

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## THE ROSE AND THE KEY.

CHAPTER XLVI. GRIEF.

AT Roydon Hall, whither Doctor Malkin's thoughts had led him this morning, dulness reigned.

Maud was relieved of the embarrassment of a tête-à-tête with her mother at breakfast, by Lady Vernon's remaining in her room, in consequence of a cold.

She missed her cheery and energetic cousin. How on earth could she dispose of the day? She could have a carriage, of course, if she pleased, and drive where she liked. Whom should she visit?

About one o'clock her doubts on this point were ended by the arrival of Miss Tintern, who came to see her, having a great deal to say, and looking unhappy. She had come alone. Her father had ridden over to the Wymering Sessions.

"Is Lady Vernon coming down?" she asked immediately after their salutation.

"I can't say. But do you wish that we should be to ourselves?"

"Immensely. I have ever so much to tell you."

The young lady was in great distress.

"I don't know, Maud, whether I ought to tell you. It would, I fear, only embarrass you; but I have no one to speak to."

"What would embarrass me?"

"Keeping my secret, dear Maud."

"Never mind—not a bit. I'm not the least afraid," said Miss Maud, eagerly; for what young lady objects to hearing a secret?

"It is a secret I would not have told to any living creature for the world."

"Of course; I quite understand that. But I have no one to tell anything to, if I wished it. Mamma——"

"Oh, not *that* for the world!"

"Not to mamma? No, of course. But why particularly must it be concealed from her?"

"Well, I'll explain by-and-bye. Do you think she will come here? I should not like to be surprised. Would you mind walking out among the flowers? We could not be taken unawares there."

"I was thinking of that myself," said Maud, and the two young ladies walked into the garden.

As soon as they got to a quiet spot, under the three acacia-trees, with the scarlet and blue verbena in front, Miss Tintern looked round softly, and being assured that they were not observed, she began to pour forth her sorrows.

She began by narrating how Mr. Plimby, of Cowslip Meads, that detestable old bachelor, had wanted to dance very often with her at the Wymering ball, and how, after her papa had at last made her give him a quadrille, he had hardly left her for ten minutes all the rest of the evening.

"Oh, my dear Ethel, is he in love with you? Is he in love? I know he is. Oh, how delightful!" cried Maud, in an ecstasy of laughter.

"There's nothing to laugh at," said Ethel Tintern, a good deal hurt. "Don't you see how vexed I am, Maud?"

"He is such a figure! He is such a wonderful creature!" and again she broke into peals of laughter.

"Well, Maud, perhaps I had better come another day."

"Oh, oh, oh!" almost sobbed Maud, recovering a little, with tears in her eyes. "I'm so sorry I've interrupted you so shamefully. But he always struck me as so delightfully ridiculous; do tell me the rest."

"I suppose it is ridiculous, at least to every one who does not suffer from it; but

for me it is the greatest vexation. I wish it was no worse, but it is a great deal worse—vexation is no name for it."

"You must tell me all about it," said Maud. "You look so tragical, Ethel. Why, after all, it can't be so very awful. I don't think Mr. Plimby will run away with you against your will."

"Listen now, and judge; but, oh, Maud, remember what a confidence it is! I am going to tell you things, that but one other person in the world knows anything of."

"I'll not tell, I assure you, mamma never giving me an opportunity; and, besides, she is the last person on earth I should volunteer to tell anything to."

"No; I was thinking more of Miss Medwyn."

"Max shan't hear one word about it; no, upon my honour, not a living being shall ever hear a word about it till you give me leave."

And the young lady drew Miss Tintern towards her and kissed her.

"I know you won't tell. Where did I leave off? Oh yes, he has been, at one time or another, every day since the ball, to call at the Grange."

"And do you mean to tell me that all this mischief has been done by one quadrille at the Wymering ball?"

"No; it seems he has been paying me pretty little attentions, though I never perceived it, for more than a year, and I suppose he thinks he has made an impression, and that the time has come for being more explicit. And he has actually spoken to papa, who sent him to me."

"Well?"

"I refused him, of course. You could not suppose anything else."

"Well, then, if you did, where's the distress? I can't see what there is to trouble you."

"Well, listen. After I had refused him, papa, who was waiting to see him before he went, persuaded him that it was all a mistake, and that I did not know my own mind. This occurred yesterday, and he fixed to-morrow for his return to the Grange, where he is to have another interview with me. Only think!"

"Well, there's no great danger from that, is there?" said Maud.

"Wait till I've told you all. Papa returned, having spoken to him, and sent for me. He seemed very ill and pale, and I soon perceived he was very much agitated. I can never forget his face. And then he told me, oh, Maud, Maud! what I had not a suspicion of. He has been making im-

mense speculations in mines, and they have turned out badly, and he says he is ruined, and Mr. Plimby is his principal creditor, and that his being able still to live at the Grange, depends altogether on my saying 'yes,' and marrying him."

"Oh, darling! I'm so awfully sorry," said Maud, in consternation. "But it can't possibly be. Oh no! I believe every one exaggerates when they lose. You'll find it is nothing so bad as he thinks."

But Maud's consolation failed to comfort Miss Tintern—failed even to reassure herself.

"Well, Ethel, if things do go wrong, remember I shall be my own mistress very soon. I intend to go to my cousin Maximilla, and live with her, and you shall come—I'm quite serious—and live with us. We shall be the three happiest old maids in England. But, after all, Mr. Plimby, they say, is very rich, and no one, that I know of, ever said anything against him. I don't recommend him particularly, but he might be a better husband than a great many men who are thought very eligible indeed."

"No, no, no, Maud, dear. I know it is kindly said, but all that tortures me—it is totally impossible—and oh, Maud, darling, I am in such misery! Oh, Maud, you will think me so odious, and yet I could not help it. It was not my secret; but I have been concealing something ever so long, and I know you'll hate me."

"Hate you! Nonsense; what is it?"

And upon this invitation, with an effort, Miss Tintern told the story of her engagement to Captain Vivian.

"It was when I was at the Carisbrokes', last summer; and it has been ever since; and he has insisted on its being a secret; and I'm ashamed to look you in the face, Maud. And oh, what am I to do?"

And she threw her arms round Maud's neck and cried.

Maud, if the truth must be told, was a little affronted. The idea of having been duped and made use of by Captain Vivian to conceal his real attachment to another young lady, stung her pride.

"What am I to do, what am I to do?" sobbed poor Ethel's voice.

"What are you to do? By all means marry him, if you like him well enough. But I don't think he is the least worthy of you. I don't know a great deal of him. Very little, considering that he was so long here. He dances very nicely, that I do know, for I danced two or three dances with him at the ball. It may be that I

don't know him as well as other people, but he seems nothing like good enough for you."

Miss Tintern met this with a protest, and a torrent of the sort of eulogy with which the enamoured astonish those who still enjoy their senses, and then she continued:

"Oh, Maud, it is such a lesson to me. I ought never to have consented to this miserable concealment, and the idea of giving up Evelyn is simply despair—I should die."

"Well, don't give him up."

"I could not if I wished."

"Some way or other it will all come right, you'll find. How is Mr. Tintern; not ill, I hope?"

"He seems absent and anxious, but he bears up wonderfully; and he goes to sessions, and everything else, just as usual. I never was so astonished as when I learned the awful news from him."

"I don't think it is quite so bad as he would have you believe; that is, I'm sure he is making the worst of it."

"Well, darling Maud, I feel better since I told you. I think I should have gone mad if I had not some one like you just now to talk to; and remember, Maud, not a word to Miss Medwyn."

"Not one word, I promise, to a living creature."

"I'll not ask to see Lady Vernon. You can tell her I came in, but she was not down. I'll get into the carriage, now. Good-bye." And so she departed, and Maud returned to the house, wondering.

#### CHAPTER XLVII. ROYDON PARK.

IN the evening of that very lonely day Maud took a ramble in the park of Roydon.

There is nothing very bold or striking in the park, but it is prettily varied, with many rising undulations and rocky, fern-clad knolls, and many winding hollows. Here the yellow gorse perfumes the air, and brambles straggle over the rocks; the hawthorn and birch-trees stretch from their clefts, and pretty wild flowers show their many hues in sheltered nooks, while, all around, in groups or singly, stand the nobler forest trees, casting their mighty shadows along the uneven sward.

Maud was passing through a gentle hollow, almost a little glen, when she heard the tramp of running feet near her. A little boy was scampering along the summit of the narrow hollow at the other side.

She called to him, and he halted. She observed that the boy had a note in his hand, and beckoned him to approach. After a

moment's hesitation, he descended the bank at his leisure, and stood before her.

"What are you doing here, my little man?" she asked. "Aren't you afraid that the keepers will find you?"

"I was taking a message up to the Hall yonder, but the lady's not there. Happen you'll be her?"

"What is her name?"

"Miss Mack—Mack-something—Medwyn!"

"Oh! Miss Maximilla Medwyn?"

"Ay, that will be it," replied the boy.

"No, she's not there now. Miss Medwyn left the Hall yesterday," said the young lady, looking with an unconscious scrutiny at the note he held clutched in his dirty little fist.

"Ay," said the boy.

"And you can tell whoever wishes to send the letter, that any one by asking at the house can learn where Miss Medwyn is at present."

"Ay, sure," said the boy again, and started once more to find his employer.

Very curious was Maud; but she did not continue her walk in its former direction. She turned about, and at the same quiet pace began to saunter towards home.

