# Mary Jane Married

By George R. Sims.

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Tales of a Village Inn

Author: George R. Sims

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MARY JANE MARRIED

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London
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1888

# CONTENTS.



# MARY JANE MARRIED.

# CHAPTER I.

## *MARY JANE EXPLAINS.*

It is no use my trying to stop myself. I'm sure I've tried hard enough. When I changed my name from Mary Jane Buffham to Mary Jane Beckett by marrying Harry, my sailor sweetheart (God bless him!), I said to myself—Now, Mary Jane, my girl, no more pens and ink. You've written a book and had it published, and the newspaper gentlemen have been most kind in what they said about it. You'd better be satisfied with that, and do your duty in that state of life unto which you have been called, that state being mistress of a sweet little hotel—inn, some people will call it, but it's quite as much right to be called an hotel as lots of places that have "Hotel" up in big letters all over them—in a pretty village not very far from London. Of course I have enough to do, though Harry takes a good deal off my shoulders; but there are so many things that a landlady can do to make a house comfortable that a landlord can't, and I take a great pride in my dear little home, and everybody says it's a picture, and so it is. Harry says it's my training as a thorough servant that makes me such a good mistress, and I dare say it is. Our house is called "The Stretford Arms," and we put "Hotel" on the signboard underneath it soon after we had it, and made it pretty and comfortable, so that people—nice people—came to stay at it.

But, oh dear me, before we got it what a lot of trouble we had! If you have read my "Memoirs" you know all about me and Harry, and how I left service to marry him, and he made up his mind—having a bit of money saved, and some come to him from a relative—to take a nice little inn in the country; not a public-house, but something better, with plenty of garden to it for us to have flowers, and fruit, and fowls, and all that sort of thing; and we made up our minds we'd have one with a porch and trellis-work, and roses growing over it, and lattice windows, like we'd seen in a play before we were married.

We hadn't gone into business when my book came out in a volume. When the publisher sent me a copy, I thought, "Oh, how proud I shall be when I show this to Harry!" I declare I could have cried with rage when I took the brown paper off and saw the cover. It was most wicked, and upset me awfully. There on the cover was a picture of me sitting in my kitchen with a horrid, grinning policeman, with his arm round my waist. I threw the book on the floor, the tears

policeman, with his arm round my waist. I threw the book on the floor, the tears streaming down my face. It was such a bitter disappointment.

Harry came in while I was crying, and he said, “Why, my lass, what’s the matter with you?” And I sobbed out, pointing to the book, “Look at that, Harry!” Harry picked the book up, and when he saw the cover his face went crimson under the sunburn.

He said, “Did this ever happen, Mary Jane?” and I said, “No, Harry. Do you think I would ever have demeaned myself like that?”

He looked at the grinning idiot of a policeman for a minute, and then he brought his fist down hard right on his nose (the policeman’s). Then he said, “Put it out of my sight, and never let me see it again.” But presently he said, “There must be something about you and a policeman in the book, or they wouldn’t have put him hugging you on the cover. Which chapter is it? I’ll read it and see what the truth of this business is.”

I recollected then that there *was* something about a policeman, so I said, “No, Harry, dear, don’t read it now; you’re not in a fit state of mind. But whatever there is, I swear he didn’t sit in my kitchen with his arm round my waist; and he —he—he wasn’t—a grinning idiot like that.”

I took the book away from Harry, and wouldn’t let him see it then. But he kept on about it all the evening, and I could see it had made him jealous as well as savage; and it was very hard—all through that horrid picture the pleasure I had looked forward to was quite spoilt. But so it is in this world; and how often it happens that what we have been longing for to be a pleasure to us, when it comes is only a disappointment and a misery!

Harry said to me that evening that he would go to London and see the publishers, and have it out with them about the picture. He said it was a libel on my character, and he wasn’t going to have his wife stuck about on all the bookstalls in a policeman’s arms. But, I said to him, the publishers didn’t mean any harm, and it was no good being cross with them, or making a disturbance at their office.

But some time afterwards I wrote a little note to Messrs. Chatto and Windus about it, and Mr. Chatto wrote back that he was very sorry the picture had caused words between me and my husband, and, in the next editions, it should be altered, and soon after that he sent me a proof of the new cover, and it was

be altered, and soon after that he sent me a proof of the new cover, and it was Harry with his arm round my waist instead of the policeman, which makes all the difference.

There were many things that I shouldn't have written, perhaps, if I'd been quite sure that they would be published, and my husband would read them; but, after all, there was no harm, and I only wrote the truth. I wrote what I saw, and it was because it was the real experience of a real servant that people read it, and, as I have reason to know, liked it. And now, after I have been landlady of a village hotel, doing a nice trade both in the bar and in the coffee-room (why coffee-room, I don't know, for there is less coffee drunk in it than anything), I find myself putting down what I have seen and heard on paper, just as I did in my "Memoirs."

People say to me sometimes, "Law, now, fancy your noticing that!—I never did;" and that's the secret of my being an authoress, I suppose. I keep my eyes open, and my ears too; and if I see a character, I like to watch it, and find out all about it.

I've seen some strange characters in our inn, I can tell you; and as to the people in the village, why, when you come to know their stories, you find out that every place is a little world in itself, with its own dramas being played out in people's lives just the same as in big towns. Yes, there are village tragedies and village comedies, and the village inn is the place to hear all about them. I haven't got an imagination, so I can't invent things, and I think it's a good thing for me, because I might be tempted to make up stories, which are never so good as those that really happen. I thought when I came to this village I should have nothing to write about, but I hadn't been in it long before I found my mistake. I hear a lot, of course, in the bar-parlour, because it's like a club, and all the chatty people come there of an evening and talk their neighbours over, and I hear lots more in the house from the market women and from our cook and the people about the place, and I can promise you that I have learnt some real romances of real life—rich and poor, too—since I became the landlady of the 'Stretford Arms.'

We didn't get into the place all at once. Oh dear me, what an anxious time it was till we found what we wanted! and the way we were tried to be "done," as Harry calls it, was something dreadful. Harry said he supposed, being a sailor, people thought he didn't know anything; but when we came to compare notes with other people who had started in the business, we found our experiences of trying to become licensed victuallers was quite a common one.

We had a beautiful honeymoon first; but I'm not going to write anything about that, except that we were very happy—so happy that when I thanked God for my dear, kind husband and my happy life, the tears used to come into my eyes. But all that time is sacred. It is something between two people, and not to put into print. I don't think a honeymoon would come out well in print. It is only people who are having honeymoons who would understand it.

After we had had a nice long honeymoon, Harry began to think it was time we looked out for something; so he said, "Now, little woman, this is all very nice and lazy and lovely, but we must begin to think about the future. The sooner we look for a place the better."

So every day we read the advertisements in the papers of public-houses and inns and hotels in the country which were for sale.

Whenever we saw "nice home," or "lovely garden," or "comfortable home just suited to a young married couple," we wrote at once for full particulars. When we wrote to the agents about the best ones, I found that it was very like the paragon servants advertised—they had just been disposed of, but the agent had several others equally nice on hand if we would call.

It was very annoying to find all the "lovely gardens" and "charming homes," which were so cheap, just gone, and to get instead of them particulars of a horrid place at the corner of a dirty lane, with only a back yard to it, or something of that sort.

We went to see some of the places the agents or brokers sent us, and they were very much nicer in the advertisements than they were in themselves.

One house we went to look at we thought would do, though the situation seemed lonely. We wrote we would come to see it on a certain day, and when we got there, certainly there was no mistake about its doing a good trade. They asked a lot of money for it, but the bar was full, and in the coffee-room were men who looked like farmers having dinner and ordering wine, and smoking fourpenny cigars quite fast. And while we were having dinner with the landlord in his room, the servant kept coming in and saying, "Gentleman wants a room, sir," till presently all the rooms were gone, and people had to be turned away.

"It's like that now nearly always," said the landlord. "If it wasn't that I must go out to Australia, to my brother, who is dying, and going to leave me a fortune

made at the diggings, I wouldn’t part with the house for anything.”

“Where do the people all come from?” said Harry. “The station’s two miles off.”

“Oh,” said the landlord, “there’s something against the Railway Hotel—it’s haunted, I believe, and this last month everybody comes on here. If you like to start the fly business as well, you’ll make a lot of money at that. Flys to meet the trains would fill you up every day.”

We went away from the house quite convinced that it was a great bargain, and Harry said he thought we might as well settle with the agents, for we couldn’t do better.

But when we got to the station we had just missed a train, and had an hour to wait, so we went to the Railway Hotel. I sat down in a little room, and had some tea, while Harry went into the smoke-room to hear the talk, and see if he could find out about the place being haunted, and if it was likely to be haunted long.

In half an hour he came back looking very queer. “Mary Jane,” he said, “that swab ought to be prosecuted”—meaning the landlord of the inn we had been after.

Then he told me what he’d found out in the smoke-room, hearing a man talk, who, of course, didn’t know who Harry was. He was making quite a joke about what he called the landlord’s “artful dodge,” and he let it all out.

It seems the place we had been after had been going down for months, and the landlord had made up his mind to get out of it before he lost all his capital. So to get a good price he had been getting a lot of loafers and fellows about the village to come in and have drinks with him and fill up the place, and the day we came nobody paid for anything, and the farmers in the coffee-room were all his friends, and it was one man who kept taking all the bedrooms that the servant came in about when we were there.

Wasn’t it wicked? But it opened our eyes, and showed us that there are tricks in every trade, and that we should have to be very careful how we took a place by its appearance.

But, cautious as we were after that, we had one or two narrow escapes, and I may as well tell you something about them as a warning to young people going

into business. Of course we laughed at the tricks tried to be played on us, because we escaped being taken in, but if we had invested our money and lost it all in a worthless concern, we shouldn't have been able to laugh. Perhaps Harry would have had to get another ship, and I should have had to get another situation, and be a servant again. And a nice thing that would have been with my ba——

But I must not anticipate events. I know more about writing now than I did when I put my "Memoirs" together, and I'm going to see if I can't write a book about our inn, and our village, and all that happened in them, without troubling the gentleman who was so kind to me over my first book. I wish he had seen to the outside as well as the inside, and prevented that nasty, impertinent, grinning policeman behaving so disgracefully in my kitchen on the cover.

I say we can afford to laugh now; and there are many things in life to laugh at when we are on the safe side that we might cry at if we weren't. I know that I always laugh when people say about me not having changed my initials, but being Mary Jane Beckett instead of Mary Jane Buffham, and they quote the old proverb:

"Change your name and not the letter,
Change for the worse and not the better."

I laugh, because I *have* changed for the better; and Harry's as good as gold and as gentle as a baby—well, a good deal gentler, for I shouldn't like Harry to pull my hair, and put his finger in my eye, and kick me like my ba——

But I am anticipating again.

I was writing about the houses we went to look at before we fixed on the 'Stretford Arms.' There was one not quite in the country, but out in a suburb of London—a new sort of a suburb: rather melancholy, like new suburbs are when some of the houses are only skeletons, and the fields are half field and half brickyard, and old iron and broken china lie scattered about, with a dead cat in a pond that's been nearly used up and just shows the cat's head; and a bit of rotten plank above the inch or so of clay-coloured water. And there's generally a little boy standing on the plank, and making it squeeze down into the water and jump up again, and smothering himself up to the eyes in squirts of the dirty, filthy water, which seems to be quite a favourite amusement with little suburban boys

and girls. I suppose it's through so much building always going on.

We went to look at a nice house, that certainly was very cheap and nicely fitted up, in this new suburb; and there was a fair garden and a bit of a field at the back. It stood on the high-road, or what would be the high-road when the suburb was finished, and we were told it would one day be a fine property, as houses were letting fast, and all being built in the new pretty way; you know what I mean—a lot of coloured glass and corners to them, and wood railings dotted about here and there, something like the Swiss Cottage, where the omnibuses stop—Queen Anne, I think they call them.

We wanted to be more out of town, but we heard such glowing accounts from the broker about this place, we hesitated to let it go. The landlord, we were told, was giving up the business because he had to go to a warmer climate for the winter, being in bad health, and, having lost his wife, he had nobody to leave behind to look after the place. If ever you try to take a business, dear reader, I dare say you will find, as we did, that the people who are going to sell it to you never give up because things aren't good, but always because they've made so much money they don't want any more, or because they have to go and live a long way off. I suppose it wouldn't do to be quite truthful in advertising a business for sale, any more than in giving a servant a character. If the whole truth and nothing but the truth was told in these cases, I fancy very few businesses would change hands and very few servants get places.

We had only seen this house in the new suburb once on a very fine day in the autumn, and it looked very nice, as I told you; but, as luck would have it, we made up our minds to go down without saying we were coming, one wet Saturday afternoon. "Let's see how it looks in bad weather," said Harry. So I put on my thick boots and my waterproof, and off we went.

Certainly that new suburb didn't look lively in the rain. The mud was up to your ankles in the new roads, and the unfinished houses looked soaked to the skin, and seemed to steam with the damp.

When we got to the house we went in and asked for the landlord. "He's very ill in bed," said the barmaid, who had her face tied up with a handkerchief.

"What's the matter with him?" said Harry.

"Rheumatics," said the barmaid. "He's regular bent double, and twisted into

knots with it.”

The barmaid didn’t know us or our business, so Harry gave me a look not to say anything, and then he got the girl on to talk about the house.

“House!” she said, putting her hand to her swollen face; “’tain’t a house; it’s a mausolium—it’s a mortchery. Why, the cat as belongs to the place can’t hardly crawl for the rheumatiz. And the master, who came here a healthy, upright young man a year ago, he’s a wreck, that’s what he is, and the missis died here. If he don’t sell the place and get out of it soon he’ll die here too.”

“And how long have you been barmaid here?” asked Harry.

“Oh, I ain’t the regular barmaid. She’s gone away ill. I’m the ’ousemaid; but I serve in the bar when any one wants anything, which isn’t often now, for the people declare as they catch cold only standing in the place.”

“What’s the matter with it?” I asked.

“What’s the matter with it?” said the girl. “Why, damp’s the matter with it. It was built wet, and it’ll never get dry. And there ain’t no drainage yet; and when it rains—— Well, you should see our cellars!”

“I think I will,” said Harry, “if you’ll allow me;” and by pitying the girl, and one thing and another, Harry managed to get her to let him see the cellars.

It was really something shocking. The cellars were full of water, and the beer and the spirits were actually floating about.

“It’s only on days when it’s pouring wet we get like that,” said the girl; “but the damp’s always in the house.”

“Yes,” said Harry, “it would be.” With that he finished his glass of beer and biscuit, and said “Good day,” without troubling to leave word for the landlord that he had called.

“My dear,” he said, when we got outside, “I don’t think this place’ll do. I want a business ashore, not afloat.”

“Oh, Harry,” I said, almost with a little sob, for it did seem as if we were never

to be dealt fairly with—“oh, Harry,” I said, “isn’t it dreadful? Fancy that we might have gone into that place and died there for all these people cared.”

“Self-preservation, my dear,” said Harry; “it’s only a natural thing, if you come to think of it. This poor fellow wants to get out, and to get himself out he must let somebody else in. So long as he doesn’t die there, it doesn’t much matter to him who does.”

I didn’t answer, but I felt quite sad all the way home. It seemed to me that life was one great game of cheat your neighbour, and I began to wonder if to get on in business we should have to cheat our neighbours too. And that evening, when we were in our lodgings, sitting by the nice cosy fire, and I was doing my work, and Harry was smoking his big brown meerschaum pipe, I told him how sad I felt about all this trickery and deceit, and I asked him if perhaps there might not be some business that we could buy that wasn’t so full of traps and dodges as the public-house business. He shook his head, and said, “No. He was sure a nice little country inn was what would suit us, and it was only a question of waiting a little, and keeping our wits about us, and we should get what we wanted, and be none the worse for the experiences we picked up in the search.”

And we did pick up some experiences, and I wish I had time to write them all out: I am sure that hundreds of thousands of pounds of hard-earned money would be saved, and many suffering women and helpless children be shielded from misery.

Harry has got his eyes pretty wide open, and he knows how to take care of himself, but he has often said to me that in trying to get a public-house he met more land-sharks lying in wait for his money than ever he saw in Ratcliff Highway lying in wait for the sailors. I should like to show up some of these nice little advertisements of desirable houses you see in the daily papers, but perhaps it wouldn’t do. I’m always so afraid of that law which sends you to prison for writing what is true—the law of libel, I think it is called. But this I will say, that I hope no young married couple with a bit of money will ever take a public-house except through a really respectable broker. Don’t be led away by a beautiful description: and when you call on the broker and he won’t tell you where it is till you have signed a paper, don’t sign it. If you do you’ll have to pay for it. The broker and the man who is selling the property will “cut you up”—that’s what Harry calls it—between them, and you’ll probably go into the house only to leave it for the place which is called “*the* house,” and where there are

plenty of people who have got there through putting all their little fortune into one of these “first-class houses” as advertised.

We had plenty of them tried on us, and of course we saw plenty of genuine concerns. Some brokers are very nice, and all is square and above-board; and they let you know all about the property, and tell you the truth about it, and don’t make you sign anything before they tell you where it is to be seen.

At one place which *wasn’t* a swindle we had an adventure which I can’t help telling. It was a very pretty place just by a lock on the river, with gardens and roses, and a place for a pony, and quite a pretty view, and the rooms very cosy and comfortable, and Harry and I quite fell in love with it.

“I do believe this place will do, dear,” I said, being quite worn out with seeing so many.

“Yes,” said Harry, “it’s a perfect little paradise. I think we could be very happy here, my darling, and the customers seem nice, quiet sort of people, don’t they?”

We talked like that before we’d made our business known and been shown over the place.

Presently we went round the outhouses, and as I was going on a little ahead I went into one before our guide came up. I went right in, and then I gave a shriek and ran out, feeling as if I should fall to the ground.

There, lying on the straw, stark and staring, I had seen the dead body of a man, and, oh, that dreadful face! I shall never forget it while I live.

“What’s the matter?” cried Harry, running to me and catching me in his arms just as I was fainting.

“Oh, oh!” I gasped; “there’s a dead man in there.”

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said the guide. “There’s always something of the sort in that shed. It’s kept on purpose.”

“What!” I stammered; “always a corpse there?”

“Yes, ma’am. You see, most of the people as throws theirselves into the river get carried into this lock, so we’re always on the look-out for ’em, and this is the

carried into this lock, so we're always on the look out for 'em, and this is the inquest house. Lor', ma'am, you wouldn't believe what a lot of custom they bodies bring to the house! What with friends coming to identify 'em, and the inquest and the funeral, it's a very good thing for the house, I can tell you."

"Oh, Harry," I said, as soon as I felt a little better; "I could never be happy here. Fancy these roses and flowers, and yet always a corpse on the premises. Let's go away; we don't want to see any more."

But we did get settled at last. We found the place where I'm writing these Memoirs—the 'Stretford Arms.' It is called so after the Stretfords, who were the great family here, and it's on what used to be their property, and nice people they were—some of them—but a queer lot some of the others, with stories in the family to make the *Police News* Sunday-school reading to them. The house is very pretty, quite countryfied, and standing back from the road, with a garden on each side of it, and lots of trees. And the windows are latticed, and there are creepers growing all over the walls, and it looks really just like the pretty house Harry and I saw in the melodrama and fell in love with.

We got it through a respectable broker, who was very useful to us, and told us everything we had to do, and put us right with the brewer and the distiller, and managed "the change" for us capitally, and gave us excellent advice about the house and the class of customers we should have to deal with, and was very obliging in every way.

He told us that it was just the house to suit us, and we should just suit the house. He said it was a mistake to suppose that a man who could manage one house could manage another. "There are men for houses and houses for men," he said, "and this was the house for a quiet, energetic young couple, with taste and pleasing manners, and plenty of domestic management."

It was nice of him—wasn't it?—to say that, and he didn't charge for it in the bill. He explained that it was a house which might easily be worked up into a little country hotel, if it had a good housewife to look after it; and Harry and I both felt that we really were lucky to get it, and we made up our minds to try and make it a nice, quiet hotel for London people, who wanted a few days in the country, to come and stay at.

I remember hearing my old master, Mr. Saxon, say how nice it was to know a really pretty country inn where one could have a room and breathe pure air for a few days, and eat simple food, and get away from the fog and the smoke, and

few days, and eat simple food, and get away from the fog and the smoke, and feel truly rural.

“Harry,” I said, “as soon as we’re straight, and everything’s in order, I’ll write and let a lot of my old masters and mistresses know where I am. Perhaps with their recommendation we might get a nice little connection together for the hotel part. The local people will keep the bar going all right.”

“Yes,” said Harry, “that wouldn’t be a bad plan; and don’t you think that literary gentleman you lived with—the one that had the bad liver—might come, and recommend his friends? I should think it was just the house for a literary gentleman. Why, I believe I could write poetry here, myself.”

The dear old goose!—I should like to see his poetry. He’s always saying that some day *he* shall write his Memoirs, and then I shall be nowhere.

Oh dear, what fun it would be! But he wouldn’t have patience to go on long; he hates pens and ink.

But when he said about the literary people I didn’t answer all at once. I should like Mr. Saxon to come, but I don’t think I should like it to be a literary house altogether. Literary gentlemen are so queer in their ways, and they are *not* so particular as they might be with the ink, and they do burn the gas so late, and some of them smoke in bed; and there was another thing—if we had a lot of literary people down, they might get hold of the characters and the stories of the place, and then where would my book be?

So I said, “No, dear; I think we’ll ask Mr. Saxon to come, but we won’t try to get any more writers just yet. What we want are nice, quiet married couples and respectable elderly gentlemen—people who can appreciate peace and quietness, and won’t give much trouble.”

Ah me! when I think of the respectable elderly gentleman who *did* come, and then remember that I thought elderly respectable gentlemen were desirable guests, I feel inclined to——

* * * * *

Oh, dear, dear, how unkind of you, baby! You needn’t have woke up just as I’ve got a few minutes to myself. All right, dear, mamma’s coming. Bless his big

blue eyes! Oh, he *is* so like Harry!

# CHAPTER II.

## *THE SQUIRE'S ROOM.*

After we got into our new house everything was very strange at first. Harry knew something about the business, having been with a relative, who was in the same line, for six months that he didn't go to sea; but to me it was something quite new.

We took on the people who had been with the late owners, and that was a great help to us—one girl, the barmaid, being a very nice young woman, and a great comfort to me, telling me many things quietly that prevented me looking foolish through not knowing.

She was about four-and-twenty, and rather pretty; Miss Ward her name was, and she didn't mind turning her hand to anything, and would help me about the house, and was quite a companion to me. She said she was very glad we had taken the place, because she hadn't been comfortable with the people who had left it. The master was all right, but his wife was very stuck up, having been the daughter of a Government clerk, and she wouldn't have anything to do with the business, saying it was lowering, and only dressed herself up and sat in her own room, and read novels, and wanted everybody about the place to attend on her instead of the customers, and was very proud and haughty if any of them said "Good evening, mum," to her, hardly having a civil word for them, though it was their money she dressed herself up on.

She and her husband were going to have a real hotel instead of an inn, she having come into money, which was why we got the place so cheap.

Certainly it was left beautifully clean, that I will say; and there was an air of gentility about the place that was comforting. When Harry had first talked about going into this sort of business I felt rather nervous. My idea of an inn was a place where there were quarrels and fights, and where you had to put people out, and where wives came crying about ten o'clock to fetch their husbands home.

But I felt quite easy in my mind as soon as we were settled down in the 'Stretford Arms,' and very nice and cosy it was of an evening in our parlour,

with three or four nice respectable people sitting and smoking, and Harry, “the landlord” (dear me, how funny it was to hear him called “landlord” at first!), smoking his pipe with them, and me doing my needlework. Every now and then Harry would have to get up and go into the bar, to help Miss Ward, and say a word or two to the customers, but they were all respectable people; and the light and the warmth and the comfort made a nice dozy, contented, sleek feeling come over me.

I don’t know what made me think it, but the first night in our little parlour I felt as if I ought to purr, because I felt just as I should think a cat must feel when she settles down comfortably in front of the fire, on that round place that is in the middle of a fender.

I didn’t go into the bar much, having the house to see to, and getting the rooms to look pretty, and fitting them up as bedrooms, we being quite determined to make it a little hotel where people could stop.

We made one of the rooms look very pretty, and bought some old volumes of *Punch* and *Fun* for it, and a picture or two, and called it the coffee-room; and we kept another room for the local people to have bread and cheese and chops in. As soon as we were quite ready we had “Hotel” put up big, and I wrote nice letters to all my masters and mistresses, and I wrote specially to Mr. Saxon, asking for his patronage.

I was very anxious to get him, because I thought perhaps if we made him comfortable he would put us a nice paragraph in some of the papers he wrote for, and that would be a good advertisement.

I soon began to find out a good deal about our customers and our neighbours, and the people who lived in the village. The most famous people, as I have said before, were the Stretfords, the family whose land our house was on, and whose arms were on our signboard.

We hadn’t anything to do with the Stretfords ourselves, and they didn’t live in the place any longer, the house having passed to a stranger, and all the property being in other people’s hands, but the place was saturated with stories of the old Squire’s goings-on. Poor old Squire! He was dead long before we took his “Arms,” and everything belonging to him had gone except his name; but the old people still spoke of him with love and admiration, and seemed proud of the dreadful things he had done.

When I say dreadful I don’t mean low dreadful, but high dreadful—that is, things a gentleman may do that are not right, but still gentlemanly—or, rather, they were gentlemanly in the Squire’s time, but wouldn’t be thought so nowadays.

I’ve heard old people tell of “the days when they were young,” and the things that were thought nothing of then for a gentleman to do. There is a dear old gentleman with long white hair who uses our house, who lived servant in a great family in London sixty years ago, and his father before him, and the stories he tells about the young “bloods”—that is what he calls them—are really wonderful.

They were a nice lot certainly in those days. If they went on like it now they would be had up before a magistrate, and not allowed to mix with respectable people. They were great drinkers and great fighters and great gamblers, and thought nothing of staggering about the streets and creating a disturbance with the watch or pulling off knockers, and doing just the sort of mischief that only very young fellows and little rough boys do in the streets now.

Squire Stretford was one of the good old sort of country gentlemen, with red faces and ruffled shirts, who carried snuffboxes and sticks with a tassel to them, and didn’t think it any harm to take a little too much to drink of an evening. And he was a great gambler, and would go up to London to his club and gamble, till, bit by bit, he had to part with all his property to pay his debts.

He had a daughter, a fine, handsome girl she was, so I was told, and a lovely rider. Miss Diana her name was, and she was in love with a young fellow who lived at a great house not far from the Hall—a Mr. George Owen. His father was a pawnbroker in London, having several shops; but the son had been to Oxford, and had never had anything to do with taking in people’s watches and blankets and flat-irons. When Miss Diana told her papa that if she couldn’t have George Owen she would never have anybody, he was in a dreadful rage. “Good heavens, Di,” he said, “you must be mad! Marry a fellow who lends money on poor people’s shirts and flannel petticoats? Marry the man that’s got our plate, and your poor mother’s jewels; a Jew rascal, who only lends about a quarter what things are worth, and sells them in a year if you don’t redeem them? Why, you’ll be proposing the dashed fellow who serves me with a writ for my son-in-law next!”

It was no good for the poor young lady to argue that young Mr. Owen was a private gentleman, and hadn't anything to do with the business—the old Squire wouldn't listen to her. "If ever you marry that man, Di," he said, "you're no daughter of mine, and I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

Miss Di never said any more, but moped a good deal; and Mr. Owen never came to the Squire to ask for her hand, because, of course, she'd told him that it was no use.

But the Squire went on just as reckless as before, gambling and enjoying himself, and being up in London more than ever.

One morning he came down by the first train from London, looking very pale, and he went straight up to the Hall, and got there just as Miss Di had come down to breakfast. "Di," he said, "I'm going away, and you'll have to go away too. I've lost the Hall."

It was true; he'd actually played for the Hall, the old place where he was born, and lost it at cards, having parted with everything else long before. They say that altogether he must have gambled away a hundred thousand pounds—at any rate he was ruined, for all his estate and all his property had been lost, and he was in debt.

Miss Di looked at her pa, and said, "What am I to do?"

"Come abroad with me," he said; "we must live cheaply for a little while somewhere."

"No, I sha'n't," said the girl; "as long as you kept a home for me, I obeyed you as your daughter. As you have gambled my home away, I shall go where there is one for me. I shall marry George Owen."

And marry him she did very soon after. The Squire wasn't at the wedding, you may be sure. He went away abroad, and lived there for years—how nobody knew; and strangers took the Hall and the lands; and the name of Stretford, that had been in the place for hundreds of years, died out of it; the village inn, the 'Stretford Arms,' being the only thing that kept it alive.

And it was in the best bedroom of that inn—a dear old-fashioned room it is, with a great four-post bedstead, and an old oak chest, and a big fireplace with old

brass dogs for the logs of wood—that the old Squire lay, years afterwards, dying.

It was years before we came to the place, but the room the old Squire lay in seemed a sacred place to me directly I had heard the story, and over and over again when I've had a fire lighted there for a guest who was expected, I've stood and watched the firelight flickering on the old oak panels, and I've seen the old Squire's handsome face lying on the pillow of the great four-post bedstead.

He had come back from abroad, terribly broken and ill and poor. He said he knew he was dying, and he wanted to die as near the old place as possible. He wouldn't have anything to do with his daughter, Mrs. Owen, and would never take a penny from her, though she was very rich; and when he came back, and she wanted to see him and get him to consent to be taken to her house, he said, "No, he didn't want to die in pawn. He'd as soon have the sheriff's officer or a Jew money-lender sitting by his death-bed as a pawnbroker or a pawnbroker's wife."

It's wonderful how with some people this family pride will keep up to the last. Of course it isn't so much nowadays, when ladies of title marry rich tradesmen, and are very glad to get them, and noblemen don't mind making a marine-store dealer's daughter a lady, if her pa has enough money to give her a fine dowry.

But the Squire was one of the proud old sort that began to go out when railways began to come in. That's how Mr. Wilkins, the parish clerk, who uses our parlour regularly of an evening, puts it. It was Mr. Wilkins—quite a character in his way, as you'll say when you know more about him—who told me the story of the old Squire after whose Arms our house is named.

The people who had our house at the time were the Squire's butler and his wife, and of course they made their dear old master as comfortable as they could, and made his bill as light as possible, for he would pay for everything with the little bit of money he'd got, and would swear just as he used to do in former days if they didn't let him have his bill regularly.

One day he said to the doctor, "Doctor, how long do you think I shall live?"

"Why do you ask?" said the doctor.

"Because I must cut my cloth according to my measure," said the Squire. "I want to know how long I've got to spread my money over. My funeral will be all right, because I've paid for that beforehand."

right, because I've paid for that beforehand.

Which he had, as was found out afterwards.

Well, the doctor was in a fix. He knew if he said a long time the poor old gentleman would begin to starve himself and do without his wine, and if he said a short time he thought it would be cruel; so he said that it all depended upon the turn his illness took.

It was in the winter time that the Squire lay ill at the "Arms," and Christmas was coming.

As it came nearer, the Squire grew weaker and weaker, and everybody saw he was going home. One evening the landlady went up to the Squire's rooms, and found him out of bed with his dressing-gown on, sitting in a chair and looking out of the window. It was a bright, frosty evening and the moon was up, and you could see a long way off.

She went in on tiptoe, fancying he might be asleep, and not wanting to wake him, and she saw he was looking out over the fields right away to the old Hall. It stood out in the moonlight far away, looking very haunted and gloomy, as it often does now when I look at it from that very window.

The tears were running down the old man's face, and he was quite sobbing, and the landlady heard him say to himself, "The dear old place! Ah! if I could only have died there I could have died happy."

Mr. Owen used to come every day to ask after the Squire, and the landlady told him about this, and he set about thinking if something couldn't be managed. He knew the Squire wouldn't take charity or be beholden to anybody, or accept a favour; and the thing was—how could he be got back to the Hall believing it was his own?

Mr. Owen told his wife—the Squire's daughter—and they both put their heads together, as the saying is. Miss Di, as she was always called about here, suddenly had an idea, and Mr. Owen went to London that night.

The next day the Squire was told that an old friend wanted to see him, and when he was told it was a friend of the old wild days he said, "Let him come—let him come."

The friend was Colonel Rackstraw—that was the name, I think—a great gambler, like the Squire—and it was to him the Squire had lost the Hall.

It was quite a meeting, those two old fellows seeing each other again, they say, and they began to talk about old times and the adventures they had had, and the Squire got quite chirrupy, and chuckled at things they remembered.

“Ah, Rackstraw,” says the Squire presently, “I never had your luck; you were always a lucky dog, and you broke me at last. I didn’t mind anything but the old place—that settled me.”

“Well,” says the Colonel, “I haven’t done much good by it. There it stands. The people I let it to have cleared out (which wasn’t true), and I’ll sell it cheap.” (He’d sold it long ago, and the people living in it were big wholesale tailors.)

“So the old place is for sale?” says the Squire.

“Yes; will you buy it?”

“I, my dear fellow! I’m a pauper.”

“Of course, of course; I forgot,” says the old Colonel. “Well, I’ve come to cheer you up a bit. I suppose you never touch the pictures now?”

“No, no,” says the Squire, “not for a long time. I haven’t had any money to lose.”

“I should like to have had a quiet game with you for auld lang syne,” says the Colonel. “Shall I ring for a pack?”

“I should like it. I should like to have one more turn with you, old friend, before I die; but—but——”

“Oh, come, it’ll do you good—cheer you up; and as to the stakes—well, we’ll play for silver, just to make the game interesting.”

After a lot of coaxing the old Squire consented, and the Colonel got the cards, and pulled a table up to the bed, and they began to play.

The Squire soon forgot everything in playing. The old excitement came back; his cheeks got red, and his eyes grew bright, and he kept making jokes just as they

[illegible] say he used to do.

He had wonderful luck, for he won everything, and he was so excited he must have fancied himself back again at the club by the way he went on. When he had won they made the stakes higher, and he kept winning, till he had won quite a lot. The Colonel had bank-notes in his pocket and he paid them over, and presently he said—

“Look here, Stretford, I’ll play you double or quits the lot.”

The Squire was like a boy now. “All right,” he said; “come on.” He won, and the Colonel had to owe him a lot of money.

When the Squire was quite worked up the Colonel cried out, “A thousand!” He lost it. “Double or quits!” He lost again—and so on till he had lost a fortune: and then he pretended to be awfully wild, and brought his fist down on the table and shouted out, “Confound it, I’m not going to be beaten! I’ll play you the Hall against what you’ve won.”

I wish you could hear Mr. Wilkins tell the story as he told it to Harry and me in our bar parlour. He made us quite hot the way he described this game with the Colonel and the dying Squire, and he made it quite real, which I can’t do in writing. We were quite carried away, and I knew when it came to the Hall being staked, and Mr. Wilkins described the Squire sitting up, almost at death’s door, and laughing and shouting, and evidently carried away by “the ruling passion” (that’s what Mr. Wilkins called it), that he must have believed himself back again at his club and the devil-may-care fellow he was in those days.

“Done!” said the Squire.

And then they played for the old Hall that the Squire had lost ten years ago.

And the Squire won it!

As he won the game he flung the cards up in the air, and shouted out so loud that the landlady ran up, thinking he was in a fit or something.

“I’ve won it!” he cried. “Thank God—thank God!” Then he fell back on the bed, and burst out crying like a child.

The doctor came in to him and gave him something, and by and by they got him

The doctor came in to him and gave him something, and by-and-by they got him to sleep.

“He’ll rally a bit,” said the doctor; “the excitement’s done him good, but he’ll go back again all the quicker afterwards.”

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The next morning it was all over the village that the Squire was better, and was going back to the Hall again; that he’d come into money or something, and had bought it back again. Mr. Owen arranged everything—him and Miss Di—or Mrs. Owen, I should say.

The people came from far and near, and gathered about the old place when they heard that the Squire was coming, and they determined to give him a grand welcome.

The doctor had a long conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Owen that morning, and determined to try the experiment. He got the Squire up and dressed, and, well wrapped up, he was carried down and put in a close carriage, and then they drove away to the Hall.

The people shouted like mad when they saw the Squire coming, and they took the horses out, and dragged the carriage right up to the doors.

The landlord of the “Arms” was there in his old butler’s coat, and he received the Squire, and he was taken into the big room, which had been the justice-room, and the villagers all crowded in; and the Squire, sitting in his old easy-chair by the fire, received them, and, after he had had some stimulant, made a little speech that brought tears into the people’s eyes, and thanked them, and said he should die happy now, for he should die master of the dear old place.

* * * * *

After that the Squire never left his bed, but he was very happy; he lay in the old room—the room his wife had died in—and all the old things were about him, just as he had left them; and on Christmas Day he told the doctor to send for his daughter and “the pawnbroker.”

They came, and the Squire kissed his daughter, and said he was so happy he couldn’t let anything mar his happiness; so he forgave her and kissed her, and

then held out his hand and said, “Mr. Owen, they tell me that for a pawnbroker you are a very decent fellow.”

He didn’t live very long after that—only a few weeks; but he saw his daughter every day, and she was holding his hand when he died. It was just in the twilight he went—only the firelight let everything in the room be seen.

He had been sinking for days, and hadn’t said much; but he seemed to get a little strength for a moment then. He had had his wife’s portrait brought from Mrs. Owen’s and hung on the wall opposite his bed. He looked at that—a long, loving look—and his lips seemed to move as if he was saying a little prayer.

Then he pressed his daughter’s hand, and she stooped and kissed him, and listened to catch his words, for he spoke in a whisper.

“God bless you, dear,” he said; “I’m at peace with everybody, and I’m so glad to die in the old place. Tell the pawnbroker”—a little smile passed over his face as he whispered the word—“tell the pawnbroker that I forgave——”

Miss Di could catch no more. The lips moved, but no sound came. Then all was quiet. A little gentle breathing, then a deep long sigh—a happy sigh—and then—the end.

* * * * *

When Mr. Wilkins first told me and Harry that story, the way he told it (oh, if I could only tell it in writing like that!) made me cry, and Harry—he pulled out his handkerchief and had a cold just like he had when the clergyman was reading our marriage service. Several times while that service was on I thought Harry had a dreadful cold, but he said afterwards, “Little woman, it wasn’t a cold; it was the words and the thoughts that came into my heart and made it feel too big for my waistcoat; and I felt once or twice as if I should have liked to put my knuckles in my eyes, and boo-hoo, like I used to when I was a boy.”

It came home to us, you see, having the ‘Stretford Arms;’ and it being in our house that it all happened, long, long ago—and that room, the Squire’s room, was my pride after that, and I kept it a perfect picture; but I never dusted it or arranged it without thinking of the poor old gentleman sitting in the big armchair, and looking out in the moonlight at the old home that he had lost—the home his race had lived and died in for hundreds of years.

Of course as soon as we'd got over the first effect of the story, we asked Mr. Wilkins to explain how it had been done, though we guessed a good deal.

He told us that it was all through Mr. George Owen—("He was a brick," said Harry, and though I couldn't call him a brick, because somehow or other "brick" isn't a woman's word, I said he was an angel, which Harry says is the feminine of "brick")—and it was he who had arranged the whole thing.

The wholesale tailors were going away for three months, and Mr. Owen had got them to let him rent the place of them for the time, and longer if he wanted it, and then he had gone off to London and found the Colonel, who was an old bachelor living in Albany something—whether the barracks or the street I forget—and, knowing the whole story from Miss Di, he had begged him to come down and assist in the trick—if trick is the word for such a noble action.

The Colonel had played to lose, the money being Mr. Owen's, and it had all been arranged, and he was very glad to do it for his old friend, for though a born gambler, the Hall had always stuck in his throat—to use a common saying.

I wrote the story down when Mr. Wilkins had told it us, because I thought if ever I wrote the memoirs of our inn, I couldn't begin with a better one than the story of old Squire Stretford, seeing that the strangest part of it took place in our house, and that our house is the 'Stretford Arms,' and the Stretfords are bound up with the history of the place.

Mr. and Mrs. Owen left the neighbourhood soon after that; they sold their house, and went to live in another part of the country, and the wholesale tailors came back again. The eldest son of the tailors has the place now, and he sometimes comes in and has a chat with Harry. When he was a boy he ran away to sea, and his people never knew what had become of him for ever so long, and gave him up for dead, till one morning his ma came down to breakfast and found a letter from him, dated from some awful place where cannibals live. It was some island that Harry knew quite well, having been there with his ship, but since cannibalism had been done away with, it being many years after the wholesale tailor's eldest son was in those parts.

Of course he is a middle-aged man now, this eldest son, and settled down, and has the business, and is quite reformed; but he likes to come and talk to Harry about that cannibal island, and foreign parts which they have both visited. I think

it is likely to be a very good thing for us in business, Harry having been a sailor. People seem to like sailors, and, of course, if they can talk at all, and can remember what they have seen, their conversation is sure to be interesting.

When Harry sometimes begins to spin a yarn of an evening, everybody leaves off talking and listens to him, not because he is the landlord, but because he has something to say that is worth listening to, about places and people that nobody else in the company knows anything about. I wish I could use some of his stories here, but I can't, because I am only going to write about what belongs to our hotel and the village, and the things that I see and hear myself.

When the gentleman who lives at the Hall that was the home of the Stretfords for so many years comes in of an evening, of course we always ask him in the——

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The cat asleep in baby's cradle! Oh, Harry! and I only left you with him for half an hour while I did my writing. Don't laugh! please don't laugh! I've heard the most terrible things about cats in babies' cradles. I declare I can't trust you with baby for a second. Thought they looked so pretty together, did you? A nice thing if I'd found my dear baby with its breath sucked by the cat, and its father looking on laughing!

# CHAPTER III.

## *MISS WARD'S YOUNG MAN.*

I told you that when we took over the 'Stretford Arms' we kept most of the people about the place, and among them the barmaid, Miss Ward—Clara we generally called her. She was a great help to us, knowing the ways of the place and the customers; for you may be sure everything was very strange to us at first.

If I were to tell you that once or twice I really felt inclined to sit down and cry, you would laugh at me; but it was true. I said to Harry, when we went to bed the first night, quite worn out, "Harry, we shall be ruined! We've gone into a business we know nothing about, and we shall lose all our money."

Harry laughed, and said I was a goose, and he was soon fast asleep. But I lay awake for ever so long, imagining all manner of dreadful things; even seeing ourselves seized for rent, the customers having all gone away through my knowing nothing about the business. And when I wasn't thinking of that, I was seeing a great big navvy come into the bar and begin to swear, and throw quart pots at the plate glass, and Harry jumping over the bar and having a fight with him, and both of them rolling over on the floor, and knocking their heads against the spittoons.

If once I begin to think instead of going to sleep, I think dreadful things, and they seem quite real at the time. I wonder why it is that everything in your life seems going wrong sometimes when you lie awake at night, and when you've been to sleep and wake up in the morning everything seems to have come right again?

I know that the first night at our new home, when I didn't sleep, beside the things I've told you, I imagined people coming and taking our rooms, and staying for a week and not paying their bills, and I couldn't get out of my head a story I had once heard about a gentleman who stayed a month at an hotel, and lived on the fat of the land, borrowed ten pounds, and went away leaving a very heavy box, and when the box was opened it was full of nothing but bricks.

And I was dreadfully frightened about the licensing laws. I didn't know much

about them, but I had read cases in the papers about landlords being summoned, and the first night, when it was closing time, and the customers in our bar and smoking-room were slow in going, and Harry had to say, “Now, gentlemen, please!” twice, and still they stopped talking, and one old gentleman didn’t seem as if he’d ever get into his overcoat, being a little paralyzed on one side, I felt inclined to drop down on my knees and say, “Oh, do go; please go! Fancy if the policeman comes and Harry’s summoned!”

Of course I soon got over this sort of thing, and now they tell me I make a very good landlady indeed; but at first everything made me dreadfully nervous, and I made a few mistakes.

Miss Ward, as I told you, was our right hand. She was a tall, rather pretty girl, with dark hair and eyes, and about five-and-twenty, with a history, which she told me one afternoon when we were slack, and we were both sitting in the parlour doing needlework.

Her father was a farmer in Essex, but, times being bad, she was taken by her uncle, who had a large hotel and no children of his own, and brought up like a lady, only just superintending things that her aunt, being an invalid, couldn’t see to.

Her uncle had made a fortune with his hotel, and could have retired, but instead of that he took to sporting, and went to race meetings, and was a good deal away from home.

After a time, people began to notice a change in his manner, and he neglected his business altogether, and would come home sometimes with his dog-cart full of legs of mutton, and poultry, and things, which he said he’d bought cheap. One day he brought home fifty ducks in his trap; and another day he brought six mastiff dogs, and they were all kept chained up in the yard, and a nice noise they made.

