PARABLES

AND

SKETCHES.

BY

ALFRED E. KNIGHT,

Author of "Tobiah Jalf, Lay Preacher and Methodist," &c.

Edinburgh and London:
OLIPHANT, ANDERSON & FERRIER.

Second Edition

Completing Fifth Thousand.

THE "GOLDEN NAILS" SERIES

OF

ADDRESSES TO THE YOUNG.

Post 8vo size. Neat Cloth Binding. Price 1s. 6d. each.

"Messrs Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier's 'Golden Nails' Series is one of the happiest of recent enterprises in book-publishing. Every volume has had a good reception, and every new volume increases one's admiration for the enterprise."—*Expository Times.*

Sixth Thousand.

GOLDEN NAILS, and Other Addresses to Children. By the Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

Fourth Thousand.

PLEASANT PLACES. Words to the Young. By the Rev. R. S. DUFF, D.D.

Fifth Thousand.

PARABLES AND SKETCHES. By ALFRED E. KNIGHT.

Fourth Thousand.

SILVER WINGS. Addresses to Children. By the Rev. ANDREW G. FLEMING.

Fourth Thousand.

THREE FISHING BOATS, and Other Talks to Children. By the Rev. JOHN C. LAMBERT, B.D.

LAMPS AND PITCHERS, and Other Addresses to Children. By the Rev. GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D.

Third Thousand.

A BAG WITH HOLES, and Other Talks to Children. By the Rev. JAS. AITCHISON.

Third Thousand.

KINGLESS FOLK, and Other Addresses on Bible Animals. By the Rev. JOHN ADAMS, B.D., Inverkeillor.

CONTENTS.

Decision.

"A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself."—FOSTER'S *Essays.*

IN a lonely wood, at the top of an old elm, a missel-thrush had built her nest.

Here, in the bright spring weather, she had deposited three pretty little eggs; and night and day, through many long, long weary hours, she had sat over her little treasures, and had warmed and watched them with all a mother's care, until, in course of time, the eggs were hatched, and three little missel-thrushes issued from their shells. This was a full reward for all her patient watching, and she quite forgot her former anxieties by reason of the great joy her little family afforded her.

For she had had her anxieties, I must tell you. The saucy magpies had given her a world of trouble, and it had often been as much as she could do to drive such quarrelsome visitors away. Then, again, on more than one occasion she had seen those strange beings called men wandering about in search of nests and birds' eggs, and it had needed all her arts to lure them away from her own dear home and treasures.

But, curious to relate, the most fruitful source of anxiety to her fond heart was the tree in which her nest was built. The elm had deceived her.

Yes, the elm had deceived her. When, in the early spring, she had been looking out for a safe and suitable place in which to build her nest, the elm had stretched out his arms invitingly, and had said, as plainly as a tree could say it: "Build in me." And the tree had looked so tempting, decked out as he was in a coat of green, which the ivy had lent him, and which, by the way, the missel-thrush had really thought its own, that the bird had

been captivated by the winning voice, and had reared her little dwelling in the elm tree's arms.

But one gusty March morning, when the wind was swaying the forest trees to and fro, the missel-thrush had heard a strange cracking noise at the foot of the elm, and on going down to look she had found to her horror that the tree was dying.

Yes, dying! There was no doubt about it, for disease and decay had evidently been busy there for a long time, and the elm tree's case was clearly a hopeless one. This had been a sad discovery for the missel-thrush, for she knew that there was no remedy, and it was too late in the season to begin another nest.

Still, the tree might last out for some time yet, and it was in this hope that she had laid her eggs, and hatched her young, anxiously anticipating the moment when their little wings would be strong enough to enable them to leave the treacherous elm for ever.

At last a time came when the missel-

thrush thought it would be wise to acquaint her young ones of their danger. Their feathers were grown, and it was time that they began to fly. So she opened the conversation in a general way by asking:

"Don't you think it must be pleasant to understand the art of flying?"

"Yes, yes!" said the missel-thrushes in unison.

Had the mother-thrush dropped a worm into each of their beaks they could scarcely have been more delighted.

"Well, then," said the fond mother, spreading her wings, "look at me, and do as I bid you."

The little missel-thrushes looked, but they had no resolution to act, and retreated precipitately to the farthest corner of the nest.

"We are so high up," said one of them, "and might fall."

"Our wings are so small, and will not carry us," objected another.

"And I do not want to fly," objected the third, sullenly.

"Fie! fie!" said the mother-bird, reply

ing to the three objections at once. "You only want resolution, and flying is quite easy and delightful. There is no fear of falling, and, if you were to grow giddy, am not I here to help you? Come, just hop to the edge of the nest and try."

"We cannot—we cannot!" cried the little missel-thrushes in terrified concert.

"What! cannot trust your mother?" said the grieved parent, in a voice of tender reproach.

"Yes, yes, I can trust you," said the youngest fledgeling, running to the edge of the nest with a full heart.

But her resolution again failed her, as she looked down and saw the giddy space between the nest and the ground.

"Don't look at the dangers and difficulties, little one, they are only imaginary; but look at me, and do as I bid you. *One moment of decision, and you are free.*"

So sang the mother-thrush, as she again flew upward in the morning air.

"But it seems all dark before me, and I am growing giddy," said the baby-thrush, mounting, nevertheless, to the edge of

the nest. And here she remained for a moment, in spite of doubts and fears.

"The first step of faith is always in the dark," sang the mother-bird. "But trust me, and come."

"You have told me," said the little one, spreading out her wings. "I will trust you. I am coming."

With that the trembling claws let go the last twig, and in a moment the young bird was fluttering in the air.

"Do you want me now?" sang the mother-bird, her voice tremulous with joy.

"Not to teach me to fly, mother," chirped the baby-thrush. "See! I can fly quite easily; but I want you to be near me always, to tell me about the sun and the stars, and the rosy clouds, and to comfort me by your loving words."

"That I will gladly do," sang the mother-bird. "But come back now and rest awhile; for remember, though you have learnt to fly, you cannot be always on the wing."

. . . . .

As you may imagine, there was a great

commotion in the nest when these events were taking place.

"Certainly the size of the wings seems no hindrance," remarked the missel-thrush which had formerly raised an objection on that point.

"Why, no," said the other, sullenly; "and I could fly if I wished. It is quite easy."

"Why don't you, then?"

"Because I don't choose to. I have my worms and berries brought to me, and plenty of other good food, and therefore I'm quite content to remain where I am."

"But what brings these good things to you? Is it not the one who wants you —for your own good—to learn to fly?"

"A nice one to preach!" said the complaining missel-thrush, pertly. "Why don't you learn to fly yourself?"

"I wish I could," sighed the other.

The mother-bird returned at that moment, and just caught the close of their conversation.

"Wishing will not do it," said she; "the

power is within your reach, and you have only to use it."

"But surely I need something?" sighed the willing bird.

"Yes—*decision;* that is all," said the mother-thrush.

"Yes, of course. Decision—that is all," broke in the baby-thrush, peeping knowingly into the nest; "it's as easy as eating worms. Dear me, I never thought that flying was so simple!"

"I always thought so," muttered the complaining thrush, in a sulky undertone.

"But you never truly believed it," said the mother-bird, sadly.

The little grumbler was the oldest of the family, but did not feel equal to contending the point with his mother, so he just ruffled up his feathers and then lapsed into silence.

"Whether you learn to fly or not," pursued the mother in a grave voice, "I have a sad discovery to make to you. Your lives are not safe where you are; they are in daily, hourly, momentary danger; they are being threatened even

now; in short, the dwelling in which you have been born and reared has been built upon a rotten foundation!"

This was a disturbing disclosure for the three young missel-thrushes, but specially for the two who had not learnt to fly. The elder one, however, tried to brave it out, and muttered very confidently that *he* wasn't going to be frightened in that way; *he* knew all about the tree; he had lived in it all his life, and hoped yet to spend many happy days there.

"Be warned in time," said the mother-thrush. "Look at the leaves; they are shrivelled and falling though the summer has scarcely begun. Use your wings, get quickly out of this place of death, or you will die too."

"O teach me to fly!" cried the second-born, in a perfect flutter of fear, "teach me; I am willing to learn."

"Look to me, and act as I have told you," chirped the mother-bird, as she opened her wings; "do not be afraid."

"*Must* I come?" cried the second-born "Is there no other way?"

"None, if you would wish to fly," chirped the mother.

A moment more and the young trembler —trembling no longer—was rejoicing in the use of her wings.

"One by love, and another by fear," chirped the mother-bird, as she soared aloft; "what matters the way, so long as they are safe?"

. . . . .

"How still the air is!" observed one of the young missel-thrushes that evening, as they were going to rest.

"Yes; there is thunder in the air, and I fear we shall have a storm to-night," returned the mother-bird.

No more was said, and the three little missel-thrushes closed their eyes, and were soon fast asleep.

But the mother sat watching and watching, thinking most of all, I daresay, of her little one that would not learn to fly.

Presently a few big drops of rain came pattering down on the dry leaves, and one or two would have fallen into the nest and upon the little sleepers, but the mother

spread out her wings and so sheltered them.

But a strong wind was rising, and as it rose the raindrops came thicker and faster, and as they fell the dead leaves fell rustling too.

"It is closing in for a rough night," thought the mother-bird, as she buried her head in her feathers; "but I will not wake them yet."

At that moment the wind rushed boisterously in among the branches, and broke one of them in half with a loud crack.

"It is time to wake them now," said the mother. "Children, we must leave this spot at once."

Six little eyes opened to the call, but they were tired little eyes, and closed again the next moment.

But now a loud peal of thunder broke over their heads, and at this unceremonious call they awoke in some confusion. Another crack, and the two who could fly had taken to their wings, and were fluttering nervously in the air.

"Fear not, but fly down amongst the

bushes," chirped the mother-bird; "you will get shelter there."

"But what must I do?" cried the eldest missel-thrush, as another dèad branch fell crackling to the ground.

"Look to me," came the old repeated cry, and the mother gave an anxious hop to the edge of the nest; "spread your wings, and use them as I do."

"It is dark; I cannot see you!" wailed the wretched bird.

"Alas! it is too true!" cried the mother-thrush; "night has come on, and you are unprepared."

Yes,—it was too late. For at that moment the forked twig which held the little nest gave way before the wind, and was swept, with its burden of house and tenant, into the thick darkness!

And this, I understand, was the end of the eldest missel-thrush, though I have heard that the rotten tree is still standing, and that some foolish ones are building in it even now.

The More Excellent Way.

"Our Rights will never take us out of self;
Our Yieldings sometimes lift us up to God."
Weeds from a Wild Garden.

"IT is very cold," said a Snowdrop, one frosty February morning, to an Icicle that was hanging from the window-sill above her head.

"Cold!" repeated the Icicle, "I don't feel cold."

"You are cold by nature, and perhaps that is the reason," said the Snowdrop.

"You are too forward by half," said the Icicle, in his most freezing manner; "the cold is a judgment upon you, I make no doubt."

"Too forward! Pray tell me when I have acted in a forward way?" The Snowdrop was not a little nettled by the Icicle's insinuation.

"That is soon answered," returned the Icicle, coldly. "What are you doing above ground, I should like to know. What but the precocious forwardness of your nature would have brought you out of the ground in such weather?"

The Snowdrop, who was looking very pale, trembled uneasily; and any one but an Icicle would have been melted to pity by her looks; but the Icicle stood stiffly out, and continued:

"You know as well I do that your conduct is most improper. You know that you are not in your right place at this moment. Instead of being content with a position of obscurity under the earth until the spring comes back, you must stick your vain little head above ground, and rise out of it with all the importance of an evergreen. And now you are fretty because you find the world cold and cheerless—a pretty state of things to be sure!"

"I think you are rather hard upon me," said the Snowdrop, sorrowfully. "I own that I should have done better to wait patiently with my friend the Crocus until a more genial season; but I have already suffered a great deal from the consequences of my folly, and think therefore that you might speak to me in a less harsh and chilling manner. I cannot possibly do more than express my sorrow."

"Oh, you acknowledge your fault?" said the Icicle, speaking slowly to give himself time to raise some new complaint. "Well, I'm thankful for that. But you can scarcely talk of being sorry, after acting so rudely in my presence. Do you know that a very important principle is involved in your conduct; and though I should be willing to forgive the injury, I cannot consent to——"

"But I am sorry," said the Snowdrop, "and *so* cold."

"Let us consider the principle first," said the Icicle, in his iciest manner; "I fear that you do not sufficiently realise the importance of principles."

"What is a principle, if you please?" asked the Snowdrop.

Just then a Sunbeam lighted upon the trembling flower, and in such a kindly and inspiriting manner that the Snowdrop felt emboldened to repeat the question in his hearing.

"What is a principle, if you please, Sunbeam?"

"Don't talk about principles just now," said the Sunbeam; "you are cold, aren't you?"

"Yes, very cold," returned the Snowdrop; "but I shall soon get warm again if you remain with me a little."

"And principles won't warm you, will they?" inquired the Sunbeam.

"I don't think so," returned the Snowdrop, timidly.

"Then leave them alone," said the Sunbeam; "at least, for the present. We may have occasion to discuss them later on."

"I only asked," said the Snowdrop, "because the Icicle has been telling me that I do not sufficiently realise the importance of principles."

"And I repeat that assertion," said the Icicle.

"But the Sunbeam says I must leave principles alone, and get warm," observed the Snowdrop, archly.

"The Sunbeam understands nothing about the question," said the Icicle, angrily.

"I don't know so much about that," returned the Snowdrop, who had grown wonderfully courageous now that the Sunbeam had befriended her. "The Sunbeam is much older than you, and I'm sure he is much wiser. And who are you, after all? You were only born last night; while the Sunbeam, I have heard say, has lived for many years."

"What you say is the truth, but that is no reason why you should abuse the Icicle," said the Sunbeam.

"This is just her impudent way," added the Icicle, encouraged in his turn by the friendliness of the Sunbeam. "But tell me, sir, is it not important that principles should be maintained?"

"As a rule they should; but we must

watch lest we make the rule an occasion for avenging wrongs." The Sunbeam had no party feeling, and could speak the truth without fear or favour.

"Your remark, I trust, contains no insinuation," said the Icicle.

"I insinuate nothing," returned the Sunbeam; "you ask me for my opinion, and I give it. But, since you have drawn me into the discussion, permit me to add that I do not think your way of approaching the Snowdrop was a happy one. Your manner was too cold, and you were much too forward with your principles. There is such a thing as being righteous overmuch; and never are we in greater danger of so failing than when, on whatever pretext, we withhold a forgiveness that is asked."

"Then you set no value on principles," persisted the Icicle.

"Did not I say that they should be maintained?" returned the Sunbeam, warmly; "but when the Snowdrop was drooping and shivering with the cold, that was not the time to lecture her about

principles. However, the truth is, you have been out with the Frost all night, which has made you stiff and cold, and that is why you are so unyielding. In a little while you will wonder that you could ever have acted so frigidly."

"He is relenting already!" said the Snowdrop, compassionately; "see his tears!"

It was a fact, too. For other Sunbeams, closely related to the Sunbeam who had lately spoken, had gathered round him with such melting tenderness of manner, that he was actually weeping himself away.

And the big tears, as they fell, went down to the roots of the little Snowdrop, as a witness to the Icicle's sorrow. And the Snowdrop drank them up; and thus they became, in a certain sense, a part of herself, and so she lived on many years in the strength which they had given her. And when the Crocuses appeared she was still alive, and, of course, had much to tell them about her friend the Icicle.

The White Sheep that left the Fold.

"Trust not the dangerous path again—
O forward step and lingering will!
O loved and warned in vain!
And wilt thou perish still?"

KEBLE'S *Christian Year.*

SUN, Breezes, Rain, and Dew all contributed to the comfort and happiness of the White Sheep.

Let us see, first of all, what the Sun did. That he acted the part of a true friend all the year round may be taken as a thing of course, but it was during sheep-shearing time that his genial glances and daily companionship were especially welcome. The life of our poor Sheep during this season was anything but plea-

sant, for it was no joke to be driven into a running stream, and rolled over and over in it by the Shepherd's men; and had not the Sun taken the chill from the water, and afterwards helped to remove some of the moisture from the heavy fleece, it might have fared hardly with our simple friend. Of course the washing was necessary, for dirt-marks on a white fleece are so very discreditable, and only water can remove them; but the experience of washing had its sorrows, and here it was that the sympathy of the Sun was so stimulating.

The Breezes, also, were the Sheep's true friends. They helped the Sun to dry his fleece after the washing; and on other occasions, when the Sun was inclined perhaps to be a little warm in his friendship, they would gently fan the wearied Sheep, and cool the parched grass before he stretched himself upon it.

And the Rain. She was very kind to our fleecy friend. The Breezes could only cool the grass, but the Rain went down to its roots, and made it succulent and

fresh; and so the Sheep had to thank the Rain for many good and wholesome meals.

And the Dew was like the Rain in her friendship, only she was milder and more constant. Morning and evening she paid her visits to the Sheep, and did much to make his life peaceful and happy.