She had not reached the end of this shallow glen when she was again overtaken, and this time it was Charles Marston who was beside her.

"I hope you are not vexed. I am sure you won't be when you hear."

Maud was more startled than she would have cared to betray, and there followed a very short silence. She had set down Captain Vivian as Maximilla's correspondent, and had never suspected such a move on Mr. Marston's part. It was unlike him. It was hardly consistent with his promise to her. Yet she was glad.

"I'm not vexed, I assure you," she said, smiling a little, and blushing very much, as she gave him her hand. "A little boy overtook me just now, when I was going in the opposite direction, and told me he had been looking for Miss Medwyn at the house, to give her a note. I dare say he was your messenger?"

"He was. I had sent to find her, that I might ask her fifty things, and, above all, whether she thought she could persuade you to see me for a very few minutes."

"Well, it has come about, you see, by accident."

"And that is better, and—don't, I entreat, walk so fast—you won't refuse me a few minutes?" She did walk slower.

"Our walk must not be very far," she

said. "Why have you come here? You ought to consider me. It was unkind of you to come here, knowing all that Miss Medwyn told you."

"I'm not to blame for this chance meeting; but a letter would not have done, indeed it would not; no, nothing but a few—ever so few—spoken words. And if I had failed to see you, I think I should have despaired."

"I hate the word despair; you must not talk tragedy. Would you mind picking up my locket? It is there, at that tuft of dark grass."

"What a very pretty locket!" said he, presenting it to its owner. "And that little bit of work, the rose in rubies, and the key in yellow topaz, that is the device of a branch of the Vernons."

"Yes," said Maud; "a very dear friend gave it to me."

"I was in hopes you wore it as your own," he said; "it would have given me a right to claim a cousinship."

"But have you really a right to bear the Rose and the Key?" asked Maud.

"It is quite true," he answered, smiling. "One of our family, a lady named Rhoda Marston, married a Vernon five hundred years ago; at least the College of Heralds, while there was such a thing, used to tell the story; and we intermarried after, and that gave us a right to quarter the Rose and the Key. In our old shield it is often quartered. I think it such a pretty device. I wonder why our people gave it up."

"I'm a very bad herald; I did not know there had ever been such a cousinship," said Miss Maud.

"Oh, yes, I recollect hearing the paper read when I was a boy. It is more than a hundred years old, and it said that our name was originally Vernon, but that we took the name of Marston from the place granted to our ancestor by the Conqueror. And that a Marston, Sir Guy Marston, it said, I think, was in love with a lady called the Lady Rhoda Vernon."

"Oh! Really?" said Maud.

"A long time ago, of course. The lady from her name, was called the Rose, the Rose of Wyke it is in the legend. In one of their raids the lady was carried off by the lances of the Earl of Northumberland, and imprisoned, and held to ransom, in one of his many castles; but in which, Sir Guy could not learn. But the lady contrived from her place of captivity to send him, by a sure messenger, a rose, which he took as the emblem of his Rose; and learning from what castle it was sent, he

raised his hand to the wall, and taking down his battle-axe, he said, 'Behold the key of Percy's keep,' and so the story says he undertook the adventure, and rescued the lady, and hence came the device of the Rose and the Key."

"Then there were Vernons on both sides, and you are a Vernon," said the young lady.

"My ancestors have borne the name of Marston for five hundred years, but our real name is Vernon." With a saddened change of voice and look, he said: "I can't understand you, Maud; I think you might be more frank with me. I think, knowing the torture of my suspense, you might tell me how you wished me to understand all that passed at the Wymering ball. Tell me frankly, and I shall trouble you no more; do you wish all over between us, or will you give me a chance?"

"What do you speak of as having occurred at the Wymering ball?" asked the young lady, evasively.

"Oh, you must know," replied Charles Marston, his jealousy overcoming all other considerations. "I mean your having given so many dances to Captain Vivian, when you refused me more than one; and you had thrown over other men for him."

"Suppose I tell you that I have a perfect right to do as I please, that I say that I will neither be questioned nor lectured by any one, there would be an end of all this."

"Certainly, Miss Vernon; and you make me feel that I have, for a moment, forgotten myself."

"But I won't say any such thing. I tell you, frankly, that I don't care if I never see Captain Vivian again. I had reasons of my own for all I did; I told you so beforehand; and it seems a little strange that you should assume that there can be none but unkind ones."

The reply that had opened with so much fire and spirit, grew gentle, reproachful almost, as it ended.

They had come now, from walking very slowly, quite to a standstill under a hawthorn-tree, that stretched a friendly shelter from the steep bank.

"Heaven bless you for that reproof, because there is hope in it. Oh! how I wish, Miss Vernon, you were what you seemed to me at first, poor and almost friendless. I think my devotion might have moved you, and the proudest hope I cherished was that some day you would permit me to lift you from your troubles. But now I feel it is all changed. When I saw who you were my heart sank. I saw my presumption, and that I ought to renounce my folly, but I

could not; and now what dare I ask?—only, perhaps, that you will allow me still to be your friend.” He took her hand. “No, Maud, that could not be. I could not live and be no more to you than friend.” He spoke in great agitation, and kissed the hand he had taken. “Oh, don’t withdraw it. Listen for one moment, in mercy. I am going to say what is quite desperate. You will tell me now, Maud, can you ever like me?”

“We have been on strange terms for a long time—I hardly understand them myself. We may meet again, and we may never see one another more in this uncertain world. If I were to answer you now, as you ask me, I should speak as recklessly as you say you have spoken. But I won’t answer. I don’t know you well enough to give you a promise, and I like you too well to take leave of you for ever. I like no one else. Perhaps I never shall; perhaps I shall never like any one. Let all remain as it has been a little longer. And now I have said everything, and I am very glad I met you. Will you agree to what I have said? Are you content?”

“I do agree; I am content,” he answered.

A mountain of doubt and fear was lifted from his heart in the assurance, “I like no one else.” And the words, “I like you too well to take leave of you for ever,” had made him tumultuously proud and happy.

“And now we must say good-bye. If you want to hear of me, write to Miss Medwyn, but not to me, and you must not come here again. I don’t act from caprice. I have good reasons for all I ask. Now I must go home; and you must not follow me one step more. Good-bye.”

He held her hand for a moment, and said, “Good-bye, darling, but only for a little time. Good-bye.”

And he kissed it passionately.

She turned and left him hurriedly, and with hasty steps walked homeward.

#### CHAPTER XLVIII. A SURPRISE.

So Maud had all but confessed her love. Filled with a strange and delightful agitation, she followed the path towards the Hall.

Crossing the stile she stopped for a minute and looked back. How infinitely fonder that vague love had grown! In that one hour her character was saddened and softened for ever. For the first time, on leaving him, she felt a great loneliness. She almost repented that she had not ended all doubt and hesitation in the

matter. But there was an alarm when she thought of Lady Vernon. She did not know what powers she might have under that terrible will, in the shadow of which she had, for the last few weeks, begun to feel herself dismayed.

In the sweet reverie in which already the melancholy of a care quite new to her was mingling, how incredibly short the walk home proved!

She lifted up her eyes before the door, and saw the flight of white steps, and the noble doorway with its massive florid carving, friendly too, as all things seen unchanged since childhood are. Sad a little now, for the first time, it looks to her, with an altered face, in the slanting evening beams, and a smile of reproach seems to light it mournfully. She will take her flight, as others have done, from the old home, generation after generation, for two hundred and fifty years. It does not look like home, quite, any longer.

Great heiress as she was, if all went right, she knew generally that her position might be immensely modified by certain possible events. She knew that under certain circumstances her mother had what amounted very nearly to a veto on her marriage, and that she hated the Marstons. Was she likely to sacrifice her feud to please a daughter, of whom she scarcely concealed her disdain?

Who quite understood that complicated and teasing will of her grandfather’s? He had spent half his life pulling it to pieces and putting it together again. It was his hobby. Wherever he went, or whatever he seemed to be doing, his mind was always working upon it. He left it, he confided, a few days before his death, to his attorney, in a very unfinished state. He left behind him, nevertheless, such a tessellation of puzzles, so many provisos, exceptions, conditions, as no layman could disentangle; and his chief earthly regret, on his death-bed, was that he had not been spared some six years longer, to elaborate this masterpiece.

There was uncertainty enough in her actual position to make the future anxious.

On the shield over the hall-door stands forth the sculptured Rose and Key, sharply defined in the oblique sunlight. The interest of those symbols of heraldry, after a moment’s contemplation, made her think of the “shield-room,” as the peculiar chamber I have already described was called, and to it she turned her steps.

She passed through the smooth-floored, silent hall, and along a corridor, and opened

the door of the shield-room. It is so spacious a room that she did not hear a sharp voice speaking at the further end, with great animation, until she had entered it.

Her eyes, on entering the room, were dazzled by the western sky glaring through the three great windows, and for a moment or two all the rest looked but shadow. But she soon saw better, and the picture, touched with light, came out of the darkness.

It was Mr. Tintern's voice that was exerting itself with so much spirit. He was leaning back, in an easy posture, with his leg crossed, his arm resting on the table, and his hat and walking-cane in his other hand, reposing on his knee.

Round the corner of the table, which was not a very large one, and fronting the door, sat Lady Vernon, with a pretty little pocket-book in her hand, in which she seemed to have been making notes with a pencil; near her sat Doctor Malkin. The angle of the room, which formed a background for him, was a good deal in shadow, but a sunbeam glanced on his bald head, which shone in that light as red as blood.

