

THE GREAT INUNDATION.

By W. W. FENN.



THAT "fact is stranger than fiction" is a very old saying, and whilst we fully admit its truth it should not be forgotten that fact very often seems to imitate fiction. That is to say, we hear a story told of some remarkable event which is supposed to have occurred long ago, and soon after we have heard the story, we read in a newspaper of some very similar event which actually happened only the other day. It may have been that the original story was true, or was pure

fiction invented by its writer for our amusement. However this may be, whether it was founded on truth or was only invention, certain it is, we are constantly coming across real events which strangely resemble something of which we have heard or read before. This circumstance possibly may have given rise to another common saying, which is, that "history repeats itself." Without, however, speculating too closely on this latter point, I will illustrate what I mean by an example. A certain distinguished novelist wrote a long story which turned upon a strange disappearance. A gentleman wandered away from his house into a forest of old pollard trees, many so old that their main trunks had grown quite hollow with age, and he was never heard of nor seen again. No one could tell what had become of him for years and years afterwards. At last some of the oldest trees in the forest had to be felled. When the woodman laid his axe at the foot of one of

these and brought it crumbling and tumbling down, lo and behold the skeleton of a man was discovered in the hollow of the trunk. From the evidence afforded by remnants of clothing, and other less perishable things such as a watch and chain, a knife, keys, etc., which were found with the skeleton, it was proved to be none other than that of the unfortunate gentleman whose disappearance had been such a matter of mystery for so long. He was known to have had the habit of climbing into the trees and of sitting there reading in hot summer weather. It is supposed that on the day when he was missed, he had been so engaged, and in moving had slipped down at the top into the hollow rotten pollard trunk, and being held there was unable to extricate himself. Far away in the depths of the forest his cries for help reached no human ears, and wedged in there as he was, upright, the tree's trunk literally became his living grave or coffin. His death must have been miserable and terrible, and of course the accident which cost him his life left no trace, and hence all search for him was in vain. This, roughly speaking, was the main incident of the fiction.

Now only a very few years ago, and long after the above story was written, the skeletons of two men were discovered in the hollow trunks of trees exactly in the same way—one somewhere in Germany—the other, I think, in our own Forest of Dean. There are many other instances on record which would illustrate my statement, that fact very often seems to imitate fiction; but the one I have just given is sufficient to show what I mean—and to show its truth. I have prefaced the story I am about to tell with these remarks because it is also a striking illustration of the odd sort of coincidence which frequently exists between fiction and fact. That which I

am going to tell is a fact, and, like the skeleton in the tree-trunk, appears to be a direct imitation of an old fiction—a fiction in this case, however, created not with the pen but with the brush. About twelve or thirteen years ago Mr. Millais painted a picture of an inundation in which a baby lying asleep in its little boat-like cradle was set afloat, and carried away by the rushing waters from a distant cottage out among the fields and hedges. It was a very notable and beautiful work of art, but none the less a pure fiction, entirely due to the inventive genius of the great artist. He had probably never seen such an incident, but his mind imagined the possibility of its occurring during a flood in a rural district; and he was right, a similar circumstance has actually happened. And this is the story about it—the story which is the imitation of the fiction.

Not a hundred miles from one of the principal towns in Lincolnshire, there is a little village named Fenchurch-in-the-Fens. It is situated on a slight eminence on the borders of a moderate-sized river which winds its sluggish way among the flat marshy meadows for which certain parts of that county are celebrated. The population consists mainly of the better sort of agricultural labourers. Amongst the most prosperous of these, not many years ago there lived one Zachariah Hazel, a widower with three sons. Their mother had died whilst they were all children, but they had been well cared-for and brought up by their father, who was a stern but on the whole an upright man, although he sometimes strained his ideas of justice a little too tight perhaps, not making sufficient allowance under all circumstances for the weaknesses common to humanity. As time went on and the boys grew to be men, he failed to think of them as such, and did not remember that by degrees his control over them would in the natural order of things become less and less. He expected them to obey him in every little detail of life when they were nineteen or twenty and thereabouts, exactly as they did when they were nine or