But that wasn’t the worst. He got very violent if his wife objected to his buying things, and she said she was sure he wasn’t right in his head. After a terrible quarrel about his buying four billiard tables, and having them sent home, with nowhere to put them, he went off, and was away for weeks, and when he came back he never said where he’d been, but letters began to come, and his wife opened them, and it seemed he’d been about the country and had bought horses and traps everywhere, and had left them at different yards at hotels, and there

they were, eating their heads off—the horses, not the traps.

And they found out that he'd bought a sailing vessel at Brighton, and it was lying on the beach; and in London he'd been to a sale and bought a lot of pictures, and had them sent to a furniture depository, where they were standing at a fearful rent.

It seemed as though he couldn't think of enough ways to fool his money away, and they found he'd got rid of thousands.

His wife went to a solicitor to see what could be done to stop him getting rid of any more, and when he found it out he jumped about the place and smashed the furniture, and went down in the cellar with a hammer and broke bottles, till you could have swum about the place in mixed wine.

Everybody said that his brain was softening, or something of the sort, and he would have to be put under restraint. Poor Clara told me they had a dreadful time with him, and it came to the worst one evening, when there was a ball and supper being given in the big room belonging to the hotel. Everything was ready for the supper; pies and jellies, and creams, and tipsy cakes: and her uncle went into the supper-room when the table was all beautifully laid; and when the guests began to come in, he ordered them all out, saying it was his house, and he wasn't going to have a pack of people dancing and singing, when they ought to be in bed and asleep; and, before anybody knew what he was going to do, he seized the jellies and the creams and threw them at the guests, regularly bombarding them, so to speak, before anybody could stop him. It was a dreadful sight. The poor ladies shrieked, as jellies and creams came all over them; and one gentleman was smothered all over his head with a dish of tipsy cake, the custard running down over his face.

The people who were just coming in at the doorway couldn't get back, because the people behind pressed forward; and there were tongues, and hams, and patties, and fowls, and jellies, and greasy things flying right and left and all among them—that madman seizing things with both hands to hurl at them.

When Miss Ward told me about it first, I couldn't for the life of me help laughing. I could see the jellies and the creams hitting the people, and I thought how ridiculous they must have looked; but, of course, it was very dreadful, and that was the finishing stroke to the house. People wouldn't come there to have things thrown at them by the landlord. And when he was put in an asylum,

where he died, it was found out he had got rid of so much money, and was liable for so much more, that his affairs had to be wound up and the business sold. Out of the wreck there was only just enough left for the aunt to live on, and so Miss Ward had to go out as a barmaid, her own father not being able to offer her a home, through a large family, and farming having become so bad.

She had had a good education, though, and could play the piano and spoke a little French, and was very ladylike; and that, I dare say, made me take to her at once. I liked her so much that I always tried to make the place as easy for her as I could; and when one day she said she hoped I would have no objection to her young man coming there to see her occasionally, I said, “Oh dear no; certainly not.”

I knew myself how hard it was never to be able to speak a word to your sweetheart, when perhaps he’s got plenty of time of an evening, now and then, just to come and say a few words to you and cheer you up.

When I told Harry he was quite agreeable. You may be sure he remembered how he used to come and see me, and how much happier we had been when we could see each other comfortably without deceiving anybody.

“She’s a nice girl,” he said, “and I’m sure her young man will be respectable, and not one of those low fellows, who get in with barmaids and lead them on to change bad money for them, and do all manner of dreadful things with the till.”

It was about a week after that, one Sunday afternoon, that Miss Ward’s young man, who lived in London, came to our house for the first time. Directly I saw him I didn’t like him. He’d got red hair, which, of course, oughtn’t to be against a man, because it’s a thing he can’t help—but there was what I call a “shifty” look in his face. He never looked at you when he spoke to you, and when you shook hands with him, his hand was one of those cold, clammy hands that I never could abide.

But he was very agreeable. He brought me a cucumber and a bunch of flowers, and, it being teatime, we asked him to join us. He was very affectionate and nice to Miss Ward, and as they sat there with us, and she kept looking up in his face, and showing how proud she was of every word he said, my thoughts went back to the day when Harry came home from sea, and my good, kind mistress let him come down in the kitchen and have tea with us, and that softened me towards Miss Ward’s young man—Mr. Shipsides his name was—and I made up my

mind I'd done him a wrong in not liking him.

How he did talk, to be sure! All that teatime nobody else could get a word in edgeways. He told us all about the business he'd bought in London, and what a nice home he was getting together, to be ready for Miss Ward when she married him. Poor girl, how her eyes brightened as he talked of all the beautiful things she was to have in her home!

He said that he'd taken a splendid shop, and stocked it in the grocery line, having been an assistant at a grocer's, and come into money lately, and that he had the promise of all his former masters' customers to deal with him. He told us the first day he opened he had the shop crowded all day, and had to take on two extra assistants, and that among his customers were dukes, marquises, earls, and barons.

Harry looked up at that and said, "Do you mean to say that swells like that come to your shop after their grocery?" "Not themselves," said Mr. Shipsides; "but their names are on my books." "You're doing very well," said Harry, "if you've got a business like that—you must be making money fast." "I am," said Mr. Shipsides; "but of course I can't put much by yet, because I've got relatives' money in the business that helped to start me, and that's all got to be paid out first, and the place cost me a lot of money to fit up and stock; but by-and-by, if things go on as they are now, I shall be on the high-road to fortune, and Clara will ride in her carriage."

Of course, I said I hoped she would; but all the same, it made me wince a little. I had just a little feeling of womanly jealousy, which, I suppose, was only natural, at the idea of my barmaid riding in her carriage, while I was taking a twopenny 'bus, in a manner of speaking, for, of course, where we lived there were no twopenny 'buses, or sixpenny ones either for the matter of that.

I think it took Harry a bit aback, too, hearing the fellow go on like that, for he said, "I hope when you've got your carriage you'll drive down here with it. It'll do us good, you know, to let folks see that we've got a connection with carriage people."

Miss Ward laughed at that, but Mr. Shipsides coloured up almost as red as his hair, and I saw he didn't like it, so I turned the conversation. But he always got it back on to himself, and the wonderful fellow he was, and the wonderful things he was going to do. He made out that he was very highly connected, although

he was going to do. He made out that he was very highly connected, although he'd been a grocer's assistant, and said his father was the son of a baronet, but had married against his father's (the baronet's) wish, and had gone away—being proud—and never spoken to any member of the family again; and when he died had made himself and his brothers and sisters vow they would never seek a reconciliation.

"I never heard of a Sir anything Shipsides," Harry said.

"That's very likely," said the fellow, "because that wasn't the name. My father was so indignant that he changed it by Act of Parliament; but his real name was one that is known and respected throughout the length and breadth of the land."

And afterwards we found out that his father wasn't dead at all, but alive, and that he was——

But I mustn't anticipate.

Mr. Shipsides, after tea was over, had a cigar with Harry while Miss Ward went into the bar, the house being opened again. Harry got out a box of cigars and put them on the table, always doing the thing well, like a sailor, for though he is in business on shore, he'll never quite get rid of the sea. I had to go upstairs to see to things, and Harry went into the bar, so Mr. Shipsides was left alone with a bottle of whiskey and the box of cigars. He didn't stop long, saying he had to catch a train back to town, so he said good-bye to Miss Ward and shook hands with Harry in the bar, and went off.

And when Harry went into the parlour the whiskey-bottle was half empty, and quite a dozen cigars were gone, and as Shipsides couldn't have smoked them in the time, he must have filled his pockets.

Harry and I looked at each other when we found it out, but I said, "Don't say anything before Miss Ward, it will only hurt her feelings;" but after that I tried to get into her confidence about her young man, having an uneasy feeling that he wasn't quite good enough for her.

But what she said about him made him out to be quite a beautiful character. She said that he had brought up his younger brother and his sisters, and had paid for their education out of his salary, and that he was a most steady young fellow, and had been teacher in a Sunday-school, and was always asked to tea with the clergyman on the Sundays that he didn't come to see her.

“But how did he get the money to buy this grand business he talks about?” I said.

“Oh,” she said, “it was left him in his late master’s will. His master had a great respect for him because he managed his business so well while he was ill. It wasn’t quite enough to start the business, but the rest he borrowed from his friends.”

“Well, my dear,” I said, “I hope you’ll be very happy.”

“I’m sure we shall,” she said; “he’s so steady and so affectionate, and he consults me about everything for our home, and everything I want I’m to have.”

“Aren’t you going to live at the business, then?” I asked.

“Oh no,” she said; “Tom” (that was his Christian name) “says it’s not a nice locality to live in, so he’s taken a house a little way out.”

I didn’t say any more, but I thought a good deal. Still, the poor girl might be right about her lover; and his filling his pockets with the cigars might only be a peculiarity. The richest people often do that sort of thing, because I remember Harry telling me about a nobleman, Lord Somebody, who was invited to lunch on board a ship in harbour that Harry was on. There was a beautiful cold champagne luncheon laid out, and Harry saw this nobleman, while everybody was eating, put two roast fowls in his coat-pockets, and then try to get a bottle of champagne in as well. The captain was very indignant, and went up to him and said, “You can eat as much as you like, sir, but don’t pocket the things.” Lord Somebody turned very red, and said, “Dash it, sir! do you know I’m a nobleman?” “You may be a nobleman,” said the captain; “but I’m hanged if you’re a gentleman; and if you don’t put those cold fowls back on the table you’ll go ashore a jolly sight quicker than you came aboard.” The lord who did that was a well-known nobleman, and very rich, so that pocketing things isn’t any proof of a man being a nobody or poor.

Two or three days after that Harry went to London on business, and when he came back he said, “I say, little woman, do you remember that Shipsides telling us that dukes, marquises, earls, and barons were his customers?”

I said, “Yes, I do.”

“Well,” said Harry, “I know where he got that from. There’s a tea advertised all along the railway lines in all the stations, and it says on it, ‘as supplied to dukes, marquises, earls, and barons.’ He’s seen that, and that put it into his head. If he’d tell one lie he’d tell another, and mark my words, Mary Jane, Miss Ward’s young man is a humbug.”

Two Sundays after that Mr. Shipsides came down again, but we didn’t ask him in to tea. We had company, which was one reason, but really we didn’t want to encourage him, feeling sure he was a man who would take advantage of kindness.

But it was an awful nuisance, for all the evening he was leaning over the bar, talking to our barmaid, and taking her attention off her work. I didn’t like to say anything, no more did Harry, especially as we weren’t very busy, many of our regular customers not being in on Sunday evenings, when we did more of a chance trade than anything—principally people who’d been down to the place for the day from London, or people driving home to town, and that sort of thing.

When it was closing time the fellow didn’t offer to go, so Harry said, “I say, Mr. Shipsides, the train for London goes in ten minutes. You’ll have to hurry to the station to catch it.”

He went away then, and we closed the doors; but about twenty minutes afterwards there came a ring at the bell, just as we were going upstairs to bed.

Harry went to the door, but didn’t open it, saying, “Who’s there?”

“Me,” said a voice.

“Who’s me?”

“Mr. Shipsides.”

And if it wasn’t him come back again. So Harry opened the door and asked him what he wanted.

“I’ve missed the train,” he said; “so I’ll have to take a room here for the night.”

Harry didn’t know what to say, so he let him in, and gave him a candle, and showed him upstairs to a room.

We didn’t like it at all, but Harry said we couldn’t turn a customer away; and of course Shipsides only came as a customer, and would have to pay for his room.

The next morning he came down, and walked into the coffee-room as bold as brass, and ordered his breakfast. He had eggs and bacon and a chop cooked, and then he wanted hot buttered toast and marmalade.

I waited on him, though I didn’t like it, but I wouldn’t send Miss Ward in. Harry said it was better not.

He talked away to me nineteen to the dozen, but quite grand, just as if he was patronizing our house, and he had the impudence to say that the tea wasn’t strong enough, and would I make him some more, and when he began to tell me how he liked his tea made I flushed up and said, “I think I ought to know how to make tea, Mr. Shipsides.”

“Oh! of course,” he said; “but where do you buy your tea? Perhaps it’s the fault of the article, and not the making.”

“Oh!” I said; “the tea is all right—it’s the same that’s supplied to the dukes, marquises, earls, and barons. You’ve seen it advertised at all the railway-stations.”

I couldn’t help saying it, he made me so indignant. He didn’t say anything, but I made the next tea very weak on purpose, and he drank it without a murmur.

After he’d done his breakfast I put the time-table in front of him, and I said, “The next train’s at 9.15. Hadn’t you better go? You’ll be late to business.”

“Oh no,” he said. “Now I’m here I’ll stop for the day. I’ve a customer at one of the big houses near here. I’ll go and look him up.”

He went out, but he came back at dinner-time and ordered a dinner in the coffee-room. He wanted fish, but I said, “We don’t have fish on Mondays—it isn’t fresh.” So he had soup and a fowl and bacon, and when I said, “What beer will you have?” he said, “Oh, I’ll drink a bottle of wine for the good of the house. Bring me a bottle of champagne.”

I went to Harry about it, and he went in and said, “Look here, old man; let’s understand each other. Of course, you’re not here at my invitation.”

“Oh no,” answered the fellow. “I’m here for my own pleasure, Mr. Beckett, and I suppose I can have what I like, if I pay for it.”

“Certainly,” said Harry; and he went and got him the champagne.

I could see Miss Ward didn’t quite like it. She felt that it wasn’t quite the thing, she being our barmaid, for him to come staying there, and swelling about the place, instead of attending to his business in London.

But *he* didn’t see there was anything out of the way, evidently, for after dinner he went into the bar-parlour and called for a cigar: “One of your best, old man, and none of your Britishers”—that’s what he had the impudence to say.

You may be sure Harry didn’t put the box down by him this time. He got a cigar out and put it in a glass, and brought it to him.

The champagne had evidently made him even more talkative than usual, for he began to find fault with the place, and to tell us what we ought to do. I stood it for a little while, and then I let out. “Mr. Shipsides,” I said, “I think we are quite capable of managing our own business, although it isn’t like yours—one that manages itself.”

“Oh, no offence, I hope,” he said, “only you’re young beginners, and I didn’t think you were above taking a hint. I’ve stayed at some of the best hotels in the kingdom in my time, you see, and I know how things ought to be done.”

I was so wild that I took my work-basket and went and sat in the bar; and presently he came there and began talking to Miss Ward, which I thought very rude, and it didn’t look well at all.

Harry had gone out to see the builder, who was going to fix up some stabling for us, as we meant to have a nice place for people driving to put up their traps and horses; and the cook wanted to speak to me in the kitchen about the oven, which had gone wrong, so I went to her; and presently I thought it was a good chance to call Miss Ward out of the bar and tell her to give Mr. Shipsides a gentle hint that he was making too free.

So I said, “Cook, just tell Miss Ward I want her for a moment.”

Miss Ward came, and I spoke to her as nicely as I could, and she saw that I was right, and promised to tell her young man that we would like him to keep his

right, and promised to tell her young man that we would like him to keep his place, and not interfere with our business.

We went back together, and, when we get to the bar, if there wasn't that fellow actually serving a customer, just as if he were the landlord of the place. It took my breath away. "Well, I never!" I said. "If your young man stops here much longer, Miss Ward, he'll put his name up over the door."

Poor girl, she blushed to her eyes. "It is only his way," she said; "he doesn't mean any harm." Then she went into the bar and whispered something to him, and he came and took his hat and went out. But he came back at teatime and ordered his tea in the coffee-room, and rang the bell for more coals to be put on the fire, and made such a fire up that it was enough to roast the place, and while he was sitting toasting himself in front of it two coffee-room customers arrived, a lady and gentleman who had come by train—very nice people. They took our best bedroom, and had some nice luggage that looked very genteel. They ordered dinner in the coffee-room for seven o'clock, and when I went in to lay the table that fellow had gone and sat down at the piano, and was banging away at it and singing a horrid music-hall song.

"Don't do that," I said, quite sharply. "There are ladies and gentlemen staying in the house, and they won't like it."

He shut the piano and went and stuck his back against the fire, and stood there with his coat-tails over his arm.

"Harry," I said to my husband when he came in, "you *must* get rid of that fellow. If you don't, I will!"

So Harry went to him and said, "Look here, Shipsides, I don't think our hotel is good enough for you. I should be glad if you'd pay your bill and take your custom somewhere else."

He looked Harry up and down in his nasty, red-haired, contemptuous way, and then he said, "All right, Beckett"—no Mr., mind you—"all right, Beckett; if you're independent, so am I. I'll say good-bye to Clara and be off."

"When you've paid your bill," says Harry.

"Oh, that'll be all right! I'll send you a cheque."

“I don’t want a cheque for twenty-five shillings,” says Harry. “Cash’ll do for me.”

“I haven’t got the cash with me,” says the fellow; “and if my cheque isn’t good enough, you can stop it out of Clara’s wages.”

And with that he walks into the bar, kisses Clara before the customers, sticks his hat on one side, defiant like, and walks out of the place as bold as brass.

And that was the last we saw of Miss Ward’s young man, and the last she saw of him too, poor girl—for bad as we thought him, he turned out to be worse.

A few days after he went, Harry had to go to town to see the brewers, and, having an hour or two to spare after he’d done his business, he thought he’d go and look at Shipsides’ shop, and see what sort of a place it was.

He knew the address, because Miss Ward used to write to her lover at it, and sometimes her letters lay about to be sent to post.

When he got to the street and found the number, it was a grocer’s—but quite a little common shop, full of jam in milk-jugs and sugar-basins, and flashy-looking ornaments given away with a pound of tea; and the name over the door wasn’t Shipsides at all.

Harry walked in, and said, “I want to see Mr. Shipsides.”

A little old man, in a dirty apron, behind the counter looked at him, and said, “Private door; knock twice.”

Harry thought that was odd; but he went out and knocked twice, and presently a woman came and asked him what he wanted.

“Mr. Shipsides,” said Harry.

“Oh!” says she, “are you a friend of his?”

“Yes,” says Harry, not knowing what else to say at the moment.

“Then,” said the woman, “p’r’aps you’ll tell me when you saw him last, for I haven’t seen him for a week; and he’s been and let himself in unbeknown to me, and taken his box out somehow, and we want to summons him for the rent.”

When Harry saw how the land lay—that's his sailor way of putting it, and I've caught lots of sailor expressions from him—he altered his tack—that's another—and told the woman that he wanted money of Mr. Shipsides too; and at last he got her to talk freely, and she told him that the fellow was very little better than a swindler, and she went upstairs and brought down a lot of letters and showed them to Harry, and told him they had all come that week for the fellow—and what did he think she ought to do?

They were all in different female handwritings, and two were in Miss Ward's, which Harry recognized.

"It's my belief," said the woman, "he's a regular bad 'un, and has been imposing on a lot of young women, and he ought to be ashamed of himself, for, after he'd left, a poor woman came here after him and said she was his wife and was in service, and she wanted him to come to her missus and explain as she was married, as she was going to be turned away through circumstances which, being a respectable married woman, ought not to count against her."

Harry told me that when he heard that he felt that if he could have met the fellow he'd have knocked him down—sailors being very chivalrous, I think the word is, I mean, when women are concerned; and all the way home he thought of poor Miss Ward, and how I was to break it to her that her lover was a scoundrel.

I had to do it; and, in trying to do it gently, I blurted it all out, and the poor thing fainted right away, and was so ill afterwards she had to go to bed. I went and sat with her and comforted her, and she cried and told me everything. That mean fellow had actually had thirty pounds out of her—all her savings, that she'd drawn out of the Post Office Savings Bank to give him, towards the capital he wanted for the grand business he was doing with dukes, marquises, earls, and barons.

It was a long time before she got over the shock, but it was a lesson to her, and at last she began to see that she was well rid of such a vampire.

And a long time after that we found out—that is, Harry did—a lot more about the beauty. Happening to go to another house one day—a public-house in London—Harry, who knew the landlord, told him about our barmaid and her lover, and when he described him the landlord said, "Why, that's the fellow who

had twenty pounds out of the barmaid at the ‘Hat and Feathers’ at Hendon!” And then Harry’s friend went and talked about it in the trade, and by-and-by it was found out that Mr. Shipsides had got over one hundred and fifty pounds out of different barmaids at different places, and that he was engaged to marry them all, and he’d stayed at some of the houses, just like he had at ours, and never paid a farthing—only at one place he’d borrowed five pounds of the landlord as well.

The last that we found out about him was that he’d gone to Australia with the wife of a small shopkeeper he’d lodged with afterwards, and that she’d robbed her husband of one hundred pounds to go with him. I’m sorry for her when she got to Australia and her hundred pounds was gone.

Miss Ward wasn’t with us long after that. I don’t think she felt quite comfortable. She fancied perhaps that in——

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“*Is* it a bad half-sovereign? Of course it is, you stupid girl! What’s the good of bringing it to me now? Why, the fellow’s half a mile away by this time! Thought he must be respectable, as he asked for a sixpenny cigar? Nonsense! He wanted nine and sixpence change for *this* thing. I declare I can’t sit down quietly for ten minutes but something goes wrong!”

# CHAPTER IV.

## *THE REVEREND TOMMY.*

What a lot there is in the world that you must die not knowing anything about because you don't get mixed up with it! I don't know if that's quite the way to say what I mean, but it came into my head looking over the things I had put down in my diary that I thought would be worth telling about in my new book of experiences as the landlady of a village inn.

At first it was all so new and strange to me that I didn't quite gather what it meant, some of it. As a servant, of course, I saw a good deal, and many strange characters, but in their family life mostly. A servant can't see much of the outside life of her people—in fact, if you come to think of it, servants don't see much outside at all, unless it's shaking a cloth in the garden; and many a time when I was a servant have I made that a very long job on a fine morning, with the sun shining and the birds singing; for it was so beautiful to breathe the fresh air, and feel the soft wind blowing in your face with just a dash of the scent of flowers in it. A dash of the scent!—dear, dear, that's how your style gets spoiled by what you have to hear going on round you! I suppose my style will get public-housey in time, if I'm not careful. It's hearing the customers say, "Just a dash of this in it, ma'am," and "Just a dash of that," and so on.

Seeing the outside view of life—life away from the home—and being always in a place where all sorts of people and all sorts of characters come, I have learned things that I might have been a servant a hundred years and never have known. You get a pretty good view of life under the roof of an inn, and not always a view that makes you very happy—but there's good and bad everywhere, even in the church.

I know of a clergyman who was a very fine preacher indeed, and a strict teetotaller and never entered a public-house, but he managed to be very cruel to his wife on gingerbeer and lemonade. And it came out afterwards in the courts, when the poor lady tried to get a separation, fearing for her life, that on the day her husband had knocked her down and emptied the inkpot down her throat, he had gone off straight to a school meeting and delivered the prizes for the best essay on being kind to animals, and had made all the people cry by the beautiful

way he spoke about dogs and horses and cats.

Our clergyman, the curate, is very different to that, though I must say he is eccentric. He comes into our coffee-room now and then, and will have a glass of ale and sit and read the newspaper, because he lives by himself in lodgings up in the village. He likes talking to Harry, and he seems to like talking to me; but though he's a very agreeable gentleman, I'm always rather sorry to see him come in, especially when his pockets look bulgy. He's one of those people who go about in awful places with hammers, and chip bits of rock and stone off, and dig up bits of ground; and he's always got his coat-pockets full of sand and grit, and chalk and bits of stone, and sometimes a lot of weeds and ferns pulled up by the roots. I asked Mr. Wilkins, the parish clerk, what the name for these people was, and he told me geologist, those that went after the stones, and botanist, those that went after the roots; and he said Mr. Lloyd—"the Reverend Tommy" he is called in the village when he isn't there to hear—was both, and was a great authority, and wrote papers about rocks and roots and the rubbish he dug up, for learned societies to read, and that he belonged to a good many of them, and had a right to put half the letters of the alphabet after his name if he chose.

I've seen the Reverend Tommy come into our place of an afternoon as red as a turkey-cock, the perspiration pouring down his face, mudded all over his clothes—he always wore black, which made it look worse—and looking that dirty and untidy and disreputable that if he hadn't been known he'd have been taken for a tramp.

It certainly was very trying for me to see him sit down in our nice, neat, pretty little coffee-room, putting pounds of mud on the carpet, and turning all the dirty things out of his pockets on to our nice tablecloth. Poor dear man; I'm sure he never thought he was doing any harm, for he didn't live in this world; he lived in a world of hundreds of thousands of years ago—a world that our world has grown up on top of, so it was explained to me afterwards.

I'd never heard of such things before. Of course I knew there was a Noah's Ark, and that the Flood drowned lots of animals, and carried lots of things out of their proper places and put them somewhere else, as even a small flood will do. A flood that happened where my brother John lives, who went to America years ago, as I told you in my "Memoirs," washed his house right away, and floated it miles down the river, and put it on an island, and it's been there ever since, and he and his family in it, they liking the situation better, and, as he says, having been moved free of expense. John wrote me about that from America himself, so

been moved free of expense. John wrote me about that from America himself, so it must be true, and it is a most wonderful place for adventures, according to John. Of course, if a flood can do that nowadays, the great Flood that covered the earth must have mixed up things very much before it went down.

It was this Flood that made Mr. Lloyd go about with a hammer looking for bits of the animals that were drowned in it, as far as I could make out. And when he found bits he was almost mad with delight. “Fossils” he called the things, but how he could know they were bits of animals was a wonder to me; they might have been anything. He showed me a lump of chalk one day that he said was a bit of an animal that had lived in our village thousands of years ago!

He made a horrid mess with his things while he was having a glass of ale and looking at his “specimens,” as he called them, but it was nothing to where he lodged. His landlady told me that she never went into the room because he didn’t like her to, but he made his bed himself, and it was just pushed up in the corner, and all the rest of the room was bones and rocks and bits of chalk, and on the wall he’d got skulls and shinbones and bits of skeletons of different animals, and some pictures of animals so hideous that the landlady’s daughter, a young married woman, on a visit to her mother, going in out of curiosity and not knowing what she was going to see, had a shock that made her mother very, very anxious about her, and especially as the poor girl would keep on saying, for some time afterwards, “Oh, mother, that hideous animal with the long nose! I can see it now.”

But it was all right, fortunately; because, when the landlady told me that it was all over, I asked, and she said, “It’s all right, my dear, thank goodness, and a really beautiful nose.”

She came to have tea with us one evening soon after that, and through our talking about her daughter and the fright in Mr. Lloyd’s room, it led to her telling me many things about our clergyman that I didn’t know. I knew he was a dear, kind old gentleman, and, when his head wasn’t full of the Flood and old bones, just the clergyman for a village like ours. Kind to the old and gentle to the young, treating rich and poor alike, he was always ready with a good, comforting word of wholesome Christianity for those who were in trouble.

He came to our place often after he got to know us, because he liked to come in of an evening now and then, and have a pipe with Harry in our own private sitting-room. He had never been in foreign countries, and he loved to hear about

all the places Harry had seen, but he didn't care much about the towns and the people. He always wanted to know more about the soil and the trees and the animals, and what the cliffs and rocks were like, and asked Harry all sorts of funny questions, which of course he couldn't answer, as it wouldn't do for the mate of a merchantman to go about the world with his head full of Noah's Ark and the Flood. He asked Harry if he hadn't brought skulls from New Zealand, and other places he had been to, and I said, "No, indeed he hasn't. Do you think I'd have married him if he'd carried dead men's heads about with him?"

I was sorry directly I'd said it, and coloured up terribly—which is a horrible failing I have. I believe I shall go red when I'm an old woman; it isn't blushing—that's rather pretty, and I shouldn't mind it—it's going fiery red, which is not becoming.

Mr. Lloyd noticed how hot I'd gone, and he smiled and said, "Don't mind me, Mrs. Beckett. I know you didn't mean anything." But there was a look in his face presently that told me I had touched a sore place. It was only a shadow that crept across his face, and a look that came into his eyes, but it told me a good deal, and after he'd gone I said to my husband—

"Harry, Mr. Lloyd's been in love at some time and has had a disappointment."

"Old Tommy in love!" said Harry; "then it must have been with a young woman who lived before the Flood. Nothing after that date would have any attraction for him."

"Don't be so absurd, Harry," I said. "Women know more about these things than men do, and I'm as certain as that I sit here that Mr. Lloyd has been crossed in love, and that it's through skulls."

Something happened to stop our conversation—a gentleman and lady, I think it was, who wanted apartments—and Mr. Lloyd and his skulls went out of my head, till his landlady came to tea, and I got talking about him.

Then I told her what had been my idea, and I asked her if she knew anything.

"Know anything about the Reverend Tommy being in love, my dear?" she said. "Why, that's the story of his life!"

"I knew it," I said; and I thought what a triumph it would be for me over Harry,

for I must confess I do like to prove him wrong now and then. Men—even the best of them—will persist in thinking women don't know much about anything except how to boil potatoes, how to make beds, and how to nurse babies, and I have known a husband who even wanted to show his wife how to do that till she lost her temper, and said, "Oh, as you know such a lot about it, perhaps you'll tell me whose babies you've been in the habit of nursing!"

Harry—though I don't want to say a word against him as a husband and a father, for a better never breathed, God bless him!—has little faults of his own, and good-tempered as I am and hope I always shall be, yet once or twice he has nearly put me out, and made me speak a little sharp, and it's generally been about baby. A nicer, plumper, healthier baby there doesn't exist, but Harry is that foolish over him, you'd think he (the baby, not Harry) was made of glass and would break. Of course I'm very fond of showing him to my female friends who come to see me, and sometimes I just undress him a little to show them what lovely little limbs he has. If Harry comes in, he begins to fidget at that directly. "You'll give that child his death of cold," he says; "the idea of taking him out of his warm bed and stripping him."

Of course that makes me indignant. No mother likes to be told how to nurse her own child before other mothers.

Once when he came in like that I didn't take any notice, but I just undressed baby a little more. It was a very warm room, and there was a bright fire, so it didn't hurt, and I thought I would just show the other ladies that I didn't give the management of the nursery over to Harry.

What made me do it, perhaps, more than anything was, that Mrs. Goose—a dreadful mischief-making old woman, that I must tell you about by-and-by—was in the room, and she curled her lip in a very irritating way, and said—

"Well, I never! What do sailors know about babies? I should like to have seen my husband interfering between me and my infant when I was young!"

"Ah," said Harry, "things were different in olden times, I dare say."

"Olden times!" says she. "My youngest is only eighteen come next Michaelmas, Mr. Beckett; but, of course, a man who would teach his wife how to manage her infant——"

“Oh, please don’t take any notice, Mrs. Goose,” I said; “it’s only one of my husband’s funny ways.” And I took baby’s nightgown right off, and let him kick his dear little legs up, and crow on my lap, with only his little flannel on.

“Funny ways or not, my dear,” said Harry, “that baby belongs to me as much as it does to you, and I’m not going to have its constitution ruined just to amuse a lot of old women.”

With that, if he didn’t come and pick up baby and its nightgown, put the gown on, take baby in his arms, and walk upstairs with it to its cot.

“Harry, how dare you!” I cried; and I felt so indignant I could have stamped my foot, for that horrid Mrs. Goose had seen it, and I should be the laughing-stock of the village.

I ran upstairs after Harry, quite in a passion, and I pushed the door to; and, gasping for breath, I said, “Don’t you ever do that again! I won’t be insulted in my own house before people.”

“Mary,” he said, gently; “come here, my lass.”

“No, I won’t,” I said; and then I felt as if I could shake myself like I used to in a temper at school, and then I began to cry.

He had put baby in its little cot; and he came and took my hand and drew me towards him.

“My little wife,” he said, “we’ve scarcely had a wry word since we’ve known each other—never an unkind one. Don’t let our first quarrel be about the child we both love so dearly. Come, my lass, kiss me and make it up. There may be troubles ahead that we shall have to face, and that we shall want all our strength to meet. Don’t let’s begin making troubles for ourselves about nothing.”

I didn’t kiss him quite at once. I stood for a minute trying to look as cross as I could, but I couldn’t keep it up. He clasped my hand so lovingly, and there was such a grieved look in his eyes, that I gave an hysterical little cry, and threw my arms round his neck, and hid my face on his breast and cried. Oh, how I cried! But it wasn’t all sorrow that I had been naughty; I think a good many of the tears were tears of joy—the joy I felt in having a husband that I could not only love, but honour and respect and look up to. And I sobbed so loudly that baby put out

his dear little fat arm, and said, “Mum, mum;” and then I fell on my knees by the cot, and thanked God for my baby and my Harry, and I didn’t care for all the Mrs. Gooses in the whole wide world.

Writing about our first quarrel over baby has led me away from what I was going to tell you about the Reverend Tommy. Harry wasn’t at the tea-table, we being extra busy in the bar, so I and Mr. Lloyd’s landlady were alone.

She didn’t want much urging, I found, to talk about her lodger—in fact, I should think he was the principal subject of conversation, whenever she went out to tea.

I’m not going to repeat all the things she told me about his queer ways at home, because I don’t think people who let lodgings ought to be encouraged to pry into the private life of their lodgers and reveal it, or to tell about their ways and habits in the room for which they pay rent, and where they ought to be as private as in their own home.

Before we got the ‘Stretford Arms,’ Harry and I were in lodgings for a short time, and some day I will tell you something about *that*.

But the story about the Reverend Tommy that his landlady told me I can repeat, because it was about his past life; and it seems he used to talk about it himself sometimes, but always among the gentry. I mean, it was a subject—kind and unassuming as he was—that he never spoke of to his inferiors. I can quite understand the feeling. I could tell the ladies and gentlemen who stay at our place about Harry, and my having been a servant; but I should not care to talk in the same way to our barmaid, or our potman, or our cook.

This was the story—not as the landlady told it; for if I told it her way, I should have to wander off into something else every five minutes. If there is one thing I dislike it is people who can’t stick to the point when they are telling a story.

The Reverend Tommy, years and years ago, it seems, and long before he came to be our clergyman, was the curate at a place just beyond Beachy Head, an old-fashioned village that was on the Downs, hidden in among them, in fact—a place full of very old houses and very old people, quite shut away from the world; for you could see nothing of anything except the trees and the tops of the hills, the village lying down in a deep, deep hollow.

At least, that is the sort of village I gathered it was from the landlady, who said

Mr. Lloyd had described it to her and showed her photographs of it.

He was quite a young man then, and, though the place was dull, it suited him, because of the cliffs and hills and places round about, where no end of wonderful old bones and fossils and things were to be found.

All the time that he could spare he was climbing the cliffs and hammering away at them to find the treasures that he thought such a lot of. They were only fisher folk who lived near the cliffs, and they soon got used to the young clergyman, who climbed like a goat, and would be let down by ropes, and do things that would have made Mr. Blondin feel nervous, and all to hammer away at the cliffs and the rocks.

Mr. Lloyd's favourite place was a cliff just beyond Beachy Head—it was a very dangerous one, and many years ago a man had been killed there—a young fellow who used to do just what Mr. Lloyd did. People told him about it, but it didn't frighten him. He said, "Oh, he must have been careless, or gone giddy. I'm all right." But it was a very nasty place, being a straight fall from top to bottom, with only horrid jagged bits of cliff sticking out.

I can quite understand what it was like, because on our honeymoon we went for a day or two to the seaside, and Harry showed me a cliff that he had gone over when he was a boy after a seagull's nest, and it made me go hot and cold all over to look at it, and when we stood at the edge I clutched hold of Harry's coat and felt as if we must go over, it looked so awful. I hate looking over high places; it gives me a dreadful feeling that I must jump over if somebody doesn't catch hold of me and keep me back. That's a very horrid feeling to have, but I have it, and nobody ever got me up on the Monument. I can't even bear to look down a well-staircase. I always see myself lying all of a heap, smashed on the floor at the bottom; and even when once in London I used to have to go over Westminster Bridge, I always walked in the middle of the road among the cabs and carts and omnibuses, even in the muddiest weather.

Perhaps the young woman that I'm coming to presently in this story—story it isn't, because it's true, but you know what I mean—had the same sort of feeling, —vertigo, I think they call it. At any rate, one evening when the Reverend Tommy was out with his hammer and his coil of rope and things that he used, right on the highest and loneliest part of the cliff, he saw a young woman looking over. It was a summer evening, and quite light and quite still. There wasn't a soul in sight but this young woman, and the Reverend Tommy

wondered what she was doing there all alone. As he got close to her he saw she was quite a young woman, and very nicely dressed, and that she was very pretty.

But before he could get right up to her—she hadn't heard him coming, as he was walking on the turf of the Downs—this young woman gave a little cry, swung forward, and in a second had disappeared over the edge of that awful cliff.

The young clergyman rushed to the spot, knelt on the edge and peered over, and then he saw this poor girl hanging half-way between life and death. As she had fallen, one of the rugged juts I told you of had caught under the bottom of a short tight-fitting cloth kind of jacket she wore, and there it held her. It made my blood run cold when the landlady described it to me, as she had heard it of a lady Mr. Lloyd had told it to.

He shouted out to her, but he got no answer; so he made up his mind she had fainted. He looked about and shouted, but he could see nobody near. Then he looked over the cliff again, and it seemed to him that the girl's jacket was giving way under the strain, and that in a minute she would be hurled to an awful death on the rocks below.

I don't know how he did it, because the landlady couldn't tell me, not knowing about ropes and things, but in some way Mr. Lloyd made his rope fast. I think he drove a big stake or wooden peg into the turf, and piled stones on it—at any rate, he made his rope fast, as he thought, and then, with his hammer in his pocket, he swung himself over and went down bit by bit, steadying himself every now and then by digging his foot into holes in the side of the cliff.

He managed to swing himself right down by the side of the poor girl, and spoke to her and told her to have courage; but she was senseless.

He lowered himself a bit more, and then with his hammer beat out a place in the cliff where it was hard, just room enough for him to put his two feet in and take the strain off the rope.

Then he looked above him and below him to see if there was any place that was safe to stand on without the rope, as he wanted to tie that round the poor girl's body.

He found a place just on the other side where he could stand and hold on by a jutting piece of cliff, and he got there somehow—he never remembered himself

quite how—but his hands were fearfully bruised in doing it, and it was as much as he could do to hold on when he got there.

The girl had come to a little, but it was getting darker, and he could only just see her face by the time he had made himself quite firm on the little ledge.

When he spoke to her she answered him, and cried to him to save her, and he told her not to attempt to move or struggle, and, with God's help, he *would* save her.

She was quite quiet; she seemed dazed, he said—and no wonder at it; I should have lost my senses altogether—and he managed to get the rope across her, and then pass it round under her arms, but he couldn't leave go with both hands to tie it, and he had to beg and pray of her to try and do it herself. She was afraid at first to move her arms, for fear she should fall; but he found that her heels were resting on a bit of cliff, so that there would not be so much danger if she did it quietly.

Well, at last she got it tied round her all right, and then, with one hand, he made the knot she had tied the rope in quite firm, she helping him; and then it was quite dark, and there they were, with the sea moaning below them, and the stars up above them.

When she felt a little safer she began to groan and cry, and say that she should die, and to pray, and to say that God had punished her for all her sins.

He comforted her, and told her to be a brave girl, but that she must stop quite still, for he had to climb up the face of the cliff again to the top if she was to be rescued from her awful position.

She begged and prayed of him not to leave her, but he said he must—that he could do nothing more for her if he stopped there, and they would have to wait till the daylight for help, because the coastguard's beat lay some distance away from the edge, and it was no good shouting, as the wind blew strong from the land and carried their voices right out to sea.

When he had made her a little braver he began to go slowly up the side of the cliff, using his hammer to make little steps.

It was an awful climb, and every minute it seemed as though he would have to loose his hold and fall, and be dashed to pieces. But he was one of the best cliff

loose his hold and fall, and be dashed to pieces. But he was one of the best cliff-climbers in England, and young and strong then, and at last he reached the top.

He was so numb and worn out and bruised when he got to the top that he fell down on the grass and lay there quite a minute before he could move. Just as he was pulling himself together, he looked up and saw the coastguard in the distance.

He shouted at the top of his voice, and the coastguard came running to him, and, when he heard what was the matter, shook his head. “It’ll be an awful job pulling the poor girl up,” he said. “She won’t have the sense to keep kicking herself away from the side of the cliff, and it’s likely she’ll be dreadfully injured.”

“Well, it’s the only chance,” said the parson; “we must be careful, and go slow.”

They were careful, and they went slow—so slow that when they at last dragged the poor girl up she was in a dead swoon, and she never spoke or opened her eyes, but lay there like a dead thing. They saw that she was cut and injured, too, for blood was on her face, and when they touched her arm she groaned and shuddered.

Of course, something must be done, so the parson picked her up in his arms and carried her, senseless as she was, across the Downs to the place where he lodged.

Luckily, it wasn’t far, and he had told the coastguard to go at once into the village and knock up the doctor and send him.

The young clergyman’s landlady stared, you may be sure, when she saw her lodger coming home at that time of night carrying a young woman; but he explained what had happened, and the landlady gave up her room, and laid the poor girl on her bed, and got brandy and bathed her face with cold water, and at last brought her to.

It was a month before the girl could be moved, she was so injured, and all that time, when he could, the clergyman, would sit with her and read to her—for none of her friends came to see her.

She said she had no friends, when they asked her—that she was an orphan and a shop-girl in London; that she had been ill, and left her situation to come to the seaside, and had gone out in the evening, and turned giddy, and fallen over the

seaside, and had gone out in the evening, and turned giddy, and fallen over the edge of the cliff. They sent to her lodgings in Eastbourne and got her boxes for her, but no letters came for her, and she never offered to write any. And—well, you can guess what would happen under such circumstances—the young clergyman fell head over heels in love with the beautiful girl he had saved.

She was very beautiful. The landlady told me she had once seen a photograph of her that the Reverend Tommy kept in his room, and that it was an angel's face.

The end of it was the Reverend Tommy proposed to the girl—Annie Ewen, she said her name was; and, without stopping to think how little he knew of her or her antecedents, they were married the month after the rescue from the cliff.

They were happy for a month—very happy. The girl seemed grateful to the young clergyman, and tried all she could to deserve his affection; but the cloud soon came into the sky, and a big, black cloud it was.

One day, when the clergyman came home, he found his wife crying. She said it was a headache—that she was ill, and out of sorts. The next day when he came home, after his parish work, the house was empty. His young wife had gone, and left behind her a letter—a letter which no one ever saw but the man to whom it was written; but what it was was guessed at through other things that were found out afterwards.

The girl hadn't fallen over the cliff. She had thrown herself over—to kill herself; to kill herself because a man she believed true was false, and had deserted her, and she had the same terror of shame and disgrace that many a poor girl has who knows that she is to be left alone to bear the punishment of loving a man too much and trusting him too well.

She told the clergyman she wished to save him the shame of what must be known if she stopped there; that he could say she had gone to her friends, who were abroad, for a time.

The blow broke poor Mr. Lloyd, for he worshipped that woman. He would have forgiven or borne anything. He tried to find her and tell her so, and would have opened his arms for her to come back to him and be his honoured wife.

He did find her at last; but when he found her he could not say the words he wanted to speak. It was too late.

He found her a year afterwards with another man—the man who had caused her to seek the death from which the clergyman had saved her. But she loved the other man best, and though he had refused to marry her and save her from shame she had gone back to him.

Oh dear me! I'm a woman myself, and I know what queer things our hearts are; but it does seem to me sometimes that it is easier for a bad man to win and keep a girl's love than for a good man. This girl, you see, would rather be what she was with a man who treated her badly than the loved and honoured wife of the young clergyman who had saved her. Woman certainly are——

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What's the matter in the bar? It's that new barmaid. "Oh, Miss Jenkins, how careless of you! I'm so sorry, sir. I hope it hasn't hurt you very much. You *must* be careful how you open soda-water, Miss Jenkins, or somebody's eye will be knocked out with a cork, and I wouldn't have such a thing happen here for the world. Come into the parlour, please, sir, and sit down. I'll hold a knife to it to stop it going black. I *am* so sorry!"

# CHAPTER V.

## *THE LONDON PHYSICIAN.*

Our hotel being just a nice driving distance from London, and a very easy and convenient distance by train, and the village being really very quaint and pretty, and nice scenery and walks all round us, we made up our minds that, if we were lucky, we should soon be able to make it a staying-place—that is, a place people would come and stop at for a day or two, or perhaps a week, who wanted a little fresh air and not to be too far from town. We had every accommodation, and very pretty bedrooms, and private sitting-rooms, and all we wanted was the connection—the last people never having worked it up as an hotel, being satisfied with the local trade and the coffee-room customers, of which there were a good many in the summer.

Harry said, as soon as we had put our nice new furniture in and done the rooms up a little, that he thought we ought to advertise. The refurnishing was very nice, but it cost a lot of money; and, as we paid for everything in cash, of course we had to buy useful cheap things. I had to select the things, as Harry said he was no good at that; so we went to London together, and looked over one or two big furniture places.

It was a great treat, but, of course, nothing was very new to me, as I had lived in good houses and seen lots of beautiful furniture and had the care of it—and a nice bother it was to keep dusted, I can tell you, especially in London, where directly you open a window the dust and dirt seem to blow in in clouds, and if you *don't* open a window it gets in somehow. It was the ornamental carving, and the chairbacks and things with fret-work, that used to be the greatest worry. Fret-work it was, and no mistake, and I used to fret over it, for it would take me hours to work my duster in and out and get the things to look decent.

