"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

CHAPTER XVI. A SKIRMISH.

PLUMP little Mr. Puntles is a cosey bachelor of two-and-sixty. Something of an antiquary, something of a herald, he is strong in county lore. He is the only man in Roydon who honestly likes books. He lives in the comfortable square brick house of Charles the First's date, at the northern end of the village. He usually takes a nap of five minutes after his dinner, and then is bright for all the evening after.

The Reverend Mr. Foljambe, who considers himself an aristocrat, talks with him upon genealogies, and such matters, with the condescending attention that befits his high descent and connexions.

"No family has a right to powdered-blue in their liveries, except this branch of the Vernons, one branch of the Lindseys, and two other families," said Mr. Puntles, with his eyes closed, and his finger tracing diagrams slowly on the table-cloth. "It is a very distinguished privilege, and I'll tell you how the Vernons came by it."

Mr. Foljambe smiled blandly, and also, nearly closing his eyes, inclined his ear; but a vociferation at another part of the table, where Captain Bamme and the curate were in hot debate, arrested the communication.

"Who consolidated your civil power in India?" urges the curate. "I'll tell you, captain. It was Mr. Richard Colley Wellesley of Dangan, in the county of Meath. The Marquis Wellesley, as you are good enough to call him. And who commanded the Indian army, at the same critical period, when something more was wanted than blundering and plundering, a teaste of genius and a teaste for thundering?"

Before answering his own question the Reverend Mr. Doody applied his glass to his lips, his disengaged hand being extended all the time toward his gallant adversary, with a movement of the fingers, intended to retain the ear of the company and the right of continuing his speech.

"So far as thundering is concerned, Mr. Doody," said the vicar, with stately jocularity, "it seems to me that your countrymen seldom want a Jupiter."

The captain with a rather inflamed visage, for more had passed between the curate and him, smirked angrily, and nodded at the vicar, and leaned back and tossed his head, and rolled a little in his chair, smiling scornfully along the cornice.

But the Reverend Mr. Doody could hear no one but himself, and think of no one but Captain Bamme and the Wellesley family at that moment, and he continued: "Who, I repeat, saved India by his genius for arms, as the other consolidated the same empire by his genius for organisation and rule? Who but that Irishman's Irish brother, Arthur Wellesley, Jooke of Wellington? And I think I remember some trifling services that same county o' Meath man did you on other ground. But I'm speaking of India just now, and I ask again, who saved it, again, when its existence was imperilled by the natives? Who but my countryman, Irish Lord Gough, from Tipperary? It's easy for you, in quiet times, when you're enjoying the fruits of Irish gallantry and Irish genius, to make little of Ireland, but you know where to run for help when you're in danger."

"Haven't you a rather uncomfortable way of putting it, Mr. Doody?" said the Reverend Mr. Foljambe, a little gravely.

"Why I can prove to you," began Mr. Doody, not hearing the vicar, "if you take

up the old chronicles, that the Irish were in the habit of continually invading England."

"With what result?" inquired Mr. Foljambe, with a smile.

"Ship-loads of plundher and slaves," answered Mr. Doody, promptly.

"We had better look sharp," said cosey Mr. Puntles, who rather enjoyed the debate.

"If they had but a regiment of tall Irish clergymen, no doubt they'd march through the country," said the captain, laughing stingingly.

"If they had nothing but a regiment of small English captains before them," said the curate, "they'd do it easy enough. My dear friend," continued the curate, "I don't say, mind, that a mob can fight a trained army; but give us eighteen months to drill in, and see where you'll be; give us what ye must give us, before long, federalism, and before ten years, we'll conquer England!"

Captain Bamme uttered a short laugh of scorn.

"I hope you'll spare my little collection of curiosities," said Mr. Puntles, merrily.

"If you're strong be merciful," broke in Captain Bamme.

"Don't be frightened, captain; we'll spare them, and all other little curiosities, too," said Mr. Doody, hilariously, meaning, of course, the captain. "But, seriously, as sure as you're sitting there, Ireland will conquer England, if she gets a fair chance."

"That will be something new, won't it?" says the Reverend Mr. Foljambe. "Shakespeare says something about a country

> That never yet did lie
> Under the proud foot of a conqueror."

"Shakespeare said more than his prayers, sir; didn't he know as well as we do, that there is no country in christendom that has been so often and so completely conquered as England? 'Did never lie!' ha, ha, ha! 'The proud foot of a conqueror?' Mighty fine! Did ye never lie undher the Romans? or the Saxons? or the Danes? or the Normans? and didn't they, one after the other, stay here and settle here, and take your houses and live in them, and your fields, and make ye dig, and sow, and reap, and stack for them? and didn't they drive you hither and thither, and tax ye, and work ye, and put ye to bed at sunset, and make ye put out your candles and fires by sound of bell? And after all, England did never lie under the proud foot of a conqueror! Sure, my dear sir, ye oughtn't to be talking like a madman. It's enough to make a pig laugh. Can't ye buy books, and read them?"

"But, sir, I'm very proud of those conquests," interposed Mr. Puntles, smiling happily. "All these invaders are blended down into one composite mass, and that fusion is the stuff that makes the modern Englishman."

"It won't do, sir; a few thousands scattered among millions never changed the blood or nature of a nation yet—you're Britons, still. You are Britons, the same as ever; by no means a warlike people, not gifted with any military aptitudes, pacific and thradesman-like, and the natural prey and possession of a nation with the spirit of conquest and a genius for arms. You're sinking into your natural, hereditary state, that of Quakers and weavers, contented with your comforts and your opulence, knuckling down to the strong, and bullying the helpless, and leaving soldiering in earnest to nations that have the heart and the head for that sort of game, and just taking your chance, and hoarding your money."

"Chance has answered pretty well up to this," said Mr. Foljambe; "we have escaped a military occupation tolerably well I hope."

"So has Iceland, sir, so has Greenland; ye're out of the gangway, don't ye see, sir? I could show you in the middle ages——"

"Don't mind the middle ages," said the captain, "pray don't—we won't undertake to follow you there."

"*You* won't follow me, captain, because ye're gone before me there, my dear fellow, ha, ha, ha!—ye're one of the middle ages of this place yourself, my dear captain; but never mind, age is honourable, and middle age is middling honourable, anyhow."

The captain stared hard at the decanter from which he filled his glass. He so obviously meditated a retort that the neutral powers interposed.

"Now, now, now—pray Captain Bamme take some wine, and send the decanters this way," said the vicar, who was in charge of the party; "and Mr. Doody, I think we have stood the Irish invasion very well, and I vote we declare an armistice and a—eh—what do you think?"

"We'll be better friends, captain, you and I," said Mr. Doody, generously, "when we come to understand one another; but don't ye be talking about things you don't understand. Stick to the cane and the pipeclay, my boy; and my blessing attend ye! and I pledge ye in a glass of clar't. Gentle-

men, I give ye our gallant friend, Captain—— I give ye my word, I never heard your neeme. No matter; our gallant friend the captain; but I fill to ye all the same."

"I think he's gone," observed Doctor Malkin, rousing himself suddenly from a profound "brown study." So he was, although the Reverend Michael Doody who, during his concluding remarks, had been staring at a claret jug, in the direction of which his powerful arm was extended, while he twiddled his fingers toward the handle, in general invitation to the company to push it within reach of his generous clutch, had not perceived his disdainful retreat.

"So he is! There now! Ye see what it is to be thin-skinned," said the curate, filling his glass and drinking it off, without insisting on the presence of the object of the compliment, or the participation of the rest of the company.

"That's good clar't. I'll trouble ye, sir, for the white wine—the madeira—thank ye, and I drink to our departed friend, the captain, and, in solemn silence to the memory of his temper, the ci aiture!" Which ceremony, like the last, he had all to himself, and performed with a loud smack of his lips.

The Reverend Mr. Foljambe and Mr. Puntles had dropped into their quiet feudal talk again. Doctor Malkin would take no more wine, and the tall and courtly vicar, having collected the general suffrage in favour of joining the ladies, arose, and the little party retreated, talking listlessly, in the direction of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVII. IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THE drawing-room is now in a blaze of wax-lights, and every object in it brilliantly defined. Miss Maximilla Medwyn has arrived, and stands near the fire-place, in a dark silk dress, with a good deal of handsome lace; otherwise the same erect figure, and energetic and pleasant face, that we have seen.

Two gentlemen have arrived to tea—a tall man, quiet and gentleman-like, of fifty years or upwards, who is talking to Lady Vernon, and a very short, vulgar man, fat and sleek-haired, with smooth chin and cheek, and ill-made, black, baggy clothes, and a general greasiness of hair, face, and habiliments. This is Mr. Zachary Smelt, a light in the firmament of Roydon dissent, who does not disdain to revolve, on occasions, round the munificent centre of so many religious charities, enterprises, and cliques.

Mr. Smelt has taught the muscles of his fat face to smile, with a perseverance that must have been immensely fatiguing when he first tried it; but every fold and pucker in his cheeks was, by this time, as fixed as those of the great window curtains opposite to him were by the tacks and hammer of the upholsterer. I am sure he sleeps in that smile, and that he will die with it on. When he is angry it still sits on his putty face, though his little black eyes look never so fell and wicked over it, and though it has become a grimace by no means pleasant.

"I'm less in the world, Mr. Smelt, than you are," Miss Maximilla is saying tartly enough to this good man, whom, instinctively, she loves not. "What do you mean by telling me I live too much in and for the world? You don't say that to Lady Vernon, I venture to say. You like her money too well to risk it. I venture to say you have fifty times as many spites, and a hundred times as many schemes, in your head as I. I have just as good a commission to speak plainly as you have. There's your great gun, the Honourable Bagge Muggridge, as you take care to advertise him whenever he attends a meeting, or makes a speech. He has gone out of the world, as you term it; that is, he shirks his duties as a public man and a country gentleman, surrounds himself with parasites and flatterers, and indulges his taste for notoriety by making dull speeches at canting meetings, and putting himself down for shabby contributions to all sorts of useless things. And this selfish creature, because he gratifies his indolence and his vanity, and rides his hobby, has, you tell us, retired from the world, and become an apostle, and is perfectly certain of an eternal crown of glory. Those were your words, and I have seldom read anything more shocking."

Perhaps Miss Medwyn had something more to say, and no doubt Mr. Z. Smelt had somewhat to rejoin, but the Reverend Mr. Foljambe walked slowly up with a gracious smile, his head inclined and his hand extended, and said, with dignified affection:

"And how is my very dear friend, Miss Medwyn?"

The vicar chose not to see Mr. Smelt, though the shoulder of his fashionably cut clerical coat almost touched the forehead of that fat thunderer against episcopacy, whose fixed smile acquired under this affront a character as nearly that of a sneer as anything so celestial could wear. So

Zachary Smelt, folding his fat hands, turned on his heel with an expression of malignant compassion, and Mr. Foljambe inclined his long face and high nose over Maximilla Medwyn, smiling, in his way, as sweetly as his fellow-labourer, and as his "very dear friend" answered his affectionate inquiries, his shrewd eye was peering after Lady Vernon, and I am afraid he could not have given a very accurate account of what the good old spinster answered.

A cloud crossed the pure light of his brow as he saw the fat dissenter, who was always extracting money for the behoof of his sect from Lady Vernon, place himself before her exactly as the tall grave man with the iron-grey head was withdrawing.