ten. They were naturally good and obedient fellows, and in their relation to him were excellent sons; but of course by degrees they began to have wills and opinions of their own. The consequence was there arose occasional differences, not to say squabbles, between Zachariah Hazel and his boys. They were not really a quarrelsome family, but the father's constant attempts to control all their actions just as he used to do ten and twelve years before brought about many disputes. These however never reached any serious dimensions until Adam, the eldest, was nearly seven-and-twenty years of age. Unluckily, about that time, he must needs want to get married, and this desire led to the most angry and serious consequences. Zachariah Hazel was a careful man; and having by degrees saved a little money, he had contrived from time to time to add to the patch of land attached to the cottage where he lived (a freehold) which had come to him at his wife's death. Thus, instead of being employed himself on a neighbouring farm, he began to farm for himself, and to employ workmen of his own. His sons, of course, laboured with him in their own fields; for he always used to say that his property would be theirs at his death, and that he looked upon the whole concern as a general partnership, although of course he never forgot, as was perfectly right, to show that he was master and the head of the firm. In spite of all opposition, urged it must be admitted without much show of reason by the father, Adam persisted in his determination to get married.

"All I can say, my lad, is that, if you do make Lucy Muswell your wife, you cease to be my son," finally remarked the elder Hazel, at the end of the last long angry discussion on the subject. "I have done with you; I shall wipe you out of my memory and from my will; I won't leave you a stiver, and you'll have to find for yourself for the rest of your days, and for your wife and family, if family you have, which of course you will."

"Very well, father, I am very sorry,"

answered the son, "but there is no help for it, so I must make the best of it. Lucy is a good girl, she is very fond of me and I am very fond of her, and I don't mean to give her up. She is better born than any of us, and if her parents are willing to take me, as I am, for their son—well! I shan't be the loser—rather the other way, for I shall gain a mother besides a father—and a wife into the bargain. She is an only child, and if I work for Mr. Muswell as I have done for you, I don't think he'll be a loser neither. His farm is worth double and treble what your's is, and if you live long enough, as I hope you will, you'll see me as well to do a man as you are. Sam and Jack likewise will be the better off if what you have to leave goes to them without my standing in for my share. So all will be for the best, you'll see; so let us part friends. There's my hand."

But the obstinate and unreasonable Zachariah was so blinded by this opposition to his will that he refused to take his son's outstretched palm, and Adam went his way saddened to the heart, but feeling that the fault was not his. His brothers Samuel and John, who were also now three or four-and-twenty, came in for a good deal of their father's anger when Adam had taken this step, for they had all along done what they could to bring about an amicable arrangement.

So Adam Hazel was married and went to live with his wife in a small cottage adjoining the farm of his father-in-law, a man now stricken in years and who was glad to hand over the management of his property to such an active, upright and experienced farmer as Adam. The square red-brick farmhouse, with its huge projecting chimney-stack, stood some five miles higher up the sluggish old river than Fenchurch-in-the-Fens. It was a somewhat lonely looking abode save in the brightest summer weather. But when the sun shone and trees and fields were green, its aspect was pleasant enough, nestling as it did amongst some groups of gaunt poplars, alders, and willows. These latter stretched away in all directions in long low lines marking the dykes and tribu-