Harry had never seen such beautiful things as we were shown before, and he kept standing and staring at them really with his mouth almost open, and it was as much as I could do to get him to leave the beautiful things and look at the ordinary ones that we wanted.

The salesman—a very nice young man—when he saw Harry admired the things,

kept showing us cabinets and suites and bookcases that were really grand. “How much is that wardrobe?” said Harry, pointing to a very fine one. “Two hundred and forty pounds,” said the salesman; and I thought Harry would have dropped into a thirty-pound armchair that was just behind him.

He whispered to me that it seemed wicked for people to give all that money for a wardrobe just to hang a few old clothes up in.

“A few old clothes?” I laughed, and wondered what he would have said if he could have seen the number of dresses some ladies have, and known the prices they pay for them. But I didn’t begin talking to him about that, because I wanted to get our business done and get back again home, and he would have liked to stop there all day looking at the things and talking to the nice salesman.

We chose what we wanted—a few simple things, cheap but pretty, and in the very newest style, and Harry gave a cheque for them. I can’t tell you how proud I felt as I stood by and saw my husband take out his cheque-book and flourish the pen round; and the way he said, “Let’s see, what’s the day of the month?” was really quite grand.

It was three days before the goods came down, and when they did, on a big van, there was quite a little crowd outside to see them unloaded. When they had been carried upstairs and put in their places, and I had finished off the rooms with the mats and the toilet-covers that I had made all ready, and had put the antimacassars in the sitting-rooms, and stood the ornaments that we had bought on the little cabinet, everything looked lovely.

And all that afternoon I kept going into the different rooms and looking at them and admiring them, and I fancied I could hear the guests, when they were shown in, saying, “How very nice! how very neat and comfortable! what excellent taste!” and paying me compliments on my sitting-rooms and bedrooms.

Oh dear me! I know more about hotel customers now than I did then, and I don’t expect any of them to go into raptures about anything. It’s generally the other way; they always find something to grumble at. We had one gentleman who, all the time he was with us, did nothing but grumble at the pattern of the wall-paper in his bedroom (a very *pretty* paper it was, being storks with frogs in their mouths, and some other animal sitting on its hind legs that I’ve never met anybody who could tell me its name), and he declared that he had the nightmare

every night through looking at it; and another gentleman wanted all the furniture shifted in his room because it was green, and he hated green; and another said the pattern of the carpet made him bilious; and we had a lady who used to go on all day long to me about the bedroom furniture, and say it was so vulgar that if she lived with it long she believed that she would begin to use vulgar language. Then she went into a long rigmarole about the influence of your surroundings, or whatever you call it, till I quite lost my patience, and said we couldn't refurnish the house for everybody who came.

It was the same with the beds. One person wouldn't sleep in a wooden bedstead, because—— Well, you know the usual objection to wooden beds, but such a thing, I am sure, need never have been mentioned in my house, for one has never been known; and if they do get into bedsteads it's the fault of the mistress of the house and the servants in nine cases out of ten.

Another gentleman, who was put in a room with a brass bedstead—the only room we had to spare—shook his head, and said he was sorry he had to sleep on brass, as it destroyed the rural character of the place. Give him a good old four-poster and he felt he *was* sleeping in the country, but with a brass bedstead you might just as well be in London.

And if the customers didn't grumble about the bedsteads, they did about the beds. It was really quite heart-breaking at first, when we were very anxious to please, and so, of course, listened to everything people had to say, so as to alter what was wrong, if possible. But it was no use. We had nearly all feather beds at first, and then the customers all hated feather beds and said they weren't healthy, and we bought mattresses, and then half the people that came said they preferred feather beds, and couldn't sleep on mattresses.

And as to the bolsters and the pillows, the grumbling about them used to be terrible. I think we must have had an extra fanciful lot of people, for one swore the pillows were too hard, and another that they were too soft. There was one old gentleman who stayed with us three weeks, and all that time we never managed to make his bed right. I made it myself, the housemaid made it, and I even got cook to come and make it, to see if by accident she could make it right. But it was no use; every morning he swore he hadn't slept a wink because the bed wasn't made his way, and he kept on about it till he had his breakfast, and then he began to grumble about the tea, and say nobody in the house knew how to make a decent cup of tea. Then it was the same with the bacon, and with the eggs; they were never right. I believe that old gentleman was what you call a

eggs: they were never right. I believe that old gentleman was what you call a born grumbler; nothing was ever right while he was with us. He grumbled so much that I said to Harry we must be careful with his bill, for I felt sure he would fight every item, as some of them do; but when I took it to him he just looked at the total and threw down a couple of banknotes, and never said a word or examined a single item.

I've found that often with people who grumble at everything—they don't grumble at the bill; and people you think have been pleased with everything, you have to argue with them for half an hour to make them believe they've had a meal in the house.

But these people aren't so much bother as the customers who make it a rule to grumble at the wines and the spirits and the beer. Harry used to get quite wild at first when they used to send for him over a bottle of wine, before a lot of people, and say, "Landlord, just taste this wine." Harry used to have to take a glass, of course, and put on a pleasing expression, and taste it and say, "There's nothing the matter with it, sir!"

But, they would have it that it wasn't sound, or it was new, or it was corked, or it was something or the other; and the same with the spirits. There are a lot of people who go about and pretend to be great judges of sixpenny-worths of whiskey and brandy, and sniff at it, and taste it, and palate it as if you were selling it ten shillings a bottle and warranting it a hundred years old. And they're not at all particular about saying out loud that it isn't good. I heard one gentleman say one day, when our coffee-room was quite full of customers, "Very nice people who keep this house; pity they sell such awful stuff."

It made me go crimson; I felt so indignant, because it wasn't true. Harry is most particular, and if anything were wrong he would speak to the distillers at once; but there is nothing wrong, for he is an excellent judge of whiskey and brandy himself, and we always pay the best price to have the best article, because that is what we believe in. Some people, especially young beginners, do doctor their stuff, I know, to make a larger profit; but it is a great mistake, for it soon gets known, and the house gets a bad name.

I've heard a gentleman myself, when asked to go into a certain house with a friend, say, "No, thank you; if I have anything to drink there, I'm always ill for a week afterwards." The tricks of the trade are all very well, but trade that's done by trick doesn't last long, and in inn-keeping, as in any other business, honesty is the best policy in the long run.

the best policy in the long run.

These complaints worried us very much, and made Harry almost swear—a thing which, being a sailor, he can't help sometimes, but doesn't do often, and then only something very mild, quite different to real sea-swearing, which I've heard is very strong indeed.

He was telling another gentleman in our business who came to see us one day about it, and the gentleman said, "My boy, we all have to put up with that sort of thing. But I'll tell you what to do. If you give a man a good bottle of wine, and he grumbles at it, and pretends there's something wrong with it, the next bottle he orders give him the worst you've got in your cellar, and it's ten to one he'll smack his lips and say, 'Ah, that's something very different now.' Then you say, 'Yes, sir; it was a mistake yesterday—a mistake of the cellarman's.' 'Ah,' he will say, 'I am a connoisseur, and my opinion of a wine is taken by the best judges.' You humour him and flatter him a bit, and if he stays long enough he'll drink up all the common wine that you've got, pay the top price, and recommend your house everywhere for its 'capital cellar.'"

Of course Harry wouldn't play such a trick, but it would have served some of the customers right if he had. There are people who think it shows what a lot they know to grumble at the quality of everything—especially at hotels, where some gentlemen never forget to let everybody know that they are capital judges of wines and spirits. With the cigars, too, there is trouble sometimes, though, of course, not so much, as hotel customers who smoke good cigars generally carry their own Havannahs, and for the ordinary cigars, except in the bar and the smoking-room, there is not much call.

But sometimes a gentleman who is sitting in our parlour talking to us, will ask for a Havannah cigar, and Harry will offer him one of the best—and they are really good, for Harry is a judge, and has been with his ship to Havannah, and smoked them green. And I've known a gentleman—after smoking the Havannah a little while—say, it was a British cigar in a Havannah box; he could tell by the flavour. And the same gentleman, one evening that we were out, asked for a cigar, and our barmaid gave him one of the threepenny ones by mistake, and he liked it, and said that was something like a cigar. He said Harry had been swindled in the others.

Of course I don't say all gentlemen are like this. Plenty of them who come to our place do know good wine and good cigars, and when they get them, appreciate

them, and don’t mind paying for them.

It is always the people who grumble so much about the quality that are the worst judges, and they do it to be thought good judges. I only mention these things to show what innkeepers have to put up with, and how difficult it is for them always to please their customers, though they try as hard as they can.

Soon after our hotel was quite ready and repainted and repapered, we determined to advertise. We put an advertisement in a London paper, and the next morning we had twenty or thirty letters. “Oh, Harry,” I said, “that advertisement has brought us a lot of customers already.” I expected all the letters were ordering apartments. So when I opened them I was very disappointed. They were all from different newspapers, and guide-books, and railway time-tables, and things of that sort, enclosing our advertisement cut out, and saying, “The cost for inserting this advertisement in so-and-so will be so much;” and soon after that, we began to be pestered with men coming in with big books in a black bag which were just coming out, and they talked for an hour to try and convince us that we ought to put our advertisement in their books.

Some of these books were going all over the world, and everybody was sure to read them; they would be put in every hotel in Europe and Asia and Africa and America, and I don’t know where else besides.

Harry listened for a long time, till the advertisement man began to point out that we should be advertised all over the world for thirty shillings, and then Harry said, “Thank you—but we can’t go into your book till we’ve enlarged our premises. If we are to have customers from Europe and Asia and Africa and America, we shall want a barracks instead of a village hotel.”

But our first advertisement did bring us some customers, and from London, too. It was very nicely worded, because we had copied one that was in the *Daily News*, and altered it to suit our hotel. We said: “Pretty and quiet little country hotel. Charming apartments. Picturesque scenery. Moderate terms. Very suitable for ladies and gentlemen desiring home comforts, perfect privacy, and salubrious air.”

We got several answers to the advertisement from people who didn’t come. The questions they asked were awful—it took me a whole day nearly to answer them. Were we on gravel soil? Where did we get our water from? Was the church High or Low? How far off was the nearest doctor? Was the air bracing or relaxing?—

and, some of them, if these things were all satisfactory, were good enough to say that they would come if we could take them on inclusive terms. One lady and her three daughters, after writing four pages every other day, wanted the best sitting-room and three bedrooms, fire and light, breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and late dinner, for two guineas a week for the four of them, no extras to be charged.

It was about a week after our advertisement appeared that we got our first visitor through it. A very nice old gentleman, with beautiful silver hair and gold spectacles, and a hand portmanteau, arrived one evening, and told us that he'd seen our advertisement, and he'd come to give the place a trial.

He told us that he was a London physician, and had been ordered a few days' holiday; and he had seen our advertisement, and thought, if it suited, it would be just the place for him to send some of his patients to. He said he had a big practice among City men, and he had often to tell them to go and sleep in the country for a week or so because of their nerves; but as they wanted to get to business every day he couldn't send them far, and we were just the right distance.

Harry was delighted when he heard the gentleman say that, because it was just the sort of connection he wanted—people who wanted to be quiet and go to bed early, and wouldn't want a lot of waiting on till all hours of the morning; and people of that sort, business people, are always so respectable.

You may be sure we made the celebrated London physician as comfortable as we could, and gave him the best rooms, and waited on him hand and foot, and I went into the kitchen myself to look after cook while his meals were being prepared, because our cook was what you call "unequal."

One day everything would be beautiful, a credit to the best hotel in the kingdom, and the next day everything would be spoiled. And she always was at her best when we'd nobody particular in the house, and she was always at her worst when it was a very particular customer. And she had a vile temper, too, as most cooks have, through standing so much over the fire, and wanted a lot of humouring, especially when she knew everything depended on her and I was anxious.

When the London physician came, I remembered how particular doctors are about food for their patients, especially for those that have nerves, and stomachs, and gout, and other things that come from overwork and anxiety, some of them

saying that a badly-cooked dinner is at the bottom of many ailments that people suffer from, such as dyspepsia and indigestion.

So I stopped in the kitchen as much as I could to keep cook up to the mark for the London physician, and, to make her try her best, I told her if she suited she was to have her wages raised when we began to get busy.

She *did* try her best, and came out really quite grand once or twice in entrées and fancy puddings that I didn't know she knew anything about, so that all the time the London physician was with us his dinners were fit for a nobleman.

He enjoyed them, too, and no mistake, and there wasn't much that went up that came down again. "Ah, my dear madam," he said to me one day, when I came to clear away and found that he'd finished a whole apple charlotte, and only left a quarter of a wine-jelly that cook had made—"ah, my dear madam, your salubrious air has made a new man of me. Why, before I came down here the very sight of food almost made me ill!"

He was very affable and chatty, not only to me, but to everybody, and we all liked him very much. Of an evening, he said he felt lonely in his sitting-room, so he would come down and sit in the bar-parlour, and have his pipe and talk with Mr. Wilkins, and the one or two of our neighbours that made it a sort of a local club.

He was a very nice talker, and full of anecdotes. So he soon got to be quite a favourite, and Mr. Wilkins told him about the people in the neighbourhood, and of course that story about the Squire's room that I told you when I began these Memoirs.

He said it was a very pretty story, and then he asked about the people who lived at the Hall now. "Oh," said Mr. Wilkins, "it's the eldest son of the Phillipses, the wholesale clothes people, who lives there now. The old people are dead, and he's the master of the place, and lives there with his family. They're very rich, for his father made an immense fortune in business." (Mr. Phillips was the gentleman I told you about who comes and talks to Harry sometimes about foreign parts, through having run away to sea himself when a boy.)

"Is he married?" said the London physician.

"Oh yes," I said, joining in the conversation; "he married a very rich young lady,

and has a large family."

"Let's see," he said, "she was a Miss Jacobs, wasn't she?"

"Yes, sir; that was the name. She's a very beautiful woman. I've got a picture of her in an illustrated newspaper, if you'd like to see it."

"Thank you, I should very much."

I went and got out a back number of an illustrated lady's paper that had Mrs. Phillips in it, sketched at the Lord Mayor's ball.

"That's her, sir," I said, pointing to her picture; "but she's really handsomer than she looks here. That dress was made for her in Paris, it says here. Everybody noticed her at the ball, not only because she was so beautiful, but because of her diamonds. They say she's got the finest jewellery in the county."

The London physician looked at the picture, and said she was certainly very handsome; and then he asked about the house they lived in, and if the grounds were very fine.

"Fine!" said Mr. Wilkins; "they're grand! Haven't you seen them?"

"No; I didn't know that they were open."

"They aren't," said Mr. Wilkins; "but I can always go when I like and take a friend. I'm going up there to-morrow to see the head gardener. If you'd like to go, sir, I should be very pleased to show you over the place."

"Thank you. I'll go with pleasure. I should like to leave a card at the hall, as I knew Mrs. Phillips's brother once. I might inquire after his health. Is Mr. Phillips at home?"

"No; he's on the Continent. Mrs. Phillips would have been with him, but she's ill in bed."

"Oh, I'm sorry for that," said the physician. "Never mind, I can see the grounds with you."

The next day Mr. Wilkins called and took our guest up to the Hall, and when he came back he said, "What a delightful old place! I don't wonder at the old Squire

feeling the loss of it so much."

"Did you see the house, sir?" I said.

"Oh, yes; Mr. Wilkins got the butler to take me over it. What a beautiful drawing-room!"

"Yes, it is, sir," I said. "Ah, you can do a lot with money—and they're rolling in it."

He had been with us nearly a week when this happened. The morning after that he said he must go to London for the day to make some arrangements, but he would be back in the evening, and he hoped, if he found all well at home, to be able to stay a few days longer. He said he'd be back by the six o'clock train, and would I have dinner ready for him at half-past.

He came back and said he was very sorry, but he found he shouldn't be able to stay as he had hoped, so would I have his bill ready for him in the morning, when he would have to return to town.

"I hope you have been comfortable, sir?" I said.

"Very comfortable indeed, Mrs. Beckett, and I shall certainly recommend all my patients who want a few days' change and rest to come to you."

That evening, about nine o'clock, one of our customers came into the bar-parlour looking very pale. It was Mr. Jarvis, the miller, whose mill was about five minutes' walk from the lodge gates of the Hall.

"What's the matter, Jarvis?" everybody said, for they saw something was wrong directly they looked at him.

"Oh," he said; "it's nothing. I shall be all right directly; but I've had a narrow escape. You know how narrow the lane is near my place. Well, as I was walking along coming here I heard wheels, and before I could get out of the way a dog-cart came along at a fearful pace, and the shaft caught me and threw me into the hedge. It was a mercy I wasn't killed. I shouted after the man who was driving, and he turned round and used the most fearful language at me. What with the fright and my rage at being treated like that, it's no wonder if I look queer. Give me six o' brandy neat, Mrs. Beckett, please."

“How disgraceful!” said the London physician. “Do you know the driver?”

“No, he don’t belong about here. I couldn’t see his face, because he didn’t carry no lights; but he were a Londoner. I could tell by the way he spoke.”

The conversation turned on Londoners and their horrid ways in the country, and how they drove over people; and Mr. Wilkins said that there ought to be something done to stop it, for at holiday times and on Sundays a lot of roughs came from London, and, when they got drunk in the evening, drove at such a rate and so carelessly that it was a mercy people weren’t killed every day.

He said there ought to be two or three of the inhabitants in places that suffered from the nuisance made special constables, and be about every Sunday evening to look out for the wretches, and have them caught and brought to justice.

The conversation was still on the same subject when it was closing time, and they all had to go. The London physician told me he was going by the half-past nine train in the morning, and to be sure and have his bill ready: and I promised to see that it should be. Then he said good night and went to bed; and we went to bed about a quarter of an hour after, and I went to sleep and dreamed that a man in a dog-cart was driving over me, and I was running away, and the faster I ran the faster he drove, and I was just falling down and the dog-cart was coming over my body, when somebody shouted, “Hi! hi! hi!” and I woke up with a start.

And somebody *was* shouting “Hi!” and hammering at our bedroom door.

I sat bolt upright in bed to see if I was awake, and then I woke Harry, who’d sleep, I believe, if somebody was hammering on his head instead of on the door.

“Harry!” I screamed, “there’s something the matter. See who it is.”

He got up and opened the door, and there was Jones, our village policeman.

“Hullo!” says Harry, “how the devil did you get in?”

“Walked in,” he said; “do you know your front door’s open?”

“What!” said Harry. “Why, I bolted and barred it myself.”

“It’s open now, then,” said Jones. “I only found it out by accident. It looked shut all right when I passed it twice before, but just now when I came by I could see a

all right when I passed it twice before, but just now when I came by I could see a streak of light, and I pushed it and it flew back wide open, so I found my way upstairs and woke you. You'd better come down."

Harry was out after the policeman in a minute, and I got up and dressed, knowing something must be wrong, for I'd seen Harry bolt up that door with my own eyes.

It was about five in the morning, and just getting daylight. I went down all of a tremble, and my heart beating loud enough to be heard all over the house. I found Harry and the policeman examining the door.

"It's been done from the inside," said Harry; "that's certain. What can it mean?"

"Who's in the house?" said the policeman.

"Only the servants and ourselves and the gentleman who's been staying here for a week," I said.

"Go and see if the servants are in bed, please, ma'am," said Jones.

I went and knocked at their doors, and they thought they were all oversleeping themselves, and late, and jumped up directly I knocked.

"Well," said the policeman, when I told him, "you'd better see if that gentleman's in the house still."

"Oh, nonsense!" I said; "I can't go and disturb him at this hour. Whatever would he think? Besides, it mightn't be wise to let him know about this. It isn't a thing to do the house good."

"I'd like you to go," said Jones, "just for me to be able to say I ascertained as no one had left the house. Which is his room?"

"I'll take you," said Harry; and they went upstairs together. Presently Harry came tearing down.

"Mary Jane;" he said, looking as scared as if he'd seen a ghost, "the London physician's gone, and he's taken his portmanteau with him!"

I couldn't speak. I dropped down flop on the stairs with horror.

And at that very minute a man on horseback came dashing through the streets, and pulled up by our door as Jones ran out to see what it could be.

It was a groom from the Hall. “I’m going to the station for help,” he said. “The Hall’s been broken into in the night by burglars, and the missus’s jewellery ____”

* * * * *

“*What’s that?* It’s in the best sitting-room, Susan. It’s something smashed. Oh dear me, whatever can it be? What! the *best* vase! Of course; the cat got on the mantelpiece! Well, whose fault is it? I told you you’d shut it in one day by accident, and now you see what’s happened!”

# CHAPTER VI.

## *MR. AND MRS. SMITH.*

It was a long time before I got over the burglary at the Hall. It was a most daring thing, and the detective that came down from London, said it was the work of an old hand. A nice haul the wretches had made, though they hadn't got all Mrs. Phillips's diamonds and jewels, because, it seems, the best had been sent to the bank, but they had taken a lot that were in her room, and valuable plate and things, and got clean away with everything.

We didn't learn all about it till next day. The first story that went about when people got up in the morning was that Mrs. Phillips had been murdered in her bed, but, thank goodness, it wasn't as bad as that; but the nurse that slept in the next room to her, got a nasty knock on the head, hearing a noise and coming in, which made her so queer that she was a long time before she could say what the man was like she saw in the room, ransacking the things.

But what gave us the most dreadful shock first of all, was the disappearance of the London physician, and him going out in the middle of the night and leaving our front door open.

Directly we told the policeman, he said, "He's the man."

"What man?" I said.

"Why, the man that committed the burglary."

I couldn't believe that. I said it was nonsense. A London physician wouldn't go breaking into people's houses at night. But he certainly was gone, and his hand portmanteau too, and he didn't come back again the next morning, and then we recollected about his going up to the Hall with Mr. Wilkins, and his having seen the grounds and been shown over the house by the butler.

But it was such a dreadful idea that it was a very long time before I could believe it, and I didn't quite till the detective came down from London and began to ask questions.

We’d never asked the physician his name, and no letters had come for him, which he explained by saying, that as he wanted to be quite quiet and rest, he had ordered no letters to be forwarded, only he was to be telegraphed to in case of anything very particular, and of course we should have taken up any telegram that came, and said, “Is this for you, sir?” because there was nobody else staying in the house. His going away like that and not coming back again, wasn’t what a first-class London physician would have done, so it was evident he’d deceived us about himself, and if he’d done that, why shouldn’t he be the burglar?

The detective said it was a “put-up job”—that’s what he called it. He said the Hall had been “marked,” and this fellow had come to stay at our house so as to take his observations and find out all he could, and “do the trick” (those were the detective’s words) as soon as he saw a good opportunity.

Poor Mr. Wilkins was nearly mad to think that he’d been the one to take him over the grounds and introduce him to the butler, and so let him find out all he wanted to, and you may be sure that we were pretty mad, too, that the burglar who burgled the Hall should have been a visitor staying at our house. Our first visitor, too, and one we’d been so proud of, and thought was going to do us such a lot of good!

It wasn’t his not paying his bill so much that we minded as the scandal!

Harry said, “Well, we wanted to get something about our house in the papers, and, by Jove, missus, we’ve got it! It’s all over the county now. I shouldn’t wonder if our hotel wasn’t known as ‘The Burglar’s Arms.’”

“Oh, Harry,” I said, “don’t say that—it’s awful. If we got a name like that no respectable person would pass a night here.” I began to think, when Harry said that, about an inn I’d seen on the stage, where awful things are done—a murder, I think; by two awful villains who stayed there, though they made you laugh. Their names were Mr. Macaire and Mr. Strop, I think; but how the landlord could have taken them in dressed as they were, and putting bread and cheese and onions in their hats, and stuffing their umbrellas with meat and vegetables, I couldn’t understand. You could see they were bad characters, but no one would ever have suspected that silver-haired, golden-spectacled old gentleman, who really looked just what he said he was—a London physician.

I must confess that for a good many nights after the awful discovery I didn’t feel very comfortable. It made me nervous to think that we should never know who

was sleeping under our roof. I'm sure I should never have suspected that nice amiable old gentleman of being a burglar.

We got over it after a bit, and when no trace was found of the burglar, and the excitement was over, I didn't think so much about it. All that was found out was that the man in the dog-cart who nearly drove over the miller was an accomplice. They traced the wheels away from the Hall, and the detective said the man in the dog-cart had waited for the physician and driven him off with the "swag." (That's what the detective called it.)

A few days after that another old gentleman came, and wanted a room, but he'd only got a black bag, and I was so nervous that I told him we were full, and he went back to the station, and went on somewhere else.

Of course it was a stupid thing to do, but my nerves were bad, and being an *old* gentleman and having no luggage it gave me a turn, and I sent him away on the spur of the moment.

Afterwards we found out he was a big solicitor in London, and very savage with myself I was for my foolishness.

Soon after that two more customers came, and I was not a bit frightened of them, for they were just the sort of people we wanted. It must have been a little more than a fortnight after the burglary that the station fly brought us a young lady and gentleman with some lovely luggage—honeymoon luggage I saw it was at once by the new dress trunks, and the new dressing-bags, and I knew it was a honeymoon by the way the young gentleman helped the young lady out of the fly and the bashful way he came in and said, "Can I have apartments here for myself and my wife?"

"Certainly, sir," I said; "I will show you the apartments we have vacant."

We had all the apartments vacant, but of course it's never business to say that. I took him upstairs, the lady following, and showed him the best sitting-room and the best bedroom, and he said to his wife, "I think these will do, dear, don't you?" and she said, "Oh, yes! they are very nice indeed," and then she went to the window and looked out into the garden, and said, "Oh, what a pretty garden!"—and then he went and looked out too, and she slipped her arm through his, and they stood there together, and I saw him give her a little squeeze with his arm, and it made me think of my own honeymoon, when Harry used to

squeeze my arm just like that.

When I went downstairs the young gentleman followed me to settle with the fly, and I told him not to bother about the things—everything should be sent upstairs directly. He was very shy and awkward, I thought—shyer and awkwarder than Harry had been; but then, of course, he wasn't a sailor, and sailors have a knack of accommodating themselves to circumstances at once.

When I went up to take their orders for dinner, I knocked at the door, and I heard them move before the young gentleman said, "Come in."

I'm sure they were sitting side by side on the sofa, and when I went in he was standing up by the fireplace, and the young lady was looking out of the window, with her face close to the glass, just as if they hadn't been within a mile of each other!

"What time will you have dinner, please?" I said; "and what would you like?"

He turned to her and asked her what I had asked him.

"Six o'clock, I think, dear," she said.

"And what shall we have?"

"What you like, dear."

I saw that they didn't quite know what to say, so I suggested what we could get easiest, and they said, "Oh, yes; that will do capitally," and seemed quite pleased that I had helped them.

"Will you take dinner, here, sir," I said, "or in the coffee-room?"

"Oh, here, please, if you don't mind," said the young lady, turning round from the window in a minute, and looking at me quite anxiously.

"Oh, it's no trouble," I said. "All your meals can be served here."

"Thank you," she said; and they both seemed quite relieved at not having to go down in the coffee-room.

Before dinner they went out for a little walk, and I stood at the door and looked

after them as they strolled away.

Oh, how happy they looked!—his arm through hers, and his head bent down a little listening to her. It made a tear come into my eye as I watched them.

I think it is so beautiful to see young sweethearts together like that, in the first beautiful sunshine of their married life, without a care, without a thought except for each other. I think it must be one of the most beautiful things in life, that first happy married love, that first “together,” with no good-bye to come, and the future looking so bright and peaceful. Troubles *must* come, we know. It’s very few couples who can go on to the end of the journey loving and trusting and worshipping like that; but even when the troubles come, there is that dear old happy, holy time—the purest and most sacred happiness that we get in this world—to look back upon; and it is so bright in our memory that its light can reach still to where we stand in the darkness, and make that darkness less.

I know it’s sentimental, as they call it, to talk like that; but I can’t help being sentimental when I write about that happy boy-husband and girl-wife—write it at a time when I have had my own little troubles of married life; only *little* ones, Harry is *so* good—and my own love and my own honeymoon get mixed up in my mind with theirs, and that makes sentimental thoughts come into my head.

When they came in just before dinner, the table was ready laid for them, and I had gathered some flowers and made a nice nosegay, and put it in a glass, to make the table look nice; and I waited on them myself—Susan, the housemaid, carrying the dishes up for me.

The young lady looked so pretty with her hat off when she sat down to dinner, her cheeks bright with the air and the sunshine, and her eyes—those beautiful, gentle brown eyes that have such a world of love in them—watching her husband every moment, that for a minute I stood and looked at her instead of taking the cover off the soles.

She caught my look, and went *so* red, poor girl; and I felt quite confused myself, and was afraid I had made her uncomfortable by my awkwardness.

The young gentleman served the fish all right, but when I put the next dish in front of him—a roast chicken—he looked at it quite horrified, and the young lady she looked horrified too. Then they both looked at each other and laughed.

“I—I’m afraid—I—er—can’t carve this properly,” he stammered. “Would you mind cutting it up downstairs?”

I smiled, and said, “If you like, sir, I’ll carve it.”

“Oh, thank you so much,” he said; “I’m such a bad carver.”

I took the chicken on to the side-table, and cut it up for them; and from that minute both their spirits rose. I’m sure that chicken had been on their minds from the moment they ordered it.

They had a bottle of champagne with their dinner; and to follow the chicken I had made a fruit tart, and they both said it was beautiful, and they ate it all. I told them I made it myself, and the young lady said it was very clever of me, and asked me how to make pastry as light as that. I told her my way, and they got quite friendly, and asked me about the hotel, and how long I’d been there; and then I told them how I’d lived in service; and then the young lady asked me how long I’d been married, and all the shyness wore off, and they began to laugh quite merrily; and the young gentleman, when he heard Harry was a sailor, said he hoped he should see something of him, as sailors were jolly fellows.

After they’d had some tea, I said to Harry, “Harry, I shall take them up our visitors’ book that we’ve bought. They’re our first customers since we’ve had it, and must put their names in for us.”

We bought that visitors’ book after the burglar had stayed with us that we’d never asked his name, because Harry said we must always ask people’s names in future, and you can do it in a nicer way by saying, “Please enter your name in the visitors’ book.”

I got the book, and was going upstairs with it, when Harry said, “Wait a minute. Won’t it be better to write a few names in first? P’r’aps they won’t like to be the first, being on a honeymoon; it will be so conspicuous, and everybody who comes afterwards will see their names, being the first, and they mightn’t like it.”

That was quite true, and I understood what Harry meant; so, not to be deceitful and write false names, I wrote my maiden name first, and then Harry wrote H. Beckett, and I went into the bar and got Mr. Wilkins, who had just come in, to write his name, and then we put the names of some of the people who came in of an evening.

When I went in, the young lady was sitting in the arm-chair reading a book out loud, and the young gentleman was smoking a cigar, sitting by the table, listening to her.

“If you please, sir,” I said, “will you kindly write your names in our visitors’ book?”

If I’d asked them to come to prison they couldn’t have looked more terrified. I saw both their faces change in a moment, the young lady’s going quite white, and the young gentleman’s quite red.

His hand trembled as he took the cigar out of his mouth. But he recovered himself in a moment, and said, “Certainly—with pleasure.”

I gave him the book, and put the pen and ink by him, and I saw him exchange glances with the young lady, as much as to say, “Don’t be frightened. I’ll manage it.”

Then he took the pen and wrote in a bold, distinct hand, “Mr. and Mrs. Smith, from London.”

“Thank you,” I said; and took the book and went downstairs.

“Harry,” I said, “there’s something wrong upstairs.”

“Good gracious!” he said; “whatever do you mean?”

“I don’t know what I mean,” I said; “but that young gentleman has signed a false name in our visitors’ book.”

Harry looked grave for a minute, and he didn’t like the idea any more than I did, and I felt so sorry that there should be anything that might be wrong, because I had taken to the young lady and gentleman so much, and they seemed so very nice.

Presently Harry said, “Perhaps it’s a runaway match.”

“No,” I said, “I don’t think so, because of the luggage and the dressing-bags.”

“Oh, they might have had them all ready,” he said; “if people *are* going to run

away they can have luggage.”

“They are so young,” I said; “it—it can’t be anything worse than that, can it?”

“Oh no,” said Harry, “I’m sure it’s not. Come, cheer up, little woman; don’t let’s get frightened because we’ve had one bad lot in the house! Nice hotel-keepers we shall be if we’re going to be nervous about everybody that puts up at the ‘Stretford Arms!’”

I tried to laugh, but I didn’t feel comfortable, and all that night I kept thinking about it, and in the morning, when I took the breakfast up to the sitting-room, I think they saw by my manner that I suspected something, and they both looked very uncomfortable.

We didn’t talk at all. I only just said “Good morning,” and I put the eggs and bacon on the table and left them.

About ten o’clock they went out for a walk, and I went upstairs to see that the rooms had been properly tidied up by the housemaid.

When I went into the bedroom the first thing that caught my eye was the young gentleman’s dressing-bag. It was closed, and the waterproof cover was over it, but not fastened.

I lifted it off the chair on which it stood, to put it on the chest of drawers while the chair was dusted, and as I did so the waterproof flap flew back, and I saw that there were three initials stamped on the leather, and the initials were “T. C. K.”

“I knew it!” I exclaimed; and I rushed downstairs and told Harry.

“If his surname begins with K, it’s certain his name isn’t Smith,” said Harry.

“I don’t want you to tell me that!” I said, a little sharply. “I do know how to spell. What I do want to know is what we are going to do?”

“How do you mean?”

“How do I mean! I suppose we are not going to let people stay at our hotel under false names after the lesson we’ve had with the London physician.”

Harry looked puzzled.

“Well, my dear,” he said, “I haven’t much experience yet, and I don’t know. I suppose as long as people pay their bill and behave themselves, they can stay under what name they choose. Besides,” he said, his face brightening, and being evidently struck with an idea, “people do travel nowadays under false names. The Queen, when she travels, calls herself the countess of something or other, and so do many crowned heads.”

“Perhaps they do,” I said; “but you don’t want me to believe that we’ve got crowned heads staying in our house.”

“No,” said Harry, laughing, “I’m sure they’re not crowned heads, but they may be big swells who are travelling in—in something.”

“Incognito, you mean.”

I knew the word from a story I’d read with that title to it.

“Yes, that’s it. Perhaps they’re a young earl and countess.”

“No, they’re not, or they’d have coronets all over their bags, and on their brushes.”

While we were talking, the young couple came in, and went up to their sitting-room and rang the bell.

I went up, and they ordered luncheon. While I was taking the order, Harry came up and called me out of the room.

“Here’s a telegram for Mr. Smith,” he said; “somebody knows him by that name, at any rate.”

I took the telegram in and handed it to the young gentleman. The young lady, who was sitting down, jumped up and watched him with a frightened look in her eyes as he tore the envelope open.

He read the telegram, and sank down on to the sofa.

“I’ve an important telegram,” he stammered. “We must go home at once: somebody ill. Let me have my bill. What time’s the next train to London?”

I looked at the clock.

“In half an hour, sir,” I said.

“Order a fly to the door, then. We shall be ready. Pack your things, dear,” he said to the young lady; and then, turning to me, “Let me have the bill at once.”

This new turn worried me more than anything. There was evidently something very wrong. Harry agreed with me, and we both felt glad they were going.

I took up the bill, and he paid it, and said he was sorry to have to go, and he gave me half-a-sovereign, saying, “For the servants,” and then he and the young lady went downstairs and got into the fly.

I noticed that she had a thick veil on, but I could see she had been crying and was trembling like an aspen leaf.

When they had driven off, I said to Harry, “Thank goodness they’re gone! It’s quite a load off my mind.”

“Well,” he said, “it’s a rum go. We’ve been trying all we know to get people to come to our house, and when they do come we’re jolly glad to get rid of them.”

I didn’t answer him, but I never got Mr. and Mrs. Smith out of my head all that afternoon, and I made up my mind they’d be a mystery to me for the rest of my life.

But they were not.

That very afternoon, just as we were sitting down to tea, two gentlemen drove up in the station fly, and one of them came in and asked to see the landlord.

Harry came out to him, and I followed.

“Have you had a young gentleman and lady staying here lately?”

“Yes, sir,” I said, beginning to tremble, for I expected something dreadful was coming. “Yes, sir; they came yesterday.”

“Are they here now?”

“No, sir, they left this afternoon.”

The gentleman said something—it was only one word, but it meant a good deal. He said “D——!”

“If you please, sir, is there anything wrong about them?” I asked, feeling that I must know the truth.

“Wrong? I should think there was!” the gentleman yelled out—he really did yell it. “I’m that young lady’s guardian, and she’s a ward in Chancery, and that young scoundrel’s married her without my consent—without the Lord Chancellor’s consent—and he’ll spend his honeymoon in Holloway. That’s what’s wrong.”

“Oh dear!” I said. “Poor young gentleman!”

“Poor young gentleman;” the old gentleman yelled. “D——d young scoundrel! The girl’s got ten thousand a year, and he’s the beggarly youngest son of a beggarly baronet, who has to work for his living. Did they say where they were going?”

“No, sir,” I said.

It was a little white story, but I couldn’t find it in my heart to say “To London,” for fear it might be true. I wasn’t going to help to send a handsome young gentleman to prison for marrying his sweetheart and taking her away from that horrid Court of Chancery, which, judging by the outside, must be a dreadful place for a young girl to be brought up in.

The old gentleman swore a little more, then he jumped into the fly again, said something to the other old gentleman, and drove off again back to the station.

“I hope they won’t be caught,” I said to Harry. “Poor young things! How dreadful to be hunted about on their honeymoon, and the poor young lady to be always dreaming that her husband is being seized and dragged away from her and put into prison.”

* * * * *

About a week after that Harry was reading the paper, when suddenly he shouted

About a week after that Harry was reading the paper, when suddenly he shouted out, “They’re caught!”

“Oh, Harry, no!” I said. I knew what he meant.

“Yes, they are!”

Then he read me the account. The young gentleman, Mr. Thomas C. Kenyon, was brought before the Lord Chancellor. He was arrested at Dover just as they were going on board the steamer for France. Our hotel was mentioned as one of the places they’d been traced to, but, though it was another advertisement, we didn’t want it at that price—we’d had enough of newspaper advertisement of that sort; and the young gentleman was ordered to be imprisoned.

Oh, how my heart ached for that dear young lady when I read that! Harry said it was an infernal shame, and I said so too, only I didn’t say the word Harry did.

There was a lot of talk at our bar about it, and it made the bar trade brisk for some time—lots of people coming in from the village to have a glass and ask about the case who didn’t use our house as a rule; but I could have thrown something at that Mrs. Goose, who came in, of course, and said right out before everybody, “My dear, you ought to keep a policeman on the premises to take up the people who come to stay with you.”

But some time afterwards we heard that the young gentleman had been released, having apologized, and having got his friends and the young lady’s friends to try and melt the Lord Chancellor’s heart, or whatever a Lord Chancellor has in the place of one; and that evening Harry opened three bottles of champagne, and invited all our regular customers to join him in drinking long life and happiness to the first young couple who had stayed at our hotel, Mr. and Mrs. Kenyon—or, as they were always called at the ‘Stretford Arms,’ “Mr. and Mrs. Smith.”

* * * * *

They came to see us soon after the young gentleman was released. They came and stayed with us, and had their old rooms; but they weren’t shy or bashful this time, but, oh, so nice!—and they said they would do all they could to recommend us, and they did. In fact, we owe a great deal to them, and they were very lucky customers to us after all. This time they brought a beautiful victoria with them, and a pair of lovely horses and a coachman and a groom. Our

stabling was just ready, so we were able to take them in, and they drove about the place, and were the admiration of the village, and it's wonderful how Harry and I went up in the estimation of the inhabitants of the place through our having carriage company staying at our hotel.

When "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" left they shook hands heartily with Harry and with me, and they told us——

* * * * *

Met our pony galloping down the lane? Why, he's in the stable! The door's open? Oh, that boy! I've told him twenty times what would happen. Harry, put on your hat and go after him at once. The pony's got loose, and he's galloping down the lane as hard as he can go.

# CHAPTER VII.

## *MR. SAXON'S GHOST.*

I think I have mentioned how, soon after we had got our house straight and ready to be an hotel, I sent a nice, respectful letter to those of my old masters and mistresses that I thought I should like to know where I was, so that we might perhaps have their patronage.

Of course I did not expect them all to pack up at once, and leave their homes and come and stay with us, but I thought at some time or other one or two of them might want to go somewhere, say, from Saturday to Monday, and they might say, "Oh, let us go down and see how Mary Jane is getting on!"

But the one I was most anxious to get down was Mr. Saxon—the author I told you such a lot about in my "Memoirs"—because I knew he wrote in the papers about the places he visited, and I thought if we made him comfortable, and the place suited him, and the air did his liver good, he might write about our hotel, and give it what Harry calls "a leg up," though, of course, it isn't right, because an hotel doesn't have legs.

Mr. Saxon wrote a line of congratulation to us. I think it was to say he was glad we were settled so comfortably, and he'd come and see us one day, but we only guessed it was that, after reading over the letter for about two hours, because he wrote so dreadfully that you had to get as near what he meant as a word that was readable here and there would let you.

After the letter we heard no more, and as months went by we'd quite given up expecting him, when one morning we had a telegram from him, and that not being in his handwriting (thank goodness!), we could read it. It was this: "Keep me sitting-room and bedroom. Arrive this evening.—Saxon."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" I said. "I hope he'll like the place. We must make him comfortable and humour him, and he'll give us a nice advertisement."

"I hope he will," said Harry; "but, I say, my dear, you don't think he'll go on like he does in your 'Memoirs,' do you?"

“Oh, he’s a little odd, and he’s sure to be a bit fidgety, but you’ll soon get used to him,” I said; and then I went upstairs and got the best rooms ready, and put the furniture just how I knew he liked it. Two tables in the sitting-room—one for him to eat on, and the other for him to write on—and I put a great big linen-basket in the room for a waste-paper basket, and I put the big inkstand on the table, and I sent out for a dozen pens and a new blotting-pad; and I put an easy-chair for him to sit in, because I remembered how particular he was about his chairs, always declaring that he never could get one that was fit to sit in, and I made the place look so nice and comfortable that I said to Harry, “There now, I don’t believe even he can grumble at it.”

We wished he had said whether he was coming to dinner or not, because we could have had the table all laid ready for him; but as he only said “this evening,” we made up our minds he would arrive by the train which got in at 8.15; and that was the one he did come by.

When the fly drove up we went outside to welcome him, and we saw there was another gentleman with him—a big gentleman, with a large round face and a fair moustache and blue eyes, who looked like a German, but we found out afterwards he wasn’t—through Mr. Saxon, who, when we asked what nation the gentleman was, said, “Oh, I don’t think he knows himself, but his father was a Russian and his mother was a German, and so I suppose he’s a Swede.”

When Mr. Saxon got out he was going on at the other gentleman about something dreadfully, and I said to myself, “Oh dear, he’s come down in a bad temper! We must look out for squalls.”

The other gentleman said, “Well, Mr. Saxon, it was not my fault; didn’t you tell me you would pack the manuscript yourself?”

“No, I didn’t. Never mind. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters now. I’m getting used to everything. I’ve come down here on purpose to finish that story, and you’ve left the manuscript behind, and it’s wanted in a hurry. I’m working against time. Don’t say anything. It’s my punishment—it’s my doom. Heaven doesn’t want me to prosper. I’m to be ruined, and you are only the humble instrument sent by Providence to accomplish my ruin.”

“Well, sir, hadn’t I better telegraph?”

“Telegraph! To whom? Who knows which manuscript I want? Besides, it

couldn’t get here in time. I wanted to finish that story to-night. Now it’s impossible. If my greatest enemy had employed you to play me a trick, you couldn’t have played me one that would have caused me more inconvenience.”

The Swedish gentleman looked very miserable, and all this time there was me and Harry and the fly-driver standing with the door of the fly open, and Mr. Saxon was going on at the Swedish gentleman, taking no notice of anybody.

So I thought I’d interrupt, and I said, “I hope you’re well, Mr. Saxon?”

He turned on me in a minute, and said, “No, Mary Jane, I am *not* well. I’m half dead.”

“I’m very sorry, sir. What’s the matter with you?”

“What’s the matter with me!” he said. Then he gave a withering glance at the Swedish gentleman, and said, “Idiots, Mary Jane—that’s the disease I’m suffering from! Idiots!”

Then he nodded to Harry, and walked into the house, and Harry showed him upstairs to his sitting-room.

I helped the flyman to get the rugs and the small things out of the fly and carried them in, and the Swedish gentleman paid the man.

I noticed all he did, because I said to myself, “This is somebody new. I suppose he’s Mr. Saxon’s new secretary.” And so he was, as he told me afterwards, when he came down and had a pipe in the bar-parlour, Mr. Saxon being busy upstairs writing, having found the manuscript after all in the portmanteau, where he’d put it himself.