Mr. Foljambe turned out of his way, and looked into a book of prints which Doctor Malkin was turning over.

"An unexpected pleasure that," murmured the doctor, with smiling irony, as he glanced toward the short fat figure of Mr. Smelt.

"Oh! That is——?" hesitated the vicar, compressing his eyelids a little as he glanced towards Mr. Smelt, whom he knew as well as the doctor did. "I stupidly forgot my glasses."

"Mr. Zachary Smelt, the Independent preacher. I venture to say there is not a drawing-room in the country, except this, into which that fellow would be admitted," said the doctor, who had no practice among that sect.

"Well, you know, Lady Vernon may do things that other people couldn't. Smelt? Yes, he is a troublesome person, and certainly, I don't pretend to say—I don't stand, at all, I hope, on that sort of thing; but I should not suppose he can feel quite at home among gentlemen."

Doctor Malkin smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is, you know, a very distinguished house," continues the vicar, loftily, "and not the place, as you say, where one would expect to meet people of a certain level in society; I don't object to it, though, of course, there are others who, I dare say, don't like it. But I do say it is a mistake, as respects the object of the distinction; it does not answer its purpose. I venture to say there is not a more uncomfortable man in this county to-night, than this Mr.—Mr.—a—Smelt."

"I'm not so sure; he is such an impudent fellow," said the doctor.

"I shouldn't wonder if he had a good deal of that kind of thing, as you say. You possibly have more opportunities than I can boast. You see, Doctor—a—Doctor—a—a—Malkin." The Reverend Mr. Foljambe had a habit of hesitating rather over the names of small men with whom he was good enough to converse. "Lady Vernon, though she is a church-woman, and a very staunch one, in a certain sense, has yet very vague views respecting the special sympathy due to those who, in a more intimate way, are of the household of faith; but she'll come all right, ultimately, with her powerful mind, and the supremacy she assigns to conscience in everything. I have had, from my position, opportunities, and I can safely say I have rarely encountered a mind so entirely under the guidance and control of conscience."

The Reverend Richard Howard Foljambe looked with the affectionate interest of a good pastor and kinsman at that paragon of women.

"What a splendidly handsome woman she is!" observed the doctor. "By Jove, for her time of life, she's perfectly wonderful."

Every one flatters Lady Vernon, and these gentlemen like to pay her compliments in each other's ears, though she does not hear them. This frank testimony behind backs prevents the least suspicion of adulation in what they may say in her hearing. But in truth, Doctor Malkin's criticism is no flattery, though, perhaps, they hardly know that it is not, their critical faculties being a little confused, standing so much as they do in the relation of courtiers to her.

They are both covertly looking at her. They see a lady of some four or five-and-forty, still very handsome, according to the excellence of middle-aged beauty. How refined and elegant she looks, as she talks gravely with that little vulgar dissenter. She is the representative of an ancient family. She is peculiar in appearance, in habits, in character. A fine figure, a little fuller than girlhood, but only a little. A Greek face, pale, proud, and very still.

"What a talent for command that woman has!" says the doctor.

"She's very clever—she's very able, I may say, is Lady Vernon," says the clergyman, who being a kinsman, does not quite like Doctor Malkin's calling her a woman.

"Did it ever strike you, sir, making allowance for the difference of sex, that her eye has a very powerful resemblance to that

of a remarkable historic genius?" asks Doctor Malkin.

"Ah—well, I can't quite say; a—do you mean—I don't quite see," says the vicar.

"A large wonderful grey eye that will be famous as long as history lasts—I mean Napoleon the first consul, Napoleon the Great. It is powerfully like some of the portraits."

"Well, do you know, I should not wonder. I believe there is—very likely," replies the vicar.

"Now, Miss Maud's, you see, although they are large and grey, they haven't got that peculiar character—a look of serene command, and what some people would call cold; it is very fine."

"Yes, and accompanied with that talent, she has so much administrative ability! She is a Dorcas, but a Dorcas on a very princely scale indeed," says Mr. Foljambe.

"More like my idea of Minerva-glaucopis, you know—just that marble brow and pencilled eyebrow, and cold, full, splendid grey eye. It is a study for Pallas; it would be worth a fortune to some of our artists," says the doctor.

The doctor's face looks a little sterner as he closes his little speech. It is not always easy to say what a man is looking at with an obliquity of vision like his; but I think of his two rather fine dark eyes, that one which he chiefly uses glanced at that moment on Miss Maud Vernon. Perhaps some association or train of thought, suddenly suggested, caused the change. The doctor's face is well enough when he is talking and animated. In repose it is not prepossessing; disturbed by any unpleasant emotion it is still less so.

LYCEUMS AND LECTURING IN AMERICA.

The custom of organising lyceums, and of employing lecturers, has long been in vogue in some parts of the United States. But, in recent years, the occasional custom has grown into a universal national "institution." Formerly, only towns and villages of exceptional enterprise and literary taste could support a series of lectures for the winter evenings. Now it would be difficult to find a community, counted by thousands, without its established system of lecturing. Lyceums there used to be, in the country towns, wherein local magnates at intervals entertained their neighbours with political disquisitions and agricultural dissertations; where the college heroes of the locality puzzled their audiences with difficult Latinised sentences on subjects of mysterious import; where great oracles of philosophy or sociology, famous apostles of temperance, or stirring revivalists in religion, now and then appeared; and where the more serious entertainments were varied by concerts in which the village soprani astonished their best friends by producing an act from a real opera, and the village basses rolled out sonorously the Sexton, and Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep.

But, in those days, there was little system about the lyceums and the lecturing. The lyceums were, for the most part, in the country at least, held in the town-hall, where the electors were wont to meet and choose their "select men" and "school committee," and where such exhibitions as the folk were privileged to witness took place. The hall was hired by the lecturer, a doorkeeper paid to receive the admission fees, a bill-poster set to advertise the entertainment on the fences and dead walls, and on the appointed evening the lecturer made his appearance, said his say, and retired. Then, in the cities, as lecturing grew more into favour, organisations were effected, and committees formed for selecting the lecturers, hiring the hall, and making the general arrangements. These organisations were (and are still) of great use, in making lecturing an entertaining and useful system for the benefit of the people. They at once produced a standard of excellence in lecturing, brought about a beneficial competition among the lecturers, and were able to attract and hold the general attention of the public to this method of passing the evenings. Twenty years ago, the professional lecturers in America were few in number, and comprised only men well known to be endowed with gifts peculiarly adapted to the platform. They comprised eloquent advocates of particular causes—as John B. Gough, the total abstinence champion; Wendell Phillips, Garrison, and Frederick Douglass, the abolitionists; eminent pulpit orators, such as Henry Ward Beecher and Edwin H. Chapin; scientific lecturers, such as Agassiz; men of forensic fame, such as Edward Everett and George W. Curtis. There was but a poor chance for ambitious young men of little fame to enter lists for the most part narrowed to such names; and to the great men only was lecturing a profitable vocation. Very few of the lecturers of that time devoted themselves to amusing the public; the

lectures were fine displays of ability, often of genius, and were intended to teach and to guide. Everybody was not interested in or attracted by them; it takes long for even enthusiastic reformers to arouse a kindred spirit in the multitude; and a keen taste for eloquence as an æsthetic art is perhaps a gift inferior only to the art itself. So, though the lecturers in the days before the civil war were doubtless popular and successful, they were few in number, and came only now and then.

But of late, for whatever reason, the lyceums in America have become well nigh as numerous, and quite as indispensable, as the pulpits and the theatres. To thousands they are to-day a substitute for the drama, and they are to be found in hundreds of places where theatres are impossible. They afford a means of entertainment to that large class which still clings to the Puritan notion that theatres are either immoral and temptations of the Evil One, or at least have a bad influence upon their frequenters. For of that leaven not a little yet exists in New England. In towns and villages where, during the long and cheerless winter evenings, there was but seldom external distraction or pastime other than the tavern, or the occasional political meeting, there are now weekly lectures, attended by old and young.

The lecture system is more popular and universal in New England than in the West. Boston and its vicinity sends out a larger number of popular speakers throughout the country than any other city. Wendell Phillips and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Weiss, Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, Mrs. Howe, Miss Field, are but a few of the celebrated lecturers contributed by Boston to the platforms of the country. In New England, every village has its regular winter course of lectures. In the city there are a dozen rival courses, sharply competing with each other for the best thought and best oratory in the land; and no evening in the week, during the winter season, passes without the delivery of four or five lectures. Even Sunday is invaded, and on one Sunday evening lately two lecturers delivered addresses on entertaining secular subjects at two of the Boston theatres.

Lecturing has been called "lay preaching," and the lectures "lay sermons." And, in many cases, the American lecturer is a very high-priest of science and letters. These lecturers popularise science; Agassiz, in his own winning way, imparts great elementary truths to the thousands who crowd to hear him. They create a genuine taste for literature, and the arts, and history: they lead men (and women) to think on great moral, social, political problems. The lecture system has become, as one of the most eloquent of American lecturers has said, "one of the chief means of touching the springs of public opinion in this country. That, indeed, is its great power." It is quite true that the lecturer finds himself forced, in one way or another, to be entertaining. It is equally true that he must be something more. Neither Dryasdusts nor buffoons, pure and simple, are tolerated. Their entertaining quality must be either due to great charm of oratory, great pith of subject pithily illustrated, original humour, or "a laugh loaded with a purpose." A man who merely tries to make people grin is out of place Per contra, a man who has an immensity of dry learning in his discourse, and nothing else, will soon find it necessary to abandon the platform and return to his books. The lecturer I have already quoted relates, that when about to speak in a university town, a veteran retired lecturer called him to him and said: "I can't hear you, Mr. C. But I have seen a good deal of service on the platform, and I want to give you, in one sentence, the result of my experience. If you wish to succeed as a public lecturer, make the audience laugh. Believe me, it does not wish to be instructed, or benefited, or preached to. It is composed of men and women tired of their day's work, and of boys and their sweethearts. Make 'em laugh, Mr. C., make 'em laugh, and you'll be right." But the lecturer did not take the advice, and found out, after all, that the audience would take a serious lecture on an interesting subject, well delivered. Still, he agreed that "the lecturer is an orator; the orator is an artist, and the artist must please; and so the lecture is none the worse when it makes us laugh."

The lecture system began with the preaching of great social reforms, and the range of topics selected was, comparatively, limited. Now the subjects upon which the lecturer speaks comprise the widest variety, and take the freest range. During one week of the present season the citizens of Boston were invited to hear discourses on the following subjects: American Literature, Eloquence and Orators, Robert Burns, The Coming Empire, A Chat on Irish Bulls, Peasant Life in Ireland, Kindergarten Schools, Girls, The Man of Sin, The War, Charles Dickens, and The Adirondacks. Ge-

neral Butler took the opportunity of an engagement to lecture, to announce his views on the Alabama Claims. General Banks embraced a similar occasion to speak on the Franco-German War. The present secretary of the Treasury, wishing to explain his financial views more informally than was possible in an official report, delivered them in the form of a lecture to an audience in Philadelphia. No stirring event, affecting the well-being of men, or the condition of nations, passes, without being illustrated to the American public by means of lectures. No small share in bringing the Americans to the point of resisting the spread of slavery at all hazards, is due to the anti-slavery lecturers. Time was, when Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison lectured in Puritan Boston under the guard of a force of police. They were at last heard and welcomed everywhere as the apostles of abolition. Authors and poets alike are indebted to lecturers for a wider fame, and a much increased sale of their works.