aries and backwaters of the main stream, and only just above the level of which stood the house and adjacent outbuildings, including Adam's cottage. The barns, sheds, and ricks, with the adjoining straw-yard, the cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry, horses, waggons and carts which were congregated round about the spot when farming operations were in full activity, of course gave it an air of life, if only by contrast with the otherwise desolate character of the district. There were no other houses near it, and the extreme flatness of the country enabled you even from a very low elevation to see for miles round. Fenchurch, on its little hill surmounted by the church spire, was a conspicuous feature, however, in the landscape from far and near, and the eye always travelled to it as something pleasant to rest upon amidst the surrounding monotony. Adam Hazel and his young wife looked forth at it constantly, but rarely went near the village itself unless obliged by some business. For Zachariah carried out his threat to the letter, and refused to acknowledge his son by word or look when he chanced to meet him. He cut him dead, as the phrase goes in less rural societies, and forbade Sam and John also to speak to their brother or any of his belongings. Thus the young married couple kept themselves as much to themselves as they could, and sometimes six months would pass without the relations even catching sight of each other. The parson and a few of the more educated inhabitants of Fenchurch deplored this state of things, for the Hazels were much respected and the family feud was a source of regret to all. Still, there it was, and nobody could help it; and so in the course of a couple of years it had begun to fade from people's minds. Adam Hazel was seldom seen, and his wife and her parents even less frequently, by the good people of Fenchurch-in-the-Fens.

In wintertime intercourse in such lonely and out of the way districts is at the best very restricted. The bleak climate of our eastern counties is felt in its full intensity nowhere more than in the Fens of Lincolnshire. Snow, frost, and flood, have it all

their own way, and the bitter wind drives up from the sea across the low-lying land in a way which makes even the inhabitants wince, whilst the sportsmen who come to look after the wild-fowl which swarm in the neighbourhood are often the only living human beings who face the elements, as one may say, of their own accord.

It is at this season of the year that the true desolation and wild, forbidding aspect of the country can be fully realized. For miles around there seems to be but one pale grey-green waste, canopied by a leaden-grey sky often only one degree less broken and colourless than the land. Even when the snow has blotted every remnant of colour out of it and reduced it to one flat blank, its monotony is somehow less depressing than during the merely hard dull grey weather which generally prevails. But perhaps to see it at its very worst we should be there when the floods are out. Then truly the region presents a scene of miserable desolation unparalleled. Soddened strips and patches of land, lines of the dyke embankments here and there, the tops of the submerged willows or the bare taller trees, with now and then a bit of hedgerow just peeping up, a half-drowned group of hayricks or the roof and chimneys of some isolated cottage—these are the sights which meet the eye as it gazes round upon the waste of water—sights which seem to affect the heart of man with terror and despair, as though some intuitive and inherited memory of the way in which God chastised the wickedness of the land, still lingered in our consciousness and made us dread lest our continued evil doings might again bring down upon us a like punishment.

It was during the third winter after the rupture between Adam Hazel and his father, that one of the worst of these inundations occurred in Lincolnshire. The rain set in about six weeks before Christmas, "which falling in the land had every pelting river made so proud, that they had o'erborne their continents," as Shakspeare says. Day after day it continued pouring in torrents, as if it had never rained before,

and as if it never meant to stop. What little intercourse between farms, villages, and towns was possible, was mainly carried on by boats. Hundreds of pounds' worth of property were destroyed, sheep and cattle perished, accidents of all kinds occurred, people were driven from their houses and many drowned. The greatest distress prevailed, consternation and terror were written in all faces. Of course, from its comparatively elevated situation, the village of Fenchurch suffered less than any other spot in the immediate neighbourhood. It also, for the same reason, became a rallying point for the unhappy people who had to seek refuge from the floods.

There was not, however, one road leading to or from it which could be passed for more than a mile without the axle-trees of the vehicles and the knees of the horses being covered with water; and the difficulty of reaching even its lower approaches, were seldom overcome without the assistance of boats. The usually sluggish old river had become a foaming torrent, and the little ditches, streams, and inlets were swollen to treble their usual size, whilst rushing and tearing along and overflowing their banks they carried away foot-bridges, palings, planks—everything indeed that would float or could be torn up. The salvage of the flotsam and jetsam as it was washed past the village, became a melancholy and often dangerous occupation for the inhabitants, and one to which they were driven by necessity, for all other work was entirely at a standstill. Zachariah Hazel and his sons Samuel and John, were foremost amongst the most active of those who took their share of this task. From morning till night they were on the alert with poles, hooks, ropes, pitchforks, rakes—anything which would help them to reach and rescue the property set afloat by the deluge. By their exertions several live sheep and a cow, which had been washed down in the direction of Fenchurch, were got out of their sad plight, just as the poor beasts had been vainly trying to swim to land. Many dead sheep as well as pigs, a poor little