Could the Sheep have known it, he was highly privileged in having so many steady friends, all engaged in promoting his happiness and comfort.

But then there was the Shepherd—the wise and watchful Shepherd; and he, you may be sure, was the truest friend of all. Sometimes, and particularly in the winter months, the Sun would cool a little in his friendship; or the Breezes would get rude and boisterous; or the Rain would be a little too gushing; or the Dew would come by deputy in the person of the Frost. But the Shepherd was never at fault. He was the same at all seasons—unchanging in his love, untiring in his watchfulness, and unremitting in his care. He was, indeed, the Sheep's most faithful and devoted friend.

Once his fleecy friend had the foot-rot, which made him walk very badly for a time; but the Shepherd noticed his limping gait, and the Sheep was speedily restored —not, however, before there had been some rather painful paring of the hoof and a little salutary washing of the diseased member in chloride of lime. Occasionally too the simple creature was sadly teased and worried by the flesh-fly, which sought to lay its eggs in the uncovered parts of his skin; but the Shepherd was more than a match for this troublesome pest, and no great mischief was done.

Happy, indeed, were the long hours spent by this favoured Sheep in the Shepherd's company. He had nothing to fear, and everything to hope for that was worth having. Want and hunger were unknown to him. He was made to lie down in green pastures, and was led beside still waters. In short, he was the happiest of Sheep.

But one November afternoon, when the Sheep was standing with several of his companions within the fold, and the Shep-

herd was in another part of the field unfastening the padlock of a shed in which his flock was to repose that night, a Black Sheep sidled up to our shivering friend and became communicative.

"It is freezing cold here," he said, in a discontented voice.

"It *is* cold," returned the White Sheep, with a piteous bleat.

"Who *could* be anything but cold in such a place?" said the Black Sheep.

This, to the White Sheep, was really quite a shocking inquiry, and he answered with an involuntary shudder—

"Oh! I wouldn't say that!"

"And why not?" asked the Black Sheep, in a supercilious voice.

"Why should I?—that's the question," returned the White Sheep. "I think I've spent some very happy and comfortable times in the fold, and I trust something will be done to make me comfortable to-night."

"Oh, you *think* you have spent some happy times! It strikes me there is little else than thinking in the matter. And

you *trust* you'll be made comfortable to-night! Trust's an easy word; but what's the use of trusting? At present things don't look as though you were going to be very comfortable, do they? Whom are you to trust? Where's your Shepherd? Hasn't he deserted you already?"

"Deserted me!—I won't believe it!" said the White Sheep, indignantly.

"Don't lose your temper," returned his black companion; "there's no occasion to be flustered. The fact is, you don't know a true friend when you see him. The Shepherd, I suppose, is your ideal of a true friend; but what has he done for you?"

"A great deal, I think," said the White Sheep, reflectively.

"You *think!* And pray what is the great deal he has done? He made you very ill last spring, that I know, for I saw him rubbing you all over with mercurial ointment and lard; and that was a nice way to treat a sheep, wasn't it?"

"If I remember rightly," returned the White Sheep, "I was ill before the oint-

ment was applied, and I got better after it. Indeed, I am more than half persuaded that the ointment was my cure. I believe——"

"You *believe!* I hate creeds!" said the Black Sheep. "But you were always absurdly credulous."

"Is it more harmful to believe in the Shepherd's kindness than to doubt it?" asked the White Sheep, innocently.

"Foolish creature!" retorted the Black Sheep. "Have not I shown you that the Shepherd tried to harm you last spring, and what further proof do you wish for? Did not he give you the foot-rot the year before, by cruelly cutting your hoof and washing it with chloride of lime, besides separating you from your companions in a most heartless manner as though you were unfit for their society? And didn't he try to drown you in the mill-stream last June, and only a week later rob you of your handsome fleece?"

The mention of the fleece touched a sore point in the White Sheep's memory, and from that moment he began to waver.

The fleece had been his great pride during the mild spring, and when the summer came and he was stripped of it, the experience had not been a pleasant one. Who ever did like being stripped of his pride?

The Black Sheep saw that he had scored a point, and continued,—"And now your fleece has grown again, just see what your amiable Shepherd has done—smeared you all over with tar and butter, and caused I don't know how much damage to your wool! Do you call that kindness? Why, my handsome friend, your own natural intelligence, of which you possess so large a share, should teach you differently, and *would* do so, but for this poor blind faith of yours."

"And do you really think I am too credulous?" asked the wavering sheep.

"Think!" answered his companion; "thinking is not the word — I *know!* Why, my dear friend, you have little idea what wisdom you possess, and how it is all paralysed, if I may say so, by your thoughtless credulity. An independent

exercise of your faculties would place you in possession of a joy which you never tasted before, and of a liberty which you cannot at present understand. Your superstitious reverence for the Shepherd sadly trammels you."

"How is this independence to be gained?" asked the White Sheep, eagerly.

"Why, in the first place, you must learn to treat me as I have always treated you —as a friend. In the second place, you must submit to my leading in everything. In the third place, you must be prepared to turn your tail upon the Shepherd, and to leave the fold without delay."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!" cried the White Sheep, shrinking back, aghast.

"No—of course not"—the voice of the Black Sheep had become very cynical all at once—"of course not. You prefer being blind, credulous, and cold, to being wise, free, and happy. As I said before, you do not know your true friends."

"But I was born and fostered and brought up in the very midst of the fold,

and, to tell you the truth, I am half afraid of leaving it."

"Of course," returned the Black Sheep; "that is one of the results of your bringing up. Ever since you were a lamb you have been taught to trust the Shepherd, and been schooled into the belief that there is no true happiness except within the fold. The result is you have never exercised an independent judgment, and so know nothing of the thousand and one delights which lie beyond your narrow circle."

What was to be done? The prospect certainly seemed inviting, and it was true the Shepherd was not in sight at that moment.

"I will come a short distance with you," said the White Sheep, yielding; "there can be no harm in that."

Yet something told him that there *was* some harm in it, and he would have given anything, just at that crisis, to recall the words.

"Come along, then," said the Black Sheep, cheerily, as he leapt through a hole in the fold-net; "you will soon be

free from this life of ill-treatment and restraint."

The White Sheep was now beside his black companion on the outside of the fold, where he stood shivering, and not a little frightened.

"Now, we're free!" cried the Black Sheep, triumphantly. "Come along, old friend."

So they trotted on together in the midst of a gathering mist; and in a very little while the fold was out of sight.

Evening had set in, and the air was piercingly cold. The White Sheep was a little surprised that the promised joy was so long in coming; but he kept quiet at first—and, indeed, had quite enough to occupy him in his fleece, which was continually getting entangled in the long brambles that covered the broad path which they were taking. At last he became fatigued, and stood still to rest a moment.

"And so here we are!" said the Black Sheep, heartily; "freed from the silly superstitious notions that were such a

trammel to you in the fold. Free to think as you like, speak as you like, act as you like—with a due regard, of course, to the sentiments of those around you; isn't it glorious?"

But the glory of the thing was not so evident to the White Sheep, who was ready to drop with fatigue, and found the wet cold mist exceptionally cheerless. He shook his head despondingly.

"Are we nearly there?" he presently asked.

"Where?" returned his companion.

"Where the thousand and one delights are of which you told me."

"Well, to be sure! Are they not all around you at this very moment? You must be blind."

"I am very wretched," returned the White Sheep, "and cannot see even *one* delight, to say nothing of the odd thousand. I wish I were back in the fold."

"What fold?"

"Why, the fold, to be sure."

"You are dreaming. You never were in any fold. Some strange fancy must

have possessed you. Perhaps the cold has made you sleepy."

"You are jesting with me," said the White Sheep, reproachfully.

"Indeed I am not jesting. I know nothing about a fold."

The White Sheep was greatly puzzled. "Did not the Shepherd place me there this afternoon?"

"What Shepherd? This is some more of your dreaming," said the Black Sheep.

The White Sheep peered long and anxiously into the mist, hoping to catch a glimpse of fold or Shepherd, but could see nothing.

"I suppose you doubt my words?" said the Black Sheep, coldly.

"But there *is* a Shepherd, isn't there?" said the White Sheep, piteously; "you were talking of him yourself before I left the fold."

"More fancies," answered the Black Sheep; "you are mistaking forms of your own intuitions for concrete realities."

"I don't understand your long words," observed the White Sheep; "but who,

may I ask, watched over and cared for me in the happy days that are past?"

"Fancies—fancies!" answered the Black Sheep. "Don't you perceive that both the fold and the Shepherd are simply apparitions of your mind?"

"But I have seen them with my eyes: I can have no doubt of it."

The Black Sheep gave a knowing wink.

"You *think* you have seen them," he said; "but what you were really conscious of was simply an affection of the retina."

"But have I not touched them too?" said the poor Sheep, becoming more and more mystified.

"You *think* you have," explained the Black Sheep; "but what you were really conscious of was, not that you actually touched them, but that the nerves of your body underwent a change."

"Perhaps you also are only an apparition of the mind," said the White Sheep, with delightful simplicity.

"Come now, if you are going to be rude I shall have to leave you," said the Black Sheep, touchily.

And leave him he did; for they had not proceeded on their journey more than a few paces when the White Sheep became entangled in a bramble, and when, after some feeble efforts to extricate himself, he sank down exhausted, the Black Sheep turned his tail on his afflicted friend, and trotted away.

"False creature!" said the White Sheep, faintly, "thus to forsake a struggling friend. Alas! but you are no friend. You are a deceiver, and have lured me from the fold by treachery. Yet come back, and remain with me: for though I am in this plight, and the thorns are pricking me, my place is a safer one than yours. Faithless and ungrateful as I have been to my kind Shepherd, I know that he will not desert me in my hour of need. Come back, and be ready to share with me a place upon his shoulder."

And when his false friend returned him no answer, he added this further admonition,—

"Come back — come back! You are wandering, you know not whither. Con-

fident as you are in your own wisdom, you are lost; and it will be certain death to you if you refuse to come back."

But the Black Sheep was out of hearing by that time, and the exhausted wanderer was quite alone. The night was very dark; the mist had wrapped him round like a shroud; and the thorns were tearing his fleece, and pricking his wearied limbs.

What was to be done? He was getting colder and colder every moment, and it was certain that he could not live in this condition till morning. He would make another effort to extricate himself.

Alas! it was fruitless. As he struggled to get away, a thorn that was longer than any which had pricked him yet was driven into his unprotected leg, and he sank back with exhaustion and pain.

"I am very sorry," said the Bramble, "but if you had kept within the fold I should have had no occasion to hurt your pretty limbs."

Ay — that was it. He had wandered from the fold, and was now suffering the consequences of his folly. His body was

numbed and weary, his limbs were torn and bleeding, and the thick mist had blotted out the Shepherd from his view.

At length—it was his last resource—he turned his head in the direction of the fold, and began to bleat piteously.

Before the sound had died away, an answering voice was heard in the darkness, and a form that was not to be mistaken appeared through the mist. Taking the strayed one in his arms, the Shepherd placed him tenderly on his shoulder, and without one chiding word or angry look bore him back to the fold.

And as for the Black Sheep, he wandered on and on in his own proud way, until, towards morning, he came to a dark precipice, into which he blindly leapt, and after that was never heard of more.

The Lily that had its Neck Broken.

"To wilful men,
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters."
—*King Lear.*

THE garden in which the Lilies lived was surrounded by an old wall, in which the Wren and Fly-catcher had their nests, and on which the Mason-bee reared her habitation. Gorgeous Butterflies and Beetles with glittering wings issued from its thousand chinks and crannies, and Spiders spread their webs amongst the ivy which almost covered it.

Within this picturesque enclosure were flowers of every form and colour. Richly

scented ones, such as the Pinks and Damask roses, the Honey-suckle and Sweet-briar, the Stocks and Gilliflowers; and others of less odoriferous pretensions, Monkshood and Phlox, the climbing Cobœa and Love-everlasting, the white-flowered Bachelor's-button, and the tall showy Asphodels.

Ay, it was a lovely garden this: one that you might lie down in and dream of Fairyland. For there were plenty of green arbours to lie under, and smooth-shaven stretches of green lawn; and many a time, I doubt not, had one little Maiden slept there, and actually dreamt of fays and fairies.

Well, it was in this garden that the Lilies lived. There were two of them, I must tell you, and they were sisters. Both were tall and stately, and exceedingly fair to look upon; but in disposition they were not alike. You might have learnt this on one memorable occasion from a conversation which they had together.

"I'll not submit to this treatment any longer," said the elder Lily, with an indig-

nant shake of her fair head ; "as though I can't stand alone!"

The cause of grievance was a thin white hazel-wand, to which the Lily had been confined by a piece of twine.

"The Gardener is wiser than we, and doubtless sees that we need such treatment," said the younger Lily, quietly.

"You may need it—I do not," returned her sister, pettishly ; "I hate restraint!"

"What we hate is sometimes what we need," said the younger Lily ; "surely the Gardener knows what is best for us."

She had herself been tied up by the Gardener that morning, but had betrayed no resentment ; indeed, she had been well content to trust herself unreservedly to his care, convinced that to be passive and patient was the duty and only sure happiness of a dependent creature. How did she grow? Not by her own will, certainly. And who was it watered her roots in the dry weather, and kept her clear of the slugs and caterpillars? Not herself, surely. She could have no will in such matters. Considered alone, the confinement to the

hazel rod was not pleasant; but when she thought of the many good things with which her life was crowned, and weighed them against the evil things, she was surprised to find how much heavier the good things weighed; and when her meditations had carried her as far as this, she had said to herself,—"What if some day I should discover that even the evil things are good, and that it is my own senses which have deceived me?"

But the wilful Lily was not so easily satisfied.

"I'll not be put down!" she said, snappishly. "Surely I'm my own mistress, and can have a voice in my own affairs. This wretched stick is positively ugly, and I tell you I can stand quite well without it."

"You think you can," said the younger Lily, dryly.

"I'll not be put down!" repeated her companion, straining with all her might to get free; "a Lily that can submit quietly to such indignities should go and live with the Daisies, who seem to exist to be trodden upon."

At that moment the twine gave way, and the liberated Lily—buds, petals, stem, and leaves—shook with a momentary and tremulous delight.

"Now I am free," she murmured, as the twine dropped aimlessly to the ground.

"Submission would have been best," was the closing remark of the sister Lily; "licence is not liberty, and may end in worse bondage."

But the wilful one, being proud of her achievement, went on talking for a long time, till her sister grew quite ashamed of her, and had to hang her head. And still she rambled on, till the shadows grew longer on the gravel path, and the wrens and the fly-catchers went to their nests, and the sun sank down in a bank of fire behind the crannied wall; by which time the flowers were almost lost in the gloom, and the garden seemed quite deserted.

There was a storm that night, and next morning it would have made your heart ache to have seen the younger Lily—she was so sad. Perhaps the cause of her depression was very near at hand; for her

sister, till yesterday a fair and stately flower like herself, was lying bruised and bleeding at her side. In fact (and, of course, we only desire to speak of facts) the wilful Lily was dying.

During the night the wind had broken her beautiful neck, and now the pale bleeding head was hanging powerless from the stem. Poor thing! her silly pride had been her ruin.

Her sister was full of compassion. The Lilies had lived together, on the same spot, for many pleasant months, the only members of their family in all the garden; and therefore the blow, which had broken the neck of one, had been felt by both, and perhaps not least by the survivor.

Yet the Lily uttered no complaints, and that was the marvel of it. Not one angry murmur, not one rebellious word was heard to fall from her lips; and when, a little later, a Bee called round to pay a visit of condolence, and told her that had *his* sister been so ill-treated he would have flown at the assailant very quickly, and have given him a taste of his sting—

when, I say, the Bee had told her that, she answered quite meekly,—

"Would you have gained anything by your anger? Ah! my friend, it is better to be patient and bear the wrong, than seek to avenge it. Maybe even this is a mercy in disguise."

At that moment the little Maiden of whom we have spoken rushed into the garden in a state of great excitement.

"I shan't. I won't!" she said, abruptly, and then burst into tears.

Here was a commotion. It was difficult to see what it was all about, for no one followed the Child into the garden; and in a few moments the storm was over, and the Child was gazing in a half-disconsolate manner at the Lily's fading companion.

"Poor little flower," she presently observed; and, lifting up its drooping head, tried to replace it in its proper position on the stalk.

"Don't call me poor; and I'm not little," said the Lily, faintly, though fretfully. "I hate pity! Perhaps you'll have your own neck broken one day."

"There, I'll not hold you up at all, since you're so disagreeable," said the Child, releasing the flower from her grasp; and as she turned to go away the dying Lily was swinging painfully from its broken stem.

"My poor sister," murmured the younger Lily, feelingly. "Alas! you have only brought fresh trouble on yourself. Why will you be so proud?"

"What did she mean by saying that I'd have my own neck broken one day?" asked the Child.

The younger Lily said nothing. To go over the events of the previous night would have been to expose her sister's faults, and she had no desire to do that.

"Steady my head for a moment, and I will tell you all," moaned the broken Lily, who at last began to realise the folly of her wilfulness, and perhaps felt that any sort of submission was preferable to the pain of swinging by a fibre of her stem.

