

But now the young and fresh imagination
 Finds traces of their presence everywhere,
 And peoples with a new and bright creation
 The clear blue chambers of the sunny air.

For them the gate of many a fairy palace
 Opens to the ringing bugle of the bee,
 And every flower-cup is a golden chalice,
 Wine-filled, in some grand elfin revelry.

Quaint little eyes from grassy nooks are peering;
 Each dewy leaf is rich in magic lore;
 The foam-bells, down the merry brooklet steering,
 Are fairy-freighted to some happier shore.

Stern theorists, with wisdom overreaching
 The aim of wisdom, in your precepts cold,
 And with a painful stress of callous teaching,
 That withers the young heart into the old,

What is the gain if all their flowers were perished,
 Their vision-fields for ever shorn and bare,
 The mirror shattered that their young faith cherished,
 Showing the face of things so very fair?

Time hath enough of ills to un deceive them,
 And cares will crowd where dreams have dwelt
 before;

Oh, therefore, while the heart is trusting, leave them
 Their happy childhood and their fairy lore!

HUNTED DOWN.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

IN TWO PORTIONS. PORTION THE FIRST.

I.

MOST of us see some romances in life. In my capacity as Chief-Manager of a Life Assurance Office, I think I have, within the last thirty years, seen more romances than the generality of men, however unpromising the opportunity may at first sight seem.

As I have retired, and live at my ease, I possess the means that I used to want, of considering what I have seen, at leisure. My experiences have a more remarkable aspect, so reviewed, than they had when they were in progress. I have come home from the Play now, and can recal the scenes of the Drama upon which the curtain has fallen, free from the glare, bewilderment, and bustle, of the Theatre.

Let me recal one of these Romances of the real world.

There is nothing truer (I believe) than physiognomy, taken in connexion with manner. The art of reading that book of which Eternal Wisdom obliges every human creature to present his or her own page with the individual character written on it, is a difficult one, perhaps, and is little studied. It may require some natural aptitude, and it must require (for everything does) some patience and some pains. That, these are not usually given to it—that, numbers of people accept a few stock common-place expressions of face as the whole list of characteristics, and neither seek nor recognise the refinements that are truest—that You, for instance, give a great deal of time and attention to the reading of music, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Hebrew, if you please, and do not qualify yourself to read the face of the master or mistress looking over your shoulder teaching it to you—I assume to be five

hundred times more probable than improbable. Perhaps some little self-sufficiency may be at the bottom of this; facial expression requires no study from you, you think; it comes by nature to you to know enough about it, and you are not to be taken in.

I confess, for my part, that I have been taken in, over and over and over again. I have been taken in by acquaintances, and I have been taken in (of course) by friends; far oftener by friends than by any other class of persons. How came I to be so deceived? Had I quite misread their faces? No. Believe me, my first impression of those people, founded on face and manner alone, was invariably true. My mistake was, in suffering them to come nearer to me, and explain themselves away.

II.

THE partition which separated my own office from our general outer office, in the City, was of thick plate-glass. I could see through it what passed in the outer office, without hearing a word. I had had it put up, in place of a wall that had been there for years—ever since the house was built. It is no matter whether I did or did not make the change, in order that I might derive my first impression of strangers who came to us on business, from their faces alone, without being influenced by anything they said. Enough to mention that I turned my glass partition to that account, and that a Life Assurance Office is at all times exposed to be practised upon by the most crafty and cruel of the human race.

It was through my glass partition that I first saw the gentleman whose story I am going to tell.

He had come in without my observing it, and had put his hat and umbrella on the broad counter, and was bending over it to take some papers from one of the clerks. He was about forty or so, dark, exceedingly well dressed in black—being in mourning—and the hand he extended with a polite air, had a particularly well-fitting black kid glove upon it. His hair, which was elaborately brushed and oiled, was parted straight up the middle; and he presented this parting to the clerk, exactly (to my thinking) as if he had said, in so many words: "You must take me, if you please, my friend, just as I show myself. Come straight up here, follow the gravel path, keep off the grass, I allow no trespassing."

I conceived a very great aversion to that man, the moment I thus saw him.

He had asked for some of our printed forms, and the clerk was giving them to him, and explaining them. An obliged and agreeable smile was on his face, and his eyes met those of the clerk with a sprightly look. (I have known a vast quantity of nonsense talked about bad men not looking you in the face. Don't trust that conventional idea. Dishonesty will stare honesty out of countenance, any day in the week, if there is anything to be got by it.)

I saw, in the corner of his eyelash, that he

became aware of my looking at him. Immediately, he turned the parting in his hair towards the glass partition, as if he said to me with a sweet smile, "Straight up here, if you please. Off the grass!"

In a few moments he had put on his hat and taken up his umbrella, and was gone.

I beckoned the clerk into my room, and asked, "Who was that?"

He had the gentleman's card in his hand. "Mr. Julius Slinkton, Middle Temple."

"A barrister, Mr. Adams?"

"I think not, sir."

"I should have thought him a clergyman, but for his having no Reverend here," said I.

"Probably, from his appearance," Mr. Adams replied, "he is reading for orders."

I should mention that he wore a dainty white cravat, and dainty linen altogether.

"What did he want, Mr. Adams?"

"Merely a form of proposal, sir, and a form of reference."

"Recommended here? Did he say?"

"Yes; he said he was recommended here by a friend of yours. He noticed you, but said that as he had not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance he would not trouble you."

"Did he know my name?"

"Oh yes, sir! He said, 'There is Mr. Sampson, I see.'"

"A well-spoken gentleman, apparently?"

"Remarkably so, sir."

"Insinuating manners, apparently?"

"Very much so, indeed, sir."

"Hah!" said I. "I want nothing at present, Mr. Adams."