pony, and an old donkey, were also saved by these sturdy, energetic fellows and others like them. The contents of cottages, such as chairs, tables, bedsteads even occasionally, were amongst the wreckage, showing that the visitation had not spared the innermost recesses of some of the people's homes. The humblest household-gods were floated out from their shrines, and added a melancholy feature to the sufficiently melancholy scene. One of the chief streamlets adjacent to the village skirted the main street, and wound its now foaming way through a part of the property of Zachariah Hazel.

Down this, from some peculiar set of the current, had come floating from the upper river way, a large quantity of household property. More than one item of furniture had been saved by the father and his two sons, as it drifted along this channel; and evidence was not wanting to show that the contents of some specially well-cared-for habitation higher up the stream, was sharing the common fate.

"Look out father!" cried Sam, suddenly one day, when the three were engaged in their usual work; "here's a queer looking article coming along. I can't rightly make out what it is. Run to the bank with your pole; Jack and I can reach it from the bridge before it goes under, if you hook hold of it."

The object which excited this exclamation, was indeed an unusual looking waif; and at the first glance, as it came swirling into that part of the stream where it was crossed by a narrow-planked bridge, more resembled a little boat, or a sort of toy Noah's Ark half covered at one end, than anything else. The directions given by Sam were promptly executed. On came the strange little craft, bobbing about and twisting round and round as it was caught by the current, sometimes getting spun into mid-stream, and then floating gaily on until another eddy took it and brought it close to the shore. At last it was only a few yards from the bridge, with its back or covered end towards the anxious watchers.

Suddenly it was turned completely round, and then for the first time they saw what it really was, and what it contained. A cry of surprise and alarm broke simultaneously from the lips of the three men—all now standing on the bridge waiting to intercept it.

"Dear heart!" exclaimed Zachariah, "why, if it isn't a cradle, with a dear blessed little babe a-lying fast asleep in it." In a moment the hook of his pole was extended, and in another moment, as the floating object came within reach, he had hooked hold of it, and was drawing it gently towards the bridge, on which Sam and Jack had now laid down ready to catch at it directly it was within arm's length. Some other of the villagers had observed the strange nature of this burthen, which the flood was bearing along to destruction; and two or three of them, armed with the usual implements of rescue, now came running and shouting down the little street. By the time they reached the water's edge the cradle had been lifted on to the plank of the bridge, and the hard stern Zachariah Hazel was holding the poor little baby affectionately in his arms, alternately expressing his thanks to God for having been permitted to save this tiny human life, and then kissing and sobbing over it as if it had been his own child. It was a touching sight to see this strong rough man, with moistened eyes, hold the delicate little form to his breast and patting its face and smoothing aside its hair from off the forehead with his great, hard finger-tips, with all the tenderness of a mother.

"It ain't got very wet, after all," he cried, "and it don't seem much the worse neither; for, look! it's opening its eyes and beginning to laugh, but we must take it indoors to the fire and warm it, for its poor little pats are as cold as ice." "Come on, boys, bring along the cradle, for that'll tell us, p'raps, whose child it is. Maybe they'll think it's drowned, poor souls, until we can tell 'em otherwise. Come on, Sam, I say; don't be loitering now; look alive," and with this Hazel made straight away to his house

which was not far off. In a few minutes more he had given his burthen into the charge of the elderly woman who kept house for him, and who was soon warming

and tending the child before the ample kitchen fire, whilst the man stood looking on with admiration and delight. For never let it be forgotten that, odd and



obstinate as Zachariah was towards his children when they were grown up, he had always been especially fond of them when they were little, and his love for all babies, and indeed for young creatures of all sorts, was very remarkable and formed one of the best traits in his character.

