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ELLEN ST. SURE
THE WAY WE LIVE NOW.

VOL. II.
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PAUL MONTAGUE reached London on his return from Suffolk early on the Monday morning, and on the following day he wrote to Mrs. Hurtle. As he sat in his lodgings, thinking of his condition, he almost wished that he had taken Melmotte's offer and gone to Mexico. He might at any rate have endeavoured to promote the railway earnestly, and then have abandoned it if he found the whole thing false. In such case of course he would never have seen Hetta Carbury again; but, as things were, of what use to him was his love, of what use to him or to her? The kind of life of which he dreamed, such a life in England as was that of Roger Carbury, or, as such life would be, if Roger had a wife whom he loved, seemed to be far beyond his reach. Nobody was like Roger Carbury! Would it not be well that he should go away, and, as he went, write to Hetta and bid her marry the best man that ever lived in the world.

But the journey to Mexico was no longer open to him. He had repudiated the proposition and had quarrelled with Melmotte. It was necessary that he should immediately take some further step in regard to Mrs. Hurtle. Twice lately he had gone to Islington determined that he would see that lady for the last time. Then he had taken her to Lowestoffe, and had been equally firm in his resolution that he would there put an end to his present bonds. Now he had promised to go again to Islington;—and was aware that if he failed to keep his promise, she would come to him. In this way there would never be an end to it.

He would certainly go again, as he had promised,—if she should still require it; but he would first try what a letter would do,—a plain unvarnished tale. Might it still be possible that a plain tale sent by post should have sufficient efficacy. This was his plain tale as he now told it.

"Tuesday, 2nd July, 1873.

"My Dear Mrs. Hurtle,—

"I promised that I would go to you again in Islington, and so I will, if you still require it. But I think that such a meeting can be of no service to either of us. What is to be gained? I do not for a moment mean to justify my own conduct. It is not to be justified. When I met you on our journey hither from San Francisco, I was..."
charmed with your genius, your beauty, and your character. They are now what I found them to be then. But circumstances have made our lives and temperaments so far different, that I am certain that, were we married, we should not make each other happy. Of course the fault was mine; but it is better to own that fault, and to take all the blame,—and the evil consequences, let them be what they may,—to be shot, for instance, like the gentleman in Oregon,—"than to be married with the consciousness that even at the very moment of the ceremony, such marriage will be a matter of sorrow and repentance. As soon as my mind was made up on this I wrote to you. I can not,—I dare not,—blame you for the step you have since taken. But I can only adhere to the resolution I then expressed.

"The first day I saw you here in London you asked me whether I was attached to another woman. I could answer you only by the truth. But I should not of my own accord have spoken to you of altered affections. It was after I had resolved to break my engagement with you that I first knew this girl. It was not because I had come to love her that I broke it. I have no grounds whatever for hoping that my love will lead to any results.

"I have now told you as exactly as I can the condition of my mind. If it were possible for me in any way to compensate the injury I have done you,—or even to undergo retribution for it,—I would do so. But what compensation can be given, or what retribution can you exact? I think that our further meeting can avail nothing. But if, after this, you wish me to come again, I will come for the last time,—because I have promised.

"Your most sincere friend,

"PAUL MONTAGUE."

Mrs. Hurtle, as she read this, was torn in two ways. All that Paul had written was in accordance with the words written by herself on a scrap of paper which she still kept in her own pocket. Those words, fairly transcribed on a sheet of note-paper, would be the most generous and the fittest answer she could give. And she longed to be generous. She had all a woman's natural desire to sacrifice herself. But the sacrifice which would have been most to her taste would have been of another kind. Had she found him ruined and penniless she would have delighted to share with him all that she possessed. Had she found him a cripple, or blind, or miserably struck with some disease, she would have stayed by him and have nursed him and given him comfort. Even had he been disgraced she would have fled with him to some far country and have pardoned all his faults. No sacrifice would have been too much for her that would have been accompanied by a feeling that he appreciated all that she was doing for him, and that she was loved in return. But to sacrifice herself by going away and never more being heard of, was too much for her! What woman can endure such sacrifice as that? To give up not only her love, but her wrath also;—that was too much for her! The idea of being tame was terrible to her. Her life had not been very prosperous, but she was what she was because she had dared to
protect herself by her own spirit. Now, at last, should she succumb
and be trodden on like a worm? Should she be weaker even than an
English girl? Should she allow him to have amused himself with her
love, to have had "a good time," and then to roam away like a bee,
while she was so dreadfully scorched, so mutilated and punished!
Had not her whole life been opposed to the theory of such passive
endurance? She took out the scrap of paper and read it; and, in
spite of all, she felt that there was a feminine softness in it that
gratified her.

But no;—she could not send it. She could not even copy the
words. And so she gave play to all her strongest feelings on the
other side,—being in truth torn in two directions. Then she sat
herself down to her desk, and with rapid words, and flashing thoughts,
wrote as follows;—

"Paul Montague,—

"I have suffered many injuries, but of all injuries this is the
worst and most unpardonable,—and the most unmanly. Surely there
never was such a coward, never so false a liar. The poor wretch that
I destroyed was mad with liquor and was only acting after his
kind. Even Caradoc Hurtle never premeditated such wrong as this.
What;—you are to bind yourself to me by the most solemn obliga-
tion that can join a man and a woman together, and then tell me,—
when they have affected my whole life,—that they are to go for
nothing, because they do not suit your view of things? On
thinking over it, you find that an American wife would not make you
so comfortable as some English girl;—and therefore it is all to go for
nothing! I have no brother, no man near me;—or you would not
dare to do this. You can not but be a coward.

"You talk of compensation! Do you mean money? You do not
dare to say so, but you must mean it. It is an insult the more. But
as to retribution; yes. You shall suffer retribution. I desire you to
come to me,—according to your promise,—and you will find me with
a horsewhip in my hand. I will whip you till I have not a breath in
my body. And then I will see what you will dare to do;—whether
you will drag me into a court of law for the assault.

"Yes; come. You shall come. And now you know the welcome
you shall find. I will buy the whip while this is reaching you, and
you shall find that I know how to choose such a weapon. I call upon
you to come. But should you be afraid and break your promise, I
will come to you. I will make London too hot to hold you;—and if I
do not find you I will go with my story to every friend you have.

"I have now told you as exactly as I can the condition of my mind.

"Winifrid Hurtle."

Having written this she again read the short note, and again gave
way to violent tears. But on that day she sent no letter. On the
following morning she wrote a third, and sent that. This was the
third letter;—

"Yes. Come.

"W. H."
This letter duly reached Paul Montague at his lodgings. He started immediately for Islington. He had now no desire to delay the meeting. He had at any rate taught her that his gentleness towards her, his going to the play with her, and drinking tea with her at Mrs. Pipkin's, and his journey with her to the sea, were not to be taken as evidence that he was gradually being conquered. He had declared his purpose plainly enough at Lowestoffe,—and plainly enough in his last letter. She had told him down at the hotel, that had she by chance have been armed at the moment, she would have shot him. She could arm herself now if she pleased;—but his real fear had not lain in that direction. The pang consisted in having to assure her that he was resolved to do her wrong. The worst of that was now over.

The door was opened for him by Ruby, who by no means greeted him with a happy countenance. It was the second morning after the night of her imprisonment; and nothing had occurred to alleviate her woe. At this very moment her lover should have been in Liverpool, but he was, in fact, abed in Welbeck Street. "Yes, sir; she's at home," said Ruby, with a baby in her arms and a little child hanging on to her dress. "Don't pull so, Sally. Please, sir, is Sir Felix still in London?" Ruby had written to Sir Felix the very night of her imprisonment, but had not as yet received any reply. Paul, whose mind was altogether intent on his own troubles, declared that at present he knew nothing about Sir Felix, and was then shown into Mrs. Hurtle's room.

"So you have come," she said, without rising from her chair.

"Of course I came, when you desired it."

"I don't know why you should. My wishes do not seem to affect you much: Will you sit down there," she said, pointing to a seat at some distance from herself. "So you think it would be best that you and I should never see each other again?" She was very calm; but it seemed to him that the quietness was assumed, and that at any moment it might be converted into violence. He thought that there was that in her eye which seemed to foretell the spring of the wild-cat.

"I did think so certainly. What more can I say?"

"Oh, nothing; clearly nothing." Her voice was very low. "Why should a gentleman trouble himself to say any more,—than that he has changed his mind? Why make a fuss about such little things as a woman's life, or a woman's heart?" Then she paused. "And having come, in consequence of my unreasonable request, of course you are wise to hold your peace,"

"I came because I promised."

"But you did not promise to speak;—did you?"

"What would you have me say?"

"Ah what! Am I to be so weak as to tell you now what I would have you say? Suppose you were to say, 'I am a gentleman, and a man of my word, and I repent me of my intended perfidy,' do you not think you might get your release that way? Might it not be possible that I should reply that as your heart was gone from me, your hand might go after it;—that I scorned to be the wife of a man
The door was opened for him by Ruby.
who did not want me?" As she asked this she gradually raised her
voice, and half lifted herself in her seat, stretching herself towards
him.

"You might indeed," he replied, not well knowing what to say.
"But I should not. I at least will be true. I should take you
Paul,—still take you; with a confidence that I should yet win you
to me by my devotion. I have still some kindness of feeling towards
you,—none to that woman who is I suppose younger than I, and
gentler, and a maid." She still looked as though she expected a
reply, but there was nothing to be said in answer to this. "Now
that you are going to leave me, Paul, is there any advice you can
give me, as to what I shall do next. I have given up every friend in
the world for you. I have no home. Mrs. Pipkin's room here is
more my home than any other spot on the earth. I have all the
world to choose from, but no reason whatever for a choice. I have
my property. What shall I do with it, Paul? If I could die and be
no more heard of, you should be welcome to it." There was no
answer possible to all this. The questions were asked because there
was no answer possible. "You might at any rate advise me. Paul,
you are in some degree responsible,—are you not,—for my lone-
liness?"

"I am. But you know that I cannot answer your questions."
"You cannot wonder that I should be somewhat in doubt as to my
future life. As far as I can see, I had better remain here. I do good
at any rate to Mrs. Pipkin. She went into hysterics yesterday when
I spoke of leaving her. That woman, Paul, would starve in our
country, and I shall be desolate in this." Then she paused, and there
was absolute silence for a minute. "You thought my letter very
short; did you not?"

"It said, I suppose, all you had to say."
"No, indeed. I did have much more to say. That was the third
letter I wrote. Now you shall see the other two. I wrote three,
and had to choose which I would send you. I fancy that yours to
me was easier written than either one of mine. You had no doubts,
you know. I had many doubts. I could not send them all by post,
together. But you may see them all now." There is one. You may
read that first. "While I was writing it, I was determined that that
should go." Then she handed him the sheet of paper which contained
the threat of the horsewhip.

"I am glad you did not send that," he said.
"I meant it."
"But you have changed your mind?"
"Is there anything in it that seems to you to be unreasonable?
Speak out and tell me."
"I am thinking of you, not of myself."
"Think of me, then. Is there anything said there which the usage
to which I have been subjected does not justify?"
"You ask me questions which I cannot answer. I do not think
that under any provocation a woman should use a horsewhip."
"It is certainly more comfortable for gentlemen,—who amuse
themselves,—that women should have that opinion. But, upon my
word, I don't know what to say about that. As long as there are
men to fight for women, it may be well to leave the fighting to the
men. But when a woman has no one to help her, is she to bear
everything without turning upon those who ill-use her? Shall a
woman be flayed alive because it is unfeminine in her to fight for her
own skin? What is the good of being—feminine, as you call it? 
Have you asked yourself that? That men may be attracted I should
say. But if a woman finds that men only take advantage of her
assumed weakness, shall she not throw it off? If she be treated as
prey, shall she not fight as a beast of prey? Oh no;—it is so
unfeminine! I also, Paul, had thought of that. The charm of
womanly weakness presented itself to my mind in a soft moment,—
and then I wrote this other letter. You may as well see them all." 
And so she handed him the scrap which had been written at
Lowestoffe, and he read that also.

He could hardly finish it, because of the tears which filled his eyes.
But, having mastered its contents, he came across the room and threw
himself on his knees at her feet, sobbing. "I have not sent it, you
know," she said. "I only show it you—that you may see how my
mind has been at work."

"It hurts me more than the other," he replied.

"Nay, I would not hurt you,—not at this moment. Sometimes I
feel that I could tear you limb from limb, so great is my disappoint-
ment, so ungovernable my rage!. Why,—why should I be such a
victim? Why should life be an utter blank to me, while you have
everything before you? There, you have seen them all. Which will
you have?"

"I cannot now take that other as the expression of your mind."

"But it will be when you have left me;—and was when you were
with me at the sea-side. And it was so I felt when I got your first
letter in San Francisco. Why should you kneel there? You do not
love me. A man should kneel to a woman for love, not for pardon."
But though she spoke thus, she put her hand upon his forehead, and
pushed back his hair, and looked into his face. "I wonder whether
that other woman loves you. I do not want an answer, Paul.
I suppose you had better go." She took his hand and pressed it to her
breast. "Tell me one thing. When you spoke of—compensation,
did you mean—money?"

"No; indeed no."

"I hope not;—I hope not that. Well, there;—go. You shall be
troubled no more with Winifrid Hurtle." She took the sheet of
paper which contained the threat of the horsewhip and tore it into
scrap.

"And am I to keep the other?" he asked.

"No. For what purpose would you have it? To prove my weak-
ness? That also shall be destroyed." But she took it and restored
it to her pocket-book.

"Good-bye, my friend," he said.

"Nay! This parting will not bear a farewell. Go, and let there
be no other word spoken." And so he went.
As soon as the front door was closed behind him she rang the bell
and begged Ruby to ask Mrs. Pipkin to come to her. "Mrs. Pipkin," she said, as soon as the woman had entered the room; "everything is over between me and Mr. Montague." She was standing upright in the middle of the room, and as she spoke there was a smile on her face.

"Lord a' mercy," said Mrs. Pipkin, holding up both her hands.

"As I have told you that I was to be married to him, I think it right now to tell you that I'm not going to be married to him."

"And why not?—and he such a nice young man,—and quiet too."

"As to the why not, I don't know that I am prepared to speak about that. But it is so. I was engaged to him."

"I'm well sure of that, Mrs. Hurtle."

"And now I'm no longer engaged to him. That's all."

"Dearie me! and you going down to Lowestoffe with him, and all." Mrs. Pipkin could not bear to think that she should hear no more of such an interesting story.

"We did go down to Lowestoffe together, and we both came back,—not together. And there's an end of it."

"I'm sure it's not your fault, Mrs. Hurtle. When a marriage is to be, and doesn't come off, it never is the lady's fault."

"There's an end of it, Mrs. Pipkin. If you please, we won't say anything more about it."

"And are you going to leave, ma'am?" said Mrs. Pipkin, prepared to have her apron up to her eyes at a moment's notice. Where should she get such another lodger as Mrs. Hurtle,—a lady who not only did not inquire about victuals, but who was always suggesting that the children should eat this pudding or finish that pie, and who had never questioned an item in a bill since she had been in the house!

"We'll say nothing about that yet, Mrs. Pipkin." Then Mrs. Pipkin gave utterance to so many assurances of sympathy and help that it almost seemed that she was prepared to guarantee to her lodger another lover in lieu of the one who was now dismissed.

CHAPTER LII.

THE RESULTS OF LOVE AND WINE.

TWO, three, four, and even five o'clock still found Sir Felix Carbury in bed on that fatal Thursday. More than once or twice his mother crept up to his room, but on each occasion he feigned to be fast asleep and made no reply to her gentle words. But his condition was one which only admits of short snatches of uneasy slumber. From head to foot, he was sick and ill and sore, and could find no comfort anywhere. To lie where he was, trying by absolute quiescence to soothe the agony of his brows and to remember that as long as he lay there he would be safe from attack by the outer world, was all the solace within her reach. Lady Carbury sent the page up to him, and to the page he was awake. The boy brought him tea. He asked for soda and brandy; but there was none to be had, and in his present condition he did not dare to hector about it till it was procured for him.
The world surely was now all over to him. He had made arrangements for running away with the great heiress of the day, and had absolutely allowed the young lady to run away without him. The details of their arrangement had been such that she absolutely would start upon her long journey across the ocean before she could find out that he had failed to keep his appointment. Melmotte's hostility would be incurred by the attempt, and hers by the failure. Then he had lost all his money,—and hers. He had induced his poor mother to assist in raising a fund for him,—and even that was gone. He was so cowed that he was afraid even of his mother. And he could remember something, but no details, of some row at the club,—but still with a conviction on his mind that he had made the row. Ah,—when would he summon courage to enter the club again? When could he show himself again anywhere? All the world would know that Marie Melmotte had attempted to run off with him, and that at the last moment he had failed her. What lie could he invent to cover his disgrace? And his clothes! All his things were at the club;—or he thought that they were, not being quite certain whether he had not made some attempt to carry them off to the Railway Station. He had heard of suicide. If ever it could be well that a man should cut his own throat, surely the time had come for him now. But as this idea presented itself to him he simply gathered the clothes around him and tried to sleep. The death of Cato would hardly have for him persuasive charms.

Between five and six his mother again came up to him, and when he appeared to sleep, stood with her hand upon his shoulder. There must be some end to this. He must at any rate be fed. She, wretched woman, had been sitting all day,—thinking of it. As regarded her son himself, his condition told his story with sufficient accuracy. What might be the fate of the girl she could not stop to enquire. She had not heard all the details of the proposed scheme; but she had known that Felix had proposed to be at Liverpool on the Wednesday night, and to start on Thursday for New York with the young lady; and with the view of aiding him in his object she had helped him with money. She had bought clothes for him, and had been busy with Hetta for two days preparing for his long journey,—having told some lie to her own daughter as to the cause of her brother's intended journey. He had not gone, but had come, drunk and degraded, back to the house. She had searched his pockets with less scruple than she had ever before felt, and had found his ticket for the vessel and the few sovereigns which were left to him. About him she could read the riddle plainly. He had stayed at his club till he was drunk, and had gambled away all his money. When she had first seen him she had asked herself what further lie she should now tell to her daughter. At breakfast there was instant need for some story. "Mary says that Felix came back this morning, and that he has not gone at all," Hetta exclaimed. The poor woman could not bring herself to expose the vices of the son to her daughter. She could not say that he had stumbled into the house drunk at six o'clock. Hetta no doubt had her own suspicions. "Yes; he has come back," said Lady Carbury, broken-hearted by her troubles, "It
was some plan about the Mexican railway I believe, and has broken through. He is very unhappy and not well. I will see to him." After that Hetta had said nothing during the whole day. And now, about an hour before dinner, Lady Carbury was standing by her son's bedside, determined that he should speak to her.

"Felix," she said,—"speak to me, Felix.—I know that you are awake." He groaned, and turned himself away from her, burying himself further under the bedclothes. "You must get up for your dinner. It is near six o'clock."

"All right," he said at last.

"What is the meaning of this, Felix? You must tell me. It must be told sooner or later. I know you are unhappy. You had better trust your mother."

"I am so sick, mother."

"You will be better up. What were you doing last night? What has come of it all? Where are your things?"

"At the club.—You had better leave me now, and let Sam come up to me." Sam was the page.

"I will leave you presently; but, Felix, you must tell me about this. What has been done?"

"It hasn't come off."

"But how has it not come off?"

"I didn't get away. What's the good of asking?"

"You said this morning when you came in, that Mr. Melmotte had discovered it."

"Did I? Then I suppose he has. Oh, mother, I wish I could die. I don't see what's the use of anything. I won't get up to dinner. I'd rather stay here."

"You must have something to eat, Felix."

"Sam can bring it me. Do let him get me some brandy and water. I'm so faint and sick with all this that I can hardly bear myself. I can't talk now. If he'll get me a bottle of soda water and some brandy, I'll tell you all about it then."

"Where is the money, Felix?"

"I paid it for the ticket," said he, with both his hands up to his head.

Then his mother again left him with the understanding that he was to be allowed to remain in bed till the next morning; but that he was to give her some further explanation when he had been refreshed and invigorated after his own prescription. The boy went out and got him soda water and brandy, and meat was carried up to him, and then he did succeed for a while in finding oblivion from his misery in sleep.

"Is he ill, mamma?" Hetta asked.

"Yes, my dear."

"Had you not better send for a doctor?"

"No, my dear. He will be better to-morrow."

"Mamma, I think you would be happier if you would tell me everything."

"I can't," said Lady Carbury, bursting out into tears. "Don't ask. What's the good of asking? It is all misery and wretchedness. There is nothing to tell,—except that I am ruined."
"Has he done anything, mamma?"
"No. What should he have done? How am I to know what he does. He tells me nothing. Don't talk about it any more. Oh, God,—how much better it would be to be childless!"
"Oh, mamma, do you mean me?" said Hetta, rushing across the room, and throwing herself close to her mother's side on the sofa.
"Mamma, say that you do not mean me."
"It concerns you as well as me and him. I wish I were childless."
"Oh, mamma, do not be cruel to me! Am I not good to you? Do I not try to be a comfort to you?"
"Then marry your cousin, Roger Carbury, who is a good man, and who can protect you. You can, at any rate, find a home for yourself, and a friend for us. You are not like Felix. You do not get drunk and gamble,—because you are a woman. But you are stiff-necked, and will not help me in my trouble."
"Shall I marry him, mamma, without loving him?"
"Love! Have I been able to love? Do you see much of what you call love around you. Why should you not love him? He is a gentleman, and a good man,—soft-hearted, of a sweet nature, whose life would be one effort to make yours happy. You think that Felix is very bad."
"I have never said so."
"But ask yourself whether you do not give as much pain, seeing what you could do for us if you would. But it never occurs to you to sacrifice even a fantasy for the advantage of others."

Hetta retired from her seat on the sofa, and when her mother again went up-stairs she turned it all over in her mind. Could it be right that she should marry one man when she loved another? Could it be right that she should marry at all, for the sake of doing good to her family? This man, whom she might marry if she would,—who did in truth worship the ground on which she trod,—was, she well knew, all that her mother had said. And he was more than that. Her mother had spoken of his soft heart, and his sweet nature. But Hetta knew also, that he was a man of high honour and a noble courage. In such a condition as was hers now he was the very friend whose advice she could have asked,—had he not been the very lover who was desirous of making her his wife. Hetta felt that she could sacrifice much for her mother. Money, if she had it, she could have given, though she left herself penniless. Her time, her inclinations, her very heart's treasure, and, as she thought, her life, she could give. She could doom herself to poverty, and loneliness, and heart-rending regrets for her mother's sake. But she did not know how she could give herself into the arms of a man she did not love.

"I don't know what there is to explain," said Felix to his mother. She had asked him why he had not gone to Liverpool, whether he had been interrupted by Melmotte himself, whether news had reached him from Marie that she had been stopped, or whether,—as might have been possible,—Marie had changed her own mind. But he could not bring himself to tell the truth, or any story bordering on the truth. "It didn't come off," he said, "and of course that knocked me off my legs. Well; yes. I did take some champagne
"Can I marry the man I do not love?"
when I found how it was. A fellow does get cut up by that kind of thing. Oh, I heard it at the club,—that the whole thing was off. I can't explain anything more. And then I was so mad, I can't tell what I was after. I did get the ticket. There it is. That shows I was in earnest. I spent the £30 in getting it. I suppose the change is there. Don't take it, for I haven't another shilling in the world.'

Of course he said nothing of Marie's money, or of that which he had received from Melmotte. And as his mother had heard nothing of these sums she could not contradict what he said. She got from him no further statement, but she was sure that there was a story to be told which would reach her ears sooner or later.

That evening, about nine o'clock, Mr. Broune called in Welbeck Street. He very often did call now, coming up in a cab, staying for a cup of tea, and going back in the same cab to the office of his newspaper. Since Lady Carbury had, so devotedly, abstained from accepting his offer, Mr. Broune had become almost sincerely attached to her. There was certainly between them now more of the intimacy of real friendship than had ever existed in earlier days. He spoke to her more freely about his own affairs, and even she would speak to him with some attempt at truth. There was never between them now even a shade of love-making. She did not look into his eyes, nor did he hold her hand. As for kissing her,—he thought no more of it than of kissing the maid-servant. But he spoke to her of the things that worried him,—the unreasonable exactions of proprietors; and the perilous inaccuracy of contributors. He told her of the exceeding weight upon his shoulders, under which an Atlas would have succumbed. And he told her something too of his triumphs;—how he had had this fellow bowled over in punishment for some contradiction, and that man snuffed out for daring to be an enemy. And he expatiated on his own virtues, his justice and clemency. Ah,—if men and women only knew his good nature and his patriotism;—how he had spared the rod here, how he had made the fortune of a man there, how he had saved the country millions by the steadiness of his adherence to some grand truth! Lady Carbury delighted in all this and repaid him by flattery, and little confidences of her own. Under his teaching she had almost made up her mind to give up Mr. Alf. Of nothing was Mr. Broune more certain than that Mr. Alf was making a fool of himself in regard to the Westminster election and those attacks on Melmotte. "The world of London generally knows what it is about," said Mr. Broune, "and the London world believes Mr. Melmotte to be sound. I don't pretend to say that he has never done anything that he ought not to do. I am not going into his antecedents. But he is a man of wealth, power, and genius, and Alf will get the worst of it." Under such teaching as this, Lady Carbury was almost obliged to give up Mr. Alf.

Sometimes they would sit in the front room with Hetta, to whom also Mr. Broune had become attached; but sometimes Lady Carbury would be in her own sanctum. On this evening she received him there, and at once poured forth all her troubles about Felix. On this occasion she told him everything, and almost told him everything truly. He
had already heard the story. "The young lady went down to Liverpool, and Sir Felix was not there."

"He could not have been there. He has been in bed in this house all day. Did she go?"

"So I am told;—and was met at the station by the senior officer of the police at Liverpool, who brought her back to London without letting her go down to the ship at all. She must have thought that her lover was on board;—probably thinks so now. I pity her."

"How much worse it would have been, had she been allowed to start," said Lady Carbury.

"Yes; that would have been bad. She would have had a sad journey to New York, and a sadder journey back. Has your son told you anything about money?"

"What money?"

"They say that the girl entrusted him with a large sum which she had taken from her father. If that be so he certainly ought to lose no time in restoring it. It might be done through some friend. I would do it for that matter. If it be so,—to avoid unpleasantness,—it should be sent back at once. It will be for his credit."

This Mr. Broune said with a clear intimation of the importance of his advice.

It was dreadful to Lady Carbury. She had no money to give back, nor, as she was well aware, had her son. She had heard nothing of any money. What did Mr. Broune mean by a large sum?

"That would be dreadful," she said.

"Had you not better ask him about it?"

Lady Carbury was again in tears. She knew that she could not hope to get a word of truth from her son. "What do you mean by a large sum?"

"Two or three hundred pounds, perhaps."

"I have not a shilling in the world, Mr. Broune." Then it all came out,—the whole story of her poverty, as it had been brought about by her son’s misconduct. She told him every detail of her money affairs from the death of her husband, and his will, up to the present moment.

"He is eating you up, Lady Carbury." Lady Carbury thought that she was nearly eaten up already, but she said nothing. "You must put a stop to this."

"But how?"

"You must rid yourself of him. It is dreadful to say so, but it must be done. You must not see your daughter ruined. Find out what money he got from Miss Melmotte and I will see that it is repaid. That must be done;—and we will then try to get him to go abroad. No;—do not contradict me. We can talk of the money another time. I must be off now, as I have stayed too long. Do as I bid you. Make him tell you, and send me word down to the office. If you could do it early to-morrow, that would be best. God bless you." And so he hurried off.

Early on the following morning a letter from Lady Carbury was put into Mr. Broune’s hands, giving the story of the money as far as she had been able to extract it from Sir Felix. Sir Felix declared
that Mr. Melmotte had owed him £600, and that he had received £250 out of this from Miss Melmotte,—so that there was still a large balance due to him. Lady Carbury went on to say that her son had at last confessed that he had lost this money at play. The story was fairly true; but Lady Carbury in her letter acknowledged that she was not justified in believing it because it was told to her by her son.

CHAPTER LIII.

A DAY IN THE CITY.

MELMOTTE had got back his daughter, and was half inclined to let the matter rest there. He would probably have done so had he not known that all his own household were aware that she had gone off to meet Sir Felix Carbury, and had he not also received the condolence of certain friends in the city. It seemed that about two o'clock in the day the matter was known to everybody. Of course Lord Nidderdale would hear of it, and if so all the trouble that he had taken in that direction would have been taken in vain. Stupid fool of a girl to throw away her chance,—nay, to throw away the certainty of a brilliant career, in that way! But his anger against Sir Felix was infinitely more bitter than his anger against his daughter. The man had pledged himself to abstain from any step of this kind,—had given a written pledge,—had renounced under his own signature his intention of marrying Marie! Melmotte had of course learned all the details of the cheque for £250,—how the money had been paid at the bank to Didon, and how Didon had given it to Sir Felix. Marie herself acknowledged that Sir Felix had received the money. If possible he would prosecute the baronet for stealing his money.

Had Melmotte been altogether a prudent man he would probably have been satisfied with getting back his daughter and would have allowed the money to go without further trouble. At this especial point in his career ready money was very valuable to him, but his concerns were of such magnitude that £250 could make but little difference. But there had grown upon the man during the last few months an arrogance, a self-confidence inspired in him by the worship of other men, which clouded his intellect, and robbed him of much of that power of calculation which undoubtedly he naturally possessed. He remembered perfectly his various little transactions with Sir Felix. Indeed it was one of his gifts to remember with accuracy all money transactions, whether great or small, and to keep an account book in his head, which was always totted up and balanced with accuracy. He knew exactly how he stood, even with the crossing-sweeper to whom he had given a penny last Tuesday, as with the Longestaffes, father and son, to whom he had not as yet made any payment on behalf of the purchase of Pickering. But Sir Felix's money had been consigned into his hands for the purchase of shares,—and that consignment did not justify Sir Felix in taking another sum of money
from his daughter. In such a matter he thought that an English magistrate, and an English jury, would all be on his side,—especially as he was Augustus Melmotte, the man about to be chosen for Westminster, the man about to entertain the Emperor of China!

The next day was Friday,—the day of the Railway Board. Early in the morning he sent a note to Lord Nidderdale.

"My dear Nidderdale,—

Pray come to the Board to day;—or at any rate come to me in the city. I specially want to speak to you.

Yours,

"A. M."

This he wrote, having made up his mind that it would be wise to make a clear breast of it with his hoped-for son-in-law. If there was still a chance of keeping the young lord to his guns that chance would be best supported by perfect openness on his part. The young lord would of course know what Marie had done. But the young lord had for some weeks past been aware that there had been a difficulty in regard to Sir Felix Carbury, and had not on that account relaxed his suit. It might be possible to persuade the young lord that as the young lady had now tried to elope and tried in vain, his own chance might on the whole be rather improved than injured.

Mr. Melmotte on that morning had many visitors, among whom one of the earliest and most unfortunate was Mr. Longestaffe. At that time there had been arranged at the offices in Abchurch Lane, a mode of double ingress and egress,—a front stairs and a back stairs approach and exit, as is always necessary with very great men,—in reference to which arrangement the honour and dignity attached to each is exactly contrary to that which generally prevails in the world; the front stairs being intended for everybody, and being both slow and uncertain, whereas the back stairs are quick and sure, and are used only for those who are favoured. Miles Grendall had the command of the stairs, and found that he had plenty to do in keeping people in their right courses. Mr. Longestaffe reached Abchurch Lane before one,—having altogether failed in getting a moment's private conversation with the big man on that other Friday, when he had come later. He fell at once into Miles's hands, and was ushered through the front stairs passage and into the front stairs waiting-room, with much external courtesy. Miles Grendall was very voluble. Did Mr. Longestaffe want to see Mr. Melmotte? Oh;—Mr. Longestaffe wanted to see Mr. Melmotte as soon as possible! Of course Mr. Longestaffe should see Mr. Melmotte. He, Miles, knew that Mr. Melmotte was particularly desirous of seeing Mr. Longestaffe. Mr. Melmotte had mentioned Mr. Longestaffe's name twice during the last three days. Would Mr. Longestaffe sit down for a few minutes? Had Mr. Longestaffe seen the "Morning Breakfast Table?" Mr. Melmotte undoubtedly was very much engaged. At this moment a deputation from the Canadian Government was with him;—and Sir Gregory Gribe was in the office waiting for a few words. But Miles thought that the Canadian Government would not be long,—and as for Sir Gregory, perhaps his business might be postponed. Miles
would do his very best to get an interview for Mr. Longestaffe,—more especially as Mr. Melmotte was so very desirous himself of seeing his friend. It was astonishing that such a one as Miles Grendall should have learned his business so well and should have made himself so handy! We will leave Mr. Longestaffe with the "Morning Breakfast Table" in his hands, in the front waiting-room, merely notifying the fact that there he remained for something over two hours.

In the mean time both Mr. Broune and Lord Niddersdale came to the office, and both were received without delay. Mr. Broune was the first. Miles knew who he was, and made no attempt to seat him in the same room with Mr. Longestaffe. "I'll just send him a note," said Mr. Broune, and he scrawled a few words at the office counter. "I'm commissioned to pay you some money on behalf of Miss Melmotte." Those were the words, and they at once procured him admission to the sanctum. The Canadian Deputation must have taken its leave, and Sir Gregory could hardly have as yet arrived. Lord Niddersdale, who had presented himself almost at the same moment with the Editor, was shown into a little private room,—which was, indeed, Miles Grendall's own retreat. "What's up with the Governor?" asked the young Lord.

"Anything particular do you mean?" said Miles. "There are always so many things up here."

"He has sent for me."

"Yes,—you'll go in directly. There's that fellow who does the 'Breakfast Table' in with him. I don't know what he's come about. You know what he has sent for you for?"

Lord Niddersdale answered this question by another. "I suppose all this about Miss Melmotte is true?"

"She did go off yesterday morning," said Miles, in a whisper.

"But Carbury wasn't with her."

"Well, no;—I suppose not. He seems to have mulled it. He's such a d—brute, he'd be sure to go wrong whatever he had in hand."

"You don't like him, of course, Miles. For that matter I've no reason to love him. He couldn't have gone. He staggered out of the club yesterday morning at four o'clock as drunk as Cloe. He'd lost a pot of money, and had been kicking up a row about you for the last hour."

"Brute!" exclaimed Miles, with honest indignation.

"I dare say. But though he was able to make a row, I'm sure he couldn't get himself down to Liverpool. And I saw all his things lying about the club hall late last night;—no end of portmanteaux and bags; just what a fellow would take to New York. By George! Fancy taking a girl to New York! It was plucky."

"It was all her doing," said Miles, who was of course intimate with Mr. Melmotte's whole establishment, and had had means therefore of hearing the true story.

"What a fiasco!" said the young lord, "I wonder what the old boy means to say to me about it." Then there was heard the clear tingle of a little silver bell, and Miles told Lord Niddersdale that his time had come.
Mr. Broune had of late been very serviceable to Mr. Melmotte, and Melmotte was correspondingly gracious. On seeing the Editor he immediately began to make a speech of thanks in respect of the support given by the "Breakfast Table" to his candidature. But Mr. Broune cut him short. "I never talk about the 'Breakfast Table,'" said he. "We endeavour to get along as right as we can, and the less said the soonest mended." Melmotte bowed. "I have come now about quite another matter, and perhaps, the less said the sooner mended about that also. Sir Felix Carbury on a late occasion received a sum of money in trust from your daughter. Circumstances have prevented its use in the intended manner, and, therefore, as Sir Felix's friend, I have called to return the money to you." Mr. Broune did not like calling himself the friend of Sir Felix, but he did even that for the lady who had been good enough to him not to marry him.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Melmotte, with a scowl on his face, which he would have repressed if he could.

"No doubt you understand all about it."

"Yes;—I understand. D—— scoundrel!"

"We won't discuss that, Mr. Melmotte. I've drawn a cheque myself, payable to your order,—to make the matter all straight. The sum was £250, I think." And Mr. Broune put a cheque for that amount down upon the table.

"I dare say it's all right," said Mr. Melmotte. "But, remember, I don't think that this absolves him. He has been a scoundrel."

"At any rate he has paid back the money, which chance put into his hands, to the only person entitled to receive it on the young lady's behalf. Good morning." Mr. Melmotte did put out his hand in token of amity. Then Mr. Broune departed and Melmotte tinkled his bell. As Nidderdale was shown in he crumpled up the cheque, and put it into his pocket. He was at once clever enough to perceive that any idea which he might have had of prosecuting Sir Felix must be abandoned. "Well, my Lord, and how are you?" said he with his pleasantest smile. Nidderdale declared himself to be as fresh as paint. "You don't look down in the mouth, my Lord."

Then Lord Nidderdale,—who no doubt felt that it behaved him to show a good face before his late intended father-in-law,—sang the refrain of an old song, which it is trusted my readers may remember.

"Cheer up, Sam;
Don't let your spirits go down.
There's many a girl that I know well,
Is waiting for you in the town."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Melmotte, "very good. I've no doubt there is,—many a one. But you won't let this stupid nonsense stand in your way with Marie."

"Upon my word, sir, I don't know about that. Miss Melmotte has given the most convincing proof of her partiality for another gentleman, and of her indifference to me."

"A foolish baggage! A silly little romantic baggage! She's been reading novels till she has learned to think she couldn't settle down quietly till she had run off with somebody."
"She doesn't seem to have succeeded on this occasion, Mr. Melmotte."

"No;—of course we had her back again from Liverpool."

"But they say that she got further than the gentleman."

"He is a dishonest, drunken scoundrel. My girl knows very well what he is now. She'll never try that game again. Of course, my Lord, I'm very sorry. You know that I've been on the square with you always. She's my only child, and sooner or later she must have all that I possess. What she will have at once will make any man wealthy,—that is, if she marries with my sanction; and in a year or two I expect that I shall be able to double what I give her now, without touching my capital. Of course you understand that I desire to see her occupying high rank. I think that, in this country, that is a noble object of ambition. Had she married that sweep I should have broken my heart. Now, my Lord, I want you to say that this shall make no difference to you. I am very honest with you. I do not try to hide anything. The thing of course has been a misfortune. Girls will be romantic. But you may be sure that this little accident will assist rather than impede your views. After this she will not be very fond of Sir Felix Carbury."

"I dare say not. Though, by Jove, girls will forgive anything."

"She won't forgive him. By George, she shan't. She shall hear the whole story. You'll come and see her just the same as ever!"

"I don't know about that, Mr. Melmotte."

"Why not? You're not so weak as to surrender all your settled projects for such a piece of folly as that! He didn't even see her all the time."

"That wasn't her fault."

"The money will all be there, Lord Nidderdale."

"The money's all right, I've no doubt. And there isn't a man in all London would be better pleased to settle down with a good income than I would. But, by Jove, it's a rather strong order when a girl has just run away with another man. Everybody knows it."

"In three months' time everybody will have forgotten it."

"To tell you the truth, sir, I think Miss Melmotte has got a will of her own stronger than you give her credit for. She has never given me the slightest encouragement. Ever so long ago, about Christmas, she did once say that she would do as you bade her. But she is very much changed since then. The thing was off."

"She had nothing to do with that."

"No;—but she has taken advantage of it, and I have no right to complain."

"You just come to the house, and ask her again to-morrow. Or come on Sunday morning. Don't let us be done out of all our settled arrangements by the folly of an idle girl. Will you come on Sunday morning about noon?" Lord Nidderdale thought of his position for a few moments and then said that perhaps he would come on Sunday morning. After that Melmotte proposed that they two should go and "get a bit of lunch" at a certain Conservative club in the City. There would be time before the meeting of the Railway Board. Nidderdale had no objection to the lunch, but expressed a strong
opinion that the Board was "rot." "That's all very well for you, young man," said the chairman, "but I must go there in order that you may be able to enjoy a splendid fortune." Then he touched the young man on the shoulder and drew him back as he was passing out by the front stairs. "Come this way, Nidderdale;—come this way. I must get out without being seen. There are people waiting for me there who think that a man can attend to business from morning to night without ever having a bit in his mouth." And so they escaped by the back stairs.

At the club, the City Conservative world,—which always lunches well,—welcomed Mr. Melmotte very warmly. The election was coming on, and there was much to be said. He played the part of the big City man to perfection, standing about the room with his hat on, and talking loudly to a dozen men at once. And he was glad to show the club that Lord Nidderdale had come there with him. The club of course knew that Lord Nidderdale was the accepted suitor of the rich man's daughter,—accepted, that is, by the rich man himself,—and the club knew also that the rich man's daughter had tried,—but had failed,—to run away with Sir Felix Carbury. There is nothing like wiping out a misfortune and having done with it. The presence of Lord Nidderdale was almost an assurance to the club that the misfortune had been wiped out, and, as it were, abolished. A little before three Mr. Melmotte returned to Abchurch Lane, intending to regain his room by the back way; while Lord Nidderdale went westward, considering within his own mind whether it was expedient that he should continue to show himself as a suitor for Miss Melmotte's hand. He had an idea that a few years ago a man could not have done such a thing—that he would be held to show a poor spirit should he attempt it; but that now it did not much matter what a man did,—if only he were successful. "After all it's only an affair of money," he said to himself.

Mr. Longestaffe in the meantime had progressed from weariness to impatience, from impatience to ill-humour, and from ill-humour to indignation. More than once he saw Miles Grendall, but Miles Grendall was always ready with an answer. That Canadian Deputation was determined to settle the whole business this morning, and would not take itself away. And Sir Gregory Gribé had been obstinate, beyond the ordinary obstinacy of a bank director. The rate of discount at the bank could not be settled for to-morrow without communication with Mr. Melmotte, and that was a matter on which the details were always most oppressive. At first Mr. Longestaffe was somewhat stunned by the Deputation and Sir Gregory Gribé; but as he waxed wroth the potency of those institutions dwindled away, and as, at last, he waxed hungry, they became as nothing to him. Was he not Mr. Longestaffé of Caversham, a Deputy-Lieutenant of his County, and accustomed to lunch punctually at two o'clock? When he had been in that waiting-room for two hours, it occurred to him that he only wanted his own, and that he would not remain there to be starved for any Mr. Melmotte in Europe. It occurred to him also that that thorn in his side, Squercum, would certainly get a finger into the pie to his infinite annoyance. Then he
walked forth, and attempted to see Grendall for the fourth time. But Miles Grendall also liked his lunch, and was therefore declared by one of the junior clerks to be engaged at that moment on most important business with Mr. Melmotte. "Then say that I can't wait any longer," said Mr. Longestaffe, stamping out of the room with angry feet.

At the very door he met Mr. Melmotte. "Ah, Mr. Longestaffe," said the great financier, seizing him by the hand, "you are the very man I am desirous of seeing."

"I have been waiting two hours up in your place," said the Squire of Caversham."

"Tut, tut, tut;—and they never told me!"

"I spoke to Mr. Grendall half a dozen times."

Yes,—yes. And he did put a slip with your name on it on my desk. I do remember. My dear sir, I have so many things on my brain, that I hardly know how to get along with them. You are coming to the Board? It's just the time now."

"No;"—said Mr. Longestaffe. "I can stay no longer in the City." It was cruel that a man so hungry should be asked to go to a Board by a chairman who had just lunched at his club.

"I was carried away to the Bank of England and could not help myself," said Melmotte. "And when they get me there I can never get away again."

"My son is very anxious to have the payments made about Pickering," said Mr. Longestaffe, absolutely holding Melmotte by the collar of his coat.

"Payments for Pickering!" said Melmotte, assuming an air of unimportant doubt,—of doubt as though the thing were of no real moment. "Haven't they been made?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Longestaffe, "unless made this morning."

"There was something about it, but I cannot just remember what. My second cashier, Mr. Smith, manages all my private affairs, and they go clean out of my head. I'm afraid he's in Grosvenor Square at this moment. Let me see;—Pickering! Wasn't there some question of a mortgage. I'm sure there was something about a mortgage."

"There was a mortgage, of course;—but that only made three payments necessary instead of two."

"But there was some unavoidable delay about the papers;—something occasioned by the mortgagee. I know there was. But you shan't be inconvenienced, Mr. Longestaffe."

"It's my son, Mr. Melmotte. He's got a lawyer of his own."

"I never knew a young man that wasn't in a hurry for his money," said Melmotte laughing. "Oh, yes;—there were three payments to be made; one to you, one to your son, and one to the mortgagee. I will speak to Mr. Smith myself to-morrow—and you may tell your son that he really need not trouble his lawyer. He will only be losing his money, for lawyers are expensive. What; you won't come to the Board? I am sorry for that." Mr. Longestaffe, having after a fashion said what he had to say, declined to go to the Board. A painful rumour had reached him the day before, which had been communicated to him in a very quiet way by a very old
friend,—by a member of a private firm of bankers whom he was accustomed to regard as the wisest and most eminent man of his acquaintance,—that Pickering had been already mortgaged to its full value by its new owner. "Mind, I know nothing," said the banker. "The report has reached me, and if it be true, it shows that Mr. Melmotte must be much pressed for money. It does not concern you at all if you have got your price. But it seems to be rather a quick transaction. I suppose you have, or he wouldn't have the title deeds." Mr. Longestaffe thanked his friend, and acknowledged that there had been something remiss on his part. Therefore, as he went westward, he was low in spirits. But nevertheless he had been reassured by Melmotte's manner.

Sir Felix Carbury of course did not attend the Board; nor did Paul Montague, for reasons with which the reader has been made acquainted. Lord Nidderdale had declined, having had enough of the City for that day, and Mr. Longestaffe had been banished by hunger. The chairman was therefore supported only by Lord Alfred and Mr. Cohenlupe. But they were such excellent colleagues that the work was got through as well as though those absentees had all attended. When the Board was over Mr. Melmotte and Mr. Cohenlupe retired together.

"I must get that money for Longestaffe," said Melmotte to his friend.

"What, eighty thousand pounds! You can't do it this week,—nor yet before this day week."

"It isn't eighty thousand pounds. I've renewed the mortgage, and that makes it only fifty. If I can manage the half of that which goes to the son, I can put the father off."

"You must raise what you can on the whole property."

"I've done that already," said Melmotte hoarsely.

"And where's the money gone?"

"Brehgert has had £40,000. I was obliged to keep it up with them. You can manage £25,000 for me by Monday?" Mr. Cohenlupe said that he would try, but intimated his opinion that there would be considerable difficulty in the operation.

CHAPTER LIV.

"THE INDIA OFFICE."

The Conservative party at this particular period was putting its shoulder to the wheel,—not to push the coach up any hill, but to prevent its being hurried along at a pace which was not only dangerous, but manifestly destructive. The Conservative party now and then does put its shoulder to the wheel, ostensibly with the great national object above named; but also actuated by a natural desire to keep its own head well above water and be generally doing something, so that
other parties may not suppose that it is moribund. There are, no doubt, members of it who really think that when some object has been achieved,—when, for instance, a good old Tory has been squeezed into Parliament for the borough of Porcorum, which for the last three parliaments has been represented by a Liberal,—the coach has been really stopped. To them, in their delightful faith, there comes at these triumphant moments, a conviction that after all the people as a people have not been really in earnest in their efforts to take something from the greatness of the great, and to add something to the lowliness of the lowly. The handle of the windlass has been broken, the wheel is turning fast the reverse way, and the rope of Radical progress is running back. Who knows what may not be regained if the Conservative party will only put its shoulder to the wheel and take care that the handle of the windlass be not mended! Sticinthemud, which has ever been a doubtful little borough, has just been carried by a majority of fifteen! A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether,—and the old day will come back again. Venerable patriarchs think of Lord Liverpool and other heroes, and dream dreams of Conservative bishops, Conservative lord-lieutenants, and of a Conservative ministry that shall remain in for a generation.

Such a time was now present. Porcorum and Sticinthemud had done their duty valiantly,—with much management. But Westminster! If this special seat for Westminster could be carried, the country then could hardly any longer have a doubt on the matter. If only Mr. Melmotte could be got in for Westminster, it would be manifest that the people were sound at heart, and that all the great changes which had been effected during the last forty years,—from the first reform in Parliament down to the Ballot,—had been managed by the cunning and treachery of a few ambitious men. Not, however, that the Ballot was just now regarded by the party as an unmitigated evil, though it was the last triumph of Radical wickedness. The Ballot was on the whole popular with the party. A short time since, no doubt it was regarded by the party as being one and the same as national ruin and national disgrace. But it had answered well at Porcorum, and with due manipulation had been found to be favourable at Sticinthemud. The Ballot might perhaps help the long pull and the strong pull,—and, in spite of the ruin and disgrace, was thought by some just now to be a highly Conservative measure. It was considered that the Ballot might assist Melmotte at Westminster very materially.

Any one reading the Conservative papers of the time, and hearing the Conservative speeches in the borough,—any one at least who lived so remote as not to have learned what these things really mean, —would have thought that England’s welfare depended on Melmotte’s return. In the enthusiasm of the moment, the attacks made on his character were answered by eulogy as loud as the censure was bitter. The chief crime laid to his charge was connected with the ruin of some great continental assurance company, as to which it was said that he had so managed it as to leave it utterly stranded, with an enormous fortune of his own. It was declared that every shilling which he had brought to England with him had consisted of plunder
stolen from the shareholders in the company. Now the "Evening Pul-
pit," in its endeavour to make the facts of this transaction known, had
placed what it called the domicile of this company in Paris, whereas
it was ascertained that its official head-quarters had in truth been
placed at Vienna. Was not such a blunder as this sufficient to show
that no merchant of higher honour than Mr. Melmotte had ever
adorned the Exchanges of modern capitals? And then two different
newspapers of the time, both of them antagonistic to Melmotte, failed
to be in accord on a material point. One declared that Mr. Melmotte
was not in truth possessed of any wealth. The other said that he
had derived his wealth from those unfortunate shareholders. Could
anything betray so bad a cause as contradictions such as these?
Could anything be so false, so weak, so malignant, so useless, so
wicked, so self-condemned,—in fact, so "Liberal" as a course of
action such as this. The belief naturally to be deduced from such
statements, nay, the unavoidable conviction on the minds—of, at any
rate, the Conservative newspapers—was that Mr. Melmotte had ac-
mulated an immense fortune, and that he had never robbed any
shareholder of a shilling.

The friends of Melmotte had moreover a basis of hope, and were
enabled to sound premonitory notes of triumph, arising from causes
quite external to their party. The "Breakfast Table" supported
Melmotte, but the "Breakfast Table" was not a Conservative organ.
This support was given, not to the great man's political opinions, as
to which a well-known writer in that paper suggested that the great
man had probably not as yet given very much attention to the party
questions which divided the country,—but to his commercial position.
It was generally acknowledged that few men living,—perhaps no man
alive,—had so acute an insight into the great commercial questions of
the age as Mr. Augustus Melmotte. In whatever part of the world
he might have acquired his commercial experience,—for it had been
said repeatedly that Melmotte was not an Englishman,—he now made
London his home and Great Britain his country, and it would be for
the welfare of the country that such a man should sit in the British
Parliament. Such were the arguments used by the "Breakfast Table" in
supporting Mr. Melmotte. This was, of course, an assistance;—
and not the less so because it was asserted in other papers that the
country would be absolutely disgraced by his presence in Parliament.
The hotter the opposition the keener will be the support. Honest
good men, men who really loved their country, fine gentlemen, who
had received unsullied names from great ancestors, shed their money
right and left, and grew hot in personally energetic struggles to have
this man returned to Parliament as the head of the great Conservative
mercantile interests of Great Britain!

There was one man who thoroughly believed that the thing at
the present moment most essentially necessary to England's glory
was the return of Mr. Melmotte for Westminster. This man was
undoubtedly a very ignorant man. He knew nothing of any one
political question which had vexed England for the last half century,
—nothing whatever of the political history which had made England
what it was at the beginning of that half century. Of such names as
Hampden, Somers, and Pitt he had hardly ever heard. He had probably never read a book in his life. He knew nothing of the working of parliament, nothing of nationality,—had no preference whatever for one form of government over another, never having given his mind a moment's trouble on the subject. He had not even reflected how a despotic monarch or a federal republic might affect himself, and possibly did not comprehend the meaning of those terms. But yet he was fully confident that England did demand and ought to demand that Mr. Melmotte should be returned for Westminster. This man was Mr. Melmotte himself.

In this conjunction of his affairs Mr. Melmotte certainly lost his head. He had audacity almost sufficient for the very dangerous game which he was playing; but, as crisis heaped itself upon crisis, he became deficient in prudence. He did not hesitate to speak of himself as the man who ought to represent Westminster, and of those who opposed him as little malignant beings who had mean interests of their own to serve. He went about in his open carriage, with Lord Alfred at his left hand, with a look on his face which seemed to imply that Westminster was not good enough for him. He even hinted to certain political friends that at the next general election he should try the City. Six months since he had been a humble man to a Lord,—but now he scolded Earls and snubbed Dukes, and yet did it in a manner which showed how proud he was of connecting himself with their social pre-eminence, and how ignorant of the manner in which such pre-eminence affects English gentlemen generally. The more arrogant he became the more vulgar he was, till even Lord Alfred would almost be tempted to rush away to impecuniosity and freedom. Perhaps there were some with whom this conduct had a salutary effect. No doubt arrogance will produce submission; and there are men who take other men at the price those other men put upon themselves. Such persons could not refrain from thinking Melmotte to be mighty because he swaggered; and gave their hinder parts to be kicked merely because he put up his toe. We all know men of this calibre,—and how they seem to grow in number. But the net result of his personal demeanour was injurious; and it was debated among some of the warmest of his supporters, whether a hint should not be given him. "Couldn't Lord Alfred say a word to him," said the Honourable Beauchamp Beauchlerk, who, himself in Parliament, a leading man in his party, thoroughly well acquainted with the borough, wealthy and connected by blood with half the great Conservative families in the kingdom, had been moving heaven and earth on behalf of the great financial king, and working like a slave for his success.

"Alfred's more than half afraid of him," said Lionel Lupton, a young aristocrat, also in Parliament, who had been inoculated with the idea that the interests of the party demanded Melmotte in Parliament, but who would have given up his Scotch shooting rather than have undergone Melmotte's company for a day.

"Something really must be done, Mr. Beauchlerk," said Mr. Jones, who was the leading member of a very wealthy firm of builders in the borough, who had become a Conservative politician, who had
thoughts of the House for himself, but who never forgot his own position. "He is making a great many personal enemies."

"He's the finest old turkey cock out," said Lionel Lupton.

Then it was decided that Mr. Beauclerk should speak a word to Lord Alfred. The rich man and the poor man were cousins, and had always been intimate. "Alfred," said the chosen mentor at the club one afternoon, "I wonder whether you couldn't say something to Melmotte about his manner." Lord Alfred turned sharp round and looked into his companion's face. "They tell me he is giving offence. Of course he doesn't mean it. Couldn't he draw it a little milder?"

Lord Alfred made his reply almost in a whisper. "If you ask me, I don't think he could. If you got him down and trampled on him, you might make him mild. I don't think there's any other way."

"You couldn't speak to him, then?"

"Not unless I did it with a horsewhip."

This, coming from Lord Alfred, who was absolutely dependent on the man, was very strong. Lord Alfred had been much afflicted that morning. He had spent some hours with his friend, either going about the borough in the open carriage, or standing just behind him at meetings, or sitting close to him in committee-rooms,—and had been nauseated with Melmotte. When spoken to about his friend he could not restrain himself. Lord Alfred had been born and bred a gentleman, and found the position in which he was now earning his bread to be almost insupportable. It had gone against the grain with him at first, when he was called Alfred; but now that he was told "just to open the door," and "just to give that message," he almost meditated revenge. Lord Nidderdale, who was quick at observation, had seen something of this in Grosvenor Square, and declared that Lord Alfred had invested part of his recent savings in a cutting whip. Mr. Beauclerk, when he had got his answer, whistled and withdrew. But he was true to his party. Melmotte was not the first vulgar man whom the Conservatives had taken by the hand, and patted on the back, and told that he was a god.

The Emperor of China was now in England, and was to be entertained one night at the India Office. The Secretary of State for the second great Asiatic Empire was to entertain the ruler of the first. This was on Saturday the 6th of July, and Melmotte's dinner was to take place on the following Monday. Very great interest was made by the London world generally to obtain admission to the India Office,—the making of such interest consisting in the most abject begging for tickets of admission, addressed to the Secretary of State, to all the under secretaries, to assistant secretaries, secretaries of departments, chief clerks, and to head-messengers and their wives. If a petitioner could not be admitted as a guest into the splendour of the reception rooms, might not he,—or she,—be allowed to stand in some passage whence the Emperor's back might perhaps be seen,—so that, if possible, the petitioner's name might be printed in the list of guests which would be published on the next morning. Now Mr. Melmotte with his family was, of course, supplied with tickets. He, who was to spend a fortune in giving the Emperor a dinner, was of course
entitled to be present at other places to which the Emperor would be brought to be shown. Melmotte had already seen the Emperor at a breakfast in Windsor Park, and at a ball in royal halls. But hitherto he had not been presented to the Emperor. Presentations have to be restricted,—if only on the score of time; and it had been thought that as Mr. Melmotte would of course have some communication with the hardworked Emperor at his own house, that would suffice. But he had felt himself to be illused and was offended. He spoke with bitterness to some of his supporters of the Royal Family generally, because he had not been brought to the front rank either at the breakfast or at the ball,—and now, at the India Office, was determined to have his due. But he was not on the list of those whom the Secretary of State intended on this occasion to present to the Brother of the Sun.

He had dined freely. At this period of his career he had taken to dining freely,—which was in itself imprudent, as he had need at all hours of his best intelligence. Let it not be understood that he was tipsy. He was a man whom wine did not often affect after that fashion. But it made him, who was arrogant before, tower in his arrogance till he was almost sure to totter. It was probably at some moment after dinner that Lord Alfred decided upon buying the cutting whip of which he had spoken. Melmotte went with his wife and daughter to the India Office, and soon left them far in the background with a request,—we may say an order,—to Lord Alfred to take care of them. It may be observed here that Marie Melmotte was almost as great a curiosity as the Emperor himself, and was much noticed as the girl who had attempted to run away to New York, but had gone without her lover. Melmotte entertained some foolish idea that as the India Office was a Westminster, he had a peculiar right to demand an introduction on this occasion because of his candidature. He did succeed in getting hold of an unfortunate under secretary of state, a studious and invaluable young peer, known as Earl De Griffin. He was a shy man, of enormous wealth, of mediocre intellect, and no great physical ability, who never amused himself; but worked hard night and day, and read everything that anybody could write, and more than any other person could read, about India. Had Mr. Melmotte wanted to know the exact dietary of the peasants in Orissa, or the revenue of the Punjaub, or the amount of crime in Bombay, Lord De Griffin would have informed him without a pause. Put in this matter of managing the Emperor, the under secretary had nothing to do, and would have been the last man to be engaged in such a service. He was, however, second in command at the India Office, and of his official rank Melmotte was unfortunately made aware. "My Lord," said he, by no means hiding his demand in a whisper, "I am desirous of being presented to his Imperial Majesty." Lord De Griffin looked at him in despair, not knowing the great man,—being one of the few men in that room who did not know him.

"This is Mr. Melmotte," said Lord Alfred, who had deserted the ladies and still stuck to his master. "Lord De Griffin, let me introduce you to Mr. Melmotte."
"Oh—oh—oh," said Lord De Griffin, just putting out his hand. "I am delighted;—ah, yes," and pretending to see somebody, he made a weak and quite ineffectual attempt to escape.

Melmotte stood directly in his way, and with unabashed audacity repeated his demand. "I am desirous of being presented to his Imperial Majesty. Will you do me the honour of making my request known to Mr. Wilson?" Mr. Wilson was the Secretary of State, who was as busy as a Secretary of State is sure to be on such an occasion.

"I hardly know," said Lord De Griffin. "I'm afraid it's all arranged. I don't know anything about it myself."

"You can introduce me to Mr. Wilson."

"He's up there, Mr. Melmotte; and I couldn't get at him. Really you must excuse me. I'm very sorry. If I see him I'll tell him." And the poor under secretary again endeavoured to escape.

Mr. Melmotte put up his hand and stopped him. "I'm not going to stand this kind of thing," he said. The old Marquis of Auld Reekie was close at hand, the father of Lord Nidderdale, and therefore the proposed father-in-law of Melmotte's daughter, and he poked his thumb heavily into Lord Alfred's ribs. "It is generally understood, I believe," continued Melmotte, "that the Emperor is to do me the honour of dining at my poor house on Monday. He don't dine there unless I'm made acquainted with him before he comes. I mean what I say. I ain't going to entertain even an Emperor unless I'm good enough to be presented to him. Perhaps you'd better let Mr. Wilson know, as a good many people intend to come."

"Here's a row," said the old Marquis. "I wish he'd be as good as his word."

"He has taken a little wine," whispered Lord Alfred. "Melmotte," he said, still whispering; "upon my word it isn't the thing. They're only Indian chaps and Eastern swells who are presented here,—not a fellow among 'em all who hasn't been in India or China, or isn't a Secretary of State, or something of that kind."

"Then they should have done it at Windsor, or at the ball," said Melmotte, pulling down his waistcoat. "By George, Alfred! I'm in earnest, and somebody had better look to it. If I'm not presented to his Imperial Majesty to-night, by G—, there shall be no dinner in Grosvenor Square on Monday. I'm master enough of my own house, I suppose, to be able to manage that."

Here was a row, as the Marquis had said! Lord De Griffin was frightened, and Lord Alfred felt that something ought to be done. "There's no knowing how far the pig-headed brute may go in his obstinacy," Lord Alfred said to Mr. Lupton, who was there. It no doubt might have been wise to have allowed the merchant prince to return home with the resolution that his dinner should be abandoned. He would have repented probably before the next morning; and had he continued obdurate it would not have been difficult to explain to Celestial Majesty that something preferable had been found for that particular evening even to a banquet at the house of British commerce. The Government would probably have gained the seat for Westminster, as Melmotte would at once have become very
unpopular with the great body of his supporters. But Lord De Griffin was not the man to see this. He did make his way up to Mr. Wilson, and explained to the Amphytrion of the night the demand which was made on his hospitality. A thoroughly well-established and experienced political Minister of State always feels that if he can make a friend or appease an enemy without paying a heavy price he will be doing a good stroke of business. "Bring him up," said Mr. Wilson. "He's going to do something out in the East, isn't he?" "Nothing in India," said Lord De Griffin. "The submarine telegraph is quite impossible." Mr. Wilson, instructing some satellite to find out in what way he might properly connect Mr. Melmotte with China, sent Lord De Griffin away with his commission.

"My dear Alfred, just allow me to manage these things myself," Mr. Melmotte was saying when the under secretary returned. "I know my own position and how to keep it. There shall be no dinner. I'll be d—— if any of the lot shall dine in Grosvenor Square on Monday." Lord Alfred was so astounded that he was thinking of making his way to the Prime Minister, a man whom he abhorred and didn't know, and of acquainting him with the terrible calamity which was threatened. But the arrival of the under secretary saved him the trouble.

"If you will come with me," whispered Lord De Griffin, "it shall be managed. It isn't just the thing, but as you wish it, it shall be done."

"I do wish it," said Melmotte aloud. He was one of those men whom success never mollified, whose enjoyment of a point gained always demanded some hoarse note of triumph from his own trumpet.

"If you will be so kind as to follow me," said Lord De Griffin. And so the thing was done. Melmotte, as he was taken up to the imperial footstool, was resolved upon making a little speech, forgetful at the moment of interpreters,—of the double interpreters whom the Majesty of China required; but the awful, quiescent solemnity of the celestial one quelled even him, and he shuffled by without saying a word even of his own banquet.

But he had gained his point, and, as he was taken home to poor Mr. Longestaffe's house in Bruton Street, was intolerable. Lord Alfred tried to escape after putting Madame Melmotte and her daughter into the carriage, but Melmotte insisted on his presence. "You might as well come, Alfred;—there are two or three things I must settle before I go to bed."

"I'm about knocked up," said the unfortunate man.

"Knocked up, nonsense! Think what I've been through. I've been all day at the hardest work a man can do." Had he as usual got in first, leaving his man-of-all-work to follow, the man-of-all-work would have escaped. Melmotte, fearing such defection, put his hand on Lord Alfred's shoulder, and the poor fellow was beaten. As they were taken home a continual sound of cock-crowing was audible, but as the words were not distinguished they required no painful attention; but when the soda water and brandy and cigars made their appearance in Mr. Longestaffe's own back room, then the trumpet was sounded with a full blast. "I mean to let the fellows know what's
what," said Melmotte, walking about the room. Lord Alfred had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and was consoling himself as best he might with tobacco. "Give and take is a very good motto. If I scratch their back, I mean them to scratch mine. They won't find many people to spend ten thousand pounds in entertaining a guest of the country's as a private enterprise. I don't know of any other man of business who could do it, or would do it. It's not much any of them can do for me. Thank God, I don't want 'em. But if consideration is to be shown to anybody, I intend to be considered. The Prince treated me very scurvily, Alfred, and I shall take an opportunity of telling him so on Monday. I suppose a man may be allowed to speak to his own guests."

"You might turn the election against you if you said anything the Prince didn't like."

"D—— the election, sir. I stand before the electors of Westminster as a man of business, not as a courtier,—as a man who understands commercial enterprise, not as one of the Prince's toadies. Some of you fellows in England don't realise the matter yet; but I can tell you that I think myself quite as great a man as any Prince." Lord Alfred looked at him, with strong reminiscences of the old ducal home, and shuddered. "'I'll teach them a lesson before long. Didn't I teach 'em a lesson to-night,—eh? They tell me that Lord De Griffin has sixty thousand a-year to spend. What's sixty thousand a year? Didn't I make him go on my business? And didn't I make 'em do as I chose? You want to tell me this and that, but I can tell you that I know more of men and women than some of you fellows do, who think you know a great deal."

This went on through the whole of a long cigar; and afterwards, as Lord Alfred slowly paced his way back to his lodgings in Mount Street, he thought deeply whether there might not be means of escaping from his present servitude. "Beast! Brute! Pig!" he said to himself over and over again as he slowly went to Mount Street.

CHAPTER LV.

CLERICAL CHARITIES.

MELMOTTE'S success, and Melmotte's wealth, and Melmotte's antecedents were much discussed down in Suffolk at this time. He had been seen there in the flesh, and there is no believing like that which comes from sight. He had been staying at Caversham, and many in those parts knew that Miss Longestaffe was now living in his house in London. The purchase of the Pickering estate had also been noticed in all the Suffolk and Norfolk newspapers. Rumours, therefore, of his past frauds, rumour also as to the instability of his presumed fortune, were as current as those which declared him to be by far the richest man in England. Miss Melmotte's little attempt had also been communicated in the papers; and
Sir Felix, though he was not recognised as being "real Suffolk" himself, was so far connected with Suffolk by name as to add something to this feeling of reality respecting the Melmottes generally. Suffolk is very old-fashioned. Suffolk, taken as a whole, did not like the Melmotte fashion. Suffolk, which is, I fear, persistently and irrecoversably Conservative, did not believe in Melmotte as a Conservative Member of Parliament. Suffolk on this occasion was rather ashamed of the Longestaffes, and took occasion to remember that it was barely the other day, as Suffolk counts days, since the original Longestaffe was in trade. This selling of Pickering, and especially the selling of it to Melmotte, was a mean thing. Suffolk, as a whole, thoroughly believed that Melmotte had picked the very bones of every shareholder in that Franco-Austrian Assurance Company.

Mr. Hepworth was over with Roger one morning, and they were talking about him,—or talking rather of the attempted elopement. "I know nothing about it," said Roger, "and I do not intend to ask. Of course I did know when they were down here that he hoped to marry her, and I did believe that she was willing to marry him. But whether the father had consented or not I never enquired."

"It seems he did not consent."

"Nothing could have been more unfortunate for either of them than such a marriage. Melmotte will probably be in the 'Gazette' before long, and my cousin not only has not a shilling, but could not keep one if he had it."

"You think Melmotte will turn out a failure."

"A failure! Of course he's a failure, whether rich or poor;—a miserable imposition, a hollow vulgar fraud from beginning to end, too insignificant for you and me to talk of, were it not that his position is a sign of the degeneracy of the age. What are we coming to when such as he is an honoured guest at our tables?"

"At just a table here and there," suggested his friend.

"No;—it is not that. You can keep your house free from him, and so can I mine. But we set no example to the nation at large. They who do set the example go to his feasts, and of course he is seen at theirs in return. And yet these leaders of the fashion know,—at any rate they believe,—that he is what he is because he has been a swindler greater than other swindlers. What follows as a natural consequence? Men reconcile themselves to swindling. Though they themselves mean to be honest, dishonesty of itself is no longer odious to them. Then there comes the jealousy that others should be growing rich with the approval of all the world,—and the natural aptitude to do what all the world approves. It seems to me that the existence of a Melmotte is not compatible with a wholesome state of things in general."

Roger dined with the Bishop of Elmham that evening, and the same hero was discussed under a different heading. "He has given £200," said the Bishop, "to the Curates' Aid Society. I don't know that a man could spend his money much better than that."

"Clap-trap!" said Roger, who in his present mood was very bitter.
"The money is not clap-trap," my friend. "I presume that the money is really paid."

"I don't feel at all sure of that."

"Our collectors for clerical charities are usually stern men,—very ready to make known defalcations on the part of promising subscribers. I think they would take care to get the money during the election."

"And you think that money got in that way redounds to his credit?"

"Such a gift shows him to be a useful member of society,—and I am always for encouraging useful men."

"Even though their own objects may be vile and pernicious?"

"There you beg ever so many questions, Mr. Carbury. Mr. Melmotte wishes to get into Parliament, and if there would vote on the side which you at any rate approve. I do not know that his object in that respect is pernicious. And as a seat in Parliament has been a matter of ambition to the best of our countrymen for centuries, I do not know why we should say that it is vile in this man." Roger frowned and shook his head. "Of course Mr. Melmotte is not the sort of gentleman whom you have been accustomed to regard as a fitting member for a Conservative constituency. But the country is changing."

"It's going to the dogs, I think;—about as fast as it can go."

"We build churches much faster than we used to do."

"Do we say our prayers in them when we have built them?" asked the Squire.

"It is very hard to see into the minds of men," said the Bishop; "but we can see the results of their minds' work. I think that men on the whole do live better lives than they did a hundred years ago. There is a wider spirit of justice abroad, more of mercy from one to another, a more lively charity, and if less of religious enthusiasm, less also of superstition. Men will hardly go to heaven, Mr. Carbury, by following forms only because their fathers followed the same forms before them."

"I suppose men will go to heaven, my Lord, by doing as they would be done by."

"There can be no safer lesson. But we must hope that some may be saved even if they have not practised at all times that grand self-denial, Who comes up to that teaching? Do you not wish for, nay, almost demand, instant pardon for any trespass that you may commit,—of temper, or manner, for instance? and are you always ready to forgive in that way yourself? Do you not writhe with indignation at being wrongly judged by others who condemn you without knowing your actions or the causes of them; and do you never judge others after that fashion?"

"I do not put myself forward as an example."

"I apologise for the personal form of my appeal. A clergyman is apt to forget that he is not in the pulpit. Of course I speak of men in general. Taking society as a whole, the big and the little, the rich and the poor, I think that it grows better from year to year, and not worse. I think, too, that they who grumble at the times, as Horace did, and declare that each age is worse than its forerunner,
look only at the small things beneath their eyes, and ignore the course of the world at large."

"But Roman freedom and Roman manners were going to the dogs when Horace wrote."

"But Christ was about to be born, and men were already being made fit by wider intelligence for Christ's teaching. And as for freedom, has not freedom grown, almost every year, from that to this?"

"In Rome they were worshipping just such men as this Melmotte. Do you remember the man who sat upon the seats of the knights and scourcd the Via Sacra with his toga, though he had been scourged from pillar to post for his villainies? I always think of that man when I hear Melmotte's name mentioned. Hoc, hoc tribuno militum! Is this the man to be Conservative member for Westminster?"

"Do you know of the scourges, as a fact?"

"I think I know that they are deserved."

"That is hardly doing to others as you would be done by. If the man is what you say, he will surely be found out at last, and the day of his punishment will come. Your friend in the odo probably had a bad time of it, in spite of his farms and his horses. The world perhaps is managed more justly than you think, Mr. Carbury."

"My Lord, I believe you're a Radical at heart," said Roger, as he took his leave.

"Very likely,—very likely. Only don't say so to the Prime Minister, or I shall never get any of the better things which may be going."

The Bishop was not hopelessly in love with a young lady, and was therefore less inclined to take a melancholy view of things in general than Roger Carbury. To Roger everything seemed to be out of joint. He had that morning received a letter from Lady Carbury, reminding him of the promise of a loan, should a time come to her of great need. It had come very quickly. Roger Carbury did not in the least begrudge the hundred pounds which he had already sent to his cousin; but he did begrudge any furtherance afforded to the iniquitous schemes of Sir Felix. He felt all but sure that the foolish mother had given her son money for his abortive attempt, and that therefore this appeal had been made to him. He alluded to no such fear in his letter. He simply enclosed the cheque, and expressed a hope that the amount might suffice for the present emergency. But he was disheartened and disgusted by all the circumstances of the Carbury family. There was Paul Montague, bringing a woman such as Mrs. Hurtle down to Lowestoft, declaring his purpose of continuing his visits to her, and, as Roger thought, utterly unable to free himself from his toils,—and yet, on this man's account, Hetta was cold and hard to him. He was conscious of the honesty of his own love, sure that he could make her happy,—confident, not in himself, but in the fashion and ways of his own life. What would be Hetta's lot if her heart was really given to Paul Montague?

When he got home, he found Father Barham sitting in his library. An accident had lately happened at Father Barham's own establish-
ment. The wind had blown the roof off his cottage; and Roger Carbury, though his affection for the priest was waning, had offered him shelter while the damage was being repaired. Shelter at Carbury Manor was very much more comfortable than the priest's own establishment, even with the roof on, and Father Barham was in closer. Father Barham was reading his own favourite newspaper, "The Surplice," when Roger entered the room. "Have you seen this, Mr. Carbury?" he said.

"What's this? I am not likely to have seen anything that belongs peculiarly to 'The Surplice.'"

"That's the prejudice of what you are pleased to call the Anglican Church. Mr. Melmotte is a convert to our faith. He is a great man, and will perhaps be one of the greatest known on the face of the globe."

"Melmotte a convert to Romanism! I'll make you a present of him, and thank you to take him; but I don't believe that we've any such good riddance."

Then Father Barham read a paragraph out of "The Surplice."

"Mr. Augustus Melmotte, the great financier and capitalist, has presented a hundred guineas towards the erection of an altar for the new church of St. Fabricius, in Tothill Fields. The donation was accompanied by a letter from Mr. Melmotte's secretary, which leaves but little doubt that the new member for Westminster will be a member, and no inconsiderable member, of the Catholic party in the House, during the next session."

"That's another dodge, is it?" said Carbury.

"What do you mean by a dodge, Mr. Carbury? Because money is given for a pious object of which you do not happen to approve, must it be a dodge?"

"But, my dear Father Barham, the day before the same great man gave £200 to the Protestant Curates' Aid Society. I have just left the Bishop exulting in this great act of charity."

"I don't believe a word of it;—or it may be a parting gift to the Church to which he belonged in his darkness."

"And you would be really proud of Mr. Melmotte as a convert?"

"I would be proud of the lowest human being that has a soul," said the priest; "but of course we are glad to welcome the wealthy and the great."

"The great! Oh dear!"

"A man is great who has made for himself such a position as that of Mr. Melmotte. And when such a one leaves your Church and joins our own, it is a great sign to us that the Truth is prevailing." Roger Carbury, without another word, took his candle and went to bed.
CHAPTER LVI.

FATHER BARHAM VISITS LONDON.

It was considered to be a great thing to catch the Roman Catholic vote in Westminster. For many years it has been considered a great thing both in the House and out of the House to "catch" Roman Catholic votes. There are two modes of catching these votes. This or that individual Roman Catholic may be promoted to place, so that he personally may be made secure; or the right hand of fellowship may be extended to the people of the Pope generally, so that the people of the Pope may be taught to think that a general step is being made towards the reconversion of the nation. The first measure is the easier, but the effect is but slight and soon passes away. The promoted one, though as far as his prayers go he may remain as good a Catholic as ever, soon ceases to be one of the party to be conciliated, and is apt after a while to be regarded by them as an enemy. But the other mode, if a step be well taken, may be very efficacious. It has now and then occurred that every Roman Catholic in Ireland and England has been brought to believe that the nation is coming round to them;—and in this or that borough the same conviction has been made to grow. To catch the Protestant,—that is the peculiarly Protestant,—vote and the Roman Catholic vote at the same instant is a feat difficult of accomplishment; but it has been attempted before, and was attempted now by Mr. Melmotte and his friends. It was perhaps thought by his friends that the Protestants would not notice the £100 given for the altar to St. Fabrius; but Mr. Alf was wide awake, and took care that Mr. Melmotte's religious opinions should be a matter of interest to the world at large. During all that period of newspaper excitement there was perhaps no article that created so much general interest as that which appeared in the "Evening Pulpit," with a special question asked at the head of it, "For Priest or Parson?" In this article, which was more than usually delightful as being pungent from the beginning to the end and as being unalloyed with any dry didactic wisdom, Mr. Alf's man, who did that business, declared that it was really important that the nation at large and especially the electors of Westminster should know what was the nature of Mr. Melmotte's faith. That he was a man of a highly religious temperament was most certain by his munificent charities on behalf of religion. Two noble donations, which by chance had been made just at this crisis, were doubtless no more than the regular continuation of his ordinary flow of Christian benevolence. The "Evening Pulpit" by no means insinuated that the gifts were intended to have any reference to the approaching election. Far be it from the "Evening Pulpit" to imagine that so great a man as Mr. Melmotte looked for any return in this world from his charitable generosity. But still, as Protestants naturally desired to be represented in Parlia-

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ment by a Protestant member, and as Roman Catholics as naturally desired to be represented by a Roman Catholic, perhaps Mr. Melmotte would not object to declare his creed.

This was biting, and of course did mischief; but Mr. Melmotte and his manager were not foolish enough to allow it to actuate them in any way. He had thrown his bread upon the waters, assisting St. Fabricius with one hand and the Protestant curates with the other, and must leave the results to take care of themselves. If the Protestants chose to believe that he was hyper-protestant, and the Catholics that he was tending towards papacy, so much the better for him. Any enthusiastic religionists wishing to enjoy such convictions would not allow themselves to be enlightened by the manifestly interested malignity of Mr. Alf's newspaper.

It may be doubted whether the donation to the Curate's Aid Society did have much effect. It may perhaps have induced a resolution in some few to go to the poll whose minds were active in regard to religion and torpid as to politics. But the donation to St. Fabricius certainly had results. It was taken up and made much of by the Roman Catholic party generally, till a report got itself spread abroad and almost believed that Mr. Melmotte was going to join the Church of Rome. These manoeuvres require most delicate handling, or evil may follow instead of good. On the second afternoon after the question had been asked in the "Evening Pulpit," an answer to it appeared, "For Priest and not for Parson." Therein various assertions made by Roman Catholic organs and repeated in Roman Catholic speeches were brought together, so as to show that Mr. Melmotte really had at last made up his mind on this important question. All the world knew now, said Mr. Alf's writer, that with that keen sense of honesty which was the Great Financier's peculiar characteristic,—the Great Financier was the name which Mr. Alf had specially invented for Mr. Melmotte,—he had doubted, till the truth was absolutely borne in upon him, whether he could serve the nation best as a Liberal or as a Conservative. He had solved that doubt with wisdom. And now this other doubt had passed through the crucible, and by the aid of fire a golden certainty had been produced. The world of Westminster at last knew that Mr. Melmotte was a Roman Catholic. Now nothing was clearer than this,—that though catching the Catholic vote would greatly help a candidate, no real Roman Catholic could hope to be returned. This last article vexed Mr. Melmotte, and he proposed to his friends to send a letter to the "Breakfast Table" asserting that he adhered to the Protestant faith of his ancestors. But, as it was suspected by many, and was now being whispered to the world at large, that Melmotte had been born a Jew, this assurance would perhaps have been too strong. "Do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Beauchamp Beauchlerk. "If any one asks you a question at any meeting, say that you are a Protestant. But it isn't likely, as we have none but our own people. Don't go writing letters."

But unfortunately the gift of an altar to St. Fabricius was such a godsend that sundry priests about the country were determined to cling to the good man who had bestowed his money so well. I think that many of them did believe that this was a great sign of a beauteous
stirring of people’s minds in favour of Rome. The fervent Romanists have always this point in their favour, that they are ready to believe. And they have a desire for the conversion of men which is honest in an exactly inverse ratio to the dishonesty of the means which they employ to produce it. Father Barham was ready to sacrifice anything personal to himself in the good cause,—his time, his health, his money when he had any, and his life. Much as he liked the comfort of Carbury Hall, he would never for a moment condescend to ensure its continued enjoyment by reticence as to his religion. Roger Carbury was hard of heart. He could see that. But the dropping of water might hollow the stone. If the dropping should be put an end to by outward circumstances before the stone had been impressed that would not be his fault. He at any rate would do his duty. In that fixed resolution Father Barham was admirable. But he had no scruple whatsoever as to the nature of the arguments he would use,—or as to the facts which he would proclaim. With the mingled ignorance of his life and the positiveness of his faith he had at once made up his mind that Melmotte was a great man, and that he might be made a great instrument on behalf of the Pope. He believed in the enormous proportions of the man’s wealth,—believed that he was powerful in all quarters of the globe,—and believed, because he was so told by “The Surplice,” that the man was at heart a Catholic. That a man should be at heart a Catholic, and live in the world professing the Protestant religion, was not to Father Barham either improbable or distressing. Kings who had done so were to him objects of veneration. By such subterfuges and falsehood of life had they been best able to keep alive the spark of heavenly fire. There was a mystery and religious intrigue in this which recommended itself to the young priest’s mind. But it was clear to him that this was a peculiar time,—in which it behoved an earnest man to be doing something. He had for some weeks been preparing himself for a trip to London in order that he might spend a week in retreat with kindred souls who from time to time betook themselves to the cells of St. Fabriicius. And so, just at this season of the Westminster election, Father Barham made a journey to London.

He had conceived the great idea of having a word or two with Mr. Melmotte himself. He thought that he might be convinced by a word or two as to the man’s faith. And he thought, also, that it might be a happiness to him hereafter to have had intercourse with a man who was perhaps destined to be the means of restoring the true faith to his country. On Saturday night,—that Saturday night on which Mr. Melmotte had so successfully exercised his greatness at the India Office,—he took up his quarters in the cloisters of St. Fabricius; he spent a goodly festive Sunday among the various Romanist church services of the metropolis; and on the Monday morning he sallied forth in quest of Mr. Melmotte. Having obtained that address from some circular, he went first to Abchurch Lane. But on this day, and on the next, which would be the day of the election, Mr. Melmotte was not expected in the City, and the priest was referred to his present private residence in Bruton Street. There he was told that the great man might probably be found in Grosvenor Square, and at
the house in the square Father Barham was at last successful. Mr. Melmotte was there superintending the arrangements for the entertainment of the Emperor.

The servants, or more probably the workmen, must have been at fault in giving the priest admittance. But in truth the house was in great confusion. The wreaths of flowers and green boughs were being suspended, last daubs of heavy gilding were being given to the wooden capitals of mock pilasters, incense was being burned to kill the smell of the paint, tables were being fixed and chairs were being moved; and an enormous set of open presses were being nailed together for the accommodation of hats and cloaks. The hall was chaos, and poor Father Barham, who had heard a good deal of the Westminster election, but not a word of the intended entertainment of the Emperor, was at a loss to conceive for what purpose these operations were carried on. But through the chaos he made his way, and did soon find himself in the presence of Mr. Melmotte in the banqueting hall.

Mr. Melmotte was attended both by Lord Alfred and his son. He was standing in front of the chair which had been arranged for the Emperor, with his hat on one side of his head, and he was very angry indeed. He had been given to understand when the dinner was first planned, that he was to sit opposite to his august guest;—by which he had conceived that he was to have a seat immediately in face of the Emperor of Emperors, of the Brother of the Sun, of the Celestial One himself. It was now explained to him that this could not be done. In face of the Emperor there must be a wide space, so that his Majesty might be able to look down the hall; and the royal princesses who sat next to the Emperor, and the royal princes who sat next to the princesses, must also be so indulged. And in this way Mr. Melmotte's own seat became really quite obscure. Lord Alfred was having a very bad time of it. "It's that fellow from "The Herald" office did it, not me," he said, almost in a passion. "I don't know how people ought to sit. But that's the reason."

"I'm d—if I'm going to be treated in this way in my own house," were the first words which the priest heard. And as Father Barham walked up the room and came close to the scene of action, unperceived by either of the Grendalls, Mr. Melmotte was trying, but trying in vain, to move his own seat nearer to Imperial Majesty. A bar had been put up of such a nature that Melmotte, sitting in the seat prepared for him, would absolutely be barred out from the centre of his own hall. "Who the d—are you?" he asked, when the priest appeared close before his eyes on the inner or more imperial side of the bar. It was not the habit of Father Barham's life to appear in sleek apparel. He was ever clothed in the very rustiest brown black that age can produce. In Beccles where he was known it signified little, but in the halls of the great one in Grosvenor Square, perhaps the stranger's welcome was cut to the measure of his outer man. A comely priest in glossy black might have been received with better grace.

Father Barham stood humbly with his hat off. He was a man of infinite pluck; but outward humility—at any rate at the commencement of an enterprise,—was the rule of his life. "I am the Rev.
Father Barham.
Mr. Barham," said the visitor. "I am the priest of Beccles in Suffolk. I believe I am speaking to Mr. Melmotte."

"That's my name, sir. And what may you want? I don't know whether you are aware that you have found your way into my private dining-room without any introduction. Where the mischief are the fellows, Alfred, who ought to have seen about this? I wish you'd look to it, Miles. Can anybody who pleases walk into my hall?"

"I came on a mission which I hope may be pleaded as my excuse," said the priest. Although he was bold, he found it difficult to explain his mission. Had not Lord Alfred been there he could have done it better, in spite of the very repulsive manner of the great man himself.

"Is it business?" asked Lord Alfred.
"Certainly it is business," said Father Barham with a smile.
"Then you had better call at the office in Abchurch Lane,—in the City," said his lordship.
"My business is not of that nature. I am a poor servant of the Cross, who is anxious to know from the lips of Mr. Melmotte himself that his heart is inclined to the true Faith."

"Some lunatic," said Melmotte. "See that there ain't any knives about, Alfred."

"No otherwise mad, sir, than they have ever been accounted mad who are enthusiastic in their desire for the souls of others."

"Just get a policeman, Alfred. Or send somebody; you'd better not go away."

"You will hardly need a policeman, Mr. Melmotte," continued the priest. "If I might speak to you alone for a few minutes—"

"Certainly not;—certainly not. I am very busy, and if you will not go away you'll have to be taken away. I wonder whether anybody knows him."

"Mr. Carbury, of Carbury Hall, is my friend."
"Carbury! D—— the Carburys! Did any of the Carburys send you here? A set of beggars! Why don't you do something, Alfred, to get rid of him?"

"You'd better go," said Lord Alfred. "Don't make a rumpus, there's a good fellow;—but just go."

"There shall be no rumpus," said the priest, waxing wrathful.
"I asked for you at the door, and was told to come in by your own servants. Have I been uncivil that you should treat me in this fashion?"

"You're in the way," said Lord Alfred.
"It's a piece of gross impertinence," said Melmotte. "Go away."
"Will you not tell me before I go whether I shall pray for you as one whose steps in the right path should be made sure and firm; or as one still in error and in darkness?"

"What the mischief does he mean?" asked Melmotte.
"He wants to know whether you're a papist," said Lord Alfred.
"What the deuce is it to him?" almost screamed Melmotte;—whereupon Father Barham bowed and took his leave.

"That's a remarkable thing," said Melmotte,—"very remarkable."
Even this poor priest's mad visit added to his inflation. "I suppose he was in earnest."

"Mad as a hatter," said Lord Alfred.

"But why did he come to me in his madness—to me especially? That's what I want to know. I'll tell you what it is. There isn't a man in all England at this moment thought of so much as—your humble servant. I wonder whether the "Morning Pulpit" people sent him here now to find out really what is my religion."

"Mad as a hatter," said Lord Alfred again;—"just that and no more."

"My dear fellow, I don't think you've the gift of seeing very far. The truth is they don't know what to make of me;—and I don't intend that they shall. I'm playing my game, and there isn't one of 'em understands it except myself. It's no good my sitting here you know. I shan't be able to move. How am I to get at you if I want anything?"

"What can you want? There'll be lots of servants about."

"I'll have this bar down, at any rate." And he did succeed in having removed the bar which had been specially put up to prevent his intrusion on his own guests in his own house. "I look upon that fellow's coming here as a very singular sign of the times," he went on to say. "They'll want before long to know where I have my clothes made, and who measures me for my boots!" Perhaps the most remarkable circumstance in the career of this remarkable man was the fact that he came almost to believe in himself.

Father Barham went away certainly disgusted; and yet not altogether disheartened. The man had not declared that he was not a Roman Catholic. He had shown himself to be a brute. He had blasphemed and cursed. He had been outrageously uncivil to a man whom he must have known to be a minister of God. He had manifested himself to this priest, who had been born an English gentleman, as being no gentleman. But, not the less might he be a good Catholic,—or good enough at any rate to be influential on the right side. To his eyes Melmotte, with all his insolent vulgarity, was infinitely a more hopeful man than Roger Carbury. "He insulted me," said Father Barham to a brother religionist that evening within the cloisters of St. Fabriicus.

"Did he intend to insult you?"

"Certainly he did. But what of that? It is not by the hands of polished men, nor even of the courteous, that this work has to be done. He was preparing for some great festival, and his mind was intent upon that."

"He entertains the Emperor of China this very day," said the brother priest, who, as a resident in London, heard from time to time what was being done.

"The Emperor of China! Ah, that accounts for it. I do think that he is on our side, even though he gave me but little encouragement for saying so. Will they vote for him, here at Westminster?"

"Our people will. They think that he is rich and can help them."

"There is no doubt of his wealth, I suppose," said Father Barham.

"Some people do doubt;—but others say he is the richest man in the world."
"He looked like it,—and spoke like it," said Father Barham. "Think what such a man might do, if he be really the wealthiest man in the world! And if he had been against us would he not have said so? Though he was uncivil, I am glad that I saw him." Father Barham, with a simplicity that was singularly mingled with his religious cunning, made himself believe before he returned to Beecles that Mr. Melmotte was certainly a Roman Catholic.

CHAPTER LVII.

LORD NIDDERDALE TRIES HIS HAND AGAIN.

LORD NIDDERDALE had half consented to renew his suit to Marie Melmotte. He had at any rate half promised to call at Melmotte's house on the Sunday with the object of so doing. As far as that promise had been given it was broken, for on the Sunday he was not seen in Bruton Street. Though not much given to severe thinking, he did feel that on this occasion there was need for thought. His father's property was not very large. His father and his grandfather had both been extravagant men, and he himself had done something towards adding to the family embarrassments. It had been an understood thing, since he had commenced life, that he was to marry an heiress. In such families as his, when such results have been achieved, it is generally understood that matters shall be put right by an heiress. It has become an institution, like primogeniture, and is almost as serviceable for maintaining the proper order of things. Rank squanders money; trade makes it;—and then trade purchases rank by re-gilding its splendour. The arrangement, as it affects the aristocracy generally, is well understood, and was quite approved of by the old marquis—so that he had felt himself to be justified in eating up the property, which his son's future marriage would renew as a matter of course. Nidderdale himself had never dissented, had entertained no fanciful theory opposed to this view, had never alarmed his father by any liaison tending towards matrimony with any undowered beauty;—but had claimed his right to "have his fling" before he devoted himself to the redintegration of the family property. His father had felt that it would be wrong and might probably be foolish to oppose so natural a desire. He had regarded all the circumstances of "the fling" with indulgent eyes. But there arose some little difference as to the duration of the fling, and the father had at last found himself compelled to inform his son that if the fling were carried on much longer it must be done with internecine war between himself and his heir. Nidderdale, whose sense and temper were alike good, saw the thing quite in the proper light. He assured his father that he had no intention of "cutting up rough," declared that he was ready for the heiress as soon as the heiress should be put in his way, and sat himself honestly about the task imposed on him. This had all
been arranged at Auld Reekie Castle during the last winter, and the reader knows the result.

But the affair had assumed abnormal difficulties. Perhaps the Marquis had been wrong in flying at wealth which was reputed to be almost unlimited, but which was not absolutely fixed. A couple of hundred thousand pounds down might have been secured with greater ease. But here there had been a prospect of endless money,—of an inheritance which might not improbably make the Auld Reekie family conspicuous for its wealth even among the most wealthy of the nobility. The old man had fallen into the temptation, and abnormal difficulties had been the result. Some of these the reader knows: Latterly two difficulties had culminated above the others. The young lady preferred another gentleman, and disagreeable stories were afloat, not only as to the way in which the money had been made, but even as to its very existence.

