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SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, BART.

BY

JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD

AUTHOR OF

"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE," "THE TENTH EARL,
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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'I hoped, I almost trusted, that I should find you here.'

There was not much in the words, perhaps, although they were rather more earnest than the ordinary utterances of polite society; but they derived weight from the meaning tone in which they were spoken, and which, when addressed to Violet Mowbray by Sir Robert Shirley,
had the effect of making the listener uncomfortable. There was no reason why the baronet, who had just ridden over from Helston, should have been surprised at meeting Miss Mowbray in the rose-garden, that was one of the boasts of Thorsdale, and where six or seven other guests were strolling among the bright flowers; nor did there appear to be any cogent reason for his having hoped to find her there. But Sir Robert had of late affected to speak to Mrs. Langton's beautiful young charge as though there had been some kind of understanding between him and her. It was not so much what he said as how he said it which at times perplexed and almost alarmed Violet.

'The roses are looking very pretty today,' said Miss Mowbray, vexed at the inane nature of her own remark.
There were the noble flowers in all their glory and splendour, a blaze of blended colours, bright as living jewels in the sunlight, and Violet was ashamed to think how poor and trite appeared to herself her words of praise.

'Are they?' indolently rejoined Sir Robert; and again there was that odious implied something in his accent, and she knew that he was looking at her, not at the roses; but she did not choose to allow her eyes to meet his.

There are young ladies who bask, so to speak, in the sunshine of a compliment, even if the payer of it be distasteful to themselves, but Violet was of another order. She did not dislike Sir Robert Shirley, and, more certainly still, she did not regard him with any of that liking which may afterwards be transmuted into
a warmer sentiment. When first, at Woodburn Parsonage, she had become acquainted with this accomplished man of the world, she had been pleased by what appeared an agreeable break in the monotony of a somewhat tame and colourless existence. Miss Mowbray had listened with interest to the travelled baronet's descriptions of far-off isles and cities and famous mountain ranges, of those Alps and Apennines, that purple Mediterranean, the Holy Land, Greece, Egypt—places that she only knew through the medium of books. And perhaps Sir Robert may have mistaken the attention with which Violet hearkened to his conversation for somewhat of a preference for himself, and presumed upon it, since, without any formal declaration of love, he was always posing in the character of a suitor who
does not avow his attachment, because there is already a tacit understanding between himself and the object of his choice.

The baronet, with all his astuteness and all his experience, did not read Violet's nature aright. He saw in her simply a country-bred girl of a modest and retiring disposition, who might be dazzled by the adventitious brilliancy of an admirer like himself, but whose repugnance—if she had any—to becoming Lady Shirley would be perfectly sure to succumb to a patient and persistent courtship. Such a girl, he argued, would be very much influenced by the opinions of those under whose care she was, and on this account Sir Robert had taken much pains to stand well in the estimation of the Langtons, husband and wife. He had, to use his own phrase,
‘drawn out’ the worthy rector to dilate upon his favourite topics and to air his cherished theories, confident that by playing the part of a sympathetic listener he should best earn the good word and the good-will of the reverend rector. He had entered into Mrs. Langton’s pursuits, too, actually taking the trouble to send to London for recent works on botany and floriculture, that he might read up the subjects, and take rank as a kindred spirit with the simple-minded lady. He had humoured the very children, praised and patted the fat white ponies, sipped the tea, and taken a deep interest in the aquarium. The shrewd baronet felt confident that he should find Mr. and Mrs. Langton his well-wishers when once the subject of matrimony should be mooted.

Sir Robert, however, like many another
mercenary wooer, was reluctant to commit himself by a downright proposal. How if he should offer himself, how if the girl should accept him, either willingly or yielding to the advice of her judicious friends, and then it should turn out that there was some unexpected hitch, something wrong about that seventy thousand pounds—that golden magnet which had attracted the wily lord of Shirley to Violet’s side? He could not quite trust Crouch. The man was malignant as well as headstrong. It might be that something would yet come betwixt the cup and the lip, and the baronet’s splendid hopes be doomed to disappointment. For the few poor annual hundreds to which Violet was undoubtedly entitled he cared, very naturally, nothing. It would be ruin, simple ruin, for a man in Sir Robert’s
position to marry a penniless girl; and Violet’s tiny income was not sufficient to put her outside the category of penniless girls. What was the use of such an income—guarded by settlements, no doubt, so that the petty principal should not be touched—to a needy gentleman of high degree, such as was Sir Robert Shirley of Shirley? What a drop—what a ridiculous drop—would it be in the ocean of his debts! And such a marriage would add the last straw to the load under which his patient tradesmen and enduring money-lenders groaned. He would have thrown away his chance. Hitherto he had been reckoned as a marrying man, or rather, a marriageable man, whose rank, pedigree, and qualifications would provide him with ample resources one day, did he but play his cards properly, and marry a rich wife.
But how if he married a poor wife? What would Shylock—Baron Shylock, if you please—say to such an alliance? What would Simon Longtick, of Bond Street, army tailor and discounter of bills to the nobility and gentry, say to it? Beeswing and Loader the wine merchants, Rattler the coachmaker, and many more, would consider their titled customer as a counterfeit coin that had lost its value, and act accordingly.

What Sir Robert wished was to touch Violet's heart, or if not her heart—for he was somewhat sceptical as to the sentimental uses of that organ—then her fancy, and to have her safe and secured: 'booked,' as he himself called it, to him. He wished her to be in love with him until such time as, after ascertaining with business-like precision the accuracy of the
Australian gold-digger's statements as to her pecuniary expectations, he felt justified in declaring himself to be in love with her. As it was, he preferred to hint, and to look, and to insinuate what he had not the manhood and the honesty to say.

No course which the baronet could well have followed could have been more disagreeable, and at the same time more embarrassing, for Violet Mowbray. She had not had the hardening training which enables the well-seasoned girls of society to vary their moods, like a barometer, according to the pretensions of a suitor, from 'stormy' to 'set fair,' nor had she ever had occasion to frown. So she was obliged to let Sir Robert talk, and to have an uncomfortable suspicion that he regarded herself as a shy, shallow-brained
little thing, while it was quite out of her power to induce him to transfer his homage to somebody else. And then, too—so little is a good girl capable of fathoming the nature of a bad man—there were times when Violet doubted as to whether she was not ungrateful in regarding Sir Robert's advances as she did. Whether Sir Robert would much have relished the idea that he was tolerated as a kind, fatherly gentleman, is uncertain; but with all his good looks, and deft horsemanship, and goodly presence, Violet was apt to consider him in some such capacity—just as in Eastern countries the youthful beauty who peers through the latticed window of the zenana to see the procession go by, with prancing steeds and guards and gholaums, cymbals clashing and trumpets sounding, never thinks of the
middle-aged pasha as a possible spouse, until the day when the bargain is struck, and the wedding presents ordered, and everything got ready for the marriage feast.

'As I rode up here to-day,' said the baronet, in an altered tone, 'I could have found it in my heart to wish that I had been in Yorkshire all my life. We men of the world are often envied because of the bustle and stir and glitter of a life spent in courts and cities; but I think people are wrong. I know that since I have seen Woodburn, and the quiet contented happiness of those who dwell there, I have wished more than once that I were one of them, and no mere sojourner in the land. I feel as though, in front of the sunny sea and amidst those rustling woods, real peace might be found—if I
were but in orders, now, and if Mr. Langton would but have accepted me as a curate at Woodburn.'

Violet, for once, could not help laughing.

'You cannot be serious, Sir Robert?' she said. Perhaps the idea just conjured up of the worldly baronet going through the daily grind of parochial duty, the schools, the visiting, the Dorcas Sewing Society, as well as officiating in the village church, was too much for her gravity. Sir Robert bit his lip angrily. He had ventured on his little bit of sentiment, and it had not only fallen flat, but had provoked mirth. The girl was not, then, so complete a simpleton as he had chosen to consider her. But it was not his cue to be offended; so he replied, with well-assumed good-humour,

'Yes, Miss Mowbray, you are quite right
and I was quite wrong. I should make a sorry figure as a curate, and deserve your ridicule. We never know ourselves. I may feel desire for a quiet life of peaceful usefulness, and be absurd, quite unintentionally, for wishing to become a humble worker in the world's vineyard.'

There was somewhat of sadness in the speaker's tone, and Violet, whose sympathies were quick and tender, was about to say a gentle word or two, when sudden help appeared. It arrived in the person of Lord David Todhunter, tall, portly, jovial, his amber-tinted whiskers dashed with grey, and his white waistcoat gleaming in the sun. He was not alone. He came at the head of a party of the younger visitors, amongst whom Charley Fitzgerald and the Piminy girls were conspicuous.

'I say, Shirley,' began the blithe, but
impecunious, brother of his solemn Grace of Pentland, 'since you are Grand Vizier here, and Lady Thorsdale leaves everything to you, do tell us whether the Saturday picnic is to be at Bolton Crag or Bottomley Briars. Of course we all know the crag is the most picturesque, and so forth, but then it's awfully bleak up there if the wind spins up from the wolds, and five miles' further driving along a very ill-kept road. Now, Bottomley Briars is snug, with a cosy inn, where we can all take shelter if it rains. But then it's damp along the river there, and the earl is afraid of his gout. A very ticklish thing, that gout.'

'I never had the gout. It would be a new sensation. Don't you think so, Miss Piminy?' demanded the hussar.

'You always are too absurd, Mr. Fitz-
gerald," responded the handsome, dull-witted, eldest daughter of anxious Lady Piminy.

'And I want to hear what Sir Robert decides about the picnic,' chimed in her younger sister.

What Sir Robert, who had too much tact to look annoyed, decided as to the relative merits of the rival sites for that *al fresco* festivity, matters little. At any rate, for the moment there was an end of his courtship. Babble, chatter, and banter prevailed, and Violet was enabled to leave the rose-garden without further vexation from the importunity of her suitor.
CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

Rufus Crouch, clad in a coarse white slop suit, like a dock labourer or navvy, and puffing forth smoke from the short and blackened pipe that was his almost inseparable companion, came striding up the long and narrow valley that led from the sea-coast to that hollow in which his unenviable dwelling stood. He walked more swiftly, and more strongly too, than could have been conjectured of a man of his build. And indeed it is a mistake to sup-
pose that a cross-built, ungainly figure, like that of Rufus, is necessarily unfit for speed, whether at a walk or a run. Your flashing Mercury, your clean-limbed, perfectly proportioned athlete of course leads the van, but there is many a shambling fellow, such as the gold-digger was, who could press hard on his heels in a long race. Rufus Crouch was very strong; you could tell that, in spite of his crab-like gait, by the rapidity with which he mounted every steep little bit of the hilly road, and by the fact that he never paused to take breath. He, like Sir Robert Shirley, was not in his first youth, but he bore his years and the hardships he had gone through even better than the well-preserved baronet endured the flight of time.

Very sullen and very dark was the knit-
ted brow of the ex-gold-digger and actual jet-hunter. Rufus Crouch as a child had been the terror of his little play-fellows—a surly, disputatious boy, who wanted always to win at games, to snatch toys, to have the lion’s share at treats and bun-feasts. In adolescence and in manhood he had been much the same, more cautious, but not less grasping than of old, always fierce, selfish, greedy, beneath the Southern Cross of Australia as beneath the Pole-star of England—always a ‘bad chum’ among the rude adventurers of the gold-fields, as he had been thought reckless and ill-conditioned among his fellow-parishioners at home.

He had not improved in temper during the months he had spent in Yorkshire as a member of the jet-hunters’ band. He was shrewd and bold and strong, and he...
had won for himself a sort of position among them, but nobody liked him, nor did he care to be liked. It suited his savage humour to live alone in the hut he had raised on land that was none of his, and without a neighbour save the hill-fox and the hawk.

Rufus reached his solitary dwelling. The wind, as usual, set in from the sea-ward, and the dogs, scenting the approach of a human being, set up their hoarse clamour that grew louder as the distance lessened. But presently the fierce barking changed into a whimpering cry as the chained hounds recognised their master. That amiable person, however, made it his first duty to walk round to the kennels of his four-footed sentinels, and kick them all sharply with his nailed boots for their breach of discipline.
'I'll teach you, you brutes!' he growled out, as a bear endowed with human speech might have done; and then he laughed within his red shaggy beard to see how the ferocious mastiffs cowered and crouched beneath the threatening eye and lifted hand. Then the ex-gold-digger pulled out a key from his baggy pocket, and unlocked the clumsy door of the hovel in which he dwelt. He went in, shutting the door behind him. It was a hot July evening. In that hollow amidst the uplands the sea-breeze was not able to cool, through the narrow glassless apertures that were called windows, the low-roofed hut.

'A nice, comfortable sort of crib, this!' grumbled Rufus, looking about him sourly; 'a nice sort of lodging, rather! A regular tent and a rainless sky, such as I've been used to, would do better for an
overlander like myself. I've got coin enough, even if Sir R. wouldn't cash up—as he must, if I tackle him properly—to take me back to Eaglehawk Rush, or the Buckland, or Omawha, or even the new reefs, Queensland or Tasmania way. But then how a man must work, with beef and flour and tea and pickles at such a price—just like a horse for his hay and oats. And then, my friend here'—he clutched his big stoneware spirit-bottle as he spoke, and, groping for a dingy glass, filled himself a bumper, and tossed it off—'does double the mischief there that it does in this foggy old country climate. I feel that, and I can't do without the comfort of it. I should be a madman to go back poorer than I came, when I left the hospital at Melbourne, and they gave me back my clothes and the rest of my swag, and the
surgeon complimented me on my constitution, and bade me go back to England, work hard, put on the muzzle where drink was concerned, and live to the age of a hundred. Here I am; and what's the good of it?" querulously demanded Mr. Crouch, looking to right and left at his squalid furniture and the grimy gloom of the interior of his dwelling; and then, as if disappointed of an answer, consoled himself by tossing off in rapid succession two more glasses of the fiery liquor which the stoneware bottle contained. He felt amidst the miscellaneous litter that strewed his rough table until he found the match-box, and then, striking a light, he kindled the great petroleum lamp that stood conspicuously in the centre of the board. The bright gleam flashed upon the pannikins and cooking utensils of tin,
lit up the darksome corners of the hut, and irradiated the ruddy beard and broad uncomely face of the grisly master of this unpromising abode.

'Robinson Crusoe they call me, the fools!' he growled, mockingly. 'Squire Crouch, I reckon, will be the word the day they see me in a carriage of my own, and with smarter clothes than a farmer's Sunday best.' This soliloquy seemed to suggest to the fierce recluse a new train of thought. He dragged over towards the end of the table the great glaring lamp, and next took from a locker near him a wooden box of small size, which he unlocked with the help of a tiny key attached to his silver watch-chain. Seating himself on the empty barrel that did duty for a chair, he produced from his pockets several pieces of coarse brown paper, carefully
folded, each of which contained a sample of sand, some glistening white, others of a darker hue. Then taking from the box a small bottle labelled 'Quicksilver,' he poured a few of the shining globules into the hollow of his hand, tilted them into one of the papers that held the sand, tossed the whole into a small bottle half full of water, and shook the bottle vigorously for some minutes. Then he emptied it into a shallow pan, and through a lens keenly inspected its contents. Apparently the result was in part satisfactory, for, with a fresh growl, he took out of the box an end of wax-candle, which he lighted, a shallow spoon, which looked as if it were of tin, but was of that infusible metal called platinum, and a blow-pipe of brass, with an ivory mouth-piece and a platinum nozzle, fit to bear the fierce flame that
wears away commoner metals so rapidly. With the point of a penknife, also taken from the box, he laid the little grey lumps of amalgamated sand and quicksilver in the hollow of the spoon, and then, lifting the blow-pipe to his mouth, sent a stream of continuous flame against each little grey lump of moist sandy matter. For some minutes the process went on, and the ex-gold-digger, who must have possessed a technical knowledge that few of his fellows can lay claim to, paused, laid aside his blow-pipe, and through his magnifying-glass took a survey of the results.

'Specks, mere specks,' he said, resentfully, as he contemplated the tiny golden spangle, faintly glimmering amidst the dull grains of unaltered sand. 'Not a liv-
AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

ing to be made out of a creelful of it. No, no; it won't do here.'

Rufus Crouch was neat-handed, however, in putting away the blow-pipe, and shallow platinum spoon, and the other objects which he had taken from the box, and in re-locking and stowing away the box itself. Then he stood scowling, with his brawny arms folded across his broad chest.

'England is the place for gold,' muttered the ruffian, after a few minutes of meditation; 'but then, you must have a full pocket to pull upon. Here, after all, will prove to lie a bigger nugget than ever Bendigo gold-fields or Hunger Rush produced when they were at their best.'

As he spoke he walked up to a corner of the hut where sundry tools were stacked,
selected a crowbar, small, sharp-pointed, and made of as good steel as ever Sheffield sent forth, and, armed with this instrument, and carrying the great petroleum lamp, he approached the now fireless hearth, on which there lay, cold and dead, the ashes of his fire of peat and wood.

As he did so, the watchful dogs without set up their hoarse and frantic baying. Their ferocious master, striding to the glassless casement nearest to him, silenced them by a volley of curses and threats, and then, as the cowed animals slunk back to their lairs, resumed the occupation which their clamour had interrupted.

Using the strong steel crowbar with considerable skill, Rufus Crouch managed to lift the heavy hearthstone and to sway
it to one side, giving to view beneath a cavity artfully contrived to serve as a place of deposit for articles too precious to be left in some cupboard or unprotected receptacle in a house so tenantless. The hole only held two objects: the one a common jar of baked clay, with a lid, such as in Holland is used for the storage of tobacco, the other a large tin box, fastened by a padlock.

Rufus lifted the lid of the Dutch tobacco-jar, and threw a casual glance at the money—gold, silver, and copper coins mixed together—that lay below. Then he replaced the cover, and unlocking the padlock with a key which, like that other which he first employed, was attached to his silver watch-chain, he drew forth a number of papers and parchments, most of which were documents inscribed in that legal copper-plate
which so impresses the uninitiated with the majesty of law. From these, after some search, he separated a particular deed, and seating himself on some rude substitute for a chair, and planting the large lamp at a corner of the unplaned table, began, for the hundredth time, with greedy eyes to study its contents.

Not a doubt about it, he muttered—‘all that sum of seventy thousand pounds, Consolidated Three per Cents., with all unclaimed back dividends therefrom accruing, belongs as certainly to Violet, only daughter—’

Here the lonely student’s interested commentary on the legal document in his clutch was interrupted by a whining cry from the dogs without, a tap at the door, the lifting of the latch, and it was Obadiah
Jedson's towering figure that now darkened the doorway.

'Here, Rufus, man!' said the deep, resonant voice of the captain of the jet-hunters; 'you must be deaf or busy. I knocked before, and I gave the word before I came in. However, all's well; only time is short.'

'What's up, captain?' confusedly demanded the occupant of the hut, as he huddled together the law papers that lay before him on the untidy table, and looked askance at the new-comer. 'I was asleep, I think, and didn't hear you, and the bar wasn't on the door; and those accursed brutes outside,' he added, with unjust anger against his four-footed guards, 'didn't bark, and be hanged to them for a set of mangy curs, not worth their meat!'
All this time the ex-gold-digger was very busily collecting his law papers, and thrusting them, with all possible efforts to screen them from observation, into the tin box whence they came, and which still remained in the cavity beneath the raised hearthstone. 'I was reading—a thing I don't often do,' said Crouch, with a constrained laugh: 'poring over a lot of old letters, and they sent me to sleep as I sat. What's stirring, Captain Jedson?'

'We ought to be?' answered old Obadiah, frowningly, as his strongly-marked features and long grey locks came within the radius of the lamp-light. 'In digging the foundations for the new pier at Daneborough, jet traces have been found—very good ones, since nine pounds' weight were picked up by mere children in a couple of hours. I have seen the stuff and the
place, and how the bearings lie, and I have been round to summon the lads and women to muster at Daneborough old pier at five to-morrow morn. In your turn, Rufus mate, I have come to you. I look to you as my lieutenant, in Don's place. And that is why I am here.'

'Don's turned gentleman, ain't he?' sneeringly asked the confederate of Sir Robert Shirley. 'A pleasanter trade for him than jet-seeking, I guess, and a safer.'

'Don dragged you, body and bones, out of what would else have been your grave in the Soldiers' Slough, comrade Rufus,' retorted old Obadiah, with such dignified sternness of rebuke that the ruffian quailed before the severe regard of the gaunt captain of jet-hunters; 'and, as for taking a new trade, it is held by all of us along
this coast that my foster-son is a gentleman born. But I did not come here to talk of our Don, who will be back with us one day, but of the work of the morrow, mate. I have others to call, who live far away. Can I count on you, Crouch, to make one?'

'You see, captain, that Dutchman's Bay job did sicken a chap,' grumbled Crouch, irresolutely, and always with his eyes wandering to the gaping space beneath the raised hearthstone.

'No man in a free country is forced to follow a calling against his will,' rejoined Obadiah, in his deep, rich voice. 'Not a stroke have you done, Rufus, since that time. It has been slack tide, I won't deny, with most of us since then; but this is a new harvest to reap, and I, as captain, must know on whom to rely.
Are you a jet-hunter still, and one of our company?'

'Ay, ay, captain,' was the sulky response.

'Then to-morrow at five o'clock I shall look to see you, comrade, at Daneborough old pier, where all are to meet. And now I must not tarry, for I have far to walk yet. You'll be there?'

'Yes,' sullenly replied Rufus; 'yes, I'll be there—never fear me; I'll be there.'

And so they parted.
CHAPTER III.

THROUGH THE MIST.

'Don't give that horse to my daughter, I beg you, Mr. Burt.'

Such had been the words of anxious Lady Piminy.

'Certainly not, my lady,' had been the respectful answer of the eminently respectable stud-groom; but, when it came to sorting the steeds for the riding-party from Thorsdale Park, Mr. Burt was puzzled.