While he was thus standing near the fire-place looking down into the good woman's lap, and every now and then gently patting the cheeks of the little thing nestling and crooning there, his two sons entered the roomy old kitchen carrying the still dripping cradle lightly between them. As they set

it down their father immediately turned his attention to it, and lifted it on to a dresser near the window.

"Bless my heart¹ alive," he said as he began to examine it; "I wonder whose babe it is: we must find out that afore anything else."

He turned back the little counterpane and with it one corner of the snowy sheet, and then started suddenly back as if he had received a violent blow. And indeed he had, for there—conspicuous in black marking-ink upon the edge of the white sheet—were the words 'Adam and Lucy Hazel.' The moment his eye had rested on them he knew as certainly as he did afterwards that it was none other than his own grandchild whom he had saved from a watery grave.

For several minutes he stood regarding the letters in a half-stupefied fashion as if he were in a waking dream. Then he passed the back of his hand across his eyes, and with a doubtful, puzzled expression on his face, stooped down the closer to examine the writing. Appearing at length convinced that his senses were not deceiving him, he turned half round and began staring at the baby. Then he looked back at the cradle, and then again back at the child, rubbed his eyes once more, heaved up from his broad chest a strange sound, half sigh, half whistle, and finally walking across the room to the large wooden arm-chair by the fire, sat down. Resting his elbows on his knees and his chin in his palms he so sat motionless for a long while, silently glaring into the glowing peat. When Zachariah Hazel lapsed into a fit of silence of this sort it was an ominous sign. Something was known to be brewing in his mind, and no one who knew him, least of all his sons, cared to break in on such reveries. Thus, not a word was spoken for nearly a quarter of an hour. Sam and Jack had also seen the names on the edge of the sheet, and had read their meaning aright. They exchanged significant glances with each other—glances expressing surprise and apprehension, but they neither ventured to

speak. They stood awkwardly by the dresser examining and drying the cradle, and pretending to smooth out the linen which was only drabbed and wet here and there; but they were both really pre-occupied by wondering what would be the upshot on their father's temper of this discovery. At length the silence in the room was slightly disturbed by a faint wail from the infant who, soothed by the warmth and comfort of its newly found nurse's lap had fallen asleep and was now just waking. Presently it broke into a crow of delight as the woman raised and caressed it. Hazel immediately arose and bent over it with even greater tenderness than before, and after muttering a few words about its beauty turned sharply upon his two sons and said:—

"Now, you fellows, what are you standing idling about there for? Be off with you at once and find out what has happened with Adam. Away with you, and make the best of your way up to old Muswell's farm. Find out what's going on, and what has become of your brother, tell him his babe is safe, and bring him back with you."

Then the man, as if half relenting in this tacitly expressed desire for a reconciliation, called his sons back as they were leaving the kitchen.

"Stop a bit," he said; "I don't see as there's any need for me to shake hands with him, after all. Tell him the child's safe, that'll do. I don't want to see him."

"Oh, master, don't say so," here broke in the good woman, who had now guessed from Zachariah's words the real state of things; "don't say so. If this dear little thing is really your Adam's daughter——"

"Oh, is it a girl?" interrupted Zachariah excitedly; "I'm glad of that, I'm glad of that." And with this he instantly took the baby from its nurse into his own arms, and began kissing and fondling it more affectionately than ever. Sam and Jack, still lingering on the threshold, cast each a glance at their father, and then, as if moved by a common impulse, hastened out of the room. They knew the man through and

through, and, to a certain extent, how to manage him, and made their calculations accordingly.

