"The Story of Our Lives from Year to Year."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS, JUN.

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS."

No. 119. New Series. | SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 1871. | Price Twopence.

THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

CHAPTER XVIII. DRESSING-GOWNS AND SLIPPERS.

Captain Bamme, who has been entertaining the young lady, is taking his leave. The doctor says good-night at the same time, and walks down the old avenue in the long streak of moonlight between the shadows of the trees in company with the captain, who is eloquent upon the treason against the peace and decency of the town perpetrated by old Foljambe in the importation of his Irish curate.

"I hope I have a proper respect for everything that's sacred; but, by Jove, if a fellow behaves like a rowdy, parson or no parson, sooner or later, he'll get what he wants—a good licking; and I'd chuck him out of the window as soon as look at him:" a feat not only morally but physically worthy of admiration, considering the relative proportions of the curate and the captain.

The curate meanwhile has taken his departure, and very amicably, side by side with Mr. Smelt, is trudging after the captain and the doctor to the village. These apostolic men are manifestly deep in conversation, if we may so call a talk in which the loud and hilarious voice of the curate, interspersed with his peals of laughter echoing among the branches of the ancient trees, does duty for both. The captain quickens his pace on hearing these ominous sounds. He was going to light his cigar, but does not care to loiter, and with a sniff and a muttered word or two between his teeth, postpones that indulgence till he shall have reached the gate, where, as he knows, the curate turns to the right, and he to the left.

Mr. and Mrs. Foljambe, in their one-horse brougham, come rolling down the avenue, and oblige the fat dissenter to skip out of the way as their wheel grazes his elbow. He is, no doubt, grateful for his escape, but the fright does not abate his righteous abhorrence of prelatical pride; and the boisterous and unfeeling banter of the Reverend Michael Doody fails to soothe him as he stands gazing, for some seconds, after the equipage. The driver and the parson are of one mind no doubt. If he had been a bishop would they have made his "lordship" cut that terrified caper? His blood boils as he looks after the carriage. The mud of the wheel, he could swear, is upon his shoulder. He half regrets, for the sake of the moral and the scandal, that he was not knocked down. Perhaps if he had possessed presence of mind he would have gone down at that touch, as adroit pugilists sometimes do in the ring.

Notwithstanding this little incident, however, Mr. Smelt and the curate proceed, side by side, in very friendly march toward the town.

The churchman's jocularity has subsided, and he is now learning all he can about the religious state of the little town, and the statistics of its poverty, from the preacher at his side, who is puzzled a little by the unaffectedly secular demeanour of the curate, by his utter repudiation of the doctrine of apostolic succession, and by his earnest and simple desire to go to the heart of his work, and do some good in his generation.

From the cold moonlight, and still shadows of the foliage on the broad avenue, we return to the great drawing-room of Roydon and the glow of other lights, where the clear voice of Lady Vernon is saying to the tall, grey gentleman, with whom she has talked a good deal that evening, and who was on

the point of going out to light his bedroom candle, and make his way to his room:

"I don't think I have introduced my daughter."

The tall gentleman's eyes follow the direction of Lady Vernon's expectantly, and she says:

"Maud, I want to introduce you to Mr. Coke, who has been so good as to come with the papers for the trustees, who are coming to-morrow, and it may be right that you should be present."

The elderly attorney looked at the young lady with interest as he made his bow, and he thought how high-spirited, how high-bred, and beautiful she looked, and what a becoming representative of that great and ancient family she was.

"It is a good many years since I saw you, Miss Vernon, a long time in your life, that is—not in mine. You were only so high," he says, with the familiarity of an old retainer, measuring a standard in the air with his hand.

Ten minutes later they have broken up and gone to their rooms, and Maud, in her dressing-gown, with her long hair loose over her shoulders, taps at her Cousin Max's door, which is near her own.

"Who's there?"

"Maud. May I come in?"

"Come in, my dear child, to be sure."

Maximilla Medwyn is in her dressing-gown and slippers, and smiles — rather an odd figure, her dressing-gown being "skimpy," as her maid tells her often, and her head being bound up tightly in a long flannel band.

"What is the matter now?"

"Nothing. Only I could not rest till I had seen you again. Mamma received me to-day just as usual."

"She can't help it," replies Miss Medwyn. "My maid is gone to her bed; there's no one to hear us. She is the same to every one; it is her way; she was always cold. I tried to know her long ago —and I believe she liked me as well as she liked any one else—but I never could know her, young as she was. It is her nature, and she can't change it now."

"I wish I could be cold and reasonable like other people. I wish I could care nothing about it, but—I'm such a fool."

"You make too much of it."

"I can't help it, and whenever I do speak out, we quarrel. It is so miserable."

"You must treat different people differently, my dear, according to their natures. I make it a point to meet her just as coolly as she meets me," said Maximilla. "She was always an oddity. Why, nothing odder was ever heard of than her marriage with your poor father. To me she always seemed unfathomable. All I know about her is, that she has the strongest will I ever heard of, and that she looks, I think, like a haughty lady superioress of a convent. Very handsome, of course, we all see that; but with a countenance, it seems to me, incapable of sympathy, incapable of frankness, and dominated by pride, and dead to everything else."

"You are frank enough, at all events," says the young lady, a little dryly.

"Very frank always with you, Maud," replies the old cousin, seating herself on the sofa at the foot of her bed.

"I see more good in her than that," persists the girl.

"So do I; but not in her face. She has a great deal of good. She is generous; she is courageous; she has many very fine points. But she seems to me to hold every one on earth at arm's length; that's all I say. As for me, I gave up the idea of ever knowing her, twenty years ago. You must take her for what she is, and be content with so much love as she is capable of giving. She may give more than she shows, for anything we can tell, and I'm sure she'll do her duty. She has always been a pattern of all the virtues."

"Yes, conscience, a strong sense of duty, every one says that. I'm quite serious. But you said that she was odd. What was there about her marriage with papa?"

"Well, yes, that was extremely odd. I never was so surprised in my life. Your father had his baronetage, but that in your family was less than nothing; that title had been twice offered within the last hundred years to the Vernons of Roydon, and twice refused. He was a handsome man, and rather agreeable, and there ended his attractions. He had not a guinea. He was twenty years older than she. He liked nothing that she liked. He was a captain in the Guards, you know, and when he was ruined, had retired. He came down here, and tried to make love to her, without your grandfather's knowing anything about it; but she could not endure him, and treated him with utter contempt, and he grew to hate her. People thought, my dear, that he did not want anything but her money, and was furious at finding himself foiled. She certainly did hate him, then. He was of the same family—a Vernon—her third cousin."

"Was not grandmamma alive then?"

"Yes, but in miserable health—slowly dying, in fact. They went away for a little tour, somewhere—a fancy of the doctor's, I believe; when she returned, which was in less than a year, your father came here, uninvited and unwished for. I was here at the time. Barbara seemed to hate him more intensely than ever. She would not even see him. She spoke of him to me, when I asked her to come down and take her place as usual, with a degree of detestation I could not understand."

"Yet he was very gentle, I have always heard, and a great many people liked him," said Maud.

"I dare say. I only tell you what I saw," says Maximilla. "I need not tell you I did not want her to like him. I thought his courtship, all things considered, a most audacious thing; and I could not believe, after all that had passed, that he had any serious idea of renewing it."

"It was certainly very unequal in all things but birth," said Maud.

"Yes, you know, she might have married any one, and he had no pretensions. Your grandfather plainly did not like his being here, though he did not choose to turn him out. I don't think, indeed, he saw what Amerald Vernon was aiming at; but I could not help fancying that, for some reason, he was afraid of him. Your grandfather was a most upright, honourable man. If he had ever been a reckless young man, or among objectionable companions, I could have understood the possibility of his dreading some awkward disclosure. But his whole life had been transparent, and, in all respects, honourable; and this puzzled me, for I could not account for his seeming embarrassed and timid in his own house, and so uneasy while Amerald Vernon continued there. I had given up asking your mamma to appear as usual in her place while he was there. One morning, however, she did come down, hating him just as much as ever, but thinking, I fancied, that it was making him too important, keeping out of the way on his account. I remember so well her standing for a few minutes in the window, before breakfast, and his joining her there, and talking to her. They were both looking out, so I could not see their faces. But the next thing that happened was their taking a long walk, up and down the terrace, together, after luncheon; after that, her demeanour changed entirely; he seemed to exercise an unaccountable fascination over her; and one morning, in the drawing-room, she told me, as coldly as if it was a matter of going to take a drive, that she had made up her mind to marry Sir Amerald Vernon. I don't think I was ever so astounded in all my life. I remonstrated and represented all I could, but it was in vain; whatever his fascination was, it had prevailed, and I might as well have tried to lift the house from its foundations by my eloquence. She must have fallen in love with him. Her father always made a pet of her; too much, indeed. She would, perhaps, under other management, have learned to be less wilful and less haughty. So, I suppose, he let her do as she pleased. But the end of it was that she did marry him; and, I think, her liking, if there was any, expired before two months were over, for when I saw them next, she seemed—begging your pardon, my dear—to hate him as much as ever. They did not quarrel; I don't mean that. She was too cold and dignified for any such exhibitions. But I could not mistake her. There was fixed dislike. And when, two years later, he lost his life by the fall of his horse, I don't think she cried a single tear, and I never heard her speak of him, except now and then, as coolly and curtly as you might mention a not very pleasant acquaintance who had gone to Van Diemen's Land."

These recollections of Maximilla Medwyn's revived in Maud's mind a scene, which often recurred of itself.

It was one of those short scenes, in the remembrance of which fear and disgust are mingled; to disclosing which there grows an invincible repugnance, and on which the mind silently dwells with a sense of odious curiosity.

When she was a little thing, some five or six years of age, she was fond of old Margaret Creswell, who had been her mother's nurse. She used to run to her as a redresser of grievances, and to pour out her complaints and petitions at her knees. But a time came when her protectress was to take her last leave of her and of all things.

The old woman was dying, and found dying a hard and tedious piece of work. The child had not been in her room for four months, and one day, in a state of rebellion against some new rule of her mamma's, she broke from the nursery, and ran into old Margaret Creswell's room.

She was sitting up, in flannels, by the fire. The room was darkened. A little table, with her medicine bottles, her table-

spoon, and glasses, was beside her. With her one idea the child trotted into the room, prattled and sobbed through her story, and ended by saying, "And that wouldn't be done to me if papa was alive."

The figure in the flannels beckoned, and, for the first time, a little awe stole over the child; she drew near, trying to see her more distinctly in the obscurity. When she did, it was not the face she knew. There was no smile there. The face was hollow and yellow, a clammy blackness was about the lips, the eyes looked at her, large and earnest; the child came beside her, returning her strange gaze in silence. She was frightened that such a thing should be Maggie Creswell.

The old woman placed her bony hand on the child's arm, and clasped it feebly. She spoke in a hard whisper, with a little quick panting at every word.

"That's Anne Holt has been saying that; it's a shame to be putting things in your head against your good mamma. Well it is for you that you are under her, and not under him; no blacker villain ever lived on earth than your papa. Keep that to yourself; if you tell any one in the nursery, I'll come to you after I'm dead, and frighten you." She let go her arm, and said, "Go now to your toys, and do as mamma bids you, and be thankful."

Very much scared, and very quiet, the child stole back to the nursery, and kept the secret guarded by that menace.

That dark room; the old woman, stern and changed; the last words she was ever to hear from her; and the dreadful terms of hatred applied to her father, which she tried to put away as a blasphemy, returned often, and drew her into conjecture.