There were plenty of sound horses, only
fit for a male rider. There were three or four lame horses, which, if only right all round, could have carried a lady. As it was, the supply of side-saddle nags was not quite equal to the demand.

'The white—Lily, I mean—for Miss Piminy. Young Mrs. Scoresby can have the chestnut from London—it fidgets; but she has been often out with the hounds, I'm told, so it won't matter. Lady Paget, the black mare; Miss Martin, the roan cob; Miss Leader, the cream-coloured pony; and for Miss Mowbray, the mettled grey.'

'I don't know about putting Miss Mowbray on the mettled grey, Mr. Burt,' demurred the thoughtful head-groom, who may have expected, in the fulness of time, himself to blossom into the stud-groom variety of the species.
'It must be so,' returned his chief, chewing a straw; 'Lady Piminy won't have him for her young lady. Miss Martin couldn't sit him, nor yet Miss Leader, while Lady Paget and Mrs. Scoresby choose their own mounts for themselves. Yes, we must give the mettled grey to Miss Mowbray from the parsonage. He's not really vicious.'

'Of course not, Mr. Burt, not right-down vicious, only a little awkward and difficult to ride,' demurely assented his prudent subordinate.

There are some speeches, as there are some political documents, in which it is permissible—if such a phrase may be employed—to read between the lines. And when an earl's trusted stud-groom makes the qualified assertion that such and such an animal is not so flagrantly vicious as
to make it absolutely unsafe to place a fair rider on his back, and an earl's trust-
worthy head-groom expresses a guarded deference for the opinion of his superior officer, the steed in question is pretty sure to be what ordinary mortals, uninterested in taking a rose-coloured view of the situation, would unhesitatingly designate as vicious.

A word here as to the superior class of stable-servants in great households. They are not, considering the temptations that lie in their path, sinners beyond the average. They very often have the credit of their employer's establishment much at heart; 'do justice,' to quote their own words, to the valuable equine property committed to their charge, and are too zealous to deserve the reproach of being mere time-servers. But, then—alas that
there should be a 'but'—some of them are prone, like Hotspur's noble correspondent, to love their own barn better than their master's house—or, in other words, to prefer a little present profit to the ultimate advantage of their employer. It has, in hunting shires, passed into a proverb that the rich men, Plutus and Midas, and the Marquis of Carabas and Sir Bullion, own the lame horses.

How odd it is! and how curious a reversal it seems of the usual conditions of life, where the magic wand of gold smoothes away difficulties just as the pick and spade level hillocks and fill up hollows, that a wealthy man like, we will say, Sir Bullion, who has discreetly bought his seat in Parliament with the money his father and grandsire made, should be worse mounted at a pinch than
are gentlemen who do not pay a tithe of his enormous income-tax; or, for that matter, Farmer Bullfinch, who honestly takes his share of the sport, and is seldom absent at a finish? Yet Sir Bullion's stables, and, for the matter of that, those of Midas Blunt, Esq., from Crutched Friars, E.C., who sells the worst port wine and gives the best dinners in London, and of the most noble the Marquis of Carabas himself, are crowded with cripples. 'Not fit to go!' is the apologetic phrase so constantly poured into the ears of rich horse-owners that they ought to wonder why Jack Fortescue, once of the Blues, and plain, shrewd Mr. Tidmarsh, get so much amusement at so insignificant a cost. Yet the fact remains.

'Can't ride Bolus, my lord!'—'Indeed, Sir Bullion, Tomnoddy's feet are too
tender yet to stand a bucketing with the hounds.'—'If I were your grace, I wouldn't really have out Royal Regent this week. That back sinew,' &c.

The truth is that the chief grooms in such establishments have too many fingers in the pie, too selfish an interest in the purchase of horses, to make their handling of them a matter of such moment as it might otherwise be. Sir Bullion and the marquis buy and sell very much according to the advice of Mr. Strapper, the stud-groom. And that circumstance is remarkably well-known to many of those ingenious dealers who can do almost anything with a fairly-bred and tolerable-looking quadruped of the genus Equus. Long rest, great care, and vigilant grooming can accomplish marvels in palming off four-footed invalids as sound horses, and a
lavish tip to Mr. Strapper does the rest. The astute stud-groom, once he has pocketed the crumpled bank-notes that, accompanied by a knowing wink, are thrust into his ready hand, takes an indulgent view of the whole transaction, and gives abundant proof of his possession of that tolerant charity which thinks no evil.

'Many a nag we think ruined,' thus soliloquises Mr. Strapper, 'turns out really good after a bit of care.'

And the care, amounting to excessive caution, is seldom lacking when we compare the amount of service done with the formidable muster-roll of horses that are there to do it.

But Mr. Burt, stud-groom at Thorsdale Park, had a conscience of his own, a little dulled, it may be, but not entirely callous,
and that inward monitor pricked him somewhat as he went about the place in the course of his habitual routine. How well he remembered the purchase of the mettled grey! He could recollect the very words with which Mr. Mottram, the horse-dealer—Mottram, senior partner in the house of Mottram and Macspivin—had overruled his scruples.

'A little hot, perhaps, Mr. Burt, as you say—but then, for a young horse, rising six, and with his work before him, that's not much of a fault. In the stable a lamb, and will be as quiet as a lamb on the road, too, after a few months. What he wants is something to do.'

And Mr. Mottram had put into the stud-groom's hand something that chinked, and something too that rustled, as the promises of the old lady of Threadneedle
Street are apt to rustle, and Mr. Burt had been able to reconcile it to his conscience to recommend the grey horse as 'good and safe,' not to the earl, his noble master, but to Mr. Sharpe, the earl's secretary, who, for his part, knew no more of horses than he did of elephants, but was willing to accept the assurance of an approved expert.

And now Miss Mowbray, from Woodburn Parsonage, was to be the rider of the mettled grey, and the girl was not more used to riding, or perhaps more brave, than the majority of her sex. And Mr. Burt, the stud-groom, hoped that no harm would come of it, and wished, perhaps, that he were himself a little less anxious to conciliate talkative lady guests such as Mrs. Scoresby, and even that he had never fingered Mr. Mottram's money; but there
was no help for it. Lady Piminy had spoken, and Miss Mowbray was to ride the mettled grey.

The riding-party set out from the great house gaily enough. The day was fine, though a little ominous haze hung about the horizon to windward, like those sable cloud-banks that in tropical latitudes portend the coming hurricane. Up the road leading towards the high moors, the trampling squadron went, the merry notes of blithe talk and the silvery sound of girlish laughter floating on the summer wind. There were the six young ladies, two married and four unmarried, and with them a masculine escort of sufficient strength, without including the grooms, who brought up the rear. There was Lord David Todhunter, who rode another man's horse, as he relished another man's
diners and claret, most heartily, and who really seemed to earn his eleemosynary quarters by the genial fashion in which he enjoyed their comforts. There were Sir Robert Shirley, and the other baronet, Sir Harker; and young Charley Fitzgerald; and Mr. Tracker the African explorer, who had been tattooed and qualified by a nose-ring in the course of his travels in savage lands; and Mr. Smart, M.P. for some metropolitan borough—a sort of Parliamentary free lance, always bent on earning renown by making himself disagreeable to both factions, and of whom it was said that at the impending General Election he would be kept out of the House, if the united strength of Government and Opposition could avail to exclude him.

The start was a satisfactory one. Not
a horse, when brought round to the grand entrance to be mounted—always a trying ordeal to a steed of spirit, and wherefore our prosaic ancestors had stone mounting-blocks set at their doors to testify to their superior wisdom—but behaved well. Not an animal showed a sign of temper, save only the hot little chestnut, one of the new mounts from London, that was to have the honour of carrying young Mrs. Scoresby. Mrs. Scoresby was pretty, or at least prettyish—in the third flight, so far as good looks went, of fashionable London married ladies. But she was cleverish as well as prettyish, and men were glad to talk with her, because she amused them, and so spared them the trouble of racking their brains for something to say, while as to her riding there was no mistake. She had earned a reputation with the buck-
hounds last year, and meant to make sleepy Colonel Scoresby take her to Melton or Market Harborough to win fresh laurels in the season to come. Lady Paget, too, was a first-rate horsewoman. The Miss Piminy who rode, like her sister who sang and her sister who danced, was merely an animated doll on a quiet horse. Miss Martin and Miss Leader thought themselves heroines on their respective mounts, the cob and the pony. Violet Mowbray, who had had little practice, sat the mettled grey gracefully enough.

One riding-party, as a rule, is very like another. The horses are more or less fretful or quiescent, and so are the riders. Some young beauty bites her red lip and tugs at her curb-rein until her sensitive horse is in a lather of froth and heat,
because the right man has not ridden up to accompany her. The right man himself is frowning, or looking ineffably bored, because he has been intercepted by some tiresome talkative girls, or more likely some elderly damsels, who demand at his hands the small services that no one can refuse—'If you would, Captain Blank, just let out a link of the curb-chain;' or 'Might I ask you to tell the groom that my niece's saddle is slipping round to the right? Thank you; so kind!'

But at last people generally contrive, as on foot, to select their company for themselves. So it was with the party from Thorsdale. Of course Sir Robert Shirley was often beside Violet, but not exclusively so, for Mrs. Scoresby was exacting, and at times noisily satirical, and he did not
as yet choose to exhibit himself in the character of a declared lover.

Presently, without warning, except to the practised eye of some gamekeeper or shepherd, had such been there, a mist swooped down from the lofty moors, rolling, in its sombre majesty, like a tumbling sea over the purple heather, the gold-blossomed gorse, and the paler yellow of the broom-banks, hiding the bare rocks, the peat mosses, the scattered farm-houses, the fields, every sign and landmark, as if a sudden deluge had blotted them from the map of the county. In Yorkshire, as in Scotland, such mists do fall, with an abruptness that is almost theatrical. Battles have been lost under such conditions, which might have been won had light lasted.
'What are we to do now?' demanded Mrs. Scoresby, loudly.

'Oh, rattle along! it's all right. We shall manage it capitally, in spite of the fog; shan't we, Miss Mowbray?' cheerily responded Charley Fitzgerald. 'We are on the York Road, aren't we, Topham?'

'Right as a trivet!' replied Sir Harker. 'Better keep together, though, for these moorland mists are no joke.' So they rode on, but as they rounded the next angle of the road, it so happened that a gipsy tent was pitched there, a cart standing, a horse tethered, a swarm of swarthy urchins buzzing about, and, worst of all, a bright crackling fire burning. Violet Mowbray's mettlesome grey could not bear the sight, but snorting, and mad with fear, it swerved, reared, and, taking the bit between its teeth, dashed off along the road, and
vanished in the mist. The thing happened so quickly that everyone was taken by surprise.

'Bolted with her! I do hope she can keep her seat till he's had enough of it, the brute!' exclaimed kind little Charley Fitzgerald, of the hussars, while Lord David Todhunter, who was far in the rear, bawled out inquiries as to what had occurred. Sir Robert, whose wits were quicker, had been also in the rear. He spurred forward now.

'What's this?' he cried. 'She will be killed. Fitzgerald, it's your fault.'

'How could I prevent the beast from bolting?' pleaded the cavalry subaltern. 'Let us gallop on before worse comes of it.' And they rode, helter-skelter, into the blinding mist, clattering along the hard road, until at last Sir Harker, who knew
the country better than the rest, bawled out,

"Stop, stop! Shirley—Lady Paget! we've passed the cross-roads, and I'm sure we're going wrong. I thought I heard a horse faintly to the left. Do pull up, and listen!"

They all reined up. When silence was re-established, the hoof-strokes of a horse, going at a furious gallop, could be distinctly heard to the left.

"That's it. I thought so. The brute has wheeled into the Thrapmore Road, and is heading back towards his own stable. If the poor girl only keeps her seat—but we ought to ride——"

And off they went, even Miss Martin and Miss Leader ceasing to groan at the unwonted exertion, on account of Violet's peril. Sir Harker, who knew the country,
led the way. But neck and neck with him rode Sir Robert Shirley, better mounted, and ready to dash forward, and by rescuing Miss Mowbray from danger to establish a claim to her gratitude that might forward his mercenary courtship.

'What a chance!' he muttered, between his white teeth, as he flew swiftly on. 'What a stroke of luck!—I say, Topham, are you sure we're on the right road?'

'Don't you hear the rattle of the hoofs?' gruffly retorted Sir Harker, who was a good-natured young fellow in the main. 'All I hope is, she won't meet a cart or a carriage, and that the beast will stick to the road.'

On they sped. It is no light matter, the pursuit of a runaway horse, when the
life of one whom we have loved or liked is at stake. Violet Mowbray had won the good-will of almost everybody at Thorsdale, and even hard little Mrs. Scoresby, who was fighting her own upward battle so sedulously that she had seldom time to care for the pains and cares of others, was for once sympathetic. The sound of the terrified horse's hoofs came to their ears like the roll of distant thunder. They hurried on in a long straggling file, Sir Robert and the Yorkshire baronet leading, Mrs. Scoresby and Charley Fitzgerald and Lady Paget next, Lord David bringing up the rear, with the slow-riding damsels under his fatherly care. But the pace was a fast one. Every quadruped there was doing its best. Far off the thunder of the hoofs could be heard, as the runaway horse dashed
on, unseen, through the dense, floating mist.

‘Thorsdale’s near, anyhow!’ exclaimed Sir Harker, as he recognised some familiar objects. Sir Robert spurred on. Presently these two, followed by the rest, but at a long interval, reached the great courtyard, with the block of stabling beyond it. The great yard was brightly lighted now with lanterns and candles hastily brought out. The central point of attraction was a grey horse, specked and wreathed with foam, in a lather of heat, snorting wildly, with distended nostrils, his bridle floating loose, his saddle empty. It was the mettled grey. But where was his rider? None of the grooms, helpers, indoor servants who had come hurrying out could answer that question.
Where was Violet Mowbray?

The grey horse had dashed in, foaming, red-eyed, wild with terror, but riderless. Where was the fair girl that he had borne when he started? That was a question easier to ask than to answer. There were gentlemen, guests who had not been of the riding-party, mixed with the servants, and presently the rest of the riding-party came in. Where was Violet? Sir Robert Shirley frowned his blackest frown and bit his lip savagely. He had thought of a romantic incident, the easy rescue of an unsuspecting heiress—he knew that his good black was speedier than Sir Harker's brown nag—and here had he been uselessly employed in hunting down a runaway horse without a rider. Meanwhile there was eager and excited talk. The earl must be spoken to.
The alarm bell should be rung, rewards offered, the villagers aroused, and with torches and lanterns a search-party sent off, through the mist and across the moors, to find Violet Mowbray, dead or alive.
CHAPTER IV.

DON IS COMPELLED TO SPEAK.

The mist on the high moors, like all such mists, hovered above the ground like a grey winding-sheet, leaving a foot or two of clear air, and rendering it quite possible for a pedestrian, by stooping or kneeling at intervals, to see his way for a few yards, and to ascertain that he had not wandered from the beaten track. Few, however, are those, not moorland-born and bred, who are fit to cross with safety any considerable waste, such as the Yorkshire wolds,
or the more formidable deserts of savage Dartmoor, when once the fog-drift has set in. Don, who had been an apt pupil of the keepers and herdsmen, from whom he had learned a portion of their open-air lore, must have been one of these exceptional persons, since he held to the beaten path across the moor on his way back from some solitary farm, whither he had been despatched on an errand in the course of duty, and reached the cross-roads without blunder or mishap.

What was that lying on the grass by the roadside, quite still? A woman's form, surely; and, as surely, lying there in the awful quiet of death! Yes, it was a lady in a riding-habit, her bright, silken hair loosened, and streaming over her shoulder as she thus lay. That she was young and fair to look upon, Don could
SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, BART.

see; but it was not until he came a step or two nearer, and could recognise the pale, upturned face, that the full horror of the discovery rushed upon him. His own heart ceased to beat. He started back aghast. Violet—Violet Mowbray—cold, dead, for ever gone, in the early bloom of her youthful promise, from the world and from him. The riding-habit, the loosened hair, the marks of hoofs indented in the turf, explained the nature of the accident but too well. With a great sob he rushed forward, and, kneeling on the grass, lifted the lifeless form in his strong arms.

'My darling! my darling!' he cried out, wildly; 'my Violet, my hope, my all!'

There was no response. The fair, helpless young head lay passive on Don's shoulder. He clasped the insensible form to his heart and kissed the pale cheek.
'Oh, my love, my love!' exclaimed the young man, passionately; 'are you gone from me, my dearest? I have worshipped you for years, always hoping—against hope—one day to be worthy of you, and now death has robbed me of the thing I loved the best on earth—my Violet, my angel!'

And again he kissed her, while his tears fell fast upon her pallid face. What was that? Surely a sigh. Violet's lips were parted, her eyes opened feebly, and she moved, as if trying to rise. Half incredulous, in mingled joy and confusion, Don drew back.

'Can it be?' he asked.

'Yes—I—I remember now how it happened,' said Violet, in a weak voice.

'Forgive me—pray, forgive me,' pleaded Don, flushing crimson, and tingling in
every pulse with shame and anger against himself, 'since I thought I had—lost you. Forget my folly, and forgive!'

'There is nothing to forgive, dear friend—noting!' said Violet, in her sweet, low voice, and she put out her little hand to him.

Don clasped it in his own and held it fast.

'I ought not to have spoken,' said Don, contritely, as he aided Miss Mowbray to rise; 'but can it be, dear Violet, that you are unhurt? You have been riding—not, of course, alone? Where are your friends? How could they leave you here? and by what strange coincidence could it be my fortune, out of all the world, to find you here in this solitary spot, and in such a mist as this, which hides the very fence that borders the opposite side of the
road? But you are safe. Oh! tell me again, Miss Violet, that you are unharmed. And lean on me, for you are weak and trembling, as I see.'

Poor Violet had little to tell. There had been a large riding-party from the Park—most things at Thorsdale were done on a great scale—and she had ridden a grey horse that had taken fright, had run away into the blinding mist, had crossed, so she thought, a stretch of moorland, as the hoofs made no noise for awhile, had struck into the hard road, swerved so as to fling her from her saddle with stunning force, and that was all she knew. She had been thrown, and had been senseless, and had lain on the turf beside the road in a swoon, until—until Don found her. As for the horse, it had vanished. And that was all. She said no
more, but there was a reticence in her manner, a shy looking earthwards of those beautiful great eyes of hers, and an avoidance of Don's gaze, which forced upon the young man the conviction that the girl had a perfect memory of how he had clasped her in his arms and kissed her, believing her, as he did, to be dead. And then some chivalrous instinct in his heart awakened, and he felt that he must tell his tale and plead his cause under all disadvantages of worldly position. Because he had gone so far, he was, as it were, bound to go further. He owed it to himself, he owed it to the girl he loved, to tell her how and why he dared to love her. It did not become him, he felt, to take refuge behind the ægis of a maiden's natural timidity and unwillingness to in-
terrogate him. He had said so much that he must say more.

'I ought not to have spoken,' said Don, half penitently, but half proudly too; 'I know that I ought not. For the sake of much kindness from kind Mr. Langton and his wife, it would have been treacherous in me, as well as presumptuous, to breathe a word of love to the young lady who dwelt beneath his roof. I have put a padlock on my lips hitherto, and have schooled my very eyes not to betray me. But this has been too much for my resolve and my reserve. My secret, kept for months and years, has been wrung from me at last. The excitement of that miserable moment scattered all my prudence, all my wise determinations, to the winds. It is true,
Violet—I may call you by that dear name?—that I thought you dead, and that with the loss of you all the joy and brightness of my own young life were gone—gone for ever. So the passionate cry broke from my heart, and so I dared to kiss your cheek, and to clasp you to my breast, and to tell you how I loved—but I was all unaware that your ears, dearest, could drink in my wild words. I must, as I am an honest man, repeat them now. Yes, I, the poor jet-hunter, the nameless, kinless foundling of the sea-beach, have dared to love the highly-connected Miss Mowbray, and at last to tell her so. Now, if you choose to banish me for my presumption, I can but bow my head and go.'

She seemed stronger by this time, and
had let go her hold on his arm, and he stood a little way off, looking intently in her face with his dark, eager eyes—surely as noble and true a lover as ever wooed an earthly damsel in this world of ours. Violet Mowbray glanced at him timidly.

‘You have not—have not offended me, Mr. Don—indeed!’ she said.

He sprang forward, hope, wonder, love flashing from his bright eyes, and again he took her hand.

‘Violet—Miss Mowbray,’ said Don, quickly, ‘can it be that I have heard aright? Can it be that you do not chide me for the presumption, the—’

‘There was no presumption,’ almost whispered Violet. ‘You saved my life, but before that day the recollection of you, the image of you, as the truest
gentleman, the best and bravest I have ever known, had grown to be—I may own it now—very dear to me.'

And then Don took her in his arms and kissed her, and for a few delicious moments the two young things felt as supremely happy as if they had suddenly been spirited away into some enchanted island of their own, where disparities of rank, harsh guardians, and conventional prejudices could find no entrance, and where Love reigned supreme.

‘I used to think, Don, when I read of deeds of chivalry,’ murmured Violet, ‘that had I lived in those old days you should have been my knight, faithful ever and true. And so you would have been, if then, as now, you had chosen poor little me.’

‘I would have died for you then, my
Darling, as I would die for you now,' answered Don, simply; and few chevaliers that ever put on helmet and mail could have been more loyal to a pledge than Obadiah Jedson's foster-son to his. But it became necessary soon to think of sublunary matters. Miss Mowbray, happily, was unhurt; but by this time, no doubt, the tidings of her accident, or at any rate of her runaway steed and his fair rider having been lost to sight in the dense mist, must have reached Thorsdale, and given ground for no unreasonable alarms. There would, so Don conjectured, be a search instituted for the missing member of the riding-party, but in the meantime it was imperative to make the best of their way to the Park, and allay the natural apprehension of Violet's hosts and their friends. They set forth, therefore; Don
insisting that Miss Mowbray—his Violet, as he was never weary of calling her—should lean on his arm as she walked beside him. The distance was not very great, so the young man assured her, and it would be better to reach Thorsdale before the neighbourhood should be aroused to scour lane and road in quest of the lost guest.