It was all very well for them to be told to make their way to Muswell's farm; but this was no easy task, as can be readily understood when the state of the country is remembered. They bent their steps, however, in the direction of their brother's residence, and, on passing through the village street, freely told their neighbours the nature of their mission, and of the discovery which had led to it. In a little community like that of Fenchurch-in-the-Fens, we may be sure the news was not long in spreading to everybody, and everybody's thoughts immediately turned to the parents of the child just providentially rescued.

"Poor souls," cried one villager. "I reckon they have been pretty nigh drowned out of their house themselves. It'll be a main hard job for you to get over there, Master Sam. But come along, we'll all help, now you seem to think your father'll come round. Lord, Lord, but it will be good coming out of evil, and no mistake, if it only brings round old Zach to shake hands with Adam again."

Thus it became a large party who went in quest of the poor folks at Muswell's farm. Nothing so far had been seen of any of them at Fenchurch during the present flood, and although this circumstance was not extraordinary, it seemed to cause some anxiety now that there was good reason for believing they were in danger. Getting as far along the road on foot as the waters would allow them, the knot of sturdy fellows jumped into a boat and a large punt which were moored to some palings, and which had already done good service in ferrying many distressed people into safety. The two brothers formed part of the crew of the punt, and, with the wherry in attendance, were soon paddling and pushing their way across a large stretch of inundated land to a line of dyke embankments which, for a considerable distance, rose a little above the waters. The boats were now taken in tow until another waste of water obliged the

men to re-enter them, and a still further distance was got over. Again and again this process was repeated: here and there in the shallower places, some delay being caused by the craft getting aground. Then there was much floundering and splashing, and pulling and hauling, until they could again get fairly afloat. More than three miles were thus, by degrees, put between them and Fenchurch; but at last they were enabled to get into real deep water. So far they had made their way across country, but here they struck into a long reach of the river itself. Although the force of the current obliged the men to put out all their strength to stem it, their progress was less interrupted when once they were fairly afloat on the river. They had only to make headway along it and it would lead them straight to within a stone's throw of their destination. This was now in sight; the roofs and chimneys of Muswell's farm, and the tops of the tall trees round about it, rose conspicuously against the dull, grey, but now rainless sky. The nearer they came to it the more their apprehensions for the safety of its inmates increased. It soon became quite evident that the whole of the basements of the buildings, together with the yards and neighbouring fields, were under water. The solid house itself, of course, had resisted, as it might have done many times before, the inroads of the deluge. Not so, however, the barns, out-houses, and less substantial erections. Several of these, together with many ricks, had been undermined, and had given way. Great masses of half-thatched corn and hay were floating sluggishly about, or had become jammed together in soddened heaps against trees, hedges, or walls. Timbers and broken-up portions of weatherboarding, planks, beams, hen-coops, gates and branches of trees likewise formed conspicuous features in the scene of havoc. Everything that would float was afloat, and now and then getting adrift, came swirling away in the current past the approaching boats, whilst the projecting tops of some crumbling walls here and there showed that

much of the destroyed property had sunk beneath the surface of the waters. A bend in the river brought the terrible scene of desolation into full view of the approaching party, who could then all see that the little cottage at the rear of the farm-house where Adam Hazel lived, had suffered more severely than all other parts of the premises. One end of it had been entirely washed away, so that a section of the building with the top of the staircase and one of the upper rooms lay completely open to the daylight. Filled with consternation and apprehension, the men, as soon as they could manage to row and punt themselves into the precincts of the farm, began to shout and call upon the inmates by name. So far there had been no sign of any living creature, but now a window was flung open at the top of the farm-house, and a young woman, one of the servants, appeared, evidently in the deepest distress. She recognized Sam Hazel, and so soon as he had floated the punt to within earshot, just below the window, she began to tell her sad tale.

"Oh, master Sam," she cried quickly, "it's well you are come, or we might have all been drowned like the poor darling babe. Your brother and the missus were over here with the old people, and had only left her about a quarter of an hour this morning, asleep and safe in her cradle, when a side of the house fell in with a crash, and nobody ha'n't seen nothing of her since. Nobody can't find her, and we can't tell if she's been crushed to death or drowned."