"Was there any reason," she asked her Cousin Max, after a little silence, "for mamma's want of affection for poor papa?"

"No particular reason—no good reason. As a husband, I don't think there was anything against him. He devoted himself very much to his duties, and did his best to become a popular and useful country gentleman. I suppose she repented too late, and had acted on an impulse, and was disgusted to find, as many of us are, that the past is irrevocable."

Old Miss Maximilla sighed. Perhaps she had a retrospect to regret, and Maud, with the world before her, looked for a moment on the carpet sadly.

"I don't know your mamma, my dear; she has been always a sealed book to me. I don't think she ever wanted either sympathy or advice. I don't think any one ever knew her. *I* never could, and I have long given up the riddle. But, dear me, it is almost one o'clock. Run away, my dear, and let your poor old cousin get to her bed. I shan't go for a day or two, and we shall have time enough; I have fifty things to talk to you about. Good-night." And so they parted till next morning.

CHAPTER XIX. BREAKFAST.

At half-past nine in the morning, the roar of the gong spreads shivering and swelling through rooms and passages, up staircases, great and small, through lobbies and long galleries, calling all the inmates of Roydon Hall to prayers.

In a long room which projects, at the end, in a mass of stone-shafted window, they assemble. A hundred years ago, and more, the then Vernon of Roydon gave to this great chamber, as nearly as he could, the character of a chapel. The light streams in through stained glass, brought from Antwerp tradition says, flaming from the base up to the cornice with sacred story. The oak carving of this sombre room is admired by critics, who say that the spoils of some ancient church must have furnished it. Mr. Coke, the elderly attorney, with his head full of the strategy of the consulting-room and the rhetoric of the courts, is for a moment solemnised, as he enters and looks round him. He then falls to admiring, in detail, the stained glass. He and Miss Max are the only guests at present in the house. It is a very small party confronting so imposing an array of servants. There is hardly another house in England where so prodigious a household assembles. Mr. Coke, whose business brings him, about settlements and at other legal crises, to many noble houses, is struck by the unusual superfluity of servant-kind here, and while Mr. Penrhyn, Lady Vernon's secretary, who officiates, is reading a chapter from the Old Testament, he tries to count them, but his polling always breaks down in the middle, at the back rows; and then comes the thought, "Here are just one lady and her daughter, a girl, to be attended to, and this enormous piece of machinery is got up and maintained, for that simple end;" and the words of "the preacher" stand good to this hour: "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?"

These morning prayers of Lady Vernon's

are unusually long. There are the psalms of the day, and the chapters, and, in fact, a "service," which lasts about half an hour.

Mr. Penrhyn, who officiates, has had his breakfast an hour ago, in his own little office, and having talked and smirked a little, remits himself, in a fuss, to his work.

The breakfast-room still bears the ancient title of the "parlour," and is a spacious and cheery apartment, hung with festive tapestry, and opening into the dining-room. Here the little party of four assembled.

"It is eleven years, Mr. Coke, I was counting up last night, since I last saw you; and I believe you are one of the very oldest friends I have," said Miss Max. "Why don't you pay me a visit at Wybourne, when your excursions carry you to points so near as Hammerton and Dake's Hall? I heard of you there. I don't think it was kind."

"It is all your fault," said Lady Vernon. "He went to Dake's Hall to arrange settlements. Why don't you give him a reason to visit you?"

"Thank you very much, Lady Vernon," put in Mr. Coke, merrily.

"I think it is rather hard that an old woman should be put into Coventry because she can't find any one to marry her," replied Miss Max.

"A lady who might have married any one of a score of suitors, every one eligible, has no case to make," Mr. Coke said.

"I think Cousin Max is right. I think one's liberty is a great deal," remarked Maud. "Doctor Malkin said last night what I quite agree in, that it is better to marry never, than once too often."

"He says that a woman who marries once is a fool," said Maximilla Medwyn, "but a woman who marries twice is a criminal."

"Is not that rather violent doctrine?" Mr. Coke inquired.

"I think he only said, who marries within a short time after the death of her husband," said Maud; "and you recollect the curious stories he told us? There was a woman who would not allow him to bleed her husband, whose life, he said, would certainly have been saved by it, pretending too great a tenderness for him to allow it, and, in a few weeks after his death, she married a person who lived in the house; and there was another story of a woman who married immediately after her husband's death, without the slightest suspicion, who, ten years later, was convicted of having murdered him, by hammering a nail into his head while he was asleep."

"But, seriously, I'm a mere slave, and can never command an hour, except when I get to the Continent, and letters can't find me any longer. Doctor Malkin was here last night? I don't know the people —which was he?" said the attorney.

"He is a pale man, with a high nose, and dishevelled black whiskers, and good eyes," Miss Maud answered.

"My dear Maud, that doesn't describe him," interposed Miss Max. "In the first place he squints; next, he is bald, and he has a long upper-lip and a short chin, and an odious smile, that I think is both conceited and insincere, and you could fancy him just the doctor, if he did not like you, to bleed you to death, or poison you by mistake."

"My dear Maximilla, how can you?" said Lady Vernon, gravely, with a glow in both cheeks that comes when she is either angry or otherwise agitated. "My cousin, Mr. Coke, is not acquainted with Doctor Malkin. She does not know him; but I do; and I have the very highest opinion of him. I have great confidence in his skill, and still greater in his integrity. He is as conscientious a person as I ever met in my life. I know no one more entirely trustworthy than Doctor Malkin."

Lady Vernon spoke coldly after her wont, but she was evidently in earnest.

"Then his countenance does him great wrong," answered Miss Max, cheerfully, "that's all I say. It is quite true I don't know him, and I don't desire to know him."

And she sipped her tea.

"I assure you, Mr. Coke, I speak from knowledge; there is no one of whose good sense and truth I have a higher opinion. I wished you to understand that," said Lady Vernon. "And I have an almost equally high opinion of his skill. For the last fifteen years he has been attending, in every illness, in this house; and he has been so attentive and so successful, it would be impossible not to have the highest opinion of him as a physician."

Perhaps Mr. Coke thought it a little odd that Lady Vernon should make such a point of his believing this country doctor a paragon; and wondered why the peculiar flush by which she betrayed excitement should glow in her cheeks, and make her broad, cold eyes, fiery.

"Country doctors are often the ablest," he remarked, letting the subject drop softly; "they get to know the idiosyncrasies of their small circle of patients so thoroughly; and their dispensaries and the

rustic population furnish an immense field of observation and experience. Does Lord Verney come to-day?"

"Yes; I'm sorry he does, he is such a bore, poor man; I should have preferred his staying away," replied Lady Vernon, with plaintive disgust. "Barroden comes, and so does Mr. Hildering."

"And each, I think, brings his solicitor with him?" asked Mr. Coke.

"I wrote to them to do so, and I suppose they will," answered Lady Vernon. "Only Sir Harry Strafford doesn't come."

"I don't think we are likely to hit upon anything very new. I have gone over it so often, and I don't think anything has escaped us," ruminated Mr. Coke. "Is there a solicitor to represent Miss Maud Vernon?"

"No, I did not think it necessary. Does it strike you that this room is lighter than it was when you were last here?" inquired Lady Vernon, a little irrelevantly. "I'll show you how that happens."

And breakfast being by this time over, she rose and walked to the great window that looks towards the east. Mr. Coke, a little thoughtful, followed her mechanically.

"Two great lime-trees stood just there, where you see the grass a little yellow, and they were so shaken by the storm last year, that they were pronounced unsafe, and had to come down; they were beautiful trees, but the room is a great deal lighter."

"Yes," said Mr. Coke. "It is rather complicated, you see, and there might be a conflict of interests, and as the meeting is a little formal, it would have relieved me of a responsibility, but I'll do my best."

"I don't see that any conflict *can* arise, Mr. Coke," said Lady Vernon, coldly. "At all events, if she wishes to ascertain her rights and opportunities, or whatever they are, separately, there is nothing to prevent her. What we do to-day can't fetter her in any way, and I thought you were quite competent to protect us both. It would be rather early to anticipate her litigating with her mother. I should hope there won't be an opportunity."

"No," acquiesced Mr. Coke; "I should have preferred that arrangement; but I'll do my best. At what hour do you expect the trustees, Lady Vernon?"

"They will all be here by three o'clock, if they keep their appointments. I think Mr. Hildering will come at one; he said so."

Mr. Coke was thoughtful; and when Lady Vernon was gone, he looked over his note-book for a time, and raising his eyes a little after, he saw the slight figure of Miss Maximilla Medwyn walking up and down the long terrace before the house.

He went out and joined her.

STORIES OF THE ITALIAN PEASANTRY.

Stories in prose and verse, which can be sung or recited by the fireside, are great favourites in Italy, especially among the peasant classes, and in the families of poor villagers and other tenants of the hills and valleys. In this category must be included shepherds and foresters, muleteers, charcoal-burners, and fishers; perhaps smugglers and brigands. The fishermen of the Northern Lakes are not sailors in the strict sense of the word; they are peasants, just as soldiers and volunteers are landsmen, whether they are employed to fight on battle-fields or on board ship. These (the lake peasantry) and the seafaring men of the coast are the great patrons of the "mercanti," or wandering pedlars, who carry their stores of merchandise into fishing villages and mountain districts, far away from the track of civilisation. Men of this sort supply the peasantry of Italy with all they want in the shape of books—that is, pamphlets—together with ribbons, lace, ear-rings, beads, rosaries, necklaces, and other articles of use and luxury, from a pair of slippers or a cravat, to a wedding-ring or a pack of cards. These lusty fellows sing at the fairs; they are often able to play the flute or the Spanish guitar, and their stock of stories is generally very extensive; albeit, now and then rather equivocal. Their collections of printed books generally consist of tracts, rudely stitched together, and printed on bad paper, detailing the Lives of the Saints, and the Adventures of Kings and Queens, and heroes of the olden time. These productions are duly authorised by the Church and patronised by the local priests, so that they obtain a rapid sale, and are read and understood in spite of the Latin (which no one understands) with which they are interlarded. It is only recently that the pedlars have taken to selling "profane" works along with the religious ones; for it is only recently that the taxes have been taken off literature, and the monopoly of education taken out of the hands of the priests; so that peasants may read what they like without

incurring the odium of their spiritual advisers, or the vengeance of Mother Church. It is chiefly on this account that the pedlars, as a class, are becoming less unique than they were in the days of the grand dukes and other petty rulers of Italy—their peddling tricks being more apparent now-a-days in driving heavy bargains, than in contributing to the enjoyment of their customers on the village green. Nay, it is said that they are becoming what is called "respectable," and are giving up the "comic" part of their business to clowns and buffoons. They sell more, and talk less, than formerly, selling a song off hand instead of singing it from house to house as of yore; and their great ambition is to become proprietors of a booth, preparatory to setting up a haberdasher's shop in some large village or market-town.

The stories of the peasantry are for the most part legendary, the names of their authors and the dates of their composition being, in many cases, unknown, even to collectors of ballads. They are printed and sewed together in a form somewhat similar to that of the Priest's Calendar and the Book of Mary, works which the peasantry, and other persons who profess to be well-informed, look upon as parts of the New Testament. They are sold at various prices averaging from two soldi (a penny) to a franc, and a franc and a half, the dearest books being bound in fancy covers, made of parchment, or coarse paper, and ornamented with woodcuts of an ambiguous character. Thus, a saint's portrait is often to be found attached to a story of brigands, and a standard-bearer, who appears to belong to the Austrian army, figures as a monk of the olden time, carrying the sacred flag or emblem of his convent.