The lyceum became gradually an open platform. The committees of the organisation at first declined, then hesitated, to permit the lecturers to speak upon "irritating" political issues—the most irritating at that time being, of course, slavery. Where this was the case, the lyceum-goers were forced to be content with the respectable Mr. Splurger's periods about "great domain," or the Reverend Joshua Walker's fervid description of Jerusalem and the Holy Places, or Dr. Smoothbore on the happiness derived from doing right, and the felicities of home life, or Mr. Frantic's awful pictures of the results of wine-drinking. But it would not do. The political speakers were too many and too eloquent to be shut out. The lyceums manifestly drooped. People would hear Wendell Phillips on slavery. "Before the war," says a writer, "the most noted and fashionable public room in Philadelphia was the Musical Fund Hall. The chief lecturers had all spoken there. But one day they ascertained that a regulation of the management forbade the entrance of coloured persons. If the owners of a hall chose to exclude any particular class of people, it was their unquestionable right. Nobody denied it; but many of the chief lecturers said, 'We prefer not to speak in that hall while that regulation continues'; and from that day no great and successful course of lectures has been given in that hall." When war came, not only did clergymen preach politics from the pulpit, but dozens of lecturers followed the example set by Phillips, and those few bold spirits who had defied lecture committees, and compelled a hearing on political issues of the gravest import. And from that time may be dated, as I have said, the present unexampled prosperity of the American lecture system. Now the lyceum platform is absolutely free. No subject is tabooed. Mormons have lectured on the holiness of polygamy to "orthodox" audiences, and a famous Oriental atheist has discoursed on the negation of the Scriptures. Wendell Phillips (the greatest of American orators and lecturers) on politics, is succeeded on the same platform by Emerson on philosophy, Cox on wit, and Petroleum J. Nasby on nonsense in general.

The organisation of the lecturing system has been matured, within the past three or four years, by the establishment of bureaux to engage in correspondence with lecturers and lyceum committees, and to make, from a central position, all the arrangements necessary to the numerous courses of lectures throughout the land. There are at present three of these: the first, the American Literary Bureau, is established at New York, under the superintendence of Mr. James K. Medberry, a littérateur of considerable fame; the other two are, the Boston Lyceum Bureau, under Mr. Redpath, and the Western Lecture Association, located at Chicago. The flourishing condition of these bureaux is sufficient to attest the universality of this method of evening entertainment. They are the exchanges and head-quarters of the system, which now requires brokers and regular media of communication. For a fee of one dollar a lecturer may have his name recorded in their books; and in case the bureau effects one or more engagements for him, a certain percentage of the price received for the lecture is deducted for commission. The bureau makes the contracts with the local lecture committees, the money passing through the hands of its agents. Reciprocally, the lecture committees of the various cities and towns allow a certain percentage as commission for securing lecturers to the bureaux. This business is found to be of sufficient magnitude to support the bureaux handsomely. Of course the best known lecturers receive as many engagements as they can fill, and almost at their own prices. Some of them receive a net sum of two hundred dollars, and even sometimes three hundred dollars, per evening, over expenses. Perhaps the average price paid to lecturers of established reputation,

below the first half-dozen, lies between seventy-five dollars and one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Besides these fees, the local lecture committees—at least those in the smaller towns—provide lodgings for the lecturer, or he is invited to partake the hospitality of some "eminent citizen." From the sums I have mentioned, down to the modest remuneration of ten dollars, is the range of emoluments of those who, having "the gift of the gab," are able to use it profitably on lyceum platforms. In the present elaborate organisation of lecturing, it is not wonderful that more and more young men and young women enter this field, which promises prizes so enticing in fame, in gaslight triumphs of applause, in the delightful emotions of oratorical success, and in substantial pecuniary gain. In America a considerable portion of the school-boy's education is devoted to public declamation. He declaims before his mates, first selections, then his own compositions; often, in his teens, he is called upon to speak at exhibitions before fond parents and admiring damsels, or even to mount the rostrum on patriotic anniversaries, and to "spout" at political gatherings. So it is that the taste for oratory is a very general one among the educated youths. Now, also, at the female seminaries and colleges the young ladies are, in many instances, required to declaim and debate—one of the many signs of these woman-suffrage days. To young people thus trained, the prospect of adopting as a distinct and sole profession, that of holding audiences spell-bound, of moving them to laughter or to tears, of swaying public opinion, of teaching masses of men, is most alluring. These fresh recruits who besiege the bureaux at the period when the engagements for the autumn and winter courses take place—that is, in May and June—are, if judged worthy by the bureau managers, set on the first round of the ladder; that is, they are supplied to the village lyceums at ten dollars a head. They usually make their début either at the town-hall or, mayhap, the orthodox or methodist meeting-house of the village; are received, perhaps, with due honour at the parson's or the squire's, and their success or failure duly reported to the central bureau, which takes note of the result for its future guidance.

The literary bureaux which I have described do not confine themselves to providing lyceums with lecturers, and lecturers with platforms. They also act as media, by which those who desire it may enter upon any literary pursuit. They announce that they will provide newspapers with editors, correspondents, and reporters, and those wishing such places with them; colleges with professors and tutors, and professors and tutors with chairs; magazines with writers, and writers with places in magazine or periodical columns. Thus, the whole province of letters seems to have, in a degree, become a matter of brokerage. A young man, or woman, unknown to fame, writes a magazine article, but has no means of bringing it to the notice of a magazine editor. For a small fee the article is taken by the bureau, read and adjudged by its selected critics, and if it prove suitable, by the connexion of the bureau with the publishing houses, a place is found for it somewhere. A country editor, outside the city literary and Bohemian circles, wishes an experienced assistant without delay. He sends to the bureau, stating the salary to be paid, the advantages of Pumpkinville as a residence, the politics of his Banner of Liberty; the bureau, well posted as to the antecedents and capabilities of all applicants for such places on its books, sends the right man to the editor, receiving a modest commission from both parties. Of course, the success of a system such as this depends entirely upon the reputation and known honesty and skill of the bureau managers. If they are in these respects responsible, demand and supply may be mutually suited by their medium.

To return to lecturing. At the present stage of the "woman question," when, in America, two great associations are devoted to the agitation of woman's rights, and we find women sitting in religious and political conventions, becoming postmasters (or mistresses), and brokers, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen (or clergywomen), running for Congress, and even announcing themselves as candidates for the Presidency, it is almost needless to say that the lecture field is thronged with feminine combatants. Years ago no women were heard from the platform, except a few bold, masculine spirits, with lank hair and wearing spectacles, of uncertain age, who no more feared to speak in crowded halls than they did to appear on public thoroughfares in bloomer trousers. A very different state of things exists now. It is quite a mistake to suppose that American female lecturers are now-a-days eccentric ladies of manly temper, endowed with a mission, and scornful of feminine graces and accomplishments. You may now see brisk and airy damsels, not disdaining Grecian bends and chignons,

who hold you rapt for an hour of sprightly elocution, bright sallies of wit, sharp satire, and apt illustration; young women who, albeit public characters, and dealing with public questions, give a quaint colouring to their thought and address by their feminine qualities. There are precocious young women, who talk about the tyranny of man, and argue in favour of more easy divorces; but the most lovely female lecturer of the day, who is also one of the brightest in her mental accomplishments, is now counteracting such influences on the platform by preaching a most eloquent crusade in favour of home virtues, and the sacredness of the marriage tie. That even the "strongest-minded" lady speakers are susceptible to feminine vanities and tastes is proved by an anecdote related of Miss Anna Dickinson. On one occasion she was to speak to a large audience; and was introduced upon the platform by the chairman of the lecture committee. An air was played, previously to the lecture, upon an organ: although a chair stood by the desk, Miss Dickinson remained standing till the music ceased. The chairman asked her afterwards why she did not sit. "What!" she replied. "Did you suppose I was going to sit down in my new silk?" While speaking of Anna Dickinson, let it be said, that there are few American statesmen or lecturers who can speak with such pungency, original thought, learning, irony, apt expression, and stirring eloquence on political subjects, as this little lady, with swarthy face and short curly hair, from the city of the Quakers. Of "magnetic and persuasive women," there are many on the lyceum platform; and their range of subject is as wide as that between philosophy and puns. Not a few combine personal beauty and engaging manners with the art of pleasing by literary grace, and of striking by originality of matter and subject. Among the more noted are Olive Logan, who passed from the stage to the lyceum platform, and whose forte is piquancy and literary gossip; Miss Julia Ward Howe, who speaks always earnestly and well on earnest topics, philosophical or moral; Mrs. Livermore, whose hobby is the right of women to participate in politics; Catherine Beecher, the oldest of the Beechers, and Kate Field, the daughter of an actor. The lecture courses are often varied with readings of the poets; and the Shakespearian readings of Fanny Kemble and Mrs. Scott-Siddons have proved attractive, as a change from the eloquence of the regular lecturers. The lecture platform also has its uses in affording distinguished foreigners opportunities of addressing American audiences; and recently Mr. Thomas Hughes and Mr. Mundella have lectured in the United States, during visiting tours, on the labour question in England.

The American lecturers usually prepare their lectures in the summer vacation, when they are at leisure to resort to rural tranquillity to collect their thoughts, imagine their witticisms, and polish up their rhetorical flights. Many have but one or two lectures for a season; going rapidly through the country, lecturing one night here, and the next night there, repeating the same lecture in the various towns. They arrange their appointments so that there may be a method in their journeyings. And the travelling which some of them are called upon to do, are often no pleasure jaunts. More than one has been summoned from New England to Omaha, the far western limit of settled civilisation, and has journeyed thence viâ Nashville by Atlanta, through the circle of the Gulf States, and so round to Richmond and Buffalo. Stories are told by veteran lecturers, "old stagers," of their trials in "the wilderness," their difficulties in reaching remote western towns where the houses were not yet set in order, and whose inhabitants, nevertheless, thirsted for knowledge and entertainment; of their "bunking" in log-cabins, and living on buffalo steaks and maize; their overturnings on the prairies, and their isolation from post-offices and telegraph-posts. One of the best of American lecturers—George William Curtis—says of this universal lecture system which now so ramifies through every section of the land (and I conclude with his words): "To-day, apparently the simplest, the lyceum is also a most complex institution. It still summons to its platform the latest Gifted Hopkins of the hour. It does not disdain the jester, nor spare the philosopher. Its root is the real charm of oratory, and in the feeling that it is an arena in which important individual opinion may be fearlessly spoken. It entertains, it amuses, it instructs, and it inspires."

A LIFE OF ADVENTURE.

Colonel Corvin, a German gentleman, who has lived a troubled and adventurous life, sits down, towards its close, to relate his adventures. These are so exciting, so characteristic of German manners, and are so naturally told, that the book will find a place upon the shelf beside the pleasant

chronicles which first-class adventurers have unfolded. For an adventurer, in the honest sense, is charming company, whether he has a pen in his hand, or a sword by his side: and Colonel Corvin is a very dashing sort of adventurer.