"Stop, stop!" cried Sam; "where's my brother and his wife? Their child's all safe and at our house, but where are they?"

"Lord bless your heart, Master Sam! they're a'most beside theirselves. Master Adam have been——." But here attention was diverted from the girl by the sudden opening of a window on a lower storey, and the appearance at it of the head and shoulders of Adam himself.

"All right!" immediately shouted Sam and Jack together, "all right, Adam! your child's safe and sound, and you're to come

back to father. He wants to see you and make it up, he's sent us to fetch you. Heart alive, man! come along, bring the missus, and catch him while he's in the humour. Aye? but this is a rare mercy God has given us, and your little girl has done it all!"

Adam scarcely waited to interchange more than another brief word or two with Sam, but descending as low as the water in the house would allow him, appeared in a few minutes at a lower window; and this time with his wife by his side.

The men in the punt were holding on to any little projection which offered itself on the side of the house as if it had been the side of a ship, but the boat was yet too far below the window, for a woman at any rate to get into it. So there was more delay while a ladder had to be fetched by Adam, but soon this was thrust out of the window and down into the boat, and by degrees poor Mrs. Adam was handed out and seated safely at one end of the sturdy, flat-bottomed craft, where she soon began to console herself with the recollection that her child was alive and well. Her husband went back for the purpose of inducing her parents to leave the house now that rescue had come, but the old people refused to desert their home. The father said that the worst was over, he knew, and that the flood would soon abate, and that he could rely on the stability of the old house which he had more than once before seen in nearly equal peril. Finally, therefore, it was decided that the young people only should be taken to Fenchurch, and when Adam at length had taken his place in the punt beside his wife, the party began the return journey, which was in the course of time accomplished in the same way as they had come.

The short winter twilight was fast fading into night with a promising strip of crimson in the western sky, as the three brothers and Mrs. Adam entered the old kitchen of the paternal abode.

No one was ever able exactly to tell who spoke first, or what was said by anybody for

a long while. Zachariah, however, who seemed to feel the awkwardness of the situation less than the others, was still nursing the child, which he, was never tired of doing. The moment he caught sight of the mother, he popped it into her arms without a word, and peace and good-will was thenceforth re-established in the Hazel household. Suddenly somebody remembered that it was Christmas Eve, and this most appropriate discovery so diverted attention from the awkward side of the meeting, that, what with laughing and rejoicing, and then with some crying and sobbing on the part of the two women, and the general thanksgiving for the mercy which had been vouchafed, they resolved themselves after a time into quite a happy little family-party. Refreshment was produced in the shape of a huge pie, and a foaming jug of ale; and, bating the recollection of the havoc and sorrow now wrought by the great inundation, there certainly could not have been found for miles around that unlucky district, a group of people whose hearts were beating with more cordial affection and thankfulness. Old Zachariah, perverse though he was, was a frank-hearted man, and though he said nothing about the mistake he had made, he felt it none the

less deeply in his rough way, and continued tacitly acknowledging it over and over again, by suddenly getting up and kissing his daughter-in-law and her child, and then by shaking his son's hand as if he would wring his arm off. The vocabulary of these good people was rather limited, so we need not linger over their conversation. It turned upon home and public affairs, so to speak, alternately; and old Hazel's satisfaction was the greater perhaps when he discovered that the little girl he and his sons had rescued was his first and so far his only grandchild. Later on he announced his intention of making over to her what would have been her father's share in his property. He seemed to have a satisfaction in making this arrangement, as it did not oblige him to re-introduce Adam's name into his will—that young man's future, he said, being provided for by his marriage.

All at Fenchurch-in-the-Fens rejoiced to hear of the reconciliation. It was the one bright spot, the solitary piece of good that could be extracted from the surrounding evil; and as it is in the nature of things for mortals to err, people said that perhaps it was not extraordinary once in a way for a father to have been in the wrong instead of a son.