As Don and Violet walked together towards Thorsdale, they talked and thought—with the delightful egotism, if so it may be called, of newly-plighted lovers—of themselves, or rather, of each other. Of actual plans or projects for the future, little or nothing was said. Was not the future all rose-colour, since each of those two was loving and beloved? It was enough for Don that Violet should have cared for him, jet-hunter though he had
been. It was enough for Violet that Don was all her own. It would have spoiled that fairy-tale, their new-found happiness, to be too precise as to what would be the next step. Mr. and Mrs. Langton were forgotten, and we may be sure that not a thought was wasted upon Miss Mowbray's guardian, honest, rigid Ephraim Marsh, of Dagger Court, E.C. The present was in itself all-sufficient.

Presently, as Thorsdale itself was approached, the mist seemed to grow thinner, and the tall trees and high deer-pailings of the Park loomed more and more distinctly through the shifting sea of vapour. And at last the courtyard of the mansion was reached, that lighted yard where horses were being saddled and carriages got ready by the glare of links and lanterns, and where already a number of outdoor ser-
vants and hangers-on had assembled, and were waiting for orders.

Mr. Tracker, the African traveller, was there conspicuous, somewhat boastfully declaring that he could 'trace a spoor,' whether of brute or being, with any man, black or white, from Capetown to Zanzibar, and insisting that the exploring-party should be placed under his orders. And there was Sir Robert Shirley, frowning and silent, standing beside his black horse, the bridle of which a helper held, and in his wily brain bewailing the probable overthrow of his cherished schemes. Several of the gentlemen there, however, were most unselfishly anxious to scour the country, at any cost of fatigue to themselves, so as to bring aid to the presumed victim of the recent accident. That the grey horse had, after unseating his rider,
doubled back by another road, thus throwing out his pursuers, and headed for Thorsdale Park and his own stable, was pretty clearly divined by this time, but there was nothing to indicate the route which in his headlong career he had traversed.

Violet's arrival under Don's charge occasioned a great relief to many minds, and put an end to the wild conjectures which were current as to her fate.

A strange sight it was as the crowd, the lights, and the clamour all converged towards where the young girl stood, pale and lovely, with dishevelled hair, leaning on the arm of the young man, handsome and graceful enough to have been a prince of romance, but whom many knew to be the new clerk in Lord Thorsdale's land-office, and some few among the underlings knew to be Don the jet-hunter. A fair
young couple they looked as for a moment they stood there side by side. Sir Robert Shirley's brow darkened as he saw by whom it was that Violet was escorted. He stepped forward, but, before he had time to speak, the joyful news had spread from lip to lip, and kindly, rubicund Lord David Todhunter came hurrying up, with almost the air of a guardian.

'My dear young lady, welcome back!' he exclaimed. 'Bless my soul! what a marvellous escape! and what a fright you have given us! So this gentleman found you? I am sure we are much obliged to him. And you are not hurt? That's nice. Please to take my arm and come this way, for the countess is very anxious and distressed; and no wonder.'

So Violet was hurried into the house, with short space for leave-taking; and
Don, having given as brief an account as he could of the circumstances of his meeting with Miss Mowbray, withdrew himself as early as possible from the noise and comments of the crowd.
CHAPTER V.

THE LETTER.

'Sir Robert's room to be redded up,' said the chief housemaid, who came from the East-Riding, and spoke not exactly broad Yorkshire, but rather the narrow vernacular of that famous county. The room which was assigned at Thorsdale Park to Sir Robert Shirley was just then vacant. The countess would, with sisterly regard, especially when visitors had to be amused and kept in good-humour, have preferred that her elder brother should be always
beneath her roof, but often the baronet chose to dine and sleep at his own house, Helston, sometimes even to absent himself for a couple of days at a time from the gaieties of Thorsdale. Now he was expected back, and, of course, the chamber which had been allotted to him, and which overlooked a corner of the rose-garden, had to be got ready for his reception. Who has not seen the feminine bustle and stir when a visitor, loved or respected, was on the point of arrival?—the incessant bustling, flutter, rustling, and stir, as fresh preparations are made, the furniture pushed hither and thither, the curtains draped more gracefully, the pretty knick-knacks, the fresh flowers, re-adjusted, and the finishing touches put, for the twentieth time perhaps, to the adornment of the chamber.
The Countess of Thorsdale was too great a lady to occupy herself personally with such matters as the inspection of an expected visitor's room; but, then, she put great faith in the taste of her clever foreign maid, Mademoiselle Glitka. When the English servants had done their work, mademoiselle—as they all called her with unwilling respect—was summoned, and she alone remained in the room after the other servants had departed, putting the draperies into more elegant folds, making a new disposition of the flowers that filled the vases, and looking around her, lynx-eyed, for the signs of neglect.

She was herself worthy of notice, this Mademoiselle Glitka. Young she was, though probably she looked three or four years older than an English girl of her age would have done. Handsome she was,
though of a swarthy pallor of complexion, and with a thin face and well-cut mobile features. She had raven-black hair, very thick and long, and wound tightly round her small, well-poised head. Her figure was slight and active. But her eyes were her great attraction—eyes that spoke, eyes that flashed, dark, expressive, and at times terrible. Thanks to those eyes, and to her glib tongue, and to her vehement manner, which swept others before it as a whirlwind does the straws and dead leaves, the Hungarian lady's-maid, Mademoiselle Glitka, was more feared in the Thorsdale establishment than was the countess herself. She stood, as was known, high in Lady Thorsdale's favour, and had been clever enough to make herself all but indispensable, not only to the countess, but to the invalid earl.
Lord Thorsdale still often dreamed of the Engadine, but he would as soon have thought of going there without Schültz the courier as without his wife's invaluable maid. Glitka always understood at a word. Glitka saw the situation when others required lengthy explanations. Glitka would have made a better courier than even polyglot and wayworn Schültz himself, had but her age and sex permitted her to assume such a post. The Thorsdale servants deferred to the delegated authority which 'mademoiselle'—they always called her mademoiselle, and never by her name—exercised over them. Her very promptitude of speech took away the slower breath of her insular listeners. Nobody liked her. But the head coachman, who was a wag, sometimes said, with
bated breath, that mademoiselle was 'all there.'

Just then Mademoiselle Glitka was in Sir Robert Shirley's room—not the worst by any means of the many bed-rooms at Thorsdale Park—and was alone. She had ascertained, by the simple process of peeping through the keyhole, that the subordinate domestics were not prying. Perhaps Miss Glitka, on the outer side of doors, had peeped more than once through keyholes, and knew something of the things to be learned by such espionage. At any rate, having satisfied herself that she was not herself the subject of scrutiny, she made haste to institute a special search everywhere.

Sir Robert Shirley, as was not unnatural with a gentleman who, for the moment,
has virtually two homes, had left some clothes behind him. Mademoiselle's pliant fingers explored every pocket as deftly as those of a member of the Paris detective police could possibly have done. But she found nothing: only a photograph of Mrs. Scoresby—a pink, scented, three-cornered note from Lady Paget, asking 'Dear Sir Robert' whether Tomahawk was really sure to win the St. Leger before she put her money on at the long odds. Then, at last, in a drawer she found a letter of another sort. Here it is:—

'Dear Sir R. Shirley, Baronet,

'I am getting so sick of this worn-out old country that unless you soon force on the trump-card I have put into your hand I shall have to play mine, and blow the whole concern sky-high. Mind,
there's no mistake about what I have to sell. The seventy thousand pounds go as surely to Miss V——, and, if she marries without settlements, to her husband, as her name is Violet Mowbray. You, Sir R., are not the man I take you for if you cannot get a "Yes" out of a country-bred young thing like that. I need hardly say, don't spoil your own game and mine by hinting to our innocent what a fortune goes with her at the altar. You are quite fit to hold your tongue when there's money to be lost by speaking. But remember that I'm weary of waiting, and shall have, if you shilly-shally, to clap the other screw on; and remember, too, that there must be a fair share of the swag, as we say in Australia—where I wish I was again—for your old pal,

'**Rufus Crouch.**'
Glitka’s eyes glowed, darkened, glittered, as she perused this epistle. She spoke English, perhaps, better than she read it, but she had good brains and a vivid imagination, and could fill up the gaps with some approximation to the truth. First she folded the letter and thrust it into her pocket. Then, resisting the momentary impulse, she snatched it out again, and taking up the writing materials that lay on a side-table near, she made a rapid, but accurate, copy of the contents of the epistle. The letter itself she put back with scrupulous care into the drawer in which she had found it.

‘I have him now!’ she hissed out, between her shut teeth; ‘I have him, hard and fast! He is in Glitka’s hands, now!’

And, to judge by the tightening of her
lithe, dark fingers, it might have been dangerous to be delivered over to the handling of tiger-footed, bright-eyed Glitka.

'He is expected at noon,' she said, presently, and slipped away.

About noon, Sir Robert Shirley drove up to Thorsdale Park, and went at once to his room. Scarcely had he reached it before there came a light tap at the door, and Mademoiselle Glitka gliding in, and, shutting the door, stood before him.

'I have to speak to you, Milord Sir Robert,' said the girl, looking Sir Robert Shirley very steadily in the face.

'Indeed, have you? From my sister, perhaps?' asked the baronet, irresolutely, but with some annoyance.

'No, but from myself,' answered Glitka,
opening her eyes as a she-panther might have opened hers ere she showed her white fangs and sprang on her prey. ‘You are a lord, it seems. I am miladi’s very humble servant, to obey her bell, to study her caprice. And you are a seigneur. Yet, traitor, craven, dissembler, is not this ring’—and she showed him on her finger a golden hoop set with small blue stones—‘the betrothal-ring you put on my finger at Arad? and are you not my promised husband, if there be faith in old customs or the troth-plight of man?’

‘Upon my word, Glitka,’ answered the baronet, in deprecatory tones, ‘I hoped you had forgotten or learned to take a more reasonable view of anything that was said in far-off Hungary between you and me. How could I be expected to understand your ancient customs, and to be
bound by what seems binding to you? We liked each other, I daresay, but I was a mere traveller, a mere bird of passage, and——'

'And you thought that you could win the heart of the Hungarian girl, and cast it aside like a faded flower?' she flashed out; 'and you knew so little of a Magyar as to believe the thing was safe. Safe!' she repeated, with a sibilant sound like a hiss of a snake. 'No; we of the true race do not brook deceit. I would sooner die than let you wed another than Glitka Eberganyi.'

'Glitka, be reasonable!' expostulated Sir Robert. 'I admired you, of course, and do still, and there was an exchange of rings and the like, but indeed, my good girl, there was never a serious possibility of a marriage between you and me. Such
a thing would have been a simple death-blow to a gentleman in my position. I was then a captain, now I am a baronet with an estate, but scarcely any rents: that much you know. I cannot afford to marry. Certainly, Glitka, even when first I saw you, the belle of the village, at your good old grandfather's great farm-house near Arad, I must have felt that I could not wreck my prospects, seriously, by marrying you.'

'Yet I am as noble as yourself!' fiercely retorted Glitka. 'We are all noble—except a few Slavs, like the glazier and the smith—in our village; first as free Magyars, then as being ennobled by the Empress hundreds of years ago. The Empress-Queen gave the rank of baron to every free peasant who killed a Turkish invader. My ancestors have killed many Turks. Your
own eyes have seen the scimitars and matchlocks of old foes—infidels, turbaned dogs—hanging on the oaken walls of my grandfather's house. And I can remember seeing my grandsire show you, the English stranger, with honest pride, the grand parchment with the gold and colour and the great seal, of the paper from Imperial Vienna that made his grandsire a baron. My father, too, had the rank of baron. I, too, am Baroness Glitka, servant as I am, and mademoiselle as they call me. We peasant nobles, Polish or Magyar, know our value, and will not be dogs to lick a master's feet!'

'Glitka,' answered the baronet, in despair, 'you, with your impassioned nature and your reliance on old usages, scarcely can do justice to a used-up, out-at-elbows gentleman like myself. I am in debt, poor
and worried. There are times when to put a pistol to my head and blow my brains out appears the only natural result of my position. I only wish you would keep quiet, and leave me to battle with my creditors as best I may.'

A woman is seldom cruel to a man who bows his head, and owns himself in the struggle of life defeated and hopeless. Glitka's eyes lost some of their menace, and her voice was softer as she said,

'Yes, for you too, it seems, life is not a bed of roses. Poor milord! poor Robert!'

But in a moment after the tigress-soul in her flamed forth.

'Hear you, Sir Robert,' said her ladyship's confidential maid, with bitter emphasis; 'a woman who has loved, seldom hurts the man who has left her, unless he makes the pain more than she can bear.
So shall it be now. I came over to England, and became a servant, more that I might meet you than for any other cause. The old home is broken up. My uncle's farm—it was his when the grandfather died—has passed into the hands of the Hebrew money-lender who had lent the money on mortgage, and Glitka and her brothers earn their bread as they may. But, little as you deem my words to be true, I have a hold on you, proud Sir Robert, that you can no more shake off than a strayed lamb can get free from the wolf of the woods or the snake of the fens. Marry Miss Violet Mowbray, even for her thousands, and see what comes of it!

She curtsied, and left him.
CHAPTER VI.

The picnic, on a grand scale—for things were liberally done at Thorsdale—duly took place, and it was favoured by the weather, an integral factor in the success of such festivities, and one which not even crowned heads can command. The picnic was at Bottomley Briars. Bolton Crag, the rival site, had its partisans to the last, and it was certainly by far the more picturesque spot of the two; but, as generally happens, the choice of those
with whom lay the ultimate decision was for the snugger locality. Some of the young ladies, and some of the young men, raved about Bolton Crag, which was the most elevated piece of ground in the vast Thorsdale estate, and where there was some really picturesque scenery, such as is so common in Wales, and Devon, and Cumberland, and so rare in the east of England. For a moment it had seemed as if the romantic party would carry the day, so contagious is enthusiasm of any sort. But the old ladies were, very sensibly, afraid of rheumatism, and a whisper, adroitly conveyed to the earl, settled the point. The *al fresco* entertainment was to be in the valley, not amidst the rocks and ancient heathen barrow-tumuli of the purple hills.

Bottomley Briars, it may be mentioned,
was, for a wonder, outside the wide-stretching ring-fence of Lord Thorsdale's great estate. The place for the picnic was on Sir Harker Topham's land, not on that of his noble neighbour. But Sir Harker was only a nominal land-owner, as his tenant, the landlady of the pretty little inn, the 'Topham Arms,' in a meadow near which hostelry the open-air banquet was to be held, very well knew. Mrs. Crummer paid her rent for farm and inn, not to Sir Harker or his agent, but to the solicitors of the mortgagees, Messrs. Abrams, Moss, and Levison, of Crutched Friars, London. And poor young Sir Harker, whose deplenished pockets made him as glad to accept somebody else's hospitality as was Lord David Todhunter himself, made no pretensions to play, on his own freehold, the part of host, but
came as meekly to fulfil the duties of a guest as did Captain Crasher, as to whom no one knew anything—even who his father had been, whence he derived his income, or in what service he had risen high enough to earn the military title that he bore.

It was a fine picnic. Those entertainments vary so much that, at their mention, very different ideas are conjured up. Some of them are improvised, are cheaply and unostentatiously carried out, and are often the very pleasantest of the species. Others are of almost Persian—to quote Horace—cumbrous magnificence of preparation, and may prove costly failures, after all. But one feature there is in common between the picnic elaborate and the picnic simple, and that is that, thanks to the long drive and the pure air, and the
unaccustomed surroundings of the meal, the banqueters are always hungry, like so many emigrants at sea. A mere packet of humble sandwiches may seem then superior to the most artistic mayonnaise of lobster or chicken, and a pigeon-pie a luxury compared with which ortolans, and plovers' eggs, and Isle of Wight prawns, and potted grouse, and chevreuil from the Continent fade into insignificance. Plenty to eat, the absence of rain, and the presence of merry young people will generally carry such a festival to a satisfactory conclusion; and, if minor inconveniences crop up, they are usually remembered afterwards with amused indulgence.

A picnic given by Lord Thorsdale, and planned by his wife, was sure to be on a large and lavish scale.
‘Spend, and spare not!’ constituted the pith of the countess’s directions to Mr. Sharpe, the secretary, and of what she said to her brother, Sir Robert. To no apter hands could she have entrusted the sceptre of delegated authority. Sir Robert Shirley was very glad to propitiate some of his London tradesmen by sending them handsome orders in the earl’s name, while Mr. Sharpe proved himself, as usual, an excellent commissary-general. Everything that was scarce, and dear, and dainty, edible and potable, was conjured down from the metropolitan market, and fresh assistant cooks and confectioners were sent for, just as were the Covent Garden fruit, and salads, and the ice. There would be good music as well as good viands, since a fine band, under the guidance of a renowned band-master, had been engaged,
and would be stationed in ambush, as it were, in an impromptu orchestra at the corner of a leafy grove.

The weather, as has been said, was fine. There had been a shower on the previous morning, but only heavy enough to refresh the greenery of the somewhat parched grass, and to add a new sheen to the soft tints of the leaves of the wych-elms, and now the sky was all but cloudless, and the turf dry and elastic to the tread. There was a little dust, perhaps, as the long train of carriages straggled along the winding road; but nothing can be perfect, and the light, summer toilets of the ladies were not much the worse for the sprinkling. It was not an entertainment confined to those who were visitors beneath the earl's roof at Thorsdale; invitations had been freely distributed, and
sundry neighbours of greater or less degree, and among them the party from the parsonage at Woodburn, had responded to the appeal.

The earl himself had condescended to be present. It was not often that the imperious master of so much wealth graced by his actual presence the special festivities that were planned and executed for the sole, if not ostensible, purpose of keeping him in good humour, and preserving his devoted countess from the exile of the Engadine. Only some three times a week did the earl dine at his own sumptuous table. At breakfast, as at luncheon, he was never seen. But he often spent an hour or two in the evening among his guests, listening to music, or talking to some one whom, for that occasion, he had credited with the faculty of under-
standing him, and of sympathising with the laments of a valetudinarian who believed himself to have been ill-treated by the world at large. But it was very seldom that he would be a spectator of any amateur performance, and this, since the yeomanry review, was the first open-air gathering at which the Right Honourable Algernon, Earl of Thorsdale, had deigned to appear. He came in his carriage, then, propped by his cushions, and surrounded by the many appliances which his nervous fancy suggested as necessary for his broken health; while it was partly on her lord's account that Lady Thorsdale had chosen to bring her confidential maid, Mademoiselle Glitka, out to Bottomley Briars. Servants are taken to picnics, of course, commonly enough, to the great ease and comfort of employers, who
would otherwise be bewildered amidst unpacked hampers and piles of plates: but a lady's-maid is seldom numbered among the attendants at such a merry-making.

'What can it matter,' Captain Crasher had cynically remarked, shrugging his shoulders, as he chalked the tip of his cue in the billiard-room of Thorsdale the night before, 'where we go, or whether we see a prospect, or have to stare at a cow in a field? Périgord pies and truffled turkey, the iced drinks well made and the salad well mixed, constitute a picnic, my boy, if I know anything of such matters, and all the rest is mere sentimental rubbish.'

And Sir Harker Topham, to whom this social sage had addressed his discourse, did not say nay, for there is nothing which a young man dreads so much as
seeming ridiculous in the eyes of his seniors; and Captain Crasher was a practical materialist, of all clubmen the one most certain to take a hard and prosaic, not to say common-place, view of whatsoever subject was under discussion. The Briars was, after all, an exceedingly snug place for a picnic, and, in its way, almost pretty. There was a grove of wych-elms, bordered by thickets of hazel and ash. The river was covered with the broad leaves and great blossoms of the water-lily; there were banks fringed with willows, and an islet beloved of swans. The meadow in which the meal was to be eaten was dry and sheltered, golden with buttercups and silvered with daisies; and then there was the tidy little inn—with its old-fashioned, holly-hedged garden, full of old-fashioned, sweet-scented flowers,
such as Lady Thorsdale's highly-scientific Scotch gardener would never have tolerated at the Park, and its quaint, clean rooms, smelling of lavender—over which the worthy Mrs. Crummer presided, and which was a favourite resort of artists and anglers.

In long array the carriages swept down the winding road, and the guests gathered in force, while the attentive servants, and those auxiliaries engaged for the nonce, who could scarcely be called servants, but rather experts in their different lines, made haste with their preparations. Of course, among the thickets gipsy-fires were lighted. They added to the picturesqueness of the scene, and were supposed to be necessary for the cooking of the fish and the boiling of the vegetables, and the making of the tea and coffee. But it is probable that the
salmon was really boiled and the potatoes really steamed in Mrs. Crummer's commodious kitchen hard by, since that obliging hostess had placed her whole establishment at the disposal of the party from Thorsdale. Then the open-air feast took place, the popping of the corks, the clatter of knives and forks, and the clink of glasses blending not unpleasantly with the melodious strains from the band. Louder and louder swelled the music, and in the intervals between the tunes the laughter and noise of conversation was in itself enough to prove the thing a success.

'I never,' Lady Piminy afterwards said in confidence to a sympathetic friend, 'enjoyed a picnic before. As a rule, I hate them. It is always too hot or else too damp for the girls' dresses and complexions. And you get wasps in your
soup and gnats in your wine-glass, and, if
the moon gets behind the clouds, are as
likely as not to have a carriage accident on
your way home. But this one was really
nice, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.'

Perhaps the chief reason for Lady
Piminy’s enjoyment of the festival at
Bottomley Briars was that she had, by the
exercise of a little feminine diplomacy, got
herself next to the earl, and profited by
his unwonted good temper to extract from
him a promise that he would write to some
very great officials in London, and ‘see
what could be done’ for her muscular, but
dull-witted, darling boys in Warwickshire.
And with a mother’s prescience she already
saw those stalwart dunces promoted to a
comfortable share of the Government
loaves and fishes. As for the younger
members of the party, they, of course,
were cheerful enough, since they had for
the most part been long enough together
in a country house to have become intim-
ate, and it could hardly be that they
should fail to catch the holiday spirit of
the fleeting hour. Presently, too, the
dinner over, and the wearied musicians
having hushed their instruments for the
sake of rest and refreshment, there was a
general move, at least among the junior
guests.