When a boy he was sent to the Cadet House, the Prussian Military Academy, and was there duly prepared to receive a commission. The photographs he gives of German military life become interesting at this time. But the esprit de corps had no influence over him, for he was at heart a republican; and before the stirring days of 1848, there was no theory of a united Germany and splendid military conquests to reconcile the people to a grinding despotism. When a young man, the colonel had a pastoral love affair with a little tender maiden who gave the officer her whole heart. It is a very pretty little idyll, only for the tragic ending, when the little maid fell into a nervous fever from her passion, sickened, and died of love. The officer was near dying too; but he was in the army, had other things to take his mind off, and soon fell in love again. This new adventure brought him to Paris, where he found the revolution going on: and the account of the organisation of a German invasion of Vaterland by a number of wild democrats who lived there, is most characteristic. A regular legion was formed, and the provisional government gave them money and support. The leaders were Hervegh, the poet, and others, who, after much dreamy discussion of their visionary projects, at last set off on their march from Paris. Crossing the Rhine, the little band commenced a regular campaign. They were joined by some insurgents. There was such confusion in the various towns, and so much disaffection, that they could advance with a great deal of the theatrical effects of campaigning. But at last they came on the Wurtemburgians, with whom they had a gallant little battle, in which they were defeated. At last the Prussians began to appear on the scene. His present majesty had taken the command of his own army: and, near Ludwigshafen, a rather serious engagement took place. Finally the invaders were fairly invested in the fortress of Rastadt, and had to surrender. Colonel Corvin, amid the usual exhibition of divisions, incapacity, and jealousy, had been the moving spirit of the whole defence; and it is quite evident that all his proceedings were marked by good sense and moderation. On the surrender of Rastadt the exciting part of his narrative begins. As he rode out he found the Prussians had come close up, in violation of the terms of the capitulation. He remonstrated.

"Shoot him down!" cried the Prussian soldiers, arrogantly. "What does the fellow say?"

When the garrison came out, the commander offered his sword to Count Groeben, the Prussian general, who contemptuously motioned to the provost to take it. This looked ominous. The surrender was at discretion, but promises had been made of intercession for indulgence and clemency. Some of the rebels, like Corvin, had been in the Prussian service, and these pitiless masters were as reticent as they were likely to be severe.

The instant the capitulation was concluded, the rebel officers were led away, and literally thrust into "the lowest dungeon beneath the castle moat," which was all streaming with water, and crawling with toads. They were fed on bread and water, and it was with difficulty that they got this frightful casemate changed for something better. Then their clothes were taken away; their spurs and epaulettes dragged off. Then commenced slow trials and executions, the trials worse than the executions. The Baden government was determined to carry out measures of the most cruel severity. A court, half military, half civil, began its duties. Nearly every day news came in to the unhappy prisoners that one of their companions had been tried and shot. The first refused to have his eyes bandaged, and said: "I will see my murderers!" Another took his two bottles of wine, and went to the place of execution smoking a cigar. Corvin's wife, a brave woman, had accompanied him, as many other wives had accompanied their husbands, on this expedition. Madame Corvin worked heaven and earth, as the phrase goes, forced her way into the presence of the Princess of Prussia, attacked Count Groeben, and was thrust aside as importunate. Before the surrender she was heroic enough to bid her husband "blow out his brains sooner than surrender to the Prussians." But she rejoiced that her advice had not been followed. When she saw him in his prison, she said, "If you must die, I know you will die like a man." At last his long-deferred trial came round. The Baden government was dealing with him, yet the court was composed of Prussian officers and sergeants. Colonel Corvin made an eloquent speech of two hours in

his own defence, but it was a foregone conclusion. He was found guilty, "by five voices to one, condemned to be shot, and *to pay the costs.*" As they drove away past the hotel of the place he heard a cry from a window, and a white hand was waved to him. He was thrust into the condemned cell. It was Saturday; and as no executions were allowed on Sundays, and Monday would be too long a grace, he knew he would be shot that night. About four hours then remained to him. Beside him was a little tumbled litter, from which poor Lieutenant Schad had risen that morning for his sentence. The jailer asked with a sepulchral voice:

"Would he have anything, or see a clergyman?"

The reply was an order for a good dinner, a good bottle of wine, a dozen cigars, and writing-paper. His gallant wife now arrived. She had forced her way into the grand duke's palace, but he would not see her. With an ingenious cruelty, all the princes, before the insurrection was put down, had divested themselves formally of the prerogative of mercy, and relegated it to the hands of the chief soldiers. When she got to the prison, they had the execution dinner served, which was furnished at the expense of the city. She had a little plan for his escape, but he refused to avail himself of it. They were then told that the execution was put off until Monday. So here was a grateful respite. Late at night, however, came the sound of many tramping feet, and two officers called him out to speak to him. She heard their whisperings. It was to tell him that all had been changed, and that he must be ready to be shot at half-past four in the morning.

She heard every word. They were to come for her at three. The agony of the interval may be conceived. The brave woman, however, knew that if she gave way, she would only unnerve him. He held her in his arms all the time: and the only thought that came upon her was, that what she felt so warm and living, would by five o'clock be cold, dead, and inanimate.

At three she was taken away. She knocked at the house of some friendly citizens. "They opened to me. After these good people had lain down again at my request, I stood at the open window alone, despairingly watching the coming morning, and listening to every sound. I felt as cold as stone, but I did not lose consciousness. The clock struck one quarter—half—three quarters—four! He has only one half-hour left to him. Then I heard the report of some shots—the people in the house heard them also—and I fell senseless to the ground, as if they had pierced my heart also." What a terribly dramatic picture!

The prisoner was quite composed, having faced death very often. He made his little preparations. At dawn he heard footsteps, and the mayor and officers entered.

"I am quite prepared, gentlemen," he said.

"No, my friend," said the voice of the counsel who had defended him, "we bring you better news."

The honest lawyer had worked hard through the night; had gone to Carlsruhe and obtained a reprieve. Corvin's sentence was commuted, and he passed six years in penal servitude of the most terrible kind. He was at last released through his health being utterly shattered, and has lived to write these entertaining volumes.

The glimpses of Prussian military life are perhaps the worst portion of his history. No officer was allowed to marry unless he had special permission from the king, and unless he could prove the possession of a certain income. If he married any one in trade of a lower station, he was cut by his brethren, or forced to leave. The Prussian captains would not associate with the subalterns. The discipline was fearful. There were savage colonels and majors who kept drilling their soldiers half the day for their own satisfaction, boxing or pulling the men's ears if they were displeased. Perhaps these old officers now trace all their recent victories to this Spartan discipline.

MARCH.

THE March wind whistles through the sombre pines,
Whose sable crests show on the mountain ridge,
Like band of spectres gaunt, and grey, and grim,
Against the cold blue sky: cold, clear, and blue,
Without one fleecy cloud.
From furrows brown
The green blades shoot, that shall hereafter glow,
'Neath August sun-rays, into molten gold,
And fill our garners with the beauteous store
That crowns man's labour, and rewards his toil.
March, with his stern, grand brow, frowning, yet kind,
Front of a Titan; of imperious will,
King March rides blustering o'er dale and mead,
And with his chastening rule, prepares the way
For green-robed April, with her showers soft,
The pure warm sunshine, and her opening buds
Of yellow cowslip bells.
And jocund May,
Crowned with white blossoms, scatters in her track
Hawthorns all odorous, pink apple-blooms,
And all the gorgeous beauty of her dower,

That glads our English homes. So in our life,
Our truest joys must be from trial reaped,
And as March winds foreshadow April sun,
Our dross through furnace passing, comes out—gold.

THE SOLAR FURNACE.

For ages nobody dreamt of doubting that the sun was fire, in the literal and vernacular sense of the word; that is, heat given out by something undergoing consumption by burning. At one time it was a blazing ball "as big as the Peloponessus"—a theory which nearly cost its author his life, in consequence of its excessive boldness. The Athenians did not allow free-thinkers to speculate as they pleased about the sun. Afterwards, the sun was an enormous globe of combustibles — coal, wood, or pitch and tar—on which some vagabond planet had struck a light, and put into a state of conflagration.

In the middle of the last century, wise men held the fiery nature of the sun to be proved by its rays, when collected by concave mirrors or convex lenses, burning, consuming, and melting the most solid bodies, or else converting them into ashes. The sun's rays produce the same effects as might be expected from the most vehement fire. Consequently, the sun is of a fiery substance. Hence it follows that its surface is everywhere fluid, *that* being the condition of flame. As there are no other marks whereby to distinguish fire from other bodies—fire was then a body, an element—but light, heat, a power of burning, consuming, melting, calcining, and vitrifying, there is nothing to hinder us from believing the sun to be a globe of fire, like ours, only invested with flames. In short, set fire to the earth, and you have a minor sun. The sun is only an overgrown bonfire.

The difficulty of this theory is, that if the materials of the sun belonged to our list of known combustibles, they would long since have been exhausted. It is not difficult to calculate how many years a given mass of fuel will keep alight, if placed under similar circumstances to the fires with which we roast and boil.

Sir John Herschel says (in his Familiar Lectures): "The light and heat of the sun cannot possibly arise from the burning of *fuel*, so as to give out what we call flame. If it be the sun's substance that *burns* (I mean consumes), where is the oxygen to come from? and what is to become of the ashes and other products of combustion? Even supposing the oxygen supplied from the material, as in the case of gun-cotton, still the chemical products have to be disposed of. In the case of gun-cotton, it has been calculated that if the sun were made of it so condensed as only to burn on the surface, it would burn out, at the rate of the sun's expenditure of light and heat, in eight thousand years. Anyhow, fire kept up by fuel and air is out of the question. There remain only three possible sources of them, so far as we can perceive—electricity, friction, and vital action."

Please, reader, note this "vital action," because we shall pick it up again by-and-bye.* It is needless to remark that modern chronology will not be satisfied with eight thousand years as the length of the sun's past existence, as a light, from the day on which he first began to shine; and, luckily for us, he does not show the slightest intention of going out. His immense longevity and apparent permanence must therefore be accounted for in some other way than by supposing him to be fire, the result of combustion.

Consequently, to meet this objection, Dr. Mayer started, in 1848, and Mr. Waterston, five years afterwards, independently sketched, what is called the Meteoric Theory of the Sun. The sun's heat and light are thereby derived from a shower of asteroids constantly falling into the sun. The idea has been admirably propounded and made familiar to the British public by Professor Tyndall.† It is calculated that the final maximum velocity of an asteroid, just before striking the sun, would be three hundred and ninety miles a second; the final minimum velocity, two hundred and seventy-six miles a second. The asteroid,

* Is the sun a cluster of glowworms, a shoal of torpedoes, or a swarm of fireflies—behemoths in dimensions and illuminating power? "The bright surface of the sun consists of separate individual objects or *things*, all nearly or exactly of one definite size and shape, which is more like that of a willow-leaf than anything else. These leaves are not arranged in any order, but lie crossing one another in all directions .... Nothing remains but to consider them as separate and independent flakes or scales having some sort of solidity. These flakes, be they what they may, are evidently *the immediate sources of the solar light and heat*, by whatever processes they may be enabled to elaborate those elements from the bosom of the non-luminous fluid in which they appear to float. Looked at in this point of view, we cannot refuse to regard them as *organisms* of some peculiar and amazing kind; and though it would be too daring to speak of such organisms as *partaking of the nature of life*, yet we do know that vital action is competent to develop both heat, light, and electricity."—Familiar Lectures, by Sir John F. W. Herschel, p. 83.

