household honour and character as a hospitable English country

gentleman.

Consequently the lady smiled and tried to look self-satisfied as

she invited her guest to eat. "This is ham," said she with a little

simper, "broiled ham, Mr. Dockwrath; and there is chicken at the

other end; I think they call it--devilled."

"Shall I assist the young ladies to anything first?" said the

attorney, wishing to be polite.

"Nothing, thank you," said Miss Penelope, with a very stiff bow.

She also knew that Mr. Dockwrath was an attorney from Hamworth, and

considered herself by no means bound to hold any sort of conversation

with him.

"My daughters only eat bread and butter in the middle of the day,"

said the lady. "Creusa, my dear, will you give Mr. Dockwrath a

potato. Mr. Mason, Mr. Dockwrath will probably take a bit of that

chicken."

"I would recommend him to follow the girls' example, and confine

himself to the bread and butter," said the master of the house,

pushing about the scraps with his knife and fork. "There is nothing

here for him to eat."

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Mason.

"There is nothing here for him to eat," repeated Mr. Mason. "And

as far as I can see there is nothing there either. What is it you

pretend to have in that dish?"

"My dear!" again exclaimed Mrs. Mason.

"What is it?" repeated the lord of the house in an angry tone.

"Broiled ham, Mr. Mason."

"Then let the ham be brought in," said he. "Diana, ring the bell."

"But the ham is not cooked, Mr. Mason," said the lady. "Broiled ham

is always better when it has not been first boiled."

"Is there no cold meat in the house?" he asked.

"I am afraid not," she replied, now trembling a little in

anticipation of what might be coming after the stranger should have

gone. "You never like large joints yourself, Mr. Mason; and for

ourselves we don't eat meat at luncheon."

"Nor anybody else either, here," said Mr. Mason in his anger.

"Pray don't mind me, Mr. Mason," said the attorney, "pray don't, Mr.

Mason. I am a very poor fist at lunch; I am indeed."

"I am sure I am very sorry, very sorry, Mr. Mason," continued the

lady. "If I had known that an early dinner was required, it should

have been provided;--although the notice given was so very short."

"I never dine early," said Mr. Dockwrath, thinking that some

imputation of a low way of living was conveyed in this supposition

that he required a dinner under the pseudonym of a lunch. "I never

do, upon my word--we are quite regular at home at half-past five, and

all I ever take in the middle of the day is a biscuit and a glass of

sherry,--or perhaps a bite of bread and cheese. Don't be uneasy about

me, Mrs. Mason."

The three young ladies, having now finished their repast, got up from

the table and retired, following each other out of the room in a

line. Mrs. Mason remained for a minute or two longer, and then she

also went. "The carriage has been ordered at three, Mr. M.," she

said. "Shall we have the pleasure of your company?" "No," growled

the husband. And then the lady went, sweeping a low curtsy to Mr.

Dockwrath as she passed out of the room.

There was again a silence between the host and his guest for some two

or three minutes, during which Mr. Mason was endeavouring to get the

lunch out of his head, and to redirect his whole mind to Lady Mason

and his hopes of vengeance. There is nothing perhaps so generally

consoling to a man as a well-established grievance; a feeling of

having been injured, on which his mind can brood from hour to hour,

allowing him to plead his own cause in his own court, within his

own heart,--and always to plead it successfully. At last Mr. Mason

succeeded, and he could think of his enemy's fraud and forget his

wife's meanness. "I suppose I may as well order my gig now," said Mr.

Dockwrath, as soon as his host had arrived at this happy frame of

mind.

"Your gig? ah, well. Yes. I do not know that I need detain you

any longer. I can assure you that I am much obliged to you, Mr.

Dockwrath, and I shall hope to see you in London very shortly."

"You are determined to go to Round and Crook, I suppose?"

"Oh, certainly."

"You are wrong, sir. They'll throw you over again as sure as your

name is Mason."

"Mr. Dockwrath, you must if you please allow me to judge of that

myself."

"Oh, of course, sir, of course. But I'm sure that a gentleman like

you, Mr. Mason, will understand--"

"I shall understand that I cannot expect your services, Mr.

Dockwrath,--your valuable time and services,--without remunerating

you for them. That shall be fully explained to Messrs. Round and

Crook."

"Very well, sir; very well. As long as I am paid for what I do, I am

content. A professional gentleman of course expects that. How is he

to get along else; particular with sixteen children?" And then Mr.

Dockwrath got into the gig, and was driven back to the Bull at Leeds.

CHAPTER IX.

A CONVIVIAL MEETING.

On the whole Mr. Dockwrath was satisfied with the results of his trip

to Groby Park, and was in a contented frame of mind as he was driven

back to Leeds. No doubt it would have been better could he have

persuaded Mr. Mason to throw over Messrs. Round and Crook, and put

himself altogether into the hands of his new adviser; but this had

been too much to expect. He had not expected it, and had made the

suggestion as the surest means of getting the best terms in his

power, rather than with a hope of securing the actual advantage

named. He had done much towards impressing Mr. Mason with an idea of

his own sharpness, and perhaps something also towards breaking the

prestige which surrounded the names of the great London firm. He

would now go to that firm and make his terms with them. They would

probably be quite as ready to acquiesce in the importance of his

information as had been Mr. Mason.

Before leaving the inn after breakfast he had agreed to join the

dinner in the commercial room at five o'clock, and Mr. Mason's hot

lunch had by no means induced him to alter his purpose. "I shall dine

here," he had said when Mr. Moulder was discussing with the waiter

the all-important subject of dinner. "At the commercial table sir?"

the waiter had asked, doubtingly. Mr. Dockwrath had answered boldly

in the affirmative, whereat Mr. Moulder had growled; but Mr. Kantwise

had expressed satisfaction. "We shall be extremely happy to enjoy

your company," Mr. Kantwise had said, with a graceful bow, making up

by his excessive courtesy for the want of any courtesy on the part of

his brother-traveller. With reference to all this Mr. Moulder said

nothing; the stranger had been admitted into the room, to a certain

extent even with his own consent, and he could not now be turned out;

but he resolved within his own mind that for the future he would

be more firm in maintaining the ordinances and institutes of his

profession.

On his road home, Mr. Dockwrath had encountered Mr. Kantwise going to

Groby Park, intent on his sale of a drawing-room set of the metallic

furniture; and when he again met him in the commercial room he asked

after his success. "A wonderful woman that, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mr.

Kantwise, "a really wonderful woman; no particular friend of yours I

think you say?"

"None in the least, Mr. Kantwise,"

"Then I may make bold to assert that for persevering sharpness she

beats all that I ever met, even in Yorkshire;" and Mr. Kantwise

looked at his new friend over his shoulder, and shook his head as

though lost in wonder and admiration. "What do you think she's done

now?"

"She didn't give you much to eat, I take it."

"Much to eat! I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Dockwrath; my belief is

that woman would have an absolute pleasure in starving a Christian; I

do indeed. I'll tell you what she has done; she has made me put her

up a set of them things at twelve, seventeen, six! I needn't tell you

that they were never made for the money."

"Why, then, did you part with them at a loss?"

"Well; that's the question. I was soft, I suppose. She got round me,

badgering me, till I didn't know where I was. She wanted them as a

present for the curate's wife, she said. Whatever should induce her

to make a present!"

"She got them for twelve, seventeen, six; did she?" said Dockwrath,

thinking that it might be as well to remember this, if he should feel

inclined to make a purchase himself.

"But they was strained, Mr. Dockwrath; I must admit they was

strained,--particularly the loo."

"You had gone through your gymnastics on it a little too often?"

asked the attorney. But this Mr. Kantwise would not acknowledge. The

strength of that table was such that he could stand on it for ever

without injury to it; but nevertheless, in some other way it had

become strained, and therefore he had sold the set to Mrs. Mason for

Â£12 17\_s.\_ 6\_d.\_, that lady being minded to make a costly present to

the wife of the curate of Groby.

When dinner-time came Mr. Dockwrath found that the party was swelled

to the number of eight, five other undoubted commercials having

brought themselves to anchor at the Bull Inn during the day. To all

of these, Mr. Kantwise introduced him. "Mr. Gape, Mr. Dockwrath,"

said he, gracefully moving towards them the palm of his hand, and

eyeing them over his shoulder. "Mr. Gape is in the stationery line,"

he added, in a whisper to the attorney, "and does for Cumming and

Jibber of St. Paul's Churchyard. Mr. Johnson, Mr. Dockwrath. Mr.

J. is from Sheffield. Mr. Snengkeld, Mr. Dockwrath;" and then he

imparted in another whisper the necessary information as to Mr.

Snengkeld. "Soft goods, for Brown Brothers, of Snow Hill," and so

on through the whole fraternity. Each member bowed as his name was

mentioned; but they did not do so very graciously, as Mr. Kantwise

was not a great man among them. Had the stranger been introduced to

them by Moulder,--Moulder the patriarch,--his reception among them

would have been much warmer. And then they sat down to dinner, Mr.

Moulder taking the chair as president, and Mr. Kantwise sitting

opposite to him, as being the longest sojourner at the inn. Mr.

Dockwrath sat at the right hand of Kantwise, discreetly avoiding the

neighbourhood of Moulder, and the others ranged themselves according

to fancy at the table. "Come up along side of me, old fellow,"

Moulder said to Snengkeld. "It ain't the first time that you and

I have smacked our lips together over the same bit of roast beef."

"Nor won't, I hope, be the last by a long chalk, Mr. Moulder,"

said Snengkeld, speaking with a deep, hoarse voice which seemed to

ascend from some region of his body far below his chest. Moulder and

Snengkeld were congenial spirits; but the latter, though the older

man, was not endowed with so large a volume of body or so highly

dominant a spirit. Brown Brothers, of Snow Hill, were substantial

people, and Mr. Snengkeld travelled in strict accordance with the

good old rules of trade which Moulder loved so well.

The politeness and general good manners of the company were something

very pretty to witness. Mr. Dockwrath, as a stranger, was helped

first, and every courtesy was shown to him. Even Mr. Moulder carved

the beef for him with a loving hand, and Mr. Kantwise was almost

subservient in his attention. Mr. Dockwrath thought that he had

certainly done right in coming to the commercial table, and resolved

on doing so on all occasions of future journeys. So far all was good.

The commercial dinner, as he had ascertained, would cost him only

two shillings, and a much inferior repast eaten by himself elsewhere

would have stood in his bill for three. So far all was good; but the

test by which he was to be tried was now approaching him.

When the dinner was just half over,--Mr. Moulder well knew how to

mark the time,--that gentleman called for the waiter, and whispered

an important order into that functionary's ears. The functionary

bowed, retired from the room, and reappeared again in two minutes,

bearing a bottle of sherry in each hand; one of these he deposited at

the right hand of Mr. Moulder; and the other at the right hand of Mr.

Kantwise.

"Sir," said Mr. Moulder, addressing himself with great ceremony to

Mr. Dockwrath, "the honour of a glass of wine with you, sir," and

the president, to give more importance to the occasion, put down his

knife and fork, leaned back in his chair, and put both his hands upon

his waistcoat, looking intently at the attorney out of his little

eyes.

Mr. Dockwrath was immediately aware that a crisis had come upon

him which demanded an instant decision. If he complied with the

president's invitation he would have to pay his proportion of all the

wine bill that might be incurred that evening by the seven commercial

gentlemen at the table, and he knew well that commercial gentlemen do

sometimes call for bottle after bottle with a reckless disregard of

expense. But to him, with his sixteen children, wine at an hotel was

terrible. A pint of beer and a glass of brandy and water were the

luxuries which he had promised himself, and with manly fortitude

he resolved that he would not be coerced into extravagance by any

president or any Moulder.

"Sir," said he, "I'm obliged by the honour, but I don't drink wine

to my dinner." Whereupon Mr. Moulder bowed his head very solemnly,

winked at Snengkeld, and then drank wine with that gentleman.

"It's the rule of the room," whispered Mr. Kantwise into Mr.

Dockwrath's ear; but Mr. Dockwrath pretended not to hear him, and the

matter was allowed to pass by for the time.

But Mr. Snengkeld asked him for the honour, as also did Mr. Gape,

who sat at Moulder's left hand; and then Mr. Dockwrath began to wax

angry. "I think I remarked before that I don't drink wine to my

dinner," he said; and then the three at the president's end of the

table all looked at each other very solemnly, and they all winked;

and after that there was very little conversation during the

remainder of the meal, for men knew that the goddess of discord was

in the air.

The cheese came, and with that a bottle of port wine, which was

handed round, Mr. Dockwrath of course refusing to join in the

conviviality; and then the cloth was drawn, and the decanters

were put before the president. "James, bring me a little

brandy-and-water," said the attorney, striving to put a bold face on

the matter, but yet speaking with diminished voice.

"Half a moment, if you please, sir," said Moulder; and then he

exclaimed with stentorian voice, "James, the dinner bill." "Yes,

sir," said the waiter, and disappeared without any thought towards

the requisition for brandy-and-water from Mr. Dockwrath.

For the next five minutes they all remained silent, except that Mr.

Moulder gave the Queen's health as he filled his glass and pushed

the bottles from him. "Gentlemen, the Queen," and then he lifted his

glass of port up to the light, shut one eye as he looked at it, and

immediately swallowed the contents as though he were taking a dose

of physic. "I'm afraid they'll charge you for the wine," said Mr.

Kantwise, again whispering to his neighbour. But Mr. Dockwrath paid

no apparent attention to what was said to him. He was concentrating

his energies with a view to the battle.

James, the waiter, soon returned. He also knew well what was

about to happen, and he trembled as he handed in the document to

the president. "Let's have it, James," said Moulder, with much

pleasantry, as he took the paper in his hand. "The old ticket I

suppose; five bob a head." And then he read out the bill, the total

of which, wine and beer included, came to forty shillings. "Five

shillings a head, gentlemen, as I said. You and I can make a pretty

good guess as to the figure; eh, Snengkeld?" And then he put down his

two half-crowns on the waiter, as also did Mr. Snengkeld, and then

Mr. Gape, and so on till it came to Mr. Kantwise.

"I think you and I will leave it, and settle at the bar," said

Kantwise, appealing to Dockwrath, and intending peace if peace were

still possible.

"No," shouted Moulder, from the other end of the table; "let the man

have his money now, and then his troubles will be over. If there's

to be any fuss about it, let's have it out. I like to see the dinner

bill settled as soon as the dinner is eaten. Then one gets an

appetite for one's supper."

"I don't think I have the change," said Kantwise, still putting off

the evil day.

"I'll lend, it you," said Moulder, putting his hand into his

trousers-pockets. But the money was forthcoming out of Mr. Kantwise's

own proper repositories, and with slow motion he put down the five

shillings one after the other.

And then the waiter came to Mr. Dockwrath. "What's this?" said the

attorney, taking up the bill and looking at it. The whole matter had

been sufficiently explained to him, but nevertheless Mr. Moulder

explained it again. "In commercial rooms, sir, as no doubt you must

be well aware, seeing that you have done us the honour of joining us

here, the dinner bill is divided equally among all the gentlemen as

sit down. It's the rule of the room, sir. You has what you like, and

you calls for what you like, and conwiviality is thereby encouraged.

The figure generally comes to five shillings, and you afterwards

gives what you like to the waiter. That's about it, ain't it, James?"

"That's the rule, sir, in all commercial rooms as I ever see," said

the waiter.

The matter had been so extremely well put by Mr. Moulder, and that

gentleman's words had carried with them so much conviction, that

Dockwrath felt himself almost tempted to put down the money; as far

as his sixteen children and general ideas of economy were concerned

he would have done so; but his legal mind could not bear to be

beaten. The spirit of litigation within him told him that the point

was to be carried. Moulder, Gape, and Snengkeld together could not

make him pay for wine he had neither ordered nor swallowed. His

pocket was guarded by the law of the land, and not by the laws of any

special room in which he might chance to find himself. "I shall pay

two shillings for my dinner," said he, "and sixpence for my beer;"

and then he deposited the half-crown.

"Do you mean us to understand," said Moulder, "that after forcing

your way into this room, and sitting down along with gentlemen at

this table, you refuse to abide by the rules of the room?" And Mr.

Moulder spoke and looked as though he thought that such treachery

must certainly lead to most disastrous results. The disastrous result

which a stranger might have expected at the moment would be a fit of

apoplexy on the part of the worthy president.

"I neither ordered that wine nor did I drink it," said Mr. Dockwrath,

compressing his lips, leaning back in his chair, and looking up into

one corner of the ceiling.

"The gentleman certainly did not drink the wine," said Kantwise, "I

must acknowledge that; and as for ordering it, why that was done by

the president, in course."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Moulder, and he fixed his eyes steadfastly upon

his Vice. "Kantwise, that's gammon. The most of what you says is

gammon."

"Mr. Moulder, I don't exactly know what you mean by that word gammon,

but it's objectionable. To my feelings it's very objectionable. I

say that the gentleman did not drink the wine, and I appeal to the

gentleman who sits at the gentleman's right, whether what I say

is not correct. If what I say is correct, it can't be--gammon. Mr.

Busby, did that gentleman drink the wine, or did he not?"

"Not as I see," said Mr. Busby, somewhat nervous at being thus

brought into the controversy. He was a young man just commencing his

travels, and stood in awe of the great Moulder.

"Gammon!" shouted Moulder, with a very red face. "Everybody at the

table knows he didn't drink the wine. Everybody saw that he declined

the honour when proposed, which I don't know that I ever saw a

gentleman do at a commercial table till this day, barring that he

was a teetotaller, which is gammon too. But its P.P. here, as every

commercial gentleman knows, Kantwise as well as the best of us."

"P.P., that's the rule," growled Snengkeld, almost from under the

table.

"In commercial rooms, as the gentleman must be aware, the rule is as

stated by my friend on my right," said Mr. Gape. "The wine is ordered

by the president or chairman, and is paid for in equal proportions by

the company or guests," and in his oratory Mr. Gape laid great stress

on the word "or." "The gentleman will easily perceive that such a

rule as this is necessary in such a society; and unless--"

But Mr. Gape was apt to make long speeches, and therefore Mr. Moulder

interrupted him. "You had better pay your five shillings, sir, and

have no jaw about it. The man is standing idle there."

"It's not the value of the money," said Dockwrath, "but I must

decline to acknowledge that I am amenable to the jurisdiction."

"There has clearly been a mistake," said Johnson from Sheffield, "and

we had better settle it among us; anything is better than a row."

Johnson from Sheffield was a man somewhat inclined to dispute the

supremacy of Moulder from Houndsditch.

"No, Johnson," said the president. "Anything is not better than a

row. A premeditated infraction of our rules is not better than a

row."

"Did you say premeditated?" said Kantwise. "I think not

premeditated."

"I did say premeditated, and I say it again."

"It looks uncommon like it," said Snengkeld.

"When a gentleman," said Gape, "who does not belong to a society--"

"It's no good having more talk," said Moulder, "and we'll soon

bring this to an end. Mr.--; I haven't the honour of knowing the

gentleman's name."

"My name is Dockwrath, and I am a solicitor."

"Oh, a solicitor; are you? and you said last night you was

commercial! Will you be good enough to tell us, Mr. Solicitor--for I

didn't just catch your name, except that it begins with a dock--and

that's where most of your clients are to be found, I suppose--"

"Order, order, order!" said Kantwise, holding up both his hands.

"It's the chair as is speaking," said Mr. Gape, who had a true

Englishman's notion that the chair itself could not be called to

order.

"You shouldn't insult the gentleman because he has his own ideas,"

said Johnson.

"I don't want to insult no one," continued Moulder; "and those who

know me best, among whom I can't as yet count Mr. Johnson, though

hopes I shall some day, won't say it of me." "Hear--hear--hear!"

from both Snengkeld and Gape; to which Kantwise added a little

"hear--hear!" of his own, of which Mr. Moulder did not quite approve.

"Mr. Snengkeld and Mr. Gape, they're my old friends, and they knows

me. And they knows the way of a commercial room--which some gentlemen

don't seem as though they do. I don't want to insult no one; but

as chairman here at this conwivial meeting, I asks that gentleman

who says he is a solicitor whether he means to pay his dinner bill

according to the rules of the room, or whether he don't?"

"I've paid for what I've had already," said Dockwrath, "and I don't

mean to pay for what I've not had."

"James," exclaimed Moulder,--and all the chairman was in his voice

as he spoke,--"my compliments to Mr. Crump, and I will request his

attendance for five minutes;" and then James left the room, and there

was silence for a while, during which the bottles made their round of

the table.

"Hadn't we better send back the pint of wine which Mr. Dockwrath

hasn't used?" suggested Kantwise.

"I'm d---- if we do!" replied Moulder, with much energy; and the

general silence was not again broken till Mr. Crump made his

appearance; but the chairman whispered a private word or two to his

friend Snengkeld. "I never sent back ordered liquor to the bar yet,

unless it was bad; and I'm not going to begin now."

And then Mr. Crump came in. Mr. Crump was a very clean-looking

person, without any beard; and dressed from head to foot in black. He

was about fifty, with grizzly gray hair, which stood upright on his

head, and his face at the present moment wore on it an innkeeper's

smile. But it could also assume an innkeeper's frown, and on

occasions did so--when bills were disputed, or unreasonable strangers

thought that they knew the distance in posting miles round the

neighbourhood of Leeds better than did he, Mr. Crump, who had lived

at the Bull Inn all his life. But Mr. Crump rarely frowned on

commercial gentlemen, from whom was derived the main stay of his

business and the main prop of his house.

"Mr. Crump," began Moulder, "here has occurred a very unpleasant

transaction."

"I know all about it, gentlemen," said Mr. Crump. "The waiter has

acquainted me, and I can assure you, gentlemen, that I am extremely

sorry that anything should have arisen to disturb the harmony of your

dinner-table."

"We must now call upon you, Mr. Crump," began Mr. Moulder, who was

about to demand that Dockwrath should be turned bodily out of the

room.

"If you'll allow me one moment, Mr. Moulder," continued Mr. Crump,

"and I'll tell you what is my suggestion. The gentleman here, who I

understand is a lawyer, does not wish to comply with the rules of the

commercial room."

"I certainly don't wish or intend to pay for drink that I didn't

order and haven't had," said Dockwrath.

"Exactly," said Mr. Crump. "And therefore, gentlemen, to get out of

the difficulty, we'll presume, if you please, that the bill is paid."

"The lawyer, as you call him, will have to leave the room," said

Moulder.

"Perhaps he will not object to step over to the coffee-room on the

other side," suggested the landlord.

"I can't think of leaving my seat here under such circumstances,"

said Dockwrath.

"You can't," said Moulder. "Then you must be made, as I take it."

"Let me see the man that will make me," said Dockwrath.

Mr. Crump looked very apologetic and not very comfortable. "There

is a difficulty, gentlemen; there is a difficulty, indeed," he said.

"The fact is, the gentleman should not have been showed into the room

at all;" and he looked very angrily at his own servant, James.

"He said he was 'mercial," said James. "So he did. Now he says as how

he's a lawyer. What's a poor man to do?"

"I'm a commercial lawyer," said Dockwrath.

"He must leave the room, or I shall leave the house," said Moulder.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Crump. "This kind of thing does not

happen often, and on this occasion I must try your kind patience. If

Mr. Moulder would allow me to suggest that the commercial gentlemen

should take their wine in the large drawing-room up stairs this

evening, Mrs. C. will do her best to make it comfortable for them in

five minutes. There of course they can be private."

There was something in the idea of leaving Mr. Dockwrath alone in his

glory which appeased the spirit of the great Moulder. He had known

Crump, moreover, for many years, and was aware that it would be a

dangerous, and probably an expensive proceeding to thrust out the

attorney by violence. "If the other gentlemen are agreeable, I am,"

said he. The other gentlemen were agreeable, and, with the exception

of Kantwise, they all rose from their chairs.

"I must say I think you ought to leave the room as you don't

choose to abide by the rules," said Johnson, addressing himself to

Dockwrath.

"That's your opinion," said Dockwrath.

"Yes, it is," said Johnson. "That's my opinion."

"My own happens to be different," said Dockwrath; and so he kept his

chair.

"There, Mr. Crump," said Moulder, taking half a crown from his pocket

and throwing it on the table. "I sha'n't see you at a loss."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Crump; and he very humbly took up the

money.

"I keep a little account for charity at home," said Moulder.

"It don't run very high, do it?" asked Snengkeld, jocosely.

"Not out of the way, it don't. But now I shall have the pleasure of

writing down in it that I paid half a crown for a lawyer who couldn't

afford to settle his own dinner bill. Sir, we have the pleasure of

wishing you a good night."

"I hope you'll find the large drawing-room up stairs quite

comfortable," said Dockwrath.

And then they all marched out of the room, each with his own glass,

Mr. Moulder leading the way with stately step. It was pleasant to see

them as they all followed their leader across the open passage of the

gateway, in by the bar, and so up the chief staircase. Mr. Moulder

walked slowly, bearing the bottle of port and his own glass, and

Mr. Snengkeld and Mr. Gape followed in line, bearing also their

own glasses, and maintaining the dignity of their profession under

circumstances of some difficulty.

[Illustration: And then they all marched out of the room,

each with his own glass.]

"Gentlemen, I really am sorry for this little accident," said Mr.

Crump, as they were passing the bar; "but a lawyer, you know--"

"And such a lawyer, eh, Crump?" said Moulder.

"It might be five-and-twenty pound to me to lay a hand on him!" said

the landlord.

When the time came for Mr. Kantwise to move, he considered the matter

well. The chances, however, as he calculated them, were against any

profitable business being done with the attorney, so he also left the

room. "Good night, sir," he said as he went. "I wish you a very good

night."

"Take care of yourself," said Dockwrath; and then the attorney spent

the rest of the evening alone.

CHAPTER X.

MR., MRS., AND MISS FURNIVAL.

I will now ask my readers to come with me up to London, in order

that I may introduce them to the family of the Furnivals. We shall

see much of the Furnivals before we reach the end of our present

undertaking, and it will be well that we should commence our

acquaintance with them as early as may be done.

Mr. Furnival was a lawyer--I mean a barrister--belonging to Lincoln's

Inn, and living at the time at which our story is supposed to

commence in Harley Street. But he had not been long a resident in

Harley Street, having left the less fashionable neighbourhood of

Russell Square only two or three years before that period. On his

marriage he had located himself in a small house in Keppel Street,

and had there remained till professional success, long waited for,

enabled him to move further west, and indulge himself with the

comforts of larger rooms and more servants. At the time of which I am

now speaking Mr. Furnival was known, and well known, as a successful

man; but he had struggled long and hard before that success had come

to him, and during the earliest years of his married life had found

the work of keeping the wolf from the door to be almost more than

enough for his energies.

Mr. Furnival practised at the common law bar, and early in life had

attached himself to the home circuit. I cannot say why he obtained no

great success till he was nearer fifty than forty years of age. At

that time I fancy that barristers did not come to their prime till

a period of life at which other men are supposed to be in their

decadence. Nevertheless, he had married on nothing, and had kept the

wolf from the door. To do this he had been constant at his work in

season and out of season, during the long hours of day and the long

hours of night. Throughout his term times he had toiled in court,

and during the vacations he had toiled out of court. He had reported

volumes of cases, having been himself his own short-hand writer,--as

it is well known to most young lawyers, who as a rule always fill

an upper shelf in their law libraries with Furnival and Staples'

seventeen volumes in calf. He had worked for the booksellers, and for

the newspapers, and for the attorneys,--always working, however, with

reference to the law; and though he had worked for years with the

lowest pay, no man had heard him complain. That no woman had heard

him do so, I will not say; as it is more than probable that into the

sympathising ears of Mrs. Furnival he did pour forth plaints as to

the small wages which the legal world meted out to him in return for

his labours. He was a constant, hard, patient man, and at last there

came to him the full reward of all his industry. What was the special

case by which Mr. Furnival obtained his great success no man could

say. In all probability there was no special case. Gradually it

began to be understood that he was a safe man, understanding his

trade, true to his clients, and very damaging as an opponent. Legal

gentlemen are, I believe, quite as often bought off as bought up. Sir

Richard and Mr. Furnival could not both be required on the same side,

seeing what a tower of strength each was in himself; but then Sir

Richard would be absolutely neutralized if Mr. Furnival were employed

on the other side. This is a system well understood by attorneys, and

has been found to be extremely lucrative by gentlemen leading at the

bar.

Mr. Furnival was now fifty-five years of age, and was beginning

to show in his face some traces of his hard work. Not that he was

becoming old, or weak, or worn; but his eye had lost its fire--except

the fire peculiar to his profession; and there were wrinkles in his

forehead and cheeks; and his upper lip, except when he was speaking,

hung heavily over the lower; and the loose skin below his eye was

forming into saucers; and his hair had become grizzled; and on his

shoulders, except when in court, there was a slight stoop. As seen in

his wig and gown he was a man of commanding presence,--and for ten

men in London who knew him in this garb, hardly one knew him without

it. He was nearly six feet high, and stood forth prominently, with

square, broad shoulders and a large body. His head also was large;

his forehead was high, and marked strongly by signs of intellect; his

nose was long and straight, his eyes were very gray, and capable to

an extraordinary degree both of direct severity and of concealed

sarcasm. Witnesses have been heard to say that they could endure

all that Mr. Furnival could say to them, and continue in some sort

to answer all his questions, if only he would refrain from looking

at them. But he would never refrain; and therefore it was now well

understood how great a thing it was to secure the services of Mr.

Furnival. "Sir," an attorney would say to an unfortunate client

doubtful as to the expenditure, "your witnesses will not be able to

stand in the box if we allow Mr. Furnival to be engaged on the other

side." I am inclined to think that Mr. Furnival owed to this power of

his eyes his almost unequalled perfection in that peculiar branch of

his profession. His voice was powerful, and not unpleasant when used

within the precincts of a court, though it grated somewhat harshly on

the ears in the smaller compass of a private room. His flow of words

was free and good, and seemed to come from him without the slightest

effort. Such at least was always the case with him when standing

wigged and gowned before a judge. Latterly, however, he had tried his

eloquence on another arena, and not altogether with equal success. He

was now in Parliament, sitting as member for the Essex Marshes, and

he had not as yet carried either the country or the House with him,

although he had been frequently on his legs. Some men said that

with a little practice he would yet become very serviceable as an

honourable and learned member; but others expressed a fear that he

had come too late in life to these new duties.

I have spoken of Mr. Furnival's great success in that branch of

his profession which required from him the examination of evidence,

but I would not have it thought that he was great only in this, or

even mainly in this. There are gentlemen at the bar, among whom

I may perhaps notice my old friend Mr. Chaffanbrass as the most

conspicuous, who have confined their talents to the browbeating

of witnesses,--greatly to their own profit, and no doubt to the

advantage of society. But I would have it understood that Mr.

Furnival was by no means one of these. He had been no Old Bailey

lawyer, devoting himself to the manumission of murderers, or the

security of the swindling world in general. He had been employed on

abstruse points of law, had been great in will cases, very learned as

to the rights of railways, peculiarly apt in enforcing the dowries of

married women, and successful above all things in separating husbands

and wives whose lives had not been passed in accordance with the

recognised rules of Hymen. Indeed there is no branch of the Common

Law in which he was not regarded as great and powerful, though

perhaps his proficiency in damaging the general characters of his

opponents has been recognised as his especial forte. Under these

circumstances I should grieve to have him confounded with such men

as Mr. Chaffanbrass, who is hardly known by the profession beyond

the precincts of his own peculiar court in the City. Mr. Furnival's

reputation has spread itself wherever stuff gowns and horsehair wigs

are held in estimation.

Mr. Furnival when clothed in his forensic habiliments certainly

possessed a solemn and severe dignity which had its weight even with

the judges. Those who scrutinised his appearance critically might

have said that it was in some respects pretentious; but the ordinary

jurymen of this country are not critical scrutinisers of appearance,

and by them he was never held in light estimation. When in his

addresses to them, appealing to their intelligence, education, and

enlightened justice, he would declare that the property of his

clients was perfectly safe in their hands, he looked to be such an

advocate as a litigant would fain possess when dreading the soundness

of his own cause. Any cause was sound to him when once he had been

feed for its support, and he carried in his countenance his assurance

of this soundness,--and the assurance of unsoundness in the cause of

his opponent. Even he did not always win; but on the occasion of his

losing, those of the uninitiated who had heard the pleadings would

express their astonishment that he should not have been successful.

When he was divested of his wig his appearance was not so perfect.

There was then a hard, long straightness about his head and face,

giving to his countenance the form of a parallelogram, to which there

belonged a certain meanness of expression. He wanted the roundness of

forehead, the short lines, and the graceful curves of face which are

necessary to unadorned manly comeliness. His whiskers were small,

grizzled, and ill grown, and required the ample relief of his wig.

In no guise did he look other than a clever man; but in his dress as

a simple citizen he would perhaps be taken as a clever man in whose

tenderness of heart and cordiality of feeling one would not at first

sight place implicit trust.

As a poor man Mr. Furnival had done his duty well by his wife and

family,--for as a poor man he had been blessed with four children.

Three of these had died as they were becoming men and women, and now,

as a rich man, he was left with one daughter, an only child. As a

poor man Mr. Furnival had been an excellent husband, going forth

in the morning to his work, struggling through the day, and then

returning to his meagre dinner and his long evenings of unremitting

drudgery. The bodily strength which had supported him through his

work in those days must have been immense, for he had allowed himself

no holidays. And then success and money had come,--and Mrs. Furnival

sometimes found herself not quite so happy as she had been when

watching beside him in the days of their poverty.

The equal mind,--as mortal Delius was bidden to remember, and as Mr.

Furnival might also have remembered had time been allowed him to

cultivate the classics,--the equal mind should be as sedulously

maintained when things run well, as well as when they run hardly;

and perhaps the maintenance of such equal mind is more difficult in

the former than in the latter stage of life. Be that as it may, Mr.

Furnival could now be very cross on certain domestic occasions, and

could also be very unjust. And there was worse than this,--much worse

behind. He, who in the heyday of his youth would spend night after

night poring over his books, copying out reports, and never asking to

see a female habiliment brighter or more attractive than his wife's

Sunday gown, he, at the age of fifty-five, was now running after

strange goddesses! The member for the Essex Marshes, in these his

latter days, was obtaining for himself among other successes the

character of a Lothario; and Mrs. Furnival, sitting at home in her

genteel drawing-room near Cavendish Square, would remember with

regret the small dingy parlour in Keppel Street.

Mrs. Furnival in discussing her grievances would attribute them

mainly to port wine. In his early days Mr. Furnival had been

essentially an abstemious man. Young men who work fifteen hours a day

must be so. But now he had a strong opinion about certain Portuguese

vintages, was convinced that there was no port wine in London equal

to the contents of his own bin, saving always a certain green cork

appertaining to his own club, which was to be extracted at the rate

of thirty shillings a cork. And Mrs. Furnival attributed to these

latter studies not only a certain purple hue which was suffusing his

nose and cheeks, but also that unevenness of character and those

supposed domestic improprieties to which allusion has been made. It

may, however, be as well to explain that Mrs. Ball, the old family

cook and housekeeper, who had ascended with the Furnivals in the

world, opined that made-dishes did the mischief. He dined out too

often, and was a deal too particular about his dinner when he dined

at home. If Providence would see fit to visit him with a sharp attack

of the gout, it would--so thought Mrs. Ball--be better for all

parties.

Whether or no it may have been that Mrs. Furnival at fifty-five--for

she and her lord were of the same age--was not herself as attractive

in her husband's eyes as she had been at thirty, I will not pretend

to say. There can have been no just reason for any such change in

feeling, seeing that the two had grown old together. She, poor woman,

would have been quite content with the attentions of Mr. Furnival,

though his hair was grizzled and his nose was blue; nor did she ever

think of attracting to herself the admiration of any swain whose

general comeliness might be more free from all taint of age. Why then

should he wander afield--at the age of fifty-five? That he did wander

afield, poor Mrs. Furnival felt in her agony convinced; and among

those ladies whom on this account she most thoroughly detested was

our friend Lady Mason of Orley Farm. Lady Mason and the lawyer had

first become acquainted in the days of the trial, now long gone

by, on which occasion Mr. Furnival had been employed as the junior

counsel; and that acquaintance had ripened into friendship, and now

flourished in full vigour,--to Mrs. Furnival's great sorrow and

disturbance.

Mrs. Furnival herself was a stout, solid woman, sensible on most

points, but better adapted, perhaps, to the life in Keppel Street

than that to which she had now been promoted. As Kitty Blacker she

had possessed feminine charms which would have been famous had

they been better known. Mr. Furnival had fetched her from farther

East--from the region of Great Ormond street and the neighbourhood of

Southampton Buildings. Her cherry cheeks, and her round eye, and her

full bust, and her fresh lip, had conquered the hard-tasked lawyer;

and so they had gone forth to fight the world together. Her eye

was still round, and her cheek red, and her bust full,--there had

certainly been no falling off there; nor will I say that her lip had

lost its freshness. But the bloom of her charms had passed away, and

she was now a solid, stout, motherly woman, not bright in converse,

but by no means deficient in mother-wit, recognizing well the duties

which she owed to others, but recognizing equally well those which

others owed to her. All the charms of her youth--had they not been

given to him, and also all her solicitude, all her anxious fighting

with the hard world? When they had been poor together, had she not

patched and turned and twisted, sitting silently by his side into the

long nights, because she would not ask him for the price of a new

dress? And yet now, now that they were rich--? Mrs. Furnival, when

she put such questions within her own mind, could hardly answer this

latter one with patience. Others might be afraid of the great Mr.

Furnival in his wig and gown; others might be struck dumb by his

power of eye and mouth; but she, she, the wife of his bosom, she

could catch him without his armour. She would so catch him and let

him know what she thought of all her wrongs. So she said to herself

many a day, and yet the great deed, in all its explosiveness, had

never yet been done. Small attacks of words there had been many, but

hitherto the courage to speak out her griefs openly had been wanting

to her.

I can now allow myself but a small space to say a few words of Sophia

Furnival, and yet in that small space must be confined all the direct

description which can be given of one of the principal personages

of this story. At nineteen Miss Furnival was in all respects a

young woman. She was forward in acquirements, in manner, in general

intelligence, and in powers of conversation. She was a handsome, tall

girl, with expressive gray eyes and dark-brown hair. Her mouth, and

hair, and a certain motion of her neck and turn of her head, had come

to her from her mother, but her eyes were those of her father: they

were less sharp perhaps, less eager after their prey; but they were

bright as his had been bright, and sometimes had in them more of

absolute command than he was ever able to throw into his own.

Their golden days had come on them at a period of her life which

enabled her to make a better use of them than her mother could do.

She never felt herself to be struck dumb by rank or fashion, nor did

she in the drawing-rooms of the great ever show signs of an Eastern

origin. She could adapt herself without an effort to the manners of

Cavendish Square;--ay, and if need were, to the ways of more glorious

squares even than that. Therefore was her father never ashamed to be

seen with her on his arm in the houses of his new friends, though on

such occasions he was willing enough to go out without disturbing the

repose of his wife. No mother could have loved her children with a

warmer affection than that which had warmed the heart of poor Mrs.

Furnival; but under such circumstances as these was it singular that

she should occasionally become jealous of her own daughter?

Sophia Furnival was, as I have said, a clever, attractive girl,

handsome, well-read, able to hold her own with the old as well as

with the young, capable of hiding her vanity if she had any, mild

and gentle to girls less gifted, animated in conversation, and yet

possessing an eye that could fall softly to the ground, as a woman's

eye always should fall upon occasions.

Nevertheless she was not altogether charming. "I don't feel quite

sure that she is real," Mrs. Orme had said of her, when on a certain

occasion Miss Furnival had spent a day and a night at The Cleeve.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. FURNIVAL AT HOME.

Lucius Mason on his road to Liverpool had passed through London,

and had found a moment to call in Harley Street. Since his return

from Germany he had met Miss Furnival both at home at his mother's

house--or rather his own--and at The Cleeve. Miss Furnival had been

in the neighbourhood, and had spent two days with the great people at

The Cleeve, and one day with the little people at Orley Farm. Lucius

Mason had found that she was a sensible girl, capable of discussing

great subjects with him; and had possibly found some other charms in

her. Therefore he had called in Harley Street.

On that occasion he could only call as he passed through London

without delay; but he received such encouragement as induced him to

spend a night in town on his return, in order that he might accept an

invitation to drink tea with the Furnivals. "We shall be very happy

to see you," Mrs. Furnival had said, backing the proposition which

had come from her daughter without any very great fervour; "but I

fear Mr. Furnival will not be at home. Mr. Furnival very seldom is at

home now." Young Mason did not much care for fervour on the part of

Sophia's mother, and therefore had accepted the invitation, though he

was obliged by so doing to curtail by some hours his sojourn among

the guano stores of Liverpool.

It was the time of year at which few people are at home in London,

being the middle of October; but Mrs. Furnival was a lady of whom at

such periods it was not very easy to dispose. She could have made

herself as happy as a queen even at Margate, if it could have suited

Furnival and Sophia to be happy at Margate with her. But this did not

suit Furnival or Sophia. As regards money, any or almost all other

autumnal resorts were open to her, but she could be contented at

none of them because Mr. Furnival always pleaded that business--law

business or political business--took him elsewhere. Now Mrs. Furnival

was a woman who did not like to be deserted, and who could not, in

the absence of those social joys which Providence had vouchsafed to

her as her own, make herself happy with the society of other women

such as herself. Furnival was her husband, and she wanted him to

carve for her, to sit opposite to her at the breakfast table, to tell

her the news of the day, and to walk to church with her on Sundays.

They had been made one flesh and one bone, for better and worse,

thirty years since; and now in her latter days she could not put up

with disseveration and dislocation.

She had gone down to Brighton in August, soon after the House broke

up, and there found that very handsome apartments had been taken for

her--rooms that would have made glad the heart of many a lawyer's

wife. She had, too, the command of a fly, done up to look like

a private brougham, a servant in livery, the run of the public

assembly-rooms, a sitting in the centre of the most fashionable

church in Brighton--all that the heart of woman could desire. All

but the one thing was there; but, that one thing being absent, she

came moodily back to town at the end of September. She would have

exchanged them all with a happy heart for very moderate accommodation

at Margate, could she have seen Mr. Furnival's blue nose on the other

side of the table every morning and evening as she sat over her

shrimps and tea.

Men who had risen in the world as Mr. Furnival had done do find it

sometimes difficult to dispose of their wives. It is not that the

ladies are in themselves more unfit for rising than their lords, or

that if occasion demanded they would not as readily adapt themselves

to new spheres. But they do not rise, and occasion does not demand

it. A man elevates his wife to his own rank, and when Mr. Brown,

on becoming solicitor-general, becomes Sir Jacob, Mrs. Brown also

becomes my lady. But the whole set among whom Brown must be more

or less thrown do not want her ladyship. On Brown's promotion she

did not become part of the bargain. Brown must henceforth have two

existences--a public and a private existence; and it will be well for

Lady Brown, and well also for Sir Jacob, if the latter be not allowed

to dwindle down to a minimum.

If Lady B. can raise herself also, if she can make her own

occasion--if she be handsome and can flirt, if she be impudent and

can force her way, if she have a daring mind and can commit great

expenditure, if she be clever and can make poetry, if she can in

any way create a separate glory for herself, then, indeed, Sir Jacob

with his blue nose may follow his own path, and all will be well.

Sir Jacob's blue nose seated opposite to her will not be her summum

bonum.

But worthy Mrs. Furnival--and she was worthy--had created for herself

no such separate glory, nor did she dream of creating it; and

therefore she had, as it were, no footing left to her. On this

occasion she had gone to Brighton, and had returned from it sulky

and wretched, bringing her daughter back to London at the period of

London's greatest desolation. Sophia had returned uncomplaining,

remembering that good things were in store for her. She had been

asked to spend her Christmas with the Staveleys at Noningsby--the

family of Judge Staveley, who lives near Alston, at a very pretty

country place so called. Mr. Furnival had been for many years

acquainted with Judge Staveley,--had known the judge when he was a

leading counsel; and now that Mr. Furnival was a rising man, and

now that he had a pretty daughter, it was natural that the young

Staveleys and Sophia Furnival should know each other. But poor Mrs.

Furnival was too ponderous for this mounting late in life, and she

had not been asked to Noningsby. She was much too good a mother to

repine at her daughter's promised gaiety. Sophia was welcome to go;

but by all the laws of God and man it would behove her lord and

husband to eat his mincepie at home.

"Mr. Furnival was to be back in town this evening," the lady said, as

though apologizing to young Mason for her husband's absence, when he

entered the drawing-room, "but he has not come, and I dare say will

not come now."

Mason did not care a straw for Mr. Furnival. "Oh! won't he?" said he.

"I suppose business keeps him."

"Papa is very busy about politics just at present," said Sophia,

wishing to make matters smooth in her mother's mind. "He was obliged

to be at Romford in the beginning of the week, and then he went down

to Birmingham. There is some congress going on there, is there not?"

"All that must take a great deal of time," said Lucius.

"Yes; and it is a terrible bore," said Sophia. "I know papa finds it

so."

"Your papa likes it, I believe," said Mrs. Furnival, who would not

hide even her grievances under a bushel.

"I don't think he likes being so much from home, mamma. Of course he

likes excitement, and success. All men do. Do they not, Mr. Mason?"

"They all ought to do so, and women also."

"Ah! but women have no sphere, Mr. Mason."

"They have minds equal to those of men," said Lucius, gallantly, "and

ought to be able to make for themselves careers as brilliant."

"Women ought not to have any spheres," said Mrs. Furnival.

"I don't know that I quite agree with you there, mamma."

"The world is becoming a great deal too fond of what you call

excitement and success. Of course it is a good thing for a man to

make money by his profession, and a very hard thing when he can't do

it," added Mrs. Furnival, thinking of the olden days. "But if success

in life means rampaging about, and never knowing what it is to sit

quiet over his own fireside, I for one would as soon manage to do

without it."

"But, mamma, I don't see why success should always be rampageous."

"Literary women who have achieved a name bear their honours quietly,"

said Lucius.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Furnival. "I am told that some of them are

as fond of gadding as the men. As regards the old maids, I don't care

so much about it; people who are not married may do what they like

with themselves, and nobody has anything to say to them. But it

is very different for married people. They have no business to be

enticed away from their homes by any success."

"Mamma is all for a Darby and Joan life," said Sophia, laughing.

"No I am not, my dear; and you should not say so. I don't advocate

anything that is absurd. But I do say that life should be lived at

home. That is the best part of it. What is the meaning of home if it

isn't that?"

Poor Mrs. Furnival! she had no idea that she was complaining to a

stranger of her husband. Had any one told her so she would have

declared that she was discussing world-wide topics; but Lucius Mason,

young as he was, knew that the marital shoe was pinching the lady's

domestic corn, and he made haste to change the subject.

"You know my mother, Mrs. Furnival?"

Mrs. Furnival said that she had the honour of acquaintance with Lady

Mason; but on this occasion also she exhibited but little fervour.

"I shall meet her up in town to-morrow," said Lucius. "She is coming

up for some shopping."

"Oh! indeed," said Mrs. Furnival.

"And then we go down home together. I am to meet her at the chymist's

at the top of Chancery Lane."

Now this was a very unnecessary communication on the part of young

Mason, and also an unfortunate one. "Oh! indeed," said Mrs. Furnival

again, throwing her head a little back. Poor woman! she could not

conceal what was in her mind, and her daughter knew all about it

immediately. The truth was this. Mr. Furnival had been for some days

on the move, at Birmingham and elsewhere, and had now sent up sudden

notice that he should probably be at home that very night. He should

probably be at home that night, but in such case would be compelled

to return to his friends at Birmingham on the following afternoon.

Now if it were an ascertained fact that he was coming to London

merely with the view of meeting Lady Mason, the wife of his bosom

would not think it necessary to provide for him the warmest welcome.

This of course was not an ascertained fact; but were there not

terrible grounds of suspicion? Mr. Furnival's law chambers were in

Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, close to Chancery Lane, and Lady Mason had

made her appointment with her son within five minutes' walk of that

locality. And was it not in itself a strange coincidence that Lady

Mason, who came to town so seldom, should now do so on the very day

of Mr. Furnival's sudden return? She felt sure that they were to meet

on the morrow, but yet she could not declare even to herself that it

was an ascertained fact.

"Oh! indeed," she said; and Sophia understood all about it, though

Lucius did not.

Then Mrs. Furnival sank into silence; and we need not follow, word

for word, the conversation between the young lady and the young

gentleman. Mr. Mason thought that Miss Furnival was a very nice girl,

and was not at all ill pleased to have an opportunity of passing

an evening in her company; and Miss Furnival thought--. What she

thought, or what young ladies may think generally about young

gentlemen, is not to be spoken openly; but it seemed as though she

also were employed to her own satisfaction, while her mother sat

moody in her own arm-chair. In the course of the evening the footman

in livery brought in tea, handing it round on a big silver salver,

which also added to Mrs. Furnival's unhappiness. She would have

liked to sit behind her tea-tray as she used to do in the good

old hard-working days, with a small pile of buttered toast on

the slop-bowl, kept warm by hot water below. In those dear old

hard-working days, buttered toast had been a much-loved delicacy

with Furnival; and she, kind woman, had never begrudged her eyes, as

she sat making it for him over the parlour fire. Nor would she have

begrudged them now, neither her eyes nor the work of her hands, nor

all the thoughts of her heart, if he would have consented to accept

of her handiwork; but in these days Mr. Furnival had learned a relish

for other delicacies.

She also had liked buttered toast, always, however, taking the pieces

with the upper crust, in order that the more luscious morsels might

be left for him; and she had liked to prepare her own tea leisurely,

putting in slowly the sugar and cream--skimmed milk it had used to

be, dropped for herself with a sparing hand, in order that his large

breakfast-cup might be whitened to his liking; but though the milk

had been skimmed and scanty, and though the tea itself had been put

in with a sparing hand, she had then been mistress of the occasion.

She had had her own way, and in stinting herself had found her own

reward. But now--the tea had no flavour now that it was made in the

kitchen and brought to her, cold and vapid, by a man in livery whom

she half feared to keep waiting while she ministered to her own

wants.

And so she sat moody in her arm-chair, cross and sulky, as her

daughter thought. But yet there was a vein of poetry in her heart, as

she sat there, little like a sibyl as she looked. Dear old days, in

which her cares and solicitude were valued; in which she could do

something for the joint benefit of the firm into which she had been

taken as a partner! How happy she had been in her struggles, how

piteously had her heart yearned towards him when she thought that he

was struggling too fiercely, how brave and constant he had been; and

how she had loved him as he sat steady as a rock at his grinding

work! Now had come the great success of which they had both dreamed

together, of which they had talked as arm in arm they were taking the

exercise that was so needful to him, walking quickly round Russell

Square, quickly round Bloomsbury Square and Bedford Square, and so

back to the grinding work in Keppel Street. It had come now--all of

which they had dreamed, and more than all they had dared to hope.

But of what good was it? Was he happy? No; he was fretful, bilious,

and worn with toil which was hard to him because he ate and drank

too much; he was ill at ease in public, only half understanding the

political life which he was obliged to assume in his new ambition;

and he was sick in his conscience--she was sure that must be so: he

could not thus neglect her, his loving, constant wife, without some

pangs of remorse. And was she happy? She might have revelled in silks

and satins, if silks and satins would have done her old heart good.

But they would do her no good. How she had joyed in a new dress when

it had been so hard to come by, so slow in coming, and when he would

go with her to the choosing of it! But her gowns now were hardly

of more interest to her than the joints of meat which the butcher

brought to the door with the utmost regularity. It behoved the

butcher to send good beef and the milliner to send good silk, and

there was an end of it.

Not but what she could have been ecstatic about a full skirt on a

smart body if he would have cared to look at it. In truth she was

still soft and young enough within, though stout, and solid, and

somewhat aged without. Though she looked cross and surly that night,

there was soft poetry within her heart. If Providence, who had

bountifully given, would now by chance mercifully take away those

gifts, would she not then forgive everything and toil for him again

with the same happiness as before? Ah! yes; she could forgive

everything, anything, if he would only return and be contented to

sit opposite to her once again. "O mortal Delius, dearest lord and

husband!" she exclaimed within her own breast, in language somewhat

differing from that of the Roman poet, "why hast thou not remembered

to maintain a mind equal in prosperity as it was always equal and

well poised in adversity? Oh my Delius, since prosperity has been too

much for thee, may the Lord bless thee once more with the adversity

which thou canst bear--which thou canst bear, and I with thee!" Thus

did she sing sadly within her own bosom,--sadly, but with true poetic

cadence; while Sophia and Lucius Mason, sitting by, when for a moment

they turned their eyes upon her, gave her credit only for the cross

solemnity supposed to be incidental to obese and declining years.

And then there came a ring at the bell and a knock at the door, and a

rush along the nether passages, and the lady knew that he of whom she

had been thinking had arrived. In olden days she had ever met him in

the narrow passage, and, indifferent to the maid, she had hung about

his neck and kissed him in the hall. But now she did not stir from

the chair. She could forgive him all and run again at the sound of

his footstep, but she must first know that such forgiveness and such

running would be welcome.

"That's papa," said Sophia.

"Don't forget that I have not met him since I have been home from

Germany," said Lucius. "You must introduce me."

In a minute or two Mr. Furnival opened the door and walked into the

room. Men when they arrive from their travels now-a-days have no

strippings of greatcoats, no deposits to make of thick shawls and

double gloves, no absolutely necessary changes of raiment. Such had

been the case when he had used to come back cold and weary from the

circuits; but now he had left Birmingham since dinner by the late

express, and enjoyed his nap in the train for two hours or so, and

walked into his own drawing-room as he might have done had he dined

in his own dining-room.

"How are you, Kitty?" he said to his wife, handing to her the

forefinger of his right hand by way of greeting. "Well, Sophy, my

love;" and he kissed his daughter. "Oh! Lucius Mason. I am very glad

to see you. I can't say I should have remembered you unless I had

been told. You are very welcome in Harley Street, and I hope you will

often be here."

[Illustration: Mr. Furnival's welcome home.]

"It's not very often he'd find you at home, Mr. Furnival," said the

aggrieved wife.

"Not so often as I could wish just at present; but things will be

more settled, I hope, before very long. How's your mother, Lucius?"

"She's pretty well, thank you, sir. I've to meet her in town

to-morrow, and go down home with her."

There was then silence in the room for a few seconds, during which

Mrs. Furnival looked very sharply at her husband. "Oh! she's to be in

town, is she?" said Mr. Furnival, after a moment's consideration. He

was angry with Lady Mason at the moment for having put him into this

position. Why had she told her son that she was to be up in London,

thus producing conversation and tittle-tattle which made deceit on

his part absolutely necessary? Lady Mason's business in London was

of a nature which would not bear much open talking. She herself, in

her earnest letter summoning Mr. Furnival up from Birmingham, had

besought him that her visit to his chambers might not be made matter

of discussion. New troubles might be coming on her, but also they

might not; and she was very anxious that no one should know that

she was seeking a lawyer's advice on the matter. To all this Mr.

Furnival had given in his adhesion; and yet she had put it into her

son's power to come to his drawing-room and chatter there of her

whereabouts. For a moment or two he doubted; but at the expiration of

those moments he saw that the deceit was necessary. "She's to be in

town, is she?" said he. The reader will of course observe that this

deceit was practised, not as between husband and wife with reference

to an assignation with a lady, but between the lawyer and the outer

world with reference to a private meeting with a client. But then it

is sometimes so difficult to make wives look at such matters in the

right light.

"She's coming up for some shopping," said Lucius.

"Oh! indeed," said Mrs. Furnival. She would not have spoken if she

could have helped it, but she could not help it; and then there

was silence in the room for a minute or two, which Lucius vainly

endeavoured to break by a few indifferent observations to Miss

Furnival. The words, however, which he uttered would not take the

guise of indifferent observations, but fell flatly on their ears, and

at the same time solemnly, as though spoken with the sole purpose of

creating sound.

"I hope you have been enjoying yourself at Birmingham," said Mrs.

Furnival.

"Enjoyed myself! I did not exactly go there for enjoyment."

"Or at Romford, where you were before?"

"Women seem to think that men have no purpose but amusement when they

go about their daily work," said Mr. Furnival; and then he threw

himself back in his arm-chair, and took up the last Quarterly.

Lucius Mason soon perceived that all the harmony of the evening had

in some way been marred by the return of the master of the house, and

that he might be in the way if he remained; he therefore took his

leave.

"I shall want breakfast punctually at half-past eight to-morrow

morning," said Mr. Furnival, as soon as the stranger had withdrawn.

"I must be in chambers before ten;" and then he took his candle and

withdrew to his own room.

Sophia rang the bell and gave the servant the order; but Mrs.

Furnival took no trouble in the matter whatever. In the olden days

she would have bustled down before she went to bed, and have seen

herself that everything was ready, so that the master of the house

might not be kept waiting. But all this was nothing to her now.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. FURNIVAL'S CHAMBERS.

Mr. Furnival's chambers were on the first floor in a very dingy

edifice in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn. This square was always dingy,

even when it was comparatively open and served as the approach from

Chancery Lane to the Lord Chancellor's Court; but now it has been

built up with new shops for the Vice-Chancellor, and to my eyes it

seems more dingy than ever.

He there occupied three rooms, all of them sufficiently spacious

for the purposes required, but which were made oppressive by their

general dinginess and by a smell of old leather which pervaded them.

In one of them sat at his desk Mr. Crabwitz, a gentleman who had now

been with Mr. Furnival for the last fifteen years, and who considered

that no inconsiderable portion of the barrister's success had been

attributable to his own energy and genius. Mr. Crabwitz was a

genteel-looking man, somewhat over forty years of age, very careful

as to his gloves, hat, and umbrella, and not a little particular

as to his associates. As he was unmarried, fond of ladies' society,

and presumed to be a warm man in money matters, he had his social

successes, and looked down from a considerable altitude on some men

who from their professional rank might have been considered as his

superiors. He had a small bachelor's box down at Barnes, and not

unfrequently went abroad in the vacations. The door opening into the

room of Mr. Crabwitz was in the corner fronting you on the left-hand

side as you entered the chambers. Immediately on your left was a

large waiting-room, in which an additional clerk usually sat at an

ordinary table. He was not an authorised part of the establishment,

being kept only from week to week; but nevertheless, for the last two

or three years he had been always there, and Mr. Crabwitz intended

that he should remain, for he acted as fag to Mr. Crabwitz. This

waiting-room was very dingy, much more so than the clerk's room, and

boasted of no furniture but eight old leathern chairs and two old

tables. It was surrounded by shelves which were laden with books and

dust, which by no chance were ever disturbed. But to my ideas the

most dingy of the three rooms was that large one in which the great

man himself sat; the door of which directly fronted you as you

entered. The furniture was probably better than that in the other

chambers, and the place had certainly the appearance of warmth and

life which comes from frequent use; but nevertheless, of all the

rooms in which I ever sat I think it was the most gloomy. There were

heavy curtains to the windows, which had once been ruby but were now

brown; and the ceiling was brown, and the thick carpet was brown, and

the books which covered every portion of the wall were brown, and the

painted wood-work of the doors and windows was of a dark brown. Here,

on the morning with which we have now to deal, sat Mr. Furnival over

his papers from ten to twelve, at which latter hour Lady Mason was

to come to him. The holidays of Mr. Crabwitz had this year been cut

short in consequence of his patron's attendance at the great congress

which was now sitting, and although all London was a desert, as he

had piteously complained to a lady of his acquaintance whom he had

left at Boulogne, he was there in the midst of the desert, and on

this morning was sitting in attendance at his usual desk.

Why Mr. Furnival should have breakfasted by himself at half-past

eight in order that he might be at his chambers at ten, seeing that

the engagement for which he had come to town was timed for twelve,

I will not pretend to say. He did not ask his wife to join him, and

consequently she did not come down till her usual time. Mr. Furnival

breakfasted by himself, and at ten o'clock he was in his chambers.

Though alone for two hours he was not idle, and exactly at twelve Mr.

Crabwitz opened his door and announced Lady Mason.

When we last parted with her after her interview with Sir Peregrine

Orme, she had resolved not to communicate with her friend the

lawyer,--at any rate not to do so immediately. Thinking on that

resolve she had tried to sleep that night; but her mind was

altogether disturbed, and she could get no rest. What, if after

twenty years of tranquillity all her troubles must now be

recommenced? What if the battle were again to be fought,--with such

termination as the chances might send to her? Why was it that she was

so much greater a coward now than she had been then? Then she had

expected defeat, for her friends had bade her not to be sanguine;

but in spite of that she had borne up and gone gallantly through the

ordeal. But now she felt that if Orley Farm were hers to give she

would sooner abandon it than renew the contest. Then, at that former

period of her life, she had prepared her mind to do or die in the

cause. She had wrought herself up for the work, and had carried it

through. But having done that work, having accomplished her terrible

task, she had hoped that rest might be in store for her.

As she rose from her bed on the morning after her interview with Sir

Peregrine, she determined that she would seek counsel from him in

whose counsel she could trust. Sir Peregrine's friendship was more

valuable to her than that of Mr. Furnival, but a word of advice

from Mr. Furnival was worth all the spoken wisdom of the baronet,

ten times over. Therefore she wrote her letter, and proposed an

appointment; and Mr. Furnival, tempted as I have said by some evil

spirit to stray after strange goddesses in these his blue-nosed

days, had left his learned brethren at their congress in Birmingham,

and had hurried up to town to assist the widow. He had left that

congress, though the wisest Rustums of the law from all the civilised

countries of Europe were there assembled, with Boanerges at their

head, that great, old, valiant, learned, British Rustum, inquiring

with energy, solemnity, and caution, with much shaking of ponderous

heads and many sarcasms from those which were not ponderous, whether

any and what changes might be made in the modes of answering that

great question, "Guilty or not guilty?" and that other equally great

question, "Is it meum or is it tuum?" To answer which question justly

should be the end and object of every lawyer's work. There were

great men there from Paris, very capable, the Ulpians, Tribonians,

and Papinians of the new empire, armed with the purest sentiments

expressed in antithetical and magniloquent phrases, ravishing to

the ears, and armed also with a code which, taken in its integrity,

would necessarily, as the logical consequence of its clauses, drive

all injustice from the face of the earth. And there were great

practitioners from Germany, men very skilled in the use of questions,

who profess that the tongue of man, if adequately skilful, may always

prevail on guilt to disclose itself; who believe in the power of

their own craft to produce truth, as our forefathers believed in

torture; and sometimes with the same result. And of course all that

was great on the British bench, and all that was famous at the

British bar was there,--men very unlike their German brethren, men

who thought that guilt never should be asked to tell of itself,--men

who were customarily but unconsciously shocked whenever unwary guilt

did tell of itself. Men these were, mostly of high and noble feeling,

born and bred to live with upright hearts and clean hands, but taught

by the peculiar tenets of their profession to think that that which

was high and noble in their private intercourse with the world need

not also be so esteemed in their legal practice. And there were

Italians there, good-humoured, joking, easy fellows, who would laugh

their clients in and out of their difficulties; and Spaniards, very

grave and serious, who doubted much in their minds whether justice

might not best be bought and sold; and our brethren from the United

States were present also, very eager to show that in this country

law, and justice also, were clouded and nearly buried beneath their

wig and gown.

All these and all this did Mr. Furnival desert for the space of

twenty-four hours in order that he might comply with the request of

Lady Mason. Had she known what it was that she was calling on him

to leave, no doubt she would have borne her troubles for another

week,--for another fortnight, till those Rustums at Birmingham had

brought their labours to a close. She would not have robbed the

English bar of one of the warmest supporters of its present mode

of practice, even for a day, had she known how much that support

was needed at the present moment. But she had not known; and Mr.

Furnival, moved by her woman's plea, had not been hard enough in his

heart to refuse her.

When she entered the room she was dressed very plainly as was her

custom, and a thick veil covered her face; but still she was dressed

with care. There was nothing of the dowdiness of the lone lorn woman

about her, none of that lanky, washed-out appearance which sorrow and

trouble so often give to females. Had she given way to dowdiness, or

suffered herself to be, as it were, washed out, Mr. Furnival, we may

say, would not have been there to meet her;--of which fact Lady Mason

was perhaps aware.

"I am so grateful to you for this trouble," she said, as she raised

her veil, and while he pressed her hand between both his own. "I can

only ask you to believe that I would not have troubled you unless I

had been greatly troubled myself."

Mr. Furnival, as he placed her in an arm-chair by the fireside,

declared his sorrow that she should be in grief, and then he took

the other arm-chair himself, opposite to her, or rather close to

her,--much closer to her than he ever now seated himself to Mrs. F.

"Don't speak of my trouble," said he, "it is nothing if I can do

anything to relieve you." But though he was so tender, he did not

omit to tell her of her folly in having informed her son that she was

to be in London. "And have you seen him?" asked Lady Mason.

"He was in Harley Street with the ladies last night. But it does not

matter. It is only for your sake that I speak, as I know that you

wish to keep this matter private. And now let us hear what it is. I

cannot think that there can be anything which need really cause you

trouble." And he again took her hand,--that he might encourage her.

Lady Mason let him keep her hand for a minute or so, as though she

did not notice it; and yet as she turned her eyes to him it might

appear that his tenderness had encouraged her.

Sitting there thus, with her hand in his,--with her hand in his

during the first portion of the tale,--she told him all that she

wished to tell. Something more she told now to him than she had done

to Sir Peregrine. "I learned from her," she said, speaking about Mrs.

Dockwrath and her husband, "that he had found out something about

dates which the lawyers did not find out before."

"Something about dates," said Mr. Furnival, looking with all his eyes

into the fire. "You do not know what about dates?"

"No; only this; that he said that the lawyers in Bedford Row--"

"Round and Crook."

"Yes; he said that they were idiots not to have found it out before;

and then he went off to Groby Park. He came back last night; but of

course I have not seen her since."

By this time Mr. Furnival had dropped the hand, and was sitting

still, meditating, looking earnestly at the fire while Lady Mason

was looking earnestly at him. She was trying to gather from his face

whether he had seen signs of danger, and he was trying to gather from

her words whether there might really be cause to apprehend danger.

How was he to know what was really inside her mind; what were her

actual thoughts and inward reasonings on this subject; what private

knowledge she might have which was still kept back from him? In the

ordinary intercourse of the world when one man seeks advice from

another, he who is consulted demands in the first place that he shall

be put in possession of all the circumstances of the case. How else

will it be possible that he should give advice? But in matters of law

it is different. If I, having committed a crime, were to confess my

criminality to the gentleman engaged to defend me, might he not be

called on to say: "Then, O my friend, confess it also to the judge;

and so let justice be done. Ruat coelum, and the rest of it?" But

who would pay a lawyer for counsel such as that?

In this case there was no question of payment. The advice to be given

was to a widowed woman from an experienced man of the world; but,

nevertheless, he could only make his calculations as to her peculiar

case in the way in which he ordinarily calculated. Could it be

possible that anything had been kept back from him? Were there facts

unknown to him, but known to her, which would be terrible, fatal,

damning to his sweet friend if proved before all the world? He could

not bring himself to ask her, but yet it was so material that he

should know! Twenty years ago, at the time of the trial, he had at

one time thought,--it hardly matters to tell what, but those thoughts

had not been favourable to her cause. Then his mind had altered,

and he had learned,--as lawyers do learn,--to believe in his own

case. And when the day of triumph had come, he had triumphed loudly,

commiserating his dear friend for the unjust suffering to which she

had been subjected, and speaking in no low or modified tone as to

the grasping, greedy cruelty of that man of Groby Park. Nevertheless,

through it all, he had felt that Round and Crook had not made the

most of their case.

And now he sat, thinking, not so much whether or no she had been in

any way guilty with reference to that will, as whether the counsel

he should give her ought in any way to be based on the possibility

of her having been thus guilty. Nothing might be so damning to her

cause as that he should make sure of her innocence, if she were not

innocent; and yet he would not ask her the question. If innocent, why

was it that she was now so much moved, after twenty years of quiet

possession?

"It was a pity," he said, at last, "that Lucius should have disturbed

that fellow in the possession of his fields."

"It was; it was!" she said. "But I did not think it possible that

Miriam's husband should turn against me. Would it be wise, do you

think, to let him have the land again?"

"No, I do not think that. It would be telling him, and telling others

also, that you are afraid of him. If he have obtained any information

that may be considered of value by Joseph Mason, he can sell it at a

higher price than the holding of these fields is worth."

"Would it be well--?" She was asking a question and then checked

herself.

"Would what be well?"

"I am so harassed that I hardly know what I am saying. Would it be

wise, do you think, if I were to pay him anything, so as to keep him

quiet?"

"What; buy him off, you mean?"

"Well, yes;--if you call it so. Give him some sum of money in

compensation for his land; and on the understanding, you know--," and

then she paused.

"That depends on what he may have to sell," said Mr. Furnival, hardly

daring to look at her.

"Ah; yes," said the widow. And then there was another pause.

"I do not think that that would be at all discreet," said Mr.

Furnival. "After all, the chances are that it is all moonshine."

"You think so?"

"Yes; I cannot but think so. What can that man possibly have found

among the old attorney's papers that may be injurious to your

interests?"

"Ah! I do not know; I understand so little of these things. At the

time they told me,--you told me that the law might possibly go

against my boy's rights. It would have been bad then, but it would be

ten times more dreadful now."

"But there were many questions capable of doubt then, which were

definitely settled at the trial. As to your husband's intellect on

that day, for instance."

"There could be no doubt as to that."

"No; so it has been proved; and they will not raise that point again.

Could he have possibly have made a later will?"

"No; I am sure he did not. Had he done so it could not have been

found among Mr. Usbech's papers; for, as far as I remember, the poor

man never attended to any business after that day."

"What day?"

"The 14th of July, the day on which he was with Sir Joseph."

It was singular, thought the barrister, with how much precision she

remembered the dates and circumstances. That the circumstances of the

trial should be fresh on her memory was not wonderful; but how was

it that she knew so accurately things which had occurred before the

trial,--when no trial could have been expected? But as to this he

said nothing.

"And you are sure he went to Groby Park?"

"Oh, yes; I have no doubt of it. I am quite sure."

"I do not know that we can do anything but wait. Have you mentioned

this to Sir Peregrine?" It immediately occurred to Lady Mason's mind

that it would be by no means expedient, even if it were possible,

to keep Mr. Furnival in ignorance of anything that she really did;

and therefore explained that she had seen Sir Peregrine. "I was so

troubled at the first moment that I hardly knew where to turn," she

said.

"You were quite right to go to Sir Peregrine."

"I am so glad you are not angry with me as to that."

"And did he say anything--anything particular?"

"He promised that he would not desert me, should there be any new

difficulty."

"That is well. It is always good to have the countenance of such a

neighbour as he is."

"And the advice of such a friend as you are." And she again put out

her hand to him.

"Well; yes. It is my trade, you know, to give advice," and he smiled

as he took it.

"How should I live through such troubles without you?"

"We lawyers are very much abused now-a-days," said Mr. Furnival,

thinking of what was going on down at Birmingham at that very moment;

"but I hardly know how the world would get on without us."

"Ah! but all lawyers are not like you."

"Some perhaps worse, and a great many much better. But, as I was

saying, I do not think I would take any steps at present. The man

Dockwrath is a vulgar, low-minded, revengeful fellow; and I would

endeavour to forget him."

"Ah, if I could!"

"And why not? What can he possibly have learned to your injury?" And

then as it seemed to Lady Mason that Mr. Furnival expected some reply

to this question, she forced herself to give him one. "I suppose that

he cannot know anything."

"I tell you what I might do," said Mr. Furnival, who was still

musing. "Round himself is not a bad fellow, and I am acquainted with

him. He was the junior partner in that house at the time of the

trial, and I know that he persuaded Joseph Mason not to appeal to the

Lords. I will contrive, if possible, to see him. I shall be able to

learn from him at any rate whether anything is being done."

"And then if I hear that there is not, I shall be comforted."

"Of course; of course."

"But if there is--"

"I think there will be nothing of the sort," said Mr. Furnival,

leaving his seat as he spoke.

"But if there is--I shall have your aid?" and she slowly rose from

her chair as she spoke.

Mr. Furnival gave her a promise of this, as Sir Peregrine had done

before; and then with her handkerchief to her eyes she thanked him.

Her tears were not false as Mr. Furnival well saw; and seeing that

she wept, and seeing that she was beautiful, and feeling that in her

grief and in her beauty she had come to him for aid, his heart was

softened towards her, and he put out his arms as though he would take

her to his heart--as a daughter. "Dearest friend," he said, "trust me

that no harm shall come to you."

"I will trust you," she said, gently stopping the motion of his arm.

"I will trust you, altogether. And when you have seen Mr. Round,

shall I hear from you?"

At this moment, as they were standing close together, the door

opened, and Mr. Crabwitz introduced another lady--who indeed had

advanced so quickly towards the door of Mr. Furnival's room, that the

clerk had been hardly able to reach it before her.

"Mrs. Furnival, if you please, sir," said Mr. Crabwitz.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY.

Unfortunately for Mr. Furnival, the intruder was Mrs.

Furnival--whether he pleased or whether he did not please. There

she was in his law chamber, present in the flesh, a sight pleasing

neither to her husband nor to her husband's client. She had knocked

at the outside door, which, in the absence of the fag, had been

opened by Mr. Crabwitz, and had immediately walked across the passage

towards her husband's room, expressing her knowledge that Mr.

Furnival was within. Mr. Crabwitz had all the will in the world to

stop her progress, but he found that he lacked the power to stay it

for a moment.

The advantages of matrimony are many and great,--so many and so

great, that all men, doubtless, ought to marry. But even matrimony

may have its drawbacks; among which unconcealed and undeserved

jealousy on the part of the wife is perhaps as disagreeable as any.

What is a man to do when he is accused before the world,--before

any small fraction of the world, of making love to some lady of his

acquaintance? What is he to say? What way is he to look? "My love, I

didn't. I never did, and wouldn't think of it for worlds. I say it

with my hand on my heart. There is Mrs. Jones herself, and I appeal

to her." He is reduced to that! But should any innocent man be so

reduced by the wife of his bosom?

I am speaking of undeserved jealousy, and it may therefore be thought

that my remarks do not apply to Mrs. Furnival. They do apply to

her as much as to any woman. That general idea as to the strange

goddesses was on her part no more than a suspicion: and all women who

so torment themselves and their husbands may plead as much as she

could. And for this peculiar idea as to Lady Mason she had no ground

whatever. Lady Mason may have had her faults, but a propensity to rob

Mrs. Furnival of her husband's affections had not hitherto been one

of them. Mr. Furnival was a clever lawyer, and she had great need of

his assistance; therefore she had come to his chambers, and therefore

she had placed her hand in his. That Mr. Furnival liked his client

because she was good looking may be true. I like my horse, my

picture, the view from my study window for the same reason. I am

inclined to think that there was nothing more in it than that.

"My dear!" said Mr. Furnival, stepping back a little, and letting his

hands fall to his sides. Lady Mason also took a step backwards, and

then with considerable presence of mind recovered herself and put out

her hand to greet Mrs. Furnival.

"How do you do, Lady Mason?" said Mrs. Furnival, without any presence

of mind at all. "I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you very well.

I did hear that you were to be in town--shopping; but I did not for a

moment expect the--gratification of finding you here." And every word

that the dear, good, heart-sore woman spoke, told the tale of her

jealousy as plainly as though she had flown at Lady Mason's cap with

all the bold demonstrative energy of Spitalfields or St. Giles.

"I came up on purpose to see Mr. Furnival about some unfortunate law

business," said Lady Mason.

"Oh, indeed! Your son Lucius did say--shopping."

[Illustration: "Your son Lucius did say--shopping."]

"Yes; I told him so. When a lady is unfortunate enough to be driven

to a lawyer for advice, she does not wish to make it known. I should

be very sorry if my dear boy were to guess that I had this new

trouble; or, indeed, if any one were to know it. I am sure that I

shall be as safe with you, dear Mrs. Furnival, as I am with your

husband." And she stepped up to the angry matron, looking earnestly

into her face.

To a true tale of woman's sorrow Mrs. Furnival's heart could be as

snow under the noonday sun. Had Lady Mason gone to her and told her

all her fears and all her troubles, sought counsel and aid from her,

and appealed to her motherly feelings, Mrs. Furnival would have been

urgent night and day in persuading her husband to take up the widow's

case. She would have bade him work his very best without fee or

reward, and would herself have shown Lady Mason the way to Old

Square, Lincoln's Inn. She would have been discreet too, speaking no

word of idle gossip to any one. When he, in their happy days, had

told his legal secrets to her, she had never gossiped,--had never

spoken an idle word concerning them. And she would have been constant

to her friend, giving great consolation in the time of trouble, as

one woman can console another. The thought that all this might be so

did come across her for a moment, for there was innocence written in

Lady Mason's eyes. But then she looked at her husband's face; and

as she found no innocence there, her heart was again hardened. The

woman's face could lie;--"the faces of such women are all lies," Mrs.

Furnival said to herself;--but in her presence his face had been

compelled to speak the truth.

"Oh dear, no; I shall say nothing of course," she said. "I am

quite sorry that I intruded. Mr. Furnival, as I happened to be in

Holborn--at Mudie's for some books--I thought I would come down and

ask whether you intend to dine at home to-day. You said nothing about

it either last night or this morning; and nowadays one really does

not know how to manage in such matters."

"I told you that I should return to Birmingham this afternoon; I

shall dine there," said Mr. Furnival, very sulkily.

"Oh, very well. I certainly knew that you were going out of town.

I did not at all expect that you would remain at home; but I thought

that you might, perhaps, like to have your dinner before you

went. Good morning, Lady Mason; I hope you may be successful in

your--lawsuit." And then, curtsying to her husband's client, she

prepared to withdraw.

"I believe that I have said all that I need say, Mr. Furnival,"

said Lady Mason; "so that if Mrs. Furnival wishes--," and she also

gathered herself up as though she were ready to leave the room.

"I hardly know what Mrs. Furnival wishes," said the husband.

"My wishes are nothing," said the wife, "and I really am quite sorry

that I came in." And then she did go, leaving her husband and the

woman of whom she was jealous once more alone together. Upon the

whole I think that Mr. Furnival was right in not going home that day

to his dinner.

As the door closed somewhat loudly behind the angry lady--Mr.

Crabwitz having rushed out hardly in time to moderate the violence of

the slam--Lady Mason and her imputed lover were left looking at each

other. It was certainly hard upon Lady Mason, and so she felt it.

Mr. Furnival was fifty-five, and endowed with a bluish nose; and she

was over forty, and had lived for twenty years as a widow without

incurring a breath of scandal.

"I hope I have not been to blame," said Lady Mason in a soft, sad

voice; "but perhaps Mrs. Furnival specially wished to find you

alone."

"No, no; not at all."

"I shall be so unhappy if I think that I have been in the way. If

Mrs. Furnival wished to speak to you on business I am not surprised

that she should be angry, for I know that barristers do not usually

allow themselves to be troubled by their clients in their own

chambers."

"Nor by their wives," Mr. Furnival might have added, but he did not.

"Do not mind it," he said; "it is nothing. She is the best-tempered

woman in the world; but at times it is impossible to answer even for

the best-tempered."

"I will trust you to make my peace with her."

"Yes, of course; she will not think of it after to-day; nor must you,

Lady Mason."

"Oh, no; except that I would not for the world be the cause of

annoyance to my friends. Sometimes I am almost inclined to think that

I will never trouble any one again with my sorrows, but let things

come and go as they may. Were it not for poor Lucius I should do so."

Mr. Furnival, looking into her face, perceived that her eyes were

full of tears. There could be no doubt as to their reality. Her eyes

were full of genuine tears, brimming over and running down; and the

lawyer's heart was melted. "I do not know why you should say so," he

said. "I do not think your friends begrudge any little trouble they

may take for you. I am sure at least that I may so say for myself."

"You are too kind to me; but I do not on that account the less know

how much it is I ask of you."

"'The labour we delight in physics pain,'" said Mr. Furnival

gallantly. "But, to tell the truth, Lady Mason, I cannot understand

why you should be so much out of heart. I remember well how brave and

constant you were twenty years ago, when there really was cause for

trembling."

"Ah, I was younger then."

"So the almanac tells us; but if the almanac did not tell us I should

never know. We are all older, of course. Twenty years does not go by

without leaving its marks, as I can feel myself."

"Men do not grow old as women do, who live alone and gather rust as

they feed on their own thoughts."

"I know no one whom time has touched so lightly as yourself, Lady

Mason; but if I may speak to you as a friend--"

"If you may not, Mr. Furnival, who may?"

"I should tell you that you are weak to be so despondent, or rather

so unhappy."

"Another lawsuit would kill me, I think. You say that I was brave and

constant before, but you cannot understand what I suffered. I nerved

myself to bear it, telling myself that it was the first duty that I

owed to the babe that was lying on my bosom. And when standing there

in the Court, with that terrible array around me, with the eyes of

all men on me, the eyes of men who thought that I had been guilty of

so terrible a crime, for the sake of that child who was so weak I

could be brave. But it nearly killed me. Mr. Furnival, I could not

go through that again; no, not even for his sake. If you can save me

from that, even though it be by the buying off of that ungrateful

man--"

"You must not think of that."

"Must I not? ah me!"

"Will you tell Lucius all this, and let him come to me?"

"No; not for worlds. He would defy every one, and glory in the fight;

but after all it is I that must bear the brunt. No; he shall not know

it;--unless it becomes so public that he must know it."

And then, with some further pressing of the hand, and further words

of encouragement which were partly tender as from the man, and partly

forensic as from the lawyer, Mr. Furnival permitted her to go,

and she found her son at the chemist's shop in Holborn as she had

appointed. There were no traces of tears or of sorrow in her face as

she smiled on Lucius while giving him her hand, and then when they

were in a cab together she asked him as to his success at Liverpool.

"I am very glad that I went," said he, "very glad indeed. I saw the

merchants there who are the real importers of the article, and I have

made arrangements with them."

"Will it be cheaper so, Lucius?"

"Cheaper! not what women generally call cheaper. If there be anything

on earth that I hate, it is a bargain. A man who looks for bargains

must be a dupe or a cheat, and is probably both."

"Both, Lucius. Then he is doubly unfortunate."

"He is a cheat because he wants things for less than their value; and

a dupe because, as a matter of course, he does not get what he wants.

I made no bargain at Liverpool,--at least, no cheap bargain; but

I have made arrangements for a sufficient supply of a first-rate

unadulterated article at its proper market price, and I do not fear

but the results will be remunerative." And then, as they went home in

the railway carriage the mother talked to her son about his farming

as though she had forgotten her other trouble, and she explained to

him how he was to dine with Sir Peregrine.

"I shall be delighted to dine with Sir Peregrine," said Lucius, "and

very well pleased to have an opportunity of talking to him about his

own way of managing his land; but, mother, I will not promise to be

guided by so very old-fashioned a professor."

Mr. Furnival, when he was left alone, sat thinking over the interview

that had passed. At first, as was most natural, he bethought himself

of his wife; and I regret to say that the love which he bore to her,

and the gratitude which he owed to her, and the memory of all that

they had suffered and enjoyed together, did not fill his heart with

thoughts towards her as tender as they should have done. A black

frown came across his brow as he meditated on her late intrusion,

and he made some sort of resolve that that kind of thing should be

prevented for the future. He did not make up his mind how he would

prevent it,--a point which husbands sometimes overlook in their

marital resolutions. And then, instead of counting up her virtues,

he counted up his own. Had he not given her everything; a house such

as she had not dreamed of in her younger days? servants, carriages,

money, comforts, and luxuries of all sorts? He had begrudged her

nothing, had let her have her full share of all his hard-earned

gains; and yet she could be ungrateful for all this, and allow her

head to be filled with whims and fancies as though she were a young

girl,--to his great annoyance and confusion. He would let her know

that his chambers, his law chambers, should be private even from her.

He would not allow himself to become a laughing-stock to his own

clerks and his own brethren through the impertinent folly of a woman

who owed to him everything;--and so on! I regret to say that he never

once thought of those lonely evenings in Harley Street, of those

long days which the poor woman was doomed to pass without the only

companionship which was valuable to her. He never thought of that vow

which they had both made at the altar, which she had kept so loyally,

and which required of him a cherishing, comforting, enduring love.

It never occurred to him that in denying her this he as much broke

his promise to her as though he had taken to himself in very truth

some strange goddess, leaving his wedded wife with a cold ceremony

of alimony or such-like. He had been open-handed to her as regards

money, and therefore she ought not to be troublesome! He had done his

duty by her, and therefore he would not permit her to be troublesome!

Such, I regret to say, were his thoughts and resolutions as he sat

thinking and resolving about Mrs. Furnival.

And then, by degrees, his mind turned away to that other lady,

and they became much more tender. Lady Mason was certainly both

interesting and comely in her grief. Her colour could still come and

go, her hand was still soft and small, her hair was still brown and

smooth. There were no wrinkles in her brow though care had passed

over it; her step could still fall lightly, though it had borne a

heavy weight of sorrow. I fear that he made a wicked comparison--a

comparison that was wicked although it was made unconsciously.

But by degrees he ceased to think of the woman and began to think of

the client, as he was in duty bound to do. What was the real truth

of all this? Was it possible that she should be alarmed in that way

because a small country attorney had told his wife that he had found

some old paper, and because the man had then gone off to Yorkshire?

Nothing could be more natural than her anxiety, supposing her to be

aware of some secret which would condemn her if discovered;--but

nothing more unnatural if there were no such secret. And she must

know! In her bosom, if in no other, must exist the knowledge whether

or no that will were just. If that will were just, was it possible

that she should now tremble so violently, seeing that its justice

had been substantially proved in various courts of law? But if it

were not just--if it were a forgery, a forgery made by her, or with

her cognizance--and that now this truth was to be made known! How

terrible would that be! But terrible is not the word which best

describes the idea as it entered Mr. Furnival's mind. How wonderful

would it be; how wonderful would it all have been! By whose hand in

such case had those signatures been traced? Could it be possible that

she, soft, beautiful, graceful as she was now, all but a girl as she

had then been, could have done it, unaided,--by herself?--that she

could have sat down in the still hour of the night, with that old man

on one side and her baby in his cradle on the other, and forged that

will, signatures and all, in such a manner as to have carried her

point for twenty years,--so skilfully as to have baffled lawyers and

jurymen and resisted the eager greed of her cheated kinsman? If so,

was it not all wonderful! Had not she been a woman worthy of wonder!

And then Mr. Furnival's mind, keen and almost unerring at seizing

legal points, went eagerly to work, considering what new evidence

might now be forthcoming. He remembered at once the circumstances of

those two chief witnesses, the clerk who had been so muddle-headed,

and the servant-girl who had been so clear. They had certainly

witnessed some deed, and they had done so on that special day. If

there had been a fraud, if there had been a forgery, it had been so

clever as almost to merit protection! But if there had been such

fraud, the nature of the means by which it might be detected became

plain to the mind of the barrister,--plainer to him without knowledge

of any circumstances than it had done to Mr. Mason after many of such

circumstances had been explained to him.

But it was impossible. So said Mr. Furnival to himself, out

loud;--speaking out loud in order that he might convince himself.

It was impossible, he said again; but he did not convince himself.

Should he ask her? No; it was not on the cards that he should do

that. And perhaps, if a further trial were forthcoming, it might be

better for her sake that he should be ignorant. And then, having

declared again that it was impossible, he rang his bell. "Crabwitz,"

said he, without looking at the man, "just step over to Bedford

Row, with my compliments, and learn what is Mr. Round's present

address;--old Mr. Round, you know."

Mr. Crabwitz stood for a moment or two with the door in his hand, and

Mr. Furnival, going back to his own thoughts, was expecting the man's

departure. "Well," he said, looking up and seeing that his myrmidon

still stood there.

Mr. Crabwitz was not in a very good humour, and had almost made up

his mind to let his master know that such was the case. Looking at

his own general importance in the legal world, and the inestimable

services which he had rendered to Mr. Furnival, he did not think that

that gentleman was treating him well. He had been summoned back to

his dingy chamber almost without an excuse, and now that he was in

London was not permitted to join even for a day the other wise men of

the law who were assembled at the great congress. For the last four

days his heart had been yearning to go to Birmingham, but had yearned

in vain; and now his master was sending him about town as though he

were an errand-lad.

"Shall I step across to the lodge and send the porter's boy to Round

and Crook's?" asked Mr. Crabwitz.

"The porter's boy! no; go yourself; you are not busy. Why should I

send the porter's boy on my business?" The fact probably was, that

Mr. Furnival forgot his clerk's age and standing. Crabwitz had been

ready to run anywhere when his employer had first known him, and Mr.

Furnival did not perceive the change.

"Very well, sir; certainly I will go if you wish it;--on this

occasion that is. But I hope, sir, you will excuse my saying--"

"Saying what?"

"That I am not exactly a messenger, sir. Of course I'll go now, as

the other clerk is not in."

"Oh, you're too great a man to walk across to Bedford Row, are you?

Give me my hat, and I'll go."

"Oh, no, Mr. Furnival, I did not mean that. I'll step over to Bedford

Row, of course;--only I did think--"

"Think what?"

"That perhaps I was entitled to a little more respect, Mr. Furnival.

It's for your sake as much as my own that I speak, sir; but if the

gentlemen in the Lane see me sent about like a lad of twenty, sir,

they'll think--"

"What will they think?"

"I hardly know what they'll think, but I know it will be very

disagreeable, sir;--very disagreeable to my feelings. I did think,

sir, that perhaps--"

"I'll tell you what it is, Crabwitz, if your situation here does not

suit you, you may leave it to-morrow. I shall have no difficulty in

finding another man to take your place."

"I am sorry to hear you speak in that way, Mr. Furnival, very

sorry--after fifteen years, sir--."

"You find yourself too grand to walk to Bedford Row!"

"Oh, no. I'll go now, of course, Mr. Furnival." And then Mr. Crabwitz

did go, meditating as he went many things to himself. He knew his own

value, or thought that he knew it; and might it not be possible to

find some patron who would appreciate his services more justly than

did Mr. Furnival?

CHAPTER XIV.

DINNER AT THE CLEEVE.

Lady Mason on her return from London found a note from Mrs. Orme

asking both her and her son to dine at The Cleeve on the following

day. As it had been already settled between her and Sir Peregrine

that Lucius should dine there in order that he might be talked to

respecting his mania for guano, the invitation could not be refused;

but, as for Lady Mason herself, she would much have preferred to

remain at home.

Indeed, her uneasiness on that guano matter had been so outweighed

by worse uneasiness from another source, that she had become, if not

indifferent, at any rate tranquil on the subject. It might be well

that Sir Peregrine should preach his sermon, and well that Lucius

should hear it; but for herself it would, she thought, have been more

comfortable for her to eat her dinner alone. She felt, however, that

she could not do so. Any amount of tedium would be better than the

danger of offering a slight to Sir Peregrine, and therefore she wrote

a pretty little note to say that both of them would be at The Cleeve

at seven.

"Lucius, my dear, I want you to do me a great favour," she said as

she sat by her son in the Hamworth fly.

"A great favour, mother! of course I will do anything for you that I

can."

"It is that you will bear with Sir Peregrine to-night."

"Bear with him! I do not know exactly what you mean. Of course I will

remember that he is an old man, and not answer him as I would one of

my own age."

"I am sure of that, Lucius, because you are a gentleman. As much

forbearance as that a young man, if he be a gentleman, will always

show to an old man. But what I ask is something more than that. Sir

Peregrine has been farming all his life."

"Yes; and see what are the results! He has three or four hundred

acres of uncultivated land on his estate, all of which would grow

wheat."

"I know nothing about that," said Lady Mason.

"Ah, but that's the question. My trade is to be that of a farmer, and

you are sending me to school. Then comes the question, Of what sort

is the schoolmaster?"

"I am not talking about farming now, Lucius."

"But he will talk of it."

"And cannot you listen to him without contradicting him--for my

sake? It is of the greatest consequence to me,--of the very

greatest, Lucius, that I should have the benefit of Sir Peregrine's

friendship."

"If he would quarrel with you because I chanced to disagree with

him about the management of land, his friendship would not be worth

having."

"I do not say that he will do so; but I am sure you can understand

that an old man may be tender on such points. At any rate I ask it

from you as a favour. You cannot guess how important it is to me to

be on good terms with such a neighbour."

"It is always so in England," said Lucius, after pausing for a while.

"Sir Peregrine is a man of family, and a baronet; of course all the

world, the world of Hamworth that is, should bow down at his feet.

And I too must worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar, the

King of Fashion, has set up!"

"Lucius, you are unkind to me."

"No, mother, not unkind; but like all men, I would fain act in such

matters as my own judgment may direct me."

"My friendship with Sir Peregrine Orme has nothing to do with his

rank; but it is of importance to me that both you and I should stand

well in his sight." There was nothing more said on the matter; and

then they got down at the front door, and were ushered through the

low wide hall into the drawing-room.

The three generations of the family were there,--Sir Peregrine, his

daughter-in-law, and the heir. Lucius Mason had been at The Cleeve

two or three times since his return from Germany, and on going there

had always declared to himself that it was the same to him as though

he were going into the house of Mrs. Arkwright, the doctor's widow at

Hamworth,--or even into the kitchen of Farmer Greenwood. He rejoiced

to call himself a democrat, and would boast that rank could have no

effect on him. But his boast was an untrue boast, and he could not

carry himself at The Cleeve as he would have done and did in Mrs.

Arkwright's little drawing-room. There was a majesty in the manner

of Sir Peregrine which did awe him; there were tokens of birth

and a certain grace of manner about Mrs. Orme which kept down his

assumption; and even with young Peregrine he found that though he

might be equal he could by no means be more than equal. He had

learned more than Peregrine Orme, had ten times more knowledge in his

head, had read books of which Peregrine did not even know the names

and probably never would know them; but on his side also young Orme

possessed something which the other wanted. What that something might

be Lucius Mason did not at all understand.

Mrs. Orme got up from her corner on the sofa to greet her friend, and

with a soft smile and two or three all but whispered words led her

forward to the fire. Mrs. Orme was not a woman given to much speech

or endowed with outward warmth of manners, but she could make her few

words go very far; and then the pressure of her hand, when it was

given, told more than a whole embrace from some other women. There

are ladies who always kiss their female friends, and always call them

"dear." In such cases one cannot but pity her who is so bekissed.

Mrs. Orme did not kiss Lady Mason, nor did she call her dear; but she

smiled sweetly as she uttered her greeting, and looked kindness out

of her marvellously blue eyes; and Lucius Mason, looking on over his

mother's shoulders, thought that he would like to have her for his

friend in spite of her rank. If Mrs. Orme would give him a lecture on

farming it might be possible to listen to it without contradiction;

but there was no chance for him in that respect. Mrs. Orme never gave

lectures to any one on any subject.

"So, Master Lucius, you have been to Liverpool, I hear," said Sir

Peregrine.

"Yes, sir--I returned yesterday."

"And what is the world doing at Liverpool?"

"The world is wide awake there, sir."

"Oh, no doubt; when the world has to make money it is always

wide awake. But men sometimes may be wide awake and yet make no

money;--may be wide awake, or at any rate think that they are so."

"Better that, Sir Peregrine, than wilfully go to sleep when there is

so much work to be done."

"A man when he's asleep does no harm," said Sir Peregrine.

"What a comfortable doctrine to think of when the servant comes with

the hot water at eight o'clock in the morning!" said his grandson.

"It is one that you study very constantly, I fear," said the old man,

who at this time was on excellent terms with his heir. There had

been no apparent hankering after rats since that last compact had

been made, and Peregrine had been doing great things with the H. H.;

winning golden opinions from all sorts of sportsmen, and earning a

great reputation for a certain young mare which had been bred by Sir

Peregrine himself. Foxes are vermin as well as rats, as Perry in his

wickedness had remarked; but a young man who can break an old one's

heart by a predilection for rat-catching may win it as absolutely

and irretrievably by prowess after a fox. Sir Peregrine had told to

four different neighbours how a fox had been run into, in the open,

near Alston, after twelve desperate miles, and how on that occasion

Peregrine had been in at the death with the huntsman and only one

other. "And the mare, you know, is only four years old and hardly

half trained," said Sir Peregrine, with great exultation. "The young

scamp, to have ridden her in that way!" It may be doubted whether he

would have been a prouder man or said more about it if his grandson

had taken honours.

And then the gong sounded, and, Sir Peregrine led Lady Mason into the

dining-room. Lucius, who as we know thought no more of the Ormes than

of the Joneses and Smiths, paused in his awe before he gave his arm

to Mrs. Orme; and when he did so he led her away in perfect silence,

though he would have given anything to be able to talk to her as

he went. But he bethought himself that unfortunately he could find

nothing to say. And when he sat down it was not much better. He had

not dined at The Cleeve before, and I am not sure whether the butler

in plain clothes and the two men in livery did not help to create his

confusion,--in spite of his well-digested democratic ideas.

The conversation during dinner was not very bright. Sir Peregrine

said a few words now and again to Lady Mason, and she replied with

a few others. On subjects which did not absolutely appertain to the

dinner, she perhaps was the greatest talker; but even she did not say

much. Mrs. Orme as a rule never spoke unless she were spoken to in

any company consisting of more than herself and one other; and young

Peregrine seemed to imagine that carving at the top of the table,

asking people if they would take stewed beef, and eating his own

dinner, were occupations quite sufficient for his energies. "Have a

bit more beef, Mason; do. If you will, I will." So far he went in

conversation, but no farther while his work was still before him.

When the servants were gone it was a little better, but not much.

"Mason, do you mean to hunt this season?" Peregrine asked.

"No," said the other.

"Well, I would if I were you. You will never know the fellows about

here unless you do."

"In the first place I can't afford the time," said Lucius, "and in

the next place I can't afford the money." This was plucky on his

part, and it was felt to be so by everybody in the room; but perhaps

had he spoken all the truth, he would have said also that he was not

accustomed to horsemanship.

"To a fellow who has a place of his own as you have, it costs

nothing," said Peregrine.

"Oh, does it not?" said the baronet; "I used to think differently."

"Well; not so much, I mean, as if you had everything to buy. Besides,

I look upon Mason as a sort of Croesus. What on earth has he got

to do with his money? And then as to time;--upon my word I don't

understand what a man means when he says he has not got time for

hunting."

"Lucius intends to be a farmer," said his mother.

"So do I," said Peregrine. "By Jove, I should think so. If I had two

hundred acres of land in my own hand I should not want anything else

in the world, and would never ask any one for a shilling."

"If that be so, I might make the best bargain at once that ever a man

made," said the baronet. "If I might take you at your word, Master

Perry--."

"Pray don't talk of it, sir," said Mrs. Orme.

"You may be quite sure of this, my dear--that I shall not do more

than talk of it." Then Sir Peregrine asked Lady Mason if she would

take any more wine; after which the ladies withdrew, and the lecture

commenced.

But we will in the first place accompany the ladies into the

drawing-room for a few minutes. It was hinted in one of the first

chapters of this story that Lady Mason might have become more

intimate than she had done with Mrs. Orme, had she so pleased it; and

by this it will of course be presumed that she had not so pleased.

All this is perfectly true. Mrs. Orme had now been living at The

Cleeve the greater portion of her life, and had never while there

made one really well-loved friend. She had a sister of her own, and

dear old friends of her childhood, who lived far away from her in

the northern counties. Occasionally she did see them, and was then

very happy; but this was not frequent with her. Her sister, who was

married to a peer, might stay at The Cleeve for a fortnight, perhaps

once in the year; but Mrs. Orme herself seldom left her own home. She

thought, and certainly not without cause, that Sir Peregrine was not

happy in her absence, and therefore she never left him. Then, living

there so much alone, was it not natural that her heart should desire

a friend?

But Lady Mason had been living much more alone. She had no sister to

come to her, even though it were but once a year. She had no intimate

female friend, none to whom she could really speak with the full

freedom of friendship, and it would have been delightful to have

bound to her by ties of love so sweet a creature as Mrs. Orme, a

widow like herself,--and like herself a widow with one only son. But

she, warily picking her steps through life, had learned the necessity

of being cautious in all things. The countenance of Sir Peregrine had

been invaluable to her, and might it not be possible that she should

lose that countenance? A word or two spoken now and then again, a

look not intended to be noticed, an altered tone, or perhaps a change

in the pressure of the old man's hand, had taught Lady Mason to think

that he might disapprove such intimacy. Probably at the moment she

was right, for she was quick at reading such small signs. It behoved

her to be very careful, and to indulge in no pleasure which might be

costly; and therefore she had denied herself in this matter,--as in

so many others.

But now it had occurred to her that it might be well to change her

conduct. Either she felt that Sir Peregrine's friendship for her was

too confirmed to be shaken, or perhaps she fancied that she might

strengthen it by means of his daughter-in-law. At any rate she

resolved to accept the offer which had once been tacitly made to her,

if it were still open to her to do so.

"How little changed your boy is!" she said, when they were seated

near to each other, with their coffee-cups between them.

"No; he does not change quickly; and, as you say, he is a boy still

in many things. I do not know whether it may not be better that it

should be so."

"I did not mean to call him a boy in that sense," said Lady Mason.

"But you might; now your son is quite a man."

"Poor Lucius! yes; in his position it is necessary. His little bit

of property is already his own; and then he has no one like Sir

Peregrine to look out for him. Necessity makes him manly."

"He will be marrying soon, I dare say," suggested Mrs. Orme.

"Oh, I hope not. Do you think that early marriages are good for young

men?"

"Yes, I think so. Why not?" said Mrs. Orme, thinking of her own year

of married happiness. "Would you not wish to see Lucius marry?"

"I fancy not. I should be afraid lest I should become as nothing to

him. And yet I would not have you think that I am selfish."

"I am sure that you are not that. I am sure that you love him better

than all the world besides. I can feel what that is myself."

"But you are not alone with your boy as I am. If he were to send me

from him, there would be nothing left for me in this world."

"Send you from him! Ah, because Orley Farm belongs to him. But he

would not do that; I am sure he would not."

"He would do nothing unkind; but how could he help it if his wife

wished it? But nevertheless I would not keep him single for that

reason;--no, nor for any reason if I knew that he wished to marry.

But it would be a blow to me."

"I sincerely trust that Peregrine may marry early," said Mrs. Orme,

perhaps thinking that babies were preferable either to rats or foxes.

"Yes, it would be well I am sure, because you have ample means, and

the house is large; and you would have his wife to love."

"If she were nice it would be so sweet to have her for a daughter. I

also am very much alone, though perhaps not so much as you are, Lady

Mason."

"I hope not--for I am sometimes very lonely."

"I have often thought that."

"But I should be wicked beyond everything if I were to complain,

seeing that Providence has given me so much that I had no right to

expect. What should I have done in my loneliness if Sir Peregrine's

hand and door had never been opened to me?" And then for the next

half-hour the two ladies held sweet converse together, during which

we will go back to the gentlemen over their wine.

[Illustration: Over their Wine.]

"Are you drinking claret?" said Sir Peregrine, arranging himself and

his bottles in the way that was usual to him. He had ever been a

moderate man himself, but nevertheless he had a business-like way of

going to work after dinner, as though there was a good deal to be

done before the drawing-room could be visited.

"No more wine for me, sir," said Lucius.

"No wine!" said Sir Peregrine the elder.

"Why, Mason, you'll never get on if that's the way with you," said

Peregrine the younger.

"I'll try at any rate," said the other.

"Water-drinker, moody thinker," and Peregrine sang a word or two from

an old drinking-song.

"I am not quite sure of that. We Englishmen I suppose are the

moodiest thinkers in all the world, and yet we are not so much given

to water-drinking as our lively neighbours across the Channel."

Sir Peregrine said nothing more on the subject, but he probably

thought that his young friend would not be a very comfortable

neighbour. His present task, however, was by no means that of

teaching him to drink, and he struck off at once upon the business he

had undertaken. "So your mother tells me that you are going to devote

all your energies to farming."

"Hardly that, I hope. There is the land, and I mean to see what I

can do with it. It is not much, and I intend to combine some other

occupation with it."

"You will find that two hundred acres of land will give you a good

deal to do;--that is if you mean to make money by it."

"I certainly hope to do that,--in the long run."

"It seems to me the easiest thing in the world," said Peregrine.

"You'll find out your mistake some day; but with Lucius Mason it is

very important that he should make no mistake at the commencement.

For a country gentleman I know no prettier amusement than

experimental farming;--but then a man must give up all idea of making

his rent out of the land."

"I can't afford that," said Lucius.

"No; and that is why I take the liberty of speaking to you. I hope

that the great friendship which I feel for your mother will be

allowed to stand as my excuse."

"I am very much obliged by your kindness, sir; I am indeed."

"The truth is, I think you are beginning wrong. You have now been to

Liverpool, to buy guano, I believe."

"Yes, that and some few other things. There is a man there who has

taken out a patent--"

"My dear fellow, if you lay out your money in that way, you will

never see it back again. Have you considered in the first place what

your journey to Liverpool has cost you?"

"Exactly nine and sixpence per cent. on the money that I laid out

there. Now that is not much more than a penny in the pound on the sum

expended, and is not for a moment to be taken into consideration in

comparison with the advantage of an improved market."

There was more in this than Sir Peregrine had expected to encounter.

He did not for a moment doubt the truth of his own experience or

the folly and the danger of the young man's proceedings; but he did

doubt his own power of proving either the one or the other to one

who so accurately computed his expenses by percentages on his outlay.

Peregrine opened his eyes and sat by, wondering in silence. What on

earth did Mason mean by an improved market?

"I am afraid then," said the baronet, "that you must have laid out a

large sum of money."

"A man can't do any good, Sir Peregrine, by hoarding his capital. I

don't think very much of capital myself--"

"Don't you?"

"Not of the theory of capital;--not so much as some people do; but

if a man has got it, of course it should be expended on the trade to

which it is to be applied."

"But some little knowledge--some experience is perhaps desirable

before any great outlay is made."

"Yes; some little knowledge is necessary,--and some great knowledge

would be desirable if it were accessible;--but it is not, as I take

it."

"Long years, perhaps, devoted to such pursuits--"

"Yes, Sir Peregrine; I know what you are going to say. Experience no

doubt will teach something. A man who has walked thirty miles a day

for thirty years will probably know what sort of shoes will best suit

his feet, and perhaps also the kind of food that will best support

him through such exertion; but there is very little chance of his

inventing any quicker mode of travelling."

"But he will have earned his wages honestly," said Sir Peregrine,

almost angrily. In his heart he was very angry, for he did not love

to be interrupted.

"Oh, yes; and if that were sufficient we might all walk our thirty

miles a day. But some of us must earn wages for other people, or the

world will make no progress. Civilization, as I take it, consists in

efforts made not for oneself but for others."

"If you won't take any more wine we will join the ladies," said the

baronet.

"He has not taken any at all," said Peregrine, filling his own glass

for the last time and emptying it.

"That young man is the most conceited puppy it was ever my misfortune

to meet," said Sir Peregrine to Mrs. Orme, when she came to kiss him

and take his blessing as she always did before leaving him for the

night.

"I am sorry for that," said she, "for I like his mother so much."

"I also like her," said Sir Peregrine; "but I cannot say that I shall

ever be very fond of her son."

"I'll tell you what, mamma," said young Peregrine, the same evening

in his mother's dressing-room. "Lucius Mason was too many for the

governor this evening."

"I hope he did not tease your grandfather."

"He talked him down regularly, and it was plain that the governor did

not like it."

And then the day was over.

CHAPTER XV.

A MORNING CALL AT MOUNT PLEASANT VILLA.

On the following day Lady Mason made two visits, using her new

vehicle for the first time. She would fain have walked had she dared;

but she would have given terrible offence to her son by doing so. He

had explained to her, and with some truth, that as their joint income

was now a thousand a year, she was quite entitled to such a luxury;

and then he went on to say that as he had bought it for her, he

should be much hurt if she would not use it. She had put it off from

day to day, and now she could put it off no longer.

Her first visit was by appointment at The Cleeve. She had promised

Mrs. Orme that she would come up, some special purpose having been

named;--but with the real idea, at any rate on the part of the

latter, that they might both be more comfortable together than alone.

The walk across from Orley Farm to The Cleeve had always been very

dear to Lady Mason. Every step of it was over beautiful ground, and a

delight in scenery was one of the few pleasures which her lot in life

had permitted her to enjoy. But to-day she could not allow herself

the walk. Her pleasure and delight must be postponed to her son's

wishes! But then she was used to that.

She found Mrs. Orme alone, and sat with her for an hour. I do not

know that anything was said between them which deserves to be

specially chronicled. Mrs. Orme, though she told her many things, did

not tell her what Sir Peregrine had said as he was going up to his

bedroom on the preceding evening, nor did Lady Mason say much about

her son's farming. She had managed to gather from Lucius that he

had not been deeply impressed by anything that had fallen from Sir

Peregrine on the subject, and therefore thought it as well to hold

her tongue. She soon perceived also, from the fact of Mrs. Orme

saying nothing about Lucius, that he had not left behind him any very

favourable impression. This was to her cause of additional sorrow,

but she knew that it must be borne. Nothing that she could say would

induce Lucius to make himself acceptable to Sir Peregrine.

When the hour was over she went down again to her little carriage,

Mrs. Orme coming with her to look at it, and in the hall they met Sir

Peregrine.

"Why does not Lady Mason stop for lunch?" said he. "It is past

half-past one. I never knew anything so inhospitable as turning her

out at this moment."

"I did ask her to stay," said Mrs. Orme.

"But I command her to stay," said Sir Peregrine, knocking his stick

upon the stone floor of the hall. "And let me see who will dare to

disobey me. John, let Lady Mason's carriage and pony stand in the

open coach-house till she is ready." So Lady Mason went back and did

remain for lunch. She was painfully anxious to maintain the best

possible footing in that house, but still more anxious not to have

it thought that she was intruding. She had feared that Lucius by his

offence might have estranged Sir Peregrine against herself; but that

at any rate was not the case.

After lunch she drove herself to Hamworth and made her second visit.

On this occasion she called on one Mrs. Arkwright, who was a very

old acquaintance, though hardly to be called an intimate friend.

The late Mr. Arkwright,--Dr. Arkwright as he used to be styled

in Hamworth,--had been Sir Joseph's medical attendant for many

years, and therefore there had been room for an intimacy. No real

friendship, that is no friendship of confidence, had sprung up; but

nevertheless the doctor's wife had known enough of Lady Mason in her

younger days to justify her in speaking of things which would not

have been mentioned between merely ordinary acquaintance. "I am glad

to see you have got promotion," said the old lady, looking out at

Lady Mason's little phaeton on the gravel sweep which divided Mrs.

Arkwright's house from the street. For Mrs. Arkwright's house was

Mount Pleasant Villa, and therefore was entitled to a sweep.

"It was a present from Lucius," said the other, "and as such must be

used. But I shall never feel myself at home in my own carriage."

"It is quite proper, my dear Lady Mason, quite proper. With his

income and with yours I do not wonder that he insists upon it. It is

quite proper, and just at the present moment peculiarly so."

Lady Mason did not understand this; but she would probably have

passed it by without understanding it, had she not thought that there

was some expression more than ordinary in Mrs. Arkwright's face. "Why

peculiarly so at the present moment?" she said.

"Because it shows that this foolish report which is going about has

no foundation. People won't believe it for a moment when they see you

out and about, and happy-like."

"What rumour, Mrs. Arkwright?" And Lady Mason's heart sunk within her

as she asked the question. She felt at once to what it must allude,

though she had conceived no idea as yet that there was any rumour on

the subject. Indeed, during the last forty-eight hours, since she had

left the chambers of Mr. Furnival, she had been more at ease within

herself than during the previous days which had elapsed subsequent to

the ill-omened visit made to her by Miriam Dockwrath. It had seemed

to her that Mr. Furnival anticipated no danger, and his manner and

words had almost given her confidence. But now,--now that a public

rumour was spoken of, her heart was as low again as ever.

"Sure, haven't you heard?" said Mrs. Arkwright. "Well, I wouldn't be

the first to tell you, only that I know that there is no truth in

it."

"You might as well tell me now, as I shall be apt to believe worse

than the truth after what you have said."

And then Mrs. Arkwright told her. "People have been saying that Mr.

Mason is again going to begin those law proceedings about the farm;

but I for one don't believe it."

"People have said so!" Lady Mason repeated. She meant nothing; it was

nothing to her who the people were. If one said it now, all would

soon be saying it. But she uttered the words because she felt herself

forced to say something, and the power of thinking what she might

best say was almost taken away from her.

"I am sure I don't know where it came from," said Mrs. Arkwright;

"but I would not have alluded to it if I had not thought that of

course you had heard it. I am very sorry if my saying it has vexed

you."

"Oh, no," said Lady Mason, trying to smile.

"As I said before, we all know that there is nothing in it; and your

having the pony chaise just at this time will make everybody see that

you are quite comfortable yourself."

"Thank you, yes; good-bye, Mrs. Arkwright." And then she made a great

effort, feeling aware that she was betraying herself, and that it

behoved her to say something which might remove the suspicion which

her emotion must have created. "The very name of that lawsuit is so

dreadful to me that I can hardly bear it. The memory of it is so

terrible to me, that even my enemies would hardly wish that it should

commence again."

"Of course it is merely a report," said Mrs. Arkwright, almost

trembling at what she had done.

"That is all--at least I believe so. I had heard myself that some

such threat had been made, but I did not think that any tidings of it

had got abroad."

"It was Mrs. Whiting told me. She is a great busybody, you know."

Mrs. Whiting was the wife of the present doctor.

"Dear Mrs. Arkwright, it does not matter in the least. Of course I

do not expect that people should hold their tongue on my account.

Good-bye, Mrs. Arkwright." And then she got into the little carriage,

and did contrive to drive herself home to Orley Farm.

"Dear, dear, dear, dear!" said Mrs. Arkwright to herself when she was

left alone. "Only to think of that; that she should be knocked in a

heap by a few words--in a moment, as we may say." And then she began

to consider of the matter. "I wonder what there is in it! There must

be something, or she would never have looked so like a ghost. What

will they do if Orley Farm is taken away from them after all!" And

then Mrs. Arkwright hurried out on her daily little toddle through

the town, that she might talk about and be talked to on the same

subject. She was by no means an ill-natured woman, nor was she at

all inclined to direct against Lady Mason any slight amount of venom

which might alloy her disposition. But then the matter was of such

importance! The people of Hamworth had hardly yet ceased to talk of

the last Orley Farm trial; and would it not be necessary that they

should talk much more if a new trial were really pending? Looking at

the matter in that light, would not such a trial be a godsend to the

people of Hamworth? Therefore I beg that it may not be imputed to

Mrs. Arkwright as a fault that she toddled out and sought eagerly for

her gossips.

Lady Mason did manage to drive herself home; but her success in the

matter was more owing to the good faith and propriety of her pony,

than to any skilful workmanship on her own part. Her first desire had

been to get away from Mrs. Arkwright, and having made that effort she

was now for a time hardly able to make any other. It was fast coming

upon her now. Let Sir Peregrine say what comforting words he might,

let Mr. Furnival assure her that she was safe with ever so much

confidence, nevertheless she could not but believe, could not but

feel inwardly convinced, that that which she so dreaded was to

happen. It was written in the book of her destiny that there should

be a new trial.

And now, from this very moment, the misery would again begin. People

would point at her, and talk of her. Her success in obtaining Orley

Farm for her own child would again be canvassed at every house in

Hamworth; and not only her success, but the means also by which that

success had been obtained. The old people would remember and the

young people would inquire; and, for her, tranquillity, repose, and

that retirement of life which had been so valuable to her, were all

gone.

There could be no doubt that Dockwrath had spread the report

immediately on his return from Yorkshire; and had she well thought of

the matter she might have taken some comfort from this. Of course he

would tell the story which he did tell. His confidence in being able

again to drag the case before the Courts would by no means argue that

others believed as he believed. In fact the enemies now arraigned

against her were only those whom she already knew to be so arraigned.

But she had not sufficient command of her thoughts to be able at

first to take comfort from such a reflection as this. She felt, as

she was being carried home, that the world was going from her, and

that it would be well for her, were it possible, that she should die.

But she was stronger when she reached her own door than she had been

at Mrs. Arkwright's. There was still within her a great power of

self-maintenance, if only time were allowed to her to look about and

consider how best she might support herself. Many women are in this

respect as she was. With forethought and summoned patience they can

endure great agonies; but a sudden pang, unexpected, overwhelms them.

She got out of the pony carriage with her ordinary placid face, and

walked up to her own room without having given any sign that she was

uneasy; and then she had to determine how she should bear herself

before her son. It had been with her a great object that both Sir

Peregrine and Mr. Furnival should first hear of the tidings from her,

and that they should both promise her their aid when they had heard

the story as she would tell it. In this she had been successful; and

it now seemed to her that prudence would require her to act in the

same way towards Lucius. Had it been possible to keep this matter

from him altogether, she would have given much to do so; but now it

would not be possible. It was clear that Mr. Dockwrath had chosen to

make the matter public, acting no doubt with forethought in doing

so; and Lucius would be sure to hear words which would become common

in Hamworth. Difficult as the task would be to her, it would be

best that she should prepare him. So she sat alone till dinner-time

planning how she would do this. She had sat alone for hours in the

same way planning how she would tell her story to Sir Peregrine; and

again as to her second story for Mr. Furnival. Those whose withers

are unwrung can hardly guess how absolutely a sore under the collar

will embitter every hour for the poor jade who is so tormented!

But she met him at dinner with a smiling face. He loved to see her

smile, and often told her so, almost upbraiding her when she would

look sad. Why should she be sad, seeing that she had everything that

a woman could desire? Her mind was burdened with no heavy thoughts as

to feeding coming multitudes. She had no contests to wage with the

desultory chemists of the age. His purpose was to work hard during

the hours of the day,--hard also during many hours of the night; and

it was becoming that his mother should greet him softly during his

few intervals of idleness. He told her so, in some words not badly

chosen for such telling; and she, loving mother that she was, strove

valiantly to obey him.

During dinner she could not speak to him, nor immediately after

dinner. The evil moment she put off from half-hour to half-hour,

still looking as though all were quiet within her bosom as she sat

beside him with her book in her hand. He was again at work before she

began her story; he thought at least that he was at work, for he had

before him on the table both Prichard and Latham, and was occupied

in making copies from some drawings of skulls which purposed to

represent the cerebral development of certain of our more distant

Asiatic brethren.

"Is it not singular," said be, "that the jaws of men born and bred

in a hunter state should be differently formed from those of the

agricultural tribes?"

"Are they?" said Lady Mason.

"Oh yes; the maxillary profile is quite different. You will see this

especially with the Mongolians, among the Tartar tribes. It seems to

me to be very much the same difference as that between a man and a

sheep, but Prichard makes no such remark. Look here at this fellow;

he must have been intended to eat nothing but flesh; and that raw,

and without any knife or fork."

"I don't suppose they had many knives or forks."

"By close observation I do not doubt that one could tell from a

single tooth not only what food the owner of it had been accustomed

to eat, but what language he had spoken. I say close observation, you

know. It could not be done in a day."

"I suppose not." And then the student again bent over his drawing.

"You see it would have been impossible for the owner of such a jaw

as that to have ground a grain of corn between his teeth, or to have

masticated even a cabbage."

"Lucius," said Lady Mason, becoming courageous on the spur of the

moment, "I want you to leave that for a moment and speak to me."

"Well," said he, putting down his pencil and turning round. "Here I

am."

"You have heard of the lawsuit which I had with your brother when you

were an infant?"

"Of course I have heard of it; but I wish you would not call that man

my brother. He would not own me as such, and I most certainly would

not own him. As far as I can learn he is one of the most detestable

human beings that ever existed."

"You have heard of him from an unfavourable side, Lucius; you should

remember that. He is a hard man, I believe; but I do not know that he

would do anything which he thought to be unjust."

"Why then did he try to rob me of my property?"

"Because he thought that it should have been his own. I cannot see

into his breast, but I presume that it was so."

"I do not presume anything of the kind, and never shall. I was an

infant and you were a woman,--a woman at that time without many

friends, and he thought that he could rob us under cover of the law.

Had he been commonly honest it would have been enough for him to

know what had been my father's wishes, even if the will had not been

rigidly formal. I look upon him as a robber and a thief."

"I am sorry for that, Lucius, because I differ from you. What I wish

to tell you now is this,--that he is thinking of trying the question

again."

"What!--thinking of another trial now?" and Lucius Mason pushed his

drawings and books from him with a vengeance.

"So I am told."

"And who told you? I cannot believe it, If he intended anything of

the kind I must have been the first person to hear of it. It would be

my business now, and you may be sure that he would have taken care to

let me know his purpose."

And then by degrees she explained to him that the man himself, Mr.

Mason of Groby, had as yet declared no such purpose. She had intended

to omit all mention of the name of Mr. Dockwrath, but she was unable

to do so without seeming to make a mystery with her son. When she

came to explain how the rumour had arisen and why she had thought it

necessary to tell him this, she was obliged to say that it had all

arisen from the wrath of the attorney. "He has been to Groby Park,"

she said, "and now that he has returned he is spreading this report."

"I shall go to him to-morrow," said Lucius, very sternly.

"No, no; you must not do that. You must promise me that you will not

do that."

"But I shall. You cannot suppose that I shall allow such a man as

that to tamper with my name without noticing it! It is my business

now."

"No, Lucius. The attack will be against me rather than you;--that is,

if an attack be made. I have told you because I do not like to have a

secret from you."

"Of course you have told me. If you are attacked who should defend

you, if I do not?"

"The best defence, indeed the only defence till they take some active

step, will be silence. Most probably they will not do anything,

and then we can afford to live down such reports as these. You can

understand, Lucius, that the matter is grievous enough to me; and I

am sure that for my sake you will not make it worse by a personal

quarrel with such a man as that."

"I shall go to Mr. Furnival," said he, "and ask his advice."

"I have done that already, Lucius. I thought it best to do so, when

first I heard that Mr. Dockwrath was moving in the matter. It was for

that that I went up to town."

"And why did you not tell me?"

"I then thought that you might be spared the pain of knowing anything

of the matter. I tell you now because I hear to-day in Hamworth that

people are talking on the subject. You might be annoyed, as I was

just now, if the first tidings had reached you from some stranger."

He sat silent for a while, turning his pencil in his hand, and

looking as though he were going to settle the matter off hand by his

own thoughts. "I tell you what it is, mother; I shall not let the

burden of this fall on your shoulders. You carried on the battle

before, but I must do so now. If I can trace any word of scandal to

that fellow Dockwrath, I shall indict him for a libel."

"Oh, Lucius!"

"I shall, and no mistake!"

What would he have said had he known that his mother had absolutely

proposed to Mr. Furnival to buy off Mr. Dockwrath's animosity, almost

at any price?

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. DOCKWRATH IN BEDFORD ROW.

Mr. Dockwrath, as he left Leeds and proceeded to join the bosom of

his family, was not discontented with what he had done. It might not

improbably have been the case that Mr. Mason would altogether refuse

to see him, and having seen him, Mr. Mason might altogether have

declined his assistance. He might have been forced as a witness to

disclose his secret, of which he could make so much better a profit

as a legal adviser. As it was, Mr. Mason had promised to pay him for

his services, and would no doubt be induced to go so far as to give

him a legal claim for payment. Mr. Mason had promised to come up to

town, and had instructed the Hamworth attorney to meet him there; and

under such circumstances the Hamworth attorney had but little doubt

that time would produce a considerable bill of costs in his favour.

And then he thought that he saw his way to a great success. I should

be painting the Devil too black were I to say that revenge was

his chief incentive in that which he was doing. All our motives

are mixed; and his wicked desire to do evil to Lady Mason in

return for the evil which she had done to him was mingled with

professional energy, and an ambition to win a cause that ought to

be won--especially a cause which others had failed to win. He said

to himself, on finding those names and dates among old Mr. Usbech's

papers, that there was still an opportunity of doing something

considerable in this Orley Farm Case, and he had made up his mind to

do it. Professional energy, revenge, and money considerations would

work hand in hand in this matter; and therefore, as he left Leeds in

the second-class railway carriage for London, he thought over the

result of his visit with considerable satisfaction.

He had left Leeds at ten, and Mr. Moulder had come down in the same

omnibus to the station, and was travelling in the same train in

a first-class carriage. Mr. Moulder was a man who despised the

second-class, and was not slow to say so before other commercials who

travelled at a cheaper rate than he did. "Hubbles and Grease," he

said, "allowed him respectably, in order that he might go about their

business respectable; and he wasn't going to give the firm a bad name

by being seen in a second-class carriage, although the difference

would go into his own pocket. That wasn't the way he had begun, and

that wasn't the way he was going to end." He said nothing to Mr.

Dockwrath in the morning, merely bowing in answer to that gentleman's

salutation. "Hope you were comfortable last night in the back

drawing-room," said Mr. Dockwrath; but Mr. Moulder in reply only

looked at him.

At the Mansfield station, Mr. Kantwise, with his huge wooden boxes,

appeared on the platform, and he got into the same carriage with Mr.

Dockwrath. He had come on by a night train, and had been doing a

stroke of business that morning. "Well, Kantwise," Moulder holloaed

out from his warm, well-padded seat, "doing it cheap and nasty, eh?"

"Not at all nasty, Mr. Moulder," said the other. "And I find myself

among as respectable a class of society in the second-class as you do

in the first; quite so;--and perhaps a little better," Mr. Kantwise

added, as he took his seat immediately opposite to Mr. Dockwrath. "I

hope I have the pleasure of seeing you pretty bobbish this morning,

sir." And he shook hands cordially with the attorney.

"Tidy, thank you," said Dockwrath. "My company last night did not do

me any harm; you may swear to that."

"Ha! ha! ha! I was so delighted that you got the better of Moulder; a

domineering party, isn't he? quite terrible! For myself, I can't put

up with him sometimes."

"I didn't have to put up with him last night."

"No, no; it was very good, wasn't it now? very capital, indeed. All

the same I wish you'd heard Busby give us 'Beautiful Venice, City

of Song!' A charming voice has Busby; quite charming." And there

was a pause for a minute or so, after which Mr. Kantwise resumed

the conversation. "You'll allow me to put you up one of those

drawing-room sets?" he said.

"Well, I am afraid not. I don't think they are strong enough where

there are children."

"Dear, dear; dear, dear; to hear you say so, Mr. Dockwrath! Why, they

are made for strength. They are the very things for children, because

they don't break, you know."

"But they'd bend terribly."

"By no means. They're so elastic that they always recovers

themselves. I didn't show you that; but you might turn the backs of

them chairs nearly down to the ground, and they will come straight

again. You let me send you a set for your wife to look at. If she's

not charmed with them I'll--I'll--I'll eat them."

"Women are charmed with anything," said Mr. Dockwrath. "A new bonnet

does that."

"They know what they are about pretty well, as I dare say you have

found out. I'll send express to Sheffield and have a completely new

set put up for you."

"For twelve seventeen six, of course?"

"Oh! dear no, Mr. Dockwrath. The lowest figure for ready money,

delivered free, is fifteen ten."

"I couldn't think of paying more than Mrs. Mason."

"Ah! but that was a damaged set; it was, indeed. And she merely

wanted it as a present for the curate's wife. The table was quite

sprung, and the music-stool wouldn't twist."

"But you'll send them to me new?"

"New from the manufactory; upon my word we will."

"A table that you have never acted upon--have never shown off on;

standing in the middle, you know?"

"Yes; upon my honour. You shall have them direct from the workshop,

and sent at once; you shall find them in your drawing-room on Tuesday

next."

"We'll say thirteen ten."

"I couldn't do it, Mr. Dockwrath--" And so they went on, bargaining

half the way up to town, till at last they came to terms for fourteen

eleven. "And a very superior article your lady will find them," Mr.

Kantwise said as he shook hands with his new friend at parting.

One day Mr. Dockwrath remained at home in the bosom of his family,

saying all manner of spiteful things against Lady Mason, and on the

next day he went up to town and called on Round and Crook. That one

day he waited in order that Mr. Mason might have time to write; but

Mr. Mason had written on the very day of the visit to Groby Park,

and Mr. Round junior was quite ready for Mr. Dockwrath when that

gentleman called.

Mr. Dockwrath when at home had again cautioned his wife to have no

intercourse whatever "with that swindler at Orley Farm," wishing

thereby the more thoroughly to imbue poor Miriam with a conviction

that Lady Mason had committed some fraud with reference to the will.

"You had better say nothing about the matter anywhere; d'you hear?

People will talk; all the world will be talking about it before long.

But that is nothing to you. If people ask you, say that you believe

that I am engaged in the case professionally, but that you know

nothing further." As to all which Miriam of course promised the most

exact obedience. But Mr. Dockwrath, though he only remained one day

in Hamworth before he went to London, took care that the curiosity of

his neighbours should be sufficiently excited.

Mr. Dockwrath felt some little trepidation at the heart as he walked

into the office of Messrs. Round and Crook in Bedford Row. Messrs.

Round and Crook stood high in the profession, and were men who in

the ordinary way of business would have had no personal dealings

with such a man as Mr. Dockwrath. Had any such intercourse become

necessary on commonplace subjects Messrs. Round and Crook's

confidential clerk might have seen Mr. Dockwrath, but even he would

have looked down upon the Hamworth attorney as from a great moral

height. But now, in the matter of the Orley Farm Case, Mr. Dockwrath

had determined that he would transact business only on equal terms

with the Bedford Row people. The secret was his--of his finding;

he knew the strength of his own position, and he would use it. But

nevertheless he did tremble inwardly as he asked whether Mr. Round

was within;--or if not Mr. Round, then Mr. Crook.

There were at present three members in the firm, though the old name

remained unaltered. The Mr. Round and the Mr. Crook of former days

were still working partners;--the very Round and the very Crook who

had carried on the battle on the part of Mr. Mason of Groby twenty

years ago; but to them had been added another Mr. Round, a son of

old Round, who, though his name did not absolutely appear in the

nomenclature of the firm, was, as a working man, the most important

person in it. Old Mr. Round might now be said to be ornamental and

communicative. He was a hale man of nearly seventy, who thought a

great deal of his peaches up at Isleworth, who came to the office

five times a week--not doing very much hard work, and who took the

largest share in the profits. Mr. Round senior had enjoyed the

reputation of being a sound, honourable man, but was now considered

by some to be not quite sharp enough for the practice of the present

day.

Mr. Crook had usually done the dirty work of the firm, having been

originally a managing clerk; and he still did the same--in a small

way. He had been the man to exact penalties, look after costs, and

attend to any criminal business, or business partly criminal in its

nature, which might chance find its way to them. But latterly in all

great matters Mr. Round junior, Mr. Matthew Round,--his father was

Richard,--was the member of the firm on whom the world in general

placed the greatest dependence. Mr. Mason's letter had in the

ordinary way of business come to him, although it had been addressed

to his father, and he had resolved on acting on it himself.

When Mr. Dockwrath called Mr. Round senior was at Birmingham, Mr.

Crook was taking his annual holiday, and Mr. Round junior was

reigning alone in Bedford Row. Instructions had been given to the

clerks that if Mr. Dockwrath called he was to be shown in, and

therefore he found himself seated, with much less trouble than he had

expected, in the private room of Mr. Round junior. He had expected

to see an old man, and was therefore somewhat confused, not feeling

quite sure that he was in company with one of the principals; but

nevertheless, looking at the room, and especially at the arm-chair

and carpet, he was aware that the legal gentleman who motioned him to

a seat could be no ordinary clerk.

The manner of this legal gentleman was not, as Mr. Dockwrath thought,

quite so ceremoniously civil as it might be, considering the

important nature of the business to be transacted between them.

Mr. Dockwrath intended to treat on equal terms, and so intending

would have been glad to have shaken hands with his new ally at the

commencement of their joint operations. But the man before him,--a

man younger than himself too,--did not even rise from his chair. "Ah!

Mr. Dockwrath," he said, taking up a letter from the table, "will you

have the goodness to sit down?" And Mr. Matthew Round wheeled his

own arm-chair towards the fire, stretching out his legs comfortably,

and pointing to a somewhat distant seat as that intended for the

accommodation of his visitor. Mr. Dockwrath seated himself in the

somewhat distant seat, and deposited his hat upon the floor, not

being as yet quite at home in his position; but he made up his mind

as he did so that he would be at home before he left the room.

"I find that you have been down in Yorkshire with a client of ours,

Mr. Dockwrath," said Mr. Matthew Round.

"Yes, I have," said he of Hamworth.

"Ah! well--; you are in the profession yourself, I believe?"

"Yes; I am an attorney."

"Would it not have been well to have come to us first?"

"No, I think not. I have not the pleasure of knowing your name, sir."

"My name is Round--Matthew Round."

"I beg your pardon, sir; I did not know," said Mr. Dockwrath, bowing.

It was a satisfaction to him to learn that he was closeted with a Mr.

Round, even if it were not the Mr. Round. "No, Mr. Round, I can't say

that I should have thought of that. In the first place I didn't know

whether Mr. Mason employed any lawyer, and in the next--"

"Well, well; it does not matter. It is usual among the profession;

but it does not in the least signify. Mr. Mason has written to us,

and he says that you have found out something about that Orley Farm

business."

"Yes; I have found out something. At least, I rather think so."

"Well, what is, it, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"Ah! that's the question. It's rather a ticklish business, Mr. Round;

a family affair, as I may say."

"Whose family?"

"To a certain extent my family, and to a certain extent Mr. Mason's

family. I don't know how far I should be justified in laying all the

facts before you--wonderful facts they are too--in an off-hand way

like that. These matters have to be considered a great deal. It is

not only the extent of the property. There is much more than that in

it, Mr. Round."

"If you don't tell me what there is in it, I don't see what we are to

do. I am sure you did not give yourself the trouble of coming up here

from Hamworth merely with the object of telling us that you are going

to hold your tongue."

"Certainly not, Mr. Round."

"Then what did you come to say?"

"May I ask you, Mr. Round, what Mr. Mason has told you with reference

to my interview with him?"

"Yes; I will read you a part of his letter--'Mr. Dockwrath is

of opinion that the will under which the estate is now enjoyed

is absolutely a forgery.' I presume you mean the codicil, Mr.

Dockwrath?"

"Oh yes! the codicil of course."

"'And he has in his possession documents which I have not seen,

but which seem to me, as described, to go far to prove that this

certainly must have been the case.' And then he goes on with

a description of dates, although it is clear that he does not

understand the matter himself--indeed he says as much. Now of course

we must see these documents before we can give our client any

advice." A certain small portion of Mr. Mason's letter Mr. Round did

then read, but he did not read those portions in which Mr. Mason

expressed his firm determination to reopen the case against Lady

Mason, and even to prosecute her for forgery if it were found that he

had anything like a fair chance of success in doing so. "I know that

you were convinced," he had said, addressing himself personally to

Mr. Round senior, "that Lady Mason was acting in good faith. I was

always convinced of the contrary, and am more sure of it now than

ever." This last paragraph, Mr. Round junior had not thought it

necessary to read to Mr. Dockwrath.

"The documents to which I allude are in reference to my confidential

family matters; and I certainly shall not produce them without

knowing on what ground I am standing."

"Of course you are aware, Mr. Dockwrath, that we could compel you."

"There, Mr. Round, I must be allowed to differ."

"It won't come to that, of course. If you have anything worth

showing, you'll show it; and if we make use of you as a witness, it

must be as a willing witness."

"I don't think it probable that I shall be a witness in the matter at

all."

"Ah, well; perhaps not. My own impression is that no case will be

made out; that there will be nothing to take before a jury."

"There again, I must differ from you, Mr. Round."

"Oh, of course! I suppose the real fact is, that it is a matter of

money. You want to be paid for what information you have got. That is

about the long and the short of it; eh, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I don't know what you call the long and the short of it, Mr. Round;

or what may be your way of doing business. As a professional man, of

course I expect to be paid for my work;--and I have no doubt that you

expect the same."

"No doubt, Mr. Dockwrath; but--as you have made the comparison,

I hope you will excuse me for saying so--we always wait till our

clients come to us."

Mr. Dockwrath drew himself up with some intention of becoming angry;

but he hardly knew how to carry it out; and then it might be a

question whether anger would serve his turn. "Do you mean to say, Mr.

Round, if you had found documents such as these, you would have done

nothing about them--that you would have passed them by as worthless?"

"I can't say that till I know what the documents are. If I found

papers concerning the client of another firm, I should go to that

firm if I thought that they demanded attention."

"I didn't know anything about the firm;--how was I to know?"

"Well! you know now, Mr. Dockwrath. As I understand it, our client

has referred you to us. If you have anything to say, we are ready to

hear it. If you have anything to show, we are ready to look at it. If

you have nothing to say, and nothing to show--"

"Ah, but I have; only--"

"Only you want us to make it worth your while. We might as well have

the truth at once. Is not that about it?"

"I want to see my way, of course."

"Exactly. And now, Mr. Dockwrath, I must make you understand that we

don't do business in that way."

"Then I shall see Mr. Mason again myself."

"That you can do. He will be in town next week, and, as I believe,

wishes to see you. As regards your expenses, if you can show us

that you have any communication to make that is worth our client's

attention, we will see that you are paid what you are out of pocket,

and some fair remuneration for the time you may have lost;--not as an

attorney, remember, for in that light we cannot regard you."

"I am every bit as much an attorney as you are."

"No doubt; but you are not Mr. Mason's attorney; and as long as it

suits him to honour us with his custom, you cannot be so regarded."

"That's as he pleases."

"No; it is not, Mr. Dockwrath. It is as he pleases whether he employs

you or us; but it is not as he pleases whether he employs both on

business of the same class. He may give us his confidence, or he may

withdraw it."

"Looking at the way the matter was managed before, perhaps the latter

may be the better for him."

"Excuse me, Mr. Dockwrath, for saying that that is a question I shall

not discuss with you."

Upon this Mr. Dockwrath jumped from his chair, and took up his hat.

"Good morning to you, sir," said Mr. Round, without moving from his

chair; "I will tell Mr. Mason that you have declined making any

communication to us. He will probably know your address--if he should

want it."

Mr. Dockwrath paused. Was he not about to sacrifice substantial

advantage to momentary anger? Would it not be better that he should

carry this impudent young London lawyer with him if it were possible?

"Sir," said he, "I am quite willing to tell you all that I know of

this matter at present, if you will have the patience to hear it."

"Patience, Mr. Dockwrath! Why I am made of patience. Sit down again,

Mr. Dockwrath, and think of it."

Mr. Dockwrath did sit down again, and did think of it; and it ended

in his telling to Mr. Round all that he had told to Mr. Mason. As he

did so, he looked closely at Mr. Round's face, but there he could

read nothing. "Exactly," said Mr. Round. "The fourteenth of July is

the date of both. I have taken a memorandum of that. A final deed for

closing partnership, was it? I have got that down. John Kenneby and

Bridget Bolster. I remember the names,--witnesses to both deeds, were

they? I understand; nothing about this other deed was brought up at

the trial? I see the point--such as it is. John Kenneby and Bridget

Bolster;--both believed to be living. Oh, you can give their address,

can you? Decline to do so now? Very well; it does not matter. I think

I understand it all now, Mr. Dockwrath; and when we want you again,

you shall hear from us. Samuel Dockwrath, is it? Thank you. Good

morning. If Mr. Mason wishes to see you, he will write, of course.

Good day, Mr. Dockwrath."

And so Mr. Dockwrath went home, not quite contented with his day's

work.

CHAPTER XVII.

VON BAUHR.

It will be remembered that Mr. Crabwitz was sent across from

Lincoln's Inn to Bedford Row to ascertain the present address of old

Mr. Round. "Mr. Round is at Birmingham," he said, coming back. "Every

one connected with the profession is at Birmingham, except--"

"The more fools they," said Mr. Furnival.

"I am thinking of going down myself this evening," said Mr. Crabwitz.

"As you will be out of town, sir, I suppose I can be spared?"

"You too!"

"And why not me, Mr. Furnival? When all the profession is meeting

together, why should not I be there as well as another? I hope you do

not deny me my right to feel an interest in the great subjects which

are being discussed."

"Not in the least, Mr. Crabwitz. I do not deny you your right to be

Lord Chief Justice, if you can accomplish it. But you cannot be Lord

Chief Justice and my clerk at the same time. Nor can you be in my

chambers if you are at Birmingham. I rather think I must trouble you

to remain here, as I cannot tell at what moment I may be in town

again."

"Then, sir, I'm afraid--" Mr. Crabwitz began his speech and then

faltered. He was going to tell Mr. Furnival that he must suit himself

with another clerk, when he remembered his fees, and paused. It would

be very pleasant to him to quit Mr. Furnival, but where could he get

such another place? He knew that he himself was invaluable, but then

he was invaluable only to Mr. Furnival. Mr. Furnival would be mad to

part with him, Mr. Crabwitz thought; but then would he not be almost

more mad to part with Mr. Furnival?

"Eh; well?" said Mr. Furnival.

"Oh! of course; if you desire it, Mr. Furnival, I will remain. But I

must say I think it is rather hard."

"Look here, Mr. Crabwitz; if you think my service is too hard upon

you, you had better leave it. But if you take upon yourself to

tell me so again, you must leave it. Remember that." Mr. Furnival

possessed the master mind of the two; and Mr. Crabwitz felt this as

he slunk back to his own room.

So Mr. Round also was at Birmingham, and could be seen there. This

was so far well; and Mr. Furnival, having again with ruthless malice

sent Mr. Crabwitz for a cab, at once started for the Euston Square

Station. He could master Mr. Crabwitz, and felt a certain pleasure

in having done so; but could he master Mrs. F.? That lady had on one

or two late occasions shown her anger at the existing state of her

domestic affairs, and had once previously gone so far as to make

her lord understand that she was jealous of his proceedings with

reference to other goddesses. But she had never before done this in

the presence of other people;--she had never allowed any special

goddess to see that she was the special object of such jealousy.

Now she had not only committed herself in this way, but had also

committed him, making him feel himself to be ridiculous; and it was

highly necessary that some steps should be taken;--if he only knew

what step! All which kept his mind active as he journeyed in the cab.

At the station he found three or four other lawyers, all bound for

Birmingham. Indeed, during this fortnight the whole line had been

alive with learned gentlemen going to and fro, discussing weighty

points as they rattled along the iron road, and shaking their

ponderous heads at the new ideas which were being ventilated.

Mr. Furnival, with many others--indeed, with most of those who

were so far advanced in the world as to be making bread by their

profession--was of opinion that all this palaver that was going on in

the various tongues of Babel would end as it began--in words. "Vox et

prÃ¦terea nihil." To practical Englishmen most of these international

congresses seem to arrive at nothing else. Men will not be talked out

of the convictions of their lives. No living orator would convince a

grocer that coffee should be sold without chicory; and no amount of

eloquence will make an English lawyer think that loyalty to truth

should come before loyalty to his client. And therefore our own

pundits, though on this occasion they went to Birmingham, summoned by

the greatness of the occasion, by the dignity of foreign names, by

interest in the question, and by the influence of such men as Lord

Boanerges, went there without any doubt on their minds as to the

rectitude of their own practice, and fortified with strong resolves

to resist all idea of change.

And indeed one cannot understand how the bent of any man's mind

should be altered by the sayings and doings of such a congress.

"Well, Johnson, what have you all been doing to-day?" asked Mr.

Furnival of a special friend whom he chanced to meet at the club

which had been extemporized at Birmingham.

"We have had a paper read by Von Bauhr. It lasted three hours."

"Three hours! heavens! Von Bauhr is, I think, from Berlin."

"Yes; he and Dr. Slotacher. Slotacher is to read his paper the day

after to-morrow."

"Then I think I shall go to London again. But what did Von Bauhr say

to you during those three hours?"

"Of course it was all in German, and I don't suppose that any one

understood him,--unless it was Boanerges. But I believe it was the

old story, going to show that the same man might be judge, advocate,

and jury."

"No doubt;--if men were machines, and if you could find such machines

perfect at all points in their machinery."

"And if the machines had no hearts?"

"Machines don't have hearts," said Mr. Furnival; "especially those in

Germany. And what did Boanerges say? His answer did not take three

hours more, I hope."

"About twenty minutes; but what he did say was lost on Von Bauhr, who

understands as much English as I do German. He said that the practice

of the Prussian courts had always been to him a subject of intense

interest, and that the general justice of their verdicts could not be

impugned."

"Nor ought it, seeing that a single trial for murder will occupy a

court for three weeks. He should have asked Von Bauhr how much work

he usually got through in the course of a sessions. I don't seem

to have lost much by being away. By-the-by, do you happen to know

whether Round is here?"

"What, old Round? I saw him in the hall to-day yawning as though

he would burst." And then Mr. Furnival strolled off to look for

the attorney among the various purlieus frequented by the learned

strangers.

"Furnival," said another barrister, accosting him,--an elderly man,

small, with sharp eyes and bushy eyebrows, dirty in his attire and

poor in his general appearance, "have you seen Judge Staveley?" This

was Mr. Chaffanbrass, great at the Old Bailey, a man well able to

hold his own in spite of the meanness of his appearance. At such a

meeting as this the English bar generally could have had no better

representative than Mr. Chaffanbrass.

"No; is he here?"

"He must be here. He is the only man they could find who knows enough

Italian to understand what that fat fellow from Florence will say

to-morrow."

"We're to have the Italian to-morrow, are we?"

"Yes; and Staveley afterwards. It's as good as a play; only, like

all plays, it's three times too long. I wonder whether anybody here

believes in it?"

"Yes, Felix Graham does."

"He believes everything--unless it is the Bible. He is one of

those young men who look for an instant millennium, and who regard

themselves not only as the prophets who foretell it, but as the

preachers who will produce it. For myself, I am too old for a new

gospel, with Felix Graham as an apostle."

"They say that Boanerges thinks a great deal of him."

"That can't be true, for Boanerges never thought much of any one but

himself. Well, I'm off to bed, for I find a day here ten times more

fatiguing than the Old Bailey in July."

On the whole the meeting was rather dull, as such meetings usually

are. It must not be supposed that any lawyer could get up at will, as

the spirit moved him, and utter his own ideas; or that all members of

the congress could speak if only they could catch the speaker's eye.

Had this been so, a man might have been supported by the hope of

having some finger in the pie, sooner or later. But in such case the

congress would have lasted for ever. As it was, the names of those

who were invited to address the meeting were arranged, and of course

men from each country were selected who were best known in their own

special walks of their profession. But then these best-known men

took an unfair advantage of their position, and were ruthless in the

lengthy cruelty of their addresses. Von Bauhr at Berlin was no doubt

a great lawyer, but he should not have felt so confident that the

legal proceedings of England and of the civilised world in general

could be reformed by his reading that book of his from the rostrum

in the hall at Birmingham! The civilised world in general, as there

represented, had been disgusted, and it was surmised that poor Dr.

Slotacher would find but a meagre audience when his turn came.

At last Mr. Furnival succeeded in hunting up Mr. Round, and found him

recruiting outraged nature with a glass of brandy and water and a

cigar. "Looking for me, have you? Well, here I am; that is to say,

what is left of me. Were you in the hall to-day?"

"No; I was up in town."

"Ah! that accounts for your being so fresh. I wish I had been there.

Do you ever do anything in this way?" and Mr. Round touched the

outside of his glass of toddy with his spoon. Mr. Furnival said that

he never did do anything in that way, which was true. Port wine was

his way, and it may be doubted whether on the whole it is not the

more dangerous way of the two. But Mr. Furnival, though he would

not drink brandy and water or smoke cigars, sat down opposite to Mr.

Round, and had soon broached the subject which was on his mind.

"Yes," said the attorney, "it is quite true that I had a letter on

the subject from Mr. Mason. The lady is not wrong in supposing that

some one is moving in the matter."

"And your client wishes you to take up the case again?"

"No doubt he does. He was not a man that I ever greatly liked, Mr.

Furnival, though I believe he means well. He thinks that he has been

ill used; and perhaps he was ill used--by his father."

"But that can be no possible reason for badgering the life out of his

father's widow twenty years after his father's death!"

"Of course he thinks that he has some new evidence. I can't say I

looked into the matter much myself. I did read the letter; but that

was all, and then I handed it to my son. As far as I remember, Mr.

Mason said that some attorney at Hamworth had been to him."

"Exactly; a low fellow whom you would be ashamed to see in your

office! He fancies that young Mason has injured him; and though he

has received numberless benefits from Lady Mason, this is the way in

which he chooses to be revenged on her son."

"We should have nothing to do with such a matter as that, you know.

It's not our line."

"No, of course it is not; I am well aware of that. And I am equally

well aware that nothing Mr. Mason can do can shake Lady Mason's

title, or rather her son's title, to the property. But, Mr. Round, if

he be encouraged to gratify his malice--"

"If who be encouraged?"

"Your client, Mr. Mason of Groby;--there can be no doubt that he

might harass this unfortunate lady till he brought her nearly to the

grave."

"That would be a pity, for I believe she's still an uncommon pretty

woman." And the attorney indulged in a little fat inward chuckle;

for in these days Mr. Furnival's taste with reference to strange

goddesses was beginning to be understood by the profession.

"She is a very old friend of mine," said Mr. Furnival, gravely, "a

very old friend indeed; and if I were to desert her now, she would

have no one to whom she could look."

"Oh, ah, yes; I'm sure you're very kind;" and Mr. Round altered his

face and tone, so that they might be in conformity with those of his

companion. "Anything I can do, of course I shall be very happy. I

should be slow, myself, to advise my client to try the matter again,

but to tell the truth anything of this kind would go to my son now. I

did read Mr. Mason's letter, but I immediately handed it to Matthew."

"I will tell you how you can oblige me, Mr. Round."

"Do tell me; I am sure I shall be very happy."

"Look into this matter yourself, and talk it over with Mr. Mason

before you allow anything to be done. It is not that I doubt your

son's discretion. Indeed we all know what an exceedingly good man of

business he is."

"Matthew is sharp enough," said the prosperous father.

"But then young men are apt to be too sharp. I don't know whether you

remember the case about that Orley Farm, Mr. Round."

"As well as if it were yesterday," said the attorney.

"Then you must recollect how thoroughly you were convinced that your

client had not a leg to stand upon."

"It was I that insisted that he should not carry it before the

Chancellor. Crook had the general management of those cases then, and

would have gone on; but I said, no. I would not see my client's money

wasted in such a wild-goose chase. In the first place the property

was not worth it; and in the next place there was nothing to impugn

the will. If I remember right it all turned on whether an old man who

had signed as witness was well enough to write his name."

"That was the point."

"And I think it was shown that he had himself signed a receipt on

that very day--or the day after, or the day before. It was something

of that kind."

"Exactly; those were the facts. As regards the result of a new trial,

no sane man, I fancy, could have any doubt. You know as well as any

one living how great is the strength of twenty years of possession--"

"It would be very strong on her side, certainly."

"He would not have a chance; of course not. But, Mr. Round, he might

make that poor woman so wretched that death would be a relief to her.

Now it may be possible that something looking like fresh evidence

may have been discovered; something of this kind probably has been

found, or this man would not be moving; he would not have gone to the

expense of a journey to Yorkshire had he not got hold of some new

story."

"He has something in his head; you may be sure of that."

"Don't let your son be run away with by this, or advise your client

to incur the terrible expense of a new trial, without knowing what

you are about. I tell you fairly that I do dread such a trial on this

poor lady's account. Reflect what it would be, Mr. Round, to any lady

of your own family."

"I don't think Mrs. Round would mind it much; that is, if she were

sure of her case."

"She is a strong-minded woman; but poor Lady Mason--."

"She was strong-minded enough too, if I remember right, at the last

trial. I shall never forget how composed she was when old Bennett

tried to shake her evidence. Do you remember how bothered he was?"

"He was an excellent lawyer,--was Bennett. There are few better men

at the bar now-a-days."

"You wouldn't have found him down here, Mr. Furnival, listening to a

German lecture three hours long. I don't know how it is, but I think

we all used to work harder in those days than the young men do now."

And then these eulogists of past days went back to the memories of

their youths, declaring how in the old glorious years, now gone, no

congress such as this would have had a chance of success. Men had

men's work to do then, and were not wont to play the fool, first at

one provincial town and then at another, but stuck to their oars and

made their fortunes. "It seems to me, Mr. Furnival," said Mr. Round,

"that this is all child's play, and to tell the truth I am half

ashamed of myself for being here."