There was one figure standing, and that completed a rather odd party of four. It was the slim figure of a long-necked, lantern-jawed man, with long hands, folded one over the other, a saintly smile, a head a little plaintively inclined to one side, and something indefinably villanous in his one eye. He seemed to be undergoing an examination, and Mr. Tintern rose suddenly, gazing upon Maud, and suspended his question as she advanced.

The same light that flamed on Doctor Malkin's burnished head, also showed this lank, roguish face very distinctly, and Miss Maud instantaneously recognised Elihu Lizard.

Nearly all the party seemed put out by the interruption. Mr. Lizard made a soft step or two backwards, receding into shadow. Doctor Malkin stood up, staring at her, as if not quite sure whether he saw Miss Maud or a spectral illusion. Mr. Tintern, who, as I said, had started up, advanced, after a moment's hesitation, jauntily, with his hand extended gallantly.

But the young lady had stopped short, looking very much confounded.

Lady Vernon was the only one of the party who did not appear much disconcerted.

"Come in, dear, come in," she said, employing the very unusual term "dear."  
"There is nothing to prevent you, that is, if you have anything to say."

"Nothing, thanks; no, mamma. I had

not an idea you were busy—how do you do, Mr. Tintern and Doctor Malkin?" she said, but without delaying her retreat beyond the brief space it took to utter these hasty salutations, and gave them each a little bow.

What could they be about? This vague wonder and misgiving filled her as she ran up-stairs.

Mr. Tintern she knew to be a magistrate. That odious Elihu Lizard, the sight of whom chilled her, was plainly under the ordeal of examination, when she had surprised them all together.

Why had Doctor Malkin looked at her, with an expression she had never seen before, as if she were something horrible?

What was the meaning of Mr. Tintern's cringing smile, and deprecatory, almost agitated, air?

Maximilla Medwyn had always told her that Mr. Tintern had an interest under that will which was adverse to hers. She would spend that night over the printed copy of the will, which Mr. Coke had given her, and would try to understand it.

Her mother! Yes, she appeared just as usual, and not at all disconcerted. But she never was the least put out by anything. Never. Her mother! What was she thinking of? No, if there was anything under discussion which could injure her, her mother was surely unconscious of it.

She was in her own room, alone, standing at the window with her hands folded together, thinking, or rather, thunderstruck.

Except her mother's, which was always negative, and therefore inflexible and inscrutable, every countenance she had seen, even the features of Elihu Lizard, wore a new and ominous expression which dismayed her.

"I wish I had my cousin Max to talk to," she thought, "or any living creature to consult. How lonely I have always been! Is there any creature in the house who, under a risk of mamma's displeasure, would tell me the plain truth?"

So, wishing in vain, she at last rang for her maid. It was time to dress for dinner.

"Jones, do you know why mamma saw Doctor Malkin and Mr. Tintern in the shield-room to-day? She does not usually sit there?"

No, Jones did not know.

"Did you see that ill-looking man, blind of one eye, who was also in the room?"

"No, miss, not I."

"Well, Jones, I'm very curious, and you must try to make out all about it, mind,

and tell me to-night when I come up to bed. Don't forget."

So Jones promised, and did her best; but nothing was to be learned, except that the blind man in question had had refreshments in the housekeeper's room, and that the housekeeper was of opinion that he was one of those missionary folk, whom Lady Vernon was pleased to encourage.

There are some pictures which, we scarcely know why, seize the imagination, and retain their hold on the retina; and ever and anon, during a troubled night, the obscure background of that spacious room, and the figures touched by the horizontal glare of sunset, were before Maud.

Miss Vernon was one of those people who rely very much upon instincts and intuitions: felt uneasily that the spectacle of that strange quartette conveyed to her a warning; and that all that was needed was the faculty of reading it aright.

#### ANOTHER EVENING AT MOPE-TOWN.

In due course of time I found myself again at Mopetown. When I say that no one else got out or got in at the station, and that I was taken away in a sort of rickety one-horse omnibus, up a slushy hill, into the town, and that I was received with as much respect at the Dolphin as if I came to lie in state there, it may be conceived that the fortunes of the place were not improving. I had to stay over the next day; certain duties of inspection, which it is not necessary to dwell on, forcing me to resort to the place. It was a streaming, splashing night, and I repaired to the coffee-room, where a monk might have made a retreat without any one to interfere with him.

I was reading the Mopetown Argus in a disconsolate fashion, having written some letters—and it seems to me that a letter written by coffee-room gas-light has a specially dismal flavour of its own—when a tall, large-whiskered gentleman looked in, then looked out, and presently came back with the landlord. Though his business seemed confidential, he talked in a loud, semi-theatrical manner.

"You see, the thing should be pushed. You should force the people in. We gave just such another thing before I left Quaverton, for poor Romano's widow. The best people came in. I got the thing done—I worked it. Even the Little Sappho put her teeny shoulder to the wheel."

I noticed that as this gentleman dwelt on adjectives of the affections, his voice fell into a tenderly plaintive key, and his mouth collapsed with a mournful smile. The landlord, no doubt thinking of his tap, had no views at all upon the subject, and got away as soon as he could. The loud gentleman walked about impatiently, pulled at his whiskers, then said, with much deference, to me:

"Sad case this, sir. We are all putting our shoulders to the wheel."

I said first, "Indeed!" expressive of interest, then added that "I had not heard," in reference to the case.

"Bless me! Why it's in the Argus. Poor Smallpage, the curate, left a widow and five children, and without a halfpenny. The people of this place want to do something for the poor creatures, and I have been putting them in the way of doing it. But they understand nothing here, sir. This place is an utter imposture from beginning to end. I was trepanned here, sir, I and my family, under false pretences. They're barbarians. No taste, no culture, no civilisation, no trade, no healthy wish for the refining influences of music. Mrs. Jackson, my wife, a masterly performer on the instrument, a pupil of De Bagge's—my two daughters, who studied under Pranello—the Little Sappho, whom Ringsend, the member for Quaverton, said could teach Grisi and Mario and the whole kit—all thrown away here; a case of pearls before swine."

"A case of pearls," I repeated, smiling. "But as to Mr. Smallpage's family, I presume this is some sort of a concert—"

"Precisely, sir. I have set the thing going. I have organised the entertainment, I and my family. It is for the drones here to do their part. You will be here, of course?"

I begun to answer with hesitation. But he interrupted me with gravity, "Oh, but you should stay. You really should. In such a cause as this one does not stand on ceremony, and I push a ticket wherever I can. Oh, you should support a thing of this sort, you know; chee-arity," and again Mr. Jackson's voice assumed the plaintive tone, "before all. Stalls halfa crown each, family ticket to admit four, seven and six. I think, myself, under the circumstances, the man of humane feelings would indulge himself in a family ticket. What do you say? I have a number about me."

I was induced to take a family ticket, and the charitable vendor, I remarked, went away much elated, and passed straight into

the bar—no doubt to have the pleasure of drinking my health.

How the next day passed in Mopetown I will not detail. It is enough to say that it rained the whole time, and that open air work on such a day, and in Mopetown, is not exhilarating. When I returned in the evening it was nearly time to go to the concert. I found a bill on the table, which I read eagerly, wishing to see what I was to have in return for my family ticket, in addition, of course, to the luxury of one's feelings in doing a work of charity.

The Rooms were tolerably full; that is, there were some seventy or eighty persons present. I seated myself in my stalls, which I observed enjoyed a solitary distinction in being labelled with white cards, marked with "reserved" in a female hand—I say I seated myself in my four chartered places, occupying one with my hat, another with my great-coat, the third with my umbrella, and the fourth with my own person. Then I read my bill leisurely. It ran thus:

**GREAT ATTRACTION!**

**THE MENDELSSOHN JACKSON FAMILY  
FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY.**

In aid of the fund for the support of the widow and orphan children of the late Reverend HERCULES SMALLEAGE, B.A., left completely destitute.

The quality of mercy is not strained;  
It droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven.  
SHAKESPEARE.

**MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON**

*(Late Professor of Music at Quaverton, and Joint Director with Signor de Bagge, of the Melodia Society in that city)*

Begs to announce to the inhabitants of Mopetown, that he will give a

**GRAND CONCERT**

IN AID OF THE ABOVE MERITORIOUS CHARITY.

**MR. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON**

Will be assisted by the Members of his Family.

**MRS. MENDELSSOHN JACKSON**

*(Late Soprano Assoluta at Owllet Chapel and the Melodia Concerts),*

**MISS PERDITA JACKSON**

*(Of the Melodia Concerts),*

**MISS JUANITA JACKSON,**

**MR. HANDEL JACKSON**

*(Late Organist at Owllet Chapel),*

AND

**THE LITTLE SAPHO!**

Who will, on this occasion only, sing some of the choice lyrics which have won her reputation in the western district as the English Musical Prodigy!

While I was perusing this document, Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson, who had come on the platform once or twice in a restless way, suddenly attracted public attention by hurriedly advancing towards me, removing the occupant of the nearest chair,

which was my hat, and commencing in a hurried fashion behind his hand:

"This is a very painful thing. Most awkward for me. Would you mind stepping into the artist's room a moment?"

"What do you want?" I asked. "You can say it here."

"Well, I would prefer not. It's as to the deposit. Scandalous!"

"A deposit?" I said.