Within a fortnight of that day, I went to dine with a friend of mine—a merchant, a man of taste, who buys pictures and books; and the first person I saw among the company was Mr. Julius Slinkton. There he was, standing before the fire, with good large eyes and an open expression of face; but still (I thought) requiring everybody to come at him by the prepared way he offered, and by no other.

I noticed him ask my friend to introduce him to Mr. Sampson, and my friend did so. Mr. Slinkton was very happy to see me. Not too happy; there was no overdoing of the matter; happy, in a thoroughly well-bred, perfectly unmeaning way.

"I thought you had met," our host observed.

"No," said Mr. Slinkton. "I did look in at Mr. Sampson's office, on your recommendation; but I really did not feel justified in troubling Mr. Sampson himself, on a point within the everyday routine of an ordinary clerk."

I said I should have been glad to show him any attention on our friend's introduction.

"I am sure of that," said he, "and am much obliged. At another time, perhaps, I may be less delicate. Only, however, if I have real business; for I know, Mr. Sampson, how precious business time is, and what a vast number of impertinent people there are in the world."

I acknowledged his consideration with a slight

how. "You were thinking," said I, "of effecting a policy on your life?"

"Oh dear, no! I am afraid I am not so prudent as you pay me the compliment of supposing me to be, Mr. Sampson. I merely inquired for a friend. But you know what friends are, in such matters. Nothing may ever come of it. I have the greatest reluctance to trouble men of business with inquiries for friends, knowing the probabilities to be a thousand to one that the friends will never follow them up. People are so fickle, so selfish, so inconsiderate. Don't you, in your business, find them so every day, Mr. Sampson?"

I was going to give a qualified answer; but, he turned his smooth, white parting on me, with its "Straight up here, if you please!" and answered, "Yes."

"I hear, Mr. Sampson," he resumed, presently, for our friend had a new cook, and dinner was not so punctual as usual, "that your profession has recently suffered a great loss."

"In money?" said I.

He laughed at my ready association of loss with money, and replied, "No; in talent and vigour."

Not at once following out his allusion, I considered for a moment. "Has it sustained a loss of that kind?" said I. "I was not aware of it."

"Understand me, Mr. Sampson. I don't imagine that you have retired. It is not so bad as that. But Mr. Meltham——"

"Oh, to be sure!" said I. "Yes! Mr. Meltham, the young actuary of the 'Investible'?"

"Just so," he returned, in a consoling way.

"He is a great loss. He was at once the most profound, the most original, and the most energetic man, I have ever known connected with Life Assurance."

I spoke strongly; for I had a high esteem and admiration for Meltham, and my gentleman had indefinitely conveyed to me some suspicion that he wanted to sneer at him. He recalled me to my guard, by presenting that trim pathway to his head, with its infernal, "Not on the grass, if you please—the gravel."

"You knew him, Mr. Slinkton?"

"Only by reputation. To have known him as an acquaintance, or as a friend, is an honour I should have sought, if he had remained in society: though I might never have had the good fortune to attain it, being a man of far inferior mark. He was scarcely above thirty, I suppose?"

"About thirty."

"Ah!" He sighed in his former consoling way. "What creatures we are! To break up, Mr. Sampson, and become incapable of business at that time of life!—Any reason assigned for the melancholy fact?"

("Humph!" thought I, as I looked at him. "But I won't go up the track, and I will go on the grass.")

"What reason have you heard assigned, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked, point blank.

"Most likely a false one. You know what Rumour is, Mr. Sampson. I never repeat what I hear; it is the only way of paring the nails and shaving the head of Rumour. But, when you ask me what reason I have heard assigned for Mr. Meltham's passing away from among men, it is another thing. I am not gratifying idle gossip then. I was told, Mr. Sampson, that Mr. Meltham had relinquished all his avocations and all his prospects, because he was, in fact, broken-hearted. A disappointed attachment, I heard—though it hardly seems probable, in the case of a man so distinguished and so attractive."

"Attractions and distinctions are no armour against death," said I.

"Oh! She died? Pray, pardon me. I did not hear that. That, indeed, makes it very very sad. Poor Mr. Meltham! She died? Ah, dear me! Lamentable, lamentable!"

I still thought his pity not quite genuine, and I still suspected an unaccountable sneer under all this, until he said, as we were parted, like the other knots of talkers, by the announcement of dinner:

"Mr. Sampson, you are surprised to see me so moved, on behalf of a man whom I have never known. I am not so disinterested as you may suppose. I myself have suffered, and recently too, from death. I have lost one of two charming nieces, who were my constant companions. She died young—barely three-and-twenty—and even her remaining sister is far from strong. The world is a grave!"

He said this with deep feeling, and I felt reproached for the coldness of my manner. Coldness and distrust had been engendered in me, I knew, by my bad experiences; they were not natural to me; and I often thought how much I had lost in life, losing trustfulness, and how little I had gained, gaining hard caution. This state of mind being habitual to me, I troubled myself more about this conversation than I might have troubled myself about a greater matter. I listened to his talk at dinner, and observed how readily other men responded to it, and with what a graceful instinct he adapted his subjects to the knowledge and habits of those he talked with. As, in talking with me, he had easily started the subject I might be supposed to understand best, and to be the most interested in, so, in talking with others, he guided himself by the same rule. The company was of a varied character; but, he was not at fault, that I could discover, with any member of it. He knew just as much of each man's pursuit as made him agreeable to that man in reference to it, and just as little as made it natural in him to seek modestly for information when the theme was broached.

As he talked and talked—but really not too much, for the rest of us seemed to force it upon him—I became quite angry with myself. I took his face to pieces in my mind, like a watch, and examined it in detail. I could not say much against any of his features separately; I could say even less against them when they were put

together. "Then is it not monstrous," I asked myself, "that because a man happens to part his hair straight up the middle of his head, I should permit myself to suspect, and even to detest, him?"