The most popular of the stories of the peasantry is the novel or saga of the Reali di Francia, a work which is intimately connected with the Orlando Innamorato of Boyardo, and the still more famous Orlando Furioso of Ariosto, throwing much light on early manners, and the practice of knight-errantry. Its real title in English is the Royalties of France, but it might with equal propriety have been styled the Royalties of Spain, or the Kings and Queens of Fairyland. There is nothing in this book which might not have been written with equal truth about the kings and queens of England, or of any other part of Europe, and the Italian writer, who appears to have flourished at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, might have transferred the French scenes of his story from France to Lombardy, and the Roman ones from Italy to Languedoc, without much confusion. All the names in the book are Italian, with the exception of those of Constantine, Charlemagne, and one or two others, and the whole treatment of the story is as unlike anything French or Provençal as can well be conceived. It is, in fact, a kind of epic in prose—an Italian Morte d'Arthur, in which the heroes and heroines of chivalry are brought together in a quaint, but highly poetical manner, with plenty of dash and fervour, but with little or no adherence to truth. Fabulous times are brought before the reader in a spirit of truth, and facts are described and commented upon in a spirit of fable. History and geography are ignored; battles are fought; kings are crowned; wives are conquered at the sword's point. It is astonishing how many events of a dramatic character are compressed into one small volume.

The Royalties of France begins with an account of the conversion of Constantine, and the instalment of the first pope in the Eternal City. The name of this prelate is Sylvester, not Peter, which would seem to clash with the generally-received account of the first wearer of the papal crown. But it is to be presumed that this book was written at a time when people knew or cared little about chronology, or the bonâ fide annals of the Church, or it is possible that the writer was a bit of a sceptic in these matters, and thought that one name was as good as another in cases where both were open to doubt. But it is very certain that a pope bearing the name of Sylvester is entered on the Roman calendar as existing at the time of Constantine, and that that pope or bishop of Rome, whether his actual name was Sylvester or not, was in some way connected with the conversion of the Roman emperor. The Sylvester of the calendar, dubbed a saint by one of the mediæval popes, was the thirty-third on the list of sovereign pontiffs (Peter the Apostle being counted as the first), and reigned—if the annals be correct—twenty-two years, namely from the year 314 to 336; at which time three Constantines—Constantine the Great, Constantine the Second, and Constantine the African—successively reigned over the Roman empire. All the early popes, down to the year 526, were saints; Boniface the Second (the fifty-fifth successor of St. Peter) being the first uncanonised pope. Some of these saints were godly men, who won their

honours after death by a life of usefulness and self-denial, but others were mere impostors, and some were mystical beings who worked miracles out of the tomb. San Sylvester, who figures in the Royalties of France, was especially famous for his miracle of the turnips. But the story must speak for itself.

There lived in the neighbourhood of Rome in the days of Constantine, a certain pastor of the Church named Sylvester. He had been persecuted for his religion, and took refuge on a hill called Mount Sirach, where there was a wood with a cavern in it. But he was driven away from thence, and fled to Aspromonte, accompanied by two of his followers. He lived here for several months in quiet and seclusion, during which time Constantine, who had been suffering from leprosy for twelve years, fell dangerously ill, and exhausted all the arts of his physicians. At last one of them, who had no children of his own, and was looked upon as a kind of genius, prescribed a bath of children's blood. Seven little girls, three years of age, who were born on the same day and at the same hour, were to be bled to death on the morning of their birthday in the emperor's palace. Their clothes were to be burnt at a sacred fire, and their bodies thrown into the Tiber, so that nothing should remain of their identity while the emperor was taking his bath. But the mothers of the little babes, though devoted to the emperor, and belonging for the most part to the lower classes of society (so that a bribe or blood-money might have been deemed acceptable), objected to the doctor's prescription, and began shrieking and tearing their hair in the ante-chamber. Hearing all this noise, the emperor came out of his bath-room, and inquired the cause of the disturbance.

"What!" he exclaimed, "are the mothers sorry? They are ungrateful wretches! Give them some more money and let them be gone." And so saying he disappeared into an inner room.

Soon afterwards a second disturbance was heard, louder than the first, and a second time the emperor came out of his bath-room.

"What is the matter now?" exclaimed Constantine, who though very ill (as has been stated) was able to walk about. "Are these women not contented yet? Do they want more money?"

"If it please your majesty," said one of the servants, trembling in every limb, "they won't take the money. They want their children back!"

"This is very extraordinary!" said Constantine with a kind of start; "well, I suppose I must yield to them, for I do not like to make people uncomfortable. Take the children away!" So the babes were restored to their parents, and Constantine went without his bath; but not for long. Strange stories were flying about concerning the cures effected by another doctor, greater than any that had yet appeared. Sylvester, the persecuted Christian, had been going about bathing people in what he called a bath of righteousness, and sprinkling them with holy water; and the fame of these things, after being reported in various parts of Christendom, reached the emperor's palace. Constantine sent for one of his barons, called Lucius Alboyne, and bade him ride to Aspromonte at the head of a thousand knights, and bring the hermit to Rome. The baron, setting out immediately, arrived at his journey's end early on the fourth day. When he and his troops arrived at the foot of the hill, Sylvester was at prayers, and thinking his time was come (for he looked forward to a martyr's death), he went out to meet Alboyne, who, leaving his troops in the valley, advanced with one attendant towards the sacred grove. He immediately made himself known to Sylvester, telling him that Constantine had sent for him.

Sylvester smiled. "I was prepared for this," said he, "for I have seen angels in my dreams, and I know by this sign that my time has come."

"I have a thousand of these angels down yonder," said the sturdy Alboyne, with a loud, mocking laugh. "They are waiting for us with drawn swords. Hasten, I pray you, for our Lord expects us."

"My Lord expects me, indeed," said the hermit, piously; "but I am glad of this!" He then asked Alboyne two favours; first, whether his followers, or fellow-Christians, might be allowed to stay on the hill and practise their religion as heretofore, and, secondly, whether he might be allowed to say mass before he went away. Both these favours were granted, and the two entering the garden, the holy man took a few turnip-seeds out of a sack, planted them in the earth, and made the sign of the cross above them with his right hand. He then performed mass—greatly to the astonishment of Alboyne, who had never seen anything of the kind before—and, lo! as he spoke, the turnips rose out of the ground and covered all the strips of earth over which the cross had been signed; so that

the heathen Roman soldier saw and believed at once, and asked to be baptised. When he had confessed his sins, and had received absolution for the same, the two set out together, and arrived in Rome on the fourth day, accompanied by the thousand knights. The travellers were at once admitted to a private audience.

"I hear you are a great doctor," said the emperor, very kindly, when he had dismissed Alboyne. "Where is this water that you recommend? How much does it cost? How many baths must I take a day?"

"The water that I recommend is the Water of Eternal Life," said the hermit, with a smile. "It costs nothing. One bath, if taken in a spirit of truth, is sufficient."

"But what is this water called?" asked the emperor, whose curiosity was now fairly roused; "my doctors have never said anything about it. I suppose it is some new invention?"

"It is older than the kingdoms of the earth," said the saint, lifting his eyes to heaven, "and it is called acqua santa, or the water of baptism."

"But will it cure me of my illness?" asked the emperor, still undecided.

"It will cure you and all mankind of all your illnesses, and prepare you and all of us for the life to come."

"Then give me some of this water in the name of charity, for I like your face, my father, and I am sure you are a good man."

The emperor bowed his head, and Sylvester sprinkled him with holy water, so that the sufferer was instantly cured of his leprosy, and became a Christian and a notable pillar of the Church, nay, its principal supporter. In a few years the whole of the Roman empire was converted to Christianity, and Sylvester was made bishop, and then pope of Rome.

Another very popular story in the Reali di Francia is the story of Rizzio or Rizzieri, the first of the Palladins, and Fegra-Albana, daughter of the King of Tunis. It is as pretty a piece of foolishness as one may wish to read, and has served as a model for many stories of a similar kind in France, Italy, and Spain, and also in Germany and England, where stories of knight-errantry were at one time very popular.

Two versions of the story exist: one short and sweet, like a nursery tale, or the song the fishers sing in the Bay of Naples; the other long-winded, and spun out into a kind of prose ballad, like the legends of the saints, with fifty episodes or sequels, each of which is, properly speaking, a separate story, though the names of the heroes and heroines are always the same. In the long version Rizzio is taken prisoner when he goes to Tunis, and is liberated by his jailer's daughter on condition that he marries her, which he is loth to do, as she has one eye larger than the other. He then enters the lists as the champion of Fegra-Albana, the king's daughter, and conquers all his foes; but the evil-eyed lady appears when least expected, and he is unable to obtain the hand of the beautiful princess, but is seized by treachery and shipped off to sea, where, after many strange adventures, he is sold to pirates. He escapes by an act of prowess and skill, worthy of Sindbad the Sailor and Monte Christo combined, and fights his way back to Africa, across Turkey and the Holy Land, making his appearance once more at the court of the King of Tunis, where, on being recognised by the faithful page Arcail, he is led to his mistress's bower, and there lodged and fed, till he is able to take part in another tournament. He gains a second victory, but Fegra-Albana, thinking he is killed, poisons herself, and the poor Palladin takes ship for Sicily, with Arcail for his man-at-arms, and gains more victories in field and bower, winning the love of another lady called Albana, but not Fegra, whom he marries and makes his queen; for he becomes a king of men. We have chosen the shorter and prettier of the two stories, that which brings the adventures of Rizzio and Albana to a happy climax, without putting them to unnecessary torture. Some authorities affirm that this is not the oldest version; but we have never felt particularly angry with those writers who put Chevy Chase and other ballads and stories of the black-letter age of English poesy into a modern garb, and we shall not grumble at the present handiwork, or wish it older than it is, whoever its writer may have been.

King Dannebrunne, sometimes called the Sultan of Babylon, after fighting several battles in Italy in unison with other kings and princes of the border-lands of Africa and Asia, pitched his tents before the city of Rome and laid siege to it with an immense army, but without success. During the armistice which followed the first attack, he sent messengers to different parts of the world—to Spain, to Egypt, to Arabia, to Persia, and to Turkey—an-

nouncing that several kings and other potentates had been killed in the various engagements, and, among others, Prince Arcaro, cousin of the King of Tunis. To Tunis were sent three ambassadors to report the prince's death, and to contract for a fresh supply of men and money in the event of war breaking out again. The king promised assistance, and the queen invited the ambassadors to her private room to obtain a detailed account of the battles, and to satisfy the curiosity of her maids of honour, which was at least as great as her own. When everything of a public nature had been described, the queen, bursting into tears, asked who killed Arcaro, saying she was sure he was some miserable assassin.

"No assassin, your majesty," said the principal ambassador, "but a brave young soldier, as beautiful as a girl, and with no beard on his chin. His name is Rizzio, the Palladin, and he is twenty years of age."

"So young, and yet so famous!" said the queen. "But who is he? I could kill him with my own hand. I hate him, for he slew Arcaro."

One of the maids of honour blushed deeply at these words, and yearned to hear more about the beautiful knight. This was Fegra-Albana, daughter of the queen, a girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age, who served at her mother's court. The ambassador proceeded with his story.

"Rizzio met Arcaro in single combat. Both were brave and true, and both were strong; but Rizzio was the stronger. He clove the prince's helm at one blow, and pierced him through the heart; but he refused the spoils of war, and left the corpse of that brave man to be honoured by his friends. Would to Heaven that this Rizzio were a Saracen, for I have seen him in the field, both before and after victory, and never have I seen a man to be compared with him!"