† See Is Heat Motion? All the Year Round, First Series, vol. xiii., p. 534.

on striking the sun with the former velocity, would develop more than nine thousand times the heat generated by the combustion of an equal asteroid of solid coal; while the shock, in the latter case, would generate heat equal to that of the combustion of upwards of four thousand such asteroids. It matters not, therefore, whether the substances falling into the sun be combustible or not; their being combustible would not add sensibly to the tremendous heat produced by their mechanical collision. In the fall of asteroids Dr. Mayer finds the means of producing the solar light and heat. If the earth struck the sun, it would utterly vanish from perception; but the heat developed by the shock would cover the expenditure of a century.

To this continual bombardment of the sun by showers of aërolites drawn into its mass, it is objected that the meteoric theory continually alters the velocity of planetary motion by the constant increase of the sun's mass, and consequent gravitation; which alteration is contradicted by all the records of solar and planetary constancy. But the meteoric theory of the sun is *one* of Sir John Herschel's possibilities, being based on friction, impact, arrested motion. What should we say to his third possibility, "vital action?" Now Professor Tyndall, without committing himself to the meteoric theory or forcing it on his readers' acceptance, evidently regards it with great favour. He considers that it would be a great mistake to regard it as chimerical, and calls it a noble speculation, adding, "Depend upon it, the true theory, if this, or some form of it, be not the true one, will not appear less wild or less astonishing."

Well; another theory, sufficiently "wild and astonishing," has recently been put forth in a most remarkable and carefully reasoned essay.* What say you, reader, to the idea that the sun maintains his heat by a process analogous to breathing? Not that the sun has lungs like you and I, who include ourselves amongst the higher animals; but that his fiery strength is incessantly renewed during the course of his passage through an atmospheric medium, just as many lower and microscopic animals breathe by the very act of locomotion through the fluid in which they are immersed. Extremes meet; stars and infusorial creatures are similarly fed. The sun is an enormous volvox globator. Nothing is absolutely dead in the universe. Life, when not present, is always "potential."

It is now admitted that all space is filled with the ether. Without it, no satisfactory theory of light is possible; with it, the undulatory theory becomes as lucid as light itself. Mr. Williams holds that all space is also pervaded with an atmosphere, the same in its nature as that which we breathe, but varying in density according to circumstances, excessively rare in the interstellar spaces, and what we know it to be on the surface of the earth. In this hypothesis, remember, there is no more absurdity than in that of the universality of the ether; nay, it has been conjectured that hydrogen gas, the lightest of known bodies, is nothing but a condensation of the earth. From forty-five to fifty miles is usually given as the limit of our atmosphere. Sir John Robison, however, states that the air is sufficiently dense for reflecting a sensible light (and so producing twilight), at a height of nearly two hundred miles. Mr. Williams holds that the terrestrial atmosphere has no actual limit, but that it grows gradually rarer and rarer as it is more and more distant from a centre of attraction. Men before him have maintained that the music of Tubal Cain's organ is still travelling somewhere in far-off strata of attenuated air; and he gives reasons for concluding that the gaseous ocean in which we are immersed is but a portion of the infinite atmosphere that fills the whole solidity of space.

If we believe the confessions of those portions of atmospheric matter, which have been subjected to the torture of experimental rarefaction, to be truthful statements of the general conduct of the great atmosphere, regarded as a whole, the inference is that it must go on expanding and expanding continually, as its distance from the earth increases, and the pressure of the portion above consequently diminishes. Supposing that we still go further upwards, the limit still evades us by continually multiplying expansion, until the gravitation of the earth is neutralised by that of some other orb, towards which our imaginary course is tending. If we cross this neutral line, and continue further in the same direction, we enter the domain of another world, in which as we advance we find the order of density reversed. In short, our atmosphere is but a portion of a universal medium, which is distributed by gravitation, as above indicated, amongst the countless orbs of space.

* The Fuel of the Sun. By W. Mattieu Williams, F.C.S. Simpkin and Marshall, 1870.

Now, with an infinite number of orbs floating amidst the infinity of space, filled with such an elastic medium, every orb will be surrounded on every side by others, and its power of accumulation from the general atmosphere will be controlled and limited by the general resultant of their counteracting gravitating forces. But as we know the relative masses of our own earth and those of the other members of the solar system, and we also know the absolute amount of atmosphere which our earth has appropriated from the general medium, we have the data for calculating, according to the above, the absolute atmospheres of the sun, the moon, and our companion planets and their satellites. Taking the mass and the atmosphere of the earth as his units, Mr. Williams gets a simple rule for calculating the atmosphere of any of the bodies of the solar system.

In making those calculations, an important question presents itself. Are we to regard the waters that cover the lower valleys of the earth as planetary or atmospheric matter? Is the water of the ocean one of the special constituents of the earth, or only a portion of the universal atmospheric matter which the earth's gravitation has condensed around it?

This question may, perhaps, be answered by considering the known properties of water; which tell us that the position occupied by the water on our own, or any other planet, is entirely dependent on comparatively moderate variations of temperature and pressure. If the temperature of the earth were raised, or the atmospheric pressure diminished, in a sufficient degree, the whole of the water of the ocean would rise from its present bed, and take its place in the atmosphere as one of its constituent gases, and would there exist in a state exactly corresponding to the carbonic acid of our actual atmosphere; that is, as a mixture, not a chemical combination, with it. We only require the conditions which actually exist on the planet Mercury to bring this about. On that planet, in all probability, water can only exist as a gas and a regular constituent of the atmosphere. If Mercury has had its Faraday, he may have succeeded in demonstrating the condensability of this gas. By refrigeration and pressure, he may have produced liquid water and water-snow, and, by the aid of mechanical devices, have obtained sufficient quantities to exhibit them as lecture-table curiosities. The Mercurians would certainly regard water as purely atmospheric matter.

Mr. Williams agrees with the Mercurians in including water among the original constituents of the general atmospheric medium, and in concluding that the water upon our earth is but a portion of the matter which its gravitation has collected from the all-pervading medium of the universe. Certainly there would be good reason to believe that gaseous water is one of the most important constituents of the general atmospheric medium. If it exists there in the same proportion that the water of our globe bears to the permanently gaseous constituents of our atmosphere, it must constitute above ninety per cent of the whole. The spectroscope, whether directed to the envelopes of the sun, to the stars, or the nebulæ, tells of "water, water, everywhere;" the state of its existence (whether solid, fluid, or gaseous, whether combined as water, or separated into its constituents of free hydrogen and free oxygen) being dependent on the physical conditions to which it is subjected.

Mr. Williams calculates the pressure of the sun's atmosphere upon any given area of his surface as equal to the pressure of fifteen thousand two hundred and thirty-three earthly atmospheres. Those figures are only approximative, but are under rather than overstated, because any estimate of the diameter of the body of the sun must be of a most hypothetical and doubtful character. Putting together and comparing the various descriptions of different observers, there are good grounds for concluding that the real body of the sun has never been seen at all.

The most important result, our author infers, of such a vast accumulation of solar atmosphere, is the evolution of heat which must be produced by the compression of the lower strata. If the pressure that can be exerted by the human hand upon the piston of a condensing syringe is capable, in spite of the surrounding conductors, of producing sufficient heat to ignite a piece of German tinder, what must be the consequence of the enormous pressure of this vast atmosphere!

Now, all the records of human observation indicate that, during the historical period, no sensible increase or diminution of the solar light and heat has occurred; and the incomparably older records of geological history point to the same conclusion. No theory of the sources of solar heat and light can be sound which fails to explain this degree of permanency. There also exists in the human mind an almost

irresistible à priori belief in the permanency of the universe, which is usually strongest in those who have the most deeply studied its mechanism. A further examination shows that no extinction of the sun — even at the remotest conceivable period—no gradual diminution of his energies, need be feared; but that when once a certain normal amount of radiation has been attained, it will be maintained eternally both by our sun and by all the other suns that are surrounded by dependent planets. The fresh supply of fuel is supplied by the progressive motion of the greater orbs and the reacting gravitation of their attendant worlds. The process is assumed to take place in this wise:

Our sun is travelling through space with a velocity which has been computed at from four to five hundred thousand miles per day. Now, if the hypothesis of an universal atmosphere is correct, the sun must, of necessity, encounter some resistance in his passage through it. This resistance will obviously be applied to the outer regions of his atmosphere, which, being fluid, will yield to such resistance, and a portion will be left behind. But the sun will obtain his share of the general medium, which of course will be obtained from that portion of space into which he is progressing.

Let us now see what will be the amount of the fresh fuel thus supplied to the sun. The daily supply will be equal in bulk to the contents of a cylinder having a diameter equal to that of the sun and his attendant atmosphere, and whose length is four or five hundred thousand miles. Taking this diameter at nine hundred thousand miles, and the length of the cylinder at four hundred and fifty thousand miles, its cubic contents will be 286,278,300,000,000,000 cubic miles. Mr. Williams assumes that the interstellar atmosphere has a density of only one hundred-thousandth part of that of our atmosphere at the level of the sea. A cubic mile of such rarefied air would weigh rather more than fifty tons. The total weight of the daily cylinder of fresh fuel will thus be in round numbers one hundred and sixty-five millions of millions of tons per second.

But the furnace of the sun, like our humble furnaces on earth, requires not only a continuous supply of fuel, but a stoker to feed and stir it. Now, the planetary attendants of the sun perform this duty with untiring vigilance and efficiency. The actual effect of planetary gravitation on the sun is to produce a disturbance of the kind required, although in a most irregular manner. The planetary motions are so complex, and their relative positions are so perpetually changing, that the position of the general centre of gravity, in relation to the mass of the sun, is never the same for two consecutive seconds. In all probability, the greater portion of the bulk of the sun consists of gaseous matter, and the "nucleus" is only a comparatively small kernel in the midst of the gaseous mass. These forces, therefore, are quite sufficient to produce an enormous amount of disturbance in the solar atmosphere—a complication of clashing tides, and the consequent formation of mighty maelströms, vortices and cyclones, hurricanes and tornadoes, of fury inconceivable to the dwellers upon this comparatively tranquil earth. Whether we regard the nucleus of the sun as reeling irregularly in the midst of his profound fluid envelope, or his atmosphere as dragged here by Jupiter, there by Venus, hither by the Earth, thither by Saturn, and everywhere in the mean time by the vivacious Mercury, we cannot fail to perceive in planetary attraction an agent for perpetually stirring up and mingling together the various strata of the solar atmosphere. By means of this agency, the vigorous and newly-arriving fuel must be whirled into the midst of the sun's photosphere, while huge upheavals of thermally-exhausted matter must find their way again to the upper regions of the rarefied atmosphere, where that matter will be cooled by re-expansion below the general temperature of the inter-planetary medium, and then swept round and carried into the wake of the sun.

That an actual connexion between the disturbances of the solar atmosphere and the position of the planets does exist, is shown by the observations of Mr. Carrington, who finds that the varying distances of Jupiter affect the development of spots, which are more abundant when this planet is furthest from the sun. M. Rudolph Wolf, of Berne, has observed that, besides the well-known period of a little more than eleven years, there is also another period of maximum spot-development of about fifty-six years, which Mr. Balfour Stewart has shown to correspond very nearly with the epoch at which Jupiter and Saturn come to aphelion together.