The Marquis, however, was a man who hated to be beaten. As far as he could learn from inquiry, the money would be there,—or, at least, so much money as had been promised. A considerable sum, sufficient to secure the bridegroom from absolute shipwreck,—though by no means enough to make a brilliant marriage,—had in truth been already settled on Marie, and was, indeed, in her possession. As to that, her father had armed himself with a power of attorney for drawing the income,—but had made over the property to his daughter, so that in the event of unforeseen accidents on 'Change, he might retire to obscure comfort, and have the means perhaps of beginning again with whitewashed cleanliness. When doing this, he had doubtless not anticipated the grandeur to which he would soon rise, or the fact that he was about to embark on seas so dangerous that this little harbour of refuge would hardly offer security to his vessel. Marie had been quite correct in her story to her favoured lover. And the Marquis's lawyer had ascertained that if Marie ever married before she herself had restored this money to her father, her husband would be so far safe,—with this as a certainty and the immense remainder in prospect. The Marquis had determined to persevere. Pickering was to be added. Mr. Melmotte had been asked to depone the title-deeds, and had promised to do so as soon as the day of the wedding should have been fixed with the consent of all the parties. The Marquis's lawyer had ventured to express a doubt; but the Marquis had determined to persevere. The reader will, I trust, remember that those dreadful misgivings, which are I trust agitating his own mind, have been borne in upon him by information which had not as yet reached the Marquis in all its details.

But Nidderdale had his doubts. That absurd elopement, which Melmotte declared really to mean nothing,—the romance of a girl who wanted to have one little fling of her own before she settled down for life,—was perhaps his strongest objection. Sir Felix, no doubt, had not gone with her; but then one doesn't wish to have one's intended wife even attempt to run off with any one but oneself. "She'll be sick of him by this time, I should say," her father said to him. "What does it matter, if the money's there?" The Marquis seemed to think that the escapade had simply been the girl's revenge against
his son for having made his arrangements so exclusively with Melmotte, instead of devoting himself to her. Nidderdale acknowledged to himself that he had been remiss. He told himself that she was possessed of more spirit than he had thought. By the Sunday evening he had determined that he would try again. He had expected that the plum would fall into his mouth. He would now stretch out his hand to pick it.

On the Monday he went to the house in Bruton Street, at lunch time. Melmotte and the two Grendalls had just come over from their work in the square, and the financier was full of the priest’s visit to him. Madame Melmotte was there, and Miss Longestaffe, who was to be sent for by her friend Lady Monogram that afternoon,—and, after they had sat down, Marie came in. Nidderdale got up and shook hands with her,—of course as though nothing had happened. Marie, putting a brave face upon it, struggling hard in the midst of very real difficulties, succeeded in saying an ordinary word or two. Her position was uncomfortable. A girl who has run away with her lover and has been brought back again by her friends, must for a time find it difficult to appear in society with ease. But when a girl has run away without her lover,—has run away expecting her lover to go with her, and has then been brought back, her lover not having stirred, her state of mind must be peculiarly harassing. But Marie’s courage was good, and she ate her lunch even though she sat next to Lord Nidderdale.

Melmotte was very gracious to the young lord. “Did you ever hear anything like that, Nidderdale?” he said, speaking of the priest’s visit.

“Mad as a hatter,” said Lord Alfred.

“I don’t know much about his madness. I shouldn’t wonder if he had been sent by the Archbishop of Westminster. Why don’t we have an Archbishop of Westminster when they’ve got one? I shall have to see to that when I’m in the House. I suppose there is a bishop, isn’t there, Alfred?” Alfred shook his head. “There’s a Dean, I know, for I called on him. He told me flat he wouldn’t vote for me. I thought all those parsons were Conservatives. It didn’t occur to me that the fellow had come from the Archbishop, or I would have been more civil to him.”

“Mad as a hatter;—nothing else,” said Lord Alfred.

“You should have seen him, Nidderdale. It would have been as good as a play to you.”

“I suppose you didn’t ask him to the dinner, sir.”

“D—— the dinner, I’m sick of it,” said Melmotte, frowning.

“We must go back again, Alfred. Those fellows will never get along if they are not looked after. Come, Miles. Ladies, I shall expect you to be ready at exactly a quarter before eight. His Imperial Majesty is to arrive at eight precisely, and I must be there to receive him. You, Madame, will have to receive your guests in the drawing-room.” The ladies went up-stairs, and Lord Nidderdale followed them. Miss Longestaffe soon took her departure, alleging that she couldn’t keep her dear friend Lady Monogram waiting for her. Then there fell upon Madame Melmotte the duty of leaving the young people together,
a duty which she found a great difficulty in performing. After all that had happened, she did not know how to get up and go out of the room. As regarded herself, the troubles of these troublous times were becoming almost too much for her. She had no pleasure from her grandeur,—and probably no belief in her husband's achievements. It was her present duty to assist in getting Marie married to this young man, and that duty she could only do by going away. But she did not know how to get out of her chair. She expressed in fluent French her abhorrence of the Emperor, and her wish that she might be allowed to remain in bed during the whole evening. She liked Nidderdale better than any one else who came there, and wondered at Marie's preference for Sir Felix. Lord Nidderdale assured her that nothing was so easy as kings and emperors, because no one was expected to say anything. She sighed and shook her head, and wished again that she might be allowed to go to bed. Marie, who was by degrees plucking up her courage, declared that though kings and emperors were horrors as a rule, she thought an Emperor of China would be good fun. Then Madame Melmotte also plucked up her courage, rose from her chair, and made straight for the door. "Mamma, where are you going?" said Marie, also rising. Madame Melmotte, putting her handkerchief up to her face, declared that she was being absolutely destroyed by a toothache. "I must see if I can't do something for her," said Marie, hurrying to the door. But Lord Nidderdale was too quick for her, and stood with his back to it. "That's a shame," said Marie.

"Your mother has gone on purpose that I may speak to you," said his lordship. "Why should you grudge me the opportunity?"

Marie returned to her chair and again seated herself. She also had thought much of her own position since her return from Liverpool. Why had Sir Felix not been there? Why had he not come since her return, and, at any rate, endeavoured to see her? Why had he made no attempt to write to her? Had it been her part to do so, she would have found a hundred ways of getting at him. She absolutely had walked inside the garden of the square on Sunday morning, and had contrived to leave a gate open on each side. But he had made no sign. Her father had told her that he had not gone to Liverpool—and had assured her that he had never intended to go. Melmotte had been very savage with her about the money, and had loudly accused Sir Felix of stealing it. The repayment he never mentioned,—a piece of honesty, indeed, which had showed no virtue on the part of Sir Felix. But even if he had spent the money, why was he not man enough to come and say so? Marie could have forgiven that fault,—could have forgiven even the gambling and the drunkenness which had caused the failure of the enterprise on his side, if he had had the courage to come and confess to her. What she could not forgive was continued indifference,—or the cowardice which forbade him to show himself. She had more than once almost doubted his love, though as a lover he had been better than Nidderdale. But now, as far as she could see, he was ready to consent that the thing should be considered as over between them. No doubt she could write to him. She had more than once almost determined to do so. But then she had
reflected that if he really loved her he would come to her. She was quite ready to run away with a lover, if her lover loved her; but she would not fling herself at a man’s head. Therefore she had done nothing,—beyond leaving the garden gates open on the Sunday morning.

But what was she to do with herself? She also felt, she knew not why, that the present turmoil of her father’s life might be brought to an end by some dreadful convulsion. No girl could be more anxious to be married and taken away from her home. If Sir Felix did not appear again, what should she do? She had seen enough of life to be aware that suitors would come,—would come as long as that convulsion was staved off. She did not suppose that her journey to Liverpool would frighten all the men away. But she had thought that it would put an end to Lord Nidderdale’s courtship; and when her father had commanded her, shaking her by the shoulders, to accept Lord Nidderdale when he should come on Sunday, she had replied by expressing her assurance that Lord Nidderdale would never be seen at that house any more. On the Sunday he had not come; but here he was now, standing with his back to the drawing-room door, and cutting off her retreat with the evident intention of renewing his suit. She was determined at any rate that she would speak up. “I don’t know what you should have to say to me, Lord Nidderdale.”

“Why shouldn’t I have something to say to you?”

“Because—. Oh, you know why. Besides, I’ve told you ever so often, my lord. I thought a gentleman would never go on with a lady when the lady has told him that she liked somebody else better.”

“Perhaps I don’t believe you when you tell me.”

“Well; that is impudent! You may believe it then. I think I’ve given you reason to believe it, at any rate.”

“You can’t be very fond of him now, I should think.”

“That’s all you know about it, my lord. Why shouldn’t I be fond of him? Accidents will happen, you know.”

“I don’t want to make any allusion to anything that’s unpleasant, Miss Melmotte.”

“You may say just what you please. All the world knows about it. Of course I went to Liverpool, and of course papa had me brought back again.”

“Why did not Sir Felix go?”

“I don’t think, my lord, that that can be any business of yours.”

“But I think that it is, and I’ll tell you why. You might as well let me say what I’ve got to say,—out at once.”

“You may say what you like, but it can’t make any difference.”

“You knew me before you knew him, you know.”

“What does that matter? If it comes to that, I knew ever so many people before I knew you.”

“And you were engaged to me.”

“You broke it off.”

“Listen to me for a moment or two. I know I did. Or, rather, your father and my father broke it off for us.”

“If we had cared for each other they couldn’t have broken it off. Nobody in the world could break me off as long as I felt that he really loved me;—not if they were to cut me in pieces. But you didn’t.
care, not a bit. You did it just because your father told you. And
so did I. But I know better than that now. You never cared for
me a bit more than for the old woman at the crossing. You thought
I didn't understand;—but I did. And now you've come again;—
because your father has told you again. And you'd better go away."
  "There's a great deal of truth in what you say."
  "It's all true, my lord. Every word of it."
  "I wish you wouldn't call me my lord."
  "I suppose you are a lord, and therefore I shall call you so. I
ever called you anything else when they pretended that we were to
be married, and you never asked me. I never even knew what your
name was till I looked it out in the book after I had consented."
  "There is truth in what you say;—but it isn't true now. How
was I to love you when I had seen so little of you? I do love you
now."
  "Then you needn't;—for it isn't any good."
  "I do love you now, and I think you'd find that I should be truer
to you than that fellow who wouldn't take the trouble to go down to
Liverpool with you."
  "You don't know why he didn't go."
  "Well;—perhaps I do. But I did not come here to say anything
about that."
  "Why didn't he go, Lord Nidderdale?" She asked the question
with an altered tone and an altered face. "If you really know, you
might as well tell me."
  "No, Marie;—that's just what I ought not to do. But he ought
to tell you. Do you really in your heart believe that he means to
come back to you?"
  "I don't know," she said, sobbing. "I do love him;—I do indeed.
I know that you are good-natured. You are more good-natured than
he is. But he did like me. You never did;—no; not a bit. It
isn't true. I ain't a fool. I know. No;—go away. I won't let
you now. I don't care what he is; I'll be true to him. Go away,
Lord Nidderdale. You oughtn't to go on like that because papa and
mamma let you come here. I didn't let you come. I don't want
you to come. No;—I won't say any kind word to you. I love Sir
Felix Carbury better—than any person—in all the world. There!
I don't know whether you call that kind, but it's true."
  "Say good-bye to me, Marie."
  "Oh, I don't mind saying good-bye. Good-bye, my lord; and
don't come any more."
  "Yes, I shall. Good-bye, Marie. You'll find the difference between
me and him yet." So he took his leave, and as he sauntered away
he thought that upon the whole he had prospered, considering the
extreme difficulties under which he had laboured in carrying on his
suit. "She's quite a different sort of girl from what I took her to
be," he said to himself. "Upon my word, she's awfully jolly."

Marie, when the interview was over, walked about the room almost
in dismay. It was borne in upon her by degrees that Sir Felix Carbury
was not at all points quite as nice as she had thought him. Of his
beauty there was no doubt; but then she could trust him for no other
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good quality. Why did he not come to her? Why did he not show some pluck? Why did he not tell her the truth? She had quite believed Lord Nidderdale when he said that he knew the cause that had kept Sir Felix from going to Liverpool. And she had believed him, too, when he said that it was not his business to tell her. But the reason, let it be what it might, must, if known, be prejudicial to her love. Lord Nidderdale was, she thought, not at all beautiful. He had a common-place, rough face, with a turn-up nose, high cheek bones, no especial complexion, sandy-coloured whiskers, and bright laughing eyes,—not at all an Adonis such as her imagination had painted. But if he had only made love at first as he had attempted to do it now, she thought that she would have submitted herself to be cut in pieces for him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MR. SQUERCUM IS EMPLOYED.

WHILE these things were being done in Bruton Street and Grosvenor Square horrid rumours were prevailing in the City and spreading from the City westwards to the House of Commons, which was sitting this Monday afternoon with a prospect of an adjournment at seven o'clock in consequence of the banquet to be given to the Emperor. It is difficult to explain the exact nature of this rumour, as it was not thoroughly understood by those who propagated it. But it is certainly the case that the word forgery was whispered by more than one pair of lips.

Many of Melmotte's staunchest supporters thought that he was very wrong not to show himself that day in the City. What good could he do pottering about among the chairs and benches in the banqueting room? There were people to manage that kind of thing. In such an affair it was his business to do simply as he was told, and to pay the bill. It was not as though he were giving a little dinner to a friend, and had to see himself that the wine was brought up in good order. His work was in the City; and at such a time as this and in such a crisis as this, he should have been in the City. Men will whisper forgery behind a man's back who would not dare even to think it before his face.

Of this particular rumour our young friend Dolly Longestaffe was the parent. With unhesitating resolution, nothing awed by his father, Dolly had gone to his attorney; Mr. Squercum, immediately after that Friday on which Mr. Longestaffe first took his seat at the Railway Board. Dolly was possessed of fine qualities, but it must be owned that veneration was not one of them. "I don't know why Mr. Melmotte is to be different from anybody else," he had said to his father. "When I buy a thing and don't pay for it, it is because I haven't got the tin, and I suppose it's about the same with him. It's all right,
no doubt, but I don't see why he should have got hold of the place till
the money was paid down."

"Of course it's all right," said the father. "You think you under-
stand everything, when you really understand nothing at all."

"Of course I'm slow," said Dolly. "I don't comprehend these
things. But then Squerem does. When a fellow is stupid himself,
he ought to have a sharp fellow to look after his business."

"You'll ruin me and yourself too, if you go to such a man as that.
Why can't you trust Mr. Bideawhile? Slow and Bideawhile have
been the family lawyers for a century." Dolly made some remark as
to the old family advisers which was by no means pleasing to the
father's ears, and went his way. The father knew his boy, and knew
that his boy would go to Squerem. All he could himself do was to
press Mr. Melmotte for the money with what importance he could
assume. He wrote a timid letter to Mr. Melmotte, which had no
result; and then, on the next Friday, again went into the City and
there encountered perturbation of spirit and sheer loss of time,—as
the reader has already learned.

Squerem was a thorn in the side of all the Bideawhiles. Mr.
Slow had been gathered to his fathers, but of the Bideawhiles there
were three in the business, a father and two sons, to whom Squerem
was a pest and a mosquito, a running sore and a skeleton in the cup-
board. It was not only in reference to Mr. Longestaff's affairs that
they knew Squerem. The Bideawhiles piqued themselves on the
decorous and orderly transaction of their business. It had grown
to be a rule in the house that anything done quickly must be done
badly. They never were in a hurry for money, and they expected
their clients never to be in a hurry for work. Squerem was the
very opposite to this. He had established himself, without prede-
cessors and without a partner, and we may add without capital, at a
little office in Fetter Lane, and had there made a character for getting
things done after a marvellous and new fashion. And it was said of
him that he was fairly honest, though it must be owned that among the
Bideawhiles of the profession this was not the character which he bore.
He did sharp things no doubt, and had no hesitation in supporting
the interests of sons against those of their fathers. In more than one
case he had computed for a young heir the exact value of his share in
a property as compared to that of his father, and had come into
hostile contact with many family Bideawhiles. He had been closely
watched. There were some who, no doubt, would have liked to
crush a man who was at once so clever, and so pestilential. But he
had not as yet been crushed, and had become quite in vogue with older
sons. Some three years since his name had been mentioned to Dolly
by a friend who had for years been at war with his father, and Squer-
em had been quite a comfort to Dolly.

He was a mean-looking little man, not yet above forty, who always
wore a stiff light-coloured cotton cravat, an old dress coat, a coloured
dingy waistcoat, and light trousers of some hue different from his
waistcoat. He generally had on dirty shoes and gaiters. He was
light haired, with light whiskers, with putty-formed features, a squat
nose, a large mouth, and very bright blue eyes. He looked as unlike
Mr. Squercum in his Office.
the normal Bideawhile of the profession as a man could be; and it
must be owned, though an attorney, would hardly have been taken for
a gentleman from his personal appearance. He was very quick, and
active in his motions, absolutely doing his law work himself, and trust-
ing to his three or four juvenile clerks for little more than scriven-er's
labour. He seldom or never came to his office on a Saturday, and
many among his enemies said that he was a Jew. What evil will not
a rival say to stop the flow of grist to the mill of the hated one? But
this report Squercum rather liked, and assisted. They who knew
the inner life of the little man declared that he kept a horse and
hunted down in Essex on Saturday, doing a bit of gardening in the
summer months;—and they said also that he made up for this by
working hard all Sunday. Such was Mr. Squercum,—a sign, in his
way, that the old things are being changed.
Squercum sat at a desk, covered with papers in chaotic confusion, on
a chair which moved on a pivot. His desk was against the wall, and
when clients came to him, he turned himself sharp round, sticking
out his dirty shoes, throwing himself back till his body was an in-
clined plane, with his hands thrust into his pockets. In this attitude he
would listen to his client's story, and would himself speak as little as
possible. It was by his instructions that Dolly had insisted on getting
his share of the purchase money for Pickering into his own hands, so
that the incumbrance on his own property might be paid off. He now
listened as Dolly told him of the delay in the payment. "Melmotte's
at Pickering?" asked the attorney. Then Dolly informed him how
the tradesmen of the great financier had already half knocked down
the house. Squercum still listened, and promised to look to it. He
did ask what authority Dolly had given for the surrender of the title-
deeds. Dolly declared that he had given authority for the sale, but
none for the surrender. His father, some time since, had put before
him, for his signature, a letter, prepared in Mr. Bideawhile's office,
which Dolly said that he had refused even to read, and certainly had
not signed. Squercum again said that he'd look to it, and bowed
Dolly out of his room. "They've got him to sign something when
he was tight," said Squercum to himself, knowing something of the
habits of his client. "I wonder whether his father did it, or old
Bideawhile, or Melmotte himself?" Mr. Squercum was inclined to
think that Bideawhile would not have done it, that Melmotte could
have had no opportunity, and that the father must have been the
practitioner. "It's not the trick of a pompous old fool either," said
Mr. Squercum, in his soliloquy. He went to work, however, making
himself detestably odious among the very respectable clerks in Mr.
Bideawhile's office,—men who considered themselves to be altogether
superior to Squercum himself in professional standing.
And now there came this rumour which was so far particular in its
details that it inferred the forgery, of which it accused Mr. Melmotte,
to his mode of acquiring the Pickering property. The nature of the
forgery was of course described in various ways,—as was also the
signature said to have been forged. But there were many who
believed, or almost believed, that something wrong had been done,—
that some great fraud had been committed; and in connection with
this it was ascertained,—by some as a matter of certainty,—that the
Pickering estate had been already mortgaged by Melmotte to its full
value at an assurance office. In such a transaction there would be
nothing dishonest; but as this place had been bought for the great
man's own family use, and not as a speculation, even this report of the
mortgage tended to injure his credit. And then, as the day went on,
other tidings were told as to other properties. Houses in the East-
end of London were said to have been bought and sold, without pay-
ment of the purchase money as to the buying, and with receipt of the
purchase money as to the selling.

It was certainly true that Squercum himself had seen the letter in
Mr. Bideawhile's office which conveyed to the father's lawyer the
son's sanction for the surrender of the title-deeds, and that that letter,
prepared in Mr. Bideawhile's office, purported to have Dolly's signa-
ture. Squercum said but little, remembering that his client was
not always clear in the morning as to anything he had done on the
preceding evening. But the signature, though it was scrawled
as Dolly always scrawled it, was not like the scrawl of a drunken
man.

The letter was said to have been sent to Mr. Bideawhile's office
with other letters and papers, direct from old Mr. Longestaffe. Such
was the statement made at first to Mr. Squercum by the Bideawhile
party, who at that moment had no doubt of the genuineness of the
letter or of the accuracy of their statement. Then Squercum saw his
client again, and returned to the charge at Bideawhile's office, with
the positive assurance that the signature was a forgery. Dolly, when
questioned by Squercum, quite admitted his propensity to be "tight.
He had no reticence, no feeling of disgrace on such matters. But he
had signed no letter when he was tight. "Never did such a thing in
my life, and nothing could make me," said Dolly. "I'm never tight
except at the club, and the letter couldn't have been there. I'll
be drawn and quartered if I ever signed it. That's flat." Dolly was
intent on going to his father at once, on going to Melmotte at once,
on going to Bideawhile's at once, and making there "no end of a
row,"—but Squercum stopped him. "We'll just ferret this thing out
quietly," said Squercum, who perhaps thought that there would be
high honour in discovering the pecadillos of so great a man as Mr.
Melmotte. Mr. Longestaffe, the father, had heard nothing of the matter
till the Saturday after his last interview with Melmotte in the City.
He had then called at Bideawhile's office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and
had been shown the letter. He declared at once that he had never sent
the letter to Mr. Bideawhile. He had begged his son to sign the letter
and his son had refused. He did not at that moment distinctly remem-
ber what he had done with the letter unsigned. He believed he had
left it with the other papers; but it was possible that his son might have
taken it away. He acknowledged that at the time he had been both
angry and unhappy. He didn't think that he could have sent the letter
back unsigned,—but he was not sure. He had more than once been
in his own study in Bruton Street since Mr. Melmotte had occupied the
house,—by that gentleman's leave,—having left various papers there
under his own lock and key. Indeed it had been matter of agree-
ment that he should have access to his own study when he let the house. He thought it probable that he would have kept back the unsigned letter, and have kept it under lock and key, when he sent away the other papers. Then reference was made to Mr. Longestaff's own letter to the lawyer, and it was found that he had not even alluded to that which his son had been asked to sign; but that he had said, in his own usually pompous style, that Mr. Longestaff, junior, was still prone to create unsubstantial difficulties. Mr. Bideawhile was obliged to confess that there had been a want of caution among his own people. This allusion to the creation of difficulties by Dolly, accompanied, as it was supposed to have been, by Dolly's letter doing away with all difficulties, should have attracted notice. Dolly's letter must have come in a separate envelope; but such envelope could not be found, and the circumstance was not remembered by the clerk. The clerk who had prepared the letter for Dolly's signature represented himself as having been quite satisfied when the letter came again beneath his notice with Dolly's well-known signature.

Such were the facts as far as they were known at Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile's office,—from whom no slightest rumour emanated; and as they had been in part collected by Squercum, who was probably less prudent. The Bideawhiles were still perfectly sure that Dolly had signed the letter, believing the young man to be quite incapable of knowing on any day what he had done on the day before.

Squercum was quite sure that his client had not signed it. And it must be owned on Dolly's behalf that his manner on this occasion was qualified to convince. "Yes," he said to Squercum; "it's easy saying that I'm lack-a-daisical. But I know when I'm lack-a-daisical and when I'm not. Awake or asleep, drunk or sober, I never signed that letter." And Mr. Squercum believed him.

It would be hard to say how the rumour first got into the City on this Monday morning. Though the elder Longestaff had first heard of the matter only on the previous Saturday, Mr. Squercum had been at work for above a week. Mr. Squercum's little matter alone might hardly have attracted the attention which certainly was given on this day to Mr. Melmotte's private affairs;—but other facts coming to light assisted Squercum's views. A great many shares of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway had been thrown upon the market, all of which had passed through the hands of Mr. Cohenlupe;—and Mr. Cohenlupe in the City had been all to Mr. Melmotte as Lord Alfred had been at the West End. Then there was the mortgage of this Pickering property, for which the money certainly had not been paid; and there was the traffic with half a street of houses near the Commercial Road, by which a large sum of money had come into Mr. Melmotte's hands. It might, no doubt, all be right. There were many who thought that it would all be right. There were not a few who expressed the most thorough contempt for these rumours. But it was felt to be a pity that Mr. Melmotte was not in the City.

This was the day of the dinner. The Lord Mayor had even made up his mind that he would not go to the dinner. What one of his brother aldermen said to him about leaving others in the lurch might be quite true; but, as his lordship remarked, Melmotte was a com-
commercial man, and as these were commercial transactions it behoved
the Lord Mayor of London to be more careful than other men. He
had always had his doubts, and he would not go. Others of the
chosen few of the City who had been honoured with commands to
meet the Emperor resolved upon absenting themselves unless the
Lord Mayor went. The affair was very much discussed, and there
were no less than six declared City defaulters. At the last moment a
seventh was taken ill and sent a note to Miles Grendall excusing him-
self, which was thrust into the secretary’s hands just as the Emperor
arrived.

But a reverse worse than this took place;—a defalcation more
injurious to the Melmotte interests generally even than that which was
causcd either by the prudence or by the cowardice of the City Mag-
nates. The House of Commons, at its meeting, had heard the tidings
in an exaggerated form. It was whispered about that Melmotte had
been detected in forging the deed of conveyance of a large property,
and that he had already been visited by policemen. By some it was
believed that the Great Financier would lie in the hands of the Philis-
tines while the Emperor of China was being fed at his house. In the
third edition of the “Evening Pulpit” came out a mysterious para-
graph which nobody could understand but they who had known all
about it before. “A rumour is prevalent that frauds to an enormous
extent have been committed by a gentleman whose name we are par-
ticularly unwilling to mention. If it be so it is indeed remarkable
that they should have come to light at the present moment. We
cannot trust ourselves to say more than this.” No one wishes to
dine with a swindler. No one likes even to have dined with a
swindler,—especially to have dined with him at a time when his
swindling was known or suspected. The Emperor of China no
doubt was going to dine with this man. The motions of Emperors
are managed with such ponderous care that it was held to be impos-
sible now to save the country from what would doubtless be felt to be
a disgrace if it should hereafter turn out that a forger had been
solicited to entertain the imperial guest of the country. Nor was the
thing as yet so far certain as to justify such a charge, were it possible.
But many men were unhappy in their minds. How would the story
be told hereafter if Melmotte should be allowed to play out his game
of host to the Emperor, and be arrested for forgery as soon as the
Eastern Monarch should have left his house? How would the
brother of the Sun like the remembrance of the banquet which he
had been instructed to honour with his presence? How would it tell
in all the foreign newspapers, in New York, in Paris, and Vienna that
this man who had been cast forth from the United States, from
France, and from Austria had been selected as the great and honour-
able type of British Commerce? There were those in the House
who thought that the absolute consummation of the disgrace might
yet be avoided, and who were of opinion that the dinner should be
“postponed.” The leader of the Opposition had a few words on the
subject with the Prime Minister. “It is the merest rumour,” said
the Prime Minister. “I have inquired, and there is nothing to
justify me in thinking that the charges can be substantiated.”
"They say that the story is believed in the City."
"I should not feel myself justified in acting upon such a report. The Prince might probably find it impossible not to go. Where should we be if Mr. Melmotte to-morrow were able to prove the whole to be a calumny, and to show that the thing had been got up with a view of influencing the election at Westminster? The dinner must certainly go on."
"And you will go yourself?"
"Most assuredly," said the Prime Minister. "And I hope that you will keep me in countenance." His political antagonist declared with a smile that at such a crisis he would not desert his honourable friend;—but he could not answer for his followers. There was, he admitted, a strong feeling among the leaders of the Conservative party of distrust in Melmotte. He considered it probable that among his friends who had been invited there would be some who would be unwilling to meet even the Emperor of China on the existing terms. "They should remember," said the Prime Minister, "that they are also to meet their own Prince, and that empty seats on such an occasion will be a dishonour to him."
"Just at present I can only answer for myself," said the leader of the Opposition.—At that moment even the Prime Minister was much disturbed in his mind; but in such emergencies a Prime Minister can only choose the least of two evils. To have taken the Emperor to dine with a swindler would be very bad; but to desert him, and to stop the coming of the Emperor and all the Princes on a false rumour, would be worse.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE DINNER.

It does sometimes occur in life that an unambitious man, who is in no degree given to enterprises, who would fain be safe, is driven by the cruelty of circumstances into a position in which he must choose a side, and in which, though he has no certain guide as to which side he should choose, he is aware that he will be disgraced if he should take the wrong side. This was felt as a hardship by many who were quite suddenly forced to make up their mind whether they would go to Melmotte's dinner, or join themselves to the faction of those who had determined to stay away although they had accepted invitations. Some there were not without a suspicion that the story against Melmotte had been got up simply as an electioneering trick,—so that Mr. Alf might carry the borough on the next day. As a dodge for an election this might be very well, but any who might be deterred by such a manœuvre from meeting the Emperor and supporting the Prince would surely be marked men. And none of the wives, when they were consulted, seemed to care a straw whether Melмотte was a
swindler or not. Would the Emperor and the Princes and Princesses be there? This was the only question which concerned them. They did not care whether Melmotte was arrested at the dinner or after the dinner, so long as they, with others, could show their diamonds in the presence of eastern and western royalty. But yet,—what a fiasco would it be, if at this very instant of time the host should be apprehended for common forgery! The great thing was to ascertain whether others were going. If a hundred or more out of the two hundred were to be absent how dreadful would be the position of those who were present! And how would the thing go if at the last moment the Emperor should be kept away. The Prime Minister had decided that the Emperor and the Prince should remain altogether in ignorance of the charges which were preferred against the man; but of that these doubters were unaware. There was but little time for a man to go about town and pick up the truth from those who were really informed; and questions were asked in an uncomfortable and restless manner. "Is your Grace going?" said Lionel Lupton to the Duchess of Stevenage,—having left the House and gone into the park between six and seven to pick up some hints among those who were known to have been invited. The Duchess was Lord Alfred's sister, and of course she was going. "I usually keep engagements when I make them, Mr. Lupton," said the Duchess. She had been assured by Lord Alfred not a quarter of an hour before that everything was as straight as a die. Lord Alfred had not then even heard of the rumour. But ultimately both Lionel Lupton and Beauclerk Beauclerk attended the dinner. They had received special tickets as supporters of Mr. Melmotte at the election,—out of the scanty number allotted to that gentleman himself,—and they thought themselves bound in honour to be there. But they, with their leader, and one other influential member of the party, were all who at last came as the political friends of the candidate for Westminster. The existing ministers were bound to attend to the Emperor and the Prince. But members of the Opposition, by their presence, would support the man and the politician, and both as a man and as a politician they were ashamed of him.

When Melmotte arrived at his own door with his wife and daughter he had heard nothing of the matter. That a man so vexed with affairs of money, so laden with cares, encompassed by such dangers, should be free from suspicion and fear it is impossible to imagine. That such burdens should be borne at all is a wonder to those whose shoulders have never been broadened for such work;—as is the strength of the blacksmith's arm to men who have never wielded a hammer. Surely his whole life must have been a life of terrors! But of any special peril to which he was at that moment subject, or of any embarrassment which might affect the work of the evening, he knew nothing. He placed his wife in the drawing-room and himself in the hall, and arranged his immediate satellites around him,—among whom were included the two Grendalls, young Nidderdale, and Mr. Cohenlupe,—with a feeling of gratified glory. Nidderdale down at the House had heard the rumour, but had determined that he would not as yet fly from his colours. Cohenlupe had also come up from
the House, where no one had spoken to him. Though grievously frightened during the last fortnight, he had not dared to be on the wing as yet. And, indeed, to what clime could such a bird as he fly in safety? He had not only heard,—but also knew very much, and was not prepared to enjoy the feast. Since they had been in the hall Miles had spoken dreadful words to his father. "You've heard about it; haven't you?" whispered Miles. Lord Alfred, remembering his sister's question, became almost pale, but declared that he had heard nothing. "They're saying all manner of things in the City;—forgery and heaven knows what. The Lord Mayor is not coming." Lord Alfred made no reply. It was the philosophy of his life that misfortunes when they came should be allowed to settle themselves. But he was unhappy.

The grand arrivals were fairly punctual, and the very grand people all came. The unfortunate Emperor,—we must consider a man to be unfortunate who is compelled to go through such work as this,—with impassible and awful dignity, was marshalled into the room on the ground floor, whence he and other royalties were to be marshalled back into the banqueting hall. Melmotte, bowing to the ground, walked backwards before him, and was probably taken by the Emperor for some Court Master of the Ceremonies especially selected to walk backwards on this occasion. The Princes had all shaken hands with their host, and the Princesses had bowed graciously. Nothing of the rumour had as yet been whispered in royal palaces. Besides royalty the company allowed to enter the room downstairs was very select. The Prime Minister, one archbishop, two duchesses, and an ex-governor of India with whose features the Emperor was supposed to be peculiarly familiar, were alone there. The remainder of the company, under the superintendence of Lord Alfred, were received in the drawing-room above. Everything was going on well, and they who had come and had thought of not coming were proud of their wisdom.

But when the company was seated at dinner the deficiencies were visible enough, and were unfortunate. Who does not know the effect made by the absence of one or two from a table intended for ten or twelve,—how grievous are the empty places, how destructive of the outward harmony and grace which the hostess has endeavoured to preserve are these interstices, how the lady in her wrath declares to herself that those guilty ones shall never have another opportunity of filling a seat at her table? Some twenty, most of whom had been asked to bring their wives, had slunk from their engagements, and the empty spaces were sufficient to declare a united purpose. A week since it had been understood that admission for the evening could not be had for love or money, and that a seat at the dinner-table was as a seat at some banquet of the gods! Now it looked as though the room were but half-filled. There were six absences from the City. Another six of Mr. Melmotte's own political party were away. The archbishops and the bishop were there, because bishops never hear worldly tidings till after other people;—but that very Master of the Buckhounds for whom so much pressure had been made did not come. Two or three peers were absent, and so also was that
editor who had been chosen to fill Mr. Alf's place. One poet, two painters, and a philosopher had received timely notice at their clubs, and had gone home. The three independent members of the House of Commons for once agreed in their policy, and would not lend the encouragement of their presence to a man suspected of forgery. Nearly forty places were vacant when the business of the dinner commenced.

Melmotte had insisted that Lord Alfred should sit next to himself at the big table, and having had the objectionable bar removed, and his own chair shoved one step nearer to the centre, had carried his point. With the anxiety natural to such an occasion, he glanced repeatedly round the hall, and of course became aware that many were absent. "How is it that there are so many places empty?" he said to his faithful Achates.

"Don't know," said Achates, shaking his head, steadfastly refusing to look round upon the hall.

Melmotte waited awhile, then looked round again, and asked the question in another shape: "Hasn't there been some mistake about the numbers? There's room for ever so many more."

"Don't know," said Lord Alfred, who was unhappy in his mind, and repenting himself that he had ever seen Mr. Melmotte.

"What the deuce do you mean?" whispered Melmotte. "You've been at it from the beginning and ought to know. When I wanted to ask Brehgert, you swore that you couldn't squeeze a place."

"Can't say anything about it," said Lord Alfred, with his eyes fixed upon his plate.

"I'll be d—— if I don't find out," said Melmotte. "There's either some horrible blunder, or else there's been imposition. I don't see quite clearly. Where's Sir Gregory Gripe?"

"Hasn't come, I suppose."

"And where's the Lord Mayor?" Melmotte, in spite of royalty, was now sitting with his face turned round upon the hall. "I know all their places, and I know where they were put. Have you seen the Lord Mayor?"

"No; I haven't seen him at all."

"But he was to come. What's the meaning of it, Alfred?"

"Don't know anything about it." He shook his head but would not, for even a moment, look round upon the room.

"And where's Mr. Killegrew,—and Sir David Boss?" Mr. Killegrew and Sir David were gentlemen of high standing, and destined for important offices in the Conservative party. "There are ever so many people not here. Why, there's not above half of them down the room. What's up, Alfred? I must know."

"I tell you I know nothing. I could not make them come," Lord Alfred's answers were made not only with a surly voice, but also with a surly heart. He was keenly alive to the failure, and alive also to the feeling that the failure would partly be attached to himself. At the present moment he was anxious to avoid observation, and it seemed to him that Melmotte, by the frequency and impetuosity of his questions, was drawing special attention to him. "If you go on making a row," he said, "I shall go away." Melmotte looked at
him with all his eyes. "Just sit quiet and let the thing go on. You'll know all about it soon enough." This was hardly the way to give Mr. Melmotte peace of mind. For a few minutes he did sit quiet. Then he got up and moved down the hall behind the guests.

In the meantime, Imperial Majesty and Royalties of various denominations ate their dinner, without probably observing those Banquo's seats. As the Emperor talked Manchow only, and as there was no one present who could even interpret Manchow into English,—the imperial interpreter condescending only to interpret Manchow into ordinary Chinese which had to be reinterpreted,—it was not within his Imperial Majesty's power to have much conversation with his neighbours. And as his neighbours on each side of him were all cousins and husbands, and brothers and wives, who saw each constantly under, let us presume, more comfortable circumstances, they had not very much to say to each other. Like most of us, they had their duties to do, and, like most of us, probably found their duties irksome. The brothers and sisters and cousins were used to it; but that awful Emperor, solid, solemn, and silent, must, if the spirit of an Eastern Emperor be at all like that of a Western man, have had a weary time of it. He sat there for more than two hours, awful, solid, solemn, and silent, not eating very much,—for this was not his manner of eating; nor drinking very much—for this was not his manner of drinking; but wondering, no doubt, within his own awful bosom, at the changes which were coming when an Emperor of China was forced, by outward circumstances, to sit and hear this buzz of voices and this clatter of knives and forks. "And this," he must have said to himself, "is what they call royalty in the West!" If a prince of our own was forced, for the good of the country, to go among some far distant outlandish people, and there to be poked in the ribs, and slapped on the back all round, the change to him could hardly be so great.

"Where's Sir Gregory?" said Melmotte, in a hoarse whisper, bending over the chair of a city friend. It was old Todd, the senior partner of Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheimer. Mr. Todd was a very wealthy man, and had a considerable following in the City.

"Ain't he here?" said Todd,—knowing very well who had come from the City and who had declined.

"No;—and the Lord Mayor's not come;—nor Postlethwaite, nor Bunter. What's the meaning of it?"

Todd looked first at one neighbour and then at another before he answered. "I'm here, that's all I can say, Mr. Melmotte; and I've had a very good dinner. They who haven't come, have lost a very good dinner."

There was a weight upon Melmotte's mind of which he could not rid himself. He knew from the old man's manner, and he knew also from Lord Alfred's manner, that there was something which each of them could tell him if he would. But he was unable to make the men open their mouths. And yet it might be so important to him that he should know! "It's very odd," he said, "that gentlemen should promise to come and then stay away. There were hundreds anxious to be present whom I should have been glad to welcome, if I had known that there would be room. I think it is very odd."
"It is odd," said Mr. Todd, turning his attention to the plate before him.

Melmotte had lately seen much of Beauchamp Beaulclerk, in reference to the coming election. Passing back up the table, he found the gentleman with a vacant seat on one side of him. There were many vacant seats in this part of the room, as the places for the Conservative gentlemen had been set apart together. There Mr. Melmotte seated himself for a minute, thinking that he might get the truth from his new ally. Prudence should have kept him silent. Let the cause of these desertions have been what it might, it ought to have been clear to him that he could apply no remedy to it now. But he was bewildered and dismayed, and his mind within him was changing at every moment. He was now striving to trust to his arrogance and declaring that nothing should cow him. And then again he was so cowed that he was ready to creep to any one for assistance. Personally, Mr. Beaulclerk had disliked the man greatly. Among the vulgar, loud upstarts whom he had known, Melmotte was the vulgarest, the loudest, and the most arrogant. But he had taken the business of Melmotte's election in hand, and considered himself bound to stand by Melmotte till that was over; and he was now the guest of the man in his own house, and was therefore constrained to courtesy. His wife was sitting by him, and he at once introduced her to Mr. Melmotte. "You have a wonderful assemblage here, Mr. Melmotte," said the lady, looking up at the royal table.

"Yes, ma'am, yes. His Majesty the Emperor has been pleased to intimate that he has been much gratified."—Had the Emperor in truth said so, no one who looked at him could have believed his imperial word.—"Can you tell me, Mr. Beauchamp, why those other gentlemen are not here? It looks very odd; does it not?"

"Ah; you mean Killegrew."

"Yes; Mr. Killegrew and Sir David Boss, and the whole lot. I made a particular point of their coming. I said I wouldn't have the dinner at all unless they were to be asked. They were going to make it a Government thing; but I said no. I insisted on the leaders of our own party; and now they're not here. I know the cards were sent;—and, by George, I have their answers, saying they'd come."

"I suppose some of them are engaged," said Mr. Beauchamp.

"Engaged! What business has a man to accept one engagement and then take another. And, if so, why shouldn't he write and make his excuses? No, Mr. Beauchamp, that won't go down."

"I'm here, at any rate," said Beauchamp, making the very answer that had occurred to Mr. Todd.

"Oh, yes, you're here. You're all right. But what is it, Mr. Beauchamp? There's something up, and you must have heard." And so it was clear to Mr. Beauchamp that the man knew nothing about it himself. If there was anything wrong, Melmotte was not aware that the wrong had been discovered. "Is it anything about the election to-morrow?"

"One never can tell what is actuating people," said Mr. Beauchamp.

"If you know anything about the matter I think you ought to tell me."
"I know nothing except that the ballot will be taken to-morrow. You and I have got nothing more to do in the matter except to wait the result."

"Well; I suppose it's all right," said Melmotte, rising and going back to his seat. But he knew that things were not all right. Had his political friends only been absent, he might have attributed their absence to some political cause which would not have touched him deeply. But the treachery of the Lord Mayor and of Sir Gregory Gribe was a blow. For another hour after he had returned to his place, the Emperor sat solemn in his chair; and then, at some signal given by some one, he was withdrawn. The ladies had already left the room about half an hour. According to the programme arranged for the evening, the royal guests were to return to the smaller room for a cup of coffee, and were then to be paraded upstairs before the multitude who would by that time have arrived, and to remain there long enough to justify the invited ones in saying that they had spent the evening with the Emperor and the Princes and the Princesses. The plan was carried out perfectly. At half-past ten the Emperor was made to walk upstairs, and for half an hour sat awful and composed in an arm-chair that had been prepared for him. How one would wish to see the inside of the mind of the Emperor as it worked on that occasion!

Melmotte, when his guests ascended his stairs, went back into the banquetting-room and through to the hall, and wandered about till he found Miles Grendall. "Miles," he said, "tell me what the row is."

"How row?" asked Miles.

"There's something wrong, and you know all about it. Why didn't the people come?" Miles, looking guilty, did not even attempt to deny his knowledge. "Come; what is it? We might as well know all about it at once." Miles looked down on the ground, and grunted something. "Is it about the election?"

"No, it's not that," said Miles.

"Then what is it?"

"They got hold of something to-day in the City—about Pickering."

"They did, did they? And what were they saying about Pickering? Come; you might as well out with it. You don't suppose that I care what lies they tell."

"They say there's been something—forged. Title-deeds, I think they say."

"Title-deeds! that I have forged title-deeds. Well; that's beginning well. And his lordship has stayed away from my house after accepting my invitation because he has heard that story! All right, Miles; that will do." And the Great Financier went upstairs into his own drawing-room.
CHAPTER LX.

MISS LONGESTAFFE'S LOVER.

A FEW days before that period in our story which we have now reached, Miss Longestaffe was seated in Lady Monogram's back drawing-room, discussing the terms on which the two tickets for Madame Melmotte's grand reception had been transferred to Lady Monogram,—the place on the cards for the names of the friends whom Madame Melmotte had the honour of inviting to meet the Emperor and the Princes, having been left blank; and the terms also on which Miss Longestaffe had been asked to spend two or three days with her dear friend Lady Monogram. Each lady was disposed to get as much and to give as little as possible,—in which desire the ladies carried out the ordinary practice of all parties to a bargain. It had of course been settled that Lady Monogram was to have the two tickets,—for herself and her husband,—such tickets at that moment standing very high in the market. In payment for these valuable considerations, Lady Monogram was to undertake to chaperon Miss Longestaffe at the entertainment, to take Miss Longestaffe as a visitor for three days, and to have one party at her own house during the time, so that it might be seen that Miss Longestaffe had other friends in London besides the Melmottes's on whom to depend for her London gaieties. At this moment Miss Longestaffe felt herself justified in treating the matter as though she were hardly receiving a fair equivalent. The Melmotte tickets were certainly ruling very high. They had just culminated. They fell a little soon afterwards, and at ten p.m. on the night of the entertainment were hardly worth anything. At the moment which we have now in hand, there was a rush for them. Lady Monogram had already secured the tickets. They were in her desk. But, as will sometimes be the case in a bargain, the seller was complaining that as she had parted with her goods too cheap, some makeweight should be added to the stipulated price.

"As for that, my dear," said Miss Longestaffe, who, since the rise in Melmotte stock generally had endeavoured to resume something of her old manners, "I don't see what you mean at all. You meet Lady Julia Goldsheiner everywhere, and her father-in-law is Mr. Brehgart's junior partner."

"Lady Julia is Lady Julia, my dear, and young Mr. Goldsheiner has, in some sort of way, got himself in. He hunts, and Damask says that he is one of the best shots at Hurlingham. I never met old Mr. Goldsheiner anywhere."

"I have."

"Oh, yes, I dare say. Mr. Melmotte, of course, entertains all the City people. I don't think Sir Damask would like me to ask Mr. Brehgart to dine here." Lady Monogram managed everything herself
with reference to her own parties; invited all her own guests, and
never troubled Sir Damask,—who, again, on his side, had his own set
of friends; but she was very clever in the use which she made of her
husband. There were some aspirants who really were taught to think
that Sir Damask was very particular as to the guests whom he
welcomed to his own house.

"May I speak to Sir Damask about it," asked Miss Longestaff, who
was very urgent on the occasion.

"Well, my dear, I really don't think you ought to do that. There
are little things which a man and his wife must manage together
without interference."

"Nobody can ever say that I interfered in any family. But really,
Julia, when you tell me that Sir Damask cannot receive Mr. Brehgert,
it does sound odd. As for City people, you know as well as I do,
that kind of thing is all over now. City people are just as good
as West-end people."

"A great deal better, I dare say. I'm not arguing about that. I
don't make the lines; but there they are; and one gets to know
in a sort of way what they are. I don't pretend to be a bit
better than my neighbours. I like to see people come here whom
other people who come here will like to meet. I'm big enough to hold
my own, and so is Sir Damask. But we ain't big enough to introduce
new-comers. I don't suppose there's anybody in London understands
it better than you do, Georgiana, and therefore it's absurd my pretend-
ing to teach you. I go pretty well everywhere, as you are aware;
and I shouldn't know Mr. Brehgert if I were to see him."

"You'll meet him at the Meltotte's, and, in spite of all you said
once, you're glad enough to go there."

"Quite true, my dear. I don't think that you are just the person to
throw that in my teeth; but never mind that. There's the butcher round
the corner in Bond Street, or the man who comes to do my hair. I
don't at all think of asking them to my house. But if they were
suddenly to turn out wonderful men, and go everywhere, no doubt I
should be glad to have them here. That's the way we live, and you
are as well used to it as I am. Mr. Brehgert at present to me is like
the butcher round the corner." Lady Monogram had the tickets
safe under lock and key, or I think she would hardly have said this.

"He is not a bit like a butcher," said Miss Longestaff, blazing up
in real wrath.

"I did not say that he was."

"Yes, you did; and it was the unkindest thing you could possibly
say. It was meant to be unkind. It was monstrous. How would
you like it if I said that Sir Damask was like a hair-dresser?"

"You can say so if you please. Sir Damask drives four in hand,
rides as though he meant to break his neck every winter, is one of the
best shots going, and is supposed to understand a yacht as well as any
other gentleman out. And I'm rather afraid that before he was
married he used to box with all the prize-fighters, and to be a little
too free behind the scenes. If that makes a man like a hair-dresser,
well, there he is."
"How proud you are of his vices."

"He's very good-natured, my dear, and as he does not interfere with me, I don't interfere with him. I hope you'll do as well. I dare say Mr. Brehgert is good-natured."

"He's an excellent man of business, and is making a very large fortune."

"And has five or six grown-up children, who, no doubt, will be a comfort."

"If I don't mind them, why need you? You have none at all, and you find it lonely enough."

"Not at all lonely. I have everything that I desire. How hard you are trying to be ill-natured, Georgiana."

"Why did you say that he was a —— butcher?"

"I said nothing of the kind. I didn't even say that he was like a butcher. What I did say was this,—that I don't feel inclined to risk my own reputation on the appearance of new people at my table. Of course, I go in for what you call fashion. Some people can dare to ask anybody they meet in the streets. I can't. I've my own line, and I mean to follow it. It's hard work, I can tell you; and it would be harder still if I wasn't particular. If you like Mr. Brehgert to come here on Tuesday evening, when the rooms will be full, you can ask him; but as for having him to dinner, I — won't — do it." So the matter was at last settled. Miss Longstaff did ask Mr. Brehgert for the Tuesday evening, and the two ladies were again friends.

Perhaps Lady Monogram, when she illustrated her position by an allusion to a butcher and a hair-dresser, had been unaware that Mr. Brehgert had some resemblance to the form which men in that trade are supposed to bear. Let us at least hope that she was so. He was a fat, greasy man, good-looking in a certain degree, about fifty, with hair dyed black, and beard and moustache dyed a dark purple colour. The charm of his face consisted in a pair of very bright black eyes, which were, however, set too near together in his face for the general delight of Christians. He was stout; — fat all over rather than corpulent, — and had that look of command in his face which has become common to master-butchers, probably by long intercourse with sheep and oxen. But Mr. Brehgert was considered to be a very good man of business, and was now regarded as being, in a commercial point of view, the leading member of the great financial firm of which he was the second partner. Mr. Todd's day was nearly done. He walked about constantly between Lombard Street, the Exchange, and the Bank, and talked much to merchants; he had an opinion too of his own on particular cases; but the business had almost got beyond him, and Mr. Brehgert was now supposed to be the moving spirit of the firm. He was a widower, living in a luxurious villa at Fulham with a family, not indeed grown up, as Lady Monogram had ill-naturedly said, but which would be grown up before long, varying from an eldest son of eighteen, who had just been placed at a desk in the office, to the youngest girl of twelve, who was at school at Brighton. He was a man who always asked for what he wanted;
and having made up his mind that he wanted a second wife, had asked Miss Georgiana Longestaffe to fill that situation. He had met her at the Melmottes', had entertained her, with Madame Melmotte and Marie, at Beaudesert, as he called his villa, had then proposed in the square, and two days after had received an assenting answer in Bruton Street.

Poor Miss Longestaffe! Although she had acknowledged the fact to Lady Monogram in her desire to pave the way for the reception of herself into society as a married woman, she had not as yet found courage to tell her family. The man was absolutely a Jew;—not a Jew that had been, as to whom there might possibly be a doubt whether he or his father or his grandfather had been the last Jew of the family; but a Jew that was. So was Goldsheiner a Jew, whom Lady Julia Start had married,—or at any rate had been one a very short time before he ran away with that lady. She counted up ever so many instances on her fingers of "decent people" who had married Jews or Jewesses. Lord Frederic Framlingham had married a girl of the Berrenhofers; and Mr. Hart had married a Miss Chute. She did not know much of Miss Chute, but was certain that she was a Christian. Lord Frederic's wife and Lady Julia Goldsheiner were seen everywhere. Though she hardly knew how to explain the matter even to herself, she was sure that there was at present a general heaving-up of society on this matter, and a change in progress which would soon make it a matter of indifference whether anybody was Jew or Christian. For herself she regarded the matter not at all, except as far as it might be regarded by the world in which she wished to live. She was herself above all personal prejudices of that kind. Jew, Turk, or infidel was nothing to her. She had seen enough of the world to be aware that her happiness did not lie in that direction, and could not depend in the least on the religion of her husband. Of course she would go to church herself. She always went to church. It was the proper thing to do. As to her husband, though she did not suppose that she could ever get him to church,—nor perhaps would it be desirable,—she thought that she might induce him to go nowhere, so that she might be able to pass him off as a Christian. She knew that such was the Christianity of young Goldsheiner, of which the Starts were now boasting.

Had she been alone in the world she thought that she could have looked forward to her destiny with complacency; but she was afraid of her father and mother. Lady Pomona was distressingly old-fashioned, and had so often spoken with horror even of the approach of a Jew,—and had been so loud in denouncing the iniquity of Christians who allowed such people into their houses! Unfortunately, too, Georgiana in her earlier days had re-echoed all her mother's sentiments. And then her father,—if he had ever earned for himself the right to be called a Conservative politician by holding a real opinion of his own,—it had been on that matter of admitting the Jews into parliament. When that had been done he was certain that the glory of England was sunk for ever. And since that time, whenever creditors were more than ordinarily importunate, when
Slow and Bideawhile could do nothing for him, he would refer to that fatal measure as though it was the cause of every embarrassment which had harassed him. How could she tell parents such as these that she was engaged to marry a man who at the present moment went to synagogue on a Saturday and carried out every other filthy abomination common to the despised people?

That Mr. Brehgert was a fat, greasy man of fifty, conspicuous for hair-dye, was in itself distressing:—but this minor distress was swallowed up in the greater. Miss Longestaffie was a girl possessing considerable discrimination, and was able to weigh her own possessions in just scales. She had begun life with very high aspirations, believing in her own beauty, in her mother's fashion, and her father's fortune. She had now been ten years at the work, and was aware that she had always flown a little too high for her mark at the time. At nineteen and twenty and twenty-one she had thought that all the world was before her. With her commanding figure, regular long features, and bright complexion, she had regarded herself as one of the beauties of the day, and had considered herself entitled to demand wealth and a coronet. At twenty-two, twenty-three, and twenty-four any young peer, or peer's eldest son, with a house in town and in the country, might have sufficed. Twenty-five and six had been the years for baronets and squires; and even a leading fashionable lawyer or two had been marked by her as sufficient since that time. But now she was aware that hitherto she had always fixed her price a little too high. On three things she was still determined,—that she would not be poor, that she would not be banished from London, and that she would not be an old maid. "Mamma," she had often said, "there's one thing certain. I shall never do to be poor." Lady Pomona had expressed full concurrence with her child. "And, mamma, to do as Sophia is doing would kill me. Fancy having to live at Toodlam all one's life with George Whitstable!" Lady Pomona had agreed to this also, though she thought that Toodlam Hall was a very nice home for her elder daughter. "And, mamma, I should drive you and papa mad if I were to stay at home always. And what would become of me when Dolly was master of everything?" Lady Pomona, looking forward as well as she was able to the time at which she should herself have departed, when her dower and dower-house would have reverted to Dolly, acknowledged that Georgiana should provide herself with a home of her own before that time.

And how was this to be done? Lovers with all the glories and all the graces are supposed to be plentiful as blackberries by girls of nineteen, but have been proved to be rare hothouse fruits by girls of twenty-nine. Brehgert was rich, would live in London, and would be a husband. People did such odd things now and "lived them down," that she could see no reason why she should not do this and live this down. Courage was the one thing necessary,—that and perseverance. She must teach herself to talk about Brehgert as Lady Monogram did of Sir Damask. She had plucked up so much courage as had enabled her to declare her fate to her old friend,—remembering as she did so how in days long past she and her friend Julia Triplex
had scattered their scorn upon some poor girl who had married a man with a Jewish name,—whose grandfather had possibly been a Jew. "Dear me," said Lady Monogram. "Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheiner! Mr. Todd is—one of us, I suppose."

"Yes," said Georgiana boldly, "and Mr. Brehgert is a Jew. His name is Ezekiel Brehgert, and he is a Jew. You can say what you like about it."

"I don't say anything about it, my dear."

"And you can think anything you like. Things are changed since you and I were younger."

"Very much changed, it appears," said Lady Monogram. Sir Damask's religion had never been doubted, though except on the occasion of his marriage no acquaintance of his had probably ever seen him in church.

But to tell her father and mother required a higher spirit than she had shown even in her communication to Lady Monogram, and that spirit had not as yet come to her. On the morning before she left the Melmottes in Bruton Street, her lover had been with her. The Melmottes of course knew of the engagement and quite approved of it. Madame Melmotte rather aspired to credit for having had so happy an affair arranged under her auspices. It was some set-off against Marie's unfortunate escapade. Mr. Brehgert, therefore, had been allowed to come and go as he pleased, and on that morning he had pleased to come. They were sitting alone in some back room, and Brehgert was pressing for an early day. "I don't think we need talk of that yet, Mr. Brehgert," she said.

"You might as well get over the difficulty and call me Ezekiel at once," he remarked. Georgiana frowned, and made no soft little attempt at the name as ladies in such circumstances are wont to do. "Mrs. Brehgert"—he alluded of course to the mother of his children—"used to call me Ezzy."

"Perhaps I shall do so some day," said Miss Longestaffe, looking at her lover, and asking herself why she should not have been able to have the house and the money and the name of the wife without the troubles appertaining. She did not think it possible that she should ever call him Ezzy.

"And when shall it be? I should say as early in August as possible."

"In August!" she almost screamed. It was already July.

"Vy not, my dear. We would have our little holiday in Germany,—at Vienna. I have business there, and know many friends." Then he pressed her hard to fix some day in the next month. It would be expedient that they should be married from the Melmottes' house, and the Melmottes would leave town some time in August. There was truth in this. Unless married from the Melmottes' house, she must go down to Caversham for the occasion,—which would be intolerable. No;—she must separate herself altogether from father and mother, and become one with the Melmottes and the Brehgerts,—till she could live it down and make a position for herself. If the spending of money could do it, it should be done.
"I must at any rate ask mamma about it," said Georgiana. Mr. Brehgert, with the customary good-humour of his people, was satisfied with the answer, and went away promising that he would meet his love at the great Melmotte reception. Then she sat silent, thinking how she should declare the matter to her family. Would it not be better for her to say to them at once that there must be a division among them,—an absolute breaking off of all old ties, so that it should be tacitly acknowledged that she, Georgiana, had gone out from among the Longstaffes altogether, and had become one with the Melmottes, Brehgerts, and Goldsheiners?
"What's up, Ju?"
CHAPTER LXI.

LADY MONOGRAM PREPARES FOR THE PARTY.

WHEN the little conversation took place between Lady Monogram and Miss Longestaffe, as recorded in the last chapter, Mr. Melmotte was in all his glory, and tickets for the entertainment were very precious. Gradually their value subsided. Lady Monogram had paid very dear for hers,—especially as the reception of Mr. Brehgert must be considered. But high prices were then being paid. A lady offered to take Marie Melmotte into the country with her for a week; but this was before the elopement. Mr. Cohenlupe was asked out to dinner to meet two peers and a countess. Lord Alfred received various presents. A young lady gave a lock of her hair to Lord Nidderdale, although it was known that he was to marry Marie Melmotte. And Miles Grendall got back an I O U of considerable nominal value from Lord Grasslough, who was anxious to accommodate two country cousins who were in London. Gradually the prices fell;—not at first from any doubt in Melmotte, but through that customary reaction which may be expected on such occasions. But at eight or nine o’clock on the evening of the party the tickets were worth nothing. The rumour had then spread itself through the whole town from Pimlico to Marylebone. Men coming home from clubs had told their wives. Ladies who had been in the park had heard it. Even the hairdressers had it, and ladies’ maids had been instructed by the footmen and grooms who had been holding horses and seated on the coach-boxes. It had got into the air, and had floated round dining-rooms and over toilet-tables.

I doubt whether Sir Damask would have said a word about it to his wife as he was dressing for dinner, had he calculated what might be the result to himself. But he came home open-mouthed, and made no calculation. "Have you heard what’s up, Ju?" he said, rushing half-dressed into his wife’s room.

"What is up?"

"Haven’t you been out?"

"I was shopping, and that kind of thing. I don’t want to take that girl into the Park. I’ve made a mistake in having her here, but I mean to be seen with her as little as I can."

"Be good-natured, Ju, whatever you are."

"Oh, bother! I know what I’m about. What is it you mean?"

"They say Melmotte’s been found out."

"Found out!" exclaimed Lady Monogram, stopping her maid in some arrangement which would not need to be continued in the event of her not going to the reception. "What do you mean by found out?"

"I don’t know exactly. There are a dozen stories told. It’s something about that place he bought of old Longestaffe."

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"Are the Longestaffes mixed up in it? I won't have her here a
day longer if there is anything against them."
"Don't be an ass, Ju. There's nothing against him except that the
poor old fellow hasn't got a shilling of his money."
"Then he's ruined,—and there's an end of them."
"Perhaps he will get it now. Some say that Melmotte has forged
a receipt, others a letter. Some declare that he has manufactured a
whole set of title-deeds. You remember Dolly?"
"Of course I know Dolly Longstaffe," said Lady Monogram,
who had thought at one time that an alliance with Dolly might be
convenient.
"They say he has found it all out. There was always something
about Dolly more than fellows gave him credit for. At any rate,
everybody says that Melmotte will be in quod before long."
"Not to-night, Damask!"
"Nobody seems to know. Lupton was saying that the policemen
would wait about in the room like servants till the Emperor and the
Princes had gone away."
"Is Mr. Lupton going?"
"He was to have been at the dinner, but hadn't made up his mind
whether he'd go or not when I saw him. Nobody seems to be quite
certain whether the Emperor will go. Somebody said that a Cabinet
Council was to be called to know what to do."
"A Cabinet Council!"
"Why, you see it's rather an awkward thing, letting the Prince go
to dine with a man who perhaps may have been arrested and taken
to gaol before dinner-time. That's the worst part of it. Nobody
knows."
Lady Monogram waved her attendant away. She piqued herself
upon having a French maid who could not speak a word of English, and
was therefore quite careless what she said in the woman's presence.
But, of course, everything she did say was repeated down-stairs in
some language that had become intelligible to the servants generally.
Lady Monogram sat motionless for some time, while her husband,
retreating to his own domain, finished his operations. "Damask,"
she said, when he reappeared, "one thing is certain;—we can't go."
"After you've made such a fuss about it!"
"It is a pity,—having that girl here in the house. You know,
don't you, she's going to marry one of these people?"
"I heard about her marriage yesterday. But Brehgert isn't one of
Melmotte's set. They tell me that Brehgert isn't a bad fellow.
A vulgar cad, and all that, but nothing wrong about him."
"He's a Jew,—and he's seventy years old, and makes up horribly."
"What does it matter to you if he's eighty? You are determined,
then, you won't go?"
But Lady Monogram had by no means determined that she wouldn't
go. She had paid her price, and with that economy which sticks to
a woman always in the midst of her extravagances, she could not bear
to lose the thing that she had bought. She cared nothing for Mel-
motte's villainy, as regarded herself. That he was enriching himself
by the daily plunder of the innocent she had taken for granted since
she had first heard of him. She had but a confused idea of any difference between commerce and fraud. But it would grieve her greatly to become known as one of an awkward squad of people who had driven to the door, and perhaps been admitted to some wretched gathering of wretched people,—and not, after all, to have met the Emperor and the Prince. But then, should she hear on the next morning that the Emperor and the Princes, that the Princesses, and the Duchesses, with the Ambassadors, Cabinet Ministers, and proper sort of world generally, had all been there,—that the world, in short, had ignored Melmotte’s villainy,—then would her grief be still greater. She sat down to dinner with her husband and Miss Longestaffe, and could not talk freely on the matter. Miss Longestaffe was still a guest of the Melmottes, although she had transferred herself to the Monograms for a day or two. And a horrible idea crossed Lady Monogram’s mind. What should she do with her friend Georgiana if the whole Melmotte establishment were suddenly broken up? Of course, Madame Melmotte would refuse to take the girl back if her husband were sent to gaol. “I suppose you’ll go,” said Sir Damask as the ladies left the room.

“Of course we shall,—in about an hour,” said Lady Monogram as she left the room, looking round at him and rebuking him for his imprudence.

“Because, you know——” and then he called her back. “If you want me I’ll stay, of course; but if you don’t, I’ll go down to the club.”

“How can I say, yet? You needn’t mind the club to-night.”

“All right;—only it’s a bore being here alone.”

Then Miss Longestaffe asked what “was up.” “Is there any doubt about our going to-night?”

“I can’t say. I’m so harassed that I don’t know what I’m about. There seems to be a report that the Emperor won’t be there.”

“Impossible!”

“It’s all very well to say impossible, my dear,” said Lady Monogram; “but still that’s what people are saying. You see Mr. Melmotte is a very great man, but perhaps—something else has turned up, so that he may be thrown over. Things of that kind do happen. You had better finish dressing. I shall. But I shan’t make sure of going till I hear that the Emperor is there.” Then she descended to her husband, whom she found forlornly consoling himself with a cigar. “Damask,” she said, “you must find out.”

“Find out what?”

“Whether the Prince and the Emperor are there.”

“Send John to ask,” suggested the husband.

“He would be sure to make a blunder about it. If you’d go your- self you’d learn the truth in a minute. Have a cab,—just go into the hall and you’ll soon know how it all is;—I’d do it in a minute if I were you.” Sir Damask was the most good-natured man in the world, but he did not like the job. “What can be the objection?” asked his wife.

“Go to a man’s house and find out whether a man’s guests are come before you go yourself! I don’t just see it, Ju.”

“Guests! What nonsense! The Emperor and all the Royal
Family! As if it were like any other party. Such a thing, probably, never happened before, and never will happen again. If you don’t go, Damask, I must; and I will." Sir Damask, after groaning and smoking for half a minute, said that he would go. He made many remonstrances. It was a confounded bore. He hated emperors and he hated princes. He hated the whole box and dice of that sort of thing! He “wished to goodness” that he had dined at his club and sent word up home that the affair was to be off. But at last he submitted, and allowed his wife to leave the room with the intention of sending for a cab. The cab was sent for and announced, but Sir Damask would not stir till he had finished his big cigar.

It was past ten when he left his own house. On arriving in Grosvenor Square he could at once see that the party was going on. The house was illuminated. There was a concourse of servants round the door, and half the square was already blocked up with carriages. It was not without delay that he got to the door, and when there he saw the royal liveries. There was no doubt about the party. The Emperor and the Princes and the Princesses were all there. As far as Sir Damask could then perceive, the dinner had been quite a success. But again there was a delay in getting away, and it was nearly eleven before he could reach home. “It’s all right,” said he to his wife. “They’re there, safe enough.”

“You are sure that the Emperor is there.”

“As sure as a man can be without having seen him.”

Miss Longstaffe was present at this moment, and could not but resent what appeared to be a most unseemly slur cast upon her friends. “I don’t understand it at all,” she said. “Of course the Emperor is there. Everybody has known for the last month that he was coming. What is the meaning of it, Julia?”

“My dear, you must allow me to manage my own little affairs my own way. I dare say I am absurd. But I have my reason. Now, Damask, if the carriage is there we had better start.” The carriage was there, and they did start, and with a delay which seemed unprecedented, even to Lady Monogram, who was accustomed to these things, they reached the door. There was a great crush in the hall, and people were coming down-stairs. But at last they made their way into the room above, and found that the Emperor of China and all the Royalties had been there,—but had taken their departure.

Sir Damask put the ladies into the carriage and went at once to his club.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE PARTY.

LADY MONOGRAM retired from Mr. Melmotte’s house in disgust as soon as she was able to escape; but we must return to it for a short time. When the guests were once in the drawing-room the immediate sense of failure passed away. The crowd never became so
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thick as had been anticipated. They who were knowing in such matters had declared that the people would not be able to get themselves out of the room till three or four o'clock in the morning, and that the carriages would not get themselves out of the Square till breakfast time. With a view to this kind of thing Mr. Melmotte had been told that he must provide a private means of escape for his illustrious guests, and with a considerable sacrifice of walls and general house arrangements this had been done. No such gathering as was expected took place; but still the rooms became fairly full, and Mr. Melmotte was able to console himself with the feeling that nothing certainly fatal had as yet occurred.

There can be no doubt that the greater part of the people assembled did believe that their host had committed some great fraud which might probably bring him under the arm of the law. When such rumours are spread abroad, they are always believed. There is an excitement and a pleasure in believing them. Reasonable hesitation at such a moment is dull and phlegmatic. If the accused one be near enough to ourselves to make the accusation a matter of personal pain, of course we disbelieve. But, if the distance be beyond this, we are almost ready to think that anything may be true of anybody. In this case nobody really loved Melmotte and everybody did believe. It was so probable that such a man should have done something horrible! It was only hoped that the fraud might be great and horrible enough.

Melmotte himself during that part of the evening which was passed up-stairs kept himself in the close vicinity of royalty. He behaved certainly very much better than he would have done had he had no weight at his heart. He made few attempts at beginning any conversation, and answered, at any rate with brevity, when he was addressed. With scrupulous care he ticked off on his memory the names of those who had come and whom he knew, thinking that their presence indicated a verdict of acquittal from them on the evidence already before them. Seeing the members of the Government all there, he wished that he had come forward in Westminster as a Liberal. And he freely forgave those omissions of Royalty as to which he had been so angry at the India Office, seeing that not a Prince or Princess was lacking of those who were expected. He could turn his mind to all this, although he knew how great was his danger. Many things occurred to him as he stood, striving to smile as a host should smile. It might be the case that half-a-dozen detectives were already stationed in his own hall,—perhaps one or two, well dressed, in the very presence of royalty,—ready to arrest him as soon as the guests were gone, watching him now lest he should escape. But he bore the burden,—and smiled. He had always lived with the consciousness that such a burden was on him and might crush him at any time. He had known that he had to run these risks. He had told himself a thousand times that when the dangers came, dangers alone should never cow him. He had always endeavoured to go as near the wind as he could, to avoid the heavy hand of the criminal law of whatever country he inhabited. He had studied the criminal laws, so that he might be sure in his reckonings; but he had always felt that he might be carried by circumstances into
deeper waters than he intended to enter. As the soldier who leads a forlorn hope, or as the diver who goes down for pearls, or as the searcher for wealth on fever-breeding coasts, knows that as his gains may be great, so are his perils, Melmotte had been aware that in his life, as it opened itself out to him, he might come to terrible destruction. He had not always thought, or even hoped, that he would be as he was now, so exalted as to be allowed to entertain the very biggest ones of the earth; but the greatness had grown upon him, and so had the danger. He could not now be as exact as he had been. He was prepared himself to bear all mere ignominy with a tranquil mind,—to disregard any shouts of reprobation which might be uttered, and to console himself when the bad quarter of an hour should come with the remembrance that he had garnered up a store sufficient for future wants and placed it beyond the reach of his enemies. But as his intellect opened up to him new schemes, and as his ambition got the better of his prudence, he gradually fell from the security which he had preconceived, and became aware that he might have to bear worse than ignominy.

Perhaps never in his life had he studied his own character and his own conduct more accurately, or made sterner resolves, than he did as he stood there smiling, bowing, and acting without impropriety the part of host to an Emperor. No;—he could not run away. He soon made himself sure of that. He had risen too high to be a successful fugitive, even should he succeed in getting off before hands were laid upon him. He must bide his ground, if only that he might not at once confess his own guilt by flight; and he would do so with courage. Looking back at the hour or two that had just passed, he was aware that he had allowed himself not only to be frightened in the dinner-room,—but also to seem to be frightened. The thing had come upon him unawares and he had been untrue to himself. He acknowledged that. He should not have asked those questions of Mr. Todd and Mr. Beauclerk, and should have been more good-humoured than usual with Lord Alfred in discussing those empty seats. But for spilt milk there is no remedy. The blow had come upon him too suddenly, and he had faltered. But he would not falter again. Nothing should cow him,—no touch from a policeman, no warrant from a magistrate, no defalcation of friends, no scorn in the City, no solitude in the West End. He would go down among the electors to-morrow and would stand his ground, as though all with him were right. Men should know at any rate that he had a heart within his bosom. And he confessed also to himself that he had sinned in that matter of arrogance. He could see it now,—as so many of us do see the faults which we have committed, which we strive, but in vain, to discontinue, and which we never confess except to our own bosoms. The task which he had imposed on himself, and to which circumstances had added weight, had been very hard to bear. He should have been good-humoured to these great ones whose society he had gained. He should have bound these people to him by a feeling of kindness as well as by his money. He could see it all now. And he could see too that there was no help for spilt milk. I think he took some pride in his own confidence as to his own courage, as he stood
there turning it all over in his mind. Very much might be suspected. Something might be found out. But the task of unravelling it all would not be easy. It is the small vermin and the little birds that are trapped at once. But wolves and vultures can fight hard before they are caught. With the means which would still be at his command, let the worst come to the worst, he could make a strong fight. When a man's frauds have been enormous there is a certain safety in their very diversity and proportions. Might it not be that the fact that these great ones of the earth had been his guests should speak in his favour? A man who had in very truth had the real brother of the Sun dining at his table could hardly be sent into the dock and then sent out of it like a common felon.

Madame Melmotte during the evening stood at the top of her own stairs with a chair behind her on which she could rest herself for a moment when any pause took place in the arrivals. She had of course dined at the table,—or rather sat there;—but had been so placed that no duty had devolved upon her. She had heard no word of the rumours, and would probably be the last person in that house to hear them. It never occurred to her to see whether the places down the table were full or empty. She sat with her large eyes fixed on the Majesty of China and must have wondered at her own destiny at finding herself with an Emperor and Princes to look at. From the dining-room she had gone when she was told to go, up to the drawing-room, and had there performed her task, longing only for the comfort of her bedroom. She, I think, had but small sympathy with her husband in all his work, and but little understanding of the position in which she had been placed. Money she liked, and comfort, and perhaps diamonds and fine dresses, but she can hardly have taken pleasure in duchesses or have enjoyed the company of the Emperor. From the beginning of the Melmotte era it had been an understood thing that no one spoke to Madame Melmotte.

Marie Melmotte had declined a seat at the dinner-table. This at first had been cause of quarrel between her and her father, as he desired to have seen her next to young Lord Nidderdale as being acknowledged to be betrothed to him. But since the journey to Liverpool he had said nothing on the subject. He still pressed the engagement, but thought now that less publicity might be expedient. She was, however, in the drawing-room standing at first by Madame Melmotte, and afterwards retreating among the crowd. To some ladies she was a person of interest as the young woman who had lately run away under such strange circumstances; but no one spoke to her till she saw a girl whom she herself knew, and whom she addressed, plucking up all her courage for the occasion. This was Hetta Carbury who had been brought hither by her mother.

The tickets for Lady Carbury and Hetta had of course been sent before the elopement;—and also, as a matter of course, no reference had been made to them by the Melmotte family after the elopement. Lady Carbury herself was anxious that that affair should not be considered as having given cause for any personal quarrel between herself and Mr. Melmotte, and in her difficulty had consulted Mr. Broune. Mr. Broune was the staff on which she learnt at present in all her difficulties.
Mr. Broune was going to the dinner. All this of course took place while Melmotte's name was as yet unsullied as snow. Mr. Broune saw no reason why Lady Carbury should not take advantage of her tickets. These invitations were simply tickets to see the Emperor surrounded by the Princes. The young lady's elopement is "no affair of yours," Mr. Broune had said. "I should go, if it were only for the sake of showing that you did not consider yourself to be implicated in the matter." Lady Carbury did as she was advised, and took her daughter with her. "Nonsense," said the mother, when Hetta objected; "Mr. Broune sees it quite in the right light. This is a grand demonstration in honour of the Emperor, rather than a private party;—and we have done nothing to offend the Melmottes. You know you wish to see the Emperor." A few minutes before they started from Welbeck Street a note came from Mr. Broune, written in pencil and sent from Melmotte's house by a Commissioner. "Don't mind what you hear; but come. I am here and as far as I can see it is all right. The E. is beautiful, and P.'s are as thick as blackberries." Lady Carbury, who had not been in the way of hearing the reports, understood nothing of this; but of course she went. And Hetta went with her.

Hetta was standing alone in a corner, near to her mother, who was talking to Mr. Booker, with her eyes fixed on the awful tranquillity of the Emperor's countenance, when Marie Melmotte timidly crept up to her and asked her how she was. Hetta, probably, was not very cordial to the poor girl, being afraid of her, partly as the daughter of the great Melmotte and partly as the girl with whom her brother had failed to run away; but Marie was not rebuked by this. "I hope you won't be angry with me for speaking to you." Hetta smiled more graciously. She could not be angry with the girl for speaking to her, feeling that she was there as the guest of the girl's mother. "I suppose you know about your brother," said Marie, whispering with her eyes turned to the ground.

"I have heard about it," said Hetta. "He never told me himself."

"Oh, I do so wish that I knew the truth. I know nothing. Of course, Miss Carbury, I love him. I do love him so dearly! I hope you don't think I would have done it if I hadn't loved him better than anybody in the world. Don't you think that if a girl loves a man,—really loves him,—that ought to go before everything?"

This was a question that Hetta was hardly prepared to answer. She felt quite certain that under no circumstances would she run away with a man. "I don't quite know. It is so hard to say," she replied.

"I do. What's the good of anything if you're to be broken-hearted? I don't care what they say of me, or what they do to me, if he would only be true to me. Why doesn't he—let me know—something about it?" This also was a question difficult to be answered. Since that horrid morning on which Sir Felix had stumbled home drunk,—which was now four days since,—he had not left the house in Welbeck Street till this evening. He had gone out a few minutes before Lady Carbury had started, but up to that time he had almost kept his bed. He would not get up till dinner-time, would come down after some half-dressed fashion, and then get back to his bedroom, where he
would smoke and drink brandy-and-water and complain of headache. The theory was that he was ill;—but he was in fact utterly cowed and did not dare to show himself at his usual haunts. He was aware that he had quarrelled at the club, aware that all the world knew of his intended journey to Liverpool, aware that he had tumbled about the streets intoxicated. He had not dared to show himself, and the feeling had grown upon him from day to day. Now, fairly worn out by his confinement, he had crept out intending, if possible, to find consolation with Ruby Ruggles. "Do tell me. Where is he?" pleaded Marie.

"He has not been very well lately."
"Is he ill? Oh, Miss Carbury, do tell me. You can understand what it is to love him as I do;—can't you?"
"He has been ill. I think he is better now."
"Why does he not come to me, or send to me; or let me know something? It is cruel, is it not? Tell me,—you must know,—does he really care for me?"

Hetta was exceedingly perplexed. The real feeling betrayed by the girl recommended her. Hetta could not but sympathize with the affection manifested for her own brother, though she could hardly understand the want of reticence displayed by Marie in thus speaking of her love to one who was almost a stranger. "Felix hardly ever talks about himself to me," she said.

"If he doesn't care for me, there shall be an end of it," Marie said very gravely. "If I only knew! If I thought that he loved me, I'd go through,—oh,—all the world for him. Nothing that papa could say should stop me. That's my feeling about it. I have never talked to any one but you about it. Isn't that strange? I haven't a person to talk to. That's my feeling, and I'm not a bit ashamed of it. There's no disgrace in being in love. But it's very bad to get married without being in love. That's what I think."

"It is bad," said Hetta, thinking of Roger Carbury.

"But if Felix doesn't care for me!" continued Marie, sinking her voice to a low whisper, but still making her words quite audible to her companion. Now Hetta was strongly of opinion that her brother did not in the least "care for" Marie Melmotte, and that it would be very much for the best that Marie Melmotte should know the truth. But she had not that sort of strength which would have enabled her to tell it. "Tell me just what you think," said Marie. Hetta was still silent. "Ah,—I see. Then I must give him up? Eh?"

"What can I say, Miss Melmotte? Felix never tells me. He is my brother,—and of course I love you for loving him:" This was almost more than Hetta meant; but she felt herself constrained to say some gracious word.

"Do you? Oh! I wish you did. I should so like to be loved by you. Nobody loves me, I think. That man there wants to marry me. Do you know him? He is Lord Nidderdale. He is very nice; but he does not love me any more than he loves you. That's the way with men. It isn't the way with me. I would go with Felix, and slave for him if he were poor. Is it all to be over then? You will give him a message from me?" Hetta, doubting as to the propriety
of the promise, promised that she would. "Just tell him I want to know; that's all. I want to know. You'll understand. I want to know the real truth. I suppose I do know it now. Then I shall not care what happens to me. It will be all the same. I suppose I shall marry that young man, though it will be very bad. I shall just be as if I hadn't any self of my own at all. But he ought to send me word after all that has passed. Do not you think he ought to send me word?"

"Yes, indeed."

"You tell him, then," said Marie, nodding her head as she crept away.

Nidderdale had been observing her while she had been talking to Miss Carbury. He had heard the rumour, and of course felt that it behoved him to be on his guard more specially than any one else. But he had not believed what he had heard. That men should be thoroughly immoral, that they should gamble, get drunk, run into debt, and make love to other men's wives, was to him a matter of every-day life. Nothing of that kind shocked him at all. But he was not as yet quite old enough to believe in swindling. It had been impossible to convince him that Miles Grendall had cheated at cards, and the idea that Mr. Melmotte had forged was as improbable and shocking to him as that an officer should run away in battle. Common soldiers, he thought, might do that sort of thing. He had almost fallen in love with Marie when he saw her last, and was inclined to feel the more kindly to her now because of the hard things that were being said about her father. And yet he knew that he must be careful. If "he came a cropper" in this matter, it would be such an awful cropper! "How do you like the party?" he said to Marie.

"I don't like it at all, my lord. How do you like it?"

"Very much, indeed. I think the Emperor is the greatest fun I ever saw. Prince Frederic,"—one of the German princes who was staying at the time among his English cousins,—"Prince Frederic says that he's stuffed with hay, and that he's made up fresh every morning at a shop in the Haymarket."

"I've seen him talk."

"He opens his mouth, of course. There is machinery as well as hay. I think he's the grandest old buffer out, and I'm awfully glad that I've dined with him. I couldn't make out whether he really put anything to eat into his jolly old mouth."

"Of course he did."

"Have you been thinking about what we were talking about the other day?"

"No, my lord,—I haven't thought about it since. Why should I?"

"Well;—it's a sort of thing that people do think about, you know."

"You don't think about it."

"Don't I. I've been thinking about nothing else the last three months."

"You've been thinking whether you'd get married or not."


"It isn't what I mean, then."

"I'll be shot if I can understand you."
"Perhaps not. And you never will understand me. Oh, goodness;—they're all going, and we must get out of the way. Is that Prince Frederic, who told you about the hay? He is handsome; isn't he? And who is that in the violet dress;—with all the pearls?"

"That's the Princess Dwarza."

"Dear me;—isn't it odd, having a lot of people in one's own house, and not being able to speak a word to them. I don't think it's at all nice. Good night, my lord. I'm glad you like the Emperor."

And then the people went, and when they had all gone Melmotte put his wife and daughter into his own carriage, telling them that he would follow them on foot to Bruton Street when he had given some last directions to the people who were putting out the lights, and extinguishing generally the embers of the entertainment. He had looked round for Lord Alfred, taking care to avoid the appearance of searching; but Lord Alfred had gone. Lord Alfred was one of those who knew when to leave a falling house. Melmotte at the moment thought of all that he had done for Lord Alfred, and it was something of the real venom of ingratitude that stung him at the moment rather than this additional sign of coming evil. He was more than ordinarily gracious as he put his wife into the carriage, and remarked that, considering all things, the party had gone off very well. "I only wish it could have been done a little cheaper," he said laughing. Then he went back into the house, and up into the drawing-rooms which were now utterly deserted. Some of the lights had been put out, but the men were busy in the rooms below, and he threw himself into the chair in which the Emperor had sat. It was wonderful that he should come to such a fate as this;—that he, the boy out of the gutter, should entertain at his own house, in London, a Chinese Emperor and English and German Royalty,—and that he should do so almost with a rope round his neck. Even if this were to be the end of it all, men would at any rate remember him. The grand dinner which he had given before he was put into prison would live in history. And it would be remembered, too, that he had been the liberal candidate for the great borough of Westminster,—perhaps, even, the elected member. He, too, in his manner, assured himself that a great part of him would escape Oblivion. "Non omnis moriar," in some language of his own, was chanted by him within his own breast, as he sat there looking out on his own magnificent suite of rooms from the arm-chair which had been consecrated by the use of an Emperor.

No policemen had come to trouble him yet. No hint that he would be "wanted" had been made to him. There was no tangible sign that things were not to go on as they went before. Things would be exactly as they were before, but for the absence of those guests from the dinner-table, and for the words which Miles Grendall had spoken. Had he not allowed himself to be terrified by shadows? Of course he had known that there must be such shadows. His life had been made dark by similar clouds before now, and he had lived through the storms which had followed them. He was thoroughly ashamed of the weakness which had overcome him at the dinner-table, and of that palsy of fear which he had allowed himself to exhibit. There should
be no more shrinking such as that. When people talked of him they should say that he was at least a man.

As this was passing through his mind a head was pushed in through one of the doors, and immediately withdrawn. It was his Secretary. "Is that you, Miles?" he said. "Come in. I'm just going home, and came up here to see how the empty rooms would look after they were all gone. What became of your father?"

"I suppose he went away."

"I suppose he did," said Melmotte, unable to hinder himself from throwing a certain tone of scorn into his voice,—as though proclaiming the fate of his own house and the consequent running away of the rat. "It went off very well, I think."

"Very well," said Miles, still standing at the door. There had been a few words of consultation between him and his father,—only a very few words. "You'd better see it out to-night, as you've had a regular salary, and all that. I shall hook it. I sha'n't go near him to-morrow till I find out how things are going. By G—, I've had about enough of him." But hardly enough of his money,—or it may be presumed that Lord Alfred would have "hooked it" sooner.

"Why don't you come in, and not stand there?" said Melmotte. "There's no Emperor here now for you to be afraid of."

"I'm afraid of nobody," said Miles, walking into the middle of the room.

"Nor am I. What's one man that another man should be afraid of him? We've got to die, and there'll be an end of it, I suppose."

"That's about it," said Miles, hardly following the working of his master's mind.

"I shouldn't care how soon. When a man has worked as I have done, he gets about tired at my age. I suppose I'd better be down at the committee-room about ten to-morrow?"

"That's the best, I should say."

"You'll be there by that time?" Miles Grendall assented slowly, and with imperfect assent. "And tell your father he might as well be there as early as convenient."

"All right," said Miles as he took his departure.

"Curs!" said Melmotte almost aloud. "They neither of them will be there. If any evil can be done to me by treachery and desertion, they will do it." Then it occurred to him to think whether the Grendall article had been worth all the money that he had paid for it. "Curs!" he said again. He walked down into the hall, and through the banqueting-room, and stood at the place where he himself had sat. What a scene it had been, and how frightfully low his heart had sunk within him! It had been the defection of the Lord Mayor that had hit him hardest. "What cowards they are!" The men went on with their work, not noticing him, and probably not knowing him. The dinner had been done by contract, and the contractor's foreman was there. The care of the house and the alterations had been confided to another contractor, and his foreman was waiting to see the place locked up. A confidential clerk, who had been with Melmotte for years, and who knew his ways, was there also to guard the property. "Good night, Croll," he said to the man in German. Croll
Mr. Melmotte speculates.
touched his hat and bade him good night. Melmotte listened anxiously to the tone of the man’s voice, trying to catch from it some indication of the mind within. Did Croll know of these rumours, and if so, what did he think of them? Croll had known him in some perilous circumstances before, and had helped him through them. He paused a moment as though he would ask a question, but resolved at last that silence would be safest. “You’ll see everything safe, eh, Croll?” Croll said that he would see everything safe, and Melmotte passed out into the Square.

He had not far to go, round through Berkeley Square into Bruton Street, but he stood for a few moments looking up at the bright stars. If he could be there, in one of those unknown distant worlds, with all his present intellect and none of his present burdens, he would, he thought, do better than he had done here on earth. If he could even now put himself down nameless, fameless, and without possessions in some distant corner of the world, he could, he thought, do better. But he was Augustus Melmotte, and he must bear his burdens, whatever they were, to the end. He could reach no place so distant but that he would be known and traced.

CHAPTER LXIII.

MR. MELMOTTE ON THE DAY OF THE ELECTION.

No election of a Member of Parliament by ballot in a borough so large as that of Westminster had as yet been achieved in England since the ballot had been established by law. Men who heretofore had known, or thought that they knew, how elections would go, who counted up promises, told off professed enemies, and weighed the doubtful ones, now confessed themselves to be in the dark. Three days since the odds had been considerably in Melmotte’s favour; but this had come from the reputation attached to his name, rather than from any calculation as to the politics of the voters. Then Sunday had intervened. On the Monday Melmotte’s name had continued to go down in the betting from morning to evening. Early in the day his supporters had thought little of this, attributing the fall to that vacillation which is customary in such matters; but towards the latter part of the afternoon the tidings from the City had been in everybody’s mouth, and Melmotte’s committee-room had been almost deserted. At six o’clock there were some who suggested that his name should be withdrawn. No such suggestion, however, was made to him,—perhaps, because no one dared to make it. On the Monday evening all work and strategy for the election, as regarded Melmotte and his party, died away; and the interest of the hour was turned to the dinner.

But Mr. Alf’s supporters were very busy. There had been a close consultation among a few of them as to what should be done by their Committee as to these charges against the opposite candidate. In
the "Pulpit" of that evening an allusion had been made to the affair, which was of course sufficiently intelligible to those who were immediately concerned in the matter, but which had given no name and mentioned no details. Mr. Alf explained that this had been put in by the sub-editor, and that it only afforded such news as the paper was bound to give to the public. He himself pointed out the fact that no note of triumph had been sounded, and that the rumour had not been connected with the election.

One old gentleman was of opinion that they were bound to make the most of it. "It's no more than we've all believed all along," said the old gentleman, "and why are we to let a fellow like that get the seat if we can keep him out?" He was of opinion that everything should be done to make the rumour with all its exaggerations as public as possible,—so that there should be no opening for an indictment for libel; and the clever old gentleman was full of devices by which this might be effected. But the Committee generally was averse to fight in this manner. Public opinion has its Bar as well as the Law Courts. If, after all, Melmotte had committed no fraud,—or, as was much more probable, should not be convicted of fraud,—then it would be said that the accusation had been forged for purely electioneering purposes, and there might be a rebound which would pretty well crush all those who had been concerned. Individual gentlemen could, of course, say what they pleased to individual voters; but it was agreed at last that no overt use should be made of the rumours by Mr. Alf's Committee. In regard to other matters, they who worked under the Committee were busy enough. The dinner to the Emperor was turned into ridicule, and the electors were asked whether they felt themselves bound to return a gentleman out of the City to Parliament because he had offered to spend a fortune on entertaining all the royalties then assembled in London. There was very much said on placards and published in newspapers to the discrediting of Melmotte, but nothing was so printed which would not have appeared with equal venom had the recent rumours never been sent out from the City. At twelve o'clock at night, when Mr. Alf's committee-room was being closed, and when Melmotte was walking home to bed, the general opinion at the clubs was very much in favour of Mr. Alf.

On the next morning Melmotte was up before eight. As yet no policeman had called for him, nor had any official intimation reached him that an accusation was to be brought against him. On coming down from his bedroom he at once went into the back-parlour on the ground floor, which Mr. Longestaffe called his study, and which Mr. Melmotte had used since he had been in Mr. Longestaffe's house for the work which he did at home. He would be there often early in the morning, and often late at night after Lord Alfred had left him. There were two heavy desk-tables in the room, furnished with drawers down to the ground. One of these the owner of the house had kept locked for his own purposes. When the bargain for the temporary letting of the house had been made, Mr. Melmotte and Mr. Longestaffe were close friends. Terms for the purchase of Pickering had just been made, and no cause for suspicion had as yet arisen. Everything between the two gentlemen had been managed with the greatest ease.
Oh dear, yes! Mr. Longestaffe could come whenever he pleased. He, Melmotte, always left the house at ten and never returned till six. The ladies would never enter that room. The servants were to regard Mr. Longestaffe quite as master of the house as far as that room was concerned. If Mr. Longestaffe could spare it, Mr. Melmotte would take the key of one of the tables. The matter was arranged very pleasantly.

Mr. Melmotte, on entering the room bolted the door, and then, sitting at his own table, took certain papers out of the drawers,—a bundle of letters and another of small documents. From these, with very little examination, he took three or four,—two or three perhaps from each. These he tore into very small fragments and burned the bits,—holding them over a gas-burner and letting the ashes fall into a large china plate. Then he blew the ashes into the yard through the open window. This he did to all these documents but one. This one he put bit by bit into his mouth, chewing the paper into a pulp till he swallowed it. When he had done this, and had re-locked his own drawers, he walked across to the other table, Mr. Longestaffe's table, and pulled the handle of one of the drawers. It opened;—and then, without touching the contents, he again closed it. He then knelt down and examined the lock, and the hole above into which the bolt of the lock ran. Having done this he again closed the drawer, drew back the bolt of the door, and, seating himself at his own desk, rang the bell which was close to hand. The servant found him writing letters after his usual hurried fashion, and was told that he was ready for breakfast. He always breakfasted alone with a heap of newspapers around him, and so he did on this day. He soon found the paragraph alluding to himself in the "Pulpit," and read it without a quiver in his face or the slightest change in his colour. There was no one to see him now,—but he was acting under a resolve that at no moment, either when alone, or in a crowd, or when suddenly called upon for words,—not even when the policemen with their first hints of arrest should come upon him,—would he betray himself by the working of a single muscle, or the loss of a drop of blood from his heart. He would go through it, always armed, without a sign of shrinking. It had to be done, and he would do it.