"And you'll look into that matter yourself, Mr. Round?"

"Yes, I will, certainly."

"I shall take it as a great favour. Of course you will advise your

client in accordance with any new facts which may be brought before

you; but as I feel certain that no case against young Mason can have

any merits, I do hope that you will be able to suggest to Mr. Mason

of Groby that the matter should be allowed to rest." And then Mr.

Furnival took his leave, still thinking how far it might be possible

that the enemy's side of the question might be supported by real

merits. Mr. Round was a good-natured old fellow, and if the case

could be inveigled out of his son's hands and into his own, it might

be possible that even real merits should avail nothing.

"I confess I am getting rather tired of it," said Felix Graham that

evening to his friend young Staveley, as he stood outside his bedroom

door at the top of a narrow flight of stairs in the back part of a

large hotel at Birmingham.

"Tired of it! I should think you are too."

"But nevertheless I am as sure as ever that good will come from it.

I am inclined to think that the same kind of thing must be endured

before any improvement is made in anything."

"That all reformers have to undergo Von Bauhr?"

"Yes, all of them that do any good. Von Bauhr's words were very dry,

no doubt."

"You don't mean to say that you understood them?"

"Not many of them. A few here and there, for the first half-hour,

came trembling home to my dull comprehension, and then--"

"You went to sleep."

"The sounds became too difficult for my ears; but dry and dull and

hard as they were, they will not absolutely fall to the ground. He

had a meaning in them, and that meaning will reproduce itself in some

shape."

"Heaven forbid that it should ever do so in my presence! All the

iniquities of which the English bar may be guilty cannot be so

intolerable to humanity as Von Bauhr."

"Well, good-night, old fellow; your governor is to give us his ideas

to-morrow, and perhaps he will be as bad to the Germans as your Von

Bauhr was to us."

"Then I can only say that my governor will be very cruel to the

Germans." And so they two went to their dreams.

In the mean time Von Bauhr was sitting alone looking back on the past

hours with ideas and views very different from those of the many

English lawyers who were at that time discussing his demerits. To him

the day had been one long triumph, for his voice had sounded sweet

in his own ears as, period after period, he had poured forth in full

flowing language the gathered wisdom and experience of his life.

Public men in England have so much to do that they cannot give time

to the preparation of speeches for such meetings as these, but Von

Bauhr had been at work on his pamphlet for months. Nay, taking it in

the whole, had he not been at work on it for years? And now a kind

Providence had given him the opportunity of pouring it forth before

the assembled pundits gathered from all the nations of the civilised

world.

As he sat there, solitary in his bedroom, his hands dropped down by

his side, his pipe hung from his mouth on to his breast, and his

eyes, turned up to the ceiling, were lighted almost with inspiration.

Men there at the congress, Mr. Chaffanbrass, young Staveley, Felix

Graham, and others, had regarded him as an impersonation of dullness;

but through his mind and brain, as he sat there wrapped in his old

dressing-gown, there ran thoughts which seemed to lift him lightly

from the earth into an elysium of justice and mercy. And at the

end of this elysium, which was not wild in its beauty, but trim

and orderly in its gracefulness,--as might be a beer-garden at

Munich,--there stood among flowers and vases a pedestal, grand above

all other pedestals in that garden; and on this there was a bust with

an inscription:--"To Von Bauhr, who reformed the laws of nations."

It was a grand thought; and though there was in it much of human

conceit, there was in it also much of human philanthropy. If a reign

of justice could be restored through his efforts--through those

efforts in which on this hallowed day he had been enabled to make

so great a progress--how beautiful would it be! And then as he sat

there, while the smoke still curled from his unconscious nostrils, he

felt that he loved all Germans, all Englishmen, even all Frenchmen,

in his very heart of hearts, and especially those who had travelled

wearily to this English town that they might listen to the results

of his wisdom. He said to himself, and said truly, that he loved

the world, and that he would willingly spend himself in these great

endeavours for the amelioration of its laws and the perfection of its

judicial proceedings. And then he betook himself to bed in a frame of

mind that was not unenviable.

[Illustration: Von Bauhr's Dream.]

I am inclined, myself, to agree with Felix Graham that such efforts

are seldom absolutely wasted. A man who strives honestly to do good

will generally do good, though seldom perhaps as much as he has

himself anticipated. Let Von Bauhr have his pedestal among the

flowers, even though it be small and humble!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ENGLISH VON BAUHR.

On the following morning, before breakfast, Felix Graham and Augustus

Staveley prepared themselves for the labours of the coming day by a

walk into the country; for even at Birmingham, by perseverance, a

walk into the country may be attained,--and very pretty country it

is when reached. These congress meetings did not begin before eleven,

so that for those who were active time for matutinal exercise was

allowed.

Augustus Staveley was the only son of the judge who on that day was

to defend the laws of England from such attacks as might be made on

them by a very fat advocate from Florence. Of Judge Staveley himself

much need not be said now, except that he lived at Noningsby near

Alston, distant from The Cleeve about nine miles, and that at his

house Sophia Furnival had been invited to pass the coming Christmas.

His son was a handsome clever fellow, who had nearly succeeded in

getting the Newdegate, and was now a member of the Middle Temple. He

was destined to follow the steps of his father, and become a light

at the Common Law bar; but hitherto he had not made much essential

progress. The world had been too pleasant to him to allow of his

giving many of his hours to work. His father was one of the best men

in the world, revered on the bench, and loved by all men; but he

had not sufficient parental sternness to admit of his driving his

son well into harness. He himself had begun the world with little

or nothing, and had therefore succeeded; but his son was already

possessed of almost everything that he could want, and therefore his

success seemed doubtful. His chambers were luxuriously furnished, he

had his horse in Piccadilly, his father's house at Noningsby was

always open to him, and the society of London spread out for him all

its allurements. Under such circumstances how could it be expected

that he should work? Nevertheless he did talk of working, and had

some idea in his head of the manner in which he would do so. To a

certain extent he had worked, and he could talk fluently of the

little that he knew. The idea of a \_far niente\_ life would have been

intolerable to him; but there were many among his friends who began

to think that such a life would nevertheless be his ultimate destiny.

Nor did it much matter, they said, for the judge was known to have

made money.

But his friend Felix Graham was rowing in a very different boat; and

of him also many prophesied that he would hardly be able to push his

craft up against the strength of the stream. Not that he was an idle

man, but that he would not work at his oars in the only approved

method of making progress for his boat. He also had been at Oxford;

but he had done little there except talk at a debating society, and

make himself notorious by certain ideas on religious subjects which

were not popular at the University. He had left without taking a

degree, in consequence, as it was believed, of some such notions,

and had now been called to the bar with a fixed resolve to open the

oyster with such weapons, offensive and defensive, as nature had

given to him. But here, as at Oxford, he would not labour on the

same terms with other men, or make himself subject to the same

conventional rules; and therefore it seemed only too probable that he

might win no prize. He had ideas of his own that men should pursue

their labours without special conventional regulations, but should be

guided in their work by the general great rules of the world,--such

for instance as those given in the commandments:--Thou shalt not bear

false witness; Thou shalt not steal; and others. His notions no doubt

were great, and perhaps were good; but hitherto they had not led him

to much pecuniary success in his profession. A sort of a name he

had obtained, but it was not a name sweet in the ears of practising

attorneys.

And yet it behoved Felix Graham to make money, for none was coming

to him ready made from any father. Father or mother he had none, nor

uncles and aunts likely to be of service to him. He had begun the

world with some small sum, which had grown smaller and smaller, till

now there was left to him hardly enough to create an infinitesimal

dividend. But he was not a man to become downhearted on that

account. A living of some kind he could pick up, and did now procure

for himself, from the press of the day. He wrote poetry for the

periodicals, and politics for the penny papers with considerable

success and sufficient pecuniary results. He would sooner do this, he

often boasted, than abandon his great ideas or descend into the arena

with other weapons than those which he regarded as fitting for an

honest man's hand.

Augustus Staveley, who could be very prudent for his friend, declared

that marriage would set him right. If Felix would marry he would

quietly slip his neck into the collar and work along with the team,

as useful a horse as ever was put at the wheel of a coach. But Felix

did not seem inclined to marry. He had notions about that also, and

was believed by one or two who knew him intimately to cherish an

insane affection for some unknown damsel, whose parentage, education,

and future were not likely to assist his views in the outer world.

Some said that he was educating this damsel for his wife,--moulding

her, so that she might be made fit to suit his taste; but Augustus,

though he knew the secret of all this, was of opinion that it would

come right at last. "He'll meet some girl in the world with a hatful

of money, a pretty face, and a sharp tongue; then he'll bestow his

moulded bride on a neighbouring baker with two hundred pounds for her

fortune;--and everybody will be happy."

Felix Graham was by no means a handsome man. He was tall and thin,

and his face had been slightly marked with the small-pox. He stooped

in his gait as he walked, and was often awkward with his hands and

legs. But he was full of enthusiasm, indomitable, as far as pluck

would make him so, in contests of all kinds, and when he talked on

subjects which were near his heart there was a radiance about him

which certainly might win the love of the pretty girl with the sharp

tongue and the hatful of money. Staveley, who really loved him, had

already selected the prize, and she was no other than our friend,

Sophia Furnival. The sharp tongue and the pretty face and the hatful

of money would all be there; but then Sophia Furnival was a girl who

might perhaps expect in return for these things more than an ugly

face which could occasionally become radiant with enthusiasm.

The two men had got away from the thickness of the Birmingham smoke,

and were seated on the top rung of a gate leading into a stubble

field. So far they had gone with mutual consent, but further than

this Staveley refused to go. He was seated with a cigar in his mouth.

Graham also was smoking, but he was accommodated with a short pipe.

[Illustration: The English Von Bauhr and his pupil.]

"A walk before breakfast is all very well," said Staveley, "but I

am not going on a pilgrimage. We are four miles from the inn this

minute."

"And for your energies that is a good deal. Only think that you

should have been doing anything for two hours before you begin to

feed."

"I wonder why matutinal labour should always be considered as so

meritorious. Merely, I take it, because it is disagreeable."

"It proves that the man can make an effort."

"Every prig who wishes to have it believed that he does more than his

neighbours either burns the midnight lamp or gets up at four in the

morning. Good wholesome work between breakfast and dinner never seems

to count for anything."

"Have you ever tried?"

"Yes; I am trying now, here at Birmingham."

"Not you."

"That's so like you, Graham. You don't believe that anybody is

attending to what is going on except yourself. I mean to-day to take

in the whole theory of Italian jurisprudence."

"I have no doubt that you may do so with advantage. I do not suppose

that it is very good, but it must at any rate be better than our own.

Come, let us go back to the town; my pipe is finished."

"Fill another, there's a good fellow. I can't afford to throw away my

cigar, and I hate walking and smoking. You mean to assert that our

whole system is bad, and rotten, and unjust?"

"I mean to say that I think so."

"And yet we consider ourselves the greatest people in the world,--or

at any rate the honestest."

"I think we are; but laws and their management have nothing to do

with making people honest. Good laws won't make people honest, nor

bad laws dishonest."

"But a people who are dishonest in one trade will probably be

dishonest in others. Now, you go so far as to say that all English

lawyers are rogues."

"I have never said so. I believe your father to be as honest a man as

ever breathed."

"Thank you, sir," and Staveley lifted his hat.

"And I would fain hope that I am an honest man myself."

"Ah, but you don't make money by it."

"What I do mean is this, that from our love of precedent and ceremony

and old usages, we have retained a system which contains many of

the barbarities of the feudal times, and also many of its lies. We

try our culprit as we did in the old days of the ordeal. If luck

will carry him through the hot ploughshares, we let him escape

though we know him to be guilty. We give him the advantage of every

technicality, and teach him to lie in his own defence, if nature has

not sufficiently so taught him already."

"You mean as to his plea of not guilty."

"No, I don't; that is little or nothing. We ask him whether or no he

confesses his guilt in a foolish way, tending to induce him to deny

it; but that is not much. Guilt seldom will confess as long as a

chance remains. But we teach him to lie, or rather we lie for him

during the whole ceremony of his trial. We think it merciful to give

him chances of escape, and hunt him as we do a fox, in obedience to

certain laws framed for his protection."

"And should he have no protection?"

"None certainly, as a guilty man; none which may tend towards the

concealing of his guilt. Till that be ascertained, proclaimed, and

made apparent, every man's hand should be against him."

"But if he is innocent?"

"Therefore let him be tried with every possible care. I know you

understand what I mean, though you look as though you did not. For

the protection of his innocence let astute and good men work their

best, but for the concealing of his guilt let no astute or good man

work at all."

"And you would leave the poor victim in the dock without defence?"

"By no means. Let the poor victim, as you call him,--who in

ninety-nine cases out of a hundred is a rat who has been preying in

our granaries,--let him, I say, have his defender,--the defender of

his possible innocence, not the protector of his probable guilt. It,

all resolves itself into this. Let every lawyer go into court with

a mind resolved to make conspicuous to the light of day that which

seems to him to be the truth. A lawyer who does not do that--who does

the reverse of that, has in my mind undertaken work which is unfit

for a gentleman and impossible for an honest man."

"What a pity it is that you should not have an opportunity of

rivalling Von Bauhr at the congress!"

"I have no doubt that Von Bauhr said a great deal of the same nature;

and what Von Bauhr said will not wholly be wasted, though it may not

yet have reached our sublime understandings."

"Perhaps he will vouchsafe to us a translation."

"It would be useless at present, seeing that we cannot bring

ourselves to believe it possible that a foreigner should in any

respect be wiser than ourselves. If any such point out to us our

follies, we at once claim those follies as the special evidences of

our wisdom. We are so self-satisfied with our own customs, that we

hold up our hands with surprise at the fatuity of men who presume

to point out to us their defects. Those practices in which we most

widely depart from the broad and recognised morality of all civilised

ages and countries are to us the Palladiums of our jurisprudence.

Modes of proceeding which, if now first proposed to us, would be

thought to come direct from the devil, have been made so sacred by

time that they have lost all the horror of their falseness in the

holiness of their age. We cannot understand that other nations look

upon such doings as we regard the human sacrifices of the Brahmins;

but the fact is that we drive a Juggernaut's car through every assize

town in the country, three times a year, and allow it to be dragged

ruthlessly through the streets of the metropolis at all times and

seasons. Now come back to breakfast, for I won't wait here any

longer." Seeing that these were the ideas of Felix Graham, it is

hardly a matter of wonder that such men as Mr. Furnival and Mr. Round

should have regarded his success at the bar as doubtful.

"Uncommon bad mutton chops these are," said Staveley, as they sat at

their meal in the coffee-room of the Imperial Hotel.

"Are they?" said Graham. "They seem to me much the same as other

mutton chops."

"They are uneatable. And look at this for coffee! Waiter, take this

away, and have some made fresh."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, striving to escape without further

comment.

"And waiter--"

"Yes, sir;" and the poor overdriven functionary returned.

"Ask them from me whether they know how to make coffee. It does not

consist of an unlimited supply of lukewarm water poured over an

infinitesimal proportion of chicory. That process, time-honoured in

the hotel line, will not produce the beverage called coffee. Will you

have the goodness to explain that in the bar as coming from me?"

"Yes, sir," said the waiter; and then he was allowed to disappear.

"How can you give yourself so much trouble with no possible hope of

an advantageous result?" said Felix Graham.

"That's what you weak men always say. Perseverance in such a course

will produce results. It is because we put up with bad things that

hotel-keepers continue to give them to us. Three or four Frenchmen

were dining with my father yesterday at the King's Head, and I had to

sit at the bottom of the table. I declare to you that I literally

blushed for my country; I did indeed. It was useless to say anything

then, but it was quite clear that there was nothing that one of them

could eat. At any hotel in France you'll get a good dinner; but we're

so proud that we are ashamed to take lessons." And thus Augustus

Staveley was quite as loud against his own country, and as laudatory

with regard to others, as Felix Graham had been before breakfast.

And so the congress went on at Birmingham. The fat Italian from

Tuscany read his paper; but as he, though judge in his own country

and reformer here in England, was somewhat given to comedy, this

morning was not so dull as that which had been devoted to Von Bauhr.

After him Judge Staveley made a very elegant, and some said, a very

eloquent speech; and so that day was done. Many other days also wore

themselves away in this process; numerous addresses were read, and

answers made to them, and the newspapers for the time were full of

law. The defence of our own system, which was supposed to be the most

remarkable for its pertinacity, if not for its justice, came from Mr.

Furnival, who roused himself to a divine wrath for the occasion. And

then the famous congress at Birmingham was brought to a close, and

all the foreigners returned to their own countries.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STAVELEY FAMILY.

The next two months passed by without any events which deserve our

special notice, unless it be that Mr. Joseph Mason and Mr. Dockwrath

had a meeting in the room of Mr. Matthew Round, in Bedford Row. Mr.

Dockwrath struggled hard to effect this without the presence of the

London attorney; but he struggled in vain. Mr. Round was not the man

to allow any stranger to tamper with his client, and Mr. Dockwrath

was forced to lower his flag before him. The result was that the

document or documents which had been discovered at Hamworth were

brought up to Bedford Row; and Dockwrath at last made up his mind

that as he could not supplant Matthew Round, he would consent to

fight under him as his lieutenant--or even as his sergeant or

corporal, if no higher position might be allowed to him.

"There is something in it, certainly, Mr. Mason," said young Round;

"but I cannot undertake to say as yet that we are in a position to

prove the point."

"It will be proved," said Mr. Dockwrath.

"I confess it seems to me very clear," said Mr. Mason, who by this

time had been made to understand the bearings of the question. "It

is evident that she chose that day for her date because those two

persons had then been called upon to act as witnesses to that other

deed."

"That of course is our allegation. I only say that we may have some

difficulty in proving it."

"The crafty, thieving swindler!" exclaimed Mr. Mason. "She has been

sharp enough if it is as we think," said Round, laughing; and then

there was nothing more done in the matter for some time, to the great

disgust both of Mr. Dockwrath and Mr. Mason. Old Mr. Round had kept

his promise to Mr. Furnival; or, at least, had done something towards

keeping it. He had not himself taken the matter into his own hands,

but he had begged his son to be cautious. "It's not the sort of

business that we care for, Mat," said he; "and as for that fellow

down in Yorkshire, I never liked him." To this Mat had answered that

neither did he like Mr. Mason; but as the case had about it some very

remarkable points, it was necessary to look into it; and then the

matter was allowed to stand over till after Christmas.

We will now change the scene to Noningsby, the judge's country

seat, near Alston, at which a party was assembled for the Christmas

holidays. The judge was there of course,--without his wig; in which

guise I am inclined to think that judges spend the more comfortable

hours of their existence; and there also was Lady Staveley, her

presence at home being altogether a matter of course, inasmuch as she

had no other home than Noningsby. For many years past, ever since the

happy day on which Noningsby had been acquired, she had repudiated

London; and the poor judge, when called upon by his duties to reside

there, was compelled to live like a bachelor, in lodgings. Lady

Staveley was a good, motherly, warm-hearted woman, who thought a

great deal about her flowers and fruit, believing that no one else

had them so excellent,--much also about her butter and eggs, which

in other houses were, in her opinion, generally unfit to be eaten;

she thought also a great deal about her children, who were all

swans,--though, as she often observed with a happy sigh, those of her

neighbours were so uncommonly like geese. But she thought most of

all of her husband, who in her eyes was the perfection of all manly

virtues. She had made up her mind that the position of a puisne judge

in England was the highest which could fall to the lot of any mere

mortal. To become a Lord Chancellor, or a Lord Chief Justice, or

a Chief Baron, a man must dabble with Parliament, politics, and

dirt; but the bench-fellows of these politicians were selected for

their wisdom, high conduct, knowledge, and discretion. Of all such

selections, that made by the late king when he chose her husband, was

the one which had done most honour to England, and had been in all

its results most beneficial to Englishmen. Such was her creed with

reference to domestic matters.

The Staveley young people at present were only two in number,

Augustus, namely, and his sister Madeline. The eldest daughter was

married, and therefore, though she spent these Christmas holidays at

Noningsby, must not be regarded as one of the Noningsby family. Of

Augustus we have said enough; but as I intend that Madeline Staveley

shall, to many of my readers, be the most interesting personage

in this story, I must pause to say something of her. I must say

something of her; and as, with all women, the outward and visible

signs of grace and beauty are those which are thought of the most, or

at any rate spoken of the oftenest, I will begin with her exterior

attributes. And that the muses may assist me in my endeavour,

teaching my rough hands to draw with some accuracy the delicate lines

of female beauty, I now make to them my humble but earnest prayer.

Madeline Staveley was at this time about nineteen years of age. That

she was perfect in her beauty I cannot ask the muses to say, but that

she will some day become so, I think the goddesses may be requested

to prophesy. At present she was very slight, and appeared to be

almost too tall for her form. She was indeed above the average height

of women, and from her brother encountered some ridicule on this

head; but not the less were all her movements soft, graceful, and

fawnlike as should be those of a young girl. She was still at this

time a child in heart and spirit, and could have played as a child

had not the instinct of a woman taught to her the expediency of a

staid demeanour. There is nothing among the wonders of womanhood more

wonderful than this, that the young mind and young heart,--hearts and

minds young as youth can make them, and in their natures as gay,--can

assume the gravity and discretion of threescore years and maintain

it successfully before all comers. And this is done, not as a lesson

that has been taught, but as the result of an instinct implanted from

the birth. Let us remember the mirth of our sisters in our homes, and

their altered demeanours when those homes were opened to strangers;

and remember also that this change had come from the inward working

of their own feminine natures!

But I am altogether departing from Madeline Staveley's external

graces. It was a pity almost that she should ever have become grave,

because with her it was her smile that was so lovely. She smiled with

her whole face. There was at such moments a peculiar laughing light

in her gray eyes, which inspired one with an earnest desire to be in

her confidence; she smiled with her soft cheek, the light tints of

which would become a shade more pink from the excitement, as they

softly rippled into dimples; she smiled with her forehead which would

catch the light from her eyes and arch itself in its glory; but above

all she smiled with her mouth, just showing, but hardly showing, the

beauty of the pearls within. I never saw the face of a woman whose

mouth was equal in pure beauty, in beauty that was expressive of

feeling, to that of Madeline Staveley. Many have I seen with a richer

lip, with a more luxurious curve, much more tempting as baits to the

villainy and rudeness of man; but never one that told so much by

its own mute eloquence of a woman's happy heart and a woman's happy

beauty. It was lovely as I have said in its mirth, but if possible it

was still more lovely in its woe; for then the lips would separate,

and the breath would come, and in the emotion of her suffering the

life of her beauty would be unrestrained.

Her face was oval, and some might say that it was almost too thin;

they might say so till they knew it well, but would never say so when

they did so know it. Her complexion was not clear, though it would be

wrong to call her a brunette. Her face and forehead were never brown,

but yet she could not boast the pure pink and the pearly white which

go to the formation of a clear complexion. For myself I am not sure

that I love a clear complexion. Pink and white alone will not give

that hue which seems best to denote light and life, and to tell of

a mind that thinks and of a heart that feels. I can name no colour

in describing the soft changing tints of Madeline Staveley's face,

but I will make bold to say that no man ever found it insipid or

inexpressive.

And now what remains for me to tell? Her nose was Grecian, but

perhaps a little too wide at the nostril to be considered perfect

in its chiselling. Her hair was soft and brown,--that dark brown

which by some lights is almost black; but she was not a girl whose

loveliness depended much upon her hair. With some women it is their

great charm,--NeÃ¦ras who love to sit half sleeping in the shade,--but

it is a charm that possesses no powerful eloquence. All beauty of a

high order should speak, and Madeline's beauty was ever speaking. And

now that I have said that, I believe that I have told all that may

be necessary to place her outward form before the inward eyes of my

readers.

In commencing this description I said that I would begin with her

exterior; but it seems to me now that in speaking of these I have

sufficiently noted also that which was within. Of her actual thoughts

and deeds up to this period it is not necessary for our purposes that

anything should be told; but of that which she might probably think

or might possibly do, a fair guess may, I hope, be made from that

which has been already written.

Such was the Staveley family. Those of their guests whom it is

necessary that I should now name, have been already introduced to us.

Miss Furnival was there, as was also her father. He had not intended

to make any prolonged stay at Noningsby,--at least so he had said in

his own drawing-room; but nevertheless he had now been there for a

week, and it seemed probable that he might stay over Christmas-day.

And Felix Graham was there. He had been asked with a special purpose

by his friend Augustus, as we already have heard; in order, namely,

that he might fall in love with Sophia Furnival, and by the aid of

her supposed hatful of money avoid the evils which would otherwise so

probably be the consequence of his highly impracticable turn of mind.

The judge was not averse to Felix Graham; but as he himself was a

man essentially practical in all his views, it often occurred that,

in his mild kindly way, he ridiculed the young barrister. And Sir

Peregrine Orme was there, being absent from home as on a very rare

occasion; and with him of course were Mrs. Orme and his grandson.

Young Perry was making, or was prepared to make, somewhat of a

prolonged stay at Noningsby. He had a horse there with him for the

hunting, which was changed now and again; his groom going backwards

and forwards between that place and The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine,

however, intended to return before Christmas, and Mrs. Orme would go

with him. He had come for four days, which for him had been a long

absence from home, and at the end of the four days he would be gone.

They were all sitting in the dining-room round the luncheon-table

on a hopelessly wet morning, listening to a lecture from the judge

on the abomination of eating meat in the middle of the day, when a

servant came behind young Orme's chair and told him that Mr. Mason

was in the breakfast-parlour and wished to see him.

"Who wishes to see you?" said the baronet in a tone of surprise. He

had caught the name, and thought at the moment that it was the owner

of Groby Park.

"Lucius Mason," said Peregrine, getting up. "I wonder what he can

want me for?"

"Oh, Lucius Mason," said the grandfather. Since the discourse about

agriculture he was not personally much attached even to Lucius; but

for his mother's sake he could be forgiven.

"Pray ask him into lunch," said Lady Staveley. Something had been

said about Lady Mason since the Ormes had been at Noningsby, and the

Staveley family were prepared to regard her with sympathy, and if

necessary with the right hand of fellowship.

"He is the great agriculturist, is he not?" said Augustus. "Bring him

in by all means; there is no knowing how much we may not learn before

dinner on such a day as this."

"He is an ally of mine; and you must not laugh at him," said Miss

Furnival, who was sitting next to Augustus.

But Lucius Mason did not come in. Young Orme remained with him for

about a quarter of an hour, and then returned to the room, declaring

with rather a serious face, that he must ride to Hamworth and back

before dinner.

"Are you going with young Mason?" asked his grandfather.

"Yes, sir; he wishes me to do something for him at Hamworth, and I

cannot well refuse him."

"You are not going to fight a duel!" said Lady Staveley, holding up

her hands in horror as the idea came across her brain.

"A duel!" screamed Mrs. Orme. "Oh, Peregrine!"

"There can be nothing of the sort," said the judge. "I should think

that young Mason is not so foolish; and I am sure that Peregrine Orme

is not."

"I have not heard of anything of the kind," said Peregrine, laughing.

"Promise me, Peregrine," said his mother. "Say that you promise me."

"My dearest mother, I have no more thought of it than you

have;--indeed I may say not so much."

"You will be back to dinner?" said Lady Staveley.

"Oh yes, certainly."

"And tell Mr. Mason," said the judge, "that if he will return with

you we shall be delighted to see him."

The errand which took Peregrine Orme off to Hamworth will be

explained in the next chapter, but his going led to a discussion

among the gentlemen after dinner as to the position in which Lady

Mason was now placed. There was no longer any possibility of keeping

the matter secret, seeing that Mr. Dockwrath had taken great care

that every one in Hamworth should hear of it. He had openly declared

that evidence would now be adduced to prove that Sir Joseph Mason's

widow had herself forged the will, and had said to many people that

Mr. Mason of Groby had determined to indict her for forgery. This

had gone so far that Lucius had declared as openly that he would

prosecute the attorney for a libel, and Dockwrath had sent him word

that he was quite welcome to do so if he pleased.

"It is a scandalous state of things," said Sir Peregrine, speaking

with much enthusiasm, and no little temper, on the subject. "Here is

a question which was settled twenty years ago to the satisfaction of

every one who knew anything of the case, and now it is brought up

again that two men may wreak their vengeance on a poor widow. They

are not men; they are brutes."

"But why does she not bring an action against this attorney?" said

young Staveley.

"Such actions do not easily lie," said his father. "It may be quite

true that Dockwrath may have said all manner of evil things against

this lady, and yet it may be very difficult to obtain evidence of a

libel. It seems to me from what I have heard that the man himself

wishes such an action to be brought."

"And think of the state of poor Lady Mason!" said Mr. Furnival.

"Conceive the misery which it would occasion her if she were dragged

forward to give evidence on such a matter!"

"I believe it would kill her," said Sir Peregrine.

"The best means of assisting her would be to give her some

countenance," said the judge; "and from all that I can hear of her,

she deserves it."

"She does deserve it," said Sir Peregrine, "and she shall have it.

The people at Hamworth shall see at any rate that my daughter regards

her as a fit associate. I am happy to say that she is coming to The

Cleeve on my return home, and that she will remain there till after

Christmas."

"It is a very singular case," said Felix Graham, who had been

thinking over the position of the lady hitherto in silence.

"Indeed it is," said the judge; "and it shows how careful men should

be in all matters relating to their wills. The will and the codicil,

as it appears, are both in the handwriting of the widow, who acted

as an amanuensis not only for her husband but for the attorney. That

fact does not in my mind produce suspicion; but I do not doubt that

it has produced all this suspicion in the mind of the claimant. The

attorney who advised Sir Joseph should have known better."

"It is one of those cases," continued Graham, "in which the sufferer

should be protected by the very fact of her own innocence. No lawyer

should consent to take up the cudgels against her."

"I am afraid that she will not escape persecution from any such

professional chivalry," said the judge.

"All that is moonshine," said Mr. Furnival.

"And moonshine is a very pretty thing if you were not too much afraid

of the night air to go and look at it. If the matter be as you all

say, I do think that any gentleman would disgrace himself by lending

a hand against her."

"Upon my word, sir, I fully agree with you," said Sir Peregrine,

bowing to Felix Graham over his glass.

"I will take permission to think, Sir Peregrine," said Mr. Furnival,

"that you would not agree with Mr. Graham if you had given to the

matter much deep consideration."

"I have not had the advantage of a professional education," said Sir

Peregrine, again bowing, and on this occasion addressing himself to

the lawyer; "but I cannot see how any amount of learning should alter

my views on such a subject."

"Truth and honour cannot be altered by any professional

arrangements," said Graham; and then the conversation turned away

from Lady Mason, and directed itself to those great corrections of

legal reform which had been debated during the past autumn.

The Orley Farm Case, though in other forms and different language,

was being discussed also in the drawing-room. "I have not seen much

of her," said Sophia Furnival, who by some art had usurped the most

prominent part in the conversation, "but what I did see I liked much.

She was at The Cleeve when I was staying there, if you remember, Mrs.

Orme." Mrs. Orme said that she did remember.

"And we went over to Orley Farm. Poor lady! I think everybody ought

to notice her under such circumstances. Papa, I know, would move

heaven and earth for her if he could."

"I cannot move the heaven or the earth either," said Lady Staveley;

"but if I thought that my calling on her would be any satisfaction to

her--"

"It would, Lady Staveley," said Mrs. Orme. "It would be a great

satisfaction to her. I cannot tell you how warmly I regard her, nor

how perfectly Sir Peregrine esteems her."

"We will drive over there next week, Madeline."

"Do, mamma. Everybody says that she is very nice."

"It will be so kind of you, Lady Staveley," said Sophia Furnival.

"Next week she will be staying with us," said Mrs. Orme. "And that

would save you three miles, you know, and we should be so glad to see

you."

Lady Staveley declared that she would do both. She would call at

The Cleeve, and again at Orley Farm after Lady Mason's return home.

She well understood, though she could not herself then say so, that

the greater part of the advantage to be received from her kindness

would be derived from its being known at Hamworth that the Staveley

carriage had been driven up to Lady Mason's door.

"Her son is very clever, is he not?" said Madeline, addressing

herself to Miss Furnival.

Sophia shrugged her shoulders and put her head on one side with a

pretty grace. "Yes, I believe so. People say so. But who is to tell

whether a young man be clever or no?"

"But some are so much more clever than others. Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes, as some girls are so much prettier than others. But if Mr.

Mason were to talk Greek to you, you would not think him clever."

"I should not understand him, you know."

"Of course not; but you would understand that he was a blockhead to

show off his learning in that way. You don't want him to be clever,

you see; you only want him to be agreeable."

"I don't know that I want either the one or the other."

"Do you not? I know I do. I think that young men in society are bound

to be agreeable, and that they should not be there if they do not

know how to talk pleasantly, and to give something in return for all

the trouble we take for them."

"I don't take any trouble for them," said Madeline laughing.

"Surely you must, if you only think of it. All ladies do, and so they

ought. But if in return for that a man merely talks Greek to me, I,

for my part, do not think that the bargain is fairly carried out."

"I declare you will make me quite afraid of Mr. Mason."

"Oh, he never talks Greek;--at least he never has to me. I rather

like him. But what I mean is this, that I do not think a man a bit

more likely to be agreeable because he has the reputation of being

very clever. For my part I rather think that I like stupid young

men."

"Oh, do you? Then now I shall know what you think of Augustus. We

think he is very clever; but I do not know any man who makes himself

more popular with young ladies."

"Ah, then he is a gay deceiver."

"He is gay enough, but I am sure he is no deceiver. A man may make

himself nice to young ladies without deceiving any of them; may he

not?"

"You must not take me 'au pied de la lettre,' Miss Staveley, or I

shall be lost. Of course he may. But when young gentlemen are so very

nice, young ladies are so apt to--"

"To what?"

"Not to fall in love with them exactly, but to be ready to be fallen

in love with, and then if a man does do it he is a deceiver. I

declare it seems to me that we don't allow them a chance of going

right."

"I think that Augustus manages to steer through such difficulties

very cleverly."

"He sails about in the open sea, touching at all the most lovely

capes and promontories, and is never driven on shore by stress of

weather! What a happy sailor he must be!"

"I think he is happy, and that he makes others so."

"He ought to be made an admiral at once But we shall hear some day of

his coming to a terrible shipwreck."

"Oh, I hope not!"

"He will return home in desperate plight, with only two planks left

together, with all his glory and beauty broken and crumpled to pieces

against some rock that he has despised in his pride."

"Why do you prophesy such terrible things for him?"

"I mean that he will get married."

"Get married! of course he will. That's just what we all want. You

don't call that a shipwreck; do you?"

"It's the sort of shipwreck that these very gallant barks have to

encounter."

"You don't mean that he'll marry a disagreeable wife!"

"Oh, no; not in the least. I only mean to say that like other sons of

Adam, he will have to strike his colours. I dare say, if the truth

were known, he has done so already."

"I am sure he has not."

"I don't at all ask to know his secrets, and I should look upon you

as a very bad sister if you told them."

"But I am sure he has not got any,--of that kind."

"Would he tell you if he had?"

"Oh, I hope so; any serious secret. I am sure he ought, for I am

always thinking about him."

"And would you tell him your secrets?"

"I have none."

"But when you have, will you do so?"

"Will I? Well, yes; I think so. But a girl has no such secret," she

continued to say, after pausing for a moment. "None, generally, at

least, which she tells, even to herself, till the time comes in

which she tells it to all whom she really loves." And then there was

another pause for a moment.

"I am not quite so sure of that," said Miss Furnival. After which the

gentlemen came into the drawing-room.

Augustus Staveley had gone to work in a manner which he conceived to

be quite systematic, having before him the praiseworthy object of

making a match between Felix Graham and Sophia Furnival. "By George,

Graham," he had said, "the finest girl in London is coming down to

Noningsby; upon my word I think she is."

"And brought there expressly for your delectation, I suppose."

"Oh no, not at all; indeed, she is not exactly in my style; she is

too,--too,--too--in point of fact, too much of a girl for me. She has

lots of money, and is very clever, and all that kind of thing."

"I never knew you so humble before."

"I am not joking at all. She is a daughter of old Furnival's, whom

by-the-by I hate as I do poison. Why my governor has him down at

Noningsby I can't guess. But I tell you what, old fellow, he can give

his daughter five-and-twenty thousand pounds. Think of that, Master

Brook." But Felix Graham was a man who could not bring himself to

think much of such things on the spur of the moment, and when he was

introduced to Sophia, he did not seem to be taken with her in any

wonderful way.

Augustus had asked his mother to help him, but she had laughed at

him. "It would be a splendid arrangement," he had said with energy.

"Nonsense, Gus," she had answered. "You should always let those

things take their chance. All I will ask of you is that you don't

fall in love with her yourself; I don't think her family would be

nice enough for you."

But Felix Graham certainly was ungrateful for the friendship spent

upon him, and so his friend felt it. Augustus had contrived to

whisper into the lady's ear that Mr. Graham was the cleverest young

man now rising at the bar, and as far as she was concerned, some

amount of intimacy might at any rate have been produced; but he,

Graham himself, would not put himself forward. "I will pique him into

it," said Augustus to himself, and therefore when on this occasion

they came into the drawing-room, Staveley immediately took a vacant

seat beside Miss Furnival, with the very friendly object which he had

proposed to himself.

There was great danger in this, for Miss Furnival was certainly

handsome, and Augustus Staveley was very susceptible. But what will

not a man go through for his friend? "I hope we are to have the

honour of your company as far as Monkton Grange the day we meet

there," he said. The hounds were to meet at Monkton Grange, some

seven miles from Noningsby, and all the sportsmen from the house were

to be there.

"I shall be delighted," said Sophia, "that is to say if a seat in the

carriage can be spared for me."

"But we'll mount you. I know that you are a horsewoman." In answer to

which Miss Furnival confessed that she was a horsewoman, and owned

also to having brought a habit and hat with her.

"That will be delightful. Madeline will ride also, and you will meet

the Miss Tristrams. They are the famous horsewomen of this part of

the country."

"You don't mean that they go after the dogs, across the hedges."

"Indeed they do."

"And does Miss Staveley do that?"

"Oh, no--Madeline is not good at a five-barred gate, and would make

but a very bad hand at a double ditch. If you are inclined to remain

among the tame people, she will be true to your side."

"I shall certainly be one of the tame people, Mr. Staveley."

"I rather think I shall be with you myself; I have only one horse

that will jump well, and Graham will ride him. By-the-by, Miss

Furnival, what do you think of my friend Graham?"

"Think of him! Am I bound to have thought anything about him by this

time?"

"Of course you are;--or at any rate of course you have. I have

no doubt that you have composed in your own mind an essay on the

character of everybody here. People who think at all always do."

"Do they? My essay upon him then is a very short one."

"But perhaps not the less correct on that account. You must allow me

to read it."

"Like all my other essays of that kind, Mr. Staveley, it has been

composed solely for my own use, and will be kept quite private."

"I am so sorry for that, for I intended to propose a bargain to you.

If you would have shown me some of your essays, I would have been

equally liberal with some of mine." And in this way, before the

evening was over, Augustus Staveley and Miss Furnival became very

good friends.

"Upon my word she is a very clever girl," he said afterwards, as

young Orme and Graham were sitting with him in an outside room which

had been fitted up for smoking.

"And uncommonly handsome," said Peregrine.

"And they say she'll have lots of money," said Graham. "After all,

Staveley, perhaps you could not do better."

"She's not my style at all," said he. "But of course a man is obliged

to be civil to girls in his own house." And then they all went to

bed.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. DOCKWRATH IN HIS OWN OFFICE.

In the conversation which had taken place after dinner at Noningsby

with regard to the Masons Peregrine Orme took no part, but his

silence had not arisen from any want of interest on the subject.

He had been over to Hamworth that day on a very special mission

regarding it, and as he was not inclined to speak of what he had then

seen and done, he held his tongue altogether.

"I want you to do me a great favour," Lucius had said to him, when

the two were together in the breakfast-parlour at Noningsby; "but I

am afraid it will give you some trouble."

"I sha'n't mind that," said Peregrine, "if that's all."

"You have heard of this row about Joseph Mason and my mother? It has

been so talked of that I fear you must have heard it."

"About the lawsuit? Oh yes. It has certainly been spoken of at The

Cleeve."

"Of course it has. All the world is talking of it. Now there is a man

named Dockwrath in Hamworth--;" and then he went on to explain how it

had reached him from various quarters that Mr. Dockwrath was accusing

his mother of the crime of forgery; how he had endeavoured to

persuade his mother to indict the man for libel; how his mother had

pleaded to him with tears in her eyes that she found it impossible to

go through such an ordeal; and how he, therefore, had resolved to go

himself to Mr. Dockwrath. "But," said he, "I must have some one with

me, some gentleman whom I can trust, and therefore I have ridden over

to ask you to accompany me as far as Hamworth."

"I suppose he is not a man that you can kick," said Peregrine.

"I am afraid not," said Lucius; "he's over forty years old, and has

dozens of children."

"And then he is such a low beast," said Peregrine.

"I have no idea of kicking him, but I think it would be wrong to

allow him to go on saying these frightful things of my mother,

without showing him that we are not afraid of him." Upon this the

two young men got on horseback, and riding into Hamworth, put their

horses up at the inn.

"And now I suppose we might as well go at once," said Peregrine, with

a very serious face.

"Yes," said the other; "there's nothing to delay us. I cannot tell

you how much obliged I am to you for coming with me."

"Oh, don't say anything about that; of course I'm only too happy."

But all the same he felt that his heart was beating, and that he

was a little nervous. Had he been called upon to go in and thrash

somebody, he would have been quite at home; but he did not feel at

his ease in making an inimical visit to an attorney's office.

It would have been wise, perhaps, if in this matter Lucius had

submitted himself to Lady Mason's wishes. On the previous evening

they had talked the matter over with much serious energy. Lucius

had been told in the streets of Hamworth by an intermeddling little

busybody of an apothecary that it behoved him to do something, as Mr.

Dockwrath was making grievous accusations against his mother. Lucius

had replied haughtily, that he and his mother would know how to

protect themselves, and the apothecary had retreated, resolving to

spread the report everywhere. Lucius on his return home had declared

to the unfortunate lady that she had now no alternative left to her.

She must bring an action against the man, or at any rate put the

matter into the hands of a lawyer with a view of ascertaining whether

she could do so with any chance of success. If she could not, she

must then make known her reason for remaining quiet. In answer to

this, Lady Mason had begun by praying her son to allow the matter to

pass by.

"But it will not pass by," Lucius had said.

"Yes, dearest, if we leave it, it will,--in a month or two. We can do

nothing by interference. Remember the old saying, You cannot touch

pitch without being defiled."

But Lucius had replied, almost with anger, that the pitch had already

touched him, and that he was defiled. "I cannot consent to hold the

property," he had said, "unless something be done." And then his

mother had bowed her head as she sat, and had covered her face with

her hands.

"I shall go to the man myself," Lucius had declared with energy.

"As your mother, Lucius, I implore you not to do so," she had said to

him through her tears.

"I must either do that or leave the country. It is impossible that I

should live here, hearing such things said of you, and doing nothing

to clear your name." To this she had made no actual reply, and now

he was standing at the attorney's door about to do that which he had

threatened.

They found Mr. Dockwrath sitting at his desk at the other side of

which was seated his clerk. He had not yet promoted himself to the

dignity of a private office, but generally used his parlour as such

when he was desirous of seeing his clients without disturbance. On

this occasion, however, when he saw young Mason enter, he made no

offer to withdraw. His hat was on his head as he sat on his stool,

and he did not even take it off as he returned the stiff salutation

of his visitor. "Keep your hat on your head, Mr. Orme," he said, as

Peregrine was about to take his off. "Well, gentlemen, what can I do

for you?"

Lucius looked at the clerk, and felt that there would be great

difficulty in talking about his mother before such a witness. "We

wish to see you in private, Mr. Dockwrath, for a few minutes--if it

be convenient."

"Is not this private enough?" said Dockwrath. "There is no one here

but my confidential clerk."

"If you could make it convenient--" began Lucius.

"Well, then, Mr. Mason, I cannot make it convenient, and there is the

long and the short of it. You have brought Mr. Orme with you to hear

what you've got to say, and I choose that my clerk shall remain by

to hear it also. Seeing the position in which you stand there is no

knowing what may come of such an interview as this."

"In what position do I stand, sir?"

"If you don't know, Mr. Mason, I am not going to tell you. I feel

for you, I do upon my word. I feel for you, and I pity you." Mr.

Dockwrath as he thus expressed his commiseration was sitting with his

high chair tilted back, with his knees against the edge of his desk,

with his hat almost down upon his nose as he looked at his visitors

from under it, and he amused himself by cutting up a quill pen into

small pieces with his penknife. It was not pleasant to be pitied by

such a man as that, and so Peregrine Orme conceived.

"Sir, that is nonsense," said Lucius. "I require no pity from you or

from any man."

"I don't suppose there is one in all Hamworth that does not feel for

you," said Dockwrath.

"He means to be impudent," said Peregrine. "You had better come to

the point with him at once."

"No, I don't mean to be impudent, young gentleman. A man may speak

his own mind in his own house I suppose without any impudence. You

wouldn't stand cap in hand to me if I were to go down to you at The

Cleeve."

"I have come here to ask of you," said Lucius, "whether it be true

that you are spreading these reports about the town with reference to

Lady Mason. If you are a man you will tell me the truth."

"Well; I rather think I am a man."

"It is necessary that Lady Mason should be protected from such

infamous falsehoods, and it may be necessary to bring the matter into

a court of law--"

"You may be quite easy about that, Mr. Mason. It will be necessary."

"As it may be necessary, I wish to know whether you will acknowledge

that these reports have come from you?"

"You want me to give evidence against myself. Well, for once in a way

I don't mind if I do. The reports have come from me. Now, is that

manly?" And Mr. Dockwrath, as he spoke, pushed his hat somewhat off

his nose, and looked steadily across into the face of his opponent.

Lucius Mason was too young for the task which he had undertaken, and

allowed himself to be disconcerted. He had expected that the lawyer

would deny the charge, and was prepared for what he would say and do

in such a case; but now he was not prepared.

"How on earth could you bring yourself to be guilty of such

villainy?" said young Orme.

"Highty-tighty! What are you talking about, young man? The fact is,

you do not know what you are talking about. But as I have a respect

for your grandfather and for your mother I will give you and them a

piece of advice, gratis. Don't let them be too thick with Lady Mason

till they see how this matter goes."

"Mr. Dockwrath," said Lucius, "you are a mean, low, vile scoundrel."

"Very well, sir. Adams, just take a note of that. Don't mind what Mr.

Orme said. I can easily excuse him. He'll know the truth before long,

and then he'll beg my pardon."

"I'll take my oath I look upon you as the greatest miscreant that

ever I met," said Peregrine, who was of course bound to support his

friend.

"You'll change your mind, Mr. Orme, before long, and then you'll find

that you have met a worse miscreant than I am. Did you put down those

words, Adams?"

"Them as Mr. Mason spoke? Yes; I've got them down."

"Read them," said the master.

And the clerk read them, "Mr. Dockwrath, you are a mean, low, vile

scoundrel."

"And now, young gentlemen, if you have got nothing else to observe,

as I am rather busy, perhaps you will allow me to wish you good

morning."

"Very well, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mason; "you may be sure that you

will hear further from me."

"We shall be sure to hear of each other. There is no doubt in the

world about that," said the attorney. And then the two young men

withdrew with an unexpressed feeling in the mind of each of them,

that they had not so completely got the better of their antagonist as

the justice of their case demanded.

They then remounted their horses, and Orme accompanied his friend as

far as Orley Farm, from whence he got into the Alston road through

The Cleeve grounds. "And what do you intend to do now?" said

Peregrine as soon as they were mounted.

"I shall employ a lawyer," said he, "on my own footing; not my

mother's lawyer, but some one else. Then I suppose I shall be guided

by his advice." Had he done this before he made his visit to Mr.

Dockwrath, perhaps it might have been better. All this sat very

heavily on poor Peregrine's mind; and therefore as the company were

talking about Lady Mason after dinner, he remained silent, listening,

but not joining in the conversation.

The whole of that evening Lucius and his mother sat together, saying

nothing. There was not absolutely any quarrel between them, but on

this terrible subject there was an utter want of accordance, and

almost of sympathy. It was not that Lucius had ever for a moment

suspected his mother of aught that was wrong. Had he done so he

might perhaps have been more gentle towards her in his thoughts and

words. He not only fully trusted her, but he was quite fixed in

his confidence that nothing could shake either her or him in their

rights. But under these circumstances he could not understand how she

could consent to endure without resistance the indignities which were

put upon her. "She should combat them for my sake, if not for her

own," he said to himself over and over again. And he had said so also

to her, but his words had had no effect.

She, on the other hand, felt that he was cruel to her. She was

weighed down almost to the ground by these sufferings which had

fallen on her, and yet he would not be gentle and soft to her. She

could have borne it all, she thought, if he would have borne with

her. She still hoped that if she remained quiet no further trial

would take place. At any rate this might be so. That it would be so

she had the assurance of Mr. Furnival. And yet all this evil which

she dreaded worse than death was to be precipitated on her by her

son! So they sat through the long evening, speechless; each seated

with the pretence of reading, but neither of them capable of the

attention which a book requires.

He did not tell her then that he had been with Mr. Dockwrath, but she

knew by his manner that he had taken some terrible step. She waited

patiently the whole evening, hoping that he would tell her, but when

the hour came for her to go up to her room he had told her nothing.

If he now were to turn against her, that would be worse than all! She

went up to her room and sat herself down to think. All that passed

through her brain on that night I may not now tell; but the grief

which pressed on her at this moment with peculiar weight was the

self-will and obstinacy of her boy. She said to herself that she

would be willing now to die,--to give back her life at once, if such

might be God's pleasure; but that her son should bring down her hairs

with shame and sorrow to the grave--! In that thought there was a

bitterness of agony which she knew not how to endure!

The next morning at breakfast he still remained silent, and his brow

was still black. "Lucius," she said, "did you do anything in that

matter yesterday?"

"Yes, mother; I saw Mr. Dockwrath."

"Well?"

"I took Peregrine Orme with me that I might have a witness, and I

then asked him whether he had spread these reports. He acknowledged

that he had done so, and I told him that he was a villain."

Upon hearing this she uttered a long, low sigh, but she said nothing.

What use could there now be in her saying aught? Her look of agony

went to the young man's heart, but he still thought that he had been

right. "Mother," he continued to say, "I am very sorry to grieve

you in this way;--very sorry. But I could not hold up my head in

Hamworth,--I could not hold up my head anywhere, if I heard these

things said of you and did not resent it."

"Ah, Lucius, if you knew the weakness of a woman!"

"And therefore you should let me bear it all. There is nothing I

would not suffer; no cost I would not undergo rather than you should

endure all this. If you would only say that you would leave it to

me!"

"But it cannot be left to you. I have gone to a lawyer, to Mr.

Furnival. Why will you not permit that I should act in it as he

thinks best? Can you not believe that that will be the best for both

of us?"

"If you wish it, I will see Mr. Furnival."

Lady Mason did not wish that, but she was obliged so far to yield as

to say that he might do so if he would. Her wish was that he should

bear it all and say nothing. It was not that she was indifferent to

good repute among her neighbours, or that she was careless as to what

the apothecaries and attorneys said of her; but it was easier for

her to bear the evil than to combat it. The Ormes and the Furnivals

would support her. They and such-like persons would acknowledge her

weakness, and would know that from her would not be expected such

loud outbursting indignation as might be expected from a man. She had

calculated the strength of her own weakness, and thought that she

might still be supported by that,--if only her son would so permit.

It was two days after this that Lucius was allowed the honour of

a conference by appointment with the great lawyer; and at the

expiration of an hour's delay he was shown into the room by Mr.

Crabwitz. "And, Crabwitz," said the barrister, before he addressed

himself to his young friend, "just run your eye over those papers,

and let Mr. Bideawhile have them to-morrow morning; and, Crabwitz--."

"Yes, sir."

"That opinion of Sir Richard's in the Ahatualpaca Mining Company--I

have not seen it, have I?"

"It's all ready, Mr. Furnival."

"I will look at it in five minutes. And now, my young friend, what

can I do for you?"

It was quite clear from Mr. Furnival's tone and manner that he did

not mean to devote much time to Lucius Mason, and that he was not

generally anxious to hold any conversation with him on the subject in

question. Such, indeed, was the case. Mr. Furnival was determined to

pull Lady Mason out of the sea of trouble into which she had fallen,

let the effort cost him what it might, but he did not wish to do so

by the instrumentality, or even with the aid, of her son.

"Mr. Furnival," began Mason, "I want to ask your advice about these

dreadful reports which are being spread on every side in Hamworth

about my mother."

"If you will allow me then to say so, I think that the course which

you should pursue is very simple. Indeed there is, I think, only one

course which you can pursue with proper deference to your mother's

feelings."

"And what is that, Mr. Furnival?"

"Do nothing, and say nothing. I fear from what I have heard that you

have already done and said much more than was prudent."

"But how am I to hear such things as these spoken of my own mother?"

"That depends on the people by whom the things are spoken. In this

world, if we meet a chimney-sweep in the path we do not hustle with

him for the right of way. Your mother is going next week to The

Cleeve. It was only yesterday that I heard that the Noningsby people

are going to call on her. You can hardly, I suppose, desire for your

mother better friends than such as these. And can you not understand

why such people gather to her at this moment? If you can understand

it you will not trouble yourself to interfere much more with Mr.

Dockwrath."

There was a rebuke in this which Lucius Mason was forced to endure;

but nevertheless as he retreated disconcerted from the barrister's

chambers, he could not bring himself to think it right that such

calumny should be borne without resistance. He knew but little as yet

of the ordinary life of gentlemen in England; but he did know,--so at

least he thought,--that it was the duty of a son to shield his mother

from insult and libel.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHRISTMAS IN HARLEY STREET.

It seems singular to me myself, considering the idea which I have

in my own mind of the character of Lady Staveley, that I should be

driven to declare that about this time she committed an unpardonable

offence, not only against good nature, but also against the domestic

proprieties. But I am driven so to say, although she herself was of

all women the most good-natured and most domestic; for she asked

Mr. Furnival to pass his Christmas-day at Noningsby, and I find it

impossible to forgive her that offence against the poor wife whom in

that case he must leave alone by her desolate hearth. She knew that

he was a married man as well as I do. Sophia, who had a proper regard

for the domestic peace of her parents, and who could have been happy

at Noningsby without a father's care, not unfrequently spoke of her,

so that her existence in Harley Street might not be forgotten by

the Staveleys--explaining, however, as she did so, that her dear

mother never left her own fireside in winter, so that no suspicion

might be entertained that an invitation was desired for her also;

nevertheless, in spite of all this, on two separate occasions did

Lady Staveley say to Mr. Furnival that he might as well prolong his

visit over Christmas.

And yet Lady Staveley was not attached to Mr. Furnival with any

peculiar warmth of friendship; but she was one of those women whose

foolish hearts will not allow themselves to be controlled in the

exercise of their hospitality. Her nature demanded of her that she

should ask a guest to stay. She would not have allowed a dog to

depart from her house at this season of the year, without suggesting

to him that he had better take his Christmas bone in her yard. It

was for Mr. Furnival to adjust all matters between himself and his

wife. He was not bound to accept the invitation because she gave it;

but she, finding him there, already present in the house, did feel

herself bound to give it;--for which offence, as I have said before,

I cannot bring myself to forgive her.

At his sin in staying away from home, or rather--as far as the story

has yet carried us--in thinking that he would do so, I am by no means

so much surprised. An angry ill-pleased wife is no pleasant companion

for a gentleman on a long evening. For those who have managed that

things shall run smoothly over the domestic rug there is no happier

time of life than these long candlelight hours of home and silence.

No spoken content or uttered satisfaction is necessary. The fact that

is felt is enough for peace. But when the fact is not felt; when

the fact is by no means there; when the thoughts are running in a

direction altogether different; when bitter grievances from one to

the other fill the heart, rather than memories of mutual kindness;

then, I say, those long candlelight hours of home and silence are not

easy of endurance. Mr. Furnival was a man who chose to be the master

of his own destiny, so at least to himself he boasted; and therefore

when he found himself encountered by black looks and occasionally by

sullen words, he declared to himself that he was ill-used and that he

would not bear it. Since the domestic rose would no longer yield him

honey, he would seek his sweets from the stray honeysuckle on which

there grew no thorns.

Mr. Furnival was no coward. He was not one of those men who wrong

their wives by their absence, and then prolong their absence because

they are afraid to meet their wives. His resolve was to be free

himself, and to be free without complaint from her. He would have

it so, that he might remain out of his own house for a month at the

time and then return to it for a week--at any rate without outward

bickerings. I have known other men who have dreamed of such a state

of things, but at this moment I can remember none who have brought

their dream to bear.

Mr. Furnival had written to his wife,--not from Noningsby, but

from some provincial town, probably situated among the Essex

marshes,--saying various things, and among others that he should

not, as he thought, be at home at Christmas-day. Mrs. Furnival had

remarked about a fortnight since that Christmas-day was nothing to

her now; and the base man, for it was base, had hung upon this poor,

sore-hearted word an excuse for remaining away from home. "There are

lawyers of repute staying at Noningsby," he had said, "with whom it

is very expedient that I should remain at this present crisis."--When

yet has there been no crisis present to a man who has wanted an

excuse?--"And therefore I may probably stay,"--and so on. Who does

not know the false mixture of excuse and defiance which such a letter

is sure to maintain; the crafty words which may be taken as adequate

reason if the receiver be timid enough so to receive them, or as a

noisy gauntlet thrown to the ground if there be spirit there for the

picking of it up? Such letter from his little borough in the Essex

marshes did Mr. Furnival write to the partner of his cares, and there

was still sufficient spirit left for the picking up of the gauntlet.

"I shall be home to-morrow," the letter had gone on to say, "but

I will not keep you waiting for dinner, as my hours are always so

uncertain. I shall be at my chambers till late, and will be with you

before tea. I will then return to Alston on the following morning."

There was at any rate good courage in this on the part of Mr.

Furnival;--great courage; but with it coldness of heart, dishonesty

of purpose, and black ingratitude. Had she not given everything to

him?

Mrs. Furnival when she got the letter was not alone. "There,"

said she; throwing it over to a lady who sat on the other side of

the fireplace handling a loose sprawling mass of not very clean

crochet-work. "I knew he would stay away on Christmas-day. I told you

so."

"I didn't think it possible," said Miss Biggs, rolling up the big

ball of soiled cotton, that she might read Mr. Furnival's letter at

her leisure. "I didn't really think it possible--on Christmas-day!

Surely, Mrs. Furnival, he can't mean Christmas-day? Dear, dear, dear!

and then to throw it in your face in that way that you said you

didn't care about it."

"Of course I said so," answered Mrs. Furnival. "I was not going to

ask him to come home as a favour."

"Not to make a favour of it, of course not." This was Miss Biggs

from ----. I am afraid if I tell the truth I must say that she came

from Red Lion Square! And yet nothing could be more respectable than

Miss Biggs. Her father had been a partner with an uncle of Mrs.

Furnival's; and when Kitty Blacker had given herself and her young

prettinesses to the hardworking lawyer, Martha Biggs had stood at the

altar with her, then just seventeen years of age, and had promised

to her all manner of success for her coming life. Martha Biggs had

never, not even then, been pretty; but she had been very faithful.

She had not been a favourite with Mr. Furnival, having neither wit

nor grace to recommend her, and therefore in the old happy days of

Keppel Street she had been kept in the background; but now, in this

present time of her adversity, Mrs. Furnival found the benefit of

having a trusty friend.

"If he likes better to be with these people down at Alston, I am sure

it is the same to me," said the injured wife.

"But there's nobody special at Alston, is there?" asked Miss Biggs,

whose soul sighed for a tale more piquant than one of mere general

neglect. She knew that her friend had dreadful suspicions, but Mrs.

Furnival had never as yet committed herself by uttering the name of

any woman as her rival. Miss Biggs thought that a time had now come

in which the strength of their mutual confidence demanded that such

name should be uttered. It could not be expected that she should

sympathise with generalities for ever. She longed to hate, to

reprobate, and to shudder at the actual name of the wretch who had

robbed her friend of a husband's heart. And therefore she asked the

question, "There's nobody special at Alston, is there?"

Now Mrs. Furnival knew to a furlong the distance from Noningsby to

Orley Farm, and knew also that the station at Hamworth was only

twenty-five minutes from that at Alston. She gave no immediate

answer, but threw up her head and shook her nostrils, as though she

were preparing for war; and then Miss Martha Biggs knew that there

was somebody special at Alston. Between such old friends why should

not the name be mentioned?

On the following day the two ladies dined at six, and then waited tea

patiently till ten. Had the thirst of a desert been raging within

that drawing-room, and had tea been within immediate call, those

ladies would have died ere they would have asked for it before his

return. He had said he would be home to tea, and they would have

waited for him, had it been till four o'clock in the morning! Let the

female married victim ever make the most of such positive wrongs as

Providence may vouchsafe to her. Had Mrs. Furnival ordered tea on

this evening before her husband's return, she would have been a woman

blind to the advantages of her own position. At ten the wheels of Mr.

Furnival's cab were heard, and the faces of both the ladies prepared

themselves for the encounter.

"Well, Kitty, how are you?" said Mr. Furnival, entering the room with

his arms prepared for a premeditated embrace. "What, Miss Biggs with

you? I did not know. How do you do, Miss Biggs?" and Mr. Furnival

extended his hand to the lady. They both looked at him, and they

could tell from the brightness of his eye and from the colour of his

nose that he had been dining at his club, and that the bin with the

precious cork had been visited on his behalf.

"Yes, my dear, it's rather lonely being here in this big room all

by oneself so long; so I asked Martha Biggs to come over to me. I

suppose there's no harm in that."

"Oh, if I'm in the way," began Miss Biggs, "or if Mr. Furnival is

going to stay at home for long--"

"You are not in the way, and I am not going to stay at home for

long," said Mr. Furnival, speaking with a voice that was perhaps a

little thick,--only a very little thick. No wife on good terms with

her husband would have deigned to notice, even in her own mind, an

amount of thickness of voice which was so very inconsiderable. But

Mrs. Furnival at the present moment did notice it.

"Oh, I did not know," said Miss Biggs.

"You know now," said Mr. Furnival, whose ear at once appreciated the

hostility of tone which had been assumed.

"You need not be rude to my friend after she has been waiting tea for

you till near eleven o'clock," said Mrs. Furnival. "It is nothing to

me, but you should remember that she is not used to it."

"I wasn't rude to your friend, and who asked you to wait tea till

near eleven o'clock? It is only just ten now, if that signifies."

"You expressly desired me to wait tea, Mr. Furnival. I have got your

letter, and will show it you if you wish it."

"Nonsense; I just said I should be home--"

"Of course you just said you would be home, and so we waited; and

it's not nonsense; and I declare--! Never mind, Martha, don't mind

me, there's a good creature. I shall get over it soon;" and then fat,

solid, good-humoured Mrs. Furnival burst out into an hysterical fit

of sobbing. There was a welcome for a man on his return to his home

after a day's labour!

Miss Biggs immediately got up and came round behind the drawing-room

table to her friend's head. "Be calm, Mrs. Furnival," she said; "do

be calm, and then you will be better soon. Here is the hartshorn."

"It doesn't matter, Martha: never mind: leave me alone," sobbed the

poor woman.

"May I be excused for asking what is really the matter?" said Mr.

Furnival, "for I'll be whipped if I know." Miss Biggs looked at him

as if she thought that he ought to be whipped.

"I wonder you ever come near the place at all, I do," said Mrs.

Furnival.

"What place?" asked Mr. Furnival.

"This house in which I am obliged to live by myself, without a soul

to speak to, unless when Martha Biggs comes here."

"Which would be much more frequent, only that I know I am not welcome

by everybody."

"I know that you hate it. How can I help knowing it?--and you hate

me too; I know you do;--and I believe you would be glad if you need

never come back here at all; I do. Don't, Martha; leave me alone. I

don't want all that fuss. There; I can bear it now, whatever it is.

Do you choose to have your tea, Mr. Furnival? or do you wish to keep

the servants waiting out of their beds all night?"

"D---- the servants," said Mr. Furnival.

"Oh laws!" exclaimed Miss Biggs, jumping up out of her chair with her

hands and fingers outstretched, as though never, never in her life

before, had her ears been wounded by such wicked words as those.

"Mr. Furnival, I am ashamed of you," said his wife with gathered

calmness of stern reproach.

Mr. Furnival was very wrong to swear; doubly wrong to swear before

his wife; trebly wrong to swear before a lady visitor; but it must

be confessed that there was provocation. That he was at this present

period of his life behaving badly to his wife must be allowed, but on

this special evening he had intended to behave well. The woman had

sought a ground of quarrel against him, and had driven him on till he

had forgotten himself in his present after-dinner humour. When a man

is maintaining a whole household on his own shoulders, and working

hard to maintain it well, it is not right that he should be brought

to book because he keeps the servants up half an hour later than

usual to wash the tea-things. It is very proper that the idle members

of the establishment should conform to hours, but these hours must

give way to his requirements. In those old days of which we have

spoken so often he might have had his tea at twelve, one, two, or

three without a murmur. Though their staff of servants then was

scanty enough, there was never a difficulty then in supplying any

such want for him. If no other pair of hands could boil the kettle,

there was one pair of hands there which no amount of such work on his

behalf could tire. But now, because he had come in for his tea at

ten o'clock, he was asked if he intended to keep the servants out of

their beds all night!

"Oh laws!" said Miss Biggs, jumping up from her chair as though she

had been electrified.

Mr. Furnival did not think it consistent with his dignity to keep up

any dispute in the presence of Miss Biggs, and therefore sat himself

down in his accustomed chair without further speech. "Would you

wish to have tea now, Mr. Furnival?" asked his wife again, putting

considerable stress upon the word now.

"I don't care about it," said he.

"And I am sure I don't at this late hour," said Miss Biggs. "But so

tired as you are, dear--"

"Never mind me, Martha; as for myself, I shall take nothing now." And

then they all sat without a word for the space of some five minutes.

"If you like to go, Martha," said Mrs. Furnival, "don't mind waiting

for me."

"Oh, very well," and then Miss Biggs took her bedcandle and left the

room. Was it not hard upon her that she should be forced to absent

herself at this moment, when the excitement of the battle was about

to begin in earnest? Her footsteps lingered as she slowly retreated

from the drawing-room door, and for one instant she absolutely

paused, standing still with eager ears. It was but for an instant,

and then she went on up stairs, out of hearing, and sitting herself

down by her bedside allowed the battle to rage in her imagination.

Mr. Furnival would have sat there silent till his wife had gone also,

and so the matter would have terminated for that evening,--had she

so willed it. But she had been thinking of her miseries; and, having

come to some sort of resolution to speak of them openly, what time

could she find more appropriate for doing so than the present? "Tom,"

she said,--and as she spoke there was still a twinkle of the old

love in her eye, "we are not going on together as well as we should

do,--not lately. Would it not be well to make a change before it is

too late?"

"What change?" he asked; not exactly in an ill humour, but with a

husky, thick voice. He would have preferred now that she should have

followed her friend to bed.

"I do not want to dictate to you, Tom, but--! Oh Tom, if you knew how

wretched I am!"

"What makes you wretched?"

"Because you leave me all alone; because you care more for other

people than you do for me; because you never like to be at home,

never if you can possibly help it. You know you don't. You are always

away now upon some excuse or other; you know you are. I don't have

you home to dinner not one day in the week through the year. That

can't be right, and you know it is not. Oh Tom! you are breaking my

heart, and deceiving me,--you are. Why did I go down and find that

woman in your chamber with you, when you were ashamed to own to me

that she was coming to see you? If it had been in the proper way of

law business, you wouldn't have been ashamed. Oh, Tom!"

The poor woman had begun her plaint in a manner that was not

altogether devoid of a discreet eloquence. If only she could have

maintained that tone, if she could have confined her words to the

tale of her own grievances, and have been contented to declare that

she was unhappy, only because he was not with her, it might have

been well. She might have touched his heart, or at any rate his

conscience, and there might have been some enduring result for good.

But her feelings had been too many for her, and as her wrongs came to

her mind, and the words heaped themselves upon her tongue, she could

not keep herself from the one subject which she should have left

untouched. Mr. Furnival was not the man to bear any interference such

as this, or to permit the privacy of Lincoln's Inn to be invaded even

by his wife. His brow grew very black, and his eyes became almost

bloodshot. The port wine which might have worked him to softness, now

worked him to anger, and he thus burst forth with words of marital

vigour:

"Let me tell you once for ever, Kitty, that I will admit of no

interference with what I do, or the people whom I may choose to

see in my chambers in Lincoln's Inn. If you are such an infatuated

simpleton as to believe--"

"Yes; of course I am a simpleton; of course I am a fool; women always

are."

"Listen to me, will you?"

"Listen, yes; it's my business to listen. Would you like that I

should give this house up for her, and go into lodgings somewhere? I

shall have very little objection as matters are going now. Oh dear,

oh dear, that things should ever have come to this!"

"Come to what?"

"Tom, I could put up with a great deal,--more I think than most

women; I could slave for you like a drudge, and think nothing about

it. And now that you have got among grand people, I could see you go

out by yourself without thinking much about that either. I am very

lonely sometimes,--very; but I could bear that. Nobody has longed to

see you rise in the world half so anxious as I have done. But, Tom,

when I know what your goings on are with a nasty, sly, false woman

like that, I won't bear it; and there's an end." In saying which

final words Mrs. Furnival rose from her seat, and thrice struck her

hand by no means lightly on the loo table in the middle of the room.

"I did not think it possible that you should be so silly. I did not

indeed."

"Oh, yes, silly! very well. Women always are silly when they mind

that kind of thing. Have you got anything else to say, sir?"

"Yes, I have; I have this to say, that I will not endure this sort of

usage."

"Nor I won't," said Mrs. Furnival; "so you may as well understand it

at once. As long as there was nothing absolutely wrong, I would put

up with it for the sake of appearances, and because of Sophia. For

myself I don't mind what loneliness I may have to bear. If you had

been called on to go out to the East Indies or even to China, I could

have put up with it. But this sort of thing I won't put up with;--nor

I won't be blind to what I can't help seeing. So now, Mr. Furnival,

you may know that I have made up my mind." And then, without waiting

further parley, having wisked herself in her energy near to the door,

she stalked out, and went up with hurried steps to her own room.

Occurrences of a nature such as this are in all respects unpleasant

in a household. Let the master be ever so much master, what is he to

do? Say that his wife is wrong from the beginning to the end of the

quarrel,--that in no way improves the matter. His anxiety is that the

world abroad shall not know he has ought amiss at home; but she, with

her hot sense of injury, and her loud revolt against supposed wrongs,

cares not who hears it. "Hold your tongue, madam," the husband says.

But the wife, bound though she be by an oath of obedience, will not

obey him, but only screams the louder.

All which, as Mr. Furnival sat there thinking of it, disturbed his

mind much. That Martha Biggs would spread the tale through all

Bloomsbury and St. Pancras of course he was aware. "If she drives

me to it, it must be so," he said to himself at last. And then he

also betook himself to his rest. And so it was that preparations for

Christmas were made in Harley Street.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHRISTMAS AT NONINGSBY.

The house at Noningsby on Christmas-day was quite full, and yet it

was by no means a small house. Mrs. Arbuthnot, the judge's married

daughter, was there, with her three children; and Mr. Furnival was

there, having got over those domestic difficulties in which we lately

saw him as best he might; and Lucius Mason was there, having been

especially asked by Lady Staveley when she heard that his mother was

to be at The Cleeve. There could be no more comfortable country-house

than Noningsby; and it was, in its own way, pretty, though

essentially different in all respects from The Cleeve. It was a new

house from the cellar to the ceiling, and as a house was no doubt the

better for being so. All the rooms were of the proper proportion, and

all the newest appliances for comfort had been attached to it. But

nevertheless it lacked that something, in appearance rather than in

fact, which age alone can give to the residence of a gentleman in the

country. The gardens also were new, and the grounds around them trim,

and square, and orderly. Noningsby was a delightful house; no one

with money and taste at command could have created for himself one

more delightful; but then there are delights which cannot be created

even by money and taste.

It was a pleasant sight to see, the long, broad, well-filled

breakfast table, with all that company round it. There were some

eighteen or twenty gathered now at the table, among whom the judge

sat pre-eminent, looming large in an arm-chair and having a double

space allotted to him;--some eighteen or twenty, children included.

At the bottom of the table sat Lady Staveley, who still chose to

preside among her own tea cups as a lady should do; and close to her,

assisting in the toils of that presidency, sat her daughter Madeline.

Nearest to them were gathered the children, and the rest had formed

themselves into little parties, each of which already well knew its

own place at the board. In how very short a time will come upon one

that pleasant custom of sitting in an accustomed place! But here, at

these Noningsby breakfasts, among other customs already established,

there was one by which Augustus Staveley was always privileged to

sit by the side of Sophia Furnival. No doubt his original object was

still unchanged. A match between that lady and his friend Graham was

still desirable, and by perseverance he might pique Felix Graham to

arouse himself. But hitherto Felix Graham had not aroused himself in

that direction, and one or two people among the party were inclined

to mistake young Staveley's intentions.

"Gus," his sister had said to him the night before, "I declare I

think you are going to make love to Sophia Furnival."

"Do you?" he had replied. "As a rule I do not think there is any one

in the world for whose discernment I have so much respect as I have

for yours. But in this respect even you are wrong."

"Ah, of course you say so."

"If you won't believe me, ask her. What more can I say?"

"I certainly sha'n't ask her, for I don't know her well enough."

"She's a very clever girl; let me tell you that, whoever falls in

love with her."

"I'm sure she is, and she is handsome too, very; but for all that she

is not good enough for our Gus."

"Of course she is not, and therefore I am not thinking of her. And

now go to bed and dream that you have got the Queen of the Fortunate

Islands for your sister-in-law."

But although Staveley was himself perfectly indifferent to all the

charms of Miss Furnival, nevertheless he could hardly restrain his

dislike to Lucius Mason, who, as he thought, was disposed to admire

the lady in question. In talking of Lucius to his own family and to

his special friend Graham, he had called him conceited, pedantic,

uncouth, unenglish, and detestable. His own family, that is, his

mother and sister, rarely contradicted him in anything; but Graham

was by no means so cautious, and usually contradicted him in

everything. Indeed, there was no sign of sterling worth so plainly

marked in Staveley's character as the full conviction which he

entertained of the superiority of his friend Felix.

"You are quite wrong about him," Felix had said. "He has not been at

an English school, or English university, and therefore is not like

other young men that you know; but he is, I think, well educated

and clever. As for conceit, what man will do any good who is not

conceited? Nobody holds a good opinion of a man who has a low opinion

of himself."

"All the same, my dear fellow, I do not like Lucius Mason."

"And some one else, if you remember, did not like Dr. Fell."

"And now, good people, what are you all going to do about church?"

said Staveley, while they were still engaged with their rolls and

eggs.

"I shall walk," said the judge.

"And I shall go in the carriage," said the judge's wife.

"That disposes of two; and now it will take half an hour to settle

for the rest. Miss. Furnival, you no doubt will accompany my mother.

As I shall be among the walkers you will see how much I sacrifice by

the suggestion."

It was a mile to the church, and Miss Furnival knew the advantage

of appearing in her seat unfatigued and without subjection to wind,

mud, or rain. "I must confess," she said, "that under all the

circumstances, I shall prefer your mother's company to yours;"

whereupon Staveley, in the completion of his arrangements, assigned

the other places in the carriage to the married ladies of the

company.

"But I have taken your sister Madeline's seat in the carriage,"

protested Sophia with great dismay.

"My sister Madeline generally walks."

"Then of course I shall walk with her;" but when the time came Miss

Furnival did go in the carriage whereas Miss Staveley went on foot.

It so fell out, as they started, that Graham found himself walking at

Miss Staveley's side, to the great disgust, no doubt, of half a dozen

other aspirants for that honour. "I cannot help thinking," he said,

as they stepped briskly over the crisp white frost, "that this

Christmas-day of ours is a great mistake."

"Oh, Mr. Graham!" she exclaimed

"You need not regard me with horror,--at least not with any special

horror on this occasion."

"But what you say is very horrid."

"That, I flatter myself, seems so only because I have not yet said

it. That part of our Christmas-day which is made to be in any degree

sacred is by no means a mistake."

"I am glad you think that."

"Or rather, it is not a mistake in as far as it is in any degree made

sacred. But the peculiar conviviality of the day is so ponderous! Its

roast-beefiness oppresses one so thoroughly from the first moment

of one's waking, to the last ineffectual effort at a bit of fried

pudding for supper!"

"But you need not eat fried pudding for supper. Indeed, here, I am

afraid, you will not have any supper offered you at all."

"No; not to me individually, under that name. I might also manage

to guard my own self under any such offers. But there is always the

flavour of the sweetmeat, in the air,--of all the sweetmeats edible

and non-edible."

"You begrudge the children their snap-dragon. That's what it all

means, Mr. Graham."

"No; I deny it; unpremeditated snap-dragon is dear to my soul; and I

could expend myself in blindman's buff."

"You shall then, after dinner; for of course you know that we all

dine early."

"But blindman's buff at three, with snap-dragon at a quarter to

four--charades at five, with wine and sweet cake at half-past six,

is ponderous. And that's our mistake. The big turkey would be very

good;--capital fun to see a turkey twice as big as it ought to

be! But the big turkey, and the mountain of beef, and the pudding

weighing a hundredweight, oppress one's spirits by their combined

gravity. And then they impart a memory of indigestion, a halo as it

were of apoplexy, even to the church services."

"I do not agree with you the least in the world."

"I ask you to answer me fairly. Is not additional eating an ordinary

Englishman's ordinary idea of Christmas-day?"

"I am only an ordinary Englishwoman and therefore cannot say. It is

not my idea."

"I believe that the ceremony, as kept by us, is perpetuated by the

butchers and beersellers, with a helping hand from the grocers. It is

essentially a material festival; and I would not object to it even on

that account if it were not so grievously overdone. How the sun is

moistening the frost on the ground. As we come back the road will be

quite wet."

"We shall be going home then and it will not signify. Remember, Mr.

Graham, I shall expect you to come forward in great strength for

blindman's buff." As he gave her the required promise, he thought

that even the sports of Christmas-day would be bearable, if she also

were to make one of the sportsmen; and then they entered the church.

[Illustration: Christmas at Noningsby--Morning.]

I do not know of anything more pleasant to the eye than a pretty

country church, decorated for Christmas-day. The effect in a city is

altogether different. I will not say that churches there should not

be decorated, but comparatively it is a matter of indifference. No

one knows who does it. The peculiar munificence of the squire who

has sacrificed his holly bushes is not appreciated. The work of the

fingers that have been employed is not recognised. The efforts made

for hanging the pendent wreaths to each capital have been of no

special interest to any large number of the worshippers. It has

been done by contract, probably, and even if well done has none of

the grace of association. But here at Noningsby church, the winter

flowers had been cut by Madeline and the gardener, and the red

berries had been grouped by her own hands. She and the vicar's wife

had stood together with perilous audacity on the top of the clerk's

desk while they fixed the branches beneath the cushion of the

old-fashioned turret, from which the sermons were preached. And

all this had of course been talked about at the house; and some of

the party had gone over to see, including Sophia Furnival, who had

declared that nothing could be so delightful, though she had omitted

to endanger her fingers by any participation in the work. And the

children had regarded the operation as a triumph of all that was

wonderful in decoration; and thus many of them had been made happy.

On their return from church, Miss Furnival insisted on walking,

in order, as she said, that Miss Staveley might not have all the

fatigue; but Miss Staveley would walk also, and the carriage, after

a certain amount of expostulation and delay, went off with its load

incomplete.

"And now for the plum-pudding part of the arrangement," said Felix

Graham.

"Yes, Mr. Graham," said Madeline, "now for the plum-pudding--and the

blindman's buff."

"Did you ever see anything more perfect than the church, Mr. Mason?"

said Sophia.

"Anything more perfect? no; in that sort of way, perhaps, never. I

have seen the choir of Cologne."

"Come, come; that's not fair," said Graham. "Don't import Cologne in

order to crush us here down in our little English villages. You never

saw the choir of Cologne bright with holly berries."

"No; but I have with cardinal's stockings, and bishop's robes."

"I think I should prefer the holly," said Miss Furnival. "And why

should not our churches always look like that, only changing the

flowers and the foliage with the season? It would make the service so

attractive."

"It would hardly do at Lent," said Madeline, in a serious tone.

"No, perhaps not at Lent exactly."

Peregrine and Augustus Staveley were walking on in front, not perhaps

as well satisfied with the day as the rest of the party. Augustus, on

leaving the church, had made a little effort to assume his place as

usual by Miss Furnival's side, but by some accident of war, Mason

was there before him. He had not cared to make one of a party of

three, and therefore had gone on in advance with young Orme. Nor was

Peregrine himself much more happy. He did not know why, but he felt

within his breast a growing aversion to Felix Graham. Graham was a

puppy, he thought, and a fellow that talked too much; and then he

was such a confoundedly ugly dog, and--and--and--Peregrine Orme did

not like him. He was not a man to analyze his own feelings in such

matters. He did not ask himself why he should have been rejoiced to

hear that instant business had taken Felix Graham off to Hong Kong;

but he knew that he would have rejoiced. He knew also that Madeline

Staveley was--. No; he did not know what she was; but when he was

alone, he carried on with her all manner of imaginary conversations,

though when he was in her company he had hardly a word to say to her.

Under these circumstances he fraternized with her brother; but even

in that he could not receive much satisfaction, seeing that he could

not abuse Graham to Graham's special friend, nor could he breathe a

sigh as to Madeline's perfections into the ear of Madeline's brother.

The children,--and there were three or four assembled there besides

those belonging to Mrs. Arbuthnot, were by no means inclined to agree

with Mr. Graham's strictures as to the amusements of Christmas-day.

To them it appeared that they could not hurry fast enough into the

vortex of its dissipations. The dinner was a serious consideration,

especially with reference to certain illuminated mince-pies which

were the crowning glory of that banquet; but time for these was

almost begrudged in order that the fast handkerchief might be tied

over the eyes of the first blindman.

"And now we'll go into the schoolroom," said Marian Arbuthnot,

jumping up and leading the way. "Come along, Mr. Felix," and Felix

Graham followed her.

Madeline had declared that Felix Graham should be blinded first, and

such was his doom. "Now mind you catch me, Mr. Felix; pray do," said

Marian, when she had got him seated in a corner of the room. She was

a beautiful fair little thing, with long, soft curls, and lips red as

a rose, and large, bright blue eyes, all soft and happy and laughing,

loving the friends of her childhood with passionate love, and fully

expecting an equal devotion from them. It is of such children that

our wives and sweethearts should be made.

"But how am I to find you when my eyes are blinded?"

"Oh, you can feel, you know. You can put your hand on the top of my

head. I mustn't speak, you know; but I'm sure I shall laugh; and

then you must guess that it's Marian." That was her idea of playing

blindman's buff according to the strict rigour of the game.

"And you'll give me a big kiss?" said Felix.

"Yes, when we've done playing," she promised with great seriousness.

And then a huge white silk handkerchief, as big as a small sail, was

brought down from grandpapa's dressing-room, so that nobody should

see the least bit "in the world," as Marian had observed with great

energy; and the work of blinding was commenced. "I ain't big enough

to reach round," said Marian, who had made an effort, but in vain.

"You do it, aunt Mad," and she tendered the handkerchief to Miss

Staveley, who, however, did not appear very eager to undertake the

task.

"I'll be the executioner," said grandmamma, "the more especially as

I shall not take any other share in the ceremony. This shall be the

chair of doom. Come here, Mr. Graham, and submit yourself to me." And

so the first victim was blinded. "Mind you remember," said Marian,

whispering into his ear as he was led away. "Green spirits and white;

blue spirits and gray--," and then he was twirled round in the room

and left to commence his search as best he might.

Marian Arbuthnot was not the only soft little laughing darling that

wished to be caught, and blinded, so that there was great pulling

at the blindman's tails, and much grasping at his outstretched arms

before the desired object was attained. And he wandered round the

room skilfully, as though a thought were in his mind false to his

treaty with Marian,--as though he imagined for a moment that some

other prize might be caught. But if so, the other prize evaded him

carefully, and in due progress of play, Marian's soft curls were

within his grasp. "I'm sure I didn't speak, or say a word," said she,

as she ran up to her grandmother to have the handkerchief put over

her eyes. "Did I, grandmamma?"

"There are more ways of speaking than one," said Lady Staveley. "You

and Mr. Graham understand each other, I think."

"Oh, I was caught quite fairly," said Marian--"and now lead me round

and round." To her at any rate the festivities of Christmas-day were

not too ponderous for real enjoyment.

And then, at last, somebody caught the judge. I rather think it

was Madeline; but his time in truth was come, and he had no chance

of escape. The whole room was set upon his capture, and though he

barricaded himself with chairs and children, he was duly apprehended

and named. "That's papa; I know by his watch-chain, for I made it."

"Nonsense, my dears," said the judge. "I will do no such thing. I

should never catch anybody, and should remain blind for ever."

"But grandpapa must," said Marian. "It's the game that he should be

blinded when he's caught."

"Suppose the game was that we should be whipped when we are caught,

and I was to catch you," said Augustus.

"But I would not play that game," said Marian.

"Oh, papa, you must," said Madeline. "Do--and you shall catch Mr.

Furnival."

"That would be a temptation," said the judge. "I've never been able

to do that yet, though I've been trying it for some years."

"Justice is blind," said Graham. "Why should a judge be ashamed to

follow the example of his own goddess?" And so at last the owner of

the ermine submitted, and the stern magistrate of the bench was led

round with the due incantation of the spirits, and dismissed into

chaos to seek for a new victim.

[Illustration: Christmas at Noningsby--Evening.]

One of the rules of blindman's buff at Noningsby was this, that

it should not be played by candlelight,--a rule that is in every

way judicious, as thereby an end is secured for that which might

otherwise be unending. And therefore when it became so dark in the

schoolroom that there was not much difference between the blind man

and the others, the handkerchief was smuggled away, and the game was

at an end.

"And now for snap-dragon," said Marian.

"Exactly as you predicted, Mr. Graham," said Madeline: "blindman's

buff at a quarter past three, and snap-dragon at five."

"I revoke every word that I uttered, for I was never more amused in

my life."

"And you will be prepared to endure the wine and sweet cake when they

come."

"Prepared to endure anything, and go through everything. We shall be

allowed candles now, I suppose."

"Oh, no, by no means. Snap-dragon by candlelight! who ever heard

of such a thing? It would wash all the dragon out of it, and leave

nothing but the snap. It is a necessity of the game that it should be

played in the dark,--or rather by its own lurid light."

"Oh, there is a lurid light; is there?"

"You shall see;" and then she turned away to make her preparations.

To the game of snap-dragon, as played at Noningsby, a ghost was

always necessary, and aunt Madeline had played the ghost ever since

she had been an aunt, and there had been any necessity for such a

part. But in previous years the spectators had been fewer in number

and more closely connected with the family. "I think we must drop the

ghost on this occasion," she said, coming up to her brother.

"You'll disgust them all dreadfully if you do," said he. "The young

Sebrights have come specially to see the ghost."

"Well, you can do ghost for them."

"I! no; I can't act a ghost. Miss Furnival, you'd make a lovely

ghost."

"I shall be most happy to be useful," said Sophia.

"Oh, aunt Mad, you must be ghost," said Marian, following her.

"You foolish little thing, you; we are going to have a beautiful

ghost--a divine ghost," said uncle Gus.

"But we want Madeline to be the ghost," said a big Miss Sebright, ten

or eleven years old.

"She's always ghost," said Marian.

"To be sure; it will be much better," said Miss Furnival. "I only

offered my poor services hoping to be useful. No Banquo that ever

lived could leave a worse ghost behind him than I should prove."

It ended in there being two ghosts. It had become quite impossible

to rob Miss Furnival of her promised part, and Madeline could not

refuse to solve the difficulty in this way without making more of the

matter than it deserved. The idea of two ghosts was delightful to

the children, more especially as it entailed two large dishes full

of raisins, and two blue fires blazing up from burnt brandy. So the

girls went out, not without proffered assistance from the gentlemen,

and after a painfully long interval of some fifteen or twenty

minutes,--for Miss Furnival's back hair would not come down and

adjust itself into ghostlike lengths with as much readiness as that

of her friend,--they returned bearing the dishes before them on large

trays. In each of them the spirit was lighted as they entered the

schoolroom door, and thus, as they walked in, they were illuminated

by the dark-blue flames which they carried.

"Oh, is it not grand?" said Marian, appealing to Felix Graham.

"Uncommonly grand," he replied.

"And which ghost do you think is the grandest? I'll tell you which

ghost I like the best,--in a secret, you know; I like aunt Mad the

best, and I think she's the grandest too."

"And I'll tell you in a secret that I think the same. To my mind she

is the grandest ghost I ever saw in my life."

"Is she indeed?" asked Marian, solemnly, thinking probably that her

new friend's experience in ghosts must be extensive. However that

might be, he thought that as far as his experience in women went, he

had never seen anything more lovely than Madeline Staveley dressed in

a long white sheet, with a long bit of white cambric pinned round her

face.

And it may be presumed that the dress altogether is not unbecoming

when accompanied by blue flames, for Augustus Staveley and Lucius

Mason thought the same thing of Miss Furnival, whereas Peregrine Orme

did not know whether he was standing on his head or his feet as he

looked at Miss Staveley. Miss Furnival may possibly have had some

inkling of this when she offered to undertake the task, but I protest

that such was not the case with Madeline. There was no second thought

in her mind when she first declined the ghosting, and afterwards

undertook the part. No wish to look beautiful in the eyes of Felix

Graham had come to her--at any rate as yet; and as to Peregrine Orme,

she had hardly thought of his existence. "By heavens!" said Peregrine

to himself, "she is the most beautiful creature that I ever saw;" and

then he began to speculate within his own mind how the idea might be

received at The Cleeve.

But there was no such realised idea with Felix Graham. He saw that

Madeline Staveley was very beautiful, and he felt in an unconscious

manner that her character was very sweet. He may have thought that he

might have loved such a girl, had such love been a thing permitted to

him. But this was far from being the case. Felix Graham's lot in this

life, as regarded that share which his heart might have in it, was

already marked out for him;--marked out for himself and by himself.

The future wife of his bosom had already been selected, and was now

in course of preparation for the duties of her future life. He was

one of those few wise men who have determined not to take a partner

in life at hazard, but to mould a young mind and character to those

pursuits and modes of thought which may best fit a woman for the

duties she will have to perform. What little it may be necessary to

know of the earlier years of Mary Snow shall be told hereafter. Here

it will be only necessary to say that she was an orphan, that as yet

she was little more than a child, and that she owed her maintenance

and the advantage of her education to the charity and love of her

destined husband. Therefore, as I have said, it was manifest that

Felix Graham could not think of falling in love with Miss Staveley,

even had not his very low position, in reference to worldly affairs,

made any such passion on his part quite hopeless. But with Peregrine

Orme the matter was different. There could be no possible reason why

Peregrine Orme should not win and wear the beautiful girl whom he so

much admired.

But the ghosts are kept standing over their flames, the spirit is

becoming exhausted, and the raisins will be burnt. At snap-dragon,

too, the ghosts here had something to do. The law of the game is

this--a law on which Marian would have insisted had not the flames

been so very hot--that the raisins shall become the prey of those

audacious marauders only who dare to face the presence of the ghost,

and to plunge their hands into the burning dish. As a rule the boys

do this, clawing out the raisins, while the girls pick them up and

eat them. But here at Noningsby the boys were too little to act thus

as pioneers in the face of the enemy, and the raisins might have

remained till the flames were burnt out, had not the beneficent ghost

scattered abroad the richness of her own treasures.

"Now, Marian," said Felix Graham, bringing her up in his arms.

"But it will burn, Mr. Felix. Look there; see; there are a great many

at that end. You do it."

"I must have another kiss then."

"Very well, yes; if you get five." And then Felix dashed his hand in

among the flames and brought forth a fistful of fruit, which imparted

to his fingers and wristband a smell of brandy for the rest of the

evening.

"If you take so many at a time I shall rap your knuckles with the

spoon," said the ghost, as she stirred up the flames to keep them

alive.

"But the ghost shouldn't speak," said Marian, who was evidently

unacquainted with the best ghosts of tragedy.

"But the ghost must speak when such large hands invade the caldron;"

and then another raid was effected, and the threatened blow was

given. Had any one told her in the morning that she would that day

have rapped Mr. Graham's knuckles with a kitchen spoon, she would not

have believed that person; but it is thus that hearts are lost and

won.

And Peregrine Orme looked on from a distance, thinking of it all.

That he should have been stricken dumb by the beauty of any girl was

surprising even to himself; for though young and almost boyish in his

manners, he had never yet feared to speak out in any presence. The

tutor at his college had thought him insolent beyond parallel; and

his grandfather, though he loved him for his open face and plain

outspoken words, found them sometimes almost too much for him. But

now he stood there looking and longing, and could not summon courage

to go up and address a few words to this young girl even in the midst

of their sports. Twice or thrice during the last few days he had

essayed to speak to her, but his words had been dull and vapid, and

to himself they had appeared childish. He was quite conscious of his

own weakness. More than once, during that period of the snap-dragon,

did he say to himself that he would descend into the lists and break

a lance in that tourney; but still he did not descend, and his lance

remained inglorious in its rest.

At the other end of the long table the ghost also had two attendant

knights, and neither of them refrained from the battle. Augustus

Staveley, if he thought it worth his while to keep the lists at

all, would not be allowed to ride through them unopposed from any

backwardness on the part of his rival. Lucius Mason was not likely

to become a timid, silent, longing lover. To him it was not possible

that he should fear the girl whom he loved. He could not worship that

which he wished to obtain for himself. It may be doubted whether he

had much faculty of worshipping anything in the truest meaning of

that word. One worships that which one feels, through the inner and

unexpressed conviction of the mind, to be greater, better, higher

than oneself; but it was not probable that Lucius Mason should so

think of any woman that he might meet.

Nor, to give him his due, was it probable that he should be in any

way afraid of any man that he might encounter. He would fear neither

the talent, nor the rank, nor the money influence, nor the dexterity

of any such rival. In any attempt that he might make on a woman's

heart he would regard his own chance as good against that of any

other possible he. Augustus Staveley was master here at Noningsby,

and was a clever, dashing, handsome, fashionable young fellow; but

Lucius Mason never dreamed of retreating before such forces as those.

He had words with which to speak as fair as those of any man, and

flattered himself that he as well knew how to use them.

It was pretty to see with what admirable tact and judicious

management of her smiles Sophia received the homage of the two young

men, answering the compliments of both with ease, and so conducting

herself that neither could fairly accuse her of undue favour to the

other. But unfairly, in his own mind, Augustus did so accuse her.

And why should he have been so venomous, seeing that he entertained

no regard for the lady himself? His object was still plain

enough,--that, namely, of making a match between his needy friend and

the heiress.

His needy friend in the mean time played on through the long evening

in thoughtless happiness; and Peregrine Orme, looking at the game

from a distance, saw that rap given to the favoured knuckles with a

bitterness of heart and an inner groaning of the spirit that will not

be incomprehensible to many.

"I do so love that Mr. Felix!" said Marian, as her aunt Madeline

kissed her in her little bed on wishing her good night. "Don't you,

aunt Mad--?"

And so it was that Christmas-day was passed at Noningsby.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHRISTMAS AT GROBY PARK.

Christmas-day was always a time of very great trial to Mrs. Mason of

Groby Park. It behoved her, as the wife of an old English country

gentleman, to spread her board plenteously at that season, and in

some sort to make an open house of it. But she could not bring

herself to spread any board with plenty, and the idea of an open

house would almost break her heart. Unlimited eating! There was

something in the very sounds of such words which was appalling to the

inner woman.

And on this Christmas-day she was doomed to go through an ordeal of

very peculiar severity. It so happened that the cure of souls in the

parish of Groby had been intrusted for the last two or three years to

a young, energetic, but not very opulent curate. Why the rector of

Groby should be altogether absent, leaving the work in the hands

of a curate, whom he paid by the lease of a cottage and garden and

fifty-five pounds a year,--thereby behaving as he imagined with

extensive liberality,--it is unnecessary here to inquire. Such was

the case, and the Rev. Adolphus Green, with Mrs. A. Green and the

four children, managed to live with some difficulty on the produce

of the garden and the allotted stipend; but could not probably have

lived at all in that position had not Mrs. Adolphus Green been

blessed with some small fortune.

It had so happened that Mrs. Adolphus Green had been instrumental in

imparting some knowledge of singing to two of the Miss Masons, and

had continued her instructions over the last three years. This had

not been done in any preconcerted way, but the lessons had grown by

chance. Mrs. Mason the while had looked on with a satisfied eye at an

arrangement that was so much to her taste.

"There are no regular lessons you know," she had said to her husband,

when he suggested that some reward for so much work would be

expedient. "Mrs. Green finds it convenient to have the use of my

drawing-room, and would never see an instrument from year's end to

year's end if she were not allowed to come up here. Depend upon it

she gets a great deal more than she gives."

But after two years of tuition Mr. Mason had spoken a second time.

"My dear," he said, "I cannot allow the girls to accept so great a

favour from Mrs. Green without making her some compensation."

"I don't see that it is at all necessary," Mrs. Mason had

answered; "but if you think so, we could send her down a hamper of

apples,--that is, a basketful." Now it happened that apples were very

plentiful that year, and that the curate and his wife were blessed

with as many as they could judiciously consume.

"Apples! nonsense!" said Mr. Mason.

"If you mean money, my dear, I couldn't do it. I wouldn't so offend a

lady for all the world."

"You could buy them something handsome, in the way of furniture. That

little room of theirs that they call the drawing-room has nothing in

it at all. Get Jones from Leeds to send them some things that will

do for them." And hence, after many inner misgivings, had arisen

that purchase of a drawing-room set from Mr. Kantwise,--that set of

metallic "Louey Catorse furniture," containing three tables, eight

chairs, &c., &c., as to which it may be remembered that Mrs. Mason

made such an undoubted bargain, getting them for less than cost

price. That they had been "strained," as Mr. Kantwise himself

admitted in discoursing on the subject to Mr. Dockwrath, was not

matter of much moment. They would do extremely well for a curate's

wife.

And now on this Christmas-day the present was to be made over to the

happy lady. Mr. and Mrs. Green were to dine at Groby Park,--leaving

their more fortunate children to the fuller festivities of the

cottage; and the intention was that before dinner the whole

drawing-room set should be made over. It was with grievous pangs of

heart that Mrs. Mason looked forward to such an operation. Her own

house was plenteously furnished from the kitchens to the attics,

but still she would have loved to keep that metallic set of painted

trumpery. She knew that the table would not screw on; she knew that

the pivot of the music stool was bent; she knew that there was no

place in the house in which they could stand; she must have known

that in no possible way could they be of use to her or hers,--and

yet she could not part with them without an agony. Her husband was

infatuated in this matter of compensation for the use of Mrs. Green's

idle hours; no compensation could be necessary;--and then she paid

another visit to the metallic furniture. She knew in her heart of

hearts that they could never be of use to anybody, and yet she made

up her mind to keep back two out of the eight chairs. Six chairs

would be quite enough for Mrs. Green's small room.

As there was to be feasting at five, real roast beef, plum-pudding

and mince-pies;--"Mince-pies and plum-pudding together are vulgar,

my dear," Mrs. Mason had said to her husband; but in spite of the

vulgarity he had insisted;--the breakfast was of course scanty. Mr.

Mason liked a slice of cold meat in the morning, or the leg of a

fowl, or a couple of fresh eggs as well as any man; but the matter

was not worth a continual fight. "As we are to dine an hour earlier

to-day I did not think you would eat meat," his wife said to him.

"Then there would be less expense in putting it on the table," he

had answered; and after that there was nothing more said about it.

He always put off till some future day that great contest which he

intended to wage and to win, and by which he hoped to bring it about

that plenty should henceforward be the law of the land at Groby Park.

And then they all went to church. Mrs. Mason would not on any account

have missed church on Christmas-day or a Sunday. It was a cheap duty,

and therefore rigidly performed. As she walked from her carriage up

to the church-door she encountered Mrs. Green, and smiled sweetly as

she wished that lady all the compliments of the season.

"We shall see you immediately after church," said Mrs. Mason.

"Oh yes, certainly," said Mrs. Green.

"And Mr. Green with you?"

"He intends to do himself the pleasure," said the curate's wife.

"Mind he comes, because we have a little ceremony to go through

before we sit down to dinner," and Mrs. Mason smiled again ever

so graciously. Did she think, or did she not think, that she was

going to do a kindness to her neighbour? Most women would have sunk

into their shoes as the hour grew nigh at which they were to show

themselves guilty of so much meanness.

She stayed for the sacrament, and it may here be remarked that on

that afternoon she rated both the footman and housemaid because they

omitted to do so. She thought, we must presume, that she was doing

her duty, and must imagine her to have been ignorant that she was

cheating her husband and cheating her friend. She took the sacrament

with admirable propriety of demeanour, and then, on her return home,

withdrew another chair from the set. There would still be six,

including the rocking chair, and six would be quite enough for that

little hole of a room.

There was a large chamber up stairs at Groby Park which had been used

for the children's lessons, but which now was generally deserted.

There was in it an old worn-out pianoforte,--and though Mrs. Mason

had talked somewhat grandly of the use of her drawing-room, it was

here that the singing had been taught. Into this room the metallic

furniture had been brought, and up to that Christmas morning it had

remained here packed in its original boxes. Hither immediately after

breakfast Mrs. Mason had taken herself, and had spent an hour in her

efforts to set the things forth to view. Two of the chairs she then

put aside into a cupboard, and a third she added to her private store

on her return to her work after church.

But, alas, alas! let her do what she would, she could not get the top

on to the table. "It's all smashed, ma'am," said the girl whom she

at last summoned to her aid. "Nonsense, you simpleton; how can it be

smashed when it's new," said the mistress. And then she tried again,

and again, declaring as she did do, that she would have the law of

the rogue who had sold her a damaged article. Nevertheless she had

known that it was damaged, and had bought it cheap on that account,

insisting in very urgent language that the table was in fact worth

nothing because of its injuries.

At about four Mr. and Mrs. Green walked up to the house and were

shown into the drawing-room. Here was Mrs. Mason supported by

Penelope and Creusa. As Diana was not musical, and therefore under

no compliment to Mrs. Green, she kept out of the way. Mr. Mason also

was absent. He knew that something very mean was about to be done,

and would not show his face till it was over. He ought to have taken

the matter in hand himself, and would have done so had not his mind

been full of other things. He himself was a man terribly wronged and

wickedly injured, and could not therefore in these present months

interfere much in the active doing of kindnesses. His hours were

spent in thinking how he might best obtain justice,--how he might

secure his pound of flesh. He only wanted his own, but that he

would have;--his own, with due punishment on those who had for so

many years robbed him of it. He therefore did not attend at the

presentation of the furniture.

"And now we'll go up stairs, if you please," said Mrs. Mason, with

that gracious smile for which she was so famous. "Mr. Green, you must

come too. Dear Mrs. Green has been so very kind to my two girls; and

now I have got a few articles,--they are of the very newest fashion,

and I do hope that Mrs. Green will like them." And so they all went

up into the schoolroom.

"There's a new fashion come up lately," said Mrs. Mason as she walked

along the corridor, "quite new:--of metallic furniture. I don't know

whether you have seen any." Mrs. Green said she had not seen any as

yet.

"The Patent Steel Furniture Company makes it, and it has got very

greatly into vogue for small rooms. I thought that perhaps you would

allow me to present you with a set for your drawing-room."

"I'm sure it is very kind of you to think of it," said Mrs. Green.

"Uncommonly so," said Mr. Green. But both Mr. Green and Mrs. Green

knew the lady, and their hopes did not run high.

And then the door was opened and there stood the furniture to view.

There stood the furniture, except the three subtracted chairs, and

the loo table. The claw and leg of the table indeed were standing

there, but the top was folded up and lying on the floor beside it. "I

hope you'll like the pattern," began Mrs. Mason. "I'm told that it

is the prettiest that has yet been brought out. There has been some

little accident about the screw of the table, but the smith in the

village will put that to rights in five minutes. He lives so close to

you that I didn't think it worth while to have him up here."

"It's very nice," said Mrs. Green, looking round her almost in

dismay.

"Very nice indeed," said Mr. Green, wondering in his mind for

what purpose such utter trash could have been manufactured, and

endeavouring to make up his mind as to what they might possibly do

with it. Mr. Green knew what chairs and tables should be, and was

well aware that the things before him were absolutely useless for any

of the ordinary purposes of furniture.

"And they are the most convenient things in the world," said Mrs.

Mason, "for when you are going to change house you pack them all up

again in those boxes. Wooden furniture takes up so much room, and is

so lumbersome."

"Yes, it is," said Mrs. Green.

"I'll have them all put up again and sent down in the cart

to-morrow."

"Thank you; that will be very kind," said Mr. Green, and then the

ceremony of the presentation was over. On the following day the boxes

were sent down, and Mrs. Mason might have abstracted even another

chair without detection, for the cases lay unheeded from month to

month in the curate's still unfurnished room. "The fact is they

cannot afford a carpet," Mrs. Mason afterwards said to one of her

daughters, "and with such things as those they are quite right to

keep them up till they can be used with advantage. I always gave Mrs.

Green credit for a good deal of prudence."

And then, when the show was over, they descended again into the

drawing-room,--Mr. Green and Mrs. Mason went first, and Creusa

followed. Penelope was thus so far behind as to be able to speak to

her friend without being heard by the others.

"You know mamma," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders and a look

of scorn in her eye.

"The things are very nice."

"No, they are not, and you know they are not. They are worthless;

perfectly worthless."

"But we don't want anything."

"No; and if there had been no pretence of a gift it would all have

been very well. What will Mr. Green think?"

"I rather think he likes iron chairs;" and then they were in the

drawing-room.

Mr. Mason did not appear till dinner-time, and came in only just in

time to give his arm to Mrs. Green. He had had letters to write,--a

letter to Messrs. Round and Crook, very determined in its tone; and a

letter also to Mr. Dockwrath, for the little attorney had so crept on

in the affair that he was now corresponding with the principal. "I'll

teach those fellows in Bedford Row to know who I am," he had said to

himself more than once, sitting on his high stool at Hamworth.

And then came the Groby Park Christmas dinner. To speak the truth Mr.

Mason had himself gone to the neighbouring butcher, and ordered the

surloin of beef, knowing that it would be useless to trust to orders

conveyed through his wife. He had seen the piece of meat put on

one side for him, and had afterwards traced it on to the kitchen

dresser. But nevertheless when it appeared at table it had been

sadly mutilated. A steak had been cut off the full breadth of it--a

monstrous cantle from out its fair proportions. The lady had seen the

jovial, thick, ample size of the goodly joint, and her heart had been

unable to spare it. She had made an effort and turned away, saying to

herself that the responsibility was all with him. But it was of no

use. There was that within her which could not do it. "Your master

will never be able to carve such a mountain of meat as that," she had

said, turning back to the cook. "Deed, an' it's he that will, ma'am,"

said the Irish mistress of the spit; for Irish cooks are cheaper than

those bred and born in England. But nevertheless the thing was done,

and it was by her own fair hands that the envious knife was used. "I

couldn't do it, ma'am," the cook had said; "I couldn't railly."

Mr. Mason's face became very black when he saw the raid that had been

effected, and when he looked up across the table his wife's eye was

on him. She knew what she had to expect, and she knew also that it

would not come now. Her eye steadily looked at his, quivering with

fear; for Mr. Mason could be savage enough in his anger. And what had

she gained? One may as well ask what does the miser gain who hides

away his gold in an old pot, or what does that other madman gain

who is locked up for long long years because he fancies himself the

grandmother of the Queen of England?

But there was still enough beef on the table for all of them to

eat, and as Mrs. Mason was not intrusted with the carving of it,

their plates were filled. As far as a sufficiency of beef can make

a good dinner Mr. and Mrs. Green did have a good dinner on that

Christmas-day. Beyond that their comfort was limited, for no one was

in a humour for happy conversation.

And over and beyond the beef there was a plum-pudding and three

mince-pies. Four mince-pies had originally graced the dish, but

before dinner one had been conveyed away to some up stairs receptacle

for such spoils. The pudding also was small, nor was it black and

rich, and laden with good things as a Christmas pudding should be

laden. Let us hope that what the guests so lost was made up to them

on the following day, by an absence of those ill effects which

sometimes attend upon the consumption of rich viands.

"And now, my dear, we'll have a bit of bread and cheese and a glass

of beer," Mr. Green said when he arrived at his own cottage. And so

it was that Christmas-day was passed at Groby Park.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHRISTMAS IN GREAT ST. HELENS.

We will now look in for a moment at the Christmas doings of our fat

friend, Mr. Moulder. Mr. Moulder was a married man living in lodgings

over a wine-merchant's vaults in Great St. Helens. He was blessed--or

troubled, with no children, and prided himself greatly on the

material comfort with which his humble home was surrounded. "His

wife," he often boasted, "never wanted for plenty of the best of

eating; and for linen and silks and such-like, she could show her

drawers and her wardrobes with many a great lady from Russell Square,

and not be ashamed, neither!" And then, as for drink,--"tipple," as

Mr. Moulder sportively was accustomed to name it among his friends,

he opined that he was not altogether behind the mark in that respect.

"He had got some brandy--he didn't care what anybody might say about

Cognac and eau de vie; but the brandy which he had got from Betts'

private establishment seventeen years ago, for richness of flavour

and fullness of strength, would beat any French article that anybody

in the city could show. That at least was his idea. If anybody didn't

like it, they needn't take it. There was whisky that would make your

hair stand on end." So said Mr. Moulder, and I can believe him; for

it has made my hair stand on end merely to see other people drinking

it.

And if comforts of apparel, comforts of eating and drinking, and

comforts of the feather-bed and easy-chair kind can make a woman

happy, Mrs. Moulder was no doubt a happy woman. She had quite fallen

in to the mode of life laid out for her. She had a little bit of hot

kidney for breakfast at about ten; she dined at three, having seen

herself to the accurate cooking of her roast fowl, or her bit of

sweetbread, and always had her pint of Scotch ale. She turned over

all her clothes almost every day. In the evening she read Reynolds's

Miscellany, had her tea and buttered muffins, took a thimbleful of

brandy and water at nine, and then went to bed. The work of her

life consisted in sewing buttons on to Moulder's shirts, and seeing

that his things were properly got up when he was at home. No doubt

she would have done better as to the duties of the world, had the

world's duties come to her. As it was, very few such had come in her

direction. Her husband was away from home three-fourths of the year,

and she had no children that required attention. As for society, some

four or five times a year she would drink tea with Mrs. Hubbles at

Clapham. Mrs. Hubbles was the wife of the senior partner in the firm,

and on such occasions Mrs. Moulder dressed herself in her best, and

having travelled to Clapham in an omnibus, spent the evening in dull

propriety on one corner of Mrs. Hubbles's sofa. When I have added to

this that Moulder every year took her to Broadstairs for a fortnight,

I think that I have described with sufficient accuracy the course of

Mrs. Moulder's life.

On the occasion of this present Christmas-day Mr. Moulder entertained

a small party. And he delighted in such occasional entertainments,

taking extraordinary pains that the eatables should be of the

very best; and he would maintain an hospitable good humour to the

last,--unless anything went wrong in the cookery, in which case he

could make himself extremely unpleasant to Mrs. M. Indeed, proper

cooking for Mr. M. and the proper starching of the bands of his

shirts were almost the only trials that Mrs. Moulder was doomed to

suffer. "What the d---- are you for?" he would say, almost throwing

the displeasing viands at her head across the table, or tearing the

rough linen from off his throat. "It ain't much I ask of you in

return for your keep;" and then he would scowl at her with bloodshot

eyes till she shook in her shoes. But this did not happen often, as

experiences had made her careful.

But on this present Christmas festival all went swimmingly to the

end. "Now, bear a hand, old girl," was the harshest word he said

to her; and he enjoyed himself like Duncan, shut up in measureless

content. He had three guests with him on this auspicious day. There

was his old friend Snengkeld, who had dined with him on every

Christmas since his marriage; there was his wife's brother, of whom

we will say a word or two just now;--and there was our old friend,

Mr. Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise was not exactly the man whom Moulder would

have chosen as his guest, for they were opposed to each other in

all their modes of thought and action; but he had come across the

travelling agent of the Patent Metallic Steel Furniture Company on

the previous day, and finding that he was to be alone in London on

this general holiday, he had asked him out of sheer good nature.

Moulder could be very good natured, and full of pity when the sorrow

to be pitied arose from some such source as the want of a Christmas

dinner. So Mr. Kantwise had been asked, and precisely at four o'clock

he made his appearance at Great St. Helens.

But now, as to this brother-in-law. He was no other than that John

Kenneby whom Miriam Usbech did not marry,--whom Miriam Usbech might,

perhaps, have done well to marry. John Kenneby, after one or two

attempts in other spheres of life, had at last got into the house

of Hubbles and Grease, and had risen to be their book-keeper. He

had once been tried by them as a traveller, but in that line he had

failed. He did not possess that rough, ready, self-confident tone

of mind which is almost necessary for a man who is destined to move

about quickly from one circle of persons to another. After a six

months' trial he had given that up, but during the time, Mr. Moulder,

the senior traveller of the house, had married his sister. John

Kenneby was a good, honest, painstaking fellow, and was believed

by his friends to have put a few pounds together in spite of the

timidity of his character.

When Snengkeld and Kenneby were shown up into the room, they found

nobody there but Kantwise. That Mrs. Moulder should be down stairs

looking after the roast turkey was no more than natural; but why

should not Moulder himself be there to receive his guests? He soon

appeared, however, coming up without his coat.

"Well, Snengkeld, how are you, old fellow; many happy returns, and

all that; the same to you, John. I'll tell you what, my lads; it's a

prime 'un. I never saw such a bird in all my days."

"What, the turkey?" said Snengkeld.

"You didn't think it'd be a ostrich, did you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Snengkeld. "No, I didn't expect nothing but a

turkey here on Christmas-day."

"And nothing but a turkey you'll have, my boys. Can you eat turkey,

Kantwise?"

Mr. Kantwise declared that his only passion in the way of eating was

for a turkey.

"As for John, I'm sure of him. I've seen him at the work before."

Whereupon John grinned but said nothing.

"I never see such a bird in my life, certainly."

"From Norfolk, I suppose," said Snengkeld, with a great appearance of

interest.

"Oh, you may swear to that. It weighed twenty-four pounds, for I put

it into the scales myself, and old Gibbetts let me have it for a

guinea. The price marked on it was five-and-twenty, for I saw it.

He's had it hanging for a fortnight, and I've been to see it wiped

down with vinegar regular every morning. And now, my boys, it's done

to a turn. I've been in the kitchen most of the time myself; and

either I or Mrs. M. has never left it for a single moment."

"How did you manage about divine service?" said Kantwise; and then,

when he had spoken, closed his eyes and sucked his lips.

Mr. Moulder looked at him for a minute, and then said, "Gammon."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Snengkeld. And then Mrs. Moulder appeared,

bringing the turkey with her; for she would trust it to no hands less

careful than her own.

"By George, it is a bird," said Snengkeld, standing over it and

eyeing it minutely.

"Uncommon nice it looks," said Kantwise.

"All the same, I wouldn't eat none, if I were you," said Moulder,

"seeing what sinners have been a basting it." And then they all sat

down to dinner, Moulder having first resumed his coat.

For the next three or four minutes Moulder did not speak a word. The

turkey was on his mind, with the stuffing, the gravy, the liver, the

breast, the wings, and the legs. He stood up to carve it, and while

he was at the work he looked at it as though his two eyes were hardly

sufficient. He did not help first one person and then another, so

ending by himself; but he cut up artistically as much as might

probably be consumed, and located the fragments in small heaps or

shares in the hot gravy; and then, having made a partition of the

spoils, he served it out with unerring impartiality. To have robbed

any one of his or her fair slice of the breast would, in his mind,

have been gross dishonesty. In his heart he did not love Kantwise,

but he dealt by him with the utmost justice in the great affair of

the turkey's breast. When he had done all this, and his own plate was

laden, he gave a long sigh. "I shall never cut up such another bird

as that, the longest day that I have to live," he said; and then he

took out his large red silk handkerchief and wiped the perspiration

from his brow.

"Deary me, M.; don't think of that now," said the wife.

"What's the use?" said Snengkeld. "Care killed a cat."

"And perhaps you may," said John Kenneby, trying to comfort him; "who

knows?"

"It's all in the hands of Providence," said Kantwise, "and we should

look to him."

"And how does it taste?" asked Moulder, shaking the gloomy thoughts

from his mind.

"Uncommon," said Snengkeld, with his mouth quite full. "I never eat

such a turkey in all my life."

"Like melted diamonds," said Mrs. Moulder, who was not without a

touch of poetry.

"Ah, there's nothing like hanging of 'em long enough, and watching of

'em well. It's that vinegar as done it;" and then they went seriously

to work, and there was nothing more said of any importance until the

eating was nearly over.

And now Mrs. M. had taken away the cloth, and they were sitting

cozily over their port wine. The very apple of the eye of the evening

had not arrived even yet. That would not come till the pipes were

brought out, and the brandy was put on the table, and the whisky was

there that made the people's hair stand on end. It was then that the

floodgates of convivial eloquence would be unloosed. In the mean time

it was necessary to sacrifice something to gentility, and therefore

they sat over their port wine.

"Did you bring that letter with you, John?" said his sister. John

replied that he had done so, and that he had also received another

letter that morning from another party on the same subject.

"Do show it to Moulder, and ask him," said Mrs. M.

"I've got 'em both on purpose," said John; and then he brought

forth two letters, and handed one of them to his brother-in-law.

It contained a request, very civilly worded, from Messrs. Round

and Crook, begging him to call at their office in Bedford Row on

the earliest possible day, in order that they might have some

conversation with him regarding the will of the late Sir Joseph

Mason, who died in 18--.

"Why, this is law business," said Moulder, who liked no business

of that description. "Don't you go near them, John, if you ain't

obliged."

And then Kenneby gave his explanation on the matter, telling how in

former years,--many years ago, he had been a witness in a lawsuit.

And then as he told it he sighed, remembering Miriam Usbech, for

whose sake he had remained unmarried even to this day. And he went

on to narrate how he had been bullied in the court, though he had

valiantly striven to tell the truth with exactness; and as he spoke,

an opinion of his became manifest that old Usbech had not signed

the document in his presence. "The girl signed it certainly," said

he, "for I handed her the pen. I recollect it, as though it were

yesterday."

"They are the very people we were talking of at Leeds," said Moulder,

turning to Kantwise. "Mason and Martock; don't you remember how you

went out to Groby Park to sell some of them iron gimcracks? That was

old Mason's son. They are the same people."

"Ah, I shouldn't wonder," said Kantwise, who was listening all the

while. He never allowed intelligence of this kind to pass by him

idly.

"And who's the other letter from?" asked Moulder. "But, dash my wigs,

it's past six o'clock. Come, old girl, why don't you give us the

tobacco and stuff?"

"It ain't far to fetch," said Mrs. Moulder. And then she put the

tobacco and "stuff" upon the table.

"The other letter is from an enemy of mine," said John Kenneby,

speaking very solemnly; "an enemy of mine, named Dockwrath, who lives

at Hamworth. He's an attorney too."

"Dockwrath!" said Moulder.

Mr. Kantwise said nothing, but he looked round over his shoulder at

Kenneby, and then shut his eyes.

"That was the name of the man whom we left in the commercial room at

the Bull," said Snengkeld.

"He went out to Mason's at Groby Park that same day," said Moulder.

"Then it's the same man," said Kenneby; and there was as much

solemnity in the tone of his voice as though the unravelment of

all the mysteries of the iron mask was now about to take place. Mr.

Kantwise still said nothing, but he also perceived that it was the

same man.

"Let me tell you, John Kenneby," said Moulder, with the air of one

who understood well the subject that he was discussing, "if they two

be the same man, then the man who wrote that letter to you is as big

a blackguard as there is from this to hisself." And Mr. Moulder in

the excitement of the moment puffed hard at his pipe, took a long

pull at his drink, and dragged open his waistcoat. "I don't know

whether Kantwise has anything to say upon that subject," added

Moulder.

"Not a word at present," said Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise was a very

careful man, and usually calculated with accuracy the value which he

might extract from any circumstances with reference to his own main

chance. Mr. Dockwrath had not as yet paid him for the set of metallic

furniture, and therefore he also might well have joined in that

sweeping accusation; but it might be that by a judicious use of what

he now heard he might obtain the payment of that little bill,--and

perhaps other collateral advantages.

And then the letter from Dockwrath to Kenneby was brought forth and

read. "My dear John," it began,--for the two had known each other

when they were lads together,--and it went on to request Kenneby's

attendance at Hamworth for the short space of a few hours,--"I want

to have a little conversation with you about a matter of considerable

interest to both of us; and as I cannot expect you to undertake

expense I enclose a money order for thirty shillings."

"He's in earnest at any rate," said Mr. Moulder.

"No mistake about that," said Snengkeld.

But Mr. Kantwise spoke never a word.

It was at last decided that John Kenneby should go both to Hamworth

and to Bedford Row, but that he should go to Hamworth first. Moulder

would have counselled him to have gone to neither, but Snengkeld

remarked that there were too many at work to let the matter sleep,

and John himself observed that "anyways he hadn't done anything to be

ashamed of."

"Then go," said Moulder at last, "only don't say more than you are

obliged to."

"I does not like these business talkings on Christmas night," said

Mrs. Moulder, when the matter was arranged.

"What can one do?" asked Moulder.

"It's a tempting of Providence in my mind," said Kantwise, as he

replenished his glass, and turned his eyes up to the ceiling.

"Now that's gammon," said Moulder. And then there arose among them a

long and animated discussion on matters theological.

"I'll tell you what my idea of death is," said Moulder, after a

while. "I ain't a bit afeard of it. My father was an honest man as

did his duty by his employers, and he died with a bottom of brandy

before him and a pipe in his mouth. I sha'n't live long myself--"

"Gracious, Moulder, don't!" said Mrs. M.

"No, more I sha'n't, 'cause I'm fat as he was; and I hope I may die

as he did. I've been honest to Hubbles and Grease. They've made

thousands of pounds along of me, and have never lost none. Who can

say more than that? When I took to the old girl there, I insured my

life, so that she shouldn't want her wittles and drink--"

"Oh, M., don't!"

"And I ain't afeard to die. Snengkeld, my old pal, hand us the

brandy."

Such is the modern philosophy of the Moulders, pigs out of the sty

of Epicurus. And so it was they passed Christmas-day in Great St.

Helens.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. FURNIVAL AGAIN AT HIS CHAMBERS.

The Christmas doings at The Cleeve were not very gay. There was no

visitor there, except Lady Mason, and it was known that she was

in trouble. It must not, however, be supposed that she constantly

bewailed herself while there, or made her friends miserable by a

succession of hysterical tears. By no means. She made an effort to be

serene, and the effort was successful--as such efforts usually are.

On the morning of Christmas-day they duly attended church, and Lady

Mason was seen by all Hamworth sitting in The Cleeve pew. In no way

could the baronet's friendship have been shown more plainly than

in this, nor could a more significant mark of intimacy have been

given;--all which Sir Peregrine well understood. The people of

Hamworth had chosen to talk scandal about Lady Mason, but he at any

rate would show how little attention he paid to the falsehoods that

there were circulated. So he stood by her at the pew door as she

entered, with as much deference as though she had been a duchess; and

the people of Hamworth, looking on, wondered which would be right,

Mr. Dockwrath or Sir Peregrine.

After dinner Sir Peregrine gave a toast. "Lady Mason, we will drink

the health of the absent boys. God bless them! I hope they are

enjoying themselves."

"God bless them!" said Mrs. Orme, putting her handkerchief to her

eyes.

"God bless them both!" said Lady Mason, also putting her handkerchief

to her eyes. Then the ladies left the room, and that was the extent

of their special festivity. "Robert," said Sir Peregrine immediately

afterwards to his butler, "let them have what port wine they want in

the servants' hall--within measure."

"Yes, Sir Peregrine."

"And Robert, I shall not want you again."

"Thank you, Sir Peregrine."

From all which it may be imagined that the Christmas doings at The

Cleeve were chiefly maintained below stairs.

"I do hope they are happy," said Mrs. Orme, when the two ladies

were together in the drawing-room. "They have a very nice party at

Noningsby."

"Your boy will be happy, I'm sure," said Lady Mason.

"And why not Lucius also?"

It was sweet in Lady Mason's ear to hear her son called by his

Christian name. All these increasing signs of interest and intimacy

were sweet, but especially any which signified some favour shown to

her son. "This trouble weighs heavy on him," she replied. "It is only

natural that he should feel it."

"Papa does not seem to think much of it," said Mrs. Orme. "If I were

you, I would strive to forget it."

"I do strive," said the other; and then she took the hand which Mrs.

Orme had stretched out to her, and that lady got up and kissed her.

"Dearest friend," said Mrs. Orme, "if we can comfort you we will."

And then they sobbed in each other's arms.

In the mean time Sir Peregrine was sitting alone, thinking. He sat

thinking, with his glass of claret untouched by his side, and with

the biscuit which he had taken lying untouched upon the table. As he

sat he had raised one leg upon the other, placing his foot on his

knee, and he held it there with his hand upon his instep. And so he

sat without moving for some quarter of an hour, trying to use all

his mind on the subject which occupied it. At last he roused himself,

almost with a start, and leaving his chair, walked three or four

times the length of the room. "Why should I not?" at last he said to

himself, stopping suddenly and placing his hand upon the table. "Why

should I not, if it pleases me? It shall not injure him--nor her."

And then he walked again. "But I will ask Edith," he said, still

speaking to himself. "If she says that she disapproves of it, I will

not do it." And then he left the room, while the wine still remained

untasted on the table.

[Illustration: "Why should I not?"]

On the day following Christmas Mr. Furnival went up to town, and Mr.

Round junior,--Mat Round, as he was called in the profession,--came

to him at his chambers. A promise had been made to the barrister by

Round and Crook that no active steps should be taken against Lady

Mason on the part of Joseph Mason of Groby, without notice being

given to Mr. Furnival. And this visit by appointment was made in

consequence of that promise.

"You see," said Matthew Round, when that visit was nearly brought to

a close, "that we are pressed very hard to go on with this, and if we

do not, somebody else will."

"Nevertheless, if I were you, I should decline," said Mr. Furnival.

"You're looking to your client, not to ours, sir," said the attorney.

"The fact is that the whole case is very queer. It was proved on the

last trial that Bolster and Kenneby were witnesses to a deed on the

14th of July, and that was all that was proved. Now we can prove that

they were on that day witnesses to another deed. Were they witnesses

to two?"

"Why should they not be?"

"That is for us to see. We have written to them both to come up to

us, and in order that we might be quite on the square I thought it

right to tell you."

"Thank you; yes; I cannot complain of you. And what form do you think

that your proceedings will take?"

"Joseph Mason talks of indicting her for--forgery," said the

attorney, pausing a moment before he dared to pronounce the dread

word.

"Indict her for forgery!" said Furnival, with a start. And yet the

idea was one which had been for some days present to his mind's eye.

"I do not say so," said Round. "I have as yet seen none of the

witnesses myself. If they are prepared to prove that they did sign

two separate documents on that day, the thing must pass off." It was

clear to Mr. Furnival that even Mr. Round junior would be glad that

it should pass off. And then he also sat thinking. Might it not be

probable that, with a little judicious exercise of their memory,

those two witnesses would remember that they had signed two

documents; or at any rate, looking to the lapse of the time, that

they might be induced to forget altogether whether they had signed

one, two, or three? Or even if they could be mystified so that

nothing could be proved, it would still be well with his client.

Indeed no magistrate would commit such a person as Lady Mason,

especially after so long an interval, and no grand jury would find a

bill against her, except upon evidence that was clear, well defined,

and almost indubitable. If any point of doubt could be shown, she

might be brought off without a trial, if only she would be true

to herself. At the former trial there was the existing codicil,

and the fact also that the two surviving reputed witnesses would

not deny their signatures. These signatures--if they were genuine

signatures--had been attached with all proper formality, and the form

used went to state that the testator had signed the instrument in the

presence of them all, they all being present together at the same

time. The survivors had both asserted that when they did affix their

names the three were then present, as was also Sir Joseph; but

there had been a terrible doubt even then as to the identity of the

document; and a doubt also as to there having been any signature made

by one of the reputed witnesses--by that one, namely, who at the

time of that trial was dead. Now another document was forthcoming,

purporting to have been witnessed, on the same day, by these two

surviving witnesses! If that document were genuine, and if these

two survivors should be clear that they had written their names but

once on that 14th of July, in such case could it be possible to

quash further public inquiry? The criminal prosecution might not be

possible as a first proceeding, but if the estate were recovered at

common law, would not the criminal prosecution follow as a matter of

course? And then Mr. Furnival thought it all over again and again.

If this document were genuine,--this new document which the man

Dockwrath stated that he had found,--this deed of separation of

partnership which purported to have been executed on that 14th of

July! That was now the one important question. If it were genuine!

And why should there not be as strong a question of the honesty

of that document as of the other? Mr. Furnival well knew that no

fraudulent deed would be forged and produced without a motive; and

that if he impugned this deed he must show the motive. Motive enough

there was, no doubt. Mason might have had it forged in order to get

the property, or Dockwrath to gratify his revenge. But in such case

it would be a forgery of the present day. There could have been no

motive for such a forgery twenty years ago. The paper, the writing,

the attested signature of Martock, the other party to it, would prove

that it had not been got up and manufactured now. Dockwrath would not

dare to bring forward such a forgery as that. There was no hope of

any such result.

But might not he, Furnival, if the matter were pushed before a jury,

make them think that the two documents stood balanced against each

other? and that Lady Mason's respectability, her long possession,

together with the vile malignity of her antagonists, gave the greater

probability of honesty to the disputed codicil? Mr. Furnival did

think that he might induce a jury to acquit her; but he terribly

feared that he might not be able to induce the world to acquit her

also. As he thought of all the case, he seemed to put himself apart

from the world at large. He did not question himself as to his own

belief, but seemed to feel that it would suffice for him if he could

so bring it about that her other friends should think her innocent.

It would by no means suffice for him to secure for her son the

property, and for her a simple acquittal. It was not that he dreaded

the idea of thinking her guilty himself; perhaps he did so think her

now--he half thought her so, at any rate; but he greatly dreaded the

idea of others thinking so. It might be well to buy up Dockwrath, if

it were possible. If it were possible! But then it was not possible

that he himself could have a hand in such a matter. Could Crabwitz do

it? No; he thought not. And then, at this moment, he was not certain

that he could depend on Crabwitz.

And why should he trouble himself in this way? Mr. Furnival was a

man loyal to his friends at heart. Had Lady Mason been a man, and had

he pulled that man through great difficulties in early life, he

would have been loyally desirous of carrying him through the same or

similar difficulties at any after period. In that cause which he had

once battled he was always ready to do battle, without reference to

any professional consideration of triumph or profit. It was to this

feeling of loyalty that he had owed much of his success in life. And

in such a case as this it may be supposed that that feeling would be

strong. But then such a feeling presumed a case in which he could

sympathise--in which he could believe. Would it be well that he

should allow himself to feel the same interest in this case, to

maintain respecting it the same personal anxiety, if he ceased to

believe in it? He did ask himself the question, and he finally

answered it in the affirmative. He had beaten Joseph Mason once in a

good stand-up fight; and having done so, having thus made the matter

his own, it was necessary to his comfort that he should beat him

again, if another fight were to be fought. Lady Mason was his client,

and all the associations of his life taught him to be true to her as

such.

And as we are thus searching into his innermost heart we must say

more than this. Mrs. Furnival perhaps had no sufficient grounds for

those terrible fears of hers; but nevertheless the mistress of Orley

Farm was very comely in the eyes of the lawyer. Her eyes, when full

of tears, were very bright, and her hand, as it lay in his, was very

soft. He laid out for himself no scheme of wickedness with reference

to her; he purposely entertained no thoughts which he knew to be

wrong; but, nevertheless, he did feel that he liked to have her by

him, that he liked to be her adviser and friend, that he liked to

wipe the tears from those eyes--not by a material handkerchief from

his pocket, but by immaterial manly sympathy from his bosom; and that

he liked also to feel the pressure of that hand. Mrs. Furnival had

become solid, and heavy, and red; and though he himself was solid,

and heavy, and red also--more so, indeed, in proportion than his poor

wife, for his redness, as I have said before, had almost reached a

purple hue; nevertheless his eye loved to look upon the beauty of a

lovely woman, his ear loved to hear the tone of her voice, and his

hand loved to meet the soft ripeness of her touch. It was very wrong

that it should have been so, but the case is not without a parallel.

And therefore he made up his mind that he would not desert Lady

Mason. He would not desert her; but how would he set about the

fighting that would be necessary in her behalf? He was well aware of

this, that if he fought at all, he must fight now. It would not do to

let the matter go on till she should be summoned to defend herself.

Steps which might now be available would be altogether unavailable in

two or three months' time--would be so, perhaps, if he allowed two or

three weeks to pass idly by him. Mr. Round, luckily, was not disposed

to hurry his proceedings; nor, as far as he was concerned, was there

any bitterness of antagonism. But with both Mason and Dockwrath there

would be hot haste, and hotter malice. From those who were really her

enemies she could expect no quarter.

He was to return on that evening to Noningsby, and on the following

day he would go over to The Cleeve. He knew that Lady Mason was

staying there; but his object in making that visit would not be

merely that he might see her, but also that he might speak to Sir

Peregrine, and learn how far the baronet was inclined to support

his neighbour in her coming tribulation. He would soon be able to

ascertain what Sir Peregrine really thought--whether he suspected the

possibility of any guilt; and he would ascertain also what was the

general feeling in the neighbourhood of Hamworth. It would be a great

thing if he could spread abroad a conviction that she was an injured

woman. It would be a great thing even if he could make it known that

the great people of the neighbourhood so thought. The jurymen of

Alston would be mortal men; and it might be possible that they should

be imbued with a favourable bias on the subject before they assembled

in their box for its consideration.

He wished that he knew the truth in the matter; or rather he wished

he could know whether or no she were innocent, without knowing

whether or no she were guilty. The fight in his hands would be

conducted on terms so much more glorious if he could feel sure of her

innocence. But then if he attempted that, and she were not innocent,

all might be sacrificed by the audacity of his proceedings. He could

not venture that, unless he were sure of his ground. For a moment or

two he thought that he would ask her the question. He said to himself

that he could forgive the fault. That it had been repented ere this

he did not doubt, and it would be sweet to say to her that it was

very grievous, but that yet it might be forgiven. It would be sweet

to feel that she was in his hands, and that he would treat her with

mercy and kindness. But then a hundred other thoughts forbade him to

think more of this. If she had been, guilty,--if she declared her

guilt to him,--would not restitution be necessary? In that case her

son must know it, and all the world must know it. Such a confession

would be incompatible with that innocence before the world which it

was necessary that she should maintain. Moreover, he must be able to

proclaim aloud his belief in her innocence; and how could he do that,

knowing her to be guilty--knowing that she also knew that he had such

knowledge? It was impossible that he should ask any such question, or

admit of any such confidence.

It would be necessary, if the case did come to a trial, that

she should employ some attorney. The matter must come into the

barrister's hands in the usual way, through a solicitor's house, and

it would be well that the person employed should have a firm faith in

his client. What could he say--he, as a barrister--if the attorney

suggested to him that the lady might possibly be guilty? As he

thought of all these things he almost dreaded the difficulties before

him.

He rang the bell for Crabwitz,--the peculiar bell which Crabwitz was

bound to answer,--having first of all gone through a little ceremony

with his cheque-book. Crabwitz entered, still sulky in his demeanour,

for as yet the old anger had not been appeased, and it was still a

doubtful matter in the clerk's mind whether or no it might not be

better for him to seek a master who would better appreciate his

services. A more lucrative position it might be difficult for him to

find; but money is not everything, as Crabwitz said to himself more

than once.

"Crabwitz," said Mr. Furnival, looking with a pleasant face at his

clerk, "I am leaving town this evening, and I shall be absent for the

next ten days. If you like you can go away for a holiday."

"It's rather late in the season now, sir," said Crabwitz, gloomily,

as though he were determined not to be pleased.

"It is a little late, as you say; but I really could not manage it

earlier. Come, Crabwitz, you and I should not quarrel. Your work has

been a little hard, but then so has mine also."

"I fancy you like it, sir."

"Ha! ha! Like it, indeed! But so do you like it--in its way. Come,

Crabwitz, you have been an excellent servant to me; and I don't think

that, on the whole, I have been a bad master to you."

"I am making no complaint, sir."

"But you're cross because I've kept you in town a little too long.

Come, Crabwitz, you must forget all that. You have worked very hard

this year past. Here is a cheque for fifty pounds. Get out of town

for a fortnight or so, and amuse yourself."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged, sir," said Crabwitz, putting out

his hand and taking the cheque. He felt that his master had got the

better of him, and he was still a little melancholy on that account.

He would have valued his grievance at that moment almost more

than the fifty pounds, especially as by the acceptance of it he

surrendered all right to complain for some considerable time to come.

"By-the-by, Crabwitz," said Mr. Furnival, as the clerk was about to

leave the room.

"Yes, sir," said Crabwitz.

"You have never chanced to hear of an attorney named Dockwrath, I

suppose?"

"What! in London, Mr. Furnival?"

"No; I fancy he has no place of business in town. He lives I know at

Hamworth."

"It's he you mean, sir, that is meddling in this affair of Lady

Mason's."

"What! you have heard of that; have you?"

"Oh! yes, sir. It's being a good deal talked about in the profession.

Messrs. Round and Crook's leading young man was up here with me the

other day, and he did say a good deal about it. He's a very decent

young man, considering his position, is Smart."

"And he knows Dockwrath, does he?"

"Well, sir, I can't say that he knows much of the man; but Dockwrath

has been at their place of business pretty constant of late, and he

and Mr. Matthew seem thick enough together."

"Oh! they do; do they?"

"So Smart tells me. I don't know how it is myself, sir. I don't

suppose this Dockwrath is a very--"

"No, no; exactly. I dare say not. You've never seen him yourself,

Crabwitz?"

"Who, sir? I, sir? No, sir, I've never set eyes on the man, sir. From

all I hear it's not very likely he should come here; and I'm sure it

is not at all likely that I should go to him."

Mr. Furnival sat thinking awhile, and the clerk stood waiting

opposite to him, leaning with both his hands upon the table. "You

don't know any one in the neighbourhood of Hamworth, I suppose?" Mr.

Furnival said at last.

"Who, sir? I, sir? Not a soul, sir. I never was there in my life."

"I'll tell you why I ask. I strongly suspect that that man Dockwrath

is at some very foul play." And then he told to his clerk so much of

the whole story of Lady Mason and her affairs as he chose that he

should know. "It is plain enough that he may give Lady Mason a great

deal of annoyance," he ended by saying.

"There's no doubting that, sir," said Crabwitz. "And, to tell the

truth, I believe his mind is made up to do it."

"You don't think that anything could be done by seeing him? Of course

Lady Mason has got nothing to compromise. Her son's estate is as safe

as my hat; but--"

"The people at Round's think it isn't quite so safe, sir."

"Then the people at Round's know nothing about it. But Lady Mason is

so averse to legal proceedings that it would be worth her while to

have matters settled. You understand?"

"Yes, sir; I understand. Would not an attorney be the best person,

sir?"

"Not just at present, Crabwitz. Lady Mason is a very dear friend of

mine--"

"Yes, sir; we know that," said Crabwitz.

"If you could make any pretence for running down to Hamworth--change

of air, you know, for a week or so. It's a beautiful country; just

the place you like. And you might find out whether anything could be

done, eh?"

Mr. Crabwitz was well aware, from the first, that he did not get

fifty pounds for nothing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHY SHOULD I NOT?

A day or two after his conversation with Crabwitz, as described in

the last chapter, Mr. Furnival was driven up to the door of Sir

Peregrine Orme's house in a Hamworth fly. He had come over by train

from Alston on purpose to see the baronet, whom he found seated in

his library. At that very moment he was again asking himself those

questions which he had before asked as he was walking up and down his

own dining-room. "Why should I not?" he said to himself,--"unless,

indeed, it will make her unhappy." And then the barrister was shown

into his room, muffled up to his eyes in his winter clothing.

Sir Peregrine and Mr. Furnival were well known to each other, and had

always met as friends. They had been interested on the same side in

the first Orley Farm Case, and possessed a topic of sympathy in their

mutual dislike to Joseph Mason of Groby Park. Sir Peregrine therefore

was courteous, and when he learned the subject on which he was to be

consulted he became almost more than courteous.

"Oh! yes; she's staying here, Mr. Furnival. Would you like to see

her?"

"Before I leave I shall be glad to see her, Sir Peregrine; but if I

am justified in regarding you as specially her friend, it may perhaps

be well that I should first have some conversation with you." Sir

Peregrine in answer to this declared that Mr. Furnival certainly

would be so justified; that he did regard himself as Lady Mason's

special friend, and that he was ready to hear anything that the

barrister might have to say to him.

Many of the points of this case have already been named so often, and

will, I fear, be necessarily named so often again that I will spare

the repetition when it is possible. Mr. Furnival on this occasion

told Sir Peregrine--not all that he had heard, but all that he

thought it necessary to tell, and soon became fully aware that in the

baronet's mind there was not the slightest shadow of suspicion that

Lady Mason could have been in any way to blame. He, the baronet, was

thoroughly convinced that Mr. Mason was the great sinner in this

matter, and that he was prepared to harass an innocent and excellent

lady from motives of disappointed cupidity and long-sustained malice,

which made him seem in Sir Peregrine's eyes a being almost too vile

for humanity. And of Dockwrath he thought almost as badly--only that

Dockwrath was below the level of his thinking. Of Lady Mason he spoke

as an excellent and beautiful woman driven to misery by unworthy

persecution; and so spoke with an enthusiasm that was surprising

to Mr. Furnival. It was very manifest that she would not want for

friendly countenance, if friendly countenance could carry her through

her difficulties.

There was no suspicion against Lady Mason in the mind of Sir

Peregrine, and Mr. Furnival was careful not to arouse any such

feeling. When he found that the baronet spoke of her as being

altogether pure and good, he also spoke of her in the same tone; but

in doing so his game was very difficult. "Let him do his worst, Mr.

Furnival," said Sir Peregrine; "and let her remain tranquil; that is

my advice to Lady Mason. It is not possible that he can really injure

her."

"It is possible that he can do nothing--very probable that he can do

nothing; but nevertheless, Sir Peregrine--"

"I would have no dealing with him or his. I would utterly disregard

them. If he, or they, or any of them choose to take steps to annoy

her, let her attorney manage that in the usual way. I am no lawyer

myself, Mr. Furnival, but that I think is the manner in which things

of this kind should be arranged. I do not know whether they have

still the power of disputing the will, but if so, let them do it."

Gradually, by very slow degrees, Mr. Furnival made Sir Peregrine

understand that the legal doings now threatened were not of that

nature;--that Mr. Mason did not now talk of proceeding at law for

the recovery of the property, but for the punishment of his father's

widow as a criminal; and at last the dreadful word "forgery" dropped

from his lips.

"Who dares to make such a charge as that?" demanded the baronet,

while fire literally flashed from his eyes in his anger. And when he

was told that Mr. Mason did make such a charge he called him "a mean,

unmanly dastard." "I do not believe that he would dare to make it

against a man," said Sir Peregrine.

But there was the fact of the charge--the fact that it had been

placed in the hands of respectable attorneys, with instructions to

them to press it on--and the fact also that the evidence by which

that charge was to be supported possessed at any rate a \_primÃ¢ facie\_

appearance of strength. All that it was necessary to explain to Sir

Peregrine, as it would also be necessary to explain it to Lady Mason.

"Am I to understand, then, that you also think--?" began Sir

Peregrine.

"You are not to understand that I think anything injurious to the

lady; but I do fear that she is in a position of much jeopardy, and

that great care will be necessary."

"Good heavens! Do you mean to say that an innocent person can under

such circumstances be in danger in this country?"

"An innocent person, Sir Peregrine, may be in danger of very great

annoyance, and also of very great delay in proving that innocence.

Innocent people have died under the weight of such charges. We must

remember that she is a woman, and therefore weaker than you or I."

"Yes, yes; but still--. You do not say that you think she can be in

any real danger?" It seemed, from the tone of the old man's voice, as

though he were almost angry with Mr. Furnival for supposing that such

could be the case. "And you intend to tell her all this?" he asked.

"I fear that, as her friend, neither you nor I will be warranted in

keeping her altogether in the dark. Think what her feelings would be

if she were summoned before a magistrate without any preparation!"

"No magistrate would listen to such a charge," said Sir Peregrine.

"In that he must be guided by the evidence."

"I would sooner throw up my commission than lend myself in any way to

a proceeding so iniquitous."

This was all very well, and the existence of such a feeling showed

great generosity, and perhaps also poetic chivalry on the part of

Sir Peregrine Orme; but it was not the way of the world, and so Mr.

Furnival was obliged to explain. Magistrates would listen to the

charge--would be forced to listen to the charge,--if the evidence

were apparently sound. A refusal on the part of a magistrate to do

so would not be an act of friendship to Lady Mason, as Mr. Furnival

endeavoured to explain. "And you wish to see her?" Sir Peregrine

asked at last.

"I think she should be told; but as she is in your house, I will,

of course, do nothing in which you do not concur." Upon which

Sir Peregrine rang the bell and desired the servant to take his

compliments to Lady Mason and beg her attendance in the library if

it were quite convenient. "Tell her," said Sir Peregrine, "that Mr.

Furnival is here."

When the message was given to her she was seated with Mrs. Orme, and

at the moment she summoned strength to say that she would obey the

invitation, without displaying any special emotion while the servant

was in the room; but when the door was shut, her friend looked at her

and saw that she was as pale as death. She was pale and her limbs

quivered, and that look of agony, which now so often marked her face,

was settled on her brow. Mrs. Orme had never yet seen her with such

manifest signs of suffering as she wore at this instant.

"I suppose I must go to them," she said, slowly rising from her seat;

and it seemed to Mrs. Orme that she was forced to hold by the table

to support herself.

"Mr. Furnival is a friend, is he not?"

"Oh, yes! a kind friend, but--"

"They shall come in here if you like it better, dear."

"Oh, no! I will go to them. It would not do that I should seem so

weak. What must you think of me to see me so?"

"I do not wonder at it, dear," said Mrs. Orme, coming round to her;

"such cruelty would kill me. I wonder at your strength rather than

your weakness." And then she kissed her. What was there about the

woman that had made all those fond of her that came near her?

Mrs. Orme walked with her across the hall, and left her only at the

library door. There she pressed her hand and again kissed her, and

then Lady Mason turned the handle of the door and entered the room.

Mr. Furnival, when he looked at her, was startled by the pallor of

her face, but nevertheless he thought that she had never looked so

beautiful. "Dear Lady Mason," said he, "I hope you are well."

Sir Peregrine advanced to her and handed her over to his own

arm-chair. Had she been a queen in distress she could not have been

treated with more gentle deference. But she never seemed to count

upon this, or in any way to assume it as her right. I should accuse

her of what I regard as a sin against all good taste were I to say

that she was humble in her demeanour; but there was a soft meekness

about her, an air of feminine dependence, a proneness to lean

and almost to cling as she leaned, which might have been felt as

irresistible by any man. She was a woman to know in her deep sorrow

rather than in her joy and happiness; one with whom one would love to

weep rather than to rejoice. And, indeed, the present was a time with

her for weeping, not for rejoicing.

Sir Peregrine looked as though he were her father as he took her

hand, and the barrister immediately comforted himself with the

remembrance of the baronet's great age. It was natural, too, that

Lady Mason should hang on him in his own house. So Mr. Furnival

contented himself at the first moment with touching her hand and

hoping that she was well. She answered hardly a word to either of

them, but she attempted to smile as she sat down, and murmured

something about the trouble she was giving them.

"Mr. Furnival thinks it best that you should be made aware of the

steps which are being taken by Mr. Mason of Groby Park," began Sir

Peregrine. "I am no lawyer myself, and therefore of course I cannot

put my advice against his."

"I am sure that both of you will tell me for the best," she said.

"In such a matter as this it is right that you should be guided by

him. That he is as firmly your friend as I am there can be no doubt."

"I believe Lady Mason trusts me in that," said the lawyer.

"Indeed I do; I would trust you both in anything," she said.

"And there can be no doubt that he must be able to direct you for

the best. I say so much at the first, because I myself so thoroughly

despise that man in Yorkshire,--I am so convinced that anything which

his malice may prompt him to do must be futile, that I could not

myself have thought it needful to pain you by what must now be said."

This was a dreadful commencement, but she bore it, and even was

relieved by it. Indeed, no tale that Mr. Furnival could have to tell

after such an exordium would be so bad as that which she had feared

as the possible result of his visit. He might have come there to let

her know that she was at once to be carried away--immediately to be

taken to her trial--perhaps to be locked up in gaol. In her ignorance

of the law she could only imagine what might or might not happen to

her at any moment, and therefore the words which Sir Peregrine had

spoken relieved her rather than added to her fears.

And then Mr. Furnival began his tale, and gradually put before her

the facts of the matter. This he did with a choice of language and a

delicacy of phraseology which were admirable, for he made her clearly

understand the nature of the accusation which was brought against her

without using any word which was in itself harsh in its bearing. He

said nothing about fraud, or forgery, or false evidence, but he made

it manifest to her that Joseph Mason had now instructed his lawyer

to institute a criminal proceeding against her for having forged a

codicil to her husband's will.

"I must bear it as best I may," she said. "May the Lord give me

strength to bear it!"

"It is terrible to think of," said Sir Peregrine; "but nobody can

doubt how it will end. You are not to suppose that Mr. Furnival

intends to express any doubt as to your ultimate triumph. What we

fear for you is the pain you must endure before this triumph comes."

Ah, if that were all! As the baronet finished speaking she looked

furtively into the lawyer's face to see how far the meaning of these

smooth words would be supported by what she might read there. Would

he also think that a final triumph did certainly await her? Sir

Peregrine's real opinion was easily to be learned, either from his

countenance or from his words; but it was not so with Mr. Furnival.

In Mr. Furnival's face, and from Mr. Furnival's words, could be

learned only that which Mr. Furnival wished to declare. He saw that

glance, and fully understood it; and he knew instinctively, on the

spur of the moment, that he must now either assure her by a lie, or

break down all her hopes by the truth. That final triumph was not

certain to her--was very far from certain! Should he now be honest to

his friend, or dishonest? One great object with him was to secure the

support which Sir Peregrine could give by his weight in the county;

and therefore, as Sir Peregrine was present, it was needful that he

should be dishonest. Arguing thus he looked the lie, and Lady Mason

derived more comfort from that look than from all Sir Peregrine's

words.

And then those various details were explained to her which Mr.

Furnival understood that Mr. Dockwrath had picked up. They went into

that matter of the partnership deed, and questions were asked as to

the man Kenneby and the woman Bolster. They might both, Lady Mason

said, have been witnesses to half a dozen deeds on that same day, for

aught she knew to the contrary. She had been present with Sir Joseph,

as far as she could now remember, during the whole of that morning,

"in and out, Sir Peregrine, as you can understand." Sir Peregrine

said that he did understand perfectly. She did know that Mr. Usbech

had been there for many hours that day, probably from ten to two

or three, and no doubt therefore much business was transacted. She

herself remembered nothing but the affair of the will; but then that

was natural, seeing that there was no other affair in which she had

specially interested herself.

"No doubt these people did witness both the deeds," said Sir

Peregrine. "For myself, I cannot conceive how that wretched man can

be so silly as to spend his money on such a case as this."