When her wish had been obeyed, she began, sadly,—

"Only last evening, when the Sun said Good-bye' to the Garden, and the birds

went to their nests, I was a fair and stately Lily, like my sister."

"Yes, I know," said the Child, in a more pitiful tone, "you looked just alike."

"Ah," said the wounded flower, "you remember. Well, at that time I was tied to a hazel-wand, as you see my sister is now tied. But I did not like restraint. I wanted to have my own way, thinking (such was my conceit) that I knew better than the Gardener what was good for me; and when he was out of the way I pulled and pulled at the twine which bound me, till it broke, and——"

"You had your wish," said the Child, eagerly.

"Yes—and was free." But when the Lily said this there was an unusual sobriety in her manner.

"And could do just as you liked?—how nice!" added the Child.

"Wait a minute," continued the poor flower, who, with her head the wrong way up, began to find talking very irksome. "Did you hear the Wind last night?"

The Child nodded.

"Well, the Wind did it," said the Lily, solemnly. "I heard it a long way off among the beeches before it reached us here, and I said to my sister (for I was in a very pettish mood just then), 'Who's the Wind I should like to know? I'm as strong as the Wind any day.' And so, when the Wind came bustling past, in his usual rude and boisterous way, instead of bowing to him as my sister did, I kept my head erect, and—and——"

"He cut it off!" said the Child, shortly.

"Well, he broke my neck, and that was just as bad," said the wretched Lily; "you see my head is only hanging by a fibre now."

"O dear—how sad!" said the Child, compassionately.

"It wouldn't have happened, though, if I'd had the hazel-wand to support me,' added the Lily.

The Child thought a moment.

"What a pity you broke the twine!" she then said.

"Yes, wasn't it? But you see I thought I knew better than the Gardener. I

imagined that—O dear! I believe that's the Gardener coming towards us at this moment! If he sees me in this plight he'll just cut my head completely off."

This is what precisely happened; and when the poor Lily presently found herself cooped up with a lot of other flowers in a blue vase in the drawing-room, she was bound to acknowledge the wisdom of her sister's words,—"The Gardener is wiser than we: submission is best." Ay! and as she stood there, a captive among captives, perchance she thought also of that other saying,—"Licence is not liberty, and may end in worse bondage."

On Training and Fruit-Bearing.

"A dull axe never loves grindstones; but a keen workman does, and he puts his tool on them in order that it may be sharp. And men do not like grinding; but they are dull for the purposes which God designs to work out with them, and therefore He is grinding them."—*Royal Truths*, p. 195.

"WHAT a dreary, dismal, wasted life is mine!" sighed a young Seedling of the Black Currant, as it stood in a dejected manner in the hotbed of a suburban nursery. "Here I've been sticking for I don't know how many weeks, with no perceptible growth, and without producing a single berry. I wish I were dead—indeed I do!"

"You only echo my sentiments," re-

turned the young Stock of a Cherry-tree, who was standing near. "Little's the good that I shall ever be to anybody, miserable child of the Wild Honey Cherry that I am!"

"That is just my case," sighed the young Stock of an Apple-tree, who was also standing near, "but mine is the most hopeless case of all. Would you believe me, I have only the makings of a Crab-tree, and if ever I do produce fruit it will be miserable Crabs!"

The Nursery in which these remarks were dropped was a model one of its kind, being remarkably well trenched and manured, with a fresh nourishing soil, and surrounded by a strong enclosure for the exclusion of cattle and vermin. The Nurseryman, too, was a model man, noted both for his skill in rearing his leafy wards and for his tenderness towards them. He entered the Nursery a few moments after the above conversation, and was followed by a Gentleman, to whom he began to show his treasures with evident pride.

He stopped as he was passing the Seedlings of the Black Currant, of which there were a goodly number, and said,—

"These belong to a familiar species, the *Ribes Nigrum.* It is surprising how quickly they have shot up—nine inches in a very few weeks. They promise to be very fruitful."

The sweep of his hand included the Seedling which had spoken so despondingly, and it set the young complainer thinking.

"Can it be that I am growing after all?" she asked herself, "and is it possible that I shall bear fruit in time to come?"

Well, her Guardian had said so, and she began to be a little hopeful.

The Nurseryman had moved on, and was now standing opposite the young Stock of the Cherry-tree.

"This is a vigorous young plant," he said, "a Seedling of the Wild Honey species. I am hoping later on to get some exceptionally firm-fleshed May Dukes from it by grafting."

"What! May Dukes from me?" said

the young Stock, "from *me*—a fruitless Wild Honey Cherry!—the man's mad!"

Nevertheless, there was something very flattering and consolatory in the mere thought of yielding May Duke cherries, and on second considerations he became strongly inclined to admit the possibility of such a thing.

"The Nurseryman spoke of grafting," he argued, "and I don't know what that means, so perhaps he will effect the transformation that way."

Encouraged by this reflection, the young Stock of the Cherry-tree began to hope too.

The Guardian of the young plants was now opposite the complaining Crab, and he pointed it out to his companion with considerable animation.

"A young Crab, sir," he said, "*Pyrus Malus*—I'm rearing it, with several others, for Golden Pippins."

Imagine the surprise of the young Crab. The astonishment of the other seedlings was not to be compared to it.

"Golden Pippins!" he repeated.

"Well, well, if this is true, a strange eventful life is before me, and no mistake!"

And a strange eventful life *was* before him, as we shall see. But we must now return to our young friend the Seedling of the Black Currant.

That very afternoon the Seedling was dug out of her hotbed and transferred to a large Orchard in the neighbourhood. The Orchard belonged to the Gentleman who had entered the Nursery some hours before with the Seedling's Gardener.

The experience of being removed was not pleasant, and the little measure of hope which the Nurseryman's words had afforded her vanished while the operation was in progress.

"Alas!" replied the Seedling; "what good will this removal do? I might have got on in time where I was; but in this strange place I shall only die."

Days rolled by, however, and the Seedling lived on. As the weather grew warmer too, she began to throw out leafy shoots in some profusion, and hope revived. Indeed, what with the Nursery-

man's prophetic words and her own increasing strength, a certain complacency and even pride began to characterise her.

But when the fruit season drew near, and no signs of fruit or even blossom appeared upon her shoots, this hope was dissipated, and her fears returned with tenfold depressing power.

"The Nurseryman said that I should bear fruit," she murmured, one lovely morning in June, "and the trees and bushes around me are covered with blossom —he must have been deceived about me."

Her lament gave way to bitter complainings when, towards evening, she was visited by several Caterpillars, who, having taken the grossest liberties with her person by roaming about her bark in all directions, commenced to feed in a voracious way on her leaves. Next day they continued their depredations, and were joined by reinforcements of Caterpillars, who took the same liberties and exhibited the same voracious propensities, until the poor Seedling became thoroughly alarmed.

"Alas!" she groaned, "that I was ever brought to this wretched place!"

But the Gardener passed by on his rounds that evening, and his quick eye detected what was going on. He picked off as many of the little epicures as he could find, and then gave the unhappy Seedling a good sousing in tobacco-water. Relief was rapid and effectual, but the means employed were far from agreeable.

"This is not bearing fruit," murmured the Seedling; "I might as well be dead for all the good I'm doing."

Weeks and months passed by, and matters began to look more hopeless still; for the leaves of the Seedling began to fall, and the days began to shorten, and Autumn, with its sad story of ruin and decay, set in. Then one day the Gardener approached the Seedling with a knife in his hand.

"Ah!" cried the Seedling, "it is all up with me now." And she really thought her end was come.

The Gardener did not hear this remark, but when he had removed a few of the

Seedling's shoots—those shoots of which she was so proud—and had top-dressed the whole bush, he said in an under-tone,—

"Now you'll do; and if you don't bear a good crop next Autumn, I'll eat my head."

"Cruel man — he jests with me!" moaned the Seedling. "How can I bear fruit, or even live when my shoots are taken from me thus?"

Next year, however, when the growing period began again, the Seedling was still alive; and with the Spring's return her hopes once more revived. Yet a good deal of her self-confidence had disappeared, and sundry retrospective glances had taught her that the Gardener knew more about her than she knew herself, and that any possible future fruit-bearing depended more on his wise care and training than anything which she could do.

"But for that tobacco-water," she said, "I might have been dead ere this; and as for the pruning which the Gardener gave me last November, I can see now

that it was quite necessary, and, indeed, has done me a world of good."

Having thus acknowledged, with becoming submission, her obligation to the Gardener, we need scarcely wonder that the Seedling was in a fit state for bearing fruit; and sure enough, before many more months had passed, the Nurseryman's prophecy was fulfilled, and she had produced an exceptionally fine crop of currants.

It was during this happy season that the Gardener came into the Orchard one afternoon, bearing on his shoulder a young Cherry-tree, which he proceeded to plant in the deep and mellow loam, at no great distance from the Currant-bush.

A groan from the Cherry-tree, when this service had been accomplished for him, aroused the attention of the Currant-bush.

"Hey-day!" said she, "what's the matter now?"

"I know that voice," returned the Cherry-tree, in a startled manner; "where have we met before?"

"Now you speak in a more genial tone, I recognise your own voice," returned the Currant-bush. "It was in the Nursery that I last had the pleasure of conversing with you."

"How strange that we should meet again!" said the Cherry-tree.

"Yes, and under such happy circumstances," said the Currant-bush.

"Happy circumstances!" repeated the Cherry. "How can you call them happy? I was never more wretched in my life."

"Fie!" returned the Currant; "those who are bearing fruit should never talk of being wretched."

"I see now what you mean by 'happy circumstances,'" sighed the Cherry. "*You* are bearing fruit. Alas! I am barren still."

"You don't say so!" returned the Currant.

And then a shrewd suspicion seized her that there must be something physically wrong in the Cherry which would account for his barrenness.

"Mine has been a painful and bitter

experience," resumed the Cherry, "and all to no purpose. It would make your leaves quiver were I to tell you all that I have suffered."

"I should like to hear about it," returned the Currant, curiously.

"Well," said the Cherry, "sad as it is to review the past, I will tell you. In the first place, you must know that I am older than you by nearly three years, and that when you saw me standing in a row with others of my family on the day of your removal, I had been in that stiff and formal manner for more than eighteen months. During that time I suffered many indignities from various quarters, particularly from the insects which infested me, and had it not been for the attentions of the Nurseryman—who, however, was only saving me for further cruelties—I should certainly have died."

"Those were just my thoughts about the Nurseryman till I learned differently," interposed the Currant-bush.

"I only referred to him in passing," said the Cherry-tree; "when I come to speak

of him more particularly you will see that I have just cause for complaint; at present I am speaking only of the insects. Night and day, almost without intermission, I was pestered by one kind and another of these miserable creatures. Sometimes my young shoots would be attacked by one Caterpillar, sometimes by another. One sort would feed upon my leaves, another would feed upon my bark, and a third would actually bore into my trunk, and coolly enter upon its chrysalis state while so ensconced. Then there was a tribe of Beetles, called Weevils, which treated me in a similar way, except that they laid their eggs within me instead of forming chrysalises; but the Nurseryman stopped their saucy pranks, and got rid of them by giving me a good shaking. The shaking was not pleasant, and broke some of my shoots, but it dislodged the Weevils, and thus was I relieved of them for a time."

"I could relate some very similar experiences," observed the Currant, with emulation; for though she had been very

quick in shrinking from troubles when they came, she was ready to grow eloquent about them now that they were over.

"But I have not done yet," pursued the Cherry. "One day I was visited by a Rabbit, who began gnawing at my bark in a wanton manner, and, as you may imagine, put me to no little pain and inconvenience. Next morning the Nurseryman observed what had taken place, so he daubed my trunk with some thick and horrible paste, composed of clay and tobacco-water, and a mixture of glue and lime to make it sticky. Nice treatment that, wasn't it?"

The Currant-bush murmured something about pride and obstinacy, and hinted that treatment of that kind must certainly be a judgment on the Cherry for his faulty growth; for *she* had never been caked with clay and glue in that fashion. And then she added something in a still lower key about laziness and want of effort,—which, however, was lost upon the poor Cherry-tree, and perhaps it was a mercy that he did not hear.

Poor fellow! his troubles were not all told even then; and when he proceeded to relate how that, less than a year ago, the Nurseryman had come one morning and actually cut off his head, and then, after mangling him in a shocking manner with his pruning knife, had forced an alien bud of Cherry into the slit which he had made. When he had told his friend all this, and how the bud had afterwards been tied to him with a shred of bass-matting, the amazement of the Currant was unbounded.

On recovering her composure, she said, —"Alas, my friend, yours must be a bad and hopeless case indeed! *I* never had my head cut off in that fashion, and nobody ever had occasion to stick pieces of other trees into *me.* Believe me, I truly feel for you, and would not, of course, say anything to alarm you, but I fear that you have only been brought here to die."

"I don't know so much about that," said the Cherry, quickly; for though he could talk despondingly about the case himself, and found a sort of melancholy

pleasure in doing so, he did not like to hear such hopeless prognostications from others,—"I don't know so much about that. Indeed, I am feeling much better than I was, and, perhaps——"

The owner of the Orchard was approaching with the Gardener at that moment, and the two came to a stand opposite the Cherry-tree.

"This fellow seems doing well," said the Gentleman, tapping the trunk with his walking-stick.

"Uncommonly well, sir," said the Gardener; "I'd be bold to say there's not another tree in the county as 'll yield a finer crop of May Dukes if he's only looked after."

"Well, I never!" murmured the Cherry, gratefully, as the critics passed on.

The Currant had "never," either, and she said so. And that was the conclusion of their conversation for that day, they were so utterly bewildered.

The hopes of the Gardener were fulfilled too. For in course of time the Cherry-tree became covered with hundreds of

snowy-white blossoms, which in due season gave place to such a splendid crop of fruit, that the Gardener rubbed his hands delightedly, and on two occasions at least left off rolling the tennis-lawn to go and peep at it.

And what of the poor Crab, think you?

Well, his lot, I must confess, was the hardest of all; for he had the sharpest experiences of the pruning-knife, and had to wait the longest before he bore fruit. But then he did bear fruit at last, and his crop — Golden Pippins, mark you — was the most valuable of all.

It would take a long while to tell you all his history, and the narrative might be tedious. Let this suffice. Of all the trees, none suffered more than the poor Crab from the ravages of the insect tribe; none was more barked and tunnelled and nibbled at; none received deeper cuts when the time of cleft-grafting arrived; but then—and pray remember this—none yielded a finer or more valuable crop when the training and pruning time was over.

"BLESSED BE DRUDGERY."

"Blessed be Drudgery."

"Let us sing a hallelujah and make a fresh beatitude: Blessed be drudgery! It is the one thing we cannot spare."—W. C. GANNETT.

"WHAT'S the use of being a drudge?" complained a Coal-scuttle one morning, as it stood in the scullery full of cinders.

"Ay, indeed! What *is* the use?" said the Dish-cloth, speaking from an elevated position on the copper.

"Let's band together and form a Socialist league," said the Soda-jar, recklessly. "Nothing would please me better than to break the neck of the Terra-cotta vase on the bracket in the Blue Chamber."

"Grand!" echoed the Dish-cloth.

"Socialism is just the creed for me, if it means that sort of thing. What's the use of being trodden down and oppressed, I say? Just think of the Opera-cloak in the teak-wood chest upstairs. It lies there doing nothing, while I—I'm just simply a drudge—thanking the Coal-scuttle for his very expressive word."

"Don't mention it," said the Coal-scuttle, well pleased, notwithstanding, that the Dish-cloth *had* mentioned it.

"Why shouldn't I lie in the teak-wood chest myself sometimes?" argued the Dish-cloth, "and the Opera-cloak do service for a Dish-cloth? A showy, dainty thing! I'm as good as she is, any day."

"Of course," responded the Soda-jar, with a soapy and sympathetic smile; "and I'm as good as the Terra-cotta Vase. Don't you think so?"

Both the Dish-cloth and the Kitchen-scuttle said "Of course," too, which was polite and proper, since the Soda-jar had shown himself so agreeable.

"The Terra-cotta Vase thinks herself somebody, I've no doubt," sneered the

Soda-jar, "stuck up there on her plush bracket, and filled with Pampas grass; but she's only made of clay like myself. Why shouldn't there be social equality? That's what I say."

"I will join your Society," broke in the Kitchen-scuttle. "It's simply scandalous that I should be made to wear myself out like a common drudge,"—the scuttle was partial to its own word,—"carrying cinders and coke, and the veriest rubbish of the house, while the Purdonium in the Blue Chamber has a mat all to himself, and stands there night and day doing nothing."

The Dish-cloth, the Soda-jar, and the Kitchen-scuttle, finding that they had thus a common ground of grievance, forthwith formed themselves into a Society, and without more ado (the Copper-stick and Hearth-broom being also present), proposed and passed the following resolutions:—

> "That the members of the Scullerydom and Kitchenland Socialist League, having viewed with indignation the over-taxed and down-trodden

condition of the labouring masses of the said Scullerydom and Kitchenland, and having regard to the fact that everything in the great Mansion has the same earthly origin, resolve—

"1. That social equality, without which there can be no true progress, be insisted upon in every place, at all times, and under all circumstances.