At ten he walked down to the central committee-room at Whitehall Place. He thought that he would face the world better by walking than if he were taken in his own brougham. He gave orders that the carriage should be at the committee-room at eleven, and wait an hour for him if he was not there. He went along Bond Street and Piccadilly, Regent Street and through Pall Mall to Charing Cross, with the blandly triumphant smile of a man who had successfully entertained the great guest of the day. As he got near the club he met two or three men whom he knew, and bowed to them. They returned his bow graciously enough, but not one of them stopped to speak to him. Of one he knew that he would have stopped, had it not been for the rumour. Even after the man had passed on he was careful to show no displeasure on his face. He would take it all as it would come and still be the blandly triumphant Merchant Prince,—as long as the police would allow him. He probably was not aware how very
different was the part he was now playing from that which he had assumed at the India Office.

At the committee-room he only found a few understrappers, and was informed that everything was going on regularly. The electors were balloting; but with the ballot,—so said the leader of the understrappers,—there never was any excitement. The men looked half-frightened,—as though they did not quite know whether they ought to seize their candidate, and hold him till the constable came. They certainly had not expected to see him there. "Has Lord Alfred been here?" Melmotte asked, standing in the inner room with his back to the empty grate. No,—Lord Alfred had not been there. "Nor Mr. Grendall?" The senior understrapper knew that Melmotte would have asked for "his Secretary," and not for Mr. Grendall, but for the rumours. It is so hard not to tumble into Scylla when you are avoiding Charybdis. Mr. Grendall had not been there. Indeed, nobody had been there. "In fact, there is nothing more to be done, I suppose?" said Mr. Melmotte. The senior understrapper thought that there was nothing more to be done. He left word that his brougham should be sent away, and strolled out again on foot.

He went up into Covent Garden, where there was a polling booth. The place seemed to him, as one of the chief centres for a contested election, to be wonderfully quiet. He was determined to face everybody and everything, and he went close up to the booth. Here he was recognised by various men, mechanics chiefly, who came forward and shook hands with him. He remained there for an hour conversing with people, and at last made a speech to a little knot around him. He did not allude to the rumour of yesterday, nor to the paragraph in the "Pulpit" to which his name had not been attached; but he spoke freely enough of the general accusations that had been brought against him previously. He wished the electors to understand that nothing which had been said against him made him ashamed to meet them here or elsewhere. He was proud of his position, and proud that the electors of Westminster should recognise it. He did not, he was glad to say, know much of the law, but he was told that the law would protect him from such aspersions as had been unfairly thrown upon him. He flattered himself that he was too good an Englishman to regard the ordinary political attacks to which candidates were, as a matter of course, subject at elections;—and he could stretch his back to bear perhaps a little more than these, particularly as he looked forward to a triumphant return. But things had been said, and published, which the excitement of an election could not justify, and as to these things he must have recourse to the law. Then he made some allusion to the Princes and the Emperor, and concluded by observing that it was the proudest boast of his life to be an Englishman and a Londoner.

It was asserted afterwards that this was the only good speech he had ever been known to make; and it was certainly successful, as he was applauded throughout Covent Garden. A reporter for the "Breakfast-Table" who was on duty at the place, looking for paragraphs as to the conduct of electors, gave an account of the speech in that paper, and made more of it, perhaps, than it deserved. It was
asserted afterwards, and given as a great proof of Melmotte's cleverness, that he had planned the thing and gone to Covent Garden all alone having considered that in that way could he best regain a step in reputation; but in truth the affair had not been preconcerted. It was while in Whitehall Place that he had first thought of going to Covent Garden, and he had had no idea of making a speech till the people had gathered round him.

It was then noon, and he had to determine what he should do next. He was half inclined to go round to all the booths and make speeches. His success at Covent Garden had been very pleasant to him. But he feared that he might not be so successful elsewhere. He had shown that he was not afraid of the electors. Then an idea struck him that he would go boldly into the City,—to his own offices in Abchurch Lane. He had determined to be absent on this day, and would not be expected. But his appearance there could not on that account be taken amiss. Whatever enmities there might be, or whatever perils, he would face them. He got a cab therefore and had himself driven to Abchurch Lane.

The clerks were hanging about doing nothing, as though it were a holiday. The dinner, the election, and the rumour together had altogether demoralized them. But some of them at least were there, and they showed no signs of absolute insubordination. "Mr. Grendall has not been here?" he asked. No; Mr. Grendall had not been there; but Mr. Cohenlupe was in Mr. Grendall's room. At this moment he hardly desired to see Mr. Cohenlupe. That gentleman was privy to many of his transactions, but was by no means privy to them all. Mr. Cohenlupe knew that the estate at Pickering had been purchased, and knew that it had been mortgaged. He knew also what had become of the money which had so been raised. But he knew nothing of the circumstances of the purchase, although he probably surmised that Melmotte had succeeded in getting the title-deeds on credit, without paying the money. He was afraid that he could hardly see Cohenlupe and hold his tongue, and that he could not speak to him without danger. He and Cohenlupe might have to stand in a dock together; and Cohenlupe had none of his spirit. But the clerks would think, and would talk, were he to leave the office without seeing his old friend. He went therefore into his own room, and called to Cohenlupe as he did so.

"Ve didn't expect you here to-day," said the member for Staines.

"Nor did I expect to come. But there isn't much to do at Westminster while the ballot is going on; so I came up, just to look at the letters. The dinner went off pretty well yesterday, eh?"

"Uncommon;—nothing better. Vy did the Lord Mayor stay away, Melmotte?"

"Because he's an ass and a cur," said Mr. Melmotte with an assumed air of indignation. "Alf and his people had got hold of him. There was ever so much fuss about it at first,—whether he would accept the invitation. I say it was an insult to the City to take it and not to come. I shall be even with him some of these days."

"Things will go on just the same as usual, Melmotte?"

"Go on. Of course they'll go. What's to hinder them?"
"There's ever so much been said," whispered Cohenlupe.

"Said;—yes," ejaculated Melmotte very loudly. "You're not such a fool, I hope, as to believe every word you hear. You'll have enough to believe, if you do."

"There's no knowing vat anybody does know, and vat anybody does not know," said Cohenlupe.

"Look you here, Cohenlupe,"—and now Melmotte also sank his voice to a whisper,—"keep your tongue in your mouth; go about just as usual, and say nothing. It's all right. There has been some heavy pulls upon us."

"Oh dear, there has indeed!"

"But any paper with my name to it will come right."

"That's nothing;—nothing at all," said Cohenlupe.

"And there is nothing;—nothing at all! I've bought some property and have paid for it; and I have bought some, and have not yet paid for it. There's no fraud in that."

"No, no,—nothing in that."

"You hold your tongue, and go about your business. I'm going to the bank now." Cohenlupe had been very low in spirits, and was still low in spirits; but he was somewhat better after the visit of the great man to the City.

Mr. Melmotte was as good as his word and walked straight to the bank. He kept two accounts at different banks, one for his business, and one for his private affairs. The one he now entered was that which kept what we may call his domestic account. He walked straight through, after his old fashion, to the room behind the bank in which sat the manager and the manager's one clerk, and stood upon the rug before the fire-place just as though nothing had happened,—or as nearly as though nothing had happened as was within the compass of his powers. He could not quite do it. In keeping up an appearance intended to be natural he was obliged to be somewhat milder than his wont. The manager did not behave nearly as well as he did, and the clerks manifestly betrayed their emotion. Melmotte saw that it was so;—but he had expected it, and had come there on purpose to "put it down."

"We hardly expected to see you in the City to-day, Mr. Melmotte."

"And I didn't expect to see myself here. But it always happens that when one expects that there's most to be done, there's nothing to be done at all. They're all at work down at Westminster, balloting; but as I can't go on voting for myself, I'm of no use. I've been at Covent Garden this morning, making a stump speech, and if all that they say there is true, I haven't much to be afraid of."

"And the dinner went off pretty well?" asked the manager.

"Very well, indeed. They say the Emperor liked it better than anything that has been done for him yet." This was a brilliant flash of imagination. "For a friend to dine with me every day, you know, I should prefer somebody who had a little more to say for himself. But then, perhaps, you know, if you or I were in China we shouldn't have much to say for ourselves;—ch?" The manager
acceded to this proposition. "We had one awful disappointment. His lordship from over the way didn't come."

"The Lord Mayor, you mean."

"The Lord Mayor didn't come! He was frightened at the last moment;—took it into his head that his authority in the City was somehow compromised. But the wonder was that the dinner went on without him." Then Melmotte referred to the purport of his call there that day. He would have to draw large cheques for his private wants. "You don't give a dinner to an Emperor of China for nothing, you know." He had been in the habit of over-drawing on his private account,—making arrangements with the manager. But now, in the manager's presence, he drew a regular cheque on his business account for a large sum, and then, as a sort of afterthought, paid in the £250 which he had received from Mr. Broune on account of the money which Sir Felix had taken from Marie.

"There don't seem much the matter with him," said the manager, when Melmotte had left the room.

"He brazens it out, don't he," said the senior clerk. But the feeling of the room after full discussion inclined to the opinion that the rumours had been a political manœuvre. Nevertheless, Mr. Melmotte would not now have been allowed to overdraw at the present moment.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ELECTION.

MR. ALF'S central committee-room was in Great George Street, and there the battle was kept alive all the day. It had been decided, as the reader has been told, that no direct advantage should be taken of that loud blast of accusation which had been heard throughout the town on the previous afternoon. There had not been sufficient time for inquiry as to the truth of that blast. If there were just ground for the things that had been said, Mr. Melmotte would no doubt soon be in gaol, or would be,—wanted. Many had thought that he would escape as soon as the dinner was over, and had been disappointed when they heard that he had been seen walking down towards his own committee room on the following morning. Others had been told that at the last moment his name would be withdrawn,—and a question arose as to whether he had the legal power to withdraw his name after a certain hour on the day before the ballot. An effort was made to convince a portion of the electors that he had withdrawn, or would have withdrawn, or should have withdrawn. When Melmotte was at Covent Garden, a large throng of men went to Whitehall Place with the view of ascertaining the truth. He certainly had made no attempt at withdrawal. They who propagated this report certainly

6 2
damaged Mr. Alf's cause. A second reaction set in, and there grew a feeling that Mr. Melmotte was being ill-used. Those evil things had been said of him,—many at least so declared,—not from any true motive, but simply to secure Mr. Alf's return. Tidings of the speech in Covent Garden were spread about at the various polling places, and did good service to the so-called conservative cause. Mr. Alf's friends, hearing all this, instigated him also to make a speech. Something should be said, if only that it might be reported in the newspapers, to show that they had behaved with generosity, instead of having injured their enemy by false attacks. Whatever Mr. Alf might say, he might at any rate be sure of a favourable reporter.

About two o'clock in the day, Mr. Alf did make a speech,—and a very good speech it was, if correctly reported in the "Evening Pulpit." Mr. Alf was a clever man, ready at all points, with all his powers immediately at command, and, no doubt, he did make a good speech. But in this speech, in which we may presume that it would be his intention to convince the electors that they ought to return him to Parliament, because, of the two candidates, he was the fittest to represent their views, he did not say a word as to his own political ideas, not, indeed, a word that could be accepted as manifesting his own fitness for the place which it was his ambition to fill. He contented himself with endeavouring to show that the other man was not fit;—and that he and his friends, though solicitous of proving to the electors that Mr. Melmotte was about the most unfit man in the world, had been guilty of nothing shabby in their manner of doing so. "Mr. Melmotte," he said, "comes before you as a Conservative, and has told us, by the mouths of his friends,—for he has not favoured us with many words of his own,—that he is supported by the whole Conservative party. That party is not my party, but I respect it. Where, however, are these Conservative supporters? We have heard, till we are sick of it, of the banquet which Mr. Melmotte gave yesterday. I am told that very few of those whom he calls his conservative friends could be induced to attend that banquet. It is equally notorious that the leading merchants of the City refused to grace the table of this great commercial prince. I say that the leaders of the conservative party have at last found their candidate out, have repudiated him;—and are seeking now to free themselves from the individual shame of having supported the candidature of such a man by remaining in their own houses instead of clustering round the polling booths. Go to Mr. Melmotte's committee-room and inquire if those leading Conservatives be there. Look about, and see whether they are walking with him in the streets, or standing with him in public places, or taking the air with him in the parks. I respect the leaders of the conservative party; but they have made a mistake in this matter, and they know it." Then he ended by alluding to the rumours of yesterday. "I scorn," said he, "to say anything against the personal character of a political opponent, which I am not in a position to prove. I make no allusion, and have made no allusion, to reports which were circulated yesterday about him, and which I believe were originated in the City. They may be false or they may be true. As I know nothing of the matter, I prefer to regard them as
false, and I recommend you to do the same. But I declared to you long before these reports were in men's mouths, that Mr. Melmotte was not entitled by his character to represent you in parliament, and I repeat that assertion. A great British merchant, indeed! How long, do you think, should a man be known in this city before that title be accorded to him? Who knew aught of this man two years since,—unless, indeed, it be some one who had burnt his wings in trafficking with him in some continental city? Ask the character of this great British merchant in Hamburg and Vienna; ask it in Paris;—ask those whose business here has connected them with the assurance companies of foreign countries, and you will be told whether this is a fit man to represent Westminster in the British parliament!” There was much more yet; but such was the tone of the speech which Mr. Alf made with the object of inducing the electors to vote for himself.

At two or three o'clock in the day, nobody knew how the matter was going. It was supposed that the working-classes were in favour of Melmotte, partly from their love of a man who spends a great deal of money, partly from the belief that he was being ill-used,—partly, no doubt, from that occult sympathy which is felt for crime, when the crime committed is injurious to the upper classes. Masses of men will almost feel that a certain amount of injustice ought to be inflicted on their betters, so as to make things even, and will persuade themselves that a criminal should be declared to be innocent, because the crime committed has had a tendency to oppress the rich and pull down the mighty from their seats. Some few years since, the basest calumnies that were ever published in this country, uttered by one of the basest men that ever disgraced the country, levelled, for the most part, at men of whose characters and services the country was proud, were received with a certain amount of sympathy by men not themselves dishonest, because they who were thus slandered had received so many good things from Fortune, that a few evil things were thought to be due to them. There had not as yet been time for the formation of such a feeling generally, in respect of Mr. Melmotte. But there was a commencement of it. It had been asserted that Melmotte was a public robber. Whom had he robbed? Not the poor. There was not a man in London who caused the payment of a larger sum in weekly wages than Mr. Melmotte.

About three o'clock, the editor of the “Morning Breakfast-Table” called on Lady Carbury. “What is it all about?” she asked, as soon as her friend was seated. There had been no time for him to explain anything at Madame Melmotte's reception, and Lady Carbury had as yet failed in learning any certain news of what was going on.

“I don't know what to make of it,” said Mr. Broune. “There is a story abroad that Mr. Melmotte has forged some document with reference to a purchase he made,—and hanging on to that story are other stories as to moneys that he has raised. I should say that it was simply an electioneering trick, and a very unfair trick, were it not that all his own side seem to believe it.”

“Do you believe it?”

“Ah,—I could answer almost any question sooner than that.”
"Then he can't be rich at all."
"Even that would not follow. He has such large concerns in hand that he might be very much pressed for funds, and yet be possessed of immense wealth. Everybody says that he pays all his bills."
"Will he be returned?" she asked.
"From what we hear, we think not. I shall know more about it in an hour or two. At present I should not like to have to publish an opinion; but were I forced to bet, I would bet against him. Nobody is doing anything for him. There can be no doubt that his own party are ashamed of him. As things used to be, this would have been fatal to him at the day of election; but now, with the ballot, it won't matter so much. If I were a candidate, at present, I think I would go to bed on the last day, and beg all my committee to do the same as soon as they had put in their voting papers."
"I am glad Felix did not go to Liverpool," said Lady Carbury.
"It would not have made much difference. She would have been brought back all the same. They say Lord Nidderdale still means to marry her."
"I saw him talking to her last night."
"There must be an immense amount of property somewhere. No one doubts that he was rich when he came to England two years ago, and they say everything has prospered that he has put his hand to since. The Mexican Railway shares had fallen this morning, but they were at £15 premium yesterday morning. He must have made an enormous deal out of that." But Mr. Broune's eloquence on this occasion was chiefly displayed in regard to the presumption of Mr. Alf. "I shouldn't think him such a fool if he had announced his resignation of the editorship when he came before the world as a candidate for parliament. But a man must be mad who imagines that he can sit for Westminster and edit a London daily paper at the same time."
"Has it never been done?"
"Never, I think;—that is, by the editor of such a paper as the "Pulpit." How is a man who sits in parliament himself ever to pretend to discuss the doings of parliament with impartiality? But Alf believes that he can do more than anybody else ever did, and he'll come to the ground. Where's Felix now?"
"Do not ask me," said the poor mother.
"Is he doing anything?"
"He lies in bed all day, and is out all night."
"But that wants money." She only shook her head. "You do not give him any?"
"I have none to give."
"I should simply take the key of the house from him,—or bolt the door if he will not give it up."
"And be in bed, and listen while he knocks,—knowing that he must wander in the streets if I refuse to let him in? A mother cannot do that, Mr. Broune. A child has such a hold upon his mother. When her reason has bade her to condemn him, her heart will not let her carry out the sentence." Mr. Broune never now thought
of kissing Lady Carbury; but when she spoke thus, he got up and took her hand, and she, as she pressed his hand, had no fear that she would be kissed. The feeling between them was changed.

Melmotte dined at home that evening with no company but that of his wife and daughter. Latterly one of the Grendalls had almost always joined their party when they did not dine out. Indeed, it was an understood thing, that Miles Grendall should dine there always, unless he explained his absence by some engagement,—so that his presence there had come to be considered as a part of his duty. Not frequently "Alfred" and Miles would both come, as Melmotte's dinners and wines were good, and occasionally the father would take the son's place,—but on this day they were both absent. Madame Melmotte had not as yet said a word to any one indicating her own apprehension of any evil. But not a person had called to-day,—the day after the great party,—and even she, though she was naturally callous in such matters, had begun to think that she was deserted. She had, too, become so used to the presence of the Grendalls, that she now missed their company. She thought that on this day, of all days, when the world, was balloting for her husband at Westminster, they would both have been with him to discuss the work of the day. "Is not Mr. Grendall coming?" she asked, as she took her seat at the table.

"No, he is not," said Melmotte.
"Nor Lord Alfred?"
"Nor Lord Alfred." Melmotte had returned home much comforted by the day's proceedings. No one had dared to say a harsh word to his face. Nothing further had reached his ears. After leaving the bank he had gone back to his office, and had written letters,—just as if nothing had happened; and, as far as he could judge, his clerks had plucked up courage. One of them, about five o'clock, came into him with news from the west, and with second editions of the evening papers. The clerk expressed, his opinion that the election was going well. Mr. Melmotte, judging from the papers, one of which was supposed to be on his side and the other of course against him, thought that his affairs altogether were looking well. The Westminster election had not the foremost place in his thoughts; but he took what was said on that subject as indicating the minds of men upon the other matter. He read Alf's speech, and consoled himself with thinking that Mr. Alf had not dared to make new accusations against him. All that about Hamburg and Vienna and Paris was as old as the hills, and availed nothing. His whole candidature had been carried in the face of that. "I think we shall do pretty well," he said to the clerk. His very presence in Abchurch Lane of course gave confidence. And thus, when he came home, something of the old arrogance had come back upon him, and he could swagger at any rate before his wife and servants. "Nor Lord Alfred," he said with scorn. Then he added more. "The father and son are two d—-eurs." This of course frightened Madame Melmotte, and she joined this desertion of the Grendalls to her own solitude all the day.

"Is there anything wrong, Melmotte?" she said afterwards, creeping up to him in the back parlour, and speaking in French.
"What do you call wrong?"
"I don't know;—but I seem to be afraid of something."
"I should have thought you were used to that kind of feeling by this time."
"Then there is something."
"Don't be a fool. There is always something. There is always much. You don't suppose that this kind of thing can be carried on as smoothly as the life of an old maid with £400 a year paid quarterly in advance."
"Shall we have to—move again?" she asked.
"How am I to tell? You haven't much to do when we move, and may get plenty to eat and drink wherever you go. Does that girl mean to marry Lord Nidderdale?" Madame Melmotte shook her head. "What a poor creature you must be when you can't talk her out of a fancy for such a reprobate as young Carbury. If she throws me over, I'll throw her over. I'll flog her within an inch of her life if she disobeys me. You tell her that I say so."
"Then he may flog me," said Marie, when so much of the conversation was repeated to her that evening. "Papa does not know me if he thinks that I'm to be made to marry a man by flogging." No such attempt was at any rate made that night, for the father and husband did not again see his wife or daughter.

Early the next day a report was current that Mr. Alf had been returned. The numbers had not as yet been counted, or the books made up;—but that was the opinion expressed. All the morning newspapers, including the "Breakfast-Table," repeated this report,—but each gave it as the general opinion on the matter. The truth would not be known till seven or eight o'clock in the evening. The conservative papers did not scruple to say that the presumed election of Mr. Alf was owing to a sudden declension in the confidence originally felt in Mr. Melmotte. The "Breakfast-Table," which had supported Mr. Melmotte's candidature, gave no reason, and expressed more doubt on the result than the other papers. "We know not how such an opinion forms itself," the writer said;—"but it seems to have been formed. As nothing as yet is really known, or can be known, we express no opinion of our own upon the matter."

Mr. Melmotte again went into the City, and found that things seemed to have returned very much into their usual grooves. The Mexican Railway shares were low, and Mr. Cohenlupe was depressed in spirits and unhappy;—but nothing dreadful had occurred or seemed to be threatened. If nothing dreadful did occur, the railway shares would probably recover, or nearly recover, their position. In the course of the day, Melmotte received a letter from Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, which, of itself, certainly contained no comfort;—but there was comfort to be drawn even from that letter, by reason of what it did not contain. The letter was unfriendly in its tone and peremptory. It had come evidently from a hostile party. It had none of the feeling which had hitherto prevailed in the intercourse between these two well-known conservative gentlemen, Mr. Adolphus Longestaffe and Mr. Augustus Melmotte. But there was no allusion in it to forgery; no question of criminal proceedings; no hint at aught beyond the not unnatural desire of Mr. Longestaffe and Mr. Longe-
Staffe's son to be paid for the property at Pickering which Mr. Melmotte had purchased.

"We have to remind you," said the letter, in continuation of paragraphs which had contained simply demands for the money, "that the title-deeds were delivered to you on receipt by us of authority to that effect from the Messrs. Longstaffe, father and son, on the understanding that the purchase-money was to be at once paid to us by you. We are informed that the property has been since mortgaged by you. We do not state this as a fact. But the information, whether true or untrue, forces upon us the necessity ofdemanding that you should at once pay to us the purchase-money,—£80,000,—or else return to us the title-deeds of the estate."

This letter, which was signed Slow and Bideawhile, declared positively that the title-deeds had been given up on authority received by them from both the Longstaffes,—father and son. Now the accusation brought against Melmotte, as far as he could as yet understand it, was that he had forged the signature to the young Mr. Longstaffe's letter. Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile were therefore on his side. As to the simple debt, he cared little comparatively about that. Many fine men were walking about London who owed large sums of money which they could not pay.

As he was sitting at his solitary dinner this evening,—for both his wife and daughter had declined to join him, saying that they had dined early,—news was brought to him that he had been elected for Westminster. He had beaten Mr. Alf by something not much less than a thousand votes.

It was very much to be member for Westminster. So much had at any rate been achieved by him who had begun the world without a shilling and without a friend,—almost without education! Much as he loved money, and much as he loved the spending of money, and much as he had made and much as he had spent, no triumph of his life had been so great to him as this. Brought into the world in a gutter, without father or mother, with no good thing ever done for him, he was now a member of the British Parliament, and member for one of the first cities in the empire. Ignorant as he was he understood the magnitude of the achievement, and dismayed as he was as to his present position, still at this moment he enjoyed keenly a certain amount of elation. Of course he had committed forgery;—of course he had committed robbery. That, indeed, was nothing, for he had been cheating and forging and stealing all his life. Of course he was in danger of almost immediate detection and punishment. He hardly hoped that the evil day would be very much longer protracted, and yet he enjoyed his triumph. Whatever they might do, quick as they might be, they could hardly prevent his taking his seat in the House of Commons. Then if they sent him to penal servitude for life, they would have to say that they had so treated the member for Westminster!

He drank a bottle of claret, and then got some brandy-and-water. In such troubles as were coming upon him now, he would hardly get sufficient support from wine. He knew that he had better not drink;—that is, he had better not drink, supposing the world to be free to
him for his own work and his own enjoyment. But if the world were no longer free to him, if he were really coming to penal servitude and annihilation,—then why should he not drink while the time lasted? An hour of triumphant joy might be an eternity to a man, if the man's imagination were strong enough to make him so regard his hour. He therefore took his brandy-and-water freely, and as he took it he was able to throw his fears behind him, and to assure himself that, after all, he might even yet escape from his bondages. No;—he would drink no more. This he said to himself as he filled another beaker. He would work instead. He would put his shoulder to the wheel, and would yet conquer his enemies. It would not be so easy to convict a member for Westminster,—especially if money were spent freely. Was he not the man who, at his own cost, had entertained the Emperor of China? Would not that be remembered in his favour? Would not men be unwilling to punish the man who had received at his own table all the Princes of the land, and the Prime Minister, and all the Ministers? To convict him would be a national disgrace. He fully realised all this as he lifted the glass to his mouth, and puffed out the smoke in large volumes through his lips. But money must be spent! Yes;—money must be had! Cohenlupé certainly had money. Though he squeezed it out of the coward's veins he would have it. At any rate, he would not despair. There was a fight to be fought yet, and he would fight it to the end. Then he took a deep drink, and slowly, with careful and almost solemn steps, he made his way up to his bed.

CHAPTER LXV.

MISS LONGESTAFFE WRITES HOME.

LADY MONOGRAM, when she left Madame Melmote's house after that entertainment of Imperial Majesty which had been to her of so very little avail, was not in a good humour. Sir Damask, who had himself affected to laugh at the whole thing, but who had been in truth as anxious as his wife to see the Emperor in private society, put her ladyship and Miss Longestaffe into the carriage without a word, and rushed off to his club in disgust. The affair from beginning to end, including the final failure, had been his wife's doing. He had been made to work like a slave, and had been taken against his will to Melmote's house, and had seen no Emperor and shaken hands with no Prince! "They may fight it out between them now like the Kilkenny cats." That was his idea as he closed the carriage-door on the two ladies,—thinking that if a larger remnant were left of one cat than of the other that larger remnant would belong to his wife.

"What a horrid affair!" said Lady Monogram. "Did anybody ever see anything so vulgar?" This was at any rate unreasonable,
for whatever vulgarity there may have been, Lady Monogram had seen none of it.

"I don't know why you were so late," said Georgiana.

"Late! Why it's not yet twelve. I don't suppose it was eleven when we got into the Square. Anywhere else it would have been early."

"You knew they did not mean to stay long. It was particularly said so. I really think it was your own fault."

"My own fault. Yes;—I don't doubt that. I know it was my own fault, my dear, to have had anything to do with it. And now I have got to pay for it."

"What do you mean by paying for it, Julia?"

"You know what I mean very well. Is your friend going to do us the honour of coming to us to-morrow night?" She could not have declared in plainer language how very high she thought the price to be which she had consented to give for those ineffective tickets.

"If you mean Mr. Brehgert, he is coming. You desired me to ask him, and I did so."

"Desired you! The truth is, Georgiana, when people get into different sets, they'd better stay where they are. It's no good trying to mix things."

Lady Monogram was so angry that she could not control her tongue.

Miss Longestaffe was ready to tear herself with indignation. That she should have been brought to hear insolence such as this from Julia Triplex,—she, the daughter of Adolphus Longestaffe of Caversham and Lady Pomona; she, who was considered to have lived in quite the first London circle! But she could hardly get hold of fit words for a reply. She was almost in tears, and was yet anxious to fight rather than weep. But she was in her friend's carriage, and was being taken to her friend's house, was to be entertained by her friend all the next day, and was to see her lover among her friend's guests. "I wonder what has made you so ill-natured," she said at last. "You didn't use to be like that."

"It's no good abusing me," said Lady Monogram. "Here we are, and I suppose we had better get out,—unless you want the carriage to take you anywhere else." Then Lady Monogram got out and marched into the house, and taking a candle went direct to her own room. Miss Longestaffe followed slowly to her own chamber, and having half undressed herself, dismissed her maid and prepared to write to her mother.

The letter to her mother must be written. Mr. Brehgert had twice proposed that he should, in the usual way, go to Mr. Longestaffe, who had been backwards and forwards in London, and was there at the present moment. Of course it was proper that Mr. Brehgert should see her father,—but, as she had told him, she preferred that he should postpone his visit for a day or two. She was now agonized by many doubts. Those few words about "various sets" and the "mixing of things" had stabbed her to the very heart,—as had been intended. Mr. Brehgert was rich. That was a certainty. But she already repented of what she had done. If it were necessary that she should
really go down into another and a much lower world, a world composed altogether of Brehgerts, Melmottes, and Cohenlupe, would it avail her much to be the mistress of a gorgeous house? She had known, and understood, and had revelled in the exclusiveness of county position. Caversham had been dull, and there had always been there a dearth of young men of the proper sort; but it had been a place to talk of, and to feel satisfied with as a home to be acknowledged before the world. Her mother was dull, and her father pompous and often cross; but they were in the right set,—miles removed from the Brehgerts and Melmottes,—until her father himself had suggested to her that she should go to the house in Grosvenor Square. She would write one letter to-night; but there was a question in her mind whether the letter should be written to her mother telling her the horrid truth,—or to Mr. Brehgert begging that the match should be broken off. I think she would have decided on the latter had it not been that so many people had already heard of the match. The Monograms knew it, and had of course talked far and wide. The Melmottes knew it, and she was aware that Lord Nidderdale had heard it. It was already so far known that it was sure to be public before the end of the season. Each morning lately she had feared that a letter from home would call upon her to explain the meaning of some frightful rumours reaching Caversham, or that her father would come to her and with horror on his face demand to know whether it was indeed true that she had given her sanction to so abominable a report.

And there were other troubles. She had just spoken to Madame Melmotte this evening, having met her late hostess as she entered the drawing-room, and had felt from the manner of her reception that she was not wanted back again. She had told her father that she was going to transfer herself to the Monograms for a time, not mentioning the proposed duration of her visit, and Mr. Longstaffe, in his ambiguous way, had expressed himself glad that she was leaving the Melmottes. She did not think that she could go back to Grosvenor Square, although Mr. Brehgert desired it. Since the expression of Mr. Brehgert's wishes she had perceived that ill-will had grown up between her father and Mr. Melmotte. She must return to Caversham. They could not refuse to take her in, though she had betrothed herself to a Jew!

If she decided that the story should be told to her mother it would be easier to tell it by letter than by spoken words, face to face. But then if she wrote the letter there would be no retreat,—and how should she face her family after such a declaration? She had always given herself credit for courage, and now she wondered at her own cowardice. Even Lady Monogram, her old friend Julia Triplex, had trampled upon her. Was it not the business of her life, in these days, to do the best she could for herself, and would she allow paltry considerations as to the feelings of others to stand in her way and become bugbears to affright her? Who sent her to Melmotte's house? Was it not her own father? Then she sat herself square at the table, and wrote to her mother,—as follows,—dating her letter for the following morning:—
“My Dear Mamma,

“I am afraid you will be very much astonished by this letter, and perhaps disappointed. I have engaged myself to Mr. Brehgert, a member of a very wealthy firm in the City, called Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheiner. I may as well tell you the worst at once. Mr. Brehgert is a Jew.” This last word she wrote very rapidly, but largely, determined that there should be no lack of courage apparent in the letter. “He is a very wealthy man, and his business is about banking and what he calls finance. I understand they are among the most leading people in the City. He lives at present at a very handsome house at Fulham. I don’t know that I ever saw a place more beautifully fitted up. I have said nothing to papa, nor has he; but he says he will be willing to satisfy papa perfectly as to settlements. He has offered to have a house in London if I like,—and also to keep the villa at Fulham or else to have a place somewhere in the country. Or I may have the villa at Fulham and a house in the country. No man can be more generous than he is. He has been married before, and has a family, and now I think I have told you all.

“I suppose you and papa will be very much dissatisfied. I hope papa won’t refuse his consent. It can do no good. I am not going to remain as I am now all my life, and there is no use waiting any longer. It was papa who made me go to the Melmottes, who are not nearly so well placed as Mr. Brehgert. Everybody knows that Madame Melmotte is a Jewess, and nobody knows what Mr. Melmotte is. It is no good going on with the old thing when everything seems to be upset and at sixes and sevens. If papa has got to be so poor that he is obliged to let the house in town, one must of course expect to be different from what we were.

“I hope you won’t mind having me back the day after to-morrow,—that is to-morrow, Wednesday. There is a party here to-night, and Mr. Brehgert is coming. But I can’t stay longer with Julia, who doesn’t make herself nice, and I do not at all want to go back to the Melmottes. I fancy that there is something wrong between papa and Mr. Melmotte.

“Send the carriage to meet me by the 2.30 train from London,—and pray, mamma, don’t scold when you see me, or have hysterics, or anything of that sort. Of course it isn’t all nice, but things have got so that they never will be nice again. I shall tell Mr. Brehgert to go to papa on Wednesday.

“Your affectionate daughter,

“G.”

When the morning came she desired the servant to take the letter away and have it posted, so that the temptation to stop it might no longer be in her way.

About one o’clock on that day Mr. Longestaffe called at Lady Monogram’s. The two ladies had breakfasted up-stairs, and had only just met in the drawing-room when he came in. Georgiana trembled at first, but soon perceived that her father had as yet heard nothing of Mr. Brehgert. She immediately told him that she pro-
posed returning home on the following day. "I am sick of the Melmottes," she said.

"And so am I," said Mr. Longestaffe, with a serious countenance.

"We should have been delighted to have had Georgiana to stay with us a little longer," said Lady Monogram; "but we have but the one spare bedroom, and another friend is coming." Georgiana, who knew both these statements to be false, declared that she wouldn't think of such a thing. "We have a few friends coming to-night, Mr. Longestaffe, and I hope you'll come in and see Georgiana." Mr. Longestaffe hummed and hawed and muttered something, as old gentlemen always do when they are asked to go out to parties after dinner. Mr. Brehgert will be here," continued Lady Monogram with a peculiar smile.

"Mr. who?" the name was not at first familiar to Mr. Longestaffe.

"Mr. Brehgert." Lady Monogram looked at her friend. "I hope I'm not revealing any secret."

"I don't understand anything about it," said Mr. Longestaffe. "Georgiana, who is Mr. Brehgert?" He had understood very much. He had been quite certain from Lady Monogram's manner and words, and also from his daughter's face, that Mr. Brehgert was mentioned as an accepted lover. Lady Monogram had meant that it should be so, and any father would have understood her tone. As she said afterwards to Sir Damask, she was not going to have that Jew there at her house as Georgiana Longestaffe's accepted lover without Mr. Longestaffe's knowledge.

"My dear Georgiana," she said, "I supposed your father knew all about it."

"I know nothing. Georgiana, I hate a mystery. I insist upon knowing. Who is Mr. Brehgert, Lady Monogram?"

"Mr. Brehgert is a—very wealthy gentleman. That is all I know of him. Perhaps, Georgiana, you will be glad to be alone with your father." And Lady Monogram left the room.

Was there ever cruelty equal to this! But now the poor girl was forced to speak,—though she could not speak as boldly as she had written. "Papa, I wrote to mamma this morning, and Mr. Brehgert was to come to you to-morrow."

"Do you mean that you are engaged to marry him?"

"Yes, papa."

"What Mr. Brehgert is he?"

"He is a merchant."

"You can't mean the fat Jew whom I've met with Mr. Melmotte; —a man old enough to be your father!" The poor girl's condition now was certainly lamentable. The fat Jew, old enough to be her father, was the very man she did mean. She thought that she would try to brazen it out with her father. But at the present moment she had been so cowed by the manner in which the subject had been introduced that she did not know how to begin to be bold. She only looked at him as though imploring him to spare her. "Is the man a Jew?" demanded Mr. Longestaffe, with as much thunder as he knew how to throw into his voice.

"Yes, papa," she said.
"He is that fat man?"
"Yes, papa."
"And nearly as old as I am?"
"No, papa,—not nearly as old as you are. He is fifty."
"And a Jew?" He again asked the horrid question, and again threw in the thunder. On this occasion she condescended to make no further reply. "If you do, you shall do it as an alien from my house. I certainly will never see him. Tell him not to come to me, for I certainly will not speak to him. You are degraded and disgraced; but you shall not degrade and disgrace me and your mother and sister."

"It was you, papa, who told me to go to the Melmottes."
"That is not true. I wanted you to stay at Caversham. A Jew! an old fat Jew! Heavens and earth! that it should be possible that you should think of it! You;—my daughter,—that used to take such pride in yourself! Have you written to your mother?"
"I have."
"It will kill her. It will simply kill her. And you are going home to-morrow?"
"I wrote to say so."
"And there you must remain. I suppose I had better see the man and explain to him that it is utterly impossible. Heavens on earth;—a Jew! An old fat Jew! My daughter! I will take you down home myself to-morrow. What have I done that I should be punished by my children in this way?" The poor man had had rather a stormy interview with Dolly that morning. "You had better leave this house to-day, and come to my hotel in Jermyn Street."

"Oh, papa, I can't do that."
"Why can't you do it? You can do it, and you shall do it. I will not have you see him again. I will see him. If you do not promise me to come, I will send for Lady Monogram and tell her that I will not permit you to meet Mr. Brehgert at her house. I do wonder at her. A Jew! An old fat Jew!" Mr. Longestaffe, putting up both his hands, walked about the room in despair. She did consent, knowing that her father and Lady Monogram between them would be too strong for her. She had her things packed up, and in the course of the afternoon allowed herself to be carried away. She said one word to Lady Monogram before she went. "Tell him that I was called away suddenly."

"I will, my dear. I thought your papa would not like it." The poor girl had not spirit sufficient to upbraid her friend; nor did it suit her now to acerbate an enemy. For the moment, at least, she must yield to everybody and everything. She spent a lonely evening with her father in a dull sitting-room in the hotel, hardly speaking or spoken to, and the following day she was taken down to Caversham. She believed that her father had seen Mr. Brehgert on the morning of that day;—but he said no word to her, nor did she ask him any question.

That was on the day after Lady Monogram's party. Early in the evening, just as the gentlemen were coming up from the dining-room,
Mr. Brehgert, apparelled with much elegance, made his appearance. Lady Monogram received him with a sweet smile. "Miss Longestaffe," she said, "has left me and gone to her father."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes," said Lady Monogram, bowing her head, and then attending to other persons as they arrived. Nor did she condescend to speak another word to Mr. Brehgert, or to introduce him even to her husband. He stood for about ten minutes inside the drawing-room, leaning against the wall, and then he departed. No one had spoken a word to him. But he was an even-tempered, good-humoured man. When Miss Longestaffe was his wife things would no doubt be different;—or else she would probably change her acquaintance.
CHAPTER LXVI.

"YOU shall be troubled no more with Winifrid Hurtle." So Mrs. Hurtle had said, speaking in perfect good faith to the man whom she had come to England with the view of marrying. And then when he had said good-bye to her, putting out his hand to take hers for the last time, she declined that. "Nay," she had said; "this parting will bear no farewell."

Having left her after that fashion Paul Montague could not return home with very high spirits. Had she insisted on his taking that letter with the threat of the horsewhip as the letter which she intended to write to him,—that letter which she had shown him, owning it to be the ebullition of her uncontrolled passion, and had then destroyed,—he might at any rate have consoled himself with thinking that, however badly he might have behaved, her conduct had been worse than his. He could have made himself warm and comfortable with anger, and could have assured himself that under any circumstances he must be right to escape from the clutches of a wild cat such as that. But at the last moment she had shown that she was no wild cat to him. She had melted, and become soft and womanly. In her softness she had been exquisitely beautiful; and as he returned home he was sad and dissatisfied with himself. He had destroyed her life for her,—or, at least, had created a miserable episode in it which could hardly be obliterated. She had said that she was all alone, and had given up everything to follow him,—and he had believed her. Was he to do nothing for her now? She had allowed him to go, and after her fashion had pardoned him the wrong he had done her. But was that to be sufficient for him,—so that he might now feel inwardly satisfied at leaving her, and make no further inquiry as to her fate? Could he pass on and let her be as the wine that has been drunk,—as the hour that has been enjoyed,—as the day that is past?

But what could he do? He had made good his own escape. He had resolved that, let her be woman or wild cat, he would not marry her, and in that he knew he had been right. Her antecedents, as now declared by herself, unfitted her for such a marriage. Were he to return to her he would be again thrusting his hand into the fire. But his own selfish coldness was hateful to him when he thought that there was nothing to be done but to leave her desolate and lonely in Mrs. Pipkin's lodgings.

During the next three or four days, while the preparations for the dinner and the election were going on, he was busy in respect to the American railway. He again went down to Liverpool, and at Mr. Ramsbottom's advice prepared a letter to the board of directors, in which he resigned his seat, and gave his reasons for resigning it; adding that he should reserve to himself the liberty of publishing his
letter, should at any time the circumstances of the railway company seem to him to make such a course desirable. He also wrote a letter to Mr. Fisker, begging that gentleman to come to England, and expressing his own wish to retire altogether from the firm of Fisker, Montague, and Montague upon receiving the balance of money due to him,—a payment which must, he said, be a matter of small moment to his two partners, if, as he had been informed, they had enriched themselves by the success of the railway company in San Francisco. When he wrote these letters at Liverpool the great rumour about Melmotté had not yet sprung up. He returned to London on the day of the festival, and first heard of the report at the Bear-garden. There he found that the old set had for the moment broken itself up. Sir Felix Carbury had not been heard of for the last four or five days,—and then the whole story of Miss Melmotté's journey, of which he had read something in the newspapers, was told to him. "We think that Carbury has drowned himself," said Lord Grasslough, "and I haven't heard of anybody being heartbroken about it." Lord Nidderdale had hardly been seen at the club. "He's taken up the running with the girl," said Lord Grasslough. "What he'll do now, nobody knows. If I was at it, I'd have the money down in hard cash before I went into the church. He was there at the party yesterday, talking to the girl all the night;—a sort of thing he never did before. Nidderdale is the best fellow going, but he was always an ass." Nor had Miles Grendall been seen in the club for three days. "We've got into a way of play the poor fellow doesn't like," said Lord Grasslough; "and then Melmotté won't let him out of his sight. He has taken to dine there every day." This was said during the election,—on the very day on which Miles deserted his patron; and on that evening he did dine at the club. Paul Montague also dined there, and would fain have heard something from Grendall as to Melmotté's condition; but the secretary, if not faithful in all things, was faithful at any rate in his silence. Though Grasslough talked openly enough about Melmotté in the smoking-room Miles Grendall said never a word.

On the next day, early in the afternoon, almost without a fixed purpose, Montague strolled up to Welbeck Street, and found Hetta alone. "Mamma has gone to her publisher's," she said. "She is writing so much now that she is always going there. Who has been elected, Mr. Montague?" Paul knew nothing about the election, and cared very little. At that time, however, the election had not been decided. "I suppose it will make no difference to you whether your chairman be in Parliament or not?" Paul said that Melmotté was no longer a chairman of his. "Are you out of it altogether, Mr. Montague?" Yes;—as far as it lay within his power to be out of it, he was out of it. He did not like Mr. Melmotté, nor believe in him. Then with considerable warmth he repudiated all connection with the Melmotté party, expressing deep regret that circumstances had driven him for a time into that alliance. "Then you think that Mr. Melmotté is—?"

"Just a scoundrel;—that's all."

"You heard about Felix?"
"Of course I heard that he was to marry the girl, and that he tried to run off with her. I don't know much about it. They say that Lord Nidderdale is to marry her now."

"I think not, Mr. Montague."

"I hope not, for his sake. At any rate, your brother is well out of it."

"Do you know that she loves Felix? There is no pretence about that. I do think she is good. The other night at the party she spoke to me."

"You went to the party, then?"

"Yes;—I could not refuse to go when mamma chose to take me. And when I was there she spoke to me about Felix. I don't think she will marry Lord Nidderdale. Poor girl;—I do pity her. Think what a downfall it will be if anything happens."

But Paul Montague had certainly not come there with the intention of discussing Melmotte's affairs, nor could he afford to lose the opportunity which chance had given him. He was off with one love, and now he thought that he might be on with the other. "Hetta," he said, "I am thinking more of myself than of her,—or even of Felix."

"I suppose we all do think more of ourselves than of other people," said Hetta, who knew from his voice at once what it was in his mind to do.

"Yes;—but I am not thinking of myself only. I am thinking of myself, and you. In all my thoughts of myself I am thinking of you too."

"I do not know why you should do that."

"Hetta, you must know that I love you."

"Do you?" she said. Of course she knew it. And of course she thought that he was equally sure of her love. Had he chosen to read signs that ought to have been plain enough to him, could he have doubted her love after the few words that had been spoken on that night when Lady Carbury had come in with Roger and interrupted them? She could not remember exactly what had been said; but she did remember that he had spoken of leaving England for ever in a certain event, and that she had not rebuked him;—and she remembered also how she had confessed her own love to her mother. He, of course, had known nothing of that confession; but he must have known that he had her heart! So at least she thought. She had been working some morsel of lace, as ladies do when ladies wish to be not quite doing nothing. She had endeavoured to ply her needle, very idly, while he was speaking to her, but now she allowed her hands to fall into her lap. She would have continued to work at the lace had she been able, but there are times when the eyes will not see clearly, and when the hands will hardly act mechanically.

"Yes,—I do. Hetta, say a word to me. Can it be so? Look at me for one moment so as to let me know." Her eyes had turned downwards after her work. "If Roger is dearer to you than I am, I will go at once."

"Roger is very dear to me."

"Do you love him as I would have you love me?"

She paused for a time, knowing that his eyes were fixed upon her,
and then she answered the question in a low voice, but very clearly. "No," she said;—"not like that."

"Can you love me like that?" He put out both his arms as though to take her to his breast should the answer be such as he longed to hear. She raised her hand towards him, as if to keep him back, and left it with him when he seized it. "Is it mine?" he said.

"If you want it."

Then he was at her feet in a moment, kissing her hands and her dress, looking up into her face with his eyes full of tears, ecstatic with joy as though he had really never ventured to hope for such success. "Want it!" he said. "Hetta, I have never wanted anything but that with real desire. Oh, Hetta, my own. Since I first saw you this has been my only dream of happiness. And now it is my own."

She was very quiet, but full of joy. Now that she had told him the truth she did not coy her love. Having once spoken the word she did not care how often she repeated it. She did not think that she could ever have loved anybody but him,—even if he had not been fond of her. As to Roger,—dear Roger, dearest Roger,—no; it was not the same thing. "He is as good as gold," she said,—"ever so much better than you are, Paul," stroking his hair with her hand and looking into his eyes.

"Better than anybody I have ever known," said Montague with all his energy.

"I think he is;—but, ah, that is not everything. I suppose we ought to love the best people best; but I don't, Paul."

"I do," said he.

"No,—you don't. You must love me best, but I won't be called good. I do not know why it has been so. Do you know, Paul, I have sometimes thought I would do as he would have me, out of sheer gratitude. I did not know how to refuse such a trifling thing to one who ought to have everything that he wants."

"Where should I have been?"

"Oh, you! Somebody else would have made you happy. But do you know, Paul, I think he will never love any one else. I ought not to say so, because it seems to be making so much of myself. But I feel it. He is not so young a man, and yet I think that he never was in love before. He almost told me so once, and what he says is true. There is an unchanging way with him that is awful to think of. He said that he never could be happy unless I would do as he would have me,—and he made me almost believe even that. He speaks as though every word he says must come true in the end. Oh, Paul, I love you so dearly,—but I almost think that I ought to have obeyed him." Paul Montague of course had very much to say in answer to this. Among the holy things which did exist to gild this every-day unholy world, love was the holiest. It should be soiled by no falsehood, should know nothing of compromises, should admit no excuses, should make itself subject to no external circumstances. If Fortune had been so kind to him as to give him her heart, poor as his claim might be, she could have no right to refuse him the assurance of her love. And though his rival were an angel, he could have no shadow of a claim
upon her,—seeing that he had failed to win her heart. It was very well said,—at least so Hetta thought,—and she made no attempt at argument against him. But what was to be done in reference to poor Roger? She had spoken the word now, and, whether for good or bad, she had given herself to Paul Montague. Even though Roger should have to walk disconsolate to the grave, it could not now be helped. But would it not be right that it should be told? "Do you know I almost feel that he is like a father to me," said Hetta, leaning on her lover's shoulder.

Paul thought it over for a few minutes, and then said that he would himself write to Roger. "Hetta, do you know, I doubt whether he will ever speak to me again."

"I cannot believe that."

"There is a sternness about him which it is very hard to understand. He has taught himself to think that as I met you in his house, and as he then wished you to be his wife, I should not have ventured to love you. How could I have known?"

"That would be unreasonable."

"He is unreasonable—about that. It is not reason with him. He always goes by his feelings. Had you been engaged to him——"

"Oh, then, you never could have spoken to me like this."

"But he will never look at it in that way;—and he will tell me that I have been untrue to him and ungrateful."

"If you think, Paul——"

"Nay; listen to me. If it be so I must bear it. It will be a great sorrow, but it will be as nothing to that other sorrow, had that come upon me. I will write to him, and his answer will be all scorn and wrath. Then you must write to him afterwards. I think he will forgive you, but he will never forgive me." Then they parted, she having promised that she would tell her mother directly Lady Carbury came home, and Paul undertaking to write to Roger that evening.

And he did, with infinite difficulty, and much trembling of the spirit. Here is his letter;

"My dear Roger,—

"I think it right to tell you at once what has occurred to-day. I have proposed to Miss Carbury and she has accepted me. You have long known what my feelings were, and I have also known yours. I have known, too, that Miss Carbury has more than once declined to take your offer. Under these circumstances I cannot think that I have been untrue to friendship in what I have done, or that I have proved myself ungrateful for the affectionate kindness which you have always shown me. I am authorised by Hetta to say that, had I never spoken to her, it must have been the same to you." This was hardly a fair representation of what had been said, but the writer, looking back upon his interview with the lady, thought that it had been implied.

"I should not say so much by way of excusing myself, but that you once said, that should such a thing occur there must be a division between us ever after. If I thought that you would adhere to that threat, I should be very unhappy and Hetta would be miserable."
Surely, if a man loves he is bound to tell his love, and to take the chance. You would hardly have thought it manly in me if I had abstained. Dear friend, take a day or two before you answer this, and do not banish us from your heart if you can help it.

"Your affectionate friend,

"PAUL MONTAGUE."

Roger Carbury did not take a single day,—or a single hour to answer the letter. He received it at breakfast, and after rushing out on the terrace and walking there for a few minutes, he hurried to his desk and wrote his reply. As he did so, his whole face was red with wrath, and his eyes were glowing with indignation.

"There is an old French saying that he who makes excuses is his own accuser. You would not have written as you have done, had you not felt yourself to be false and ungrateful. You knew where my heart was, and there you went and undermined my treasure, and stole it away. You have destroyed my life, and I will never forgive you.

"You tell me not to banish you both from my heart. How dare you join yourself with her in speaking of my feelings! She will never be banished from my heart. She will be there morning, noon, and night, and as is and will be my love to her, so shall be my enmity to you.

"ROGER CARbury."

It was hardly a letter for a Christian to write; and, yet, in those parts Roger Carbury had the reputation of being a good Christian.

Henrietta told her mother that morning, immediately on her return.

"Mamma, Mr. Paul Montague has been here."

"He always comes here when I am away," said Lady Carbury.

"That has been an accident. He could not have known that you were going to Messrs. Leadham and Loiter's."

"I'm not so sure of that, Hetta."

"Then, mamma, you must have told him yourself, and I don't think you knew till just before you were going. But, mamma, what does it matter? He has been here, and I have told him——"

"You have not accepted him?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Without even asking me?"

"Mamma, you knew. I will not marry him without asking you. How was I not to tell him when he asked me whether I—loved him?"

"Marry him! How is it possible you should marry him? Whatever he had got was in that affair of Melmotte's, and that has gone to the dogs. He is a ruined man, and for aught I know may be compromised in all Melmotte's wickedness."

"Oh, mamma, do not say that!"

"But I do say it. It is hard upon me. I did think that you would try to comfort me after all this trouble with Felix. But you are as bad as he is;—or worse, for you have not been thrown into tempta-
tion like that poor boy! And you will break your cousin’s heart. Poor Roger! I feel for him;—he that has been so true to us! But you think nothing of that.”

“‘I think very much of my cousin Roger.’”

“And how do you show it;—or your love for me? There would have been a home for us all. Now we must starve, I suppose. Hetta, you have been worse to me even than Felix.” Then Lady Carbury, in her passion, burst out of the room, and took herself to her own chamber.

CHAPTER LXVII.

SIR FELIX PROTECTS HIS SISTER.

Up to this period of his life Sir Felix Carbury had probably felt but little of the punishment due to his very numerous shortcomings. He had spent all his fortune; he had lost his commission in the army; he had incurred the contempt of everybody that had known him; he had forfeited the friendship of those who were his natural friends, and had attached to him none others in their place; he had pretty nearly ruined his mother and sister; but, to use his own language, he had always contrived “to carry on the game.” He had eaten and drunk, had gambled, hunted, and diverted himself generally after the fashion considered to be appropriate to young men about town. He had kept up till now. But now there seemed to him to have come an end to all things. When he was lying in bed in his mother’s house he counted up all his wealth. He had a few pounds in ready money, he still had a little roll of Mr. Miles Grendall’s notes of hand, amounting perhaps to a couple of hundred pounds,—and Mr. Melmotte owed him £600. But where was he to turn, and what was he to do with himself? Gradually he learned the whole story of the journey to Liverpool,—how Marie had gone there and had been sent back by the police, how Marie’s money had been repaid to Mr. Melmotte by Mr. Broune, and how his failure to make the journey to Liverpool had become known. He was ashamed to go to his club. He could not go to Melmotte’s house. He was ashamed even to show himself in the streets by day. He was becoming almost afraid even of his mother. Now that the brilliant marriage had broken down, and seemed to be altogether beyond hope, now that he had to depend on her household for all his comforts, he was no longer able to treat her with absolute scorn,—nor was she willing to yield as she had yielded.

One thing only was clear to him. He must realise his possessions. With this view he wrote both to Miles Grendall and to Melmotte. To the former he said he was going out of town,—probably for some time, and he must really ask for a cheque for the amount due. He went on to remark that he could hardly suppose that a nephew of the
Duke of Albury was unable to pay debts of honour to the amount of £200;—but that if such was the case he would have no alternative but to apply to the Duke himself. The reader need hardly be told that to this letter Mr. Grendall vouchsafed no answer whatever. In his letter to Mr. Melmotte he confined himself to one matter of business in hand. He made no allusion whatever to Marie, or to the great man's anger, or to his seat at the board. He simply reminded Mr. Melmotte that there was a sum of £600 still due to him, and requested that a cheque might be sent to him for that amount. Melmotte's answer to this was not altogether unsatisfactory, though it was not exactly what Sir Felix had wished. A clerk from Mr. Melmotte's office called at the house in Welbeck Street, and handed to Felix railway scrip in the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway to the amount of the sum claimed,—insisting on a full receipt for the money before he parted with the scrip. The clerk went on to explain, on behalf of his employer, that the money had been left in Mr. Melmotte's hands for the purpose of buying these shares. Sir Felix, who was glad to get anything, signed the receipt and took the scrip. This took place on the day after the balloting at Westminster, when the result was not yet known,—and when the shares in the railway were very low indeed. Sir Felix had asked as to the value of the shares at the time. The clerk professed himself unable to quote the price,—but there were the shares if Sir Felix liked to take them. Of course he took them;—and hurrying off into the City found that they might perhaps be worth about half the money due to him. The broker to whom he showed them could not quite answer for anything. Yes;—the scrip had been very high; but there was a panic. They might recover,—or, more probably, they might go to nothing. Sir Felix cursed the Great Financier aloud, and left the scrip for sale. That was the first time that he had been out of the house before dark since his little accident.

But he was chiefly tormented in these days by the want of amusement. He had so spent his life hitherto that he did not know how to get through a day in which no excitement was provided for him. He never read. Thinking was altogether beyond him. And he had never done a day's work in his life. He could lie in bed. He could eat and drink. He could smoke and sit idle. He could play cards; and could amuse himself with women,—the lower the culture of the women, the better the amusement. Beyond these things the world had nothing for him. Therefore he again took himself to the pursuit of Ruby Ruggles.

Poor Ruby had endured a very painful incarceration at her aunt's house. She had been wrathful and had stormed, swearing that she would be free to come and go as she pleased. Free to go, Mrs. Pipkin told her that she was;—but not free to return if she went out otherwise than as she, Mrs. Pipkin, chose. "Am I to be a slave?" Ruby asked, and almost upset the perambulator which she had just dragged in at the hall door. Then Mrs. Hurtle had taken upon herself to talk to her, and poor Ruby had been quelled by the superior strength of the American lady. But she was very unhappy, finding that it did not suit her to be nursemaid to her aunt. After all John
Crumb couldn't have cared for her a bit, or he would have come to look after her. While she was in this condition Sir Felix came to Mrs. Pipkin's house, and asked for her at the door. It happened that Mrs. Pipkin herself had opened the door,—and, in her fright and dismay at the presence of so pernicious a young man in her own passage, had denied that Ruby was in the house. But Ruby had heard her lover's voice, and had rushed up and thrown herself into his arms. Then there had been a great scene. Ruby had sworn that she didn't care for her aunt, didn't care for her grandfather, or for Mrs. Hurtle, or for John Crumb,—or for any person or anything. She cared only for her lover. Then Mrs. Hurtle had asked the young man his intentions. Did he mean to marry Ruby? Sir Felix had said that he "supposed he might as well some day." "There," said Ruby, "there!"—shouting in triumph as though an offer had been made to her with the completest ceremony of which such an event admits. Mrs. Pipkin had been very weak. Instead of calling in the assistance of her strong-minded lodger, she had allowed the lovers to remain together for half-an-hour in the dining-room. I do not know that Sir Felix in any way repeated his promise during that time, but Ruby was probably too blessed with the word that had been spoken to ask for such renewal. "There must be an end of this," said Mrs. Pipkin, coming in when the half-hour was over. Then Sir Felix had gone, promising to come again on the following evening. "You must not come here, Sir Felix," said Mrs. Pipkin, "unless you puts it in writing." To this, of course, Sir Felix made no answer. As he went home he congratulated himself on the success of his adventure. Perhaps the best thing he could do when he had realised the money for the shares would be to take Ruby for a tour abroad. The money would last for three or four months,—and three or four months ahead was almost an eternity.

That afternoon before dinner he found his sister alone in the drawing-room. Lady Carbury had gone to her own room after hearing the distressing story of Paul Montague's love, and had not seen Hetta since. Hetta was melancholy, thinking of her mother's hard words,—thinking perhaps of Paul's poverty as declared by her mother, and of the ages which might have to wear themselves out before she could become his wife; but still tinting all her thoughts with a rosy hue because of the love which had been declared to her. She could not but be happy if he really loved her. And she,—as she had told him that she loved him,—would be true to him through everything! In her present mood she could not speak of herself to her brother, but she took the opportunity of making good the promise which Marie Melmotte had extracted from her. She gave him some short account of the party, and told him that she had talked with Marie. "I promised to give you a message," she said.

"It's all of no use now," said Felix.

"But I must tell you what she said. I think, you know, that she really loves you."

"But what's the good of it? A man can't marry a girl when all the policemen in the country are dodging her."
"She wants you to let her know what,—what you intend to do. If you mean to give her up, I think you should tell her."

"How can I tell her? I don't suppose they would let her receive a letter."

"Shall I write to her;—or shall I see her?"

"Just as you like. I don't care."

"Felix, you are very heartless."

"I don't suppose I'm much worse than other men;—or for the matter of that, worse than a great many women either. You all of you here put me up to marry her."

"I never put you up to it."

"Mother did. And now because it did not go off all serene, I am to hear nothing but reproaches. Of course I never cared so very much about her."

"Oh, Felix, that is so shocking!"

"Awfully shocking I dare say. You think I am as black as the very mischief, and that sugar wouldn't melt in other men's mouths. Other men are just as bad as I am,—and a good deal worse too. You believe that there is nobody on earth like Paul Montague."

Hetta blushed, but said nothing. She was not yet in a condition to boast of her lover before her brother, but she did, in very truth, believe that but few young men were as true-hearted as Paul Montague. "I suppose you'd be surprised to hear that Master Paul is engaged to marry an American widow living at Islington."

"Mr. Montague—engaged—to marry—an American widow! I don't believe it."

"You'd better believe it if it's any concern of yours, for it's true. And it's true too that he travelled about with her for ever so long in the United States, and that he had her down with him at the hotel at Lowestoffe about a fortnight ago. There's no mistake about it."

"I don't believe it," repeated Hetta, feeling that to say even as much as that was some relief to her. It could not be true. It was impossible that the man should have come to her with such a lie in his mouth as that. Though the words astounded her, though she felt faint, almost as though she would fall in a swoon, yet in her heart of hearts she did not believe it. Surely it was some horrid joke,—or perhaps some trick to divide her from the man she loved. "Felix, how dare you say things so wicked as that to me?"

"What is there wicked in it? If you have been fool enough to become fond of the man, it is only right you should be told. He is engaged to marry Mrs. Hurtle, and she is lodging with one Mrs. Pipkin in Islington. I know the house, and could take you there to-morrow, and show you the woman. There," said he, "that's where she is;" —and he wrote Mrs. Hurtle's name down on a scrap of paper.

"It is not true," said Hetta, rising from her seat, and standing upright. "I am engaged to Mr. Montague, and I am sure he would not treat me in that way."

"Then, by heaven, he shall answer it to me," said Felix, jumping up. "If he has done that, it is time that I should interfere. As true as I stand here, he is engaged to marry a woman called Mrs. Hurtle whom he constantly visits at that place in Islington."
"I do not believe it," said Hetta, repeating the only defence for her lover which was applicable at the moment.

"By George, this is beyond a joke. Will you believe it if Roger Carbury says it's true? I know you'd believe anything fast enough against me, if he told you."

"Roger Carbury will not say so?"

"Have you the courage to ask him? I say he will say so. He knows all about it,—and has seen the woman."

"How can you know? Has Roger told you?"

"I do know, and that's enough. I will make this square with Master Paul. By heaven, yes! He shall answer to me. But my mother must manage you. She will not' seruple to ask Roger, and she will believe what Roger tells her."

"I do not believe a word of it," said Hetta, leaving the room. But when she was alone she was very wretched. There must be some foundation for such a tale. Why should Felix have referred to Roger Carbury? And she did feel that there was something in her brother's manner which forbade her to reject the whole story as being altogether baseless. So she sat upon her bed and cried, and thought of all the tales she had heard of faithless lovers. And yet why should the man have come to her, not only with soft words of love, but asking her hand in marriage, if it really were true that he was in daily communion with another woman whom he had promised to make his wife.

Nothing on the subject was said at dinner. Hetta with difficulty to herself sat at the table, and did not speak. Lady Carbury and her son were nearly as silent. Soon after dinner Felix slunk away to some music hall or theatre in quest of some other Ruby Ruggles. Then Lady Carbury, who had now been told as much as her son knew, again attacked her daughter. Very much of the story Felix had learned from Ruby. Ruby had of course learned that Paul was engaged to Mrs. Hurtle. Mrs. Hurtle had at once declared the fact to Mrs. Pipkin, and Mrs. Pipkin had been proud of the position of her lodger. Ruby had herself seen Paul Montague at the house, and had known that he had taken Mrs. Hurtle to Lowestoffe. And it had also become known to the two women, the aunt and her niece, that Mrs. Hurtle had seen Roger Carbury on the sands at Lowestoffe. Thus the whole story with most of its details,—not quite with all,—had come round to Lady Carbury's ears. "What he has told you, my dear, is true. Much as I disapprove of Mr. Montague, you do not suppose that I would deceive you."

"How can he know, mamma?"

"He does know. I cannot explain to you how. He has been at the same house."

"Has he seen her?"

"I do not know that he has, but Roger Carbury has seen her. If I write to him you will believe what he says?"

"Don't do that, mamma. Don't write to him."

"But I shall. Why should I not write if he can tell me? If this other man is a villain am I not bound to protect you? Of course Felix is not steady. If it came only from him you might not credit it. And he has not seen her. If your cousin Roger tells you that it
is true,—tells me that he knows the man is engaged to marry this woman, then I suppose you will be contented."

"Contented, mamma!"

"Satisfied that what we tell you is true."

"I shall never be contented again. If that is true, I will never believe anything. It can't be true. I suppose there is something, but it can't be that."

The story was not altogether displeasing to Lady Carbury, though it pained her to see the agony which her daughter suffered. But she had no wish that Paul Montague should be her son-in-law, and she still thought that if Roger would persevere he might succeed. On that very night before she went to bed she wrote to Roger, and told him the whole story. "If," she said, "you know that there is such a person as Mrs. Hurtle, and if you know also that Mr. Montague has promised to make her his wife, of course you will tell me." Then she declared her own wishes, thinking that by doing so she could induce Roger Carbury to give such real assistance in this matter that Paul Montague would certainly be driven away. Who could feel so much interest in doing this as Roger, or who be so closely acquainted with all the circumstances of Montague's life? "You know," she said, "what my wishes are about Hetta, and how utterly opposed I am to Mr. Montague's interference. If it is true, as Felix says, that he is at the present moment entangled with another woman, he is guilty of gross insolence; and if you know all the circumstances you can surely protect us,—and also yourself."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MISS MELMOTTE DECLARES HER PURPOSE.

POOR Hetta passed a very bad night. The story she had heard seemed to be almost too awful to be true,—even about any one else. The man had come to her, and had asked her to be his wife,—and yet at that very moment was living in habits of daily intercourse with another woman whom he had promised to marry! And then, too, his courtship with her had been so graceful, so soft, so modest, and yet so long continued! Though he had been slow in speech, she had known since their first meeting how he regarded her! The whole state of his mind had, she had thought, been visible to her,—had been intelligible, gentle, and affectionate. He had been aware of her friends' feeling, and had therefore hesitated. He had kept himself from her because he had owed so much to friendship. And yet his love had not been the less true, and had not been less dear to poor Hetta. She had waited, sure that it would come,—having absolute confidence in his honour and love. And now she was told that this man had been playing a game so base, and at the same time so foolish, that she could find not only no excuse but no possible cause for it.
It was not like any story she had heard before of man's faithlessness. Though she was wretched and sore at heart she swore to herself that she would not believe it. She knew that her mother would write to Roger Carbury,—but she knew also that nothing more would be said about the letter till the answer should come. Nor could she turn anywhere else for comfort. She did not dare to appeal to Paul himself. As regarded him, for the present she could only rely on the assurance, which she continued to give herself, that she would not believe a word of the story that had been told her.

But there was other wretchedness besides her own. She had undertaken to give Marie Melmotte's message to her brother. She had done so, and she must now let Marie have her brother's reply. That might be told in a very few words—"Everything is over!" But it had to be told.

"I want to call upon Miss Melmotte, if you'll let me," she said to her mother at breakfast.

"Why should you want to see Miss Melmotte? I thought you hated the Melmottes?"

"I don't hate them, mamma. I certainly don't hate her. I have a message to take to her,—from Felix."

"A message,—from Felix."

"It is an answer from him. She wanted to know if all that was over. Of course it is over. Whether he said so or not, it would be so. They could never be married now;—could they, mamma?"

The marriage, in Lady Carbury's mind, was no longer even desirable. She, too, was beginning to disbelieve in the Melmotte wealth, and did quite disbelieve that that wealth would come to her son, even should he succeed in marrying the daughter. It was impossible that Melmotte should forgive such offence as had now been committed. "It is out of the question," she said. "That, like everything else with us, has been a wretched failure. You can go, if you please. Felix is under no obligation to them, and has taken nothing from them. I should much doubt whether the girl will get anybody to take her now. You can't go alone, you know," Lady Carbury added. But Hetta said that she did not at all object to going alone as far as that. It was only just over Oxford Street.

So she went out and made her way into Grosvenor Square. She had heard, but at the time remembered nothing, of the temporary migration of the Melmottes to Bruton Street. Seeing, as she approached the house, that there was a confusion there of carts and workmen, she hesitated. But she went on, and rang the bell at the door, which was wide open. Within the hall the pilasters and trophies, the wreaths and the banners, which three or four days since had been built up with so much trouble, were now being pulled down and hauled away. And amidst the ruins Melmotte himself was standing. He was now a member of Parliament, and was to take his place that night in the House. Nothing, at any rate, should prevent that. It might be but for a short time;—but it should be written in the history of his life that he had sat in the British House of Commons as member for Westminster. At the present moment he was careful to show himself everywhere. It was now noon, and he had already been into
the City. At this moment he was talking to the contractor for the work,—having just propitiated that man by a payment which would hardly have been made so soon but for the necessity which these wretched stories had entailed upon him of keeping up his credit for the possession of money. Hetta timidly asked one of the workmen whether Miss Melmottie was there. "Do you want my daughter?" said Melmottie coming forward, and just touching his hat. "She is not living here at present."

"Oh,—I remember now," said Hetta.

"May I be allowed to tell her who was asking after her?" At the present moment Melmottie was not unreasonably suspicious about his daughter.

"I am Miss Carbury," said Hetta in a very low voice.

"Oh, indeed;—Miss Carbury!—the sister of Sir Felix Carbury?" There was something in the tone of the man's voice which grated painfully on Hetta's ears,—but she answered the question. "Oh;—Sir Felix's sister! May I be permitted to ask whether—you have any business with my daughter?" The story was a hard one to tell, with all the workmen around her, in the midst of the lumber, with the coarse face of the suspicious man looking down upon her; but she did tell it very simply. She had come with a message from her brother. There had been something between her brother and Miss Melmottie, and her brother had felt that it would be best that he should acknowledge that it must be all over. "I wonder whether that is true," said Melmottie, looking at her out of his great coarse eyes, with his eyebrows knit, with his hat on his head and his hands in his pockets. Hetta, not knowing how, at the moment, to repudiate the suspicion expressed, was silent. "Because, you know, there has been a deal of falsehood and double dealing. Sir Felix has behaved infamously; yes,—by G,—infamously. A day or two before my daughter started, he gave me a written assurance that the whole thing was over, and now he sends you here. How am I to know what you are really after?"

"I have come because I thought I could do some good," she said, trembling with anger and fear. "I was speaking to your daughter at your party."

"Oh, you were there;—were you? It may be as you say, but how is one to tell? When one has been deceived like that, one is apt to be suspicious, Miss Carbury." Here was one who had spent his life in lying to the world, and who was in his very heart shocked at the atrocity of a man who had lied to him! "You are not plotting another journey to Liverpool;—are you?" To this Hetta could make no answer. The insult was too much, but alone, unsupported, she did not know how to give him back scorn for scorn. At last he proposed to take her across to Bruton Street himself, and at his bidding she walked by his side. "May I hear what you say to her?" he asked.

"If you suspect me, Mr. Melmottie, I had better not see her at all. It is only that there may no longer be any doubt."

"You can say it all before me."

"No;—I could not do that. But I have told you, and you can say it for me. If you please, I think I will go home now."
But Melmotte knew that his daughter would not believe him on such a subject. This girl she probably would believe. And though Melmotte himself found it difficult to trust anybody, he thought that there was more possible good than evil to be expected from the proposed interview. "Oh, you shall see her," he said. "I don't suppose she's such a fool as to try that kind of thing again." Then the door in Bruton Street was opened, and Hetta, repeating her mission, found herself almost pushed into the hall. She was bidden to follow Melmotte up-stairs, and was left alone in the drawing-room, as she thought, for a long time. Then the door was slowly opened and Marie crept into the room. "Miss Carbury," she said, "this is so good of you,—so good of you! I do so love you for coming to me! You said you would love me. You will; will you not?" and Marie, sitting down by the stranger, took her hand and encircled her waist.

"Mr. Melmotte has told you why I have come."

"Yes;—that is, I don't know. I never believe what papa says to me." To poor Hetta such an announcement as this was horrible.

"We are at daggers drawn. He thinks I ought to do just what he tells me, as though my very soul were not my own. I won't agree to that;—would you?" Hetta had not come there to preach disobedience, but could not fail to remember at the moment that she was not disposed to obey her mother in an affair of the same kind. "What does he say, dear?"

Hetta's message was to be conveyed in three words, and when those were told, there was nothing more to be said. "It must all be over, Miss Melmotte."

"Is that his message, Miss Carbury?" Hetta nodded her head.

"Is that all?"

"What more can I say? The other night you told me to bid him send you word. And I thought he ought to do so. I gave him your message, and I have brought back the answer. My brother, you know, has no income of his own;—nothing at all."

"But I have," said Marie with eagerness.

"But your father—"

"It does not depend upon papa. If papa treats me badly, I can give it to my husband. I know I can. If I can venture, cannot he?"

"I think it is impossible."

"Impossible! Nothing should be impossible. All the people that one hears of that are really true to their loves never find anything impossible. Does he love me, Miss Carbury? It all depends on that. That's what I want to know." She paused, but Hetta could not answer the question. "You must know about your brother. Don't you know whether he does love me? If you know I think you ought to tell me." Hetta was still silent. "Have you nothing to say?"

"Miss Melmotte—" began poor Hetta very slowly.

"Call me Marie. You said you would love me;—did you not? I don't even know what your name is."

"My name is—Hetta."

"Hetta;—that's short for something. But it's very pretty. I have no brother, no sister. And I'll tell you, though you must not tell anybody again;—I have no real mother. Madame Melmotte is not
my mamma, though papa chooses that it should be thought so." All
this she whispered, with rapid words, almost into Hetta's ear. "And
papa is so cruel to me! He beats me sometimes." The new friend,
round whom Marie still had her arm, shuddered as she heard this.
"But I never will yield a bit for that. When he boxes and thumps
me I always turn and gnash my teeth at him. Can you wonder that
I want to have a friend? Can you be surprised that I should be
always thinking of my lover? But,—if he doesn't love me, what am
I to do then?"
"I don't know what I am to say," ejaculated Hetta amidst her
sobs. Whether the girl was good or bad, to be sought or to be
avoided, there was so much tragedy in her position that Hetta's heart
was melted with sympathy.
"I wonder whether you love anybody, and whether he loves you," said Marie. Hetta certainly had not come there to talk of her own
affairs, and made no reply to this. "I suppose you won't tell me
about yourself."
"I wish I could tell you something for your own comfort."
"He will not try again, you think?"
"I am sure he will not."
"I wonder what he fears. I should fear nothing,—nothing. Why
should not we walk out of the house, and be married any way.
Nobody has a right to stop me. Papa could only turn me out of his
house. I will venture if he will."
It seemed to Hetta that even listening to such a proposition
amounted to falsehood,—to that guilt of which Mr. Melmotte had
dared to suppose that she could be capable. "I cannot listen to it.
Indeed I cannot listen to it. My brother is sure that he cannot—
cannot—"
"Cannot love me, Hetta! Say it out, if it is true."
"It is true," said Hetta. There came over the face of the other
girl a stern hard look, as though she had resolved at the moment to
throw away from her all soft womanly things. And she relaxed her
hold on Hetta's waist. "Oh, my dear, I do not mean to be cruel,
but you ask me for the truth."
"Yes; I did."
"Men are not, I think, like girls."
"I suppose not," said Marie slowly. "What liars they are, what
brutes;—what wretches! Why should he tell me lies like that? Why
should he break my heart? That other man never said that he
loved me. Did he never love me,—once?"
Hetta could hardly say that her brother was incapable of such love
as Marie expected, but she knew that it was so. "It is better that
you should think of him no more."
"Are you like that? If you had loved a man and told him of it,
and agreed to be his wife and done as I have, could you bear to be
told to think of him no more,—just as though you had got rid of a
servant or a horse? I won't love him. No;—I'll hate him. But I
must think of him. I'll marry that other man to spite him, and then,
when he finds that we are rich, he'll be broken-hearted."
"You should try to forgive him, Marie."
"Never. Do not tell him that I forgive him. I command you not to tell him that. Tell him,—tell him, that I hate him, and that if I ever meet him, I will look at him so that he shall never forget it. I could,—oh!—you do not know what I could do. Tell me;—did he tell you to say that he did not love me?"

"I wish I had not come," said Hetta.

"I am glad you have come. It was very kind. I don't hate you. Of course I ought to know. But did he say that I was to be told that he did not love me?"

"No;—he did not say that."

"Then how do you know? What did he say?"

"That it was all over."

"Because he is afraid of papa. Are you sure he does not love me?"

"I am sure."

"Then he is a brute. Tell him that I say that he is a false-hearted liar, and that I trample him under my foot." Marie as she said this thrust her foot upon the ground as though that false one were in truth beneath it,—and spoke aloud, as though regardless who might hear her. "I despise him;—despise him. They are all bad, but he is the worst of all. Papa beats me, but I can bear that. Mamma reviles me and I can bear that. He might have beaten me and reviled me, and I could have borne it. But to think that he was a liar all the time;—that I can't bear." Then she burst into tears. Hetta kissed her, tried to comfort her, and left her sobbing on the sofa.

Later in the day, two or three hours after Miss Carbury had gone, Marie Melmotte, who had not shown herself at luncheon, walked into Madame Melmotte's room, and thus declared her purpose. "You can tell papa that I will marry Lord Nidderdale whenever he pleases." She spoke in French and very rapidly.

On hearing this Madame Melmotte expressed herself to be delighted. "Your papa," said she, "will be very glad to hear that you have thought better of this at last. Lord Nidderdale is, I am sure, a very good young man."

"Yes," continued Marie, boiling over with passion as she spoke. "I'll marry Lord Nidderdale, or that horrid Mr. Grendall who is worse than all the others, or his old fool of a father,—or the sweeper at the crossing,—or the black man that waits at table, or anybody else that he chooses to pick up. I don't care who it is the least in the world. But I'll lead him such a life afterwards! I'll make Lord Nidderdale repent the hour he saw me! You may tell papa." And then, having thus entrusted her message to Madame Melmotte, Marie left the room.
CHAPTER LXIX.

MELMOTTE IN PARLIAMENT.

MELMOTTE did not return home in time to hear the good news that day,—good news as he would regard it, even though, when told to him it should be accompanied by all the extraneous additions with which Marie had communicated her purpose to Madame Melmotte. It was nothing to him what the girl thought of the marriage,—if the marriage could now be brought about. He, too, had cause for vexation, if not for anger. If Marie had consented a fortnight since he might have so hurried affairs that Lord Nidderdale might by this time have been secured. Now there might be,—must be, doubt, through the folly of his girl and the villany of Sir Felix Carbury. Were he once the father-in-law of the eldest son of a marquis, he thought he might almost be safe. Even though something might be all but proved against him,—which might come to certain proof in less august circumstances,—matters would hardly be pressed against a Member for Westminster whose daughter was married to the heir of the Marquis of Auld Reekie! So many persons would then be concerned! Of course his vexation with Marie had been great. Of course his wrath against Sir Felix was unbounded. The seat for Westminster was his. He was to be seen to occupy it before all the world on this very day. But he had not as yet heard that his daughter had yielded in reference to Lord Nidderdale.

There was considerable uneasiness felt in some circles as to the manner in which Melmotte should take his seat. When he was put forward as the conservative candidate for the borough a good deal of fuss had been made with him by certain leading politicians. It had been the manifest intention of the party that his return, if he were returned, should be hailed as a great conservative triumph, and be made much of through the length and the breadth of the land. He was returned,—but the trumpets had not as yet been sounded loudly. On a sudden, within the space of forty-eight hours, the party had become ashamed of their man. And, now, who was to introduce him to the House? But with this feeling of shame on one side, there was already springing up an idea among another class that Melmotte might become as it were a conservative tribune of the people,—that he might be the realization of that hitherto hazy mixture of radicalism and old-fogyism, of which we have lately heard from a political master, whose eloquence has been employed in teaching us that progress can only be expected from those whose declared purpose is to stand still. The new farthing newspaper, "The Mob," was already putting Melmotte forward as a political hero, preaching with reference to his commercial transactions the grand doctrine that magnitude in affairs is a valid defence for certain irregularities. A Napoleon, though he may exterminate tribes in carrying out his projects, cannot be judged
MELMOTTE IN PARLIAMENT.
by the same law as a young lieutenant who may be punished for cruelty to a few negroes. "The Mob" thought that a good deal should be overlooked in a Melmotte, and that the philanthropy of his great designs should be allowed to cover a multitude of sins. I do not know that the theory was ever so plainly put forward as it was done by the ingenious and courageous writer in "The Mob;" but in practice it has commanded the assent of many intelligent minds.

Mr. Melmotte, therefore, though he was not where he had been before that wretched Squercum had set afloat the rumours as to the purchase of Pickering, was able to hold his head much higher than on the unfortunate night of the great banquet. He had replied to the letter from Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, by a note written in the ordinary way in the office, and only signed by himself. In this he merely said that he would lose no time in settling matters as to the purchase of Pickering. Slow and Bideawhile were of course anxious that things should be settled. They wanted no prosecution for forgery. To make themselves clear in the matter, and their client,—and if possible to take some wind out of the sails of the odious Squercum;—this would suit them best. They were prone to hope that for his own sake Melmotte would raise the money. If it were raised there would be no reason why that note purporting to have been signed by Dolly Longestaffe should ever leave their office. They still protested their belief that it did bear Dolly's signature. They had various excuses for themselves. It would have been useless for them to summon Dolly to their office, as they knew from long experience that Dolly would not come. The very letter written by themselves,—as a suggestion,—and given to Dolly's father, had come back to them with Dolly's ordinary signature, sent to them,—as they believed,—with other papers by Dolly's father. What justification could be clearer? But still the money had not been paid. That was the fault of Longestaffe senior. But if the money could be paid, that would set everything right. Squercum evidently thought that the money would not be paid, and was ceaseless in his intercourse with Bideawhile's people. He charged Slow and Bideawhile with having delivered up the title deeds on the authority of a mere note, and that a note with a forged signature. He demanded that the note should be impounded. On the receipt by Mr. Bideawhile of Melmotte's rather curt reply Mr. Squercum was informed that Mr. Melmotte had promised to pay the money at once, but that a day or two must be allowed. Mr. Squercum replied that on his client's behalf he should open the matter before the Lord Mayor.

But in this way two or three days had passed without any renewal of the accusation before the public, and Melmotte had in a certain degree recovered his position. The Beauclerks and the Luptons disliked and feared him as much as ever, but they did not quite dare to be so loud and confident in condemnation as they had been. It was pretty well known that Mr. Longestaffe had not received his money,—and that was a condition of things tending greatly to shake the credit of a man living after Melmotte's fashion. But there was no crime in that. No forgery was implied by the publication of any statement to that effect. The Longestaffes, father and son, might
probably have been very foolish. Whoever expected anything but folly from either? And Slow and Bideawhile might have been very remiss in their duty. It was astonishing, some people said, what things attorneys would do in these days! But they who had expected to see Melmotte behind the bars of a prison before this, and had regulated their conduct accordingly, now imagined that they had been deceived.

Had the Westminster triumph been altogether a triumph it would have become the pleasant duty of some popular Conservative to express to Melmotte the pleasure he would have in introducing his new political ally to the House. In such case Melmotte himself would have been walked up the chamber with a pleasurable ovation and the thing would have been done without trouble to him. But now this was not the position of affairs. Though the matter was debated at the Carlton, no such popular Conservative offered his services. "I don't think we ought to throw him over," Mr. Beauleker said. Sir Orlando Drought, quite a leading Conservative, suggested that as Lord Nidderdale was very intimate with Mr. Melmotte he might do it. But Nidderdale was not the man for such a performance. He was a very good fellow and everybody liked him. He belonged to the House because his father had territorial influence in a Scotch county;—but he never did anything there, and his selection for such a duty would be a declaration to the world that nobody else would do it. "It wouldn't hurt you, Lupton," said Mr. Beauleker. "Not at all," said Lupton; "but I also, like Nidderdale, am a young man and of no use,—and a great deal too bashful." Melmotte, who knew but little about it, went down to the House at four o'clock, somewhat cowed by want of companionship, but carrying out his resolution that he would be stopped by no phantom fears,—that he would lose nothing by want of personal pluck. He knew that he was a Member, and concluded that if he presented himself he would be able to make his way in and assume his right. But here again fortune befriended him. The very leader of the party, the very founder of that new doctrine of which it was thought that Melmotte might become an apostle and an expounder,—who, as the reader may remember, had undertaken to be present at the banquet when his colleagues were dismayed and untrue to him, and who kept his promise and sat there almost in solitude,—he happened to be entering the House, as his late host was claiming from the door-keeper the fruition of his privilege. "You had better let me accompany you," said the conservative leader, with something of chivalry in his heart. And so Mr. Melmotte was introduced to the House by the head of his party! When this was seen many men supposed that the rumours had been proved to be altogether false. Was not this a guarantee sufficient to guarantee any man's respectability?

Lord Nidderdale saw his father in the lobby of the House of Lords that afternoon and told him what had occurred. The old man had been in a state of great doubt since the day of the dinner party. He was aware of the ruin that would be incurred by a marriage with Melmotte's daughter, if the things which had been said of Melmotte should be proved to be true. But he knew also that if his son should
"Not a Bottle of Champagne in the House."
now recede, there must be an end of the match altogether;—and he did not believe the rumours. He was fully determined that the money should be paid down before the marriage was celebrated; but if his son were to secede now, of course no money would be forthcoming. He was prepared to recommend his son to go on with the affair still a little longer. "Old Cure tells me he doesn't believe a word of it," said the father. Cure was the family lawyer of the Marquises of Auld Reekie.

"There's some hitch about Dolly Longestaffe's money, sir," said the son.

"What's that to us if he has our money ready? I suppose it isn't always easy even for a man like that to get a couple of hundred thousand together. I know I've never found it easy to get a thousand. If he has borrowed a trifle from Longestaffe to make up the girl's money, I shan't complain. You stand to your guns. There's no harm done till the parson has said the word."

"You couldn't let me have a couple of hundred;—could you, sir?" suggested the son.

"No, I couldn't," replied the father with a very determined aspect.

"I'm awfully hard up."

"So am I." Then the old man toddled into his own chamber, and after sitting there ten minutes went away home.

Lord Nidderdale also got quickly through his legislative duties and went to the Bear Garden. There he found Grasslough and Miles Grendall dining together, and seated himself at the next table. They were full of news. "You've heard it, I suppose," said Miles in an awful whisper.

"Heard what?"

"I believe he doesn't know!" said Lord Grasslough. "By Jove, Nidderdale, you're in a mess like some others."

"What's up now?"

"Only fancy that they shouldn't have known down at the House! Vossner has bolted!"

"Bolted!" exclaimed Nidderdale, dropping the spoon with which he was just going to eat his soup.

"Bolted," repeated Grasslough. Lord Nidderdale looked round the room and became aware of the awful expression of dismay which hung upon the features of all the dining members. "Bolted by George! He has sold all our acceptances to a fellow in Great Marlbro' that's called 'Flatfleece.'"

"I know him," said Nidderdale shaking his head.

"I should think so," said Miles ruefully.

"A bottle of champagne!" said Nidderdale, appealing to the waiter in almost a humble voice, feeling that he wanted sustenance in this new trouble that had befallen him. The waiter, beaten almost to the ground by an awful sense of the condition of the club, whispered to him the terrible announcement that there was not a bottle of champagne in the house. "Good G—-," exclaimed the unfortunate nobleman. Miles Grendall shook his head. Grasslough shook his head.

"It's true," said another young lord from the table on the other
side. Then the waiter, still speaking with suppressed and melancholy voice, suggested that there was some port left. It was now the middle of July.

"Brandy?" suggested Nidderdale. There had been a few bottles of brandy, but they had been already consumed. "Send out and get some brandy," said Nidderdale with rapid impetuosity. But the club was so reduced in circumstances that he was obliged to take silver out of his pocket before he could get even such humble comfort as he now demanded.

Then Lord Grasslough told the whole story as far as it was known. Herr Vossner had not been seen since nine o'clock on the preceding evening. The head waiter had known for some weeks that heavy bills were due. It was supposed that three or four thousand pounds were owing to tradesmen, who now professed that the credit had been given, not to Herr Vossner but to the club. And the numerous acceptances for large sums which the accommodating purveyor held from many of the members had all been sold to Mr. Flatfleece. Mr. Flatfleece had spent a considerable portion of the day at the club, and it was now suggested that he and Herr Vossner were in partnership. At this moment Dolly Longestaffe came in. Dolly had been at the club before and had heard the story,—but had gone at once to another club for his dinner when he found that there was not even a bottle of wine to be had. "Here's a go," said Dolly. "One thing atop of another! There'll be nothing left for anybody soon. Is that brandy you're drinking, Nidderdale? There was none here when I left."

"Had to send round the corner for it, to the public."

"We shall be sending round the corner for a good many things now. Does anybody know anything of that fellow Melmotte?"

"He's down in the House, as big as life," said Nidderdale. "He's all right I think."

"I wish he'd pay me my money then. That fellow Flatfleece was here, and he showed me notes of mine for about £1,500! I write such a beastly hand that I never know whether I've written it or not. But, by George, a fellow can't eat and drink £1,500 in less than six months!"

"There's no knowing what you can do, Dolly," said Lord Grasslough.

"He's paid some of your card money, perhaps," said Nidderdale.

"I don't think he ever did. Carbury had a lot of my I O U's while that was going on, but I got the money for that from old Melmotte. How is a fellow to know? If any fellow writes D. Longestaffe, am I obliged to pay it? Everybody is writing my name! How is any fellow to stand that kind of thing? Do you think Melmotte's all right?" Nidderdale said that he did think so.

"I wish he wouldn't go and write my name then. That's a sort of thing that a man should be left to do for himself. I suppose Vossner is a swindler; but, by Jove, I know a worse than Vossner." With that he turned on his heels and went into the smoking room. And, after he was gone, there was silence at the table, for it was known that Lord Nidderdale was to marry Melmotte's daughter.

In the meantime a scene of a different kind was going on in the
House of Commons. Melmotte had been seated on one of the back conservative benches, and there he remained for a considerable time unnoticed and forgotten. The little emotion that had attended his entrance had passed away, and Melmotte was now no more than any one else. At first he had taken his hat off, but, as soon as he observed that the majority of members were covered, he put it on again. Then he sat motionless for an hour, looking round him and wondering. He had never hitherto been even in the gallery of the House. The place was very much smaller than he had thought, and much less tremendous. The Speaker did not strike him with the awe which he had expected, and it seemed to him that they who spoke were talking much like other people in other places. For the first hour he hardly caught the meaning of a sentence that was said, nor did he try to do so. One man got up very quickly after another, some of them barely rising on their legs to say the few words that they uttered. It seemed to him to be a very common-place affair,—not half so awful as those festive occasions on which he had occasionally been called upon to propose a toast or to return thanks. Then suddenly the manner of the thing was changed, and one gentleman made a long speech. Melmotte by this time, weary of observing, had begun to listen, and words which were familiar to him reached his ears. The gentleman was proposing some little addition to a commercial treaty and was expounding in very strong language the ruinous injustice to which England was exposed by being tempted to use gloves made in a country in which no income tax was levied. Melmotte listened to his eloquence caring nothing about gloves, and very little about England's ruin. But in the course of the debate which followed, a question arose about the value of money, of exchange, and of the conversion of shillings into francs and dollars. About this Melmotte really did know something and he pricked up his ears. It seemed to him that a gentleman whom he knew very well in the city,—and who had maliciously stayed away from his dinner,—one Mr. Brown, who sat just before him on the same side of the House, and who was plodding wearily and slowly along with some pet fiscal theory of his own, understood nothing at all of what he was saying. Here was an opportunity for himself! Here was at his hand the means of revenging himself for the injury done him, and of showing to the world at the same time that he was not afraid of his city enemies! It required some courage certainly,—this attempt that suggested itself to him of getting upon his legs a couple of hours after his first introduction to parliamentary life. But he was full of the lesson which he was now ever teaching himself. Nothing should cow him. Whatever was to be done by brazen-faced audacity he would do. It seemed to be very easy, and he saw no reason why he should not put that old fool right. He knew nothing of the forms of the House;—was more ignorant of them than an ordinary schoolboy;—but on that very account felt less trepidation than might another parliamentary novice. Mr. Brown was tedious and prolix; and Melmotte, though he thought much of his project and had almost told himself that he would do the thing, was still doubting, when, suddenly, Mr. Brown sat down. There did not seem to be any
particular end to the speech, nor had Melmotte followed any general thread of argument. But a statement had been made and repeated, containing, as Melmotte thought, a fundamental error in finance; and he longed to set the matter right. At any rate he desired to show the House that Mr. Brown did not know what he was talking about, — because Mr. Brown had not come to his dinner. When Mr. Brown was seated, nobody at once rose. The subject was not popular, and they who understood the business of the House were well aware that the occasion had simply been one on which two or three commercial gentlemen, having crazes of their own, should be allowed to ventilate them. The subject would have dropped; — but on a sudden the new member was on his legs.