"He would do anything for revenge," said Mr. Furnival.

And then Lady Mason was allowed to go back to the drawing-room, and

what remained to be said was said between the two gentlemen alone.

Sir Peregrine was very anxious that his own attorneys should be

employed, and he named Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, than whom there

were no more respectable men in the whole profession. But then Mr.

Furnival feared that they were too respectable. They might look at

the matter in so straightforward a light as to fancy their client

really guilty; and what might happen then? Old Slow would not conceal

the truth for all the baronets in England--no, nor for all the pretty

women. The touch of Lady Mason's hand and the tear in her eye would

be nothing to old Slow. Mr. Furnival, therefore, was obliged to

explain that Slow and Bideawhile did not undertake that sort of

business.

"But I should wish it to be taken up through them. There must be

some expenditure, Mr. Furnival, and I should prefer that they should

arrange about that."

Mr. Furnival made no further immediate objection, and consented at

last to having an interview with one of the firm on the subject,

provided, of course, that that member of the firm came to him at his

chambers. And then he took his leave. Nothing positive had been done,

or even settled to be done, on this morning; but the persons most

interested in the matter had been made to understand that the affair

was taking an absolute palpable substance, and that steps must be

taken--indeed would be taken almost immediately. Mr. Furnival, as he

left the house, resolved to employ the attorneys whom he might think

best adapted for the purpose. He would settle that matter with Slow

and Bideawhile afterwards.

And then, as he returned to Noningsby, he wondered at his persistence

in the matter. He believed that his client had been guilty; he

believed that this codicil was no real instrument made by Sir Joseph

Mason. And so believing, would it not be better for him to wash his

hands of the whole affair? Others did not think so, and would it not

be better that such others should be her advisers? Was he not taking

up for himself endless trouble and annoyance that could have no

useful purpose? So he argued with himself, and yet by the time that

he had reached Noningsby he had determined that he would stand by

Lady Mason to the last. He hated that man Mason, as he declared to

himself when providing himself with reasons for his resolve, and

regarded his bitter, malicious justice as more criminal than any

crime of which Lady Mason might have been guilty. And then as he

leaned back in the railway carriage he still saw her pale face before

him, still heard the soft tone of her voice, and was still melted by

the tear in her eye. Young man, young friend of mine, who art now

filled to the overflowing of thy brain with poetry, with chivalry,

and love, thou seest seated opposite to thee there that grim old man,

with long snuffy nose, with sharp piercing eyes, with scanty frizzled

hairs. He is rich and cross, has been three times married, and has

often quarrelled with his children. He is fond of his wine, and

snores dreadfully after dinner. To thy seeming he is a dry, withered

stick, from which all the sap of sentiment has been squeezed by the

rubbing and friction of years. Poetry, the feeling if not the words

of poetry,--is he not dead to it, even as the pavement is dead over

which his wheels trundle? Oh, my young friend! thou art ignorant in

this--as in most other things. He may not twitter of sentiment, as

thou doest; nor may I trundle my hoop along the high road as do the

little boys. The fitness of things forbids it. But that old man's

heart is as soft as thine, if thou couldst but read it. The body

dries up and withers away, and the bones grow old; the brain, too,

becomes decrepit, as do the sight, the hearing, and the soul. But the

heart that is tender once remains tender to the last.

Lady Mason, when she left the library, walked across the hall towards

the drawing-room, and then she paused. She would fain remain alone

for a while if it were possible, and therefore she turned aside into

a small breakfast parlour, which was used every morning, but which

was rarely visited afterwards during the day. Here she sat, leaving

the door slightly open, so that she might know when Mr. Furnival left

the baronet. Here she sat for a full hour, waiting--waiting--waiting.

There was no sofa or lounging-chair in the room, reclining in which

she could remain there half sleeping, sitting comfortably at her

ease; but she placed herself near the table, and leaning there with

her face upon her hand, she waited patiently till Mr. Furnival had

gone. That her mind was full of thoughts I need hardly say, but yet

the hour seemed very long to her. At last she heard the library door

open, she heard Sir Peregrine's voice as he stood in the hall and

shook hands with his departing visitor, she heard the sound of the

wheels as the fly moved upon the gravel, and then she heard Sir

Peregrine again shut the library door behind him.

She did not immediately get up from her chair; she still waited

awhile, perhaps for another period of ten minutes, and then she

noiselessly left the room, and moving quickly and silently across the

hall she knocked at Sir Peregrine's door. This she did so gently that

at first no answer was made to her. Then she knocked again, hardly

louder but with a repeated rap, and Sir Peregrine summoned her to

come in. "May I trouble you once more--for one moment?" she said.

"Certainly, certainly; it is no trouble. I am glad that you are here

in the house at this time, that you may see me at any moment that you

may wish."

"I do not know why you should be so good to me."

"Because you are in great grief, in undeserved grief, because--. Lady

Mason, my services are at your command. I will act for you as I would

for a--daughter."

"You hear now of what it is that they accuse me."

"Yes, he said; I do hear;" and as he spoke he came round so that he

was standing near to her, but with his back to the fireplace. "I do

hear, and I blush to think that there is a man in England, holding

the position of a county magistrate, who can so forget all that is

due to honesty, to humanity, and to self-respect."

"You do not then think that I have been guilty of this thing?"

"Guilty--I think you guilty! No, nor does he think so. It is

impossible that he should think so. I am no more sure of my own

innocence than of yours;" and as he spoke he took both her hands and

looked into her face, and his eyes also were full of tears. "You

may be sure of this, that neither I nor Edith will ever think you

guilty."

"Dearest Edith," she said; she had never before called Sir

Peregrine's daughter-in-law by her Christian name, and as she now did

so she almost felt that she had sinned. But Sir Peregrine took it in

good part. "She is dearest," he said; "and be sure of this, that she

will be true to you through it all."

And so they stood for a while without further speech. He still held

both her hands, and the tears still stood in his eyes. Her eyes were

turned to the ground, and from them the tears were running fast. At

first they ran silently, without audible sobbing, and Sir Peregrine,

with his own old eyes full of salt water, hardly knew that she was

weeping. But gradually the drops fell upon his hand, one by one at

first, and then faster and faster; and soon there came a low sob, a

sob all but suppressed, but which at last forced itself forth, and

then her head fell upon his shoulder. "My dear," he said, himself

hardly able to speak; "my poor dear, my ill-used dear!" and as she

withdrew one hand from his, that she might press a handkerchief to

her face, his vacant arm passed itself round her waist. "My poor,

ill-used dear!" he said again, as he pressed her to his old heart,

and leaning over her he kissed her lips.

So she stood for some few seconds, feeling that she was pressed

close by the feeble pressure of his arm, and then she gradually sank

through from his embrace, and fell upon her knees at his feet. She

knelt at his feet, supporting herself with one arm upon the table,

and with the other hand she still held his hand over which her head

was bowed. "My friend," she said, still sobbing, and sobbing loudly

now; "my friend, that God has sent me in my trouble." And then, with

words that were wholly inaudible, she murmured some prayer on his

behalf.

"I am better now," she said, raising herself quickly to her feet when

a few seconds had passed. "I am better now," and she stood erect

before him. "By God's mercy I will endure it; I think I can endure it

now."

"If I can lighten the load--"

"You have lightened it--of half its weight; but, Sir Peregrine, I

will leave this--"

"Leave this! go away from The Cleeve!"

"Yes; I will not destroy the comfort of your home by the wretchedness

of my position. I will not--"

"Lady Mason, my house is altogether at your service. If you will be

led by me in this matter, you will not leave it till this cloud shall

have passed by you. You will be better to be alone now;" and then

before she could answer him further, he led her to the door. She

felt that it was better for her to be alone, and she hastened up the

stairs to her own chamber.

"And why should I not?" said Sir Peregrine to himself, as he again

walked the length of the library.

CHAPTER XXVII.

COMMERCE.

Lucius Mason was still staying at Noningsby when Mr. Furnival made

his visit to Sir Peregrine, and on that afternoon he received a note

from his mother. Indeed, there were three notes passed between them

on that afternoon, for he wrote an answer to his mother, and then

received a reply to that answer. Lady Mason told him that she did not

intend to return home to the Farm quite immediately, and explained

that her reason for not doing so was the necessity that she should

have assistance and advice at this period of her trouble. She did

not say that she misdoubted the wisdom of her son's counsels; but it

appeared to him that she intended to signify to him that she did so,

and he answered her in words that were sore and almost bitter. "I am

sorry," he said, "that you and I cannot agree about a matter that is

of such vital concern to both of us; but as it is so, we can only act

as each thinks best, you for yourself and I for myself. I am sure,

however, that you will believe that my only object is your happiness

and your fair name, which is dearer to me than anything else in the

world." In answer to this, she had written again immediately, filling

her letter with sweet words of motherly love, telling him that she

was sure, quite sure, of his affection and kind spirit, and excusing

herself for not putting the matter altogether in his hands by saying

that she was forced to lean on those who had supported her from the

beginning--through that former trial which had taken place when he,

Lucius, was yet a baby. "And, dearest Lucius, you must not be angry

with me," she went on to say; "I am suffering much under this cruel

persecution, but my sufferings would be more than doubled if my own

boy quarrelled with me." Lucius, when he received this, flung up his

head. "Quarrel with her," he said to himself; "nothing on earth would

make me quarrel with her; but I cannot say that that is right which I

think to be wrong." His feelings were good and honest, and kindly too

in their way; but tenderness of heart was not his weakness. I should

wrong him if I were to say that he was hard-hearted, but he flattered

himself that he was just-hearted, which sometimes is nearly the

same--as had been the case with his father before him, and was now

the case with his half-brother Joseph.

The day after this was his last at Noningsby. He had told Lady

Staveley that he intended to go, and though she had pressed his

further stay, remarking that none of the young people intended to

move till after twelfth-night, nevertheless he persisted. With

the young people of the house themselves he had not much advanced

himself; and altogether he did not find himself thoroughly happy in

the judge's house. They were more thoughtless than he--as he thought;

they did not understand him, and therefore he would leave them.

Besides, there was a great day of hunting coming on, at which

everybody was to take a part, and as he did not hunt that gave

him another reason for going. "They have nothing to do but amuse

themselves," he said to himself; "but I have a man's work before me,

and a man's misfortunes. I will go home and face both."

In all this there was much of conceit, much of pride, much of

deficient education,--deficiency in that special branch of education

which England has imparted to the best of her sons, but which

is now becoming out of fashion. He had never learned to measure

himself against others,--I do not mean his knowledge or his

book-acquirements, but the every-day conduct of his life,--and

to perceive that that which is insignificant in others must be

insignificant in himself also. To those around him at Noningsby his

extensive reading respecting the IapetidÃ¦ recommended him not at all,

nor did his agricultural ambitions;--not even to Felix Graham, as a

companion, though Felix Graham could see further into his character

than did the others. He was not such as they were. He had not the

unpretentious, self-controlling humour, perfectly free from all

conceit, which was common to them. Life did not come easy to him,

and the effort which he was ever making was always visible. All men

should ever be making efforts, no doubt; but those efforts should

not be conspicuous. But yet Lucius Mason was not a bad fellow, and

young Staveley showed much want of discernment when he called him

empty-headed and selfish. Those epithets were by no means applicable

to him. That he was not empty-headed is certain; and he was moreover

capable of a great self-sacrifice.

That his talents and good qualities were appreciated by one person

in the house, seemed evident to Lady Staveley and the other married

ladies of the party. Miss Furnival, as they all thought, had not

found him empty-headed. And, indeed, it may be doubted whether Lady

Staveley would have pressed his stay at Noningsby, had Miss Furnival

been less gracious. Dear Lady Staveley was always living in a fever

lest her only son, the light of her eyes, should fall irrevocably

in love with some lady that was by no means goods enough for him.

Revocably in love he was daily falling; but some day he would go too

deep, and the waters would close over his well-loved head. Now in her

dear old favouring eyes Sophia Furnival was by no means good enough,

and it had been quite clear that Augustus had become thoroughly lost

in his attempts to bring about a match between Felix Graham and

the barrister's daughter. In preparing the bath for his friend he

had himself fallen bodily into the water. He was always at Miss

Furnival's side as long as Miss Furnival would permit it. But it

seemed to Lady Staveley that Miss Furnival, luckily, was quite as

fond of having Lucius Mason at her side;--that of the two she perhaps

preferred Lucius Mason. That her taste and judgment should be so bad

was wonderful to Lady Staveley; but this depravity though wonderful

was useful; and therefore Lucius Mason might have been welcome to

remain at Noningsby.

It may, however, be possible that Miss Furnival knew what she was

doing quite as well as Lady Staveley could know for her. In the

first place she may possibly have thought it indiscreet to admit Mr.

Staveley's attentions with too much freedom. She may have doubted

their sincerity; or feared to give offence to the family, or Mr.

Mason may in her sight have been the preferable suitor. That his

gifts of intellect were at any rate equal to those of the other there

can be no doubt. Then, his gifts of fortune were already his own, and

for ought that Miss Furnival knew, might be equal to any that would

ever appertain to the other gentleman. That Lady Staveley should

think her swan better looking than Lady Mason's goose was very

natural; but then Lady Mason would no doubt have regarded the two

birds in an exactly opposite light. It is only fair to conceive that

Miss Furnival was a better judge than either of them.

On the evening before his departure the whole party had been playing

commerce; for the rule of the house during these holidays was this,

that all the amusements brought into vogue were to be adapted to the

children. If the grown-up people could adapt themselves to them, so

much the better for them; if not, so much the worse; they must in

such case provide for themselves. On the whole, the grown-up people

seemed to live nearly as jovial a life as did the children. Whether

the judge himself was specially fond of commerce I cannot say; but he

persisted in putting in the whole pool, and played through the entire

game, rigidly fighting for the same pool on behalf of a very small

grandchild, who sat during the whole time on his knee. There are

those who call cards the devil's books, but we will presume that the

judge was of a different way of thinking.

On this special evening Sophia had been sitting next to Augustus,--a

young man can always arrange these matters in his own house,--but had

nevertheless lost all her lives early in the game. "I will not have

any cheating to-night," she had said to her neighbour; "I will take

my chance, and if I die, I die. One can die but once." And so she

had died, three times indeed instead of once only, and had left the

table. Lucius Mason also had died. He generally did die the first,

having no aptitude for a collection of kings or aces, and so they two

came together over the fire in the second drawing-room, far away from

the card-players. There was nothing at all remarkable in this, as Mr.

Furnival and one or two others who did not play commerce were also

there; but nevertheless they were separated from those of the party

who were most inclined to criticise their conduct.

"So you are leaving to-morrow, Mr. Mason," said Sophia.

"Yes. I go home to-morrow after breakfast; to my own house, where for

some weeks to come I shall be absolutely alone."

"Your mother is staying at The Cleeve, I think."

"Yes,--and intends remaining there as she tells me. I wish with all

my heart she were at Orley Farm."

"Papa saw her yesterday. He went over to The Cleeve on purpose to see

her; and this morning he has been talking to me about her. I cannot

tell you how I grieve for her."

"It is very sad; very sad. But I wish she were in her own house.

Under the circumstances as they now are, I think it would be better

for her to be there than elsewhere. Her name has been disgraced--"

"No, Mr. Mason; not disgraced."

"Yes; disgraced. Mark you; I do not say that she has been disgraced;

and pray do not suppose it possible that I should think so. But a

great opprobrium has been thrown on her name, and it would be better,

I think, that she should remain at home till she has cast it off from

her. Even for myself, I feel it almost wrong to be here; nor would I

have come had I known when I did come as much as I do know now."

"But no one can for a moment think that your mother has done anything

that she should not have done."

"Then why do so many people talk of her as though she had committed a

great crime? Miss Furnival, I know that she is innocent. I know it as

surely as I know the fact of my own existence--"

"And we all feel the same thing."

"But if you were in my place,--if it were your father whose name was

so bandied about in people's mouths, you would think that it behoved

him to do nothing, to go nowhere, till he had forced the world to

confess his innocence. And this is ten times stronger with regard to

a woman. I have given my mother my counsel, and I regret to say that

she differs from me."

"Why do you not speak to papa?"

"I did once. I went to him at his chambers, and he rebuked me."

"Rebuked you, Mr. Mason! He did not do that intentionally I am sure.

I have heard him say that you are an excellent son."

"But nevertheless he did rebuke me. He considered that I was

travelling beyond my own concerns, in wishing to interfere for the

protection of my mother's name. He said that I should leave it to

such people as the Staveleys and the Ormes to guard her from ignominy

and disgrace."

"Oh, he did not mean that!"

"But to me it seems that it should be a son's first duty. They are

talking of trouble and of cost. I would give every hour I have in the

day, and every shilling I own in the world to save her from one week

of such suffering as she now endures; but it cuts me to the heart

when she tells me that because she is suffering, therefore she must

separate herself from me. I think it would be better for her, Miss

Furnival, to be staying at home with me, than to be at The Cleeve."

"The kindness of Mrs. Orme must be a great support to her."

"And why should not my kindness be a support to her,--or rather my

affection? We know from whom all these scandals come. My desire is to

meet that man in a court of law and thrust these falsehoods down his

throat."

"Ah! but you are a man."

"And therefore I would take the burden from her shoulders. But no;

she will not trust to me. The truth, Miss Furnival, is this, that she

has not yet learned to think of me as a man. To her I am still the

boy for whom she is bound to provide, not the son who should bear

for her all her cares. As it is I feel that I do not dare again to

trouble her with my advice."

"Grandmamma is dead," shouted out a shrill small voice from the

card-table. "Oh, grandmamma, do have one of my lives. Look! I've got

three," said another.

"Thank you, my dears; but the natural term of my existence has come,

and I will not rebel against fate."

"Oh, grandmamma,--we'll let you have another grace."

"By no means, Charley. Indeed I am not clear that I am entitled to

Christian burial, as it is."

"A case of felo de se, I rather think," said her son. "About this

time of the night suicide does become common among the elders.

Unfortunately for me, the pistol that I have been snapping at my own

head for the last half-hour always hangs fire."

There was not much of love-making in the conversation which had taken

place between young Mason and Sophia; not much at least up to this

point; but a confidence had been established, and before he left her

he did say a word or two that was more tender in its nature. "You

must not be in dudgeon with me," he said, "for speaking to you of all

this. Hitherto I have kept it all to myself, and perhaps I should

still have done so."

"Oh no; do not say that."

"I am in great grief. It is dreadful to me to hear these things said,

and as yet I have found no sympathy."

"I can assure you, Mr. Mason, that I do sympathise with you most

sincerely. I only wish my sympathy could be of more value."

"It will be invaluable," he said, not looking at her, but fixing his

eyes upon the fire, "if it be given with constancy from the first to

the last of this sad affair."

"It shall be so given," said Miss Furnival, also looking at the fire.

"It will be tolerably long, and men will say cruel things of us. I

can foresee this, that it will be very hard to prove to the world

with certainty that there is no foundation whatever for these

charges. If those who are now most friendly to us turn away from

us--"

"I will never turn away from you, Mr. Mason."

"Then give me your hand on that, and remember that such a promise

in my ears means much." He in his excitement had forgotten that

there were others in the room who might be looking at them, and that

there was a vista open upon them direct from all the eyes at the

card-table; but she did not forget it. Miss Furnival could be very

enthusiastic, but she was one of those who in her enthusiasm rarely

forgot anything. Nevertheless, after a moment's pause, she gave him

her hand. "There it is," she said; "and you may be sure of this, that

with me also such a promise does mean something. And now I will say

good night." And so, having received the pressure of her hand, she

left him.

"I will get you your candle," he said, and so he did.

"Good night, papa," she said, kissing her father. And then, with

a slight muttered word to Lady Staveley, she withdrew, having

sacrificed the remainder of that evening for the sake of acceding to

Mr. Mason's request respecting her pledge. It could not be accounted

strange that she should give her hand to the gentleman with whom she

was immediately talking as she bade him good night.

"And now grandpapa is dead too," said Marian, "and there's nobody

left but us three."

"And we'll divide," said Fanny Sebright; and so the game of commerce

was brought to an end.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MONKTON GRANGE.

During these days Peregrine Orme--though he was in love up to his

very chin, seriously in love, acknowledging this matter to himself

openly, pulling his hair in the retirement of his bedroom, and

resolving that he would do that which he had hitherto in life always

been successful in doing--ask, namely, boldly for that he wanted

sorely--Peregrine Orme, I say, though he was in this condition, did

not in these days neglect his hunting. A proper attendance upon the

proceedings of the H. H. was the only duty which he had hitherto

undertaken in return for all that his grandfather had done for him,

and I have no doubt that he conceived that he was doing a duty in

going hither and thither about the county to their most distant

meets. At this period of the present season it happened that

Noningsby was more central to the proceedings of the hunt than The

Cleeve, and therefore he was enabled to think that he was remaining

away from home chiefly on business. On one point, however, he had

stoutly come to a resolution. That question should be asked of

Madeline Staveley before he returned to his grandfather's house.

And now had arrived a special hunting morning,--special, because

the meet was in some degree a show meet, appropriate for ladies,

at a comfortable distance from Noningsby, and affording a chance

of amusement to those who sat in carriages as well as to those on

horseback. Monkton Grange was the well-known name of the place,

a name perhaps dearer to the ladies than to the gentlemen of the

country, seeing that show meets do not always give the best sport.

Monkton Grange is an old farm-house, now hardly used as such,

having been left, as regards the habitation, in the hands of a head

labourer; but it still possesses the marks of ancient respectability

and even of grandeur. It is approached from the high road by a long

double avenue of elms, which still stand in all their glory. The road

itself has become narrow, and the space between the side row of trees

is covered by soft turf, up which those coming to the meet love to

gallop, trying the fresh metal of their horses. And the old house

itself is surrounded by a moat, dry indeed now for the most part, but

nevertheless an evident moat, deep and well preserved, with a bridge

over it which Fancy tells us must once have been a drawbridge. It

is here, in front of the bridge, that the old hounds sit upon their

haunches, resting quietly round the horses of the huntsmen, while

the young dogs move about, and would wander if the whips allowed

them--one of the fairest sights to my eyes that this fair country

of ours can show. And here the sportsmen and ladies congregate by

degrees, men from a distance in dog-carts generally arriving first,

as being less able to calculate the time with accuracy. There is room

here too in the open space for carriages, and there is one spot on

which always stands old Lord Alston's chariot with the four posters;

an ancient sportsman he, who still comes to some few favourite meets;

and though Alston Court is but eight miles from the Grange, the

post-horses always look as though they had been made to do their

best, for his lordship likes to move fast even in his old age. He is

a tall thin man, bent much with age, and apparently too weak for much

walking; he is dressed from head to foot in a sportsman's garb, with

a broad stiffly starched coloured handkerchief tied rigidly round his

neck. One would say that old as he is he has sacrificed in no way

to comfort. It is with difficulty that he gets into his saddle, his

servant holding his rein and stirrup and giving him perhaps some

other slight assistance; but when he is there, there he will remain

all day, and when his old blood warms he will gallop along the road

with as much hot fervour as his grandson. An old friend he of Sir

Peregrine's. "And why is not your grandfather here to-day?" he said

on this occasion to young Orme. "Tell him from me that if he fails

us in this way, I shall think he is getting old." Lord Alston was in

truth five years older than Sir Peregrine, but Sir Peregrine at this

time was thinking of other things.

[Illustration: Monkton Grange.]

And then a very tidy little modern carriage bustled up the road,

a brougham made for a pair of horses which was well known to all

hunting men in these parts. It was very unpretending in its colour

and harness; but no vehicle more appropriate to its purpose ever

carried two thorough-going sportsmen day after day about the country.

In this as it pulled up under the head tree of the avenue were seated

the two Miss Tristrams. The two Miss Tristrams were well known to the

Hamworth Hunt--I will not merely say as fearless riders,--of most

girls who hunt as much can be said as that; but they were judicious

horsewomen; they knew when to ride hard, and when hard riding, as

regarded any necessary for the hunt, would be absolutely thrown

away. They might be seen for half the day moving about the roads as

leisurely, or standing as quietly at the covert's side as might the

seniors of the fields. But when the time for riding did come, when

the hounds were really running--when other young ladies had begun

to go home--then the Miss Tristrams were always there;--there or

thereabouts, as their admirers would warmly boast.

Nor did they commence their day's work as did other girls who came

out on hunting mornings. With most such it is clear to see that the

object is pretty much the same here as in the ballroom. "Spectatum

veniunt; veniunt spectentur ut ipsÃ¦," as it is proper, natural, and

desirable that they should do. By that word "spectatum" I would wish

to signify something more than the mere use of the eyes. Perhaps an

occasional word dropped here and there into the ears of a cavalier

may be included in it; and the "spectentur" also may include a word

so received. But the Miss Tristrams came for hunting. Perhaps there

might be a slight shade of affectation in the manner by which they

would appear to come for that and that only. They would talk of

nothing else, at any rate during the earlier portion of the day, when

many listeners were by. They were also well instructed as to the

country to be drawn, and usually had a word of import to say to the

huntsman. They were good-looking, fair-haired girls, short in size,

with bright gray eyes, and a short decisive mode of speaking. It must

not be imagined that they were altogether indifferent to such matters

as are dear to the hearts of other girls. They were not careless as

to admiration, and if report spoke truth of them were willing enough

to establish themselves in the world; but all their doings of that

kind had a reference to their favourite amusement, and they would as

soon have thought of flirting with men who did not hunt as some other

girls would with men who did not dance.

I do not know that this kind of life had been altogether successful

with them, or that their father had been right to permit it. He

himself had formerly been a hunting man, but he had become fat and

lazy, and the thing had dropped away from him. Occasionally he did

come out with them, but when he did not do so some other senior of

the field would have them nominally under charge; but practically

they were as independent when going across the country as the young

men who accompanied them. I have expressed a doubt whether this life

was successful with them, and indeed such doubt was expressed by many

of their neighbours. It had been said of each of them for the last

three years that she was engaged, now to this man, and then to that

other; but neither this man nor that other had yet made good the

assertion, and now people were beginning to say that no man was

engaged to either of them. Hunting young ladies are very popular

in the hunting-field; I know no place in which girls receive more

worship and attention; but I am not sure but they may carry their

enthusiasm too far for their own interests, let their horsemanship be

as perfect as it may be.

The two girls on this occasion sat in their carriage till the groom

brought up their horses, and then it was wonderful to see with what

ease they placed themselves in their saddles. On such occasions they

admitted no aid from the gentlemen around them, but each stepping

for an instant on a servant's hand, settled herself in a moment on

horseback. Nothing could be more perfect than the whole thing, but

the wonder was that Mr. Tristram should have allowed it.

The party from Noningsby consisted of six or seven on horseback,

besides those in the carriage. Among the former there were the two

young ladies, Miss Furnival and Miss Staveley, and our friends Felix

Graham, Augustus Staveley, and Peregrine Orme. Felix Graham was not

by custom a hunting man, as he possessed neither time nor money for

such a pursuit; but to-day he was mounted on his friend Staveley's

second horse, having expressed his determination to ride him as long

as they two, the man and the horse, could remain together.

"I give you fair warning," Felix had said, "if I do not spare my own

neck, you cannot expect me to spare your horse's legs."

"You may do your worst," Staveley had answered. "If you give him his

head, and let him have his own way, he won't come to grief, whatever

you may do."

On their road to Monkton Grange, which was but three miles from

Noningsby, Peregrine Orme had ridden by the side of Miss Staveley,

thinking more of her than of the affairs of the hunt, prominent as

they were generally in his thoughts. How should he do it, and when,

and in what way should he commence the deed? He had an idea that it

might be better for him if he could engender some closer intimacy

between himself and Madeline before he absolutely asked the fatal

question; but the closer intimacy did not seem to produce itself

readily. He had, in truth, known Madeline Staveley for many years,

almost since they were children together; but lately, during these

Christmas holidays especially, there had not been between them that

close conversational alliance which so often facilitates such an

overture as that which Peregrine was now desirous of making. And,

worse again, he had seen that there was such close conversational

alliance between Madeline and Felix Graham. He did not on that

account dislike the young barrister, or call him, even within his own

breast, a snob or an ass. He knew well that he was neither the one

nor the other; but he knew as well that he could be no fit match

for Miss Staveley, and, to tell the truth, he did not suspect that

either Graham or Miss Staveley would think of such a thing. It was

not jealousy that tormented him, so much as a diffidence in his

own resources. He made small attempts which did not succeed, and

therefore he determined that he would at once make a grand attempt.

He would create himself an opportunity before he left Noningsby, and

would do it even to-day on horseback, if he could find sufficient

opportunity. In taking a determined step like that, he knew that he

would not lack the courage.

"Do you mean to ride to-day," he said to Madeline, as they were

approaching the bottom of the Grange avenue. For the last half-mile

he had been thinking what he would say to her, and thinking in

vain; and now, at the last moment, he could summon no words to his

assistance more potent for his purpose than these.

"If you mean by riding, Mr. Orme, going across the fields with you

and the Miss Tristrams, certainly not. I should come to grief, as you

call it, at the first ditch."

"And that is just what I shall do," said Felix Graham, who was at her

other side.

"Then, if you take my advice, you'll remain with us in the wood, and

act as squire of dames. What on earth would Marian do if aught but

good was to befall you?"

"Dear Marian! She gave me a special commission to bring her the fox's

tail. Foxes' tails are just like ladies."

"Thank you, Mr. Graham. I've heard you make some pretty compliments,

and that is about the prettiest."

"A faint heart will never win either the one or the other, Miss

Staveley."

"Oh, ah, yes. That will do very well. Under these circumstances I

will accept the comparison."

All of which very innocent conversation was overheard by Peregrine

Orme, riding on the other side of Miss Staveley's horse. And why not?

Neither Graham nor Miss Staveley had any objection. But how was it

that he could not join in and take his share in it? He had made one

little attempt at conversation, and that having failed he remained

perfectly silent till they reached the large circle at the head of

the avenue. "It's no use, this sort of thing," he said to himself. "I

must do it at a blow, if I do it at all;" and then he rode away to

the master of the hounds.

As our party arrived at the open space the Miss Tristrams were

stepping out of their carriage, and they came up to shake hands with

Miss Staveley.

"I am so glad to see you," said the eldest; "it is so nice to have

some ladies out besides ourselves."

"Do keep up with us," said the second. "It's a very open country

about here, and anybody can ride it." And then Miss Furnival was

introduced to them. "Does your horse jump, Miss Furnival?"

"I really do not know," said Sophia; "but I sincerely trust that if

he does, he will refrain to-day."

"Don't say so," said the eldest sportswoman. "If you'll only begin

it will come as easy to you as going along the road;" and then, not

being able to spare more of these idle moments, they both went off to

their horses, walking as though their habits were no impediments to

them, and in half a minute they were seated.

"What is Harriet on to-day?" asked Staveley of a constant member of

the hunt. Now Harriet was the eldest Miss Tristram.

"A little brown mare she got last week. That was a terrible brush we

had on Friday. You weren't out, I think. We killed in the open, just

at the edge of Rotherham Common. Harriet was one of the few that was

up, and I don't think the chestnut horse will be the better of it

this season."

"That was the horse she got from Griggs?"

"Yes; she gave a hundred and fifty for him; and I'm told he was as

nearly done on Friday as any animal you ever put your eyes on. They

say Harriet cried when she got home." Now the gentleman who was

talking about Harriet on this occasion was one with whom she would no

more have sat down to table than with her own groom.

But though Harriet may have cried when she got home on that fatal

Friday evening, she was full of the triumph of the hunt on this

morning. It is not often that the hounds run into a fox and

absolutely surround and kill him on the open ground, and when this

is done after a severe run, there are seldom many there to see it.

If a man can fairly take a fox's brush on such an occasion as that,

let him do it; otherwise let him leave it to the huntsman. On the

occasion in question it seems that Harriet Tristram might have done

so, and some one coming second to her had been gallant enough to do

it for her.

"Oh, my lord, you should have been out on Friday," she said to Lord

Alston. "We had the prettiest thing I ever saw."

"A great deal too pretty for me, my dear."

"Oh, you who know the roads so well would certainly have been up. I

suppose it was thirteen miles from Cobbleton's Bushes to Rotherham

Common."

"Not much less, indeed," said his lordship, unwilling to diminish the

lady's triumph. Had a gentleman made the boast his lordship would

have demonstrated that it was hardly more than eleven.

"I timed it accurately from the moment he went away," said the lady,

"and it was exactly fifty-seven minutes. The first part of it was

awfully fast. Then we had a little check at Moseley Bottom. But for

that, nobody could have lived through it. I never shall forget how

deep it was coming up from there to Cringleton. I saw two men get off

to ease their horses up the deep bit of plough; and I would have done

so too, only my horse would not have stood for me to get up."

"I hope he was none the worse for it," said the sporting character

who had been telling Staveley just now how she had cried when she got

home that night.

"To tell the truth, I fear it has done him no good. He would not

feed, you know, that night at all."

"And broke out into cold sweats," said the gentleman.

"Exactly," said the lady, not quite liking it, but still enduring

with patience.

"Rather groggy on his pins the next morning?" suggested her friend.

"Very groggy," said Harriet, regarding the word as one belonging to

fair sporting phraseology.

"And inclined to go very much on the points of his toes. I know all

about it, Miss Tristam, as well as though I'd seen him."

"There's nothing but rest for it, I suppose."

"Rest and regular exercise--that's the chief thing; and I should give

him a mash as often as three times a week. He'll be all right again

in three or four weeks,--that is if he's sound, you know."

"Oh, as sound as a bell," said Miss Tristram.

"He'll never be the same horse on a road though," said the sporting

gentlemen, shaking his head and whispering to Staveley.

And now the time had come at which they were to move. They always met

at eleven; and at ten minutes past, to the moment, Jacob the huntsman

would summons the old hounds from off their haunches. "I believe we

may be moving, Jacob," said Mr. Williams, the master.

"The time be up," said Jacob, looking at a ponderous timekeeper that

might with truth be called a hunting-watch; and then they all moved

slowly away back from the Grange, down a farm-road which led to

Monkton Wood, distant from the old house perhaps a quarter of a mile.

"May we go as far as the wood?" said Miss Furnival to Augustus.

"Without being made to ride over hedges, I mean."

"Oh, dear, yes; and ride about the wood half the day. It will be an

hour and a half before a fox will break--even if he ever breaks."

"Dear me! how tired you will be of us. Now do say something pretty,

Mr. Staveley."

"It's not my \_mÃ©tier\_. We shall be tired, not of you, but of the

thing. Galloping up and down the same cuts in the wood for an hour

and a half is not exciting; nor does it improve the matter much if we

stand still, as one should do by rights."

"That would be very slow."

"You need not be afraid. They never do here. Everybody will be

rushing about as though the very world depended on their galloping."

"I'm so glad; that's just what I like."

"Everybody except Lord Alston, Miss Tristram, and, the other old

stagers. They will husband their horses, and come out as fresh at

two o'clock as though they were only just out. There is nothing so

valuable as experience in hunting."

"Do you think it nice seeing a young lady with so much hunting

knowledge?"

"Now you want me to talk slander, but I won't do it. I admire the

Miss Tristrams exceedingly, and especially Julia."

"And which is Julia?"

"The youngest; that one riding by herself."

"And why don't you go and express your admiration?"

"Ah, me! why don't we all express the admiration that we feel, and

pour sweet praises into the ears of the lady that excites it? Because

we are cowards, Miss Furnival, and are afraid even of such a weak

thing as a woman."

"Dear me! I should hardly have thought that you would suffer from

such terror as that."

"Because you don't quite know me, Miss Furnival."

"And Miss Julia Tristram is the lady that has excited it?"

"If it be not she, it is some other fair votary of Diana at present

riding into Monkton Wood."

"Ah, now you are giving me a riddle to guess, and I never guess

riddles. I won't even try at it. But they all seem to be stopping."

"Yes, they are putting the hounds into covert. Now if you want to

show yourself a good sportsman, look at your watch. You see that

Julia Tristram has got hers in her hand."

"What's that for?"

"To time the hounds; to see how long they'll be before they find.

It's very pretty work in a small gorse, but in a great wood like this

I don't care much for being so accurate. But for heaven's sake don't

tell Julia Tristram; I should not have a chance if she thought I was

so slack."

And now the hounds were scattering themselves in the wood, and the

party rode up the centre roadway towards a great circular opening in

the middle of it. Here it was the recognised practice of the horsemen

to stand, and those who properly did their duty would stand there;

but very many lingered at the gate, knowing that there was but one

other exit from the wood, without overcoming the difficulty of a very

intricate and dangerous fence.

"There be a gap, bain't there?" said one farmer to another, as they

were entering.

"Yes, there be a gap, and young Grubbles broke his 'orse's back a

getting over of it last year," said the second farmer.

"Did he though?" said the first; and so they both remained at the

gate.

And others, a numerous body, including most of the ladies, galloped

up and down the cross ways, because the master of the hounds and the

huntsman did so. "D---- those fellows riding up and down after me

wherever I go," said the master. "I believe they think I'm to be

hunted." This seemed to be said more especially to Miss Tristram, who

was always in the master's confidence; and I fear that the fellows

alluded to included Miss Furnival and Miss Staveley.

And then there came the sharp, eager sound of a hound's voice; a

single, sharp, happy opening bark, and Harriet Tristram was the first

to declare that the game was found. "Just five minutes and twenty

seconds, my lord," said Julia Tristram to Lord Alston. "That's not

bad in a large wood like this."

"Uncommonly good," said his lordship. "And when are we to get out of

it?"

"They'll be here for the next hour, I'm afraid," said the lady, not

moving her horse from the place where she stood, though many of the

more impetuous of the men were already rushing away to the gates.

"I have seen a fox go away from here without resting a minute; but

that was later in the season, at the end of February. Foxes are away

from home then." All which observations showed a wonderfully acute

sporting observation on the part of Miss Tristram.

And then the music of the dogs became fast and frequent, as they

drove the brute across and along from one part of the large wood to

another. Sure there is no sound like it for filling a man's heart

with an eager desire to be at work. What may be the trumpet in battle

I do not know, but I can imagine that it has the same effect. And

now a few of them were standing on that wide circular piece of grass,

when a sound the most exciting of them all reached their ears. "He's

away!" shouted a whip from a corner of the wood. The good-natured

beast, though as yet it was hardly past Christmas-time, had consented

to bless at once so many anxious sportsmen, and had left the back of

the covert with the full pack at his heels.

"There is no gate that way, Miss Tristram," said a gentleman.

"There's a double ditch and bank that will do as well," said she, and

away she went directly after the hounds, regardless altogether of the

gates. Peregrine Orme and Felix Graham, who were with her, followed

close upon her track.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BREAKING COVERT.

"There's a double ditch and bank that will do as well," Miss Tristram

had said when she was informed that there was no gate out of the

wood at the side on which the fox had broken. The gentleman who had

tendered the information might as well have held his tongue, for Miss

Tristram knew the wood intimately, was acquainted with the locality

of all its gates, and was acquainted also with the points at which it

might be left, without the assistance of any gate at all, by those

who were well mounted and could ride their horses. Therefore she had

thus replied, "There's a double ditch and bank that will do as well."

And for the double ditch and bank at the end of one of the grassy

roadways Miss Tristram at once prepared herself.

"That's the gap where Grubbles broke his horse's back," said a man in

a red coat to Peregrine Orme, and so saying he made up his wavering

mind and galloped away as fast as his nag could carry him. But

Peregrine Orme would not avoid a fence at which a lady was not afraid

to ride; and Felix Graham, knowing little but fearing nothing,

followed Peregrine Orme.

At the end of the roadway, in the middle of the track, there was the

gap. For a footman it was doubtless the easiest way over the fence,

for the ditch on that side was half filled up, and there was space

enough left of the half-broken bank for a man's scrambling feet; but

Miss Tristram at once knew that it was a bad place for a horse. The

second or further ditch was the really difficult obstacle, and there

was no footing in the gap from which a horse could take his leap. To

the right of this the fence was large and required a good horse, but

Miss Tristram knew her animal and was accustomed to large fences. The

trained beast went well across on to the bank, poised himself there

for a moment, and taking a second spring carried his mistress across

into the further field apparently with ease. In that field the dogs

were now running, altogether, so that a sheet might have covered

them; and Miss Tristram, exulting within her heart and holding in her

horse, knew that she had got away uncommonly well.

Peregrine Orme followed,--a little to the right of the lady's

passage, so that he might have room for himself, and do no mischief

in the event of Miss Tristram or her horse making any mistake at

the leap. He also got well over. But, alas! in spite of such early

success he was destined to see nothing of the hunt that day! Felix

Graham, thinking that he would obey instructions by letting his horse

do as he pleased, permitted the beast to come close upon Orme's track

and to make his jump before Orme's horse had taken his second spring.

"Have a care," said Peregrine, feeling that the two were together on

the bank, "or you'll shove me into the ditch." He however got well

over.

Felix, attempting to "have a care" just when his doing so could be

of no avail, gave his horse a pull with the curb as he was preparing

for his second spring. The outside ditch was broad and deep and well

banked up, and required that an animal should have all his power. It

was at such a moment as this that he should have been left to do his

work without injudicious impediment from his rider. But poor Graham

was thinking only of Orme's caution, and attempted to stop the beast

when any positive and absolute stop was out of the question. The

horse made his jump, and, crippled as he was, jumped short. He came

with his knees against the further bank, threw his rider, and then in

his struggle to right himself rolled over him.

Felix felt at once that he was much hurt--that he had indeed come to

grief; but still he was not stunned nor did he lose his presence of

mind. The horse succeeded in gaining his feet, and then Felix also

jumped up and even walked a step or two towards the head of the

animal with the object of taking the reins. But he found that he

could not raise his arm, and he found also that he could hardly

breathe.

Both Peregrine and Miss Tristram looked back. "There's nothing

wrong I hope," said the lady; and then she rode on. And let it be

understood that in hunting those who are in advance generally do

ride on. The lame and the halt and the wounded, if they cannot pick

themselves up, have to be picked up by those who come after them. But

Peregrine saw that there was no one else coming that way. The memory

of young Grubbles' fate had placed an interdict on that pass out

of the wood, which nothing short of the pluck and science of Miss

Tristram was able to disregard. Two cavaliers she had carried with

her. One she had led on to instant slaughter, and the other remained

to look after his fallen brother-in-arms. Miss Tristram in the mean

time was in the next field and had settled well down to her work.

"Are you hurt, old fellow?" said Peregrine, turning back his horse,

but still not dismounting.

"Not much, I think," said Graham, smiling. "There's something wrong

about my arm,--but don't you wait." And then he found that he spoke

with difficulty.

"Can you mount again?"

"I don't think I'll mind that. Perhaps I'd better sit down." Then

Peregrine Orme knew that Graham was hurt, and jumping off his own

horse he gave up all hope of the hunt.

"Here, you fellow, come and hold these horses." So invoked, a boy who

in following the sport had got as far as this ditch did as he was

bid, and scrambled over. "Sit down, Graham: there; I'm afraid you

are hurt. Did he roll on you?" But Felix merely looked up into his

face,--still smiling. He was now very pale, and for the moment could

not speak. Peregrine came close to him, and gently attempted to raise

the wounded limb; whereupon Graham shuddered, and shook his head.

"I fear it is broken," said Peregrine. Graham nodded his head, and

raised his left hand to his breast; and Peregrine then knew that

something else was amiss also.

I don't know any feeling more disagreeable than that produced by

being left alone in a field, when out hunting, with a man who has

been very much hurt and who is incapable of riding or walking.

The hurt man himself has the privilege of his infirmities and may

remain quiescent; but you, as his only attendant, must do something.

You must for the moment do all, and if you do wrong the whole

responsibility lies on your shoulders. If you leave a wounded man on

the damp ground, in the middle of winter, while you run away, five

miles perhaps, to the next doctor, he may not improbably--as you

then think--be dead before you come back. You don't know the way;

you are heavy yourself, and your boots are very heavy. You must stay

therefore; but as you are no doctor you don't in the least know what

is the amount of the injury. In your great trouble you begin to roar

for assistance; but the woods re-echo your words, and the distant

sound of the huntsman's horn, as he summons his hounds at a check,

only mocks your agony.

But Peregrine had a boy with him. "Get upon that horse," he said at

last; "ride round to Farmer Griggs, and tell them to send somebody

here with a spring cart. He has got a spring cart I know;--and a

mattress in it."

"But I hain't no gude at roiding like," said the boy, looking with

dismay at Orme's big horse.

"Then run; that will be better, for you can go through the wood. You

know where Farmer Griggs lives. The first farm the other side of the

Grange."

"Ay, ay, I knows where Farmer Griggs lives well enough."

"Run, then; and if the cart is here in half an hour I'll give you a

sovereign."

Inspirited by the hopes of such wealth, golden wealth, wealth for a

lifetime, the boy was quickly back over the fence, and Peregrine was

left alone with Felix Graham. He was now sitting down, with his feet

hanging into the ditch, and Peregrine was kneeling behind him. "I am

sorry I can do nothing more," said he; "but I fear we must remain

here till the cart comes."

"I am--so--vexed--about your hunt," said Felix, gasping as he spoke.

He had in fact broken his right arm which had been twisted under him

as the horse rolled, and two of his ribs had been staved in by the

pommel of his saddle. Many men have been worse hurt and have hunted

again before the end of the season, but the fracture of three bones

does make a man uncomfortable for the time. "Now the cart--is--sent

for, couldn't you--go on?" But it was not likely that Peregrine Orme

would do that. "Never mind me," he said. "When a fellow is hurt he

has always to do as he's told. You'd better have a drop of sherry.

Look here: I've got a flask at my saddle. There; you can support

yourself with that arm a moment. Did you ever see horses stand so

quiet. I've got hold of yours, and now I'll fasten them together. I

say, Whitefoot, you don't kick, do you?" And then he contrived to

picket the horses to two branches, and having got out his case of

sherry, poured a small modicum into the silver mug which was attached

to the apparatus and again supported Graham while he drank. "You'll

be as right as a trivet by-and-by; only you'll have to make Noningsby

your headquarters for the next six weeks." And then the same idea

passed through the mind of each of them;--how little a man need be

pitied for such a misfortune if Madeline Staveley would consent to be

his nurse.

[Illustration: Felix Graham in trouble.]

No man could have less surgical knowledge than Peregrine Orme, but

nevertheless he was such a man as one would like to have with him if

one came to grief in such a way. He was cheery and up-hearted, but at

the same time gentle and even thoughtful. His voice was pleasant and

his touch could be soft. For many years afterwards Felix remembered

how that sherry had been held to his lips, and how the young heir of

The Cleeve had knelt behind him in his red coat, supporting him as he

became weary with waiting, and saying pleasant words to him through

the whole. Felix Graham was a man who would remember such things.

In running through the wood the boy first encountered three horsemen.

They were the judge, with his daughter Madeline and Miss Furnival.

"There be a mon there who be a'most dead," said the boy, hardly able

to speak from want of breath. "I be agoing for Farmer Griggs' cart."

And then they stopped him a moment to ask for some description, but

the boy could tell them nothing to indicate that the wounded man

was one of their friends. It might however be Augustus, and so the

three rode on quickly towards the fence, knowing nothing of the

circumstances of the ditches which would make it out of their power

to get to the fallen sportsman.

But Peregrine heard the sound of the horses and the voices of the

horsemen. "By Jove, there's a lot of them coming down here," said he.

"It's the judge and two of the girls. Oh, Miss Staveley, I'm so glad

you've come. Graham has had a bad fall and hurt himself. You haven't

a shawl, have you? the ground is so wet under him."

"It doesn't signify at all," said Felix, looking round and seeing the

faces of his friends on the other side of the bank.

Madeline Staveley gave a slight shriek which her father did not

notice, but which Miss Furnival heard very plainly. "Oh papa," she

said, "cannot you get over to him?" And then she began to bethink

herself whether it were possible that she should give up something of

her dress to protect the man who was hurt from the damp muddy ground

on which he lay.

"Can you hold my horse, dear," said the judge, slowly dismounting;

for the judge, though he rode every day on sanitary considerations,

had not a sportsman's celerity in leaving and recovering his saddle.

But he did get down, and burdened as he was with a great-coat, he

did succeed in crossing that accursed fence. Accursed it was from

henceforward in the annals of the H. H., and none would ride it but

dare-devils who professed themselves willing to go at anything.

Miss Tristram, however, always declared that there was nothing in

it--though she avoided it herself, whispering to her friends that she

had led others to grief there, and might possibly do so again if she

persevered.

"Could you hold the horse?" said Madeline to Miss Furnival; "and I

will go for a shawl to the carriage." Miss Furnival declared that to

the best of her belief she could not, but nevertheless the animal was

left with her, and Madeline turned round and galloped back towards

the carriage. She made her horse do his best though her eyes were

nearly blinded with tears, and went straight on for the carriage,

though she would have given much for a moment to hide those tears

before she reached it.

"Oh, mamma! give me a thick shawl; Mr. Graham has hurt himself in the

field, and is lying on the grass." And then in some incoherent and

quick manner she had to explain what she knew of the accident before

she could get a carriage-cloak out of the carriage. This, however,

she did succeed in doing, and in some manner, very unintelligible

to herself afterwards, she did gallop back with her burden. She

passed the cloak over to Peregrine, who clambered up the bank to get

it, while the judge remained on the ground, supporting the young

barrister. Felix Graham, though he was weak, was not stunned or

senseless, and he knew well who it was that had procured for him that

comfort.

And then the carriage followed Madeline, and there was quite a

concourse of servants and horses and ladies on the inside of the

fence. But the wounded man was still unfortunately on the other side.

No cart from Farmer Griggs made its appearance, though it was now

more than half an hour since the boy had gone. Carts, when they are

wanted in such sudden haste, do not make their appearance. It was two

miles through the wood to Mr. Griggs's farm-yard, and more than three

miles back by any route which the cart could take. And then it might

be more than probable that in Farmer Griggs's establishment there was

not always a horse ready in harness, or a groom at hand prepared to

yoke him. Peregrine had become very impatient, and had more than once

invoked a silent anathema on the farmer's head; but nevertheless

there was no appearance of the cart.

"We must get him across the ditches into the carriage," said the

judge.

"If Lady Staveley will let us do that," said Peregrine.

"The difficulty is not with Lady Staveley but with these nasty

ditches," said the judge, for he had been up to his knees in one of

them, and the water had penetrated his boots. But the task was at

last done. Mrs. Arbuthnot stood up on the back seat of the carriage

so that she might hold the horses, and the coachman and footman got

across into the field. "It would be better to let me lie here all

day," said Felix, as three of them struggled back with their burden,

the judge bringing up the rear with two hunting-whips and Peregrine's

cap. "How on earth any one would think of riding over such a place as

that!" said the judge. But then, when he had been a young man it had

not been the custom for barristers to go out hunting.

Madeline, as she saw the wounded man carefully laid on the back seat

of the carriage, almost wished that she could have her mother's place

that she might support him. Would they be careful enough with him?

Would they remember how terrible must be the pain of that motion to

one so hurt as he was? And then she looked into his face as he was

made to lean back, and she saw that he still smiled. Felix Graham was

by no means a handsome man; I should hardly sin against the truth if

I were to say that he was ugly. But Madeline, as she looked at him

now lying there utterly without colour but always with that smile on

his countenance, thought that no face to her liking had ever been

more gracious. She still rode close to him as they went down the

grassy road, saying never a word. And Miss Furnival rode there also,

somewhat in the rear, condoling with the judge as to his wet feet.

"Miss Furnival," he said, "when a judge forgets himself and goes out

hunting he has no right to expect anything better. What would your

father have said had he seen me clambering up the bank with young

Orme's hunting-cap between my teeth? I positively did."

"He would have rushed to assist you," said Miss Furnival, with a

little burst of enthusiasm which was hardly needed on the occasion.

And then Peregrine came after them leading Graham's horse. He had

been compelled to return to the field and ride both the horses back

into the wood; one after the other, while the footman held them. That

riding back over fences in cold blood is the work that really tries

a man's nerve. And a man has to do it too when no one is looking on.

How he does crane and falter and look about for an easy place at such

a moment as that! But when the blood is cold, no places are easy.

The procession got back to Noningsby without adventure, and Graham

as a matter of course was taken up to his bed. One of the servants

had been despatched to Alston for a surgeon, and in an hour or

two the extent of the misfortune was known. The right arm was

broken--"very favourably," as the doctor observed. But two ribs were

broken--"rather unfavourably." There was some talk of hÃ¦morrhage and

inward wounds, and Sir Jacob from Saville Row was suggested by Lady

Staveley. But the judge, knowing the extent of Graham's means, made

some further preliminary inquiries, and it was considered that Sir

Jacob would not be needed--at any rate not as yet.

"Why don't they send for him?" said Madeline to her mother with

rather more than her wonted energy.

"Your papa does not think it necessary, my dear. It would be very

expensive, you know."

"But, mamma, would you let a man die because it would cost a few

pounds to cure him?"

"My dear, we all hope that Mr. Graham won't die--at any rate not at

present. If there be any danger you may be sure that your papa will

send for the best advice."

But Madeline was by no means satisfied. She could not understand

economy in a matter of life and death. If Sir Jacob's coming would

have cost fifty pounds, or a hundred, what would that have signified,

weighed in such a balance? Such a sum would be nothing to her father.

Had Augustus fallen and broken his arm all the Sir Jacobs in London

would not have been considered too costly could their joint coming

have mitigated any danger. She did not however dare to speak to her

mother again, so she said a word or two to Peregrine Orme, who was

constant in his attendance on Felix. Peregrine had been very kind,

and she had seen it, and her heart therefore warmed towards him.

"Don't you think he ought to have more advice, Mr. Orme?"

"Well, no; I don't know. He's very jolly, you know; only he can't

talk. One of the bones ran into him, but I believe he's all right."

"Oh, but that is so frightful!" and the tears were again in her eyes.

"If I were him I should think one doctor enough. But it's easy enough

having a fellow down from London, you know, if you like it."

"If he should get worse, Mr. Orme--." And then Peregrine made her a

sort of promise, but in doing so an idea shot through his poor heart

of what the truth might really be. He went back and looked at Felix

who was sleeping. "If it is so I must bear it," he said to himself;

"but I'll fight it on;" and a quick thought ran through his brain of

his own deficiencies. He knew that he was not clever and bright in

talk like Felix Graham. He could not say the right thing at the right

moment without forethought. How he wished that he could! But still he

would fight it on, as he would have done any losing match,--to the

last. And then he sat down by Felix's head, and resolved that he

would be loyal to his new friend all the same--loyal in all things

needful. But still he would fight it on.

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER FALL.

Felix Graham had plenty of nurses, but Madeline was not one of them.

Augustus Staveley came home while the Alston doctor was still busy

at the broken bones, and of course he would not leave his friend. He

was one of those who had succeeded in the hunt, and consequently had

heard nothing of the accident till the end of it. Miss Tristram had

been the first to tell him that Mr. Graham had fallen in leaving the

covert, but having seen him rise to his legs she had not thought he

was seriously hurt.

"I do not know much about your friend," she had said; "but I think I

may comfort you by an assurance that your horse is none the worse. I

could see as much as that."

"Poor Felix!" said, Staveley. "He has lost a magnificent run. I

suppose we are nine or ten miles from Monkton Grange now?"

"Eleven if we are a yard," said the lady. "It was an ugly country,

but the pace was nothing wonderful." And then others dropped in, and

at last came tidings about Graham. At first there was a whisper that

he was dead. He had ridden over Orme, it was said; had nearly killed

him, and had quite killed himself. Then the report became less fatal.

Both horses were dead, but Graham was still living though with most

of his bones broken.

"Don't believe it," said Miss Tristram. "In what condition Mr. Graham

may be I won't say; but that your horse was safe and sound after he

got over the fence, of that you may take my word." And thus, in a

state of uncertainty, obtaining fresh rumours from every person he

passed, Staveley hurried home. "Right arm and two ribs," Peregrine

said to him, as he met him in the hall. "Is that all?" said Augustus.

It was clear therefore that he did not think so much about it as his

sister.

"If you'd let her have her head she'd never have come down like

that," Augustus said, as he sat that evening by his friend's bedside.

"But he pulled off, I fancy, to avoid riding over me," said

Peregrine.

"Then he must have come too quick at his leap," said Augustus. "You

should have steadied him as he came to it." From all which Graham

perceived that a man cannot learn how to ride any particular horse by

two or three words of precept.

"If you talk any more about the horse, or the hunt, or the accident,

neither of you shall stay in the room," said Lady Staveley, who came

in at that moment. But they both did stay in the room, and said a

great deal more about the hunt, and the horse, and the accident

before they left it; and even became so far reconciled to the

circumstance that they had a hot glass of brandy and water each,

sitting by Graham's fire.

"But, Augustus, do tell me how he is," Madeline said to her brother,

as she caught him going to his room. She had become ashamed of asking

any more questions of her mother.

"He's all right; only he'll be as fretful as a porcupine, shut up

there. At least I should be. Are there lots of novels in the house?

Mind you send for a batch to-morrow. Novels are the only chance a man

has when he's laid up like that." Before breakfast on the following

morning Madeline had sent off to the Alston circulating library a

list of all the best new novels of which she could remember the

names.

No definite day had hitherto been fixed for Peregrine's return to

The Cleeve, and under the present circumstances he still remained at

Noningsby assisting to amuse Felix Graham. For two days after the

accident such seemed to be his sole occupation; but in truth he was

looking for an opportunity to say a word or two to Miss Staveley, and

paving his way as best he might for that great speech which he was

fully resolved that he would make before he left the house. Once or

twice he bethought himself whether he would not endeavour to secure

for himself some confidant in the family, and obtain the sanction and

special friendship either of Madeline's mother, or her sister, or her

brother. But what if after that she should reject him? Would it not

be worse for him then that any one should have known of his defeat?

He could, as he thought, endure to suffer alone; but on such a matter

as that pity would be unendurable. So as he sat there by Graham's

fireside, pretending to read one of poor Madeline's novels for the

sake of companionship, he determined that he would tell no one of his

intention;--no one till he could make the opportunity for telling

her.

And when he did meet her, and find, now and again, some moment for

saying a word alone to her, she was very gracious to him. He had been

so kind and gentle with Felix, there was so much in him that was

sweet and good and honest, so much that such an event as this brought

forth and made manifest, that Madeline, and indeed the whole family,

could not but be gracious to him. Augustus would declare that he was

the greatest brick he had ever known, repeating all Graham's words as

to the patience with which the embryo baronet had knelt behind him on

the cold muddy ground, supporting him for an hour, till the carriage

had come up. Under such circumstances how could Madeline refrain from

being gracious to him?

"But it is all from favour to Graham!" Peregrine would say to himself

with bitterness; and yet though he said so he did not quite believe

it. Poor fellow! It was all from favour to Graham. And could he have

thoroughly believed the truth of those words which he repeated to

himself so often, he might have spared himself much pain. He might

have spared himself much pain, and possibly some injury; for if aught

could now tend to mature in Madeline's heart an affection which was

but as yet nascent, it would be the offer of some other lover. But

such reasoning on the matter was much too deep for Peregrine Orme.

"It may be," he said to himself, "that she only pities him because he

is hurt. If so, is not this time better for me than any other? If it

be that she loves him, let me know it, and be out of my pain." It did

not then occur to him that circumstances such as those in question

could not readily be made explicit;--that Madeline might refuse

his love, and yet leave him no wiser than he now was as to her

reasons for so refusing;--perhaps, indeed, leave him less wise, with

increased cause for doubt and hopeless hope, and the green melancholy

of a rejected lover.

Madeline during these two days said no more about the London doctor;

but it was plain to all who watched her that her anxiety as to the

patient was much more keen than that of the other ladies of the

house. "She always thinks everybody is going to die," Lady Staveley

said to Miss Furnival, intending, not with any consummate prudence,

to account to that acute young lady for her daughter's solicitude.

"We had a cook here, three months since, who was very ill, and

Madeline would never be easy till the doctor assured her that the

poor woman's danger was altogether past."

"She is so very warm-hearted," said Miss Furnival in reply. "It is

quite delightful to see her. And she will have such pleasure when she

sees him come down from his room."

Lady Staveley on this immediate occasion said nothing to her

daughter, but Mrs. Arbuthnot considered that a sisterly word might

perhaps be spoken in due season.

"The doctor says he is doing quite well now," Mrs. Arbuthnot said to

her, as they were sitting alone.

"But does he indeed? Did you hear him?" said Madeline, who was

suspicious.

"He did so, indeed. I heard him myself. But he says also that he

ought to remain here, at any rate for the next fortnight,--if mamma

can permit it without inconvenience."

"Of course she can permit it. No one would turn any person out of

their house in such a condition as that!"

"Papa and mamma both will be very happy that he should stay here;--of

course they would not do what you call turning him out. But, Mad,

my darling,"--and then she came up close and put her arm round

her sister's waist. "I think mamma would be more comfortable in

his remaining here if your charity towards him were--what shall I

say?--less demonstrative."

"What do you mean, Isabella?"

"Dearest, dearest; you must not be angry with me. Nobody has hinted

to me a word on the subject, nor do I mean to hint anything that can

possibly be hurtful to you."

"But what do you mean?"

"Don't you know, darling? He is a young man--and--and--people see

with such unkind eyes, and hear with such scandal-loving ears. There

is that Miss Furnival--"

"If Miss Furnival can think such things, I for one do not care what

she thinks."

"No, nor do I;--not as regards any important result. But may it not

be well to be careful? You know what I mean, dearest?"

"Yes--I know. At least I suppose so. And it makes me know also how

very cold and shallow and heartless people are! I won't ask any more

questions, Isabella; but I can't know that a fellow-creature is

suffering in the house,--and a person like him too, so clever, whom

we all regard as a friend,--the most intimate friend in the world

that Augustus has,--and the best too, as I heard papa himself

say--without caring whether he is going to live or die."

"There is no danger now, you know."

"Very well; I am glad to hear it. Though I know very well that there

must be danger after such a terrible accident as that."

"The doctor says there is none."

"At any rate I will not--" And then instead of finishing her sentence

she turned away her head and put up her handkerchief to wipe away a

tear.

"You are not angry with me, dear?" said Mrs. Arbuthnot.

"Oh, no," said Madeline; and then they parted.

For some days after that Madeline asked no question whatever about

Felix Graham, but it may be doubted whether this did not make the

matter worse. Even Sophia Furnival would ask how he was at any rate

twice a day, and Lady Staveley continued to pay him regular visits

at stated intervals. As he got better she would sit with him, and

brought back reports as to his sayings. But Madeline never discussed

any of these; and refrained alike from the conversation, whether

his broken bones or his unbroken wit were to be the subject of it.

And then Mrs. Arbuthnot, knowing that she would still be anxious,

gave her private bulletins as to the state of the sick man's

progress;--all which gave an air of secrecy to the matter, and caused

even Madeline to ask herself why this should be so.

On the whole I think that Mrs. Arbuthnot was wrong. Mrs. Arbuthnot

and the whole Staveley family would have regarded a mutual attachment

between Mr. Graham and Madeline as a great family misfortune. The

judge was a considerate father to his children, holding that a

father's control should never be brought to bear unnecessarily. In

looking forward to the future prospects of his sons and daughters

it was his theory that they should be free to choose their life's

companions for themselves. But nevertheless it could not be agreeable

to him that his daughter should fall in love with a man who had

nothing, and whose future success at his own profession seemed to be

so very doubtful. On the whole I think that Mrs. Arbuthnot was wrong,

and that the feeling that did exist in Madeline's bosom might more

possibly have died away, had no word been said about it--even by a

sister.

And then another event happened which forced her to look into her

own heart. Peregrine Orme did make his proposal. He waited patiently

during those two or three days in which the doctor's visits were

frequent, feeling that he could not talk about himself while any

sense of danger pervaded the house. But then at last a morning came

on which the surgeon declared that he need not call again till

the morrow; and Felix himself, when the medical back was turned,

suggested that it might as well be to-morrow week. He began also to

scold his friends, and look bright about the eyes, and drink his

glass of sherry in a pleasant dinner-table fashion, not as if he were

swallowing his physic. And Peregrine, when he saw all this, resolved

that the moment had come for the doing of his deed of danger. The

time would soon come at which he must leave Noningsby, and he would

not leave Noningsby till he had learned his fate.

Lady Staveley, who with a mother's eye had seen her daughter's

solicitude for Felix Graham's recovery,--had seen it, and

animadverted on it to herself,--had seen also, or at any rate had

suspected, that Peregrine Orme looked on her daughter with favouring

eyes. Now Peregrine Orme would have satisfied Lady Staveley as a

son-in-law. She liked his ways and manners of thought--in spite of

those rumours as to the rat-catching which had reached her ears. She

regarded him as quite clever enough to be a good husband, and no

doubt appreciated the fact that he was to inherit his title and The

Cleeve from an old grandfather instead of a middle-aged father. She

therefore had no objection to leave Peregrine alone with her one

ewe-lamb, and therefore the opportunity which he sought was at last

found.

"I shall be leaving Noningsby to-morrow, Miss Staveley," he said one

day, having secured an interview in the back drawing-room--in that

happy half-hour which occurs in winter before the world betakes

itself to dress. Now I here profess my belief, that out of every

ten set offers made by ten young lovers, nine of such offers are

commenced with an intimation that the lover is going away. There is

a dash of melancholy in such tidings well suited to the occasion. If

there be any spark of love on the other side it will be elicited by

the idea of a separation. And then, also, it is so frequently the

actual fact. This making of an offer is in itself a hard piece of

business,--a job to be postponed from day to day. It is so postponed,

and thus that dash of melancholy, and that idea of separation are

brought in at the important moment with so much appropriate truth.

"I shall be leaving Noningsby to-morrow, Miss Staveley," Peregrine

said.

"Oh dear! we shall be so sorry. But why are you going? What will Mr.

Graham and Augustus do without you? You ought to stay at least till

Mr. Graham can leave his room."

"Poor Graham!--not that I think he is much to be pitied either; but

he won't be about for some weeks to come yet."

"You do not think he is worse; do you?"

"Oh, dear, no; not at all." And Peregrine was unconsciously irritated

against his friend by the regard which her tone evinced. "He is quite

well; only they will not let him be moved. But, Miss Staveley, it was

not of Mr. Graham that I was going to speak."

"No--only I thought he would miss you so much." And then she blushed,

though the blush in the dark of the evening was lost upon him. She

remembered that she was not to speak about Felix Graham's health, and

it almost seemed as though Mr. Orme had rebuked her for doing so in

saying that he had not come there to speak of him.

"Lady Staveley's house has been turned up side down since this

affair, and it is time now that some part of the trouble should

cease."

"Oh! mamma does not mind it at all."

"I know how good she is; but nevertheless, Miss Staveley, I must go

to-morrow." And then he paused a moment before he spoke again. "It

will depend entirely upon you," he said, "whether I may have the

happiness of returning soon to Noningsby."

"On me, Mr. Orme!"

"Yes, on you. I do not know how to speak properly that which I have

to say; but I believe I may as well say it out at once. I have come

here now to tell you that I love you and to ask you to be my wife."

And then he stopped as though there were nothing more for him to say

upon the matter.

It would be hardly extravagant to declare that Madeline's breath was

taken away by the very sudden manner in which young Orme had made his

proposition. It had never entered her head that she had an admirer in

him. Previously to Graham's accident she had thought nothing about

him. Since that event she had thought about him a good deal; but

altogether as of a friend of Graham's. He had been good and kind to

Graham, and therefore she had liked him and had talked to him. He

had never said a word to her that had taught her to regard him as

a possible lover; and now that he was an actual lover, a declared

lover standing before her, waiting for an answer, she was so

astonished that she did not know how to speak. All her ideas too,

as to love,--such ideas as she had ever formed, were confounded by

his abruptness. She would have thought, had she brought herself

absolutely to think upon it, that all speech of love should be very

delicate; that love should grow slowly, and then be whispered softly,

doubtingly, and with infinite care. Even had she loved him, or had

she been in the way towards loving him, such violence as this would

have frightened her and scared her love away. Poor Peregrine! His

intentions had been so good and honest! He was so true and hearty,

and free from all conceit in the matter! It was a pity that he should

have marred his cause by such ill judgment.

But there he stood waiting an answer,--and expecting it to be as

open, definite, and plain as though he had asked her to take a walk

with him. "Madeline," he said, stretching out his hand when he

perceived that she did not speak to him at once. "There is my hand.

If it be possible give me yours."

"Oh, Mr. Orme!"

"I know that I have not said what I had to say very--very gracefully.

But you will not regard that I think. You are too good, and too

true."

She had now seated herself, and he was standing before her. She had

retreated to a sofa in order to avoid the hand which he had offered

her; but he followed her, and even yet did not know that he had no

chance of success. "Mr. Orme," she said at last, speaking hardly

above her breath, "what has made you do this?"

"What has made me do it? What has made me tell you that I love you?"

"You cannot be in earnest!"

"Not in earnest! By heavens, Miss Staveley, no man who has said the

same words was ever more in earnest. Do you doubt me when I tell you

that I love you?"

"Oh, I am so sorry!" And then she hid her face upon the arm of the

sofa and burst into tears.

Peregrine stood there, like a prisoner on his trial, waiting for a

verdict. He did not know how to plead his cause with any further

language; and indeed no further language could have been of any

avail. The judge and jury were clear against him, and he should have

known the sentence without waiting to have it pronounced in set

terms. But in plain words he had made his offer, and in plain words

he required that an answer should be given to him. "Well," he said,

"will you not speak to me? Will you not tell me whether it shall be

so?"

"No,--no,--no," she said.

"You mean that you cannot love me." And as he said this the agony

of his tone struck her ear and made her feel that he was suffering.

Hitherto she had thought only of herself, and had hardly recognised

it as a fact that he could be thoroughly in earnest.

"Mr. Orme, I am very sorry. Do not speak as though you were angry

with me. But--"

"But you cannot love me?" And then he stood again silent, for there

was no reply. "Is it that, Miss Staveley, that you mean to answer? If

you say that with positive assurance, I will trouble you no longer."

Poor Peregrine! He was but an unskilled lover!

"No!" she sobbed forth through her tears; but he had so framed his

question that he hardly knew what No meant.

"Do you mean that you cannot love me, or may I hope that a day will

come--? May I speak to you again--?"

"Oh, no, no! I can answer you now. It grieves me to the heart. I know

you are so good. But, Mr. Orme--"

"Well--"

"It can never, never be."

"And I must take that as answer?"

"I can make no other." He still stood before her,--with gloomy and

almost angry brow, could she have seen him; and then he thought he

would ask her whether there was any other love which had brought

about her scorn for him. It did not occur to him, at the first

moment, that in doing so he would insult and injure her.

"At any rate I am not flattered by a reply which is at once so

decided," he began by saying.

"Oh! Mr. Orme, do not make me more unhappy--"

"But perhaps I am too late. Perhaps--" Then he remembered himself and

paused. "Never mind," he said, speaking to himself rather than to

her. "Good-bye, Miss Staveley. You will at any rate say good-bye to

me. I shall go at once now."

"Go at once! Go away, Mr. Orme?"

"Yes; why should I stay here? Do you think that I could sit down to

table with you all after that? I will ask your brother to explain my

going; I shall find him in his room. Good-bye."

She took his hand mechanically, and then he left her. When she came

down to dinner she looked furtively round to his place and saw that

it was vacant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE CORRIDOR.

"Upon my word I am very sorry," said the judge. "But what made him go

off so suddenly? I hope there's nobody ill at The Cleeve!" And then

the judge took his first spoonful of soup.

"No, no; there is nothing of that sort," said Augustus. "His

grandfather wants him, and Orme thought he might as well start at

once. He was always a sudden harum-scarum fellow like that."

"He's a very pleasant, nice young man," said Lady Staveley; "and

never gives himself any airs. I like him exceedingly."

Poor Madeline did not dare to look either at her mother or her

brother, but she would have given much to know whether either of them

were aware of the cause which had sent Peregrine Orme so suddenly

away from the house. At first she thought that Augustus surely did

know, and she was wretched as she thought that he might probably

speak to her on the subject. But he went on talking about Orme and

his abrupt departure till she became convinced that he knew nothing

and suspected nothing of what had occurred.

But her mother said never a word after that eulogium which she had

uttered, and Madeline read that eulogium altogether aright. It said

to her ears that if ever young Orme should again come forward with

his suit, her mother would be prepared to receive him as a suitor;

and it said, moreover, that if that suitor had been already sent away

by any harsh answer, she would not sympathise with that harshness.

The dinner went on much as usual, but Madeline could not bring

herself to say a word. She sat between her brother-in-law, Mr.

Arbuthnot, on one side, and an old friend of her father's, of thirty

years' standing, on the other. The old friend talked exclusively to

Lady Staveley, and Mr. Arbuthnot, though he now and then uttered a

word or two, was chiefly occupied with his dinner. During the last

three or four days she had sat at dinner next to Peregrine Orme, and

it seemed to her now that she always had been able to talk to him.

She had liked him so much too! Was it not a pity that he should have

been so mistaken! And then as she sat after dinner, eating five or

six grapes, she felt that she was unable to recall her spirits and

look and speak as she was wont to do: a thing had happened which had

knocked the ground from under her--had thrown her from her equipoise,

and now she lacked the strength to recover herself and hide her

dismay.

After dinner, while the gentlemen were still in the dining-room, she

got a book, and nobody disturbed her as she sat alone pretending to

read it. There never had been any intimate friendship between her and

Miss Furnival, and that young lady was now employed in taking the

chief part in a general conversation about wools. Lady Staveley got

through a good deal of wool in the course of the year, as also did

the wife of the old thirty-years' friend; but Miss Furnival, short as

her experience had been, was able to give a few hints to them both,

and did not throw away the occasion. There was another lady there,

rather deaf, to whom Mrs. Arbuthnot devoted herself, and therefore

Madeline was allowed to be alone.

Then the men came in, and she was obliged to come forward and

officiate at the tea-table. The judge insisted on having the teapot

and urn brought into the drawing-room, and liked to have his cup

brought to him by one of his own daughters. So she went to work and

made the tea; but still she felt that she scarcely knew how to go

through her task. What had happened to her that she should be thus

beside herself, and hardly capable of refraining from open tears?

She knew that her mother was looking at her, and that now and again

little things were done to give her ease if any ease were possible.

"Is anything the matter with my Madeline?" said her father, looking

up into her face, and holding the hand from which he had taken his

cup.

"No, papa; only I have got a headache."

"A headache, dear; that's not usual with you."

"I have seen that she has not been well all the evening," said Lady

Staveley; "but I thought that perhaps she might shake it off. You had

better go, my dear, if you are suffering. Isabella, I'm sure, will

pour out the tea for us."

And so she got away, and skulked slowly up stairs to her own room.

She felt that it was skulking. Why should she have been so weak as to

have fled in that way? She had no headache--nor was it heartache that

had now upset her. But a man had spoken to her openly of love, and no

man had ever so spoken to her before.

She did not go direct to her own chamber, but passed along the

corridor towards her mother's dressing-room. It was always her custom

to remain there some half-hour before she went to bed, doing little

things for her mother, and chatting with any other girl who might be

intimate enough to be admitted there. Now she might remain there for

an hour alone without danger of being disturbed; and she thought to

herself that she would remain there till her mother came, and then

unburthen herself of the whole story.

As she went along the corridor she would have to pass the room which

had been given up to Felix Graham. She saw that the door was ajar,

and as she came close up to it, she found the nurse in the act of

coming out from the room. Mrs. Baker had been a very old servant in

the judge's family, and had known Madeline from the day of her birth.

Her chief occupation for some years had been nursing when there was

anybody to nurse, and taking a general care and surveillance of the

family's health when there was no special invalid to whom she could

devote herself. Since Graham's accident she had been fully employed,

and had greatly enjoyed the opportunities it had given her.

Mrs. Baker was in the doorway as Madeline attempted to pass by on

tiptoe. "Oh, he's a deal better now, Miss Madeline, so that you

needn't be afeard of disturbing;--ain't you, Mr. Graham?" So she was

thus brought into absolute contact with her friend, for the first

time since he had hurt himself.

[Illustration: Footsteps in the corridor.]

"Indeed I am," said Felix; "I only wish they'd let me get up and go

down stairs. Is that Miss Staveley, Mrs. Baker?"

"Yes, sure. Come, my dear, he's got his dressing-gown on, and you may

just come to the door and ask him how he does."

"I am very glad to hear that you are so much better, Mr. Graham,"

said Madeline, standing in the doorway with averted eyes, and

speaking with a voice so low that it only just reached his ears.

"Thank you, Miss Staveley; I shall never know how to express what I

feel for you all."

"And there's none of 'em have been more anxious about you than she,

I can tell you; and none of 'em ain't kinder-hearteder," said Mrs.

Baker.

"I hope you will be up soon and be able to come down to the

drawing-room," said Madeline. And then she did glance round, and for

a moment saw the light of his eye as he sat upright in the bed. He

was still pale and thin, or at least she fancied so, and her heart

trembled within her as she thought of the danger he had passed.

"I do so long to be able to talk to you again; all the others come

and visit me, but I have only heard the sounds of your footsteps as

you pass by."

"And yet she always walks like a mouse," said Mrs. Baker.

"But I have always heard them," he said. "I hope Marian thanked you

for the books. She told me how you had gotten them for me."

"She should not have said anything about them; it was Augustus who

thought of them," said Madeline.

"Marian comes to me four or five times a day," he continued; "I do

not know what I should do without her."

"I hope she is not noisy," said Madeline.

"Laws, miss, he don't care for noise now, only he ain't good at

moving yet, and won't be for some while."

"Pray take care of yourself, Mr. Graham," she said; "I need not

tell you how anxious we all are for your recovery. Good night, Mr.

Graham." And then she passed on to her mother's dressing-room, and

sitting herself down in an arm-chair opposite to the fire began to

think--to think, or else to try to think.

And what was to be the subject of her thoughts? Regarding Peregrine

Orme there was very little room for thinking. He had made her an

offer, and she had rejected it as a matter of course, seeing that she

did not love him. She had no doubt on that head, and was well aware

that she could never accept such an offer. On what subject then was

it necessary that she should think?

How odd it was that Mr. Graham's room door should have been open

on this especial evening, and that nurse should have been standing

there, ready to give occasion for that conversation! That was the

idea that first took possession of her brain. And then she recounted

all those few words which had been spoken as though they had had some

special value--as though each word had been laden with interest. She

felt half ashamed of what she had done in standing there and speaking

at his bedroom door, and yet she would not have lost the chance for

worlds. There had been nothing in what had passed between her and the

invalid. The very words, spoken elsewhere, or in the presence of her

mother and sister, would have been insipid and valueless; and yet she

sat there feeding on them as though they were of flavour so rich that

she could not let the sweetness of them pass from her. She had been

stunned at the idea of poor Peregrine's love, and yet she never asked

herself what was this new feeling. She did not inquire--not yet at

least--whether there might be danger in such feelings.

She remained there, with eyes fixed on the burning coals, till her

mother came up. "What, Madeline," said Lady Staveley, "are you here

still? I was in hopes you would have been in bed before this."

"My headache is gone now, mamma; and I waited because--"

"Well, dear; because what?" and her mother came and stood over her

and smoothed her hair. "I know very well that something has been the

matter. There has been something; eh, Madeline?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And you have remained up that we may talk about it. Is that it,

dearest?"

"I did not quite mean that, but perhaps it will be best. I can't be

doing wrong, mamma, in telling you."

"Well; you shall judge of that yourself;" and Lady Staveley sat down

on the sofa so that she was close to the chair which Madeline still

occupied. "As a general rule I suppose you could not be doing wrong;

but you must decide. If you have any doubt, wait till to-morrow."

"No, mamma; I will tell you now. Mr. Orme--"

"Well, dearest. Did Mr. Orme say anything specially to you before he

went away?"

"He--he--"

"Come to me, Madeline, and sit here. We shall talk better then."

And the mother made room beside her on the sofa for her daughter,

and Madeline, running over, leaned with her head upon her mother's

shoulder. "Well, darling; what did he say? Did he tell you that he

loved you?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And you answered him--"

"I could only tell him--"

"Yes, I know. Poor fellow! But, Madeline, is he not an excellent

young man;--one, at any rate, that is lovable? Of course in such a

matter the heart must answer for itself. But I, looking at the offer

as a mother--I could have been well pleased--"

"But, mamma, I could not--"

"Well, love, there shall be an end of it; at least for the present.

When I heard that he had gone suddenly away I thought that something

had happened."

"I am so sorry that he should be unhappy, for I know that he is

good."

"Yes, he is good; and your father likes him, and Augustus. In such a

matter as this, Madeline, I would never say a word to persuade you. I

should think it wrong to do so. But it may be, dearest, that he has

flurried you by the suddenness of his offer; and that you have not

yet thought much about it."

"But, mamma, I know that I do not love him."

"Of course. That is natural. It would have been a great misfortune if

you had loved him before you had reason to know that he loved you;--a

great misfortune. But now,--now that you cannot but think of him, now

that you know what his wishes are, perhaps you may learn--"

"But I have refused him, and he has gone away."

"Young gentlemen under such circumstances sometimes come back again."

"He won't come back, mamma, because--because I told him so plainly--I

am sure he understands that it is all to be at an end."

"But if he should, and if you should then think differently towards

him--"

"Oh, no!"

"But if you should, it may be well that you should know how all your

friends esteem him. In a worldly view the marriage would be in all

respects prudent; and as to disposition and temper, which I admit are

much more important, I confess I think that he has all the qualities

best adapted to make a wife happy. But, as I said before, the heart

must speak for itself."

"Yes; of course. And I know that I shall never love him;--not in that

way."

"You may be sure, dearest, that there will be no constraint put

upon you. It might be possible that I or your papa should forbid a

daughter's marriage, if she had proposed to herself an imprudent

match; but neither he nor I would ever use our influence with a child

to bring about a marriage because we think it prudent in a worldly

point of view." And then Lady Staveley kissed her daughter.

"Dear mamma, I know how good you are to me." And she answered her

mother's embrace by the pressure of her arm. But nevertheless she did

not feel herself to be quite comfortable. There was something in

the words which her mother had spoken which grated against her most

cherished feelings;--something, though she by no means knew what.

Why had her mother cautioned her in that way, that there might be a

case in which she would refuse her sanction to a proposed marriage?

Isabella's marriage had been concluded with the full agreement of

the whole family; and she, Madeline, had certainly never as yet

given cause either to father or mother to suppose that she would

be headstrong and imprudent. Might not the caution have been

omitted?--or was it intended to apply in any way to circumstances as

they now existed?

"You had better go now, dearest," said Lady Staveley, "and for

the present we will not think any more about this gallant young

knight." And then Madeline, having said good night, went off rather

crestfallen to her own room. In doing so she again had to pass

Graham's door, and as she went by it, walking not quite on tiptoe,

she could not help asking herself whether or no he would really

recognise the sound of her footsteps.

It is hardly necessary to say that Lady Staveley had conceived

to herself a recognised purpose in uttering that little caution

to her daughter; and she would have been quite as well pleased

had circumstances taken Felix Graham out of her house instead of

Peregrine Orme. But Felix Graham must necessarily remain for the next

fortnight, and there could be no possible benefit in Orme's return,

at any rate till Graham should have gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT BRIDGET BOLSTER HAD TO SAY.

It has been said in the earlier pages of this story that there was

no prettier scenery to be found within thirty miles of London than

that by which the little town of Hamworth was surrounded. This was

so truly the case that Hamworth was full of lodgings which in the

autumn season were always full of lodgers. The middle of winter was

certainly not the time for seeing the Hamworth hills to advantage;

nevertheless it was soon after Christmas that two rooms were taken

there by a single gentleman who had come down for a week, apparently

with no other view than that of enjoying himself. He did say

something about London confinement and change of air; but he was

manifestly in good health, had an excellent appetite, said a great

deal about fresh eggs,--which at that time of the year was hardly

reasonable, and brought with him his own pale brandy. This gentleman

was Mr. Crabwitz.

The house at which he was to lodge had been selected with

considerable judgment. It was kept by a tidy old widow known as Mrs.

Trump; but those who knew anything of Hamworth affairs were well

aware that Mrs. Trump had been left without a shilling, and could not

have taken that snug little house in Paradise Row and furnished it

completely, out of her own means. No. Mrs. Trump's lodging-house was

one of the irons which Samuel Dockwrath ever kept heating in the

fire, for the behoof of those fourteen children. He had taken a lease

of the house in Paradise Row, having made a bargain and advanced a

few pounds while it was yet being built; and he then had furnished

it and put in Mrs. Trump. Mrs. Trump received from him wages and a

percentage; but to him were paid over the quota of shillings per

week in consideration for which the lodgers were accommodated. All

of which Mr. Crabwitz had ascertained before he located himself in

Paradise Row.

And when he had so located himself he soon began to talk to Mrs.

Trump about Mr. Dockwrath. He himself, as he told her in confidence,

was in the profession of the law; he had heard of Mr. Dockwrath, and

should be very glad if that gentleman would come over and take a

glass of brandy and water with him some evening.

"And a very clever sharp gentleman he is," said Mrs. Trump.

"With a tolerably good business, I suppose?" asked Crabwitz.

"Pretty fair for that, sir. But he do be turning his hand to

everything. He's a mortal long family of his own, and he has need of

it all, if it's ever so much. But he'll never be poor for the want of

looking after it."

But Mr. Dockwrath did not come near his lodger on the first evening,

and Mr. Crabwitz made acquaintance with Mrs. Dockwrath before he saw

her husband. The care of the fourteen children was not supposed to

be so onerous but that she could find a moment now and then to see

whether Mrs. Trump kept the furniture properly dusted, and did not

infringe any of the Dockwrathian rules. These were very strict; and

whenever they were broken it was on the head of Mrs. Dockwrath that

the anger of the ruler mainly fell.

"I hope you find everything comfortable, sir," said poor Miriam,

having knocked at the sitting-room door when Crabwitz had just

finished his dinner.

"Yes, thank you; very nice. Is that Mrs. Dockwrath?"

"Yes, sir. I'm Mrs. Dockwrath. As it's we who own the room I looked

in to see if anything's wanting."

"You are very kind. No; nothing is wanting. But I should be delighted

to make your acquaintance if you would stay for a moment. Might I ask

you to take a chair?" and Mr. Crabwitz handed her one.

"Thank you; no, sir I won't intrude."

"Not at all, Mrs. Dockwrath. But the fact is, I'm a lawyer myself,

and I should be so glad to become known to your husband. I have heard

a great deal of his name lately as to a rather famous case in which

he is employed."

"Not the Orley Farm case?" said Mrs. Dockwrath immediately.

"Yes, yes; exactly."

"And is he going on with that, sir?" asked Mrs. Dockwrath with great

interest.

"Is he not? I know nothing about it myself, but I always supposed

that such was the case. If I had such a wife as you, Mrs. Dockwrath,

I should not leave her in doubt as to what I was doing in my own

profession."

"I know nothing about it, Mr. Cooke;"--for it was as Mr. Cooke that

he now sojourned at Hamworth. Not that it should be supposed he had

received instructions from Mr. Furnival to come down to that place

under a false name. From Mr. Furnival he had received no further

instructions on that matter than those conveyed at the end of a

previous chapter. "I know nothing about it, Mr. Cooke; and don't want

to know generally. But I am anxious about this Orley Farm case. I do

hope that he's going to drop it." And then Mr. Crabwitz elicited her

view of the case with great ease.

On that evening, about nine, Mr. Dockwrath did go over to Paradise

Row, and did allow himself to be persuaded to mix a glass of brandy

and water and light a cigar. "My missus tells me, sir, that you

belong to the profession as well as myself."

"Oh yes; I'm a lawyer, Mr. Dockwrath."

"Practising in town as an attorney, sir?"

"Not as an attorney on my own hook exactly. I chiefly employ my time

in getting up cases for barristers. There's a good deal done in that

way."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Dockwrath, beginning to feel himself the

bigger man of the two; and from that moment he patronised his

companion instead of allowing himself to be patronised.

This went against the grain with Mr. Crabwitz, but, having an object

to gain, he bore it. "We hear a great deal up in London just at

present about this Orley Farm case, and I always hear your name as

connected with it. I had no idea when I was taking these lodgings

that I was coming into a house belonging to that Mr. Dockwrath."

"The same party, sir," said Mr. Dockwrath, blowing the smoke out of

his mouth as he looked up to the ceiling.

And then by degrees Mr. Crabwitz drew him into conversation.

Dockwrath was by nature quite as clever a man as Crabwitz, and in

such a matter as this was not one to be outwitted easily; but in

truth he had no objection to talk about the Orley Farm case. "I have

taken it up on public motives, Mr. Cooke," he said, "and I mean to go

through with it."

"Oh, of course; in such a case as that you will no doubt go through

with it?"

"That's my intention, I assure you. And I tell you what; young

Mason,--that's the son of the widow of the old man who made the

will--"

"Or rather who did not make it, as you say."

"Yes, yes; he made the will; but he did not make the codicil--and

that young Mason has no more right to the property than you have."

"Hasn't he now?"

"No; and I can prove it too."

"Well; the general opinion in the profession is that Lady Mason will

stand her ground and hold her own. I don't know what the points are

myself, but I have heard it discussed, and that is certainly what

people think."

"Then people will find that they are very much mistaken."

"I was talking to one of Round's young men about it, and I fancy they

are not very sanguine."

"I do not care a fig for Round or his young men. It would be quite

as well for Joseph Mason if Round and Crook gave up the matter

altogether. It lies in a nutshell, and the truth must come out

whatever Round and Crook may choose to say. And I'll tell you

more--old Furnival, big a man as he thinks himself, cannot save her."

"Has he anything to do with it?" asked Mr. Cooke.

"Yes; the sly old fox. My belief is that only for him she'd give up

the battle, and be down on her marrow-bones asking for mercy."

"She'd have little chance of mercy, from what I hear of Joseph

Mason."

"She'd have to give up the property of course. And even then I don't

know whether he'd let her off. By heavens! he couldn't let her off

unless I chose." And then by degrees he told Mr. Cooke some of the

circumstances of the case.

But it was not till the fourth evening that Mr. Dockwrath spent with

his lodger that the intimacy had so far progressed as to enable Mr.

Crabwitz to proceed with his little scheme. On that day Mr. Dockwrath

had received a notice that at noon on the following morning Mr.

Joseph Mason and Bridget Bolster would both be at the house of

Messrs. Round and Crook in Bedford Row, and that he could attend at

that hour if it so pleased him. It certainly would so please him,

he said to himself when he got that letter; and in the evening he

mentioned to his new friend the business which was taking him to

London.

"If I might advise you in the matter, Mr. Dockwrath," said Crabwitz,

"I should stay away altogether."

"And why so?"

"Because that's not your market. This poor devil of a woman--for she

is a poor devil of a woman--"

"She'll be poor enough before long."

"It can't be any gratification to you running her down."

"Ah, but the justice of the thing."

"Bother. You're talking now to a man of the world. Who can say what

is the justice or the injustice of anything after twenty years of

possession? I have no doubt the codicil did express the old man's

wish,--even from your own story. But of course you are looking for

your market. Now it seems to me that there's a thousand pounds in

your way as clear as daylight."

"I don't see it myself, Mr. Cooke."

"No; but I do. The sort of thing is done every day. You have your

father-in-law's office journal?"

"Safe enough."

"Burn it;--or leave it about in these rooms like;--so that somebody

else may burn it."

"I'd like to see the thousand pounds first."

"Of course you'd do nothing till you knew about that;--nothing except

keeping away from Round and Crook to-morrow. The money would be

forthcoming if the trial were notoriously dropped by next assizes."

Dockwrath sat thinking for a minute or two, and every moment of

thought made him feel more strongly that he could not now succeed in

the manner pointed out by Mr. Cooke. "But where would be the market

you are talking of?" said he.

"I could manage that," said Crabwitz.

"And go shares in the business?"

"No, no; nothing of the sort." And then he added, remembering that he

must show that he had some personal object, "If I got a trifle in the

matter it would not come out of your allowance."

The attorney again sat silent for a while, and now he remained so for

full five minutes, during which Mr. Crabwitz puffed the smoke from

between his lips with a look of supreme satisfaction. "May I ask," at

last Mr. Dockwrath said, "whether you have any personal interest in

this matter?"

"None in the least;--that is to say, none as yet."

"You did not come down here with any view--"

"Oh dear no; nothing of the sort. But I see at a glance that it is

one of those cases in which a compromise would be the most judicious

solution of difficulties. I am well used to this kind of thing, Mr.

Dockwrath."

"It would not do, sir," said Mr. Dockwrath, after some further slight

period of consideration. "It wouldn't do. Round and Crook have all

the dates, and so has Mason too. And the original of that partnership

deed is forthcoming; and they know what witnesses to depend on. No,

sir; I've begun this on public grounds, and I mean to carry it on. I

am in a manner bound to do so as the representative of the attorney

of the late Sir Joseph Mason;--and by heavens, Mr. Cooke, I'll do my

duty."

"I dare say you're right," said Mr. Crabwitz, mixing a quarter of a

glass more brandy and water.

"I know I'm right, sir," said Dockwrath. "And when a man knows he's

right, he has a deal of inward satisfaction in the feeling." After

that Mr. Crabwitz was aware that he could be of no use at Hamworth,

but he stayed out his week in order to avoid suspicion.

On the following day Mr. Dockwrath did proceed to Bedford Row,

determined to carry out his original plan, and armed with that inward

satisfaction to which he had alluded. He dressed himself in his best,

and endeavoured as far as was in his power to look as though he were

equal to the Messrs. Round. Old Crook he had seen once, and him he

already despised. He had endeavoured to obtain a private interview

with Mrs. Bolster before she could be seen by Matthew Round; but in

this he had not succeeded. Mrs. Bolster was a prudent woman, and,

acting doubtless under advice, had written to him, saying that she

had been summoned to the office of Messrs. Round and Crook, and would

there declare all that she knew about the matter. At the same time

she returned to him a money order which he had sent to her.

Punctually at twelve he was in Bedford Row, and there he saw a

respectable-looking female sitting at the fire in the inner part of

the outer office. This was Bridget Bolster, but he would by no means

have recognised her. Bridget had risen in the world and was now head

chambermaid at a large hotel in the west of England. In that capacity

she had laid aside whatever diffidence may have afflicted her earlier

years, and was now able to speak out her mind before any judge or

jury in the land. Indeed she had never been much afflicted by such

diffidence, and had spoken out her evidence on that former occasion,

now twenty years since, very plainly. But as she now explained to the

head clerk, she had at that time been only a poor ignorant slip of a

girl, with no more than eight pounds a year wages.

Dockwrath bowed to the head clerk, and passed on to Mat Round's

private room. "Mr. Matthew is inside, I suppose," said he, and hardly

waiting for permission he knocked at the door, and then entered.

There he saw Mr. Matthew Round, sitting in his comfortable arm-chair,

and opposite to him sat Mr. Mason of Groby Park.

Mr. Mason got up and shook hands with the Hamworth attorney, but

Round junior made his greeting without rising, and merely motioned

his visitor to a chair.

"Mr. Mason and the young ladies are quite well, I hope?" said Mr.

Dockwrath, with a smile.

"Quite well, I thank you," said the county magistrate.

"This matter has progressed since I last had the pleasure of seeing

them. You begin to think I was right; eh, Mr. Mason?"

"Don't let us triumph till we are out of the wood," said Mr. Round.

"It is a deal easier to spend money in such an affair as this than it

is to make money by it. However we shall hear to-day more about it."

"I do not know about making money," said Mr. Mason, very solemnly.

"But that I have been robbed by that woman out of my just rights in

that estate for the last twenty years,--that I may say I do know."

"Quite true, Mr. Mason; quite true," said Mr. Dockwrath with

considerable energy.

"And whether I make money or whether I lose money I intend to proceed

in this matter. It is dreadful to think that in this free and

enlightened country so abject an offender should have been able to

hold her head up so long without punishment and without disgrace."

"That is exactly what I feel," said Dockwrath. "The very stones and

trees of Hamworth cry out against her."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Round, "we have first to see whether there has

been any injustice or not. If you will allow me I will explain to you

what I now propose to do."

"Proceed, sir," said Mr. Mason, who was by no means satisfied with

his young attorney.

"Bridget Bolster is now in the next room, and as far as I can

understand the case at present, she would be the witness on whom your

case, Mr. Mason, would most depend. The man Kenneby I have not yet

seen; but from what I understand he is less likely to prove a willing

witness than Mrs. Bolster."

"I cannot go along with you there, Mr. Round," said Dockwrath.

"Excuse me, sir, but I am only stating my opinion. If I should find

that this woman is unable to say that she did not sign two separate

documents on that day--that is, to say so with a positive and point

blank assurance, I shall recommend you, as my client, to drop the

prosecution."

"I will never drop it," said Mr. Mason.

"You will do as you please," continued Round; "I can only say what

under such circumstances will be the advice given to you by this

firm. I have talked the matter over very carefully with my father and

with our other partner, and we shall not think well of going on with

it unless I shall now find that your view is strongly substantiated

by this woman."

Then outspoke Mr. Dockwrath, "Under these circumstances, Mr. Mason,

if I were you, I should withdraw from the house at once. I certainly

would not have my case blown upon."

"Mr. Mason, sir, will do as he pleases about that. As long as the

business with which he honours us is straight-forward, we will do it

for him, as for an old client, although it is not exactly in our own

line. But we can only do it in accordance with our own judgment. I

will proceed to explain what I now propose to do. The woman Bolster

is in the next room, and I, with the assistance of my head clerk,

will take down the headings of what evidence she can give."

"In our presence, sir," said Mr. Dockwrath; "or if Mr. Mason should

decline, at any rate in mine."

"By no means, Mr. Dockwrath," said Round.

"I think Mr. Dockwrath should hear her story," said Mr. Mason.

"He certainly will not do so in this house or in conjunction with me.

In what capacity should he be present, Mr. Mason?"

"As one of Mr. Mason's legal advisers," said Dockwrath.

"If you are to be one of them, Messrs. Round and Crook cannot be the

others. I think I explained that to you before. It now remains for

Mr. Mason to say whether he wishes to employ our firm in this matter

or not. And I can tell him fairly," Mr. Round added this after a

slight pause, "that we shall be rather pleased than otherwise if he

will put the case into other hands."

"Of course I wish you to conduct it," said Mr. Mason, who, with all

his bitterness against the present holders of Orley Farm, was afraid

of throwing himself into the hands of Dockwrath. He was not an

ignorant man, and he knew that the firm of Round and Crook bore a

high reputation before the world.

"Then," said Round, "I must do my business in accordance with my own

views of what is right. I have reason to believe that no one has

yet tampered with this woman," and as he spoke he looked hard at

Dockwrath, "though probably attempts may have been made."

"I don't know who should tamper with her," said Dockwrath, "unless it

be Lady Mason--whom I must say you seem very anxious to protect."

"Another word like that, sir, and I shall be compelled to ask you to

leave the house. I believe that this woman has been tampered with by

no one. I will now learn from her what is her remembrance of the

circumstances as they occurred twenty years since, and I will then

read to you her deposition. I shall be sorry, gentlemen, to keep you

here, perhaps for an hour or so, but you will find the morning papers

on the table." And then Mr. Round, gathering up certain documents,

passed into the outer office, and Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath were

left alone.

"He is determined to get that woman off," said Mr. Dockwrath, in a

whisper.

"I believe him to be an honest man," said Mr. Mason, with some

sternness.

"Honesty, sir! It is hard to say what is honesty and what is

dishonesty. Would you believe it, Mr. Mason, only last night I had a

thousand pounds offered me to hold my tongue about this affair?"

Mr. Mason at the moment did not believe this, but he merely looked

hard into his companion's face, and said nothing.

"By the heavens above us what I tell you is true! a thousand pounds,

Mr. Mason! Only think how they are going it to get this thing

stifled. And where should the offer come from but from those who know

I have the power?"

"Do you mean to say that the offer came from this firm?"

"Hush-sh, Mr. Mason. The very walls hear and talk in such a place as

this. I'm not to know who made the offer, and I don't know. But a man

can give a very good guess sometimes. The party who was speaking to

me is up to the whole transaction, and knows exactly what is going on

here--here, in this house. He let it all out, using pretty nigh the

same words as Round used just now. He was full about the doubt that

Round and Crook felt--that they'd never pull it through. I'll tell

you what it is, Mr. Mason, they don't mean to pull it through."

"What answer did you make to the man?"

"What answer! why I just put my thumb this way over my shoulder.

No, Mr. Mason, if I can't carry on without bribery and corruption,

I won't carry on at all. He'd called at the wrong house with that

dodge, and so he soon found."

"And you think he was an emissary from Messrs. Round and Crook?"

"Hush-sh-sh. For heaven's sake, Mr. Mason, do be a little lower. You

can put two and two together as well as I can, Mr. Mason. I find they

make four. I don't know whether your calculation will be the same. My

belief is, that these people are determined to save that woman. Don't

you see it in that young fellow's eye--that his heart is all on the

other side. Now he's got hold of that woman Bolster, and he'll teach

her to give such evidence as will upset us. But I'll be even with him

yet, Mr. Mason. If you'll only trust me, we'll both be even with him

yet."

Mr. Mason at the present moment said nothing further, and when

Dockwrath pressed him to continue the conversation in whispers, he

distinctly said that he would rather say no more upon the subject

just then. He would wait for Mr. Round's return. "Am I at liberty,"

he asked, "to mention that offer of the thousand pounds?"

"What--to Mat Round?" said Dockwrath. "Certainly not, Mr. Mason. It

wouldn't be our game at all."

"Very well, sir." And then Mr. Mason took up a newspaper, and no

further words were spoken till the door opened and Mr. Round

re-entered the room.

This he did with slow, deliberate step, and stopping on the

hearth-rug, he stood leaning with his back against the mantelpiece.

It was clear from his face to see that he had much to tell, and clear

also that he was not pleased at the turn which affairs were taking.

"Well, gentlemen, I have examined the woman," he said, "and here is

her deposition."

"And what does she say?" asked Mr. Mason.

"Come, out with it, sir," said Dockwrath. "Did she, or did she not

sign two documents on that day?"

"Mr. Mason," said Round, turning to that gentleman, and altogether

ignoring Dockwrath and his question; "I have to tell you that her

statement, as far as it goes, fully corroborates your view of the

case. As far as it goes, mind you."

"Oh, it does; does it?" said Dockwrath.

"And she is the only important witness?" said Mr. Mason with great

exultation.

"I have never said that; what I did say was this--that your case

must break down unless her evidence supported it. It does support

it--strongly; but you will want more than that."

"And now if you please, Mr. Round, what is it that she has deposed?"

asked Dockwrath.

"She remembers it all then?" said Mason.

"She is a remarkably clear-headed woman, and apparently does remember

a great deal. But her remembrance chiefly and most strongly goes to

this--that she witnessed only one deed."

"She can prove that, can she?" said Mason, and the tone of his voice

was loudly triumphant.

"She declares that she never signed but one deed in the whole of her

life--either on that day or on any other; and over and beyond this

she says now--now that I have explained to her what that other deed

might have been--that old Mr. Usbech told her that it was about a

partnership."

"He did, did he?" said Dockwrath, rising from his chair and clapping

his hands. "Very well. I don't think we shall want more than that,

Mr. Mason."

There was a tone of triumph in the man's voice, and a look of

gratified malice in his countenance which disgusted Mr. Round and

irritated him almost beyond his power of endurance. It was quite true

that he would much have preferred to find that the woman's evidence

was in favour of Lady Mason. He would have been glad to learn that

she actually had witnessed the two deeds on the same day. His tone

would have been triumphant, and his face gratified, had he returned

to the room with such tidings. His feelings were all on that side,

though his duty lay on the other. He had almost expected that it

would be so. As it was, he was prepared to go on with his duty, but

he was not prepared to endure the insolence of Mr. Dockwrath. There

was a look of joy also about Mr. Mason which added to his annoyance.

It might be just and necessary to prosecute that unfortunate woman at

Orley Farm, but he could not gloat over such work.

"Mr. Dockwrath," he said, "I will not put up with such conduct here.

If you wish to rejoice about this, you must go elsewhere."

"And what are we to do now?" said Mr. Mason. "I presume there need be

no further delay."

"I must consult with my partner. If you can make it convenient to

call this day week--"

"But she will escape."

"No, she will not escape. I shall not be ready to say anything before

that. If you are not in town, then I can write to you." And so the

meeting was broken up, and Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath left the

lawyer's office together.

Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath left the office in Bedford Row together,

and thus it was almost a necessity that they should walk together for

some distance through the streets. Mr. Mason was going to his hotel

in Soho Square, and Mr. Dockwrath turned with him through the passage

leading into Red Lion Square, linking his own arm in that of his

companion. The Yorkshire county magistrate did not quite like this,

but what was he to do?

"Did you ever see anything like that, sir?" said Mr. Dockwrath; "for

by heavens I never did."

"Like what?" said Mr. Mason.

"Like that fellow there;--that Round. It is my opinion that he

deserves to have his name struck from the rolls. Is it not clear that

he is doing all in his power to bring that wretched woman off? And

I'll tell you what, Mr. Mason, if you let him play his own game in

that way, he will bring her off."

"But he expressly admitted that this woman Bolster's evidence is

conclusive."

"Yes; he was so driven into a corner that he could not help admitting

that. The woman had been too many for him, and he found that he

couldn't cushion her. But do you mind my words, Mr. Mason. He intends

that you shall be beaten. It's as plain as the nose on your face. You

can read it in the very look of him, and in every tone of his voice.

At any rate I can. I'll tell you what it is"--and then he squeezed

very close to Mr. Mason--"he and old Furnival understand each other

in this matter like two brothers. Of course Round will have his bill

against you. Win or lose, he'll get his costs out of your pocket. But

he can make a deuced pretty thing out of the other side as well. Let

me tell you, Mr. Mason, that when notes for a thousand pounds are

flying here and there, it isn't every lawyer that will see them pass

by him without opening his hand."

"I do not think that Mr. Round would take a bribe," said Mr. Mason

very stiffly.

"Wouldn't he? Just as a hound would a pat of butter. It's your own

look-out, you know, Mr. Mason. I haven't got an estate of twelve

hundred a year depending on it. But remember this;--if she escapes

now, Orley Farm is gone for ever."

All this was extremely disagreeable to Mr. Mason. In the first place

he did not at all like the tone of equality which the Hamworth

attorney had adopted; he did not like to acknowledge that his affairs

were in any degree dependent on a man of whom he thought so badly as

he did of Mr. Dockwrath; he did not like to be told that Round and

Crook were rogues,--Round and Crook whom he had known all his life;

but least of all did he like the feeling of suspicion with which,

in spite of himself, this man had imbued him, or the fear that his

victim might at last escape him. Excellent, therefore, as had been

the evidence with which Bridget Bolster had declared herself ready

to give in his favour, Mr. Mason was not a contented man when he sat

down to his solitary beefsteak in Soho Square.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ANGEL OF LIGHT.

In speaking of the character and antecedents of Felix Graham I have

said that he was moulding a wife for himself. The idea of a wife thus

moulded to fit a man's own grooves, and educated to suit matrimonial

purposes according to the exact views of the future husband was by no

means original with him. Other men have moulded their wives, but I do

not know that as a rule the practice has been found to answer. It is

open, in the first place, to this objection,--that the moulder does

not generally conceive such idea very early in life, and the idea

when conceived must necessarily be carried out on a young subject.

Such a plan is the result of much deliberate thought, and has

generally arisen from long observation, on the part of the thinker,

of the unhappiness arising from marriages in which there has been no

moulding. Such a frame of mind comes upon a bachelor, perhaps about

his thirty-fifth year, and then he goes to work with a girl of

fourteen. The operation takes some ten years, at the end of which the

moulded bride regards her lord as an old man. On the whole I think

that the ordinary plan is the better, and even the safer. Dance

with a girl three times, and if you like the light of her eye and

the tone of voice with which she, breathless, answers your little

questions about horseflesh and music--about affairs masculine and

feminine,--then take the leap in the dark. There is danger, no doubt;

but the moulded wife is, I think, more dangerous.

With Felix Graham the matter was somewhat different, seeing that he

was not yet thirty, and that the lady destined to be the mistress

of his family had already passed through three or four years of her

noviciate. He had begun to be prudent early in life; or had become

prudent rather by force of sentiment than by force of thought. Mary

Snow was the name of his bride-elect; and it is probable that, had

not circumstances thrown Mary Snow in his way, he would not have gone

out of his way to seek a subject for his experiment. Mary Snow was

the daughter of an engraver,--not of an artist who receives four or

five thousand pounds for engraving the chef-d'oeuvre of a modern

painter,--but of a man who executed flourishes on ornamental cards

for tradespeople, and assisted in the illustration of circus

playbills. With this man Graham had become acquainted through certain

transactions of his with the press, and had found him to be a

widower, drunken, dissolute, and generally drowned in poverty. One

child the man had, and that child was Mary Snow.

How it came to pass that the young barrister first took upon himself

the charge of maintaining and educating this poor child need not now

be told. His motives had been thoroughly good, and in the matter he

had endeavoured to act the part of a kind Samaritan. He had found her

pretty, half starved, dirty, ignorant, and modest; and so finding

her had made himself responsible for feeding, cleaning, and teaching

her,--and ultimately for marrying her. One would have said that in

undertaking a task of such undoubted charity as that comprised in the

three first charges, he would have encountered no difficulty from

the drunken, dissolute, impoverished engraver. But the man from the

beginning was cunning; and before Graham had succeeded in obtaining

the custody of the child, the father had obtained a written

undertaking from him that he would marry her at a certain age if

her conduct up to that age had been becoming. As to this latter

stipulation no doubt had arisen; and indeed Graham had so acted by

her that had she fallen away the fault would have been all her own.

There wanted now but one year to the coming of that day on which he

was bound to make himself a happy man, and hitherto he himself had

never doubted as to the accomplishment of his undertaking.

He had told his friends,--those with whom he was really intimate,

Augustus Staveley and one or two others,--what was to be his

matrimonial lot in life; and they had ridiculed him for his quixotic

chivalry. Staveley especially had been strong in his conviction that

no such marriage would ever take place, and had already gone so far

as to plan another match for his friend.

"You know you do not love her," he had said, since Felix had been

staying on this occasion at Noningsby.

"I know no such thing," Felix had answered, almost in anger. "On the

contrary I know that I do love her."

"Yes, as I love my niece Marian, or old Aunt Bessy, who always

supplied me with sugar-candy when I was a boy."

"It is I that have supplied Mary with her sugar-candy, and the love

thus engendered is the stronger."

"Nevertheless you are not in love with her, and never will be, and if

you marry her you will commit a great sin."

"How moral you have grown!"

"No, I'm not. I'm not a bit moral. But I know very well when a man

is in love with a girl, and I know very well that you're not in love

with Mary Snow. And I tell you what, my friend, if you do marry her

you are done for life. There will absolutely be an end of you."

"You mean to say that your royal highness will drop me."

"I mean to say nothing about myself. My dropping you or not dropping

you won't alter your lot in life. I know very well what a poor man

wants to give him a start; and a fellow like you who has such quaint

ideas on so many things requires all the assistance he can get. You

should look out for money and connection."

"Sophia Furnival, for instance."

"No; she would not suit you. I perceive that now."

"So I supposed. Well, my dear fellow, we shall not come to

loggerheads about that. She is a very fine girl, and you are welcome

to the hatful of money--if you can get it."

"That's nonsense. I'm not thinking of Sophia Furnival any more than

you are. But if I did it would be a proper marriage. Now--" And then

he went on with some further very sage remarks about Miss Snow.

All this was said as Felix Graham was lying with his broken bones in

the comfortable room at Noningsby; and to tell the truth, when it was

so said his heart was not quite at ease about Mary Snow. Up to this

time, having long since made up his mind that Mary should be his

wife, he had never allowed his thoughts to be diverted from that

purpose. Nor did he so allow them now,--as long as he could prevent

them from wandering.

But, lying there at Noningsby, thinking of those sweet Christmas

evenings, how was it possible that they should not wander? His friend

had told him that he did not love Mary Snow; and then, when alone,

he asked himself whether in truth he did love her. He had pledged

himself to marry her, and he must carry out that pledge. But

nevertheless did he love her? And if not her, did he love any other?

Mary Snow knew very well what was to be her destiny, and indeed had

known it for the last two years. She was now nineteen years old,--and

Madeline Staveley was also nineteen; she was nineteen, and at twenty

she was to become a wife, as by agreement between Felix Graham and

Mr. Snow, the drunken engraver. They knew their destiny,--the future

husband and the future wife,--and each relied with perfect faith on

the good faith and affection of the other.

Graham, while he was thus being lectured by Staveley, had under

his pillow a letter from Mary. He wrote to her regularly--on every

Sunday, and on every Tuesday she answered him. Nothing could be more

becoming than the way she obeyed all his behests on such matters;

and it really did seem that in his case the moulded wife would turn

out to have been well moulded. When Staveley left him he again read

Mary's letter. Her letters were always of the same length, filling

completely the four sides of a sheet of note paper. They were

excellently well written; and as no one word in them was ever

altered or erased, it was manifest enough to Felix that the original

composition was made on a rough draft. As he again read through the

four sides of the little sheet of paper, he could not refrain from

conjecturing what sort of a letter Madeline Staveley might write.

Mary Snow's letter ran as follows:--

3 Bloomfield Terrace, Peckham,

Tuesday, 10 January, 18--.

MY DEAREST FELIX,

--she had so called him for the last twelvemonth by common consent

between Graham and the very discreet lady under whose charge she at

present lived. Previously to that she had written to him as, My dear

Mr. Graham.

MY DEAREST FELIX,

I am very glad to hear that your arm and your two ribs are

getting so much better. I received your letter yesterday,

and was glad to hear that you are so comfortable in

the house of the very kind people with whom you are

staying. If I knew them I would send them my respectful

remembrances, but as I do not know them I suppose it would

not be proper. But I remember them in my prayers.--

This last assurance was inserted under the express instruction

of Mrs. Thomas, who however did not read Mary's letters, but

occasionally, on some subjects, gave her hints as to what she ought

to say. Nor was there hypocrisy in this, for under the instruction of

her excellent mentor she had prayed for the kind people.--

I hope you will be well enough to come and pay me a visit

before long, but pray do not come before you are well

enough to do so without giving yourself any pain. I am

glad to hear that you do not mean to go hunting any more,

for it seems to me to be a dangerous amusement.

And then the first paragraph came to an end.

My papa called here yesterday. He said he was very badly

off indeed, and so he looked. I did not know what to

say at first, but he asked me so much to give him some

money, that I did give him at last all that I had. It was

nineteen shillings and sixpence. Mrs. Thomas was angry,

and told me I had no right to give away your money, and

that I should not have given more than half a crown. I

hope you will not be angry with me. I do not want any more

at present. But indeed he was very bad, especially about

his shoes.

I do not know that I have any more to say except that

I put back thirty lines of TÃ©lÃ©maque into French every

morning before breakfast. It never comes near right, but

nevertheless M. Grigaud says it is well done. He says that

if it came quite right I should compose French as well as

M. FÃ©nelon, which of course I cannot expect.

I will now say good-bye, and I am yours most

affectionately,

MARY SNOW.

There was nothing in this letter to give any offence to Felix Graham,

and so he acknowledged to himself. He made himself so acknowledge,

because on the first reading of it he had felt that he was half angry

with the writer. It was clear that there was nothing in the letter

which would justify censure;--nothing which did not, almost, demand

praise. He would have been angry with her had she limited her filial

donation to the half-crown which Mrs. Thomas had thought appropriate.

He was obliged to her for that attention to her French which he had

specially enjoined. Nothing could be more proper than her allusion to

the Staveleys;--and altogether the letter was just what it ought to

be. Nevertheless it made him unhappy and irritated him. Was it well

that he should marry a girl whose father was "indeed very bad, but

especially about his shoes?" Staveley had told him that connection

would be necessary for him, and what sort of a connection would this

be? And was there one word in the whole letter that showed a spark

of true love? Did not the footfall of Madeline Staveley's step as

she passed along the passage go nearer to his heart than all the

outspoken assurance of Mary Snow's letter?

Nevertheless he had undertaken to do this thing, and he would do

it,--let the footfall of Madeline Staveley's step be ever so sweet in

his ear. And then, lying back in his bed, he began to think whether

it would have been as well that he should have broken his neck

instead of his ribs in getting out of Monkton Grange covert.

Mrs. Thomas was a lady who kept a school consisting of three little

girls and Mary Snow. She had in fact not been altogether successful

in the line of life she had chosen for herself, and had hardly been

able to keep her modest door-plate on her door, till Graham, in

search of some home for his bride, then in the first noviciate of her

moulding, had come across her. Her means were now far from plentiful;

but as an average number of three children still clung to her, and

as Mary Snow's seventy pounds per annum--to include clothes--were

punctually paid, the small house at Peckham was maintained. Under

these circumstances Mary Snow was somebody in the eyes of Mrs.

Thomas, and Felix Graham was a very great person indeed.

Graham had received his letter on a Wednesday, and on the following

Monday Mary, as usual, received one from him. These letters always

came to her in the evening, as she was sitting over her tea with Mrs.

Thomas, the three children having been duly put to bed. Graham's

letters were very short, as a man with a broken right arm and two

broken ribs is not fluent with his pen. But still a word or two did

come to her. "Dearest Mary, I am doing better and better, and I hope

I shall see you in about a fortnight. Quite right in giving the

money. Stick to the French. Your own F. G." But as he signed himself

her own, his mind misgave him that he was lying.

"It is very good of him to write to you while he is in such a state,"

said Mrs. Thomas.

"Indeed it is," said Mary--"very good indeed." And then she went

on with the history of "Rasselas" in his happy valley, by which

study Mrs. Thomas intended to initiate her into that course of

novel-reading which has become necessary for a British lady. But Mrs.

Thomas had a mind to improve the present occasion. It was her duty to

inculcate in her pupil love and gratitude towards the beneficent man

who was doing so much for her. Gratitude for favours past and love

for favours to come; and now, while that scrap of a letter was lying

on the table, the occasion for doing so was opportune.

"Mary, I do hope you love Mr. Graham with all your heart and all your

strength." She would have thought it wicked to say more; but so far

she thought she might go, considering the sacred tie which was to

exist between her pupil and the gentleman in question.

"Oh, yes, indeed I do;" and then Mary's eyes fell wishfully on the

cover of the book which lay in her lap while her finger kept the

place. Rasselas is not very exciting, but it was more so than Mrs.

Thomas.

"You would be very wicked if you did not. And I hope you think

sometimes of the very responsible duties which a wife owes to her

husband. And this will be more especially so with you than with any

other woman--almost that I ever heard of."

There was something in this that was almost depressing to poor Mary's

spirit, but nevertheless she endeavoured to bear up against it and

do her duty. "I shall do all I can to please him, Mrs. Thomas;--and

indeed I do try about the French. And he says I was right to give

papa that money."

"But there will be many more things than that when you've stood at

the altar with him and become his wife;--bone of his bone, Mary." And

she spoke these last words in a very solemn tone, shaking her head,

and the solemn tone almost ossified poor Mary's heart as she heard

it.

"Yes; I know there will. But I shall endeavour to find out what he

likes."

"I don't think he is so particular about his eating and drinking as

some other gentlemen; though no doubt he will like his things nice."

"I know he is fond of strong tea, and I sha'n't forget that."

"And about dress. He is not very rich you know, Mary; but it will

make him unhappy if you are not always tidy. And his own shirts--I

fancy he has no one to look after them now, for I so often see the

buttons off. You should never let one of them go into his drawers

without feeling them all to see that they're on tight."

"I'll remember that," said Mary, and then she made another little

furtive attempt to open the book.

"And about your own stockings, Mary. Nothing is so useful to a young

woman in your position as a habit of darning neat. I'm sometimes

almost afraid that you don't like darning."

"Oh yes I do." That was a fib; but what could she do, poor girl, when

so pressed?

"Because I thought you would look at Jane Robinson's and Julia

Wright's which are lying there in the basket. I did Rebecca's myself

before tea, till my old eyes were sore."

"Oh, I didn't know," said Mary, with some slight offence in her tone.

"Why didn't you ask me to do them downright if you wanted?"

"It's only for the practice it will give you."

"Practice! I'm always practising something." But nevertheless she

laid down the book, and dragged the basket of work up on to the

table. "Why, Mrs. Thomas, it's impossible to mend these; they're all

darn."

"Give them to me," said Mrs. Thomas. And then there was silence

between them for a quarter of an hour during which Mary's thoughts

wandered away to the events of her future life. Would his stockings

be so troublesome as these?

But Mrs. Thomas was at heart an honest woman, and as a rule was

honest also in practice. Her conscience told her that Mr. Graham

might probably not approve of this sort of practice for conjugal

duties, and in spite of her failing eyes she resolved to do her duty.

"Never mind them, Mary," said she. "I remember now that you were

doing your own before dinner."

"Of course I was," said Mary sulkily. "And as for practice, I don't

suppose he'll want me to do more of that than anything else."

"Well, dear, put them by." And Miss Snow did put them by, resuming

Rasselas as she did so. Who darned the stockings of Rasselas and felt

that the buttons were tight on his shirts? What a happy valley must

it have been if a bride expectant were free from all such cares as

these!

"I suppose, Mary, it will be some time in the spring of next year."

Mrs. Thomas was not reading, and therefore a little conversation from

time to time was to her a solace.

"What will be, Mrs. Thomas?"

"Why, the marriage."

"I suppose it will. He told father it should be early in 18--, and I

shall be past twenty then."

"I wonder where you'll go to live."

"I don't know. He has never said anything about that."

"I suppose not; but I'm sure it will be a long way away from

Peckham." In answer to this Mary said nothing, but could not help

wishing that it might be so. Peckham to her had not been a place

bright with happiness, although she had become in so marked a way a

child of good fortune. And then, moreover, she had a deep care on her

mind with which the streets and houses and pathways of Peckham were

closely connected. It would be very expedient that she should go far,

far away from Peckham when she had become, in actual fact, the very

wife of Felix Graham.

"Miss Mary," whispered the red-armed maid of all work, creeping up

to Mary's bedroom door, when they had all retired for the night, and

whispering through the chink. "Miss Mary. I've somethink to say."

And Mary opened the door. "I've got a letter from him;" and the maid

of all work absolutely produced a little note enclosed in a green

envelope.

"Sarah, I told you not," said Mary, looking very stern and hesitating

with her finger whether or no she would take the letter.

"But he did so beg and pray. Besides, miss, as he says hisself he

must have his answer. Any gen'leman, he says, 'as a right to a

answer. And if you'd a seed him yourself I'm sure you'd have took it.

He did look so nice with a blue and gold hankercher round his neck.

He was a-going to the the-a-tre he said."

"And who was going with him, Sarah?"

"Oh, no one. Only his mamma and sister, and them sort. He's all

right--he is." And then Mary Snow did take the letter.

"And I'll come for the answer when you're settling the room after

breakfast to-morrow?" said the girl.

"No; I don't know. I sha'n't send any answer at all. But, Sarah, for

heaven's sake, do not say a word about it!"

"Who, I? Laws love you, miss. I wouldn't;--not for worlds of gold."

And then Mary was left alone to read a second letter from a second

suitor.

"Angel of light!" it began, "but cold as your own fair name." Poor

Mary thought it was very nice and very sweet, and though she was so

much afraid of it that she almost wished it away, yet she read it a

score of times. Stolen pleasures always are sweet. She had not cared

to read those two lines from her own betrothed lord above once, or at

the most twice; and yet they had been written by a good man,--a man

superlatively good to her, and written too with considerable pain.

[Illustration: The Angel of Light.]

She sat down all trembling to think of what she was doing; and then,

as she thought, she read the letter again. "Angel of light! but cold

as your own fair name." Alas, alas! it was very sweet to her!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. FURNIVAL LOOKS FOR ASSISTANCE.

"And you think that nothing can be done down there?" said Mr.

Furnival to his clerk, immediately after the return of Mr. Crabwitz

from Hamworth to London.

"Nothing at all, sir," said Mr. Crabwitz, with laconic significance.

"Well; I dare say not. If the matter could have been arranged at a

reasonable cost, without annoyance to my friend Lady Mason, I should

have been glad; but, on the whole, it will perhaps be better that the

law should take its course. She will suffer a good deal, but she will

be the safer for it afterwards."

"Mr. Furnival, I went so far as to offer a thousand pounds!"

"A thousand pounds! Then they'll think we're afraid of them."

"Not a bit more than they did before. Though I offered the money, he

doesn't know the least that the offer came from our side. But I'll

tell you what it is, Mr. Furnival--. I suppose I may speak my mind."

"Oh, yes! But remember this, Crabwitz; Lady Mason is no more in

danger of losing the property than you are. It is a most vexatious

thing, but there can be no doubt as to what the result will be."

"Well, Mr. Furnival,--I don't know."

"In such matters, I am tolerably well able to form an opinion."

"Oh, certainly!"

"And that's my opinion. Now I shall be very glad to hear yours."

"My opinion is this, Mr. Furnival, that Sir Joseph never made that

codicil."

"And what makes you think so?"

"The whole course of the evidence. It's quite clear there was another

deed executed that day, and witnessed by Bolster and Kenneby. Had

there been two documents for them to witness, they would have

remembered it so soon after the occurrence."

"Well, Crabwitz, I differ from you,--differ from you in toto. But

keep your opinion to yourself, that's all. I've no doubt you did

the best for us you could down at Hamworth, and I'm much obliged to

you. You'll find we've got our hands quite full again,--almost too

full." Then he turned round to his table, and to the papers upon it;

whereupon, Crabwitz took the hint, and left the room.

But when he had gone, Mr. Furnival again raised his eyes from the

papers on the table, and leaning back in his chair, gave himself up

to further consideration of the Orley Farm case. Crabwitz he knew was

a sharp, clever man, and now the opinion formed by Crabwitz, after

having seen this Hamworth attorney, tallied with his own opinion.

Yes; it was his own opinion. He had never said as much, even to

himself, with those inward words which a man uses when he assures

himself of the result of his own thoughts; but he was aware that it

was his own opinion. In his heart of hearts, he did believe that that

codicil had been fraudulently manufactured by his friend and client,

Lady Mason.

Under these circumstances, what should he do? He had the handle of

his pen between his teeth, as was his habit when he was thinking, and

tried to bring himself to some permanent resolution.

How beautiful had she looked while she stood in Sir Peregrine's

library, leaning on the old man's arm--how beautiful and how

innocent! That was the form which his thoughts chiefly took. And then

she had given him her hand, and he still felt the soft silken touch

of her cool fingers. He would not be a man if he could desert a woman

in such a strait. And such a woman! If even guilty, had she not

expiated her guilt by deep sorrow? And then he thought of Mr. Mason

of Groby Park; and he thought of Sir Peregrine's strong conviction,

and of Judge Staveley's belief; and he thought also of the strong

hold which public opinion and twenty years of possession would still

give to the cause he favoured. He would still bring her through! Yes;

in spite of her guilt, if she were guilty; on the strength of her

innocency, if she were innocent; but on account of her beauty, and

soft hand, and deep liquid eye. So at least he would have owned,

could he have been honest enough to tell himself the whole truth.

But he must prepare himself for the battle in earnest. It was not as

though he had been briefed in this case, and had merely to perform

the duty for which he had been hired. He was to undertake the

whole legal management of the affair. He must settle what attorney

should have the matter in hand, and instruct that attorney how to

reinstruct him, and how to reinstruct those other barristers who must

necessarily be employed on the defence, in a case of such magnitude.

He did not yet know under what form the attack would be made; but he

was nearly certain that it would be done in the shape of a criminal

charge. He hoped that it might take the direct form of an accusation

of forgery. The stronger and more venomous the charge made, the

stronger also would be public opinion in favour of the accused,

and the greater the chance of an acquittal. But if she were to be

found guilty on any charge, it would matter little on what. Any

such verdict of guilty would be utter ruin and obliteration of her

existence.

He must consult with some one, and at last he made up his mind to go

to his very old friend, Mr. Chaffanbrass. Mr. Chaffanbrass was safe,

and he might speak out his mind to him without fear of damaging the

cause. Not that he could bring himself to speak out his real mind,

even to Mr. Chaffanbrass. He would so speak that Mr. Chaffanbrass

should clearly understand him; but still, not even to his ears, would

he say that he really believed Lady Mason to have been guilty. How

would it be possible that he should feign before a jury his assured,

nay, his indignant conviction of his client's innocence, if he had

ever whispered to any one his conviction of her guilt?

On that same afternoon he sent to make an appointment with Mr.

Chaffanbrass, and immediately after breakfast, on the following

morning, had himself taken to that gentleman's chambers. The chambers

of this great guardian of the innocence--or rather not-guiltiness

of the public--were not in any so-named inn, but consisted of two

gloomy, dark, panelled rooms in Ely Place. The course of our story,

however, will not cause us to make many visits to Ely Place, and

any closer description of them may be spared. I have said that Mr.

Chaffanbrass and Mr. Furnival were very old friends. So they were.

They had known each other for more than thirty years, and each knew

the whole history of the other's rise and progress in the profession;

but any results of their friendship at present were but scanty. They

might meet each other in the streets, perhaps, once in the year; and

occasionally--but very seldom--might be brought together on subjects

connected with their profession; as was the case when they travelled

together down to Birmingham. As to meeting in each other's houses, or

coming together for the sake of the friendship which existed,--the

idea of doing so never entered the head of either of them.

All the world knows Mr. Chaffanbrass--either by sight or by

reputation. Those who have been happy enough to see the face and

gait of the man as, in years now gone, he used to lord it at the Old

Bailey, may not have thought much of the privilege which was theirs.

But to those who have only read of him, and know of his deeds simply

by their triumphs, he was a man very famous and worthy to be seen.

"Look; that's Chaffanbrass. It was he who cross-examined ---- at the

Old Bailey, and sent him howling out of London, banished for ever

into the wilderness." "Where, where? Is that Chaffanbrass? What a

dirty little man!"

To this dirty little man in Ely Place, Mr. Furnival now went in his

difficulty. Mr. Furnival might feel himself sufficient to secure the

acquittal of an innocent person, or even of a guilty person, under

ordinary circumstances; but if any man in England could secure the

acquittal of a guilty person under extraordinary circumstances, it

would be Mr. Chaffanbrass. This had been his special line of work for

the last thirty years.

Mr. Chaffanbrass was a dirty little man; and when seen without his

gown and wig, might at a first glance be thought insignificant. But

he knew well how to hold his own in the world, and could maintain

his opinion, unshaken, against all the judges in the land. "Well,

Furnival, and what can I do for you?" he said, as soon as the member

for the Essex Marshes was seated opposite to him. "It isn't often

that the light of your countenance shines so far east as this.

Somebody must be in trouble, I suppose?"

"Somebody is in trouble," said Mr. Furnival; and then he began

to tell his story. Mr. Chaffanbrass listened almost in silence

throughout. Now and then he asked a question by a word or two,

expressing no opinion whatever as he did so; but he was satisfied to

leave the talking altogether in the hands of his visitor till the

whole tale was told. "Ah," he said then, "a clever woman!"

"An uncommonly sweet creature too," said Mr. Furnival.

"I dare say," said Mr. Chaffanbrass; and then there was a pause.

"And what can I do for you?" said Mr. Chaffanbrass.

"In the first place I should be very glad to have your advice; and

then--. Of course I must lead in defending her,--unless it were well

that I should put the case altogether in your hands."

"Oh no! don't think of that. I couldn't give the time to it. My heart

is not in it, as yours is. Where will it be?"

"At Alston, I suppose."

"At the Spring assizes. That will be--. Let me see; about the 10th of

March."

"I should think we might get it postponed till the summer. Round is

not at all hot about it."

"Should we gain anything by that? If a prisoner be innocent why

torment him by delay. He is tolerably sure of escape. If he be

guilty, extension of time only brings out the facts the clearer.

As far as my experience goes, the sooner a man is tried the

better,--always."

"And you would consent to hold a brief?"

"Under you? Well; yes. I don't mind it at Alston. Anything to oblige

an old friend. I never was proud, you know."

"And what do you think about it, Chaffanbrass?"

"Ah! that's the question."

"She must be pulled through. Twenty years of possession! Think of

that."

"That's what Mason, the man down in Yorkshire, is thinking of.

There's no doubt of course about that partnership deed?"

"I fear not. Round would not go on with it if that were not all

true."

"It depends on those two witnesses, Furnival. I remember the case of

old, though it was twenty years ago, and I had nothing to do with it.

I remember thinking that Lady Mason was a very clever woman, and that

Round and Crook were rather slow."

"He's a brute; is that fellow, Mason of Groby Park."

"A brute; is he? We'll get him into the box and make him say as much

for himself. She's uncommonly pretty, isn't she?"

"She is a pretty woman."

"And interesting? It will all tell, you know. A widow with one son,

isn't she?"

"Yes, and she has done her duty admirably since her husband's death.

You will find too that she has the sympathies of all the best

people in her neighbourhood. She is staying now at the house of Sir

Peregrine Orme, who would do anything for her."

"Anything, would he?"

"And the Staveleys know her. The judge is convinced of her

innocence."

"Is he? He'll probably have the Home Circuit in the summer. His

conviction expressed from the bench would be more useful to her. You

can make Staveley believe everything in a drawing-room or over a

glass of wine; but I'll be hanged if I can ever get him to believe

anything when he's on the bench."

"But, Chaffanbrass, the countenance of such people will be of great

use to her down there. Everybody will know that she's been staying

with Sir Peregrine."

"I've no doubt she's a clever woman."

"But this new trouble has half killed her."

"I don't wonder at that either. These sort of troubles do vex people.

A pretty woman like that should have everything smooth; shouldn't

she? Well, we'll do the best we can. You'll see that I'm properly

instructed. By-the-by, who is her attorney? In such a case as that

you couldn't have a better man than old Solomon Aram. But Solomon

Aram is too far east from you, I suppose?"

"Isn't he a Jew?"

"Upon my word I don't know. He's an attorney, and that's enough for

me."

And then the matter was again discussed between them, and it was

agreed that a third counsel would be wanting. "Felix Graham is very

much interested in the case," said Mr. Furnival, "and is as firmly

convinced of her innocence as--as I am." And he managed to look his

ally in the face and to keep his countenance firmly.

"Ah," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "But what if he should happen to change

his opinion about his own client?"

"We could prevent that, I think."

"I'm not so sure. And then he'd throw her over as sure as your name's

Furnival."

"I hardly think he'd do that."

"I believe he'd do anything." And Mr. Chaffanbrass was quite moved

to enthusiasm. "I've heard that man talk more nonsense about the

profession in one hour, than I ever heard before since I first put a

cotton gown on my back. He does not understand the nature of the duty

which a professional man owes to his client."

"But he'd work well if he had a case at heart himself. I don't like

him, but he is clever."

"You can do as you like, of course. I shall be out of my ground down

at Alston, and of course I don't care who takes the fag of the work.

But I tell you this fairly;--if he does go into the case and then

turns against us or drops it,--I shall turn against him and drop into

him."

"Heaven help him in such a case as that!" And then these two great

luminaries of the law shook hands and parted.

One thing was quite clear to Mr. Furnival as he had himself carried

in a cab from Ely Place to his own chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Mr.

Chaffanbrass was fully convinced of Lady Mason's guilt. He had not

actually said so, but he had not even troubled himself to go through

the little ceremony of expressing a belief in her innocence. Mr.

Furnival was well aware that Mr. Chaffanbrass would not on this

account be less likely to come out strongly with such assurances

before a jury, or to be less severe in his cross-examination of a

witness whose evidence went to prove that guilt; but nevertheless

the conviction was disheartening. Mr. Chaffanbrass would know, almost

by instinct, whether an accused person was or was not guilty; and

he had already perceived, by instinct, that Lady Mason was guilty.

Mr. Furnival sighed as he stepped out of his cab, and again wished

that he could wash his hands of the whole affair. He wished it very

much;--but he knew that his wish could not be gratified.

"Solomon Aram!" he said to himself, as he again sat down in his

arm-chair. "It will sound badly to those people down at Alston. At

the Old Bailey they don't mind that kind of thing." And then he made

up his mind that Solomon Aram would not do. It would be a disgrace to

him to take a case out of Solomon Aram's hands. Mr. Chaffanbrass

did not understand all this. Mr. Chaffanbrass had been dealing with

Solomon Arams all his life. Mr. Chaffanbrass could not see the effect

which such an alliance would have on the character of a barrister

holding Mr. Furnival's position. Solomon Aram was a good man in his

way no doubt;--perhaps the best man going. In taking every dodge to

prevent a conviction no man could be better than Solomon Aram. All

this Mr. Furnival felt;--but he felt also that he could not afford

it. "It would be tantamount to a confession of guilt to take such a

man as that down into the country," he said to himself, trying to

excuse himself.

And then he also made up his mind that he would sound Felix Graham.

If Felix Graham could be induced to take up the case thoroughly

believing in the innocence of his client, no man would be more useful

as a junior. Felix Graham went the Home Circuit on which Alston was

one of the assize towns.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOVE WAS STILL THE LORD OF ALL.

Why should I not? Such had been the question which Sir Peregrine Orme

had asked himself over and over again, in these latter days, since

Lady Mason had been staying at his house; and the purport of the

question was this:--Why should he not make Lady Mason his wife?

I and my readers can probably see very many reasons why he should not

do so; but then we are not in love with Lady Mason. Her charms and

her sorrows,--her soft, sad smile and her more lovely tears have not

operated upon us. We are not chivalrous old gentlemen, past seventy

years of age, but still alive, keenly alive, to a strong feeling of

romance. That visit will perhaps be remembered which Mr. Furnival

made at The Cleeve, and the subsequent interview between Lady Mason

and the baronet. On that day he merely asked himself the question,

and took no further step. On the subsequent day and the day after,

it was the same. He still asked himself the question, sitting alone

in his library; but he did not ask it as yet of any one else. When

he met Lady Mason in these days his manner to her was full of the

deference due to a lady and of the affection due to a dear friend;

but that was all. Mrs. Orme, seeing this, and cordially concurring in

this love for her guest, followed the lead which her father-in-law

gave, and threw herself into Lady Mason's arms. They two were fast

and bosom friends.

And what did Lady Mason think of all this? In truth there was much in

it that was sweet to her, but there was something also that increased

that idea of danger which now seemed to envelop her whole existence.

Why had Sir Peregrine so treated her in the library, behaving towards

her with such tokens of close affection? He had put his arm round her

waist and kissed her lips and pressed her to his old bosom. Why had

this been so? He had assured her that he would be to her as a father,

but her woman's instinct had told her that the pressure of his hand

had been warmer than that which a father accords to his adopted

daughter. No idea of anger had come upon her for a moment; but she

had thought about it much, and had thought about it almost in dismay.

What if the old man did mean more than a father's love? It seemed to

her as though it must be a dream that he should do so; but what if he

did? How should she answer him? In such circumstances what should she

do or say? Could she afford to buy his friendship,--even his warmest

love at the cost of the enmity of so many others? Would not Mrs. Orme

hate her, Mrs. Orme, whom she truly, dearly, eagerly loved? Mrs.

Orme's affection was, of all personal gratifications, the sweetest

to her. And the young heir,--would not he hate her? Nay, would he

not interfere and with some strong hand prevent so mean a deed on the

part of his grandfather? And if so, would she not thus have lost them

altogether? And then she thought of that other friend whose aid would

be so indispensable to her in this dreadful time of tribulation. How

would Mr. Furnival receive such tidings, if it should come to pass

that such tidings were to be told?

Lady Mason was rich with female charms, and she used them partly with

the innocence of the dove, but partly also with the wisdom of the

serpent. But in such use as she did make of these only weapons which

Providence had given to her, I do not think that she can be regarded

as very culpable. During those long years of her young widowhood in

which nothing had been wanting to her, her conduct had been free from

any hint of reproach. She had been content to find all her joy in

her duties and in her love as a mother. Now a great necessity for

assistance had come upon her. It was necessary that she should bind

men to her cause, men powerful in the world and able to fight her

battle with strong arms. She did so bind them with the only chains at

her command,--but she had no thought, nay, no suspicion of evil in so

doing. It was very painful to her when she found that she had caused

unhappiness to Mrs. Furnival; and it caused her pain now, also, when

she thought of Sir Peregrine's new love. She did wish to bind these

men to her by a strong attachment; but she would have stayed this

feeling at a certain point had it been possible for her so to manage

it.

In the mean time Sir Peregrine still asked himself that question. He

had declared to himself when first the idea had come to him, that

none of those whom he loved should be injured. He would even ask his

daughter-in-law's consent, condescending to plead his cause before

her, making her understand his motives, and asking her acquiescence

as a favour. He would be so careful of his grandson that this second

marriage--if such event did come to pass--should not put a pound out

of his pocket, or at any rate should not hamper the succession of the

estate with a pound of debt. And then he made excuses to himself as

to the step which he proposed to take, thinking how he would meet his

friends, and how he would carry himself before his old servants.

Old men have made more silly marriages than this which he then

desired. Gentlemen such as Sir Peregrine in age and station have

married their housemaids,--have married young girls of eighteen

years of age,--have done so and faced their friends and servants

afterwards. The bride that he proposed to himself was a lady, an old

friend, a woman over forty, and one whom by such a marriage he could

greatly assist in her deep sorrow. Why should he not do it?

After much of such thoughts as these, extended over nearly a week,

he resolved to speak his mind to Mrs. Orme. If it were to be done it

should be done at once. The incredulous unromantic readers of this

age would hardly believe me if I said that his main object was to

render assistance to Lady Mason in her difficulty; but so he assured

himself, and so he believed. This assistance to be of true service

must be given at once;--and having so resolved he sent for Mrs. Orme

into the library.

"Edith, my darling," he said, taking her hand and pressing it between

both his own as was often the wont with him in his more affectionate

moods. "I want to speak to you--on business that concerns me nearly;

may perhaps concern us all nearly. Can you give me half an hour?"

"Of course I can--what is it, sir? I am a bad hand at business; but

you know that."

"Sit down, dear; there; sit there, and I will sit here. As to this

business, no one can counsel me as well as you."

"Dearest father, I should be a poor councillor in anything."

"Not in this, Edith. It is about Lady Mason that I would speak to

you. We both love her dearly; do we not?"

"I do."

"And are glad to have her here?"

"Oh, so glad. When this trial is only over, it will be so sweet, to

have her for a neighbour. We really know her now. And it will be so

pleasant to see much of her."

There was nothing discouraging in this, but still the words in some

slight degree grated against Sir Peregrine's feelings. At the present

moment he did not wish to think of Lady Mason as living at Orley

Farm, and would have preferred that his daughter-in-law should have

spoken of her as being there, at The Cleeve.

"Yes; we know her now," he said. "And believe me in this, Edith; no

knowledge obtained of a friend in happiness is at all equal to that

which is obtained in sorrow. Had Lady Mason been prosperous, had she

never become subject to the malice and avarice of wicked people, I

should never have loved her as I do love her."

"Nor should I, father."

"She is a cruelly ill-used woman, and a woman worthy of the kindest

usage. I am an old man now, but it has never before been my lot to

be so anxious for a fellow-creature as I am for her. It is dreadful

to think that innocence in this country should be subject to such

attacks."

"Indeed it is; but you do not think that there is any danger?"

This was all very well, and showed that Mrs. Orme's mind was well

disposed towards the woman whom he loved. But he had known that

before, and he began to feel that he was not approaching the object

which he had in view. "Edith," at last he said abruptly, "I love her

with my whole heart. I would fain make her--my wife." Sir Peregrine

Orme had never in his course through life failed in anything for lack

of courage; and when the idea came home to him that he was trembling

at the task which he had imposed on himself, he dashed at it at once.

It is so that forlorn hopes are led, and become not forlorn; it is so

that breaches are taken.

"Your wife!" said Mrs. Orme. She would not have breathed a syllable

to pain him if she could have helped it, but the suddenness of the

announcement overcame her for a moment.

"Yes, Edith, my wife. Let us discuss the matter before you condemn

it. But in the first place I would have you to understand this--I

will not marry her if you say that it will make you unhappy. I have

not spoken to her as yet, and she knows nothing of this project." Sir

Peregrine, it may be presumed, had not himself thought much of that

kiss which he had given her. "You," he continued to say, "have given

up your whole life to me. You are my angel. If this thing will make

you unhappy it shall not be done."

Sir Peregrine had not so considered it, but with such a woman as Mrs.

Orme this was, of course, the surest way to overcome opposition. On

her own behalf, thinking only of herself, she would stand in the

way of nothing that could add to Sir Peregrine's happiness. But

nevertheless the idea was strong in her mind that such a marriage

would be imprudent. Sir Peregrine at present stood high before the

world. Would he stand so high if he did this thing? His gray hair

and old manly bearing were honoured and revered by all who knew him.

Would this still be so if he made himself the husband of Lady Mason?

She loved so dearly, she valued so highly the honour that was paid

to him! She was so proud of her own boy in that he was the grandson

of so perfect a gentleman! Would not this be a sad ending to such

a career? Such were the thoughts which ran through her mind at the

moment.

"Make me unhappy!" she said getting up and going over to him. "It is

your happiness of which I would think. Will it make you more happy?"

"It will enable me to befriend her more effectually."

"But, dearest father, you must be the first consideration to us,--to

me and Peregrine. Will it make you more happy?"

"I think it will," he answered slowly.

"Then I, for one, will say nothing against it," she answered. She was

very weak, it will be said. Yes, she was weak. Many of the sweetest,

kindest, best of women are weak in this way. It is not every woman

that can bring herself to say hard, useful, wise words in opposition

to the follies of those they love best. A woman to be useful and wise

no doubt should have such power. For myself I am not so sure that I

like useful and wise women. "Then I for one will say nothing against

it," said Mrs. Orme, deficient in utility, wanting in wisdom, but

full of the sweetest affection.

"You are sure that you will not love her the less yourself?" said Sir

Peregrine.

"Yes; I am sure of that. If it were to be so, I should endeavour to

love her the more."

"Dearest Edith. I have only one other person to tell."

"Do you mean Peregrine?" she said in her softest voice.

"Yes. Of course he must be told. But as it would not be well to ask

his consent,--as I have asked yours--" and then as he said this she

kissed his brow.

"But you will let him know it?"

"Yes; that is if she accepts my proposition. Then he shall know it

immediately. And, Edith, my dear, you may be sure of this; nothing

that I do shall be allowed in any way to injure his prospects or to

hamper him as regards money when I am gone. If this marriage takes

place I cannot do very much for her in the way of money; she will

understand that. Something I can of course."

And then Mrs. Orme stood over the fire, looking at the hot coals, and

thinking what Lady Mason's answer would be. She esteemed Lady Mason

very highly, regarding her as a woman sensible and conscientious at

all points, and she felt by no means certain that the offer would

be accepted. What if Lady Mason should say that such an arrangement

would not be possible for her. Mrs. Orme felt that under such

circumstances she at any rate would not withdraw her love from Lady

Mason.

"And now I may as well speak to her at once," said Sir Peregrine. "Is

she in the drawing-room?"

"I left her there."

"Will you ask her to come to me--with my love?"

"I had better not say anything I suppose?"

Sir Peregrine, in his heart of hearts wished that his daughter-in-law

could say it all, but he would not give her such a commission. "No;

perhaps not." And then Mrs. Orme was going to leave him.

"One word more, Edith. You and I, darling, have known each other so

long and loved each other so well, that I should be unhappy if I were

to fall in your estimation."

"There is no fear of that, father."

"Will you believe me when I assure you that my great object in doing

this is to befriend a good and worthy woman whom I regard as ill

used--beyond all ill usage of which I have hitherto known anything?"

She then assured him that she did so believe, and she assured him

truly; after that she left him and went away to send in Lady Mason

for her interview. In the mean time Sir Peregrine got up and stood

with his back to the fire. He would have been glad that the coming

scene could be over, and yet I should be wronging him to say that

he was afraid of it. There would be a pleasure to him in telling

her that he loved her so dearly and trusted her with such absolute

confidence. There would be a sort of pleasure to him in speaking even

of her sorrow, and in repeating his assurance that he would fight the

battle for her with all the means at his command. And perhaps also

there would be some pleasure in the downcast look of her eye, as she

accepted the tender of his love. Something of that pleasure he had

known already. And then he remembered the other alternative. It was

quite upon the cards that she should decline his offer. He did not by

any means shut his eyes to that. Did she do so, his friendship should

by no means be withdrawn from her. He would be very careful from the

onset that she should understand so much as that. And then he heard

the light footsteps in the hall; the gentle hand was raised to the

door, and Lady Mason was standing in the room.

"Dear Lady Mason," he said, meeting her half way across the room, "it

is very kind of you to come to me when I send for you in this way."

"It would be my duty to come to you, if it were half across the

kingdom;--and my pleasure also."

"Would it?" said he, looking into her face with all the wishfulness

of a young lover. From that moment she knew what was coming. Strange

as was the destiny which was to be offered to her at this period of

her life, yet she foresaw clearly that the offer was to be made. What

she did not foresee, what she could not foretell, was the answer

which she might make to it!

"It would certainly be my sweetest pleasure to send for you if you

were away from us,--to send for you or to follow you," said he.

"I do not know how to make return for all your kind regard to me;--to

you and to dear Mrs. Orme."

"Call her Edith, will you not? You did so call her once."

"I call her so often when we are alone together, now; and yet I feel

that I have no right."

"You have every right. You shall have every right if you will accept

it. Lady Mason, I am an old man,--some would say a very old man. But

I am not too old to love you. Can, you accept the love of an old man

like me?"

Lady Mason was, as we are aware, not taken in the least by surprise;

but it was quite necessary that she should seem to be so taken. This

is a little artifice which is excusable in almost any lady at such

a period. "Sir Peregrine," she said, "you do not mean more than the

love of a most valued friend?"

"Yes, much more. I mean the love of a husband for his wife; of a wife

for her husband."

"Sir Peregrine! Ah me! You have not thought of this, my friend. You

have not remembered the position in which I am placed. Dearest,

dearest friend; dearest of all friends,"--and then she knelt before

him, leaning on his knees, as he sat in his accustomed large

arm-chair. "It may not be so. Think of the sorrow that would come to

you and yours, if my enemies should prevail."

"By ---- they shall not prevail!" swore Sir Peregrine, roundly; and

as he swore the oath he put his two hands upon her shoulders.

"No; we will hope not. I should die here at your feet if I thought

that they could prevail. But I should die twenty deaths were I to

drag you with me into disgrace. There will be disgrace even in

standing at that bar."

"Who will dare to say so, when I shall stand there with you?" said

Sir Peregrine.

There was a feeling expressed in his face as he spoke these words,

which made it glorious, and bright, and beautiful. She, with her eyes

laden with tears, could not see it; but nevertheless, she knew that

it was bright and beautiful. And his voice was full of hot eager

assurance,--that assurance which had the power to convey itself from

one breast to another. Would it not be so? If he stood there with her

as her husband and lord, would it not be the case that no one would

dare to impute disgrace to her?

And yet she did not wish it. Even yet, thinking of all this as she

did think of it, according to the truth of the argument which he

himself put before her, she would still have preferred that it should

not be so. If she only knew with what words to tell him so;--to tell

him so and yet give no offence! For herself, she would have married

him willingly. Why should she not? Nay, she could and would have

loved him, and been to him a wife, such as he could have found in no

other woman. But she said within her heart that she owed him kindness

and gratitude--that she owed them all kindness, and that it would

be bad to repay them in such a way as this. She also thought of Sir

Peregrine's gray hairs, and of his proud standing in the county, and

the respect in which men held him. Would it be well in her to drag

him down in his last days from the noble pedestal on which he stood,

and repay him thus for all that he was doing for her?

"Well," said he, stroking her soft hair with his hands--the hair

which appeared in front of the quiet prim cap she wore, "shall it be

so? Will you give me the right to stand there with you and defend you

against the tongues of wicked men? We each have our own weakness, and

we also have each our own strength. There I may boast that I should

be strong."

