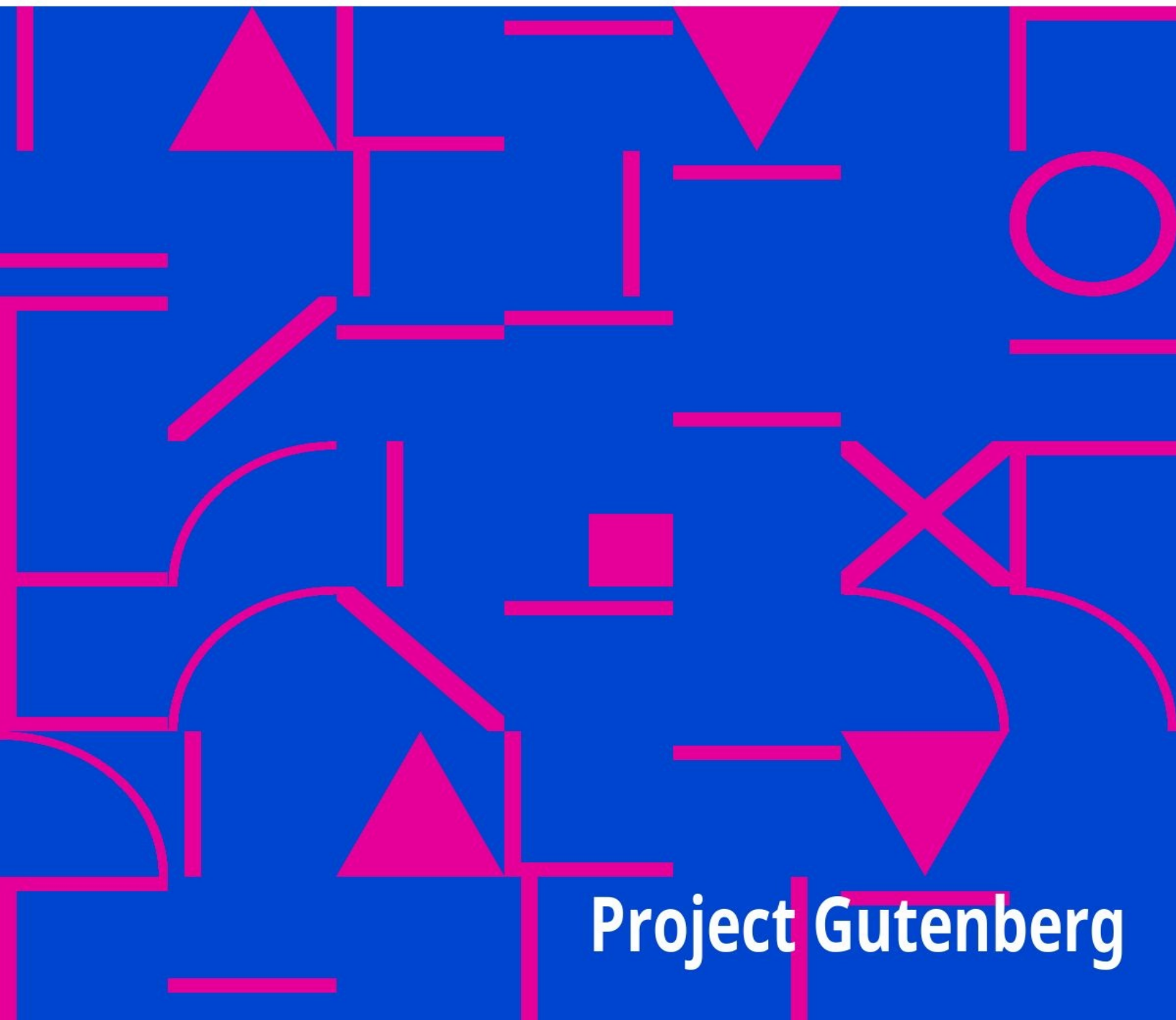


Tales of the Wonder Club, Volume III

M. Y. Halidom

The bottom half of the cover features a vibrant blue background adorned with a complex, abstract pattern of bright pink geometric shapes. These shapes include various triangles, squares, rectangles, circles, and lines, some of which are interconnected to form larger, more intricate designs. The pattern is dense and covers the entire lower portion of the cover, creating a visually stimulating effect.

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M. Y. Halidom (pseud. Dryasdust)

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES OF THE WONDER CLUB ***

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The Abduction

The Fire

TALES OF THE WONDER CLUB.

BY

DRYASDUST.

VOL. III.

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN JELLCOE AND VAL PRINCE,

AFTER DESIGNS BY THE AUTHOR.

HARRISON & SONS, 59, PALL MALL,
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The Curiosity Shop

PREFACE TO VOL. III.

Before taking leave of his readers, the author would inform them that at the commencement of these "Tales," the earlier ones dating some thirty years back, nothing was further from his intentions than rushing into print, although repeatedly persuaded to do so by certain well-meaning friends, who from time to time were permitted to peruse the hidden MSS. The tales, nearly all of them, were written when the author was living abroad, and to beguile a period of enforced idleness, which otherwise would have been intolerable.

Never in his wildest dreams did he meditate inflicting them on the public mind. Partly, it may be, that he thought with Lord Tennyson, that "fame is half dis fame," and that "in making many books there is no end," as Solomon teaches. Or it may be that he didn't care to augment that already numerous class who are said "to rush on where angels fear to tread." However this might be, time passed and the tales began to accumulate, when the author conceived the idea of stringing them together in a decameron, and later still of illustrating them with his own designs. Still years rolled on, and the tales, long abandoned, were consigned to the limbo of a mysterious black box, where they remained all but forgotten till many years later.

"Why on earth don't you publish them?" was the constant cry of those few who were taken into the writer's confidence.

The author answered by a modest shrug of self-depreciation, and still the unfinished MSS. lay at the bottom of the black box. The fact was that a weight of inertia oppressed him, added to a total lack of experience in business matters of this kind, which prevented him from taking the first step. He recoiled from the thought of calling on a publisher and presenting his own MSS., and being occupied in other ways besides writing, he begrudged the time lost in hunting up printers, publishers, and engravers, together with all the delays *contretemps*, and disappointments attendant on red tape.

What he wanted was a factotum, "an all round man," who would take, so to speak, the dirty work off his hands. Where was such a man to be found? He knew of none. The author is a man of unusually retired habits, and associates

with but few of his kind. By proclaiming his want openly, doubtless, many would have presented themselves for the task, but in matters of this sort a certain amount of intimacy with the person employed seems to be necessary; at least, so the author thought, and thus time rolled on, and the "Tales" were no nearer publication than they were years ago, and might still have remained in this state for years longer but for an unforeseen incident. One morning, whilst taking a constitutional in a neighbouring suburb, the author's attention was attracted by a strange-looking stringed instrument of undoubted antiquity, in the window of an old curiosity shop. He would enquire the price of it. The proprietor, a weasel-faced little man, with a polished bald head, foxy beard streaked with grey, and a nose rather red at the tip, stood at the door of his shop. His ferret eyes spotted a customer.

"What is the price of that instrument?"

"One guinea."

"I'll take it. Wrap it up in paper."

"Right you are, sir. Good morning, sir. Thank you."

And off trudged the author with this new acquisition to his collection of curios.

Little did he imagine at the time what an important part this same weasely little man was destined to play in the drama of his every day life. Soon after this a second visit was paid to the shop. It was a strange place, choked with odd lumber, where any curio might be obtained, from a mermaid to a mummy. A stuffed crocodile hung in the window. There were cases of stuffed birds and animals, dummies in costume, old pictures, antique furniture, armour, weapons, coins, and postage stamps. A third and fourth visit succeeded, and after almost every visit the author's collection was enriched by some new curio. At length, so frequent became these visits to the curio shop, that hardly a day passed without the author putting in an appearance. Some two years may thus have passed away, during which time the author had ample opportunity of studying this human weasel. He learned that he was a bum-bailiff, a commission agent, etc., ready to undertake any odd job for money.

Here, then, at last, was the very man. The author accordingly propounded his plan of publishing the "Tales." That weasel nose sniffed business. With alacrity he seized the MSS., and donning a new top hat, which he did whenever he desired to create an impression of respectability, he climbed to the top of a 'bus,

and was soon landed in the thick of our metropolis. From that time all has been comparatively plain sailing. "*Ce n' est que le premier pas qui coûte*," and cost it did, readers, you may be certain of that.

THE AUTHOR.

The Gipsy Queen

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIPSY QUEEN.—MR. BLACKDEED'S NEW PLAY.

It was Monday morning. Our members assembled as usual at the breakfast table, after which the host entered with the newspaper, to show his guests an account of some political event of great importance. The appearance of a newspaper in the club was a thing of great rarity, as we have already hinted that politics were only permitted occasionally on sufferance. As Mr. Oldstone was commonly looked up to as the head of the club, if not altogether on account of his age, still as one who was most rigid against any infringement of discipline and decorum, each member glanced timidly towards this worthy, as if to ask his consent and absolution, which having given with a solemn nod of his head, the other members seized with eagerness the mystic folio, and having spread it out upon the table, huddled one behind the other to get the first look at its contents.

As for our artist, he had "metal more attractive," as Mr. Blackdeed might have observed. Nothing would satisfy him but a good long sitting from his enchantress, Helen. So stealing from the company, engrossed as they were with their politics, he retired to his chamber, where he set his palette; and, placing Helen's portrait on the easel, he called his model, who came without much pressing, and having placed her in the old carved high-backed chair, he commenced work. The portrait waxes apace. Our host's daughter is in her very best looks. The painter's hand is inspired not merely by the love of art—great, though that love undoubtedly is with all artists—but spurred on by another, perhaps more powerful feeling, which lends such temper to our artist's ordinary faculties, as to render the painter himself, a rare occurrence, utterly amazed at his own powers. The first hour passes away like five minutes. Scarce a word has been spoken on either side. To those who feel they love, few words are necessary, and in many cases, perhaps the fewer the better. This was a case in point. Our couple loved. Why should we deny it? How futile, indeed, for lovers themselves to deny it to the world? How utterly hopeless a task it is for lovers to attempt to conceal their love one for the other, even *when* they intend to do so! Murder will out sooner or later. In this, as in many other cases, love given vent

to in words could be productive of no good to either party; and, therefore, as we said before, the fewer words spoken, the better.

But what do I say? Will nature be subdued by mere obstinate silence? Will not the trampled down heart rebel and burst its fetters, seeking an outlet in the powerful upheavings of the breast; the electric flashes of the impassioned eye that the strongest efforts of our feeble will in vain endeavour to render cold and indifferent; the involuntary blush, the haggard cheek, the pensive look; the smothered sigh—have they no language? Nay, your very silence speaks for itself. Oh, youth! if you would hide your passion, do so by flight, there is no other way.

This is what McGuilp felt. As for Helen, poor child, her virgin heart was a stranger to the tender passion. She had heard of love, but just heard of it vaguely as the world speaks of it, without being able to realise its power. She would have been incapable of analysing her own feelings, but a mysterious languishing softness welled forth from her large blue eyes, which whispered to the painter's heart things that it dare not acknowledge to her own. Strange, awful, mysterious passion; instilling thy subtle poison into the veins of thy willing victims. Merciless poisoned dart! Swift as thou art deep, inextricable as thou art unerring—who can escape thee?

But let us leave the enamoured couple to themselves for a while. Far be it from us to play the spy upon their actions, and let us return to the club-room, where the members, having exhausted their newspaper, are interrupted in the midst of a political discussion by an authoritative thump on the table from Mr. Oldstone, who reminds the company that Mr. Blackdeed has not yet discharged his debt to the club—viz., the recital of his new play, that he had just finished preparing for the stage.

"Ay, ay, the play, the play!" shouted several voices.

"Now then. Blackdeed," said Parnassus, "the play is the thing, you know."

Our dramatist, with some show of modest reluctance, or, as Mr Parnassus observed, "with sweet reluctant amorous delay," produced his manuscript from his ample pocket, inwardly, nothing loath to declaim his late effusion before the august assembly, seated himself with an air of dignity, and having waited till the whole club was fairly settled, and all attention, he thus began:

THE GIPSY QUEEN.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

DON DIEGO.

DON SILVIO.

DON PASCUAL, son of Don Diego, in love with Inez.

PEDRO, servant to Don Silvio.

JUAN, servant to Don Diego.

DON ALFONSO, friend to Don Pascual, and student of Salamanca.

DONNA INEZ, only daughter of Don Silvio.

DONNA RODRIGUEZ, nurse to Donna Inez.

LADY ABBESS, sister to Don Silvio.

GIPSY QUEEN, Pepa.

MIGUEL, a Priest.

Another Priest, Gipsies, Soldiers, Guests, Attendants, and Populace.

The Scene is laid in Spain in the mountains of Grenada. In Scene III. of Act I., in Salamanca.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Study of Don Silvio, with large open window, through which is seen the castle of Don Diego on the opposite mountain peak. Don Silvio is discovered at a table covered with books, papers, and scientific instruments. Strewn about the floor and on shelves are various objects of natural science. Don Silvio closes a book he has been reading and advances.*

D. SIL. In vain the consolations of deep science,
The chiding voice of grave philosophy,
To wean us from our earthly fond affections,
When once deep-rooted in our bosom's core.
Paternal love, surviving youthful passion,

As autumn's deep'ning tints the summer's green,
Remains mature till the cold wintry blast
Of death hath scattered its last quivering leaf,
And driven us, whither? I have a daughter,
Than whom no saint in heaven purer is.
Fair and virtuous Inez! Sole object left
Me now to love on earth of all my kin.
An old man's pride, and only legacy
Of my late spouse, the sainted Dorothea.
Who, giving birth to this fair angel, left,
After ten years of childless married life,
This, my poor helpless babe, but in exchange
For her own precious self. Long unconsoled
For this, my doleful loss, I sought once more
Relief from sorrow in those studies deep,
Abandoned since my manhood's prime, when I
In Salamanca's university,
Did strive for honors, my child consigning
To a certain faithful old retainer,
The good Rodriguez, who in lieu of mother
Did rear the tender babe until it grew
To years maturer, when I thought it fit
To rescue her from out the hands of one
Who, whatsoe'er her care maternal be,
Is yet too full of vanity to make
A good instructress to my only child,
Whom I designed to educate in mode
Far different from that in which Rodriguez
And all her worldly tribe would seek to do.
With this my aim in view, I took the child
Away from home whilst yet her mind was tender,
And placing her under my sister's care,
The Lady Abbess of Saint Ursula—
A convent distant thirty miles from hence—
I left her until she should reach such age
As maidens having made due preparations
Are deemed fit to marry. Scarce sixteen
Is now my daughter Inez; far too young
To face without a guide the many wiles

And dire temptations of this giddy world;
I fain would keep her longer there, but then,
Then comes the thought that harasses my soul.
Having in youth squandered my patrimony,
Wasting my substance that I might procure
Expensive books and likewise instruments
I needed in the fond pursuits of science,
In gratifying literary tastes,
And other fancies, thus I soon became
Deeply indebted to my richer neighbour,
The valiant Don Diego, who, much loath
To see an old house ruined, hath full oft
From time to time with liberal hand advanced
Such sums as I could ne'er hope to repay.
This knew he, too, full well, and having seen
Once my little daughter at the castle,
And fancying much her beauty, thereupon
Did make what he then doubtless did consider
An offer fair and not to be refused
By me, a desperate man—his debtor, too—
An offer, namely, for my daughter's hand
When she should have attained her sixteenth year;
And this he gave me well to understand
Would be the only way that he'd consent
To counsel all my former debts to him;
Refusing this, I knew th' alternative.
Don Diego is a soldier fierce and proud
As he is courageous, stern and merciless
Towards those who thwart his will. What could I do?
Unable to pay and in his power,
Groaning 'neath a sense of obligation;
Allured, too, perhaps, by prospects flattering
In worldly sense to her, a poor man's daughter,
I e'en consented. In an evil hour
I gave my word to friend Diego,
A man of my own years, whose castle stands
Upon the opposite peak. Behold it.
A man, I say, who might be her grandsire;
Nor is it mere disparity of years

That makes the gap to gape between the pair.
Besides his age, and now decaying health,
Don Diego all his youth has led a life
The most licentious. Rumours strange and wild
Are busy with his name, for it is known
That he esteems the holy love of woman
But as a flower to pluck and cast aside.
He hath no reverence for religious rites,
And thinks of matrimony but as a bond,
Of all bonds easiest broke. With thoughts like these
How shall it fare then with my poor daughter
When once the knot is tied? His temper then
Is stern and imperious, blunt and rude.
Accustomed to command, he reigns alone
Amidst a flattering troupe of followers,
Like petty tyrant, treating men as serfs.
In boasting moods he vaunts of ancestry
Who never thwarted were in lust or hate,
And to this man shall I consign my daughter?
No, no, it was an evil hour when I
O'er hastily did consent to sacrifice
My lovely Inez, purest of her sex,
To this man's savage and rapacious lust.
Repentance came too late, for he doth hold
Me still to my promise, and all in vain
Are pleadings of my daughter's tender age.
The promise of her hand at some time hence,
When she to riper womanhood hath grown,
Excuse or promise unavailing both,
For he, with military punctilio
And lustful hot impatience, doth demand
Her hand at once, and will brook no delay.
He called on me of late, and from his mien
I saw there was but little left to hope.
A father's tears, as ever, failed to soften
His all too stubborn nature, and at length
He threatened me with ruin or with death
And forcible abduction of my daughter
If on a certain day ('tis now at hand)

I gave not him my daughter for his wife.
As yet my child knows nothing of this plan,
But now the time draws near when she must know.
How can I face my daughter? How can I
With humble, piteous whine, say, "Inez,
Thy father is ruined, an thou heed him not?
Save him by the sacrifice of thyself."
Or else, with imperious and austere brow,
Say, "Inez, I command thee as a father
To wed the man I've chosen thee—Don Diego.
Obedience is a filial duty, and
Thy father better knows what's for thy good
Than thou thyself. At once prepare, obey!"
Or should I, contrary to precepts taught
Once by myself when she was yet a child,
When I have preached 'gainst vanities and poms,
Empty frivolities and lust of greed,
Can I now plead thus, and say, "Daughter mine,
Behold what a grand thing it is to be
One of the great ones of the earth, and move
For ever midst the gay and high-born throng
Of lords and ladies without care or pain,
With means at hand to gratify each wish,
To live the mistress of a noble castle,
With serfs at thy command, with gold, with jewels,
Dress at thy caprice, and hear around thee
Ravishing strains of music in thy halls;
Thy gardens, parks, and pleasure grounds rivalling
Those of the noblest peers, exciting envy
Of all thy neighbours, and this, yes, all this,
Thou hast but to reach out thy hand to take;
Accept the old Don Diego for thy spouse,
His castle's thine, and all that therein is;
Don't be a fool and throw this chance away
Because, forsooth, he's old, somewhat infirm,
Unfair to view, irascible and stern,
And recklessly give up thy giddy heart
To some young spendthrift, all because he's fair;
Throw not such a glorious chance away,

But make thy father's fortune and thine own?"
Is this the strain that I could use to her
After my virtuous lessons and wise saws?
Could she not answer, "Father, is it thou—
Thou who didst ever counsel me to shun
The whispered words of gallants with the wiles
And impious vanities of this base world,
Didst inculcate obedience, filial love,
As primary virtues ever with the young?
Was it that I might blindly, passively
Submit my will to thine? Shunning fresh youth;
That at thy bidding I might give my hand,
Loathing, yet passively, unto a man
Whose years do full quadruple mine, and all
Because this man has wealth and I have none?
Is this thy virtue, father? This the end
Of all thy teachings, that I should become
The minion, yes, the minion of a dotard?"
And would she not be right? Could I look up
Into her angel's face unblushingly,
And with a base hypocrisy reply,
"My child, 'tis for thy good. Such is the world."
Would she believe me? Would she not despise
Me and my words, see through my selfishness?
Yet what to do I know not. I am lost.
Would not the world itself proclaim me base?
Would not the mockers say, "Behold the sage,
The philosophic, wise Don Silvio,
He who despises wealth and this world's pomp,
Yet sells his daughter for Don Diego's gold?"
Thus run I counter both to God and man,
And mine own conscience. Crushing my child's heart
That I might save my own grey head from ruin.
Help me, ye saints! for I have need of guidance.
[Kneeling.]
Soul of my blest departed Dorothea!
Assist me with thy counsels, and send down
From that high heaven where thou in peace doth dwell
A blessing on thy daughter and her sire;

It cannot, sure, be that our Inez shall
Unwillingly and loathingly consent
To wed a vicious dotard for his gold. [*Rising.*
Time wanes, and with my part I must go through;
Then, as to the rest, let heaven think on't.
I know not if I meditate aright;
Nay, I know I am wrong, but I've no choice.
Hola! Rodriguez!—Rodriguez, I say!

Enter RODRIGUEZ.

How now, Rodriguez, did'st not hear me call?

ROD. Indeed, my lord, I came as soon as I
Did hear you, but it may be that of late
I have grown a little hard of hearing;
Rodriguez now is getting old. How many
Years is it I have served your lordship here?

D. SIL. Cease thy prating tongue, and now lend thine
ear.

ROD. I'm all attention, good my lord, proceed.

D. SIL. Well then, here is a letter I have written
To thy young mistress, bidding her return
With fullest speed to the paternal roof.

ROD. What! my young mistress Inez coming home
After full five years' stay within the walls,
The gloomy walls, of grim St. Ursula!
Poor soul! she'll scarce remember old Rodriguez.
How I long to see her! How she'll have grown.
Time will have wrought great changes. But a child
She was when first she left her father's hall,
And now returns a woman. Pretty dear!
Shall I ever forget how she did cry
At leaving me? For you must know, Señor,
That ever with a mother's tender care

I've cherished her as were she child of mine,
And she, sweet soul, ne'er having known her mother,
Looked for no other mother than myself.
And mother she would call me when a babe,
Until she grew and first began to learn
The death of your good lady Dorothea—
Peace be to her soul, the dear sweet lady—
Then she learned to call me Nurse Rodriguez.
Dear little soul! When I did see her last
She had her mother's brow, her mother's hair,
Her eyes, too, and her tiny foot and hand;
Her smile was all her mother's, yet methinks
Something about the nose and mouth and chin
Was from your lordship. How I wonder now
If she be changed, if she do remember
How I was wont to dance her on my knee
To still her cries with sweets, and how she'd ask
Me to tell her all about her mother—
How she looked and spoke, and how she dressed?
I told her all I knew. What I knew not
That straight I did invent to please the child,
And oftimes on a chilly wintry night
Of storm and tempest, when the lightning's flash
Lit up with lurid glare the outward gloom,
And the loud thunder, like to wake the dead,
Shook the old castle walls to their foundation,
On such nights as these, when sleep would desert
Her downy pillow, I would lift her thus,
And wrapping her up in my ample shawl,
I'd draw her to the fire. Then, whilst the warmth
Of the genial element diffused
Itself throughout the chamber, rendering
By the contrast of the black storm without
Its growing blaze more grateful, then would I
Beguile the night with tales of ghosts and ghouls,
Of elves and fairies, and hobgoblins grim,
Of witches, wizards, vampires, dwarfs, and giants,
Pirates, brigands, and unburied corpses,
Whose restless spirits, ever hovering near,

Render the place accursed, and bring ill
To happen unto those who wander there.
Wraiths and doubles, and corpse candles glim'ring
O'er unhallowed graves. Of secret murders,
Of spells, enchantment, and of hidden treasure,
Fights of knights and dragons, Christian damsels
Rescued from Moorish captors by their lovers,
Tales of the Inquisition and its tortures,
Of dungeons dark and drear, and skeletons
Found bleak and bare, laden with rusty chains
That ever and anon at midnight's hour
Were heard to move and shake, with many a tale
Of the wild gipsy tribes that roam these mountains,
Of haunted houses and weird palaces,
That at the magician's word sink 'neath the ground,
Of devils and of fiends—

D. SIL. And all the lore
That gossips love to frighten children with.
Wretch and most wicked beldam! Is it thus
By giving reins to thine accursed tongue
That thou hast sought to poison my child's mind?
Is this why every eve when it grew dark
I've seen her shudder and look o'er her shoulder?
Why she would never enter a dark room?
Why, as I've watched beside her tiny crib,
I've seen her start in sleep with stifled sob?
When I have watched her wan and haggard cheek,
Her thoughtful mien, her dreamy vacant stare,
Until I've fancied her in a decline,
And feared she would not long be left to cheer
My gloomy hearth; then was it this, I say,
Thy foolish wicked lies, torturing thus
Her tender infant brain? I say, for shame!
In good time I rescued her from thy hands.

ROD. I'm sure my lord, I've always sought to—

D. SIL. Hush!
And give me no more of thy silly prate,
I've some affairs on hand, and must away,
O'er long thou hast detained me with thy cant.
Here, take this note, bid Pedro start at once
And bear this safely to my daughter there,
For to-night at the hostel he must sleep,
To-morrow early he must start towards home,
Accompanying my daughter by the way. [*Going.*]

ROD. My lord, I'll see to't.

D. SIL. And hark! Rodriguez,
There's one thing I would caution you against.

ROD. And that is, my lord?

D. SIL. And that is, I say,
That when my daughter home arrives to-morrow,
You fill not her head with foolish stories
And antiquated superstitions.
Above all, talk to her not of gallants,
Of tournaments, elopements, serenades,
Or anecdotes of thine own frivolous life.

ROD. My lord! my lord!

D. SIL. Once for all, I repeat,
Detail not all the follies of thy youth;
Talk to her not of dress or finery,
Nor all the gilded pageantries of courts,
Or such like vanities; and now, adieu,
I must go hence. Think well of what I've said. [*Exit.*]

ROD. (*Alone.*) Poor, poor gentleman, I fear he's going;
He's growing old now, is my poor master,
And folks when they grow old are ever childish.
He ne'er has been the same since the departure
Of my poor mistress, Lady Dorothea.

What said he about my frivolous life?
Who can cast a stone at Dame Rodriguez?
Oh, his head's gone; that's very clear, alas!
My life! 'Twere well he thought about his own,
Spent here mid dusty books and parchments old,
With dirty bottles and queer instruments.
As no one ever saw the like before.
What he does with them, who can understand?
Shut up here like a hermit all day long.
A plague on him, and all his crotchety ways!
Wait till my mistress Inez doth return;
She will enliven him, and 'twixt us two,
We'll make a clearance of this dusty cell.
"Talk to her not of dress!" Poor silly man!
Why, how on earth is the poor child to know,
Shut up these five years in those convent walls,
Of all the latest fashions of the day?
How should she dress herself without the aid
Of old Rodriguez? See how these men are.
Do we live in a world or do we not?
I should not do my duty to his child
Were I to listen to him. No I must,
The instant she arrives, take her in hand.
"Talk to her not of gallants!" Why, forsooth?
Must the poor child see no society?
Is this hall a convent or a desert?
Was she not born to marry and to mix
With other ladies of her state and rank?
How should she find a husband without me?
She's growing up now, and has no mother,
And as for her poor father, he'd as soon
Think of flying as of his daughter's weal.
No, no; but I will teach her how to cut
A figure in this world as best becomes
Her rank and station. I will teach her, too,
What colours best become her, and how I,
I, Rodriguez, figured once in youth,
When I with train of yellow and scarlet silk,
And stomacher of green, sleeves of sky-blue,

First did meet my Carlos at the bull-fight.
I'll teach her how to dress, to use the fan—
Thus, also thus, and thus, and how to draw,
With well-feigned coyness, the mantilla, thus,
Across her face, leaving one eye exposed,
And ogle, so, the gallants as they pass.
A few good lessons taken from an adept
Will soon prepare her for society.

PEDRO. (*Without.*) Rodriguez, Hola! Rodriguez, What ho!

Enter PEDRO.

ROD. Donna Rodriguez, an it please you, sir.

PED. Well then, be it so, Donna Rodriguez,
I've just met master coming from the castle,
Apparently in no good humour. He
Asked me if you'd given me a letter
Addressed to Donna Inez at the convent,
And bid me thither haste without delay,
Threatening me with mine instant dismissal
Should Mistress Inez fail to arrive to-morrow,
And thus with hasty step and moody brow
He passed me by, as if old retainers
Had not their privileges, eh? Rodriguez—
Donna Rodriguez, I should say. Pardon me.

ROD. Here is the letter; you had best be off.
Stay, Pedro. Did master look so savage?

PED. Even so.

ROD. Something must have angered him.
Prithee, good Pedro, hast thou not of late
Noted a change in poor Don Silvio?

PED. Faith, I cannot tell. Since I have known him

He hath been always the same moody man.

ROD. But has he not of late seemed more estranged,
More dull, more gloomy, just as if there were
Something of unusual import that
Were hanging o'er him?

PED. In truth I know not.

ROD. He sees no company.

PED. That's nothing new.

ROD. I mean—save that of that old haughty Don,
Old Don Diego from the neighbouring castle,
Who ne'er vouchsafes me word, but when he comes
Passes me by as the veriest slut,
With not so much as "Good-day, Rodriguez,"
But asks me sternly if my master's in.
His visits have been frequent here of late.
What think'st thou is the meaning of all this?

PED. In faith, I know not, and do not much care.

ROD. Ha! thou carest not? Come now, good Pedro,
Wilt thou that I confide a secret to thee?

PED. A secret that shall increase my wages,
Take more work off my shoulders? Then declare 't;
If it be ought else, then keep your secret.
I am tired of ever being the slave and drudge
Of my old master for such paltry pay.
I've served here now some twenty years and more.
But matters were not always thus. I've seen
The castle walls look handsomer in my day.
In Lady Dorothea's time I never
Had to wait for my wages, and my suit
Was always clean and new. Then were there more
Servants in the castle who took near all

The work off my hands. Now that they're dismissed
The burden of the household falls on me,
And the wages, 'stead of waxing more,
I have to wait for. I know not how long 'tis
I have not seen the colour of his gold.
Why, the castle's gone to rack and ruin.
I am ashamed to meet my former friends,
The well-fed menials of Don Diego's hall,
When they with grave and supercilious smile
Do thus accost me, "Ha! good man, Pedro,
How fares it with thee and thy poor master?
Thy suit, methinks, grows musty, like his castle,
And, to speak truth, I once have seen thee fatter."
Then straight they talk about their master's bounty.
"Look how we fare," say they; "an I were thou
I'd strike for higher wages or else leave."
And all these taunts I have to bear—for what?

ROD. Well, well, I fare but as yourself; but hark—
Something's astir within the castle.

PED. (*Turning round timidly.*) Where?

ROD. Bah! I mean something's about to happen
In this old hall, an I do not mistake.
A change.

PED. For the better? Out with it, Rodriguez.
Be quick, for with this note I must away. [*Going.*]

ROD. Just so; the letter. What think'st thou there's in 't?

PED. I never play the spy. Money, think you? [*Holding it up to the light.*]

ROD. I trow not. I spoke but of it's import.

PED. Marry, what should it be but just to bid
Young Mistress Inez home without delay?

ROD. Exactly; and canst divine the motive?

PED. Faith! Perhaps the charges of the convent
Have grown too costly for the miser's purse,
Or 't may be having stayed there her full time,
She now returns unto her father's hall.

ROD. Not altogether that, for I well know
Don Silvio would fain have kept her longer.
Hark, Pedro! thou know'st that I've always been
A faithful follower of this ancient house,
And no time-server as some others are.

PED. (*Aside.*) Humph! That's meant for me. Time-server,
forsooth!

ROD. Ill would 't become a faithful old retainer
Not to take interest in her lord's affairs,
So with this sense of duty upmost, aye,
And marking something most unusual
In these frequent visits of Don Diego,
Then hearing once his voice in angry tones,
And that of our poor master, trembling, meek,
I naturally bent my ear until
It level stood with the chamber's keyhole.

PED. Naturally, Donna Rodriguez. Well?

ROD. Ha! Now you take more interest in my tale.
Well, then I heard the whining piteous tones
Of our old master's voice in broken sobs.
"Think of her tender age, and your own years.
Can this disparity between you both,
This forced consent on her part, bring to her
Ought but unhappiness? Prithee, reflect.
Think of a father's feelings, and forbear."
"Think of your debts, old man, and of your past,"
Now said a sterner voice; "and if you fail

To have your daughter all in readiness
The next time that I call, so the wedding
May be solemnised within my private chapel
At whatsoever hour I please, hark ye!
I'll sell your ruined castle o'er your head,
Drive you houseless into the open air
To beg your bread; by force abduct your daughter,
And——

PED. Did he say that?

ROD. Ay, he did, indeed.

Enter DON SILVIO musingly behind—he stops and listens.

PED. Why then he'll do 't; that is, if our old lord
Do not peaceably give up his daughter.

ROD. Oh, it's horrible, horrible. Poor child!

PED. Horrible for us to be turned adrift.
Poor child, indeed! the best thing that could hap,
I wish the little jade no better luck.
The daughter of a threadbare miser. *She*
Turn up her nose at such a match as this!
I can't think what our master's scruples are
To such a union. Luck seems on his side.

ROD. Hush. You forget her age, the poor dear child
Has scarce arrived at puberty, and then
Knows nothing of the world, but cometh straight
From that old convent without time to taste
The sweets of life, or choose from out the crowd
Of motley youths who *should* encompass her
One of her choice, befitting more her age
Than this grey, grim, and surly Don Diego.

PED. Don Diego is a proper gentleman.

A trifle old, perhaps; so much the better,
He will but die the sooner, and so leave
Our Inez mistress of his lordly hall.
Once left a widow, young and rich, she then
May marry any gallant that she likes.
First let her fill her mouth and clothe her back,
Then indulge her own caprice at leisure.
I'm for Don Diego, and will help his plan
With all my power.

ROD. Oh! you men, you men,
You're all alike, and have no sentiments.
Just such a one is master, who would sell
His only child to pay his debts withal.

PED. Why, how can he help it? Debts must be paid.
And when the debt is cancelled in this way
I fancy I can see the old miser chuckle
To himself at having got off so cheap.

DON SILVIO *advances in their midst.*

D. SIL. Discussing matters that concern ye not,
Eavesdropping hounds, unmannered miscreants!
Is this your duty and your gratitude?
Knaves that ye are, and base-born time-servers,
Off with ye both! Thou, Pedro, lazy lout,
Off to the convent, as I bade thee. Fly!
Rouse not my wrath; and thou, thou gossiping hag,
Back to thy room and give thy tongue a rest,
Else it will swell and choke thee. Would it might.

*[Exeunt severally Pedro
and Rodriguez. Don
Silvio throws himself
into an armchair,
and covers his face
with his hands.]*

SCENE II.—*Interior of the Convent of St. Ursula. Inez discovered
pacing up and down dejectedly.*

INEZ. 'Tis passing strange that all these five long years
That I have lived within these convent walls,
A stranger to the world without, unless
To the narrow limits of our garden.
I ne'er remember to have passed a night
Like last night was. Most strange and fearful dreams
Disturbed my slumber, robbing me of rest;
Confused they were, and I can scarce recall
Aught of their substance, but methought that I
Was caught and roughly handled by rude men
With dark ferocious faces. By their dress
I should have deemed them gipsies; then methought
I saw a female—tall, majestic, old,
Or middle-aged, in strange and wild attire,
Who spoke to me, and questioned me in proud,
Yet calm and kindly accents, and that she
Rebuked the ruffians, so that they fell back
And did no harm to me; yet still I sat
Surrounded by the band, which kept close guard.
My fear was very great, so that I think
I must have fainted, for I knew no more.
It was a dream most unaccountable.
My aunt, the Lady Abbess, says that dreams
Are sent us oftentimes by the saints to warn,
Guide, and admonish us. That holy men,
Ay, and women, too, have had many things
Revealed to them in dreams and visions.
Old nurse Rodriguez, too, I can recall,
Oft would relate me hers, and would declare
They all came true, or bore some hidden sense
That none save gifted sybils could explain.
And now, although my memory's much confused,
Methinks Rodriguez formed part of my dream.

Enter LADY ABBESS.

LADY AB. What! Inez, musing—art not well, my child?

INEZ. I've slept badly, aunt, and have a headache.

LADY AB. Here's that will cure it.

INEZ. What! A letter?

LADY AB. Ay, from thy father; it was hither brought
By an old servitor.

INEZ. The good Pedro?

LADY AB. I think the same; I've seen his face before.
Thou know'st, Inez, that it is my custom
To break the seal of all the letters that
Come here directed to my novices,
To prevent clandestine correspondence;
But knowing well my brother's handwriting,
And being well informed of the contents
By this same Pedro, I deemed it useless.
Read it then, dear, thyself.