“Mr. Saxon seemed a little put out just now,” I said to him.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” he said. “His liver’s bad. He can’t help it. He must go on at somebody when he’s like that, and I’m getting used to it.”

Presently I went upstairs and knocked at the sitting-room door. When I went in Mr. Saxon was groaning, but writing away for his life.

“If you please, sir,” I said, “I only want to know if you would like any supper.”

“What!” he yelled—really he used to yell sometimes, and that’s the only word for it. “Supper! Good heavens, Mary Jane, do you want me to wake the house up in the middle of the night screaming murder? Look at me now. Do you see how yellow I am? Can’t you see the agony I’m suffering? Supper! Yes, bring me some bread and beetlepaste and a pint of laudanum in a pewter. That’s the supper I want!”

“Lor’, sir,” I said, beginning to be used to him again through old times coming back, “I shouldn’t like you to have that in my house. I hope we’re going to do you good and make you better here. I’m sure we shall do our best.”

He looked up at that, and said, “Thank you, I know you will. You mustn’t mind me if I grumble and growl a bit. I can’t help it. I’m ill, and the least thing makes me irritable.”

“Oh, we sha’n’t take any notice, sir. We hope you’ll do just as you like here, and if there’s anything you want, tell us, so that we can get it for you.”

He turned quite nice after that, and began chatting with me so pleasantly, you’d think he was the most agreeable gentleman in the world if you didn’t know him. He asked about the house and the customers, and all about the people who lived in the neighbourhood, and, thinking to amuse him, I told him a lot of queer things about the people who came to the house, and were characters, being quite taken off my guard, till I saw him jotting down something on the blotting-pad, and then I saw what a stupid girl I’d been. He was taking notes, and I knew he’d go and use up all my characters and make stories of them. So I stopped short all at once, and pretended I’d left somebody downstairs waiting for me.

It was a narrow escape, and I only just remembered his old tricks in time, and what a dreadful man he was for putting everybody into his stories. I knew he’d put his own pa and ma and all his brothers and sisters and all his relations in stories, and nobody ever told their experience about anything, or an adventure that had happened to them, but he’d have it all in his note-book before you could say Jack Robinson.

I remember what he did once, when I was in his service. He went down to stay with his ma at Cheltenham at a boarding-house for a day or two, and his ma told him a lot of things about the people in the house, and the queer characters they were, and what they said and did, never dreaming of any harm; and the very next week if he didn’t write a paper about “Life in a boarding-house,” and put all

these people in, only making them a good deal worse than they were, because he couldn't help exaggerating if he was to be killed the next minute for it.

His pa, it seems, who came down to the boarding-house too, had let out to several people that it was his son who was the Mr. Saxon who wrote for the newspapers, and had persuaded a lot of the people to read what he wrote; and the Monday after, when the paper on boarding-houses came out, a lot of the people staying at the same boarding-house as his ma bought it, and saw themselves in it, and things that only the landlady could know—it was the landlady who had told his ma—and they were so indignant they all gave notice and left, except some that didn't care and stopped, and were so nasty his ma had to leave. I heard him tell the story, and that's how I knew, and it was remembering that that made me drop the conversation before I put my foot in it in the same way.

When I got downstairs, the Swedish gentleman was talking to Harry, and telling him some of the wonderful adventures he and Mr. Saxon had had abroad, and we sat talking till it was closing time. Then the Swedish gentleman said, "I must go upstairs to the governor and get all his medicines out."

"All his medicines!" I said. "Why, how many does he take?"

"Oh, it's awful!" said the Swedish gentleman. "We have to carry a whole portmanteau full everywhere. There's the medicine for his dyspepsia, and the medicine for his liver, and the embrocation for his rheumatics, and the wash for his hair, and three different sorts of pills, and a tonic, and now he takes powdered charcoal, and we have to carry a great bottle full of that—and I have to put them all out, so that he can find them directly he wants them—and then there are his clothes to unpack and his books. I tell you we shall want a furniture-van to take us about soon."

The Swedish gentleman went upstairs, and presently he came down again looking as white as death.

“Oh, Mrs. Beckett,” he said, “whatever shall I do? Look here.” He held up a lot of underclothing all smothered with black patches.

“Why, whatever is it?” I said.

“It’s the bottles broken in the portmanteau,” he said. “The governor kept worrying me so while I was packing I didn’t know if I was on my head or my heels, and I’ve put the bottle of powdered charcoal and the bottle of cod liver oil too close together, and they’ve broken each other in the jolting, and mixed and run about all over the clothes.”

It was a nice mess, and no mistake. The cod liver oil and the charcoal had made a nasty, sticky blacking, and smothered everything.

“Whatever shall I do?” said the Swedish gentleman. “If the governor finds it out he’ll go on at me for a month.”

I thought a minute, and then I said, “Well, sir, the best thing will be for me to have them all washed to-morrow. I’ll get them done at once and sent home. Perhaps he won’t want them before they’re ready.”

He left the things with me and went upstairs again to put the medicines out, and then we went upstairs to bed. Passing Mr. Saxon’s door I knocked just to ask him about breakfast in the morning, and when I opened the door he was dancing about in an awful rage, and the Swedish gentleman was standing in the middle of the room looking the picture of misery.

Mr. Saxon was shouting out, “I can’t sleep without it—you know I can’t! Not one wink shall I have this blessed night. It’s murder, downright cold-blooded, brutal murder, and you’re my murderer!”

“Well, sir,” said the Swedish gentleman, “you didn’t tell me the bottle was empty. It’s in a wooden case for travelling, and I couldn’t see it was empty.”

“What is it you want, sir?” I said. “If it’s anything I can get you——”

“Oh, I dare say you can get it me!” exclaimed Mr. Saxon. “I’ve no doubt you

"Oh, I dare say you can get it me!" exclaimed Mr. Saxon, "I've no doubt you keep it on draught! Do you draw bromide of potassium in people's own jugs?"

"Bro—— what, sir?"

"Bromide of potassium. I have to take it every night. I must. My nerves are in such a state, I can't sleep without it; and this gentleman, knowing that, has let me come away without it. I sha'n't go to bed. I'll sit up all night. If I go to bed I shall go mad, because I sha'n't be able to go to sleep. Go to bed, all of you. I'll go out for a walk. There's a forest near here; I can roam about that all night. I must do something, for I can't go to sleep without my bromide of potassium."

"Oh," I said, "perhaps the country air will make you sleep."

"No, it won't," he said; and he began to put on his hat and coat. "I must go and walk about the forest all night. If I get tired I can hang myself to the branch of a tree."

"Oh, please don't do that," I said, for I knew I shouldn't sleep a wink thinking of him roaming about the forest in his excited state.

"Oh, very well," he said, taking off his hat and coat and flinging them down on the floor, "then perhaps you'll tell me what I am to do. I won't go to bed and lie awake all night. It's too awful."

The Swedish gentleman, who was looking awfully worried, let him go on, and, when he'd done, he said quietly—

"Don't put yourself out like that, sir; you'll only be ill all day to-morrow. Let me go to a chemist's."

I was just going to say that there wasn't a chemist's in the village, and the doctor lived a mile and a half away, when I saw that the Swedish gentleman was trying to make signs to me not to say anything, so I held my tongue.

At first Mr. Saxon refused. He said he wasn't going to have a respectable chemist dragged out of his warm bed at that time of night because he was surrounded with idiots; but the Swedish gentleman quieted him a bit, and then beckoned me to come outside.

When the door was shut he said, "Come downstairs with me, Mrs. Beckett, and

show me a light, please."

"Yes, sir," I said; "but you'll have to go a mile and a half to get what you want."

"No, I sha'n't," he said. "Come downstairs to the parlour."

When we got there he pulled the empty medicine bottle out of his pocket, and said, "Get me some cold water."

I got him some cold water, and he put it in a tumbler. Then he said, "Give me a little salt."

I gave him the salt, and he put it in the water. Then he mixed it up well with a spoon, and then he tasted it. "That'll do," he said. Then he poured it into the medicine-bottle, and corked it up.

"Now," he said, "I'll put on my hat and coat, and you let me out and bang the door loud."

I did, and waited five minutes; and then he knocked, and I let him in.

He was quite out of breath.

"Why, you've been running!" I said.

"Yes; I've been running up and down outside to make me look as if I'd been a long way. Now, I'll go upstairs and give the governor his bromide of potassium."

"But it's salt and water."

"Never mind; he'll *think* it's the bromide, and that's all that's necessary. I know Mr. Saxon, and I know how to manage him."

And he did certainly, for the next morning, when I went to take breakfast up to the sitting-room, there was Mr. Saxon looking quite jolly, and he said he'd had the best night's rest he'd had for a year.

"And if I hadn't had the bromide," he said, "I shouldn't have closed my eyes all night."

The Swedish gentleman never let a muscle of his face move, but I caught him looking at me, and there was a twinkle in his light blue eyes that said a good deal.

There was no doubt about his understanding Mr. Saxon, and knowing how to manage him.

* * * * *

The next evening Mr. Saxon hadn't any work to do, and so after dinner he and the Swedish gentleman came and sat in the bar-parlour along with Mr. Wilkins and the company, and he and the Swedish gentleman joined in the conversation, and they both told such wonderful stories that it made our village people open their eyes. Mr. Wilkins generally had all the talk, but he had to sit still because Mr. Saxon didn't let him get a word in edgeways when he was once fairly started.

Of course he must talk about awful things—things to make your blood curdle—it wouldn't be him if he didn't do that; and the stories he told made what hair Mr. Wilkins had on his head stand upright, he being a very nervous man, and believing in ghosts and supernatural things.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" said Mr. Saxon.

"Well, I do to a certain extent," said Mr. Wilkins; "but I've never seen one."

"You've never had a conversation with a dead man?"

"Lor', no," said Mr. Wilkins, "nor nobody else, I should think."

"Yes," said Mr. Saxon, "I have."

We were all silent directly, and I began to feel creepy, and as if somebody was breathing on the back of my neck, which is a feeling I always have when people begin to tell ghost stories.

"I'll tell you about it," said Mr. Saxon; and then he began. Of course I can't tell it in his own words, because I had to write it down from memory afterwards, but this is something like it.

"When I was a young fellow," said Mr. Saxon, "and a clerk in my father's office

in the City, I used to knock about a good deal of an evening and see life, and as my father and mother wouldn't let me have a latchkey, and didn't like me coming in at all hours, I left home, and went to live by myself in lodgings in a street running off the Camden-road. There were a lot of other young fellows living in the house—all of them lads studying for veterinary surgeons at the Royal Veterinary College in Great College-street. Lots of the houses in this neighbourhood were filled with these young fellows, as many of them came up from the country for the 'term,' and, of course, wanted to live near the College.

"One of the nicest of them, and my particular friend, was Charley Ransom. He was a good-looking lad about eighteen, but very reckless, and a good deal fonder of billiard-rooms, and betting, and music-halls, than he was of work. He'd been up for an examination and failed, and he told me that his old dad down in the country was very wild with him, and that if he didn't pass this term he would have to go back home and go into an office as a clerk.

"He made up his mind to try, but he was in with a bad set, and they got him out of an evening when he ought to be studying, and unfortunately he was a fellow that a very little drink made excited, and then he lost his head, and no freak was too mad for him.

"At this time I had just begun to get things that I wrote put into the newspapers, and as I had to be at the City all day, I used to go straight home and shut myself up in my room, and work till very late, sometimes till one in the morning; but I always went out for a walk before going to bed, no matter what time it was when I left off.

"Once or twice when I was going out I met Ransom coming in, looking very queer, and walking very unsteady, and from that, and what the landlord told me, I knew he was 'going wrong.'

"One Sunday morning I met him in Park-street, and we walked into the Park together, and I ventured to say I thought it was a pity he didn't try and settle down and be steady, as I was sure he'd never pass his exam. the way he was going on, and he might be wrecking all his future life.

"He took my advice in good part, and said I was quite right, but he couldn't help it. He'd got a lot of trouble, and he was up a tree.

"'What is it?' I said. 'Tell me; I may be able to help you.'

“‘No; you can’t, old fellow,’ and then he told me his trouble, and a very dreadful one it was. It seems he’d been squandering money and gambling, and had got into debt, and, not wanting his father to know, he’d raised money. He wouldn’t tell me how, because he said it would incriminate another fellow; but I knew it was in some way that might land him in a police-court.

“He had hoped to have got the money again, poor lad; he’d been betting to get it back again, but he’d only got deeper into the mire, and now every day might bring exposure, disgrace, and ruin.

“I was very sorry, but I couldn’t help him. I hadn’t any money to spare. All I could do was to beg him to write to his father, tell him everything, and get assistance there.

“This he refused to do. I found out afterwards that his father had sustained heavy losses, and was himself in straitened circumstances.

“Two nights afterwards, while I was at work, there came a knock at my door, and one of the young fellows came in. ‘Oh, Mr. Saxon,’ he said, ‘such a terrible thing’s happened! Charley Ransom’s poisoned himself accidentally.’ As soon as I had recovered from the shock Ransom’s friend told me all about it. Charley, who had been suffering with a troublesome cough, carried a bottle of ‘drops’ in his pocket, which he took when the cough was bad. That afternoon he had had a small bottle filled with poison which he was going to use in a chemical experiment. It was supposed that, the cough coming on, he had by mischance taken the poison instead of the drops. He had been found lying in an insensible state in the lavatory of a billiard-room in Park-street, and had been taken to the hospital.

“I guessed the truth at once. In a moment of despair and desperation Ransom had committed suicide.

“I went to the hospital that evening to make inquiries. I was told that the case was almost hopeless, and that death might be expected at any moment.

“The landlord telegraphed to Charley’s father, and the next day the poor old gentleman came up. He was allowed to see his son, but the lad was unconscious, and, being able to do nothing, the father came away.

“That night a message came to the house from the hospital.

“Ransom was dead!

“The next morning, when I got to the city, I found my father there before me. He called me into his office and told me I must pack up at once and go to the South of France. My mother was there with my two sisters, and both of them had been attacked with scarlet fever. My mother wanted me to go out to her at once, as she did not like to be there alone with this anxiety on her mind.

“I returned to my lodgings, and, as I should probably be away some time, I paid my rent and a week in lieu of notice, and left. I was not at all sorry to turn my back upon the place, for Ransom’s terrible fate had made me very miserable.

“I went to Nice, and when I got there soon found something to distract my thoughts from Ransom. My sisters were seriously ill. For a month it was a battle between life and death, and it was two months before they could be moved. In this fresh trouble I forgot all about poor Charley. Under any other circumstances, I should have tried to get the English newspapers, and have watched for the inquest.

“When my sisters were well enough to travel we returned to London, but only for a day, as they were to go at once to the seaside. I went down with them to Eastbourne, which was the place recommended by the doctors.

“The first evening that we were there, after dinner I strolled out. It was just twilight, and, lighting my pipe, I turned away from the sea, and walked along the road leading to the Links. The quietness of the country, and the stillness of the night, set me meditating, and I began to think of Charley Ransom. I was tired with my walk, and I sat down on a seat under one of the big trees, and was soon lost in reverie.

“How long I sat there I don’t know, but presently I became conscious that somebody was sitting beside me. I struck a match to relight my pipe, which had gone out, and the light of the vesta fell full on the face of the man who was my companion.

“I could not speak—for a second I could not move. It was no human being that sat beside me. The face I saw was the white face of death—the face of the man who had poisoned himself and died in a London hospital—the face of Charley Ransom!

“I rose with an effort, and walked—almost ran—away. I am not ashamed to confess that in that moment of horror I was an absolute, abject coward. I walked on at full speed until I got to the town and saw the lights of the shops, and mixed with the crowd, and then only I began to recover myself.

“I said to myself that I had been deceived by my imagination—that there was nobody by me on that seat. I had been thinking of Ransom, and had imagined that I saw him. Such things, I knew, had often occurred to imaginative people.

“By the time I reached home I was convinced that I had been the victim of an hallucination.

“I determined to conquer my folly, and the next evening I went to the same place and sat down. There was no one there. The road was lonely and deserted. I sat on till it was dark, and no one came. I rose to go. I walked a little distance away, and then I turned round.

“There *was* a man on the seat now. I walked back again—trembling, but determined to know the truth. When I came within a few yards I could see the man’s face.

“It was that white, dead face again—it was the face of Charley Ransom!

“With a supreme effort I went right up to the ghost. Its head was bent a little, its eyes were on the ground.

“‘Ransom!’ I said.

“The face was slowly lifted. The strange lack-lustre eyes looked into mine.

“It *was* the dead man’s ghost!

“One look was sufficient to convince me, and then I took to my heels and fairly bolted.

“Laugh at me, if you will—call me a coward—but put yourself in my place, and say what you would have done. One doesn’t stop to reason—one doesn’t think of what a ghost can do, and what it can’t. The sight of a man you know to be dead and buried sitting within arm’s-length of you is enough to shock the nervous system of a brave man—and a brave man I am not, and never was.

“I didn’t go that walk again. No power on earth would have tempted me to pass, after the sun had gone down, that haunted seat. That, Mr. Wilkins, is the ghost I saw and spoke to—the ghost of the man who took poison and died in the hospital—the ghost of my fellow-lodger, Charley Ransom.”

“Awful!” said Mr. Wilkins, as Mr. Saxon finished.

I didn’t say anything, but that ghostly blowing on the back of my neck was worse than ever, and I made up my mind that we’d burn a nightlight that night. I couldn’t sleep in the dark with Mr. Saxon’s ghost in my head, I was sure of that.

Harry was the first to speak. “I suppose you did see it, sir?” he said. “But why should Mr. Ransom’s ghost come all the way to Eastbourne after you?”

“Ah!” said Mr. Saxon; “I’ll tell you why. It had been ordered there for change of air.”

“A ghost ordered to Eastbourne for change of air?”

“Yes; it seems that the man who had died in the hospital that night was a man named Lansom. By one of those mischances which will sometimes happen, there was a confusion through the similarity of the names, and a messenger was sent to Ransom’s friends and Ransom’s address to give information of his death.”

“The mistake wasn’t rectified till after I had left the next day. It was nobody’s business to write to me, and nobody knew where I was, so I didn’t hear of it. Ransom got better, and, when he was well enough to be moved, was sent to Eastbourne. It was Ransom, and not his ghost, that I had seen on the seat. The deathly look of the face was due to the effect of the poison he had taken.”

“And he wasn’t punished?” I said.

“No; the poison was supposed to have been taken accidentally, for nothing came out about his trouble. The young fellow who had got him into it made a clean breast of it to the other fellows, and the students at the College, like the good-hearted fellows they are, in spite of their little failings, made a subscription and paid the man who could have prosecuted all that was due to him.”

“Three cheers for the vets.!” said Harry.

“Quite so,” said Mr. Saxon; “I’ve known a good many in my time, and take

"Quite so," said Mr. Saxon, "I've known a good many in my time, and, take them altogether, a better set of fellows, though a bit noisy now and again, doesn't exist."

* * * * *

I've been able to finish Mr. Saxon's story without being interrupted, for a wonder. I shouldn't have used it here, only it's a little triumph for me to have got something out of him for my book. He's got plenty out of other people. I don't suppose he thought when he was telling it to make Mr. Wilkins's hair stand up that I was taking it all in to use for my book. He can't say anything, because it's the way he's served other people all his life. Tit for tat, Mr. Saxon—and one to Mary Jane.

# CHAPTER VIII.

## *MRS. CROKER'S "No. 2."*

It was pretty late when we went to bed the night that Mr. Saxon got telling stories, because after everybody had gone he sat on with Harry, and he and the Swedish gentleman didn't seem to be inclined to go to bed at all, till at last I had to say it was long past twelve o'clock, and we should all lose our beauty sleep, and at last I got them to take their candles and go up to bed.

There weren't any letters for Mr. Saxon next morning, so they both went out for a walk, asking me the nicest walk to go.

They were quite jolly, Mr. Saxon being full of jokes, and insisting upon going behind the bar before they started and pretending to serve the customers, and asking questions about everything he saw; and when I told him anything, the Swedish gentleman had to put it down in the little black book he carried in his pocket, and I noticed he was always making notes in it—whenever Mr. Saxon thought of anything the other having to put it down for him. If a customer came in with a curious manner, Mr. Saxon would say, "Put that down;" and out came the book. If Harry told about something that had happened to him on a voyage, it was, "Put that down;" and I noticed the Swedish gentleman always pulled out about a dozen papers before he found the book. It seems Mr. Saxon picked up handbills, and cut things out of the paper, and wrote things on bits of paper, and everything had to go into the Swedish gentleman's pocket, till he looked quite bulged out.

Mr. Saxon, when he came in, wrote till dinner-time, and the Swedish gentleman had to copy all he wrote, and when he couldn't read the words Mr. Saxon went on at him and said his common sense ought to tell him what they were, but there wasn't anything to attract attention till they had their dinner. They had a very good dinner, and the air had evidently given them an appetite; but Mr. Saxon kept chaffing all the time, and saying the Swedish gentleman would have to be lifted out of his chair by a steam-crane if he ate any more, and begging him not to make us bankrupt, because we were young beginners.

And he told me while they were travelling abroad they had gone to an hotel

where the meals were fixed price, and after staying two days the landlord came and offered them a pound to go somewhere else because the Swedish gentleman was ruining him. But I noticed that Mr. Saxon ate quite as much as the other; perhaps not so much meat, but he ate nearly all the apple-pie and three-quarters of a cold jam tart, and the Swedish gentleman didn't touch the pastry at all.

And after Mr. Saxon had eaten all the pastry, if he didn't tell me never to put such things on the table again for him, as they were poison; so the next day I only made a milky pudding, and then, if he didn't say, "What, no pastry! Oh dear me! Here, Mrs. Beckett, go and make us half-a-dozen pancakes."

What *are* you to do with a man like that?

The second day, in the morning, I saw that Mr. Saxon had got out of bed the wrong side.

He was groaning when I went to lay the breakfast, and he said his liver was bad, and his life was a burden to him; and certainly he did look green and yellow. And he was looking at himself in the glass, and going on because his hair wouldn't lie down; and he kept banging it and saying he looked like a death's-head, and he should be glad when he was in his grave.

I had put his letters—a dozen, I should say—on the table; but just as he was going to open them the Swedish gentleman came in and snatched them away.

"No, sir," he said; "you have your breakfast first. I see how you are this morning; and there's sure to be something in the letters to annoy you, so have your breakfast first. I know you won't eat any if you open them."

He was right, for when I went to clear the things away Mr. Saxon was walking up and down the room in a dreadful rage, and the perspiration was streaming down his face.

"The wretches, the fiends!" he said, "to dare to say this to me! The scoundrels! but I'll teach them a lesson; I'll tell them what I think of them."

And directly the cloth was off he seized the pen and ink and began writing page after page on letter-paper, and then tearing it up and groaning, and then beginning again.

"There!" he said, "that's the sort of thing to say to wretches like that. Take that to the post at once."

The Swedish gentleman took it and put it in his pocket, and went outside the door.

I followed him with the crumb-brush, and I said, "Shall I send the boy to the post with it, sir?"

He said, "Oh no; it's all right. I sha'n't post it at all."

"What!" I said; "not post it?"

"No, bless you; if I were to post all the letters he writes to people when he's in a rage he wouldn't have a friend left in the world. I burn them instead. Why, when he's put out like he is now he writes the most awful things to people. They don't understand him, and might think he meant it; but I do understand him, and I don't post the letters."

"But don't you tell him?"

"Oh yes; when he's cooled down a bit, and had time to think; and then he's very glad. He's made no end of enemies through writing in a rage when I haven't been by to stop the letters going; but he sha'n't make any more if I can help it."

"What a pity it is he has such a hasty temper," I said.

"It is, because it gives people a wrong impression of him. But he can't help it; it's nervous irritability, and rages and furious letter-writing are only the symptoms."

"Ah," I said, "I know. He used to be like that when I was with him; but he's all right when you know him."

"Yes," he said, "he's like the gentleman in the song—

'He's all right when you know him;
But you've got to know him fust.'"

When I told Harry about the bromide and about the letters that weren't posted, he said—

“I say, missis, do you think he’s all right?”

“What do you mean, Harry, by ‘all right’?”

“Why, all right *here*,” and he touched his forehead.

“Why, of course he is. It’s only his curious way.”

“Well,” said Harry, “if you say so, I suppose it’s right. You know more about him than I do; but if I’d met him without being introduced I should have said that he was a lunatic, and the big foreigner was his keeper.”

That was a nice idea, wasn’t it? But, of course, a character like Mr. Saxon isn’t met with every day; and perhaps it’s a good job it isn’t. Too many of them would make things uncomfortable.

All that day Mr. Saxon was very excited, and I could see it was his liver by the look of him; and he kept groaning and saying his head ached, and he felt as if he’d been beaten black and blue.

He said he couldn’t write and he couldn’t read, and he couldn’t sit still, and so he came downstairs into our parlour and made Harry come and sit and talk with him. But he talked so much himself, Harry never had a chance. Harry did manage to say once what a fine thing it must be to be able to make money, and have your name stuck about the hoardings; and that was enough—that started him.

“A fine thing!” he said; “why, I’m the most miserable wretch that ever trod the earth! For twenty years I haven’t known what it is to be well for a single day. I’m always doubled up, I’m always in pain, I can’t go anywhere, I shun society, and I can’t eat anything without being ill for a week.”

“But you manage to write a good deal,” said Harry.

“Ah! I used to, but that faculty’s gone now. I’m too ill. I shall have to give up soon. Then I shall be ruined, and die in the workhouse. It’s an awful thing, Beckett, after working hard all your life, to die in the workhouse.”

“Can’t say, sir,” said Harry jokingly; “I never tried it.”

But Mr. Saxon wouldn’t joke. He kept on talking in such a melancholy way that

But Mr. Saxon wouldn't joke. He kept on talking in such a melancholy way that at last we all began to feel miserable. He said that life was all a mistake—that it was no good trying to be anything in the world, because death was sure to come, and that misery and trouble were our portions from the cradle to the grave. Then he began to tell the most dreadful stories about people he'd known, and the awful things that had happened to them; and Harry, who wasn't used to that sort of thing, got up and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Saxon, I'll go and get a little fresh air. If I listen to you much longer I shall begin to believe that I'd better take the missis and the baby and tie them round my neck and jump into the canal, before anything worse happens to us."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Mr. Saxon; "I'm always like that when I've got dyspepsia—and I've got it awfully this afternoon."

"Well," said Harry, "the best thing for that is exercise. Come and have a good walk."

They went out, Harry and Mr. Saxon and the Swedish gentleman, and when they came back they were all roaring with laughter. Mr. Saxon had forgotten all about his ailments, and Harry told me Mr. Saxon and the Swedish gentleman had been pretending that they were two agents from London, who were down to look for the next heir to a John Smith, who had died in Australia worth a hundred thousand pounds, and they'd been into all the cottages making inquiries and questioning the people about their great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, and Harry said that they'd set the whole village agog, and that half the people in it had tried to make out that they once had a relative named Smith. Harry laughed when he told me, because it was so droll, the way all the people began to tell Mr. Saxon their family histories, the Swedish gentleman taking it all down, as grave as a judge, in his note-book.

He said it was as good as a play. But it was an awful nuisance when people kept coming in and wanting to see the two gentlemen, and leaving bits of paper with the names of their ancestors written on, and old samplers, and I don't know what. And one old gentleman from the almshouses, who hadn't been out of his room for three months, was brought down in a wheelbarrow, with his family Bible to show his mother's maiden name was Smith; and he was so disappointed not to find the hundred thousand pounds waiting for him, that Harry had to give him a shilling and a bit of tobacco to comfort him.

It really was too bad of Mr. Saxon to have played a joke like that, because people in a country place always have an idea that they are "next of kin," or

people in a country place always have an idea that they are "next of kin," or whatever you call it, to rich people, and that there is unclaimed money waiting for them.

You have only to mention that somebody of their name is advertised for or inquired for, and they are certain that they are coming into a fortune. Almost every old lady in a country place believes that there is a fortune left to her somewhere, if she only knew where to look for it.

But Mr. Saxon got nicely paid out for his joke. There was an old lady who lived in the village, a regular character, called Mrs. Croker, though her real name was Mrs. Smith—Croker having been the name of her first husband and Smith of her second; but she went back to her first husband's name when her second ran away. She was an awful tartar if all they say of her was true, and no wonder the first one died and the second ran away. She was married from the village, her family living there for centuries, and that's how her history was so well known.

She married a very quiet, middle-aged man first, and went to live in London with him, where he worked at his trade; but she was the master, it seems, from the first. They had a little house over Lambeth way. She made him scrub the stairs and clean the steps, and do all the house-work that a woman generally does, before he went to his work and after he came home from it; and he had to give her all his money, and she allowed him so much a day, just enough for his fare and his dinner that he had to get out. And woe betide him if he didn't come home to his tea to the minute he ought to be home!

He was due home at half-past five from his work, and at five-and-twenty minutes to six the tea was all cleared away, and he had to go without for being late. Then she used to set him to do cleaning or whatever had to be done, and she always found him a job, because she said it wasn't good for a man to be idle.

Once a friend called to see poor Mr. Croker, I was told, but she answered the door and gave the friend a bit of her mind. She said when a man came home he belonged to his wife, and she wasn't going to have any dissolute companions coming there after him luring him into bad ways.

You can guess what a nice sort of woman she was; perhaps being over forty when she married had something to do with it.

Poor Mr. Croker was a very mild little man who daren't say his soul was his own, and he obeyed like a lamb, and was very kind to her with it all, and I dare

own, and he obeyed like a lamb, and was very kind to her with it all, and I dare say loved her very much—for I've heard, and I dare say it's true, that men do love women like that sometimes much better than women who let themselves be trodden on.

On Sunday Mr. Croker had to work harder than ever, because his wife went to church in the morning, and left him at home to do the cooking and get the dinner ready, and when she came home she sat down and let him dish it up, and a nice to-do there was if everything wasn't quite right.

On Sunday afternoon she used to have a nap, and to keep Croker out of mischief she used to give him the Sunday-school books that she had had when a little girl to read, and, to make sure he didn't go to sleep or get lazy, she used to make him learn the collect for the day and a hymn while she was asleep, and he had to say them when she woke up.

It seems hardly possible that a man would lead such a life, but poor Croker did, and I know that it is true, for I can judge by her goings-on now, when I see her very often; and all the people who knew about her married life tell the same story, and poor Croker's "mates" in his workshop told what they had heard from him when he died, and there was an inquest on him.

But I must not anticipate.

To show how she treated her husband, it was a fact—and she confessed it herself—that she didn't even let him have what she had in the way of crockery. She had nicer things, china and that sort of thing, which she used for herself, but poor Croker had his tea in a big yellow mug, and had a common cracked old plate to have his dinner on, and had his beer in the same old yellow mug, while she had hers in a glass; and even the beer was different, he having to fetch her a pint of the best, while he was only allowed half a pint of the common.

It was one Sunday afternoon that Mr. Croker came to his end, and it was really through his being so afraid of his wife.

It seems she never allowed him to smoke, because she said it was a wasteful habit; but he used to keep a pipe at the shop, and smoke it secretly till he got near his home, and then call at a friend's house and leave it for fear she should search his pockets and find it on him.

He had some way of not smelling of tobacco by having a chronic cough, which

He had some way of not smelling of tobacco by having a chronic cough, which made him always take a coughdrop that hid the smell of tobacco; and that was enough, because I shouldn't suppose that Mrs. Croker ever so far unbent her dignity as to kiss the poor man.

Sunday was his great trial, because he was never allowed out till evening, and then she always went with him for a short stroll. Not being able to get a smoke that day made him want it all the more—which is only human nature, and always has been.

At last, noticing that she used to sleep very soundly of an afternoon, he got artful, and would learn his collect beforehand in his dinner-hour at the shop, and, when she was asleep and snoring, creep out of the room with his hymn-book, and learn that over a pipe down in the shed that was at the bottom of the yard, where the coals were always kept, they having no underground coal-cellar in the little house they lived in. He was afraid to smoke in the garden, for fear the neighbours should see him and by chance let her know he had been smoking. So he used to crawl into the shed, and had made himself a comfortable corner there, and a seat on an old basket turned upside down, and he had a candle, which he stuck up to read by; and that was his most enjoyable half-hour on Sunday.

He always managed to go in with some coals, so that, if she woke up and missed him, he could say, when he came in, he had been to the coal-shed. He had to work the kitchen fire in the summer very carefully, so as to make it always want coals just at that time.

His end was very awful. It seems that Mrs. Croker, who was always one to drive a bargain, and had bought no end of things cheap, which she hoarded away, being a miser, as you may guess, had been offered a big can of oil, that is burned in lamps, cheap by a neighbour who had the brokers in, and been sold up or something of the sort, and she had bought it and had it taken into this shed.

One dark Sunday afternoon, poor Croker, knowing nothing about the oil, went into the coal-shed and lit his candle, and sat down to learn his hymn and have his pipe, when, in settling himself down, he knocked over the can that he didn't know was there, and it made him jump, and in his fright down he came and the candle too, and he and the candle fell into a pool of the oil, and everything was in a blaze in a minute.

His screams brought assistance, and he was got out, but not before he was so burned that he never got over it, but died a little while after.

burned that he never got over it, but died a little while after.

It was at the inquest that it came out why he was there smoking, one of his mates volunteering and giving off a bit of his mind before the coroner could stop him.

Mrs. Croker, after she got over the shock, said it was a judgment, and it all happened through men deceiving their wives; but other people who knew all about her put it differently.

Two years after Mr. Croker's quiet Sunday pipe had caused his end, Mrs. Croker, who must have had a tidy bit of money, because she had saved a good deal out of Croker's wages, and was always thrifty, and had his club and insurance money, married again. This time she married a younger man, a man in good work, named Dan Smith. I suppose Mr. Smith thought she had a bit of money, and didn't know what a character she was.

At any rate, Mrs. Croker became Mrs. Smith, and she tried the same game on with Daniel as she had with the other.

But Daniel didn't take it quite in the same way. He humoured her at first, and cleaned the steps and cooked the dinner; but they say it was over the collect and the hymn on Sunday afternoon that they fell out.

He said if she went out Sunday mornings he should go out Sunday afternoons, and he should smoke his pipe out of doors and in the house, too. He wouldn't give up his baccy for the best woman breathing.

They had awful quarrels about it, and neither would give way; and, what's more, Mr. Smith wouldn't hand over all his wages every week as Mr. Croker had done.

She must have led him a pretty life in consequence, for one Saturday morning Mr. Smith went out, and he didn't come home to dinner, and he didn't come home to tea. Mrs. Smith worked herself up into an awful rage, and was getting ready to make it warm for him when he did come in—but he didn't come in to supper, and he didn't come in all night.

Then she got awfully frightened, and the next morning, Sunday, she went down to the works and found out where the foreman lived, and went to see if he could tell her anything. The foreman told her that Dan had left his employment, having given a week's notice the Saturday before, and had wished them all good-bye; and then she knew that her husband hadn't meant to come home—in fact, that he

had run away from her.

She went on anyhow about him then, and called him dreadful names, and said he was a villain, and vowed she would find him, if she went to the end of the world after him, and have him up for deserting her.

She didn't get much sympathy from anybody, because people knew how she'd treated her first husband, and they said she didn't deserve to have another; but some of the mischievous people played jokes on her. One would come to her and say, "Oh, Mrs. Smith, your husband was seen last night with a young woman in a public-house at Bow."

Off she would go to the place, and insist on seeing the landlord, and make a fine to-do, accusing him of harbouring her husband. Wherever people told her her husband had been seen she would go, till she had been half over London, and she began to be known as "the old gal who was looking for her husband."

But at last she gave up the search and sold up her home, and came back to live in her native village near where our house is; and then she pretended to be very poor, and used to ask herself out to tea to different people's houses as often as she could, and would come in and talk about her wrongs, till people used to have to make all sorts of excuses to get rid of her.

She was said to wear all her clothes one set on top of the other, and she certainly looked very bulky always; and whenever she called and people were at tea, she'd have a cup, and manage to take a lump or two of sugar extra and put in her pocket, and was always asking to be obliged with a stamp, which she didn't pay for, and all that sort of thing.

She managed to make friends with us somehow soon after we came, and when we weren't at tea or dinner when she came in, she would have an awful attack of the spasms, and, of course, at first I used to say, "Have a little brandy, or a little gin," and she never said "No."

I had managed to stop her calling so often when Mr. Saxon started that story about the Mr. Smith who had died in Australia. She heard of it, and she was certain it was her husband, and down she came to our place and insisted on seeing the agents.

We tried to get rid of her, saying they weren't in, but she said she'd stay till they

did come in, and at last Mr. Saxon had to see her to try and get rid of her.

But once she got in his room, there she stuck. It was no good his saying the man Smith had been in Australia fifty years—she knew better. For everything he said she had an argument ready, and she demanded the name of his employers, and I don't know what; and as he had some writing to do he got out of temper, and then she slanged him, and said he was in the conspiracy, and at last he put her out of his room and locked the door.

We got her away after she'd shouted at him outside his door for a quarter of an hour; but when he went out the next morning for a walk she was waiting for him, and she followed him and the Swedish gentleman through the village, shouting at them, till everybody came out of their doors, and Mr. Saxon had to run fast to get away from her, because she couldn't run far with three or four complete sets of clothes on.

When Mr. Saxon returned he came in the back way and sat down in a chair.

"Good heavens, Mary Jane," he said, "that old woman will drive me mad! Can't she be put in the pound?"

I said it was a pity he had put that story about, because it would never do to say there was no Mr. Smith—all the other people would be so indignant. He must think of something to persuade Mrs. Smith it wasn't her husband.

"I know," said the Swedish gentleman; "we must show her a photograph of the real Mr. Smith, and say that's the man. Then she can't say it's her husband."

"But I don't carry photographs about with me," said Mr. Saxon. Then he asked me if I had one.

"No," I said, "not that she wouldn't recognize, because she's looked through my album over and over again, and I can't borrow one of anybody in the village, because she'd recognize that too. She knows everybody's business."

"Oh, leave it to me, sir," said the Swedish gentleman; "I'll manage to get one."

So he went out and got a photograph, and I heard afterwards how he got it. He certainly was very clever at scheming and planning, seeming to like it.

He went to the photographers in the nearest town to us and asked if they had any

He went to the photographers in the nearest town to us and asked if they had any photographs of celebrities, and they said, “No; there was no demand for them.” Then he asked if they had any photographs of anybody who didn’t live in the place or near the place. The photographer thought a minute, and then said, “Yes; he thought he had.” He went to a drawer, and brought out a photograph of a man.

“I’m sure that is a stranger,” he said; “you can have this.” The Swedish gentleman had said he wanted an old photograph to do a conjuring trick with, but didn’t want anybody who was an inhabitant.

He paid a shilling for the photo, and brought it back. When he got near our house he met Mr. Saxon, who had gone out for a stroll, and that blessed Mrs. Croker was watching for him, and was on to him again demanding particulars of her husband’s death in Australia and of her fortune. She wasn’t going to let a lot of people that had no claim on him get it.

Mr. Saxon asked the Swedish gentleman in German if he’d got a photo. “Yes,” he said.

Then Mr. Saxon turned to Mrs. Croker and said, “Madam, I suppose you would know your husband’s photograph?”

“Yes, I should,” she said.

“Then, madam, my friend will show you the photograph of our Mr. Smith, and you will see it is not your husband.”

The Swedish gentleman took out his pocket-book and took the photograph he had bought from it.

“There, madam,” he said, “that is the Mr. Smith.”

“Ah!” shouted the woman; “I knew it. *That is my husband!*”

And it was. The photographer had given the Swedish gentleman a copy of the photograph of Daniel Smith. When Mrs. Croker came to the village she had had a dozen taken to send about, in case she ever heard of any clue in distant parts. The photographer had taken more than had been ordered—she wouldn’t pay for them, and he had to keep them. He had given one to the Swedish gentleman.

That evening Mr. Saxon packed up and fled. He went away in a close carriage, and drove to a station four miles off, to elude the vigilance of Mrs. Croker.

She used to go to London about once a week regularly to look for him, and she was quite convinced that some day she would receive the hundred thousand pounds that her husband left in Australia. She was convinced that she had been hoaxed at last by receiving news of the death of the real Daniel Smith. He had died at——

* * * * *

What's that smell of burning? It's from the kitchen. Why, cook, what are you thinking of? You know how particular No. 7 is, and these cutlets are burned to a cinder. You—— Why, good heavens, the woman's drunk!

# CHAPTER IX.

## *OLD GAFFER GABBITAS.*

It’s got about. I wouldn’t have had it happen for the world; but Mr. Wilkins has got to know that I write stories. He told me the other evening that he was going to buy my book, and he hoped I’d write my name in it.

“What book?” I said, going very red.

“Why, your ‘Memoirs,’ ma’am,” he said. “My daughter up in London, that I went to see last week—she’s a great reader, and I do believe that she has read everything, ancient and modern—and we were having a lot of conversation about you, and I was saying what a nice lady you were, and about your husband being a sailor, and one or two things I dropped made her prick up her ears, and she asked me a lot of questions, and presently she said, ‘Father, what’s Mrs. Beckett’s christian name?’ Well, of course I knew what it was, through your having written it in the visitors’ book, as you remember, when you asked me to write mine too, when it was new, and you wanted to take it up for ‘Mr. and Mrs. Smith’ to put their names in. So I said, ‘Mrs. Beckett’s christian name, my dear, is Mary Jane.’

“‘I thought so,’ said my daughter.

“Of course I asked her why she should think your name was Mary Jane, ma’am, and then she said, ‘She’s a celebrated authoress. She’s written a book all about us (my daughter is in domestic service), and it’s the truest book I ever read about servants. It’s her “Memoirs” and all about the places she lived in, and the people she lived with. She said in the book she was going to marry Harry and have a country inn.’

“‘Harry’s the landlord’s name, right enough,’ I said; and from one or two things my daughter told me were in that book, ma’am, I’m sure I have the honour of addressing the talented authoress.”

I blushed more than ever when Mr. Wilkins said that, and I felt very uncomfortable. I never thought it would get about that I wrote books, and I felt

that if it was known it might injure our business, as folks wouldn't like to come and stay at an hotel, if they thought the landlady was studying their characters to make stories about them for print. I saw it was no good denying it, so I put a bold face on the matter, and I said, "Mr. Wilkins, it is quite true; but I want you to give me your promise you won't say a word of what you have found out to anybody else."

"Good gracious, ma'am!" said Mr. Wilkins. "Why should you hide your candle under a bushel? It's a great thing to be a writing lady nowadays."

"Yes: but I'm not a lady, Mr. Wilkins," I said, "and I've my husband's business to attend to, and I don't want the people about here to know me as anything else but the landlady of the 'Stretford Arms.'"

I explained to him as well as I could why it wasn't advisable for me to be known as an authoress, especially an authoress who wrote about what she saw, and put real live people in her books; and, after a little talk, Mr. Wilkins said he saw what I meant, and he thought I was right, and he gave me his word of honour he wouldn't breathe my secret to a soul.

After that, of course, I was obliged to take him a good deal into my confidence, and as once or twice he had seen me writing, it was no good my denying that I was at work on more "Memoirs," and he very soon jumped to the conclusion that it was our inn and its customers, and the people in the place, that I was writing about. Then he asked me point-blank if he was in, and I said, "Yes, Mr. Wilkins; you are."

Bless the little man, you should have seen him when he heard that. He positively glowed all over his face, and begged and prayed of me to let him see what I'd written about him. I said he should one day, that I'd only just put down some notes at present, and that they weren't in shape yet.

After that, he was on at me whenever he got a chance about my new "Memoirs." "I can give you a lot of things to put in," he said, "because I've lived here man and boy, and there isn't a soul whose history I don't know. When are you going to publish 'em, ma'am?"

"Oh," I said, "not yet. It wouldn't do while we're here. A nice time I should have of it, if the people here got hold of the book, and came and asked me how I dared put them in!"

“But you aren’t going to leave here?”

“Not yet, of course; but I hope we shall have a better house some day. If we make this a good business we shall sell it, and buy another—a real hotel, perhaps, with waiters in evening dress, and all that sort of thing; but there’s plenty of time to think about that.”

Poor little Mr. Wilkins! certainly he couldn’t have taken more interest in my new work if he’d been writing it himself; and I really believe he did think he was what they call collaborating; for, after a time, whenever he brought me a bit of information, he would say, “Won’t that do for our ‘Memoirs’?”

*Our* “Memoirs!” It made me a little cold to him at first, because I have an authoress’s feelings; but I saw he didn’t mean any harm, and I soon forgave him, and we were the best of friends. I will acknowledge here that he was of very great service to me; and having been the parish clerk so many years, and his father before him, and having an old-established little business in the place, he had many opportunities of knowing things which I couldn’t have found out. I can say what I like of him. now, because the old gentleman, at the time I am writing, is far, far away, and isn’t likely to see or hear of my book. But I must not anticipate. I shall tell you his story by-and-by in its proper place, as it happened long after this.