She thought again for a moment or two without rising from her knees,

and also without speaking. Would such strength suffice? And if it did

suffice, would it then be well with him? As for herself, she did love

him. If she had not loved him before, she loved him now. Who had ever

been to her so noble, so loving, so gracious as he? In her ears no

young lover's vows had ever sounded. In her heart such love as all

the world knows had never been known. Her former husband had been

kind to her in his way, and she had done her duty by him carefully,

painfully, and with full acceptance of her position. But there had

been nothing there that was bright, and grand, and noble. She would

have served Sir Peregrine on her knees in the smallest offices, and

delighted in such services. It was not for lack of love that she must

refuse him. But still she did not answer him, and still he stroked

her hair.

"It would be better that you had never seen me," at last she said;

and she spoke with truth the thought of her mind. That she must do

his bidding, whatever that bidding might be, she had in a certain way

acknowledged to herself. If he would have it so, so it must be. How

could she refuse him anything, or be disobedient in aught to one to

whom she owed so much? But still it would be wiser otherwise, wiser

for all--unless it were for herself alone. "It would be better that

you had never seen me," she said.

"Nay, not so, dearest. That it would not be better for me,--for me

and Edith I am quite sure. And I would fain hope that for you--"

"Oh, Sir Peregrine! you know what I mean. You know how I value your

kindness. What should I be if it were withdrawn from me?"

"It shall not be withdrawn. Do not let that feeling actuate you.

Answer me out of your heart, and however your heart may answer,

remember this, that my friendship and support shall be the same. If

you will take me for your husband, as your husband will I stand by

you. If you cannot,--then I will stand by you as your father."

What could she say? A word or two she did speak as to Mrs. Orme and

her feelings, delaying her absolute reply--and as to Peregrine Orme

and his prospects; but on both, as on all other points, the baronet

was armed with his answer. He had spoken to his darling Edith, and

she had gladly given her consent. To her it would be everything to

have so sweet a friend. And then as to his heir, every care should

be taken that no injury should be done to him; and speaking of this,

Sir Peregrine began to say a few words, plaintively, about money.

But then Lady Mason stopped him. "No," she said, "she could not,

and would not, listen to that. She would have no settlement. No

consideration as to money should be made to weigh with her. It was

in no degree for that--" And then she wept there till she would have

fallen had he not supported her.

What more is there to be told. Of course she accepted him. As far as

I can see into such affairs no alternative was allowed to her. She

also was not a wise woman at all points. She was one whose feelings

were sometimes too many for her, and whose feelings on this occasion

had been much too many for her. Had she been able to throw aside from

her his offer, she would have done so; but she had felt that she was

not able. "If you wish it, Sir Peregrine," she said at last.

"And can you love an old man?" he had asked. Old men sometimes will

ask questions such as these. She did not answer him, but stood by his

side; and, then again he kissed her, and was happy.

He resolved from that moment that Lady Mason should no longer be

regarded as the widow of a city knight, but as the wife elect of a

country baronet. Whatever ridicule he might incur in this matter, he

would incur at once. Men and women had dared to speak of her cruelly,

and they should now learn that any such future speech would be spoken

of one who was exclusively his property. Let any who chose to be

speakers under such circumstances look to it. He had devoted himself

to her that he might be her knight and bear her scathless through the

fury of this battle. With God's help he would put on his armour at

once for that fight. Let them who would now injure her look to it. As

soon as might be she should bear his name; but all the world should

know at once what was her right to claim his protection. He had never

been a coward, and he would not now be guilty of the cowardice of

hiding his intentions. If there were those who chose to smile at the

old man's fancy, let them smile. There would be many, he knew, who

would not understand an old man's honour and an old man's chivalry.

"My own one," he then said, pressing her again to his side, "will

you tell Edith, or shall I? She expects it." But Lady Mason begged

that he would tell the tale. It was necessary, she said, that she

should be alone for a while. And then, escaping, she went to her own

chamber.

"Ask Mrs. Orme if she will kindly step to me," said Sir Peregrine,

having rang his bell for the servant.

Lady Mason escaped across the hall to the stairs, and succeeded in

reaching her room without being seen by any one. Then she sat herself

down, and began to look her future world in the face. Two questions

she had to ask. Would it be well for her that this marriage should

take place? and would it be well for him? In an off-hand way she

had already answered both questions; but she had done so by feeling

rather than by thought.

No doubt she would gain much in the coming struggle by such a

position as Sir Peregrine would give her. It did seem to her that Mr.

Dockwrath and Joseph Mason would hardly dare to bring such a charge

as that threatened against the wife of Sir Peregrine Orme. And then,

too, what evidence as to character would be so substantial as the

evidence of such a marriage? But how would Mr. Furnival bear it,

and if he were offended would it be possible that the fight should

be fought without him? No; that would be impossible. The lawyer's

knowledge, experience, and skill were as necessary to her as the

baronet's position and character. But why should Mr. Furnival be

offended by such a marriage? "She did not know," she said to herself.

"She could not see that there should be cause of offence." But yet

some inner whisper of her conscience told her that there would be

offence. Must Mr. Furnival be told; and must he be told at once? And

then what would Lucius say and think, and how should she answer the

strong words which her son would use to her? He would use strong

words she knew, and would greatly dislike this second marriage of his

mother. What grown-up son is ever pleased to hear that his mother is

about to marry? The Cleeve must be her home now--that is, if she did

this deed. The Cleeve must be her home, and she must be separated

in all things from Orley Farm. As she thought of this her mind went

back, and back to those long gone days in which she had been racked

with anxiety that Orley Farm should be the inheritance of the little

baby that was lying at her feet. She remembered how she had pleaded

to the father, pointing out the rights of her son--declaring, and

with justice, that for herself she had asked for nothing; but that

for him--instead of asking might she not demand? Was not that other

son provided for, and those grown-up women with their rich husbands?

"Is he not your child as well as they?" she had pleaded. "Is he not

your own, and as well worthy of your love?" She had succeeded in

getting the inheritance for the baby at her feet;--but had his having

it made her happy, or him? Then her child had been all in all to her;

but now she felt that that child was half estranged from her about

this very property, and would become wholly estranged by the method

she was taking to secure it! "I have toiled for him," she said to

herself, "rising up early, and going to bed late; but the thief

cometh in the night and despoileth it." Who can guess the bitterness

of her thoughts as she said this?

But her last thoughts, as she sat there thinking, were of him--Sir

Peregrine. Would it be well for him that he should do this? And in

thus considering she did not turn her mind chiefly to the usual

view in which such a marriage would be regarded. Men might call Sir

Peregrine an old fool and laugh at him; but for that she would, with

God's help, make him amends. In those matters, he could judge for

himself; and should he judge it right thus to link his life to hers,

she would be true and leal to him in all things.

But then, about this trial. If there came disgrace and ruin, and

an utter overthrow? If--? Would it not be well at any rate that no

marriage should take place till that had been decided? She could not

find it in her heart to bring down his old gray hairs with utter

sorrow to the grave.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHAT THE YOUNG MEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

Lucius Mason at this time was living at home at Orley Farm, not by

any means in a happy frame of mind. It will be perhaps remembered

that he had at one time had an interview with Mr. Furnival in that

lawyer's chambers, which was by no means consoling to him, seeing

that Mr. Furnival had pooh-poohed him and his pretensions in a very

off-hand way; and he had since paid a very memorable visit to Mr.

Dockwrath in which he had hardly been more successful. Nevertheless,

he had gone to another lawyer. He had felt it impossible to remain

tranquil, pursuing the ordinary avocations of his life, while such

dreadful charges were being made openly against his mother, and

being so made without any authorised contradiction. He knew that she

was innocent. No doubt on that matter ever perplexed his mind for a

moment. But why was she such a coward that she would not allow him

to protect her innocence in the only way which the law permitted? He

could hardly believe that he had no power of doing so even without

her sanction; and therefore he went to another lawyer.

The other lawyer did him no good. It was not practicable that he, the

son, should bring an action for defamatory character on the part of

the mother, without that mother's sanction. Moreover, as this new

lawyer saw in a moment, any such interference on the part of Lucius,

and any interposition of fresh and new legal proceedings would

cripple and impede the advisers to whom Lady Mason had herself

confided her own case. The new lawyer could do nothing, and thus

Lucius, again repulsed, betook himself to Orley Farm in no happy

frame of mind.

For some day or two after this he did not see his mother. He would

not go down to The Cleeve, though they sent up and asked him; and she

was almost afraid to go across to the house and visit him. "He will

be in church on Sunday," she had said to Mrs. Orme. But he was not

in church on Sunday, and then on Sunday afternoon she did go to him.

This, it will be understood, was before Sir Peregrine had made his

offer, and therefore as to that, there was as yet no embarrassment on

the widow's mind.

"I cannot help feeling, mother," he said, after she had sat there

with him for a short time, "that for the present there is a division

between you and me."

"Oh, Lucius!"

"It is no use our denying it to ourselves. It is so. You are in

trouble, and you will not listen to my advice. You leave my house and

take to the roof of a new and an untried friend."

"No, Lucius; not that."

"Yes. I say a new friend. Twelve months ago, though you might call

there, you never did more than that--and even that but seldom. They

are new friends; and yet, now that you are in trouble, you choose to

live with them."

"Dear Lucius, is there any reason why I should not visit at The

Cleeve?"

"Yes; if you ask me--yes;" and now he spoke very sternly. "There is a

cloud upon you, and you should know nothing of visitings and of new

friendships till that cloud has been dispersed. While these things

are being said of you, you should set at no other table than this,

and drink of no man's cup but mine. I know your innocence," and as

he went on to speak, he stood up before her and looked down fully

into her face, "but others do not. I know how unworthy are these

falsehoods with which wicked men strive to crush you, but others

believe that they are true accusations. They cannot be disregarded,

and now it seems,--now that you have allowed them to gather to a

head, they will result in a trial, during which you will have to

stand at the bar charged with a dreadful crime."

"Oh, Lucius!" and she hid her eyes in her hands. "I could not have

helped it. How could I have helped it?"

"Well; it must be so now. And till that trial is over, here should

be your place. Here, at my right hand; I am he who am bound to stand

by you. It is I whose duty it is to see that your name be made white

again, though I spend all I have, ay, and my life in doing it. I am

the one man on whose arm you have a right to lean. And yet, in such

days as these, you leave my house and go to that of a stranger."

"He is not a stranger, Lucius."

"He cannot be to you as a son should be. However, it is for you to

judge. I have no control in this matter, but I think it right that

you should know what are my thoughts."

And then she had crept back again to The Cleeve. Let Lucius say what

he might, let this additional sorrow be ever so bitter, she could not

obey her son's behests. If she did so in one thing she must do so in

all. She had chosen her advisers with her best discretion, and by

that choice she must abide--even though it separated her from her

son. She could not abandon Sir Peregrine Orme and Mr. Furnival. So

she crept back and told all this to Mrs. Orme. Her heart would have

utterly sunk within her could she not have spoken openly to some one

of this sorrow.

"But he loves you," Mrs. Orme had said, comforting her. "It is not

that he does not love you."

"But he is so stern to me." And then Mrs. Orme had kissed her, and

promised that none should be stern to her, there, in that house. On

the morning after this Sir Peregrine had made his offer, and then

she felt that the division between her and her boy would be wider

than ever. And all this had come of that inheritance which she had

demanded so eagerly for her child.

And now Lucius was sitting alone in his room at Orley Farm, having,

for the present, given up all idea of attempting anything himself by

means of the law. He had made his way into Mr. Dockwrath's office,

and had there insulted the attorney in the presence of witnesses. His

hope now was that the attorney might bring an action against him. If

that were done he would thus have the means of bringing out all the

facts of the case before a jury and a judge. It was fixed in his mind

that if he could once drag that reptile before a public tribunal,

and with loud voice declare the wrong that was being done, all might

be well. The public would understand and would speak out, and the

reptile would be scorned and trodden under foot. Poor Lucius! It

is not always so easy to catch public sympathy, and it will occur

sometimes that the wrong reptile is crushed by the great public heel.

[Illustration: Lucius Mason in his Study.]

He had his books before him as he sat there--his Latham and his

Pritchard, and he had the jawbone of one savage and the skull of

another. His Liverpool bills for unadulterated guano were lying on

the table, and a philosophical German treatise on agriculture which

he had resolved to study. It became a man, he said to himself, to do

a man's work in spite of any sorrow. But, nevertheless, as he sat

there, his studies were but of little service to him. How many men

have declared to themselves the same thing, but have failed when the

trial came! Who, can command the temper and the mind? At ten I will

strike the lyre and begin my poem. But at ten the poetic spirit is

under a dark cloud--because the water for the tea had not boiled when

it was brought in at nine. And so the lyre remains unstricken.

And Lucius found that he could not strike his lyre. For days he had

sat there and no good note had been produced. And then he had walked

over his land, having a farming man at his heels, thinking that he

could turn his mind to the actual and practical working of his land.

But little good had come of that either. It was January, and the land

was sloppy and half frozen. There was no useful work to be done on

it. And then what farmer Greenwood had once said of him was true

enough, "The young maister's spry and active surely, but he can't let

unself down to stable doong and the loik o' that." He had some grand

idea of farming--a conviction that the agricultural world in general

was very backward, and that he would set it right. Even now in his

sorrow, as he walked through his splashy, frozen fields, he was

tormented by a desire to do something, he knew not what, that might

be great.

He had no such success on the present occasion and returned

disconsolate to the house. This happened about noon on the day after

that on which Sir Peregrine had declared himself. He returned as

I have said to the house, and there at the kitchen door he met a

little girl whom he knew well as belonging to The Cleeve. She was a

favourite of Mrs. Orme's, was educated and clothed by her, and ran

on her messages. Now she had brought a letter up to Lucius from his

mother. Curtsying low she so told him, and he at once went into the

sitting-room where he found it lying on his table. His hand was

nervous as he opened it; but if he could have seen how tremulous had

been the hand that wrote it! The letter was as follows:--

DEAREST LUCIUS,

I know you will be very much surprised at what I am going

to tell you, but I hope you will not judge me harshly.

If I know myself at all I would take no step of any kind

for my own advantage which could possibly injure you. At

the present moment we unfortunately do not agree about a

subject which is troubling us both, and I cannot therefore

consult you as I should otherwise have done. I trust that

by God's mercy these troubles may come to an end, and that

there may be no further differences between you and me.

Sir Peregrine Orme has made me an offer of marriage and I

have accepted it--

Lucius Mason when he had read so far threw down the letter upon the

table, and rising suddenly from his chair walked rapidly up and

down the room. "Marry him!" he said out loud, "marry him!" The idea

that their fathers and mothers should marry and enjoy themselves is

always a thing horrible to be thought of in the minds of the rising

generation. Lucius Mason now began to feel against his mother the

same sort of anger which Joseph Mason had felt when his father had

married again. "Marry him!" And then he walked rapidly about the

room, as though some great injury had been threatened to him.

And so it had, in his estimation. Was it not her position in life to

be his mother? Had she not had her young days? But it did not occur

to him to think what those young days had been. And this then was the

meaning of her receding from his advice and from his roof! She had

been preparing for herself in the world new hopes, a new home, and a

new ambition. And she had so prevailed upon the old man that he was

about to do this foolish thing! Then again he walked up and down the

room, injuring his mother much in his thoughts. He gave her credit

for none of those circumstances which had truly actuated her in

accepting the hand which Sir Peregrine had offered her. In that

matter touching the Orley Farm estate he could acquit his mother

instantly,--with acclamation. But in this other matter he had

pronounced her guilty before she had been allowed to plead. Then he

took up the letter and finished it.

Sir Peregrine Orme has made me an offer of marriage and

I have accepted it. It is very difficult to explain in a

letter all the causes that have induced me to do so. The

first perhaps is this, that I feel myself so bound to him

by love and gratitude, that I think it my duty to fall in

with all his wishes. He has pointed out to me that as my

husband he can do more for me than would be possible for

him without that name. I have explained to him that I

would rather perish than that he should sacrifice himself;

but he is pleased to say that it is no sacrifice. At any

rate he so wishes it, and as Mrs. Orme has cordially

assented, I feel myself bound to fall in with his views.

It was only yesterday that Sir Peregrine made his offer. I

mention this that you may know that I have lost no time in

telling you.

Dearest Lucius, believe that I shall be as ever

Your most affectionate mother,

MARY MASON.

The little girl will wait for an answer if she finds that

you are at the farm.

"No," he said to himself, still walking about the room. "She can

never be to me the same mother that she was. I would have sacrificed

everything for her. She should have been the mistress of my house, at

any rate till she herself should have wished it otherwise. But now--"

And then his mind turned away suddenly to Sophia Furnival.

I cannot myself but think that had that affair of the trial been set

at rest Lady Mason would have been prudent to look for another home.

The fact that Orley Farm was his house and not hers occurred almost

too frequently to Lucius Mason; and I am not certain that it would

have been altogether comfortable as a permanent residence for his

mother after he should have brought home to it some such bride as her

he now proposed to himself.

It was necessary that he should write an answer to his mother, which

he did at once.

Orley Farm, -- January.

DEAR MOTHER,

It is I fear too late for me to offer any counsel on the

subject of your letter. I cannot say that I think you are

right.

Your affectionate son,

LUCIUS MASON.

And then, having finished this, he again walked the room. "It is all

up between me and her," he said, "as real friends in life and heart.

She shall still have the respect of a son, and I shall have the

regard of a mother. But how can I trim my course to suit the welfare

of the wife of Sir Peregrine Orme?" And then he lashed himself into

anger at the idea that his mother should have looked for other solace

than that which he could have given.

Nothing more from The Cleeve reached him that day; but early on

the following morning he had a visitor whom he certainly had not

expected. Before he sat down to his breakfast he heard the sound of

a horse's feet before the door, and immediately afterwards Peregrine

Orme entered the sitting-room. He was duly shown in by the servant,

and in his ordinary way came forward quickly and shook hands. Then he

waited till the door was closed, and at once began upon the subject

which had brought him there.

"Mason," he said, "you have heard of this that is being done at The

Cleeve?"

Lucius immediately fell back a step or two, and considered for a

moment how he should answer. He had pressed very heavily on his

mother in his own thoughts, but he was not prepared to hear her

harshly spoken of by another.

"Yes," said he, "I have heard."

"And I understand from your mother that you do not approve of it."

"Approve of it! No; I do not approve of it."

"Nor by heavens do I!"

"I do not approve of it," said Mason, speaking with deliberation;

"but I do not know that I can take any steps towards preventing it."

"Cannot you see her, and talk to her, and tell her how wrong it is?"

"Wrong! I do not know that she is wrong in that sense. I do not know

that you have any right to blame her. Why do not you speak to your

grandfather?"

"So I have--as far as it was possible for me. But you do not know Sir

Peregrine. No one has any influence over him, but my mother;--and now

also your mother."

"And what does Mrs. Orme say?"

"She will say nothing. I know well that she disapproves of it. She

must disapprove of it, though she will not say so. She would rather

burn off both her hands than displease my grandfather. She says that

he asked her and that she consented."

"It seems to me that it is for her and you to prevent this."

"No; it is for your mother to prevent it. Only think of it, Mason.

He is over seventy, and, as he says himself, he will not burden the

estate with a new jointure. Why should she do it?"

"You are wronging her there. It is no affair of money. She is not

going to marry him for what she can get."

"Then why should she do it?"

"Because he tells her. These troubles about the lawsuit have turned

her head, and she has put herself entirely into his hands. I think

she is wrong. I could have protected her from all this evil, and

would have done so. I could have done more, I think, than Sir

Peregrine can do. But she has thought otherwise, and I do not know

that I can help it."

"But will you speak to her? Will make her perceive that she is

injuring a family that is treating her with kindness?"

"If she will come here I will speak to her. I cannot do it there. I

cannot go down to your grandfather's house with such an object as

that."

"All the world will turn against her if she marries him," said

Peregrine. And then there was silence between them for a moment or

two.

"It seems to me," said Lucius at last, "that you wrong my mother very

much in this matter, and lay all the blame where but the smallest

part of the blame is deserved. She has no idea of money in her mind,

or any thought of pecuniary advantage. She is moved solely by what

your grandfather has said to her,--and by an insane dread of some

coming evil which she thinks may be lessened by his assistance. You

are in the house with them, and can speak to him,--and if you please

to her also. I do not see that I can do either."

"And you will not help me to break it off?"

"Certainly,--if I can see my way."

"Will you write to her?"

"Well; I will think about it."

"Whether she be to blame or not it must be your duty as well as mine

to prevent such a marriage if it be possible. Think what people will

say of it?"

After some further discussion Peregrine remounted his horse, and rode

back to The Cleeve, not quite satisfied with young Mason.

"If you do speak to her,--to my mother, do it gently." Those were the

last words whispered by Lucius as Peregrine Orme had his foot in the

stirrup.

Young Peregrine Orme, as he rode home, felt that the world was using

him very unkindly. Everything was going wrong with him, and an idea

entered his head that he might as well go and look for Sir John

Franklin at the North Pole, or join some energetic traveller in the

middle of Central Africa. He had proposed to Madeline Staveley and

had been refused. That in itself caused a load to lie on his heart

which was almost unendurable;--and now his grandfather was going to

disgrace himself. He had made his little effort to be respectable

and discreet, devoting himself to the county hunt and county

drawing-rooms, giving up the pleasures of London and the glories of

dissipation. And for what?

Then Peregrine began to argue within himself as some others have done

before him--

"Were it not better done as others use--" he said to himself, in that

or other language; and as he rode slowly into the courtyard of The

Cleeve, he thought almost with regret of his old friend Carroty Bob.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PEREGRINE'S ELOQUENCE.

In the last chapter Peregrine Orme called at Orley Farm with the

view of discussing with Lucius Mason the conduct of their respective

progenitors; and, as will be remembered, the young men agreed in

a general way that their progenitors were about to make fools of

themselves. Poor Peregrine, however, had other troubles on his mind.

Not only had his grandfather been successful in love, but he had

been unsuccessful. As he had journeyed home from Noningsby to The

Cleeve in a high-wheeled vehicle which he called his trap, he had

determined, being then in a frame of mind somewhat softer than was

usual with him, to tell all his troubles to his mother. It sounds as

though it were lack-a-daisical--such a resolve as this on the part

of a dashing young man, who had been given to the pursuit of rats,

and was now a leader among the sons of Nimrod in the pursuit of

foxes. Young men of the present day, when got up for the eyes of the

world, look and talk as though they could never tell their mothers

anything,--as though they were harder than flint, and as little in

want of a woman's counsel and a woman's help as a colonel of horse

on the morning of a battle. But the rigid virility of his outward

accoutrements does in no way alter the man of flesh and blood who

wears them; the young hero, so stern to the eye, is, I believe, as

often tempted by stress of sentiment to lay bare the sorrow of his

heart as is his sister. On this occasion Peregrine said to himself

that he would lay bare the sorrow of his heart. He would find out

what others thought of that marriage which he had proposed to

himself; and then, if his mother encouraged him, and his grandfather

approved, he would make another attack, beginning on the side of the

judge, or perhaps on that of Lady Staveley.

But he found that others, as well as he, were labouring under a

stress of sentiment; and when about to tell his own tale, he had

learned that a tale was to be told to him. He had dined with Lady

Mason, his mother, and his grandfather, and the dinner had been very

silent. Three of the party were in love, and the fourth was burdened

with the telling of the tale. The baronet himself said nothing on the

subject as he and his grandson sat over their wine; but later in the

evening Peregrine was summoned to his mother's room, and she, with

considerable hesitation and much diffidence, informed him of the

coming nuptials.

"Marry Lady Mason!" he had said.

"Yes, Peregrine. Why should he not do so if they both wish it?"

Peregrine thought that there were many causes and impediments

sufficiently just why no such marriage should take place, but he

had not his arguments ready at his fingers' ends. He was so stunned

by the intelligence that he could say but little about it on that

occasion. By the few words that he did say, and by the darkness of

his countenance, he showed plainly enough that he disapproved. And

then his mother said all that she could in the baronet's favour,

pointing out that in a pecuniary way Peregrine would receive benefit

rather than injury.

"I'm not thinking of the money, mother."

"No, my dear; but it is right that I should tell you how considerate

your grandfather is."

"All the same, I wish he would not marry this woman."

"Woman, Peregrine! You should not speak in that way of a friend whom

I dearly love."

"She is a woman all the same." And then he sat sulkily looking at the

fire. His own stress of sentiment did not admit of free discussion

at the present moment, and was necessarily postponed. On that other

affair he was told that his grandfather would be glad to see him on

the following morning; and then he left his mother.

"Your grandfather, Peregrine, asked for my assent," said Mrs. Orme;

"and I thought it right to give it." This she said to make him

understand that it was no longer in her power to oppose the match.

And she was thoroughly glad that this was so, for she would have

lacked the courage to oppose Sir Peregrine in anything.

On the next morning Peregrine saw his grandfather before breakfast.

His mother came to his room door while he was dressing to whisper

a word of caution to him. "Pray, be courteous to him," she

said. "Remember how good he is to you--to us both! Say that you

congratulate him."

"But I don't," said Peregrine.

"Ah, but, Peregrine--"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, mother. I'll leave the house altogether

and go away, if you wish it."

"Oh, Peregrine! How can you speak in that way? But he's waiting now.

Pray, pray, be kind in your manner to him."

He descended with the same sort of feeling which had oppressed him on

his return home after his encounter with Carroty Bob in Smithfield.

Since then he had been on enduring good terms with his grandfather,

but now again all the discomforts of war were imminent.

"Good morning, sir," he said, on going into his grandfather's

dressing-room.

"Good morning, Peregrine." And then there was silence for a moment or

two.

"Did you see your mother last night?"

"Yes; I did see her."

"And she told you what it is that I propose to do?"

"Yes, sir; she told me."

"I hope you understand, my boy, that it will not in any way affect

your own interests injuriously."

"I don't care about that, sir--one way or the other."

"But I do, Peregrine. Having seen to that I think that I have a right

to please myself in this matter."

"Oh, yes, sir; I know you have the right."

"Especially as I can benefit others. Are you aware that your mother

has cordially given her consent to the marriage?"

"She told me that you had asked her, and that she had agreed to it.

She would agree to anything."

"Peregrine, that is not the way in which you should speak of your

mother."

And then the young man stood silent, as though there was nothing more

to be said. Indeed, he had nothing more to say. He did not dare to

bring forward in words all the arguments against the marriage which

were now crowding themselves into his memory, but he could not induce

himself to wish the old man joy, or to say any of those civil things

which are customary on such occasions. The baronet sat for a while,

silent also, and a cloud of anger was coming across his brow; but he

checked that before he spoke. "Well, my boy," he said, and his voice

was almost more than usually kind, "I can understand your thoughts,

and we will say nothing of them at present. All I will ask of you is

to treat Lady Mason in a manner befitting the position in which I

intend to place her."

"If you think it will be more comfortable, sir, I will leave The

Cleeve for a time."

"I hope that may not be necessary--Why should it? Or at any rate, not

as yet," he added, as a thought as to his wedding day occurred to

him. And then the interview was over, and in another half-hour they

met again at breakfast.

In the breakfast-room Lady Mason was also present. Peregrine was the

last to enter, and as he did so his grandfather was already standing

in his usual place, with the book of Prayers in his hand, waiting

that the servants should arrange themselves at their chairs before he

knelt down. There was no time then for much greeting, but Peregrine

did shake hands with her as he stept across to his accustomed corner.

He shook hands with her, and felt that her hand was very cold; but he

did not look at her, nor did he hear any answer given to his muttered

words. When they all got up she remained close to Mrs. Orme, as

though she might thus be protected from the anger which she feared

from Sir Peregrine's other friends. And at breakfast also she sat

close to her, far away from the baronet, and almost hidden by the urn

from his grandson. Sitting there she said nothing; neither in truth

did she eat anything. It was a time of great suffering to her, for

she knew that her coming could not be welcomed by the young heir. "It

must not be," she said to herself over and over again. "Though he

turn me out of the house, I must tell him that it cannot be so."

After breakfast Peregrine had ridden over to Orley Farm, and there

held his consultation with the other heir. On his returning to The

Cleeve, he did not go into the house, but having given up his horse

to a groom, wandered away among the woods. Lucius Mason had suggested

that he, Peregrine Orme, should himself speak to Lady Mason on this

matter. He felt that his grandfather would be very angry, should he

do so. But he did not regard that much. He had filled himself full

with the theory of his duties, and he would act up to it. He would

see her, without telling any one what was his purpose, and put it

to her whether she would bring down this destruction on so noble a

gentleman. Having thus resolved, he returned to the house, when it

was already dark, and making his way into the drawing-room, sat

himself down before the fire, still thinking of his plan. The room

was dark, as such rooms are dark for the last hour or two before

dinner in January, and he sat himself in an arm-chair before the

fire, intending to sit there till it would be necessary that he

should go to dress. It was an unaccustomed thing with him so to place

himself at such a time, or to remain in the drawing-room at all till

he came down for a few minutes before dinner; but he did so now,

having been thrown out of his usual habits by the cares upon his

mind. He had been so seated about a quarter of an hour, and was

already nearly asleep, when he heard the rustle of a woman's garment,

and looking round, with such light as the fire gave him, perceived

that Lady Mason was in the room. She had entered very quietly, and

was making her way in the dark to a chair which she frequently

occupied, between the fire and one of the windows, and in doing so

she passed so near Peregrine as to touch him with her dress.

"Lady Mason," he said, speaking, in the first place, in order that

she might know that she was not alone, "it is almost dark; shall I

ring for candles for you?"

She started at hearing his voice, begged his pardon for disturbing

him, declined his offer of light, and declared that she was going up

again to her own room immediately. But it occurred to him that if it

would be well that he should speak to her, it would be well that he

should do so at once; and what opportunity could be more fitting than

the present? "If you are not in a hurry about anything," he said,

"would you mind staying here for a few minutes?"

"Oh no, certainly not." But he could perceive that her voice trembled

in uttering even these few words.

"I think I'd better light a candle," he said; and then he did light

one of those which stood on the corner of the mantelpiece,--a

solitary candle, which only seemed to make the gloom of the large

room visible. She, however, was standing close to it, and would have

much preferred that the room should have been left to its darkness.

"Won't you sit down for a few minutes?" and then she sat down. "I'll

just shut the door, if you don't mind." And then, having done so, he

returned to his own chair and again faced the fire. He saw that she

was pale and nervous, and he did not like to look at her as he spoke.

He began to reflect also that they might probably be interrupted by

his mother, and he wished that they could adjourn to some other room.

That, however, seemed to be impossible; so he summoned up all his

courage, and began his task.

"I hope you won't think me uncivil, Lady Mason, for speaking to you

about this affair."

"Oh no, Mr. Orme; I am sure that you will not be uncivil to me."

"Of course I cannot help feeling a great concern in it, for it's very

nearly the same, you know, as if he were my father. Indeed, if you

come to that, it's almost worse; and I can assure you it is nothing

about money that I mind. Many fellows in my place would be afraid

about that, but I don't care twopence what he does in that respect.

He is so honest and so noble-hearted, that I am sure he won't do me a

wrong."

"I hope not, Mr. Orme; and certainly not in respect to me."

"I only mention it for fear you should misunderstand me. But there

are other reasons, Lady Mason, why this marriage will make me--make

me very unhappy."

"Are there? I shall be so unhappy if I make others unhappy."

"You will then,--I can assure you of that. It is not only me, but

your own son. I was up with him to-day, and he thinks of it the same

as I do."

"What did he say, Mr. Orme?"

"What did he say? Well, I don't exactly remember his words; but he

made me understand that your marriage with Sir Peregrine would make

him very unhappy. He did indeed. Why do you not see him yourself, and

talk to him?"

"I thought it best to write to him in the first place."

"Well, now you have written; and don't you think it would be well

that you should go up and see him? You will find that he is quite as

strong against it as I am,--quite."

Peregrine, had he known it, was using the arguments which were of all

the least likely to induce Lady Mason to pay a visit to Orley Farm.

She dreaded the idea of a quarrel with her son, and would have made

almost any sacrifice to prevent such a misfortune; but at the present

moment she feared the anger of his words almost more than the anger

implied by his absence. If this trial could be got over, she would

return to him and almost throw herself at his feet; but till that

time, might it not be well that they should be apart? At any rate,

these tidings of his discontent could not be efficacious in inducing

her to seek him.

"Dear Lucius!" she said, not addressing herself to her companion, but

speaking her thoughts. "I would not willingly give him cause to be

discontented with me."

"He is, then, very discontented. I can assure you of that."

"Yes; he and I think differently about all this."

"Ah, but don't you think you had better speak to him before you quite

make up your mind? He is your son, you know; and an uncommon clever

fellow too. He'll know how to say all this much better than I do."

"Say what, Mr. Orme?"

"Why, of course you can't expect that anybody will like such a

marriage as this;--that is, anybody except you and Sir Peregrine."

"Your mother does not object to it."

"My mother! But you don't know my mother yet. She would not object to

have her head cut off if anybody wanted it that she cared about. I

do not know how it has all been managed, but I suppose Sir Peregrine

asked her. Then of course she would not object. But look at the

common sense of it, Lady Mason. What does the world always say when

an old man like my grandfather marries a young woman?"

"But I am not--." So far she got, and then she stopped herself.

"We have all liked you very much. I'm sure I have for one; and I'll

go in for you, heart and soul, in this shameful law business. When

Lucius asked me, I didn't think anything of going to that scoundrel

in Hamworth; and all along I've been delighted that Sir Peregrine

took it up. By heavens! I'd be glad to go down to Yorkshire myself,

and walk into that fellow that wants to do you this injury. I would

indeed; and I'll stand by you as strong as anybody. But, Lady Mason,

when it comes to one's grandfather marrying, it--it--it--. Think what

people in the county will say of him. If it was your father, and if

he had been at the top of the tree all his life, how would you like

to see him get a fall, and be laughed at as though he were in the mud

just when he was too old ever to get up again?"

I am not sure whether Lucius Mason, with all his cleverness, could

have put the matter much better, or have used a style of oratory more

efficacious to the end in view. Peregrine had drawn his picture with

a coarse pencil, but he had drawn it strongly, and with graphic

effect. And then he paused; not with self-confidence, or as giving

his companion time to see how great had been his art, but in want of

words, and somewhat confused by the strength of his own thoughts. So

he got up and poked the fire, turning his back to it, and then sat

down again. "It is such a deuce of a thing, Lady Mason," he said,

"that you must not be angry with me for speaking out."

"Oh, Mr. Orme, I am not angry, and I do not know what to say to you."

"Why don't you speak to Lucius?"

"What could he say more than you have said? Dear Mr. Orme, I would

not injure him,--your grandfather, I mean,--for all that the world

holds."

"You will injure him;--in the eyes of all his friends."

"Then I will not do it. I will go to him, and beg him that it may not

be so. I will tell him that I cannot. Anything will be better than

bringing him to sorrow or disgrace."

"By Jove! but will you really?" Peregrine was startled and almost

frightened at the effect of his own eloquence. What would the baronet

say when he learned that he had been talked out of his wife by his

grandson?

"Mr. Orme," continued Lady Mason, "I am sure you do not understand

how this matter has been brought about. If you did, however much it

might grieve you, you would not blame me, even in your thoughts.

From the first to the last my only desire has been to obey your

grandfather in everything."

"But you would not marry him out of obedience?"

"I would--and did so intend. I would, certainly; if in doing so I did

him no injury. You say that your mother would give her life for him.

So would I;--that or anything else that I could give, without hurting

him or others. It was not I that sought for this marriage; nor did I

think of it. If you were in my place, Mr. Orme, you would know how

difficult it is to refuse."

Peregrine again got up, and standing with his back to the fire,

thought over it all again. His soft heart almost relented towards the

woman who had borne his rough words with so much patient kindness.

Had Sir Peregrine been there then, and could he have condescended so

far, he might have won his grandson's consent without much trouble.

Peregrine, like some other generals, had expended his energy in

gaining his victory, and was more ready now to come to easy terms

than he would have been had he suffered in the combat.

[Illustration: Peregrine's Eloquence.]

"Well," he said after a while, "I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you

for the manner in which you have taken what I said to you. Nobody

knows about it yet, I suppose; and perhaps, if you will talk to the

governor--"

"I will talk to him, Mr. Orme."

"Thank you; and then perhaps all things may turn out right. I'll go

and dress now." And so saying he took his departure, leaving her to

consider how best she might act at this crisis of her life, so that

things might go right, if such were possible. The more she thought of

it, the less possible it seemed that her affairs should be made to go

right.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OH, INDEED!

The dinner on that day at The Cleeve was not very dull. Peregrine had

some hopes that the idea of the marriage might be abandoned, and was

at any rate much better disposed towards Lady Mason than he had been.

He spoke to her, asking her whether she had been out, and suggesting

roast mutton or some such creature comfort. This was lost neither on

Sir Peregrine nor on Mrs. Orme, and they both exerted themselves to

say a few words in a more cheery tone than had been customary in the

house for the last day or two. Lady Mason herself did not say much;

but she had sufficient tact to see the effort which was being made;

and though she spoke but little she smiled and accepted graciously

the courtesies that were tendered to her.

Then the two ladies went away, and Peregrine was again left with his

grandfather. "That was a nasty accident that Graham had going out of

Monkton Grange," said he, speaking on the moment of his closing the

dining-room door after his mother. "I suppose you heard all about

it, sir?" Having fought his battle so well before dinner, he was

determined to give some little rest to his half-vanquished enemy.

"The first tidings we heard were that he was dead," said Sir

Peregrine, filling his glass.

"No; he wasn't dead. But of course you know that now. He broke an arm

and two ribs, and got rather a bad squeeze. He was just behind me,

you know, and I had to wait for him. I lost the run, and had to see

Harriet Tristram go away with the best lead any one has had to a

fast thing this year. That's an uncommon nasty place at the back of

Monkton Grange."

"I hope, Peregrine, you don't think too much about Harriet Tristram."

"Think of her! who? I? Think of her in what sort of a way? I think

she goes uncommonly well to hounds."

"That may be, but I should not wish to see you pin your happiness on

any lady that was celebrated chiefly for going well to hounds."

"Do you mean marry her?" and Peregrine immediately made a strong

comparison in his mind between Miss Tristram and Madeline Staveley.

"Yes; that's what I did mean."

"I wouldn't have her if she owned every fox-cover in the county. No,

by Jove! I know a trick worth two of that. It's jolly enough to see

them going, but as to being in love with them--in that sort of way--"

"You are quite right, my boy; quite right. It is not that that a man

wants in a wife."

"No," said Peregrine, with a melancholy cadence in his voice,

thinking of what it was that he did want. And so they sat sipping

their wine. The turn which the conversation had taken had for the

moment nearly put Lady Mason out of the young man's head.

"You would be very young to marry yet," said the baronet.

"Yes, I should be young; but I don't know that there is any harm in

that."

"Quite the contrary, if a young man feels himself to be sufficiently

settled. Your mother I know would be very glad that you should marry

early;--and so should I, if you married well."

What on earth could all this mean? It could not be that his

grandfather knew that he was in love with Miss Staveley; and had this

been known his grandfather would not have talked of Harriet Tristram.

"Oh yes; of course a fellow should marry well. I don't think much of

marrying for money."

"Nor do I, Peregrine;--I think very little of it."

"Nor about being of very high birth."

"Well; it would make me unhappy--very unhappy if you were to marry

below your own rank."

"What do you call my own rank?"

"I mean any girl whose father is not a gentleman, and whose mother is

not a lady; and of whose education among ladies you could not feel

certain."

"I could be quite certain about her," said Peregrine, very

innocently.

"Her! what her?"

"Oh, I forgot that we were talking about nobody."

"You don't mean Harriet Tristram?"

"No, certainly not."

"Of whom were you thinking, Peregrine? May I ask--if it be not too

close a secret?" And then again there was a pause, during which

Peregrine emptied his glass and filled it again. He had no objection

to talk to his grandfather about Miss Staveley, but he felt ashamed

of having allowed the matter to escape him in this sort of way. "I

will tell you why I ask, my boy," continued the baronet. "I am going

to do that which many people will call a very foolish thing."

"You mean about Lady Mason."

"Yes; I mean my own marriage with Lady Mason. We will not talk about

that just at present, and I only mention it to explain that before I

do so, I shall settle the property permanently. If you were married

I should at once divide it with you. I should like to keep the old

house myself, till I die--"

"Oh, Sir!"

"But sooner than give you cause of offence I would give that up."

"I would not consent to live in it unless I did so as your guest."

"Until your marriage I think of settling on you a thousand a

year;--but it would add to my happiness if I thought it likely that

you would marry soon. Now may I ask of whom were you thinking?"

Peregrine paused for a second or two before he made any reply, and

then he brought it out boldly. "I was thinking of Madeline Staveley."

"Then, my boy, you were thinking of the prettiest girl and the

best-bred lady in the county. Here's her health;" and he filled for

himself a bumper of claret. "You couldn't have named a woman whom I

should be more proud to see you bring home. And your mother's opinion

of her is the same as mine. I happen to know that;" and with a look

of triumph he drank his glass of wine, as though much that was very

joyful to him had been already settled.

"Yes," said Peregrine mournfully, "she is a very nice girl; at least

I think so."

"The man who can win her, Peregrine, may consider himself to be a

lucky fellow. You were quite right in what you were saying about

money. No man feels more sure of that than I do. But if I am not

mistaken Miss Staveley will have something of her own. I rather think

that Arbuthnot got ten thousand pounds."

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," said Peregrine; and his voice was by no

means as much elated as that of his grandfather.

"I think he did; or if he didn't get it all, the remainder is settled

on him. And the judge is not a man to behave better to one child than

to another."

"I suppose not."

And then the conversation flagged a little, for the enthusiasm was

all one side. It was moreover on that side which naturally would have

been the least enthusiastic. Poor Peregrine had only told half his

secret as yet, and that not the most important half. To Sir Peregrine

the tidings, as far as he had heard them, were very pleasant. He did

not say to himself that he would purchase his grandson's assent to

his own marriage by giving his consent to his grandson's marriage.

But it did seem to him that the two affairs, acting upon each other,

might both be made to run smooth. His heir could have made no better

choice in selecting the lady of his love. Sir Peregrine had feared

much that some Miss Tristram or the like might have been tendered to

him as the future Lady Orme, and he was agreeably surprised to find

that a new mistress for The Cleeve had been so well chosen. He would

be all kindness to his grandson and win from him, if it might be

possible, reciprocal courtesy and complaisance. "Your mother will be

very pleased when she hears this," he said.

"I meant to tell my mother," said Peregrine, still very dolefully,

"but I do not know that there is anything in it to please her. I only

said that I--I admired Miss Staveley."

"My dear boy, if you'll take my advice you'll propose to her at once.

You have been staying in the same house with her, and--"

"But I have."

"Have what?"

"I have proposed to her."

"Well?"

"And she has refused me. You know all about it now, and there's no

such great cause for joy."

"Oh, you have proposed to her. Have you spoken to her father or

mother?"

"What was the use when she told me plainly that she did not care for

me? Of course I should have asked her father. As to Lady Staveley,

she and I got on uncommonly well. I'm almost inclined to think that

she would not have objected."

"It would be a very nice match for them, and I dare say she would not

have objected." And then for some ten minutes they sat looking at the

fire. Peregrine had nothing more to say about it, and the baronet was

thinking how best he might encourage his grandson.

"You must try again, you know," at last he said.

"Well; I fear not. I do not think it would be any good. I'm not quite

sure she does not care for some one else."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, a fellow that's there. The man who broke his arm. I don't say

she does, you know, and of course you won't mention it."

Sir Peregrine gave the necessary promises, and then endeavoured to

give encouragement to the lover. He would himself see the judge, if

it were thought expedient, and explain what liberal settlement would

be made on the lady in the event of her altering her mind. "Young

ladies, you know, are very prone to alter their minds on such

matters," said the old man. In answer to which Peregrine declared

his conviction that Madeline Staveley would not alter her mind. But

then do not all despondent lovers hold that opinion of their own

mistresses?

Sir Peregrine had been a great gainer by what had occurred, and so

he felt it. At any rate all the novelty of the question of his own

marriage was over, as between him and Peregrine; and then he had

acquired a means of being gracious which must almost disarm his

grandson of all power of criticism. When he, an old man, was ready to

do so much to forward the views of a young man, could it be possible

that the young man should oppose his wishes? And Peregrine was aware

that his power of opposition was thus lessened.

In the evening nothing remarkable occurred between them. Each had his

or her own plans; but these plans could not be furthered by anything

to be said in a general assembly. Lady Mason had already told to Mrs.

Orme all that had passed in the drawing-room before dinner, and Sir

Peregrine had determined that he would consult Mrs. Orme as to that

matter regarding Miss Staveley. He did not think much of her refusal.

Young ladies always do refuse--at first.

On the day but one following this there came another visit from Mr.

Furnival, and he was for a long time closeted with Sir Peregrine.

Matthew Round had, he said, been with him, and had felt himself

obliged in the performance of his duty to submit a case to counsel

on behalf of his client Joseph Mason. He had not as yet received the

written opinion of Sir Richard Leatherham, to whom he had applied;

but nevertheless, as he wished to give every possible notice, he had

called to say that his firm were of opinion that an action must be

brought either for forgery or for perjury.

"For perjury!" Mr. Furnival had said.

"Well; yes. We would wish to be as little harsh as possible. But if

we convict her of having sworn falsely when she gave evidence as to

having copied the codicil herself, and having seen it witnessed by

the pretended witnesses;--why in that case of course the property

would go back."

"I can't give any opinion as to what might be the result in such a

case," said Mr. Furnival.

Mr. Round had gone on to say that he thought it improbable that the

action could be tried before the summer assizes.

"The sooner the better as far as we are concerned," said Mr.

Furnival.

"If you really mean that, I will see that there shall be no

unnecessary delay." Mr. Furnival had declared that he did really mean

it, and so the interview had ended.

Mr. Furnival had really meant it, fully concurring in the opinion

which Mr. Chaffanbrass had expressed on this matter; but nevertheless

the increasing urgency of the case had almost made him tremble.

He still carried himself with a brave outside before Mat Round,

protesting as to the utter absurdity as well as cruelty of the

whole proceeding; but his conscience told him that it was not

absurd. "Perjury!" he said to himself, and then he rang the bell for

Crabwitz. The upshot of that interview was that Mr. Crabwitz received

a commission to arrange a meeting between that great barrister, the

member for the Essex Marshes, and Mr. Solomon Aram.

"Won't it look rather, rather--rather--; you know what I mean, sir?"

Crabwitz had asked.

"We must fight these people with their own weapons," said Mr.

Furnival;--not exactly with justice, seeing that Messrs. Round and

Crook were not at all of the same calibre in the profession as Mr.

Solomon Aram.

Mr. Furnival had already at this time seen Mr. Slow, of the firm of

Slow and Bideawhile, who were Sir Peregrine's solicitors. This he had

done chiefly that he might be able to tell Sir Peregrine that he had

seen him. Mr. Slow had declared that the case was one which his firm

would not be prepared to conduct, and he named a firm to which he

should recommend his client to apply. But Mr. Furnival, carefully

considering the whole matter, had resolved to take the advice and

benefit by the experience of Mr. Chaffanbrass.

And then he went down once more to The Cleeve. Poor Mr. Furnival! In

these days he was dreadfully buffeted about both as regards his outer

man and his inner conscience by this unfortunate case, giving up to

it time that would otherwise have turned itself into heaps of gold;

giving up domestic conscience--for Mrs. Furnival was still hot in

her anger against poor Lady Mason; and giving up also much peace of

mind, for he felt that he was soiling his hands by dirty work. But

he thought of the lady's pale sweet face, of her tear-laden eye, of

her soft beseeching tones, and gentle touch; he thought of these

things--as he should not have thought of them;--and he persevered.

On this occasion he was closeted with Sir Peregrine for a couple of

hours, and each heard much from the other that surprised him very

much. Sir Peregrine, when he was told that Mr. Solomon Aram from

Bucklersbury, and Mr. Chaffanbrass from the Old Bailey, were to be

retained for the defence of his future wife, drew himself up and said

that he could hardly approve of it. The gentlemen named were no doubt

very clever in criminal concerns; he could understand as much as

that, though he had not had great opportunity of looking into affairs

of that sort. But surely, in Lady Mason's case, assistance of such a

description would hardly be needed. Would it not be better to consult

Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile?

And then it turned out that Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile had been

consulted; and Mr. Furnival, not altogether successfully, endeavoured

to throw dust into the baronet's eyes, declaring that in a combat

with the devil one must use the devil's weapons. He assured Sir

Peregrine that he had given the matter his most matured and indeed

most painful professional consideration; there were unfortunate

circumstances which required peculiar care; it was a matter which

would depend entirely on the evidence of one or two persons who might

be suborned; and in such a case it would be well to trust to those

who knew how to break down and crush a lying witness. In such work as

that Slow and Bideawhile would be innocent and ignorant as babes. As

to breaking down and crushing a witness anxious to speak the truth,

Mr. Furnival at that time said nothing.

"I will not think that falsehood and fraud can prevail," said Sir

Peregrine proudly.

"But they do prevail sometimes," said Mr. Furnival. And then with

much outer dignity of demeanour, but with some shame-faced tremblings

of the inner man hidden under the guise of that outer dignity, Sir

Peregrine informed the lawyer of his great purpose.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Furnival, throwing himself back into his chair

with a start.

"Yes, Mr. Furnival. I should not have taken the liberty to trouble

you with a matter so private in its nature, but for your close

professional intimacy and great friendship with Lady Mason."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Furnival; and the baronet could understand

from the lawyer's tone that even he did not approve.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHY SHOULD HE GO?

"I am well aware, Mr. Staveley, that you are one of those gentlemen

who amuse themselves by frequently saying such things to girls. I had

learned your character in that respect before I had been in the house

two days."

"Then, Miss Furnival, you learned what was very false. May I ask who

has blackened me in this way in your estimation?" It will be easily

seen from this that Mr. Augustus Staveley and Miss Furnival were at

the present moment alone together in one of the rooms at Noningsby.

"My informant," she replied, "has been no one special sinner whom you

can take by the throat and punish. Indeed, if you must shoot anybody,

it should be chiefly yourself, and after that your father, and

mother, and sisters. But you need not talk of being black. Such sins

are venial now-a-days, and convey nothing deeper than a light shade

of brown."

"I regard a man who can act in such a way as very base."

"Such a way as what, Mr. Staveley?"

"A man who can win a girl's heart for his own amusement."

"I said nothing about the winning of hearts. That is treachery of

the worst dye; but I acquit you of any such attempt. When there is a

question of the winning of hearts men look so different."

"I don't know how they look," said Augustus, not altogether satisfied

as to the manner in which he was being treated--"but such has been my

audacity,--my too great audacity on the present occasion."

"You are the most audacious of men, for your audacity would carry you

to the feet of another lady to-morrow without the slightest check."

"And that is the only answer I am to receive from you?"

"It is quite answer enough. What would you have me do? Get up and

decline the honour of being Mrs. Augustus Staveley with a curtsy?"

"No--I would have you do nothing of the kind. I would have you get up

and accept the honour,--with a kiss."

"So that you might have the kiss, and I might have the--; I was going

to say disappointment, only that would be untrue. Let me assure you

that I am not so demonstrative in my tokens of regard."

"I wonder whether you mean that you are not so honest?"

"No, Mr. Staveley; I mean nothing of the kind; and you are very

impertinent to express such a supposition. What have I done or said

to make you suppose that I have lost my heart to you?"

"As you have mine, it is at any rate human nature in me to hope that

I might have yours."

"Psha! your heart! You have been making a shuttlecock of it till it

is doubtful whether you have not banged it to pieces. I know two

ladies who carry in their caps two feathers out of it. It is so

easy to see when a man is in love. They all go cross-gartered like

Malvolio;--cross-gartered in their looks and words and doings."

"And there is no touch of all this in me?"

"You cross-gartered! You have never got so far yet as a

lack-a-daisical twist to the corner of your mouth. Did you watch Mr.

Orme before he went away?"

"Why; was he cross-gartered?"

"But you men have no eyes; you never see anything. And your idea of

love-making is to sit under a tree wishing, wondering whether the

ripe fruit will fall down into your mouth. Ripe fruit does sometimes

fall, and then it is all well with you. But if it won't, you pass on

and say that it is sour. As for climbing--"

"The fruit generally falls too fast to admit of such exercise," said

Staveley, who did not choose that all the sharp things should be said

on the other side.

"And that is the result of your very extended experience? The

orchards which have been opened to you have not, I fear, been of the

first quality. Mr. Staveley, my hand will do very well by itself.

Such is not the sort of climbing that is required. That is what I

call stooping to pick up the fruit that has fallen." And as she

spoke, she moved a little away from him on the sofa.

"And how is a man to climb?"

"Do you really mean that you want a lesson? But if I were to tell

you, my words would be thrown away. Men will not labour who have

gotten all that they require without work. Why strive to deserve any

woman, when women are plenty who do not care to be deserved? That

plan of picking up the fallen apples is so much the easier."

The lesson might perhaps have been given, and Miss Furnival might

have imparted to Mr. Staveley her idea of "excelsior" in the matter

of love-making, had not Mr. Staveley's mother come into the room at

that moment. Mrs. Staveley was beginning to fear that the results of

her Christmas hospitality would not be satisfactory. Peregrine Orme,

whom she would have been so happy to welcome to the warmest corner of

her household temple as a son, had been sent away in wretchedness and

disappointment. Madeline was moping about the house, hardly making an

effort to look like herself; attributing, in her mother's ears, all

her complaint to that unexpected interview with Peregrine Orme, but

not so attributing it--as her mother fancied--with correctness. And

there was Felix Graham still in the room up stairs, the doctor having

said that he might be moved in a day or two;--that is, such movement

might possibly be effected without detriment;--but having said also

that another ten days of uninterrupted rest would be very desirable.

And now, in addition to this, her son Augustus was to be found on

every wet morning closeted somewhere with Sophia Furnival;--on every

wet morning, and sometimes on dry mornings also!

[Illustration: Lady Stavely interrupting her Son

and Sophia Furnival.]

And then, on this very day, Lady Staveley had discovered that Felix

Graham's door in the corridor was habitually left open. She knew

her child too well, and was too clear and pure in her own mind, to

suppose that there was anything wrong in this;--that clandestine

talkings were arranged, or anything planned in secret. What she

feared was that which really occurred. The door was left open, and as

Madeline passed Felix would say a word, and then Madeline would pause

and answer him. Such words as they were might have been spoken before

all the household, and if so spoken would have been free from danger.

But they were not free from danger when spoken in that way, in the

passage of a half-closed doorway;--all which Lady Staveley understood

perfectly.

"Baker," she had said, with more of anger in her voice than was usual

with her, "why do you leave that door open?"

"I think it sweetens the room, my lady;" and, indeed, Felix Graham

sometimes thought so too.

"Nonsense; every sound in the house must be heard. Keep it shut, if

you please."

"Yes, my lady," said Mrs. Baker--who also understood perfectly.

"He is better, my darling," said Mrs. Baker to Madeline, the same

day; "and, indeed, for that he is well enough as regards eating and

drinking. But it would be cruelty to move him yet. I heard what the

doctor said."

"Who talks of moving him?"

"Well, he talks of it himself; and the doctor said it might be

possible. But I know what that means."

"What does it mean?"

"Why, just this: that if we want to get rid of him, it won't quite be

the death of him."

"But who wants to get rid of him?"

"I'm sure I don't. I don't mind my trouble the least in life. He's as

nice a young gentleman as ever I sat beside the bed of; and he's full

of spirit--he is."

And then Madeline appealed to her mother. Surely her mother would not

let Mr. Graham be sent out of the house in his present state, merely

because the doctor said it might be possible to move him without

causing his instant death! And tears stood in poor Madeline's eyes

as she thus pleaded the cause of the sick and wounded. This again

tormented Lady Staveley, who found it necessary to give further

caution to Mrs. Baker. "Baker," she said, "how can you be so foolish

as to be talking to Miss Madeline about Mr. Graham's arm?"

"Who, my lady? I, my lady?"

"Yes, you; when you know that the least thing frightens her. Don't

you remember how ill it made her when Roger"--Roger was an old family

groom--"when Roger had that accident?" Lady Staveley might have saved

herself the trouble of the reminiscence as to Roger, for Baker knew

more about it than that. When Roger's scalp had been laid bare by a

fall, Miss Madeline had chanced to see it, and had fainted; but Miss

Madeline was not fainting now. Baker knew all about it, almost better

than Lady Staveley herself. It was of very little use talking to

Baker about Roger the groom. Baker thought that Mr. Felix Graham

was a very nice young man, in spite of his "not being exactly

handsomelike about the physgognomy," as she remarked to one of the

younger maids, who much preferred Peregrine Orme.

Coming away from this last interval with Mrs. Baker, Lady Staveley

interrupted her son and Sophia Furnival in the back drawing-room, and

began to feel that her solicitude for her children would be almost

too much for her. Why had she asked that nasty girl to her house, and

why would not the nasty girl go away? As for her going away, there

was no present hope; for it had been arranged that she should stay

for another fortnight. Why could not the Fates have been kind, and

have allowed Felix Graham and Miss Furnival to fall in love with each

other? "I can never make a daughter of her if he does marry her,"

Lady Staveley said to herself, as she looked at them.

Augustus looked as though he were detected, and stammered out some

question about his mother and the carriage; but Miss Furnival did not

for a moment lose her easy presence of mind. "Lady Staveley," said

she, "why does not your son go and hunt, or shoot, or fish, instead

of staying in the house all day? It seems to me that his time is so

heavy on his hands that he will almost have to hang himself."

"I'm sure I can't tell," said Lady Staveley, who was not so perfect

an actor as her guest.

"I do think gentlemen in the house in the morning always look so

unfortunate. You have been endeavouring to make yourself agreeable,

but you know you've been yawning."

"Do you suppose then that men never sit still in the morning?" said

Augustus.

"Oh, in their chambers, yes; or on the bench, and perhaps also behind

counters; but they very seldom do so in a drawing-room. You have been

fidgeting about with the poker till you have destroyed the look of

the fireplace."

"Well, I'll go and fidget up stairs with Graham," said he; and so he

left the room.

"Nasty, sly girl," said Lady Staveley to herself as she took up her

work and sat herself down in her own chair.

Augustus did go up to his friend and found him reading letters. There

was no one else in the room, and the door when Augustus reached it

was properly closed. "I think I shall be off to-morrow, old boy,"

said Felix.

"Then I think you'll do no such thing," said Augustus. "What's in the

wind now?"

"The doctor said this morning that I could be moved without danger."

"He said that it might possibly be done in two or three days--that

was all. What on earth makes you so impatient? You've nothing to do.

Nobody else wants to see you; and nobody here wants to get rid of

you."

"You're wrong in all your three statements."

"The deuce I am! Who wants to get rid of you?"

"That shall come last. I have something to do, and somebody else

does want to see me. I've got a letter from Mary here, and another

from Mrs. Thomas;" and he held up to view two letters which he had

received, and which had, in truth, startled him.

"Mary's duenna;--the artist who is supposed to be moulding the wife."

"Yes; Mary's duenna, or Mary's artist, whichever you please."

"And which of them wants to see you? It's just like a woman, to

require a man's attendance exactly when he is unable to move."

Then Felix, though he did not give up the letters to be read,

described to a certain extent their contents. "I don't know what

on earth has happened," he said. "Mary is praying to be forgiven,

and saying that it is not her fault; and Mrs. Thomas is full

of apologies, declaring that her conscience forces her to tell

everything; and yet, between them both, I do not know what has

happened."

"Miss Snow has probably lost the key of the workbox you gave her."

"I have not given her a workbox."

"Then the writing-desk. That's what a man has to endure when he will

make himself head schoolmaster to a young lady. And so you're going

to look after your charge with your limbs still in bandages?"

"Just so;" and then he took up the two letters and read them again,

while Staveley still sat on the foot of the bed. "I wish I knew what

to think about it," said Felix.

"About what?" said the other. And then there was another pause, and

another reading of a portion of the letters.

"There seems something--something almost frightful to me," said Felix

gravely, "in the idea of marrying a girl in a few months' time, who

now, at so late a period of our engagement, writes to me in that sort

of cold, formal way."

"It's the proper moulded-wife style, you may depend," said Augustus.

"I'll tell you what, Staveley, if you can talk to me seriously for

five minutes, I shall be obliged to you. If that is impossible to

you, say so, and I will drop the matter."

"Well, go on; I am serious enough in what I intend to express, even

though I may not be so in my words."

"I'm beginning to have my doubts about this dear girl."

"I've had my doubts for some time."

"Not, mark you, with regard to myself. The question is not now

whether I can love her sufficiently for my own happiness. On that

side I have no longer the right to a doubt."

"But you wouldn't marry her if you did not love her."

"We need not discuss that. But what if she does not love me? What if

she would think it a release to be freed from this engagement? How am

I to find that out?"

Augustus sat for a while silent, for he did feel that the matter was

serious. The case as he looked at it stood thus:--His friend Graham

had made a very foolish bargain, from which he would probably be glad

to escape, though he could not now bring himself to say as much. But

this bargain, bad for him, would probably be very good for the young

lady. The young lady, having no shilling of her own, and no merits

of birth or early breeding to assist her outlook in the world, might

probably regard her ready-made engagement to a clever, kind-hearted,

high-spirited man, as an advantage not readily to be abandoned.

Staveley, as a sincere friend, was very anxious that the match should

be broken off; but he could not bring himself to tell Graham that

he thought that the young lady would so wish. According to his idea

the young lady must undergo a certain amount of disappointment,

and receive a certain amount of compensation. Graham had been very

foolish, and must pay for his folly. But in preparing to do so, it

would be better that he should see and acknowledge the whole truth of

the matter.

"Are you sure that you have found out your own feelings?" Staveley

said at last; and his tone was then serious enough even for his

friend.

"It hardly matters whether I have or have not," said Felix.

"It matters above all things;--above all things, because as to them

you may come to something like certainty. Of the inside of her heart

you cannot know so much. The fact I take it is this--that you would

wish to escape from this bondage."

"No; not unless I thought she regarded it as bondage also. It may be

that she does. As for myself, I believe that at the present moment

such a marriage would be for me the safest step that I could take."

"Safe as against what danger?"

"All dangers. How, if I should learn to love another woman,--some one

utterly out of my reach,--while I am still betrothed to her?"

"I rarely flatter you, Graham, and don't mean to do it now; but no

girl ought to be out of your reach. You have talent, position, birth,

and gifts of nature, which should make you equal to any lady. As for

money, the less you have the more you should look to get. But if

you would cease to be mad, two years would give you command of an

income."

"But I shall never cease to be mad."

"Who is it that cannot be serious, now?"

"Well, I will be serious--serious enough. I can afford to be so, as

I have received my medical passport for to-morrow. No girl, you say,

ought to be out of my reach. If the girl were one Miss Staveley,

should she be regarded as out of my reach?"

"A man doesn't talk about his own sister," said Staveley, having got

up from the bed and walked to the window, "and I know you don't mean

anything."

"But, by heavens! I do mean a great deal."

"What is it you mean, then?"

"I mean this--What would you say if you learned that I was a suitor

for her hand?"

Staveley had been right in saying that a man does not talk about

his own sister. When he had declared, with so much affectionate

admiration for his friend's prowess, that he might aspire to the

hand of any lady, that one retiring, modest-browed girl had not been

thought of by him. A man in talking to another man about women is

always supposed to consider those belonging to himself as exempt from

the incidents of the conversation. The dearest friends do not talk

to each other about their sisters when they have once left school;

and a man in such a position as that now taken by Graham has to make

fight for his ground as closely as though there had been no former

intimacies. My friend Smith in such a matter as that, though I have

been hail fellow with him for the last ten years, has very little

advantage over Jones, who was introduced to the house for the first

time last week. And therefore Staveley felt himself almost injured

when Felix Graham spoke to him about Madeline.

"What would I say? Well--that is a question one does not understand,

unless--unless you really meant to state it as a fact that it was

your intention to propose to her."

"But I mean rather to state it as a fact that it is not my intention

to propose to her."

"Then we had better not speak of her."

"Listen to me a moment. In order that I may not do so, it will be

better for me--better for us all, that I should leave the house."

"Do you mean to say--?"

"Yes, I do mean to say! I mean to say all that your mind is now

suggesting to you. I quite understand your feelings when you declare

that a man does not like to talk of his own sister, and therefore we

will talk of your sister no more. Old fellow, don't look at me as

though you meant to drop me."

Augustus came back to the bedside, and again seating himself, put his

hand almost caressingly over his friend's shoulder. "I did not think

of this," he said.

"No; one never does think of it," Graham replied.

"And she?"

"She knows no more of it than that bed-post," said Graham. "The

injury, such as there is, is all on one side. But I'll tell you who

suspects it."

"Baker?"

"Your mother. I am much mistaken if you will not find that she, with

all her hospitality, would prefer that I should recover my strength

elsewhere."

"But you have done nothing to betray yourself."

"A mother's ears are very sharp. I know that it is so. I cannot

explain to you how. Do you tell her that I think of getting up to

London to-morrow, and see how she will take it. And, Staveley, do not

for a moment suppose that I am reproaching her. She is quite right.

I believe that I have in no way committed myself--that I have said

no word to your sister with which Lady Staveley has a right to feel

herself aggrieved; but if she has had the wit to read the thoughts of

my bosom, she is quite right to wish that I were out of the house."

Poor Lady Staveley had been possessed of no such wit at all. The

sphynx which she had read had been one much more in her own line. She

had simply read the thoughts in her daughter's bosom--or rather, the

feelings in her daughter's heart.

Augustus Staveley hardly knew what he ought to say. He was not

prepared to tell his friend that he was the very brother-in-law for

whose connection he would be desirous. Such a marriage for Madeline,

even should Madeline desire it, would not be advantageous. When

Augustus told Graham that he had gifts of nature which made him equal

to any lady, he did not include his own sister. And yet the idea of

acquiescing in his friend's sudden departure was very painful to him.

"There can be no reason why you should not stay up here, you know,"

at last he said;--and in so saying he pronounced an absolute verdict

against poor Felix.

On few matters of moment to a man's own heart can he speak out

plainly the whole truth that is in him. Graham had intended so to

do, but had deceived himself. He had not absolutely hoped that his

friend would say, "Come among us, and be one of us; take her, and

be my brother." But yet there came upon his heart a black load of

disappointment, in that the words which were said were the exact

opposite of these. Graham had spoken of himself as unfit to match

with Madeline Staveley, and Madeline Staveley's brother had taken him

at his word. The question which Augustus asked himself was this--Was

it, or was it not practicable that Graham should remain there without

danger of intercourse with his sister? To Felix the question came in

a very different shape. After having spoken as he had spoken--might

he be allowed to remain there, enjoying such intercourse, or might he

not? That was the question to which he had unconsciously demanded an

answer;--and unconsciously he had still hoped that the question might

be answered in his favour. He had so hoped, although he was burdened

with Mary Snow, and although he had spoken of his engagement with

that lady in so rigid a spirit of self-martyrdom. But the question

had been answered against him. The offer of a further asylum in the

seclusion of that bedroom had been made to him by his friend with a

sort of proviso that it would not be well that he should go further

than the bedroom, and his inner feelings at once grated against each

other, making him wretched and almost angry.

"Thank you, no; I understand how kind you are, but I will not do

that. I will write up to-night, and shall certainly start to-morrow."

"My dear fellow--"

"I should get into a fever, if I were to remain in this house after

what I have told you. I could not endure to see you, or your mother,

or Baker, or Marian, or any one else. Don't talk about it. Indeed,

you ought to feel that it is not possible. I have made a confounded

ass of myself, and the sooner I get away the better. I say--perhaps

you would not be angry if I was to ask you to let me sleep for an

hour or so now. After that I'll get up and write my letters."

He was very sore. He knew that he was sick at heart, and ill at ease,

and cross with his friend; and knew also that he was unreasonable

in being so. Staveley's words and manner had been full of kindness.

Graham was aware of this, and was therefore the more irritated with

himself. But this did not prevent his being angry and cross with his

friend.

"Graham," said the other, "I see clearly enough that I have annoyed

you."

"Not in the least. A man falls into the mud, and then calls to

another man to come and see him. The man in the mud of course is not

comfortable."

"But you have called to me, and I have not been able to help you."

"I did not suppose you would, so there has been no disappointment.

Indeed, there was no possibility for help. I shall follow out the

line of life which I have long since chalked out for myself, and

I do not expect that I shall be more wretched than other poor

devils around me. As far as my idea goes, it all makes very little

difference. Now leave me; there's a good fellow."

"Dear old fellow, I would give my right hand if it would make you

happy!"

"But it won't. Your right hand will make somebody else happy, I

hope."

"I'll come up to you again before dinner."

"Very well. And, Staveley, what we have now said cannot be forgotten

between us; but when we next meet, and ever after, let it be as

though it were forgotten." Then he settled himself down on the bed,

and Augustus left the room.

It will not be supposed that Graham did go to sleep, or that he had

any thought of doing so. When he was alone those words of his friend

rang over and over again in his ears, "No girl ought to be out of

your reach." Why should Madeline Staveley be out of his reach, simply

because she was his friend's sister? He had been made welcome to that

house, and therefore he was bound to do nothing unhandsome by the

family. But then he was bound by other laws, equally clear, to do

nothing unhandsome by any other family--or by any other lady. If

there was anything in Staveley's words, they applied as strongly to

Staveley's sister as to any other girl. And why should not he, a

lawyer, marry a lawyer's daughter? Sophia Furnival, with her hatful

of money, would not be considered too high for him; and in what

respect was Madeline Staveley above Sophia Furnival? That the one

was immeasurably above the other in all those respects which in his

estimation tended towards female perfection, he knew to be true

enough; but the fruit which he had been forbidden to gather hung no

higher on the social tree than that other fruit which he had been

specially invited to pluck and garner.

And then Graham was not a man to think any fruit too high for him.

He had no overweening idea of his own deserts, either socially or

professionally, nor had he taught himself to expect great things from

his own genius; but he had that audacity of spirit which bids a man

hope to compass that which he wishes to compass,--that audacity which

is both the father and mother of success,--that audacity which seldom

exists without the inner capability on which it ought to rest.

But then there was Mary Snow! Augustus Staveley thought but little of

Mary Snow. According to his theory of his friend's future life, Mary

Snow might be laid aside without much difficulty. If this were so,

why should not Madeline be within his reach? But then was it so? Had

he not betrothed himself to Mary Snow in the presence of the girl's

father, with every solemnity and assurance, in a manner fixed beyond

that of all other betrothals? Alas, yes; and for this reason it was

right that he should hurry away from Noningsby.

Then he thought of Mary's letter, and of Mrs. Thomas's letter. What

was it that had been done? Mary had written as though she had been

charged with some childish offence; but Mrs. Thomas talked solemnly

of acquitting her own conscience. What could have happened that had

touched Mrs. Thomas in the conscience?

But his thoughts soon ran away from the little house at Peckham,

and settled themselves again at Noningsby. Should he hear more of

Madeline's footsteps?--and if not, why should they have been banished

from the corridor? Should he hear her voice again at the door,--and

if not, why should it have been hushed? There is a silence which may

be more eloquent than the sounds which it follows. Had no one in that

house guessed the feelings in his bosom, she would have walked along

the corridor as usual, and spoken a word with her sweet voice in

answer to his word. He felt sure that this would be so no more; but

who had stopped it, and why should such sounds be no more heard?

At last he did go to sleep, not in pursuance of any plan formed for

doing so; for had he been asked he would have said that sleep was

impossible for him. But he did go to sleep, and when he awoke it was

dark. He had intended to have got up and dressed on that afternoon,

or to have gone through such ceremony of dressing as was possible for

him,--in preparation of his next day's exercise; and now he rose up

in his bed with a start, angry with himself in having allowed the

time to pass by him.

"Lord love you, Mr. Graham, why how you have slept!" said Mrs. Baker.

"If I haven't just sent your dinner down again to keep hot. Such a

beautiful pheasant, and the bread sauce'll be lumpy now, for all the

world like pap."

"Never mind the bread sauce, Mrs. Baker;--the pheasant's the thing."

"And her ladyship's been here, Mr. Graham, only she wouldn't have you

woke. She won't hear of your being moved to-morrow, nor yet won't the

judge. There was a rumpus down stairs when Mr. Augustus as much as

mentioned it. I know one who--"

"You know one who--you were saying?"

"Never mind.--It ain't one more than another, but it's all. You ain't

to leave this to-morrow, so you may just give it over. And indeed

your things is all at the wash, so you can't;--and now I'll go down

for the pheasant."

Felix still declared very positively that he should go, but his

doing so did not shake Mrs. Baker. The letter-bag he knew did not

leave till eight, and as yet it was not much past five. He would see

Staveley again after his dinner, and then he would write.

When Augustus left the room in the middle of the day he encountered

Madeline wandering about the house. In these days she did wander

about the house, as though there were something always to be done in

some place apart from that in which she then was. And yet the things

which she did were but few. She neither worked nor read, and as for

household duties, her share in them was confined almost entirely to

the morning and evening teapot.

"It isn't true that he's to go to-morrow morning, Augustus, is it?"

said she.

"Who, Graham? Well; he says that he will. He is very anxious to get

to London; and no doubt he finds it stupid enough lying there and

doing nothing."

"But he can do as much there as he can lying by himself in his own

chambers, where I don't suppose he would have anybody to look after

him. He thinks he's a trouble and all that, and therefore he wants to

go. But you know mamma doesn't mind about trouble of that kind; and

what should we think of it afterwards if anything bad was to happen

to your friend because we allowed him to leave the house before

he was in a fit state to be moved? Of course Mr. Pottinger says

so--" Mr. Pottinger was the doctor. "Of course Mr. Pottinger says

so, because he thinks he has been so long here, and he doesn't

understand."

"But Mr. Pottinger would like to keep a patient."

"Oh no; he's not at all that sort of man. He'd think of mamma,--the

trouble I mean of having a stranger in the house. But you know mamma

would think nothing of that, especially for such an intimate friend

of yours."

Augustus turned slightly round so as to look more fully into his

sister's face, and he saw that a tear was gathered in the corner of

her eye. She perceived his glance and partly shrank under it, but she

soon recovered herself and answered it. "I know what you mean," she

said, "and if you choose to think so, I can't help it. But it is

horrible--horrible--" and then she stopped herself, finding that a

little sob would become audible if she trusted herself to further

words.

"You know what I mean, Mad?" he said, putting his arm affectionately

round her waist. "And what is it that I mean? Come; you and I never

have any secrets;--you always say so when you want to get at mine.

Tell me what it is that I mean."

"I haven't got any secret."

"But what did I mean?"

"You looked at me, because I don't want you to let them send Mr.

Graham away. If it was old Mr. Furnival I shouldn't like them to turn

him out of this house when he was in such a state as that."

"Poor Mr. Furnival; no; I think he would bear it worse than Felix."

"Then why should he go? And why--should you look at me in that way?"

"Did I look at you, Mad? Well, I believe I did. We are to have no

secrets; are we?"

"No," said she. But she did not say it in the same eager voice with

which hitherto she had declared that they would always tell each

other everything.

"Felix Graham is my friend," said he, "my special friend; and I hope

you will always like my friends. But--"

"Well?" she said.

"You know what I mean, Mad"

"Yes," she said.

"That is all, dearest." And then she knew that he also had cautioned

her not to fall in love with Felix Graham, and she felt angry with

him for the caution. "Why--why--why--?" But she hardly knew as yet

how to frame the question which she desired to ask herself.

CHAPTER XL.

I CALL IT AWFUL.

"Oh indeed!" Those had been the words with which Mr. Furnival had

received the announcement made by Sir Peregrine as to his proposed

nuptials. And as he uttered them the lawyer drew himself up stiffly

in his chair, looking much more like a lawyer and much less like an

old family friend than he had done the moment before.

Whereupon Sir Peregrine drew himself up also. "Yes," he said. "I

should be intrusive if I were to trouble you with my motives, and

therefore I need only say further as regards the lady, that I trust

that my support, standing as I shall do in the position of her

husband, will be more serviceable to her than it could otherwise have

been in this trial which she will, I presume, be forced to undergo."

"No doubt; no doubt," said Mr. Furnival; and then the interview

had ended. The lawyer had been anxious to see his client, and had

intended to ask permission to do so; but he had felt on hearing Sir

Peregrine's tidings that it would be useless now to make any attempt

to see her alone, and that he could speak to her with no freedom

in Sir Peregrine's presence. So he left The Cleeve, having merely

intimated to the baronet the fact of his having engaged the services

of Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram. "You will not see Lady

Mason?" Sir Peregrine had asked. "Thank you; I do not know that

I need trouble her," Mr. Furnival had answered. "You of course

will explain to her how the case at present stands. I fear she

must reconcile herself to the fact of a trial. You are aware, Sir

Peregrine, that the offence imputed is one for which bail will be

taken. I should propose yourself and her son. Of course I should be

happy to lend my own name, but as I shall be on the trial, perhaps it

may be as well that this should be avoided."

Bail will be taken! These words were dreadful in the ears of the

expectant bridegroom. Had it come to this; that there was a question

whether or no she should be locked up in a prison, like a felon? But

nevertheless his heart did not misgive him. Seeing how terribly she

was injured by others, he felt himself bound by the stronger law to

cling to her himself. Such was the special chivalry of the man.

Mr. Furnival on his return to London thought almost more of Sir

Peregrine than he did either of Lady Mason or of himself. Was it not

a pity? Was it not a thousand pities that that aged noble gentleman

should be sacrificed? He had felt angry with Sir Peregrine when the

tidings were first communicated to him; but now, as he journeyed up

to London this feeling of anger was transferred to his own client.

This must be her doing, and such doing on her part, while she was in

her present circumstances, was very wicked. And then he remembered

her guilt,--her probable guilt, and his brow became very black. Her

supposed guilt had not been horrible to him while he had regarded it

as affecting herself alone, and in point of property affecting Joseph

Mason and her son Lucius. He could look forward, sometimes almost

triumphantly, to the idea of washing her--so far as this world's

washing goes--from that guilt, and setting her up again clear before

the world, even though in doing so he should lend a hand in robbing

Joseph Mason of his estate. But this dragging down of another--and

such another--head into the vortex of ruin and misery was horrible to

him. He was not straitlaced, or mealy-mouthed, or overburthened with

scruples. In the way of his profession he could do many a thing at

which--I express a single opinion with much anxious deference--at

which an honest man might be scandalized if it came beneath his

judgment unprofessionally. But this he could not stand. Something

must be done in the matter. The marriage must be stayed till after

the trial,--or else he must himself retire from the defence and

explain both to Lady Mason and to Sir Peregrine why he did so.

And then he thought of the woman herself, and his spirit within him

became very bitter. Had any one told him that he was jealous of the

preference shown by his client to Sir Peregrine, he would have fumed

with anger, and thought that he was fuming justly. But such was in

truth the case. Though he believed her to have been guilty of this

thing, though he believed her to be now guilty of the worse offence

of dragging the baronet to his ruin, still he was jealous of her

regard. Had she been content to lean upon him, to trust to him as her

great and only necessary friend, he could have forgiven all else, and

placed at her service the full force of his professional power,--even

though by doing so he might have lowered himself in men's minds. And

what reward did he expect? None. He had formed no idea that the woman

would become his mistress. All that was as obscure before his mind's

eye, as though she had been nineteen and he five-and-twenty.

He was to dine at home on this day, that being the first occasion of

his doing so for--as Mrs. Furnival declared--the last six months. In

truth, however, the interval had been long, though not so long as

that. He had a hope that having announced his intention, he might

find the coast clear and hear Martha Biggs spoken of as a dear

one lately gone. But when he arrived at home Martha Biggs was

still there. Under circumstances as they now existed Mrs. Furnival

had determined to keep Martha Biggs by her, unless any special

edict for her banishment should come forth. Then, in case of such

special edict, Martha Biggs should go, and thence should arise the

new casus belli. Mrs. Furnival had made up her mind that war was

expedient,--nay, absolutely necessary. She had an idea, formed no

doubt from the reading of history, that some allies require a smart

brush now and again to blow away the clouds of distrust which become

engendered by time between them; and that they may become better

allies than ever afterwards. If the appropriate time for such a brush

might ever come, it had come now. All the world,--so she said to

herself,--was talking of Mr. Furnival and Lady Mason. All the world

knew of her injuries.

Martha Biggs was second cousin to Mr. Crook's brother's wife--I speak

of that Mr. Crook who had been professionally known for the last

thirty years as the partner of Mr. Round. It had been whispered in

the office in Bedford Row--such whisper I fear originating with old

Round--that Mr. Furnival admired his fair client. Hence light had

fallen upon the eyes of Martha Biggs, and the secret of her friend

was known to her. Need I trace the course of the tale with closer

accuracy?

"Oh, Kitty," she had said to her friend with tears that evening--"I

cannot bear to keep it to myself any more! I cannot when I see you

suffering so. It's awful."

"Cannot bear to keep what, Martha?"

"Oh, I know. Indeed all the town knows it now."

"Knows what? You know how I hate that kind of thing. If you have

anything to say, speak out."

This was not kind to such a faithful friend as Martha Biggs; but

Martha knew what sacrifices friendship such as hers demanded, and she

did not resent it.

"Well then;--if I am to speak out, it's--Lady Mason. And I do say

that it's shameful, quite shameful;--and awful; I call it awful."

Mrs. Furnival had not said much at the time to encourage the fidelity

of her friend, but she was thus justified in declaring to herself

that her husband's goings on had become the talk of all the

world;--and his goings on especially in that quarter in which she

had long regarded them with so much dismay. She was not therefore

prepared to welcome him on this occasion of his coming home to dinner

by such tokens of friendly feeling as the dismissal of her friend to

Red Lion Square. When the moment for absolute war should come Martha

Biggs should be made to depart.

Mr. Furnival when he arrived at his own house was in a thoughtful

mood, and disposed for quiet and domestic meditation. Had Miss Biggs

not been there he could have found it in his heart to tell everything

about Lady Mason to his wife, asking her counsel as to what he should

do with reference to that marriage. Could he have done so, all would

have been well; but this was not possible while that red-faced lump

of a woman from Red Lion Square sat in his drawing-room, making

everything uncomfortable.

The three sat down to dinner together, and very little was said

between them. Mr. Furnival did try to be civil to his wife, but wives

sometimes have a mode of declining such civilities without committing

themselves to overt acts of war. To Miss Biggs Mr. Furnival could not

bring himself to say anything civil, seeing that he hated her; but

such words as he did speak to her she received with grim griffin-like

austerity, as though she were ever meditating on the awfulness of his

conduct. And so in truth she was. Why his conduct was more awful in

her estimation since she had heard Lady Mason's name mentioned, than

when her mind had been simply filled with general ideas of vague

conjugal infidelity, I cannot say; but such was the case. "I call it

awful," were the first words she again spoke when she found herself

once more alone with Mrs. Furnival in the drawing-room. And then

she sat down over the fire, thinking neither of her novel nor her

knitting, with her mind deliciously filled with the anticipation of

coming catastrophes.

"If I sit up after half-past ten would you mind going to bed?" said

Mrs. Furnival, when they had been in the drawing-room about ten

minutes.

"Oh no, not in the least," said Miss Biggs. "I'll be sure to go."

But she thought it very unkind, and she felt as a child does who is

deceived in a matter of being taken to the play. If no one goes the

child can bear it. But to see others go, and to be left behind, is

too much for the feelings of any child,--or of Martha Biggs.

Mr. Furnival had no inclination for sitting alone over his wine on

this occasion. Had it been possible for him he would have preferred

to have gone quickly up stairs, and to have taken his cup of coffee

from his wife's hand with some appreciation of domestic comfort. But

there could be no such comfort to him while Martha Biggs was there,

so he sat down stairs, sipping his port according to his custom, and

looking into the fire for a solution of his difficulties about Lady

Mason. He began to wish that he had never seen Lady Mason, and to

reflect that the intimate friendship of pretty women often brings

with it much trouble. He was resolved on one thing. He would not go

down into court and fight that battle for Lady Orme. Were he to do so

the matter would have taken quite a different phase,--one that he had

not at all anticipated. In case that his present client should then

have become Lady Orme, Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram might

carry on the battle between them, with such assistance as they might

be able to get from Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile. He became angry as

he drank his port, and in his anger he swore that it should be so.

And then as his anger became hot at the close of his libations, he

remembered that Martha Biggs was up stairs, and became more angry

still. And thus when he did go into the drawing-room at some time in

the evening not much before ten, he was not in a frame of mind likely

to bring about domestic comfort.

He walked across the drawing-room, sat down in an arm-chair by the

table, and took up the last number of a review, without speaking to

either of them. Whereupon Mrs. Furnival began to ply her needle which

had been lying idly enough upon her work, and Martha Biggs fixed

her eyes intently upon her book. So they sat twenty minutes without

a word being spoken, and then Mrs. Furnival inquired of her lord

whether he chose to have tea.

"Of course I shall,--when you have it," said he.

"Don't mind us," said Mrs. Furnival.

"Pray don't mind me," said Martha Biggs. "Don't let me be in the

way."

"No, I won't," said Mr. Furnival. Whereupon Miss Biggs again jumped

up in her chair as though she had been electrified. It may be

remembered that on a former occasion Mr. Furnival had sworn at

her--or at least in her presence.

"You need not be rude to a lady in your own house, because she is my

friend," said Mrs. Furnival.

"Bother," said Mr. Furnival. "And now if we are going to have any

tea, let us have it."

"I don't think I'll mind about tea to-night, Mrs. Furnival," said

Miss Biggs, having received a notice from her friend's eye that it

might be well for her to depart. "My head aches dreadful, and I shall

be better in bed. Good-night, Mrs. Furnival." And then she took her

candle and went away.

For the next five minutes there was not a word said. No tea had been

ordered, although it had been mentioned. Mrs. Furnival had forgotten

it among the hot thoughts that were running through her mind, and Mr.

Furnival was indifferent upon the subject. He knew that something was

coming, and he resolved that he would have the upper hand let that

something be what it might. He was being ill used,--so he said to

himself--and would not put up with it.

At last the battle began. He was not looking, but he heard her first

movement as she prepared herself. "Tom!" she said, and then the voice

of the war goddess was again silent. He did not choose to answer her

at the instant, and then the war goddess rose from her seat and again

spoke. "Tom!" she said, standing over him and looking at him.

"What is it you mean?" said he, allowing his eyes to rise to her face

over the top of his book.

"Tom!" she said for the third time.

"I'll have no nonsense, Kitty," said he. "If you have anything to

say, say it."

Even then she had intended to be affectionate,--had so intended at

the first commencement of her address. She had no wish to be a war

goddess. But he had assisted her attempt at love by no gentle word,

by no gentle look, by no gentle motion. "I have this to say," she

replied; "you are disgracing both yourself and me, and I will not

remain in this house to be a witness to it."

"Then you may go out of the house." These words, be it remembered,

were uttered not by the man himself, but by the spirit of port wine

within the man.

"Tom, do you say that;--after all?"

"By heavens I do say it! I'll not be told in my own drawing-room,

even by you, that I am disgracing myself."

"Then why do you go after that woman down to Hamworth? All the world

is talking of you. At your age too! You ought to be ashamed of

yourself."

"I can't stand this," said he, getting up and throwing the book from

him right across the drawing-room floor; "and, by heavens! I won't

stand it."

"Then why do you do it, sir?"

"Kitty, I believe the devil must have entered into you to drive you

mad."

"Oh, oh, oh! very well, sir. The devil in the shape of drink

and lust has entered into you. But you may understand this;

I--will--not--consent to live with you while such deeds as these are

being done." And then without waiting for another word, she stormed

out of the room.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOW CAN I SAVE HIM?

"I will not consent to live with you while such deeds as these are

being done." Such were the last words which Mrs. Furnival spoke as

she walked out of her own drawing-room, leaving her husband still

seated in his arm-chair.

What was he to do? Those who would hang by the letter of the law in

such matters may say that he should have rung the bell, sent for his

wife, explained to her that obedience was a necessary duty on her

part, and have finished by making her understand that she must and

would continue to live wherever he chose that she should live. There

be those who say that if a man be anything of a man, he can always

insure obedience in his own household. He has the power of the purse

and the power of the law; and if, having these, he goes to the wall,

it must be because he is a poor creature. Those who so say have

probably never tried the position.

Mr. Furnival did not wish to send for his wife, because by doing so

he would have laid bare his sore before his servants. He could not

follow her, because he knew that he should not find her alone in her

room. Nor did he wish for any further parley, because he knew that

she would speak loud, and probably sob--nay, very possibly proceed to

a fainting fit. And, moreover, he much doubted whether he would have

the power to keep her in the house if it should be her pleasure to

leave it. And then what should he do? The doing of something in such

a catastrophe was, he thought, indispensable.

Was ever a man so ill treated? Was ever jealousy so groundless? Here

was a woman, with whom he was on the point of quarrelling, who was

engaged to be married to another man, whom for months past he had

only seen as a client; and on her account he was to be told by his

wife that she would not consent to live with him! Yes; it was quite

indispensable that he should do something.

At last he went to bed, and slept upon it; not sharing the marital

couch, but occupying his own dressing-room. In the morning, however,

as he sat down to his solitary breakfast, he was as far as ever from

having made up his mind what that something should be. A message

was brought to him by an elderly female servant with a grave

face,--the elderly servant who had lived with them since their

poorer days,--saying that "Missus would not come down to breakfast

this morning." There was no love sent, no excuse as to illness, no

semblance of a peaceable reason, assumed even to deceive the servant.

It was clear to Mr. Furnival that the servant was intended to know

all about it. "And Miss Biggs says, sir, that if you please you're

not to wait for her."

"Very well, that'll do," said Mr. Furnival, who had not the slightest

intention of waiting for Miss Biggs; and then he sat himself down to

eat his bacon, and bethink himself what step he would take with this

recreant and troublesome spouse.

While he was thus employed the post came. The bulk of his letters as

a matter of course went to his chambers; but there were those among

his correspondents who wrote to him at Harley Street. To-day he

received three or four letters, but our concern will be with one

only. This one bore the Hamworth post-mark, and he opened it the

first, knowing that it came from Lady Mason. It was as follows:--

\_Private\_

THE CLEEVE, 23rd January, 18--.

MY DEAR MR. FURNIVAL,

I am so very sorry that I did not see you to-day! Indeed,

your leaving without seeing me has made me unhappy, for I

cannot but think that it shows that you are displeased.

Under these circumstances I must write to you and explain

to you how that came to pass which Sir Peregrine told you.

I have not let him know that I am writing to you, and I

think for his sake that I had better not. But he is so

good, and has shown to me such nobleness and affection,

that I can hardly bring myself to have any secret from

him.

You may conceive what was my surprise when I first

understood that he wished to make me his wife. It is

hardly six months since I thought that I was almost

exceeding my station in visiting at his house. Then by

degrees I began to be received as a friend, and at last I

found myself treated with the warmest love. But still I

had no thought of this, and I knew that it was because of

my great trouble that Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme were so

good to me.

When he sent for me into his library and told me what

he wished, I could not refuse him anything. I promised

obedience to him as though I were a child; and in this way

I found myself engaged to be his wife. When he told me

that he would have it so, how could I refuse him, knowing

as I do all that he has done for me, and thinking of it

as I do every minute? As for loving him, of course I love

him. Who that knows him does not love him? He is made to

be loved. No one is so good and so noble as he. But of

love of that sort I had never dreamed. Ah me, no!--a woman

burdened as I am does not think of love.

He told me that he would have it so, and I said that I

would obey him; and he tried to prove to me that in this

dreadful trial it would be better for me. But I would not

wish it on that account. He has done enough for me without

my causing him such injury. When I argued it with him,

trying to say that others would not like it, he declared

that Mrs. Orme would be well pleased, and, indeed, so she

told me afterwards herself. And thus I yielded to him,

and agreed that I would be his wife. But I was not happy,

thinking that I should injure him; and I promised only

because I could not deny him.

But the day before yesterday young Mr. Orme, his grandson,

came to me and told me that such a marriage would be very

wrong. And I do believe him. He said that old family

friends would look down upon his grandfather and ridicule

him if he were to make this marriage. And I can see that

it would be so. I would not have such injury come upon him

for the gain of all the world to myself. So I have made

up my mind to tell him that it cannot be, even though I

should anger him. And I fear that it will anger him, for

he loves to have his own way,--especially in doing good;

and he thinks that our marriage would rescue me altogether

from the danger of this trial.

So I have made up my mind to tell him, but I have not

found courage to do it yet; and I do wish, dear Mr.

Furnival, that I might see you first. I fear that I may

have lost your friendship by what has already been done.

If so, what will become of me? When I heard that you had

gone without asking for me, my heart sank within me. I

have two friends whom I so dearly love, and I would fain

do as both direct me, if that may be possible. And now I

propose to go up to London to-morrow, and to be at your

chambers about one o'clock. I have told Sir Peregrine and

Mrs. Orme that I am going; but he is too noble-minded

to ask questions now that he thinks I may feel myself

constrained to tell him. So I will call in Lincoln's Inn

at one o'clock, and I trust that if possible you will see

me. I am greatly in want of your advice, for in truth I

hardly know what to do.

Pray believe me to be always your attached friend,

MARY MASON.

There was hardly a word,--I believe not a word in that letter that

was not true. Her acceptance of Sir Peregrine had been given exactly

in the manner and for the reasons there explained; and since she had

accepted him she had been sorry for having done so, exactly in the

way now described. She was quite willing to give up her husband if it

was thought best,--but she was not willing to give up her friend. She

was not willing to give up either friend, and her great anxiety was

so to turn her conduct that she might keep them both.

Mr. Furnival was gratified as he read the letter--gratified in spite

of his present frame of mind. Of course he would see her;--and of

course, as he himself well knew, would take her again into favour.

But he must insist on her carrying out her purpose of abandoning the

marriage project. If, arising from this abandonment, there should

be any coolness on the part of Sir Peregrine, Mr. Furnival would

not regret it. Mr. Furnival did not feel quite sure whether in the

conduct of this case he was not somewhat hampered by the--energetic

zeal of Sir Peregrine's line of defence.

When he had finished the perusal of his letter and the consideration

which it required, he put it carefully into his breast coat pocket,

envelope and all. What might not happen if he left that envelope

about in that house? And then he took it out again, and observed upon

the cover the Hamworth post-mark, very clear. Post-marks now-a-days

are very clear, and everybody may know whence a letter comes. His

letters had been brought to him by the butler; but was it not

probable that that ancient female servant might have seen them first,

and have conveyed to her mistress intelligence as to this post-mark?

If so--; and Mr. Furnival almost felt himself to be guilty as he

thought of it.

While he was putting on his greatcoat in the hall, the butler

assisting him, the ancient female servant came to him again. There

was a look about her face which told of war, and declared her

to be, if not the chief lieutenant of his wife, at any rate her

colour-serjeant. Martha Biggs no doubt was chief lieutenant. "Missus

desires me to ask," said she, with her grim face and austere voice,

"whether you will be pleased to dine at home to-day?" And yet the

grim, austere woman could be affectionate and almost motherly in her

ministrations to him when things were going well, and had eaten his

salt and broken his bread for more than twenty years. All this was

very hard! "Because," continued the woman, "missus says she thinks

she shall be out this evening herself."

"Where is she going?"

"Missus didn't tell me, sir."

He almost determined to go up stairs and call upon her to tell him

what she was going to do, but he remembered that if he did it would

surely make a row in the house. Miss Biggs would put her head out

of some adjacent door and scream, "Oh laws!" and he would have to

descend his own stairs with the consciousness that all his household

were regarding him as a brute. So he gave up that project. "No," he

said, "I shall not dine at home;" and then he went his way.

"Missus is very aggravating," said the butler, as soon as the door

was closed.

"You don't know what cause she has, Spooner," said the housekeeper

very solemnly.

"Is it at his age? I believe it's all nonsense, I do;--feminine

fancies, and vagaries of the weaker sex."

"Yes, I dare say; that's what you men always say. But if he don't

look out he'll find missus'll be too much for him. What'd he do if

she were to go away from him?"

"Do?--why live twice as jolly. It would only be the first rumpus of

the thing."

I am afraid that there was some truth in what Spooner said. It is the

first rumpus of the thing, or rather the fear of that, which keeps

together many a couple.

At one o'clock there came a timid female rap at Mr. Furnival's

chamber door, and the juvenile clerk gave admittance to Lady Mason.

Crabwitz, since the affair of that mission down at Hamworth, had

so far carried a point of his, that a junior satellite was now

permanently installed; and for the future the indignity of opening

doors, and "just stepping out" into Chancery Lane, would not await

him. Lady Mason was dressed all in black,--but this was usual

with her when she left home. To-day, however, there was about her

something blacker and more sombre than usual. The veil which she wore

was thick, and completely hid her face; and her voice, as she asked

for Mr. Furnival, was low and plaintive. But, nevertheless, she had

by no means laid aside the charm of womanhood; or it might be more

just to say that the charm of womanhood had not laid aside her. There

was that in her figure, step, and gait of going which compelled men

to turn round and look at her. We all know that she had a son some

two or three and twenty years of age, and that she had not been quite

a girl when she married. But, notwithstanding this, she was yet

young; and though she made no effort--no apparent effort--to maintain

the power and influence which beauty gives, yet she did maintain it.

He came forward and took her by the hand with all his old

affectionate regard, and, muttering some words of ordinary

salutation, led her to a chair. It may be that she muttered something

also, but if so the sound was too low to reach his ears. She sat down

where he placed her, and as she put her hand on the table near her

arm, he saw that she was trembling.

"I got your letter this morning," he said, by way of beginning the

conversation.

"Yes," she said; and then, finding that it was not possible that he

should hear her through her veil, she raised it. She was very pale,

and there was a look of painful care, almost of agony, round her

mouth. He had never seen her look so pale,--but he said to himself at

the same time that he had never seen her look so beautiful.

"And to tell you the truth, Lady Mason, I was very glad to get it.

You and I had better speak openly to each other about this;--had we

not?"

"Oh, yes," she said. And then there was a struggle within her not to

tremble--a struggle that was only too evident. She was aware of this,

and took her hand off the table.

"I vexed you because I did not see you at The Cleeve the other day."

"Because I thought that you were angry with me."

"And I was so."

"Oh, Mr. Furnival!"

"Wait a moment, Lady Mason. I was angry;--or rather sorry and

vexed to hear of that which I did not approve. But your letter has

removed that feeling. I can now understand the manner in which

this engagement was forced upon you; and I understand also--do I

not?--that the engagement will not be carried out?"

She did not answer him immediately, and he began to fear that

she repented of her purpose. "Because," said he, "under no other

circumstances could I--"

"Stop, Mr. Furnival. Pray do not be severe with me." And she looked

at him with eyes which would almost have melted his wife,--and which

he was quite unable to withstand. Had it been her wish, she might

have made him promise to stand by her, even though she had persisted

in her engagement.

"No, no; I will not be severe."

"I do not wish to marry him," she went on to say. "I have resolved to

tell him so. That was what I said in my letter."

"Yes, yes."

"I do not wish to marry him. I would not bring his gray hairs with

sorrow to the grave--no, not to save myself from--" And then, as she

thought of that from which she desired to save herself, she trembled

again, and was silent.

"It would create in men's minds such a strong impression against you,

were you to marry him at this moment!"

"It is of him I am thinking;--of him and Lucius. Mr. Furnival, they

might do their worst with me, if it were not for that thought. My

boy!" And then she rose from her chair, and stood upright before him,

as though she were going to do or say some terrible thing. He still

kept his chair, for he was startled, and hardly knew what he would be

about. That last exclamation had come from her almost with a shriek,

and now her bosom was heaving as though her heart would burst with

the violence of her sobbing. "I will go," she said. "I had better

go." And she hurried away towards the door.

"No, no; do not go yet." And he rose to stop her, but she was quite

passive. "I do not know why you should be so much moved now." But

he did know. He did understand the very essence and core of her

feelings;--as probably may the reader also. But it was impossible

that he should allow her to leave him in her present state.

She sat down again, and leaning both her arms upon the table, hid

her face within her hands. He was now standing, and for the moment

did not speak to her. Indeed he could not bring himself to break the

silence, for he saw her tears, and could still hear the violence of

her sobs. And then she was the first to speak. "If it were not for

him," she said, raising her head, "I could bear it all. What will he

do? what will he do?"

"You mean," said Mr. Furnival, speaking very slowly, "if

the--verdict--should go against us."

"It will go against us," she said. "Will it not?--tell me the truth.

You are so clever, you must know. Tell me how it will go. Is there

anything I can do to save him?" And she took hold of his arm with

both her hands, and looked up eagerly--oh, with such terrible

eagerness!--into his face.

Would it not have been natural now that he should have asked her to

tell him the truth? And yet he did not dare to ask her. He thought

that he knew it. He felt sure,--almost sure, that he could look into

her very heart, and read there the whole of her secret. But still

there was a doubt,--enough of doubt to make him wish to ask the

question. Nevertheless he did not ask it.

"Mr. Furnival," she said; and as she spoke there was a hardness came

over the soft lines of her feminine face; a look of courage which

amounted almost to ferocity, a look which at the moment recalled

to his mind, as though it were but yesterday, the attitude and

countenance she had borne as she stood in the witness-box at that

other trial, now so many years since,--that attitude and countenance

which had impressed the whole court with so high an idea of her

courage. "Mr. Furnival, weak as I am, I could bear to die here on the

spot,--now--if I could only save him from this agony. It is not for

myself I suffer." And then the terrible idea occurred to him that she

might attempt to compass her escape by death. But he did not know

her. That would have been no escape for her son.

"And you too think that I must not marry him?" she said, putting up

her hands to her brows as though to collect her thoughts.

"No; certainly not, Lady Mason."

"No, no. It would be wrong. But, Mr. Furnival, I am so driven that I

know not how I should act. What if I should lose my mind?" And as she

looked at him there was that about her eyes which did tell him that

such an ending might be possible.

"Do not speak in such a way," he said.

"No, I will not. I know that it is wrong. I will go down there, and

tell him that it must not--must not be so. But I may stay at The

Cleeve;--may I not?"

"Oh, certainly--if he wishes it,--after your understanding with him."

"Ah; he may turn me out, may he not? And they are so kind to me,

so gentle and so good. And Lucius is so stern. But I will go back.

Sternness will perhaps be better for me now than love and kindness."

In spite of everything, in the teeth of his almost certain conviction

of her guilt, he would now, even now, have asked her to come to his

own house, and have begged her to remain there till the trial was

over,--if only he had had the power to do so. What would it be to him

what the world might say, if she should be proved guilty? Why should

not he have been mistaken as well as others? And he had an idea

that if he could get her into his own hands he might still bring

her through triumphantly,--with assistance from Solomon Aram and

Chaffanbrass. He was strongly convinced of her guilt, but by no means

strongly convinced that her guilt could be proved. But then he had no

house at the present moment that he could call his own. His Kitty,

the Kitty of whom he still sometimes thought with affection,--that

Kitty whose soft motherly heart would have melted at such a story

of a woman's sorrows, if only it had been rightly approached,--that

Kitty was now vehemently hostile, hostile both to him and to this

very woman for whom he would have asked her care.

"May God help me!" said the poor woman. "I do not know where else to

turn for aid. Well; I may go now then. And, indeed, why should I take

up your time further?"

But before she did go, Mr. Furnival gave her much counsel. He did not

ask as to her guilt, but he did give her that advice which he would

have thought most expedient had her guilt been declared and owned. He

told her that very much would depend on her maintaining her present

position and standing; that she was so to carry herself as not to

let people think that she was doubtful about the trial; and that

above all things she was to maintain a composed and steadfast manner

before her son. As to the Ormes, he bade her not to think of leaving

The Cleeve, unless she found that her remaining there would be

disagreeable to Sir Peregrine after her explanation with him. That

she was to decline the marriage engagement, he was very positive; on

that subject there was to be no doubt.

And then she went; and as she passed down the dark passage into the

new square by the old gate of the Chancellor's court, she met a stout

lady. The stout lady eyed her savagely, but was not quite sure as to

her identity. Lady Mason in her trouble passed the stout lady without

taking any notice of her.

CHAPTER XLII.

JOHN KENNEBY GOES TO HAMWORTH.

When John Kenneby dined with his sister and brother-in-law on

Christmas-day he agreed, at the joint advice of the whole party there

assembled, that he would go down and see Mr. Dockwrath at Hamworth,

in accordance with the invitation received from that gentleman;--his

enemy, Dockwrath, who had carried off Miriam Usbech, for whom John

Kenneby still sighed,--in a gentle easy manner indeed,--but still

sighed as though it were an affair but of yesterday. But though he

had so agreed, and though he had never stirred from that resolve, he

by no means did it immediately. He was a slow man, whose life had

offered him but little excitement; and the little which came to him

was husbanded well and made to go a long way. He thought about this

journey for nearly a month before he took it, often going to his

sister and discussing it with her, and once or twice seeing the great

Moulder himself. At last he fixed a day and did go down to Hamworth.

He had, moreover, been invited to the offices of Messrs. Round and

Crook, and that visit also was as yet unpaid. A clerk from the house

in Bedford Row had found him out at Hubbles and Grease's, and had

discovered that he would be forthcoming as a witness. On the special

subject of his evidence not much had then passed, the clerk having

had no discretion given him to sift the matter. But Kenneby had

promised to go to Bedford Row, merely stipulating for a day at some

little distance of time. That day was now near at hand; but he was

to see Dockwrath first, and hence it occurred that he now made his

journey to Hamworth.

But another member of that Christmas party at Great St. Helen's had

not been so slow in carrying out his little project. Mr. Kantwise had

at once made up his mind that it would be as well that he should see

Dockwrath. It would not suit him to incur the expense of a journey

to Hamworth, even with the additional view of extracting payment for

that set of metallic furniture; but he wrote to the attorney telling

him that he should be in London in the way of trade on such and such

a day, and that he had tidings of importance to give with reference

to the great Orley Farm case. Dockwrath did see him, and the result

was that Mr. Kantwise got his money, fourteen eleven;--at least he

got fourteen seven six, and had a very hard fight for the three odd

half-crowns,--and Dockwrath learned that John Kenneby, if duly used,

would give evidence on his side of the question.

And then Kenneby did go down to Hamworth. He had not seen Miriam

Usbech since the days of her marriage. He had remained hanging

about the neighbourhood long enough to feast his eyes with the

agony of looking at the bride, and then he had torn himself away.

Circumstances since that had carried him one way and Miriam another,

and they had never met. Time had changed him very little, and what

change time had made was perhaps for the better. He hesitated

less when he spoke, he was less straggling and undecided in his

appearance, and had about him more of manhood than in former days.

But poor Miriam had certainly not been altered for the better by

years and circumstances as far as outward appearance went.

Kenneby as he walked up from the station to the house,--and from old

remembrances he knew well where the house stood,--gave up his mind

entirely to the thought of seeing Miriam, and in his memories of old

love passages almost forgot the actual business which now brought him

to the place. To him it seemed as though he was going to meet the

same Miriam he had left,--the Miriam to whom in former days he had

hardly ventured to speak of love, and to whom he must not now venture

so to speak at all. He almost blushed as he remembered that he would

have to take her hand.

There are men of this sort, men slow in their thoughts but very keen

in their memories; men who will look for the glance of a certain

bright eye from a window-pane, though years have rolled on since

last they saw it,--since last they passed that window. Such men will

bethink themselves, after an interval of weeks, how they might have

brought up wit to their use and improved an occasion which chance

had given them. But when the bright eyes do glance, such men pass

by abashed; and when the occasion offers, their wit is never at

hand. Nevertheless they are not the least happy of mankind, these

never-readies; they do not pick up sudden prizes, but they hold

fast by such good things as the ordinary run of life bestows upon

them. There was a lady even now, a friend of Mrs. Moulder, ready to

bestow herself and her fortune on John Kenneby,--a larger fortune

than Miriam had possessed, and one which would not now probably be

neutralised by so large a family as poor Miriam had bestowed upon her

husband.

How would Miriam meet him? It was of this he thought, as he

approached the door. Of course he must call her Mrs. Dockwrath,

though the other name was so often on his tongue. He had made up

his mind, for the last week past, that he would call at the private

door of the house, passing by the door of the office. Otherwise

the chances were that he would not see Miriam at all. His enemy,

Dockwrath, would be sure to keep him from her presence. Dockwrath had

ever been inordinately jealous. But when he came to the office-door

he hardly had the courage to pass on to that of the private dwelling.

His heart beat too quickly, and the idea of seeing Miriam was almost

too much for him. But, nevertheless, he did carry out his plan, and

did knock at the door of the house.

And it was opened by Miriam herself. He knew her instantly in spite

of all the change. He knew her, but the whole course of his feelings

were altered at the moment, and his blood was made to run the other

way. And she knew him too. "La, John," she said, "who'd have thought

of seeing you?" And she shifted the baby whom she carried from one

arm to the other as she gave him her hand in token of welcome.

[Illustration: John Kenneby and Miriam Dockwrath.]

"It is a long time since we met," he said. He felt hardly any

temptation now to call her Miriam. Indeed it would have seemed

altogether in opposition to the common order of things to do so. She

was no longer Miriam, but the maternal Dockwrath;--the mother of that

long string of dirty children whom he saw gathered in the passage

behind her. He had known as a fact that she had all the children, but

the fact had not made the proper impression on his mind till he had

seen them.

"A long time! 'Deed then it is. Why we've hardly seen each other

since you used to be a courting of me; have we? But, my! John; why

haven't you got a wife for yourself these many years? But come in.

I'm glad to see every bit of you, so I am; though I've hardly a place

to put you to sit down in." And then she opened a door and took him

into a little sitting-room on the left-hand side of the passage.

His feeling of intense enmity to Dockwrath was beginning to wear

away, and one of modified friendship for the whole family was

supervening. It was much better that it should be so. He could not

understand before how Dockwrath had had the heart to write to him and

call him John, but now he did understand it. He felt that he could

himself be friendly with Dockwrath now, and forgive him all the

injury; he felt also that it would not go so much against the grain

with him to marry that friend as to whom his sister would so often

solicit him.

"I think you may venture to sit down upon them," said Miriam, "though

I can't say that I have ever tried myself." This speech referred to

the chairs with which her room was supplied, and which Kenneby seemed

to regard with suspicion.

"They are very nice I'm sure," said he, "but I don't think I ever saw

any like them."

"Nor nobody else either. But don't you tell him so," and she nodded

with her head to the side of the house on which the office stood. "I

had as nice a set of mahoganys as ever a woman could want, and bought

with my own money too, John; but he's took them away to furnish some

of his lodgings opposite, and put them things here in their place.

Don't, Sam; you'll have 'em all twisted about nohows in no time if

you go to use 'em in that way."

"I wants to see the pictur' on the table," said Sam.

"Drat the picture," said Mrs. Dockwrath. "It was hard, wasn't it,

John, to see my own mahoganys, as I had rubbed with my own hands till

they was ever so bright, and as was bought with my own money too,

took away and them things brought here? Sam, if you twist that round

any more, I'll box your ears. One can't hear oneself speak with the

noise."

"They don't seem to be very useful," said Kenneby.

"Useful! They're got up for cheatery;--that's what they're got up

for. And that Dockwrath should be took in with 'em--he that's so

sharp at everything,--that's what surprises me. But laws, John, it

isn't the sharp ones that gets the best off. You was never sharp, but

you're as smirk and smooth as though you came out of a band-box. I am

glad to see you, John, so I am." And she put her apron up to her eyes

and wiped away a tear.

"Is Mr. Dockwrath at home?" said John.

"Sam, run round and see if your father's in the office. He'll be home

to dinner, I know. Molly, do be quiet with your sister. I never see

such a girl as you are for bothering. You didn't come down about

business, did you, John?" And then Kenneby explained to her that he

had been summoned by Dockwrath as to the matter of this Orley Farm

trial. While he was doing so, Sam returned to say that his father had

stepped out, but would be back in half an hour, and Mrs. Dockwrath,

finding it impossible to make use of her company sitting-room, took

her old lover into the family apartment which they all ordinarily

occupied.

"You can sit down there at any rate without it all crunching under

you, up to nothing." And she emptied for him as she spoke the seat

of an old well-worn horse-hair bottomed arm-chair. "As to them tin

things I wouldn't trust myself on one of them; and so I told him,

angry as it made him. But now about poor Lady Mason--. Sam and Molly,

you go into the garden, there's good children. They is so ready with

their ears, John; and he contrives to get everything out of 'em. Now

do tell me about this."

Kenneby could not help thinking that the love match between Miriam

and her husband had not turned out in all respects well, and I fear

that he derived from the thought a certain feeling of consolation.

"He" was spoken about in a manner that did not betoken unfailing love

and perfect confidence. Perhaps Miriam was at this moment thinking

that she might have done better with her youth and her money! She

was thinking of nothing of the kind. Her mind was one that dwelt on

the present, not on the past. She was unhappy about her furniture,

unhappy about the frocks of those four younger children, unhappy that

the loaves of bread went faster and faster every day, very unhappy

now at the savageness with which her husband prosecuted his anger

against Lady Mason. But it did not occur to her to be unhappy because

she had not become Mrs. Kenneby.

Mrs. Dockwrath had more to tell in the matter than had Kenneby, and

when the elder of the children who were at home had been disposed of

she was not slow to tell it. "Isn't it dreadful, John, to think that

they should come against her now, and the will all settled as it was

twenty year ago? But you won't say anything against her; will you

now, John? She was always a good friend to you; wasn't she? Though

it wasn't much use; was it?" It was thus that she referred to the

business before them, and to the love passages of her early youth at

the same time.

"It's a very dreadful affair," said Kenneby, very solemnly; "and the

more I think of it the more dreadful it becomes."

"But you won't say anything against her, will you? You won't go over

to his side; eh, John?"

"I don't know much about sides," said he.

"He'll get himself into trouble with it; I know he will. I do so wish

you'd tell him, for he can't hurt you if you stand up to him. If I

speak,--Lord bless you, I don't dare to call my soul my own for a

week afterwards."

"Is he so very--"

"Oh, dreadful, John. He's bid me never speak a word to her. But for

all that I used till she went away down to The Cleeve yonder. And

what do you think they say now? And I do believe it too. They say

that Sir Peregrine is going to make her his lady. If he does that it

stands to reason that Dockwrath and Joseph Mason will get the worst

of it. I'm sure I hope they will; only he'll be twice as hard if he

don't make money by it in some way."

"Will he, now?"

"Indeed he will. You never knew anything like him for hardness if

things go wrong awhile. I know he's got lots of money, because he's

always buying up bits of houses; besides, what has he done with mine?

but yet sometimes you'd hardly think he'd let me have bread enough

for the children--and as for clothes--!" Poor Miriam! It seemed that

her husband shared with her but few of the spoils or triumphs of his

profession.

Tidings now came in from the office that Dockwrath was there. "You'll

come round and eat a bit of dinner with us?" said she, hesitatingly.

He felt that she hesitated, and hesitated himself in his reply. "He

must say something in the way of asking you, you know, and then say

you'll come. His manner's nothing to you, you know. Do now. It does

me good to look at you, John; it does indeed." And then, without

making any promise, he left her and went round to the office.

Kenneby had made up his mind, talking over the matter with Moulder

and his sister, that he would be very reserved in any communication

which he might make to Dockwrath as to his possible evidence at the

coming trial; but nevertheless when Dockwrath had got him into his

office, the attorney made him give a succinct account of everything

he knew, taking down his deposition in a regular manner. "And now if

you'll just sign that," Dockwrath said to him when he had done.

"I don't know about signing," said Kenneby. "A man should never write

his own name unless he knows why."

"You must sign your own deposition;" and the attorney frowned at him

and looked savage. "What would a judge say to you in court if you had

made such a statement as this, affecting the character of a woman

like Lady Mason, and then had refused to sign it? You'd never be able

to hold up your head again."

"Wouldn't I?" said Kenneby gloomily; and he did sign it. This was a

great triumph to Dockwrath. Mat Round had succeeded in getting the

deposition of Bridget Bolster, but he had got that of John Kenneby.

"And now," said Dockwrath, "I'll tell you what we'll do;--we'll go to

the Blue Posts--you remember the Blue Posts?--and I'll stand a beef

steak and a glass of brandy and water. I suppose you'll go back to

London by the 3 P.M. train. We shall have lots of time."

Kenneby said that he should go back by the 3 P.M. train, but he

declined, with considerable hesitation, the beefsteak and brandy and

water. After what had passed between him and Miriam he could not go

to the Blue Posts with her husband.

"Nonsense, man," said Dockwrath. "You must dine somewhere."

But Kenneby said that he should dine in London. He always preferred

dining late. Besides, it was a long time since he had been at

Hamworth, and he was desirous of taking a walk that he might renew

his associations.

"Associations!" said Dockwrath with a sneer. According to his ideas

a man could have no pleasant associations with a place unless he had

made money there or been in some way successful. Now John Kenneby

had enjoyed no success at Hamworth. "Well then, if you prefer

associations to the Blue Posts I'll say good-bye to you. I don't

understand it myself. We shall see each other at the trial you know."

Kenneby with a sigh said that he supposed they should.

"Are you going into the house," said Dockwrath, "to see her again?"

and he indicated with his head the side on which his wife was, as she

before had indicated his side.

"Well, yes; I think I'll say good-bye."

"Don't be talking to her about this affair. She understands nothing

about it, and everything goes up to that woman at Orley Farm." And so

they parted.

"And he wanted you to go to the Blue Posts, did he?" said Miriam when

she heard of the proposition. "It's like him. If there is to be any

money spent it's anywhere but at home."

"But I ain't going," said John.

"He'll go before the day's out, though he mayn't get his dinner

there. And he'll be ever so free when he's there. He'll stand brandy

and water to half Hamworth when he thinks he can get anything by

it; but if you'll believe me, John, though I've all the fag of the

house on me, and all them children, I can't get a pint of beer--not

regular--betwixt breakfast and bedtime." Poor Miriam! Why had she not

taken advice when she was younger? John Kenneby would have given her

what beer was good for her, quite regularly.

Then he went out and took his walk, sauntering away to the gate of

Orley Farm, and looking up the avenue. He ventured up some way, and

there at a distance before him he saw Lucius Mason walking up and

down, from the house towards the road and back again, swinging a

heavy stick in his hand, with his hat pressed down over his brows.

Kenneby had no desire to speak to him; so he returned to the gate,

and thence went back to the station, escaping the town by a side

lane; and in this way he got back to London without holding further

communication with the people of Hamworth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

JOHN KENNEBY'S COURTSHIP.

"She's as sweet a temper, John, as ever stirred a lump of sugar in

her tea," said Mrs. Moulder to her brother, as they sat together over

the fire in Great St. Helen's on that same evening,--after his return

from Hamworth. "That she is,--and so Smiley always found her. 'She's

always the same,' Smiley said to me many a day. And what can a man

want more than that?"

"That's quite true," said John.

"And then as to her habits--I never knew her take a drop too much

since first I set eyes on her, and that's nigh twenty years ago. She

likes things comfortable;--and why shouldn't she, with two hundred a

year of her own coming out of the Kingsland Road brick-fields? As for

dress, her things is beautiful, and she is the woman that takes care

of 'em! Why, I remember an Irish tabinet as Smiley gave her when

first that venture in the brick-fields came up money; if that tabinet

is as much as turned yet, why, I'll eat it. And then, the best of

it is, she'll have you to-morrow. Indeed she will; or to-night, if

you'll ask her. Goodness gracious! if there ain't Moulder!" And the

excellent wife jumped up from her seat, poked the fire, emptied the

most comfortable arm-chair, and hurried out to the landing at the top

of the stairs. Presently the noise of a loudly wheezing pair of lungs

was heard, and the commercial traveller, enveloped from head to foot

in coats and comforters, made his appearance. He had just returned

from a journey, and having deposited his parcels and packages at

the house of business of Hubbles and Grease in Houndsditch, had now

returned to the bosom of his family. It was a way he had, not to let

his wife know exactly the period of his return. Whether he thought

that by so doing he might keep her always on the alert and ready for

marital inspection, or whether he disliked to tie himself down by the

obligation of a fixed time for his return, Mrs. Moulder had never

made herself quite sure. But on neither view of the subject did she

admire this practice of her lord. She had on many occasions pointed

out to him how much more snug she could make him if he would only let

her know when he was coming. But he had never taken the hint, and in

these latter days she had ceased to give it.

"Why, I'm uncommon cold," he said in answer to his wife's inquiries

after his welfare. "And so would you be too, if you'd come up from

Leeds since you'd had your dinner. What, John, are you there? The two

of you are making yourself snug enough, I suppose, with something

hot?"

"Not a drop he's had yet since he's been in the house," said Mrs.

Moulder. "And he's hardly as much as darkened the door since you

left it." And Mrs. Moulder added, with some little hesitation in her

voice, "Mrs. Smiley is coming in to-night, Moulder."

"The d---- she is! There's always something of that kind when I gets

home tired out, and wants to be comfortable. I mean to have my supper

to myself, as I likes it, if all the Mother Smileys in London choose

to come the way. What on earth is she coming here for this time of

night?"

"Why, Moulder, you know."

"No; I don't know. I only know this, that when a man's used up with

business he don't want to have any of that nonsense under his nose."

"If you mean me--" began John Kenneby.

"I don't mean you; of course not; and I don't mean anybody. Here,

take my coats, will you? and let me have a pair of slippers. If Mrs.

Smiley thinks that I'm going to change my pants, or put myself about

for her--"

"Laws, Moulder, she don't expect that."

"She won't get it any way. Here's John dressed up as if he was

going to a box in the the-atre. And you--why should you be going to

expense, and knocking out things that costs money, because Mother

Smiley's coming? I'll Smiley her."

"Now, Moulder--" But Mrs. Moulder knew that it was of no use speaking

to him at the present moment. Her task should be this,--to feed and

cosset him if possible into good humour before her guest should

arrive. Her praises of Mrs. Smiley had been very fairly true. But

nevertheless she was a lady who had a mind and voice of her own,

as any lady has a right to possess who draws in her own right two

hundred a year out of a brick-field in the Kingsland Road. Such a one

knows that she is above being snubbed, and Mrs. Smiley knew this of

herself as well as any lady; and if Moulder, in his wrath, should

call her Mother Smiley, or give her to understand that he regarded

her as an old woman, that lady would probably walk herself off in a

great dudgeon,--herself and her share in the brick-field. To tell the

truth, Mrs. Smiley required that considerable deference should be

paid to her.

Mrs. Moulder knew well what was her husband's present ailment. He had

dined as early as one, and on his journey up from Leeds to London had

refreshed himself with drink only. That last glass of brandy which

he had taken at the Peterborough station had made him cross. If she

could get him to swallow some hot food before Mrs. Smiley came, all

might yet be well.

"And what's it to be, M.?" she said in her most insinuating

voice--"there's a lovely chop down stairs, and there's nothing so

quick as that."

"Chop!" he said, and it was all he did say at the moment.

"There's a 'am in beautiful cut," she went on, showing by the urgency

of her voice how anxious she was on the subject.

For the moment he did not answer her at all, but sat facing the fire,

and running his fat fingers through his uncombed hair. "Mrs. Smiley!"

he said; "I remember when she was kitchen-maid at old Pott's."

"She ain't nobody's kitchen-maid now," said Mrs. Moulder, almost

prepared to be angry in the defence of her friend.

"And I never could make out when it was that Smiley married

her,--that is, if he ever did."

"Now, Moulder, that's shocking of you. Of course he married her. She

and I is nearly an age as possible, though I think she is a year over

me. She says not, and it ain't nothing to me. But I remember the

wedding as if it was yesterday. You and I had never set eyes on each

other then, M." This last she added in a plaintive tone, hoping to

soften him.

"Are you going to keep me here all night without anything?" he then

said. "Let me have some whisky,--hot, with;--and don't stand there

looking at nothing."

"But you'll take some solids with it, Moulder? Why it stands to

reason you'll be famished."

"Do as you're bid, will you, and give me the whisky. Are you going to

tell me when I'm to eat and when I'm to drink, like a child?" This he

said in that tone of voice which made Mrs. Moulder know that he meant

to be obeyed; and though she was sure that he would make himself

drunk, she was compelled to minister to his desires. She got the

whisky and hot water, the lemon and sugar, and set the things beside

him; and then she retired to the sofa. John Kenneby the while sat

perfectly silent looking on. Perhaps he was considering whether he

would be able to emulate the domestic management of Dockwrath or of

Moulder when he should have taken to himself Mrs. Smiley and the

Kingsland brick-field.

"If you've a mind to help yourself, John, I suppose you'll do it,"

said Moulder.

"None for me just at present, thank'ee," said Kenneby.

"I suppose you wouldn't swallow nothing less than wine in them togs?"

said the other, raising his glass to his lips. "Well, here's better

luck, and I'm blessed if it's not wanting. I'm pretty well tired of

this go, and so I mean to let 'em know pretty plainly."

All this was understood by Mrs. Moulder, who knew that it only

signified that her husband was half tipsy, and that in all

probability he would be whole tipsy before long. There was no

help for it. Were she to remonstrate with him in his present mood,

he would very probably fling the bottle at her head. Indeed,

remonstrances were never of avail with him. So she sat herself down,

thinking how she would run down when she heard Mrs. Smiley's step,

and beg that lady to postpone her visit. Indeed it would be well to

send John to convey her home again.

Moulder swallowed his glass of hot toddy fast, and then mixed

another. His eyes were very bloodshot, and he sat staring at the

fire. His hands were thrust into his pockets between the periods of

his drinking, and he no longer spoke to any one. "I'm ---- if I stand

it," he growled forth, addressing himself. "I've stood it a ---- deal

too long." And then he finished the second glass. There was a sort

of understanding on the part of his wife that such interjections

as these referred to Hubbles and Grease, and indicated a painfully

advanced state of drink. There was one hope; the double heat, that of

the fire and of the whisky, might make him sleep; and if so, he would

be safe for two or three hours.

"I'm blessed if I do, and that's all," said Moulder, grasping the

whisky-bottle for the third time. His wife sat behind him very

anxious, but not daring to interfere. "It's going over the table,

M.," she then said.

"D---- the table!" he answered; and then his head fell forward on his

breast, and he was fast asleep with the bottle in his hand.

"Put your hand to it, John," said Mrs. Moulder in a whisper. But John

hesitated. The lion might rouse himself if his prey were touched.

"He'll let it go easy if you put your hand to it. He's safe enough

now. There. If we could only get him back from the fire a little, or

his face'll be burnt off of him."

"But you wouldn't move him?"

"Well, yes; we'll try. I've done it before, and he's never stirred.

Come here, just behind. The casters is good, I know. Laws! ain't he

heavy?" And then they slowly dragged him back. He grunted out some

half-pronounced threat as they moved him; but he did not stir, and

his wife knew that she was again mistress of the room for the next

two hours. It was true that he snored horribly, but then she was used

to that.

"You won't let her come up, will you?" said John.

"Why not? She knows what men is as well I do. Smiley wasn't that way

often, I believe; but he was awful when he was. He wouldn't sleep it

off, quite innocent, like that; but would break everything about the

place, and then cry like a child after it. Now Moulder's got none of

that about him. The worst of it is, how am I ever to get him into bed

when he wakes?"

While the anticipation of this great trouble was still on her mind,

the ring at the bell was heard, and John Kenneby went down to the

outer door that he might pay to Mrs. Smiley the attention of waiting

upon her up stairs. And up stairs she came, bristling with silk--the

identical Irish tabinet, perhaps, which had never been turned--and

conscious of the business which had brought her.

"What--Moulder's asleep is he?" she said as she entered the room. "I

suppose that's as good as a pair of gloves, any way."

"He ain't just very well," said Mrs. Moulder, winking at her friend;

"he's tired after a long journey."

"Oh-h! ah-h!" said Mrs. Smiley, looking down upon the sleeping

beauty, and understanding everything at a glance. "It's uncommon bad

for him, you know, because he's so given to flesh."

"It's as much fatigue as anything," said the wife.

"Yes, I dare say;" and Mrs. Smiley shook her head. "If he fatigues

himself so much as that often he'll soon be off the hooks."

Much was undoubtedly to be borne from two hundred a year in a

brick-field, especially when that two hundred a year was coming so

very near home; but there is an amount of impertinent familiarity

which must be put down even in two hundred a year. "I've known worse

cases than him, my dear; and that ended worse."

"Oh, I dare say. But you're mistook if you mean Smiley. It was

'sepilus as took him off, as everybody knows."

"Well, my dear, I'm sure I'm not going to say anything against that.

And now, John, do help her off with her bonnet and shawl, while I get

the tea-things."

Mrs. Smiley was a firm set, healthy-looking woman of--about forty.

She had large, dark, glassy eyes, which were bright without

sparkling. Her cheeks were very red, having a fixed settled colour

that never altered with circumstances. Her black wiry hair was

ended in short crisp curls, which sat close to her head. It almost

collected like a wig, but the hair was in truth her own. Her mouth

was small, and her lips thin, and they gave to her face a look of

sharpness that was not quite agreeable. Nevertheless she was not a

bad-looking woman, and with such advantages as two hundred a year and

the wardrobe which Mrs. Moulder had described, was no doubt entitled

to look for a second husband.

"Well, Mr. Kenneby, and how do you find yourself this cold weather?

Dear, how he do snore; don't he?"

"Yes," said Kenneby, very thoughtfully, "he does rather." He was

thinking of Miriam Usbech as she was twenty years ago, and of Mrs.

Smiley as she appeared at present. Not that he felt inclined to

grumble at the lot prepared for him, but that he would like to take a

few more years to think about it.

And then they sat down to tea. The lovely chops which Moulder had

despised, and the ham in beautiful cut which had failed to tempt

him, now met with due appreciation. Mrs. Smiley, though she had

never been known to take a drop too much, did like to have things

comfortable; and on this occasion she made an excellent meal,

with a large pocket-handkerchief of Moulder's--brought in for the

occasion--stretched across the broad expanse of the Irish tabinet.

"We sha'n't wake him, shall we?" said she, as she took her last bit

of muffin.

"Not till he wakes natural, of hisself," said Mrs. Moulder. "When

he's worked it off, he'll rouse himself, and I shall have to get him

to bed."

"He'll be a bit patchy then, won't he?"

"Well, just for a while of course he will," said Mrs. Moulder. "But

there's worse than him. To-morrow morning, maybe, he'll be just as

sweet as sweet. It don't hang about him, sullen like. That's what I

hate, when it hangs about 'em." Then the tea-things were taken away,

Mrs. Smiley in her familiarity assisting in the removal, and--in

spite of the example now before them--some more sugar and some more

spirits, and some more hot water were put upon the table. "Well,

I don't mind just the least taste in life, Mrs. Moulder, as we're

quite between friends; and I'm sure you'll want it to-night to keep

yourself up." Mrs. Moulder would have answered these last words with

some severity had she not felt that good humour now might be of great

value to her brother.

"Well, John, and what is it you've got to say to her?" said Mrs.

Moulder, as she put down her empty glass. Between friends who

understood each other so well, and at their time of life, what was

the use of ceremony?

"La, Mrs. Moulder, what should he have got to say? Nothing I'm sure

as I'd think of listening to."

"You try her, John."

"Not but what I've the greatest respect in life for Mr. Kenneby,

and always did have. If you must have anything to do with men, I've

always said, recommend me to them as is quiet and steady, and hasn't

got too much of the gab;--a quiet man is the man for me any day."

"Well, John?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"Now, Mrs. Moulder, can't you keep yourself to yourself, and we shall

do very well. Laws, how he do snore! When his head goes bobbing that

way I do so fear he'll have a fit."

"No he won't; he's coming to, all right. Well, John?"

"I'm sure I shall be very happy," said John, "if she likes it. She

says that she respects me, and I'm sure I've a great respect for her.

I always had--even when Mr. Smiley was alive."

"It's very good of you to say so," said she; not speaking however as

though she were quite satisfied. What was the use of his remembering

Smiley just at present?

"Enough's enough between friends any day," said Mrs. Moulder. "So

give her your hand, John."

"I think it'll be right to say one thing first," said Kenneby, with a

solemn and deliberate tone.

"And what's that?" said Mrs. Smiley, eagerly.

"In such a matter as this," continued Kenneby, "where the hearts are

concerned--"

"You didn't say anything about hearts yet," said Mrs. Smiley, with

some measure of approbation in her voice.

"Didn't I?" said Kenneby. "Then it was an omission on my part, and I

beg leave to apologise. But what I was going to say is this: when the

hearts are concerned, everything should be honest and above-board."

"Oh of course," said Mrs. Moulder; "and I'm sure she don't suspect

nothing else."

"You'd better let him go on," said Mrs. Smiley.

"My heart has not been free from woman's lovely image."

"And isn't free now, is it, John?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"I've had my object, and though she's been another's, still I've kept

her image on my heart."

"But it ain't there any longer, John? He's speaking of twenty years

ago, Mrs. Smiley."

"It's quite beautiful to hear him," said Mrs. Smiley. "Go on, Mr.

Kenneby."

"The years are gone by as though they was nothing, and still I've had

her image on my heart. I've seen her to-day."

"Her gentleman's still alive, ain't he?" asked Mrs. Smiley.

"And likely to live," said Mrs. Moulder.

"I've seen her to-day," Kenneby continued; "and now the Adriatic's

free to wed another."

Neither of the ladies present exactly understood the force of the

quotation; but as it contained an appropriate reference to marriage,

and apparently to a second marriage, it was taken by both of them in

good part. He was considered to have made his offer, and Mrs. Smiley

thereupon formally accepted him. "He's spoke quite handsome, I'm

sure," said Mrs. Smiley to his sister; "and I don't know that any

woman has a right to expect more. As to the brick-fields--." And then

there was a slight reference to business, with which it will not be

necessary that the readers of this story should embarrass themselves.

Soon after that Mr. Kenneby saw Mrs. Smiley home in a cab, and poor

Mrs. Moulder sat by her lord till he roused himself from his sleep.

Let us hope that her troubles with him were as little vexatious as

possible; and console ourselves with the reflection that at twelve

o'clock the next morning, after the second bottle of soda and brandy,

he was "as sweet as sweet."

CHAPTER XLIV.

SHOWING HOW LADY MASON COULD BE VERY NOBLE.

Lady Mason returned to The Cleeve after her visit to Mr. Furnival's

chambers, and nobody asked her why she had been to London or whom she

had seen. Nothing could be more gracious than the deference which was

shown to her, and the perfect freedom of action which was accorded

to her. On that very day Lady Staveley had called at The Cleeve,

explaining to Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme that her visit was made

expressly to Lady Mason. "I should have called at Orley Farm, of

course," said Lady Staveley, "only that I hear that Lady Mason is

likely to prolong her visit with you. I must trust to you, Mrs. Orme,

to make all that understood." Sir Peregrine took upon himself to say

that it all should be understood, and then drawing Lady Staveley

aside, told her of his own intended marriage. "I cannot but be

aware," he said, "that I have no business to trouble you with an

affair that is so exclusively our own; but I have a wish, which

perhaps you may understand, that there should be no secret about it.

I think it better, for her sake, that it should be known. If the

connection can be of any service to her, she should reap that benefit

now, when some people are treating her name with a barbarity which

I believe to be almost unparalleled in this country." In answer to

this Lady Staveley was of course obliged to congratulate him, and she

did so with the best grace in her power; but it was not easy to say

much that was cordial, and as she drove back with Mrs. Arbuthnot to

Noningsby the words which were said between them as to Lady Mason

were not so kindly meant towards that lady as their remarks on their

journey to The Cleeve.

Lady Staveley had hoped,--though she had hardly expressed her hope

even to herself, and certainly had not spoken of it to any one

else,--that she might have been able to say a word or two to Mrs.

Orme about young Peregrine, a word or two that would have shown her

own good feeling towards the young man,--her own regard, and almost

affection for him, even though this might have been done without

any mention of Madeline's name. She might have learned in this way

whether young Orme had made known at home what had been his hopes and

what his disappointments, and might have formed some opinion whether

or no he would renew his suit. She would not have been the first to

mention her daughter's name; but if Mrs. Orme should speak of it,

then the subject would be free for her, and she could let it be known

that the heir of The Cleeve should at any rate have her sanction and

good will. What happiness could be so great for her as that of having

a daughter so settled, within eight miles of her? And then it was not

only that a marriage between her daughter and Peregrine Orme would be

an event so fortunate, but also that those feelings with reference

to Felix Graham were so unfortunate! That young heart, she thought,

could not as yet be heavy laden, and it might be possible that the

whole affair should be made to run in the proper course,--if only

it could be done at once. But now, that tale which Sir Peregrine

had told her respecting himself and Lady Mason had made it quite

impossible that anything should be said on the other subject. And

then again, if it was decreed that the Noningsby family and the

family of The Cleeve should be connected, would not such a marriage

as this between the baronet and Lady Mason be very injurious? So that

Lady Staveley was not quite happy as she returned to her own house.

Lady Staveley's message, however, for Lady Mason was given with all

its full force. Sir Peregrine had felt grateful for what had been

done, and Mrs. Orme, in talking of it, made quite the most of it.

Civility from the Staveleys to the Ormes would not, in the ordinary

course of things, be accounted of any special value. The two families

might, and naturally would, know each other on intimate terms. But

the Ormes would as a matter of course stand the highest in general

estimation. Now, however, the Ormes had to bear up Lady Mason with

them. Sir Peregrine had so willed it, and Mrs. Orme had not for a

moment thought of contesting the wish of one whose wishes she had

never contested. No words were spoken on the subject; but still with

both of them there was a feeling that Lady Staveley's countenance

and open friendship would be of value. When it had come to this

with Sir Peregrine Orme, he was already disgraced in his own

estimation,--already disgraced, although he declared to himself a

thousand times that he was only doing his duty as a gentleman.

On that evening Lady Mason said no word of her new purpose. She

had pledged herself both to Peregrine Orme and to Mr. Furnival. To

both she had made a distinct promise that she would break off her

engagement, and she knew well that the deed should be done at once.

But how was she to do it? With what words was she to tell him that

she had changed her mind and would not take the hand that he had

offered to her? She feared to be a moment alone with Peregrine lest

he should tax her with the non-fulfilment of her promise. But in

truth Peregrine at the present moment was thinking more of another

matter. It had almost come home to him that his grandfather's

marriage might facilitate his own; and though he still was far from

reconciling himself to the connection with Lady Mason, he was almost

disposed to put up with it.

On the following day, at about noon, a chariot with a pair of

post-horses was brought up to the door of The Cleeve at a very fast

pace, and the two ladies soon afterwards learned that Lord Alston was

closeted with Sir Peregrine. Lord Alston was one of Sir Peregrine's

oldest friends. He was a man senior both in age and standing to the

baronet; and, moreover, he was a friend who came but seldom to The

Cleeve, although his friendship was close and intimate. Nothing was

said between Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason, but each dreaded that Lord

Alston had come to remonstrate about the marriage. And so in truth he

had. The two old men were together for about an hour, and then Lord

Alston took his departure without asking for, or seeing any other

one of the family. Lord Alston had remonstrated about the marriage,

using at last very strong language to dissuade the baronet from

a step which he thought so unfortunate; but he had remonstrated

altogether in vain. Every word he had used was not only fruitless,

but injurious; for Sir Peregrine was a man whom it was very difficult

to rescue by opposition, though no man might be more easily led by

assumed acquiescence.

"Orme, my dear fellow," said his lordship, towards the end of the

interview, "it is my duty, as an old friend, to tell you this."

"Then, Lord Alston, you have done your duty."

"Not while a hope remains that I may prevent this marriage."

"There is ground for no such hope on your part; and permit me to

say that the expression of such a hope to me is greatly wanting in

courtesy."

"You and I," continued Lord Alston, without apparent attention to the

last words which Sir Peregrine had spoken, "have nearly come to the

end of our tether here. Our careers have been run; and I think I may

say as regards both, but I may certainly say as regards you, that

they have been so run that we have not disgraced those who preceded

us. Our dearest hopes should be that our names may never be held as a

reproach by those who come after us."

"With God's blessing I will do nothing to disgrace my family."

"But, Orme, you and I cannot act as may those whose names in the

world are altogether unnoticed. I know that you are doing this from a

feeling of charity to that lady."

"I am doing it, Lord Alston, because it so pleases me."

"But your first charity is due to your grandson. Suppose that he was

making an offer of his hand to the daughter of some nobleman,--as he

is so well entitled to do,--how would it affect his hopes if it were

known that you at the time had married a lady whose misfortune made

it necessary that she should stand at the bar in a criminal court?"

"Lord Alston," said Sir Peregrine, rising from his chair, "I trust

that my grandson may never rest his hopes on any woman whose heart

could be hardened against him by such a thought as that."

"But what if she should be guilty?" said Lord Alston.

"Permit me to say," said Sir Peregrine, still standing, and standing

now bolt upright, as though his years did not weigh on him a feather,

"that this conversation has gone far enough. There are some surmises

to which I cannot listen, even from Lord Alston."

Then his lordship shrugged his shoulders, declared that in speaking

as he had spoken he had endeavoured to do a friendly duty by an old

friend,--certainly the oldest, and almost the dearest friend he

had,--and so he took his leave. The wheels of the chariot were heard

grating over the gravel, as he was carried away from the door at a

gallop, and the two ladies looked into each other's faces, saying

nothing. Sir Peregrine was not seen from that time till dinner; but

when he did come into the drawing-room his manner to Lady Mason was,

if possible, more gracious and more affectionate than ever.

"So Lord Alston was here to-day," Peregrine said to his mother that

night before he went to bed.

"Yes, he was here."

"It was about this marriage, mother, as sure as I am standing here."

"I don't think Lord Alston would interfere about that, Perry."

"Wouldn't he? He would interfere about anything he did not like; that

is, as far as the pluck of it goes. Of course he can't like it. Who

can?"

"Perry, your grandfather likes it; and surely he has a right to

please himself."

"I don't know about that. You might say the same thing if he wanted

to kill all the foxes about the place, or do any other outlandish

thing. Of course he might kill them, as far as the law goes, but

where would he be afterwards? She hasn't said anything to him, has

she?"

"I think not."

"Nor to you?"

"No; she has not spoken to me; not about that."

"She promised me positively that she would break it off."

"You must not be hard on her, Perry."

Just as these words were spoken, there came a low knock at Mrs.

Orme's dressing-room door. This room, in which Mrs. Orme was wont to

sit for an hour or so every night before she went to bed, was the

scene of all the meetings of affection which took place between the

mother and the son. It was a pretty little apartment, opening from

Mrs. Orme's bed-room, which had at one time been the exclusive

property of Peregrine's father. But by degrees it had altogether

assumed feminine attributes; had been furnished with soft chairs,

a sofa, and a lady's table; and though called by the name of Mrs.

Orme's dressing-room, was in fact a separate sitting-room devoted to

her exclusive use. Sir Peregrine would not for worlds have entered it

without sending up his name beforehand, and this he did on only very

rare occasions. But Lady Mason had of late been admitted here, and

Mrs. Orme now knew that it was her knock.

"Open the door, Perry," she said; "it is Lady Mason." He did open the

door, and Lady Mason entered.

"Oh, Mr. Orme, I did not know that you were here."

"I am just off. Good night, mother."

"But I am disturbing you."

"No, we had done;" and he stooped down and kissed his mother. "Good

night, Lady Mason. Hadn't I better put some coals on for you, or the

fire will be out?" He did put on the coals, and then he went his way.

Lady Mason while he was doing this had sat down on the sofa, close

to Mrs. Orme; but when the door was closed Mrs. Orme was the first

to speak. "Well, dear," she said, putting her hand caressingly on

the other's arm. I am inclined to think that had there been no one

whom Mrs. Orme was bound to consult but herself, she would have

wished that this marriage should have gone on. To her it would have

been altogether pleasant to have had Lady Mason ever with her in

the house; and she had none of those fears as to future family

retrospections respecting which Lord Alston had spoken with so much

knowledge of the world. As it was, her manner was so caressing and

affectionate to her guest, that she did much more to promote Sir

Peregrine's wishes than to oppose them. "Well, dear," she said, with

her sweetest smile.

"I am so sorry that I have driven your son away."

"He was going. Besides, it would make no matter; he would stay here

all night sometimes, if I didn't drive him away myself. He comes here

and writes his letters at the most unconscionable hours, and uses up

all my note-paper in telling some horsekeeper what is to be done with

his mare."

"Ah, how happy you must be to have him!"

"Well, I suppose I am," she said, as a tear came into her eyes.

"We are so hard to please. I am all anxiety now that he should be

married; and if he were married, then I suppose I should grumble

because I did not see so much of him. He would be more settled if he

would marry, I think. For myself I approve of early marriages for

young men." And then she thought of her own husband whom she had

loved so well and lost so soon. And so they sat silent for a while,

each thinking of her own lot in life.

"But I must not keep you up all night," said Lady Mason.

"Oh, I do so like you to be here," said the other. Then again she

took hold of her arm, and the two women kissed each other.

"But, Edith," said the other, "I came in here to-night with a

purpose. I have something that I wish to say to you. Can you listen

to me?"

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Orme; "surely."

"Has your son been talking to you about--about what was said between

him and me the other day? I am sure he has, for I know he tells you

everything,--as he ought to do."

"Yes, he did speak to me," said Mrs. Orme, almost trembling with

anxiety.

"I am so glad, for now it will be easier for me to tell you. And

since that I have seen Mr. Furnival, and he says the same. I tell you

because you are so good and so loving to me. I will keep nothing from

you; but you must not tell Sir Peregrine that I talked to Mr.

Furnival about this."

Mrs. Orme gave the required promise, hardly thinking at the moment

whether or no she would be guilty of any treason against Sir

Peregrine in doing so.

"I think I should have said nothing to him, though he is so very old

a friend, had not Mr. Orme--"

"You mean Peregrine?"

"Yes; had not he been so--so earnest about it. He told me that if I

married Sir Peregrine I should be doing a cruel injury to him--to his

grandfather."

"He should not have said that."

"Yes, Edith,--if he thinks it. He told me that I should be turning

all his friends against him. So I promised him that I would speak to

Sir Peregrine, and break it off if it be possible."

"He told me that."

"And then I spoke to Mr. Furnival, and he told me that I should be

blamed by all the world if I were to marry him. I cannot tell you all

he said, but he said this: that if--if--"

"If what, dear?"

"If in the court they should say--"

"Say what?"

"Say that I did this thing,--then Sir Peregrine would be crushed, and

would die with a broken heart."

"But they cannot say that;--it is impossible. You do not think it

possible that they can do so?" And then again she took hold of Lady

Mason's arm, and looked up anxiously, into her face. She looked up

anxiously, not suspecting anything, not for a moment presuming it

possible that such a verdict could be justly given, but in order that

she might see how far the fear of a fate so horrible was operating on

her friend. Lady Mason's face was pale and woe-worn, but not more so

than was now customary with her.

"One cannot say what may be possible," she answered slowly. "I

suppose they would not go on with it if they did not think they had

some chance of success."

"You mean as to the property?"

"Yes; as to the property."

"But why should they not try that, if they must try it, without

dragging you there?"

"Ah, I do not understand; or at least I cannot explain it. Mr.

Furnival says that it must be so; and therefore I shall tell Sir

Peregrine to-morrow that all this must be given up." And then they

sat together silently, holding each other by the hand.

"Good night, Edith," Lady Mason said at last, getting up from her

seat.

"Good night, dearest."

"You will let me be your friend still, will you not?" said Lady

Mason.

"My friend! Oh yes; always my friend. Why should this interfere

between you and me?"

"But he will be very angry--at least I fear that he will. Not

that--not that he will have anything to regret. But the very strength

of his generosity and nobleness will make him angry. He will be

indignant because I do not let him make this sacrifice for me. And

then--and then--I fear I must leave this house."

"Oh no, not that; I will speak to him. He will do anything for me."

"It will be better perhaps that I should go. People will think that I

am estranged from Lucius. But if I go, you will come to me? He will

let you do that; will he not?"

And then there were warm, close promises given, and embraces

interchanged. The women did love each other with a hearty, true

love, and each longed that they might be left together. And yet how

different they were, and how different had been their lives!

The prominent thought in Lady Mason's mind as she returned to her own

room was this:--that Mrs. Orme had said no word to dissuade her from

the line of conduct which she had proposed to herself. Mrs. Orme

had never spoken against the marriage as Peregrine had spoken, and

Mr. Furnival. Her heart had not been stern enough to allow her to

do that. But was it not clear that her opinion was the same as

theirs? Lady Mason acknowledged to herself that it was clear, and

acknowledged to herself also that no one was in favour of the

marriage. "I will do it immediately after breakfast," she said to

herself. And then she sat down,--and sat through the half the night

thinking of it.

Mrs. Orme, when she was left alone, almost rebuked herself in that

she had said no word of counsel against the undertaking which Lady

Mason proposed for herself. For Mr. Furnival and his opinion she did

not care much. Indeed, she would have been angry with Lady Mason

for speaking to Mr. Furnival on the subject, were it not that her

pity was too deep to admit of any anger. That the truth must be

established at the trial Mrs. Orme felt all but confident. When alone

she would feel quite sure on this point, though a doubt would always

creep in on her when Lady Mason was with her. But now, as she sat

alone, she could not realise the idea that the fear of a verdict

against her friend should offer any valid reason against the

marriage. The valid reasons, if there were such, must be looked for

elsewhere. And were these other reasons so strong in their validity?

Sir Peregrine desired the marriage; and so did Lady Mason herself, as

regarded her own individual wishes. Mrs. Orme was sure that this was

so. And then for her own self, she,--Sir Peregrine's daughter-in-law,

the only lady concerned in the matter,--she also would have liked it.

But her son disliked it, and she had yielded so far to the wishes of

her son. Well; was it not right that with her those wishes should be

all but paramount? And thus she endeavoured to satisfy her conscience

as she retired to rest.

On the following morning the four assembled at breakfast. Lady Mason

hardly spoke at all to any one. Mrs. Orme, who knew what was about to

take place, was almost as silent; but Sir Peregrine had almost more

to say than usual to his grandson. He was in good spirits, having

firmly made up his mind on a certain point; and he showed this by

telling Peregrine that he would ride with him immediately after

breakfast. "What has made you so slack about your hunting during the

last two or three days?" he asked.

"I shall hunt to-morrow," said Peregrine.

"Then you can afford time to ride with me through the woods after

breakfast." And so it would have been arranged had not Lady Mason

immediately said that she hoped to be able to say a few words to Sir

Peregrine in the library after breakfast. "\_Place aux dames\_," said

he. "Peregrine, the horses can wait." And so the matter was arranged

while they were still sitting over their toast.

Peregrine, as this was said, had looked at his mother, but she had

not ventured to take her eyes for a moment from the teapot. Then he

had looked at Lady Mason, and saw that she was, as it were, going

through a fashion of eating her breakfast. In order to break the

absolute silence of the room he muttered something about the weather,

and then his grandfather, with the same object, answered him. After

that no words were spoken till Sir Peregrine, rising from his chair,

declared that he was ready.

He got up and opened the door for his guest, and then hurrying across

the hall, opened the library door for her also, holding it till she

had passed in. Then he took her left hand in his, and passing his

right arm round her waist, asked her if anything disturbed her.

"Oh yes," she said, "yes; there is much that disturbs me. I have done

very wrong."

"How done wrong, Mary?" She could not recollect that he had called

her Mary before, and the sound she thought was very sweet;--was very

sweet, although she was over forty, and he over seventy years of age.

"I have done very wrong, and I have now come here that I may undo it.

Dear Sir Peregrine, you must not be angry with me."

"I do not think that I shall be angry with you; but what is it,

dearest?"

But she did not know how to find words to declare her purpose. It was

comparatively an easy task to tell Mrs. Orme that she had made up

her mind not to marry Sir Peregrine, but it was by no means easy to

tell the baronet himself. And now she stood there leaning over the

fireplace, with his arm round her waist,--as it behoved her to stand

no longer, seeing the resolution to which she had come. But still she

did not speak.

"Well, Mary, what is it? I know there is something on your mind or

you would not have summoned me in here. Is it about the trial? Have

you seen Mr. Furnival again?"

"No; it is not about the trial," she said, avoiding the other

question.

"What is it then?"

"Sir Peregrine, it is impossible that we should be married." And thus

she brought forth her tidings, as it were at a gasp, speaking at the

moment with a voice that was almost indicative of anger.