Now it was probably not in the remembrance of any gentleman there that a member had got up to make a speech within two or three hours of his first entry into the House. And this gentleman was one whose recent election had been of a very peculiar kind. It had been considered by many of his supporters that his name should be withdrawn just before the ballot; by others that he would be deterred by shame from showing himself even if he were elected; and again by another party that his appearance in Parliament would be prevented by his disappearance within the walls of Newgate. But here he was, not only in his seat, but on his legs! The favourable grace, the air of courteous attention, which is always shown to a new member when he first speaks, was extended also to Melmotte. There was an excitement in the thing which made gentlemen willing to listen, and a consequent hum, almost of approbation.

As soon as Melmotte was on his legs, and, looking round, found that everybody was silent with the intent of listening to him, a good deal of his courage oozed out of his fingers' ends. The House, which, to his thinking, had by no means been august while Mr. Brown had been toddling through his speech, now became awful. He caught the eyes of great men fixed upon him, — of men, who had not seemed to him to be at all great as he had watched them a few minutes before, yawning beneath their hats. Mr. Brown, poor as his speech had been, had, no doubt, prepared it, — and had perhaps made three or four such speeches every year for the last fifteen years. Melmotte had not dreamed of putting two words together. He had thought, as far as he had thought at all, that he could rattle off what he had to say just as he might do it when seated in his chair at the Mexican Railway Board. But there was the Speaker, and those three clerks in their wigs, and the mace, — and worse than all, the eyes of that long row of statesmen opposite to him! His position was felt by him to be dreadful. He had forgotten even the very point on which he had intended to crush Mr. Brown.

But the courage of the man was too high to allow him to be altogether quelled at once. The hum was prolonged; and though he was red in the face, perspiring, and utterly confused, he was determined to make a dash at the matter with the first words which would occur to him. "Mr. Brown is all wrong," he said. He had not even taken off his hat as he rose. Mr. Brown turned slowly round and looked up at him. Some one, whom he could not exactly hear, touching him
behind, suggested that he should take off his hat. There was a cry of order, which of course he did not understand. "Yes, you are," said Melmotte, nodding his head, and frowning angrily at poor Mr. Brown.

"The honourable member," said the Speaker, with the most good-natured voice which he could assume, "is not perhaps as yet aware that he should not call another member by his name. He should speak of the gentleman to whom he alluded as the honourable member for Whitechapel. And in speaking he should address, not another honourable member, but the chair."

"You should take your hat off," said the good-natured gentleman behind.

In such a position how should any man understand so many and such complicated instructions at once, and at the same time remember the gist of the argument to be produced? He did take off his hat, and was of course made hotter and more confused by doing so.

"What he said was all wrong," continued Melmotte; "and I should have thought a man out of the City, like Mr. Brown, ought to have known better." Then there were repeated calls of order, and a violent ebullition of laughter from both sides of the House. The man stood for a while glaring around him, summoning his own pluck for a renewal of his attack on Mr. Brown, determined that he would be appalled and put down neither by the ridicule of those around him, nor by his want of familiarity with the place; but still utterly unable to find words with which to carry on the combat. "I ought to know something about it," said Melmotte sitting down and hiding his indignation and his shame under his hat.

"We are sure that the honourable member for Westminster does understand the subject," said the leader of the House, "and we shall be very glad to hear his remarks. The House I am sure will pardon ignorance of its rules in so young a member."

But Mr. Melmotte would not rise again. He had made a great effort, and had at any rate exhibited his courage. Though they might all say that he had not displayed much eloquence, they would be driven to admit that he had not been ashamed to show himself. He kept his seat till the regular stampede was made for dinner, and then walked out with as stately a demeanour as he could assume.

"Well, that was plucky!" said Cohenlupe, taking his friend's arm in the lobby.

"I don't see any pluck in it. That old fool Brown didn't know what he was talking about, and I wanted to tell them so. They wouldn't let me do it; and there's an end of it. It seems to me to be a stupid sort of a place."

"Has Longestaffe's money been paid," said Cohenlupe opening his black eyes while he looked up into his friend's face.

"Don't you trouble your head about Longestaffe, or his money either," said Melmotte, getting into his hansom; "do you leave Mr. Longestaffe and his money to me. I hope you are not such a fool as to be scared by what the other fools say. When men play such a game as you and I are concerned in, they ought to know better than to be afraid of every word that is spoken."
"Oh, dear; yes;" said Cohenlupe apologetically. "You don't suppose that I am afraid of anything." But at that moment Mr. Cohenlupe was meditating his own escape from the dangerous shores of England, and was trying to remember what happy country still was left in which an order from the British police would have no power to interfere with the comfort of a retired gentleman such as himself.

That evening Madame Melmotte told her husband that Marie was now willing to marry Lord Nidderdale;—but she did not say anything as to the crossing-sweeper or the black footman, nor did she allude to Marie's threat of the sort of life she would lead her husband.

CHAPTER LXX.

SIR FELIX MEDDLES WITH MANY MATTERS.

There is no duty more certain or fixed in the world than that which calls upon a brother to defend his sister from ill-usage; but, at the same time, in the way we live now, no duty is more difficult, and we may say generally more indistinct. The ill-usage to which men's sisters are most generally exposed is one which hardly admits of either protection or vengeance,—although the duty of protecting and avenging is felt and acknowledged. We are not allowed to fight duels, and that banging about of another man with a stick is always disagreeable and seldom successful. A John Crumb can do it, perhaps, and come out of the affair exulting; but not a Sir Felix Carbury, even if the Sir Felix of the occasion have the requisite courage. There is a feeling, too, when a girl has been jilted,—thrown over, perhaps, is the proper term,—after the gentleman has had the fun of making love to her for an entire season, and has perhaps even been allowed privileges as her promised husband, that the less said the better. The girl does not mean to break her heart for love of the false one, and become the tragic heroine of a tale for three months. It is her purpose again to

—trick her beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flame in the forehead of the morning sky.

Though this one has been false, as were perhaps two or three before, still the road to success is open. Uno avulso non deficit alter. But if all the notoriety of cudgels and cutting whips be given to the late unfortunate affair, the difficulty of finding a substitute will be greatly increased. The brother recognises his duty, and prepares for vengeance. The injured one probably desires that she may be left to fight her own little battles alone.

"Then, by heaven, he shall answer it to me," Sir Felix had said very grandly, when his sister had told him that she was engaged to a man who was, as he thought he knew, engaged also to marry another
woman. Here, no doubt, was gross ill-usage, and opportunity at any rate for threats. No money was required and no immediate action, and Sir Felix could act the fine gentleman and the dictatorial brother at very little present expense. But Hetta, who ought perhaps to have known her brother more thoroughly, was fool enough to believe him. On the day but one following, no answer had as yet come from Roger Carbury,—nor could as yet have come. But Hetta’s mind was full of her trouble, and she remembered her brother’s threat. Felix had forgotten that he had made a threat,—and, indeed, had thought no more of the matter since his interview with his sister.

"Felix," she said, "you won’t mention that to Mr. Montague!"

"Mention what? Oh! about that woman, Mrs. Hurtle? Indeed I shall. A man who does that kind of thing ought to be crushed;—and, by heavens, if he does it to you, he shall be crushed."

"I want to tell you, Felix. If it is so, I will see him no more."

"If it is so! I tell you I know it."

"Mamma has written to Roger. At least I feel sure she has."

"What has she written to him for? What has Roger Carbury to do with our affairs?"

"Only you said he knew! If he says so, that is, if you and he both say that he is to marry that woman,—I will not see Mr. Montague again. Pray do not go to him. If such a misfortune does come, it is better to bear it and to be silent. What good can be done?"

"Leave that to me," said Sir Felix, walking out of the room with much fraternal bluster. Then he went forth, and at once had himself driven to Paul Montague’s lodgings. Had Hetta not been foolish enough to remind him of his duty, he would not now have undertaken the task. He too, no doubt, remembered as he went that duels were things of the past, and that even fists and sticks are considered to be out of fashion. "Montague," he said, assuming all the dignity of demeanour that his late sorrows had left to him, "I believe I am right in saying that you are engaged to marry that American lady, Mrs. Hurtle."

"Then let me tell you that you were never more wrong in your life. What business have you with Mrs. Hurtle?"

"When a man proposes to my sister, I think I’ve a great deal of business," said Sir Felix.

"Well;—yes; I admit that fully. If I answered you roughly, I beg your pardon. Now as to the facts. I am not going to marry Mrs. Hurtle. I suppose I know how you have heard her name;—but as you have heard it, I have no hesitation in telling you so much. As you know where she is to be found you can go and ask her if you please. On the other hand, it is the dearest wish of my heart to marry your sister. I trust that will be enough for you."

"You were engaged to Mrs. Hurtle?"

"My dear Carbury, I don’t think I’m bound to tell you all the details of my past life. At any rate, I don’t feel inclined to do so in answer to hostile questions. I dare say you have heard enough of Mrs. Hurtle to justify you, as your sister’s brother, in asking me whether I am in any way entangled by a connection with her. I tell
you that I am not. If you still doubt, I refer you to the lady herself. Beyond that, I do not think I am called on to go; and beyond that I won’t go,—at any rate, at present.” Sir Felix still blustered, and made what capital he could out of his position as a brother; but he took no steps towards positive revenge. “Of course, Carbury,” said the other, “I wish to regard you as a brother; and if I am rough to you, it is only because you are rough to me.”

Sir Felix was now in that part of town which he had been accustomed to haunt,—for the first time since his misadventure,—and, plucking up his courage, resolved that he would turn into the Bear Garden. He would have a glass of sherry, and face the one or two men who would as yet be there, and in this way gradually creep back to his old habits. But when he arrived there, the club was shut up. “What the deuce is Vossner about?” said he, pulling out his watch. It was nearly five o’clock. He rang the bell, and knocked at the door, feeling that this was an occasion for courage. One of the servants, in what we may call private clothes, after some delay, drew back the bolts, and told him the astounding news;—The club was shut up! “Do you mean to say I can’t come in?” said Sir Felix. The man certainly did mean to tell him so, for he opened the door no more than a foot, and stood in that narrow aperture. Mr. Vossner had gone away. There had been a meeting of the Committee, and the club was shut up. Whatever further information rested in the waiter’s bosom he declined to communicate to Sir Felix Carbury.

“By George!” The wrong that was done him filled the young baronet’s bosom with indignation. He had intended, he assured himself, to dine at his club, to spend the evening there sportively, to be pleasant among his chosen companions. And now the club was shut up, and Vossner had gone away? What business had the club to be shut up? What right had Vossner to go away? Had he not paid his subscription in advance? Throughout the world, the more wrong a man does, the more indignant is he at wrong done to him. Sir Felix almost thought that he could recover damages from the whole Committee.

He went direct to Mrs. Pipkin’s house. When he made that half promise of marriage in Mrs. Pipkin’s hearing, he had said that he would come again on the morrow. This he had not done; but of that he thought nothing. Such breaches of faith, when committed by a young man in his position, require not even an apology. He was admitted by Ruby herself, who was of course delighted to see him. “Who do you think is in town?” she said. “John Crumb; but though he came here ever so smart, I wouldn’t so much as speak to him, except to tell him to go away.” Sir Felix, when he heard the name, felt an uncomfortable sensation creep over him. “I don’t know I’m sure what he should come after me for, and me telling him as plain as the nose on his face that I never want to see him again.”

“He’s not of much account,” said the baronet.

“He would marry me out and out immediately, if I’d have him,” continued Ruby, who perhaps thought that her honest old lover should not be spoken of as being altogether of no account. “And he has everything comfortable in the way of furniture, and all that. And
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they do say he's ever so much money in the bank. But I detest him," said Ruby, shaking her pretty head, and inclining herself towards her aristocratic lover's shoulder.

This took place in the back parlour, before Mrs. Pipkin had ascended from the kitchen prepared to disturb so much romantic bliss with wretched references to the cold outer world. "Well, now, Sir Felix," she began, "if things is square, of course you're welcome to see my niece."

"And what if they're round, Mrs. Pipkin?" said the gallant, careless, sparkling Lothario.

"Well, or round either, so long as they're honest."

"Ruby and I are both honest;—ain't we, Ruby? I want to take her out to dinner, Mrs. Pipkin. She shall be back before late;—before ten; she shall indeed." Ruby inclined herself still more closely towards his shoulder. "Come, Ruby, get your hat and change your dress, and we'll be off. I've ever so many things to tell you."

Ever so many things to tell her! They must be to fix a day for the marriage, and to let her know where they were to live, and to settle what dress she should wear,—and perhaps to give her the money to go and buy it! Ever so many things to tell her! She looked up into Mrs. Pipkin's face with imploring eyes. Surely on such an occasion as this an aunt would not expect that her niece should be a prisoner and a slave. "Have it been put in writing, Sir Felix Carbury?" demanded Mrs. Pipkin with cruel gravity. Mrs. Hurtle had given it as her decided opinion that Sir Felix would not really mean to marry Ruby Ruggles unless he showed himself willing to do so with all the formality of a written contract.

"Writing be bothered," said Sir Felix.

"That's all very well, Sir Felix. Writing do bother, very often. But when a gentleman has intentions, a bit of writing shews it plainer nor words. Ruby don't go no where to dine unless you puts it into writing."

"Aunt Pipkin!" exclaimed the wretched Ruby.

"What do you think I'm going to do with her?" asked Sir Felix.

"If you want to make her your wife, put it in writing. And if it be as you don't, just say so, and walk away,—free."

"I shall go," said Ruby. "I'm not going to be kept here a prisoner for any one. I can go when I please. You wait, Felix, and I'll be down in a minute." The girl, with a nimble spring, ran upstairs, and began to change her dress without giving herself a moment for thought.

"She don't come back no more here, Sir Felix," said Mrs. Pipkin, in her most solemn tones. "She ain't nothing to me, no more than she was my poor dear husband's sister's child. There ain't no blood between us, and won't be no disgrace. But I'd be loth to see her on the streets."

"Then why won't you let me bring her back again?"

"'Cause that'd be the way to send her there. You don't mean to marry her." To this Sir Felix said nothing. "You're not thinking of that. It's just a bit of sport,—and then there she is, an old shoe
to be chucked away, just a rag to be swept into the dust-bin. I've seen scores of 'em, and I'd sooner a child of mine should die in a workus', or be starved to death. But it's all nothing to the likes o' you."

"I haven't done her any harm," said Sir Felix, almost frightened.

"Then go away, and don't do her any. That's Mrs. Hurtle's door open. You go and speak to her. She can talk a deal better nor me."

"Mrs. Hurtle hasn't been able to manage her own affairs very well."

"Mrs. Hurtle's a lady, Sir Felix, and a widow, and one as has seen the world." As she spoke, Mrs. Hurtle came downstairs, and an introduction, after some rude fashion, was effected between her and Sir Felix. Mrs. Hurtle had heard often of Sir Felix Carbury, and was quite as certain as Mrs. Pipkin that he did not mean to marry Ruby Ruggles. In a few minutes Felix found himself alone with Mrs. Hurtle in her own room. He had been anxious to see the woman since he had heard of her engagement with Paul Montague, and doubly anxious since he had also heard of Paul's engagement with his sister. It was not an hour since Paul himself had referred him to her for corroboration of his own statement.

"Sir Felix Carbury," she said, "I am afraid you are doing that poor girl no good, and are intending to do her none." It did occur to him very strongly that this could be no affair of Mrs. Hurtle's, and that he, as a man of position in society, was being interfered with in an unjustifiable manner. Aunt Pipkin wasn't even an aunt; but who was Mrs. Hurtle? "Would it not be better that you should leave her to become the wife of a man who is really fond of her?"

He could already see something in Mrs. Hurtle's eye which prevented his at once bursting into wrath;—but who was Mrs. Hurtle, that she should interfere with him? "Upon my word, ma'am," he said, "I'm very much obliged to you, but I don't quite know to what I owe the honour of your—your—"

"Interference you mean."

"I didn't say so, but perhaps that's about it."

"I'd interfere to save any woman that God ever made," said Mrs. Hurtle with energy. "We're all apt to wait a little too long, because we're ashamed to do any little good that chance puts in our way. You must go and leave her, Sir Felix."

"I suppose she may do as she pleases about that."

"Do you mean to make her your wife?" asked Mrs. Hurtle sternly.

"Does Mr. Paul Montague mean to make you his wife?" rejoined Sir Felix with an impudent swagger. He had struck the blow certainly hard enough, and it had gone all the way home. She had not surmised that he would have heard aught of her own concerns. She only barely connected him with that Roger Carbury who, she knew, was Paul's great friend, and she had as yet never heard that Hetta Carbury was the girl whom Paul loved. Had Paul so talked about her that this young scamp should know all her story?

She thought awhile,—she had to think for a moment,—before she
could answer him. "I do not see," she said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "that there is any parallel between the two cases. I, at any rate, am old enough to take care of myself. Should he not marry me, I am as I was before. Will it be so with that poor girl if she allows herself to be taken about the town by you at night?" She had desired in what she said to protect Ruby rather than herself. What could it matter whether this young man was left in a belief that she was, or that she was not, about to be married?

"If you'll answer me, I'll answer you," said Sir Felix. "Does Mr. Montague mean to make you his wife?"

"It does not concern you to know," said she, flashing upon him.

"The question is insolent."

"It does concern me,—a great deal more than anything about Ruby can concern you. And as you won't answer me, I won't answer you."

"Then, sir, that girl's fate will be upon your head."

"I know all about that," said the baronet.

"And the young man who has followed her up to town will probably know where to find you," added Mrs. Hurtle.

To such a threat as this, no answer could be made, and Sir Felix left the room. At any rate, John Crumb was not there at present. And were there not policemen in London? And what additional harm would be done to John Crumb, or what increase of anger engendered in that true lover's breast, by one additional evening's amusement? Ruby had danced with him so often at the Music Hall that John Crumb could hardly be made more bellicose by the fact of her dining with him on this evening. When he descended, he found Ruby in the hall, all arrayed. "You don't come in here again to-night," said Mrs. Pipkin, thumping the little table which stood in the passage, "if you go out of that there door with that there young man."

"Then I shall," said Ruby linking herself on to her lover's arm.

"Baggage! Slut!" said Mrs. Pipkin; "after all I've done for you, just as one as though you were my own flesh and blood."

"I've worked for it, I suppose;—haven't I?" rejoined Ruby.

"You send for your things to-morrow, for you don't come in here no more. You ain't nothing to me no more nor no other girl. But I'd've saved you, if you'd but a' let me. As for you,"—and she looked at Sir Felix,—"only because I've lodgings to let, and because of the lady upstairs, I'd shake you that well, you'd never come here no more after poor girls." I do not think that she need have feared any remonstrance from Mrs. Hurtle, even had she put her threat into execution.

Sir Felix, thinking that he had had enough of Mrs. Pipkin and her lodger, left the house with Ruby on his arm. For the moment, Ruby had been triumphant, and was happy. She did not stop to consider whether her aunt would or would not open her door when she should return tired, and perhaps repentant. She was on her lover's arm, in her best clothes, and going to have a dinner given to her. And her lover had told her that he had ever so many things,—ever so many things to say to her! But she would ask no impertinent questions in the first hour of her bliss. It was so pleasant to
walk with him up to Pentonville;—so joyous to turn into a gay enclosure, half public-house and half tea-garden; so pleasant to hear him order the good things, which in his company would be so nice! Who cannot understand that even an urban Rosherville must be an Elysium to those who have lately been eating their meals in all the gloom of a small London underground kitchen? There we will leave Ruby in her bliss.

At about nine that evening John Crumb called at Mrs. Pipkin's, and was told that Ruby had gone out with Sir Felix Carbury. He hit his leg a blow with his fist, and glared out of his eyes. "He'll have it hot some day," said John Crumb. He was allowed to remain waiting for Ruby till midnight, and then, with a sorrowful heart, he took his departure.
CHAPTER LXXI.

JOHN CRUMB FALLS INTO TROUBLE.

IT was on a Friday evening, an inauspicious Friday, that poor Ruby Ruggles had insisted on leaving the security of her Aunt Pipkin's house with her aristocratic and vicious lover, in spite of the positive assurance made to her by Mrs. Pipkin that if she went forth in such company she should not be allowed to return. "Of course you must let her in," Mrs. Hurtle had said soon after the girl's departure. Whereupon Mrs. Pipkin had cried. She knew her own softness too well to suppose it to be possible that she could keep the girl out in the streets all night; but yet it was hard upon her, very hard, that she should be so troubled. "We usen't to have our ways like that when I was young," she said, sobbing. What was to be the end of it? Was she to be forced by circumstances to keep the girl always there, let the girl's conduct be what it might? Nevertheless she acknowledged that Ruby must be let in when she came back. Then, about nine o'clock, John Crumb came; and the latter part of the evening was more melancholy even than the first. It was impossible to conceal the truth from John Crumb. Mrs. Hurtle saw the poor man and told the story in Mrs. Pipkin's presence.

"She's headstrong, Mr. Crumb," said Mrs. Hurtle.

"She is that, ma'am. And it was along wi' the baro-nite she went?"

"It was so, Mr. Crumb."

"Baro-nite! Well;—perhaps I shall catch him some of these days;—went to dinner wi' him, did she? Didn't she have no dinner here?"

Then Mrs. Pipkin spoke up with a keen sense of offence. Ruby Ruggles had had as wholesome a dinner as any young woman in London,—a bullock's heart and potatoes,—just as much as ever she had pleased to eat of it. Mrs. Pipkin could tell Mr. Crumb that there was "no starvation nor yet no stint in her house." John Crumb immediately produced a very thick and admirably useful blue cloth cloak, which he had brought up with him to London from Bungay, as a present to the woman who had been good to his Ruby. He assured her that he did not doubt that her victuals were good and plentiful, and went on to say that he had made bold to bring her a trifle out of respect. It was some little time before Mrs. Pipkin would allow herself to be appeased;—but at last she permitted the garment to be placed on her shoulders. But it was done after a melancholy fashion. There was no smiling consciousness of the bestowal of joy on the countenance of the donor as he gave it, no exuberance of thanks from the recipient as she received it. Mrs. Hurtle, standing by, declared it to be perfect;—but the occasion was one which admitted of no delight. "It's very good of you, Mr. Crumb, to think
of an old woman like me,—particularly when you've such a deal of trouble with a young un'."

"It's like the smut in the wheat, Mrs. Pipkin, or the d'sease in the 'tatoes;—it has to be put up with, I suppose. Is she very partial, ma'am, to that young baro-nite?" This question was asked of Mrs. Hurtle.

"Just a fancy for the time, Mr. Crumb," said the lady.

"They never thinks as how their fancies may well-nigh half kill a man!" Then he was silent for awhile, sitting back in his chair, not moving a limb, with his eyes fastened on Mrs. Pipkin's ceiling. Mrs. Hurtle had some work in her hand, and sat watching him. The man was to her an extraordinary being,—so constant, so slow, so unexpressive, so unlike her own countrymen,—willing to endure so much, and at the same time so warm in his affections! "Sir Felix Carbury!" he said. "I'll Sir Felix him some of these days. If it was only dinner, wouldn't she be back afore this, ma'am?"

"I suppose they've gone to some place of amusement," said Mrs. Hurtle.

"Like enough," said John Crumb in a low voice.

"She's that mad after dancing as never was," said Mrs. Pipkin.

"And where is it as 'em dances?" asked Crumb, getting up from his chair, and stretching himself. It was evident to both the ladies that he was beginning to think that he would follow Ruby to the music hall. Neither of them answered him, however, and then he sat down again. "Does 'em dance all night at them places, Mrs. Pipkin?"

"They do pretty nearly all that they oughtn't to do," said Mrs. Pipkin. John Crumb raised one of his fists, brought it down heavily on the palm of his other hand, and then again sat silent for awhile.

"I never knowed as she was fond o' dancing," he said. "I'd a had dancing for her down at Bungay,—just as ready as anything. D'ye think, ma'am, it's the dancing she's after, or the baro-nite?"

This was another appeal to Mrs. Hurtle.

"I suppose they go together," said the lady.

Then there was another long pause, at the end of which poor John Crumb burst out with some violence. "Domn him! Domn him! What 'ad I ever dun to him? Nothing! Did I ever interfere wi' him? Never! But I wull. I wull. I wouldn't wonder but I'll swing for this at Bury!"

"Oh, Mr. Crumb, don't talk like that," said Mrs. Pipkin.

"Mr. Crumb is a little disturbed, but he'll get over it presently," said Mrs. Hurtle.

"She's a nasty slut to go and treat a young man as she's treating you," said Mrs. Pipkin.

"No, ma'am;—she ain't nasty," said the lover. "But she's crou'll—horrid crou'll. It's no more use my going down about meal and pollard, nor business, and she up here with that baro-nite,—no, no more nor nothin'! When I handles it I don't know whether its middlings nor nothin' else. If I was to twist his neck, ma'am, would you take it on yourself to say as I was wrong?"

"I'd sooner hear that you had taken the girl away from him," said Mrs. Hurtle.
"I could pretty well eat him,—that's what I could. Half past eleven; is it? She must come some time, mustn't she?" Mrs. Pipkin, who did not want to burn candles all night long, declared that she could give no assurance on that head. If Ruby did come, she should, on that night, be admitted. But Mrs. Pipkin thought that it would be better to get up and let her in than to sit up for her. Poor Mr. Crumb did not at once take the hint, and remained there for another half-hour, saying little, but waiting with the hope that Ruby might come. But when the clock struck twelve he was told that he must go. Then he slowly collected his limbs and dragged them out of the house.

"That young man is a good fellow," said Mrs. Hurtle as soon as the door was closed.

"A deal too good for Ruby Ruggles," said Mrs. Pipkin. "And he can maintain a wife. Mr. Carbury says as he's as well to do as any tradesman down in them parts."

Mrs. Hurtle disliked the name of Mr. Carbury, and took this last statement as no evidence in John Crumb's favour. "I don't know that I think better of the man for having Mr. Carbury's friendship," she said.

"Mr. Carbury ain't any way like his cousin, Mrs. Hurtle."

"I don't think much of any of the Carburys, Mrs. Pipkin. It seems to me that everybody here is either too humble or too over-bearing. Nobody seems content to stand firm on his own footing and interfere with nobody else." This was all Greek to poor Mrs. Pipkin. "I suppose we may as well go to bed now. When that girl comes and knocks, of course we must let her in. If I hear her, I'll go down and open the door for her."

Mrs. Pipkin made very many apologies to her lodger for the condition of her household. She would remain up herself to answer the door at the first sound, so that Mrs. Hurtle should not be disturbed. She would do her best to prevent any further annoyance. She trusted Mrs. Hurtle would see that she was endeavouring to do her duty by the naughty wicked girl. And then she came round to the point of her discourse. She hoped that Mrs. Hurtle would not be induced to quit the rooms by these disagreeable occurrences. "I don't mind saying it now, Mrs. Hurtle, but your being here is ever so much to me. I ain't nothing to depend on,—only lodgers, and them as is any good is so hard to get!" The poor woman hardly understood Mrs. Hurtle, who, as a lodger, was certainly peculiar. She cared nothing for disturbances, and rather liked than otherwise the task of endeavouring to assist in the salvation of Ruby. Mrs. Hurtle begged that Mrs. Pipkin would go to bed. She would not be in the least annoyed by the knocking. Another half-hour had thus been passed by the two ladies in the parlour after Crumb's departure. Then Mrs. Hurtle took her candle and had ascended the stairs half way to her own sitting-room, when a loud double knock was heard. She immediately joined Mrs. Pipkin in the passage. The door was opened, and there stood Ruby Ruggles, John Crumb, and two policemen! Ruby rushed in, and casting herself on to one of the stairs began to throw her hands about, and to howlpiteously. "Laws a mercy; what is it?" asked Mrs. Pipkin.
"He's been and murdered him!" screamed Ruby. "He has! He's been and murdered him!"

"This young woman is living here;—is she?" asked one of the policemen.

"She is living here," said Mrs. Hurle. But now we must go back to the adventures of John Crumb after he had left the house.

He had taken a bedroom at a small inn close to the Eastern Counties Railway Station which he was accustomed to frequent when business brought him up to London, and thither he proposed to himself to return. At one time there had come upon him an idea that he would endeavour to seek Ruby and his enemy among the dancing saloons of the metropolis; and he had asked a question with that view. But no answer had been given which seemed to aid him in his project, and his purpose had been abandoned as being too complex and requiring more intelligence than he gave himself credit for possessing. So he had turned down a street with which he was so far acquainted as to know that it would take him to the Islington Angel,—where various roads meet, and whence he would know his way eastwards. He had just passed the Angel, and the end of Goswell Road, and was standing with his mouth open, looking about, trying to make certain of himself that he would not go wrong, thinking that he would ask a policeman whom he saw, and hesitating because he feared that the man would want to know his business. Then, of a sudden, he heard a woman scream, and knew that it was Ruby's voice. The sound was very near him, but in the glimmer of the gaslight he could not quite see whence it came. He stood still, putting his hand up to scratch his head under his hat,—trying to think what, in such an emergency, it would be well that he should do. Then he heard the voice distinctly, "I won't;—I won't," and after that a scream. Then there were further words. "It's no good—I won't." At last he was able to make up his mind. He rushed after the sound, and turning down a passage to the right which led back into Goswell Road, saw Ruby struggling in a man's arms. She had left the dancing establishment with her lover; and when they had come to the turn of the passage, there had arisen a question as to her further destiny for the night. Ruby, though she well remembered Mrs. Pipkin's threats, was minded to try her chance at her aunt's door. Sir Felix was of opinion that he could make a preferable arrangement for her; and as Ruby was not at once amenable to his arguments he had thought that a little gentle force might avail him. He had therefore dragged Ruby into the passage. The unfortunate one! That so ill a chance should have come upon him in the midst of his diversion! He had swallowed several tumblers of brandy and water, and was therefore brave with reference to that interference of the police, the fear of which might otherwise have induced him to relinquish his hold of Ruby's arm when she first raised her voice. But what amount of brandy and water would have enabled him to persevere, could he have dreamed that John Crumb was near him? On a sudden he found a hand on his coat, and he was swung violently away, and brought with his back against the railings so forcibly as to have the breath almost knocked out of his body. But he could hear Ruby's
"Get up, you wiper!"
exclamation, "If it isn't John Crumb!" Then there came upon him a sense of coming destruction, as though the world for him were all over; and, collapsing throughout his limbs, he slunk down upon the ground.

"Get up, you wiper," said John Crumb. But the baronet thought it better to cling to the ground. "You shall get up," said John, taking him by the collar of his coat and lifting him. "Now, Ruby; he's a-going to have it," said John. Whereupon Ruby screamed at the top of her voice, with a shriek very much louder than that which had at first attracted John Crumb's notice.

"Don't hit a man when he's down," said the baronet, pleading as though for his life.

"I wunt," said John;—"but I'll hit a fellow when un's up." Sir Felix was little more than a child in the man's arms. John Crumb raised him, and catching him round the neck with his left arm,—getting his head into chancery as we used to say when we fought at school,—struck the poor wretch some half dozen times violently in the face, not knowing or caring exactly where he hit him, but at every blow obliterating a feature. And he would have continued had not Ruby flown at him and rescued Sir Felix from his arms. "He's about got enough of it," said John Crumb as he gave over his work. Then Sir Felix fell again to the ground, moaning fearfully. "I know'd he'd have to have it," said John Crumb.

Ruby's screams of course brought the police, one arriving from each end of the passage on the scene of action at the same time. And now the cruellest thing of all was that Ruby in the complaints which she made to the policemen said not a word against Sir Felix, but was as bitter as she knew how to be in her denunciations of John Crumb. It was in vain that John endeavoured to make the man understand that the young woman had been crying out for protection when he had interfered. Ruby was very quick of speech and John Crumb was very slow. Ruby swore that nothing so horrible, so cruel, so bloodthirsty had ever been done before. Sir Felix himself when appealed to could say nothing. He could only moan and make futile efforts to wipe away the stream of blood from his face when the men stood him up leaning against the railings. And John, though he endeavoured to make the policemen comprehend the extent of the wickedness of the young baronet, would not say a word against Ruby. He was not even in the least angered by her denunciations of himself. As he himself said sometimes afterwards, he had "dropped into the baro-nite" just in time, and, having been successful in this, felt no wrath against Ruby for having made such an operation necessary.

There was soon a third policeman on the spot, and a dozen other persons,—cabb-drivers, haunters of the street by night, and houseless wanderers, casuals who at this season of the year preferred the pavements to the poor-house wards. They all took part against John Crumb. Why had the big man interfered between the young woman and her young man? Two or three of them wiped Sir Felix's face, and dabbed his eyes, and proposed this and the other remedy. Some thought that he had better be taken straight to an hospital. One
lady remarked that he was "so mashed and mauled" that she was sure he would never "come to" again. A precocious youth remarked that he was "all one as a dead un'." A cabman observed that he had "'ad it awful 'eavy." To all these criticisms on his condition Sir Felix himself made no direct reply, but he intimated his desire to be carried away somewhere, though he did not much care whither.

At last the policemen among them decided upon a course of action. They had learned by the united testimony of Ruby and Crumb that Sir Felix was Sir Felix. He was to be carried in a cab by one constable to Bartholomew Hospital, who would then take his address so that he might be produced and bound over to prosecute. Ruby should be even conducted to the address she gave,—not half a mile from the spot on which they now stood,—and be left there or not according to the account which might be given of her. John Crumb must be undoubtedly locked up in the station-house. He was the offender;—for aught that any of them yet knew, the murderer. No one said a good word for him. He hardly said a good word for himself, and certainly made no objection to the treatment that had been proposed for him. But, no doubt, he was buoyed up inwardly by the conviction that he had thoroughly thrashed his enemy.

Thus it came to pass that the two policemen with John Crumb and Ruby came together to Mrs. Pipkin's door. Ruby was still loud with complaints against the ruffian who had beaten her lover,—who, perhaps, had killed her loved one. She threatened the gallows, and handcuffs, and perpetual imprisonment, and an action for damages amidst her lamentations. But from Mrs. Hurtle the policemen did manage to learn something of the truth. Oh yes;—the girl lived there and was ——— respectable. This man whom they had arrested was respectable also, and was the girl's proper lover. The other man who had been beaten was undoubtedly the owner of a title; but he was not respectable, and was only the girl's improper lover. And John Crumb's name was given. "I'm John Crumb of Bungay," said he, "and I aint afeared of nothin' nor nobody. And I aint a been a drinking; no, I aint. Mauled un'! In course I've mauled un'. And I meanted it. That ere young woman is engaged to be my wife."

"'No, I aint,'" shouted Ruby.

"But she is," persisted John Crumb.

"Well then, I never will," rejoined Ruby.

John Crumb turned upon her a look of love, and put his hand on his heart. Whereupon the senior policeman said that he saw at a glance how it all was, but that Mr. Crumb had better come along with him,—just for the present. To this arrangement the unfortunate hero from Bungay made not the slightest objection.

"Miss Ruggles," said Mrs. Hurtle, "if that young man doesn't conquer you at last you can't have a heart in your bosom."

"Indeed and I have then, and I don't mean to give it him if it's ever so. He's been and killed Sir Felix." Mrs. Hurtle in a whisper to Mrs. Pipkin expressed a wicked wish that it might be so. After that the three women all went to bed.
CHAPTER LXXII.

"ASK HIMSELF."

ROGER CARBURY when he received the letter from Hetta's mother desiring him to tell her all that he knew of Paul Montague's connection with Mrs. Hurtle found himself quite unable to write a reply. He endeavoured to ask himself what he would do in such a case if he himself were not personally concerned. What advice in this emergency would he give to the mother and what to the daughter, were he himself uninterested? He was sure that, as Hetta's cousin and asking as though he were Hetta's brother, he would tell her that Paul Montague's entanglement with that American woman should have forbidden him at any rate for the present to offer his hand to any other lady. He thought that he knew enough of all the circumstances to be sure that such would be his decision. He had seen Mrs. Hurtle with Montague at Lowestoffe, and had known that they were staying together as friends at the same hotel. He knew that she had come to England with the express purpose of enforcing the fulfilment of an engagement which Montague had often acknowledged. He knew that Montague made frequent visits to her in London. He had, indeed, been told by Montague himself that, let the cost be what it might, the engagement should be and in fact had been broken off. He thoroughly believed the man's word, but put no trust whatever in his firmness. And, hitherto, he had no reason whatever for supposing that Mrs. Hurtle had consented to be abandoned. What father, what elder brother would allow a daughter or a sister to become engaged to a man embarrassed by such difficulties? He certainly had counselled Montague to rid himself of the trammels by which he had surrounded himself;—but not on that account could he think that the man in his present condition was fit to engage himself to another woman.

All this was clear to Roger Carbury. But then it had been equally clear to him that he could not, as a man of honour, assist his own cause by telling a tale,—which tale had become known to him as the friend of the man against whom it would have to be told. He had resolved upon that as he left Montague and Mrs. Hurtle together upon the sands at Lowestoffe. But what was he to do now? The girl whom he loved had confessed her love for the other man,—that man, who in seeking the girl's love, had been as he thought so foul a traitor to himself! That he would hold himself as divided from the man by a perpetual and undying hostility he had determined. That his love for the woman would be equally perpetual he was quite sure. Already there were floating across his brain ideas of perpetuating his name in the person of some child of Hetta's,—but with the distinct understanding that he and the child's father should never see each other. No more than twenty-four hours had intervened between the receipt of
Paul's letter and that from Lady Carbury,—but during those four-and-twenty hours he had almost forgotten Mrs. Hurtle. The girl was gone from him, and he thought only of his own loss and of Paul's perfidy. Then came the direct question as to which he was called upon for a direct answer. Did he know anything of facts relating to the presence of a certain Mrs. Hurtle in London which were of a nature to make it inexpedient that Hetta should accept Paul Montague as her betrothed lover? Of course he did. The facts were all familiar to him. But how was he to tell the facts? In what words was he to answer such a letter? If he told the truth as he knew it how was he to secure himself against the suspicion of telling a story against his rival in order that he might assist himself, or at any rate, punish the rival?

As he could not trust himself to write an answer to Lady Carbury's letter he determined that he would go to London. If he must tell the story he could tell it better face to face than by any written words. So he made the journey, arrived in town late in the evening, and knocked at the door in Welbeck Street between ten and eleven on the morning after the unfortunate meeting which took place between Sir Felix and John Crumb. The page when he opened the door looked as a page should look when the family to which he is attached is suffering from some terrible calamity. "My lady" had been summoned to the hospital to see Sir Felix who was,—as the page reported,—in a very bad way indeed. The page did not exactly know what had happened, but supposed that Sir Felix had lost most of his limbs by this time. Yes; Miss Carbury was up-stairs; and would no doubt see her cousin, though she, too, was in a very bad condition; and dreadfully put about. That poor Hetta should be "put about" with her brother in the hospital and her lover in the toils of an abominable American woman was natural enough.

"What's this about Felix?" asked Roger. The new trouble always has precedence over those which are of earlier date.

"Oh Roger, I am so glad to see you. Felix did not come home last night, and this morning there came a man from the hospital in the city to say that he is there."

"What has happened to him?"

"Somebody,—somebody has,—beaten him," said Hetta whimpering. Then she told the story as far as she knew it. The messenger from the hospital had declared that the young man was in no danger and that none of his bones were broken, but that he was terribly bruised about the face, that his eyes were in a frightful condition, sundry of his teeth knocked out, and his lips cut open. But, the messenger had gone on to say, the house surgeon had seen no reason why the young gentleman should not be taken home. "And mamma has gone to fetch him," said Hetta.

"That's John Crumb," said Roger. Hetta had never heard of John Crumb, and simply stared into her cousin's face. "You have not been told about John Crumb? No;—you would not hear of him."

"Why should John Crumb beat Felix like that?"

"They say, Hetta, that women are the cause of most troubles that
occur in the world." The girl blushed up to her eyes, as though the whole story of Felix' sin and folly had been told to her. "If it be as I suppose," continued Roger, "John Crumb has considered himself to be aggrieved and has thus avenged himself."

"Did you—know of him before?"

"Yes indeed;—very well. He is a neighbour of mine and was in love with a girl, with all his heart; and he would have made her his wife and have been good to her. He had a home to offer her, and is an honest man with whom she would have been safe and respected and happy. Your brother saw her and, though he knew the story, though he had been told by myself that this honest fellow had placed his happiness on the girl's love, he thought,—well, I suppose he thought that such a pretty thing as this girl was too good for John Crumb."

"But Felix has been going to marry Miss Melmotte!"

"You're old-fashioned, Hetta. It used to be the way,—to be off with the old love before you are on with the new; but that seems to be all changed now. Such fine young fellows as there are now can be in love with two at once. That I fear is what Felix has thought;—and now he has been punished."

"You know all about it then?"

"No;—I don't know. But I think it has been so. I do know that John Crumb had threatened to do this thing, and I felt sure that sooner or later he would be as good as his word. If it has been so, who is to blame him?"

Hetta as she heard the story hardly knew whether her cousin, in his manner of telling the story, was speaking of that other man, of that stranger of whom she had never heard, or of himself. He would have made her his wife and have been good to her. He had a home to offer her. He was an honest man with whom she would have been safe and respected and happy! He had looked at her while speaking as though it were her own case of which he spoke. And then, when he talked of the old-fashioned way, of being off with the old love before you are on with the new, had he not alluded to Paul Montague and this story of the American woman? But, if so, it was not for Hetta to notice it by words. He must speak more plainly than that before she could be supposed to know that he alluded to her own condition. "It is very shocking," she said.

"Shocking;—yes. One is shocked at it all. I pity your mother, and I pity you."

"It seems to me that nothing ever will be happy for us," said Hetta. She was longing to be told something of Mrs. Hurtle, but she did not as yet dare to ask the question.

"I do not know whether to wait for your mother or not," said he after a short pause.

"Pray wait for her if you are not very busy."

"I came up only to see her, but perhaps she would not wish me to be here when she brings Felix back to the house."

"Indeed she will. She would like you always to be here when there are troubles. Oh, Roger, I wish you could tell me."

"Tell you what?"
"She has written to you;—has she not?"

"Yes; she has written to me."

"And about me?"

"Yes;—about you, Hetta. And, Hetta, Mr. Montague has written to me also."

"He told me that he would," whispered Hetta.

"Did he tell you of my answer?"

"No;—he has told me of no answer. I have not seen him since."

"You do not think that it can have been very kind, do you? I also have something of the feeling of John Crumb, though I shall not attempt to show it after the same fashion."

"Did you not say the girl had promised to love that man?"

"I did not say so;—but she had promised. Yes, Hetta; there is a difference. The girl then was fickle and went back from her word. You never have done that. I am not justified in thinking even a hard thought of you. I have never harboured a hard thought of you. It is not you that I reproach. But he,—he has been if possible more false than Felix."

"Oh, Roger, how has he been false?"

Still he was not wishful to tell her the story of Mrs. Hurtle. The treachery of which he was speaking was that which he had thought had been committed by his friend towards himself. "He should have left the place and never have come near you," said Paul, "when he found how it was likely to be with him. He owed it to me not to take the cup of water from my lips."

How was she to tell him that the cup of water never could have touched his lips? And yet if this were the only falsehood of which he had to tell, she was bound to let him know that it was so. That horrid story of Mrs. Hurtle;—she would listen to that if she could hear it. She would be all ears for that. But she could not admit that her lover had sinned in loving her. "But Roger," she said—"it would have been the same."

"You may so. You may feel it. You may know it. I at any rate will not contradict you when you say that it must have been so. But he didn't feel it. He didn't know it. He was to me as a younger brother,—and he has robbed me of everything. I understand, Hetta, what you mean. I should never have succeeded! My happiness would have been impossible if Paul had never come home from America. I have told myself so a hundred times, but I cannot therefore forgive him. And I won't forgive him, Hetta. Whether you are his wife, or another man's, or whether you are Hetta Carbury or to the end, my feeling to you will be the same. While we both live, you must be to me the dearest creature living. My hatred to him—"

"Oh, Paul, do not say hatred."

"My hostility to him can make no difference in my feeling to you. I tell you that should you become his wife you will still be my love. As to not coveting,—how is a man to cease to covet that which he has always coveted? But I shall be separated from you. Should I be dying, then I should send for you. You are the very essence of my life. I have no dream of happiness otherwise than as connected with you. He might have my whole property and I would work for my
bread, if I could only have a chance of winning you to share my toils with me.'

But still there was no word of Mrs. Hurtle. "Roger," she said, "I have given it all away now. It cannot be given twice."

"If he were unworthy would your heart never change?"

"I think—never. Roger, is he unworthy?"

"How can you trust me to answer such a question? He is my enemy. He has been ungrateful to me as one man hardly ever is to another. He has turned all my sweetness to gall, all my flowers to bitter weeds; he has choked up all my paths. And now you ask me whether he is unworthy! I cannot tell you."

"If you thought him worthy you would tell me," she said, getting up and taking him by the arm.

"No;—I will tell you nothing. Go to some one else, not to me;" and he tried with gentleness but tried ineffectually to disengage himself from her hold.

"Roger, if you knew him to be good you would tell me,—because you yourself are so good. Even though you hated him you would say so. It would not be you to leave a false impression even against your enemies. I ask you because, however it may be with you, I know I can trust you. I can be nothing else to you, Roger; but I love you as a sister loves, and I come to you as a sister comes to a brother. He has my heart. Tell me;—is there any reason why he should not also have my hand?"

"Ask himself, Hetta."

"And you will tell me nothing? You will not try to save me though you know that I am in danger? Who is,—Mrs. Hurtle?"

"Have you asked him?"

"I had not heard her name when he parted from me. I did not even know that such a woman lived. Is it true that he has promised to marry her? Felix told me of her, and told me also that you knew. But I cannot trust Felix as I would trust you. And mamma says that it is so;—but mamma also bids me ask you. There is such a woman?"

"There is such a woman certainly."

"And she has been,—a friend of Paul's?"

"Whatever be the story, Hetta, you shall not hear it from me. I will say neither evil nor good of the man except in regard to his conduct to myself. Send for him and ask him to tell you the story of Mrs. Hurtle as it concerns himself. I do not think he will lie, but if he lies you will know that he is lying."

"And that is all?"

"All that I can say, Hetta. You ask me to be your brother; but I cannot put myself in the place of your brother. I tell you plainly that I am your lover, and shall remain so. Your brother would welcome the man whom you would choose as your husband. I can never welcome any husband of yours. I think if twenty years were to pass over us, and you were still Hetta Carbury, I should still be your lover,—though an old one. What is now to be done about Felix, Hetta?"
"Ah,—what can be done? I think sometimes that it will break mamma's heart."

"Your mother makes me angry by her continual indulgence."

"But what can she do? You would not have her turn him into the street?"

"I do not know that I would not. For a time it might serve him perhaps. Here is the cab. Here they are. Yes; you had better go down and let your mother know that I am here. They will perhaps take him up to bed, so that I need not see him."

Hetta did as she was bid, and met her mother and her brother in the hall. Felix having the full use of his arms and legs was able to descend from the cab, and hurry across the pavement into the house, and then, without speaking a word to his sister, hid himself in the dining-room. His face was strapped up with plaister so that not a feature was visible; and both his eyes were swollen and blue; part of his beard had been cut away, and his physiognomy had altogether been so treated that even the page would hardly have known him.

"Roger is up-stairs, mamma," said Hetta in the hall.

"Has he heard about Felix;—has he come about that?"

"He has heard only what I have told him. He has come because of your letter. He says that a man named Crumb did it."

"Then he does know. Who can have told him? He always knows everything. Oh, Hetta, what am I to do? Where shall I go with this wretched boy?"

"Is he hurt, mamma?"

"Hurt;—of course he is hurt; horribly hurt. The brute tried to kill him. They say that he will be dreadfully scarred for ever. But oh, Hetta;—what am I to do with him? What am I to do with myself and you?"

On this occasion Roger was saved from the annoyance of any personal intercourse with his cousin Felix. The unfortunate one was made as comfortable as circumstances would permit in the parlour, and Lady Carbury then went up to her cousin in the drawing-room. She had learned the truth with some fair approach to accuracy, though Sir Felix himself had of course lied as to every detail. There are some circumstances so distressing in themselves as to make lying almost a necessity. When a young man has behaved badly about a woman, when a young man has been beaten without returning a blow, when a young man's pleasant vices are brought directly under a mother's eyes, what can he do but lie? How could Sir Felix tell the truth about that rash encounter? But the policeman who had brought him to the hospital had told all that he knew. The man who had thrashed the baronet had been called Crumb, and the thrashing had been given on the score of a young woman called Ruggles. So much was known at the hospital, and so much could not be hidden by any lies which Sir Felix might tell. And when Sir Felix swore that a policeman was holding him while Crumb was beating him, no one believed him. In such cases the liar does not expect to be believed. He knows that his disgrace will be made public, and only hopes to be saved from the ignominy of declaring it with his own words.

"What am I to do with him?" Lady Carbury said to her cousin.
"It is no use telling me to leave him. I can't do that. I know he is bad. I know that I have done much to make him what he is." As she said this the tears were running down her poor worn cheeks. "But he is my child. What am I to do with him now?"

This was a question which Roger found it almost impossible to answer. If he had spoken his thoughts he would have declared that Sir Felix had reached an age, at which, if a man will go headlong to destruction, he must go headlong to destruction. Thinking as he did of his cousin he could see no possible salvation for him. "Perhaps I should take him abroad," he said.

"Would he be better abroad than here?"

"He would have less opportunity for vice, and fewer means of running you into debt."

Lady Carbury, as she turned this counsel in her mind, thought of all the hopes which she had indulged,—her literary aspirations, her Tuesday evenings, her desire for society, her Brounes, her Alfs, and her Bookers, her pleasant drawing-room, and the determination which she had made that now in the afternoon of her days she would become somebody in the world. Must she give it all up and retire to the dreariness of some French town because it was no longer possible that she should live in London with such a son as hers? There seemed to be a cruelty in this beyond all cruelties that she had hitherto endured. This was harder even than those lies which had been told of her when almost in fear of her life she had run from her husband's house. But yet she must do even this if in no other way she and her son could be together. "Yes," she said, "I suppose it would be so. I only wish that I might die, so that were an end of it."

"He might go out to one of the Colonies," said Roger.

"Yes;—be sent away that he might kill himself with drink in the bush, and so be got rid of. I have heard of that before. Wherever he goes I shall go."

As the reader knows, Roger Carbury had not latterly held this cousin of his in much esteem. He knew her to be worldly and he thought her to be unprincipled. But now, at this moment, her exceeding love for the son whom she could no longer pretend to defend, wiped out all her sins. He forgot the visit made to Carbury under false pretences, and the Melmottes, and all the little tricks which he had detected, in his appreciation of an affection which was pure and beautiful. "If you like to let your house for a period," he said, "mine is open to you."

"But, Felix?"

"You shall take him there. I am all alone in the world. I can make a home for myself at the cottage. It is empty now. If you think that would save you you can try it for six months."

"And turn you out of your own house? No, Roger. I cannot do that. And, Roger;—what is to be done about Hetta?" Hetta herself had retreated, leaving Roger and her mother alone together, feeling sure that there would be questions asked and answered in her absence respecting Mrs. Hurtle, which her presence would prevent. She wished it could have been otherwise—that she might have been
allowed to hear it all herself—as she was sure that the story coming through her mother would not savour so completely of unalloyed truth as if told to her by her cousin Roger.

"Hetta can be trusted to judge for herself," he said.

"How can you say that when she has just accepted this young man? Is it not true that he is even now living with an American woman whom he has promised to marry?"

"No;—that is not true."

"What is true, then? Is he not engaged to the woman?"

Roger hesitated a moment. "I do know that even that is true. When last he spoke to me about it he declared that the engagement was at an end. I have told Hetta to ask himself. Let her tell him that she has heard of this woman from you, and that it behoves her to know the truth. I do not love him, Lady Carbury. He has no longer any place in my friendship. But I think that if Hetta asks him simply what is the nature of his connexion with Mrs. Hurtle, he will tell her the truth."

Roger did not again see Hetta before he left the house, nor did he see his cousin Felix at all. He had now done all that he could do by his journey up to London, and he returned on that day back to Carbury. Would it not be better for him, in spite of the protestations which he had made, to dismiss the whole family from his mind? There could be no other love for him. He must be desolate and alone. But he might then save himself from a world of cares, and might gradually teach himself to live as though there were no such woman as Hetta Carbury in the world. But no! He would not allow himself to believe that this could be right. The very fact of his love made it a duty to him,—made it almost the first of his duties,—to watch over the interests of her he loved and of those who belonged to her.

But among those so belonging he did not recognise Paul Montague.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

MARIE'S FORTUNE.

WHEN Marie Melmotté assured Sir Felix Carbury that her father had already endowed her with a large fortune which could not be taken from her without her own consent, she spoke no more than the truth. She knew of the matter almost as little as it was possible that she should know. As far as reticence on the subject was compatible with the object he had in view Melmotté had kept from her all knowledge of the details of the arrangement. But it had been necessary when the thing was done to explain, or to pretend to explain, much; and Marie's memory and also her intelligence had been strong beyond her father's anticipation. He was deriving a very consider-
able income from a large sum of money which he had invested in foreign funds in her name, and had got her to execute a power of attorney enabling him to draw this income on her behalf. This he had done fearing shipwreck in the course which he meant to run, and resolved that, let circumstances go as they might, there should still be left enough to him of the money which he had realised to enable him to live in comfort and luxury, should he be doomed to live in obscurity, or even in infamy. He had sworn to himself solemnly that under no circumstances would he allow this money to go back into the vortex of his speculations, and hitherto he had been true to his oath. Though bankruptcy and apparent ruin might be imminent he would not bolster up his credit by the use of this money even though it might appear at the moment that the money would be sufficient for the purpose. If such a day should come, then, with that certain income, he would make himself happy, if possible, or at any rate luxurious, in whatever city of the world might know least of his antecedents, and give him the warmest welcome on behalf of his wealth. Such had been his scheme of life. But he had failed to consider various circumstances. His daughter might be untrue to him, or in the event of her marriage might fail to release his property,—or it might be that the very money should be required to dower his daughter. Or there might come troubles on him so great that even the certainty of a future income would not enable him to bear them. Now, at this present moment, his mind was tortured by great anxiety. Were he to resume this property it would more than enable him to pay all that was due to the Longestaffes. It would do that and tide him for a time over some other difficulties. Now in regard to the Longestaffes themselves, he certainly had no desire to depart from the rule which he had made for himself, on their behalf. Were it necessary that a crash should come they would be as good creditors as any other. But then he was painfully alive to the fact that something beyond simple indebtedness was involved in that transaction. He had with his own hand traced Dolly Longestaffe’s signature on the letter which he had found in old Mr. Longestaffe’s drawer. He had found it in an envelope, addressed by the elder Mr. Longestaffe to Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, and he had himself posted this letter in a pillar-box near to his own house. In the execution of this manœuvre, circumstances had greatly befriended him. He had become the tenant of Mr. Longestaffe’s house, and at the same time had only been the joint tenant of Mr. Longestaffe’s study,—so that Mr. Longestaffe’s papers were almost in his very hands. To pick a lock was with him an accomplishment long since learned. But his science in that line did not go so far as to enable him to replace the bolt in its receptacle. He had picked a lock, had found the letter prepared by Mr. Bideawhile with its accompanying envelope, and had then already learned enough of the domestic circumstances of the Longestaffe family to feel assured that unless he could assist the expedition of this hitherto uncompleted letter by his own skill, the letter would never reach its intended destination. In all this fortune had in some degree befriended him. The circumstances being as they were it was hardly possible that the forgery should be discovered.
Even though the young man were to swear that the signature was not his, even though the old man were to swear that he had left that drawer properly locked with the unsigned letter in it, still there could be no evidence. People might think. People might speak. People might feel sure. And then a crash would come. But there would still be that ample fortune on which to retire and eat and drink and make merry for the rest of his days.

Then there came annoying complications in his affairs. What had been so easy in reference to that letter which Dolly Longestaffe never would have signed, was less easy but still feasible in another matter. Under the joint pressure of immediate need, growing ambition, and increasing audacity it had been done. Then the rumours that were spread abroad,—which to Melmotte were serious indeed,—they named, at any rate in reference to Dolly Longestaffe, the very thing that had been done. Now if that, or the like of that, were brought actually home to him, if twelve jurymen could be got to say that he had done that thing, of what use then would be all that money? When that fear arose, then there arose also the question whether it might not be well to use the money to save him from such ruin, if it might be so used. No doubt all danger in that Longestaffe affair might be bought off by payment of the price stipulated for the Pickering property. Neither would Dolly Longestaffe nor Squereum, of whom Mr. Melmotte had already heard, concern himself in this matter if the money claimed were paid. But then the money would be as good as wasted by such a payment, if, as he firmly believed, no sufficient evidence could be produced to prove the thing which he had done.

But the complications were so many! Perhaps in his admiration for the country of his adoption Mr. Melmotte had allowed himself to attach higher privileges to the British aristocracy than do in truth belong to them. He did in his heart believe that could he be known to all the world as the father-in-law of the eldest son of the Marquis of Auld Reekie he would become, not really free of the law, but almost safe from its fangs in regard to such an affair as this. He thought he could so use the family with which he would be connected as to force from it that protection which he would need. And then again, if he could tide over this bad time, how glorious would it be to have a British Marquis for his son-in-law! Like many others he had failed altogether to enquire when the pleasure to himself would come, or what would be its nature. But he did believe that such a marriage would add a charm to his life. Now he knew that Lord Nidderdale could not be got to marry his daughter without the positive assurance of absolute property, but he did think that the income which might thus be transferred with Marie, though it fell short of that which had been promised, might suffice for the time; and he had already given proof to the Marquis's lawyer that his daughter was possessed of the property in question.

And indeed, there was another complication which had arisen within the last few days and which had startled Mr. Melmotte very much indeed. On a certain morning he had sent for Marie to the study and had told her that he should require her signature in
reference to a deed. She had asked him what deed. He had replied that it would be a document regarding money and reminded her that she had signed such a deed once before, telling her that it was all in the way of business. It was not necessary that she should ask any more questions as she would be wanted only to sign the paper. Then Marie astounded him, not merely by showing him that she understood a great deal more of the transaction than he had thought,—but also by a positive refusal to sign anything at all. The reader may understand that there had been many words between them. "I know, papa. It is that you may have the money to do what you like with. You have been so unkind to me about Sir Felix Carbury that I won't do it. If I ever marry the money will belong to my husband!" His breath almost failed him as he listened to these words. He did not know whether to approach her with threats, with entreaties, or with blows. Before the interview was over he had tried all three. He had told her that he could and would put her in prison for conduct so fraudulent. He besought her not to ruin her parent by such monstrous perversity. And at last he took her by both arms and shook her violently. But Marie was quite firm. He might cut her to pieces; but she would sign nothing. "I suppose you thought Sir Felix would have had the entire sum," said the father with deriding scorn.

"And he would;—if he had the spirit to take it," answered Marie.

This was another reason for sticking to the Nidderdale plan. He would no doubt lose the immediate income, but in doing so he would secure the Marquis. He was therefore induced, on weighing in his nicest-balanced scales the advantages and disadvantages, to leave the Longestaffes unpaid and to let Nidderdale have the money. Not that he could make up his mind to such a course with any conviction that he was doing the best for himself. The dangers on all sides were very great! But at the present moment audacity recommended itself to him, and this was the boldest stroke. Marie had now said that she would accept Nidderdale,—or the sweep at the crossing.

On Monday morning,—it was on the preceding Thursday that he had made his famous speech in Parliament,—one of the Bideawhiles had come to him in the City. He had told Mr. Bideawhile that all the world knew that just at the present moment money was very "tight" in the City. "We are not asking for payment of a commercial debt," said Mr. Bideawhile, "but for the price of a considerable property which you have purchased." Mr. Melmotte had suggested that the characteristics of the money were the same, let the sum in question have become due how it might. Then he offered to make the payment in two bills at three and six months' date, with proper interest allowed. But this offer Mr. Bideawhile scouted with indignation, demanding that the title-deeds might be restored to them.

"You have no right whatever to demand the title-deeds," said Melmotte. "You can only claim the sum due, and I have already told you how I propose to pay it."
Mr. Bideawhile was nearly beside himself with dismay. In the whole course of his business, in all the records of the very respectable firm to which he belonged, there had never been such a thing as this. Of course Mr. Longestaffe had been the person to blame,—so at least all the Bideawhiles declared among themselves. He had been so anxious to have dealings with the man of money that he had insisted that the title-deeds should be given up. But then the title-deeds had not been his to surrender. The Pickering estate had been the joint property of him and his son. The house had been already pulled down, and now the purchaser offered bills in lieu of the purchase money! "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Melmotte, that you have not got the money to pay for what you have bought, and that nevertheless the title-deeds have already gone out of your hands?"

"I have property to ten times the value, twenty times the value," said Melmotte proudly; "but you must know I should think by this time that a man engaged in large affairs cannot always realise such a sum as eighty thousand pounds at a day's notice." Mr. Bideawhile without using language that was absolutely vituperative gave Mr. Melmotte to understand that he thought that he and his client had been robbed, and that he should at once take whatever severest steps the law put in his power. As Mr. Melmotte shrugged his shoulders and made no further reply, Mr. Bideawhile could only take his departure.

The attorney, although he was bound to be staunch to his own client, and to his own house in opposition to Mr. Squercum, nevertheless was becoming doubtful in his own mind as to the genuineness of the letter which Dolly was so persistent in declaring that he had not signed. Mr. Longestaffe himself, who was at any rate an honest man, had given it as his opinion that Dolly had not signed the letter. His son had certainly refused to sign it once, and as far as he knew could have had no opportunity of signing it since. He was all but sure that he had left the letter under lock and key in his own drawer in the room which had latterly become Melmotte's study as well as his own. Then, on entering the room in Melmotte's presence,—their friendship at the time having already ceased,—he found that his drawer was open. This same Mr. Bideawhile was with him at the time. "Do you mean to say that I have opened your drawer?" said Mr. Melmotte. Mr. Longestaffe had become very red in the face and had replied by saying that he certainly made no such accusation, but as certainly he had not left the drawer unlocked. He knew his own habits and was sure that he had never left that drawer open in his life. "Then you must have changed the habits of your life on this occasion," said Mr. Melmotte with spirit. Mr. Longestaffe would trust himself to no other word within the house, but, when they were out in the street together, he assured the lawyer that certainly that drawer had been left locked, and that to the best of his belief the letter unsigned had been left within the drawer. Mr. Bideawhile could only remark that it was the most unfortunate circumstance with which he had ever been concerned.

The marriage with Nidderdale would upon the whole be the best thing, if it could only be accomplished. The reader must understand
that though Mr. Melmotte had allowed himself considerable poetical licence in that statement as to property thirty times as great as the price which he ought to have paid for Pickering, still there was property. The man's speculations had been so great and so wide that he did not really know what he owned, or what he owed. But he did know that at the present moment he was driven very hard for large sums. His chief trust for immediate money was in Cohenlupe, in whose hands had really been the manipulation of the shares of the Mexican railway. He had trusted much to Cohenlupe,—more than it had been customary with him to trust to any man. Cohenlupe assured him that nothing could be done with the railway shares at the present moment. They had fallen under the panic almost to nothing. Now in the time of his trouble Melmotte wanted money from the great railway, but just because he wanted money the great railway was worth nothing. Cohenlupe told him that he must tide over the evil hour,—or rather over an evil month. It was at Cohenlupe's instigation that he had offered the two bills to Mr. Bideawhile. "Offer 'em again," said Cohenlupe. "He must take the bills sooner or later."

On the Monday afternoon Melmotte met Lord Nidderdale in the lobby of the House. "Have you seen Marie lately?" he said. Nidderdale had been assured that morning, by his father's lawyer, in his father's presence, that if he married Miss Melmotte at present he would undoubtedly become possessed of an income amounting to something over £5,000 a year. He had intended to get more than that,—and was hardly prepared to accept Marie at such a price; but then there probably would be more. No doubt there was a difficulty about Pickering. Melmotte certainly had been raising money. But this might probably be an affair of a few weeks. Melmotte had declared that Pickering should be made over to the young people at the marriage. His father had recommended him to get the girl to name a day. The marriage could be broken off at the last day if the property were not forthcoming.

"I'm going up to your house almost immediately," said Nidderdale.

"You'll find the women at tea to a certainty between five and six," said Melmotte.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

MELMOTTE MAKES A FRIEND.

"HAVE you been thinking any more about it?" Lord Nidderdale said to the girl as soon as Madame Melmotte had succeeded in leaving them alone together.

"I have thought over so much more about it," said Marie.

"And what's the result?"

"Oh,—I'll have you."

"That's right," said Nidderdale, throwing himself on the sofa close to her, so that he might put his arm round her waist.
“Wait a moment, Lord Nidderdale,” she said.
“You might as well call me John.”
“Then wait a moment,—John. You think you might as well marry me, though you don’t love me a bit.”
“That’s not true, Marie.”
“Yes it is;—it’s quite true. And I think just the same,—that I might as well marry you, though I don’t love you a bit.”
“But you will.”
“I don’t know. I don’t feel like it just at present. You had better know the exact truth you know. I have told my father that I did not think you’d ever come again, but that if you did I would accept you. But I’m not going to tell any stories about it. You know who I’ve been in love with.”
“But you can’t be in love with him now.”
“Why not? I can’t marry him. I know that. And if he were to come to me, I don’t think that I would. He has behaved bad.”
“Have I behaved bad?”
“Not like him. You never did care, and you never said you cared.”
“Oh yes,—I have.”
“Not at first. You say it now because you think that I shall like it. But it makes no difference now. I don’t mind about your arm being there if we are to be married, only it’s just as well for both of us to look on it as business.”
“How very hard you are, Marie.”
“No, I ain’t. I wasn’t hard to Sir Felix Carbury, and so I tell you. I did love him.”
“Surely you have found him out now.”
“Yes, I have,” said Marie. “He’s a poor creature.”
“He has just been thrashed, you know, in the streets,—most horribly.” Marie had not been told of this, and started back from her lover’s arms. “You hadn’t heard it?”
“Who has thrashed him?”
“I don’t want to tell the story against him, but they say he has been cut about in a terrible manner.”
“Why should anybody beat him? Did he do anything?”
“There was a young lady in the question, Marie.”
“A young lady! What young lady? I don’t believe it. But it’s nothing to me. I don’t care about anything, Lord Nidderdale;—not a bit. I suppose you’ve made up all that out of your own head.”
“Indeed, no. I believe he was beaten, and I believe it was about a young woman. But it signifies nothing to me, and I don’t suppose it signifies much to you. Don’t you think we might fix a day, Marie?”
“I don’t care the least,” said Marie. “The longer it’s put off the better I shall like it;—that’s all.”
“Because I’m so detestable?”
“No,—you ain’t detestable. I think you are a very good fellow; only you don’t care for me. But it is detestable not being able to do
what one wants. It's detestable having to quarrel with everybody and never to be good friends with anybody. And it's horribly detestable having nothing on earth to give one any interest."

"You couldn't take any interest in me?"

"Not the least."

"Suppose you try. Wouldn't you like to know anything about the place where we live?"

"It's a castle, I know."

"Yes;—Castle Reekie; ever so many hundred years old."

"I hate old places. I should like a new house, and a new dress, and a new horse every week,—and a new lover. Your father lives at the castle. I don't suppose we are to go and live there too."

"We shall be there sometimes. When shall it be?"

"The year after next."

"Nonsense, Marie."

"To-morrow."

"You wouldn't be ready."

"You may manage it all just as you like with papa. Oh, yes,—kiss me; of course you may. If I'm to belong to you what does it matter? No;—I won't say that I love you. But if ever I do say it, you may be sure it will be true. That's more than you can say of yourself,—John."

So the interview was over and Nidderdale walked back to the house thinking of his lady love, as far as he was able to bring his mind to any operation of thinking. He was fully determined to go on with it. As far as the girl herself was concerned, she had, in these latter days, become much more attractive to him than when he had first known her. She certainly was not a fool. And, though he could not tell himself that she was altogether like a lady, still she had a manner of her own which made him think that she would be able to live with ladies. And he did think that, in spite of all she said to the contrary, she was becoming fond of him,—as he certainly had become fond of her. "Have you been up with the ladies?" Melmotte asked him.

"Oh yes."

"And what does Marie say?"

"That you must fix the day."

"We'll have it very soon then;—some time next month. You'll want to get away in August. And to tell the truth so shall I. I never was worked so hard in my life as I've been this summer. The election and that horrid dinner had something to do with it. And I don't mind telling you that I've had a fearful weight on my mind in reference to money. I never had to find so many large sums in so short a time! And I'm not quite through it yet."

"I wonder why you gave the dinner then."

"My dear boy;—it was very pleasant to him to call the son of a marquis his dear boy,—" as regards expenditure that was a flea-bite. Nothing that I could spend myself would have the slightest effect upon my condition,—one way or the other."

"I wish it could be the same way with me," said Nidderdale.

"If you chose to go into business with me instead of taking Marie's
money out, it very soon would be so with you. But the burden is very great. I never know whence these panics arise, or why they come, or whither they go. But when they do come, they are like a storm at sea. It is only the strong ships that can stand the fury of the winds and waves. And then the buffeting which a man gets leaves him only half the man he was. I've had it very hard this time."

"I suppose you are getting right now."

"Yes;—I am getting right. I am not in any fear if you mean that. I don't mind telling you everything as it is settled now that you are to be Marie's husband. I know that you are honest, and that if you could hurt me by repeating what I say you wouldn't do it."

"Certainly I would not."

"You see I've no partner,—nobody that is bound to know my affairs. My wife is the best woman in the world, but is utterly unable to understand anything about it. Of course I can't talk freely to Marie. Cohenlupe whom you see so much with me is all very well,—in his way, but I never talk over my affairs with him. He is concerned with me in one or two things,—our American railway for instance, but he has no interest generally in my house. It is all on my own shoulders, and I can tell you the weight is a little heavy. It will be the greatest comfort to me in the world if I can get you to have an interest in the matter."

"I don't suppose I could ever really be any good at business," said the modest young lord.

"You wouldn't come and work, I suppose. I shouldn't expect that. But I should be glad to think that I could tell you how things are going on. Of course you heard all that was said just before the election. For forty-eight hours I had a very bad time of it then. The fact was that Alf and they who were supporting him thought that they could carry the election by running me down. They were at it for a fortnight,—perfectly unscrupulous as to what they said or what harm they might do me and others. I thought that very cruel. They couldn't get their man in, but they could and did have the effect of depreciating my property suddenly by nearly half a million of money. Think what that is!"

"I don't understand how it could be done."

"Because you don't understand how delicate a thing is credit. They persuaded a lot of men to stay away from that infernal dinner, and consequently it was spread about the town that I was ruined. The effect upon shares which I held was instantaneous and tremendous. The Mexican railway were at 117, and they fell from that in two days to something quite nominal,—so that selling was out of the question. Cohenlupe and I between us had about 8,000 of these shares. Think what that comes to!" Nidderdale tried to calculate what it did come to, but failed altogether. "That's what I call a blow;—a terrible blow. When a man is concerned as I am with money interests, and concerned largely with them all, he is of course exchanging one property for another every day of his life,—according as the markets go. I don't keep such a sum as that in one concern as an investment. Nobody does. Then when a panic comes, don't you see how it hits?"
"Will they never go up again?"
"Oh yes;—perhaps higher than ever. But it will take time. And in the meantime I am driven to fall back upon property intended for other purposes. That's the meaning of what you hear about that place down in Sussex which I bought for Marie. I was so driven that I was obliged to raise forty or fifty thousand wherever I could. But that will be all right in a week or two. And as for Marie's money,—that, you know, is settled."

He quite succeeded in making Nidderdale believe every word that he spoke, and he produced also a friendly feeling in the young man's bosom, with something approaching to a desire that he might be of service to his future father-in-law. Hazily, as through a thick fog, Lord Nidderdale thought that he did see something of the troubles, as he had long seen something of the glories, of commerce on an extended scale, and an idea occurred to him that it might be almost more exciting than whist or unlimited loo. He resolved too that whatever the man might tell him should never be divulged. He was on this occasion somewhat captivated by Melmotte, and went away from the interview with a conviction that the financier was a big man;—one with whom he could sympathise, and to whom in a certain way he could become attached.

And Melmotte himself had derived positive pleasure even from a simulated confidence in his son-in-law. It had been pleasant to him to talk as though he were talking to a young friend whom he trusted. It was impossible that he could really admit any one to a participation in his secrets. It was out of the question that he should ever allow himself to be betrayed into speaking the truth of his own affairs. Of course every word he had said to Nidderdale had been a lie, or intended to corroborate lies. But it had not been only on behalf of the lies that he had talked after this fashion. Even though his friendship with the young man were but a mock friendship,—though it would too probably be turned into bitter enmity before three months had passed by,—still there was a pleasure in it. The Grendalls had left him since the day of the dinner,—Miles having sent him a letter up from the country complaining of severe illness. It was a comfort to him to have someone to whom he could speak, and he much preferred Nidderdale to Miles Grendall.

This conversation took place in the smoking-room. When it was over Melmotte went into the House, and Nidderdale strolled away to the Bear-garden. The Bear-garden had been opened again though with difficulty, and with diminished luxury. Nor could even this be done without rigid laws as to the payment of ready money. Herr Vossner had never more been heard of, but the bills which Vossner had left unpaid were held to be good against the club, whereas every note of hand which he had taken from the members was left in the possession of Mr. Fleeceflat. Of course there was sorrow and trouble at the Bear-garden; but still the institution had become so absolutely necessary to its members that it had been reopened under a new management. No one had felt this need more strongly during every hour of the day,—of the day as he counted his days, rising as he did about an hour after noon and going to bed three or four hours after
midnight,—than did Dolly Longestaffe. The Bear-garden had become so much to him that he had begun to doubt whether life would be even possible without such a resort for his hours. But now the club was again open, and Dolly could have his dinner and his bottle of wine with the luxury to which he was accustomed.

But at this time he was almost mad with the sense of injury. Circumstances had held out to him a prospect of almost unlimited ease and indulgence. The arrangement made as to the Pickering estate would pay all his debts, would disem-barrass his own property, and would still leave him a comfortable sum in hand. Squercum had told him that if he would stick to his terms he would surely get them. He had stuck to his terms and he had got them. And now the property was sold, and the title-deeds gone,—and he had not received a penny! He did not know whom to be loudest in abusing,—his father, the Bideawhiles, or Mr. Melmotte. And then it was said that he had signed that letter! He was very open in his manner of talking about his misfortune at the club. His father was the most obstinate old fool that ever lived. As for the Bideawhiles,—he would bring an action against them. Squercum had explained all that to him. But Melmotte was the biggest rogue the world had ever produced. "By George! the world," he said, "must be coming to an end. There's that infernal scoundrel sitting in Parliament just as if he had not robbed me of my property, and forged my name, and,—and,—by George he ought to be hung. If any man ever deserved to be hung, that man deserves to be hung." This he spoke openly in the coffee-room of the club, and was still speaking as Nidderdale was taking his seat at one of the tables. Dolly had been dining, and had turned round upon his chair so as to face some half-dozen men whom he was addressing.

Nidderdale leaving his chair walked up to him very gently. "Dolly," said he, "do not go on in that way about Melmotte when I am in the room. I have no doubt you are mistaken, and so you'll find out in a day or two. You don't know Melmotte."

"Mistaken!" Dolly still continued to exclaim with a loud voice. "Am I mistaken in supposing that I haven't been paid my money?"

"I don't believe it has been owing very long."

"Am I mistaken in supposing that my name has been forged to a letter?"

"I am sure you are mistaken if you think that Melmotte had any-thing to do with it."

"Squercum says—"

"Never mind Squercum. We all know what are the suspicions of a fellow of that kind."

"I'd believe Squercum a deuced sight sooner than Melmotte."

"Look here, Dolly. I know more probably of Melmotte's affairs than you do or perhaps than anybody else. If it will induce you to remain quiet for a few days and to hold your tongue here,—I'll make myself responsible for the entire sum he owes you."

"The devil you will."

"I will indeed."
Nidderdale was endeavouring to speak so that only Dolly should hear him, and probably nobody else did hear him; but Dolly would not lower his voice. "That's out of the question, you know," he said. "How could I take your money? The truth is, Nidderdale, the man is a thief, and so you'll find out, sooner or later. He has broken open a drawer in my father's room and forged my name to a letter. Everybody knows it. Even my governor knows it now,— and Bideawhile. Before many days are over you'll find that he will be in gaol for forgery."

This was very unpleasant as every one knew that Nidderdale was either engaged or becoming engaged to Melmotte's daughter. "Since you will speak about it in this public way——" began Nidderdale.

"I think it ought to be spoken about in a public way," said Dolly.

"I deny it as publicly. I can't say anything about the letter except that I am sure Mr. Melmotte did not put your name to it. From what I understand there seems to have been some blunder between your father and his lawyer."

"That's true enough," said Dolly; "but it doesn't excuse Melmotte."

"As to the money, there can be no more doubt that it will be paid than that I stand here. What is it?—twenty-five thousand, isn't it?"

"Eighty thousand, the whole."

"Well,—eighty thousand. It's impossible to suppose that such a man as Melmotte shouldn't be able to raise eighty thousand pounds."

"Why don't he do it then?" asked Dolly.

All this was very unpleasant and made the club less social than it used to be in old days. There was an attempt that night to get up a game of cards; but Nidderdale would not play because he was offended with Dolly Longestaffe; and Miles Grendall was away in the country,—a fugitive from the face of Melmotte, and Carbury was in hiding at home with his countenance from top to bottom supported by plasters, and Montague in these days never went to the club. At the present moment he was again in Liverpool, having been summoned thither by Mr. Ramsbottom. "By George," said Dolly, as he filled another pipe and ordered more brandy and water, "I think everything is going to come to an end. I do indeed. I never heard of such a thing before as a man being done in this way. And then Vossner has gone off, and it seems everybody is to pay just what he says they owed him. And now one can't even get up a game of cards. I feel as though there were no good in hoping that things would ever come right again."

The opinion of the club was a good deal divided as to the matter in dispute between Lord Nidderdale and Dolly Longestaffe. It was admitted by some to be "very fishy." If Melmotte were so great a man why didn't he pay the money, and why should he have mortgaged the property before it was really his own? But the majority of the men thought that Dolly was wrong. As to the signature of the letter, Dolly was a man who would naturally be quite unable to
say what he had and what he had not signed. And then, even into the Bear-garden there had filtered, through the outer world, a feeling that people were not now bound to be so punctilious in the paying of money as they were a few years since. No doubt it suited Melmotte to make use of the money, and therefore,—as he had succeeded in getting the property into his hands,—he did make use of it. But it would be forthcoming sooner or later! In this way of looking at the matter the Bear-garden followed the world at large. The world at large, in spite of the terrible falling-off at the Emperor of China's dinner, in spite of all the rumours, in spite of the ruinous depreciation of the Mexican Railway stock, and of the undoubted fact that Dolly Longestaffe had not received his money, was inclined to think that Melmotte would "pull through."

CHAPTER LXXV.
IN BRUTON STREET.

MR. SQUERCUM all this time was in a perfect fever of hard work and anxiety. It may be said of him that he had been quite sharp enough to perceive the whole truth. He did really know it all,—if he could prove that which he knew. He had extended his enquiries in the city till he had convinced himself that, whatever wealth Melmotte might have had twelve months ago, there was not enough of it left at present to cover the liabilities. Squercum was quite sure that Melmotte was not a falling, but a fallen star,—perhaps not giving sufficient credence to the recuperative powers of modern commerce. Squercum told a certain stockbroker in the City, who was his specially confidential friend, that Melmotte was a "gone coon." The stockbroker made also some few enquiries, and on that evening agreed with Squercum that Melmotte was a "gone coon." If such were the case it would positively be the making of Squercum if it could be so managed that he should appear as the destroying angel of this offensive dragon. So Squercum raged among the Bideawhiles, who were unable altogether to shut their doors against him. They could not dare to bid defiance to Squercum,—feeling that they had themselves blundered, and feeling also that they must be careful not to seem to screen a fault by a falsehood. "I suppose you give it up about the letter having been signed by my client," said Squercum to the elder of the two younger Bideawhiles.

"I give up nothing and I assert nothing," said the superior attorney. "Whether the letter be genuine or not we had no reason to believe it to be otherwise. The young gentleman's signature is never very plain, and this one is about as like any other as that other would be like the last."

"Would you let me look at it again, Mr. Bideawhile." Then the letter which had been very often inspected during the last ten days
was handed to Mr. Squercum. "It's a stiff resemblance;—such as he never could have written had he tried it ever so."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Squercum. We are not generally on the look out for forgeries in letters from our clients or our clients' sons."

"Just so, Mr. Bideawhile. But then Mr. Longestaffe had already told you that his son would not sign the letter."

"How is one to know when and how and why a young man like that will change his purpose?"

"Just so, Mr. Bideawhile. But you see after such a declaration as that on the part of my client's father, the letter,—which is in itself a little irregular perhaps—"

"I don't know that it's irregular at all."

"Well;—it didn't reach you in a very confirmatory manner. We'll just say that. What Mr. Longestaffe can have been at to wish to give up his title-deeds without getting anything for them—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Squercum, but that's between Mr. Longestaffe and us."

"Just so;—but as Mr. Longestaffe and you jeopardised my client's property it is natural that I should make a few remarks. I think you'd have made a few remarks yourself, Mr. Bideawhile, if the case had been reversed. I shall bring the matter before the Lord Mayor, you know." To this Mr. Bideawhile said not a word. "And I think I understand you now that you do not intend to insist on the signature as being genuine."

"I say nothing about it, Mr. Squercum. I think you'll find it very hard to prove that it's not genuine."

"My client's oath, Mr. Bideawhile."

"I'm afraid your client is not always very clear as to what he does."

"I don't know what you mean by that, Mr. Bideawhile. I fancy that if I were to speak in that way of your client you would be very angry with me. Besides, what does it all amount to? Will the old gentleman say that he gave the letter into his son's hands, so that, even if such a freak should have come into my client's head, he could have signed it and sent it off? If I understand, Mr. Longestaffe says that he locked the letter up in a drawer in the very room which Melmotte occupied, and that he afterwards found the drawer open. It won't, I suppose, be alleged that my client knew so little what he was about that he broke open the drawer in order that he might get at the letter. Look at it whichever way you will, he did not sign it, Mr. Bideawhile."

"I have never said he did. All I say is that we had fair ground for supposing that it was his letter. I really don't know that I can say anything more."

"Only that we are to a certain degree in the same boat together in this matter."

"I won't admit even that, Mr. Squercum."

"The difference being that your client by his fault has jeopardised his own interests and those of my client, while my client has not been in fault at all. I shall bring the matter forward before the Lord Mayor to-morrow, and as at present advised shall ask for an investi-
gation with reference to a charge of fraud. I presume you will be served with a subpoena to bring the letter into court."

"If so you may be sure that we shall produce it." Then Mr. Squercum took his leave and went straight away to Mr. Bumby, a barrister well known in the City. The game was too powerful to be hunted down by Mr. Squercum's unassisted hands. He had already seen Mr. Bumby on the matter more than once. Mr. Bumby was inclined to doubt whether it might not be better to get the money, or some guarantee for the money. Mr. Bumby thought that if a bill at three months could be had for Dolly's share of the property it might be expedient to take it. Mr. Squercum suggested that the property itself might be recovered, no genuine sale having been made. Mr. Bumby shook his head. "Title-deeds give possession, Mr. Squercum. You don't suppose that the company which has lent money to Melmotte on the title deeds would have to lose it. Take the bill; and if it is dishonoured run your chance of what you'll get out of the property. There must be assets."

"Every rap will have been made over," said Mr. Squercum.

This took place on the Monday, the day on which Melmotte had offered his full confidence to his proposed son-in-law. On the following Wednesday three gentlemen met together in the study in the house in Bruton Street from which it was supposed that the letter had been abstracted. There were Mr. Longestaffe, the father, Dolly Longestaffe, and Mr. Bideawhile. The house was still in Melmotte's possession, and Melmotte and Mr. Longestaffe were no longer on friendly terms. Direct application for permission to have this meeting in this place had been formally made to Mr. Melmotte, and he had complied. The meeting took place at eleven o'clock—a terribly early hour. Dolly had at first hesitated as to placing himself as he thought between the fire of two enemies, and Mr. Squercum had told him that as the matter would probably soon be made public, he could not judiciously refuse to meet his father and the old family lawyer. Therefore Dolly had attended, at great personal inconvenience to himself. "By George, it's hardly worth having if one is to take all this trouble about it," Dolly had said to Lord Grasslough, with whom he had fraternised since the quarrel with Nidderdale. Dolly entered the room last, and at that time neither Mr. Longestaffe nor Mr. Bideawhile had touched the drawer, or even the table, in which the letter had been deposited.

"Now, Mr. Longestaffe," said Mr. Bideawhile, "perhaps you will show us where you think you put the letter."

"I don't think at all," said he. "Since the matter has been discussed the whole thing has come back upon my memory."

"I never signed it," said Dolly, standing with his hands in his pockets and interrupting his father.

"Nobody says you did, sir," rejoined the father with an angry voice. "If you will condescend to listen we may perhaps arrive at the truth."

"But somebody has said that I did. I've been told that Mr. Bideawhile says so."

"No, Mr. Longestaffe; no. We have never said so. We have
only said that we had no reason for supposing the letter to be other than genuine. We have never gone beyond that."

"Nothing on earth would have made me sign it," said Dolly. "Why should I have given my property up before I got my money? I never heard such a thing in my life."

The father looked up at the lawyer and shook his head, testifying as to the hopelessness of his son's obstinacy. "Now, Mr. Longstaffe," continued the lawyer, "let us see where you put the letter."

Then the father very slowly, and with much dignity of deportment, opened the drawer,—the second drawer from the top, and took from it a bundle of papers very carefully folded and docketed. "There," said he, "the letter was not placed in the envelope but on the top of it, and the two were the two first documents in the bundle." He went on to say that as far as he knew no other paper had been taken away. He was quite certain that he had left the drawer locked. He was very particular in regard to that particular drawer, and he remembered that about this time Mr. Melmotte had been in the room with him when he had opened it, and,—as he was certain,—had locked it again. At that special time there had been, he said, considerable intimacy between him and Melmotte. It was then that Mr. Melmotte had offered him a seat at the Board of the Mexican railway.

"Of course he picked the lock, and stole the letter," said Dolly. "It's as plain as a pike-staff. It's clear enough to hang any man."

"I am afraid that it falls short of evidence, however strong and just may be the suspicion induced," said the lawyer. "Your father for a time was not quite certain about the letter."

"He thought that I had signed it," said Dolly. "I am quite certain now," rejoined the father angrily. "A man has to collect his memory before he can be sure of anything."

"I am thinking you know how it would go to a jury."

"What I want to know is how we are to get the money," said Dolly. "I should like to see him hung,—of course; but I'd sooner have the money. Squercum says—"

"Adolphus, we don't want to know here what Mr. Squercum says."

"I don't know why what Mr. Squercum says shouldn't be as good as what Mr. Bideawhile says. Of course Squercum doesn't sound very aristocratic."

"Quite as much so as Bideawhile, no doubt," said the lawyer laughing.

"No; Squercum isn't aristocratic, and Fetter Lane is a good deal lower than Lincoln's Inn. Nevertheless Squercum may know what he's about; it was Squercum who was first down upon Melmotte in this matter, and if it wasn't for Squercum we shouldn't know as much about it as we do at present." Squercum's name was odious to the elder Longstaffe. He believed, probably without much reason, that all his family troubles came to him from Squercum, thinking that if his son would have left his affairs in the hands of the old Slows and the old Bideawhiles, money would never have been scarce with him, and that he would not have made this terrible blunder about the Pickering property. And the sound of Squercum, as his son knew,
was horrid to his ears. He hummed and hawed, and fumed and fretted about the room, shaking his head and frowning. His son looked at him as though quite astonished at his displeasure. "There's nothing more to be done here, sir, I suppose," said Dolly putting on his hat.

"Nothing more," said Mr. Bideawhile. "It may be that I shall have to instruct counsel, and I thought it well that I should see in the presence of both of you exactly how the thing stood. You speak so positively, Mr. Longestaff, that there can be no doubt?"

"There is no doubt."

"And now perhaps you had better lock the drawer in our presence. Stop a moment—I might as well see whether there is any sign of violence having been used." So saying Mr. Bideawhile knelt down in front of the table and began to examine the lock. This he did very carefully and satisfied himself that there was "no sign of violence."

"Whoever has done it, did it very well," said Bideawhile.

"Of course Melmotte did it," said Dolly Longestaffe standing immediately over Bideawhile's shoulder.

At that moment there was a knock at the door,—a very distinct, and, we may say, a formal knock. There are those who knock and immediately enter without waiting for the sanction asked. Had he who knocked done so on this occasion Mr. Bideawhile would have been found still on his knees, with his nose down to the level of the keyhole. But the intruder did not intrude rapidly, and the lawyer jumped on to his feet, almost upsetting Dolly with the effort. There was a pause, during which Mr. Bideawhile moved away from the table,—as he might have done had he been picking a lock;—and then Mr. Longestaffe bade the stranger come in with a sepulchral voice. The door was opened, and Mr. Melmotte appeared.

Now Mr. Melmotte's presence certainly had not been expected. It was known that it was his habit to be in the City at this hour. It was known also that he was well aware that this meeting was to be held in this room at this special hour,—and he might well have surmised with what view. There was now declared hostility between both the Longestaffes and Mr. Melmotte, and it certainly was supposed by all the gentlemen concerned that he would not have put himself out of the way to meet them on this occasion. "Gentlemen," he said, "perhaps you think that I am intruding at the present moment." No one said that he did not think so. The elder Longestaffe simply bowed very coldly. Mr. Bideawhile stood upright and thrust his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets. Dolly, who at first forgot to take his hat off, whistled a bar, and then turned a pirouette on his heel. That was his mode of expressing his thorough surprise at the appearance of his debtor. "I fear that you do think I am intruding," said Melmotte, "but I trust that what I have to say will be held to excuse me. I see, sir," he said, turning to Mr. Longestaffe, and glancing at the still open drawer, "that you have been examining your desk. I hope that you will be more careful in locking it than you were when you left it before."

"The drawer was locked when I left it," said Mr. Longestaffe. "I make no deductions and draw no conclusions, but the drawer was locked."
"I MIGHT AS WELL SEE WHETHER THERE IS ANY SIGN OF VIOLENCE HAVING BEEN USED."
"Then I should say it must have been locked when you returned to it."

"No, sir, I found it open. I make no deductions and draw no conclusions,—but I left it locked and I found it open."

"I should make a deduction and draw a conclusion," said Dolly; "and that would be that somebody else had opened it."

"This can answer no purpose at all," said Bideawhile.

"It was but a chance remark," said Melmotte. "I did not come here out of the City at very great personal inconvenience to myself to squabble about the lock of the drawer. As I was informed that you three gentlemen would be here together, I thought the opportunity a suitable one for meeting you and making you an offer about this unfortunate business." He paused a moment; but neither of the three spoke. It did occur to Dolly to ask them to wait while he should fetch Squercum; but on second thoughts he reflected that a great deal of trouble would have to be taken, and probably for no good. "Mr. Bideawhile I believe," suggested Melmotte; and the lawyer bowed his head. "If I remember rightly I wrote to you offering to pay the money due to your clients——"

"Squercum is my lawyer," said Dolly.

"That will make no difference."

"It makes a deal of difference," said Dolly.

"I wrote," continued Melmotte, "offering my bills at three and six months' date."

"They couldn't be accepted, Mr. Melmotte."

"I would have allowed interest. I never have had my bills refused before."

"You must be aware, Mr. Melmotte," said the lawyer, "that the sale of a property is not like an ordinary mercantile transaction in which bills are customarily given and taken. The understanding was that money should be paid in the usual way. And when we learned, as we did learn, that the property had been at once mortgaged by you, of course we became,—well, I think I may be justified in saying more than suspicious. It was a most,—most—unusual proceeding. You say you have another offer to make, Mr. Melmotte."

"Of course I have been short of money. I have had enemies whose business it has been for some time past to run down my credit, and, with my credit, has fallen the value of stocks in which it has been known that I have been largely interested. I tell you the truth openly. When I purchased Pickering I had no idea that the payment of such a sum of money could inconvenience me in the least. When the time came at which I should pay it, stocks were so depreciated that it was impossible to sell. Very hostile proceedings are threatened against me now. Accusations are made, false as hell,"—Mr. Melmotte as he spoke raised his voice and looked round the room,—"but which at the present crisis may do me most cruel damage. I have come to say that, if you will undertake to stop proceedings which have been commenced in the City, I will have fifty thousand pounds,—which is the amount due to these two gentlemen,—ready for payment on Friday at noon."

"I have taken no proceedings as yet," said Bideawhile.
"It's Squercum," says Dolly.