(I may stop to remark that this was no proof of my good sense. An observer of men who finds himself steadily repelled by some apparently trifling thing in a stranger, is right to give it great weight. It may be the clue to the whole mystery. A hair or two will show where a lion is hidden. A very little key will open a very heavy door.)

I took my part in the conversation with him after a time, and we got on remarkably well. In the drawing-room, I asked the host how long he had known Mr. Slinkton? He answered, not many months; he had met him at the house of a celebrated painter then present, who had known him well when he was travelling with his nieces in Italy for their health. His plans in life being broken by the death of one of them, he was reading, with the intention of going back to college as a matter of form, taking his degree, and going into orders. I could not but argue with myself that here was the true explanation of his interest in poor Meltham, and that I had been almost brutal in my distrust on that simple head.

III.

On the very next day but one, I was sitting behind my glass partition as before, when he came into the outer office as before. The moment I saw him again without hearing him, I hated him worse than ever.

It was only for a moment that he gave me this opportunity; for, he waved his tight-fitting black glove the instant I looked at him, and came straight in.

"Mr. Sampson, good day! I presume, you see, upon your kind permission to intrude upon you. I don't keep my word in being justified by business, for my business here—if I may so abuse the word—is of the slightest nature."

I asked, was it anything I could assist him in?

"I thank you, no. I merely called to inquire outside, whether my dilatory friend has been so false to himself, as to be practical and sensible. But, of course, he has done nothing. I gave him your papers with my own hand, and he was hot upon the intention, but of course he has done nothing. Apart from the general human disinclination to do anything that ought to be done, I dare say there is a speciality about assuring one's life? You find it like will-making? People are so superstitious, and take it for granted they will die soon afterwards?"

—Up here, if you please. Straight up here, Mr. Sampson. Neither to the right nor to the left! I almost fancied I could hear him breathe the words, as he sat smiling at me, with that intolerable parting exactly opposite the bridge of my nose.

"There is such a feeling sometimes, no doubt," I replied; "but I don't think it obtains to any great extent."

"Well!" said he, with a shrug and a smile, "I wish some good angel would influence my friend in the right direction. I rashly promised his mother and sister in Norfolk, to see it done, and he promised them that he would do it. But I suppose he never will."

He spoke for a minute or two on indifferent topics, and went away.

I had scarcely unlocked the drawers of my writing-table next morning when he reappeared. I noticed that he came straight to the door in the glass partition, and did not pause a single moment outside.

"Can you spare me two minutes, my dear Mr. Sampson?"

"By all means."

"Much obliged," laying his hat and umbrella on the table. "I came early, not to interrupt you. The fact is, I am taken by surprise, in reference to this proposal my friend has made."

"Has he made one?" said I.

"Yes," he answered, deliberately looking at me; and then a bright idea seemed to strike him;—"or he only tells me he has. Perhaps that may be a new way of evading the matter. By Jupiter, I never thought of that!"

Mr. Adams was opening the morning's letters in the outer office. "What is the name, Mr. Slinkton?" I asked.

"Beckwith."

I looked out at the door and requested Mr. Adams, if there were a proposal in that name, to bring it in. He had already laid it out of his hand on the counter. It was easily selected from the rest, and he gave it me. Alfred Beckwith. Proposal to effect a Policy with us for two thousand pounds. Dated yesterday.

"From the Middle Temple, I see, Mr. Slinkton."

"Yes. He lives on the same staircase with me; his door is opposite mine. I never thought he would make me his reference, though."

"It seems natural enough that he should."

"Quite so, Mr. Sampson; but I never thought of it. Let me see." He took the printed paper from his pocket. "How am I to answer all these questions?"

"According to the truth, of course," said I.

"Oh! Of course," he answered, looking up from the paper with a smile: "I meant, they were so many. But, you do right to be particular. It stands to reason that you must be particular. Will you allow me to use your pen and ink?"

"Certainly."

"And your desk?"

"Certainly."

He had been hovering about between his hat and his umbrella, for a place to write on. He now sat down in my chair, at my blotting paper and inkstand, with the long walk up his head in accurate perspective before me, as I stood with my back to the fire.

Before answering each question, he ran over it aloud, and discussed it. How long had he

known Mr. Alfred Beckwith? That he had to calculate by years, upon his fingers. What were his habits? No difficulty about *them*; temperate in the last degree, and took a little too much exercise, if anything. All the answers were satisfactory. When he had written them all, he looked them over, and finally signed them in a very pretty hand. He supposed he had now done with the business? I told him he was not likely to be troubled any further. Should he leave the papers there? If he pleased. Much obliged. Good morning!

I had had one other visitor before him; not at the office, but at my own house. That visitor had come to my bedside when it was not yet daylight, and had been seen by no one else but by my faithful confidential servant.

A second reference paper (for we always required two) was sent down into Norfolk, and was duly received back by post. This, likewise, was satisfactorily answered in every respect. Our forms were all complied with, we accepted the proposal, and the premium for one year was paid.

OUR DAILY BREAD.

IN the time of Pliny, six different kinds of wheat were cultivated by the Romans; in the present time there are from a hundred and fifty to a hundred and sixty different races of wheat: most of which, however, are distinctly referable to four or five principal types. The minor varieties are by no means permanent in their characters, except under special cultivation, and they degenerate when grown in unfavourable conditions. In like manner, favourable conditions readily bring out improved qualities in inferior kinds. But it must not be concluded from this, that Buffon and the other writers are correct in their views who regard the corn-grains as artificial products. The principal types appear constant, for Decandolle recognised the seeds of "Triticum turgidum" in specimens from the Egyptian mummy-cases; Loiseleur confirms the fact; and the Count de Sternberg, in 1834, raised plants of the common wheat from a sample obtained from an Egyptian tomb. This is further confirmed by a note presented to the French Academy of Sciences by M. Guérin Méneville. Some botanists—to whom the absence of wild wheat in most countries is an indication of the artificial origin of the corn of our fields—regard it as a product of long-continued cultivation.