"And why not?" said he, releasing her from his arm and looking at

her.

"It cannot be," she said.

"And why not, Lady Mason?"

"It cannot be," she said again, speaking with more emphasis, and with

a stronger tone.

"And is that all that you intend to tell me? Have I done anything

that has offended you?"

"Offended me! No. I do not think that would be possible. The offence

is on the other side--"

"Then, my dear,--"

"But listen to me now. It cannot be. I know that it is wrong.

Everything tells me that such a marriage on your part would be a

sacrifice,--a terrible sacrifice. You would be throwing away your

great rank--"

"No," shouted Sir Peregrine; "not though I married a

kitchen-maid,--instead of a lady who in social life is my equal."

"Ah, no; I should not have said rank. You cannot lose that;--but your

station in the world, the respect of all around you, the--the--the--"

"Who has been telling you all this?"

"I have wanted no one to tell me. Thinking of it has told it me all.

My own heart which is full of gratitude and love for you has told

me."

"You have not seen Lord Alston?"

"Lord Alston! oh, no."

"Has Peregrine been speaking to you?"

"Peregrine!"

"Yes; Peregrine; my grandson?"

"He has spoken to me."

"Telling you to say this to me. Then he is an ungrateful boy;--a very

ungrateful boy. I would have done anything to guard him from wrong in

this matter."

"Ah; now I see the evil that I have done. Why did I ever come into

the house to make quarrels between you?"

"There shall be no quarrel. I will forgive him even that if you will

be guided by me. And, dearest Mary, you must be guided by me now.

This matter has gone too far for you to go back--unless, indeed, you

will say that personally you have an aversion to the marriage."

"Oh, no; no; it is not that," she said eagerly. She could not help

saying it with eagerness. She could not inflict the wound on his

feelings which her silence would then have given.

"Under those circumstances, I have a right to say that the marriage

must go on."

"No; no."

"But I say it must. Sit down, Mary." And she did sit down, while he

stood leaning over her and thus spoke. "You speak of sacrificing

me. I am an old man with not many more years before me. If I did

sacrifice what little is left to me of life with the object of

befriending one whom I really love, there would be no more in it than

what a man might do, and still feel that the balance was on the right

side. But here there will be no sacrifice. My life will be happier,

and so will Edith's. And so indeed will that boy's, if he did but

know it. For the world's talk, which will last some month or two, I

care nothing. This I will confess, that if I were prompted to this

only by my own inclination, only by love for you--" and as he spoke

he held out his hand to her, and she could not refuse him hers--"in

such a case I should doubt and hesitate and probably keep aloof from

such a step. But it is not so. In doing this I shall gratify my own

heart, and also serve you in your great troubles. Believe me, I have

thought of that."

"I know you have, Sir Peregrine,--and therefore it cannot be."

"But therefore it shall be. The world knows it now; and were we to

be separated after what has past, the world would say that I--I had

thought you guilty of this crime."

"I must bear all that." And now she stood before him, not looking him

in the face, but with her face turned down towards the ground, and

speaking hardly above her breath.

"By heavens, no; not whilst I can stand by your side. Not whilst I

have strength left to support you and thrust the lie down the throat

of such a wretch as Joseph Mason. No, Mary, go back to Edith and tell

her that you have tried it, but that there is no escape for you." And

then he smiled at her. His smile at times could be very pleasant!

But she did not smile as she answered him. "Sir Peregrine," she said;

and she endeavoured to raise her face to his but failed.

"Well, my love."

"Sir Peregrine, I am guilty."

"Guilty! Guilty of what?" he said, startled rather than instructed by

her words.

"Guilty of all this with which they charge me." And then she threw

herself at his feet, and wound her arms round his knees.

[Illustration: Guilty.]

CHAPTER XLV.

SHOWING HOW MRS. ORME COULD BE VERY WEAK MINDED.

I venture to think, I may almost say to hope, that Lady Mason's

confession at the end of the last chapter will not have taken anybody

by surprise. If such surprise be felt I must have told my tale badly.

I do not like such revulsions of feeling with regard to my characters

as surprises of this nature must generate. That Lady Mason had

committed the terrible deed for which she was about to be tried, that

Mr. Furnival's suspicion of her guilt was only too well founded, that

Mr. Dockwrath with his wicked ingenuity had discovered no more than

the truth, will, in its open revelation, have caused no surprise to

the reader;--but it did cause terrible surprise to Sir Peregrine

Orme.

And now we must go back a little and endeavour to explain how it was

that Lady Mason had made this avowal of her guilt. That she had not

intended to do so when she entered Sir Peregrine's library is very

certain. Had such been her purpose she would not have asked Mrs. Orme

to visit her at Orley Farm. Had such a course of events been in her

mind she would not have spoken of her departure from The Cleeve as

doubtful. No. She had intended still to keep her terrible secret to

herself; still to have leaned upon Sir Peregrine's arm as on the arm

of a trusting friend. But he had overcome her by his generosity; and

in her fixed resolve that he should not be dragged down into this

abyss of misery the sudden determination to tell the truth at least

to him had come upon her. She did tell him all; and then, as soon as

the words were out of her mouth, the strength which had enabled her

to do so deserted her, and she fell at his feet overcome by weakness

of body as well as spirit.

But the words which she spoke did not at first convey to his mind

their full meaning. Though she had twice repeated the assertion

that she was guilty, the fact of her guilt did not come home to his

understanding as a thing that he could credit. There was something,

he doubted not, to surprise and harass him,--something which when

revealed and made clear might, or might not, affect his purpose of

marrying,--something which it behoved this woman to tell before she

could honestly become his wife, something which was destined to give

his heart a blow. But he was very far as yet from understanding the

whole truth. Let us think of those we love best, and ask ourselves

how much it would take to convince us of their guilt in such a

matter. That thrusting of the lie down the throat of Joseph Mason had

become to him so earnest a duty, that the task of believing the lie

to be on the other side was no easy one. The blow which he had to

suffer was a cruel blow. Lady Mason, however, was merciful, for she

might have enhanced the cruelty tenfold.

He stood there wondering and bewildered for some minutes of time,

while she, with her face hidden, still clung round his knees. "What

is it?" at last he said. "I do not understand." But she had no answer

to make to him. Her great resolve had been quickly made and quickly

carried out, but now the reaction left her powerless. He stooped down

to raise her; but when he moved she fell prone upon the ground; he

could hear her sobs as though her bosom would burst with them.

And then by degrees the meaning of her words began to break upon him.

"I am guilty of all this with which they charge me." Could that be

possible? Could it be that she had forged that will; that with base,

premeditated contrivance she had stolen that property; stolen it and

kept it from that day to this;--through all these long years? And

then he thought of her pure life, of her womanly, dignified repose,

of her devotion to her son,--such devotion indeed!--of her sweet pale

face and soft voice! He thought of all this, and of his own love and

friendship for her,--of Edith's love for her! He thought of it all,

and he could not believe that she was guilty. There was some other

fault, some much lesser fault than that, with which she charged

herself. But there she lay at his feet, and it was necessary that he

should do something towards lifting her to a seat.

He stooped and took her by the hand, but his feeble strength was not

sufficient to raise her. "Lady Mason," he said, "speak to me. I do

not understand you. Will you not let me seat you on the sofa?"

But she, at least, had realised the full force of the revelation she

had made, and lay there covered with shame, broken-hearted, and

unable to raise her eyes from the ground. With what inward struggles

she had played her part during the last few months, no one might ever

know! But those struggles had been kept to herself. The world, her

world, that world for which she had cared, in which she had lived,

had treated her with honour and respect, and had looked upon her as

an ill-used innocent woman. But now all that would be over. Every one

now must know what she was. And then, as she lay there, that thought

came to her. Must every one know it? Was there no longer any hope

for her? Must Lucius be told? She could bear all the rest, if only

he might be ignorant of his mother's disgrace;--he, for whom all

had been done! But no. He, and every one must know it. Oh! if the

beneficent Spirit that sees all and pities all would but take her

that moment from the world!

When Sir Peregrine asked her whether he should seat her on the sofa,

she slowly picked herself up, and with her head still crouching

towards the ground, placed herself where she before had been sitting.

He had been afraid that she would have fainted, but she was not one

of those women whose nature easily admits of such relief as that.

Though she was always pale in colour and frail looking, there was

within her a great power of self-sustenance. She was a woman who with

a good cause might have dared anything. With the worst cause that a

woman could well have, she had dared and endured very much. She did

not faint, nor gasp as though she were choking, nor become hysteric

in her agony; but she lay there, huddled up in the corner of the

sofa, with her face hidden, and all those feminine graces forgotten

which had long stood her in truth so royally. The inner, true, living

woman was there at last,--that and nothing else.

But he,--what was he to do? It went against his heart to harass her

at that moment; but then it was essential that he should know the

truth. The truth, or a suspicion of the truth was now breaking upon

him; and if that suspicion should be confirmed, what was he to do?

It was at any rate necessary that everything should be put beyond a

doubt.

"Lady Mason," he said, "if you are able to speak to me--"

"Yes," she said, gradually straightening herself, and raising her

head though she did not look at him. "Yes. I am able." But there was

something terrible in the sound of her voice. It was such a sound of

agony that he felt himself unable to persist.

"If you wish it I will leave you, and come back,--say in an hour."

"No, no; do not leave me." And her whole body was shaken with a

tremour, as though of an ague fit. "Do not go away, and I will tell

you everything. I did it."

"Did what?"

"I--forged the will. I did it all.--I am guilty."

There was the whole truth now, declared openly and in the most simple

words, and there was no longer any possibility that he should doubt.

It was very terrible,--a terrible tragedy. But to him at this present

moment the part most frightful was his and her present position. What

should he do for her? How should he counsel her? In what way so act

that he might best assist her without compromising that high sense

of right and wrong which in him was a second nature. He felt at

the moment that he would still give his last shilling to rescue

her,--only that there was the property! Let the heavens fall, justice

must be done there. Even a wretch such as Joseph Mason must have that

which was clearly his own.

As she spoke those last words, she had risen from the sofa, and was

now standing before him resting with her hands upon the table, like a

prisoner in the dock.

"What!" he said; "with your own hands?"

"Yes; with my own hands. When he would not do justice to my baby,

when he talked of that other being the head of his house, I did it,

with my own hands,--during the night."

"And you wrote the names,--yourself?"

"Yes; I wrote them all." And then there was again silence in the

room; but she still stood, leaning on the table, waiting for him to

speak her doom.

He turned away from the spot in which he had confronted her and

walked to the window. What was he to do? How was he to help her? And

how was he to be rid of her? How was he to save his daughter from

further contact with a woman such as this? And how was he to bid his

daughter behave to this woman as one woman should behave to another

in her misery? Then too he had learned to love her himself,--had

yearned to call her his own; and though this in truth was a minor

sorrow, it was one which at the moment added bitterness to the

others. But there she stood, still waiting her doom, and it was

necessary that that doom should be spoken by him.

"If this can really be true--"

"It is true. You do not think that a woman would falsely tell such a

tale as that against herself!"

"Then I fear--that this must be over between you and me."

There was a relief to her, a sort of relief, in those words. The doom

as so far spoken was so much a matter of course that it conveyed no

penalty. Her story had been told in order that that result might be

attained with certainty. There was almost a tone of scorn in her

voice as she said, "Oh yes; all that must be over."

"And what next would you have me do?" he asked.

"I have nothing to request," she said. "If you must tell it to all

the world, do so."

"Tell it; no. It will not be my business to be an informer."

"But you must tell it. There is Mrs. Orme."

"Yes: to Edith!"

"And I must leave the house. Oh, where shall I go when he knows it?

And where will he go?" Wretched miserable woman, but yet so worthy

of pity! What a terrible retribution for that night's work was now

coming on her!

He again walked to the window to think how he might answer these

questions. Must he tell his daughter? Must he banish this criminal

at once from his house? Every one now had been told of his intended

marriage; every one had been told through Lord Alston, Mr. Furnival,

and such as they. That at any rate must now be untold. And would it

be possible that she should remain there, living with them at The

Cleeve, while all this was being done? In truth he did not know how

to speak. He had not hardness of heart to pronounce her doom.

"Of course I shall leave the house," she said, with something almost

of pride in her voice. "If there be no place open to me but a gaol I

will do that. Perhaps I had better go now and get my things removed

at once. Say a word of love for me to her;--a word of respectful

love." And she moved as though she were going to the door.

But he would not permit her to leave him thus. He could not let the

poor, crushed, broken creature wander forth in her agony to bruise

herself at every turn, and to be alone in her despair. She was still

the woman whom he had loved; and, over and beyond that, was she not

the woman who had saved him from a terrible downfall by rushing

herself into utter ruin for his sake? He must take some steps in her

behalf--if he could only resolve what those steps should be. She was

moving to the door, but stopping her, he took her by the hand. "You

did it," he said, "and he, your husband, knew nothing of it?" The

fact itself was so wonderful, that he had hardly as yet made even

that all his own.

"I did it, and he knew nothing of it. I will go now, Sir Peregrine; I

am strong enough."

"But where will you go?"

"Ah me, where shall I go?" And she put the hand which was at liberty

up to her temple, brushing back her hair as though she might thus

collect her thoughts. "Where shall I go? But he does not know it yet.

I will go now to Orley Farm. When must he be told? Tell me that. When

must he know it?"

"No, Lady Mason; you cannot go there to-day. It's very hard to say

what you had better do."

"Very hard," she echoed, shaking her head.

"But you must remain here at present;--at The Cleeve I mean; at any

rate for to-day. I will think about it. I will endeavour to think

what may be the best."

"But--we cannot meet now. She and I;--Mrs. Orme?" And then again

he was silent; for in truth the difficulties were too many for him.

Might it not be best that she should counterfeit illness and be

confined to her own room? But then he was averse to recommend any

counterfeit; and if Mrs. Orme did not go to her in her assumed

illness, the counterfeit would utterly fail of effect in the

household. And then, should he tell Mrs. Orme? The weight of these

tidings would be too much for him, if he did not share them with some

one. So he made up his mind that he must tell them to her--though to

no other one.

"I must tell her," he said.

"Oh yes," she replied; and he felt her hand tremble in his, and

dropped it. He had forgotten that he thus held her as all these

thoughts pressed upon his brain.

"I will tell it to her, but to no one else. If I might advise you, I

would say that it will be well for you now to take some rest. You are

agitated, and--"

"Agitated! yes. But you are right, Sir Peregrine. I will go at once

to my room. And then--"

"Then, perhaps,--in the course of the morning, you will see me

again."

"Where?--will you come to me there?"

"I will see you in her room, in her dressing-room. She will be down

stairs, you know." From which last words the tidings were conveyed to

Lady Mason that she was not to see Mrs. Orme again.

And then she went, and as she slowly made her way across the hall

she felt that all of evil, all of punishment that she had ever

anticipated, had now fallen upon her. There are periods in the lives

of some of us--I trust but of few--when, with the silent inner voice

of suffering, we call on the mountains to fall and crush us, and

on the earth to gape open and take us in. When, with an agony of

intensity, we wish that our mothers had been barren. In those moments

the poorest and most desolate are objects to us of envy, for their

sufferings can be as nothing to our own. Lady Mason, as she crept

silently across the hall, saw a servant girl pass down towards the

entrance to the kitchen, and would have given all, all that she had

in the world, to have changed places with that girl. But no change

was possible for her. Neither would the mountains crush her, nor

would the earth take her in. There was her burden, and she must bear

it to the end. There was the bed which she had made for herself, and

she must lie upon it. No escape was possible to her. She had herself

mixed the cup, and she must now drink of it to the dregs.

Slowly and very silently she made her way up to her own room, and

having closed the door behind her sat herself down upon the bed. It

was as yet early in the morning, and the servant had not been in the

chamber. There was no fire there although it was still mid-winter.

Of such details as these Sir Peregrine had remembered nothing when

he recommended her to go to her own room. Nor did she think of them

at first as she placed herself on the bed-side. But soon the bitter

air pierced her through and through, and she shivered with the cold

as she sat there. After a while she got herself a shawl, wrapped it

close around her, and then sat down again. She bethought herself that

she might have to remain in this way for hours, so she rose again

and locked the door. It would add greatly to her immediate misery

if the servants were to come while she was there, and see her in

her wretchedness. Presently the girls did come, and being unable to

obtain entrance were told by Lady Mason that she wanted the chamber

for the present. Whereupon they offered to light the fire, but she

declared that she was not cold. Her teeth were shaking in her head,

but any suffering was better than the suffering of being seen.

[Illustration: Lady Mason after her Confession.]

She did not lie down, or cover herself further than she was covered

with that shawl, nor did she move from her place for more than an

hour. By degrees she became used to the cold. She was numbed, and

as it were, half dead in all her limbs, but she had ceased to shake

as she sat there, and her mind had gone back to the misery of her

position. There was so much for her behind that was worse! What

should she do when even this retirement should not be allowed to her?

Instead of longing for the time when she should be summoned to meet

Sir Peregrine, she dreaded its coming. It would bring her nearer to

that other meeting when she would have to bow her head and crouch

before her son.

She had been there above an hour and was in truth ill with the cold

when she heard,--and scarcely heard,--a light step come quickly along

the passage towards her door. Her woman's ear instantly told her who

owned that step, and her heart once more rose with hope. Was she

coming there to comfort her, to speak to the poor bruised sinner one

word of feminine sympathy? The quick light step stopped at the door,

there was a pause, and then a low, low knock was heard. Lady Mason

asked no question, but dropping from the bed hurried to the door and

turned the key. She turned the key, and as the door was opened half

hid herself behind it;--and then Mrs. Orme was in the room.

"What! you have no fire?" she said, feeling that the air struck her

with a sudden chill. "Oh, this is dreadful! My poor, poor dear!" And

then she took hold of both Lady Mason's hands. Had she possessed the

wisdom of the serpent as well as the innocence of the dove she could

not have been wiser in her first mode of addressing the sufferer. For

she knew it all. During that dreadful hour Sir Peregrine had told

her the whole story; and very dreadful that hour had been to her. He,

when he attempted to give counsel in the matter, had utterly failed.

He had not known what to suggest, nor could she say what it might

be wisest for them all to do; but on one point her mind had been at

once resolved. The woman who had once been her friend, whom she had

learned to love, should not leave the house without some sympathy

and womanly care. The guilt was very bad; yes, it was terrible;

she acknowledged that it was a thing to be thought of only with

shuddering. But the guilt of twenty years ago did not strike her

senses so vividly as the abject misery of the present day. There was

no pity in her bosom for Mr. Joseph Mason when she heard the story,

but she was full of pity for her who had committed the crime. It was

twenty years ago, and had not the sinner repented? Besides, was she

to be the judge? "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged," she said,

when she thought that Sir Peregrine spoke somewhat harshly in the

matter. So she said, altogether misinterpreting the Scripture in her

desire to say something in favour of the poor woman.

But when it was hinted to her that Lady Mason might return to Orley

Farm without being again seen by her, her woman's heart at once

rebelled. "If she has done wrong," said Mrs. Orme--

"She has done great wrong--fearful wrong," said Sir Peregrine.

"It will not hurt me to see her because she has done wrong. Not see

her while she is in the house! If she were in the prison, would I not

go to see her?" And then Sir Peregrine had said no more, but he loved

his daughter-in-law all the better for her unwonted vehemence.

"You will do what is right," he said--"as you always do." Then he

left her; and she, after standing for a few moments while she shaped

her thoughts, went straight away to Lady Mason's room.

She took Lady Mason by both her hands and found that they were icy

cold. "Oh, this is dreadful," she said. "Come with me, dear." But

Lady Mason still stood, up by the bed-head, whither she had retreated

from the door. Her eyes were still cast upon the ground and she

leaned back as Mrs. Orme held her, as though by her weight she would

hinder her friend from leading her from the room.

"You are frightfully cold," said Mrs. Orme.

"Has he told you?" said Lady Mason, asking the question in the lowest

possible whisper, and still holding back as she spoke.

"Yes; he has told me;--but no one else--no one else." And then for a

few moments nothing was spoken between them.

"Oh, that I could die!" said the poor wretch, expressing in words

that terrible wish that the mountains might fall upon her and crush

her.

"You must not say that. That would be wicked, you know. He can

comfort you. Do you not know that He will comfort you, if you are

sorry for your sins and go to Him?"

But the woman in her intense suffering could not acknowledge to

herself any idea of comfort. "Ah, me!" she exclaimed, with a deep

bursting sob which went straight to Mrs. Orme's heart. And then a

convulsive fit of trembling seized her so strongly that Mrs. Orme

could hardly continue to hold her hands.

"You are ill with the cold," she said. "Come with me, Lady Mason, you

shall not stay here longer."

Lady Mason then permitted herself to be led out of the room, and the

two went quickly down the passage to the head of the front stairs,

and from thence to Mrs. Orme's room. In crossing the house they had

seen no one and been seen by no one; and Lady Mason when she came to

the door hurried in, that she might again hide herself in security

for the moment. As soon as the door was closed Mrs. Orme placed her

in an arm-chair which she wheeled up to the front of the fire, and

seating herself on a stool at the poor sinner's feet, chafed her

hands within her own. She took away the shawl and made her stretch

out her feet towards the fire, and thus seated close to her, she

spoke no word for the next half-hour as to the terrible fact that

had become known to her. Then, on a sudden, as though the ice of her

heart had thawed from the warmth of the other's kindness, Lady Mason

burst into a flood of tears, and flinging herself upon her friend's

neck and bosom begged with earnest piteousness to be forgiven.

And Mrs. Orme did forgive her. Many will think that she was wrong to

do so, and I fear it must be acknowledged that she was not strong

minded. By forgiving her I do not mean that she pronounced absolution

for the sin of past years, or that she endeavoured to make the

sinner think that she was no worse for her sin. Mrs. Orme was a good

churchwoman but not strong, individually, in points of doctrine. All

that she left mainly to the woman's conscience and her own dealings

with her Saviour,--merely saying a word of salutary counsel as to a

certain spiritual pastor who might be of aid. But Mrs. Orme forgave

her,--as regarded herself. She had already, while all this was

unknown, taken this woman to her heart as pure and good. It now

appeared that the woman had not been pure, had not been good!--And

then she took her to her heart again! Criminal as the woman was,

disgraced and debased, subject almost to the heaviest penalties of

outraged law and justice, a felon against whom the actual hands of

the law's myrmidons would probably soon prevail, a creature doomed to

bear the scorn of the lowest of her fellow-creatures,--such as she

was, this other woman, pure and high, so shielded from the world's

impurity that nothing ignoble might touch her,--this lady took her

to her heart again and promised in her ear with low sweet words of

consolation that they should still be friends. I cannot say that Mrs.

Orme was right. That she was weak minded I feel nearly certain. But,

perhaps, this weakness of mind may never be brought against her to

her injury, either in this world or in the next.

I will not pretend to give the words which passed between them at

that interview. After a while Lady Mason allowed herself to be guided

all in all by her friend's advice as though she herself had been a

child. It was decided that for the present,--that is for the next day

or two,--Lady Mason should keep her room at The Cleeve as an invalid.

Counterfeit in this there would be none certainly, for indeed she was

hardly fit for any place but her own bed. If inclined and able to

leave her room, she should be made welcome to the use of Mrs. Orme's

dressing-room. It would only be necessary to warn Peregrine that for

the present he must abstain from coming there. The servants, Mrs.

Orme said, had heard of their master's intended marriage. They would

now hear that this intention had been abandoned. On this they would

put their own construction, and would account in their own fashion

for the fact that Sir Peregrine and his guest no longer saw each

other. But no suspicion of the truth would get abroad when it was

seen that Lady Mason was still treated as a guest at The Cleeve. As

to such future steps as might be necessary to be taken, Mrs. Orme

would consult with Sir Peregrine, and tell Lady Mason from time to

time. And as for the sad truth, the terrible truth,--that, at any

rate for the present, should be told to no other ears. And so the

whole morning was spent, and Mrs. Orme saw neither Sir Peregrine nor

her son till she went down to the library in the first gloom of the

winter evening.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A WOMAN'S IDEA OF FRIENDSHIP.

Sir Peregrine after the hour that he had spent with his

daughter-in-law,--that terrible hour during which Lady Mason had sat

alone on the bed-side,--returned to the library and remained there

during the whole of the afternoon. It may be remembered that he had

agreed to ride through the woods with his grandson; but that purpose

had been abandoned early in the day, and Peregrine had in consequence

been hanging about the house. He soon perceived that something was

amiss, but he did not know what. He had looked for his mother, and

had indeed seen her for a moment at her door; but she had told him

that she could not then speak to him. Sir Peregrine also had shut

himself up, but about the hour of dusk he sent for his grandson; and

when Mrs. Orme, on leaving Lady Mason, went down to the library, she

found them both together.

They were standing with their backs to the fire, and the gloom in the

room was too dark to allow of their faces being seen, but she felt

that the conversation between them was of a serious nature. Indeed

what conversation in that house could be other than serious on

that day? "I see that I am disturbing you," she said, preparing to

retreat. "I did not know that you were together."

"Do not go, Edith," said the old man. "Peregrine, put a chair for

your mother. I have told him that all this is over now between me and

Lady Mason."

She trembled as she heard the words, for it seemed to her that there

must be danger now in even speaking of Lady Mason,--danger with

reference to that dreadful secret, the divulging of which would be so

fatal.

"I have told him," continued Sir Peregrine, "that for a few minutes I

was angry with him when I heard from Lady Mason that he had spoken to

her; but I believe that on the whole it is better that it should have

been so."

"He would be very unhappy if anything that he had done had distressed

you," said Mrs. Orme, hardly knowing what words to use, or how to

speak. Nor did she feel quite certain as yet how much had been told

to her son, and how much was concealed from him.

"No, no, no," said the old man, laying his arm affectionately on the

young man's shoulder. "He has done nothing to distress me. There is

nothing wrong--nothing wrong between him and me. Thank God for that.

But, Perry, we will think now of that other matter. Have you told

your mother anything about it?" And he strove to look away from the

wretchedness of his morning's work to something in his family that

still admitted of a bright hope.

"No, sir; not yet. We won't mind that just now." And then they all

remained silent, Mrs. Orme sitting, and the two men still standing

with their backs towards the fire. Her mind was too intent on the

unfortunate lady up stairs to admit of her feeling interest in that

other unknown matter to which Sir Peregrine had alluded.

"If you have done with Perry," she said at last, "I would be glad to

speak to you for a minute or two."

"Oh yes," said Peregrine;--"we have done." And then he went.

"You have told him," said she, as soon as they were left together.

"Told him; what, of her? Oh no. I have told him that that,--that

idea of mine has been abandoned." From this time forth Sir Peregrine

could never endure to speak of his proposed marriage, nor to hear it

spoken of. "He conceives that this has been done at her instance," he

continued.

"And so it has," said Mrs. Orme, with much more of decision in her

voice than was customary with her.

"And so it has," he repeated after her.

"Nobody must know of this,"--said she very solemnly, standing up and

looking into his face with eager eyes. "Nobody but you and I."

"All the world, I fear, will know it soon," said Sir Peregrine.

"No; no. Why should all the world know it? Had she not told us we

should not have known it. We should not have suspected it. Mr.

Furnival, who understands these things;--he does not think her

guilty."

"But, Edith--the property!"

"Let her give that up--after a while; when all this has passed by.

That man is not in want. It will not hurt him to be without it a

little longer. It will be enough for her to do that when this trial

shall be over."

"But it is not hers. She cannot give it up. It belongs to her

son,--or is thought to belong to him. It is not for us to be

informers, Edith--"

"No, no; it is not for us to be informers. We must remember that."

"Certainly. It is not for us to tell the story of her guilt; but her

guilt will remain the same, will be acted over and over again every

day, while the proceeds of the property go into the hands of Lucius

Mason. It is that which is so terrible, Edith;--that her conscience

should have been able to bear that load for the last twenty years! A

deed done,--that admits of no restitution, may admit of repentance.

We may leave that to the sinner and his conscience, hoping that he

stands right with his Maker. But here, with her, there has been a

continual theft going on from year to year,--which is still going

on. While Lucius Mason holds a sod of Orley Farm, true repentance

with her must be impossible. It seems so to me." And Sir Peregrine

shuddered at the doom which his own rectitude of mind and purpose

forced him to pronounce.

"It is not she that has it," said Mrs. Orme. "It was not done for

herself."

"There is no difference in that," said he sharply. "All sin

is selfish, and so was her sin in this. Her object was the

aggrandisement of her own child; and when she could not accomplish

that honestly, she did it by fraud, and--and--and--. Edith, my dear,

you and I must look at this thing as it is. You must not let your

kind heart make your eyes blind in a matter of such moment."

"No, father; nor must the truth make our hearts cruel. You talk of

restitution and repentance. Repentance is not the work of a day. How

are we to say by what struggles her poor heart has been torn?"

"I do not judge her."

"No, no; that is it. We may not judge her; may we? But we may assist

her in her wretchedness. I have promised that I will do all I can to

aid her. You will allow me to do so;--you will; will you not?" And

she pressed his arm and looked up into his face, entreating him.

Since first they two had known each other, he had never yet denied

her a request. It was a law of his life that he would never do so.

But now he hesitated, not thinking that he would refuse her, but

feeling that on such an occasion it would be necessary to point out

to her how far she might go without risk of bringing censure on her

own name. But in this case, though the mind of Sir Peregrine might

be the more logical, the purpose of his daughter-in-law was the

stronger. She had resolved that such communication with crime would

not stain her, and she already knew to what length she would go in

her charity. Indeed, her mind was fully resolved to go far enough.

"I hardly know as yet what she intends to do; any assistance that you

can give her must, I should say, depend on her own line of conduct."

"But I want your advice as to that. I tell you what I purpose. It is

clear that Mr. Furnival thinks she will gain the day at this trial."

"But Mr. Furnival does not know the truth."

"Nor will the judge and the lawyers, and all the rest. As you say so

properly, it is not for us to be the informers. If they can prove it,

let them. But you would not have her tell them all against herself?"

And then she paused, waiting for his answer.

"I do not know. I do not know what to say. It is not for me to advise

her."

"Ah, but it is for you," she said; and as she spoke she put her

little hand down on the table with an energy which startled him. "She

is here--a wretched woman, in your house. And why do you know the

truth? Why has it been told to you and me? Because without telling it

she could not turn you from that purpose of yours. It was generous,

father--confess that; it was very generous."

"Yes, it was generous," said Sir Peregrine.

"It was very generous. It would be base in us if we allowed ourselves

to forget that. But I was telling you my plan. She must go to this

trial."

"Oh yes; there will be no doubt as to that."

"Then--if she can escape, let the property be given up afterwards."

"I do not see how it is to be arranged. The property will belong to

Lucius, and she cannot give it up then. It is not so easy to put

matters right when guilt and fraud have set them wrong."

"We will do the best we can. Even suppose that you were to tell

Lucius afterwards;--you yourself! if that were necessary, you know."

And so by degrees she talked him over; but yet he would come to no

decision as to what steps he himself must take. What if he himself

should go to Mr. Round, and pledge himself that the whole estate

should be restored to Mr. Mason of Groby, on condition that the trial

were abandoned? The world would probably guess the truth after that;

but the terrible trial and the more terrible punishment which would

follow it might be thus escaped. Poor Sir Peregrine! Even when

he argued thus within himself, his conscience told him that in

taking such a line of conduct, he himself would be guilty of some

outrage against the law by aiding a criminal in her escape. He had

heard of misprision of felony; but nevertheless, he allowed his

daughter-in-law to prevail. Before such a step as this could be taken

the consent of Lady Mason must of course be obtained; but as to that

Mrs. Orme had no doubt. If Lucius could be induced to abandon the

property without hearing the whole story, it would be well. But if

that could not be achieved,--then the whole story must be told to

him. "And you will tell it," Mrs. Orme said to him. "It would be

easier for me to cut off my right arm," he answered; "but I will do

my best."

And then came the question as to the place of Lady Mason's immediate

residence. It was evident to Mrs. Orme that Sir Peregrine expected

that she would at once go back to Orley Farm;--not exactly on that

day, nor did he say on the day following. But his words made it

very manifest that he did not think it right that she should under

existing circumstances remain at The Cleeve. Sir Peregrine, however,

as quickly understood that Mrs. Orme did not wish her to go away for

some days.

"It would injure the cause if she were to leave us quite at once,"

said Mrs. Orme.

"But how can she stay here, my dear,--with no one to see her; with

none but the servants to wait upon her?"

"I should see her," said Mrs. Orme, boldly.

"Do you mean constantly--in your old, friendly way?"

"Yes, constantly; and," she added after a pause, "not only here, but

at Orley Farm also." And then there was another pause between them.

Sir Peregrine certainly was not a cruel man, nor was his heart by any

means hardened against the lady with whom circumstances had lately

joined him so closely. Indeed, since the knowledge of her guilt had

fully come upon him, he had undertaken the conduct of her perilous

affairs in a manner more confidential even than that which had

existed while he expected to make her his wife. But, nevertheless,

it went sorely against the grain with him when it was proposed that

there should still exist a close intimacy between the one cherished

lady of his household and the woman who had been guilty of so base

a crime. It seemed to him that he might touch pitch and not be

defiled;--he or any man belonging to him. But he could not reconcile

it to himself that the widow of his son should run such risk. In

his estimation there was something almost more than human about the

purity of the only woman that blessed his hearth. It seemed to him

as though she were a sacred thing, to be guarded by a shrine,--to be

protected from all contact with the pollutions of the outer world.

And now it was proposed to him that she should take a felon to her

bosom as her friend!

"But will that be necessary, Edith?" he said; "and after all that has

been revealed to us now, will it be wise?"

"I think so," she said, speaking again with a very low voice. "Why,

should I not?"

"Because she has shown herself unworthy of such friendship;--unfit

for it I should say."

"Unworthy! Dear father, is she not as worthy and as fit as she was

yesterday? If we saw clearly into each other's bosom, whom should we

think worthy?"

"But you would not choose for your friend one--one who could do such

a deed as that?"

"No; I would not choose her because she had so acted; nor perhaps if

I knew all beforehand would I open my heart to one who had so done.

But it is different now. What are love and friendship worth if they

cannot stand against such trials as these?"

"Do you mean, Edith, that no crime would separate you from a friend?"

"I have not said that. There are circumstances always. But if she

repents,--as I am sure she does, I cannot bring myself to desert her.

Who else is there that can stand by her now; what other woman? At any

rate I have promised her, and you would not have me break my word."

Thus she again gained her point, and it was settled that for the

present Lady Mason should be allowed to occupy her own room,--her own

room, and occasionally Mrs. Orme's sitting-room, if it pleased her

to do so. No day was named for her removal, but, Mrs. Orme perfectly

understood that the sooner such a day could be fixed the better Sir

Peregrine would be pleased. And, indeed, his household as at present

arranged was not a pleasant one. The servants had all heard of his

intended marriage, and now they must also hear that that intention

was abandoned. And yet the lady would remain up stairs as a guest

of his! There was much in this that was inconvenient; but under

circumstances as they now existed, what could he do?

When all this was arranged and Mrs. Orme had dressed for dinner, she

again went to Lady Mason. She found her in bed, and told her that at

night she would come to her and tell her all. And then she instructed

her own servant as to attending upon the invalid. In doing this she

was cunning in letting a word fall here and there, that might teach

the woman that that marriage purpose was all over; but nevertheless

there was so much care and apparent affection in her mode of

speaking, and she gave her orders for Lady Mason's comfort with so

much earnestness, that no idea could get abroad in the household that

there had been any cause for absolute quarrel.

Late at night, when her son had left her, she did go again to her

guest's room, and sitting down by the bed-side she told her all that

had been planned, pointing out however with much care that, as a

part of those plans, Orley Farm was to be surrendered to Joseph

Mason. "You think that is right; do you not?" said Mrs. Orme, almost

trembling as she asked a question so pertinent to the deed which the

other had done, and to that repentance for the deed which was now so

much to be desired.

"Yes," said the other, "of course it will be right." And then the

thought that it was not in her power to abandon the property occurred

to her also. If the estate must be voluntarily surrendered, no one

could so surrender it but Lucius Mason. She knew this, and felt at

the moment that of all men he would be the least likely to do so,

unless an adequate reason was made clearly plain to him. The same

thought at the same moment was passing through the minds of them

both; but Lady Mason could not speak out her thought, and Mrs. Orme

would not say more on that terrible day to trouble the mind of the

poor creature whose sufferings she was so anxious to assuage.

And then Lady Mason was left alone, and having now a partner in her

secret, slept sounder than she had done since the tidings first

reached her of Mr. Dockwrath's vengeance.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE GEM OF THE FOUR FAMILIES.

And now we will go back to Noningsby. On that evening Graham ate his

pheasant with a relish although so many cares sat heavy on his mind,

and declared, to Mrs. Baker's great satisfaction, that the cook had

managed to preserve the bread sauce uninjured through all the perils

of delay which it had encountered.

"Bread sauce is so ticklish; a simmer too much and it's clean done

for," Mrs. Baker said with a voice of great solicitude. But she had

been accustomed perhaps to patients whose appetites were fastidious.

The pheasant and the bread sauce and the mashed potatoes, all

prepared by Mrs. Baker's own hands to be eaten as spoon meat,

disappeared with great celerity; and then, as Graham sat sipping the

solitary glass of sherry that was allowed to him, meditating that

he would begin his letter the moment the glass was empty, Augustus

Staveley again made his appearance.

[Illustration: "Bread Sauce is so ticklish."]

"Well, old fellow," said he, "how are you now?" and he was

particularly careful so to speak as to show by his voice that his

affection for his friend was as strong as ever. But in doing so he

showed also that there was some special thought still present in his

mind,--some feeling which was serious in its nature if not absolutely

painful.

"Staveley," said the other, gravely, "I have acquired knowledge

to-day which I trust I may carry with me to my grave."

"And what is that?" said Augustus, looking round to Mrs. Baker as

though he thought it well that she should be out of the room before

the expected communication was made. But Mrs. Baker's attention was

so riveted by her patient's earnestness, that she made no attempt to

go.

"It is a wasting of the best gifts of Providence," said Graham, "to

eat a pheasant after one has really done one's dinner."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Augustus.

"So it is, sir," said Mrs. Baker, thinking that the subject quite

justified the manner.

"And of no use whatsoever to eat only a little bit of one as a man

does then. To know what a pheasant is you should have it all to

yourself."

"So you should, sir," said Mrs. Baker, quite delighted and very much

in earnest.

"And you should have nothing else. Then, if the bird be good to begin

with, and has been well hung--"

"There's a deal in that," said Mrs. Baker.

"Then, I say, you'll know what a pheasant is. That's the lesson which

I have learned to-day, and I give it you as an adequate return for

the pheasant itself."

"I was almost afeard it would be spoilt by being brought up the

second time," said Mrs. Baker. "And so I said to my lady; but she

wouldn't have you woke, nohow." And then Mrs. Baker, having heard the

last of the lecture, took away the empty wine-glass and shut the door

behind her.

"And now I'll write those two letters," said Graham. "What I've

written hitherto I wrote in bed, and I feel almost more awkward now I

am up than I did then."

"But what letters are they?"

"Well, one to my laundress to tell her I shall be there to-morrow,

and one to Mary Snow to say that I'll see her the day after."

"Then, Felix, don't trouble yourself to write either. You positively

won't go to-morrow--"

"Who says so?"

"The governor. He has heard from my mother exactly what the doctor

said, and declares that he won't allow it. He means to see the doctor

himself before you stir. And he wants to see you also. I am to tell

you he'll come to you directly after breakfast."

"I shall be delighted to see your father, and am very much gratified

by his kindness, but--"

"But what--"

"I'm a free agent, I suppose,--to go when I please?"

"Not exactly. The law is unwritten; but by traditional law a man laid

up in his bedroom is not free to go and come. No action for false

imprisonment would lie if Mrs. Baker kept all your clothes away from

you."

"I should like to try the question."

"You will have the opportunity, for you may be sure that you'll not

leave this to-morrow."

"It would depend altogether on the evidence of the doctor."

"Exactly so. And as the doctor in this case would clearly be on the

side of the defendants, a verdict on behalf of the plaintiff would

not be by any means attainable." After that the matter was presumed

to be settled, and Graham said no more as to leaving Noningsby on

the next day. As things turned out afterwards he remained there for

another week.

"I must at any rate write a letter to Mary Snow," he said. And to

Mary Snow he did write some three or four lines, Augustus sitting by

the while. Augustus Staveley would have been very glad to know the

contents, or rather the spirit of those lines; but nothing was said

about them, and the letter was at last sealed up and intrusted to

his care for the post-bag. There was very little in it that could

have interested Augustus Staveley or any one else. It contained the

ordinary, but no more than the ordinary terms of affection. He told

her that he found it impracticable to move himself quite immediately.

And then as to that cause of displeasure,--that cause of supposed

displeasure as to which both Mary and Mrs. Thomas had written, he

declared that he did not believe that anything had been done that he

should not find it easy to forgive after so long an absence.

Augustus then remained there for another hour, but not a word was

said between the young men on that subject which was nearest, at the

moment, to the hearts of both of them. Each was thinking of Madeline,

but neither of them spoke as though any such subject were in their

thoughts.

"Heaven and earth!" said Augustus at last, pulling out his watch. "It

only wants three minutes to seven. I shall have a dozen messages from

the judge before I get down, to know whether he shall come and help

me change my boots. I'll see you again before I go to bed. Good-bye,

old fellow." And then Graham was again alone.

If Lady Staveley were really angry with him for loving her

daughter,--if his friend Staveley were in very truth determined

that such love must under no circumstances be sanctioned,--would

they treat him as they were treating him? Would they under such

circumstances make his prolonged stay in the house an imperative

necessity? He could not help asking himself this question, and

answering it with some gleam of hope. And then he acknowledged

to himself that it was ungenerous in him to do so. His remaining

there,--the liberty to remain there which had been conceded to

him,--had arisen solely from the belief that a removal in his present

state would be injudicious. He assured himself of this over and over

again, so that no false hope might linger in his heart. And yet hope

did linger there whether false or true. Why might he not aspire to

the hand of Madeline Staveley,--he who had been assured that he need

regard no woman as too high for his aspirations?

"Mrs. Baker," he said that evening, as that excellent woman was

taking away his tea-things, "I have not heard Miss Staveley's voice

these two days."

"Well, no; no more you have," said she. "There's two ways, you know,

Mr. Graham, of going to her part of the house. There's the door that

opens at the end of the passage by her mamma's room. She's been that

way, and that's the reason, I suppose. There ain't no other, I'm

sure."

"One likes to hear one's friends if one can't see them; that's all."

"To be sure one does. I remember as how when I had the measles--I was

living with my lady's mother, as maid to the young ladies. There was

four of 'em, and I dressed 'em all--God bless 'em. They've all got

husbands now and grown families--only there ain't one among 'em equal

to our Miss Madeline, though there's some of 'em much richer. When

my lady married him,--the judge, you know,--he was the poorest of

the lot. They didn't think so much of him when he came a-courting in

those days."

"He was only a practising barrister then."

"Oh yes; he knew well how to practise, for Miss Isabella--as she was

then--very soon made up her mind about him. Laws, Mr. Graham, she

used to tell me everything in them days. They didn't want her to

have nothing to say to Mr. Staveley at first; but she made up her

mind, and though she wasn't one of them as has many words, like Miss

Furnival down there, there was no turning her."

"Did she marry at last against their wish?"

"Oh dear, no; nothing of that sort. She wasn't one of them flighty

ones neither. She just made up her own mind and bided. And now I

don't know whether she hasn't done about the best of 'em all. Them

Oliphants is full of money, they do say--full of money. That was

Miss Louisa, who came next. But, Lord love you, Mr. Graham, he's so

crammed with gout as he can't ever put a foot to the ground; and as

cross;--as cross as cross. We goes there sometimes, you know. Then

the girls is all plain; and young Mr. Oliphant, the son,--why he

never so much as speaks to his own father; and though they're rolling

in money, they say he can't pay for the coat on his back. Now our Mr.

Augustus, unless it is that he won't come down to morning prayers and

always keeps the dinner waiting, I don't think there's ever a black

look between him and his papa. And as for Miss Madeline,--she's the

gem of the four families. Everybody gives that up to her."

If Madeline's mother married a barrister in opposition to the wishes

of her family--a barrister who then possessed nothing but his

wits--why should not Madeline do so also? That was of course the line

which his thoughts took. But then, as he said to himself, Madeline's

father had been one of the handsomest men of his day, whereas he was

one of the ugliest; and Madeline's father had been encumbered with no

Mary Snow. A man who had been such a fool as he, who had gone so far

out of the regular course, thinking to be wiser than other men, but

being in truth much more silly, could not look for that success and

happiness in life which men enjoy who have not been so lamentably

deficient in discretion! 'Twas thus that he lectured himself; but

still he went on thinking of Madeline Staveley.

There had been some disagreeable confusion in the house that

afternoon after Augustus had spoken to his sister. Madeline had gone

up to her own room, and had remained there, chewing the cud of her

thoughts. Both her sister and her brother had warned her about this

man. She could moreover divine that her mother was suffering under

some anxiety on the same subject. Why was all this? Why should these

things be said and thought? Why should there be uneasiness in the

house on her account in this matter of Mr. Graham? She acknowledged

to herself that there was such uneasiness;--and she almost

acknowledged to herself the cause.

But while she was still sitting over her own fire, with her needle

untouched beside her, her father had come home, and Lady Staveley had

mentioned to him that Mr. Graham thought of going on the next day.

"Nonsense, my dear," said the judge. "He must not think of such a

thing. He can hardly be fit to leave his room yet."

"Pottinger does say that it has gone on very favourably," pleaded

Lady Staveley.

"But that's no reason he should destroy the advantages of his healthy

constitution by insane imprudence. He's got nothing to do. He wants

to go merely because he thinks he is in your way."

Lady Staveley looked wishfully up in her husband's face, longing to

tell him all her suspicions. But as yet her grounds for them were so

slight that even to him she hesitated to mention them.

"His being here is no trouble to me, of course," she said.

"Of course not. You tell him so, and he'll stay," said the judge. "I

want to see him to-morrow myself;--about this business of poor Lady

Mason's."

Immediately after that he met his son. And Augustus also told him

that Graham was going.

"Oh no; he's not going at all," said the judge. "I've settled that

with your mother."

"He's very anxious to be off," said Augustus gravely.

"And why? Is there any reason?"

"Well; I don't know." For a moment he thought he would tell his

father the whole story; but he reflected that his doing so would

be hardly fair towards his friend. "I don't know that there is any

absolute reason; but I'm quite sure that he is very anxious to go."

The judge at once perceived that there was something in the wind,

and during that hour in which the pheasant was being discussed up

in Graham's room, he succeeded in learning the whole from his wife.

Dear, good, loving wife! A secret of any kind from him was an

impossibility to her, although that secret went no further than her

thoughts.

"The darling girl is so anxious about him, that--that I'm afraid,"

said she.

"He's by no means a bad sort of man, my love," said the judge.

"But he's got nothing--literally nothing," said the mother.

"Neither had I, when I went a wooing," said the judge. "But,

nevertheless, I managed to have it all my own way."

"You don't mean really to make a comparison?" said Lady Staveley. "In

the first place you were at the top of your profession."

"Was I? If so I must have achieved that distinction at a very early

age." And then he kissed his wife very affectionately. Nobody was

there to see, and under such circumstances a man may kiss his wife

even though he be a judge, and between fifty and sixty years old.

After that he again spoke to his son, and in spite of the resolves

which Augustus had made as to what friendship required of him,

succeeded in learning the whole truth.

Late in the evening, when all the party had drunk their cups of tea,

when Lady Staveley was beginning her nap, and Augustus was making

himself agreeable to Miss Furnival--to the great annoyance of

his mother, who half rousing herself every now and then, looked

sorrowfully at what was going on with her winking eyes,--the judge

contrived to withdraw with Madeline into the small drawing-room,

telling her as he put his arm around her waist, that he had a few

words to say to her.

"Well, papa," said she, as at his bidding she sat herself down beside

him on the sofa. She was frightened, because such summonses were very

unusual; but nevertheless her father's manner towards her was always

so full of love that even in her fear she felt a comfort in being

with him.

"My darling," he said, "I want to ask you one or two questions--about

our guest here who has hurt himself,--Mr. Graham."

"Yes, papa." And now she knew that she was trembling with nervous

dread.

"You need not think that I am in the least angry with you, or that I

suspect you of having done or said, or even thought anything that is

wrong. I feel quite confident that I have no cause to do so."

"Oh, thank you, papa."

"But I want to know whether Mr. Graham has ever spoken to you--as a

lover."

"Never, papa."

"Because under the circumstances of his present stay here, his doing

so would, I think, have been ungenerous."

"He never has, papa, in any way--not a single word."

"And you have no reason to regard him in that light."

"No, papa." But in the speaking of these last two words there was a

slight hesitation,--the least possible shade of doubt conveyed, which

made itself immediately intelligible to the practised ear of the

judge.

"Tell me all, my darling;--everything that there is in your heart, so

that we may help each other if that may be possible."

"He has never said anything to me, papa."

"Because your mamma thinks that you are more anxious about him than

you would be about an ordinary visitor."

"Does she?"

"Has any one else spoken to you about Mr. Graham?"

"Augustus did, papa; and Isabella, some time ago."

"Then I suppose they thought the same."

"Yes; I suppose they did."

"And now, dear, is there anything else you would like to say to me

about it?"

"No, papa, I don't think there is."

"But remember this always;--that my only wishes respecting you, and

your mother's wishes also, are to see you happy and good."

"I am very happy, papa."

"And very good also to the best of my belief." And then he kissed

her, and they went back again into the large drawing-room.

Many of my readers, and especially those who are old and wise,--if I

chance to have any such,--will be inclined to think that the judge

behaved foolishly in thus cross-questioning his daughter on a matter,

which, if it were expedient that it should die away, would die away

the more easily the less it were talked about. But the judge was

an odd man in many of the theories of his life. One of them, with

reference to his children, was very odd, and altogether opposed to

the usual practice of the world. It was this,--that they should be

allowed, as far as was practicable, to do what they liked. Now the

general opinion of the world is certainly quite the reverse--namely

this, that children, as long as they are under the control of their

parents, should be hindered and prevented in those things to which

they are most inclined. Of course the world in general, in carrying

out this practice, excuses it by an assertion,--made to themselves

or others,--that children customarily like those things which they

ought not to like. But the judge had an idea quite opposed to this.

Children, he said, if properly trained would like those things which

were good for them. Now it may be that he thought his daughter had

been properly trained.

"He is a very clever young man, my dear; you may be sure of that,"

were the last words which the judge said to his wife that night.

"But then he has got nothing," she replied; "and he is so uncommonly

plain."

The judge would not say a word more, but he could not help thinking

that this last point was one which might certainly be left to the

young lady.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE ANGEL OF LIGHT UNDER A CLOUD.

On the following morning, according to appointment, the judge visited

Felix Graham in his room. It was only the second occasion on which he

had done so since the accident, and he was therefore more inclined to

regard him as an invalid than those who had seen him from day to day.

"I am delighted to hear that your bones have been so amenable," said

the judge. "But you must not try them too far. We'll get you down

stairs into the drawing-room, and see how you get on there by the

next few days."

"I don't want to trouble you more than I can help," said Felix,

sheepishly. He knew that there were reasons why he should not go

into that drawing-room, but of course he could not guess that those

reasons were as well known to the judge as they were to himself.

"You sha'n't trouble us--more than you can help. I am not one of

those men who tell my friends that nothing is a trouble. Of course

you give trouble."

"I am so sorry!"

"There's your bed to make, my dear fellow, and your gruel to warm.

You know Shakspeare pretty well by heart I believe, and he puts that

matter,--as he did every other matter,--in the best and truest point

of view. Lady Macbeth didn't say she had no labour in receiving the

king. 'The labour we delight in physics pain,' she said. Those were

her words, and now they are mine."

"With a more honest purpose behind," said Felix.

"Well, yes; I've no murder in my thoughts at present. So that is all

settled, and Lady Staveley will be delighted to see you down stairs

to-morrow."

"I shall be only too happy," Felix answered, thinking within his own

mind that he must settle it all in the course of the day with

Augustus.

"And now perhaps you will be strong enough to say a few words about

business."

"Certainly," said Graham.

"You have heard of this Orley Farm case, in which our neighbour Lady

Mason is concerned."

"Oh yes; we were all talking of it at your table;--I think it was the

night, or a night or two, before my accident."

"Very well; then you know all about it. At least as much as the

public knows generally. It has now been decided on the part of Joseph

Mason,--the husband's eldest son, who is endeavouring to get the

property,--that she shall be indicted for perjury."

"For perjury!"

"Yes; and in doing that, regarding the matter from his point of view,

they are not deficient in judgment."

"But how could she have been guilty of perjury?"

"In swearing that she had been present when her husband and the three

witnesses executed the deed. If they have any ground to stand on--and

I believe they have none whatever, but if they have, they would much

more easily get a verdict against her on that point than on a charge

of forgery. Supposing it to be the fact that her husband never

executed such a deed, it would be manifest that she must have sworn

falsely in swearing that she saw him do so."

"Why, yes; one would say so."

"But that would afford by no means conclusive evidence that she had

forged the surreptitious deed herself."

"It would be strong presumptive evidence that she was cognizant of

the forgery."

"Perhaps so,--but uncorroborated would hardly bring a verdict after

such a lapse of years. And then moreover a prosecution for forgery,

if unsuccessful, would produce more painful feeling. Whether

successful or unsuccessful it would do so. Bail could not be taken in

the first instance, and such a prosecution would create a stronger

feeling that the poor lady was being persecuted."

"Those who really understand the matter will hardly thank them for

their mercy."

"But then so few will really understand it. The fact however is

that she will be indicted for perjury. I do not know whether the

indictment has not been already laid. Mr. Furnival was with me in

town yesterday, and at his very urgent request, I discussed the whole

subject with him. I shall be on the Home Circuit myself on these next

spring assizes, but I shall not take the criminal business at Alston.

Indeed I should not choose that this matter should be tried before me

under any circumstances, seeing that the lady is my near neighbour.

Now Furnival wants you to be engaged on the defence as junior

counsel."

"With himself?"

"Yes; with himself,--and with Mr. Chaffanbrass."

"With Mr. Chaffanbrass!" said Graham, in a tone almost of horror--as

though he had been asked to league himself with all that was most

disgraceful in the profession;--as indeed perhaps he had been.

"Yes--with Mr. Chaffanbrass."

"Will that be well, judge, do you think?"

"Mr. Chaffanbrass no doubt is a very clever man, and it may be wise

in such a case as this to have the services of a barrister who is

perhaps unequalled in his power of cross-examining a witness."

"Does his power consist in making a witness speak the truth, or in

making him conceal it?"

"Perhaps in both. But here, if it be the case as Mr. Furnival

suspects, that witnesses will be suborned to give false evidence--"

"But surely the Rounds would have nothing to do with such a matter as

that?"

"No, probably not. I am sure that old Richard Round would abhor any

such work as you or I would do. They take the evidence as it is

brought to them. I believe there is no doubt that at any rate one

of the witnesses to the codicil in question will now swear that the

signature to the document is not her signature."

"A woman--is it?"

"Yes; a woman. In such a case it may perhaps be allowable to employ

such a man as Mr. Chaffanbrass; and I should tell you also, such

another man as Mr. Solomon Aram."

"Solomon Aram, too! Why, judge, the Old Bailey will be left bare."

"The shining lights will certainly be down at Alston. Now under those

circumstances will you undertake the case?"

"Would you;--in my place?"

"Yes; if I were fully convinced of the innocence of my client at the

beginning."

"But what if I were driven to change my opinion as the thing

progressed?"

"You must go on, in such a case, as a matter of course."

"I suppose I can have a day or two to think of it?"

"Oh yes. I should not myself be the bearer to you of Mr. Furnival's

message, were it not that I think that Lady Mason is being very

cruelly used in the matter. If I were a young man in your position,

I should take up the case \_con amore\_, for the sake of beauty and

womanhood. I don't say that that Quixotism is very wise; but still I

don't think it can be wrong to join yourself even with such men as

Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram, if you can feel confident that you

have justice and truth on your side." Then after a few more words the

interview was over, and the judge left the room making some further

observation as to his hope of seeing Graham in the drawing-room on

the next day.

On the following morning there came from Peckham two more letters for

Graham, one of course from Mary Snow, and one from Mrs. Thomas. We

will first give attention to that from the elder lady. She commenced

with much awe, declaring that her pen trembled within her fingers,

but that nevertheless she felt bound by her conscience and that

duty which she owed to Mr. Graham, to tell him everything that had

occurred,--"word by word," as she expressed it. And then Felix,

looking at the letter, saw that he held in his hand two sheets of

letter paper, quite full of small writing, the latter of which was

crossed. She went on to say that her care had been unremitting, and

her solicitude almost maternal; that Mary's conduct had on the whole

been such as to inspire her with "undeviating confidence;" but that

the guile of the present age was such, especially in respect to

female servants--who seemed, in Mrs. Thomas's opinion, to be sent in

these days express from a very bad place for the express assistance

of a very bad gentleman--that it was impossible for any woman, let

her be ever so circumspect, to say "what was what, or who was who."

From all which Graham learned that Mrs. Thomas had been "done;" but

by the middle of the third page he had as yet learned nothing as to

the manner of the doing.

But by degrees the long reel unwinded itself;--angel of light, and

all. Mary Snow had not only received but had answered a lover's

letter. She had answered that lover's letter by making an appointment

with him; and she had kept that appointment,--with the assistance of

the agent sent express from that very bad gentleman. All this Mrs.

Thomas had only discovered afterwards by finding the lover's letter,

and the answer which the angel of light had written. Both of these

she copied verbatim, thinking probably that the original documents

were too precious to be intrusted to the post; and then ended by

saying that an additional year of celibacy, passed under a closer

espionage, and with more severe moral training, might still perhaps

make Mary Snow fit for the high destiny which had been promised to

her.

The only part of this letter which Felix read twice was that which

contained the answer from the angel of light to her lover. "You have

been very wicked to address me," the angel of light said severely.

"And it is almost impossible that I should ever forgive you!" If only

she could have brought herself to end there! But her nature, which

the lover had greatly belied in likening it to her name, was not cold

enough for this. So she added a few more words very indiscreetly. "As

I want to explain to you why I can never see you again, I will meet

you on Thursday afternoon, at half-past four, a little way up Clapham

Lane, at the corner of the doctor's wall, just beyond the third

lamp." It was the first letter she had ever written to a lover, and

the poor girl had betrayed herself by keeping a copy of it.

And then Graham came to Mary Snow's letter to himself, which, as it

was short, the reader shall have entire.

MY DEAR MR. GRAHAM,

I never was so unhappy in my life, and I am sure I don't

know how to write to you. Of course I do not think you

will ever see me again unless it be to upbraid me for my

perfidy, and I almost hope you won't, for I should sink

into the ground before your eyes. And yet I didn't mean to

do anything very wrong, and when I did meet him I wouldn't

as much as let him take me by the hand;--not of my own

accord. I don't know what she has said to you, and I think

she ought to have let me read it; but she speaks to me now

in such a way that I don't know how to bear it. She has

rummaged among everything I have got, but I am sure she

could find nothing except those two letters. It wasn't my

fault that he wrote to me, though I know now I ought not

to have met him. He is quite a genteel young man, and very

respectable in the medical line; only I know that makes

no difference now, seeing how good you have been to me. I

don't ask you to forgive me, but it nearly kills me when I

think of poor papa.

Yours always, most unhappy, and very sorry for what I have

done,

MARY SNOW.

Poor Mary Snow! Could any man under such circumstances have been

angry with her? In the first place if men will mould their wives,

they must expect that kind of thing; and then, after all, was there

any harm done? If ultimately he did marry Mary Snow, would she make

a worse wife because she had met the apothecary's assistant at the

corner of the doctor's wall, under the third lamp-post? Graham, as he

sat with the letters before him, made all manner of excuses for her;

and this he did the more eagerly, because he felt that he would have

willingly made this affair a cause for breaking off his engagement,

if his conscience had not told him that it would be unhandsome in him

to do so.

When Augustus came he could not show the letters to him. Had he done

so it would have been as much as to declare that now the coast was

clear as far as he was concerned. He could not now discuss with his

friend the question of Mary Snow, without also discussing the other

question of Madeline Staveley. So he swept the letters away, and

talked almost entirely about the Orley Farm case.

"I only wish I were thought good enough for the chance," said

Augustus. "By heavens! I would work for that woman as I never could

work again for any fee that could be offered me."

"So would I; but I don't like my fellow-labourers."

"I should not mind that."

"I suppose," said Graham, "there can be no possible doubt as to her

absolute innocence?"

"None whatever. My father has no doubt. Furnival has no doubt. Sir

Peregrine has no doubt,--who, by-the-by, is going to marry her."

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, but he is though. He has taken up her case \_con amore\_ with a

vengeance."

"I should be sorry for that. It makes me think him a fool, and her--a

very clever woman."

And so that matter was discussed, but not a word was said between

them about Mary Snow, or as to that former conversation respecting

Madeline Staveley. Each felt then there was a reserve between them;

but each felt also that there was no way of avoiding this. "The

governor seems determined that you sha'n't stir yet awhile," Augustus

said as he was preparing to take his leave.

"I shall be off in a day or two at the furthest all the same," said

Graham.

"And you are to drink tea down stairs to-night. I'll come and fetch

you as soon as we're out of the dining-room. I can assure you that

your first appearance after your accident has been duly announced to

the public, and that you are anxiously expected." And then Staveley

left him.

So he was to meet Madeline that evening. His first feeling at the

thought was one of joy, but he soon brought himself almost to wish

that he could leave Noningsby without any such meeting. There

would have been nothing in it,--nothing that need have called for

observation or remark,--had he not told his secret to Augustus. But

his secret had been told to one, and might be known to others in the

house. Indeed he felt sure that it was suspected by Lady Staveley. It

could not, as he said to himself, have been suspected by the judge,

or the judge would not have treated him in so friendly a manner, or

have insisted so urgently on his coming down among them.

And then, how should he carry himself in her presence? If he were to

say nothing to her, his saying nothing would be remarked; and yet

he felt that all his powers of self-control would not enable him to

speak to her in the same manner that he would speak to her sister. He

had to ask himself, moreover, what line of conduct he did intend to

follow. If he was still resolved to marry Mary Snow, would it not be

better that he should take this bull by the horns and upset it at

once? In such case, Madeline Staveley must be no more to him than her

sister. But then he had two intentions. In accordance with one he

would make Mary Snow his wife; and in following the other he would

marry Miss Staveley. It must be admitted that the two brides which he

proposed to himself were very different. The one that he had moulded

for his own purposes was not, as he admitted, quite equal to her of

whom nature, education, and birth had had the handling.

Again he dined alone; but on this occasion Mrs. Baker was able to

elicit from him no enthusiasm as to his dinner. And yet she had done

her best, and placed before him a sweetbread and dish of sea-kale

that ought to have made him enthusiastic. "I had to fight with the

gardener for that like anything," she said, singing her own praises

when he declined to sing them.

"Dear me! They'll think that I am a dreadful person to have in the

house."

"Not a bit. Only they sha'n't think as how I'm going to be said 'no'

to in that way when I've set my mind on a thing. I know what's going

and I know what's proper. Why, laws, Mr. Graham, there's heaps of

things there and yet there's no getting of 'em;--unless there's a

party or the like of that. What's the use of a garden I say,--or of

a gardener neither, if you don't have garden stuff? It's not to look

at. Do finish it now;--after all the trouble I had, standing over him

in the cold while he cut it."

"Oh dear, oh dear, Mrs. Baker, why did you do that?"

"He thought to perish me, making believe it took him so long to get

at it; but I'm not so easy perished; I can tell him that! I'd have

stood there till now but what I had it. Miss Madeline see'd me as I

was coming in, and asked me what I'd been doing."

"I hope you didn't tell her that I couldn't live without sea-kale?"

"I told her that I meant to give you your dinner comfortable as long

as you had it up here; and she said--; but laws, Mr. Graham, you

don't care what a young lady says to an old woman like me. You'll see

her yourself this evening, and then you can tell her whether or no

the sea-kale was worth the eating! It's not so badly biled, I will

say that for Hannah Cook, though she is rampagious sometimes." He

longed to ask her what words Madeline had used, even in speaking on

such a subject as this; but he did not dare to do so. Mrs. Baker was

very fond of talking about Miss Madeline, but Graham was by no means

assured that he should find an ally in Mrs. Baker if he told her all

the truth.

At last the hour arrived, and Augustus came to convoy him down to

the drawing-room. It was now many days since he had been out of that

room, and the very fact of moving was an excitement to him. He hardly

knew how he might feel in walking down stairs, and could not quite

separate the nervousness arising from his shattered bones from that

other nervousness which came from his--shattered heart. The word is

undoubtedly a little too strong, but as it is there, there let it

stay. When he reached the drawing-room, he almost felt that he had

better decline to enter it. The door however was opened, and he was

in the room before he could make up his mind to any such step, and

he found himself being walked across the floor to some especial seat,

while a dozen kindly anxious faces were crowding round him.

"Here's an arm-chair, Mr. Graham, kept expressly for you, near the

fire," said Lady Staveley. "And I am extremely glad to see you well

enough to fill it."

"Welcome out of your room, sir," said the judge. "I compliment you,

and Pottinger also, upon your quick recovery; but allow me to tell

you that you don't yet look a man fit to rough it alone in London."

"I feel very well, sir," said Graham.

And then Mrs. Arbuthnot greeted him, and Miss Furnival, and four or

five others who were of the party, and he was introduced to one or

two whom he had not seen before. Marian too came up to him,--very

gently, as though he were as brittle as glass, having been warned by

her mother. "Oh, Mr. Felix," she said, "I was so unhappy when your

bones were broken. I do hope they won't break again."

And then he perceived that Madeline was in the room and was coming

up to him. She had in truth not been there when he first entered,

having thought it better, as a matter of strategy, to follow upon his

footsteps. He was getting up to meet her, when Lady Staveley spoke to

him.

"Don't move, Mr. Graham. Invalids, you know, are chartered."

"I am very glad to see you once more down stairs," said Madeline, as

she frankly gave him her hand,--not merely touching his--"very, very

glad. But I do hope you will get stronger before you venture to leave

Noningsby. You have frightened us all very much by your terrible

accident."

All this was said in her peculiarly sweet silver voice, not speaking

as though she were dismayed and beside herself, or in a hurry to get

through a lesson which she had taught herself. She had her secret to

hide, and had schooled herself how to hide it. But in so schooling

herself she had been compelled to acknowledge to herself that the

secret did exist. She had told herself that she must meet him, and

that in meeting him she must hide it. This she had done with absolute

success. Such is the peculiar power of women; and her mother, who had

listened not only to every word, but to every tone of her voice, gave

her exceeding credit.

"There's more in her than I thought there was," said Sophia Furnival

to herself, who had also listened and watched.

"It has not gone very deep, with her," said the judge, who on this

matter was not so good a judge as Miss Furnival.

"She cares about me just as Mrs. Baker does," said Graham to himself,

who was the worst judge of them all. He muttered something quite

unintelligible in answer to the kindness of her words; and then

Madeline, having gone through her task, retired to the further side

of the round table, and went to work among the teacups.

And then the conversation became general, turning altogether on the

affairs of Lady Mason. It was declared as a fact by Lady Staveley

that there was to be a marriage between Sir Peregrine Orme and his

guest, and all in the room expressed their sorrow. The women were

especially indignant. "I have no patience with her," said Mrs.

Arbuthnot. "She must know that such a marriage at his time of life

must be ridiculous, and injurious to the whole family."

The women were very indignant,--all except Miss Furnival, who did not

say much, but endeavoured to palliate the crimes of Lady Mason in

that which she did say. "I do not know that she is more to blame

than any other lady who marries a gentleman thirty years older than

herself."

"I do then," said Lady Staveley, who delighted in contradicting

Miss Furnival. "And so would you too, my dear, if you had known Sir

Peregrine as long as I have. And if--if--if--but it does not matter.

I am very sorry for Lady Mason,--very. I think she is a woman cruelly

used by her own connections; but my sympathies with her would

be warmer if she had refrained from using her power over an old

gentleman like Sir Peregrine, in the way she has done." In all which

expression of sentiment the reader will know that poor dear Lady

Staveley was wrong from the beginning to the end.

"For my part," said the judge, "I don't see what else she was to do.

If Sir Peregrine asked her, how could she refuse?"

"My dear!" said Lady Staveley.

"According to that, papa, every lady must marry any gentleman that

asks her," said Mrs. Arbuthnot.

"When a lady is under so deep a weight of obligation I don't know how

she is to refuse. My idea is that Sir Peregrine should not have asked

her."

"And mine too," said Felix. "Unless indeed he did it under an

impression that he could fight for her better as her husband than

simply as a friend."

"And I feel sure that that is what he did think," said Madeline, from

the further side of the table. And her voice sounded in Graham's ears

as the voice of Eve may have sounded to Adam. No; let him do what he

might in the world;--whatever might be the form in which his future

career should be fashioned, one thing was clearly impossible to him.

He could not marry Mary Snow. Had he never learned to know what were

the true charms of feminine grace and loveliness, it might have been

possible for him to do so, and to have enjoyed afterwards a fair

amount of contentment. But now even contentment would be impossible

to him under such a lot as that. Not only would he be miserable, but

the woman whom he married would be wretched also. It may be said that

he made up his mind definitely, while sitting in that arm-chair, that

he would not marry Mary Snow. Poor Mary Snow! Her fault in the matter

had not been great.

When Graham was again in his room, and the servant who was obliged

to undress him had left him, he sat over his fire, wrapped in his

dressing-gown, bethinking himself what he would do. "I will tell the

judge everything," he said at last. "Then, if he will let me into his

house after that, I must fight my own battle." And so he betook

himself to bed.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MRS. FURNIVAL CAN'T PUT UP WITH IT.

When Lady Mason last left the chambers of her lawyer in Lincoln's

Inn, she was watched by a stout lady as she passed through the narrow

passage leading from the Old to the New Square. That fact will I

trust be remembered, and I need hardly say that the stout lady was

Mrs. Furnival. She had heard betimes of the arrival of that letter

with the Hamworth post-mark, had felt assured that it was written by

the hands of her hated rival, and had at once prepared for action.

"I shall leave this house to-day,--immediately after breakfast," she

said to Miss Biggs, as they sat disconsolately at the table with the

urn between them.

"And I think you will be quite right, my dear," replied Miss Biggs.

"It is your bounden duty to put down such wicked iniquity as

this;--not only for your own sake, but for that of morals in general.

What in the world is there so beautiful and so lovely as a high tone

of moral sentiment?" To this somewhat transcendental question Mrs.

Furnival made no reply. That a high tone of moral sentiment as a

thing in general, for the world's use, is very good, she was no doubt

aware; but her mind at the present moment was fixed exclusively on

her own peculiar case. That Tom Furnival should be made to give up

seeing that nasty woman who lived at Hamworth, and to give up also

having letters from her,--that at present was the extent of her moral

sentiment. His wicked iniquity she could forgive with a facility

not at all gratifying to Miss Biggs, if only she could bring about

such a result as that. So she merely grunted in answer to the above

proposition.

"And will you sleep away from this?" asked Miss Biggs.

"Certainly I will. I will neither eat here, nor sleep here, nor stay

here till I know that all this is at an end. I have made up my mind

what I will do."

"Well?" asked the anxious Martha.

"Oh, never mind. I am not exactly prepared to talk about it. There

are things one can't talk about,--not to anybody. One feels as though

one would burst in mentioning it. I do, I know."

Martha Biggs could not but feel that this was hard, but she knew that

friendship is nothing if it be not long enduring. "Dearest Kitty!"

she exclaimed. "If true sympathy can be of service to you--"

"I wonder whether I could get respectable lodgings in the

neighbourhood of Red Lion Square for a week?" said Mrs. Furnival,

once more bringing the conversation back from the abstract to the

concrete.

In answer to this Miss Biggs of course offered the use of her own

bedroom and of her father's house; but her father was an old man, and

Mrs. Furnival positively refused to agree to any such arrangement. At

last it was decided that Martha should at once go off and look for

lodgings in the vicinity of her own home, that Mrs. Furnival should

proceed to carry on her own business in her own way,--the cruelty

being this, that she would not give the least hint as to what that

way might be,--and that the two ladies should meet together in the

Red Lion Square drawing-room at the close of the day.

"And about dinner, dear?" asked Miss Biggs.

"I will get something at a pastrycook's," said Mrs. Furnival.

"And your clothes, dear?"

"Rachel will see about them; she knows." Now Rachel was the old

female servant of twenty years' standing; and the disappointment

experienced by poor Miss Biggs at the ignorance in which she was left

was greatly enhanced by a belief that Rachel knew more than she did.

Mrs. Furnival would tell Rachel but would not tell her. This was

very, very hard, as Miss Biggs felt. But, nevertheless, friendship,

sincere friendship is long enduring, and true patient merit will

generally receive at last its appropriate reward.

Then Mrs. Furnival had sat down, Martha Biggs having been duly sent

forth on the mission after the lodgings, and had written a letter to

her husband. This she intrusted to Rachel, whom she did not purpose

to remove from that abode of iniquity from which she herself was

fleeing, and having completed her letter she went out upon her own

work. The letter ran as follows:--

Harley Street--Friday.

MY DEAREST TOM,

I cannot stand this any longer, so I have thought it best

to leave the house and go away. I am very sorry to be

forced to such a step as this, and would have put up with

a good deal first; but there are some things which I

cannot put up with,--and won't. I know that a woman has

to obey her husband, and I have always obeyed you, and

thought it no hardship even when I was left so much alone;

but a woman is not to see a slut brought in under her very

nose,--and I won't put up with it. We've been married now

going on over twenty-five years, and it's terrible to

think of being driven to this. I almost believe it will

drive me mad, and then, when I'm a lunatic, of course you

can do as you please.

I don't want to have any secrets from you. Where I shall

go I don't yet know, but I've asked Martha Biggs to take

lodgings for me somewhere near her. I must have somebody

to speak to now and again, so you can write to 23 Red Lion

Square till you hear further. It's no use sending for me,

for I \_won't come\_;--not till I know that you think better

of your present ways of going on. I don't know whether you

have the power to get the police to come after me, but I

advise you not. If you do anything of that sort the people

about shall hear of it.

And now, Tom, I want to say one word to you. You can't

think it's a happiness to me going away from my own home

where I have lived respectable so many years, or leaving

you whom I've loved with all my whole heart. It makes me

very very unhappy, so that I could sit and cry all day if

it weren't for pride and because the servants shouldn't

see me. To think that it has come to this after all! Oh,

Tom, I wonder whether you ever think of the old days when

we used to be so happy in Keppel Street! There wasn't

anybody then that you cared to see, except me;--I do

believe that. And you'd always come home then, and I never

thought bad of it though you wouldn't have a word to speak

to me for hours. Because you were doing your duty. But you

ain't doing your duty now, Tom. You know you ain't doing

your duty when you never dine at home, and come home so

cross with wine that you curse and swear, and have that

nasty woman coming to see you at your chambers. Don't tell

me it's about law business. Ladies don't go to barristers'

chambers about law business. All that is done by

attorneys. I've heard you say scores of times that you

never would see people themselves, and yet you see her.

Oh, Tom, you have made me so wretched! But I can forgive

it all, and will never say another word about it to fret

you, if you'll only promise me to have nothing more to

say to that woman. Of course I'd like you to come home to

dinner, but I'd put up with that. You've made your own way

in the world, and perhaps it's only right you should enjoy

it. I don't think so much dining at the club can be good

for you, and I'm afraid you'll have gout, but I don't

want to bother you about that. Send me a line to say that

you won't see her any more, and I'll come back to Harley

Street at once. If you can't bring yourself to do that,

you--and--I--must--part. I can put up with a great deal,

but I can't put up with that;--\_and won't\_.

Your affectionate loving wife,

C. FURNIVAL.

"I wonder whether you ever think of the old days when we used to be

so happy in Keppel Street?" Ah me, how often in after life, in those

successful days when the battle has been fought and won, when all

seems outwardly to go well,--how often is this reference made to the

happy days in Keppel Street! It is not the prize that can make us

happy; it is not even the winning of the prize, though for the one

short half-hour of triumph that is pleasant enough. The struggle, the

long hot hour of the honest fight, the grinding work,--when the teeth

are set, and the skin moist with sweat and rough with dust, when all

is doubtful and sometimes desperate, when a man must trust to his own

manhood knowing that those around him trust to it not at all,--that

is the happy time of life. There is no human bliss equal to twelve

hours of work with only six hours in which to do it. And when

the expected pay for that work is worse than doubtful, the inner

satisfaction is so much the greater. Oh, those happy days in Keppel

Street, or it may be over in dirty lodgings in the Borough, or

somewhere near the Marylebone workhouse;--anywhere for a moderate

weekly stipend. Those were to us, and now are to others, and always

will be to many, the happy days of life. How bright was love, and how

full of poetry! Flashes of wit glanced here and there, and how they

came home and warmed the cockles of the heart. And the unfrequent

bottle! Methinks that wine has utterly lost its flavour since those

days. There is nothing like it; long work, grinding weary work, work

without pay, hopeless work; but work in which the worker trusts

himself, believing it to be good. Let him, like Mahomet, have one

other to believe in him, and surely nothing else is needed. "Ah me! I

wonder whether you ever think of the old days when we used to be so

happy in Keppel Street?"

Nothing makes a man so cross as success, or so soon turns a pleasant

friend into a captious acquaintance. Your successful man eats too

much and his stomach troubles him; he drinks too much and his nose

becomes blue. He wants pleasure and excitement, and roams about

looking for satisfaction in places where no man ever found it. He

frets himself with his banker's book, and everything tastes amiss to

him that has not on it the flavour of gold. The straw of an omnibus

always stinks; the linings of the cabs are filthy. There are but

three houses round London at which an eatable dinner may be obtained.

And yet a few years since how delicious was that cut of roast goose

to be had for a shilling at the eating-house near Golden Square. Mrs.

Jones and Mrs. Green, Mrs. Walker and all the other mistresses, are

too vapid and stupid and humdrum for endurance. The theatres are dull

as Lethe, and politics have lost their salt. Success is the necessary

misfortune of life, but it is only to the very unfortunate that it

comes early.

Mrs. Furnival, when she had finished her letter and fastened it, drew

one of the heavy dining-room arm-chairs over against the fire, and

sat herself down to consider her past life, still holding the letter

in her lap. She had not on that morning been very careful with her

toilet, as was perhaps natural enough. The cares of the world were

heavy on her, and he would not be there to see her. Her hair was

rough, and her face was red, and she had hardly had the patience

to make straight the collar round her neck. To the eye she was

an untidy, angry, cross-looking woman. But her heart was full of

tenderness,--full to overflowing. She loved him now as well as ever

she had loved him:--almost more as the thought of parting from

him pressed upon her! Was he not all in all to her? Had she not

worshipped him during her whole life? Could she not forgive him?

Forgive him! Yes. Forgive him with the fullest, frankest, freest

pardon, if he would only take forgiveness. Should she burn that

letter in the fire, send to Biggs saying that the lodgings were not

wanted, and then throw herself at Tom's feet, imploring him to have

mercy upon her? All that she could do within her heart, and make her

words as passionate, as soft, and as poetical as might be those of a

young wife of twenty. But she felt that such words,--though she could

frame the sentence while sitting there,--could never get themselves

spoken. She had tried it, and it had been of no avail. Not only

should she be prepared for softness, but he also must be so prepared

and at the same moment. If he should push her from him and call her

a fool when she attempted that throwing of herself at his feet, how

would it be with her spirit then? No. She must go forth and the

letter must be left. If there were any hope of union for the future

it must come from a parting for the present. So she went up stairs

and summoned Rachel, remaining with her in consultation for some

half-hour. Then she descended with her bonnet and shawl, got into a

cab while Spooner stood at the door looking very serious, and was

driven away,--whither, no one knew in Harley Street except Mrs.

Furnival herself, and that cabman.

"She'll never put her foot inside this hall door again. That's my

idea of the matter," said Spooner.

"Indeed and she will," said Rachel, "and be a happier woman than ever

she's been since the house was took."

"If I know master," said Spooner, "he's not the man to get rid of an

old woman, easy like that, and then 'ave her back agin." Upon hearing

which words, so very injurious to the sex in general, Rachel walked

into the house not deigning any further reply.

And then, as we have seen, Mrs. Furnival was there, standing in the

dark shadow of the Lincoln's Inn passage, when Lady Mason left the

lawyer's chambers. She felt sure that it was Lady Mason, but she

could not be quite sure. The woman, though she came out from the

entry which led to her husband's chambers, might have come down

from some other set of rooms. Had she been quite certain she would

have attacked her rival there, laying bodily hands upon her in the

purlieus of the Lord Chancellor's Court. As it was, the poor bruised

creature was allowed to pass by, and as she emerged out into the

light at the other end of the passage Mrs. Furnival became quite

certain of her identity.

"Never mind," she said to herself. "She sha'n't escape me long. Him

I could forgive, if he would only give it up; but as for her--! Let

what come of it, come may, I will tell that woman what I think of her

conduct before I am many hours older." Then, giving one look up to

the windows of her husband's chambers, she walked forth through the

dusty old gate into Chancery Lane, and made her way on foot up to No.

23 Red Lion Square. "I'm glad I've done it," she said to herself as

she went; "very glad. There's nothing else for it, when things come

to such a head as that." And in this frame of mind she knocked at her

friend's door.

"Well!" said Martha Biggs, with her eyes, and mouth, and arms, and

heart all open.

"Have you got me the lodgings?" said Mrs. Furnival.

"Yes, close by;--in Orange Street. I'm afraid you'll find them very

dull. And what have you done?"

"I have done nothing, and I don't at all mind their being dull. They

can't possibly be more dull than Harley Street."

"And I shall be near you; sha'n't I?" said Martha Biggs.

"Umph," said Mrs. Furnival. "I might as well go there at once and

get myself settled." So she did, the affectionate Martha of course

accompanying her; and thus the affairs of that day were over.

Her intention was to go down to Hamworth at once, and make her way

up to Orley Farm, at which place she believed that Lady Mason was

living. Up to this time she had heard no word of the coming trial

beyond what Mr. Furnival had told her as to his client's "law

business." And whatever he had so told her, she had scrupulously

disbelieved. In her mind all that went for nothing. Law business! she

was not so blind, so soft, so green, as to be hoodwinked by such

stuff as that. Beautiful widows don't have personal interviews with

barristers in their chambers over and over again, let them have what

law business they may. At any rate Mrs. Furnival took upon herself to

say that they ought not to have such interviews. She would go down to

Orley Farm and she would have an interview with Lady Mason. Perhaps

the thing might be stopped in that way.

On the following morning she received a note from her husband the

consideration of which delayed her proceedings for that day.

"DEAR KITTY," the note ran.

I think you are very foolish. If regard for me had not

kept you at home, some consideration with reference to

Sophia should have done so. What you say about that poor

lady at Orley Farm is too absurd for me to answer. If you

would have spoken to me about her, I would have told you

that which would have set your mind at rest, at any rate

as regards her. I cannot do this in a letter, nor could I

do it in the presence of your friend, Miss Biggs.

I hope you will come back at once; but I shall not add

to the absurdity of your leaving your own house by any

attempt to bring you back again by force. As you must want

money I enclose a check for fifty pounds. I hope you will

be back before you want more; but if not I will send it as

soon as you ask for it.

Yours affectionately as always,

T. FURNIVAL.

There was about this letter an absence of sentiment, and an absence

of threat, and an absence of fuss, which almost overset her. Could

it be possible that she was wrong about Lady Mason? Should she go to

him and hear his own account before she absolutely declared war by

breaking into the enemy's camp at Orley Farm? Then, moreover, she was

touched and almost overcome about the money. She wished he had not

sent it to her. That money difficulty had occurred to her, and been

much discussed in her own thoughts. Of course she could not live away

from him if he refused to make her any allowance,--at least not for

any considerable time. He had always been liberal as regards money

since money had been plenty with him, and therefore she had some

supply with her. She had jewels too which were her own; and though,

as she had already determined, she would not part with them without

telling him what she was about to do, yet she could, if pressed, live

in this way for the next twelve months;--perhaps, with close economy,

even for a longer time than that. In her present frame of mind she

had looked forward almost with gratification to being pinched and

made uncomfortable. She would wear her ordinary and more dowdy

dresses; she would spend much of her time in reading sermons; she

would get up very early and not care what she ate or drank. In short,

she would make herself as uncomfortable as circumstances would admit,

and thoroughly enjoy her grievances.

But then this check of fifty pounds, and this offer of as much more

as she wanted when that was gone, rather took the ground from under

her feet. Unless she herself chose to give way she might go on living

in Orange Street to the end of the chapter, with every material

comfort about her,--keeping her own brougham if she liked, for the

checks she now knew would come without stint. And he would go on

living in Harley street, seeing Lady Mason as often as he pleased.

Sophia would be the mistress of the house, and as long as this was

so, Lady Mason would not show her face there. Now this was not a

course of events to which Mrs. Furnival could bring herself to look

forward with satisfaction.

All this delayed her during that day, but before she went to bed she

made up her mind that she would at any rate go down to Hamworth. Tom,

she knew, was deceiving her; of that she felt morally sure. She would

at any rate go down to Hamworth, and trust to her own wit for finding

out the truth when there.

CHAPTER L.

IT IS QUITE IMPOSSIBLE.

All was now sadness at The Cleeve. It was soon understood among the

servants that there was to be no marriage, and the tidings spread

from the house, out among the neighbours and into Hamworth. But no

one knew the reason of this change;--none except those three, the

woman herself who had committed the crime and the two to whom she had

told it. On that same night, the night of the day on which the tale

had been told, Lady Mason wrote a line,--almost a single line to her

son.

DEAREST LUCIUS,

All is over between me and Sir Peregrine. It is better

that it should be so. I write to tell you this without

losing an hour. For the present I remain here with my

dear--dearest friends.

Your own affectionate mother,

M. MASON.

This note she had written in obedience to the behests of Mrs. Orme,

and even under her dictation--with the exception of one or two words,

"I remain here with my friends," Mrs. Orme had said; but Lady Mason

had put in the two epithets, and had then declared her own conviction

that she had now no right to use such language.

"Yes, of me you may, certainly," said Mrs. Orme, keeping close to her

shoulder.

"Then I will alter it," said Lady Mason. "I will write it again and

say I am staying with you."

But this Mrs. Orme had forbidden. "No; it will be better so," she

said. "Sir Peregrine would wish it. I am sure he would. He quite

agrees that--" Mrs. Orme did not finish her sentence, but the letter

was despatched, written as above. The answer which Lucius sent down

before breakfast the next morning was still shorter.

DEAREST MOTHER,

I am greatly rejoiced that it is so.

Your affectionate son,

L. M.

He sent this note, but he did not go down to her, nor was there any

other immediate communication between them.

All was now sadness at The Cleeve. Peregrine knew that that marriage

project was over, and he knew also that his grandfather and Lady

Mason did not now meet each other; but he knew nothing of the cause,

though he could not but remark that he did not see her. On that day

she did not come down either to dinner or during the evening; nor

was she seen on the following morning. He, Peregrine, felt aware

that something had occurred at that interview in the library after

breakfast, but was lost in surmising what that something had been.

That Lady Mason should have told his grandfather that the marriage

must be given up would have been only in accordance with the promise

made by her to him; but he did not think that that alone would

have occasioned such utter sadness, such deathlike silence in the

household. Had there been a quarrel Lady Mason would have gone

home;--but she did not go home. Had the match been broken off without

a quarrel, why should she mysteriously banish herself to two rooms so

that no one but his mother should see her?

And he too had his own peculiar sorrow. On that morning Sir Peregrine

had asked him to ride through the grounds, and it had been the

baronet's intention to propose during that ride that he should go

over to Noningsby and speak to the judge about Madeline. We all know

how that proposition had been frustrated. And now Peregrine, thinking

over the matter, saw that his grandfather was not in a position at

the present moment to engage himself ardently in any such work. By

whatever means or whatever words he had been induced to agree to the

abandonment of that marriage engagement, that abandonment weighed

very heavily on his spirits. It was plain to see that he was a broken

man, broken in heart and in spirit. He shut himself up alone in his

library all that afternoon, and had hardly a word to say when he came

out to dinner in the evening. He was very pale too, and slow and weak

in his step. He tried to smile as he came up to his daughter-in-law

in the drawing-room; but his smile was the saddest thing of all. And

then Peregrine could see that he ate nothing. He was very gentle

in his demeanour to the servants, very courteous and attentive

to Mrs. Orme, very kind to his grandson. But yet his mind was

heavy;--brooding over some sorrow that oppressed it. On the following

morning it was the same, and the grandson knew that he could look to

his grandfather for no assistance at Noningsby.

Immediately after breakfast Peregrine got on his horse, without

speaking to any one of his intention,--almost without having formed

an intention, and rode off in the direction of Alston. He did not

take the road, but went out through The Cleeve woods, on to the

common, by which, had he turned to the left, he might have gone to

Orley Farm; but when on the top of the rise from Crutchley Bottom he

turned to the right, and putting his horse into a gallop, rode along

the open ground till he came to an enclosure into which he leaped.

From thence he made his way through a farm gate into a green country

lane, along which he still pressed his horse, till he found himself

divided from the end of a large wood by but one field. He knew the

ground well, and the direction in which he was going. He could pass

through that wood, and then down by an old farm-house at the other

end of it, and so on to the Alston road, within a mile of Noningsby.

He knew the ground well, for he had ridden over every field of it.

When a man does so after thirty he forgets the spots which he passes

in his hurry, but when he does so before twenty he never forgets.

That field and that wood Peregrine Orme would never forget. There was

the double ditch and bank over which Harriet Tristram had ridden with

so much skill and courage. There was the spot on which he had knelt

so long, while Felix Graham lay back against him, feeble and almost

speechless. And there, on the other side, had sat Madeline on her

horse, pale with anxiety but yet eager with hope, as she asked

question after question as to him who had been hurt.

Peregrine rode up to the ditch, and made his horse stand while he

looked at it. It was there, then, on that spot, that he had felt the

first pang of jealousy. The idea had occurred to him that he for

whom he had been doing a friend's offices with such zealous kindness

was his worst enemy. Had he,--he, Peregrine Orme,--broken his arms

and legs, or even broken his neck, would she have ridden up, all

thoughtless of herself, and thrown her very life into her voice as

she had done when she knew that Felix Graham had fallen from his

horse? And then he had gone on with his work, aiding the hurt man as

zealously as before, but still feeling that he was bound to hate him.

And afterwards, at Noningsby, he had continued to minister to him as

to his friend,--zealously doing a friend's offices, but still feeling

that the man was his enemy. Not that he was insincere. There was no

place for insincerity or treachery within his heart. The man had done

no ill,--was a good fellow--was entitled to his kindness by all the

social laws which he knew. They two had gone together from the same

table to the same spot, and had been close together when the one had

come to sorrow. It was his duty to act as Graham's friend; and yet

how could he not feel that he must hate him?

And now he sat looking at the fence, wishing,--wishing;--no,

certainly not wishing that Graham's hurt had been more serious; but

wishing that in falling from his horse he might utterly have fallen

out of favour with that sweet young female heart; or rather wishing,

could he so have expressed it, that he himself might have had the

fall, and the broken bones, and all the danger,--so that he might

also have had the interest which those eyes and that voice had shown.

And then quickly he turned his horse, and without giving the beast

time to steady himself he rammed him at the fence. The leap out of

the wood into the field was difficult, but that back into the wood

was still worse. The up-jump was higher, and the ditch which must be

first cleared was broader. Nor did he take it at the easiest part as

he had done on that day when he rode his own horse and then Graham's

back into the wood. But he pressed his animal exactly at the spot

from which his rival had fallen. There were still the marks of the

beast's struggle, as he endeavoured to save himself before he came

down, head foremost, into the ditch. The bank had been somewhat

narrowed and pared away, and it was clearly the last place in the

face of the whole opening into the wood, which a rider with his

senses about him would have selected for his jump.

The horse knowing his master's humour, and knowing also,--which is so

vitally important,--the nature of his master's courage, jumped at the

bank, without pausing. As I have said, no time had been given him to

steady himself,--not a moment to see where his feet should go, to

understand and make the most of the ground that he was to use. He

jumped and jumped well, but only half gained the top of the bank. The

poor brute, urged beyond his power, could not get his hind feet up so

near the surface as to give him a fulcrum for a second spring. For a

moment he strove to make good his footing, still clinging with his

fore feet, and then slowly came down backwards into the ditch, then

regained his feet, and dragging himself with an effort from the mud,

made his way back into the field. Peregrine Orme had kept his seat

throughout. His legs were accustomed to the saddle and knew how to

cling to it, while there was a hope that he might struggle through.

And now that he was again in the field he wheeled his horse to a

greater distance, striking him with his whip, and once more pushed

him at the fence. The gallant beast went at it bravely, slightly

swerving from the fatal spot to which Peregrine had endeavoured once

more to guide him, leaped with a full spring from the unworn turf,

and, barely touching the bank, landed himself and his master lightly

within the precincts of the wood.

"Ah-h!" said Peregrine, shouting angrily at the horse, as though the

brute had done badly instead of well. And then he rode down slowly

through the wood, and out by Monkton Grange farm, round the moat, and

down the avenue, and before long he was standing at Noningsby gate.

He had not made up his mind to any plan of action, nor indeed had he

determined that he would ask to see any of the family or even enter

the place. The woman at the lodge opened the gate, and he rode in

mechanically, asking if any of them were at home. The judge and Mr.

Augustus were gone up to London, but my lady and the other ladies

were in the house. Mr. Graham had not gone, the woman said in answer

to his question; nor did she know when he was going. And then, armed

with this information, Peregrine Orme rode round to the stables, and

gave up his horse to a groom.

"Yes, Lady Staveley was at home," the servant said at the door.

"Would Mr. Orme walk into the drawing-room, where he would find the

young ladies?" But Mr. Orme would not do this. He would go into a

small book-room with which he was well acquainted, and have his name

taken up to Lady Staveley. "He did not," he said, "mean to stay very

long; but particularly wished to see Lady Staveley." In a few minutes

Lady Staveley came to him, radiant with her sweetest smile, and with

both her hands held out to greet him.

"My dear Mr. Orme," she said, "I am delighted to see you; but what

made you run away from us so suddenly?" She had considered her words

in that moment as she came across the hall, and had thought that in

this way she might best enable him to speak.

"Lady Staveley," he said, "I have come here on purpose to tell you.

Has your daughter told you anything?"

"Who--Madeline?"

"Yes, Madeline. I mean Miss Staveley. Has she said anything to you

about me?"

"Well; yes, she has. Will you not sit down, Mr. Orme, and then

we shall be more comfortable." Hitherto he had stood up, and had

blurted out his words with a sudden, determined, and almost ferocious

air,--as though he were going to demand the girl's hand, and

challenge all the household if it were refused him. But Lady Staveley

understood his manner and his nature, and liked him almost the better

for his abruptness.

"She has spoken to me, Mr. Orme; she has told me of what passed

between you on the last day that you were with us."

"And yet you are surprised that I should have gone! I wonder at that,

Lady Staveley. You must have known--"

"Well; perhaps I did know; but sit down, Mr. Orme. I won't let you

get up in that restless way, if we are to talk together. Tell me

frankly; what is it you think that I can do for you?"

"I don't suppose you can do anything;--but I thought I would come

over and speak to you. I don't suppose I've any chance?" He had

seated himself far back on a sofa, and was holding his hat between

his knees, with his eyes fixed on the ground; but as he spoke the

last words he looked round into her face with an anxious inquiring

glance which went direct to her heart.

"What can I say, Mr. Orme?"

"Ah, no. Of course nothing. Good-bye, Lady Staveley. I might as well

go. I know that I was a fool for coming here. I knew it as I was

coming. Indeed I hardly meant to come in when I found myself at the

gate."

"But you must not go from us like that."

"I must though. Do you think that I could go in and see her? If I did

I should make such a fool of myself that I could never again hold up

my head. And I am a fool. I ought to have known that a fellow like me

could have no chance with her. I could knock my own head off, if I

only knew how, for having made such an ass of myself."

"No one here thinks so of you, Mr. Orme."

"No one here thinks what?"

"That it was--unreasonable in you to propose to Madeline. We all know

that you did her much honour."

"Psha!" said he, turning away from her.

"Ah! but you must listen to me. That is what we all think--Madeline

herself, and I, and her father. No one who knows you could think

otherwise. We all like you, and know how good and excellent you are.

And as to worldly station, of course you stand above her."

"Psha!" he said again angrily. How could any one presume to talk of

the worldly station of his goddess? For just then Madeline Staveley

to him was a goddess!

"That is what we think, indeed, Mr. Orme. As for myself, had my girl

come to me telling me that you had proposed to her, and telling me

also that--that--that she felt that she might probably like you, I

should have been very happy to hear it." And Lady Staveley as she

spoke, put out her hand to him.

"But what did she say?" asked Peregrine, altogether disregarding the

hand.

"Ah, she did not say that. She told me that she had declined the

honour that you had offered her;--that she did not regard you as she

must regard the man to whom she would pledge her heart."

"But did she say that she could never love me?" And now as he asked

the question he stood up again, looking down with all his eyes into

Lady Staveley's face,--that face which would have been so friendly to

him, so kind and so encouraging, had it been possible.

"Never is a long word, Mr. Orme."

"Ah, but did she say it? Come, Lady Staveley; I know I have been a

fool, but I am not a cowardly fool. If it be so;--if I have no hope,

tell me at once, that I may go away. In that case I shall be better

anywhere out of the county."

"I cannot say that you should have no hope."

"You think then that there is a chance?" and for a moment he looked

as though all his troubles were nearly over.

"If you are so impetuous, Mr. Orme, I cannot speak to you. If you

will sit down for a minute or two I will tell you exactly what I

think about it." And then he sat down, trying to look as though he

were not impetuous. "I should be deceiving you if I were not to tell

you that she speaks of the matter as though it were all over,--as

though her answer to you was a final one."

"Ah; I knew it was so."

"But then, Mr. Orme, many young ladies who have been at the first

moment quite as sure of their decision have married the gentlemen

whom they refused, and have learned to love them with all their

hearts."

"But she isn't like other girls," said Peregrine.

"I believe she is a great deal better than many, but nevertheless she

may be like others in that respect. I do not say that it will be so,

Mr. Orme. I would not on any account give you hopes which I believed

to be false. But if you are anxious in the matter--"

"I am as anxious about it as I am about my soul!"

"Oh fie, Mr. Orme! You should not speak in that way. But if you are

anxious, I would advise you to wait."

"And see her become the wife of some one else."

"Listen to me, Mr. Orme. Madeline is very young. And so indeed are

you too;--almost too young to marry as yet, even if my girl were

willing that it should be so. But we all like you very much; and

as you both are so very young, I think that you might wait with

patience,--say for a year. Then come to Noningsby again, and try your

fortune once more. That is my advice."

"Will you tell me one thing, Lady Staveley?"

"What is that, Mr. Orme?"

"Does she care for any one else?"

Lady Staveley was prepared to do anything she could for her young

friend except to answer that question. She did believe that Madeline

cared for somebody else,--cared very much. But she did not think that

any way would be opened by which that caring would be made manifest;

and she thought also that if wholly ungratified by any word of

intercourse that feeling would die away. Could she have told

everything to Peregrine Orme she would have explained to him that his

best chance lay in that liking for Felix Graham; or, rather, that as

his rejection had been caused by that liking, his chance would be

good again when that liking should have perished from starvation. But

all this Lady Staveley could not explain to him; nor would it have

been satisfactory to her feelings had it been in her power to do so.

Still there remained the question, "Does she care for any one else?"

"Mr. Orme," she said, "I will do all for you that a mother can do or

ought to do; but I must not admit that you have a right to ask such

a question as that. If I were to answer that now, you would feel

yourself justified in asking it again when perhaps it might not be so

easy to answer."

"I beg your pardon, Lady Staveley;" and Peregrine blushed up to his

eyes. "I did not intend--"

"No; do not beg my pardon, seeing that you have given me no offence.

As I said just now, all that a mother can and ought to do I will do

for you. I am very frank, and tell you that I should be rejoiced to

have you for my son-in-law."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you."

"But neither by me nor by her father will any constraint ever be put

on the inclinations of our child. At any rate as to whom she will not

accept she will always be allowed to judge for herself. I have told

you that to us you would be acceptable as a suitor; and after that

I think it will be best to leave the matter for the present without

any further words. Let it be understood that you will spend next

Christmas at Noningsby, and then you will both be older and perhaps

know your own minds better."

"That's a year, you know."

"A year is not so very long--at your time of life." By which latter

remark Lady Staveley did not show her knowledge of human nature.

"And I suppose I had better go now?" said Peregrine sheepishly.

"If you like to go into the drawing-room, I'm sure they will all be

very glad to see you."

But Peregrine declared that he would not do this on any account. "You

do not know, Lady Staveley, what a fool I should make myself. It

would be all over with me then."

"You should be more moderate in your feelings, Mr. Orme."

"It's all very well saying that; but you wouldn't be moderate if

Noningsby were on fire, or if you thought the judge was going to

die."

"Good gracious, Mr. Orme!"

"It's the same sort of thing to me, I can tell you. A man can't be

moderate when he feels that he should like to break his own neck. I

declare I almost tried to do it to-day."

"Oh, Mr. Orme!"

"Well; I did. But don't suppose I say that as a sort of threat. I'm

safe enough to live for the next sixty years. It's only the happy

people and those that are some good in the world that die. Good-bye,

Lady Staveley. I'll come back next Christmas;--that is if it isn't

all settled before then; but I know it will be no good." Then he got

on his horse and rode very slowly home, along the high road to The

Cleeve.

Lady Staveley did not go in among the other ladies till luncheon was

announced, and when she did so, she said no word about her visitor.

Nevertheless it was known by them all that Peregrine Orme had been

there. "Ah, that's Mr. Orme's roan-coloured horse," Sophia Furnival

had said, getting up and thrusting her face close to the drawing-room

window. It was barely possible to see a portion of the road from the

drawing-room; but Sophia's eyes had been sharp enough to see that

portion.

"A groom has probably come over with a note," said Mrs. Arbuthnot.

"Very likely," said Sophia. But they all knew from her voice that the

rider was no groom, and that she did not intend it to be thought that

he was a groom. Madeline said not a word, and kept her countenance

marvellously; but she knew well enough that Peregrine had been with

her mother; and guessed also why he had been there.

Madeline had asked herself some serious questions, and had answered

them also, since that conversation which she had had with her father.

He had assured her that he desired only her happiness; and though in

so saying he had spoken nothing of marriage, she had well understood

that he had referred to her future happiness,--at that time when by

her own choice she should be leaving her father's house. And now

she asked herself boldly in what way might that happiness be best

secured. Hitherto she had refrained from any such home questions.

Latterly, within the last week or two, ideas of what love meant had

forced themselves upon her mind. How could it have been otherwise?

But she had never dared to tell herself either that she did love, or

that she did not. Mr. Orme had come to her with his offer, plainly

asking her for the gift of her heart, and she had immediately been

aware that any such gift on her part was impossible,--any such gift

in his favour. She had known without a moment's thought that there

was no room for hesitation. Had he asked her to take wings and fly

away with him over the woods, the feat would not have been to her

more impossible than that of loving him as his wife. Yet she liked

him,--liked him much in these latter days, because he had been so

good to Felix Graham. When she felt that she liked him as she refused

him, she felt also that it was for this reason that she liked him.

On the day of Graham's accident she had thought nothing of him,--had

hardly spoken to him. But now she loved him--with a sort of love,

because he had been so good to Graham. Though in her heart she knew

all this, she asked herself no questions till her father had spoken

to her of her future happiness.

Then, as she wandered about the house alone,--for she still went on

wandering,--she did ask herself a question or two. What was it that

had changed her thus, and made her gay quick step so slow? what had

altered the happy silver tone of her voice? what had created that

load within her which seemed to weigh her down during every hour of

the day? She knew that there had been a change; that she was not as

she had been; and now she asked herself the question. Not on the

first asking nor on the second did the answer come; not perhaps on

the twentieth. But the answer did come at last, and she told herself

that her heart was no longer her own. She knew and acknowledged to

herself that Felix Graham was its master and owner.

And then came the second question. Under those circumstances what had

she better do? Her mother had told her,--and the words had fallen

deep into her ears,--that it would be a great misfortune if she loved

any man before she had reason to know that that man loved her. She

had no such knowledge as regarded Felix Graham. A suspicion that it

might be so she did feel,--a suspicion which would grow into a hope

let her struggle against it as she might. Baker, that injudicious

Baker, had dropped in her hearing a word or two, which assisted this

suspicion. And then the open frank question put to her by her father

when he demanded whether Graham had addressed her as a lover, had

tended towards the same result. What had she better do? Of one thing

she now felt perfectly certain. Let the world go as it might in

other respects, she could never leave her father's house as a bride

unless the bridegroom were Felix Graham. A marriage with him might

probably be impracticable, but any other marriage would be absolutely

impossible. If her father or her mother told her not to think of

Felix Graham, as a matter of course she would obey them; but not even

in obedience to father or mother could she say that she loved any one

else.

And now, all these matters having been considered, what should she

do? Her father had invited her to tell everything to him, and she was

possessed by a feeling that in this matter she might possibly find

more indulgence with her father than with her mother; but yet it was

more natural that her mother should be her confidante and adviser.

She could speak to her mother, also, with a better courage, even

though she felt less certain of sympathy. Peregrine Orme had now been

there again, and had been closeted With Lady Staveley. On that ground

she would speak, and having so resolved she lost no time in carrying

out her purpose.

"Mamma, Mr. Orme was here to-day; was he not?"

"Yes, my love." Lady Staveley was sorry rather than otherwise that

her daughter had asked her, but would have been puzzled to explain

why such should have been the case.

"I thought so," said Madeline.

"He rode over, and told me among other things that the match between

his grandfather and Lady Mason is at an end. I was very glad to hear

it, for I thought that Sir Peregrine was going to do a very foolish

thing." And then there were a few further remarks on that subject,

made probably by Lady Staveley with some undefined intention of

inducing her daughter to think that Peregrine Orme had come over

chiefly on that matter.

"But, mamma--"

"Well, my love."

"Did he say anything about--about what he was speaking to me about?"

"Well, Madeline; he did. He did say something on that subject; but I

had not intended to tell you unless you had asked."

"I hope, mamma, he understands that what he wants can never

happen;--that is if he does want it now?"

"He does want it certainly, my dear."

"Then I hope you told him that it can never be? I hope you did,

mamma!"

"But why should you be so certain about it, my love? He does not

intend to trouble you with his suit,--nor do I. Why not leave that

to time? There can be no reason why you should not see him again on

a friendly footing when this embarrassment between you shall have

passed away."

"There would be no reason, mamma, if he were quite sure that there

could never be any other footing."

"Never is a very long word."

[Illustration: "Never is a very long word."]

"But it is the only true word, mamma. It would be wrong in you, it

would indeed, if you were to tell him to come again. I like Mr. Orme

very much as a friend, and I should be very glad to know him,--that

is if he chose to know me." And Madeline as she made this little

proviso was thinking what her own worldly position might be as the

wife of Felix Graham. "But as it is quite impossible that he and I

should ever be anything else to each other, he should not be asked to

come here with any other intention."

"But Madeline, I do not see that it is so impossible."

"Mamma, it is impossible; quite impossible!" To this assertion

Lady Staveley made no answer in words, but there was that in her

countenance which made her daughter understand that she did not quite

agree in this assertion, or understand this impossibility.

"Mamma, it is quite, quite impossible!" Madeline repeated.

"But why so?" said Lady Staveley, frightened by her daughter's

manner, and almost fearing that something further was to come which

had by far better be left unsaid.

"Because, mamma, I have no love to give him. Oh, mamma, do not be

angry with me; do not push me away. You know who it is that I love.

You knew it before." And then she threw herself on her knees, and hid

her face on her mother's lap.

Lady Staveley had known it, but up to that moment she had hoped that

that knowledge might have remained hidden as though it were unknown.

CHAPTER LI.

MRS. FURNIVAL'S JOURNEY TO HAMWORTH.

When Peregrine got back to The Cleeve he learned that there was a

lady with his mother. He had by this time partially succeeded in

reasoning himself out of his despondency. He had learned at any rate

that his proposition to marry into the Staveley family had been

regarded with favour by all that family except the one whose views

on that subject were by far the most important to him; and he had

learned, as he thought, that Lady Staveley had no suspicion that her

daughter's heart was preoccupied. But in this respect Lady Staveley

had been too cunning for him. "Wait!" he said to himself as he went

slowly along the road. "It's all very well to say wait, but there

are some things which won't bear waiting for. A man who waits never

gets well away with the hounds." Nevertheless as he rode into the

courtyard his hopes were somewhat higher than they had been when he

rode out of it.

"A lady! what lady? You don't mean Lady Mason?"

No. The servant did not mean Lady Mason. It was an elderly stout lady

who had come in a fly, and the elderly stout lady was now in the

drawing-room with his mother. Lady Mason was still up stairs. We all

know who was that elderly stout lady, and we must now go back and say

a few words as to her journey from Orange Street to Hamworth.

On the preceding evening Mrs. Furnival had told Martha Biggs what was

her intention; Or perhaps it would be more just to say that Martha

Biggs had worked it out of her. Now that Mrs. Furnival had left the

fashionable neighbourhood of Cavendish Square, and located herself in

that eastern homely district to which Miss Biggs had been so long

accustomed, Miss Biggs had been almost tyrannical. It was not that

she was less attentive to her friend, or less willing to slave for

her with a view to any possible or impossible result. But the friend

of Mrs. Furnival's bosom could not help feeling her opportunity. Mrs.

Furnival had now thrown herself very much upon her friend, and of

course the friend now expected unlimited privileges;--as is always

the case with friends in such a position. It is very well to have

friends to lean upon, but it is not always well to lean upon one's

friends.

"I will be with you before you start in the morning," said Martha.

"It will not be at all necessary," said Mrs. Furnival.

"Oh, but I shall indeed. And, Kitty, I should think nothing of going

with you, if you would wish it. Indeed I think you should have a

female friend alongside of you in such a trouble. You have only to

say the word and I'll go in a minute."

Mrs. Furnival however did not say the word, and Miss Biggs was

obliged to deny herself the pleasure of the journey. But true to her

word she came in the morning in ample time to catch Mrs. Furnival

before she started, and for half an hour poured out sweet counsel

into her friend's ear. If one's friends would as a rule refrain from

action how much more strongly would real friendship flourish in the

world!

"Now, Kitty, I do trust you will persist in seeing her."

"That's why I'm going there."

"Yes; but she might put you off it, if you're not firm. Of course

she'll deny herself if you send in your name first. What I should do

would be this;--to ask to be shown in to her and then follow the

servant. When the happiness of a life is at stake,--the happinesses

of two lives I may say, and perhaps the immortal welfare of one of

them in another world,--one must not stand too much upon etiquette.

You would never forgive yourself if you did. Your object is to save

him and to shame her out of her vile conduct. To shame her and

frighten her out of it if that be possible. Follow the servant in and

don't give them a moment to think. That's my advice."

In answer to all this Mrs. Furnival did not say much, and what little

she did say was neither in the affirmative nor in the negative.

Martha knew that she was being ill treated, but not on that account

did she relax her friendly efforts. The time would soon come, if

all things went well, when Mrs. Furnival would be driven by the

loneliness of her position to open her heart in a truly loving and

confidential manner. Miss Biggs hoped sincerely that her friend and

her friend's husband might be brought together again;--perhaps by

her own efforts; but she did not anticipate,--or perhaps desire any

speedy termination of the present arrangements. It would be well

that Mr. Furnival should be punished by a separation of some months.

Then, when he had learned to know what it was to have a home without

a "presiding genius," he might, if duly penitent and open in his

confession, be forgiven. That was Miss Biggs's programme, and she

thought it probable that Mrs. Furnival might want a good deal of

consolation before that day of open confession arrived.

"I shall go with you as far as the station, Kitty," she said in a

very decided voice.

"It will not be at all necessary," Mrs. Furnival replied.

"Oh, but I shall. You must want support at such a moment as this, and

as far as I can give it you shall have it."

"But it won't be any support to have you in the cab with me. If you

will believe me, I had rather go alone. It is so necessary that I

should think about all this."

But Martha would not believe her; and as for thinking, she was quite

ready to take that part of the work herself. "Don't say another

word," she said, as she thrust herself in at the cab-door after her

friend. Mrs. Furnival hardly did say another word, but Martha Biggs

said many. She knew that Mrs. Furnival was cross, ill pleased, and

not disposed to confidence. But what of that? Her duty as a friend

was not altered by Mrs. Furnival's ill humour. She would persevere,

and having in her hands so great an opportunity, did not despair but

what the time might come when both Mr. and Mrs. Furnival would with

united voices hail her as their preserver. Poor Martha Biggs! She did

not mean amiss; but she was troublesome.

It was very necessary that Mrs. Furnival should think over the step

which she was taking. What was it that she intended to do when she

arrived at Hamworth? That plan of forcing her way into Lady Mason's

house did not recommend itself to her the more in that it was

recommended by Martha Biggs. "I suppose you will come up to us this

evening?" Martha said, when she left her friend in the railway

carriage. "Not this evening, I think. I shall be so tired," Mrs.

Furnival had replied. "Then I shall come down to you," said Martha,

almost holloaing after her friend, as the train started. Mr. Furnival

would not have been displeased had he known the state of his wife's

mind at that moment towards her late visitor. During the whole of her

journey down to Hamworth she tried to think what she would say to

Lady Mason, but instead of so thinking her mind would revert to the

unpleasantness of Miss Biggs's friendship.

When she left the train at the Hamworth station she was solicited by

the driver of a public vehicle to use his fly, and having ascertained

from the man that he well knew the position of Orley Farm, she got

into the carriage and had herself driven to the residence of her

hated rival. She had often heard of Orley Farm, but she had never as

yet seen it, and now felt considerable anxiety both as regards the

house and its occupant.

"This is Orley Farm, ma'am," said the man, stopping at the gate.

"Shall I drive up?"

But at this moment the gate was opened by a decent, respectable

woman,--Mrs. Furnival would not quite have called her a lady,--who

looked hard at the fly as it turned on to the private road.

"Perhaps this lady could tell me," said Mrs. Furnival, putting out

her hand. "Is this where Lady Mason lives?"

The woman was Mrs. Dockwrath. On that day Samuel Dockwrath had gone

to London, but before starting he had made known to his wife with

fiendish glee that it had been at last decided by all the persons

concerned that Lady Mason should be charged with perjury, and tried

for that offence.

"You don't mean to say that the judges have said so?" asked poor

Miriam.

"I do mean to say that all the judges in England could not save her

from having to stand her trial, and it is my belief that all the

lawyers in the land cannot save her from conviction. I wonder whether

she ever thinks now of those fields which she took away from me!"

Then, when her master's back was turned, she put on her bonnet and

walked up to Orley Farm. She knew well that Lady Mason was at The

Cleeve, and believed that she was about to become the wife of Sir

Peregrine; but she knew also that Lucius was at home, and it might

be well to let him know what was going on. She had just seen Lucius

Mason when she was met by Mrs. Furnival's fly. She had seen Lucius

Mason, and the angry manner in which he declared that he could in no

way interfere in his mother's affairs had frightened her. "But, Mr.

Lucius," she had said, "she ought to be doing something, you know.

There is no believing how bitter Samuel is about it."

"He may be as bitter as he likes, Mrs. Dockwrath," young Mason had

answered with considerable dignity in his manner. "It will not in the

least affect my mother's interests. In the present instance, however,

I am not her adviser." Whereupon Mrs. Dockwrath had retired, and as

she was afraid to go to Lady Mason at The Cleeve, she was about to

return home when she opened the gate for Mrs. Furnival. She then

explained that Lady Mason was not at home and had not been at home

for some weeks; that she was staying with her friends at The Cleeve,

and that in order to get there Mrs. Furnival must go back through

Hamworth and round by the high road.

"I knows the way well enough, Mrs. Dockwrath," said the driver. "I've

been at The Cleeve before now, I guess."

So Mrs. Furnival was driven back to Hamworth, and on going over that

piece of ground she resolved that she would follow Lady Mason to The

Cleeve. Why should she be afraid of Sir Peregrine Orme or of all the

Ormes? Why should she fear any one while engaged in the performance

of so sacred a duty? I must confess that in truth she was very much

afraid, but nevertheless she had herself taken on to The Cleeve. When

she arrived at the door, she asked of course for Lady Mason, but did

not feel at all inclined to follow the servant uninvited into the

house as recommended by Miss Biggs. Lady Mason, the man said, was

not very well, and after a certain amount of parley at the door the

matter ended in her being shown into the drawing-room, where she was

soon joined by Mrs. Orme.

"I am Mrs. Furnival," she began, and then Mrs. Orme begged her to sit

down. "I have come here to see Lady Mason--on some business--some

business not of a very pleasant nature. I'm sure I don't know how to

trouble you with it, and yet--" And then even Mrs. Orme could see

that her visitor was somewhat confused.

"Is it about the trial?" asked Mrs. Orme.

"Then there is really a lawsuit going on?"

"A lawsuit!" said Mrs. Orme, rather puzzled.

"You said something about a trial. Now, Mrs. Orme, pray do not

deceive me. I'm a very unhappy woman; I am indeed."

"Deceive you! Why should I deceive you?"

"No, indeed. Why should you? And now I look at you I do not think you

will."

"Indeed I will not, Mrs. Furnival."

"And there is really a lawsuit then?" Mrs. Furnival persisted in

asking.

"I thought you would know all about it," said Mrs. Orme, "as Mr.

Furnival manages Lady Mason's law business. I thought that perhaps it

was about that that you had come."

Then Mrs. Furnival explained that she knew nothing whatever about

Lady Mason's affairs, that hitherto she had not believed that there

was any trial or any lawsuit, and gradually explained the cause of

all her trouble. She did not do this without sundry interruptions,

caused both by her own feelings and by Mrs. Orme's exclamations. But

at last it all came forth; and before she had done she was calling

her husband Tom, and appealing to her listener for sympathy.

"But indeed it's a mistake, Mrs. Furnival. It is indeed. There are

reasons which make me quite sure of it." So spoke Mrs. Orme. How

could Lady Mason have been in love with Mr. Furnival,--if such a

state of things could be possible under any circumstances,--seeing

that she had been engaged to marry Sir Peregrine? Mrs. Orme did not

declare her reasons, but repeated with very positive assurances her

knowledge that Mrs. Furnival was labouring under some very grievous

error.

"But why should she always be at his chambers? I have seen her there

twice, Mrs. Orme. I have indeed;--with my own eyes."

Mrs. Orme would have thought nothing of it if Lady Mason had

been seen there every day for a week together, and regarded Mrs.

Furnival's suspicions as an hallucination bordering on insanity. A

woman be in love with Mr. Furnival! A very pretty woman endeavour

to entice away from his wife the affection of such a man as that!

As these ideas passed through Mrs. Orme's mind she did not perhaps

remember that Sir Peregrine, who was more than ten years Mr.

Furnival's senior, had been engaged to marry the same lady. But then

she herself loved Sir Peregrine dearly, and she had no such feeling

with reference to Mr. Furnival. She however did what was most within

her power to do to allay the suffering under which her visitor

laboured, and explained to her the position in which Lady Mason was

placed. "I do not think she can see you," she ended by saying, "for

she is in very great trouble."

"To be tried for perjury!" said Mrs. Furnival, out of whose heart all

hatred towards Lady Mason was quickly departing. Had she heard that

she was to be tried for murder,--that she had been convicted for

murder,--it would have altogether softened her heart towards her

supposed enemy. She could forgive her any offence but the one.

"Yes indeed," said Mrs. Orme, wiping a tear away from her eye as she

thought of all the troubles present and to come. "It is the saddest

thing. Poor lady! It would almost break your heart if you were to see

her. Since first she heard of this, which was before Christmas, she

has not had one quiet moment."

"Poor creature!" said Mrs. Furnival.

"Ah, you would say so, if you knew all. She has had to depend a great

deal upon Mr. Furnival for advice, and without that I don't know

what she would do." This Mrs. Orme said, not wishing to revert to

the charge against Lady Mason which had brought Mrs. Furnival down

to Hamworth, but still desirous of emancipating her poor friend

completely from that charge. "And Sir Peregrine also is very kind

to her,--very." This she added; feeling that up to that moment Mrs.

Furnival could have heard nothing of the intended marriage, but

thinking it probable that she must do so before long. "Indeed anybody

would be kind to her who saw her in her suffering. I am sure you

would, Mrs. Furnival."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Furnival who was beginning to entertain

almost a kindly feeling towards Mrs. Orme.

"It is such a dreadful position for a lady. Sometimes I think that

her mind will fail her before the day comes."

"But what a very wicked man that other Mr. Mason must be!" said Mrs.

Furnival.

That was a view of the matter on which Mrs. Orme could not say much.

She disliked that Mr. Mason as much as she could dislike a man whom

she had never seen, but it was not open to her now to say that he was

very wicked in this matter. "I suppose he thinks the property ought

to belong to him," she answered.

"That was settled years ago," said Mrs. Furnival. "Horrid, cruel man!

But after all I don't see why she should mind it so much."

"Oh, Mrs. Furnival!--to stand in a court and be tried."

"But if one is innocent! For my part, if I knew myself innocent I

could brave them all. It is the feeling that one is wrong that cows

one." And Mrs. Furnival thought of the little confession which she

would be called upon to make at home.

And then feeling some difficulty as to her last words in such an

interview, Mrs. Furnival got up to go. "Perhaps, Mrs. Orme," she

said, "I have been foolish in this."

"You have been mistaken, Mrs. Furnival. I am sure of that."

"I begin to think I have. But, Mrs. Orme, will you let me ask you

a favour? Perhaps you will not say anything about my coming here.

I have been very unhappy; I have indeed; and--" Mrs. Furnival's

handkerchief was now up at her eyes, and Mrs. Orme's heart was again

full of pity. Of course she gave the required promise; and, looking

to the character of the woman, we may say that, of course, she kept

it.

"Mrs. Furnival! What was she here about?" Peregrine asked of his

mother.

"I would rather not tell you, Perry," said his mother, kissing him;

and then there were no more words spoken on the subject.

Mrs. Furnival as she made her journey back to London began to dislike

Martha Biggs more and more, and most unjustly attributed to that lady

in her thoughts the folly of this journey to Hamworth. The journey

to Hamworth had been her own doing, and had the idea originated with

Miss Biggs the journey would never have been made. As it was, while

she was yet in the train, she came to the strong resolution of

returning direct from the London station to her own house in Harley

Street. It would be best to cut the knot at once, and thus by a bold

stroke of the knife rid herself of the Orange Street rooms and Miss

Biggs at the same time. She did drive to Harley Street, and on her

arrival at her own door was informed by the astonished Spooner that,

"Master was at home,--all alone in the dining-room. He was going to

dine at home, and seemed very lonely like." There, as she stood in

the hall, there was nothing but the door between her and her husband,

and she conceived that the sound of her arrival must have been

heard by him. For a moment her courage was weak, and she thought of

hurrying up stairs. Had she done so her trouble would still have been

all before her. Some idea of this came upon her mind, and after a

moment's pause, she opened the dining-room door and found herself

in her husband's presence. He was sitting over the fire in his

arm-chair, very gloomily, and had not heard the arrival. He too had

some tenderness left in his heart, and this going away of his wife

had distressed him.

"Tom," she said, going up to him, and speaking in a low voice, "I

have come back again." And she stood before him as a suppliant.

[Illustration: "Tom," she said, "I have come back."]

CHAPTER LII.

SHOWING HOW THINGS WENT ON AT NONINGSBY.

Yes, Lady Staveley had known it before. She had given a fairly

correct guess at the state of her daughter's affections, though

she had not perhaps acknowledged to herself the intensity of her

daughter's feelings. But the fact might not have mattered if it had

never been told. Madeline might have overcome this love for Mr.

Graham, and all might have been well if she had never mentioned

it. But now the mischief was done. She had acknowledged to her

mother,--and, which was perhaps worse, she had acknowledged to

herself,--that her heart was gone, and Lady Staveley saw no cure for

the evil. Had this happened but a few hours earlier she would have

spoken with much less of encouragement to Peregrine Orme.

And Felix Graham was not only in the house, but was to remain there

for yet a while longer, spending a very considerable portion of his

time in the drawing-room. He was to come down on this very day at

three o'clock, after an early dinner, and on the next day he was

to be promoted to the dining-room. As a son-in-law he was quite

ineligible. He had, as Lady Staveley understood, no private fortune,

and he belonged to a profession which he would not follow in the only

way by which it was possible to earn an income by it. Such being

the case, her daughter, whom of all girls she knew to be the most

retiring, the least likely to speak of such feelings unless driven to

it by great stress,--her daughter had positively declared to her that

she was in love with this man! Could anything be more hopeless? Could

any position be more trying?

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" she said, almost wringing her hands in

her vexation,--"No, my darling I am not angry," and she kissed her

child and smoothed her hair. "I am not angry; but I must say I think

it very unfortunate. He has not a shilling in the world."

"I will do nothing that you and papa do not approve," said Madeline,

holding down her head.

"And then you know he doesn't think of such a thing himself--of

course he does not. Indeed, I don't think he's a marrying man at

all."

"Oh, mamma, do not talk in that way;--as if I expected anything. I

could not but tell you the truth when you spoke of Mr. Orme as you

did."

"Poor Mr. Orme! he is such an excellent young man."

"I don't suppose he's better than Mr. Graham, mamma, if you speak of

goodness."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Lady Staveley, very much put beside

herself. "I wish there were no such things as young men at all.

There's Augustus making a fool of himself." And she walked twice the

length of the room in an agony of maternal anxiety. Peregrine Orme

had suggested to her what she would feel if Noningsby were on fire;

but could any such fire be worse than these pernicious love flames?

He had also suggested another calamity, and as Lady Staveley

remembered that, she acknowledged to herself that the Fates were not

so cruel to her as they might have been. So she kissed her daughter,

again assured her that she was by no means angry with her, and then

they parted.

This trouble had now come to such a head that no course was any

longer open to poor Lady Staveley, but that one which she had adopted

in all the troubles of her married life. She would tell the judge

everything, and throw all the responsibility upon his back. Let him

decide whether a cold shoulder or a paternal blessing should be

administered to the ugly young man up stairs, who had tumbled off

his horse the first day he went out hunting, and who would not earn

his bread as others did, but thought himself cleverer than all the

world. The feelings in Lady Staveley's breast towards Mr. Graham at

this especial time were not of a kindly nature. She could not make

comparisons between him and Peregrine Orme without wondering at her

daughter's choice. Peregrine was fair and handsome, one of the

curled darlings of the nation, bright of eye and smooth of skin,

good-natured, of a sweet disposition, a young man to be loved by

all the world, and--incidentally--the heir to a baronetcy and a

good estate. All his people were nice, and he lived close in the

neighbourhood! Had Lady Staveley been set to choose a husband for

her daughter she could have chosen none better. And then she counted

up Felix Graham. His eyes no doubt were bright enough, but taken

altogether he was,--at least so she said to herself--hideously ugly.

He was by no means a curled darling. And then he was masterful in

mind, and not soft and pleasant as was young Orme. He was heir to

nothing; and as to people of his own he had none in particular. Who

could say where he must live? As likely as not in Patagonia, having

been forced to accept a judgeship in that new colony for the sake of

bread. But her daughter should not go to Patagonia with him if she

could help it! So when the judge came home that evening, she told him

all before she would allow him to dress for dinner.

"He certainly is not very handsome," the judge said, when Lady

Staveley insisted somewhat strongly on that special feature of the

case.

"I think he is the ugliest young man I know," said her ladyship.

"He looks very well in his wig," said the judge.

"Wig! Madeline would not see him in a wig; nor anybody else very

often, seeing the way he is going on about his profession. What are

we to do about it?"

"Well. I should say, do nothing."

"And let him propose to the dear girl if he chooses to take the fancy

into his head?"

"I don't see how we are to hinder him. But I have that impression of

Mr. Graham that I do not think he will do anything unhandsome by us.

He has some singular ideas of his own about law, and I grant you that

he is plain--"

"The plainest young man I ever saw," said Lady Staveley.

"But, if I know him, he is a man of high character and much more than

ordinary acquirement."

"I cannot understand Madeline," Lady Staveley went on, not caring

overmuch about Felix Graham's acquirements.

"Well, my dear, I think the key to her choice is this, that she has

judged not with her eyes, but with her ears, or rather with her

understanding. Had she accepted Mr. Orme, I as a father should of

course have been well satisfied. He is, I have no doubt, a fine young

fellow, and will make a good husband some day."

"Oh, excellent!" said her ladyship; "and The Cleeve is only seven

miles."

"But I must acknowledge that I cannot feel angry with Madeline."

"Angry! no, not angry. Who would be angry with the poor child?"

"Indeed, I am somewhat proud of her. It seems to me that she prefers

mind to matter, which is a great deal to say for a young lady."

"Matter!" exclaimed Lady Staveley, who could not but feel that the

term, as applied to such a young man as Peregrine Orme, was very

opprobrious.

"Wit and intellect and power of expression have gone further with her

than good looks and rank and worldly prosperity. If that be so, and I

believe it is, I cannot but love her the better for it."

"So do I love her, as much as any mother can love her daughter."

"Of course you do." And the judge kissed his wife.

"And I like wit and genius and all that sort of thing."

"Otherwise you would have not taken me, my dear."

"You were the handsomest man of your day. That's why I fell in love

with you."

"The compliment is a very poor one," said the judge.

"Never mind that. I like wit and genius too; but wit and genius are

none the better for being ugly; and wit and genius should know how to

butter their own bread before they think of taking a wife."

"You forget, my dear, that for aught we know wit and genius may be

perfectly free from any such thought." And then the judge made it

understood that if he were left to himself he would dress for dinner.

When the ladies left the parlour that evening they found Graham

in the drawing-room, but there was no longer any necessity for

embarrassment on Madeline's part at meeting him. They had been in the

room together on three or four occasions, and therefore she could

give him her hand, and ask after his arm without feeling that every

one was watching her. But she hardly spoke to him beyond this, nor

indeed did she speak much to anybody. The conversation, till the

gentlemen joined them, was chiefly kept up by Sophia Furnival and

Mrs. Arbuthnot, and even after that the evening did not pass very

briskly.

One little scene there was, during which poor Lady Staveley's eyes

were anxiously fixed upon her son, though most of those in the room

supposed that she was sleeping. Miss Furnival was to return to

London on the following day, and it therefore behoved Augustus to be

very sad. In truth he had been rather given to a melancholy humour

during the last day or two. Had Miss Furnival accepted all his civil

speeches, making him answers equally civil, the matter might very

probably have passed by without giving special trouble to any one.

But she had not done this, and therefore Augustus Staveley had

fancied himself to be really in love with her. What the lady's

intentions were I will not pretend to say; but if she was in truth

desirous of becoming Mrs. Staveley, she certainly went about her

business in a discreet and wise manner.

"So you leave us to-morrow, immediately after breakfast," said he,

having dressed his face with that romantic sobriety which he had been

practising for the last three days.

"I am sorry to say that such is the fact," said Sophia.

"To tell you the truth I am not sorry," said Augustus; and he turned

away his face for a moment, giving a long sigh.

"I dare say not, Mr. Staveley; but you need not have said so to me,"

said Sophia, pretending to take him literally at his word.

"Because I cannot stand this kind of thing any longer. I suppose I

must not see you in the morning,--alone?"

"Well, I suppose not. If I can get down to prayers after having all

my things packed up, it will be as much as I can do."

"And if I begged for half an hour as a last kindness--"

"I certainly should not grant it. Go and ask your mother whether such

a request would be reasonable."

"Psha!"

"Ah, but it's not psha! Half-hours between young ladies and young

gentlemen before breakfast are very serious things."

"And I mean to be serious," said Augustus.

"But I don't," said Sophia.

"I am to understand then that under no possible circumstances--"

"Bless me, Mr. Staveley, how solemn you are."

"There are occasions in a man's life when he is bound to be solemn.

You are going away from us, Miss Furnival--"

"One would think I was going to Jeddo, whereas I am going to Harley

Street."

"And I may come and see you there!"

"Of course you may if you like it. According to the usages of the

world you would be reckoned very uncivil if you did not. For myself I

do not much care about such usages, and therefore if you omit it I

will forgive you."

"Very well; then I will say good-night,--and good-bye." These last

words he uttered in a strain which should have melted her heart, and

as he took leave of her he squeezed her hand with an affection that

was almost painful.

It may be remarked that if Augustus Staveley was quite in earnest

with Sophia Furnival, he would have asked her that all-important

question in a straightforward manner as Peregrine Orme had asked it

of Madeline. Perhaps Miss Furnival was aware of this, and, being so

aware, considered that a serious half-hour before breakfast might not

as yet be safe. If he were really in love he would find his way to

Harley Street. On the whole I am inclined to think that Miss Furnival

did understand her business.

On the following morning Miss Furnival went her way without any

further scenes of tenderness, and Lady Staveley was thoroughly glad

that she was gone. "A nasty, sly thing," she said to Baker. "Sly

enough, my lady," said Baker; "but our Mr. Augustus will be one too

many for her. Deary me, to think of her having the imperance to think

of him." In all which Miss Furnival was I think somewhat ill used.

If young gentlemen, such as Augustus Staveley, are allowed to amuse

themselves with young ladies, surely young ladies such as Miss

Furnival should be allowed to play their own cards accordingly.

On that day, early in the morning, Felix Graham sought and obtained

an interview with his host in the judge's own study. "I have come

about two things," he said, taking the easy chair to which he was

invited.

"Two or ten, I shall be very happy," said the judge cheerily.

"I will take business first," said Graham.

"And then pleasure will be the sweeter afterwards," said the judge.

"I have been thinking a great deal about this case of Lady Mason's,

and I have read all the papers, old and new, which Mr. Furnival has

sent me. I cannot bring myself to suppose it possible that she can

have been guilty of any fraud or deception."

"I believe her to be free from all guilt in the matter--as I told you

before. But then of course you will take that as a private opinion,

not as one legally formed. I have never gone into the matter as you

have done."

"I confess that I do not like having dealings with Mr. Chaffanbrass

and Mr. Aram."

"Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram may not be so bad as you, perhaps

in ignorance, suppose them to be. Does it not occur to you that we

should be very badly off without such men as Chaffanbrass and Aram?"

"So we should without chimney-sweepers and scavengers."

"Graham, my dear fellow, judge not that you be not judged. I am older

than you, and have seen more of these men. Believe me that as you

grow older and also see more of them, your opinion will be more

lenient,--and more just. Do not be angry with me for taking this

liberty with you."

"My dear judge, if you knew how I value it;--how I should value any

mark of such kindness that you can show me! However I have decided

that I will know something more of these gentlemen at once. If I have

your approbation I will let Mr. Furnival know that I will undertake

the case."

The judge signified his approbation, and thus the first of those two

matters was soon settled between them.

"And now for the pleasure," said the judge.

"I don't know much about pleasure," said Graham, fidgeting in his

chair, rather uneasily. "I'm afraid there is not much pleasure for

either of us, or for anybody else, in what I'm going to say."

"Then there is so much more reason for having it said quickly.

Unpleasant things should always be got over without delay."

"Nothing on earth can exceed Lady Staveley's kindness to me, and

yours, and that of the whole family since my unfortunate accident."

"Don't think of it. It has been nothing. We like you, but we should

have done as much as that even if we had not."

"And now I'm going to tell you that I have fallen in love with

your daughter Madeline." As the judge wished to have the tale told

quickly, I think he had reason to be satisfied with the very succinct

terms used by Felix Graham.

"Indeed!" said the judge.

"And that was the reason why I wished to go away at the earliest

possible time--and still wish it."

"You are right there, Mr. Graham. I must say you are right there.

Under all the circumstances of the case I think you were right to

wish to leave us."

"And therefore I shall go the first thing to-morrow morning"--in

saying which last words poor Felix could not refrain from showing a

certain unevenness of temper, and some disappointment.

"Gently, gently, Mr. Graham. Let us have a few more words before we

accede to the necessity of anything so sudden. Have you spoken to

Madeline on this subject?"

"Not a word."

"And I may presume that you do not intend to do so."

For a moment or so Felix Graham sat without speaking, and then,

getting up from his chair, he walked twice the length of the room.

"Upon my word, judge, I will not answer for myself if I remain here,"

he said at last.

A softer-hearted man than Judge Staveley, or one who could make

himself more happy in making others happy, never sat on the English

bench. Was not this a gallant young fellow before him,--gallant and

clever, of good honest principles, and a true manly heart? Was he not

a gentleman by birth, education, and tastes? What more should a man

want for a son-in-law? And then his daughter had had the wit to love

this man so endowed. It was almost on his tongue to tell Graham that

he might go and seek the girl and plead his own cause to her.

But bread is bread, and butcher's bills are bills! The man and the

father, and the successful possessor of some thousands a year, was

too strong at last for the soft-hearted philanthropist. Therefore,

having collected his thoughts, he thus expressed himself upon the

occasion:--

"Mr. Graham, I think you have behaved very well in this matter, and

it is exactly what I should have expected from you." The judge at the

time knew nothing about Mary Snow. "As regards yourself personally

I should be proud to own you as my son-in-law, but I am of course

bound to regard the welfare of my daughter. Your means I fear are but

small."

"Very small indeed," said Graham.

"And though you have all those gifts which should bring you on in

your profession, you have learned to entertain ideas, which hitherto

have barred you from success. Now I tell you what you shall do.

Remain here two or three days longer, till you are fit to travel,

and abstain from saying anything to my daughter. Come to me again

in three months, if you still hold the same mind, and I will pledge

myself to tell you then whether or no you have my leave to address my

child as a suitor."

Felix Graham silently took the judge's hand, feeling that a strong

hope had been given to him, and so the interview was ended.

CHAPTER LIII.

LADY MASON RETURNS HOME.

Lady Mason remained at The Cleeve for something more than a week

after that day on which she made her confession, during which time

she was fully committed to take her trial at the next assizes at

Alston on an indictment for perjury. This was done in a manner that

astonished even herself by the absence of all publicity or outward

scandal. The matter was arranged between Mr. Matthew Round and Mr.

Solomon Aram, and was so arranged in accordance with Mr. Furnival's

wishes. Mr. Furnival wrote to say that at such a time he would call

at The Cleeve with a post-chaise. This he did, and took Lady Mason

with him before two magistrates for the county who were sitting at

Doddinghurst, a village five miles distant from Sir Peregrine's

house. Here by agreement they were met by Lucius Mason who was

to act as one of the bailsmen for his mother's appearance at the

trial. Sir Peregrine was the other, but it was brought about by

amicable management between the lawyers that his appearance before

the magistrates was not required. There were also there the two

attorneys, Bridget Bolster the witness, one Torrington from London

who brought with him the absolute deed executed on that 14th of

July with reference to the then dissolved partnership of Mason and

Martock; and there was Mr. Samuel Dockwrath. I must not forget to say

that there was also a reporter for the press, provided by the special

care of the latter-named gentleman.

[Illustration: Lady Mason going before the Magistrates.]

The arrival in the village of four different vehicles, and the sight

of such gentlemen as Mr. Furnival, Mr. Round, and Mr. Aram, of course

aroused some excitement there; but this feeling was kept down as much

as possible, and Lady Mason was very quickly allowed to return to the

carriage. Mr. Dockwrath made one or two attempts to get up a scene,

and to rouse a feeling of public anger against the lady who was to be

tried; but the magistrates put him down. They also seemed to be fully

impressed with a sense of Lady Mason's innocence in the teeth of the

evidence which was given against her. This was the general feeling

on the minds of all people,--except of those who knew most about her.

There was an idea that affairs had so been managed by Mr. Joseph

Mason and Mr. Dockwrath that another trial was necessary, but that

the unfortunate victim of Mr. Mason's cupidity and Mr. Dockwrath's

malice would be washed white as snow when the day of that trial came.

The chief performers on the present occasion were Round and Aram, and

a stranger to such proceedings would have said that they were acting

in concert. Mr. Round pressed for the indictment, and brought forward

in a very short way the evidence of Bolster and Torrington. Mr. Aram

said that his client was advised to reserve her defence, and was

prepared with bail to any amount. Mr. Round advised the magistrates

that reasonable bail should be taken, and then the matter was

settled. Mr. Furnival sat on a chair close to the elder of those two

gentlemen, and whispered a word to him now and then. Lady Mason was

provided with an arm-chair close to Mr. Furnival's right hand, and

close to her right hand stood her son. Her face was covered by a

deep veil, and she was not called upon during the whole proceeding

to utter one audible word. A single question was put to her by the

presiding magistrate before the committal was signed, and it was

understood that some answer was made to it; but this answer reached

the ears of those in the room by means of Mr. Furnival's voice.

It was observed by most of those there that during the whole of the

sitting Lady Mason held her son's hand; but it was observed also that

though Lucius permitted this he did not seem to return the pressure.

He stood there during the entire proceedings without motion or

speech, looking very stern. He signed the bail-bond, but even that

he did without saying a word. Mr. Dockwrath demanded that Lady Mason

should be kept in custody till the bond should also have been signed

by Sir Peregrine; but upon this Mr. Round remarked that he believed

Mr. Joseph Mason had intrusted to him the conduct of the case, and

the elder magistrate desired Mr. Dockwrath to abstain from further

interference. "All right," said he to a person standing close to

him. "But I'll be too many for them yet, as you will see when she is

brought before a judge and jury." And then Lady Mason stood committed

to take her trial at the next Alston assizes.

When Lucius had come forward to hand her from the post-chaise in

which she arrived Lady Mason had kissed him, but this was all

the intercourse that then passed between the mother and son. Mr.

Furnival, however, informed him that his mother would return to Orley

Farm on the next day but one.

"She thinks it better that she should be at home from this time to

the day of the trial," said Mr. Furnival; "and on the whole Sir

Peregrine is inclined to agree with her."

"I have thought so all through," said Lucius.

"But you are to understand that there is no disagreement between your

mother and the family at The Cleeve. The idea of the marriage has, as

I think very properly, been laid aside."

"Of course it was proper that it should be laid aside."

"Yes; but I must beg you to understand that there has been no

quarrel. Indeed you will, I have no doubt, perceive that, as Mrs.

Orme has assured me that she will see your mother constantly till the

time comes."

"She is very kind," said Lucius. But it was evident from the tone of

his voice that he would have preferred that all the Ormes should have

remained away. In his mind this time of suffering to his mother and

to him was a period of trial and probation,--a period, if not of

actual disgrace, yet of disgrace before the world; and he thought

that it would have best become his mother to have abstained from

all friendship out of her own family, and even from all expressed

sympathy, till she had vindicated her own purity and innocence. And

as he thought of this he declared to himself that he would have

sacrificed everything to her comfort and assistance if she would only

have permitted it. He would have loved her, and been tender to her,

receiving on his own shoulders all those blows which now fell so

hardly upon hers. Every word should have been a word of kindness;

every look should have been soft and full of affection. He would have

treated her not only with all the love which a son could show to a

mother, but with all the respect and sympathy which a gentleman could

feel for a lady in distress. But then, in order that such a state

of things as this should have existed, it would have been necessary

that she should have trusted him. She should have leaned upon him,

and,--though he did not exactly say so in talking over the matter

with himself, still he thought it,--on him and on him only. But

she had declined to lean upon him at all. She had gone away to

strangers,--she, who should hardly have spoken to a stranger during

these sad months! She would not have his care; and under those

circumstances he could only stand aloof, hold up his head, and look

sternly. As for her innocence, that was a matter of course. He knew

that she was innocent. He wanted no one to tell him that his own

mother was not a thief, a forger, a castaway among the world's worst

wretches. He thanked no one for such an assurance. Every honest man

must sympathise with a woman so injured. It would be a necessity

of his manhood and of his honesty! But he would have valued most a

sympathy which would have abstained from all expression till after

that trial should be over. It should have been for him to act and for

him to speak during this terrible period. But his mother who was a

free agent had willed it otherwise.

And there had been one other scene. Mr. Furnival had introduced Lady

Mason to Mr. Solomon Aram, having explained to her that it would be

indispensable that Mr. Aram should see her, probably once or twice

before the trial came on.

"But cannot it be done through you?" said Lady Mason. "Though of

course I should not expect that you can so sacrifice your valuable

time."

"Pray believe me that that is not the consideration," said Mr.

Furnival. "We have engaged the services of Mr. Aram because he is

supposed to understand difficulties of this sort better than any

other man in the profession, and his chance of rescuing you from

this trouble will be much better if you can bring yourself to have

confidence in him--full confidence." And Mr. Furnival looked into

her face as he spoke with an expression of countenance that was very

eloquent. "You must not suppose that I shall not do all in my power.

In my proper capacity I shall be acting for you with all the energy

that I can use; but the case has now assumed an aspect which requires

that it should be in an attorney's hands." And then Mr. Furnival

introduced her to Mr. Solomon Aram.

Mr. Solomon Aram was not, in outward appearance, such a man as Lady

Mason, Sir Peregrine Orme, or others quite ignorant in such matters

would have expected. He was not a dirty old Jew with a hooked

nose and an imperfect pronunciation of English consonants. Mr.

Chaffanbrass, the barrister, bore more resemblance to a Jew of that

ancient type. Mr. Solomon Aram was a good-looking man about forty,

perhaps rather over-dressed, but bearing about him no other sign of

vulgarity. Nor at first sight would it probably have been discerned

that he was of the Hebrew persuasion. He had black hair and a

well-formed face; but his eyes were closer than is common with most

of us, and his nose seemed to be somewhat swollen about the bridge.

When one knew that he was a Jew one saw that he was a Jew; but in the

absence of such previous knowledge he might have been taken for as

good a Christian as any other attorney.

Mr. Aram raised his hat and bowed as Mr. Furnival performed the

ceremony of introduction. This was done while she was still seated in

the carriage, and as Lucius was waiting at the door to hand her down

into the house where the magistrates were sitting. "I am delighted to

have the honour of making your acquaintance," said Mr. Aram.

Lady Mason essayed to mutter some word; but no word was audible, nor

was any necessary. "I have no doubt," continued the attorney, "that

we shall pull through this little difficulty without any ultimate

damage whatsoever. In the mean time it is of course disagreeable to

a lady of your distinction." And then he made another bow. "We are

peculiarly happy in having such a tower of strength as Mr. Furnival,"

and then he bowed to the barrister.

"And my old friend Mr. Chaffanbrass is another tower of strength. Eh,

Mr. Furnival?" And so the introduction was over.

Lady Mason had quite understood Mr. Furnival;--had understood both

his words and his face, when he told her how indispensable it was

that she should have full confidence in this attorney. He had meant

that she should tell him all. She must bring herself to confess

everything to this absolute stranger. And then--for the first

time--she felt sure that Mr. Furnival had guessed her secret. He also

knew it, but it would not suit him that any one should know that he

knew it! Alas, alas! would it not be better that all the world should

know it and that there might be an end? Had not her doom been told to

her? Even if the paraphernalia of justice,--the judge, and the jury,

and the lawyers, could be induced to declare her innocent before all

men, must she not confess her guilt to him,--to that one,--for whose

verdict alone she cared? If he knew her to be guilty what matter who

might think her innocent? And she had been told that all must be

declared to him. That property was his,--but his only through her

guilt; and that property must be restored to its owner! So much Sir

Peregrine Orme had declared to be indispensable,--Sir Peregrine Orme,

who in other matters concerning this case was now dark enough in his

judgment. On that point, however, there need be no darkness. Though

the heaven should fall on her devoted head, that tardy justice must

be done!

When this piece of business had been completed at Doddinghurst, Lady

Mason returned to The Cleeve, whither Mr. Furnival accompanied her.

He had offered his seat in the post-chaise to Lucius, but the young

man had declared that he was unwilling to go to The Cleeve, and

consequently there was no opportunity for conversation between Lady

Mason and her son. On her arrival she went at once to her room, and

there she continued to live as she had done for the last few days

till the morning of her departure came. To Mrs. Orme she told all

that had occurred, as Mr. Furnival did also to Sir Peregrine. On that

occasion Sir Peregrine said very little to the barrister, merely

bowing his head courteously as each different point was explained, in

intimation of his having heard and understood what was said to him.

Mr. Furnival could not but see that his manner was entirely altered.

There was no enthusiasm now, no violence of invective against

that wretch at Groby Park, no positive assurance that his guest's.

innocence must come out at the trial bright as the day! He showed no

inclination to desert Lady Mason's cause, and indeed insisted on

hearing the particulars of all that had been done; but he said very

little, and those few words adverted to the terrible sadness of the

subject. He seemed too to be older than he had been, and less firm

in his gait. That terrible sadness had already told greatly upon

him. Those about him had observed that he had not once crossed the

threshold of his hall door since the morning on which Lady Mason had

taken to her own room.

"He has altered his mind," said the lawyer to himself as he was

driven back to the Hamworth station. "He also now believes her to be

guilty." As to his own belief, Mr. Furnival held no argument within

his own breast, but we may say that he was no longer perplexed by

much doubt upon the matter.

And then the morning came for Lady Mason's departure. Sir Peregrine

had not seen her since she had left him in the library after her

confession, although, as may be remembered, he had undertaken to do

so. But he had not then known how Mrs. Orme might act when she heard

the story. As matters had turned out Mrs. Orme had taken upon herself

the care of their guest, and all intercourse between Lady Mason and

Sir Peregrine had passed through his daughter-in-law. But now, on

this morning, he declared that he would go to her up stairs in Mrs.

Orme's room, and himself hand her down through the hall into the

carriage. Against this Lady Mason had expostulated, but in vain.

"It will be better so, dear," Mrs. Orme had said. "It will teach the

servants and people to think that he still respects and esteems you."

"But he does not!" said she, speaking almost sharply. "How would it

be possible? Ah, me--respect and esteem are gone from me for ever!"

"No, not for ever," replied Mrs. Orme. "You have much to bear, but no

evil lasts for ever."

"Will not sin last for ever;--sin such as mine?"

"Not if you repent;--repent and make such restitution as is possible.

Lady Mason, say that you have repented. Tell me that you have asked

Him to pardon you!" And then, as had been so often the case during

these last days, Lady Mason sat silent, with hard, fixed eyes, with

her hands clasped, and her lips compressed. Never as yet had Mrs.

Orme induced her to say that she had asked for pardon at the cost of

telling her son that the property which he called his own had been

procured for him by his mother's fraud. That punishment, and that

only, was too heavy for her neck to bear. Her acquittal in the law

court would be as nothing to her if it must be followed by an avowal

of her guilt to her own son!

Sir Peregrine did come up stairs and handed her down through the hall

as he had proposed. When he came into the room she did not look at

him, but stood leaning against the table, with her eyes fixed upon

the ground.

"I hope you find yourself better," he said, as he put out his hand to

her. She did not even attempt to make a reply, but allowed him just

to touch her fingers.

"Perhaps I had better not come down," said Mrs. Orme. "It will be

easier to say good-bye here."

"Good-bye," said Lady Mason, and her voice sounded in Sir Peregrine's

ears like a voice from the dead.

"God bless you and preserve you," said Mrs. Orme, "and restore you to

your son. God will bless you if you will ask Him. No; you shall not

go without a kiss." And she put out her arms that Lady Mason might

come to her.

The poor broken wretch stood for a moment as though trying to

determine what she would do; and then, almost with a shriek, she

threw herself on to the bosom of the other woman, and burst into a

flood of tears. She had intended to abstain from that embrace; she

had resolved that she would do so, declaring to herself that she was

not fit to be held against that pure heart; but the tenderness of the

offer had overcome her; and now she pressed her friend convulsively

in her arms, as though there might yet be comfort for her as long as

she could remain close to one who was so good to her.

"I shall come and see you very often," said Mrs. Orme,--"almost

daily."

"No, no, no," exclaimed the other, hardly knowing the meaning of her

own words.

"But I shall. My father is waiting now, dear, and you had better go."