Captain Crasher, Lord David Todhunter,
and a few veterans preferred to keep their
seats in proximity to the fresh supplies of
cunningly compounded claret-cup; while
the earl, who was more talkative than
usual, poured into Lady Piminy's patient
ears an account of his sufferings and his
wrongs, physical and political, and darkly
hinted that he should one day, after re-
covering his health by a sojourn in the Rocky Mountains, revenge himself upon the 'party' that had neglected him, by publishing his memoirs.

Meanwhile, light-coloured dresses fluttered gaily, like so many tropical butterflies, among the willow-trees that bordered the bank of the sluggish stream, and the pleasant sounds of girlish laughter and of young voices floated on the breeze. Mrs. Crummer's garden also was invaded, and the strange old flowers that it contained were admired or quizzed, according to the mood of the explorers. Anything, even those York and Lancaster roses of blended red and white, those stocks, and wall-flowers, and carnations, and picotees, did for a subject of talk, wonder, and amusement, and lent itself somehow to the flirtation without which an expedition such as this
would appear flat and savourless indeed.

Violet Mowbray never knew afterwards how it came about that she found herself alone, as it were, with Sir Robert Shirley in the garden of the inn. She had been standing in front of a bed of the sweet, queer old roses, not very far from a hedge of clipped holly, cut by the shears of some long-dead gardener into the quaint fantastic shapes that the horticulturists of the two last centuries doted upon, but since that time grown out of all likeness to the pea-cocks and elephants of the original design. Two of the Piminy girls and three of the young men had been near, but they had moved off, and their voices could be heard in the distance. There was no one to be seen, except Sir Robert himself.

'I have been watching long for this
opportunity, Miss Mowbray,' he said, gravely. 'I have something to say to you that must be said.'
CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPOSAL.

'SOMETHING to say to me, Sir Robert?'
Violet Mowbray falteringly replied; of course she knew of what he meant to speak.

Of course she divined his intention. A woman's intuition is rarely at fault, except when, as sometimes happens, it perceives non-existent facts, and looks a little too far into the proverbial mile-stone. Violet, however, guessed correctly in supposing that the baronet was about to make a declaration of his feelings towards herself
which must occasion her annoyance, and might cause her pain. She had read in his looks for weeks past, and had heard in the tones of his voice, enough to convince her that he had chosen to single her out as the future Lady Shirley.

Violet's nature was too simple, sweet, and pure for her to derive even the slightest satisfaction from the compliment which a proposal of marriage implies. There are young ladies who take a horrid delight in reckoning up the hearts they have broken, the admirers they have lured on and snubbed, the offers they have rejected, precisely as a Pawnee or Sioux brave points proudly to the human hair that fringes his deer-skin moccasins, and tells shuddering travellers how and where he took the scalps that adorn his holiday attire. But Violet was of another mould.
'Yes, I must speak,' resumed Sir Robert —'and without vanity, Miss Mowbray, I think I may say that you can scarcely be quite unprepared for the disclosure I have to make. You must have seen, you cannot have failed to observe, how very dear you have become to me: how, as if drawn by a power which I cannot but obey, I instinctively seek your company: how attentive I am to the lightest word that falls from those fair lips: how eager to anticipate your wishes, how anxious to conciliate your good opinion. Have I been quite unsuccessful in doing this? I hope not. Fervently I hope not. Do you not like me a little bit, as a friend?' he added, trying to take her hand.

But Violet withdrew her hand. She trembled—not, as she trusted, perceptibly—but her voice was steady as she replied,
'As a friend, Sir Robert, you have, I am sure, always been regarded by everyone at Woodburn, by Mr. and Mrs. Langton and the children, and—all of us, ever since we first saw you.'

The baronet did not, perhaps, much care for being set down as *ami de la maison* at the parsonage, and was possibly nettled that Miss Mowbray should hide herself, as it were, behind the ægis of the Langton family. A slight shadow darkened his white forehead, and he bit his lip.

'You dear little hypocrite!' he exclaimed, energetically, 'do you think I mix you up in my thoughts with excellent Mr. Langton and his charming household? If I have been a frequent visitor at Woodburn, have you not guessed what was the magnet that drew me there? If I neglect my own place,
Helston, and am almost as much at Thorsdale as if I were a permanent resident under its roof, can you not see—does not your heart tell you—why I come? It is for your sake, dear Violet—let me call you so—that I linger in Yorkshire at all; and it is because I know that all the future happiness of my life hangs on your answer, that I have watched and waited for the opportunity of craving it to-day.'

He was silent, and Violet, looking down, said nothing. She was quite inexperienced, but her natural tact told her that it did not behove her to speak until she had heard more. Not that she doubted for a moment as to the nature of her reply. Had not her troth been plighted—had not her mind been filled with Don's dear image—still Sir Robert Shirley would have sped but ill in his wooing. Simple country-bred girl as
she might be, Violet could somehow tell the true gold from the tinsel.

Don was of the true gold. He was of quite another metal from that base but bright one of which the showy master of Shirley was compounded. Both these men were fair to look upon, graceful, soft-voiced, and of a goodly presence. But Don was royally beautiful, brave, and loyal of heart, whereas the baronet's specious exterior did but cover a heart hopelessly perverted, vile, and selfish; and something of this was visible even to those innocent eyes of Violet Mowbray.

Sir Robert mistook the meaning of the girl's silence. He went on.

'Dear, dearest Violet,' he said, in accents of well-counterfeited tenderness, as he bent over her, so as to see her downcast face, and tried for the second time to take her hand,
SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY, BART.

'let me plead my cause before the fairest judge in all Europe. I have been thought'—here his voice trembled a little—'a proud man, but I feel humbled now, when I know how entirely all joy and hope in the life that lies before me must depend upon your kindness or your cruelty. That I love you I have said already. How I love you, Violet darling, words are too weak to tell; but perhaps a life's devotion would be the best proofs of my sincerity. Be my wife, dear. Make me happy; and let me welcome in the old halls of Shirley—a finer place than Thorsdale, as I often think, and certainly a prettier—the sweetest, noblest young bride that ever a husband yet brought to reign there!'

It was all mere acting. Even the trembling of the man's voice was a clever stage trick. As the baronet talked of wel-
coming his youthful bride to the grand old halls of Shirley, he well knew in his inmost soul that the use he designed to make of Violet's seventy thousand pounds was not to set up expensive housekeeping in the mansion of his ancestors. But he wished to leave no stone unturned. She seemed a good girl, timid and unselfish, but her heart might contain a leaven of ambition, after all. He had spoken to her before of Shirley, and, of set purpose, of his great Elizabethan house, the park, the lake, the magnificent timber—such as grows in western countries to a bulk and height unknown in Yorkshire—the fallow-deer, the swans, the pomp, pride, and circumstance of the home that he would have brought to the auctioneer's hammer had it not been guarded by a strict entail. He had artfully insinuated to her, too, how fine
a thing it was to be Lady Shirley: how the chief families of the shire were proud to count kin with his: how easily his grandfather could have been a lord instead of a baronet, had he chosen to accept the offers of two successive premiers.

‘Do not say me nay,’ urged Sir Robert; and this time he succeeded in capturing Violet’s hand. But Violet, with new-found courage, drew her hand back from his grasp.

‘It cannot be as you wish, Sir Robert,’ she said, very gently, but very firmly. The man of the world bit his lip.

‘Dear, timid little creature!’ he was beginning, when, to his surprise, Violet lifted her beautiful eyes, and met the gaze of his stedfastly enough.

‘Pray, pray, let this cease,’ she said. ‘You are very kind, I am sure, but it is
quite out of the question that I should listen to you. What you have asked of me I can never grant. It cannot be.'

'You mean, Miss Mowbray, that you cannot do me so high an honour as to consent to be my wife?' demanded the baronet, with a sort of haughty surprise.

'I cannot agree to be your wife, Sir Robert; but I had no wish to give you pain, or to annoy you, by the manner of my refusal,' returned Violet, gently, and looking aside.

'And I say,' passionately retorted the master of Shirley, 'that I will not, as the saying is, take "No" for an answer: that I will not desist from my suit until you accept me: that I will not allow my hopes and my life to be wrecked by the caprice of a girl too young to have heard as yet the voice of her own heart! I tell you,
Violet Mowbray, that I have set my very soul and my dearest wishes on making you my wife, and I will never draw back until I win from you the consent that you are so coy to grant!

"You might spare me this," answered Violet, "since, believe me, Sir Robert, my reply will never be different from that which I have made to you to-day. It will be better to consider the matter as one which need not again be mentioned between us."

"Is it possible," asked the baronet, in a changed voice that quivered with anger, "that I am forestalled? Do you reject me, Violet, on the ground, forsooth, of pre-engaged affections?"

She flushed indignant crimson, and turned away, but she did not tell him, as a girl who knew the world better might
have done, that he had no right to ask her any such question. Her very silence confirmed his suspicions.

'And who may the fortunate swain be, I wonder?' he broke out, furiously. 'Some beggarly curate, I suppose; or perhaps a dapper clerk in the Daneborough bank. If so, let him look to it. I am one of those whom it is safer to have for a friend than for an enemy!' He absolutely hissed out the last words, with an emphasis that was really terrible, much as a serpent might have done that, by enchantment, had been endowed for a time with human shape. Now he was playing his true part; now all the spite of a character that was bitterly resentful, and yet mean and cowardly, betrayed itself, and Violet looked round at him with alarm, not for herself, but for him she loved. The baronet saw
her start and grow pale. This seemed to him a sign of weakness, and he made haste to say, 'Dearest Violet, only hear me—only give me time. Think over what I have said to you, and—'

'Leave me, pray, leave me!' exclaimed the girl, in real distress, when, at that moment, she caught sight of a group of Lady Thorsdale's guests, just then entering the shady garden of the inn, and amongst them she recognised the rector and Mrs. Langton. Without saying a word more—without lingering to hear a word more—Violet hurried off to meet her friends, under whose protection she felt that she was safe from further persecution, while Sir Robert, turning sharply on his heel, and pulling down his hat over his brows, strode off in an opposite direction, and abruptly entered the 'Topham Arms' by
the side door, festooned with old-fashioned creepers, that was nearest to him.

'We have been looking for you everywhere, Violet dear,' said motherly Mrs. Langton. Violet hardly knew what she answered, so glad was she to be rid for the time being of the importunity of her baleful admirer. Neither of the actors in this little scene had beheld a pair of dark glittering eyes that had watched them from a convenient nook in the tall and straggling holly-hedge, and which, when both were gone, gave to view for a moment the keen Hungarian face of Mademoiselle Glitka.

'Good!' said the foreign maid, in a low, menacing whisper—'good! He shall reckon to me for that!' And she stretched forth her hand as if its pliant brown fingers had an unseen dagger in their
nervous grasp. But a few minutes later, when she was adjusting the shawl round Lady Thorsdale's shoulders, and arranging the pillows and wraps for the earl's comfort in the carriage on the homeward route, all trace of emotion had vanished, and the girl was merely the high-trained domestic, solely intent upon promoting the well-being of her noble employers.

All things must come to an end, and the picnic at Bottomley Briars was no exception to this rule. One by one the carriages came up to receive their living freight; the band played a sort of parting serenade; and those neighbours who had been amongst the invited, and who were now homeward-bound, expressed to the countess, with more or less grace as of sincerity, how excessive had been their enjoyment of the festivity.
'It was a very jolly time of it!' Lord David Todhunter said, truly enough, as the long line of carriages returning to Thorsdale reached the lofty moorland road, whence their occupants could catch a glimpse of the broad moon rising above the eastern sea. But Violet was very silent, and so, for other reasons, was Sir Robert Shirley.
CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MARSH RECEIVES A LETTER.

'Halloa, there, hoy! Look alive there—mates! Up she goes!' And the gigantic crane, and the strong iron chain, and the huge hook began to do their work again, as the great bales were hurried up, by steam-power well directed, to the loftiest loft of a many-storeyed building, one of those giant warehouses of which Londoners—City of Londoners—are excessively proud, and which excite astonishment and dismay amongst Gallic visitors of commercial experience.
There was bustle—unusual bustle—in the crowded and cumbered yard, always a busy spot, above which towered the many-storeyed building, and over the gates of which were inscribed the words, 'Crump, Marsh, and Caxton, Importers,' followed by the (apparently unnecessary) announcement—'No admittance except on business.' Certainly a pleasure-seeker or a sauntering idler must have had a strange perversity of taste if he sought to pass through those massive gates, and to plunge into the midst of that labyrinth of bales, barrels, vans, wheelbarrows, and active toilers. As well might a butterfly intrude her feathery wings and dainty grace into a hive of bees. Waggons were being unladen, and their contents stowed away, either in cellarrage that yawned like the gaping depths of Avernus, or in

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elevated halls that could only be reached from within by a succession of ladder-like staircases of wrought iron, and from without by the action of the monstrous steam-cranes that worked in the midst of the human labourers, as some tamed Titan might have done, poising and carrying off weights that seemed portentous, and delivering its heavy burdens with mechanical gentleness at the open doors above.

A great firm, or, at any rate, a firm in an extensive way of business, was that old-established one which was still known by the name of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton. Strictly speaking, though a Crump had founded the firm forty years before, there was now no Crump in the flesh. Crump meant an invalid brother and his devoted sister, whose name was Waddilove,
who wintered in Algiers, and summered at Cadenabbia, on Lake Como, and whose connection with the house was that of sleeping partners alone. As there was no Crump, so there was no Caxton, beyond the fact that a deaf old lady, with a wig, a poodle, a companion, a carriage, and an ear-trumpet, resided at Cheltenham, and was a sleeping partner in the concern, too, in right of her deceased husband. Very often in these venerable, or quasi-venerable, London firms such is the case; and the profits may go to, and the responsibilities be shared by, half a score of persons who could not stand the mildest cross-examination as to the details of the business which they conduct by proxy.

But if there was not a Crump, and if there was not a Caxton, at any rate there
was a bonâ fide Mr. Marsh, and this surviving partner was very real and tangible. He it was who practically carried on the honoured old concern, and, knowing the value of the master's eye, was often in that very unattractive and dingy place, which was the hive wherein the golden honey was made. He was there on this particular occasion, when the bustle and stir were, as has been said, something remarkable, as fresh consignments had to be stowed away in appropriate storage.

Messrs. Crump, Marsh, and Caxton were drysalters, a dry work that requires explanation. Unquestionably they did not sell salt, dry or wet, nor were they dealers in red herrings or salted provisions of any sort, as their technical designation in the Post-Office Directory might seem to imply. What they did sell was the raw
material of dyes—costly cochineal from Mexico, logwood, dragon's-blood, and all the queer things that grow or are grown, are extracted or manufactured, in far-away countries, and which minister to the making of dyes. Now-a-days so much comes out of gas-tar that the old resources, the time-honoured products of remote lands, signify less than they once did. Mexican cochineal, which once cost a guinea an ounce, yields perhaps a matchless scarlet, but can be approached closely enough by a cheap competitor of less romantic origin. Ultramarine blue was once at a heart-breaking price, precious beryls having to be pounded up with steel pestle and mortar to produce the rare turquoise tint; but now as good a shade can be got for a twentieth of the former cost. French madder was the finest crop
in the rich lands along the Southern Rhone, but alizarine does just as well to give a full red colour to woollen, if not to cotton, fabrics. But there are some textures, some uses, some fancies that require the old juices, the old extracts of root, and berry, and branch, and leaf, and insect of far-off tropical climes; and so it came about that Crump, Marsh, and Caxton had still plenty to do and plenty to sell.

Mr. Marsh, then, moved about the encumbered yard, giving orders personally now and then, but not as a rule interfering in the general management of the place. Sometimes a clerk, with a pen behind his ear and a roll of papers in his hand, came rushing out of a glazed slice of building that was called a counting-house,—but which might pardonably have
MR. MARSH RECEIVES A LETTER.

been mistaken by visitors for a lean-to hot-house, wherein young vines and melon plants might be brought to precocious maturity—and solicited instructions as to 'that German consignment of rough blue,' or 'the Turkey red from Max and Molinari's, of Smyrna.' And more often the burly foreman, a grizzled soldierly man, who had probably served the Queen before he passed into the pacific employ of the drysalting firm, would come up to give his gruffly deferential opinion as to 'that lot of Campeachy wood,' or the condition of 'the last batch of Calcutta indigo.'

But no doubt the work went on the better, and the giants in corduroy suits, who were styled heavy porters, and the paler and slighter-built assistants in slop suits, who were known as extra hands, were all the brisker for the knowledge
that their employer's eye was upon them.

Mr. Marsh himself was a spare, bony man, with white whiskers and bushy eyebrows, high-shouldered, and a little above the middle height. He had crisp grey hair, cut short, and very carefully brushed up from the sides of his pink head, so as to form a kind of crest, and which caused him, especially when in moments of surprise he elevated his prominent eyebrows, to bear a curious resemblance to an astonished cockatoo. In dress, and in person, he was a model of neatness—trim, clean, formal, and precise. The skill with which he tied his severely starched neckcloth, and the admirable smoothness of his well-shaven chin, matched well with the perfect fit of his frock-coat and the polish of his square-toed boots. He was an old-
fashioned man, and the bent of his mind would have prompted him, but for the fear of ridicule, to be more old-fashioned still. He would well have liked to have emulated those flat-capped citizens of London whose brown jerkins or grey doublets, shining boots, and sober seriousness of apparel rebuked the flowing love-locks, and plumed hats, and jewelled swords, and gold-laced coats of gay colours worn by the flaunting gallants of the Court.

Something has been said in a previous chapter concerning Mr. Marsh and his tastes and habits. The guardian of Violet Mowbray, it has been mentioned, was a chess-player during the long winter evenings, and in the pleasant summer-time a sedulous angler, whose punt was often to be found moored amongst the sedgy and
willow-bordered aits of the Thames, and who waged unrelenting war against gudgeon and barbel, roach and perch, in many a reach of the winding river, from Teddington to Marlow or Pangbourn. These are not expensive hobbies. A thrifty man can well afford to follow in the footsteps of Izaak Walton, so that he does not aspire to be fashionable, and rent Scottish rivers, and pay for the monopoly of Norwegian fiords, and thus purchase every pound of salmon that he brings to bank or to boat at a net price of fabulous amount. Humble Thames angling certainly never ruined any amateur of the gentle art, and the same may be said of chess-playing, quietest and most sedate of amusements.

Mr. Marsh, in the City, was reckoned as a warm man, and respected accordingly. What was his exact proportional share of
the profits of the firm, no one, of course, except perhaps the income-tax officials, could tell. But he could scarcely have spent the half of his income, so frugal was his mode of life and so simple were his tastes.

'A letter, sir,' said one of the messengers, coming up to his employer with a note in his hand, which the passing postman had just delivered at the counting-house door.

'Heyday!' exclaimed Mr. Marsh, arching his eyebrows, and taking the proffered epistle between his finger and thumb. 'What's this?'

Now, Messrs. Crump, Marsh, and Caxton received, as was but natural, very many letters. The firm's waste-paper basket had need to be a large one, so extensive was their correspondence, foreign
and British. They had a German clerk in their employment, and a Greek clerk, and a Spanish clerk, all of whom were valued as interpreters, as well as scribes and specialists, and who had their hands pretty full, so manifold were the dealings of the house with alien customers and purveyors. There must have been something unusual in the aspect of this particular letter to have elicited a start and an exclamation of surprise from so experienced a man of business as Mr. Ephraim Marsh. And there was something unusual in the appearance of the letter. It was not addressed to the firm at large, as were hundreds and thousands of others, penned by business correspondents, who were perfectly well aware that it was with Mr. Marsh alone that they were dealing, but who stuck to the old fiction of a real
Mr. Marsh receives a letter. 141

Crump, a real Caxton, and began 'Gentlemen,' as punctiliously as though the deceased partners had been immortal. This pink envelope, highly scented, was directed, in an unmistakably female hand, to

_Ephraim Marsh, Esquire,
Creek Lane,
City of London._

Creek Lane, within civic limits, is not a large, although a bustling and wealthy locality. Four great warehouses, some stabling for van-horses, a brewery, six quaint gloomy little dwellings, kept standing only till a sufficient offer is made for the valuable ground they occupy, and a public-house, monopolise the whole of it. And the name of Ephraim Marsh, as sole surviving partner and manager of the
great drysalting firm, was as well known there—nay, better than in Dagger Court, where he dwelt. Creek Lane, as its appellation implies, abuts upon the river, and one of the wharves that line its bank is known as Crump’s Wharf to this hour, in memory of the founder of the business. Mr. Marsh, then, was in the habit of receiving and perusing, on behalf of self and partners, many letters, but seldom one that resembled this. He opened it with visible reluctance, glanced at its contents, and exclaimed, ‘Heyday!’ again, and more emphatically than before. To all appearance he was not satisfied with this cursory inspection of the missive that had been thrust into his hand, for he made haste to enter a compartment of the glazed counting-house sacred to himself; and, pulling out his gold-rimmed spectacles, proceeded
in a leisurely way to read the epistle that had caused him, it seemed, more emotion than its exterior would have warranted. The manager of such a firm as that old one of the famous drysalters has often to receive bad news. Banks break, correspondents fail, bad debts have to be 'written off,' or compromises effected, and such are generally losses to be borne with stoical placidity,

Mr. Marsh's eyesight, by daylight, was pretty good for a man of his years. He seldom missed the occasion of hooking a roach at Thames Ditton when his fine quill float was suddenly sucked down by a rapid bite. Also, he could generally verify column after column of figures without the adventitious aid of magnifying lenses, until the gas began to flare. But on this occasion he had resort to his
spectacles, and read the pink letter, which was not a long one, two or three times over, with manifest annoyance, but with minutest care. As he did so, he seemed to become excited—a thing that was rare with him—and a flush mounted to his cheek. Heedfully he put away the letter and its envelope in an inner pocket of his coat, and then replaced his spectacles in their morocco case. When he emerged from his own glazed den in the glazed slice of building—that looked so much as if it had been intended for horticultural purposes that the clerks, with their stools and desks, and huge ink-stands, and green-backed ledgers, seemed out of place in it,—Mr. Marsh was a changed man.