He certainly kept his word, and never told anybody of what he’d found out, and nobody here ever said anything to me about my “Memoirs,” except one person, and when that one person said it, it took my breath away more than Mr. Wilkins did.

I must tell you about that now, or else I shall forget it. It shows the danger of expressing your opinions too freely in a book.

We were always changing our cooks—in fact, cooks were our great difficulty; and female cooks in hotels generally are a difficulty, and even harder to manage than cooks in private families.

The one I had the most trouble with was a middle-aged woman, who came from London, very highly recommended from her last place. She was capital at first—punctual, clean, and as good with her vegetables as she was with the joints and pastry, and that was a great thing, for some English cooks think vegetables are beneath their notice and ought to be left to the kitchenmaid; but I am very strong

on vegetables in plain English cooking—especially in an hotel. I know from our customers, who have travelled about, that the vegetables are *the* weak points in most hotels, and potatoes and cabbage will be served with an expensive dinner that would be a disgrace to a cookshop.

A gentleman told me one day, after he'd had his dinner, when I'd cooked the vegetables myself, that he'd been travelling about the country, and it was the first time he'd eaten a well-cooked potato since he'd left home. He said vegetables were murdered as a rule, and were so badly served, that the waiter didn't even give them their names, but called them "veg" (pronounced vedge). I've heard that said myself at a restaurant in London where Harry took me to dinner, so I know it's true. "Veg on five," said our waiter. That was for the boy to put vegetables on table No. 5. Then another waiter put his head into the lift and shouted, "Now, then, look sharp with the veg, there!"

Yes, and "veg" was the word for what we got. Three nasty, half-boiled, diseased-looking potatoes, that had been out of the saucepan half an hour if they had been a minute, and a dab of cabbage—"dab" is the only word—and the cabbage was tasteless, sodden stuff, floating in water; and not a particle of salt had that cabbage or potato seen.

That was a lesson to me, because I felt what I didn't like I couldn't expect our customers to like. So I said to myself, "No veg at the 'Stretford Arms,' Mary Jane; you'll give your customers good sound, honest vegetables, cooked well, with as much care as the meat or the pastry or the pudding."

I've wandered a little bit, I know, but I can't help it. I do feel so strongly on the shameful treatment of vegetables by the ordinary English cook. Now, to come back to the cook I was telling you about. She went on beautifully for a month, and I thought I'd got a treasure; and then she went and fell in love with a young fellow in the village—a very decent young fellow, but a bit too fond of gallivanting. He was a good-looking chap, and the girls encouraged him, as they will do, for I've noticed that if a man's at all decent-looking there are always plenty of girls ready to encourage him to be a flirt. He fell in love with our cook—at any rate, he walked out with her once or twice, and then she told me they were engaged.

Unfortunately, he left off his work at seven every evening, and when our cook couldn't go out with him, I dare say he wasn't particular if he laughed and joked

with the other young women of the place, who *could* get out.

Cook got to hear of something of the sort, and it made her dreadfully jealous, and she was always coming to me and saying, “Oh, please, ma’am, we aren’t very busy this evening; can I just run out and get a piece of ribbon?” or, “Oh, if you please, ma’am, could you spare me for ten minutes this evening?” And if I couldn’t let her go she’d be careless and ill-tempered, and work herself up into quite a rage—of course, fancying that her young man was “up to his larks,” as the kitchenmaid used to call it, when she chaffed poor cook about it.

I let her go out as often as I could when we were slack; but when we were busy, and there were late dinners to cook, and meat teas and early suppers, it wasn’t possible, and I had to be firm, and say no.

One evening, when we’d let the best sitting-room to a London lady and gentleman, and they’d ordered dinner at seven, cook came to me about ten minutes to, and said, “Please, ma’am, everything’s all ready, and Mary can dish up and see to the rest, if you’ll let me go out. I won’t be long.”

“No,” I said; “I really can’t, cook. I’m expecting people by the next train, and they’ll very likely want something cooked at once.”

“Oh, ma’am, do, please; it’s *very* particular.”

“Nonsense, cook,” I said; “you’ve been out twice this week. You only want to see your young man, and I can’t have it. You’re making yourself ridiculous over him, and neglecting your work. Go back to the kitchen at once.”

“Oh, then, you won’t let me go?” she said, turning fiery red.

“No. I’ve told you so.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” she said. “That’s your fellow-feeling for servants, is it? But it ain’t the sort of stuff you put in your ‘Memoirs.’”

“My what?” I gasped.

“Your ‘Memoirs’! Oh, you know what I mean, Miss Mary Jane Buffham. You’re a nice one to stick up for the poor servants, you are! Why don’t you practise what you preach?”

I never was so insulted in my life. It was all my work to prevent myself taking that woman by the shoulders and shaking her—the idea of her daring to throw my “Memoirs” in my face—my *own* servant, too!

But I kept my temper, and I said quietly, “Cook, you forget yourself.”

“No, I don’t,” she said, with an exasperating leer. “It’s you that forget yourself. You’re a missus now, but you weren’t always, and when you weren’t, you could reckon missuses up as well as anybody.”

“Go out of the room directly,” I said.

“Oh, I’m a-going! You can give me notice if you like. I’m sick of your twopenny-halfpenny public-house. I’ve always lived with gentlefolk before, and been treated as such.”

“Go out of the room!” I shouted, stamping my foot; “and go out of the house.”

“Yes, I will. I’ll go now, this very minute; but I want a month’s money.”

“You sha’n’t have a penny more than’s due to you, you impudent hussy!” I said. “There!” and I banged her wages up to date down on the table; “there’s your money. Now go and pack your box and be off, or I shall have you turned out.”

She took the money, counted it, and then threw it on the table.

“I want a month’s money or a month’s notice,” she said.

“Then you’ll have to get it,” I said. “Be off, or I’ll send for a policeman.”

“Oh!—hadn’t you better send for the one who used to cuddle you in the kitchen, while your other chap was away at sea?”

I did lose my temper at that. It was more than human flesh and blood could bear. I gave a little scream, and then I ran at her, took her by the shoulders, and ran her right out of the room, and banged the door in her face and locked it. And then I fell back into a chair; and if I hadn’t cried I should have had hysterics.

Harry was just outside when I turned cook out, and she began at him. He saw how the land lay, and he made short work of her, though she kept going on about me all the time. He made her pack and be off within a quarter of an hour; and I

had to go into the kitchen, hot and crying and excited as I was, and the kitchenmaid and I had to dish up the dinner, and do all the rest of the cooking that evening.

When I had five minutes I went upstairs and bathed my face and put myself tidy; but I had such a dreadful splitting headache, I could hardly see out of my eyes.

When I came down again, Harry was in the parlour smoking his pipe and staring at the ceiling, and he didn't look very good-tempered.

"Oh, that wretched woman," I said; "she's upset everything."

Harry didn't speak.

"Harry," I said, "haven't you anything to say? Aren't you sorry for me to have been so upset?"

"Oh yes," he said, "I'm sorry; but I wish that d——d policeman was at Jericho!"

That cat!—that ever I should call her so—to go and drag that policeman off the cover of my book and throw him at Harry, and all because I wouldn't let her go and see her young man before she'd cooked the best sitting-room's dinner!

It was a blow to me to have what I'd said in my book thrown in my face by my own servant. After that I felt inclined to ask a girl before I engaged her if she'd read my "Memoirs," and if she said she had, to say, "Then you won't suit me," because that book puts wrong notions into girls' heads. If ever there's a second edition, there's one or two things about servants in it that I shall certainly alter. And every bit about that policeman will come out. I made up my mind to *that* long ago.

Writing about the cook who threw my "Memoirs" in my face, and the rage she put me in, has quite put poor Mr. Wilkins's nose out of joint. I told you how he was always bringing me things to put in my "Memoirs" of the village and our inn. Lots of the things he came to me full of were no use at all, and I had to tell him so. He seemed to think a book was a sort of dust-bin, into which you shot any rubbish you picked up. But, of course, people who are not authors don't understand these things—they don't know that everybody isn't interested in just what interests them.

But one evening, he came in looking very important, and he had a very, very old gentleman with him—a white-haired, apple-faced old fellow, all wrinkles, who looked like a picture I've seen somewhere of a very old man. The gentleman who painted it was a foreigner, I think. I know it was in an illustrated paper, and said, "An Old Man's Head," by some name I couldn't pronounce, and I'm sure I couldn't spell from memory.

When Mr. Wilkins brought him in he walked with a stick, being a bit bent and feeble; and Mr. Wilkins took his hand, and led him to the fire, and everybody made way for him.

"I've brought you a new customer, Mrs. Beckett," said Mr. Wilkins, with a look which was as much as to say, "Here's something for our 'Memoirs.'"

I nodded to the new old gentleman, and said I hoped he was well, and what would he take.

He said he'd take a hot rum-and-water, and I had it brought, and he settled down comfortably in the arm-chair.

"Are you all right, Gaffer?" said Mr. Wilkins.

"Yes, thank'e," said the old man, in a piping sort of voice. "I'm all right, Muster Wilkins. It's the fust time I've been here for many a year, though; old place be altered surely."

"My old friend is a very celebrated man, Mrs. Beckett," said Mr. Wilkins. "He doesn't live here now, but he's come to stay with his daughter who does, and I've brought him out along with me this evening, and I've promised to see him safe home again, haven't I, Gaffer?"

“Yes, you have, Muster Wilkins.”

“This is old Gaffer Gabbitas, ma’am, as you may have heard of. He was pretty well known about these parts once, weren’t you, Gaffer?”

“Yes, yes; a long time ago. There wasn’t many betterer known than Tom Gabbitas, as I was called afore I got old and folks took to callin’ me Gaffer. Dear me, how it do bring back old times to be sitting here! But it’s all changed, all changed. It’s ten year since I left the village, Muster Wilkins, and went to live in London along o’ my son.”

“Ay, and you were an old man then, Gaffer. Why, you must be a hundred nearly!”

“No, no, Muster Wilkins, though I hope to be, for—thank the Lord!—I’ve all my faculties still; but I ain’t so old as that. I’m only ninety, come next Michaelmas Day.”

“*Only* ninety.” It almost made me smile to hear the old gentleman talk like that; but he certainly was a wonderful old fellow for his age, for he could see and hear, and he seemed to be pretty strong generally, only a bit feeble when he walked.

“And how many years is it since the murder, Gaffer?” said Mr. Wilkins.

I pricked up my ears at that. Murder! So this old gentleman had something to do with a murder. I understood why Mr. Wilkins had brought him, and why he kept looking across at me, as much as to say, “I’ve got something for you this time, ma’am, and no mistake.”

“Fifty year since the murder,” said the Gaffer. “Quite fifty year; and twenty since they found poor Muster Crunock’s body.”

“Fancy that, ma’am!” exclaimed Mr. Wilkins. “A murder was committed here—two murders—fifty years ago, and one body wasn’t found till thirty years after.”

“Here!” I exclaimed, “not here in this house. You don’t mean to say there was a murder at the ‘Stretford Arms’?”

“No—here—in this village! The murder was at Curnock’s farm, two miles from

"No—here—in this village. The murder was at Curnock's farm, two miles from here—the second murder—but Gaffer'll tell you all about it; he was in it, weren't you, Gaffer?"

"Yes, yes; I was in it—I was in it."

I couldn't help shuddering. It made me creepy to look at that venerable old man and think that he'd been in a murder.

It took Mr. Wilkins a long time to get the story out of the old gentleman, and it took the old gentleman longer to tell it, for he kept wandering, and he would leave off and go into a lot of outside matters to make himself remember whether a day was a Monday or a Tuesday, when it didn't matter which it was. You know the sort of thing; but when he had finished his story I was bound to confess it was a very wonderful thing, and it was all true, for Mr. Wilkins borrowed the old newspaper that the Gaffer had kept, and showed it me there.

Fifty years ago, it seemed, in the village next ours—the village where Curnock's farm was—there was a terrible trouble about the tithes. The parson was disliked by the people, especially the farmers, and some of the farmers wouldn't pay the tithes at all, and stirred the people up against him, and as far as I could make out, Ned Curnock, a young farmer in the neighbourhood, was the ringleader; so the parson got the law of him, and had a lot of his goods seized and taken away to pay the tithes.

He was fearfully mad about that, and swore he'd be revenged. At that time Tom Gabbitas was a labourer on the farm, and an old servant, for he was forty then.

Ned Curnock and another man—a young fellow, the son of a farmer—went out one night to waylay the parson, who had been to the Squire's house to a party, and had to ride home through a dark lane. They said they'd give him a jolly good hiding, and that was all they meant to do. The only man who knew they'd gone, and what their errand was, was Tom Gabbitas, for he heard them talking it over, they not knowing he was near them, it being dark at the time.

About ten o'clock they went out, with two big sticks, and about eleven o'clock they came back. Ned Curnock was as white as death, and his clothes were all over blood. Tom met them, and they confided in him and told him what had happened, making him take an awful oath he'd never reveal a word to any living soul that could harm either of them.

It seems they'd met the parson, and pulled him off his horse, and begun to thrash him, when he had pulled out a pistol to shoot them. They got it from him, and somehow or other it went off and shot the parson, and they ran away; but they said they were sure he was killed, and it was a murder job.

Tom Gabbitas ran off to the place to get help, and when he got there he found other people there too. The parson was just dead; but he'd had time to say that he'd been murdered by two men, and he'd recognized one of them as Ned Curnock.

Tom only stopped to hear that, and bolted back and told his master, who was terribly frightened, and said he should be hanged, and how was he to escape? The young fellow who was with him said, "You must hide till the coast's clear. Where can you hide? They'll think you've run away."

So they thought it out, and Curnock remembered that in his barn there was a trapdoor which opened on to a kind of cellar in the ground. So he went to the barn, and opened the trap, and got in, and they strewed things about over the top, so that the trap would be hidden. It was agreed that Tom Gabbitas was to take him food and drink there twice a day, which he could do, because he could go into the barn about his work without suspicion.

The other young man went home quietly, saying he was safe, as nobody but Gabbitas and Curnock knew he was in it, and they wouldn't blab.

The people and the police came to the farm that night, but Tom said his master had gone out and hadn't come in. The farm was searched and watched all night and all the next day, and then everybody said that Ned Curnock had got clear away. Rewards were offered, and the description of Curnock was sent all over England; but, of course, he was never found, and at last he was forgotten.

But something awful had happened in the meantime. Tom took his master food all right the first day, going cautiously into the barn, and, when nobody was about, lifting the trap. His master would put his head up then, and take the food, and ask, "What news?" The third night, when everybody was sure Curnock had gone, the other young fellow came to see about some things of his Curnock had bought, he said, and hadn't settled for; but, of course, it was to get into the barn and see Curnock.

He went, and Tom took the dark lantern and went first, and when they were in

they lifted the trap. Curnock was tired of being there, and he said escape was hopeless, and he should go and give himself up and make a clean breast of it.

“No,” said the other fellow, “don’t do that; you shall escape, and get clean away this very night. I’ll come to you at midnight and tell you how.”

Then Tom and this young fellow went back into the house, where there was only an old female servant—Curnock being a bachelor—and the young fellow gave Tom money, and told him he’d better rise early in the morning and walk to the nearest town, and take the stage-coach and go to London, and wait for his master at a place he was told of.

Tom went, and three days after, instead of his master, the young fellow came. “It’s all right, Tom,” he said; “Mr Curnock’s got clear away and gone to America. I’m going to buy his farm and send the money out to him.”

“What am I going to do?” said Tom.

“Oh, you can come back, and work on my farm. There’s always a job for you there, and I’ll give you and your wife a cottage on my place.”

Tom wondered then why he had been sent to London; but he supposed they had altered their plans afterwards, as he was to have met his master in London and helped him in some way.

When he got back, all his things had been moved to the cottage at the other farm, which was three miles away, and he worked on that farm for thirty years. And his new master carried on both; but he never went to the old farm again.

All these years, whenever anybody spoke of Ned Curnock, it was always said he’d got away to America, and was living there.

After thirty years, the other farmer, who had lived a bachelor all his life, died, and then the farm was sold again. A stranger took it, and when he came he began a lot of alteration. Among other places altered was the barn, which was pulled down for a new building to be put up in its place. And when they cleared it out, and began pulling it down, they came on the trapdoor.

The flooring was taken up, of course, and underneath—in the cellar—was found the skeleton of a man.

It was the skeleton of Ned Curnock.

For thirty years the dead man had been there, and it was proved that he had been murdered. He was identified by many things—among others by a peculiar ring, which was on the bony finger still, the hands having been clutched together in death. How they proved he had been murdered was by the skull. The doctor proved he had been struck on the head with a chopper, which had split the skull open.

Tom Gabbitas came forward then, and told all he knew; and there is no doubt Ned Curnock was murdered the night Tom went away. His accomplice went to the trap, and, instead of helping his friend to escape, killed him as he put his head out, fearing that he would be caught if he went away, and would tell the truth, and so get his accomplice hanged as well.

Tom Gabbitas was charged with being an accessory after the fact of the parson's murder—that's how Mr. Wilkins puts it, I think—but it was so long ago, and Tom was so respected by everybody, and it was proved that he'd thought the parson was accidentally killed in a struggle and no murder was meant, and after he'd been remanded a lot of times he was sentenced to a short imprisonment, which was to date from the time he was locked up; so he was set free and came back to the village, where he was quite a hero and had to tell the story to everybody, and to lots of people who weren't born when it all happened.

When the story was done I looked at old Gaffer Gabbitas, aged eighty-nine, sitting there, and it seemed so strange to be looking at a man who'd been mixed up in two murders and could talk of them now as calmly and as quietly as if they were nothing at all.

When you get very old you are like that, I'm told. I asked the Gaffer a lot of questions, and he answered me quite nicely, and was as clear about everything as if it was yesterday.

But fancy him living in the village for thirty years, and never suspecting that the master he thought was in America was lying in his own barn, murdered, all that time, and him being servant to the man who was his murderer!

And the man who did the murder! Fancy him living in the place, too, and growing old there, with the body of his victim on his premises, and going about his business quietly, and living his life like everybody else! I wonder if he ever

passed that barn at night! I wonder if he didn't often start out of his sleep and think that all was going to be found out. The more you think of these things, the more wonderful they are. What awful secrets some of the easy-going, comfortable-looking people we meet every day must be carrying about locked up in their breasts, hidden from everybody, just as Ned Curnock's dead body lay hidden away for thirty years in his own barn.

Mr. Wilkins, when it was time to go, took the Gaffer's arm, and said he'd see him to his door, and the old gentleman shook hands with me, and said he should come and see us again. He'd had many a glass in the old place when it was only a little inn, he said; and as he was going out he said, "Wonderful changes—wonderful changes in the old place, surely."

Mr. Wilkins came back a minute, and he whispered to me, "Well, are you glad I brought old Gaffer Gabbitas to see you?"

"Yes," I said; "certainly. His story is part of the story of the place. But it's very dreadful. I shall dream of skeletons in a barn all night long."

And so I did, and I woke up with a scream, lying on my back, and Harry said, "Good heavens! what's the matter?"

"Oh, it's the skeleton in the barn!" I said. I knew I should dream of it, and I didn't go to sleep again for an hour, but kept thinking of old Gaffer Gabbitas and the two murders he'd been mixed up in and seemed none the worse for.

Two murders, and both in our village! Thank goodness they were such a long time ago. Murders aren't the sort of things you care to be too common in a place you've got to live in. Harry said he should go and have a look at Curnock's farm, as it was still called, in the morning, and he asked me if I'd come with him.

I said, "Oh, please talk of something else, or not a wink shall I have this night." I couldn't get to sleep. I counted sheep, but there was a skeleton among them. I watched the waving corn, and a skeleton looked at me out of the middle of it. I looked at the sea-waves rolling along, but a skeleton floated——

* * * * *

"Oh, Harry, let me send for a doctor!"

"Nonsense!"

Nonsense!

“It isn’t nonsense. Why, your hands are cut dreadfully—it’s most dangerous—it turns to lock-jaw sometimes! ‘Only a scratch?’ It’s a cut—a deep, deep, deep cut. Oh, how could you be so careless? I told you you’d burst a bottle some day—driving the corks in like that. You should always look to see they’re not too full. It’s a mercy you weren’t killed on the spot.”

# CHAPTER X.

## *DASHING DICK.*

The first year that we had the ‘Stretford Arms’ was one of great anxiety to us, as you may be sure. All our capital was invested in the business, and not only all our capital, but a good deal of money that Harry’s friends had lent him to help us to take it. If things had gone wrong with us it would have been dreadful, and I don’t know what we should have done.

It was a great relief to both our minds when, from the first, we found that we had a property which, with care and good management, could be improved. Some properties, especially in our trade, go all the other way, and nothing will save them. There are so many things that will take the business from an hotel, and when they happen no power on earth can stop your going down. You may spend your money, you may advertise, you may work yourself to the bone, but down, down, down you go, and the longer you cling to the hope of things taking a turn, the more money you lose.

Of course, we couldn’t tell what would happen when we took the ‘Stretford Arms,’ and my want of experience in the business made me very nervous. But from the first we began to get confidence, and that is a wonderful thing. When you can see things are going right, you can do a lot that you can’t do when things are wavering or going wrong.

But, though we very soon got confidence, and felt comfortable in our minds, we were just as careful as ever, and we determined not to leave anything to chance. We were very economical ourselves, and we only laid out money on the place a little at the time, knowing how true the old proverb is which says, “Learn to walk before you try to run.”

We didn’t have more servants than we could help, and Harry and I worked like niggers, as the saying is; though Harry, who had seen niggers at work, says it isn’t a good one, for some niggers do just as much as you make them do, and not a bit more.

But after the first year in the ‘Stretford Arms,’ I couldn’t do so much as I had

done, because I had my dear little baby boy to think about, and I wasn't quite so well and strong for a little time after that as I had been before, and Harry wouldn't let me even do what I might have done.

He said my health was far more precious to him than anything else in the world, and that we'd much better pay a few pounds a year extra in wages than a lot of money in doctor's bills. So after baby was born we had a nurse for him, and another housemaid, and a few months after that, when business kept on improving, and we found that we were getting a nice little hotel connection, we took on an odd man. His duties were to clean the boots, to carry the luggage up and down, to look after the pony, and, when we weren't busy, he filled up his time with odd jobs and in the garden.

We were very glad we had him, for a nicer, civiller, more obliging fellow I never met with. It was quite a pleasure to ask him to do anything, because you saw at once that you had pleased him by giving him a chance of showing how useful he could be. There aren't many of that sort about, so that we were lucky to get him.

He came to us in this way. We had been talking about having an odd man, and getting rid of the boy who looked after the pony and did the boots, etc., because the boy was the plague of our lives, and we never knew what he was going to be up to next. He was a boy named Dick, that we took on to oblige Mr. Wilkins, who recommended him as a smart boy; and there was another reason, which was that his grandmother, a very decent old woman, who lived in the village, couldn't afford to keep him at home, and wanted him out somewhere where he could sleep on the premises.

We took him, and he certainly was smart. He had been educated at a good charity school (as I was myself, so I've nothing to say against that), but, unfortunately, he'd learnt to read and write and nothing very much else. He couldn't cipher, and his writing was very bad, and his spelling not over grand. So he couldn't be got into an office, and his poor old grandmother was worrying herself into the grave about what to do for him, when Mr. Wilkins mentioned him to Harry, and Harry, who'd just bought our pony, took him.

He was a nice-looking lad, and always very respectful, and spoke nicely, though using words above his station and in the wrong place; but there was no reliance to be placed upon him, and he forgot things he was told to do over and over again.

For a long time we couldn’t make out what made him so slow over his work, and so careless; but we found it out at last. He was a great reader, and took in a lot of trash, written for boys, about pirates and highwaymen, and all that sort of thing, and his head was filled with romantic nonsense instead of thinking about his work.

Harry found it out first one day going into the stables, when nobody had seen the boy for an hour, and finding him sitting down comfortably in one of the stalls smoking the end of a cigar, and reading “The Boy Highwayman.”

Harry boxed his ears for smoking in the stables, and was so mad with him he told him to go; but the boy began to cry, and Harry said he would give him another chance, but read him an awful lecture, saying he might burn us all down in our beds, and telling him if he read such rubbish he would come to be hanged.

He went on all right for a little while after that, though his work was not done properly; but one day our nursemaid, Lucy Jones, a nice, well-behaved girl of eighteen, came to me and asked me if she could speak to me about a private matter.

I said “Yes,” and then she said she wanted to show me a letter which she had found inside one of her boots when she went to put it on.

I took the letter and read it, and it made my blood run cold. This is the letter, which I kept as a curiosity:—

My darling Miss Jones,

“This comes hoping that you will dain to smile on my suit. I have long love you from a fur. Will you elope with me to forring climbs, where we may live happy. You shall have silks and sattings and jewls, and be the envy of all my dashing companons. I shall be verry proud of you at the hed of my bord, when it is spred with the feest, and all my brave, dare-devill fellowes shall tost you as their cheifs inamerato. This is French, but it means a bride. If you will fly with me name your own time. It must be nite, and I will have the hosses redy. Bring all your jewls and money. If we are follered I am prepaired to die in your defense; but have no fere. The man does not brethe the God’s air that is to take his pray from

“Dashing Dick.

"If you accep my hoffer, deer Miss Jones, put your answer in your boots when you put them out to be clened. I will make you a Quene. Don't delay, as my brave Band is waiting for their horders."

At first the letter made me so indignant I couldn't laugh, though it was so ridiculous. I guessed at once who it was had sent it to her by the writing, and its coming in her boots, and the answer to be put back in her boots.

The girl was quite indignant. "I never heard such impudence in my life, ma'am!" she said. "And a bit of a boy like that, too!"

"You've never given him any encouragement, I suppose!" I said.

"Never, ma'am. The only time he ever spoke to me on such a subject was when he asked me to walk out with him on Sunday, and then I said he'd better go home and read to his grandmother. Encouragement! I hope I know myself better, ma'am, than to keep company with the likes of him. Why, he's ever so much younger than me, ma'am."

"I only asked, Lucy," I said. "I didn't suppose you *had* encouraged him."

I didn't, because I knew Lucy had set her cap, so to speak, at a young fellow in the village—a handsome young fellow, too—with a little black moustache, that was quite unique in the neighbourhood; but I asked her, because, having been in service, I know how girls will sometimes encourage forward lads—pages, for instance—being fond of larking, and saying, "Oh, there's no harm; he's only a boy." So I thought I'd just ask Lucy the question.

I saw by her style she was quite innocent in the matter; so I told her to leave the letter with me, and I would speak to my husband about it, and he would decide what should be done.

When I showed the letter to Harry he couldn't help laughing, though he was very cross. "The young varmint!" he said.

"What are you going to do?" I said. "You must get rid of the boy. He isn't safe to be about the place with notions like that in his head. I'm very sorry for his poor old grandmother; but he'll come to a bad end soon, and I don't want him to come to it here."

"Oh, I shall give him the sack," said Harry; "but I'm sorry for him, because it's

"Oh, I shall give him the sack," said Harry; "but I'm sorry for him, because it's the trash he's been reading that has put this stuff into his head."

After dinner, Harry sent for Master Dick, and, when the young gentleman came in, showed him the letter, and asked him what he meant by writing such wickedness to our nursemaid.

The boy never changed colour a moment. He looked straight at Harry, and said, "Did she show it to you, sir?"

"She showed it to Mrs. Beckett," said Harry.

"Then it was very unladylike of her," said the boy, "and she's a mean sneak. No man likes his love-letters to be shown about."

"Love-letters, you young rascal!" cried Harry; "what business have you putting your love-letters in a respectable young woman's boots? And, besides, this isn't a love-letter, it's asking the girl to elope, and it's full of wickedness about jewels, and a band of daring fellows. What do you mean by it, sir?"

Master Dick looked at Harry a minute. Then he struck an attitude.

"What I do after I've left your service, sir, is my own business, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," said Harry; "it's mine, because you're placed with me by your grandmother, and it's my duty to see that you don't do anything to disgrace yourself if I can help it. Whose horses are you going to have ready, pray? And where are you going to get the silks and satins and jewels from? A nice idea, indeed! I've a good mind to send for a policeman."

The boy turned very red at that, and his manner made Harry think he was frightened that something might be found out.

So, instead of dismissing the boy there and then, he gave him a good talking to, and said he should decide what was to be done with him afterwards.

Then Harry came to me, and said, "Mary Jane, there's something wrong with that boy. I'm afraid he's been up to no good."

"Of course he hasn't," I said. "He certainly wasn't up to any good when he wrote that wicked letter to Lucy."

“It isn’t that only I’m thinking of. I’m afraid, putting two and two together, that he’s been making ready to run away, and that perhaps he’s got what doesn’t belong to him.”

“You don’t mean you think he’s been stealing?”

“Yes, I do,” said Harry; “but the thing is, how am I to make sure? I’ll go and make inquiries.”

Harry went and asked the other servants, and the people about the place, a few questions, and at last he found out that Master Dick had been seen going pretty often into a shed where we kept some empty cases and lumber. So Harry went to it quietly, and turned it thoroughly over, and then he came on a box hidden away that aroused his suspicions. He broke the box open, and inside it he found an old pistol and a belt, and a pair of his old sea-boots, that must have been taken from our spare room upstairs, and an old red flannel shirt, and a lot of penny numbers about boy pirates and highwaymen, and right at the bottom of the box two pairs of my best stockings and some old bows of ribbons, and one or two trifles like that, which the young rascal had evidently taken at different times when he had been at work about the house.

Harry came and told me, and said he supposed the pistol and the belt, and the red shirt, and the boots were for the young gentleman to dress himself up in when he took to the road or to the sea, whichever it was to be, and my stockings and the bits of ribbons were the satins and jewels, etc., which he was going to present to Lucy, if she consented to elope with him, and be the bride of the chief of the “band of daring fellows,” which was himself, viz. Dashing Dick.

“Oh, Harry!” I said, “how shocking! Who would believe that a boy, decently brought up, could be so wicked!”

Of course, after we found he had taken things, we couldn’t keep him, even if we had looked over that letter to our nursemaid, and so Harry went to his grandmother and told her that our place didn’t suit her boy, as he had too much liberty, and then he told her that the boy had taken one or two little things, and he must be punished. We shouldn’t, of course, give him into custody and ruin him for life for my stockings and Harry’s boots, but that sort of thing, if not checked in time, would go on till it became wholesale robbery.

The old lady was very much upset, and said, what could she do, as the boy was

quite beyond her control. So Harry said he would try and think, but he should give the boy notice, and send him home, as he couldn't have him about the place. If he overlooked it, it would be an encouragement to the boy to go on in his evil courses.

That evening, after his work was done, my young gentleman was told he wouldn't be wanted any more, and Harry made him come into the kitchen and unpack his box before all the servants to try and make him ashamed of himself. The other servants laughed at the pistol and the red shirt, but Harry told them it was no laughing matter, as the young lad would come to ruin the way he was going on; and then he discharged him and gave him a most severe lecture, telling him to think himself lucky he wasn't given into custody.

But the boy was very sullen and defiant, and though he didn't say anything to Harry, as he was going he turned to Lucy, who was in the kitchen, and he said, "This is your doing, and you shall pay for it." And he gave her such a glance with his eyes as he went out of the door that the girl came to me and said she was quite frightened.

"What nonsense, Lucy!" I said; "it's only his brag. It's something he's picked up out of one of the wretched tales he has been reading."

"I don't know, ma'am," answered Lucy; "it's my belief that he's off his head; and I've heard of boys doing dreadful things when they're like that. I sha'n't feel safe till he's out of the place."

I talked to the girl, and told her not to be a goose; but she quite made up her mind that the young imp meant to do her a mischief, for showing his letter to me and Harry.

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That night, just as we were shutting up, a man from the village came with a message from Dick's grandmother to say her boy had been home, put on his Sunday clothes, done all his things up in a bundle and started off, saying she would never see him again, and please what was she to do. Had we any idea where he was likely to be gone to?

Harry sent word back that he couldn't say anything; but the best thing was to send up to the police-station, and they might hear something.

The next day, Lucy came to me as pale as death, and said, “Oh, ma’am, look at this,” and showed me a letter which had come for her that morning, and it was this—“You have betrade our captin; deth to informars!” and underneath it was a skull and two cross-bones and a coffin.

“I daren’t go out, ma’am,” she said; “I daren’t, indeed. He might be lurking about and jump out on me with a pistol. He used to be always telling stories in the kitchen about highwaymen and their stopping people on the road, and you may depend upon it, ma’am, that’s what he’s going to be now he’s run away. I shouldn’t be afraid of him, but if he’s got hold of a pistol there’s no knowing what might happen. And suppose, ma’am, he was to meet me in the lane while I was out with baby, whatever should I do?”

This was a nice idea, and it made me nervous, too; for I had visions of Lucy fainting, or dropping my baby; or, perhaps, the pistol, if the young rascal had one, going off accidentally, and hitting my baby. So I made up my mind she shouldn’t take baby out, except into the garden, and just in front of the house.

I said to Harry, “It’s a nice thing if we are all to be kept in terror by a bit of a boy, who has read penny numbers, and wants to play at being a highwayman; and something must be done.” Harry said it was all nonsense—the boy was gone, and if he *was* hanging about the neighbourhood, where was he to get a pistol from? The one Harry had taken out of his box was an old worn-out thing, and wasn’t loaded, and he wouldn’t have the money to get another.

I said, “Oh, I don’t know; he might steal one. I’ve read in the papers about errand boys getting revolvers; and I shall never know a moment’s peace till I know where that wretched boy is. A nice thing, if my nurse goes out one day with baby, and gets shot by the young fiend.”

So Harry went up to the police-station, and they laid a trap to catch my lord. From something one of the policemen had heard, he believed that one of the boys of the village was in league with Dick, and knew where he was hiding. So Lucy was told to get hold of this boy, and tell him that she had thought it over and altered her mind, and she wanted to send a letter to Dick.

The boy was sharp. He said, “I don’t know where Dick is; but, if I see him, I’ll give it to him;” and he took the letter. The letter asked Dick to meet Lucy at nine o’clock the next night up by Giles’s farm, which is up at the top of a lonely road, about half a mile away from the village.

When the time came, instead of Lucy going, one of the policemen in plain clothes went up to the place, and hid behind a hedge. We heard all about it afterwards. After he had waited a little, he saw Master Dick come cautiously along, it being a nice light night, and when he was quite close, the policeman jumped out on him; but, before he could get hold of him, the young fiend had a revolver pointed at his head.

“Oh, it’s a trick, is it?” he said. “I thought it was, so I’ve come prepared.”

“Put that down, you young varmint!” yelled the policeman. “Do you hear? Put that down.”

He told us afterwards he felt very nervous; for that horrid boy pointed the revolver at him, with his finger on the trigger, and he was afraid every minute it might go off.

“Not me,” said the little wretch; “you’re at my mercy now.”

“If you don’t put that pistol down,” said the policeman, beginning to be all of a perspiration, “I’ll give you such a thrashing as you never had in your life.”

“Oh no, you won’t,” said the boy; “you come a step nearer to me, and I’ll blow your brains out.”

With that the policeman began to shout, because he saw he could do nothing. Being a married man, and the father of a family, he didn’t care to have a bullet in him.

But directly he began to shout, the boy called out, “You shout again, and I’ll shoot you dead,” and he put his finger on the trigger again, ready to pull it.

It was a terrible position for our policeman, and he didn’t know what to do. There was nobody about, and he was helpless. Of course he might have made a dash for the revolver; but, as he said, before he could get it, it might have gone off, and then, where would he have been?

The little wretch saw his advantage, and if he didn’t say, as cool as you please, “Now then, Jones” (it was the same policeman who woke us up about our door being open, the night of the burglary at The Hall),—“now then, Jones, take off your watch and chain, and throw them on the ground.”

your watch and chain, and throw them on the ground.

“I sha’n’t,” said the policeman.

“Oh, very well; then I shall have to make you. I’ll count three, and if you haven’t put them down I’ll pull the trigger.”

“One!”

“Two!”

Poor Jones hesitated. It was ridiculous; but he was in mortal terror of that deadly weapon in a boy’s hands. So he took off his watch and chain and put them down.

“Now, all the money you’ve got in your pockets.”

Jones had drawn his week’s pay, and had a sovereign; but he wouldn’t say so.

“I haven’t got any money,” he said.

“Yes, you have.”

“No, I haven’t. Come, my boy, don’t make a fool of yourself. Put that pistol down and come with me.”

“Not likely! What do you take me for? Come, your money or your life!”

“I haven’t got any money, I tell you.”

“Take off your coat, then!”

“I sha’n’t!”

“Take off your coat, and throw it on the ground.”

“One!”

“Two!”

Again the pistol was pointed straight at Jones’s head. He looked round. It was a lonely place. The farm lay right back across the fields, and he daren’t shout, so he didn’t know what to do. He wished he had brought somebody with him; but it

had been agreed he should go alone; because, if several people had gone, the boy's suspicions would have been aroused, and he wouldn't have come near enough to be caught perhaps.

"If I say 'Three,' I'll shoot," said the boy.

The policeman saw it was no use, so he took off his coat.

"Now, your waistcoat!"

Jones had to take off his waistcoat.

"Turn out the pockets!"

Jones turned out the pockets. There was only his pipe and his handkerchief in them.

"Now, turn out the trousers pockets."

Poor Jones! The sovereign was in one trousers pocket. He turned them out; but kept the sovereign in his hand.

But Master Dick saw the trick.

"Drop what you've got in your hand!"

"One!"

"Two!"

Down went the sovereign on the road.

"Now! Right about turn. Quick march!"

"I sha'n't."

"If you don't, I'll shoot you."

"You'll be hanged."

"I don't care. I'll die game."

Wasn’t it awful? But it was the stuff he had read.

Poor Jones, who certainly is not a brave man, perhaps through having a wife and family, had to give it up as a bad job, turned round, and began to move slowly away.

As soon as he had got a little distance, he turned round, and saw Master Dick pick up the sovereign and the coat and waistcoat, and run away with them.

Jones turned round then, and shouted, and ran after him.

But directly he came close, Master Dick turned round with the revolver.

Jones hesitated.

“If you come a step nearer, I’ll fire,” shouted the boy.

Jones was just turning round to go away again, wondering whatever people would say if he came back into the village in his shirt-sleeves, when, suddenly, a man came along the road in the opposite direction, and before the boy knew what was up, his aims were seized from behind, and the pistol was forced out of his hand. It was Harry, who had gone up to the place to see if anything had happened, and who had seen the last part of the performance at a distance.

And when they had collared the boy, and Jones had put on his coat and waistcoat and got his sovereign back, and was walking Master Dick off to the police-station, Harry picked up the revolver, and looked at it.

*It was empty!*

Poor Jones went hot and cold, and begged Harry not to say anything about it, because it would make him look so small; and Harry, who would have burst out laughing if the boy hadn’t been there, promised not to tell; and he didn’t tell anybody except me. It must have looked ridiculous. I couldn’t help laughing at the idea myself, the policeman having to take off his clothes, frightened by a boy with an empty revolver.

Master Dick was taken before the magistrates, and tried for sending a threatening letter, and being in possession of a pistol, which, it was presumed, he had stolen from a farmer’s house in the neighbourhood, but nothing was said by Jones about the robbery from him, and the boy was wise enough to hold his

Jones about the robbery from him, and the boy was wise enough to hold his tongue.

We all begged hard that he mightn't be sent to prison, because of the evil company and the stain for life, so the magistrate sent him to a reformatory; and I suppose he is there now.

After that, our nursemaid felt relieved in her mind, poor girl, and so did I. It was not a nice idea to think that Dashing Dick, the boy highwayman, was waiting about for her with a pistol, every time she took baby out for a walk.

That was our first boy, and we didn't have another. They're more trouble than they're worth, especially boys that can read, and get bitten with the romantic idea. It was all very well when they only ran away to sea; but now that they want to be burglars and pirates and highwaymen, it's awful. You never know what dreadful things they'll be up to. I knew a boy once that stole a hundred pounds, and bought six revolvers with the money, and stuck them all in his belt, loaded, and rode about the country on a horse, stopping old ladies coming home from market, and making them stand and deliver their purses, and all they had in their baskets, and was only caught through robbing an old lady who had a bottle of gin in her basket, which he drank, and got so drunk that he fell off his horse, and was found lying in the road, with his head cut open, and taken to the station.

I'm sure the trash that's sold to boys and girls has a lot to answer for, for they read it at a time when their minds are influenced by it, and they haven't the sense to see the wickedness of it and what it leads to. Lots of girls in service are ruined through the vile stuff they read making them discontented, and wanting to be I don't know what.

It was after this awful boy of ours had turned out so badly that we determined to have a man, and it was then that Tom Dexter came to us. He is the odd man I was going to speak about, when I left off to tell you the story of Dashing Dick, who wanted our nursemaid to elope with him, and who put his love-letters in her boots when he cleaned them. Tom Dexter was——

* * * * *

Oh, Harry, dear, *do* you really think it? Money going out of the till! Whoever can it be?

# CHAPTER XI.

## *OUR ODD MAN.*

I told you our odd man, Tom Dexter, came to us after that awful young scamp of a boy, who was going to be a highwayman, left.

Mr. Wilkins wanted to recommend a man he knew, who had been ostler up in London, but Harry said, “No, thank you, Wilkins, I’ll look out for one myself.” It was Mr. Wilkins who recommended us the boy highwayman, so we hadn’t much faith in his recommendations after that; though, of course, he meant well, and only wanted to do the boy’s grandmother a good turn.

I often think what a lot of bad turns you do sometimes to many people through trying to do one person a good turn. I’ve heard it said over and over again, “This comes of trying to do a man a good turn;” and it has always been about something unpleasant having happened.

It isn’t only that the person you try to do a good turn to brings trouble about, but the person himself or herself—for women are as bad as men in that respect—is generally ungrateful to you for what you’ve done, and very often “rounds” on you, as the common expression is, and tries to make out that you’ve done them, or I suppose I ought to say, to be grammatical, done him or her an injury.

“One good turn deserves another,” the proverb says; but my experience of doing anybody a good turn is, that it very seldom gets what it deserves; but generally the other thing.

I recollect one place, when I was in service, where the master was a most kind-hearted man, and a friend came to him one day, and told him a tale about an old lady of very superior education, whose husband had died, and left her in such reduced circumstances that if she did not soon get something to do, she would have to go in the workhouse. The friend told my master that this old lady was a most excellent housekeeper, and used to looking after servants, because she had had her own, and she spoke and wrote French, and would be very useful that way, when there were children learning the language, to talk to them, and give them an accent.

“I knew her husband in business,” said the friend to master, “and you’d be doing a deserving woman a good turn, if you could find her a situation where her talents would be appreciated.”

It happened just at that time that my mistress had been saying to master that, her health being so delicate, and they having to travel about a good deal through it, the awful London winter being too much for her, they ought really to have a housekeeper—a person they could leave at home, to look after the house and the servants while they were away.

Master came home and told missus about the old lady (Mrs. Le Jeune, her name was), and missus said that that was just the very sort of person they wanted. Why not give her a trial?

“Just what I was thinking myself,” said master; “only, my dear, I thought I would consult you first.”

He knew by experience that if he *did’nt* consult missus first about everything, the fat would be in the fire; for she was one of those ladies who don’t believe that a man can do anything right, and master used to say sometimes he wondered she let him manage his own business. Of course he didn’t say that to us servants; but we used to hear when they were having arguments at dinner, which was pretty often.

It happened that just at the time master’s friend told him about Mrs. Le Jeune, we were going to have a grand ball, and missus, who had nervous headaches, was grumbling a good deal, and saying she couldn’t attend to everything because of her health; so master said it would be a good thing to have the old lady engaged at once, and then she could take a lot of trouble off missus’s shoulders.

But Mrs. Le Jeune, it seems, couldn’t come for some reason just then. What it was I don’t know, but at any rate she didn’t arrive until the afternoon of the day that the ball was to come off, and then she drove up in a four-wheeled cab, with a big box outside, about five o’clock.

Of course we were all sixes and sevens in the kitchen, because it was rather a small house, and we’d had to turn the best bedroom into a supper-room, and we’d had the upholsterer’s men about all day fitting it up, and draping and decorating the other rooms, and we were all topsy-turvy.

Mrs. Le Jeune, when I let her in, told me she was the new housekeeper, and asked to see missus. Missus had gone to lie down, so as to be right for the evening, and had given orders that she wasn't to be disturbed for anybody till six o'clock, and I knew it would be bad for me if I went and woke her up; so I said to the old lady that missus was asleep; but I would show her to the room that was to be hers.

She was a queer-looking old lady, certainly. She was very short, and had a big bonnet on, and a long, black, foreign-looking cloak, and the longest nose I think I ever saw on a woman in my life, but she spoke like a lady certainly, but when she walked it almost made me laugh. It wasn't a walk—it was a little skip, and when she moved about, it was for all the world as if she was dancing.

When I told her missus could not see her, she said, "Oh, it is very strange. Madam knew that I was coming, she should have arranged for my reception; but these City people have no manners. What's your name, girl?"

"Mary Jane."

"Mary Jane what?"