A few years ago, M. Esprit Fabre, of Agde, gave an account of the supposed production of wheat by a grass called "Ægilops ovata," growing wild in the south of France. It never exceeds a foot in height, and has a short broad ear with but four spikelets, only two of them being fertile. It has long been known to produce a variety called "triticoides," from its approach in some degree to the character of wheat. When this grass, in its wild state, produces this variety, a portion of the characteristic bristles or awns of the valves disappears, and the spikelets are generally barren. The ripe grain is long and

The light flows round them with a happy tune,
While the uniting charm is made complete
With hands thrice waved towards the setting moon,
And the buds open to give us flowers sweet.

HUNTED DOWN.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

IN TWO PORTIONS. PORTION THE SECOND.

IV.

FOR six or seven months, I saw no more of Mr. Slinkton. He called once at my house, but I was not at home; and he once asked me to dine with him in the Temple, but I was engaged. His friend's Assurance was effected in March. Late in September or early in October, I was down at Scarborough for a breath of sea air, where I met him on the beach. It was a hot evening; he came towards me with his hat in his hand; and there was the walk I had felt so strongly disinclined to take, in perfect order again, exactly in front of the bridge of my nose.

He was not alone; he had a young lady on his arm. She was dressed in mourning, and I looked at her with great interest. She had the appearance of being extremely delicate, and her face was remarkably pale and melancholy; but she was very pretty. He introduced her, as his niece, Miss Niner.

"Are you strolling, Mr. Sampson? Is it possible you can be idle?"

It was possible, and I was strolling.

"Shall we stroll together?"

"With pleasure."

The young lady walked between us, and we walked on the cool sea sand in the direction of Filey.

"There have been wheels here," said Mr. Slinkton. "And now I look again, the wheels of a hand-carriage! Margaret, my love, your shadow, without doubt!"

"Miss Niner's shadow?" I repeated, looking down at it on the sand.

"Not that one," Mr. Slinkton returned, laughing. "Margaret, my dear, tell Mr. Sampson."

"Indeed," said the young lady, turning to me, "there is nothing to tell—except that I constantly see the same invalid old gentleman, at all times, wherever I go. I have mentioned it to my uncle, and he calls the gentleman my shadow."

"Does he live in Scarborough?" I asked.

"He is staying here."

"Do you live in Scarborough?"

"No, I am staying here. My uncle has placed me with a family here, for my health."

"And your shadow?" said I, smiling.

"My shadow," she answered, smiling too, "is—like myself—not very robust, I fear; for, I lose my shadow sometimes, as my shadow loses me at other times. We both seem liable to confinement to the house. I have not seen my shadow for days and days; but it does oddly happen, occasionally, that wherever I go, for many days together, this gentleman goes. We

have come together in the most unfrequented nooks on this shore."

"Is this he?" said I, pointing before us.

The wheels had swept down to the water's edge, and described a great loop on the sand returning. Bringing the loop back towards us, and spinning it out as it came, was a hand-carriage drawn by a man.

"Yes," said Miss Niner, "this really is my shadow, uncle!"

As the carriage approached us and we approached the carriage, I saw within it an old man, whose head was sunk on his breast, and who was enveloped in a variety of wampers. He was drawn by a very quiet but very lame-looking man, with iron-grey hair, who was slightly lame. They had passed us, when the carriage stopped, and the old gentleman, with putting out his arm, called to me by my name. I went back, and was absent from Mr. Slinkton and his niece for about five minutes.

When I rejoined them, Mr. Slinkton was the first to speak. Indeed, he said to me in a low voice before I came up with him: "It is very long you have not been longer, or my niece must have died of curiosity to know who her shadow is, Mr. Sampson."

"An old East India Director," said I. "An intimate friend of our friend's at whose house I first had the pleasure of meeting you. A certain Major Banks. You have heard of him?"

"Never."

"Very rich, Miss Niner; but very old, and very crippled. An amiable man—sensible—most interested in you. He has just been expatiating on the affection that he has observed to exist between you and your uncle."

Mr. Slinkton was holding his hat again, as he passed his hand up the straight walk, as if himself went up it serenely, after me.

"Mr. Sampson," he said, tenderly pressing his niece's arm in his, "our affection was always a strong one, for we have had but few near ties. We have still fewer now. We have associations to bring us together, that are not of this world, Margaret."

"Dear uncle!" murmured the young lady, and turned her face aside to hide her tears.

"My niece and I have such remembrances and regrets in common, Mr. Sampson," she feelingly pursued, "that it would be strange indeed if the relations between us were cold or indifferent. If you remember a conversation you and I once had together, you will understand the reference I make. Cheer up, dear Margaret, Don't droop, don't droop. My Margaret! I cannot bear to see you droop!"

The poor young lady was very much affected, but controlled herself. His feelings, too, were very acute. In a word, he found himself under such great need of a restorative, that he presently went away, to take a bath of sea water; leaving the young lady and me sitting on a point of rock, and probably presuming—but that, you will say, was a pardonable indulgence in a luxury—that she would praise him with all her heart.

She did, poor thing. With all her confiding heart, she praised him to me, for his care of her dead sister, and for his untiring devotion in her last illness. The sister had wasted away very slowly, and wild and terrible fantasies had come over her towards the end; but he had never been impatient with her, or at a loss; had always been gentle, watchful, and self-possessed. The sister had known him, and she knew him, to be the best of men, the kindest of men, and yet a man of such admirable strength of character, as to be a very tower for the support of their weak natures while their poor lives endured.