The queen frowned at these eulogies, but dismissed the ambassadors without giving vent to her displeasure, for she knew that the laws of chivalry required that men should speak well of their enemies. But she determined to avenge the death of Arcaro, and slew Rizzio many times in her dreams that night. Not so Fegra-Albana, whose youthful heart had become enamoured of this prodigy, and could not sleep for thinking of him. Next morning at an early hour she called her page Arcail, a little man with rosy cheeks, a year older than herself, and thus addressed him:

"Arcail, I have always loved you, and been kind to you, so I am sure you will do everything I wish. I want you to go to Rome, where the armies of King Dannebrunne are encamped, and find out Rizzio, who will be easily discovered, for he is the most beautiful man in that part of the world, and give him this letter, which I have written with my heart's blood, and tell him, good Arcail, that where the letter is blotted (and it is blotted in many places), tears of love and tenderness have fallen from the eyes of a king's daughter. And if you praise my eyes, it will be well, and still better will it be if you tell the whole truth, which is, that I am beautiful, though not worthy to be his bride; but of my love you cannot speak too much, for it is as deep as the sea, and reaches as far as Rome, where my hero lives, to which city, if you love me, Arcail, draw a passionate love-chain and draw my lover here, that I may be saved from early death."

The page swore to obey the lady's commands, and knelt down while she administered the oath, which was, that he would never reveal what he had that day heard, and that he would deliver the letter into no hands but those of Rizzio. After he had received money and passports from an officer of the palace, Fegra-Albana made him a present of a fine steed, and gave him one still finer for Rizzio, together with a shield and a garland of pearls, to be worn in the tilts and tournaments before the court. The page departed and took ship for Sicily, where he arrived in three weeks, after a stormy passage, and thence crossed the straits to the mainland, where he arrived in safety with the two horses, the shield, and the garland of pearls, reaching the camp of King Dannebrunne at the time of the full moon. When he found Rizzio he gave him the letter and the costly presents, and asked for food and a night's lodging, as he was tired out after his long journey.

Rizzio read the letter by the light of the moon, and was filled with wonder and delight at its contents, and turning to Arcail asked him, as he valued his own soul, to tell him all he knew about the Princess Albana: whether she was beautiful, how old she was, what were the principal characteristics of her beauty, and other matters more interesting to lovers than to quiet people like ourselves.

"There is only one sun in the sky," said Arcail, "and only one Albana on the earth. She is fairer than a flower and brighter than a star; she is as straight as a

palm-tree, and just tall enough to reach up to your heart if you stand side by side (as two such lovers ought), while she makes a bower for herself with her golden hair."

This reply satisfied Rizzio; that is to say, it made him very discontented, for he was glad to hear how beautiful his mistress was, but sorry that she lived so far away. He dismissed the page, and went into a lonely part of the camp, and read her letter over again, and when he came to the words, "I, Fegra-Albana, love my hero Rizzio. I have never seen him, but I will be true to him. I shall die if I see him not," he resolved to go to her. He dressed himself in his best armour, put on the shield and the garland of pearls which the king's daughter had sent to him, and bade Arcail saddle his horse. The page, who had refreshed himself with a few hours' sleep and a hearty supper, was glad to return to Africa to his dear mistress; so they set out immediately. The good Arab steeds ran fast, and the brave ship flew before the wind, and landed them in safety on the coast of Tunis. In a few hours they were at the king's palace, and in a few minutes more they were in the boudoir of the princess, who clapped her hands for joy (for she was a girl still) when she saw her lover. Then she remembered that she was a king's daughter, and drew herself up to her full height, and smiled upon the knight. This last, who had never seen anything so beautiful in all his life, unless it were his own gracious self reflected on his shield and in the brooks by the wayside, threw himself at her feet, and kneeling on one knee, exclaimed: "O, noble lady, deign to speak to me, for I am stricken down and conquered by your beauty, which is more potent than the swords of fifty enemies!" The lady smiled again, and bade him rise, and the two lovers, heedless of the presence of the page, heedless of the lateness of the hour, heedless of everything except their own happiness, began questioning each other about their former lives, and the end of it all was that Fegra-Albana became the affianced bride of Rizzio. In three days they were married, unbeknown to any one but the page and a Christian monk, who converted Arcail and Fegra-Albana to the true faith, and escaped with them to Italy, where the page, who had been secretly in love with the king's daughter, died of a broken heart. The others lived for many a year in peace and happiness, for Rizzio gave up fighting, and became a troubadour and the father of a large family of soldiers and poets.

These are the stories which the Italian peasant likes to read and listen to when he has done his work on the long summer evenings, or is leaning over the fire in winter, smoking his pipe. Some of the stories he loves to hear are stories of a later time—tales of every-day life, in which the miracles of the Madonna are the turning point of the plot, as in the story of the Gambler's Wife, whose soul was played for in a game at cards; or they are prose versions of Orlando Furioso, Morgante Maggiore, and other poems of chivalry done up in a modern dress to suit the tastes of villagers and lonely men lying on the outskirts of civilisation; men like the charcoal-burners of the Appenines, who live for nine months in the year without seeing a village, or hearing a church-bell. The peasant will tell you that these men are nearly all singers and story-tellers, and right glad is he when the winter is coming on (if he is a peasant of the right sort), to meet and drink a bout of wine with one of these demi-savages, certain beforehand that the wine will bring into notice some strange wild story of brigands and wolf-hunters. Sometimes the stories of his predilection are sung or chanted in a tremendous song two thousand lines in length, with a break in the middle of it for rest, or a glass of wine, or even for a dance, when a village feast or veglione is going on. At other times—as in the example above quoted—they are told in prose, with ad libitum songs to vary the monotony of the narrative: for songs are to the ear what pictures are to the eye, and stamp a subject on the memory as only songs and pictures can do when they are properly executed. And in these cases, especially in the south of Italy, where men's hearts are warmer, or more easily roused than in the northern provinces, one sometimes sees a crowd of peasants weeping hot tears about the wrongs of some imaginary lady, or a rough fellow threatening to beat the story-teller if he does not instantly let the hero out of prison! Few books afford more scope for this kind of sympathy than the Reali di Francia, and few books with which the present writer is acquainted are better adapted for the work they do: that of giving the peasants a taste for poetry and the fine arts. The Reali di Francia abounds in fit subjects for songs, and contains many charming episodes of love and war, stories of the Golden Age of history, which would do credit to any

library, and would not look very much out of place if they were bound up with a copy of the Morte d'Arthur.

FROM BORDEAUX TO PARIS, 1871.

THE DOVE OF FIFTEEN THOUSAND MESSAGES.

[Paris, Jan. 11.—The pigeon which arrived on Sunday brought in an immense mass of matter, which requires answer, and it has taken nearly two days to decipher all its messages. It brought in despatches for the Government, which when printed filled three or four columns of the newspapers; and in addition it has been the bearer of no less than fifteen thousand messages for private individuals. Never has a pigeon entered into a town bringing glad tidings to more people than the one which arrived on Sunday. If Paris needed to be comforted, in consequence of the psychological effects of the bombardment, the bird of good omen brought news which would far more than compensate for any depression produced by the Prussian shells. —Daily News.]

LADEN with sorrow—laden with love,
Soar to thy home again, beautiful dove!
Like rain to the desert thy tidings shall be,
Bird of good omen, our hope is in thee!

Up in the sunny air, up and away,
Swift as the dawn that announces the day,
And safe as the dawn from the shafts of the foe
That lurks in his murderous myriads below.

Tidings and messages float on thy wing;
Some of them glad as the blooms of the spring,
Some of them sad as the leaves when they fall,
But fresh from the hearts that have prompted them all.

From lover to lover, from husband to wife;
Volumes, one-sentenced, of death or of life,
Or message of hope from brave mother to son,
To nerve his right arm for the fight to be won.

Soar with them, haste with them, beautiful bird,
Untiring, unerring, unseen, and unheard,
And stay not thy flight on the breeze or the blast,
Till Paris, the lovely, receives thee at last.

Oh! proud will she be, the sad Queen of the World,
Oppressed, not uncrowned, with her banner unfurled,
To learn that her France in defiance and scorn,
Is armed to avenge every wrong she has borne.

Speed with thy tidings, beautiful dove!
Carry to Paris our hope and our love,
Our will to be free whatsoever betide.
Bird of good omen, may God be thy guide!

IN THE FIELD WITH THE PRUSSIANS.

A SORTIE FROM METZ.

THE 31st of August of the year 1870 was a fine, warm day. In and around Metz the sun shone brightly on hundreds of thousands of soldiers who were busily employed, for one of the greatest of military achievements was quickly and surely working its way to fulfilment. The Prussians and their allies were in crowds in all the villages surrounding Metz, and their foreposts and outposts stretched as far as they dared toward the awful forts.

It must not be supposed that the French host was kept within the walls of the town of Metz. The Germans had to keep a very respectful distance. Any one who has a good map of Metz will be able to trace the following villages, beginning at the south side of Metz by the Moselle bank, and working round eastward: Ars-sur-Moselle, Augny, Marly, Mercy le Haut, Ars Laquenery, Olgy, Nouilly, Vany, and Malroy. These were the villages occupied by the German troops. Nearer than this they dared not come, and thus the French had in some places a run of four or five miles from their fortress. From the village of Malroy, which lies north of Metz, and which is situated on the Moselle, right round the west side of Metz, there were no villages in which the Germans could find shelter consistent with their duty of keeping the French from breaking out of the city, so that something like one hundred thousand men who had had to bivouac under the open sky, during the time they had been near Metz, would have to keep that up till the place was either taken or relieved. The prospect was not an enjoyable one for the poor fellows, for stories were abroad that Metz had provisions for six months, and thus the campaign would last far into winter.

The position of Metz is not difficult to understand. It lies at the foot of two very high hills, which are surmounted by the strong forts before mentioned, and are dotted here and there by villages which, lying under the protection of the fort guns, were safe from German attack. The approaches to Metz on the other three sides are through level ground, and consist of long straight chaussées, with rows of trees on either side. Now, as these roads were sure to play an important feature in sorties, the Germans had strongly barricaded them with cut-down trees, which were placed with the branches towards Metz and their trunks towards the besiegers. On either side of these barricades, as well as behind them, the Prussians had tremendously strong earthworks; not mere hastily formed rifle-pits, but strong, well-formed earthworks, behind which hundreds of men might find shelter, and leisurely fire when occasion required.

The object in making these preparations was twofold—one of course being that the French, in making a sortie, must first conquer these obstacles before proceeding to more desperate work; the other, that in order to gain time for massing troops, such obstacles as cut-down trees, with their entanglement of branches, take a long time to get out of the way, particularly if they

have to be cleared away during an incessant shower of bullets, or perhaps of shells. Besides these earthworks and cut-down trees, every available house was turned into a little fortress; loopholed walls were everywhere visible as one approached the advanced Prussian posts.

For many days all the villagers in the neighbourhood were collected and made to work at rifle-pits, and in cutting down their trees; it was dreadful work for them, and the Prussians had to apply the flats of their swords pretty freely to make these Frenchmen do such distasteful work. People who are vanquished in war are not allowed to have any feelings, or if they have any they are not allowed to show them, so that many a proud Frenchman was obliged to pocket his rage and work for his enemies.