"Well, sir," continued Melmotte addressing Dolly, "let me assure you that if these proceedings are stayed the money will be forthcoming;—but if not, I cannot produce the money. I little thought two months ago that I should ever have to make such a statement in reference to such a sum as fifty thousand pounds. But so it is. To raise that money by Friday, I shall have to cripple my resources frightfully. It will be done at a terrible cost. But what Mr. Bideawhile says is true. I have no right to suppose that the purchase of this property should be looked upon as an ordinary commercial transaction. The money should have been paid,—and, if you will now take my word, the money shall be paid. But this cannot be done if I am made to appear before the Lord Mayor to-morrow. The accusations brought against me are damnably false. I do not know with whom they have originated. Whoever did originate them, they are damnably false. But unfortunately, false as they are, in the present crisis, they may be ruinous to me. Now gentlemen, perhaps you will give me an answer."

Both the father and the lawyer looked at Dolly. Dolly was in truth the accuser through the mouthpiece of his attorney Squercum. It was at Dolly's instance that these proceedings were being taken.

"I, on behalf of my client," said Mr. Bideawhile, "will consent to wait till Friday at noon."

"I presume, Adolphus, that you will say as much," said the elder Longestaffe.

Dolly Longestaffe was certainly not an impressionable person, but Melmotte's eloquence had moved even him. It was not that he was sorry for the man, but that at the present moment he believed him. Though he had been absolutely sure that Melmotte had forged his name or caused it to be forged,—and did not now go so far into the matter as to abandon that conviction,—he had been talked into crediting the reasons given for Melmotte's temporary distress, and also into a belief that the money would be paid on Friday. Something of the effect which Melmotte's false confessions had had upon Lord Nidderdale, they now also had on Dolly Longestaffe. "I'll ask Squercum, you know," he said.

"Of course Mr. Squercum will act as you instruct him," said Bideawhile.

"I'll ask Squercum. I'll go to him at once. I can't do any more than that. And upon my word, Mr. Melmotte, you've given me a great deal of trouble."

Melmotte with a smile apologized. Then it was settled that they three should meet in that very room on Friday at noon, and that the payment should then be made,—Dolly stipulating that as his father would be attended by Bideawhile, so would he be attended by Squercum. To this Mr. Longestaffe senior yielded with a very bad grace.
CHAPTER LXXVI.

LADY CARBURY was at this time so miserable in regard to her son that she found herself unable to be active as she would otherwise have been in her endeavours to separate Paul Montague and her daughter. Roger had come up to town and given his opinion, very freely at any rate with regard to Sir Felix. But Roger had immediately returned to Suffolk, and the poor mother in want of assistance and consolation turned naturally to Mr. Broune, who came to see her for a few minutes almost every evening. It had now become almost a part of Mr. Broune’s life to see Lady Carbury once in the day. She told him of the two propositions which Roger had made: first, that she should fix her residence in some second-rate French or German town, and that Sir Felix should be made to go with her; and, secondly, that she should take possession of Carbury manor for six months. “And where would Mr. Carbury go?” asked Mr. Broune.

“He’s so good that he doesn’t care what he does with himself. There’s a cottage on the place, he says, that he would move to.” Mr. Broune shook his head. Mr. Broune did not think that an offer so quixotically generous as this should be accepted. As to the German or French town, Mr. Broune said that the plan was no doubt feasible, but he doubted whether the thing to be achieved was worth the terrible sacrifice demanded. He was inclined to think that Sir Felix should go to the colonies. “That he might drink himself to death,” said Lady Carbury, who now had no secrets from Mr. Broune. Sir Felix in the mean time was still in the doctor’s hands up-stairs. He had no doubt been very severely thrashed, but there was not in truth very much ailing him beyond the cuts on his face. He was, however, at the present moment better satisfied to be an invalid than to have to come out of his room and to meet the world. “As to Melmotte,” said Mr. Broune, “they say now that he is in some terrible mess which will ruin him and all who have trusted him.”

“And the girl?”

“It is impossible to understand it all. Melmotte was to have been summoned before the Lord Mayor to-day on some charge of fraud;—but it was postponed. And I was told this morning that Nidderdale still means to marry the girl. I don’t think anybody knows the truth about it. We shall hold our tongue about him till we really do know something.” The “we” of whom Mr. Broune spoke was, of course, the “Morning Breakfast Table.”

But in all this there was nothing about Hetta. Hetta, however, thought very much of her own condition, and found herself driven to take some special step by the receipt of two letters from her lover, written to her from Liverpool. They had never met since she had confessed her love to him. The first letter she did not at once answer, as she was at that moment waiting to hear what Roger Carbury would say
about Mrs. Hurtle. Roger Carbury had spoken, leaving a conviction on her mind that Mrs. Hurtle was by no means a fiction,—but indeed a fact very injurious to her happiness. Then Paul's second love-letter had come, full of joy, and love, and contentment,—with not a word in it which seemed to have been in the slightest degree influenced by the existence of a Mrs. Hurtle. Had there been no Mrs. Hurtle, the letter would have been all that Hetta could have desired; and she could have answered it, unless forbidden by her mother, with all a girl's usual enthusiastic affection for her chosen lord. But it was impossible that she should now answer it in that strain;—and it was equally impossible that she should leave such letters unanswered. Roger had told her to "ask himself;" and she now found herself constrained to bid him either come to her and answer the question, or, if he thought it better, to give her some written account of Mrs. Hurtle,—so that she might know who the lady was, and whether the lady's condition did in any way interfere with her own happiness. So she wrote to Paul, as follows:—

"Welbeck Street, 16th July, 18—.

"My dear Paul." She found that after that which had passed between them she could not call him "My dear Sir," or "My dear Mr. Montague," and that it must either be "Sir" or "My dear Paul." He was dear to her,—very dear; and she thought that he had not been as yet convicted of any conduct bad enough to force her to treat him as an outcast. Had there been no Mrs. Hurtle he would have been her "Dearest Paul,"—but she made her choice, and so commenced.

"My dear Paul,

"A strange report has come round to me about a lady called Mrs. Hurtle. I have been told that she is an American lady living in London, and that she is engaged to be your wife. I cannot believe this. It is too horrid to be true. But I fear,—I fear there is something true that will be very very sad for me to hear. It was from my brother I first heard it,—who was of course bound to tell me anything he knew. I have talked to mamma about it, and to my cousin Roger. I am sure Roger knows it all;—but he will not tell me. He said,—'Ask himself.' And so I ask you. Of course I can write about nothing else till I have heard about this. I am sure I need not tell you that it has made me very unhappy. If you cannot come and see me at once, you had better write. I have told mamma about this letter." Then came the difficulty of the signature, with the declaration which must naturally be attached to it. After some hesitation she subscribed herself,

"Your affectionate friend,

"Henrietta Carbury."

"Most affectionately your own Hetta" would have been the form in which she would have wished to finish the first letter she had ever written to him.

Paul received it at Liverpool on the Wednesday morning, and on the Wednesday evening he was in Welbeck Street. He had been quite aware that it had been incumbent on him to tell her thewhole
history of Mrs. Hurtle. He had meant to keep back—almost nothing. But it had been impossible for him to do so on that one occasion on which he had pleaded his love to her successfully. Let any reader who is intelligent in such matters say whether it would have been possible for him then to have commenced the story of Mrs. Hurtle and to have told it to the bitter end. Such a story must be postponed for a second or a third interview. Or it may, indeed, be communicated by letter. When Paul was called away to Liverpool he did consider whether he should write the story. But there are many reasons strong against such written communications. A man may desire that the woman he loves should hear the record of his folly,—so that, in after days, there may be nothing to be detected; so that, should the Mrs. Hurtle of his life at any time intrude upon his happiness, he may with a clear brow and undaunted heart say to his beloved one,—"Ah, this is the trouble of which I spoke to you." And then he and his beloved one will be in one cause together. But he hardly wishes to supply his beloved one with a written record of his folly. And then who does not know how much tenderness a man may show to his own faults by the tone of his voice, by half-spoken sentences, and by an admixture of words of love for the lady who has filled up the vacant space once occupied by the Mrs. Hurtle of his romance? But the written record must go through from beginning to end, self-accusing, thoroughly perspicuous, with no sweet, soft falsehoods hidden under the half-expressed truth. The soft falsehoods which would be sweet as the scent of violets in a personal interview, would stand in danger of being denounced as deceit added to deceit, if sent in a letter. I think therefore that Paul Montague did quite right in hurrying up to London.

He asked for Miss Carbury, and when told that Miss Henrietta was with her mother, he sent his name up and said that he would wait in the dining-room. He had thoroughly made up his mind to this course. They should know that he had come at once; but he would not, if it could be helped, make his statement in the presence of Lady Carbury. Then, up-stairs, there was a little discussion. Hetta pleaded her right to see him alone. She had done what Roger had advised, and had done it with her mother's consent. Her mother might be sure that she would not again accept her lover till this story of Mrs. Hurtle had been sifted to the very bottom. But she must herself hear what her lover had to say for himself. Felix was at the time in the drawing-room and suggested that he should go down and see Paul Montague on his sister's behalf;—but his mother looked at him with scorn, and his sister quietly said that she would rather see Mr. Montague herself. Felix had been so cowed by circumstances that he did not say another word, and Hetta left the room alone.

When she entered the parlour Paul stept forward to take her in his arms. That was a matter of course. She knew it would be so, and she had prepared herself for it. "Paul," she said, "let me hear about all this—first." She sat down at some distance from him,—and he found himself compelled to seat himself at some little distance from her.

"And so you have heard of Mrs. Hurtle," he said, with a faint attempt at a smile.
"Yes;—Felix told me, and Roger evidently had heard about her."
"Oh yes; Roger Carbury has heard about her from the beginning;—knows the whole story almost as well as I know it myself. I don't think your brother is as well informed."
"Perhaps not. But—isn't it a story that—concerns me?"
"Certainly it so far concerns you, Hetta, that you ought to know it. And I trust you will believe that it was my intention to tell it you."
"I will believe anything that you will tell me."
"If so, I don't think that you will quarrel with me when you know all. I was engaged to marry Mrs. Hurtle."
"Is she a widow?"—He did not answer this at once. "I suppose she must be a widow if you were going to marry her."
"Yes;—she is a widow. She was divorced."
"Oh, Paul! And she is an American?"
"Yes."
"And you loved her?"
Montague was desirous of telling his own story, and did not wish to be interrogated. "If you will allow me I will tell it you all from beginning to end."
"Oh, certainly. But I suppose you loved her. If you meant to marry her you must have loved her." There was a frown upon Hetta's brow and a tone of anger in her voice which made Paul uneasy.
"Yes;—I loved her once; but I will tell you all." Then he did tell his story, with a repetition of which the reader need not be detained. Hetta listened with fair attention,—not interrupting very often, though when she did interrupt, the little words which she spoke were bitter enough. But she heard the story of the long journey across the American continent, of the ocean journey before the end of which Paul had promised to make this woman his wife. "Had she been divorced then?" asked Hetta,—"because I believe they get themselves divorced just when they like." Simple as the question was he could not answer it. "I could only know what she told me," he said, as he went on with his story. Then Mrs. Hurtle had gone on to Paris, and he, as soon as he reached Carbury, had revealed everything to Roger. "Did you give her up then?" demanded Hetta with stern severity. No,—not then. He had gone back to San Francisco, and,—he had not intended to say that the engagement had been renewed, but he was forced to acknowledge that it had not been broken off. Then he had written to her on his second return to England,—and then she had appeared in London at Mrs. Pipkin's lodgings in Islington. "I can hardly tell you how terrible that was to me," he said, "for I had by that time become quite aware that my happiness must depend upon you." He tried the gentle, soft falsehoods that should have been as sweet as violets. Perhaps they were sweet. It is odd how stern a girl can be, while her heart is almost breaking with love. Hetta was very stern.
"But Felix says you took her to Lowestoft,—quite the other day."
Montague had intended to tell all,—almost all. There was a something about the journey to Lowestoft which it would be impossible to make Hetta understand, and he thought that that might be omitted. "It was on account of her health."
“You had better go back to Mrs. Hurtle.”
"Oh;—on account of her health. And did you go to the play with her?"
"I did."
"Was that for her—health?"
"Oh, Hetta, do not speak to me like that! Cannot you under-
stand that when she came here, following me, I could not desert her?"
"I cannot understand why you deserted her at all," said Hetta.
"You say you loved her, and you promised to marry her. It seems
horrid to me to marry a divorced woman,—a woman who just says
that she was divorced. But that is because I don't understand
American ways. And I am sure you must have loved her when you
took her to the theatre, and down to Lowestoft,—for her health.
That was only a week ago."
"It was nearly three weeks," said Paul in despair.
"Oh;—nearly three weeks! That is not such a very long time for
a gentleman to change his mind on such a matter. You were engaged
to her, not three weeks ago."
"No, Hetta, I was not engaged to her then."
"I suppose she thought you were when she went to Lowestoft
with you."
"She wanted then to force me to—to—to. Oh, Hetta, it is so
hard to explain, but I am sure that you understand. I do know that
you do not, cannot think that I have, even for one moment, been false
to you."
"But why should you be false to her? Why should I step in and
crush all her hopes? I can understand that Roger should think
badly of her because she was—divorced. Of course he would. But
an engagement is an engagement. You had better go back to
Mrs. Hurtle and tell her that you are quite ready to keep your
promise."
"She knows now that it is all over."
"I dare say you will be able to persuade her to reconsider it.
When she came all the way here from San Francisco after you, and
when she asked you to take her to the theatre, and to Lowestoft—
because of her health, she must be very much attached to you. And
she is waiting here,—no doubt on purpose for you. She is a very
old friend,—very old,—and you ought not to treat her unkindly.
Good bye, Mr. Montague. I think you had better lose no time in
going—back to Mrs. Hurtle." All this she said with sundry little
impedimentary gurgles in her throat, but without a tear and without
any sign of tenderness.
"You don't mean to tell me, Hetta, that you are going to quarrel
with me!"
"I don't know about quarrelling. I don't wish to quarrel with
any one. But of course we can't be friends when you have married
—Mrs. Hurtle."
"Nothing on earth would induce me to marry her."
"Of course I cannot say anything about that. When they told
me this story I did not believe them. No; I hardly believed Roger
when,—he would not tell it for he was too kind,—but when he would
not contradict it. It seemed to be almost impossible that you should
have come to me just at the very same moment. For, after all,
Mr. Montague, nearly three weeks is a very short time. That trip to Lowestoft couldn’t have been much above a week before you came to me.”

“'What does it matter?’"

“'Oh no; of course not;—nothing to you. I think I will go away now, Mr. Montague. It was very good of you to come and tell me all. It makes it so much easier.’"

“'Do you mean to say that—you are going to—throw me over?’"

“I don’t want you to throw Mrs. Hurtle over. Good bye.”

“'Hetta!’"

“No; I will not have you lay your hand upon me. Good night, Mr. Montague.” And so she left him.

Paul Montague was beside himself with dismay as he left the house. He had never allowed himself for a moment to believe that this affair of Mrs. Hurtle would really separate him from Hetta Carbury. If she could only really know it all, there could be no such result. He had been true to her from the first moment in which he had seen her, never swerving from his love. It was to be supposed that he had loved some woman before; but, as the world goes, that would not, could not, affect her. But her anger was founded on the presence of Mrs. Hurtle in London,—which he would have given half his possessions to have prevented. But when she did come, was he to have refused to see her? Would Hetta have wished him to be cold and cruel like that? No doubt he had behaved badly to Mrs. Hurtle;—but that trouble he had overcome. And now Hetta was quarrelling with him, though he certainly had never behaved badly to her.

He was almost angry with Hetta as he walked home. Everything that he could do he had done for her. For her sake he had quarrelled with Roger Carbury. For her sake,—in order that he might be effectually free from Mrs. Hurtle,—he had determined to endure the spring of the wild cat. For her sake,—so he told himself,—he had been content to abide by that odious railway company, in order that he might if possible preserve an income on which to support her. And now she told him that they must part,—and that only because he had not been cruelly indifferent to the unfortunate woman who had followed him from America. There was no logic in it, no reason,—and, as he thought, very little heart. “I don’t want you to throw Mrs. Hurtle over,” she had said. Why should Mrs. Hurtle be anything to her? Surely she might have left Mrs. Hurtle to fight her own battles. But they were all against him. Roger Carbury, Lady Carbury, and Sir Felix; and the end of it would be that she would be forced into marriage with a man almost old enough to be her father! She could not ever really have loved him. That was the truth. She must be incapable of such love as was his own for her. True love always forgives. And here there was really so very little to forgive! Such were his thoughts as he went to bed that night. But he probably omitted to ask himself whether he would have forgiven her very readily had he found that she had been living “nearly three weeks ago” in close intercourse with another lover of whom he had hitherto never even heard the name. But then,—as all the world knows,—there is a wide difference between young men and young women!
Hetta, as soon as she had dismissed her lover, went up at once to her own room. Thither she was soon followed by her mother, whose anxious ear had heard the closing of the front door. "Well; what has he said?" asked Lady Carbury. Hetta was in tears,—or very nigh to tears,—struggling to repress them, and struggling almost successfully. "You have found that what we told you about that woman was all true."

"Enough of it was true," said Hetta, who, angry as she was with her lover, was not on that account less angry with her mother for disturbing her bliss.

"What do you mean by that, Hetta? Had you not better speak to me openly?"

"I say, mamma, that enough was true. I do not know how to speak more openly. I need not go into all the miserable story of the woman. He is like other men, I suppose. He has entangled himself with some abominable creature and then when he is tired of her thinks that he has nothing to do but to say so,—and to begin with somebody else."

"Roger Carbury is very different."

"Oh, mamma, you will make me ill if you go on like that. It seems to me that you do not understand in the least."

"I say he is not like that."

"Not in the least. Of course I know that he is not in the least like that."

"I say that he can be trusted."

"Of course he can be trusted. Who doubts it?"

"And that if you would give yourself to him, there would be no cause for any alarm."

"Mamma," said Hetta jumping up, "how can you talk to me in that way? As soon as one man doesn't suit, I am to give myself to another! Oh, mamma, how can you propose it? Nothing on earth will ever induce me to be more to Roger Carbury than I am now."

"You have told Mr. Montague that he is not to come here again?"

"I don't know what I told him, but he knows very well what I mean."

"That it is all over?" Hetta made no reply. "Hetta, I have a right to ask that, and I have a right to expect a reply. I do not say that you have hitherto behaved badly about Mr. Montague."

"I have not behaved badly. I have told you everything. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of."

"But we have now found out that he has behaved very badly. He has come here to you,—with unexampled treachery to your cousin Roger—-"

"I deny that," exclaimed Hetta.

"And at the very time was almost living with this woman who says that she is divorced from her husband in America! Have you told him that you will see him no more?"

"He understood that."

"If you have not told him so plainly, I must tell him."

"Mamma, you need not trouble yourself. I have told him very plainly." Then Lady Carbury expressed herself satisfied for the moment, and left her daughter to her solitude.
CHAPTER LXXVII.

ANOTHER SCENE IN BRUTON STREET.

WHEN Mr. Melmotte made his promise to Mr. Longestaffe and to Dolly, in the presence of Mr. Bideawhile, that he would, on the next day but one, pay to them a sum of fifty thousand pounds, thereby completing, satisfactorily as far as they were concerned, the purchase of the Pickering property, he intended to be as good as his word. The reader knows that he had resolved to face the Longestaffe difficulty,—that he had resolved that at any rate he would not get out of it by sacrificing the property to which he had looked forward as a safe haven when storms should come. But, day by day, every resolution that he made was forced to undergo some change. Latterly he had been intent on purchasing a noble son-in-law with this money,—still trusting to the chapter of chances for his future escape from the Longestaffe and other difficulties. But Squereum had been very hard upon him; and in connexion with this accusation as to the Pickering property, there was another, which he would be forced to face also, respecting certain property in the East of London, with which the reader need not much trouble himself specially, but in reference to which it was stated that he had induced a foolish old gentleman to consent to accept railway shares in lieu of money. The old gentleman had died during the transaction, and it was asserted that the old gentleman’s letter was hardly genuine. Melmotte had certainly raised between twenty and thirty thousand pounds on the property, and had made payments for it in stock which was now worth—almost nothing at all. Melmotte thought that he might face this matter successfully if the matter came upon him single-handed; —but in regard to the Longestaffes he considered that now, at this last moment, he had better pay for Pickering.

The property from which he intended to raise the necessary funds was really his own. There could be no doubt about that. It had never been his intention to make it over to his daughter. When he had placed it in her name, he had done so simply for security,—feeling that his control over his only daughter would be perfect and free from danger. No girl apparently less likely to take it into her head to defraud her father could have crept quietly about a father’s house. Nor did he now think that she would disobey him when the matter was explained to her. Heavens and earth! That he should be robbed by his own child,—robbed openly, shamefully, with brazen audacity! It was impossible. But still he had felt the necessity of going about this business with some little care. It might be that she would disobey him if he simply sent for her and bade her to affix her signature here and there. He thought much about it and considered that it would be wise that his wife should be present on the occasion, and that a full explanation should be given to Marie, by which she might be made to understand that the money had in no sense become
ANOTHER SCENE IN BRUTON STREET.

her own. So he gave instructions to his wife when he started into
the city that morning; and when he returned, for the sake of making
his offer to the Longestaffes, he brought with him the deeds which it
would be necessary that Marie should sign, and he brought also
Mr. Croll, his clerk, that Mr. Croll might witness the signature.
When he left the Longestaffes and Mr. Bideawhile he went at once
to his wife's room. "Is she here?" he asked.
"I will send for her. I have told her."
"You haven't frightened her?"
"Why should I frighten her? It is not very easy to frighten her,
Melmotte. She is changed since these young men have been so
much about her."
"I shall frighten her if she does not do as I bid her. Bid her
come now." This was said in French. Then Madame Melmotte left
the room, and Melmotte arranged a lot of papers in order upon a
table. Having done so, he called to Croll, who was standing on the
landing-place, and told him to seat himself in the back drawing-
room till he should be called. Melmotte then stood with his back
to the fire-place in his wife's sitting-room, with his hands in his
pockets, contemplating what might be the incidents of the coming
interview. He would be very gracious,—affectionate if it were pos-
sible,—and, above all things, explanatory. But, by heavens, if there
were continued opposition to his demand,—to his just demand,—if this
girl should dare to insist upon exercising her power to rob him, he
would not then be affectionate,—nor gracious! There was some
little delay in the coming of the two women, and he was already
beginning to lose his temper when Marie followed Madame Melmotte
into the room. He at once swallowed his rising anger—with an effort.
He would put a constraint upon himself. The affection and the
graciousness should be all there,—as long as they might secure the
purpose in hand.
"Marie," he began, "I spoke to you the other day about some
property which for certain purposes was placed in your name just
as we were leaving Paris."
"Yes, papa."
"You were such a child then,—I mean when we left Paris,—that
I could hardly explain to you the purpose of what I did."
"I understood it, papa."
"You had better listen to me, my dear. I don't think you did
quite understand it. It would have been very odd if you had, as I
never explained it to you."
"You wanted to keep it from going away if you got into trouble."
This was so true that Melmotte did not know how at the moment
to contradict the assertion. And yet he had not intended to talk
of the possibility of trouble. "I wanted to lay aside a large sum of
money which should not be liable to the ordinary fluctuations of com-
mercial enterprise."
"So that nobody could get at it."
"You are a little too quick, my dear."
"Marie, why can't you let your papa speak?" said Madame
Melmotte.
"But of course, my dear," continued Melmotte, "I had no idea of
putting the money beyond my own reach. Such a transaction is very common; and in such cases a man naturally uses the name of some one who is very near and dear to him, and in whom he is sure that he can put full confidence. And it is customary to choose a young person, as there will then be less danger of the accident of death. It was for these reasons, which I am sure that you will understand, that I chose you. Of course the property remained exclusively my own."

"But it is really mine," said Marie.

"No, miss; it was never yours," said Melmotte, almost bursting out into anger, but restraining himself. "How could it become yours, Marie? Did I ever make you a gift of it?"

"But I know that it did become mine,—legally."

"By a quibble of law,—yes; but not so as to give you any right to it. I always draw the income."

"But I could stop that, papa,—and if I were married, of course it would be stopped."

Then, quick as a flash of lightning, another idea occurred to Melmotte, who feared that he already began to see that this child of his might be stiff-necked. "As we are thinking of your marriage," he said, "it is necessary that a change should be made. Settlements must be drawn for the satisfaction of Lord Nidderdale and his father. The old Marquis is rather hard upon me, but the marriage is so splendid that I have consented. You must now sign these papers in four or five places. Mr. Croll is here, in the next room, to witness your signature, and I will call him."

"Wait a moment, papa."

"Why should we wait?"

"I don't think I will sign them."

"Why not sign them? You can't really suppose that the property is your own. You could not even get it if you did think so."

"I don't know how that may be; but I had rather not sign them. If I am to be married, I ought not to sign anything except what he tells me."

"He has no authority over you yet. I have authority over you. Marie, do not give more trouble. I am very much pressed for time. Let me call in Mr. Croll."

"No, papa," she said.

Then came across his brow that look which had probably first induced Marie to declare that she would endure to be "cut to pieces," rather than to yield in this or that direction. The lower jaw squared itself, and the teeth became set, and the nostrils of his nose became extended,—and Marie began to prepare herself to be "cut to pieces." But he reminded himself that there was another game which he had proposed to play before he resorted to anger and violence. He would tell her how much depended on her compliance. Therefore he relaxed the frown,—as well as he knew how, and softened his face towards her, and turned again to his work. "I am sure, Marie, that you will not refuse to do this when I explain to you its importance to me. I must have that property for use in the city to-morrow, or—— I shall be ruined." The statement was very short, but the manner in which he made it was not without effect.

"Oh!" shrieked his wife.
"It is true. These harpies have so beset me about the election that they have lowered the price of every stock in which I am concerned, and have brought the Mexican Railway so low that they cannot be sold at all. I don’t like bringing my troubles home from the city; but on this occasion I cannot help it. The sum locked up here is very large, and I am compelled to use it. In point of fact it is necessary to save us from destruction." This he said, very slowly, and with the utmost solemnity.

"But you told me just now you wanted it because I was going to be married," rejoined Marie.

A liar has many points in his favour,—but he has this against him that unless he devote more time to the management of his lies than life will generally allow, he cannot make them tally. Melmotte was thrown back for a moment, and almost felt that the time for violence had come. He longed to be at her that he might shake the wickedness and the folly, and the ingratitude out of her. But he once more condescended to argue and to explain. "I think you misunderstood me, Marie. I meant you to understand that settlements must be made, and that of course I must get my own property back into my own hands before anything of that kind can be done. I tell you once more, my dear, that if you do not do as I bid you, so that I may use that property the first thing to-morrow, we are all ruined. Everything will be gone."

"This can’t be gone," said Marie, nodding her head at the papers.

"Marie,—do you wish to see me disgraced and ruined? I have done a great deal for you."

"You turned away the only person I ever cared for," said Marie.

"Marie, how can you be so wicked? Do as your papa bids you," said Madame Melmotte.

"No!" said Melmotte. "She does not care who is ruined, because we saved her from that reprobate."

"She will sign them now," said Madame Melmotte.

"No;—I will not sign them," said Marie. "If I am to be married to Lord Nidderdale as you all say, I am sure I ought to sign nothing without telling him. And if the property was once made to be mine, I don’t think I ought to give it up again because papa says that he is going to be ruined. I think that’s a reason for not giving it up again."

"It isn’t yours to give. It’s mine," said Melmotte gnashing his teeth.

"Then you can do what you like with it without my signing," said Marie.

He paused a moment, and then laying his hand gently upon her shoulder, he asked her yet once again. His voice was changed, and was very hoarse. But he still tried to be gentle with her. "Marie," he said, "will you do this to save your father from destruction?"

But she did not believe a word that he said to her. How could she believe him? He had taught her to regard him as her natural enemy, making her aware that it was his purpose to use her as a chattel for his own advantage, and never allowing her for a moment to suppose that aught that he did was to be done for her happiness.
And now, almost in a breath, he had told her that this money was wanted that it might be settled on her and the man to whom she was to be married, and then that it might be used to save him from instant ruin. She believed neither one story nor the other. That she should have done as she was desired in this matter can hardly be disputed. The father had used her name because he thought that he could trust her. She was his daughter and should not have betrayed his trust. But she had steeled herself to obstinacy against him in all things. Even yet, after all that had passed, although she had consented to marry Lord Nidderdale, though she had been forced by what she had learned to despise Sir Felix Carbury, there was present to her an idea that she might escape with the man she really loved. But any such hope could depend only on the possession of the money which she now claimed as her own. Melmotte had endeavoured to throw a certain supplcatoriy pathos into the question he had asked her; but, though he was in some degree successful with his voice, his eyes and his mouth and his forehead still threatened her. He was always threatening her. All her thoughts respecting him reverted to that inward assertion that he might "cut her to pieces" if he liked. He repeated his question in the pathetic strain. "Will you do this now,—to save us all from ruin?" But his eyes still threatened her.

"No;" she said, looking up into his face as though watching for the personal attack which would be made upon her; "no, I won't."

"Marie!" exclaimed Madame Melmotte.

She glanced round for a moment at her pseudo-mother with contempt. "No;" she said. "I don't think I ought,—and I won't."

"You won't!" shouted Melmotte. She merely shook her head.

"Do you mean that you, my own child, will attempt to rob your father just at the moment you can destroy him by your wickedness?" She shook her head but said no other word.

"Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet."

"Let not Medea with unnatural rage
Slaughter her mangled infants on the stage."

Nor will I attempt to harrow my readers by a close description of the scene which followed. Poor Marie! That cutting her up into pieces was commenced after a most savage fashion. Marie crouching down hardly uttered a sound. But Madame Melmotte frightened beyond endurance screamed at the top of her voice,—"Ah, Melmotte, tu la tueras!" And then she tried to drag him from his prey.

"Will you sign them now?" said Melmotte, panting. At that moment Croll, frightened by the screams, burst into the room. It was perhaps not the first time that he had interfered to save Melmotte from the effects of his own wrath.

"Oh, Mr. Melmotte, vat is de matter?" asked the clerk.

Melmotte was out of breath and could hardly tell his story. Marie gradually recovered herself, and crouched, cowering, in a corner of a sofa, by no means vanquished in spirit, but with a feeling that the very life had been crushed out of her body. Madame Melmotte was standing weeping copiously, with her handkerchief up to her eyes.

"Will you sign the papers?" Melmotte demanded. Marie, lying as she
"Ah, Ma’am-moiselle,' said Croll, 'you should oblige your father.'"
was, all in a heap, merely shook her head. "Pig!" said Melmotte, —"wicked, ungrateful pig."

"Ah, Ma'am-moiselle," said Croll, "you should oblige your fader."

"Wretched, wicked girl!" said Melmotte, collecting the papers together. Then he left the room, and followed by Croll descended to the study, whence the Longstaffes and Mr. Bideawhile had long since taken their departure.

Madame Melmotte came and stood over the girl, but for some minutes spoke never a word. Marie lay on the sofa, all in a heap, with her hair dishevelled and her dress disordered, breathing hard, but uttering no sobs and shedding no tears. The stepmother,—if she might so be called,—did not think of attempting to persuade where her husband had failed. She feared Melmotte so thoroughly, and was so timid in regard to her own person, that she could not understand the girl's courage. Melmotte was to her an awful being, powerful as Satan,—whom she never openly disobeyed, though she daily deceived him, and was constantly detected in her deceptions. Marie seemed to her to have all her father's stubborn, wicked courage, and very much of his power. At the present moment she did not dare to tell the girl that she had been wrong. But she had believed her husband when he had said that destruction was coming, and had partly believed him when he declared that the destruction might be averted by Marie's obedience. Her life had been passed in almost daily fear of destruction. To Marie the last two years of splendour had been so long that they had produced a feeling of security. But to the elder woman the two years had not sufficed to eradicate the remembrance of former reverses, and never for a moment had she felt herself to be secure. At last she asked the girl what she would like to have done for her. "I wish he had killed me," Marie said, slowly dragging herself up from the sofa, and retreatling without another word to her own room.

In the meantime another scene was being acted in the room below. Melmotte after he reached the room hardly made a reference to his daughter,—merely saying that nothing would overcome her wicked obstinacy. He made no allusion to his own violence, nor had Croll the courage to expostulate with him now that the immediate danger was over. The Great Financier again arranged the papers, just as they had been laid out before,—as though he thought that the girl might be brought down to sign them there. And then he went on to explain to Croll what he had wanted to have done,—how necessary it was that the thing should be done, and how terribly cruel it was to him that in such a crisis of his life he should be hampered, impeded,—he did not venture to his clerk to say ruined,—by the ill-conditioned obstinacy of a girl! He explained very fully how absolutely the property was his own, how totally the girl was without any right to withhold it from him! How monstrous in its injustice was the present position of things! In all this Croll fully agreed. Then Melmotte went on to declare that he would not feel the slightest scruple in writing Marie's signature to the papers himself. He was the girl's father and was justified in acting for her. The property was his own property, and he was justified in doing with it as he pleased.
Of course he would have no scruple in writing his daughter’s name. Then he looked up at the clerk. The clerk again assented,—after a fashion, not by any means with the comfortable certainty with which he had signified his accordance with his employer’s first propositions. But he did not, at any rate, hint any disapprobation of the step which Melmotte proposed to take. Then Melmotte went a step farther, and explained that the only difficulty in reference to such a transaction would be that the signature of his daughter would be required to be corroborated by that of a witness before he could use it. Then he again looked up at Croll;—but on this occasion Croll did not move a muscle of his face. There certainly was no assent. Melmotte continued to look at him; but then came upon the old clerk’s countenance a stern look which amounted to very strong dissent. And yet Croll had been conversant with some irregular doings in his time, and Melmotte knew well the extent of Croll’s experience. Then Melmotte made a little remark to himself. “He knows that the game is pretty well over.” “You had better return to the city now,” he said aloud. “I shall follow you in half an hour. It is quite possible that I may bring my daughter with me. If I can make her understand this thing I shall do so. In that case I shall want you to be ready.” Croll again smiled, and again assented, and went his way.

But Melmotte made no further attempt upon his daughter. As soon as Croll was gone he searched among various papers in his desk and drawers, and having found two signatures, those of his daughter and of this German clerk, set to work tracing them with some thin tissue paper. He commenced his present operation by bolting his door and pulling down the blinds. He practised the two signatures for the best part of an hour. Then he forged them on the various documents;—and, having completed the operation, refolded them, placed them in a little locked bag of which he had always kept the key in his purse, and then, with the bag in his hand, was taken in his brougham into the city.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

MISS LONGESTAFFE AGAIN AT CAVERSHAM.

All this time Mr. Longestaffe was necessarily detained in London while the three ladies of his family were living forlornly at Caversham. He had taken his younger daughter home on the day after his visit to Lady Monogram, and in all his intercourse with her had spoken of her suggested marriage with Mr. Brehgert as a thing utterly out of the question. Georgiana had made one little fight for her independence at the Jermyn Street Hotel. “Indeed, papa, I think it’s very hard,” she said.

“What’s hard? I think a great many things are hard; but I have to bear them.”

“You can do nothing for me.”

“Do nothing for you! Haven’t you got a home to live in, and clothes to wear, and a carriage to go about in,—and books to read if you chose to read them? What do you expect?”
"You know, papa, that's nonsense."
"How do you dare to tell me that what I say is nonsense?"
"Of course there's a house to live in and clothes to wear; but what's to be the end of it? Sophia, I suppose, is going to be married."
"I am happy to say she is,—to a most respectable young man and a thorough gentleman."
"And Dolly has his own way of going on."
"You have nothing to do with Adolphus."
"Nor will he have anything to do with me. If I don't marry what's to become of me? It isn't that Mr. Brehgert is the sort of man I should choose."
"Do not mention his name to me."
"But what am I to do? You give up the house in town, and how am I to see people? It was you sent me to Mr. Melmotte."
"I didn't send you to Mr. Melmotte."
"It was at your suggestion I went there, papa. And of course I could only see the people he had there. I like nice people as well as anybody."
"There's no use talking any more about it."
"I don't see that. I must talk about it, and think about it too. If I can put up with Mr. Brehgert I don't see why you and mamma should complain."
"A Jew!"
"People don't think about that as they used to, papa. He has a very fine income, and I should always have a house in——"

Then Mr. Longestaffe became so furious and loud, that he stopped her for that time. "Look here," he said, "if you mean to tell me that you will marry that man without my consent, I can't prevent it. But you shall not marry him as my daughter. You shall be turned out of my house, and I will never have your name pronounced in my presence again. It is disgusting,—degrading,—disgraceful!" And then he left her.

On the next morning before he started for Caversham he did see Mr. Brehgert; but he told Georgiana nothing of the interview, nor had she the courage to ask him. The objectionable name was not mentioned again in her father's hearing, but there was a sad scene between herself, Lady Pomona, and her sister. When Mr. Longestaffe and his younger daughter arrived, the poor mother did not go down into the hall to meet her child,—from whom she had that morning received the dreadful tidings about the Jew. As to these tidings she had as yet heard no direct condemnation from her husband. The effect upon Lady Pomona had been more grievous even than that made upon the father. Mr. Longestaffe had been able to declare immediately that the proposed marriage was out of the question, that nothing of the kind should be allowed, and could take upon himself to see the Jew with the object of breaking off the engagement. But poor Lady Pomona was helpless in her sorrow. If Georgiana chose to marry a Jew tradesman she could not help it. But such an occurrence in the family would, she felt, be to her as though the end of all things had come. She could never again hold up her head, never go into society, never take pleasure in her powdered footmen. When
her daughter should have married a Jew, she didn't think that she could pluck up the courage to look even her neighbours Mrs. Yeld and Mrs. Hepworth in the face. Georgiana found no one in the hall to meet her, and dreaded to go to her mother. She first went with her maid to her own room, and waited there till Sophia came to her. As she sat pretending to watch the process of unpacking, she strove to regain her courage. Why need she be afraid of anybody? Why, at any rate, should she be afraid of other females? Had she not always been dominant over her mother and sister? "Oh, Georgey," said Sophia, "this is wonderful news!"

"I suppose it seems wonderful that anybody should be going to be married except yourself."

"No;—but such a very odd match!"

"Look here, Sophia. If you don't like it, you need not talk about it. We shall always have a house in town, and you will not. If you don't like to come to us, you needn't. That's about all."

"George wouldn't let me go there at all," said Sophia.

"Then—George—had better keep you at home at Toodlam. Where's mamma? I should have thought somebody might have come and met me to say a word to me, instead of allowing me to creep into the house like this."

"Mamma isn't at all well; but she's up and in her own room. You mustn't be surprised, Georgey, if you find mamma very—very much cut up about this." Then Georgiana understood that she must be content to stand all alone in the world, unless she made up her mind to give up Mr. Brehgert.

"So I've come back," said Georgiana, stooping down and kissing her mother.

"Oh, Georgiana; oh, Georgiana!" said Lady Pomona, slowly raising herself and covering her face with one of her hands. "This is dreadful. It will kill me. I will indeed. I didn't expect it from you."

"What is the good of all that, mamma?"

"It seems to me that it can't be possible. It's unnatural. It's worse than your wife's sister. I'm sure there's something in the Bible against it. You never would read your Bible, or you wouldn't be going to do the house like this."

"Lady Julia Start has done just the same thing,—and she goes everywhere."

"What does your papa say? I'm sure your papa won't allow it. If he's fixed about anything, it's about the Jews. An accursed race;—think of that, Georgiana;—expelled from Paradise."

"Mamma, that's nonsense."

"Scattered about all over the world, so that nobody knows who anybody is. And it's only since those nasty Radicals came up that they have been able to sit in Parliament."

"One of the greatest judges in the land is a Jew," said Georgiana, who had already learned to fortify her own case.

"Nothing that the Radicals can do can make them anything else but what they are. I'm sure that Mr. Whitstable, who is to be your brother-in-law, will never condescend to speak to him."

Now, if there was anybody whom Georgiana Longestaffe had despised from her youth upwards it was George Whitstable. He had
been a laughing-stock to her when they were children, had been regarded as a lout when he left school, and had been her common example of rural dullness since he had become a man. He certainly was neither beautiful nor bright;—but he was a Conservative squire born of Tory parents. Nor was he rich,—having but a moderate income, sufficient to maintain a moderate country house and no more. When first there came indications that Sophia intended to put up with George Whitstable, the more ambitious sister did not spare the shafts of her scorn. And now she was told that George Whitstable would not speak to her future husband! She was not to marry Mr. Brehgert lest she should bring disgrace, among others, upon George Whitstable! This was not to be endured.

"Then Mr. Whitstable may keep himself at home at Toodlam and not trouble his head at all about me or my husband. I'm sure I shan't trouble myself as to what a poor creature like that may think about me. George Whitstable knows as much about London as I do about the moon."

"He has always been in county society," said Sophia, "and was staying only the other day at Lord Cantab's."

"Then there were two fools together," said Georgiana, who at this moment was very unhappy.

"Mr. Whitstable is an excellent young man, and I am sure he will make your sister happy; but as for Mr. Brehgert,—I can't bear to have his name mentioned in my hearing."

"Then, mamma, it had better not be mentioned. At any rate it shan't be mentioned again by me." Having so spoken, Georgiana bounced out of the room and did not meet her mother and sister again till she came down into the drawing-room before dinner.

Her position was one very trying both to her nerves and to her feelings. She presumed that her father had seen Mr. Brehgert, but did not in the least know what had passed between them. It might be that her father had been so decided in his objection as to induce Mr. Brehgert to abandon his intention,—and if this were so, there could be no reason why she should endure the misery of having the Jew thrown in her face. Among them all they had made her think that she would never become Mrs. Brehgert. She certainly was not prepared to nail her colours upon the mast and to live and die for Brehgert. She was almost sick of the thing herself. But she could not back out of it so as to obliterate all traces of the disgrace. Even if she should not ultimately marry the Jew, it would be known that she had been engaged to a Jew,—and then it would certainly be said afterwards that the Jew had jilted her. She was thus vacillating in her mind, not knowing whether to go on with Brehgert or to abandon him. That evening Lady Pomona retired immediately after dinner, being "far from well." It was of course known to them all that Mr. Brehgert was her ailment. She was accompanied by her younger daughter, and Georgiana was left with her father. Not a word was spoken between them. He sat behind his newspaper till he went to sleep, and she found herself alone and deserted in that big room. It seemed to her that even the servants treated her with disdain. Her own maid had already given her notice. It was manifestly the inten-
tion of her family to ostracise her altogether. Of what service would it be to her that Lady Julia Goldsheimer should be received every-where, if she herself were to be left without a single Christian friend? Would a life passed exclusively among the Jews content even her lessened ambition? At ten o'clock she kissed her father's head and went to bed. Her father grunted less audibly than usual under the operation. She had always given herself credit for high spirits, but she began to fear that her courage would not suffice to carry her through sufferings such as these.

On the next day her father returned to town, and the three ladies were left alone. Great preparations were going on for the Whitstable wedding. Dresses were being made and linen marked, and consultations held,—from all which things Georgiana was kept quite apart. The accepted lover came over to lunch, and was made as much of as though the Whitstables had always kept a town house. Sophy loomed so large in her triumph and happiness, that it was not to be borne. All Caversham treated her with a new respect. And yet if Toodlam was a couple of thousand a year, it was all it was;—and there were two unmarried sisters! Lady Pomona went half into hysterics every time she saw her younger daughter, and became in her way a most oppressive parent. Oh, heavens;—was Mr. Brehgert with his two houses worth all this? A feeling of intense regret for the things she was losing came over her. Even Caversham, the Caversham of old days which she had hated, but in which she had made herself respected and partly feared by everybody about the place,—had charms for her which seemed to her delightful now that they were lost for ever. Then she had always considered herself to be the first personage in the house,—superior even to her father;—but now she was decidedly the last.

Her second evening was worse even than the first. When Mr. Longestaffe was not at home the family sat in a small dingy room between the library and the dining-room, and on this occasion the family consisted only of Georgiana. In the course of the evening she went up-stairs and calling her sister out into the passage demanded to be told why she was thus deserted. "Poor mamma is very ill," said Sophy. "I won't stand it if I'm to be treated like this," said Georgiana. "I'll go away somewhere."

"How can I help it, Georgey? It's your own doing. Of course you must have known that you were going to separate yourself from us."

On the next morning there came a dispatch from Mr. Longestaffe,—of what nature Georgey did not know as it was addressed to Lady Pomona. But one enclosure she was allowed to see. "Mamma," said Sophy, "thinks you ought to know how Dolly feels about it." And then a letter from Dolly to his father was put into Georgey's hands. The letter was as follows:—

"My dear Father,—

"Can it be true that Georgey is thinking of marrying that horrid vulgar Jew, old Brehgert? The fellows say so; but I can't believe it. I'm sure you wouldn't let her. You ought to lock her up."

"Yours affectionately,

"A. Longestaffe."
Dolly's letters made his father very angry, as, short as they were, they always contained advice or instruction, such as should come from a father to a son, rather than from a son to a father. This letter had not been received with a welcome. Nevertheless the head of the family had thought it worth his while to make use of it, and had sent it to Caversham in order that it might be shown to his rebellious daughter.

And so Dolly had said that she ought to be locked up! She'd like to see somebody do it! As soon as she had read her brother's epistle she tore it into fragments and threw it away in her sister's presence. "How can mamma be such a hypocrite as to pretend to care what Dolly says? Who doesn't know that he's an idiot? And papa has thought it worth his while to send that down here for me to see! Well after that I must say that I don't much care what papa does."

"I don't see why Dolly shouldn't have an opinion as well as any-body else," said Sophy.

"As well as George Whitstable? As far as stupidity goes they are about the same. But Dolly has a little more knowledge of the world."

"Of course we all know, Georgiana," rejoined the elder sister, "that for cuteness and that kind of thing one must look among the commercial classes, and especially among a certain sort."

"I've done with you all," said Georgey rushing out of the room. "I'll have nothing more to do with any one of you."

But it is very difficult for a young lady to have done with her family! A young man may go anywhere, and may be lost at sea; or come and claim his property after twenty years. A young man may demand an allowance, and has almost a right to live alone. The young male bird is supposed to fly away from the paternal nest. But the daughter of a house is compelled to adhere to her father till she shall get a husband. The only way in which Georgey could "have done" with them all at Caversham would be by trusting herself to Mr. Brehgert, and at the present moment she did not know whether Mr. Brehgert did or did not consider himself as engaged to her.

That day also passed away with ineffable tedium. At one time she was so beaten down by ennui that she almost offered her assistance to her sister in reference to the wedding garments. In spite of the very bitter words which had been spoken in the morning she would have done so had Sophy afforded her the slightest opportunity. But Sophy was heartlessly cruel in her indifference. In her younger days she had had her bad things, and now,—with George Whitstable by her side,—she meant to have good things, the goodness of which was infinitely enhanced by the badness of her sister's things. She had been so greatly despised that the charm of despising again was irre sistible. And she was able to reconcile her cruelty to her conscience by telling herself that duty required her to show implacable resistance to such a marriage as this which her sister contemplated. Therefore Georgiana dragged out another day, not in the least knowing what was to be her fate.
CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE BREHGERT CORRESPONDENCE.

Mr. Longestaffe had brought his daughter down to Caversham on a Wednesday. During the Thursday and Friday she had passed a very sad time, not knowing whether she was or was not engaged to marry Mr. Brehgert. Her father had declared to her that he would break off the match, and she believed that he had seen Mr. Brehgert with that purpose. She had certainly given no consent, and had never hinted to any one of the family an idea that she was disposed to yield. But she felt that, at any rate with her father, she had not adhered to her purpose with tenacity, and that she had allowed him to return to London with a feeling that she might still be controlled. She was beginning to be angry with Mr. Brehgert, thinking that he had taken his dismissal from her father without consulting her. It was necessary that something should be settled, something known. Life such as that she was leading now would drive her mad. She had all the disadvantages of the Brehgert connection and none of the advantages. She could not comfort herself with thinking of the Brehgert wealth and the Brehgert houses, and yet she was living under the general ban of Caversham on account of her Brehgert associations. She was beginning to think that she herself must write to Mr. Brehgert,—only she did not know what to say to him.

But on the Saturday morning she got a letter from Mr. Brehgert. It was handed to her as she was sitting at breakfast with her sister,—who at that moment was triumphant with a present of gooseberries which had been sent over from Toodlam. The Toodlam gooseberries were noted throughout Suffolk, and when the letters were being brought in Sophia was taking her lover's offering from the basket with her own fair hands. "Well!" Georgey had exclaimed, "to send a bottle of gooseberries to his lady love across the country! Who but George Whitstable would do that?"

"I dare say you get nothing but gems and gold," Sophy retorted.

"I don't suppose that Mr. Brehgert knows what a gooseberry is." At that moment the letter was brought in, and Georgiana knew the writing. "I suppose that's from Mr. Brehgert," said Sophy.

"I don't think it matters much to you who it's from." She tried to be composed and stately, but the letter was too important to allow of composure, and she retired to read it in privacy.

The letter was as follows;—

"My dear Georgiana,

"Your father came to me the day after I was to have met you at Lady Monogram's party. I told him then that I would not write to you till I had taken a day or two to consider what he said to me;—and also that I thought it better that you should have a day or two to consider what he might say to you. He has now repeated what he said at our first interview, almost with more violence; for I must say
that I think he has allowed himself to be violent when it was surely unnecessary.

"The long and short of it is this. He altogether disapproves of your promise to marry me. He has given three reasons;—first that I am in trade; secondly that I am much older than you, and have a family; and thirdly that I am a Jew. In regard to the first I can hardly think that he is earnest. I have explained to him that my business is that of a banker; and I can hardly conceive it to be possible that any gentleman in England should object to his daughter marrying a banker, simply because the man is a banker. There would be a blindness of arrogance in such a proposition of which I think your father to be incapable. This has merely been added in to strengthen his other objections.

"As to my age, it is just fifty-one. I do not at all think myself too old to be married again. Whether I am too old for you is for you to judge,—as is also that question of my children who, of course, should you become my wife will be to some extent a care upon your shoulders. As this is all very serious you will not, I hope, think me wanting in gallantry if I say that I should hardly have ventured to address you if you had been quite a young girl. No doubt there are many years between us;—and so I think there should be. A man of my age hardly looks to marry a woman of the same standing as himself. But the question is one for the lady to decide,—and you must decide it now.

"As to my religion, I acknowledge the force of what your father says,—though I think that a gentleman brought up with fewer prejudices would have expressed himself in language less likely to give offence. However I am a man not easily offended; and on this occasion I am ready to take what he has said in good part. I can easily conceive that there should be those who think that the husband and wife should agree in religion. I am indifferent to it myself. I shall not interfere with you if you make me happy by becoming my wife, nor, I suppose, will you with me. Should you have a daughter or daughters I am quite willing that they should be brought up subject to your influence." There was a plain-speaking in this which made Georgiana look round the room as though to see whether any one was watching her as she read it. "But no doubt your father objects to me specially because I am a Jew. If I were an atheist he might, perhaps, say nothing on the subject of religion. On this matter as well as on others it seems to me that your father has hardly kept pace with the movements of the age. Fifty years ago whatever claim a Jew might have to be as well considered as a Christian, he certainly was not so considered. Society was closed against him, except under special circumstances, and so were all the privileges of high position. But that has been altered. Your father does not admit the change; but I think he is blind to it, because he does not wish to see.

"I say all this more as defending myself than as combating his views with you. It must be for you and for you alone to decide how far his views shall govern you. He has told me, after a rather peremptory fashion, that I have behaved badly to him and to his family because I did not go to him in the first instance when I thought of obtaining the honour of an alliance with his daughter. I have been obliged to tell him that in this matter I disagree with him entirely,
though in so telling him I endeavoured to restrain myself from any appearance of warmth. I had not the pleasure of meeting you in his house, nor had I any acquaintance with him. And again, at the risk of being thought uncourteous, I must say that you are to a certain degree emancipated by age from that positive subordination to which a few years ago you probably submitted without a question. If a gentleman meets a lady in society, as I met you in the home of our friend Mr. Melmotte, I do not think that the gentleman is to be debarred from expressing his feelings because the lady may possibly have a parent. Your father, no doubt with propriety, had left you to be the guardian of yourself, and I cannot submit to be accused of improper conduct because, finding you in that condition, I availed myself of it.

"And now, having said so much, I must leave the question to be decided entirely by yourself. I beg you to understand that I do not at all wish to hold you to a promise merely because the promise has been given. I readily acknowledge that the opinion of your family should be considered by you, though I will not admit that I was bound to consult that opinion before I spoke to you. It may well be that your regard for me or your appreciation of the comforts with which I may be able to surround you, will not suffice to reconcile you to such a breach from your own family as your father, with much repetition, has assured me will be inevitable. Take a day or two to think of this and turn it well over in your mind. When I last had the happiness of speaking to you, you seemed to think that your parents might raise objections, but that those objections would give way before an expression of your own wishes. I was flattered by your so thinking; but, if I may form any judgment from your father's manner, I must suppose that you were mistaken. You will understand that I do not say this as any reproach to you. Quite the contrary. I think your father is irrational; and you may well have failed to anticipate that he should be so.

"As to my own feelings they remain exactly as they were when I endeavoured to explain them to you. Though I do not find myself to be too old to marry, I do think myself too old to write love letters. I have no doubt you believe me when I say that I entertain a most sincere affection for you; and I beseech you to believe me in saying further that should you become my wife it shall be the study of my life to make you happy.

"It is essentially necessary that I should allude to one other matter, as to which I have already told your father what I will now tell you. I think it probable that within this week I shall find myself a loser of a very large sum of money through the failure of a gentleman whose bad treatment of me I will the more readily forgive because he was the means of making me known to you. This you must understand is private between you and me, though I have thought it proper to inform your father. Such loss, if it fall upon me, will not interfere in the least with the income which I have proposed to settle upon you for your use after my death; and, as your father declares that in the event of your marrying me he will neither give to you nor bequeath to you a shilling, he might have abstained from telling me to my face that I was a bankrupt merchant when I myself
told him of my loss. I am not a bankrupt merchant nor at all likely to become so. Nor will this loss at all interfere with my present mode of living. But I have thought it right to inform you of it, because, if it occur,—as I think it will,—I shall not deem it right to keep a second establishment probably for the next two or three years. But my house at Fulham and my stables there will be kept up just as they are at present.

"I have now told you everything which I think it is necessary you should know, in order that you may determine either to adhere to or to recede from your engagement. When you have resolved you will let me know,—but a day or two may probably be necessary for your decision. I hope I need not say that a decision in my favour will make me a happy man.

"I am, in the meantime, your affectionate friend,

"EZEKIEL BREHIGERT."

This very long letter puzzled Georgey a good deal, and left her, at the time of reading it, very much in doubt as to what she would do. She could understand that it was a plain-spoken and truth-telling letter. Not that she, to herself, gave it praise for those virtues; but that it imbued her unconsciously with a thorough belief. She was apt to suspect deceit in other people;—but it did not occur to her that Mr. Brehigert had written a single word with an attempt to deceive her. But the single-minded genuine honesty of the letter was altogether thrown away upon her. She never said to herself, as she read it, that she might safely trust herself to this man, though he were a Jew, though greasy and like a butcher, though over fifty and with a family, because he was an honest man. She did not see that the letter was particularly sensible;—but she did allow herself to be pained by the total absence of romance. She was annoyed at the first allusion to her age, and angry at the second; and yet she had never supposed that Brehigert had taken her to be younger than she was. She was well aware that the world in general attributes more years to unmarried women than they have lived, as a sort of equalising counter-weight against the pretences which young women make on the other side, or the lies which are told on their behalf. Nor had she wished to appear peculiarly young in his eyes. But, nevertheless, she regarded the reference to be uncivil,—perhaps almost butcher-like,—and it had its effect upon her. And then the allusion to the "daughter or daughters" troubled her. She told herself that it was vulgar,—just what a butcher might have said. And although she was quite prepared to call her father the most irrational, the most prejudiced, and most ill-natured of men, yet she was displeased that Mr. Brehigert should take such a liberty with him. But the passage in Mr. Brehigert's letter which was most distasteful to her was that which told her of the loss which he might probably incur through his connection with Melmote. What right had he to incur a loss which would incapacitate him from keeping his engagements with her? The town-house had been the great persuasion, and now he absolutely had the face to tell her that there was to be no town-house for three years. When she read this she felt that she ought to be indignant, and for a few moments was minded to sit down without further consideration and tell
the man with considerable scorn that she would have nothing more
to say to him.

But on that side too there would be terrible bitterness. How would
she have fallen from her greatness when, barely forgiven by her father
and mother for the vile sin which she had contemplated, she should
consent to fill a common bridesmaid place at the nuptials of George
Whistable! And what would then be left to her in life? This
episode of the Jew would make it quite impossible for her again to
contest the question of the London house with her father. Lady
Pomona and Mrs. George Whitstable would be united with him against
her. There would be no "season" for her, and she would be nobody
at Caversham. As for London, she would hardly wish to go there!
Everybody would know the story of the Jew. She thought that she
could have plucked up courage to face the world as the Jew's wife,
but not as the young woman who had wanted to marry the Jew and
had failed. How would her future life go with her, should she now
make up her mind to retire from the proposed alliance? If she could
get her father to take her abroad at once, she would do it; but she
was not now in a condition to make any terms with her father. As
all this gradually passed through her mind, she determined that she
would so far take Mr. Brehgert's advice as to postpone her answer
till she had well considered the matter.

She slept upon it, and the next day she asked her mother a few
questions. "Mamma, have you any idea what papa means to do?"

"In what way, my dear?" Lady Pomora's voice was not
gracious, as she was free from that fear of her daughter's ascendancy
which had formerly affected her.

"Well;—I suppose he must have some plan."

"You must explain yourself. I don't know why he should have
any particular plan."

"Will he go to London next year?"

"That will depend upon money, I suppose. What makes you ask?"

"Of course I have been very cruelly circumstanced. Everybody
must see that. I'm sure you do, mamma. The long and the short
of it is this;—if I give up my engagement, will he take us abroad for
a year?"

"Why should he?"

"You can't suppose that I should be very comfortable in England.
If we are to remain here at Caversham, how am I to hope ever to get
settled?"

"Sophy is doing very well."

"Oh, mamma, there are not two George Whitstables;—thank
God." She had meant to be humble and supplanting, but she could
not restrain herself from the use of that one shaft. "I don't mean
but what Sophy may be very happy, and I am sure that I hope she
will. But that won't do me any good. I should be very unhappy here."

"I don't see how you are to find any one to marry you by going
abroad," said Lady Pomona, "and I don't see why your papa is to be
taken away from his own home. He likes Caversham."

"Then I am to be sacrificed on every side," said Georgy, stalking
out of the room. But still she could not make up her mind what letter
she would write to Mr. Brehgert, and she slept upon it another night.
On the next day after breakfast she did write her letter, though when she sat down to her task she had not clearly made up her mind what she would say. But she did get it written, and here it is.

"My dear Mr. Brehgert,

"As you told me not to hurry, I have taken a little time to think about your letter. Of course it would be very disagreeable to quarrel with papa and mamma and everybody. And if I do so, I'm sure somebody ought to be very grateful. But papa has been very unfair in what he has said. As to not asking him, it could have been of no good, for of course he would be against it. He thinks a great deal of the Longstaffe family, and so, I suppose, ought I. But the world does change so quick that one doesn't think of anything now as one used to do. Anyway, I don't feel that I'm bound to do what papa tells me just because he says it. Though I'm not quite so old as you seem to think, I'm old enough to judge for myself,—and I mean to do so. You say very little about affection, but I suppose I am to take all that for granted.

"I don't wonder at papa being annoyed about the loss of the money. It must be a very great sum when it will prevent your having a house in London,—as you agreed. It does make a great difference, because, of course, as you have no regular place in the country, one could only see one's friends in London. Fulham is all very well now and then, but I don't think I should like to live at Fulham all the year through. You talk of three years, which would be dreadful. If as you say it will not have any lasting effect, could you not manage to have a house in town? If you can do it in three years, I should think you could do it now. I should like to have an answer to this question. I do think so much about being the season in town!

"As for the other parts of your letter, I knew very well beforehand that papa would be unhappy about it. But I don't know why I'm to let that stand in my way when so very little is done to make me happy. Of course you will write to me again, and I hope you will say something satisfactory about the house in London.

"Yours always sincerely,

"Georgiana Longstaffe."

It probably never occurred to Georgey that Mr. Brehgert would under any circumstances be anxious to go back from his engagement. She so fully recognised her own value as a Christian lady of high birth and position giving herself to a commercial Jew, that she thought that under any circumstances Mr. Brehgert would be only too anxious to stick to his bargain. Nor had she any idea that there was anything in her letter which could probably offend him. She thought that she might at any rate make good her claim to the house in London; and that as there were other difficulties on his side, he would yield to her on this point. But as yet she hardly knew Mr. Brehgert. He did not lose a day in sending to her a second letter. He took her letter with him to his office in the city, and there answered it without a moment's delay.
"My dear Miss Longstaffe,

"You say it would be very disagreeable to you to quarrel with your papa and mamma; and as I agree with you, I will take your letter as concluding our intimacy. I should not, however, be dealing quite fairly with you or with myself if I gave you to understand that I felt myself to be coerced to this conclusion simply by your qualified assent to your parents' views. It is evident to me from your letter that you would not wish to be my wife unless I can supply you with a house in town as well as with one in the country. But this for the present is out of my power. I would not have allowed my losses to interfere with your settlement because I had stated a certain income; and must therefore to a certain extent have compromised my children. But I should not have been altogether happy till I had replaced them in their former position, and must therefore have abstained from increased expenditure till I had done so. But of course I have no right to ask you to share with me the discomfort of a single home. I may perhaps add that I had hoped that you would have looked to your happiness to another source, and that I will bear my disappointment as best I may.

"As you may perhaps under these circumstances be unwilling that I should wear the ring you gave me, I return it by post. I trust you will be good enough to keep the trifle you were pleased to accept from me, in remembrance of one who will always wish you well.

"Yours sincerely,

"Ezekiel Brehgert."

And so it was all over! Georgey, when she read this letter, was very indignant at her lover's conduct. She did not believe that her own letter had at all been of a nature to warrant it. She had regarded herself as being quite sure of him, and only so far doubting herself, as to be able to make her own terms because of such doubts. And now the Jew had rejected her! She read this last letter over and over again, and the more she read it the more she felt that in her heart of hearts she had intended to marry him. There would have been inconveniences no doubt, but they would have been less than the sorrow on the other side. Now she saw nothing before her but a long vista of Caversham dullness, in which she would be trampled upon by her father and mother, and scorned by Mr. and Mrs. George Whitstable.

She got up and walked about the room thinking of vengeance. But what vengeance was possible to her? Everybody belonging to her would take the part of the Jew in that which he had now done. She could not ask Dolly to beat him; nor could she ask her father to visit him with the stern frown of paternal indignation. There could be no revenge. For a time,—only for a few seconds,—she thought that she would write to Mr. Brehgert and tell him that she had not intended to bring about this termination of their engagement. This, no doubt, would have been an appeal to the Jew for mercy;—and she could not quite descend to that. But she would keep the watch and chain he had given her, and which somebody had told her had not cost less than a hundred and fifty guineas. She could not wear them,
as people would know whence they had come; but she might ex-
change them for jewels which she could wear.
At lunch she said nothing to her sister, but in the course of the
afternoon she thought it best to inform her mother. "Mamma," she
said, "as you and papa take it so much to heart, I have broken off
everything with Mr. Brehgert."
"Of course it must be broken off," said Lady Pomona. This was
very ungracious,—so much so that Georgy almost flounced out of
the room. "Have you heard from the man?" asked her ladyship.
"I have written to him, and he has answered me; and it is all
settled. I thought that you would have said something kind to me."
And the unfortunate young woman burst out into tears.
"It was so dreadful," said Lady Pomona; —"so very dreadful. I
never heard of anything so bad. When young what's-his-name mar-
rried the tallow-chandler's daughter I thought it would have killed me
if it had been Dolly; but this was worse than that. Her father was
a methodist."
"They had neither of them a shilling of money," said Georgy
through her tears.
"And your papa says this man was next door to a bankrupt. But
it's all over?"
"Yes, mamma."
"And now we must all remain here at Caversham till people forget
it. It has been very hard upon George Whitstable, because of course
everybody has known it through the county. I once thought he
would have been off, and I really don't know that we could have said
anything." At that moment Sophy entered the room. "It's all over
between Georgiana and the—man," said Lady Pomona, who hardly
saved herself from stigmatising him by a further reference to his religion.
"I knew it would be," said Sophy.
"Of course it could never have really taken place," said their mother.
"And now I beg that nothing more may be said about it," said
Georgiana. "I suppose, mamma, you will write to papa?"
"You must send him back his watch and chain, Georgy," said
Sophy.
"What business is that of yours?"
"Of course she must. Her papa would not let her keep it."
To such a miserable depth of humility had the younger Miss Longe-
staffe been brought by her ill-considered intimacy with the Mel-
mottes! Georgiana, when she looked back on this miserable episode
in her life, always attributed her grief to the scandalous breach of
compact of which her father had been guilty.

CHAPTER LXXX.
RUBY PREPARES FOR SERVICE.

OUR poor old honest friend John Crumb was taken away to durance
vile after his performance in the street with Sir Felix, and was
locked up for the remainder of the night. This indignity did not sit
so heavily on his spirits as it might have done on those of a quicker
nature. He was aware that he had not killed the baronet, and that he had therefore enjoyed his revenge without the necessity of "swinging for it at Bury." That in itself was a comfort to him. Then it was a great satisfaction to think that he had "served the young man out" in the actual presence of his Ruby. He was not prone to give himself undue credit for his capability and willingness to knock his enemies about; but he did think that Ruby must have observed on this occasion that he was the better man of the two. And, to John, a night in the station-house was no great personal inconvenience. Though he was very proud of his four-post bed at home, he did not care very much for such luxuries as far as he himself was concerned. Nor did he feel any disgrace from being locked up for the night. He was very good-humoured with the policeman, who seemed perfectly to understand his nature, and was as meek as a child when the lock was turned upon him. As he lay down on the hard bench, he comforted himself with thinking that Ruby would surely never care any more for the "baronite" since she had seen him go down like a cur without striking a blow. He thought a good deal about Ruby, but never attributed any blame to her for her share in the evils that had befallen him.

The next morning he was taken before the magistrates, but was told at an early hour of the day that he was again free. Sir Felix was not much the worse for what had happened to him, and had refused to make any complaint against the man who had beaten him. John Crumb shook hands cordially with the policeman who had had him in charge, and suggested beer. The constable, with regrets, was forced to decline, and bade adieu to his late prisoner with the expression of a hope that they might meet again before long. "You come down to Bungay," said John, "and I'll show you how we live there."

From the police-office he went direct to Mrs. Pipkin's house, and at once asked for Ruby. He was told that Ruby was out with the children, and was advised both by Mrs. Pipkin and Mrs. Hurtle not to present himself before Ruby quite yet. "You see," said Mrs. Pipkin, "she's a thinking how heavy you were upon that young gentleman."

"But I wasn't;—not particular. Lord love you, he ain't a hair the wuss."

"You let her alone for a time," said Mrs. Hurtle. "A little neglect will do her good."

"Maybe," said John,—"only I wouldn't like her to have it bad. You'll let her have her wittles regular, Mrs. Pipkin."

It was then explained to him that the neglect proposed should not extend to any deprivation of food, and he took his leave, receiving an assurance from Mrs. Hurtle that he should be summoned to town as soon as it was thought that his presence there would serve his purposes; and with loud promises repeated to each of the friendly women that as soon as ever a "line should be dropped" he would appear again upon the scene, he took Mrs. Pipkin aside, and suggested that if there were "any hextras," he was ready to pay for them. Then he took his leave without seeing Ruby, and went back to Bungay.
When Ruby returned with the children she was told that John Crumb had called. "I thought as he was in prison," said Ruby.

"What should they keep him in prison for?" said Mrs. Pipkin. "He hasn't done nothing as he oughtn't to have done. That young man was dragging you about as far as I can make out, and Mr. Crumb just did as anybody ought to have done to prevent it. Of course they weren't going to keep him in prison for that. Prison indeed! It isn't him as ought to be in prison."

"And where is he now, aunt?"

"Gone down to Bungay to mind his business, ant' won't be coming here any more of a fool's errand. He must have seen now pretty well what's worth having, and what ain't. Beauty is but skin deep, Ruby."

"John Crumb 'd be after me again to-morrow, if I'd give him encouragement," said Ruby. "If I'd hold up my finger he'd come."

"Then John Crumb's a fool for his pains, that's all; and now do you go about your work." Ruby didn't like to be told to go about her work, and tossed her head, and slammed the kitchen door, and scolded the servant girl, and then sat down to cry. What was she to do with herself now? She had an idea that Felix would not come back to her after the treatment he had received;—and a further idea that if he did come he was not, as she phrased it to herself, "of much account." She certainly did not like him the better for having been beaten, though, at the time, she had been disposed to take his part. She did not believe that she would ever dance with him again. That had been the charm of her life in London, and that was now all over. And as for marrying her,—she began to feel certain that he did not intend it. John Crumb was a big, awkward, dull, uncouth lump of a man, with whom Ruby thought it impossible that a girl should be in love. Love and John Crumb were poles asunder. But ——! Ruby did not like wheeling the perambulator about Islington, and being told by her aunt Pipkin to go about her work. What Ruby did like was being in love and dancing; but if all that must come to an end, then there would be a question whether she could not do better for herself, than by staying with her aunt and wheeling the perambulator about Islington.

Mrs. Hurtle was still living in solitude in the lodgings, and having but little to do on her own behalf, had devoted herself to the interest of John Crumb. A man more unlike one of her own countrymen she had never seen. "I wonder whether he has any ideas at all in his head," she had said to Mrs. Pipkin. Mrs. Pipkin had replied that Mr. Crumb had certainly a very strong idea of marrying Ruby Ruggles. Mrs. Hurtle had smiled, thinking that Mrs. Pipkin was also very unlike her own countrywomen. But she was very kind to Mrs. Pipkin, ordering rice-puddings on purpose that the children might eat them, and she was quite determined to give John Crumb all the aid in her power.

In order that she might give effectual aid she took Mrs. Pipkin into confidence, and prepared a plan of action in reference to Ruby. Mrs. Pipkin was to appear as chief actor on the scene, but the plan was altogether Mrs. Hurtle's plan. On the day following John's return to Bungay Mrs. Pipkin summoned Ruby into the back parlour, and
thus addressed her. "Ruby, you know, this must come to an end now."
"What must come to an end?"
"You can't stay here always, you know."
"I'm sure I work hard, Aunt Pipkin, and I don't get no wages."
"I can't do with more than one girl,—and there's the keep if there isn't wages. Besides, there's other reasons. Your grandfather won't have you back there; that's certain."
"I wouldn't go back to grandfather, if it was ever so."
"But you must go somewheres. You didn't come to stay here always,—nor I couldn't have you. You must go into service."
"I don't know anybody as 'd have me," said Ruby.
"You must put a 'vertisement into the paper. You'd better say as nursemaid, as you seems to take kindly to children. And I must give you a character;—only I shall say just the truth. You mustn't ask much wages just at first." Ruby looked very sorrowful, and the tears were near her eyes. The change from the glories of the music hall was so startling and so oppressive! "It has got to be done sooner or later, so you may as well put the 'vertisement in this afternoon."
"You're going to turn me out, Aunt Pipkin."
"Well;—if that's turning out, I am. You see you never would be said by me as though I was mistress. You would go out with that rapscallion when I bid you not. Now when you're in a regular place like, you must mind when you're spoke to, and it will be best for you. You've had your swing, and now you see you've got to pay for it. You must earn your bread, Ruby, as you've quarrelled both with your lover and with your grandfather."

There was no possible answer to this, and therefore the necessary notice was put into the paper.—Mrs. Hurtle paying for its insertion.
"Because, you know," said Mrs. Hurtle, "she must stay here really, till Mr. Crumb comes and takes her away." Mrs. Pipkin expressed her opinion that Ruby was a "baggage" and John Crumb a "soft." Mrs. Pipkin was perhaps a little jealous at the interest which her lodger took in her niece, thinking perhaps that all Mrs. Hurtle's sympathies were due to herself.

Ruby went hither and thither for a day or two, calling upon the mothers of children who wanted nursemaids. The answers which she had received had not come from the highest members of the aristocracy, and the houses which she visited did not appal her by their splendour. Many objections were made to her. A character from an aunt was objectionable. Her ringlets were objectionable. She was a deal too flighty-looking. She spoke up much too free. At last one happy mother of five children offered to take her on approval for a month, at £12 a year, Ruby to find her own tea and wash for herself. This was slavery;—abject slavery. And she too, who had been the beloved of a baronet, and who might even now be the mistress of a better house than that into which she was to go as a servant,—if she would only hold up her finger! But the place was accepted, and with broken-hearted sobbings Ruby prepared herself for her departure from aunt Pipkin's roof.

"I hope you like your place, Ruby," Mrs. Hurtle said on the afternoon of her last day.
"Indeed then I don't like it at all. They're the ugliest children you ever see, Mrs. Hurtle."

"Ugly children must be minded as well as pretty ones."

"And the mother of 'em is as cross as cross."

"It's your own fault, Ruby; isn't it?"

"I don't know as I've done anything out of the way."

"Don't you think it's anything out of the way to be engaged to a young man and then to throw him over? All this has come because you wouldn't keep your word to Mr. Crumb. Only for that your grandfather wouldn't have turned you out of his house."

"He didn't turn me out. I ran away. And it wasn't along of John Crumb, but because grandfather hauled me about by the hair of my head."

"But he was angry with you about Mr. Crumb. When a young woman becomes engaged to a young man, she ought not to go back from her word." No doubt Mrs. Hurtle, when preaching this doctrine, thought that the same law might be laid down with propriety for the conduct of young men. "Of course you have brought trouble on yourself. I am sorry that you don't like the place. I'm afraid you must go to it now."

"I am going,—I suppose," said Ruby, probably feeling that if she could but bring herself to condescend so far there might yet be open for her a way of escape.

"I shall write and tell Mr. Crumb where you are placed."

"Oh, Mrs. Hurtle, don't. What should you write to him for? It ain't nothing to him."

"I told him I'd let him know if any steps were taken."

"You can forget that, Mrs. Hurtle. Pray don't write. I don't want him to know as I'm in service."

"I must keep my promise. Why shouldn't he know? I don't suppose you care much now what he hears about you."

"Yes I do. I wasn't never in service before, and I don't want him to know."

"What harm can it do you?"

"Well, I don't want him to know. It is such a come down, Mrs. Hurtle."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of in that. What you have to be ashamed of is jilting him. It was a bad thing to do;—wasn't it, Ruby?"

"I didn't mean nothing bad, Mrs. Hurtle; only why couldn't he say what he had to say himself, instead of bringing another to say it for him? What would you feel, Mrs. Hurtle, if a man was to come and say it all out of another man's mouth?"

"I don't think I should much care if the thing was well said at last. You know he meant it."

"Yes;—I did know that."

"And you know he means it now?"

"I'm not so sure about that. He's gone back to Bungay, and he isn't no good at writing letters no more than at speaking. Oh,—he'll go and get somebody else now."

"Of course he will if he hears nothing about you. I think I'd better tell him. I know what would happen."
"What would happen, Mrs. Hurtle?"

"He'd be up in town again in half a jiffey to see what sort of a place you'd got. Now, Ruby, I'll tell you what I'll do, if you'll say the word. I'll have him up here at once and you shan't go to Mrs. Buggins." Ruby dropped her hands and stood still, staring at Mrs. Hurtle. "I will. But if he comes you mustn't behave this time as you did before."

"But I'm to go to Mrs. Buggins' to-morrow."

"We'll send to Mrs. Buggins and tell her to get somebody else. You're breaking your heart about going there;—are you not?"

"I don't like it, Mrs. Hurtle."

"And this man will make you mistress of his house. You say he isn't good at speaking; but I tell you I never came across an honest man in the whole course of my life, or one who I think would treat a woman better. What's the use of a glib tongue if there isn't a heart with it? What's the use of a lot of tinsel and lacker, if the real metal isn't there? Sir Felix Carbury could talk, I dare say, but you don't think now he was a very fine fellow."

"He was so beautiful, Mrs. Hurtle!"

"But he hadn't the spirit of a mouse in his bosom. Well, Ruby, you have one more choice left you. Shall it be John Crumb or Mrs. Buggins?"

"He wouldn't come, Mrs. Hurtle."

"Leave that to me, Ruby. May I bring him if I can?" Then Ruby in a very low whisper told Mrs. Hurtle, that if she thought proper she might bring John Crumb back again. "And there shall be no more nonsense?"

"No," whispered Ruby.

On that same night a letter was sent to Mrs. Buggins, which Mrs. Hurtle also composed, informing that lady that unforeseen circumstances prevented Ruby Ruggles from keeping the engagement she had made; to which a verbal answer was returned that Ruby Ruggles was an impudent hussey. And then Mrs. Hurtle in her own name wrote a short note to Mr. John Crumb.

"DEAR MR. CRUMB,

"If you will come back to London I think you will find Miss Ruby Ruggles all that you desire.

"Yours faithfully,

"WINIFRID HURTLE."

"She's had a deal more done for her than I ever knew to be done for young women in my time," said Mrs. Pipkin, "and I'm not at all so sure that she has deserved it."

"John Crumb will think she has."

"John Crumb's a fool;—and as to Ruby; well, I haven't got no patience with girls like them. Yes; it is for the best; and as for you, Mrs. Hurtle, there's no words to say how good you've been. I hope, Mrs. Hurtle, you ain't thinking of going away because this is all done."
CHAPTER LXXXI.

MR. COHENLUPE LEAVES LONDON.

DOLLY LONGESTAFFE had found himself compelled to go to Fetter Lane immediately after that meeting in Bruton Street at which he had consented to wait two days longer for the payment of his money. This was on a Wednesday, the day appointed for the payment being Friday. He had undertaken that, on his part, Squercum should be made to desist from further immediate proceedings, and he could only carry out his word by visiting Squercum. The trouble to him was very great, but he began to feel that he almost liked it. The excitement was nearly as good as that of loo. Of course it was a "horrid bore,"—this having to go about in cabs under the sweltering sun of a London July day. Of course it was a "horrid bore,"—this doubt about his money. And it went altogether against the grain with him that he should be engaged in any matter respecting the family property in agreement with his father and Mr. Bideawhile. But there was an importance in it that sustained him amidst his troubles. It is said that if you were to take a man of moderate parts and make him Prime Minister out of hand, he might probably do as well as other Prime Ministers, the greatness of the work elevating the man to its own level. In that way Dolly was elevated to the level of a man of business, and felt and enjoyed his own capacity. "By George!" It depended chiefly upon him whether such a man as Melmotte should or should not be charged before the Lord Mayor. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have promised," he said to Squercum, sitting in the lawyer's office on a high-legged stool with a cigar in his mouth. He preferred Squercum to any other lawyer he had met because Squercum's room was untidy and homely, because there was nothing awful about it, and because he could sit in what position he pleased, and smoke all the time.

"Well; I don't think you ought, if you ask me," said Squercum.

"You weren't there to be asked, old fellow."

"Bideawhile shouldn't have asked you to agree to anything in my absence," said Squercum indignantly. "It was a very unprofessional thing on his part, and so I shall take an opportunity of telling him."

"It was you told me to go."

"Well;—yes. I wanted you to see what they were at in that room; but I told you to look on and say nothing."

"I didn't speak half-a-dozen words."

"You shouldn't have spoken those words. Your father then is quite clear that you did not sign the letter?"

"Oh, yes;—the governor is pig-headed, you know, but he's honest."

"That's a matter of course," said the lawyer. "All men are honest; but they are generally specially honest to their own side."
Bideawhile's honest; but you've got to fight him deuced close to prevent his getting the better of you. Melmotte has promised to pay the money on Friday, has he?"

"He's to bring it with him to Bruton Street."

"I don't believe a word of it;—and I'm sure Bideawhile doesn't. In what shape will he bring it? He'll give you a cheque dated on Monday, and that'll give him two days more, and then on Monday there'll be a note to say the money can't be lodged till Wednesday. There should be no compromising with such a man. You only get from one mess into another. I told you neither to do anything or to say anything."

"I suppose we can't help ourselves now. You're to be there on Friday. I particularly bargained for that. If you're there, there won't be any more compromising."

Squercum made one or two further remarks to his client, not at all flattering to Dolly's vanity,—which might have caused offence had not there been such perfectly good feeling between the attorney and the young man. As it was Dolly replied to everything that was said with increased flattery. "If I was a sharp fellow like you, you know," said Dolly, "of course I should get along better; but I ain't, you know." It was then settled that they should meet each other, and also meet Mr. Longestaffe senior, Bideawhile, and Melmotte, at twelve o'clock on Friday morning in Bruton Street.

Squercum was by no means satisfied. He had busied himself in this matter, and had ferreted things out, till he had pretty nearly got to the bottom of that affair about the houses in the East, and had managed to induce the heirs of the old man who had died to employ him. As to the Pickering property he had not a doubt on the subject. Old Longestaffe had been induced by promises of wonderful aid and by the bribe of a seat at the Board of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway to give up the title-deeds of the property,—as far as it was in his power to give them up; and had endeavoured to induce Dolly to do so also. As he had failed, Melmotte had supplemented his work by ingenuity, with which the reader is acquainted. All this was perfectly clear to Squercum, who thought that he saw before him a most attractive course of proceeding against the Great Financier. It was pure ambition rather than any hope of lucre that urged him on. He regarded Melmotte as a grand swindler,—perhaps the grandest that the world had ever known,—and he could conceive no greater honour than the detection, successful prosecution, and ultimate destroying of so great a man. To have hunted down Melmotte would make Squercum as great almost as Melmotte himself. But he felt himself to have been unfairly hampered by his own client. He did not believe that the money would be paid; but delay might rob him of his Melmotte. He had heard a good many things in the City, and believed it to be quite out of the question that Melmotte should raise the money,—but there were various ways in which a man might escape.

It may be remembered that Croll, the German clerk, preceded Melmotte into the City on Wednesday after Marie's refusal to sign the deeds. He, too, had his eyes open, and had perceived that things
were not looking as well as they used to look. Croll had for many years been true to his patron, having been, upon the whole, very well paid for such truth. There had been times when things had gone badly with him, but he had believed in Melmotte, and, when Melmotte rose, had been rewarded for his faith. Mr. Croll at the present time had little investments of his own, not made under his employer's auspices, which would leave him not absolutely without bread for his family should the Melmotte affairs at any time take an awkward turn. Melmotte had never required from him service that was actually fraudulent,—had at any rate never required it by spoken words. Mr. Croll had not been over-scrupulous, and had occasionally been very useful to Mr. Melmotte. But there must be a limit to all things; and why should any man sacrifice himself beneath the ruins of a falling house,—when convinced that nothing he can do can prevent the fall? Mr. Croll would have been of course happy to witness Miss Melmotte's signature; but as for that other kind of witnessing,—this clearly to his thinking was not the time for such good-nature on his part.

"You know what's up now;—don't you?" said one of the junior clerks to Mr. Croll when he entered the office in Abchurch Lane.

"A good deal will be up soon," said the German.

"Cohenlupe has gone!"

"And to vere has Mr. Cohenlupe gone?"

"He hasn't been civil enough to leave his address. I fancy he don't want his friends to have to trouble themselves by writing to him. Nobody seems to know what's become of him."

"New York," suggested Mr. Croll.

"They seem to think not. They're too hospitable in New York for Mr. Cohenlupe just at present. He's travelling private. He's on the continent somewhere,—half across France by this time; but nobody knows what route he has taken. That'll be a poke in the ribs for the old boy;—eh, Croll?" Croll merely shook his head.

"I wonder what has become of Miles Grendall," continued the clerk.

"Ven de rats is going away it is bad for de house. I like de rats to stay."

"There seems to have been a regular manufactory of Mexican Railway scrip."

"Our governor knew nodding about dat," said Croll.

"He has a hat full of them at any rate. If they could have been kept up another fortnight they say Cohenlupe would have been worth nearly a million of money, and the governor would have been as good as the bank. Is it true they are going to have him before the Lord Mayor about the Pickering title-deeds?" Croll declared that he knew nothing about the matter, and settled himself down to his work.

In little more than two hours he was followed by Melmotte, who thus reached the City late in the afternoon. It was he knew too late to raise the money on that day, but he hoped that he might pave the way for getting it on the next day, which would be Thursday. Of course the first news which he heard was of the defection of Mr. Cohenlupe. It was Croll who told him. He turned back, and his
jaw fell, but at first he said nothing. "It's a bad thing," said Mr. Croll.

"Yes;—it is bad. He had a vast amount of my property in his hands. Where has he gone?" Croll shook his head. "It never rains but it pours," said Melmotte. "Well; I'll weather it all yet. I've been worse than I am now, Croll, as you know, and have had a hundred thousand pounds at my banker's,—loose cash,—before the month was out."

"Yes, indeed," said Croll.

"But the worst of it is that every one around me is so damnably jealous. It isn't what I've lost that will crush me, but what men will say that I've lost. Ever since I began to stand for Westminster there has been a dead set against me in the City. The whole of that affair of the dinner was planned,—planned by G——, that it might ruin me. It was all laid out just as you would lay the foundation of a building. It is hard for one man to stand against all that when he has dealings so large as mine."

"Very hard, Mr. Melmotte."

"But they'll find they're mistaken yet. There's too much of the real stuff, Croll, for them to crush me. Property's a kind of thing that comes out right at last. It's cut and come again, you know, if the stuff is really there. But I mustn't stop talking here. I suppose I shall find Brehgert in Cuthbert's Court."

"I should say so, Mr. Melmotte. Mr. Brehgert never leaves much before six."

Then Mr. Melmotte took his hat and gloves, and the stick that he usually carried, and went out with his face carefully dressed in its usually jaunty air. But Croll as he went heard him mutter the name of Cohenlupe between his teeth. The part which he had to act is one very difficult to any actor. The carrying an external look of indifference when the heart is sinking within,—or has sunk almost to the very ground,—is more than difficult; it is an agonizing task. In all mental suffering the sufferer longs for solitude,—for permission to cast himself loose along the ground, so that every limb and every feature of his person may faint in sympathy with his heart. A grandly urbane deportment over a crushed spirit and ruined hopes is beyond the physical strength of most men;—but there have been men so strong. Melmotte very nearly accomplished it. It was only to the eyes of such a one as Herr Croll that the failure was perceptible.

Melmotte did find Mr. Brehgert. At this time Mr. Brehgert had completed his correspondence with Miss Longstaffe, in which he had mentioned the probability of great losses from the anticipated commercial failure in Mr. Melmotte's affairs. He had now heard that Mr. Cohenlupe had gone upon his travels, and was therefore nearly sure that his anticipation would be correct. Nevertheless, he received his old friend with a smile. When large sums of money are concerned there is seldom much of personal indignation between man and man. The loss of fifty pounds or of a few hundreds may create personal wrath;—but fifty thousand require equanimity. "So Cohenlupe hasn't been seen in the City to-day," said Brehgert.
"He has gone," said Melmotte hoarsely.
"I think I once told you that Cohenlupe was not the man for large dealings."
"Yes, you did," said Melmotte.
"Well;—it can't be helped; can it? And what is it now?"
Then Melmotte explained to Mr. Brehgert what it was that he wanted then, taking the various documents out of the bag which throughout the afternoon he had carried in his hand. Mr. Brehgert understood enough of his friend's affairs, and enough of affairs in general, to understand readily all that was required. He examined the documents, declaring as he did so that he did not know how the thing could be arranged by Friday. Melmotte replied that £50,000 was not a very large sum of money, that the security offered was worth twice as much as that. "You will leave them with me this evening," said Brehgert. Melmotte paused for a moment, and said that he would of course do so. He would have given much, very much, to have been sufficiently master of himself to have assented without hesitation;—but then the weight within was so very heavy!

Having left the papers and the bag with Mr. Brehgert, he walked westwards to the House of Commons. He was accustomed to remain in the City later than this, often not leaving it till seven,—though during the last week or ten days he had occasionally gone down to the House in the afternoon. It was now Wednesday, and there was no evening sitting;—but his mind was too full of other things to allow him to remember this. As he walked along the Embankment, his thoughts were very heavy. How would things go with him?—What would be the end of it? Ruin;—yes, but there were worse things than ruin. And a short time since he had been so fortunate;—had made himself so safe! As he looked back at it, he could hardly say how it had come to pass that he had been driven out of the track that he had laid down for himself. He had known that ruin would come, and had made himself so comfortably safe, so brilliantly safe, in spite of ruin. But insane ambition had driven him away from his anchorage. He told himself over and over again that the fault had been not in circumstances,—not in that which men call Fortune,—but in his own incapacity to bear his position. He saw it now. He felt it now. If he could only begin again, how different would his conduct be!

But of what avail were such regrets as these? He must take things as they were now, and see that, in dealing with them, he allowed himself to be carried away neither by pride nor cowardice. And if the worst should come to the worst, then let him face it like a man! There was a certain manliness about him which showed itself perhaps as strongly in his own self-condemnation as in any other part of his conduct at this time. Judging of himself, as though he were standing outside himself and looking on to another man's work, he pointed out to himself his own shortcomings. If it were all to be done again he thought that he could avoid this bump against the rocks on one side, and that terribly shattering blow on the other. There was much that he was ashamed of,—many a little act which
reached him vividly in this solitary hour as a thing to be repented of with inner sackcloth and ashes. But never once, not for a moment, did it occur to him that he should repent of the fraud in which his whole life had been passed. No idea ever crossed his mind of what might have been the result had he lived the life of an honest man. Though he was inquiring into himself as closely as he could, he never even told himself that he had been dishonest. Fraud and dishonesty had been the very principle of his life, and had so become a part of his blood and bones that even in this extremity of his misery he made no question within himself as to his right judgment in regard to them. Not to cheat, not to be a scoundrel, not to live more luxuriously than others by cheating more brilliantly, was a condition of things to which his mind had never turned itself. In that respect he accused himself of no want of judgment. But why had he, so unrighteous himself, not made friends to himself of the Mammon of unrighteousness? Why had he not conciliated Lord Mayors? Why had he trod upon all the corns of all his neighbours? Why had he been insolent at the India Office? Why had he trusted any man as he had trusted Cohenlupe? Why had he not stuck to Abchurch Lane instead of going into Parliament? Why had he called down unnecessary notice on his head by entertaining the Emperor of China? It was too late now, and he must bear it; but these were the things that had ruined him.

He walked into Palace Yard and across it, to the door of Westminster Abbey, before he found out that Parliament was not sitting.

"Oh, Wednesday! Of course it is," he said, turning round and directing his steps towards Grosvenor Square. Then he remembered that in the morning he had declared his purpose of dining at home, and now he did not know what better use to make of the present evening. His house could hardly be very comfortable to him. Marie no doubt would keep out of his way, and he did not habitually receive much pleasure from his wife's company. But in his own house he could at least be alone. Then, as he walked slowly across the park, thinking so intently on matters as hardly to observe whether he himself were observed or no, he asked himself whether it still might not be best for him to keep the money which was settled on his daughter, to tell the Longestaffes that he could make no payment, and to face the worst that Mr. Squercum could do to him,—for he knew already how busy Mr. Squercum was in the matter. Though they should put him on his trial for forgery, what of that? He had heard of trials in which the accused criminals had been heroes to the multitude while their cases were in progress,—who had been feted from the beginning to the end though no one had doubted their guilt,—and who had come out unseathed at the last. What evidence had they against him? It might be that the Longestaffes and Bideawhiles and Squercums should know that he was a forger, but their knowledge would not produce a verdict. He, as member for Westminster, as the man who had entertained the Emperor, as the owner of one of the most gorgeous houses in London, as the great Melmoth, could certainly command the best half of the bar. He already felt what popular support might do for him. Surely there need be no
despondency while so good a hope remained to him! He did tremble as he remembered Dolly Longestaffe's letter, and the letter of the old man who was dead. And he knew that it was possible that other things might be adduced; but would it not be better to face it all than surrender his money and become a pauper, seeing, as he did very clearly, that even by such surrender he could not cleanse his character?

But he had given those forged documents into the hands of Mr. Brehgert! Again he had acted in a hurry,—without giving sufficient thought to the matter in hand. He was angry with himself for that also. But how is a man to give sufficient thought to his affairs when no step that he takes can be other than ruinous? Yes;—he had certainly put into Brehgert's hands means of proving him to have been absolutely guilty of forgery. He did not think that Marie would disclaim the signatures, even though she had refused to sign the deeds, when she should understand that her father had written her name; nor did he think that his clerk would be urgent against him, as the forgery of Croll's name could not injure Croll. But Brehgert, should he discover what had been done, would certainly not permit him to escape. And now he had put these forgeries without any guard into Brehgert's hands.