"I shall leave him, Mr. Sampson, very soon," said the young lady; "I know my life is drawing to an end; and when I am gone, I hope he will marry and be happy. I am sure he has lived single so long, only for my sake, and for my poor poor sister's."

The little hand-carriage had made another great loop on the damp sand, and was coming back again, gradually spinning out a slim figure of eight, half a mile long.

"Young lady," said I, looking around, laying my hand upon her arm, and speaking in a low voice; "time presses. You hear the gentle murmur of that sea?"

She looked at me with the utmost wonder and alarm, saying, "Yes!"

"And you know what a voice is in it when the storm comes?"

"Yes!"

"You see how quiet and peaceful it lies before us, and you know what an awful sight of power without pity it might be, this very night?"

"Yes!"

"But if you had never heard or seen it, or heard of it, in its cruelty, could you believe that it beats every inanimate thing in its way to pieces, without mercy, and destroys life without remorse?"

"You terrify me, sir, by these questions!"

"To save you, young lady, to save you! For God's sake, collect your strength and collect your firmness! If you were here alone, and hemmed in by the rising tide on the flow to fifty feet above your head, you could not be in greater danger than the danger you are now to be saved from."

The figure on the sand was spun out, and straggled off into a crooked little jerk that ended at the cliff very near us.

"As I am, before Heaven and the Judge of all mankind, your friend, and your dead sister's friend, I solemnly entreat you, Miss Niner, without one moment's loss of time, to come to this gentleman with me!"

If the little carriage had been less near to us, I doubt if I could have got her away; but, it was so near, that we were there, before she had recovered the hurry of being urged from the rock. I did not remain there with her, two minutes. Certainly within five, I had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing her—from the point we had sat on, and to which I had returned—half supported and half carried up

some rude steps notched in the cliff, by the figure of an active man. With that figure beside her, I knew she was safe anywhere.

I sat alone on the rock, awaiting Mr. Slinkton's return. The twilight was deepening and the shadows were heavy, when he came round the point, with his hat banging at his button-hole, smoothing his wet hair with one of his hands, and picking out the old path with the other and a pocket-comb.

"My niece not here, Mr. Sampson?" he said, looking about.

"Miss Niner seemed to feel a chill in the air after the sun was down, and has gone home."

He looked surprised, as though she were not accustomed to do anything without him: even to originate so slight a proceeding. "I persuaded Miss Niner," I explained.

"Ah!" said he. "She is easily persuaded—for her good. Thank you, Mr. Sampson; she is better within doors. The bathing-place was further than I thought, to say the truth."

"Miss Niner is very delicate," I observed.

He shook his head and drew a deep sigh. "Very, very, very. You may recollect my saying so? The time that has since intervened, has not strengthened her. The gloomy shadow that fell upon her sister so early in life, seems, in my anxious eyes, to gather over her too, ever darker, ever darker. Dear Margaret, dear Margaret! But we must hope."

The hand-carriage was spinning away before us, at a most indecorous pace for an invalid vehicle, and was making most irregular curves upon the sand. Mr. Slinkton, noticing it after he had put his handkerchief to his eyes, said:

"If I may judge from appearances, your friend will be upset, Mr. Sampson."

"It looks probable, certainly," said I.

"The servant must be drunk."

"The servants of old gentlemen will get drunk sometimes," said I.

"The major draws very light, Mr. Sampson."

"The major does draw light," said I.

By this time, the carriage, much to my relief, was lost in the darkness. We walked on for a little, side by side over the sand, in silence. After a short while he said, in a voice still affected by the emotion that his niece's state of health had awakened in him:

"Do you stay here long, Mr. Sampson?"

"Why, no. I am going away to-night."

"So soon? But, business always holds you in request. Men like Mr. Sampson are too important to others, to be spared to their own need of relaxation and enjoyment."

"I don't know about that," said I. "However, I am going back."

"To London?"

"To London."

"I shall be there too, soon after you."

I knew that, as well as he did. But, I did not tell him so. Any more than I told him what defensive weapon my right hand rested on in my pocket, as I walked by his side. Any more than I told him why I did not walk on the sea-side of him, with the night closing in.

We left the beach, and our ways diverged. We exchanged Good night, and had parted indeed, when he said, returning:

"Mr. Sampson, *may* I ask? Poor Meltham, whom we spoke of.—Dead yet?"

"Not when I last heard of him; but too broken a man to live long, and hopelessly lost to his old calling."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said he, with great feeling. "Sad, sad, sad! The world is a grave!" And so went his way.

It was not his fault if the world were not a grave; but, I did not call that observation after him, any more than I had mentioned those other things just now enumerated. He went his way, and I went mine with all expedition. This happened, as I have said, either at the end of September or beginning of October. The next time I saw him, and the last time, was late in November.

v.

I HAD a very particular engagement, to breakfast in the Temple. It was a bitter north-easterly morning, and the sleet and slush lay inches deep in the streets. I could get no conveyance, and was soon wet to the knees; but I should have been true to that appointment though I had had to wade to it, up to my neck in the same impediments.

The appointment took me to some chambers in the Temple. They were at the top of a lonely corner house overlooking the river. The name MR. ALFRED BECKWITH was painted on the outer door. On the door opposite, on the same landing, the name MR. JULIUS SLINKTON. The doors of both sets of chambers stood open, so that anything said aloud in one set, could be heard in the other.

I had never been in those chambers before. They were dismal, close, unwholesome, and oppressive; the furniture, originally good, and not yet old, was faded and dirty; the rooms were in great disorder; there was a strong pervading smell of opium, brandy, and tobacco; the grate and fire-irons were splashed all over, with unsightly blotches of rust; and on a sofa by the fire, in the room where breakfast had been prepared, lay the host, Mr. Beckwith: a man with all the appearances upon him of the worst kind of drunkard, very far advanced upon his shameful way to death.