"Mary Jane Buffham."

"'Mary Jane, madam,' you mean. Be good enough never to address me without calling me 'madam.'"

"I beg your pardon, I didn't know——"

"Did you hear what I said to you? I can't allow you to speak to me as if I were your equal. I am a lady by birth and education. I have consented to take charge of this establishment in order that it may be properly conducted. I shall have to begin by teaching the servants how to behave themselves, evidently. Now, send some one to carry my box and conduct me to my apartment."

"Yes, madam."

I thought to myself, "Well, this is a nice old lady the master's got hold of. She and missus won't hit it off together long;" but, of course, it was no business of mine, so I asked one of the upholsterer's men to give me a hand, and we carried her box upstairs, and I showed the old lady her room.

It was at the top of the house, next the servants' bedrooms. Before she got up she was out of breath.

"Oh!" she said, "the attics! This is an insult to which I cannot submit. I am a lady; your master does not seem to be aware of the fact."

I said I didn't know anything about that. This was the room. So I got her box in, and gave her a candle, and left her muttering to herself, and taking off her bonnet in front of the looking-glass, and putting on a most wonderful cap, which she took out of the blue bonnet-box she had carried in her hand.

It was a big black cap, with cherries and red-currants and grapes sticking up all over it, and she looked so odd with it on, I had to go away, for fear I should burst out laughing, and hurt her feelings.

In about half an hour the old lady came downstairs into the kitchen, and everybody stared at her. It was most uncomfortable for us all to have a strange housekeeper, and such an eccentric one, walking in right in the middle of the preparations for a party, and beginning to missus it over us at once, and to talk like a duchess to us.

There were a lot of men about the kitchen, which made it worse, the upholsterer's men, and the confectioner's men, who were finishing off the things for supper, and the florist's man with the plants and the flowers; and when that extraordinary old lady walked in, with her wonderful cap, and began to go on at us at once, and order us to do this and to do that, and to say we were a common lot, and not one of us knew how things ought to be done, I wondered what would be the end of it.

Before the company came, master went to have a look at the ball-room to see if everything was right, while missus was dressing, and there he found the old lady, who had gone upstairs, and was talking to the upholsterer's men, who were finishing off, and telling them about how different things were when she was young, and the men were what is called "getting at her," and encouraging her to talk.

When master went in, he was quite flabbergasted to see that old lady, in her wonderful cap, talking away, and saying this ought to be altered and that ought to be altered, and he didn't know who she was at first, not recognizing her, till she came up and said—

“Good evening, sir; I’m just looking round to see if things are as they should be.”

“Oh, thank you,” said the master, hardly knowing what to say. “But I won’t trouble you to do that.”

“Oh, it’s no trouble,” she said; “I’m used to these affairs. If you’ll allow me to say it, sir, I don’t care for these artificial flowers about the place. They should be real.”

“Perhaps so,” said master; “but if you’ll kindly stay below and look after the servants, that is all you need do at present.”

He was anxious to get her out of the way before missus came down, because he guessed there would be trouble if missus found that old lady interfering and giving orders.

Missus was like that. She wouldn’t allow anybody to interfere with her, and she was very touchy on the point. Once she wanted to leave the house they were living in, and master put it in the agent’s hands and advertised it, and a gentleman and his wife came and looked at it several times, and everything was settled, and the deed or agreement, or whatever you call it, was to be signed, when, the day before, the lady who was going to take the house came to look over it again, and, going over the drawing-room with missus, she said, “I don’t think the colour of your curtains harmonizes with the paper. When I have the house, I shall have the curtains such and such a colour.”

That was enough for missus. She fired up directly, and said, “Oh, I’m sorry I didn’t consult you when I was putting my curtains up, but the colour suits me well enough, and you won’t alter it, because you won’t have the house!”

And then there were a few words, and the lady thought it best to retire.

That night, when the master came home, missus told him that she’d changed her mind, and she wouldn’t leave the house, and the agreement wasn’t to be signed.

“Oh, but, my dear,” said master, “everything is in the lawyer’s hands, and the place is as good as let. We can’t back out of it now.”

“You’ll have to back out of it,” said missus, “for I’m not going to let that woman have my house. She’s had the impudence to find fault with my taste, and to tell

have my house. She's had the impudence to find fault with my taste, and to tell me what she's going to do, and so she sha'n't come in at all—so there now!"

And all master could say was no good. Missus declared she'd never go into another house alive, and, for the sake of peace and quietness, master had to refuse to sign the agreement at the last moment.

There was an awful row about it, I heard, and the other gentleman was very indignant, but it was no use. It was more than master dared do to sign the agreement, knowing what his wife was, and he couldn't be made to, legally, so the other people had to give way after lawyer's letters had passed.

And one day, when missus met the other lady in an omnibus going to Regent Street, she said to her, "My curtains are still blue, madam;" and the other lady called to the conductor to stop the omnibus, and she paid her fare, and got out.

Knowing how missus was, you may be sure the master was in a fright about the new housekeeper interfering. There would have been a nice scene, and, with the company beginning to arrive, he didn't want that.

So he said to the waiter who was had in—the man we always had for dinner-parties and balls—"Waters," he said, "for Heaven's sake, keep that old woman downstairs. Do anything you like, only keep her downstairs."

"All right; sir," said Waters. And he got the old lady to sit down in the breakfast-room, and keep guard over the provisions and the wine that were put out for the musicians' supper, and made out it was very important she should be there, as she was to see that nobody came in and helped themselves.

She saw that nobody did, but *she* helped *herself*, and by the time the ball was in full swing the poor old lady had drunk so much wine, she was quite silly, and presently began to get lively, and, feeling lonely, I suppose, she went upstairs to stand in the hall and see the fun, though she had to lean up against the wall a good deal, the wine having got in her head.

I can't tell you the trouble we had with her; but the end of it was she suddenly made her appearance in the ball-room with her cap very much on one side, and her face very flushed, and said, "Where's Mr. —— [naming the master]? I have a communication to make to him."

Master was horrified, and missus said, "Good gracious, who is this person?"

Master was horrified, and missus said, "Good gracious, who is this person?"

"Person, madam?" said the new housekeeper, "I'd have you to know I'm a real lady, which is more than you are."

She made as if she would come across to missus, but she staggered, and fell into the arms of a very stout old gentleman, and put her arms round his neck, and began to have hysterics, and the waiter and master had to get her away by main force between them, the company almost bursting with laughter.

Master was in an awful rage, and said he'd turn her out there and then, but he couldn't in her condition, and so two of us girls got her upstairs and put her to bed, and we thought she'd go off to sleep; but just as the company had sat down to supper in the bedroom, which had been turned into a supper-room, she appeared with a candle in her hand, like Lady Macbeth, and no cap on, only her bald head, looking the most extraordinary figure you ever saw in your life, and asked if there was a doctor present, as she felt very ill, and was liable to heart attacks if not taken in time.

Master and the waiter had to get her out again; but missus was in a terrible rage about it, and went on at master before all the company, saying he ought to be ashamed of himself, bringing such a creature into the house. And the rest of the party was quite spoilt, missus going off to bed herself in a temper, saying she had a bad headache, and master was so worried that he took a little more champagne than was good for him, and slipped up dancing, and hit his eye against a rout seat, and made it so bad he was disfigured for the rest of the evening, and went and hid himself down in the breakfast-room till the company were gone, which they soon were, as everything was upset, and it got awkward.

The next day when the old lady got up, about ten o'clock, she came down and ordered her breakfast, and was beginning to missus it again, and say what she was going to do, and how she was going to keep missus in her place, when master came and told her to be off. He gave her ten shillings, and ordered her box to be brought down and put on a cab, and told her she was a wicked old woman, and she ought to be ashamed of herself.

She refused to go at first, saying she was engaged for three months, and she wanted three months' money. But she was got into the cab at last, and we were all very thankful to see the last of her.

But she sent master a County Court summons for three months' wages, and he

had no end of trouble with her. And through going and giving his friend, who had recommended her, a bit of his mind, they quarrelled, and never spoke again; and missus, having put herself in such a rage the night before, and gone to bed, got up cross the next morning, wild with herself and everybody else, and had an awful quarrel with her mother, who was very rich, and who reprimanded her for being so passionate, and it caused such a coldness between them that, when a year after the mother died, it was found she had altered her will, and left all her money to charitable institutions, and master reckoned that he was twenty thousand pounds out through doing a friend a good turn in giving that old lady a job, besides all the worry and annoyance and the unpleasantness that had come of it.

It was writing about Mr. Wilkins and his doing the boy-highwayman's grandmother a good turn that put this story into my head; but, of course, it happened while I was in service, and has nothing to do with the 'Stretford Arms.'

Mr. Wilkins was very sorry, I know, and we didn't blame him; but we weren't going to let him do anybody else a good turn at our expense. So Harry looked out for man, and having heard of one who was in want of a job, named Tom Dexter, and liking his manner, and what he had heard about him, he took him on, and a better servant we never had.

Tom was about fifty, a fine, burly fellow; but his hair was quite grey, and his face wrinkled. It was trouble, as we found out afterwards, that had given him such an old look.

Tom was soon a great favourite with us all, and it was quite a pleasure to ask him to do anything; he was so willing. The customers liked him, too; and he soon began to do very well, because, being so civil and obliging, he got good tips. And one great thing about him was, he was a strict teetotaller.

I dare say you'll laugh at a licensed victualler's wife praising a man for being a teetotaller, because if everybody were teetotallers our trade wouldn't have been what it was; but I must say with servants it is a great thing when they are teetotallers, especially servants about a place where drink is easy to get.

Tom was quite a character in his way, being full of odd sayings, and very sharp at reckoning people up in a minute. Harry used to say that directly Tom had cleaned a man's boots he knew his character, but I do not go so far as that

cleaned a man's boots he knew his character, but I do not go so far as that, though certainly he was able to tell what people would be like, almost directly he saw them.

When anybody new came, Tom would carry their luggage upstairs, and, for fun, Harry would say sometimes, “Well, Tom, what’s this lot’s character?” Tom would say, “Grumblers, sir,” or “troublesome,” or “mean,” or “jolly,” or something else, as the case might be, and he wasn’t often wrong. Sometimes he would say, “Wait till I’ve had their boots through my hands, sir.” And it was very rarely after that that he hesitated. He used to declare that a man’s boots told a lot about him, and once he tried to explain to me how it was with the boots he was cleaning, for an example. It wasn’t only the shape, but it was the way they were worn at the heels, and the condition of them, and the way he found them put outside the door, and all that. It was a curious idea, but I dare say living among boots, so to speak, and seeing the different varieties, makes you notice little things that other people wouldn’t.

Tom had been with us six months before I knew what his story was, for about himself he never had very much to say. Harry was chaffing him about making a fortune. He was doing so well in tips, and not spending anything, and, having nobody, so far as we knew, to keep, Harry said he would be taking a public-house and setting up in opposition to us.

Tom smiled, and said, “Not likely, sir.” And one thing led to another, till he told us why he was a teetotaller, and what he was saving his money up for.

It seems he had had a wife, who had been a great trouble to him—not at first, because they were very happy, and married for love. Tom was in a good situation in London when they married, and he got a comfortable home together, having always been a hard-working, saving fellow.

He was about thirty when he married, and his wife was ten years younger, so they were a very good match. After they had been married about ten years, and had got two nice children—a boy and a girl—a great trouble came. The little boy was the mother’s favourite, and she doted on him, as mothers will. But when the boy was a nice age, and growing into a sturdy little fellow, he caught the scarlet fever of some other children, and, in spite of everything that could be done for him, he died.

It nearly turned the poor mother’s brain, and I can quite understand it, for, oh! what should I do, if anything happened to my little one? Tom was nearly broken-

What should I do, if anything happened to my little one? Tom was nearly broken-hearted too; but, as he said, he had his work to go to every day, and that took his mind off his trouble. But it is so different for the woman, who has to be alone with her grief in the house, where everything reminds her of her lost one, and where she misses him every minute.

Tom came home always, directly his work was over, and he put on a cheerful face, and tried to get his wife to talk of something else, but she always came back to the one subject that was on her mind—her boy. Then Tom tried to do her good by taking her out to places of amusement now and then, and on Saturday evening they would go to a play, or a music-hall; but it was all no good. He would see his wife's face change all of a sudden, and he would know that her thoughts were far away from the noise and the glare, and the smoke and the smiling faces round her; far away in the great cemetery, where her little boy lay buried.

Tom putting his big, rough hand across his eyes as he told me this, it brought the tears into mine. Poor woman! it must be so dreadful, when your life ought to be at its best, to be haunted like that.

Well, at last she got so melancholy and absent-minded that Tom saw it was no good taking her out, and he was quite unhappy about it. She loved him, and she loved her little girl, but she was one of those people who, when sorrow comes, haven't the strength of mind to battle with it, but nurse it, and pamper it, and encourage it, giving themselves over body and soul to it, and brooding night and day, instead of making an effort to throw it off.

The home, which had once been so spick and span, now began to look dirty and untidy; the little girl was neglected, and when Tom came home if was a very different place that he came to from what it used to be.

He didn't like to say much to the poor, broken-hearted woman; but he was only a man, and at last began to grumble a little, because things were going from bad to worse, and his home was really going to rack and ruin.

She didn't say anything when he grumbled. She only cried, and that upset Tom awfully, so he said, "Come, come, missus, I didn't mean to be unkind. Kiss me, and make it up. I know your poor heart's broke, my lass, but life's got to be lived, you know, my dear, and sorrows will come. Let's make the best of it, instead of the worst. We've got each other, and we've got our little girl, God bless her, and we must be thankful for the blessings we've got, instead of

bless her, and we must be thankful for the blessings we've got, instead of grieving over those we've lost."

Tom's wife sighed, and said, in a weary sort of a way, she'd try; and she did try for a week or two, and Tom's home was a little better; but after that she dropped back again into her old listless state, and nothing seemed to rouse her.

And then Tom made an awful discovery. The poor woman was doing what hundreds have done before—drinking to drown her sorrow, drinking quietly, never getting drunk, but only dazed and helpless.

He was nearly broken-hearted when he found it out, and he went down on his knees and prayed to her for God's sake to give it up, or it would be ruin for all of them. But she didn't seem to care now even for him, and his reproaches and prayers and entreaties only made her more miserable, and then she took more drink than ever.

He didn't tell me all he went through for two or three years after that, but it must have been awful for him to do what he did. She ruined him, brought him down till his home was sold up. It's a common enough story—the drinking wife or the drinking husband that ruins the home, and you can read about it in the police cases almost every day. Sometimes it comes to murder, for a man who is a decent, hard-working fellow goes mad when he gets together home after home, only to see each go to pieces, wrecked by the dreadful drink, and his children, that he is proud of and loves, running the streets ragged and neglected.

But it was doubly sad in our odd man's case, poor fellow, because the thing that brought it about was the mother's love for her little one. He had lost his child, and through that he lost his wife and his home.

He found at last that all his trying was no good. If he didn't give his wife money to get the drink she pawned his things, and what she couldn't pawn she sold. She ran him into debt and got him into difficulties everywhere, and he was driven mad when he saw his life and her life being wrecked in such a dreadful way.

It was too much for him at last, and then he grew desperate. One night, when he came home and found the place stripped and his wife in a drunken sleep, he went out himself, and, meeting a friend, they went to the public-house together, and Tom had a glass of brandy to steady his nerves, and then he had another, and then—well, and then he took to drink too—drank hard himself to drown *his* trouble, and then the end came quickly. He was dismissed from his place for drunkenness, a place he had had for twenty years, and that week he was homeless—homeless, with a drunken wife and a delicate child, and, as he said, it might have been so different.

Oh, that "might have been!" What a lot it means in our lives!

When Tom got to this part of his story, he broke down at last. "You mustn't mind me, ma'am," he said; "but I can't think of that awful time even now without a shudder. The first night that I slept in the casual ward, and lay awake and thought the past over, I thought I should have gone mad. I made up my mind that the next day I'd go to one of the bridges and drown myself.

"And then I thought, What would become of my poor little girl and that poor misguided woman if I was dead?

"I was the only hope they had in the world. Then I said to myself, 'Perhaps, now things are at the worst, they will mend. There may be a chance of my poor lass coming to her senses now she sees what she's brought us all to. At any rate, she can't get any drink now, and the break may be the means of curing her.'"

"And was it, Tom?" I said, for I was getting interested in his story, and I knew something must have happened to change his luck, as they call it, or he wouldn't be our odd man now, so cheerful, and so contented and respectable.

"Well, ma'am, it didn't all come right at once. We'd a good deal to go through before things began to mend. My wife——"

"Is your wife alive, Tom?" I said, interrupting him.

“I hope so, ma’am.”

“You hope so! Don’t you know?”

“No, ma’am—that’s the sad part of the story. That’s what I’m coming to. When we left the casual ward the next day——”

* * * * *

No. 17 going—given you a cheque for his bill. Let me see it. That’s a good bank, but I don’t think I ought to take a cheque. But if I say I won’t, it’s like suspecting the gentleman of being a swindler. His luggage is very respectable. Dear me, I wish Harry was here. Something’s sure to crop up just because he’s gone down for two days to see his mother. It’s only ten pounds odd. I suppose I’d better take it. All right; receipt the bill. Oh, dear, I hope it’s all right. Harry will think me so stupid if it isn’t. I shall have that cheque on my mind, night and day, till it’s paid. I don’t think I’ll take it. Susan, Susan, bring that bill back. What! you’ve given it to the gentleman? He’s got his bill receipted? Dear, dear, I don’t think I can refuse now. Well, I hope it will be all right.

# CHAPTER XII.

## *TOM DEXTER'S WIFE.*

The worst of anybody who is not a regular author or authoress trying to write out incidents of their life, or things that they know about which they think will be interesting, is that there is always some interruption or other just as one is getting to the point.

When I was writing my "Memoirs" as a servant, of course, it was dreadful, for anybody who knows anything about it knows how little time a servant gets to herself, and when she does have a quiet half-hour to sit still in the kitchen, writing is out of the question, because there is no quiet if you are with other servants; and if you are by yourself there is sure to be plenty for you to do.

How I ever managed to get those "Memoirs" done at all will always be a mystery to me; and the more I look back on the difficulties I had to encounter, the more wonderful it seems.

When I began to put down things about our life and adventures in the 'Stretford Arms,' I thought to myself, "Now I am my own mistress, I shall be able to have a quiet hour now and then, and to take more trouble with my composition;" but, bless you, I am not sure that I am not worse off, so far as authorship is concerned, now than when I was a servant.

I declare I never get a real quiet hour, for there is always something to be seen to, or somebody wanting to see me; and if it isn't that, it's baby or Harry.

To tell you the truth, I sometimes think Harry is a little jealous of my writing. I don't mean jealous in a bad sense; but, from one or two remarks he has let drop, he doesn't like my going and shutting myself away and writing. He says when we have half an hour to spare we might as well spend it together.

Of course I am always glad to have a quiet hour with my husband, but it's no good my trying to write while he's in the room. He will keep on talking to me, and nothing will stop him; and if he doesn't speak, I think every minute that he is going to, and that's worse, for it makes me nervous and fidgety, and the ideas

all get mixed up in my head together, and I can't tell my story straightforward, as I always like to do.

Sometimes it is a whole fortnight before I get a chance of writing anything in my book that I keep, and it has been even longer than that.

This is what a real author or authoress never has to put up with. I believe, from what I've heard, that they have a beautiful room full of dictionaries for the hard words and the foreign words, and maps hung all round the room, and they sit in it all day long quite quiet, and nobody is allowed to come in and interrupt.

I should think anybody could write like that. It must be very easy, if you've got anything in you at all. But it's very different when you've got a house, and an hotel, and servants, and a baby, and a husband to look after, and if you take your eyes off for a minute, something is bound to go wrong.

Once or twice while I have been sitting in my own room writing, having given orders that I was not to be disturbed, something has gone wrong, and Harry has said, "You were writing your book, I suppose;" and I've said, "Yes"; and then he's said, "It's my opinion, my dear, that if you don't make haste and finish that book, that book will finish us."

Of course to anybody who hates what they call "pens and ink"—and some people do, like poison—writing seems dreadfully silly and a waste of time; and I'm afraid that Harry, with all his good qualities, hasn't much respect for literature. He certainly hasn't the slightest idea how difficult it is to write. I once said to him that I believed he thought I could make out a bill with one hand and write my "Memoirs" with the other, and talk to a customer at the same time, and all he said was, "Why not?"

"Why not!" It really made me so cross I could have cried with vexation; for it was just when I had got in rather a muddle with my book about the 'Stretford Arms,' finding that the housemaid had taken a lot of pages that I had written notes on and lighted the fire with them, and I couldn't for the life of me remember what the notes were.

All I remembered that was on them was some things I had taken down about Tom Dexter, our odd man, the one whose story I began to tell you when I was interrupted; but what the others were it was weeks before I remembered, and I quite wore myself out trying to think.

If there is one thing that annoys me more than another, it is trying to think of something I particularly want to think of and can't.

Sometimes Harry will say, "What was the name of that man, or that woman, or that gentleman, or that lady," as the case may be; and if I can't think of it, it worries me all day, and I keep saying, perhaps, dozens of names, and not the right one; and after the house is closed and we're gone to bed, it keeps me awake, and I keep on saying names over and over till Harry gets quite wild, and says, "Oh, bother the name! Do go to sleep, my dear. I want to be up at six to-morrow morning."

Then I leave off trying to think the name out loud, and I think it to myself, and perhaps, after about an hour's agony, I suddenly recollect it, and then I'm obliged to get it off my mind by waking Harry up and telling it him before I forget it.

It's bad enough with a name, but it's worse with a thing. I remember once in service tying a piece of cotton round my finger to remind me to do something that I particularly didn't want to forget, and I went to bed with the cotton on my finger, and never thought any more about it until the next afternoon, and then I was a whole day trying to remember what I'd tied the cotton round my finger for; and go mad over it I really thought I should, it kept me on such tenter-hooks all the time.

What was in the notes that stupid girl destroyed I don't suppose I shall ever remember: that is, not anything worth remembering.

The notes about our odd man, of course, I recollected, because they didn't matter, he being in our service still at the time, and I could get all I wanted about him by talking to him.

When I was interrupted I had told you as far as where he went into the casual ward, with his wife and little girl, and how he came out.

It must have been a dreadful experience for him, poor fellow, seeing that it was not his own fault that the misery and ruin had come to him, after years of hard work.

When he got out of the casual ward, he and his wife and child walked along the streets, and his wife began to cry and to say it was all her fault, and she had

brought him to it, and if she was dead he would be a happier man.

He tried to comfort her, and said it was no use talking about being dead. She could make him much happier by living, if she'd only give up the dreadful drink. He said they couldn't go much lower than they'd got; now was the time to begin to go up again. If he tried and got work, would she keep straight, so that they could get a home together again?

"No; she knew she couldn't," she said. "It was no use. If she ever got any money again, she knew the temptation would be too strong for her—she'd tried over and over again to stop herself, and it was no use. She'd go away and leave Tom free, and then he might have a chance, and perhaps, some day, it might all come right; but she was sure, if she stopped with him, she would only keep him down as low as he was now, and perhaps bring him to worse, for she might bring him to crime."

Tom didn't argue any more with her, because it was no use: she was in that weak, low, dreadful state that people are in who have drunk a great deal and then can't get it. Sometimes, in cases I have known of the sort, I've thought it would be a mercy, if people with that awful curse upon them, settled themselves quickly, for the sake of their friends and relations and those about them. If they are treated very skilfully when force is used to make them leave off, or if they are kept where they can't get anything, and taken very great care of, they may, and do sometimes, get cured; but, as a rule, all the trouble and anxiety are of no use, and the dreadful end comes.

I have known such sad cases—most people in our line do know of them—that my heart has bled to think about them. It is such an awful thing—that slow, deliberate suicide by drink, those awful living wrecks, hardly human in their horribleness, that the poor victims of the disease—for it must be a disease—become.

I thought of what I knew while Tom Dexter was telling me his story, and I quite understood what an awful position it was for a man to be placed in: loving his wife as he did, and she loving him, and it all having come about through her grief at the loss of her boy, made it doubly terrible.

Really, it makes you shudder sometimes when you think what awful tragedies there are in some people's lives; and oh, how thankful we ought to be who live peacefully and happily, and never know the dark and awful side that there is to

life!

Tom told me that he himself almost gave up when he heard his wife talk like that, and the thought came into his head that it would be much better if they all three went to some nice quiet part of the canal, that was near where they were, and dropped in, and then there would be no more trouble for any of them.

He was thinking that when, as they were walking along, he met an old friend of his that he hadn't seen for a long time—a man that had worked with him, but had married a widow who kept a public-house, and was now well off.

He saw that things were bad with Tom at a glance—he saw it by his face and his clothes, and the clothes of his wife and child; but he was a good fellow, and instead of passing by on the other side, as many would have done, he came up to Tom, and took his hand, and said, "Hullo, old fellow! I'm sorry to see you under water. What does it mean?"

Tom stopped a minute and talked to him, and told him as well as he could without "rounding on his missus," as he called it, and then his friend said, "Well, Tom, I'm awfully sorry, old fellow. Look here! let me lend you a couple of sovereigns, and you can pay me back as soon as you get a bit straight."

The tears came into Tom's eyes, and his throat swelled up; but, before he could say anything, his friend had turned off sharp and gone away.

Tom showed the sovereigns to his wife, and said, "There, my lass, look at that! there's a chance for us to make another start. It's a bit of good luck, and it's a good omen; it means what the old proverb says, that when things are at the worst they will mend. Let us both try; we've had a rough lesson, and if we've learnt it, perhaps it will be all the better for us for the rest of our lives."

Tom's wife didn't say anything, but only turned her head away.

That night he got a bit of a lodging for himself and his wife and his child, and he went to bed full of hope and faith in the future, and he determined the first thing in the morning to get out and look for work.

But when he woke up in the morning his wife was gone. She had got up quietly, while he was fast asleep, and had gone away, and left a bit of a note saying she was sure she should bring him to ruin again, and she didn't want to do it now he had another chance. For his own sake and the sake of the child it was better he

had another chance. For his own sake and the sake of the child it was better he should be rid of her, for she was only a burden and a curse to him. If ever she cured herself, and felt that she could trust herself, she would come back to him; but if she didn't, it was just as well he should never know what had become of her.

It was an awful letter for poor Tom to find just as everything looked so promising, and it dashed his hopes to the ground and made him very miserable.

He told me that when he read that letter he felt so low that the temptation came to him to go out and drink to drown his trouble and black thoughts that came into his mind. Then he thought of the little girl—the poor little girl, that had suffered so much already—and he made up his mind that he would do his duty by her, and be father and mother to her both, now her mother had gone away and left her; and he knelt down by her bed-side where she was fast asleep, and made a vow that he would never touch a drop of drink again as long as he lived.

He spent the whole of the first day trying to find some trace of his wife, but it was no good. Nobody knew them where they had taken the lodging, and no one had noticed the woman go away. He had a dreadful idea that she would kill herself, and he went to the police-station, and everywhere he could think of for days after that, to find out if anybody had been found in the water; or anything of the sort.

But while he was doing this he looked for work too, and after two days he got taken on for a short time at some works, and, when that job was over, he got another to help in a mews; and then, through somebody that knew him, he got a better place offered him down in the country at a little hotel, but it was one where he would have to sleep on the premises.

By this time he had given up all hope of tracing his wife, for he had been unable to find out anything concerning her, and now he was worried what to do about his little girl. He couldn't take her into the country, because there would be no home for her, and, besides, there would be nobody to look after her.

But his good luck, which had never failed since those two sovereigns got him out of the difficulty, came to his aid now. He was able to get his little girl into a capital school, where she would be educated and trained for domestic service, and he felt it was the best thing for her to grow up like that under proper control, and with good people; and, though he felt parting with her very much, he was

glad to think she would be so well cared for, and get such a good start in life.

When he had said good-bye to his little girl, and taken her to the school, which was a little way out of London, he felt that he was really making a fresh start. He went to his place, and was there till the house was given up as an hotel and turned into something else, and then, with a good character, he went to another place as outdoor man, and it was from this place that Harry, who had heard of him when he was inquiring for a trustworthy man, took him, and he came to us.

I didn't know all his story at first, because he didn't know it himself then. The most wonderful part of it happened after he was with us.

I knew he must make a good bit of money, because most of the visitors gave him something when they left, as he put their luggage on to the fly if they had one, and if they didn't he wheeled it up to the station; and as he never drank, and was very careful, and hardly seemed to spend anything, I wondered what he was doing with his money.

But one day he told me that he was putting it all in the bank, and saving it, so that he might have a good home for his little girl when she was old enough to come home; and if she went into service, then it would be for her when he died or when she married.

"And you know, sometimes, ma'am," he said, "I think that I may hear of my wife again. I often lie awake at night and wonder what's become of her, and then the thought will come into my head that we may come together again. God's mercy is very wonderful, and He brings strange things to pass. Oh, if I could only find her, and have my home again, as it used to be!"

"Poor fellow!" I said to myself; "he will go on thinking that all his life, and it will never happen."

I thought so much of poor Tom Dexter and his story that I told Harry all about it, and while I was telling him, Mr. Wilkins was in the parlour. Somehow or other Mr. Wilkins had never taken to Tom—he was the only person about the place that hadn't; but, after all, it was only human nature, because we had taken Tom on instead of somebody Mr. Wilkins wanted to recommend after Dashing Dick had turned out so dreadfully.

Harry said it was a very sad story, and he felt very sorry for Tom, and was glad he had got hold of him; but Mr. Wilkins was nasty, and said, he dare say that it

he had got hold of him, but Mr. Wilkins was hasty, and said, he dare say that it was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, for it was generally the husband's fault if the wife turned out badly.

I defended Tom heartily, and Mr. Wilkins and me had a few words, because he presumes a little sometimes. What put me out was his saying that he thought I'd better not put Tom's story in my book, as very likely it was all a pack of lies. That made me say I knew very well what to put in my book without Mr. Wilkins's advice, and one thing led to another, till Mr. Wilkins put on his hat and coat and went off in a huff; but not before he had been very objectionable about the Scotch whiskey, trying to make out it was not as good as usual, and talking about his having noticed that the spirits were of an inferior quality lately.

That put my back up, and I said I was very sorry that our spirits were not good enough for Mr. Wilkins; but, of course, if we lost his patronage we should try and bear up with Christian resignation under the loss.

I know it was very wrong of me to say that, because in our business you must always keep your temper, and try to please customers and not offend them. And Mr. Wilkins is really an important local man in his way, and might, if he left us and went to the other house, take a few of the local people with him, though I may say without pride, and not wishing to run my neighbours down, that as the other house is quite a common sort of place, and more used by waggoners and labourers, and with only a very common tap-room, that there wouldn't be any grave danger of Mr. Wilkins stopping away long, if he did go.

Still, it was not my place to be rude to him, and I never should have been, but for his presuming so much about my "Memoirs." It wasn't the first time he had done it, as I have told you before; though, of course, in his heart he meant no harm. Poor old gentleman, it was only his ignorance!

Why I have mentioned about my little difference with Mr. Wilkins is to explain how Tom Dexter and his story got impressed on his mind. It was through this that one day Mr. Wilkins came to me with the *Morning Advertiser*, which he had borrowed from our coffee-room, in his hand, and he said, "I say, Mrs. Beckett, just look at this advertisement."

I took it and read it, and I said, "Dear me, I wonder if it's the same?"

The advertisement was this:—

“Thomas Dexter, formerly of —— Street, London, if alive, is requested to communicate with Mrs. Lyons, such and such an address, London.”

Of course Mr. Wilkins must have his joke, and say what nonsense to say “if alive,” as if Thomas Dexter could communicate with anybody if he was dead; but I didn’t take any notice of him, but went straight out to the stables, where Tom was at work, and showed him the advertisement.

He stared at it, and said, “That’s me, right enough, ma’am, for that’s the street we used to live in before things went wrong.”

“What does it mean, Tom?” I said.

“What does it mean, ma’am?” he said, his face quite bright with happiness; “why, it means that my prayer’s been answered, and that I’m going to hear of my wife again, after all these years.”

“Tom, my good fellow,” I said, “I’m sure I hope it is so, and I don’t want to dispirit you, but don’t build on it too much, for fear it should be something else. It might be—well, it might be to tell you——”

I hesitated to say what was in my mind.

“To tell me she’s dead! No, ma’am, it ain’t that, I’m sure of it. It’s to tell me she’s alive and cured, and ready for the home as I’ve been saving up to give her all these years.”

He was so sure, that I didn’t argue with him any more, but I asked him what he was going to do, and he said, “Write to the address at once.”

I got him a sheet of paper and an envelope, and I helped him to compose the letter, for I was quite anxious to know the result. It was only to say that Tom Dexter was at the ‘Stretford Arms’ Hotel.

I told Tom to go and post the letter himself, and he did; and all that evening and the next day we were quite excited. I don’t know which was the worst, Tom or me. I could see what a state of mind he was in, though he didn’t show it so much outwardly. For the first time he made a mistake with the luggage, and in the morning he got wrong with the boots, having actually taken them from the doors without chalking the numbers on, and a nice state of confusion it was, for our

hotel happened to be quite full at the time, there being a grand ball at a mansion in the neighbourhood the night before, and we having had to put up some of the guests, and that, with our other visitors had filled us quite up.

But I forgave him, though mixing the boots is a dreadful thing in an hotel, and has been done sometimes as a trick in a big hotel by young fellows for a lark, and all the bells have been ringing in the morning, and gentlemen swearing, wanting to catch trains, and everybody having the wrong boots.

Tom was awfully sorry, and couldn't think how he could have been so foolish, but I knew; and between us we got the boots right, being able to guess fairly well, some being patents and some lace-ups and heavies, and you can generally tell the patent-leather customers from the others by their general appearance.

All that day I was on tenter-hooks, and I wasn't right till the next morning, and when the post came in there was a letter for "Mr. Dexter." I took it to Tom myself, and my heart almost stood still while he opened it.

"Tain't her writing, ma'am, on the envelope," he said; and his lip trembled as he tore the envelope open clumsily, as people do who don't often have letters.

He opened it at last and got the letter out, a bit torn in opening the envelope. He looked at it hard a minute; then he dropped it, and his face went blood-red, then deadly white. Then he put his hands up over his face, and cried like a child.

"Tom," I said, "my poor Tom! Tell me, is she——"

"It's all right, ma'am," he said. "I've expected it; but it took me a bit aback. She's alive and well, and she's waiting for me—waiting to show me that she's the good, loving little woman of the dear old days—waiting for her husband and her daughter, and the home that she's going to be the light of and the joy of, please God, for all the rest of her life!"

* * * * *

Tom Dexter and his wife and their little girl—not very little now—are in a happy home. Tom left us, and sorry were we to part with him, and he with us; but it was his wife's wish that they should be together, and she was housekeeper to the lady who had saved her from ruin, and made a new woman of her, and wanted her always to live near her.

After she left Tom, she had gone away to drown herself, and had been taken by the police for trying to do so, but had given a false name to the magistrate, and Tom had heard nothing about it. A lady was in court, and had promised to look after the poor woman, if she was given up to her, and, after a week's remand, this was done. Tom's wife didn't tell the lady she was married, but said she was a widow; and the lady took her to be her servant, and tried to wean her from the drink. She had lost a sister from it, and devoted her life to good work, as some people do who have a great sorrow.

It was hard work, for Mrs. Dexter fretted about her husband and her lost home now, and the temptation would come, and then, somehow or other, she would get the drink.

But the lady would not turn her away; she was grieved, but she determined to try and try again, and at last a whole year went by and Tom's wife had kept the pledge she had made.

But she then felt, if she was to go back to her husband, and have her liberty, she might break down again.

She was afraid of herself.

She said she would try another year, and she did, and then she felt safe; and one day she told her mistress all her story, and how strong the yearning had come upon her for her husband and her home again.

And then the lady put that advertisement in the paper, and Tom and his wife came together again, as he always believed they would, and now there isn't a happier home in all England.

Tom works on the lady's estate, and is a great favourite with her, and he has a cottage all his own, with roses and a big garden, and only the other day he sent me the loveliest pumpkin of his own growing, and with it was a letter from his wife thanking me for——

* * * * *

The beer sour! Who says so? Mr. Wilkins? Let me taste it. So it is; it's the thunderstorm. I suppose the whole lot's gone wrong. Harry! Harry! Where's your master? Up in the billiard-room? Good gracious! isn't that billiard-table

fitted up yet? The men have been at it all day!

# CHAPTER XIII.

## *A LOVE STORY.*

If there is one thing that is unpleasant in a small hotel, it is to have anybody very ill in it. I dare say it is unpleasant in a big hotel; but there it isn't noticed so much, as, of course, nothing is noticed much in a large place, which makes up hundreds of beds every night.

A gentleman, who used to stay with us now and then—an artist, who had been all over the world nearly, and every year went away abroad—was very fond of gossiping with us of an evening, and he told me a lot about these big hotels, which was very interesting, and especially so to Harry and myself, we being in the hotel business, though, of course, only in a small way, compared with the huge concerns that call themselves Grand Hotel Something or other, and are small towns.

Mr. Stuart—that was the artist's name who stayed with us—said that he hated these huge hotels, because you were only a number; that you ceased to be a human being, and became No. 367 or No. 56 or No. 111, as the case might be, and if you were ill, or if you died, it was all the same to the management. He said he always had visions of lying ill in one of these places, and hearing somebody call down the speaking-tube outside in the corridor, "Doctor wanted, No. 360," and perhaps after that, "Coffin wanted, No. 360." And if ever he felt the least bit ill he always got out of a big hotel as quickly as possible, and went to a small one, so as to leave off being a number, and become a human being again.

He said it was bad enough in the big hotels in our country, but abroad it was something awful to be ill in them. He had a friend of his taken very ill in Italy, in a Grand Hotel, and he used to go and sit with him and try to cheer him up, and he said directly he began to be ill and it was thought he was going to die, the hotel tariff went up about two hundred per cent. for everything. The poor gentleman died in the hotel, and the friends had to be telegraphed for to come and settle up, and a nice settle up it was. Not only was the bill something terrible—such a thing as a cup of beef-tea being about five shillings, and double and

treble charged for every little thing in the way of refreshment for the invalid, brought up into the room—but, after the poor gentleman was dead, the manager of the hotel sent the friends in a bill, charging them for the bed, the bed-linen, the curtains, the carpets, and the furniture, and even the wall-paper.

When Mr. Stuart told me that, I said, “Good gracious! whatever for?” And then he explained to me that it is the custom in some of the countries in the South of Europe to be awfully afraid of death—especially in Naples, where the poor gentleman died—and everybody shrinks away from death; the friends leaving the poor invalid to die alone, with only a priest in the room, even though the dying person has all his senses about him; and after there has been death in a room no one will touch anything that has been in it, and so everything is given away or sold cheap to the poor, and everything is had in new, even the walls being stripped and all new paper put on them.

You may be sure in a Grand Hotel in these places the refurnishing is made as expensive as possible, because it is all put down in the corpse’s friends’ bill.

Mr. Stuart—or, as we got to call him, after he’d stayed at the ‘Stretford Arms’ Hotel several times, “The Traveller”—when he found that Harry and I were interested in these things about hotels abroad, and the ways of the people, told us a lot of things, and I put them down in my book, thinking perhaps they would be useful to me some day.

What brought it up about people dying in hotels, was our having a young lady very, very ill indeed, in our house at the time, and we were really afraid that she was going to die, for the doctor shook his head over her; and it was talking about the case, and the worry it was to us having it in the hotel, that led Mr. Stuart to tell us what he did.

Fancy everybody going away and leaving their own relations directly the doctor says that their last moments are coming! It must be awful to the dying people to look round and find all the faces that they love gone from the bedside. Mr. Stuart told us that this custom is so well known among the Naples people, that one day a little girl, who was dying of consumption and had come to her last hour, opened her eyes and saw her father, who was her only relation, stealing out of the room. She looked at him a moment, and then, in a feeble voice and with tears in her eyes, she whispered, “Ah, papa, I see it is all over with me now, for you are going away.”

That made her father feel so sorry that he came back, and sat down, and held his little girl's hand till she died. But everybody in Naples, when they heard of it, said, "How awful! and how could he do such a thing?" and for a long time afterwards people seemed to shrink from him.

I shouldn't like to live in a country like that, especially as you are put under ground in twenty-four hours, and the men who put you in your coffin, and go to your funeral, are covered with a long white sack from head to foot, with two holes cut in it for their eyes. So Mr. Stuart said, and he showed us some photographs of them, and made me feel ill for a week.

I said to Harry, when Mr. Stuart had gone to his room and left us thinking over what he had told us, that I hoped the young lady wasn't going to die in our hotel. To have anybody die in the place—especially a small place like ours—is most unfortunate, and makes everybody uncomfortable, besides interfering with business.

I don't say this in a hard-hearted way; but I am sure everybody who knows anything about our business will understand what I mean. The other people staying in the house don't like it, and they generally leave, and, if it gets about, people avoid the hotel for a time, for fear they should be put in the same room directly after. I dare say they are in big hotels, because I know that when anybody dies in them they are fetched away at once, and nothing is said about it. Harry told me about an hotel a friend of his was manager of in the City, where the undertaker in the same street kept a special room for hotel customers. I said, "Oh, Harry, don't talk like that!" And Harry said, "It's quite true, and the undertaker's man calls round the last thing of a night and asks if there are any orders."

I knew that couldn't be true, so I told Harry it was very dreadful of him to make light of such awful things. It always seems strange to me, but how many people there are who will make jokes about death and tell comic stories about it! I think there is some reason for it in human nature, but I am not clever enough to say what it is. I always notice, in our parlour, if one of the customers tells a very awful story, and the conversation gets on things to freeze your blood, there's always somebody ready with another, and they go on until, when it's closing time, I'm sure that some of them are half afraid to go home in the dark.

Writing about people dying in hotels reminds me of what I heard one of my masters tell one of mv missuses. while I was in service. He had been down to

Brighton, staying at an hotel, and one Sunday afternoon, in the smoking-room, he met a nice, middle-aged gentleman, and they got into conversation. The middle-aged gentleman told my master that he had been very ill, and had been travelling about for six months in search of health, but that he was quite well now, and that the day after to-morrow he was going to his house in the country. He seemed so pleased, for he said he had not seen his wife and children for six months, and they would be so delighted to see him well and strong again.

That evening, my master and the gentleman dined together in the coffee-room, and over their dinner it was arranged that they would go for a long walk together in the morning to the Devil's Dyke. They would have breakfast early and start directly after, so as to take their time for the excursion.

The next morning my master was down early to his breakfast; but the other gentleman hadn't come down at nine o'clock, so my master asked the number of his room, and thought he would go and hurry him up.

He went upstairs, and knocked at the bedroom door, but got no answer. Then he knocked louder, and said, "What about our walk to the Dyke? It's nine o'clock now."

Still no answer.

"He must be very fast asleep," said master to himself; and then he banged quite hard.

Still no answer.

It was so strange, that my master got frightened, and called the waiter up; and when they had both banged and could hear nothing, they sent for the landlord, and he ordered the door to be burst open.

The gentleman was there. He was sitting fully dressed at the table in the room. In front of him was a letter which he had been writing; but his head was down on the table, as if he had fallen asleep writing it.

The landlord went up to him and touched him on the shoulder. Then he started back, with an exclamation of horror.

The poor gentleman was dead.

He had evidently died as he was writing the letter; but he looked for all the world as if he was sleeping peacefully.

My master saw the letter, and read it.

It was this:—

“My dear Mary,

This will, I think, reach you only just before I arrive. I am counting the hours, my darling, till I see you and the children again. You will be so pleased to see how well and strong I look. Oh, how I long to be home once more! It is the longest parting we have had, dear, since God gave you to me for my wife; but it will soon be over now. I shall post this letter to-morrow early. I find that the train I shall come by arrives at 4.30 in the afternoon. So at five, my darling, all being well, you may expect to see me. I should like——”

And there the letter ended. The last three words were written differently to the others. There must have been a sudden trembling of the hand, a mist before the eyes, perhaps, and then the pen dropped where it was found—on the floor. And the poor gentleman fell forward and died—died just as he was thinking of the happy meeting with his wife and little ones, and bidding them be ready to welcome him.

Of course, the doctor was sent for, and there had to be an inquest. The doctor said that it was heart disease, and that the gentleman had died in a moment.

It was very awful, and most painful to my master and the landlord, or, rather, the landlord’s brother, who managed the hotel.

Of course the poor wife had to be told what had happened. At first they were going to send her a telegram to the address they found on a letter in the gentleman’s pocket, but they decided it would be such a terrible shock, and so the landlord’s brother, “Mr. Arthur,” as he was called, and quite a character, so master said, decided that he would go himself and break the terrible news to the poor lady as gently as possible.

He couldn’t go till the next day. And so it happened that he arrived by the very train that the poor gentleman was to have gone by himself. He took a fly from the station to the house—a lovely little villa, standing in its own grounds—and

when he drove up, two sweet little girls came rushing down the garden-path, crying out, “Papa, dear papa! Mamma, mamma, papa’s come home—papa’s come home!”