"Yes. Deposit for the Rooms, you know. It seems it's a rule of the Rooms not to allow the thing to begin unless two pounds is put in their hand, or they take at the door."

"They? Who?" I said, much bewildered.

"The Rooms, of course. You see, though the tickets have been taken, all the money has been promised, and will be sent in later."

"All the money?" I said.

"Oh, the preliminary expenses. The posters alone have swallowed up more than that. Now if you would——"

"Oh, I fear I can do nothing," I said. "I have taken a family ticket—three more places than I want. You must really excuse me."

The next moment Mr. Jackson had seized on the landlord of the Dolphin, and in a few moments it was evident that an arrangement had been effected. Then Mr. Jackson bustled "behind," and the concert began.

After a moment's pause the new and unpainted deal door at the side opened, was shut again with hesitation, quivered on its hinges, was closed abruptly, as if a discussion were going on, and was then finally opened. A little procession emerged. Mr. Mendelssohn Jackson, with Mrs. M. Jackson on his arm, Mr. Handel Jackson, between Miss Perdita and Miss Juanita Jackson. Mr. Jackson père plunged straight at the piano, while his family deployed into line with almost military precision. Mrs. Jackson was a portly matron, and, with her daughters, was anxious about the arrangement of the folds of her dress.

Blow Gentle Gales, the late Sir Henry Bishop's work, was the first piece, and Mr. Jackson, pounding the chords vigorously, and growling a rasping bass, encouraged the "blowing" with good effect. The well-known cannon-shot, introducing the "look, look again!" made us all start. There was much swelling, rising, and falling, and the working of the Jackson mouths was in itself a delightful study; for at the placidly piano parts they all assumed a sweet and kindly look, as if



enjoying ecstatic bliss in company; but on the invitation of the paternal rumble, they changed at once into a haughty and determined ferocity of purpose. The final chord, which was somewhere down at the Jackson waists, was a prolonged and scornful growl. Mr. Jackson leaped from his piano, led away his family in the same order, and the new deal door closed on them. Again it opened, closed, hesitated, and out came Mr. Jackson, leading his spouse, with ceremonious politeness, to the front. All was lost, I mean that All is Lost, the well-known vocal gymnastic feat for which Mrs. M. Jackson had, years ago, been famous, was the next performance. She attacked it with extraordinary vivacity and courage, putting her poor broken-down voice at all the jumps and intricate "ha-ha's" with something like desperation. I cannot say she got over them, but she certainly got through them, splashing, plunging, and kicking, breaking down the fences, and smashing the bars. All this time her husband working at his leaps, and I must own very diligently supplying, with sudden crashes and "rumbles" in the bass, the deficiencies of his decaying spouse; now throwing his whiskered head back, now bending it down as if he wished to kiss his own hand. But the way the lady shook her head, leaned to this side and that, as if leaning over a balcony, and the awful contortion of visage with which the last "high" scream was got out—like a back tooth—was amazing. Mrs. Jackson's "high A" in old days was a favourite theme with her husband. When we had applauded, and the lady had made three profound reverences, as though bouquets had been showered on her, Mr. Jackson took her hand, and smiling graciously, led her slowly off.

Again the deal door opened, and Mr. Handel Jackson emerged briskly to play what I found was set down in the bill as:

Deux Morceaux. (a) The Ripple. } HANDEL  
(b) Reaper's Dance. } JACKSON.

These were little things of his own. Handel Jackson, I could see, was partial to little things of his own; and I have no doubt at Owlet Chapel always played those works, preferring them to the hackneyed and rococo effects of the old masters. Then we had another concerted piece; after that a solo from Miss Perdita Jackson—Cherry Ripe—which was really fairly well sung, and gave satisfaction; but I could see she was looked on rather contemptuously by her own family. Then came the real feature of the evening, "by

special desire," we were informed, though I doubt if the musical intelligence of the place was sufficiently advanced to "desire specially" any such article. This was a duet from the *Elisir d'Amore*, rendered by Mr. and Mrs. Jackson in a dramatic manner, without accompaniment. The coquetting, tossings of head, closing of eyes, and shyly significant confidences to the audience on Mrs. Jackson's part, seemed to convey that there was a vast deal of secret and mysterious business going on which she was engaged in circumventing; while Mr. Jackson nodded and winked (in Italian), and repeated a great many words very fast, made as though he was going to cry, laughed loudly, and had sly jokes all to himself. All this never interfered with the profound gravity of the audience, which, strange to say, deepened as the humour of the performance was supposed to increase—a result, by-the-by, which I have not unfrequently observed even in the case of real, genuine, Opera House Italian buffos. When it was done, Mrs. M. Jackson was led across, seemed again to acknowledge a shower of imaginary bouquets, and retired smiling, led out by her partner.

At the beginning of the second part, Mr. Jackson came forward, and said he threw himself on our indulgence; he hoped we would overlook what was only the result of an unhappy fatality. Miss Juanita Jackson was labouring under a cold, and could not sing the song down for her in the programme. If we would allow him "to depart from the arrangement set down for us in the printed bills" he would substitute Mrs. Mendelssohn, who had consented, under the circumstances, to give the rendering of *Bid me Discourse*, as sung by her at the *Melodia*. "I may be pardoned for adding," said Mr. Jackson, "that the occasion was a most interesting one; for among the audience was General Stubbs, whose daughter was later placed under my own personal tuition; and the general," said Mr. Jackson, looking at his programme in a hesitating way, as if overcome with modesty, remarked, "that he heard it sung once before in the same style, and that was by the lamented Malibrawn de Beriot!" Here we applauded heartily.

The song having been somehow got through, we had Mr. Jackson himself in a solo, for which, before sitting down, he pulled the piano round at an angle, so that a side-view of him could be obtained by the audience, lifted the top, let down the music-stand with a clatter, tried the pedals, and

rubbed his hands in a ruminative manner. Then assuming quite a nautical air, he dashed into the Bay of Biscay. Mr. Jackson's voice was quite gone, but that was no matter, for he spoke, or rather declaimed, the various descriptive passages of the lyric with great slowness of articulation and pantomimic effect. Thus, when sunny weather was overhead, he wore a smile on his beaming face, which was always turned to us, though his person was sideways, as mentioned. He seemed to convey a complacent pride and benignity in his sea-faring life, his good ship, &c., and when he reached the well-known burden, he broke into a brisk canter, as it were:

A-a-s we lay,  
A-a-all th' day,  
I-i-n the Be-**HA**-hay-o'-ho-Biskeyo!

But when the sky became overcast, and the terrible storm came on, his face justly reflected the warring of the elements, his hands worked as if belaying ropes, or at the wheel. When young Mr. Jackson, behind the deal door, conveyed an imitation of the distant gun with, I think, two books struck together, the mariner half rose from his seat, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked out over the top of the piano, through the blinding mist. "A seeail! a seeail!" we heard him cry. Then taken on board, he sang jocundly and rapidly,

The-hen we sail  
Wi-hith a ge-ail,  
Fro-hom the Bee-**ay**-hay-haw-hof-Biskeyo!

This deserved applause, and got it.

Finally came the gem of the evening, reserved for the last, the Little Sappho. Her father was charming in his tenderness and paternal care. He came out and stood looking in at the open deal door, inviting out, and smiling and nodding to the audience. Then he shook his head lightly, as who should say, "Too shy and tender; be indulgent," tripped away, and returned slowly, leading the Sappho. She was only six years, at most, judging from her dress, which belonged to the nursery, little blue socks, little frock, &c. But the face, as happens not unfrequently with your infant phenomenon, betrayed a greater age. She made a little nursery curtsy. Her father placed a chair, lifted her up on it tenderly, all the time smiling and nodding at the audience, then drew the piano nearer, and with the upper part of his body stretched over, struck the chords in a quiet, encouraging way, as if fearful that a breath might put her out. She sang My Pretty Jane in an appropriate infantine fashion,

and all the while Mr. Jackson smiled at us and at her, encouraging, deprecating. She got through very respectably, and we encored her.

Such was the concert of the Mendelssohn Jackson family. It might be considered successful in itself, though not for the end for which it was constituted. So, at least, I gathered from the organiser, who strode in gloomily to the Dolphin the next morning.

"Expenses, sir, awful! All swallowed up. Always the way of the world. Yet, here I have given the professional services of my family gratuitously—yes, absolutely gratuitously, sir. Not a halfpenny for myself. I wouldn't touch it, you know, sir, in the cause of charity."

#### A STATE OF SIEGE IN CUBA.

"WE are in a state of siege!" says my friend Don Javier, editor of a Cuban periodical called *El Sufragio Universal*.

"Y bien, amigo mio; how does the situation affect you?"

"Malisimamente!" returns Don Javier, offering me a seat at his editorial table. "The maldito censor," he whispers, "has suppressed four columns of to-day's paper, and there remains little in the way of information besides the feuilleton and some of the advertisements."

The weather is sultry and oppressive. The huge doors and windows of *El Sufragio Universal* office are thrown wide open. Everybody is dressed in a coat of white drill, a pair of white trousers, is without waistcoat, cravat, or shirt-collar, wears a broad-brimmed Panama, and smokes a long damp cigar.