I was at a village near Metz on the day in question; some Prussian officers and I had had a bathe in the blue Moselle, from the boats of a pontoon bridge, in the very early morning, and as the mists from the plain rose and the sun came out, I set out for a walk to a hill overlooking the valley through which the river flowed. On reaching the summit of the hill I looked down, and to the right of where I was standing was one of the most lovely scenes I have ever witnessed. The beautiful little river was dancing on in the sunlight through green meadows, dotted by clumps of beautiful trees; by one of its banks a herd of oxen were lazily chewing the cud, while on the other a large flock of sheep were quietly grazing; it was as perfect a picture as I have ever seen. I scarcely altered my position, and looked down on my left; the contrast was perfectly appalling. Instead of green meadows there was a marshy swamp, without a tree to be seen; on and around this dreary waste, baggage waggons and market-tenders' carts swarmed; further on I could see men engaged in buying dead horses. The Moselle, muddied by the hoofs of some trooper's horse, carried on its bosom the carcass of a dead animal. From a bend of the river, right across the muddy plain, stretched a long mound, and behind the mound was a correspondingly long trench half filled with water, in which stood a number of Prussians on watch. At the next bend of the river another mound and trench stretched across the plain, and the intervening space between the two trenches was green. Behind this mound one caught sight of the red caps of the French, and every now and then the cruel, cold gleam of the bright sword-bayonets. After looking at this wonderful contrast between peace and war for some time, I came down from the hill into the village of Ars-sur-Moselle. In this wretched little place, through which thousands of Prussian soldiers streamed every day to one or other of the banks of the Moselle, I in vain looked for something to eat. Soldiers filled every house and building from garret to cellar, and neither apparently for love nor money was any food to be obtained. I wandered some way out of the village across the Moselle bridge, as at that time I had no settled employment, and was only waiting for what a sortie might bring me in the way of work. I had not gone very far when I came upon a Prussian bivouac by the wayside. The bivouac, as usual surrounded by a perfect Slough of Despond, was built of boughs; two or three fires were burning brightly, although it was mid-day, and some soldiers were boiling some potatoes that the French had sown, little expecting at the time they did so that the Prussians would gather in their crops. Two officers were sitting on chairs smoking cigars, with their feet towards a fire; one of these was a big, burly, good-natured looking individual, with a red face, the other was a spare, puny, bumptious, little fellow, with a turned-up nose, and two little tufts of red hair on either side of his chin.

Now I was getting, or rather had got, ravenously hungry, and I was determined, come what might, to get something to eat. So I went up to the two at the fire, and, putting the tips of the fingers of my left hand to my left temple, and bending my body forwards with two little jerks, I said: "Gentlemen, I have the honour; my name is ——." Thereupon the big officer rose from his seat, and went through the same gesticulations as I had done, and pronounced his name to be Von Kummerling Schmetterbau. His companion also went through the same contortions, and said his name was Grummingfeld Kissinger. This he croaked into my ear in such a deep voice that it almost made me laugh; it was so unlike the little body from which it came.

After this formal greeting I asked if they could direct me to the whereabouts of any market-tender's cart, as I was nothing more nor less than starving. The good-natured looking man said they had not seen their market-tender since that morning, but that he had got some bread and sausage; if I would accept it, he would think it a great honour. I said I thought it a great kindness on his part, but that

I could not think of taking it, knowing, as I did, that it must sometimes be very difficult for him to get a meal.

"We have our regular rations," he said; "so I must beg of you to take it. Who knows but that in a few days, or even hours, you may find me helpless and wounded on a field of battle; and if I refused to give you a little assistance now, do you think I could bear to accept your relief then? All those whom one can help in time of war one ought to help, for God knows there are enough sufferers already, without adding to the number by individual deeds of selfishness or cruelty."

I bowed my thanks and acquiescence of what he had said, and I soon found that my hunger disappeared before a huge hunch of black bread and sausage. To wash this rather indigestible food down, Von Kummerling Schmetterbau produced some rare good wine. "Requisition," thought I, as I tasted it; and I came to the conclusion that campaigning was not half so bad as people sometimes made out. After I had finished my repast, I asked the big burly lieutenant when he thought it likely that Marshal Bazaine would make a sortie.

"That's an impossibility for me to say correctly," was his answer; "but every day that he delays it makes it harder for him to break through, and easier for us, when he is out, to drive him back again."

"Do you think he has any means of communication with the outer world?"

"Yes; I fancy he has," said Von Schmetterbau. "They say there is a subterranean telegraph between Metz and Paris. Besides that, there is some private signalling going on."

I begged he would explain how that was possible.

"To give you an example of how it is done, I will give you an account of what I myself found going on," he said. "The other night my regiment had outpost duty on the other side of Ars. After seeing my men were all on the alert, after one of my rounds, I took a short stroll towards Ars. I had a cigar, and was enjoying it very much, when, at a window in the first house of the village, I noticed a red light. At first I took this to be a red flower painted on a lamp-glass, and I did not at first take much notice of it; but it suddenly shifted while I was looking on, and two red lights appeared, these, in their turn, being superseded by a red and a green one. I threw away my cigar, told a picket of men to surround the house, and took two poor innocent peasants prisoners. Of course they had never done anything wrong in their lives; but, as they could give no satisfactory reason for having dozens of lamp-glasses of various hues, their innocent assurances did not prevent their being taken to the nearest wood, and shot like dogs. No doubt exists in my mind that these worthies had for weeks been signalling to Metz before they were found out, and these kind of spies are the most dangerous sort there are, and often cause the deaths of thousands through such bare information as can be given by these lamp-glasses."

"Holloa!" said the little lieutenant, "there's a gun!"

We waited but a moment, and then we could distinctly hear, thud-thud, thud-thud, and then the sound of volley after volley, following in such quick succession as to remind me of the surging of the sea. The lieutenants hastily rose; Von Schmetterbau shook my hand, saying, "I may need you sooner than I thought." I answered, "I hope not," and in a few minutes the bivouac fires were deserted, and the little company had set out to join its regiment at the appointed rallying post. It was curious to see the rueful faces of some of the soldiers who had to turn the almost cooked potatoes on to the earth, in order that their cooking utensils should not be left behind. The hot black little cans had all to be strapped on to the top of their knapsacks, just as if they had been bright and clean. The alacrity was wonderful; the Prussian officers have no trouble in collecting their men, as they seem instinctively to know exactly what is required of them, and long before the alarming trumpet's blast, they roll up their great-coats, and prepare themselves for the signal, so that, when it does come, the officers have only to say, "Shoulder knapsacks and arms! Vorwärts!" and they fall into ranks as they proceed.

I now looked about to find some means of conveyance to take me to the battle-field. I was not long in finding what I wanted, in the shape of a waggon with surgical stores, which was coming from Pange, and going near the battle-field. A young German surgeon was sitting on some mattresses, and he gladly gave me a seat by his side.

"Whereabouts is the fighting?" said I, producing a map I had with me.

"I don't exactly know," answered my fellow-voyager; "but it's on this side the Moselle. That Bazaine has broken out. I have orders to go to St. Barbe. If you want to go under fire, you can get out any-

where you like between here and there. And if you walk towards Metz you will soon get more than you want. I was in the fight of the 14th of August, by Pange," continued he, "and I never wish to go under fire again. I prayed more in five minutes than I did all my life before."

"Is it so very terrific?" I asked, in order to hear what description he would give of it.

"Terrific!" he ejaculated; "I should rather think it is. Listen to that."

We both held our breath, and in spite of the grinding of the cart-wheels along the road, and the clatter of the horses' hoofs, we could distinctly hear something besides the loud booming of the guns.

"That surging noise is the hiss of bullets," said he; "and when one is not really in the action, but has only to take a passive part in it, I can tell you it's enough to turn one's hair white, that terrific hiss, let alone what one sees from the effect of one bursting shell. It's all very well for the combatants to rush into the fire; they have several feelings which sustain them; esprit de corps is perhaps the strongest. Then they long for revenge, and are to a certain extent blind to the noises and scenes around them; but the non-combatant, let him be doctor or peasant, who is mixed up with crashing battalions, will not forget his feelings till the day of his death."

As the cart proceeded, the din of battle became louder and louder. It was about seven in the evening, and the first cannon had been heard at four in the afternoon. The battle raged more furiously than ever; there was a heavy cloud of smoke extending several thousand yards, which was perceptibly increasing in size, and by it the tide of battle seemed rolling against the Prussians.

"Vany seems to be about the place where the fighting is hottest," said my companion. "If you'll take my advice, you will not go that way. From what I can see and hear, it strikes me Bazaine is well out of Metz, and if so there will be terrible work to-morrow again."

"Here come the ambulances," said our driver.

We looked in the direction indicated, and eight cumbersome waggons were seen coming almost at right angles to us. I said good-bye to the young surgeon, thanked him for his company and help on the road he had given me, and went up to the ambulance waggons. I touched my hat to the head surgeon, told him who I was, and asked to be permitted to follow his ambulance.

"Certainly," was his answer. "Would that there were hundreds more like you coming, for there won't be much sleep for us for the next three or four days. It seems to be a heavy cannonade."

The ambulance waggons belonged to the First Army Corps.

"What corps are engaged?" I asked a Prussian surgeon, who was bestriding one of the most miserable specimens of the equine species that I have ever beheld.

"I can't say," replied the surgeon. "Of course, our corps (the First) is there, and, I think, the Seventh; but I don't know what others."

The ambulances were now fast approaching the conflict, and as we neared, columns of ammunition waggons and regiments pressing on to the fight were everywhere visible.

"We must not go nearer than this," said the head doctor. "Halt!" The waggons drew up.

Night was now casting its sombre shadows over the thick, sulphurous clouds. I could distinctly see the streaks of fire and hear the dull thud, thud, which rolled along the leaden atmosphere unceasingly. Just as the darkness closed in, the fires of death ceased, and stillness reigned once more, broken only by the sigh of pain, the death rattle in some brave fellow's throat, or the convulsive kick of some half-slaughtered charger. Through the hours of this short summer night the dying had to comfort themselves, for such was the utter confusion into which the Germans had been thrown, that a Prussian colonel told me no man knew where he stood, and that Bazaine, with the whole of his forces, had broken through. I was proceeding to see if it were possible to get a little nearer, when I was arrested by the gruff challenge of a German sentry, "Wer da?" I went up to him, but before going many steps he bade me halt, and tell him who I was. I told him. To my joy, I found it was one of the soldiers from Von Kummerling Schmetterbau's bivouac; he knew my voice. I asked him where the lieutenants were.

"Einer ist schon Todt," he said.

"Which of them is dead?" I asked.

"Der Kleiner," was his answer.

"Poor little Kissinger," I thought; "this afternoon full of conceit, and so soon to be cut down." My short reverie was broken by some one calling to the sentry to know whether he was on the look-out.

"Ya, Herr Lieutenant," was his answer; "I stand like a wall."

The lieutenant passed on, the rain began to fall, and I felt wretchedly cold.

"Did you see Lieutenant Kissinger shot?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," answered the sentry. "I am his servant, and was sent back to help him, but I found he was dead; bullet through forehead, sir; no hope."

"Can I get to the wounded, to help them?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said the man, "orders are to let no ambulance go on the battle-field, and no one is to strike a light, not so much as to light a pipe; so you would not be able to do much, sir. But, if you would like to speak to Lieutenant Schmetterbau, you will find him rolled up in his great-coat asleep, behind a cut-down tree, to my right."

I thanked the civil sentry, and made my way to the tree indicated. I soon picked out the huge form of the lieutenant, thinking, as I did so, that bullets choose strange billets, and that it was wonderful that the little lieutenant's forehead should have received a bullet, while his ponderous companion's broad chest had escaped. It was marvellous how he slept, still within chassepot range in all probability.