'Another time, Gregg, another time!' he said, hurriedly, to the foreman, who came to report the damaged condition of certain
'Honduras chips.' Mr. Marsh's brougham stood waiting in the lane without, the coachman, like a doctor's coachman, on the alert.

'Home, James; and drive fast, will you?' said the merchant, shortly. And the carriage dashed off quickly in the direction of Dagger Court, E.C.
CHAPTER IX.

AT DAGGER COURT.

Dagger Court, E.C., is a place which has received scanty notice on the part of topographical historians of the ancient and famous City of London, and which yet merits some regard. Old it is, but perhaps not so very old. It is certainly not coëval with the Temple, or with Cheape, or the Guildhall. Very likely, when the early Plantagenet kings reigned over us Englishmen, the site of Dagger Court was garden ground, or more pro-
bably a patch of waste land, whereon the ragamuffins of the period set their curs to fight, or played at hustle-cap and chuck-farthino. The court takes its name, clearly, from those municipal armorial bearings which date from the day when Lord Mayor Walworth used his sharp steel poniard so effectually in despatching the Kentish rebel Wat Tyler, already unhorsed and stunned by a stroke of King Richard II.'s royal mace. It consists of eight houses, of which two are very small and six large and roomy, though low, like giants cut short. It survived the Great Fire, and Sir Christopher Wren had not the trouble of laying down Dagger Court on the lines of the old buildings, as was the case in more important localities.

The houses in Dagger Court are all old,
one or two possibly dating from a period before that when we had Tudors to reign over us, and the latest interloper being a tenement of Queen Anne's time. All are solidly built, good seasoned oaken timbers mingling with such brickwork as now moves the regretful envy of conscientious contractors. And two or three of the larger houses are very handsome, with their carved oaken staircases, broad as in Italy, and on the massive balustrades of which flowers, fruit, and leaves, garland after garland, bunch after bunch, were carved by skilled artists of long ago, and with their ceilings blushing with gorgeous mythology.

The rooms which Mr. Marsh inhabited—a first-floor set of apartments—were approached by such a staircase as has been described, and up which, according to the
old saying, a coach and six might have been driven, so broad and easy were the shallow steps in blackened oak, while the banisters were heavy with grapes and apples and rose clusters, carved by forgotten chisels of those who must have loved their handiwork long ago in the dim past.

Mr. Marsh's apartments, once reached, presented in themselves and their contents an aggravating contrast, the meanness and triteness of the modern furniture jarring with the splendour of the antique fixtures. Here, too, there was rich carving on the panelled walls and elaborate cornices, pinked with gold, while above glowed the bright colours of the painted ceiling, un-dimmed by time, and scarcely the worse for London smoke, fog, and even that gas which is the deadliest foe to all pictures.
Noble rooms they were, and had once perhaps been the home of one of those merchant princes whose memory lends a sort of halo to civic history—men who may have swept a shop, like Osborne, or, like his brother-mayor, Whittington the Magnificent, boasted of gentle blood and the hereditary rank of armiger, but who, at any rate, were burghers fit to vie with the patrician traders of Genoa and Venice. There was some old stained glass, too, in the expensive panes of which Flemish artists had depicted Biblical subjects in strict accordance with Low Country garb and surroundings, and which would have been worth its weight in gold to many a collector of such brittle relics of the past.

But the well-worn old Kidderminster carpet, the furniture—made after the
tasteless fashion of the early years of the Victorian reign—and the modern rugs and framed prints and looking-glasses, blemished the general effect.

Such as the place was, it was Mr. Marsh's home, and he was fond of it, having, so to speak, a cat-like attachment to the old rooms. He had, indeed, been born in Dagger Court, and had been known, in moments of after-dinner confidence, to boast of himself as a Londoner _pur sang_, a cockney of the cockneys, and a living illustration of the fact that the City was both a healthy and an attractive place of residence. His was an instance of that singular local, and almost parochial, patriotism, of which we see much more in foreign countries than in England, and which caused him to prefer the mouldy little church and indifferent preacher in
an adjacent lane to more renowned places of worship, and a dark-browed tavern which Falstaff and the Wild Prince may occasionally have patronised, to the sumptuous club-houses of the west. There were even those who confidently affirmed that one reason for Mr. Marsh's confirmed celibacy was the fear that, as a married man, he would be forced to abandon an abode that custom had endeared to him, but which might not find favour in feminine eyes of this generation.

Just now, Mr. Marsh was very ill at ease. As soon as he reached the big, low drawing-room, with its ceiling emblazoned with mythology, like an after-taste of the Renaissance, he drew forth his gold-rimmed spectacles once more, and again, with the severest scrutiny, inspected the pink letter that had reached
him at his place of business. The letter ran thus:—

'Sir,

'I do not know whether you are aware that your ward, Miss Violet Mowbray, is the lawful possessor of seventy thousand pounds sterling, of which she is deprived by fraud. Also I have to tell you that an unprincipled man, who knows of this circumstance, is trying to win her to become his wife, to possess himself of the money.

'As this is a great wealth, and a very important communication, I think your sense of justice will point out to you the necessity for immediate investigation of the fact, before it shall be too late.

'I remain, sir, obediently yours,

'A True Friend.'
'The thing is only an anonymous letter!' contemptuously remarked Mr. Marsh, pursing up his lips and knitting his brows; 'and yet——' 

Ephraim Marsh had not lived so many years in the world without having formed a pretty strong opinion concerning anonymous letters and the writers of them. He felt the scorn, natural to an honest man, which the whole tribe of concealed correspondents merit. He knew that the 'Well-Wishers,' and 'True Friends,' and 'Lovers of Justice,' were either impelled by motives of private hate or envy, or were prompted by that sheer love of mischief-making which is most often found amongst idle people.

But he knew, too, that some truth, if not the whole truth, is often to be elicited
from these ill-famed epistles, and that the nameless backbiter has now and then supplied the first links in a chain of evidence later on to be welded into coherent shape by force of law. There is no smoke without fire. The writer of an anonymous accusation may be actuated by motives very base, yet some good grains of golden corn may be thrashed out of the tares that he or she has tried to sow in the enemy's wheat-field.

Mr. Marsh ruffled up his crisp grey hair at the sides until he looked more like an alarmed cockatoo than ever, and frowned at the letter, and eyed it as if he suspected the use of invisible ink, and wished to read between the lines, or as though he had before him one of those artfully-worded epistles in which words
are mere symbols, and the whole letter an elaborate system of signalling. But though Nihilists and Anarchists abroad, and perhaps also Fenians in Ireland, have recourse to these painful methods of communicating with their fellow-conspirators, not even a Rosicrucian of the Middle-Ages would have tried such arts upon an unillumined correspondent. No; clearly there was no hidden meaning in the letter. The letter itself, sufficiently disturbing when addressed to the punctilious guardian of such a ward as Miss Mowbray, was one of those puzzling epistles as to the authorship of which even experts, as we see in the reports of famous cases in the Central Criminal Court, may differ. A woman had written it. The penmanship, though cramped, was clear and careful. The expressions
used were those which would suggest themselves to a person of limited education, such as a shop-girl or a servant. The spelling was correct and the grammar not involved, which last advantage was perhaps due to the shortness of the sentences. But the style was awkward and stiff, as that of a foreigner might be.

'I wonder if a foreigner did write it?' rapped out Mr. Marsh.

But he quickly reflected that no alien amongst us, no German clerk or waiter, no French language master or teacher of music, no Swiss shopkeeper or Italian confectioner, could possibly have known, or cared, about a great sum of money to which Violet was entitled. And at the mention of such a sum vague recollections recurred to Mr. Marsh’s memory, such as caused him to tap his forehead, and
purse up his lips, and frown until his face was all wrinkles.

'lt may have been—' muttered Mr. Marsh, 'of course it may have been. Old General Yorke, it was thought, would have made his niece his heiress—and Violet was her only child; yet I have seen his will, with no mention of the name of Mowbray in it, and bequeathing what he had to leave to more distant kinsfolk. He was reputed rich, but report plays strange tricks with the sum-total of the savings of these old Indian generals. His will was duly proved. But there may have been a codicil; or there may have been a trust-deed.'

Again Mr. Marsh looked frowningly at the pink paper, and again he shook his head. He was a conscientious man. His guardianship of Violet Mowbray was one
of his most sacred duties in his eyes. There must have been some reason, of sentiment or of gratitude, for his acceptance of such a position: some reason, too, for his ever having been asked to undertake a task so seemingly uncongenial. He looked at his watch, and then compared it with the great, bronze, loud-ticking clock on the enormous chimney-piece of carved marble. Then he rang the bell. The oddest little man-servant—a year or two older than his master, to judge by the puckers and lines in his withered, sharp-chinned face, tightly buttoned up in a pantry suit of Oxford grey—came presently into the room in answer to the ring.

'Juniper,' said Mr. Marsh, in a tone of assumed indifference, 'I shall not sleep here to-night. I am going out of town;
and I want you to pack my portmanteau, since I have just time to catch the 1.40 express.'

'I say, Mr. Ephraim, you're a-going it—no offence, sir, but you be,' said the servitor. 'Toosday and Wednesday, sir, you was at Thames Ditton, at the gudgeoning. Now 'tis Friday, and off you go again; barbel, I suppose, and Hampton Wick. All play and no work, Mr. Ephraim, meant a ragged shirt in my time, anyhow!'

'Rubbish, Juniper!' retorted Mr. Marsh. 'Crump, Marsh, and Caxton wouldn't break, I tell you, if I did take a second holiday in the week. But this is an errand of business.'

'Very likely, sir,' responded Juniper; 'but your good father, my old master, used to say, sir, "House runs mad where
people gad;" and what was true then is true now, I suppose.'

'Hold your tongue, you croaker, and help me to get ready!' answered his employer, half roughly; and then added, as he passed into his bed-room, 'Tell your wife I shan't dine at home.'

'I'll tell Sarah Matilda, sir,' ruefully replied the serving-man; nor had Mr. Marsh proceeded far with the packing of his portmanteau before there came a discreet tap-tapping of hard knuckles at his bed-room door, and in answer to his 'Come in,' a very tall, middle-aged woman, of bony figure and austere countenance, stalked in as stiffly as the ghost in 'Hamlet.'

'Sorry, sir, I am sure,' said this apparition, 'to hear you are leaving your home again at such short notice. It's not that I forget my place. And I do hope that
no shortcomings of respect or of attention on part of self, or part of Samuel, have rendered you so discomfortable as to make you fly to other scenes.'

'Not at all, not at all, Mrs. Juniper!' exclaimed Mr. Marsh, as he hurriedly stowed away shirts and razors, dress boots and black suit together, and began to tug at the well-worn straps. 'I am called down to Yorkshire on business, that is all, and have not a moment to lose. So, Juniper, the hat-box, and now call a cab—a hansom, of course.'

'You know best, sir,' sorrowfully, but reproachfully, responded the housekeeper. 'Cod's head and shoulders, the oyster sauce and lamb chops, so much thrown away, aren't they?'

'Eat them, pray, eat them, Mrs. Juniper—that is, if you and Juniper like fish
and lamb,' replied the master; and in a minute more he was in his cab, bound for the terminus.
'We are sorry to lose you, dear Miss Mowbray,' the countess had said, with her sweetest smile and in her most dulcet accents, when her young guest left Thorsdale to return to Woodburn Parsonage. 'One comfort is, that we shall be near neighbours still, and I hope you will not forget how glad Lord Thorsdale and myself will always be to see you among us again.'

Lady Thorsdale was tolerably sincere
in her polite expression of regret. She was sorry to lose Violet, for a pretty face, even if the owner of it be a timid and somewhat silent girl, does count for something in a country-house. Of course Lady Paget or lively Mrs. Scoresby signified more than a dozen of quiet young ladies in the way of keeping the men in good humour and the house full, but still the countess would have preferred to keep Violet as an inmate of her hospitable mansion so long as her valetudinarian lord required to be amused by a miscellaneous company.

Miss Mowbray's visit at Thorsdale Park, however, had been already prolonged beyond the usual duration of such visits, and had at last to come to a close. She had no especial friends at Thorsdale. Perhaps of all who were there she had liked
burly Lord David Todhunter—who was really kind when the kindness did not occasion any call upon his chronically empty pockets—the best. Lord David, who had no daughters of his own, was a fatherly sort of man in his bluff, jovial way, and it really did seem as if he had seen that Sir Robert Shirley’s attentions were not to Violet’s taste, and as if, with apparent artlessness, he now and then interposed his jolly personality and hearty conversation, much to the baronet’s annoyance, between him and the object of his interested suit.

Much to Violet’s relief, Sir Robert had not been present at Thorsdale on the occasion of her departure. Don she had not seen since the memorable day of their betrothal. There were, indeed, few opportunities of meetings between a young lady
guest beneath the earl's roof and a subordinate of Mr. Bartlett, the earl's land-agent, but none the less did the remembrance of Don's proud, handsome face, and the recollection of the rich tones of his musical voice, haunt the high-born orphan in her hours of solitude. She had not been neglected at Thorsdale. Charley Fitzgerald, of the hussars, who was a fourth son, and whose luckless position as a so-called detrimental was held to cut him off from married life, nevertheless had a warm, if shallow, heart, and had shown signs of a wish to abandon his frivolous ways and to attach himself to Violet. But he had received no encouragement in that quarter, and had consoled himself by dangling after the handsomest of the three well-looking, stupid Piminy girls. And Mr. Tracker, the African traveller, had gone so far as
to tell her how contentedly he could ascend the head-waters of the Congo, or plod through Elephant Swamp, or sail over the inland sea of Lake Nyanza, with her by his side. But Violet had no wish to become Mrs. Tracker, so the chance of sharing such joys of tropical travel was lost to her.

The carriage from Thorsdale Park, with its coroneted panels and high-stepping greys, which had brought Miss Mowbray back to the parsonage on the conclusion of her visit, had but just driven off, when another and humbler vehicle drew up at the garden-gate, and Don, springing from the dog-cart that he drove, gave the horse in charge to the weeding-boy who was within call, and briskly ascended the well-known road, with some books under his arm.
'Is Mr. Langton at home?' asked the young man of the housemaid, who came, all smiles, to open the door.

All the Woodburn household knew Don, and liked him, and rejoiced over his promotion.

'Sure, yes, Mr. Don,' answered the handmaiden; 'only, please wait a minute, and I'll tell him you are here.'

The rector was in the conservatory when Don's visit was announced. So was Mrs. Langton. So was Violet, newly returned from her sojourn with those whom the good clergyman's wife persisted in calling her grand friends. 'I am very glad to come home!' Violet had said, simply. Mrs. Langton had just received some new orchids of hitherto unknown shape and colour—gaudy vegetable butterflies they looked like, and all too dainty
for a work-a-day world like ours—and Mrs. Langton was so busily fearful lest these delicate exotics should not adapt themselves to their new place of residence, that she had scarcely eyes or ears for anything else; while the rector, newspaper in hand, chatted cheerfully to Violet concerning the great house and the fashionable company which she had so lately left.

'Show him in, show him in,' said the rector, genially, when Don's name was mentioned; 'my young friend is no stranger here. We are always glad to see him.'

Don came in, bright and frank as ever. He could scarcely repress a start and an exclamation of surprise as he caught sight of Violet, whom he believed to be still at Thorsdale Park, of his own Violet—
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she had given him the right to call her so—and whom he was yet bound to treat as a mere acquaintance of social position much higher than his own. But it did seem as though Don had gained a step, or a good many steps, of the social ladder, in becoming a clerk in the land-office of Lord Thorsdale. A jet-hunter is a mere beach-comber, to use the current expression of those South-Sea Isles, where ambergris, coral, pearl-oysters, and those bêches-de-mer, or sea-slugs, that Chinese epicures set such store by, are to be picked up. But a clerk may be of any degree, and remunerated by any amount of salary. Even peers of England will condescend sometimes to be clerks and précis-writers in the Foreign Office, and aristocratic wielders of the pen, and sitters at the desk, of dignified clerkdom, are
numerous. Perhaps it was on this account that Mrs. Langton unhesitatingly shook hands with Don now, and therefore made it easier for Violet to put her little hand into his.

'I have brought back the books, Mr. Langton, which you were kind enough to lend me,' said Don, after a few words had been exchanged. 'I had a long drive to take on the outskirts of the earl's property, and it brought me so near to Woodburn itself, that I chose the opportunity of bringing the books with me. I have some time for study still, although we lead an active life yonder.

'An active life always does leave time,' answered the rector, with a smile, 'for reading. Julius Cæsar bustled about a good deal, yet his librarians and his secretaries had no sinecure. What a de-
vourer of books, too, was the First Napoleon, and on the very battle-field—'

A clang-clanging of the door-bell, violently pulled, and the rat-tat of the rusty door-knocker, long disused, interrupted Mr. Langton's disquisition upon Napoleon the Grand's abnormal love of reading, even in the midst of all the cruel realities and hard struggles of European war.

'Who can it be?' asked Mr. Langton, in surprise, not because of the vehemence with which the bell was rung, but on account of the fact that the obsolete knocker was so suddenly impressed into the service of notifying an arrival. 'None of the neighbours, I am sure, would think of knocking in the country here. And I think I hear the stamping of a horse's feet, too, on the gravel. Some fly from the railway station at Carstead
or Daneborough, perhaps; but who—'

'Mr. Marsh!' announced the flurried housemaid, and in, with almost alarming suddenness, bolted the bachelor uncle of the clergyman's wife, his umbrella in his hand, and a bundle of railway rugs hanging from his left arm.

'Uncle—Uncle Marsh—so very glad to see you!' exclaimed Mrs. Langton, coming forward with both hands outstretched to greet the new-comer. Mr. Marsh did not take either of the offered hands, at least for the moment, because he was embarrassed by his rugs and umbrella.

'Very glad, Charlotte, I'm sure—How d'ye do, Langton?—Not forgotten me, Miss Violet? Bless me! how you've grown, and how the time does run. Now, if I could find a corner to put down these things—thank you—so now we can shake
hands.' And the hand-shaking ceremony was duly performed.

'I've run down from London,' continued Mr. Marsh, rubbing his fat ungloved hands together, 'just to spend a day or two with you here, Langton, in your Yorkshire home—if you can put me up, Niece Charlotte, without inconvenience to yourselves—and to renew my acquaintance with my ward, Miss Violet here. I am not,' went on the merchant, 'much of a visitor, nor, I am afraid, a very amusing inmate of a house; but, such as I am, here I am, if you will have me.'

'We are only too delighted, my dear sir!' said the rector, with his best smile of welcome, while Mrs. Langton first murmured some words expressive of hospitality, and then turned over in her mind the question as to whether the 'best
room' or guest-chamber of the parsonage was or was not quite ready for its new and unexpected occupant. She was quite sure, however, that Uncle Marsh must be starved. Country housewives of the old-world stamp, such as Mrs. Langton, are apt to regard a traveller as a being who must by the very nature of things reach their dwellings in a famished condition. But Mr. Marsh denied that he was faint or hungry. He had had a sandwich at the junction, so he said, and could very well await the regular hour of the family dinner. Nothing special need be prepared for him.

All this time he was staring at Don, who had been for the time being forgotten both by the rector and his wife, and who had taken the opportunity of exchanging a few words, in a low voice,
with Miss Mowbray. Very innocent, commonplace words they were, such as the merest acquaintance might have spoken. Violet had told Don how she had but just terminated her visit at Thorsdale, and the young man had mentioned his first surprise at seeing her at Woodburn.

Mr. Marsh was a little too far from the two young people to allow anything of what either said to reach his ears. All he knew was that a very handsome young man was talking to a lovely girl, and that the lovely girl in question was his ward, and the unconscious cause of his sudden journey to Yorkshire. The excellent Ephraim, in his capacity of guardian, fidgeted and looked uneasy. Following the direction of Mr. Marsh's eyes, the rector saw on whom his gaze was fixed, and immediately proceeded to in-

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introduce 'Mr. Don, his young friend.'

The merchant made a stiff bow. The name of Don told him nothing as to the condition or antecedents of the young man, and nothing as to his being an eligible acquaintance for Violet. Mr. Marsh was not, in the every-day concerns of life, a suspicious man. But a tendency to suspicion was latent in his character, and it had been, very excusably, stimulated into unwonted activity by the anonymous letter which had caused him so much disquiet. He bowed stiffly, then, and in a manner that was anything but friendly, in return to Don's graceful inclination of the head, and an awkward silence ensued.

Then Mrs. Langton slipped away to busy herself in household cares for the benefit of the freshly-arrived visitor,
and Don about the same time took his leave.

‘Who is that young gentleman?’ asked the merchant, abruptly, when Violet, some minutes later, had quitted the conservatory, and he and his clerical host were left alone.

‘I scarcely know,’ answered the rector, smiling, ‘whether the verdict of the world would accord to Don, my young friend and pet pupil, the rank of gentleman. And yet hereabouts you would not find a living soul, from the village crones to gruff Lieutenant Simcox who commands the coastguard, who does not hold as a canon of faith that Don is of gentle birth. And yet, a few weeks ago, the lad was a jet-hunter.’

‘A what?’ asked Mr. Marsh, in a tone of amazed disgust. Of course the mer-
chant was acquainted with such a substance as jet, but of its natural history he knew nothing, while the idea of the hunter of such an article suggested nothing more dignified than the mudlarks of the Thames.