"2. That the dwellers in the Library, Blue Chamber, Boudoir, and other lofty regions, luxuriating in a false paradise of Turkey carpets, painted ceilings, hundred-jetted candelabras, and such gauds, be called upon to descend from their proud position, and meet on equal terms with their brethren of Scullerydom and Kitchenland."

"There—that'll do," said the Dish-cloth, upon whom devolved the task of proposing both resolutions.

To ensure the utmost unanimity, the Kitchen-scuttle supported the first resolution, and the Soda-jar the second; and the propriety of moving a vote of thanks

to the Scullery-maid for leaving them alone so long together was being considered, when a crash was heard.

"Cinders!" cried the Kitchen-scuttle, "what was that?"

"It sounded like a smash," said the Dish-cloth, who knew something of such calamities, and had been present at many breakages herself.

"So it did," said the Soda-jar. "I'm glad it wasn't me."

Just then a beautiful Persian cat bounded into the room in a dreadful state of alarm.

"What's the matter?" said the three Socialists of Scullerydom in concert.

"Oh, dear! it wasn't me—at least—how could I help it?" said the Persian Cat. "I was only climbing after the Pampas grass, and——"

"Yes!—and——?" The Soda-jar was almost breathless with expectation.

"And somehow or other — I don't exactly know how — I — I — the — the— Oh, dear!——"

"The what?"

"The Terra-cotta Vase fell over and got smashed."

A week later, to the very day and hour, what do you think happened? The Purdonium from the Blue Chamber was brought into the scullery in a very rusty state.

"Here's a go!" said the Kitchen-scuttle. "What brings you here, I wonder?"

"I'm doomed!" returned the Purdonium, in the dismallest of tones.

"Doomed! why! — what have you done?"

"What have I done? Ah! that's just the mischief," groaned the Purdonium; "I've done nothing—they wouldn't let me do anything; and now—now I've rusted out!"

"Well, that's better than wearing out," said the Kitchen-scuttle, somewhat ungraciously.

"Not at all," said the Purdonium. "I'm quite useless, you know; but I heard them say in the Blue Chamber just now that you are to have a new bottom because you have proved so serviceable."

"Dear now! who'd have thought it?" said the Kitchen-scuttle. "Well, this *is* news!" And the poor drudge felt happier than he had felt for many a day.

"They're having quite a clear-out up-stairs," continued the Purdonium; "I hear that her Ladyship's lovely Opera-cloak is doomed too."

"You don't say so?" said the Dish-cloth, incredulously.

"On my honour," said the Purdonium, solemnly. "You see, it has been lying by for such a time that the moth has got into it."

The Purdonium was only speaking the truth, though the Dish-cloth found it very difficult to accept so startling an announcement all at once.

"By the way, have you heard about the Soda-jar?" continued the loquacious Purdonium.

"No," said the Dish-cloth, . "though we've missed him these three days past; and only this morning the Kitchen-scuttle was asking me about him."

"Where do you think he is?" asked the Purdonium.

"How should *I* know?—perhaps on the kitchen mantel-piece," said the Dish-cloth, venturing a guess.

"Guess again," said the Purdonium.

"I couldn't," returned the Dish-cloth, impatiently; "you must tell me."

"With the early Dresden and old Sevres china in the rosewood cabinet upstairs."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Dish-cloth.

The Kitchen-scuttle simply ejaculated "Cinders!" and at once became very thoughtful.

"How did it come there?" inquired the Dish-cloth.

"Well, you know it was sent upstairs the other day to the young master with some paste in it. He collects all sorts of old rubbish in the way of Chelsea and Derby ware, Majolica and *Gris Flamand*, and every scarce thing in the fragile world of Ceramics; and directly he saw the Soda-jar, he clapped his hands upon it, and exclaimed, 'My word—here's

sacrilege! A veritable glyptic jar by Wedgwood and Flaxman degraded to a paste-pot!' And, would you believe me, he forbade the maid even to take it in her hands again, and went straight to his own room, and turned out the paste; and after that he washed the jar clean with his own hands, and having wiped it carefully with a silken duster, he placed it in the cabinet, as I said."

"And you saw this with your own eyes?"

"Yes—and heard the Soda-jar talking to the Dresden *écuelle* about it afterwards.

"And what did he say?"

"Oh! don't ask me; I couldn't remember a half of what he said. But you'll be glad to hear that he is so conservative and loyal."

"What do you mean?" The Dish-cloth and Kitchen-scuttle blurted out the question in the same breath.

"You should just have heard him!" said the Purdonium, with admiration; "of course, I couldn't remember all that

passed, but his loyalty and conservatism were most beautiful."

"But what did he say?"

"Say? well, he said that it was a good thing for the Mansion that there were chambers for the better-class things, for that it would be ridiculous to mix them with the kitchen goods. He said that he could have no patience with the foolish talk about Socialism, Communism, and all that sort of thing, which was becoming so rife in the neighbourhood of Scullerydom and Kitchenland. He said that individuals who went about inciting others to interfere with the settled state of society ought to be clapped under lock and key, or consigned to the Dust-bin. He said——"

"Did you ever?" interrupted the Dish-cloth, looking incredulously in the direction of the Kitchen-scuttle.

But the Kitchen-scuttle was too much overcome to answer the inquiry, and could only ejaculate again, in a very feeble voice, "Cinders!"

Doing and Dreaming.

"Do something—do it."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

A HUMBLE-BEE left her nest one morning to gather honey. As she winged her way along she passed over a little rustic garden, in which were some Holly-hocks and Sweet-williams, and others of the poorer sort of flowers; and being but a simple rusticated creature herself, she flew down amongst them, and settled contentedly on the flower of a Fox-glove, where she was soon busily at work.

While she was actively employed drilling a hole with her proboscis through the calyx of the flower (for the breadth of her shoulders prevented her reaching the

honeyed tube in the orthodox manner), a Hive-bee flew proudly past.

"Poor thing!" said the Hive-bee, as he looked down in a pitying, patronising, supercilious manner on his poor relation; "how thankful I am that I was not born a Humble-bee!"

"Poor thing!—why do you call me poor?" was the lively response; and the Humble-bee paused for a moment in her work. "The contented are never poor; and I am contented."

The Hive-bee paused in his flight, and stared in surprise at the plump little villager.

"You wonder that I call myself contented," resumed the Humble-bee; "but fly down here and you will find among the Fox-gloves and Holly-hocks some of the most delightful nectar you ever tasted."

"Delightful to *your* taste, I daresay," returned the Hive-bee, consequentially.

"Or to the taste of any other Bee of judgment," said the Humble-bee, thrusting her proboscis into the nectary with a vigour that gave emphasis to her words.

"Ignorance is always dogmatic," retorted the Hive-bee; "but I suppose you think you speak the truth."

"Well, come and see for yourself," said the Humble-bee, cheerily.

"I *know* differently without looking," was the reply.

"But how do you know?" asked the Humble-bee, for she was a Bee of some experience, and had tapped many a nectary in her time, which was more than the Hive-bee could claim to have done. She had therefore a perfect right to ask the question.

"Never mind how I know; I KNOW, and that's enough," returned the Hive-bee profoundly.

"Well, if you know, of course that *is* enough," said the Humble-bee; "but take my advice and come down. You will find no honey or pollen in the direction you were taking just now. You are young and inexperienced; I am old, and have lived a long while in these parts. Don't neglect present mercies, or waste the shining hours seeking for imaginary good,

when that which is real and visible is lying within your reach."

"Thank you for your sermon," said the Hive-bee, ironically, for he was greatly nettled because the Humble-bee had called him young and inexperienced; "but you will forgive me, madam, if I do not act upon your advice. You see, I have been brought up in a city, and not in a village; and if my taste is more refined than that of *other* Bees, who may be older and more experienced, whose fault is it?"

"But why not be satisfied with the flowers before you?" said the Humble-bee, who was too old to be angry, and too kind to send the Hive-bee away without another effort for his good.

"How could I waste my time on such poor rusticated flowers?" retorted the Hive-bee, disdainfully. "There are plenty of other flowers farther on, where the honey is better and more plentiful, and I go to those."

"Time is short," said the Humble-bee, "and it is better to get a little that is sure, than hope for much that is uncertain."

"You are captious," said the Hive-bee. "This is always the way with such tame, slow, village-bred Bees. Because you have no high thoughts and objects yourselves, you try to fetter the aspirations of others, and ridicule the expectations of those who have the courage to live and act for the future. But you will change your dismal tune in a few hours, when I return well laden."

"Those only live for the future who act in the present," said the Humble-bee, sagely. "Life is short, and should teach us to moderate our passions and contract our designs. It is not by laying out schemes for the future that lives are made useful, but by taking advantage of present opportunities."

"Then I suppose I am not to regard the future at all!"

"Instant in season or out of season," said the Humble-bee, as she dipped her proboscis in another flower; "the present is the time to work. Are you sure that you will find better flowers farther on? You may fly about all day looking for

your ideal flowers, and then gather nothing; and so the night will come on; and when the night comes you cannot work."

"And, pray, who said that there are no flowers like the flowers I am looking for, Madam Critical,—eh?" said the Hive-bee.

As nobody present would answer to that name, the question went unanswered; but the Humble-bee took occasion to observe that "when advice is given abuse must be expected. You, my city friend, have been feasting your imagination with dreams of impossible flowers, honey-dropping and pollen-laden, which you are vainly hoping to obtain; and now you are in that unhappy state when counsel is received with impatience, and warning with insult. Pride has dethroned your reason, and only the failure of your schemes will bring you to your senses again."

"Dear, dear! listen to the oracle!" cried the Hive-bee; "here's a wise one if you like! So original! Why, my dear madam, your remarks are as old as the hills. I have heard the same things a

score of times at least, and could repeat them off like a book."

"But we sometimes need to be reminded of what we know," returned the Humble-bee.

"As old as the hills!" repeated the Hive-bee, scornfully.

"And being so old, you have proof that what I tell you has stood the test of time. Truth is necessarily old. It is eternal."

At this point the grave imperturbability of the village-bee proved too much for her city friend, and he flew angrily away.

The Humble-bee watched him out of sight, and then went humming off to a third Fox-glove, which she tapped as she had done the others, and from that she went to a fourth, and a fifth, and so on, till her honey-bag was full. Then she made an excursion to the Holly-hocks, and, entering their flower-cups one after another, rolled herself in the pollen to her heart's content. Having collected as much of the yellow dust as she required, she kneaded it into two little balls, which she

stuck in the cavities of her thighs, and then prepared to return home.

Night was coming on, and as she hummed her evening farewell to the flowers, her thoughts went back to the Hive-bee and the conversation which she had had with him during the afternoon.

"Poor thing!" she murmured, unconsciously using the epithet which the Hive-bee had used to her some hours before; "I do hope he has found the honey and pollen which he had talked of."

"Did I hear you say 'poor thing'?" said a voice at that moment; and the Humble-bee, looking hastily up, encountered the disconsolate gaze of her city friend. There was certainly a touch of irritation in the question, but more of despair; and the heart of the Humble-bee was melted at once.

"I am sorry if the name pains you," she said; "but I did not know that you were near."

"And, after all, I deserve the name," said the Hive-bee, in whose heart the kindness of the Humble-bee had produced

a sudden disposition to confess his faults. "I was a fool to make light of your advice this afternoon, and now I must reap a fool's reward."

"And you have gathered nothing?"

"Nothing. Having left the Garden, I passed over a field, but there were no Daisies or Clover in it; and so I came upon another field, and another, but still I could find no flowers; and then I came upon a wide expanse of water, where great ships were sailing, and on which the Sun shone fiercely; but when I would have flown over it, the water moaned and roared at me, so I grew frightened, and was obliged to return."

"This has been a sad lesson for you," said the Humble-bee; "but come with me, and I think I can spare you a little honey from the nest, and perhaps a ball or two of bee-bread."

The Hive-bee was overcome.

"This is too kind!" he said. "You have indeed been a true friend to me. Your goodness of heart is only equalled by your sagacity and wisdom; and——"

"Stay," said the Humble-bee, mildly; "if I have been, as you say, a true friend to you, let the matter rest there. You will only spread a net for my feet by indulging too freely in your well-meant but incautious flattery."

A Field Sermon.

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty."—SOLOMON.

"An arm of aid to the weak,
A friendly hand to the friendless;
Kind words, so short to speak,
But whose echo is endless,—
The world is wide, these things are small,
They may be nothing—but *they are all!*"

IT was on a dry August afternoon, if I mistake not, that the Clover was seen to act in the strange way which I shall tell you of. Not the Clover everywhere, nor even a whole field of it, but one languid little stalk with pink florets, which reared its solitary head amidst the sturdy weeds and long grass on the very edge of the field in which it lived.

There was only one other stalk of Clover

in the wide field, and this had a white flower, and was yards away, surrounded by scarlet poppies and tall purple thistles, and by daisies of a lustier growth than those of lawn or meadow.

Along one side of the field—that side on which the first-named stalk of Clover vegetated—ran a ditch, which on this sultry afternoon was quite dry; and no wonder, for the clouds had made themselves scarce, and the sun had had it all his own way for several days past.

Perhaps it was partly on this account that the conduct of the Pink Clover was so strange. At all events, the flower was thirsty, and her thirst made her irritable. Others beside the Pink Clover have been known to grow irritable, and with less cause a great deal. She looked very dusty and draggled, I must confess; and the grey chalky soil on which she stood, and which was responsible in some measure for her support, could afford her no sustenance, for the sun had drunk up all its moisture, and was cracking it about in a most cruel way because it had nothing more to give.

All was silent overhead, for the birds had grown lazy by reason of the heat; but down below, where the Clover was, there was sound enough. The Bees were dodging about by dozens among the thistles, and kept up a monotonous hum; and the clicking of unnumbered Grasshoppers, hidden away amongst the darnel and poppies, completed the annoyance.

So, at least, complained the Clover—that is to say, the Pink Clover; and she thought it very hard that those about her should be healthful and happy, while she was drooping and miserable. A strange idea, you will say, and so it was; for the Bees and Grasshoppers were not responsible for her troubles.

Presently a Honey-bee came buzzing by, and would have thrust his nose right in among the pink petals; but the Clover drooped her head in such a sulky manner, that the Bee became disconcerted and flew on.

Then a bright-winged Butterfly drew near, and would have settled on the Clover's dusty petals, for she was on the

look-out for honey too; but the Clover hung her head more sullenly than ever, and the Butterfly flew on.

Then a Grasshopper,

> "Which loves at noon to lie
> Serenely in the green-ribbed clover's eye,"

came near, and would have rested for a few moments in its favourite resting-place, for it was very tired; but the Clover turned her head again, with the most morose of looks, and the green-vested little creature hopped, pittering, away.

And then a light lulling Breeze came along, and would have begged a little scent from the Clover; but the Clover had hung her head so low that it passed over her.

Presently the day began to fade, and the Sun sent forth his last beams to call the insects home and to bid the Daisies close their eyes. And as this signal was given a Honey-bee—the very Bee which had been turned away from the Pink Clover—came bustling out of the White Clover in the centre of the field, its fat little body as dusty as a miller's jacket.

"Well, who'd have thought it?" said the

Honey-bee; "so much honey from so small a flower. Really, my dear Clover, I am very grateful to you for the good things which you have been placing at my disposal. Yet I fear that my long visit must have tired you."

"Not at all," said the White Clover, good-naturedly; "the pleasure has been mutual. True, I was feeling somewhat tired when you called, and thirsty too; but your company has made me forget my troubles, and the thought that I have been of any service to a fellow-creature has made me really happy."

"And I must thank you, too," said a Butterfly, gracefully waving his antennæ; "the meal which you gave me when I passed some hours ago was most enjoyable; and I could wish that your sister, the Pink Clover, were only half as good-hearted and amiable as you."

"Your presence was most welcome," returned the White Clover, "but I would rather you said no hard things about my sister. No good can be done by speaking of her failures, unless you tell them,

privately and prudently, in her own ears. However, I can assure you that I have gained far more than I have given up by your visit; for your wings afforded a comforting shade to my scorched head, and had it not been for their shadow I should probably have died."

Here the voice of the Grasshopper broke in. He, too, felt called upon to speak his thanks.

"My rest has been most refreshing," chirped the Grasshopper; "and all owing to your kindness, my dear Clover. Since you wish otherwise, I will make no hard reflections on the Pink Clover; but I *could* say some very discreditable things about her."

The Clover was about to reply, when a Child's voice interrupted her.

"Why, Mamma," said the voice, "I do believe this is the flower whose scent you said was so reviving when we passed this afternoon!"

"No doubt it is," returned the Mother, "and we may learn from this how useful even a little flower may be. Everything in

Nature has a purpose, you know. Not a flower, not a weed, not an insect, has been made in vain."

But the Child was not in a mood to generalise in that way. She was thinking only of the one flower, the White Clover, the scent of which had refreshed her Mother.

"Shall I pick the pretty flower?" she asked.