He would tell Brehgert in the morning that he had changed his mind. He would see Brehgert before any action could have been taken on the documents, and Brehgert would no doubt restore them to him. Then he would instruct his daughter to hold the money fast, to sign no paper that should be put before her, and to draw the income herself. Having done that, he would let his foes do their worst. They might drag him to gaol. They probably would do so. He had an idea that he could not be admitted to bail if accused of forgery. But he would bear all that. If convicted he would bear the punishment, still hoping that an end might come. But how great was the chance that they might fail to convict him! As to the dead man's letter, and as to Dolly Longestaffe's letter, he did not think that any sufficient evidence could be found. The evidence as to the deeds by which Marie was to have released the property was indeed conclusive; but he believed that he might still recover those documents. For the present it must be his duty to do nothing,—when he should have recovered and destroyed those documents,—and to live before the eyes of men as though he feared nothing.

He dined at home alone, in the study, and after dinner carefully went through various bundles of papers, preparing them for the eyes of those ministers of the law who would probably before long have the privilege of searching them. At dinner, and while he was thus employed, he drank a bottle of champagne,—feeling himself greatly comforted by the process. If he could only hold up his head and look men in the face, he thought that he might still live through it all. How much had he done by his own unassisted powers! He had once been imprisoned for fraud at Hamburgh, and had come out of gaol a pauper; friendless, with all his wretched antecedents against him. Now he was a member of the British House of Parliament, the undoubted owner of perhaps the most gorgeously furnished house in London,
a man with an established character for high finance,—a commercial giant whose name was a familiar word on all the exchanges of the two hemispheres. Even though he should be condemned to penal servitude for life, he would not all die. He rang the bell and desired that Madame Melmotte might be sent to him, and bade the servant bring him brandy.

In ten minutes his poor wife came crawling into the room. Every one connected with Melmotte regarded the man with a certain amount of awe,—every one except Marie, to whom alone he had at times been himself almost gentle. The servants all feared him, and his wife obeyed him implicitly when she could not keep away from him. She came in now and stood opposite to him, while he spoke to her. She never sat in his presence in that room. He asked her where she and Marie kept their jewelry;—for during the last twelvemonths rich trinkets had been supplied to both of them. Of course she answered by another question. "Is anything going to happen, Melmotte?"

"A good deal is going to happen. Are they here in this house, or in Grosvenor Square?"

"They are here."

"Then have them all packed up,—as small as you can; never mind about wool and cases and all that. Have them close to your hand so that if you have to move you can take them with you. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I understand."

"Why don't you speak, then?"

"What is going to happen, Melmotte?"

"How can I tell? You ought to know by this time that when a man's work is such as mine, things will happen. You'll be safe enough. Nothing can hurt you?"

"Can they hurt you, Melmotte?"

"Hurt me! I don't know what you call hurting. Whatever there is to be borne, I suppose it is I must bear it. I have not had it very soft all my life hitherto, and I don't think it's going to be very soft now."

"Shall we have to move?"

"Very likely. Move! What's the harm of moving? You talk of moving as though that were the worst thing that could happen. How would you like to be in some place where they wouldn't let you move?"

"Are they going to send you to prison?"

"Hold your tongue."

"Tell me, Melmotte;—are they going to?" Then the poor woman did sit down, overcome by her feelings.

"I didn't ask you to come here for a scene," said Melmotte. "Do as I bid you about your own jewels, and Marie's. The thing is to have them in small compass, and that you should not have it to do at the last moment, when you will be flurried and incapable. Now you needn't stay any longer, and it's no good asking any questions because I shan't answer them." So dismissed, the poor woman crept out again, and immediately, after her own slow fashion, went to work with her ornaments.
MELMOTTE sat up during the greater part of the night, sometimes sipping brandy and water, and sometimes smoking. But he did no work, and hardly touched a paper after his wife left him.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

MELMOTTE'S PERSEVERANCE.

VERY early the next morning, very early that is for London life, Melmotte was told by a servant that Mr. Croll had called and wanted to see him. Then it immediately became a question with him whether he wanted to see Croll. "Is it anything special?" he asked. The man thought that it was something special, as Croll had declared his purpose of waiting when told that Mr. Melmotte was not as yet dressed. This happened at about nine o'clock in the morning. Melmotte longed to know every detail of Croll's manner,—to know even the servant's opinion of the clerk's manner,—but he did not dare to ask a question. Melmotte thought that it might be well to be gracious. "Ask him if he has breakfasted, and if not give him something in the study." But Mr. Croll had breakfasted and declined any further refreshment.

Nevertheless Melmotte had not as yet made up his mind that he would meet his clerk. His clerk was his clerk. It might perhaps be well that he should first go into the City and send word to Croll, bidding him wait for his return. Over and over again, against his will, the question of flying would present itself to him; but, though he discussed it within his own bosom in every form, he knew that he could not fly. And if he stood his ground,—as most assuredly he would do,—then must he not be afraid to meet any man, let the man come with what thunderbolts in his hand he might. Of course sooner or later some man must come with a thunderbolt,—and why not Croll as well as another? He stood against a press in his chamber, with a razor in his hand, and steadied himself. How easily might he put an end to it all! Then he rang his bell and desired that Croll might be shown up into his room.

The three or four minutes which intervened seemed to him to be very long. He had absolutely forgotten in his anxiety that the latter was still upon his face. But he could not smother his anxiety. He was fighting with it at every turn, but he could not conquer it. When the knock came at his door, he grasped at his own breast as though to support himself. With a hoarse voice he told the man to come in, and Croll himself appeared, opening the door gently and very slowly. Melmotte had left the bag which contained the papers in possession of Mr. Brehgert, and he now saw, at a glance, that Croll had got the bag in his hand,—and could see also by the shape of the bag that the bag contained the papers. The man therefore had in his own hands, in his own keeping, the very documents to which his own name had
been forged! There was no longer a hope, no longer a chance that Croll should be ignorant of what had been done. "Well, Croll," he said with an attempt at a smile, "what brings you here so early?" He was pale as death, and let him struggle as he would, could not restrain himself from trembling.

"Herr Brehgert was vid me last night," said Croll.

"Eh!"

"And he thought I had better bring these back to you. That's all." Croll spoke in a very low voice, with his eyes fixed on his master's face, but with nothing of a threat in his attitude or manner.

"Eh!" repeated Melmotte. Even though he might have saved himself from all coming evils by a bold demeanour at that moment, he could not assume it. But it all flashed upon him at a moment. Brehgert had seen Croll after he, Melmotte, had left the City, had then discovered the forgery, and had taken this way of sending back all the forged documents. He had known Brehgert to be of all men who ever lived the most good-natured, but he could hardly believe in pure good-nature such as this. It seemed that the thunderbolt was not yet to fall.

"Mr. Brehgert came to me," continued Croll, "because one signature was wanting. It was very late, so I took them home with me. I said I'd bring them to you in the morning."

They both knew that he had forged the documents, Brehgert and Croll; but how would that concern him, Melmotte, if these two friends had resolved together that they would not expose him? He had desired to get the documents back into his own hands, and here they were! Melmotte's immediate trouble arose from the difficulty of speaking in a proper manner to his own servant who had just detected him in forgery. He couldn't speak. There were no words appropriate to such an occasion. "It was a strong order, Mr. Melmotte," said Croll. Melmotte tried to smile but only grinned. "I vill not be back in the Lane, Mr. Melmotte."

"Not back at the office, Croll?"

"I tink not;—no. De leetle money coming to me, you will send it. Adieu." And so Mr. Croll took his final leave of his old master after an intercourse which had lasted twenty years. We may imagine that Herr Croll found his spirits to be oppressed and his capacity for business to be obliterated by his patron's misfortunes rather than by his patron's guilt. But he had not behaved unkindly. He had merely remarked that the forgery of his own name half-a-dozen times over was a "strong order."

Melmotte opened the bag, and examined the documents one by one. It had been necessary that Marie should sign her name some half-dozen times, and Marie's father had made all the necessary forgeries. It had been of course necessary that each name should be witnessed;—but here the forger had seamped his work. Croll's name he had written five times; but one forged signature he had left unattested! Again he had himself been at fault. Again he had aided his own ruin by his own carelessness. One seems inclined to think sometimes that any fool might do an honest business. But fraud requires a man to be alive and wide awake at every turn!
"He thought I had better bring these back to you."
Melmotte had desired to have the documents back in his own hands, and now he had them. Did it matter much that Brehgert and Croll both knew the crime which he had committed? Had they meant to take legal steps against him they would not have returned the forgeries to his own hands. Brehgert, he thought, would never tell the tale,—unless there should arise some most improbable emergency in which he might make money by telling it; but he was by no means so sure of Croll. Croll had signified his intention of leaving Melmotte's service, and would therefore probably enter some rival service, and thus become an enemy to his late master. There could be no reason why Croll should keep the secret. Even if he got no direct profit by telling it, he would curry favour by making it known. Of course Croll would tell it.

But what harm could the telling of such a secret do him? The girl was his own daughter! The money had been his own money! The man had been his own servant! There had been no fraud; no robbery; no purpose of peculation. Melmotte, as he thought of this, became almost proud of what he had done, thinking that if the evidence were suppressed the knowledge of the facts could do him no harm. But the evidence must be suppressed, and with the view of suppressing it he took the little bag and all the papers down with him to the study. Then he ate his breakfast,—and suppressed the evidence by the aid of his gas lamp.

When this was accomplished he hesitated as to the manner in which he would pass his day. He had now given up all idea of raising the money for Longestaffe. He had even considered the language in which he would explain to the assembled gentlemen on the morrow the fact that a little difficulty still presented itself, and that as he could not exactly name a day, he must leave the matter in their hands. For he had resolved that he would not evade the meeting. Cohenlupe had gone since he had made his promise, and he would throw all the blame on Cohenlupe. Everybody knows that when panics arise the breaking of one merchant causes the downfall of another. Cohenlupe should bear the burden. But as that must be so, he could do no good by going into the City. His pecuniary downfall had now become too much a matter of certainty to be staved off by his presence; and his personal security could hardly be assisted by it. There would be nothing for him to do. Cohenlupe had gone. Miles Grendall had gone. Croll had gone. He could hardly go to Cuthbert's Court and face Mr. Brehgert! He would stay at home till it was time for him to go down to the House, and then he would face the world there. He would dine down at the House, and stand about in the smoking-room with his hat on, and be visible in the lobbies, and take his seat among his brother legislators,—and, if it were possible, rise on his legs and make a speech to them. He was about to have a crushing fall,—but the world should say that he had fallen like a man.

About eleven his daughter came to him as he sat in the study. It can hardly be said that he had ever been kind to Marie, but perhaps she was the only person who in the whole course of his career had received indulgence at his hands. He had often beaten her; but he had also often made her presents and smiled on her, and in the
periods of his opulence, had allowed her pocket-money almost without limit. Now she had not only disobeyed him, but by most perverse obstinacy on her part had driven him to acts of forgery which had already been detected. He had cause to be angry now with Marie if he had ever had cause for anger. But he had almost forgotten the transaction. He had at any rate forgotten the violence of his own feelings at the time of its occurrence. He was no longer anxious that the release should be made, and therefore no longer angry with her for her refusal.

"Papa," she said, coming very gently into the room, "I think that perhaps I was wrong yesterday."

"Of course you were wrong;—but it doesn't matter now."

"If you wish it I'll sign those papers. I don't suppose Lord Nidderdale means to come any more;—and I'm sure I don't care whether he does or not."

"What makes you think that, Marie?"

"I was out last night at Lady Julia Goldsheiner's, and he was there. I'm sure he doesn't mean to come here any more."

"Was he uncivil to you?"

"O dear no. He's never uncivil. But I'm sure of it. Never mind how. I never told him that I cared for him and I never did care for him. Papa, is there something going to happen?"

"What do you mean?"

"Some misfortune! Oh, papa, why didn't you let me marry that other man?"

"He is a penniless adventurer."

"But he would have had this money that I call my money, and then there would have been enough for us all. Papa, he would marry me still if you would let him."

"Have you seen him since you went to Liverpool?"

"Never, papa."

"Or heard from him?"

"Not a line."

"Then what makes you think he would marry you?"

"He would if I got hold of him and told him. And he is a baronet. And there would be plenty of money for us all. And we could go and live in Germany."

"We could do that just as well without your marrying."

"But I suppose, papa, I am to be considered as somebody. I don't want after all to run away from London, just as if everybody had turned up their noses at me. I like him, and I don't like anybody else."

"He wouldn't take the trouble to go to Liverpool with you."

"He got tipsy. I know all about that. I don't mean to say that he's anything particularly grand. I don't know that anybody is very grand. He's as good as anybody else."

"It can't be done, Marie."

"Why can't it be done?"

"There are a dozen reasons. Why should my money be given up to him? And it is too late. There are other things to be thought of now than marriage."
"You don't want me to sign the papers?"

"No;—I haven't got the papers. But I want you to remember that the money is mine and not yours. It may be that much may depend on you, and that I shall have to trust to you for nearly everything. Do not let me find myself deceived by my daughter."

"I won't,—if you'll let me see Sir Felix Carbury once more."

Then the father's pride again reasserted itself and he became angry. "I tell you, you little fool, that it is out of the question. Why cannot you believe me? Has your mother spoken to you about your jewels? Get them packed up, so that you can carry them away in your hand if we have to leave this suddenly. You are an idiot to think of that young man. As you say, I don't know that any of them are very good, but among them all he is about the worst. Go away and do as I bid you."

That afternoon the page in Welbeck Street came up to Lady Carbury and told her that there was a young lady down-stairs who wanted to see Sir Felix. At this time the dominion of Sir Felix in his mother's house had been much curtailed. His latch-key had been surreptitiously taken away from him, and all messages brought for him reached his hands through those of his mother. The plasters were not removed from his face, so that he was still subject to that loss of self-assertion with which we are told that hitherto dominant cocks become afflicted when they have been daubed with mud. Lady Carbury asked sundry questions about the lady, suspecting that Ruby Ruggles, of whom she had heard, had come to seek her lover. The page could give no special description, merely saying that the young lady wore a black veil. Lady Carbury directed that the young lady should be shown into her own presence,—and Marie Melmotte was ushered into the room. "I dare say you don't remember me, Lady Carbury," Marie said. "I am Marie Melmotte."

At first Lady Carbury had not recognised her visitor;—but she did so before she replied, "Yes, Miss Melmotte, I remember you."

"Yes;—I am Mr. Melmotte's daughter. How is your son? I hope he is better. They told me he had been horribly used by a dreadful man in the street."

"Sit down, Miss Melmotte. He is getting better." Now Lady Carbury had heard within the last two days from Mr. Broune that "it was all over" with Melmotte. Broune had declared his very strong belief, his thorough conviction, that Melmotte had committed various forgeries, that his speculations had gone so much against him as to leave him a ruined man, and, in short, that the great Melmotte bubble was on the very point of bursting. "Everybody says that he'll be in gaol before a week is over." That was the information which had reached Lady Carbury about the Melmottes only on the previous evening.

"I want to see him," said Marie. Lady Carbury, hardly knowing what answer to make, was silent for a while. "I suppose he told you everything;—didn't he? You know that we were to have been married? I loved him very much, and so I do still. I am not ashamed of coming and telling you."

"I thought it was all off," said Lady Carbury.
"I never said so. Does he say so? Your daughter came to me and was very good to me. I do so love her. She said that it was all over; but perhaps she was wrong. It shan't be all over if he will be true."

Lady Carbury was taken greatly by surprise. It seemed to her at the moment that this young lady, knowing that her own father was ruined, was looking out for another home, and was doing so with a considerable amount of audacity. She gave Marie little credit either for affection or for generosity; but yet she was unwilling to answer her roughly. "I am afraid," she said, "that it would not be suitable."

"Why should it not be suitable? They can't take my money away. There is enough for all of us even if Papa wanted to live with us;—but it is mine. It is ever so much;—I don't know how much, but a great deal. We should be quite rich enough. I ain't a bit ashamed to come and tell you, because we were engaged. I know he isn't rich, and I should have thought it would be suitable."

It then occurred to Lady Carbury that if this were true the marriage after all might be suitable. But how was she to find out whether it was true? "I understand that your Papa is opposed to it," she said.

"Yes, he is;—but Papa can't prevent me, and Papa can't make me give up the money. It's ever so many thousands a year, I know. If I can dare to do it, why can't he?"

Lady Carbury was so beside herself with doubts, that she found it impossible to form any decision. It would be necessary that she should see Mr. Broune. What to do with her son, how to bestow him, in what way to get rid of him so that in ridding herself of him she might not aid in destroying him,—this was the great trouble of her life, the burden that was breaking her back. Now this girl was not only willing but persistently anxious to take her black sheep and to endow him,—as she declared,—with ever so many thousands a year. If the thousands were there,—or even an income of a single thousand a year,—then what a blessing would such a marriage be! Sir Felix had already fallen so low that his mother on his behalf would not be justified in declining a connection with the Melmottes because the Melmottes had fallen. To get any niche in the world for him in which he might live with comparative safety would now be to her a heaven-sent comfort. "My son is up-stairs," she said. "I will go up and speak to him."

"Tell him I am here and that I have said that I will forgive him everything, and that I love him still, and that if he will be true to me, I will be true to him."

"I couldn't go down to her," said Sir Felix, "with my face all in this way."

"I don't think she would mind that."

"I couldn't do it. Besides, I don't believe about her money. I never did believe it. That was the real reason why I didn't go to Liverpool."

"I think I would see her if I were you, Felix. We could find out to a certainty about her fortune. It is evident at any rate that she is very fond of you."
"What's the use of that, if he is ruined?" He would not go down to see the girl,—because he could not endure to expose his face, and was ashamed of the wounds which he had received in the street. As regarded the money he half-believed and half-disbelieved Marie's story. But the fruition of the money, if it were within his reach, would be far off and to be attained with much trouble; whereas the nuisance of a scene with Marie would be immediate. How could he kiss his future bride, with his nose bound up with a bandage?

"What shall I say to her?" asked his mother.

"She oughtn't to have come. I should tell her just that. You might send the maid to her to tell her that you couldn't see her again."

But Lady Carbury could not treat the girl after that fashion. She returned to the drawing-room, descending the stairs very slowly, and thinking what answer she would make. "Miss Melmotte," she said, "my son feels that everything has been so changed since he and you last met, that nothing can be gained by a renewal of your acquaintance."

"That is his message,—is it?" Lady Carbury remained silent. "Then he is indeed all that they have told me; and I am ashamed that I should have loved him. I am ashamed;—not of coming here, although you will think that I have run after him. I don't see why a girl should not run after a man if they have been engaged together. But I'm ashamed of thinking so much of so mean a person. Good-bye, Lady Carbury."

"Good-bye, Miss Melmotte. I don't think you should be angry with me."

"No;—no. I am not angry with you. You can forget me now as soon as you please, and I will try to forget him."

Then with a rapid step she walked back to Bruton Street, going round by Grosvenor Square and in front of her old house on the way. What should she now do with herself? What sort of life should she endeavour to prepare for herself? The life that she had led for the last year had been thoroughly wretched. The poverty, and hardship which she remembered in her early days had been more endurable. The servitude to which she had been subjected before she had learned by intercourse with the world to assert herself, had been preferable. In these days of her grandeur, in which she had danced with princes, and seen an emperor in her father's house, and been allied to lords, she had encountered degradation which had been abominable to her. She had really loved;—but had found out that her golden idol was made of the basest clay. She had then declared to herself that bad as the clay was she would still love it;—but even the clay had turned away from her and had refused her love!

She was well aware that some catastrophe was about to happen to her father. Catastrophes had happened before, and she had been conscious of their coming. But now the blow would be a very heavy blow. They would again be driven to pack up and move and seek some other city,—probably in some very distant part. But go where she might, she would now be her own mistress. That was the one resolution she succeeded in forming before she re-entered the house in Bruton Street.
CHAPTER LXXXIII.

MELMOTTE AGAIN AT THE HOUSE.

On that Thursday afternoon it was known everywhere that there was to be a general ruin of all the Melmotte affairs. As soon as Cohenlupe had gone, no man doubted. The City men who had not gone to the dinner prided themselves on their foresight, as did also the politicians who had declined to meet the Emperor of China at the table of the suspected Financier. They who had got up the dinner and had been instrumental in taking the Emperor to the house in Grosvenor Square, and they also who had brought him forward at Westminster and had fought his battle for him, were aware that they would have to defend themselves against heavy attacks. No one now had a word to say in his favour, or a doubt as to his guilt. The Grendalls had retired altogether out of town, and were no longer even heard of. Lord Alfred had not been seen since the day of the dinner. The Duchess of Albury, too, went into the country some weeks earlier than usual, quelled, as the world said, by the general Melmotte failure. But this departure had not as yet taken place at the time at which we have now arrived.

When the Speaker took his seat in the House, soon after four o'clock, there were a great many members present, and a general feeling prevailed that the world was more than ordinarily alive because of Melmotte and his failures. It had been confidently asserted throughout the morning that he would be put upon his trial for forgery in reference to the purchase of the Pickering property from Mr. Longestaffe, and it was known that he had not as yet shown himself anywhere on this day. People had gone to look at the house in Grosvenor Square,—not knowing that he was still living in Mr. Longestaffe's house in Bruton Street, and had come away with the impression that the desolation of ruin and crime was already plainly to be seen upon it. "I wonder where he is," said Mr. Lupton to Mr. Beauchamp Beauclerk in one of the lobbies of the House.

"They say he hasn't been in the City all day. I suppose he's in Longestaffe's house. That poor fellow has got it heavy all round. The man has got his place in the country and his house in town. There's Nidderdale. I wonder what he thinks about it all."

"This is awful;—ain't it?" said Nidderdale.

"It might have been worse, I should say, as far as you are concerned," replied Mr. Lupton.

"Well, yes. But I'll tell you what, Lupton. I don't quite understand it all yet. Our lawyer said three days ago that the money was certainly there."

"And Cohenlupe was certainly here three days ago," said Lupton;—"but he isn't here now. It seems to me that it has just happened in time for you." Lord Nidderdale shook his head and tried to look very grave.
“There’s Brown,” said Sir Orlando Drought, hurrying up to the commercial gentleman whose mistakes about finance Mr. Melmotte on a previous occasion had been anxious to correct. “He’ll be able to tell us where he is. It was rumoured, you know, an hour ago, that he was off to the continent after Cohenlupe.” But Mr. Brown shook his head. Mr. Brown didn’t know anything. But Mr. Brown was very strongly of opinion that the police would know all that there was to be known about Mr. Melmotte before this time on the following day. Mr. Brown had been very bitter against Melmotte since that memorable attack made upon him in the House.

Even ministers as they sat to be badgered by the ordinary question-mongers of the day were more intent upon Melmotte than upon their own defence. “Do you know anything about it?” asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

“I understand that no order has been given for his arrest. There is a general opinion that he has committed forgery; but I doubt whether they’ve got their evidence together.”

“He’s a ruined man, I suppose,” said the Chancellor.

“I doubt whether he ever was a rich man. But I’ll tell you what;—he has been about the grandest rogue we’ve seen yet. He must have spent over a hundred thousand pounds during the last twelve months on his personal expenses. I wonder how the Emperor will like it when he learns the truth.” Another minister sitting close to the Secretary of State was of opinion that the Emperor of China would not care half so much about it as our own First Lord of the Treasury.

At this moment there came a silence over the House which was almost audible. They who know the sensation which arises from the continued hum of many suppressed voices will know also how plain to the ear is the feeling caused by the discontinuance of the sound. Everybody looked up, but everybody looked up in perfect silence. An Under-Secretary of State had just got upon his legs to answer a most indignant question as to an alteration of the colour of the facings of a certain regiment, his prepared answer to which, however, was so happy as to allow him to anticipate quite a little triumph. It is not often that such a Godsend comes in the way of an under-secretary; and he was intent upon his performance. But even he was startled into momentary oblivion of his well-arranged point. Augustus Melmotte, the member for Westminster, was walking up the centre of the House.

He had succeeded by this time in learning so much of the forms of the House as to know what to do with his hat,—when to wear it, and when to take it off,—and how to sit down. As he entered by the door facing the Speaker, he wore his hat on one side of his head, as was his custom. Much of the arrogance of his appearance had come from this habit, which had been adopted probably from a conviction that it added something to his powers of self-assertion. At this moment he was more determined than ever that no one should trace in his outer gait or in any feature of his face any sign of that ruin which, as he well knew, all men were anticipating. Therefore, perhaps, his hat was a little more cocked than usual, and the lappels of

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his coat were thrown back a little wider, displaying the large jewelled studs which he wore in his shirt; and the arrogance conveyed by his mouth and chin was specially conspicuous. He had come down in his brougham, and as he had walked up Westminster Hall and entered the House by the private door of the members, and then made his way in across the great lobby and between the doorkeepers,—no one had spoken a word to him. He had of course seen many whom he had known. He had indeed known nearly all whom he had seen;—but he had been aware, from the beginning of this enterprise of the day, that men would shun him, and that he must bear their cold looks and colder silence without seeming to notice them. He had schooled himself to the task, and he was now performing it. It was not only that he would have to move among men without being noticed, but that he must endure to pass the whole evening in the same plight. But he was resolved, and he was now doing it. He bowed to the Speaker with more than usual courtesy, raising his hat with more than usual care, and seated himself, as usual, on the third opposition-bench, but with more than his usual fling. He was a big man, who always endeavoured to make an effect by deportment, and was therefore customarily conspicuous in his movements. He was desirous now of being as he was always, neither more nor less demonstrative;—but, as a matter of course, he exceeded; and it seemed to those who looked at him that there was a special impudence in the manner in which he walked up the House and took his seat. The Under-Secretary of State, who was on his legs, was struck almost dumb, and his morsel of wit about the facings was lost to Parliament for ever.

That unfortunate young man, Lord Nidderdale, occupied the seat next to that on which Melmotte had placed himself. It had so happened three or four times since Melmotte had been in the House, as the young lord, fully intending to marry the Financier's daughter, had resolved that he would not be ashamed of his father-in-law. He had understood that countenance of the sort which he as a young aristocrat could give to the man of millions who had risen no one knew whence, was part of the bargain in reference to the marriage, and he was gifted with a mingled honesty and courage which together made him willing and able to carry out his idea. He had given Melmotte little lessons as to ordinary forms of the House, and had done what in him lay to earn the money which was to be forthcoming. But it had become manifest both to him and to his father during the last two days,—very painfully manifest to his father,—that the thing must be abandoned. And if so,—then why should he be any longer gracious to Melmotte? And, moreover, though he had been ready to be courteous to a very vulgar and a very disagreeable man, he was not anxious to extend his civilities to one who, as he was now assured, had been certainly guilty of forgery. But to get up at once and leave his seat because Melmotte had placed himself by his side, did not suit the turn of his mind. He looked round to his neighbour on the right, with a half-comic look of misery, and then prepared himself to bear his punishment, whatever it might be.

"Have you been up with Marie to-day?" said Melmotte.

"No;—I've not," replied the lord.
"Why don't you go? She's always asking about you now. I hope we shall be in our own house again next week, and then we shall be able to make you comfortable."

Could it be possible that the man did not know that all the world was united in accusing him of forgery? "I'll tell you what it is," said Nidderdale. "I think you had better see my governor again, Mr. Melmotte."

"There's nothing wrong, I hope."

"Well;—I don't know. You'd better see him. I'm going now. I only just came down to enter an appearance." He had to cross Melmotte on his way out, and as he did so Melmotte grasped him by the hand. "Good night, my boy," said Melmotte quite aloud,—in a voice much louder than that which members generally allow themselves for conversation. Nidderdale was confused and unhappy; but there was probably not a man in the House who did not understand the whole thing. He rushed down through the gangway and out through the doors with a hurried step, and as he escaped into the lobby he met Lionel Lutpon, who, since his little conversation with Mr. Beauclerk, had heard further news.

"You know what has happened, Nidderdale?"

"About Melmotte, you mean?"

"Yes, about Melmotte," continued Lutpon. "He has been arrested in his own house within the last half-hour on a charge of forgery."

"I wish he had," said Nidderdale, "with all my heart. If you go in you'll find him sitting there as large as life. He has been talking to me as though everything were all right."

"Compton was here not a moment ago, and said that he had been taken under a warrant from the Lord Mayor."

"The Lord Mayor is a member and had better come and fetch his prisoner himself. At any rate he's there. I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't on his legs before long."

Melmotte kept his seat steadily till seven, at which hour the House adjourned till nine. He was one of the last to leave, and then with a slow step,—with almost majestic steps,—he descended to the dining-room and ordered his dinner. There were many men there, and some little difficulty about a seat. No one was very willing to make room for him. But at last he secured a place, almost jostling some unfortunate who was there before him. It was impossible to expel him,—almost as impossible to sit next him. Even the waiters were unwilling to serve him;—but with patience and endurance he did at last get his dinner. He was there in his right, as a member of the House of Commons, and there was no ground on which such service as he required could be refused to him. It was not long before he had the table all to himself. But of this he took no apparent notice. He spoke loudly to the waiters and drank his bottle of champagne with much apparent enjoyment. Since his friendly intercourse with Nidderdale no one had spoken to him, nor had he spoken to any man. They who watched him declared among themselves that he was happy in his own audacity;—but in truth he was probably at that moment the most utterly wretched man in London. He would have better studied his
personal comfort had he gone to his bed, and spent his evening in
groans and wailings. But even he, with all the world now gone from
him, with nothing before him but the extreme misery which the
indignation of offended laws could inflict, was able to spend the
last moments of his freedom in making a reputation at any rate for
audacity. It was thus that Augustus Melmotte wrapped his toga
around him before his death!

He went from the dining-room to the smoking-room, and there,
taking from his pocket a huge case which he always carried, proceeded
to light a cigar about eight inches long. Mr. Brown, from the City,
was in the room, and Melmotte, with a smile and a bow, offered Mr.
Brown one of the same. Mr. Brown was a short, fat, round little
man, over sixty, who was always endeavouring to give to a somewhat
commonplace set of features an air of importance by the contraction
of his lips and the knitting of his brows. It was as good as a play
to see Mr. Brown jumping back from any contact with the wicked one,
and putting on a double frown as he looked at the impudent sinner.
"You needn't think so much, you know, of what I said the other
night. I didn't mean any offence." So spoke Melmotte, and then
laughed with a loud, hoarse laugh, looking round upon the assembled
crowd as though he were enjoying his triumph.

He sat after that and smoked in silence. Once again he burst out
into a laugh, as though peculiarly amused with his own thoughts;—
as though he were declaring to himself with much inward humour
that all these men around him were fools for believing the stories
which they had heard; but he made no further attempt to speak to
any one. Soon after nine he went back again into the House, and
again took his old place. At this time he had swallowed three glasses
of brandy and water, as well as the champagne, and was brave
enough almost for anything. There was some debate going on in
reference to the game laws,—a subject on which Melmotte was as
ignorant as one of his own housemaids,—but, as some speaker sat down,
he jumped up to his legs. Another gentleman had also risen, and
when the House called to that other gentleman Melmotte gave way.
The other gentleman had not much to say, and in a few minutes
Melmotte was again on his legs. Who shall dare to describe the
thoughts which would cross the august mind of a Speaker of the
House of Commons at such a moment? Of Melmotte's villainy he
had no official knowledge. And even could he have had such know-
ledge it was not for him to act upon it. The man was a member of
the House, and as much entitled to speak as another. But it seemed
on that occasion that the Speaker was anxious to save the House from
disgrace;—for twice and thrice he refused to have his "eye caught"
by the member for Westminster. As long as any other member
would rise he would not have his eye caught. But Melmotte was
persistent, and determined not to be put down. At last no one else
would speak, and the House was about to negative the motion without
a division,—when Melmotte was again on his legs, still persisting.
The Speaker scowled at him and leaned back in his chair. Melmotte
standing erect, turning his head round from one side of the House to
another, as though determined that all should see his audacity, prop-
ping himself with his knees against the seat before him, remained for half a minute perfectly silent. He was drunk,—but better able than most drunken men to steady himself, and showing in his face none of those outward signs of intoxication by which drunkenness is generally made apparent. But he had forgotten in his audacity that words are needed for the making of a speech, and now he had not a word at his command. He stumbled forward, recovered himself, then looked once more round the House with a glance of anger, and after that toppled headlong over the shoulders of Mr. Beauclerk, who was now sitting in front of him.

He might have wrapped his toga around him better perhaps had he remained at home, but if to have himself talked about was his only object, he could hardly have taken a surer course. The scene, as it occurred, was one very likely to be remembered when the performer should have been carried away into enforced obscurity. There was much commotion in the House. Mr. Beauclerk, a man of natural good nature, though at the moment put to considerable personal inconvenience, hastened, when he recovered his own equilibrium, to assist the drunken man. But Melmotte had by no means lost the power of helping himself. He quickly recovered his legs, and then reseating himself, put his hat on, and endeavoured to look as though nothing special had occurred. The House resumed its business, taking no further notice of Melmotte, and having no special rule of its own as to the treatment to be adopted with drunken members. But the member for Westminster caused no further inconvenience. He remained in his seat for perhaps ten minutes, and then, not with a very steady step, but still with capacity sufficient for his own guidance, he made his way down to the doors. His exit was watched in silence, and the moment was an anxious one for the Speaker, the clerks, and all who were near him. Had he fallen some one,—or rather some two or three,—must have picked him up and carried him out. But he did not fall either there or in the lobbies, or on his way down to Palace Yard. Many were looking at him, but none touched him. When he had got through the gates, leaning against the wall he hallooed for his brougham, and the servant who was waiting for him soon took him home to Bruton Street. That was the last which the British Parliament saw of its new member for Westminster.

Melmotte as soon as he reached home got into his own sitting-room without difficulty, and called for more brandy and water. Between eleven and twelve he was left there by his servant with a bottle of brandy, three or four bottles of sodawater, and his cigar-case. Neither of the ladies of the family came to him, nor did he speak of them. Nor was he so drunk then as to give rise to any suspicion in the mind of the servant. He was habitually left there at night, and the servant as usual went to his bed. But at nine o'clock on the following morning the maid-servant found him dead upon the floor. Drunk as he had been,—more drunk as he probably became during the night,—still he was able to deliver himself from the indignities and penalties to which the law might have subjected him by a dose of prussic acid.
CHAPTER LXXXIV.

PAUL MONTAGUE'S VINDICATION.

It is hoped that the reader need hardly be informed that Hetta Carbury was a very miserable young woman as soon as she decided that duty compelled her to divide herself altogether from Paul Montague. I think that she was irrational; but to her it seemed that the offence against herself,—the offence against her own dignity as a woman,—was too great to be forgiven. There can be no doubt that it would all have been forgiven with the greatest ease had Paul told the story before it had reached her ears from any other source. Had he said to her,—when her heart was softest towards him,—I once loved another woman, and that woman is here now in London, a trouble to me, persecuting me, and her history is so and so, and the history of my declining love is after that fashion, and the history of my declining love is after that fashion, and of this at any rate you may be sure, that this woman has never been near my heart from the first moment in which I saw you;—had he told it to her thus, there would not have been an opening for anger. And he doubtless would have so told it, had not Hetta's brother interfered too quickly. He was then forced to exculpate himself, to confess rather than to tell his own story,—and to admit facts which wore the air of having been concealed, and which had already been conceived to be altogether damming if true. It was that journey to Lowestoft, not yet a month old, which did the mischief,—a journey as to which Hetta was not slow in understanding all that Roger Carbury had thought about it, though Roger would say nothing of it to herself. Paul had been staying at the seaside with this woman in amicable intimacy,—this horrid woman,—in intimacy worse than amicable, and had been visiting her daily at Islington! Hetta felt quite sure that he had never passed a day without going there since the arrival of the woman; and everybody would know what that meant. And during this very hour he had been,—well, perhaps not exactly making love to herself, but looking at her and talking to her, and behaving to her in a manner such as could not but make her understand that he intended to make love to her. Of course they had really understood it, since they had met at Madame Melmott's first ball, when she had made a plea that she could not allow herself to dance with him more than,—say half-a-dozen times. Of course she had not intended him then to know that she would receive his love with favour; but equally of course she had known that he must so feel it. She had not only told herself, but had told her mother, that her heart was given away to this man; and yet the man during this very time was spending his hours with a,—woman, with a strange American woman, to whom he acknowledged that he had been once engaged. How could she not quarrel with him? How could she refrain from telling him that everything must be over between them? Everybody was against him,—her mother, her brother, and her cousin: and she felt that
she had not a word to say in his defence. A horrid woman! A wretched, bad, bold American intriguing woman! It was terrible to her that a friend of hers should ever have attached himself to such a creature;—but that he should have come to her with a second tale of love long, long before he had cleared himself from the first;—perhaps with no intention of clearing himself from the first! Of course she could not forgive him! No;—she would never forgive him. She would break her heart for him. That was a matter of course; but she would never forgive him. She knew well what it was that her mother wanted. Her mother thought that by forcing her into a quarrel with Montague she would force her also into a marriage with Roger Carbury. But her mother would find out that in that she was mistaken. She would never marry her cousin, though she would be always ready to acknowledge his worth. She was sure now that she would never marry any man. As she made this resolve she had a wicked satisfaction in feeling that it would be a trouble to her mother;—for though she was altogether in accord with Lady Carbury as to the iniquities of Paul Montague she was not the less angry with her mother for being so ready to expose those iniquities.

Oh, with what slow, cautious fingers, with what heartbroken tenderness did she take out from its guardian case the brooch which Paul had given her! It had as yet been an only present, and in thanking him for it, which she had done with full, free-spoken words of love, she had begged him to send her no other, so that that might ever be to her,—to her dying day,—the one precious thing that had been given to her by her lover while she was yet a girl. Now it must be sent back;—and, no doubt, it would go to that abominable woman! But her fingers lingered over it as she touched it, and she would fain have kissed it, had she not told herself that she would have been disgraced, even in her solitude, by such a demonstration of affection. She had given her answer to Paul Montague; and, as she would have no further personal correspondence with him, she took the brooch to her mother with a request that it might be returned.

"Of course, my dear, I will send it back to him. Is there nothing else?"

"No, mamma;—nothing else. I have no letters, and no other present. You always knew everything that took place. If you will just send that back to him,—without a word. You won't say anything,—will you, mamma?"

"There is nothing for me to say if you have really made him understand you."

"I think he understood me, mamma. You need not doubt about that."

"He has behaved very, very badly,—from the beginning," said Lady Carbury.

But Hetta did not really think that the young man had behaved very badly from the beginning, and certainly did not wish to be told of his misbehaviour. No doubt she thought that the young man had behaved very well in falling in love with her directly he saw her;—only that he had behaved so badly in taking Mrs. Hurtle to Lowestoft afterwards! "It's no good talking about that, mamma. I hope you will never talk of him any more."
"He is quite unworthy," said Lady Carbury.
"I can't bear to—have him—abused," said Hetta sobbing.
"My dear Hetta, I have no doubt this has made you for the time unhappy. Such little accidents do make people unhappy—for the time. But it will be much for the best that you should endeavour not to be so sensitive about it. The world is too rough and too hard for people to allow their feelings full play. You have to look out for the future, and you can best do so by resolving that Paul Montague shall be forgotten at once."

"Oh, mamma, don't. How is a person to resolve? Oh, mamma, don't say any more."

"But, my dear, there is more that I must say. Your future life is before you, and I must think of it, and you must think of it. Of course you must be married."

"There is no of course at all."

"Of course you must be married," continued Lady Carbury, "and of course it is your duty to think of the way in which this may be best done. My income is becoming less and less every day. I already owe money to your cousin, and I owe money to Mr. Broune."

"Money to Mr. Broune!"

"Yes,—to Mr. Broune. I had to pay a sum for Felix which Mr. Broune told me ought to be paid. And I owe money to tradesmen. I fear that I shall not be able to keep on this house. And they tell me,—your cousin and Mr. Broune,—that it is my duty to take Felix out of London,—probably abroad."

"Of course I shall go with you."

"It may be so at first; but, perhaps, even that may not be necessary. Why should you? What pleasure could you have in it? Think what my life must be with Felix in some French or German town!"

"Mamma, why don't you let me be a comfort to you? Why do you speak of me always as though I were a burden?"

"Everybody is a burden to other people. It is the way of life. But you,—if you will only yield in ever so little,—you may go where you will be no burden, where you will be accepted simply as a blessing. You have the opportunity of securing comfort for your whole life, and of making a friend, not only for yourself, but for me and your brother, of one whose friendship we cannot fail to want."

"Mamma, you cannot really mean to talk about that now?"

"Why should I not mean it? What is the use of indulging in high-flown nonsense? Make up your mind to be the wife of your cousin Roger."

"This is horrid," said Hetta, bursting out in her agony. "Cannot you understand that I am broken-hearted about Paul, that I love him from my very soul, that parting from him is like tearing my heart in pieces? I know that I must, because he has behaved so very badly,—and because of that wicked woman! And so I have. But I did not think that in the very next hour you would bid me give myself to somebody else! I will never marry Roger Carbury. You may be quite—quite sure that I shall never marry any one. If you won't take me with you when you go away with Felix, I must stay behind and try and earn my bread. I suppose I could go out as a nurse."
Then, without waiting for a reply she left the room and betook herself to her own apartment.

Lady Carbury did not even understand her daughter. She could not conceive that she had in any way acted unkindly in taking the opportunity of Montague's rejection for pressing the suit of the other lover. She was simply anxious to get a husband for her daughter,—as she had been anxious to get a wife for her son,—in order that her child might live comfortably. But she felt that whenever she spoke common sense to Hetta, her daughter took it as an offence, and flew into tantrums, being altogether unable to accommodate herself to the hard truths of the world. Deep as was the sorrow which her son brought upon her, and great as was the disgrace, she could feel more sympathy for him than for the girl. If there was anything that she could not forgive in life it was romance. And yet she, at any rate, believed that she delighted in romantic poetry! At this present moment she was very wretched; and was certainly unselfish in her wish to see her daughter comfortably settled before she commenced those miserable roamings with her son which seemed to be her coming destiny.

In these days she thought a good deal of Mr. Broune's offer, and of her own refusal. It was odd that since that refusal she had seen more of him, and had certainly known much more of him than she had ever seen or known before. Previous to that little episode their intimacy had been very fictitious, as are many intimacies. They had played at being friends, knowing but very little of each other. But now, during the last five or six weeks,—since she had refused his offer,—they had really learned to know each other. In the exquisite misery of her troubles, she had told him the truth about herself and her son, and he had responded, not by compliments, but by real aid and true counsel. His whole tone was altered to her, as was hers to him. There was no longer any egregious flattery between them,—and he, in speaking to her, would be almost rough to her. Once he had told her that she would be a fool if she did not do so and so. The consequence was that she almost regretted that she had allowed him to escape. But she certainly made no effort to recover the lost prize, for she told him all her troubles. It was on that afternoon, after her disagreement with her daughter, that Marie Melmotte came to her. And, on that same evening, closeted with Mr. Broune in her back room, she told him of both occurrences. "If the girl has got the money——" she began, regretting her son's obstinacy.

"I don't believe a bit of it," said Broune. "From all that I can hear, I don't think that there is any money. And if there is, you may be sure that Melmotte would not let it slip through his fingers in that way. I would not have anything to do with it."

"You think it is all over with the Melmottes?"

"A rumour reached me just now that he had been already arrested." It was now between nine and ten in the evening. "But as I came away from my room, I heard that he was down at the House. That he will have to stand a trial for forgery, I think there cannot be a doubt, and I imagine that it will be found that not a shilling will be saved out of the property."
"What a wonderful career it has been!"
"Yes,—the strangest thing that has come up in our days. I am inclined to think that the utter ruin at this moment has been brought about by his reckless personal expenditure."
"Why did he spend such a lot of money?"
"Because he thought that he could conquer the world by it, and obtain universal credit. He very nearly succeeded too. Only he had forgotten to calculate the force of the envy of his competitors."
"You think he has committed forgery?"
"Certainly, I think so. Of course we know nothing as yet."
"Then I suppose it is better that Felix should not have married her."
"Certainly better. No redemption was to have been had on that side, and I don't think you should regret the loss of such money as his."
Lady Carbury shook her head, meaning probably to imply that even Melmott's money would have had no bad odour to one so dreadfully in want of assistance as her son. "At any rate do not think of it any more." Then she told him her grief about Hetta.
"Ah, there," said he, "I feel myself less able to express an authori-
tative opinion."
"He doesn't owe a shilling," said Lady Carbury, "and he is really a fine gentleman."
"But if she doesn't like him?"
"Oh, but she does. She thinks him to be the finest person in the world. She would obey him a great deal sooner than she would me. But she has her mind stuffed with nonsense about love."
"A great many people, Lady Carbury, have their minds stuffed with that nonsense."
"Yes;—and ruin themselves with it, as she will do. Love is like any other luxury. You have no right to it unless you can afford it. And those who will have it when they can't afford it, will come to the ground like this Mr. Melmottle. How odd it seems! It isn't a fort-
night since we all thought him the greatest man in London." Mr. Broune only smiled, not thinking it worth his while to declare that he had never held that opinion about the late idol of Abchurch Lane.

On the following morning, very early, while Melmottle was still lying, as yet undiscovered, on the floor of Mr. Longestaffe's room, a letter was brought up to Hetta by the maid-servant, who told her that Mr. Montague had delivered it with his own hands. She took it greedily, and then repressing herself, put it with an assumed gesture of indifference beneath her pillow. But as soon as the girl had left the room she at once seized her treasure. It never occurred to her as yet to think whether she would or would not receive a letter from her dismissed lover. She had told him that he must go, and go for ever, and had taken it for granted that he would do so,—probably willingly. No doubt he would be delighted to return to the American woman. But now that she had the letter, she allowed no doubt to come between her and the reading of it. As soon as she was alone she opened it, and she ran through its contents without allowing her-
self a moment for thinking, as she went on, whether the excuses made by her lover were or were not such as she ought to accept.
"Dearest Hetta,

"I think you have been most unjust to me, and if you have ever loved me I cannot understand your injustice. I have never deceived you in anything, not by a word, or for a moment. Unless you mean to throw me over because I did once love another woman, I do not know what cause of anger you have. I could not tell you about Mrs. Hurtle till you had accepted me, and, as you yourself must know, I had had no opportunity to tell you anything afterwards till the story had reached your ears. I hardly know what I said the other day, I was so miserable at your accusation. But I suppose I said then, and I again declare now, that I had made up my mind that circumstances would not admit of her becoming my wife before I had ever seen you, and that I have certainly never wavered in my determination since I saw you. I can with safety refer to Roger as to this, because I was with him when I so determined, and made up my mind very much at his instance. This was before I had ever even met you.

"If I understand it all right you are angry because I have associated with Mrs. Hurtle since I so determined. I am not going back to my first acquaintance with her now. You may blame me for that if you please,—though it cannot have been a fault against you. But, after what had occurred, was I to refuse to see her when she came to England to see me? I think that would have been cowardly. Of course I went to her. And when she was all alone here, without a single other friend, and telling me that she was unwell, and asking me to take her down to the seaside, was I to refuse? I think that that would have been unkind. It was a dreadful trouble to me. But of course I did it."

"She asked me to renew my engagement. I am bound to tell you that, but I know in telling you that it will go no farther. I declined, telling her that it was my purpose to ask another woman to be my wife. Of course there has been anger and sorrow,—anger on her part and sorrow on mine. But there has been no doubt. And at last she yielded. As far as she was concerned my trouble was over,—except in so far that her unhappiness has been a great trouble to me,—when, on a sudden, I found that the story had reached you in such a form as to make you determined to quarrel with me!

"Of course you do not know it all, for I cannot tell you all without telling her history. But you know everything that in the least concerns yourself, and I do say that you have no cause whatever for anger. I am writing at night. This evening your brooch was brought to me with three or four cutting words from your mother. But I cannot understand that if you really love me, you should wish to separate yourself from me,—or that, if you ever loved me, you should cease to love me now because of Mrs. Hurtle.

"I am so absolutely confused by the blow that I hardly know what I am writing, and take first one outrageous idea into my head and then another. My love for you is so thorough and so intense that I cannot bring myself to look forward to living without you, now that you have once owned that you have loved me. I cannot think it possible that love, such as I suppose yours must have been, could be made to cease all at a moment. Mine can't. I don't think it is natural that we should be parted."
"If you want corroboration of my story go yourself to Mrs. Hurtle. Anything is better than that we both should be broken-hearted."

"Yours most affectionately,

"Paul Montague."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

BREAKFAST IN BERKELEY SQUARE.

LORD NIDDERDALE was greatly disgusted with his own part of the performance when he left the House of Commons, and was, we may say, disgusted with his own position generally, when he considered all its circumstances. That had been at the commencement of the evening, and Melmotte had not then been tipsy; but he had behaved with unsurpassable arrogance and vulgarity, and had made the young lord drink the cup of his own disgrace to the very dregs. Everybody now knew it as a positive fact that the charges made against the man were to become matter of investigation before the chief magistrate for the City, everybody knew that he had committed forgery upon forgery, everybody knew that he could not pay for the property which he had pretended to buy, and that he was actually a ruined man;—and yet he had seized Nidderdale by the hand, and called the young lord "his dear boy" before the whole House.

And then he had made himself conspicuous as this man's advocate. If he had not himself spoken openly of his coming marriage with the girl, he had allowed other men to speak to him about it. He had quarrelled with one man for saying that Melmotte was a rogue, and had confidentially told his most intimate friends that in spite of a little vulgarity of manner, Melmotte at bottom was a very good fellow. How was he now to back out of his intimacy with the Melmottes generally? He was engaged to marry the girl, and there was nothing of which he could accuse her. He acknowledged to himself that she deserved well at his hands. Though at this moment he hated the father most bitterly, as those odious words, and the tone in which they had been pronounced, rang in his ears, nevertheless he had some kindly feeling for the girl. Of course he could not marry her now. That was manifestly out of the question. She herself, as well as all others, had known that she was to be married for her money, and now that bubble had been burst. But he felt that he owed it to her, as to a comrade who had on the whole been loyal to him, to have some personal explanation with herself. He arranged in his own mind the sort of speech that he would make to her. "Of course you know it can't be. It was all arranged because you were to have a lot of money, and now it turns out that you haven't got any. And I haven't got any, and we should have nothing to live upon. It's out of the question. But, upon my word, I'm very sorry, for I like you very much, and I really think we should have got on uncommon well together." That was the kind of speech that he suggested to himself,
but he did not know how to find for himself the opportunity of making it. He thought that he must put it all into a letter. But then that would be tantamount to a written confession that he had made her an offer of marriage, and he feared that Melmotte,—or Madame Melmotte on his behalf, if the great man himself were absent, in prison,—might make an ungenerous use of such an admission.

Between seven and eight he went into the Beargarden, and there he saw Dolly Longestaffe and others. Everybody was talking about Melmotte, the prevailing belief being that he was at this moment in custody. Dolly was full of his own griefs; but consoled amidst them by a sense of his own importance. "I wonder whether it's true," he was saying to Lord Grasslough. "He has an appointment to meet me and my governor at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and to pay us what he owes us. He swore yesterday that he would have the money to-morrow. But he can't keep his appointment, you know, if he's in prison."

"You won't see the money, Dolly, you may swear to that," said Grasslough.

"I don't suppose I shall. By George, what an ass my governor has been. He had no more right than you have to give up the property. Here's Nidderdale. He could tell us where he is; but I'm afraid to speak to him since he cut up so rough the other night."

In a moment the conversation was stopped; but when Lord Grasslough asked Nidderdale in a whisper whether he knew anything about Melmotte, the latter answered out loud, "Yes;—I left him in the House half an hour ago."

"People are saying that he has been arrested."

"I heard that also; but he certainly had not been arrested when I left the House." Then he went up and put his hand on Dolly Longestaffe's shoulder, and spoke to him. "I suppose you were about right the other night and I was about wrong; but you could understand what it was that I meant. I'm afraid this is a bad look out for both of us."

"Yes;—I understand. It's deuced bad for me," said Dolly. "I think you're very well out of it. But I'm glad there's not to be a quarrel. Suppose we have a rubber of whist."

Later on in the night news was brought to the club that Melmotte had tried to make a speech in the House, that he had been very drunk, and that he had tumbled over, upsetting Beauchamp Beauleclerk in his fall. "By George, I should like to have seen that!" said Dolly.

"I am very glad I was not there," said Nidderdale. It was three o'clock before they left the card table, at which time Melmotte was lying dead upon the floor in Mr. Longestaffe's house.

On the following morning, at ten o'clock, Lord Nidderdale sat at breakfast with his father in the old lord's house in Berkeley Square. From thence the house which Melmotte had hired was not above a few hundred yards distant. At this time the young lord was living with his father, and the two had now met by appointment in order that something might be settled between them as to the proposed marriage. The Marquis was not a very pleasant companion when the affairs in which he was interested did not go exactly as he would have them. He could be very cross and say most disagreeable words,—so that the
ladies of the family, and others connected with him, for the most part, found it impossible to live with him. But his eldest son had endured him;—partly perhaps because, being the eldest, he had been treated with a nearer approach to courtesy, but chiefly by means of his own extreme good humour. What did a few hard words matter? If his father was ungracious to him, of course he knew what all that meant. As long as his father would make fair allowance for his own peccadilloes,—he also would make allowances for his father's roughness. All this was based on his grand theory of live and let live. He expected his father to be a little cross on this occasion, and he acknowledged to himself that there was cause for it.

He was a little late himself, and he found his father already buttering his toast. "I don't believe you'd get out of bed a moment sooner than you liked if you could save the whole property by it."

"You show me how I can make a guinea by it, sir, and see if I don't earn the money." Then he sat down and poured himself out a cup of tea, and looked at the kidneys and looked at the fish.

"I suppose you were drinking last night," said the old lord.

"Not particular." The old man turned round and gnashed his teeth at him. "The fact is, sir, I don't drink. Everybody knows that."

"I know when you're in the country you can't live without champagne. Well;—what have you got to say about all this?"

"What have you got to say?"

"You've made a pretty kettle of fish of it."

"I've been guided by you in everything. Come, now; you ought to own that. I suppose the whole thing is over?"

"I don't see why it should be over. I'm told she has got her own money." Then Nidderdale described to his father Melmotte's behaviour in the House on the preceding evening. "What the devil does that matter?" said the old man. "You're not going to marry the man himself."

"I shouldn't wonder if he's in goal now."

"And what does that matter? She's not in goal. And if the money is her's, she can't lose it because he goes to prison. Beggars mustn't be choosers. How do you mean to live if you don't marry this girl?"

"I shall scrape on, I suppose. I must look for somebody else." The Marquis showed very plainly by his demeanour that he did not give his son much credit either for diligence or for ingenuity in making such a search. "At any rate, sir, I can't marry the daughter of a man who is to be put upon his trial for forgery."

"I can't see what that has to do with you."

"I couldn't do it, sir. I'd do anything else to oblige you, but I couldn't do that. And, moreover, I don't believe in the money."

"Then you may just go to the devil," said the old Marquis turning himself round in his chair, and lighting a cigar as he took up the newspaper. Nidderdale went on with his breakfast with perfect equanimity, and when he had finished lighted his cigar. "They tell me," said the old man, "that one of those Goldsheiner girls will have a lot of money."

"What difference does that make?"
"What difference does that make?"

"Oh no;—not in the least;—if the money's really there. Have you heard any sum named, sir?" The old man only grunted. "There are two sisters and two brothers. I don't suppose the girls would have a hundred thousand each."

"They say the widow of that brewer who died the other day has about twenty thousand a year."

"It's only for her life, sir."

"She could insure her life. D—me, sir, we must do something. If you turn up your nose at one woman after another how do you mean to live?"

"I don't think a woman of forty with only a life interest would be a good speculation. Of course I'll think of it if you press it." The old man growled again. "You see, sir, I've been so much in earnest about this girl that I haven't thought of inquiring about any one else. There always is some one up with a lot of money. It's a pity there shouldn't be a regular statement published with the amount of money, and what is expected in return. It'd save a deal of trouble."

"If you can't talk more seriously than that you'd better go away," said the old Marquis.

At that moment a footman came into the room and told Lord Nidderdale that a man particularly wished to see him in the hall. He was not always anxious to see those who called on him, and he asked the servant whether he knew who the man was. "I believe, my lord, he's one of the domestics from Mr. Melmotte's in Bruton Street," said the footman, who was no doubt fully acquainted with all the circumstances of Lord Nidderdale's engagement. The son, who was still smoking, looked at his father as though in doubt. "You'd better go and see," said the Marquis. But Nidderdale before he went asked a question as to what he had better do if Melmotte had sent for him. "Go and see Melmotte. Why should you be afraid to see him? Tell him that you are ready to marry the girl if you can see the money down, but that you won't stir a step till it has been actually paid over."

"He knows that already," said Nidderdale as he left the room.

In the hall he found a man whom he recognised as Melmotte's butler, a ponderous, elderly, heavy man who now had a letter in his hand. But the lord could tell by the man's face and manner that he himself had some story to tell. "Is there anything the matter?"

"Yes, my lord,—yes. Oh, dear,—oh, dear! I think you'll be sorry to hear it. There was none who came there he seemed to take to so much as your lordship."

"They've taken him to prison!" exclaimed Nidderdale. But the man shook his head. "What is it then? He can't be dead." Then the man nodded his head, and, putting his hand up to his face, burst into tears. "Mr. Melmotte dead! He was in the House of Commons last night. I saw him myself. How did he die?" But the fat, ponderous man was so affected by the tragedy he had witnessed, that he could not as yet give any account of the scene of his master's death, but simply handed the note which he had in his hand to Lord
Nidderdale. It was from Marie, and had been written within half an hour of the time at which news had been brought to her of what had occurred. The note was as follows:

"Dear Lord Nidderdale,

"The man will tell you what has happened. I feel as though I was mad. I do not know who to send to. Will you come to me, only for a few minutes?"

"Marie."

He read it standing up in the hall, and then again asked the man as to the manner of his master's death. And now the Marquis, gathering from a word or two that he heard and from his son's delay that something special had occurred, hobbled out into the hall. "Mr. Melmotte is—dead," said his son. The old man dropped his stick, and fell back against the wall. "This man says that he is dead, and here is a letter from Marie asking me to go there. How was it that he—died?"

"It was—poison," said the butler solemnly. "There has been a doctor already, and there isn't no doubt of that. He took it all by himself last night. He came home, perhaps a little fresh, and he had in brandy and soda and cigars;—and sat himself down all to himself. Then in the morning, when the young woman went in,—there he was,—poisoned! I see him lay on the ground, and I helped to lift him up, and there was that smell of prussic acid that I knew what he had been and done just the same as when the doctor came and told us."

Before the man could be allowed to go back, there was a consultation between the father and son as to a compliance with the request which Marie had made in her first misery. The Marquis thought that his son had better not go to Bruton Street. "What's the use? What good can you do? She'll only be falling into your arms, and that's what you've got to avoid,—at any rate, till you know how things are."

But Nidderdale's better feelings would not allow him to submit to this advice. He had been engaged to marry the girl, and she in her abject misery had turned to him as the friend she knew best. At any rate for the time the heartlessness of his usual life deserted him, and he felt willing to devote himself to the girl not for what he could get,—but because she had so nearly been so near to him. "I couldn't refuse her," he said over and over again. "I couldn't bring myself to do it. Oh, no;—I shall certainly go."

"You'll get into a mess if you do."

"Then I must get into a mess. I shall certainly go. I will go at once. It is very disagreeable, but I cannot possibly refuse. It would be abominable." Then going back to the hall, he sent a message by the butler to Marie, saying that he would be with her in less than half an hour.

"Don't you go and make a fool of yourself," his father said to him when he was alone. "This is just one of those times when a man may ruin himself by being soft-hearted." Nidderdale simply shook his head as he took his hat and gloves to go across to Bruton Street.
CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE MEETING IN BRUTON STREET.

WHEN the news of her husband's death was in some very rough way conveyed to Madame Melmotte, it crushed her for the time altogether. Marie first heard that she no longer had a living parent as she stood by the poor woman's bedside, and she was enabled, as much perhaps by the necessity incumbent upon her of attending to the wretched woman as by her own superior strength of character, to save herself from that prostration and collapse of power which a great and sudden blow is apt to produce. She stared at the woman who first conveyed to her tidings of the tragedy, and then for a moment seated herself at the bedside. But the violent sobbings and hysterical screams of Madame Melmotte soon brought her again to her feet, and from that moment she was not only active but efficacious. No;—she would not go down to the room; she could do no good by going thither. But they must send for a doctor. They should send for a doctor immediately. She was then told that a doctor and an inspector of police were already in the rooms below. The necessity of throwing whatever responsibility there might be on to other shoulders had been at once apparent to the servants, and they had sent out right and left, so that the house might be filled with persons fit to give directions in such an emergency. The officers from the police station were already there when the woman who now filled Didon's place in the house communicated to Madame Melmotte the fact that she was a widow.

It was afterwards said by some of those who had seen her at the time, that Marie Melmotte had shown a hard heart on the occasion. But the condemnation was wrong. Her feeling for her father was certainly not that which we are accustomed to see among our daughters and sisters. He had never been to her the petted divinity of the household, whose slightest wish had been law, whose little comforts had become matters of serious care, whose frowns were horrid clouds, whose smiles were glorious sunshine, whose kisses were daily looked for, and if missed would be missed with mourning. How should it have been so with her? In all the intercourses of her family, since the first rough usage which she remembered, there had never been anything sweet or gracious. Though she had recognised a certain duty, as due from herself to her father, she had found herself bound to measure it, so that more should not be exacted from her than duty required. She had long known that her father would fain make her a slave for his own purposes, and that if she put no limits to her own obedience he certainly would put none. She had drawn no comparison between him and other fathers, or between herself and other daughters, because she had never become conversant with the ways of other families. After a fashion she had loved him, because nature creates love in a daughter's heart; but she had never
respected him, and had spent the best energies of her character on a resolve that she would never fear him. "He may cut me into pieces, but he shall not make me do for his advantage that which I do not think he has a right to exact from me." That had been the state of her mind towards her father; and now that he had taken himself away with terrible suddenness, leaving her to face the difficulties of the world with no protector and no assistance, the feeling which dominated her was no doubt one of awe rather than of broken-hearted sorrow. Those who depart must have earned such sorrow before it can be really felt. They who are left may be overwhelmed by the death—even of their most cruel tormentors. Madame Melmotte was altogether overwhelmed; but it could not probably be said of her with truth that she was crushed by pure grief. There was fear of all things, fear of solitude, fear of sudden change, fear of terrible revelations, fear of some necessary movement she knew not whither, fear that she might be discovered to be a poor wretched impostor who never could have been justified in standing in the same presence with emperors and princes, with duchesses and cabinet ministers. This and the fact that the dead body of the man, who had so lately been her tyrant was lying near her, so that she might hardly dare to leave her room lest she should encounter him dead, and thus more dreadful even than when alive, utterly conquered her. Feelings of the same kind, the same fears, and the same awe were powerful also with Marie;—but they did not conquer her. She was strong and conquered them; and she did not care to affect a weakness to which she was in truth superior. In such a household the death of such a father after such a fashion will hardly produce that tender sorrow which comes from real love.

She soon knew it all. Her father had destroyed himself, and had doubtless done so because his troubles in regard to money had been greater than he could bear. When he had told her that she was to sign those deeds because ruin was impending, he must indeed have told her the truth. He had so often lied to her that she had had no means of knowing whether he was lying then or telling her a true story. But she had offered to sign the deeds since that, and he had told her that it would be of no avail,—and at that time had not been angry with her as he would have been had her refusal been the cause of his ruin. She took some comfort in thinking of that.

But what was she to do? What was to be done generally by that over-cumbered household? She and her pseudo-mother had been instructed to pack up their jewellery, and they had both obeyed the order. But she herself at this moment cared but little for any property. How ought she to behave herself? Where should she go? On whose arm could she lean for some support at this terrible time? As for love, and engagements, and marriage,—that was all over. In her difficulty she never for a moment thought of Sir Felix Carbury. Though she had been silly enough to love the man because he was pleasant to look at, she had never been so far gone in silliness as to suppose that he was a staff upon which any one might lean. Had that marriage taken place, she would have been the staff. But it might
be possible that Lord Nidderdale would help her. He was good-natured and manly, and would be efficacious,—if only he would come to her. He was near, and she thought that at any rate she would try. So she had written her note and sent it by the butler,—thinking as she did so of the words she would use to make the young man understand that all the nonsense they had talked as to marrying each other was, of course, to mean nothing now.

It was past eleven when he reached the house, and he was shown up-stairs into one of the sitting-rooms on the first-floor. As he passed the door of the study, which was at the moment partly open, he saw the dress of a policeman within, and knew that the body of the dead man was still lying there. But he went by rapidly without a glance within, remembering the look of the man as he had last seen his burly figure, and that grasp of his hand, and those odious words. And now the man was dead,—having destroyed his own life. Surely the man must have known when he uttered those words what it was that he intended to do! When he had made that last appeal about Marie, conscious as he was that everyone was deserting him, he must even then have looked his fate in the face and have told himself that it was better that he should die! His misfortunes, whatever might be their nature, must have been heavy on him then with all their weight; and he himself and all the world had known that he was ruined. And yet he had pretended to be anxious about the girl's marriage, and had spoken of it as though he still believed that it would be accomplished!

Nidderdale had hardly put his hat down on the table before Marie was with him. He walked up to her, took her by both hands, and looked into her face. There was no trace of a tear, but her whole countenance seemed to him to be altered. She was the first to speak.

"I thought you would come when I sent for you."

"Of course I came."

"I knew you would be a friend, and I knew no one else who would. You won't be afraid, Lord Nidderdale, that I shall ever think any more of all those things which he was planning?" She paused a moment, but he was not ready enough to have a word to say in answer to this. "You know what has happened?"

"Your servant told us."

"What are we to do? Oh, Lord Nidderdale, it is so dreadful! Poor papa! Poor papa! When I think of all that he must have suffered I wish that I could be dead too."

"Has your mother been told?"

"Oh yes. She knows. No one tried to conceal anything for a moment. It was better that it should be so;—better at last. But we have no friends who would be considerate enough to try to save us from sorrow. But I think it was better. Mamma is very bad. She is always nervous and timid. Of course this has nearly killed her. What ought we to do? It is Mr. Longstaffe's house, and we were to have left it to-morrow."

"He will not mind that now."

"Where must we go? We can't go back to that big place in q 2
Grosvenor Square. Who will manage for us? Who will see the doctor and the policemen?"

"I will do that."

"But there will be things that I cannot ask you to do. Why should I ask you to do anything?"

"Because we are friends."

"No," she said, "no. You cannot really regard me as a friend. I have been an impostor. I know that. I had no business to know a person like you at all. Oh, if the next six months could be over! Poor papa;—poor papa!" And then for the first time she burst into tears.

"I wish I knew what might comfort you," he said.

"How can there be any comfort? There never can be comfort again! As for comfort, when were we ever comfortable? It has been one trouble after another,—one fear after another! And now we are friendless and homeless. I suppose they will take everything that we have."

"Your papa had a lawyer, I suppose?"

"I think he had ever so many,—but I do not know who they were. His own clerk, who had lived with him for over twenty years, left him yesterday. I suppose they will know something in Abchurch Lane; but now that Herr Croll has gone I am not acquainted even with the name of one of them. Mr. Miles Grendall used to be with him."

"I do not think that he could be of much service."

"Nor Lord Alfred? Lord Alfred was always with him till very lately." Nidderdale shook his head. "I suppose not. They only came because papa had a big house." The young lord could not but feel that he was included in the same rebuke. "Oh, what a life it has been! And now,—now it's over." As she said this it seemed that for the moment her strength failed her, for she fell backwards on the corner of the sofa. He tried to raise her, but she shook him away, burying her face in her hands. He was standing close to her, still holding her arm, when he heard a knock at the front door, which was immediately opened, as the servants were hanging about in the hall. "Who are they?" said Marie, whose sharp ears caught the sound of various steps. Lord Nidderdale went out on to the head of the stairs, and immediately heard the voice of Dolly Longestaffe.

Dolly Longestaffe had on that morning put himself early into the care of Mr. Squercum, and it had happened that he with his lawyer had met his father with Mr. Bideawhile at the corner of the square. They were all coming according to appointment to receive the money which Mr. Melmotte had promised to pay them at this very hour. Of course they had none of them as yet heard of the way in which the Financier had made his last grand payment, and as they walked together to the door had been intent only in reference to their own money. Squercum, who had heard a good deal on the previous day, was very certain that the money would not be forthcoming, whereas Bideawhile was sanguine of success. "Don't we wish we may get it?" Dolly had said, and by saying so had very much offended his
father, who had resented the want of reverence implied in the use of that word "we." They had all been admitted together, and Dolly had at once loudly claimed an old acquaintance with some of the articles around him. "I knew I'd got a coat just like that," said Dolly, "and I never could make out what my fellow had done with it." This was the speech which Nidderdale had heard, standing on the top of the stairs.

The two lawyers had at once seen, from the face of the man who had opened the door and from the presence of three or four servants in the hall, that things were not going on in their usual course. Before Dolly had completed his buffoonery the butler had whispered to Mr. Bideawhile that Mr. Melmotte—" was no more."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mr. Bideawhile. Squeercum put his hands into his trowsers pockets and opened his mouth wide. "Dead!" muttered Mr. Longestaffe senior. "Dead!" said Dolly. "Who's dead?" The butler shook his head. Then Squeercum whispered a word into the butler's ear, and the butler thereupon nodded his head. "It's about what I expected," said Squeercum. Then the butler whispered the word to Mr. Longestaffe, and whispered it also to Mr. Bideawhile, and they all knew that the millionaire had swallowed poison during the night.

It was known to the servants that Mr. Longestaffe was the owner of the house, and he was therefore, as having authority there, shown into the room where the body of Melmotte was lying on a sofa. The two lawyers and Dolly of course followed, as did also Lord Nidderdale, who had now joined them from the lobby above. There was a policeman in the room who seemed to be simply watching the body, and who rose from his seat when the gentlemen entered. Two or three of the servants followed them, so that there was almost a crowd round the dead man's bier. There was no further tale to be told. That Melmotte had been in the House on the previous night, and had there disgraced himself by intoxication, they had known already. That he had been found dead that morning had been already announced. They could only stand round and gaze on the square, sullen, livid features of the big-framed man, and each lament that he had ever heard the name of Melmotte.

"Are you in the house here?" said Dolly to Lord Nidderdale in a whisper.

"She sent for me. We live quite close, you know. She wanted somebody to tell her something. I must go up to her again now."

"Had you seen him before?"

"No indeed. I only came down when I heard your voices. I fear it will be rather bad for you;—won't it?"

"He was regularly smashed, I suppose?" asked Dolly.

"I know nothing myself. He talked to me about his affairs once, but he was such a liar that not a word that he said was worth anything. I believed him then. How it will go, I can't say."

"That other thing is all over of course," suggested Dolly.

Nidderdale intimidated by a gesture of his head that the other thing was all over, and then returned to Marie. There was nothing
further that the four gentlemen could do, and they soon departed from the house;—not, however, till Mr. Bideawhile had given certain short injunctions to the butler concerning the property contained in Mr. Longestaff’s town residence.

"They had come to see him," said Lord Nidderdale in a whisper. "There was some appointment. He had told them to be all here at this hour."

"They didn’t know, then?" asked Marie.

"Nothing,—till the man told them."

"And did you go in?"

"Yes; we all went into the room." Marie shuddered, and again hid her face. "I think the best thing I can do," said Nidderdale, "is to go to Abchurch Lane, and find out from Smith who is the lawyer whom he chiefly trusted. I know Smith had to do with his own affairs, because he has told me so at the Board; and if necessary I will find out Croll. No doubt I can trace him. Then we had better employ the lawyer to arrange everything for you."

"And where had we better go to?"

"Where would Madame Melmotte wish to go?"

"Anywhere, so that we could hide ourselves. Perhaps Frankfort would be the best. But shouldn’t we stay till something has been done here? And couldn’t we have lodgings, so as to get away from Mr. Longestaff’s house?" Nidderdale promised that he himself would look for lodgings, as soon as he had seen the lawyer. "And now, my lord, I suppose that I never shall see you again," said Marie.

"I don’t know why you should say that."

"Because it will be best. Why should you? All this will be trouble enough to you when people begin to say what we are. But I don’t think it has been my fault."

"Nothing has ever been your fault."

"Good-bye, my lord. I shall always think of you as one of the kindest people I ever knew. I thought it best to send to you for different reasons, but I do not want you to come back."

"Good-bye, Marie. I shall always remember you." And so they parted.

After that he did go into the City, and succeeded in finding both Mr. Smith and Herr Croll. When he reached Abchurch Lane, the news of Melmotte’s death had already been spread abroad; and more was known, or said to be known, of his circumstances than Nidderdale had as yet heard. The crushing blow to him, so said Herr Croll, had been the desertion of Cohenlupe,—that and the sudden fall in the value of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway shares, consequent on the rumours spread about the City respecting the Pickering property. It was asserted in Abchurch Lane that had he not at that moment touched the Pickering property, or entertained the Emperor, or stood for Westminster, he must, by the end of the autumn, have been able to do any or all of those things without danger, simply as the result of the money which would then have been realised by the railway. But he had allowed himself to become hampered by the want of comparatively small sums of ready money,
and in seeking relief had rushed from one danger to another, till at last the waters around him had become too deep even for him, and had overwhelmed him. As to his immediate death, Herr Croll expressed not the slightest astonishment. It was just the thing. Herr Croll said, that he had been sure that Melmotte would do, should his difficulties ever become too great for him. "And dere vas a leetle ting he lay himself open by de oder day," said Croll, "dat vas nasty,—very nasty." Nidderdale shook his head, but asked no questions. Croll had alluded to the use of his own name, but did not on this occasion make any further revelation. Then Croll made a further statement to Lord Nidderdale, which I think he must have done in pure good-nature. "My lor," he said, whispering very gravely, "de money of de yong lady is all her own." Then he nodded his head three times. "Nobody can toch it, not if he vas in debt millions." Again he nodded his head.

"I am very glad to hear it for her sake," said Lord Nidderdale as he took his leave.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

DOWN AT CARBURY.

WHEN Roger Carbury returned to Suffolk, after seeing his cousins in Welbeck Street, he was by no means contented with himself. That he should be discontented generally with the circumstances of his life was a matter of course. He knew that he was farther removed than ever from the object on which his whole mind was set. Had Hetta Carbury learned all the circumstances of Paul's engagement with Mrs. Hurtle before she had confessed her love to Paul,—so that her heart might have been turned against the man before she had made her confession,—then, he thought, she might at last have listened to him. Even though she had loved the other man, she might have at last done so, as her love would have been buried in her own bosom. But the tale had been told after the fashion which was most antagonistic to his own interests. Hetta had never heard Mrs. Hurtle's name till she had given herself away, and had declared to all her friends that she had given herself away to this man, who was so unworthy of her. The more Roger thought of this, the more angry he was with Paul Montague, and the more convinced that that man had done him an injury which he could never forgive.

But his grief extended even beyond that. Though he was never tired of swearing to himself that he would not forgive Paul Montague, yet there was present to him a feeling that an injury was being done to the man, and that he was in some sort responsible for that injury. He had declined to tell Hetta any part of the story
about Mrs. Hurtle,—actuated by a feeling that he ought not to betray
the trust put in him by a man who was at the time his friend; and he
had told nothing. But no one knew so well as he did the fact that
all the attention latterly given by Paul to the American woman had
by no means been the effect of love, but had come from a feeling on
Paul's part that he could not desert the woman he had once loved,
when she asked him for his kindness. If Hetta could know every-
thing exactly,—if she could look back and read the state of Paul's
mind as he, Roger, could read it,—then she would probably forgive
the man, or perhaps tell herself that there was nothing for her to
forgive. Roger was anxious that Hetta's anger should burn hot,—
because of the injury done to himself. He thought that there were
ample reasons why Paul Montague should be punished,—why Paul
should be utterly expelled from among them, and allowed to go his
own course. But it was not right that the man should be punished
on false grounds. It seemed to Roger now that he was doing an
injustice to his enemy by refraining from telling all that he knew.

As to the girl's misery in losing her lover, much as he loved her,
true as it was that he was willing to devote himself and all that he
had to her happiness, I do not think that at the present moment he
was disturbed in that direction. It is hardly natural, perhaps, that a
man should love a woman with such devotion as to wish to make her
happy by giving her to another man. Roger told himself that Paul
would be an unsafe husband, a fickle husband,—one who might be
carried hither and thither both in his circumstances and his feelings,—
and that it would be better for Hetta that she should not marry him;
but at the same time he was unhappy as he reflected that he himself
was a party to a certain amount of deceit.

And yet he had said not a word. He had referred Hetta to the
man himself. He thought that he knew, and he did indeed accu-
rately know, the state of Hetta's mind. She was wretched because
she thought that while her lover was winning her love, while she
herself was willingly allowing him to win her love, he was dallying
with another woman, and making to that other woman promises
the same as those he made to her. This was not true. Roger knew
that it was not true. But when he tried to quiet his conscience by
saying that they must fight it out among themselves, he felt himself
to be uneasy under that assurance.

His life at Carbury, at this time, was very desolate. He had
become tired of the priest, who, in spite of various repulses, had
never for a moment relaxed his efforts to convert his friend. Roger
had told him once that he must beg that religion might not be made
the subject of further conversation between them. In answer to this,
Father Barham had declared that he would never consent to remain
as an intimate associate with any man on those terms. Roger had
persisted in his stipulation, and the priest had then suggested that it
was his host's intention to banish him from Carbury Hall. Roger
had made no reply, and the priest had of course been banished. But
even this added to his misery. Father Barham was a gentleman, was
a good man, and in great penury. To ill-treat such a one, to expel
"She's a coomin; she's a coomin."
such a one from his house, seemed to Roger to be an abominable cruelty. He was unhappy with himself about the priest, and yet he could not bid the man come back to him. It was already being said of him among his neighbours, at Eardly, at Caversham, and at the Bishop's palace, that he either had become or was becoming a Roman Catholic, under the priest's influence. Mrs. Yeld had even taken upon herself to write to him a most affectionate letter, in which she said very little as to any evidence that had reached her as to Roger's defection, but dilated at very great length on the abominations of a certain lady who is supposed to indulge in gorgeous colours.

He was troubled, too, about old Daniel Ruggles, the farmer at Sheep's Acre, who had been so angry because his niece would not marry John Crumb. Old Ruggles, when abandoned by Ruby and accused by his neighbours of personal cruelty to the girl, had taken freely to that source of consolation which he found to be most easily within his reach. Since Ruby had gone he had been drunk every day, and was making himself generally a scandal and a nuisance. His landlord had interfered with his usual kindness, and the old man had always declared that his niece and John Crumb were the cause of it all; for now, in his maudlin misery, he attributed as much blame to the lover as he did to the girl. John Crumb wasn't in earnest. If he had been in earnest he would have gone after her to London at once. No;—he wouldn't invite Ruby to come back. If Ruby would come back, repentant, full of sorrow,—and hadn't been and made a fool of herself in the meantime,—then he'd think of taking her back. In the meantime, with circumstances in their present condition, he evidently thought that he could best face the difficulties of the world by an unflagging adhesion to gin, early in the day and all day long. This, too, was a grievance to Roger Carbury.

But he did not neglect his work, the chief of which at the present moment was the care of the farm which he kept in his own hands. He was making hay at this time in certain meadows down by the river side; and was standing by while the men were loading a cart, when he saw John Crumb approaching across the field. He had not seen John since the eventful journey to London; nor had he seen him in London; but he knew well all that had occurred,—how the dealer in pollard had thrashed his cousin, Sir Felix, how he had been locked up by the police and then liberated,—and how he was now regarded in Bungay as a hero, as far as arms were concerned, but as being very "soft" in the matter of love. The reader need hardly be told that Roger was not at all disposed to quarrel with Mr. Crumb, because the victim of Crumb's heroism had been his own nephew. Crumb had acted well, and had never said a word about Sir Felix since his return to the country. No doubt he had now come to talk about his love,—and in order that his confessions might not be made before all the assembled haymakers, Roger Carbury hurried to meet him. There was soon evident on Crumb's broad face a whole sunshine of delight. As Roger approached him he began to laugh aloud, and to wave a bit of paper that he had in his hands. "She's a coomin; she's a coomin," were the first words he uttered. Roger knew very well
that in his friend's mind there was but one "she" in the world, and
that the name of that she was Ruby Ruggles.
"I am delighted to hear it," said Roger. "She has made it up with
her grandfather?"
"Don't know nowt about grandfeyther. She have made it up wi'
me. Know'd she would when I'd polish'd t'other un off a bit;—
know'd she would."
"Has she written to you, then?"
"Well, squoire,—she ain't; not just herself. I do suppose that
isn't the way they does it. But it's all as one." And then Mr.
Crumb thrust Mrs. Hurtle's note into Roger Carbury's hand.
Roger certainly was not predisposed to think well or kindly of
Mrs. Hurtle. Since he had first known Mrs. Hurtle's name, when
Paul Montague had told the story of his engagement on his return
from America, Roger had regarded her as a wicked, intriguing, bad
woman. It may, perhaps, be confessed that he was prejudiced
against all Americans, looking upon Washington much as he did
upon Jack Cade or Wat Tyler; and he pictured to himself all
American women as being loud, masculine, and atheistical. But it
certainly did seem that in this instance Mrs. Hurtle was endeavouring
to do a good turn from pure charity. "She is a lady," Crumb began
to explain, "who do be living with Mrs. Pipkin; and she is a lady as
is a lady."
Roger could not fully admit the truth of this assertion; but he
explained that he, too, knew something of Mrs. Hurtle, and that he
thought it probable that what she said of Ruby might be true.
"True, squoire!" said Crumb, laughing with his whole face. "I
ha' nae a doubt it's true. What's again its being true? When
I had dropped into t'other fellow, of course she made her choice.
It was me as was to blame, because I didn't do it before. I ought
to ha' dropped into him when I first heard as he was arter her. It's
that as girls like. So, squoire, I'm just going again to Lon'on
right away."
Roger suggested that old Ruggles would, of course, receive his
niece; but as to this John expressed his supreme indifference. The
old man was nothing to him. Of course he would like to have the
old man's money; but the old man couldn't live for ever, and he
supposed that things would come right in time. But this he knew,—
that he wasn't going to cringe to the old man about his money. When
Roger observed that it would be better that Ruby should have some
home to which she might at once return, John advertised with a
renewed grin to all the substantial comforts of his own house. It
seemed to be his idea, that on arriving in London he would at once
take Ruby away to church and be married to her out of hand. He
had thrashed his rival, and what cause could there now be for delay?
But before he left the field he made one other speech to the squire.
"You ain't a'taken it amiss, squoire, 'cause he was coosin to your-
self?"
"Not in the least, Mr. Crumb."
"That's koind now. I ain't a done the yong man a ha'porth o'
harm, and I don't feel no grudge again him, and when me and Ruby's once spliced, I'm darned if I don't give 'un a bottle of wine the first day as he'll come to Bungay."

Roger did not feel himself justified in accepting this invitation on the part of Sir Felix; but he renewed his assurance that he, on his own part, thought that Crumb had behaved well in that matter of the street encounter, and he expressed a strong wish for the immediate and continued happiness of Mr. and Mrs. John Crumb.

"Oh, ay, we'll be 'appy, squoire," said Crumb as he went exulting out of the field.

On the day after this Roger Carbury received a letter which disturbed him very much, and to which he hardly knew whether to return any answer, or what answer. It was from Paul Montague, and was written by him but a few hours after he had left his letter for Hetta with his own hands, at the door of her mother's house. Paul's letter to Roger was as follows;

"My dear Roger,—

"Though I know that you have cast me off from you I cannot write to you in any other way, as any other way would be untrue. You can answer me, of course, as you please, but I do think that you will owe me an answer, as I appeal to you in the name of justice.

"You know what has taken place between Hetta and myself. She had accepted me, and therefore I am justified in feeling sure that she must have loved me. But she has now quarrelled with me altogether, and has told me that I am never to see her again. Of course I don't mean to put up with this. Who would? You will say that it is no business of yours. But I think that you would not wish that she should be left under a false impression, if you could put her right.

"Somebody has told her the story of Mrs. Hurtle. I suppose it was Felix, and that he had learned it from those people at Islington. But she has been told that which is untrue. Nobody knows and nobody can know the truth as you do. She supposes that I have willingly been passing my time with Mrs. Hurtle during the last two months, although during that very time I have asked for and have received the assurance of her love. Now, whether or no I have been to blame about Mrs. Hurtle,—as to which nothing at present need be said,—it is certainly the truth that her coming to England was not only not desired by me, but was felt by me to be the greatest possible misfortune. But after all that had passed I certainly owed it to her not to neglect her;—and this duty was the more incumbent on me as she was a foreigner and unknown to any one. I went down to Lowestoft with her at her request, having named the place to her as one known to myself, and because I could not refuse her so small a favour. You know that it was so, and you know also, as no one else does, that whatever courtesy I have shown to Mrs. Hurtle in England, I have been constrained to show her.

"I appeal to you to let Hetta know that this is true. She had made me understand that not only her mother and brother, but you
also, are well acquainted with the story of my acquaintance with Mrs. Hurtle. Neither Lady Carbury nor Sir Felix has ever known anything about it. You, and you only, have known the truth. And now, though at the present you are angry with me, I call upon you to tell Hetta the truth as you know it. You will understand me when I say that I feel that I am being destroyed by a false representation. I think that you, who abhor a falsehood, will see the justice of setting me right, at any rate as far as the truth can do so. I do not want you to say a word for me beyond that.

"Yours always,
"Paul Montague."

What business is all that of mine? This, of course, was the first feeling produced in Roger's mind by Montague's letter. If Hetta had received any false impression, it had not come from him. He had told no stories against his rival, whether true or false. He had been so scrupulous that he had refused to say a word at all. And if any false impression had been made on Hetta's mind, either by circumstances or by untrue words, had not Montague deserved any evil that might fall upon him? Though every word in Montague's letter might be true, nevertheless, in the end, no more than justice would be done him, even should he be robbed at last of his mistress under erroneous impressions. The fact that he had once disgraced himself by offering to make Mrs. Hurtle his wife, rendered him unworthy of Hetta Carbury. Such, at least, was Roger Carbury's verdict as he thought over all the circumstances. At any rate, it was no business of his to correct these wrong impressions.

And yet he was ill at ease as he thought of it all. He did believe that every word in Montague's letter was true. Though he had been very indignant when he met Roger and Mrs. Hurtle together on the sands at Lowestoft, he was perfectly convinced that the cause of their coming there had been precisely that which Montague had stated. It took him two days to think over all this, two days of great discomfort and unhappiness. After all, why should he be a dog in the manger? The girl did not care for him,—looked upon him as an old man to be regarded in a fashion altogether different from that in which she regarded Paul Montague. He had let his time for love-making go by, and now it behoved him, as a man, to take the world as he found it, and not to lose himself in regrets for a kind of happiness which he could never attain. In such an emergency as this he should do what was fair and honest, without reference to his own feelings. And yet the passion which dominated John Crumb altogether, which made the mealman so intent on the attainment of his object as to render all other things indifferent to him for the time, was equally strong with Roger Carbury. Unfortunately for Roger, strong as his passion was, it was embarrassed by other feelings. It never occurred to Crumb to think whether he was a fit husband for Ruby, or whether Ruby, having a decided preference for another man, could be a fit wife for him. But with Roger there were a thousand surrounding difficulties to hamper him. John Crumb never doubted
for a moment what he should do. He had to get the girl, if possible, and he meant to get her whatever she might cost him. He was always confident though sometimes perplexed. But Roger had no confidence. He knew that he should never win the game. In his sadder moments he felt that he ought not to win it. The people around him, from old fashion, still called him the young squire! Why;—he felt himself at times to be eighty years old,—so old that he was unfitted for intercourse with such juvenile spirits as those of his neighbour the bishop, and of his friend Hepworth. Could he, by any training, bring himself to take her happiness in hand, altogether sacrificing his own?

In such a mood as this he did at last answer his enemy's letter,—and he answered it as follows;—

"I do not know that I am concerned to meddle in your affairs at all. I have told no tale against you, and I do not know that I have any that I wish to tell in your favour, or that I could so tell if I did wish. I think that you have behaved badly to me, cruelly to Mrs. Hurtle, and disrespectfully to my cousin. Nevertheless, as you appeal to me on a certain point for evidence which I can give, and which you say no one else can give, I do acknowledge that, in my opinion, Mrs. Hurtle's presence in England has not been in accordance with your wishes, and that you accompanied her to Lowestoft, not as her lover but as an old friend whom you could not neglect.

"ROGER CARBURY.

"Paul Montague, Esq.

"You are at liberty to show this letter to Miss Carbury, if you please; but if she reads part she should read the whole!"

There was more perhaps of hostility in this letter than of that spirit of self-sacrifice to which Roger intended to train himself; and so he himself felt after the letter had been dispatched.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE INQUEST.

MELMOTTE had been found dead on Friday morning, and late on the evening of the same day Madame Melmotte and Marie were removed to lodgings far away from the scene of the tragedy, up at Hampstead. Herr Croll had known of the place, and at Lord Nidderdale's instance had busied himself in the matter, and had seen that the rooms were made instantly ready for the widow of his late employer. Nidderdale himself had assisted them in their departure; and the German, with the poor woman's maid, with the jewels also, which had been packed according to Melmotte's last
orders to his wife, followed the carriage which took the mother and
the daughter. They did not start till nine o'clock in the evening, and
Madame Melmotte at the moment would fain have been allowed to rest
one other night in Bruton Street. But Lord Nidderdale, with one
hardly uttered word, made Marie understand that the inquest would
be held early on the following morning, and Marie was imperious
with her mother and carried her point. So the poor woman was
taken away from Mr. Longstaffe's residence, and never again saw the
grandeur of her own house in Grosvenor Square, which she had not
visited since the night on which she had helped to entertain the
Emperor of China.

On Saturday morning the inquest was held. There was not the
slightest doubt as to any one of the incidents of the catastrophe.
The servants, the doctor, and the inspector of police between them,
learned that he had come home alone, that nobody had been near
him during the night, that he had been found dead, and that he had
undoubtedly been poisoned by prussic acid. It was also proved that
he had been drunk in the House of Commons, a fact to which one of
the clerks of the House, very much against his will, was called upon
to testify. That he had destroyed himself there was no doubt,—nor
was there any doubt as to the cause.

In such cases as this it is for the jury to say whether the unfor-
tunate one who has found his life too hard for endurance, and has
rushed away to see whether he could not find an improved condition
of things elsewhere, has or has not been mad at the moment. Su-
viving friends are of course anxious for a verdict of insanity, as in
that case no further punishment is exacted. The body can be buried
like any other body, and it can always be said afterwards that the
poor man was mad. Perhaps it would be well that all suicides
should be said to have been mad, for certainly the jurymen are not
generally guided in their verdicts by any accurately ascertained facts.
If the poor wretch has, up to his last days, been apparently living a
decent life; if he be not hated, or has not in his last moments made
himself specially obnoxious to the world at large, then he is declared
to have been mad. Who would be heavy on a poor clergyman who
has been at last driven by horrid doubts to rid himself of a difficulty
from which he saw no escape in any other way? Who would not
give the benefit of the doubt to the poor woman whose lover and
lord had deserted her? Who would remit to unhallowed earth the
body of the once beneficent philosopher who has simply thought that
he might as well go now, finding himself powerless to do further
good upon earth? Such, and such like, have of course been tem-
porarily insane, though no touch even of strangeness may have
marked their conduct up to their last known dealings with their
fellow-mortals. But let a Melmotte be found dead, with a bottle of
prussic acid by his side—a man who has become horrid to the world
because of his late iniquities, a man who has so well pretended to be
rich that he has been able to buy and to sell properties without
paying for them, a wretch who has made himself odious by his ruin
to friends who had taken him up as a pillar of strength in regard to
wealth, a brute who had got into the House of Commons by false pretences, and had disgraced the House by being drunk there,—and, of course, he will not be saved by a verdict of insanity from the cross roads, or whatever scornful grave may be allowed to those who have killed themselves with their wits about them. Just at this moment there was a very strong feeling against Melmotte, owing perhaps as much to his having tumbled over poor Mr. Beauchamp in the House of Commons as to the stories of the forgeries he had committed, and the virtue of the day vindicated itself by declaring him to have been responsible for his actions when he took the poison. He was *felo de se*, and therefore carried away to the cross roads—or elsewhere. But it may be imagined, I think, that during that night he may have become as mad as any other wretch, have been driven as far beyond his powers of endurance as any other poor creature who ever at any time felt himself constrained to go. He had not been so drunk but that he knew all that happened, and could foresee pretty well what would happen. The summons to attend upon the Lord Mayor had been served upon him. There were some, among them Croll and Mr. Brehgert, who absolutely knew that he had committed forgery. He had no money for the Longestaffes, and he was well aware what Squercum would do at once. He had assured himself long ago,—he had assured himself indeed not very long ago,—that he would brave it all like a man. But we none of us know what load we can bear, and what would break our backs. Melmotte's back had been so utterly crushed that I almost think that he was mad enough to have justified a verdict of temporary insanity.

But he was carried away, no one knew whither, and for a week his name was hateful. But after that, a certain amount of white-washing took place, and, in some degree, a restitution of fame was made to the manes of the departed. In Westminster he was always odious. Westminster, which had adopted him, never forgave him. But in other districts it came to be said of him that he had been more sinned against than sinning; and that, but for the jealousy of the old stagers in the mercantile world, he would have done very wonderful things. Marylebone, which is always merciful, took him up quite with affection, and would have returned his ghost to Parliament could his ghost have paid for committee rooms. Finsbury delighted for a while to talk of the great Financier, and even Chelsea thought that he had been done to death by ungenerous tongues. It was, however, Marylebone alone that spoke of a monument.