Sir Peregrine had turned to the window, where he stood shading his

eyes with his hand. When he heard his daughter-in-law's last words he

again came forward, and offered Lady Mason his arm. "Edith is right,"

he said. "You had better go now. When you are at home you will be

more composed." And then he led her forth, and down the stairs,

and across the hall, and with infinite courtesy put her into the

carriage. It was a moment dreadful to Lady Mason; but to Sir

Peregrine, also, it was not pleasant. The servants were standing

round, officiously offering their aid,--those very servants who had

been told about ten days since that this lady was to become their

master's wife and their mistress. They had been told so with no

injunction as to secrecy, and the tidings had gone quickly through

the whole country. Now it was known that the match was broken off,

that the lady had been living up stairs secluded for the last week,

and that she was to leave the house this morning, having been

committed during the last day or two to stand her trial at the

assizes for some terrible offence! He succeeded in his task. He

handed her into the carriage, and then walked back through his own

servants to the library without betraying to them the depth of his

sorrow; but he knew that the last task had been too heavy for him.

When it was done he shut himself up and sat there for hours without

moving. He also declared to himself that the world was too hard for

him, and that it would be well for him that he should die. Never till

now had he come into close contact with crime, and now the criminal

was one whom as a woman he had learned to love, and whom he had

proposed to the world as his wife! The criminal was one who had

declared her crime in order to protect him, and whom therefore he was

still bound in honour to protect!

When Lady Mason arrived at Orley Farm her son was waiting at the door

to receive her. It should have been said that during the last two

days,--that is ever since the committal,--Mrs. Orme had urged upon

her very strongly that it would be well for her to tell everything to

her son. "What! now, at once?" the poor woman had said. "Yes, dear,

at once," Mrs. Orme had answered. "He will forgive you, for I know he

is good. He will forgive you, and then the worst of your sorrow will

be over." But towards doing this Lady Mason had made no progress even

in her mind. In the violence of her own resolution she had brought

herself to tell her guilt to Sir Peregrine. That effort had nearly

destroyed her, and now she knew that she could not frame the words

which should declare the truth to Lucius. What; tell him the tale;

whereas her whole life had been spent in an effort to conceal it from

him? No. She knew that she could not do it. But the idea of doing so

made her tremble at the prospect of meeting him.

"I am very glad you have come home, mother," said Lucius, as he

received her. "Believe me that for the present this will be the best

place for both of us," and then he led her into the house.

"Dear Lucius, it would always be best for me to be with you, if it

were possible."

He did not accuse her of hypocrisy in saying this; but he could not

but think that had she really thought and felt as she now spoke

nothing need have prevented her remaining with him. Had not his house

ever been open to her? Had he not been willing to make her defence

the first object of his life? Had he not longed to prove himself a

good son? But she had gone from him directly that troubles came upon

her, and now she said that she would fain be with him always--if it

were possible! Where had been the impediment? In what way had it been

not possible? He thought of this with bitterness as he followed her

into the house, but he said not a word of it. He had resolved that he

would be a pattern son, and even now he would not rebuke her.

She had lived in this house for some four-and-twenty years, but it

seemed to her in no way like her home. Was it not the property of her

enemy, Joseph Mason? and did she not know that it must go back into

that enemy's hands? How then could it be to her like a home? The room

in which her bed was laid was that very room in which her sin had

been committed. There in the silent hours of the night, while the

old man lay near his death in the adjoining chamber, had she with

infinite care and much slow preparation done that deed, to undo

which, were it possible, she would now give away her existence,--ay,

her very body and soul. And yet for years she had slept in that room,

if not happily at least tranquilly. It was matter of wonder to her

now, as she looked back at her past life, that her guilt had sat so

lightly on her shoulders. The black unwelcome guest, the spectre

of coming evil, had ever been present to her; but she had seen it

indistinctly, and now and then the power had been hers to close her

eyes. Never again could she close them. Nearer to her, and still

nearer, the spectre came; and now it sat upon her pillow, and put

its claw upon her plate; it pressed upon her bosom with its fiendish

strength, telling her that all was over for her in this world:--ay,

and telling her worse even than that. Her return to her old home

brought with it but little comfort.

And yet she was forced to make an effort at seeming glad that she had

come there,--a terrible effort! He, her son, was not gay or disposed

to receive from her a show of happiness; but he did think that she

should compose herself and be tranquil, and that she should resume

the ordinary duties of her life in her ordinarily quiet way. In

all this she was obliged to conform herself to his wishes,--or to

attempt so to conform herself, though her heart should break in the

struggle. If he did but know it all, then he would suffer her to be

quiet,--suffer her to lie motionless in her misery! Once or twice she

almost said to herself that she would make the effort; but when she

thought of him and his suffering, of his pride, of the respect which

he claimed from all the world as the honest son of an honest mother,

of his stubborn will and stiff neck, which would not bend, but would

break beneath the blow. She had done all for him,--to raise him in

the world; and now she could not bring herself to undo the work that

had cost her so dearly!

That evening she went through the ceremony of dinner with him, and he

was punctilious in waiting upon her as though bread and meat could

comfort her or wine could warm her heart. There was no warmth for her

in all the vintages of the south, no comfort though gods should bring

to her their banquets. She was heavy laden,--laden to the breaking of

her back, and did not know where to lay her burden down.

"Mother," he said to her that night, lifting his head from the books

over which he had been poring, "There must be a few words between us

about this affair. They might as well be spoken now."

"Yes, Lucius; of course--if you desire it."

"There can be no doubt now that this trial will take place."

"No doubt;" she said. "There can be no doubt."

"Is it your wish that I should take any part in it?"

She remained silent, for some moments before she answered him,

thinking,--striving to think, how best she might do him pleasure.

"What part?" she said at last.

"A man's part, and a son's part. Shall I see these lawyers and learn

from them what they are at? Have I your leave to tell them that you

want no subterfuge, no legal quibbles,--that you stand firmly on your

own clear innocence, and that you defy your enemies to sully it?

Mother, those who have sent you to such men as that cunning attorney

have sent you wrong,--have counselled you wrong."

"It cannot be changed now, Lucius."

"It can be changed, if you will tell me to change it."

And then again she paused. Ah, think of her anguish as she sought for

words to answer him! "No, Lucius," she said, "it cannot be changed

now."

"So be it, mother; I will not ask again," and then he moodily

returned to his books, while she returned to her thoughts. Ah, think

of her misery!

CHAPTER LIV.

TELLING ALL THAT HAPPENED BENEATH THE LAMP-POST.

When Felix Graham left Noningsby and made his way up to London, he

came at least to one resolution which he intended to be an abiding

one. That idea of a marriage with a moulded wife should at any rate

be abandoned. Whether it might be his great destiny to be the husband

of Madeline Staveley, or whether he might fail in achieving this

purpose, he declared to himself that it would be impossible that he

should ever now become the husband of Mary Snow. And the ease with

which his conscience settled itself on this matter as soon as he had

received from the judge that gleam of hope astonished even himself.

He immediately declared to himself that he could not marry Mary Snow

without perjury! How could he stand with her before the altar and

swear that he would love her, seeing that he did not love her at

all,--seeing that he altogether loved some one else? He acknowledged

that he had made an ass of himself in this affair of Mary Snow. This

moulding of a wife had failed with him, he said, as it always must

fail with every man. But he would not carry his folly further.

He would go to Mary Snow, tell her the truth, and then bear

whatever injury her angry father might be able to inflict on him.

Independently of that angry father he would of course do for Mary

Snow all that his circumstances would admit.

Perhaps the gentleman of a poetic turn of mind whom Mary had

consented to meet beneath the lamp-post might assist him in his

views; but whether this might be so or not, he would not throw that

meeting ungenerously in her teeth. He would not have allowed that

offence to turn him from his proposed marriage had there been nothing

else to turn him, and therefore he would not plead that offence as

the excuse for his broken troth. That the breaking of that troth

would not deeply wound poor Mary's heart--so much he did permit

himself to believe on the evidence of that lamp-post.

He had written to Mrs. Thomas telling her when he would be at

Peckham, but in his letter he had not said a word as to those

terrible tidings which she had communicated to him. He had written

also to Mary, assuring her that he accused her of no injury against

him, and almost promising her forgiveness; but this letter Mary had

not shown to Mrs. Thomas. In these days Mary's anger against Mrs.

Thomas was very strong. That Mrs. Thomas should have used all her

vigilance to detect such goings on as those of the lamp-post was

only natural. What woman in Mrs. Thomas's position,--or in any other

position,--would not have done so? Mary Snow knew that had she

herself been the duenna she would have left no corner of a box

unturned but she would have found those letters. And having found

them she would have used her power over the poor girl. She knew

that. But she would not have betrayed her to the man. Truth between

woman and woman should have prevented that. Were not the stockings

which she had darned for Mrs. Thomas legion in number? Had she not

consented to eat the veriest scraps of food in order that those three

brats might be fed into sleekness to satisfy their mother's eyes? Had

she not reported well of Mrs. Thomas to her lord, though that house

of Peckham was nauseous to her? Had she ever told to Mr. Graham any

one of those little tricks which were carried on to allure him into a

belief that things at Peckham were prosperous? Had she ever exposed

the borrowing of those teacups when he came, and the fact that those

knobs of white sugar were kept expressly on his behoof? No; she would

have scorned to betray any woman; and that woman whom she had not

betrayed should have shown the same feeling towards her. Therefore

there was enmity at Peckham, and the stockings of those infants lay

unmended in the basket.

"Mary, I have done it all for the best," said Mrs. Thomas, driven to

defend herself by the obdurate silence of her pupil.

"No, Mrs. Thomas, you didn't. You did it for the worst," said Mary.

And then there was again silence between them.

It was on the morning following this that Felix Graham was driven

to the door in a cab. He still carried his arm in a sling, and was

obliged to be somewhat slow in his movements, but otherwise he was

again well. His accident however was so far a godsend to both the

women at Peckham that it gave them a subject on which they were

called upon to speak, before that other subject was introduced. Mary

was very tender in her inquiries,--but tender in a bashful retiring

way. To look at her one would have said that she was afraid to touch

the wounded man lest he should be again broken.

"Oh, I'm all right," said he, trying to assume a look of good-humour.

"I sha'n't go hunting again in a hurry; you may be sure of that."

"We have all great reason to be thankful that Providence interposed

to save you," said Mrs. Thomas, in her most serious tone. Had

Providence interposed to break Mrs. Thomas's collar-bone, or at least

to do her some serious outward injury, what a comfort it would be,

thought Mary Snow.

"Have you seen your father lately?" asked Graham.

"Not since I wrote to you about the money that he--borrowed," said

Mary.

"I told her that she should not have given it to him," said Mrs.

Thomas.

"She was quite right," said Graham. "Who could refuse assistance to

a father in distress?" Whereupon Mary put her handkerchief up to her

eyes and began to cry.

"That's true of course," said Mrs. Thomas; "but it would never do

that he should be a drain in that way. He should feel that if he had

any feeling."

"So he has," said Mary. "And you are driven close enough yourself

sometimes, Mrs. Thomas. There's days when you'd like to borrow

nineteen and sixpence if anybody would lend it you."

"Very well," said Mrs. Thomas, crossing her hands over each other in

her lap and assuming a look of resignation; "I suppose all this will

be changed now. I have endeavoured to do my duty, and very hard it

has been."

Felix felt that the sooner he rushed into the middle of the subject

which brought him there, the better it would be for all parties. That

the two ladies were not very happy together was evident, and then he

made a little comparison between Madeline and Mary. Was it really

the case that for the last three years he had contemplated making

that poor child his wife? Would it not be better for him to tie a

millstone round his neck and cast himself into the sea? That was now

his thought respecting Mary Snow.

"Mrs. Thomas," he said, "I should like to speak to Mary alone for a

few minutes if you could allow it."

"Oh certainly; by all means. It will be quite proper." And gathering

up a bundle of the unfortunate stockings she took herself out of the

room.

Mary, as soon as Graham had spoken, became almost pale, and sat

perfectly still with her eyes fixed on her betrothed husband. While

Mrs. Thomas was there she was prepared for war and her spirit was hot

within her, but all that heat fled in a moment when she found herself

alone with the man to whom it belonged to speak her doom. He had

almost said that he would forgive her, but yet she had a feeling that

that had been done which could not altogether be forgiven. If he

asked her whether she loved the hero of the lamp-post what would she

say? Had he asked her whether she loved him, Felix Graham, she would

have sworn that she did, and have thought that she was swearing

truly; but in answer to that other question if it were asked, she

felt that her answer must be false. She had no idea of giving up

Felix of her own accord, if he were still willing to take her. She

did not even wish that he would not take her. It had been the lesson

of her life that she was to be his wife, and, by becoming so, provide

for herself and for her wretched father. Nevertheless a dream of

something different from that had come across her young heart, and

the dream had been so pleasant! How painfully, but yet with what a

rapture, had her heart palpitated as she stood for those ten wicked

minutes beneath the lamp-post!

"Mary," said Felix, as soon as they were alone,--and as he spoke he

came up to her and took her hand, "I trust that I may never be the

cause to you of any unhappiness;--that I may never be the means of

making you sad."

"Oh, Mr. Graham, I am sure that you never will. It is I that have

been bad to you."

"No, Mary, I do not think you have been bad at all. I should have

been sorry that that had happened, and that I should not have known

it."

"I suppose she was right to tell, only--" In truth Mary did not at

all understand what might be the nature of Graham's thoughts and

feelings on such a subject. She had a strong woman's idea that the

man whom she ought to love would not be gratified by her meeting

another man at a private assignation, especially when that other man

had written to her a love-letter; but she did not at all know how far

such a sin might be regarded as pardonable according to the rules of

the world recognised on such subjects. At first, when the letters

were discovered and the copies of them sent off to Noningsby, she

thought that all was over. According to her ideas, as existing

at that moment, the crime was conceived to be one admitting of

no pardon; and in the hours spent under that conviction all her

consolation came from the feeling that there was still one who

regarded her as an angel of light. But then she had received Graham's

letter, and as she began to understand that pardon was possible, that

other consolation waxed feeble and dim. If Felix Graham chose to take

her, of course she was there for him to take. It never for a moment

occurred to her that she could rebel against such taking, even though

she did shine as an angel of light to one dear pair of eyes.

"I suppose she was right to tell you, only--"

"Do not think, Mary, that I am going to scold you, or even that I am

angry with you."

"Oh, but I know you must be angry."

"Indeed I am not. If I pledge myself to tell you the truth in

everything, will you be equally frank with me?"

"Yes," said Mary. But it was much easier for Felix to tell the truth

than for Mary to be frank. I believe that schoolmasters often tell

fibs to schoolboys, although it would be so easy for them to tell the

truth. But how difficult it is for the schoolboy always to tell the

truth to his master! Mary Snow was now as a schoolboy before her

tutor, and it may almost be said that the telling of the truth was

to her impossible. But of course she made the promise. Who ever said

that she would not tell the truth when so asked?

"Have you ever thought, Mary, that you and I would not make each

other happy if we were married?"

"No; I have never thought that," said Mary innocently. She meant to

say exactly that which she thought Graham would wish her to say, but

she was slow in following his lead.

"It has never occurred to you that though we might love each other

very warmly as friends--and so I am sure we always shall--yet we

might not suit each other in all respects as man and wife?"

"I mean to do the very best I can; that is, if--if--if you are not

too much offended with me now."

"But, Mary, it should not be a question of doing the best you can.

Between man and wife there should be no need of such effort. It

should be a labour of love."

"So it will;--and I'm sure I'll labour as hard as I can."

Felix began to perceive that the line he had taken would not answer

the required purpose, and that he must be somewhat more abrupt with

her,--perhaps a little less delicate, in coming to the desired point.

"Mary," he said, "what is the name of that gentleman whom--whom you

met out of doors you know?"

"Albert Fitzallen," said Mary, hesitating very much as she pronounced

the name, but nevertheless rather proud of the sound.

"And you are--fond of him?" asked Graham.

Poor girl! What was she to say? "No; I'm not very fond of him."

"Are you not? Then why did you consent to that secret meeting?"

"Oh, Mr. Graham--I didn't mean it; indeed I didn't. And I didn't tell

him to write to me, nor yet to come looking after me. Upon my word I

didn't. But then I thought when he sent me that letter that he didn't

know;--about you I mean; and so I thought I'd better tell him; and

that's why I went. Indeed that was the reason."

"Mrs. Thomas could have told him that."

"But I don't like Mrs. Thomas, and I wouldn't for worlds that she

should have had anything to do with it. I think Mrs. Thomas has

behaved very bad to me; so I do. And you don't half know her;--that

you don't."

"I will ask you one more question, Mary, and before answering it I

want to make you believe that my only object in asking it is to

ascertain how I may make you happy. When you did meet Mr.--this

gentleman--"

"Albert Fitzallen."

"When you did meet Mr. Fitzallen, did you tell him nothing else

except that you were engaged to me? Did you say nothing to him as to

your feelings towards himself?"

"I told him it was very wrong of him to write me that letter."

"And what more did you tell him?"

"Oh, Mr. Graham, I won't see him any more; indeed I won't. I give you

my most solemn promise. Indeed I won't. And I will never write a line

to him,--or look at him. And if he sends anything I'll send it to

you. Indeed I will. There was never anything of the kind before; upon

my word there wasn't. I did let him take my hand, but I didn't know

how to help it when I was there. And he kissed me--only once. There;

I've told it all now, as though you were looking at me. And I ain't a

bad girl, whatever she may say of me. Indeed I ain't." And then poor

Mary Snow burst out into an agony of tears.

Felix began to perceive that he had been too hard upon her. He had

wished that the first overtures of a separation should come from her,

and in wishing this he had been unreasonable. He walked for a while

about the room, and then going up to her he stood close by her and

took her hand. "Mary," he said, "I'm sure you're not a bad girl."

"No;" she said, "no, I ain't;" still sobbing convulsively. "I didn't

mean anything wrong, and I couldn't help it."

"I am sure you did not, and nobody has said you did."

"Yes, they have. She has said so. She said that I was a bad girl. She

told me so, up to my face."

"She was very wrong if she said so."

"She did then, and I couldn't bear it."

"I have not said so, and I don't think so. Indeed in all this matter

I believe that I have been more to blame than you."

"No;--I know I was wrong. I know I shouldn't have gone to see him."

"I won't even say as much as that, Mary. What you should have

done;--only the task would have been too hard for any young girl--was

to have told me openly that you--liked this young gentleman."

"But I don't want ever to see him again."

"Look here, Mary," he said. But now he had dropped her hand and taken

a chair opposite to her. He had begun to find that the task which he

had proposed to himself was not so easy even for him. "Look here,

Mary. I take it that you do like this young gentleman. Don't answer

me till I have finished what I am going to say. I suppose you do like

him,--and if so it would be very wicked in you to marry me."

"Oh, Mr. Graham--"

"Wait a moment, Mary. But there is nothing wicked in your liking

him." It may be presumed that Mr. Graham would hold such an opinion

as this, seeing that he had allowed himself the same latitude of

liking. "It was perhaps only natural that you should learn to do

so. You have been taught to regard me rather as a master than as a

lover."

"Oh, Mr. Graham, I'm sure I've loved you. I have indeed. And I will.

I won't even think of Al--"

"But I want you to think of him,--that is if he be worth thinking

of."

"He's a very good young man, and always lives with his mother."

"It shall be my business to find out that. And now Mary, tell me

truly. If he be a good young man, and if he loves you well enough to

marry you, would you not be happier as his wife than you would as

mine?"

There! The question that he wished to ask her had got itself asked at

last. But if the asking had been difficult, how much more difficult

must have been the answer! He had been thinking over all this for the

last fortnight, and had hardly known how to come to a resolution. Now

he put the matter before her without a moment's notice and expected

an instant decision. "Speak the truth, Mary;--what you think about

it;--without minding what anybody may say of you." But Mary could not

say anything, so she again burst into tears.

"Surely you know the state of your own heart, Mary?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"My only object is to secure your happiness;--the happiness of both

of us, that is."

"I'll do anything you please," said Mary.

"Well then, I'll tell you what I think. I fear that a marriage

between us would not make either of us contented with our lives. I'm

too old and too grave for you." Yet Mary Snow was not younger than

Madeline Staveley. "You have been told to love me; and you think that

you do love me because you wish to do what you think to be your duty.

But I believe that people can never really love each other merely

because they are told to do so. Of course I cannot say what sort of

a young man Mr. Fitzallen may be; but if I find that he is fit to

take care of you, and that he has means to support you,--with such

little help as I can give,--I shall be very happy to promote such an

arrangement."

Everybody will of course say that Felix Graham was base in not

telling her that all this arose, not from her love affair with Albert

Fitzallen, but from his own love affair with Madeline Staveley. But

I am inclined to think that everybody will be wrong. Had he told her

openly that he did not care for her, but did care for some one else,

he would have left her no alternative. As it was, he did not mean

that she should have any alternative. But he probably consulted her

feelings best in allowing her to think that she had a choice. And

then, though he owed much to her, he owed nothing to her father;

and had he openly declared his intention of breaking off the match

because he had attached himself to some one else, he would have put

himself terribly into her father's power. He was willing to submit to

such pecuniary burden in the matter as his conscience told him that

he ought to bear; but Mr. Snow's ideas on the subject of recompense

night be extravagant; and therefore,--as regarded Snow the

father,--he thought that he might make some slight and delicate use

of the meeting under the lamp-post. In doing so he would be very

careful to guard Mary from her father's anger. Indeed Mary would be

surrendered, out of his own care, not to that of her father, but to

the fostering love of the gentleman in the medical line of life.

"I'll do anything that you please," said Mary, upon whose mind and

heart all these changes had come with a suddenness which prevented

her from thinking,--much less speaking her thoughts.

"Perhaps you had better mention it to Mrs. Thomas."

"Oh, Mr. Graham, I'd rather not talk to her. I don't love her a bit."

"Well, I will not press it on you if you do not wish it. And have I

your permission to speak to Mr. Fitzallen;--and if he approves to

speak to his mother?"

"I'll do anything you think best, Mr. Graham," said poor Mary. She

was poor Mary; for though she had consented to meet a lover beneath

the lamp-post, she had not been without ambition, and had looked

forward to the glory of being wife to such a man as Felix Graham. She

did not however, for one moment, entertain any idea of resistance to

his will.

And then Felix left her, having of course an interview with Mrs.

Thomas before he quitted the house. To her, however, he said nothing.

"When anything is settled, Mrs. Thomas, I will let you know." The

words were so lacking in confidence that Mrs. Thomas when she heard

them knew that the verdict had gone against her.

Felix for many months had been accustomed to take leave of Mary Snow

with a kiss. But on this day he omitted to kiss her, and then Mary

knew that it was all over with her ambition. But love still remained

to her. "There is some one else who will be proud to kiss me," she

said to herself, as she stood alone in the room when he closed the

door behind him.

CHAPTER LV.

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN HARLEY STREET.

"Tom, I've come back again," said Mrs. Furnival, as soon as the

dining-room door was closed behind her back.

"I'm very glad to see you; I am indeed," said he, getting up and

putting out his hand to her. "But I really never knew why you went

away."

"Oh yes, you know. I'm sure you know why I went. But--"

"I'll be shot if I did then."

"I went away because I did not like Lady Mason going to your

chambers."

"Psha!"

"Yes; I know I was wrong, Tom. That is I was wrong--about that."

"Of course you were, Kitty."

"Well; don't I say I was? And I've come back again, and I beg your

pardon;--that is about the lady."

"Very well. Then there's an end of it."

"But Tom; you know I've been provoked. Haven't I now? How often have

you been home to dinner since you have been member of parliament for

that place?"

"I shall be more at home now, Kitty."

"Shall you indeed? Then I'll not say another word to vex you. What on

earth can I want, Tom, except just that you should sit at home with

me sometimes on evenings, as you used to do always in the old days?

And as for Martha Biggs--"

"Is she come back too?"

"Oh dear no. She's in Red Lion Square. And I'm sure, Tom, I never had

her here except when you wouldn't dine at home. I wonder whether you

know how lonely it is to sit down to dinner all by oneself!"

"Why; I do it every other day of my life. And I never think of

sending for Martha Biggs; I promise you that."

"She isn't very nice, I know," said Mrs. Furnival--"that is, for

gentlemen."

"I should say not," said Mr. Furnival. Then the reconciliation had

been effected, and Mrs. Furnival went up stairs to prepare for

dinner, knowing that her husband would be present, and that Martha

Biggs would not. And just as she was taking her accustomed place at

the head of the table, almost ashamed to look up lest she should

catch Spooner's eye who was standing behind his master, Rachel went

off in a cab to Orange Street, commissioned to pay what might be due

for the lodgings, to bring back her mistress's boxes, and to convey

the necessary tidings to Miss Biggs.

"Well I never!" said Martha, as she listened to Rachel's story.

"And they're quite loving I can assure you," said Rachel.

"It'll never last," said Miss Biggs triumphantly--"never. It's been

done too sudden to last."

"So I'll say good-night if you please, Miss Biggs," said Rachel, who

was in a hurry to get back to Harley Street.

"I think she might have come here before she went there; especially

as it wasn't anything out of her way. She couldn't have gone shorter

than Bloomsbury Square, and Russell Square, and over Tottenham Court

Road."

"Missus didn't think of that, I dare say."

"She used to know the way about these parts well enough. But give her

my love, Rachel." Then Martha Biggs was again alone, and she sighed

deeply.

It was well that Mrs. Furnival came back so quickly to her own house,

as it saved the scandal of any domestic quarrel before her daughter.

On the following day Sophia returned, and as harmony was at that time

reigning in Harley Street, there was no necessity that she should

be presumed to know anything of what had occurred. That she did

know,--know exactly what her mother had done, and why she had done

it, and how she had come back, leaving Martha Biggs dumfounded by

her return, is very probable, for Sophia Furnival was a clever girl,

and one who professed to understand the inns and outs of her own

family,--and perhaps of some other families. But she behaved very

prettily to her papa and mamma on the occasion, never dropping a word

which could lead either of them to suppose that she had interrogated

Rachel, been confidential with the housemaid, conversed on the

subject--even with Spooner, and made a morning call on Martha Biggs

herself.

There arose not unnaturally some conversation between the mother

and daughter as to Lady Mason;--not as to Lady Mason's visits to

Lincoln's Inn and their impropriety as formerly presumed;--not at

all as to that; but in respect to her present lamentable position

and that engagement which had for a time existed between her and Sir

Peregrine Orme. On this latter subject Mrs. Furnival had of course

heard nothing during her interview with Mrs. Orme at Noningsby. At

that time Lady Mason had formed the sole subject of conversation;

but in explaining to Mrs. Furnival that there certainly could be

no unhallowed feeling between her husband and the lady, Mrs. Orme

had not thought it necessary to allude to Sir Peregrine's past

intentions. Mrs. Furnival, however, had heard the whole matter

discussed in the railway carriage, had since interrogated her

husband,--learning, however, not very much from him,--and now

inquired into all the details from her daughter.

"And she and Sir Peregrine were really to be married?" Mrs. Furnival,

as she asked the question, thought with confusion of her own unjust

accusations against the poor woman. Under such circumstances as

those Lady Mason must of course have been innocent as touching Mr.

Furnival.

"Yes," said Sophia. "There is no doubt whatsoever that they were

engaged. Sir Peregrine told Lady Staveley so himself."

"And now it's all broken off again?"

"Oh yes; it is all broken off now. I believe the fact to be this.

Lord Alston, who lives near Noningsby, is a very old friend of Sir

Peregrine's. When he heard of it he went to The Cleeve--I know that

for certain;--and I think he talked Sir Peregrine out of it."

"But, my conscience, Sophia--after he had made her the offer!"

"I fancy that Mrs. Orme arranged it all. Whether Lord Alston saw

her or not I don't know. My belief is that Lady Mason behaved very

well all through, though they say very bitter things against her at

Noningsby."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival, the feelings of whose heart were

quite changed as regarded Lady Mason.

"I never knew a woman so badly treated." Sophia had her own reasons

for wishing to make the best of Lady Mason's case. "And for myself

I do not see why Sir Peregrine should not have married her if he

pleased."

"He is rather old, my dear."

"People don't think so much about that now-a-days as they used. If he

liked it, and she too, who had a right to say anything? My idea is

that a man with any spirit would have turned Lord Alston out of the

house. What business had he to interfere?"

"But about the trial, Sophia?"

"That will go on. There's no doubt about that. But they all say that

it's the most unjust thing in the world, and that she must be proved

innocent. I heard the judge say so myself."

"But why are they allowed to try her then?"

"Oh, papa will tell you that."

"I never like to bother your papa about law business." Particularly

not, Mrs. Furnival, when he has a pretty woman for his client!

"My wonder is that she should make herself so unhappy about it,"

continued Sophia. "It seems that she is quite broken down."

"But won't she have to go and sit in the court,--with all the people

staring at her?"

"That won't kill her," said Sophia, who felt that she herself would

not perish under any such process. "If I was sure that I was in the

right, I think that I could hold up my head against all that. But

they say that she is crushed to the earth."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival. "I wish that I could do anything

for her." And in this way they talked the matter over very

comfortably.

Two or three days after this Sophia Furnival was sitting alone in the

drawing-room in Harley Street, when Spooner answered a double knock

at the door, and Lucius Mason was shown up stairs. Mrs. Furnival had

gone to make her peace in Red Lion Square, and there may perhaps

be ground for supposing that Lucius had cause to expect that Miss

Furnival might be seen at this hour without interruption. Be that

as it may, she was found alone, and he was permitted to declare his

purpose unmolested by father, mother, or family friends.

"You remember how we parted at Noningsby," said he, when their first

greetings were well over.

"Oh, yes; I remember it very well. I do not easily forget words such

as were spoken then."

"You said that you would never turn away from me."

"Nor will I;--that is with reference to the matter as to which we

were speaking."

"Is our friendship then to be confined to one subject?"

"By no means. Friendship cannot be so confined, Mr. Mason. Friendship

between true friends must extend to all the affairs of life. What I

meant to say was this-- But I am quite sure that you understand me

without any explanation."

He did understand her. She meant to say that she had promised to

him her sympathy and friendship, but nothing more. But then he had

asked for nothing more. The matter of doubt within his own heart was

this. Should he or should he not ask for more; and if he resolved

on answering this question in the affirmative, should he ask for it

now? He had determined that morning that he would come to some fixed

purpose on this matter before he reached Harley Street. As he crossed

out of Oxford Street from the omnibus he had determined that the

present was no time for love-making;--walking up Regent Street,

he had told himself that if he had one faithful heart to bear him

company he could bear his troubles better;--as he made his way along

the north side of Cavendish Square he pictured to himself what would

be the wound to his pride if he were rejected;--and in passing the

ten or twelve houses which intervened in Harley Street between the

corner of the square and the abode of his mistress, he told himself

that the question must be answered by circumstances.

"Yes, I understand you," he said. "And believe me in this--I would

not for worlds encroach on your kindness. I knew that when I pressed

your hand that night, I pressed the hand of a friend,--and nothing

more."

"Quite so," said Sophia. Sophia's wit was usually ready enough, but

at that moment she could not resolve with what words she might make

the most appropriate reply to her--friend. What she did say was

rather lame, but it was not dangerous.

"Since that I have suffered a great deal," said Lucius. "Of course

you know that my mother has been staying at The Cleeve?"

"Oh yes. I believe she left it only a day or two since."

"And you heard perhaps of her--. I hardly know how to tell you, if

you have not heard it."

"If you mean about Sir Peregrine, I have heard of that."

"Of course you have. All the world has heard of it." And Lucius Mason

got up and walked about the room holding his hand to his brow. "All

the world are talking about it. Miss Furnival, you have never known

what it is to blush for a parent."

Miss Furnival at the moment felt a sincere hope that Mr. Mason might

never hear of Mrs. Furnival's visit to the neighbourhood of Orange

Street and of the causes which led to it, and by no means thought

it necessary to ask for her friend's sympathy on that subject. "No,"

said she, "I never have; nor need you do so for yours. Why should not

Lady Mason have married Sir Peregrine Orme, if they both thought such

a marriage fitting?"

"What; at such a time as this; with these dreadful accusations

running in her ears? Surely this was no time for marrying! And what

has come of it? People now say that he has rejected her and sent her

away."

"Oh no. They cannot say that."

"But they do. It is reported that Sir Peregrine has sent her away

because he thinks her to be guilty. That I do not believe. No honest

man, no gentleman, could think her guilty. But is it not dreadful

that such things should be said?"

"Will not the trial take place very shortly now? When that is once

over all these troubles will be at an end."

"Miss Furnival, I sometimes think that my mother will hardly have

strength to sustain the trial. She is so depressed that I almost fear

her mind will give way; and the worst of it is that I am altogether

unable to comfort her."

"Surely that at present should specially be your task."

"I cannot do it. What should I say to her? I think that she is wrong

in what she is doing; thoroughly, absolutely wrong. She has got about

her a parcel of lawyers. I beg your pardon, Miss Furnival, but you

know I do not mean such as your father."

"But has not he advised it?"

"If so I cannot but think he is wrong. They are the very scum of

the gaols; men who live by rescuing felons from the punishment they

deserve. What can my mother require of such services as theirs? It is

they that frighten her and make her dread all manner of evils. Why

should a woman who knows herself to be good and just fear anything

that the law can do to her?"

"I can easily understand that such a position as hers must be very

dreadful. You must not be hard upon her, Mr. Mason, because she is

not as strong as you might be."

"Hard upon her! Ah, Miss Furnival, you do not know me. If she would

only accept my love I would wait upon her as a mother does upon her

infant. No labour would be too much for me; no care would be too

close. But her desire is that this affair should never be mentioned

between us. We are living now in the same house, and though I see

that this is killing her yet I may not speak of it." Then he got

up from his chair, and as he walked about the room he took his

handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes.

"I wish I could comfort you," said she. And in saying so she spoke

the truth. By nature she was not tender hearted, but now she did

sympathise with him. By nature, too, she was not given to any deep

affection, but she did feel some spark of love for Lucius Mason. "I

wish I could comfort you." And as she spoke she also got up from her

chair.

"And you can," said he, suddenly stopping himself and coming close to

her. "You can comfort me,--in some degree. You and you only can do

so. I know this is no time for declarations of love. Were it not that

we are already so much to each other, I would not indulge myself at

such a moment with such a wish. But I have no one whom I can love;

and--it is very hard to bear." And then he stood, waiting for her

answer, as though he conceived that he had offered her his hand.

But Miss Furnival well knew that she had received no offer. "If my

warmest sympathy can be of service to you--"

"It is your love I want," he said, taking her hand as he spoke. "Your

love, so that I may look on you as my wife;--your acceptance of my

love, so that we may be all in all to each other. There is my hand.

I stand before you now as sad a man as there is in all London. But

there is my hand--will you take it and give me yours in pledge of

your love."

I should be unjust to Lucius Mason were I to omit to say that he

played his part with a becoming air. Unhappiness and a melancholy

mood suited him perhaps better than the world's ordinary good-humour.

He was a man who looked his best when under a cloud, and shone the

brightest when everything about him was dark. And Sophia also was not

unequal to the occasion. There was, however, this difference between

them. Lucius was quite honest in all that he said and did upon the

occasion; whereas Miss Furnival was only half honest. Perhaps she was

not capable of a higher pitch of honesty than that.

"There is my hand," said she; and they stood holding each other, palm

to palm.

"And with it your heart?" said Lucius.

"And with it my heart," answered Sophia. Nor as she spoke did she

hesitate for a moment, or become embarrassed, or lose her command

of feature. Had Augustus Staveley gone through the same ceremony at

Noningsby in the same way I am inclined to think that she would have

made the same answer. Had neither done so, she would not on that

account have been unhappy. What a blessed woman would Lady Staveley

have been had she known what was being done in Harley Street at this

moment!

In some short rhapsody of love it may be presumed that Lucius

indulged himself when he found that the affair which he had in hand

had so far satisfactorily arranged itself. But he was in truth

too wretched at heart for any true enjoyment of the delights of

a favoured suitor. They were soon engaged again on that terrible

subject, seated side by side indeed and somewhat close, but the tone

of their voices and their very words were hardly different from what

they might have been had no troth been plighted between them. His

present plan was that Sophia should visit Orley Farm for a time, and

take that place of dear and bosom friend which a woman circumstanced

as was his mother must so urgently need. We, my readers, know well

who was now that loving friend, and we know also which was best

fitted for such a task, Sophia Furnival or Mrs. Orme. But we have

had, I trust, better means of reading the characters of those ladies

than had fallen to the lot of Lucius Mason, and should not be angry

with him because his eyes were dark.

Sophia hesitated a moment before she answered this proposition,--not

as though she were slack in her love, or begrudged her services to

his mother; but it behoved her to look carefully at the circumstances

before she would pledge herself to such an arrangement as that. If

she went to Orley Farm on such a mission would it not be necessary

to tell her father and mother,--nay, to tell all the world that she

was engaged to Lucius Mason; and would it be wise to make such a

communication at the present moment? Lucius said a word to her of

going into court with his mother, and sitting with her, hand in hand,

while that ordeal was passing by. In the publicity of such sympathy

there was something that suited the bearings of Miss Furnival's mind,

The idea that Lady Mason was guilty had never entered her head, and

therefore, on this she thought there could be no disgrace in such a

proceeding. But nevertheless--might it not be prudent to wait till

that trial were over?

"If you are my wife you must be her daughter; and how can you better

take a daughter's part?" pleaded Lucius.

"No, no; and I would do it with my whole heart. But, Lucius, does she

know me well enough? It is of her that we must think. After all that

you have told me, can we think that she would wish me to be there?"

It was his desire that his mother should learn to have such a wish,

and this he explained to her. He himself could do but little at home

because he could not yield his opinion on those matters of importance

as to which he and his mother differed so vitally; but if she had a

woman with her in the house,--such a woman as his own Sophia,--then

he thought her heart would be softened and part of her sorrow might

be assuaged.

Sophia at last said that she would think about it. It would be

improper, she said, to pledge herself to anything rashly. It might be

that as her father was to defend Lady Mason, he might on that account

object to his daughter being in the court. Lucius declared that this

would be unreasonable,--unless indeed Mr. Furnival should object to

his daughter's engagement. And might he not do so? Sophia thought

it very probable that he might. It would make no difference in her,

she said. Her engagement would be equally binding,--as permanently

binding, let who would object to it. And as she made this

declaration, there was of course a little love scene. But, for the

present, it might be best that in this matter she should obey her

father. And then she pointed out how fatal it might be to avert her

father from the cause while the trial was still pending. Upon the

whole she acted her part very prudently, and when Lucius left her

she was pledged to nothing but that one simple fact of a marriage

engagement.

CHAPTER LVI.

HOW SIR PEREGRINE DID BUSINESS WITH MR. ROUND.

In the mean time Sir Peregrine was sitting at home trying to

determine in what way he should act under the present emergency,

actuated as he was on one side by friendship and on the other by

duty. For the first day or two--nay for the first week after the

confession had been made to him,--he had been so astounded, had

been so knocked to the earth, and had remained in such a state of

bewilderment, that it had been impossible for him to form for himself

any line of conduct. His only counsellor had been Mrs. Orme; and,

though he could not analyze the matter, he felt that her woman's

ideas of honour and honesty were in some way different from his ideas

as a man. To her the sorrows and utter misery of Lady Mason seemed of

greater weight than her guilt. At least such was the impression which

her words left. Mrs. Orme's chief anxiety in the matter still was

that Lady Mason should be acquitted;--as strongly so now as when they

both believed her to be as guiltless as themselves. But Sir Peregrine

could not look at it in this light. He did not say that he wished

that she might be found guilty;--nor did he wish it. But he did

announce his opinion to his daughter-in-law that the ends of justice

would so be best promoted, and that if the matter were driven to a

trial it would not be for the honour of the court that a false

verdict should be given. Nor would he believe that such a false

verdict could be obtained. An English judge and an English jury were

to him the Palladium of discerning truth. In an English court of law

such a matter could not remain dark;--nor ought it, let whatever

misery betide. It was strange how that old man should have lived so

near the world for seventy years, should have taken his place in

Parliament and on the bench, should have rubbed his shoulders so

constantly against those of his neighbours, and yet have retained so

strong a reliance on the purity of the world in general. Here and

there such a man may still be found, but the number is becoming very

few.

As for the property, that must of necessity be abandoned. Lady Mason

had signified her agreement to this; and therefore he was so far

willing that she should be saved from further outward punishment, if

that were still possible. His plan was this; and to his thinking it

was the only plan that was feasible. Let the estate be at once given

up to the proper owner,--even now, before the day of trial should

come; and then let them trust, not to Joseph Mason, but to Joseph

Mason's advisers to abstain from prosecuting the offender. Even this

course he knew to be surrounded by a thousand difficulties; but it

might be possible. Of Mr. Round, old Mr. Round, he had heard a good

report. He was a kind man, and even in this very matter had behaved

in a way that had shamed his client. Might it not be possible that

Mr. Round would engage to drop the prosecution if the immediate

return of the property were secured? But to effect this must he not

tell Mr. Round of the woman's guilt? And could he manage it himself?

Must he not tell Mr. Furnival? And by so doing, would he not rob Lady

Mason of her sole remaining tower of strength?--for if Mr. Furnival

knew that she was guilty, Mr. Furnival must of course abandon her

cause. And then Sir Peregrine did not know how to turn himself, as he

thus argued the matter within his own bosom.

And then too his own disgrace sat very heavy on him. Whether or no

the law might pronounce Lady Mason to have been guilty, all the world

would know her guilt. When that property should be abandoned, and

her wretched son turned out to earn his bread, it would be well

understood that she had been guilty. And this was the woman, this

midnight forger, whom he had taken to his bosom, and asked to be

his wife! He had asked her, and she had consented, and then he had

proclaimed the triumph of his love to all the world. When he stood

there holding her to his breast he had been proud of her affection.

When Lord Alston had come to him with his caution he had scorned his

old friend and almost driven him from his door. When his grandson had

spoken a word, not to him but to another, he had been full of wrath.

He had let it be known widely that he would feel no shame in showing

her to the world as Lady Orme. And now she was a forger, and a

perjurer, and a thief;--a thief who for long years had lived on the

proceeds of her dexterous theft. And yet was he not under a deep

obligation to her--under the very deepest? Had she not saved him from

a worse disgrace;--saved him at the cost of all that was left to

herself? Was he not still bound to stand by her? And did he not still

love her?

Poor Sir Peregrine! May we not say that it would have been well for

him if the world and all its trouble could have now been ended so

that he might have done with it?

Mrs. Orme was his only counsellor, and though she could not be

brought to agree with him in all his feelings, yet she was of

infinite comfort to him. Had she not shared with him this terrible

secret his mind would have given way beneath the burden. On the day

after Lady Mason's departure from The Cleeve, he sat for an hour in

the library considering what he would do, and then he sent for his

daughter-in-law. If it behoved him to take any step to stay the

trial, he must take it at once. The matter had been pressed on by

each side, and now the days might be counted up to that day on

which the judges would arrive in Alston. That trial would be very

terrible to him in every way. He had promised, during those pleasant

hours of his love and sympathy in which he had felt no doubt as to

his friend's acquittal, that he would stand by her when she was

arraigned. That was now impossible, and though he had not dared to

mention it to Lady Mason, he knew that she would not expect that he

should do so. But to Mrs. Orme he had spoken on the matter, and she

had declared her purpose of taking the place which it would not now

become him to fill! Sir Peregrine had started from his chair when she

had so spoken. What! his daughter! She, the purest of the pure, to

whom the very air of a court of law would be a contamination;--she,

whose whiteness had never been sullied by contact with the world's

dust; she set by the side of that terrible criminal, hand in hand

with her, present to all the world as her bosom friend! There had

been but few words between them on the matter; but Sir Peregrine had

felt strongly that that might not be permitted. Far better than that

it would be that he should humble his gray hairs and sit there to

be gazed at by the crowd. But on all accounts how much was it to be

desired that there should be no trial!

"Sit down, Edith," he said, as with her soft step she came up to him.

"I find that the assizes will be here, in Alston, at the end of next

month."

"So soon as that, father?"

"Yes; look here: the judges will come in on the 25th of March."

"Ah me--this is very sudden. But, father, will it not be best for her

that it should be over?"

Mrs. Orme still thought, had always thought that the trial itself was

unavoidable. Indeed she had thought and she did think that it

afforded to Lady Mason the only possible means of escape. Her mind on

the subject, if it could have been analyzed, would probably have been

this. As to the property, that question must for the present stand

in abeyance. It is quite right that it should go to its detestable

owners,--that it should be made over to them at some day not very

distant. But for the present, the trial for that old, long-distant

crime was the subject for them to consider. Could it be wrong to wish

for an acquittal for the sinner,--an acquittal before this world's

bar, seeing that a true verdict had undoubtedly been given before

another bar? Mrs. Orme trusted that no jury would convict her friend.

Let Lady Mason go through that ordeal; and then, when the law had

declared her innocent, let restitution be made.

"It will be very terrible to all if she be condemned," said Sir

Peregrine.

"Very terrible! But Mr. Furnival--"

"Edith, if it comes to that, she will be condemned. Mr. Furnival is a

lawyer and will not say so; but from his countenance, when he speaks

of her, I know that he expects it!"

"Oh, father, do not say so."

"But if it is so--. My love, what is the purport of these courts of

law if it be not to discover the truth, and make it plain to the

light of day?" Poor Sir Peregrine! His innocence in this respect was

perhaps beautiful, but it was very simple. Mr. Aram, could he have

been induced to speak out his mind plainly, would have expressed,

probably, a different opinion.

"But she escaped before," said Mrs. Orme, who was clearly at present

on the same side with Mr. Aram.

"Yes; she did;--by perjury, Edith. And now the penalty of that

further crime awaits her. There was an old poet who said that the

wicked man rarely escapes at last. I believe in my heart that he

spoke the truth."

"Father, that old poet knew nothing of our faith."

Sir Peregrine could not stop to explain, even if he knew how to do

so, that the old poet spoke of punishment in this world, whereas the

faith on which his daughter relied is efficacious for pardon beyond

the grave. It would be much, ay, in one sense everything, if Lady

Mason could be brought to repent of the sin she had committed; but

no such repentance would stay the bitterness of Joseph Mason or

of Samuel Dockwrath. If the property were at once restored, then

repentance might commence. If the property were at once restored,

then the trial might be stayed. It might be possible that Mr. Round

might so act. He felt all this, but he could not argue on it. "I

think, my dear," he said, "that I had better see Mr. Round."

"But you will not tell him?" said Mrs. Orme, sharply.

"No; I am not authorised to do that."

"But he will entice it from you! He is a lawyer, and he will wind

anything out from a plain, chivalrous man of truth and honour."

"My dear, Mr. Round I believe is a good man."

"But if he asks you the question, what will you say?"

"I will tell him to ask me no such question."

"Oh, father, be careful. For her sake be careful. How is it that you

know the truth;--or that I know it? She told it here because in that

way only could she save you from that marriage. Father, she has

sacrificed herself for--for us."

Sir Peregrine when this was said to him got up from his chair and

walked away to the window. He was not angry with her that she so

spoke to him. Nay; he acknowledged inwardly the truth of her words,

and loved her for her constancy. But nevertheless they were very

bitter. How had it come to pass that he was thus indebted to so deep

a criminal? What had he done for her but good?

"Do not go from me," she said, following him. "Do not think me

unkind."

"No, no, no," he answered, striving almost ineffectually to repress a

sob. "You are not unkind."

For two days after that not a word was spoken between them on the

subject, and then he did go to Mr. Round. Not a word on the subject

was spoken between Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme; but she was twice at

Orley Farm during the time, and told Lady Mason of the steps which

her father-in-law was taking. "He won't betray me!" Lady Mason had

said. Mrs. Orme had answered this with what best assurance she should

give; but in her heart of hearts she feared that Sir Peregrine would

betray the secret.

It was not a pleasant journey for Sir Peregrine. Indeed it may be

said that no journeys could any longer be pleasant for him. He was

old and worn and feeble; very much older and much more worn than he

had been at the period spoken of in the commencement of this story,

though but a few months had passed over his head since that time. For

him now it would have been preferable to remain in the arm-chair by

the fireside in his own library, receiving such comfort in his old

age as might come to him from the affection of his daughter-in-law

and grandson. But he thought that it behoved him to do this work; and

therefore, old and feeble as he was, he set himself to his task. He

reached the station in London, had himself driven to Bedford Row in a

cab, and soon found himself in the presence of Mr. Round.

[Illustration: Sir Peregrine at Mr. Round's office.]

There was much ceremonial talk between them before Sir Peregrine

could bring himself to declare the purport which had brought him

there. Mr. Round of course protested that he was very sorry for all

this affair. The case was not in his hands personally. He had hoped

many years since that the matter was closed. His client, Mr. Mason of

Groby Park, had insisted that it should be reopened; and now he, Mr.

Round, really hardly knew what to say about it.

"But, Mr. Round, do you think it is quite impossible that the trial

should even now be abandoned?" asked Sir Peregrine very carefully.

"Well, I fear it is. Mason thinks that the property is his, and is

determined to make another struggle for it. I am imputing nothing

wrong to the lady. I really am not in a position to have any opinion

of my own--"

"No, no, no; I understand. Of course your firm is bound to do the

best it can for its client. But, Mr. Round;--I know I am quite safe

with you."

"Well; safe in one way I hope you are. But, Sir Peregrine, you must

of course remember that I am the attorney for the other side,--for

the side to which you are opposed."

"But still;--all that you can want is your client's interest."

"Of course we desire to serve his interest."

"And with that view, Mr. Round, is it not possible that we might come

to some compromise?"

"What;--by giving up part of the property?"

"By giving up all the property," said Sir Peregrine, with

considerable emphasis.

"Whew-w-w." Mr. Round at the moment made no other answer than this,

which terminated in a low whistle.

"Better that, at once, than that she should die broken-hearted," said

Sir Peregrine.

There was then silence between them for a minute or two, after which

Mr. Round, turning himself round in his chair so as to face his

visitor more fully, spoke as follows. "I told you just now, Sir

Peregrine, that I was Mr. Mason's attorney, and I must now tell you,

that as regards this interview between you and me, I will not hold

myself as being in that position. What you have said shall be as

though it had not been said; and as I am not, myself, taking any part

in the proceedings, this may with absolute strictness be the case.

But--"

"If I have said anything that I ought not to have said--" began Sir

Peregrine.

"Allow me for one moment," continued Mr. Round. "The fault is mine,

if there be a fault, as I should have explained to you that the

matter could hardly be discussed with propriety between us."

"Mr. Round, I offer you my apology from the bottom of my heart."

"No, Sir Peregrine. You shall offer me no apology, nor will I accept

any. I know no words strong enough to convey to you my esteem and

respect for your character."

"Sir!"

"But I will ask you to listen to me for a moment. If any compromise

be contemplated, it should be arranged by the advice of Mr. Furnival

and of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and the terms should be settled between Mr.

Aram and my son. But I cannot myself say that I see any possibility

of such a result. It is not however for me to advise. If on that

matter you wish for advice, I think that you had better see Mr.

Furnival."

"Ah!" said Sir Peregrine, telling more and more of the story by every

utterance he made.

"And now it only remains for me to assure you once more that the

words which have been spoken in this room shall be as though they had

not been spoken." And then Mr. Round made it very clear that there

was nothing more to be said between them on the subject of Lady

Mason. Sir Peregrine repeated his apology, collected his hat and

gloves, and with slow step made his way down to his cab, while Mr.

Round absolutely waited upon him till he saw him seated within the

vehicle.

"So Mat is right after all," said the old attorney to himself as he

stood alone with his back to his own fire, thrusting his hands into

his trousers-pockets. "So Mat is right after all!" The meaning of

this exclamation will be plain to my readers. Mat had declared to

his father his conviction that Lady Mason had forged the codicil in

question, and the father was now also convinced that she had done so.

"Unfortunate woman!" he said; "poor, wretched woman!" And then he

began to calculate what might yet be her chances of escape. On the

whole he thought that she would escape. "Twenty years of possession,"

he said to himself "and so excellent a character!" But, nevertheless,

he repeated to himself over and over again that she was a wretched,

miserable woman.

We may say that all the persons most concerned were convinced, or

nearly convinced, of Lady Mason's guilt. Among her own friends Mr.

Furnival had no doubt of it, and Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram but

very little; whereas Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme of course had none.

On the other side Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath were both fully sure of

the truth, and the two Rounds, father and son, were quite of the same

mind. And yet, except with Dockwrath and Sir Peregrine, the most

honest and the most dishonest of the lot, the opinion was that she

would escape. These were five lawyers concerned, not one of whom gave

to the course of justice credit that it would ascertain the truth,

and not one of whom wished that the truth should be ascertained.

Surely had they been honest-minded in their profession they would

all have so wished;--have so wished, or else have abstained from all

professional intercourse in the matter. I cannot understand how any

gentleman can be willing to use his intellect for the propagation

of untruth, and to be paid for so using it. As to Mr. Chaffanbrass

and Mr. Solomon Aram,--to them the escape of a criminal under their

auspices would of course be a matter of triumph. To such work

for many years had they applied their sharp intellects and legal

knowledge. But of Mr. Furnival;--what shall we say of him?

Sir Peregrine went home very sad at heart, and crept silently back

into his own library. In the evening, when he was alone with Mrs.

Orme, he spoke one word to her. "Edith," he said, "I have seen Mr.

Round. We can do nothing for her there."

"I feared not," said she.

"No; we can do nothing for her there."

After that Sir Peregrine took no step in the matter. What step could

he take? But he sat over his fire in his library, day after day,

thinking over it all, and waiting till those terrible assizes should

have come.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LOVES AND HOPES OF ALBERT FITZALLEN.

Felix Graham, when he left poor Mary Snow, did not go on immediately

to the doctor's shop. He had made up his mind that Mary Snow should

never be his wife, and therefore considered it wise to lose no time

in making such arrangements as might be necessary both for his

release and for hers. But, nevertheless, he had not the heart to

go about the work the moment that he left her. He passed by the

apothecary's, and looking in saw a young man working sedulously at a

pestle. If Albert Fitzallen were fit to be her husband and willing

to be so, poor as he was himself, he would still make some pecuniary

sacrifice by which he might quiet his own conscience and make Mary's

marriage possible. He still had a sum of Â£1,200 belonging to him,

that being all his remaining capital; and the half of that he would

give to Mary as her dower. So in two days he returned, and again

looking in at the doctor's shop, again saw the young man at his work.

"Yes, sir, my name is Albert Fitzallen," said the medical aspirant,

coming round the counter. There was no one else in the shop, and

Felix hardly knew how to accost him on so momentous a subject, while

he was still in charge of all that store of medicine, and liable

to be called away at any moment to relieve the ailments of Clapham.

Albert Fitzallen was a pale-faced, light-haired youth, with an

incipient moustache, with his hair parted in equal divisions over

his forehead, with elaborate shirt-cuffs elaborately turned back,

and with a white apron tied round him so that he might pursue his

vocation without injury to his nether garments. His face, however,

was not bad, nor mean, and had there not been about him a little air

of pretension, assumed perhaps to carry off the combined apron and

beard, Felix would have regarded him altogether with favourable eyes.

"Is it in the medical way?" asked Fitzallen, when Graham suggested

that he should step out with him for a few minutes. Graham explained

that it was not in the medical way,--that it was in a way altogether

of a private nature; and then the young man, pulling off his apron

and wiping his hands on a thoroughly medicated towel, invoked the

master of the establishment from an inner room, and in a few minutes

Mary Snow's two lovers were walking together, side by side, along the

causeway.

"I believe you know Miss Snow," said Felix, rushing at once into the

middle of all those delicate circumstances.

Albert Fitzallen drew himself up, and declared that he had that

honour.

"I also know her," said Felix. "My name is Felix Graham--"

"Oh, sir, very well," said Albert. The street in which they were

standing was desolate, and the young man was able to assume a look

of decided hostility without encountering any other eyes than those

of his rival. "If you have anything to say to me, sir, I am quite

prepared to listen to you--to listen to you, and to answer you. I

have heard your name mentioned by Miss Snow." And Albert Fitzallen

stood his ground as though he were at once going to cover himself

with his pistol arm.

"Yes, I know you have. Mary has told me what has passed between you.

You may regard me, Mr. Fitzallen, as Mary's best and surest friend."

"I know you have been a friend to her; I am aware of that. But, Mr.

Graham, if you will allow me to say so, friendship is one thing, and

the warm love of a devoted bosom is another."

"Quite so," said Felix.

"A woman's heart is a treasure not to be bought by any efforts of

friendship," said Fitzallen.

"I fully agree with you there," said Graham.

"Far be it from me to make any boast," continued the other, "or even

to hint that I have gained a place in that lady's affections. I know

my own position too well, and say proudly that I am existing only on

hope." Here, to show his pride, he hit himself with his closed fist

on his shirt-front. "But, Mr. Graham, I am free to declare, even in

your presence, though you may be her best and surest friend,"--and

there was not wanting from the tone of his voice a strong flavour of

scorn as he repeated these words--"that I do exist on hope, let your

claims be what they will. If you desire to make such hope on my part

a cause of quarrel, I have nothing to say against it." And then he

twirled all that he could twirl of that incipient moustache.

"By no means," said Graham.

"Oh, very well," said Fitzallen. "Then we understand that the arena

of love is open to us both. I do not fail to appreciate the immense

advantages which you enjoy in this struggle." And then Fitzallen

looked up into Graham's ugly face, and thought of his own appearance

in the looking-glass.

"What I want to know is this," said Felix. "If you marry Mary Snow,

what means have you of maintaining her? Would your mother receive her

into her house? I presume you are not a partner in that shop; but

would it be possible to get you in as a partner, supposing Mary were

to marry you and had a little money as her fortune?"

"Eh!" said Albert, dropping his look of pride, allowing his hand to

fall from his lips, and standing still before his companion with his

mouth wide open.

"Of course you mean honestly by dear Mary."

"Oh, sir, yes, on the honour of a gentleman. My intentions, sir,

are--. Mr. Graham, I love that young lady with a devotion of heart,

that--that--that--. Then you don't mean to marry her yourself; eh,

Mr. Graham?"

"No, Mr. Fitzallen, I do not. And now, if you will so far confide in

me, we will talk over your prospects."

"Oh, very well. I'm sure you are very kind. But Miss Snow did tell

me--"

"Yes, I know she did, and she was quite right. But as you said just

now, a woman's heart cannot be bought by friendship. I have not been

a bad friend to Mary, but I had no right to expect that I could win

her love in that way. Whether or no you may be able to succeed,

I will not say, but I have abandoned the pursuit." In all which

Graham intended to be exceedingly honest, but was, in truth, rather

hypocritical.

"Then the course is open to me," said Fitzallen.

"Yes, the course is open," answered Graham.

"But the race has still to be run. Don't you think that Miss Snow is

of her nature very--very cold?"

Felix remembered the one kiss beneath the lamp-post,--the one kiss

given, and received. He remembered also that Mary's acquaintance with

the gentleman must necessarily have been short; and he made no answer

to this question. But he made a comparison. What would Madeline have

said and done had he attempted such an iniquity? And he thought of

her flashing eyes and terrible scorn, of the utter indignation of all

the Staveley family, and of the wretched abyss into which the

offender would have fallen.

He brought back the subject at once to the young man's means, to

his mother, and to the doctor's shop; and though he learned nothing

that was very promising, neither did he learn anything that was the

reverse. Albert Fitzallen did not ride a very high horse when he

learned that his supposed rival was so anxious to assist him. He was

quite willing to be guided by Graham, and, in that matter of the

proposed partnership, was sure that old Balsam, the owner of the

business, would be glad to take a sum of money down. "He has a son

of his own," said Albert, "but he don't take to it at all. He's gone

into wine and spirits; but he don't sell half as much as he drinks."

Felix then proposed that he should call on Mrs. Fitzallen, and to

this Albert gave a blushing consent. "Mother has heard of it," said

Albert, "but I don't exactly know how." Perhaps Mrs. Fitzallen was as

attentive as Mrs. Thomas had been to stray documents packed away in

odd places. "And I suppose I may call on--on--Mary?" asked the lover,

as Graham took his leave. But Felix could give no authority for this,

and explained that Mrs. Thomas might be found to be a dragon still

guarding the Hesperides. Would it not be better to wait till Mary's

father had been informed? and then, if all things went well, he might

prosecute the affair in due form and as an acknowledged lover.

All this was very nice, and as it was quite unexpected, Fitzallen

could not but regard himself as a fortunate young man. He had never

contemplated the possibility of Mary Snow being an heiress. And when

his mother had spoken to him of the hopelessness of his passion, she

had suggested that he might perhaps marry his Mary in five or six

years. Now the dearest wish of his heart was brought close within

his reach, and he must have been a happy man. But yet, though this

certainly was so, nevertheless, there was a feeling of coldness about

his love, and almost of disappointment as he again took his place

behind the counter. The sorrows of Lydia in the play when she finds

that her passion meets with general approbation are very absurd

but, nevertheless, are quite true to nature. Lovers would be great

losers if the path of love were always to run smooth. Under such a

dispensation, indeed, there would probably be no lovers. The matter

would be too tame. Albert did not probably bethink himself of a

becoming disguise, as did Lydia,--of an amiable ladder of ropes,

of a conscious moon, or a Scotch parson; but he did feel, in some

undefined manner, that the romance of his life had been taken away

from him. Five minutes under a lamp-post with Mary Snow was sweeter

to him than the promise of a whole bevy of evenings spent in the same

society, with all the comforts of his mother's drawing-room around

him. Ah, yes, dear readers--my male readers of course I mean--were

not those minutes under the lamp-post always very pleasant?

But Graham encountered none of this feeling when he discussed the

same subject with Albert's mother. She was sufficiently alive to the

material view of the matter, and knew how much of a man's married

happiness depends on his supplies of bread and butter. Six hundred

pounds! Mr. Graham was very kind--very kind indeed. She hadn't a word

to say against Mary Snow. She had seen her, and thought her very

pretty and modest looking. Albert was certainly warmly attached to

the young lady. Of that she was quite certain. And she would say this

of Albert,--that a better-disposed young man did not exist anywhere.

He came home quite regular to his meals, and spent ten hours a day

behind the counter in Mr. Balsam's shop--ten hours a day, Sundays

included, which Mrs. Fitzallen regarded as a great drawback to the

medical line--as should I also, most undoubtedly. But six hundred

pounds would make a great difference. Mrs. Fitzallen little doubted

but that sum would tempt Mr. Balsam into a partnership, or perhaps

the five hundred, leaving one hundred for furniture. In such a case

Albert would spend his Sundays at home, of course. After that, so

much having been settled, Felix Graham got into an omnibus and took

himself back to his own chambers.

So far was so good. This idea of a model wife had already become a

very expensive idea, and in winding it up to its natural conclusion

poor Graham was willing to spend almost every shilling that he could

call his own. But there was still another difficulty in his way. What

would Snow pÃ¨re say? Snow pÃ¨re was, he knew, a man with whom dealings

would be more difficult than with Albert Fitzallen. And then, seeing

that he had already promised to give his remaining possessions to

Albert Fitzallen, with what could he bribe Snow pÃ¨re to abandon that

natural ambition to have a barrister for his son-in-law? In these

days, too, Snow pÃ¨re had derogated even from the position in which

Graham had first known him, and had become but little better than a

drunken, begging impostor. What a father-in-law to have had! And then

Felix Graham thought of Judge Staveley.

He sent, however, to the engraver, and the man was not long in

obeying the summons. In latter days Graham had not seen him

frequently, having bestowed his alms through Mary, and was shocked at

the unmistakable evidence of the gin-shop which the man's appearance

and voice betrayed. How dreadful to the sight are those watery

eyes; that red, uneven, pimpled nose; those fallen cheeks; and that

hanging, slobbered mouth! Look at the uncombed hair, the beard half

shorn, the weak, impotent gait of the man, and the tattered raiment,

all eloquent of gin! You would fain hold your nose when he comes nigh

you, he carries with him so foul an evidence of his only and his

hourly indulgence. You would do so, had you not still a respect for

his feelings, which he himself has entirely forgotten to maintain.

How terrible is that absolute loss of all personal dignity which the

drunkard is obliged to undergo! And then his voice! Every tone has

been formed by gin, and tells of the havoc which the compound has

made within his throat. I do not know whether such a man as this is

not the vilest thing which grovels on God's earth. There are women

whom we affect to scorn with the full power of our contempt; but I

doubt whether any woman sinks to a depth so low as that. She also may

be a drunkard, and as such may more nearly move our pity and affect

our hearts, but I do not think she ever becomes so nauseous a thing

as the man that has abandoned all the hopes of life for gin. You can

still touch her;--ay, and if the task be in one's way, can touch her

gently, striving to bring her back to decency. But the other! Well,

one should be willing to touch him too, to make that attempt of

bringing back upon him also. I can only say that the task is both

nauseous and unpromising. Look at him as he stands there before the

foul, reeking, sloppy bar, with the glass in his hand, which he has

just emptied. See the grimace with which he puts it down, as though

the dram had been almost too unpalatable. It is the last touch of

hypocrisy with which he attempts to cover the offence;--as though

he were to say, "I do it for my stomach's sake; but you know how

I abhor it." Then he skulks sullenly away, speaking a word to no

one,--shuffling with his feet, shaking himself in his foul rags,

pressing himself into a heap--as though striving to drive the warmth

of the spirit into his extremities! And there he stands lounging at

the corner of the street, till his short patience is exhausted, and

he returns with his last penny for the other glass. When that has

been swallowed the policeman is his guardian.

Reader, such as you and I have come to that, when abandoned by the

respect which a man owes to himself. May God in his mercy watch over

us and protect us both!

Such a man was Snow pÃ¨re as he stood before Graham in his chambers in

the Temple. He could not ask him to sit down, so he himself stood up

as he talked to him. At first the man was civil, twirling his old hat

about, and shifting from one foot to the other;--very civil, and also

somewhat timid, for he knew that he was half drunk at the moment. But

when he began to ascertain what was Graham's object in sending for

him, and to understand that the gentleman before him did not propose

to himself the honour of being his son-in-law, then his civility left

him, and, drunk as he was, he spoke out his mind with sufficient

freedom.

"You mean to say, Mr. Graham"--and under the effect of gin he turned

the name into Gorm--"that you are going to throw that young girl

over?"

"I mean to say no such thing. I shall do for her all that is in my

power. And if that is not as much as she deserves, it will, at any

rate, be more than you deserve for her."

"And you won't marry her?"

"No; I shall not marry her. Nor does she wish it. I trust that she

will be engaged, with my full approbation--"

"And what the deuce, sir, is your full approbation to me? Whose

child is she, I should like to know? Look here, Mr. Gorm; perhaps

you forget that you wrote me this letter when I allowed you to have

the charge of that young girl?" And he took out from his breast a

very greasy pocket-book, and displayed to Felix his own much-worn

letter,--holding it, however, at a distance, so that it should not

be torn from his hands by any sudden raid. "Do you think, sir, I

would have given up my child if I didn't know she was to be married

respectable? My child is as dear to me as another man's."

"I hope she is. And you are a very lucky fellow to have her so well

provided for. I've told you all I've got to say, and now you may go."

"Mr. Gorm!"

"I've nothing more to say; and if I had, I would not say it to you

now. Your child shall be taken care of."

"That's what I call pretty cool on the part of any gen'leman. And

you're to break your word,--a regular breach of promise, and nothing

ain't to come of it! I'll tell you what, Mr. Gorm, you'll find that

something will come of it. What do you think I took this letter for?"

"You took it, I hope, for Mary's protection."

"And by ---- she shall be protected."

"She shall, undoubtedly; but I fear not by you. For the present I

will protect her; and I hope that soon a husband will do so who will

love her. Now, Mr. Snow, I've told you all I've got to say, and I

must trouble you to leave me."

Nevertheless there were many more words between them before Graham

could find himself alone in his chambers. Though Snow pÃ¨re might be

a thought tipsy--a sheet or so in the wind, as folks say, he was not

more tipsy than was customary with him, and knew pretty well what he

was about. "And what am I to do with myself; Mr. Gorm?" he asked in

a snivelling voice, when the idea began to strike him that it might

perhaps be held by the courts of law that his intended son-in-law was

doing well by his daughter.

"Work," said Graham, turning upon him sharply and almost fiercely.

"That's all very well. It's very well to say 'Work!'"

"You'll find it well to do it, too. Work, and don't drink. You hardly

think, I suppose, that if I had married your daughter I should have

found myself obliged to support you in idleness?"

"It would have been a great comfort in my old age to have had a

daughter's house to go to," said Snow, naÃ¯vely, and now reduced to

lachrymose distress.

But when he found that Felix would do nothing for him; that he would

not on the present occasion lend him a sovereign, or even half a

crown, he again became indignant and paternal, and in this state of

mind was turned out of the room.

"Heaven and earth!" said Felix to himself, clenching his hands and

striking the table with both of them at the same moment. That was the

man with whom he had proposed to link himself in the closest ties

of family connection. Albert Fitzallen did not know Mr. Snow; but

it might be a question whether it would not be Graham's duty to

introduce them to each other.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MISS STAVELEY DECLINES TO EAT MINCED VEAL.

The house at Noningsby was now very quiet. All the visitors had gone,

including even the Arbuthnots. Felix Graham and Sophia Furnival,

that terrible pair of guests, had relieved Mrs. Staveley of their

presence; but, alas! the mischief they had done remained behind them.

The house was very quiet, for Augustus and the judge were up in town

during the greater part of the week, and Madeline and her mother were

alone. The judge was to come back to Noningsby but once before he

commenced the circuit which was to terminate at Alston; and it seemed

to be acknowledged now on all sides that nothing more of importance

was to be done or said in that locality until after Lady Mason's

trial.

It may be imagined that poor Madeline was not very happy. Felix had

gone away, having made no sign, and she knew that her mother rejoiced

that he had so gone. She never accused her mother of cruelty, even

within her own heart. She seemed to realise to herself the assurance

that a marriage with the man she loved was a happiness which she had

no right to expect. She knew that her father was rich. She was aware

that in all probability her own fortune would be considerable. She

was quite sure that Felix Graham was clever and fit to make his way

through the world. And yet she did not think it hard that she should

be separated from him. She acknowledged from the very first that he

was not the sort of man whom she ought to have loved, and therefore

she was prepared to submit.

It was, no doubt, the fact that Felix Graham had never whispered

to her a word of love, and that therefore, on that ground, she had

no excuse for hope. But, had that been all, she would not have

despaired. Had that been all, she might have doubted, but her doubt

would have been strongly mingled with the sweetness of hope. He had

never whispered a syllable of love, but she had heard the tone of his

voice as she spoke a word to him at his chamber door; she had seen

his eyes as they fell on her when he was lifted into the carriage;

she had felt the tremor of his touch on that evening when she walked

up to him across the drawing-room and shook hands with him. Such a

girl as Madeline Staveley does not analyze her feelings on such a

matter, and then draw her conclusions. But a conclusion is drawn; the

mind does receive an impression; and the conclusion and impression

are as true as though they had been reached by the aid of logical

reasoning. Had the match been such as her mother would have approved,

she would have had a hope as to Felix Graham's love--strong enough

for happiness.

As it was, there was no use in hoping; and therefore she

resolved--having gone through much logical reasoning on this

head--that by her all ideas of love must be abandoned. As regarded

herself, she must be content to rest by her mother's side as a flower

ungathered. That she could marry no man without the approval of her

father and mother was a thing to her quite certain; but it was, at

any rate, as certain that she could marry no man without her own

approval. Felix Graham was beyond her reach. That verdict she herself

pronounced, and to it she submitted. But Peregrine Orme was still

more distant from her;--Peregrine Orme, or any other of the curled

darlings who might come that way playing the part of a suitor.

She knew what she owed to her mother, but she also knew her own

privileges.

There was nothing said on the subject between the mother and

child during three days. Lady Staveley was more than ordinarily

affectionate to her daughter, and in that way made known the thoughts

which were oppressing her; but she did so in no other way. All

this Madeline understood, and thanked her mother with the sweetest

smiles and the most constant companionship. Nor was she, even

now, absolutely unhappy, or wretchedly miserable; as under such

circumstances would be the case with many girls. She knew all that

she was prepared to abandon, but she understood also how much

remained to her. Her life was her own, and with her life the energy

to use it. Her soul was free. And her heart, though burdened with

love, could endure its load without sinking. Let him go forth on his

career. She would remain in the shade, and be contented while she

watched it.

So strictly wise and philosophically serene had Madeline become

within a few days of Graham's departure, that she snubbed poor Mrs.

Baker, when that good-natured and sharp-witted housekeeper said a

word or two in praise of her late patient.

"We are very lonely, ain't we, miss, without Mr. Graham to look

after?" said Mrs. Baker.

"I'm sure we are all very glad that he has so far recovered as to be

able to be moved."

"That's in course,--though I still say that he went before he ought.

He was such a nice gentleman. Where there's one better, there's

twenty worse; and as full of cleverness as an egg's full of meat." In

answer to which Madeline said nothing.

"At any rate, Miss Madeline, you ought to say a word for him,"

continued Mrs. Baker; "for he used to worship the sound of your

voice. I've known him lay there and listen, listen, listen, for your

very footfall."

"How can you talk such stuff, Mrs. Baker? You have never known

anything of the kind--and even if he had, how could you know it? You

should not talk such nonsense to me, and I beg you won't again." Then

she went away, and began to read a paper about sick people written by

Florence Nightingale.

But it was by no means Lady Staveley's desire that her daughter

should take to the Florence Nightingale line of life. The charities

of Noningsby were done on a large scale, in a quiet, handsome,

methodical manner, and were regarded by the mistress of the mansion

as a very material part of her life's duty; but she would have been

driven distracted had she been told that a daughter of hers was

about to devote herself exclusively to charity. Her ideas of general

religion were the same. Morning and evening prayers, church twice

on Sundays, attendance at the Lord's table at any rate once a month,

were to herself--and in her estimation for her own family--essentials

of life. And they had on her their practical effects. She was not

given to backbiting--though, when stirred by any motive near to her

own belongings, she would say an ill-natured word or two. She was

mild and forbearing to her inferiors. Her hand was open to the poor.

She was devoted to her husband and her children. In no respect

was she self-seeking or self-indulgent. But, nevertheless, she

appreciated thoroughly the comforts of a good income--for herself and

for her children. She liked to see nice-dressed and nice-mannered

people about her, preferring those whose fathers and mothers

were nice before them. She liked to go about in her own carriage,

comfortably. She liked the feeling that her husband was a judge, and

that he and she were therefore above other lawyers and other lawyers'

wives. She would not like to have seen Mrs. Furnival walk out of a

room before her, nor perhaps to see Sophia Furnival when married take

precedence of her own married daughter. She liked to live in a large

place like Noningsby, and preferred country society to that of the

neighbouring town.

It will be said that I have drawn an impossible character, and

depicted a woman who served both God and Mammon. To this accusation

I will not plead, but will ask my accusers whether in their life's

travail they have met no such ladies as Lady Staveley?

But such as she was, whether good or bad, she had no desire whatever

that her daughter should withdraw herself from the world, and give

up to sick women what was meant for mankind. Her idea of a woman's

duties comprehended the birth, bringing up, education, and settlement

in life of children, also due attendance upon a husband, with a close

regard to his special taste in cookery. There was her granddaughter

Marian. She was already thinking what sort of a wife she would make,

and what commencements of education would best fit her to be a good

mother. It is hardly too much to say that Marian's future children

were already a subject of care to her. Such being her disposition, it

was by no means matter of joy to her when she found that Madeline was

laying out for herself little ways of life, tending in some slight

degree to the monastic. Nothing was said about it, but she fancied

that Madeline had doffed a ribbon or two in her usual evening attire.

That she read during certain fixed hours in the morning was very

manifest. As to that daily afternoon service at four o'clock--she had

very often attended that, and it was hardly worthy of remark that

she now went to it every day. But there seemed at this time to be a

monotonous regularity about her visits to the poor, which told to

Lady Staveley's mind--she hardly knew what tale. She herself visited

the poor, seeing some of them almost daily. If it was foul weather

they came to her, and if it was fair weather she went to them. But

Madeline, without saying a word to any one, had adopted a plan of

going out exactly at the same hour with exactly the same object, in

all sorts of weather. All this made Lady Staveley uneasy; and then,

by way of counterpoise, she talked of balls, and offered Madeline

\_carte blanche\_ as to a new dress for that special one which would

grace the assizes. "I don't think I shall go," said Madeline; and

thus Lady Staveley became really unhappy. Would not Felix Graham

be better than no son-in-law? When some one had once very strongly

praised Florence Nightingale in Lady Staveley's presence, she had

stoutly declared her opinion that it was a young woman's duty to get

married. For myself, I am inclined to agree with her. Then came the

second Friday after Graham's departure, and Lady Staveley observed,

as she and her daughter sat at dinner alone, that Madeline would eat

nothing but potatoes and sea-kale. "My dear, you will be ill if you

don't eat some meat."

"Oh no, I shall not," said Madeline with her prettiest smile.

"But you always used to like minced veal."

"So I do, but I won't have any to-day, mamma, thank you."

Then Lady Staveley resolved that she would tell the judge that Felix

Graham, bad as he might be, might come there if he pleased. Even

Felix Graham would be better than no son-in-law at all.

On the following day, the Saturday, the judge came down with

Augustus, to spend his last Sunday at home before the beginning of

his circuit, and some little conversation respecting Felix Graham did

take place between him and his wife.

"If they are both really fond of each other, they had better marry,"

said the judge, curtly.

"But it is terrible to think of their having no income," said his

wife.

"We must get them an income. You'll find that Graham will fall on his

legs at last."

"He's a very long time before he begins to use them," said Lady

Staveley. "And then you know The Cleeve is such a nice property, and

Mr. Orme is--"

"But, my love, it seems that she does not like Mr. Orme."

"No, she doesn't," said the poor mother in a tone of voice that

was very lachrymose. "But if she would only wait she might like

him,--might she not now? He is such a very handsome young man."

"If you ask me, I don't think his beauty will do it."

"I don't suppose she cares for that sort of thing," said Lady

Staveley, almost crying. "But I'm sure of this, if she were to go and

make a nun of herself, it would break my heart,--it would, indeed. I

should never hold up my head again."

What could Lady Staveley's idea have been of the sorrows of some

other mothers, whose daughters throw themselves away after a

different fashion?

After lunch on Sunday the judge asked his daughter to walk with him,

and on that occasion the second church service was abandoned. She got

on her bonnet and gloves, her walking-boots and winter shawl, and

putting her arm happily and comfortably within his, started for what

she knew would be a long walk.

"We'll get as far as the bottom of Cleeve Hill," said the judge.

Now the bottom of Cleeve Hill, by the path across the fields and the

common, was five miles from Noningsby.

"Oh, as for that, I'll walk to the top if you like," said Madeline.

"If you do, my dear, you'll have to go up alone," said the judge. And

so they started.

There was a crisp, sharp enjoyment attached to a long walk with her

father which Madeline always loved, and on the present occasion

she was willing to be very happy; but as she started, with her

arm beneath his, she feared she knew not what. She had a secret,

and her father might touch upon it; she had a sore, though it was

not an unwholesome festering sore, and her father might probe the

wound. There was, therefore, the slightest shade of hypocrisy in the

alacrity with which she prepared herself, and in the pleasant tone of

her voice as she walked down the avenue towards the gate.

But by the time that they had gone a mile, when their feet had left

the road and were pressing the grassy field-path, there was no longer

any hypocrisy in her happiness. Madeline believed that no human being

could talk as did her father, and on this occasion he came out with

his freshest thoughts and his brightest wit. Nor did he, by any

means, have the talk all to himself. The delight of Judge Staveley's

conversation consisted chiefly in that--that though he might bring on

to the carpet all the wit and all the information going, he rarely

uttered much beyond his own share of words. And now they talked of

pictures and politics--of the new gallery that was not to be built at

Charing Cross, and the great onslaught which was not to end in the

dismissal of Ministers. And then they got to books--to novels, new

poetry, magazines, essays, and reviews; and with the slightest touch

of pleasant sarcasm the judge passed sentence on the latest efforts

of his literary contemporaries. And thus at last they settled down on

a certain paper which had lately appeared in a certain Quarterly--a

paper on a grave subject, which had been much discussed--and the

judge on a sudden stayed his hand, and spared his raillery. "You have

not heard, I suppose, who wrote that?" said he. No; Madeline had not

heard. She would much like to know. When young people begin their

world of reading there is nothing so pleasant to them as knowing the

little secrets of literature; who wrote this and that, of which folk

are then talking;--who manages this periodical, and puts the salt and

pepper into those reviews. The judge always knew these events of the

inner literary world, and would communicate them freely to Madeline

as they walked. No; there was no longer the slightest touch of

hypocrisy in her pleasant manner and eager voice as she answered,

"No, papa, I have not heard. Was it Mr. So-and-so?" and she named an

ephemeral literary giant of the day. "No," said the judge, "it was

not So-and-so; but yet you might guess, as you know the gentleman."

Then the slight shade of hypocrisy came upon her again in a moment.

"She couldn't guess," she said; "she didn't know." But as she thus

spoke the tone of her voice was altered. "That article," said the

judge, "was written by Felix Graham. It is uncommonly clever, and yet

there are a great many people who abuse it."

And now all conversation was stopped. Poor Madeline, who had been so

ready with her questions, so eager with her answers, so communicative

and so inquiring, was stricken dumb on the instant. She had ceased

for some time to lean upon his arm, and therefore he could not feel

her hand tremble; and he was too generous and too kind to look into

her face; but he knew that he had touched the fibres of her heart,

and that all her presence of mind had for the moment fled from her.

Of course such was the case, and of course he knew it. Had he not

brought her out there, that they might be alone together when he

subjected her to the violence of this shower-bath?

"Yes," he continued, "that was written by our friend Graham. Do you

remember, Madeline, the conversation which you and I had about him in

the library some time since?"

"Yes," she said, "she remembered it."

"And so do I," said the judge, "and have thought much about it since.

A very clever fellow is Felix Graham. There can be no doubt of that."

"Is he?" said Madeline.

I am inclined to think that the judge also had lost something of his

presence of mind, or, at least, of his usual power of conversation.

He had brought his daughter out there with the express purpose of

saying to her a special word or two; he had beat very wide about the

bush with the view of mentioning a certain name; and now that his

daughter was there, and the name had been mentioned, it seemed that

he hardly knew how to proceed.

"Yes, he is clever enough," repeated the judge, "clever enough; and

of high principles and an honest purpose. The fault which people find

with him is this,--that he is not practical. He won't take the world

as he finds it. If he can mend it, well and good; we all ought to do

something to mend it; but while we are mending it we must live in

it."

"Yes, we must live in it," said Madeline, who hardly knew at the

moment whether it would be better to live or die in it. Had her

father remarked that they must all take wings and fly to heaven, she

would have assented.

Then the judge walked on a few paces in silence, bethinking himself

that he might as well speak out at once the words which he had to

say. "Madeline, my darling," said he, "have you the courage to tell

me openly what you think of Felix Graham?"

"What I think of him, papa?"

"Yes, my child. It may be that you are in some difficulty at this

moment, and that I can help you. It may be that your heart is sadder

than it would be if you knew all my thoughts and wishes respecting

you, and all your mother's. I have never had many secrets from my

children, Madeline, and I should be pleased now if you could see into

my mind and know all my thoughts and wishes as they regard you."

"Dear papa!"

"To see you happy--you and Augustus and Isabella--that is now

our happiness; not to see you rich or great. High position and a

plentiful income are great blessings in this world, so that they be

achieved without a stain. But even in this world they are not the

greatest blessings. There are things much sweeter than them." As he

said this, Madeline did not attempt to answer him, but she put her

arm once more within his, and clung to his side.

"Money and rank are only good, if every step by which they are gained

be good also. I should never blush to see my girl the wife of a poor

man whom she loved; but I should be stricken to the core of my heart

if I knew that she had become the wife of a rich man whom she did not

love."

"Papa!" she said, clinging to him. She had meant to assure him that

that sorrow should never be his, but she could not get beyond the one

word.

"If you love this man, let him come," said the judge, carried by his

feelings somewhat beyond the point to which he had intended to go.

"I know no harm of him. I know nothing but good of him. If you are

sure of your own heart, let it be so. He shall be to me as another

son,--to me and to your mother. Tell me, Madeline, shall it be so?"

She was sure enough of her own heart; but how was she to be sure of

that other heart? "It shall be so," said her father. But a man could

not be turned into a lover and a husband because she and her father

agreed to desire it;--not even if her mother would join in that

wish. She had confessed to her mother that she loved this man, and

the confession had been repeated to her father. But she had never

expressed even a hope that she was loved in return. "But he has never

spoken to me, papa," she said, whispering the words ever so softly

lest the winds should carry them.

"No; I know he has never spoken to you," said the judge. "He told me

so himself. I like him the better for that."

So then there had been other communications made besides that which

she had made to her mother. Mr. Graham had spoken to her father, and

had spoken to him about her. In what way had he done this, and how

had he spoken? What had been his object, and when had it been done?

Had she been indiscreet, and allowed him to read her secret? And then

a horrid thought came across her mind. Was he to come there and offer

her his hand because he pitied and was sorry for her? The Friday

fastings and the evening church and the sick visits would be better

far than that. She could not however muster courage to ask her father

any question as to that interview between him and Mr. Graham.

"Well, my love," he said, "I know it is impertinent to ask a young

lady to speak on such a subject; but fathers are impertinent. Be

frank with me. I have told you what I think, and your mamma agrees

with me. Young Mr. Orme would have been her favourite--"

"Oh, papa, that is impossible."

"So I perceive, my dear, and therefore we will say no more about it.

I only mention his name because I want you to understand that you may

speak to your mamma quite openly on the subject. He is a fine young

fellow, is Peregrine Orme."

"I'm sure he is, papa."

"But that is no reason you should marry him if you don't like him."

"I could never like him,--in that way."

"Very well, my dear. There is an end of that, and I'm sorry for him.

I think that if I had been a young man at The Cleeve, I should have

done just the same. And now let us decide this important question.

When Master Graham's ribs, arms, and collar bones are a little

stronger, shall we ask him to come back to Noningsby?"

"If you please, papa."

"Very well, we'll have him here for the assize week. Poor fellow,

he'll have a hard job of work on hand just then, and won't have much

time for philandering. With Chaffanbrass to watch him on his own

side, and Leatherham on the other, I don't envy him his position. I

almost think I should keep my arm in the sling till the assizes were

over, by way of exciting a little pity."

"Is Mr. Graham going to defend Lady Mason?"

"To help to do so, my dear."

"But, papa, she is innocent; don't you feel sure of that?"

The judge was not quite so sure as he had been once. However, he said

nothing of his doubts to Madeline. "Mr. Graham's task on that account

will only be the more trying if it becomes difficult to establish her

innocence."

"Poor lady!" said Madeline. "You won't be the judge; will you, papa?"

"No, certainly not. I would have preferred to have gone any other

circuit than to have presided in a case affecting so near a

neighbour, and I may almost say a friend. Baron Maltby will sit in

that court."

"And will Mr. Graham have to do much, papa?"

"It will be an occasion of very great anxiety to him, no doubt." And

then they began to return home,--Madeline forming a little plan in

her mind by which Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass were to fail

absolutely in making out that lady's innocence, but the fact was to

be established to the satisfaction of the whole court, and of all the

world, by the judicious energy of Felix Graham.

On their homeward journey the judge again spoke of pictures and

books, of failures and successes, and Madeline listened to him

gratefully. But she did not again take much part in the conversation.

She could not now express a very fluent opinion on any subject, and

to tell the truth, could have been well satisfied to have been left

entirely to her own thoughts. But just before they came out again

upon the road, her father stopped her and asked a direct question.

"Tell me, Madeline, are you happy now?"

[Illustration: "Tell me, Madeline, are you happy now?"]

"Yes, papa."

"That is right. And what you are to understand is this; Mr. Graham

will now be privileged by your mother and me to address you. He has

already asked my permission to do so, and I told him that I must

consider the matter before I either gave it or withheld it. I shall

now give him that permission." Whereupon Madeline made her answer by

a slight pressure upon his arm.

"But you may be sure of this, my dear; I shall be very discreet, and

commit you to nothing. If he should choose to ask you any question,

you will be at liberty to give him any answer that you may think

fit." But Madeline at once confessed to herself that no such liberty

remained to her. If Mr. Graham should choose to ask her a certain

question, it would be in her power to give him only one answer. Had

he been kept away, had her father told her that such a marriage might

not be, she would not have broken her heart. She had already told

herself, that under such circumstances, she could live and still live

contented. But now,--now if the siege were made, the town would have

to capitulate at the first shot. Was it not an understood thing that

the governor had been recommended by the king to give up the keys as

soon as they were asked for?

"You will tell your mamma of this my dear," said the judge, as they

were entering their own gate.

"Yes," said Madeline. But she felt that, in this matter, her father

was more surely her friend than her mother. And indeed she could

understand her mother's opposition to poor Felix, much better than

her father's acquiescence.

"Do, my dear. What is anything to us in this world, if we are not all

happy together? She thinks that you have become sad, and she must

know that you are so no longer."

"But I have not been sad, papa," said Madeline, thinking with some

pride of her past heroism.

When they reached the hall-door she had one more question to ask; but

she could not look in her father's face as she asked.

"Papa, is that review you were speaking of here at Noningsby?"

"You will find it on my study table; but remember, Madeline, I don't

above half go along with him."

The judge went into his study before dinner, and found that the

review had been taken.

CHAPTER LIX.

NO SURRENDER.

Sir Peregrine Orme had gone up to London, had had his interview with

Mr. Round, and had failed. He had then returned home, and hardly a

word on the subject had been spoken between him and Mrs. Orme. Indeed

little or nothing was now said between them as to Lady Mason or the

trial. What was the use of speaking on a subject that was in every

way the cause of so much misery? He had made up his mind that it was

no longer possible for him to take any active step in the matter. He

had become bail for her appearance in court, and that was the last

trifling act of friendship which he could show her. How was it any

longer possible that he could befriend her? He could not speak up

on her behalf with eager voice, and strong indignation against her

enemies, as had formerly been his practice. He could give her no

counsel. His counsel would have taught her to abandon the property

in the first instance, let the result be what it might. He had made

his little effort in that direction by seeing the attorney, and his

little effort had been useless. It was quite clear to him that there

was nothing further for him to do;--nothing further for him, who

but a week or two since was so actively putting himself forward and

letting the world know that he was Lady Mason's champion.

Would he have to go into court as a witness? His mind was troubled

much in his endeavour to answer that question. He had been her

great friend. For years he had been her nearest neighbour. His

daughter-in-law still clung to her. She had lived at his house. She

had been chosen to be his wife. Who could speak to her character, if

he could not do so? And yet, what could he say, if so called on? Mr.

Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass--all those who would have the selection

of the witnesses, believing themselves in their client's innocence,

as no doubt they did, would of course imagine that he believed in it

also. Could he tell them that it would not be in his power to utter a

single word in her favour?

In these days Mrs. Orme went daily to the Farm. Indeed, she never

missed a day from that on which Lady Mason left The Cleeve up to the

time of the trial. It seemed to Sir Peregrine that his daughter's

affection for this woman had grown with the knowledge of her guilt;

but, as I have said before, no discussion on the matter now took

place between them. Mrs. Orme would generally take some opportunity

of saying that she had been at Orley Farm; but that was all.

Sir Peregrine during this time never left the house once, except for

morning service on Sundays. He hung his hat up on its accustomed peg

when he returned from that ill-omened visit to Mr. Round, and did not

move it for days, ay, for weeks,--except on Sunday mornings. At first

his groom would come to him, suggesting to him that he should ride,

and the woodman would speak to him about the young coppices; but

after a few days they gave up their efforts. His grandson also strove

to take him out, speaking to him more earnestly than the servants

would do, but it was of no avail. Peregrine, indeed, gave up the

attempt sooner, for to him his grandfather did in some sort confess

his own weakness. "I have had a blow," said he; "Peregrine, I have

had a blow. I am too old to bear up against it;--too old and too

weak." Peregrine knew that he alluded in some way to that proposed

marriage, but he was quite in the dark as to the manner in which his

grandfather had been affected by it.

"People think nothing of that now, sir," said he, groping in the dark

as he strove to administer consolation.

"People will think of it;--and I think of it. But never mind, my boy.

I have lived my life, and am contented with it. I have lived my life,

and have great joy that such as you are left behind to take my place.

If I had really injured you I should have broken my heart--have

broken my heart."

Peregrine of course assured him that let what would come to him the

pride which he had in his grandfather would always support him. "I

don't know anybody else that I could be so proud of," said Peregrine;

"for nobody else that I see thinks so much about other people. And I

always was, even when I didn't seem to think much about it;--always."

Poor Peregrine! Circumstances had somewhat altered him since that

day, now not more than six months ago, in which he had pledged

himself to abandon the delights of Cowcross Street. As long as there

was a hope for him with Madeline Staveley all this might be very

well. He preferred Madeline to Cowcross Street with all its delights.

But when there should be no longer any hope--and indeed, as things

went now, there was but little ground for hoping--what then? Might it

not be that his trial had come on him too early in life, and that he

would solace himself in his disappointment, if not with Carroty Bob,

with companionships and pursuits which would be as objectionable, and

perhaps more expensive?

On three or four occasions his grandfather asked him how things

were going at Noningsby, striving to interest himself in something

as to which the outlook was not altogether dismal, and by degrees

learned,--not exactly all the truth--but as much of the truth as

Peregrine knew.

"Do as she tells you," said the grandfather, referring to Lady

Staveley's last words.

"I suppose I must," said Peregrine, sadly. "There's nothing else for

it. But if there's anything that I hate in this world, it's waiting."

"You are both very young," said his grandfather.

"Yes; we are what people call young, I suppose. But I don't

understand all that. Why isn't a fellow to be happy when he's young

as well as when he's old?"

Sir Peregrine did not answer him, but no doubt thought that he might

alter his opinion in a few years. There is great doubt as to what may

be the most enviable time of life with a man. I am inclined to think

that it is at that period when his children have all been born but

have not yet began to go astray or to vex him with disappointment;

when his own pecuniary prospects are settled, and he knows pretty

well what his tether will allow him; when the appetite is still good

and the digestive organs at their full power; when he has ceased to

care as to the length of his girdle, and before the doctor warns

him against solid breakfasts and port wine after dinner; when his

affectations are over and his infirmities have not yet come upon him;

while he can still walk his ten miles, and feel some little pride in

being able to do so; while he has still nerve to ride his horse to

hounds, and can look with some scorn on the ignorance of younger men

who have hardly yet learned that noble art. As regards men, this,

I think, is the happiest time of life; but who shall answer the

question as regards women? In this respect their lot is more liable

to disappointment. With the choicest flowers that blow the sweetest

aroma of their perfection lasts but for a moment. The hour that sees

them at their fullest glory sees also the beginning of their fall.

On one morning before the trial Sir Peregrine rang his bell and

requested that Mr. Peregrine might be asked to come to him. Mr.

Peregrine was out at the moment, and did not make his appearance much

before dark, but the baronet had fully resolved upon having this

interview, and ordered that the dinner should be put back for half

an hour. "Tell Mrs. Orme, with my compliments," he said, "that if it

does not put her to inconvenience we will not dine till seven." It

put Mrs. Orme to no inconvenience; but I am inclined to agree with

the cook, who remarked that the compliments ought to have been sent

to her.

"Sit down, Peregrine," he said, when his grandson entered his room

with his thick boots and muddy gaiters. "I have been thinking of

something."

"I and Samson have been cutting down trees all day," said Peregrine.

"You've no conception how the water lies down in the bottom there;

and there's a fall every yard down to the river. It's a sin not to

drain it."

"Any sins of that kind, my boy, shall lie on your own head for the

future. I will wash my hands of them."

"Then I'll go to work at once," said Peregrine, not quite

understanding his grandfather.

"You must go to work on more than that, Peregrine." And then the old

man paused. "You must not think that I am doing this because I am

unhappy for the hour, or that I shall repent it when the moment has

gone by."

"Doing what?" asked Peregrine.

"I have thought much of it, and I know that I am right. I cannot get

out as I used to do, and do not care to meet people about business."

"I never knew you more clear-headed in my life, sir."

"Well, perhaps not. We'll say nothing about that. What I intend to do

is this;--to give up the property into your hands at Lady-day. You

shall be master of The Cleeve from that time forth."

"Sir?"

"The truth is, you desire employment, and I don't. The property is

small, and therefore wants the more looking after. I have never had

a regular land steward, but have seen to that myself. If you'll take

my advice you'll do the same. There is no better employment for a

gentleman. So now, my boy, you may go to work and drain wherever you

like. About that Crutchley bottom I have no doubt you're right. I

don't know why it has been neglected." These last words the baronet

uttered in a weak, melancholy tone, asking, as it were, forgiveness

for his fault; whereas he had spoken out the purport of his great

resolution with a clear, strong voice, as though the saying of the

words pleased him well.

"I could not hear of such a thing as that," said his grandson, after

a short pause.

"But you have heard it, Perry, and you may be quite sure that I

should not have named it had I not fully resolved upon it. I have

been thinking of it for days, and have quite made up my mind. You

won't turn me out of the house, I know."

"All the same, I will not hear of it," said the young man, stoutly.

"Peregrine!"

"I know very well what it all means, sir, and I am not at all

astonished. You have wished to do something out of sheer goodness of

heart, and you have been balked."

"We will not talk about that, Peregrine."

"But I must say a few words about it. All that has made you unhappy,

and--and--and--" He wanted to explain that his grandfather was

ashamed of his baffled attempt, and for that reason was cowed and

down at heart at the present moment; but that in the three or four

months when this trial would be over and the wonder passed away, all

that would be forgotten, and he would be again as well as ever. But

Peregrine, though he understood all this, was hardly able to express

himself.

"My boy," said the old man, "I know very well what you mean. What

you say is partly true, and partly not quite true. Some day, perhaps,

when we are sitting here together over the fire, I shall be better

able to talk over all this; but not now, Perry. God has been very

good to me, and given me so much that I will not repine at this

sorrow. I have lived my life, and am content."

"Oh yes, of course all that's true enough. And if God should choose

that you should--die, you know, or I either, some people would be

sorry, but we shouldn't complain ourselves. But what I say is this:

you should never give up as long as you live. There's a sort of

feeling about it which I can't explain. One should always say to

oneself, No surrender." And Peregrine, as he spoke, stood up from his

chair, thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets, and shook his head.

[Illustration: "No Surrender."]

Sir Peregrine smiled as he answered him. "But Perry, my boy, we can't

always say that. When the heart and the spirit and the body have all

surrendered, why should the voice tell a foolish falsehood?"

"But it shouldn't be a falsehood," said Peregrine. "Nobody should

ever knock under of his own accord."

"You are quite right there, my boy; you are quite right there. Stick

to that yourself. But, remember, that you are not to knock under to

any of your enemies. The worst that you will meet with are folly, and

vice, and extravagance."

"That's of course," said Peregrine, by no means wishing on the

present occasion to bring under discussion his future contests with

any such enemies as those now named by his grandfather.

"And now, suppose you dress for dinner," said the baronet. "I've got

ahead of you there you see. What I've told you to-day I have already

told your mother."

"I'm sure she doesn't think you right."

"If she thinks me wrong, she is too kind and well-behaved to

say so,--which is more than I can say for her son. Your mother,

Perry, never told me that I was wrong yet, though she has had many

occasions;--too many, too many. But, come, go and dress for dinner."

"You are wrong in this, sir, if ever you were wrong in your life,"

said Peregrine, leaving the room. His grandfather did not answer him

again, but followed him out of the door, and walked briskly across

the hall into the drawing-room.

"There's Peregrine been lecturing me about draining," he said to his

daughter-in-law, striving to speak in a half-bantering tone of voice,

as though things were going well with him.

"Lecturing you!" said Mrs. Orme.

"And he's right, too. There's nothing like it. He'll make a better

farmer, I take it, than Lucius Mason. You'll live to see him know the

value of an acre of land as well as any man in the county. It's the

very thing that he's fit for. He'll do better with the property than

ever I did."

There was something beautiful in the effort which the old man was

making when watched by the eyes of one who knew him as well as did

his daughter-in-law. She knew him, and understood all the workings of

his mind, and the deep sorrow of his heart. In very truth, the star

of his life was going out darkly under a cloud; but he was battling

against his sorrow and shame--not that he might be rid of them

himself, but that others might not have to share them. That doctrine

of "No surrender" was strong within his bosom, and he understood

the motto in a finer sense than that in which his grandson had used

it. He would not tell them that his heart was broken,--not if he

could help it. He would not display his wound if it might be in his

power to hide it. He would not confess that lands, and houses, and

seignorial functions were no longer of value in his eyes. As far as

might be possible he would bear his own load till that and the memory

of his last folly might be hidden together in the grave.

But he knew that he was no longer fit for a man's work, and that

it would be well that he should abandon it. He had made a terrible

mistake. In his old age he had gambled for a large stake, and had

lost it all. He had ventured to love;--to increase the small number

of those who were nearest and dearest to him, to add one to those

whom he regarded as best and purest,--and he had been terribly

deceived. He had for many years almost worshipped the one lady who

had sat at his table, and now in his old age he had asked her to

share her place of honour with another. What that other was need not

now be told. And the world knew that this woman was to have been his

wife! He had boasted loudly that he would give her that place and

those rights. He had ventured his all upon her innocence and her

purity. He had ventured his all,--and he had lost.

I do not say that on this account there was any need that he should

be stricken to the ground,--that it behoved him as a man of high

feeling to be broken-hearted. He would have been a greater man had

he possessed the power to bear up against all this, and to go forth

to the world bearing his burden bravely on his shoulders. But Sir

Peregrine Orme was not a great man, and possessed few or none of the

elements of greatness. He was a man of a singularly pure mind, and

endowed with a strong feeling of chivalry. It had been everything to

him to be spoken of by the world as a man free from reproach,--who

had lived with clean hands and with clean people around him. All

manner of delinquencies he could forgive in his dependents which did

not tell of absolute baseness; but it would have half killed him had

he ever learned that those he loved had become false or fraudulent.

When his grandson had come to trouble about the rats, he had acted,

not over-cleverly, a certain amount of paternal anger; but had

Peregrine broken his promise to him, no acting would have been

necessary. It may therefore be imagined what were now his feelings as

to Lady Mason.

Her he could forgive for deceiving him. He had told his

daughter-in-law that he would forgive her; and it was a thing done.

But he could not forgive himself in that he had been deceived. He

could not forgive himself for having mingled with the sweet current

of his Edith's life the foul waters of that criminal tragedy. He

could not now bid her desert Lady Mason: for was it not true that the

woman's wickedness was known to them two, through her resolve not to

injure those who had befriended her? But all this made the matter

worse rather than better to him. It is all very well to say, "No

surrender;" but when the load placed upon the back is too heavy to be

borne, the back must break or bend beneath it.

His load was too heavy to be borne, and therefore he said to himself

that he would put it down. He would not again see Lord Alston and

the old friends of former days. He would attend no more at the

magistrates' bench, but would send his grandson out into his place.

For the few days that remained to him in this world, he might be well

contented to abandon the turmoils and troubles of life. "It will not

be for long," he said to himself over and over again. And then he

would sit in his arm-chair for hours, intending to turn his mind

to such solemn thoughts as might befit a dying man. But, as he sat

there, he would still think of Lady Mason. He would remember her as

she had leaned against his breast on that day that he kissed her; and

then he would remember her as she was when she spoke those horrid

words to him--"Yes; I did it; at night, when I was alone." And this

was the woman whom he had loved! This was the woman whom he still

loved,--if all the truth might be confessed.

His grandson, though he read much of his grandfather's mind, had

failed to read it all. He did not know how often Sir Peregrine

repeated to himself those words, "No Surrender," or how gallantly

he strove to live up to them. Lands and money and seats of honour

he would surrender, as a man surrenders his tools when he has done

his work; but his tone of feeling and his principle he would not

surrender, though the maintenance of them should crush him with their

weight. The woman had been very vile, desperately false, wicked

beyond belief, with premeditated villany, for years and years;--and

this was the woman whom he had wished to make the bosom companion of

his latter days!

"Samson is happy now, I suppose, that he has got the axe in his

hand," he said to his grandson.

"Pretty well for that, sir, I think."

"That man will cut down every tree about the place, if you'll let

him." And in that way he strove to talk about the affairs of the

property.

CHAPTER LX.

WHAT REBEKAH DID FOR HER SON.

Every day Mrs. Orme went up to Orley Farm and sat for two hours

with Lady Mason. We may say that there was now no longer any secret

between them, and that she whose life had been so innocent, so pure,

and so good, could look into the inmost heart and soul of that other

woman whose career had been supported by the proceeds of one terrible

life-long iniquity. And now, by degrees, Lady Mason would begin to

plead for herself, or rather, to put in a plea for the deed she had

done, acknowledging, however, that she, the doer of it, had fallen

almost below forgiveness through the crime. "Was he not his son as

much as that other one; and had I not deserved of him that he should

do this thing for me?" And again "Never once did I ask of him any

favour for myself from the day that I gave myself to him, because he

had been good to my father and mother. Up to the very hour of his

death I never asked him to spend a shilling on my own account. But I

asked him to do this thing for his child; and when at last he refused

me, I told him that I myself would cause it to be done."

"You told him so?"

"I did; and I think that he believed me. He knew that I was one who

would act up to my word. I told him that Orley Farm should belong to

our babe."

"And what did he say?"

"He bade me beware of my soul. My answer was very terrible, and I

will not shock you with it. Ah me! it is easy to talk of repentance,

but repentance will not come with a word."

In these days Mrs. Orme became gradually aware that hitherto she had

comprehended but little of Lady Mason's character. There was a power

of endurance about her, and a courage that was almost awful to the

mind of the weaker, softer, and better woman. Lady Mason, during

her sojourn at The Cleeve, had seemed almost to sink under her

misfortune; nor had there been any hypocrisy, any pretence in her

apparent misery. She had been very wretched;--as wretched a human

creature, we may say, as any crawling God's earth at that time. But

she had borne her load, and, bearing it, had gone about her work,

still striving with desperate courage as the ground on which she trod

continued to give way beneath her feet, inch by inch. They had known

and pitied her misery; they had loved her for misery--as it is in

the nature of such people to do;--but they had little known how great

had been the cause for it. They had sympathised with the female

weakness which had succumbed when there was hardly any necessity for

succumbing. Had they then known all, they would have wondered at the

strength which made a struggle possible under such circumstances.

Even now she would not yield. I have said that there had been no

hypocrisy in her misery during those weeks last past; and I have said

so truly. But there had perhaps been some pretences, some acting of a

part, some almost necessary pretence as to her weakness. Was she not

bound to account to those around her for her great sorrow? And was it

not above all things needful that she should enlist their sympathy

and obtain their aid? She had been obliged to cry to them for help,

though obliged also to confess that there was little reason for such

crying. "I am a woman, and weak," she had said, "and therefore cannot

walk alone, now that the way is stony." But what had been the truth

with her? How would she have cried, had it been possible for her to

utter the sharp cry of her heart? The waters had been closing over

her head, and she had clutched at a hand to save her; but the owner

of that hand might not know how imminent, how close was the danger.

But in these days, as she sat in her own room with Mrs. Orme, the

owner of that hand might know everything. The secret had been told,

and there was no longer need for pretence. As she could now expose

to view the whole load of her wretchedness, so also could she make

known the strength that was still left for endurance. And these two

women who had become endeared to each other under such terrible

circumstances, came together at these meetings with more of the

equality of friendship than had ever existed at The Cleeve. It may

seem strange that it should be so--strange that the acknowledged

forger of her husband's will should be able to maintain a better

claim for equal friendship than the lady who was believed to be

innocent and true! But it was so. Now she stood on true ground;--now,

as she sat there with Mrs. Orme, she could speak from her heart,

pouring forth the real workings of her mind. From Mrs. Orme she had

no longer aught to fear; nor from Sir Peregrine. Everything was known

to them, and she could now tell of every incident of her crime with

an outspoken boldness that in itself was incompatible with the humble

bearing of an inferior in the presence of one above her.

And she did still hope. The one point to be gained was this; that

her son, her only son, the child on whose behalf this crime had been

committed, should never know her shame, or live to be disgraced by

her guilt. If she could be punished, she would say, and he left in

ignorance of her punishment, she would not care what indignities

they might heap upon her. She had heard of penal servitude, of years,

terribly long, passed in all the misery of vile companionship; of

solitary confinement, and the dull madness which it engenders; of

all the terrors of a life spent under circumstances bearable only by

the uneducated, the rude, and the vile. But all this was as nothing

to her compared with the loss of honour to her son. "I should live,"

she would say; "but he would die. You cannot ask me to become his

murderer!"

It was on this point that they differed always. Mrs. Orme would

have had her confess everything to Lucius, and strove to make her

understand that if he were so told, the blow would fall less heavily

than it would do if the knowledge came to him from her conviction at

the trial. But the mother would not bring herself to believe that it

was absolutely necessary that he should ever know it. "There was the

property! Yes; but let the trial come, and if she were acquitted,

then let some arrangement be made about that. The lawyers might find

out some cause why it should be surrendered." But Mrs. Orme feared

that if the trial were over, and the criminal saved from justice,

the property would not be surrendered. And then how would that wish

of repentance be possible? After all was not that the one thing

necessary?

I will not say that Mrs. Orme in these days ever regretted that her

sympathy and friendship had been thus bestowed, but she frequently

acknowledged to herself that the position was too difficult for her.

There was no one whose assistance she could ask; for she felt that

she could not in this matter ask counsel from Sir Peregrine. She

herself was good, and pure, and straightminded, and simple in her

perception of right and wrong; but Lady Mason was greater than she in

force of character,--a stronger woman in every way, endowed with more

force of will, with more power of mind, with greater energy, and

a swifter flow of words. Sometimes she almost thought it would be

better that she should stay away from Orley Farm; but then she

had promised to be true to her wretched friend, and the mother's

solicitude for her son still softened the mother's heart.

In these days, till the evening came, Lucius Mason never made his way

into his mother's sitting-room, which indeed was the drawing-room of

the house,--and he and Mrs. Orme, as a rule, hardly ever met each

other. If he saw her as she entered or left the place, he would lift

his hat to her and pass by without speaking. He was not admitted to

those councils of his mother's, and would not submit to ask after

his mother's welfare or to inquire as to her affairs from a stranger.

On no other subject was it possible that he should now speak to the

daily visitor and the only visitor at Orley Farm. All this Mrs. Orme

understood, and saw that the young man was alone and comfortless. He

passed his hours below, in his own room, and twice a day his mother

found him in the parlour, and then they sat through their silent,

miserable meals. She would then leave him, always saying some soft

words of motherly love, and putting her hand either upon his shoulder

or his arm. On such occasions he was never rough to her, but he would

never respond to her caress. She had ill-treated him, preferring in

her trouble the assistance of a stranger to his assistance. She would

ask him neither for his money nor his counsel, and as she had thus

chosen to stand aloof from him, he also would stand aloof from her.

Not for always,--as he said to himself over and over again; for his

heart misgave him when he saw the lines of care so plainly written

on his mother's brow. Not for always should it be so. The day of the

trial would soon be present, and the day of the trial would soon be

over; then again would they be friends. Poor young man! Unfortunate

young man!

Mrs. Orme saw all this, and to her it was very terrible. What would

be the world to her, if her boy should frown at her, and look black

when she caressed him? And she thought that it was the fault of

the mother rather than of the son; as indeed was not all that

wretchedness the mother's fault? But then again, there was the one

great difficulty. How could any step be taken in the right direction

till the whole truth had been confessed to him?

The two women were sitting together in that up stairs room; and the

day of the trial was now not a full week distant from them, when Mrs.

Orme again tried to persuade the mother to intrust her son with the

burden of all her misery. On the preceding day Mr. Solomon Aram had

been down at Orley Farm, and had been with Lady Mason for an hour.

"He knows the truth!" Lady Mason had said to her friend. "I am sure

of that."

"But did he ask you?"

"Oh, no, he did not ask me that. He asked of little things that

happened at the time; but from his manner I am sure he knows it all.

He says--that I shall escape."

"Did he say escape?"

"No; not that word, but it was the same thing. He spoke to Lucius,

for I saw them on the lawn together."

"You do not know what he said to him?"

"No; for Lucius would not speak to me, and I could not ask him." And

then they both were silent, for Mrs. Orme was thinking how she could

bring about that matter that was so near her heart. Lady Mason was

seated in a large old-fashioned arm-chair, in which she now passed

nearly all her time. The table was by her side, but she rarely turned

herself to it. She sat leaning with her elbow on her arm, supporting

her face with her hand; and opposite to her, so close that she might

look into her face and watch every movement of her eyes, sat Mrs.

Orme,--intent upon that one thing, that the woman before her should

be brought to repent the evil she had done.

"And you have not spoken to Lucius?"

"No," she answered. "No more than I have told you. What could I say

to him about the man?"

"Not about Mr. Aram. It might not be necessary to speak of him. He

has his work to do; and I suppose that he must do it in his own way?"

"Yes; he must do it, in his own way. Lucius would not understand."

"Unless you told him everything, of course he could not understand."

"That is impossible."

"No, Lady Mason, it is not impossible. Dear Lady Mason, do not turn

from me in that way. It is for your sake,--because I love you, that I

press you to do this. If he knew it all--"

"Could you tell your son such a tale?" said Lady Mason, turning upon

her sharply, and speaking almost with an air of anger.

Mrs. Orme was for a moment silenced, for she could not at once bring

herself to conceive it possible that she could be so circumstanced.

But at last she answered. "Yes," she said, "I think I could, if--."

And then she paused.

"If you had done such a deed! Ah, you do not know, for the doing of

it would be impossible to you. You can never understand what was my

childhood, and how my young years were passed. I never loved anything

but him;--that is, till I knew you, and--and--." But instead of

finishing her sentence she pointed down towards The Cleeve. "How,

then, can I tell him? Mrs. Orme, I would let them pull me to pieces,

bit by bit, if in that way I could save him."

"Not in that way," said Mrs. Orme; "not in that way."

But Lady Mason went on pouring forth the pent-up feelings of her

bosom, not regarding the faint words of her companion. "Till he lay

in my arms I had loved nothing. From my earliest years I had been

taught to love money, wealth, and property; but as to myself the

teachings had never come home to me. When they bade me marry the old

man because he was rich, I obeyed them,--not caring for his riches,

but knowing that it behoved me to relieve them of the burden of my

support. He was kinder to me than they had been, and I did for him

the best I could. But his money and his wealth were little to me. He

told me over and over again that when he died I should have the means

to live, and that was enough. I would not pretend to him that I cared

for the grandeur of his children who despised me. But then came my

baby, and the world was all altered for me. What could I do for the

only thing that I had ever called my own? Money and riches they had

told me were everything."

"But they had told you wrong," said Mrs. Orme, as she wiped the tears

from her eyes.

"They had told me falsely. I had heard nothing but falsehoods from my

youth upwards," she answered fiercely. "For myself I had not cared

for these things; but why should not he have money and riches and

land? His father had them to give over and above what had already

made those sons and daughters so rich and proud. Why should not this

other child also be his father's heir? Was he not as well born as

they? was he not as fair a child? What did Rebekah do, Mrs. Orme? Did

she not do worse; and did it not all go well with her? Why should my

boy be an Ishmael? Why should I be treated as the bondwoman, and see

my little one perish of thirst in this world's wilderness?"

"No Saviour had lived and died for the world in those days," said

Mrs. Orme.

"And no Saviour had lived and died for me," said the wretched woman,

almost shrieking in her despair. The lines of her face were terrible

to be seen as she thus spoke, and an agony of anguish loaded her brow

upon which Mrs. Orme was frightened to look. She fell on her knees

before the wretched woman, and taking her by both her hands strove

all she could to find some comfort for her.

"Ah, do not say so. Do not say that. Whatever may come, that

misery--that worst of miseries need not oppress you. If that indeed

were true!"

"It was true;--and how should it be otherwise?"

"But now,--now. It need not be true now. Lady Mason, for your soul's

sake say that it is so now."

"Mrs. Orme," she said, speaking with a singular quiescence of tone

after the violence of her last words, "it seems to me that I care

more for his soul than for my own. For myself I can bear even that.

But if he were a castaway--!"

I will not attempt to report the words that passed between them for

the next half-hour, for they concerned a matter which I may not dare

to handle too closely in such pages as these. But Mrs. Orme still

knelt there at her feet, pressing Lady Mason's hands, pressing

against her knees, as with all the eagerness of true affection she

endeavoured to bring her to a frame of mind that would admit of some

comfort. But it all ended in this:--Let everything be told to Lucius,

so that the first step back to honesty might be taken,--and then let

them trust to Him whose mercy can ever temper the wind to the shorn

lamb.

But, as Lady Mason had once said to herself, repentance will not come

with a word. "I cannot tell him," she said at last. "It is a thing

impossible. I should die at his feet before the words were spoken."

"I will do it for you," said Mrs. Orme, offering from pure charity

to take upon herself a task perhaps as heavy as any that a human

creature could perform. "I will tell him."

"No, no," screamed Lady Mason, taking Mrs. Orme by both her arms as

she spoke. "You will not do so: say that you will not. Remember your

promise to me. Remember why it is that you know it all yourself."

"I will not, surely, unless you bid me," said Mrs. Orme.

"No, no; I do not bid you. Mind, I do not bid you. I will not have it

done. Better anything than that, while it may yet be avoided. I have

your promise; have I not?"

"Oh, yes; of course I should not do it unless you told me." And then,

after some further short stay, during which but little was said, Mrs.

Orme got up to go.

"You will come to me to-morrow," said Lady Mason.

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Orme.

"Because I feared that I had offended you."

"Oh, no; I will take no offence from you."

"You should not, for you know what I have to bear. You know, and no

one else knows. Sir Peregrine does not know. He cannot understand.

But you know and understand it all. And, Mrs. Orme, what you do now

will be counted to you for great treasure,--for very great treasure.

You are better than the Samaritan, for he went on his way. But you

will stay till the last. Yes; I know you will stay." And the poor

creature kissed her only friend;--kissed her hands and her forehead

and her breast. Then Mrs. Orme went without speaking, for her heart

was full, and the words would not come to her; but as she went she

said to herself that she would stay till the last.

Standing alone on the steps before the front door she found Lucius

Mason all alone, and some feeling moved her to speak a word to him as

she passed. "I hope all this does not trouble you much, Mr. Mason,"

she said, offering her hand to him. She felt that her words were

hypocritical as she was speaking them; but under such circumstances

what else could she say to him?

"Well, Mrs. Orme, such an episode in one's family history does give

one some trouble. I am unhappy,--very unhappy; but not too much

so to thank you for your most unusual kindness to my poor mother."

And then, having been so far encouraged by her speaking to him, he

accompanied her round the house on to the lawn, from whence a path

led away through a shrubbery on to the road which would take her by

the village of Coldharbour to The Cleeve.

"Mr. Mason," she said, as they walked for a few steps together before

the house, "do not suppose that I presume to interfere between you

and your mother."

"You have a right to interfere now," he said.

"But I think you might comfort her if you would be more with her.

Would it not be better if you could talk freely together about all

this?"

"It would be better," he said; "but I fear that that is no longer

possible. When this trial is over, and the world knows that she is

innocent; when people shall see how cruelly she has been used--"

Mrs. Orme might not tell the truth to him, but she could with

difficulty bear to hear him dwell thus confidently on hopes which

were so false. "The future is in the hands of God, Mr. Mason; but for

the present--"

"The present and the future are both in His hands, Mrs. Orme. I know

my mother's innocence, and would have done a son's part towards

establishing it;--but she would not allow me. All this will soon be

over now, and then, I trust, she and I will once again understand

each other. Till then I doubt whether I shall be wise to interfere.

Good morning, Mrs. Orme; and pray believe that I appreciate at its

full worth all that you are doing for her." Then he again lifted his

hat and left her.

Lady Mason from her window saw them as they walked together, and her

heart for a moment misgave her. Could it be that her friend was

treacherous to her? Was it possible that even now she was telling

everything that she had sworn that she would not tell? Why were they

two together, seeing that they passed each other day by day without

intercourse? And so she watched with anxious eyes till they parted,

and then she saw that Lucius stood idly on the terrace swinging his

stick as he looked down the hill towards the orchard below him. He

would not have stood thus calmly had he already heard his mother's

shame. This she knew, and having laid aside her immediate fears she

retreated back to her chair. No; she would not tell him: at any rate

till the trial should be over.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION.

The day of the trial was now quickly coming on, and the London world,

especially the world of lawyers, was beginning to talk much on the

subject. Men about the Inns of Court speculated as to the verdict,

offering to each other very confident opinions as to the result, and

offering, on some occasions, bets as well as opinions. The younger

world of barristers was clearly of opinion that Lady Mason was

innocent; but a portion, an unhappy portion, was inclined to fear,

that, in spite of her innocence, she would be found guilty. The elder

world of barristers was not, perhaps, so demonstrative, but in that

world the belief in her innocence was not so strong, and the fear of

her condemnation much stronger. The attorneys, as a rule, regarded

her as guilty. To the policeman's mind every man not a policeman is

a guilty being, and the attorneys perhaps share something of this

feeling. But the attorneys to a man expected to see her acquitted.

Great was their faith in Mr. Furnival; great their faith in Solomon

Aram; but greater than in all was their faith in Mr. Chaffanbrass. If

Mr. Chaffanbrass could not pull her through, with a prescription of

twenty years on her side, things must be very much altered indeed in

our English criminal court. To the outer world, that portion of the

world which had nothing to do with the administration of the law, the

idea of Lady Mason having been guilty seemed preposterous. Of course

she was innocent, and of course she would be found to be innocent.

And of course, also, that Joseph Mason of Groby Park was, and would

be found to be, the meanest, the lowest, the most rapacious of

mankind.

And then the story of Sir Peregrine's attachment and proposed

marriage, joined as it was to various hints of the manner in which

that marriage had been broken off, lent a romance to the whole

affair, and added much to Lady Mason's popularity. Everybody had

now heard of it, and everybody was also aware, that though the

idea of a marriage had been abandoned, there had been no quarrel.

The friendship between the families was as close as ever, and

Sir Peregrine,--so it was understood--had pledged himself to an

acquittal. It was felt to be a public annoyance that an affair of so

exciting a nature should be allowed to come off in the little town of

Alston. The court-house, too, was very defective in its arrangements,

and ill qualified to give accommodation to the great body of would-be

attendants at the trial. One leading newspaper went so far as to

suggest, that in such a case as this, the antediluvian prejudices

of the British grandmother--meaning the Constitution--should be set

aside, and the trial should take place in London. But I am not aware

that any step was taken towards the carrying out of so desirable a

project.

Down at Hamworth the feeling in favour of Lady Mason was not

perhaps so strong as it was elsewhere. Dockwrath was a man not much

respected, but nevertheless many believed in him; and down there, in

the streets of Hamworth, he was not slack in propagating his view of

the question. He had no doubt, he said, how the case would go. He had

no doubt, although he was well aware that Mr. Mason's own lawyers

would do all they could to throw over their own client. But he was

too strong, he said, even for that. The facts as he would bring them

forward would confound Round and Crook, and compel any jury to find

a verdict of guilty. I do not say that all Hamworth believed in

Dockwrath, but his energy and confidence did have its effect, and

Lady Mason's case was not upheld so strongly in her own neighbourhood

as elsewhere.

The witnesses in these days were of course very important persons,

and could not but feel the weight of that attention which the world

would certainly pay to them. There would be four chief witnesses for

the prosecution; Dockwrath himself, who would be prepared to speak

as to the papers left behind him by old Usbech; the man in whose

possession now remained that deed respecting the partnership which

was in truth executed by old Sir Joseph on that fourteenth of

July; Bridget Bolster; and John Kenneby. Of the manner in which Mr.

Dockwrath used his position we already know enough. The man who held

the deed, one Torrington, was a relative of Martock, Sir Joseph's

partner, and had been one of his executors. It was not much indeed

that he had to say, but that little sent him up high in the social

scale during those days. He lived at Kennington, and he was asked

out to dinner in that neighbourhood every day for a week running, on

the score of his connection with the great Orley Farm case. Bridget

Bolster was still down at the hotel in the West of England, and

being of a solid, sensible, and somewhat unimaginative turn of mind,

probably went through her duties to the last without much change of

manner. But the effect of the coming scenes upon poor John Kenneby

was terrible. It was to him as though for the time they had made of

him an Atlas, and compelled him to bear on his weak shoulders the

weight of the whole world. Men did talk much about Lady Mason and the

coming trial; but to him it seemed as though men talked of nothing

else. At Hubbles and Grease's it was found useless to put figures

into his hands till all this should be over. Indeed it was doubted

by many whether he would ever recover his ordinary tone of mind.

It seemed to be understood that he would be cross-examined by

Chaffanbrass, and there were those who thought that John Kenneby

would never again be equal to a day's work after that which he would

then be made to endure. That he would have been greatly relieved

could the whole thing have been wiped away from him there can

be no manner of doubt; but I fancy that he would also have been

disappointed. It is much to be great for a day, even though the day's

greatness should cause the shipwreck of a whole life.

"I shall endeavour to speak the truth," said John Kenneby, solemnly.

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said

Moulder.

"Yes, Moulder, that will be my endeavour; and then I may lay my hand

upon my bosom and think that I have done my duty by my country." And

as Kenneby spoke he suited the action to the word.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Them's the sentiments of

a man, and I, as a woman having a right to speak where you are

concerned, quite approve of them."

"They'll get nothing but the truth out of John," said Mrs. Moulder;

"not if he knows it." These last words she added, actuated by

admiration of what she had heard of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and perhaps

with some little doubt as to her brother's firmness.

"That's where it is," said Moulder. "Lord bless you, John, they'll

turn you round their finger like a bit of red tape. Truth! Gammon!

What do they care for truth?"

"But I care, Moulder," said Kenneby. "I don't suppose they can make

me tell falsehoods if I don't wish it."

"Not if you're the man I take you to be," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Gammon!" said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, that's an objectionable word," said Mrs. Smiley. "If

John Kenneby is the man I take him to be,--and who's a right to speak

if I haven't, seeing that I am going to commit myself for this world

into his hands?"--and Mrs. Smiley, as she spoke, simpered, and looked

down with averted head on the fulness of her Irish tabinet--"if

he's the man that I take him to be, he won't say on this thrilling

occasion no more than the truth, nor yet no less. Now that isn't

gammon--if I know what gammon is."

It will have been already seen that the party in question were

assembled at Mr. Moulder's room in Great St. Helen's. There had been

a little supper party there to commemorate the final arrangements

as to the coming marriage, and the four were now sitting round the

fire with their glasses of hot toddy at their elbows. Moulder was

armed with his pipe, and was enjoying himself in that manner which

most delighted him. When last we saw him he had somewhat exceeded

discretion in his cups, and was not comfortable. But at the present

nothing ailed him. The supper had been good, the tobacco was good,

and the toddy was good. Therefore when the lovely Thais sitting

beside him,--Thais however on this occasion having been provided not

for himself but for his brother-in-law,--when Thais objected to the

use of his favourite word, he merely chuckled down in the bottom of

his fat throat, and allowed her to finish her sentence.

Poor John Kenneby had more--much more, on his hands than this

dreadful trial. Since he had declared that the Adriatic was free

to wed another, he had found himself devoted and given up to Mrs.

Smiley. For some days after that auspicious evening there had been

considerable wrangling between Mrs. Moulder and Mrs. Smiley as to the

proceeds of the brick-field; and on this question Moulder himself

had taken a part. The Moulder interest had of course desired that

all right of management in the brick-field should be vested in

the husband, seeing that, according to the usages of this country,

brick-fields and their belongings appertain rather to men than to

women; but Mrs. Smiley had soon made it evident that she by no means

intended to be merely a sleeping partner in the firm. At one time

Kenneby had entertained a hope of escape; for neither would the

Moulder interest give way, nor would the Smiley. But two hundred a

year was a great stake, and at last the thing was arranged, very much

in accordance with the original Smiley view. And now at this most

trying period of his life, poor Kenneby had upon his mind all the

cares of a lover as well as the cares of a witness.

"I shall do my best," said John. "I shall do my best and then throw

myself upon Providence."

"And take a little drop of something comfortable in your pocket,"

said his sister, "so as to sperrit you up a little when your name's

called."

"Sperrit him up!" said Moulder; "why I suppose he'll be standing in

that box the best part of a day. I knowed a man was a witness; it was

a case of horse-stealing; and the man who was the witness was the man

who'd took the horse."

"And he was witness against hisself!" said Mrs. Smiley.

"No; he'd paid for it. That is to say, either he had or he hadn't.

That was what they wanted to get out of him, and I'm blessed if he

didn't take 'em till the judge wouldn't set there any longer. And

then they hadn't got it out of him."

"But John Kenneby ain't one of that sort," said Mrs. Smiley.

"I suppose that man did not want to unbosom himself," said Kenneby.

"Well; no. The likes of him seldom do like to unbosom themselves,"

said Moulder.

"But that will be my desire. If they will only allow me to speak

freely whatever I know about this matter, I will give them no

trouble."

"You mean to act honest, John," said his sister.

"I always did, Mary Anne."

"Well now, I'll tell you what it is," said Moulder. "As Mrs. Smiley

don't like it I won't say anything more about gammon;--not just at

present, that is."

"I've no objection to gammon, Mr. Moulder, when properly used," said

Mrs. Smiley, "but I look on it as disrespectful; and seeing the

position which I hold as regards John Kenneby, anything disrespectful

to him is hurtful to my feelings."

"All right," said Moulder. "And now, John, I'll just tell you what

it is. You've no more chance of being allowed to speak freely there

than--than--than--no more than if you was in church. What are them

fellows paid for if you're to say whatever you pleases out in your

own way?"

"He only wants to say the truth, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, who probably

knew less than her husband of the general usages of courts of law.

"Truth be ----," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder!" said Mrs. Smiley. "There's ladies by, if you'll please

to remember."

"To hear such nonsense sets one past oneself," continued he; "as if

all those lawyers were brought together there--the cleverest and

sharpest fellows in the kingdom, mind you--to listen to a man like

John here telling his own story in his own way. You'll have to tell

your story in their way; that is, in two different ways. There'll be

one fellow'll make you tell it his way first, and another fellow'll

make you tell it again his way afterwards; and its odds but what the

first 'll be at you again after that, till you won't know whether you

stand on your heels or your head."

"That can't be right," said Mrs. Moulder.

"And why can't it be right?" said Moulder. "They're paid for it;

it's their duties; just as it's my duty to sell Hubbles and Grease's

sugar. It's not for me to say the sugar's bad, or the samples not

equal to the last. My duty is to sell, and I sell;--and it's their

duty to get a verdict."

"But the truth, Moulder--!" said Kenneby.

"Gammon!" said Moulder. "Begging your pardon, Mrs. Smiley, for making

use of the expression. Look you here, John; if you're paid to bring

a man off not guilty, won't you bring him off if you can? I've been

at trials times upon times, and listened till I've wished from the

bottom of my heart that I'd been brought up a barrister. Not that I

think much of myself, and I mean of course with education and all

that accordingly. It's beautiful to hear them. You'll see a little

fellow in a wig, and he'll get up; and there'll be a man in the box

before him,--some swell dressed up to his eyes, who thinks no end of

strong beer of himself; and in about ten minutes he'll be as flabby

as wet paper, and he'll say--on his oath, mind you,--just anything

that that little fellow wants him to say. That's power, mind you, and

I call it beautiful."

"But it ain't justice," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Why not? I say it is justice. You can have it if you choose to pay

for it, and so can I. If I buy a greatcoat against the winter, and

you go out at night without having one, is it injustice because

you're perished by the cold while I'm as warm as a toast. I say it's

a grand thing to live in a country where one can buy a greatcoat."

The argument had got so far, Mr. Moulder certainly having the best of

it, when a ring at the outer door was heard.

"Now who on earth is that?" said Moulder.

"Snengkeld, I shouldn't wonder," said his wife.

"I hope it ain't no stranger," said Mrs. Smiley. "Situated as John

and I are now, strangers is so disagreeable." And then the door was

opened by the maid-servant, and Mr. Kantwise was shown into the room.

"Halloo, Kantwise!" said Mr. Moulder, not rising from his chair, or

giving any very decided tokens of welcome. "I thought you were down

somewhere among the iron foundries?"

"So I was, Mr. Moulder, but I came up yesterday. Mrs. Moulder, allow

me to have the honour. I hope I see you quite well; but looking

at you I need not ask. Mr. Kenneby, sir, your very humble servant.

The day's coming on fast; isn't it, Mr. Kenneby? Ma'am, your very

obedient. I believe I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted."

"Mrs. Smiley, Mr. Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise, Mrs. Smiley," said the

lady of the house, introducing her visitors to each other in the

appropriate way.

"Quite delighted, I'm sure," said Kantwise.

"Smiley as is, and Kenneby as will be this day three weeks," said

Moulder; and then they all enjoyed that little joke, Mrs. Smiley by

no means appearing bashful in the matter although Mr. Kantwise was a

stranger.

"I thought I should find Mr. Kenneby here," said Kantwise, when the

subject of the coming nuptials had been sufficiently discussed, "and

therefore I just stepped in. No intrusion, I hope, Mr. Moulder."

"All right," said Moulder; "make yourself at home. There's the stuff

on the table. You know what the tap is."

"I've just parted from--Mr. Dockwrath," said Kantwise, speaking

in a tone of voice which implied the great importance of the

communication, and looking round the table to see the effect of it

upon the circle.

"Then you've parted from a very low-lived party, let me tell you

that," said Moulder. He had not forgotten Dockwrath's conduct in the

commercial room at Leeds, and was fully resolved that he never would

forgive it.

"That's as may be," said Kantwise. "I say nothing on that subject at

the present moment, either one way or the other. But I think you'll

all agree as to this: that at the present moment Mr. Dockwrath fills

a conspicuous place in the public eye."

"By no means so conspicuous as John Kenneby," said Mrs. Smiley, "if I

may be allowed in my position to hold an opinion."

"That's as may be, ma'am. I say nothing about that. What I hold by

is, that Mr. Dockwrath does hold a conspicuous place in the public

eye. I've just parted with him in Gray's Inn Lane, and he says--that

it's all up now with Lady Mason."

"Gammon!" said Moulder. And on this occasion Mrs. Smiley did not

rebuke him. "What does he know about it more than any one else? Will

he bet two to one? Because, if so, I'll take it;--only I must see the

money down."

"I don't know what he'll bet, Mr. Moulder; only he says it's all up

with her."

"Will he back his side, even handed?"

"I ain't a betting man, Mr. Moulder. I don't think it's right. And on

such a matter as this, touching the liberty and almost life of a lady

whom I've had the honour of seeing, and acquainted as I am with the

lady of the other party, Mrs. Mason that is of Groby Park, I should

rather, if it's no offence to you, decline the subject of--betting."

"Bother!"

"Now M., in your own house, you know!" said his wife.

"So it is bother. But never mind that. Go on, Kantwise. What is this

you were saying about Dockwrath?"

"Oh, that's about all. I thought you would like to know what they

were doing,--particularly Mr. Kenneby. I do hear that they mean to be

uncommonly hard upon him."

The unfortunate witness shifted uneasily in his seat, but at the

moment said nothing himself.

"Well, now, I can't understand it," said Mrs. Smiley, sitting upright

in her chair, and tackling herself to the discussion as though she

meant to express her opinion, let who might think differently. "How

is any one to put words into my mouth if I don't choose to speak

then? There's John's waistcoat is silk." Upon which they all looked

at Kenneby's waistcoat, and, with the exception of Kantwise,

acknowledged the truth of the assertion.

"That's as may be," said he, looking round at it from the corner of

his eyes.

"And do you mean to say that all the barristers in London will make

me say that it's made of cloth? It's ridic'lous--nothing short of

ridic'lous."

"You've never tried, my dear," said Moulder.

"I don't know about being your dear, Mr. Moulder--"

"Nor yet don't I neither, Mrs. Smiley," said the wife.

"Mr. Kenneby's my dear, and I ain't ashamed to own him,--before men

and women. But if he allows hisself to be hocussed in that way, I

don't know but what I shall be ashamed. I call it hocussing--just

hocussing."

"So it is, ma'am," said Kantwise, "only this, you know, if I hocus

you, why you hocus me in return; so it isn't so very unfair, you

know."

"Unfair!" said Moulder. "It's the fairest thing that is. It's the

bulwark of the British Constitution."

"What! being badgered and browbeat?" asked Kenneby, who was thinking

within himself that if this were so he did not care if he lived

somewhere beyond the protection of that blessed Ãgis.

"Trial by jury is," said Moulder. "And how can you have trial by jury

if the witnesses are not to be cross-questioned?"

To this position no one was at the moment ready to give an answer,

and Mr. Moulder enjoyed a triumph over his audience. That he lived

in a happy and blessed country Moulder was well aware, and with

those blessings he did not wish any one to tamper. "Mother," said a

fastidious child to his parent, "the bread is gritty and the butter

tastes of turnips." "Turnips indeed,--and gritty!" said the mother.

"Is it not a great thing to have bread and butter at all?" I own that

my sympathies are with the child. Bread and butter is a great thing;

but I would have it of the best if that be possible.

After that Mr. Kantwise was allowed to dilate upon the subject

which had brought him there. Mr. Dockwrath had been summoned to

Bedford Row, and there had held a council of war together with Mr.

Joseph Mason and Mr. Matthew Round. According to his own story Mr.

Matthew had quite come round and been forced to acknowledge all that

Dockwrath had done for the cause. In Bedford Row there was no doubt

whatever as to the verdict. "That woman Bolster is quite clear that

she only signed one deed," said Kantwise.

"I shall say nothing--nothing here," said Kenneby.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Your feelings on the occasion

become you."

"I'll lay an even bet she's acquitted," said Moulder. "And I'll do it

in a ten-p'und note."

CHAPTER LXII.

WHAT THE FOUR LAWYERS THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

I have spoken of the state of public opinion as to Lady Mason's

coming trial, and have explained that for the most part men's

thoughts and sympathies took part with her. But I cannot say that

such was the case with the thoughts of those who were most closely

concerned with her in the matter,--whatever may have been their

sympathies. Of the state of Mr. Furnival's mind on the matter enough

has been said. But if he had still entertained any shadow of doubt

as to his client's guilt or innocence, none whatever was entertained

either by Mr. Aram or by Mr. Chaffanbrass. From the day on which they

had first gone into the real circumstances of the case, looking into

the evidence which could be adduced against their client, and looking

also to their means of rebutting that evidence, they had never felt

a shadow of doubt upon the subject. But yet neither of them had ever

said that she was guilty. Aram, in discussing with his clerks the

work which it was necessary that they should do in the matter, had

never expressed such an opinion; nor had Chaffanbrass done so in the

consultations which he had held with Aram. As to the verdict they

had very often expressed an opinion--differing considerably. Mr.

Aram was strongly of opinion that Lady Mason would be acquitted,

resting that opinion mainly on his great confidence in the powers

of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But Mr. Chaffanbrass would shake his head, and

sometimes say that things were not now as they used to be.

"That may be so in the City," said Mr. Aram. "But you won't find a

City jury down at Alston."

"It's not the juries, Aram. It's the judges. It usedn't to be so,

but it is now. When a man has the last word, and will take the

trouble to use it, that's everything. If I were asked what point I'd

best like to have in my favour I'd say, a deaf judge. Or if not that,

one regularly tired out. I've sometimes thought I'd like to be a

judge myself, merely to have the last word."

"That wouldn't suit you at all, Mr. Chaffanbrass, for you'd be sick

of it in a week."

"At any rate I'm not fit for it," said the great man meekly. "I'll

tell you what, Aram, I can look back on life and think that I've done

a deal of good in my way. I've prevented unnecessary bloodshed. I've

saved the country thousands of pounds in the maintenance of men

who've shown themselves well able to maintain themselves. And I've

made the Crown lawyers very careful as to what sort of evidence they

would send up to the Old Bailey. But my chances of life have been

such that they haven't made me fit to be a judge. I know that."

"I wish I might see you on the bench to-morrow;--only that we

shouldn't know what to do without you," said the civil attorney. It

was no more than the fair every-day flattery of the world, for the

practice of Mr. Solomon Aram in his profession was quite as surely

attained as was that of Mr. Chaffanbrass. And it could hardly be

called flattery, for Mr. Solomon Aram much valued the services of

Mr. Chaffanbrass, and greatly appreciated the peculiar turn of that

gentleman's mind.

The above conversation took place in Mr. Solomon Aram's private room

in Bucklersbury. In that much-noted city thoroughfare Mr. Aram rented

the first floor of a house over an eating establishment. He had no

great paraphernalia of books and boxes and clerks' desks, as are

apparently necessary to attorneys in general. Three clerks he did

employ, who sat in one room, and he himself sat in that behind

it. So at least they sat when they were to be found at the parent

establishment; but, as regarded the attorney himself and his senior

assistant, the work of their lives was carried on chiefly in the

courts of law. The room in which Mr. Aram was now sitting was

furnished with much more attention to comfort than is usual in

lawyers' chambers. Mr. Chaffanbrass was at present lying, with his

feet up, on a sofa against the wall, in a position of comfort never

attained by him elsewhere till the after-dinner hours had come to

him; and Mr. Aram himself filled an easy lounging-chair. Some few law

papers there were scattered on the library table, but none of those

piles of dusty documents which give to a stranger, on entering an

ordinary attorney's room, so terrible an idea of the difficulty and

dreariness of the profession. There were no tin boxes with old names

labelled on them; there were no piles of letters, and no pigeon-holes

loaded with old memoranda. On the whole Mr. Aram's private room was

smart and attractive; though, like himself, it had an air rather of

pretence than of steady and assured well-being.

[Illustration: Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram.]

It is not quite the thing for a barrister to wait upon an attorney,

and therefore it must not be supposed that Mr. Chaffanbrass had come

to Mr. Aram with any view to immediate business; but nevertheless, as

the two men understood each other, they could say what they had to

say as to this case of Lady Mason's, although their present positions

were somewhat irregular. They were both to meet Mr. Furnival and

Felix Graham on that afternoon in Mr. Furnival's chambers with

reference to the division of those labours which were to be commenced

at Alston on the day but one following, and they both thought that

it might be as well that they should say a word to each other on the

subject before they went there.

"I suppose you know nothing about the panel down there, eh?" said

Chaffanbrass.

"Well, I have made some inquiries; but I don't think there's

anything especial to know;--nothing that matters. If I were you, Mr.

Chaffanbrass, I wouldn't have any Hamworth people on the jury, for

they say that a prophet is never a prophet in his own country."

"But do you know the Hamworth people?"

"Oh, yes; I can tell you as much as that. But I don't think it will

matter much who is or is not on the jury."

"And why not?"

"If those two witnesses break down--that is, Kenneby and Bolster, no

jury can convict her. And if they don't--"

"Then no jury can acquit her. But let me tell you, Aram, that it's

not every man put into a jury-box who can tell whether a witness has

broken down or not."

"But from what I hear, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I don't think either of

these can stand a chance;--that is, if they both come into your

hands."

"But they won't both come into my hands," said the anxious hero of

the Old Bailey.

"Ah! that's where it is. That's where we shall fail. Mr. Furnival is

a great man, no doubt."

"A very great man,--in his way," said Mr. Chaffanbrass.

"But if he lets one of those two slip through his fingers the thing's

over."

"You know my opinion," said Chaffanbrass. "I think it is all over. If

you're right in what you say,--that they're both ready to swear in

their direct evidence that they only signed one deed on that day, no

vacillation afterwards would have any effect on the judge. It's just

possible, you know, that their memory might deceive them."

"Possible! I should think so. I'll tell you what, Mr. Chaffanbrass,

if the matter was altogether in your hands I should have no

fear,--literally no fear."

"Ah, you're partial, Aram."

"It couldn't be so managed, could it, Mr. Chaffanbrass? It would be a

great thing; a very great thing." But Mr. Chaffanbrass said that he

thought it could not be managed. The success or safety of a client

is a very great thing;--in a professional point of view a very

great thing indeed. But there is a matter which in legal eyes is

greater even than that. Professional etiquette required that the

cross-examination of these two most important witnesses should not be

left in the hands of the same barrister.

And then the special attributes of Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were

discussed between them, and it was manifest that Aram knew with great

accuracy the characters of the persons with whom he had to deal. That

Kenneby might be made to say almost anything was taken for granted.

With him there would be very great scope for that peculiar skill with

which Mr. Chaffanbrass was so wonderfully gifted. In the hands of

Mr. Chaffanbrass it was not improbable that Kenneby might be made to

swear that he had signed two, three, four--any number of documents

on that fourteenth of July, although he had before sworn that he had

only signed one. Mr. Chaffanbrass indeed might probably make him

say anything that he pleased. Had Kenneby been unsupported the case

would have been made safe,--so said Mr. Solomon Aram,--by leaving

Kenneby in the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But then Bridget Bolster

was supposed to be a witness of altogether a different class of

character. To induce her to say exactly the reverse of that which she

intended to say might, no doubt, be within the power of man. Mr. Aram

thought that it would be within the power of Mr. Chaffanbrass. He

thought, however, that it would as certainly be beyond the power of

Mr. Furnival; and when the great man lying on the sofa mentioned the

name of Mr. Felix Graham, Mr. Aram merely smiled. The question with

him was this:--Which would be the safest course?--to make quite sure

of Kenneby by leaving him with Chaffanbrass; or to go for the double

stake by handing Kenneby over to Mr. Furnival and leaving the task of

difficulty to the great master?

"When so much depends upon it, I do detest all this etiquette and

precedence," said Aram with enthusiasm. "In such a case Mr. Furnival

ought not to think of himself."

"My dear Aram," said Mr. Chaffanbrass, "men always think of

themselves first. And if we were to go out of the usual course, do

you conceive that the gentlemen on the other side would fail to

notice it?"

"Which shall it be then?"

"I'm quite indifferent. If the memory of either of these two persons

is doubtful,--and after twenty years it may be so,--Mr. Furnival will

discover it."

"Then on the whole I'm disposed to think that I'd let him take the

man."

"Just as you please, Aram. That is, if he's satisfied also."

"I'm not going to have my client overthrown, you know," said Aram.

"And then you'll take Dockwrath also, of course. I don't know that

it will have much effect upon the case, but I shall like to see

Dockwrath in your hands; I shall indeed."

"I doubt he'll be too many for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Aram might well laugh; for when had any one shown

himself able to withstand the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass?

"They say he is a sharp fellow," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "Well, we

must be off. When those gentlemen at the West End get into Parliament

it does not do to keep them waiting. Let one of your fellows get

a cab." And then the barrister and the attorney started from

Bucklersbury for the general meeting of their forces to be held in

the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn.

We have heard how it came to pass that Felix Graham had been induced

to become one of that legal phalanx which was employed on behalf of

Lady Mason. It was now some days since he had left Noningsby, and

those days with him had been very busy. He had never yet undertaken

the defence of a person in a criminal court, and had much to

learn,--or perhaps he rather fancied that he had. And then that

affair of Mary Snow's new lover was not found to arrange itself

altogether easily. When he came to the details of his dealings with

the different parties, every one wanted from him twice as much money

as he had expected. The chemist was very willing to have a partner,

but then a partnership in his business was, according to his view

of the matter, a peculiarly expensive luxury. Snow pÃ¨re, moreover,

came forward with claims which he rested on various arguments, that

Graham found it almost impossible to resist them. At first,--that is

immediately subsequent to the interview between him and his patron

described in a preceding chapter, Graham had been visited by a very

repulsive attorney who had talked loudly about the cruel wrongs of

his ill-used client. This phasis of the affair would have been by

far the preferable one; but the attorney and his client probably

disagreed. Snow wanted immediate money, and as no immediate money

was forthcoming through the attorney, he threw himself repentant at

Graham's feet, and took himself off with twenty shillings. But his

penitence, and his wants, and his tears, and the thwarted ambition

of his parental mind were endless; and poor Felix hardly knew where

to turn himself without seeing him. It seemed probable that every

denizen of the courts of law in London would be told before long

the sad tale of Mary Snow's injuries. And then Mrs. Thomas wanted

money,--more money than she had a right to want in accordance with

the terms of their mutual agreement. "She had been very much put

about," she said,--"dreadfully put about. She had had to change her

servant three times. There was no knowing the trouble Mary Snow had

given her. She had, in a great measure, been forced to sacrifice her

school." Poor woman! she thought she was telling the truth while

making these false plaints. She did not mean to be dishonest, but it

is so easy to be dishonest without meaning it when one is very poor!

Mary Snow herself made no claim on her lost lover, no claim for money

or for aught besides. When he parted from her on that day without

kissing her, Mary Snow knew that all that was over. But not the less

did Graham recognise her claim. The very bonnet which she must wear

when she stood before the altar with Fitzallen must be paid for out

of Graham's pocket. That hobby of moulding a young lady is perhaps of

all hobbies the most expensive to which a young gentleman can apply

himself.

And in these days he heard no word from Noningsby. Augustus Staveley

was up in town, and once or twice they saw each other. But, as may

easily be imagined, nothing was said between them about Madeline. As

Augustus had once declared, a man does not talk to his friend about

his own sister. And then hearing nothing--as indeed how could he

have heard anything?--Graham endeavoured to assure himself that that

was all over. His hopes had ran high at that moment when his last

interview with the judge had taken place; but after all to what did

that amount? He had never even asked Madeline to love him. He had

been such a fool that he had made no use of those opportunities which

chance had thrown in his way. He had been told that he might fairly

aspire to the hand of any lady. And yet when he had really loved, and

the girl whom he had loved had been close to him, he had not dared

to speak to her! How could he now expect that she, in his absence,

should care for him?

With all these little troubles around him he went to work on Lady

Mason's case, and at first felt thoroughly well inclined to give her

all the aid in his power. He saw Mr. Furnival on different occasions,

and did much to charm that gentleman by his enthusiasm in this

matter. Mr. Furnival himself could no longer be as enthusiastic as he

had been. The skill of a lawyer he would still give if necessary, but

the ardour of the loving friend was waxing colder from day to day.

Would it not be better, if such might be possible, that the whole

affair should be given up to the hands of Chaffanbrass who could be

energetic without belief, and of Graham who was energetic because

he believed? So he would say to himself frequently. But then he

would think again of her pale face and acknowledge that this was

impossible. He must go on till the end. But, nevertheless, if this

young man could believe, would it not be well that he should bear the

brunt of the battle? That fighting of a battle without belief is, I

think, the sorriest task which ever falls to the lot of any man.

But, as the day grew nigh, a shadow of unbelief, a dim passing

shade--a shade which would pass, and then return, and then pass

again--flitted also across the mind of Felix Graham. His theory had

been, and still was, that those two witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster,

were suborned by Dockwrath to swear falsely. He had commenced

by looking at the matter with a full confidence in his client's

innocence, a confidence which had come from the outer world, from his

social convictions, and the knowledge which he had of the confidence

of others. Then it had been necessary for him to reconcile the

stories which Kenneby and Bolster were prepared to tell with this

strong confidence, and he could only do so by believing that they

were both false and had been thus suborned. But what if they were not

false? What if he were judging them wrongfully? I do not say that

he had ceased to believe in Lady Mason; but a shadow of doubt would

occasionally cross his mind, and give to the whole affair an aspect

which to him was very tragical.

He had reached Mr. Furnival's chambers on this day some few minutes

before his new allies, and as he was seated there discussing the

matter which was now so interesting to them all, he blurted out a

question which nearly confounded the elder barrister.

"I suppose there can really be no doubt as to her innocence?"

What was Mr. Furnival to say? Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram had asked

no such question. Mr. Round had asked no such question when he had

discussed the whole matter confidentially with him. It was a sort of

question never put to professional men, and one which Felix Graham

should not have asked. Nevertheless it must be answered.

"Eh?" he said.

"I suppose we may take it for granted that Lady Mason is really

innocent,--that is, free from all falsehood or fraud in this matter?"