"Slinkton is not come yet," said this creature, staggering up when I went in; "I'll call him. Halloo! Julius Cæsar! Come and drink!" As he hoarsely roared this out, he beat the poker and tongs together in a mad way, as if that were his usual manner of summoning his associate.

The voice of Mr. Slinkton was heard through the clatter, from the opposite side of the staircase, and he came in. He had not expected the pleasure of meeting me. I have seen several artful men brought to a stand, but I never saw a man so agitated as he was when his eyes rested on mine.

"Julius Cæsar," cried Beckwith, staggering between us, "Mist' Sampson! Mist' Sampson,

Julius Cæsar! Julius, Mist' Sampson, is the friend of my soul. Julius keeps me plied with liquor, morning, noon, and night. Julius is real benefactor. Julius threw the tea and coffee out of window when I used to have it. Julius empties all the water jugs of their contents, and fills 'em with spirits. Julius washes me up and keeps me going. Boil the brandy, Julius!"

There was a rusty and furred saucepan in the ashes—the ashes looked like the accumulation of weeks—and Beckwith, rolling and staggering between us as if he were going to plunge headlong into the fire, got the saucepan out, and tried to force it into Slinkton's hand.

"Boil the brandy, Julius Cæsar! Come! Do your usual office. Boil the brandy!"

He became so fierce in his gesticulations with the saucepan, that I expected to see him lay on Slinkton's head with it. I therefore put out my hand to check him. He reeled back to the wall, and sat there, panting, shaking, and red-eyed, in his rags of dressing-gown, looking at us both. I noticed then, that there was nothing to drink on the table but brandy, and nothing to eat but salted herrings, and a hot, sickly, highly-peppery stew.

"At all events, Mr. Sampson," said Slinkton, offering me the smooth gravel path for the last time, "I thank you for interfering between me and this unfortunate man's violence. However you came here, Mr. Sampson, or with whatever motive you came here, at least I thank you for that."

"Boil the brandy!" muttered Beckwith.

Without gratifying his desire to know how I came there, I said, quietly, "How is your mistress, Mr. Slinkton?"

He looked hard at me, and I looked hard at him.

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Sampson, that my niece has proved treacherous and ungrateful to her best friend. She left me, without a word of notice or explanation. She was misled, no doubt, by some designing rascal. Perhaps you may have heard of it?"

"I did hear that she was misled by a designing rascal. In fact, I have proof of it."

"Are you sure of it?" said he.

"Quite."

"Boil the brandy!" muttered Beckwith. "Company to breakfast, Julius Cæsar! Do your usual office—provide the usual breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper—boil the brandy!"

The eyes of Slinkton looked from him to me, and he said, after a moment's consideration:

"Mr. Sampson, you are a man of the world, and so am I. I will be plain with you."

"Oh, no, you won't," said I, shaking my head.

"I tell you, sir, I will be plain with you."

"And I tell you, you will not," said I. "I know all about you. You plain with any one? Nonsense, nonsense!"

"I plainly tell you, Mr. Sampson," he went on, with a manner almost composed, "that I understand your object. You want to save your

funds, and escape from your liabilities; these are old tricks of trade with you Office-gentlemen. But you will not do it, sir: you will not succeed. You have not an easy adversary to play against, when you play against me. We shall have to inquire, in due time, when and how Mr. Beckwith fell into his present habits. With that remark, sir, I put this poor creature and his incoherent wanderings of speech, aside, and wish you a good morning and a better case next time."

While he was saying this, Beckwith had filled a half-pint glass with brandy. At this moment, he threw the brandy at his face, and threw the glass after it. Slinkton put his hands up, half-blinded with the spirit, and cut with the glass across the forehead. At the sound of the breakage, a fourth person came into the room, closed the door, and stood at it. He was a very quiet but very keen looking man, with iron-grey hair, and slightly lame.

Slinkton pulled out his handkerchief, assuaged the pain in his smarting eyes, and dabbed the blood on his forehead. He was a long time about it, and I saw that, in the doing of it, a tremendous change came over him, occasioned by the change in Beckwith—who ceased to pant and tremble, sat upright, and never took his eyes off him. I never in my life saw a face in which abhorrence and determination were so forcibly painted, as in Beckwith's then.

"Look at me, you villain," said Beckwith, "and see me as I really am. I took these rooms, to make them a trap for you. I came into them as a drunkard, to bait the trap for you. You fell into the trap, and you will never leave it alive. On the morning when you last went to Mr. Sampson's office, I had seen him first. Your plot has been known to both of us, all along, and you have been counterplotted all along. What? Having been cajoled into putting that prize of two thousand pounds in your power, I was to be done to death with brandy, and, brandy not proving quick enough, with something quicker? Have I never seen you, when you thought my senses gone, pouring from your little bottle into my glass? Why, you Murderer and Forger, alone here with you in the dead of the night, as I have so often been, I have had my hand upon the trigger of a pistol, twenty times, to blow your brains out!"

This sudden starting up of the thing that he had supposed to be his imbecile victim, into a determined man, with a settled resolution to hunt him down and be the death of him mercilessly expressed from head to foot, was, in the first shock, too much for him. Without any figure of speech, he staggered under it. But, there is no greater mistake than to suppose, that a man who is a calculating criminal, is, in any phase of his guilt, otherwise than true to himself and perfectly consistent with his whole character. Such a man commits murder, and murder is the natural culmination of his course; such a man has to outface murder, and he will do it with hardness and effrontery. It is a sort of fashion to express surprise that any notorious

criminal, having such crime upon his conscience, can so brave it out. Do you think that if he had it on his conscience, or had a conscience to have it upon, he would ever have committed the crime?