INEZ. (*Reads.*) "My dearest child,
The time has now come round when thou should'st end
Thy course of studies at St. Ursula's.
It is my wish that thou at once take leave
For ever of thy aunt, the Lady Abbess,
And without more delay prepare to start
In the company of my servant Pedro.
See that thou be not tardy, but straightway,
Quick after the perusal of these lines,
Set off upon thy journey, for I have
Much to say to thee. Greet my good sister.
Your loving father,
Silvio."

Dearest aunt,
I know not if I should laugh for joy or weep,
For, returning home to see my father,

I've my baggage yet to pack, and to say
Some words in private to our Lady Abbess. [*Exeunt
Inez and Lady Abbess.*]

PED. Why, how the little wench has grown, i' faith!
But I'd have known her anywhere, I would,
So strong is the resemblance to her mother—
Her voice, her very manner too's the same
As Lady Dorothy's when first I knew her.
Ah, those were merry days. Would I could live
Them o'er again. Let me see. What was it
The gipsy beldam told me by the road?
Ha! I remember. When about half-way
Between the castle and St. Ursula,
While jogging through a bleak and bare ravine
Upon my mule, and leading on the other,
A crone stood in my path—a gipsy crone.
I know not how old; but past middle age.
Still, from her mien, which was majestic, proud,
I think she had been handsome in her youth.
"Good morrow, Pedro," said the crone. "Speed well"
"Good morrow, Dame," said I. "You know me, then?"
"And have done long. Gipsies know everything.
Wilt have a proof of it? Wilt know thy fortune?
Show me thy palm," she said. "My palm!" said I,
"Know thou, good gipsy, I have nought withal
To pay thee." "Never mind for that," she said;
"I love to gossip with an old retainer.
Thy gossip shall repay me. Quick, thy palm."
Then tracing with her gaunt and taloned finger
A mystic sign across the line of life,
"Not always thus, good Pedro, hast thou been.
Thou hast a master who but ill repays
Thy manifold and useful services.
Thou hadst a mistress once, but she is gone;
With her decease good luck hath fled the house,
But times will change, and luck will reappear,
And thou shalt live content to good old age."
I recollect no more of what she said,

But mighty promises she made of luck.
Then straightway she did ask me of my lord—
How he fared, and also of Don Diego.
"Excellent well," said I, and here I laughed.
"Too well, too well, for one with head so white."
"How mean'st thou?" she said, with searching gaze.
"Why, marry thus!" said I; "they say Don Diego——
Hush, but this is a secret (here I winked)
That old Don Diego, spite his years, doth think
To take to him a young and pretty wife."
Here the crone started somewhat, as I thought,
And o'er her bronzed features came a flush
Like burnished copper, and her eagle eye
Flashed as with fire; but in an instant
Her cheeks grew ashen pale and her lips trembled.
Why I know not; but deeming her unwell,
I offered her a sip of wine from out
The gourd I carried at my saddle's flank;
But she declined. "No wine," saith she, "hath ever
Passed my lips since I was born. Shall I
Break through my abstinence in hoary age?"
Then seeming quite recovered, "Well," she said,
"What was it of Don Diego, thou wert saying?
Thou saidst, he thought to take to him a wife.
Can this be true? Who may the lady be?"
Then, mocking her, I said, "Thou knowest all things,
Know'st thou not, the lady is our Inez,
The daughter of my old lord Don Silvio.
Still in her teens, and staying with her aunt,
Lady Superior at St Ursula's,
From here some fifteen miles, whither I go
By order of her father, at full speed
To carry back his daughter to his hall?
And know'st thou not the wedding day is fixed,
And all in readiness, but that our Inez
As yet knows nought o't; but that to-morrow,
When at eve I bring her to her father,
She will soon learn it all, and willy, nilly,
Will have to wed the old man for his gold?"

All this I told her. Then she said, "True, true,
The stars already have revealed so much;
But mark me, Pedro, mark me well, I say,
For I know all things. It shall never be
It will not happen. The stars forbid it."
"What! Don Diego's wedding," said I. "We'll see."
And off I trotted till I reached the convent.

Re-enter LADY ABBESS and INEZ.

LADY AB. And now, dear Inez, now that all's prepared
For thy long homeward journey, one more kiss.
Salute thy father, and bear well in mind
All I have taught thee. When thou hast arrived
Write to me straight to say that thou art safe.
Thou, Pedro, do thy duty towards thy charge.
And, Inez, love, thou'lt think of me sometimes,
And should chance ever bring thee by this way,
Thou'lt come and see me, eh? And now farewell.
I dare not keep thee longer. Bless thee, Inez.
Adieu; the saints protect thee. Go in peace. [*Embracing
her.*]

INEZ. Farewell, kind aunt, farewell.

*[Exeunt Lady Abbess and
Inez weeping, Pedro
following.]*



ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A country inn in the Sierra Nevada. A table spread under
a vine.*

Enter DON ALFONSO and DON PASCUAL.

D. PAS. Must thou then really leave me and return
To Salamanca to resume thy studies?
Alas! to think that thou shouldst go alone,
And that I dare not bear thee company.
Tell me, Alfonso, think'st thou the police
Are ever on my track, or else that they
Have now given up all strict and diligent search,
Some weeks having passed o'er since the fatal deed?

D. ALF. I would not counsel thee yet to return.
Too many rash deeds have been done of late
For the law to lie much longer passive;
Besides, the man you murdered was a count,
A great hidalgo, and of haughty race;
His family will leave no stone unturned
Until this murdered member is avenged.

D. PAS. Murdered! say'st thou again? 'Twas in a duel.

D. ALF. Murder or homicide, 'twill go ill with thee,
An thou fall'st in the clutches of the law.
In good time thou leftest Salamanca.
But live and learn; I did ever tell thee
Thou wast over ready with thy weapon.
What! For a hasty word said in hot blood
Must thou be ever quarte, and tierce, and thrust?

D. PAS. Hold, friend, but you must know the case was
thus—
I met Count Pablo——

D. ALF. I know the story.
The count was stern and haughty as thyself,
Nor made allowances for others' pride;
He could not brook the independent gaze
Of one whom, perhaps, he deemed of lower birth;

This led to altercation and fierce looks
(I own him wrong, for he began the quarrel),
But it was thou who wast the first to challenge;
And all for a word, too.

D. PAS. And was that nought?
Nought, the being called a gipsy bastard?
What! Call'st thou that a trifle? Bastard! Ugh!
I swear, that had he been ten times my friend,
I would have slain him. Bastard! Gipsy, too!
What! Are we Spaniards of so fair a skin
That he would have me pale-eyed, flaxen-haired,
Like the barbarians of northern climes?
May not a Spaniard have an olive skin
And jetty eye without being gipsy called?
A mystery, I know, hangs o'er my birth;
I ne'er knew my parents. Some secret hand
Doth forward me remittances at times,
That I might be enabled to pursue
My studies at the university.
I cannot think it is my spurious father,
For I do well remember me of one—
Indeed, I think that she was not my mother.
Although she treated me as her own son—
A lady of high rank and ample means,
A widow, too, with kind and gentle ways.
I knew not then that she was not my mother;
But dying when I yet was but a child,
I was put early to a seminary.
It may be I inherited her fortune,
And out of this expenses are disbursed.
When young I made no strict inquiries
As to my origin. Those around me
Told me but little, but I think I heard
I was adopted by this widow lady.
More I ne'er cared to know, until of late,
Being stung by the count's taunt of spurious birth,
I challenged him and killed him in a duel.
And now I fain would have the myst'ry cleared,

E'en should the certain knowledge gall my soul
And I in truth should be a gipsy bastard.
It may be that he spoke the truth. But how
Did he come to know of it? Or, if truth,
That truth was spoke in insult, and so ta'en.
He who would call me gipsy, let him fear
My gipsy blood. Let who would call me bastard
Prepare to feel the sting a bastard feels. [*Touching his sword hilt.*]

D. ALF. Chafe not thyself; the deed is done. No more
Mar not the precious moments of our parting
With fiery words, like braggadocio,
Or vain lamentings of the fatal past,
But let us rather draw unto the table,
And o'er a merry flask of Val de Peñas
Strive to forget all sorrow.

D. P^{AS}. So say I; [*Seating themselves at the table.*]

And here's to thy safe journey and return
To thy most beloved Salamanca.
And here's to the eyes that await thee there.
Here's also to the delicate moustache——

D. ALF. Enough, enough, my friend. Such toasts as these
Keep for thyself. I've other ends in view.
I have to carve my passage through the world,
To which no syren's eyes must be a hindrance.
Wish me but success in all my studies.

D. P_{AS}. Ay, so I do, Alfonso, from my heart.

D. ALF. As to thyself, Pascual, as it seems
Thou art but little formed for study, being
Of a too warm and hasty temperament
To find much solace in the student's page,
Preferring lone rambles and sylvan sports

To the uncertain fame a scholar seeks.
To thee, and such as thee, the love of woman
Thy ardent nature will not fail to find
Out of the many one whom thou canst love.
May she be virtuous as she is fair,
And worthy of thy love as thou of hers.

D. PAS. I thank thee, but as yet my heart is whole.
May I dare hope yet that a time may come
When a woman's love and a happy home
To thee may not be all contemptible.
Heigho!

D. ALF. Thou sighest. Sure thou art in love.

D. PAS. Not so, my friend, not yet.

D. ALF. Then wherefore sigh?

D. PAS. Thou hast awoke strange mem'ries in my mind
—
Events long past that I'd but all forgot.
'Tis nothing, thou'lt say—mere childish fancy.
Prithee, friend Alfonso, tell me one thing.
Dost really think I come of gipsy blood?

D. ALF. What! Is it there the shoe still pinches? Ha!
Fill up another bumper of this wine
And wash down the word, else it will choke thee.

D. PAS. Nay, I am serious, and would have thy word.
Tell me in honour, now, what thou dost think.

D. ALF. Bah! What matters it? Thou art somewhat dark;
But, as thou well sayst, so are all our race.

D. PAS. True. But what think'st thou?

D. ALF. Faith! I cannot tell.

Perhaps over dark for a Castilian.

D. PAs. Ha! Say'st thou so? I've long thought so myself.
And what confirms me in the thought is this,
That ever since my earliest youth I've felt
A strange affection for these gipsy tribes—
A sympathy for their wild wandering life
And fierce impatience at the cold restraints
By which well-bred society doth cramp
Our fervid passions. Friend, thou knowest me well.
Thou sayest well I am not formed for study,
That is to say, such studies as thine own—
Th' intricacies of law, philosophy,
The mysteries of theology, and all
The lore for which you students sap your youth.
My book is nature. In the open fields
I've loved to lie at night and watch the stars,
The various aspects of the changing moon,
Or on the giddy mountain peak at morn
To view the first beams of the rising sun
As from the rosy horizon it climbs
Up towards the purple zenith. At midday
I love to rest me in the sylvan shade
And watch the deer grazing on the rich turf,
Or else in company of some jovial friends,
Hunt these poor denizens from their peaceful haunts,
And, heated with the chase, dismount and slake
My parching thirst from out the neighbouring brook.
Full oft in my wild wanderings I have passed
Through desert places, where no dwelling was,
And, overcome by hunger and fatigue,
Have well nigh fainted, but in such cases,
When human hospitality doth fail
Nature comes to the rescue and procures
Its roots and berries, sometimes luscious fruit:
And thus I've journeyed often from my youth,
Encountering many dangers in my path.
Twice captured by the brigands, nor set free
Without heavy ransom. More than once

I've 'scaped unaided from the blades of ruffians,
But not unscathed, and fighting hand to hand.
I've also fallen in with the gipsy tribes,
And lived among them, too, in early youth,
Till I became familiar with their tongue,
Their life and customs, for when yet a child
They stole me from my friends, whoe'er they were,
But I was rescued, and the dusky tribe
Were driven out from that part of the land.
Among my early reminiscences
I can recall the tall and bronzed form
Of one who should have been the queen of them,
For so I've heard her styled. I met her oft;
And when I first remember her she bore
A countenance as beautiful as day.
I have not seen her now for many years.
When last I met her I could plainly see
That time and trouble and a roving life
Had left their stamp upon her dusky brow.
But I had nought to fear from *her*. The crone
Would call me to her and caress me, too;
Call me endearing names, and, as a proof
Of further love, she gave this ring to me;
Made me swear it ne'er should leave my finger,
And that some day it would protect my life.
For should I fall in with the gipsy band,
On seeing this token they would let me pass
Without let or hindrance, so she said.
For years I have not seen the gipsy band,
And therefore have not put it to the proof;
But still I've kept my vow, and from that time
I ne'er have doffed it. And now tell me, friend,
If what I've just told you does not prove
Me sprung from gipsy blood?

D. ALF. We cannot help
Our birth. What matters it our parentage?

D. PAS. Thou seest not, then, what it is that galls me.

List. If I be of gipsy origin,
I must be likewise bastard, for whoe'er
Did hear of legal marriage in a case
Of love 'twixt Christian and a gipsy maid?
Knowest thou not what the term "bastard" means?
Could I once but meet my spurious father,
He should account for sending me adrift
And nameless through the world, or I'd know why.
For know, whate'er my origin may be,
I have been brought up as a gentleman,
And hope to marry one of gentle blood.
What proud Castilian family would mate
A cherished daughter to a lineage soiled?

D. ALF. I do acknowledge thy perplexity.
But bastard though thou beest, thou'rt still a man.
Would'st 'rase the bar sinister from thy shield,
Or, what is much the same, cast it i' the shade,
So that it appear not for the lustre
Of thy many and resplendent virtues?
Make thy name famous. Fame, however bought,
Hath ne'er failed to win the heart of woman.
A woman's heart being once securely won,
The vict'ry's thine. Th' obstacles that follow
Thou'lt find will not be insurmountable;
I mean, to gain the parents' full consent.
But he must fight who'd win. And now, adieu
I have no time to tarry longer. See,
My mule is saddled, and I must away.
Detain me not, my friend, for I would fain
Reach the adjacent township ere nightfall.

D. PAS. Bless thee, Alfonso, and fortune speed thee.

D. ALF. The like to thee, Pascual, from my heart.

*[They embrace. Exit
Alfonso. Pascual
remains behind and*

waves his
handkerchief from
the terrace.

D. PAS. Adios! He is gone. His ambling mule
Has borne its gallant freight far out of sight.
Farewell, Alfonso. Fortune be thy guide,
Truest of comrades, best of counsellors,
Ride *thou*, my friend, towards fame, whilst I, Pascual,
Like Cain, must roam the earth, a vagabond,
Flying the face of man, by man pursued;
A price set on my head. Not merely bastard,
But vagabond! What was't he said of fame?
He mocked me. Fame for an outlawed gipsy!
An it be not such fame the gallows brings,
Write me down lucky. Would not an attempt
To bring my name to light sign my death warrant?
My friend thought not of this. For such as I
The monast'ry's sequestered cell were good,
Rather than fame. But courage yet! I feel
The blood of our dark race boil in my veins,
And cry shame on my fears. Then fame be it,
But not that fame Alfonso wrings from books.
Not that for me. The valour of my arm,
The patient wasting of my hardy frame
Shall win the fame I seek. For I recall
The words long spoken, and but all forgot,
By that same gipsy queen when first she gazed
Into my infant palm. "Hail to thee, child!
For thou beneath a lucky star was born.
Fortune," she said, "hath marked thee for her own."
These are the words. I cannot choose, but trust.
Shine out, my star, since thou dost lead me on,
For as the loadstone draws the unwilling steel
Unto itself, so man is led by fate.
Avaunt, base fear, and fortune, thus I seize thee. [*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—A wild ravine. Gipsies, headed by the Gipsy Queen, in

ambush.

GIP. Q. This way she comes. Now to your work; but mark!

Exceed not my commands. Do her no harm,
Show yourselves loyal to your queen, as men,
And not wild beasts.

SEVERAL GIPSIES.
obeyed.

Queen, thou shalt be

Enter DONNA INEZ and PEDRO, on mules.

PED. Cheer up, fair mistress. Banish idle fears.
Already we've accomplished half our journey.
Ere sundown we'll have reached your father's castle.
So follow me. Fear not. And as for dreams,
They are all vain, and bred of convent fare—
Sickly disease engendered in the mind
By monkish legends and low superstition,
Unworthy ladies of your rank. Look ye!
I, Pedro, now am old, and yet I never
Have known a dream of mine that did come true.
No, my young mistress, take Pedro's word for't,
All dreaming is unhealthy—a bad sign.
Live well, sleep soundly, and you'll dream no more.
Dreams proceed but from impaired digestion.
Take my advice and give no heed to them.

*[Gipsies advance
suddenly and seize
the bridles.]*

FIRST GIPSY. Hola! there, good people. Halt and
dismount!

*[Inez screams and falls
against Pedro.]*

INEZ. Pedro, protect me. Oh, holy Virgin!
Oh, blessed saints and souls in purgatory!

Have mercy on us, or we're lost, O God!
Pedro, dost hear? Assist me. Fly! Call. Help!

PED. Help, help! To the rescue, I say. What ho!

SECOND GIPSY. Any attempt at flight or cry for help
Is vain, and may prove fatal. Come, dismount.

INEZ. Oh, saints! The very faces, I declare,
That I saw in my dream—and dreams are false.
Holy Virgin, protect us. Help, I say!

THIRD GIPSY. Ay, call upon your saints. Call on, call on!
And see if they'll come to your assistance.

FIRST GIPSY. An you cease not your screaming, you'll be
gagged.

[*Pedro and Inez*
dismount.]

GIP. Q. Come, no rough treatment to this young lady,
Or it will be the worse for some of you.
Tie up the mules and bind the serving man,
That he escape not, and so call for help.
As to this damsel, leave her all to me.
(*To Inez*) Young lady, have no fear, for I am one
Who can command th' entire gipsy band,
Who are my serfs and tremble at my frown.
An you be docile, they shall do no harm.
Raise but your voice, and I will have you bound.
But I, the gipsy queen, would be your friend;
And soon you shall acknowledge me as such;
But not just now. (*To the gipsies*) Bind not the young
lady
Unless she call for help or attempt to escape.
(*To Inez*) And you, young lady, courage. Tremble not.
Think not I crave your pelf or trinkets rare.
I have no need. Thysself 'tis I'd detain.

INEZ. And why, O strange, O dread, mysterious queen,
All powerful amongst thy dusky band,
If, as thou sayst, thou hast no need of pelf,
And canst and wilt protect me from the hands
Of thy half-savage subjects, wherefore then
Detain a poor and simple maiden bound
For her paternal castle, having left
The Convent of St. Ursula this morn?

GIP. Q. Oh, of your story I am well informed.
Better, perchance, than what you are yourself.
For am I not a gipsy? Know we not
By the aspect of the heavenly bodies
All events that are about to happen?
As to my object in detaining you
Let it suffice you I have an object,
Which you shall know hereafter. (*To gipsies*) Guard her
close.
Methought I did hear footsteps, but 'tis nought.

Enter hastily PASCUAL with a drawn sword.

PAS. This way I heard the cries. How now! What's this?
Hell and furies! A chaste and lovely maid
Attacked by dusky ruffians! Halt! Forbear!
For, by my soul, I swear I will not leave
One black hide whole among ye, an ye dare
To touch a single hair of her fair head.

GIP. Q. Disarm that vain and too hot-headed youth.

[*Gipsies surround
Pascual, who
defends himself
desperately, killing
and wounding some
of the nearest.
Gipsies back a few
paces. Pascual
follows, and cuts*

through them.

Unto him, cowards! Seize the presumptuous fool.
Hear ye not, slaves? What! Is a single arm,
And that, too, of a pampered gentleman,
Too much for ye? Shame on ye, cowards, slaves!

FIRST GIPSY. Yield, fellow! and put up thy silly skewer,
An thou be not a-weary of thy life.

PAS. Never! Whilst yet a drop of my heart's blood
Flows freely in my veins. By heaven, I swear
I will release yon damsel ere I die!

SECOND GIPSY. Why, who is this, though clad in costly
gear,
Doth fight as desperately as one of us?

THIRD GIPSY. Beware, young man! We do not seek thy
life;
Yield up thyself. Ask pardon of our queen,
And we will let thee live.

PAS. (*Still fighting.*) Base curs, avaunt!
My life is nothing. Take it an ye list,
Though ye shall buy it dearly. 'Twill console
My parting spirit somewhat but to know
That it hath rid the surface of the earth
Of even a few of such vile scum as ye.

FIRST GIPSY. Such words to us! Have at thee then, proud
youth.

*[Wounds Pascual on the
head, whilst others
attempt to bind him,
but he liberates
himself and
continues fighting.]*

INEZ. He bleeds! he bleeds! Saints, help the noble youth
Who, at the cost of his young precious life,
Would save us both. I fear he's killed. Oh, help!
[*Screams and faints.*]

GIP. Q. Hush! minion, or that cry will be thy last.

A WOUNDED GIPSY. Look, she faints!

ANOTHER GIPSY. Bah! 'tis but a trick to
'scape
The easier in the confusion.
Look well to her.

GIP. Q. Make room for me, ye slaves.
I fear no mortal man. Leave him to me.
Sirrah! put down your sword.

PAS. Never, vile crone.

GIP. Q. (*Disarming him with her staff.*)
Then there it lies, thou vain, presumptuous youth.
[*Murmurs of applause*
among the gipsies.]

PAS. Disarmed! And by a woman! Ha! I faint. [*Staggers and falls.*]

GIP. Q. He faints from loss of blood. Bind up his wounds.

He hath fought well. I tell ye, dusky slaves,
This youth to-day hath put ye all to shame.
Do him no hurt. I e'er respect the brave.
He in a sacred cause fought valiantly;
And, faithful to his generous Christian creed,
Did seek to wrest the innocent from wrong.

FIRST GIPSY. Thou wert not wont to praise the
Christians, Queen,

GIP. Q. I praise that creed that shows forth in its works
The principles of manhood. Would that thine
Had taught thee what this Christian's has taught him.

FIRST GIPSY. (*To Second Gipsy*). The queen doth mock
us, calls us cowards, slaves;
And yet we did our best; but, to say sooth,
He set upon us in such furious haste,
Such blind and desperate rage, that we did gape
With sheer wonder, and stand aghast with awe
At's prowess, when we should have been fighting.

SECOND GIPSY. Ay, none but a madman tired of his life
Had fought so desperately.

THIRD GIPSY. The maid recovers.

INEZ. (*Recovering.*) Where am I? Ah! then 'tis no dream;
'tis true.
Where's my preserver? Let me straight to him,
That I may thank him on my bended knees
For all his deeds to-day.

A GIPSY. There, low he lies.

INEZ. (*Rising and advancing towards Pascual*). What!
dead! Oh, heavens! Grant it be not so.
Look, now he moves; then life is not extinct.
Thank God for this! Hail, generous friend! What cheer?

PAS. 'Tis but a bruise, fair maid; 'twill soon be well.

INEZ. God grant it may.

GIP. Q. Here, girl, take this balsam.
It is a gipsy cure for all such wounds.
One fair action doth demand another:
For you he shed his blood, thinking that we

Did mean you harm. (How should he tell, poor youth?)
Return now you the courtesy, fair maid;
Bind up his wounds. Anon I will assist.

*[Inez commences binding
up Pascual's head.
The gipsies retire a
few paces. The Gipsy
Queen fetches water
in a gourd.]*

Quaff from this gourd, young man. The flowing rill
Doth yield thee medicine. *[Pascual drinks.]*

Ha! what is this?

Shade of my father Djâbel! it is *he*!
My long lost son! my own, my valiant boy:
Methought I knew that semi-gipsy form.
The very ring, too, wrought in virgin gold
And graven o'er with mystic hieroglyphics—
An heirloom of our tribe that I him gave
With my maternal blessing years gone by,
And he hath kept till now. God, I thank thee.
Oh, how I long to press him to this breast!
This breast that nurtured him and gave him strength!
But patience; too precipitous a step
May mar my plans. Enough, I've found my son.
Oh, ye great Powers that move earth and heaven,
Accept a mother's thanks! I faint for joy.

FIRST GIPSY. How far'st thou, noble Queen? Thou art not
well.

GIP. Q. Nay, marry, I am well. I'm over well.
[Staggering.]

SECOND GIPSY. Look to our queen. She faints. Art
wounded, queen?

GIP. Q. *(Mastering herself.)* Nay, look, I faint not. I am
very well.

THIRD GIPSY. Some strong emotion seems to have
stirred our Queen

But yet she masters it. How brave a spirit!

*[Gipsies retire some
paces and converse
in groups. Gipsy
Queen remains a
little distance off,
watching Inez and
Pascual. A hunter
passes above
unseen.]*

HUNTER. (*Aside.*) What's this? Whom have the gipsies
captured now?

A fair maid and a gallant cavalier;

And who is he, yon serving-man, bound there?

I ought to know his face. Why is not he

Don Silvio's servant Pedro? Sure it is,

For oft I've parleyed with him when at times

I've brought the game up to his master's hall.

And these two gentle-folks I ween must be

Guests at Don Silvio's castle. Ah, the knaves!

The arrant gipsy knaves! I'll dog them yet.

I've my own private wrongs that seek redress:

And I'll be even with them, by the saints!

At once I'll off unto Don Silvio's hall,

And warn him of the danger to his guests.

It may be he'll reward me slightly, though

They say that his is but a stingy house.

Still, this much for humanity I'll do. [*Exit.*]

D. PAS. (*to Inez.*) Nay, I assure you, dearest——

INEZ.

Hush! Señor.

It ill becomes a maid of gentle blood

Unblushingly to listen to the vows

And fervid protestations of a knight

Upon such slight acquaintance.

D. P_{AS}. Lovely child!
Bid me but hope, and I will rest content.

INEZ. Nay, talk not thus, Señor. Pray calm yourself.
Bethink you that your wound is not yet healed.
You're faint from loss of blood. These ecstasies
May e'en prove fatal. Do thyself no harm.

D. PAS. I feel recovered in that thou bidst me live;
And so will do thy bidding, fairest maid,
And live but for thy service and thy love.

INEZ. Good saints in Heaven! Will nothing calm thy
tongue?
Hush, hush, Señor, I pray. I may not listen.
I am your debtor, or I'd take offence
At too much boldness.

D. PAs. Be not harsh, fair maid,
I meant not to be overbold. I swear
I would the tongue that could give thee offence
Were wrenched from out my throat. Oh, pity me!
It was thy beauty that inflamed me so.

INEZ. If so, I must retire, and leave you to
The care and guidance of the gipsy queen.

D. PAS. Thou couldst not be so cruel. What! debar
Your wounded knight, in this wild barren spot,
From the sunshine of those heavenly orbs.
Then bid me bleed to death. My life is thine.

INEZ. (*Aside*) Poor youth! How full of passion are his words!
I feel he loves me, and I do repent
That I have spoke too harshly. Woe is me!
(*Aloud.*) Fret not. I did but threaten, gentle youth!

I will not leave thee.

D. PAS. Oh, say that again.
Thou wilt not leave me.

INEZ. (*Confused.*) That is, not yet.
I mean——

D. PAS. Nay, qualify not what was once well said;
I hold thee to thy word. Thou must not leave me.

INEZ. Thou wouldst extort a promise. Be but calm,
Obey my orders until thou be well,
And I know not what I may not promise.

D. PAS. I will obey thee, maid.

INEZ. Then now be still.

GIP. Q. (*Aside.*) Drift on, young turtle doves, adown the
stream
The balmy course the stars map out for ye.
Pepa can look on at the joys of others
That were denied herself, unenvying.
But mark, Pascual, if thou dost inherit
But one drop of thy hated father's blood,
Whose cursed name shall ne'er more pass my lips,
And thou, with subtle wile, like to thy sire,
Should first attempt to gain the trusting love
Of this fair damsel, and then betray her,
I, Pepa, though thy mother, with this hand
Will quench that spark of life I gave to thee.

SCENE III.—*Study of Don Silvio. D. Silvio is discovered pacing up
and down dejectedly.*

D. SIL. The day wears on, and still there is no sign
Of Pedro and my daughter. 'Tis full time.

It wants an hour to sundown; and ere then
I dread another visit from Don Diego;
Before this sand is spent he will be here.
He never yet did come behind his time.
Hark! I hear footsteps in the corridor.
'Tis he. He's come for news about my daughter.
This the very night, too, of the wedding.
What shall I say to him, or how shall I——?

*An abrupt knock at the door of the study, and
enter DON DIEGO.*

D. DIE. Well, friend Silvio, well. Art thou nigh
prepared?
Where is the gentle Inez? Bring her forth.

D. SIL. (*Humbly.*) Worthy Don Diego, I do much regret
My daughter Inez has not yet arrived.

D. DIE. Not yet arrived! Why it's long past the time.

D. SIL. I doubt not but what she will soon be here.

D. DIE. Soon! Didst thou say soon? Ay, marry ought
she,
An she left St. Ursula's at daybreak.
Stay, this casement that opens towards the west
Ought to command a wide extensive view.
Lo! yonder lies the road that she should come;
My sight is good, an yet I see no one.
(*Suspiciously*) Hark ye, Don Silvio. Some new wile is
this.

D. SIL. Nay, on mine honour, Diego. Think not thus.
Be patient yet awhile and thou shalt see——

D. DIE. Patience! What, patience! But I'll have my
bond.

Enter RODRIGUEZ frantically.

Rod. Oh, holy Virgin and good saints in Heaven!
Oh, blessed martyrs! Souls in Purgatory!
Would that Rodriguez ne'er had seen this day!
Oh, holy saints! Have mercy on us now!

D. SIL. How now, Rodriguez! What means all this riot?

ROD. Oh, peace! my master! Hold me ere I faint.

D. SIL. Speak! Rodriguez.

ROD. Alack! Alack! the day.

D. SIL. Nay, cease thy sobs, and more explicit be.

ROD. Oh, holy San Antonio be our guide!
My master, what ill luck's befallen the house!

D. DIE. Explain thyself, vile hag, and prate no more!

ROD. Oh, mercy on us! I can't speak for sobbing.
Oh, what disaster! Oh, what dire mishap!
Help us, ye saints.

D. DIE. This is past all bearing!
Speak out, thou limb of Satan, or I swear
By the foul fiend that 'gat thee, I will force
The lying words from out thy strumpet's throat.

ROD. Nay, good my liege, be calm. I'll tell you all.
The Lady Inez——

D. DIE. Ha! and what of her?

ROD. In sooth, my lord, but I am very faint.

D. SIL. AND D. DIE. (*Angrily.*) Speak out! Speak out!

Alack! and well-a-day!

D. DIE. Zounds!

ROD. The Lady Inez and good Pedro
Started from St. Ursula's this morning
Upon their mules, and were about half-way
Upon their journey, when from ambush sprang
Some dusky ruffians of the gipsy band,
Who, having bound, robbed, and detained the pair——

D. SIL. My daughter captured by the gipsies! Oh!
[Groans bitterly.]

D. DIE. Foul hag, thou liest. Now hark ye, Silvio.
This is some farce got up to play me false.
But think not, sirrah, to elude me thus.

*[Drawing his sword and
seizing Don Silvio by
the throat.]*

Traitor! tell me where hast hid thy daughter.

ROD. *(Rallying, and throwing herself between them.)*
Help! Murder! Help! Oh, help! What ho! Help! Help!
Don Silvio to the rescue! Help! I say.

D. DIE. *(Leaving hold of Don Silvio, fells Rodriguez
with the pommel of his sword.)*
Peace, harlot, or this blade shall make thee dumb.
Arise, and tell me whence thou hadst this news.
Beware now how thou tell me aught but truth,
For by this hand! an thou dost play me false,
I'll have thee burnt alive, or gibbeted
From the highest turret of this castle.

ROD. My noble liege, would that it were not true.
A hunter, an eye-witness of the scene,
Did bring the news unto your servant Juan.

D. DIE. My servant Juan! Why, then the tale is true!
No serf of mine would dare tell *me* a lie.
Go, call him hither.

ROD. He is at the door. [*Exit Rodriguez.*]

Enter JUAN.

D. DIE. How now, Juan! Say, can this wild tale be true?
What has happened to the Lady Inez?

JUAN. My lord, as I heard it you shall hear it.
A certain hunter——

D. D_{IE}. Stay, where is this man?

JUAN. He is without, my lord.

D. DIE. Then call him here.
[Exit Juan and re-enter
with hunter.]

HUNTER. (*Bowing to Don, Diego and Don Silvio.*) My noble lords——

D. DIE. Hold! sirrah. Say, can'st thou
Upon thy oath affirm, thy hopes of Heaven,
That thou wert an eye-witness to this scene?
If so, relate to us in fewest words
How the case happened, and the where, the when.

HUNT. Then thus it came about, my liege. As I
Was wandering, towards mid-day, among the
Many rocks and fissures of these mountainous ranges,
Armed with my carbine, in search of game,
As is my daily wont, I came upon
A deep ravine, yet hidden from my sight

By thorns and bushes and like obstacles,
When soon I heard the hum of human voices.
The spot, if I may judge well, I should say
Was half-way 'twixt St. Ursula's and here.
Well, trampling down the brambles, I stood firm
Upon the brink of a steep precipice;
And lo! beneath me was the gipsy gang,
And chief amongst them, one tall stately form,
A woman's that would seem to be their queen.

D. DIE. (*Confused*) Ahem! Didst say the queen?

HUNT. Ay, my good lord.
And 'mongst the tribe I saw as captives, soon,
A gentle damsel and young cavalier.

D. DIE. How, sayest thou, Sirrah? A young cavalier!
Sure, 'twas an aged servitor you saw.

HUNT. An aged serving-man, 'tis true, there was,
And tightly-bound that he could not escape;
I knew him instantly. 'Twas Pedro here,
Don Silvio's servant.

D. SIL. Alas! alas! 'tis true. I was in hopes,
When the hunter spoke of a young gallant,
That he had mistaken some other travellers
For my daughter Inez and my servant.
But since he saith he knoweth Pedro——

D. DIE. Hold!
The case is not quite clear to me e'en now,
Silvio! Who's this gallant, as ye term him?
Speak, for ye ought to know.

D. SIL. No, faith, not I.

D. DIE. Proceed then, hunter, with thy story. Quick.

HUNT. Well then, my lord, knowing good Pedro's face,
I did presume that the young gentle pair
Were visitors, bound for Don Silvio's castle.

D. DIE. (*Musingly.*) Young gentle pair—ahem! Well,
man, proceed.

HUNT. I watched in silence, and they saw me not;
But still, from out my ambush I did take
The whole scene in, and it appeared to me
That the young knight must have resistance made,
For low he lay, sore wounded in the head,
While ever and anon the gentle maid
Would dress his wound, and gaze with tearful eye
And such a fond affection on her knight.

D. DIE. (*Aside to Don Silvio.*) Traitor, thou shalt account
to me for this.
(*Aloud to Hunter.*) Well, man, proceed. Hast thou ought
more to say?

HUNT. But little good, my lord; but as I stood
Watching this trusting, loving, pair——

D. DIE. (*Aside.*) Damnation!

HUNT. I thought my heart would bleed from tenderness.

D. DIE. (*Laughs diabolically.*) Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

HUNT. So, rising to my feet,
But still unseen of any, I did haste,
As was my bounden duty, to this castle,
T'inform my lord, Don Silvio, of the fate
Impending both his servant and his guests.

D. DIE. Good; look ye, fellow. An thy tale be true,
Prepare to marshal me the way thyself,
Without loss of a moment, and may be

That thou shalt taste my bounty.

HUNT. Good, my lord;
The sun hath set, and it is growing dark.

D. DIE. No matter, thou shalt have the better pay.

HUNT. As my lord wills.

D. DIE. And Juan, see my charger
Be forthwith saddled. Bid my men-at-arms
To mount, armed cap-à-pie; whilst such amongst
The populace as thou canst muster, quick
Arm thou with pikes and loaded carabines,
And bid them follow me, their lord, Don Diego.
Lose not one precious moment, but set forth. [*Exeunt
Juan and Hunter.*

What, gipsies! vagrants! bastard heathen dogs!
I'll clear the country of this filthy scum,
Were it but for the sake of Christendom;
Maybe that some day they will dub me saint. [*Exit.*

[*Don Silvio makes a
gesture of despair,
and curtain falls.*

END OF ACT II.



ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Outside the castle of Don Silvio. The castle of Don Diego
seen in the background, upon the opposite peak of the
mountain. Time: Sunrise. Don Silvio and Donna
Rodriguez.*

D. SIL. My tears still blind my eyes. Look out,
Rodriguez,
And see if there be traces of my daughter.
Alas! alas! this hoary head is bowed
As 'neath the weight of yet a score of years.
Oh, Inez, Inez! What a fate is thine!
An thy young life be spared, could ought repay
Th' injury done thine honour at the hands
Of these bold, lawless, gipsies? Woe is me!
Let me not think on't, or I shall go mad.