"No, no, darling; that would be but a poor return. Let it live on, for it is a means of blessing where it is; and perhaps others passing to-morrow, or the day after, or a week hence, may get the same refreshment from its scent."

"Well, good-bye, little flower," said the Child, stooping over it, and, with a Child's fancy, kissing its white petals. "Good-bye; perhaps I shall come and see you again, some day."

"Good-bye," murmured the Honey-bee, as it soared away well laden.

"Good-bye," echoed the Butterfly, touching the White Clover gently with her antennæ, in lieu of shaking hands.

"Good-bye," chirped the Grasshopper, as it skipped nimbly down, and disappeared among the darnel and poppies.

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed the White Clover, quite overcome by this accumulation of good wishes. "How thankful I ought to be! Whoever thought there was so much pleasure to be got by doing such a mite of good!"

Just at that moment the Child caught sight of the Pink Clover, who was hanging her head disconsolately over the ditch, and she ran towards the flower. Presently she was looking up inquiringly in her Mother's face.

"Yes, you may pick that, Elsie," said her Mother, as she drew near; "it can be of little use there, wasting its life and fragrance in such a place."

The Child picked the flower, and placed it with the others which she had been gathering; but long ere she had reached home it had dropped from the bunch, and the wheels of a heavy waggon passed over it, so putting an end to a wretched and wasted life.

The White Clover lived on; but her little florets in time faded and went to seed; yet she did not mind that. And when in course of time the sun cracked the tiny seed-pods, and the wind scattered their contents over the field, she was still happy. "For," said she, "though I die, and die I must, there is yet a satisfaction in reflecting that I have not lived in vain."

Wisdom and Guile.

"If there are any that have made up their mind to know life, I say to them, Stop! you may pay too dear for your knowledge. Men have looked into the crater of a volcano to see what was there, and gone down to explore, without coming back to report progress."—*Royal Truths*, p. 270.

"WHEN you have done prying about, and can turn your critical eyes a little nearer home, I shall be glad."

The speaker was a plump little Lady-bird, who was resting comfortably one morning on a rose leaf, after her morning meal of Aphides.

As the Gnat, to whom this question was addressed, vouchsafed no answer, but continued dancing what seemed to be a

little minuet just above her head, the Ladybird continued,—

"Perhaps you don't hear me. It is convenient to be deaf at times. Why don't you cease that silly dance, and turn your attention to a little useful work?"

This remark put the Gnat upon his mettle at once.

"You don't suppose that I am going to crawl about all day on a miserable rose-bush," he said, conceitedly. "It is not for a winged creature like me to degrade myself by such menial labour."

"Wings can furnish no excuse for idleness," said the Ladybird; "I have wings too."

"You have wings? What nonsense you talk!" exclaimed the Gnat.

"Because I am not always flitting about in a giddy way like yourself, you think I cannot fly," observed the Ladybird, with judicial calmness. "If it would afford you any satisfaction to see me use my wings, I certainly have no objection to do so."

Saying this, the Ladybird opened her

scarlet case, and flew to the topmost leaf of a lilac bush and back again, just to show the Gnat what she could do.

"Dear me! to think of that! Well, I suppose you are right," said the Gnat, pausing for the first time in his airy dance. "But since you are really a winged creature like myself, why don't you make a better use of your privileges?"

"I keep my wings in my case till I need them," said the Ladybird. "Even such creatures as you and I cannot be always on the wing. There are earthly duties to be performed, and we cannot neglect them with impunity."

"The Garden Spider has wings too," observed the Gnat, as he began his dance.

"Not a bit of it," said the Ladybird, abruptly.

"He told me so himself. I had the statement from his own lips," said the Gnat.

"What tales you do swallow!" returned the Ladybird, quite amused by

the Gnat's credulity. "A winged Spider, indeed!"

"One would think that Spiders cannot speak the truth, or are simple know-nothings, to hear you talk," said the Gnat, testily.

"Dear, dear! how touchy you are," returned the Ladybird. "Don't think that I am making light of what the Spiders know. I have always given them credit for being remarkably well informed; but they are sly, and cruel and vicious——"

"Oh!" said the Gnat, pausing again in his aerial dance; "but what about yourself, pray? Only this morning I have watched you kill and eat, with all the composure imaginable, no less than fourteen helpless Aphides, who were certainly doing you no harm, and were merely sucking the juices from this useless tree."

Perhaps it was only the Sun peeping out at that moment and shining down on the Ladybird, which seemed to turn her spotted case to a brighter red.

"Who told you the tree was useless, I

should like to know?" she said. "Believe me, you are quite mistaken. And as for saying that I have eaten fourteen Aphides,—well, to say the least, it is no proof of your good breeding to watch every morsel of food that passes into the mouth of a friend. I may tell you, however, that the Gardener, who destroys all the slugs and worms and caterpillars, never interferes with me; and I heard him remark the other day that he wished there were more of my kind about, but that good things were always scarce. Incredible as it may appear to you, it was the Gardener who took me from the honeysuckle yonder, and placed me on this tree, which he prizes very much, though the Aphides are destroying it."

"Then perhaps you are placed here to get rid of them?" suggested the Gnat.

"Precisely. Our family—which is very numerous, spite of what the Gardener said — has been always valued on that account; and were it not for our assistance, the Hop-growers and Nurserymen

would be quite powerless to stay the havoc of the Aphides. We were talking about our neighbour the Garden Spider, however. I was telling you that he is sly and cruel, and that you must avoid him as much as possible, in spite of his worldly wisdom. Of course you must be moving about where he is sometimes, but don't encourage any familiarity. Remember, he is bent on mischief, and would do you harm if he could. Be not too curious of his doings, nor heed his artful and deceiving talk. An extended knowledge of his ways may make you cunning, but it will never make you good."

"Anything more?" asked the Gnat.

"Only this," returned the Ladybird, sedately; "don't be gadding about like a useless thing, whirring your wings like the sails of a cornless mill. Try a little honest work. Mind, however, that you keep a sharp look-out, and should you find yourself in circumstances of difficulty or danger, remember that then is the time to use your wings."

With these words the Ladybird opened

her scarlet case, expanded her own beautiful wings, and flew away.

The conversation which had just taken place put the Gnat in a muse.

"A strange creature, the Ladybird," he said, when his friend was out of hearing, "but very timid. I am sure there are many things that the Garden Spider might teach her, which would do her no harm, and would be very useful things to know. His knowledge of the weather is really wonderful. I can see him at work now, lengthening the master-thread of his web, and I've an idea that that's a premonitor of fine weather. There can be no harm in flying down to exchange a word with him."

So saying, the Gnat descended from his elevation, and alighted on the yellow blossom of a Love-everlasting, within a few inches of which the Spider was at work. Here his lively dance attracted the quick eye of the Spider, who paused for a moment in the midst of fastening a thread.

"Good morning," said the Spider.

"Good morning," returned the Gnat.

Then they were both silent.

After a while the Spider ran to the end of a leaf, and threw out a thread, one end of which he fastened to the leaf. The breeze caught up the thread like a streamer, and carried it out until the opposite end almost touched a petal of the Love-everlasting.

"You are busy to-day, sir," said the Gnat.

"We are to have fine weather. It is time to be busy," returned the Spider.

"You were always a judge of the weather, were you not?"

"Well, it has been my study for several years past. I *ought* to know something about it. Besides, a taste for the science runs in the family."

"To be sure," said the Gnat, looking furtively at the floating thread; "and might I ask why you have fastened that little streamer to the leaf?"

"You wouldn't understand me if I told you," said the Spider, with an air of great mystery and erudition.

"Try me," said the Gnat.

"Well, I was making a meteorological calculation," said the Spider, speaking slowly and impressively, "and tied——"

"A what?" gasped the Gnat.

"A meteorological calculation. In fact, the thread shows me which way the wind blows."

"What a delicate little thread, isn't it?" said the Gnat, daintily.

"Yes, but you'd never guess how strong it is."

"Nonsense!" said the Gnat.

"Well, take hold of it and try."

"It has no connection with the web, I suppose?" said the Gnat, suspiciously.

"Do you think I would ask you to take hold of it if it had?"

Nothing could have been more mildly reproachful than the Spider's voice just then.

The thoughtless creature would have fallen into the trap without more ado, but at that moment one of his companions came floating by, and got entangled in the thread.

"Miserable deceiver!" cried the Gnat, as he took to his wings with all expedition. "What the Ladybird told me is indeed true. You are cunning, and cruel, and vicious."

"You would not believe my words," said the Ladybird, as they met at that moment in the air, "so now you have been taught by experience. Be thankful that you have escaped with only a fright."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sighed the Gnat, as he floated aloft. "The world is full of deceit. In future I will live quite out of it, and be a heavenly creature like the Lark. I shall be safe then."

"Heavenly creatures may be sometimes caught," said the Ladybird, as they again separated; "and if you only seek to be heavenly to escape from earthly dangers, you are doing a very foolish thing. The Lark is a bird of praise, and therefore a fit inhabitant of the skies. But you can only frisk and dance, and fritter away the fleeting moments. Such trifling will never make a heavenly creature."

A PROBLEM OF LIFE.

AN ALLEGORY.

A Problem of Life.

An Allegory.

"Life's but breath: to trust it, error."
—*Pericles, Prince of Tyre.*

TURNING over the leaves of my Bible one evening, I came upon the question, "What is Man?" and ere I could read further, fell into a reverie, of which this question became the central thought.

Yes, thought I, what is Man? Have the secrets of his nature been truthfully revealed? Have the depths of his heart been truly fathomed? Has any yet been able to understand those restless strivings after good, of which we read so much, and of which our own hearts have told us so much more? Are all those strivings

vain—fraught only with mocking failure when the strife is over?

Meditating on these questions my eyes grew heavy; and before reason or experience could answer the question I was fast asleep.

I will now record the substance of my dream, which still remains fresh in my recollection, and which, indeed, I do not think I could ever entirely forget.

I thought that I was standing in some vast desert or wilderness; a weary waste of country as it seemed, relieved by no shadow, and brightened by no tree or shrub of any kind. Not a blade of grass, not a flower, not a tuft of herbage could be seen, to witness to the gentle rains of heaven, which must have descended time after time upon its thankless bosom. There was no level lake with grateful gleam, no silver line of brook or river to relieve the monotony; but, as I stood, I could feel the hot sand crushing like hoar-frost beneath my feet, and I could feel the scorching heat of the granite rocks below: and then it was that I learned the

secret of the desolation. Then it was that I learned the secret of that joyless waste of earth, that bladeless, flowerless desert, that thankless bosom. Beneath the earth was a floor of granite; within the bosom was a heart of stone! Scarcely had this fact dawned upon me, than I heard a voice at my back, which cried in my ears—"Such is Man!"

A thrill of wonder ran through me, and turning involuntarily round, I saw, only a few paces off, an erect and shining form, white-robed and winged, the transparent purity of whose presence filled me with guilty apprehensions.

While I yet stood, wondering greatly, the angelic being advanced towards me, and seizing my resistless and trembling hand, exclaimed a second time, "Such is Man!" while he waved his right arm with passionless dignity across the arid desert.

Ere I could recover from the effects of this surprise, I was lifted from the earth and conducted through the air with a motion that was swifter than the wind; while sudden night descended on the plain,

and obscured the objects by which I had been so lately surrounded. A profound awe fell upon my spirit, not so much because of the unusual manner of my transit through the air, which indeed excited little or no apprehension, but because of the darkness and silence, and particularly the silence of my Companion.

At last this feeling of awe became intolerable, and, rather than endure it any longer, I demanded, in a sort of frenzy, whither I was being taken.

"Asked you not, What is Man?" returned my Companion; "I am taking you to the city of his choice. See! we are nearly there."

He had scarcely spoken than my giddy flight was suddenly arrested, and, pointing earthwards, my Companion bade me look.

"Behold the leprous city!" he exclaimed; "man's boasted work, and the pride of human nature. Explore its wonders; gaze upon its glories; and then tell me, child of Adam, what is Man?"

Obedient to the word I looked below,

and instantly the rays of a thousand twinkling lights from some far distant town burst upon my sight. Then, as I gazed, one flickered and went out; but immediately another lamp, of larger flame, shone forth in its place. This thing I saw repeated many times.

"And what am I to learn from this?" at last I said.

"These lamps," returned my Companion, "are the lamps of Human Pride, and they are fed with the oil of Selfishness. No inhabitant of the city is without one; but whenever a citizen dies his lamp expires too, and the reason thereof you will readily understand. But descend with me, and you shall see the Plague City with your own eyes, and learn more concerning the habits and conditions of the citizens."

Then I descended in my dream, till I came so near to the city that its streets and buildings were distinctly visible; and at this point I was much impressed with the vastness of the place, with the magnificence and beauty of its architecture, and the apparent fruitfulness of its soil. On

making known my thoughts to my Companion, he said,—

"Do you wonder at this? alas! how many are influenced by external shows, and deluded by the merest pretensions to power."

And when I pressed him for a clearer answer, he said,—

"The city is indeed built upon a fruitful soil, the soil of Unbelief; but its foundations are sinking. It has been well called by certain of its former inhabitants the City of Destruction; for the whole neighbourhood is of volcanic origin, and underneath the thin crust of earth is a bed of molten lava, into which the whole city will be one day precipitated."

Then he brought me still nearer to the city, and bade me direct my gaze towards it again.

"Look yonder," said he, and pointed with his finger; which, when I had done, I beheld a man, of a dogged countenance, seated upon a lofty throne, with an osier wand in his hand.

"This," said my Companion, "is the

Governor of the City, and his name is Self-will. His countenance, as you observe, is turned towards the heavens, and it has a dogged and defiant expression. Yet the Governor has no such looks for the citizens, and his easy sceptre—made, as you see, of osier wood—ensures for him a steady popularity. Despite his name, his actions are controlled entirely by the Prince who placed him there, the Prince of the Power of the Air, who is also looked upon as a god by the citizens of the Plague City. This Prince is a usurper; and at a time appointed will be stripped of his power, in order that the rightful Prince may take the throne, and rule the citizens with a rod of iron. At present they are doing pretty much as they please under their easy Governor; and as they are all the children of one mother, whose name is Disobedience, you may readily conceive that the things which they elect to do are quite opposed to the mind of the rightful Prince."

Then I looked more narrowly at the citizens as they passed and re-passed

beneath me, and I saw that they were clad in warm apparel, though the breast of each was bare, and brought to view a dark purple spot. The garments of some were made from the skins of wolves and goats, and these were the most respectable; the garments of the poorer and more dissolute were made from the skins of swine. I noticed that some would try to draw their coats across their breasts, as though to hide these purple spots, particularly the more respectable citizens; and this fact awakened my curiosity.

"Tell me, sir," said I, "what are these purple spots which some are seeking so assiduously to hide?"

"Those are the plague spots," returned my Companion, "and those citizens who are seeking to hide them are the Professors of Morality in the Plague City."

"And is there none in all this great city able to cure the awful disease?" I asked.

"Many have tried," returned my Companion, "and the attempt is as old as Professor Cain who designed the city.

Yonder man, with shaven crown and bare feet, is reputed to be very skilful as a plague doctor, but he is not so popular as he was. He is known as Professor Mortification. The busy bustling man who has just passed him has taken much of his practice, for his prescriptions are simpler and more easily taken. Professor Würkhardt is his name and title. He has invented a plaster called 'Goodworks,' which, though it may cover the plague spot, has never been known to effect a cure. Professor Mortification recommends frequent applications of the vinegar of Asceticism, which he contends is the only remedy. The Professors of Morality, differing from both authorities, assert that a milder lotion, which they call the Pay-my-way-and-do-the-best-I-can lotion, is unfailing in its results."

"And what are those huge buildings yonder?" I asked.

"They are the halls and chambers in which the Professors lecture. They contain many witty inventions, which are known to act as opiates on the more

refined citizens, lulling the pain and producing forgetfulness. That hall, surmounted by a lyre, is the Hall of Music; it was founded by Professor Jubal, 'the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.' That with the statue of Jealousy is the Chamber of Literature, and that with the painted dome is the Academy of Art. The imposing building in the next street, with the unsightly new wing surmounted by a statue of Infidelity, is the Chamber of Science."

"And yonder magnificent structure with gilded minarets, to which so many seem hurrying—what is that?"

"That is the Palace of Wealth. Many, as you see, are pressing towards the door, but very few succeed in gaining admittance. Yet the excitement of trying causes them to forget their disease; and even when they fail they may repair to yonder Hall of Carnal Delights, where admission is easier, and a variety of pleasures may be had for a very small consideration."

And now, methought, as I was looking

down in wonder upon the city, a voice, which seemed to rise from the gloom beyond, diverted my attention.

"See now," it cried, "that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand."

Then I saw in my dream that the citizens of the Plague City clapped their hands to their ears in great alarm. The Professors, also, became exceeding wroth, and strove to drown the unwelcome sound by their more boisterous eloquence. Yet were there one or two who remained listening, and for these came this further message,—

"I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord. For I am the Lord that healeth thee."

Then I said to my Companion,—

"How can they escape from this place? for the walls of the city are high, and the country beyond seems dark and perilous."