"Ah," he said, awaking "how have you found me?"

"By the sentry, against whom I happened to stumble," was my reply. "I want to go and help the wounded," I said. "How do you advise me to set about it? Which way are the French?"

He raised his hand and waved it very nearly in a circle round his head, and said: "That way."

"How can you sleep?" I said. "We must be in a frightfully perilous position."

"So we are," was his answer. "There are eighty thousand French out, if I mistake not. Good-night, my dear comrade," he said. "I must get a little more sleep. Nature refuses to be polite."

I left him for ever; the next day he, too, slept the sleep of death, and a little mound bearing a wooden cross is all that marks the last resting-place of the good-natured Prussian lieutenant.

WILL O' THE WISP AND HIS RELATIONS.

PEOPLE are not yet tired of asking for the real meaning of Will o' the Wisp. Time after time the question is raised whether Will has a real existence, or is only a phantom; whether a natural phenomenon, a creation of the fancy, or a relic of superstition from dark ages. Will spells his name in many ways: Will o' the Wisp, Will a'. Wisp, Will with a Wisp, Dank Will; sometimes the sex is changed, and we have Kitty with a Wisp; sometimes it becomes Jack, in the form of Jack o' Lantern, Jack in the Lantern, Jack with the Lantern, Hob o' Lantern, Hobby Lantern, and even Peg a' Lantern; then there is Kit o' the Candlestick, and Gill or Gyl Burnt Tail, and Friar's Lantern. The German Irrwisch appears to have the same meaning; but the Italian Luccida belongs to the insect kind, in companionship with the glowworm, the fire-fly, and the lantern-fly. Will and Jack are brothers, perhaps twins, perhaps one identity with many names.

Concerning the luminous appearances which have given rise to the popular notion about Will o' the Wisp and Jack o' Lantern, it may be well to present a few descriptions by persons who have narrated what they saw, or thought they saw, but who rather sought for an explanation than fashioned one for themselves. A letter to Baxter, from a Mr. Davis, noticed a nocturnal light, which was believed in by the Welsh in those days, and was called the Tan-we, or Tan-wed. It was described as a light "appearing in the lower region of the air, straight and long, not much unlike a glaive; it shoots directly and level, as who should say I'll hit, but far more slowly than falling stars. It lighteneth all the air and ground where it passeth, and lasteth three or four miles or more, for aught is known; because no man seeth the rising or beginning of it; and when it falls to the ground it sparkleth and lighteth all about." This relates to a district where the corpse-candle was very generally believed in, and is, indeed, still believed in to a considerable extent. A short time before death, a light was to be seen proceeding from the house of a sick person, and pursuing its way towards the churchyard; it was supposed to presage death. Grose gave very exact details, as if all the causes and effects had been ascertained with scientific precision. "If a little candle is seen, of a pale bluish colour, then follows the corpse of some infant; if a larger one, then the corpse of some one come to age. If there be seen two, three, or more of different sizes, some big, some small, then shall so many corpses pass together, and of such ages or degrees. If two candles come from different places, and be seen to meet, the corpses will do the same; and if any of them be seen to turn aside, through some by-path leading to the church, the follow-

ing corpse will be forced to take exactly the same way." Most of these so-called corpse-candles appear in graveyards and swamps, and are, in all probability, identical with Will and Jack now to be more particularly noticed.

Several years ago a gentleman was travelling in the south of Ireland one night, when, being a few miles from Killarney, he saw a light flickering about, vanishing at intervals, and as often reappearing. His car-driver and he stopped some time, and observed it steadily. The light varied from fifty to a hundred yards distance. The air was very still, the time about nine o'clock on a September evening. The peasantry often saw the light in various pieces of marshy ground.

A resident near Cambridge has described a light which he saw in a fenny bog on the Newmarket road, of which many varieties had been seen by him in Norfolk and Suffolk. The appearance was always so peculiar, and the movements so fantastic, that it seemed to him strange for the rustics to liken the light to a lantern. The Gentleman's Magazine, about forty years ago, said: "In the parish of St. Austell, in Cornwall, there is a singular phenomenon. It is the appearance of light near the turnpike-road at Hill Head, about three quarters of a mile west of the town. In the summer season it is rarely to be seen; but in the winter, particularly in the months of November and December, scarcely a dark night passes in which it is not visible. It appears of a yellow hue, and seems to resemble a small flame. It is generally stationary; and when it moves it wanders but little from its primitive spot, sometimes mounting upwards, and then descending to the earth. As it has frequented this spot from time immemorial, it is now rendered so familiar, that it almost ceases to excite attention." What the Cornish people thought about it we are not told. Lights of the same kind have been seen dancing over a moor near Torrington, in Devonshire, and over undrained land in North Lincolnshire.

A Warrington newspaper, not very long ago, gave a circumstantial account of a Will o' the Wisp, useful on account of its clearness. On going into his garden about ten o'clock on a February night, an inhabitant of a country district in Lancashire saw a light in a field, which floated down the wind for about a hundred yards, and then disappeared. He mounted on the garden fence to have a better outlook, and watched for a quarter of an hour. During that time eleven distinct lights rose in the same field, and floated down the wind various distances, from forty to a hundred and fifty yards, before disappearing. They seemed to him to shine with the brilliancy of the planet Jupiter; but this mode of comparison is of course not very trustworthy. Besides these, there were many smaller lights continually rising, and floating ten or twenty yards before disappearing. The field in which these appearances were presented was a hollow one, lying on the banks of a brook. Still more detailed was an account of the Will o' the Wisp, or, rather, a whole family of Wills, given by Mr. Allies, in 1839. On the 30th of December, at Upton-on-Severn, he was told that the weather was such as denoted a probable approach of these lights; there was a white frost in early morn, then the sun rose behind a mantle of very red and beautifully stratified clouds, and in the evening rain fell heavily. On the following evening the phenomenon appeared in some meadows near the high road. "Sometimes it was only like a flash in the pan on the ground; at other times it rose up several feet, then fell to the earth and became extinguished; and many times it proceeded horizontally for fifty or a hundred yards with an undulating motion, like the flight of the laughing woodpecker, and about as rapid; and once or twice it proceeded with considerable rapidity in a straight line upon or close to the ground. The light of these ignes fatui was very clear and strong, much bluer than that of a candle, and very like that of an electric spark. Three or four of them looked larger, and as bright as the star Sirius. Of course they look dim when seen in ground fogs, but there was not any fog on the night in question; there was, however, a muddy closeness in the atmosphere, and at the same time a considerable breeze from the south-west. Those lights which shot horizontally invariably proceeded before the wind towards the north-east." Two nights afterwards, Mr. Allies not only witnessed a recurrence of the phenomenon, but at about eight o'clock two very beautiful lights rose together about fifty yards apart; one ascended several yards, and then fell to the ground in the shape of an arch, and vanished; the other proceeded in a horizontal direction for fifty yards, but vanished before it could be approached more closely.

A gentleman of Bath, about two years ago, was riding over Mere Down after dark on a December evening, when he

suddenly saw five lights glimmer forth on his horse's head. One was on each ear, about the size of the flame of a small taper, of a bluish colour; two of the others, smaller in size, were on the right eyebrow, and the remaining one on the left. They glimmered something like glowworms, or as if the parts had been rubbed with phosphorus. The night was dark, and a steady rain was falling; nevertheless, while the lights lasted, which was during a quarter of an hour's riding, the light given was sufficient to render visible the buckles on the bridle. The rider went on steadily, trying to make out what the glimmering could mean, when it disappeared as suddenly as it came. The horse had been taken from the stable, and had travelled no great distance. The animal exhibited no symptoms of unusual perspiration; but the rider, remembering that there had been thunder and lightning in the afternoon, was disposed to think that something in the atmosphere had produced the phenomenon.

Whether called Ignis Fatuus, Jack o' Lantern, or Will o' the Wisp, there can be no doubt that these nocturnal lights are real phenomena, susceptible of a scientific explanation, when all the facts are collected and compared. Of course, illusions, more or less ludicrous, are now and then mixed up in the matter. On some occasions, real lanterns of humble make have been mistaken for these nocturnal sprites under odd circumstances. About twenty years ago, the household of a country residence, within sight of a low swampy tract of meadow, were startled one September evening, and the superstitious among them frightened, by the appearance of strange, waving, wandering lights, which continued for several hours. The motion of these lights was very eccentric, and they traversed the district in every direction, up and down, backwards and forwards. All night this continued. As the day approached, the lights vanished, leaving the observers to account as well as they could for the phenomena. At length some of them, bolder than the rest, having examined the ground by daylight, and discovered neither sinking bog nor any other pitfall that would be hazardous after dark, resolved to ascertain the real nature and origin of the lights. They went on the following night, noiselessly and secretly, and followed up the dancing lights till they came close to them. When, lo! the mysterious visitors proved to be lanterns tied by collars to the necks of small well-trained setters, in the service of poachers who, with nets, were thus pursuing their avocation—catching almost every head of game on the estate.

The first modes of accounting for the lights were naturally more or less tinged with superstition. Being often near bogs and quagmires, the lights acquired the character of snares or decoys to lead travellers into danger. According to an old provincial legend, St. Peter was once travelling on horseback; his horse lost a shoe; a smith named Will put on a new one: and St. Peter was so pleased with the manner in which the work was done, that he offered to grant any favour the smith might ask. Will, who was getting advanced in years, begged that he might be made young again. It was done, and he spent a very rollicking and rakish life. One result of this was, that he became Will o' the Wisp, going about the world to lure travellers to their death. The Wisp is understood to mean an ignited twist of straws, in many a passage not quite so startling as this about St. Peter. The name Ignis Fatuus, or foolish fire, denotes a very similar idea, that of a light which leads foolish people astray. Gay says

> How Will o' Wisp misleads night-fearing clowns
> O'er hills, and sinking bogs, and pathless downs.

There are still peasants in Norfolk who call the Wills and the Jacks Lantern-men, and who believe that if any one goes with a real lighted lantern near them, the lantern-men will become enraged, knock him down, and break his lantern. There is also a phrase in use among the same peasants, of being "led-will'd," applied to any one who has lost his way after dark, and cannot find a gate or stile with which he is usually familiar enough; the remedy has at any rate the merit of simplicity—to turn the left stocking wrong side out, and renew the search.

In the seventeenth century, many writers had got a clue to a scientific explanation in a certain degree in conformity with the notions then in vogue concerning essences, vapours, spirits, and the like. Referring to lights visible in and near houses rather than to those in open swamps and graveyards, a still earlier philosopher said: "Such fyres are seene in moyst kitchens, sinckes, or guttours, and where the orfall of beastes killed are thrown." He was on the right track, if he had pursued the matter. In the time of the Charleses, one writer described the Will o' the Wisp, or Jack o' Lantern, as "a certain viscous substance, reflecting light in the dark, evaporated out of a fat earth, and flying in the air. It

commonly haunts churchyards and fens, because it is begotten out of fatness; it flies about rivers, hedges, &c., because in these places there is a certain flux of air." Another put forth his scientific explanation thus: "It is caused by a great and well-compacted exhalation, and being kindled, it stands in the ayre, and by the man's motion the ayre is moved, and the fire by the ayre, and so goes before or follows a man." Milton put a little science into his lines, when he treated the Ignis Fatuus as

> A wandering form,
> Compact of unctuous vapours which the night
> Condenses, and the cold environs round,
> Kindled through agitation to a flame.