"Really innocent! Oh yes; I presume we take that for granted, as a

matter of course."

"But you yourself, Mr. Furnival; you have no doubt about it? You have

been concerned in this matter from the beginning, and therefore I

have no hesitation in asking you."

But that was exactly the reason why he should have hesitated! At

least so Mr. Furnival thought. "Who; I? No; I have no doubt; none in

the least," said he. And thus the lie, which he had been trying to

avoid, was at last told.

The assurance thus given was very complete as far as the words were

concerned; but there was something in the tone of Mr. Furnival's

voice, which did not quite satisfy Felix Graham. It was not that he

thought that Mr. Furnival had spoken falsely, but the answer had not

been made in a manner to set his own mind at rest. Why had not Mr.

Furnival answered him with enthusiasm? Why had he not, on behalf of

his old friend, shown something like indignation that any such doubt

should have been expressed? His words had been words of assurance;

but, considering the subject, his tone had contained no assurance.

And thus the shadow of doubt flitted backwards and forwards before

Graham's mind.

Then the general meeting of the four lawyers was held, and the

various arrangements necessary for the coming contest were settled.

No such impertinent questions were asked then, nor were there

any communications between them of a confidential nature. Mr.

Chaffanbrass and Solomon Aram might whisper together, as might also

Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham; but there could be no whispering

when all the four were assembled. The programme of their battle was

settled, and then they parted with the understanding that they were

to meet again in the court-house at Alston.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE TRIAL.

The eve of the trial had now come, and still there had been no

confidence between the mother and the son. No words of kindness had

been spoken with reference to that terrible event which was so near

at hand. Lucius had in his manner been courteous to his mother, but

he had at the same time been very stern. He had seemed to make no

allowance for her sorrows, never saying to her one of those soft

words which we all love to hear from those around us when we are

suffering. Why should she suffer thus? Had she chosen to lean upon

him, he would have borne on her behalf all this trouble and vexation.

As to her being guilty--as to her being found guilty by any twelve

jurymen in England,--no such idea ever entered his head. I have said

that many people had begun to suspect; but no such suspicions had

reached his ears. What man, unless it should be Dockwrath, would

whisper to the son the possibility of his mother's guilt? Dockwrath

had done more than whisper it; but the words of such a man could have

no avail with him against his mother's character.

On that day Mrs. Orme had been with Lady Mason for some hours, and

had used all her eloquence to induce the mother even then to divulge

her secret to her son. Mrs. Orme had suggested that Sir Peregrine

should tell him; she had offered to tell him herself; she had

proposed that Lady Mason should write to Lucius. But all had been of

no avail. Lady Mason had argued, and had argued with some truth, that

it was too late to tell him now, with the view of obtaining from him

support during the trial. If he were now told, he would not recover

from the first shock of the blow in time to appear in court without

showing on his brow the perturbation of his spirit. His terrible

grief would reveal the secret to every one. "When it is over,"--she

had whispered at last, as Mrs. Orme continued to press upon her the

absolute necessity that Lucius should give up the property,--"when it

is over, you shall do it."

With this Mrs. Orme was obliged to rest contented. She had not the

heart to remind Lady Mason how probable it was that the truth might

be told out to all the world during the next two or three days;--that

a verdict of Guilty might make any further telling unnecessary. And

indeed it was not needed that she should do so. In this respect Lady

Mason was fully aware of the nature of the ground on which she stood.

Mrs. Orme had sat with her the whole afternoon, only leaving herself

time to be ready for Sir Peregrine's dinner; and as she left her she

promised to be with her early on the following morning to go with her

down to the court. Mr. Aram was also to come to the Farm for her, and

a closed carriage had been ordered from the inn for the occasion.

"You won't let him prevent you?" were the last words she spoke, as

Mrs. Orme then left her.

"He will not wish to do so," said Mrs. Orme. "He has already given me

his permission. He never goes back from his word, you know."

This had been said in allusion to Sir Peregrine. When Mrs. Orme had

first proposed to accompany Lady Mason to the court and to sit by her

side during the whole trial, he had been much startled. He had been

startled, and for a time had been very unwilling to accede to such

a step. The place which she now proposed to fill was one which he

had intended to fill himself;--but he had intended to stand by an

innocent, injured lady, not a perpetrator of midnight forgery. He

had intended to support a spotless being, who would then be his

wife,--not a woman who for years had lived on the proceeds of fraud

and felony, committed by herself!

"Edith," he had said, "you know that I am unwilling to oppose you;

but I think that in this your feelings are carrying you too far."

"No, father," she answered, not giving way at all, or showing herself

minded to be turned from her purpose by anything he might say.

"Do not think so; think of her misery. How could she endure it by

herself?"

"Think of her guilt, Edith!"

"I will leave others to think of that. But, father, her guilt will

not stain me. Are we not bound to remember what injury she might

have done to us, and how we might still have been ignorant of all

this, had not she herself confessed it--for our sakes--for our sakes,

father?"

And then Sir Peregrine gave way. When this argument was used to him,

he was forced to yield. It was true that, had not that woman been as

generous as she was guilty, he would now have been bound to share her

shame. The whole of this affair, taken together, had nearly laid him

prostrate; but that which had gone the farthest towards effecting

this ruin, was the feeling that he owed so much to Lady Mason. As

regarded the outer world, the injury to him would have been much more

terrible had he married her; men would then have declared that all

was over with him; but as regards the inner man, I doubt whether he

would not have borne that better. It was easier for him to sustain

an injury than a favour,--than a favour from one whom his judgment

compelled him to disown as a friend.

But he had given way, and it was understood at The Cleeve that Mrs.

Orme was to remain by Lady Mason's side during the trial. To the

general household there was nothing in this that was wonderful. They

knew only of the old friendship. To them the question of her guilt

was still an open question. As others had begun to doubt, so had

they; but no one then presumed that Sir Peregrine or Mrs. Orme had

any doubt. That they were assured of her innocence was the conviction

of all Hamworth and its neighbourhood.

"He never goes back from his word, you know," Mrs. Orme had said;

and then she kissed Lady Mason, and went her way. She had never left

her without a kiss, had never greeted her without a warm pressure of

the hand, since that day on which the secret had been told in Sir

Peregrine's library. It would be impossible to describe how great

had been the worth of this affection to Lady Mason; but it may

almost be said that it had kept her alive. She herself had said but

little about it, uttering but few thanks; but not the less had she

recognised the value of what had been done for her. She had even

become more free herself in her intercourse with Mrs. Orme,--more

open in her mode of speech,--had put herself more on an equality with

her friend, since there had ceased to be anything hidden between

them. Previously Lady Mason had felt, and had occasionally expressed

the feeling, that she was hardly fit to associate on equal terms with

Mrs. Orme; but now there was none of this,--now, as they sat together

for hours and hours, they spoke, and argued, and lived together as

though they were equal. But nevertheless, could she have shown her

love by any great deed, there was nothing which Lady Mason would not

have done for Mrs. Orme.

She was now left alone, and according to her daily custom would

remain there till the servant told her that Mr. Lucius was waiting

for her in the dining-room. In an early part of this story I have

endeavoured to describe how this woman sat alone, with deep sorrow in

her heart and deep thought on her mind, when she first learned what

terrible things were coming on her. The idea, however, which the

reader will have conceived of her as she sat there will have come

to him from the skill of the artist, and not from the words of the

writer. If that drawing is now near him, let him go back to it. Lady

Mason was again sitting in the same room--that pleasant room, looking

out through the verandah on to the sloping lawn, and in the same

chair; one hand again rested open on the arm of the chair, while the

other supported her face as she leaned upon her elbow; and the sorrow

was still in her heart, and the deep thought in her mind. But the

lines of her face were altered, and the spirit expressed by it was

changed. There was less of beauty, less of charm, less of softness;

but in spite of all that she had gone through there was more of

strength,--more of the power to resist all that this world could do

to her.

It would be wrong to say that she was in any degree a hypocrite. A

man is no more a hypocrite because his manner and gait when he is

alone are different from those which he assumes in company, than he

is for wearing a dressing-gown in the morning, whereas he puts on a

black coat in the evening. Lady Mason in the present crisis of her

life endeavoured to be true in all her dealings with Mrs. Orme; but

nevertheless Mrs. Orme had not yet read her character. As she now sat

thinking of what the morrow would bring upon her,--thinking of all

that the malice of that man Dockwrath had brought upon her,--she

resolved that she would still struggle on with a bold front. It

had been brought home to her that he, her son, the being for whom

her soul had been imperilled, and all her hopes for this world

destroyed,--that he must be told of his mother's guilt and shame. Let

him be told, and then let him leave her while his anguish and the

feeling of his shame were hot upon him. Should she be still a free

woman when this trial was over she would move herself away at once,

and then let him be told. But still it would be well--well for his

sake, that his mother should not be found guilty by the law. It was

still worth her while to struggle. The world was very hard to her,

bruising her to the very soul at every turn, allowing her no hope,

offering to her no drop of cool water in her thirst. But still for

him there was some future career; and that career perhaps need not be

blotted by the public notice of his mother's guilt. She would still

fight against her foes,--still show to that court, and to the world

that would then gaze at her, a front on which guilt should not seem

to have laid its hideous, defacing hand.

There was much that was wonderful about this woman. While she was

with those who regarded her with kindness she could be so soft and

womanly; and then, when alone, she could be so stern and hard! And

it may be said that she felt but little pity for herself. Though she

recognised the extent of her misery, she did not complain of it. Even

in her inmost thoughts her plaint was this,--that he, her son, should

be doomed to suffer so deeply for her sin! Sometimes she would utter

to that other mother a word of wailing, in that he would not be soft

to her; but even in that she did not mean to complain of him. She

knew in her heart of hearts that she had no right to expect such

softness. She knew that it was better that it should be as it now

was. Had he stayed with her from morn till evening, speaking kind

words to her, how could she have failed to tell him? In sickness it

may irk us because we are not allowed to take the cool drink that

would be grateful; but what man in his senses would willingly swallow

that by which his very life would be endangered? It was thus she

thought of her son, and what his love might have been to her.

Yes; she would still bear up, as she had borne up at that other

trial. She would dress herself with care, and go down into the court

with a smooth brow. Men, as they looked at her, should not at once

say, "Behold the face of a guilty woman!" There was still a chance

in the battle, though the odds were so tremendously against her. It

might be that there was but little to which she could look forward,

even though the verdict of the jury should be in her favour; but all

that she regarded as removed from her by a great interval. She had

promised that Lucius should know all after the trial,--that he should

know all, so that the property might be restored to its rightful

owner; and she was fully resolved that this promise should be kept.

But nevertheless there was a long interval. If she could battle

through this first danger,--if by the skill of her lawyers she could

avert the public declaration of her guilt, might not the chances of

war still take some further turn in her favour? And thus, though

her face was pale with suffering and thin with care, though she

had realised the fact that nothing short of a miracle could save

her,--still she would hope for that miracle.

But the absolute bodily labour which she was forced to endure was so

hard upon her! She would dress herself, and smooth her brow for the

trial; but that dressing herself, and that maintenance of a smooth

brow would impose upon her an amount of toil which would almost

overtask her physical strength. O reader, have you ever known what it

is to rouse yourself and go out to the world on your daily business,

when all the inner man has revolted against work, when a day of rest

has seemed to you to be worth a year of life? If she could have

rested now, it would have been worth many years of life,--worth all

her life. She longed for rest,--to be able to lay aside the terrible

fatigue of being ever on the watch. From the burden of that necessity

she had never been free since her crime had been first committed.

She had never known true rest. She had not once trusted herself to

sleep without the feeling that her first waking thought would be

one of horror, as the remembrance of her position came upon her. In

every word she spoke, in every trifling action of her life, it was

necessary that she should ask herself how that word and action might

tell upon her chances of escape. She had striven to be true and

honest,--true and honest with the exception of that one deed. But

that one deed had communicated its poison to her whole life. Truth

and honesty,--fair, unblemished truth and open-handed, fearless

honesty,--had been impossible to her. Before she could be true and

honest it would be necessary that she should go back and cleanse

herself from the poison of that deed. Such cleansing is to be done.

Men have sinned deep as she had sinned, and, lepers though they have

been, they have afterwards been clean. But that task of cleansing

oneself is not an easy one;--the waters of that Jordan in which it is

needful to wash are scalding hot. The cool neighbouring streams of

life's pleasant valleys will by no means suffice.

Since she had been home at Orley Farm she had been very scrupulous

as to going down into the parlour both at breakfast and at dinner,

so that she might take her meals with her son. She had not as yet

omitted this on one occasion, although sometimes the task of sitting

through the dinner was very severe upon her. On the present occasion,

the last day that remained to her before the trial--perhaps the last

evening on which she would ever watch the sun set from those windows,

she thought that she would spare herself. "Tell Mr. Lucius," she said

to the servant who came to summon her, "that I would be obliged to

him if he would sit down without me. Tell him that I am not ill, but

that I would rather not go down to dinner!" But before the girl was

on the stairs she had changed her mind. Why should she now ask for

this mercy? What did it matter? So she gathered herself up from the

chair, and going forth from the room, stopped the message before it

was delivered. She would bear on to the end.

She sat through the dinner, and answered the ordinary questions

which Lucius put to her with her ordinary voice, and then, as was

her custom, she kissed his brow as she left the room. It must be

remembered that they were still mother and son, and that there had

been no quarrel between them. And now, as she went up stairs, he

followed her into the drawing-room. His custom had been to remain

below, and though he had usually seen her again during the evening,

there had seldom or never been any social intercourse between them.

On the present occasion, however, he followed her, and closing the

door for her as he entered the room, he sat himself down on the sofa,

close to her chair.

"Mother," he said, putting out his hand and touching her arm, "things

between us are not as they should be."

She shuddered, not at the touch, but at the words. Things were not as

they should be between them. "No," she said. "But I am sure of this,

Lucius, that you never had an unkind thought in your heart towards

me."

"Never, mother. How could I,--to my own mother, who has ever been so

good to me? But for the last three months we have been to each other

nearly as though we were strangers."

"But we have loved each other all the same," said she.

"But love should beget close social intimacy, and above all close

confidence in times of sorrow. There has been none such between us."

What could she say to him? It was on her lips to promise him that

such love should again prevail between them as soon as this trial

should be over; but the words stuck in her throat. She did not dare

to give him so false an assurance. "Dear Lucius," she said, "if it

has been my fault, I have suffered for it."

"I do not say that it is your fault;--nor will I say that it has been

my own. If I have seemed harsh to you, I beg your pardon."

"No, Lucius, no; you have not been harsh. I have understood you

through it all."

"I have been grieved because you did not seem to trust me;--but let

that pass now. Mother, I wish that there may be no unpleasant feeling

between us when you enter on this ordeal to-morrow."

"There is none;--there shall be none."

"No one can feel more keenly,--no one can feel so keenly as I do, the

cruelty with which you are treated. The sight of your sorrow has made

me wretched."

"Oh, Lucius!"

"I know how pure and innocent you are--"

"No, Lucius, no."

"But I say yes; and knowing that, it has cut me to the quick to see

them going about a defence of your innocence by quips and quibbles,

as though they were struggling for the escape of a criminal."

"Lucius!" And she put her hands up, praying for mercy, though she

could not explain to him how terribly severe were his words.

"Wait a moment, mother. To me such men as Mr. Chaffanbrass and his

comrades are odious. I will not, and do not believe that their

services are necessary to you--"

"But, Lucius, Mr. Furnival--"

"Yes; Mr. Furnival! It is he that has done it all. In my heart I wish

that you had never known Mr. Furnival;--never known him as a lawyer

that is," he added, thinking of his own strong love for the lawyer's

daughter.

"Do not upbraid me now, Lucius. Wait till it is all over."

"Upbraid you! No. I have come to you now that we may be friends.

As things have gone so far, this plan of defence must of course be

carried on. I will say no more about that. But, mother, I will go

into the court with you to-morrow. That support I can at any rate

give you, and they shall see that there is no quarrel between us."

But Lady Mason did not desire this. She would have wished that he

might have been miles away from the court had that been possible.

"Mrs. Orme is to be with me," she said.

Then again there came a black frown upon his brow,--a frown such as

there had often been there of late. "And will Mrs. Orme's presence

make the attendance of your own son improper?"

"Oh, no; of course not. I did not mean that, Lucius."

"Do you not like to have me near you?" he asked; and as he spoke he

rose up, and took her hand as he stood before her.

She gazed for a moment into his face while the tears streamed down

from her eyes, and then rising from her chair, she threw herself on

to his bosom and clasped him in her arms. "My boy! my boy!" she said.

"Oh, if you could be near me, and away from this--away from this!"

She had not intended thus to give way, but the temptation had been

too strong for her. When she had seen Mrs. Orme and Peregrine

together,--when she had heard Peregrine's mother, with words

expressed in a joyful tone, affect to complain of the inroads which

her son made upon her, she had envied her that joy. "Oh, if it could

be so with me also!" she always thought; and the words too had more

than once been spoken. Now at last, in this last moment, as it might

be, of her life at home, he had come to her with kindly voice, and

she could not repress her yearning.

"Lucius," she said; "dearest Lucius! my own boy!" And then the tears

from her eyes streamed hot on to his bosom.

"Mother," he said, "it shall be so. I will be with you."

But she was now thinking of more than this--of much more. Was it

possible for her to tell him now? As she held him in her arms, hiding

her face upon his breast, she struggled hard to speak the word. Then

in the midst of that struggle, while there was still something like a

hope within her that it might be done, she raised her head and looked

up into his face. It was not a face pleasant to look at, as was that

of Peregrine Orme. It was hard in its outlines, and perhaps too manly

for his age. But she was his mother, and she loved it well. She

looked up at it, and raising her hands she stroked his cheeks. She

then kissed him again and again, with warm, clinging kisses. She

clung to him, holding him close to her, while the sobs which she had

so long repressed came forth from her with a violence that terrified

him. Then again she looked up into his face with one long wishful

gaze; and after that she sank upon the sofa and hid her face within

her hands. She had made the struggle, but it had been of no avail.

She could not tell him that tale with her own voice.

"Mother," he said, "what does this mean? I cannot understand such

grief as this." But for a while she was quite unable to answer. The

flood-gates were at length opened, and she could not restrain the

torrent of her sobbings.

"You do not understand how weak a woman can be," she said at last.

But in truth he understood nothing of a woman's strength. He sat down

by her, now and then taking her by the hand when she would leave it

to him, and in his way endeavoured to comfort her. All comfort, we

may say, was out of the question; but by degrees she again became

tranquil. "It shall be to-morrow as you will have it. You will not

object to her being with me also?"

He did object, but he could not say so. He would have much preferred

to be the only friend near to her, but he felt that he could not

deny her the solace of a woman's aid and a woman's countenance. "Oh

no," he said, "if you wish it." He would have found it impossible to

define even to himself the reason for his dislike to any assistance

coming from the family of the Ormes; but the feeling was there,

strong within his bosom.

"And when this is over, mother, we will go away," he said. "If you

would wish to live elsewhere, I will sell the property. It will be

better perhaps after all that has passed. We will go abroad for a

while."

She could make no answer to this except pressing his hand. Ah, if

he had been told--if she had allowed Mrs. Orme to do that kindness

for her, how much better for her would it now have been! Sell the

property! Ah, me! Were they not words of fearful sound in her

ears,--words of terrible import?

"Yes, it shall be so," she said, putting aside that last proposition

of his. "We will go together to-morrow. Mr. Aram said that he would

sit at my side, but he cannot object to your being there between us."

Mr. Aram's name was odious to Lucius Mason. His close presence would

be odious to him. But he felt that he could urge nothing against an

arrangement that had now become necessary. Mr. Aram, with all his

quibbles, had been engaged, and the trial must now be carried through

with all the Aram tactics.

After that Lucius left his mother, and took himself out into the dark

night, walking up and down on the road between his house and the

outer gate, endeavouring to understand why his mother should be so

despondent. That she must fear the result of the trial, he thought,

was certain, but he could not bring himself to have any such fear. As

to any suspicion of her guilt,--no such idea had even for one moment

cast a shadow upon his peace of mind.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE FIRST JOURNEY TO ALSTON.

At that time Sir Richard Leatherham was the Solicitor-general, and

he had been retained as leading counsel for the prosecution. It was

quite understood by all men who did understand what was going on in

the world, that this trial had been in truth instituted by Mr. Mason

of Groby with the hope of recovering the property which had been left

away from him by his father's will. The whole matter had now been so

much discussed, that the true bearings of it were publicly known. If

on the former trial Lady Mason had sworn falsely, then there could be

no doubt that that will, or the codicil to the will, was an untrue

document, and the property would in that case revert to Mr. Mason,

after such further legal exercitations on the subject as the lawyers

might find necessary and profitable. As far as the public were

concerned, and as far as the Masons were concerned, it was known and

acknowledged that this was another struggle on the part of the Groby

Park family to regain the Orley Farm estate. But then the question

had become much more interesting than it had been in the days of the

old trial, through the allegation which was now made of Lady Mason's

guilt. Had the matter gone against her in the former trial, her child

would have lost the property, and that would have been all. But

the present issue would be very different. It would be much more

tragical, and therefore of much deeper interest.

As Alston was so near to London, Sir Richard, Mr. Furnival,

Mr. Chaffanbrass, and others, were able to go up and down by

train,--which arrangement was at ordinary assizes a great heartsore

to the hotel-keepers and owners of lodging-houses in Alston. But on

this occasion the town was quite full in spite of this facility. The

attorneys did not feel it safe to run up and down in that way, nor

did the witnesses. Mr. Aram remained, as did also Mr. Mat Round.

Special accommodation had been provided for John Kenneby and Bridget

Bolster, and Mr. Mason of Groby had lodgings of his own.

Mr. Mason of Groby had suggested to the attorneys in Bedford Row that

his services as a witness would probably be required, but they had

seemed to think otherwise. "We shall not call you," Mr. Round had

said, "and I do not suppose that the other side will do so. They

can't if they do not first serve you." But in spite of this Mr. Mason

had determined to be at Alston. If it were true that this woman had

robbed him;--if it could be proved that she had really forged a will,

and then by crime of the deepest dye taken from him for years that

which was his own, should he not be there to see? Should he not be a

witness to her disgrace? Should he not be the first to know and feel

his own tardy triumph? Pity! Pity for her! When such a word was named

to him, it seemed to him as though the speaker were becoming to a

certain extent a partner in her guilt. Pity! Yes; such pity as an

Englishman who had caught the Nana Sahib might have felt for his

victim. He had complained twenty times since this matter had been

mooted of the folly of those who had altered the old laws. That folly

had probably robbed him of his property for twenty years, and would

now rob him of half his revenge. Not that he ever spoke even to

himself of revenge. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." He would

have been as able as any man to quote the words, and as willing.

Justice, outraged justice, was his theme. Whom had he ever robbed? To

whom had he not paid all that was owing? "All that have I done from

my youth upwards." Such were his thoughts of himself; and with such

thoughts was it possible that he should willingly be absent from

Alston during such a trial?

"I really would stay away if I were you," Mat Round had said to him.

"I will not stay away," he had replied, with a look black as a

thundercloud. Could there really be anything in those suspicions of

Dockwrath, that his own lawyer had wilfully thrown him over once, and

was now anxious to throw him over again? "I will not stay away," he

said; and Dockwrath secured his lodgings for him. About this time

he was a good deal with Mr. Dockwrath, and almost regretted that he

had not followed that gentleman's advice at the commencement of the

trial, and placed the management of the whole concern in his hands.

Thus Alston was quite alive on the morning of the trial, and the

doors of the court-house were thronged long before they were opened.

They who were personally concerned in the matter, whose presence

during the ceremony would be necessary, or who had legal connection

with the matter in hand, were of course not driven to this tedious

manner of obtaining places. Mr. Dockwrath, for instance, did

not stand waiting at the door, nor did his friend Mr. Mason. Mr.

Dockwrath was a great man as far as this day was concerned, and could

command admittance from the doorkeepers and others about the court.

But for the outer world, for men and women who were not lucky enough

to be lawyers, witnesses, jurymen, or high sheriff, there was no

means of hearing and seeing the events of this stirring day except

what might be obtained by exercise of an almost unlimited patience.

There had been much doubt as to what arrangement for her attendance

at the court it might be best for Lady Mason to make, and some

difficulty too as to who should decide as to these arrangements.

Mr. Aram had been down more than once, and had given a hint that it

would be well that something should be settled. It had ended in his

settling it himself,--he, with the assistance of Mrs. Orme. What

would Sir Peregrine have said had he known that on any subject these

two had been leagued in council together?

"She can go from hence in a carriage--a carriage from the inn," Mrs.

Orme had said.

"Certainly, certainly; a carriage from the inn; yes. But in the

evening, ma'am?"

"When the trial is over?" said Mrs. Orme, inquiring from him his

meaning.

"We can hardly expect that it shall be over in one day, ma'am. She

will continue to be on bail, and can return home. I will see that she

is not annoyed as she leaves the town."

"Annoyed?" said Mrs. Orme.

"By the people I mean."

"Will there be anything of that, sir?" she asked, turning pale at the

idea. "I shall be with her, you know."

"Through the whole affair, ma'am?"

"Yes, through the whole affair."

"They'll want to have a look at her of course; but,--Mrs. Orme, we'll

see that you are not annoyed. Yes; she had better come back home the

first day. The expense won't be much; will it?"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Orme. "I must return home, you know. How many days

will it be, sir?"

"Well, perhaps two,--perhaps three. It may run on all the week. Of

course you know, Mrs. Orme--"

"Know what?" she asked.

"When the trial is over, if--if it should go against us,--then you

must return alone."

And so the matter had been settled, and Mr. Aram himself had ordered

the carriage from the inn. Sir Peregrine's carriage would have been

at their disposal,--or rather Mrs. Orme's own carriage; but she had

felt that The Cleeve arms on The Cleeve panels would be out of place

in the streets of Hamworth on such an occasion. It would of course be

impossible that she should not be recognised in the court, but she

would do as little as possible to proclaim her own presence.

When the morning came, the very morning of the terrible day, Mrs.

Orme came down early from her room, as it was necessary that she

should breakfast two hours before the usual time. She had said

nothing of this to Sir Peregrine, hoping that she might have been

able to escape in the morning without seeing him. She had told her

son to be there; but when she made her appearance in the breakfast

parlour, she found that his grandfather was already with him. She sat

down and took her cup of tea almost in silence, for they all felt

that on such a morning much speech was impossible for them.

"Edith, my dear," said the baronet, "you had better eat something.

Think of the day that is before you."

"Yes, father, I have," said she, and she lifted a morsel of bread to

her mouth.

"You must take something with you," said he, "or you will be faint in

the court. Have you thought how many hours you will be there?"

"I will see to that," said Peregrine, speaking with a stern decision

in his voice that was by no means natural to him.

"Will you be there, Perry?" said his mother.

"Of course I shall. I will see that you have what you want. You will

find that I will be near you."

"But how will you get in, my boy?" asked his grandfather.

"Let me alone for that. I have spoken to the sheriff already. There

is no knowing what may turn up; so if anything does turn up you may

be sure that I am near you."

Then another slight attempt at eating was made, the cup of tea was

emptied, and the breakfast was finished. "Is the carriage there,

Perry?" asked Mrs. Orme.

"Yes; it is at the door."

"Good-bye, father; I am so sorry to have disturbed you."

"Good-bye, Edith; God bless you, and give you strength to bear it.

And, Edith--"

"Sir?" and she held his hand as he whispered to her.

"Say to her a word of kindness from me;--a word of kindness. Tell her

that I have forgiven her, but tell her also that man's forgiveness

will avail her nothing."

"Yes, father, I will."

"Teach her where to look for pardon. But tell her all the same that I

have forgiven her."

And then he handed her into the carriage. Peregrine, as he stood

aside, had watched them as they whispered, and to his mind also as he

followed them to the carriage a suspicion of what the truth might be

now made its way. Surely there would be no need of all this solemn

mourning if she were innocent. Had she been esteemed as innocent, Sir

Peregrine was not the man to believe that any jury of his countrymen

could find her guilty. Had this been the reason for that sudden

change,--for that breaking off of the intended marriage? Even

Peregrine, as he went down the steps after his mother, had begun to

suspect the truth; and we may say that he was the last within all

that household who did so. During the last week every servant at The

Cleeve had whispered to her fellow-servant that Lady Mason had forged

the will.

"I shall be near you, mother," said Peregrine as he put his hand into

the carriage; "remember that. The judge and the other fellows will

go out in the middle of the day to get a glass of wine. I'll have

something for both of you near the court."

Poor Mrs. Orme as she pressed her son's hand felt much relieved by

the assurance. It was not that she feared anything, but she was going

to a place that was absolutely new to her,--to a place in which the

eyes of many would be fixed on her,--to a place in which the eyes of

all would be fixed on the companion with whom she would be joined.

Her heart almost sank within her as the carriage drove away. She

would be alone till she reached Orley Farm, and there she would take

up not only Lady Mason, but Mr. Aram also. How would it be with them

in that small carriage while Mr. Aram was sitting opposite to them?

Mrs. Orme by no means regretted this act of kindness which she was

doing, but she began to feel that the task was not a light one. As

to Mr. Aram's presence in the carriage, she need have been under no

uneasiness. He understood very well when his presence was desirable,

and also when it was not desirable.

When she arrived at the door of Orley Farm house she found Mr. Aram

waiting there to receive her. "I am sorry to say," said he, raising

his hat, "that Lady Mason's son is to accompany us."

"She did not tell me," said Mrs. Orme, not understanding why this

should make him sorry.

"It was arranged between them last night, and it is very unfortunate.

I cannot explain this to her; but perhaps--"

"Why is it unfortunate, sir?"

"Things will be said which--which--which would drive me mad if they

were said about my mother." And immediately there was a touch of

sympathy between the high-bred lady and the Old Bailey Jew lawyer.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Orme. "It will be dreadful."

"And then if they find her guilty! It may be so, you know. And how is

he to sit there and hear the judge's charge;--and then the verdict,

and the sentence. If he is there he cannot escape. I'll tell you

what, Mrs. Orme; he should not be there at all."

But what could she do? Had it been possible that she should be an

hour alone with Lady Mason, she would have explained all this to

her,--or if not all, would have explained much of it. But now, with

no minutes to spare, how could she make this understood? "But all

that will not come to-day, will it, sir?"

"Not all,--not the charge or the verdict. But he should not be there

even to-day. He should have gone away; or if he remained at home, he

should not have shown himself out of the house."

But this was too late now, for as they were still speaking Lady Mason

appeared at the door, leaning on her son's arm. She was dressed from

head to foot in black, and over her face there was a thick black

veil. Mr. Aram spoke no word further as she stepped up the steps

from the hall door to the carriage, but stood back, holding the

carriage-door open in his hand. Lucius merely bowed to Mrs. Orme as

he assisted his mother to take her place; and then following her,

he sat himself down in silence opposite to them. Mr. Aram, who had

carefully arranged his own programme, shut the door, and mounted on

to the box beside the driver.

Mrs. Orme had held out her own hand, and Lady Mason having taken

it, still held it after she was seated. Then they started, and for

the first mile no word was spoken between them. Mrs. Orme was most

anxious to speak, if it might only be for the sake of breaking the

horrid stillness of their greeting; but she could think of no word

which it would be proper on such an occasion to say, either to

Lucius, or even before him. Had she been alone with Lady Mason there

would have been enough of words that she could have spoken. Sir

Peregrine's message was as a burden upon her tongue till she could

deliver it; but she could not deliver it while Lucius Mason was

sitting by her.

Lady Mason herself was the first to speak. "I did not know yesterday

that Lucius would come," she said, "or I should have told you."

"I hope it does not inconvenience you," he said.

"Oh no; by no means."

"I could not let my mother go out without me on such an occasion as

this. But I am grateful to you, Mrs. Orme, for coming also."

"I thought it would be better for her to have some lady with her,"

said Mrs. Orme.

"Oh yes, it is better--much better." And then no further word was

spoken by any of them till the carriage drove up to the court-house

door. It may be hoped that the journey was less painful to Mr. Aram

than to the others, seeing that he solaced himself on the coach-box

with a cigar.

There was still a great crowd round the front of the court-house when

they reached it, although the doors were open, and the court was

already sitting. It had been arranged that this case--the great case

of the assize--should come on first on this day, most of the criminal

business having been completed on that preceding; and Mr. Aram

had promised that his charge should be forthcoming exactly at ten

o'clock. Exactly at ten the carriage was driven up to the door,

and Mr. Aram jumping from his seat directed certain policemen and

sheriff's servants to make a way for the ladies up to the door, and

through the hall of the court-house. Had he lived in Alston all his

life, and spent his days in the purlieus of that court, he could not

have been more at home or have been more promptly obeyed.

"And now I think we may go in," he said, opening the door and letting

down the steps with his own hands.

At first he took them into a small room within the building, and

then bustled away himself into the court. "I shall be back in half a

minute," he said; and in half a dozen half-minutes he was back. "We

are all ready now, and shall have no trouble about our places. If you

have anything to leave,--shawls, or things of that sort,--they will

be quite safe here: Mrs. Hitcham will look after them." And then

an old woman who had followed Mr. Aram into the room on the last

occasion curtsied to them. But they had nothing to leave, and their

little procession was soon made.

Lucius at first offered his arm to his mother, and she had taken it

till she had gone through the door into the hall. Mr. Aram also had,

with some hesitation, offered his arm to Mrs. Orme; but she, in spite

of that touch of sympathy, had managed, without speaking, to decline

it. In the hall, however, when all the crowd of gazers had turned

their eyes upon them and was only kept off from pressing on them by

the policemen and sheriff's officers, Lady Mason remembered herself,

and suddenly dropping her son's arm, she put out her hand for Mrs.

Orme. Mr. Aram was now in front of them, and thus they two followed

him into the body of the court. The veils of both of them were down;

but Mrs. Orme's veil was not more than ordinarily thick, and she

could see everything that was around her. So they walked up through

the crowded way, and Lucius followed them by himself.

They were very soon in their seats, the crowd offering them no

impediment. The judge was already on the bench,--not our old

acquaintance Justice Staveley, but his friend and colleague Baron

Maltby. Judge Staveley was sitting in the other court. Mrs. Orme and

Lady Mason soon found themselves seated on a bench, with a slight

standing desk before them, much as though they were seated in

a narrow pew. Up above them, on the same seat, were the three

barristers employed on Lady Mason's behalf; nearest to the judge

was Mr. Furnival; then came Felix Graham, and below him sat Mr.

Chaffanbrass, somewhat out of the line of precedence, in order that

he might more easily avail himself of the services of Mr. Aram.

Lucius found himself placed next to Mr. Chaffanbrass, and his mother

sat between him and Mrs. Orme. On the bench below them, immediately

facing a large table which was placed in the centre of the court, sat

Mr. Aram and his clerk.

[Illustration: The Court.]

Mrs. Orme as she took her seat was so confused that she could hardly

look around her; and it may be imagined that Lady Mason must have

suffered at any rate as much in the same way. But they who were

looking at her--and it may be said that every one in the court was

looking at her--were surprised to see that she raised her veil as

soon as she was seated. She raised her veil, and never lowered it

again till she left the court, and repassed out into the hall. She

had thought much of this day,--even of the little incidents which

would occur,--and she was aware that her identification would be

necessary. Nobody should tell her to unveil herself, nor would she

let it be thought that she was afraid to face her enemies. So there

she sat during the whole day, bearing the gaze of the court.

She had dressed herself with great care. It may be said of most women

who could be found in such a situation, that they would either give

no special heed to their dress on such a morning, or that they would

appear in garments of sorrow studiously unbecoming and lachrymose, or

that they would attempt to outface the world, and have appeared there

in bright trappings, fit for happier days. But Lady Mason had dressed

herself after none of these fashions. Never had her clothes been

better made, or worn with a better grace; but they were all black,

from her bonnet-ribbon down to her boot, and were put on without

any attempt at finery or smartness. As regards dress, she had never

looked better than she did now; and Mr. Furnival, when his eye caught

her as she turned her head round towards the judge, was startled by

the grace of her appearance. Her face was very pale, and somewhat

hard; but no one on looking at it could say that it was the

countenance of a woman overcome either by sorrow or by crime. She was

perfect mistress of herself, and as she looked round the court, not

with defiant gaze, but with eyes half raised, and a look of modest

but yet conscious intelligence, those around her hardly dared to

think that she could be guilty.

As she thus looked her gaze fell on one face that she had not seen

for years, and their eyes met. It was the face of Joseph Mason of

Groby, who sat opposite to her; and as she looked at him her own

countenance did not quail for a moment. Her own countenance did not

quail; but his eyes fell gradually down, and when he raised them

again she had averted her face.

CHAPTER LXV.

FELIX GRAHAM RETURNS TO NONINGSBY.

"If you love the man, let him come." It was thus that the judge had

declared to his daughter his opinion of what had better be done in

that matter of Felix Graham. Then he had gone on to declare that he

had given his permission to Felix Graham to say anything that he had

got to say, and finally had undertaken to invite Felix Graham to

spend the assize week at Noningsby. Of course in the mind of the

judge all this amounted to an actual giving away of his daughter.

He regarded the thing now as done, looking upon the young people as

betrothed, and his reflections mainly ran on the material part of

the business. How should Graham be made to earn an income, and what

allowance must be made to him till he did so? There was a certain sum

set apart for Madeline's fortune, but that would by no means suffice

for the livelihood of a married barrister in London. Graham no doubt

earned something as it was, but that was done by his pen rather than

by his wig, and the judge was inclined to think that the pen must

be abandoned before the wig could be made profitable. Such were the

directions which his thoughts took regarding Madeline's lot in life.

With him the next week or two, with their events, did not signify

much; whereas the coming years did signify a great deal.

At that time, on that Sunday afternoon, there still remained to

Madeline the best part of a month to think of it all, before Felix

should reappear upon the scene. But then she could not think of it

by herself in silence. Her father had desired her to tell her mother

what had passed, and she felt that a great difficulty still lay

before her. She knew that her mother did not wish her to marry Felix

Graham. She knew that her mother did wish her to marry Peregrine

Orme. And therefore though no mother and child had ever treated each

other with a sweeter confidence, or loved each other with warmer

hearts, there was as it were a matter of disunion between them. But

nevertheless she must tell her mother, and the dread of this telling

weighed heavy upon her as she sat that night in the drawing-room

reading the article which Felix had written.

But she need not have been under any alarm. Her father, when he told

her to discuss the matter with her mother, had by no means intended

to throw on her shoulders the burden of converting Lady Staveley to

the Graham interest. He took care to do this himself effectually, so

that in fact there should be no burden left for Madeline's shoulders.

"Well, my dear," he said that same Sunday evening to his wife, "I

have had it all out with Madeline this afternoon."

"About Mr. Graham, do you mean?"

"Yes; about Mr. Graham. I have promised that he shall come here for

the assize week."

"Oh, dear!"

"It's done, my love; and I believe we shall find it all for the

best. The bishops' daughters always marry clergymen, and the judges'

daughters ought to marry lawyers."

"But you can't give him a practice. The bishops have livings to give

away."

"Perhaps I may show him how to make a practice for himself, which

would be better. Take my word for it that it will be best for her

happiness. You would not have liked to be disappointed yourself, when

you made up your mind to be married."

"No, I should not," said Lady Staveley.

"And she will have a will of her own quite as strong as you had." And

then there was silence in the room for some time.

"You'll be kind to him when he comes?" said the judge.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Staveley, in a voice that was by no means devoid

of melancholy.

"Nobody can be so kind as you when you please. And as it is to be--"

"I always did like him," said Lady Staveley, "although he is so very

plain."

"You'll soon get used to that, my dear."

"And as for poor young Mr. Orme--"

"As for poor young Mr. Orme, as you call him, he will not die of a

broken heart. Poor young Mr. Orme has all the world before him and

will soon console himself."

"But he is so attached to her. And then The Cleeve is so near."

"We must give up all that, my dear."

"Very well," said Lady Staveley; and from that moment it may be said

that she had given in her adhesion to the Graham connection. When

some time after she gave her orders to Baker as to preparing a room

for Mr. Graham, it was made quite clear to that excellent woman by

her mistress's manner and anxiety as to the airing of the sheets,

that Miss Madeline was to have her own way in the matter.

But long previous to these preparations Madeline and her mother had

discussed the matter fully. "Papa says that Mr. Graham is to come

here for the assize week," said Lady Staveley.

"Yes; so he told me," Madeline replied, very bashfully.

"I suppose it's all for the best."

"I hope it is," said Madeline. What could she do but hope so?

"Your papa understands everything so very well that I am sure he

would not let him come if it were not proper."

"I suppose not," said Madeline.

"And now I look upon the matter as all settled."

"What matter, mamma?"

"That he--that he is to come here as your lover."

"Oh, no, mamma. Pray don't imagine that. It is not so at all. What

should I do if you were to say anything to make him think so?"

"But you told me that you loved him."

"So I do, mamma."

"And he told your papa that he was desperately in love with you."

"I don't know, mamma."

"But he did;--your papa told me so, and that's why he asked him to

come down here again. He never would have done it without."

Madeline had her own idea about this, believing that her father had

thought more of her wants in the matter than he had of those of Felix

Graham; but as to this she said nothing. "Nevertheless, mamma, you

must not say that to any one," she answered. "Mr. Graham has never

spoken to me,--not a word. I should of course have told you had he

done so."

"Yes, I am sure of that. But, Madeline, I suppose it's all the same.

He asked papa for permission to speak to you, and your papa has given

it."

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma."

It was a quarter of an hour after that when Lady Staveley again

returned to the subject. "I am sure Mr. Graham is very clever, and

all that."

"Papa says that he is very clever indeed."

"I'm quite sure he is, and he makes himself very nice in the house,

always talking when there are people to dinner. Mr. Arbuthnot never

will talk when there are people to dinner. But Mr. Arbuthnot has got

a very nice place in Warwickshire, and they say he'll come in for the

county some day."

"Of course, mamma, if there should be anything of that sort, we

should not be rich people, like Isabella and Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Not at first, dear."

"Neither first nor last. But I don't care about that. If you and papa

will like him, and--and--if it should come to that!--Oh, mamma, he is

so good, and so clever, and he understands things, and talks about

things as though he knew how to make himself master of them. And he

is honest and proud. Oh, mamma, if it should be so, I do hope you

will love him."

And then Lady Staveley promised that she would love him, thinking

nevertheless that had things gone differently she would have extended

a more motherly warmth of affection to Peregrine Orme.

And about this time Peregrine Orme made another visit to Noningsby.

His intention was to see the judge, explaining what steps his

grandfather had taken as to The Cleeve property, and then once more

to have thrown himself at Madeline's feet. But circumstances as they

turned out prevented this. Although he had been at some trouble to

ascertain when the judge would be at Noningsby, nevertheless, on his

arrival, the judge was out. He would be home, the servant said,

to dinner, but not before; and therefore he had again seen Lady

Staveley, and after seeing her had not thrown himself at Madeline's

feet.

He had made up his mind to give a systematic and detailed account of

his pecuniary circumstances, and had selected nearly the very words

in which this should be made, not actuated by any idea that such a

process would have any weight with Madeline, or by any means assist

him with her, but hoping that he might thus procure the judge's

permission to press his suit. But all this preparation and all his

chosen words were of no use to him. When he saw Lady Staveley's face

he at once knew that she had no comfort to offer to him. "Well," he

said; "is there any chance for me?" He had intended to speak in a

very different tone, but words which have been prepared seldom manage

to fit themselves into their appropriate places.

"Oh, Mr. Orme," she said, taking him by the hand, and holding it. "I

wish it were different; I wish it could be different."

"There is no hope then?" And as he spoke there was a sound in his

voice as though the tidings would utterly unman him.

"I should be wicked to deceive you," she said. "There is no hope."

And then as she looked up at the sorrow so plainly written in the

lines of his young, handsome face, tears came into her eyes and

rolled down her cheeks. How could it be that a daughter of hers

should be indifferent to the love of such a suitor as this?

But Peregrine, when he saw her sorrow, repressed his own. "Very

well," said he; "I will at any rate know how to take an answer. And

for your kindness to me in the matter I am much obliged. I ought to

have known myself better than to have supposed she could have cared

for me."

"I am sure she feels that you have done her great honour."

"Psha! honour! But never mind--Good-bye, Lady Staveley."

"Will you not see her?"

"No. Why should I see her? Give her my love--my best love--"

"I will--I will."

"And tell her that I hope she may be happy, and make some fellow

happy who is more fortunate than I am. I shall get out of the way

somewhere, so that I shall not make a fool of myself when I see it."

And then he took his departure, and rode back again to The Cleeve.

This happened two days before the commencement of the trial, and the

day before that on which Graham was to arrive at Noningsby.

When Graham received the judge's note asking him to put up at

Noningsby for the assize week, he was much astonished. It was very

short.

DEAR GRAHAM,

As you are coming down to Alston, special in Lady Mason's

case, you may as well come and stay here. Lady Staveley

bids me say that she will be delighted. Your elder

brethren will no doubt go back to London each night, so

that you will not be expected to remain with them.

Yours always, &c.

What could be the intention of the judge in taking so strange a step

as this? The judge had undertaken to see him in three months, having

given him some faint idea that there then might be a chance of hope.

But now, before one month was over, he was actually sending for him

to the house, and inviting him to stay there. What would all the bar

world say when they found that a young barrister was living at the

judge's house during the assizes? Would it not be in every man's

mouth that he was a suitor accepted both by the judge's daughter and

by the judge? There would be nothing in that to go against the grain

with him, if only the fact were so. That the fact should be so he

could not venture to hope even on this hint; but he accepted the

judge's invitation, sent his grateful thanks to Lady Staveley;--as

to Lady Staveley's delight, he was sure that the judge must have

romanced a little, for he had clearly recognised Lady Staveley as his

enemy;--and then he prepared himself for the chances of war.

On the evening before the trial he arrived at Noningsby just in time

for dinner. He had been obliged to remain an hour or two at Alston in

conference with Mr. Aram, and was later than he had expected he would

be. He had been afraid to come early in the day, lest by doing so he

might have seemed to overstep the margin of his invitation. When he

did arrive, the two ladies were already dressing, and he found the

judge in the hall.

"A pretty fellow you are," said the judge. "It's dinner-time already,

and of course you take an hour to dress."

"Mr. Aram--" began Felix.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Aram! I'll give you fifteen minutes, but not a moment

more." And so Felix was hurried on up to his bedroom--the old bedroom

in which he had passed so many hours, and been so very uneasy. As

he entered the room all that conversation with Augustus Staveley

returned upon his memory. He had seen his friend in London, and told

him that he was going down to Noningsby. Augustus had looked grave,

but had said nothing about Madeline. Augustus was not in his father's

confidence in this matter, and had nothing to do but to look grave.

On that very morning, moreover, some cause had been given to himself

for gravity of demeanour.

At the door of his room he met Mrs. Baker, and, hurried though he was

by the judge's strict injunction, he could not but shake hands with

his old and very worthy friend.

"Quite strong again," said he, in answer to her tender inquiries.

"So you are, I do declare. I will say this, Mr. Graham, for

wholesomeness of flesh you beat anything I ever come nigh. There's

a many would have been weeks and weeks before they could have been

moved."

"It was your good nursing, Mrs. Baker."

"Well, I think we did take care of you among us. Do you remember the

pheasant, Mr. Graham?"

"Remember it! I should think so; and how I improved the occasion."

"Yes; you did improve fast enough. And the sea-kale, Mr. Graham.

Laws! the row I had with John Gardener about that! And, Mr. Graham,

do you remember how a certain friend used to come and ask after you

at the door? Dear, dear, dear! I nearly caught it about that."

But Graham in his present frame of mind could not well endure to

discuss his remembrances on that subject with Mrs. Baker, so he

good-humouredly pushed her out of the room, saying that the judge

would be mad if he delayed.

"That's true, too, Mr. Graham. And it won't do for you to take up Mr.

Augustus's tricks in the house yet; will it?" And then she left the

room. "What does she mean by 'yet'?" Felix said to himself as he went

through the ceremony of dressing with all the haste in his power.

He was in the drawing-room almost within the fifteen minutes, and

there he found none but the judge and his wife and daughter. He had

at first expected to find Augustus there, but had been told by Mrs.

Baker that he was to come down on the following morning. His first

greeting from Lady Staveley was something like that he had already

received up stairs, only made in less exuberant language. He was

congratulated on his speedy recovery and made welcome by a kind

smile. Then he shook hands with Madeline, and as he did so he

observed that the judge was at the trouble to turn away, so that he

should not watch the greeting. This he did see, but into Madeline's

face he hardly ventured to look. He touched her hand, however, and

said a word; and she also murmured something about his injury. "And

now we'll go to dinner," said the judge. "Give your arm that is not

broken to Lady Staveley." And so the meeting was over. "Augustus will

be in Alston to-morrow when the court is opened," said the judge.

"That is to say if he finds it possible to get up so soon; but to-day

he had some engagements in town." The truth however was that the

judge had chosen to be alone with Felix after dinner.

The dinner was very pleasant, but the judge talked for the whole

party. Madeline hardly spoke at all, nor did Lady Staveley say much.

Felix managed to put in a few words occasionally, as it always

becomes a good listener to do, but the brunt of the battle lay with

the host. One thing Felix observed painfully,--that not a word was

spoken about Lady Mason or Orley Farm. When he had been last there

the judge had spoken of it openly before the whole party, expressing

his opinion that she was a woman much injured; but now neither did

he say anything nor did Lady Staveley. He would probably not have

observed this had not a feeling crept upon him during the last

fortnight, that that thorough conviction which men had felt as to her

innocence was giving way. While the ladies were there, however, he

did not himself allude to the subject.

When they had left the room and the door had been closed behind

them, the judge began the campaign--began it, and as far as he was

concerned, ended it in a very few minutes. "Graham," said he, "I am

glad to see you."

"Thank you, judge," said he.

"Of course you know, and I know, what that amounts to now. My idea is

that you acted as an honest man when you were last here. You are not

a rich man--"

"Anything but that."

"And therefore I do not think it would have been well had you

endeavoured to gain my daughter's affections without speaking to

me,--or to her mother." Judge Staveley always spoke of his wife

as though she were an absolute part of himself. "She and I have

discussed the matter now,--and you are at liberty to address yourself

to Madeline if you please."

"My dear judge--"

"Of course you understand that I am not answering for her?"

"Oh, of course not."

"That's your look out. You must fight your own battle there. What you

are allowed to understand is this,--that her father and mother will

give their consent to an engagement, if she finds that she can bring

herself to give hers. If you are minded to ask her, you may do so."

"Of course I shall ask her."

"She will have five thousand pounds on her marriage, settled upon

herself and her children,--and as much more when I die, settled

in the same way. Now fill your glass." And in his own easy way he

turned the subject round and began to talk about the late congress at

Birmingham.

Felix felt that it was not open to him at the present moment to say

anything further about Madeline; and though he was disappointed at

this,--for he would have wished to go on talking about her all the

evening--perhaps it was better for him. The judge would have said

nothing further to encourage him, and he would have gradually been

taught to think that his chance with Madeline was little, and then

less. "He must have been a fool," my readers will say, "not to

have known that Madeline was now his own." Probably. But then

modest-minded young men are fools.

At last he contrived to bring the conversation round from the

Birmingham congress to the affairs of his new client; and indeed he

contrived to do so in spite of the judge, who was not particularly

anxious to speak on the subject. "After all that we said and did at

Birmingham, it is odd that I should so soon find myself joined with

Mr. Furnival."

"Not at all odd. Of course you must take up your profession as others

have taken it up before you. Very many young men dream of a Themis

fit for Utopia. You have slept somewhat longer than others, and your

dreams have been more vivid."

"And now I wake to find myself leagued with the Empson and Dudley of

our latter-day law courts."

"Fie, Graham, fie. Do not allow yourself to speak in that tone of men

whom you know to be zealous advocates, and whom you do not know to be

dishonest opponents."

"It is they and such as they that make so many in these days feel the

need of some Utopia,--as it was in the old days of our history. But I

beg your pardon for nicknaming them, and certainly ought not to have

done so in your presence."

"Well; if you repent yourself, and will be more charitable for the

future, I will not tell of you."

"I have never yet even seen Mr. Chaffanbrass in court," said Felix,

after a pause.

"The more shame for you, never to have gone to the court in which he

practises. A barrister intending to succeed at the common law bar

cannot have too wide an experience in such matters."

"But then I fear that I am a barrister not intending to succeed."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the judge. And then again the

conversation flagged for a minute or two.

"Have you ever seen him at a country assize town before, judge?"

asked Felix.

"Whom? Chaffanbrass? I do not remember that I have."

"His coming down in this way is quite unusual, I take it."

"Rather so, I should say. The Old Bailey is his own ground."

"And why should they think it necessary in such a case as this to

have recourse to such a proceeding?"

"It would be for me to ask you that, seeing that you are one of the

counsel."

"Do you mean to say, judge, that between you and me you are unwilling

to give an opinion on such a subject?"

"Well; you press me hard, and I think I may fairly say that I am

unwilling. I would sooner discuss the matter with you after the

verdict than before it. Come; we will go into the drawing-room."

There was not much in this. Indeed if it were properly looked at

there was nothing in it. But nevertheless Graham, as he preceded the

judge out of the dining-room, felt that his heart misgave him about

Lady Mason. When first the matter had been spoken of at Noningsby,

Judge Staveley had been fully convinced of Lady Mason's innocence,

and had felt no reserve in expressing his opinion. He had expressed

such an opinion very openly. Why should he now affect so much

reticence, seeing that the question had been raised in the presence

of them two alone? It was he who had persuaded Graham to undertake

this work, and now he went back from what he had done, and refused

even to speak upon the subject. "It must be that he thinks she is

guilty," said Graham to himself, as he lay down that night in bed.

But there had been something more for him to do before bedtime came.

He followed the judge into the drawing-room, and in five minutes

perceived that his host had taken up a book with the honest intention

of reading it. Some reference was made to him by his wife, but he

showed at once that he did not regard Graham as company, and that he

conceived himself to be entitled to enjoy the full luxury of home.

"Upon my word I don't know," he answered, without taking his eye off

the page. And then nobody spoke to him another word.

After another short interval Lady Staveley went to sleep. When Felix

Graham had before been at Noningsby, she would have rebelled against

nature with all her force rather than have slept while he was left to

whisper what he would to her darling. But now he was authorised to

whisper, and why should not Lady Staveley sleep if she wished it? She

did sleep, and Felix was left alone with his love.

[Illustration: The Drawing-Room at Noningsby.]

And yet he was not altogether alone. He could not say to her those

words which he was now bound to say; which he longed to say in order

that he might know whether the next stage of his life was to be light

or dark. There sat the judge, closely intent no doubt upon his book,

but wide awake. There also sat Lady Staveley, fast asleep certainly;

but with a wondrous power of hearing even in her sleep. And yet how

was he to talk to his love unless he talked of love? He wished that

the judge would help them to converse; he wished that some one else

was there; he wished at last that he himself was away. Madeline sat

perfectly tranquil stitching a collar. Upon her there was incumbent

no duty of doing anything beyond that. But he was in a measure bound

to talk. Had he dared to do so he also would have taken up a book;

but that he knew to be impossible.

"Your brother will be down to-morrow," he said at last.

"Yes; he is to go direct to Alston. He will be here in the

evening,--to dinner."

"Ah, yes; I suppose we shall all be late to-morrow."

"Papa always is late when the assizes are going on," said Madeline.

"Alston is not very far," said Felix.

"Only two miles," she answered.

And during the whole of that long evening the conversation between

them did not reach a more interesting pitch than that.

"She must think me an utter fool," said Felix to himself, as he sat

staring at the fire. "How well her brother would have made the most

of such an opportunity!" And then he went to bed, by no means in a

good humour with himself.

On the next morning he again met her at breakfast, but on that

occasion there was no possible opportunity for private conversation.

The judge was all alive, and talked enough for the whole party during

the twenty minutes that was allowed to them before they started

for Alston. "And now we must be off. We'll say half-past seven for

dinner, my dear." And then they also made their journey to Alston.

CHAPTER LXVI.

SHOWING HOW MISS FURNIVAL TREATED HER LOVERS.

It is a great thing for young ladies to live in a household in which

free correspondence by letter is permitted. "Two for mamma, four for

Amelia, three for Fanny, and one for papa." When the postman has left

his budget they should be dealt out in that way, and no more should

be said about it,--except what each may choose to say. Papa's letter

is about money of course, and interests nobody. Mamma's contain the

character of a cook and an invitation to dinner, and as they interest

everybody, are public property. But Fanny's letters and Amelia's

should be private; and a well-bred mamma of the present day scorns

even to look at the handwriting of the addresses. Now in Harley

Street things were so managed that nobody did see the handwriting

of the addresses of Sophia's letters till they came into her own

hand,--that is, neither her father nor her mother did so. That both

Spooner and Mrs. Ball examined them closely is probable enough.

This was well for her now, for she did not wish it to be known as yet

that she had accepted an offer from Lucius Mason, and she did wish

to have the privilege of receiving his letters. She fancied that she

loved him. She told herself over and over again that she did so. She

compared him within her own mind to Augustus Staveley, and always

gave the preference to Lucius. She liked Augustus also, and could

have accepted him as well, had it been the way of the world in

England for ladies to have two accepted lovers. Such is not the

way of the world in England, and she therefore had been under the

necessity of choosing one. She had taken the better of the two, she

declared to herself very often; but nevertheless was it absolutely

necessary that the other should be abandoned altogether? Would it not

be well at any rate to wait till this trial should be over? But then

the young men themselves were in such a hurry!

Lucius, like an honest man, had proposed to go at once to Mr.

Furnival when he was accepted; but to this Sophia had objected, "The

peculiar position in which my father stands to your mother at the

present moment," said she, "would make it very difficult for him

to give you an answer now." Lucius did not quite understand the

reasoning, but he yielded. It did not occur to him for a moment that

either Mr. or Miss Furnival could doubt the validity of his title to

the Orley Farm property.

But there was no reason why he should not write to her. "Shall I

address here?" he had asked. "Oh yes," said Sophia; "my letters are

quite private." And he had written very frequently, and she had

answered him. His last letter before the trial I propose to publish,

together with Sophia's answer, giving it as my opinion that the

gentleman's production affords by no means a good type of a lover's

letter. But then his circumstances were peculiar. Miss Furnival's

answer was, I think, much better.

Orley Farm, ---- ---- ----.

MY OWN SOPHIA,

My only comfort--I may really say my only comfort now--is

in writing to you. It is odd that at my age, and having

begun the world early as I did, I should now find myself

so much alone. Were it not for you, I should have no

friend. I cannot describe to you the sadness of this

house, nor the wretched state in which my mother exists. I

sometimes think that had she been really guilty of those

monstrous crimes which people lay to her charge, she could

hardly have been more miserable. I do not understand it;

nor can I understand why your father has surrounded her

with lawyers whom he would not himself trust in a case of

any moment. To me she never speaks on the subject, which

makes the matter worse--worse for both of us. I see her

at breakfast and at dinner, and sometimes sit with her

for an hour in the evening; but even then we have no

conversation. The end of it is I trust soon coming, and

then I hope that the sun will again be bright. In these

days it seems as though there were a cloud over the whole

earth.

I wish with all my heart that you could have been here

with her. I think that your tone and strength of mind

would have enabled her to bear up against these troubles

with more fortitude. After all, it is but the shadow of

a misfortune which has come across her, if she would but

allow herself so to think. As it is, Mrs. Orme is with

her daily, and nothing I am sure can be more kind. But I

can confess to you, though I could do so to no one else,

that I do not willingly see an intimacy kept up between

my mother and The Cleeve. Why was there that strange

proposition as to her marriage; and why, when it was once

made, was it abandoned? I know that my mother has been

not only guiltless, but guileless, in these matters as to

which she is accused; but nevertheless her affairs will

have been so managed that it will be almost impossible for

her to remain in this neighbourhood.

When all this is over, I think I shall sell this place.

What is there to bind me,--to bind me or you to Orley

Farm? Sometimes I have thought that I could be happy here,

devoting myself to agriculture,--

"Fiddlesticks!" Sophia exclaimed, as she read this,

--and doing something to lessen the dense ignorance of

those around me; but for such work as that a man should

be able to extend himself over a larger surface than that

which I can influence. My dream of happiness now carries

me away from this to other countries,--to the sunny

south. Could you be happy there? A friend of mine whom I

well knew in Germany, has a villa on the Lake of Como,--

"Indeed, sir, I'll do no such thing," said Sophia to herself,

--and there I think we might forget all this annoyance.

I shall not write again now till the trial is over. I have

made up my mind that I will be in court during the whole

proceedings. If my mother will admit it, I will remain

there close to her, as her son should do in such an

emergency. If she will not have this, still I will be

there. No one shall say that I am afraid to see my mother

in any position to which fortune can bring her, or that I

have ever doubted her innocence.

God bless you, my own one.

Yours,

L. M.

Taking this letter as a whole perhaps we may say that there was not

as much nonsense in it as young gentlemen generally put into their

love-letters to young ladies; but I am inclined to think that it

would have been a better love-letter had there been more nonsense. At

any rate there should have been less about himself, and more about

the lady. He should have omitted the agriculture altogether, and been

more sure of his loved one's tastes before he suggested the sunny

south and the Como villa. It is true that he was circumstanced as few

lovers are, with reference to his mother; but still I think he might

have been less lachrymose. Sophia's answer, which was sent after the

lapse of a day or two, was as follows:--

Harley Street, ---- ---- ----.

MY DEAR LUCIUS,

I am not surprised that you should feel somewhat

low-spirited at the present moment; but you will find,

I have no doubt, that the results of the next week will

cure all that. Your mother will be herself again when this

trial is over, and you will then wonder that it should

ever have had so depressing an influence either upon you

or upon her. I cannot but suppose that papa has done the

best as to her advisers. I know how anxious he is about

it, and they say that he is very clever in such matters.

Pray give your mother my love. I cannot but think she

is lucky to have Mrs. Orme with her. What can be more

respectable than a connection at such a time with such

people?

As to your future residence, do not make up your mind

to anything while your spirits are thus depressed. If

you like to leave Orley Farm, why not let it instead of

selling it? As for me, if it should be fated that our lots

are to go together, I am inclined to think that I should

prefer to live in England. In London papa's position might

probably be of some service, and I should like no life

that was not active. But it is too early in the day to

talk thus at present. You must not think me cold hearted

if I say that what has as yet been between us must not be

regarded as an absolute and positive engagement. I, on my

part, hope that it may become so. My heart is not cold,

and I am not ashamed to own that I esteem you favourably;

but marriage is a very serious thing, and there is so much

to be considered! I regard myself as a free agent, and in

a great measure independent of my parents on such a matter

as that; but still I think it well to make no positive

promise without consulting them. When this trial is over

I will speak to my father, and then you will come up to

London and see us.

Mind you give my love to your mother; and--if it have any

value in your eyes--accept it yourself.

Your affectionate friend,

SOPHIA FURNIVAL.

I feel very confident that Mrs. Furnival was right in declining

to inquire very closely into the circumstances of her daughter's

correspondence. A young lady who could write such a letter to her

lover as that requires but little looking after; and in those points

as to which she may require it, will--if she be so minded--elude it.

Such as Miss Furnival was, no care on her mother's part would, I

think, have made her better. Much care might have made her worse, as,

had she been driven to such resources, she would have received her

letters under a false name at the baker's shop round the corner.

But the last letter was not written throughout without interruption.

She was just declaring how on her part she hoped that her present

uncertain tenure of her lover's hand might at some future time become

certain, when Augustus Staveley was announced. Sophia, who was

alone in the drawing-room, rose from her table, gracefully, slipped

her note under the cover of the desk, and courteously greeted her

visitor. "And how are they all at dear Noningsby?" she asked.

[Illustration: "And how are they all at Noningsby?"]

"Dear Noningsby is nearly deserted. There is no one there but my

mother and Madeline."

"And who more would be wanting to make it still dear,--unless it be

the judge? I declare, Mr. Staveley, I was quite in love with your

father when I left. Talk of honey falling from people's mouths!--he

drops nothing less than champagne and pineapples."

"How very difficult of digestion his conversation must be!"

"By no means. If the wine be good and the fruit ripe, nothing can be

more wholesome. And is everybody else gone? Let me see;--Mr. Graham

was still there when I left."

"He came away shortly afterwards,--as soon, that is, as his arm would

allow him."

"What a happy accident that was for him, Mr. Staveley!"

"Happy!--breaking three of his ribs, his arm, and his collar-bone! I

thought it very unhappy."

"Ah, that's because your character is so deficient in true chivalry.

I call it a very happy accident which gives a gentleman an

opportunity of spending six weeks under the same roof with the lady

of his love. Mr. Graham is a man of spirit, and I am by no means sure

that he did not break his bones on purpose."

Augustus for a moment thought of denying the imputation with regard

to his sister, but before he had spoken he had changed his mind. He

was already aware that his friend had been again invited down to

Noningsby, and if his father chose to encourage Graham, why should

he make difficulties? He had conceived some general idea that Felix

Graham was not a guest to be welcomed into a rich man's family as a

son-in-law. He was poor and crotchety, and as regards professional

matters unsteady. But all that was a matter for his father to

consider, not for him. So he held his peace as touching Graham, and

contrived to change the subject, veering round towards that point of

the compass which had brought him into Harley Street.

"Perhaps then, Miss Furnival, it might answer some purpose if I were

to get myself run over outside there. I could get one of Pickford's

vans, or a dray from Barclay and Perkins', if that might be thought

serviceable."

"It would be of no use in the world, Mr. Staveley. Those very

charitable middle-aged ladies opposite, the Miss Mac Codies, would

have you into their house in no time, and when you woke from your

first swoon, you would find yourself in their best bedroom, with one

on each side of you."

"And you in the mean time--"

"I should send over every morning at ten o'clock to inquire after

you--in mamma's name. 'Mrs. Furnival's compliments, and hopes Mr.

Staveley will recover the use of his legs.' And the man would bring

back word: 'The doctor hopes he may, miss; but his left eye is gone

for ever.' It is not everybody that can tumble discreetly. Now you, I

fancy, would only disfigure yourself."

"Then I must try what fortune can do for me without the brewer's

dray."

"Fortune has done quite enough for you, Mr. Staveley; I do not advise

you to tempt her any further."

"Miss Furnival, I have come to Harley Street to-day on purpose to

tempt her to the utmost. There is my hand--"

"Mr. Staveley, pray keep your hand for a while longer in your own

possession."

"Undoubtedly I shall do so, unless I dispose of it this morning. When

we were at Noningsby together, I ventured to tell you what I felt for

you--"

"Did you, Mr. Staveley? If your feelings were anything beyond the

common, I don't remember the telling."

"And then," he continued, without choosing to notice her words, "you

affected to believe that I was not in earnest in what I said to you."

"And you must excuse me if I affect to believe the same thing of you

still."

Augustus Staveley had come into Harley Street with a positive resolve

to throw his heart and hand and fortune at the feet of Miss Furnival.

I fear that I shall not raise him in the estimation of my readers by

saying so. But then my readers will judge him unfairly. They will

forget that they have had a much better opportunity of looking into

the character of Miss Furnival than he had had; and they will also

forget that they have had no such opportunity of being influenced by

her personal charms. I think I remarked before that Miss Furnival

well understood how best to fight her own battle. Had she shown

herself from the first anxious to regard as a definite offer the

first words tending that way which Augustus had spoken to her,

he would at once have become indifferent about the matter. As a

consequence of her judicious conduct he was not indifferent. We

always want that which we can't get easily. Sophia had made herself

difficult to be gotten, and therefore Augustus fancied that he wanted

her. Since he had been in town he had been frequently in Harley

Street, and had been arguing with himself on the matter. What match

could be more discreet or better? Not only was she very handsome, but

she was clever also. And not only was she handsome and clever, but

moreover she was an heiress. What more could his friends want for

him, and what more could he want for himself? His mother did in truth

regard her as a nasty, sly girl; but then his mother did not know

Sophia, and in such matters mothers are so ignorant!

Miss Furnival, on his thus repeating his offer, again chose to affect

a belief that he was not in earnest. I am inclined to think that she

rather liked this kind of thing. There is an excitement in the game;

and it is one which may be played without great danger to either

party if it be played cautiously and with some skill. As regards

Augustus at the present moment, I have to say--with some regret--that

he abandoned all idea of caution, and that he showed very little

skill.

"Then," said he, "I must beg you to lay aside an affectation which is

so very injurious both to my honour and to my hopes of happiness."

"Your honour, Mr. Staveley, is quite safe, I am certain."

"I wish that my happiness were equally so," said he. "But at any rate

you will let me have an answer. Sophia--"

And now he stood up, looking at her with something really like love

in his eyes, and Miss Furnival began to understand that if she so

chose it the prize was really within her reach. But then was it a

prize? Was not the other thing the better prize? The other thing was

the better prize;--if only that affair about the Orley Farm were

settled. Augustus Staveley was a good-looking handsome fellow, but

then there was that in the manner and gait of Lucius Mason which

better suited her taste. There are ladies who prefer Worcester ware

to real china; and, moreover, the order for the Worcester ware had

already been given.

"Sophia, let a man be ever so light-hearted, there will come to him

moments of absolute and almost terrible earnestness."

"Even to you, Mr. Staveley."

"I have at any rate done nothing to deserve your scorn."

"Fie, now; you to talk of my scorn! You come here with soft words

which run easily from your tongue, feeling sure that I shall be proud

in heart when I hear them whispered into my ears; and now you pretend

to be angry because I do not show you that I am elated. Do you think

it probable that I should treat with scorn anything of this sort that

you might say to me seriously?"

"I think you are doing so."

"Have you generally found yourself treated with scorn when you have

been out on this pursuit?"

"By heavens! you have no right to speak to me so. In what way shall I

put my words to make them sound seriously to you? Do you want me to

kneel at your feet, as our grandfathers used to do?"

"Oh, certainly not. Our grandmothers were very stupid in desiring

that."

"If I put my hand on my heart will you believe me better?"

"Not in the least."

"Then through what formula shall I go?"

"Go through no formula, Mr. Staveley. In such affairs as these very

little, as I take it, depends on the words that are uttered. When

heart has spoken to heart, or even head to head, very little other

speaking is absolutely necessary."

"And my heart has not spoken to yours?"

"Well;--no;--not with that downright plain open language which a

heart in earnest always knows how to use. I suppose you think you

like me?"

"Sophia, I love you well enough to make you my wife to-morrow."

"Yes; and to be tired of your bargain on the next day. Has it ever

occurred to you that giving and taking in marriage is a very serious

thing?"

"A very serious thing; but I do not think that on that account it

should be avoided."

"No; but it seems to me that you are always inclined to play at

marriage. Do not be angry with me, but for the life of me I can never

think you are in earnest."

"But I shall be angry--very angry--if I do not get from you some

answer to what I have ventured to say."

"What, now; to-day;--this morning? If you insist upon that, the

answer can only be of one sort. If I am driven to decide this morning

on the question that you have asked me, great as the honour is--and

coming from you, Mr. Staveley, it is very great--I must decline it. I

am not able, at any rate at the present moment, to trust my happiness

altogether in your hands." When we think of the half-written letter

which at this moment Miss Furnival had within her desk, this was not

wonderful.

And then, without having said anything more that was of note,

Augustus Staveley went his way. As he walked up Harley Street, he

hardly knew whether or no he was to consider himself as bound to Miss

Furnival; nor did he feel quite sure whether or no he wished to be so

bound. She was handsome, and clever, and an heiress; but yet he was

not certain that she possessed all those womanly charms which are

desirable in a wife. He could not but reflect that she had never yet

said a soft word to him.

CHAPTER LXVII.

MR. MOULDER BACKS HIS OPINION.

As the day of the trial drew nigh, the perturbation of poor John

Kenneby's mind became very great. Moulder had not intended to

frighten him, but had thought it well to put him up to what he

believed to be the truth. No doubt he would be badgered and bullied.

"And," as Moulder said to his wife afterwards, "wasn't it better that

he should know what was in store for him?" The consequence was, that

had it been by any means possible, Kenneby would have run away on the

day before the trial.

But it was by no means possible, for Dockwrath had hardly left him

alone for an instant. Dockwrath at this time had crept into a sort of

employment in the case from which Matthew Round had striven in vain

to exclude him. Mr. Round had declared once or twice that if Mr.

Mason encouraged Dockwrath in interfering, he, Round, would throw

the matter up. But professional men cannot very well throw up their

business, and Round went on, although Dockwrath did interfere, and

although Mr. Mason did encourage him. On the eve of the trial he went

down to Alston with Kenneby and Bolster; and Mr. Moulder, at the

express instance of Kenneby, accompanied them.

"What can I do? I can't stop the fellow's gab," Moulder had said. But

Kenneby pleaded hard that some friend might be near him in the day of

his trouble, and Moulder at last consented.

"I wish it was me," Mrs. Smiley had said, when they talked the matter

over in Great St. Helens; "I'd let the barrister know what was what

when he came to knock me about." Kenneby wished it also, with all his

heart.

Mr. Mason went down by the same train, but he travelled by the first

class. Dockwrath, who was now holding his head up, would have gone

with him, had he not thought it better to remain with Kenneby. "He

might jump out of the carriage and destroy himself," he said to Mr.

Mason.

"If he had any of the feelings of an Englishman within his breast,"

said Mason, "he would be anxious to give assistance towards the

punishment of such a criminal as that."

"He has only the feelings of a tomtit," said Dockwrath.

Lodgings had been taken for the two chief witnesses together, and

Moulder and Dockwrath shared the accommodation with them. As they sat

down to tea together, these two gentlemen doubtless felt that Bridget

Bolster was not exactly fitting company for them. But the necessities

of an assize week, and of such a trial as this, level much of these

distinctions, and they were both prepared to condescend and become

affable.

"Well, Mrs. Bolster, and how do you find yourself?" asked Dockwrath.

Bridget was a solid, square-looking woman, somewhat given to flesh,

and now not very quick in her movements. But the nature of her past

life had given to her a certain amount of readiness, and an absence

of that dread of her fellow-creatures, which so terribly afflicted

poor Kenneby. And then also she was naturally not a stupid woman, or

one inclined to be muddle-headed. Perhaps it would be too much to say

that she was generally intelligent, but what she did understand, she

understood thoroughly.

"Pretty well, I thank you, Mr. Dockwrath. I sha'n't be sorry to have

a bit of something to my tea."

Bridget Bolster perfectly understood that she was to be well fed

when thus brought out for work in her country's service. To have

everything that she wanted to eat and drink at places of public

entertainment, and then to have the bills paid for her behind her

back, was to Bridget Bolster the summit of transitory human bliss.

"And you shall have something to your tea," said Dockwrath. "What's

it to be?"

"A steak's as good as anything at these places," suggested Moulder.

"Or some ham and eggs," suggested Dockwrath.

"Kidneys is nice," said Bridget.

"What do you say, Kenneby?" asked Dockwrath.

"It is nothing to me," said Kenneby; "I have no appetite. I think

I'll take a little brandy-and-water."

Mr. Moulder possessed the most commanding spirit, and the steak was

ordered. They then made themselves as comfortable as circumstances

would admit, and gradually fell into a general conversation about

the trial. It had been understood among them since they first came

together, that as a matter of etiquette the witnesses were not to

be asked what they had to say. Kenneby was not to divulge his facts

in plain language, nor Bridget Bolster those which belonged to her;

but it was open to them all to take a general view of the matter,

and natural that at the present moment they should hardly be able

to speak of anything else. And there was a very divided opinion on

the subject in dispute; Dockwrath, of course, expressing a strong

conviction in favour of a verdict of guilty, and Moulder being as

certain of an acquittal. At first Moulder had been very unwilling

to associate with Dockwrath; for he was a man who maintained his

animosities long within his breast; but Dockwrath on this occasion

was a great man, and there was some slight reflection of greatness

on the associates of Dockwrath; it was only by the assistance of

Dockwrath that a place could be obtained within the court, and, upon

the whole, it became evident to Moulder that during such a crisis as

this the society of Dockwrath must be endured.

"They can't do anything to one if one do one's best?" said Kenneby,

who was sitting apart from the table while the others were eating.

"Of course they can't," said Dockwrath, who wished to inspirit the

witnesses on his own side.

"It ain't what they do, but what they say," said Moulder; "and then

everybody is looking at you. I remember a case when I was young on

the road; it was at Nottingham. There had been some sugars delivered,

and the rats had got at it. I'm blessed if they didn't ask me

backwards and forwards so often that I forgot whether they was

seconds or thirds, though I'd sold the goods myself. And then the

lawyer said he'd have me prosecuted for perjury. Well, I was that

frightened, I could not stand in the box. I ain't so green now by a

good deal."

"I'm sure you're not, Mr. Moulder," said Bridget, who well understood

the class to which Moulder belonged.

"After that I met that lawyer in the street, and was ashamed to look

him in the face. I'm blessed if he didn't come up and shake hands

with me, and tell me that he knew all along that his client hadn't a

leg to stand on. Now I call that beautiful."

"Beautiful!" said Kenneby.

"Yes, I do. He fought that battle just as if he was sure of winning,

though he knew he was going to lose. Give me the man that can fight a

losing battle. Anybody can play whist with four by honours in his own

hands."

"I don't object to four by honours either," said Dockwrath; "and

that's the game we are going to play to-morrow."

"And lose the rubber after all," said Moulder.

"No, I'm blessed if we do, Mr. Moulder. If I know anything of my own

profession--"

"Humph!" ejaculated Moulder.

"And I shouldn't be here in such a case as this if I didn't;--but if

I do, Lady Mason has no more chance of escape than--than--than that

bit of muffin has." And as he spoke the savoury morsel in question

disappeared from the fingers of the commercial traveller.

For a moment or two Moulder could not answer him. The portion of food

in question was the last on his plate; it had been considerable in

size, and required attention in mastication. Then the remaining gravy

had to be picked up on the blade of the knife, and the particles of

pickles collected and disposed of by the same process. But when all

this had been well done, Moulder replied--

"That may be your opinion, Mr. Dockwrath, and I dare say you may know

what you're about."

"Well; I rather think I do, Mr. Moulder."

"Mine's different. Now when one gentleman thinks one thing and

another thinks another, there's nothing for it in my mind but for

each gentleman to back his own. That's about the ticket in this

country, I believe."

"That's just as a gentleman may feel disposed," said Dockwrath.

"No it ain't. What's the use of a man having an opinion if he won't

back it? He's bound to back it, or else he should give way, and

confess he ain't so sure about it as he said he was. There's no

coming to an end if you don't do that. Now there's a ten-pound note,"

and Moulder produced that amount of the root of all evil; "I'll put

that in John Kenneby's hands, and do you cover it." And then he

looked as though there were no possible escape from the proposition

which he had made.

"I decline to have anything to do with it," said Kenneby.

"Gammon," said Moulder; "two ten-pound notes won't burn a hole in

your pocket."

"Suppose I should be asked a question about it to-morrow; where

should I be then?"

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Kenneby," said Dockwrath; "I'm not going

to bet."

"You ain't, ain't you?" said Moulder.

"Certainly not, Mr. Moulder. If you understood professional matters

a little better, you'd know that a professional gentleman couldn't

make a bet as to a case partly in his own hands without very great

impropriety." And Dockwrath gathered himself up, endeavouring to

impress a sense of his importance on the two witnesses, even should

he fail of doing so upon Mr. Moulder.

Moulder repocketed his ten-pound note, and laughed with a long, low

chuckle. According to his idea of things, he had altogether got the

better of the attorney upon that subject. As he himself put it so

plainly, what criterion is there by which a man can test the validity

of his own opinion if he be not willing to support it by a bet? A man

is bound to do so, or else to give way and apologise. For many years

he had insisted upon this in commercial rooms as a fundamental law in

the character and conduct of gentlemen, and never yet had anything

been said to him to show that in such a theory he was mistaken.

During all this Bridget Bolster sat there much delighted. It was not

necessary to her pleasure that she should say much herself. There she

was seated in the society of gentlemen and of men of the world, with

a cup of tea beside her, and the expectation of a little drop of

something warm afterwards. What more could the world offer to her, or

what more had the world to offer to anybody? As far as her feelings

went she did not care if Lady Mason were tried every month in the

year! Not that her feelings towards Lady Mason were cruel. It was

nothing to her whether Lady Mason should be convicted or acquitted.

But it was much to her to sit quietly on her chair and have nothing

to do, to eat and drink of the best, and be made much of; and it was

very much to her to hear the conversation of her betters.

On the following morning Dockwrath breakfasted by appointment with

Mr. Mason,--promising, however, that he would return to his friends

whom he left behind him, and introduce them into the court in proper

time. As I have before hinted, Mr. Mason's confidence in Dockwrath

had gone on increasing day by day since they had first met each other

at Groby Park, till he now wished that he had altogether taken the

advice of the Hamworth attorney and put this matter entirely into

his hands. By degrees Joseph Mason had learned to understand and

thoroughly to appreciate the strong points in his own case; and

now he was so fully convinced of the truth of those surmises which

Dockwrath had been the first to make, that no amount of contrary

evidence could have shaken him. And why had not Round and Crook

found this out when the matter was before investigated? Why had they

prevented him from appealing to the Lord Chancellor when, through

their own carelessness, the matter had gone against him in the

inferior court? And why did they now, even in these latter days,

when they were driven to reopen the case by the clearness of the

evidence submitted to them,--why did they even now wound his ears,

irritate his temper, and oppose the warmest feelings of his heart by

expressing pity for this wicked criminal, whom it was their bounden

duty to prosecute to the very utmost? Was it not by their fault that

Orley Farm had been lost to him for the last twenty years? And yet

young Round had told him, with the utmost composure, that it would

be useless for him to look for any of those moneys which should have

accrued to him during all those years! After what had passed, young

Round should have been anxious to grind Lucius Mason into powder, and

make money of his very bones! Must he not think, when he considered

all these things, that Round and Crook had been wilfully dishonest

to him, and that their interest had been on the side of Lady Mason?

He did so think at last, under the beneficent tutelage of his new

adviser, and had it been possible would have taken the case out of

the hands of Round and Crook even during the week before the trial.

"We mustn't do it now," Dockwrath had said, in his triumph. "If we

did, the whole thing would be delayed. But they shall be so watched

that they shall not be able to throw the thing over. I've got them in

a vice, Mr. Mason; and I'll hold them so tight that they must convict

her whether they will or no."

And the nature and extent of Mr. Dockwrath's reward had been already

settled. When Lucius Mason should be expelled from Orley Farm with

ignominy, he, Dockwrath, should become the tenant. The very rent was

settled with the understanding that it should be remitted for the

first year. It would be pleasant to him to have back his two fields

in this way;--his two fields, and something else beyond! It may be

remembered that Lucius Mason had once gone to his office insulting

him. It would now be his turn to visit Lucius Mason at his domicile.

He was disposed to think that such visit would be made by him with

more effect than had attended that other.

"Well, sir, we're all right," he said, as he shook hands with Mr.

Mason of Groby; "there's no screw loose that I can find."

"And will that man be able to speak?" Mr. Mason was alluding to John

Kenneby.

"I think he will, as corroborating the woman Bolster. That's all we

shall want. We shall put up the woman first; that is, after I have

done. I don't think they'll make much of her, Mr. Mason."

"They can't make her say that she signed two deeds if she is willing

to tell the truth. There's no danger, you think, that she's been

tampered with,--that she has taken money."

"No, no; there's been nothing of that."

"They'd do anything, you know," said Mr. Mason. "Think of such a man

as Solomon Aram! He's been used to it all his life, you know."

"They could not do it, Mr. Mason; I've been too sharp on them. And

I tell you what,--they know it now. There isn't one of them that

doesn't know we shall get a verdict." And then for a few minutes

there was silence between the two friends.

"I'll tell you what, Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason, after a while; "I've

so set my heart upon this--upon getting justice at last--that I do

think it would kill me if I were to be beaten. I do, indeed. I've

known this, you know, all my life; and think what I've felt! For

twenty-two years, Dockwrath! By ----! in all that I have read I don't

think I ever heard of such a hardship! That she should have robbed

me for two-and-twenty years!--And now they say that she will be

imprisoned for twelve months!"

"She'll get more than that, Mr. Mason."

"I know what would have been done to her thirty years ago, when

the country was in earnest about such matters. What did they do to

Fauntleroy?"

"Things are changed since then, ain't they?" said Dockwrath, with

a laugh. And then he went to look up his flock, and take them into

court. "I'll meet you in the hall, Mr. Mason, in twenty minutes from

this time."

And so the play was beginning on each side.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE TRIAL.

And now the judge was there on the bench, the barristers and the

attorneys were collected, the prisoner was seated in their presence,

and the trial was begun. As is usual in cases of much public moment,

when a person of mark is put upon his purgation, or the offence is

one which has attracted notice, a considerable amount of time was

spent in preliminaries. But we, who are not bound by the necessities

under which the court laboured, will pass over these somewhat

rapidly. The prisoner was arraigned on the charge of perjury, and

pleaded "not guilty" in a voice which, though low, was audible to all

the court. At that moment the hum of voices had stayed itself, and

the two small words, spoken in a clear, silver tone, reached the ears

of all that then were there assembled. Some had surmised it to be

possible that she would at the last moment plead guilty, but such

persons had not known Lady Mason. And then by slow degrees a jury was

sworn, a considerable number of jurors having been set aside at the

instance of Lady Mason's counsel. Mr. Aram had learned to what part

of the county each man belonged, and upon his instructions those who

came from the neighbourhood of Hamworth were passed over.

The comparative lightness of the offence divested the commencement

of the trial of much of that importance and apparent dignity which

attach themselves to most celebrated criminal cases. The prisoner was

not bidden to look upon the juror, nor the juror to look upon the

prisoner, as though a battle for life and death were to be fought

between them. A true bill of perjury had come down to the court from

the grand jury, but the court officials could not bring themselves

on such an occasion to open the case with all that solemnity and

deference to the prisoner which they would have exhibited had she

been charged with murdering her old husband. Nor was it even the same

as though she had been accused of forgery. Though forgery be not now

a capital crime, it was so within our memories, and there is still

a certain grandeur in the name. But perjury sounds small and petty,

and it was not therefore till the trial had advanced a stage or two

that it assumed that importance which it afterwards never lost. That

this should be so cut Mr. Mason of Groby to the very soul. Even Mr.

Dockwrath had been unable to make him understand that his chance

of regaining the property was under the present circumstances much

greater than it would have been had Lady Mason been arraigned for

forgery. He would not believe that the act of forgery might possibly

not have been proved. Could she have been first whipped through the

street for the misdemeanour, and then hung for the felony, his spirit

would not have been more than sufficiently appeased.

The case was opened by one Mr. Steelyard, the junior counsel for

the prosecution; but his work on this occasion was hardly more than

formal. He merely stated the nature of the accusation against Lady

Mason, and the issue which the jury were called upon to try. Then got

up Sir Richard Leatherham, the solicitor-general, and at great length

and with wonderful perspicuity explained all the circumstances of

the case, beginning with the undoubted will left by Sir Joseph Mason,

the will independently of the codicil, and coming down gradually to

the discovery of that document in Mr. Dockwrath's office, which led

to the surmise that the signature of those two witnesses had been

obtained, not to a codicil to a will, but to a deed of another

character. In doing this Sir Richard did not seem to lean very

heavily upon Lady Mason, nor did he say much as to the wrongs

suffered by Mr. Mason of Groby. When he alluded to Mr. Dockwrath and

his part in these transactions, he paid no compliment to the Hamworth

attorney; but in referring to his learned friend on the other side

he protested his conviction that the defence of Lady Mason would be

conducted not only with zeal, but in that spirit of justice and truth

for which the gentlemen opposite to him were so conspicuous in their

profession. All this was wormwood to Joseph Mason; but nevertheless,

though Sir Richard was so moderate as to his own side, and so

courteous to that opposed to him, he made it very clear before he sat

down that if those witnesses were prepared to swear that which he was

instructed they would swear, either they must be utterly unworthy of

credit--a fact which his learned friends opposite were as able to

elicit as any gentlemen who had ever graced the English bar--or else

the prisoner now on her trial must have been guilty of the crime of

perjury now imputed to her.

Of all those in court now attending to the proceedings, none listened

with greater care to the statement made by Sir Richard than Joseph

Mason, Lady Mason herself, and Felix Graham. To Joseph Mason it

appeared that his counsel was betraying him. Sir Richard and Round

were in a boat together and were determined to throw him over

yet once again. Had it been possible he would have stopped the

proceedings, and in this spirit he spoke to Dockwrath. To Joseph

Mason it would have seemed right that Sir Richard should begin by

holding up Lady Mason to the scorn and indignation of the twelve

honest jurymen before him. Mr. Dockwrath, whose intelligence was

keener in such matters, endeavoured to make his patron understand

that he was wrong; but in this he did not succeed. "If he lets her

escape me," said Mason, "I think it will be the death of me."

To Lady Mason it appeared as though the man who was now showing to

all the crowd there assembled the chief scenes of her past life, had

been present and seen everything that she had ever done. He told the

jury of all who had been present in the room when that true deed had

been signed; he described how old Usbech had sat there incapable of

action; how that affair of the partnership had been brought to a

close; how those two witnesses had thereupon appended their name to a

deed; how those witnesses had been deceived, or partially deceived,

as to their own signatures when called upon to give their testimony

at a former trial; and he told them also that a comparison of

the signatures on the codicil with those signatures which were

undoubtedly true would lead an expert and professional judge of

writing to tell them that the one set of signatures or the other must

be forgeries. Then he went on to describe how the pretended codicil

must in truth have been executed--speaking of the solitary room in

which the bad work had been done, of the midnight care and terrible

solicitude for secrecy. And then, with apparent mercy, he attempted

to mitigate the iniquity of the deed by telling the jury that it had

not been done by that lady with any view to self-aggrandisement, but

had been brought about by a lamentable, infatuated, mad idea that she

might in this way do that justice to her child which that child's

father had refused to do at her instance. He also, when he told of

this, spoke of Rebekah and her son; and Mrs. Orme when she heard him

did not dare to raise her eyes from the table. Lucius Mason, when he

had listened to this, lifted his clenched hand on high, and brought

it down with loud violence on the raised desk in front of him. "I

know the merits of that young man," said Sir Richard, looking at

him; "I am told that he is a gentleman, good, industrious, and high

spirited. I wish he were not here; I wish with all my heart he were

not here." And then a tear, an absolute and true drop of briny

moisture, stood in the eye of that old experienced lawyer. Lucius,

when he heard this, for a moment covered his face. It was but for a

moment, and then he looked up again, turning his eyes slowly round

the entire court, and as he did so grasping his mother by the arm.

"He'll look in a different sort of fashion by to-morrow evening, I

guess," said Dockwrath into his neighbour's ear. During all this time

no change came over Lady Mason's face. When she felt her son's hand

upon her arm her muscles had moved involuntarily; but she recovered

herself at the moment, and then went on enduring it all with absolute

composure. Nevertheless it seemed to her as though that man who stood

before her, telling his tale so calmly, had read the secrets of her

very soul. What chance could there be for her when everything was

thus known?

To every word that was spoken Felix Graham gave all his mind. While

Mr. Chaffanbrass sat fidgeting, or reading, or dreaming, caring

nothing for all that his learned brother might say, Graham listened

to every fact that was stated, and to every surmise that was

propounded. To him the absolute truth in this affair was matter of

great moment, but yet he felt that he dreaded to know the truth.

Would it not be better for him that he should not know it? But yet he

listened, and his active mind, intent on the various points as they

were evolved, would not restrain itself from forming opinions. With

all his ears he listened, and as he did so Mr. Chaffanbrass, amidst

his dreaming, reading, and fidgeting, kept an attentive eye upon him.

To him it was a matter of course that Lady Mason should be guilty.

Had she not been guilty, he, Mr. Chaffanbrass, would not have been

required. Mr. Chaffanbrass well understood that the defence of

injured innocence was no part of his mission.

Then at last Sir Richard Leatherham brought to a close his long tale,

and the examination of the witnesses was commenced. By this time

it was past two o'clock, and the judge went out of court for a few

minutes to refresh himself with a glass of wine and a sandwich. And

now young Peregrine Orme, in spite of all obstacles, made his way up

to his mother and led her also out of court. He took his mother's

arm, and Lady Mason followed with her son, and so they made their way

into the small outer room which they had first entered. Not a word

was said between them on the subject which was filling the minds of

all of them. Lucius stood silent and absorbed while Peregrine offered

refreshment to both the ladies. Lady Mason, doing as she was bid,

essayed to eat and to drink. What was it to her whether she ate and

drank or was a-hungered? To maintain by her demeanour the idea in

men's minds that she might still possibly be innocent--that was her

work. And therefore, in order that those two young men might still

think so, she ate and drank as she was bidden.

On their return to court Mr. Steelyard got up to examine Dockwrath,

who was put into the box as the first witness. The attorney produced

certain documents supposed to be of relevancy, which he had found

among his father-in-law's papers, and then described how he had found

that special document which gave him to understand that Bolster and

Kenneby had been used as witnesses to a certain signature on that

14th of July. He had known all the circumstances of the old trial,

and hence his suspicions had been aroused. Acting upon this he had

gone immediately down to Mr. Mason in Yorkshire, and the present

trial was the result of his care and intelligence. This was in effect

the purport of his direct evidence, and then he was handed over to

the tender mercies of the other side.

On the other side Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to begin the battle. Mr.

Furnival had already been engaged in sundry of those preliminary

skirmishes which had been found necessary before the fight had been

commenced in earnest, and therefore the turn had now come for Mr.

Chaffanbrass. All this, however, had been arranged beforehand, and

it had been agreed that if possible Dockwrath should be made to fall

into the clutches of the Old Bailey barrister. It was pretty to see

the meek way in which Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to his work; how gently

he smiled, how he fidgeted about a few of the papers as though he

were not at first quite master of his situation, and how he arranged

his old wig in a modest, becoming manner, bringing it well forward

over his forehead. His voice also was low and soft;--so low that

it was hardly heard through the whole court, and persons who had

come far to listen to him began to feel themselves disappointed.

And it was pretty also to see how Dockwrath armed himself for the

encounter,--how he sharpened his teeth, as it were, and felt the

points of his own claws. The little devices of Mr. Chaffanbrass did

not deceive him. He knew what he had to expect; but his pluck was

good, as is the pluck of a terrier when a mastiff prepares to attack

him. Let Mr. Chaffanbrass do his worst; that would all be over in an

hour or so. But when Mr. Chaffanbrass had done his worst, Orley Farm

would still remain.

"I believe you were a tenant of Lady Mason's at one time, Mr.

Dockwrath?" asked the barrister.

"I was; and she turned me out. If you will allow me I will tell

you how all that happened, and how I was angered by the usage I

received." Mr. Dockwrath was determined to make a clean breast of it,

and rather go before his tormentor in telling all that there was to

be told, than lag behind as an unwilling witness.

"Do," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "That will be very kind of you. When I

have learned all that, and one other little circumstance of the same

nature, I do not think I shall want to trouble you any more." And

then Mr. Dockwrath did tell it all;--how he had lost the two fields,

how he had thus become very angry, how this anger had induced him at

once to do that which he had long thought of doing,--search, namely,

among the papers of old Mr. Usbech, with the view of ascertaining

what might be the real truth as regarded that doubtful codicil.

"And you found what you searched for, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I did," said Dockwrath.

"Without very much delay, apparently?"

"I was two or three days over the work."

"But you found exactly what you wanted?"

"I found what I expected to find."

"And that, although all those papers had been subjected to the

scrutiny of Messrs. Round and Crook at the time of that other trial

twenty years ago?"

"I was sharper than them, Mr. Chaffanbrass,--a deal sharper."

"So I perceive," said Chaffanbrass, and now he had pushed back his

wig a little, and his eyes had begun to glare with an ugly red light.

"Yes," he said, "it will be long, I think, before my old friends

Round and Crook are as sharp as you are, Mr. Dockwrath."

"Upon my word I agree with you, Mr. Chaffanbrass."

"Yes; Round and Crook are babies to you, Mr. Dockwrath;" and now Mr.

Chaffanbrass began to pick at his chin with his finger, as he was

accustomed to do when he warmed to his subject. "Babies to you! You

have had a good deal to do with them, I should say, in getting up

this case."

"I have had something to do with them."

"And very much they must have enjoyed your society, Mr. Dockwrath!

And what wrinkles they must have learned from you! What a pleasant

oasis it must have been in the generally somewhat dull course of

their monotonous though profitable business! I quite envy Round and

Crook having you alongside of them in their inner council-chamber."

"I know nothing about that, sir."

"No; I dare say you don't;--but they'll remember it. Well, when you'd

turned over your father-in-law's papers for three days you found what

you looked for?"

"Yes, I did."

"You had been tolerably sure that you would find it before you began,

eh?"

"Well, I had expected that something would turn up."

"I have no doubt you did,--and something has turned up. That

gentleman sitting next to you there,--who is he?"

"Joseph Mason, Esquire, of Groby Park," said Dockwrath.

"So I thought. It is he that is to have Orley Farm, if Lady Mason and

her son should lose it?"

"In that case he would be the heir."

"Exactly. He would be the heir. How pleasant it must be to you to

find yourself on such affectionate terms with--the heir! And when

he comes into his inheritance, who is to be tenant? Can you tell us

that?"

Dockwrath here paused for a moment. Not that he hesitated as to

telling the whole truth. He had fully made up his mind to do so,

and to brazen the matter out, declaring that of course he was to be

considered worthy of his reward. But there was that in the manner and

eye of Chaffanbrass which stopped him for a moment, and his enemy

immediately took advantage of this hesitation. "Come sir," said he,

"out with it. If I don't get it from you, I shall from somebody else.

You've been very plain-spoken hitherto. Don't let the jury think that

your heart is failing you at last."

"There is no reason why my heart should fail me," said Dockwrath, in

an angry tone.

"Is there not? I must differ from you there, Mr. Dockwrath. The heart

of any man placed in such a position as that you now hold must, I

think, fail him. But never mind that. Who is to be the tenant of

Orley Farm when my client has been deprived of it?"

"I am."

"Just so. You were turned out from those two fields when young Mason

came home from Germany?"

"I was."

"You immediately went to work and discovered this document?"

"I did."

"You put up Joseph Mason to this trial?"

"I told him my opinion."

"Exactly. And if the result be successful, you are to be put in

possession of the land."

"I shall become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm."

"Yes, you will become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm. Upon my word,

Mr. Dockwrath, you have made my work to-day uncommonly easy for

me,--uncommonly easy. I don't know that I have anything else to ask

you." And then Mr. Chaffanbrass, as he sat down, looked up to the

jury with an expression of countenance which was in itself worth any

fee that could be paid to him for that day's work. His face spoke as

plain as a face could speak, and what his face said was this: "After

that, gentlemen of the jury, very little more can be necessary. You

now see the motives of our opponents, and the way in which those

motives have been allowed to act. We, who are altogether upon the

square in what we are doing, desire nothing more than that." All

which Mr. Chaffanbrass said by his look, his shrug, and his gesture,

much more eloquently than he could have done by the use of any words.

Mr. Dockwrath, as he left the box and went back to his seat--in

doing which he had to cross the table in the middle of the

court--endeavoured to look and move as though all were right with

him. He knew that the eyes of the court were on him, and especially

the eyes of the judge and jury. He knew also how men's minds are

unconsciously swayed by small appearances. He endeavoured therefore

to seem indifferent; but in doing so he swaggered, and was conscious

that he swaggered; and he felt as he gained his seat that Mr.

Chaffanbrass had been too much for him.

Then one Mr. Torrington from London was examined by Sir Richard

Leatherham, and he proved, apparently beyond all doubt, that a

certain deed which he produced was genuine. That deed bore the same

date as the codicil which was now questioned, had been executed at

Orley Farm by old Sir Joseph, and bore the signatures of John Kenneby

and Bridget Bolster as witnesses. Sir Richard, holding the deeds in

his hands, explained to the jury that he did not at the present stage

of the proceedings ask them to take it as proved that those names

were the true signatures of the two persons indicated. ("I should

think not," said Mr. Furnival, in a loud voice.) But he asked them to

satisfy themselves that the document as now existing purported to

bear those two signatures. It would be for them to judge, when the

evidence brought before them should be complete, whether or no that

deed were a true document. And then the deed was handed up into the

jury-box, and the twelve jurymen all examined it. The statement made

by this Mr. Torrington was very simple. It had become his business

to know the circumstances of the late partnership between Mason and

Martock, and these circumstances he explained. Then Sir Richard

handed him over to be cross-examined.

It was now Graham's turn to begin his work; but as he rose to do so

his mind misgave him. Not a syllable that this Torrington had said

appeared to him to be unworthy of belief. The man had not uttered a

word, of the truth of which Graham did not feel himself positively

assured; and, more than that,--the man had clearly told all that was

within him to tell, all that it was well that the jury should hear

in order that they might thereby be assisted in coming to a true

decision. It had been hinted in his hearing, both by Chaffanbrass and

Aram, that this man was probably in league with Dockwrath, and Aram

had declared with a sneer that he was a puzzle-pated old fellow. He

might be puzzle-pated, and had already shown that he was bashful and

unhappy in his present position; but he had shown also, as Graham

thought, that he was anxious to tell the truth.

And, moreover, Graham had listened with all his mind to the

cross-examination of Dockwrath, and he was filled with disgust--with

disgust, not so much at the part played by the attorney as at that

played by the barrister. As Graham regarded the matter, what had the

iniquities and greed of Dockwrath to do with it? Had reason been

shown why the statement made by Dockwrath was in itself unworthy of

belief,--that that statement was in its own essence weak,--then the

character of the man making it might fairly affect its credibility.

But presuming that statement to be wrong,--presuming that it was

corroborated by other evidence, how could it be affected by any

amount of villainy on the part of Dockwrath? All that Chaffanbrass

had done or attempted was to prove that Dockwrath had had his own

end to serve. Who had ever doubted it? But not a word had been said,

not a spark of evidence elicited, to show that the man had used a

falsehood to further those views of his. Of all this the mind of

Felix Graham had been full; and now, as he rose to take his own share

of the work, his wit was at work rather in opposition to Lady Mason

than on her behalf.

This Torrington was a little old man, and Graham had watched how his

hands had trembled when Sir Richard first addressed him. But Sir

Richard had been very kind,--as was natural to his own witness, and

the old man had gradually regained his courage. But now as he turned

his face round to the side where he knew that he might expect to

find an enemy, that tremor again came upon him, and the stick which

he held in his hand was heard as it tapped gently against the side

of the witness-box. Graham, as he rose to his work, saw that Mr.

Chaffanbrass had fixed his eye upon him, and his courage rose the

higher within him as he felt the gaze of the man whom he so much

disliked. Was it within the compass of his heart to bully an old man

because such a one as Chaffanbrass desired it of him? By heaven, no!

He first asked Mr. Torrington his age, and having been told that he

was over seventy, Graham went on to assure him that nothing which

could be avoided should be said to disturb his comfort. "And now, Mr.

Torrington," he asked, "will you tell me whether you are a friend of

Mr. Dockwrath's, or have had any acquaintance with him previous to

the affairs of this trial?" This question he repeated in various

forms, but always in a mild voice, and without the appearance of any

disbelief in the answers which were given to him. All these questions

Torrington answered by a plain negative. He had never seen Dockwrath

till the attorney had come to him on the matter of that partnership

deed. He had never eaten or drunk with him, nor had there ever been

between them any conversation of a confidential nature. "That will

do, Mr. Torrington," said Graham; and as he sat down, he again turned

round and looked Mr. Chaffanbrass full in the face.

After that nothing further of interest was done that day. A few

unimportant witnesses were examined on legal points, and then the

court was adjourned.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE TWO JUDGES.

Felix Graham as he left the Alston court-house on the close of the

first day of the trial was not in a happy state of mind. He did not

actually accuse himself of having omitted any duty which he owed to

his client; but he did accuse himself of having undertaken a duty for

which he felt himself to be manifestly unfit. Would it not have been

better, as he said to himself, for that poor lady to have had any

other possible advocate than himself? Then as he passed out in the

company of Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass, the latter looked at

him with a scorn which he did not know how to return. In his heart he

could do so; and should words be spoken between them on the subject,

he would be well able and willing enough to defend himself. But had

he attempted to bandy looks with Mr. Chaffanbrass, it would have

seemed even to himself that he was proclaiming his resolution to put

himself in opposition to his colleagues.

He felt as though he were engaged to fight a battle in which truth

and justice, nay heaven itself must be against him. How can a man

put his heart to the proof of an assertion in the truth of which he

himself has no belief? That though guilty this lady should be treated

with the utmost mercy compatible with the law;--for so much, had her

guilt stood forward as acknowledged, he could have pleaded with all

the eloquence that was in him. He could still pity her, sympathise

with her, fight for her on such ground as that; but was it possible

that he, believing her to be false, should stand up before the crowd

assembled in that court, and use such intellect as God had given him

in making others think that the false and the guilty one was true and

innocent, and that those accusers were false and guilty whom he knew

to be true and innocent?

It had been arranged that Baron Maltby should stay that night at

Noningsby. The brother-judges therefore occupied the Noningsby

carriage together, and Graham was driven back in a dog-cart by

Augustus Staveley.

"Well, old boy," said Augustus, "you did not soil your conscience

much by bullying that fellow."

"No, I did not," said Graham; and then he was silent.

"Chaffanbrass made an uncommonly ugly show of the Hamworth attorney,"

said Augustus, after a pause; but to this Graham at first made no

answer.

"If I were on the jury," continued the other, "I would not believe a

single word that came from that fellow's mouth, unless it were fully

supported by other testimony. Nor will the jury believe him."

"I tell you what, Staveley," said Graham, "you will oblige me greatly

in this matter if you will not speak to me of the trial till it is

over."

"I beg your pardon."

"No; don't do that. Nothing can be more natural than that you and

I should discuss it together in all its bearings. But there are

reasons, which I will explain to you afterwards, why I would rather

not do so."

"All right," said Augustus. "I'll not say another word."

"And for my part, I will get through the work as well as I may." And

then they both sat silent in the gig till they came to the corner of

Noningsby wall.

"And is that other subject tabooed also?" said Augustus.

"What other subject?"

"That as to which we said something when you were last

here,--touching my sister Madeline."

Graham felt that his face was on fire, but he did not know how to

answer. "In that it is for you to decide whether or no there should

be silence between us," he said at last.

"I certainly do not wish that there should be any secret between us,"

said Augustus.

"Then there shall be none. It is my intention to make an offer to

her before I leave Noningsby. I can assure you for your satisfaction,

that my hopes do not run very high."

"For my satisfaction, Felix! I don't know why you should suppose me

to be anxious that you should fail." And as he so spoke he stopped

his horse at the hall-door, and there was no time for further speech.

"Papa has been home a quarter of an hour," said Madeline, meeting

them in the hall.

"Yes, he had the pull of us by having his carriage ready," said her

brother. "We had to wait for the ostler."

"He says that if you are not ready in ten minutes he will go to

dinner without you. Mamma and I are dressed." And as she spoke she

turned round with a smile to Felix, making him feel that both she and

her father were treating him as though he were one of the family.

"Ten minutes will be quite enough for me," said he.

"If the governor only would sit down," said Augustus, "it would be

all right. But that's just what he won't do. Mad, do send somebody to

help me to unpack." And then they all bustled away, so that the pair

of judges might not be kept waiting for their food.

Felix Graham hurried up stairs, three steps at a time, as though all

his future success at Noningsby depended on his being down in the

drawing-room within the period of minutes stipulated by the judge.

As he dressed himself with the utmost rapidity, thinking perhaps not

so much as he should have done of his appearance in the eyes of his

lady-love, he endeavoured to come to some resolve as to the task

which was before him. How was he to find an opportunity of speaking

his mind to Madeline, if, during the short period of his sojourn at

Noningsby, he left the house every morning directly after breakfast,

and returned to it in the evening only just in time for dinner?

When he entered the drawing-room both the judges were there, as was

also Lady Staveley and Madeline. Augustus alone was wanting. "Ring

the bell, Graham," the judge said, as Felix took his place on the

corner of the rug. "Augustus will be down about supper-time." And

then the bell was rung and the dinner ordered.

"Papa ought to remember," said Madeline, "that he got his carriage

first at Alston."

"I heard the wheels of the gig," said the judge. "They were just two

minutes after us."

"I don't think Augustus takes longer than other young men," said Lady

Staveley.

"Look at Graham there. He can't be supposed to have the use of all

his limbs, for he broke half a dozen of them a month ago; and yet

he's ready. Brother Maltby, give your arm to Lady Staveley. Graham,

if you'll take Madeline, I'll follow alone." He did not call her Miss

Staveley, as Felix specially remarked, and so remarking, pressed the

little hand somewhat closer to his side. It was the first sign of

love he had ever given her, and he feared that some mark of anger

might follow it. There was no return to his pressure;--not the

slightest answer was made with those sweet finger points; but there

was no anger. "Is your arm quite strong again?" she asked him as they

sat down, as soon as the judge's short grace had been uttered.

"Fifteen minutes to the second," said Augustus, bustling into the

room, "and I think that an unfair advantage has been taken of me. But

what can a juvenile barrister expect in the presence of two judges?"

And then the dinner went on, and a very pleasant little dinner-party

it was.

Not a word was said, either then or during the evening, or on the

following morning, on that subject which was engrossing so much of

the mind of all of them. Not a word was spoken as to that trial which

was now pending, nor was the name of Lady Mason mentioned. It was

understood even by Madeline that no allusion could with propriety be

made to it in the presence of the judge before whom the cause was now

pending, and the ground was considered too sacred for feet to tread

upon it. Were it not that this feeling is so general an English judge

and English counsellors would almost be forced to subject themselves

in such cases to the close custody which jurymen are called upon to

endure. But, as a rule, good taste and good feeling are as potent as

locks and walls.

"Do you know, Mr. Graham," said Madeline, in that sort of whisper

which a dinner-table allows, "that Mrs. Baker says you have cut her

since you got well."

"I! I cut one of my very best friends! How can she say anything so

untrue? If I knew where she lived I'd go and pay her a visit after

dinner."

"I don't think you need do that,--though she has a very snug little

room of her own. You were in it on Christmas-day when we had the

snapdragon,--when you and Marion carried away the dishes."

"I remember. And she is base enough to say that I have cut her? I did

see her for a moment yesterday, and then I spoke to her."

"Ah, but you should have had a long chat with her. She expects you

to go back over all the old ground, how you were brought in helpless,

how the doctor came to you, and how you took all the messes she

prepared for you like a good boy. I'm afraid, Mr. Graham, you don't

understand old women."

"Nor young ones either," it was on his tongue to say, but he did not

say it.

"When I was a young man," said the baron, carrying on some

conversation which had been general at the table, "I never had an

opportunity of breaking my ribs out hunting."

"Perhaps if you had," said Augustus, "you might have used it with

more effect than my friend here, and have deprived the age of one

of its brightest lights, and the bench of one of its most splendid

ornaments."

"Hear, hear, hear!" said his father.

"Augustus is coming out in a new character," said his mother.

"I am heartily obliged to him," said the baron. "But, as I was saying

before, these sort of things never came in my way. If I remember

right, my father would have thought I was mad had I talked of going

out hunting. Did you hunt, Staveley?"

When the ladies were gone the four lawyers talked about law, though

they kept quite clear of that special trial which was going on at

Alston. Judge Staveley, as we know, had been at the Birmingham

congress; but not so his brother the baron. Baron Maltby, indeed,

thought but little of the Birmingham doings, and was inclined to be a

little hard upon his brother in that he had taken a part in it.

"I think that the matter is one open to discussion," said the host.

"Well, I hope so," said Graham. "At any rate I have heard no

arguments which ought to make us feel that our mouths are closed."

"Arguments on such a matter are worth nothing at all," said the

baron. "A man with what is called a logical turn of mind may prove

anything or disprove anything; but he never convinces anybody. On any

matter that is near to a man's heart, he is convinced by the tenour

of his own thoughts as he goes on living, not by the arguments of a

logician, or even by the eloquence of an orator. Talkers are apt to

think that if their listener cannot answer them they are bound to

give way; but non-talkers generally take a very different view of the

subject."

"But does that go to show that a question should not be ventilated?"

asked Felix.

"I don't mean to be uncivil," said the baron, "but of all words in

the language there is none which I dislike so much as that word

ventilation. A man given to ventilating subjects is worse than a man

who has a mission."

"Bores of that sort, however," said Graham, "will show themselves

from time to time and are not easily put down. Some one will have a

mission to reform our courts of law, and will do it too."

"I only hope it may not be in my time," said the baron.

"I can't go quite so far as that," said the other judge. "But no

doubt we all have the same feeling more or less. I know pretty well

what my friend Graham is driving at."

"And in your heart you agree with me," said Graham.

"If you would carry men's heads with you they would do you more good

than their hearts," said the judge. And then as the wine bottles

were stationary, the subject was cut short and they went into the

drawing-room.

Graham had no opportunity that evening of telling his tale to

Madeline Staveley. The party was too large for such tale-telling or

else not large enough. And then the evening in the drawing-room was

over before it had seemed to begin; and while he was yet hoping that

there might be some turn in his favour, Lady Staveley wished him

good-night, and Madeline of course did the same. As he again pressed

her hand he could not but think how little he had said to her since

he had been in the house, and yet it seemed to him as though that

little had made him more intimate with her than he had ever found

himself before. He had made an attempt to separate himself from

the company by proposing to go and call on Mrs. Baker in her own

quarters; but Madeline had declared it to be too late for such an

expedition, explaining that when Mrs. Baker had no patient on hand

she was accustomed to go early to her bed. In the present instance,

however, she had been wrong, for when Felix reached the door of his

own room, Mrs. Baker was coming out of it.

"I was just looking if everything was right," said she. "It seems

natural to me to come and look after you, you know."

"And it is quite as natural to me to be looked after."

"Is it though? But the worst of you gentlemen when you get well is

that one has done with you. You go away, and then there's no more

about it. I always begrudge to see you get well for that reason."

"When you have a man in your power you like to keep him there."

"That's always the way with the women you know. I hope we shall see

one of them tying you by the leg altogether before long."

"I don't know anything about that," said Felix, sheepishly.

"Don't you? Well, if you don't I suppose nobody don't. But

nevertheless I did hear a little bird say--eh! Mr. Graham."

"Those little birds are the biggest liars in the world."

"Are they now? Well perhaps they are. And how do you think our Miss

Madeline is looking? She wasn't just well for one short time after

you went away."

"Has she been ill?"

"Well, not ill; not so that she came into my hands. She's looking

herself again now, isn't she?"

"She is looking, as she always does, uncommonly well."

"Do you remember how she used to come and say a word to you standing

at the door? Dear heart! I'll be bound now I care more for her than

you do."

"Do you?" said Graham.

"Of course I do. And then how angry her ladyship was with me,--as

though it were my fault. I didn't do it. Did I, Mr. Graham? But,

Lord love you, what's the use of being angry? My lady ought to have

remembered her own young days, for it was just the same thing with

her. She had her own way, and so will Miss Madeline." And then with

some further inquiries as to his fire, his towels, and his sheets,

Mrs. Baker took herself off.

Felix Graham had felt a repugnance to taking the gossiping old woman

openly into his confidence, and yet he had almost asked her whether

he might in truth count upon Madeline's love. Such at any rate had

been the tenour of his gossiping; but nevertheless he was by no means

certified. He had the judge's assurance in allowing him to be there;

he had the assurance given to him by Augustus in the few words spoken

to him at the door that evening; and he ought to have known that he

had received sufficient assurance from Madeline herself. But in truth

he knew nothing of the kind. There are men who are much too forward

in believing that they are regarded with favour; but there are others

of whom it may be said that they are as much too backward. The world

hears most of the former, and talks of them the most, but I doubt

whether the latter are not the more numerous.

The next morning of course there was a hurry and fuss at breakfast in

order that they might get off in time for the courts. The judges were

to take their seats at ten, and therefore it was necessary that they

should sit down to breakfast some time before nine. The achievement

does not seem to be one of great difficulty, but nevertheless it left

no time for lovemaking.

But for one instant Felix was able to catch Madeline alone in the

breakfast-parlour. "Miss Staveley," said he, "will it be possible

that I should speak to you alone this evening;--for five minutes?"

"Speak to me alone?" she said, repeating his words; and as she did

so she was conscious that her whole face had become suffused with

colour.

"Is it too much to ask?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then if I leave the dining-room soon after you have done so--"

"Mamma will be there, you know," she said. Then others came into the

room and he was able to make no further stipulation for the evening.

Madeline, when she was left alone that morning, was by no means

satisfied with her own behaviour, and accused herself of having been

unnecessarily cold to him. She knew the permission which had been

accorded to him, and she knew also--knew well--what answer would

be given to his request. In her mind the matter was now fixed. She

had confessed to herself that she loved him, and she could not now

doubt of his love to her. Why then should she have answered him with

coldness and doubt? She hated the missishness of young ladies, and

had resolved that when he asked her a plain question she would give

him a plain answer. It was true that the question had not been asked

as yet; but why should she have left him in doubt as to her kindly

feeling?

"It shall be but for this one day," she said to herself as she sat

alone in her room.

CHAPTER LXX.

HOW AM I TO BEAR IT?

When the first day's work was over in the court, Lady Mason and

Mrs. Orme kept their seats till the greater part of the crowd

had dispersed, and the two young men, Lucius Mason and Peregrine,

remained with them. Mr. Aram also remained, giving them sundry little

instructions in a low voice as to the manner in which they should go

home and return the next morning,--telling them the hour at which

they must start, and promising that he would meet them at the door

of the court. To all this Mrs. Orme endeavoured to give her best

attention, as though it were of the last importance; but Lady Mason

was apparently much the more collected of the two, and seemed to take

all Mr. Aram's courtesies as though they were a matter of course.

There she sat, still with her veil up, and though all those who had

been assembled there during the day turned their eyes upon her as

they passed out, she bore it all without quailing. It was not that

she returned their gaze, or affected an effrontery in her conduct;

but she was able to endure it without showing that she suffered as

she did so.

"The carriage is there now," said Mr. Aram, who had left the court

for a minute; "and I think you may get into it quietly." This

accordingly they did, making their way through an avenue of idlers

who still remained that they might look upon the lady who was accused

of having forged her husband's will.

[Illustration: Lady Mason leaving the Court.]

"I will stay with her to-night," whispered Mrs. Orme to her son as

they passed through the court.

"Do you mean that you will not come to The Cleeve at all?"

"Not to-night; not till the trial be over. Do you remain with your

grandfather."

"I shall be here to-morrow of course to see how you go on."

"But do not leave your grandfather this evening. Give him my love,

and say that I think it best that I should remain at Orley Farm till

the trial be over. And, Peregrine, if I were you I would not talk to

him much about the trial."

"But why not?"

"I will tell you when it is over. But it would only harass him at

the present moment." And then Peregrine handed his mother into the

carriage and took his own way back to The Cleeve.

As he returned he was bewildered in his mind by what he had heard,

and he also began to feel something like a doubt as to Lady Mason's

innocence. Hitherto his belief in it had been as fixed and assured as

that of her own son. Indeed it had never occurred to him as possible

that she could have done the thing with which she was charged. He

had hated Joseph Mason for suspecting her, and had hated Dockwrath

for his presumed falsehood in pretending to suspect her. But

what was he to think of this question now, after hearing the

clear and dispassionate statement of all the circumstances by the

solicitor-general? Hitherto he had understood none of the particulars

of the case; but now the nature of the accusation had been made

plain, and it was evident to him that at any rate that far-sighted

lawyer believed in the truth of his own statement. Could it be

possible that Lady Mason had forged the will,--that this deed had

been done by his mother's friend, by the woman who had so nearly

become Lady Orme of The Cleeve? The idea was terrible to him as he

rode home, but yet he could not rid himself of it. And if this were

so, was it also possible that his grandfather suspected it? Had that

marriage been stopped by any such suspicion as this? Was it this that

had broken the old man down and robbed him of all his spirit? That

his mother could not have any such suspicion seemed to him to be made

clear by the fact that she still treated Lady Mason as her friend.

And then why had he been specially enjoined not to speak to his

grandfather as to the details of the trial?

But it was impossible for him to meet Sir Peregrine without speaking

of the trial. When he entered the house, which he did by some back

entrance from the stables, he found his grandfather standing at his

own room door. He had heard the sounds of the horse, and was unable

to restrain his anxiety to learn.

"Well," said Sir Peregrine, "what has happened?"

"It is not over as yet. It will last, they say, for three days."

"But come in, Peregrine;" and he shut the door, anxious rather that

the servants should not witness his own anxiety than that they should

not hear tidings which must now be common to all the world. "They

have begun it?"

"Oh, yes! they have begun it."

"Well, how far has it gone?"

"Sir Richard Leatherham told us the accusation they make against her,

and then they examined Dockwrath and one or two others. They have not

got further than that."

"And the--Lady Mason--how does she bear it?"

"Very well I should say. She does not seem to be nearly as nervous

now, as she was while staying with us."

"Ah! indeed. She is a wonderful woman,--a very wonderful woman. So

she bears up? And your mother, Peregrine?"

"I don't think she likes it."

"Likes it! Who could like such a task as that?"

"But she will go through with it."

"I am sure she will. She will go through with anything that she

undertakes. And--and--the judge said nothing--I suppose?"

"Very little, sir."

And Sir Peregrine again sat down in his arm-chair as though the work

of conversation were too much for him. But neither did he dare to

speak openly on the subject; and yet there was so much that he was

anxious to know. Do you think she will escape? That was the question

which he longed to ask but did not dare to utter.

And then, after a while, they dined together. And Peregrine

determined to talk of other things; but it was in vain. While the

servants were in the room nothing was said. The meat was carved and

the plates were handed round, and young Orme ate his dinner; but

there was a constraint upon them both which they were quite unable to

dispel, and at last they gave it up and sat in silence till they were

alone.

When the door was closed, and they were opposite to each other over

the fire, in the way which was their custom when they two only were

there, Sir Peregrine could restrain his desire no longer. It must be

that his grandson, who had heard all that had passed in court that

day, should have formed some opinion of what was going on,--should

have some idea as to the chance of that battle which was being

fought. He, Sir Peregrine, could not have gone into the court

himself. It would have been impossible for him to show himself there.

But there had been his heart all the day. How had it gone with that

woman whom a few weeks ago he had loved so well that he had regarded

her as his wife?

"Was your mother very tired?" he said, again endeavouring to draw

near the subject.

"She did looked fagged while sitting in court."

"It was a dreadful task for her,--very dreadful."

"Nothing could have turned her from it," said Peregrine.

"No,--you are right there. Nothing would have turned her from it. She

thought it to be her duty to that poor lady. But she--Lady Mason--she

bore it better, you say?"

"I think she bears it very well,--considering what her position is."

"Yes, yes. It is very dreadful. The solicitor-general when he

opened,--was he very severe upon her?"

"I do not think he wished to be severe."

"But he made it very strong against her."

"The story, as he told it, was very strong against her;--that is, you

know, it would be if we were to believe all that he stated."

"Yes, yes, of course. He only stated what he has been told by others.

You could not see how the jury took it?"

"I did not look at them. I was thinking more of her and of Lucius."

"Lucius was there?"

"Yes; he sat next to her. And Sir Richard said, while he was telling

the story, that he wished her son were not there to hear it. Upon my

word, sir, I almost wished so too."

"Poor fellow,--poor fellow! It would have been better for him to stay

away."

"And yet had it been my mother--"

"Your mother, Perry! It could not have been your mother. She could

not have been so placed."

"If it be Lady Mason's misfortune, and not her fault--"

"Ah, well; we will not talk about that. And there will be two days

more you say?"

"So said Aram, the attorney."

"God help her;--may God help her! It would be very dreadful for a

man, but for a woman the burden is insupportable."

Then they both sat silent for a while, during which Peregrine was

engrossed in thinking how he could turn his grandfather from the

conversation.

"And you heard no one express any opinion?" asked Sir Peregrine,

after a pause.

"You mean about Lady Mason?" And Peregrine began to perceive that his

mother was right, and that it would have been well if possible to

avoid any words about the trial.

"Do they think that she will--will be acquitted? Of course the people

there were talking about it?"

"Yes, sir, they were talking about it. But I really don't know as to

any opinion. You see, the chief witnesses have not been examined."

"And you, Perry, what do you think?"

"I, sir! Well, I was altogether on her side till I heard Sir Richard

Leatherham."

"And then--?"

"Then I did not know what to think. I suppose it's all right; but one

never can understand what those lawyers are at. When Mr. Chaffanbrass

got up to examine Dockwrath, he seemed to be just as confident on his

side as the other fellow had been on the other side. I don't think

I'll have any more wine, sir, thank you."

But Sir Peregrine did not move. He sat in his old accustomed way,

nursing one leg over the knee of the other, and thinking of the

manner in which she had fallen at his feet, and confessed it all.

Had he married her, and gone with her proudly into the court,--as he

would have done,--and had he then heard a verdict of guilty given by

the jury;--nay, had he heard such proof of her guilt as would have

convinced himself, it would have killed him. He felt, as he sat

there, safe over his own fireside, that his safety was due to her

generosity. Had that other calamity fallen upon him, he could not

have survived it. His head would have fallen low before the eyes of

those who had known him since they had known anything, and would

never have been raised again. In his own spirit, in his inner life,

the blow had come to him; but it was due to her effort on his behalf

that he had not been stricken in public. When he had discussed the

matter with Mrs. Orme, he had seemed in a measure to forget this. It

had not at any rate been the thought which rested with the greatest

weight upon his mind. Then he had considered how she, whose life had

been stainless as driven snow, should bear herself in the presence of

such deep guilt. But now,--now as he sat alone, he thought only of

Lady Mason. Let her be ever so guilty,--and her guilt had been very

terrible,--she had behaved very nobly to him. From him at least she

had a right to sympathy.

And what chance was there that she should escape? Of absolute escape

there was no chance whatever. Even should the jury acquit her, she

must declare her guilt to the world,--must declare it to her son,

by taking steps for the restoration of the property. As to that Sir

Peregrine felt no doubt whatever. That Joseph Mason of Groby would

recover his right to Orley Farm was to him a certainty. But how

terrible would be the path over which she must walk before this

deed of retribution could be done! "Ah, me! ah, me!" he said, as

he thought of all this,--speaking to himself, as though he were

unconscious of his grandson's presence. "Poor woman! poor woman!"

Then Peregrine felt sure that she had been guilty, and was sure also

that his grandfather was aware of it.

"Will you come into the other room, sir?" he said.

"Yes, yes; if you like it." And then the one leg fell from the other,

and he rose to do his grandson's bidding. To him now and henceforward

one room was much the same as another.

In the mean time the party bound for Orley Farm had reached that

place, and to them also came the necessity of wearing through that

tedious evening. On the mind of Lucius Mason not even yet had a

shadow of suspicion fallen. To him, in spite of it all, his mother

was still pure. But yet he was stern to her, and his manner was very

harsh. It may be that had such suspicion crossed his mind he would

have been less stern, and his manner more tender. As it was he could

understand nothing that was going on, and almost felt that he was

kept in the dark at his mother's instance. Why was it that a man

respected by all the world, such as Sir Richard Leatherham, should

rise in court and tell such a tale as that against his mother; and

that the power of answering that tale on his mother's behalf should

be left to such another man as Mr. Chaffanbrass? Sir Richard had told

his story plainly, but with terrible force; whereas Chaffanbrass had

contented himself with brow-beating another lawyer with the lowest

quirks of his cunning. Why had not some one been in court able to use

the language of passionate truth and ready to thrust the lie down the

throats of those who told it?

Tea and supper had been prepared for them, and they sat down

together; but the nature of the meal may be imagined. Lady Mason had

striven with terrible effort to support herself during the day, and

even yet she did not give way. It was quite as necessary that she

should restrain herself before her son as before all those others

who had gazed at her in court. And she did sustain herself. She took

a knife and fork in her hand and ate a few morsels. She drank her

cup of tea, and remembering that there in that house she was still

hostess, she made some slight effort to welcome her guest. "Surely

after such a day of trouble you will eat something," she said to her

friend. To Mrs. Orme it was marvellous that the woman should even

be alive,--let alone that she should speak and perform the ordinary

functions of her daily life. "And now," she said--Lady Mason said--as

soon as that ceremony was over, "now as we are so tired I think we

will go up stairs. Will you light our candles for us, Lucius?" And so

the candles were lit, and the two ladies went up stairs.

A second bed had been prepared in Lady Mason's room, and into this

chamber they both went at once. Mrs. Orme, as soon as she had

entered, turned round and held out both her hands in order that she

might comfort Lady Mason by taking hers; but Lady Mason, when she had

closed the door, stood for a moment with her face towards the wall,

not knowing how to bear herself. It was but for a moment, and then

slowly moving round, with her two hands clasped together, she sank on

her knees at Mrs. Orme's feet, and hid her face in the skirt of Mrs.

Orme's dress.

"My friend--my friend!" said Lady Mason.

"Yes, I am your friend--indeed I am. But, dear Lady Mason--" And she

endeavoured to think of words by which she might implore her to rise

and compose herself.

"How is it you can bear with such a one as I am? How is it that you

do not hate me for my guilt?"

"He does not hate us when we are guilty."

"I do not know. Sometimes I think that all will hate me,--here and

hereafter--except you. Lucius will hate me, and how shall I bear

that? Oh, Mrs. Orme, I wish he knew it!"

"I wish he did. He shall know it now,--to-night, if you will allow me

to tell him."

"No. It would kill me to bear his looks. I wish he knew it, and was

away, so that he might never look at me again."

"He too would forgive you if he knew it all."

"Forgive! How can he forgive?" And as she spoke she rose again to her

feet, and her old manner came upon her. "Do you think what it is that

I have done for him? I,--his mother,--for my only child? And after

that, is it possible that he should forgive me?"

"You meant him no harm."

"But I have ruined him before all the world. He is as proud as

your boy; and could he bear to think that his whole life would be

disgraced by his mother's crime?"

"Had I been so unfortunate he would have forgiven me."

"We are speaking of what is impossible. It could not have been so.

Your youth was different from mine."

"God has been very good to me, and not placed temptation in my

way;--temptation, I mean, to great faults. But little faults require

repentance as much as great ones."

"But then repentance is easy; at any rate it is possible."

"Oh, Lady Mason, is it not possible for you?"

"But I will not talk of that now. I will not hear you compare

yourself with such a one as I am. Do you know I was thinking to-day

that my mind would fail me, and that I should be mad before this is

over? How can I bear it? how can I bear it?" And rising from her

seat, she walked rapidly through the room, holding back her hair from

her brows with both her hands.

[Illustration: "How can I bear it?"]

And how was she to bear it? The load on her back was too much for her

shoulders. The burden with which she had laden herself was too heavy

to be borne. Her power of endurance was very great. Her strength in

supporting the extreme bitterness of intense sorrow was wonderful.

But now she was taxed beyond her power. "How am I to bear it?" she

said again, as still holding her hair between her fingers, she drew

her hands back over her head.

"You do not know. You have not tried it. It is impossible," she said

in her wildness, as Mrs. Orme endeavoured to teach her the only

source from whence consolation might be had. "I do not believe in

the thief on the cross, unless it was that he had prepared himself

for that day by years of contrition. I know I shock you," she added,

after a while. "I know that what I say will be dreadful to you. But

innocence will always be shocked by guilt. Go, go and leave me. It

has gone so far now that all is of no use." Then she threw herself on

the bed, and burst into a convulsive passion of tears.

Once again Mrs. Orme endeavoured to obtain permission from her to

undertake that embassy to her son. Had Lady Mason acceded, or been

near acceding, Mrs. Orme's courage would probably have been greatly

checked. As it was she pressed it as though the task were one to be

performed without difficulty. Mrs. Orme was very anxious that Lucius

should not sit in the court throughout the trial. She felt that if he

did so the shock,--the shock which was inevitable,--must fall upon

him there; and than that she could conceive nothing more terrible.

And then also she believed that if the secret were once made known

to Lucius, and if he were for a time removed from his mother's side,

the poor woman might be brought to a calmer perception of her true

position. The strain would be lessened, and she would no longer feel

the necessity of exerting so terrible a control over her feelings.

"You have acknowledged that he must know it sooner or later," pleaded

Mrs. Orme.

"But this is not the time,--not now, during the trial. Had he known

it before--"

"It would keep him away from the court."

"Yes, and I should never see him again! What will he do when he hears

it? Perhaps it would be better that he should go without seeing me."

"He would not do that."

"It would be better. If they take me to the prison, I will never see

him again. His eyes would kill me. Do you ever watch him and see the

pride that there is in his eye? He has never yet known what disgrace

means; and now I, his mother, have brought him to this!"

It was all in vain as far as that night was concerned. Lady Mason

would give no such permission. But Mrs. Orme did exact from her a

kind of promise that Lucius should be told on the next evening, if it

then appeared, from what Mr. Aram should say, that the result of the

trial was likely to be against them.

Lucius Mason spent his evening alone; and though he had as yet heard

none of the truth, his mind was not at ease, nor was he happy at

heart. Though he had no idea of his mother's guilt, he did conceive

that after this trial it would be impossible that they should remain

at Orley Farm. His mother's intended marriage with Sir Peregrine, and

then the manner in which that engagement had been broken off; the

course of the trial, and its celebrity; the enmity of Dockwrath; and

lastly, his own inability to place himself on terms of friendship

with those people who were still his mother's nearest friends, made

him feel that in any event it would be well for them to change their

residence. What could life do for him there at Orley Farm, after all

that had passed? He had gone to Liverpool and bought guano, and now

the sacks were lying in his barn unopened. He had begun to drain, and

the ugly unfinished lines of earth were lying across his fields. He

had no further interest in it, and felt that he could no longer go to

work on that ground as though he were in truth its master.

But then, as he thought of his future hopes, his place of residence

and coming life, there was one other beyond himself and his mother

to whom his mind reverted. What would Sophia wish that he should

do?--his own Sophia,--she who had promised him that her heart should

be with his through all the troubles of this trial? Before he went

to bed that night he wrote to Sophia, and told her what were his

troubles and what his hopes. "This will be over in two days more,"

he said, "and then I will come to you. You will see me, I trust, the

day after this letter reaches you; but nevertheless I cannot debar

myself from the satisfaction of writing. I am not happy, for I am

dissatisfied with what they are doing for my mother; and it is only

when I think of you, and the assurance of your love, that I can feel

anything like content. It is not a pleasant thing to sit by and

hear one's mother charged with the foulest frauds that practised

villains can conceive! Yet I have had to bear it, and have heard

no denial of the charge in true honest language. To-day, when the

solicitor-general was heaping falsehoods on her name, I could hardly

refrain myself from rushing at his throat. Let me have a line of

comfort from you, and then I will be with you on Friday."

That line of comfort never came, nor did Lucius on the Friday make

his intended visit. Miss Furnival had determined, some day or two

before this, that she would not write to Lucius again till this

trial was over; and even then it might be a question whether a

correspondence with the heir of Noningsby would not be more to her

taste.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SHOWING HOW JOHN KENNEBY AND BRIDGET BOLSTER

BORE THEMSELVES IN COURT.

On the next morning they were all in their places at ten o'clock,

and the crowd had been gathered outside the doors of the court from

a much earlier hour. As the trial progressed the interest in it

increased, and as people began to believe that Lady Mason had in

truth forged a will, so did they the more regard her in the light of

a heroine. Had she murdered her husband after forging his will, men

would have paid half a crown apiece to have touched her garments, or

a guinea for the privilege of shaking hands with her. Lady Mason had

again taken her seat with her veil raised, with Mrs. Orme on one side

of her and her son on the other. The counsel were again ranged on the

seats behind, Mr. Furnival sitting the nearest to the judge, and Mr.

Aram again occupied the intermediate bench, so placing himself that

he could communicate either with his client or with the barristers.

These were now their established places, and great as was the crowd,

they found no difficulty in reaching them. An easy way is always made

for the chief performers in a play.

This was to be the great day as regarded the evidence. "It is a

case that depends altogether on evidence," one young lawyer said to

another. "If the counsel know how to handle the witnesses, I should

say she is safe." The importance of this handling was felt by every

one, and therefore it was understood that the real game would

be played out on this middle day. It had been all very well for

Chaffanbrass to bully Dockwrath and make the wretched attorney

miserable for an hour or so, but that would have but little bearing

on the verdict. There were two persons there who were prepared to

swear that on a certain day they had only signed one deed. So much

the solicitor-general had told them, and nobody doubted that it

would be so. The question now was this, would Mr. Furnival and Mr.

Chaffanbrass succeed in making them contradict themselves when they

had so sworn? Could they be made to say that they had signed two

deeds, or that they might have done so?

It was again the duty of Mr. Furnival to come first upon the

stage,--that is to say, he was to do so as soon as Sir Richard had

performed his very second-rate part of eliciting the evidence in

chief. Poor John Kenneby was to be the first victim, and he was

placed in the box before them all very soon after the judge had

taken his seat. Why had he not emigrated to Australia, and escaped

all this,--escaped all this, and Mrs. Smiley also? That was John

Kenneby's reflection as he slowly mounted the two steps up into

the place of his torture. Near to the same spot, and near also to

Dockwrath who had taken these two witnesses under his special charge,

sat Bridget Bolster. She had made herself very comfortable that

morning with buttered toast and sausages; and when at Dockwrath's

instance Kenneby had submitted to a slight infusion of Dutch

courage,--a bottle of brandy would not have sufficed for the

purpose,--Bridget also had not refused the generous glass. "Not that

I wants it," said she, meaning thereby to express an opinion that she

could hold her own, even against the great Chaffanbrass, without any

such extraneous aid. She now sat quite quiet, with her hands crossed

on her knees before her, and her eyes immovably fixed on the table

which stood in the centre of the court. In that position she remained

till her turn came; and one may say that there was no need for fear

on account of Bridget Bolster.

And then Sir Richard began. What would be the nature of Kenneby's

direct evidence the reader pretty well knows. Sir Richard took a long

time in extracting it, for he was aware that it would be necessary

to give his witness some confidence before he came to his main

questions. Even to do this was difficult, for Kenneby would speak in

a voice so low that nobody could hear him; and on the second occasion

of the judge enjoining him to speak out, he nearly fainted. It is odd

that it never occurs to judges that a witness who is naturally timid

will be made more so by being scolded. When I hear a judge thus use

his authority, I always wish that I had the power of forcing him to

some very uncongenial employment,--jumping in a sack, let us say; and

then when he jumped poorly, as he certainly would, I would crack my

whip and bid him go higher and higher. The more I so bade him, the

more he would limp; and the world looking on, would pity him and

execrate me. It is much the same thing when a witness is sternly told

to speak louder.

But John Kenneby at last told his plain story. He remembered the day

on which he had met old Usbech and Bridget Bolster and Lady Mason

in Sir Joseph's chamber. He had then witnessed a signature by Sir

Joseph, and had only witnessed one on that day;--of that he was

perfectly certain. He did not think that old Usbech had signed the

deed in question, but on that matter he declined to swear positively.

He remembered the former trial. He had not then been able to swear

positively whether Usbech had or had not signed the deed. As far as

he could remember, that was the point to which his cross-examination

on that occasion had chiefly been directed. So much John Kenneby did

at last say in language that was sufficiently plain.

And then Mr. Furnival arose. The reader is acquainted with the state

of his mind on the subject of this trial. The enthusiasm on behalf of

Lady Mason, which had been aroused by his belief in her innocence, by

his old friendship, by his ancient adherence to her cause, and by his

admiration for her beauty, had now greatly faded. It had faded much

when he found himself obliged to call in such fellow-labourers as

Chaffanbrass and Aram, and had all but perished when he learned from

contact with them to regard her guilt as certain. But, nevertheless,

now that he was there, the old fire returned to him. He had wished

twenty times that he had been able to shake the matter from him and

leave his old client in the hands of her new advisers. It would be

better for her, he had said to himself. But on this day--on these

three days--seeing that he had not shaken the matter off, he rose to

his work as though he still loved her, as though all his mind was

still intent on preserving that ill-gotten inheritance for her son.

It may almost be doubted whether at moments during these three days

he did not again persuade himself that she was an injured woman.

Aram, as may be remembered, had felt misgivings as to Mr. Furnival's

powers for such cross-examination; but Chaffanbrass had never doubted

it. He knew that Mr. Furnival could do as much as himself in that

way; the difference being this,--that Mr. Furnival could do something

else besides.

"And now, Mr. Kenneby, I'll ask you a few questions," he said; and

Kenneby turned round to him. The barrister spoke in a mild low voice,

but his eye transfixed the poor fellow at once; and though Kenneby

was told a dozen times to look at the jury and speak to the jury, he

never was able to take his gaze away from Mr. Furnival's face.

"You remember the old trial," he said; and as he spoke he held in his

hand what was known to be an account of that transaction. Then there

arose a debate between him and Sir Richard, in which Chaffanbrass,

and Graham, and Mr. Steelyard all took part, as to whether Kenneby

might be examined as to his former examination; and on this point

Graham pleaded very volubly, bringing up precedents without

number,--striving to do his duty to his client on a point with which

his own conscience did not interfere. And at last it was ruled by the

judge that this examination might go on;--whereupon both Sir Richard

and Mr. Steelyard sat down as though they were perfectly satisfied.

Kenneby, on being again asked, said that he did remember the old

trial.

"It is necessary, you know, that the jury should hear you, and if you

look at them and speak to them, they would stand a better chance."

Kenneby for a moment allowed his eye to travel up to the jury box,

but it instantly fell again, and fixed itself on the lawyer's face.

"You do remember that trial?"

"Yes, sir, I remember it," whispered Kenneby.

"Do you remember my asking you then whether you had been in the habit

of witnessing Sir Joseph Mason's signature?"

"Did you ask me that, sir?"

"That is the question which I put to you. Do you remember my doing

so?"

"I dare say you did, sir."

"I did, and I will now read your answer. We shall give to the jury a

copy of the proceedings of that trial, my lord, when we have proved

it,--as of course we intend to do."

And then there was another little battle between the barristers. But

as Lady Mason was now being tried for perjury, alleged to have been

committed at that other trial, it was of course indispensable that

all the proceedings of that trial should be made known to the jury.

"You said on that occasion," continued Furnival, "that you were sure

you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's that summer,--that

you had probably witnessed three in July, that you were quite sure

you had witnessed three in one week in July, that you were nearly

sure you had witnessed three in one day, that you could not tell what

day that might have been, and that you had been used as a witness so

often that you really did not remember anything about it. Can you say

whether that was the purport of the evidence you gave then?"

"If it's down there--" said John Kenneby, and then he stopped

himself.

"It is down here; I have read it."

"I suppose it's all right," said Kenneby.

"I must trouble you to speak out," said the judge; "I cannot hear

you, and it is impossible that the jury should do so." The judge's

words were not uncivil, but his voice was harsh, and the only

perceptible consequence of the remonstrance was to be seen in the

thick drops of perspiration standing on John Kenneby's brow.

"That is the evidence which you gave on the former trial? May the

jury presume that you then spoke the truth to the best of your

knowledge?"

"I tried to speak the truth, sir."

"You tried to speak the truth? But do you mean to say that you

failed?"

"No, I don't think I failed."

"When, therefore, you told the jury that you were nearly sure that

you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's in one day, that

was truth?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Ever did what?"

"Witness three papers in one day."

"You don't think you ever did?"

"I might have done, to be sure."

"But then, at that trial, about twelve months after the man's death,

you were nearly sure you had done so."

"Was I?"

"So you told the jury."

"Then I did, sir."

"Then you did what?"

"Did witness all those papers."

"You think then now that it is probable you witnessed three

signatures on the same day?"

"No, I don't think that."

"Then what do you think?"

"It is so long ago, sir, that I really don't know."

"Exactly. It is so long ago that you cannot depend on your memory."

"I suppose I can't, sir."

"But you just now told the gentleman who examined you on the other

side, that you were quite sure you did not witness two deeds on the

day he named,--the 14th of July. Now, seeing that you doubt your own

memory, going back over so long a time, do you wish to correct that

statement?"

"I suppose I do."

"What correction do you wish to make?"

"I don't think I did."

"Don't think you did what?"

"I don't think I signed two--"

"I really cannot hear the witness," said the judge

"You must speak out louder," said Mr. Furnival, himself speaking very

loudly.

"I mean to do it as well as I can," said Kenneby.

"I believe you do," said Furnival; "but in so meaning you must be

very careful to state nothing as a certainty, of the certainty of

which you are not sure. Are you certain that on that day you did not

witness two deeds?"

"I think so."

"And yet you were not certain twenty years ago, when the fact was so

much nearer to you?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember whether you were certain twelve months after the

occurrence, but you think you are certain now."

"I mean, I don't think I signed two."

"It is, then, only a matter of thinking?"

"No;--only a matter of thinking."

"And you might have signed the two?"

"I certainly might have done so."

"What you mean to tell the jury is this: that you have no remembrance

of signing twice on that special day, although you know that you have

acted as witness on behalf of Sir Joseph Mason more than twice on the

same day?"

"Yes."

"That is the intended purport of your evidence?"

"Yes, sir."

And then Mr. Furnival travelled off to that other point of Mr.

Usbech's presence and alleged handwriting. On that matter Kenneby

had not made any positive assertion, though he had expressed a very

strong opinion. Mr. Furnival was not satisfied with this, but wished

to show that Kenneby had not on that matter even a strong opinion. He

again reverted to the evidence on the former trial, and read various

questions with their answers; and the answers as given at that time

certainly did not, when so taken, express a clear opinion on the part

of the person who gave them; although an impartial person on reading

the whole evidence would have found that a very clear opinion was

expressed. When first asked, Kenneby had said that he was nearly sure

that Mr. Usbech had not signed the document. But his very anxiety to

be true had brought him into trouble. Mr. Furnival on that occasion

had taken advantage of the word "nearly," and had at last succeeded

in making him say that he was not sure at all. Evidence by means

of torture,--thumbscrew and suchlike,--we have for many years past

abandoned as barbarous, and have acknowledged that it is of its very

nature useless in the search after truth. How long will it be before

we shall recognise that the other kind of torture is equally opposed

both to truth and civilization?

"But Mr. Usbech was certainly in the room on that day?" continued Mr.

Furnival.

"Yes, he was there."

"And knew what you were all doing, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose he knew."

"I presume it was he who explained to you the nature of the deed you

were to witness?"

"I dare say he did."

"As he was the lawyer, that would be natural."

"I suppose it would."

"And you don't remember the nature of that special deed, as explained

to you on the day when Bridget Bolster was in the room?"

"No, I don't."

"It might have been a will?"

"Yes, it might. I did sign one or two wills for Sir Joseph, I think."

"And as to this individual document, Mr. Usbech might have signed it

in your presence, for anything you know to the contrary?"

"He might have done so."

"Now, on your oath, Kenneby, is your memory strong enough to enable

you to give the jury any information on this subject upon which they

may firmly rely in convicting that unfortunate lady of the terrible

crime laid to her charge." Then for a moment Kenneby glanced round

and fixed his eyes upon Lady Mason's face. "Think a moment before

you answer; and deal with her as you would wish another should deal

with you if you were so situated. Can you say that you remember that

Usbech did not sign it?"

"Well, sir, I don't think he did."

"But he might have done so?"

"Oh, yes; he might."

"You do not remember that he did do so?"

"Certainly not."

"And that is about the extent of what you mean to say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me understand," said the judge--and then the perspiration became

more visible on poor Kenneby's face;--"do you mean to say that you

have no memory on the matter whatever?--that you simply do not

remember whether Usbech did or did not sign it?"

"I don't think he signed it."

"But why do you think he did not, seeing that his name is there?"

"I didn't see him."

"Do you mean," continued the judge, "that you didn't see him, or that

you don't remember that you saw him?"

"I don't remember that I saw him."

"But you may have done so? He may have signed, and you may have seen

him do so, only you don't remember it?"

"Yes, my lord."

And then Kenneby was allowed to go down. As he did so, Joseph Mason,

who sat near to him, turned upon him a look black as thunder. Mr.

Mason gave him no credit for his timidity, but believed that he had

been bought over by the other side. Dockwrath, however, knew better.

"They did not quite beat him about his own signature," said he; "but

I knew all along that we must depend chiefly upon Bolster."

Then Bridget Bolster was put into the box, and she was examined by

Mr. Steelyard. She had heard Kenneby instructed to look up, and she

therefore fixed her eyes upon the canopy over the judge's seat. There

she fixed them, and there she kept them till her examination was

over, merely turning them for a moment on to Mr. Chaffanbrass, when

that gentleman became particularly severe in his treatment of her.

What she said in answer to Mr. Steelyard, was very simple. She had

never witnessed but one signature in her life, and that she had done

in Sir Joseph's room. The nature of the document had been explained

to her. "But," as she said, "she was young and giddy then, and what

went in at one year went out at another." She didn't remember Mr.

Usbech signing, but he might have done so. She thought he did not. As

to the two signatures purporting to be hers, she could not say which

was hers and which was not. But this she would swear positively,

that they were not both hers. To this she adhered firmly, and Mr.

Steelyard handed her over to Mr. Chaffanbrass.

[Illustration: Bridget Bolster in Court.]

Then Mr. Chaffanbrass rose from his seat, and every one knew that his

work was cut out for him. Mr. Furnival had triumphed. It may be said

that he had demolished his witness; but his triumph had been very

easy. It was now necessary to demolish Bridget Bolster, and the

opinion was general that if anybody could do it Mr. Chaffanbrass

was the man. But there was a doggedness about Bridget Bolster which

induced many to doubt whether even Chaffanbrass would be successful.

Mr. Aram trusted greatly; but the bar would have preferred to stake

their money on Bridget.

Chaffanbrass as he rose pushed back his small ugly wig from his

forehead, thrusting it rather on one side as he did so, and then,

with his chin thrown forward, and a wicked, ill-meaning smile upon

his mouth, he looked at Bridget for some moments before he spoke to

her. She glanced at him, and instantly fixed her eyes back upon the

canopy. She then folded her hands one on the other upon the rail

before her, compressed her lips, and waited patiently.

"I think you say you're--a chambermaid?" That was the first question

which Chaffanbrass asked, and Bridget Bolster gave a little start as

she heard his sharp, angry, disagreeable voice.

"Yes, I am, sir, at Palmer's Imperial Hotel, Plymouth, Devonshire;

and have been for nineteen years, upper and under."

"Upper and under! What do upper and under mean?"

"When I was under, I had another above me; and now, as I'm upper, why

there's others under me." So she explained her position at the hotel,

but she never took her eyes from the canopy.

"You hadn't begun being--chambermaid, when you signed these

documents?"

"I didn't sign only one of 'em."

"Well, one of them. You hadn't begun being chambermaid then?"

"No, I hadn't; I was housemaid at Orley Farm."

"Were you upper or under there?"

"Well, I believe I was both; that is, the cook was upper in the

house."

"Oh, the cook was upper. Why wasn't she called to sign her name?"

"That I can't say. She was a very decent woman,--that I can say,--and

her name was Martha Mullens."

So far Mr. Chaffanbrass had not done much; but that was only the

preliminary skirmish, as fencers play with their foils before they

begin.

"And now, Bridget Bolster, if I understand you," he said, "you

have sworn that on the 14th of July you only signed one of these

documents."

"I only signed once, sir. I didn't say nothing about the 14th of

July, because I don't remember."

"But when you signed the one deed, you did not sign any other?"

"Neither then nor never."

"Do you know the offence for which that lady is being tried--Lady

Mason?"

"Well, I ain't sure; it's for doing something about the will."

"No, woman, it is not." And then, as Mr. Chaffanbrass raised his

voice, and spoke with savage earnestness, Bridget again started, and

gave a little leap up from the floor. But she soon settled herself

back in her old position. "No one has dared to accuse her of that,"

continued Mr. Chaffanbrass, looking over at the lawyers on the other

side. "The charge they have brought forward against her is that of

perjury--of having given false evidence twenty years ago in a court

of law. Now look here, Bridget Bolster; look at me, I say." She

did look at him for a moment, and then turned her eyes back to the

canopy. "As sure as you're a living woman, you shall be placed there

and tried for the same offence,--for perjury,--if you tell me a

falsehood respecting this matter."