Thereupon my Companion directed my

gaze to the figure of a young man who had just arrived before a narrow door in the north wall of the city. This door was almost hidden from within by a heap of earth, which had been collected from all parts of the city and deposited in that spot by permission of the Governor; and on top of this heap stood a sentinel, with loaded musket.

"This heap," explained my Companion, "is the heap called Doubts, for it is composed entirely of the soil of Unbelief; and the sentinel with loaded musket is Sergeant Ridicule, a dangerous fellow to look at, but quite harmless."

Now I saw in my dream that the young man paused when he came to the heap, and seemed to be considering how he could elude the vigilance of the sentry while passing round to the back of the heap.

After revolving the matter in his mind for what seemed to be a full hour, he got down upon his knees, and in that lowly posture began moving slowly towards the door. It was nearly reached, when the sentinel presented his musket

in a threatening manner. Then the young man, being seized with a sudden terror, wrung his hands like one bereft of hope; but the Sergeant, regardless of the fear he had occasioned, and anxious, as it seemed, to show the full extent of his power, actually discharged the contents of the weapon at the breast of the youth. There was a peculiar report, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, and after that a cloud of smoke; but when both had died away, I saw the young man kneeling as before, and with no signs of hurt upon him.

"There is only powder in your charge, Master Sergeant," he said, "and I need not fear that." After which he stepped towards the door, and passed out of the city.

And now methought a sudden change came over him, for he began to clap his hands, and to laugh and weep together with a great joy; and as I looked more narrowly, I saw that his wolfskin garments had been thrown aside, and that he was most comfortably clad in a lambs-

wool coat of purest white. His breast was bare as before, but the plague-spot was no longer to be seen; and as he stepped lightly along I heard him sing,—

"O thou my soul, bless God the Lord;
And all that in me is
Be stirred up, His holy name
To magnify and bless.

Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God,
And not forgetful be
Of all His gracious benefits
He hath bestowed on thee.

All thine iniquities who doth
Most graciously forgive:
Who thy diseases all and pains
Doth heal, and thee relieve.

Who doth redeem thy life, that thou
To death may'st not go down;
Who thee with loving kindness doth
And tender mercies crown."

I now noticed for the first time that the tract of country beyond the Plague City was a Wilderness, across which a narrow path had been cut. Numerous other paths, wider and more winding, branched out from it; but these ended abruptly, and had evidently been worn in that manner

by the feet of earlier pilgrims. Yet these paths could be distinguished from the narrow path without difficulty, as they were not in any way illumined, whereas the narrow path was lighted by a steady ray cast by some hidden luminary at the far end.

As I looked at the young man, I saw that he was tempted once or twice to branch off into one and another of these wider paths; but he found himself in such evil case whenever he turned aside, that he was always glad to retrace his steps. On two occasions I saw him making paths for himself, hoping, as it appeared to me, to get along more smoothly so; but these new roads only led him among brambles and pitfalls, which sometimes kept him prisoner for many tedious hours. I noticed, too, that when he struggled to get free, the citizens of the Plague City would laugh at him from the wall, and some would even pelt him with stones and mud.

"Yonder bramble, with gay and flaunting flower," said my Companion, pointing

with his finger, "is the bramble called 'Lust-of-the-Eye'; that with the luscious fruit, and pleasant intoxicating smell, is 'Lust-of-the-Flesh'; and the tall bramble which so noticeably overtops its fellows, is named 'Pride-of-Life.' All these are indigenous to the soil of the Plague City, where they are extensively cultivated by the inhabitants on account of the oil of Selfishness which they yield, and which the citizens express from the plants in order to feed their lamps. But you see how plentiful are the brambles in the Wilderness also, and how seriously they hamper the travellers who pass this way. Seeds of the various species concealed in the bosoms of pilgrims were brought away from the city on numerous occasions, and that is how they come to be growing in the Wilderness."

With these words my Companion grasped my hand more tightly, and signified by a gesture of his own that our journey was to be resumed.

The course he now took was just above the narrow path, and, as he hurried me

along, I was surprised to observe so many travellers diverging into paths of their own; and when I saw their weary looks, and heard the peevish murmurings of these strayed ones, "Verily," said I, "many of the pilgrims would return to the Plague City if they could;" and methinks I was not mistaken.

In time our aerial flight brought us nigh unto a spacious building, of plain construction, the front of which abutted upon the narrow path; so I inquired of my Conductor what this building might be.

"That," said he, arresting our flight as he spoke, "is Adelphi Hall, the trysting place of all travellers from the Plague City, and formerly the happiest spot in the Wilderness. Descend with me, and you shall explore it for yourself."

So speaking, we descended together, and alighted on a portion of the path facing the entrance to Adelphi Hall. Above the door, which had almost fallen from its hinges, were printed in fading characters, "Little children, love one

another;" but to this some one had maliciously added, in a very black ink made from the gallnut, these words, "When it suits you to do so, and doctrinal opinions will allow."

My Companion presently gave me a sad account of the changes and troubles which had been witnessed from time to time in Adelphi Hall.

I learned that the place was built nearly two thousand years ago, and originally consisted of but one great room, where travellers from the Plague City met and conversed, and, warmed by a genial fire, were particularly happy. Afterwards the building had been partitioned off into numerous smaller rooms, each room opening into a long corridor which ran the full length of the hall; and as there was then but one fire in the building, those rooms which were farthest removed from it were exceptionally cold.

In the corridor was always to be seen a person of venerable aspect—more aged than the hall itself by many, many years—who in the brave union days of Adelphi

Hall had occupied an important place in the great room; but when differences of opinion had arisen between the occupants, he had been thrust out of doors whilst the dissentients built their separate rooms, and had only been readmitted as far as the corridor when they found that they could not altogether do without him. He carried a lantern at his girdle, which was the only officially recognised light in the place, and I could not but admire the exceeding brilliancy of its flame. My Companion informed me, however, that the inmates of Adelphi Hall would sometimes kindle fires of their own, for the double purpose of light and warmth, but that this was ever a foolhardy and dangerous proceeding. The Lantern-bearer was willing at any time to show his light, and was much opposed to the practice of kindling alien fires in the hall; indeed, whenever he passed a room where one of these fires was burning, he would turn his lamp upon the transgressors, and would cry with a fearful voice: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourself

about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my Master's hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow."

There was a large skylight in the roof of the hall, with a curtain before it, the strings of which were held by the old Lantern-bearer. He would unroll it at discretion, when application was made to him; at which time the attentive eye would behold such glories in the heavens, as would transport the soul, and make the gazer happy for days together. But such applications were seldom made, or, if they were, the gazer's eyes would often be so clouded by the smoke of his self-kindled fire that a clear view would be impossible. Then he would fall to weeping, and would ask, in the bitterness of his soul, "Where is the light of His presence? Why has He hid His countenance from me?" and other such pitiful questions. Some, as I presently learned, had made so much smoke with their fires that they could not obtain a glimpse at

all, and were glad enough to construct windows in the walls, as a kind of clumsy substitute; but these were most unfortunate contrivances, for they gave the builders a sight of the Plague City, that set their hearts longing to get back to it.

I learned also that the old Lantern-bearer had a very long head, as mortals say, and knew so well the histories of the many persons who visited the hall, that he was equal to all their troubles and difficulties, and never failed to meet the questions of inquirers with a fitting answer. Some who went to question him would go away disappointed, however, because they did not get the answer they wished; and when he showed them the light of his lantern, would close their eyes, and go on in the dark. From what I could gather, the Lantern-bearer was distinguished for his plain and fearless speech; and as he would never mince matters to please anybody, it is not surprising that he was sometimes treated coldly, and with neglect. Some said that he had grown too antiquated for the

times; but my Companion smiled scornfully as he told me this, and remarked that though the Lantern-bearer was so old, he had not entered upon his dotage, as many thought; for he had lived through all the long years without changing, and was as quick and powerful as when he first began to proffer his advice. His voice, which he could modulate to suit all ears, had no uncertain sound; and such was its compass and power that he could make it heard even so far away as the Plague City.

I also learned from my guide that the courtyard of Adelphi Hall had been added some time after the completion of the main building, and that it was a kind of miniature Plague City, arranged by certain Adelphians who still retained some affection for their old governor, Self-will. Thither flocked not a few of the plague-stricken inhabitants of the city, who found a ready welcome, and even admittance into the hall itself, provided they concealed their wolfskin garments under other raiment, to make them externally like the

rest. Yet these exterior garments were not genuine lamb's-wool, but a kind of shoddy.

Being thus doubly clad, it is not surprising that these pseudo-Adelphians objected strongly to the fire. They had to present themselves sometimes, however, if only to keep up appearances; but they generally contrived to pay their visits when the fire was low, and the venerable Lantern-bearer was in another part of the hall. The light that he carried was too searching for them, it shone so relentlessly on their lamb's-wool disguises; and, I doubt not, they would have given a good deal for the pleasure of seeing it extinguished. True they professed an unbounded respect for the old Light-bearer, and would at times quote his sayings to serve their own ends; but in their hearts they thought him a very pestilent fellow, and, knowing what value was put upon his services by many in the hall, would have sacrificed their right arms to be rid of him. The truth is such people had no business in the build-

ing at all, and would never have gained an entrance had the rightful occupants been on the watch. Nor, indeed, had they entered in a respectable way by the door, but had crept round by the back of the hall, where the courtyard called Compromise was, and so had climbed in through the window.

Now, while I was learning by conversation with my Companion the Lantern-bearer's history, I heard in my dream the sound of voices proceeding from the small room where the fire was. On going thither I found that the fire was getting low, and noticed that the portion of the skylight which formed the ceiling of the room was completely covered by the curtain, so that not an inch of sky was visible. There were numerous travellers in the room, and my Companion, pointing to one of them, informed me that he was still a victim to the plague, but that he had taken advantage of the low state of the fire to enter the room and make mischief. He had covered his wolfskin raiment with a coat, the cut and fashion

of which gave it a strong resemblance to the coats of the other inmates, but the material of the garment was shoddy, and not pure wool. This pseudo-Adelphian was seated by the door, and had taken up that position in order to be as far as possible from the fire, and as near as possible to a place of retreat.

I noticed also that the conversation seemed pretty much confined to those who were farthest from the fire; and that those who were nearest thereto appeared much dejected, and would ever and anon draw their garments closer with a shiver, because they could get so little warmth from the fire. Yet they made no effort to revive the flame.

As they had evidently been talking for some time, I had to pick up with the conversation as best I could, but I presently gathered that they were discussing a subject in natural history, to wit, the vegetation of the wilderness over which I had lately passed. The point that was under consideration when I entered the room was, whether the bramble called

"Lust-of-the-Eye" caused more mischief to travellers than the bramble "Lust-of-the-Flesh," and whether the taller bramble of the three, namely "Pride-of-Life," was not more hurtful than either.

The discussion was long and learned, and I began to think it would never end, for each of the speakers held a different view, and was extremely zealous to maintain it; and such was the heat of the discussion, that one of them at length became very excited, and was evidently on the point of saying some rash and unpleasant things, when the Light-bearer appeared at the door, and, throwing his lantern on the group, exclaimed—

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother——"

No more of the remark was heard, for the traveller in wolfskin gave the door a sly kick with his heel, and it sprang to with a scrash that drowned all other sounds.

A moment later there was a further interruption. Upon the still quivering door was heard a timid knocking; and

when the door had been opened, there entered the young man whom I had seen escaping from the Plague City.

The marks of the wilderness were upon him, for his clothes were torn, and his face wore an expression of weariness and pain. As he looked around him upon the stolid and unsympathetic faces of his fellow-pilgrims, his lips quivered, and the tears gathered in his eyes. Meanwhile, the fire had been getting so low, through the neglect of those who should have tended it, that one or two of the younger travellers had left the room during the talk about the brambles, and had gone in quest of warmer quarters. Thus the prospect which presented itself to the new arrival was cheerless beyond expression.

Nevertheless, he approached the fire, and seated himself as near to it as he was able, while the traveller in wolfskin eyed him fiercely.

"I have been directed hither by the aged Lantern-bearer," said the young man, and then he paused. The coldness of his reception had embarrassed him.

Some of the Adelphians looked embarrassed too, but irritability rather than confusion was observable in the majority of faces.

"A mere beardless youth—what can he understand of science?" sneered the pseudo-Adelphian, from his stool near the door.

"I have overheard a part of your learned talk about the brambles," returned the young man, "and may frankly confess that much of it was quite beyond my comprehension. I own that I know nothing of the morphology, physiology, germination, propagation, or other functions and properties of the plants in question; but I do know that they have thorns, for I have felt them; and I can prove that they are unmitigated evils, for they have thrown me down many a time during my passage through the wilderness."

"Out upon the prating fellow! Tie his tongue, and cast him out!" broke in the pseudo-Adelphian; "he has no title to be here at all!"

"I have no wish to remain if this cold

cheer is all you have to offer," responded the youth. "Learned questions such as you discuss will never do a grain of good to travellers like myself. I will retire at once. The venerable Lantern-bearer told me that this room would be the warmest in the house, but I see there has been some mistake. I was led to expect a hearty welcome, and thought that your fire would afford me the warmth and comfort which the cold wilderness has led me to long for. Alas! you have received me with suspicion, and your fire is almost out."

With a feeling of shame, one of the party confessed to the common failure, and rose to welcome the new-comer. And then methought a curious incident occurred. On a sudden, a little flame leapt up in the grate, and began rapidly to increase in size. And with that the flagging spirits of the company revived; and the traveller in wolfskin, finding the fire too much for him, slunk out of the room.

And as he slunk away, the hall, and the pilgrims, and the old Lantern-bearer vanished from my view; and I was left

alone with the Companion of my dream-wanderings.

"Such is man!" exclaimed my shining Guide, as he again spread his wings, and caught my hand in preparation for further peregrinations; "I have shown you him in the Plague City, in the Wilderness, and in the Hall of Concord; and you have seen him at his best in each. Now tell me, child of Adam, what is Man?"

Then I awoke.

UNCLE JOHN.

Uncle John.

CHAPTER I.

"HUG-MONEY."

LET us begin with his portrait. A pale-faced, wizen little man, smelling strongly of stale tobacco smoke; with two small beads of eyes stuck close together, bald head, prominent nose with wide-spreading nostrils, coarse moustache, and brown teeth eternally biting the amber mouthpiece of a cherry-wood pipe; his dress a threadbare frock-coat and vest, once black but now green with age, the lapel and whole front of each well marked with gravy-splashes, beer-stains, and the like; trousers of a peppery-grey colour, baggy at the knees and frayed at the

bottom; and white socks that had left their first estate, and now hung hopelessly about the spring-side boots, seemingly to hide the state of the elastics. Add to this a dux collar, and so many inches of Oxford shirt as the absence of cuffs and tie render visible, and the portrait is complete.

John James Pepperdew was his name, and he lived in a suburban back street, South-eastern district, where he earned a precarious livelihood by the sale of cheap groceries at competition prices. Brown sugars—with amalgamation of dead flies, wasps, and other specimens of the order *Hymenoptera*—three-pound jars of plum-stones and vegetable marrow, and Ceylon teas—with London brand of straw and dirt—these were his specialities. A ticket in the window announced that every holder of six coupons of Pepperdew's one-and-eightpenny teas would be presented with a handsome bread-platter.

In spite of this munificence the business never paid. John James traced his ill-success to the Government laxity and in-

justice,—the existence of Civil Service Associations, Army Supply Stores, and the like, which Government should have suppressed; and was wont to protest against the iniquity of allowing men whose salaries were paid—or partly paid—out of his small earnings to open shops in his own line of business, and almost beggar him by their confederacies. "The business ought to 'a' paid," he once said, "but these co-operative societies won't give a man a chance. It's the Government we've got to thank for that. I tell you wot, sir,"—vehemently, and taking his pipe from his mouth,—"there'll be a revolution afore long!"

Perhaps another reason for John James's ill-success might be found in his inherent laziness. He was not an early riser, and misbehaved facetious little boys, passing the unopened shop at 9.30 or 10 A.M., would scrawl upon the shutters, "Not up yet. Call again at 11 o'clock." Then he would sit whole hours in the shop parlour smoking his pipe, while the dirt accumulated on the fixtures. and the mice made

havoc among the biscuits in the window, and the poisoned flies dropped aimlessly into the sugar-cask.

John James was not a popular man. He lacked those graces of diction and manner which attract people to a shop and make customers of them. Those who dealt at the stores, and came to him only for oddments, might be sure of a brusque reception; and with children he was as snappy as a mouse-trap. When a small and grubby child entered the shop one day, and deposited on the counter a half-opened tin of sardines, with these words, "Please, Mr Pepperdew, mother says the sardines does not smell right, and she's afraid to eat 'em 'cos of baby. Can you take 'em back and return the money?" what was the answer? "No, 'tain't likely! *I* don't smell anything amiss. It's her own nose that's wrong. Tell yer mother I can't change 'em." Now that was not the way to work up a connection.