And then their mamma, her face flushed with joy, came quickly out, and ran down after the children to the gate to welcome her husband.

Poor Mr. Arthur! Master said that when he told him about it his eyes filled with tears, and he could hardly speak.

He said it was a minute before he could open his lips; but the poor lady had read bad news in his face, and she gasped out,

“My husband! he is ill! he is worse! Oh, tell me; tell me. For God’s sake, tell me!”

And the little girls looked up with terrified faces, and ran to their mamma, and clung to her.

And then Mr. Arthur begged the lady to come into the house; and then, as gently as he could, he told her the terrible news.

Wasn’t it dreadful?

Oh, dear me! if anything of that sort had happened in our house it would almost have broken my heart.

Harry would have had to go; and all the time he was away I should have been picturing that poor lady——

But I won’t write any more about it. It makes me feel so unhappy. Oh dear, oh dear! what terrible sorrows there are in the world! When one thinks of them, and contrasts one’s own happy lot with them, how thankful one ought to be! Fancy, if my Harry were ever away, and—— No! no! no! I will *not* think of such things. I’m a little low to-day and out of sorts, and when I am like that I get the most melancholy ideas, and find myself crying before I know what I’m doing.

Harry says I want a change; that I’ve been working too hard, and been too anxious—and that’s quite true, for our business has got almost beyond us, and the trouble of servants and one thing and another has upset me.

But I must get this Memoir done while I have a few minutes to spare. I call them Memoirs from the old habit; but, of course, they are hardly that, though I suppose an hotel could have memoirs.

It was about the young lady who was taken so seriously ill in our house, and that we were afraid was going to die.

She came down with her mamma early in the spring, having been recommended for change of air; but not wanting to be too far away, because she was under a great London doctor—a specialist I think he was called—and she had to go up and see him once a week.

Her mamma was about fifty—a very grave, I might say “hard,” lady. I didn’t like her much when she first came; there was something about her that seemed to keep you at your distance—“stand-offish” Harry called it—and she never unbent an atom, no matter how civil you tried to be.

But the daughter, who was about two-and-twenty, was the sweetest young lady, so pale and delicate-looking; but with a sweet, sad smile that Harry said was heavenly. And certainly it was, though I couldn’t say myself what is the difference between a heavenly smile and an earthly one: but there must be, or people wouldn’t use the word.

Miss Elmore—that was the young lady’s name—always had a kind word for me when I went into her room; but she talked very little, only thanking me for any little attention I showed her, and saying she was afraid she was giving a great deal of trouble.

Of course I said, “Oh dear no,” and it was a pleasure to wait on her. And so it was, for she was so patient, and I could see that she was a great sufferer, and it seemed to me that she was very unhappy.

Her mother was generally sitting by her when she didn’t get up, and used to read to her; but whenever I heard her reading, it was a religious book, and full of things about death—solemn and sad things, not at all fit to be continually dinned into the ears of an invalid.

Perhaps it was the lady herself being so stern, and having such a hard, rasping voice, that made the things I heard her read seem so unsympathetic. Of course, I don’t want to say that people who are very ill oughtn’t to have religious books

read to them—we ought all to be prepared, and to think of our future; but I never could see that sick people, who, of course, are low and cast down, ought to be continually preached at and reminded of their sins. When I told Harry the things I'd heard Mrs. Elmore reading to her daughter, he said it wasn't right. He said it was like giving an invalid "a religious whacking," when what was wanted for a person in such delicate health was religious coddling. I think the way he put it was quite right. It seemed to me that if a person's body is too weak for anything but beef-tea their mind couldn't be able to digest a beef-steak. Not that I think a sick person wants feeding on religious slops, but certainly they want whatever they take in that way to be nourishing and comforting. There was too much Cayenne pepper for an invalid in Mrs. Elmore's religious beef-tea. I couldn't help hearing a lot of it when I was tidying up the room, which I always did myself, and some of the passages out of the books might be part of a bad-tempered gaol chaplain's sermon to convicted murderers. I couldn't believe that a sweet, quiet girl, like Miss Elmore, could have done anything bad enough to be read at in such a scarifying fashion.

But the poor girl used to lie and listen—only sometimes I thought her face would flush a little, as though she felt she didn't deserve such a lecture. Her mother had a way of reading passages *at her*, if you know what I mean, as much as to say, "There, you wicked girl, that's what you deserve!"

I never heard them talk about anything. When the mother wasn't reading to the young lady, she would sit and knit, looking as hard and cold as a stone statue.

After they had been with us a fortnight, and the day came round for the young lady to go to London to see the doctor, she wasn't well enough; but had to keep her bed all day.

After that she grew rapidly worse, and our nearest doctor was called in. He looked very grave, and asked a lot of questions, and said he should like a consultation with the London specialist.

The mother said it would be very expensive to have him down, so our doctor said he was going to town, and he would go up and see him, as he wanted particulars of her case from him, and to know what the treatment had been.

After he came back from London he appeared graver still, and I could see that he was getting nervous about the case.

The young lady didn’t get any better; and I could see myself she was getting weaker and weaker. So one day I said to the doctor, “Doctor, I should be obliged if you will tell me what you think. Is there any danger?”

“Yes, Mrs. Beckett,” he said; “there is danger; but I haven’t given up hope yet.”

“What is it, sir?” I said. “I mean, what is the young lady suffering from?”

He looked at me a minute, and then he said in a quiet way, “A broken heart. That’s not the professional term, but that’s the plain English for it.”

And then he put his hat on, and went out before I could ask him any more.

What he’d told me made me more interested in the young lady than ever, and I felt as sorry for her as though she had been my own sister.

The next day, when the doctor had been, I caught him before he got to the front door, and asked him to come into our parlour. And then I tackled him straight.

“Did he think the young lady was going to die in our house?”

“Do you want her moved?” he said, in his quiet way, looking at me over his spectacles.

“No, sir; I don’t want anything unfeeling, I hope; but I should like to know.”

“My dear lady,” he said, “I can’t tell you what I don’t know myself. Doctors are no good in these cases. I won’t say that the young lady will not get strength enough to be taken to her home; but I see no signs of any improvement at present.”

“Do you know her story, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Won’t you tell me?”

He hesitated.

“I don’t know why I shouldn’t,” he said. “It was told me by the London doctor, who knows her family, and he didn’t bind me to secrecy.”

Then he told me all about the poor young lady, and what had made her so ill.

It seems she had fallen in love with a handsome young gentleman, who had been staying for a long time at a boarding-house, where she and her mother were living.

He was quite a gentleman in every way, and as soon as he found they were falling in love with each other—as young people will do, in spite of all rules and regulations and etiquette, or whatever you call it—he asked the young lady if he might pay his addresses to her.

I think that's the Society name for what we call "walking out and keeping company;" but I only go by what I've read in novels.

Well, Miss Elmore, who was an honest, straightforward, pure-minded young lady, with no fashionable nonsense about her, told the young gentleman that she loved him—of course, not straight out like that, but in a modest, ladylike way, and said that he must ask her mamma.

The young fellow did, and the mamma, who hadn't taken the slightest notice of her daughter—being wrapped up in the local Methodist clergyman and the chapel people in the place—was very much astonished. She said she had never thought of such a thing; but if the young gentleman wished to marry her daughter, he had better tell her what his position was, etc.

The young gentleman told her about his family, which was a very good one—almost county people, in fact—and then, after a lot of stammering, he let out that he was only a younger son, and that he was by profession an actor.

An actor!

The doctor told me that the London doctor told him that, when Mrs. Elmore heard this, she dropped her knitting, and nearly had a fit.

It seems that she was one of the sort that look upon the theatre, and everything connected with it, as awful.

As soon as she had recovered from her horror, she told the young gentleman that, rather than allow her daughter to marry a man who was such a lost sinner, she would see her in her coffin.

The young fellow tried to argue the point a little, but it was no use. Mrs. Elmore forbade him ever to speak to her daughter again, and she went at once and packed up, and took her daughter away to another boarding-house, telling the landlady that she was surprised that she received such people as the young gentleman.

She gave the poor young lady a terrible lecture, and forbade her ever to mention the young man's name. And then she called in her favourite clergyman, the Methodist parson, and the two of them went at the poor girl hammer and tongs, just as if she had committed some awful crime.

After that the young people didn't meet. The young lady wouldn't disobey her mother, and so the young fellow, who had been taking a long rest during the summer, went back to London; and in the autumn, when his theatre reopened—the one he belonged to—he began to play again, and made quite a hit. Poor fellow, it was natural he should; for the part he played was that of a young man, who loves a girl and is told he shall never have her, and isn't able to see her. I wonder how many of the people who applauded him for that knew that he wasn't acting at all, but just being himself?

After he was gone, and the young lady couldn't even see him, she began to get ill, and went home, and the doctor said it was debility, and care must be taken of her or she might go into a decline.

Then her mother, to get the young man out of her head, began to read her those unkind books about sinners, and tried in that manner to show her the error of her ways.

The treatment didn't answer, for the young lady got slowly worse, until she came to our place, and then you know what happened.

"Oh, Harry," I said, after the doctor had told me the story; "isn't it dreadful? Fancy that sweet young lady dying of a broken heart, and at the 'Stretford Arms,' too!"

It quite upset me, and I was so miserable that I began to feel ill myself.

Harry was grieved too; but men don't show grief the same way we do. Harry swore. He said Mrs. Elmore was a wicked old woman, and she ought to be ashamed of herself. What did it matter how a gentleman earned his living, if he

earned it honestly, and as a gentleman should?

Mr. Wilkins, who got hold of the story—I never knew anything to go on in our house that that little man didn't get hold of—must, of course, take a different view of the matter. It was just his contrariness.

He said that, after all, perhaps the mother wasn't so much to blame. He knew the time when actors weren't thought much of—in fact, in the history of our parish there was a record of actors having been put in the stocks; and in the eyes of the law, not so very long ago, they were rogues and vagabonds, and the parish beadle could order them off, and do all manner of things to them.

I said, "If it came to what was done once, people had their noses cut off for speaking their opinions."

"Oh," said Mr. Wilkins, "that hasn't gone out yet. I know a place where a man has his nose taken off still, if he ventures to have an opinion of his own."

And then the horrid little man looked straight at me, and nodded his head and said, "Ahem!"

"If you mean me, Mr. Wilkins," I said, "I think you've made a mistake. I'm not in the habit of snapping people's noses off, as you call it. And I think you must have a good many noses, for I'm sure you've got an opinion of your own about everything that is said, whether it concerns you or not."

With that I took my work, and went into our little inner room to get away from him, for I wasn't in the humour for an argument. And I wasn't going to sit still and listen to that poor young lady's lover being abused by an ignorant parish clerk, who had never lived in London and seen the world, as I had, with her perhaps dying upstairs.

I shut my door, but I could hear Wilkins keeping on the conversation, and talking loud, for me to hear, just for aggravation, and running down actors, just as if he knew anything at all about them. I don't suppose he ever saw one in his life, except at a country fair, and, of course, that was not at all the sort of person that the young gentleman was.

Of course I knew what had made Mr. Wilkins so disagreeable of late. I had had to keep him in his place about my "Memoirs." After he found out that I was going to use old Gaffer Gabbitas's story in my book, he came to me one day

going to use old Gaffer Gabbitas's story in my book, he came to me one day, with a lot of scrawl in a penny copy-book, and said he'd begun to collect things for his own "Memoirs," and would I look over them and help him to do them? I said, "Your 'Memoirs'! What do you mean, Mr. Wilkins?"

He said, "I've been thinking that we might do 'The Memoirs of a Parish Clerk' together. I've seen a lot of strange things in my time, and they'd be very nice reading. If you like to help me, we'll go halves in the money."

I said, "Let me look at what you've written."

You never saw such stuff in your life. It is really ridiculous what an idea some people have of writing books. Mr. Wilkins had begun about his being born, and everybody saying what a fine baby he was, as if he could possibly have heard the remark; and then he had put in a lot of nonsense, which I suppose he thought very funny, about his father and mother quarrelling what name he was to have, and going through the Bible to find one, and his father wanting to call him Genesis, which made his mother go to the other extreme, and insist on Revelations.

That's the sort of stuff you'd expect a parish clerk to write; but the impudence of the thing amused me. As if anybody would care two pins about the christening of Mr. Wilkins.

I looked at some of the other notes, and I saw quite enough. He'd put a lot about his being sent to the national school, and had made out that he was quite a scholar directly, and then there was something about his learning a trade, and his falling in love with the young woman at Jones's farm; and if he hadn't gone and written out some poetry that he sent the girl, which was nothing more than some valentine words as old as the hills.

When I gave him the book back I was obliged to tell him that that sort of stuff wasn't writing—not writing for books—and that I didn't think his "Memoirs" would be of much interest to anybody but himself.

The little man was disappointed. I could see that. I dare say he put it down to me being jealous of him; but he never mentioned the subject again. Only, after that, he was always making some nasty remark or other, and if ever I had an opinion about anything, he always started arguing the other way. I knew I had offended him; but you can't help offending somebody now and then, if you've got any spirit of your own. I'm sorry I ever let him give me any information at all. I dare

spirit of your own. I'm sorry I ever let him give me any information at all. I dare say he'll go to his grave believing that he's as much the author of these tales about the 'Stretford Arms' as I am myself.

It was through this having happened that made Mr. Wilkins so nasty about the young lady's lover. At another time he would have sided with me. He didn't drop it even the next day, for in the evening, when the room was full, he pulled out a newspaper, and asked me if I'd seen the case in the police-court, of an actor having pawned the sheets from his lodgings.

I saw he was going to begin again, so I said "Mr. Wilkins, will you let me have a word with you, please?" and I beckoned him outside the door.

Then I said to him, "Mr. Wilkins, what you heard yesterday about that young lady's affairs was a private conversation between me and my husband. You'll oblige me by not referring to it again. I can't have ladies and gentlemen who stay at this hotel talked over in the bar-parlour—at least, not their private affairs, which you have only learned through being considered a friend of ours."

He winced a little. But he said, "Mrs. Beckett, ma'am, I hope I know myself better than to do anything that is not right and gentlemanly."

"Thank you, Mr. Wilkins," I said; and then we went in, and if that horrid Graves the farrier didn't say, "All right, Wilkins, I'll tell Mr. Beckett." And then they all roared, and that wretched little Wilkins giggled, and said, "They're only jealous, aren't they, Mrs. Beckett?"

I declare I could have boxed his ears. I went quite red, and then they all roared again. And that Graves said, "All right, we won't tell this time; but, Wilkins, old man, you must be careful. Beckett's got a pistol."

I gave Graves a look, and went into the bar. I'm glad he doesn't come often; he ought to go to the tap-room at the other house. It's more in his line.

But about the poor young lady, whose lover was an actor——

* * * * *

Oh, Harry, how you frightened me, coming behind me like that! Supper been ready half an hour! Has it? All right, dear, I'm coming.

# CHAPTER XIV

## *THE YOUNG PLAY-ACTOR.*

I was telling you about the young lady, who was so ill in our house, when I was interrupted through Harry insisting on my coming to supper. No matter whether I want any supper or not, Harry won't let me stop away. He always makes the excuse, that he hates to have his meals alone. Certainly it is not very nice, but often and often I could get a quiet half-hour at my writing but for supper. After supper I can never do anything, for, somehow or other, I settle down in my easy chair and get sleepy directly.

Harry smokes one pipe—his quiet pipe, he calls it—looks at the paper, and then we go to bed. Sometimes, if there is a very exciting or very amusing case in the Law Courts, he reads it out loud to me. If we have friends staying with us, or come to spend the evening, sometimes after supper we have a hand at cards, but it is not often. We are generally very glad indeed to get to bed, as most people are who have done a hard day's work, especially as we are always up very early in the morning, which is necessary in an hotel, where everybody wants looking after personally, or else it very soon goes wrong.

After the doctor had told me the story of the young lady, who was so ill in our house, you may be sure that I took more interest in her than I had ever done before. There is nothing which touches a woman's heart so much as an unhappy love affair, and poor Miss Elmore's was unhappy enough in all conscience, for it had brought her to what looked like being her death-bed.

One day the doctor told me he had had a very serious talk with Mrs. Elmore—I told you about her being so hard—and had as good as said to her that there was only one thing could save the young lady, and that was to let her see her sweetheart again.

Mrs. Elmore sniffed and tossed her head, and said, "And what about my daughter's soul? Was it a fit preparation for the other world, if she was dying, to have a play-actor standing by her bed-side? The only persons who had a right there were the doctor and the clergyman." It was no good to argue—all Mrs. Elmore would say was that never, with her consent, should her daughter see that

lost young man again. “What was the good?” she said. She would never consent to the marriage, and if what the doctor said was true, that she was breaking her heart about the young fellow, what was the good of seeing him if she couldn’t marry him? Besides, she was sure her daughter wasn’t so bad as the doctors tried to make out. She would be better again if she would only make an effort, and allow herself to rally, and fix her thoughts upon respectable things instead of play-actors.

You wouldn’t think a mother would talk like it, but Mrs. Elmore did. The human nature in her seemed to have dried up—if I may use the expression.

The doctor said it was no good talking to the mother any more, so he went and saw our local Methodist clergyman, that Mrs. Elmore sat under every Sunday, and that came sometimes to visit the sick young lady.

He put the case straight to him, and told him he believed that the poor girl’s life might be saved if her mother could be induced to consent to the match, and perhaps he, the clergyman, might be able to persuade her.

Now, our Methodist clergyman was a very nice gentleman indeed, and he was quite affected by the way the doctor told the story. He said, “I don’t know that I could induce Mrs. Elmore to let her daughter marry this young play-actor, while he is still acting in what we, rightly or wrongly, consider to be a sinful place, and a place full of devilish wiles and temptations; but if he would give up his present life, and take to another calling, perhaps it might be different.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “there is no time to lose. He ought to come down at once, but it’s no good his coming down while he is a play-actor, because the mother wouldn’t allow him to see his sweetheart. I can’t go to London, because I have a lot of people ill here, and a case I can’t leave. Would you go to London and see the young fellow?”

“Why not write to him?” said the clergyman.

“That’s no use,” said the doctor; “it couldn’t be explained in a letter. Come, it is a life that hangs on your decision. Won’t you go?”

The clergyman hesitated. He said he didn’t know the young fellow, and he wasn’t authorized by the young lady or her mamma, and it seemed such a queer thing for him to do.

But at last he consented, and the doctor so worked him up, that he promised to go that very evening. They didn't know the young fellow's private address; but the doctor knew the theatre he was playing at, because, of course, he was advertised among the company.

The clergyman said it was a dreadful thing for him to have to go to a theatre. He had never been inside one in his life, and he didn't feel quite sure what would happen to him. He told the doctor that he looked upon it that perhaps he might be going to rescue a young man from perdition, and to do that, of course, a clergyman might go into a worse place than a theatre.

Our doctor—a very jolly sort of man, and fond of his joke, and not above coming into our parlour and having a little something warm when he is out on his rounds late on a cold night—told us all about what the clergyman said afterwards, and he told us that he couldn't for the life of him help telling the dear old parson to be very careful in the theatre, as there were beautiful sirens there, and he told him to remember about St. Anthony. I didn't know what he meant about St. Anthony, no more did Harry, because I asked him who St. Anthony was afterwards; but I didn't tell the doctor I didn't know, because I never like to show ignorance, if I can help it.

I suppose St. Anthony went to a theatre and fell in love with one of the lovely ladies. Perhaps it was that.

But our clergyman—the Methodist one—went. I call him ours, though we are Church of England, and our clergyman I told you about, is the Rev. Tommy Lloyd, who carries stones and roots in his pocket—Harry, in his exaggerating way, says he carries rocks and trunks of trees there. He went up to London, and, as we learnt afterwards, he got to the theatre about half-past eight in the evening. He saw the place all lit up, and he wondered how he was to find the young fellow—Mr. Frank Leighton his name was.

He went into the place where they take the money, and said, "Please can I have a few moments' conversation with Mr. Leighton, on a private matter?"

The people in the pay-box stared at him, and said, "Stage door."

"Thank you," said the clergyman. And, seeing a door, he went through it, and up a flight of stairs.

“Your check, sir,” said the man at the top of the stairs.

“What?” said the clergyman.

“Your check,” said the man; “you’ve got a check, haven’t you?”

“I have a cheque-book,” said the clergyman, “but not with me. What, my good friend, do you want with a cheque from me?”

The man looked at him as if he was something curious, and said, “A voucher; you have a voucher, haven’t you?”

The clergyman thought perhaps they were very particular whom they admitted behind the scenes, and he thought that was very proper, so he said, “I have not a personal voucher with me, but there is my card. I am a clergyman, and well known in the district.”

“Can’t pass your card, sir,” said the man politely; “you’d better see the manager.”

“Thank you,” said the clergyman; “where shall I find him?”

“Here he comes, sir.”

At that moment a gentleman came up the stairs in full evening dress, and with very handsome diamond studs. The clergyman told the doctor that he noticed everything, all being so new and strange to him.

The man took the clergyman’s card, and showed it to the gentleman in full dress, and said, “Gentleman wants to be passed in.”

“Very sorry,” said the manager; “but we’ve no free list.”

“I think there is some mistake,” replied the clergyman. “I have no desire to see the performance. I want a few moments’ private conversation with Mr. Frank Leighton.”

The manager stared. “Oh!” he said. “But, my dear sir, how do you propose to converse with him privately this way? You can’t shout at him from the dress circle.”

“I know nothing of theatres. Is not this the stage door?”

“Oh, you thought this was the stage door. I see. Simmons!”

A commissionaire in uniform stepped forward.

“Show this gentleman the stage door.”

“Yes, sir.”

And with that our clergyman was taken outside by the commissionaire, and they went along the street and then down a dirty narrow court; and when they got to the end of the court there was a dirty old door, and the commissionaire pushed that open and said, “This is the stage-door, sir,” and left our clergyman there.

He told the doctor that it was a narrow passage, with a little room just off it; and in this little room, which was very dingy, was an old gentleman with grey hair, who said, “What do you want, sir?”

“I want a few minutes’ conversation with Mr. Frank Leighton, on a private matter. There is my card.”

The man took the card, and said, “Wait a minute, sir.”

Then he pushed another door open and went through.

Presently he came back again, and said, “Will you take a seat a minute, sir?” And the clergyman went into the dingy little room and sat down.

There was a young lady who had come through from downstairs, and she had evidently just come off the stage, for the doorkeeper said, “Is Mr. Leighton on yet?” “Yes,” she said; “he’s on to the end of the act now.”

Presently there was the report of a pistol, and the clergyman jumped up.

“Good gracious! what’s that?” he exclaimed.

“Oh,” said the young lady, “that’s Mr. Leighton; he’s just tried to commit suicide!”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed the clergyman, horrified. “How terrible—let me go

to him.” And before anybody could stop him he had rushed through the door.

At first he could not see where he was for things sticking out here and there; but presently, through some scenery, he saw a young fellow lying on the floor, with a pistol beside him. A gentleman was leaning over him and feeling his heart.

“He is not dead,” said the gentleman; “thank God! thank God!”

Our clergyman said, “Thank God!” too, and rushed to where the young gentleman was lying, and said, “Oh, my unhappy young friend, how could you do such a terrible thing! I am a clergyman; let me——”

Before he could say another word there was a wild roar of voices, and the suicide sat up and said, “What the——”

And the people at the sides yelled, “Mind your head.” And the curtain came down with a bang.

And then the clergyman knew he had made a dreadful mistake, and that it was all in the play, because the suicide jumped up and said, “What in heaven’s name do you mean, sir?” And the manager came on and was furious, and the people in front of the house were yelling and hooting, and there was a nice commotion.

The poor clergyman, who was quite bewildered and covered with perspiration, tried to explain that he had never been in a theatre before in his life, and knew nothing about it; that, hearing Mr. Leighton had committed suicide, he thought it was because of his love affair, and having come from where the young lady he loved was lying very ill, he thought it his duty as a minister to rush on and say a word or two to the poor sinner before he died.

There was quite a buzz of astonishment among the people on the stage when the clergyman told his simple story, and they saw at once that it was true.

Mr. Leighton, who had been awfully wild at having his scene spoiled, when he heard the clergyman’s story, was very much affected, and said he would see the clergyman after the performance, if he would wait. They asked him if he would like to go into a box; but the clergyman said, “No; he did not want to see anything in a theatre. He would wait outside.”

The manager said perhaps it was as well, for if he went anywhere in the house where he could be seen it would start the people off, and be unpleasant; because

where he could be seen it would start the people off, and be unpleasant, because, of course, as playgoers, what with the clergyman's words and manners, and the curtain coming down bang, they knew something had happened that wasn't in the play.

When the clergyman told the doctor the story, the doctor laughed till the tears came into his eyes; and he chaffed the poor man finely about making his first appearance, and having acted a part.

He was in a very good humour, because, though the clergyman, through his ignorance, had made such a mess of it at the beginning, he had finished by doing what he wanted. He told the young gentleman, after the play was over, all about the young lady, and what the doctor said, and the young fellow told him that he had never known a happy moment since they were parted, and he would make any sacrifice in the world to save his sweetheart's life.

He quite won our clergyman's heart by his nice manner and the way he talked. And before they parted he gave the clergyman his word that, if he was allowed to see his sweetheart again, dearly as he loved his profession, he would give it up for ever.

That made the clergyman take his part at once, and feel that he had done a wonderful thing; so he came back and saw Mrs. Elmore the next day, and told her it would be wicked to keep the young people apart, as, if she allowed them to see each other and be engaged, she would not only save her daughter's life, but she would rescue a young fellow from play-acting.

It took a long time to convince the woman—she was so hard; but at last she consented, and first the young fellow was told to send his sweetheart a letter. And the clergyman gave it to her, telling her gently to hope that the happiness she thought lost for ever might yet be hers.

And then the young lady read the letter, and it made her cry. But from that day she began to mend slowly, and in a fortnight she was sitting up again on the sofa in the sitting-room.

And one day the doctor came to me, quite beaming, and said, "Now, Mrs. Beckett, who do you think's coming to your hotel to-morrow?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I said.

“Why, Frank Leighton, the young play-actor.”

And then he told me that Mrs. Elmore had agreed that the young couple should have an interview in her presence, and that the whole matter should be discussed. I was delighted, and I could talk of nothing else. Harry at last got a bit tired of it, I think, and he said if I talked about the young play-actor any more he should have to go and put some brickdust on his face, and chalk his nose, or else he would be quite cut out.

Harry does say ridiculous things sometimes, and there is no romance about him. Perhaps it is quite as well, because an hotel-keeper, or, in fact, any man in business, doesn’t want to be too romantic. It isn’t the way to get rich.

Harry said it was lucky we didn’t have many love affairs in our house, or my brain would be turned; and he should be very glad when the young lady had got well enough to go away. He didn’t want a lot of play-actors coming and upsetting all the women in the house, from the missus to the kitchenmaid.

I don’t like to confess it; but there is no doubt that Harry is a little jealous. I have told you how disagreeable he was about that dreadful policeman. Of course you know what I mean by jealous. He isn’t absurd or ridiculous, but he turns nasty, and says sharp things, if I take too much interest in anything or anybody but himself. He’s jealous of my “Memoirs,” and I do believe sometimes he is jealous of baby. That’s the sort of jealousy I mean.

The next morning Mrs. Elmore called me upstairs, and said that they expected a visitor (of course she didn’t know that I knew everything), and that dinner was to be laid in the sitting-room for five people. I said to myself, “I know who the five will be—Mrs. Elmore, Miss Elmore, the doctor, the clergyman, and Mr. Frank Leighton.”

When I told Harry, he said, “Oh, that’s it, is it? Well, I’d sooner him than me.”

“What do you mean, Harry?” I said.

“What do I mean? Why, if that young fellow can make love to the young lady before her mother, her doctor, and her clergyman, he’s got more pluck than I give him credit for.”

“He needn’t make love at the dinner table,” I said. “Besides, they don’t want to

make love—they've made it already—long ago. This is more of a family reconciliation."

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry for the girl. It can't be pleasant to have a doctor and a clergyman standing like sentries on guard all the time your lover, that you haven't seen for ever so long, is in the room with you."

"How did you think they were going to meet, pray?" I asked.

"Well, seeing he's a play-actor, I expected that he'd come outside our house when it was moonlight, and whistle, and that the young lady would open the windows and go out on the balcony, and that they'd talk low, like that."

I saw what was in Harry's head at once. It was that beautiful play about Romeo and Juliet. So I said, "A very likely thing. As if a young lady, brought up like Miss Elmore, and in her delicate state of health, would go talking to a man in the road, standing outside the balcony of a public-house. A nice scandal there would be!"

"Well," he said, "I've seen it done on the stage."

"I dare say; but there's lots of things that are all right on the stage, but would get parties into trouble if they tried them in real life."

What an idea, wasn't it, that we were to have "Romeo and Juliet" played outside the 'Stretford Arms'? Of course it would have been much more romantic. "Romeo and Juliet" wouldn't be half so interesting if Juliet was only allowed to see her lover at dinner, with her mother and the doctor and the clergyman sitting down at the same table. Poor girl, if she had, perhaps it would have been much better for her in the long-run. She might have been a happy wife and mother, instead of coming to that creepy end in the family vault, and leading to such a lot of bloodshed.

I was on tiptoe all day, as the saying is, till the young lover arrived. I arranged a very nice little dinner and made up some flowers for the table, and saw to everything myself, being determined that nothing should be wanting on my part in bringing matters to a happy termination, and I know how much a good dinner has to do with the turn that things take.

The only time I can remember Harry to have spoken really unkindly to me was when we had a badly-made steak-and-kidney pie for dinner, and he wasn't very

when we had a badly-made steak-and-kidney pie for dinner, and he wasn't very well after it, and that made him tetchy and irritable, a most unusual thing for him, and he was quite nasty with me and lost his temper over a trifle that, if the steak-and-kidney pie had been all right, he would only have laughed at.

About two o'clock a fly drove up to the door, and a young gentleman got out and came in, and said, "This is the 'Stretford Arms,' is it not?"

I knew it was the young actor at once. There is something about an actor that you can always tell, even if you have not seen very many.

He really was handsome. He had lovely wavy hair, and beautiful sympathetic eyes, and his face was just like what you see in some of the statues in the British Museum—it was so nicely cut, if I may use the expression.

He spoke in a most eloquent voice, and it was quite a pleasure to listen to him. He was beautifully dressed, and I thought I never saw a young fellow's clothes fit so elegantly.

Our barmaid (a flighty sort of girl, I am sorry to say) stared at him, almost with her mouth open, in admiration, till at last I was obliged to say, "Miss Bowles, will you please fetch me my keys from the parlour?" I couldn't say out loud, "Don't stare at the gentleman," so I did it that way.

As soon as he had said who he was—of course, it wasn't for me to tell him that I knew—I showed him into the sitting-room, that I had got ready for him, and had a fire lighted in it, so that he might be comfortable, while I went upstairs to announce to the ladies that he had arrived.

Poor Miss Elmore was sitting up in the arm-chair when I went into the room, and her mamma was in the other room.

The young lady knew before I opened my mouth what I had to say. She read it in my face, for I'm sure I was crimson with excitement and pleasure.

The sight of her turned me so that I could only gasp out, "He's come, miss; he's come." And then I saw her cheeks flush burning red, and then go very pale again, and the tears came swimming up into her beautiful, loving blue eyes.

I felt that I would have given the world to have put my arms round her and given her a sisterly hug, and have a good cry with her; but, of course, it would have

been forgetting my place.

“Tell mamma, please,” she said, as soon as she could speak.

So I went across to the bedroom door and rapped, and told Mrs. Elmore that Mr. Leighton had arrived.

“Very good,” she said. “As soon as Dr. —— and the Rev. —— have arrived, you can show him up.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said; and I went downstairs. And then, oh, such a wicked idea came into my head! It came, and it wouldn’t go away, and I wouldn’t give myself time to think how wrong it was. I knew that Mrs. Elmore was dressing herself, and wouldn’t be ready for ten minutes, and so I went straight down to the young gentleman, and I said, “This way, if you please, sir.” And I took him upstairs to the sitting-room, where the young lady was all alone, and I opened the door wide, and said, “Mr. Leighton, miss.”

I heard a little cry from the dear young lady. I saw her rise up and stagger forwards. I saw the young fellow catch her in his arms, and I pulled the door to with a bang, and ran downstairs as if an earthquake was behind me; and when I got to the parlour I went flop into a chair and laughed and cried till Harry came running in and slapped my hands, and the barmaid brought vinegar. And right in the middle of it, in walked the doctor and the clergyman.

I couldn’t help it. My nerves were overstrung, I suppose, and the excitement had been too much for me.

But I soon pulled myself together, as Harry calls it, and went into the kitchen to see the dinner served up properly. And once I made an excuse, when the dinner was on, to go into the room just to help the waitress.

Everything seemed all right, though at first I thought everybody looked a little uncomfortable, including the young play-actor.

It must have been a little awkward for him at first, for the old lady was awfully stiff and stony when she came in, and discovered her daughter with the young man, and no doctor or clergyman present.

But she didn’t say anything to them, only I caught her eye when I went in, and it was evident she’d something pleasant to say to me about it when the company

was evident she'd something pleasant to say to me about it when the company was gone. But I didn't care what she had to say, so long as I'd made two young hearts happy. And I know I did the very best thing possible in letting them meet like that.

The doctor told me all that happened when I saw him that evening; for, you may be sure, I was very anxious to know how matters had been arranged.

The young fellow had to leave at six o'clock, as he had to get to the theatre at eight; but after dinner he had a long private talk with the clergyman, who, it seems, had Mrs. Elmore's instructions in the matter.

The young fellow agreed to give up his profession at once, for the young lady's sake. Of course it was a blow to him, as he was getting on very nicely; and I've heard that a man or a woman who has once had a success on the stage is always hankering after the footlights and applause, and it makes them very unhappy to be away from them.

However, Mr. Leighton gave up acting for Miss Elmore's sake. He got the manager to release him from his engagement, and he began to look about for some appointment that would bring him in five hundred pounds a year; as, of course, he didn't want to live on the young lady's mother, or the young lady, who, it seems, had three hundred pounds a year in her own right.

The young lady got quite well and left our hotel, and six months afterwards I read of her marriage in the papers, and the next day a three-cornered box arrived by post, and when I opened it there was a lovely piece of wedding-cake for me, with Mr. and Mrs. Frank Leighton's compliments.

And some time afterwards I heard that, through the death of a relative, the young gentleman had come into a large fortune and a *title*—yes, a title!—and that dear Miss Elmore, that we thought would die in our house of a broken heart, lived to be a happy wife and mother, and to be called "my lady."

I am pretty sure that Mrs. Elmore wouldn't have given her daughter those "religious whackings," as Harry called them, if she had known that the play-actor the poor young lady was in love with was going to have a title. What I know of the world has taught me that.

When I read the news I said to Mr Wilkins, "Well, Mr. Wilkins, what about play-actors being rogues and vagabonds now?—here is one that is a person of

play-actors being rogues and vagabonds now? — here is one that is a person of rank.”

“Oh yes,” he said, “I dare say; but rank isn’t what it was in the good old times. I have been told there is a baronet working as a labourer in the docks, and his wife, who is ‘my lady,’ goes out charing.”

Wilkins is certainly not so nice as he used to be. Perhaps it is age that is souring him; but we have never been such good friends since that business about the “Memoirs.” And he has the gout, too. I will be charitable, and put his nasty remarks down to his gout. I have heard it does make people very disagreeable. I once lived in a family where the master had the gout, and——

* * * * *

Six people arrived by the train! Oh, dear! and we have only four rooms—whatever shall we do? Wait a minute; I’ll come and see. We mustn’t turn custom away if we can help it.

# CHAPTER XV.

## *THE BILLIARD-MARKER.*

I think I mentioned in a former “Memoir” that we had had a billiard-table put up. It was Harry’s idea. He is very fond of a game of billiards himself, and is not at all a bad player, so I have heard from the gentlemen who play with him. Of course, he didn’t go to the expense for himself, you may be sure of that, but as an improvement to the house.

The way it came about was this. There was an old fellow who used our house named Jim Marshall. He was quite a character in his way. He was very stout, and walked lame with one leg, and was full of queer sayings. Not a bad fellow; but he had to be kept in his place, or else he would presume. He was hand-and-glove, as the saying is, with almost everybody in the neighbourhood, rich and poor alike. He was a capital whist-player, knew all about horses and dogs, and could sing a good song. He was a bachelor, and lived all by himself in a tumbledown old house, where he had hundreds of pounds’ worth of curiosities, old pictures, old furniture, and old books, the place being so crammed from kitchen to attic that sometimes when he went home a little the worse for his evening’s amusement, he wasn’t able to steer himself, as Harry called it, across the things to get to bed, and would go to sleep in an old steel fender, with his head on a brass coal-scuttle for a pillow.

Jim Marshall was a broker—that is to say, he went all about the neighbourhood to sales and bought things for gentlemen, and sometimes for himself. All round our village there are old-fashioned houses and farms full of old-fashioned furniture and china, and things of that sort, that nowadays are very much run after, and fetch a good price. Old Jim knew everybody’s business and what everybody had got, because he used to do their business for them. These people, if they wanted anything, would tell Jim to look out for it for them, and if they wanted to sell anything they always sent for Jim, and he would find a purchaser for them on the quiet.

The neighbourhood round our place is full of people who have gone down since railways came in, because we are too near to London, and London has taken all the local trade. A lot of people lived and kept up appearances on what their

fathers made before them—business people I mean—and when that was gone they had to give up their style and go into smaller houses, which, of course, they moved away to do, nobody who has been grand and looked up to for years in a place caring to look small there.

This gradual decay of the neighbourhood (not where we live—the railway has *made* us—but little towns and places round about) was a good thing for Jim, as there were lots of good old houses selling off their furniture and things, and he had lots of customers in London who wanted Chippendale and Sheraton and Adam's furniture, and old books, and old clocks, and old china, and old silver ornaments; and these houses being in the country, there weren't many brokers at the sales, so Jim was able to pick up plenty of bargains for his customers, and make a good thing for himself as well.

Plenty of ladies and gentlemen who came to our house, and got to know of Marshall being always at sales, would give him their address, and tell him always to send them a catalogue, if there was anything good going. Mr. Saxon, the author, I know, got a bookcase through Jim, a real old Chippendale for eleven pounds that was worth sixty pounds if it was worth a penny, and we have some fine old-fashioned things at the 'Stretford Arms' that Jim Marshall got us at sales.

You had only to say to Jim Marshall that you wanted a thing, and he would never rest till he got it for you. He would go into the grandest house in the neighbourhood and ask to see the gentleman, and say, "I say, sir, what will you take for your sideboard? I've a customer that wants one."

"Hang your impudence, Marshall!" the gentleman would say. "Do you think I keep a furniture shop?"

"No offence, sir," Jim would say. "Only remember, when you do want to part with it, I'm in the market." That was how he would begin. Presently he would call on the gentleman again, and say he knew of a magnificent sideboard, two hundred years old, in an old farmhouse, that could be got cheap. And he would go on about it until, perhaps, he would work the gentleman up to buy the other sideboard and let him have the one he had a customer for, and he would make a nice thing out of the two bargains for himself.

He was very clever at it, because he knew the fancies of different people, and how to work on them. But the most impudent thing he ever did was with an old

how to work on them. But the most impudent thing he ever did was with an old lady, who had a lovely pair of chestnut horses. A gentleman who was staying at our hotel one day saw them go by, and he said, “By Jove, that’s a fine pair of horses!—that’s just the pair I want.”

Jim Marshall was standing by at the time, and he said, “I’ll try and get ’em for you.” And he shouted, and waved his stick, and yelled at the coachman, who thought something was wrong, and pulled up.

Jim hobbled off till he came to the carriage, then raised his hat to the old lady, and said, “I beg your pardon, ma’am, but if you want to sell your horses, I’ve a customer for them.”

“What!” shrieked the old lady. And she shouted to the coachman to drive on, and pulled the window up with a bang.

Jim came back, not looking a bit ashamed of himself; and he said, “I’ve broken the ice. Now, sir, how much am I to go to for them horses?”

“The idea!” I said, for I had seen and heard everything; “as if old Mrs. —— would be likely to part with them! I do believe Jim you’d go up to a clergyman in church, and ask him what he’d take for his surplice!”

Jim smiled at that. It flattered his vanity, because nothing pleased him so much as being made out a smart fellow before London gentlemen.

“I’ll have them horses, Mrs. Beckett,” he said, “if the gentleman’ll go to a price.”

“Well,” said the gentleman, “I’m not in a hurry. I’ve got a very good pair now; but if they could be got for one hundred and twenty pounds, I wouldn’t mind.”

“Is that an order?” said Jim.

“Yes,” said the gentleman, “I’ll give one hundred and twenty pounds.”

“You’ll get a bargain if you get them at that,” said Jim, “for I know from the coachman as the lady paid over two hundred pounds for ’em, and they weren’t dear at that. But I’ll see what I can do.”

The gentleman got those horses through Jim, and he got them for the one hundred and twenty pounds. And it was only through a third party letting out the

hundred and twenty pounds. And it was only through a third party letting out the secret that I heard afterwards how it was done, and I'm not going to tell because it was told me in confidence; but I may say the old lady's coachman was always being treated by Jim in a very generous manner. And soon after that, one of the horses took to showing temper in a way he had never done before, and the coachman told the old lady that sometimes after a certain age horses that had been very quiet developed a vice.

Jim Marshall had a great "pal," as he called him, in our local veterinary surgeon —rather a fast young fellow, who was the great sporting authority, and was supposed to know more about horses and dogs than anybody in the county. I believe he was very clever—he certainly did wonders for our pony when it was ill—but he was too fond of betting, and going to London for a day or two, and coming back looking very seedy, so that he was generally hard up. Soon after the old lady's horses had changed their ways so suddenly, the veterinary and old Jim were standing outside our house, when they saw old Mr. Jenkins, the old lady's gardener, who had been with her for thirty years, come in. He was coming to see me about some fruit, which we wanted to buy of him for preserving, and about supplying us with vegetables from the kitchen garden.

Mr. Jenkins was, of course, asked into our parlour, and while he was there, in walks the veterinary, and they began to talk, till the conversation got on the horses. "Ah!" said the veterinary, "they're a nice pair, but they aren't quite the sort for your lady. I watched the mare go by the other day, and there was something about her I didn't like. I dare say she's all right in double harness, but I wouldn't care to drive her myself in single."

Then he began to tell stories about carriage accidents and runaway horses, till Mr. Jenkins turned quite pale, and said he should never know another minute's peace while his mistress was out with "them animals."

He went back, and you may be sure he told the lady all he had heard, and made the most of it. And the old lady was made quite nervous, and sent for the coachman, and the coachman said of course it wasn't his place to say anything; but, if he was asked his honest opinion, he couldn't say that he always felt quite safe with the horses himself. However, he should always be careful and do his best to prevent an accident.

A week after that, Jim Marshall got the horses for a hundred pounds. The old lady sent to him to come and take them, and he found her a nice quiet pair, that

somebody else wanted to sell. I expect he did very well out of the transaction, and so did the old lady's coachman.

This will show you what sort of a man Jim Marshall was, and how useful he could be to anybody who wanted anything. He got us our billiard-table, and it was in this way. Harry was saying one night that, as soon as he could afford it, he would have a billiard-room; but he couldn't yet, as the table would cost such a lot of money, if it was by a good maker.

"Nonsense!" said Marshall; "do you want a good billiard-table?"

"Well," said Harry, "I do want one, but I can't afford——"

"It isn't a question of affording. If I can get you one as good as new, with all the fittings complete—balls, cues, and everything—will you go to fifty pounds?"

"Certainly," said Harry.

"Then get your billiard-room ready."

Harry knew Marshall would keep his word. So we made a room at the back, with a little alteration, into a billiard-room. And as soon as it was ready Marshall said, "All right. The table is coming down from London to-morrow."

And it did come, and a beautiful table it was, and as good as new. Harry said it couldn't have been played on many times, and must have cost a lot of money when it was new. Marshall, it seems, knew of a young gentleman in London, who had come into some money, and fitted up a billiard-room in his house, and then taken a fit into his head to travel. And when he came back he didn't want to live in a house any more, but was going to have chambers, and he wanted to get rid of a lot of his things. How Marshall did it, I don't know; but, at any rate, we got our table and everything complete for fifty pounds.

Having a billiard-table was very nice for some things. Gentlemen who stayed at the hotel—artists, and such like—found it a great comfort on wet days and long evenings, and several of the young gentlemen from the houses round about would come in, and get up a game at pool, and it certainly did the house good in that way, though it brought one or two customers that I didn't care about at all—young fellows who were too clever by half, as Harry said, and who came to make money at the game, and I don't think were very particular how they made it.

it.

Harry said, when we put the table up, that we should have to be careful, and keep the place select, as, if a billiard-room wasn't well looked after, it soon got to be a meeting-place for the wrong class of customers.