"I won't say nothing but what's right," said Bridget.

"You had better not. Now look at these two signatures;" and he handed

to her two deeds, or rather made one of the servants of the court

hold them for him; "which of those signatures is the one which you

did not sign?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Did you write that further one,--that with your hand on it?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Look at it, woman, before you answer me."

Bridget looked at it, and then repeated the same words--

"I can't say, sir."

"And now look at the other." And she again looked down for a moment.

"Did you write that?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Will you swear that you wrote either?"

"I did write one once."

"Don't prevaricate with me, woman. Were either of those signatures

there written by you?"

"I suppose that one was."

"Will you swear that you wrote either the one or the other?"

"I'll swear I did write one, once."

"Will you swear you wrote one of those you have before you? You can

read, can't you?"

"Oh yes, I can read."

"Then look at them." Again she turned her eyes on them for half a

moment. "Will you swear that you wrote either of those?"

"Not if there's another anywhere else," said Bridget, at last.

"Another anywhere else," said Chaffanbrass, repeating her words;

"what do you mean by another?"

"If you've got another that anybody else has done, I won't say which

of the three is mine. But I did one, and I didn't do no more."

Mr. Chaffanbrass continued at it for a long time, but with very

indifferent success. That affair of the signatures, which was

indeed the only point on which evidence was worth anything, he then

abandoned, and tried to make her contradict herself about old Usbech.

But on this subject she could say nothing. That Usbech was present

she remembered well, but as to his signing the deed, or not signing

it, she would not pretend to say anything.

"I know he was cram full of gout," she said; "but I don't remember

nothing more."

But it may be explained that Mr. Chaffanbrass had altogether altered

his intention and the very plan of his campaign with reference to

this witness, as soon as he saw what was her nature and disposition.

He discovered very early in the affair that he could not force her

to contradict herself and reduce her own evidence to nothing, as

Furnival had done with the man. Nothing would flurry this woman,

or force her to utter words of which she herself did not know the

meaning. The more he might persevere in such an attempt, the more

dogged and steady she would become. He therefore soon gave that

up. He had already given it up when he threatened to accuse her of

perjury, and resolved that as he could not shake her he would shake

the confidence which the jury might place in her. He could not make a

fool of her, and therefore he would make her out to be a rogue. Her

evidence would stand alone, or nearly alone; and in this way he might

turn her firmness to his own purpose, and explain that her dogged

resolution to stick to one plain statement arose from her having been

specially instructed so to do, with the object of ruining his client.

For more than half an hour he persisted in asking her questions with

this object; hinting that she was on friendly terms with Dockwrath;

asking her what pay she had received for her evidence; making her

acknowledge that she was being kept at free quarters, and on the fat

of the land. He even produced from her a list of the good things

she had eaten that morning at breakfast, and at last succeeded

in obtaining information as to that small but indiscreet glass

of spirits. It was then, and then only, that poor Bridget became

discomposed. Beefsteaks, sausages, and pigs' fry, though they were

taken three times a day, were not disgraceful in her line of life;

but that little thimble of brandy, taken after much pressing and in

the openness of good fellowship, went sorely against the grain with

her. "When one has to be badgered like this, one wants a drop of

something more than ordinary," she said at last. And they were the

only words which she did say which proved any triumph on the part

of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But nevertheless Mr. Chaffanbrass was not

dissatisfied. Triumph, immediate triumph over a poor maid-servant

could hardly have been the object of a man who had been triumphant in

such matters for the last thirty years. Would it not be practicable

to make the jury doubt whether that woman could be believed? That was

the triumph he desired. As for himself, Mr. Chaffanbrass knew well

enough that she had spoken nothing but the truth. But had he so

managed that the truth might be made to look like falsehood,--or

at any rate to have a doubtful air? If he had done that, he had

succeeded in the occupation of his life, and was indifferent to his

own triumph.

CHAPTER LXXII.

MR. FURNIVAL'S SPEECH.

All this as may be supposed disturbed Felix Graham not a little. He

perceived that each of those two witnesses had made a great effort to

speak the truth;--an honest, painful effort to speak the truth, and

in no way to go beyond it. His gall had risen within him while he had

listened to Mr. Furnival, and witnessed his success in destroying the

presence of mind of that weak wretch who was endeavouring to do his

best in the cause of justice. And again, when Mr. Chaffanbrass had

seized hold of that poor dram, and used all his wit in deducing from

it a self-condemnation from the woman before him;--when the practised

barrister had striven to show that she was an habitual drunkard,

dishonest, unchaste, evil in all her habits, Graham had felt almost

tempted to get up and take her part. No doubt he had evinced this,

for Chaffanbrass had understood what was going on in his colleague's

mind, and had looked round at him from time to time with an air of

scorn that had been almost unendurable.

And then it had become the duty of the prosecutors to prove the

circumstances of the former trial. This was of course essentially

necessary, seeing that the offence for which Lady Mason was now on

her defence was perjury alleged to have been committed at that trial.

And when this had been done at considerable length by Sir Richard

Leatherham,--not without many interruptions from Mr. Furnival and

much assistance from Mr. Steelyard,--it fell upon Felix Graham to

show by cross-examination of Crook the attorney, what had been the

nature and effect of Lady Mason's testimony. As he arose to do this,

Mr. Chaffanbrass whispered into his ear, "If you feel yourself

unequal to it I'll take it up. I won't have her thrown over for any

etiquette,--nor yet for any squeamishness." To this Graham vouchsafed

no answer. He would not even reply by a look, but he got up and did

his work. At this point his conscience did not interfere with him,

for the questions which he asked referred to facts which had really

occurred. Lady Mason's testimony at that trial had been believed by

everybody. The gentleman who had cross-examined her on the part of

Joseph Mason, and who was now dead, had failed to shake her evidence.

The judge who tried the case had declared to the jury that it was

impossible to disbelieve her evidence. That judge was still living,

a poor old bedridden man, and in the course of this latter trial his

statement was given in evidence. There could be no doubt that at the

time Lady Mason's testimony was taken as worthy of all credit. She

had sworn that she had seen the three witnesses sign the codicil, and

no one had then thrown discredit on her. The upshot of all was this,

that the prosecuting side proved satisfactorily that such and such

things had been sworn by Lady Mason; and Felix Graham on the side of

the defence proved that, when she had so sworn, her word had been

considered worthy of credence by the judge and by the jury, and had

hardly been doubted even by the counsel opposed to her. All this

really had been so, and Felix Graham used his utmost ingenuity in

making clear to the court how high and unassailed had been the

position which his client then held.

All this occupied the court till nearly four o'clock, and then as

the case was over on the part of the prosecution, the question arose

whether or no Mr. Furnival should address the jury on that evening,

or wait till the following day. "If your lordship will sit till seven

o'clock," said Mr. Furnival, "I think I can undertake to finish

what remarks I shall have to make by that time." "I should not mind

sitting till nine for the pleasure of hearing Mr. Furnival," said the

judge, who was very anxious to escape from Alston on the day but one

following. And thus it was decided that Mr. Furnival should commence

his speech.

I have said that in spite of some previous hesitation his old fire

had returned to him when he began his work in court on behalf of

his client. If this had been so when that work consisted in the

cross-examination of a witness, it was much more so with him now when

he had to exhibit his own powers of forensic eloquence. When a man

knows that he can speak with ease and energy, and that he will be

listened to with attentive ears, it is all but impossible that he

should fail to be enthusiastic, even though his cause be a bad one.

It was so with him now. All his old fire came back upon him, and

before he had done he had almost brought himself again to believe

Lady Mason to be that victim of persecution as which he did not

hesitate to represent her to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I never rose to plead a client's

cause with more confidence than I now feel in pleading that of my

friend Lady Mason. Twenty years ago I was engaged in defending her

rights in this matter, and I then succeeded. I little thought at that

time that I should be called on after so long an interval to renew

my work. I little thought that the pertinacity of her opponent would

hold out for such a period. I compliment him on the firmness of his

character, on that equable temperament which has enabled him to sit

through all this trial, and to look without dismay on the unfortunate

lady whom he has considered it to be his duty to accuse of perjury. I

did not think that I should live to fight this battle again. But so

it is; and as I had but little doubt of victory then,--so have I none

now. Gentlemen of the jury, I must occupy some of your time and of

the time of the court in going through the evidence which has been

adduced by my learned friend against my client; but I almost feel

that I shall be detaining you unnecessarily, so sure I am that the

circumstances, as they have been already explained to you, could not

justify you in giving a verdict against her."

As Mr. Furnival's speech occupied fully three hours, I will not

trouble my readers with the whole of it. He began by describing the

former trial, and giving his own recollections as to Lady Mason's

conduct on that occasion. In doing this, he fully acknowledged on her

behalf that she did give as evidence that special statement which her

opponents now endeavoured to prove to have been false. "If it were

the case," he said, "that that codicil--or that pretended codicil,

was not executed by old Sir Joseph Mason, and was not witnessed by

Usbech, Kenneby, and Bridget Bolster,--then, in that case, Lady

Mason has been guilty of perjury." Mr. Furnival, as he made this

acknowledgement, studiously avoided the face of Lady Mason. But as

he made this assertion, almost everybody in the court except her own

counsel did look at her. Joseph Mason opposite and Dockwrath fixed

their gaze closely upon her. Sir Richard Leatherham and Mr. Steelyard

turned their eyes towards her, probably without meaning to do so.

The judge looked over his spectacles at her. Even Mr. Aram glanced

round at her surreptitiously; and Lucius turned his face upon his

mother's, almost with an air of triumph. But she bore it all without

flinching;--bore it all without flinching, though the state of her

mind at that moment must have been pitiable. And Mrs. Orme, who held

her hand all the while, knew that it was so. The hand which rested in

hers was twitched as it were convulsively, but the culprit gave no

outward sign of her guilt.

Mr. Furnival then read much of the evidence given at the former

trial, and especially showed how the witnesses had then failed to

prove that Usbech had not been required to write his name. It was

quite true, he said, that they had been equally unable to prove that

he had done so; but that amounted to nothing; the "onus probandi" lay

with the accusing side. There was the signature, and it was for them

to prove that it was not that which it pretended to be. Lady Mason

had proved that it was so; and because that had then been held to

be sufficient, they now, after twenty years, took this means of

invalidating her testimony. From that he went to the evidence given

at the present trial, beginning with the malice and interested

motives of Dockwrath. Against three of them only was it needful that

he should allege anything, seeing that the statements made by the

others were in no way injurious to Lady Mason,--if the statements

made by those three were not credible. Torrington, for instance, had

proved that other deed; but what of that, if on the fatal 14th of

July Sir Joseph Mason had executed two deeds? As to Dockwrath,--that

his conduct had been interested and malicious there could be no

doubt; and he submitted to the jury that he had shown himself to be a

man unworthy of credit. As to Kenneby,--that poor weak creature, as

Mr. Furnival in his mercy called him,--he, Mr. Furnival, could not

charge his conscience with saying that he believed him to have been

guilty of any falsehood. On the contrary, he conceived that Kenneby

had endeavoured to tell the truth. But he was one of those men whose

minds were so inconsequential that they literally did not know truth

from falsehood. He had not intended to lie when he told the jury

that he was not quite sure he had never witnessed two signatures by

Sir Joseph Mason on the same day, nor did he lie when he told them

again that he had witnessed three. He had meant to declare the truth;

but he was, unfortunately, a man whose evidence could not be of

much service in any case of importance, and could be of no service

whatever in a criminal charge tried, as was done in this instance,

more than twenty years after the alleged commission of the offence.

With regard to Bridget Bolster, he had no hesitation whatever in

telling the jury that she was a woman unworthy of belief,--unworthy

of that credit which the jury must place in her before they could

convict any one on her unaided testimony. It must have been clear to

them all that she had come into court drilled and instructed to make

one point-blank statement, and to stick to that. She had refused to

give any evidence as to her own signature. She would not even look at

her own name as written by herself; but had contented herself with

repeating over and over again those few words which she had been

instructed so to say;--the statement namely, that she had never put

her hand to more than one deed.

Then he addressed himself, as he concluded his speech, to that part

of the subject which was more closely personal to Lady Mason herself.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "before I can dismiss you

from your weary day's work, I must ask you to regard the position of

the lady who has been thus accused, and the amount of probability of

her guilt which you may assume from the nature of her life. I shall

call no witnesses as to her character, for I will not submit her

friends to the annoyance of those questions which the gentlemen

opposite might feel it their duty to put to them. Circumstances

have occurred--so much I will tell you, and so much no doubt

you all personally know, though it is not in evidence before

you;--circumstances have occurred which would make it cruel on my

part to place her old friend Sir Peregrine Orme in that box. The

story, could I tell it to you, is one full of romance, but full also

of truth and affection. But though Sir Peregrine Orme is not here,

there sits his daughter by Lady Mason's side,--there she has sat

through this tedious trial, giving comfort to the woman that she

loves,--and there she will sit till your verdict shall have made

her further presence here unnecessary. His lordship and my learned

friend there will tell you that you cannot take that as evidence of

character. They will be justified in so telling you; but I, on the

other hand, defy you not to take it as such evidence. Let us make

what laws we will, they cannot take precedence of human nature. There

too sits my client's son. You will remember that at the beginning of

this trial the solicitor-general expressed a wish that he were not

here. I do not know whether you then responded to that wish, but I

believe I may take it for granted that you do not do so now. Had any

woman dear to either of you been so placed through the malice of an

enemy, would you have hesitated to sit by her in her hour of trial?

Had you doubted of her innocence you might have hesitated; for who

could endure to hear announced in a crowded court like this the guilt

of a mother or a wife? But he has no doubt. Nor, I believe, has any

living being in this court,--unless it be her kinsman opposite, whose

life for the last twenty years has been made wretched by a wicked

longing after the patrimony of his brother.

"Gentlemen of the jury, there sits my client with as loving a friend

on one side as ever woman had, and with her only child on the other.

During the incidents of this trial the nature of the life she has

led during the last twenty years,--since the period of that terrible

crime with which she is charged,--has been proved before you. I may

fearlessly ask you whether so fair a life is compatible with the

idea of guilt so foul? I have known her intimately during all those

years,--not as a lawyer, but as a friend,--and I confess that the

audacity of this man Dockwrath, in assailing such a character

with such an accusation, strikes me almost with admiration. What!

Forgery!--for that, gentlemen of the jury, is the crime with which

she is substantially charged. Look at her, as she sits there! That

she, at the age of twenty, or not much more,--she who had so well

performed the duties of her young life, that she should have forged

a will,--have traced one signature after another in such a manner as

to have deceived all those lawyers who were on her track immediately

after her husband's death! For, mark you, if this be true, with

her own hand she must have done it! There was no accomplice there.

Look at her! Was she a forger? Was she a woman to deceive the sharp

bloodhounds of the law? Could she, with that young baby on her bosom,

have wrested from such as him"--and as he spoke he pointed with his

finger, but with a look of unutterable scorn, to Joseph Mason, who

was sitting opposite to him--"that fragment of his old father's

property which he coveted so sorely? Where had she learned such

skilled artifice? Gentlemen, such ingenuity in crime as that has

never yet been proved in a court of law, even against those who have

spent a life of wretchedness in acquiring such skill; and now you are

asked to believe that such a deed was done by a young wife, of whom

all that you know is that her conduct in every other respect had been

beyond all praise! Gentlemen, I might have defied you to believe

this accusation had it even been supported by testimony of a high

character. Even in such case you would have felt that there was more

behind than had been brought to your knowledge. But now, having seen,

as you have, of what nature are the witnesses on whose testimony she

has been impeached, it is impossible that you should believe this

story. Had Lady Mason been a woman steeped in guilt from her infancy,

had she been noted for cunning and fraudulent ingenuity, had she been

known as an expert forger, you would not have convicted her on this

indictment, having had before you the malice and greed of Dockwrath,

the stupidity--I may almost call it idiocy, of Kenneby, and the

dogged resolution to conceal the truth evinced by the woman Bolster.

With strong evidence you could not have believed such a charge

against so excellent a lady. With such evidence as you have had

before you, you could not have believed the charge against a

previously convicted felon.

"And what has been the object of this terrible persecution,--of the

dreadful punishment which has been inflicted on this poor lady? For

remember, though you cannot pronounce her guilty, her sufferings have

been terribly severe. Think what it must have been for a woman with

habits such as hers, to have looked forward for long, long weeks

to such a martyrdom as this! Think what she must have suffered in

being dragged here and subjected to the gaze of all the county as a

suspected felon! Think what must have been her feelings when I told

her, not knowing how deep an ingenuity might be practised against

her, that I must counsel her to call to her aid the unequalled

talents of my friend Mr. Chaffanbrass"--"Unequalled no longer, but

far surpassed," whispered Chaffanbrass, in a voice that was audible

through all the centre of the court. "Her punishment has been

terrible," continued Mr. Furnival. "After what she has gone through,

it may well be doubted whether she can continue to reside at that

sweet spot which has aroused such a feeling of avarice in the bosom

of her kinsman. You have heard that Sir Joseph Mason had promised his

eldest son that Orley Farm should form a part of his inheritance. It

may be that the old man did make such a promise. If so, he thought

fit to break it. But is it not wonderful that a man wealthy as is Mr.

Mason--for his fortune is large; who has never wanted anything that

money can buy; a man for whom his father did so much,--that he should

be stirred up by disappointed avarice to carry in his bosom for

twenty years so bitter a feeling of rancour against those who are

nearest to him by blood and ties of family! Gentlemen, it has been

a fearful lesson; but it is one which neither you nor I will ever

forget!

"And now I shall leave my client's case in your hands. As to the

verdict which you will give, I have no apprehension. You know as well

as I do that she has not been guilty of this terrible crime. That

you will so pronounce I do not for a moment doubt. But I do hope

that that verdict will be accompanied by some expression on your

part which may show to the world at large how great has been the

wickedness displayed in the accusation."

And yet as he sat down he knew that she had been guilty! To his ear

her guilt had never been confessed; but yet he knew that it was so,

and, knowing that, he had been able to speak as though her innocence

were a thing of course. That those witnesses had spoken truth he also

knew, and yet he had been able to hold them up to the execration of

all around them as though they had committed the worst of crimes from

the foulest of motives! And more than this, stranger than this, worse

than this,--when the legal world knew--as the legal world soon did

know--that all this had been so, the legal world found no fault with

Mr. Furnival, conceiving that he had done his duty by his client in a

manner becoming an English barrister and an English gentleman.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MRS. ORME TELLS THE STORY.

It was late when that second day's work was over, and when Mrs. Orme

and Lady Mason again found themselves in the Hamworth carriage. They

had sat in court from ten in the morning till past seven, with a

short interval of a few minutes in the middle of the day, and were

weary to the very soul when they left it. Lucius again led out his

mother, and as he did so he expressed to her in strong language his

approval of Mr. Furnival's speech. At last some one had spoken out on

his mother's behalf in that tone which should have been used from the

first. He had been very angry with Mr. Furnival, thinking that the

barrister had lost sight of his mother's honour, and that he was

playing with her happiness. But now he was inclined to forgive him.

Now at last the truth had been spoken in eloquent words, and the

persecutors of his mother had been addressed in language such as it

was fitting that they should hear. To him the last two hours had been

two hours of triumph, and as he passed through the hall of the court

he whispered in his mother's ear that now, at last, as he hoped, her

troubles were at an end.

And another whisper had been spoken as they passed through that hall.

Mrs. Orme went out leaning on the arm of her son, but on the other

side of her was Mr. Aram. He had remained in his seat till they had

begun to move, and then he followed them. Mrs. Orme was already half

way across the court when he made his way up to her side and very

gently touched her arm.

"Sir?" said she, looking round.

"Do not let her be too sure," he said. "Do not let her be over

confident. All that may go for nothing with a jury." Then he lifted

his hat and left her.

All that go for nothing with a jury! She hardly understood this, but

yet she felt that it all should go for nothing if right were done.

Her mind was not argumentative, nor yet perhaps was her sense of true

justice very acute. When Sir Peregrine had once hinted that it would

be well that the criminal should be pronounced guilty, because in

truth she had been guilty, Mrs. Orme by no means agreed with him. But

now, having heard how those wretched witnesses had been denounced,

knowing how true had been the words they had spoken, knowing how

false were those assurances of innocence with which Mr. Furnival had

been so fluent, she felt something of that spirit which had actuated

Sir Peregrine, and had almost thought that justice demanded a verdict

against her friend.

"Do not let her be over-confident," Mr. Aram had said. But in truth

Mrs. Orme, as she had listened to Mr. Furnival's speech, had become

almost confident that Lady Mason would be acquitted. It had seemed to

her impossible that any jury should pronounce her to be guilty after

that speech. The state of her mind as she listened to it had been

very painful. Lady Mason's hand had rested in her own during a great

portion of it; and it would have been natural that she should give

some encouragement to her companion by a touch, by a slight pressure,

as the warm words of praise fell from the lawyer's mouth. But how

could she do so, knowing that the praise was false? It was not

possible to her to show her friendship by congratulating her friend

on the success of a lie. Lady Mason also had, no doubt, felt this,

for after a while her hand had been withdrawn, and they had both

listened in silence, giving no signs to each other as to their

feelings on the subject.

But as they sat together in the carriage Lucius did give vent to his

feelings. "I cannot understand why all that should not have been said

before, and said in a manner to have been as convincing as it was

to-day."

"I suppose there was no opportunity before the trial," said Mrs.

Orme, feeling that she must say something, but feeling also how

impossible it was to speak on the subject with any truth in the

presence both of Lady Mason and her son.

"But an occasion should have been made," said Lucius. "It is

monstrous that my mother should have been subjected to this

accusation for months and that no one till now should have spoken out

to show how impossible it is that she should have been guilty."

"Ah! Lucius, you do not understand," said his mother.

"And I hope I never may," said he. "Why did not the jury get up in

their seats at once and pronounce their verdict when Mr. Furnival's

speech was over? Why should they wait there, giving another day of

prolonged trouble, knowing as they must do what their verdict will

be? To me all this is incomprehensible, seeing that no good can in

any way come from it."

And so he went on, striving to urge his companions to speak upon a

subject which to them did not admit of speech in his presence. It was

very painful to them, for in addressing Mrs. Orme he almost demanded

from her some expression of triumph. "You at least have believed in

her innocence," he said at last, "and have not been ashamed to show

that you did so."

"Lucius," said his mother, "we are very weary; do not speak to us

now. Let us rest till we are at home." Then they closed their eyes

and there was silence till the carriage drove up to the door of Orley

Farm House.

The two ladies immediately went up stairs, but Lucius, with more

cheerfulness about him than he had shown for months past, remained

below to give orders for their supper. It had been a joy to him to

hear Joseph Mason and Dockwrath exposed, and to listen to those words

which had so clearly told the truth as to his mother's history. All

that torrent of indignant eloquence had been to him an enumeration of

the simple facts,--of the facts as he knew them to be,--of the facts

as they would now be made plain to all the world. At last the day had

come when the cloud would be blown away. He, looking down from the

height of his superior intellect on the folly of those below him, had

been indignant at the great delay;--but that he would now forgive.

They had not been long in the house, perhaps about fifteen minutes,

when Mrs. Orme returned down stairs and gently entered the

dining-room. He was still there, standing with his back to the fire

and thinking over the work of the day.

"Your mother will not come down this evening, Mr. Mason."

"Not come down?"

"No; she is very tired,--very tired indeed. I fear you hardly know

how much she has gone through."

"Shall I go to her?" said Lucius.

"No, Mr. Mason, do not do that. I will return to her now.

And--but;--in a few minutes, Mr. Mason, I will come back to you

again, for I shall have something to say to you."

"You will have tea here?"

"I don't know. I think not. When I have spoken to you I will go back

to your mother. I came down now in order that you might not wait for

us." And then she left the room and again went up stairs. It annoyed

him that his mother should thus keep away from him, but still he

did not think that there was any special reason for it. Mrs. Orme's

manner had been strange; but then everything around them in these

days was strange, and it did not occur to him that Mrs. Orme would

have aught to say in her promised interview which would bring to him

any new cause for sorrow.

Lady Mason, when Mrs. Orme returned to her, was sitting exactly in

the position in which she had been left. Her bonnet was off and was

lying by her side, and she was seated in a large arm-chair, again

holding both her hands to the sides of her head. No attempt had been

made to smooth her hair or to remove the dust and soil which had

come from the day's long sitting in the court. She was a woman very

careful in her toilet, and scrupulously nice in all that touched her

person. But now all that had been neglected, and her whole appearance

was haggard and dishevelled.

"You have not told him?" she said.

"No; I have not told him yet; but I have bidden him expect me. He

knows that I am coming to him."

"And how did he look?"

"I did not see his face." And then there was silence between them

for a few minutes, during which Mrs. Orme stood at the back of Lady

Mason's chair with her hand on Lady Mason's shoulder. "Shall I go

now, dear?" said Mrs. Orme.

"No; stay a moment; not yet. Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"You will find that you will be stronger and better able to bear it

when it has been done."

"Stronger! Why should I wish to be stronger? How will he bear it?"

"It will be a blow to him, of course."

"It will strike him to the ground, Mrs. Orme. I shall have murdered

him. I do not think that he will live when he knows that he is so

disgraced."

"He is a man, and will bear it as a man should do. Shall I do

anything for you before I go?"

"Stay a moment. Why must it be to-night?"

"He must not be in the court to-morrow. And what difference will one

day make? He must know it when the property is given up."

Then there was a knock at the door, and a girl entered with a

decanter, two wine-glasses, and a slice or two of bread and butter.

"You must drink that," said Mrs. Orme, pouring out a glass of wine.

"And you?"

"Yes, I will take some too. There. I shall be stronger now. Nay, Lady

Mason, you shall drink it. And now if you will take my advice you

will go to bed."

"You will come to me again?"

"Yes; directly it is over. Of course I shall come to you. Am I not to

stay here all night?"

"But him;--I will not see him. He is not to come."

"That will be as he pleases."

"No. You promised that. I cannot see him when he knows what I have

done for him."

"Not to hear him say that he forgives you?"

"He will not forgive me. You do not know him. Could you bear to look

at your boy if you had disgraced him for ever?"

"Whatever I might have done he would not desert me. Nor will Lucius

desert you. Shall I go now?"

"Ah, me! Would that I were in my grave!"

Then Mrs. Orme bent over her and kissed her, pressed both her hands,

then kissed her again, and silently creeping out of the room made her

way once more slowly down the stairs.

Mrs. Orme, as will have been seen, was sufficiently anxious to

perform the task which she had given herself, but yet her heart sank

within her as she descended to the parlour. It was indeed a terrible

commission, and her readiness to undertake it had come not from any

feeling on her own part that she was fit for the work and could do

it without difficulty, but from the eagerness with which she had

persuaded Lady Mason that the thing must be done by some one. And

now who else could do it? In Sir Peregrine's present state it would

have been a cruelty to ask him; and then his feelings towards Lucius

in the matter were not tender as were those of Mrs. Orme. She had

been obliged to promise that she herself would do it, or otherwise

she could not have urged the doing. And now the time had come.

Immediately on their return to the house Mrs. Orme had declared that

the story should be told at once; and then Lady Mason, sinking into

the chair from which she had not since risen, had at length agreed

that it should be so. The time had now come, and Mrs. Orme, whose

footsteps down the stairs had not been audible, stood for a moment

with the handle of the door in her hand.

Had it been possible she also would now have put it off till the

morrow,--would have put it off till any other time than that which

was then present. All manner of thoughts crowded on her during those

few seconds. In what way should she do it? What words should she use?

How should she begin? She was to tell this young man that his mother

had committed a crime of the very blackest dye, and now she felt that

she should have prepared herself and resolved in what fashion this

should be done. Might it not be well, she asked herself for one

moment, that she should take the night to think of it and then see

him in the morning? The idea, however, only lasted her for a moment,

and then, fearing lest she might allow herself to be seduced into

some weakness, she turned the handle and entered the room.

He was still standing with his back to the fire, leaning against

the mantelpiece, and thinking over the occurrences of the day that

was past. His strongest feeling now was one of hatred to Joseph

Mason,--of hatred mixed with thorough contempt. What must men say of

him after such a struggle on his part to ruin the fame of a lady and

to steal the patrimony of a brother! "Is she still determined not to

come down?" he said as soon as he saw Mrs. Orme.

"No; she will not come down to-night, Mr. Mason. I have something

that I must tell you."

"What! is she ill? Has it been too much for her?"

"Mr. Mason," she said, "I hardly know how to do what I have

undertaken." And he could see that she actually trembled as she spoke

to him.

"What is it, Mrs. Orme? Is it anything about the property? I think

you need hardly be afraid of me. I believe I may say I could bear

anything of that kind."

"Mr. Mason--" And then again she stopped herself.

How was she to speak this horrible word?

"Is it anything about the trial?" He was now beginning to be

frightened, feeling that something terrible was coming; but still of

the absolute truth he had no suspicion.

"Oh! Mr. Mason, if it were possible that I could spare you I would do

so. If there were any escape,--any way in which it might be avoided."

"What is it?" said he. And now his voice was hoarse and low, for a

feeling of fear had come upon him. "I am a man and can bear it,

whatever it is."

"You must be a man then, for it is very terrible. Mr. Mason, that

will, you know--"

"You mean the codicil?"

"The will that gave you the property--"

"Yes."

"It was not done by your father."

"Who says so?"

"It is too sure. It was not done by him,--nor by them,--those other

people who were in the court to-day."

"But who says so? How is it known? If my father did not sign it, it

is a forgery; and who forged it? Those wretches have bought over some

one and you have been deceived, Mrs. Orme. It is not of the property

I am thinking, but of my mother. If it were as you say, my mother

must have known it?"

"Ah! yes."

"And you mean that she did know it; that she knew it was a forgery?"

"Oh! Mr. Mason."

"Heaven and earth! Let me go to her. If she were to tell me so

herself I would not believe it of her. Ah! she has told you?"

"Yes; she has told me."

"Then she is mad. This has been too much for her, and her brain has

gone with it. Let me go to her, Mrs. Orme."

"No, no; you must not go to her." And Mrs. Orme put herself directly

before the door. "She is not mad,--not now. Then, at that time, we

must think she was so. It is not so now."

"I cannot understand you." And he put his left hand up to his

forehead as though to steady his thoughts. "I do not understand you.

If the will be a forgery, who did it?"

This question she could not answer at the moment. She was still

standing against the door, and her eyes fell to the ground. "Who did

it?" he repeated. "Whose hand wrote my father's name?"

"You must be merciful, Mr. Mason."

"Merciful;--to whom?"

"To your mother."

"Merciful to my mother! Mrs. Orme, speak out to me. If the will was

forged, who forged it? You cannot mean to tell me that she did it!"

She did not answer him at the moment in words, but coming close up to

him she took both his hands in hers, and then looked steadfastly up

into his eyes. His face had now become almost convulsed with emotion,

and his brow was very black. "Do you wish me to believe that my

mother forged the will herself?" Then again he paused, but she

said nothing. "Woman, it's a lie," he exclaimed; and then tearing

his hands from her, shaking her off, and striding away with quick

footsteps, he threw himself on a sofa that stood in the furthest part

of the room.

She paused for a moment and then followed him very gently. She

followed him and stood over him in silence for a moment, as he lay

with his face from her. "Mr. Mason," she said at last, "you told me

that you would bear this like a man."

But he made her no answer, and she went on. "Mr. Mason, it is, as I

tell you. Years and years ago, when you were a baby, and when she

thought that your father was unjust to you--for your sake,--to remedy

that injustice, she did this thing."

"What; forged his name! It must be a lie. Though an angel came to

tell me so, it would be a lie! What; my mother!" And now he turned

round and faced her, still however lying on the sofa.

"It is true, Mr. Mason. Oh, how I wish that it were not! But you

must forgive her. It is years ago, and she has repented of it, Sir

Peregrine has forgiven her,--and I have done so."

And then she told him the whole story. She told him why the marriage

had been broken off, and described to him the manner in which the

truth had been made known to Sir Peregrine. It need hardly be said,

that in doing so, she dealt as softly as was possible with his

mother's name; but yet she told him everything. "She wrote it

herself, in the night."

"What all; all the names herself?"

"Yes, all."

"Mrs. Orme, it cannot be so. I will not believe it. To me it is

impossible. That you believe it I do not doubt, but I cannot. Let

me go to her. I will go to her myself. But even should she say so

herself, I will not believe it."

But she would not let him go up stairs even though he attempted to

move her from the door, almost with violence. "No; not till you say

that you will forgive her and be gentle with her. And it must not be

to-night. We will be up early in the morning, and you can see her

before we go;--if you will be gentle to her."

He still persisted that he did not believe the story, but it became

clear to her, by degrees, that the meaning of it all had at last sunk

into his mind, and that he did believe it. Over and over again she

told him all that she knew, explaining to him what his mother had

suffered, making him perceive why she had removed herself out of his

hands, and had leant on others for advice. And she told him also that

though they still hoped that the jury might acquit her, the property

must be abandoned.

"I will leave the house this night if you wish it," he said.

"When it is all over, when she has been acquitted and shall have gone

away, then let it be done. Mr. Mason, you will go with her; will you

not?" and then again there was a pause.

"Mrs. Orme, it is impossible that I should say now what I may do. It

seems to me as though I could not live through it. I do not believe

it. I cannot believe it."

As soon as she had exacted a promise from him that he would not go

to his mother, at any rate without further notice, she herself went

up stairs and found Lady Mason lying on her bed. At first Mrs. Orme

thought that she was asleep, but no such comfort had come to the poor

woman. "Does he know it?" she asked.

Mrs. Orme's task for that night was by no means yet done. After

remaining for a while with Lady Mason she again returned to Lucius,

and was in this way a bearer of messages between them. There was at

last no question as to doubting the story. He did believe it. He

could not avoid the necessity for such belief. "Yes," he said, when

Mrs. Orme spoke again of his leaving the place, "I will go and hide

myself; and as for her--"

"But you will go with her,--if the jury do not say that she was

guilty--"

"Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"If they do, you will come back for her, when the time of her

punishment is over? She is still your mother, Mr. Mason."

At last the work of the night was done, and the two ladies went to

their beds. The understanding was that Lucius should see his mother

before they started in the morning, but that he should not again

accompany them to the court. Mrs. Orme's great object had been,--her

great object as regarded the present moment,--to prevent his presence

in court when the verdict should be given. In this she had succeeded.

She could now wish for an acquittal with a clear conscience; and

could as it were absolve the sinner within her own heart, seeing that

there was no longer any doubt as to the giving up of the property.

Whatever might be the verdict of the jury Joseph Mason of Groby

would, without doubt, obtain the property which belonged to him.

"Good-night, Mr. Mason," Mrs. Orme said at last, as she gave him her

hand.

"Good-night. I believe that in my madness I spoke to you to-night

like a brute."

"No, no. It was nothing. I did not think of it."

"When you think of how it was with me, you will forgive me."

She pressed his hand and again told him that she had not thought of

it. It was nothing. And indeed it had been as nothing to her. There

may be moments in a man's life when any words may be forgiven, even

though they be spoken to a woman.

When Mrs. Orme was gone, he stood for a while perfectly motionless

in the dining-room, and then coming out into the hall he opened the

front door, and taking his hat, went out into the night. It was still

winter, but the night, though cold and very dark, was fine, and the

air was sharp with the beginning frost. Leaving the door open he

walked forth, and passing out on to the road went down from thence

to the gate. It had been his constant practice to walk up and down

from his own hall door to his own gate on the high road, perhaps

comforting himself too warmly with the reflection that the ground

on which he walked was all his own. He had no such comfort now, as

he made his way down the accustomed path and leaned upon the gate,

thinking over what he had heard.

[Illustration: Lucius Mason, as he leaned on the Gate

that was no longer his own.]

A forger! At some such hour as this, with patient premeditated care,

she had gone to work and committed one of the vilest crimes known

to man. And this was his mother! And he, he, Lucius Mason, had been

living for years on the fruit of this villainy;--had been so living

till this terrible day of retribution had come upon him! I fear that

at that moment he thought more of his own misery than he did of hers,

and hardly considered, as he surely should have done, that mother's

love which had led to all this guilt. And for a moment he resolved

that he would not go back to the house. His head, he said to himself,

should never again rest under a roof which belonged of right

to Joseph Mason. He had injured Joseph Mason;--had injured him

innocently, indeed, as far as he himself was concerned; but he had

injured him greatly, and therefore now hated him all the more. "He

shall have it instantly," he said, and walked forth into the high

road as though he would not allow his feet to rest again on his

brother's property.

But he was forced to remember that this could not be so. His mother's

trial was not yet over, and even in the midst of his own personal

trouble he remembered that the verdict to her was still a matter of

terrible import. He would not let it be known that he had abandoned

the property, at any rate till that verdict had been given. And then

as he moved back to the house he tried to think in what way it would

become him to behave to his mother. "She can never be my mother

again," he said to himself. They were terrible words;--but then was

not his position very terrible?

And when at last he had bolted the front door, going through the

accustomed task mechanically, and had gone up stairs to his own room,

he had failed to make up his mind on this subject. Perhaps it would

be better that he should not see her. What could he say to her? What

word of comfort could he speak? It was not only that she had beggared

him! Nay; it was not that at all! But she had doomed him to a life of

disgrace which no effort of his own could wipe away. And then as he

threw himself on his bed he thought of Sophia Furnival. Would she

share his disgrace with him? Was it possible that there might be

solace there?

Quite impossible, we should say, who know her well.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

YOUNG LOCHINVAR.

Judge Staveley, whose court had not been kept sitting to a late hour

by any such eloquence as that of Mr. Furnival, had gone home before

the business of the other court had closed. Augustus, who was his

father's marshal, remained for his friend, and had made his way in

among the crowd, so as to hear the end of the speech.

"Don't wait dinner for us," he had said to his father. "If you do you

will be hating us all the time; and we sha'n't be there till between

eight and nine."

"I should be sorry to hate you," said the judge, "and so I won't."

When therefore Felix Graham escaped from the court at about half-past

seven, the two young men were able to take their own time and eat

their dinner together comfortably, enjoying their bottle of champagne

between them perhaps more thoroughly than they would have done had

the judge and Mrs. Staveley shared it with them.

But Felix had something of which to think besides the

champagne--something which was of more consequence to him even than

the trial in which he was engaged. Madeline had promised that she

would meet him that evening;--or rather had not so promised. When

asked to do so she had not refused, but even while not refusing had

reminded him that her mother would be there. Her manner to him had,

he thought, been cold, though she had not been ungracious. Upon the

whole, he could not make up his mind to expect success. "Then he must

have been a fool!" the reader learned in such matters will say. The

reader learned in such matters is, I think, right. In that respect he

was a fool.

"I suppose we must give the governor the benefit of our company over

his wine," said Augustus, as soon as their dinner was over.

"I suppose we ought to do so."

"And why not? Is there any objection?"

"To tell the truth," said Graham, "I have an appointment which I am

very anxious to keep."

"An appointment? Where? Here at Noningsby, do you mean?"

"In this house. But yet I cannot say that it is absolutely an

appointment. I am going to ask your sister what my fate is to be."

"And that is the appointment! Very well, my dear fellow; and may God

prosper you. If you can convince the governor that it is all right, I

shall make no objection. I wish, for Madeline's sake, that you had

not such a terrible bee in your bonnet."

"And you will go to the judge alone?"

"Oh, yes. I'll tell him--. What shall I tell him?"

"The truth, if you will. Good-bye, old fellow. You will not see me

again to-night, nor yet to-morrow in this house, unless I am more

fortunate than I have any right to hope to be."

"Faint heart never won fair lady, you know," said Augustus.

"My heart is faint enough then; but nevertheless I shall say what I

have got to say." And then he got up from the table.

"If you don't come down to us," said Augustus, "I shall come up to

you. But may God speed you. And now I'll go to the governor."

Felix made his way from the small breakfast-parlour in which they had

dined across the hall into the drawing-room, and there he found Lady

Staveley alone. "So the trial is not over yet, Mr. Graham?" she said.

"No; there will be another day of it."

"And what will be the verdict? Is it possible that she really forged

the will?"

"Ah! that I cannot say. You know that I am one of her counsel, Lady

Staveley?"

"Yes; I should have remembered that, and been more discreet. If you

are looking for Madeline, Mr. Graham, I think that she is in the

library."

"Oh! thank you;--in the library." And then Felix got himself out of

the drawing-room into the hall again not in the most graceful manner.

He might have gone direct from the drawing-room to the library, but

this he did not remember. It was very odd, he thought, that Lady

Staveley, of whose dislike to him he had felt sure, should have thus

sent him direct to her daughter, and have become a party, as it were,

to an appointment between them. But he had not much time to think of

this before he found himself in the room. There, sure enough, was

Madeline waiting to listen to his story. She was seated when he

entered, with her back to him; but as she heard him she rose, and,

after pausing for a moment, she stepped forward to meet him.

"You and Augustus were very late to-day," she said.

"Yes. I was kept there, and he was good enough to wait for me."

"You said you wanted to--speak to me," she said, hesitating a little,

but yet very little; "to speak to me alone; and so mamma said I had

better come in here. I hope you are not vexed that I should have told

her."

"Certainly not, Miss Staveley."

"Because I have no secrets from mamma."

"Nor do I wish that anything should be secret. I hate all secrecies.

Miss Staveley, your father knows of my intention."

On this point Madeline did not feel it to be necessary to say

anything. Of course her father knew of the intention. Had she not

received her father's sanction for listening to Mr. Graham she would

not have been alone with him in the library. It might be that the

time would come in which she would explain all this to her lover,

but that time had not come yet. So when he spoke of her father she

remained silent, and allowing her eyes to fall to the ground she

stood before him, waiting to hear his question.

"Miss Staveley," he said;--and he was conscious himself of being very

awkward. Much more so, indeed, than there was any need, for Madeline

was not aware that he was awkward. In her eyes he was quite master

of the occasion, and seemed to have everything his own way. He had

already done all that was difficult in the matter, and had done it

without any awkwardness. He had already made himself master of her

heart, and it was only necessary now that he should enter in and take

possession. The ripe fruit had fallen, as Miss Furnival had once

chosen to express it, and there he was to pick it up,--if only he

considered it worth his trouble to do so. That manner of the picking

would not signify much, as Madeline thought. That he desired to take

it into his garner and preserve it for his life's use was everything

to her, but the method of his words at the present moment was

not much. He was her lord and master. He was the one man who had

conquered and taken possession of her spirit; and as to his being

awkward, there was not much in that. Nor do I say that he was

awkward. He spoke his mind in honest, plain terms, and I do not know

he could have done better.

"Miss Staveley," he said, "in asking you to see me alone, I have made

a great venture. I am indeed risking all that I most value." And then

he paused, as though he expected that she would speak. But she still

kept her eyes upon the ground, and still stood silent before him.

"I cannot but think you must guess my purpose," he said, "though I

acknowledge that I have had nothing that can warrant me in hoping for

a favourable answer. There is my hand; if you can take it you need

not doubt that you have my heart with it." And then he held out to

her his broad, right hand.

Madeline still stood silent before him and still fixed her eyes upon

the ground, but very slowly she raised her little hand and allowed

her soft slight fingers to rest upon his open palm. It was as though

she thus affixed her legal signature and seal to the deed of gift.

She had not said a word to him; not a word of love or a word of

assent; but no such word was now necessary.

"Madeline, my own Madeline," he said; and then taking unfair

advantage of the fingers which she had given him he drew her to his

breast and folded her in his arms.

It was nearly an hour after this when he returned to the

drawing-room. "Do go in now," she said. "You must not wait any

longer; indeed you must go."

"And you--; you will come in presently."

"It is already nearly eleven. No, I will not show myself again

to-night. Mamma will soon come up to me, I know. Good-night, Felix.

Do you go now, and I will follow you." And then after some further

little ceremony he left her.

When he entered the drawing-room Lady Staveley was there, and the

judge with his teacup beside him, and Augustus standing with his back

to the fire. Felix walked up to the circle, and taking a chair sat

down, but at the moment said nothing.

"You didn't get any wine after your day's toil, Master Graham," said

the judge.

"Indeed I did, sir. We had some champagne."

"Champagne, had you? Then I ought to have waited for my guest, for I

got none. You had a long day of it in court."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"And I am afraid not very satisfactory." To this Graham made no

immediate answer, but he could not refrain from thinking that the

day, taken altogether, had been satisfactory to him.

And then Baker came into the room, and going close up to Lady

Staveley, whispered something in her ear. "Oh, ah, yes," said Lady

Staveley. "I must wish you good night, Mr. Graham." And she took his

hand, pressing it very warmly. But though she wished him good night

then, she saw him again before he went to bed. It was a family in

which all home affairs were very dear, and a new son could not be

welcomed into it without much expression of affection.

"Well, sir! and how have you sped since dinner?" the judge asked as

soon as the door was closed behind his wife.

"I have proposed to your daughter and she has accepted me." And as

he said so he rose from the chair in which he had just now seated

himself.

"Then, my boy, I hope you will make her a good husband;" and the

judge gave him his hand.

"I will try to do so. I cannot but feel, however, how little right I

had to ask her, seeing that I am likely to be so poor a man."

"Well, well, well--we will talk of that another time. At present we

will only sing your triumphs--

"So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,

There never was knight like the young Lochinvar."

"Felix, my dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart," said

Augustus. "But I did not know you were good as a warrior."

"Ah, but he is though," said the judge. "What do you think of his

wounds? And if all that I hear be true, he has other battles on hand.

But we must not speak about that till this poor lady's trial is

over."

"I need hardly tell you, sir," said Graham, with that sheep-like air

which a man always carries on such occasions, "that I regard myself

as the most fortunate man in the world."

"Quite unnecessary," said the judge. "On such occasions that is taken

as a matter of course." And then the conversation between them for

the next ten minutes was rather dull and flat.

Up stairs the same thing was going on, in a manner somewhat more

animated, between the mother and daughter,--for ladies on such

occasions can be more animated than men.

"Oh, mamma, you must love him," Madeline said.

"Yes, my dear; of course I shall love him now. Your papa says that he

is very clever."

"I know papa likes him. I knew that from the very first. I think that

was the reason why--"

"And I suppose clever people are the best,--that is to say, if they

are good."

"And isn't he good?"

"Well--I hope so. Indeed, I'm sure he is. Mr. Orme was a very good

young man too;--but it's no good talking about him now."

"Mamma, that never could have come to pass."

"Very well, my dear. It's over now, and of course all that I looked

for was your happiness."

"I know that, mamma; and indeed I am very happy. I'm sure I could not

ever have liked any one else since I first knew him."

Lady Staveley still thought it very odd, but she had nothing else to

say. As regarded the pecuniary considerations of the affair she left

them altogether to her husband, feeling that in this way she could

relieve herself from misgivings which might otherwise make her

unhappy. "And after all I don't know that his ugliness signifies,"

she said to herself. And so she made up her mind that she would

be loving and affectionate to him, and sat up till she heard his

footsteps in the passage, in order that she might speak to him, and

make him welcome to the privileges of a son-in-law.

"Mr. Graham," she said, opening her door as he passed by.

"Of course she has told you," said Felix.

"Oh yes, she has told me. We don't have many secrets in this house.

And I'm sure I congratulate you with all my heart; and I think you

have got the very best girl in all the world. Of course I'm her

mother; but I declare, if I was to talk of her for a week, I could

not say anything of her but good."

"I know how fortunate I am."

"Yes, you are fortunate. For there is nothing in the world equal to

a loving wife who will do her duty. And I'm sure you'll be good to

her."

"I will endeavour to be so."

"A man must be very bad indeed who would be bad to her,--and I

don't think that of you. And it's a great thing, Mr. Graham, that

Madeline should have loved a man of whom her papa is so fond. I

don't know what you have done to the judge, I'm sure." This she said,

remembering in the innocence of her heart that Mr. Arbuthnot had been

a son-in-law rather after her own choice, and that the judge always

declared that his eldest daughter's husband had seldom much to say

for himself.

"And I hope that Madeline's mother will receive me as kindly as

Madeline's father," said he, taking Lady Staveley's hand and pressing

it.

"Indeed I will. I will love you very dearly if you will let me. My

girls' husbands are the same to me as sons." Then she put up her face

and he kissed it, and so they wished each other good night.

He found Augustus in his own room, and they two had hardly sat

themselves down over the fire, intending to recall the former scenes

which had taken place in that very room, when a knock was heard at

the door, and Mrs. Baker entered.

"And so it's all settled, Mr. Felix," said she.

"Yes," said he; "all settled."

"Well now! didn't I know it from the first?"

"Then what a wicked old woman you were not to tell," said Augustus.

"That's all very well, Master Augustus. How would you like me to tell

of you;--for I could, you know?"

"You wicked old woman, you couldn't do anything of the kind."

"Oh, couldn't I? But I defy all the world to say a word of Miss

Madeline but what's good,--only I did know all along which way the

wind was blowing. Lord love you, Mr. Graham, when you came in here

all of a smash like, I knew it wasn't for nothing."

"You think he did it on purpose then," said Staveley.

"Did it on purpose? What; make up to Miss Madeline? Why, of course he

did it on purpose. He's been a-thinking of it ever since Christmas

night, when I saw you, Master Augustus, and a certain young lady when

you came out into the dark passage together."

"That's a downright falsehood, Mrs. Baker."

"Oh--very well. Perhaps I was mistaken. But now, Mr. Graham, if you

don't treat our Miss Madeline well--"

"That's just what I've been telling him," said her brother. "If he

uses her ill, as he did his former wife--breaks her heart as he did

with that one--"

"His former wife!" said Mrs. Baker.

"Haven't you heard of that? Why, he's had two already."

"Two wives already! Oh now, Master Augustus, what an old fool I am

ever to believe a word that comes out of your mouth." Then having

uttered her blessing, and having had her hand cordially grasped by

this new scion of the Staveley family, the old woman left the young

men to themselves, and went to her bed.

"Now that it is done--," said Felix.

"You wish it were undone."

"No, by heaven! I think I may venture to say that it will never come

to me to wish that. But now that it is done, I am astonished at my

own impudence almost as much as at my success. Why should your father

have welcomed me to his house as his son-in-law, seeing how poor are

my prospects?"

"Just for that reason; and because he is so different from other men.

I have no doubt that he is proud of Madeline for having liked a man

with an ugly face and no money."

"If I had been beautiful like you, I shouldn't have had a chance with

him."

"Not if you'd been weighted with money also. Now, as for myself, I

confess I'm not nearly so magnanimous as my father, and, for Mad's

sake, I do hope you will get rid of your vagaries. An income, I know,

is a very commonplace sort of thing; but when a man has a family

there are comforts attached to it."

"I am at any rate willing to work," said Graham somewhat moodily.

"Yes, if you may work exactly in your own way. But men in the world

can't do that. A man, as I take it, must through life allow himself

to be governed by the united wisdom of others around him. He cannot

take upon himself to judge as to every step by his own lights. If

he does, he will be dead before he has made up his mind as to the

preliminaries." And in this way Augustus Staveley from the depth of

his life's experience spoke words of worldly wisdom to his future

brother-in-law.

On the next morning before he started again for Alston and his now

odious work, Graham succeeded in getting Madeline to himself for five

minutes. "I saw both your father and mother last night," said he,

"and I shall never forget their goodness to me."

"Yes, they are good."

"It seems like a dream to me that they should have accepted me as

their son-in-law."

"But it is no dream to me, Felix;--or if so, I do not mean to wake

any more. I used to think that I should never care very much for

anybody out of my own family;--but now--" And she then pressed her

little hand upon his arm.

"And Felix," she said, as he prepared to leave her, "you are not to

go away from Noningsby when the trial is over. I wanted mamma to tell

you, but she said I'd better do it."

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE LAST DAY.

Mrs. Orme was up very early on that last morning of the trial, and

had dressed herself before Lady Mason was awake. It was now March,

but yet the morning light was hardly sufficient for her as she went

through her toilet. They had been told to be in the court very

punctually at ten, and in order to do so they must leave Orley Farm

at nine. Before that, as had been arranged over night, Lucius was to

see his mother.

"You haven't told him! he doesn't know!" were the first words which

Lady Mason spoke as she raised her head from the pillow. But then she

remembered. "Ah! yes," she said, as she again sank back and hid her

face, "he knows it all now."

"Yes, dear; he knows it all; and is it not better so? He will come

and see you, and when that is over you will be more comfortable than

you have been for years past."

Lucius also had been up early, and when he learned that Mrs. Orme was

dressed, he sent up to her begging that he might see her. Mrs. Orme

at once went to him, and found him seated at the breakfast-table with

his head resting on his arm. His face was pale and haggard, and his

hair was uncombed. He had not been undressed that night, and his

clothes hung on him as they always do hang on a man who has passed

a sleepless night in them. To Mrs. Orme's inquiry after himself he

answered not a word, nor did he at first ask after his mother. "That

was all true that you told me last night?"

"Yes, Mr. Mason; it was true."

"And she and I must be outcasts for ever. I will endeavour to bear

it, Mrs. Orme. As I did not put an end to my life last night I

suppose that I shall live and bear it. Does she expect to see me?"

"I told her that you would come to her this morning."

"And what shall I say? I would not condemn my own mother; but how can

I not condemn her?"

"Tell her at once that you will forgive her."

"But it will be a lie. I have not forgiven her. I loved my mother and

esteemed her as a pure and excellent woman. I was proud of my mother.

How can I forgive her for having destroyed such feelings as those?"

"There should be nothing that a son would not forgive his mother."

"Ah! that is so easily spoken. Men talk of forgiveness when their

anger rankles deepest in their hearts. In the course of years I shall

forgive her. I hope I shall. But to say that I can forgive her now

would be a farce. She has broken my heart, Mrs. Orme."

"And has not she suffered herself? Is not her heart broken?"

"I have been thinking of that all night. I cannot understand how she

should have lived for the last six months. Well; is it time that I

should go to her?"

Mrs. Orme again went up stairs, and after another interval of half

an hour returned to fetch him. She almost regretted that she had

undertaken to bring them together on that morning, thinking that

it might have been better to postpone the interview till the trial

should be over. She had expected that Lucius would have been softer

in his manner. But it was too late for any such thought.

"You will find her dressed now, Mr. Mason," said she; "but I conjure

you, as you hope for mercy yourself, to be merciful to her. She is

your mother, and though she has injured you by her folly, her heart

has been true to you through it all. Go now, and remember that

harshness to any woman is unmanly."

"I can only act as I think best," he replied in that low stern voice

which was habitual to him; and then with slow steps he went up to his

mother's room.

When he entered it she was standing with her eyes fixed upon the door

and her hands clasped together. So she stood till he had closed the

door behind him, and had taken a few steps on towards the centre of

the room. Then she rushed forward, and throwing herself on the ground

before him clasped him round the knees with her arms. "My boy, my

boy!" she said. And then she lay there bathing his feet with her

tears.

"Oh! mother, what is this that she has told me?"

But Lady Mason at the moment spoke no further words. It seemed as

though her heart would have burst with sobs, and when for a moment

she lifted up her face to his, the tears were streaming down her

cheeks. Had it not been for that relief she could not have borne the

sufferings which were heaped upon her.

"Mother, get up," he said. "Let me raise you. It is dreadful that you

should lie there. Mother, let me lift you." But she still clung to

his knees, grovelling on the ground before him. "Lucius, Lucius," she

said, and she then sank away from him as though the strength of her

muscles would no longer allow her to cling to him. She sank away from

him and lay along the ground hiding her face upon the floor.

"Mother," he said, taking her gently by the arm as he knelt at her

side, "if you will rise I will speak to you."

"Your words will kill me," she said. "I do not dare to look at you.

Oh! Lucius, will you ever forgive me?"

And yet she had done it all for him. She had done a rascally deed,

an hideous cut-throat deed, but it had been done altogether for him.

No thought of her own aggrandisement had touched her mind when she

resolved upon that forgery. As Rebekah had deceived her lord and

robbed Esau, the first-born, of his birthright, so had she robbed him

who was as Esau to her. How often had she thought of that, while her

conscience was pleading hard against her! Had it been imputed as a

crime to Rebekah that she had loved her own son well, and loving him

had put a crown upon his head by means of her matchless guile? Did

she love Lucius, her babe, less than Rebekah had loved Jacob? And had

she not striven with the old man, struggling that she might do this

just thing without injustice, till in his anger he had thrust her

from him. "I will not break my promise for the brat," the old man had

said;--and then she did the deed. But all that was as nothing now.

She felt no comfort now from that Bible story which had given her

such encouragement before the thing was finished. Now the result of

evil-doing had come full home to her, and she was seeking pardon with

a broken heart, while burning tears furrowed her cheeks,--not from

him whom she had thought to injure, but from the child of her own

bosom, for whose prosperity she had been so anxious.

Then she slowly arose and allowed him to place her upon the sofa.

"Mother," he said, "it is all over here."

"Ah! yes."

"Whither we had better go, I cannot yet say,--or when. We must wait

till this day is ended."

"Lucius, I care nothing for myself,--nothing. It is nothing to me

whether or no they say that I am guilty. It is of you only that I am

thinking."

"Our lot, mother, must still be together. If they find you guilty

you will be imprisoned, and then I will go, and come back when they

release you. For you and me the future world will be very different

from the past."

"It need not be so,--for you, Lucius. I do not wish to keep you near

me now."

"But I shall be near you. Where you hide your shame there will I

hide mine. In this world there is nothing left for us. But there is

another world before you,--if you can repent of your sin." This too

he said very sternly, standing somewhat away from her, and frowning

the while with those gloomy eyebrows. Sad as was her condition he

might have given her solace, could he have taken her by the hand and

kissed her. Peregrine Orme would have done so, or Augustus Staveley,

could it have been possible that they should have found themselves

in that position. Though Lucius Mason could not do so, he was not

less just than they, and, it may be, not less loving in his heart.

He could devote himself for his mother's sake as absolutely as could

they. But to some is given and to some is denied that cruse of

heavenly balm with which all wounds can be assuaged and sore hearts

ever relieved of some portion of their sorrow. Of all the virtues

with which man can endow himself surely none other is so odious as

that justice which can teach itself to look down upon mercy almost as

a vice!

"I will not ask you to forgive me," she said, plaintively.

"Mother," he answered, "were I to say that I forgave you my words

would be a mockery. I have no right either to condemn or to forgive.

I accept my position as it has been made for me, and will endeavour

to do my duty."

It would have been almost better for her that he should have

upbraided her for her wickedness. She would then have fallen again

prostrate before him, if not in body at least in spirit, and

her weakness would have stood for her in place of strength. But

now it was necessary that she should hear his words and bear his

looks,--bear them like a heavy burden on her back without absolutely

sinking. It had been that necessity of bearing and never absolutely

sinking which, during years past, had so tried and tested the

strength of her heart and soul. Seeing that she had not sunk, we may

say that her strength had been very wonderful.

And then she stood up and came close to him. "But you will give me

your hand, Lucius?"

"Yes, mother; there is my hand. I shall stand by you through it all."

But he did not offer to kiss her; and there was still some pride in

her heart which would not allow her to ask him for an embrace.

"And now," he said, "it is time that you should prepare to go. Mrs.

Orme thinks it better that I should not accompany you."

"No, Lucius, no; you must not hear them proclaim my guilt in court."

"That would make but little difference. But nevertheless I will not

go. Had I known this before I should not have gone there. It was to

testify my belief in your innocence; nay, my conviction--"

"Oh, Lucius, spare me!"

"Well, I will speak of it no more. I shall be here to-night when you

come back."

"But if they say that I am guilty they will take me away."

"If so I will come to you,--in the morning if they will let me. But,

mother, in any case I must leave this house to-morrow." Then again

he gave her his hand, but he left her without touching her with his

lips.

When the two ladies appeared in court together without Lucius Mason

there was much question among the crowd as to the cause of his

absence. Both Dockwrath and Joseph Mason looked at it in the right

light, and accepted it as a ground for renewed hope. "He dare not

face the verdict," said Dockwrath. And yet when they had left the

court on the preceding evening, after listening to Mr. Furnival's

speech, their hopes had not been very high. Dockwrath had not

admitted with words that he feared defeat, but when Mason had gnashed

his teeth as he walked up and down his room at Alston, and striking

the table with his clenched fist had declared his fears, "By heavens

they will escape me again!" Dockwrath had not been able to give him

substantial comfort. "The jury are not such fools as to take all

that for gospel," he had said. But he had not said it with that tone

of assured conviction which he had always used till Mr. Furnival's

speech had been made. There could have been no greater attestation

to the power displayed by Mr. Furnival than Mr. Mason's countenance

as he left the court on that evening. "I suppose it will cost me

hundreds of pounds," he said to Dockwrath that evening. "Orley Farm

will pay for it all," Dockwrath had answered; but his answer had

shown no confidence. And, if we think well of it, Joseph Mason was

deserving of pity. He wanted only what was his own; and that Orley

Farm ought to be his own he had no smallest doubt. Mr. Furnival had

not in the least shaken him; but he had made him feel that others

would be shaken. "If it could only be left to the judge," thought Mr.

Mason to himself. And then he began to consider whether this British

palladium of an unanimous jury had not in it more of evil than of

good.

Young Peregrine Orme again met his mother at the door of the court,

and at her instance gave his arm to Lady Mason. Mr. Aram was also

there; but Mr. Aram had great tact, and did not offer his arm to Mrs.

Orme, contenting himself with making a way for her and walking beside

her. "I am glad that her son has not come to-day," he said, not

bringing his head suspiciously close to hers, but still speaking so

that none but she might hear him. "He has done all the good that he

could do, and as there is only the judge's charge to hear, the jury

will not notice his absence. Of course we hope for the best, Mrs.

Orme, but it is doubtful."

As Felix Graham took his place next to Chaffanbrass, the old lawyer

scowled at him, turning his red old savage eyes first on him and then

from him, growling the while, so that the whole court might notice

it. The legal portion of the court did notice it and were much

amused. "Good morning, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said Graham quite aloud as

he took his seat; and then Chaffanbrass growled again. Considering

the lights with which he had been lightened, there was a species of

honesty about Mr. Chaffanbrass which certainly deserved praise. He

was always true to the man whose money he had taken, and gave to his

customer, with all the power at his command, that assistance which he

had professed to sell. But we may give the same praise to the hired

bravo who goes through with truth and courage the task which he has

undertaken. I knew an assassin in Ireland who professed that during

twelve years of practice in Tipperary he had never failed when he had

once engaged himself. For truth and honesty to their customers--which

are great virtues--I would bracket that man and Mr. Chaffanbrass

together.

And then the judge commenced his charge, and as he went on with it

he repeated all the evidence that was in any way of moment, pulling

the details to pieces, and dividing that which bore upon the subject

from that which did not. This he did with infinite talent and with a

perspicuity beyond all praise. But to my thinking it was remarkable

that he seemed to regard the witnesses as a dissecting surgeon may

be supposed to regard the subjects on which he operates for the

advancement of science. With exquisite care he displayed what each

had said and how the special saying of one bore on that special

saying of another. But he never spoke of them as though they had been

live men and women who were themselves as much entitled to justice

at his hands as either the prosecutor in this matter or she who was

being prosecuted; who, indeed, if anything, were better entitled

unless he could show that they were false and suborned; for unless

they were suborned or false they were there doing a painful duty to

the public, for which they were to receive no pay and from which they

were to obtain no benefit. Of whom else in that court could so much

be said? The judge there had his ermine and his canopy, his large

salary and his seat of honour. And the lawyers had their wigs, and

their own loud voices, and their places of precedence. The attorneys

had their seats and their big tables, and the somewhat familiar

respect of the tipstaves. The jury, though not much to be envied,

were addressed with respect and flattery, had their honourable seats,

and were invariably at least called gentlemen. But why should there

be no seat of honour for the witnesses? To stand in a box, to be

bawled after by the police, to be scowled at and scolded by the

judge, to be browbeaten and accused falsely by the barristers, and

then to be condemned as perjurers by the jury,--that is the fate of

the one person who during the whole trial is perhaps entitled to

the greatest respect, and is certainly entitled to the most public

gratitude. Let the witness have a big arm-chair, and a canopy over

him, and a man behind him with a red cloak to do him honour and keep

the flies off; let him be gently invited to come forward from some

inner room where he can sit before a fire. Then he will be able to

speak out, making himself heard without scolding, and will perhaps be

able to make a fair fight with the cocks who can crow so loudly on

their own dunghills.

The judge in this case did his work with admirable skill, blowing

aside the froth of Mr. Furnival's eloquence, and upsetting the

sophistry and false deductions of Mr. Chaffanbrass. The case for the

jury, as he said, hung altogether upon the evidence of Kenneby and

the woman Bolster. As far as he could see, the evidence of Dockwrath

had little to do with it; and alleged malice and greed on the part of

Dockwrath could have nothing to do with it. The jury might take it

as proved that Lady Mason at the former trial had sworn that she

had been present when her husband signed the codicil and had seen

the different signatures affixed to it. They might also take it

as proved, that that other deed,--the deed purporting to close a

partnership between Sir Joseph Mason and Mr. Martock,--had been

executed on the 14th of July, and that it had been signed by Sir

Joseph, and also by those two surviving witnesses, Kenneby and

Bolster. The question, therefore, for the consideration of the jury

had narrowed itself to this: had two deeds been executed by Sir

Joseph Mason, both bearing the same date? If this had not been done,

and if that deed with reference to the partnership were a true

deed, then must the other be false and fraudulent; and if false and

fraudulent, then must Lady Mason have sworn falsely, and been guilty

of that perjury with which she was now charged. There might, perhaps,

be one loophole to this argument by which an escape was possible.

Though both deeds bore the date of 14th July, there might have been

error in this. It was possible, though no doubt singular, that that

date should have been inserted in the partnership deed, and the deed

itself be executed afterwards. But then the woman Bolster told them

that she had been called to act as witness but once in her life, and

if they believed her in that statement, the possibility of error as

to the date would be of little or no avail on behalf of Lady Mason.

For himself, he could not say that adequate ground had been shown

for charging Bolster with swearing falsely. No doubt she had been

obstinate in her method of giving her testimony, but that might have

arisen from an honest resolution on her part not to allow herself to

be shaken. The value of her testimony must, however, be judged by

the jury themselves. As regarded Kenneby, he must say that the man

had been very stupid. No one who had heard him would accuse him for

a moment of having intended to swear falsely, but the jury might

perhaps think that the testimony of such a man could not be taken as

having much value with reference to circumstances which happened more

than twenty years since.

The charge took over two hours, but the substance of it has been

stated. Then the jury retired to consider their verdict, and the

judge, and the barristers, and some other jury proceeded to the

business of some other and less important trial. Lady Mason and Mrs.

Orme sat for a while in their seats--perhaps for a space of twenty

minutes--and then, as the jury did not at once return into court,

they retired to the sitting-room in which they had first been placed.

Here Mr. Aram accompanied them, and here they were of course met by

Peregrine Orme.

"His lordship's charge was very good--very good, indeed," said Mr.

Aram.

"Was it?" asked Peregrine.

"And very much in our favour," continued the attorney.

"You think then," said Mrs. Orme, looking up into his face, "you

think that--" But she did not know how to go on with her question.

"Yes, I do. I think we shall have a verdict; I do, indeed. I would

not say so before Lady Mason if my opinion was not very strong. The

jury may disagree. That is not improbable. But I cannot anticipate

that the verdict will be against us."

There was some comfort in this; but how wretched was the nature of

the comfort! Did not the attorney, in every word which he spoke,

declare his own conviction of his client's guilt. Even Peregrine Orme

could not say out boldly that he felt sure of an acquittal because

no other verdict could be justly given. And then why was not Mr.

Furnival there, taking his friend by the hand and congratulating her

that her troubles were so nearly over? Mr. Furnival at this time did

not come near her; and had he done so, what could he have said to

her?

He and Sir Richard Leatherham left the court together, and the latter

went at once back to London without waiting to hear the verdict. Mr.

Chaffanbrass also, and Felix Graham retired from the scene of their

labours, and as they did so, a few words were spoken between them.

"Mr. Graham," said the ancient hero of the Old Bailey, "you are too

great for this kind of work I take it. If I were you, I would keep

out of it for the future."

"I am very much of the same way of thinking, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said

the other.

"If a man undertakes a duty, he should do it. That's my opinion,

though I confess it's a little old fashioned; especially if he takes

money for it, Mr. Graham." And then the old man glowered at him with

his fierce eyes, and nodded his head and went on. What could Graham

say to him? His answer would have been ready enough had there been

time or place in which to give it. But he had no answer ready

which was fit for the crowded hall of the court-house, and so Mr.

Chaffanbrass went on his way. He will now pass out of our sight,

and we will say of him, that he did his duty well according to his

lights.

There, in that little room, sat Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme till late in

the evening, and there, with them, remained Peregrine. Some sort of

refreshment was procured for them, but of the three days they passed

in the court, that, perhaps, was the most oppressive. There was

no employment for them, and then the suspense was terrible! That

suspense became worse and worse as the hours went on, for it was

clear that at any rate some of the jury were anxious to give a

verdict against her. "They say that there's eight and four," said Mr.

Aram, at one of the many visits which he made to them; "but there's

no saying how true that may be."

"Eight and four!" said Peregrine.

"Eight to acquit, and four for guilty," said Aram. "If so, we're

safe, at any rate, till the next assizes."

But it was not fated that Lady Mason should be sent away from the

court in doubt. At eight o'clock Mr. Aram came to them, hot with

haste, and told them that the jury had sent for the judge. The judge

had gone home to his dinner, but would return to court at once when

he heard that the jury had agreed.

"And must we go into court again?" said Mrs. Orme.

"Lady Mason must do so."

"Then of course I shall go with her. Are you ready now, dear?"

Lady Mason was unable to speak, but she signified that she was ready,

and then they went into court. The jury were already in the box, and

as the two ladies took their seats, the judge entered. But few of the

gas-lights were lit, so that they in the court could hardly see each

other, and the remaining ceremony did not take five minutes.

"Not guilty, my lord," said the foreman. Then the verdict was

recorded, and the judge went back to his dinner. Joseph Mason and

Dockwrath were present and heard the verdict. I will leave the reader

to imagine with what an appetite they returned to their chamber.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

I LOVE HER STILL.

It was all over now, and as Lucius had said to his mother, there was

nothing left for them but to go and hide themselves. The verdict had

reached him before his mother's return, and on the moment of his

hearing it he sat down and commenced the following letter to Mr.

Furnival:--

Orley Farm, March --, 18--.

DEAR SIR,

I beg to thank you, in my mother's name, for your great

exertions in the late trial. I must acknowledge that I

have been wrong in thinking that you gave her bad advice,

and am now convinced that you acted with the best judgment

on her behalf. May I beg that you will add to your great

kindness by inducing the gentlemen who undertook the

management of the case as my mother's attorneys to let

me know as soon as possible in what sum I am indebted to

them?

I believe I need trouble you with no preamble as to my

reasons when I tell you that I have resolved to abandon

immediately any title that I may have to the possession of

Orley Farm, and to make over the property at once, in any

way that may be most efficacious, to my half-brother,

Mr. Joseph Mason, of Groby Park. I so strongly feel the

necessity of doing this at once, without even a day's

delay, that I shall take my mother to lodgings in London

to-morrow, and shall then decide on what steps it may be

best that we shall take. My mother will be in possession

of about Â£200 a year, subject to such deduction as the

cost of the trial may make from it.

I hope that you will not think that I intrude upon you

too far when I ask you to communicate with my brother's

lawyers on the subject of this surrender. I do not know

how else to do it; and of course you will understand that

I wish to screen my mother's name as much as may be in my

power with due regard to honesty. I hope I need not insist

on the fact,--for it is a fact,--that nothing will change

my purpose as to this. If I cannot have it done through

you, I must myself go to Mr. Round. I am, moreover, aware

that in accordance with strict justice my brother should

have upon me a claim for the proceeds of the estate since

the date of our father's death. If he wishes it I will

give him such claim, making myself his debtor by any

form that may be legal. He must, however, in such case

be made to understand that his claim will be against a

beggar; but, nevertheless, it may suit his views to have

such a claim upon me. I cannot think that, under the

circumstances, I should be justified in calling on my

mother to surrender her small income; but should you be of

a different opinion, it shall be done.

I write thus to you at once as I think that not a day

should be lost. I will trouble you with another line from

London, to let you know what is our immediate address.

Pray believe me to be

Yours, faithfully and obliged,

LUCIUS MASON.

T. Furnival, Esq.,

Old Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

As soon as he had completed this letter, which was sufficiently good

for its purpose, and clearly explained what was the writer's will on

the subject of it, he wrote another, which I do not think was equally

efficacious. The second was addressed to Miss Furnival, and being

a love letter, was not so much within the scope of the writer's

peculiar powers.

DEAREST SOPHIA,

I hardly know how to address you; or what I should tell

you or what conceal. Were we together, and was that

promise renewed which you once gave me, I should tell you

all;--but this I cannot do by letter. My mother's trial is

over, and she is acquitted; but that which I have learned

during the trial has made me feel that I am bound to

relinquish to my brother-in-law all my title to Orley

Farm, and I have already taken the first steps towards

doing so. Yes, Sophia, I am now a beggar on the face of

the world. I have nothing belonging to me, save those

powers of mind and body which God has given me; and I am,

moreover, a man oppressed with a terribly heavy load of

grief. For some short time I must hide myself with my

mother; and then, when I shall have been able to brace

my mind to work, I shall go forth and labour in whatever

field may be open to me.

But before I go, Sophia, I wish to say a word of farewell

to you, that I may understand on what terms we part. Of

course I make no claim. I am aware that that which I now

tell you must be held as giving you a valid excuse for

breaking any contract that there may have been between

us. But, nevertheless, I have hope. That I love you very

dearly I need hardly now say; and I still venture to think

that the time may come when I shall again prove myself

to be worthy of your hand. If you have ever loved me you

cannot cease to do so merely because I am unfortunate; and

if you love me still, perhaps you will consent to wait. If

you will do so,--if you will say that I am rich in that

respect,--I shall go to my banishment not altogether a

downcast man.

May I say that I am still your own

LUCIUS MASON?

No; he decidedly might not say so. But as the letter was not

yet finished when his mother and Mrs. Orme returned, I will not

anticipate matters by giving Miss Furnival's reply.

Mrs. Orme came back that night to Orley Farm, but without the

intention of remaining there. Her task was over, and it would be well

that she should return to The Cleeve. Her task was over; and as the

hour must come in which she would leave the mother in the hands of

her son, the present hour would be as good as any.

They again went together to the room which they had shared for the

last night or two, and there they parted. They had not been there

long when the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel, and Mrs. Orme

got up from her seat. "There is Peregrine with the carriage," said

she.

"And you are going?" said Lady Mason.

"If I could do you good, I would stay," said Mrs. Orme.

"No, no; of course you must go. Oh, my darling, oh, my friend," and

she threw herself into the other's arms.

"Of course I will write to you," said Mrs. Orme. "I will do so

regularly."

"May God bless you for ever. But it is needless to ask for blessings

on such as you. You are blessed."

"And you too;--if you will turn to Him you will be blessed."

"Ah me. Well, I can try now. I feel that I can at any rate try."

"And none who try ever fail. And now, dear, good-bye."

"Good-bye, my angel. But, Mrs. Orme, I have one word I must first

say; a message that I must send to him. Tell him this, that never in

my life have I loved any man as well as I have loved him and as I do

love him. That on my knees I beg his pardon for the wrong I have done

him."

"But he knows how great has been your goodness to him."

"When the time came I was not quite a devil to drag him down with me

to utter destruction!"

"He will always remember what was your conduct then."

"But tell him, that though I loved him, and though I loved you with

all my heart,--with all my heart, I knew through it all, as I know

now, that I was not a fitting friend for him or you. No; do not

interrupt me, I always knew it; and though it was so sweet to me to

see your faces, I would have kept away; but that he would not have

it. I came to him to assist me because he was great and strong, and

he took me to his bosom with his kindness, till I destroyed his

strength; though his greatness nothing can destroy."

"No, no; he does not think that you have injured him."

"But tell him what I say; and tell him that a poor bruised, broken

creature, who knows at least her own vileness, will pray for him

night and morning. And now good-bye. Of my heart towards you I cannot

speak."

"Good-bye then, and, Lady Mason, never despair. There is always room

for hope; and where there is hope there need not be unhappiness."

Then they parted, and Mrs. Orme went down to her son.

"Mother, the carriage is here," he said.

"Yes, I heard it. Where is Lucius? Good-bye, Mr. Mason."

"God bless you, Mrs. Orme. Believe me I know how good you have been

to us."

As she gave him her hand, she spoke a few words to him. "My last

request to you, Mr. Mason, is to beg that you will be tender to your

mother."

"I will do my best, Mrs. Orme."

"All her sufferings and your own, have come from her great love for

you."

"That I know and feel, but had her ambition for me been less it would

have been better for both of us." And there he stood bare-headed at

the door while Peregrine Orme handed his mother into the carriage.

Thus Mrs. Orme took her last leave of Orley Farm, and was parted from

the woman she had loved with so much truth and befriended with so

much loyalty.

Very few words were spoken in the carriage between Peregrine and

his mother while they were being taken back through Hamworth to The

Cleeve. To Peregrine the whole matter was unintelligible. He knew

that the verdict had been in favour of Lady Mason, and yet there

had been no signs of joy at Orley Farm, or even of contentment. He

had heard also from Lucius, while they had been together for a few

minutes, that Orley Farm was to be given up.

"You'll let it I suppose," Peregrine had asked.

"It will not be mine to let. It will belong to my brother," Lucius

had answered. Then Peregrine had asked no further question; nor had

Lucius offered any further information.

But his mother, as he knew, was worn out with the work she had done,

and at the present moment he felt that the subject was one which

would hardly bear questions. So he sat by her side in silence; and

before the carriage had reached The Cleeve his mind had turned away

from the cares and sorrows of Lady Mason, and was once more at

Noningsby. After all, as he said to himself, who could be worse off

than he was. He had nothing to hope.

They found Sir Peregrine standing in the hall to receive them, and

Mrs. Orme, though she had been absent only three days, could not but

perceive the havoc which this trial had made upon him. It was not

that the sufferings of those three days had broken him down, but that

now, after that short absence, she was able to perceive how great had

been upon him the effect of his previous sufferings. He had never

held up his head since the day on which Lady Mason had made to him

her first confession. Up to that time he had stood erect, and though

as he walked his steps had shown that he was no longer young, he

had walked with a certain air of strength and manly bearing. Till

Lady Mason had come to The Cleeve no one would have said that Sir

Peregrine looked as though his energy and life had passed away. But

now, as he put his arm round his daughter's waist, and stooped down

to kiss her cheek, he was a worn-out, tottering old man.

During these three days he had lived almost altogether alone, and had

been ashamed to show to those around him the intense interest which

he felt in the result of the trial. His grandson had on each day

breakfasted alone, and had left the house before his grandfather was

out of his room; and on each evening he had returned late,--as he

now returned with his mother,--and had dined alone. Then he had sat

with his grandfather for an hour or two, and had been constrained

to talk over the events of the day without being allowed to ask Sir

Peregrine's opinion as to Lady Mason's innocence or to express his

own. These three days had been dreadful to Sir Peregrine. He had not

left the house, but had crept about from room to room, ever and again

taking up some book or paper and putting it down unread, as his mind

reverted to the one subject which now for him bore any interest. On

the second of these three days a note had been brought to him from

his old friend Lord Alston. "Dear Orme," the note had run, "I am not

quite happy as I think of the manner in which we parted the other

day. If I offended in any degree, I send this as a peacemaker, and

beg to shake your hand heartily. Let me have a line from you to say

that it is all right between us. Neither you nor I can afford to

lose an old friend at our time of life. Yours always, Alston." But

Sir Peregrine had not answered it. Lord Alston's servant had been

dismissed with a promise that an answer should be sent, but at the

end of the three days it had not yet been written. His mind indeed

was still sore towards Lord Alston. The counsel which his old friend

had given him was good and true, but it had been neglected, and its

very truth and excellence now made the remembrance of it unpalatable.

He had, nevertheless, intended to write; but the idea of such

exertion from hour to hour had become more distressing to him.

He had of course heard of Lady Mason's acquittal; and indeed tidings

of the decision to which the jury had come went through the country

very quickly. There is a telegraphic wire for such tidings which has

been very long in use, and which, though always used, is as yet but

very little understood. How is it that information will spread itself

quicker than men can travel, and make its way like water into all

parts of the world? It was known all through the country that night

that Lady Mason was acquitted; and before the next night it was as

well known that she had acknowledged her guilt by giving up the

property.

Little could be said as to the trial while Peregrine remained in the

room with his mother and his grandfather; but this he had the tact to

perceive, and soon left them together. "I shall see you, mother, up

stairs before you go to bed," he said as he sauntered out.

"But you must not keep her up," said his grandfather. "Remember all

that she has gone through." With this injunction he went off, and as

he sat alone in his mother's room he tried to come to some resolution

as to Noningsby. He knew he had no ground for hope;--no chance, as

he would have called it. And if so, would it not be better that

he should take himself off? Nevertheless he would go to Noningsby

once more. He would not be such a coward but that he would wish her

good-bye before he went, and hear the end of it all from her own

lips.

When he had left the room Lady Mason's last message was given to Sir

Peregrine. "Poor soul, poor soul!" he said, as Mrs. Orme began her

story. "Her son knows it all then now."

"I told him last night,--with her consent; so that he should not go

into the court to-day. It would have been very bad, you know, if they

had--found her guilty."

"Yes, yes; very bad--very bad indeed. Poor creature! And so you told

him. How did he bear it?"

"On the whole, well. At first he would not believe me."

"As for me, I could not have done it. I could not have told him."

"Yes, sir, you would;--you would, if it had been required of you."

"I think it would have killed me. But a woman can do things for which

a man's courage would never be sufficient. And he bore it manfully."

"He was very stern."

"Yes;--and he will be stern. Poor soul!--I pity her from my very

heart. But he will not desert her; he will do his duty by her."

"I am sure he will. In that respect he is a good young man."

"Yes, my dear. He is one of those who seem by nature created to bear

adversity. No trouble or sorrow would I think crush him. But had

prosperity come to him, it would have made him odious to all around

him. You were not present when they met?"

"No--I thought it better to leave them."

"Yes, yes. And he will give up the place at once."

"To-morrow he will do so. In that at any rate he has true spirit.

To-morrow early they will go to London, and she I suppose will never

see Orley Farm again." And then Mrs. Orme gave Sir Peregrine that

last message.--"I tell you everything as she told me," Mrs. Orme

said, seeing how deeply he was affected. "Perhaps I am wrong."

"No, no, no," he said.

"Coming at such a moment, her words seemed to be almost sacred."

"They are sacred. They shall be sacred. Poor soul, poor soul!"

"She did a great crime."

"Yes, yes."

"But if a crime can be forgiven,--can be excused on account of its

motives--"

"It cannot, my dear. Nothing can be forgiven on that ground."

"No; we know that; we all feel sure of that. But yet how can one help

loving her? For myself, I shall love her always."

"And I also love her." And then the old man made his confession.

"I loved her well;--better than I had ever thought to love any one

again, but you and Perry. I loved her very dearly, and felt that I

should have been proud to have called her my wife. How beautiful she

was in her sorrow, when we thought that her life had been pure and

good!"

"And it had been good,--for many years past."

"No; for the stolen property was still there. But yet how graceful

she was, and how well her sorrows sat upon her! What might she not

have done had the world used her more kindly, and not sent in her

way that sore temptation! She was a woman for a man to have loved to

madness."

"And yet how little can she have known of love!"

"I loved her." And as the old man said so he rose to his feet with

some show of his old energy. "I loved her,--with all my heart! It is

foolish for an old man so to say; but I did love her; nay, I love her

still. But that I knew that it would be wrong,--for your sake, and

for Perry's--" And then he stopped himself, as though he would fain

hear what she might say to him.

"Yes; it is all over now," she said in the softest, sweetest, lowest

voice. She knew that she was breaking down a last hope, but she knew

also that that hope was vain. And then there was silence in the room

for some ten minutes' space.

"It is all over," he then said, repeating her last words.

"But you have us still,--Perry and me. Can any one love you better

than we do?" And she got up and went over to him and stood by him,

and leaned upon him.

"Edith, my love, since you came to my house there has been an angel

in it watching over me. I shall know that always; and when I turn

my face to the wall, as I soon shall, that shall be my last earthly

thought." And so in tears they parted for that night. But the sorrow

that was bringing him to his grave came from the love of which he had

spoken. It is seldom that a young man may die from a broken heart;

but if an old man have a heart still left to him, it is more fragile.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

JOHN KENNEBY'S DOOM.

On the evening but one after the trial was over Mr. Moulder

entertained a few friends to supper at his apartments in Great St.

Helen's, and it was generally understood that in doing so he intended

to celebrate the triumph of Lady Mason. Through the whole affair he

had been a strong partisan on her side, had expressed a very loud

opinion in favour of Mr. Furnival, and had hoped that that scoundrel

Dockwrath would get all that he deserved from the hands of Mr.

Chaffanbrass. When the hour of Mr. Dockwrath's punishment had come he

had been hardly contented, but the inadequacy of Kenneby's testimony

had restored him to good humour, and the verdict had made him

triumphant.

"Didn't I know it, old fellow?" he had said, slapping his friend

Snengkeld on the back. "When such a low scoundrel as Dockwrath is

pitted against a handsome woman like Lady Mason he'll not find a jury

in England to give a verdict in his favour." Then he asked Snengkeld

to come to his little supper; and Kantwise also he invited, though

Kantwise had shown Dockwrath tendencies throughout the whole

affair;--but Moulder was fond of Kantwise as a butt for his own

sarcasm. Mrs. Smiley, too, was asked, as was natural, seeing that she

was the betrothed bride of one of the heroes of the day; and Moulder,

in the kindness of his heart, swore that he never was proud, and told

Bridget Bolster that she would be welcome to take a share of what was

going.

"Laws, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, when she was told of this. "A

chambermaid from an inn! What will Mrs. Smiley say?"

"I ain't going to trouble myself with what Mother Smiley may say or

think about my friends. If she don't like it, she may do the other

thing. What was she herself when you first knew her?"

"Yes, Moulder; but then money do make a difference, you know."

Bridget Bolster, however, was invited, and she came in spite of the

grandeur of Mrs. Smiley. Kenneby also of course was there, but he was

not in a happy frame of mind. Since that wretched hour in which he

had heard himself described by the judge as too stupid to be held

of any account by the jury he had become a melancholy, misanthropic

man. The treatment which he received from Mr. Furnival had been very

grievous to him, but he had borne with that, hoping that some word of

eulogy from the judge would set him right in the public mind. But no

such word had come, and poor John Kenneby felt that the cruel hard

world was too much for him. He had been with his sister that morning,

and words had dropped from him which made her fear that he would

wish to postpone his marriage for another space of ten years or so.

"Brick-fields!" he had said. "What can such a one as I have to do

with landed property? I am better as I am."

Mrs. Smiley, however, did not at all seem to think so, and welcomed

John Kenneby back from Alston very warmly in spite of the disgrace to

which he had been subjected. It was nothing to her that the judge had

called her future lord a fool; nor indeed was it anything to any one

but himself. According to Moulder's views it was a matter of course

that a witness should be abused. For what other purpose was he had

into the court? But deep in the mind of poor Kenneby himself the

injurious words lay festering. He had struggled hard to tell the

truth, and in doing so had simply proved himself to be an ass. "I

ain't fit to live with anybody else but myself," he said to himself,

as he walked down Bishopsgate Street.

At this time Mrs. Smiley was not yet there. Bridget had arrived, and

had been seated in a chair at one corner of the fire. Mrs. Moulder

occupied one end of a sofa opposite, leaving the place of honour at

the other end for Mrs. Smiley. Moulder sat immediately in front of

the fire in his own easy chair, and Snengkeld and Kantwise were on

each side of him. They were of course discussing the trial when Mrs.

Smiley was announced; and it was well that she made a diversion by

her arrival, for words were beginning to run high.

"A jury of her countrymen has found her innocent," Moulder had said

with much heat; "and any one who says she's guilty after that is

a libeller and a coward, to my way of thinking. If a jury of her

countrymen don't make a woman innocent, what does?"

"Of course she's innocent," said Snengkeld; "from the very moment

the words was spoken by the foreman. If any newspaper was to say she

wasn't she'd have her action."

"That's all very well," said Kantwise, looking up to the ceiling

with his eyes nearly shut. "But you'll see. What'll you bet me, Mr.

Moulder, that Joseph Mason don't get the property?"

"Gammon!" answered Moulder.

"Well, it may be gammon; but you'll see."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Smiley, sailing into the room;

"upon my word one hears all you say ever so far down the street."

"And I didn't care if they heard it right away to the Mansion House,"

said Moulder. "We ain't talking treason, nor yet highway robbery."

Then Mrs. Smiley was welcomed;--her bonnet was taken from her and her

umbrella, and she was encouraged to spread herself out over the sofa.

"Oh, Mrs. Bolster; the witness!" she said, when Mrs. Moulder went

through some little ceremony of introduction. And from the tone of

her voice it appeared that she was not quite satisfied that Mrs.

Bolster should be there as a companion for herself.

"Yes, ma'am. I was the witness as had never signed but once," said

Bridget, getting up and curtsying. Then she sat down again, folding

her hands one over the other on her lap.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Smiley. "But where's the other witness, Mrs.

Moulder? He's the one who is a deal more interesting to me. Ha, ha,

ha! But as you all know it here, what's the good of not telling the

truth? Ha, ha, ha!"

"John's here," said Mrs. Moulder. "Come, John, why don't you show

yourself?"

"He's just alive, and that's about all you can say for him," said

Moulder.

"Why, what's there been to kill him?" said Mrs. Smiley. "Well, John,

I must say you're rather backward in coming forward, considering what

there's been between us. You might have come and taken my shawl, I'm

thinking."

"Yes, I might," said Kenneby gloomily. "I hope I see you pretty well,

Mrs. Smiley."

"Pretty bobbish, thank you. Only I think it might have been Maria

between friends like us."

"He's sadly put about by this trial," whispered Mrs. Moulder. "You

know he is so tender-hearted that he can't bear to be put upon like

another."

"But you didn't want her to be found guilty; did you, John?"

"That I'm sure he didn't," said Moulder. "Why it was the way he gave

his evidence that brought her off."

"It wasn't my wish to bring her off," said Kenneby; "nor was it my

wish to make her guilty. All I wanted was to tell the truth and do my

duty. But it was no use. I believe it never is any use."

"I think you did very well," said Moulder.

"I'm sure Lady Mason ought to be very much obliged to you," said

Kantwise.

"Nobody needn't care for what's said to them in a court," said

Snengkeld. "I remember when once they wanted to make out that I'd

taken a parcel of teas--"

"Stolen, you mean, sir," suggested Mrs. Smiley.

"Yes; stolen. But it was only done by the opposite side in court, and

I didn't think a halfporth of it. They knew where the teas was well

enough."

"Speaking for myself," said Kenneby, "I must say I don't like it."

"But the paper as we signed," said Bridget, "wasn't the old

gentleman's will,--no more than this is;" and she lifted up her

apron. "I'm rightly sure of that."

Then again the battle raged hot and furious, and Moulder became angry

with his guest, Bridget Bolster. Kantwise finding himself supported

in his views by the principal witness at the trial took heart

against the tyranny of Moulder and expressed his opinion, while Mrs.

Smiley, with a woman's customary dislike to another woman, sneered

ill-naturedly at the idea of Lady Mason's innocence. Poor Kenneby had

been forced to take the middle seat on the sofa between his bride and

sister; but it did not appear that the honour of his position had

any effect in lessening his gloom or mitigating the severity of the

judgment which had been passed on him.

"Wasn't the old gentleman's will!" said Moulder, turning on poor

Bridget in his anger with a growl. "But I say it was the old

gentleman's will. You never dared say as much as that in court."

"I wasn't asked," said Bridget.

"You weren't asked! Yes, you was asked often enough."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Kantwise, "Mrs. Bolster's right in

what she says as sure as your name's Moulder."

"Then as sure as my name's Moulder she's wrong. I suppose we're to

think that a chap like you knows more about it than the jury! We all

know who your friend is in the matter. I haven't forgot our dinner at

Leeds, nor sha'n't in a hurry."

"Now, John," said Mrs. Smiley, "nobody can know the truth of this so

well as you do. You've been as close as wax, as was all right till

the lady was out of her troubles. That's done and over, and let us

hear among friends how the matter really was." And then there was

silence among them in order that his words might come forth freely.

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Smiley with a tone of encouraging love.

"There can't be any harm now; can there?"

"Out with it, John," said Moulder. "You're honest, anyways."

"There ain't no gammon about you," said Snengkeld.

"Mr. Kenneby can speak if he likes, no doubt," said Kantwise; "though

maybe it mayn't be very pleasant to him to do so after all that's

come and gone."

"There's nothing that's come and gone that need make our John hold

his tongue," said Mrs. Moulder. "He mayn't be just as bright as some

of those lawyers, but he's a deal more true-hearted."

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we

signed. I'm well assured of that," said Bridget.

But Kenneby, though thus called upon by the united strength of the

company to solve all their doubts, still remained silent. "Come,

lovey," said Mrs. Smiley, putting forth her hand and giving his arm a

tender squeeze.

"If you've anything to say to clear that woman's character," said

Moulder, "you owe it to society to say it; because she is a woman,

and because her enemies is villains." And then again there was

silence while they waited for him.

"I think it will go with him to his grave," said Mrs. Smiley, very

solemnly.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Snengkeld.

"Then he must give up all idea of taking a wife," said Moulder.

"He won't do that I'm sure," said Mrs. Smiley.

"That he won't. Will you, John?" said his sister.

"There's no knowing what may happen to me in this world," said

Kenneby, "but sometimes I almost think I ain't fit to live in it,

along with anybody else."

"You'll make him fit, won't you, my dear?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"I don't exactly know what to say about it," said Mrs. Smiley. "If

Mr. Kenneby ain't willing, I'm not the woman to bind him to his word,

because I've had his promise over and over again, and could prove

it by a number of witnesses before any jury in the land. I'm an

independent woman as needn't be beholden to any man, and I should

never think of damages. Smiley left me comfortable before all the

world, and I don't know but what I'm a fool to think of changing.

Anyways if Mr. Kenneby--"

"Come, John. Why don't you speak to her?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"And what am I to say?" said Kenneby, thrusting himself forth from

between the ample folds of the two ladies' dresses. "I'm a blighted

man; one on whom the finger of scorn has been pointed. His lordship

said that I was--stupid; and perhaps I am."

"She don't think nothing of that, John."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley.

"As long as a man can pay twenty shillings in the pound and a trifle

over, what does it matter if all the judges in the land was to call

him stupid?" said Snengkeld.

"Stupid is as stupid does," said Kantwise.

"Stupid be d----," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, there's ladies present," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Come, John, rouse yourself a bit," said his sister. "Nobody here

thinks the worse of you for what the judge said."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley. "And as it becomes me to speak,

I'll say my mind. I'm accustomed to speak freely before friends, and

as we are all friends here, why should I be ashamed?"

"For the matter of that nobody says you are," said Moulder.

"And I don't mean, Mr. Moulder. Why should I? I can pay my way, and

do what I like with my own, and has people to mind me when I speak,

and needn't mind nobody else myself;--and that's more than everybody

can say. Here's John Kenneby and I, is engaged as man and wife. He

won't say as it's not so, I'll be bound."

"No," said Kenneby, "I'm engaged I know."

"When I accepted John Kenneby's hand and heart,--and well I remember

the beauteous language in which he expressed his feelings, and always

shall,--I told him, that I respected him as a man that would do his

duty by a woman, though perhaps he mightn't be so cute in the way

of having much to say for himself as some others. 'What's the good,'

said I, 'of a man's talking, if so be he's ashamed to meet the baker

at the end of the week?' So I listened to the vows he made me, and

have considered that he and I was as good as one. Now that he's been

put upon by them lawyers, I'm not the woman to turn my back upon

him."

"That you're not," said Moulder.

"No I ain't, Mr. Moulder, and so, John, there's my hand again, and

you're free to take it if you like." And so saying she put forth her

hand almost into his lap.

"Take it, John!" said Mrs. Moulder. But poor Kenneby himself did not

seem to be very quick in availing himself of the happiness offered to

him. He did raise his right arm slightly; but then he hesitated, and

allowed it to fall again between him and his sister.

"Come, John, you know you mean it," said Mrs. Moulder. And then with

both her hands she lifted his, and placed it bodily within the grasp

of Mrs. Smiley's, which was still held forth to receive it.

"I know I'm engaged," said Kenneby.

"There's no mistake about it," said Moulder.

"There needn't be none," said Mrs. Smiley, softly blushing; "and I

will say this of myself--as I have been tempted to give a promise,

I'm not the woman to go back from my word. There's my hand, John; and

I don't care though all the world hears me say so." And then they sat

hand in hand for some seconds, during which poor Kenneby was unable

to escape from the grasp of his bride elect. One may say that all

chance of final escape for him was now gone by.

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentlemen's will as we

signed," said Bridget, breaking the silence which ensued.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said Kantwise, "as Mrs. Bolster has

come back to that matter, I'll tell you something that will surprise

you. My friend Mr. Moulder here, who is as hospitable a gentleman as

I know anywhere wouldn't just let me speak before."

"That's gammon, Kantwise. I never hindered you from speaking."

"How I do hate that word. If you knew my aversion, Mr. Moulder--"

"I can't pick my words for you, old fellow."

"But what were you going to tell us, Mr. Kantwise?" said Mrs. Smiley.

"Something that will make all your hairs stand on end, I think." And

then he paused and looked round upon them all. It was at this moment

that Kenneby succeeded in getting his hand once more to himself.

"Something that will surprise you all, or I'm very much mistaken.

Lady Mason has confessed her guilt."

He had surprised them all. "You don't say so," exclaimed Mrs.

Moulder.

"Confessed her guilt," said Mrs. Smiley. "But what guilt, Mr.

Kantwise?"

"She forged the will," said Kantwise.

"I knew that all along," said Bridget Bolster.

"I'm d---- if I believe it," said Moulder.

"You can do as you like about that," said Kantwise; "but she has.

And I'll tell you what's more: she and young Mason have already left

Orley Farm and given it all up into Joseph Mason's hands."

"But didn't she get a verdict?" asked Snengkeld.

"Yes, she got a verdict. There's no doubt on earth about that."

"Then it's my opinion she can't make herself guilty if she wished it;

and as for the property, she can't give it up. The jury has found a

verdict, and nobody can go beyond that. If anybody tries she'll have

her action against 'em." That was the law as laid down by Snengkeld.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Moulder. "Dockwrath has told

him. I'll bet a hat that Kantwise got it from Dockwrath."

It turned out that Kantwise had received his information from

Dockwrath; but nevertheless, there was that in his manner, and in the

nature of the story as it was told to them, that did produce belief.

Moulder for a long time held out, but it became clear at last that

even he was shaken; and now, even Kenneby acknowledged his conviction

that the signature to the will was not his own.

"I know'd very well that I never did it twice," said Bridget Bolster

triumphantly, as she sat down to the supper table.

I am inclined to think, that upon the whole the company in Great St.

Helen's became more happy as the conviction grew upon them that a

great and mysterious crime had been committed, which had baffled two

courts of law, and had at last thrust itself forth into the open

daylight through the workings of the criminal's conscience. When

Kantwise had completed his story, the time had come in which it

behoved Mrs. Moulder to descend to the lower regions, and give some

aid in preparation of the supper. During her absence the matter

was discussed in every way, and on her return, when she was laden

with good things, she found that all the party was contented except

Moulder and her brother.

"It's a very terrible thing," said Mrs. Smiley, later in the evening,

as she sat with her steaming glass of rum and water before her. "Very

terrible indeed; ain't it, John? I do wish now I'd gone down and

see'd her, I do indeed. Don't you, Mrs. Moulder?"

"If all this is true I should like just to have had a peep at her."

"At any rate we shall have pictures of her in all the papers," said

Mrs. Smiley.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE LAST OF THE LAWYERS.

"I should have done my duty by you, Mr. Mason, which those men have

not, and you would at this moment have been the owner of Orley Farm."

It will easily be known that these words were spoken by Mr.

Dockwrath, and that they were addressed to Joseph Mason. The two

men were seated together in Mr. Mason's lodgings at Alston, late

on the morning after the verdict had been given, and Mr. Dockwrath

was speaking out his mind with sufficient freedom. On the previous

evening he had been content to put up with the misery of the

unsuccessful man, and had not added any reproaches of his own. He

also had been cowed by the verdict, and the two had been wretched and

crestfallen together. But the attorney since that had slept upon the

matter, and had bethought himself that he at any rate would make out

his little bill. He could show that Mr. Mason had ruined their joint

affairs by his adherence to those London attorneys. Had Mr. Mason

listened to the advice of his new adviser all would have been well.

So at least Dockwrath was prepared to declare, finding that by so

doing he would best pave the way for his own important claim.

But Mr. Mason was not a man to be bullied with tame endurance. "The

firm bears the highest name in the profession, sir," he said; "and I

had just grounds for trusting them."

"And what has come of your just grounds, Mr. Mason? Where are you?

That's the question. I say that Round and Crook have thrown you over.

They have been hand and glove with old Furnival through the whole

transaction; and I'll tell you what's more, Mr. Mason. I told you how

it would be from the beginning."

"I'll move for a new trial."

"A new trial; and this a criminal prosecution! She's free of you now

for ever, and Orley Farm will belong to that son of hers till he

chooses to sell it. It's a pity; that's all. I did my duty by you

in a professional way, Mr. Mason; and you won't put the loss on my

shoulders."

"I've been robbed;--damnably robbed, that's all that I know."

"There's no mistake on earth about that, Mr. Mason; you have been

robbed; and the worst of it is, the costs will be so heavy! You'll be

going down to Yorkshire soon I suppose, sir."

"I don't know where I shall go!" said the squire of Groby, not

content to be cross-questioned by the attorney from Hamworth.

"Because it's as well, I suppose, that we should settle something

about the costs before you leave. I don't want to press for my money

exactly now, but I shall be glad to know when I'm to get it."

"If you have any claim on me, Mr. Dockwrath, you can send it to Mr.

Round."

"If I have any claim! What do you mean by that, sir? And I shall

send nothing in to Mr. Round. I have had quite enough of Mr. Round

already. I told you from the beginning, Mr. Mason, that I would have

nothing to do with this affair as connected with Mr. Round. I have

devoted myself entirely to this matter since you were pleased to

engage my services at Groby Park. It is not by my fault that you have

failed. I think, Mr. Mason, you will do me the justice to acknowledge

that." And then Dockwrath was silent for a moment, as though waiting

for an answer.

"I have nothing to say upon the subject, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mason.

"But, by heaven, something must be said. That won't do at all, Mr.

Mason. I presume you do not think that I have been working like a

slave for the last four months for nothing."

Mr. Mason was in truth an honest man, and did not wish that any one

should work on his account for nothing;--much less did he wish that

such a one as Dockwrath should do so. But then, on the other side,

in his present frame of mind he was by no means willing to yield

anything to any one. "I neither deny nor allow your claim, Mr.

Dockwrath," said he. "But I shall pay nothing except through my

regular lawyers. You can send your account to me if you please, but I

shall send it on to Mr. Round without looking at it."

"Oh, that's to be the way, is it? That's your gratitude. Very well,

Mr. Mason; I shall now know what to do. And I think you'll find--"

Here Mr. Dockwrath was interrupted by the lodging-house servant, who

brought in a note for Mr. Mason. It was from Mr. Furnival, and the

girl who delivered it said that the gentleman's messenger was waiting

for an answer.

"SIR," said the note,

A communication has been made to me this morning on the

part of your brother, Mr. Lucius Mason, which may make

it desirable that I should have an interview with you.

If not inconvenient to you, I would ask you to meet me

to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock at the chambers of

your own lawyer, Mr. Round, in Bedford Row. I have

already seen Mr. Round, and find that he can meet us.

I am, sir,

Your very obedient servant,

THOMAS FURNIVAL.

J. Mason, Esq., J.P.

(of Groby Park).

Mr. Furnival when he wrote this note had already been over to Orley

Farm, and had seen Lucius Mason. He had been at the farm almost

before daylight, and had come away with the assured conviction that

the property must be abandoned by his client.

"We need not talk about it, Mr. Furnival," Lucius had said. "It must

be so."

"You have discussed the matter with your mother?"

"No discussion is necessary, but she is quite aware of my intention.

She is prepared to leave the place--for ever."

"But the income--"

"Belongs to my brother Joseph. Mr. Furnival, I think you may

understand that the matter is one in which it is necessary that I

should act, but as to which I trust I may not have to say many words.

If you cannot arrange this for me, I must go to Mr. Round."

Of course Mr. Furnival did understand it all. His client had been

acquitted, and he had triumphed; but he had known for many a long day

that the estate did belong of right to Mr. Mason of Groby; and though

he had not suspected that Lucius would have been so told, he could

not be surprised at the result of such telling. It was clear to him

that Lady Mason had confessed, and that restitution would therefore

be made.

"I will do your bidding," said he.

"And, Mr. Furnival,--if it be possible, spare my mother." Then the

meeting was over, and Mr. Furnival returning to Hamworth wrote his

note to Mr. Joseph Mason.

Mr. Dockwrath had been interrupted by the messenger in the middle

of his threat, but he caught the name of Furnival as the note was

delivered. Then he watched Mr. Mason as he read it and read it again.

"If you please, sir, I was to wait for an answer," said the girl.

Mr. Mason did not know what answer it would behove him to give. He

felt that he was among Philistines while dealing with all these

lawyers, and yet he was at a loss in what way to reply to one without

leaning upon another. "Look at that," he said, sulkily handing the

note to Dockwrath.

"You must see Mr. Furnival, by all means," said Dockwrath. "But--"

"But what?"

"In your place I should not see him in the presence of Mr.

Round,--unless I was attended by an adviser on whom I could rely."

Mr. Mason, having given a few moments' consideration to the matter,

sat himself down and wrote a line to Mr. Furnival, saying that he

would be in Bedford Row at the appointed time.

"I think you are quite right," said Dockwrath.

"But I shall go alone," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well; you will of course judge for yourself. I cannot say

what may be the nature of the communication to be made; but if it be

anything touching the property, you will no doubt jeopardise your own

interests by your imprudence."

"Good morning, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well. Good morning, sir. You shall hear from me very

shortly, Mr. Mason; and I must say that, considering everything, I

do not know that I ever came across a gentleman who behaved himself

worse in a peculiar position than you have done in yours." And so

they parted.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on the following day Mr. Mason was in

Bedford Row. "Mr. Furnival is with Mr. Round," said the clerk, "and

will see you in two minutes." Then he was shown into the dingy office

waiting-room, where he sat with his hat in his hand, for rather more

than two minutes.

At that moment Mr. Round was describing to Mr. Furnival the manner

in which he had been visited some weeks since by Sir Peregrine Orme.

"Of course, Mr. Furnival, I knew which way the wind blew when I heard

that."

"She must have told him everything."

"No doubt, no doubt. At any rate he knew it all."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I promised to hold my tongue;--and I kept my promise. Mat knows

nothing about it to this day."

The whole history thus became gradually clear to Mr. Furnival's

mind, and he could understand in what manner that marriage had been

avoided. Mr. Round also understood it, and the two lawyers confessed

together, that though the woman had deserved the punishment which had

come upon her, her character was one which might have graced a better

destiny. "And now, I suppose, my fortunate client may come in," said

Mr. Round. Whereupon the fortunate client was released from his

captivity, and brought into the sitting-room of the senior partner.

"Mr. Mason, Mr. Furnival," said the attorney, as soon as he had

shaken hands with his client. "You know each other very well by name,

gentlemen."

Mr. Mason was very stiff in his bearing and demeanour, but remarked

that he had heard of Mr. Furnival before.

"All the world has heard of him," said Mr. Round. "He hasn't hid

his light under a bushel." Whereupon Mr. Mason bowed, not quite

understanding what was said to him.

"Mr. Mason," began the barrister, "I have a communication to make to

you, very singular in its nature, and of great importance. It is one

which I believe you will regard as being of considerable importance

to yourself, and which is of still higher moment to my--my friend,

Lady Mason."

"Lady Mason, sir--" began the other; but Mr. Furnival stopped him.

"Allow me to interrupt you, Mr. Mason. I think it will be better that

you should hear me before you commit yourself to any expression as to

your relative."

"She is no relative of mine."

"But her son is. However,--if you will allow me, I will go on. Having

this communication to make, I thought it expedient for your own sake

that it should be done in the presence of your own legal adviser and

friend."

"Umph!" grunted the disappointed litigant.

"I have already explained to Mr. Round that which I am about to

explain to you, and he was good enough to express himself as

satisfied with the step which I am taking."

"Quite so, Mr. Mason. Mr. Furnival is behaving, and I believe has

behaved throughout, in a manner becoming the very high position which

he holds in his profession."

"I suppose he has done his best on his side," said Mason.

"Undoubtedly I have,--as I should have done on yours, had it so

chanced that I had been honoured by holding a brief from your

attorneys. But the communication which I am going to make now I make

not as a lawyer but as a friend. Mr. Mason, my client Lady Mason,

and her son Lucius Mason, are prepared to make over to you the full

possession of the estate which they have held under the name of Orley

Farm."

The tidings, as so given, were far from conveying to the sense of the

hearer the full information which they bore. He heard the words, and

at the moment conceived that Orley Farm was intended to come into

his hands by some process to which it was thought desirable that

he should be brought to agree. He was to be induced to buy it, or

to be bought over from further opposition by some concession of an

indefinitely future title. But that the estate was to become his

at once, without purchase, and by the mere free will of his hated

relatives, was an idea that he did not realise.

"Mr. Furnival," he said, "what future steps I shall take I do not yet

know. That I have been robbed of my property I am as firmly convinced

now as ever. But I tell you fairly, and I tell Mr. Round so too, that

I will have no dealings with that woman."

"Your father's widow, sir," said Mr. Furnival, "is an unhappy lady,

who is now doing her best to atone for the only fault of which I

believe her to have been guilty. If you were not unreasonable as well

as angry, you would understand that the proposition which I am now

making to you is one which should force you to forgive any injury

which she may hitherto have done to you. Your half-brother Lucius

Mason has instructed me to make over to you the possession of Orley

Farm." These last words Mr. Furnival uttered very slowly, fixing his

keen grey eyes full upon the face of Joseph Mason as he did so, and

then turning round to the attorney he said, "I presume your client

will understand me now."

"The estate is yours, Mr. Mason," said Round. "You have nothing to do

but to take possession of it."

"What do you mean?" said Mason, turning round upon Furnival.

"Exactly what I say. Your half-brother Lucius surrenders to you the

estate."

"Without payment?"

"Yes; without payment. On his doing so you will of course absolve him

from all liability on account of the proceeds of the property while

in his hands."

"That will be a matter of course," said Mr. Round.

"Then she has robbed me," said Mason, jumping up to his feet. "By

----, the will was forged after all."

"Mr. Mason," said Mr. Round, "if you have a spark of generosity

in you, you will accept the offer made to you without asking any

question. By no such questioning can you do yourself any good,--nor

can you do that poor lady any harm."

"I knew it was so," he said loudly, and as he spoke he twice walked

the length of the room. "I knew it was so;--twenty years ago I

said the same. She forged the will. I ask you, as my lawyer, Mr.

Round,--did she not forge the will herself?"

"I shall answer no such question, Mr. Mason."

"Then by heavens I'll expose you. If I spend the whole value of the

estate in doing it I'll expose you, and have her punished yet. The

slippery villain! For twenty years she has robbed me."

"Mr. Mason, you are forgetting yourself in your passion," said Mr.

Furnival. "What you have to look for now is the recovery of the

property." But here Mr. Furnival showed that he had not made himself

master of Joseph Mason's character.

"No," shouted the angry man;--"no, by heaven. What I have first to

look to is her punishment, and that of those who have assisted her. I

knew she had done it,--and Dockwrath knew it. Had I trusted him, she

would now have been in gaol."

Mr. Furnival and Mr. Round were both desirous of having the matter

quietly arranged, and with this view were willing to put up with

much. The man had been ill used. When he declared for the fortieth

time that he had been robbed for twenty years, they could not deny

it. When with horrid oaths he swore that that will had been a

forgery, they could not contradict him. When he reviled the laws of

his country, which had done so much to facilitate the escape of a

criminal, they had no arguments to prove that he was wrong. They bore

with him in his rage, hoping that a sense of his own self-interest

might induce him to listen to reason. But it was all in vain. The

property was sweet, but that sweetness was tasteless when compared to

the sweetness of revenge.

"Nothing shall make me tamper with justice;--nothing," said he.

"But even if it were as you say, you cannot do anything to her," said

Round.

"I'll try," said Mason. "You have been my attorney, and what you know

in the matter you are bound to tell. And I'll make you tell, sir."

"Upon my word," said Round, "this is beyond bearing. Mr. Mason, I

must trouble you to walk out of my office." And then he rang the

bell. "Tell Mr. Mat I want to see him." But before that younger

partner had joined his father Joseph Mason had gone. "Mat," said the

old man, "I don't interfere with you in many things, but on this I

must insist. As long as my name is in the firm Mr. Joseph Mason of

Groby shall not be among our customers."

"The man's a fool," said Mr. Furnival. "The end of all that will be

that two years will go by before he gets his property; and, in the

meantime, the house and all about it will go to ruin."

In these days there was a delightful family concord between Mr.

Furnival and his wife, and perhaps we may be allowed to hope that the

peace was permanent. Martha Biggs had not been in Harley Street since

we last saw her there, and was now walking round Red Lion Square by

the hour with some kindred spirit, complaining bitterly of the return

which had been made for her friendship. "What I endured, and what I

was prepared to endure for that woman, no breathing creature can ever

know," said Martha Biggs, to that other Martha; "and now--"

"I suppose the fact is he don't like to see you there," said the

other.

"And is that a reason?" said our Martha. "Had I been in her place I

would not have put my foot in his house again till I was assured that

my friend should be as welcome there as myself. But then, perhaps, my

ideas of friendship may be called romantic."

But though there were heart-burnings and war in Red Lion Square,

there was sweet peace in Harley Street. Mrs. Furnival had learned

that beyond all doubt Lady Mason was an unfortunate woman on whose

behalf her husband was using his best energies as a lawyer; and

though rumours had begun to reach her that were very injurious to the

lady's character, she did not on that account feel animosity against

her. Had Lady Mason been guilty of all the sins in the calendar

except one, Mrs. Furnival could find it within her heart to forgive

her.

But Sophia was now more interested about Lady Mason than was her

mother, and during those days of the trial was much more eager to

learn the news as it became known. She had said nothing to her mother

about Lucius, nor had she said anything as to Augustus Staveley. Miss

Furnival was a lady who on such subjects did not want the assistance

of a mother's counsel. Then, early on the morning that followed the

trial, they heard the verdict and knew that Lady Mason was free.

"I am so glad," said Mrs. Furnival; "and I am sure it was your papa's

doing."

"But we will hope that she was really innocent," said Sophia.

"Oh, yes; of course; and so I suppose she was. I am sure I hope so.

But, nevertheless, we all know that it was going very much against

her."

"I believe papa never thought she was guilty for a moment."

"I don't know, my dear; your papa never talks of the clients for whom

he is engaged. But what a thing it is for Lucius! He would have lost

every acre of the property."

"Yes; it's a great thing for him, certainly." And then she began to

consider whether the standing held by Lucius Mason in the world was

not even yet somewhat precarious.

It was on the same day--in the evening--that she received her lover's

letter. She was alone when she read it, and she made herself quite

master of its contents before she sat herself to think in what way it

would be expedient that she should act. "I am bound to relinquish to

my brother-in-law my title to Orley Farm." Why should he be so bound,

unless--? And then she also came to that conclusion which Mr. Round

had reached, and which Joseph Mason had reached, when they heard that

the property was to be given up. "Yes, Sophia, I am a beggar," the

letter went on to say. She was very sorry, deeply sorry;--so, at

least, she said to herself. As she sat there alone, she took out her

handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes. Then, having restored it to

her pocket, after moderate use, she refolded her letter, and put that

into the same receptacle.

"Papa," said she, that evening, "what will Mr. Lucius Mason do now?

will he remain at Orley Farm?"

"No, my dear. He will leave Orley Farm, and, I think, will go abroad

with his mother."

"And who will have Orley Farm?"

"His brother Joseph, I believe."

"And what will Lucius have?"

"I cannot say. I do not know that he will have anything. His mother

has an income of her own, and he, I suppose, will go into some

profession."

"Oh, indeed. Is not that very sad for him, poor fellow?" In answer to

which her father made no remark.

That night, in her own room, she answered her lover's letter, and her

answer was as follows:--

Harley Street, March, 18--.

MY DEAR MR. MASON,

I need hardly tell you that I was grieved to the heart by

the tidings conveyed in your letter. I will not ask you

for that secret which you withhold from me, feeling that

I have no title to inquire into it; nor will I attempt to

guess at the cause which induces you to give up to your

brother the property which you were always taught to

regard as your own. That you are actuated by noble motives

I am sure; and you may be sure of this, that I shall

respect you quite as highly in your adversity as I have

ever done in your prosperity. That you will make your way

in the world, I shall never doubt; and it may be that the

labour which you will now encounter will raise you to

higher standing than any you could have achieved, had the

property remained in your possession.

I think you are right in saying, with reference to our

mutual regard for each other, that neither should be

held as having any claim upon the other. Under present

circumstances, any such claim would be very silly. Nothing

would hamper you in your future career so much as a long

marriage engagement; and for myself, I am aware that the

sorrow and solicitude thence arising would be more than I

could support. Apart from this, also, I feel certain that

I should never obtain my father's sanction for such an

engagement, nor could I make it, unless he sanctioned it.

I feel so satisfied that you will see the truth of this,

that I need not trouble you, and harass my own heart by

pursuing the subject any further.

My feelings of friendship for you--of affectionate

friendship--will be as true as ever. I shall look to your

future career with great hope, and shall hear of your

success with the utmost satisfaction. And I trust that

the time may come, at no very distant date, when we may

all welcome your return to London, and show you that our

regard for you has never been diminished.

May God bless and preserve you in the trials which are

before you, and carry you through them with honour and

safety. Wherever you may be I shall watch for tidings of

you with anxiety, and always hear them with gratification.

I need hardly bid you remember that you have no more

affectionate friend

Than yours always most sincerely,

SOPHIA FURNIVAL.

P.S.--I believe that a meeting between us at the present

moment would only cause pain to both of us. It might drive

you to speak of things which should be wrapped in silence.

At any rate, I am sure that you will not press it on me.

Lucius, when he received this letter, was living with his mother in

lodgings near Finsbury Circus, and the letter had been redirected

from Hamworth to a post-office in that neighbourhood. It was his

intention to take his mother with him to a small town on one of the

rivers that feed the Rhine, and there remain hidden till he could

find some means by which he might earn his bread. He was sitting with

her in the evening, with two dull tallow candles on the table between

them, when his messenger brought the letter to him. He read it in

silence very deliberately, then crushed it in his hand, and threw it

from him with violence into the fire.

"I hope there is nothing further to distress you, Lucius," said his

mother, looking up into his face as though she were imploring his

confidence.

"No, nothing; nothing that matters. It is an affair quite private to

myself."

Sir Peregrine had spoken with great truth when he declared that

Lucius Mason was able to bear adversity. This last blow had now come

upon him, but he made no wailings as to his misery, nor did he say

a word further on the subject. His mother watched the paper as the

flame caught it and reduced it to an ash; but she asked no further

question. She knew that her position with him did not permit of her

asking, or even hoping, for his confidence.

"I had no right to expect it would be otherwise," he said to himself.

But even to himself he spoke no word of reproach against Miss

Furnival. He had realised the circumstances by which he was

surrounded, and had made up his mind to bear their result.

As for Miss Furnival, we may as well declare here that she did not

become Mrs. Staveley. Our old friend Augustus conceived that he had

received a sufficient answer on the occasion of his last visit to

Harley Street, and did not repeat it immediately. Such little scenes

as that which took place there had not been uncommon in his life; and

when in after months he looked back upon the affair, he counted it up

as one of those miraculous escapes which had marked his career.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

FAREWELL.

"That letter you got this morning, my dear, was it not from Lady

Mason?"

"It was from Lady Mason, father; they go on Thursday."

"On Thursday; so soon as that." And then Sir Peregrine, who had asked

the question, remained silent for a while. The letter, according

to the family custom, had been handed to Mrs. Orme over the

breakfast-table; but he had made no remark respecting it till they

were alone together and free from the servants. It had been a

farewell letter, full of love and gratitude, and full also of

repentance. Lady Mason had now been for three weeks in London, and

once during that time Mrs. Orme had gone up to visit her. She had

then remained with her friend for hours, greatly to Lady Mason's

comfort, and now this letter had come, bringing a last adieu.

[Illustration: Farewell!]

"You may read it, sir, if you like," said Mrs. Orme, handing him the

letter. It was evident, by his face, that he was gratified by the

privilege; and he read it, not once only, but over and over again. As

he did so, he placed himself in the shade, and sat with his back to

Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless she could see that from time to time he

rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, and gradually raised his

handkerchief to his face.

"Thank you, dearest," he said, as he gave the letter back to her.

"I think that we may forgive her now, even all that she has done,"

said Mrs. Orme.

"Yes--yes--yes," he answered. "For myself, I forgave her from the

first."

"I know you did. But as regards the property,--it has been given up

now." And then again they were silent.

"Edith," he said, after a while, "I have forgiven her altogether. To

me she is the same as though she had never done that deed. Are we not

all sinners?"

"Surely, father."

"And can I say because she did one startling thing that the total of

her sin is greater than mine? Was I ever tempted as she was tempted?

Was my youth made dangerous for me as was hers? And then she did

nothing for herself; she did it all for another. We may think of that

now."

"I have thought of it always."

"It did not make the sin the less; but among her fellow-mortals--"

And then he stopped himself, wanting words to express his meaning.

The sin, till it was repented, was damning; but now that it was

repented, he could almost love the sinner for the sin.

"Edith," he said, again. And he looked at her so wishfully! She knew

well what was the working of his heart, and she knew also that she

did not dare to encourage him.

"I trust," said Mrs. Orme, "that she will bear her present lot for a

few years; and then, perhaps--"

"Ah! then I shall be in my grave. A few months will do that."

"Oh, sir!"

"Why should I not save her from such a life as that?"

"From that which she had most to fear she has been saved."

"Had she not so chosen it herself, she could now have demanded from

me a home. Why should I not give it to her now?"

"A home here, sir?"

"Yes;--why not? But I know what you would say. It would be wrong,--to

you and Perry."

"It would be wrong to yourself, sir. Think of it, father. It is the

fact that she did that thing. We may forgive her, but others will not

do so on that account. It would not be right that you should bring

her here."

Sir Peregrine knew that it would not be right. Though he was old, and

weak in body, and infirm in purpose, his judgment had not altogether

left him. He was well aware that he would offend all social laws if

he were to do that which he contemplated, and ask the world around

him to respect as Lady Orme--as his wife, the woman who had so deeply

disgraced herself. But yet he could hardly bring himself to confess

that it was impossible. He was as a child who knows that a coveted

treasure is beyond his reach, but still covets it, still longs for

it, hoping against hope that it may yet be his own. It seemed to him

that he might yet regain his old vitality if he could wind his arm

once more about her waist, and press her to his side, and call her

his own. It would be so sweet to forgive her; to make her sure that

she was absolutely forgiven; to teach her that there was one at

least who would not bring up against her her past sin, even in his

memory. As for his grandson, the property should be abandoned to him

altogether. 'Twas thus he argued with himself; but yet, as he argued,

he knew that it could not be so.

"I was harsh to her when she told me," he said, after another

pause--"cruelly harsh."

"She does not think so."

"No. If I had spurned her from me with my foot, she would not have

thought so. She had condemned herself, and therefore I should have

spared her."

"But you did spare her. I am sure she feels that from the first to

the last your conduct to her has been more than kind."

"And I owed her more than kindness, for I loved her;--yes, I loved

her, and I do love her. Though I am a feeble old man, tottering to my

grave, yet I love her--love her as that boy loves the fair girl for

whom he longs. He will overcome it, and forget it, and some other one

as fair will take her place. But for me it is all over."

What could she say to him? In truth, it was all over,--such love

at least as that of which his old heart was dreaming in its dotage.

There is no Medea's caldron from which our limbs can come out young

and fresh; and it were well that the heart should grow old as does

the body.

"It is not all over while we are with you," she said, caressing him.

But she knew that what she said was a subterfuge.

"Yes, yes; I have you, dearest," he answered. But he also knew that

that pretence at comfort was false and hollow.

"And she starts on Thursday," he said; "on next Thursday."

"Yes, on Thursday. It will be much better for her to be away from

London. While she is there she never ventures even into the street."

"Edith, I shall see her before she goes."

"Will that be wise, sir?"

"Perhaps not. It may be foolish,--very foolish; but still I shall

see her. I think you forget, Edith, that I have never yet bidden her

farewell. I have not spoken to her since that day when she behaved so

generously."

"I do not think that she expects it, father."

"No; she expects nothing for herself. Had it been in her nature to

expect such a visit, I should not have been anxious to make it. I

will go to-morrow. She is always at home you say?"

"Yes, she is always at home."

"And, Lucius--"

"You will not find him there in the daytime."

"I shall go to-morrow, dear. You need not tell Peregrine."

Mrs. Orme still thought that he was wrong, but she had nothing

further to say. She could not hinder his going, and therefore, with

his permission she wrote a line to Lady Mason, telling her of his

purpose. And then, with all the care in her power, and with infinite

softness of manner, she warned him against the danger which she so

much feared. What might be the result, if, overcome by tenderness,

he should again ask Lady Mason to become his wife? Mrs. Orme firmly

believed that Lady Mason would again refuse; but, nevertheless, there

would be danger.

"No," said he, "I will not do that. When I have said so you may

accept my word." Then she hastened to apologise to him, but he

assured her with a kiss that he was in nowise angry with her.

He held by his purpose, and on the following day he went up to

London. There was nothing said on the matter at breakfast, nor did

she make any further endeavour to dissuade him. He was infirm, but

still she knew that the actual fatigue would not be of a nature to

injure him. Indeed her fear respecting him was rather in regard to

his staying at home than to his going abroad. It would have been well

for him could he have been induced to think himself fit for more

active movement.

Lady Mason was alone when he reached the dingy little room near

Finsbury Circus, and received him standing. She was the first to

speak, and this she did before she had even touched his hand. She

stood to meet him, with her eyes turned to the ground, and her hands

tightly folded together before her. "Sir Peregrine," she said, "I did

not expect from you this mark of your--kindness."

"Of my esteem and affection, Lady Mason," he said. "We have known

each other too well to allow of our parting without a word. I am an

old man, and it will probably be for ever."

Then she gave him her hand, and gradually lifted her eyes to his

face. "Yes," she said; "it will be for ever. There will be no coming

back for me."

"Nay, nay; we will not say that. That's as may be hereafter. But it

will not be at once. It had better not be quite at once. Edith tells

me that you go on Thursday."

"Yes, sir; we go on Thursday."

She had still allowed her hand to remain in his, but now she withdrew

it, and asked him to sit down. "Lucius is not here," she said. "He

never remains at home after breakfast. He has much to settle as to

our journey; and then he has his lawyers to see."

Sir Peregrine had not at all wished to see Lucius Mason, but he did

not say so. "You will give him my regards," he said, "and tell him

that I trust that he may prosper."

"Thank you. I will do so. It is very kind of you to think of him."

"I have always thought highly of him as an excellent young man."

"And he is excellent. Where is there any one who could suffer without

a word as he suffers? No complaint ever comes from him; and yet--I

have ruined him."

"No, no. He has his youth, his intellect, and his education. If such

a one as he cannot earn his bread in the world--ay, and more than

his bread--who can do so? Nothing ruins a young man but ignorance,

idleness, and depravity."

"Nothing;--unless those of whom he should be proud disgrace him

before the eyes of the world. Sir Peregrine, I sometimes wonder at my

own calmness. I wonder that I can live. But, believe me, that never

for a moment do I forget what I have done. I would have poured out

for him my blood like water, if it would have served him; but instead

of that I have given him cause to curse me till the day of his death.

Though I still live, and eat, and sleep, I think of that always. The

remembrance is never away from me. They bid those who repent put on

sackcloth, and cover themselves with ashes. That is my sackcloth, and

it is very sore. Those thoughts are ashes to me, and they are very

bitter between my teeth."

He did not know with what words to comfort her. It all was as she

said, and he could not bid her even try to free herself from that

sackcloth and from those ashes. It must be so. Were it not so with

her, she would not have been in any degree worthy of that love which

he felt for her. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," he said.

"Yes," she said, "for the shorn lamb--" And then she was silent

again. But could that bitter, biting wind be tempered for the

she-wolf who, in the dead of night, had broken into the fold, and

with prowling steps and cunning clutch had stolen the fodder from the

sheep? That was the question as it presented itself to her; but she

sat silent, and refrained from putting it into words. She sat silent,

but he read her heart. "For the shorn lamb--" she had said, and he

had known her thoughts, as they followed, quick, one upon another,

through her mind. "Mary," he said, seating himself now close beside

her on the sofa, "if his heart be as true to you as mine, he will

never remember these things against you."

"It is my memory, not his, that is my punishment," she said.

Why could he not take her home with him, and comfort her, and heal

that festering wound, and stop that ever-running gush of her heart's

blood? But he could not. He had pledged his word and pawned his

honour. All the comfort that could be his to bestow must be given in

those few minutes that remained to him in that room. And it must be

given, too, without falsehood. He could not bring himself to tell her

that the sackcloth need not be sore to her poor lacerated body, nor

the ashes bitter between her teeth. He could not tell her that the

cup of which it was hers to drink might yet be pleasant to the taste,

and cool to the lips! What could he tell her? Of the only source of

true comfort others, he knew, had spoken,--others who had not spoken

in vain. He could not now take up that matter, and press it on her

with available strength. For him there was but one thing to say. He

had forgiven her; he still loved her; he would have cherished her in

his bosom had it been possible. He was a weak, old, foolish man; and

there was nothing of which he could speak but of his own heart.

"Mary," he said, again taking her hand, "I wish--I wish that I could

comfort you."

"And yet on you also have I brought trouble, and misery--and--all but

disgrace!"

"No, my love, no; neither misery nor disgrace,--except this misery,

that I shall be no longer near to you. Yes, I will tell you all now.

Were I alone in the world, I would still beg you to go back with me."

"It cannot be; it could not possibly be so."

"No; for I am not alone. She who loves you so well, has told me so.

It must not be. But that is the source of my misery. I have learned

to love you too well, and do not know how to part with you. If this

had not been so, I would have done all that an old man might to

comfort you."

"But it has been so," she said. "I cannot wash out the past. Knowing

what I did of myself, Sir Peregrine, I should never have put my foot

over your threshold."

"I wish I might hear its step again upon my floors. I wish I might

hear that light step once again."

"Never, Sir Peregrine. No one again ever shall rejoice to hear either

my step or my voice, or to see my form, or to grasp my hand. The

world is over for me, and may God soon grant me relief from my

sorrow. But to you--in return for your goodness--"

"For my love."

"In return for your love, what am I to say? I could have loved you

with all my heart had it been so permitted. Nay, I did do so. Had

that dream been carried out, I should not have sworn falsely when I

gave you my hand. I bade her tell you so from me, when I parted with

her."

"She did tell me."

"I have known but little love. He--Sir Joseph--was my master rather

than my husband. He was a good master, and I served him truly--except

in that one thing. But I never loved him. But I am wrong to talk

of this, and I will not talk of it longer. May God bless you, Sir

Peregrine! It will be well for both of us now that you should leave

me."

"May God bless you, Mary, and preserve you, and give back to you the

comforts of a quiet spirit, and a heart at rest! Till you hear that I

am under the ground you will know that there is one living who loves

you well." Then he took her in his arms, twice kissed her on the

forehead, and left the room without further speech on either side.

[Illustration: Farewell!]

Lady Mason, as soon as she was alone, sat herself down, and her

thoughts ran back over the whole course of her life. Early in her

days, when the world was yet beginning to her, she had done one evil

deed, and from that time up to those days of her trial she had been

the victim of one incessant struggle to appear before the world as

though that deed had not been done,--to appear innocent of it before

the world, but, beyond all things, innocent of it before her son.

For twenty years she had striven with a labour that had been all but

unendurable; and now she had failed, and every one knew her for what

she was. Such had been her life; and then she thought of the life

which might have been hers. In her earlier days she had known what

it was to be poor, and had seen and heard those battles after money

which harden our hearts, and quench the poetry of our natures. But it

had not been altogether so with her. Had things gone differently with

her it might afterwards have been said that she had gone through the

fire unscathed. But the beast had set his foot upon her, and when the

temptation came it was too much for her. Not for herself would she

have sinned, or have robbed that old man, who had been to her a kind

master. But when a child was born to her, her eyes were blind, and

she could not see that wealth ill gotten for her child would be

as sure a curse as wealth ill gotten for herself. She remembered

Rebekah, and with the cunning of a second Rebekah she filched a

world's blessing for her baby. Now she thought of all this as

pictures of that life which might have been hers passed before her

mind's eye.

And they were pleasant pictures, had they not burnt into her very

soul as she looked at them. How sweet had been that drawing-room at

The Cleeve, as she sat there in luxurious quiet with her new friend!

How sweet had been that friendship with a woman pure in all her

thoughts, graceful to the eye, and delicate in all her ways! She knew

now, as she thought of this, that to her had been given the power

to appreciate such delights as these. How full of charm to her

would have been that life, in which there had been so much of

true, innocent affection;--had the load ever been absent from her

shoulders! And then she thought of Sir Peregrine, with his pleasant,

ancient manner and truth of heart, and told herself that she could

have been happy with the love of even so old a man as that,--had that

burden been away from her! But the burden had never been away--never

could be away. Then she thought once more of her stern but just son,

and as she bowed her head and kissed the rod, she prayed that her

release might come to her soon.

And now we will say farewell to her, and as we do so the chief

interest of our tale will end. I may, perhaps be thought to owe an

apology to my readers in that I have asked their sympathy for a woman

who had so sinned as to have placed her beyond the general sympathy

of the world at large. If so, I tender my apology, and perhaps feel

that I should confess a fault. But as I have told her story that

sympathy has grown upon myself till I have learned to forgive her,

and to feel that I too could have regarded her as a friend. Of her

future life I will not venture to say anything. But no lesson is

truer than that which teaches us to believe that God does temper the

wind to the shorn lamb. To how many has it not seemed, at some one

period of their lives, that all was over for them, and that to them

in their afflictions there was nothing left but to die! And yet they

have lived to laugh again, to feel that the air was warm and the

earth fair, and that God in giving them ever-springing hope had given

everything. How many a sun may seem to set on an endless night, and

yet rising again on some morrow--

"He tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky!"

For Lady Mason let us hope that the day will come in which she also

may once again trick her beams in some modest, unassuming way, and

that for her the morning may even yet be sweet with a glad warmth.

For us, here in these pages, it must be sufficient to say this last

kindly farewell.

As to Lucius Mason and the arrangement of his affairs with his

step-brother a very few concluding words will suffice. When Joseph

Mason left the office of Messrs. Round and Crook he would gladly

have sacrificed all hope of any eventual pecuniary benefit from

the possession of Orley Farm could he by doing so have secured

the condign punishment of her who had so long kept him out of his

inheritance. But he soon found that he had no means of doing this.

In the first place he did not know where to turn for advice. He had

quarrelled absolutely with Dockwrath, and though he now greatly

distrusted the Rounds, he by no means put implicit trust in him of

Hamworth. Of the Rounds he suspected that they were engaged to serve

his enemy, of Dockwrath he felt sure that he was anxious only to

serve himself. Under these circumstances he was driven into the arms

of a third attorney, and learned from him, after a delay that cut

him to the soul, that he could take no further criminal proceeding

against Lady Mason. It would be impossible to have her even indicted

for the forgery,--seeing that two juries, at the interval of twenty

years, had virtually acquitted her,--unless new evidence which should

be absolute and positive in its kind should be forthcoming. But there

was no new evidence of any kind. The offer made to surrender the

property was no evidence for a jury whatever it might be in the mind

of the world at large.

"And what am I to do?" asked Mason.

"Take the goods the gods provide you," said the attorney. "Accept the

offer which your half-brother has very generously made you."

"Generously!" shouted Mason of Groby.

"Well, on his part it is generous. It is quite within his power to

keep it; and were he to do so no one would say he was wrong. Why

should he judge his mother?"

Then Mr. Joseph Mason went to another attorney; but it was of no

avail. The time was passing away, and he learned that Lady Mason and

Lucius had actually started for Germany. In his agony for revenge he

had endeavoured to obtain some legal order that should prevent her

departure;--"ne exeat regno," as he repeated over and over again to

his advisers learned in the law. But it was of no avail. Lady Mason

had been tried and acquitted, and no judge would interfere.

"We should soon have her back again, you know, if we had evidence of

forgery," said the last attorney.

"Then, by ----! we will have her back again," said Mason.

But the threat was vain; nor could he get any one even to promise him

that she could be prosecuted and convicted. And by degrees the desire

for vengeance slackened as the desire for gain resumed its sway.

Many men have threatened to spend a property upon a lawsuit who

have afterwards felt grateful that their threats were made abortive.

And so it was with Mr. Mason. After remaining in town over a month

he took the advice of the first of those new lawyers and allowed

that gentleman to put himself in communication with Mr. Furnival.

The result was that by the end of six months he again came out of

Yorkshire to take upon himself the duties and privileges of the owner

of Orley Farm.

And then came his great fight with Dockwrath, which in the end ruined

the Hamworth attorney, and cost Mr. Mason more money than he ever

liked to confess. Dockwrath claimed to be put in possession of Orley

Farm at an exceedingly moderate rent, as to the terms of which he was

prepared to prove that Mr. Mason had already entered into a contract

with him. Mr. Mason utterly ignored such contract, and contended that

the words contained in a certain note produced by Dockwrath amounted

only to a proposition to let him the land in the event of certain

circumstances and results--which circumstances and results never took

place.

This lawsuit Mr. Joseph Mason did win, and Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was,

as I have said, ruined. What the attorney did to make it necessary

that he should leave Hamworth I do not know; but Miriam, his wife,

is now the mistress of that lodging-house to which her own mahogany

furniture was so ruthlessly removed.

CHAPTER LXXX.

SHOWING HOW AFFAIRS SETTLED THEMSELVES AT NONINGSBY.

We must now go back to Noningsby for one concluding chapter, and then

our work will be completed. "You are not to go away from Noningsby

when the trial is over, you know. Mamma said that I had better tell

you so." It was thus that Madeline had spoken to Felix Graham as he

was going out to the judge's carriage on the last morning of the

celebrated great Orley Farm case, and as she did so she twisted one

of her little fingers into one of his buttonholes. This she did with

a prettiness of familiarity, and the assumption of a right to give

him orders and hold him to obedience, which was almost intoxicating

in its sweetness. And why should she not be familiar with him? Why

should she not hold him to obedience by his buttonhole? Was he not

her own? Had she not chosen him and taken him up to the exclusion of

all other such choosings and takings?

"I shall not go till you send me," he said, putting up his hand as

though to protect his coat, and just touching her fingers as he did

so.

"Mamma says it will be stupid for you in the mornings, but it will

not be worse for you than for Augustus. He stays till after Easter."

"And I shall stay till after Whitsuntide unless I am turned out."

"Oh! but you will be turned out. I am not going to make myself

answerable for any improper amount of idleness. Papa says you have

got all the law courts to reform."

"There must be a double Hercules for such a set of stables as that,"

said Felix; and then with the slight ceremony to which I have before

adverted he took his leave for the day.

"I suppose there will be no use in delaying it," said Lady Staveley

on the same morning as she and her daughter sat together in the

drawing-room. They had already been talking over the new engagement

by the hour, together; but that is a subject on which mothers

with marriageable daughters never grow tired, as all mothers and

marriageable daughters know full well.

"Oh! mamma, I think it must be delayed."

"But why, my love? Mr. Graham has not said so?"

"You must call him Felix, mamma. I'm sure it's a nice name."

"Very well, my dear, I will."

"No; he has said nothing yet. But of course he means to wait

till,--till it will be prudent."

"Men never care for prudence of that kind when they are really in

love;--and I'm sure he is."

"Is he, mamma?"

"He will marry on anything or nothing. And if you speak to him he

tells you of how the young ravens were fed. But he always forgets

that he's not a young raven himself."

"Now you're only joking, mamma."

"Indeed I'm quite in earnest. But I think your papa means to make up

an income for you,--only you must not expect to be rich."

"I do not want to be rich. I never did."

"I suppose you will live in London, and then you can come down here

when the courts are up. I do hope he won't ever want to take a

situation in the colonies."

"Who, Felix? Why should he go to the colonies?"

"They always do,--the clever young barristers who marry before they

have made their way. That would be very dreadful. I really think it

would kill me."

"Oh! mamma, he sha'n't go to any colony."

"To be sure there are the county courts now, and they are better. I

suppose you wouldn't like to live at Leeds or Merthyr-Tydvil?"

"Of course I shall live wherever he goes; but I don't know why you

should send him to Merthyr-Tydvil."

"Those are the sort of places they do go to. There is young Mrs.

Bright Newdegate,--she had to go to South Shields, and her babies

are all dreadfully delicate. She lost two, you know. I do think the

Lord Chancellor ought to think about that. Reigate, or Maidstone, or

anywhere about Great Marlow would not be so bad." And in this way

they discussed the coming event and the happy future, while Felix

himself was listening to the judge's charge and thinking of his

client's guilt.

Then there were two or three days passed at Noningsby of almost

unalloyed sweetness. It seemed that they had all agreed that Prudence

should go by the board, and that Love with sweet promises, and hopes

bright as young trees in spring, should have it all her own way.

Judge Staveley was a man who on such an occasion--knowing with whom

he had to deal--could allow ordinary prudence to go by the board.

There are men, and excellent men too, from whose minds the cares

of life never banish themselves, who never seem to remember that

provision is made for the young ravens. They toil and spin always,

thinking sternly of the worst and rarely hoping for the best. They

are ever making provision for rainy days, as though there were to be

no more sunshine. So anxious are they for their children that they

take no pleasure in them, and their fear is constant that the earth

will cease to produce her fruits. Of such was not the judge. "Dulce

est desipere in locis," he would say, "and let the opportunities be

frequent and the occasions many." Such a love-making opportunity as

this surely should be one.

So Graham wandered about through the dry March winds with his future

bride by his side, and never knew that the blasts came from the

pernicious east. And she would lean on his arm as though he had been

the friend of her earliest years, listening to and trusting him in

all things. That little finger, as they stood together, would get up

to his buttonhole, and her bright frank eyes would settle themselves

on his, and then her hand would press closely upon his arm, and he

knew that she was neither ashamed nor afraid of her love. Her love to

her was the same as her religion. When it was once acknowledged by

her to be a thing good and trustworthy, all the world might know it.

Was it not a glory to her that he had chosen her, and why should she

conceal her glory? Had it been that some richer, greater man had won

her love,--some one whose titles were known and high place in the

world approved,--it may well be that then she would have been less

free with him.

"Papa would like it best if you would give up your writing, and think

of nothing but the law," she said to him. In answer to which he told

her, with many compliments to the special fox in question, that story

of the fox who had lost his tail and thought it well that other foxes

should dress themselves as he was dressed.

"At any rate papa looks very well without his tail," said Madeline

with somewhat of a daughter's pride. "But you shall wear yours all

the same, if you like it," she added with much of a young maiden's

love.

As they were thus walking near the house on the afternoon of the

third or fourth day after the trial, one of the maids came to them

and told Madeline that a gentleman was in the house who wished to see

her.

"A gentleman!" said Madeline.

"Mr. Orme, miss. My lady told me to ask you up if you were anywhere

near."

"I suppose I must go," said Madeline, from whom all her pretty

freedom of manner and light happiness of face departed on the moment.

She had told Felix everything as to poor Peregrine in return for that

story of his respecting Mary Snow. To her it seemed as though that

had made things equal between them,--for she was too generous to

observe that though she had given nothing to her other lover, Felix

had been engaged for many months to marry his other love. But girls,

I think, have no objection to this. They do not desire first fruits,

or even early fruits, as men do. Indeed, I am not sure whether

experience on the part of a gentleman in his use of his heart is not

supposed by most young ladies to enhance the value of the article.

Madeline was not in the least jealous of Mary Snow; but with great

good nature promised to look after her, and patronise her when she

should have become Mrs. Albert Fitzallen. "But I don't think I should

like that Mrs. Thomas," she said.

"You would have mended the stockings for her all the same."

"O yes, I would have done that;--and so did Miss Snow. But I would

have kept my box locked. She should never have seen my letters."

It was now absolutely necessary that she should return to the house,

and say to Peregrine Orme what words of comfort might be possible for

her. If she could have spoken simply with her heart, she would have

said much that was friendly, even though it might not be comfortable.

But it was necessary that she should express herself in words, and

she felt that the task was very difficult. "Will you come in?" she

said to Felix.

"No, I think not. But he's a splendid fellow, and to me was a stanch

friend. If I can catch him as he comes out I will speak to him."

And then Madeline, with hesitating steps, with her hat still on her

head, and her gloves on her hands, walked through the hall into the

drawing-room. There she found her mother seated on the sofa, and

Peregrine Orme standing before her. Madeline walked up to him with

extended hand and a kindly welcome, though she felt that the colour

was high in her cheeks. Of course it would be impossible to come out

from such an interview as this without having confessed her position,

or hearing it confessed by her mother in her presence. That, however,

had been already done, and Peregrine knew that the prize was gone.

"How do you do, Miss Staveley?" said he. "As I am going to leave The

Cleeve for a long time, I have come over to say good-bye to Lady

Staveley--and to you."

"Are you going away, Mr. Orme?"

"Yes, I shall go abroad,--to Central Africa, I think. It seems a wild

sort of place with plenty of animals to kill."

"But isn't it very dangerous?"

"No, I don't think so. The people always come back alive. I've a sort

of idea that nothing will kill me. At any rate I couldn't stay here."

"Madeline, dear, I've told Mr. Orme that you have accepted Mr.

Graham. With a friend such as he is I know that you will not be

anxious to keep this a secret."

"No, mamma."

"I was sure of that; and now that your papa has consented to it, and

that it is quite fixed, I am sure that it is better that he should

know it. We shall always look upon him as a very dear friend--if he

will allow us."

Then it was necessary that Peregrine should speak, which he did as

follows, holding Madeline's hand for the first three or four seconds

of the time:--"Miss Staveley, I will say this of myself, that if ever

a fellow loved a girl truly, I loved you;--and I do so now as well or

better than ever. It is no good my pretending to be contented, and

all that sort of thing. I am not contented, but very unhappy. I have

never wished for but one thing in my life; and for that I would have

given all that I have in the world. I know that I cannot have it, and

that I am not fit to have it."

"Oh, Mr. Orme, it is not that."

"But it is that. I knew you before Graham did, and loved you quite

as soon. I believe--though of course I don't mean to ask any

questions--but I believe I told you so before he ever did."

"Marriages, they say, are planned in heaven," said Lady Staveley.

"Perhaps they are. I only wish this one had not been planned there.

I cannot help it,--I cannot express my satisfaction, though I will

heartily wish for your happiness. I knew from the first how it would

be, and was always sure that I was a fool to love you. I should have

gone away when I first thought of it, for I used to feel that you

never cared to speak to me."

"Oh, indeed I did," said poor Madeline.

"No, you did not. And why should you when I had nothing to say for

myself? I ought to have fallen in love with some foolish chit with as

little wit about her as I have myself."

"I hope you will fall in love with some very nice girl," said Lady

Staveley; "and that we shall know her and love her very much."

"Oh, I dare say I shall marry some day. I feel now as though I should

like to break my neck, but I don't suppose I shall. Good-bye, Lady

Staveley."

"Good-bye, Mr. Orme; and may God send that you may be happy."

"Good-bye, Madeline. I shall never call you so again,--except to

myself. I do wish you may be happy,--I do indeed. As for him,--he has

been before me, and taken away all that I wanted to win."

By this time the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was not free

from their effect. Of this he was aware, and therefore, pressing her

hand, he turned upon his heel and abruptly left the room. He had been

unable to say that he wished also that Felix might be happy; but this

omission was forgiven him by both the ladies. Poor Madeline, as he

went, muttered a kind farewell, but her tears had mastered her also,

so that she could hardly speak.

He went directly to the stables, there got upon his horse, and then

walked slowly down the avenue towards the gate. He had got the better

of that tear-compelling softness as soon as he found himself beyond

the presence of the girl he loved, and was now stern in his mood,

striving to harden his heart. He had confessed himself a fool in

comparison with Felix Graham; but yet,--he asked himself,--in spite

of that, was it not possible that he would have made her a better

husband than the other? It was not to his title or his estate that he

trusted as he so thought, but to a feeling that he was more akin to

her in circumstances, in ways of life, and in tenderness of heart. As

all this was passing through his mind, Felix Graham presented himself

to him in the road.

"Orme," said he, "I heard that you were in the house, and have come

to shake hands with you. I suppose you have heard what has taken

place. Will you not shake hands with me?"

"No," said Peregrine, "I will not."

"I am sorry for that, for we were good friends, and I owe you much

for your kindness. It was a fair stand-up fight, and you should not

be angry."

"I am angry, and I don't want your friendship. Go and tell her that I

say so, if you like."

"No, I will not do that."

"I wish with all my heart that we had both killed ourselves at that

bank."

"For shame, Orme, for shame!"

"Very well, sir; let it be for shame." And then he passed on, meaning

to go through the gate, and leaving Graham on the grass by the

road-side. But before he had gone a hundred yards down the road his

better feelings came back upon him, and he returned.

"I am unhappy," he said, "and sore at heart. You must not mind what

words I spoke just now."

"No, no; I am sure you did not mean them," said Felix, putting his

hand on the horse's mane.

"I did mean them then, but I do not mean them now. I won't say

anything about wishes. Of course you will be happy with her. Anybody

would be happy with her. I suppose you won't die, and give a fellow

another chance."

"Not if I can help it," said Graham.

"Well, if you are to live, I don't wish you any evil. I do wish you

hadn't come to Noningsby, that's all. Good-bye to you." And he held

out his hand, which Graham took.

"We shall be good friends yet, for all that is come and gone," said

Graham; and then there were no more words between them.

Peregrine did as he said, and went abroad, extending his travels to

many wild countries, in which, as he used to say, any one else would

have been in danger. No danger ever came to him,--so at least he

frequently wrote word to his mother. Gorillas he slew by scores,

lions by hundreds, and elephants sufficient for an ivory palace. The

skins, and bones, and other trophies, he sent home in various ships;

and when he appeared in London as a lion, no man doubted his word.

But then he did not write a book, nor even give lectures; nor did he

presume to know much about the huge brutes he had slain, except that

they were pervious to powder and ball.

Sir Peregrine had endeavoured to keep him at home by giving up the

property into his hands; but neither for grandfather, nor for mother,

nor for lands and money would he remain in the neighbourhood of

Noningsby. "No, mother," he said; "it will be better for me to be

away." And away he went.

The old baronet lived to see him return, though with plaintive wail

he often declared to his daughter-in-law that this was impossible. He

lived, but he never returned to that living life which had been his

before he had taken up the battle for Lady Mason. He would sometimes

allow Mrs. Orme to drive him about the grounds, but otherwise he

remained in the house, sitting solitary over his fire,--with a

book, indeed, open before him, but rarely reading. He was waiting

patiently, as he said, till death should come to him.

Mrs. Orme kept her promise, and wrote constantly to Lady

Mason,--hearing from her as constantly. When Lucius had been six

months in Germany, he decided on going to Australia, leaving his

mother for the present in the little German town in which they were

staying. For her, on the whole, the change was for the better. As

to his success in a thriving colony, there can be but little doubt.

Felix Graham was soon married to Madeline; and as yet I have not

heard of any banishment either to Patagonia or to Merthyr-Tydvil.

And now I may say, Farewell.