The sub-editor, a lean, coffee-coloured person, with inky sleeves, is seated at a separate table making up columns for to-morrow's "tirada," or impression. Before him is a pile of important news from Puerto Rico and San Domingo, besides a voluminous budget from that indefatigable correspondent, Mr. Archibald Cannie, of Jamaica. More than half of this interesting news has been already marked out by the censor's red pencil, and the bewildered sub looks high and low for material wherewith to replenish the censorial gaps. Small, half-naked negroes, begrimed with ink—veritable printer's devils—appear and crave for copy, but in vain.

"Give out the foreign blocks," says the editor, in the tone of a commander.

The foreign blocks are stereotyped columns supplied by American quacks and

other advertisers to every newspaper proprietor throughout the West Indies. On account of their extreme length and picturesque embellishments, these advertisements are used only in cases of emergency.

While the foreign blocks are being dispensed, the localista, or general reporter, enters in breathless haste. He has brought several fragments of local information. Four runaway negroes have been captured by the police. Two English sailors have died of yellow fever in the Casa de Salud. A coolie has stabbed another coolie at the copper mines, and has escaped justice by leaping into an adjacent pit. A gigantic cayman, or shark, has been caught in the harbour. The localista has also some items of news about the insurrection. The rebels have increased in numbers. They have occupied all the districts which surround our town, destroyed the aqueduct, cut the telegraph wire, and intercepted the land mails to Havannah. There is now no communication with the capital save by sea. Troops have again been despatched to the interior, but their efforts have proved ineffectual. Upon their appearance, the rebels vanish into the woods and thickets, and there exhaust the patience and the energies of the military.

The sub-editor notes everything down, taking care to eschew that which is likely to prove offensive to the sensitive ears of the authorities. The material is then given out for printing purposes; for his worship the censor will read nothing until it has been previously set up in type. As many hours will elapse before the proof sheets are returned with censorial corrections, Don Javier proposes a saunter through the town.

The usual military precautions against assault on an unfortified place have been taken. The entrances to the streets have been barricaded with huge hogsheads containing sand and stones; small cannon stand in the plaza and principal thoroughfares. At every corner that we turn, we are accosted by a sentry, who challenges us three times over: "Who goes there?" "Spain." "What kind of people?" "In-offensive." And so forth. The theatre, the bull-ring, the promenade, are all closed for the season. The masquerading and carnival amusements are at an end. Payments have been suspended, and provisions have become scarce and dear. The people whom we meet have grown low-spirited, and the sunny streets look gloomy and deserted. We glance in at the warehouses and manufactories, and find every-

body within attired in military costume; for many of the inhabitants have enrolled themselves as volunteers for the pleasure of wearing a uniform at their own expense, and of sporting a rifle provided by the government. The names of those who object to play at soldiers have been noted down and their proceedings are narrowly watched.

A couple of Spanish frigates lie at anchor in the harbour; for our feeble-minded governor threatens to bombard the town if the rebels should effect an entrance and stir up the inhabitants, their countrymen, to revolt. The garrison has been considerably augmented by the arrival of fresh troops from Puerto Rico and Spain, who are quartered indiscriminately in the jail, the hospitals, and churches, to expire there by the score of yellow fever, *vómito negro*, and dysentery. Meanwhile the besiegers make no attempt at assault, but occasionally challenge the troops to sally from their stronghold by firing their sporting rifles within earshot of the town.

One day a great panic is raised, with cries of "Los insurrectos! Los insurrectos!" followed by a charge of mounted military through the streets. It is reported that the insurgents are coming; so everybody hastens home, and much slamming of doors and barring of windows is heard. But the alarm proves a false one; and, with the exception of a few arrests made by the police, just to keep up appearances, no further damage results.

To reassure the terror-stricken inhabitants, and to prove to them the gallantry of the Spanish army, our governor determines on making another sally with the troops.

Curious to learn how warfare is carried on in the wilds of a West India country, I enrol myself in a company of volunteers who have obtained permission to follow in the rear of the sallying expedition. My uniform consists of a blue-striped blouse, white drill trousers, and a broad-brimmed Panama, to the band of which is affixed a vermilion cockade embellished with silver lace. The Spanish troops muster some five hundred strong. Their hand weapons are of the old-fashioned calibre, and they carry small field guns on the backs of mules. Every man is smoking either a cigarette or a cigar, as he tramps along. His uniform is of dark blue cotton, or other light material suitable to the tropical heat. He carries little else besides his gun, his tobacco, and a tin-pot for making coffee; for the country through which he is passing

abounds naturally in nearly every kind of provender.

The besiegers have altogether disappeared from the neighbouring country, and for the first few miles our march is easy and uninterrupted. But soon the passes grow narrower, until our progress is effected in single file. Occasionally we halt to refresh ourselves, for the weather is intensely hot, and the sun blazes upon our backs. To insure ourselves against brain fever, we gather a few cool plantain leaves and place them in layers in the crowns of our Panamas. Our way is incessantly intercepted by fallen trees and brushwood; but we can see nothing of the enemy, and hear little besides the singing of birds and the ripple of hidden water. Many of our party would gladly abandon the quest after human game, and make use of their weapons in a hunt after wild pig or small deer, which animals abound in that part of the country.

Alto! We have waded at last through the intricate forest, and halt in an open plain. It is evening, and as we are weary with our wanderings, we encamp here all night. A moon is shining bright enough for us to read the smallest print; but we are disinclined to be studious, and smoke our cigarettes and sip our hot coffee. Men are despatched to a neighbouring plantation in quest of bananas, pumpkins, Indian corn, sugar-cane, pine-apples, pomegranates, cocoa-nuts, and mangoes, and with this princely fare we take our suppers. Then sleep overtakes us.

Early next morning we are called to arms by the sound of firing, which seems to reach us from a hill in the distance. The noise is as if a thousand sportsmen were out for a battue. Our commander assures us that the enemy is near at hand, and soon crowds of mounted men appear on the hill before us. With the aid of our field-glasses we watch their movements, and can distinguish their dresses of white canvas, their sporting rifles, and primitive spears. A body of them surrounds a thatched hut, over the roof of which droops a white banner with a strange device, consisting of a silver star on a square of republican red. The enemy appears to be very numerous, and as he marches along the ridge of the hill, his line seems interminable. All our opponents are mounted on horses or mules with strange saddles and equipments.

Adelante! We advance to meet the foe. Some hours elapse before we can reach the thatched hut, as our course is exceedingly circuitous. We find the hut occupied by a decrepit, half-naked negro, but our birds

have flown. The negro, who tells us he is a hermit, and that his name is San Benito, can give us no information as to the whereabouts of the enemy, so we make him a prisoner of war. The opposing forces have left nothing but their patriotic banner behind them. This trophy our commander possesses himself of, and bears off in triumph. Then we scour the country in companies of fifty; but we meet with nothing more formidable than a barricade of felled trees and piled stones. Once we capture a strange weapon, made out of the trunk of a very hard tree, scooped and trimmed into the form of a cannon, and bound with strong iron hoops. Upon another occasion we discharge our rifles into a thicket whence sounds of firing proceed, and we make two more prisoners of war in the shape of a couple of runaway negroes. At length, exhausted by our brilliant campaign, and with more than two-thirds of our army afflicted with fever, we retreat in good order, and return to town. Before we enter, the governor, accompanied by a staff of officers and a band of music, comes out to meet us. A cart, driven by oxen, is procured, and upon it are placed the captured cannon and rebel banner, the former of which is as much as possible concealed by Spanish flags and flowers. A procession is then formed, and in this way we pass through the streets, followed by the military band, which plays a hymn of victory in commemoration of our triumphant return. The houses become suddenly decorated with banners, blankets, and pieces of drugget suspended from the windows, and the inhabitants welcome us with loud cheers and vivas.

Immediately upon quitting the ranks I repair to the office of El Sufragio Universal, for the purpose of reporting to Don Javier the result of our expedition. Strange to relate, that gentleman has already perused a glowing account of our glorious campaign in El Redactor, the government organ in Cuba. The editor hands me a copy of that periodical, and there, sure enough, is a thrilling description of what we might have achieved if we had had the good fortune to encounter the enemy in the open field!

But the editor has some strange news for my private ear. He tells me that a filibustering expedition from the United States has landed with arms, ammunition, and a thousand American filibusters, in the Bay of Nipe, not many leagues from our town. With this reinforcement it is confidently expected that the rebels will make

an attempt to attack the Spanish troops in their stronghold. Don Javier, who is a Cuban to the bone, is sanguine of his countrymen's success. With a few more such expeditions, he is sure that the colony will soon be rid of its Spanish rulers. Then the editor gives me some extraordinary information about myself. It appears that during my absence, El Redactor has made the wonderful discovery that I am one of the agents of an American newspaper, has referred in its leading articles to the "scandalous and untruthful reports" published by its American contemporary, and has insinuated that henceforth the climate of Cuba will be found by many degrees too warm for me. Don Javier is of opinion that my residence in the island will be no longer safe, and he recommends immediate flight. From similar sources I gather certain facts which leave no doubt that I am the object of assassination. I consult my consul upon the subject, and he too advises me to absent myself, at least until affairs are more settled. I adopt his counsel, and embark in the first mail steamer which leaves our port. A host of my Cuban acquaintances accompany me to the vessel. Foremost is my friend the editor of *El Sufragio Universal*, who, after wishing me a prosperous voyage and a hearty "vaya usted con Dios," secretly hands me a bundle of papers, containing, among other matter, the "leavings" of the censor for the past fortnight, for the edification of my friends in New York. So I leave Cuba in a state of siege; in which condition, it may be added, it differs but slightly from Cuba in any other state.