Mr. Grove, in his inaugural address to the British Association, 1866, propounded the following questions: "Our sun, our earth, and planets are constantly radiating

heat into space; so in all probability are the other suns, the stars, and their attendant planets. What becomes of the heat thus radiated into space? If the universe has no limit—and it is difficult to conceive one—there is a constant evolution of heat and light; and yet more is given off than is received by each cosmical body, for otherwise night would be as light and as warm as day. What becomes of the enormous force thus apparently non-recurrent in the same form? Does it return as palpable motion? Does it move, or contribute to move, suns and planets?"

Mr. Williams thinks he may venture to answer those questions, having shown that the heat thus radiated into space is received by the general atmospheric medium; is gathered again by the breathing of wandering suns, who inspire, as they advance, the breath of universal heat, and light, and life; then by impact, compression, and radiation, they concentrate and redistribute its vitalising power; and after its work is done, expire it in the broad wake of their retreat, leaving a track of cool exhausted ether—the ashpits of the solar furnaces—to reabsorb the general radiations, and thus maintain the eternal round of life.

Let us glance at the condition which this theory of a universal atmosphere would assign to some of the members of our solar system.

The mass and dimensions of the planet Venus approximate so closely to those of the earth, that the density of its atmosphere should only differ from ours by so small a fraction that we may consider it as about the same. The only important meteorological differences between Venus and the earth would be those due to its greater proximity to the sun, and the greater inclination of the plane of its equator to that of its orbit. In the first place, there should be land and water, as upon the earth; but as the quantity of heat received from the sun by Venus is nearly double that which comes to the earth, the atmosphere should be thickly loaded with aqueous vapour. This again would moderate the action of the sun upon the surface of the planet itself. So far, we have the conditions of a hot, humid, equable climate as compared with that of the earth; but then the inclination of the axis, producing such extreme variations between the summer and winter of the temperate and polar regions, would seriously disturb this equalising influence of the aqueous vapour. Venus should be a foggy, cloudy, and rainy planet, with some polar snow during winter, and probably polar glaciers. The evenings of Venus would be, like ours, lighted by twilight, and the mornings by the dawn.

The cloudiness of this planet is further indicated by the differences of the statements of observers respecting the permanent markings on its surface. According to Mr. Williams, the observations of the surface of Venus have to be made through the veil of a misty atmosphere, such as must always prevail over this planet, even though absolutely opaque clouds should be absent. The effect of this mistiness would be to render the outline forming the boundary between land and sea very obscure and difficult to define, except under the most favourable circumstances. Venus ought to be habitable by plants and animals not widely different from terrestrial creatures.

The total atmosphere of Mars should be about one-twentieth of our own, and the atmospheric pressure on the surface of the planet about one-fifth and a half of ours. The mercurial barometer would stand at about five and a half inches at the sea level of Mars, and water should boil at one hundred and thirty-eight degrees Fahrenheit. The bulk of the atmospheric water on Mars must be condensed or frozen. The proportion of the area of land to that of water on the earth being one of land to three of water, there should be on Mars about five of land to three of water. The seas of Mars must be frozen to the bottom, but the surface of the water on all parts of the planet, which are exposed with only moderate obliquity to the sun's rays, would be thawed to a depth varying with the circumstances. Its surface would thus be thawed during the day and frozen again at night, like the surface of our own Alpine glaciers. A little before sunset, a feathery dew of hoar-frost should begin to fall.

There would be no great, well-defined masses of vapour floating, like our clouds, in the atmosphere of Mars; no cumulus, no cumulo-stratus, nor even cirro-cumulus clouds; nothing denser than a thin mist of ice crystals, like that which, in our atmosphere, makes halos round the moon. Contrary to not a few astronomers, Mr. Williams maintains that the climate and meteorology of Mars differ so greatly from our own, that none of the creatures of this world could live upon Mars.

Jupiter and Saturn are a couple of proud planets, swelling themselves to the dimensions and quality of suns. Jupiter's total atmosphere should be six thousand two hun-

dred and thirty-two times that of the earth. His mercurial barometer would be one hundred and thirty-four feet high. The temperature of the lower regions of his atmosphere is about the melting point of cast iron. All the water on Jupiter is now, and will permanently remain, in a state of vapour. Owing to the depth of this vaporous atmosphere, there is no evidence that we have as yet ever seen the kernel within the outer shell of Jupiter. It is extremely probable that Jupiter must have manifested some degree of general solar phenomena, and that, if we could see him shaded from the solar rays, he would appear like a phosphorescent ball, by the illumination of his vaporous envelope, due to the light it absorbs from the glowing world within. Jupiter, moreover, has probably reached his permanent temperature, so that there is no hope of his being turned to agricultural purposes.

It is vexing that the results of recent research tend to deprive us of the pleasing dream of the plurality of worlds. Most people gave up Mercury as too hot to hold them; and they now find themselves obliged to give up Mars, although they still retain some hopes of Venus's capability as a residence. But it is provoking to find some, at least, of the superior planets, whose greater distance from the sun lead us to expect them to be cool, turning out to be little suns themselves. Time was, not so very long ago, when we were taught that beneath the great sun's photosphere, and veiled from the ardour of its rays, there were happy valleys, in which gentlemen, in blue cotton shirts and nankeen trousers, might devote their time to the culture of melons, without even the protection of a parasol. What do fashionable savants tell us now? That life is a series of disillusions.

THOUGHTS ON PUFFING.

With the enormous crowd of bright particular advertisements staring at us in every violent and fiery hue from pillar, post, and hoarding, it might be curious to speculate what special feelings or motives are working in the public mind, and are at the bottom of this extraordinary development of advertising. The change within a few years is amazing. Development, indeed, is not the proper description; it is rather the introduction of a new art or department. Formerly, the sole object of a placard or advertisement was to give the public information—notice that some event was to take place, that some play was to be performed, or some book was to be published. The occasional "dead wall" was consecrated to this office, and its decaying surface was turned to a useful and honourable purpose. Now, walls, dead and living, flaunt, and flare, and blaze with proclamations, competing with each other, struggling to attract notice, screaming, as it were, tossing their limbs wildly, flourishing every known colour, as who should say, "Look at me! Look at me! Not at him! Not at him!" Not only are stray and unoccupied walls, or short-lived hoardings, taken advantage of, but new structures—vast screens—are put up, on which these polychromatic names may flaunt and flash. Rooms, walls, railways, every spare space conceivable, are thus decorated with names and addresses. The title of a play, or of a new candle, jogs by at a slow trot in front of the knees of the outsides of an omnibus; it glares at us from the roof of a railway carriage, from the gallery of a railway station, from the walls of a waiting-room, from the tax-gatherer's notice, and even from the drop-scene of a theatre.

A curious speculation connected with this profuse advertising is as to how the system is found to work on the public mind. The theory is, that the fact of seeing the one name and address repeated in every direction that we turn to, must be an argument for, or even a proof of, excellence; a conclusion certainly illogical. A little margin might be allowed for human laziness, which would be appealed to after this fashion. For this ready information saves us the trouble of choosing or seeking out, and supplies us at once with name and address. But, still, the other influence prevails in the main. Even for minds of strong sense there is a lurking feeling that what is known to us from repetition must have something to recommend it; there is even the feeling of goodwill from the familiarity; just as the British playgoer likes his old jokes, at which he has laughed "these twenty years," as Diggory did at "ould grouse in the gun-room," served up again and again to him. The wisest and most sober cannot deny this superficial influence. What we are told again and again, leaves at last an impression of respect. The feeling is no doubt akin to that on which general impostors trade in society, in politics, and in literature, and by which some flashy, showy man attracts the public without real

qualities. The world, in truth, likes these plain appeals to its desires, and dislikes all troublesome appeals to its judgment and intellect. These gaudy descriptions save it trouble, and tickle both eye and ear; and it may be affected, in a small degree, like the rustic from some agricultural district come up to "Lunnun," who thinks everything "in print" and gaudy colours must stand for truth and reality in its strictest shape. Advertisers and flourishers know perfectly well that even the gravest and most cautious are to a certain length touched by their appeals, and that even in the act of denunciation, the most careful often find themselves seduced.

But the truth is, in this world sheer labour and industry always make themselves felt. This is a theory that would be dear to Mr. Carlyle as representing something real and genuine. Work, he would tell us, is never thrown away. Men who spend sums of money, and sums of trouble and toil, together with much ingenious polychromatic device in flourishing their names and wares, are pretty certain to find such bread as they have cast upon the waters returning to them. The wise who travel in the underground railways and see "Kitto's Starch" staring at them from over the heads of their vis-à-vis in the carriages, or the "Grasshopper Sewing Machine," no doubt salute those titles with a "pish!" and a "pshaw!" But later, as their eye wanders over the newspaper or dead wall, or live hoarding, or omnibus knife-board, or fly-leaf of magazine, and sees everywhere, as a murderer does blood, "Kitto's Starch," "Grasshopper Sewing Machine," a kind of dull, insensible impression is produced. By-and-bye, when either of these important necessaries are in demand in the reader's family, and when there is an impression of doubt or ignorance, the poor aide-de-camp of conceit, or conscious superiority, steps in, and aids the advertiser. Where all are groping in the dark, it is hard to resist the conscious sense of superiority. "Starch! Why, there is a fellow called Kitto, who seems to be in great demand; at least his name is everywhere. Sewing machine! Get the Grasshopper—only four guineas." It will thus be seen that advertising owes a good deal to the pardonable little infirmities of our nature.

This feeling of attraction and partiality being thus produced exactly in proportion to the diligent and costly nature of the advertisement, it is surprising that we, the public, do not reflect that all this must represent a vast enhancement of the cost of the article. A moment's reflection would show us that this spurious prestige of name, as compared with the meagre reputation of articles not thus heralded, must make an enormous difference in the price. But no. If anything, they are cheaper. This, in fact, is the claim they boast to our attention. Who, then, defrays the cost of proclamation? The article itself, which, in a manner, must be mulcted and made inferior. There is no other solution. Granting that the article is superior to its rivals, it ought to be far dearer in price to cover the cost of its advertisement, but this would be fatal to its success; and in most instances there must be an inferiority.

We might imagine Goldsmith's Citizen of the World coming to town, wandering through this great city, and asking, with amazement, the meaning of the gaudy and bewildering inscriptions which would meet his eye at every turn. He would be told they were the names of persons, their addresses, and of various articles made by them. He would speculate thoughtfully over this information, and would at last arrive at a solution. "Ah! it was as in a time of famine or of scarcity. These things and persons are difficult to discover. Their goods are scarce, and this information is welcome." On the contrary, he is told that there is an over-supply of these merchants and their articles; that at every street and alley they are to be found; and that it is actually in consequence of the superfluity and superabundance that this method of appealing to the public is adopted. It would be hard to get him to understand more than this. It is wonderful, indeed, how the system has developed, and is developing. It now requires skilled agents, professional adepts, to work it. Wherever there is space of any description, no such remunerative disposition of it can be made as by advertising. The letters grow larger, the colour more garish every day. Sometimes we see the whole side of some tall house all ablaze with gigantic characters, which not only those who run, but those who gallop, and who travel by limited mail even, can read. To pass by the enclosure of the houses levelled for the new Law Courts is enough to give one a nightmare. For there, the space being so ample, the situation so advantageous, from the enormous traffic passing and repassing, running and reading, the system seems literally to riot in all the vagaries of com-

petition. There a simpering lady of some eight or ten feet high curls her finger, as if to make an appointment, and displays an enormous bulk of hair, the result of Mrs. Allen's treatment. There the Daily Telegraph proudly trumpets that it has the largest circulation in the world; the horn of the Standard competes angrily, and lays vigorous claim to being the largest broad-sheet in the world. There the cabalistic "Ozokerit" tormented the minds of the passers-by for months; and there the daring performance of some "Brothers," vividly portrayed on a bill of the dimensions of a small theatrical scene, entertains the eyes as well as the mind. Now the picture of the battle at the Agricultural Hall shows French and Germans destroying each other on a vast scale, while the blessings of peace are illustrated by innumerable young ladies, who, bent over rival sewing-machines, exhibit models of decorous and interesting industry. Now, again, an enormous face, whose corresponding body, if it came into being, would reach half-way up Dr. Johnson's St. Clement's Danes Church, presents us with a terrible enlargement of the countenance of the ingenious Mr. Woodin.