'A fine set of fellows, some of them, are our Yorkshire jet-seekers of the coast,' explained the rector; 'bold men, and, for that matter, courageous boys and women, who earn a tolerable livelihood by much toil and some peril. It is a romantic industry, with its certain risks and its possible prizes, the like of which hardly exists in the prosaic England of to-day. It was by this very band of jet-hunters, then as now under the command of a remarkable man, old Captain Obadiah Jedson, that Don was found, years ago, a richly-dressed and beautiful child, lost or
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deserted on the sea-beach. Among them he grew up, a young hero, ever foremost where there was a life to be saved, or a danger to be confronted. I found it a pleasure, being, as you remember, an old schoolmaster, to teach a boy who outstripped the best and brightest of my former pupils. Don has lately become a clerk in our grand neighbour Lord Thorsdale’s land-office. And Mr. Bartlett, my lord’s land-agent, told me two days since, when I met with him at Daneborough, that he found his new clerk worth a dozen of his predecessor—a good young fellow, too, as I believe.’

Mr. Marsh pursed up his lips again sourly.

‘Ah, well!’ he remarked, ‘you know best, I daresay, Langton, about this protégé of yours. As for me, it will do me
good to let me ramble about as I like, while I stay here, in my own independent way, as becomes a crusty old bachelor uncle like myself. I suppose I can find a fly, when I want one, at the neat little village inn I noticed down below.'
CHAPTER XI.

SUPERINTENDENT SWANN.

'Can you tell me, sir, whereabouts is the police station?' Mr. Marsh it was who propounded this startling interrogation, and its subject was a burly elderly man, of farmer-like appearance, with a high-collared brown coat, and amply display of shirt-collar, solemnly walking arm-in-arm with a large-boned woman, some years younger than himself, draped in her shawl of state.

'Have ye been robbed of aught?' de-
manded the Yorkshire dame, with real curiosity. 'My man's deaf, and doesn't heed ye.'

'No, madam,' retorted the London merchant, tartly; 'I have not been robbed.'

'I thought it was a case for the Assizes,' answered the farmer's wife, with manifest disappointment—'but,' she added, 'yonder blue-coat will point ye out which way to go.' And, as she spoke, her thread-gloved finger indicated the portion of the mouldy pavement whereon a helmeted policeman, in his blue uniform, and with the arms of the town of Daneborough conspicuously displayed on his stiff coat-collar, was marching noisily, as a terror to evil-doers. From this constable Mr. Marsh easily learned the whereabouts of the police-station, of which he was in quest.
'It be up yon lane, and then, to the right, turn, and keep on till ye get to the circus, or what used to be the circus, and then turn sharp to the left, till ye see Salem Chapel, and beyond it the station.'

The station, when reached, proved to be a mean-looking brick structure, damp and dingy withal. They do manage matters better abroad—best, perhaps, in France, but well in Germany too—as to the accommodation of those useful functionaries, the police. Perhaps centralisation has something to do with it. Local assemblies, managing local funds, keep a tighter hold on the public purse-strings than there would be if the Right Honourable somebody in Downing Street could draw unlimited bills at sight upon Britannia at large. Anyhow, the guard-
ians of order at Daneborough were squeezed, officially, into very narrow lodgings. Their quarters were small in space, and not over-well ventilated—a stale smell as of yesterday's fried beefsteak, and of the mutton broth or singed sheep's-head of the day before yesterday, clinging heavily to the premises.

'No detective, sir, just now,' grudgingly admitted the grizzled sergeant whom Mr. Marsh found in the outer room of the station—a cheerful apartment, the panelled walls of which were decorated with handbills in fat type, the respective headings of which—'Absconded,' 'Sheep-Stealing,' 'Burglary,' and '£50 Reward for such information as may lead to the apprehension of the person, or persons, who,' &c.—told their own tale.

'No detective, now;' and really the
policeman spoke in the tone of a conscientious showman who reluctantly confesses that his hyena died the week before last, and that the Nubian lion which figures so conspicuously, with horrent mane and glaring eyes, on the painted canvas above his booth, is a mere stuffed effigy of a lion, having breathed its lamented last, under suspicion of poison administered by a rival-keeper of a wild-beast show, at Stamford or at Warrington Fair—'but you can see Superintendent Swann. Those gents of the Town Council did promise us another,' added the sergeant,—meaning another detective, not another superintendent—'and we ought to have one, too, for the forgeries and fine jobs. Like to see Mr. Swann, sir?'

'Certainly,' replied the drysalter.

Superintendent Swann, who probably
had overheard most of the preceding colloquy through the chinks and crevices of the warped and ill-fitting door, was 'discovered,' according to old stage directions, seated at a tumble-down table, and with a blunt quill pen in his great hand, and several bundles of official documents on the ink-stained table before him. A very big Yorkshireman was the superintendent, and one who looked ludicrously large by contrast with the cramped little den which he had for an office. Even his huge helmet, as it lay on a rush-bottomed chair, seemed portentous, and, as he half rose to greet the visitor, the superintendent's fat neck and red ears were distressingly prominent above the strangling collar of his braided dark-blue frock.

'Wished to see me, sir, as I understand?' said Superintendent Swann, waving his
fleshy hand towards that one of the two spare rush-bottomed chairs on which the weighty helmet did not repose.

'Not exactly,' Mr. Marsh began, with some embarrassment. 'The truth is, I have a duty to discharge, and what I wished was to engage, with the permission of his superiors, the services of a detective, to be properly remunerated, of course, for his trouble. Here is my card—it bears my London address, as you see. I am just now on a visit to my nephew, or rather my niece's husband, at Woodburn—Mr. Langton, the rector, whose name you probably know.'

Superintendent Swann made a military salute at mention of Mr. Langton's name. The rector was not himself in the county commission of peace, nor assuredly was he a borough magistrate, but he had friends
among these great ones of the earth, and had occasionally been seen at Sessions to occupy a seat upon the bench.

'Permission is always given,' said the chief policeman, blandly, 'for private inquiries, for proper objects, and by parties of known respectability. For the moment, we have no detective, I am sorry to say. But I was myself a member of the London Detective Force, and came here direct from Scotland Yard to be promoted—I have a cousin in the council, Alderman Swann, in High Street—to my present post. My time is largely poached upon,' added the superintendent, throwing a resentful glance at the bundles of documents on the rickety table, 'by frivolous complaints, and by matters of routine that must be plodded through; but I am yet at leisure to undertake any investigation with
which I may be entrusted, and which will not interfere with the regular discharge of my duty.'

Mr. Marsh, rubbing up his grey hair at the sides of his pink head, cockatoo-wise, and looking eminently uncomfortable, hesitated for a moment. Of police matters, it so happened, he had been so lucky as to have no experience. He had, like so many of us, read of detectives in stories and in newspapers, but he had never seen one in the flesh. There was Superintendent Swann in the flesh, certainly, and of most substantial personality, but the superintendent, with his fat face, and round dull eyes, by no means answered to Mr. Marsh's ideal of one of those human sleuth-hounds who scent out concealed crimes, and follow every twist and double of a flying criminal. Still,
there he was. And we cannot always pick and choose our instruments. It must be Swann, or nothing.

Mr. Marsh, then, rallying all his confidence in the great name of Scotland Yard, and in the halo of romance that surrounds the profession of a Government detective, resolved to put his trust in Superintendent Swann. He, therefore, briefly mentioned his own position, as guardian to the daughter of the late Major Mowbray, residing at Woodburn Parsonage, and went on to speak of the anonymous letter which he had received, and which was the cause of his sudden journey to Yorkshire.

‘Allow me to see the letter, sir?’ said the chief of the Daneborough police, interrogatively.

No request could have been more
reasonable. Mr. Marsh produced from an inner pocket the pink letter which had occasioned him so much mental perturbation, and handed it to the policeman. Superintendent Swann put his fat forefinger upon the letter, read it rapidly over, then more slowly, and then, applying the fat forefinger to one of his eyebrows, rubbed it thoughtfully for awhile.

'Any idea, sir, of your own as to identity of the writer?' asked the ex-detective, after a pause. The London merchant had no such suggestion to make. 'And you don't know of any sum—seventy thousand pounds—whew!—likely to have come, from any quarter, to the young lady in question?' was the next query.

'I can scarcely say,' answered Mr. Marsh, hesitatingly. 'Both the Major and

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Mrs. Mowbray had wealthy relatives, the latter particularly. Her uncle, General Yorke, who left her nothing by his will, and was on bad terms with her husband—the general was a petulant, overbearing old domestic despot—may very possibly have bequeathed, or left in trust, a part of his considerable fortune for the benefit of his niece's only child. The letter, as you perceive, speaks of fraud.

'So it does,' returned the superintendent, and with his blunt pen he made a note or two in a thick pocket-book bound in faded leather. 'Any suspicion, sir, in your opinion, attaching to the other parties who took money under this old gentleman's will?'

'No,' answered Mr. Marsh, positively. 'I have thought the matter over, and am convinced that there is no ground for any
such suspicion. The general's heirs were distant kinsfolk—a quiet widow and her daughters, residing in Wales, a Bengal civilian, and two stay-at-home ladies who lived at Bath, none of them capable, in any sense of the word, of such wrong-doing as that which is implied in the accusation which this letter, this anonymous letter, conveys.'

'I suppose not, sir,' rejoined the superintendent, regretfully, for it was his trade to be suspicious; 'and yet the job has an ugly look. A woman wrote this, of course?'

And again he laid his corpulent finger on the pink paper.

'A woman did write it, no doubt,' agreed Mr. Marsh, 'but for what motive——'

'Oh, the old story!' interrupted the big Yorkshireman, confidently. 'Jealousy,
always jealousy. We may be quite sure of that. "A True Friend," she signs herself: "A True Enemy," would have been more to the mark. They are like that. Last month we got back a plate-basket full of silver, just because a young woman got jealous, and peached upon the gang, and got 'em five years—she did. They are like that.'

Mr. Marsh again ruffled his unoffending hair, and pursed up his lips.

'The letter, as you see,' he said, 'bears the post-mark of Daneborough.'

'It does,' answered the superintendent, glancing at the envelope; 'but as for the thing itself, who wrote it, remains for the present a mystery. I hardly believe this spruce pink paper was ever bought in our town; but if you'll leave the letter with me, sir, I will go round to the stationery
shops, and, without showing a line of the writing, discover if any of the same quality remains in stock or has lately been purchased. If we could but find out that it had, we might trace the writer. A queer hand, too—disguised, I should say.'

'To me,' ventured Mr. Marsh, 'who am accustomed to correspondence from abroad, it appears like the penmanship of a foreigner used to speak, but not to write, the English language.'

Superintendent Swann negatived this idea with an emphatic shake of his head.

'Not a foreigner in Daneborough, sir,' he said, 'except the French vice-consul and a French music-master, with the German waiter at the Imperial Hotel, and a black man that tells fortunes. It's a disguised hand, or my name is not Robert Swann.'
But we may get a clue to the business, I'm thinking, through finding out who it is who is making up to the young lady for the sake of money. There, sir, you perhaps know more than me.'

A look of pain crossed Mr. Marsh's face as a remembrance of Don, handsome and young, rose up before him. He somewhat constrainedly replied that he had not as yet been long enough at Woodburn to have been able to keep an eye on his ward and her supposed admirer, but should certainly do so, and would call in the course of a day or two to consult the superintendent again. Then he put something which chinked golden in the policeman's ready palm, and went on his way.
CHAPTER XII.

BAFFLED.

Left alone, Superintendent Swann, after a brief pause opened his large hand, and contemplated with evident satisfaction the four golden sovereigns which lay in the fleshy palm. Then he swept the yellow coins into his pocket, and, propping up his head with one massive arm, was for a time absorbed in deep thought.

'A four-pounder, is he?' soliloquised the chief of the Daneborough police presently, with reference to the absent Mr. Marsh.
'Well and creditable of him, too, for the public do behave shabby to the Force as well as the authorities. Four sovs make up a tidy fee to begin. What would he give if I were to do the trick for him, I wonder?'

Apparently the contemplation of Mr. Marsh's prospective bounty opened out a large field of thought, for five minutes or more went by before the superintendent opened the door that led into the outer station, to call out, 'Who's there?'

'Sergeant Hammerton, sir, and one constable,' was the prompt response.

'Barnum, is it?' asked the commanding officer.

'No, sir; Burns. Barnum's in Dean Street, looking after the pawnbroker's shop—burglarious entry,' exclaimed the sergeant, who acted as spokesman.
‘Send for Barnum; I want him,’ curtly rejoined the head of the Daneborough guardians of law and order; and in less than a quarter-of-an-hour Constable Barnum was in the inner office, and had respectfully touched the peak of his felt helmet, by way of salute to his superior officer.

‘You may sit down,’ said the superintendent, and the subordinate policeman accordingly seated himself with humility on the edge of one of the rickety rush-bottomed chairs.

Not a prepossessing man to look at was Constable Barnum. He was a lean little man, who seemed the slighter by contrast with the burly Yorkshiremen who were his comrades, and he had a brown, hairy face, and restless, rat-like eyes of a shifty colour, that seemed brown in one light and
black in another. That he had been a thief was known; that he was by birth an American was suspected. But, oddly enough, though the man never tried to conceal the fact of his old illicit occupation, he always stoutly affirmed himself to be a native of Lancashire. He had been for five years in the police, and had made himself useful. To Superintendent Swann he was very useful. The big chief of the Daneborough police was by far too pompous and too self-sufficient to acknowledge the services of his right-hand man, or even that he had a right-hand man, but it was a fact that he acted very much as Constable Barnum, in his deferential way, advised.

‘I have sent for you, Barnum,’ said the superintendent, condescendingly, ‘to talk to you over a new job—no sworn informa-
tion, but a mere private inquiry matter—to which I have not time, with all the borough business on my shoulders, to devote sufficient attention.'

'No doubt, Mr. Superintendent, no doubt,' said the little man, cringingly; and then he waited to hear more.

Nor was his expectation deceived, for Superintendent Swann soon gave him a tolerably correct summary of Mr. Marsh's statements, and laid before him the pink perfumed letter, which had been the occasion of the London merchant's hurried journey to Yorkshire. As the head policeman told his tale, the shifty, rat-like eyes of Constable Barnum darkened and brightened alternately, changing colour as swiftly as the chameleon of the poets. And when the letter was put into his hands, he peered at it as an Assyrian scholar inves-
ticates some lettered slab from Nineveh or Babylon, rich in the cuneiform records of the long-buried past. Holding the paper up between his eyes and the light, he sought to glean such intelligence as the water-mark or the texture might furnish him; then surveyed keenly the envelope, with its post-marks, and then meekly folded his thin brown hands, and waited.

'What do you say to that, Barnum?' the chief deigned to ask.

'I should call it, sir, as your practised mind, I feel sure, has already done, a tough job,' modestly responded the rat-eyed policeman.

'But I thought, my man,' said the superintendent, loftily, 'that perhaps you, with your antecedents and so forth, might be able to suggest something about the missing money—seven-ty thousand pounds
—and the authorship of the letter.'

'Well, you see, sir,' returned the policeman, rubbing his hands together in an apologetic manner, 'I never quite forgot—how should I?—that I was once on the other side of the hedge, and I humbly hope I am all the more likely to be of use in my present capacity, because I was, as one may say, on the cross, whereas now I'm on the square. And that does give one an inkling where housebreaking, or faking-clys, or pepper-pot robberies, or thimblerig are up. But this, sir, as you are the first to perceive, is different.'

'Yes,' returned the superintendent, frowningly; 'amateurs are the plague of the Force, and very difficult to deal with!'

And Mr. Swann really did seem to smart under a sense of injustice in that crimes are not invariably committed by
regular professionals, who follow traditional rules, and can be dealt with secundum artem by the equally professional police.

'The gentleman,' observed Constable Barnum, coughing meekly behind his thin brown hand, 'seems to have considered the handwriting, which, as you at once saw, sir, was that of a woman, to be that of a foreigner too. If that is really your opinion, sir—'

'I have a shrewd guess that way,' boastfully interrupted his commanding officer; 'but then, Barnum, we've got so few of 'em here. There's the French vice-consul, but he can't have anything to do with it; and there's that new waiter at the Imperial, but he hasn't been six months out of Germany; and then there's Mounseer Petit, in Flounce Lane, teaches music.'
'Ye—yes, sir,' assented the policeman; 'but then foreign skippers and foreign sailors of the fishing-fleet do come ashore, and hang about the French consul's office; and, as for Monsieur Petit, he has a discontented look about him, and might, music-master as he is, know something, or have some fancy in his head, as I am confident you reflected, sir, before I spoke. The vice-consul is a civil gentleman, and, as you are aware, sir, would render assistance if in his power.'

'Just what I was saying,' chimed in Superintendent Swann, pompously. 'After all, Mounseer Petit is only a music-master, and there's no certificate to character in teaching the schools to strum. Anyhow, Barnum, I shall wish you to come along with me, while I conduct the preliminary inquiries as I think best in this very im-
portant and delicate business. A young lady concerned, and a mercenary villain, and a case of fraud; and, dear me! seventy thousand pounds!'

And the superintendent absolutely seemed to derive satisfaction from mouthing out the imposing sum-total of the occult fortune of which Mr. Marsh's ward was presumably deprived. Then, followed by his slinking acolyte, the large-limbed chief of the Daneborough police sallied out into the town to commence his investigations. The first steps taken were of a simple character. But neither Mr. Bennett, of the Royal Marine Circulating Library, nor the Misses Tiffin, who kept the opposition establishment for the diffusion of literature, nor any of the four proprietors of stationers' shops, would own to having sold the pink paper whereon the
anonymous letter addressed to Mr. Marsh had been penned; nor did they by any means agree as to its origin.

' Berkshire-wove!' pronounced Mr. Bennett, the librarian.

'Some of their foreign trash, German belike!' grumbled patriotic Mr. Stock, the stationer.

Varley, the chemist, who sold stationery too, declared the paper to be London-made.

'Not English; Angoulême, I should say!' authoritatively pronounced another expert. At all events, no Daneborough dealer in writing materials had ever sold paper similar to this.

'I'll go straight to Flounce Lane,' irritably remarked the superintendent; and to Flounce Lane he went, followed by his blue shadow in the helmet.

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Monsieur Petit's little fiddle was heard wailing out some disconsolate air in a minor key before the superintendent knocked at his tiny green door, a brass plate on which bore the inscription: 'Monsieur Achille Petit, French Professor of Music.'

Monsieur Petit, who was short and plump, and had an anxious face, opened the door himself, muttering some excuse about 'zat girl, ze maid, always outside!'. He had his fiddle tucked under his arm, but he wore carpet slippers and a faded dressing-gown, and looked poor and a trifle cross. Perhaps the professor's grievance was merely that he had not schools enough to teach to strum—to quote Mr. Swann's words—and found it hard to live. But he was furious, as some foreigners in England are, when the chief of the police
began to exhibit the envelope of the letter, and to ask questions.

'Is this a land of liberty?' shrieked the little Frenchman. 'Is this John Bull, your rosbif Englishman, so vaunted, in his castle, that you come, vous autres, to interrogate me—me? If I am rogue, arrest me on a warrant. If I am honest man, let me be, or I write to your Times newspaper, and I pillory you before the world civilized!' And he went into his house, and slammed the door.

Superintendent Swann and his follower looked somewhat blankly in one another's faces. Neither of them knew by experience how very much more sensitive to official interference a foreigner in England is apt to be than is a natural-born subject of Her Majesty. But while Constable Barnum felt quite sure that Monsieur
Petit's very irritability proved him to be innocent of all knowledge of the letter and its contents, his superior officer considered the little Frenchman's wordy outburst as a very suspicious symptom indeed.

'Obstructing the police,' growled out the superintendent, 'is a serious affair.' And he looked, and perhaps felt, as if he would have liked to have tested the Gallic music-master's theory that a house is a castle by bursting in the frail door, and conducting the master of the tenement to durance vile in the lock-up of the Guildhall. But he was too prudent to let anger get the upper hand of discretion, so, again shaking his large head in a minatory manner, he trudged off, with his follower at his heels, to the French vice-consulate. Here, under the shadow of the tricolour, he found the vice-consul in the act of signing
the papers of a weather-beaten fishing skipper, with curly black locks, a furred sea-cap, and round gold rings in his ears.

'I am quite at your disposal, Monsieur le Surintendant,' said the polite official, after a brief explanation, and the exhibition of the pink envelope; 'but I fear that I can render no help. The handwriting is quite unknown to me. With you, I think that it is not insular—not English. But I cannot bring it to mind that ever did I see the similarity of it before.'

'Do you happen to know, Mr. Consul, the hand of a countryman of yours here, Mounseer Petit, of Flounce Lane?' asked the superintendent.

'Indeed, no!' answered the vice-consul, with a frank laugh, 'that poor professor!'
No, I never saw any of his writing. Sometimes he waylays me in my walks, or on the pier-head does accost me as I saunter by the sea, to speak French, as he says, and to hear it after the fashion of that Paris from which we both are exiles. And I willingly consent, in complaisance to a compatriot, to this little tribute levied upon the time of one who, after all, is the representative of his country.'

'Know anything of him, sir?' meaningly inquired Superintendent Swann.

'Non, non!' replied the French official. 'A good sort of man, I daresay, but somewhat querulous and soured, because of the precarious nature of the livelihood he picks up here at your sea-port of Daneborough. If we could persuade a few scores more of your Yorkshire young
ladies and _jeunes gens_ to study the musical art, then, I doubt not, Monsieur Petit would cease to complain, and be as mild as new milk, as you call it, you other English. Is there anything further for your service, Monsieur le Surintendant? since I am about to lock up the office, and intermit my duties for the day.

Superintendent Swann could but thank the consul, and take his leave as graciously as he could in his then state of disappointment.

'You were speaking of the post-office, sir?' suggested Constable Barnum.

'The post-office next, of course,' authoritatively echoed his superior officer.