Mr. Longestaffe came back to his house, taking formal possession of it a few days after the verdict. Of course he was alone. There had been no further question of bringing the ladies of the family up to town; and Dolly altogether declined to share with his father the honour of encountering the dead man's spirit. But there was very much for Mr. Longestaffe to do, and very much also for his son. It was becoming a question with both of them how far they had been ruined by their connection with the horrible man. It was clear that they could not get back the title-deeds of the Pickering property with-
THE WAY WE LIVE NOW.

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out paying the amount which had been advanced upon them, and it
clear that they could not pay that sum unless they were
enabled to do so by funds coming out of the Melmotte estate. Dolly,
as he sat smoking upon the stool in Mr. Squercum's office, where
he now passed a considerable portion of his time, looked upon him-

was equally

self as a miracle of ill-usage.

the
''By George, you know, I shall have to go to law with
"
There's nothing else for it is there, Squercum ?
governor.
Squercum suggested that they had better wait till they found
what pickings there might be out of the Melmotte estate. He had
made inquiries too about that, and had been assured that there must
be property, but property so involved and tied up as to make it im"
possible to lay hands upon it suddenly.
They say that the things in
the square, and the plate, and the carriages and horses, and all that,
ought to fetch between twenty and thirty thousand. There were a
lot of jewels, but the women have taken them," said Squercum.
''By George, they ought to be made to give up everything. Did
the very house pulled down
you ever hear of such a thing
my
house and all done without a word from me in the matter ? I don't
suppose such a thing was ever known before, since properties were
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properties." Then he uttered sundry threats against the Bideawhiles,
in reference to whom he declared his intentidn of "making it ver}'

hot for them."
It was an annoyance added to the
management of Melmotte's affairs fell

Mr. liongestaffe that the
at last almost exclusively into
Brehgert, in spite of his many
elder

the hands of Mr. Brehgert.
Now
dealings with Melmotte, was an honest man, and, which was perhaps
of as much immediate consequence, both an energetic and a patient
man. But then he was the man who had wanted to marry Georgiana
LongostafFe, and he was the man to whom Mr. Longestaffe had been
Then there arose necessities for the presence of
particularly uncivil.
Mr. Brehgert in the house in which Melmotte had lately lived and had

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The dead man's papers were still there, deeds, documents,
died.
and these could
and such letters as he had not chosen to destroy
not be removed quite at once.
"Mr. Brehgert must of course have
access to my private room, as long as it is necessary,
absolutelj"
necessary," said Mr. Longestaffe in answer to a message which was
brought to him; "but be will of course see the expediency of
But he soon
relieving me from such intrusion as soon as possible."

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it preferable to
come to terms with the rejected suitor,
especially as the man was singularly good-natured and forbearing
after the injuries he had received.
All minor debts were to be paid at once an arrangement to which

found

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Mr. Longestaffe cordially agreed, as it included a sum of £300 due
to him for the rent of his house in Bruton Street.
Then by degrees
it became known that there would
certainly be a dividend of not less
than fifty per cent, payable on debts which could be proved to have
an arrangement
been owing by Melmotte, and perhaps of more
which was very comfortable to Dolly, as it had been already jigreed
between all the parties interested that the debt due to him should be
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satisfied before the father took anything. Mr. Longestaffe resolved during these weeks that he remained in town that, as regarded himself and his own family, the house in London should not only not be kept up, but that it should be absolutely sold, with all its belongings, and that the servants at Caversham should be reduced in number, and should cease to wear powder. All this was communicated to Lady Pomona in a very long letter, which she was instructed to read to her daughters. "I have suffered great wrongs," said Mr. Longestaffe, "but I must submit to them, and as I submit so must my wife and children. If our son were different from what he is the sacrifice might probably be made lighter. His nature I cannot alter, but from my daughters I expect cheerful obedience." From what incidents of his past life he was led to expect cheerfulness at Caversham it might be difficult to say; but the obedience was there. Georgey was for the time broken down; Sophia was satisfied with her nuptial prospects, and Lady Pomona had certainly no spirits left for a combat. I think the loss of the hair-powder afflicted her most; but she said not a word even about that.

But in all this the details necessary for the telling of our story are anticipated. Mr. Longestaffe had remained in London actually over the 1st of September, which in Suffolk is the one great festival of the year, before the letter was written to which allusion has been made. In the meantime he saw much of Mr. Brehgert, and absolutely formed a kind of friendship for that gentleman, in spite of the abomination of his religion,—so that on one occasion he even condescended to ask Mr. Brehgert to dine alone with him in Bruton Street. This, too, was in the early days of the arrangement of the Melmotte affairs, when Mr. Longestaffe's heart had been softened by that arrangement with reference to the rent. Mr. Brehgert came, and there arose a somewhat singular conversation between the two gentlemen as they sat together over a bottle of Mr. Longestaffe's old port wine. Hitherto not a word had passed between them respecting the connection which had once been proposed, since the day on which the young lady's father had said so many bitter things to the expectant bridegroom. But in this evening Mr. Brehgert, who was by no means a coward in such matters and whose feelings were not perhaps painfully fine, spoke his mind in a way that at first startled Mr. Longestaffe. The subject was introduced by a reference which Brehgert had made to his own affairs. His loss would be, at any rate, double that which Mr. Longestaffe would have to bear;—but he spoke of it in an easy way, as though it did not sit very near his heart. "Of course there's a difference between me and you," he said. Mr. Longestaffe bowed his head graciously, as much as to say that there was of course a very wide difference. "In our affairs," continued Brehgert, "we expect gains, and of course look for occasional losses. When a gentleman in your position sells a property he expects to get the purchase-money."

"Of course he does, Mr. Brehgert. That's what made it so hard."

"I can't even yet quite understand how it was with him, or why he took upon himself to spend such an enormous deal of money here
in London. His business was quite irregular, but there was very much of it, and some of it immensely profitable. He took us in completely."

"I suppose so."

"It was old Mr. Todd that first took to him;—but I was deceived as much as Todd, and then I ventured on a speculation with him outside of our house. The long and the short of it is that I shall lose something about sixty thousand pounds."

"That's a large sum of money."

"Very large;—so large as to affect my daily mode of life. In my correspondence with your daughter, I considered it to be my duty to point out to her that it would be so. I do not know whether she told you."

This reference to his daughter for the moment altogether upset Mr. Longestaff. The reference was certainly most indelicate, most deserving of censure; but Mr. Longestaff did not know how to pronounce his censure on the spur of the moment, and was moreover at the present time so very anxious for Brehgert's assistance in the arrangement of his affairs that, so to say, he could not afford to quarrel with the man. But he assumed something more than his normal dignity as he asserted that his daughter had never mentioned the fact.

"It was so," said Brehgert.

"No doubt;"—and Mr. Longestaffe assumed a great deal of dignity.

"Yes; it was so. I had promised your daughter when she was good enough to listen to the proposition which I made to her, that I would maintain a second house when we should be married."

"It was impossible," said Mr. Longestaffe,—meaning to assert that such hymeneals were altogether unnatural and out of the question.

"It would have been quite possible as things were when that proposition was made. But looking forward to the loss which I afterwards anticipated from the affairs of our deceased friend, I found it to be prudent to relinquish my intention for the present, and I thought myself bound to inform Miss Longestaffe."

"There were other reasons," muttered Mr. Longestaffe, in a suppressed voice, almost in a whisper,—in a whisper which was intended to convey a sense of present horror and a desire for future reticence.

"There may have been; but in the last letter which Miss Longe-
staffe did me the honour to write to me,—a letter with which I have not the slightest right to find any fault,—she seemed to me to confine herself almost exclusively to that reason."

"Why mention this now, Mr. Brehgert; why mention this now? The subject is painful."

"Just because it is not painful to me, Mr. Longestaffe; and because I wish that all they who have heard of the matter should know that it is not painful. I think that throughout I behaved like a gentleman." Mr. Longestaffe, in an agony, first shook his head twice, and then bowed it three times, leaving the Jew to take what answer he could from so dubious an oracle. "I am sure," continued Brehgert, "that I behaved like an honest man; and I didn't quite
like that the matter should be passed over as if I was in any way ashamed of myself."

"Perhaps on so delicate a subject the less said the soonest mended."

"I've nothing more to say, and I've nothing at all to mend."

Finishing the conversation with this little speech Brehgert arose to take his leave, making some promise at the time that he would use all the expedition in his power to complete the arrangement of the Melmotte affairs.

As soon as he was gone Mr. Longestaffe opened the door and walked about the room and blew out long puffs of breath, as though to cleanse himself from the impurities of his late contact. He told himself that he could not touch pitch and not be defiled! How vulgar had the man been, how indelicate, how regardless of all feeling, how little grateful for the honour which Mr. Longestaffe had conferred upon him by asking him to dinner! Yes;—yes! A horrid Jew! Were not all Jews necessarily an abomination? Yet Mr. Longestaffe was aware that in the present crisis of his fortunes he could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Brehgert.

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CHAPTER LXXXIX.

"THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE."

It was a long time now since Lady Carbury's great historical work on the Criminal Queens of the World had been completed and given to the world. Any reader careful as to dates will remember that it was as far back as in February that she had solicited the assistance of certain of her literary friends who were connected with the daily and weekly press. These gentlemen had responded to her call with more or less zealous aid, so that the "Criminal Queens" had been regarded in the trade as one of the successful books of the season. Messrs. Leadham and Loiter had published a second, and then, very quickly, a fourth and fifth edition; and had been able in their advertisements to give testimony from various criticisms showing that Lady Carbury's book was about the greatest historical work which had emanated from the press in the present century. With this object a passage was extracted even from the columns of the "Evening Pulpit,"—which showed very great ingenuity on the part of some young man connected with the establishment of Messrs. Leadham and Loiter. Lady Carbury had suffered something in the struggle. What efforts can mortals make as to which there will not be some disappointment? Paper and print cannot be had for nothing, and advertisements are very costly. An edition may be sold with startling rapidity, but it may have been but a scanty edition. When Lady Carbury received from Messrs. Leadham and Loiter their second very moderate cheque, with the expression of a fear on their part

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that there would not probably be a third,—unless some unforeseen demand should arise,—she repeated to herself those well-known lines from the satirist,—

"Oh, Amos Cottle, for a moment think
What meagre profits spread from pen and ink."

But not on that account did she for a moment hesitate as to further attempts. Indeed she had hardly completed the last chapter of her "Criminal Queens" before she was busy on another work; and although the last six months had been to her a period of incessant trouble, and sometimes of torture, though the conduct of her son had more than once forced her to declare to herself that her mind would fail her, still she had persevered. From day to day, with all her cares heavy upon her, she had sat at her work, with a firm resolve that so many lines should be always forthcoming, let the difficulty of making them be what it might. Messrs. Leadham and Loiter had thought that they might be justified in offering her certain terms for a novel,—terms not very high indeed, and those contingent on the approval of the manuscript by their reader. The smallness of the sum offered, and the want of certainty, and the pain of the work in her present circumstances, had all been felt by her to be very hard. But she had persevered, and the novel was now complete.

It cannot with truth be said of her that she had had any special tale to tell. She had taken to the writing of a novel because Mr. Loiter had told her that upon the whole novels did better than anything else. She would have written a volume of sermons on the same encouragement, and have gone about the work exactly after the same fashion. The length of her novel had been her first question. It must be in three volumes, and each volume must have three hundred pages. But what fewest number of words might be supposed sufficient to fill a page? The money offered was too trifling to allow of very liberal measure on her part. She had to live, and if possible to write another novel,—and, as she hoped, upon better terms,—when this should be finished. Then what should be the name of her novel; what the name of her hero; and above all what the name of her heroine? It must be a love story of course; but she thought that she would leave the complications of the plot to come by chance,—and they did come. "Don't let it end unhappily, Lady Carbury," Mr. Loiter had said, "because though people like it in a play, they hate it in a book. And whatever you do, Lady Carbury, don't be historical. Your historical novel, Lady Carbury, isn't worth a ——" Mr. Loiter stopping himself suddenly, and remembering that he was addressing himself to a lady, satisfied his energy at last by the use of the word "straw." Lady Carbury had followed these instructions with accuracy.

The name for the story had been the great thing. It did not occur to the authoress that, as the plot was to be allowed to develop itself and was, at this moment when she was perplexed as to the title, altogether uncrcated, she might as well wait to see what appellation might best suit her work when its purpose should have declared itself. A novel, she knew well, was most unlike a rose, which by any
other name will smell as sweet. "The Faultless Father," "The Mysterious Mother," "The Lame Lover,"—such names as that she was aware would be useless now. "Mary Jane Walker," if she could be very simple, would do, or "Blanche De Veau," if she were able to maintain throughout a somewhat high-stilted style of feminine rapture. But as she considered that she could best deal with rapid action and strange coincidences, she thought that something more startling and descriptive would better suit her purpose. After an hour's thought a name did occur to her, and she wrote it down, and with considerable energy of purpose framed her work in accordance with her chosen title, "The Wheel of Fortune!" She had no particular fortune in her mind when she chose it, and no particular wheel;—but the very idea conveyed by the words gave her the plot which she wanted. A young lady was blessed with great wealth, and lost it all by an uncle, and got it all back by an honest lawyer, and gave it all up to a distressed lover, and found it all again in the third volume. And the lady's name was Cordinga, selected by Lady Carbury as never having been heard before either in the world of fact or in that of fiction.

And now with all her troubles thick about her,—while her son was still hanging about the house in a condition that would break any mother's heart, while her daughter was so wretched and sore that she regarded all those around her as her enemies, Lady Carbury finished her work, and having just written the last words in which the final glow of enduring happiness was given to the young married heroine whose wheel had now come full round, sat with the sheets piled at her right hand. She had allowed herself a certain number of weeks for the task, and had completed it exactly in the time fixed. As she sat with her band near the pile, she did give herself credit for her diligence. Whether the work might have been better done she never asked herself. I do not think that she prided herself much on the literary merit of the tale. But if she could bring the papers to praise it, if she could induce Mudie to circulate it, if she could manage that the air for a month should be so loaded with "The Wheel of Fortune," as to make it necessary for the reading world to have read or to have said that it had read the book,—then she would pride herself very much upon her work.

As she was so sitting on a Sunday afternoon, in her own room, Mr. Alf was announced. According to her habit, she expressed warm delight at seeing him. Nothing could be kinder than such a visit just at such a time,—when there was so very much to occupy such a one as Mr. Alf! Mr. Alf, in his usual mildly satirical way, declared that he was not peculiarly occupied just at present. "The Emperor has left Europe at last," he said. "Poor Melmotte poisoned himself on Friday, and the inquest sat yesterday. I don't know that there is anything of interest to-day." Of course Lady Carbury was intent upon her book, rather even than on the exciting death of a man whom she had herself known. Oh, if she could only get Mr. Alf! She had tried it before, and had failed lamentably. She was well aware of that; and she had a deep-seated conviction that it would be almost impossible to get Mr. Alf. But then she had another deep-
seated conviction, that that which is almost impossible may possibly be done. How great would be the glory, how infinite the service! And did it not seem as though Providence had blessed her with this special opportunity, sending Mr. Alf to her just at the one moment at which she might introduce the subject of her novel without seeming premeditation?

"I am so tired," she said, affecting to throw herself back as though stretching her arms out for ease.

"I hope I am not adding to your fatigue," said Mr. Alf.

"Oh dear no. It is not the fatigue of the moment, but of the last six months. Just as you knocked at the door, I had finished the novel at which I have been working, oh, with such diligence!"

"Oh,—a novel! When is it to appear, Lady Carbury?"

"You must ask Leadham and Loiter that question. I have done my part of the work. I suppose you never wrote a novel, Mr. Alf?"

"I? Oh dear no; I never write anything."

"I have sometimes wondered whether I have hated or loved it the most. One becomes so absorbed in one's plot and one's characters! One loves the loveable so intensely, and hates with such fixed aversion those who are intended to be hated. When the mind is attuned to it, one is tempted to think that it is all so good. One cries at one's own pathos, laughs at one's own humour, and is lost in admiration at one's own sagacity and knowledge."

"How very nice!"

"But then there comes the reversed picture, the other side of the coin. On a sudden everything becomes flat, tedious, and unnatural. The heroine who was yesterday alive with the celestial spark is found to-day to be a lump of motionless clay. The dialogue that was so cheery on the first perusal is utterly uninteresting at a second reading. Yesterday I was sure that there was my monument," and she put her hand upon the manuscript; "to-day I feel it to be only too heavy for a gravestone!"

"One's judgment about one's-self always does vacillate," said Mr. Alf in a tone as phlegmatic as were the words.

"And yet it is so important that one should be able to judge correctly of one's own work! I can at any rate trust myself to be honest, which is more perhaps than can be said of all the critics."

"Dishonesty is not the general fault of the critics, Lady Carbury,—at least not as far as I have observed the business. It is incapacity. In what little I have done in the matter, that is the sin which I have striven to conquer. When we want shoes we go to a professed shoemaker; but for criticism we have certainly not gone to professed critics. I think that when I gave up the 'Evening Pulpit,' I left upon it a staff of writers who are entitled to be regarded as knowing their business."

"You given up the 'Pulpit?' asked Lady Carbury with astonishment, readjusting her mind at once, so that she might perceive whether any and if so what advantage might be taken of Mr. Alf's new position. He was no longer editor, and therefore his heavy sense of responsibility would no longer exist;—but he must still have
influence. Might he not be persuaded to do one act of real friendship? Might she not succeed if she would come down from her high seat, sink on the ground before him, tell him the plain truth, and beg for a favour as a poor struggling woman?

"Yes, Lady Carbury, I have given it up. It was a matter of course that I should do so when I stood for Parliament. Now that the new member has so suddenly vacated his seat, I shall probably stand again."

"And you are no longer an editor?"

"I have given it up, and I suppose I have now satisfied the scruples of those gentlemen who seemed to think that I was committing a crime against the Constitution in attempting to get into Parliament while I was managing a newspaper. I never heard such nonsense. Of course I know where it came from."

"Where did it come from?"

"Where should it come from but the 'Breakfast Table.' Broune and I have been very good friends, but I do think that of all the men I know he is the most jealous."

"That is so little," said Lady Carbury. She was really very fond of Mr. Broune, but at the present moment she was obliged to humour Mr. Alf.

"It seems to me that no man can be better qualified to sit in Parliament than an editor of a newspaper,—that is if he is capable as an editor."

"No one, I think, has ever doubted that of you."

"The only question is whether he be strong enough for the double work. I have doubted about myself, and have therefore given up the paper. I almost regret it."

"I dare say you do," said Lady Carbury, feeling intensely anxious to talk about her own affairs instead of his. "I suppose you still retain an interest in the paper?"

"Some pecuniary interest;—nothing more."

"Oh, Mr. Alf,—you could do me such a favour!"

"Can I? If I can, you may be sure I will." False-hearted, false-tongued man! Of course he knew at the moment what was the favour Lady Carbury intended to ask, and of course he had made up his mind that he would not do as he was asked.

"Will you?" And Lady Carbury clasped her hands together as she poured forth the words of her prayer. "I never asked you to do anything for me as long as you were editing the paper. Did I? I did not think it right, and I would not do it. I took my chance like others, and I am sure you must own that I bore what was said of me with a good grace. I never complained. Did I?"

"Certainly not."

"But now that you have left it yourself,—if you would have the 'Wheel of Fortune' done for me,—really well done!"

"The 'Wheel of Fortune!'"

"That is the name of my novel," said Lady Carbury, putting her hand softly upon the manuscript. "Just at this moment it would be the making of a fortune for me! And, oh Mr. Alf, if you could but know how I want such assistance!"
"I have nothing further to do with the editorial management, Lady Carbury."

"Of course you could get it done. A word from you would make it certain. A novel is different from an historical work, you know. I have taken so much pains with it."

"Then no doubt it will be praised on its own merits."

"Don't say that, Mr. Alf. The 'Evening Pulpit' is like,—oh, it is like,—like,—like the throne of heaven! Who can be justified before it? Don't talk about its own merits, but say that you will have it done. It couldn't do any man any harm, and it would sell five hundred copies at once,—that is if it were done really con amore." Mr. Alf looked at her almost piteously, and shook his head. "The paper stands so high, it can't hurt it to do that kind of thing once. A woman is asking you, Mr. Alf. It is for my children that I am struggling. The thing is done every day of the week, with much less noble motives."

"I do not think that it has ever been done by the 'Evening Pulpit.'"

"I have seen books praised."

"Of course you have."

"I think I saw a novel spoken highly of."

Mr. Alf laughed. "Why not? You do not suppose that it is the object of the 'Pulpit' to cry down novels?"

"I thought it was; but I thought you might make an exception here. I would be so thankful,—so grateful."

"My dear Lady Carbury, pray believe me when I say that I have nothing to do with it. I need not preach to you sermons about literary virtue."

"Oh, no," she said, not quite understanding what he meant.

"The sceptre has passed from my hands, and I need not vindicate the justice of my successor."

"I shall never know your successor."

"But I must assure you that on no account should I think of meddling with the literary arrangement of the paper. I would not do it for my sister." Lady Carbury looked greatly pained. "Send the book out, and let it take its chance. How much prouder you will be to have it praised because it deserves praise, than to know that it has been eulogised as a mark of friendship."

"No, I shan't," said Lady Carbury. "I don't believe that anything like real selling praise is ever given to anybody, except to friends. I don't know how they manage it, but they do." Mr. Alf shook his head. "Oh yes; that is all very well from you. Of course you have been a dragon of virtue; but they tell me that the authoress of the 'New Cleopatra' is a very handsome woman." Lady Carbury must have been worried much beyond her wont, when she allowed herself so far to lose her temper as to bring against Mr. Alf the double charge of being too fond of the authoress in question, and of having sacrificed the justice of his columns to that improper affection.

"At this moment I do not remember the name of the lady to whom you allude," said Mr. Alf, getting up to take his leave; "and I am quite sure that the gentleman who reviewed the book,—if there
"Of course you have been a dragon of virtue."
be any such lady and any such book,—had never seen her!” And so Mr. Alf departed.

Lady Carbury was very angry with herself, and very angry also with Mr. Alf. She had not only meant to be piteous, but had made the attempt and then had allowed herself to be carried away into anger. She had degraded herself to humility, and had then wasted any possible good result by a foolish fit of chagrin. The world in which she had to live was almost too hard for her. When left alone she sat weeping over her sorrows; but when from time to time she thought of Mr. Alf and his conduct, she could hardly repress her scorn. What lies he had told her! Of course he could have done it had he chosen. But the assumed honesty of the man was infinitely worse to her than his lies. No doubt the “Pulpit” had two objects in its criticisms. Other papers probably had but one. The object common to all papers, that of helping friends and destroying enemies, of course prevailed with the “Pulpit.” There was the second purpose of enticing readers by crushing authors,—as crowds used to be enticed to see men hanged when executions were done in public. But neither the one object nor the other was compatible with that Aristidean justice which Mr. Alf arrogated to himself and to his paper. She hoped with all her heart that Mr. Alf would spend a great deal of money at Westminster, and then lose his seat.

On the following morning she herself took the manuscript to Messrs. Leadham and Loiter, and was hurt again by the small amount of respect which seemed to be paid to the collected sheets. There was the work of six months; her very blood and brains,—the concentrated essence of her mind,—as she would say herself when talking with energy of her own performances; and Mr. Leadham pitched it across to a clerk, apparently perhaps sixteen years of age, and the lad chucked the parcel unceremoniously under a counter. An author feels that his work should be taken from him with fast-clutching but reverential hands, and held thoughtfully, out of harm’s way, till it be deposited within the very sanctum of an absolutely fireproof safe. Oh, heavens, if it should be lost!—or burned!—or stolen! Those scraps of paper, so easily destroyed, apparently so little respected, may hereafter be acknowledged to have had a value greater, so far greater, than their weight in gold! If “Robinson Crusoe” had been lost! If “Tom Jones” had been consumed by flames! And who knows but that this may be another “Robinson Crusoe,”—a better than “Tom Jones”? “Will it be safe there?” asked Lady Carbury.

“Quite safe,—quite safe,” said Mr. Leadham, who was rather busy, and who perhaps saw Lady Carbury more frequently than the nature and amount of her authorship seemed to him to require.

“It seemed to be,—put down there,—under the counter!”

“That’s quite right, Lady Carbury. They’re left there till they’re packed.”

“Packed!”

“There are two or three dozen going to our reader this week. He’s down in Skye, and we keep them till there’s enough to fill the sack.”
“Do they go by post, Mr. Leadham?”

“Not by post, Lady Carbury. There are not many of them would pay the expense. We send them by long sea to Glasgow, because just at this time of the year there is not much hurry. We can’t publish before the winter.” Oh, heavens! If that ship should be lost on its journey by long sea to Glasgow!

That evening, as was now almost his daily habit, Mr. Broune came to her. There was something in the absolute friendship which now existed between Lady Carbury and the editor of the “Morning Breakfast Table,” which almost made her scrupulous as to asking from him any further literary favour. She fully recognised,—no woman perhaps more fully,—the necessity of making use of all aid and furtherance which might come within reach. With such a son, with such need for struggling before her, would she not be wicked not to catch even at every straw? But this man had now become so true to her, that she hardly knew how to beg him to do that which she, with all her mistaken feelings, did in truth know that he ought not to do. He had asked her to marry him, for which,—though she had refused him,—she felt infinitely grateful. And though she had refused him, he had lent her money, and had supported her in her misery by his continued counsel. If he would offer to do this thing for her she would accept his kindness on her knees,—but even she could not bring herself to ask to have this added to his other favours. Her first word to him was about Mr. Alf. “So he has given up the paper?”

“Well, yes;—nominally.”

“Is that all?”

“I don’t suppose he’ll really let it go out of his own hands. Nobody likes to lose power. He’ll share the work, and keep the authority. As for Westminster, I don’t believe he has a chance. If that poor wretch Melmotte could beat him when everybody was already talking about the forgeries, how is it likely that he should stand against such a candidate as they’ll get now?”

“He was here yesterday.”

“And full of triumph, I suppose?”

“He never talks to me much of himself. We were speaking of my new book,—my novel. He assured me most positively that he had nothing further to do with the paper.”

“He did not care to make you a promise, I dare say.”

“That was just it. Of course I did not believe him.”

Neither will I make a promise, but we’ll see what we can do. If we can’t be good-natured, at any rate we will say nothing ill-natured. Let me see,—what is the name?”

“The Wheel of Fortune.” Lady Carbury as she told the title of her new book to her old friend seemed to be almost ashamed of it.

“Let them send it early,—a day or two before it’s out, if they can. I can’t answer, of course, for the opinion of the gentleman it will go to, but nothing shall go in that you would dislike. Good-bye. God bless you.” And as he took her hand, he looked at her almost as though the old susceptibility were returning to him.
As she sat alone after he had gone, thinking over it all,—thinking of her own circumstances and of his kindness,—it did not occur to her to call him an old goose again. She felt now that she had mistaken her man when she had so regarded him. That first and only kiss which he had given her, which she had treated with so much derision, for which she had rebuked him so mildly and yet so haughtily, had now a somewhat sacred spot in her memory. Through it all the man must have really loved her! Was it not marvellous that such a thing should be? And how had it come to pass that she in all her tenderness had rejected him when he had given her the chance of becoming his wife?

CHAPTER XC.

HETTA’S SORROW.

WHEN Hetta Carbury received that letter from her lover which was given to the reader some chapters back, it certainly did not tend in any way to alleviate her misery. Even when she had read it over half-a-dozen times, she could not bring herself to think it possible that she could be reconciled to the man. It was not only that he had sinned against her by giving his society to another woman to whom he had at any rate been engaged not long since, at the very time at which he was becoming engaged to her,—but also that he had done this in such a manner as to make his offence known to all her friends. Perhaps she had been too quick;—but there was the fact that with her own consent she had acceded to her mother’s demand that the man should be rejected. The man had been rejected, and even Roger Carbury knew that it was so. After this it was, she thought, impossible that she should recall him. But they should all know that her heart was unchanged. Roger Carbury should certainly know that, if he ever asked her further question on the matter. She would never deny it; and though she knew that the man had behaved badly,—having entangled himself with a nasty American woman,—yet she would be true to him as far as her own heart was concerned.

And now he told her that she had been most unjust to him. He said that he could not understand her injustice. He did not fill his letter with entreaties, but with reproaches. And certainly his reproaches moved her more than any prayer would have done. It was too late now to remedy the evil; but she was not quite sure within her own bosom that she had not been unjust to him. The more she thought of it the more puzzled her mind became. Had she quarrelled with him because he had once been in love with Mrs. Hurte, or because she had grounds for regarding Mrs. Hurte as her present rival? She hated Mrs. Hurte, and she was very angry with him in
that he had ever been on affectionate terms with a woman she hated;—but that had not been the reason put forward by her for quarrelling with him. Perhaps it was true that he, too, had of late loved Mrs. Hurtle hardly better than she did herself. It might be that he had been indeed constrained by hard circumstances to go with the woman to Lowestoft. Having so gone with her, it was no doubt right that he should be rejected;—for how can it be that a man who is engaged shall be allowed to travel about the country with another woman to whom also he was engaged a few months back? But still there might be hardship in it. To her, to Hetta herself, the circumstances were very hard. She loved the man with all her heart. She could look forward to no happiness in life without him. But yet it must be so.

At the end of his letter he had told her to go to Mrs. Hurtle herself if she wanted corroboration of the story as told by him. Of course he had known when he wrote it that she could not and would not go to Mrs. Hurtle. But when the letter had been in her possession three or four days,—unanswered, for, as a matter of course, no answer to it from herself was possible,—and had been read and re-read till she knew every word of it by heart, she began to think that if she could hear the story as it might be told by Mrs. Hurtle, a good deal that was now dark might become light to her. As she continued to read the letter, and to brood over it all, by degrees her anger was turned from her lover to her mother, her brother, and to her cousin Roger. Paul had of course behaved badly, very badly,—but had it not been for them she might have had an opportunity of forgiving him. They had driven her on to the declaration of a purpose from which she could now see no escape. There had been a plot against her, and she was a victim. In the first dismay and agony occasioned by that awful story of the American woman,—which had, at the moment, struck her with a horror which was now becoming less and less every hour,—she had fallen head foremost into the trap laid for her. She acknowledged to herself that it was too late to recover her ground. She was, at any rate, almost sure that it must be too late. But yet she was disposed to do battle with her mother and her cousin in the matter,—if only with the object of showing that she would not submit her own feelings to their control. She was savage to the point of rebellion against all authority. Roger Carbury would of course think that any communication between herself and Mrs. Hurtle must be most improper,—altogether indecent. Two or three days ago she thought so herself. But the world was going so hard with her, that she was beginning to feel herself capable of throwing propriety and delicacy to the winds. This man whom she had once accepted, whom she altogether loved, and who, in spite of all his faults, certainly still loved her,—of that she was beginning to have no further doubt,—accused her of dishonesty, and referred her to her rival for a corroboration of his story. She would appeal to Mrs. Hurtle. The woman was odious, abominable, a nasty intriguing American female. But her lover desired that she should hear the woman's story; and she would hear the story,—if the woman would tell it.
So resolving, she wrote as follows to Mrs. Hurtle, finding great difficulty in the composition of a letter which should tell neither too little nor too much, and determined that she would be restrained by no mock modesty, by no girlish fear of declaring the truth about herself. The letter at last was stiff and hard, but it sufficed for its purpose.

"Madam,—

"Mr. Paul Montague has referred me to you as to certain circumstances which have taken place between him and you. It is right that I should tell you that I was a short time since engaged to marry him, but that I have found myself obliged to break off that engagement in consequence of what I have been told as to his acquaintance with you. I make this proposition to you, not thinking that anything you will say to me can change my mind, but because he has asked me to do so, and has, at the same time, accused me of injustice towards him. I do not wish to rest under an accusation of injustice from one to whom I was once warmly attached. If you will receive me, I will make it my business to call any afternoon you may name.

"Yours truly,

"Henrietta Carbury."

When the letter was written she was not only ashamed of it, but very much afraid of it also. What if the American woman should put it in a newspaper! She had heard that everything was put into newspapers in America. What if this Mrs. Hurtle should send back to her some horribly insolent answer;—or should send such answer to her mother, instead of herself! And then, again, if the American woman consented to receive her, would not the American woman, as a matter of course, trample upon her with rough words? Once or twice she put the letter aside, and almost determined that it should not be sent;—but at last, with desperate fortitude, she took it out with her and posted it herself. She told no word of it to any one. Her mother, she thought, had been cruel to her, had disregarded her feelings, and made her wretched for ever. She could not ask her mother for sympathy in her present distress. There was no friend who would sympathise with her. She must do everything alone.

Mrs. Hurtle, it will be remembered, had at last determined that she would retire from the contest and own herself to have been worsted. It is, I fear, impossible to describe adequately the various half resolutions which she formed, and the changing phases of her mind before she brought herself to this conclusion. And soon after she had assured herself that this should be the conclusion,—after she had told Paul Montague that it should be so,—there came back upon her at times other half resolutions to a contrary effect. She had written a letter to the man threatening desperate revenge, and had then abstained from sending it, and had then shown it to the man,—not intending to give it to him as a letter upon which he would have to act, but only that she might ask him whether, had he received it, he would have said that he had not deserved it. Then she had
parted with him, refusing either to hear or to say a word of farewell, and had told Mrs. Pipkin that she was no longer engaged to be married. At that moment everything was done that could be done. The game had been played and the stakes lost,—and she had schooled herself into such restraint as to have abandoned all idea of vengeance. But from time to time there arose in her heart a feeling that such softness was unworthy of her. Who had ever been soft to her? Who had spared her? Had she not long since found out that she must fight with her very nails and teeth for every inch of ground, if she did not mean to be trodden into the dust? Had she not held her own among rough people after a very rough fashion, and should she now simply retire that she might weep in a corner like a love-sick schoolgirl? And she had been so stoutly determined that she would at any rate avenge her own wrongs, if she could not turn those wrongs into triumph! There were moments in which she thought that she could still seize the man by the throat, where all the world might see her, and dare him to deny that he was false, perjured, and mean.

Then she received a long passionate letter from Paul Montague, written at the same time as those other letters to Roger Carbury and Hetta, in which he told her all the circumstances of his engagement to Hetta Carbury, and implored her to substantiate the truth of his own story. It was certainly marvellous to her that the man who had so long been her own lover and who had parted with her after such a fashion should write such a letter to her. But it had no tendency to increase either her anger or her sorrow. Of course she had known that it was so, and at certain times she had told herself that it was only natural,—had almost told herself that it was right. She and this young Englishman were not fit to be mated. He was to her thinking a tame, sleek household animal, whereas she knew herself to be wild,—fitter for the woods than for polished cities. It had been one of the faults of her life that she had allowed herself to be bound by tenderness of feeling to this soft over-civilised man. The result had been disastrous, as might have been expected. She was angry with him,—almost to the extent of tearing him to pieces,—but she did not become more angry because he wrote to her of her rival.

Her only present friend was Mrs. Pipkin, who treated her with the greatest deference, but who was never tired of asking questions about the lost lover. "That letter was from Mr. Montague?" said Mrs. Pipkin on the morning after it had been received.

"How can you know that?"

"I'm sure it was. One does get to know handwriting when letters come frequent."

"It was from him. And why not?"

"Oh dear no;—why not certainly? I wish he'd write every day of his life, so that things would come round again. Nothing ever troubles me so much as broken love. Why don't he come again himself, Mrs. Hurtle?"

"It is not at all likely that he should come again. It is all over, and there is no good in talking of it. I shall return to New York on Saturday week."
“Oh, Mrs. Hurtle!”

“I can’t remain here, you know, all my life doing nothing. I came over here for a certain purpose, and that has—gone by. Now I may just go back again.”

“I know he has ill-treated you. I know he has.”

“I am not disposed to talk about it, Mrs. Pipkin.”

“I should have thought it would have done you good to speak your mind out free. I know it would me if I’d been served in that way.”

“If I had anything to say at all after that fashion it would be to the gentleman, and not to any other else. As it is I shall never speak of it again to any one. You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Pipkin, and I shall be sorry to leave you.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hurtle, you can’t understand what it is to me. It isn’t only my feelings. The likes of me can’t stand by their feelings only, as their betters do. I’ve never been above telling you what a godsend you’ve been to me this summer;—have I? I’ve paid everything, butcher, baker, rates and all, just like clockwork. And now you’re going away!” Then Mrs. Pipkin began to sob.

“I suppose I shall see Mr. Crumb before I go,” said Mrs. Hurtle.

“She don’t deserve it; do she? And even now she never says a word about him that I call respectful. She looks on him as just being better than Mrs. Buggins’s children. That’s all.”

“She’ll be all right when he has once got her home.”

“And I shall be all alone by myself,” said Mrs. Pipkin, with her apron up to her eyes.

It was after this that Mrs. Hurtle received Hetta’s letter. She had as yet returned no answer to Paul Montague,—nor had she intended to send any written answer. Were she to comply with his request she could do so best by writing to the girl who was concerned rather than to him. And though she wrote no such letter she thought of it,—of the words she would use were she to write it, and of the tale which she would have to tell. She sat for hours thinking of it, trying to resolve whether she would tell the tale,—if she told it at all,—in a manner to suit Paul’s purpose, or so as to bring that purpose utterly to shipwreck. She did not doubt that she could cause the shipwreck were she so minded. She could certainly have her revenge after that fashion. But it was a woman’s fashion, and, as such, did not recommend itself to Mrs. Hurtle’s feelings. A pistol or a horsewhip, a violent seizing by the neck, with sharp taunts and bitter-ringing words, would have made the fitting revenge. If she abandoned that she could do herself no good by telling a story of her wrongs to another woman.

Then came Hetta’s note, so stiff, so cold, so true,—so like the letter of an Englishwoman, as Mrs. Hurtle said to herself. Mrs. Hurtle smiled as she read the letter. “I make this proposition not thinking that anything you can say to me can change my mind.” Of course the girl’s mind would be changed. The girl’s mind, indeed, required no change. Mrs. Hurtle could see well enough that the girl’s heart was set upon the man. Nevertheless she did not doubt but that she could tell the story after such a fashion as to make
it impossible that the girl should marry him,—if she chose to do so.

At first she thought that she would not answer the letter at all. What was it to her? Let them fight their own lovers' battles out after their own childish fashion. If the man meant at last to be honest, there could be no doubt, Mrs. Hurtle thought, that the girl would go to him. It would require no interference of hers. But after a while she thought that she might as well see this English chit who had superseded herself in the affections of the Englishman she had condescended to love. And if it were the case that all revenge was to be abandoned, that no punishment was to be exacted in return for all the injury that had been done, why should she not say a kind word so as to smooth away the existing difficulties? Wild cat as she was, kindness was more congenial to her nature than cruelty. So she wrote to Hetta making an appointment.

"DEAR MISS CARBURY,—

"If you could make it convenient to yourself to call here either Thursday or Friday at any hour between two and four, I shall be very happy to see you.

"Yours sincerely,

"WINIFRID HURTEL."

"WAV E T J VE NOW."

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CHAPTER XCI.

THE RIVALS.

DURING these days the intercourse between Lady Carbury and her daughter was constrained and far from pleasant. Hetta, thinking that she was ill-used, kept herself aloof, and would not speak to her mother of herself or of her troubles. Lady Carbury watching her, but not daring to say much, was at last almost frightened at her girl’s silence. She had assured herself, when she found that Hetta was disposed to quarrel with her lover and to send him back his brooch, that “things would come round,” that Paul would be forgotten quickly,—or laid aside as though he were forgotten,—and that Hetta would soon perceive it to be her interest to marry her cousin. With such a prospect before her, Lady Carbury thought it to be her duty as a mother to show no tendency to sympathise with her girl’s sorrow. Such heart-breakings were occurring daily in the world around them. Who were the happy people that were driven neither by ambition, nor poverty, nor greed, nor the cross purposes of unhappy love, to stifle and trample upon their feelings? She had known no one so blessed. She had never been happy after that fashion. She herself had within the last few weeks refused to join her lot with that of a man she really liked, because her wicked son was so grievous a burden on her shoulders. A woman, she thought, if she were unfortunate enough to be a lady without wealth of her own, must give up everything, her body, her heart,—her very soul if she were that way troubled,—to the procuring of a fitting maintenance for herself. Why should Hetta hope to be more fortunate than others? And then the position which chance now offered to her was fortunate. This cousin of hers, who was so devoted to her, was in all respects good. He would not torture her by harsh restraint and cruel temper. He would not drink. He would not spend his money foolishly. He would allow her all the belongings of a fair, free life. Lady Carbury reiterated to herself the assertion that she was manifestly doing a mother’s duty by her endeavours to constrain her girl to marry such a man. With a settled purpose she was severe and hard. But when she found how harsh her daughter could be in response to this,—how gloomy, how silent, and how severe in retaliation,—she was almost frightened at what she herself was doing. She had not known how stern and how enduring her daughter could be. “Hetta,” she said, “why don’t you speak to me?” On this very day it was Hetta’s purpose to visit Mrs. Hurtle at Islington. She had said no word of her intention to any one. She had chosen the Friday because on that day she knew her mother would go in the afternoon to her publisher. There should be no deceit. Immediately on her return she would tell her mother what she had done. But she considered herself to be emancipated from control. Among them they had robbed her
of her lover. She had submitted to the robbery, but she would submit to nothing else. "Hetta, why don't you speak to me?" said Lady Carbury.

"Because, mamma, there is nothing we can talk about without making each other unhappy."

"What a dreadful thing to say! Is there no subject in the world to interest you except that wretched young man?"

"None other at all," said Hetta obstinately.

"What folly it is,—I will not say only to speak like that, but to allow yourself to entertain such thoughts!"

"How am I to control my thoughts? Do you think, mamma, that after I had owned to you that I loved a man,—after I had owned it to him and, worst of all, to myself,—I could have myself separated from him, and then not think about it? It is a cloud upon everything. It is as though I had lost my eyesight and my speech. It is as it would be to you if Felix were to die. It crushes me."

There was an accusation in this allusion to her brother which the mother felt,—as she was intended to feel it,—but to which she could make no reply. It accused her of being too much concerned for her son to feel any real affection for her daughter. "You are ignorant of the world, Hetta," she said.

"I am having a lesson in it now, at any rate."

"Do you think it is worse than others have suffered before you? In what little you see around you do you think that girls are generally able to marry the men upon whom they set their hearts?" She paused, but Hetta made no answer to this. "Marie Melmotte was as warmly attached to your brother as you can be to Mr. Montague."

"Marie Melmotte!"

"She thinks as much of her feelings as you do of yours. The truth is you are indulging a dream. You must wake from it, and shake yourself, and find out that you, like others, have got to do the best you can for yourself in order that you may live. The world at large has to eat dry bread, and cannot get cakes and sweetmeats. A girl, when she thinks of giving herself to a husband, has to remember this. If she has a fortune of her own she can pick and choose, but if she have none she must allow herself to be chosen."

"Then a girl is to marry without stopping even to think whether she likes the man or not?"

"She should teach herself to like the man, if the marriage be suitable. I would not have you take a vicious man because he was rich, or one known to be cruel and imperious. Your cousin Roger, you know—"

"Mamma," said Hetta, getting up from her seat, "you may as well believe me. No earthly inducement shall ever make me marry my cousin Roger. It is to me horrible that you should propose it to me when you know that I love that other man with my whole heart."

"How can you speak so of one who has treated you with the utmost contumely?"

"I know nothing of any contumely. What reason have I to be offended because he has liked a woman whom he knew before he ever
THE RIVALS.

saw me? It has been unfortunate, wretched, miserable; but I do not know that I have any right whatever to be angry with Mr. Paul Montague.” Having so spoken she walked out of the room without waiting for a further reply.

It was all very sad to Lady Carbury. She perceived now that she had driven her daughter to pronounce an absolution of Paul Montague’s sins, and that in this way she had lessened and loosened the barrier which she had striven to construct between them. But that which pained her most was the unrealistic, romantic view of life which pervaded all Hetta’s thoughts. How was any girl to live in this world who could not be taught the folly of such idle dreams?

That afternoon Hetta trusted herself all alone to the mysteries of the Marylebone underground railway, and emerged with accuracy at King’s Cross. She had studied her geography, and she walked from thence to Islington. She knew well the name of the street and the number at which Mrs. Hurtle lived. But when she reached the door she did not at first dare to stand and raise the knocker. She passed on to the end of the silent, vacant street, endeavouring to collect her thoughts, striving to find and to arrange the words with which she would commence her strange petition. And she endeavoured to dictate to herself some defined conduct should the woman be insolent to her. Personally she was not a coward, but she doubted her power of replying to a rough speech. She could at any rate escape. Should the worst come to the worst, the woman would hardly venture to impede her departure. Having gone to the end of the street, she returned with a very quick step and knocked at the door. It was opened almost immediately by Ruby Ruggles, to whom she gave her name.

“Oh laws,—Miss Carbury!” said Ruby, looking up into the stranger’s face. “Yes;—sure enough she must be Felix’s sister.” But Ruby did not dare to ask any question. She had admitted to all around her that Sir Felix should not be her lover any more, and that John Crumb should be allowed to return. But, nevertheless, her heart twitted as she showed Miss Carbury up to the lodger’s sitting-room.

Though it was midsummer Hetta entered the room with her veil down. She adjusted it as she followed Ruby up the stairs, moved by a sudden fear of her rival’s scrutiny. Mrs. Hurtle rose from her chair and came forward to greet her visitor, putting out both her hands to do so. She was dressed with the most scrupulous care,—simply, and in black, without an ornament of any kind, without a ribbon or a chain or a flower. But with some woman’s purpose at her heart she had so attired herself as to look her very best. Was it that she thought that she would vindicate to her rival their joint lover’s first choice, or that she was minded to teach the English girl that an American woman might have graces of her own? As she came forward she was gentle and soft in her movements, and a pleasant smile played round her mouth. Hetta at the first moment was almost dumb-founded by her beauty,—by that and by her ease and exquisite self-possession. “Miss Carbury,” she said with that low, rich voice which in old days had charmed Paul almost as much as her loveliness, “I
need not tell you how interested I am in seeing you. May I not ask you to lay aside your veil, so that we may look at each other fairly?" Hetta, dumbfounded, not knowing how to speak a word, stood gazing at the woman when she had removed her veil. She had had no personal description of Mrs. Hurtle, but had expected something very different from this! She had thought that the woman would be coarse and big, with fine eyes and a bright colour. As it was they were both of the same complexion, both dark, with hair nearly black, with eyes of the same colour. Hetta thought of all that at the moment,—but acknowledged to herself that she had no pretension to beauty such as that which this woman owned. "And so you have come to see me," said Mrs. Hurtle. "Sit down so that I may look at you. I am glad that you have come to see me, Miss Carbury."

"I am glad at any rate that you are not angry."

"Why should I be angry? Had the idea been distasteful to me I should have declined. I know not why, but it is a sort of pleasure to me to see you. It is a poor time we women have,—is it not,—in becoming playthings to men? So this Lothario that was once mine, is behaving badly to you also. Is it so? He is no longer mine, and you may ask me freely for aid, if there be any that I can give you. If he were an American I should say that he had behaved badly to me;—but as he is an Englishman perhaps it is different. Now tell me;—what can I do, or what can I say?"

"He told me that you could tell me the truth?"

"What truth? I will certainly tell you nothing that is not true. You have quarrelled with him too. Is it not so?"

"Certainly I have quarrelled with him."

"I am not curious;—but perhaps you had better tell me of that. I know him so well that I can guess that he should give offence. He can be full of youthful ardour one day, and cautious as old age itself the next. But I do not suppose that there has been need for such caution with you. What is it, Miss Carbury?"

Hetta found the telling of her story to be very difficult. "Mrs. Hurtle," she said, "I had never heard your name when he first asked me to be his wife."

"I dare say not. Why should he have told you anything of me?"

"Because,—oh, because. Surely he ought, if it is true that he had once promised to marry you."

"That certainly is true."

"And you were here, and I knew nothing of it. Of course I should have been very different to him had I known that,—that,—that—"

"That there was such a woman as Winifrid Hurtle interfering with him. Then you heard it by chance, and you were offended. Was it not so?"

"And now he tells me that I have been unjust to him and he bids me ask you. I have not been unjust."

"I am not so sure of that. Shall I tell you what I think? I think that he has been unjust to me, and that therefore your injustice to him is no more than his due. I cannot plead for him, Miss Carbury. To me he has been the last and worst of a long series of, I think,
"Sit down, so that I may look at you."
(deserve misfortune. But whether you will avenge my wrongs
must be for you to decide."

"Why did he go with you to Lowestoft?"

"Because I asked him,—and because, like many men, he cannot
be illnatured although he can be cruel. He would have given a hand
not to have gone, but he could not say me nay. As you have come
here, Miss Carbury, you may as well know the truth. He did love
me, but he had been talked out of his love by my enemies and his
own friends long before he had ever seen you. I am almost ashamed
to tell you my own part of the story, and yet I know not why I should
be ashamed. I followed him here to England—because I loved him.
I came after him, as perhaps a woman should not do, because I was
true of heart. He had told me that he did not want me;—but I
wanted to be wanted, and I hoped that I might lure him back to his
troth. I have utterly failed, and I must return to my own country,
—I will not say a broken-hearted woman, for I will not admit of such
a condition,—but a creature with a broken spirit. He has misused
me foully, and I have simply forgiven him; not because I am a
Christian, but because I am not strong enough to punish one that I
still love. I could not put a dagger unto him,—or I would; or a
bullet,—or I would. He has reduced me to a nothing by his false-
ness, and yet I cannot injure him! I, who have sworn to myself
that no man should ever lay a finger on me in scorn without feeling
my wrath in return, I cannot punish him. But if you choose to do so
it is not for me to set you against such an act of justice." Then she
.paused and looked up to Hetta as though expecting a reply.

But Hetta had no reply to make. All had been said that she had
come to hear. Every word that the woman had spoken had in truth
been a comfort to her. She had told herself that her visit was to be
made in order that she might be justified in her condemnation of her
lover. She had believed that it was her intention to arm herself with
proof that she had done right in rejecting him. Now she was told that
however false her lover might have been to this other woman he had
been absolutely true to her. The woman had not spoken kindly of
Paul,—had seemed to intend to speak of him with the utmost severity;
but she had so spoken as to acquit him of all sin against Hetta. What
was it to Hetta that her lover had been false to this American stranger?
It did not seem to her to be at all necessary that she should be angry
with her lover on that head. Mrs. Hurtle had told her that she her-
sel must decide whether she would take upon herself to avenge her
rival's wrongs. In saying that Mrs. Hurtle had taught her to feel
that there were no other wrongs which she need avenge. It was all
done now. If she could only thank the woman for the pleasantness
of her demeanour, and then go, she could, when alone, make up her
mind as to what she would do next. She had not yet told herself
she would submit herself again to Paul Montague. She had only
told herself that, within her own breast, she was bound to forgive
him. "You have been very kind," she said at last,—speaking only
because it was necessary that she should say something.

"It is well that there should be some kindness where there has
been so much that is unkind. Forgive me, Miss Carbury, if I speak
 plainly to you. Of course you will go back to him. Of course you will be his wife. You have told me that you love him dearly, as plainly as I have told you the same story of myself. Your coming here would of itself have declared it, even if I did not see your satisfaction at my account of his treachery to me."

"Oh, Mrs. Hurtle, do not say that of me!"

"But it is true, and I do not in the least quarrel with you on that account. He has preferred you to me, and as far as I am concerned there is an end of it. You are a girl, whereas I am a woman,—and he likes your youth. I have undergone the cruel roughness of the world, which has not as yet touched you; and therefore you are softer to the touch. I do not know that you are very superior in other attractions; but that has sufficed, and you are the victor. I am strong enough to acknowledge that I have nothing to forgive in you;—and am weak enough to forgive all his treachery." Hetta was now holding the woman by the hand, and was weeping, she knew not why. "I am so glad to have seen you," continued Mrs. Hurtle, "so that I may know what his wife was like. In a few days I shall return to the States, and then neither of you will ever be troubled further by Winifrid Hurtle. Tell him that if he will come and see me once before I go, I will not be more unkind to him than I can help."

When Hetta did not decline to be the bearer of this message she must have at any rate resolved that she would see Paul Montague again,—and to see him would be to tell him that she was again his own. She now got herself quickly out of the room, absolutely kissing the woman whom she had both dreaded and despised. As soon as she was alone in the street she tried to think of it all. How full of beauty was the face of that American female,—how rich and glorious her voice in spite of a slight taint of the well-known nasal twang;,—and above all how powerful and at the same time how easy and how gracious was her manner! That she would be an unfit wife for Paul Montague was certain to Hetta, but that he or any man should have loved her and have been loved by her, and then have been willing to part from her, was wonderful. And yet Paul Montague had preferred herself, Hetta Carbury, to this woman! Paul had certainly done well for his own cause when he had referred the younger lady to the elder.

Of her own quarrel of course there must be an end. She had been unjust to the man, and injustice must of course be remedied by repentance and confession. As she walked quickly back to the railway station she brought herself to love her lover more fondly than she had ever done. He had been true to her from the first hour of their acquaintance. What truth higher than that has any woman a right to desire? No doubt she gave to him a virgin heart. No other man had ever touched her lips, or been allowed to press her hand, or to look into her eyes with unrebuked admiration. It was her pride to give herself to the man she loved after this fashion, pure and white as snow on which no foot has trodden. But in taking him all that she wanted was that he should be true to her now and henceforward. The future must be her own work. As to the "now," she felt that Mrs. Hurtle had given her sufficient assurance.
She must at once let her mother know this change in her mind. When she re-entered the house she was no longer sullen, no longer anxious to be silent, very willing to be gracious if she might be received with favour,—but quite determined that nothing should shake her purpose. She went at once into her mother's room, having heard from the boy at the door that Lady Carbury had returned.

"Hetta, wherever have you been?" asked Lady Carbury.

"Mamma," she said, "I mean to write to Mr. Montague and tell him that I have been unjust to him."

"Hetta, you must do nothing of the kind," said Lady Carbury, rising from her seat.

"Yes, mamma. I have been unjust, and I must do so."

"It will be asking him to come back to you."

"Yes, mamma:—that is what I mean. I shall tell him that if he will come, I will receive him. I know he will come. Oh, mamma, let us be friends, and I will tell you everything. Why should you grudge me my love?"

"You have sent him back his brooch," said Lady Carbury hoarsely.

"He shall give it me again. Hear what I have done. I have seen that American lady."

"Mrs. Hurtle!"

"Yes;—I have been to her. She is a wonderful woman."

"And she has told you wonderful lies."

"Why should she lie to me? She has told me no lies. She said nothing in his favour."

"I can well believe that. What can any one say in his favour?"

"But she told me that which has assured me that Mr. Montague has never behaved badly to me. I shall write to him at once. If you like I will show you the letter."

"Any letter to him, I will tear," said Lady Carbury, full of anger.

"Mamma, I have told you everything, but in this I must judge for myself." Then Hetta, seeing that her mother would not relent, left the room without further speech, and immediately opened her desk that the letter might be written.

CHAPTER XCII.

HAMILTON K. FISKER AGAIN.

TEN days had passed since the meeting narrated in the last chapter,—ten days, during which Hetta's letter had been sent to her lover, but in which she had received no reply,—when two gentlemen met each other in a certain room in Liverpool, who were seen together in the same room in the early part of this chronicle. These were our young friend Paul Montague, and our not much older friend Hamilton K. Fisker. Melmotte had died on the 18th of July, and tidings of the event had been at once sent by telegraph to San Francisco. Some
weeks before this Montague had written to his partner, giving his account of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway Company,—describing its condition in England as he then believed it to be,—and urging Fisker to come over to London. On receipt of a message from his American correspondent he had gone down to Liverpool, and had there awaited Fisker's arrival, taking counsel with his friend Mr. Ramsbottom. In the mean time Hetta's letter was lying at the Beargarden, Paul having written from his club and having omitted to desire that the answer should be sent to his lodgings. Just at this moment things at the Beargarden were not well managed. They were indeed so ill managed that Paul never received that letter,—which would have had for him charms greater than those of any letter ever before written.

"This is a terrible business," said Fisker, immediately on entering the room in which Montague was waiting him. "He was the last man I'd have thought would be cut up in that way."

"He was utterly ruined."

"He wouldn't have been ruined,—and couldn't have thought so if he'd known all he ought to have known. The South Central would have pulled him through a' most anything if he'd have understood how to play it."

"We don't think much of the South Central here now," said Paul.

"Ah;—that's because you've never above half spirit enough for a big thing. You nibble at it instead of swallowing it whole,—and then, of course, folks see that you're only nibbling. I thought that Melmomte would have had spirit."

"There is, I fear, no doubt that he had committed forgery. It was the dread of detection as to that which drove him to destroy himself."

"I call it dam clumsy from beginning to end;—dam clumsy. I took him to be a different man, and I feel more than half ashamed of myself because I trusted such a fellow. That chap Cohenlupe has got off with a lot of swag. Only think of Melmomte allowing Cohenlupe to get the better of him!"

"I suppose the thing will be broken up now at San Francisco," suggested Paul.

"Bu'st up at Frisco! Not if I know it. Why should it be bu'st up? D'you think we're all going to smash there because a fool like Melmomte blows his brains out in London?"

"He took poison."

"Or p'ison either. That's not just our way. I'll tell you what I'm going to do; and why I'm over here so uncommon sharp. These shares are at a' most nothing now in London. I'll buy every share in the market. I wired for as many as I dar'd, so as not to spoil our own game, and I'll make a clean sweep of every one of them. Bu'st up! I'm sorry for him because I thought him a biggish man;—but what he's done 'll just be the making of us over there. Will you get out of it, or will you come back to Frisco with me?"

In answer to this Paul asserted most strenuously that he would not return to San Francisco, and, perhaps too ingenuously, gave his partner to understand that he was altogether sick of the great rail-
way, and would under no circumstances have anything more to do with it. Fisker shrugged his shoulders, and was not displeased at the proposed rupture. He was prepared to deal fairly,—nay, generously,—by his partner, having recognised the wisdom of that great commercial rule which teaches us that honour should prevail among associates of a certain class; but he had fully convinced himself that Paul Montague was not a fit partner for Hamilton K. Fisker. Fisker was not only unscrupulous himself, but he had a thorough contempt for scruples in others. According to his theory of life, nine hundred and ninety-nine men were obscure because of their scruples, whilst the thousandth man predominated and cropped up into the splendour of commercial wealth because he was free from such bondage. He had his own theories, too, as to commercial honesty. That which he had promised to do he would do, if it was within his power. He was anxious that his bond should be good, and his word equally so. But the work of robbing mankind in gross by magnificently false representations, was not only the duty, but also the delight and the ambition of his life. How could a man so great endure a partnership with one so small as Paul Montagne? "And now what about Winifrid Hurtle?" asked Fisker.

"What makes you ask? She's in London."

"Oh yes, I know she's in London, and Hurtle's at Frisco, swearing that he'll come after her. He would, only he hasn't got the dollars."

"He's not dead then?" muttered Paul.

"Dead!—no, nor likely to die. She'll have a bad time of it with him yet."

"But she divorced him."

"She got a Kansas lawyer to say so, and he's got a Frisco lawyer to say that there's nothing of the kind. She hasn't played her game badly neither, for she's had the handling of her own money, and has put it so that he can't get hold of a dollar. Even if it suited other ways, you know, I wouldn't marry her myself till I saw my way clearer out of the wood."

"I'm not thinking of marrying her,—if you mean that."

"There was a talk about it in Frisco;—that's all. And I have heard Hurtle say when he was a little farther gone than usual that she was here with you, and that he meant to drop in on you some of these days." To this Paul made no answer, thinking that he had now both heard enough and said enough about Mrs. Hurtle.

On the following day the two men, who were still partners, went together to London, and Fisker immediately became immersed in the arrangement of Melmotte's affairs. He put himself into communication with Mr. Brehgert, went in and out of the offices in Abchurch Lane and the rooms which had belonged to the Railway Company, cross-examined Croll, mastered the books of the Company as far as they were to be mastered, and actually summoned both the Grendalls, father and son, up to London. Lord Alfred, and Miles with him, had left London a day or two before Melmotte's death,—having probably perceived that there was no further occasion for their services. To Fisker's appeal Lord Alfred was proudly indifferent. Who was
this American that he should call upon a director of the London Company to appear? Does not every one know that a director of a company need not direct unless he pleases? Lord Alfred, therefore, did not even condescend to answer Fisker's letter;—but he advised his son to run up to town. "I should just go, because I'd taken a salary from the d—— Company," said the careful father, "but when there I wouldn't say a word." So Miles Grendall, obeying his parent, reappeared upon the scene.

But Fisker's attention was perhaps most usefully and most sedulously paid to Madame Melmotte and her daughter. Till Fisker arrived no one had visited them in their solitude at Hampstead, except Croll, the clerk. Mr. Brengert had abstained, thinking that a widow, who had become a widow under such terrible circumstances, would prefer to be alone. Lord Nidderdale had made his adieux, and felt that he could do no more. It need hardly be said that Lord Alfred had too much good taste to interfere at such a time, although for some months he had been domestically intimate with the poor woman, or that Sir Felix would not be prompted by the father's death to renew his suit to the daughter. But Fisker had not been two days in London before he went out to Hampstead, and was admitted to Madame Melmotte's presence;—and he had not been there four days before he was aware that in spite of all misfortunes, Marie Melmottewas still the undoubted possessor of a large fortune.

In regard to Melmotte's effects generally the Crown had been induced to abstain from interfering,—giving up the right to all the man's plate and chairs and tables which it had acquired by the finding of the coroner's verdict,—not from tenderness to Madame Melmotte, for whom no great commiseration was felt, but on behalf of such creditors as poor Mr. Longstaffe and his son. But Marie's money was quite distinct from this. She had been right in her own belief as to this property, and had been right, too, in refusing to sign those papers,—unless it may be that that refusal led to her father's act. She herself was sure that it was not so, because she had withdrawn her refusal, and had offered to sign the papers before her father's death. What might have been the ultimate result had she done so when he first made the request, no one could now say. That the money would have gone there could be no doubt. The money was now hers,—a fact which Fisker soon learned with that peculiar cleverness which belonged to him.

Poor Madame Melmotte felt the visits of the American to be a relief to her in her misery. The world makes great mistakes as to that which is and is not beneficial to those whom Death has bereaved of a companion. It may be, no doubt sometimes it is the case, that grief shall be so heavy, so absolutely crushing, as to make any interference with it an additional trouble, and this is felt also in acute bodily pain, and in periods of terrible mental suffering. It may also be, and, no doubt, often is the case, that the bereaved one chooses to affect such overbearing sorrow, and that friends abstain, because even such affection has its own rights and privileges. But Madame Melmotte was neither crushed by grief nor did she affect to be so crushed. She had been numbed by the suddenness and by the awe of the
catastrophe. The man who had been her merciless tyrant for years, who had seemed to her to be a very incarnation of cruel power, had succumbed, and shown himself to be powerless against his own misfortunes. She was a woman of very few words, and had spoken almost none on this occasion even to her own daughter; but when Fisker came to her, and told her more than she had ever known before of her husband's affairs, and spoke to her of her future life, and mixed for her a small glass of brandy-and-water warm, and told her that Frisco would be the fittest place for her future residence, she certainly did not find him to be intrusive.

And even Marie liked Fisker, though she had been wooed and almost won both by a lord and a baronet, and had understood, if not much, at least more than her mother, of the life to which she had been introduced. There was something of real sorrow in her heart for her father. She was prone to love,—though, perhaps, not prone to deep affection. Melmotte had certainly been often cruel to her, but he had also been very indulgent. And as she had never been specially grateful for the one, so neither had she ever specially resented the other. Tenderness, care, real solicitude for her well-being, she had never known, and had come to regard the unevenness of her life, vacillating between knockers and knick-knacks, with a blow one day and a jewel the next, as the condition of things which was natural to her. When her father was dead she remembered for a while the jewels and the knick-knacks, and forgot the knocks and blows. But she was not beyond consolation, and she also found consolation in Mr. Fisker's visits.

"I used to sign a paper every quarter," she said to Fisker, as they were walking together one evening in the lanes round Hampstead.

"You'll have to do the same now, only instead of giving the paper to any one you'll have to leave it in a banker's hands to draw the money for yourself."

"And can that be done over in California?"

"Just the same as here. Your bankers will manage it all for you without the slightest trouble. For the matter of that I'll do it, if you'll trust me. There's only one thing against it all, Miss Melmotte."

"And what's that?"

"After the sort of society you've been used to here, I don't know how you'll get on among us Americans. We're a pretty rough lot, I guess. Though, perhaps, what you lose in the look of the fruit, you'll make up in the flavour." This Fisker said in a somewhat plaintive tone, as though fearing that the manifest substantial advantages of Frisco would not suffice to atone for the loss of that fashion to which Miss Melmotte had been used.

"I hate swells," said Marie, flashing round upon him.

"Do you now?"

"Like poison. What's the use of 'em? They never mean a word that they say,—and they don't say so many words either. They're never more than half awake, and don't care the least about anybody. I hate London."

"Do you now?"

"Oh, don't I?"
"I wonder whether you’d hate Frisco?"
"I rather think it would be a jolly sort of place."
"Very jolly I find it. And I wonder whether you’d hate—me?"
"Mr. Fisk, that’s nonsense. Why should I hate anybody?"
"But you do. I’ve found out one or two that you don’t love. If you do come to Frisco, I hope you won’t just hate me, you know." Then he took her gently by the arm;—but she, whisking herself away rapidly, bade him behave himself. Then they returned to their lodgings, and Mr. Fisk, before he went back to London, mixed a little warm brandy-and-water for Madame Melmotte. I think that upon the whole Madame Melmotte was more comfortable at Hampstead than she had been either in Grosvenor Square or Bruton Street, although she was certainly not a thing beautiful to look at in her widow’s weeds.

"I don’t think much of you as a book-keeper, you know," Fisk said to Miles Grendall in the now almost deserted Board-room of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway. Miles, remembering his father’s advice, answered not a word, but merely looked with assumed amazement at the impertinent stranger who dared thus to censure his performances. Fisk had made three or four remarks previous to this, and had appealed both to Paul Montague and to Croll, who were present. He had invited also the attendance of Sir Felix Carbury, Lord Nidderdale, and Mr. Longstaffe, who were all Directors;—but none of them had come. Sir Felix had paid no attention to Fisk’s letter. Lord Nidderdale had written a short but characteristic reply. "Dear Mr. Fisk,—I really don’t know anything about it. Yours, Nidderdale." Mr. Longstaffe, with laborious zeal, had closely covered four pages with his reasons for non-attendance, with which the reader shall not be troubled, and which it may be doubted whether even Fisk perused to the end. "Upon my word," continued Fisk, "it’s astonishing to me that Melmotte should have put up with this kind of thing. I suppose you understand something of business, Mr. Croll?"

"It was not my department, Mr. Fisk," said the German.
"Nor anybody else’s either," said the domineering American.
"Of course it’s on the cards, Mr. Grendall, that we shall have to put you into a witness-box, because there are certain things we must get at." Miles was silent as the grave, but at once made up his mind that he would pass his autumn at some pleasant but economical German retreat, and that his autumnal retirement should be commenced within a very few days;—or perhaps hours might suffice.

But Fisk was not in earnest in his threat. In truth the greater the confusion in the London office, the better, he thought, were the prospects of the Company at San Francisco. Miles underwent purgatory on this occasion for three or four hours, and when dismissed had certainly revealed none of Melmotte’s secrets. He did, however, go to Germany, finding that a temporary absence from England would be comfortable to him in more respects than one,—and need not be heard of again in these pages.

When Melmotte’s affairs were ultimately wound up there was found to be nearly enough of property to satisfy all his proved
liabilities. Very many men started up with huge claims, asserting that they had been robbed, and in the confusion it was hard to ascer-
tain who had been robbed, or who had simply been unsuccessful in
their attempts to rob others. Some, no doubt, as was the case with
poor Mr. Brehgert, had speculated in dependence on Melmotte's
sagacity, and had lost heavily without dishonesty. But of those who,
like the Longestaffes, were able to prove direct debts, the condition
at last was not very sad. Our excellent friend Dolly got his money
early in the day, and was able, under Mr. Squercum's guidance, to
start himself on a new career. Having paid his debts, and with still
a large balance at his bankers', he assured his friend Nidderdale that
he meant to turn over an entirely new leaf. "I shall just make
Squercum allow me so much a month, and I shall have all the bills
and that kind of thing sent to him, and he will do everything, and pull
me up if I'm getting wrong. I like Squercum."

"Won't he rob you, old fellow?" suggested Nidderdale.

"Of course he will;—but he won't let any one else do it. One
has to be plucked, but it's everything to have it done on a system.
If he'll only let me have ten shillings out of every sovereign I think
I can get along." Let us hope that Mr. Squercum was merciful,
and that Dolly was enabled to live in accordance with his virtuous
resolutions.

But these things did not arrange themselves till late in the
winter,—long after Mr. Fisker's departure for California. That,
however, was protracted till a day much later than he had anticipated
before he had become intimate with Madame Melmotte and Marie.
Madame Melmotte's affairs occupied him for a while almost exclu-
sively. The furniture and plate were of course sold for the creditors,
but Madame Melmotte was allowed to take whatever she declared to
be specially her own property;—and, though much was said about
the jewels, no attempt was made to recover them. Marie advised
Madame Melmotte to give them up, assuring the old woman that she
should have whatever she wanted for her maintenance. But it was not
likely that Melmotte's widow would willingly abandon any property,
and she did not abandon her jewels. It was agreed between her and
Fisker that they were to be taken to New York. "You'll get as
much there as in London, if you like to part with them; and
nobody'll say anything about it there. You couldn't sell a locket or
a chain here without all the world talking about it."

In all these things Madame Melmotte put herself into Fisker's
hands with the most absolute confidence,—and, indeed, with a confi-
dence that was justified by its results. It was not by robbing an old
woman that Fisker intended to make himself great. To Madame
Melmotte's thinking, Fisker was the finest gentleman she had ever
met,—so infinitely pleasanter in his manner than Lord Alfred even
when Lord Alfred had been most gracious, with so much more to say
for himself than Miles Grendall, understanding her so much better
than any man had ever done,—especially when he supplied her with
those small warm beakers of sweet brandy-and-water. "I shall do
whatever he tells me," she said to Marie. "I'm sure I've nothing to
keep me here in this country."
"I'm willing to go," said Marie. "I don't want to stay in London."

"I suppose you'll take him if he asks you?"

"I don't know anything about that," said Marie. "A man may be very well without one's wanting to marry him. I don't think I'll marry anybody. What's the use? It's only money. Nobody cares for anything else. Fisker's all very well; but he only wants the money. Do you think Fisker 'd ask me to marry him if I hadn't got anything? Not he! He ain't slow enough for that."

"I think he's a very nice young man," said Madame Melmotte.

CHAPTER XCIII.

A TRUE LOVER.

HETTA CARBURY, out of the fulness of her heart, having made up her mind that she had been unjust to her lover, wrote to him a letter full of penitence, full of love, telling him at great length all the details of her meeting with Mrs. Hurtle, and bidding him come back to her, and bring the brooch with him. But this letter she had unfortunately addressed to the Beargarden, as he had written to her from that club; and partly through his own fault, and partly through the demoralisation of that once perfect establishment, the letter never reached his hands. When, therefore, he returned to London he was justifi ed in supposing that she had refused even to notice his appeal. He was, however, determined that he would still make further struggles. He had, he felt, to contend with many difficulties. Mrs. Hurtle, Roger Carbury, and Hetta's mother were, he thought, all inimical to him. Mrs. Hurtle, though she had declared that she would not rage as a lioness, could hardly be his friend in the matter. Roger had repeatedly declared his determination to regard him as a traitor. And Lady Carbury, as he well knew, had always been and always would be opposed to the match. But Hetta had owned that she loved him, had submitted to his caresses, and had been proud of his admiration. And Paul, though he did not probably analyze very carefully the character of his beloved, still felt instinctively that, having so far prevailed with such a girl, his prospects could not be altogether hopeless. And yet how should he continue the struggle? With what weapons should he carry on the fight? The writing of letters is but a one-sided, troublesome proceeding, when the person to whom they are written will not answer them; and the calling at a door at which the servant has been instructed to refuse a visitor admission, becomes disagreeable,—if not degrading,—after a time.

But Hetta had written a second epistle,—not to her lover, but to one who received his letters with more regularity. When she rashly and with precipitate wrath quarrelled with Paul Montague, she at once communicated the fact to her mother, and through her mother
to her cousin Roger. Though she would not recognise Roger as a lover, she did acknowledge him to be the head of her family, and her own special friend, and entitled in some special way to know all that she herself did, and all that was done in regard to her. She therefore wrote to her cousin, telling him that she had made a mistake about Paul, that she was convinced that Paul had always behaved to her with absolute sincerity, and, in short, that Paul was the best, and dearest, and most ill-used of human beings. In her enthusiasm she went on to declare that there could be no other chance of happiness for her in this world than that of becoming Paul's wife, and to beseech her dearest friend and cousin Roger not to turn against her, but to lend her an aiding hand. There are those whom strong words in letters never affect at all,—who, perhaps, hardly read them, and take what they do read as meaning no more than half what is said. But Roger Carbury was certainly not one of these. As he sat on the garden wall at Carbury, with his cousin's letter in his hand, her words had their full weight with him. He did not try to convince himself that all this was the verbiage of an enthusiastic girl, who might soon be turned and trained to another mode of thinking by fitting admonitions. To him now, as he read and re-read Hetta's letter sitting on the wall, there was not at any rate further hope for himself. Though he was altogether unchanged himself, though he was altogether incapable of change,—though he could not rally himself sufficiently to look forward to even a passive enjoyment of life without the girl whom he had loved,—yet he told himself what he believed to be the truth. At last he owned directly and plainly that, whether happy or unhappy, he must do without her. He had let time slip by with him too fast and too far before he had ventured to love. He must now stomach his disappointment, and make the best he could of such a broken, ill-conditioned life as was left to him. But, if he acknowledged this,—and he did acknowledge it,—in what fashion should he in future treat the man and woman who had reduced him so low?

At this moment his mind was tuned to high thoughts. If it were possible he would be unselfish. He could not, indeed, bring himself to think with kindness of Paul Montague. He could not say to himself that the man had not been treacherous to him, nor could he forgive the man's supposed treason. But he did tell himself very plainly that in comparison with Hetta the man was nothing to him. It could hardly be worth his while to maintain a quarrel with the man if he were once able to assure Hetta that she, as the wife of another man, should still be dear to him as a friend might be dear. He was well aware that such assurance, such forgiveness, must contain very much. If it were to be so, Hetta's child must take the name of Carbury, and must be to him as his heir,—as near as possible his own child. In her favour he must throw aside that law of primogeniture which to him was so sacred that he had been hitherto minded to make Sir Felix his heir in spite of the absolute unfitness of the wretched young man. All this must be changed, should he be able to persuade himself to give his consent to the marriage. In such case Carbury must be the home of the married couple, as far as he could induce them to
make it so. There must be born the future infant to whose existence he was already looking forward with some idea that in his old age he might there find comfort. In such case, though he should never again be able to love Paul Montague in his heart of hearts, he must live with him for her sake on affectionate terms. He must forgive Hetta altogether,—as though there had been no fault; and he must strive to forgive the man’s fault as best he might. Struggling as he was to be generous, passionately fond as he was of justice, yet he did not know how to be just himself. He could not see that he in truth had been to no extent ill-used. And ever and again, as he thought of the great prayer as to the forgiveness of trespasses, he could not refrain from asking himself whether it could really be intended that he should forgive such trespass as that committed against him by Paul Montague! Nevertheless, when he rose from the wall he had resolved that Hetta should be pardoned entirely, and that Paul Montague should be treated as though he were pardoned. As for himself,—the chances of the world had been unkind to him, and he would submit to them!

Nevertheless he wrote no answer to Hetta’s letter. Perhaps he felt, with some undefined but still existing hope, that the writing of such a letter would deprive him of his last chance. Hetta’s letter to himself hardly required an immediate answer,—did not, indeed, demand any answer. She had simply told him that, whereas she had for certain reasons quarrelled with the man she had loved, she had now come to the conclusion that she would quarrel with him no longer. She had asked for her cousin’s assent to her own views, but that, as Roger felt, was to be given rather by the discontinuance of opposition than by any positive action. Roger’s influence with her mother was the assistance which Hetta really wanted from him, and that influence could hardly be given by the writing of any letter. Thinking of all this, Roger determined that he would again go up to London. He would have the vacant hours of the journey in which to think of it all again, and tell himself whether it was possible for him to bring his heart to agree to the marriage;—and then he would see the people, and perhaps learn something further from their manner and their words, before he finally committed himself to the abandonment of his own hopes and the completion of theirs.

He went up to town, and I do not know that those vacant hours served him much. To a man not accustomed to thinking there is nothing in the world so difficult as to think. After some loose fashion we turn over things in our mind and ultimately reach some decision, guided probably by our feelings at the last moment rather than by any process of ratiocination;—and then we think that we have thought. But to follow out one argument to an end, and then to found on the base so reached the commencement of another, is not common to us. Such a process was hardly within the compass of Roger’s mind,—who when he was made wretched by the dust, and by a female who had a basket of objectionable provisions opposite to him, almost forswore his charitable resolutions of the day before; but who again, as he walked lonely at night round the square which was near to his hotel, looking up at the bright moon with a full
appreciation of the beauty of the heavens, asked himself what was he that he should wish to interfere with the happiness of two human beings much younger than himself, and much fitter to enjoy the world. But he had had a bath, and had got rid of the dust, and had eaten his dinner.

The next morning he was in Welbeck Street at an early hour. When he knocked he had not made up his mind whether he would ask for Lady Carbury or her daughter, and did at last inquire whether "the ladies" were at home. The ladies were reported as being at home, and he was at once shown into the drawing-room, where Hetta was sitting. She hurried up to him, and he at once took her in his arms and kissed her. He had never done such a thing before. He had never even kissed her hand. Though they were cousins and dear friends, he had never treated her after that fashion. Her instinct told her immediately that such a greeting from him was a sign of affectionate compliance with her wishes. That this man should kiss her as her best and dearest relation, as her most trusted friend, as almost her brother, was certainly to her no offence. She could cling to him in fondest love,—if he would only consent not to be her lover. "Oh, Roger, I am so glad to see you," she said, escaping gently from his arms.

"I could not write an answer, and so I came."
"You always do the kindest thing that can be done."
"I don't know. I don't know that I can do anything now,—kind or unkind. It is all done without any aid from me. Hetta, you have been all the world to me."
"Do not reproach me," she said.
"No;—no. Why should I reproach you? You have committed no fault. I should not have come had I intended to reproach any one."
"I love you so much for saying that."
"Let it be as you wish it,—if it must. I have made up my mind to bear it, and there shall be an end of it." As he said this he took her by the hand, and she put her head upon his shoulder and began to weep. "And still you will be all the world to me," he continued, with his arm round her waist. "As you will not be my wife, you shall be my daughter."
"I will be your sister, Roger."
"My daughter rather. You shall be all that I have in the world. I will hurry to grow old that I may feel for you as the old feel for the young. And if you have a child, Hetta, he must be my child." As he thus spoke her tears were renewed. "I have planned it all out in my mind, dear. There! If there be anything that I can do to add to your happiness, I will do it. You must believe this of me,—that to make you happy shall be the only enjoyment of my life."

It had been hardly possible for her to tell him as yet that the man to whom he was thus consenting to surrender her had not even condescended to answer the letter in which she had told him to come back to her. And now, sobbing as she was, overcome by the tenderness of her cousin's affection, anxious to express her intense gratitude,
she did not know how first to mention the name of Paul Montague. "Have you seen him?" she said in a whisper.
"Seen whom?"
"Mr. Montague."
"No;—why should I have seen him? It is not for his sake that I am here."
"But you will be his friend?"
"Your husband shall certainly be my friend;—or, if not, the fault shall not be mine. It shall all be forgotten, Hetta,—as nearly as such things may be forgotten. But I had nothing to say to him till I had seen you." At that moment the door was opened and Lady Carbury entered the room, and, after her greeting with her cousin, looked first at her daughter and then at Roger. "I have come up," said he, "to signify my adhesion to this marriage." Lady Carbury's face fell very low. "I need not speak again of what were my own wishes. I have learned at last that it could not have been so."
"Why should you say so?" exclaimed Lady Carbury.
"Pray, pray, mamma——," Hetta began, but was unable to find words with which to go on with her prayer.
"I do not know that it need be so at all," continued Lady Carbury. "I think it is very much in your own hands. Of course it is not for me to press such an arrangement; if it be not in accord with your own wishes."
"I look upon her as engaged to marry Paul Montague," said Roger.
"Not at all," said Lady Carbury.
"Yes; mamma,—yes," cried Hetta boldly. "It is so. I am engaged to him."
"I beg to let your cousin know that it is not so with my consent,—nor, as far as I can understand at present, with the consent of Mr. Montague himself."
"Mamma!"
"Paul Montague!" ejaculated Roger Carbury. "The consent of Paul Montague! I think I may take upon myself to say that there can be no doubt as to that."
"There has been a quarrel," said Lady Carbury.
"Surely he has not quarrelled with you, Hetta?"
"I wrote to him,—and he has not answered me," said Hetta piteously.

Then Lady Carbury gave a full and somewhat coloured account of what had taken place, while Roger listened with admirable patience. "The marriage is on every account objectionable," she said at last. "His means are precarious. His conduct with regard to that woman has been very bad. He has been sadly mixed up with that wretched man who destroyed himself. And now, when Henrietta has written to him without my sanction,—in opposition to my express commands,—he takes no notice of her. She, very properly, sent him back a present that he made her, and no doubt he has resented her doing so. I trust that his resentment may be continued."

Hetta was now seated on a sofa hiding her face and weeping.
Roger stood perfectly still, listening with respectful silence till Lady Carbury had spoken her last word. And even then he was slow to answer, considering what he might best say. "I think I had better see him," he replied. "If, as I imagine, he has not received my cousin's letter, that matter will be set at rest. We must not take advantage of such an accident as that. As to his income,—that I think may be managed. His connection with Mr. Melmotte was unfortunate, but was due to no fault of his." At this moment he could not but remember Lady Carbury's great anxiety to be closely connected with Melmotte, but he was too generous to say a word on that head. "I will see him, Lady Carbury, and then I will come to you again."

Lady Carbury did not dare to tell him that she did not wish him to see Paul Montague. She knew that if he really threw himself into the scale against her, her opposition would weigh nothing. He was too powerful in his honesty and greatness of character,—and had been too often admitted by herself to be the guardian angel of the family,—for her to stand against him. But she still thought that had he persevered, Hetta would have become his wife.

It was late that evening before Roger found Paul Montague, who had only then returned from Liverpool with Fisker,—whose subsequent doings have been recorded somewhat out of their turn.

"I don't know what letter you mean," said Paul.

"You wrote to her?"

"Certainly I wrote to her. I wrote to her twice. My last letter was one which I think she ought to have answered. She had accepted me, and had given me a right to tell my own story when she unfortunately heard from other sources the story of my journey to Lowestoft with Mrs. Hurtle." Paul pleaded his own case with indignant heat, not understanding at first that Roger had come to him on a friendly mission.

"She did answer your letter."

"I have not had a line from her;—not a word!"

"She did answer your letter."

"What did she say to me?"

"Nay,—you must ask her that."

"But if she will not see me?"

"She will see you. I can tell you that. And I will tell you this also;—that she wrote to you as a girl writes to the lover whom she does wish to see."

"Is that true?" exclaimed Paul, jumping up.

"I am here especially to tell you that it is true. I should hardly come on such a message if there were a doubt. You may go to her, and need have nothing to fear,—unless, indeed, it be the opposition of her mother."

"She is stronger than her mother," said Paul.

"I think she is. And now I wish you to hear what I have to say."

"Of course," said Paul, sitting down suddenly. Up to this moment Roger Carbury, though he had certainly brought glad
tidings, had not communicated them as a joyous, sympathetic messenger. His face had been severe, and the tone of his voice almost harsh; and Paul, remembering well the words of the last letter which his old friend had written him, did not expect personal kindness. Roger would probably say very disagreeable things to him, which he must bear with all the patience which he could summon to his assistance.

"You know what my feelings have been," Roger began, "and how deeply I have resented what I thought to be an interference with my affections. But no quarrel between you and me, whatever the rights of it may be—"

"I have never quarrelled with you," Paul began.

"If you will listen to me for a moment it will be better. No anger between you and me, let it arise as it might, should be allowed to interfere with the happiness of her whom I suppose we both love better than all the rest of the world put together."

"I do," said Paul.

"And so do I; and so I always shall. But she is to be your wife. She shall be my daughter. She shall have my property,—or her child shall be my heir. My house shall be her house,—if you and she will consent to make it so. You will not be afraid of me. You know me, I think, too well for that. You may now count on any assistance you could have from me were I a father giving you a daughter in marriage. I do this because I will make the happiness of her life the chief object of mine. Now good night. Don't say anything about it at present. By-and-by we shall be able to talk about these things with more equable temper." Having so spoken he hurried out of the room, leaving Paul Montague bewildered by the tidings which had been announced to him.

CHAPTER XCIV.

JOHN CRUMB'S VICTORY.

In the meantime great preparations were going on down in Suffolk for the marriage of that happiest of lovers, John Crumb. John Crumb had been up to London, had been formally reconciled to Ruby,—who had submitted to his floury embraces, not with the best grace in the world, but still with a submission that had satisfied her future husband,—had been intensely grateful to Mrs. Hurtle, and almost munificent in liberality to Mrs. Pipkin, to whom he presented a purple silk dress, in addition to the cloak which he had given on a former occasion. During this visit he had expressed no anger against Ruby, and no indignation in reference to the baronets. When informed by Mrs. Pipkin, who hoped thereby to please him, that Sir Felix was supposed to be still "all one mash of gore," he blandly smiled, remarking that no man could be much the worse for a "few
sich taps as them." He only stayed a few hours in London, but during these few hours he settled everything. When Mrs. Pipkin suggested that Ruby should be married from her house, he winked his eye as he declined the suggestion with thanks. Daniel Ruggles was old, and, under the influence of continued gin and water, was becoming feeble. John Crumb was of opinion that the old man should not be neglected, and hinted that with a little care the five hundred pounds which had originally been promised as Ruby's fortune, might at any rate be secured. He was of opinion that the marriage should be celebrated in Suffolk,—the feast being spread at Sheep's Acre farm, if Dan Ruggles could be talked into giving it,—and if not, at his own house. When both the ladies explained to him that this last proposition was not in strict accordance with the habits of the fashionable world, John expressed an opinion that, under the peculiar circumstances of his marriage, the ordinary laws of the world might be suspended. "It ain't jist like other folks, after all as we've been through," said he,—meaning probably to imply that having had to fight for his wife, he was entitled to give a breakfast on the occasion if he pleased. But whether the banquet was to be given by the bride's grandfather or by himself,—he was determined that there should be a banquet, and that he would bid the guests. He invited both Mrs. Pipkin and Mrs. Hurtle, and at last succeeded in inducing Mrs. Hurtle to promise that she would bring Mrs. Pipkin down to Bungay, for the occasion.

Then it was necessary to fix the day, and for this purpose it was of course essential that Ruby should be consulted. During the discussion as to the feast and the bridegroom's entreaties that the two ladies would be present, she had taken no part in the matter in hand. She was brought up to be kissed, and having been duly kissed she retired again among the children, having only expressed one wish of her own,—namely, that Joe Mixet might not have anything to do with the affair. But the day could not be fixed without her, and she was summoned. Crumb had been absurdly impatient, proposing next Tuesday,—making his proposition on a Friday. They could cook enough meat for all Bungay to eat by Tuesday, and he was aware of no other cause for delay. "That's out of the question," Ruby had said decisively, and as the two elder ladies had supported her Mr. Crumb yielded with a good grace. He did not himself appreciate the reasons given because, as he remarked, gowns can be bought ready made at any shop. But Mrs. Pipkin told him with a laugh that he didn't know anything about it, and when the 14th of August was named he only scratched his head and, muttering something about Thetford fair, agreed that he would, yet once again, allow love to take precedence of business. If Tuesday would have suited the ladies as well he thought that he might have managed to combine the marriage and the fair, but when Mrs. Pipkin told him that he must not interfere any further, he yielded with a good grace. He merely remained in London long enough to pay a friendly visit to the policeman who had locked him up, and then returned to Suffolk, revolving in his mind how glorious should be the matrimonial triumph which he had at last achieved.
Before the day arrived, old Ruggles had been constrained to forgive his granddaughter, and to give a general assent to the marriage. When John Crumb, with a sound of many trumpets, informed all Bungay that he had returned victorious from London, and that after all the ups and downs of his courtship Ruby was to become his wife on a fixed day, all Bungay took his part, and joined in a general attack upon Mr. Daniel Ruggles. The cross-grained old man held out for a long time, alleging that the girl was no better than she should be, and that she had run away with the baronite. But this assertion was met by so strong a torrent of contradiction, that the farmer was absolutely driven out of his own convictions. It is to be feared that many lies were told on Ruby’s behalf by lips which had been quite ready a fortnight since to take away her character. But it had become an acknowledged fact in Bungay that John Crumb was ready at any hour to punch the head of any man who should hint that Ruby Ruggles had, at any period of her life, done any act or spoken any word unbecoming a young lady; and so strong was the general belief in John Crumb, that Ruby became the subject of general eulogy from all male lips in the town. And though perhaps some slight suspicion of irregular behaviour up in London might be whispered by the Bungay ladies among themselves, still the feeling in favour of Mr. Crumb was so general, and his constancy was so popular, that the grand-father could not stand against it. “I don’t see why I ain’t to do as I likes with my own,” he said to Joe Mixet, the baker, who went out to Sheep’s Acre Farm as one of many deputations sent by the municipality of Bungay.

“She’s your own flesh and blood, Mr. Ruggles,” said the baker.

“No; she ain’t;—no more than she’s a Pipkin. She’s taken up with Mrs. Pipkin just because I hate the Pipkinses. Let Mrs. Pipkin give ’em a breakfast.”

“She is your own flesh and blood,—and your name, too, Mr. Ruggles. And she’s going to be the respectable wife of a respectable man, Mr. Ruggles.”

“I won’t give ’em no breakfast;—that’s flat,” said the farmer.

But he had yielded in the main when he allowed himself to base his opposition on one immaterial detail. The breakfast was to be given at the King’s Head, and, though it was acknowledged on all sides that no authority could be found for such a practice, it was known that the bill was to be paid by the bridegroom. Nor would Mr. Ruggles pay the five hundred pounds down as in early days he had promised to do. He was very clear in his mind that his undertaking on that head was altogether cancelled by Ruby’s departure from Sheep’s Acre. When he was reminded that he had nearly pulled his granddaughter’s hair out of her head, and had thus justified her act of rebellion, he did not contradict the assertion, but implied that if Ruby did not choose to earn her fortune on such terms as those, that was her fault. It was not to be supposed that he was to give a girl, who was after all as much a Pipkin as a Ruggles, five hundred pounds for nothing. But, in return for that night’s somewhat harsh treatment of Ruby, he did at last consent to have the money settled upon John Crumb at his death,—an arrangement which both the
lawyer and Joe Mixet thought to be almost as good as a free gift, being both of them aware that the consumption of gin and water was on the increase. And he, moreover, was persuaded to receive Mrs. Pipkin and Ruby at the farm for the night previous to the marriage. This very necessary arrangement was made by Mr. Mixet's mother, a most respectable old lady, who went out in a fly from the inn attired in her best black silk gown and an overpowering bonnet, an old lady from whom her son had inherited his eloquence, who absolutely shamed the old man into compliance,—not, however, till she had promised to send out the tea and white sugar and box of biscuits which were thought to be necessary for Mrs. Pipkin on the evening preceding the marriage. A private sitting-room at the inn was secured for the special accommodation of Mrs. Hurtle,—who was supposed to be a lady of too high standing to be properly entertained at Sheep's Acre Farm.

On the day preceding the wedding one trouble for a moment clouded the bridegroom's brow. Ruby had demanded that Joe Mixet should not be among the performers, and John Crumb, with the urbanity of a lover, had assented to her demand,—as far, at least, as silence can give consent. And yet he felt himself unable to answer such interrogatories as the parson might put to him without the assistance of his friend, although he devoted much study to the matter. "You could come in behind like, Joe, just as if I knew nothin' about it," suggested Crumb.

"Don't you say a word of me, and she won't say nothing, you may be sure. You ain't going to give in to all her cantraps that way, John?" John shook his head and rubbed the meal about on his forehead. "It was only just something for her to say. What have I done that she should object to me?"

"You didn't ever go for to—kiss her,—did you, Joe?"

"What a one'er you are! That wouldn't 'a set her again me. It is just because I stood up and spoke for you like a man that night at Sheep's Acre, when her mind was turned the other way. Don't you notice nothing about it. When we're all in the church she won't go back because Joe Mixet's there. I'll bet you a gallon, old fellow, she and I are the best friends in Bungay before six months are gone."