In short, a more mysterious jumble of letters, shows, pictures, and colours, it would be hard to conceive. Here is the latest enormous panorama, for such it is, or apotheosis of Neptune, crowned, with all his monsters and Tritons rising from the billows, which makes a sort of Turneresque pageantry of advertisement, spreading over the hoarding in a free high art fashion. This is "Sea Moss Farine;" and this gaudy mythological picture pursues us in every direction. The persevering young ladies who are walking with umbrellas have thrust out the gentleman who was always in a storm of wind and rain struggling with his, which was determined to turn itself inside out. Here, again, is the cake with the mincing gentleman, and the dainty young lady in the veil, preparing to cut it up, and the news overhead that some thousand or so of these articles are always kept in stock. Here is to be seen the vast garden, of a rather yellowish green, which a young lady in a hat, attended by a child, is watering diligently with a force-pump. But the most assiduous proclaimer of his own merits is a certain West-end silk-mercer, who has become like a household word from his never-flagging invitations to try silks. As we travel in the railway carriages he whispers in our ear — indeed the underground line seems to be his special hunting-ground, where in all the sheen and glory of enamelled iron he blazes out his trophies. There are galleries in this subterranean region, which cross the line aloft for the convenience of passengers, and across its balustrades is displayed, on vast sheets of gaudy metal, all the style and title of the silk-mercer: an inscription about fifty feet in length. No one, not even the traveller from New Zealand himself, could avoid being impressed by a name exhibited so persistently.

Seriously, this last gigantic exhibition suggests, in practical shape, the thought that this practice has reached the limits of an abuse, and that there must be a large section of the public, the majority in fact, who are sensible and experienced, and not to be attracted by such baits. These are fairly entitled to such entertainment as an intellectual and cultivated person, living in a great city, ought to find for their eyes and thoughts as they walk abroad. Now to find one's eyes settling on these monstrous placards wherever they turn, these raree-shows of cartoons and colours daubed on, certainly becomes a daily and hourly pain. There is no such cheap and pleasant education for a people as handsome out-door objects, elegant vistas and buildings, beautiful statues, choice architecture. These things, grown familiar, humanise almost better than a dozen school boards. But if instead of these we have this mercantile vulgarity staring from every coigne of vantage, this glorified shopkeeping, which can only raise associations of the prosy and baser incidents of trade, the result must only be a steady and progressive vulgarisation. Any one who would vividly realise this truth for himself, need only become a frequent passenger on the underground lines, from whose stations he will find himself emerging with a steadily increasing sense of distaste, and a low tone of moral feeling. In fact, the New Zealand citizen before alluded to, taken to a series of these stations, would naturally conclude, from the gigantic name that runs across all the galleries, that this tradesman was a sort of deified potentate, in whose honour these subterranean temples were erected. The conclusion would be quite legitimate. But the notion is a false and corrupt one; for a light iron gallery, if artistically constructed, is an object of interest, and leaves an airy and elegant impression; but if it be converted into a Patagonian sign-board, with the enormous name of an ordinary shopkeeper sprawling over

it, the limit is passed. It becomes an affront to the travelling public. The worst of it is that we seem to be only at the beginning of this abuse. Our newspapers are swelling into vast unmanageable advertising sheets, and what is more significant still, tradesmen's goods are being dragged on the stage itself for the purpose of puffery. And this unworthy use of theatres proves yet more clearly how much our other public amusements are likely to be interfered with as the abuse develops. For, after paying a sufficient price to be amused, we naturally resent having our eyes entertained by these business circulars and shopkeeping allurements.

On the whole, therefore, it may be fair to consider whether the matter has not been pushed too far, and whether there is not room for reform.

MISS PONSONBY'S COMPANION.

In Twelve Chapters.

CHAPTER IX. THE LETTER-CASE.

The moment the front door slammed upon the superintendent, Miss Ponsonby, regardless of all his instructions, rang the bell furiously for Mercy.

That worthy glided into the room with her usual hypocritical deference and catlike softness. She at least acted up to the superintendent's ideal in this respect. The old lady sat brooding over the fire as absorbed and gloomy as one of the sibyls. Horrible suspicions were passing through her mind. She had lost all faith in everything and every one. In youth these moments of disenchantment are terrible; but they are more terrible still in age. Old age has less hope, and clings to its small certainties as a miser clings to his gold. To lose a friend, to lose trust in one whom we love then, is like losing a limb. Suspense was worse to Miss Ponsonby even than certainty. She would wrestle at once with the horrible suspicion that haunted her.

Mercy said nothing; but as she snuffed the two mould candles, whose long fungus wicks burned dim as the lights in a mortuary chapel, she stole a look at the old lady, who sat staring moodily at the fire. As Mercy had been listening at the door to the greater part of the conversation between her mistress and the superintendent, she was fully able to understand what weighed upon Miss Ponsonby's mind, and to decide how best to act in accordance with her own interest.

"I'm afraid, ma'am," she said, "that you ain't so well again. It has been too exciting for you seeing Mr. Humphries. But you mustn't take it so. You must remember how Job bore his losses. Ah! it is hard to bear, I know, and I used to say so when a fellow-servant at Mrs. Baldock's once stole a sovereign of mine, and I dwelt on it for weeks. I believe if I could I'd have brought that young woman to the gallows, because I'd earned the money so hard. My heart was unregenerate then, and my eyes weren't opened."

"Mercy," said Miss Ponsonby, suddenly rising, and seizing the hypocritical woman by the wrist, "if I could find who stole my ten-pound note I'd drag the thief to prison, if I had to do it with my own hands. Mercy, who is it? Who has robbed me? I've been a good mistress to you. I have told you that I have remembered you in my will. Tell me all you know."

Mercy was silent.

"For Heaven's sake tell me, Mercy. Tell me, at least, do you know any one in this house who writes letters to any person at Gypsum?"

"I'd rather not answer, ma'am. If I can't say good I wouldn't say harm."

"But, Mercy, you must tell," said Miss Ponsonby. "Mind it is not too late for me to alter my will. I have lost a second ten-pound note."

"A second?" stammered Mercy.

"I do not suspect you."

"God forbid!" groaned Mercy. "A second ten-pound note, is it possible? Oh, this wicked, wicked world!"

"Who took those two notes I must and will find out!" cried Miss Ponsonby, clutching the two arms of her chair convulsively with her thin bony hands; "and if you have any regard for me, you must, you must help me to find out."

"The Lord knows my heart," said Mercy, turning her eyes up to the ceiling.

"I ask you again, do you ever write letters to any one at Gypsum? Is any follower of yours living there? Now, no equivocation."

"Ever since that wicked young man, who was assistant at the undertaker's in High-street, borrowed ten shillings and left the town suddenly, promising to write to me the moment he got to London, I've allowed no young man to darken these doors. I never wrote to any one at Gypsum in my life."

"Have any letters directed to Gypsum ever left this house to your knowledge?"

"Must I answer that? Oh, don't ask that," said Mercy, with well-feigned reluctance.

"Yes, I do ask it, and I insist on a plain answer."

"Well, I have seen letters so directed that Susan was taking to the post. They were Miss Lilly's letters."

Miss Ponsonby sank into her chair, and hid her face in her hands; all she said was, "As I feared."

Mercy groaned audibly, hoped that all wicked persons' hearts would be softened, and that the innocent might not be confounded with the guilty; at the same time she expressed a hope that the missing notes might have, somehow, got by mistake into one of the books or papers that were on the table.

And as she said this, with a cold, cruel smile, she shuffled about the books on the table, searching among them, and by prearranged malice taking up a letter-case of Lilly's, held it so that the contents came partly out at one end, and a letter, stamped and directed for the post, fell out close to Miss Ponsonby's hand.

"What's this?" said the old lady, instantly clawing at it with irresistible suspicion and curiosity. "Why, Mercy, it's a letter in Lilly's writing directed to Robert Dawson, Esq., Eclipse Hotel, Gypsum. Now I see what you thought, and what the superintendent hinted. Now I see what he almost told me—what I put from me, and refused to think possible. Send Miss Dampier to me. I must see her before I see Mr. Tresham."

"Shall I take down Miss Lilly's letter for the post?" said Mercy, with affected ignorance of her mistress's meaning.

"No," said Miss Ponsonby, furiously. "Leave it. I must know more about this letter. Go and tell Miss Dampier I want to see her."

A moment or two after, Lilly came bounding into the room as bright and joyous as a summer morning; but the moment she entered, a chilly sense of terror struck her, she hardly knew why. Miss Ponsonby sat on the window-seat, staring out with a mournful, absorbed look at the darkness which, following the sunset, had brought with it heavy rain. In the silence you could hear the rain beating against the glass.

"Do you want me, dear aunt?" Lilly said, coming up and kissing the old lady on the cheek. I hope you feel better now." Lilly was so happy herself that she wished all the world to be happy too. "Why, you seem low."

"I have a question to ask you," said Miss Ponsonby, turning round with a look that petrified Lilly.

"Well, dear aunt, there is nothing that I could keep secret from you;" and she blushed at the thought that her very happiness was betraying the love with which her heart was overflowing.

"You have no secret. Well, then, tell me with whom you correspond at Gypsum."

Lilly was silent, and surprised.

"Do not deny that you do so. You cannot, for here is the letter."

As she said this, with the tone of an angry accuser, Miss Ponsonby lifted the writing-case, which lay on the table, and drew from underneath it the letter.

"That is my letter," Lilly said, in a low, disturbed voice, and stretched her hand slowly towards it, but without any marked anxiety or apprehension.

The vindictive eyes of the old woman were fixed on her like those of a cat upon a mouse—cold, relentless, and with a certain sense of cruel enjoyment.

"Mr. Dawson," said Lilly, "is a—a friend of mine, a friend of my father's."

"And did I not expressly tell you," said the old woman, tapping the table fretfully with the fingers of her right hand, "that one condition of my taking you as a companion, and admitting you to all this ease and comfort, was that you should cease all acquaintance, and not write to all the low people with whom your father associates?"

"I thought, aunt," said Lilly, somewhat indignantly, for she had not been accustomed to such insults, "that I came as your companion, not as your slave. I made no promise not to write to old friends."

"So, girl, you refuse to tell me who this man Dawson is?"

"I do. I love you very much, dear aunt, but I will not submit to such a cruel restriction of my liberty. I should be above suspicion."