## RACKSTRAW'S CLIENT.

IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

I WAS again in London, in my chambers, and at work, real work. I was no longer making believe to toil in the way of noting cases I should never have to cite, or laying up stores of legal lore to rot and waste from disuse and lack of ventilation, nor wasting time in poring over a twice-read newspaper, or in gazing at my own wan reflection in a dusty looking-glass, or in staring vacantly out of window at the smoke, the tiles, the chimney-stacks, the sparrows, and the cats. I had real briefs now; not in excess, but still to a sufficient extent, and, what was more important, I was earning real fees!

There came a knock at the door. I found, standing on the landing without, a

strange, shabby-looking man, wearing a long drab over-coat, with flapped pockets at the hips, a rusty hat, much too large for him, and pressed down nearly over his eyes, and a soiled woollen comforter twisted twice or thrice round his neck. He nodded and grinned. I recognised him. It was Michael Runt.

"You want me?"

"Only two words, counsellor." He entered as he spoke, gliding past me before I had time to stop him, and entered my sitting-room.

"Now what is it?" I asked, sharply. For, quite apart from the consideration that he was interrupting my labours, I greatly objected to the man's presence. It was true enough that he had been my client, but it was equally unquestionable that he was a very consummate scoundrel. I had, as I thought, done with him, and wanted to set eyes on him no more.

He sank into a chair, and waved his hand towards me, as though asking me to be patient with him. He was very short of breath, gasping and panting, open-mouthed.

"Your staircase tries a cove," he said presently, speaking with difficulty, in husky, wheezing tones. "The mill is a fool to it; especially to one as is touched in the wind, as I is—I don't mind owning to it. It's allays bellers-to-mend with me now."

He jerked out his sentences with a curious spasmodic action of his whole body. He had removed his hat, and was wiping his wet forehead with his transparent, claw-like hand, smoothing and plastering his hair, as though trying to bring it down over his eyes. He looked very villanous and wretchedly ill, worse, in every respect, than he had looked even in the dock at the assizes.

"You did the trick handsome, counsellor, at that trial. I will say that. The nobbiest counsellor as ever I had; and I've tried a few. I called to say 'thank you,' counsellor."

"There was no occasion to do anything of the kind," I said.

"Oh, but there was, counsellor. If it hadn't been for you the other counsellor'd been one too many for me. And that there judge, he came down heavy on me, he just did. But the persecutor, he was a soft-head, uncommon."

"Well," I said, "you had a narrow escape. I hope it will prove a warning to you not to get into trouble again."

"I'm fly to that gammon," he observed, with an odious wink. "That's what they

allays says when they can't convict. I am in trouble again, for the matter of that. I don't know as I've ever bin out o' trouble. I'm a magsman; that's my line. Thieving's meat and drink to me, thieving is. I took the persecutor's watch. In course I did. You know that well enough. But, bless you, it was out of my hands in a minute. They wasn't likely to find it on me, not likely. But you're fly to all that!"

"The case is done with, and I wish to hear nothing more about it. I'm busy, and I beg that you will go."

"Busy? Well, you haven't always been busy, have you now, counsellor?"

"I insist upon your going."

"You wasn't so very busy down at Westminster a little while back, when all those coves was capering about in big wigs. Good as a pantermine I call it. Never saw such a kit of beaks together all at once."

"You saw me there?"

"I just did. Hanging about you was. Regularly up a tree you looked. I saw you. Bless you, I tried your pockets. There was nothing in them—only keys. And keys, one can get keys anywheres."

"What were you doing there?"

I began, in spite of myself, to feel an interest in the man's conversation.

"The old fakement, and"—here he lowered his voice to the hoarsest of whispers, and came so near to me that I felt his noisome breath strike hot upon my cheek—"you didn't find nothing in your bag when you got home, perhaps?"

"What!" I cried, starting up. "It was you then—"

"Hush! In course. I shoved the flimsies in. I made a post-office of you. Cos why? I saw the stop (detective) had his eye on me. I knew I was wanted. I allays am. But I wasn't going to let 'em find anything on me. I never does."

"You were arrested, then?"

"Wrong, counsellor; not that time I wasn't snaffed. It looked like it. But the stop was after another party. Billy-go-fast, I think it were. But there was a many at work that morning. So I vamosed."

"You—what?"

"Sloped. Got clear away. But I kept an eye on you. I wanted to get the flimsies back, while you were star-gazing and fly-catching about the courts. But blowed if you wasn't too quick for me. You was off sharp, as though you knowed what you'd got in your bag. Perhaps you did. Most likely. Counsellors is pretty fly, generally speaking."

"And you think—"

"To get the flimsies back? No; come, counsellor, I ain't so jolly werdant as that comes to. Get a pat of butter out of a dog's throat! A flimsy back from a counsellor! Not that. You've parted with 'em long ago. Trust you for not keeping 'em long."

This was not quite true. Still it was sufficiently so. Certain of the notes—by far the greater number of them—yet remained in my desk. But, as I have already stated, a portion of the money, stolen money, as it now too plainly was proved to be, I had certainly under very pressing circumstances converted to my own use.

"But how did you come by those notes?" I demanded.

"Come, I like that, counsellor," he answered, laughing, and disclosing a hideous, irregular array of yellow teeth. "Axing me to criminate myself! You ought to know better than that, you know. But there's no harm in trying it on, and, after all, I don't know as there'd be so much harm in my telling you; for you're my counsellor, you know, out and out, ain't you, now? My attorney-general—that's how they call 'em, ain't it?" He laughed horribly as he said this. "So I'll tell yer—only it's dry talking—and I'm that short of wind I'm like a bust balloon. Ain't you got a drain of summut anywheres about the place? It's wonderful how I feel to want filling out."

He was clearly very much exhausted, and I strongly wished to hear his story; so I gave him a tumbler of brandy-and-water, feeling deep shame, I admit, at the thought of entertaining the creature as a guest, and countenancing his longer stay in my room.

"You'll drink too. That's right. Here's success to trade—yours and mine; they ain't so very different when all's considered. Success to trade, and no flies! Uncommon good tippie—warms one all through—only, that's the worst of it, it starts my cough off fresh."

He was seized with a most painful and violent fit of coughing, and for some minutes he was quite incapable of speech. Hateful as the man's presence was to me, I could not but feel sincere pity for his wretched state. It was plain to me that he was mortally stricken.

"Churchyard work, my cough, ain't it?" he said, as though he had read my thoughts. "I've got my sentence. No doubt about it. And I don't suppose there's no tickets-of-leave where I'm going to."

Still, I never was one to caterwaul. 'Game to the last,' that's my motter. And now about these flimsies? It's soon told. They was got on the cross, I needn't say. I shouldn't have had 'em else. Still, it was a bit of chance work. I was down at the races, Newmarket, October Meeting. There was a lot of us out, but not doing much. But there was a row of a sudden. There often is rows, you know, at races. A welcher was in trouble; hustled, mauled, shoved, bonneted—you know how odd times a welcher gets served out—they was all at him at once. You couldn't see a feature or a scrap of him, not a hair of his head, for the hands that was on him, tearing him to ribbons. Well, the flimsies was my share. Most was on to his leather bag. But I'd watched him before. I see him stow the flimsies inside his shirt. I knew there wasn't much in the bag. I was horrid frightened at first; I thought I'd only got his dickey. It was quite a mercy; but I found I was to-rights with the flimsies."

"What became of the man?"

"Why, counsellor, you don't suppose I stopped to ask?" He looked at me with an air of mingled pity and wonder. "Who cares what comes of a welcher? I expect he deserved all he got. It wasn't no business of mine if he didn't. I ain't pertickler, but sport's sport, and bar welching. He had hardly a rag on last time I see him. It's much if he got away alive and in his skin. If he did, *that* wasn't perfect, I'll go bail. I didn't stop to look on. The slops (police) was fly to me. I was druv about here, and there, and everywhere. They'd hardly give me a chance. Never had such a job as I had with them flimsies. I'd them about me for days; couldn't get rid of 'em nohow. Walked up to town. Still the slops had their eyes open. Then I was at Westminster, as I told you—you know the rest. It was light come and light go. The luck was with you. Good health, counsellor. You see I did you a good turn, and you did me one. I expect the flimsies about set you up; you looked precious down in the mouth when I first clapped eyes on you."

I was struck, perhaps more than I need have been, by the curious way in which he abandoned all claim to the notes, made sure that I had already disposed of them, and regarded all chances of regaining them for himself as something quite out of the question. After all, they had never been really his property. However I might deal with them, there certainly was no sort of reason why I should restore them to him.

"It was a rare look-out, you see," he resumed. "The rags" (he called the notes indifferently rags and flimsies) "were as good as gold. The welcher didn't know the numbers—was sure not to. He'd taken them in the way of his trade. Catch a welcher coming forward to identify flimsies! Why he dursn't. Only if the slops had lagged me, they'd have nabbed them sure enough; leastways, I should never have seen them again. So you got 'em. I ain't sorry. It was flimsies well laid out. A retaining fee, don't you call it? Not but what I spotted you. I traced you here. I'd have had 'em back if I only could. Then I was took for that ticker business. 'That's the man to defend me,' I says, meaning you, counsellor. 'Luck will come of it,' I says. And luck did come. You pattered splendiferously at them 'sizes. I made sure of a long term of penal, with that beak so heavy agin me and all; but you got me off, and you'll do the trick again, now won't you, counsellor? You're my counsellor now, as I said afore. Why you might be counsellor and attorney-general to the whole swarm of us. Here's wishing——" He drank more brandy; more coughing followed.