ROD. My lord, as I stand gazing towards the west,
Methinks I see a dusty cloud advance;
As were't a troupe of horsemen at full speed,
And bearing towards the castle. Now I see
The limbs of horses and the arms of men;
The sound of human voices, too, I hear,
And, as they still approach, the distant tramp
Of horses' hoofs is plainly audible.
And now, unless my eyesight play me false,
Foremost among a file of glittering pikes,
I do discern Don Diego's waving plume.
'Tis he! and bearing at his saddle bow
My mistress Inez. Oh, thank God! she's safe.
Do you not hear, my master, what I say?
Your daughter's safe! Come, cheer up, good my lord.

D. SIL. (*Musingly*). Safe! didst thou say! My daughter's
honour safe?

ROD. How say you, sir? Her honor! Nay, her life?

D. SIL. (*Musingly*). Life without honor!

ROD. Sure, my lord's not well!
(*Aside.*) The blow has been too much for him, and
turned
His aged head. Oh, my poor, poor master!
I tell him of his daughter's safe return,

And straight he 'gins to prate about her honor.
(*Aloud.*) Look! look! Señor, at yonder cavalcade,
How it sweeps along; and now, behold,
Next to Don Diego is his servant Juan;
And there is Pedro. Bless his good old soul!
There the valiant hunter. Then all the crowd
Of vassals and retainers, and the guard, [*Cheers*
without.
With the armed populace. Hark! What cheering!

D. SIL. Is it, indeed, my daughter? Let me see;
'Tis she, 'tis she; Oh, Inez!

*Enter INEZ, accompanied by DON DIEGO. Behind,
PEDRO, JUAN, HUNTER, and ATTENDANTS.*

INEZ. (*Embracing Don Silvio.*) Father! Father!

ROD. My little mistress, Inez! What, no kiss
For poor old nurse Rodriguez!

INEZ. (*Embracing Rodriguez.*) Good Rodriguez!
*[Don Diego comes
forward, whilst Inez
in the background
appears to be
relating her
adventures to Don
Silvio and Donna
Rodriguez.]*

D. DIE. (*Sotto.*) What work I had to quell the dusky
band,
And carry off my prize. God only knows
How the black caitiffs fought! Like demons damned;
Incited on by their own swarthy queen,
My former love. Bah! why recall the past,
The ebullitions of a youthful lust,
Now five-and-twenty years ago and more?

And that at such a moment, too, as this,
When, acting bridegroom for the second time,
I now do lay my heart and hand, my wealth,
My land, and castle, all my fair domain
At fair Inez' feet. Poor Silvio's daughter!
A few hour's more, and she will be my own.
In my own private chapel at midnight,
And not one minute later, there a priest
Of my own choice, shall join our hands together.
'Twixt this and then, I must so use the time
To win her fairly, and by wiles t'efface
The prejudice young hearts by Nature have
Against old age. If needs be, I must use
Dissimulation and well act the saint,
That she may not give credit to the tales
That idle gossip may have crammed her with
Against my moral character. And now
I do bethink me that the readiest way
Of all to win her over to my will
Would be to tempt with goodly bribe her nurse
(What will not such a woman do for gold?)
To speak some little word in praise of me;
Talk of my love for her, my name, my fame,
My wealth, my virtues. How this match of hers
Will please her aged father. And again,
Should she be coy, and wickedly refuse
The fortune heaven has strewed along her path,
Let her reflect upon the consequences.
I would act fair with her, for I'd be loath
To lead to the altar an unwilling bride
In sight of all my vassals and retainers.
Yet, an she yield not (for as yet it seems
She looks with cold suspicion on my suit),
Why, then; why, then, however loath to use it,
Force must accomplish all when goodwill fails.
I cannot well expect much help at sixty
From youthful graces, as when first I wooed
My gipsy queen. *There!* ever and anon
From out the past these memories will arise,

Like phantoms, threatening whether I will or no.
Avaunt! begone! And yet I cannot choose
But call to mind how, middle in the fray,
The dead and wounded lying all around,
Her dusky form arose before my path,
And all undaunted stood with staff in hand
And glance so terrible, I would as lief
Meet with the King of Terrors face to face
As that same virago. Yet there she stood,
And with uplifted arm, in clear tones cried,
"Traitor, beware! Thy star is on the wane,
Think not to conquer always, for a hand
Mightier than thine shall yet subdue thee.
Blood is on thy hand. Thine own blood shall flow.
The stars foretell thy downfall, so look to it."
I heard no more, for I had barely placed
My Lady Inez at my saddle bow,
Mid smoke of carbines and the clash of arms:
Myself with drawn sword cutting right and left,
So could but pay slight heed to what she said,
And set off homeward with my goodly prize,
Leaving the baffled foe behind to moan.
Yet, through the smoke and dust of horses' hoofs,
Still, for a time, I heard the hellish cry:
"Vengeance on the traitor! Vengeance, vengeance!"
I know not why her words cut deeper than
Had they been the words of any other;
But from *her* lips they came with such a force,
They seemed to rend the air, and enter deep
Into the very caverns of my soul,
Turning my blood to milk, so that my arm
Fell nerveless to my side, and my good blade
Did well-nigh drop from out my hand. But hush!
It never must be known that Don Diego,
Though old in years, quailed before tongue of woman.
Bah! away with all fear of childish threats.
And, swarthy hag! do thou thy devilmost.

[Inez comes forward,

*between Don Silvio
and Rodriguez. Don
Silvio motions for
Rodriguez to retire.
Exeunt Rodriguez
and attendants.*

INEZ. Nay, one thing still doth mar the joy I feel
At having passed the dangers of last night.
Though I stand safely on my father's hearth,
And see him 'live and well, and know that I
Have henceforth naught to fear, yet still my thoughts
Will ever wander towards the gipsy camp,
Close by the couch of that brave youth who fought
At cost of his own life, to rescue me
From out their hands.

D. DIE. How say you, lady fair?
What youth? You dream. 'Twas I who rescued you.

INEZ. Your pardon, sir; but I was safe already.
I thank you for your courtesy, the same.
You thought to rescue me.

D. DIE. How now? *Thought to?*

D. SIL. Friend Diego, the tale runs thus: My daughter,
Accompanied by our old serving man,
Had hardly been attacked by the gang
And forced to dismount, when a comely youth
Of gentle blood——

D. D_{IE}. Ay, ay, the hunter's story!

D. SIL. Just so. Well, my daughter says the gipsies
Meant her no harm. Merely would detain her.

D. DIE. *Meant her no harm!* Ha, ha! Gipsies ne'er do.
Merely detain her! Good again! Ha, ha!

A base-born mongrel gipsy, just because
Deck'd in the garments of some plundered lord,
Could e'er deceive the eyes of men like us?
Nay, lady, I do compassionate you.
You are young, and the world to you is fresh,
You know not of its wiles, its vice, its crimes,
But take all men to be just as they seem.
Take my experience, lady. I am old.
Not *old*; but old enough to know the world
And all its hollowness; and so most fit
To guide and counsel inexperienced youth.
Lean then on me, lady. I'll be your staff;
And trust me faithfully when I tell you
Not all the learning of the convent cell
Is worth one ace of that we gain by age.

INEZ. Enough, sir. That the world is full of sin
And treachery I ever have been told.
My aunt, the Lady Abbess, oft would say
We ever should distrust the tongue of men
When most persuasive, be they young or old.

D. SIL. Come, Inez, thou art tired, and need rest
After thy troubles and fatigues. (*To Don Diego.*) My
friend,
You will excuse my daughter for a while,
I've much to say to her in private.

D. DIE. Good. [*Exeunt Don
Silvio and Inez.*]
Now for my ally. What ho! Rodriguez!

Enter RODRIGUEZ.

ROD. Here I am, good my lord.

D. DIE. (*Caressingly.*) Good Rodriguez,
I know that thou'rt a good and trusty friend
Unto this house. That thou lov'st well thy lord

And also thy young mistress, unto whom
From childhood thou hast acted as a mother.

ROD. Well, sir, I've always tried to do my best.

D. DIE. I know it. I know it both by report
And mine own observation. Wherefore, now
Full persuaded of thy many virtues——

ROD. Oh, my lord!

D. DIE. Nay, 'tis nothing but the truth.
I say, once more, persuaded beyond doubt
Of thy rare merits and good qualities
And of the value of one such as thou
To my old and long loved friend Don Silvio,
I do repent me of the hasty words
That lately 'scaped my too impatient tongue.

ROD. My lord, pray say no more. Rodriguez ever
Remains your humble servant. (*Aside.*) Really he
Is not so bad as once I thought he was.

D. DIE. Believe me, that those words but rose in haste,
From o'er anxiety about the fate
Of thy young mistress, whom thou lovest so well.
Whom I, too, love so well. I, too, Don Diego.

ROD. I doubt not, sir, with a true father's love.

D. DIE. Hark ye! Rodriguez, I must not waste time
In coming to the point; but silence keep.

ROD. Ay, my lord. Who better than Rodriguez
At a secret.

D. DIE. Ha! Sayest thou so, brave wench?
Then list to me, and thou shalt never want
For bit or sup, kirtel, or farthingale,

As long thou livest. First accept this purse. [*Gives a heavy purse.*]

ROD. Oh, my good lord! My generous, noble, lord!
What can I do to deserve your bounty?
(*Aside.*) Well, I remember to have heard folks say,
"The devil's not so black as he is painted."

D. DIE. Rodriguez, hark! What thou hast in that purse
Is nothing unto that which thou may'st earn,
If thou succeedest in the task I set.

ROD. Proceed, my lord. I'm all attention. Speak.

D. DIE. Know then that I love thy mistress Inez.
Ay, with the passion of a younger man.
Count not my age—the heart is never old.
I've sought her of her father, and 'twas settled
She should be mine on her arrival home
After her studies at St. Ursula's,
Ay, on the very day. So ran the 'pact.
The marriage, therefore, I have said takes place
This very night, at midnight, in my chapel.
All is prepared.

ROD. 'Tis over soon, my lord.

D. DIE. Peace! peace! I'll brook no waiting, no delay;
I've sworn it shall be so, and it shall be.
What care I, think'st thou, if the wedding dress,
Or this or that be ready, so *I* be?
Thou knowest our acquaintance is but short;
She scarce has seen my face. No matter that.
Now listen. What I ask of thee is this:
Do thou use all thy influence with the child,
T'induce her to look kindly on my suit,
And to her father's prayers and tears add thine.
But leave her not until she do consent.
And should she e'en at the eleventh hour

Be obdurate, why then, as last resource,
Tell her her father's life hangs on a thread.
Say that his castle and all that he hath
Will instantly be sold over his head;
And he and she, and you two servants both
Sent all adrift at once, to beg your bread.
If that work not, then must I fain use force,
And that were against me. So, Rodriguez,
Kind Rodriguez, I pray thee do thy best.

ROD. My lord, you ever shall have my good word
What I can do I will. Albeit, I think
Your grace is over hasty in the matter.
A little time——

D. DIE. No, faith, not one minute
Past the hour fixed. So see to't. I will now
Off to the castle, leaving thee one hour
T'exercise thy powers of persuasion
On thy young noble mistress. After that
I shall appear again and try what I
Myself can do to win her virgin heart.
Use all thy art and strength. Till then, adieu. [*Exit.*]

ROD. A pretty fix, forsooth! *Use all my art!*
I love the dear child well, and would, I'm sure,
Do all I could to help her to a state
Worthy the better days of this old house.
The Lady of Don Diego! That sounds well.
Mistress of his castle and his servants,
But wedded to a man who's old enough
To be her grandsire! Had he been a gallant—
Yet his money's good. Humph! I suppose I must.
[Exit slowly; counting her money.]

SCENE II.—*The Ravine. Time: Sunrise. Don Pascual sleeping. The Gipsy Queen standing near, watching him. The Gipsy*

Camp in the background.

D. PAS. (*In his sleep.*) Oh, Inez, Inez! (*Waking with a start.*) Ha! was that a dream?

GIP. Q. He wakes.

D. PED. Oh, that I had thus slumbered on,
Feeling her soothing presence, and so died,
Rather than waken to this cold, bleak, world.

GIP. Q. (*Aside.*) How I do long to open all my heart!
Unmask this stern exterior, and make
Him master of the secret of his birth.
His wound's but slight, I think he'll bear the news.
I'll try. (*To Don Pascual*) Young man! Say, how goes it
with thee?

D. PAS. I thank thee, mother, I have soundly slept;
My wound's already healed. The gipsy balm
Hath wrought a miracle.

GIP. Q. (*Aside.*) He calls me mother.
See how the native gipsy blood's instinct
Speaks through the lips of half-unconscious sense.
I'll wager he already half divines
His occult parentage.

D. PAS. (*Looking around him.*) Mother, where's Inez?

GIP. Q. (*Aside.*) Mother again; but Inez fills his
thoughts.
Hast thou no mem'ry, youth, of last nights fray? [*Aloud.*

D. PAS. But little, mother; all is still confused.

GIP. Q. Then be thou patient, for I've much to tell.
But say, how is't, thou ever call'st me mother?

D. PAS. In faith I know not how my careless tongue

Could shape a word so tender to thee, Queen,
Who art a stranger to me. Yet I feel,
And felt from the first moment that I gazed
Upon thy dusky brow, a mother's heart
Did beat for me within that hardy breast.
Why I know not. I, too, who never knew
A mother's love, whose infant steps were led
By other than a mother's hand. A good
Kind lady, long since dead, adopted me,
And dying, left me all her patrimony,
Which hitherto has been doled out to me
By guardians, until I should come of age.
One Father Miguel, whom I seldom saw,
Paid my expenses at the seminary;
But when I asked him questions of my birth
I never got intelligent response,
So that I long have thought some mystery
Doth underly the subject of my birth.

GIP. Q. I knew the Lady Angela, and loved her.

D. PAS. Good Heavens! What, that name! The lady who
——

GIP. Q. Adopted thee and Father Miguel too.

D. PAS. And Father Miguel!

GIP. Q. Does that surprise thee?
I could tell thee more.

D. PAS. More than that! Ay, then
Who knows thou may'st not discover
The secret of my birth.

GIP. Q. Secrets as strange
Have often been discovered by gipsies.
Am I not a gipsy? Can I not read
The destinies of all, mapped out for thee

By the great heavenly bodies? Think'st thou that
Our meeting was not fashioned by the stars
And known to me beforehand?

D. PAs. Even that!

GIP. Q. Ay, and your meeting with the Lady Inez.

D. PAs. That, too! Nay, tell me more. I fain would hear.

GIP. Q. Not so fast. Thou'rt o'er excitable.
Calm thyself first an thou wouldst hear more
Of that young damsel. But of her anon.

D. PAs. Weird and mysterious being, as I read
Thy mystic brow a whisper seems to say
I've seen thee once before. Say, art thou not
That crone who ever haunts me in my dreams,
Known in my youth, who once gave me this ring?

GIP. Q. The same, the same! I've watched thee from a
child.

D. PAs. And by that ring thou knowest me.

GIP. Q. 'Tis true.

D. PAs. Ay, now I know thee. Tell me now, O Queen,
Why tookest thou an interest in my fate?

GIP. Q. The tale is long and sad, but thou must hear.
Be patient and lend an attentive ear.
Know, then, that in Grenada's lofty range
There stands a twin-peaked mountain doubly-crowned,
With two grim feudal castles, old, yet strong.
The owners of these fortresses of yore
Were aye at feud, until at last the one
Subdued the other. Ever since that day
The victor's star in the ascendant seemed,

For though in later times they turned to friends,
Who had been foes, and were allied together
In skirmishes with castles neighbouring,
In which they came off gainers, still, the one—
The larger and the richer one, I mean,
The whilom victor of the other peak—
Did e'er with haughty overbearing sneer
Upon his humbler neighbour, and would bind
The poorer lord with obligations strong,
For favours often granted, till at last
The lesser lord became dependent on
The greater one, and ever poorer grew
And more dependent, and so stands the case.
Things will not long be thus. A change will come.
The Fates predict it, and the proud one's star
Already's on the wane.

D. PAs. In sooth, good Queen!
But tell me what has this to do with me?

GIP. Q. Peace! It concerns thee much, as thou shalt hear.
The father of the present owner of
The richer castle, Don Fernando height,
I do remember well when but a child.
A warrior proud was he, like all his race.
His son, the present lord, is like him. He
Whose name I've vowed shall ne'er more pass my lips.

D. PAs. Ha!

GIP. Q. Interrupt me not. Thou soon shalt hear.
This lord, who shall be nameless, in his youth
(He now is old) did love a gipsy maid,
Who, in the freshness of her virgin heart,
Returned his passion, being but a child,
Whilst he, the villain, was a full-grown man
Of forty years and over. Still he bore
His years so lightly that he younger seemed.
With passion fierce he wooed the gipsy maid,

And pleaded in such moving tropes his love,
That the young gipsy's heart—not then of stone,
Though long since turned to flint—did melt, and he,
Seeing his prey secure, did plot her ruin.
But the child had a father, old and wise,
Of royal blood, too, known as King Djâbel,
And proud, too, of his lineage and his race.
He thought it lowering to true gipsy blood
To mate with pale-faced Christians, even though
'Twere to a Christian king and by the church,
Drawn up with legal document and signed
In all due form, and when he heard that I
Did to a Christian's love lend listening ear.

D. PAS. You? *You*, O Queen, then, were the gipsy maid.
You're speaking of yourself. I understand.

GIP. Q. (*Starting*) My tongue has tripped, and traitor
turned. Why then
Pursue my tale under false colours? Aye,
Know that I, Pepa, was the gipsy maid
Once beloved of that false Don Diego.

D. PAS. Don Diego.

GIP. Q. Ha! My tongue has tripped again.
I vowed that name should ne'er more pass my lips.
Well, this false lord, with subtle wiles and arts
Did so win my young heart, that King Djâbel,
Furious at first at what he deemed a stain
Upon his lineage, threatened me with death,
And would have killed me, had I brought dishonour
On his fair name. But deem not that I fell.
I loved him—and how dearly! But he found
That the proud gipsy maid, though young, would not
Barter her honour. Not for wealth untold.
He then made promises that I should be
Mistress of all his castle and his lands
After his father's death. Till then, he said,

Our match must be clandestine, as his father
Would disinherit him were he to know
That his son were wedded to a gipsy.
Our plans were well nigh ripe, for oft we met
In secret, and had full time to discuss
Our future prospects, left quite undisturbed.
But one day King Djâbel, suspecting guile,
Did lie in wait for us, and with drawn blade
From ambush out did spring upon the pair,
And straight did fall upon this haughty lord,
The would-be dishonourer of his child.
But Pepa threw herself between her lover
And angered father, and so stayed the blow
And clinging to him, ever called upon
Her furious sire to spare the gentle lord,
And bid him smite *her* breast if *one* must die.
But Djâbel loved his daughter, and did pause,
Touched for a moment with her pleading prayer.
When, seeing him more calm, the wily don
Did straight, in full and flowing courteous speech,
Declare his love for me, and how he sought
Not to make me his minion, but his wife.
But Djâbel, answering with haughty scorn,
Said: "Go back to thy castle, Christian lord,
And wed some damsel of the pale-faced herd.
No blood of thine must mar our gipsy race."
The don's eye flashed. He would have spoken words
Full of wild fury and deep bitterness;
But Pepa interposed again, and flung
Herself on bended knees before her sire,
And begged her knight kneel too, and join her prayer.
The don at first loathing much to grovel
Down in the dust before a gipsy chief,
Whom he esteemed a savage, yet did yield,
And for my sake did bend his haughty knee.
And thus we knelt together, clinging to
King Djâbel's robe and choked with sobs and tears,
Did pray and plead, and plead and pray for long,
But all in vain our pleading and our prayers,

For dark as midnight grew King Djâbel's brow,
And stern his glance of cold and deep disdain,
Saying: "Humblest thou thyself, O haughty don?
Methinks thou might'st have spared thyself the pains.
Rise from the dust. Thy prayers are but as the wind
That blows against the granite mountain's side,
Yet harms it not, nor will it budge an inch,
E'en though it blow a hurricane. So I
Remain unmoved by all thy puny prayers."
Stung to the quick, and rendered desperate,
The haughty don with one bound sprang erect,
And darting lightning flashes from his eye,
Blushing the while at having bent the knee,
Humbling himself in vain, now cried aloud,
"Have at thee, then, dark chief, for *one* must die.
I fear thee not, and will not lose my hold
Upon thy daughter, whom I love as life.
Give her me, an it please thee, but if not
I'll wrest her from thee, so do thou thy worst."
Then straight the fray began. Each drew his blade
And fell upon the other, whilst my tears
And screams availed not, for the two were locked
Firm in each other's grasp, and tugged and pulled
In equal match, whilst I with streaming hair,
Torn robe, and tearful eyes, did cry aloud
For help in vain, till this poor frame, o'erwrought
With multiplex emotions, did give way,
And, swooning, I fell heavily at their feet,
Grasping my father's garment in my fall.
The fight was stayed awhile, and each took breath.
"Look to your daughter, chieftain," were the first
Words that I heard on wakening from my swoon.
And soon as e'er my tongue was loose, I cried,
In accents feeble still, "Oh, father, stay
This wicked brawl. Say, dost thou love thy child?"
With heaving breast and eyes suffused with tears,
And choking sobs, I seized his hand, and cried,
"Spare my young life. I love this Christian lord,
An thou do aught to him, 'twill be my death.

Canst see thy darling wither, droop, and die,
Or, stung to madness, seek a violent death?
Now mark well what I say, O most dread King.
Shouldst thou be guilty of this Señor's blood,
Know me no more for daughter, for I vow
Or him or none to wed, and should he fall,
And by thy hand, I too will follow next.
The oath is sworn." Then from my father's eye
A tear fell, which he brushing soon away,
As if he deemed it shame for man to weep,
And changing to a lighter mood, he cried:
"Girl, thou hast conquered. Christian knight, thy hand.
Let all broils cease between us. Thou hast fought
And won my daughter fairly, showing courage
Worthy a gipsy born. Therefore no more
Will I withhold consent unto this match.
But, mark me well, Sir Knight, this marriage must
Be, though clandestine, legally up-drawn,
That no base shuffling subterfuge may e'er
In after years crop up to thwart the bond."
Thus spake the king Djâbel. My Christian knight
Did vow upon his honour all should be
Exact as nicest lawyer could require.
Alas, for human villainy! What snares
And wiles beset the simple, trusting heart.
I loved him, and did lend a willing ear
To all his schemes, spite my father's counsel,
Suspecting nothing. What should I, poor child,
Know of the world and all its hollowness?
But King Djâbel, suspecting treachery
E'en from the first, and well upon his guard—
For little trust he placed in Christian wight—
Did stand aloof, and watched things from afar.
"Now will I try the faith of this same knight,"
He said, and with a frankness ably feigned,
He bid my lord take all things in *his* hands,
Saying he trusted him in all, but he,
For his part, was a very simple man,
Unskilled in the world's usances and all

That appertains to life 'neath governments,
'Pon seeing which, the wily Christian lord
Straight sought to profit by his innocence;
Betray the hand that trusted him, and thought
The dusky king, the dark barbarian,
Would fall an easy prey into his hands.
Howbeit, King Djâbel, like crafty foe,
Though simple seeming, sent abroad his spies,
Whilst he himself was absent. From these men—
Men whom he trusted—he was well informed
That this proud don had formed the fell design
That a false priest should join our hands together.

D. PAs. Villain!

GIP. Q. Thou speakest sooth, for villainy
More base or perjured never sprang from hell.
I thought he loved me, but I found too late
He sought to spurn me from him soon as e'er
His lust was sated. So he straightway wrote
To some base profligate and spendthrift friend
Who owed him money, promising that he
Would cancel all his debt and yet advance
Another round sum, if, peradventure,
He should so aid him in his hellish plot
As to enact the part of holy priest,
And satisfy the claims of King Djâbel,
Whilst he himself should be no longer bound
To me by law than it should seem him fit,
E'en as I were but his base concubine.
You see, he loved me not, e'en from the first,
Despite his protestations, since he could
In base cold blood conceive such dire deceit.
But this I knew not at the time, nor all
The foul devices of his reptile heart.
But fondly thinking that he loved me as
I then loved him, I listened to his suit;
Nor was I undeceived, till, ah! too late.

Why beats my heart as it ne'er throbb'd before?
Say, what is this new light that bursts upon
My whilom darkened soul? What power is this
That stirs my thoughts within me? But proceed.
I must, and will know more. Proceed, O Queen.
My frame doth tremble in expectancy
For thy next word. Tell me, oh, tell me if——

GIP. Q. (*Aside.*) Already he doth divine what I would
say;

Be still, my heart, and give me strength to tell it.
(*Aloud.*) This letter, then, by Father Miguel forged,
Ran thus in substance. Making first excuse
That sudden illness made him keep his bed,
But though unable to oblige his friend,
Did, ne'ertheless, not to disappoint him,
(Hearing the case was urgent, and not knowing
How long it might be e'er he should recover)
He thought to do not wrong in sending one,
A trusty friend and boon companion,
One, Don Elviro hight, to act as proxy;
This was the name that Father Miguel bore
To mask his own. Then straightway he set forth
T'wards the inn, from which the letter dated,
The while my lord, who, reading in hot haste
The letter through, and doubting not that he
Were aught else than what the letter stated
(To wit, Elviro, and no priest at all).
So sure was he of this, suspecting nought,
He fondly welcomed him, and many a joke
They cracked together o'er the heartless scheme.
Don Miguel acting well his part throughout
With ribald jest, and oft full merrily
Alluding to his tonsure newly shorn,
Asked of his patron how he liked his garb,
And if he did not look a priest indeed.
At this his lord laughed heartily, and thus
Time passed away till I should don the veil,
And we were married before witnesses.

The ceremony over, all passed o'er
Right merrily, nor knows my lord e'en now,
Not even to this day, that he is married.

D. PAs. Well done, by Heaven! And Father Miguel hail!
So was the base would-be seducer paid
Back in his own base coin. This should e'er be.

GIP. Q. Ay, but thinkest thou I knew aught of this,
Or was partaker in Don Miguel's scheme?
Oh, no; of this my father told me nought,
Nor knew I aught of all this base intrigue,
This would-be marriage false, by false priest blessed,
Till later years; in fact, until the time
That King Djâbel upon his death bed lay.
He then confessed to me the foul design
By him so ably thwarted. But e'en then
The traitor had abandoned me already.
He thought his marriage false, and told me plain
I had no hold on him. I sought my sire,
And then the truth came out. The blow was great,
To find myself abandoned and deceived
By him I loved and trusted, e'en though I
Knew well that I stood right before the law,
He had no right to leave me, that I knew.
'Twas heartless, as I then was big with child;
His father, too, was dead, old Don Fernand,
And I, by rights, his castle should have shared,
As he had promised, but old King Djâbel
Did counsel me, "Be patient yet awhile;
A day will come when thou shalt vengeance take.
Nature hath made me prophet. I can see
Now that my sun is sinking far beyond
This earthly sphere, all that shall come to pass
In future years. Delay thy vengeance, then,
Still a few years, and I will be thy guide;
I, Djâbel, from over this side the grave
Will guide thy steps and shape thy destinies
Until the hour arrive." Thus spake Djâbel,

And falling back upon his rugged couch,
Did breathe his last, clasping my hand in his;
He now sleeps with his fathers. Rest his soul!
And I, now left an orphan, and so young;
Abandoned, too, by the base man I loved,
How fared it with me, being then with child?
The days of mourning for my father o'er,
I could not keep my mind from wandering back
To our first days of courtship, when my lord
First wooed me, and did win my virgin heart.
I dwelt upon the memory of his words—
How he had promised me in days of yore,
His father being dead, old Don Fernand,
That I should mistress of his castle be.
How had he kept his promise? Don Fernand
Was long since dead, yet he no offer made
About his castle, but did keep me e'er
Within a little cottage that he built
During his father's lifetime for me, when
We first were married. Here I lived content,
For he then oft would visit me, and when
He came not, yet I had full trust in him,
And waited patiently, beguiling time
By tending flowers in my garden home,
For this was aye my passion from a child,
And thus the hours passed full happily.
But one day, seeing my lord with murky brow,
And not divining what the cause mote be,
I, with fond heart and young simplicity,
Did offer all that consolation
That loving wife will offer to her lord
In moments of deep sadness. But he spurned
Me coldly from him, and when I did ask
In what way I had my lord offended,
Deigning no direct reply, made answer,
He loved me not. I had no hold on him,
Should ne'er be mistress of his father's hall,
Our marriage being but a mockery,
To last as long as it should please himself.

He left me with a laugh of bitter scorn,
Whilst I, as if by lightning struck, did fall
Flat to the earth, and waking, sought my sire.
Thou knowest how my father, dying, left
A promise he would ever guide my steps
In hour of vengeance; so I patience kept.
Meanwhile our son was born. That son *art thou!*

D. PAs. Oh, mother! mother!

*[They embrace and weep
on each others'
necks.]*

(On recovering.) I did half divine
The truth from the beginning of thy tale,
But at the name of Father Miguel
My heart did smite so loud against my ribs
As like to burst them; e'en as were it charged
From Heaven with joyful tidings to my soul.
I ever knew that man in some strange way
Was mixed up in the mystery of my birth.

GIP. Q. 'Twas he that christened thee, abandoned by
Thy all unworthy father. He that holds
Proofs that our marriage valid is by law,
Without which proofs thou'dst been born a bastard,
A stray, an outcast, slave to this world's scorn.
The Lady Angela, that kind, good soul,
Whose counsellor and priest Don Miguel was,
Knew all thy history, and pitied thee.
She was thy godmother while at the font.
Don Miguel marked thee with the Christian's sign,
And being a widow lady without heirs,
And rich withal, she straightway did resolve
T'adopt thee, and 'neath Father Miguel's care
To have thee educated as a priest.
Poor pious soul! But thou know'st best of all
How thine own wilful temper at the school—
Thy wild, impatient, roving gipsy blood,—

Did give small promise for a like career,
Which Father Miguel seeing from the first
(Though not until repeated efforts made
To tame thy stubborn nature proved in vain)
Did finally, now weary of his charge,
Abandon thee unto thine own wild ways,
Doling the money out from time to time,
Till thou should'st come of age. That time has come.

D. PAs. Ha! ha! I well do call to mind the time
When Father Miguel, with church dogmas sought
To warp my stubborn brain, and if I asked
Him to explain some of that lore he taught,
And fain would burden my poor skull withal,
Then straight it was a mystery. I must
Have faith, he said; nor ask the reason why.
Against this answer my young soul rebelled.
And long and fierce the battles that we fought.
He called me insubordinate and rude.
Said I lacked discipline, humility,
That I must subjugate my intellect
Unto the church's dictates, threatening me
With purgatory and everlasting fire
Unless I thought as he did, branding me
As atheist, Jew, or heretic, whilst I
Called him a fool. Then losing all control
Over his passions, this good, holy man
Did raise his hand to strike me, seeing which
I seized a knife and threw it at his head,
Leaving a scar upon his cheek; then laughed.
As I grew older matters mended not,
So he sent me to a seminary,
Thinking to curb my will by discipline;
But they soon found the worse they treated me
The worse was I, and so all gave me up.
'Tis years since we have met. We were not formed
To live together. Greater opposites
In character Nature ne'er formed from clay.
I owe the holy man no grudge; not I.

He did his best, I mine to understand him.
We were formed differently from our birth.

GIP. Q. A wild boy thou wert ever. That is true.
I've watched thee oft when thou thought'st me afar.
Thou knew'st me not for mother, nor would I
Unveil the myst'ry of thy parentage,
Nor bring disgrace on Lady Angela,
Who had so kindly offered to adopt
Thee, the poor outcast gipsy's mongrel son,
And rear him like the proudest of the land.
Why should I, with my narrow, selfish love,
Oppose a barrier to my son's advance,
Refuse the lady's bounty, and drag down
My son unto the level of myself.
A wand'ring gipsy! Yet I loved thee. Ay,
I loved thee e'en with more than mother's love.
I would that all should love thee. As for those
Who loved thee not, these I vowed should fear thee.
I'd see thee feared and envied, proud and great
High up above thy fellows; and for this
I smothered in my heart all outward show
Of my affection, and so hid myself.
Still, I was near and watched thee day by day
Expand as the young plant before the sun.
And I was happy in my heart of hearts
To know that thou wert happy, and to know
I was thy mother, though thou knew'st it not.
And so for years I've watched thee, till thine own
Wild wand'ring nature bid thee roam abroad.
'Twas then for years that I lost sight of thee;
This also was predicted by the stars,
And so I gave to thee this gipsy ring
That I might know thee when we met again.

D. PAS. Ay, I do mind me well, when yet a child,
How once a gipsy gave it me, and bid
Me wear it ever, and 'twould bring me luck;
And how I, childlike, straight returned home,

Pleased with the gift, to show my mother, or
The lady whom I thought my mother then.
But tell me, queen or mother, which thou wilt,
Why, if as I think, all thy tale be true
And thou wert really married to Don Diego,
Knowing the law to be upon thy side,
Why didst thou not at once set up thy claim
Of lawful wife, instead of waiting now,
A score of years and more! Thou could'st have claimed

GIP. Q. Thou askest me why I did not avail
Myself of that protection that the law
In my case would enforce. I'll tell thee, then.
I was, indeed, then counselled so to do
By Father Miguel and some other friends,
Who knew that legal marriage was performed;
But being mindful of the promise made
Unto my father on his bed of death,
And having strict confidence in his words,
Those deep prophetic words which never erred,
Then finding, too, when I did scan the stars
Good reason his for bidding me postpone
My vengeance for a season less ill-starred.

D. PAS. What saw'st thou, mother, in the stars to make
Thee to abandon all thy rightful claims
And crave the charity of an alien?

GIP. Q. I craved no charity. The lady who
Did stand to thee in lieu of mother, came
Herself and craved of me permission
To take thee home and rear thee as her child;
Which offer I, though with much reluctance,
At length accepted, ever mindful of
The brilliant future that the stars foretold.

D. PAS. What sign was that that caused thee then such
fear?

GIP. Q. A star malefic in thy house of life;
Threatening thee with speedy violent death
From some traitor's hand. That hand, thy father's.
Had I ta'en counsel of well-meaning friends
And urged my rights, ay, had I moved a step,
Thy life and mine had dearly paid for it.

D. PAs. How this may be, I know not. If the stars
Do really rule our destinies, or if
Thy woman's fears but made thee dread contact
With men in power. Have we not the law?

GIP. Q. Justice may be bought. The oppressor's star
Was then in the ascendant. 'Tis no more.
Now mark, and I will show thee how the stars
Have worked and ripened for my just revenge.
Thou knowest well, 'tis now full many years
I have lost sight of thee, though I have learned
From Father Miguel thou wast still alive;
The stars foretold our meeting. Until now
I've waited for thee, and the stars likewise
Predicted that almost at the same time
Another I should meet, whose destiny
Did figure so in thy young house of life.

D. PAs. What! The Lady Inez?

GIP. Q. Ay, even she.

D. PAS. Then Heav'n be praised for happier destiny
Ne'er fell to lot of man.

GIP. Q. Nay, not so fast;
There're dangers still to pass, and thou must bear
Thyself right bravely if thou would'st succeed.

D. PAs. Dost doubt my courage, mother? My good blade

Shall carve me fortune wheresoe'er it turns.

GIP. Q. Hot headed youth! Guard well thy strength until
'Tis needed. Thou art weak from loss of blood,
And need'st repose e'er thou set forth to work.
The sun is high in heaven. Ere nightfall
Thou wilt have need of all thy youthful strength.
Ere midnight I will lead thee to a wood,
Accompanied by all my followers,
From thence we must ascend a rugged path
That leads to the tyrant's stronghold.

D. PAS. What tyrant?

GIP. Q. The nameless. Thy rival and thy father.

D. PAS. Don Diego! 'Twas he, then, that yester-eve
Did snatch the Lady Inez from my breast
As I lay faint and bleeding?

GIP. Q. Ay, e'en he;
And now he fain would marry her perforce,
With or without her answer; he has sworn
To wed her straight, scarce struck the midnight hour,
And hurries on with most indecent haste
This mockery of a marriage 'gainst the will
And inclinations of the girl herself,
And also 'gainst the wishes of her sire,
Whom, poor man, the tyrant holds in 's power,
As hawk doth hold a dove, obliging him
To give consent to this most monstrous match
With his fair daughter, only late arrived
Home from the convent of St. Ursula
(Albeit he knows not, I've the proofs in hand
Of our real marriage. Read them an you list)

*[Handing papers to Don
Pascual.]*

He needs must hasten on his base design,

For fear of interruption. Be it ours
To baulk this rabid eagle of his prey,
Snatch from his reeking claws the innocent lamb,
And rescue chastity from guilt's device.
Let this be Pepa's mission upon earth,
To succour virtue and avenge the wrong,
And thou, Pascual, stand thou me true in this,
Let no wrong pass, but quickly search it out,
And boldly in the light of day proclaim
The tyrant's wrong, in spite of odds or force.