The post-mistress of Daneborough, a most respectable middle-aged lady, in a creased silk gown, and with a loud-ticking
gold watch fastened conspicuously to her waist, came from an inner room on hearing who it was that desired to speak with her. She had a respect for Superintendent Swann, not merely as a functionary, but as own cousin to Alderman Swann, draper and grocer, in the High Street, and who was confidently expected to be mayor-elect at the November renewal of the municipal officers. But Mrs. Jarman did not know, neither did any of the young ladies in her office, any handwriting which tallied with that of the envelope of the anonymous letter.

'From information received,' observed the superintendent, sticking to the traditional formula, 'I believe the letter to be in the handwriting of a foreigner; French, most likely.'

The female clerks looked at one another.
'How very odd!' said one.
'There may be nothing in it,' said another.

And then it came out that Monsieur Petit, the music-master, after purchasing stamp for foreign postage, had dropped a letter into the box some quarter-of-an-hour previously. It took some persuasion to induce Mrs. Jarman, with the fear of St. Martin's-le-Grand before her eyes, to allow the superintendent to peep at, but not to touch, the letter in question, addressed to Monsieur A. Petit, père, 107, Rue St. Denis, Paris. But, alas! the handwriting, even to the jaundiced eyes of the chief of the Daneborough police, was utterly unlike the specimen in his hand.

Crestfallen and sullen, he went out.
'Never mind, sir, we can't land a big
fish like that always just at first, as you know so well,' murmured, in consolatory accents, his useful follower.
CHAPTER XIII.

VIOLET'S GUARDIAN SPEAKS.

At the cross-roads between Woodburn and Daneborough, there stands a guide-post, pointing, with triple finger, towards three several goals, and planted, as such indicators often are, on a rising mound of greensward. There at or about the hour of three on a sultry afternoon in early August, a low open carriage, drawn by a pair of pretty white ponies, stood drawn up. The carriage, as every rustic of those parts well knows, came from Woodburn
Parsonage, and the slight girlish figure that was its sole occupant was that of Violet Mowbray. The girl was sitting apparently in a deep reverie, unconscious almost of the present, when suddenly she heard the words,

'Violet, my sweet one!—you alone, here?' and turned, with a start and a blush, to see Don standing beside her.

'I was thinking of you, dear,' she said, as she put out her little hand to him. 'I am very, very often thinking of you.'

And then, as though ashamed of her innocent confession, Violet proceeded to explain how she came to be in Mrs. Langton's pony-carriage at the cross-roads, and alone.

'James, the groom-lad, came out with me as usual,' she said, 'but I have sent
him a quarter-of-a-mile or so along the Deeping Road, to Mr. Warburton’s house. He is the bearer of a tiny note to a friend of mine, and a favourite with Mrs. Langton—Grace Warburton, whom I think you must have seen at the parsonage—to ask if I shall call for her on my way back, after the drive, to spend the afternoon at Woodburn, and dine. Grace is the dearest little thing, but she takes ages, absolute ages, to compose anything like a letter, so I had resigned myself to waiting patiently where I was for at least ten minutes more.

‘Ten priceless minutes for me, my heart’s darling!’ answered Don, bending down to look into Violet’s eyes; ‘so few, so very few are the opportunities that I now have of speaking to you.’

Scarcely had the words been uttered
before another voice, loud, gruff, and peremptory, exclaimed,

'Heyday! Upon my word! I am afraid I am interrupting you. The fact is, Mr.—ah—Don—you are just the very person whom I wanted to see. It was necessary to put a stop to this sort of thing, and I am not sorry to have a chance of doing so once for all.'

The speaker, who, as may easily be conjectured, was no other than Mr. Marsh, had drawn near unperceived, but his presence on the scene was due to mere accident. He had sallied forth, intent upon securing what he was pleased to style a constitutional, and, striking into a by-lane, had found himself unexpectedly landed in the Deeping Road, in sight of the stationary carriage, with its long-tailed, white ponies. The spectacle of Don and Violet
together had proved too much for his equanimity, and there he stood, knitting his brows and snorting irritably, while he made vicious digs with the ferrule of his umbrella at a tuft of unoffending daisies within reach. Don reddened.

'I am not sure that I quite comprehend your meaning, sir,' he said, quietly.

'I shall try to make my meaning sufficiently clear before I am done,' wrathfully burst out Mr. Marsh, severely punishing the daisies with his umbrella. 'I am this young lady's guardian, as you have probably been informed, and it is my duty, and, I may add, my privilege, to protect her against the wiles of the unscrupulous.'

'Dear Mr. Marsh—dear guardy!' pleaded Violet, with an imploring look, which was thrown away upon the London merchant in his then state of unwonted
excitement. Violet could remember that when she was much younger the term of affectionate familiarity of which she had made use had been very potent with Ephraim Marsh, who really was, what we often see, a soft-hearted man with a rugged exterior, and a mulish obstinacy when thwarted or vexed. Don, on his part, looked with wondering eyes on the rich drysalter. He could see that Mr. Marsh was very angry, but for his very life he could not divine the reason for so much wrath. The words which he had heard were evidently meant to be offensive, but they had overshot their mark by reason of their very vehemence. He made no answer then, but waited to hear more.

'You are not angry with me, dear Mr. Marsh,' said Violet, who was herself perplexed, 'at least, I hope not, because—-'
'Not angry with you, my dear young lady,' interrupted Mr. Marsh, with marked emphasis. 'You are simple and young, and of a confiding nature—to too confiding; and it is for those who should love and protect your youth to interpose between you and the base designs of a wretched adventurer.'

'Do you mean me, sir?' demanded Don, with a sudden flash of indignation in his great dark eyes, such as might have glowed in those of a lion aroused by some wanton insult. 'If so—-'

He did not complete the sentence, but stood, flushed and angry, but doing his best to preserve an aspect of composure. Very, very rarely had Don been subjected to an affront—never, certainly, to one so outrageous as this; but after a moment of reflection he felt assured that Mr. Marsh
was honest in his prejudice against himself, no matter how unjust his thoughts and words might be.

Mr. Marsh himself had thoroughly lost his self-command. He was not reckoned in Creek Lane, E.C., a harsh master. In Dagger Court he was regarded as a very mild master. Occasionally he was rough of tongue, in his place of business, at least; and there had been times when he had sent some offender before the Lord Mayor, to be remanded, and tried at the Central Criminal Court, and sentenced to something exceedingly unpleasant, for a definite number of months or years, as a punishment for poaching on the petty cash, or the systematic purloining of costly parcels on their way to or from the rail or the ship. These were Mr. Marsh's draconian deeds. He was not ashamed of them—as
why should a virtuous citizen have been? —but each appearance as a prosecutor, whether in the Guildhall Police Court or at the Old Bailey, had caused him a pang. And then, if people knew that he had sometimes pushed such matters to the bitter end, few but himself were aware how lenient he had been to sobbing apprentices and down-looking carmen, and how often he had tempered, perhaps over-tempered, justice with mercy. But he had quite lost his temper, and was in a towering rage now.

'You may swagger, young man, as young men will, and you may look resentful,' cried out the effective partner in the great firm of Crump, Marsh, and Caxton, 'but none the less shall I do my duty by my ward. Her poor dear parents—dead long ago—left her to my care; and, what-
ever comes, sir, I'll not be found sleeping at my post. I have had warnings. I have been told what underground plots were going on. That is why I am in Yorkshire now. The fact is, Mr. Don, that you have scented out this great fortune of Miss Mowbray's, and that such is the goal of your mercenary ambition.'

'But—there is no such thing!' said bewildered Violet.

'There is, my dear young thing. You know nothing about it; but he does—miserable, gasping fortune-hunter that he is!' blurted out Mr. Marsh, looking at Don as though he would like to annihilate him with a glance. 'I never mince matters, Mr. Don, and so I have told you just what I think of you, and of the disinterested character of your attachment to Miss Mowbray.'
'Don, my love, be calm!' said Violet, with sudden terror. But Don, though he grew white to the very lips, and trembled—he who had never flinched in the face of death and danger—gave no sign of anger.

'Mr. Marsh,' he said, 'you are cruelly unjust; but I am fairer to you than you are to me, and I believe you to be the victim of a delusion, or the dupe of calumny. That I love Miss Mowbray you have forced me to own, earlier than I had meant to do so. I know that it is presumptuous in me, a jet-hunter some weeks ago, to lift my eyes to one so far removed from the humble station I have had to fill. I am quite sure of that; and also that until I have raised myself in the world I shall never claim my promised bride. But I
am sure, too, that Miss Mowbray's small income——'

'You call it a small income—seventy thousand pounds—ninety, perhaps, by this time!' rapped out the drysalter.

Violet laid her little gloved hand upon his arm.

'Guardy, dear old friend,' she pleaded, 'there is nothing of the sort. My poor little four hundred a year cannot——'

'I tell you, child, you are a rich heiress,' broke out Mr. Marsh, flinging prudence to the winds; 'and your precious so-called admirer, yonder, knows of it—by what insidious means, I am not yet in a position to establish—and therefore he has profited, by Mr. Langton's partiality, to approach you with his mercenary addresses.'

'Guardy, you do him wrong. Even if this hateful money does belong to me,
Don never knew of it, never cared for it!’ exclaimed Violet, with tears in her eyes.

Don changed colour rapidly. When he spoke, it was in a hoarse and broken voice.

‘You are the bringer of ill news, Mr. Marsh,’ he said. ‘Nothing that you could have done, no assertion of your authority, could so well have served to put a barrier between your ward and myself as this revelation. I love your ward very dearly, sir, but it is with unselfish love. Miss Violet is dearer to me than my life; but, unless I were myself rich and famous, I should not venture to claim as my wife a great heiress.’

‘Don, my darling, what matters miserable money between us two? Poor or rich, I shall always care for you alone, and
for no one else; and it is cruel—cruel,' sobbed Violet.

'The truest kindness is to be cruel, when it is right,' said Mr. Marsh, austerely, but somewhat in error as to the application of his ward's last words.

But Don stood erect, and pale, and calm, looking so noble and patient under suffering that even the prejudiced dry-salter's heart smote him as he marked the gallant bearing of the young man.

'My Violet,' said Don, with a strange, sorrowful tenderness in his voice, 'I must bow my head to this stroke which has been dealt us, and bid you adieu, for a time at least. It seems as if my dearest hopes were rudely snatched from me. I have lately received promotion, and have the prospect of more. I am no longer the mere jet-hunter. In two years' time—in
three perhaps—I might—but that is over now. Not even for the sake of you, dear, darling Violet, can I endure such an imputation as this. Honour must be obeyed, even before love. No, Mr. Marsh, I am no fortune-hunter; I will not wait for you to banish me from the side of her I love; but, if this property be really hers, I must go.'

'Don—my own, I will refuse this odious money; I will give it up, and, whether you leave me or not, I will never, never care for—never marry—anyone but you,' protested Violet, almost oblivious of Mr. Marsh's presence.

'My darling!' cried the young man, passionately, 'I shall never forget you, never cease to love you, until my dying day. But I must leave you now.'

By this time the white ponies had grown
fretful, and fidgeted so much against the bit that Violet could hardly hold them. This of itself would have mattered little, but at this instant unconscious James, the youthful groom, came running, breathless, in his boots, along the Deeping Road.

'Very sorry, miss, to have been so long,' said James the breathless, 'but all the family were out, seeing the hay got in, and I had to wait. And, please, Miss Grace Warburton is away at York for a few days, the old gentleman told me. And I left the note. Quiet, Lily! quiet, nags!' And he grasped the bridle of the white ponies.

There was an end, for the time, of private talk. Don took Violet's hand in his, and pressed it, and in a low voice murmured, not good-bye, but 'farewell,' which to our English ears has conventionally a sadder sound. Then he turned, and, springing
over a stile that stood near, was lost to sight amidst the hazel boughs. Mr. Marsh wheeled abruptly round, and, grumbling to himself, trudged away; while Violet Mowbray, relinquishing the afternoon drive she no longer cared to take, turned the ponies' heads homewards, and slowly and sadly drove back to Woodburn Parsonage.
CHAPTER XIV.

TWO LETTERS.

The land-office at Thorsdale Park was not only spacious enough for the transaction of business, but sufficiently large to have accommodated, in case of need, the whole staff of those who were entrusted with the practical charge of the earl's great Yorkshire property. Ancient retainers and hangers-on of the Thorsdale family yet preferred calling it the 'Old Steward's House,' to using the new-fangled name of the 'Land-office.' It had been, in truth, a steward's
residence, built in perhaps the second of the Georgian reigns, and under the eye of an intendant who probably was careful for the comfort of himself and his olive-branches. Worm-eaten as were its timbers, and mellowed its bricks, it was yet warm, snug, and spacious to an extent that would have moved the envy of Mr. Superintendent Swann, squeezed into his narrow official premises at Daneborough. Mr. Bartlett, the manager, had rooms there, which he could, and did, occupy at pleasure. There was, besides the clerks' room and the manager's office, a parlour that the clerks shared in common. Don had a bed-room, and so had Tom Scott, the raw junior; and there would have been one for Mr. Screedle, the feeble senior, had he not preferred the farm-house lodgings that he had dwelt in for five-and-thirty years. An old woman
and her grandchild, in pattens, furnished the kitchen contingent; while there were horses, gigs, and dog-carts, always at the service of the land-agent or of his subordinates. For a great estate is like a kingdom on a small scale, and exacts much locomotion on the part of those to whom is deputed the management of it.

The clerks' room was a queer, but not comfortless apartment, long and low, with massive beams, each thick enough for a Roman battering-ram of the pre-gunpowder days, spanning the blackened ceiling. The windows were broad and low, with deep recesses, and those quaint old window-seats under the lids of which books could be stored as a solace for rainy days, and wherein such standard works as 'Pamela,' the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and 'Robinson
Crusoe,' perhaps heirlooms handed over from one steward to another, yet lurked. There were modern desks and tables, but there was an oaken buffet gorgeously carved, and a clock, older than the house itself, as its dial-plate averred, since it had been constructed in 1683, by Simon Levett, 'Horologer of His Sacred Majesty Charles II.,' at Westminster. But this clock, although preserved in its huge brass-mounted case as a dignified memorial of the past, had not ticked within living memory.

Mr. Screedle, with a green shade over his weak eyes, was at his desk, blinkingly adding up columns of figures, and, perhaps, meditating on the probable amount of the retiring pension, which his growing infirmities must soon compel him to sue for, on
the ground of long service. And Tom Scott, the raw junior, in whom there was no guile indeed, but who belonged to that unfortunate category of boys who are born blunderers, was at his desk, too, wretched because he had made some capital error in the books that had been given over to him to post up, and he was not arithmetician enough to discover and rectify the blunder. Poor Tom Scott! Mr. Bartlett had chidden him but yesterday, as 'not worth his salt;' and, as likely as not, the manager would be over at Thorsdale again on the morrow, and would expect to find the task-work of his subalterns complete. Don, who was an excellent accountant, and good-natured withal, might yet set the problem at rest and save his office companion a scolding; but somehow, Tom, glancing at Don's face, grave and stern and sad, as he sat with his
pen in his hand, did not like to disturb him just then with a petition for aid in his dilemma.

Although Don had a pen in his hand, he was not, just then, plying it in the earl's service. No better clerk—no clerk, indeed, so good—had earned his salary in the land-office, during the viziership of Mr. Bartlett, or that of his father. There had been young clerks who could cipher well and conduct a correspondence neatly, and there had been others who scoured the braes like the galloping hero of some Scottish ballad. But, as a rule, the lads that could write could not ride, and the lads that were untiring in the saddle made provoking mistakes in their accounts. But Don was a model. Through mist and rain, over boggy moorland or along an ill-kept bridle-path, he made his way, swiftly and smoothly,
as commonly happens when horse and horseman are in tune, so to speak, with one another. In lone farms, where the solitary household had contracted manners morose and rugged, Don’s frank, bright mien and address won all hearts, and ‘Bless ye, my bonny bairn—a born gentle, if ever there was one!’ was the verdict at house-doors where strangers were seldom well received or approved of. And in the office, Screedle himself, who had learned to look on Don as his probable successor, owned that the new recruit had mastered with incredible quickness every detail of the routine.

Don was engaged just then in writing a letter. Here it is:—

‘Dear, dearest Violet,

‘This is the first letter I have ever written to you, and, sad to say,
I fear it must also be the last. I shall never cease to love you, sweet one, but I have had a rude reminder of the high barrier which stands between us two. There it is, like some cruel wall that shuts in a prisoner. In the first joy of my love—of our love, dear Violet—I forgot, almost, the inequality of our condition; I forgot that you were the young lady, and I the jet-hunter—or, if I remembered it, it was but in the hope that I might one day be deemed worthy of you. But, now that your guardian tells me you are a great heiress, I feel the news to be a death-blow to my hopes, unless indeed a fortune, in some strange and unexpected manner, should come to me. It is as though you had been suddenly lifted up, on golden wings, out of my reach.
That you do not believe in the mistaken accusation which Mr. Marsh has made against me, I am, my love, quite sure—as sure as I am of my own honour and my own faith. But others may believe it; though few, I trust, of those who have known me would credit me with baseness such as that. It is needful that I should be careful to keep my good name—that is all I have—from being sullied by malicious tongues. If I were certain that I had really lost you, Violet, my darling, I think the blow would break my heart. As it is, the thought of you must nerve me to do all I can to win a higher station in life—not from mere ambition, but because in winning it I may win that dearest prize, yourself. I do not think I shall long remain at Thorsdale, or indeed in England,
but my plans cannot yet be settled. In any case, I love you, dear, with every fibre of my heart. Never, come weal or woe, my Violet, cease to believe in the faith and fondness of

"Don—your Don."

Don was not much of a letter-writer—he had indeed, fond as he was of books, led a life of action—nor had he often had occasion to conduct a correspondence of any sort. Two or three young fellows, sons of dalesmen—who belonged to that class of poor and proud yeomanry who are so plentiful in Yorkshire and Northumberland, and who had been jet-hunters for awhile—had gone off to seek their fortunes in one or other of the two Americas, or beneath the starry skies of Australia, and had begged Don to write
to them, always in the hope, they severally said, that he would be again a comrade, 'out there.' But this was his first letter to her he loved, and a sorrowful one it was. He folded it, and placed it in its envelope, already directed. Then he rose.

'I wanted to ask you, Mr. Don, to help me out of this muddle, if you would be so kind,' called out Tom Scott, who had been watching his opportunity.

Don's own sorrows had not, as sometimes happens in maturer age, produced the effect of rendering him callous to the woes of other people. He came, smiling, to draw a chair up to where bewildered Tom sat before his desk, asked where the shoe pinched, and in a quarter-of-an-hour had thrown light upon the darkling laby-
rith of young Mr. Scott’s disordered accounts.

‘It’s all right, you see, now that the confusion between the debt and the credit is over, and the general expenses are got clear from the capital account,’ said Don, as he laid aside the pen. ‘Write it out clearly, and keep each item distinct, and I think there will be no further difficulty with Mr. Bartlett.’

And Don went out to post his letter. There was a post-office in Thorsdale village, newly set up, although at the earl’s residence they adhered to old usage and the institution of the post-bag sent over from Daneborough. It was but three-quarters of a mile, across the Park, from the Old Steward’s House to the Hall, but it was a mile and a half round by the
deer-palings and the stone-walled pleasance to the village of Thorsdale. Commonly, then, when a clerk in the earl's land-office wrote a letter, he preferred to cross the Park, and entrust it to the letter-bag always hanging up behind one of the marble columns in the entrance-hall of his noble employer's mansion, to a longer trudge that he might drop the stamped and directed missive into the narrow slit in the boarded window of the span-new office at Thorsdale. But Don chose the latter alternative. He walked round to the village, and posted his letter, all unconscious that, at that very moment, Violet Mowbray's pen was now flying, now lingering, over the paper as she wrote to himself, and that the two love-letters would cross one another, as the phrase is,
and simultaneously reach their recipients on the next morning.

I have given Don's letter. Here is Violet's:

"My darling—my poor, dear Don,

My own, my very own, if you could tell how proud your Violet is of you, and of your love, and that you should have chosen Violet Mowbray—picked out poor little me—from all the world, I think it might be some comfort to you at this present time. Believe me, Don dear, that when I saw you bearing with such noble patience every angry word of an old man—who is good, too, and I am sure meant to do his duty, cruelly unjust as his speech was—my heart bled for you. But you knew, did
you not, that your Violet was grieved for your grief, and hurt by your pain? Dearest, under what unfortunate impression Mr. Marsh, my guardian, was acting when he addressed you as he did, I do not know, and cannot learn. He will tell me nothing, except that he had his reasons for what he said. I am sure that he will one day learn to do you justice. As for that miserable money, I hate the very mention of it. If it really is mine, Don, my love, I will renounce it if I can; and if they will let me do that—I am but a girl, and know nothing of the law—why not let it be used to help you to become great and famous, as you deserve to be, and to rise in life?

'My guardian has spoken to Mr. Langton, and to Mrs. Langton, his niece, concerning you, and they have both said
some words to me. They were both of them good and kind, my darling, and are your friends yet, and certain, though they do not speak out, that Mr. Marsh, worthy man, is the victim of some extraordinary delusion. But my guardian has an authority which will last till I am twenty-one, and which he threatens to exert unless his wishes are attended to. He talks of taking me away from Yorkshire, and shutting me up in Dagger Court, in the City. He does not mean to be unkind, he says, but it is his duty to act thus, if—if you and I are to be thrown together. Those are his words, dear, not mine. And Mr. Langton has reasoned with him, but to no purpose, and so, he bids me say, it will be wiser for you not to come to Woodburn for the present.

‘But I love you, Don, my dear, dear
boy. You are all the world to poor little Violet. And remember, if we are parted now, it is not for ever. If it were, I could not endure it, however much submission may become a girl's nature. But it is not so, you know. At twenty-one, my darling, I shall be free, and then we can be happy: and if there really is this hateful fortune, why, it shall be for my husband to choose whether we will have it or not. But what I fear, Don, is lest you should form some rash resolve—something that would make me unhappy, and take you from me—perhaps for ever, who knows?—because of scruples that you need not feel; indeed, you need not, because, rich or poor, Violet loves her Don—her own dear chosen. Pray be patient, love; pray try to be patient, and to wait, as I will
do. I know that waiting comes easier to a girl than to a man; but still, for my sake, Don, try to bear this. And remember, darling, that, come what will, your poor little Vi will love no one, care for no one, marry no one, except her Don, whom she thinks of night and day. So please be patient for the sake of your own

‘Violet Mowbray.’