"You're snug up here, and quiet—uncommon," he began again presently. I was very anxious for him to go; but he seemed more and more disinclined to move. He had drawn a second chair towards him, and was resting his legs upon it. Now he lighted a pipe and surrounded himself with clouds of very strong-smelling tobacco. He went on drinking, smoking, and coughing. There seemed no chance of his speedy departure. "And it's respectable, too, in its way. And you're respectable, too—that is, fairish in *your* way, you know, counsellor. You might do a tidy stroke as a fence up here."

"As a what?"

"A fence. Come, you know what that is—a receiver. You're that already, you know, counsellor, along of them flimsies. Disposing of stolen property: that's what the slops call it. It's a great thing for a fence to look respectable. You know, counsellor, we might work it together prime. It would be long before they'd dream of looking here for a fence. Rags, tickers, plate, sparks (jewels), would be all one to you. Now here's a trifle——" He produced from his pocket a morocco leather case—evidently a jeweller's—and was proceeding to propose that I should, as a fence, buy the contents of him.

This was too much. What more he said I hardly know. I insisted upon his leaving me forthwith. It was with great difficulty

I could induce him to move. I dared say nothing of the police, or the "slops" as he preferred to term them. I feared that if I called in a constable some dreadful disclosure about the stolen notes might ensue. I might be entangled in a criminal charge. The thought was horrible. At last it occurred to me to threaten that if he did not depart at once, I would never again, under any circumstances, undertake his defence. I need hardly state that I had already quite decided to have no further dealings with so dreadful a client, upon any pretence whatever. This argument availed. With much reluctance, and pausing first to empty his tumbler, he withdrew. How thankful I was to close the door behind him, to hear him slowly and rather unsteadily descend the stairs, coughing violently as he went. I flung the glass out of which he had been drinking into the grate. I opened the window to let out the tobacco smoke, and, as it seemed to me, a certain pungent odour of felony with which the air of the room was tainted.

Suddenly I heard a noise in the court below, angry voices and something of a struggle. I looked out. My client was in the hands of the police. He was, to use his own words, "lagged" again. And this time there seemed little question that stolen property, the jeweller's case and its contents, would be found upon his person, and that altogether the probability of his being convicted of felony was very strong. From my window I could hear the click of handcuffs, and I could see the wretched man led away in custody.

A day or two later I read in the newspaper a report of the examination of Michael Runt, before a police magistrate, on a charge of robbery from the window of a West-end jeweller. The prisoner was described as a notorious offender, well-known to the police, a professional thief, adorned by his criminal friends with the nicknames of "Slippery Mike," the "Roarer," the "Coughing Stag," &c. The theft had been accomplished by the process known in thieves' language as "starring the glaze;" that is to say, a pane in the jeweller's window had been cut with a diamond, and articles of value extracted while the shopman's attention had been occupied by some idle questions asked by an accomplice of the depredator, affecting to be a customer. The operation was said to have been performed with singular skill. I pictured to myself the lean hand and long fingers of my client at work through the aperture he had made, deftly and noiselessly securing

the jewellery he had designed to appropriate. He was a detestable person; but I have not a doubt, I had reason to know, that he was a highly adroit malefactor.

Owing to some accidental cause the evidence adduced before the magistrate was incomplete, and the accused was remanded for further examination: I rather think the police applied for delay in the committal of the prisoner, alleging that there were many other charges of a similar kind to be brought against him.

I was in great dread lest I should be once more applied to to defend my client. The thought of again holding a brief for him was intolerable to me. What might he not do? What might he not say? He would probably address me from the dock familiarly as "counsellor," or his "attorney-general." He might openly allude to the fact that he had lodged stolen goods with me, or describe me as a "fence," and refer to his smoking and drinking with my consent in my chambers! The result would be simply ruinous to me. I should be publicly proclaimed the accomplice of a notorious felon.

So, very ill at ease, I waited to see what would happen. I carefully watched the newspapers for a report of the re-examination of the accused. But I could find no further mention of the case. It seemed somehow to have dropped out of notice.

At last I ventured to make inquiry on the subject at the police court. I was not, I own, without a certain fear that I should be unfavourably regarded by the authorities, possibly arrested as one in league with the prisoner. The police receive in so mysterious a way such peculiar and extensive information that it was quite conceivable they were already acquainted with the remarkable transactions that had taken place between Mr. Runt and myself. To my great relief, however, I found myself viewed as yet another of the large number of sufferers, who had come forward upon the prisoner's arrest to urge charges against him.

I then learnt that the man was dead.

"Yes, he's out of our reach now," said the police sergeant, rather grimly. He died in the House of Detention just after the first remand. It was sudden at last, but he'd long been ailing, and was as weak as a rat when he was first brought here. I thought him shamming, for he was always an uncommon artful customer. But it was a true bill. He'd cough enough to shake a man to bits. The doctor said it was a wonder he'd held together so long. It was a pity, too, for we'd as nice a case



against him as you could wish. We could have convicted him ten times over. However, it's no use talking about it. He's saved us some trouble, perhaps, and got off without punishment at last—if he has got off. It's not a thing one can be quite clear about. He was an out-and-out bad one, though not without a good point or two. However, it ain't worth while our reckoning him up now. He's safe not to touch the police any more, nor they him."

It was weak of me, perhaps, but I own to feeling saddened at the sergeant's news. After all, the poor dead felon had been my client. He had been a very hopeless creature. Had he lived, his reform was just possible: not more than that. But he had died as he had lived, the man I have described. He was more deserving of pity in death than in life.

And the bank-notes? They were never claimed. I kept them carefully a long time. Then I added to them other notes, equal in amount to those I had appropriated. Finally I packed them in an envelope, and addressed them to the secretary of a hospital devoted to the cure of the consumptive. At any rate, the stolen money wrought certain good at last.

### THIRTY DAYS AT THE DIAMOND FIELDS

I WILL not weary my readers by any description of the long, tedious, thirsty, and burning pilgrimage of our little caravan of diamond hunters from Port Natal to the banks of the Vaal. It is my object to tell, as briefly and plainly as may be, what I saw and experienced in the diamond fields themselves.

Early in the morning of the 2nd of December we finished our weary journey, and outspanned (encamped) on the banks of the yellow Vaal. The river is a fine, rapid stream, but owing to the recent rains, was swollen, turbid, and threatening. We could not get the waggons over anyhow, and it seemed very uncertain when we should do so. We might have to try the diggings on the side where we were first. Before breakfast I reconnoitred the ground, and collected what information I could. At noon I walked up to Robinson's Drift, crossed in a boat, landed at the upper diggings, and walked from one end to the other. I met several Natal people I knew, and went over several thriving stores. They were well supplied, and prices were reasonable. Meat was plentiful; beef and

mutton fourpence per pound. There was no regular post from Penel, but every Saturday a car ran between Hebron and Penel. Passengers, seven shillings and sixpence each; letters, sixpence. At the lower diggings, two miles further on, found —. He had been there five weeks, and not found a single diamond, though every one round him had been more or less successful. His party was on the move. I went prowling all over the diggings, and returned tired and hungry. More furious, heavy rain, thunder, and lightning.—December 3rd. Went all over the diggings on the Natal side, and the diggers showed me one or two diamonds said to have been found there. One advantage of our encampment was the good feed for cattle. On the other side cattle had to be driven five or six miles, morning and evening, to graze. While we were at a digger's house a terrific storm came on, and detained us several hours. No one seemed to mind it, for these wild storms are of daily occurrence.—Sunday the 4th, we spent quietly, taking a stroll up the river-bank.—December 5th. I went over Robinson's ground; I talked to the diggers, but could get no authentic information as to the findings. Robinson was very sharp, and wanted to get people to try his land. He told me his terms.

If we could not get across I felt we must try Robinson's Drift. In the mean time I sent Ash across the river to take two claims, which he did, just in the very middle of where people have found diamonds. We got the waggon unloaded, and set a man to work making cradles. We also shifted all the meal and flour into fresh sacks. The black ox died, but I trusted the rest would do, though the grass was execrably bad. In the evening I was told that a Dutchman had come and driven all our cattle into his kraal. We instantly set off to rescue them. The Kaffres all promised to stand by me. When we came to the kraal I ordered my Kaffres to drive the cattle out, and they went in to do so. Some Dutchmen instantly ran out of the house. One of them, mad with rage, was calling for his gun. In the mean time another Dutchman jumped into the kraal, screaming and shouting, and away scuttled my Kaffres, like so many sheep. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to come to terms, and after a long palaver peace was proclaimed. I was to pay ten shillings for the damage my erring cattle had done, and to get off the land. I told the Dutchmen to come to the waggon and

finish the business, and started back to camp, only wishing I had had one Englishman with me.—December 6th. The Dutchmen arrived, and I treated the matter in the tent diplomatically. I inquired what they wanted. I asked where my cattle were to go. The river was up, the oxen could not get across. I told them I was inquiring for grass on the adjoining farm. Then I produced some rum, acknowledging their sovereign right to their own land. I did not wish to trespass, but what was I to do? There was a large island in the river; what could they let me that for by the month. The head Dutchman said a sovereign, and that would give me the sole right of grazing. So we struck hands on the bargain. He then observed my biscuits, and wanted some for a child. I gave him a pound. One of his friends then asked if I had paid the ten shillings. He said no, but for a few biscuits he would say no more about it. Of course I agreed to this, and my would-be murderer of a few hours before parted from me the best of friends. We put the cattle on the island, and found there was capital feeding. My man, Colenbrander, returned with news that grazing was one shilling and sixpence per head per month, so my diplomacy with my choleric Dutch friend was not unsuccessful.