D. PAS. Mother, I swear. Fear not thou'lt find me apt;
My sword is at thy service, e'en had I
No more incentive to avenge thee than
The sense of wrong that ever stirs my blood.
But now I have my own more selfish ends
To serve. The maid 'fore all most near my heart
To rescue from the talons of a foe;
The mother, too, who gave me birth to shield
From foul dishonour, and the tyrant who
Begot me, yet fain would dub me bastard,
Still to chastise. With these wrongs to redress,
Or e'en the half, what coward would not turn brave?
What mouse would not turn lion? Rest in peace,
This night thou art avenged. Pascual doth swear it.

GIP. Q. Spoke like my own true son. And now to rest;
Thou needest sleep, to calm thy jaded nerves,
And brace thee for the work thou hast to-night.

*[They embrace. Pascual
throws himself upon
his couch. Gipsy
Queen sits watching
him. Scene changes.]*

SCENE III.—*Inez' bedchamber in Don Silvio's castle; an old four
posted bed, with faded hangings—old faded tapestry. A
prie-dieu in front of a picture of our Lady of Pain.*

*Crucifixes and pious relics adorn the chambers. Don
Silvio is discovered pleading earnestly. Inez weeping.*

INEZ. (*Tearing herself away.*) Cease, father, cease; I
cannot, dare not yield.
How can you ask me, after all you've said?
What! Wed a man I never saw before,
A man whose age, too, full quadruples mine!
And at a moment's notice! Fie! for shame!
Was it for this then that you call'dst me home,
To barter soul and body for mere gold?
Is it not thus the lowest of our sex,
Led on by glitter to fill Satan's ranks,
Fall, ne'er to rise again? Ah! woe is me.
Think, father, think. What could such union be
Before the eyes of Heaven? Would it not
Be foul adultery, base, incestuous lust?
And this you'd have from me, your only child?
Oh, father! 'twas not thus that you once spake.
Where are your noble maxims, father, now?
Alas! alas! all scattered to the winds
Before the first blast of the tempting fiend.

D. SIL. (*Aside.*) Now this is most just, by Heav'n! that I
be
Thus by my own child humbled and reprov'd,
For falling back from truth in hour of trial.
Dear inn'cent soul! How could she yield to terms
Alike repugnant to her virgin heart
As mine own conscience? But, then, what to do?
Ah! cursed be the hour I gave consent
Unto that monstrous pact! What would I give
Now to undo the same, were't in my power?
But my inexorable foe has sworn
To have his bond, and Diego never jests.
Most dire necessity doth bid me save
Myself and household from disgrace and death.
Ay, from starvation. Nothing short of that
Should make me recreant to my conscience law.

She, young and hopeful, realises not
The want and misery that must ensue
To us on her refusal. Be it so.
Occasion presses. Time must not be lost.
I will try again, though conscience brand me.
(*Aloud.*) Inez!

INEZ. Father!

D. SIL. Bethink thee, yet, my child.

INEZ. Parent, no more!

D. SIL. What am I, then, to do?
I, thy poor agèd father, sent abroad
To beg my bread. No shelter from the wind
And rain. No food; no hospitable roof.
Our servants, too, must all our ills endure;
And all through thee, through thine own obdurate heart.
But 'twill not serve thee. Not one whit, for though
Thou still resist, Don Diego will use force;
His myrmidons——

INEZ. I fear them not, when God is on our side.
This is a trial, and we must have faith.

D. SIL. (*Desperate.*) My child! Will nothing move thee?
On thy head
Will be thy father's blood. My life's at stake.

INEZ. Think of thy soul, old man, and trust in God.
Thou, who didst teach mine infant lips to pray,
Canst thou not pray, or wilt thou learn of me
Now thou art old? Hast thou no faith, father?

D. SIL. Alas! alas! 'Tis many years these knees
Have bowed no more in prayer. When I was young,
And yet had faith, 'twas then I used to pray.

INEZ. But now; Oh, father! Heaven! What can have caused

This falling off of piety in age?

For years not bent the knee unto thy God!

I wonder not He hath abandoned thee.

Come, learn of me. Look here. Gaze on this form,

*[Snatches a crucifix from
the wall, and thrusts
it into Don Silvio's
unwilling hands.]*

This bleeding image. See this crown of thorns,
These nails, that side thrust; and then learn how He
Suffered and died for us. Canst thou not bear
One little pang an 't be the will of Heaven?
What is thy grief to His, who suffered more
Than mortal man e'er suffered? Father, pray
God will not desert those who trust in Him.

D. SIL. Nay, thou art young and hopeful. I am old.

INEZ. Kneel, father, kneel; and look not so downcast.
Behold the blessed Virgin Mary, pierced
And sorrowing for our sins. Come, father, kneel.
Do as I do, and throw thyself before
This blessed image, and repeat these words.

*[Throws herself on the
prie-dieu, and clasps
her hands together
in front of the picture
of our Lady of Pain.
Don Silvio still
standing.]*

Oh! Holy Virgin, Mother of our Lord;
Chosen of God, immaculate, Divine;
Thou, who hast promised aye to intercede
With thy dear Son, the living God of Heaven
For us poor mortals when oppressed with woe,

From that high heaven where thou sittest enthroned
'Midst glorious angels, mercifully look down
Upon thy humble votaries, who groan
'Neath the oppression of a tyrant world.
Oh! thou who never turnest a deaf ear
Unto a suppliant's prayer, send down thy grace,
And succour her from evil men's designs
Who puts her trust in thee. Thwart thou their schemes,
And, for the glory of thy holy name,
Avenge thy handmaid's wrongs, and punish those
Who, strong in the abuse of worldly power,
Would fain defile the virgin chastity
Of her who seeks thy aid; rain down thy grace.
Oh! Holy Mother, who canst never see
The wrong to triumph and the right to fall,
Soften my father's heart, and let him kneel
To thee, and join with me in heartfelt prayer
And supplication, that the evils which
Do threaten us alike may be withdrawn.

*[Don Silvio drops
crucifix, and exit
slowly and moodily.]*

Oh, Holy Saints! Oh, Holy Virgin Mother!
Look down in pity on this suppliant pair,
Who all unworthy are to raise our eyes
To that high Heaven, whence thou art, and seek
Thy aid and guidance, strengthen us, O Lord!
Strengthen our faith, and let our trust in Thee
Never abate, e'en in temptation's hour.

*[Draws forth a rosary,
and remains for
some time counting
her beads. Then
rises.]*

I thank thee, Holy Virgin. Thou hast heard
The prayer of faith, and——(*looking round her*) What!
my father gone!

Too proud to pray, alas! Oh, Heaven grant
My doting father more humility,
More faith, more hope; and aye within this breast
Keep thou *my* faith alive, lest Satan send
Some emissary forth to thwart thy will.

Enter RODRIGUEZ, smiling towards INEZ, who starts, looks suspiciously at her, and shudders.

ROD. What! my young mistress taken by surprise,
And scared at poor Rodriguez! I've no doubt
Some transient fever, brought on by the shock
You late have suffered, made you shiver so.
Come to old Rodriguez, my pretty bird,
Pour forth into old nurse's willing ear
All its past troubles. Did the gipsy gang
Run off with pretty darling, and insult
Her and old Pedro! Sweetest, grieve no more
Now all is over, but take courage from
Old nurse Rodriguez, who was ever wont
To smooth its pillow, and to share its griefs.

INEZ. Good nurse, Rodriguez, 'tis not, as you think,
The gipsy tribe that causes me this dread.
I have another and a secret grief
I daren't divulge to thee. Nay, leave me, pray.

ROD. What! my young mistress has a secret grief;
And I, poor old Rodriguez, am debarred
From sharing it. Leave you alone, forsooth!
Leave my young mistress Inez all alone,
To brood and mope over her secret grief!
Never! You ill know nurse Rodriguez, child.

INEZ. (*Aside.*) This is intolerable.

ROD. As you say,
It cannot be about the gipsy tribe
My darling frets. The danger's gone and past,

Thanks to the noble conduct of my lord,
The brave and gallant Don Diego, who
At risk of his own life, with sword in hand,
Did rescue you from the dark gipsy gang.
'Twas bravely done. And how he wears his years!
Just like a stripling—and how fine a man;
How courteous, too, and what a merry eye
He has for all his favourites. I'm sure
That you yourself are one, judging from how [*Inez*
draws back scornfully.
He looks at you askance, then turns away
And sighs so deeply, little thinking that
Rodriguez guesses what he bears within.

INEZ. Rodriguez, silence! Of this trash no more.

ROD. Nay, Mistress Inez; pray not angered be
With poor old nurse. She loves a jest at times.

INEZ. I'm in no jesting mood, I promise you.
I pray you, leave me.

ROD. There you are again,
Wishing me to leave you alone to mope;
But, dear, Rodriguez better knows than leave
Her little mistress all uncomfited.
Away with nasty grief, and courage take
From kind old nurse, and, like her, merry be.

INEZ. Your consolation, nurse, is, perhaps, well meant.
Albeit, at present, 'tis superfluous.

ROD. What! Hoity, toity! child; would'st have me see
My little Inez pining and downcast,
E'en though it be for nought at all; and ne'er
Say word to cheer her? Nay, 'tis my duty
To my mistress. So here I mean to stick
Until I've made you laugh. Come now, madam.

INEZ. (*Aside.*) She's insupportable.

ROD. Were I a maid once more, I'd show you how
I'd laugh and enjoy the world. Not as you,
Pent up these years within a convent cell,
Till you've grown musty. A pest on convents all!
Keep them for cripples and incurables.
For those who from birth so ill-favoured are,
They find not husbands. These may chant and sing,
And moan and fast, an't please them; but, for you,
A maid of Lady Inez's beauty, jammed
Within these walls—'tis sacrilege, I ween.

INEZ. Rodriguez, now you must not lightly talk
Against those holy women, who have fled
All worldly joys to win the peace of Heaven.

ROD. Each to their taste. For me, I love the world.

INEZ. I know it, nurse; but at your age 'twere fit
You'd higher thoughts.

ROD. At *my* age! Pooh! tut, tut!
Those with a merry heart are never old.
Look at Don Diego, how he bears himself,
And all because he has a merry heart.
Had he been priest or monk, he had been old
At thirty. But just look how proud his step,
How clear his eye, how red his manly cheek.
Were I a maid once more, just of your age,
I straight should lose my heart, and that's a fact.
Heigh ho!

INEZ. A truce to this unseemly banter.
Nor dare to name that man to me again.

ROD. That man! What, poor Don Diego? In what way
Hath he offended, that you treat him thus?
I'm sure he is not conscious of his fault,

Or he would die with grief; the dear, good man,
Fond of you as he is, as all can see.

INEZ. Rodriguez, cease! I'll hear no more, I've said.
And let me tell you, nurse, now once for all,
It ill becomes thy years and sex, t'enact
A part, of all parts most contemptible.

ROD. What part, my pretty child? Don't so misjudge
Poor nurse Rodriguez as to think that she
Could counsel you for aught but for your good
Remember, you are young, my mistress dear,
And have yet to unlearn your convent life,
That so ill fits you for our merry world.
Your father, poor mistaken man——

INEZ. Hold there,
And reverence my father as thy lord.

ROD. Ne'er doubt me, mistress mine, but e'en my lord
Would counsel you as I would counsel you.

INEZ. Thou speak'st of counsel. How would'st counsel
me?

ROD. Nay, then, nought 'gainst your interests; that's
clear.
Had I your youth and beauty, and your chance,
I'd have a care, nor throw such chance away.
Lend not the ear to ev'ry stripling, child,
Because he's smooth of mien, but look behind
The outer gloss, and seek for solid gold.

INEZ. Your counsel, nurse, is mercenary.

ROD. Tut, tut.
We've got to live; to live we've got to eat;
Then comes our dress, our servants, and what else
May appertain unto a lady born,

As was your mother, Lady Dorothea,—
Of blessed mem'ry,—when this ancient hall
Looked livelier than at the present day.
Now hark! my dear young mistress, and attend
To these my words, as were they from the lips
Of your own sainted mother, who looks down
From her high post, and sees all that we do.
What, think you, would your fondest mother say,
To see this castle go to rack and ruin,
Her darling child descend in social scale,
Because she would espouse some popinjay.
Whose wealth was all he carried on his back?
When she could get a chance to marry one
(A goodly man, if more mature in years)
A great hidalgo, and of wealth untold,
By means of which she could redeem this hall,
And make it worthy of its better days;
Pay off her father's debts, and thus content
Him and his household, and all else beside.
Why, marry, 'twere rank madness to let slip
Such glorious chance, and such a chance have you.

INEZ. Enough.

ROD. Nay, I *will* speak in duty bound,
And tell you, willy-nilly, that the man
Who thus would lay his riches at the feet
Of my poor master's daughter is none else
Than noble Lord Don Diego.

INEZ. I have said
I will not have thee mention that man's name;
I did divine thy mission from the first,
And doubt me not that thou wert amply paid
To play the go-between; but learn for once,
Base woman, that my heart must not be bought;
The purest gift of Heaven was not made
To be an article of merchandise.
My heart's in mine own keeping, and must ne'er

Be given up save to the man I love.
Though this pile fall to ruins o'er our heads;
Though hunger threaten; though my father's life
And other lives at stake be; nay, e'en though
This robe be turned to rags and I be sent
Abroad to beg my bread, and from the cold
Night storm or tempest ne'er a shelter find;
Nay, come what will, nought 'gainst the will of Heaven
Must e'er be done to suit the present hour.

ROD. Nay, speak not thus, young mistress, but be calm;
Rodriguez, too, was once a girl and thought,
E'en as you do now.

INEZ. More's the pity then
That years, instead of bringing purer thoughts,
Should cancel all the purity of youth.

ROD. Nay, mistress mine, what I would say is this:
That being in youth, even as yourself,
More swayed by my heart than my interests,
I gave my heart unto the man I loved,
Disdaining higher offer, but soon found
Cause to repent for having thrown away
A better chance; for Carlos, when he saw
That I had nought, and he had nought, he 'gan
To lose the love he had for me, and then
He beat me, and we quarrelled. Soon he died.
And being left destitute, was fain t'accept
The place of servant in your father's house.

INEZ. And by this tale of sorrows thou would'st prove
That we in this life are in duty bound
To sell our souls unto the highest bidder.
Away with such foul subtleties, with which
The arch-fiend baits his hook to tempt God's own.
Give me the quiet of a convent cell,
Rather than rank and splendour with disgrace.

ROD. Disgrace! Nay, honour. When the knot is tied
You will be held in honour by the world.
It is not mere protection that is offered,
But legal marriage. There's the difference.

INEZ. The marriage that 'fore Heaven legal is,
Is that in which two souls are joined in one,
And not the forced and bitter mockery
Born of man's interest, by him approved.
Such match as thou would'st counsel were no match,
But lust and policy combined in one;
Most foul adultery in Heaven's eyes,
Ay, e'en despite the blessing of the church.
But, to cut short this most distasteful theme,
Perhaps thou'lt tell me, as an after-clause
Included in the pact, should I accept
This offer that Don Diego deigns to make,
'Twere necessary that this match take place
This night at midnight, without more delay.

ROD. Why, some such clause there is, I must confess,
A mere caprice. What matters it? But then
The offer is so splendid. Only think!

INEZ. In case of my refusing him. What then?

ROD. You surely would not think of such a thing,
If you knew how he loved you.

INEZ. Still I ask,
What's the alternative should I refuse?

ROD. I would not counsel you to brave his ire.
He loves you most devotedly, I know,
And 'tis for that he'd hasten on the match,
'Tis over-eagerness and fear to lose
His prize. A groundless fear, I do admit.
But he was ever an eccentric man:
A good man though.

And last, not least, yourself, my darling child.
I am bewildered and half gone mad.
What shall we do? Oh, Heaven grant us help.

INEZ. I trust as ever in the help of Heaven.
Sustain us, Lord, in our adversity,
And let us lack not faith. [*A knock at the door.*
Oh, holy saints!

PEDRO. (*Without.*) Rodriguez! What ho! Donna
Rodriguez!
My lord Don Diego awaiteth thee below.

ROD. I come, I come. (*Aside.*) Ah me! what shall I say?
[*Exit.*

INEZ. Now, saints protect us! Holy Virgin, thou
Be still my guide, nor let me pray in vain.

[*Inez throws herself half
fainting on the prie-
dieu, and the scene
closes.*

SCENE IV.—*A Wood of chestnuts. Moonlight. Gipsies in ambush.*
Don Diego's castle seen towering above the trees.

Enter GIPSY QUEEN and PASCUAL.

GIP. Q. Behold the spot I told thee of, from whence
We must begin th' ascent. (*To Gipsies.*) Is all prepared?

GIPSIES TOGETHER. Ay, Queen.

GIP. Q. And Father Miguel?

A GIPSY. He comes anon.

D. PAs. What, even Father Miguel! Will he join?

GIP. Q. He is, as ever, our most staunch ally,
And doth possess a keen and ready wit
In time of need. A soft and oily tongue
And gentle manner, that may well disarm
All base suspicion. Such sound policy
As may enable him to win the day,
When all such brainless braggadocio
As thine might fail.

D. PAs. Bravo, Father Miguel!
An he be practised in the use of 's tongue,
As I am in the use of my good blade
We shall do well together.

GIP. Q. See, he comes.

Enter FATHER MIGUEL. He walks straight up to GIPSY QUEEN.

FTH. M. Pepa, well met. Is this young man your son?

D. PAs. (*Stepping forward.*) Ay, holy father. Dost remember me?

F'TH. M. But little, son. It is so many years

We have not met, and thou art altered much.
Thou wert then but a lad—a naughty lad,
A very naughty lad.

D. PAS. Ha, ha! Ha, ha!
The accusation, I admit, is just,
But hope, after to-night, that we may learn
To know each other better.

F'TH. M. So say I.
And now, for what doth most concern us all.

TO GIPSY QUEEN. I doubt not this youth's courage. Nay,
his fault,
An I remember right in days gone by.
Was being too precipitous and rash.
Now listen, both of ye, to what I say;
We must not mar our plot with useless show
Of ill-timed valour, but hoard well our strength
Till needed, and if possible dispense
With blood and slaughter, which God grant we may.

D. PAS. How, holy father? I don't understand.
Are we not here assembled to attack
The tyrant's stronghold. Are the men-at-arms
That guard the castle made of such poor stuff,
As let a powerful and armed band
Approach without resistance. Think you, *he*
The man that I blush to call my father,
Is so utterly without resources
As let us tamely rob him of his prize,
Under his very nose, and not resent?
Too old a fox, I ween, our veteran foe,
For to be caught asleep.

F'TH. M. Nay, hear me, son.

GIP. Q. Ay, true my, son. Have patience and attend
To the good father's counsel.

D. PAS.

Father, speak.

F'TH. M. I have bethought me of a scheme, which, if
Well carried out, will bring us through the guard
Without the loss of blood. Once entered in,
And passed the threshold, let me lead the way.
Your mother will present herself anon,
Assert her rights in presence of them all;
You then will follow, ready to protect
Yourself and us, should an assault be made
Upon our persons. (*To Gipsies.*) You bold gipsies all,
Keep close at hand a little in the rear
Ready for action, but beware to lift
A finger until called upon to fight
Through grim necessity. D'ye hear me all?

GIPSIES (*Together.*) Ay, ay, Sir Priest.

D. PAS.

You have not told us yet
The means you will adopt to pass the guards
Without resistance.

F'TH. M.

Listen, then, awhile.
I have to aid me in this daring plot
A tried and trusty friend, a mountaineer;
This peasant hath across his shoulders slung
A keg of choicest wine, by me well drugged
With such a potent powder, that one drop
But taken on the tongue were full enough
In a few minutes to induce a sleep
So dull, lethargic, heavy, and profound,
That earth might quake, winds blow, and thunder growl,
And yet the victims of this potent drug
Would still sleep on, their long and death-like sleep,
And much I doubt me if the archangel's trump
Would fully wake them.

D. PAS.

'Tis not poison, father?

FTH. M. Nay, 'tis harmless. How could you think that I,
As priest, could do aught to take human life?
I come to hinder carnage, not to slay.

D. P^{AS}. This may be difficult, though, nevertheless,
The men are many. There are always dogs
That bark and bellow at the foe's approach.

FTH. M. Leave all to me, my son. As for the dogs,
I've poison brought, most instantaneous,
With which I've baited meat, that I have now
About my person, whilst this peasant here.
What ho! Felipe!

Enter a PEASANT with a keg of wine slung round him.

This same honest man
Will go ahead with me, but as we near
The castle we will separate, and choose
Two divers paths, so that in case we meet
With any man we seem not to belong
One to the other. He will chant an air
Such as our mountaineers are wont to sing,
And go his way, as one who's light of heart;
Myself, will pass on by another route,
To meet the peasant at a given point
Close to the castle and within the hearing
Of all the soldiers; and if accosted,
I have my answer ready. Do not fear.
When within hearing of the men-at-arms,
I shall call out to this same mountaineer,
As to a stranger: "Hold, friend. Where bound?"
"To the next village, father," shall he say?
"Trav'ling with wine. A buyer wants to try
A sample, and I bring him of the best."
"Ha!" shall I say, "then, prithee, let me taste.
I, too, would buy a barrel, but for *me*

D. PAS. It suits his peculiar genius. Why,
He might have been prime minister of Spain,
This same poor unknown priest.

*[A distant mountaineer's
chant is heard.]*

GIP. Q. Hark! Do you hear?

D. PAS. Ay. The mountaineer's chant. The game's
begun.

GIP. Q. List patiently, and we shall hear anon
Don Miguel's whistle. Silence, all of ye.

*[A long pause. All place
themselves in
listening attitude.
Gipsy Queen
advances slowly.
Pascual in the
background, still
listening.]*

GIP. Q. The hour fast draws near when my intent,
That purpose that the heav'ns have writ in blood,
Must be accomplished. Be still, my heart.
Shade of my father Djâbel, stand thou near;
Nerve thou this arm so that it shall not fail,
For work is to be done, and that right soon.
That man is doomed, and by this hand he dies;
Heav'n hear my oath! Respond, ye elements.

*[Sky grows dark. Thunder
and lightning. Owls
and bats flit about.
Commotion in the
camp.]*

The oath is writ in Heav'n. Recording sprites
Have taken down the gipsy's oath of blood;
And now shall all men see, all nations tell,

How, from the ashes of this trampled heart
Did all triumphant rise the gipsy queen.

[A distant whistle heard.]

D. PAS. The signal, mother! Didst hear the signal?

GIP. Q. Ay, son. Onward, then;
I'll lead the way myself. Be firm and true.

*[The ascent begins, led by
the Gipsy Queen,
and the scene closes.]*

SCENE V.—*A hall in Don Diego's castle communicating with the chapel. The chapel is in the centre of the background. Through curtains is disclosed the altar lighted up, and a priest ready to officiate. In the hall, which is illuminated, a long table is spread with fruit and other delicacies. Music. Enter guests, discoursing animatedly and laughing.*

FIRST GUEST. *(To his Partner.)* Have you yet seen the bride? They say she's fair.

PARTNER. They say so, but I have not seen her yet.
Howbeit, a friend of mine who knew her well
When at the Convent of Saint Ursula,
Says she is over young. Just turned sixteen;
And how a man of Lord Don Diego's years
Could fall in love with such a chit, beats me.

*[They pass on. Two other
guests advance.]*

LADY OF SECOND GUEST. *(To her Partner.)* Ay, true, I
think it would more seemly be
Were he to marry one of years more ripe.

SECOND GUEST. *(To his Lady.)* The older that men grow
the more they're pleased

Cry at their wedding. Just the very thing
They've looked for, prayed for, schemed for all their
lives;
Yet, when it comes to don the bridal veil
And figure at the altar, then comes straight
A bucketful of tears. Hypocrisy!

*Enter DON DIEGO, followed by DON SILVIO
pleading.*

SECOND GENT. Here comes the bridegroom; and, as it
would seem,
Not in the best of humours. Let's withdraw.

[They pass on.]

D. DIE. (*To Don Silvio.*) Silvio, no more! I'll not be
flouted thus
Before my guests, in mine own castle, too.
I've said that it shall be, and it *shall* be.
I ne'er take back my word. So bid her haste,
And put a better face upon the matter.
The time is up, and all my guests attend.
Go, bring her, then. (*To Guests.*) Friends! welcome to
this hall.

GUESTS ALL. Long live Lord Don Diego, with much
happiness!

D. DIE. Thank ye, my friends. I do regret to say,
'Fore this august and gracious company,
That we are likely to experience,
This night, some difficulty on the part
Of our fair bride. Some singular caprice;
Transient, no doubt, but not the less unfit
For gay festivity. The fact is that
My youthful bride is of a temperament
Too highly wrought and o'er hysterical.
She only late hath left her convent cell;
Her education, therefore, until now

Hath rendered her unfit to face the world.
Impressionable natures, as we know,
Recoil before aught that can cause a strong
And powerful emotion. 'Tis the shock
They dread. 'Tis nothing. Nay, I do condole
With her; ay, from the bottom of my heart.
But yet I think it not well to indulge
Young folk in such caprice. Therefore, should I,
My honoured guests, be forced to assume
An air of stern severity unmeet
This gay assembly, deem it but as naught;
'Tis firmness that is needed in this case.
We men must not be conquered by caprice.
As for the girl herself, she loves me well;
Nay, passionately.

INEZ. (*Within, distractedly.*) No! 'tis false, 'tis false.

[*Titter and commotion
among the guests.*]

D. DIE. (*To Don Silvio.*) Silvio! Why stand you there,
with folded hands?
Did I not tell you to lead forth the bride?

D. SIL. She says she *will* not come.

D. DIE. Will not? Ha! ha!
This to my face! *Will* not, indeed. We'll see.
My worthy guests, bear with me if I lose
My wonted patience, and in haste let slip
Some casual word that may seem unfit
The presence of guests so illustrious.
My temper's somewhat choleric, and if
My will is thwarted I may lose restraint.
Silvio, bring forth the maiden straight, I say,
Or I will have her dragged to me by force.

INEZ. (*Within.*) Oh, mercy! Mercy! Heaven hear my
prayer.

A GENTLEMAN. Poor little jade! How I do pity her.

A LADY. And so do I. It makes my heart quite bleed.

D. DIE. A truce to this. Ho! pages, drag her forth.

*[Exeunt two pages, who
re-enter, dragging
Inez in, who utters a
piercing scream. She
is dressed in a white
dressing gown, her
hair dishevelled, and
grasping a crucifix.
Father Miguel and
Gipsy Queen appear
at the open door
cautiously. Behind
lurk Don Pascual
and Gipsies.]*

INEZ. "Oh, Holy Virgin! Save me; save me yet.
Thou wilt not thus abandon me."

D. DIE. *(Seizing her by the hair, and dragging her
towards the Chapel.)* So jade,
Since thou hast deemed fit to flout me thus
Before my guests, and spurn'st my tenderness,
Learn how obedience can be enforced.
Come priest. Be ready.

A GUEST. Nay, but this is rape!
I cannot stay and see injustice done.
I repent me that I was invited.

ANOTHER GUEST. True, and so do I. This is no marriage,
But filthy lust and mere abuse of power.

D. DIE. *(To Guards.)* Help! Hell and Furies! or I'll have

her drugged.

GUESTS ALL. Shame! Shame! Down with Don Diego.
Seize the tyrant.

D. DIE. What! Flouted by my very guests. What next?

GUESTS ALL. Virtue to the rescue! Save the maiden!

*Enter GIPSY QUEEN hurriedly, and stands fixing
DON DIEGO with her eye, who recoils.*

GIP. Q. Hold! I forbid the banns.

INEZ. Thanks, Holy Virgin,
That hast heard my prayer, and sent an angel
Down from your high Heaven in hour of need.
What glorious halo do I see around
That sainted vision!

*[Inez falls fainting into
the arms of Don
Silvio.]*

D. DIE. Nay, this is madness.

GIP. Q. Hear me, swarthy hag. This castle is mine,
And not for such as thee. Begone, I say,
Or I will have thee hanged, ere breaks the dawn,
From the loftiest turret of this pile.

GIP. Q. Villain, I fear no threats.
Look on this bond.

D. DIE. What folly's this? Say, who let these men in?

FTH. M. (*Advancing.*) I, Don Miguel, whom you basely
thought
To use as instrument in your foul plot,
Twenty-two years ago, when you did plan

The mockery of a marriage to induce
This trusting gipsy to accede to what
Your own dark soul did lust for; thinking that
'Twere easy work to dupe the innocent.
So, writing to a worthless boon companion,
Already in your debt, you promised him
To cancel all his debt, and further add
Another sum in recompense, were he
To condescend to sink himself so low
As to enact the part of priest in this
False marriage. But that letter never reached
Its destination. Djâbel, gipsy king,
This woman's father, once suspecting guile,
As well he might, did send his spies abroad,
And so this letter, fell into my hands.
I quick conceived the plan to pen reply,
As coming from the tool you sought to use,
In which 'twas stated that he lay in bed,
Ill of a fever, and so could not come,
And therefore he would send a substitute
To act for him. That substitute was I.
I, Father Miguel, with dissembling mien,
By you too fully trusted, had access
Unto your presence, as you fondly thought,
To help you in your plot of the feigned match.
But know, base villain, you alone were duped,
Your marriage was a real one, and holds good.

D. DIE. This is some false concocted tale, got up
For some hellish purpose.

PRIEST. (*At the altar, advances.*) Lord Don Diego,
I tell you this is no invented tale,
This Father Miguel is well known to me,
A worthy priest of our most holy Church.
The bond is valid.

D. DIE. Flouted on all sides!
How now! Do I dream? Am I master here,

Or am I not?

FTH. M. Another Master there's
Above us all, more powerful than thou,
Dispensing justice and avenging wrong.

D. DIE. What cant is this? Ho! guards, cut down the
rabble.

[Some halberdiers
advance. D. Pascual
and gipsies put
themselves on the
defensive.

FTH. M. Raise but a finger, or cause to be raised
An arm in thy defence, and dread the worst.

D. DIE. This from a shaven crown! A pretty plight
For feudal lord to be in! What ho! guards.

[A skirmish ensues, and
guards are beaten
back by gipsies.

On, cowards, on! Where are my men-at-arms?

FTH. M. All drugged, and powerless by my device.
They sleep like dead men. Seek no help from them.

D. DIE. Damnation! Am I worsted by a priest
And gang of squalid gipsies? Ho! my men,
Go, rouse the sluggards! Bring my armour, quick.

FTH. M. (*To Guards.*) Budge but an inch, and not a man
of ye shall see to-morrow's sun.

D. DIE. How now! Who's he
That threatens and gives orders in my hall?
Have I no friends among these honoured guests
To save me from these insults? Who am I?

F'TH. M. A sinner, made amenable to law.

D. DIE. (*Laughs diabolically.*) Ha, ha! This craven's insolence is such
It well nigh moves my laughter. How now! guests,
Not one sword drawn! No single arm upraised.

A GUEST. My Lord Don Diego, in a cause that's just
My sword is at your service. So say all
The others. But we will not fight for wrong.
Let us be first persuaded if this priest
Have right upon his side. Show us the bond.

D. DIE. The bond is but a forgery.

D. PAS. 'Tis false,
Thou lying knave. I'll make thee eat thy words.

D. DIE. Who is this mongrel gipsy, bold of tongue,
Who beards us with drawn sword.

F'TH. M. Your lawful son,
Of this poor gipsy born in holy marriage.

D. DIE. The tale is too preposterous.

OFFICIATING PRIEST. Nay, look
Well on the bond, Don Diego.

GUESTS ALL. Ay, the bond.

D. DIE (*To Officiating Priest.*) And thou, Sir Shaveling,
didst thou not come here
To-night to draw up deed of legal marriage?
And dost thou now come forward and take part
With this base priest, who for some plan of his——

OFF. PRIEST. My compliance was but in appearance.

I came, well knowing of your former marriage,
Twenty-two years ago, as saith the bond,
With her they call the Gipsy Queen. All this
I had from Father Miguel; and besides,
Have well perused the bond, which, being valid,
I could not undertake to tie the knot
In conscience, and have no intent to do 't.

D. DIE. I was but mocked, then?

GUESTS ALL. Come, the bond! the bond!

D. DIE. Give me the bond. I'll soon cut short this work.

*[Snatches the bond from
the hands of Gipsy
Queen. Glances
hastily over it, and
proceeds to tear it.]*

'Tis false. This is no signature of mine.

GIP. Q. Darest to deny thy bond? Die, villain, then,
In this thy perjury! *[Stabs Don Diego.]*

D. DIE. Help! help! I bleed. *[Falls.]*

GUARDS. Don Diego to the rescue! Seize the hag.

*[Guards and a few guests
lay hands on Gipsy
Queen.]*

D. PAS. *(Furiously.)* Leave go, my mother. He that lays
a hand
Upon her person, I'll send straight to hell.

A GUEST. *(Advancing with drawn sword.)* Secure this
furious and audacious youth.

D. PAS. Have at thee, then. *[Kills guest.]*

GUEST

I die. [*Dies.*]

TWO GUESTS. (*Advancing.*) Hold him! hold him!

[*Both guests attack Pascual at once, but are driven back. Guards come up and attempt to seize him. Gipsies attack guards, and a general skirmish ensues. Two guards are killed by gipsies. One gipsy falls. Don Silvio bears off Inez in the confusion.*]

FTH. M. Peace, brethren, for a while, and no more blood.

A GUEST. Look to Don Diego, friends, and seize the hag.

[*All surround Gipsy Queen, who stabs herself and falls. All draw back.*]

GIP. Q. This life is forfeit. I for vengeance lived;
My mission is accomplished upon earth.
I vowed to heaven. Heaven has heard my prayer.
And I depart.

D. PAS. (*Rushes up, and throws himself beside the Gipsy Queen.*) Oh, mother! dear mother.

D. DIE. Help! help! Who has put out the lights and left
Me all in darkness?

A GUEST.

No one, noble lord.

F'TH. M. 'Tis but the darkness of thine own dark soul,
Now upon the brink of eternity;
I counsel thee, confess, and then receive
The consolation that the Church affords.

D. DIE. Water! I thirst. Alas! how grim is death!
I am afraid to die. I burn! I burn!
How hideous all the forms that flit around;

OFFICIATING PRIEST. My lord Don Diego, prithee die not
thus;
But ask forgiveness first, of all you've wronged.

D. DIE. Good father, willingly; but who would grant
Forgiveness unto such a wretch as I?

GIP. Q. I, Pepa, thy true wife, forgiveness grants,
And craves the like from thee.

D. DIE. What! Pepa, *thou*;
Thou canst forgive me? Thou, my poor wronged wife.
Let us exchange forgiveness then, for I
Have well deserved this blow. Come round me, friends,
Whilst breath yet lasts, and witness bear to this.
I leave my castle, all my lands and goods,
Unto my lawful son. How is he called?

F'TH. M. Pascual.

D. DIE. Son Pascual, thy hand. Forgive the wrongs
I've done thee, e'en as thou thyself wouldst hope
In thy last hour to be forgiven. Hold,
There's still another I have deeply wronged,
From whom I'd crave forgiveness. Bring her here.

F'TH. M. (*To Attendant.*) Don Diego means the Lady
Inez. Haste

And bring her hither, with Don Silvio. [*Exit Attendants.*]

Enter DON SILVIO, supporting INEZ.

D. DIE. Behold me, Inez, penitent, subdued.
Art thou content that heaven hath heard thy prayer?
I've wronged thee much. I frankly do confess.
Forgive me, Inez child, ere I depart
An thou canst.

INEZ. I do.

*[Giving her hand and
sobbing.]*

D. DIE. And friend Silvio,
The like I'd have from thee, and all I've wronged.

D. SIL. Friend Diego, take his hand. I would not add
One pang to that which thine own heart must feel,
By holding back my pardon at the last.
Therefore, with all my heart I pardon thee.

D. DIE. Thanks, old friend, Silvio; I already feel
Better prepared to die. Farewell, my friends.

*[Inez for the first time
perceiving Pascual.]*

INEZ. Pascual!

D. PAS. Inez!

D. DIE. Come now, my children both,
I know your minds. Come let me join your hands.

*[Pascual and Inez kneel
beside Don Diego,
who joins their
hands.]*

Receive my blessing, children, and forgive

A poor old sinner when he is no more.
Pray for my soul, and ere this clay be cold,
Let this hand clasp thy mother's, son Pascual.
Pepa, thy hand.