To say that Don pressed this letter to his lips and to his heart, that he read it and re-read it a hundred times, always finding out in it some new well-spring of tenderness and fond affection, is to repeat the veriest common-place. But not the less did he feel as if it behoved him to leave England, and to seek out for himself
a more adventurous career than that of a clerk in Lord Thorsdale’s land-office, if he were to feel himself worthy of Violet Mowbray for his wife.
CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL.

Constable Barnum, on his round of daily duty in the dull streets of sleepy Daneborough, with his sharp eyes intent on tramps, beggars, and miscellaneous vagrants, had yet time to busy his sharp brains on what his superior officer Superintendent Swann, in moments of confidential intercourse, was wont to designate as 'the anonymous letter job.' Nature had gifted the humble constable with better brains than had fallen to the lot
of his commander. Of course he was not so well-connected as was Mr. Swann, who was linked by the ties of close consanguinity with the aldermanic purple, and might soon justly boast of being cousin to the Worshipful the Mayor. Nor had his antecedents been so respectable.

Mention has been made in a previous chapter of the fact that Constable Barnum had once been a member of the light-fingered fraternity. He was, to use his own expression, on the right side of the hedge now, and he was aware that, oddly enough, he owed a portion of the respect which his pompous chief secretly entertained for him, to the circumstance of his having in his day picked pockets and cracked cribs. 'Set a thief to catch a thief' is, in police affairs, a time-honoured axiom, which has been
acted on in more countries than our own.

The rat-eyed policeman, as he patrolled the streets of the quiet Yorkshire seaport, kept puzzling himself about the solution of the riddle which had been professionally propounded to him. Constable Barnum was, as the saying is, on his promotion. And his best way to promotion, as he instinctively felt, would be to hang on to the skirts of his corpulent patron, and rise in virtue of the superintendent's good wishes. He was, and he knew himself to be, in point of brains superior, but inferior as to muscle, to the stalwart Yorkshiremen around him. And town-councillors are prone to choose a policeman as they would a cart-horse, according to his thews and sinews. Barnum was not strong, nor had he, as Super-
intendent Swann had, an imposing appearance. He felt that he must worm his way upwards. Already he had been mentioned in the *Daneborough Vigilant* and the *Daneborough Mercury* as 'that zealous and efficient officer,' acting as *fidus Achates* to that bulky and belauded Hector of Troy, 'our admirable and energetic Superintendent of Borough Police.' Before long, Alderman Swann would be Mayor of Daneborough, and, who knew! Ichabod Barnum installed as sergeant detective at the station, thence to be transferred to Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool, London itself.

Constable Barnum, then, kept his restless, slanting black eyes continually at work, and his plotting brain too, for the elucidation of the puzzle. He had seen foreign handwritings, and he had heard,
at second hand, Mr. Marsh's opinion as to the authorship of the pink and perfumed letter. It seemed, then, an especially fortunate circumstance when he spied, at the corner of the High Street, a well-dressed young woman, with dark, flashing eyes, well-cut features, and a sallow complexion, like gold-bronze—in short, undoubtedly a foreigner. She had a letter in her hand, and in a moment more she had dropped it into the lion's mouth of the Daneborough post-office, which stands, or then stood, quite at the upper end of High Street.

Constable Barnum's own rat-like eyes sparkled. Places vary, and what in London would signify nothing, might be of portentous importance in a provincial town like Daneborough of the drowsy streets. The policeman affected to be
engaged in buttoning one of his stiff, white buckskin gloves—they like to see their protectors gloved, as well as braceletted, belted, and with helmed heads, in quiet boroughs, such as the one I am depicting—but he had acquired, perhaps while on the wrong side of the legal hedge, the art of seeing without looking, which is commonly supposed to be a gift exclusively feminine. That this girl was handsome, though probably less so than she had been, that she was proud, and fierce, and shrewd, and that, although neatly and even handsomely dressed, she was not a lady, he could easily discern. She had some books in her left hand, three volumes, bound in green cloth, and with a square of printed paper pasted upon each, which Constable Barnum readi-
ly guessed to be the address of some circulating library.

The girl passed the policeman without taking any more notice of him than if he had been a lamp-post, and he very slowly and cautiously followed the girl, much as a hunting-spider pursues an unwitting fly along a window-ledge. The object of Constable Barnum's pursuit tripped daintily down the flag-stones, until she disappeared within the doorway over which stood, resplendent with gold-leaf somewhat tarnished, the lion and the unicorn, while above the shop-window was inscribed, 'Bennett's Royal Library.' Constable Barnum immediately began to take a deep interest, first in the joints of meat and dangling carcases of sheep displayed by Bridger, the butcher, op-
posite, and then in the printed announce-
ments that filled the window of Mr. Flash-
man, auctioneer and appraiser, on his own
side of the street.

But none the less did he watch the
door of the 'Royal Library' with as un-
relaxing a scrutiny as ever a weasel
bestowed upon a rabbit-hole.

Presently the girl came out. She
brought no books with her. She had,
however, in her gloved hand a slip of
paper, probably some memorandum or
list of commissions, after consulting which
she tripped daintily forward again, and
entered a Berlin-wool shop a few doors
lower down. After an instant's hesitation,
Constable Barnum entered the library.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' he said,
deferentially, to Mrs. Bennett, behind the
counter, 'but might I ask you, on Super-
intendent Swann's account, if that young lady who just called in here with books—I see 'em, bound in green—is a stranger and a foreigner?'

Mrs. Bennett did not know the policeman, and perhaps would have resented his questioning; but she was mollified by the name of his superior officer, connected as that superior officer was with the lofty ones of the earth. She was herself a customer of her neighbour, Alderman Swann, as he was of her. So she made answer,

'A foreigner she is, but not exactly a stranger, here at least. Mademoiselle, as they call her, has been here, a dozen times or more, on errands from the countess. She is her ladyship's new foreign maid, not French, but something more outlandish still, and a prime favourite,
so the other Thorsdale servants say, with my lady. No, I don't know her name. Mademoiselle is what she's called. Books? yes, she chose a lot, and there they lie, till the carriage comes round. She's gone now, mademoiselle has, to a lot of other shops, and she'll go back presently, in the carriage, with the parcels for my lady at Thorsdale.'

Taking a polite leave of Mrs. Bennett, so soon as he was sure that no further information was to be gleaned from her garrulity, Constable Barnum walked, with quick steps, up the street again, and entered the post-office. The post-mistress was at first disposed to demur to his petition that he might be allowed to look at the last letter which had been dropped into the box. But again the well-known name of Superintendent Swann produced
a talismanic effect, and the fact, too, of a previous relaxation of official discipline disposed the post-mistress to yield a reluctant consent.

'I hope it is not against the rules,' muttered the post-mistress; 'I do hope so.'

'Surely not, ma'am,' suggested the tempter, 'so long as you don't let anything go out of your own hands. A peep at the outsides might be had, mightn't it, by any chance customer that dropped in while one of these young ladies happened to be sorting or stamping at the table there. And in this case it will very much oblige my superior officer, and further the ends of justice.'

The post-mistress gave way. Had she not given way before, she would have been inexorable now; but, as it was, she yielded so far as, with unwilling fingers,
to take out from the box some half-score of the uppermost letters, and to hold them up, one by one, asking, in a dry, perfunctory manner, 'Is it this?' and then again, 'Is this the one?'

At last between the post-mistress's finger and thumb there did appear a letter, pink, stamped in accordance with the regulations of the Postal Union of Nations, and directed to some person residing in the town of Arad, in Hungary. There could be no mistake about the identity of the stationery, or of the foreign handwriting, with the handwriting or the stationery of the anonymous epistle received in Creek Lane, E.C., by Violet's guardian.

'May I trouble you, ma'am, to hold that pink letter up half a minute? Thank you,' said Constable Barnum; 'yes, that
is quite sufficient for Mr. Superintendent Swann, and in his name, ma’am, I beg to express my sense of your kindness.’

Ten minutes later, in the small, inner den of the cramped police-station of Daneborough, Superintendent Swann, looming, as usual, all too large for the narrow apartment allotted to him, was listening to the report of his zealous subordinate. It was beautiful to see with what marked respect the clever policeman, who had been a thief, addressed his dull, superior officer, who owed his present position to the fact that he was born a Swann, and that Swann had always been a name of note in the municipal annals of that seaside borough of Yorkshire.

There were those among the strong, solid members of the borough police, who
whispered that 'Yankee Barnum had found the length of the governor's foot.' It may—nay, it must have been so; but then it must be owned that Constable Barnum was a very serviceable satellite to that luminary, the chief of the Danesborough guardians of order.

'I acted, sir, as I feel sure you would have desired me to do; and my only regret was, since there was no time to be lost, that you had not been there yourself, sir, to manage the rest of it, as you know so well how to do,' humbly remarked the private constable.

'You did the trick pretty well, Barnum—pretty well,' said Superintendent Swann, condescendingly. 'But it is lucky I was here, for somebody has set a light to Farmer Moggs's ricks, within the limits of
the borough, and I was intending to walk out and report whether malice or accident. But I'll send the sergeant.'

He rose as he spoke, and, opening the door which led into the outer office, gave the necessary orders. Then he came back.

'You feel sure, my man, as to the identity of the handwriting?' demanded the chief, authoritatively.

'Smack calf-skin to it, Mr. Superintendent,' replied the policeman, thereby intimating his willingness to give legal testimony with all the customary formalities.

'It is very remarkable,' philosophically observed Mr. Swann, 'how often the same idea, or rather the bud of it, comes into your head, Barnum, which is already full-
CHAPTER XVI.

MADEMOISELLE GLITKA.

Ladies such as the Countess of Thorsdale, handsome, rich, and almost young, have many requirements. Their caprices are manifold, their purses capacious; hence new whims are vehemently welcomed, and almost idly forgotten. And English ladies of rank like to have a foreign maid, just as English lady's-maids are in high demand among the aristocracy of Paris. Perhaps we all of us see the merits, and are blind to the faults, of the native of another country.
Lady Thorsdale thought that in Gliitka, deft, lithe, bold, and quick to comprehend, she had found perfection. Every now and then she dispatched mademoiselle, as the English servants called her, to execute a string of commissions in Daneborough. Glitka forgot nothing; Gliitka deemed nothing impossible—matched unlikely shades, hunted out improbable fabrics from recondite shelves, and, in short, was very adroit as Iris to the Juno whom she served.

On this particular occasion Gliitka's list was a long one, and the carriage which had brought her from Thorsdale Park to Daneborough, and which had been 'put up' at the 'King's Arms' inn, and posting-house of pre-railway celebrity, had some time to wait. But the fare at the 'King's Arms' is good, and the coachman, though an under-coachman, found
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in the stable-yard and the common room admiring listeners. Coroneted buttons on a livery coat do produce the effect, in a certain stratum of society, which stars and crosses and jewelled decorations bring about elsewhere. The under-coachman from Thorsdale Park was quite content to wait.

Mademoiselle Glitka, gliding, tripping, with her well-fitting boots, over the Daneborough pavement, entered shop after shop, creating, generally, a little flutter among the inmates of each emporium, partly due to the importance of such a customer as her noble mistress, partly also to the energetic and impatient manner in which she conducted her shopping. She did not wait, as an English lady’s-maid would have done, to be supplied in accordance with her demand, but, as indignant trades-
people declared, 'drove people about, in her foreign way, asking if it isn't here, or isn't there, as if she knew more about the shelves and drawers of folks' shops, or what they'd got in stock, than the folks knew themselves.'

Had mademoiselle been purchasing on her own account, doubtless the favour of her future custom would have been declined by many a resentful purveyor of feminine wares. But the Earl of Thorsdale was a very great magnate in those parts, and Glitka was merely the emissary of the earl's countess, so that, in homely parlance, to affront the confidential maid of such a lady as Lady Thorsdale would have been indeed to quarrel with one's bread-and-butter.

Glitka, as she darted to and fro, like a kingfisher on the wing above the reed-
beds and sedgy shallows of a river, never noticed the two helmeted figures that watched her from the corner of Tontine Street, which, as every native of Daneborough knows, crosses High Street at its lower extremity, at right angles.

'There is an awkwardness about it, Barnum,' the superintendent condescended to observe, much as a general on the battle-field imparts his feelings to a trusty staff-officer, 'because of her ladyship at Thorsdale.'

Certainly, the name of a lord is yet strangely influential in England. The old power that once attached to patrician rank may have dwindled to a shadow, but the prestige remains. And, after all, a great landowner, deputy lieutenant of the county, and with much house property in Daneborough, was a potentate
not lightly to be angered. Yet Superintendent Swann's palm hungered for more of Mr. Marsh's money, and his vanity longed to be titillated by newspaper encomiums. And he had an idea that he was hired on the side of truth, and against the wrong-doers, which lent him boldness.

'There she goes again!' presently ejaculated the chief policeman, as, just when he had made up his mind to accost the foreign damsel, Glitka dived into a shop where beads, and trimmings, and miscellaneous fripperies were sold.

'Perhaps, sir, it would be better to make sure of her now,' suggested Constable Barnum, who feared lest the Thorsdale carriage should suddenly appear upon the scene.

If it did so, the opportunity would be
lost. But the carriage did not appear, and by-and-by, Glitka, with sundry small parcels, emerged from the repository of miscellaneous fripperies. Superintendent Swann plucked up courage, and strode forward.

‘Mademoiselle,’ he said, and then came to a dead stop.

Glitka did not start, but she halted, turned her face towards the tall policeman-in-chief, and cast a snake-like glance at him—a glance that showed repugnance, but no alarm.

‘You speak to me?’ she asked, deliberately.

‘I beg your pardon, I am sure, mademoiselle,’ apologised the big superintendent; ‘but then, you see, we of the Force are obliged sometimes, in the execution of our duties, to ask a question or two.’
'Have I broken your laws?' the girl asked, defiantly.

The superintendent coughed, awkwardly, behind his white-gloved hand. The question was, indeed, one hard to answer. The police, and in especial our own police, delight in Delphic utterances. They love a bit of mystery. The law gives them a certain—or rather, an uncertain—power over evil-doers, but nobody seems quite to know how far that power extends. Sir William Blackstone—sturdy stem on which so many a graft of legal erudition has taken root—declared the bounds between royal authority and the freedom of the subject to have remained unmeted. So, in our own time, the stipendiary magistrates and the writers of leading articles in the principal London newspapers, with some assistance from the
Home Office and the Supreme Court of Justice, settle in rough-and-ready fashion what the police may, and what they may not, do. On the one hand, we have a zealous execution, caring nothing for, and knowing nothing of, the Great Charter, the Bill of Rights, or any other palladium; on the other, a mass of public opinion antagonistic, in a dull, vague way, to being dragooned, coerced, or spied upon.

And then Superintendent Swann really did not know whether the foreign lady’s maid had broken the law, or had not broken it. All that he positively knew, or pertinently surmised, was that she had written and sent an anonymous letter. The penning of such letters is not a statutory offence. Libels, and letters intended to annoy, do indeed bring their authors to punishment, when caught. But the mere
fact that a volunteer correspondent prefers to remain shrouded in darkness is not as yet in contravention of any Act of Parliament.

'I hope no offence,' said the chief of the Daneborough police, with a meekness that was unusual with him. 'The fact is, we want information. And from what we have learned, mademoiselle, you are in a position to tell us what we want to know.'

'You stop me in your streets as if I were some poor Zigana—some miserable gipsy from Wallachia, or the Banat—whom anyone may question, and whose passport is tattered with the thumbing of gendarme and village beadle,' angrily exclaimed the foreign girl, with all a Hungarian's resentful scorn of that police interference to which a German submits so
stolidly. 'What is your information to me, sir? Or by what right do you molest me? I live at Thorsdale Park. Come there, if you dare.'

And Glitka, disdainful and resolute, put out her little hand, as if to brush away the intruders, with a quick, imperious gesture.

Superintendent Swann, with his mouth open, and his big hands hanging helplessly by his side, knew not what to say, but his acolyte had quicker wits than he.

'You see, miss,' said the rat-eyed policeman, speaking with a marked deference, and touching the peak of his helmet as he spoke, 'this is no charge, no accusation, but a delicate matter, concerning a letter which Mr. Marsh, who is our employer—or rather that of my superior officer, Mr. Superintendent Swann, of the borough
police, here—has got us to make inquiries about. Mr. Marsh, I can assure you, miss, has no hostile feeling towards the writer of that letter; but is now in Yorkshire, anxious to see the lady who wrote it, since he fancies she might be as anxious as he is to prevent a marriage between a certain mercenary party, and a certain young lady who shall be nameless. And Mr. Marsh has found, since he came down from London, that the duty he had set before him is not quite so easy as he had hoped. But this, Mr. Superintendent Swann could tell you better than myself.'

'You mean,' said Glitka, in an altered tone, while her dark eyes alternately dilated and contracted, 'that the traitor presses his suit, in spite of the guardian you mean.'
She said no more, but stood hesitating. She had said enough, however, for her words were equivalent to a confession, so far as the authorship of the anonymous letter was concerned. Even Superintendent Swann's slow-working brain perceived that. He longed to take her into custody then and there. But it was necessary to speak her fair, and so he said, as smoothly as he could,

'If you would do us the favour, mademoiselle, to give us five minutes' conversation, away from this public place, where, as you see, we are attracting notice already, it would be a very great obligation, besides helping on to the object we both have, mutually, in view.'

The superintendent may have been a little involved in his grammar, and obscure in his diction, but Glitka understood him
well enough. And there was no denying the fact that, even in Daneborough, and somnolent places of that stamp, there are prying eyes, and tongues that wag whenever pabulum for gossip can be found. Already, a little dull curiosity had been awakened by the unaccustomed spectacle of two police-officers in full uniform, in conversation with a dark and handsome young person with flashing eyes, and whom some of the starers knew to be Lady Thorsdale's foreign maid.

'But where am I to go?' asked the girl, impatiently. 'Is your bureau—office, you call it, or station, near to hand?'

'Why, not exactly so, mademoiselle,' replied the perplexed superintendent, wishing with all his heart that the Daneborough municipality had provided himself and his satellites with less narrow
lodgings. It would never do to give audience there, in that tiny den at the station, to a vehement foreigner of the fair sex. To talk with Mr. Marsh had been possible, if inconvenient, but he trembled at the idea of mademoiselle's shrill voice reverberating through those cramped premises, and every policeman turned into an unwilling eavesdropper.

In this emergency, Constable Barnum, as often happened, came to the rescue of his embarrassed chief.

'The Imperial Hotel, sir,' he said, in a low voice, 'is very near, just round the corner of Tontine Street, and very respectable, as I daresay this lady knows. I think, if you were to select a quiet place——'

'Why, just so!' broke in the superin-
tendent, loudly and confidently. 'It has come to my mind, mademoiselle, that we couldn't do better than talk the affair over in one of the private sitting-rooms at the Imperial Hotel, which is what I call handy to here, only one minute's walk, and where Mr. and Mrs. Larding know me well. So, if you'll walk in front of us, that far—'

Glitka, with a slight inclination of her proud head, notified her assent to this proposal. Then she walked on, with no appearance of hurry or confusion, though by this time heads were thrust forth from shop-doors and first-floor windows. She turned the corner of Tontine Street, and came to a stop in front of the Imperial Hotel, which had nothing imperial about it, except that it was big, a great overbuilt
barrack of an inn, which had ruined the company that had constructed it, which did little business, but needed much repair, and about which, even now, a savour of bankruptcy clung. Superintendent Swann went in, bustling, and, having presumably obtained the consent of the hotel-keeper or his wife, respectfully invited mademoiselle to enter.

Mademoiselle complied, but, once in a damp little sitting-room, furnished in Honduras mahogany and horsehair, she turned on the superintendent like a wild cat at bay.

'Are you an enemy, or are you a friend?' she asked, showing her white teeth, tigerishly.

'I'd much prefer, mademoiselle, to be a friend,' said the superintendent, doing his best to be diplomatic. 'What we both
desire, I am sure, is to protect a certain young lady, and to prevent a certain designing person from—'

'For her—for the girl I care nothing!' flashed out Glitka, scornfully. 'What matters to me your Miss Violet, one of your English dolls, pink and white, and always as if moulded in the wax? But he—the false chevalier—the traitor—he shall not marry her because she has money. No, I will stab him before he does!'

Superintendent Swann was too much amazed at this fresh outburst to be ready with his reply. But Constable Barnum was up to the situation.

'What my superior officer and myself wish for, miss,' he said, glibly, 'is to make things comfortable, and to put a stopper on the plans of a certain gentleman that
wants a rich wife, while the guardian of Miss Mowbray remains in Yorkshire. Now, miss. Mr. Marsh is a business man. He is wasting his time here, and of course cannot afford to loiter always at Woodburn. And he, and he alone, as Superintendent Swann has impressed upon me, over and over again, in that clear-sighted way he has, has authority to put an end to this gentleman's little game. Perhaps, miss, if you and he—meaning Mr. Marsh—would have a chat over things, as my superior officer has often suggested, and agree to pull together—'

'You are right!' responded Glitka, decisively—'Yes, I will do it. Tell your employer, your Mr. Marsh, that he has only to write to me, and I will meet him, and give him proofs, to enable him to act. That I live at Thorsdale Park—that I am
maid to Milady the Countess, you know. Give me a piece of paper—I have a pencil—and I will write my name.'

The piece of paper was brought. The foreign maid, in a bold, free hand, wrote down the words,

'Mademoiselle Glitka Eberganyi.'

'Good-bye!' she said, shortly, and, with a nod, went out. Superintendent Swann stalked in contemplative fashion back to the police-station, whilst his shrewd acolyte returned to his dull beat amid the tranquil streets.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.