December 7th. We were busy all day unloading the carts and allotting the stores, for I had determined to divide our party, and send some of them across the river with the cart, to begin at once working the new claims. Some diggers came, and wanted to get leave from the Dutchman to work on a spot which I thought promising. He refused them, so I resolved to try him on my own account, as some of us were bound to remain on the Natal side with the waggon.—December 8th. After an early breakfast I got four of my oxen from the island, and took the cart and packed part of our goods in it. The oxen swam after the boat. We very nearly lost one, but he finally landed safe and sound. I sent the things over with four Kaffres, in two boat-loads. They then got two large barrels, and fastened one before and one behind underneath the cart, and towed it after the boat. Directly it got into deep water, but fortunately near the bank, it did exactly what I had expected, it slowly and majestically toppled over and sunk on its side. The excitement was intense. The men lost their heads, and were hopeless, but I set to work. I told them to tow the cart round, hooked on a chain, sent all the

blacks into the water, and by dint of yells and threats, made them combine to right the cart and pull it on shore. I fastened the casks to the sides of the wheels, which I fixed with a chain, then pushed the cart into the water boldly, and away it went grandly ever so far down the river, but still safely, to the other side. I then crossed, faint with hunger and parched with thirst, for it was dangerous to drink the yellow mud of the Vaal. When I got to the camp, I rushed to a store, and don't think I ever enjoyed anything so much in my life as the three tumblers of claret and filtered water I drank. We then pitched our tent, and shortly after turned in. Through what an uproar we tried to sleep! Guns firing, music playing, men singing or quarrelling, carts busy in the moonlight, taking earth down to the cradles, dogs barking, diggers shouting; but I was so tired that even this conglomeration of discordant sounds could not keep me long awake.—December 9th. We took off the top of the cart, and settled the ground round our tent. I walked along the banks of the muddy yellow river, to secure a place for our cradle. We commenced digging that afternoon, and were to wash on the morrow. We heard that an eight carat diamond was picked up to-day on Robinson's Drift. I saw a man who had seen it. Having no great faith in Robinson, I think, though picked up there, it may not have grown there, as the man who picked it up is a Penel digger, who has lots of diamonds with him. A twenty-two carat diamond was yesterday found on Lower Hebron. This day there was an amusing scene in the camp. Three young fellows, successful diggers, mounted on mules, which were harnessed to a light cart, and galloped like madmen up and down the street, waving flags and shouting. Diggers were coming fast to Hebron, and waggons daily arriving. I caught six fish for my dinner, and pickled some of them. I am already a grand hand at making bread, and am fast becoming less civilised and helpless. It was the first very hot night, no breeze, and the mosquitoes tormenting.—December 10th. Carted down several loads of gravel, and commenced to wash.—Sunday 11th. Rested, and took a long, quick walk up the river-side.—December 12th. Unloaded the waggon, and got out planks to make more cradles. After breakfast stowed all away again before moving nearer our claim. Erasmus, for a consideration, drew our waggons, as I did not want to remove the cattle from the island. Had only time to pitch the tent be-

fore dark.—December 13th. We settled the ground, made another cradle, then took the Kaffres, and went to the claim, cleared off the big stones, and dug enough gravel for washing. Crossed the river in the afternoon, to see how they were getting on there.—December 14th. Up at four carting down stuff to the river, and sorting till seven. What a day's work! After breakfast, sorted till one. After dinner, sorting again from three till five. At five we went to the claim to pick enough stuff to wash and sort next day. This lasted till seven, which did not leave much time for anything else.

This diary gives a good notion of a digger's daily routine. If English convicts had to keep such hours, from five A.M. till seven P.M., what a groan would run through philanthropic England! Of one thing I am certain, that sorting pebbles is harder work than picking oakum.

Let me describe the diamond fields in detail. The land I am now looking at on the other side of the Vaal is a long, low hill, sloping gradually down to the water, and covered with low, prickly shrubs. The spot is by no means beautiful or inviting to cattle or man. It is neither picturesque nor promising, yet it contains the very essence of wealth, the choicest treasures of royalty, power, and beauty. There, since the beginning of the world, trodden under foot by savages and wild beasts, unheeded, while Europe has suffered its storms and convulsions, these diamonds have slumbered. The upper part of the sloping hill is composed of orange-coloured gravel, with here and there boulder stones, detritus of old water-courses, cropping out. This gravel is very attractive to the eye, and consists, for the most part, of agates, cornelians, clear yellow stones, and bits of jasper. For the first day or two you feel inclined to make a collection of the best of these; but this avarice wears off when you begin to find the good and sound stones are few and far between, and are nearly as scarce as the diamonds, which, like all good things, are shyest of all. Whenever a spot of this gravel is selected, either by new comers, or from a diamond having been found, the people make a rush, and the whole of the ground is at once divided into lots twenty-one feet square. The new and hopeful hands begin at once to pick and loose up the virgin ground, and after throwing by the big stones, they sift the smaller gravel through a large screen, and get rid of all pebbles bigger than a pigeon's egg. Of course, the man lucky enough to find a diamond bigger than this, is sure to see it

in the sieve. All that goes through the sieve is the small gravel or wash stuff. This residuum is carted down to the river early in the morning, and washed in a cradle, which consists of a couple of sieves, the upper one coarse in the mesh, the lower one fine. These sieves are placed on a frame set on rockers. The gravel is placed in the upper sieve, and one man rocks the cradle, while his companion pours water on all the gravel and fine dust which has washed through the two sieves. The upper sieve is looked over, and the contents thrown aside, while the gravel from the under one, containing pebbles from the size of a hazel-nut to that of a big pin's head, is reviewed on the table, at which we will suppose I and my comrade Ash are sitting. We are in a bower made of branches and an old sail. We each grasp a flat piece of zinc, and commence by drawing a small portion of the gravel towards us like children playing with shells. With one motion of the hand we spread out our store carefully on the table, and with another, like disappointed gamblers that we are, we sweep it contemptuously off; so the diggers here go on, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, and perhaps never, after all, see the welcome gleam of the long-sought diamond. The manual labour is not so great, but, oh! the monotony and weary watching of the stones. It is dreadfully tiring; one's back aches, all one's limbs feel benumbed, and the shoulder-blades have soon their own special grievances.

On Christmas Day, a terrible event happened; my poor Dutch carpenter, Colenbrander, was drowned in the Vaal. Poor young fellow! He, I, two Dutchmen, and two of our Kaffres, had gone to the island to look after the cattle. Colenbrander and I went across in a punt, the others waded across. After we had looked at the oxen, and had had a good rest under the trees, we proposed to return. One of the Dutchmen had gone, the other said he would swim across; Colenbrander said he would also, and asked me to carry his clothes over in the punt. I made no objection to his going, as the river was not very broad by the island, and there was no dangerous current. The Dutchman and Colenbrander went in, and I followed in the punt. About half way across I saw Colenbrander, as I thought, dip his head under to wet it; he then swam on a few strokes and did it again, making no noise beyond the puffing noise usually made by swimmers. In a second or two he went

down again. Beginning to be alarmed, I pulled the punt up, not at all sure that he was in need of it. He came up for a moment, then sank for ever. I was horror-struck. I could not realise it. Not a cry, not a gesture, to lead me to imagine that he had been in danger, or was even frightened. The Dutchman, who was swimming only ten yards off, had not the faintest idea of the poor fellow's danger. I cannot describe my stunned, paralysed feeling of horror, wonder, and regret as I stood on the opposite bank and looked at the muddy waters which hid the poor fellow from us. We had no means at hand to recover the body. I ran back to my tent, changed my clothes, and went across to break the sad news to Ash. I then ran to Alexander, and he, with generous alacrity, mustered ten or twelve Natal men, and went at once to the spot in a boat; we tried, till sun-down, to recover the body, but all in vain. Next morning the Natal men again mustered willingly, but were still unsuccessful. I spent that night and the next in Alexander's tent miserable enough. Just after tea on the Monday night, as I, Alexander, and Ash were sitting together, I suddenly saw something near a box glitter. I said, "There's a snake in the tent."

Ash replied, "What nonsense."

I persisted. "I am sure there is," I said, "for I caught its eye, and when I moved it drew back."

Ash was so positive I was mistaken that he would move the box, and prove I was in the wrong. He suddenly jumped back, crying, "There is, indeed, a snake, and a big one too." He and I had both sticks, and hit at it, but we could not get a fair blow at its head, which it kept shielded behind the box. Presently it brought its head round and hissed, and we all bolted, thinking it was coming after us. Out went the candle in the confusion of our frightened rush, and we could not venture back against our stealthy and deadly enemy in the dark. We at last got lights, and returned to the tent. I ventured in first with a lantern, expecting to find the evil one exorcised by the alarm. All at once I looked down, and seeing him within six inches of me, leaped back, thankful for my narrow escape. We then fell on him with our sticks, and finally despatched him. He was quite five feet long.

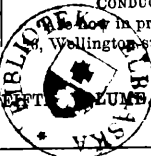


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