GIP. Q. Diego, with all my heart.
[*Pascual joins their hands.*]

Let us die thus, and hand in hand to heaven
Let our souls soar. Kiss me, my children, both.
Look how my father Djâbel smiles on us,
And beckons us away from earth. Adios.

[Don Diego and Gipsy
Queen expire.]

[Guests kneel and pray.
Curtain.]

END OF THE GIPSY QUEEN.

At the conclusion of the play our tragedian rolled up his MS. and returned it to his pocket, while various were the expressions of approval from the members of the club.

All now seemed to look towards Mr. Oldstone for his criticism of the play before pronouncing any decided opinion of their own. This was a deference they paid him as chairman, and because he was the oldest member present. It was evident that this worthy was accustomed to be appealed to in matters of importance, and expected it in the present instance in particular, for he had already stretched out his legs, thrown himself back in his arm-chair, closed his eyes, and clasped his hands together over his comely paunch, while his thumbs performed a rotary motion, one round the other, a sure sign with him that whatever his lips might utter would be the result of deep thought and mature deliberation. Our members awaited in silence the words of wisdom about to issue from the lips of the oracle.

To fill up the time in the interim, Professor Cyanite filled up a pipe of tobacco,

and was about to light it. Mr. Crucible drew out his snuff box, and was preparing to take a copious pinch. Dr. Bleedem looked at his watch, when suddenly a knock at the door caused the members to raise their heads.

"Come in!" cried several voices at once. The door opened, and Helen stood in the doorway.

"If you please, gentlemen," said the girl, blushing, and with charming modesty, "Mr. McGuilp says that he has finished my portrait, and would the gentlemen of the club like to look at it before it gets too dark."

"Of course we will, my dear, of course we will," answered Mr. Oldstone, his fingers immediately unclasping themselves and grasping the arms of the chair, preparatory to rising to his feet.

"Come along, gentlemen." No further invitation was needed. Professor Cyanite laid down his pipe unlighted. Mr. Crucible replaced the grains of snuff, he had intended conveying to his nose, back into his snuff box, which he closed with a snap and returned to his pocket. There was a general stir among the members, who rose and followed Helen to the room upstairs, that our artist had *pro tem*. transformed into a studio.

Jack Hearty and his spouse were already in the room when the members of the club appeared at the door.

"Yes, that's our Helen, to a T, and no mistake," he was saying. "Well, its just wonderful, and as like her mother, when she was her age, as one egg is to another. Eh? Molly," said he, addressing his spouse.

"Beg pardon, sir. I hope no offence," continued the landlord, turning deferentially towards our artist.

"But what might such a picture be worth, if I might ask?"

"The wealth of the universe wouldn't purchase it, my good host," replied McGuilp. "It is the best thing I ever did, and that perhaps I ever shall do. No, this one is not for sale. I do not say but that at some future time I might do another from it, and then——"

At this juncture, the members of the club, headed by Mr. Oldstone, entered the studio. Our host and hostess respectfully withdrew, in order to give the gentlemen a better chance of examining the picture, but even then the room was

as crowded as an exhibition on a private view day. Mr. Oldstone had placed himself in front of the easel, and was soon loud in his expressions of enthusiasm.

"Excellent! most excellent! Beautiful! beautiful! beautiful! What flesh tints! What colouring! What refinement of drawing and expression! As a likeness it is perfect, there is no gainsaying. Then, the pose—simple, graceful, and natural. My dear young friend," he said, shaking our artist by the hand, and seeming overcome by emotion, "Do you know *what* you have realised? Why, it is the hand of a master!" etc., etc.

Then each of the members in turn made their own remarks upon the portrait.

"What a picture of life and health!" cried Dr. Bleedem.

"What a face for the stage!" remarked the tragedian.

"Ah! why was not I born a painter?" sighed Mr. Parnassus.

The analytical chemist made a few scientific remarks upon the properties of pigments, in which Professor Cyanite joined, whilst our artist silently removed the colours from his palette.

"And what do you propose doing with the portrait, Mr.—er—Mr. McGuilp?" inquired Mr. Hardcase. "Keep it," replied our artist, laconically.

"What! *keep* it all to yourself!" exclaimed Mr. Oldstone. "For your own selfish gratification, thereby depriving others of the pleasure to be derived therefrom! Mr. McGuilp, I am surprised at you. Gentlemen," proceeded the antiquary, addressing his fellow members, "I protest against this decision of our young friend. That picture does not leave this inn if *I* can help it. Mr. McGuilp, your price. What is it? We will all club together and buy it, won't we gentlemen?"

"Ay, ay! so say we all," cried several voices at once.

"Impossible, my dear sir—impossible," remonstrated our artist.

"*Impossible!* Why?"

"I feel I shall never surpass this," answered McGuilp. "It is a sample work. I can make use of it in many ways as a study. But this I will do. I will protract my stay yet a few days, though I have already remained longer than I intended, and I will make a copy of the picture, which it shall be my pleasure to present to the honoured members of this club." Murmurs of applause and thanks followed this

speech, after which the company dispersed until dinner-time.



CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning broke dark and gloomy. Our artist rose from his couch languid and unrefreshed. His face was pale and haggard, with dark circles round his eyes. What had transpired? Had he received a second visit from the headless lady? Not so. What then? He had slept indifferently, having been kept awake by his own distracting thoughts. If he chanced to close his eyes for a moment his peace was disturbed by the most chaotic and depressing dreams. Was he unwell? Did the fare at the inn disagree with him? He made no complaints. Then why this strange squeamishness—these wild chaotic dreams, through all of which *one* face in particular seemed always to the fore? Sometimes happy and smiling, full of life and health, then sad and downcast—again looking at him with pleading eyes, yet always the same face. Whose face this was we will leave our readers to conjecture.

"Bah!" soliloquised our artist, as he placed one foot upon the floor, "a chit of a girl like that, and at *my* age too."

He wasn't much past eight and twenty, true, but then the girl running in his thoughts was barely sixteen. In love? Not he. She was a dear, sweet child, it was true, and pure as an angel; but her education, her extreme youth, her position, her surroundings—no, no.

Now he was quite out of bed. His shaving water stood ready for him outside. He opened the door ajar, and took it in. Then placing the jug on the table, he proceeded to strop his razors. As he did so, he caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror, and started.

"I'll tell you what it is, Vandyke, my boy," he said, accosting his own reflection in the glass, "you are looking worse than I thought. Come, cheer up, and make the best of things. It would never do for the members of the club to notice anything, and by putting two and two together, guess at the reason *why*. No, I must dissemble."

Now, men of the world are shrewd observers, and a very slight clue is often enough. Here, for instance, was a case of two young persons, both good looking,

being thrown together under circumstances peculiarly favourable for a flirtation, being alone and unobserved. Well, what then? Need they necessarily fall in love with each other? Not *necessarily* perhaps, says the world, but in all probability they *will*. Time and opportunity alone being necessary to bring the matter about. So the world may perhaps not be so very far wrong in its deductions.

Having now mixed up an abundant lather, McGuilp rubbed it well over his chin and lower part of his face. Then inserting his razor in the hot water, he, with as steady a hand as possible under the circumstances, proceeded to reap the hirsute stubble from its native habitat until the operation was completed to his satisfaction. Having at length finished his toilet with even more than usual precision, he called up a cheerful look to his countenance, and joined the rest of the members at the breakfast-table, with an hilarity and jocoseness of manner which took them all in.

The breakfast was sumptuous as usual. The table groaned under every delicacy of the season, and our members, having seated themselves, did ample honour to the repast. A yule log blazed on the hearth, and a general air of comfort pervaded the inn, as if to make up for the murky weather without. Yet, despite these creature comforts, and the hearty appreciation of them by our members, there was one present whose appetite failed him. In spite of his forced hilarity, which he now found it difficult to sustain, for sad thoughts would obtrude themselves, our artist but pecked at his food.

The fumes of the eggs and bacon sickened him. The kippered herrings were an offence unto his nostrils. He loathed such gross cheer. His toast and roll were but nibbled at, his cup of coffee barely sipped, yet keep up appearances he must. So he talked a good deal of vapid nonsense, made trivial remarks about the weather, etc., which served to put the rest of the members off the scent, engrossed as each was with his own favourite dish. The professional eye of Dr. Bleedem, however, was more on the alert, and not so easily deceived.

"You are not looking so well this morning, Mr. McGuilp," he said, eyeing his patient critically.

Our artist hastened to assure him that he never felt better in his life. This remark, however, fell flat upon the doctor's ears, and he proceeded as if he had not heard him.

"You have eaten nothing. I notice that you only play with your food. Now, when a patient plays with his food, it is a sure sign that there is something wrong. You

should take——"

"Oh! I don't want any medicine, thank you," interrupted McGuilp. "I assure you I am all right. A little loss of appetite, as you say; perhaps from the sudden change in the weather, which always affects me more or less. The fact is, I didn't sleep very well last night, and——"

"Yes, I can see *that*," continued Dr. Bleedem.

By this time the other members were getting interested, and our artist found himself suddenly the cynosure for all the scrutiny of the club. How he cursed the doctor's officiousness! Why couldn't he mind his own business?

"Yes, now you mention it, doctor, I can see that our young friend does *not* seem quite up to the mark to-day," remarked Mr. Oldstone.

"By his appearance I should say the young gentleman had something on his mind," suggested Mr. Hardcase. "His countenance seems sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," quoted Mr. Blackdeed from his favourite author.

Then each member had something to say in turn, till our artist felt himself blushing up to the roots of his hair. In vain did he give himself a twisted pinch in the fleshy part of his leg under the table. The blush would rise, and there was no checking it. He fancied he could see the members give side glances one to the other, or trying to conceal a smile; but this may have been imagination.

Breakfast being now over, each member rose from the table, some gathering round the fire, one or two of them peering out into the murky gloom. Then Helen entered to clear away the breakfast things. She, too, seemed less lively than her wont, her face paler, and she went about her domestic duties mechanically, with downcast eyes.

"Why, Helen, my girl," exclaimed Dr. Bleedem, "you don't look as bright as usual. Have *you* been having a sleepless night? Have *you* been losing your appetite?"

The girl looked up confusedly, and a deep blush suffused her face and neck. The fame of Dr. Bleedem was great in the neighbourhood. She believed herself to be in the presence of a man who could read the secrets of her inmost soul, and that all attempts to mask them from his scrutinising gaze would be worse than useless.

"What has come to you young people of late, I don't know," continued Dr. Bleedem. "Now, here is Mr. McGuilp, he, too, has been losing his appetite, and suffering from insomnia."

Oh! how our artist wished that the ground would open at his feet and swallow him up. In vain he trod on his toes and turned his face towards the window, as if peering into the snow that was now falling fast. His ears continued to burn like fire, and all he could do, by mopping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief, was inadequate to keep back the traitor blush.

"Oh! oh!" muttered Dr. Bleedem to himself, whilst gazing from one to the other. "Is that the way the wind lies?"

The members now began to look sideways, one at the other. One of them raised his eyebrows; another winked; a third suppressed a titter; but as this all took place behind our artist's back, who was still looking out intently at the snow, there was nothing to wound his sensibilities.

At length Mr. Oldstone broke the silence. "When are you thinking of beginning the copy of our Helen's picture, Mr. McGuilp?"

"I? Oh yes, just so," replied our artist, waking up out of a reverie. "Well, the fact is, we are most unfortunate in the weather. It is impossible to begin if it continues like this. Should it clear up later, I will at once set to work."

"Good. And now gentlemen, what do you all propose doing to while away the time? A rubber of whist, a game of chess, backgammon, or what?" inquired the antiquary.

After a little discussion, it was decided that Dr. Bleedem, Professor Cyanite, Mr. Crucible, and Mr. Oldstone, should form a party at whist. Mr. Blackdeed and Mr. Hardcase played a game of chess, while the poet and the painter, not being disposed to join in any game, retired into a corner together, and were soon deep in a discussion upon the arts of painting and poetry. A couple of hours passed away, and still the members were absorbed, each in his favourite pursuit, when the weather began to clear up, and the sun shone brightly.

This decided our artist to set about his allotted task; so breaking off the conversation with his poet friend, he repaired to the studio, and placing a clean canvas, the same size as that of the portrait, upon the easel, he commenced his copy; and here we will leave him to continue his task for the present.

Over a fortnight had passed since we left our artist at his work. The task was now completed. He had found it necessary to have one or two extra sittings from Helen herself on the copy, just to give more truth to it, as he said. However, as everything on this earth comes to an end, there was an end also to these sittings.

"Helen," said our artist to his model at the last, "I must go. My affairs call me back to Italy. I have been keeping my studio on all this time, and I have certain business to settle which will brook no delay."

Helen's countenance fell, and her lip quivered. Her eyes grew moist and downcast. In a voice that she endeavoured to render firm, she ventured to inquire: "And will it be for long, sir?"

"For very long, Helen? Perhaps for ever."

Helen had no answer to this. Her sobs were choking her. The tears stole silently down her cheeks, but she whisked them away with her handkerchief, and did her best to appear outwardly calm.

Our artist, too, felt a lump in his throat, and his eyes suffused with tears.

"Perhaps, sir," meekly suggested the girl, "when you have settled all your affairs abroad, you may think of taking a holiday, and be paying us a flying visit, just to see Mr. Oldstone and the other gentlemen, you know. I'm sure both father and mother will be glad to see you again."

"I am afraid not, Helen. I am afraid not," and our artist slowly and sadly shook his head.

"What! *never*—never again!" almost shrieked the child.

Here she broke down completely. All restraint and propriety flew to the winds. Nature, till now trampled upon and held in abeyance, at this point rebelled and relieved herself in a torrent of the bitterest sobs and tears.

"Helen! dear Helen! What is this?" cried McGuilp, running to her assistance, his own tears falling fast the while!

"Oh! what a brute I have been! Quick, rouse yourself. There are footsteps in the passage. Somebody is coming." Thus warned, there was a sudden mopping of eyes and blowing of noses, when the door opened, and Dame Hearty presented

herself to ask if Helen could be spared to assist her in the kitchen.

"Oh! certainly," replied our artist, averting his face and busying himself with putting away his palette and brushes, whilst assuming a firm voice. "Yes," continued he, still turning his back, "I think I may say that I have finished with her now. This is the last sitting in fact. There is the copy I intend to present to the club. This one here is the first one, which I am going to keep for myself. Which of the two do you prefer, Dame Hearty?"

In this way he rattled on to hide his confusion. Helen had slipped noiselessly away, bathed her face in cold water, and returned to the kitchen.

"Well, sir," replied Dame Hearty, in answer to our artist's question, "I really don't know what to say. They are both so lovely, there's not a pin to choose between them."

Then, scanning our artist's countenance, she observed:

"You appear to have a bad cold, sir."

"I am afraid I have, Dame Hearty," said McGulp; "the weather has been very uncertain, and I think I must have committed some imprudence."

"Let me make you a basin of gruel, sir. No? It's a capital thing, and you should keep out of all draughts, and——"

"And keep my bed, perhaps you'll tell me, my good woman," interrupted McGulp. "No, no; I've no time to coddle. Do you know, Dame Hearty, I must be off to-morrow to London by the stage, as I have to return to Rome without further delay. Already I am long after my time."

"So soon! Why, you *have* paid us a short visit," exclaimed the hostess. "Well, sir, you knows best. All I can say is that my husband and I will be most glad to see you again, when next you be passing this way."

A knock at the door, and our host entered to ask if he might be allowed to see the copy.

"Certainly, my good host, here it is," said McGulp.

Jack Hearty went into ecstasies over it, saying he didn't know which he liked best.

"Mr. McGuilp says he is off again to-morrow, Jack," began our hostess.

"Yes," broke in McGuilp. "What time does the stage start? Early? I'd better begin my packing at once," and off he went to his bedroom to make preparations.

The fact was, he wanted to be alone, for it was an effort to keep up a cheerful appearance with a sad heart. He locked himself within his room, and having collected together a few articles of clothing—enough to fill his valise, he threw himself into an arm-chair and gave himself up to meditation.

It will be remembered a few pages back that our artist accused himself of behaving like a brute towards his model. In this he did himself injustice. He had never deliberately set about gaining the affections of this simple village maiden. Any base design against her was the farthest from his thoughts. He admired her innocence and beauty, and wished that it might never lose its unsullied purity. He had never dreamed of actually falling in love with her, child as she was, and his conduct had been always that of a fond parent towards a pretty child. He little recked of any danger, either to her or to himself, but he found her beauty gain upon him day by day, till at length he was fairly in the toils. Yet he had never spoken to her of love. No, not a word. He *would* not. He had no desire that the girl should fall in love with him, nor would it be politic for him to fall in love with her. Wrong her he would not. Marry her he could not. For, besides hampering himself as a struggling artist with a wife and family, he dreaded quarrelling with almost the only relation he had living: a rich uncle; from whom he had expectations, and who would most decidedly consider that he had dragged the family name in the mire by marrying the daughter of a country innkeeper. In what way, then, it will be asked, did he think he had acted brutally towards the girl? This is what he blamed himself for: First, for allowing himself to be carried away with feelings of love towards the girl, however secretly; and then for incautiously allowing her to discover his secret. For, although he had not spoken of love, you may depend upon it that he had *looked* it, and it was not difficult for her to read in his burning glances the secret of his soul. Love leads to love. He, too, read in the soft eyes, the heaving bosom, the stifled sigh, the deepening blush, and other tell-tale signs that she loved *him*. Thus, each had learned the other's secret. They had spoken to each other with their eyes, and thus just as much mischief had been wrought as if the most courtly phrases had been used. He had not intended that his glances should be understood, but they *were*. Thus he blamed himself.

Matters being thus, there was no other remedy but flight. It would be a wrench,

both for himself and for the girl, but the kindest thing in the end. In fact, it was his only course. So, having hurriedly finished his packing, he went downstairs to inform the members of the club of his intention.

It may easily be conceived how unwelcome was the news, for our artist had made himself extremely popular with all, and was looked upon as a great acquisition as a story-teller. Mr. Oldstone, in particular, exhausted all his powers of persuasion to yet delay his departure, but he found him obdurate. The good antiquary, who was an old bachelor, had grown to love our artist as a son; and now that the hour of parting had come, it rent him sore.

In the evening a farewell carousal was given in his honour, in which several bowls of punch were discussed; much tobacco smoked; a few speeches made; several anecdotes related; a song or two; besides some atrocious puns, with much laughter and witty conversation, until the utterance of all grew somewhat thick; and we regret to add that the worthy chairman, in his laudable attempts to do honour to his young protégé, had to be assisted upstairs and put to bed in a state decidedly mellow.



CHAPTER IX.

The next morning broke clear and frosty, without a cloud in the sky.

"What bitter mockery!" thought McGuilp, as he looked on the beaming face of Nature, and contrasted it with the feelings he bore hidden in his breast. "A day like yesterday would have been more in harmony with my soul." The sun actually smiled on his departure.

"Good morning, my young friend!" cried the cheery voice of Mr. Oldstone as they entered the breakfast room together; "it is a fine day for you."

Our artist nodded assent, and having shaken hands with all the members in turn, seated himself at the breakfast table, and tried to keep up a cheerful appearance, but his smile was hollow, and his face was pale.

"I wish you would let me give you a little opening medicine, Mr. McGuilp," broke in Dr. Bleedem, in the midst of a lull in the conversation; "it would soon set you to rights."

Our artist persisted that he *was* all right, and required nothing.

"H'm, h'm," muttered the doctor to himself with a shake of the head, as much as to say, "You don't fool *me*."

Conversation then took a general turn, and our artist was allowed to finish his meal unmolested.

Breakfast was hardly concluded when a horn was heard in the distance. "There's the stage!" cried one of the members.

"The horn, the horn, the lusty horn," quoted Mr. Blackdeed from his great poet; but the quotation fell flat on the ears of our artist, who had grown a shade paler.

"I am quite sure, Mr. McGuilp," went on the irrepressible Doctor Bleedem, "that if you were to follow my advice——"

"There, that's enough, Bleedem. Leave the boy alone," broke in Mr. Oldstone.

"Here comes the stage. God bless you, my boy. Take an old man's blessing with you. I know I shan't see you again this side of Time. I'm getting old; I know it; I feel it. But write me as soon as you get to Rome to say you have arrived safely; and here is a letter to my old friend Rustcoin, which please give him with your own hands when you see him. There, good-bye, good-bye." Here the kind old antiquary mopped his eyes, gave our artist a fatherly pat on the back, and followed him to the door.

"Good-bye, sir, and I hope we shall meet again." This was all our artist could find to say.

The coach had now driven up, and McGuilp had to undergo once more the ordeal of shaking hands. This was rather a trial, for although there could be no doubt as to the sincerity of the regret that each member felt at his departure, and the cordiality of their good wishes, yet there was one thought alone that now occupied his mind, viz., that of tearing himself away from his fair model.

Whether the members guessed this, and out of bare humanity wished to give him a chance to say a few words alone with his lady-love, we know not; but, having wished their guest God-speed, they left him, and surrounded the coach. Some of them patted the smoking horses; one had a word with the driver; others seemed to scrutinise the travellers and the vehicle. Our host and hostess stood at the door of the inn, and wished their late guest a happy journey and a speedy return, to which our artist responded by a hearty shake of the hand and a few appropriate words.

The landlord was then called off to serve the driver with a mug of ale, but before he went he called out to his daughter, who was hiding herself behind her mother in the passage, "Now, then, Helen, my girl, the gentleman is going, and wants to bid you good-bye."

Helen now came forward, pale and trembling, while Dame Hearty, perhaps guessing the state of things, prudently retired, thus leaving the young couple to say a word to each other in private.

"Good-bye, Helen, my girl, and may God bless you," was all our artist could trust himself to say at the last; but his sad glance and the tender squeeze he gave her dimpled hand spoke volumes.

"Good-bye, sir," faltered the child, now choking with sobs; "good-bye, and may you be happy." Then breaking down altogether, she rushed inside and was seen

no more. Our artist looked after her for a moment as if dazed.

"Now, then, sir," cried the driver, "come along if you're coming; we're off."

McGuilp, thus roused, threw his cloak around him, pressed his hat over his eyes, and hastily mounted. Crack went the whip, off went the horses, and our artist was swiftly borne from the scene where he had passed so many happy hours, midst cheering and waving of hats, to which he graciously, but with an aching heart, responded. He was now alone with his own thoughts, and barely glancing at the shifting wintry landscape as it flashed passed him, was in no humour to exchange commonplaces with his fellow passengers. Here we will leave him for the present, and return to our inn.

The members of the club, with the exception of our antiquary, who had remained behind to finish a letter for the post, had resolved upon a woodland ramble, and were chatting lightly by the way.

"Yes, yes; there is no doubt about the poor lad being hard hit," said one. "I noticed it from the first."

"So did I," put in another. "In good time he bolted, for these sort of things never end well when allowed to go on ahead."

"Of course, marrying her would be out of the question altogether, looking at it from any point of view," remarked a third; "besides, there's her age. Why, she's a mere child."

"True," observed a fourth, "and even supposing her to have been of a marriageable age, he, being but a struggling artist, wholly dependent on his profession, and doomed to eke out a precarious living by the sale of his pictures, what else but misery could there be in store for either of them by such a union?"

But here we will leave them to continue their ramble and their gossip.

It has been stated above that our antiquary had remained behind to finish a letter. Having waved his last adieus to his young protégé, and waited till the coach had disappeared in the distance, he returned to the breakfast room with a sigh, muttering to himself, "Poor boy! poor boy!" He then collected his writing materials, but the breakfast things had not yet been cleared away.

Presently Helen entered, and proceeded to clear the table. Her face was pale, but calm; her eyes downcast. Our antiquary appeared not to notice her overmuch,

but was secretly scanning her countenance. At length, when the table was quite clear, and Helen returned with a fresh log for the fire, he slowly advanced towards her, and placing his right hand on her head and his left on her right shoulder, whilst he toyed for a moment with her bright curls, he remained for some moments in silence. The action was that of one invoking a blessing. Then seizing her right hand in both of his, and raising it to his breast, he gave it a gentle squeeze; then dropped it and turned away, still without a word.

Now, poor Helen's heart was full to overflowing, in spite of her outwardly calm demeanour. She was in possession of a weighty secret, which seemed too heavy for her to bear alone. Yet who was there to share it with her? She had no friend of her own age to whom she could open her heart and into whose sympathetic ears she could pour forth her woes. Her parents, much as she loved and respected them, did not seem to her to be the sort of people likely to give her that sympathy she yearned for. They would laugh at her, reprove her perhaps, and tell her roughly to get all that rubbish out of her head at once, etc. Not a soul had she in the world to whom she could cling, or from whom she could expect one ray of comfort. As to her secret being discovered by the other members of the club, this she dreaded most of all. She could imagine their banter, their coldness, or their sneers. Dr. Bleedem, too, who would prescribe her physic, and promise to make her all right again, provided she followed his course of treatment.

Love is by nature reticent, and not willing to make its secret common property. Rather than divulge its sacred feelings to the first light-hearted outsider it will prefer—oh, how infinitely!—to bear its own burden alone—aye, if need be, even to the grave.

Never before in all her life did Helen need a friend and comforter as she did now, when, lo, in the very nick of time, there came to her this kindly old man whom she had known from her earliest childhood, who had dandled her on his knee, and never passed her without a kind word. He, who seemed to have read her heart, now came forward with his silent blessing, like an angel sent from Heaven to comfort her. This was just what she needed. This mute expression of sympathy from someone whom she felt could understand her. She construed his silence thus: "There, there, my pretty child; we understand each other, don't we? You see, I've guessed your secret, and you may be sure that it will be safe in my keeping. I am not surprised. These things are common to youth, and very hard to bear for the time, but take comfort. Everything has its day. This, too, will pass in time. Cheer up; try and forget it. What! you can't? Oh, yes you will—not all at once—no; but take courage. This is your first great grief; but the world is full of

trials, and we are sent here on purpose to bear them. No one escapes them altogether; but rest assured that you will always find a friend and comforter in Obadiah Oldstone."

This, and much more, did the child understand by the antiquary's silent magnetic touch. Her heart overflowed with gratitude, and she was unable longer to control herself, but, bursting into the most passionate sobs, she covered her face with her hands and was making for the door when Oldstone called her back.

A Spanish proverb says, "He who loves you will make you weep." Helen had proved the truth of this adage.

"Come, my girl," said Oldstone; "am I such an ogre that I need scare you? Come to an old man, and pour forth all its pretty griefs. We used to be such friends, you know. Did you think I didn't guess your secret all along? We old men of the world have sharp eyes, and very little escapes us. Well, well; I am not surprised, you know. The young man who left this morning was comely, and a gentleman, besides a man of talent and resources. It is not difficult to understand how a young and susceptible child like yourself, having never seen anyone else but old fogies like us, should suddenly take a fancy to a smart young——"

"Oh! sir," broke in Helen, in agony, "he is gone—gone for ever, and I *did* love him so."

"Love! my child! why, at your age you oughtn't to know the meaning of the word."

"I didn't, sir, till quite lately. I had heard of it from others, and read about it in books; but, oh! Mr. Oldstone, I didn't know it was like this."

Here the poor distracted girl began beating her breast with her clenched fist, and gazing upwards with tearful eyes, in which there was an expression of the wildest despair, till the kind old man began to be seriously alarmed for her sanity.

"Hush! hush! my girl," he said in soothing tones; "don't give way so. Calm yourself."

"How can I be calm," screamed the girl, "when he has gone for ever, and I shall never, never see him again!"

"Well, my dear, and a good job too. The best thing that could happen to you

both," said the antiquary, "though you won't think so now; but mark my word, Helen, this will pass over, and the sooner the better for you both, for these sort of cases lead to no good, you may depend upon it."

"Why, sir," asked the girl, "is it then a sin to love?"

"A sin, my precious!" exclaimed Oldstone; "no, I can't say that. But—but—there is always danger in it."

"What danger, sir?"

"Well, my dear, there are certain things that are very difficult to explain to one so young. When you grow older——"

"Oh! sir, why cannot you tell me now—you, who know the danger?"

"Yes, my dear, I should just think I did," observed the antiquary. "There are shoals and pitfalls that beset the young, and they would do well to listen to the voice of warning ere it is too late, and profit by the experience of others, rather than trouble themselves about the *why* and the *wherefore* of everything."

"Then you mean to say that love *is* wrong after all," observed Helen.

"Not as long as it remains love," replied Oldstone, "but people may *make* it so."

"How? I don't understand."

"Perhaps not, my dear. You have much to learn yet. I mean, people *will* talk, and you can't stop them. The world can only judge by appearances. It *might* misjudge you. It might put a false construction on your conduct, however innocent."

"But that would be wrong, unjust, and cruel."

"Perhaps so, my dear. It very often is."

"Are the gentlemen of the club the world?"

"Yes, part of it."

"Would they tell stories about me?"

"If they thought they saw anything suspicious in your conduct."

Helen reflected for a moment and then said, "I don't know what they could find suspicious in my conduct."

"No, my pet, neither do I," answered the kind old man with a benevolent smile. "The fact is, there are so many people in the world who find other people's business more interesting than their own; and even when they are unable to find a flaw in their neighbour's character, they will make one. Therefore, avoid the appearance of evil."

"Still, I don't understand," began Helen.

"No, my dear, and what's more, I can't explain," observed the old man. "But *this* I can tell you. The brute world, in cases of love, exacts marriage as the hallmark of respectability. It can see nothing but harm in the love of two young pure souls, however platonic—I mean innocent. They look upon it as dangerous, to say the least, and the only way to satisfy them and avoid scandal is to *marry*."

"I never thought about marrying," said Helen. "Cannot two persons love each other just the same without either thinking of marriage?"

"They *could* I suppose, but the world would soon make it hot for them. They would have to pay for defying the world."

"Pay!"

"Yes, and dearly too. Pay for it by seeing the finger of scorn directed towards them—the cold shoulder of respectability and self-righteousness; by being forced to listen to vile gossip and scandalous reports; shunned by those far viler than themselves; bear up against the ribald jeers of the vile populace, till their lives become a burden to them, and they would finally be compelled to confess that they would have done better for their own peace and comfort if they had humoured the vile rabble and *married*."

"Does love without marriage mean all that?"

"I am afraid it does, my girl; I am afraid it does. At least, I wouldn't advise you to brave the world. It isn't worth it. If you can't marry, you had better not encourage love."

"I don't see that it matters to them if I love or if I don't," observed the girl.

"Neither do I, my dear," answered her counsellor, "and if people would mind their own business, the world would be happier."

"It seems so mean and paltry to be always prying into other people's affairs. I

can't tell why they do it. I am sure I should never take the trouble. How is it, Mr. Oldstone?"

"My dear," replied the old man, "I can't tell you how these things are, but so they are."

At this juncture the voice of Dame Hearty was heard calling for her daughter. The door then opened, and the head of our hostess appeared.

"Come now, Helen," cried our worthy dame, rather petulantly, "I have been looking for you all over the house. You knew I was waiting for you in the kitchen."

"Don't blame her, mother," interceded the kind antiquary. "It is all *my* fault. I have been detaining her perhaps over long, just for a friendly chat."

"Oh, very well, sir," replied the landlady with a bland smile, "but if you don't mind me taking her away now, as I am rather behind-hand with the work."

"Certainly, Dame Hearty," said Mr. Oldstone, with a wave of the hand.

Helen followed her mother, and the door closed behind them. Then our antiquary occupied himself vigorously with his writing, until the other members of the club returned from their ramble, hungry for their mid-day meal.



CHAPTER X.

It is not our object to weary the reader with superfluous details relating to the doings and sayings of the members of the club, nor to follow up the story of their lives from day to day. We will, therefore, suppose some two years to have passed away since our artist's departure for Rome. In two years' time much may transpire, *i.e.*, in a large town where there is much business and traffic. In this ancient hostelry, however, situated about a mile from any habitable dwelling, things went on from year to year in much the same monotonous way. Jack Hearty was just as genial and attentive as ever, and looked no older. Dame Hearty was just as active, bustling, and good-humoured. And Helen, what of her? Ah! here *was* a change. Was she falling into a decline? Did her cheek grow paler and paler, her step listless, her eye vacant, her manner distracted? No; nothing of the sort. All these signs had vanished long ago, thanks to a course of steel that Dr. Bleedem had prescribed for her, and insisted on her taking. What a feather in the good doctor's cap it was when he saw the sallow, sunken face fill out, the rose of perfect health once more return to her cheek, the elasticity to her step, and the merry ring to her voice. No wonder he blew his own trumpet. Who would not have done the same?

But there was one among the members who smiled quietly, and with an air of superiority, whenever the doctor vaunted himself.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Dr. Bleedem, one day, irritated at what he conceived to be an expression of incredulity on our antiquary's countenance, "but if you think that my medicine did not effect the marvellous cure we have been discussing, I should like to know what did, that's all."

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Oldstone, still with a quizzical look in his eye, "I said nothing."

The doctor, far from being pacified, gave a snort, then resumed severely, "And I'll tell you what it is, Oldstone, if you don't take more care of your constitution, you won't last much longer. You may depend upon that. If you pass many more nights like that one on the eve of Mr. McGuilp's departure, and think that you know better than I do, your sand will run speedily down. Then will follow a state

of utter prostration—the death rattle—the silent tomb. Ha! ha! how will you like that?"

Having thus delivered himself, this son of Æsculapius felt better, and deeming he had completely vanquished his antagonist, he proceeded to fill his yard of clay with some of his most pungent tobacco, lighted it, and throwing himself back in his chair, and crossing his legs, gave several defiant puffs at his pipe, causing the smoke to stream through his nostrils, which gave him somewhat the appearance of a fiery dragon.

"Well, man," said Mr. Oldstone, meekly, "don't croak like a bird of ill omen. It is like having the skeleton at the feast, as was the custom amongst the ancient Egyptians."

"Yes, by Gumdragon! it is," assented the leech, "and it would be good for several of you if you profited by the lesson, for I could mention some who have progressed precious little since those times."

"Come, come, doctor," insisted Oldstone, "I've seen you yourself take very kindly to your little glass of punch at our convivial meetings." (Here the antiquary winked furtively at some of the older members, as if he had scored something.)

"No, sir; never to the extent of being carried to bed helplessly drunk, as I have seen you, sir—not unfrequently, I regret to say," replied the doctor, indignantly.

A general laugh from all the members of the club, in which our antiquary heartily joined, was a signal for a cessation of hostilities, and good humour was restored.

It may interest our readers, before we go further, to learn some news of our artist since his departure. According to his promise he had written, first from London and later from Rome, to announce his safe arrival. He had written many times since, and always to Mr. Oldstone. His first letters had been short, and contained little more than the bare news we have stated; desiring, at the same time, to be remembered to all the inmates of the hostel, including our landlord and his family.

These letters were promptly and voluminously replied to by our antiquary, who, besides local news, of which there was certainly a dearth, managed to fill up his letters with wise saws and some fatherly advice, delicately, not obtrusively given

—such as is not unbecoming from an elderly man towards one considerably his junior. The tone of these letters seemed to call for a reply something in the same spirit. It was impossible for our artist to ignore the fact that the old man had taken a prodigious liking to him—loved him, in fact, as we have said, like a son. He could not reply curtly or coldly to words that so evidently came from the good man's heart, so he sat him down and penned equally long epistles, relating his adventures, the people he had met, and the places he had seen; thanking our antiquary at the same time for the kindly interest he had always taken in him.

It soon became apparent to our artist, from sundry hints carefully worded by his antiquarian friend, that the latter was no stranger to the secret he held within his breast. He doubted not but that all the members of the club knew it, and this thought caused him some annoyance; but there was something in the veiled sympathy of this fatherly old man, with his covert innuendos, his tact and discretion, that touched him deeply, and made it impossible not to open his heart to him and pour forth the secrets of his soul.

The ice was broken. Letters poured in thicker than ever, and the other members, recognising always the same handwriting, wondered what there could be so much in common between a young man like McGuilp and one of Mr. Oldstone's years. Moreover, they noticed that the antiquary never vouchsafed to read these letters aloud, merely certain portions here and there, where it referred to themselves, and these were short enough, while they watched their aged member as he gloated over page after page of close writing with evident satisfaction. There seemed a certain want of confidence in this, which each secretly resented; but they said nothing, merely venting their spleen among themselves by alluding to our artist as "the old un's protégé."

Now, about a year previous, Mr. Oldstone had received some important news from his young friend in Rome. He had lately completed a life-size half-length portrait, in which he had made use of the study he had taken of our landlord's daughter. The head he had copied from this study, but he had added a figure, which made it more interesting as a picture. The work had been finished in Rome, and sent to England to be exhibited at the Royal Academy, then held at Somerset House. It had not only been accepted, but hung upon the line, besides receiving high eulogiums from the President, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who, on a private view day, had been observed holding forth before a knot of students and expatiating upon the merits of this *chef d'œuvre*.