"So this is the reward for all my kindness. You have a proud and wicked nature, Lilly. You must pray against this spirit. You are bold enough now, but do you dare open that letter in my presence. I have no wish to read it. Come, open the letter!"

"Dare!" said Lilly. "I know no right that you have to make such a request, or what end is obtained by it. What have I

to conceal, aunt? Give me the letter, and you shall see it opened as you wish."

Lilly took the letter, as her aunt handed it to her with a malign smile, and tore open the envelope.

"Now open the letter."

Lilly did so, and a half bank-note fell out and drifted across the floor to Miss Ponsonby's foot.

"What is that?" said the old lady, snatching at it with kite-like eagerness.

"That is half a five-pound note; half my first quarter's salary."

"Five pounds! It is the lost note. You know it, and it was you who stole it," screamed Miss Ponsonby, striking her hand upon the table, then, going to the bell, she pulled it violently.

Mercy so instantaneously appeared, that it would not have been uncharitable to suppose that she had been listening at the key-hole.

"Mercy!" screamed the old harridan, who had no compassion in that moment of triumph, "I have found at last who stole my ten pounds. Tell Mr. Tresham to come up. Say I am ready to see him now."

"No, no," cried Lilly, roused from the trance of wonder into which the first terrible words of accusation had cast her, as by an enchantment, as she flung herself at her aunt's knees, and seized her hand. "No, no; you will not do that. You will not degrade me and trample upon me before him. I am innocent. Before God himself I swear that I am innocent. This is my own money. You cannot be cruel enough to think me guilty of such a crime."

"Mercy," said the inexorable woman, "do as I bid you. All this repentance comes too late. The whole world shall know of this wicked girl's ingratitude. If I do not throw her into prison, I will at least send her back degraded to her father."

"You may send me back to my father," said Lilly, proudly rising, "but you cannot degrade me, for I am innocent. He will believe that I am innocent."

"Why do you delay, Mercy?"

Mercy delayed because she exulted in the distress of the once light-hearted, happy girl, who had stood in her way.

"Oh, do not, do not let Mr. Tresham hear this cruel charge." And Lilly, weeping passionately, cast herself again at the knees of the inexorable old woman. Mercy went. A step on the stairs roused Lilly; before Frank Tresham could enter she had risen, and stood mournfully by the window.

The moment Miss Ponsonby had shaken hands with Tresham she relapsed into the passionate excitement in which she had previously indulged. "You see I'm very excited and very ill," she said. "It may be as well to——"

Tresham cast a glance at Lilly; he could see something had happened, but what he could not at all imagine. The old lady continued:

"You remember being here when I lost that ten-pound note? I have just discovered who stole it."

"I am very glad you have," said Tresham; "it must relieve your mind greatly. How was it stolen? Who was the thief?"

"*There she stands!* You must ask her," said Miss Ponsonby, turning sharply round with that wiry irritable quickness peculiar to her, and pointing to Lilly. "And that is the way in which she requites her benefactor."

Tresham felt a cold pressure at his heart, a flickering movement before his eyes. The words seemed to reach him in a nightmare. He tried to speak, but his lips did not move. His gesture to Lilly was almost imperceptible.

Another moment and Lilly's hand was in his. "No, no, Frank," she sobbed. "I am innocent; I am innocent; you will not believe this of me. I am innocent. Save me from her. Do not let her——"

"Oh, I see," said Miss Ponsonby, drawing herself up very straight. "Oh, that's it, is it? Perhaps Miss Dampier, then, will tell Mr. Tresham what she will not tell me—who this Mr. Dawson is with whom she corresponds at Gypsum?"

"No, Frank; you love me too much not to have confidence in me. Do not ask me that."

"I do not want to know, Lilly," said Frank at once, as he soothed her. "My confidence in you is entire. I would as soon believe an angel to be guilty of the theft as you, Lilly."

Lilly made no answer, but their hands remained clasped together.

"Poor infatuated young man," said Miss Ponsonby. Mercy, who had glided into the room, groaned audibly.

"Three days from this time," said Miss Ponsonby, turning to Lilly, "you leave this house."

"Lilly and I are betrothed, Miss Ponsonby," said Tresham, "and I could not allow her to stay in any house where sus-

picion rested upon her. I will take her and deliver her to her father."

The wind had risen now, wild and blustering, almost as if taking a cruel delight in the sufferings of poor Lilly. It assailed at once every nook and corner of Miss Ponsonby's house, roared down the chimneys, rattled at the windows, shook at the doors, whistled maliciously at the key-holes, as if all the evil spirits that work man mischief had banded together to force an entrance into that habitation, and to wreak their spite on the inmates. The two old elms, racked and tormented by the same untiring enemy, writhed under the torture; and as for the two bay-trees, it was all they could do to maintain their position as steadfast sentries on duty for ever at the steps.

Heedless of the uproar without, Frank and Lilly stood by the ashes of the parlour fire, she sobbing, he trying to console her with kisses, assurances of changeless love, and words of hope and comfort. He suggested that she should, as soon as possible, return to her father, to whom he could at once write, requesting his consent to their marriage.

"The cloud will pass, Lilly," he said, "and the thief will be detected. All will be sunshine again. Humphries will show these people in a moment that their suspicions are absurd. The note in your letter is no evidence."

"How can I return home, Frank," said Lilly, through her tears, "with this dark stain upon me? I know not what to do, but I know that God will guide me if I pray to him. No, do not ask me to go, Frank, dear. I must not leave dear aunt, now that she is so ill, though she has been so cruel."

"She will need great care, Lilly, after all this excitement," said Frank, "and you are an angel to still love one who has so wronged you. Her symptoms are not favourable. I will send some medicine that she must take at daybreak. Be sure that Mercy gives it her."

"I sleep on the sofa in her room," said Lilly, "since she has been worse, and I will give it her myself."

Then, after several partings, came at last the real one.

CHAPTER X. TWO HOURS AFTER MIDNIGHT.

With many groans and sighs Miss Ponsonby tried to sleep. Her sharp thin pale face looked sharper and thinner than ever, as it lay on the pillow framed in a frilled night-cap. One by one the sounds of life in the house died out. First Lilly heard Mercy bolt and lock the front door. Then Susan's quick step passed on the stairs as she ran by as fresh as if she had just got up, and was going off to work. Then came a low shuffling step, and a tap at the door. It was Mercy with the plate-box and the keys of the house.

"Who is that?" said Miss Ponsonby, in a weak, querulous voice. She was afraid and distrustful now of every one and everything.

Mercy opened the heavy orange bed-curtains of the old-fashioned four-post bed, and gazed at her mistress with a look outwardly sympathising and hypocritical.

"How is the dear lady now?" she said, as she arranged the pillow with a sharp vindictive glance at Lilly, who sat by the fire reading.

"Very ill—very ill, Mercy," said Miss Ponsonby, querulously. "What a noise you have been making with the bolts. Why does that girl Susan wear those creaking boots? I've told her of it scores of times; and every sound goes through my head."

"Shall I lock the plate in the next room, ma'am?" said Mercy. "It is all right—I've counted it all."

"Yes, Mercy. Bring me the key—I'll trust it with no one; and get my cup of tea at seven, and mind it isn't cold as it was this morning. It's very easy to do things properly, yet everything, everything is neglected."

"I try to do my duty," said Mercy. "I've been carried through many trials patiently, and I try to remember all those little ways that Mrs. Baldock, blessed soul, used to like; if I don't always——"

"There, there, that will do. I'm ill and worried. You mustn't mind what I say. You've been a good, faithful servant to me, Mercy, and I shan't forget it, as I've often told you, but go now. I'm too weak to talk."

"Good-night, ma'am. Good-night, Miss Lilly." This last wish was enunciated in a dry, unsympathetic voice.

The door closed softly, almost inaudibly, on Mercy.

"What a good, considerate soul that is!" said Miss Ponsonby to Lilly.

Lilly instantly flew to the bedside, and knelt down.

"Lilly, it was not I who first suspected you. It was what the superintendent said.

I don't yet know all his reasons. Perhaps they are insufficient. It was something about a letter that he told me that first set me against you; and, when I saw that letter of yours with the half-note in it, a sort of madness seized me. I still hope you did not take it. Tell me about that letter."

"No, aunt, dear; do not ask that. I cannot answer that. I am too proud to try and argue out my innocence with you. Your own heart should tell you I am not guilty. I leave my cause in God's hands. Time will perhaps reveal the thief."

"I don't know; I don't know what to think—what to do," said the old woman, turning her face from Lilly; "but let me sleep now if I can. I'll try to believe it, Lilly. Here, kiss me. Good-night."

At the chair by the fire Lilly knelt, and unseen angels descending breathed hope and comfort into her heart.

It was very still when the fire smouldered down from a white heat to a few red coals, and the light wavered and pulsed fainter and fainter on the ceiling. Darker and more numerous the grotesque shadows widened and widened, till there was more darkness in the room than light. An hour more and the ashes turned black, and sank together with a faint rustling movement, and the chest of drawers began to give forth strange sounds as if it were going to split in two.

Then, dressed as she was, Lilly, exhausted by excitement and watching, threw herself on the sofa-bed, which was in a corner of the window facing the vast structure in which Miss Ponsonby was now sleeping, dreaming, probably, of appalling burglaries. The wind had gone down, and a slant ray of the purest moonlight shone through the window, and fell in a silver band of pure and holy brightness on the corner of the sofa where Lilly slept, gleaming in lustre across the curtain that covered the bottom of Miss Ponsonby's bed.

It was two hours after midnight when Lilly awakened, roused by she knew not what, for the only sound audible when she sat up and listened was the mechanical pulse of the house—the clock beating on the stairs. Yes, there was a faint, creaking sound—once, twice, three times she could hear it on the stairs leading from the room overhead. Lilly listened, her heart beat fast, and seemed to swell larger and larger. The next moment the door of the bedroom moved softly back, and something came rustling and gliding past the curtains, which would have hidden the door from Lilly even if there had been a light in the room. It was some one with bare feet treading with extreme caution.

Lilly dared not scream, but lay listening and watching what would happen. The figure moved past the sofa-bed, and round by the fireside, to a small table on which were glasses, some jelly, and the phial of medicine, which was to be taken at daybreak. There was a sound then of uncorking a bottle, some liquid was emptied on the coals, and there was a gurgling sound as of liquid poured into a bottle. Then the figure glided back again round the bed, to where Lilly lay. A cold dew of terror rose on Lilly's forehead, as she lay there in the darkness, almost fancying the phosphorescent gleam that she saw before her own closed eyes would betray her to the thief, murderer, or phantom, whichever it was, that stood over her; she could hear her heart beating so loud, that the sound seemed to fill the whole room.

But the figure moved on cautiously towards the slant ray of moonlight. As it passed it, the face turned. It was Mercy, pale and corpse-like in that divine radiance, her eyes fixed, her lips white and close-pressed in a sardonic smile. There was a small bottle clutched in one of her hands. She was visible for but an instant. She glided out of the door, closing it softly after her, and pressing the lock back slowly and with extreme caution. Then there were the faint sounds on the stairs again, and then all was still as death.

The moment that quietness was perceptible, Lilly, by an almost instinctive impulse, leaped quietly from the sofa, went to the table, felt for the bottle of medicine, and thrust it under her pillow.

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