In the time of George the Second, there was a pamphlet published with the title "Natural and Philosophical Conjectures on the Ignis Fatuus, or Jack in the Lanthorn: endeavouring to prove that the light so called proceeds from some flying insect, and not from a fixed vapour, as generally believed; with a descriptive and curious figure of the Indian lanthorn-fly, a nocturnal insect which carries a light in dark nights, equal to that of our Will with a Whisp." If this philosopher meant his observations to apply beyond the phenomenon of the glowworm, he was not so near the truth as some of his predecessors.

It is by this time pretty well ascertained, that most of these appearances, which consist of a glow without a flame, are due to phosphorescence. The strange substance phosphorus exists in all animal organisms; and when the organism is decomposed after death, the phosphorus makes its presence visible in the way so familiar to those who have ever seen stale fish in a dark cupboard. But when the phosphorus enters into new combination with hydrogen and other gases, or when those gases form inflammable mixtures without phosphorus, spontaneous combustion is likely to arise, and small flames to be produced. If decaying animal substance yields more phosphorus than decaying vegetables, the latter are a more abundant source of inflammable gases; and hence the fact that bogs, marshes, morasses, swamps, moors, damp meadows, ditch-sides, &c., are the places in which the flickering nocturnal lights are mostly to be seen produced by the combustion of the gases liberated from half-decomposed roots, stems, branches, and leaves. Particular states of the atmosphere hasten decomposition, and the lights are more abundant at such times. On the banks of the Trent, where mysterious Will often played his pranks some years ago, he has now almost disappeared, owing to the conversion of dank marshes into well-drained corn-land. In the instance noticed in the Warrington newspaper, it was remembered that several cows had been buried on the spot during the cattle plague of 1866; they had died of disease, and an inference may fairly be drawn that gases produced by putrefaction were concerned in the production of the flickering flames.

There is also another agency which has to be noticed, electricity, a power that flies about all terrestrial things in a way not yet so well explained as chemical combustion and ignition. Electricity does, undoubtedly, produce luminosity, more or less vivid, and under varying conditions. When we rub the furry coat of a cat backwards in the dark, a luminous effect is well known to be produced; and similar instances are numerous. There is a phenomenon known as St. Helen's fire, gradually corrupted into St. Helme's fire, and St. Elmo's fire; consisting of lights seen on the tips of soldiers' lances, the top-masts of ships, the spires of churches, and other pointed objects. Whenever they appear the air is in a peculiar electrical condition; and they are now reckoned among electrical phenomena, depending on the same principle as the light which streams off from points connected with an electrical machine. Some of the Spanish sailors call such a light a Cuerpo Santo, or holy body: a name corrupted into Corpusanse and even Complaisance. The lights on the tips of horses' ears, noticed in a former paragraph, are probably due to some electrical condition of the horse at the time, in a peculiar state of the air. Many of the old writers puzzled themselves greatly to find a rational cause for the lights. One of them said: "Experience witnesseth that the fyre do cleave manye times to the heads and eares of beastes and shoulders of men rydinge and going on foote. For the exhalations dispersed by the ayre cleave to the eares of horses and garments of men, which of the lightnesse doe ascend, and by the heate kindled. Also this is often caused where men and other beastes by a vehement and swift motion wax very hote, that the sweate, fattie and clammye, is sent forth, which kindling, yeldeth this fyre." Another, speaking rather of the appearances presented at sea, reasoned thus: "When clammy vapours, arising from the salt water and ugly slime, hover over the sea, they, by their motion in the winds and hot blasts, are often fired; these impressions will oftentimes cleave to

the masts and ropes of ships, by reason of their clamminess and glutinous substance." This singular theory is further developed, to render it available for weather prophecy. One of these nocturnal lights, he adds, portends a coming storm, two a calm: "They denote that the exhalation is divided, which is very thick; and so the thick matter of the tempest is dissolved and scattered abroad, by the same cause that the flame is divided; therefore no violent storm can arise, but rather a calm is promised." Another writer brought in sulphur to his aid: "When this meteor" (a light seen at a mast-head, &c.) "is seen, it is an argument that the tempest which it accompanied was caused by a sulphureous spirit, rarefying and violently moving the clouds. For the cause of the fire is a sulphureous and bituminous matter, driven downwards by the impetuous motion of the air, and kindled by much agitation." A singular muddle of phrases and notions.

Thomson had the Will o' the Wisp in his thoughts when he spoke of the benighted traveller beset by an evil genius:

> Struck from the root of slimy marshes, blue,
> The wild-fire scatters round, or, gather'd, trails
> A length of flame deceitful o'er the moss;
> Whither decoyed by the fantastic blaze,
> Now lost and now recover'd, he sinks abashed.

But he put a better interpretation upon this other kind of light:

> Sent by the better Genius of the night,
> Innoxious, gleaming on the horse's mane.

The phosphorescence of living insects, the phosphorescence of decaying animal substance, the spontaneous combustion of gases from decaying vegetable substance, and electrical action, are all concerned with Will and Jack and their family.

MISS PONSONBY'S COMPANION.

In Twelve Chapters.

CHAPTER XI. MERCY'S LAST TRIUMPH.

When Lilly awoke from her troubled sleep, and a dream that seemed one entanglement of hideous terrors, she started up with a scream, for Mercy was standing by the sofa, watching her. Mercy looked very pale and serious, and was pretending to wipe away her tears with the corner of her apron.

"Miss Dampier," she said, "I came to wake you. I am afraid that missus is worse. I can't get her to speak; she seems in a sort of torpor. Oh, Miss Dampier, I think that I see the signs of death, just as they came to poor Mrs. Baldock!"

Lilly leaped out of bed, and pulled back the curtains; it was a cold grey morning, and Miss Ponsonby lay there apparently in a death-sleep. Lilly listened; the breathing was scarcely audible. What had happened in the night seemed like a dreadful dream now, as she lifted the thin white hand that lay on the bed-clothes, and felt the wrist for the scarcely perceptible pulse.

"You gave her the medicine I see, miss," said Mercy, gliding round to the side of the bed where the table was, and seeing the fatal bottle was gone.

"I watched her closely, Mercy," said Lilly, not looking round, for fear of betraying herself, "and I attended to everything. Oh, I should never have forgiven myself if I had not. Dear, dear aunt. Oh, how I wish Mr. Tresham were here. We must send for him at once. Send Susan, Mercy."

"Dear, dear missus, she will be taken, I know she will," whined Mercy. "I heard the death-watch three times last night, just as I did the very night before Mrs. Baldock went to heaven. You can't hear her breathe now."

At that moment a sharp ring at the bell startled them both. Lilly ran and looked out.

"It is Mr. Tresham," she cried. "Thank God he has come, and we may still save her. Run, Mercy, and ask him up at once."

The next moment Tresham was in the room, pressing Lilly by the hand. That first glance he gave Lilly was full of love and confidence.

"This is strange," said the doctor. "I left her better yesterday, decidedly better, pulse firmer, breathing stronger. She was certainly agitated about the robbery, but naturally, for the superintendent tells me another ten-pound note has been stolen in some mysterious way. Let me see. Draw back the curtains, Mercy. I want to rouse her, and see the expression of her eyes—it is very strange, this alteration."

Mercy drew the curtain and pulled up the venetian blind. At the sound Miss Ponsonby moved, groaned feebly, and muttered one or two words in a drowsy voice. Tresham sat on the side of the bed, felt her pulse, trying in vain to rouse her, and lifted both eyelids.

"She had the medicine at daybreak, Lilly, and the medicine last night?"

"Mercy gave her the medicine last night," said Lilly; "since that I have attended to her. Oh, Frank, save her, save her!"

Tresham looked very serious as he turned to Mercy, wrote something on a card, and

said: "You must go as fast as you can to my surgery, and ask Lyddy for the two bottles I have written for on this card."

Mercy did not seem to show so much alacrity as she might have done.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I know the spirit of my poor missus will depart while I'm away from her. Let Susan go. I would not have dear missus die, and I not near her. Oh dear, oh dear! I shall soon follow her, I know I shall."

"You must go yourself, and at once," said Tresham, sternly. "Her life may depend upon it. Susan is only a child; she might make some mistake."

Spurred by this injunction, Mercy, whimpering, took the card and left. The moment the door closed upon her, Tresham flew to where Lilly knelt by the bedside.

"Lilly," he said, "some one has been giving her laudanum. Who, who is it? There is something in your manner that tells me something has happened. Is it that wicked wretch?"

Then Lilly rose and told all the events of the night—the softly-opened door, the gliding figure, the change of the medicines—she shuddered and nearly fainted as she told it, and all the horrible moments of the night passed again before her. Coupling the fact, she knew not how, with the robbery, the house seemed to her haunted by some evil spirit that infected it with mystery, terror, and crime.

"The bottle; give it me," said Frank. "There has been some dreadful wickedness working here."

Lilly drew the bottle from under her pillow. Frank took it to the light, smelt and tasted it.

"Good God!" he said; "as I suspected; chlorodyne! The superintendent told me that wretched woman, Mercy, had been buying chlorodyne in the town, but I laughed at his suspicions. If your aunt had drank this, in her state of health, she would now, most probably, be dead, and the guilt, if it had been detected, would have rested upon you. The woman must have given her some also last night. Were you here when she gave the draught?"

"Yes. When you left, and I came upstairs, I found Mercy pouring something from a bottle by the window; she stopped when she saw me, and gave me the glass to give aunt, going down-stairs immediately for the kettle or something she pretended to want."

"The wretch! That was to make you the person who gave it."

"When I gave the medicine into her hand, aunt looked and said it was much more than a dose, so I poured back all but a wineglassful."

"Lilly, then that saved her; for the woman had only put a little chlorodyne in it, and you probably disturbed her as she was mixing it. She had no doubt calculated that, if found out, the suspicion would fall on you, who had been so lately accused by your aunt. The woman was no doubt greedy for her legacy. Wretch!"

"Oh! You have saved me, Frank! You have saved her!" said Lilly.

Frank pressed her in his arms and kissed away her tears.

"Your aunt's life is still in danger, Lilly," he said. "The antidotes I shall use are sufficient to restore her in a short time; but I must watch her through the night, as we do not know how the prostration may tell on her in her enfeebled and susceptible state."

When Mercy returned with the required medicines, Frank administered the antidotes. As Tresham was about to take leave of Lilly in the hall, he suddenly stopped at the parlour door, and, to Mercy's surprise, requested a few words with her. The three entered the room, and Tresham closed the door.

"Mercy," he said, "do you know from what your mistress is now suffering?"

Mercy turned up her eyes and said, "Mrs. Baldock's doctor called it a fit."

"Such fits," said Tresham, sternly, as he produced the bottle of chlorodyne that Lilly had given him, "are sometimes the result of wrong medicines. Do you buy much of this sort of medicine? Is this a favourite remedy of yours?"

Mercy turned livid, but said sharply:

"The medicine you sent missus has had, and none else."

"Was this the bottle you filled last night with what I sent?"

"Miss Dampier's been telling lies of me, I see," said Mercy, with a sudden desperate outburst of spite. "She has been dreaming. I changed no medicine. She is more likely to change missus's medicine than I am." Mercy was determined to brazen it out, and began to guess what had happened. "She's a pretty one to talk of me; ask her about herself. Who stole the ten-pound note? Who was found with the letter in her hand, and half the stolen note inside it?"

Lilly burst into tears, and clung to Frank's arm. Mercy continued:

"She to tell lies of me! as if I'd put anything in dear missus's medicine. Who is

she to run me down? Let me hear what things she does say—all of it."