One of the students, a friend of our artist, had written to him to congratulate him

on his success, at the same time enclosing him a slip from the *Athenæum*, being a critique in which his work was extolled to the skies, and alluded to as *the* picture of the season, and the painter as "a great genius who had taken the world by storm, and had already reached the temple of fame."

This excerpt our artist in his turn enclosed to his friend Oldstone, and wound up his letter by saying that the picture had already been sold for a considerable sum to Lord Landborough, a great patron of art, who possessed a magnificent gallery at his country seat, Feathernest, in Middleshire, filled with the choicest specimens of ancient and modern art, in which company our artist's picture, which he had chosen to designate "The Landlord's Daughter," was destined to find a place. In a postscript he referred to having just read an account of a visit from their Majesties King George III. and Queen Charlotte to Somerset House. They had taken their eldest son, George, Prince of Wales, with them to see the pictures. It is reported that the young prince was so enamoured of the portrait entitled "The Landlord's Daughter," that he cried when they took him away, and said that he wanted her for his nurse. His Majesty, ever indulgent towards his children, suggested that to discover the original of the portrait would not be impossible, in which case——. But here his royal spouse interposed, and with a vicious tap at her snuff-box declared she would never allow such a face in *her* household—not *she*. So the King of England caved in.

Now, our antiquary affected no secrecy with regard to this particular letter. There was no reason for it. On the contrary, it treated of a public event which, in all probability, the members of the club would read for themselves in the papers, so calling our host and hostess as well as their daughter together, he began thus in the presence of all:

"You remember Mr. McGuilp, Jack?"

"Ay, sir, sure enough," responded our host. "I hope he is very well."

"I believe so, Jack," said Oldstone. "Now listen to this, all of you."

Here he read the letter aloud, from beginning to end, adding, at its conclusion, on his own account, "There, I knew my boy had it in him. I saw it from the first, as soon as I set eyes on the portrait he painted of our Helen."

"Never blush, girl!" ventured Mr. Parnassus, but a stern look from Mr. Oldstone checked further banter.

"Well, well, well!" muttered our landlord. "To think that *our* daughter should have her portrait exhibited at the Royal Academy. That the Royal family should see it, and, moreover, that it should have been bought by a peer of the realm, and paid for money down. Why! it passes belief. Don't it Molly?" Our hostess thus appealed to by her spouse, admitted that it *did* seem strange, and suggested that perhaps all that got into the papers might not be true. The suggestion was instantly howled down. Cries of "Yes, yes, every word of it," from Mr. Crucible. "Especially that part where the Queen wouldn't have such a face about her at any price," chimed in Professor Cyanite.

"Just like the old cat, jealous of her husband," added Mr. Blackdeed.

"Exactly so," agreed Dr. Bleedem.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, a truce to this," now interrupted Mr. Oldstone. "I propose that we meet together this evening at eight o'clock, over a steaming bowl of rum punch, such as our good host here understands so well how to brew, and that we drink to the health of our artist friend, with a three times three." This proposition was unanimously applauded, and subsequently carried out. We much fear that on this occasion our worthy chairman was again carried away rather too much by his—emotion.

The next morning our antiquary came down late for breakfast, rather muddled in the upper regions, with, moreover, several sharp twinges of gout, which reminded him that he was not so young as he used to be. His coffee had got cold, and he had been left to finish his breakfast alone, all the other members having been drawn away to their several avocations.

"Do you want anything, sir?" asked Helen, appearing at the door.

"Well, yes, my girl," answered Oldstone. "I want you to sit down here, and keep me company."

"I can't stay for long, sir," replied Helen. "Mother is sure to be calling me."

"No matter. Wait till she calls. Now, Helen, tell me, what do you think of that letter I read out to you yesterday—eh?"

For answer Helen rubbed her hands together for joy, and flushed all over her face. Then clasping her hands upon her breast, and looking upwards, muttered as if unconscious of anyone's presence, "I *knew*, I knew he loved me!"

"Yes, I am afraid he does, you dangerous young puss," observed Oldstone. "Too much so for his peace of mind, poor boy!"

"Perhaps, but not more than *I* love *him*. *That* were impossible."

"And you're not afraid of confessing as much to *me*, you brazen hussy?" demanded the old man, playfully chucking her under the chin.

"To *you*, you know I am not," replied the girl. "To you, sir, I feel I could, nay, I *must*, tell everything, and oh! it *is* such a comfort to have a real true friend from whom one need hide nothing!"

"Well, well, my dear," said Oldstone, "I am sure I have always wished to be your true friend, but whether I am doing right in encouraging you in a passion which cannot end wisely——"

"It need never end," interrupted Helen. "I will love him eternally, even if he should cease to love *me*."

"You would!" exclaimed the antiquary with surprise, looking at her curiously.

"Yes, sir, I would. What of that?"

"But if he could not marry you," rejoined her counsellor.

"Didn't I tell you that the thought of marriage never entered my head," persisted the girl.

"You did, my child, but it won't do in this world," and the old man shook his head.

"What! can I not love the man of my choice—especially if I know that he loves me? Who will prevent me loving him, thinking of him, praying for him, *dying* for him, if need be? Who shall tear his image from my heart, through whatever trials I may have to pass for *his* sake?"

"Helen, you are a noble girl?" cried our antiquary with enthusiasm. I have no more arguments to use. I wish there were a few more like you in the world. But hark ye, my child, there are others who have felt like yourself for a time—but how long has it lasted?

"The greater part of your sex, I fear, find it easy to overthrow an old love for a new one. Then follow other new ones in succession, till they end perhaps in

marrying someone they don't love, and can't love; all for wealth, title, or position."

"You surely don't think *I* could be so base, Mr. Oldstone," cried the girl, recoiling in horror.

"No, my dear. That is the very last thing I should believe of *you*," replied her friend.

"I am glad of that," said the girl.

"Helen!" cried the voice of Dame Hearty, outside; "Where are you?" "Here, mother," answered her daughter. "I was only having a word with Mr. Oldstone," and she hurried away, leaving the antiquary alone with his writing materials.

The breakfast having been cleared away, Oldstone drew his chair up to the table and proceeded to pen a reply to his young protégé. When the letter was concluded, our antiquary reperused it, carefully dotting each *i* and crossing each *t*, until he found no more to correct.

If our reader is not more scrupulous than we are ourselves, he will join us, in imagination, in an act not generally considered respectable—viz., that of playing the spy on the old man, by peering over his shoulder, and reading what he has written, before he folds it up, seals it, and sends it to the post.

Letter from Mr. Oldstone to Mr. Vandyke McGuilp.

"MY DEAR BOY,

"I cannot express to you the joy and pride I felt in perusing your last letter, and I hasten to offer you my best congratulations, and I think I may add those of the rest of our members, on having achieved what I must needs call such unprecedented success. I read your letter, together with the critique from the *Athenæum* enclosed, aloud, before the whole club, our worthy host and his family being also present. You should have seen the blush that suffused our dear Helen's cheek at the mention of the success of her portrait. It was as if she had said, 'Lo, he has become great, and all through *me*. *My* face it was that inspired him to achieve such fame. *My* prayers and good wishes that buoyed him up with energy to thus distinguish himself!' Some such thoughts must have passed through her mind, if I am any reader of faces—and I think I am.

"One of the younger members seemed disposed to offer some banter, but I frowned him down. I never will sanction any unseemly levity towards that girl, or allow her to be treated as if she were a mere hackneyed barmaid, used to the coarse jokes of any Tom, Dick or Harry. To me she is something very precious, and I love her as my own child. Poor little one! She always comes to me for sympathy in her troubles. Not even to her own parents will she confide everything—much less to the other members. If you were to see the change that has come over her of late! She has lost all that raw awkwardness so common to growing girls, and has now developed into mature womanhood.

"Since your departure, young man, I could not but pity the poor child with her sunken cheek, her downcast eyes, and listless manner. I knew she had a secret that weighed upon her, and I guessed what it was. I came forward to offer her my friendship and advice, and encouraged her to open her heart to me. The poor child's gratitude was so touching! There *must* be an outburst when the heart is full, and she could confide in no one else.

"Ever since she found she had a true friend to lean on, I have noticed a marked change in the girl. The rose returned to her cheek, the light to her eye, an expression came into her face that I never observed before—nay, a variety of expressions which seem to chase each other with marvellous rapidity over a countenance lovely, intelligent, and pure.

"Dr. Bleedem, poor man! seeing her looking mopish, prescribed her a course of steel medicine. She declares that he only gave her one dose, which he made her take in his presence. The rest of the medicine he left her to take by herself. Now the girl insists positively that, not liking the medicine, she threw it all away.

"Dr. Bleedem, of course, is under the impression that she took it all, and naturally attributes her sudden change of health for the better to his drugs. I am of opinion that it was medicine of another sort that brought back the roses to her cheek. She is now eighteen, and by our peasantry would be considered of a marriageable age; but oh! I *do* begrudge her to any of these country bumpkins, who come in for their mug of ale and their chaff. There is no one for miles round anything like good enough for her. Of one thing, however, I feel quite certain, and that is, that she would never allow herself to be coaxed, cajoled, or threatened into marrying any man whom she did not love, however advantageous the match might appear in the eyes of the world. No, the girl has character, and would never give her hand where she had not set her affections. She would far sooner not marry at all. Whoever should win her affections will be

a lucky man, for he will get a treasure in such a wife.

"Excuse the wanderings of an old dotard, my friend, but when I once get upon this topic, I am inexhaustible; and as for local news, there simply is none. When last I spoke to Helen about writing to you, she desired me to send her duty to you. Pretty soul! *duty* indeed. Now, my dear boy, I must really draw this epistle to a close. Trusting that you are enjoying the best of health and spirits, and wishing you continued and ever increasing success in your art.

"I remain,
"Your doting but affectionate old friend,
"OBADIAH OLDSTONE."

We have said that Mr. Oldstone was prompt in answering the letters of his protégé. Neither was our artist, as a rule, tardy in answering those of his aged friend. Seldom more than a month passed between a letter and its answer, on either side. Yet to this letter no reply came. Month followed month, and no tidings arrived of our artist. Such delay was most unusual, and Mr. Oldstone now began to be seriously alarmed. What had happened to the boy? Was he ill? He knew by experience that the summer months in Rome were extremely unhealthy, on account of the malaria. Was he laid up with Roman fever? Had he met with an accident? Or was there anything in the tone of his letter that had given offence? He tried to recollect. No, he thought not; in fact, he did not know what to think. The gloomiest fancies rushed across his mind as he paced the breakfast room alone.

Presently his eye caught the portrait of Helen, that McGuilp had presented to the club, and which he, Oldstone, had with his own hands hung up over the mantel. "Ah! my pretty puss," said he, addressing the painted canvas smiling down at him, "I dare not infect you with my fears. I don't want to make *you* unhappy."

Just then the door gaped ajar, and the original of the portrait appeared at the opening. As the antiquary had not yet noticed her, his eyes being still fixed on the portrait, Helen stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. Then, walking straight up to Oldstone, she said, "Please sir, has anything happened?"

"Happened, my dear! What should happen in this dead-and-alive place? Nothing ever happens here."

"Ah! sir," rejoined Helen, "you but evade my question. You know what I would

ask."

"My dear, how should I?" demanded her friend and counsellor, with most provoking *sang froid*.

A gesture of impatience escaped the girl. Then fixing her eyes steadily on those of the antiquary, as if to read his inmost soul, she said with some approach to severity in her tone, "Mr. Oldstone, you are keeping something from me. Something has happened to Mr. McGuilp, and you won't tell me what it is."

"On my honour, my sweet child," replied her friend, "I know no more than you do yourself. I wish I did. Here have I been waiting now about six months for a reply to my letter, when he used often to write by return of post. I can't make head or tail of it."

"Then something *is* wrong, you may depend upon it," cried the girl. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! Surely he is laid up with some dreadful illness—away from me, and in a strange country, with no one to attend upon him. Oh, merciful Heaven! help him! Oh, help him. Whatever it is, let me know the worst!"

"I don't want to frighten you, my pet," broke in Oldstone; "but I own I am much perplexed myself. Perhaps he never received the letter. Sometimes letters get lost. At any rate, we'll hope for the best."

"Oh, sir, sir!" cried the girl in agony, "do you think that likely?"

"Certainly, my dear. Why not? All sorts of things happen to prevent letters arriving—especially those sent abroad. Vessels go down at sea; the mail may be detained by an accident. Who can tell? Come, cheer up, girl; there is no good in brooding. If I don't hear from him in another week I'll write again."

"Why not write at once, sir?"

"Not a bad idea, Helen; so I will."

At this juncture voices and footsteps were heard outside. The other members of the club had just returned in time for their mid-day meal. So the letter was postponed.

Helen ran to lay the cloth, and the repast was served. The meal being over, pipes were lit, and some desultory conversation ensued, interspersed with wonderments about our artist's long silence and suggestions as to the reason of it.

The weather still being fine, the members suggested a stroll, so off they went together, Mr. Oldstone being also of the party. Thus, what with one interruption and what with another, the writing of the letter was put off for that day.



CHAPTER XI.

Next morning, in the middle of breakfast, a knock was heard at the door, and our landlord let himself in with the newspaper in his hand and an expression like a sphinx on his face. He closed the door quietly after him, and walking up to Mr. Oldstone presented him with the paper, at the same time silently pointing out to him a paragraph that he had already marked with his thumb-nail. The door was no sooner closed than it silently re-opened, apparently by itself, and remained some three or four inches ajar. Few noticed this, or would have given it a thought if they had. Their attention was rivetted on Mr. Oldstone, as he settled his spectacles on his nose preparatory to reading out some tit-bit of news.

"Eh! What!" exclaimed the antiquary, trembling, and turning pale with extreme emotion. "Just listen to this, gentlemen, all of you:—

"CAPTURED BY THE BRIGANDS.

"The well-known artist, Mr. Vandyke McGuilp, whose picture of "The Landlord's Daughter" caused such a *furor* last exhibition at the Royal Academy, whilst taking a trip in the Sabine Mountains, in the vicinity of Rome, to recuperate his health, was suddenly surrounded by a band of brigands, about twelve in number, who sprang upon him from an ambush and compelled him to surrender. The painter was alone and unarmed, besides being hampered by the materials of his art. All resistance would have been worse than useless, so, finding himself perfectly defenceless, he had no choice but to "stand and deliver." They seized his gold watch and other trinkets, as well as all the coin that he carried about him. Not satisfied with this, they forced him to tramp with them high up in the fastnesses of the mountains, where he still remains in daily and hourly peril of his life. The brigand chief has demanded an exorbitant ransom, and threatens that if it does not arrive within five days they will cut off his ears and send them to his friends in a letter. Any attempt at rescue, they declare, will at once seal the fate of their captive. His position is one to cause the greatest anxiety to his friends, as the barbarity of these desperadoes is well known."

Our antiquary had proceeded thus far when all present were startled by a smothered shriek, which was followed by a dull thud, as from a heavy fall. All rushed to the door, and flung it open. Helen had fainted.

Need we relate with what agility Dr. Bleedem leapt to the fore; how carefully he raised the slim form in his arms, cut her stay lace, and applied restoratives; then, finally, with the assistance of our host, carried his patient upstairs, where he deposited her on her own little bed, administering in every way to her comfort—this we will leave to the imagination of the reader—whilst, in the breakfast-room below, the various members talked to each other in subdued tones, and Mr. Oldstone looked thoughtful.

"Humph! I think I can see through the spoke of *that* wheel," muttered Mr. Hardcase to his neighbour.

"Yes, a dreadful blow though, poor girl!" sighed Mr. Parnassus.

"Quite dramatic in its effect," remarked Mr. Blackdeed.

A snort came from Mr. Oldstone, who had turned his back on the group and begun reperusing the newspaper that he had thrust into his capacious pocket, when Dr. Bleedem re-entered the room.

"Well, doctor," inquired Professor Cyanite, "and what of your patient?"

"Recovered now, of course, but dreadfully shaken," replied our medico. "The nervous system has sustained a terrible shock. Luckily, she has suffered no injuries from her fall."

"Poor young thing!" observed Mr. Crucible, compassionately. "Well, who can wonder at it?"

During these remarks, to which Mr. Oldstone paid no attention whatever, being absorbed in the reperusal of his newspaper, he was suddenly observed to flush as with pleasure. His brow cleared, his eye sparkled. Then, suddenly rising from his chair, he crumpled up his paper, thrust it again into his pocket, rubbed his hands with satisfaction, then with a relieved expression in his face he slowly left the room without a word.

"Wonder what's come over Oldstone!" muttered one of them. "He seems quite himself again."

No sooner was our antiquary outside the door than he beckoned the landlord aside, who was still looking grave, and asked him how he had left his daughter.

"Dreadful cut up like, sir, 'bout somethin' or other," replied that worthy, "but Dr. Bleedem says as how we ain't got no call to be afeared, and that when she has finished the cordial she'll come round agin as right as a trivet."

"Now look here, Jack," began our antiquary, rubbing his hands together cheerily, and with difficulty repressing his delight. "What'll you bet that in five minutes time I don't bring her round again, cordial or no cordial?"

"Do you think you could, sir?" asked our host, somewhat incredulously, yet becoming infected, in spite of himself, by Mr. Oldstone's assurance and good humour.

"I do, mine host, most certainly I do," replied the antiquary.

"Can I see the patient?"

"Willingly, sir," rejoined the landlord. "There is her room," and pointed to the door.

"Now, Jack, you shall see which is the best doctor, Bleedem or I. If in five minutes I don't lead her out by the hand, smiling and in her right mind, my name's not Obadiah Oldstone."

Here, he opened Helen's chamber door, and for the space of five minutes was closeted with her, leaving our host completely bewildered. The girl started at seeing her friend and adviser enter her chamber, and looked at him inquiringly. "Helen, my pet," he began, "I am the bearer of good news—news that will do you more good than any cordial Dr. Bleedem can give you."

The girl looked hopeful, seeing her counsellor's cheerful manner, though her eyes were still red and swollen with weeping. "Tell me, tell me!" she cried in agony.

"Patience, patience," replied the antiquary, in the most provoking manner; "all in due time. Well, my dear," he continued, "all that I read out in the paper this morning, and which you unfortunately overheard (Oh! you wicked puss, for playing the eavesdropper); well, child, all that happened a fortnight ago. Since then there is later news. The boy has been rescued by a band of carabineers who have long been on the track of the brigands, who were taken completely by

surprise. A skirmish took place, and the brigands were exterminated to a man; a few only of the carabineers being wounded. Your friend, Mr. Vandyke McGuilp, was at once set at liberty, and he is now enjoying the best of health and spirits. So cheer up, girl."

"Oh! sir," cried Helen, half laughing and half crying, "you are not trying to comfort me by——."

"By a false report," broke in Oldstone. "Certainly not, child. Here, read for yourself. Can't you believe me?"

Helen took up the paper with trembling hands, and ran her eyes eagerly over the column. Then with a sweet smile and sign of relief she sank back on her cushions, crying, "Thank God." She then burst out again into a fresh fit of weeping, from sheer weakness, which, however, soon changed into a laugh. Then rousing herself, she leapt from her bed, bathed her face with cold water, and having dried it, she seized the hand of her aged friend and counsellor and kissed it, saying, "God bless you, sir. You were ever my good angel."

"Then follow me downstairs, and look as beaming as you can. Your parents will wonder at the change, but I shall say nothing." Seizing her hand, Oldstone led her down the flight of steps, at the foot of which stood her father, watch in hand.

"There, Jack," said the antiquary in triumph, "What did I say? Have I been successful? Look at her, and tell me if I am a good doctor or no."

Our host scanned his daughter's now happy features, then turning to Mr. Oldstone, he said, "Well, sir, its just wonderful! It's like witchcraft a'most. I don't know what you have been doing to her, sir, but I never see such a change in my life."

Here Dame Hearty made her appearance, caressed her daughter, and began to ask questions.

"Now, no questions, Dame Hearty, from either you or your husband," broke in Oldstone. "That's our secret. You may, if you like, set it down to Dr. Bleedem's cordial."

"Well, we won't bother her, if as how you don't wish it, sir," answered her father. Helen then followed her mother into the kitchen, and was soon slaving away harder than she had ever done before in her life.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Oldstone, cheerily, addressing his fellow-members as they looked enquiringly at him on his return, "I suppose you want to know the reason of the change in my countenance since the morning. Well, take this paper and read for yourselves. You will see where I have marked it." Here he handed the paper to Mr. Hardcase, who, taking it from him, proceeded to read the account of our artist's fortunate rescue from the brigands by the carabineers, which we need not repeat.

"Ah!" observed the lawyer, at the conclusion, "this accounts for everything. Now, Oldstone, if you had read this article first, and the other afterwards, we should have been spared a scene."

Oldstone answered with something like a snort, "Bah! who could tell that the girl was eavesdropping?" Then noticing the quizzical expression on the faces of some of the members, and guessing that they were about to make Helen's little love episode a subject for discussion or banter, he raised his hand as if in prohibition, being determined to nip it in the bud, and bringing it down with a bang on the table, he began, "Gentlemen, to change the conversation, I propose that we celebrate our young friend McGuilp's miraculous escape from his captors by assembling this evening round a merry bowl of punch—eh, doctor?—and drinking his health with a three times three."

"Take care, Oldstone!" remonstrated Dr. Bleedem; but the rest of the members applauded the proposition of the chairman, and prevailed. In fact, a merry evening was spent, when our artist's health was drunk, as proposed, as well as that of all his family and belongings. Our host was then called in, and had to drain a glass to the health and prosperity of our artist. Dame Hearty was next called in, and had to do the same. One of the members voted for Helen also drinking the toast.

Before Oldstone could offer any opposition, our landlord called out, "Now, then, Helen, my girl, come and drink to the health and prosperity of Mr. McGuilp, your portrait painter, with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah!—d'ye hear? Come, now, you can't get out of it."

The girl would willingly have hidden herself, and had literally to be dragged in by her father, blushing and timid. Loud cheers greeted the girl's appearance, and a glass was filled for her from the punch-bowl by Mr. Oldstone himself with the silver ladle, at the bottom of which a golden guinea had been inlaid.

"All right, my girl," said Mr. Oldstone, "toss it off. No harm in just one glass.

Now, then, all—to the health of our absent artist friend, Mr. Vandyke McGuilp, and all his belongings—also to his speedy return—with a hip, hip, hip, hurrah!"

With a charming modesty and grace, like that of a high-born lady, did this simple country girl join in the toast proposed; then, putting down her glass on the table, she curtsied elegantly to the company, and wishing them all good-night retired.

Loud applause followed this flying visit of Helen to their orgie, and they would have recalled her; but a glance from Mr. Oldstone kept them in check. At midnight the party broke up, and each returned to his bed comfortable, without having indulged to excess, and even Mr. Oldstone walked bravely off to his bed unassisted.



CHAPTER XII.

A week had passed since our last chapter. Our antiquary, finding himself once more alone, had brought out his writing materials, determined no longer to put off his much-delayed letter to his friend, when a smart tap at the door, and immediately afterwards the entry of our host's pretty daughter, caused him to look up. She appeared more radiant than ever, and held up a bulky epistle with a foreign post mark. Full well she knew the handwriting. It was addressed to Mr. Oldstone, as usual, so she placed it in his hands.

"At last!" exclaimed the antiquary. "Now we shall see for ourselves. Sit down, my girl, sit down."

The invitation had been hardly given when the daughter of our host had already seated herself, and leaning her elbow on the table and her head in her hand, looked all attention.

Oldstone broke the seal, put on his spectacles, and thus began:—

Letter from Mr. Vandyke McGuilp to Mr. Oldstone.

"Rome, Oct. —, 17—.

"MY ESTEEMED FRIEND,

"I offer you my most humble apologies for my delay in answering your interesting and most welcome letter, which, in fact, I have only just received. You will see by what follows that there were some extenuating circumstances, which may go far towards exculpating my apparent neglect. Your letter arrived at the 'Café Greco,' where I usually have my letters directed, the day after my departure from Rome. They could not forward it, not knowing my whereabouts, so I did not get it until after my return.

"I must now go back some months to explain to you how, from over anxiety about finishing a picture, I had put off my trip for the summer so late as to be about the last man left in Rome; for all those who can abandon the Eternal City before the great heat comes on. At the time I speak of I actually believe there

were more statues in Rome than living men. The models even had all returned to their respective villages, and the steps of the Spanish Staircase in the Piazza di Spagna were deserted. You may remember, sir, how even in your day they congregated in groups on this broad and elegant flight of steps, waiting for custom, lighting up the scene with their bright costumes. Well, the heat grew at length unbearable, till, what with over-work and the climate, I found myself prostrate with Roman fever. I was necessarily confined to my bed, and it was with difficulty that I could find a doctor. At last they sent me a Capuchin friar, who professed to have some knowledge of medical science—very limited, I should imagine, though perhaps enough for my purpose. He prescribed me medicine, and sent to attend upon me the cobbler's wife, who lives on the ground floor, and who makes my bed and sweeps out my room for me. The poor old woman has a sick husband, and looks far from healthy herself. She is yellow, almost toothless, with a strong beard, very far from clean—and oh! her breath! There, I will say no more. The poor old thing did her best, no doubt, and I don't want to be ungrateful. I couldn't help wishing, I remember, that instead of being laid up here I could have been laid up in England—somewhere in the country—say at the 'Headless Lady,' and had the pretty Helen to wait upon me. It would be worth while getting ill then."

"Stay," broke in Helen; "does he say that? Let me see. You are not joking with me, sir?"

"No, my dear," answered Oldstone, "I am not joking. You may see for yourself; but I don't know if I ought to read you all this nonsense. Won't it content you just to know that he is alive and well?"

Without heeding her friend and counsellor, Helen rubbed her hands together with glee, and laughed, saying, "Oh! I *do* wish he would come and be ill in our house—oh! no, I don't mean that, do I? I mean that he would come and live here altogether, without being ill, and that I could be with him always, all day long, and never leave him."

"Yes, my dear," replied Oldstone; "I know what you mean. You would like—there, never mind. The thing can't be, so what is the use of thinking about him?"

"Why not, if it makes me happy?" was the rejoinder.

"There, there, I can never argue with a woman," muttered Oldstone. "I've a good mind not to read you any more of his nonsense."

"Mr. Oldstone," cried Helen, "you know you couldn't be so cruel."

"Well, my dear," asked her friend, "what more do you want to know? I can't wade knee-deep through all this. There isn't time. Your mother will be calling you soon."

"Oh, yes, sir, please. Just a little more before mother calls. Then I'll go at once," pleaded Helen, coaxingly.

The antiquary was as wax in her hands. "Well, then, he goes on to say:"

"As soon as I was fairly recovered, I thought I would delay my holiday no longer, and accordingly took the diligence, only too glad to leave the infected city behind me, and to breathe a little fresh mountain air. What a complete change of climate I experienced high up in these mountain regions! And, oh! I cannot describe to you the extreme beauty and wildness of the scenery; the quaintness of some of these mountain villages, and the primitive state of their inhabitants! I had not been long in one of these out-of-the-way places when one morning I was tramping along in search of the picturesque, laden with my painting materials, when from behind some rocky crags some dozen brigands surrounded me.

"*'Faccia in terra'* (face on the ground), cried the brigand chief and the rest of the band in chorus, as they levelled their carbines at me.

"I was alone and unarmed, so had no choice but to do as I was commanded, so I prostrated myself, face to the ground. Several brigands came forward to search me, robbed me of my gold watch and all my loose cash. Then they opened my pocket-book, where, besides finding paper money, they came upon my passport. This they handed to their chief.

"*'So,'* said he, after perusing it; *'so it seems you are an Englishman. Good. The English are rich. You must put up with our company until your friends can disburse the sum of ten thousand pounds sterling.'*

"In vain I tried to explain to him that I was only a poor artist, who earned his living by the sweat of his brow. I saw I was not believed.

"*'But you have rich friends,'* he persisted. *'I know it by your face; so you don't fool me.'*

"He then made a sign for me to follow them, so I had to tramp higher and higher up into the mountains, till I was ready to drop, while these well trained mountaineers leapt from crag to crag with the agility of a chamois, till they reached a cave, where they halted."

"There, Helen, run along," said Mr. Oldstone, as he had got thus far. "There's your mother calling you."

Off rushed Helen to her mother, who was waiting for her at the door of the kitchen.

"Come, girl," cried Dame Hearty, "I can't think what you find to talk about with Mr. Oldstone every day. You are quite losing your head. Now, set to work, for we are terribly behind-hand."

The door once closed upon Helen, our antiquary read his friend's letter slowly through to the end. It gave an elaborate account of our artist's experience with the brigands, which we need not relate. Stay!—here was something at the end of the letter, marked "Private," that promised to be interesting. What could it be?

"(*Private.*)—I must now touch upon a subject which causes me the greatest anxiety. A report has reached me through an artist friend, who was staying on a visit to Lord Landborough, who, you will remember, bought my picture entitled 'The Landlord's Daughter.' Amongst other visitors at his country seat who were there at the time was one Lord Scampford, a young sprig of nobility, rich, accomplished, but of infamous character; a gamester, and a profligate of the first water, who had become so enamoured of my portrait of Helen, then hanging on the walls of the Academy, that in his cups he swore, by Gumdragon, that he would search the world over to find out the original, and that, willy-nilly, he would make her his paramour. Likewise, he would shoot any man dead who dared to stand in his way. Turning to my friend, he asked him if he knew the painter of the work: and upon his answering in the affirmative, he next asked him if he knew the model who had sat for the picture. This my friend was unable to tell him, as he was ignorant himself who it was. He then asked for my address, and being informed I lived in Rome, he at once set out for Italy, and, in fact, arrived here, and called upon me at my studio, but was denied admittance, as I was then laid up with the fever. After I had recovered, I heard that he had been the round of all the studios, and that of every artist he had been asking if, perchance, they could tell him where I had got my model from. Not one of them knew. Shortly after his arrival I heard that he had received a letter which necessitated his immediate return to England.

"This letter, it seems, was from his valet, a big powerful man, who generally accompanied him as his bully, and who aids him in his nefarious schemes. This man he had left behind him in England, with orders to scour the country for miles round about London, and to inform himself at every wayside inn, if the original of the picture on the Academy walls lived there. For a long time his search was fruitless. At last chance came to his aid. On one of his visits to the Royal Academy, just to refresh his memory of the features in the picture, he overheard a broadbacked old farmer, just up from the country, say to his wife,

"'Why, dash my wig, Sally, if here ain't the face of dear little Helen Hearty, daughter of my old friend, Jack Hearty, as keeps the 'Headless Lady,' at the cross-roads.'

"Upon hearing this, the valet stepped forward. 'Do I understand you to say that you know the original of this portrait?' he asked.

"'Know her!' exclaimed the farmer, 'Ay, marry do I. Why she is my God-

daughter? I've danced her on my knee since she were a kid, bless her heart! And now I remember, I did hear as how one o' them paintin' fellers—limners, they call 'em, was a puttin' up at the 'Headless Lady,' and a paintin' 'er likeness. Well, now, I never!—eh Sally?'

"'Dear me!' remarked the valet, 'How *very* strange! Really, this is *most* interesting. Tell me, good man, what part of the country is this you speak of?'

"'What! the hostel of the 'Headless Lady'? Why, at the cross-roads-parish of Littleboro', near Muddleton, on Slush Slopshire.'

"'Ah, in that part, I see. Fine country they tell me, about there. Bracing air, good shooting—eh?' inquired the valet, as he opened his pocket-book and jotted down all the farmer told him.

"'Yes, sir, good air, good shooting, and as fine a bit of country, though I ses it, as shouldn't, seeing as how its my birthplace.'

"Here, the valet took out his watch, and exclaimed, 'God bless my soul! How time flies! Why, it's just upon one o'clock, and I had an appointment at twelve, on urgent business. Good-day, my friend. Good-day, Ma'am,' addressing himself to the farmer's wife, and off he goes.

"'A pleasant, affable gentleman,' remarked the countryman to the wife of his bosom.

"'Ah, just ain't un,' acquiesced his spouse.

"That very day the valet penned a note to his lord and master, who returned to England in a great hurry at the news. You may imagine, my friend, what anxiety I feel, knowing that villain to be at large, and ready at any time to swoop down like a vulture into your peaceful dovecot and carry on his work of destruction, whilst I, being so far away, am unable to strike a blow in her defence. Though, God knows, I would willingly lay down my life, rather than that dear child should come to any harm. I write at once, having only just heard the news. God grant I may be in time for my warning to be of some avail. For all I know, the villain may be there before this letter arrives. I tremble at the thought. He is sure to travel in his own private coach, accompanied by his bully, and, doubtless, both of them will be armed to the teeth. You had better warn Jack Hearty at once, in order that he may put his daughter out of harm's way, until he has taken his departure. His lordship will stick at nothing—even at drugging her, and carrying

her off insensible, and being armed, it will be dangerous work to oppose him. I would advise Jack Hearty, as soon as he can find an opportunity to extract the bullets from his horse pistols, for depend upon it he means mischief. This is all the advice I can give him. Do whatever you can to frustrate the plot of this villian, and write me the result. No time for more. With kind remembrances to all your friends, as well as to our worthy host and family,

"Your anxious friend,
"VANDYKE MCGUILP."

"Dear! dear! dear!" muttered Oldstone to himself. "This is terrible news indeed. I must seek Jack Hearty at once, and inform him." Then, thrusting the letter into his pocket, and with a troubled expression on his face, he left the room, and beckoning to the landlord, whom he found outside, he took him by the arm and walked with him some considerable distance down one of the cross-roads, and read to him the latter part of our artist's letter. The landlord looked grave and stern.

"Humph," he grunted at length, "and this is all through me allowin' my daughter's portrait to be exhibited at the Royal Academy. If I had only known!"

"Look here, Jack," said Oldstone. "This is a thing that no one could foresee. Let us now think of the remedy."

"What remedy?" asked Jack, gloomily. "Can I refuse to take a traveller in—a nobleman, too, with a handle to his name?"

"It is a desperate case, and we must be on the alert," observed Oldstone. "I would suggest that we take Dr. Bleedem into our confidence."

"Why?"

"Perhaps he may be able to administer to them both a sleeping draught on going to bed, and whilst they are both sound asleep, you can enter their rooms and extract the bullets from their pistols, so that if perchance they should attempt to use them against us, we shall have nothing to fear on that score."

"The very thing!" exclaimed our host. "Let us seek the doctor at once."

This was done. At first the man of medicine hummed and hawed, put on a look of importance, and talked of his reputation, etc., but at length allowed himself to

be over-ruled, seeing the extreme urgency of the case, and consented to give the landlord a little harmless sleeping dose, which he could mix with their wine or whatever they called for.

Dr. Bleedem now went inside, presumably to concoct the charm by which occult power the evil designs of their enemies were to be frustrated, leaving our host and the antiquary discoursing together outside in low tones. As these two individuals were gazing towards the horizon, a small cloud of dust was presently discernible.

"Seems to be coming this way," said our host, after a pause. "Wonder if——"

"Ah, just so," broke in Oldstone. "Shouldn't wonder if it *were* our expected guest. He won't make any unnecessary delay, I warrant."

"Sure enough it's a carriage and pair with a liveried coachman and footman," observed the landlord. "How they tear along! Oh, it's his lordship, without doubt. I must go and warn my daughter."

Our host was somewhat tardy in arriving at this decision, for a stately carriage emblazoned with an escutcheon with innumerable quarterings, and surmounted by a coronet, had now driven up to the door of the inn, and both Dame Hearty and Helen were on the doorstep to welcome the new arrivals.

A gorgeous footman descended to open the carriage door, and out stepped a young man of middle height, slim and somewhat graceful of figure, dressed in the very height of fashion. Behind him stepped a powerfully-built man, respectably dressed in black, with a plebeian and repulsive countenance.

Our landlord came forward and saluted both guests gravely.

"We want two bedrooms and a sitting-room, landlord, and should like to dine in an hour," said Lord Scampford; for it was none other. Then putting up his spy-glass, he gazed at Helen from head to foot in an impertinent manner, and the two men exchanged a look of intelligence. The coachman and footman likewise followed their lord's gaze, and smiled approvingly.

Our antiquary was making his observations in the background whilst Jack Hearty was busying himself with the luggage. As our host passed his daughter in the passage he found time to say, *sotto voce*, "Helen, my girl, shut yourself up in your room till I call you. I want to speak to you."