Perfectly consistent with himself, as I believe all such monsters to be, this Slinkton recovered himself, and showed a defiance that was sufficiently cold and quiet. He was white, he was haggard, he was changed; but, only as a sharper who had played for a great stake, and had been outwitted and had lost the game.

"Listen to me, you villain," said Beckwith, "and let every word you hear me say, be a stab in your wicked heart. When I took these rooms, to throw myself in your way and lead you on to the scheme which I knew my appearance and supposed character and habits would suggest to such a devil, how did I know that? Because you were no stranger to me. I knew you well. And I knew you to be the cruel wretch who, for so much money, had killed one innocent girl while she trusted him implicitly, and who was, by inches, killing another."

Slinkton took out a snuff-box, took a pinch of snuff, and laughed.

"But, see here," said Beckwith, never looking away, never raising his voice, never relaxing his face, never unclenching his hand. "See what a dull wolf you have been, after all! The infatuated drunkard who never drank a fiftieth part of the liquor you plied him with, but poured it away, here, there, everywhere, almost before your eyes—who bought over the fellow you set to watch him and to ply him, by outbidding you in his bribe, before he had been at his work three days—with whom you have observed no caution, yet who was so bent on ridding the earth of you as a wild beast, that he would have defeated you if you had been ever so prudent—that drunkard whom you have many a time left on the floor of this room, and who has even let you go out of it, alive and undecieved, when you have turned him over with your foot—has, almost as often, on the same night, within an hour, within a few minutes, watched you awake, had his hand at your pillow when you were asleep, turned over your papers, taken samples from your bottles and packets of powder, changed their contents, rifled every secret of your life!"

He had had another pinch of snuff in his hand, but had gradually let it drop from between his fingers to the floor, where he now smoothed it out with his foot, looking down at it the while.

"That drunkard," said Beckwith, "who had free access to your rooms at all times, that he might drink the strong drinks you left in his way and be the sooner ended, holding no more terms with you than he would hold with a tiger, has had his master-key for all your locks, his test for all your poisons, his clue to your cipher writing. He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, how long it took to complete that deed, what doses there were, what intervals, what signs of gradual decay upon mind and body, what distempered fancies were produced, what observable changes, what physical pain.

He can tell you, as well as you can tell him, that all this was recorded day by day, as a lesson of experience for future service. He can tell you, better than you can tell him, where that journal is at this moment."

Slinkton stopped the action of his foot, and looked at Beckwith.

"No," said the latter, as if answering a question from him. "Not in the drawer of the writing-desk that opens with the spring; it is not there, and it never will be there again."

"Then you are a thief!" said Slinkton.

Without any change whatever in the inflexible purpose which it was quite terrific even to me to contemplate, and from the power of which I had all along felt convinced it was impossible for this wretch to escape, Beckwith returned:

"And I am your niece's shadow, too."

With an imprecation, Slinkton put his hand to his head, tore out some hair, and flung it on the ground. It was the end of the smooth walk; he destroyed it in the action, and it will soon be seen that his use for it was past.

Beckwith went on: "Whenever you left here, I left here. Although I understood that you found it necessary to pause in the completion of that purpose, to avert suspicion, still I watched you close, with the poor confiding girl. When I had your diary, and could read it word by word—it was only about the night before your last visit to Scarborough—you remember the night? you slept with a small flat phial tied to your wrist—I sent to Mr. Sampson, who was kept out of view. This is Mr. Sampson's trusty servant standing by the door. We three saved your niece among us."

Slinkton looked at us all, took an uncertain step or two from the place where he had stood, returned to it, and glanced about him in a very curious way—as one of the meaner reptiles might, when looking for a hole to hide in. I noticed at the same time, that a singular change took place in the figure of the man—as if it collapsed within his clothes, and they consequently became ill-shaped and ill-fitting.

"You shall know," said Beckwith, "for I hope the knowledge will be bitter and terrible to you, why you have been pursued by one man, and why, when the whole interest that Mr. Sampson represents, would have expended any money in hunting you down, you have been tracked to death at a single individual's charge. I hear you have had the name of Meltham on your lips sometimes?"

I saw, in addition to those other changes, a sudden stoppage come upon his breathing.

"When you sent the sweet girl whom you murdered (you know with what artfully-made-out surroundings and probabilities you sent her), to Meltham's office before taking her abroad, to originate the transaction that doomed her to the grave, it fell to Meltham's lot to see her and to speak with her. It did not fall to his lot to save her, though I know he would freely give his own life to have done it. He admired her;—I would say, he loved her deeply, if I thought it possible that you could understand the word. When she

was sacrificed, he was thoroughly assured of your guilt. Having lost her, he had but one object left in life, and that was, to avenge and destroy you."

I saw the villain's nostrils rise and fall convulsively; but, I saw no moving at his mouth.

"That man, Meltham," Beckwith steadily pursued, "was as absolutely certain that you could never elude him in this world, if he devoted himself to your destruction with his utmost fidelity and earnestness, and if he directed the sacred duty with no other duty in life, as he was certain that in achieving it he would be a poor instrument in the hands of Providence, and would do well before Heaven in striking you out from among living men. I am that man, and I thank God that I have done my work!"

If Slinkton had been running for his life from swift-footed savages, a dozen miles, he could not have shown more emphatic signs of being oppressed at heart and labouring for breath, than he showed now, when he looked at the person who had so relentlessly hunted him down.

"You never saw me under my right name before; you see me under my right name, now. You shall see me once again, in the body, when you are tried for your life. You shall see me once again, in the spirit, when the cord is round your neck, and the crowd are crying against you!"