"Nay, nay; she must have a better friend than thee, Joe, or I must know the reason why." But John Crumb's heart was too big for jealousy, and he agreed at last that Joe Mixet should be his best man, undertaking to "square it all" with Ruby, after the ceremony.

He met the ladies at the station and,—for him,—was quite eloquent in his welcome to Mrs. Hurtle and Mrs. Pipkin. To Ruby he said but little. But he looked at her in her new hat, and generally bright in subsidiary wedding garments, with great delight. "Ain't she boatiful now?" he said aloud to Mrs. Hurtle on the platform, to the great delight of half Bungay, who had accompanied him on the occasion. Ruby, hearing her praises thus sung, made a fearful grimace as she turned round to Mrs. Pipkin, and whispered to her aunt, so that those only who were within a yard or two could hear her; "He is such a fool!" Then he conducted Mrs. Hurtle in an
omnibus up to the Inn, and afterwards himself drove Mrs. Pipkin and Ruby out to Sheep's Acre; in the performance of all which duties he was dressed in the green cutaway coat with brass buttons which had been expressly made for his marriage. "Thou'rt come back then, Ruby," said the old man.

"I ain't going to trouble you long, grandfather," said the girl.

"So best;—so best. And this is Mrs. Pipkin?"

"Yes, Mr. Ruggles; that's my name."

"I've heard your name. I've heard your name, and I don't know as I ever want to hear it again. But they say as you've been kind to that girl as 'd 'a been on the town only for that."

"Grandfather, that ain't true," said Ruby with energy. The old man made no rejoinder, and Ruby was allowed to take her aunt up into the bedroom which they were both to occupy. "Now, Mrs. Pipkin, just you say," pleaded Ruby, "how was it possible for any girl to live with an old man like that?"

"But, Ruby, you might always have gone to live with the young man instead when you pleased."

"You mean John Crumb."

"Of course I mean John Crumb, Ruby."

"There ain't much to choose between 'em. What one says is all spite; and the other man says nothing at all."

"Oh Ruby, Ruby," said Mrs. Pipkin, with solemnly persuasive voice, "I hope you'll come to learn some day, that a loving heart is better nor a fickle tongue,—specially with vittels certain."

On the following morning the Bungay church bells rang merrily, and half its population was present to see John Crumb made a happy man. He himself went out to the farm and drove the bride and Mrs. Pipkin into the town, expressing an opinion that no hired charioteer would bring them so safely as he would do himself; nor did he think it any disgrace to be seen performing this task before his marriage. He smiled and nodded at every one, now and then pointing back with his whip to Ruby when he met any of his specially intimate friends, as though he would have said, "See, I've got her at last in spite of all difficulties." Poor Ruby, in her misery under this treatment, would have escaped out of the cart had it been possible. But now she was altogether in the man's hands and no escape was within her reach. "What's the odds?" said Mrs. Pipkin as they settled their bonnets in a room at the Inn just before they entered the church. "Drat it,—you make me that angry I'm half minded to cuff you. Ain't he fond o' you? Ain't he got a house of his own? Ain't he well to do all round? Manners! What's manners? I don't see nothing amiss in his manners. He means what he says, and I call that the best of good manners."

Ruby, when she reached the church, had been too completely quelled by outward circumstances to take any notice of Joe Mixet, who was standing there, quite unabashed, with a splendid nosegay in his button-hole. She certainly had no right on this occasion to complain of her husband's silence. Whereas she could hardly bring herself to utter the responses in a voice loud enough for the clergyman to catch the familiar words, he made his assertions so vehemently
The happy Bridegroom.
that they were heard throughout the whole building. "I, John,—
take thee Ruby,—to my wedded wife,—to 'ave and to 'old,—from
this day forard,—for better nor worser,—for richer nor poorer—":
and so on to the end. And when he came to the "worldly goods"
with which he endowed his Ruby, he was very emphatic indeed.
Since the day had been fixed he had employed all his leisure-hours
in learning the words by heart, and would now hardly allow the
clergyman to say them before him. He thoroughly enjoyed the
ceremony, and would have liked to be married over and over again,
every day for a week, had it been possible.

And then there came the breakfast, to which he marshalled the way
up the broad stairs of the inn at Bungay, with Mrs. Hurtle on one
arm and Mrs. Pipkin on the other. He had been told that he ought
to take his wife's arm on this occasion, but he remarked that he
meant to see a good deal of her in future, and that his opportunities
of being civil to Mrs. Hurtle and Mrs. Pipkin would be rare. Thus
it came to pass that, in spite of all that poor Ruby had said, she was
conducted to the marriage-feast by Joe Mixet himself. Ruby, I think,
had forgotten the order which she had given in reference to the baker.
When desiring that she might see nothing more of Joe Mixet,
she had been in her pride;—but now she was so tamed and
quelled by the outward circumstances of her position, that she
was glad to have some one near her who knew how to behave him-
self. "Mrs. Crumb, you have my best wishes for your continued
health and 'appiness," said Joe Mixet in a whisper

"It's very good of you to say so, Mr. Mixet."

"He's a good un'; is he."

"Oh, I dare say."

"You just be fond of him and stroke him down, and make much
of him, and I'm blessed if you may'n't do a most anything with him,—
all's one as a babby."

"A man shouldn't be all's one as a babby, Mr. Mixet."

"And he don't drink hard, but he works hard, and go where he
will he can hold his own." Ruby said no more, and soon found
herself seated by her husband's side. It certainly was wonderful to
her that so many people should pay John Crumb so much respect,
and should seem to think so little of the meal and flour which per-
vaded his countenance.

After the breakfast, or "bit of dinner," as John Crumb would call
it, Mr. Mixet of course made a speech. "He had had the pleasure
of knowing John Crumb for a great many years, and the honour of
being acquainted with Miss Ruby Ruggles,—he begged all their
pardons, and should have said Mrs. John Crumb,—ever since she
was a child." "That's a downright story," said Ruby in a whisper
to Mrs. Hurtle. "And he'd never known two young people more
fitted by the gifts of nature to contribute to one another's 'appi-
nesses. He had understood that Mars and Wenus always lived
on the best of terms, and perhaps the present company would excuse
him if he likened this 'appy young couple to them two 'eathen gods
and goddesses. For Miss Ruby,—Mrs. Crumb he should say,—was
certainly lovely as ere a Wenus as ever was; and as for John Crumb,
he didn't believe that ever a Mars among 'em could stand again him. He didn't remember just at present whether Mars and Wenus had any young family, but he hoped that before long there would be any number of young Crumbs for the Bungay birds to pick up. 'Appy is the man as 'as his quiver full of 'em,—and the woman too, if you'll allow me to say so, Mrs. Crumb." The speech, of which only a small sample can be given here, was very much admired by the ladies and gentlemen present,—with the single exception of poor Ruby, who would have run away and locked herself in an inner chamber had she not been certain that she would be brought back again.

In the afternoon John took his bride to Lowestoft, and brought her back to all the glories of his own house on the following day. His honeymoon was short, but its influence on Ruby was beneficent. When she was alone with the man, knowing that he was her husband, and thinking something of all that he had done to win her to be his wife, she did learn to respect him. "Now, Ruby, give a fellow a buss,—as though you meant it," he said, when the first fitting occasion presented itself.

"Oh, John,—what nonsense!"

"It ain't nonsense to me, I can tell you. I'd sooner have a kiss from you than all the wine as ever was swallowed." Then she did kiss him, "as though she meant it;" and when she returned with him to Bungay the next day, she had made up her mind that she would endeavour to do her duty by him as his wife.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE LONGESTAFFE MARRIAGES.

In another part of Suffolk, not very far from Bungay, there was a lady whose friends had not managed her affairs as well as Ruby's friends had done for Ruby. Miss Georgiana Longestaffe in the early days of August was in a very miserable plight. Her sister's marriage with Mr. George Whitstable was fixed for the first of September, a day which in Suffolk is of all days the most sacred; and the combined energies of the houses of Caversham and Toodlum were being devoted to that happy event. Poor Georgey's position was in every respect wretched, but its misery was infinitely increased by the triumph of those hymeneals. It was but the other day that she had looked down from a very great height on her elder sister, and had utterly despised the squire of Toodlum. And at that time, still so recent, this contempt from her had been accepted as being almost reasonable. Sophia had hardly ventured to rebel against it, and Mr. Whitstable himself had been always afraid to encounter the shafts of irony with which his fashionable future sister-in-law attacked him. But all that was now changed. Sophia in her pride of place had become a tyrant, and George Whitstable, petted in the house with those sweetmeats which
are always showered on embryo bridegrooms, absolutely gave himself airs. At this time Mr. Longstaffe was never at home. Having assured himself that there was no longer any danger of the Brehgert alliance he had remained in London, thinking his presence to be necessary for the winding up of Melmotte's affairs, and leaving poor Lady Pomona to bear her daughter's ill-humour. The family at Caversham consisted therefore of the three ladies, and was enlivened by daily visits from Toodlum. It will be owned that in this state of things there was very little consolation for Georgiana.

It was not long before she quarrelled altogether with her sister,—to the point of absolutely refusing to act as bridesmaid. The reader may remember that there had been a watch and chain, and that two of the ladies of the family had expressed an opinion that these trinkets should be returned to Mr. Brehgert who had bestowed them. But Georgiana had not sent them back when a week had elapsed since the receipt of Mr. Brehgert's last letter. The matter had perhaps escaped Lady Pomona's memory, but Sophia was happily alive to the honour of her family. "Georgey," she said one morning in their mother's presence, "don't you think Mr. Brehgert's watch ought to go back to him without any more delay?"

"What have you got to do with anybody's watch? The watch wasn't given to you?"

"I think it ought to go back. When papa finds that it has been kept I'm sure he'll be very angry."

"It's no business of yours whether he's angry or not."

"If it isn't sent George will tell Dolly. You know what would happen then."

This was unbearable! That George Whitstable should interfere in her affairs,—that he should talk about her watch and chain. "I never will speak to George Whitstable again the longest day that ever I live," she said, getting up from her chair.

"My dear, don't say anything so horrible as that," exclaimed the unhappy mother.

"I do say it. What has George Whitstable to do with me? A miserably stupid fellow! Because you've landed him, you think he's to ride over the whole family."

"I think Mr. Brehgert ought to have his watch and chain back," said Sophia.

"Certainly he ought," said Lady Pomona. "Georgiana, it must be sent back. It really must,—or I shall tell your papa."

Subsequently, on the same day, Georgiana brought the watch and chain to her mother, protesting that she had never thought of keeping them, and explaining that she had intended to hand them over to her papa as soon as he should have returned to Caversham. Lady Pomona was now empowered to return them, and they were absolutely confided to the hands of the odious George Whitstable, who about this time made a journey to London in reference to certain garments which he required. But Georgiana, though she was so far beaten, kept up her quarrel with her sister. She would not be bridesmaid. She would never speak to George Whitstable. And she would shut herself up on the day of the marriage.
She did think herself to be very hardly used. What was there left in the world that she could do in furtherance of her future cause? And what did her father and mother expect would become of her? Marriage had ever been so clearly placed before her eyes as a condition of things to be achieved by her own efforts, that she could not endure the idea of remaining tranquil in her father's house and waiting till some fitting suitor might find her out. She had struggled and struggled,—struggling still in vain,—till every effort of her mind, every thought of her daily life, was pervaded by a conviction that as she grew older from year to year, the struggle should be more intense. The swimmer when first he finds himself in the water, conscious of his skill and confident in his strength, can make his way through the water with the full command of all his powers. But when he begins to feel that the shore is receding from him, that his strength is going, that the footing for which he pants is still far beneath his feet,—that there is peril where before he had contemplated no danger,—then he begins to beat the water with strokes rapid but impotent, and to waste in anxious gaspings the breath on which his very life must depend. So it was with poor Georgey Longestaffe. Something must be done at once, or it would be of no avail. Twelve years had been passed by her since first she plunged into the stream,—the twelve years of her youth,—and she was as far as ever from the bank; nay, farther, if she believed her eyes. She must too strike out with rapid efforts, unless, indeed, she would abandon herself and let the waters close over her head. But immersed as she was here at Caversham, how could she strike at all? Even now the waters were closing upon her. The sound of them was in her ears. The ripple of the wave was already round her lips; robbing her of breath. Ah!—might not there be some last great convulsive effort which might dash her on shore, even if it were upon a rock!

That ultimate failure in her matrimonial projects would be the same as drowning she never for a moment doubted. It had never occurred to her to consider with equanimity the prospect of living as an old maid. It was beyond the scope of her mind to contemplate the chances of a life in which marriage might be well if it came, but in which unmarried tranquillity might also be well should that be her lot. Nor could she understand that others should contemplate it for her. No doubt the battle had been carried on for many years so much under the auspices of her father and mother as to justify her in thinking that their theory of life was the same as her own. Lady Pomona had been very open in her teaching, and Mr. Longestaffe had always given a silent adherence to the idea that the house in London was to be kept open in order that husbands might be caught. And now when they deserted her in her real difficulty,—when they first told her to live at Caversham all the summer, and then sent her up to the Melmottes, and after that forbade her marriage with Mr. Brehgert,—it seemed to her that they were unnatural parents who gave her a stone when she wanted bread, a serpent when she asked for a fish. She had no friend left. There was no one living who seemed to care whether she had a husband or not. She took to walking in solitude about the park, and thought of many things with a grim earnestness which had not hitherto belonged to her character.
"Mamma," she said one morning when all the care of the household was being devoted to the future comforts,—chiefly in regard to linen,—of Mrs. George Whitstable, "I wonder whether papa has any intention at all about me."

"In what sort of way, my dear?"

"In any way. Does he mean me to live here for ever and ever?"

"I don't think he intends to have a house in town again."

"And what am I to do?"

"I suppose we shall stay here at Caversham."

"And I'm to be buried just like a nun in a convent,—only that the nun does it by her own consent and I don't! Mamma, I won't stand it. I won't indeed."

"I think, my dear, that that is nonsense. You see company here, just as other people do in the country;—and as for not standing it, I don't know what you mean. As long as you are one of your papa's family of course you must live where he lives."

"Oh, mamma, to hear you talk like that!—It is horrible—horrible! As if you didn't know! As if you couldn't understand! Sometimes I almost doubt whether papa does know, and then I think that if he did he would not be so cruel. But you understand it all as well as I do myself. What is to become of me? Is it not enough to drive me mad to be going about here by myself, without any prospect of anything? Should you have liked at my age to have felt that you had no chance of having a house of your own to live in? Why didn't you, among you, let me marry Mr. Brehgert?" As she said this she was almost eloquent with passion.

"You know, my dear," said Lady Pomona, "that your papa wouldn't hear of it."

"I know that if you would have helped me I would have done it in spite of papa. What right has he to domineer over me in that way? Why shouldn't I have married the man if I chose? I am old enough to know surely. You talk now of shutting up girls in convents as being a thing quite impossible. This is much worse. Papa won't do anything to help me. Why shouldn't he let me do something for myself?"

"You can't regret Mr. Brehgert!"

"Why can't I regret him? I do regret him. I'd have him to-morrow if he came. Bad as it might be, it couldn't be so bad as Caversham."

"You couldn't have loved him, Georgiana."

"Loved him! Who thinks about love nowadays? I don't know any one who loves any one else. You won't tell me that Sophy is going to marry that idiot because she loves him! Did Julia Triplet love that man with the large fortune? When you wanted Dolly to marry Marie Melmotte you never thought of his loving her. I had got the better of all that kind of thing before I was twenty."

"I think a young woman should love her husband."

"It makes me sick, mamma, to hear you talk in that way. It does indeed. When one has been going on for a dozen years trying to do something,—and I have never had any secrets from you,—then that you should turn round upon me and talk about love! Mamma, if you
would help me. I think I could still manage with Mr. Brehgert." Lady Pomona shuddered. "You have not got to marry him."

"It is too horrid."

"Who would have to put up with it? Not you, or papa, or Dolly. I should have a house of my own at least, and I should know what I had to expect for the rest of my life. If I stay here I shall go mad,—or die."

"It is impossible."

"If you will stand to me, mamma, I am sure it may be done. I would write to him, and say that you would see him."

"Georgiana, I will never see him."

"Why not?"

"He is a Jew!"

"What abominable prejudice;—what wicked prejudice! As if you didn't know that all that is changed now! What possible difference can it make about a man's religion? Of course I know that he is vulgar, and old, and has a lot of children. But if I can put up with that, I don't think that you and papa have a right to interfere. As to his religion it cannot signify."

"Georgiana, you make me very unhappy. I am wretched to see you so discontented. If I could do anything for you, I would. But I will not meddle about Mr. Brehgert. I shouldn't dare to do so. I don't think you know how angry your papa can be."

"I'm not going to let papa be a bugbear to frighten me. What can he do? I don't suppose he'll beat me. And I'd rather he would than shut me up here. As for you, mamma, I don't think you care for me a bit. Because Sophy is going to be married to that oaf, you are become so proud of her that you haven't half a thought for anybody else."

"That's very unjust, Georgiana."

"I know what's unjust,—and I know who's ill-treated. I tell you fairly, mamma, that I shall write to Mr. Brehgert and tell him that I am quite ready to marry him. I don't know why he should be afraid of papa. I don't mean to be afraid of him any more, and you may tell him just what I say."

All this made Lady Pomona very miserable. She did not communicate her daughter's threat to Mr. Longestaffe, but she did discuss it with Sophia. Sophia was of opinion that Georgiana did not mean it, and gave two or three reasons for thinking so. In the first place had she intended it she would have written her letter without saying a word about it to Lady Pomona. And she certainly would not have declared her purpose of writing such letter after Lady Pomona had refused her assistance. And moreover,—Lady Pomona had received no former hint of the information which was now conveyed to her,—Georgiana was in the habit of meeting the curate of the next parish almost every day in the park.

"Mr. Batherbolt!" exclaimed Lady Pomona.

"She is walking with Mr. Batherbolt almost every day."

"But he is so very strict."

"It is true, mamma."

"And he's five years younger than she! And he's got nothing but
his curacy! And he's a celibate! I heard the bishop laughing at him because he called himself a celibate."

"It doesn't signify, mamma. I know she is with him constantly. Wilson has seen them,—and I know it. Perhaps papa could get him a living. Dolly has a living of his own that came to him with his property."

"Dolly would be sure to sell the presentation," said Lady Pomona.

"Perhaps the bishop would do something," said the anxious sister, "when he found that the man wasn't a celibate. Anything, mamma, would be better than the Jew." To this latter proposition Lady Pomona gave a cordial assent. "Of course it is a come-down to marry a curate,—but a clergyman is always considered to be decent."

The preparations for the Whitstable marriage went on without any apparent attention to the intimacy which was growing up between Mr. Batherbolt and Georgiana. There was no room to apprehend anything wrong on that side. Mr. Batherbolt was so excellent a young man, and so exclusively given to religion, that, even should Sophy's suspicion be correct, he might be trusted to walk about the park with Georgiana. Should he at any time come forward and ask to be allowed to make the lady his wife, there would be no disgrace in the matter. He was a clergyman and a gentleman,—and the poverty would be Georgiana's own affair.

Mr. Longestaffe returned home only on the eve of his eldest daughter's marriage, and with him came Dolly. Great trouble had been taken to teach him that duty absolutely required his presence at his sister's marriage, and he had at last consented to be there. It is not generally considered a hardship by a young man that he should have to go into a good partridge country on the 1st of September, and Dolly was an acknowledged sportsman. Nevertheless, he considered that he had made a great sacrifice to his family, and he was received by Lady Pomona as though he were a bright example to other sons. He found the house not in a very comfortable position, for Georgiana still persisted in her refusal either to be a bridesmaid or to speak to Mr. Whitstable; but still his presence, which was very rare at Caversham, gave some assistance: and, as at this moment his money affairs had been comfortably arranged, he was not called upon to squabble with his father. It was a great thing that one of the girls should be married, and Dolly had brought down an enormous china dog, about five feet high, as a wedding present, which added materially to the happiness of the meeting. Lady Pomona had determined that she would tell her husband of those walks in the park, and of other signs of growing intimacy which had reached her ears;—but this she would postpone until after the Whitstable marriage.

But at nine o'clock on the morning set apart for that marriage, they were all astounded by the news that Georgiana had run away with Mr. Batherbolt. She had been up before six. He had met her at the park gate, and had driven her over to catch the early train at Stowmarket. Then it appeared, too, that by degrees various articles of
her property had been conveyed to Mr. Batherbolt’s lodgings in the adjacent village, so that Lady Pomona’s fear that Georgiana would not have a thing to wear, was needless. When the fact was first known it was almost felt, in the consternation of the moment, that the Whitstable marriage must be postponed. But Sophia had a word to say to her mother on that head, and she said it. The marriage was not postponed. At first Dolly talked of going after his younger sister, and the father did dispatch various telegrams. But the fugitives could not be brought back, and with some little delay,—which made the marriage perhaps uncanonical but not illegal,—Mr. George Whitstable was made a happy man.

It need only be added that in about a month’s time Georgiana returned to Caversham as Mrs. Batherbolt, and that she resided there with her husband in much connubial bliss for the next six months. At the end of that time they removed to a small living, for the purchase of which Mr. Longestaffe had managed to raise the necessary money.
CHAPTER XCVI.

WHERE "THE WILD ASSES QUENCH THEIR THIRST."

WE must now go back a little in our story,—about three weeks, —in order that the reader may be told how affairs were progressing at the Beargarden. That establishment had received a terrible blow in the defection of Herr Vossner. It was not only that he had robbed the club, and robbed every member of the club who had ventured to have personal dealings with him. Although a bad feeling in regard to him was no doubt engendered in the minds of those who had suffered deeply, it was not that alone which cast an almost funereal gloom over the club. The sorrow was in this,—that with Herr Vossner all their comforts had gone. Of course Herr Vossner had been a thief. That no doubt had been known to them from the beginning. A man does not consent to be called out of bed at all hours in the morning to arrange the gambling accounts of young gentlemen without being a thief. No one concerned with Herr Vossner had supposed him to be an honest man. But then as a thief he had been so comfortable that his absence was regretted with a tenderness almost amounting to love even by those who had suffered most severely from his rapacity. Dolly Longestaffe had been robbed more outrageously than any other member of the club, and yet Dolly Longestaffe had said since the departure of the purveyor that London was not worth living in now that Herr Vossner was gone. In a week the Beargarden collapsed,—as Germany would collapse for a period if Herr Vossner's great com-patriot were suddenly to remove himself from the scene; but as Germany would strive to live even without Bismarck, so did the club make its new efforts. But here the parallel must cease. Germany no doubt would at last succeed, but the Beargarden had received a blow from which it seemed that there was no recovery. At first it was proposed that three men should be appointed as trustees,—trustees for paying Vossner's debts, trustees for borrowing more money, trustees for the satisfaction of the landlord who was beginning to be anxious as to his future rent. At a certain very triumphant general meeting of the club it was determined that such a plan should be arranged, and the members assembled were unanimous. It was at first thought that there might be a little jealousy as to the trusteeship. The club was so popular and the authority conveyed by the position would be so great, that A, B, and C might feel aggrieved at seeing so much power conferred on D, E, and F. When at the meeting above mentioned one or two names were suggested, the final choice was postponed, as a matter of detail to be arranged privately, rather from this consideration than with any idea that there might be a difficulty in finding adequate persons. But even the leading members of the Beargarden hesitated when the proposition was submitted to them with all its honours and all its
responsibilities. Lord Nidderdale declared from the beginning that he would have nothing to do with it,—pleading his poverty openly. Beauchamp Beauclerk was of opinion that he himself did not frequent the club often enough. Mr. Lupton professed his inability as a man of business. Lord Grasslough pleaded his father. The club from the first had been sure of Dolly Longstaffe's services;—for were not Dolly's pecuniary affairs now in process of satisfactory arrangement, and was it not known by all men that his courage never failed him in regard to money? But even he declined. "I have spoken to Squercum," he said to the Committee, "and Squercum won't hear of it. Squercum has made inquiries and he thinks the club very shaky." When one of the Committee made a remark as to Mr. Squercum which was not complimentary,—insinuated indeed that Squercum without injustice might be consigned to the infernal deities,—Dolly took the matter up warmly. "That's all very well for you, Grasslough; but if you knew the comfort of having a fellow who could keep you straight without preaching sermons at you you wouldn't despise Squercum. I've tried to go alone and I find that does not answer. Squercum's my coach, and I mean to stick pretty close to him." Then it came to pass that the triumphant project as to the trustees fell to the ground, although Squercum himself advised that the difficulty might be lessened if three gentlemen could be selected who lived well before the world and yet had nothing to lose. Whereupon Dolly suggested Miles Grendall. But the Committee shook its heads, not thinking it possible that the club could be re-established on a basis of three Miles Grendalls.

Then dreadful rumours were heard. The Beargarden must surely be abandoned. "It is such a pity," said Nidderdale, "because there never has been anything like it."

"Smoke all over the house!" said Dolly.

"No horrid nonsense about closing," said Grasslough, "and no infernal old fogies wearing out the carpets and paying for nothing."

"Not a vestige of propriety, or any beastly rules to be kept! That's what I liked," said Nidderdale.

"It's an old story," said Mr. Lupton, "that if you put a man into Paradise he'll make it too hot to hold him. That's what you've done here."

"What we ought to do," said Dolly, who was pervaded by a sense of his own good fortune in regard to Squercum, "is to get some fellow like Vossner, and make him tell us how much he wants to steal above his regular pay. Then we could subscribe that among us. I really think that might be done. Squercum would find a fellow, no doubt." But Mr. Lupton was of opinion that the new Vossner might perhaps not know, when thus consulted, the extent of his own cupidity.

One day, before the Whitstable marriage, when it was understood that the club would actually be closed on the 12th August unless some new heaven-inspired idea might be forthcoming for its salvation, Nidderdale, Grasslough, and Dolly were hanging about the hall and the steps, and drinking sherry and bitters preparatory to dinner, when Sir Felix Carbury came round the neighbouring corner and, in
a creeping, hesitating fashion, entered the hall door. He had nearly recovered from his wounds, though he still wore a bit of court plaster on his upper lip, and had not yet learned to look or to speak as though he had not had two of his front teeth knocked out. He had heard little or nothing of what had been done at the Beargarden since Vossner’s defection. It was now a month since he had been seen at the club. His thrashing had been the wonder of perhaps half nine days, but latterly his existence had been almost forgotten. Now, with difficulty, he had summoned courage to go down to his old haunt, so completely had he been eowed by the latter circumstances of his life; but he had determined that he would pluck up his courage, and talk to his old associates as though no evil thing had befallen him. He had still money enough to pay for his dinner and to begin a small rubber of whist. If fortune should go against him he might glide into I. O. U’s;—as others had done before, so much to his cost. “By George, here’s Carbury!” said Dolly. Lord Grasslough whistled, turned his back, and walked up-stairs; but Nidderdale and Dolly consented to have their hands shaken by the stranger. “Thought you were out of town,” said Nidderdale. “Haven’t seen you for the last ever so long.” “I have been out of town,” said Felix,—lying; “down in Suffolk. But I’m back now. How are things going on here?” “They’re not going at all;—they’re gone,” said Dolly. “Everything is smashed,” said Nidderdale. “We shall all have to pay, I don’t know how much.” “Wasn’t Vossner ever caught?” asked the baronet. “Caught!” ejaculated Dolly. “No;—but he has caught us. I don’t know that there has ever been much idea of catching Vossner. We close altogether next Monday, and the furniture is to be gone to law for. Flatfleece says it belongs to him under what he calls a deed of sale. Indeed, everything that everybody has seems to belong to Flatfleece. He’s always in and out of the club, and has got the key of the cellar.” “That don’t matter,” said Nidderdale, “as Vossner took care that there shouldn’t be any wine.” “He’s got most of the forks and spoons, and only lets us use what we have as a favour.” “I suppose one can get a dinner here?” “Yes; to-day you can, and perhaps to-morrow.” “Isn’t there any playing?” asked Felix with dismay. “I haven’t seen a card this fortnight,” said Dolly. “There hasn’t been anybody to play. Everything has gone to the dogs. There has been the affair of Melmotte, you know;—though, I suppose, you do know all about that.” “Of course I know he poisoned himself.” “Of course that had effect,” said Dolly, continuing his history. “Though why fellows shouldn’t play cards because another fellow like that takes poison, I can’t understand. Last year the only day I managed to get down in February, the hounds didn’t come because some old cove had died. What harm could our hunting have done him? I call that rot.”
"Melmotte's death was rather awful," said Nidderdale.

"Not half so awful as having nothing to amuse one. And now they say the girl is going to be married to Fisker. I don't know how you and Nidderdale like that. I never went in for her myself. Squercum never seemed to see it."

"Poor dear!" said Nidderdale. "She's welcome for me, and I dare say she couldn't do better with herself. I was very fond of her;—I'll be shot if I wasn't."

"And Carbury too, I suppose," said Dolly.

"No; I wasn't. If I'd really been fond of her I suppose it would have come off. I should have had her safe enough to America, if I'd cared about it." This was Sir Felix's view of the matter.

"Come into the smoking-room, Dolly," said Nidderdale. "I can stand most things, and I try to stand everything; but, by George, that fellow is such a cad that I cannot stand him. You and I are bad enough,—but I don't think we're so heartless as Carbury."

"I don't think I'm heartless at all," said Dolly. "I'm good-natured to everybody that is good-natured to me,—and to a great many people who ain't. I'm going all the way down to Caversham next week to see my sister married, though I hate the place and hate marriages, and if I was to be hung for it I couldn't say a word to the fellow who is going to be my brother-in-law. But I do agree about Carbury. It's very hard to be good-natured to him."

But, in the teeth of these adverse opinions Sir Felix managed to get his dinner-table close to theirs and to tell them at dinner something of his future prospects. He was going to travel and see the world. He had, according to his own account, completely run through London life and found that it was all barren.

"In life I've rung all changes through,
Run every pleasure down,
'Midst each excess of folly too,
And lived with half the town."

Sir Felix did not exactly quote the old song, probably having never heard the words. But that was the burden of his present story. It was his determination to seek new scenes, and in search of them to travel over the greater part of the known world.

"How jolly for you!" said Dolly.

"It will be a change, you know."

"No end of a change. Is any one going with you?"

"Well;—yes. I've got a travelling companion;—a very pleasant fellow, who knows a lot, and will be able to coach me up in things. There's a deal to be learned by going abroad, you know."

"A sort of a tutor," said Nidderdale.

"A parson, I suppose," said Dolly.

"Well;—he is a clergyman. Who told you?"

"It's only my inventive clergyman. Well;—yes; I should say that would be nice,—travelling about Europe with a clergyman. I shouldn't get enough advantage out of it to make it pay, but I fancy it will just suit you."

"It's an expensive sort of thing;—isn't it?" asked Nidderdale.
"Well;—it does cost something. But I've got so sick of this kind of life;—and then that railway Board coming to an end, and the club smashing up, and——"

"Marie Melmotte marrying Fisker," suggested Dolly.

"That too, if you will. But I want a change, and a change I mean to have. I've seen this side of things, and now I'll have a look at the other."

"Didn't you have a row in the street with some one the other day?" This question was asked very abruptly by Lord Grasslough, who, though he was sitting near them, had not yet joined in the conversation, and who had not before addressed a word to Sir Felix.

"We heard something about it, but we never got the right story." Nidderdale glanced across the table at Dolly, and Dolly whistled. Grasslough looked at the man he addressed as one does look when one expects an answer. Mr. Lupton, with whom Grasslough was dining, also sat expectant. Dolly and Nidderdale were both silent.

It was the fear of this that had kept Sir Felix away from the club. Grasslough, as he had told himself, was just the fellow to ask such a question,—ill-natured, insolent, and obtrusive. But the question demanded an answer of some kind. "Yes," said he; "a fellow attacked me in the street, coming behind me when I had a girl with me. He didn't get much of it though."

"Oh;—didn't he?" said Grasslough. "I think, upon the whole, you know, you're right about going abroad."

"What business is it of yours?" asked the baronet.

"Well;—as the club is being broken up, I don't know that it is very much the business of any of us."

"I was speaking to my friends, Lord Nidderdale and Mr. Longestaffe, and not to you."

"I quite appreciate the advantage of the distinction," said Lord Grasslough, "and am sorry for Lord Nidderdale and Mr. Longesta-

"What do you mean by that?" said Sir Felix, rising from his chair. His present opponent was not horrible to him as had been John Crumb, as men in clubs do not now often knock each others' heads or draw swords one upon another.

"Don't let's have a quarrel here," said Mr. Lupton. "I shall leave the room if you do."

"If we must break up, let us break up in peace and quietness," said Nidderdale.

"Of course, if there is to be a fight, I'm good to go out with anybody," said Dolly. "When there's any beastly thing to be done, I've always got to do it. But don't you think that kind of thing is a little slow?"

"Who began it?" said Sir Felix, sitting down again. Whereupon Lord Grasslough, who had finished his dinner, walked out of the room. "That fellow is always wanting to quarrel."

"There's one comfort, you know," said Dolly. "It wants two men to make a quarrel."

"Yes; it does," said Sir Felix, taking this as a friendly observation; "and I'm not going to be fool enough to be one of them."
"Oh, yes, I meant it fast enough," said Grasslough afterwards up in the card-room. The other men who had been together had quickly followed him, leaving Sir Felix alone, and they had collected themselves there not with the hope of play, but thinking that they would be less interrupted than in the smoking-room. "I don't suppose we shall ever any of us be here again, and as he did come in I thought I would tell him my mind."

"What's the use of taking such a lot of trouble?" said Dolly. "Of course he's a bad fellow. Most fellows are bad fellows in one way or another."

"But he's bad all round," said the bitter enemy. "And so this is to be the end of the Beargarden," said Lord Nidderdale with a peculiar melancholy. "Dear old place! I always felt it was too good to last. I fancy it doesn't do to make things too easy;—one has to pay so uncommon dear for them! And then, you know, when you've got things easy, then they get rowdy;—and, by George, before you know where you are, you find yourself among a lot of blackguards. If one wants to keep one's self straight, one has to work hard at it, one way or the other. I suppose it all comes from the fall of Adam."

"If Solomon, Solon, and the Archbishop of Canterbury were rolled into one, they couldn't have spoken with more wisdom," said Mr. Lupton.

"Live and learn," continued the young lord. "I don't think anybody has liked the Beargarden so much as I have, but I shall never try this kind of thing again. I shall begin reading blue books to-morrow, and shall dine at the Carlton. Next session I shan't miss a day in the House, and I'll bet anybody a fiver that I make a speech before Easter. I shall take to claret at 20s. a dozen, and shall go about London on the top of an omnibus."

"How about getting married?" asked Dolly. "Oh;—that must be as it comes. That's the governor's affair. None of you fellows will believe me, but, upon my word, I liked that girl; and I'd 've stuck to her at last,—only that there are some things a fellow can't do. He was such a thundering scoundrel!"

After a while Sir Felix followed them up-stairs, and entered the room as though nothing unpleasant had happened below. "We can make up a rubber;—can't we?" said he.

"I should say not," said Nidderdale.

"I shall not play," said Mr. Lupton.

"There isn't a pack of cards in the house," said Dolly. Lord Grasslough didn't condescend to say a word. Sir Felix sat down with his cigar in his mouth, and the others continued to smoke in silence.

"I wonder what has become of Miles Gren dall," asked Sir Felix. But no one made any answer, and they smoked on in silence. "He hasn't paid me a shilling yet of the money he owes me." Still there was not a word. "And I don't suppose he ever will." There was another pause. "He is the biggest scoundrel I ever met," said Sir Felix.

"I know one as big," said Lord Grasslough,—"or, at any rate, as little."
There was another pause of a minute, and then Sir Felix left the room muttering something as to the stupidity of having no cards;—and so brought to an end his connection with his associates of the Beargarden. From that time forth he was never more seen by them,—or, if seen, was never known.

The other men remained there till well on into the night, although there was not the excitement of any special amusement to attract them. It was felt by them all that this was the end of the Beargarden, and, with a melancholy seriousness befitting the occasion, they whispered sad things in low voices, consoling themselves simply with tobacco. "I never felt so much like crying in my life," said Dolly, as he asked for a glass of brandy-and-water at about midnight.

"Good-night, old fellows; good-bye. I'm going down to Caversham, and I shouldn't wonder if I didn't drown myself."

How Mr. Flatfleece went to law, and tried to sell the furniture, and threatened everybody, and at last singled out poor Dolly Longstaffe as his special victim; and how Dolly Longstaffe, by the aid of Mr. Squercum, utterly confounded Mr. Flatfleece, and brought that ingenious but unfortunate man, with his wife and small family, to absolute ruin, the reader will hardly expect to have told to him in detail in this chronicle.

CHAPTER XCVII.

MRS. HURTLE'S FATE.

MRS. HURTLE had consented at the joint request of Mrs. Pipkin and John Crumb to postpone her journey to New York and to go down to Bungay and grace the marriage of Ruby Ruggles, not so much from any love for the persons concerned, not so much even from any desire to witness a phase of English life, as from an irresistible tenderness towards Paul Montague. She not only longed to see him once again, but she could with difficulty bring herself to leave the land in which he was living. There was no hope for her. She was sure of that. She had consented to relinquish him. She had condoned his treachery to her,—and for his sake had even been kind to the rival who had taken her place. But still she lingered near him. And then, though, in all her very restricted intercourse with such English people as she met, she never ceased to ridicule things English, yet she dreaded a return to her own country. In her heart of hearts she liked the somewhat stupid tranquillity of the life she saw, comparing it with the rough tempests of her past days. Mrs. Pipkin, she thought, was less intellectual than any American woman she had ever known; and she was quite sure that no human being so heavy, so slow, and so incapable of two concurrent ideas as John Crumb had ever been produced in the United States;—but, nevertheless, she liked Mrs. Pipkin, and almost loved John
Crumb. How different would her life have been could she have met a man who would have been as true to her as John Crumb was to his Ruby!

She loved Paul Montague with all her heart, and she despised herself for loving him. How weak he was;—how inefficient; how unable to seize glorious opportunities; how swathed and swaddled by scruples and prejudices;—how unlike her own countrymen in quickness of apprehension and readiness of action! But yet she loved him for his very faults, telling herself that there was something sweeter in his English manners than in all the smart intelligence of her own land. The man had been false to her,—false as hell; had sworn to her and had broken his oath; had ruined her whole life; had made everything blank before her by his treachery! But then she also had not been quite true with him. She had not at first meant to deceive;—nor had he. They had played a game against each other; and he, with all the inferiority of his intellect to weigh him down, had won,—because he was a man. She had much time for thinking, and she thought much about these things. He could change his love as often as he pleased, and be as good a lover at the end as ever;—whereas she was ruined by his defection. He could look about for a fresh flower and boldly seek his honey; whereas she could only sit and mourn for the sweets of which she had been rifled. She was not quite sure that such mourning would not be more bitter to her in California than in Mrs. Pipkin’s solitary lodgings at Islington.

“So he was Mr. Montague’s partner,—was he now?” asked Mrs. Pipkin a day or two after their return from the Crumb marriage. For Mr. Fisker had called on Mrs. Hurtle, and Mrs. Hurtle had told Mrs. Pipkin so much. “To my thinking now he’s a nicer man than Mr. Montague,” Mrs. Pipkin perhaps thought that as her lodger had lost one partner she might be anxious to secure the other;—perhaps felt, too, that it might be well to praise an American at the expense of an Englishman.

“There’s no accounting for tastes, Mrs. Pipkin.”

“And that’s true, too, Mrs. Hurtle.”

“Mr. Montague is a gentleman.”

“I always did say that of him, Mrs. Hurtle.”

“And Mr. Fisker is,—an American citizen.” Mrs. Hurtle when she said this was very far gone in tenderness.

“Indeed now!” said Mrs. Pipkin, who did not in the least understand the meaning of her friend’s last remark.

“Mr. Fisker came to me with tidings from San Francisco which I had not heard before, and has offered to take me back with him.” Mrs. Pipkin’s apron was immediately at her eyes. “I must go some day, you know.”

“I suppose you must. I couldn’t hope as you’d stay here always. I wish I could. I never shall forget the comfort it’s been. There hasn’t been a week without everything settled; and most ladylike,—most ladylike! You seem to me, Mrs. Hurtle, just as though you had the bank in your pocket.” All this the poor woman said, moved by her sorrow to speak the absolute truth.
"Mr. Fisker isn’t in any way a special friend of mine. But I hear that he will be taking other ladies with him, and I fancy I might as well join the party. It will be less dull for me, and I shall prefer company just at present for many reasons. We shall start on the first of September." As this was said about the middle of August there was still some remnant of comfort for poor Mrs. Pipkin. A fortnight gained was something; and as Mr. Fisker had come to England on business, and as business is always uncertain, there might possibly be further delay. Then Mrs. Hurtle made a further communication to Mrs. Pipkin, which, though not spoken till the latter lady had her hand on the door, was, perhaps, the one thing which Mrs. Hurtle had desired to say. "By-the-bye, Mrs. Pipkin, I expect Mr. Montague to call to-morrow at eleven. Just show him up when he comes." She had feared that unless some such instructions were given, there might be a little scene at the door when the gentleman came.

"Mr. Montague;—oh! Of course, Mrs. Hurtle,—of course. I’ll see to it myself." Then Mrs. Pipkin went away abashed,—feeling that she had made a great mistake in preferring any other man to Mr. Montague, if, after all, recent difficulties were to be adjusted.

On the following morning Mrs. Hurtle dressed herself with almost more than her usual simplicity, but certainly with not less than her usual care, and immediately after breakfast seated herself at her desk, nursing an idea that she would work as steadily for the next hour as though she expected no special visitor. Of course she did not write a word of the task which she had prescribed to herself. Of course she was disturbed in her mind, though she had dictated to herself absolute quiescence.

She almost knew that she had been wrong even to desire to see him. She had forgiven him, and what more was there to be said? She had seen the girl, and had in some fashion approved of her. Her curiosity had been satisfied, and her love of revenge had been sacrificed. She had no plan arranged as to what she would now say to him, nor did she at this moment attempt to make a plan. She could tell him that she was about to return to San Francisco with Fisker, but she did not know that she had anything else to say. Then came the knock at the door. Her heart leaped within her, and she made a last great effort to be tranquil. She heard the steps on the stairs, and then the door was opened and Mr. Montague was announced by Mrs. Pipkin herself. Mrs. Pipkin, however, quite conquered by a feeling of gratitude to her lodger, did not once look in through the door, nor did she pause a moment to listen at the keyhole. "I thought you would come and see me once again before I went," said Mrs. Hurtle, not rising from her sofa, but putting out her hand to greet him. "Sit there opposite, so that we can look at one another. I hope it has not been a trouble to you."

"Of course I came when you left word for me to do so."

"I certainly should not have expected it from any wish of your own."

"I should not have dared to come, had you not bade me. You know that."
"I know nothing of the kind;—but as you are here we will not quarrel as to your motives. Has Miss Carbury pardoned you as yet? Has she forgiven your sins?"

"We are friends,—if you mean that."

"Of course you are friends. She only wanted to have somebody to tell her that somebody had maligncd you. It mattered not much who it was. She was ready to believe any one who would say a good word for you. Perhaps I wasn’t just the person to do it, but I believe even I was sufficient to serve the turn."

"Did you say a good word for me?"

"Well; no;" replied Mrs. Hurtle. "I will not boast that I did. I do not want to tell you fibs at our last meeting. I said nothing good of you. What could I say of good? But I told her what was quite as serviceable to you as though I had sung your virtues by the hour without ceasing. I explained to her how very badly you had behaved to me. I let her know that from the moment you had seen her, you had thrown me to the winds."

"It was not so, my friend."

"What did that matter? One does not scruple a lie for a friend, you know! I could not go into all the little details of your perfidies. I could not make her understand during one short and rather agonizing interview how you had allowed yourself to be talked out of your love for me by English propriety even before you had seen her beautiful eyes. There was no reason why I should tell her all my disgrace,—anxious as I was to be of service. Besides, as I put it, she was sure to be better pleased. But I did tell her how unwillingly you had spared me an hour of your company;—what a trouble I had been to you;—how you would have shirked me if you could!"

"Winifrid, that is untrue."

"That wretched journey to Lowestoft was the great crime. Mr. Roger Carbury, who I own is poison to me——"

"You do not know him."

"Knowing him or not I choose to have my own opinion, sir. I say that he is poison to me, and I say that he had so stuffed her mind with the flagrant sin of that journey, with the peculiar wickedness of our having lived for two nights under the same roof, with the awful fact that we had travelled together in the same carriage, till that had become the one stumbling block on your path to happiness."

"He never said a word to her of our being there."

"Who did then? But what matters? She knew it;—and, as the only means of whitewashing you in her eyes, I did tell her how cruel and how heartless you had been to me. I did explain how the return of friendship which you had begun to show me, had been frozen, harder than Wenham ice, by the appearance of Mr. Carbury on the sands. Perhaps I went a little farther and hinted that the meeting had been arranged as affording you the easiest means of escape from me."

"You do not believe that."

"You see I had your welfare to look after; and the baser your conduct had been to me, the truer you were in her eyes. Do I not deserve some thanks for what I did? Surely you would not have
had me tell her that your conduct to me had been that of a loyal, loving gentleman. I confessed to her my utter despair;—I abased myself in the dust, as a woman is abased who has been treacherously ill-used, and has failed to avenge herself. I knew that when she was sure that I was prostrate and hopeless she would be triumphant and contented. I told her on your behalf how I had been ground to pieces under your chariot wheels. And now you have not a word of thanks to give me!"

"Every word you say is a dagger."

"You know where to go for salve for such skin-deep scratches as I make. Where am I to find a surgeon who can put together my crushed bones? Daggers, indeed! Do you not suppose that in thinking of you I have often thought of daggers? Why have I not thrust one into your heart, so that I might rescue you from the arms of this puny, spiritless English girl?" All this time she was still seated, looking at him, leaning forward towards him with her hands upon her brow. "But, Paul, I spit out my words to you, like any common woman, not because they will hurt you, but because I know I may take that comfort, such as it is, without hurting you. You are uneasy for a moment while you are here, and I have a cruel pleasure in thinking that you cannot answer me. But you will go from me to her, and then will you not be happy? When you are sitting with your arm round her waist, and when she is playing with your smiles, will the memory of my words interfere with your joy then? Ask yourself whether the prick will last longer than the moment. But where am I to go for happiness and joy? Can you understand what it is to have to live only on retrospects?"

"I wish I could say a word to comfort you."

"You cannot say a word to comfort me, unless you will unsay all that you have said since I have been in England. I never expect comfort again. But, Paul, I will not be cruel to the end. I will tell you all that I know of my concerns, even though my doing so should justify your treatment of me. He is not dead."

"You mean Mr. Hurtle."

"Whom else should I mean? And he himself says that the divorce which was declared between us was no divorce. Mr. Fisker came here to me with tidings. Though he is not a man whom I specially love,—though I know that he has been my enemy with you,—I shall return with him to San Francisco."

"I am told that he is taking Madame Melmotte with him, and Melmotte's daughter."

"So I understand. They are adventurers,—as I am, and I do not see why we should not suit each other."

"They say also that Fisker will marry Miss Melmotte."

"Why should I object to that? I shall not be jealous of Mr. Fisker's attentions to the young lady. But it will suit me to have some one to whom I can speak on friendly terms when I am back in California. I may have a job of work to do there which will require the backing of some friends. I shall be hand-and-glove with these people before I have travelled half across the ocean with them."

"I hope they will be kind to you," said Paul.
"No;—but I will be kind to them. I have conquered others by being kind, but I have never had much kindness myself. Did I not conquer you, sir, by being gentle and gracious to you? Ah, how kind I was to that poor wretch, till he lost himself in drink! And then, Paul, I used to think of better people, perhaps of softer people, of things that should be clean and sweet and gentle,—of things that should smell of lavender instead of wild garlic. I would dream of fair, feminine women,—of women who would be scared by seeing what I saw, who would die rather than do what I did. And then I met you, Paul, and I said that my dreams should come true. I ought to have known that it could not be so. I did not dare quite to tell you all the truth. I know I was wrong, and now the punishment has come upon me. Well;—I suppose you had better say good-bye to me. What is the good of putting it off?" Then she rose from her chair and stood before him with her arms hanging listlessly by her side.

"God bless you, Winifrid!" he said, putting out his hand to her.

"But he won't. Why should he,—if we are right in supposing that they who do good will be blessed for their good, and those who do evil cursed for their evil? I cannot do good. I cannot bring myself now not to wish that you would return to me. If you would come I should care nothing for the misery of that girl,—nothing, at least nothing now, for the misery I should certainly bring upon you. Look here;—will you have this back?" As she asked this she took from out her bosom a small miniature portrait of himself which he had given her in New York, and held it towards him.

"If you wish it I will,—of course," he said.

"I would not part with it for all the gold in California. Nothing on earth shall ever part me from it. Should I ever marry another man,—as I may do,—he must take me and this together. While I live it shall be next my heart. As you know, I have but little respect for the proprieties of life. I do not see why I am to abandon the picture of the man I love because he becomes the husband of another woman. Having once said that I love you I shall not contradict myself because you have deserted me. Paul, I have loved you, and do love you,—oh, with my very heart of hearts." So speaking she threw herself into his arms and covered his face with kisses.

"For one moment you shall not banish me. For one short minute I will be here. Oh, Paul, my love;—my love!"

All this to him was simply agony,—though as she had truly said it was an agony he would soon forget. But to be told by a woman of her love,—without being able even to promise love in return,—to be so told while you are in the very act of acknowledging your love for another woman,—carries with it but little of the joy of triumph. He did not want to see her raging like a tigress, as he had once thought might be his fate; but he would have preferred the continuance of moderate resentment to this flood of tenderness. Of course he stood with his arm round her waist, and of course he returned her caresses; but he did it with such stiff constraint that she at once felt how chill they were. "There," she said, smiling through her bitter tears,—"there; you are released now, and not even my fingers shall ever be
MRS. HURTLE AT THE WINDOW.
laid upon you again. If I have annoyed you, at this our last meeting, you must forgive me."

"No;—but you cut me to the heart."

"That we can hardly help;—can we? When two persons have made fools of themselves as we have, there must I suppose be some punishment. Yours will never be heavy after I am gone. I do not start till the first of next month because that is the day fixed by our friend, Mr. Fisker, and I shall remain here till then because my presence is convenient to Mrs. Pipkin; but I need not trouble you to come to me again. Indeed it will be better that you should not.

Good-bye."

He took her by the hand, and stood for a moment looking at her, while she smiled and gently nodded her head at him. Then he essayed to pull her towards him as though he would again kiss her. But she repulsed him, still smiling the while. "No, sir; no; not again; never again, never,—never,—never again." By that time she had recovered her hand and stood apart from him. "Good-bye, Paul;—and now go." Then he turned round and left the room without uttering a word.

She stood still, without moving a limb, as she listened to his step down the stairs and to the opening and the closing of the door. Then hiding herself at the window with the scanty drapery of the curtain she watched him as he went along the street. When he had turned the corner she came back to the centre of the room, stood for a moment with her arms stretched out towards the walls, and then fell prone upon the floor. She had spoken the very truth when she said that she had loved him with all her heart.

But that evening she bade Mrs. Pipkin drink tea with her and was more gracious to the poor woman than ever. When the obsequious but still curious landlady asked some question about Mr. Montague, Mrs. Hurtle seemed to speak very freely on the subject of her late lover,—and to speak without any great pain. They had put their heads together, she said, and had found that the marriage would not be suitable. Each of them preferred their own country, and so they had agreed to part. On that evening Mrs. Hurtle made herself more than usually pleasant, having the children up into her room, and giving them jam and bread-and-butter. During the whole of the next fortnight she seemed to take a delight in doing all in her power for Mrs. Pipkin and her family. She gave toys to the children, and absolutely bestowed upon Mrs. Pipkin a new carpet for the drawing-room. Then Mr. Fisker came and took her away with him to America; and Mrs. Pipkin was left,—a desolate but grateful woman.

"They do tell bad things about them Americans," she said to a friend in the street, "and I don't pretend to know. But for a lodger, I only wish Providence would send me another just like the one I have lost. She had that good nature about her she liked to see the bairns eating pudding just as if they was her own."

I think Mrs. Pipkin was right, and that Mrs. Hurtle, with all her faults, was a good-natured woman.
CHAPTER XCVIII.

MARIE MELMOTTE'S FATE.

In the meantime Marie Melmotte was living with Madame Melmotte in their lodgings up at Hampstead, and was taking quite a new look out into the world. Fisker had become her devoted servant,—not with that old-fashioned service which meant making love, but with perhaps a truer devotion to her material interests. He had ascertained on her behalf that she was the undoubted owner of the money which her father had made over to her on his first arrival in England,—and she also had made herself mistress of that fact with equal precision. It would have astonished those who had known her six months since could they now have seen how excellent a woman of business she had become, and how capable she was of making the fullest use of Mr. Fisker's services. In doing him justice it must be owned that he kept nothing back from her of that which he learned, probably feeling that he might best achieve success in his present project by such honesty,—feeling also, no doubt, the girl's own strength in discovering truth and falsehood.

"She's her father's own daughter," he said one day to Croll in Abchurch Lane;—for Croll, though he had left Melmotte's employment when he found that his name had been forged, had now returned to the service of the daughter in some undefined position, and had been engaged to go with her and Madame Melmotte to New York.

"Ah; yees," said Croll, "but bigger. He vas passionate, and did lose his 'ead; and vas blow'd up vid bigness." Whereupon Croll made an action as though he were a frog swelling himself to the dimensions of an ox. "'E bursted himself, Mr. Fisker. 'E vas a great man; but the greater he grew he vas always less and less vise. 'E ate so much that he became too fat to see to eat his vittels." It was thus that Herr Croll analyzed the character of his late master.

"But Ma'me'selle,—ah, she is different. She vill never eat too much, but vill see to eat alway." Thus too he analyzed the character of his young mistress.

At first things did not arrange themselves pleasantly between Madame Melmotte and Marie. The reader will perhaps remember that they were in no way connected by blood. Madame Melmotte was not Marie's mother, nor, in the eye of the law, could Marie claim Melmotte as her father. She was alone in the world, absolutely without a relation, not knowing even what had been her mother's name,—not even knowing what was her father's true name, as in the various biographies of the great man which were, as a matter of course, published within a fortnight of his death, various accounts were given as to his birth, parentage, and early history. The general opinion seemed to be that his father had been a noted coiner in New York,—an Irishman of the name of Melmody,—and,
in one memoir, the probability of the descent was argued from Melmotte's skill in forgery. But Marie, though she was thus isolated, and now altogether separated from the lords and duchesses who a few weeks since had been interested in her career, was the undoubted owner of the money,—a fact which was beyond the comprehension of Madame Melmotte. She could understand,—and was delighted to understand,—that a very large sum of money had been saved from the wreck, and that she might therefore look forward to prosperous tranquillity for the rest of her life. Though she never acknowledged so much to herself, she soon learned to regard the removal of her husband as the end of her troubles. But she could not comprehend why Marie should claim all the money as her own. She declared herself to be quite willing to divide the spoil,—and suggested such an arrangement both to Marie and to Croll. Of Fisker she was afraid, thinking that the iniquity of giving all the money to Marie originated with him, in order that he might obtain it by marrying the girl. Croll, who understood it all perfectly, told her the story a dozen times,—but quite in vain. She made a timid suggestion of employing a lawyer on her own behalf, and was only deterred from doing so by Marie's ready assent to such an arrangement. Marie's equally ready surrender of any right she might have to a portion of the jewels which had been saved had perhaps some effect in softening the elder lady's heart. She thus was in possession of a treasure of her own,—though a treasure small in comparison with that of the younger woman; and the younger woman had promised that in the event of her marriage she would be liberal. 

It was distinctly understood that they were both to go to New York under Mr. Fisker's guidance as soon as things should be sufficiently settled to allow of their departure; and Madame Melmotte was told, about the middle of August, that their places had been taken for the 3rd of September. But nothing more was told her. She did not as yet know whether Marie was to go out free or as the allied bride of Hamilton Fisker. And she felt herself injured by being left so much in the dark. She herself was inimical to Fisker, regarding him as a dark, designing man, who would ultimately swallow up all that her husband had left behind him,—and trusted herself entirely to Croll, who was personally attentive to her. Fisker was, of course, going on to San Francisco. Marie also had talked of crossing the American continent. But Madame Melmotte was disposed to think that for her, with her jewels, and such share of the money as Marie might be induced to give her, New York would be the most fitting residence. Why should she drag herself across the continent to California? Herr Croll had declared his purpose of remaining in New York. Then it occurred to the lady that as Melmotte was a name which might be too well known in New York, and which it therefore might be wise to change, Croll would do as well as any other. She and Herr Croll had known each other for a great many years, and were, she thought, of about the same age. Croll had some money saved. She had, at any rate, her jewels,—and Croll would probably be able to get some portion of all that money, which ought to be hers, if his affairs were made to be
identical with her own. So she smiled upon Croll, and whispered to him; and when she had given Croll two glasses of Curacao,—which comforter she kept in her own hands, as safe guarded almost as the jewels,—then Croll understood her.

But it was essential that she should know what Marie intended to do. Marie was anything but communicative, and certainly was not in any way submissive. "My dear," she said one day, asking the question in French, without any preface or apology, "are you going to be married to Mr. Fisker?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"It is so important I should know. Where am I to live? What am I to do? What money shall I have? Who will be a friend to me? A woman ought to know. You will marry Fisker if you like him. Why cannot you tell me?"

"Because I do not know. When I know I will tell you. If you go on asking me till to-morrow morning I can say no more."

And this was true. She did not know. It certainly was not Fisker's fault that she should still be in the dark as to her own destiny, for he had asked her often enough, and had pressed his suit with all his eloquence. But Marie had now been wooed so often that she felt the importance of the step which was suggested to her. The romance of the thing was with her a good deal worn, and the material view of matrimony had also been damaged in her sight. She had fallen in love with Sir Felix Carbury, and had assured herself over and over again that she worshipped the very ground on which he stood. But she had taught herself this business of falling in love as a lesson, rather than felt it. After her father's first attempts to marry her to this and that suitor because of her wealth,—attempts which she had hardly opposed amidst the consternation and glitter of the world to which she was suddenly introduced,—she had learned from novels that it would be right that she should be in love, and she had chosen Sir Felix as her idol. The reader knows what had been the end of that episode in her life. She certainly was not now in love with Sir Felix Carbury. Then she had as it were relapsed into the hands of Lord Nidderdale,—one of her early suitors,—and had felt that as love was not to prevail, and as it would be well that she should marry some one, he might probably be as good as any other, and certainly better than many others. She had almost learned to like Lord Nidderdale and to believe that he liked her, when the tragedy came. Lord Nidderdale had been very good-natured,—but he had deserted her at last. She had never allowed herself to be angry with him for a moment. It had been a matter of course that he should do so. Her fortune was still large, but not so large as the sum named in the bargain made. And it was moreover weighted with her father's blood. From the moment of her father's death she had never dreamed that he would marry her. Why should he? Her thoughts in reference to Sir Felix were bitter enough;—but as against Nidderdale they were not at all bitter. Should she ever meet him again she would shake hands with him and smile,—if not pleasantly as she thought of the things which were past,—at any rate with good humour. But all this had not made her much in love with matri-
mony generally. She had over a hundred thousand pounds of her own, and, feeling conscious of her own power in regard to her own money, knowing that she could do as she pleased with her wealth, she began to look out into life seriously.

What could she do with her money, and in what way would she shape her life, should she determine to remain her own mistress? Were she to refuse Fisker how should she begin? He would then be banished, and her only remaining friends, the only persons whose names she would even know in her own country, would be her father's widow and Herr Croll. She already began to see Madame Melmotte's purport in reference to Croll, and could not reconcile herself to the idea of opening an establishment with them on a scale commensurate with her fortune. Nor could she settle in her own mind any pleasant position for herself as a single woman, living alone in perfect independence. She had opinions of women's rights,—especially in regard to money; and she entertained also a vague notion that in America a young woman would not need support so essentially as in England. Nevertheless, the idea of a fine house for herself in Boston, or Philadelphia,—for in that case she would have to avoid New York as the chosen residence of Madame Melmotte,—did not recommend itself to her. As to Fisker himself,—she certainly liked him. He was not beautiful like Felix Carbury, nor had he the easy good-humour of Lord Niddersdale. She had seen enough of English gentlemen to know that Fisker was very unlike them. But she had not seen enough of English gentlemen to make Fisker distasteful to her. He told her that he had a big house at San Francisco, and she certainly desired to live in a big house. He represented himself to be a thriving man, and she calculated that he certainly would not be here, in London, arranging her father's affairs, were he not possessed of commercial importance. She had contrived to learn that, in the United States, a married woman has greater power over her own money than in England, and this information acted strongly in Fisker's favour. On consideration of the whole subject she was inclined to think that she would do better in the world as Mrs. Fisker than as Marie Melmotte, if she could see her way clearly in the matter of her own money.

"I have got excellent berths," Fisker said to her one morning at Hampstead. At these interviews, which were devoted first to business and then to love, Madame Melmotte was never allowed to be present.

"I am to be alone?"

"Oh, yes. There is a cabin for Madame Melmotte and the maid, and a cabin for you. Everything will be comfortable. And there is another lady going,—Mrs. Hurtle,—whom I think you will like."

"Has she a husband?"

"Not going with us," said Mr. Fisker evasively.

"But she has one?"

"Well, yes;—but you had better not mention him. He is not exactly all that a husband should be."

"Did she not come over here to marry some one else?"—For Marie in the days of her sweet intimacy with Sir Felix Carbury had heard something of Mrs. Hurtle's story.

"There is a story, and I dare say I shall tell you all about it some
day. But you may be sure I should not ask you to associate with any one you ought not to know."

"Oh,—I can take care of myself."

"No doubt, Miss Melmotte,—no doubt. I feel that quite strongly. But what I meant to observe was this,—that I certainly should not introduce a lady whom I aspire to make my own lady to any lady whom a lady oughtn't to know. I hope I make myself understood, Miss Melmotte."

"Oh, quite."

"And perhaps I may go on to say that if I could go on board that ship as your accepted lover, I could do a deal more to make you comfortable, particularly when you land, than just as a mere friend, Miss Melmotte. You can't doubt my heart."

"I don't see why I shouldn't. Gentlemen's hearts are things very much to be doubted as far as I've seen 'em. I don't think many of 'em have 'em at all."

"Miss Melmotte, you do not know the glorious west. Your past experiences have been drawn from this effete and stone-cold country in which passion is no longer allowed to sway. On those golden shores which the Pacific washes man is still true,—and woman is still tender."

"Perhaps I'd better wait and see, Mr. Fisker."

But this was not Mr. Fisker's view of the case. There might be other men desirous of being true on those golden shores. "And then," said he, pleading his cause not without skill, "the laws regulating woman's property there are just the reverse of those which the greediness of man has established here. The wife there can claim her share of her husband's property, but hers is exclusively her own. America is certainly the country for women,—and especially California."

"Ah;—I shall find out all about it, I suppose, when I've been there a few months."

"But you would enter San Francisco, Miss Melmotte, under such much better auspices,—if I may be allowed to say so,—as a married lady or as a lady just going to be married."

"Ain't single ladies much thought of in California?"

"It isn't that. Come, Miss Melmotte, you know what I mean."

"Yes, I do."

"Let us go in for life together. We've both done uncommon well. I'm spending 30,000 dollars a year,—at that rate,—in my own house. You'll see it all. If we put them both together,—what's yours and what's mine,—we can put our foot out as far as about any one there, I guess."

"I don't know that I care about putting my foot out. I've seen something of that already, Mr. Fisker. You shouldn't put your foot out farther than you can draw it in again."

"You needn't fear me as to that, Miss Melmotte. I shouldn't be able to touch a dollar of your money. It would be such a triumph to go into Francisco as man and wife."

"I shouldn't think of being married till I had been there a while and looked about me."
"And seen the house! Well;—there's something in that. The house is all there, I can tell you. I'm not a bit afraid but what you'll like the house. But if we were engaged, I could do every thing for you. Where would you be, going into San Francisco all alone? Oh, Miss Melmotte, I do admire you so much!"

I doubt whether this last assurance had much efficacy. But the arguments with which it was introduced did prevail to a certain extent. "I'll tell you how it must be then," she said.

"How shall it be?" and as he asked the question he jumped up and put his arm round her waist.

"Not like that, Mr. Fisker," she said, withdrawing herself. "It shall be in this way. You may consider yourself engaged to me."

"I'm the happiest man on this continent," he said, forgetting in his ecstasy that he was not in the United States.

"But if I find when I get to Francisco anything to induce me to change my mind, I shall change it. I like you very well, but I'm not going to take a leap in the dark, and I'm not going to marry a pig in a poke."

"There you're quite right," he said,—"quite right."

"You may give it out on board the ship that we're engaged, and I'll tell Madame Melmotte the same. She and Croll don't mean going any farther than New York."

"We needn't break our hearts about that;—need we?"

"It don't much signify. Well;—I'll go on with Mrs. Hurtle, if she'll have me."

"Too much delighted she'll be."

"And she shall be told we're engaged."

"My darling!"

"But if I don't like it when I get to Frisco, as you call it, all the ropes in California shan't make me do it. Well;—yes; you may give me a kiss I suppose now if you care about it." And so,—or rather so far,—Mr. Fisker and Marie Melmotte became engaged to each other as man and wife.

After that Mr. Fisker's remaining business in England went very smoothly with him. It was understood up at Hampstead that he was engaged to Marie Melmotte,—and it soon came to be understood also that Madame Melmotte was to be married to Herr Croll. No doubt the father of the one lady and the husband of the other had died so recently as to make these arrangements subject to certain censorious objections. But there was a feeling that Melmotte had been so unlike other men, both in his life and in his death, that they who had been concerned with him were not to be weighed by ordinary scales. Nor did it much matter, for the persons concerned took their departure soon after the arrangement was made, and Hampstead knew them no more.

On the 3rd of September Madame Melmotte, Marie, Mrs. Hurtle, Hamilton K. Fisker, and Herr Croll left Liverpool for New York; and the three ladies were determined that they never would revisit a country of which their reminiscences certainly were not happy.
The writer of the present chronicle may so far look forward,—carrying his reader with him,—as to declare that Marie Melmotte did become Mrs. Fisker very soon after her arrival at San Francisco.

CHAPTER XCIX.

LADY CARBURY AND MR. BROUNE.

WHEN Sir Felix Carbury declared to his friends at the Bear-garden that he intended to devote the next few months of his life to foreign travel, and that it was his purpose to take with him a Protestant divine,—as was much the habit with young men of rank and fortune some years since,—he was not altogether lying. There was indeed a sounder basis of truth than was usually to be found attached to his statements. That he should have intended to produce a false impression was a matter of course,—and nearly equally so that he should have made his attempt by asserting things which he must have known that no one would believe. He was going to Germany, and he was going in company with a clergyman, and it had been decided that he should remain there for the next twelve months. A representation had lately been made to the Bishop of London that the English Protestants settled in a certain commercial town in the north-eastern district of Prussia were without pastoral aid, and the bishop had stirred himself in the matter. A clergyman was found willing to expatriate himself, but the income suggested was very small. The Protestant English population of the commercial town in question, though pious, was not liberal. It had come to pass that the "Morning Breakfast Table" had interested itself in the matter, having appealed for subscriptions after a manner not unusual with that paper. The bishop and all those concerned in the matter had fully understood that if the "Morning Breakfast Table" could be got to take the matter up heartily, the thing would be done. The heartiness had been so complete that it had at last devolved upon Mr. Broune to appoint the clergyman; and, as with all the aid that could be found, the income was still small, the Rev. Septimus Blake,—a brand snatched from the burning of Rome,—had been induced to undertake the maintenance and total charge of Sir Felix Carbury for a consideration. Mr. Broune imparted to Mr. Blake all that there was to know about the baronet, giving much counsel as to the management of the young man, and specially enjoining on the clergyman that he should on no account give Sir Felix the means of returning home. It was evidently Mr. Broune's anxious wish that Sir Felix should see as much as possible of German life, at a comparatively moderate expenditure, and under circumstances that should be externally respectable if not absolutely those which a young gentleman might choose for his own comfort or profit;—but espe-
cially that those circumstances should not admit of the speedy return to England of the young gentleman himself.

Lady Carbury had at first opposed the scheme. Terribly difficult as was to her the burden of maintaining her son, she could not endure the idea of driving him into exile. But Mr. Broune was very obstinate, very reasonable, and, as she thought, somewhat hard of heart. "What is to be the end of it then?" he said to her, almost in anger. For in those days the great editor, when in presence of Lady Carbury, differed very much from that Mr. Broune who used to squeeze her hand and look into her eyes. His manner with her had become so different that she regarded him as quite another person. She hardly dared, to contradict him, and found herself almost compelled to tell him what she really felt and thought. "Do you mean to let him eat up everything you have to your last shilling, and then go to the workhouse with him?"

"Oh, my friend, you know how I am struggling! Do not say such horrid things."

"It is because I know how you are struggling that I find myself compelled to say anything on the subject. What hardship will there be in his living for twelve months with a clergyman in Prussia? What can he do better? What better chance can he have of being weaned from the life he is leading?"

"If he could only be married?"

"Married! Who is to marry him? Why should any girl with money throw herself away upon him?"

"He is so handsome."

"What has his beauty brought him to? Lady Carbury, you must let me tell you that all that is not only foolish but wrong. If you keep him here you will help to ruin him, and will certainly ruin yourself. He has agreed to go;—let him go."

She was forced to yield. Indeed, as Sir Felix had himself assented, it was almost impossible that she should not do so. Perhaps Mr. Broune's greatest triumph was due to the talent and firmness with which he persuaded Sir Felix to start upon his travels. "Your mother," said Mr. Broune, "has made up her mind that she will not absolutely beggar your sister and herself in order that your indulgence may be prolonged for a few months. She cannot make you go to Germany of course. But she can turn you out of her house, and, unless you go, she will do so."

"I don't think she ever said that, Mr. Broune."

"No;—she has not said so. But I have said it for her in her presence; and she has acknowledged that it must necessarily be so. You may take my word as a gentleman that it will be so. If you take her advice £175 a year will be paid for your maintenance;—but if you remain in England not a shilling further will be paid." He had no money. His last sovereign was all but gone. Not a tradesman would give him credit for a coat or a pair of boots. The key of the door had been taken away from him. The very page treated him with contumely. His clothes were becoming rusty. There was no prospect of amusement for him during the coming autumn or winter. He did not anticipate much excitement in Eastern Prussia,
but he thought that any change must be a change for the better. He assented, therefore, to the proposition made by Mr. Broune, was duly introduced to the Rev. Septimus Blake, and, as he spent his last sovereign on a last dinner at the Beargarden, explained his intentions for the immediate future to those friends at his club who would no doubt mourn his departure.

Mr. Blake and Mr. Broune between them did not allow the grass to grow under their feet. Before the end of August Sir Felix, with Mr. and Mrs. Blake and the young Blakes, had embarked from Hull for Hamburgh,—having extracted at the very hour of parting a last five-pound note from his foolish mother. "It will be just enough to bring him home," said Mr. Broune with angry energy when he was told of this. But Lady Carbury, who knew her son well, assured him that Felix would be restrained in his expenditure by no such prudence as such a purpose would indicate. "It will be gone," she said, "long before they reach their destination."

"Then why the deuce should you give it him?" said Mr. Broune.

Mr. Broune's anxiety had been so intense that he had paid half a year's allowance in advance to Mr. Blake out of his own pocket. Indeed, he had paid various sums for Lady Carbury,—so that that unfortunate woman would often tell herself that she was becoming subject to the great editor, almost like a slave. He came to her, three or four times a week, at about nine o'clock in the evening, and gave her instructions as to all that she should do. "I wouldn't write another novel if I were you," he said. This was hard, as the writing of novels was her great ambition, and she had flattered herself that the one novel which she had written was good. Mr. Broune's own critic had declared it to be very good in glowing language. The "Evening Pulpit" had of course abused it,—because it is the nature of the "Evening Pulpit" to abuse. So she had argued with herself, telling herself that the praise was all true, whereas the censure had come from malice. After that article in the "Breakfast Table," it did seem hard that Mr. Broune should tell her to write no more novels. She looked up at him piteously but said nothing. "I don't think you'd find it answer. Of course you can do it as well as a great many others. But then that is saying so little!"

"I thought I could make some money."

"I don't think Mr. Leadham would hold out to you very high hopes;—I don't, indeed. I think I would turn to something else."

"It is so very hard to get paid for what one does."

To this Mr. Broune made no immediate answer; but, after sitting for a while, almost in silence, he took his leave. On that very morning Lady Carbury had parted from her son. She was soon about to part from her daughter, and she was very sad. She felt that she could hardly keep up that house in Welbeck Street for herself, even if her means permitted it. What should she do with herself? Whither should she take herself? Perhaps the bitterest drop in her cup had come from those words of Mr. Broune forbidding her to write more novels. After all, then, she was not a clever woman,—not more clever than other women around her! That very morning she had prided herself on her coming success as a novelist, basing all her
hopes on that review in the "Breakfast Table." Now, with that reaction of spirits which is so common to all of us, she was more than equally despondent. He would not thus have crushed her without a reason. Though he was hard to her now,—he who used to be so soft,—he was very good. It did not occur to her to rebel against him. After what he had said, of course there would be no more praise in the "Breakfast Table,"—and, equally of course, no novel of hers could succeed without that. The more she thought of him, the more omnipotent he seemed to be. The more she thought of herself, the more absolutely prostrate she seemed to have fallen from those high hopes with which she had begun her literary career not much more than twelve months ago.

On the next day he did not come to her at all, and she sat idle, wretched, and alone. She could not interest herself in Hetta's coming marriage, as that marriage was in direct opposition to one of her broken schemes. She had not ventured to confess so much to Mr. Broune, but she had in truth written the first pages of the first chapter of a second novel. It was impossible now that she should even look at what she had written. All this made her very sad. She spent the evening quite alone; for Hetta was staying down in Suffolk, with her cousin's friend, Mrs. Yeld, the bishop's wife; and as she thought of her life past and her life to come, she did, perhaps, with a broken light, see something of the error of her ways, and did, after a fashion, repent. It was all "leather or prunello," as she said to herself;—it was all vanity,—and vanity,—and vanity! What real enjoyment had she found in anything? She had only taught herself to believe that some day something would come which she would like;—but she had never as yet in truth found anything to like. It had all been in anticipation,—but now even her anticipations were at an end. Mr. Broune had sent her son away, had forbidden her to write any more novels,—and had been refused when he had asked her to marry him!

The next day he came to her as usual, and found her still very wretched. "I shall give up this house," she said. "I can't afford to keep it; and in truth I shall not want it. I don't in the least know where to go, but I don't think that it much signifies. Any place will be the same to me now."

"I don't see why you should say that."
"What does it matter?"
"You wouldn't think of going out of London."
"Why not? I suppose I had better go wherever I can live cheapest."
"I should be sorry that you should be settled where I could not see you," said Mr. Broune plaintively.

"So shall I,—very. You have been more kind to me than anybody. But what am I to do? If I stay in London I can live only in some miserable lodgings. I know you will laugh at me, and tell me that I am wrong; but my idea is that I shall follow Felix wherever he goes, so that I may be near him and help him when he needs help. Hetta doesn't want me. There is nobody else that I can do any good to."
"I want you," said Mr. Broune, very quietly.
"Ah,—that is so kind of you. There is nothing makes one so good as goodness;—nothing binds your friend to you so firmly as the acceptance from him of friendly actions. You say you want me, because I have so sadly wanted you. When I go you will simply miss an almost daily trouble, but where shall I find a friend?"

"When I said I wanted you, I meant more than that, Lady Carbury. Two or three months ago I asked you to be my wife. You declined, chiefly, if I understood you rightly, because of your son's position. That has been altered, and therefore I ask you again. I have quite convinced myself,—not without some doubts, for you shall know all; but, still, I have quite convinced myself,—that such a marriage will best contribute to my own happiness. I do not think, dearest, that it would mar yours."

This was said with so quiet a voice and so placid a demeanour, that the words, though they were too plain to be misunderstood, hardly at first brought themselves home to her. Of course he had renewed his offer of marriage, but he had done so in a tone which almost made her feel that the proposition could not be an earnest one. It was not that she believed that he was joking with her or paying her a poor insipid compliment. When she thought about it at all, she knew that it could not be so. But the thing was so improbable! Her opinion of herself was so poor, she had become so sick of her own vanities and littlenesses and pretences, that she could not understand that such a man as this should in truth want to make her his wife. At this moment she thought less of herself and more of Mr. Broune than either perhaps deserved. She sat silent, quite unable to look him in the face, while he kept his place in his arm-chair, lounging back, with his eyes intent on her countenance. "Well," he said; "what do you think of it? I never loved you better than I did for refusing me before, because I thought that you did so because it was not right that I should be embarrassed by your son."

"That was the reason," she said, almost in a whisper.

"But I shall love you better still for accepting me now,—if you will accept me."

The long vista of her past life appeared before her eyes. The ambition of her youth which had been taught to look only to a handsome maintenance, the cruelty of her husband which had driven her to run from him, the further cruelty of his forgiveness when she returned to him; the calumny which had made her miserable, though she had never confessed her misery; then her attempts at life in London, her literary successes and failures, and the wretchedness of her son's career;—there had never been happiness, or even comfort, in any of it. Even when her smiles had been sweetest her heart had been heaviest. Could it be that now at last real peace should be within her reach, and that tranquillity which comes from an anchor holding to a firm bottom? Then she remembered that first kiss,—or attempted kiss,—when, with a sort of pride in her own superiority, she had told herself that the man was a susceptible old goose. She certainly had not thought then that his susceptibility was of this nature. Nor could she quite understand now whether she had been right then, and that the man's feelings, and almost his nature,
It had been for answer to her. At that day, the bound thorough he any their tell; more display they would kneeling best, Age. Age. And Felix!

"I think I may say that I know all about that also."

"And then I have become so poor!"

"I am not proposing to myself to marry you for your money. Luckily for me,—I hope luckily for both of us,—it is not necessary that I should do so."

"And then I seem so to have fallen through in everything. I don't know what I've got to give to a man in return for all that you offer to give to me."

"Yourself," he said, stretching out his right hand to her. And there he sat with it stretched out,—so that she found herself compelled to put her own into it, or to refuse to do so with very absolute words. Very slowly she put out her own, and gave it to him without looking at him. Then he drew her towards him, and in a moment she was kneeling at his feet, with her face buried on his knees. Considering their ages perhaps we must say that their attitude was awkward. They would certainly have thought so themselves had they imagined that any one could have seen them. But how many absurdities of the kind are not only held to be pleasant, but almost holy,—as long as they remain mysteries inspected by no profane eyes! It is not that Age is ashamed of feeling passion and acknowledging it,—but that the display of it is, without the graces of which Youth is proud, and which Age regrets.

On that occasion there was very little more said between them. He had certainly been in earnest, and she had now accepted him. As he went down to his office he told himself now that he had done the best, not only for her but for himself also. And yet I think that she had won him more thoroughly by her former refusal than by any other virtue.

She, as she sat alone, late into the night, became subject to a thorough reaction of spirit. That morning the world had been a perfect blank to her. There was no single object of interest before her. Now everything was rose-coloured. This man who had thus bound her to him, who had given her such assured proofs of his affection and truth, was one of the considerable ones of the world; a man than whom few,—so she now told herself,—were greater or more powerful. Was it not a career enough for any woman to be the wife of such a man, to receive his friends, and to shine with his reflected glory?

Whether her hopes were realised, or,—as human hopes never are realised,—how far her content was assured, these pages cannot tell; but they must tell that, before the coming winter was over,
Lady Carbury became the wife of Mr. Broune, and, in furtherance of her own resolve, took her husband's name. The house in Welbeck Street was kept, and Mrs. Broune's Tuesday evenings were much more regarded by the literary world than had been those of Lady Carbury.

CHAPTER C.

DOWN IN SUFFOLK.

IT need hardly be said that Paul Montague was not long in adjusting his affairs with Hetta after the visit which he received from Roger Carbury. Early on the following morning he was once more in Welbeck Street, taking the brooch with him; and though at first Lady Carbury kept up her opposition, she did it after so weak a fashion as to throw in fact very little difficulty in his way. Hetta understood perfectly that she was in this matter stronger than her mother and that she need fear nothing, now that Roger Carbury was on her side. "I don't know what you mean to live on," Lady Carbury said, threatening future evils in a plaintive tone. Hetta repeated, though in other language, the assurance which the young lady made who declared that if her future husband would consent to live on potatoes, she would be quite satisfied with the potato-peelings; while Paul made some vague allusion to the satisfactory nature of his final arrangements with the house of Fisker, Montague, and Montague. "I don't see anything like an income," said Lady Carbury; "but I suppose Roger will make it right. He takes everything upon himself now it seems." But this was before the halcyon day of Mr. Broune's second offer.

It was at any rate decided that they were to be married, and the time fixed for the marriage was to be the following spring. When this was finally arranged Roger Carbury, who had returned to his own home, conceived the idea that it would be well that Hetta should pass the autumn and if possible the winter also down in Suffolk, so that she might get used to him in the capacity which he now aspired to fill; and with that object he induced Mrs. Yeld, the Bishop's wife, to invite her down to the palace. Hetta accepted the invitation and left London before she could hear the tidings of her mother's engagement with Mr. Broune.

Roger Carbury had not yielded in this matter,—had not brought himself to determine that he would recognise Paul and Hetta as acknowledged lovers,—without a fierce inward contest. Two convictions had been strong in his mind, both of which were opposed to this recognition,—the first telling him that he would be a fitter husband for the girl than Paul Montague, and the second assuring him that Paul had illtreated him in such a fashion that forgiveness would be both foolish and unmanly. For Roger, though he was a
religious man, and one anxious to conform to the spirit of Christianity, would not allow himself to think that an injury should be forgiven unless the man who did the injury repented of his own injustice. As to giving his coat to the thief who had taken his cloak,—he told himself that were he and others to be guided by that precept honest industry would go naked in order that vice and idleness might be comfortably clothed. If any one stole his cloak he would certainly put that man in prison as soon as possible and not commence his lenience till the thief should at any rate affect to be sorry for his fault. Now, to his thinking, Paul Montague had stolen his cloak, and were he, Roger, to give way in this matter of his love, he would be giving Paul his coat also. No! He was bound after some fashion to have Paul put into prison; to bring him before a jury, and to get a verdict against him, so that some sentence of punishment might be at least pronounced. How then could he yield?

And Paul Montague had shown himself to be very weak in regard to women. It might be,—no doubt it was true,—that Mrs. Hurtle's appearance in England had been distressing to him. But still he had gone down with her to Lowestoft as her lover, and, to Roger's thinking, a man who could do that was quite unfit to be the wife of Hetta Carbury. He would himself tell no tales against Montague on that head. Even when pressed to do so he had told no tale. But not the less was his conviction strong that Hetta ought to know the truth, and to be induced by that knowledge to reject her younger lover.

But then over these convictions there came a third,—equally strong,—which told him that the girl loved the younger man and did not love him, and that if he loved the girl it was his duty as a man to prove his love by doing what he could to make her happy. As he walked up and down the walk by the moat, with his hands clasped behind his back, stopping every now and again to sit on the terrace wall,—walking there, mile after mile, with his mind intent on the one idea,—he schooled himself to feel that that, and that only, could be his duty. What did love mean if not that? What could be the devotion which men so often affect to feel if it did not tend to self-sacrifice on behalf of the beloved one. A man would incur any danger for a woman, would subject himself to any toil,—would even die for her! But if this were done simply with the object of winning her, where was that real love of which sacrifice of self on behalf of another is the truest proof? So, by degrees, he resolved that the thing must be done. The man, though he had been bad to his friend, was not all bad. He was one who might become good in good hands. He, Roger, was too firm of purpose and too honest of heart to buoy himself up into new hopes by assurances of the man's unfitness. What right had he to think that he could judge of that better than the girl herself? And so, when many many miles had been walked, he succeeded in conquering his own heart,—though in conquering it he crushed it,—and in bringing himself to the resolve that the energies of his life should be devoted to the task of making Mrs. Paul Montague a happy woman. We have seen how he acted up to this resolve when last in London, withdrawing at any rate all
signs of anger from Paul Montague and behaving with the utmost tenderness to Hetta.

When he had accomplished that task of conquering his own heart and of assuring himself thoroughly that Hetta was to become his rival's wife, he was, I think, more at ease and less troubled in his spirit than he had been during those months in which there had still been doubt. The sort of happiness which he had once pictured to himself could certainly never be his. That he would never marry he was quite sure. Indeed he was prepared to settle Carbury on Hetta's eldest boy on condition that such boy should take the old name. He would never have a child whom he could in truth call his own. But if he could induce these people to live at Carbury, or to live there for at least a part of the year, so that there should be some life in the place, he thought that he could awaken himself again, and again take an interest in the property. But as a first step to this he must learn to regard himself as an old man,—as one who had let life pass by too far for the purposes of his own home, and who must therefore devote himself to make happy the homes of others.

So thinking of himself and so resolving, he had told much of his story to his friend the Bishop, and as a consequence of those revelations Mrs. Yeld had invited Hetta down to the palace. Roger felt that he had still much to say to his cousin before her marriage which could be said in the country much better than in town, and he wished to teach her to regard Suffolk as the county to which she should be attached and in which she was to find her home. The day before she came he was over at the palace with the pretence of asking permission to come and see his cousin soon after her arrival, but in truth with the idea of talking about Hetta to the only friend to whom he had looked for sympathy in his trouble. "As to settling your property on her or her children," said the Bishop, "it is quite out of the question. Your lawyer would not allow you to do it. Where would you be if after all you were to marry?"

"I shall never marry."

"Very likely not,—but yet you may. How is a man of your age to speak with certainty of what he will do or what he will not do in that respect? You can make your will, doing as you please with your property;—and the will, when made, can be revoked."

"I think you hardly understand just what I feel," said Roger, "and I know very well that I am unable to explain it. But I wish to act exactly as I would do if she were my daughter, and as if her son, if she had a son, would be my natural heir."

"But, if she were your daughter, her son wouldn't be your natural heir as long as there was a probability or even a chance that you might have a son of your own. A man should never put the power, which properly belongs to him, out of his own hands. If it does properly belong to you it must be better with you than elsewhere. I think very highly of your cousin, and I have no reason to think otherwise than well of the gentleman whom she intends to marry. But it is only human nature to suppose that the fact that your property is still at your own disposal should have some effect in producing a more complete observance of your wishes."
"I do not believe it in the least, my lord," said Roger somewhat angrily.

"That is because you are so carried away by enthusiasm at the present moment as to ignore the ordinary rules of life. There are not, perhaps, many fathers who have Regans and Gonerils for their daughters;—but there are very many who may take a lesson from the folly of the old king. 'Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown,' the fool said to him, 'when thou gav'st thy golden one away.' The world, I take it, thinks that the fool was right."

The Bishop did so far succeed that Roger abandoned the idea of settling his property on Paul Montague's children. But he was not on that account the less resolute in his determination to make himself and his own interests subordinate to those of his cousin. When he came over, two days afterwards, to see her he found her in the garden, and walked there with her for a couple of hours. "I hope all our troubles are over now," he said smiling.

"You mean about Felix," said Hetta,—"and mamma?"

"No, indeed. As to Felix I think that Lady Carbury has done the best thing in her power. No doubt she has been advised by Mr. Broune, and Mr. Broune seems to be a prudent man. And about your mother herself, I hope that she may now be comfortable. But I was not alluding to Felix and your mother. I was thinking of you—and of myself."

"I hope that you will never have any troubles."

"I have had troubles. I mean to speak very freely to you now, dear. I was nearly upset,—what I suppose people call broken-hearted,—when I was assured that you certainly would never become my wife. I ought not to have allowed myself to get into such a frame of mind. I should have known that I was too old to have a chance."

"Oh, Roger,—it was not that."

"Well,—that and other things. I should have known it sooner, and have got over my misery quicker. I should have been more manly and stronger. After all, though love is a wonderful incident in a man's life, it is not that only that he is here for. I have duties plainly marked out for me; and as I should never allow myself to be withdrawn from them by pleasure, so neither should I by sorrow. But it is done now. I have conquered my regrets, and I can say with safety that I look forward to your presence and Paul's presence at Carbury as the source of all my future happiness. I will make him welcome as though he were my brother, and you as though you were my daughter. All I ask of you is that you will not be chary of your presence there." She only answered him by a close pressure on his arm. "That is what I wanted to say to you. You will teach yourself to regard me as your best and closest friend,—as he on whom you have the strongest right to depend, of all,—except your husband?"

"There is no teaching necessary for that," she said.

"As a daughter leans on a father I would have you lean on me, Hetta. You will soon come to find that I am very old. I grow old quickly, and already feel myself to be removed from everything that is young and foolish."
"You never were foolish."

"Nor young either, I sometimes think. But now you must promise me this. You will do all that you can to induce him to make Carbury his residence."

"We have no plans as yet at all, Roger."

"Then it will be certainly so much the easier for you to fall into my plan. Of course you will be married at Carbury?"

"What will mamma say?"

"She will come here, and I am sure will enjoy it. That I regard as settled. Then, after that, let this be your home,—so that you should learn really to care about and to love the place. It will be your home really, you know, some of these days. You will have to be Squire of Carbury yourself when I am gone, till you have a son old enough to fill that exalted position." With all this love to her and his good-will to them both, he could not bring himself to say that Paul Montague should be Squire of Carbury.

"Oh, Roger, please do not talk like that."

"But it is necessary, my dear. I want you to know what my wishes are, and, if it be possible, I would learn what are yours. My mind is quite made up as to my future life. Of course, I do not wish to dictate to you,—and if I did, I could not dictate to Mr. Montague."

"Pray,—pray do not call him Mr. Montague."

"Well, I will not;—to Paul then. There goes the last of my anger." He threw his hands up as though he were scattering his indignation to the air. "I would not dictate either to you or to him, but it is right that you should know that I hold my property as steward for those who are to come after me, and that the satisfaction of my stewardship will be infinitely increased if I find that those for whom I act share the interest which I shall take in the matter. It is the only payment which you and he can make me for my trouble."

"But Felix, Roger!"

His brow became a little black as he answered her. "To a sister," he said very solemnly, "I will not say a word against her brother; but on that subject I claim a right to come to a decision on my own judgment. It is a matter in which I have thought much, and, I may say, suffered much. I have ideas, old-fashioned ideas, on the matter, which I need not pause to explain to you now. If we are as much together as I hope we shall be, you will, no doubt, come to understand them. The disposition of a family property, even though it be one so small as mine, is, to my thinking, a matter which a man should not make in accordance with his own caprices,—or even with his own affections. He owes a duty to those who live on his land, and he owes a duty to his country. And, though it may seem fantastic to say so, I think he owes a duty to those who have been before him, and who have manifestly wished that the property should be continued in the hands of their descendants. These things are to me very holy. In what I am doing I am in some respects departing from the theory of my life,—but I do so under a perfect conviction that by the course I am taking I shall best perform the duties to which I have alluded. I do not think, Hetta, that we need say any
There goes the last of my anger.
more about that." He had spoken so seriously, that, though she did not quite understand all that he had said, she did not venture to dispute his will any further. He did not endeavour to exact from her any promise, but having explained his purposes, kissed her as he would have kissed a daughter, and then left her and rode home without going into the house.

Soon after that, Paul Montague came down to Carbury, and the same thing was said to him, though in a much less solemn manner. Paul was received quite in the old way. Having declared that he would throw all anger behind him, and that Paul should be again Paul, he rigidly kept his promise, whatever might be the cost to his own feelings. As to his love for Hetta, and his old hopes, and the disappointment which had so nearly unmanned him, he said not another word to his fortunate rival. Montague knew it all, but there was now no necessity that any allusion should be made to past misfortunes. Roger indeed made a solemn resolution that to Paul he would never again speak of Hetta as the girl whom he himself had loved, though he looked forward to a time, probably many years hence, when he might perhaps remind her of his fidelity. But he spoke much of the land and of the tenants and the labourers, of his own farm, of the amount of the income, and of the necessity of so living that the income might always be more than sufficient for the wants of the household.

When the spring came round, Hetta and Paul were married by the Bishop at the parish church of Carbury, and Roger Carbury gave away the bride. All those who saw the ceremony declared that the squire had not seemed to be so happy for many a long year. John Crumb, who was there with his wife,—herself now one of Roger's tenants, having occupied the land which had become vacant by the death of old Daniel Ruggles,—declared that the wedding was almost as good fun as his own. "John, what a fool you are!" Ruby said to her spouse, when this opinion was expressed with rather a loud voice. "Yes, I be," said John,—"but not such a fool as to a' missed a having o' you." "No, John; it was I was the fool then," said Ruby. "We'll see about that when the bairn's born," said John,—equally aloud. Then Ruby held her tongue. Mrs. Broune, and Mr. Broune, were also at Carbury,—thus doing great honour to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Montague, and showing by their presence that all family feuds were at an end. Sir Felix was not there. Happily up to this time Mr. Septimus Blake had continued to keep that gentleman as one of his Protestant population in the German town,—no doubt not without considerable trouble to himself.

THE END.