Now it was not often that her father spoke to her in so serious a tone, and these words, coupled with the impression she had already formed of Lord Scampford and his companion, which was not a favourable one, caused her to tremble and turn pale. She knew there was much in the world that she could not understand, and it seemed to be considered wise not to make enquiries. She asked no question therefore, but shut herself up within her room as desired. No sooner was the landlord able to break away from his new customers, than he ascended to his daughter's chamber and knocked at the door. Helen unlocked it, and her father entered.

"My daughter," he said, "I wish you to keep as much to yourself as possible during the stay of these gentlemen below. I have my reasons. I know more than you do, so do not ask why. Enough that it is my wish."

In the good old times, parents' commands were not disputed, but humbly and reverently obeyed. So Helen, with downcast eyes and hands crossed upon her breast, answered respectfully, "It is well, sir."

"If, by any chance, they should cross your path while you are engaged in your household duties," continued her father, "and should address you, let your answers be short, though civil. Remain not long in their presence, but speedily withdraw. Moreover, if they should be sitting over their wine and should invite you to drink, to pledge them in a toast, drink not. No, not even a *sip* to please them. My daughter, there is danger ahead, and I warn you beforehand. You are young and unversed in the wickedness of the world, but obey me to the letter and you are safe. Heed not their advances or their flattery, but shun them as a pest."

Having thus delivered himself, our worthy host turned on his heel and left the chamber.

"I understand nothing, sir, but I obey," answered Helen, dutifully.

That evening Dame Hearty herself served his lordship and the man whom he was pleased to represent as his friend. Many were the questions that were put to our hostess about her daughter, and many the subterfuges she had to resort to in order to prevent Helen from putting in an appearance. Whilst thus engaged in conversation with the landlady, Jack Hearty found it no difficult task to enter the sleeping room of his guests and to extract all the bullets from their pistols, without having recourse to Dr. Bleedem's potent charm. The evening passed over quietly, and there was no appearance of Helen.

A week now passed by, and neither Lord Scampford nor his man seemed to be able to make any headway. "Tell you what it is, Tuppings," said his lordship one day to his bully, deeming himself unheard, although every word fell distinctly on the ears of our host, "I am getting tired of these eternal subterfuges. It's enough to kill a man outright with *ennui*, to vegetate day after day in this wilderness; yet leave the place without her I *will* not."

"You may depend upon it, my lord," said the man in black, "that they knew of our coming beforehand, and have been forewarned."

"I wish I knew who it was," rejoined his lordship; "I'd be even with him. The only person interested in the matter would be Lord Dodgemore, who naturally would do all in his power to make me lose my wager. I laid him a thousand pounds that I would make her my mistress within a fortnight, and I don't intend to become the laughing-stock of my friends on my return."

"Then your lordship has not a moment to lose. Half the time has already slipped by, and we are no nearer than on the evening of our arrival," murmured the bully.

"That we are being hoaxed is as plain as a pike-staff," observed his lordship.

"On our first evening the girl was engaged serving the members of the club. The next day she was indisposed and confined to her room. After that she was on a visit to her aunt, who is ill, and what with one excuse and then another—oh! it's sickening. I came across the little jade unexpectedly the other day, and tried to detain her with a little pleasant chat. You should have seen the dignified air she put on, as with a 'by your leave, my lord, I am overpressed for time,' she curtesied and passed by. What has come to these simple seeming rustics of late I am at a loss to imagine."

"If your lordship should deign to follow my advice——"

"Well."

"I would suggest that we should take the bull by the horns and make short work of it."

"How?"

"Pick the lock of her bedroom door. Gag her and carry her out of bed downstairs, wrap a warm cloak around her, and lift her into the carriage, which must be waiting for us only a few paces off. Then, head for the nearest township, and so

on, to London. In case of opposition on the way, we have our pistols. But hush! I thought I heard footsteps."

"Tut! the walls are thick enough in this antique hostelry," said his lordship. "Never fear."

They little knew that there was a sliding panel high up over the bedstead his lordship occupied, which was covered by a bad picture of His Majesty George II. on horseback, and which could be reached by a secret staircase within the thickness of the wall.

"So that is their little game, is it?" muttered our host to himself, who had been eavesdropping. "All right, my men, all right."



CHAPTER XIII.

It was the midnight hour, and the sky dark as pitch. The wind howled dismally through the trees, and seemed to shake the very foundations of this ancient hostelry. All the inmates of the 'Headless Lady' had retired to rest; that is to say, all the members of the club. Our host above was stirring, and had not yet made up his mind to go to roost. In fact, he seemed disposed to make a night of it, and enjoy himself as much as circumstances would permit.

The wind dashed the sleet against the window panes, and the ground was getting fast covered with snow. But our host stirred the fire, put on a fresh log, and filled himself up a glass of his own home brewed ale. First he took a sip, then setting his glass down, he next walked leisurely into the room adjoining for his tobacco box, with the intention of filling his yard of clay. His back was no sooner turned than the bulky figure of a man, in his stockinged feet, tripped lightly across the hall, and, quick as thought, dexterously emptied a white powder into the glass our host had left standing, then as speedily vanished.

He had hardly disappeared, when our host, suspecting nothing, re-appeared upon the scene, and proceeded to fill his churchwarden with some of his strongest tobacco. He then lighted his pipe by the fire, and throwing himself into an easy chair, puffed away complacently for a time. He was apparently musing, when, as if suddenly recollecting that his glass was at his elbow, he raised it to his lips and drained it to the dregs; making a wry face, as if he had just tossed off a dose of physic. He was on the point of filling up again from the jug close at hand, when a yawn escaped him. He had grown unaccountably sleepy. This feeling he at first endeavored to combat by having recourse to his snuff box, but the effect of the pungent herb was only temporary, for soon his eyelids fell, as if weighed down with lead, and he was now snoring loud, and as utterly oblivious as a corpse.

"I've drugged the old boy," said the man in black to his master, with a chuckle. "It's all plain sailing now. We've only got to pick the lock of the lady's room, stuff a handkerchief in her mouth, and carry her downstairs. The carriage is in readiness outside. Quick! Let's up and be doing."

Upstairs tripped the ruffianly bully as lightly and noiselessly as a grasshopper,

followed closely by his aristocratic patron, and in a moment the two men stood before the chamber of the unconscious sleeper. It was locked, as they had anticipated; but with a deftness that argued much practice in this art, the bully soon succeeded in causing the lock to yield, and the door swung noiselessly back on its hinges. Aided by the light of a taper, which his lordship carried, the ruffian was enabled to make straight for the bed, and seizing the fair sleeper roughly in his powerful arms, was in the act of rushing downstairs with her when a shriek, so loud and piercing that it bid fair to waken the dead, resounded through the walls of this ancient hostel, startling from their sleep all its inmates, save our host, who was still as fast in the arms of Morpheus as when we left him.

"Damnation!" cried the bully, between his teeth, as he thrust a handkerchief into his victim's mouth, and hurried with her towards the hall door, whilst Lord Scampford followed close at his heels, a horse pistol in either hand.

The door of the inn was soon unbolted, and before any of the household could hurry to the spot, the pair of scoundrels were already outside in the bleak night air, and hailing his lordship's carriage, which now drew up. The liveried footman had opened the door of the carriage, and in another moment it would have closed securely upon these two arrant scoundrels and their helpless victim, while a crack of the coachman's whip would have carried them miles out of reach of all human opposition, had not at this juncture something quite unforeseen occurred.

From out the darkness a cloaked figure, with broad sombrero drawn down tightly over his eyes, suddenly emerged, and with a well-directed blow from a leaden-headed cane upon the bare head of the man in black, felled the gigantic bully, who measured his full length upon the ground covered with snow, still clasping in his arms the terrified and trembling form of our heroine, whose shrieks of "murder" and cries for help at length brought all the members of the club to the spot.

The Duel

Before they arrived, however, the mysterious stranger, who had so opportunely come to the rescue, had succeeded in releasing Helen from the clasp of the unconscious ruffian, and carried her inside, but not before Lord Scampford had discharged his brace of horse pistols at him—we need not say without any effect, save that of startling the horses so terribly that they became perfectly unmanageable, and bolted with the carriage, before the footman had time to spring to the box. His lordship, finding his pistols useless, flung them from him, and drawing his rapier, made for the stranger, who likewise drew *his* sword, and

a skirmish ensued.

At this moment all the inmates of "The Headless Lady" hurried downstairs, half dressed, with lighted candles, and armed with what weapons of offence they could first lay their hands upon. One carried a torch, by the light of which the spectators could clearly note the position of affairs. Lord Scampford and the Unknown were still in the thick of the fray, and appeared well matched, when suddenly an opening presented itself, and the sword of the Unknown pierced the heart of his lordship, who fell back lifeless on the snow.

The greatest confusion reigned. Questions were asked on all hands, and no one seemed to be wiser than his neighbour, yet the main facts of the case were apparent to all. Helen had retreated hurriedly to her chamber, and locked herself in afresh. Our host seemed not yet sufficiently conscious to be able to take in the situation. It was not till the small hours of the morning that each returned to his bed. On looking round for the stranger he had vanished.



Now, it will readily be imagined that at the breakfast table next morning, at which our members assembled rather late, little else was discussed save the adventures of the previous night.

"The scoundrels!" thundered out Mr. Oldstone, with an indignant snort.

"The villains!" chimed in Professor Cyanite and Mr. Crucible together.

"The world is well rid of such a pair of jail birds," said Mr. Hardcase; "only it is a pity that they were allowed to cheat the gallows."

"Poor Helen!" sighed Parnassus; "I think there is matter for an epic poem in her misadventure."

"You are right," agreed Mr. Blackdeed. "The incident was pre-eminently dramatic; just suited to the stage, and would certainly bring down the house. I intend to dramatise it at my earliest convenience."

"And how is our patient, Dame Hearty?" enquired Dr. Bleedem of our hostess, who was waiting upon the members at table this morning instead of her daughter.

"Still very feverish, doctor," was the reply. "The poor child has caught a dreadful cold from being turned out of her warm bed and carried into the cold night air and the snow by those ruffians, and she with scarce a stitch of clothing on."

"Poor dear!" cried Dr. Bleedem, compassionately. "I'll come and see how she is getting on after breakfast."

"Why, doctor," observed Mr. Crucible, "you've got your work pretty well cut out for you. There's his lordship—well, you can dissect him; and his man, too, for the matter of that. Then there's the coachman, who was brought back here in his lordship's carriage early this morning, with his shoulder-blade broken; then the horses, with their knees broken: and now it's our sweet Helen——"

"Say, doctor," broke in Professor Cyanite, "was that rascally bully sufficiently conscious before his death to give an account of himself?"

"Oh, yes, he was conscious, though he hadn't time to say much. I saw from the first that the case was fatal. He admitted that he had been a d——d scoundrel, but added that his lordship was every whit as bad—and worse. He alleged that had he taken a situation as servant under an honest man, instead of entering the service of an unprincipled rake and debauchee like Lord Scampford, that he himself might have become an honest man. He showed some contrition for the part he had played last night, and begged me to ask the lady's forgiveness for the same, as well as to pray for his soul. Then his mind seemed to wander, and he called out: 'There's his lordship! I see him enveloped in a sheet of flame, with fire issuing from his eyes and mouth, and from the tips of his fingers. He is beckoning to me! He is calling me down to Hell! How horrible the forms that hover round me. Mercy! mercy! Oh! my God,' Here he uttered a despairing groan, and spoke no more."

"Ha! Quite dramatic again," remarked the tragedian, who had no thought but what had reference to the stage; "the repentant sinner on his death-bed—excellent! I will take a note of that, and introduce it into my next play."

"Then there is the rescuer; you forget him," observed the poet. "The mysterious stranger, with cloak and slouched hat, appearing on the spot in the very nick of time to succour Beauty in distress."

"True, true," assented the tragedian; "I had nigh forgot. If this episode wouldn't bring down the house I don't know what would."

"I wonder who he was," observed Mr. Oldstone. "His sudden appearance was most remarkable; his disappearance no less so."

In the middle of this discussion, the door opened, and our host entered with a letter, which he handed to the antiquary, who mechanically put it in his pocket as of no immediate importance, without even looking at the handwriting, while he joined in the merry banter of the other members, who, as soon as our landlord made his appearance fixed upon him at once as the butt of their satire.

"Hullo, Jack!" cried one, "got over your little nap at last, eh?"

"That last glass of your home-brewed ale, by way of a night cap was most effectual," jeered another.

Our host, however, did not view the matter by any means in the light of a joke, and answered savagely, "Ah! the dastardly cowards! They *did* me at last. Can't make out how they found time to do it. Such a trick was never played me before, and I'll take jolly good care they don't catch me again."

"Well, that's not likely under the circumstances, is it, Jack?" replied Mr. Hardcase.

"Just like these lawyer fellows," observed Professor Cyanite, "they are always tripping one up."

"Nor yet anyone else," persisted the landlord. Then added, "To think that *my* daughter who has been brought up from a kid under my very eyes, and never seen no one save her parents and you gentlemen of the club, who have always treated her with courtesy as though she were a high born lady—she, what's never heard a word in her life as she didn't oughter have heard—what never knowed nothink of the ways of this wicked world—that *she*, poor child, should be subjected to outrage from two ruffianly bullies—one o' them a peer of the realm, forsooth, and all on account of her picter being exhibited at that d——d Royal Academy!" He concluded with a thump of his fist on the breakfast table that set all the cups and saucers rattling, and felt better afterwards.

"Yes, it was a narrow shave. Wasn't it, Jack?" remarked Parnassus. "If it hadn't been for that stranger——"

"Ah! I'd like to find out who *he* was. *That* I would. Can any of you gentlemen guess?" demanded our host.

"Not I."

"Nor I," replied several voices at once.

"Why on earth don't he show himself?" asked Jack. "Well, he's a trump, whoever he is, say I."

The company now broke up, and the members of the club began to set about their several avocations. Dr. Bleedem went upstairs to visit his fair patient, and Mr. Oldstone found himself once more alone. He paced the room slowly, with his hands clasped behind his back and his chin upon his breast, as if lost in a reverie. Then suddenly blurted out, with a snort, "The d——d rascals! The double-dyed sons of Belial! To dare to carry off *my* Helen! That sweet child that I love as if she were my own flesh and blood. And how nearly they succeeded!" Here his eyes filled with tears, and thrusting his hand into his large pocket in search of his handkerchief, his fingers clutched something crisp, and he recollected the letter that Jack Hearty had put into his hand at breakfast. "Some shoemaker's bill, I suppose," he muttered, as he mopped his eyes with his handkerchief. "Hullo!" he exclaimed, glancing at the handwriting. "What! am I dreaming? Isn't this the writing of my young friend Vandyke McGuilp? But how? I am only just in possession of his letter from Rome, and this letter bears no postmark, being brought here by some casual messenger. Then he must be *here*! Don't understand it at all." Here he broke the seal and read as follows:

"Letter from Mr. Vandyke McGuilp to Mr. Oldstone"

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I am nearer to you than you imagine. I send these lines by a boy from a neighbouring village, where I slept last night, but which I leave this morning, without being able to call upon you, as I have important family business in the adjacent county of —— which I cannot afford to neglect. I had no sooner sent off to you my last letter, dated from Rome, when I received orders to return post haste to England at all costs, as my uncle had been taken suddenly ill, and now lies on his death-bed. He is not expected to last long, and I must be in the house when he dies, and remain till the funeral is over.

"I daren't risk seeing you even for a moment, but I *had* to be very near you last night, though you knew me not. I had heard from the gossip of the village that a grand carriage and pair with liveried coachman and footman were putting up at

'The Headless Lady,' and I guessed the worst and prepared myself accordingly to frustrate the diabolical plans of those villains. If I were to be hanged to-morrow for it, I should die happy in the consciousness of having rescued innocence from the clutches of vice.

"Immediately after the fray I reported myself to the authorities, who will by this time have sent over a constable to the hostel to interview his lordship's coachman and footman. For the present I am free, but I am bound to appear when called for at the next assizes. Matters are apt to go hard with a commoner like myself when the slain man happens to be a person of title; but I have hopes, as both the serving men are bound to give evidence that my act was to protect innocence; also that Lord Scampford first drew his sword upon me, having previously attempted to shoot me. No more for the present. With kind remembrances to all,—I remain,

"Your very faithful friend,
"VANDYKE MCGUILP."

Our antiquary had hardly finished reading the letter, and thrust it into his pocket, when Dr. Bleedem re-entered the room with a very serious expression on his face.

"Well, doctor," said Mr. Oldstone cheerily, not noticing his countenance, "What news?"

"Bad, bad, very bad indeed," replied the leech gravely. "She is in a high fever and delirious. Quite off her head. If I ever get her through this——"

"Good heavens! doctor," ejaculated Oldstone, "you don't mean to say that there is any actual danger of her life?"

"Very considerable danger, I am afraid," responded the physician. "She will require the most careful nursing, such as I am afraid she is not likely to get even from her own mother."

"Doctor, you frighten me," cried Oldstone. "Surely someone can be found to attend upon her to relieve her mother."

"They are a rough lot about here, and not always dependable," answered Bleedem. "It must be someone who will remain with her all night long without going to sleep. If she ever *should* get over it——"

"Nonsense! doctor. She *must* get over it, if *I* myself have to sit up to attend upon her."

"Well, well, we must see how we can manage; but it is a very bad case, for besides the chill she caught, which was of itself enough, there was, in addition, the mental shock to the nervous system. She is so delicately organised."

"Poor dear! poor dear!" whimpered Oldstone. "If *she* dies under your treatment, doctor, I shall never——"

"Under *my* treatment!" exclaimed Dr. Bleedem, with vehemence. "God bless the man! She'd die all the sooner under anyone else's. Do you think I shan't do my best to bring her round—if it were only for my reputation. If *I* fail, no man in the whole wide world will be able to save her."

Our antiquary then, by way of changing the conversation, fearing he had somewhat nettled the physician, inquired, "By the way, doctor, did she discourse much during her delirium?"

"Lord, yes; a lot of rubbish, of course," replied the leech. "Imagined she was undergoing again the adventure of last night. Thought Lord Scampford was after her with his bully. Stretched out her arms for succour towards an imaginary angel, whom she said had been sent down from heaven to protect her; ever and anon confounding him with Mr. McGuilp."

Here the man of medicine indulged in the ghost of a smile.

"Did she indeed, doctor? Well, this is most interesting. Now, while you have a moment of leisure, oblige me by reading this letter."

Here the antiquary handed over the epistle of our artist to Dr. Bleedem.

The physician seized it gravely, read it through in silence to the end; re-read it, slowly folded it up, and returned it to Oldstone.

"Humph! remarkable—very," he observed, after a pause.

Further discussion on the subject was checked by the entry of the other members for their mid-day meal, during which no secret was made as to the identity of the mysterious stranger.

"Well, well, well," cried our host, when the mystery had been cleared up. "If I didn't half suspect it all along. Why, bless my soul, if I think there could be

found another man in the world capable of it. Eh, Molly?"

As for our hostess, she went right off into hysterics, and Mr. Oldstone was not the only member of the club who was visibly affected.

A month had passed over, and it was now time for the case of that memorable night to be tried at the assizes. Our host, the two serving men, and every member of the club had received a summons to appear as witnesses. Helen herself would have been obliged to put in an appearance, had not Dr. Bleedem signed a certificate that her state of health prevented her from attending. The greatest excitement prevailed when our artist appeared in court. Nearly all were prepossessed in his favour, and several women were overheard to express hopes that they would not hang so good-looking a man. The two serving men were then called, one after the other, and both deposed that their deceased master, Lord Scampford, had first drawn his sword on the gentleman, who was forced to act on the defensive.

The case was soon settled. The jury brought it in as justifiable homicide, and in spite of some ineffectual opposition on the part of the family of the defunct Lord Scampford, who wondered what had come of nobility in these times, when a mere commoner like the defendant could waylay and assassinate a peer of the realm and get off unscathed, etc., etc. In spite, however, of all opposition, our artist was acquitted and left the court without a stain on his character, amid the cheers and congratulations of the crowd. As he left the court house he was accompanied to the "Headless Lady" by all the members of the club, who vied with each other in the cordiality of their welcome.

Many changes of importance had taken place of late. Our artist's relative had long since breathed his last, and he now slept with his fathers. His nephew had sat up with him to the end, and was chief mourner at his funeral. The will of deceased had been read, and our friend Vandyke McGuilp was known to have inherited his entire fortune, which was considerable, so that the once struggling limner was now little short of a millionaire.

A sudden change for the better had taken place in the health of our heroine, which now mended apace in a way that surprised the doctor. Still, it was deemed advisable, for the present, to keep her in ignorance of her hero's arrival on the scene.

After some discussion on the subject, *i.e.*, when her medical attendant pronounced her out of all danger, it was generally agreed upon that considering

the great confidence which had always existed between Mr. Oldstone and the daughter of our host, that he should be the man entrusted to break the joyful news to the patient.

Our antiquary accordingly bent him to the task; so mounting the staircase, he tapped at the patient's door. On entering the chamber, he was greeted by a beaming smile from its fair occupant.

"Why! my pretty pet!" cried the old man, cheerily, "what a time it seems since I saw you last! Why! you *are* pulled down, poor dear."

"Am I?" answered Helen. "I am feeling much better now, though; and I am getting tired of lying in bed all day. I feel quite well now, and want to get up."

"Don't do anything without Dr. Bleedem's permission," remonstrated Oldstone, "or you may throw yourself back, and then what should we all do without you?"

"Yes, Dr. Bleedem says I have been most seriously ill—that he has just rescued me from the jaws of death."

"Ah!" remarked the antiquary with a quiet smile, "and someone else rescued you quite lately from something very like the jaws of death—only worse," he added, in a low tone.

"Oh!" she cried, covering her face with her hands, as if to shut out some horrible vision; "don't mention those two villainous men, or I shall go mad."

"No, no; we won't mention them again. They have gone to their account at last—and—there, there, let us not judge, but try to forgive, as we ourselves would wish to be forgiven," said Oldstone.

"But what harm had I done them? Why should they—I mean, what did they want to do to me?" asked the girl, ingenuously.

"*Do* to you, silly child! He! he! What all wicked men seek to do when they get the chance," replied her friend. "Let us not talk of them, but rather of the brave man who rescued you in the very nick of time from a living death."

"I understand nothing of their object, and I can't get anyone to explain to me; but I want to know more of the brave man who, at the risk of his own life, came to my assistance."

"Perhaps I can tell you something of *him*, too," said Oldstone, mysteriously. "Did

you note him well?"

"Not I. How could I? I was half fainting when he carried me into the hall. Besides, he was so muffled up in a cloak and hat that I was unable to see his face."

"True; neither could any of us—he was so successfully disguised. But we have discovered since who he was, for all that."

"Then you have seen him—spoken to him? Please convey him my most sincere thanks and blessings for his heroic conduct towards a perfect stranger."

"Perhaps you would like to thank him yourself—some day—when you are able to get up, and feel quite well again," suggested Oldstone.

"I suppose I ought," replied Helen. "I feel most grateful to him, I am sure; for don't I owe him my life? But I am so shy with strangers—and—and I don't know what to say," pleaded the girl. Then, at length, "Tell me what manner of man he is?"

"Oh! he's a gentleman," replied Oldstone; "you may depend upon that—and, what is more, he's young, and, *I* think, very good-looking. I am sure you would say so, too."

Here a knowing look came into the antiquary's face, which puzzled the patient, who, with eyes and mouth wide open, appeared to scan his countenance as if to read the very secrets of his soul. Then, like a Pythoness of old, suddenly inspired, she exclaimed, "I have it! In vain you try to keep it from me. Mr. McGuilp has returned. It was *he*——"

Oldstone marvelled at her penetration, but replied only by a succession of little nods of his head, fixing his eyes steadily, yet laughingly, upon her the while.

"I knew it; I knew it!" she exclaimed. "My dreams confirmed it. Oh, God be praised," and she clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Calm yourself; calm yourself, my sweet one," began Oldstone, now seriously alarmed lest the patient should suffer a relapse, "What would Dr. Bleedem say to me if he knew I had been so precipitate?"

"Dr. Bleedem! Does *he* then know of our——?"

"Oh! I never said anything to him about it, you may be sure. What I mean is—he

wishes you to be spared all emotion, lest you should throw yourself back, and all his care be in vain."

"Oh! no fear of that," replied Helen. "I feel so much better since you told me. Stay!—if you have seen him, he is here. Perhaps in this very inn—tell me!"

"Well, not very far off, I dare say," said Oldstone, cautiously.

"Mr. Oldstone!" cried the girl, "you can hide nothing from me. I *know* he is here, and I *insist* upon seeing him."

"My dear! my dear! How can you? Just think! You must wait till you are well enough to get up," protested her friend and counsellor. "Dr. Bleedem will decide all that."

"I want to see him *now, this instant.*"

"What! In your bedroom!" exclaimed Oldstone. "My dear child! It's not proper."

"Then why do you come yourself, and Dr. Bleedem?"

"That is a very different matter? I am an old man, and Dr. Bleedem is your medical attendant," replied the antiquary. "Mr. McGuilp is young—and people *might* talk."

"Nonsense! If you don't let me see him, I'll make myself ill and die," exclaimed the patient, petulantly.

The antiquary began to be alarmed, but tried to pacify her by saying he would see Dr. Bleedem, and consult with him as to what were best to be done.

As he did so, the doctor mounted the stairs. He came to administer a cordial.

"She seems much better now, doctor," remarked Mr. Oldstone.

Here a muttered consultation took place just outside the patient's door. After which the physician entered the sick-room, and finding his patient's nerves somewhat excited, administered a calm soothing dose which sent her off into a peaceful sleep, while our antiquary sought his young protégé, and explained that, owing to the patient having taken a composing draught, the doctor's advice was, that he had better postpone his visit till the morrow.

Our artist's disappointment at being refused an interview with his *inamorata* after so long an absence may be imagined, but he was consoled in a measure by

the doctor's promise that she would be well enough to see him on the following day. On one thing he had thoroughly made up his mind, and that was to ask her in marriage of her father. He had never ceased to love her all the time he had been absent, but up to the present he had no position to offer her. Were she to marry one of the many country bumpkins who flocked around her, it would be affluence to what he could have offered her. He could not afford to have quarrelled with his only relative. The consequences would have been fatal. Now everything had changed. He was rich, and could afford to please himself. Therefore on the morrow he was resolved to speak to her father.

It will readily be imagined that our artist's return to his native land, to say nothing of the chain of events that followed—his heroism, his trial and acquittal, were events that could not be passed over without celebration. Therefore it is needless to say that the evening was spent round the merry punch bowl, as usual on festive occasions.

Mr. Oldstone was again elected chairman, which post none of the members felt inclined to dispute with him. The evening opened with a congratulatory speech from the chairman, addressed to our artist, to which he replied with brevity and grace. To say that his health was drunk with the usual three times three would be superfluous.

Jack Hearty was called in to join in the toast and invited to take a seat, while our artist was called upon by the members of the club to give an account of his adventures among the brigands, which he did in a manner so graphic, and with such grace and easy command of language, that the company remained spellbound, drinking in every detail of his narrative, whether it were a description of natural scenery or climate—the dress or physiognomy of his captors—their attitudes, their language, or what not. Nothing was forgotten. His trials and privations, his thoughts of home, and the friends he had left behind him. (He mentioned nothing of the girl he left behind him). Then he described the final tussle with the carabineers, and his subsequent rescue. Thus he rambled on in one continual flow of diction like a mill stream without interruption, carried away by his enthusiasm in such a manner as to leave no doubt in the minds of his hearers as to his having taken part himself in the adventures he described.

"Now, mine host," said the chairman, at the conclusion of this somewhat prolonged narrative, "what do you say to that?"

"Well, well, well," replied that worthy, musingly. "To think that all that should have happened to one of my gentlemen customers, what's been in furren parts. Why, it beats the story books out and out. Blessed if I can't see it all a goin' on before my very eyes."

"True, Jack," agreed Mr. Oldstone, "such is the power of our young friend's eloquence, that one feels that we ourselves have taken part in it."

"Might I point out to the company," began Mr. Blackdeed, "the intensely dramatic situation of——"

"Also the highly poetical episode——" broke in Mr. Parnassus.

"And if you had been there," interrupted our artist in his turn, "you would have noticed the vivid colouring, the fine grouping of the figures, the chiaroscuro—the fantastic light and shade that would have impressed the scene upon your memory in a way never to be forgotten."

"Hark at him! Hark at him!" cried several members at once, as they refilled their glasses from the punch-bowl.

The conversation then drifted towards more recent adventures, and our artist explained in full his sudden appearance on the spot in time to frustrate the designs of the ravishers, and rescue innocence from pollution.

"And to think that you rescued *my* daughter from those ruffians, sir, and at the risk of your own life, too. Why it was admirable! But there, sir, I can't find no words to thank you with—that I can't."

Here our worthy host became very moist; but the chairman filled up his glass again for him, which he tossed off at a gulp, and felt better.

"And now, gentlemen," said the chairman, rising, "just one more toast before I dismiss this honourable meeting, which I am sure you will all join in. Here is 'Health, long life, and happiness, both to the rescuer and the rescued!'"—(Shouts of "Hear, hear!" and "Yes; none but the brave deserve the fair.")—"Then, here goes with a 'Hip! hip! hip!—hurrah!'"

Our artist, somewhat taken aback, blushed up to his scalp, and drank off the toast good humouredly, after which there was shaking of hands all round, and every one retired to his dormitory in a comfortable frame of mind and body.



CHAPTER XIV.

Need it be told how, on the following morning, as soon after breakfast as convenient, our artist—and now rich land-proprietor—beckoned to our host of the "Headless Lady," and with trembling lips and palpitating heart seized him by the arm, and walked with him for a good pace down the long, straight road leading up to the door of the inn? Or how the members of the club, who happened to be looking through the diamond-shaped panes of the old-fashioned bow window in that direction, remarked one to the other how mighty intimate our hero had suddenly become with his landlord, and their wonderments as to what he could find to talk to him about so confidentially?

Suddenly our host was observed to start, slap his thigh, then, with a hand upon each bent knee, he peers steadily into the face of his interlocutor, who is placing a hand upon his shoulder. Our host, now changing his position, extends a broad, fleshy palm towards his customer, which our artist clasps in his long, slender fingers with a more than usual hearty shake.

"Why, if they are not patting each other on the back, and laughing," exclaimed Parnassus. "What *can* be up?"

"Well, that's queer," observed the Professor. "Um—m—m—m?"



Whilst this dumb show was being enacted Dame Hearty entered her daughter's bedroom to announce to her that she had Dr. Bleedem's full permission to get up and dress herself; which permission, we may easily guess, was promptly taken advantage of. So jumping suddenly out of bed with the agility of youth, she quickly set about her toilet and ablutions.

"There is one thing," began her parent, "I wish to speak to you about."

"Yes, mother," responded Helen, absently, brushing out her curls before the glass with unusual despatch, and without turning towards her parent.

"Nay, hear me, girl," continued Dame Hearty; "it is seriously I would speak."

"Say on, then, madam; I am listening."

"I am aware—ahem!—I have long taken note," continued her mother, "of a growing intimacy—a friendship, I may say, and perhaps something more—between you and this Mr. McGuilp, our guest. I know that he has done us all a great service—a service that none of us can ever forget, and you in particular, since he saved your life. It is therefore only natural and proper that you should feel grateful towards him, and regard him in the light of a friend, and as a friend, I hope, we shall ever esteem him; but listen, now, my girl, to what I say. A *too* intimate friendship between a young couple, out of different stations in life, such as in the case of yourself, who are only the daughter of a country inn-keeper, and a gentleman born and educated like Mr. McGuilp, who is, besides, enormously rich, having inherited all his uncle's fortune and estates, and consequently moves in the very best society. Such intimacies are dangerous, and may lead on to trouble before you are aware."

"How, mother?"

"Bless the child!" answered her mother, impatiently, "must I tell you everything? Must I make you as wise as myself? No; there are things I can't discuss with you. What I want of you is to be patient, and obey."

"You—all of you—treat me like a child," broke in Helen, reproachfully.

"And so you are," retorted her mother; "therefore take advice. The feeling that the world calls *love*—love, I say, that speaks not of marriage is denounced as *sin* by the laws of God and man."

"Well, that's strange," mused Helen. "Then, one may not love a friend, a parent, a child, without marrying them?"

"I have no time to quibble," replied her mother, with some asperity, "but would simply remark that whatever your feelings may be towards Mr. McGuilp, or his towards *you*, nothing but harm and unhappiness can be the lot of you both—without marriage. Now, you can't well expect a rich gentleman like Mr. McGuilp to displease all his friends by marrying a penniless girl like yourself—country bred, without education, who knows nothing of the world and society, when he could marry some high-born lady out of his own class—some rich heiress, educated and accomplished, who would grace the society to which he belongs.

He might be a great man in the county, and enter Parliament, with such a wife, while you would only drag him down to your level."

Helen had already hidden her face in her hands, and her bare shoulders heaved convulsively, while the hot tears trickled through her fingers.

"Cease, mother! Oh! cease, in pity!" she cried. "I cannot bear it."

Her anguish would have wrung the heart of a stone, and her parent being a really tender-hearted woman, deeply sympathised with her daughter, though she felt it her duty to be firm, "For what could it all end in?" she argued.

At this juncture, the voice of our host was heard at the bottom of the staircase calling out, "Molly, my dear! Mr. McGuilp wants to speak to you."

"In one moment, Jack," answered his spouse. Then to her daughter, "Dry your eyes, my girl. Bathe your face and follow me. Mr. McGuilp doubtless wants to see you. You have much to thank him for, and do it with grace, but mind what I have said."

With this parting admonition she left the room and hurried downstairs, whilst Helen deftly finished her toilet, and with one last look at the glass to ascertain that her eyes bore no traces of weeping, she was preparing to descend the stairs, when her attention was attracted by sounds from below that she was at a loss to account for. There was a jumble of human voices, but above them all was the voice of her mother, now screaming, now half laughing and half crying, whilst that of Dr. Bleedem was heard giving orders to her father, and all seemed bustle and confusion. Dame Hearty was in hysterics.



"And you really do mean it, Mr. McGuilp?" asked, in a sweet voice, a bright-faced country girl of eighteen summers of a slim young man in the garb of a gentleman, who followed her through the narrow mossy pathway of a wood adjacent to the inn at the cross roads.

"Mean it, my angel! Why, of course I do, and feel proud at the very thought of you being all my own. Only don't call me any more 'Mr. McGuilp,' or 'Sir.' It hurts my feelings. Call me 'Van'—just 'Van' as my friends and relatives have ever called me."

"Van, let it be then," quoth the maiden, "*dear* Van, my own sweet love for ever and ever! Oh! Van, you *have* made me so happy! And my parents, how you must have surprised them when you told them! Poor mother! No wonder she went into highstrikes!"

"Hysterics," corrected her lover.

"Well, that's what they call them here," answered the girl; "but you will correct me every time I make a mistake, won't you Van?"

"With pleasure, dearest," replied her suitor.

"And nothing can ever come between us now? Nothing can part us?"

"Nothing but death," was the reply.

A shade of sadness passed momentarily over the girl's features as she asked, "Must it all end with that?"

"Death ends everything," replied the young man: "that is to say, everything earthly."

"Then is there *no* love beyond the grave?" asked Helen.

"Oh! let us hope so," responded our artist. "I, for one, have the very strongest persuasion that there is. Love such as ours is not merely of earth."

"Dear, *dear* Van!" cried the maiden, in ecstasy, "I will believe all you tell me. *I* know nothing, but I *feel* you are right. Yes, we shall still continue to love even beyond the grave. Oh! Van, how have I deserved all this happiness?"

"Your sweetness, your goodness, your beauty, your love, amply counterpoise anything *I* can give you, my angel," said her lover.

"How kind you are to talk like that Van! How you *must* love me to go against the wishes of your friends and leave everything and everybody for me!" exclaimed the girl. Then added, "You are *quite* sure that you won't be ashamed of me before all the grand people you will meet? That you will be able to pardon any little slip of the tongue, my country manners, and everything else?"

"Everything, everything, dear. Besides, your education will begin from to-day. You will improve yourself in the arts of reading and writing. Learn grammar, history, geography, and other things. I will have you well taught at once, whilst I

am away in town to make preparations for our wedding. I must go about the licence, and through other formalities; buy the wedding-ring; your dress—for, of course, as *my* wife, you must now dress as beseems a lady, and leave off this simple garb; and yet it seems a pity, for I have always known you thus. Still, for the sake of public opinion—to avoid misunderstanding——"

"I care nothing about all that," broke in Helen.

"No, my darling; not yet. You do not understand. But in time you will find that you have to."

"Well, I will do anything to please you, Van."

"My own darling!" said her lover, encircling his arm around her waist.