"You were seen last night coming into the room and changing the medicine I left for that which I have here. All this violence is thrown away. I can send you to prison any moment for attempting to murder."

"Well, if I did come in" (all the varnish of sanctimoniousness was gone now), "well, if I did come in, I was only seeing if the medicine was poured out ready. I am not answerable for your sending wrong medicines. And you" (here she turned like a tigress on Lilly), "shall I tell of you now, and let your sweetheart know who it was let the young man in yesterday morning, before we were all up, and tell him who was talking together several minutes in whispers in the parlour? Ask her. See, she can't deny it."

Tresham looked at Lilly; she turned from him and made no reply.

"Lilly, this is not so? This cannot be so. I would not believe an angel that told me that!"

But Lilly was still silent.

Then Mercy laughed bitterly, and Tresham turned and said:

"Once more, Lilly, I ask you if this is true?"

She made no reply. Frank turned from her and said:

"Lilly can you explain this, for it cuts my heart in two?"

She looked up with pure and radiant eyes, and said, "Frank, yes I can; but not now. Do trust in me, Frank. Will you? Do you?"

Frank was silent for a moment. Then he kissed Lilly, and said firmly, in a clear voice, "I DO!"

"Lovers and fools will believe anything," was Mercy's sneering comment on this noble trustfulness. "Hope you mayn't repent it. All I say is, curse her! and let her be cursed for telling lies to take away my character. Am I to blame because a wrong medicine's sent and missus has a fit? Pretty doings. Ugh!"

CHAPTER XII. THE THIEF IS CAUGHT.

THAT night Frank Tresham had resolved to closely watch his patient. At the turn of the night if this death-like torpor did not begin to yield to the remedies, the danger was imminent indeed. He and Dandy were the only living creatures awake in the old house. Even the elms had rocked themselves to sleep after their late trouble, and of the stolid bay-trees not a leaf stirred. The door between the two rooms was open. Frank sat by the pleasant fire in the parlour, thinking of Lilly. A warm and cheery light played upon the bureau, and Dandy, coiled up on the hearth-rug, dreamt of his old enemies, and occasionally moved uneasily, with a faint cry, that indicated the pugnacious and aggressive character of his dreams. The silence was so intense that when a jet of gas burst out of a bituminous lump of coal, like a fire fairy, and blazed away with a noisy and brilliant whiff of momentary flame, the effect was quite startling, and made the silence the next moment seem all the deeper. A little later, the sharp tapping of a rose-branch at the window roused Frank, so that, with his mind full of what had recently happened in that house, he rose, drew aside the curtains, and looked out into the pitchy darkness. Then, laughing to himself for indulging in such foolish imaginations, Tresham resumed his seat in the low-backed Queen Anne chair, that was Miss Ponsonby's throne, and presently he went to see his patient. He had carefully locked the other door of the bedroom, yet he could not help feeling a sort of half-expectation, half-dread, that, as he turned the corner of the great curtained wall of bed, he might come full butt on that shrouded figure, which Lilly had seen the night before bent on so mysterious and suspicious an errand. Yet this, too, was foolish, he at once felt, as he turned the corner, and shaded the night-light which he carried, to look at his sleeping patient, and to feel her pulse, which was just a beat or two faster. Even then, as the floor-planks creaked under his foot, and seemed replied to by a faint jar of the locked door that opened on the head of the stairs, he could not help listening for a moment to see if his quick sense could catch even the faintest sound above or below, that might indicate the approach or retreat of that invisible thief, whose two visits had brought such misery on that house. But there came no sound but the tick, tock, tick, tock of the old clock upon the stairs.

Tresham went back and sat by the fire, thinking of all that had happened since that eventful evening when he looked through the parlour window and saw Lilly sitting in the old high-backed chair, pensively reading a letter by the fire-light. Dear Lilly! that picture was indelibly printed on his memory. What letter was that? Who was it from? No, he trod down all base distrust—crushed it as he would have crushed a snake. Next came

the loss of the first ten pounds—so he reflected—stolen from the very room where he was sitting—the room that only Mercy, Lilly, and Susan had entered that day. Then came the superintendent's dark hints the night Gumboge got drunk and tapped at the window; but policemen were always mysterious, whether they knew anything or nothing. Mercy buying the chlorodyne, too; that was strange; yet it did not seem to have anything to do with the robbery. The loss of the second note was even more remarkable, because it had been taken in full daylight, when the door between the rooms was open, when the parlour door was locked, and when Miss Ponsonby was actually awake in the next room. But had she been awake? The thief must be some one acquainted with every movement in the house, and every one's ways. The strange story, as Tresham traced it, grew darker and darker from the suspicions of the superintendent about Lilly's letters to the mysterious person at Gypsum, and Miss Ponsonby's finding the half-note in Lilly's last letter. Then the interview in the early morning before any one was down. What could that mean? Was that man the thief, and had he obtained some mysterious hold over Lilly? No, that was wild and impossible. Entangled in these doubts and fears, like Victor Hugo's hero in the poisonous feelers of the sea-monster, Tresham still kept his faith firm in Lilly, and saw her pale, beautiful face gleaming calm and radiant above all this dark nightmare struggle. Worn out by watching—for he had been out all day—gradually sleep fell upon the young doctor. The book he had taken up to beguile the time slipped from his hand upon the carpet, rousing Dandy for just a moment, and a loose bit of silver-paper, covering a steel engraving in the first page, fell out as the book dropped.

Dandy opened one sleepy eye as the silver-paper swirled down by the leg of the table, then rose, wound himself up still more cosily, and slumbered.

The scenery of Tresham's dream was Indian. He was searching for Lilly through the ruined vaults and long stone passages of some Hindoo temple, whose priests had seized her for sacrifice. It was a troubled, terrible dream. Some of the passages through which he passed seemed so low that he could hardly stand upright in them, so narrow that he could hardly force himself through, with the little earthen lamp which he carried. In some of the passages he could see snakes glide into their holes as the light fell on them, and everywhere there was a ceaseless whirr, like the sound of a factory, from the countless flesh-coloured bats that clouded the air. In some of the rooms the roofs had fallen in, and he had to force and hew his way through great thorny bushes, full of threatening reptiles, and over masses of shattered pillars and broken pediments; as he toiled over these obstacles, he suddenly, to his unspeakable agony, heard Lilly screaming to him for help, as priests, whom he could not see, dragged her to their funeral pile; then came a clash of gongs and beating drums, announcing the coming sacrifice. Which way to go he knew not; the sound rose on all sides, and her voice grew more and more distant. He could hear some wild beast at that moment stirring in the covert through which he struggled. The thought of death at that moment, when he needed angels' wings and an angel's power to spring to Lilly's help, awoke him with a pang of agony.

In an instant he was wide awake; a faint rustling caught his ear; he did not rise, but looked round; he could hardly believe his senses; it was an enormous rat, quietly dragging towards the old bureau the piece of silver-paper which had dropped from the book that had fallen on the floor.

Moving with the utmost caution, not to alarm the animal, Tresham put out his foot and aroused Dandy, who instantly comprehending the situation, darted up wide awake, and, with a screaming yelp, sprang on his formidable antagonist, who at once dropped the silver-paper, turned and joined battle; but before Tresham could spring to Dandy's rescue, Dandy had been bitten off, and the rat had darted towards the bureau, slipped under it, and disappeared. In a moment Tresham, exerting all his strength, dragged back the ponderous bureau, calming Dandy, who was furious at the sudden discovery that the whole civilised world was teeming with rats, and, with a candle, examined the wainscoting with as much eager curiosity as Dandy himself. Yes, there at a corner of the dusty skirting-board near the window was an unmistakable rat-hole. It was not difficult, aided by the poker, to wrench back a portion of this, and trace the direction the hole took behind the boarding. Forcing away a foot of this somewhat roughly—for the importance of the strange discovery seemed to warrant the violence—Tresham, lying flat on the floor, thrust in his hand and discovered a rat's nest, in which he could feel some

fragments of gnawed wood. He then wrenched back more of the boarding, so as to get his hand still deeper in the passage to a further hole, from whence with the tongs he could draw out something soft, that seemed the lining of the final apartment of the rats, and, to his extreme delight, at last extracted a ten-pound note, scratched into strips, and the bitten fragments of another. Here, then, had been the real thief; here at last was the solution of the mystery. There could be no further doubt, Lilly's innocence was proved. Dandy, racing about his master as he examined the recovered notes, barked in insane triumph.

What happy yet what leaden-footed hours those seemed till daybreak came! Frank could look out and see in the grey light the two spinster elms nodding kindly good-morning to him, and the bay-trees shaking as in sombre laughter at the strange and happy conclusion of poor Lilly's troubles. A little robin came to the window where he stood, and, from a branch of honeysuckle, sang a little hymn of rejoicing as if at the happiness restored. Perhaps it was Lilly's good angel in disguise, Frank thought. Unable any longer to contain the secret, he rang the bell furiously, and then finding that means of communication not instantly successful, pulled at the up-stairs bell. Presently Susan came, frightened out of her wits, to announce that Mercy could nowhere be found. It was afterwards discovered that that worthy, soon after the doors were shut for the night, had tied up one or two things in a bundle, and, taking off her shoes, had unbolted a back door, and fled into the night, whither, no one in Crampton, not even Superintendent Humphries, ever could discover.

Need we describe the joyful meeting of Frank and Lilly, the recapitulation of the strange event of that night, the wonder and the delight, as they stood together at Miss Ponsonby's bedside, and told that amiable person all, to her infinite astonishment? She was still weak and ill, but the deadly torpor was quite removed.

"And now, Frank, you are dying to know, aren't you," said Lilly, when they went back to the parlour and stood by the window in the fresh sunlight, "who the mysterious person of Gypsum was who Mercy saw me talking to, and with whom I corresponded? Shall I tell you now?"

"Not unless you like, Lilly dear," said Frank. "You will tell me some day, I know. No, I don't want to know. Something good and kind led you to keep the secret from me, I am sure. I could not be jealous, because I knew you had given me your heart."

"I'm afraid I should have been jealous," said Lilly; "but no, I shouldn't, because I love you entirely. That man was a half-brother of mine, Frank, dear, who ran away to Australia, and, as was supposed, died there. A month ago, however, he wrote to me for money, from Gypsum, where he was earning what he could by riding steeple-chases and betting. I was afraid to tell aunt, because she would not have let me write to him, or send him money, poor fellow, which he was always asking for; and that is all the mystery."

One evening, two weeks after that strange discovery, Miss Ponsonby, sitting at a work-table by the old bureau (taking, in fact, dummy at a snug game of whist), expressed openly her decided satisfaction at, and approval of, Frank and Lilly's speedy union, and more than hinted that all her property would revert to the young doctor who had saved her life, and the dear niece who had tended her so lovingly.

Thanks to Tresham's care, Miss Ponsonby slowly recovered, and, six weeks after the discovery of the unpunished thief, Crampton bells broke into a clamour of rejoicing to announce the marriage of a certain young doctor with Miss Ponsonby's pretty companion. George, grimly smiling, was present at the wedding, with the young woman from Big Bookham on his arm, and Lyddy herself flung an old shoe with all her heart at her young master's carriage as it left Miss Ponsonby's house for the railway station, while little Lizzy and Susan, radiant with delight at the whole ceremonial, and with arms round each other's waists, cried, as Lyddy afterward colloquially expressed it, "like bitterns."

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Published at the Office, 26, Wellington St Strand. Printed by C. WHITING, Beaufort House, Duke St., Lincoln's Inn Fields