The neighbours affirmed that John James had a miser's nature, and called him "Hug-money" behind his back. Per-

haps the neighbours were right. His liberality stopped short at pinewood bread-platters, which cost him three-farthings each. He had never been known to give away a date or cracknel; and when he once had the misfortune to spill some carraway seeds in the sugar-cask, he spent a whole evening separating them with the wire of his pipe-cleaner.

On one occasion, it is true, he slipped some jumbles into his pocket to take to his little invalid niece at Pentonville; but when her father mumbled something about paying for the same, the hint was too much for John, and he took the money.

When things were at their worst with Mr Pepperdew, his fortune took a turn. A bequest of six thousand pounds lifted the Stockwell grocer into the middle classes. Perhaps the testator, Stephen Pepperdew, would have willed his money elsewhere — to the Lock Hospital, for example, or the Licensed Victuallers' Association (for he was a publican), or to Tom Cuff the pugilist — had he ever, during his passage through this turbid

scene, set eyes upon his nephew. For John James was quite insignificant in appearance, and Stephen, in the days of his flesh, doted on big men. But uncle and nephew, for reasons best known to John's father, had never met, and the will had been made in favour of John.

The Stockwell grocer took his good fortune very quietly. He sold his business, removed his poor sticks of furniture to two unfurnished rooms in a neighbouring street (rent four-and-sixpence a week), and continued to live on in much the old way. Though his income had increased to nearly five hundred pounds per annum, his annual expenditure seldom exceeded fifty pounds, so that his money not only stuck to him, —it grew.

The change in his circumstances did not produce a corresponding moral change. By no means. The old sobriquet of "Hug-money" continued to cling to him, and perhaps was better deserved than when the name was first bestowed. Every opportunity for a generous action that arose but served to bring out more clearly the in-

grained selfishness of his nature, and proved beyond a doubt that his fortune had not improved him.

The slow, stodgy, lazy life that his easy fortune enabled him henceforth to live was in perfect harmony with his tastes. To sprawl in his broken-backed arm-chair, with a pile of sovereigns and a jug of beer on the table before him, a book on his lap, and the cherry-wood pipe in his mouth—this was the climax of terrestrial happiness to Stockwell John. The nature of the book was quite a minor consideration. It might be "Chambers's Information," or "Platt on Money," or "Binney on How to make the Best of both Worlds," or "Kirby on Ants," or a volume of "Talmage's Sermons"—for John was very catholic in his tastes. Sometimes—that is, after supper and on Sundays—he read the Bible.

One evening Stockwell John lighted upon this passage: "I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

He paused here, for he had stumbled upon a difficulty.

"I can't make that out at all," he mused. "Friends, friends—mammon of unrighteousness—well, that's money, I suppose."

Then he brushed away some white ashes which had fallen from his pipe, and had partially obscured the verse.

"Let's read it again," he said, half aloud.

He read it again—slowly and with emphasis where the sense required it.

"Mammon is certainly money," he ruminated; "an' we are told to make friends of it—which is wot I've been doing all along. Don't this just agree with wot Solomon says about the ants? They lay by a store against the winter. God gives 'em the instinct to do it, I suppose."

Somehow or other Stockwell John was not entirely satisfied with this view of the passage. He wanted to accept it—would have given something (a pinewood bread-platter, for example) to have been able to accept it, but, wish as he might, he could not bring his mind to the point.

"It says 'friends,'" he kept on repeat-

ing to himself. "And mammon is gold. Here's a positive command to lay up treasure."

But as he said this, and every time he said it, another voice whispered back to him: "No, no, that won't do. John James, you're a shuffler, sir; it's no use trying to escape the difficulty by shuffling. Your interpretation of the passage is a misinterpretation, and you know it. Read the passage again."

Of course this whispering intruder was John's conscience—for John had a conscience, let me tell you.

Again and again, as in obedience to the voice, did Mr Pepperdew brush away the ashes from the open page, and re-peruse the passage; but the wish to take his own meaning out of it was so strong, and increased so mightily every moment, that he presently lost all sense even of the signification of the words, and had to turn over to another page to compose his thoughts. Not that his object was effected thereby, however. The verse buzzed about in his brain like a fly on a

sultry afternoon; and when he turned to reading Paul's speech to the Athenians, his mind would not disconnect itself from the old theme, and he read on without knowing what he read.

At length he closed the book, and mumbling in a discontented way, for the twentieth time at least, that mammon certainly meant money, and that making friends of mammon certainly meant making friends of money, he took a little bag from the pistol pocket of his trousers and emptied its contents upon the table. There were sovereigns and half-sovereigns there, for John had been round that morning collecting his rents, and as the golden pieces fell chinking from the bag his eyes glistened.

For a while he gazed at the yellow pile in silence. Then he took his pipe from his mouth in quite a disconcerted way, and muttered, half morosely, "Why does it keep haunting me? Haven't I got light enough on the passage? Friend means friend, and mammon means gold, and I'm told to make friends of it, which is wot I'm doing."

Then he fell to building the sovereigns up, one upon the other, till he had made quite a tall pile of them, and the occupation became exciting.

"Up they go—up they go!" he kept on repeating, as each new sovereign was added to the pile; and he leaned back in his chair and crowed and chuckled, and rubbed his horny little hands together, like a child who builds a tower of bricks.

But when the pile had reached to an unusual height, and began to lean a little out of the perpendicular, his excitement became intense.

"Down they go—*down they go*—DOWN THEY GO!" he exclaimed, pushing back his chair and half rising to his feet; and when the golden tower fell, he also fell back into his chair, and proceeded to build up another pile.

At last he returned the money to the bag, and the bag to his pocket; and relapsing into his normal state of sobriety, leisurely relighted his pipe.

"I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteous-

ness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Those words again! How they clung to him! Surely John James was quite right, and friends meant friends, and mammon meant money? Then why, as he had asked, did the passage keep haunting him? Well, it was a fair question, and might reasonably be followed by another; for John had suddenly grown very hot, and really appeared to be quite uncomfortable. What was there to grow hot about?

At last he drew a heavy breath, and replacing his pipe between his brown teeth, muttered gloomily: "I don't see as I can be mistaken in the passage; but I'm not 'appy altogether. Maybe Joe Pendle has a thought about it. I'll call to-morrow and talk the matter over."

Having come to this resolution, he grew quieter again; and smoked on till his pipe was exhausted. Then he knocked the ashes into the empty grate, and shuffled off to bed.

CHAPTER II.

THE ONLY UNCLE.

JOE PENDLE was Stockwell John's brother-in-law, and father of John's little invalid niece. Joe was a widower with five children, the oldest not yet in her teens; and his house was a flat-looking two-story tenement in Pentonville, with some wax-work fruit and an enormous family Bible in the parlour window, and some pots of flowering geranium, surrounded by a miniature fence and gate, on the window-ledge. Nailed above the low door was a board, on which was inscribed, in very ill-formed letters, this legend: "Joseph Pendle, Carpenter and Joiner. Jobs executed by the day or hour."

When Stockwell John arrived before this house, laden with his difficulties of the previous night, the door was opened to him, after some delay, by the elder Miss Pendle, who expressed no pleasure

at seeing him, and left him standing on the doorstep while she went to the head of the kitchen stairs and shouted—

"Father, here's Uncle Pepperdew!"

Then, turning her face towards the visitor, she said, in a lower voice, seemingly with some view of scaring Uncle Pepperdew away—

"Uncle Luke's here. He's promised to stay all the evening."

In a moment Joe Pendle could be heard slowly ascending the stairs. He was in his shirt-sleeves; and as his tall figure appeared in sight, the carpenter was wiping his long arms on his apron. Joe had a thin and rather pleasing face, but with no superfluous intelligence in it. The weakness was in the mouth, which was incessantly open, and gave his jaws the appearance of being locked. His eyes were his best feature, but it made one feel lonely to look at them, they were so full of sorrow. Joe, you see, had only been a widower three months.

"Maybe you'll not object to the kitchen," said Joe, apologetically, when

the two men had shaken hands. "We've taken to sitting there since — since the Lord took her. The parlour seems lonely now, an' we think of letting it. At least, the children find it lonely. Doll has quite turned against the room, and frets if we leave her there. You see, it was there they placed the trestles—and—and—the coffin."

Doll was the invalid, and had to lie on her back all day, and wear irons. She was nine years of age.

"I don't object to the kitchen," said Uncle Pepperdew, as he followed the carpenter down the stairs. "How's Doll?"

"As bright as ever," said Joe, in a louder voice so that Doll might hear him; "not a murmur—not a murmur—as patient as an angel—which she is, an' no irreverence to those celestshall beings."

Joe meant all this, and his voice had quite a respectful tone while he was speaking.

"Angels! Fiddlesticks!" This was from another voice, which seemed to

issue from the kitchen. "You never saw an angel—nor did I. Doll's a pattern o' patience, I know that; but what's the use of comparing her with angels, which 'ave no existence except in silly folks' brains?"

It was Doll's other uncle who said this—the person whom the eldest Miss Pendle had described as "Uncle Luke." Luke was his Christian name, but a heathen name would have suited him better, for Joe's brother was no Christian.

He was seated at that moment in Joe's only arm-chair, winking good-naturedly at Lavinia Pendle, aged ten and-a-half, who was laying the tea, and had just gone through the preparatory ordeal of warming the teapot.

Luke Pendle was another of Joe's well-to-do relations. He was a master builder, and owned three acres of jerry-built houses out Peckham way, besides being the proprietor of some Turkish baths and a popular theatre of varieties. It would appear that when Joe was born, Nature had forgotten to provide him with

a due proportion of brains, and that the deficiency had been made up in his brother, who had entered the world some two years later; for Luke was quite a financial genius, and made money as fast as Joe made shavings.

"No argiments, please," said Joe, mildly, as he entered the room, followed by Stockwell John. "Here's Mr Pepperdew, Luke. Doll, my treasure, here's Uncle Pepperdew."

Doll, however, seemed no better pleased to see Uncle Pepperdew than the elder Miss Pendle had been; and when he bent over to kiss her, she turned away her face and gave him only her ear. Her lips, you see, were reserved for Joe, or the children, or Uncle Luke.

Stockwell John looked awkward enough, and extending his hand, said, "Well, an' 'ow's Doll?"

Doll allowed John's heavy fist to close over her delicate fingers, and answered, timidly, "Not very well, Uncle Pepperdew, thank you."

"No, not very well, my pretty pet,"

broke in Joe, in quite a motherly way; "but she'll be better soon, please God. We've going to have some tea now, and father shall sit beside his little Doll, and soak the crusts. John Pepperdew, you'll join us in a cup of tea?"

John shook his head. "I'm as full as I can hold," he said, patting his chest; "had tea afore I come away."

"P'r'aps Uncle Pepperdew would like one of my sweets," said Doll, innocently.

John felt very much ashamed, and was about to say, "No, no; you keep 'em, Doll," when Joe gave him a sudden nudge, and whispered, "Say 'yes,' and take one. It'll please her."

John did as he was advised, and slipping a sugar-almond into his mouth, began turning it over with his tongue.

"It's delicious," he said, willing to keep up the deception; "and how did Doll come by all these good things, I wonder?"

"Uncle brought them for her," said the elder Miss Pendle, with great promptness.

Uncle Luke was usually called "Uncle."

There was no need to name him; indeed, to all intents and purposes he was the *only* uncle. Stockwell John had the colder and distinguishing title of "Uncle Pepperdew."

"Bella, my dear," said Joe, in a reproachful tone, "you should 'ave let Doll speak."

At this moment the two remaining children—'Liza Pendle, aged seven, and Benjamin Pendle, aged five—entered the room. They had been sent out surreptitiously, shortly before Stockwell John's arrival, to purchase a tin of lobster on Uncle Luke's account.

The only uncle ate heartily, and swallowed more cups of tea than I should like to say; and cracked so many jokes, that the elder Miss Pendle declared that she would die of laughing, and Master Pendle tumbled off his chair in convulsions.

Stockwell John having got rid of the sugar-almond, produced his pipe, and smoked away, as he said, to "take the sweetness out of his tooth."

When tea was over, and the elder Miss Pendle, assisted by Lavinia, had washed up, the four healthy children went into the back-yard to play at luggage trains, and Doll went to sleep.

"Pretty flower! she's dropped fast asleep," said Joe, softly; and he removed the cup from which he had been feeding her, and which was still half full.

Joe always spoke of Doll as pretty; but Doll was not pretty, for all that. Her face was slightly deformed, and bore pitiful traces of the life of suffering to which she had been doomed.

"Sound as a top," said Uncle Pepperdew, speaking down into the bowl of his pipe.

"When did doctor see her last?" inquired Uncle Luke.

"Yesterday, when I was planing down a nine-inch board for Morrison opposite. He was uncommon gentle with her, Luke, an' kissed his hand to her as he was going away. Dr Croft's a clever man as ever was, and knows wot he's about."

"And what did he say about the case?"

"He said she was frail, Luke, very frail —and——"

"And what?"

"And needed a change. Said she could never get strong again unless she were sent away into the country for a time."

"Are you going to send her?"

"How can I?" said Joe, piteously.

Uncle Luke said nothing; and Uncle Pepperdew, in a state of apparent abstraction, shot out his under lip, and released a mouthful of tobacco smoke.

"P'r'aps doctor's wrong," said Joe, after a pause; "I must trust in God, and hope for the best."

"Trust in God!" repeated Uncle Luke, irreverently. "Who's God? where's God? What good has that sort of trust ever done for you? Better trust in yourself, Joseph. I've trusted in myself, and made money. Blessed are those that trust in themselves, for they'll not be disappointed —that's my text."

"You don't know anything about it," broke in Uncle Pepperdew, removing his pipe, and pointing the amber mouthpiece at Uncle Luke with sudden pugnacity of manner: "Look 'ere now,"—John always dropped his h's when he was excited—"which came first, the hen or the chicken?"

"No argiments, please," said Joe, in a nervous flutter.

"I'll answer him," said Uncle Luke, profoundly. "It's a question, and no argument."

This subject of the hen and the chicken had been up for discussion before. Not once merely, but many times; and ever with the same result, namely—that Uncle Luke had only come off second-best. Uncle Pepperdew, therefore, felt quite safe in returning to the subject. He was not aware that his adversary had lately been talking the matter over with a friend,—a Bob-Ingersoll-man from the States,—and was now amply equipped with arguments on the other side.

When, therefore, the argument had passed through its successive stages—

namely, Which came first? Answer: The chicken. Where did the first chicken come from? Answer: The egg. And when John, in a tone of anticipated and merciless triumph, had propounded his final and erstwhile unanswerable proposition: "If the chicken came before the hen, how did the first egg come into existence?"—imagine, if you please, the horrified bewilderment of the questioner, as Uncle Luke blurted out—

"By evolution, Mr Pepperdew, that's 'ow!"

"Ev-o-lu-tion!" repeated Uncle Pepperdew, sinking back in his chair, with a sort of gasp. "Why, what's that?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Uncle Luke, disregarding the question, "by ev-o-lu-tion. Everything was evolved. You was evolved, Mr Pepperdew. Joseph Pendle, there, was evolved. *I* was evolved. The horse which just trotted past the window came into being by a process of evolution. By—a—process—of—ev-o-lu-tion," slowly, and with emphasis, "so did the egg."

After awhile it dawned upon Uncle

Pepperdew that he had not been defeated, but only silenced by sophistry and long names. But what was he to do? What could he say? Uncle Luke, with his head full of evolution, was evolving ideas by the bushel load; and having once got fairly under way it was difficult to restrain his volubility. And how, indeed, could Uncle Pepperdew, who had never read Beale, or Wace, or Joseph Cook, or the Duke of Argyll, be supposed to grapple with such an adversary? If Uncle Luke, armed with the story of a bear that had been seen swimming in the water for hours, with his mouth wide open, catching flies, chose to assert that the animal would in time become as monstrous as a whale, providing only the supply of flies were constant,—if, I repeat, he chose to make this assertion, how could Uncle Pepperdew refute it? Or, again, if the only uncle solemnly affirmed —as, believe me, he did—that ages of irresistible desire to browse on high-growing vegetation had produced the long tongue and neck of the giraffe, what could Uncle Pepperdew affirm to the contrary?

"Such being the case," contended Uncle Luke, as he brought an extremely protracted argument to a close, "where's the use of a Supreme Being, I should like to know? Mr Pepperdew, sir, there's no need of a Creator when all things come into existence by themselves—by—a—law—of—evolution."

"Don't let's have no argiments, please," pleaded Joe, looking appealingly from one uncle to the other.

"But ain't it so?" persisted Uncle Luke.

To appeal to Joe for his assent in regard to such a dogma was an unexpected proceeding, for Joe never reasoned about anything, and in this instance had not the remotest idea what Uncle Luke had been talking about.

Yet Uncle Luke had affirmed that there was no Supreme Being, and wanted Joe to back him up in this assertion.

"Ain't it so?" he repeated, on perceiving that Joe hung fire.

"I suppose it is," said Joe, mildly; "but God knows. Hadn't we better have no

argiments, and leave the matter with them as is able to decide?"

Uncle Luke said nothing, but Joe's answer did not appear to afford him that satisfaction which Joe had really hoped it would.