Well, my readers, and if their lips *did* meet; what of it? It is a way that lips have under the circumstances.



"And now, gentlemen, and members of the Wonder Club, let me introduce you to the future Mrs. Vandyke McGuilp," said our artist, on his return from his walk, as he entered the club room, leading his fiancée by the hand.

Taken completely by surprise, each member rose from his chair, bowed, smiled, and offered his congratulations. Mr. Oldstone was particularly moist on this occasion.

"Oh! my dear boy, how I congratulate you; and you too, my pretty child! Bless you, my children, both!"

Then he took out his handkerchief and mopped his eyes.

"Dear me, what an old fool I am!" he muttered, in parenthesis.

Chairs were immediately placed for the engaged couple, amid boisterous cheering and banter from all the members of the club at once, whilst the bride elect laughed, blushed, and looked very happy. The father and mother of the bride next entered, and joined in the general hubbub.

Of course, this was too great an event not to be celebrated with all due honours. Therefore Mr. Oldstone proposed that they should all meet once again that

evening round the steaming punch-bowl; Helen and her parents being also of the company.

"Just to drink to the health of the bride elect," explained Mr. Oldstone with an appealing look towards Dr. Bleedem. And it was so.

That the bride's health was drunk that evening with a "Hip, hip, hurrah!" goes without saying. How Mr. McGuilp started on the morrow for town on business connected with his approaching marriage; his return; his sojourn at the "Headless Lady" until the grand event came off; how he occupied his spare time partly in painting a portrait of his friend Mr. Oldstone, which was followed in due time by portraits of his future father and mother-in-law, and in imparting instruction to his fair bride; likewise, how, when unavoidably absent on business, Mr. Oldstone would enact the rôle of instructor to the fair bride of his protégé, so that no time should be lost in fitting her for her exalted station; how Helen improved daily in intelligence and knowledge under such careful tuition, are matters of history.

All unpleasant experiences of the past had been forgotten in the joy attending the great approaching event.

Coffins had been made for the bodies of the two malefactors. The corpse of Lord Scampford had been placed in his lordship's carriage and driven by his coachman (whose shoulder blade was now quite well), and accompanied by his footman to London, where it was consigned to the family vault of the Scampfords, while that of his partner in crime filled a nameless grave in a corner of the old churchyard at Littleboro'.

Some procrastination and unexpected delays *would* occur, however, in spite of all our hero could do to hurry on the event, for we know that "the course of true love never *did* run smooth," but at length the happy day arrived. How merrily pealed the bells from the ruined tower of the picturesque old parish church of Littleboro' on that sunny morn! How gay the peasantry looked in their holiday attire! Proud, indeed, were our host and hostess as a splendid equipage with coachman and footman, each adorned with a huge nosegay, drove up to the door of the "Headless Lady" to convey the fair bride, who was attired in the most approved fashion of the period, and accompanied by her father and mother, both clad in gala, to the church.

How the yokels did gape as they recognised in the magnificently attired bride poor Nell Hearty, maid of the inn at the cross roads, whom they had seen full oft to feed the pigs, milk the cows, scrub the steps, wash and hang out the clothes,

and who had served them with many a pint of her father's home brewed ale. It was a thing not well understood—had no right to be, doubtless they thought. The little church was crammed. Needless to say that every member of the Wonder Club was present, and, lo, here comes the vicar of Littleboro', that aged and somewhat infirm cleric of benevolent aspect, and all the aristocracy of the place.

The service begins. Mr. Parnassus has been chosen as best man, and has composed an ode for the occasion. Mr. Oldstone has begged the honour of giving away the bride, which duty he performs with great dignity. A dead silence reigns as the bridegroom places the ring on the chubby finger of his bride. The benediction is given, the register is signed, *et c'est une affaire fini*. The bridal pair march out of church to the joyous strains of the organ, treading beneath their feet along the aisle the flowers that friendly rustics have strewn across their path. Bride and bridegroom then step into their carriage and drive back to the house of the bride, where a sumptuous wedding breakfast awaits them. Nor were the wedding presents wanting. The members of the club had subscribed, and presented the pair with a handsome punch-bowl and silver ladle with the usual golden guinea inlaid in the scoop. The parents of the bride presented their daughter with a handsome piece of carved oak furniture called a "brideswain," dating back as far as the commonwealth, which contained linen, goblets, and other useful articles.

The old broadbacked farmer, the bride's godfather, who was present, and whom our readers will recollect was the innocent cause of the disasters that followed, in that, in his simplicity, he had put Lord Scampford's bully into possession of the secret of Helen's address, that day at the Royal Academy; well, the bride's godfather and his spouse between them presented the couple with a metal dish and cover, besides a case containing a carving knife, fork, and steel. The bride's aunt, whom we have mentioned as an invalid, sent an expensive old-fashioned china tea service and sundry chimney ornaments, while her friends in humbler circumstances each contributed their little mite.

The breakfast went off merrily. The speeches and the toasts, who shall describe?

At length the hour of parting arrived. The carriage drove up, and the bridal pair entered amid showers of rice and old slippers. Our hero and heroine were about to set out on a continental tour for their honeymoon, and intended visiting the eternal city.

Perhaps the most touching incident of all occurred at the last moment, just as the

happy pair were entering their carriage.

Mr. Oldstone, who had been very moist on the occasion, drew off his antique ring, of which we have heard so much, from his forefinger and placed it on that of his protégé, saying with much emotion: "Take it, my son; take it with an old man's blessing. Preserve it as an heirloom, for I shall never wear it more."



"Poor old man!" said our artist with some emotion, when they had left the home of the bride a mile behind. "To think that he should make *me* this valuable present, and that I hadn't time to thank him at the last. I must write to him on the very first opportunity. Why, Helen, can you guess the value of this gem? I would sooner possess this ring than all the money he has in the world. I never thought he would give it away to anyone during his lifetime. Did you ever hear the legend attached to it?"

"Well, yes; I think I *was* present when Mr. Oldstone told his story," said Helen; "but I am sure I don't recollect anything about it now. You shall tell it to me over again some other time, darling."

"With pleasure, dearest," replied her husband. "It is a long story, and at present we have so many other things to think of, haven't we, love?"

"Yes, dear," was the reply.

"And you think you will continue to love me as much as you did at first, darling?" demanded the newly married man of his young wife.

"Oh! Van; how can you ask such a question?" exclaimed the bride. "Why, I love you more and more every minute."

"Then give hubby a pretty kiss," was the rejoinder.

Two pouting rosebuds were thrust upwards into the husband's face, upon which he settled like a bee upon a flower extracting nectar and ambrosia; and thus we will leave them.



L'ENVOI.

A universal gloom pervaded the precincts of the Wonder Club since the departure of the happy pair, which none felt more than Mr. Oldstone. Not but that he was delighted at the union of his protégé with the landlord's pretty daughter, whom he begrudged to anyone short of a gentleman. That his dear Helen, whom he loved as his own child, should have had the good fortune to marry, not only a gentleman, but the very one that he himself would have singled out for her, was the realization of his happiest dreams. He knew they were happy, and revelled in the thought of their happiness. Still, they had gone out of his life and formed one of their own, apart. Her sunny smile would no more light up the dingy walls of the old hostel. He would hear no more the ring of her merry laugh, could no longer peer into her deep blue eyes, nor delight in her exquisitely white teeth, her rosy cheeks or coral lips; and added to this, his health that had for some time past been failing him, now thoroughly broke down, and he knew his end was not far off. So he penned a letter to his friend Rustcoin, who was still living in Rome, to come over to see him before he died, as he had much to say to him.

Besides the breaking down of our antiquary's health, the club itself, as if by one accord, began to break up. Mr. Blackdeed went to London and became manager of a large theatre. Dr. Bleedem also retired to a fashionable quarter of the metropolis, where he soon had an extensive practice. Mr. Parnassus became editor of a paper at Bath, and published a volume of poems. Professor Cyanite and Mr. Crucible likewise disappeared. The former travelled about the country giving lectures on geology. The latter bought a house near town, where he pursued his studies in chemistry.

Thus our antiquary was now left quite alone; *i.e.*, with the exception of Mr. Hardcase. He managed to pass the time by writing voluminously, as if he intended to finish some important work before he died. In his intervals of rest from his labours, he would frequently take solitary rambles in the woods adjacent to the inn, or along one of the cross roads. On one of these excursions his footsteps led him to the old churchyard of Littleboro' with its old yews and cypress. As he entered the gate, the sexton was at work digging a grave. The

man ceased his labour at his approach; and, seating himself on the edge, began to fill his pipe, which he next lighted and began puffing at, apparently oblivious of anybody's presence.

It must be stated that the sexton was looked upon as a character in the village. Certainly he was a strange looking object. He was very old and decrepit, exceedingly bow-legged, had a bald, mis-shapen head. Was toothless, hollow-eyed, with features that suggested a skull. He was stone deaf, and had, moreover, acquired a habit of uttering his thoughts aloud, whoever might be present, perfectly unconscious that he could be overheard. If addressed, he never gave himself any trouble to catch the meaning of his interlocutor, but always fluked an answer such as he deemed ought to fit the question.

Thus, when our antiquary approached with a "Good morning, Delves. Hard at work, I see. Whose grave may you be working at, now?" he received for answer, "Thank you, sir; I'm very well. Yes, as you say, it *be* remarkable fine weather for this time o' the year, surely."

"But I didn't make any remark about the weather, Delves," persisted Oldstone. "You didn't understand me."

The sexton made no reply, nor looked the antiquary in the face, but muttered very audibly to himself, "That be one o' them old fools of the Wonder Club—*Wonder Club*, indeed; ha! ha!" Here he gave vent to a mocking laugh. Then, "He should see some o' my wonders."

Our antiquary was accustomed to the eccentricities of this worthy, who was generally looked upon as a harmless idiot; but when he heard the Wonder Club sneered at, he took deep offence, and was about to utter some rebuke, when the grave-digger began muttering again to himself, and Oldstone, whose curiosity was being roused, forbore to speak, and thought he would listen instead.

"A little knows I seed un's corpse candle last night, he, he! Ay, he'll be the next. They can't, none o' them, fool me. Whenever they've got to die, old Delves allers sees their corpse candles fust. Wasn't I right before Lord Scampford and his bully met with their death, eh? Didn't I say that only one on' o' 'em ud be buried in this here churchyard, and wasn't one on 'em buried in that there corner just as I prognosticated, and didn't I see the corpse candle of 'is lordship go along the road towards London? They allers lets me know beforehand, my customers. Now, there's this here gent, the *h*antiquary, as they calls him—if I didn't see 'uns corpse candle last night a leavin' the *hinn* o' the "Eadless Lady," and settle down

on this wery spot where 'e's a standin', I'll be shot, that's all. If a's not doo to-morrer, or next day, 'e's doo within this week. I never knowed one live more nor a week after I'd seen 'uns corpse candle."

Our antiquary, now intensely interested, determined to interrogate him anew, so he bawled out as loud as he could in his ear, making a trumpet of his hands, "Whose grave did you say that was?"

"Yourn, zur," replied the sexton, with a grin.

"Mine!" exclaimed the antiquary, starting back: "but I'm not dead yet."

"Not dead yet—ain't ye; he, he! Well, you soon will be; ho, ho! I'll give ye three days. I don't think ye'll last longer nor that; but there's where you've got to lie, willy-nilly," said the sexton, pointing to the grave.

"You are making very sure of me," remarked the antiquary, with a grim smile.

"Ay, by ——, I am," rejoined the grave-digger, "for when I've once seen a man's corpse candle——"

There is no knowing how much longer the conversation might have lasted, if at this moment two villagers had not entered the churchyard, so Oldstone, not wishing to be overheard, nodded to the sexton, and added, "Till we meet again." He then bent his steps towards the inn, and, arriving there, was greeted by his friend Rustcoin, who had just arrived. It was years since these two friends had met, and doubtless each found the other vastly changed.

"Why, surely, old friend, you are not so bad as you try to make out," observed Rustcoin. "You look hale and hearty still. You are up, and walking about."

"Well, do you know how much longer they give me to live?" asked Oldstone.

"No. Who?" inquired Rustcoin. "The doctor?"

"Well, not exactly. A prophet."

"A prophet, eh? That's interesting; and who may this prophet be, if I might ask?"

"The grave-digger."

"The grave-digger! What does he know about it?"

"Says he saw my corpse candle last night, and he is at this moment digging my

grave on the strength of it."

"My dear fellow, you're joking. Pray, don't give these sort of people any encouragement in their antiquated superstitions. You were always given a little that way yourself, I remember."

"Come, let's go inside, and have lunch together. You are, doubtless, hungry," said Oldstone. "We'll have a good long chat over our meal." Then leaning on his friend's arm, both entered the inn.

Our host and hostess were, of course, delighted at the arrival of the long-absent member, and many allusions were made to old times. Dame Hearty hastily laid the cloth, brought in the lunch of cold beef and pickles, the remains of a rabbit pie, some bread and cheese, with a jug of nut-brown ale, home-brewed and left the two companions to themselves.

"And so our young friend, Vandyke McGuilp, has gone and made a d——d fool of himself," said Rustcoin, after a pause in the conversation. "Well, I thought him a more sensible man. What! one of *his* talent and position to sink himself to the level of a dish-clout! Why! it's sheer madness."

"My dear fellow; don't talk like that," cried Oldstone. "If you'd only seen the girl, I assure you——"

"Bah! I make no doubt but that she's pretty—that's not the point. You won't pretend that she was any better educated than the rest of her class," maintained Rustcoin.

"Educated! *educated!*" exclaimed Oldstone. "She had something in her far beyond what *you* would call education—by which you probably mean book learning, or that flimsy social veneer which anyone can acquire who chooses to move within the radius of a certain narrow circle, where all is artificial, unreal, cold, hypocritical, and false. This is a girl of character, truth-loving, sweet, and unselfish—pure as an angel—intelligent, and with fine sensibilities."

"Nonsense," broke in Rustcoin, testily. "These country wenches are ever stubborn, hard-headed, self-interested, exacting, undocile, unteachable. Peasant she was born, and peasant she will remain to the end of her days. God help the poor idiot with such a one for a mate! She may be well enough as a wife to some country bumpkin, but for any rational being to hamper himself with one of these clods——"

"But she's not one of these clods," persisted Oldstone. "I tell you this is quite an exceptional case."

"Just because she is pretty, forsooth," interposed Rustcoin. "I believe you are gone on her yourself."

"Oh! as for me—I love her as my own daughter," replied Oldstone. "I've seen her grow up from a child, and have had plenty of time to study her disposition. I have ever found her dutiful to her parents, diligent in her duties, naturally intelligent, and of the highest principle. Her surroundings have not been altogether those that fall to the lot of a girl of that class, and she possesses all the qualities that any rational man should expect in a wife."

"Such a paragon as you describe, I confess, never came within my experience, and I have gone through something in my youth. More than once I have been on the point of making a fool of myself. At the time, I thought my goddess the most perfect being in creation, but I was soon undeceived in every case, and now I thank my stars that I have always managed to steer clear of trouble, and have remained an old bachelor."

It was the third day since Rustcoin had appeared upon the scene, since which time Oldstone had been sinking fast. At this moment he was seated, propped up by cushions, in an easy chair, in dressing gown and night cap. His friend Rustcoin was by his side, receiving instructions as to the publication of a pile of MSS, whilst Mr. Hardcase, the lawyer, whom we have mentioned as still being on the spot after the others had left, was now engaged in putting the antiquary's will into legal form.

Dr. Bleedem having retired to London, his successor, Dr. Dosemore, had been called in to attend the patient. He could do no more however than his predecessor had done—viz., to warn him of his approaching end informing him that he would succumb to internal gout, which would encroach upon his system, until it reached the heart, when it would take him off suddenly. The new doctor had just left the room, and the antiquary was addressing his old friend in feeble tones, as follows:—

"This pile of MSS," he said, "is a collection of tales, which I have jotted down from memory as nearly as possible in the words of the narrators, and which I desire to be bound and published, under the title of 'Tales of the Wonder Club, by Dryasdust.' I believe I am conferring a boon upon society in rescuing these precious documents from oblivion, and publishing them broadcast, for the

benefit of humanity at large. See that they be illustrated by the first artists of the day, so that the book may obtain all the readier sale. So shall my soul rest in peace, and my blessing remain with those I leave behind. Tell my young friend Vandyke that my last thoughts were of him and his fair bride." Then extending one hand to his friend Rustcoin and the other to the lawyer, he sank back on his cushions and spoke no more.

"So he has gone at last, the poor old gentleman," said Hardcase, disengaging his hand from that of the corpse.

"Ay, just *three days* from my arrival, as predicted by the sexton—strange, isn't it?" remarked Rustcoin. "What a fine old head it is. It's a pity a cast should not be taken of it. I should so like to possess a bust of my old friend."

"Nothing is easier," said the lawyer. "I will get the new doctor to take one. I know he can, because he told me so."

Dr. Dosemore was immediately recalled, and before the day was over, a successful mould was taken of the face, which, with as little delay as possible, Rustcoin despatched to Rome, to a sculptor friend of his of some renown, with injunctions to execute for him a bust of his old friend, in the best Carrara marble, with pedestal of scagliola.



The bell was tolling at the old church of Littleboro'. A solemn procession, all clad in deep mourning, entered the churchyard gate, and followed the coffin to the grave. The sexton was at his post, bearing a certain air of triumph about him, as if he were saying to himself, "There, I told you so. They can't none of 'em fool me. What I perdicts is *sartin*."

The same old vicar who so lately had joined together the hands of our hero and heroine in holy matrimony has now a sadder task to perform. Our host and hostess, of course, are present, as well as our friends Hardcase, Rustcoin, and the new doctor, besides several strangers. All stand reverently bareheaded during the reading of the burial service, until the usual three handfuls of earth are strewn upon the coffin, after which the sexton, with a deft and businesslike, though hardly a reverent manner, tumbles the earth hurriedly on to the top of the coffin, and all is over.

Soon after the ceremony Rustcoin and Hardcase take leave of each other, and likewise of our host and hostess, when each departs by a different route. Rustcoin returns no more to Rome, but settles in York, his native town, where he purchased a house, which he has been at some pains to fit up according to his tastes. Over the mantelpiece in his study hangs the portrait of his brother antiquary, painted by our artist, Vandyke McGuilp, while in a corner of the room is a well executed bust in the best Carrara white marble, representing the same features. He has also inherited the whole of his friend Oldstone's collection of antiquities, which are now added to his own, and make, together, a very respectable museum, which he is ever proud of showing to his visitors when they call.



Let us now return to the hostel of the "Headless Lady," where our host and hostess are left alone in their glory, for even Mr. Hardcase has at length taken his departure and settled in some neighbouring town. They are seated at some distance apart from each other, no longer looking tenderly and lovingly into each others' faces as of yore, but askance, as if they had had some matrimonial quarrel, which neither felt inclined to be the first to make up. Jack Hearty's hands are thrust deeply into his pockets, his legs extended, his brows knit, and his eyes fixed upon the ground; while his spouse, usually so active and so busy, to whom nothing was greater pain than being forced to be idle, was now lolling in a listless attitude, her arms dangling idly at her sides with an expression on her face of the most intense boredom. One who knew them both would no longer recognise in these two melancholy persons our jovial host and hostess of former days.

"Tell you what it is, Molly," began Jack, at length, "D——d if I don't think this house is haunted."

"Why so, Jack?" enquired the dame, wearily.

"Have you not noticed since Mr. Oldstone's death—nay, before—ever since our dear Helen left her home, that a curse seems to have fallen upon this house?" demanded Jack.

"True, I feel an unaccountable depression of spirits, but still I thought it nothing but the weather," rejoined his spouse.

"It's not that only," persisted her husband. "Fair or foul weather, it is just the same to me. See how our custom has fallen off."

"Naturally; now that the members of the club have all departed," replied Molly. "It's lonely like, not seeing a human face all day long."

"It's worse than that," continued Jack. "Haven't you felt—well, I don't know how to say it—as if—as if—some danger were hanging over our heads?"

"Lor, Jack!" cried our hostess, "Who'd ever have thought to hear *you* talk like that? Well, Jack, to tell you the truth—though I never liked to mention the matter before, for fear you should laugh at me—I confess I never *have* felt quite myself since the night of that tragedy."

"That's it. Depend upon it," said her husband. "The spot has become accursed. I lose my appetite and sleep; feel weak and nervous; start at the merest sound, while ever and anon I have the sensation as if someone were looking over my shoulder. If perchance I shut my eyes, I see before me all that took place upon that fearful night. I hear the stairs creak, and see that ruffian clasping our dear Helen in his arms. I hear her screams for help, whilst I seem to see myself lying drugged and helpless, incapable of running to her assistance."

"Oh, Jack! and so have I," replied his spouse. "I too have dreamed that dream. It will not go from me. Each time I close my eyes—— Hark! What was that? A footstep, I'll be sworn."

"Ay, ay," assented Jack; "I hear them oft, myself."

It was now growing late, and our host went to fetch a jug of his own nut brown ale, and filled himself up a glass, which he drained at a draught, then filled himself up another.

"You drink more than you used to, Jack," remarked the wife of his bosom. "I've seen you look very muddled of late. Don't let it grow upon you. Don't, now, there's a dear."

But to his wife's tender injunctions he turned a deaf ear, and continued to fill up again and again, and yet again, until he was perfectly mellow.

"Oh! Jack, Jack," cried Dame Hearty, despairingly, "I knew how it would be. Don't, don't; you'll break my heart."

"What the —— does it matter to you?" demanded her husband, "'s long 's I leave you alone (hic)."

Here some altercation took place between the two which we will not record; as, in such moods, our landlord was rarely very choice in his language. It was with considerable difficulty that Dame Hearty succeeded at length in getting her worse half upstairs and to bed.

We grieve to be obliged to record that on the following night there was a repetition of this painful scene, and the night after that, too. In spite of his poor wife's prayers and entreaties, he grew from bad to worse. Jack Hearty had become a confirmed drunkard. When in his cups his nature appeared completely changed. He who, up to the present, had enjoyed the reputation of being the kindest and most loving of husbands, the most genial of men, had now become morose, coarse, blasphemous, cantankerous, and cruel. His poor wife was in despair, and could do nothing but cry or go into hysterics.

It was one stormy night, when our host of the "Headless Lady" had dragged himself upstairs more intoxicated than ever, that he let fall the candle, which immediately set fire to the bed curtains, and in an instant the room was in flames. Our host was so dazed as to be incapable of saving himself, and if it had not been for Dame Hearty's presence of mind, who managed to drag her husband downstairs in time, both might have perished in the flames.

The position of the inn, as we know, was isolated. Before help could be procured the fine old hostel, that had stood for centuries, and whose walls had resounded so long with the mirth and laughter of our jovial members, was now a charred and shapeless ruin.



"Well, Jack, I hope you're satisfied now," said his better-half, as the loving couple tucked themselves into a spare bed at the house of a neighbour, who had taken them in out of charity.

Our host was now quite sober, having had to walk a mile at least through the bleak wind and driving snow, so he turned, in a humbled and penitent manner, towards his wife, crying, "Oh, Molly, Molly, how can you ever forgive me? Oh! what a fool I have been! If I had only listened to you at first. But, there—it's the drink—the cursed drink—that makes a beast of a man. I vow I will never touch a

drop of drink again as long as I live."

"Dear Jack, I believe you," replied his spouse. "Be your old self again," and with one loving kiss all past troubles were forgotten.

"Ah! Molly, Molly, you're something like a wife. Never will I for the future give you any cause for complaint."

And he kept his word. Jack Hearty was a reformed man.



We now approach the end of our story. Our hero and heroine, after a prolonged honeymoon in the sunny south, which to Helen was like a dream of Paradise, found themselves reluctantly compelled to return to England in order to superintend certain matters of business connected with their country house and estate. Soon after their return, our married couple, wishing to give the old people an agreeable surprise, proposed paying them a visit in their carriage and pair, at their old home, the "Headless Lady." What was their surprise and dismay, on their arrival, to find, in lieu of the time honoured hostel, *a blackened ruin!*

"Good Heavens!" cried husband and wife, simultaneously, "what can have become of the old people?" Tears started to the eyes of Helen at the thought of the scenes of her childhood and of the many happy hours she had spent within those old walls; but anxiety for the fate of her parents filled her soul. Enquiries having been made, Jack Hearty and his wife were tracked to the house of a neighbour in the village.

"Father! Mother!" cried the grand lady, stepping out of her carriage; and, throwing all ceremony to the winds, she embraced them both with the fondest affection, while the liveried coachman and footman exchanged glances together.

"Tell us how all this has happened," said our artist; "but first step into the carriage, and we will drive home. You must come and stay with us."

Neither his father nor his mother-in-law possessed anything but what they stood upright in, and were not long in making up their minds, so stepping into the carriage, and waving an adieu to their hospitable neighbours, were soon borne out of sight.

"Well, Jack," said our artist to his father-in-law, after he had listened to a detailed

account of the latter's misadventure, as they were sitting together that evening in the cosy parlour of our hero's country house, the two ladies having retired to the drawing-room to enjoy their own private gossip, "of course I am sorry for your loss, and for the old inn itself, which I had calculated making a picture of some day; but really, under the circumstances, I look upon it as providential."

"Providential!" exclaimed the *ci-devant* landlord, in astonishment. "What! the destruction of the home of my fathers by fire, through my idiotic folly and besotted drunkenness, providential!"

"Jack, my boy, you were but the instrument, and no responsible agent," continued his son-in-law. "From what you tell me, the house was most undoubtedly haunted—the air vitiated and poisoned as by a pestilence, from having been the seat of deep crime. I know something of these phenomena, and I have always heard and read that there is no thorough or lasting purification in such cases save by *fire*. Take, for example, the Fire of London. That broke out, providentially, after the Plague, in order to purify the City. The burning of your inn was a necessity, as it had been rendered uninhabitable through being haunted, and you were chosen as the instrument."

"Why! Good Heavens!" cried Jack Hearty, drawing his chair suddenly back, and looking straight into the face of his son-in-law, while a fat hand rested on each stout knee. "To think that that should never have occurred to me before! Why, of course, it must have been so. I see it all as plain as a pike-staff."

"You were not yourself, Jack, on that occasion," pursued our artist. "You were *beside* yourself, which means that your will, already unfeebled, was subjugated by some outside power—viz., the will of some disembodied spirit stronger than your own, who made use of you as his instrument."

"It is quite true, sir," replied Jack, "I was *not* myself at the time. Well, well—it is some consolation to think it *had* to be done, and that there was no way out of it."

Here the ladies re-entered the room, and the conversation took another turn.

"Now, Jack," proposed McGuilp, before all present, "since matters have turned out thus, what do you say to becoming steward of my estate—my man of business—caretaker of my house when I am away, and live here with the missus to the end of your days?"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Jack Hearty and his wife together, "you overwhelm us with

kindness. How can we ever repay you our debt of gratitude?" and tears started to the eyes of the old couple.

"Then so be it," said the now rich landowner.

"Dear, *dear*, Van!" exclaimed his young wife, as she threw herself upon his neck and covered him with kisses. "You have made me so happy."

And so it was that the little family party jogged on from day to day as united as birds in a nest.

Jack Hearty was a good man of business, and an honest, and the post suited him to a T. Dame Hearty's delight was naturally to cook and to wash, or in undertaking any of those rough duties that she had been accustomed to in her former life, but as these were not necessary—others having been engaged for that purpose, she was entrusted with the keys of the house, and became an excellent housekeeper, loved and respected by those under her.

Had our artist entirely abandoned art now that he had succeeded to his uncle's fortune and estate? Far from it. First and foremost among the improvements that he made was the building of a spacious studio, which he fitted up in a manner worthy of his taste and his means. In this he executed his great picture, which created such a *furor* on the following year at the Royal Academy, entitled, "Captured by the Brigands." The English captive in the composition was a faithful likeness of our artist himself, whilst the bronzed features of his captors, which were deeply impressed upon his memory were as like to the originals, our artist assures us, as if they had sat for them. The time is represented as towards evening. The light and shade powerful. The whole effect of the picture weird and unearthly. An offer had been made for it, but the would-be buyer was informed that it was not for sale. So it was hung up in the parlour of the artist's own country house, according to the wish of his loving wife, who liked constantly to be reminded of this weird episode in the life of the man she loved.

Time wore on, and not a quarrel, not a difference of opinion even arose to mar the happiness of this loving pair, when one fine morning a great event transpired. The lady of this household presented her liege lord with a son and heir, a fine healthy boy, who was christened John, after his grandfather, and never called other than Jack by his parents. Despite her household duties, Mrs. Vandyke McGuilp always managed to find time to pursue her studies, while her natural intelligence and application were such that the progress she made under her husband's tuition, was simply marvellous. In a few years the McGuilps

purchased a house in town in a fashionable quarter, and the "at homes" or "conversaziones," as they were called in those days, of Mrs. Vandyke McGuilp, were the talk of all the *elite*. Helen now felt herself called upon to enact the *rôle* of a grand lady, and in this her natural dignity, intelligence, and sweetness of disposition, enabled her to succeed to perfection.

Little more remains to be told. After a few seasons in town, and having run the usual curriculum of operas, balls, parties, concerts, visiting, and even presentation at court, the sameness and artificiality of such an existence palled upon these two artless and ingenuous lovers of nature, so the house in town was at length given up, and our artist retired into the country, where he gave up his time more thoroughly to the study of his art, working ever with increased ardour through the kind encouragement and sympathy of his loving wife.

Nor was Mrs. Vandyke McGuilp forgetful of her old friends. She fondly cherished the memory of her dear Mr. Oldstone, her friend and adviser, and it grieved her that she had not been able to be near him and attend upon him during his last moments on earth. She had also made the acquaintance of Mr. Rustcoin, who frequently called upon them. Had even been to their "at homes" when they lived in London. This gentleman had become quite reconciled to the idea of his friend Vandyke McGuilp's marriage with the daughter of a country innkeeper, and agreed with his friend Oldstone that this was quite an exceptional case. He had even been heard to declare before a company of friends that the most charming woman he had ever met for intelligence, natural grace, sound sense, good heartedness, tact, and *savoir faire*, was the wife of his friend Mr. Vandyke McGuilp.

A few years later, when it fell to Mr. Rustcoin's turn to pay the debt of nature, this gentleman recollecting how fondly the memory of his friend Oldstone was cherished by those two charming people, the McGuilps, having presented his large collection of antiquities to his native city of York, bequeathed to our friends both the bust and the oil picture of his brother antiquary, which latter, our readers will remember, was painted by the hand of our artist himself.

Our friend Rustcoin has now long gone to his rest, and both bust and portrait of Mr. Oldstone adorn the country mansion of the McGuilps. Among other cherished relics of their friend is a bound and illustrated work conspicuously placed in their library, entitled: "Tales of the Wonder Club," by Dryasdust, out of which volume little Jack McGuilp often pesters his mother to read a story to him.



CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, let me beg the reader to accompany me in imagination to the site of the once far-famed old Elizabethan hostelry, "The Headless Lady" and what do we see? Alas! not even the old blackened ruin is there to mark the spot. All, *all*, has been swept away by the ruthless hand of modern civilisation.

"She cries, a thousand types are gone,
I care for nothing, all shall go."

TENNYSON.

The Quaker

How is the whole face of the country changed! The stately elms and beeches, with the rooks' nests lodging in their branches, have been cut down to satisfy the greed of this utilitarian age. The land has been bought up in our time by a railway company, and crowded trains, with their screeching railway whistle, rush over the very site of this ancient hostelry, whose walls once resounded with the songs and applause of our friends of the "Wonder Club." Not even the picturesque old church of Littleborough has been spared. Being pronounced unsafe, it was pulled down, and on its site erected a modern Baptist chapel, in all that unsightly ugliness of style so cherished by dissenters. How strange that religious bodies should have such execrable taste. Telegraph lines cross and recross each other in every direction, and railway bridges, tunnels and aqueducts abound on all hands.

The town of Muddleton-upon-Slush, once little more than a village, has swelled to the proportions of a prosperous factory town, with its smoky chimneys, its gasometers, its rows upon rows of jerry-built houses, its new town hall, its salvation army barracks, its police station, its chapels of every conceivable denomination, to say nothing of its numerous public-houses, young men's Christian association, its baths and wash-houses, its low theatre, where questionable pieces are represented by indifferent actors to pander to the modern taste. Then its placards and pictorial advertisements, who shall tell? But, enough. As for the old fashioned honest English rustic of the past, with his sturdiness of character and devout unquestioning faith in matters of religion, *his* genus is quite

extinct; you may possibly stumble upon his fossil in a stratum of London blue clay. He has been superseded by quite a distinct species—the modern blackguard, with his blatant scepticism and blasphemous irreligion.

It might have been some forty years ago since the author, who was travelling on a matter of urgent business on this line, was roused in the midst of a reverie by the guard calling out, "Muddleton-upon-Slush! Any passengers for Muddleton?" As this was my destination I descended, and was about to cross the railway bridge when I observed an aged and reverend looking individual, whose low crowned hat with its broad brim, and the severe cut of whose sad coloured clothes proclaimed him a member of the "Society of Friends," a genuine quaker of the true old fashioned stamp, long since extinct. He was in earnest discourse with the porter, and as I passed him I caught these words, uttered in tones deliberate and slow, as one who has the whole day before him, and sees no necessity for hurry, and which contrasted strangely with the bustle and confusion going on around him.

"Prithee, friend, canst thou direct me to the ancient hostel of the 'Headless Lady'?"

"The *what*? The 'Eadless Lady.' No, sir. There ain't no public 'ouse about 'ere of that name," was the porter's curt reply. "But if it's a glass of *hale* you want, sir, there's the '*Hangel* and the *Heagle*,' the '*Helephant* and *Castle*,' and the——"

"Doubtless, friend," interrupted the reverend individual, "there are enough and to spare of those abominations, those dens of iniquity that the lost sheep of the house of Israel denominate public houses; but know, friend, that it is not ale I seek, seeing that I am a follower of one Rechab, who, as doubtless thou wilt have read in Holy Writ, indulged neither in wine nor strong drink."

The porter's face throughout this sententious speech was a study. His eyes and mouth gradually opened till they reached their utmost limit. Then suddenly recollecting that his manner might appear rude, he broke in with:

"Well, sir, if you should prefer a good rump steak and a cup of tea, I could recommend——"

"Verily, friend," again interrupted the quaker, "thou comprehendest me not, for neither doth my soul hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt, but having a taste for antiquarian lore, I would fain revisit that spot of historic interest once seen in my youth, but of which I have now no clear recollection, namely the hostel of the

'Headless Lady.'

""Eadless Lady! "*Eadless Lady*! Why, God bless my soul, sir, where *hever* do you 'ail from? Why, now I come to think of it, I remember to have 'eerd my grandfather speak of it. Lor, sir, it's been burnt down this 'alf a century ago."

"Burnt down!" exclaimed the antiquary, in extreme vexation.

"Yessir," replied the porter, briskly, "burnt down by the landlord hisself, when in his cups, as I've heered say—down to the wery ground. There, sir, is the spot, where I'm p'inting. Yessir, that's where it stood. This here line runs right bang over the wery site of it."

"Bless me!" cried the disappointed quaker in dismay, "and have I left my peaceful home, that I havn't stirred out of for years to hear this? Verily, all is vanity."

Here he would have begun a homily on the evils of intemperance, had not the guard interrupted him with:

"Yessir, I remember to have 'eerd my grandfather say, when I was a kid, on'y so high" (here he lowered the palm of his hand to within a couple of feet of the platform), "as 'ow the 'ouse was 'aunted by the ghost of a nun, as valked about vith 'er 'ead *hunder* 'er *harm*, but that's a long while ago, that is. No, sir, you may depend upon it, there *hain't* no 'eadless ladies valking about now, sir. *Ve* don't believe in 'em nowadays."

With this, he took up a rasping iron bell, which he rang so vigorously that the peaceful quaker was fain to stop his ears and hurry from the spot as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Poor old gent," muttered the porter, to himself, as he looked after him, "'e *hain't* hup to date, no 'ow."

FINIS.

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1. Images have been moved from the middle of a paragraph to the closest paragraph break.
2. Punctuation has been normalized.
3. Other than the corrections listed below, printer's inconsistencies in spelling, hyphenation, and ligature usage have been retained:

"importaut" corrected to "important" (page vii)

"Ron" corrected to "Rod" (page 405)

"little" corrected to "litttle" (page 441)

"Senor" corrected to "Señor" (page 453)

"vengeance" corrected to "vengeance" (page 487)

"portégé" corrected to "protégé" (page 562)

"my" corrected to "may" (page 597)

"upon upon" corrected to "upon" (page 603)

"physican" corrected to "physician" (page 619)

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