When Meltham had spoken these last words that miscreant suddenly turned away his face and seemed to strike his mouth with his own hand. At the same instant, the room was filled with a new and powerful odour, and, almost at the same instant, he broke into a crooked leap, start—I have no name for the spasm—he fell, with a dull weight that shook the heavy doors and windows in their frames.

That was the fitting end of him.

When we saw that he was dead, we drew away from the room, and Meltham, giving up his hand, said with a weary air:

"I have no more work on earth, my friends. But, I shall see her again, elsewhere."

It was in vain that I tried to rally him. He might have saved her, he said; he had not saved her, and he reproached himself; he had lost her, and he was broken-hearted.

"The purpose that sustained me is over, Sampson, and there is nothing now to hold me to life. I am not fit for life; I am weak and spiritless; I have no hope and no object; my day is done."

In truth, I could hardly have believed that the broken man who then spoke to me, was the man who had so strongly and so differently impressed me when his purpose was yet before him. I said such entreaties with him, as I could; but, he still said, and always said, in a patient and demonstrative way—nothing could avail him—he was broken-hearted.

He died early in the next spring. He was buried by the side of the poor young lady for whom he had cherished those tender and unhappy regrets, and he left all he had to her

sister. She lived to be a happy wife and mother; she married my sister's son, who succeeded poor Meltham; she is living now; and her children ride about the garden on my walking-stick, when I go to see her.

NEEDLEWOMAN'S HALL.

OF the grown-up unmarried women in this country, three out of four; of the widows, two in three; of the wives, a seventh part, earn their bread by their labour. Of these working women, nearly half a million live by the needle, and one-half of that number can only live at all by working twelve or sixteen hours a day.

The wretched earnings of the needle are, of course, to be ascribed to the excessive supply of workers, and the helplessness that urges thousands of them to work for any payment that will keep body and soul together. But the low payment of piece-work compels hasty production, and the good needlework in which a well-trained housewife takes delight, cannot be executed by the fingers urged by the fear that sixteen hours of work may fail to get over eighteenpenny-worth of pay.

We speak of skill in the mere act of sewing, quite apart from the sublime science of millinery. Few needlewomen can afford themselves the time to cultivate such skill, yet very many happy wives who are themselves able to sew with deliberation, and delight, in the perfection of their own work, can appreciate its value. Thousands of ladies are desiring in vain to know where they can find women who might come to the house of an employer, or take work to their own rooms and put into it stitchery that is all ornament and strength. Ladies are not, we think, unwilling to understand that skilled work is entitled to a price high in proportion to its rarity. But where is it to be found? Where is the careful housewife to look, in such a great bottle of hay as London, for example, when she wants to find the needle that will serve her turn? Wanted, a Needlewoman's Hall.

A great and, for the present, necessary burden under which the needlewoman lies, is the necessity of taking shopwork from the hands of agents or sub-agents, and paying them a serious percentage of risk money from their wretched earnings. The tradesman requires security for the material he sends out to be made; the needlewoman herself has none but her character to offer. Therefore, a more substantial middleman steps in to take from the tradesman his material and make himself responsible for its return cut and stitched into a certain number of garments, at a stipulated price for each. This man employs the needlewomen, or perhaps sublets part of his contract to others who employ them, and, for the risk of the guarantee, as well as for the profits of the occupation he has taken on himself, the price paid to the needlewoman for her work is made very decidedly to differ from the price paid for it by the person who first gave it out. The deduction is most serious to a class that is obliged to know how—and does know how—to

do more with an odd sixpence a week than perhaps any other class of beings upon earth. The tradesman cannot be expected to make weekly distribution of material upon a large scale, to a crowd of poor and suffering women whom he does not know, depending upon nothing but the principles of human nature for his surety. The agency is unavoidable at present; although its abolition, if it could be got rid of, would close a paltry way of money-making, with which men could very well dispense. Wanted, a Needlewoman's Hall.

The want is, of a point of immediate contact between the whole body of the honest needlewomen in a town, and the whole body of the public. We cannot alter the main principles of trade, to raise the needlewoman's profits, but we can study those accidents of her condition which deprive her of the whole advantage to be had of patient industry. If only a little money given by the rich, will set up a machinery that shall secure permanently for some of the hardest and the worst rewarded workers in the land, most of them helpless single women, a condition permanently raised above its present level, let the fact be shown, and the help may be looked for, confidently.

A small beginning has been established this year in London: it is the Institution for the Employment of Needlewomen, Number Twenty-six, Lamb's Conduit-street. This institution may be taken as the germ of Needlewoman's Hall. It is quite modest in its pretension, but quite capable of developing its mustard-seed into a mustard-tree, if benignant showers shall prosper it. The founder of it, is a lady who had been drawn from one spectacle of sorrow to another, into a genuine examination of the state of the different classes of Our Homeless Poor, and who, under that title, told what she had seen of the condition of poor women in London, in a little book published by Messrs. Nisbet, of Berners-street. For example, a poor widow came with her two little boys in the "slack season" of needlework, to the Refuge at Field-lane. Eager to return to honest independence, she was started on her own account in a bare room, and obtained the loan of a chaff bed and bolster. What sum would suffice to furnish her with necessaries? Half-a-crown was all she borrowed for the purpose. She hunted up a chair with three legs and no back, which she could have for threepence, and she knew a carpenter who had a spare leg of a chair. In the same spirit she made successful search for all her other furniture; found a table, a cup, a saucer, a plate, a kettle and so forth; leaving fivepence of surplus when her furniture had all been bought. The fivepence she, with all simplicity of heart, carried back to her benefactor.

At Number Twenty-six, Lamb's Conduit-street, the upper part of a house has been taken; one or two sensible and active ladies manage the affairs; but there is an ornamental committee, and there is a sufficiency of episcopal and noble patrons to attract that part of the public which