At length Uncle Pepperdew, who arrived at ideas slowly, but held hard to them when once he had obtained a grip, drew his pipe from his mouth, and said slowly—

"King Pharaoh had 'orses, didn't he?"

"I suppose so," said Uncle Luke.

"An' weren't 'orses the same in Pharaoh's day as they are now?"

"I suppose so."

"Then wot do you jolly well want to talk for?" said Uncle Pepperdew, vehemently. "Evolution indeed!"

The general bearing of the argument may not be altogether apparent to the reader; but, of course, Uncle John knew what he was about; and as he was quite satisfied that he had silenced Uncle Luke by his logic, and demolished effectually the evolution theory, we may conclude

that he had sufficient ground for that conviction.

Fortunately, at this crisis Doll woke up, and the discussion had to be adjourned.

Later in the evening Uncle Luke stepped into the back yard to watch the children at play; and Joe, who seemed desirous of unburdening his mind of some weight that was pressing heavily, followed him like a shadow.

"Luke," at length he said, in a sort of timid whisper, "could you come upstairs with me for a few moments? I want to speak with you alone."

Uncle Luke looked rather stern, and buttoned his coat across his chest with an air of some reserve; but he acceded to the request, and the two men went upstairs to the little parlour.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Joe, who was all of a tremble, and he looked furtively into his brother's face.

Uncle Luke said nothing, but he sat down in the stiffest manner possible, and frowned ominously.

"I was going to speak about Doll,"

Joe began, in a humble, pleading voice, "and I thought—at least, I hoped that —that—— But you know what the doctor said, Luke."

"He said she was frail," said Luke, shortly.

"And needed a change," added Joe, the perspiration sitting on his forehead in big beads. "It's her only chance. Luke, you've bin a friend to the children and to Doll in pertikler. Many's the time you've brought 'em sweets and sich-like when you've called in to take a simple meal in my 'ouse—an', Luke, it's the thought of this as makes me bold——"

Joe paused, and looked eagerly in his brother's face, which, however, was immovable as the face in the grocer's almanac above his head.

"Luke," he presently resumed, "don't think I've brought you here to beg—no, it's not that. I've never begged. I don't want to beg—not even for Doll. But a small loan, Luke, for a few weeks—only a few weeks. A brother may ask a loan."

"I did not think that these little kind-

nesses of which you speak would be taken advantage of in this manner," said the jerry-builder, icily.

His manner, certainly, was most unpromising, and he sat erect on his chair like a wooden doll on a stick.

"Luke—you misunderstand me," said Joe, startling from his chair, and laying his trembling hand upon his brother's arm. "I'm not begging. I'm only asking for a loan—for a loan—an obligement for a few weeks."

"That *is* taking an advantage," said the jerry-builder, testily.

Joe sank back into his chair again, crushed and hopeless.

"I meant no harm, Luke," he said at last, wiping the big drops from his forehead with the back of his hand. "I'll never ask again. I didn't think it would be taking an advantage—I hope you won't take it too much to heart."

Then, rising once more, he extended his hand, saying—

"You'll shake hands, Luke, just to show there's no ill-feeling. I couldn't a-bear to

see any coldness atween us after all these long years, or to think as how anything that I had said would hinder you from dropping in as of old, and taking a meal with us."

Uncle Luke accepted both the hand and the apology, though in a sad, reproachful way, and the brothers returned to the kitchen.

As they were descending the stairs, Luke whispered:

"John Pepperdew don't do much for the children, do he?"

Joe shook his head.

"Then why don't you ask him for the money? Ain't he a brother as well as me? And isn't Doll his sister's own child?"

Joe looked hard in the questioner's face to see if he really intended the proposal to be taken seriously, and finding that such was the case, said, quietly: "Borrow from J hn! Luke, you don't know 'im—you don't know 'im. I couldn't ask 'im, Luke, for he ain't got it in his natur'."

What the "it" was, which John's nature was deficient in, Joe did not explain; and

further discussion on the subject was prevented, as the brothers had by this time returned to the kitchen.

Uncle Pepperdew had taken advantage of their absence to weigh over again in his mind the difficulty of the previous night. The two men were no sooner seated than he blurted out: "Joe, wot's the mammon of unrighteousness?"

After considering the question for quite half a minute, Joe answered: "I'm no scholard, John; but ain't it the riches of the world?"

"So I thought," said Uncle Pepperdew, with a puzzled frown. Whereupon he withdrew his pipe from his lips, and added, cautiously, "Wot's meant by making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness?"

Joe would rather not have replied to this question, although, to be sure, he felt clear that his view of the passage (derived from Doddridge's "Family Expositor") was the right one. However, the question had been addressed to him, and John waited for an answer.

"Don't it mean using wot we've got like wise stewards?" said Joe. "Relieving the widders, and orfins, and sich?"

John Pepperdew started.

"I don't see it in that light at all," he said.

"But Joe's right; hang me if he ain't!" broke in Uncle Luke.

Uncle Pepperdew frowned severely across the table at the jerry-builder, as though resenting the interruption. He considered, indeed, that Uncle Luke was not in a position to offer an opinion, such things being only spiritually discerned.

"No argiments, please," said Joe, timorously.

The elder Miss Pendle entered at this moment, and announced, in an injured tone, that Master Benjamin was in a state of rebellion. "He won't leave off playing at luggage-trains and come to bed," explained the aggrieved young lady.

The only uncle laughed, but Uncle Pepperdew looked increasingly severe, and suggested the advisability of bringing an unnameable part of Master Benjamin's

anatomy in contact with Joe's slipper, whereat Miss Bella Pendle fled precipitately.

"Give Ben one of my sweets; he'll be good then," said Doll.

Joe proceeded to act upon this command like an obedient child, and on dipping his long fingers into the bag made the somewhat depressing discovery that only one sweet remained.

"P'r'aps Uncle Pepperdew would like that," said Doll immediately. "He said he liked the last."

"No—no; you keep it yourself, Doll, said Joe and Uncle Pepperdew together.

"I'd rather Uncle Pepperdew had it, father," said Doll quietly.

At a word from Joe, Stockwell John took the sweet, and conveyed it to his lips with extravagant expressions of pleasure. Nevertheless, he seemed to be ill at ease.

When the elder Miss Pendle had accomplished the arduous and protracted task of putting Master Benjamin to bed, and returned to lay the supper, Uncle Pepperdew rose to depart. Joe pressed

him to join them in the meal, but he declined.

"Do stay, Uncle Pepperdew," said Doll, from the sofa.

"No—no, Doll, thank-ee," said John, crossing to where she lay, and looking intently into her pale, distorted, little face.

He had never regarded her so closely before, and Doll became confused on noticing the inspection to which she was exposed.

How ill she looked! The face was thin, and of a chalky whiteness; the hands were thin also, and the blue veins showed distinctly through the smooth and delicate skin. The doctor had spoken truly when he said that the child was very frail. Among all the needy ones in that dense and overcrowded city, who needed a change so much as she?

"Well, good-bye, Doll," said Uncle Pepperdew, stooping over her.

Doll turned her cheek to him, and he kissed it in his clumsy way; afterwards shaking hands with Uncle Luke and the elder Miss Pendle, that young lady having

solemnly declined to be kissed. Miss 'Liza Pendle escaped not so easily, for he laid hands upon her unawares, and made her cheeks "smart that awful" (as she afterwards complained) with the friction of his stubbly chin. Then he followed Joe upstairs.

"Doll looks ill," he said, as soon as they were alone together.

"She *is* ill," answered Joe, gazing into Stockwell John's face with very watery eyes; "doctor says she's very ill."

"And needs a change," added Stockwell John, in a slow meditative way, as though communing with himself.

Joe nodded, and then murmured in his simple way: "The Lord shield her—pretty flower!"

"An' so He will—don't you make no doubt of that!" said Uncle Pepperdew, with warmth.

At this speech Joe opened his eyes very wide, and wondered what was coming next.

"Luke Pendle's the man," continued Uncle Pepperdew. "He's got money,

Joe, and can help you. Besides, he's your own brother. I wonder you haven't asked him before, seeing he's so fond of Doll."

Joe's countenance fell.

"Luke has done wot he can," he said, "and has allers been kind to the children; but he's no power to assist me through this trouble—I've asked him."

"Asked him!"

"Ay. But he can't be always giving," added Joe, for he was dreadfully afraid of saying anything that would expose his brother to unfriendly criticism.

Then he took courage a little, and said in a hesitating voice, "I thought, John —but don't think I'd ask for myself—that p'r'aps—p'r'aps you——"

The remark was not finished, for Uncle Pepperdew had suddenly discovered that the hour was late, and that he must be gone at once.

"Wot expenses has Luke Pendle got?" he inquired, as he was putting on his hat; "that's the question."

"He's done his best," murmured Joe, apologetically.

"An' wot does that amount to?"

"He's allers bin kind to the children," said Joe, evasively. "But there! Doll's a-calling, an' you want to be off.—I'm coming, Doll!—It's thoughtful in you to remember us, John. Good-bye.—Yes, my pretty flower, I'm coming—I'm coming!"

"Bin kind to the children, has he," repeated Uncle Pepperdew, as he turned off down the road. "It strikes me he's got hold of a good character extray-ordinary cheap."

The face of Doll rose up before his mind as he was thinking of the only uncle, and an uneasy feeling came over him. What a pinched pale face it was! What suffering was written there! What wakeful, tossing nights it told of!—what weary, weary days! Other children might sleep, and have their pleasant dreams when the night-shadows began to fall upon the land; other children might run about with merry hearts in the sunny hours;—but Doll! What of her?

She was frail—very frail; there was no need to tell him that. Her face bore

ample witness to the fact. And she needed a change—those were the doctor's own words. Then Uncle Pepperdew asked himself, How could all this concern him? What call had he to disturb himself over Joe's family matters? If any one was responsible to lend a helping hand, surely Luke was the man.

But presently those words came back to his remembrance: "Make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

"That verse again!" he muttered, biting almost savagely at the amber mouthpiece of his pipe.

And then he broke into a nervous kind of trot, to keep pace with his hurrying thoughts.

CHAPTER III.

DEAR UNCLE JOHN.

WHEN John reached home, the restless little voice which had started so many questions under his waistcoat the night before, and had been fussing him ever since, had not at all done asserting itself.

For a long time Uncle Pepperdew tried to silence the voice; but the more he tried, the more clamorous it became. He took down Kirby on *Ants*, and explored it for a statement that he had once seen in which some supposed analogy existed between their case and his, but the passage would not turn up to him. Then he consulted Binney on *How to Make the Best of Both Worlds*, and tried to find in that eminently selfish and unmanly book a salve for his troubled conscience; but he could not find it even there.

"What have I done?" he almost groaned, as he closed the book. And then

he added,—for the passage about the mammon of unrighteousness was still haunting him,—"I never said anything against the verse, not a syllable. It's Gospel truth right enough, and I'd be the last to cast a doubt upon it. Why can't it leave me alone?"

After a while a new thought occurred to him.

Did not it say somewhere in the Bible, "The poor shall never cease out of the land"? Then poverty was a divine institution. Joe Pendle, therefore—a needy man with a large family—was a living witness to the truth of Scripture. A most opportune consideration! Moreover, the special circumstance of Doll's sickness really gave emphasis to the fact. To give money to Joe would be to destroy one of the bulwarks of the faith.

Stockwell John was quite willing to adopt this view of the matter, and to bow to Joe Pendle's lot with quiet resignation; but there was still that other part of him to be won over, and here was the difficulty.

The voice, in fact, protested strongly; and after calling John a "sham," and other equally opprobrious names, till he felt hot all over, it brought matters to a crisis somewhat abruptly by asserting, that if he —Uncle Pepperdew—wanted to make to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, he could not begin in a better way than by doing something for Doll; for that Joe Pendle's explanation of the passage was the right one, and his own a miserable makeshift and misinterpretation.

"But it says, 'The poor shall never cease out of the land,'" persisted John, seeking vainly to divert his thoughts into another channel. "Why shouldn't I turn up the text?" And throwing Dr Binney aside, he reached across the table for the Sunday Book with brown covers.

He soon grew weary of his new search, however, and was closing the Bible, when his heart gave quite a jump. What was the matter now?

For the space of two minutes by the clock Stockwell John remained as speech-

less as his own pipe, and sat staring fixedly at the passage which had so suddenly arrested his attention. But the lines in his mouth and forehead, and the wrinkles round his eyes, expressed a good deal.

"Well — I'm done!" he muttered at last; "this beats me hollow. Joe was right. Lor! what a start it gave me. Where's the verse again? Stay — that's it: 'Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth—' Whew! it makes me quite hot!"

That night Stockwell John sat up later than usual, and smoked more pipes than he had ever smoked before in a single evening. Not that he slept the better for it, either; for he afterwards confessed that he had never spent so restless a night —not even in the old, anxious, competition days before his uncle's death.

Next morning, at an unconscionably early hour, he was standing in Joe's kitchen, very close to Doll, and surrounded by

the whole family of youthful Pendles. They were waiting with open mouths to learn the reason for this early and unusual visit.

"It's just this," said Uncle Pepperdew, addressing Joe, but looking hard in Doll's face: "I've been thinking over it, you know. Doll wants a change—isn't that wot the doctor said? Yes—I thought it was. Well, she shall 'ave it——"

"John!"

"She shall 'ave it, I say. And oblige me by keeping cool, Joseph Pendle, if you can. I said a change. I've been thinking over it, you know. . . . Here's twenty pounds—that'll take the whole family for a month, won't it? Yes: to be sure——"

"You mean it?" said Joe, seizing Stockwell John's hand with a half-incredulous joy.

"What should I say it for, if I don't?"

"Bless you, John!" said Joe, with much fervour, "The Lord bless you! you really mean it?"

"There — that's enough," said Uncle Pepperdew, awkwardly, for Joe was work-

ing at his arm like a pump-handle, and the youthful Pendles had also made seizure of his person, and were kissing and squeezing him all over. "Really, Benjamin, you must get off my back; and you, too, 'Liza—'pon my word, Joe, I believe they mistake me for a luggage train, and think I've come to take 'em to Margate on my back. Steady now! why—wot's amiss? 'Ere's Doll a-crying!"

"Ain't I dreamin'? Pinch me, 'Liza," was all that Joe could say at first; but when Uncle Pepperdew had drawn attention to Doll, whose joy was too great for anything but tears, he exclaimed, with a suspicious movement of his sleeve across his own eyes, "It's come so suddin-like. But, lor', that sort of crying won't do much harm—not it. Dot, my pretty flower, ain't it wonderful—wonderful? Don't it make you feel like jumpin' round the room? Please God, we'll be off to-morrow, and in a week or two my pretty one will be feeling quite strong again — thanks to Uncle Pepperdew."

Uncle Pepperdew stepped up to the

couch, and bent over the frail form that was stretched upon it. A strange, new feeling came over him as she half rose from her pillow and threw her thin wasted arms about his neck. And when she had supplemented this tenderness by a multitude of grateful kisses, how rich he felt.

"I don't think I shall get better, you know," she said, presently; "but Uncle John—(you'll let me call you Uncle John, won't you?)—I shall be able to see the sea before I die, and that is the only thing I ever wanted *very* much."

The only thing—and he had been able to meet her wish. What a privilege!

"It's like enough you'll get better, Doll," he said, a little huskily; "and next year will see wot another little trip will do—eh?"

"It's very kind of you to say that, Uncle John," said Doll, quietly, and her eyes had a far-off look as she turned them to the smoky ceiling, "I'll tell mamma all about your kindness when I get up there, for I know I sha'n't get better."

. . . .

Three weeks later Uncle Pepperdew was standing beside Doll's couch again,—not in Joe's kitchen at Pentonville, but in a comfortable lodging-house at Margate. He had been summoned thither by a telegram; for Doll's words about herself were shortly to come to pass; she was very near her end. Joe's little flower was dying.

A few hours before she passed away she said, with unusual animation, "I've been so happy since I came here, Uncle John. Directly I saw the sea I was happy; and I'm sure I haven't suffered half so much since then. I was thinking this morning what a lot more pain I should have suffered if it hadn't been for you. I shall tell mamma all about your kindness when I see her, of course."

Then she became delirious a little, and talked in a confused rambling way about home, and her uncles, and the long railway journey, and the wide wide sea.

Only Joe and Uncle Pepperdew were present at the final scene.

They sat on either side of the bed,

and each was grasping one of the moist attenuated hands.

As Doll's sight began to fail, she said in a faint voice—

"Is that you, father?"

"Yes, my pretty flower."

"Do not let go my hand," she added, hastily. "Where's Uncle John?"

"He's beside you, Doll, holding your other hand."

"How nice!" she murmured. "I shall feel strong now. Uncle John was so kind. . . . He made me very happy . . . the sea . . . so happy. . . . How the train jolts! . . . dear Uncle John——"

A moment or two more and all was over. The tired, tortured spirit was at rest. The gentle voice was silent. Doll had gone home.

. . . . .

But another voice had still a word for Uncle John.

"John Pepperdew," it said to him, "you have made one friend by the mammon of unrighteousness. Now go forth, as God's steward, and make others."