When the table was first put up, Mr. Wilkins and Graves, the farrier, and one or two more of that sort, thought it was being put up for them.

Mr. Wilkins said he thought it was a better game than bagatelle, and he should have to practise, and then he would soon give Harry a beating.

Harry said, "You can practise as much as you like, Wilkins; but it'll be sixpence a game if you play anybody, two shillings an hour if you practise, and a guinea if you cut the cloth."

You should have seen Wilkins's face at that!

"Two shillings an hour!" he said; "I thought you were putting it up for the good of the house."

A nice idea, wasn't it, that we had gone to the expense of a billiard-room and a table, and were going to engage a boy to mark, and all for the amusement of Mr. Wilkins and his friends! That is the worst of old customers. They don't advance with the business, and they seem to think that they are to have their own way in everything.

The day after the table was up Harry asked Mr. Wilkins to come and look at it. The balls were put on the table, Harry having been knocking them about to try the cushions.

Of course, Wilkins must take up a cue, and show how clever he was. "See me put the white in the pocket off the red," he said. He hit the white ball so hard, that it jumped off the cushion and went smash through the window.

"Wilkins, old man," said Harry, "I think you'd better practice billiards out on the common. This place isn't big enough for you."

I shall always remember our opening the billiard-room, from the young fellow who came to us to be our first marker.

We were going to have a boy—one who could fill up his time about the house—at first; but, as a matter of fact, our first billiard-marker, though he didn't stay long, was a young fellow named Bright—"Charley Bright," everybody about the place called him.

Poor Charley! His was a sad story. When we first knew him, he was living in one room over Mrs. Megwith's shop. Mrs. Megwith has a little drapery and stationery shop, and sells nearly everything. He was quite the gentleman. You could tell that by the way he spoke, and by his clothes, which, though they were shabby, were well cut and well made, and you could see that he had once been what is called a "swell."

He was very tall and very good-looking. He had dark, sparkling eyes, and always a high colour, and very pretty curly, dark hair. But, oh, he was so dreadfully thin! One day I said to Mrs. Megwith, "How thin your young man lodger is!" "Yes," she said; "and it isn't to be wondered at. I don't believe he has anything to eat of a day but a few slices of bread and butter."

"Is he so very poor?" I said.

"Poor! He owes me eight weeks' rent, and I know that he's pawned everything except what he stands upright in. I can't find it in my heart to turn him out, he's such a good-hearted fellow, and a perfect gentleman; but I can't afford to lose the rent of the room much longer. He's welcome to the tea and bread-and-butter; but the five shillings a week rent means something to a struggling widow woman with a family."

How we got to know Charley Bright was through one or two of the young gentlemen bringing him, now and then, to have a drink. They had made his acquaintance, and he knew a lot about racing, and was a capital talker, and so they used to talk to him. I noticed once or twice when they stood him a drink he would ask for a glass of wine, and say, "Just give me a biscuit with it, please." A biscuit, poor fellow!—it was a leg of mutton with it that he wanted—but nobody knew how terribly poor he was.

On the day after our billiard-room was opened Charley Bright came in by himself. Harry had gone up to London, to see about some business. "Mrs. Beckett," he said, almost blushing; "I hear you want a billiard-marker. I wish you'd try me."

“What!” I said, “you a billiard-marker?”

“Yes. I can play a very good game, and I wouldn’t mind what I did that I could do. I don’t want much. My meals in the house and a few shillings a week—just enough to pay my rent over the road.”

“Well,” I said, “we shall want a marker; but, of course, there will be money to take and one thing and the other, and we shall want a reference. Can you give us a reference?”

His face fell at that. “I—I—can’t refer to my people,” he said, “I shouldn’t like them to know what I was doing.”

I saw a little tear come into his eye as he spoke, and, knowing what I did, that nearly set me off. So I said, “Won’t you have a glass of wine?” And I poured out a big glass of port, and I put the bread and cheese before him on the bar.

It was the only way I could do it.

He knew what I meant, and the tears trickled right down his nose. “Thank you,” he said, and his voice was so husky he could scarcely speak.

It upset me so terribly that I had to go into the parlour, so that he shouldn’t see me cry. I am an awful goose in that way—anything that is pathetic or miserable brings a gulp into my throat and the tears into my eyes in a minute.

I left him alone with the bread and cheese for a good ten minutes, and then I went back. He was evidently all the better for the meal, for he had got back the old spirits and began to smile and chatter away quite pleasantly.

“I’ll speak to my husband when he comes back, Mr. Bright,” I said. “I’m sure, if he can, he will let you have the place.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Beckett,” he said; and then he told me his story. He was a young fellow, the son of a professional gentleman with a large family—gentlefolks, but not very well off. When he was eighteen he went into an office in the City, and after a time, being quick at figures and clever, he got two hundred pounds a year. Unfortunately, he spent his evenings in a billiard-room at the West-end, where there were a very fast set of men, and among them a lot of betting men. Charley Bright took to betting, but only in small sums, and he used to play billiards for money; and what with one thing and another, and stopping

to play billiards for money, and what with one thing and another, and stopping out late at night, he got to neglect his business, to be late in the morning, and to make mistakes, and all that sort of thing.

But what ruined him was winning a thousand pounds. There was a horse running for the Derby that had been a favourite at one time and had gone back to fifty to one, I think, or something like that. At any rate, Mr. Bright, who had won twenty pounds over a race, put it all on this horse at one thousand pounds to twenty pounds. This was long before the race was run, and after a time everybody thought this horse had gone wrong, and Bright thought he had lost his money.

He had settled down again to business, and was getting more careful and not going to the billiard-room so much, when Derby Day came and the horse won!

That was the turning-point in his career.

He had a thousand pounds.

He was always very excitable, he told me, and the good luck drove him nearly mad with joy.

He was going to take to the turf, and make a fortune in backing horses.

No more drudgery in the City, no more gloomy offices. He would be out all day long in the country, watching the horses run, and pocketing handfuls of sovereigns over the winners.

He resigned his situation in the City, he left his home and took lodgings in the West-end, dressed himself up as a great racing swell, and for about six months lived his life at express railway speed.

His eyes quite flashed, and his cheeks glowed, as he told of those days. It was one wild round of pleasure, it carried the poor lad away body and soul—and then the end came.

Good fortune followed him at first; then came a change, and his “luck was dead out,” as he put it.

Presently he had lost all his money backing horses, and got into debt, and had to part with his things. His people would not help him. His father was very severe, and never forgave him for throwing up his situation, and the young fellow was

proud, and so he kept his poverty to himself as much as he could.

Some of the fellows he had known when he was well off were kind to him in his misfortune for a bit; but as he got seedier and seedier they dropped away from him. And at last he was so ashamed of the dreadful position he had got in, that he didn't care to go anywhere where people who had known him in his swell days were likely to be.

There was a billiard-room he used to go to for a long time, where he had first met the company that had been his ruin; but, though he had spent plenty of money there once, the landlord came to him one day and said, "Look here, Bright, I don't want to hurt your feelings; but a lot of the gentlemen that come here don't like to see you always hanging about the room. It annoys them. I'll give you a sovereign to stop away."

The landlord meant it kindly, perhaps; but the young fellow told me that it hurt him dreadfully. Of course it wasn't nice for these people to see a seedy fellow, who had lost all his money through their bad example, hanging about the place. He didn't take the sovereign, but he never went near the place again, and the people who knew him lost sight of him altogether.

He came down to our village and took a room, and tried to make a little money in a very curious way. He still thought that he was a good judge of racing, and knew a good deal about the turf. So, being desperate, he hit on a scheme.

He put an advertisement in a sporting paper, and called himself by a false name, and said that he was in a great stable secret, and for thirteen stamps he would send the absolute winner of a certain race. He told me that he had the letters sent to the post office, and he got over sixty answers, with thirteen stamps in them, and he sent in reply the name of the horse he thought was sure to win. Unfortunately, the very day after he had sent his horse off it was scratched, which he told me meant being struck out of the list of runners, so that while his customers were reading his letter, which gave them the certain winner, they would see in the paper that the horse would not even run.

He said that settled him for giving tips from that address, and he didn't know where else to go, for he had paid his landlady nearly all his money, and bought a pair of boots, which he wanted badly, and so he hadn't even the money to pay his railway fare anywhere else, and he didn't know whatever he should do, for he was now absolutely starving.

“Why don’t you write to your father?” I said. “Surely he wouldn’t let you starve.”

“No,” he said, “I will starve; but I won’t ask him for help again, after what he said to me. I will go back home when I am earning my own living and am independent, and not before.”

When Harry came back, I told him about Charley Bright, and Harry was as sorry as I was. He said that it was a very sad tale, and no doubt the young fellow had had a lesson, and if he could give him a helping hand he would.

So it was settled that Charley Bright was to come and be our first billiard-marker. We couldn’t afford to give him much salary, of course, because really it was more for the convenience of the gentlemen staying in the house and visitors than anything, and we couldn’t hope to do very much at first. But he was quite satisfied, and, I think, what he looked forward to were the regular meals. You may be sure that when I sent up his dinner, I cut him as much meat as I could put on his plate, and I let him know if he wanted any more he was to send down for it.

I don’t think I had enjoyed my own dinner so much for many a long day, as I did the day that I knew that poor fellow was enjoying his upstairs. Oh, he was so dreadfully thin and delicate-looking! He wore a light grey overcoat—a relic of his old racing days, he said—and it hung on him like a sack. He had no undercoat on; he had parted with that weeks before, he told me.

After he had been with us a week he was quite a changed man. He was the life and soul of the place, always merry, and always in high spirits. The customers liked him very much, and he really brought a lot of custom to the room, some of the young gentlemen from the houses round about coming to see him, and liking to talk to him, and hear his stories of what he had seen and done.

After he had been with us a fortnight he told us he was doing very well, as most of the gentlemen gave him something for himself. He said it made him feel queer at first to take a tip, like a servant, but after all he would be able to pay his landlady what he owed her, and so that helped him to swallow his pride.

We all got to like him very much indeed. He said Harry and I were as good as a brother and sister to him—better than his own brothers and sisters had been—and he was so grateful to us, there was nothing he would not have done to show

it.

Of course, that Graves, the farrier, had something to say about it, in his nasty vulgar way. One day we were talking about Charley, and Graves said to Harry, “Yes, he’s a handsome young fellow. If he’d a lame leg and a squint eye and red hair, I don’t suppose the missus would have taken him up so kindly.” Harry gave Graves a look and curled his lip. “Graves,” he said, “I know you don’t mean to be objectionable, but shoeing horses is more in your line than people’s feelings. Talk about what you understand!”

Mr. Wilkins had something to say too, only he wasn’t as coarse as Graves. There is a little more refinement about a parish clerk than there is about a farrier. Mr. Wilkins only said that, of course, we knew our own business best; but he didn’t think a broken down betting-man was the nicest kind of person to keep on a well-conducted establishment.

I said, “Mr. Wilkins, when you have an hotel, you can manage it yourself and choose your own people; while the ‘Stretford Arms’ is ours, we’ll do the same thing.”

Charley—Mr. Bright I suppose I ought to call him now—stayed with us for two months, and then one day he came to me, and he said, “Mrs. Beckett, I hope you won’t think me ungrateful, but I’m going to leave you.”

Of course I said I was very sorry, and I asked him why.

Then he told me that a young fellow who had known him in his good days had gone into business for himself, and had offered him a situation as clerk in his office if he would come.

Of course I saw that was a more suitable situation for a young man of his position, and I said so. A few days afterwards he left us, and there wasn’t a soul but was sorry when he left; our housemaid, silly girl!—who, I do believe, had fallen in love with him—crying her eyes out.

I heard about him several times after that, because he wrote to Harry, and said he was doing well, and was reconciled to his father again. And some weeks afterwards he came down to see us, and his handsome face was handsomer than ever. He was beautifully dressed, and looked what he was—a gentleman to the backbone.

He stayed and had tea with us, and told us that he had fallen in love with his friend's sister, and they were going to be married, and he was to be taken into partnership.

Something like a friend that, was it not?

He told us that he was in business in the Baltic.

"Why," said Harry, "that's in Russia!"

But he explained it was the Baltic—an exchange or something of the sort—in London, where business is done in grain, I think, and tallow, that comes from Russia. At any rate, he was doing very well, and since then I have seen his marriage in the paper.

Some day he has promised to bring his young wife down with him to stay at our hotel.

I am sure that we shall make them heartily welcome, and take care not to mention before her about his once having been our billiard-marker.

After he left, we had to look out for another marker, and we engaged a lad about fifteen. He was a wonderful player; but of all the forward, artful young demons that ever lived, I know there never was his equal. He was that crafty, you'd have thought he was fifty instead of fifteen. Talk about old heads on young shoulders! I'll just give you a specimen of what he could be up to. One day——

* * * * *

O, baby, whatever have you been doing? Nurse, look at the child's face! What does it mean? Been at the coal-scuttle! Why, I declare he's sucking a piece of coal now! O, oo dirty, dirty boy—and oo nice tlene pinny only just put on! Go and wash him, nurse, for goodness' sake, before his father sees him, or I sha'n't hear the last of it for a week.

# CHAPTER XVI.

## *THE SILENT POOL.*

One of the things that used to make me the most nervous when we first took to hotel-keeping was not knowing what sort of people you'd got sleeping under your roof. Anybody that's got a portmanteau can come and stay at an hotel or an inn, and how are you to know who and what they are? They may be murderers, hiding from justice; they may be thieves or burglars; and they may be very respectable people; but, unless they're old customers, you must take them on trust. It's not a bit of good saying you can judge by appearances, because you can't. The most gentlemanly and good-natured-looking man that ever stopped at our house gave us a cheque for his bill, and the cheque was never paid, and turned out to be one he'd helped himself to out of somebody else's cheque-book; and, worse than that, when he left he took a good deal more away in his portmanteau than he brought with him, and one thing was a beautiful new suit belonging to a young gentleman staying in the house, which we had to make good. It worried me terribly when we found out that we'd had a regular hotel thief stopping with us, I can tell you; and, after we found it out, I was all of a tremble for days, expecting every minute something more to be found missing.

Fortunately, the suit, and a scarf-pin of Harry's, and a silver-mounted walking-stick were all he went off with, so far as we ever discovered. Perhaps he didn't have a chance of getting anything else, and was satisfied with what he did get, and letting us in for £7 15s. He wanted to draw the cheque for ten pounds and have the change, I remember; but I said "No" to that, and very glad I was afterwards that I did. It was a lesson to us, not getting the cheque paid. And after that we had a notice printed across all our billheads, "No cheques taken," like most hotel-keepers do now. Some of them have a very nice collection of unpaid cheques, which they keep as curiosities.

Having been "done," as Harry calls it, once or twice, made us more careful, and so young fellows without much luggage that we didn't know anything about, when they began to live extravagantly, having champagne, and all that sort of thing, and staying for more than a day, we generally kept an eye on.

When they were out, we used to go up to their rooms and just have a look round

[illegible] and see if they'd got much clothes with them, because the portmanteau is nothing to go by. It may be stuffed full of old books and newspapers.

It was just while we were extra suspicious through having been swindled and robbed by the man I've just told you about, that two gentlemen with two small portmanteaus came in one evening by the last train, and wanted two bedrooms and a sitting-room.

They were about thirty-five years old, I should say, by the look of them. One was tall and thin, and the other was short and stout. They certainly looked respectable, and were well dressed; but they talked in rather a curious way to each other, using words that neither Harry nor I could understand, and that made us a little suspicious, and so we kept a sort of watch on them, and kept our ears open, too, as, of course, we had a right to do, seeing we had not only the reputation of the house to look after, but also the comfort and the property of the other customers.

I showed them their bedrooms, and, as it was late, I said, "I suppose, gentlemen, you won't want a fire lighted in the sitting-room this evening?"

What made me say that was, it was past eleven, and, of course, I expected they would take their candles and go to bed.

The tall one said, "Oh yes, we do; we're rather late birds."

"That's a nice thing," I said to myself. "They'll want the gas on half the night, and somebody will have to sit up and turn it off."

However, I said nothing to them, but rang the bell, and had the fire lighted, and the gas lighted, and their portmanteaus carried upstairs.

They both pulled their chairs up to the fire, and the short gentleman lit a pipe.

"Aren't you going to smoke?" he said to the tall gentleman.

"I don't know," said the tall gentleman; "a cigar always makes me queer." Then he turned to me, and said, "Have you got any very mild cigars?"

"Yes, sir," I said; "I think so. Is there anything else you want?"

"What shall I have?" said the stout gentleman, "Can I have a cup of tea?"

"What shall I have?" said the stout gentleman. "Can I have a cup of tea?

I looked at him. It was past eleven o'clock, and we were just on closing up everything, and the fire was out in the kitchen.

"Well, sir," I said; "if you particularly wish it—but——"

"Oh, don't trouble," he said. "Of course, we're in the country. I forgot. Bring me a whiskey-and-seltzer."

"Yes, sir; and what will you have, sir?" I said, turning to the long gentleman.

The long gentleman, if he was a minute making up his mind he was ten. First he thought he'd have whiskey, and then he said whiskey made him bilious; then he thought he'd have a brandy-and-soda; and then he thought he'd have a plain lemonade.

"You couldn't make my friend a basin of gruel, could you?" said the stout gentleman; "he's very delicate."

Of course I took him seriously, so I said, "Well, sir, the cook's gone to bed; but ——"

"Oh, don't pay any attention to what he says," says the tall gentleman; "he's a lunatic. Bring me—let's see—lemonade's such cold stuff this weather—I think I'll have a port-wine negus."

I was very glad to get the order and get out of the room, for I thought they were going to keep me there half an hour.

When I got downstairs, I said to Harry, "I can't make those two men out quite, and I'm not sure I like them."

"Oh," said Harry, "I dare say they're all right. I'll take their measure to-morrow."

I took up the cigar, and the whiskey-and-seltzer, and the port-wine negus, and put them down, and was just saying good night when the tall gentleman called me back.

"You've put nutmeg in this wine?" he said.

“Yes, sir, it’s usual to put nutmeg in negus.”

“I’m very sorry, but I can’t take nutmeg—it makes me bilious. I think I’ll have a bottle of lemonade, after all.”

“Bring him six of cod-liver oil hot, and a mustard-plaster,” said the stout gentleman.

The tall gentleman certainly looked rather delicate. He had a very fair face, and a lot of very fair hair, and there was a generally languid appearance about him.

“I can make you a mustard-plaster, sir,” I said, “if you would really like one.”

“Don’t you mind him,” said the tall gentleman; “he’s only trying to be funny.”

All this time he was pinching the cigar, and looking at it as though it were some nasty medicine.

“I’m afraid this is too strong for me,” he said. “Haven’t you anything milder?”

“Bring him a halfpenny sweetstuff one,” said the stout gentleman.

I took the negus and the cigar downstairs, and I said to Harry, “I shan’t go up again. Those two men are lunatics, I believe. They want lemonade and a halfpenny sweetstuff cigar now.”

Harry laughed, and said, “Go on—they’re chaffing you.”

“Well, I’m not going to be chaffed,” I said. So I called Jane, the waitress, who was just going to bed, poor girl, having to be up at six in the morning, and I said, “Jane, you must wait on No. 16, please.” And I gave her the lemonade.

She went up, and she was gone quite ten minutes. When she came down, I said, “Jane, whatever made you so long?”

“Oh, ma’am,” she said, “they’ve been asking me such things!”

“What have they been asking you, Jane?” I said, getting alarmed; for I was more than ever convinced the two men weren’t quite right.

“They’ve been asking me if ever there was a murder here, ma’am, and if there

isn’t a silent pool in the wood where a body’s been found. And the stout gentleman says that the tall gentleman is mad, and he’s his keeper.”

“I knew it,” I screamed. And then I said, “Harry, I’m not going to bed to-night with a lunatic in the house. You must go upstairs and tell them to go. We are not licensed to receive lunatics, and I won’t have it.”

“Nonsense!” said Harry. “It’s only their nonsense. They’ve been chaffing Jane, that’s all. Don’t be a goose.”

“Well,” I said, “I shall ask them to-morrow to go somewhere else.”

“Let’s wait till to-morrow, then,” said Harry. “We’ve no reasonable excuse for turning them out at this hour of the night. Let’s go to bed.”

“Very well,” I said. “Jane, take the candles into No. 16, and turn out the gas.”

Jane took the candles, and presently she came down and said, “Please, ma’am, the gentlemen say they’ll turn out the gas themselves.”

“Very well,” I said. “Then, Harry, you’ll have to sit up, for I’m not going to leave the house at the mercy of these two fellows. They’ll go to bed and leave the gas full on, or turn it off and turn it on again, and there’ll be an escape, and we shall all be blown up, or some fine thing.”

“All right, my dear; anything to please you. I don’t mind sitting up,” said Harry; “only don’t fidget yourself so, for goodness’ sake, or you’ll be ill.”

I said I shouldn’t fidget if he sat up, and I went to bed; but I was awfully wild, because we didn’t want that sort of people at our quiet little place. It was very good of Harry to sit up, and he certainly is very kind and considerate, and I dare say I was fidgety and nervous; but I hadn’t been very well, and the least thing upset me. The doctor said it was “nerves,” and I suppose that was what it was. I had had a bad illness, and that had left me low, and the least thing upset me. I think I told you at the time Harry wanted me to go away to the seaside and get better; but I wouldn’t do that, for I should have been fidgeting all day and all night, lest something should go wrong while I was away.

I went to bed, leaving Harry in the bar-parlour smoking his pipe, and reading the newspaper; and after a bit, I fell fast asleep.

When I woke up it was just getting light. I turned to look for Harry. *He wasn’t in bed.*

I went hot and cold all over.

“Harry!” I called out.

There was no answer.

I jumped out of bed and looked at my watch by the window. It was five o’clock in the morning.

“Oh,” I said, “this is wicked—this is infamous. The idea of those fellows sitting burning the gas till this time in the morning in a respectable house, and my great gaby of a husband not going up and telling them of it.”

I hurried on some of my things, and went down the stairs.

I had to pass No. 16. The door was wide open and the gas was out.

Whatever could it mean?

A terrible thought flashed through my brain.

They had murdered Harry, robbed the house, and decamped.

How I got down to the bar-parlour I don't know. Terror gave me strength.

Directly I got to the door I saw the gas was still on there. I pushed the door open and ran in, and there was Harry fast asleep in the arm-chair, with the newspaper in his lap and his pipe dropped out of his mouth and lying on the hearthrug.

"Harry!" I said, seizing him by the arm—"Harry!"

He started and opened his eyes. "Hullo," he said, "what's the matter?"

"What's the matter!" I said. "Why, it's five o'clock in the morning, and you've given me my death of fright."

He was flabbergasted when he found out what time it was, and he said he supposed he must have dropped off sound asleep.

There wasn't much suppose about it!

A nice thing, wasn't it, to leave him to look after those two fellows, and put the gas out for safety? and then for them to put *their* gas out themselves, and him to go to sleep with his burning, and drop his lighted pipe on the hearthrug.

It's a mercy we weren't all burned alive in our beds.

* * * * *

What with the fright and the broken rest, I wasn't at all well next day, and I dare say I was a little disagreeable. I know I began at Harry about those two gentlemen, and what we were going to do.

They didn't get up till nearly ten, and it was past eleven before they'd done breakfast. I went into the sitting-room to ask about dinner; but really to have another look at them.

They didn't look anything very dreadful in the daylight, and they were certainly very pleasant with me, though a bit more jokey than I felt inclined for.

They said they'd have dinner at five o'clock; and then they asked me all about the village and the neighbourhood, and they were on again about that silent pool.

There had been a murder committed there years and years ago, and they must have heard about it somehow, for they asked me all about it, and I told them the story as well as I could remember it.

There was a young woman, the daughter of a farmer, who lived near the wood, and she was engaged to be married to a young fellow who was a farmer's son. But it seems that she had been carrying on with a young gentleman of quality, who lived in a fine mansion some miles away. The young farmer had his suspicions, and watched her, and one moonlight night he saw her go out, and meet her gentleman lover in the wood near this pool. The lovers parted at the pool, after a very stormy scene, the poor girl saying that he had broken her heart, and that she would drown herself. An old man, a farm labourer, who was going through the wood, heard the girl say that she would drown herself. He didn't see her, he only heard those words.

The next morning the poor girl was found lying drowned in the pool, and it was supposed to be suicide. The old man's evidence of what he had heard, and something that the doctor said at the inquest, made it quite clear why the poor thing should have done so. But after the inquest was over and it had been brought in suicide, the rumour got about that it wasn't a suicide after all, but a murder. Some people said that the young farmer had pushed her in, in a mad fit of jealousy and revenge, and others that the young gentleman had done it, because the poor girl had threatened to tell everything, and make a scandal; and it seems he was dreadfully in debt, and engaged to be married to a very rich young lady.

The rumour got so strong, and such a lot of evidence kept being found out by the girl's father, that the young gentleman was arrested—arrested on the very morning that he was to have been married—and was charged with the murder. The pool had been dragged, and at the bottom of the pool was found, among other things, a piece of linen, with a small diamond pin still in it. It was in the days when gentlemen wore frill shirts, with a diamond pin in them—sometimes one pin and a little chain, and a smaller pin attached to that. I dare say you remember them, because it is not so long ago that some old-fashioned gentlemen wore them still. It was said that this belonged to the man who had pushed the poor girl in—that there had been a struggle, and she had clung to him, and the shirt-front had been torn away, and the girl had gone into the pool with it in her hand, and opening her hands struggling in the water, it had gone to the bottom.

At the trial, when the gentleman's servants were examined, it was proved that he

At the trial, when the gentleman's servants were examined, it was proved that he had come home that night very excited, and one of them had noticed that he wore his coat buttoned over his chest, and it was found out that a pin, which he was known to have had, had not been seen since—that he could not produce it, though he swore he was innocent.

He was committed for trial, I think—at any rate, after the examination before the magistrates there was another grand trial at the assizes, and everybody thought he would be found guilty, when suddenly the young farmer came into the court, and made a tremendous sensation by saying that he had murdered the girl himself, in a fit of passion.

He had overheard the conversation between the lovers, and he had sprung out on them, and attacked the young gentleman. The poor girl had clung to him to protect him, badly as he had used her, and that was how the piece of shirt and the diamond pin came away in her hand. The young gentleman, who was a coward, or he could never have treated a trusting girl as he did, slunk away, for the farmer threatened he would kill him like a dog if he did not. And as soon as he was gone, leaving the girl half-fainting, the young farmer turned on her, and she answered him, and said she hated him, and upbraided him for attacking the man she loved; and this made him so mad that he pushed her into the pool, and she was drowned.

I couldn't tell the gentlemen all the details, because I didn't know them, but that was the story as I had heard it. The young farmer was put in the dock in the place of the young gentleman, and was found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged; but he managed to hang himself in his cell before the day of execution. The young gentleman lost his rich bride, and went away abroad, and they say that he was stabbed soon afterwards in a row in a low gambling-house, which was a terrible tragedy, and three young lives lost because a man was wicked and a woman was weak; but I suppose there will be tragedies of that sort as long as the world lasts.

The gentlemen seemed very interested in what I told them, and I began to think better of them, because it is always nice to tell a story to intelligent people, and to see that you have made an impression.

After breakfast, they asked me to direct them to the pool in the wood, and they went off there, and didn't come back till dinner-time.

When they came in I asked them if they had seen the pool.

When they came in I asked them if they had seen the pool.

“Yes,” said the tall gentleman; “it is a lovely place for a murder.”

“A *lovely* place for a murder,” I thought to myself. “That’s a nice way to talk certainly;” but I was wanted in the bar, and we didn’t have any more conversation.

That evening Harry had gone upstairs into one of the rooms that was being repapered, and when he came down he looked very serious.

“What’s the matter?” I said.

“Well,” he said, “I was passing No. 16, and, hearing them talking rather loud, I stopped for a minute, not exactly to listen; but I couldn’t help hearing what they said, and I heard something that’s rather worried me.”

“What is it?” I said. “You’d better tell me, or I shall think all manner of things.”

I had to press him; but he told me at last.

“I heard one say to the other,” he said, “that he thought they couldn’t do better than get the girl to that pool, and then have her pushed in.”

“‘Yes,’ said the other; ‘but who is to do it?’

“‘Why, James Maitland,’ said the other.

“‘But suppose she screamed—wouldn’t her screams be heard? And if her screams were heard, everybody would know it wasn’t suicide.’

“‘No,’ said the other, ‘there are no houses near. This other girl was murdered there, and everybody thought it was suicide.’

“There was silence for a minute, and then the other (the short one, I think, by his voice) said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

“Oh, Harry!” I said, “how awful!”

“We must keep our heads,” said Harry, “and not let them think we’ve heard anything.”

“Did you hear any more?”

“Yes, I heard the long one say that they’d better go up to the pool to-night, so as to see how it looked in the dark, and then they would be able to arrange all the details.”

“Harry,” I said, “not another moment do I rest in this house, with two men plotting murder in it. Go and tell them that we know all, and order them off the premises.”

Harry thought a minute, and then he said—

“No; we’ve got no proof yet. I’d better go and put the matter in the hands of the police.”

“Yes; go at once,” I said.

Harry went up to the station and told his story to the inspector, and the inspector said we had better not say anything to the two men, but have them watched. He said they wouldn’t know him, so he’d put on plain clothes and do the job himself; he didn’t care to trust it to Jones, as Jones was a bit of a fool. You remember Jones—he was the policeman that Dashing Dick had such a game with, with the empty revolver.

I said to Harry, “Well, if he doesn’t arrest them to-night, they don’t come back here. I’ve made up my mind to that.”

The inspector came down to our house soon afterwards in plain clothes, and sat in our bar-parlour. Harry persuaded him to let him go with him to the wood, and he promised he should, if he’d be careful.

About seven o’clock, the two fellows went out, and as soon as they’d gone the inspector and Harry went off, and took a short cut, so as to get to the pool first and conceal themselves.

Harry told me all about what happened afterwards.

They concealed themselves behind a clump of trees near the pool, and presently those two fellows came along talking earnestly together.

When they got to the pool they were silent for a bit, and walked all round it

When they got to the pool they were silent for a bit, and walked all round it, looking at the ground.

“This’ll be the place,” said the tall one presently; “this mound gives a man a good foothold, and he can throw the girl in instead of pushing her.”

“Yes,” said the other. “James Maitland mustn’t make the appointment with the girl here, but in the wood, and then they can walk this way. He’ll start quarrelling with her here, and then he can throw her in.”

“Where’s he to go to when he’s done it? Run away?”

“No; stop and brazen it out. Nobody will see him or the girl together. We can arrange that, and the suspicion is sure to fall on the other fellow, because of what’s already passed between him and Norah. Besides,” said the short fellow, “who’s going to accuse Maitland? Nobody knows that he’s mixed up with the girl.”

The tall fellow thought a bit.

“Yes,” he said, “I think that’ll be the best. I don’t see how we can get rid of the girl in any better way than that. If she was shot or stabbed, nobody could set up the theory of suicide; but if she’s found drowned, of course there’ll be nothing to prove that she didn’t go in of her own accord.”

When Harry got to that, I said, “Oh, Harry, it makes one’s blood run cold to think of the villains coolly plotting to murder a young girl like that!”

“Yes,” he said, “it made me feel creepy, and the inspector said, ‘I think I’ll collar them now. We’ve heard enough. If we let it go on they may make up their minds to have this poor girl murdered somewhere else, and then we may be too late.’

“He was just about to spring out and collar them, when the short fellow said to the long fellow, ‘One minute, my boy. I’ve got a magnificent idea. There’ll be an inquest. Can’t we make the comic man foreman of the jury? I can see a splendid scene—the comic man rubbing it into the villain and getting roars of laughter.’”

“What!” I exclaimed. “A comic man on a jury!”

“Don’t you see, little woman,” said Harry, “what it all meant? The inspector did in a minute. These gentlemen aren’t murderers. They’ve come down here to

write a play, and they're going to make the Silent Pool their big sensation scene."

* * * * *

I didn't take it all in for a minute; but when I did I laughed till I cried. Everything was explained at once. But how on earth were we to know that those two eccentric gentlemen were play-writers, and that they had come down to our inn so as to study the Silent Pool as a sensation scene for a drama.

I wasn't a bit afraid of them after that, and I let them turn their own gas out at all hours of the night, for they generally sat and wrote till the small hours, and a nice noise they made sometimes, shouting at each other—"trying the dialogue," they called it. They stayed with us nearly a fortnight, and we got to like them very much. Harry called them Mr. Lampost and Mr. Waterbutt; but, of course, not to their faces. They used to come into our parlour and tell us funny stories, and we were quite sorry when they went. They told us what they were doing at last, when they found we could be trusted, and they had a gentleman down from London, who was going to paint the scene.

When the play was brought out, Harry and I had two beautiful seats sent us to go and see it, and we enjoyed it tremendously. The Silent Pool was as real as though it had come from our wood; and there was the murder and everything. And fancy our thinking that two play-writers were two murderers! How they would have laughed if they had known! I noticed two or three little things in the play that they had picked up in our place; and one room in one of the acts was our bar-parlour exactly.

When I saw it, I said, "Oh, Harry, I do believe they've put us in it!"—and it was quite a relief when the landlady came on and wasn't me at all, but a comic old lady who made everybody scream every time she opened her mouth.

Mr. Lampost and Mr. Waterbutt promised us that when they were writing another play they would come and stay with us again, and I hope they will. Whenever I hear their play spoken about I always say, "Ah, that play was written in our house." But I never say that we thought they were murderers, and had them watched by the police.

One thing I was very thankful for, and that is that Mr. Wilkins didn't get hold of them to tell them about the murder in the Silent Pool. If he had, he'd have gone

about and told everybody that he´d collaborated in the drama.

As it is, if anybody could claim the credit of having had a hand in it, it was not Mr. Wilkins, but me.

* * * * *

Good gracious me! Isn’t supper ready? Hasn’t cook got a fit? Doesn’t Harry want the key of the cash-box? Has nothing gone wrong downstairs or upstairs? Wonders will never cease! I’ve actually been able to finish my “Memoir” of Mr. Lampost and Mr. Waterbutt, and their visit to the ‘Stretford Arms,’ without anybody knocking at the door, and saying, “Please, ma’am, you’re wanted.” Thank goodness!

# CHAPTER XVII.

## *THE OWEN WALESES.*

They had the sitting-rooms, No. 6 and No. 7.

“Sixes and Sevens” we called them, and certainly that’s what they were always at. They stayed three weeks, while their house in London was being painted and done up inside and out; and if they had stayed much longer, I think mad I should have gone. When they came I had picked up my strength again wonderfully, and was quite well; but when they went away I was reduced to such a state of nervousness that if a door banged I jumped out of my chair and burst into a perspiration.

One day we had a letter from a lady in London, asking if we had two sitting-rooms and four bedrooms to spare, and giving a list of the family she wanted to bring with her, if we could accommodate them for a fortnight. Mrs. Owen Wales was the name on the lady’s card, and it was a very good address. So we wrote back to say that we had the bedrooms to spare, and also two nice sitting-rooms—No. 6 and No. 7. She had asked us to give her an idea of our terms for such a party for three weeks; but Harry said it was no good making a reduction, as large families were sometimes more trouble than small ones, and our terms were quite moderate enough. So I wrote a nice polite letter, and said what our regular charges were, and that as we had only limited accommodation, and were generally full, we couldn’t make any reduction, but they might rely upon every attention being paid to their comfort.

One or two letters passed before the thing was settled, and then one day we had a telegram ordering fires to be lighted in both sitting-rooms and dinner to be ready at 6.30 for six people, in the largest sitting-room.

They arrived about half-past five—Mr. and Mrs. Owen Wales and two young gentlemen and two young ladies and a maidservant.

Mr. Owen Wales was a very short and very stout gentleman of about fifty-five, with the reddest hair and whiskers I ever saw in my life. Mrs. Owen Wales was about fifty, I should say, but she was six feet, if she was an inch, and a fine

women in every way; in fact, I may say a magnificent woman. The two sons, Mr. Robert and Mr. David, were fine, tall young men, taking after the mother. One was twenty-two and the other nineteen, and the daughters, Miss Rhoda and Miss Maggie, were both tall, too, and neither of them, I should say, would see twenty again. Pryce, the lady's-maid, was the queerest lady's-maid I ever saw in my life. She said she was forty to one of our girls, who asked the question delicately; but she was sixty if she was a day. She was one of those hard-faced, straight-up-and-down, hawk-eyed, eagle-nosed old women that never laugh and never smile, and seem to have been turned out of a mould hard set, and never to have melted.

I soon saw what I had to deal with in Mrs. Pryce (she was a Miss, but was always called Mrs. by her own request,) directly she got out of the fly, that came on first with the luggage.

She began to order me about, if you please, before she had been inside the door a second, and to give me directions what was to be done, as if I had never had a respectable person stay at my hotel before.

I listened to what she had to say quietly, and I said, "Very good; I will call the chambermaid, and she will attend to you."

She looked at me in a supercilious sort of way, and said, "Humph!" out loud, and growled something to herself, which I know as well as possible, though I didn't hear it, was that she supposed I was above my business.

Now, that is a thing nobody can say of me with truth; but I never could submit to be sat upon; and nothing puts my back up quicker than for anybody to try it on, especially people who are always giving themselves airs and showing off.

After she'd gone upstairs with the chambermaid and the man who carried the luggage up, to see it put in the proper rooms, I said to my husband, "Harry, there'll be trouble with that person before we've done with her—you mark my words." Harry said, "Well, my dear, don't you begin making it," which made me turn on him rather spitefully. One would have thought, to hear him say that, that I was inclined to quarrel with people and to make words, which I never was, and I hope I never shall be; though, of course, a great deal depends upon the health you are in and the condition of your nerves. You have a baby who is teething, and keeps you awake night after night for a fortnight, and I think Job himself would have lost his patience and turned snappy. And that was what had

happened to me with my second—a dear little girl, with the loveliest dark eyes you ever saw in your life, and more like me than Harry, with the prettiest ways a baby ever had, till the teething began, and then the poor mite, I am bound to say, she didn't show her mother's amiability of temper. (Ahem! Harry.)

"Well, of all the impudent things I ever saw! I left my papers on my desk while I ran downstairs to go to the stores cupboard with cook, and that impudent husband of mine has been reading my manuscript, and has put in that nasty remark. I shan't scratch it out—it shall stand there as a lasting disgrace to him. It will show young women what they have to expect when they get married, and how little men appreciate a woman who lets them have their own way, and doesn't make herself a tyrant.

And talking about tyrants, if ever there was one in this world it was that Mr. Owen Wales. That little bit of a fellow, who, as Harry said, was only a pair of red whiskers on two stumps, made his big wife and his big family tremble before him. But I shall come to that presently.

It was as much as I could do to keep from saying, "Oh!" and giggling right out when they all got out of the fly, and the little man walked in like a small turkey-cock surrounded by his giant family. They really looked giants and giantesses by the side of him; but not one of them spoke a word or offered a remark, leaving everything to "Pa."

Harry said afterwards it reminded him of a little bantam cock when Mr. Owen Wales first strutted in; but there wasn't much of the bantam when he began to crow—I mean when he began to speak. It was more like a bassoon. He had the deepest and gruffest voice I ever heard. Really, you would wonder how such sounds could come out of a little man's throat.

He spoke in his gruff voice in a short, jumpy way, as if he was ordering a regiment of soldiers about. "Rooms ready?" "Yes, sir; quite ready." "Fires alight?" "Yes, sir; they have been alight all day." He grunted, and then he turned to his family, who all stood meek and mute behind him, and said, "Go on!" Well, he didn't say it—he growled it, and they all turned and went upstairs after the waitress, like school-children, leaving Mr. Owen Wales to settle with the flyman. Our flyman is a very civil flyman, but Mr. Owen Wales bullied him about some trifle till, the poor man told me afterwards, he felt inclined to jump off the box and give the "little beggar" a good shaking. And that's how I often felt with him afterwards—that I should like to take him up, put him under my

felt with him afterwards—that I should like to take him up, put him under my arm, and drop him quietly out of the window, to teach him a lesson.

But his family stood in absolute terror of him, especially his wife, who was the dullest, meekest, quietest creature for her size that you ever saw. She could have taken that little man and given him a good shaking at any moment if she had chosen to put out her strength; and instead of that she obeyed him like a dog and trembled if he spoke cross to her or swore.

And he did swear. Not very bad swearing, but still swearing all the same. It was only one word he used, beginning with D; but he would say it as if he was thinking it out loud. This was the sort of thing. “Where did I put my glasses? D——!” “Hasn’t anybody seen them? D——!” “Oh, there they are on the sofa. D——!” “What time is it—half-past ten? D——!” “Which way is the wind this morning—east? D——!” And so on. It was such a habit with him that I think he didn’t know what he did it for. One Sunday I heard him, coming out of church, before the people were out of the doors, say quite out loud, “I have left my Church Service in the pew. D——!” And, turning round to go back, he pushed up against the clergyman’s wife, and apologized, “Beg pardon, ma’am, I’m sure. D——!”

He used to say that word between every sentence he spoke aloud, just like some people grunt between every sentence when they talk; and being such a pompous little man, and so conspicuous with his red hair and whiskers and his stoutness, it made it seem odder than ever, and attracted everybody’s attention.

I believe he was a very clever little man, which perhaps accounted for his queer ways. I was told that he was a very wonderful man at figures; and I think he was under Government, in some great office—at least, I’ve heard so; and this perhaps accounted for his muttering, and thinking, and swearing so much to himself. He really forgot that anybody was in the room, his head being on something else. Sometimes at dinner, when the joint was in front of him, he would help himself and begin to eat, forgetting his wife and family altogether, until one of them would venture to say “Pa.” And then he would look up suddenly, and say quite sharply, “Eh? What? Oh, d——!” and then serve them.

When he was in our hotel he always had one of the sitting-rooms to himself, and he would sit there for hours with a lot of papers, which he had in a big dispatch-box he carried about with him. I suppose he was ciphering, but I couldn’t tell, because he always locked the door, and nobody was allowed to go near when he was there. The only person he was really civil to, and was really afraid of, was

was there. The only person he was really civil to, and was really afraid of, was Mrs. Pryce, the lady's-maid. I'm sure that old woman knew something; for he never tried any of his bullying on with her. Sometimes, when dinner was ready, and he was locked in his room, there wasn't one of them—not his wife, and not his children—who dared go and knock and tell him. They used to send for Pryce to go; and she would march up to the door as bold as brass and knock, and say, quite short, "Dinner, sir."

If Pryce did that he would come out in a minute; but once, when Pryce was out, his eldest daughter went and gave a feeble little tap after dinner had been ready three-quarters of an hour, and he came out foaming at the mouth, and dancing about in a rage, and roaring and bellowing, like a wild animal that had been stirred up in its cage with a long pole.

The least thing would put him out. I remember when they first came I had to tell him one day that his wife had gone for a walk with the young ladies.

"Mrs. Wales has gone out, sir," I said.

"That's not her name," he said. "D——! Don't you think you ought to call people who stay with you by their proper name? D——! My name is Owen Wales, D——! not Wales. My wife's Mrs. Owen Wales; my daughters are Miss Owen Waleses. Don't chop half our name off, please. D——!"

And with that he went growling and muttering up the stairs, as though he'd been having a fight with another animal over a bone.

I've told you that when he was about, the rest of the family were like lambs. Even the sons, grown-up young men as they were, didn't dare to open their mouths hardly before him; but when he went up to London and left them in the hotel by themselves, oh dear me! you wouldn't have believed what a wonderful change took place.

Their mamma was just the same quiet, meek, long-suffering creature; but the young ladies and gentlemen were like wild animals, when the keeper's gone away and has taken the horsewhip with him. All the pa that was in them came out, and they quarrelled and went on at each other awfully; and their poor ma was no more use than a baby to manage them. She used to lie in bed generally when Mr. Owen Wales was away till eleven o'clock in the morning, and the family used to come down at all hours, one after the other, and quarrel over their breakfast.

breakfast.

When Mr. Owen Wales was with us everybody used to be at breakfast at nine sharp, all looking as if butter wouldn't melt; and woe betide any of them that was a minute late at a meal except himself.

But, oh, the meals when he wasn't there! It was dreadful. It was the same with dinner as with breakfast. They'd come in one after the other, and quarrel all the time. And one day at dinner Miss Rhoda slapped Mr. Robert's face, and Mr. Robert threw a glass of water over her, and they all jumped up, and I thought they'd have a free fight. I was so terrified that I dropped the vegetable-dish I was handing round out of my hand on the table, and, as it was cauliflower and melted-butter, and it all fell over into Mrs. Owen Wales's lap and ruined her dress, I didn't know which way to look or what to do. I thought perhaps they'd all turn on to me, and begin to tear my hair or something; but they went on calling each other beasts and cats and crocodiles, and other pet names without taking any notice, and their ma just wiped up the melted-butter out of her lap with her napkin, and said gently, "It doesn't matter, Mrs. Beckett; it'll come out." And then she looked up at the young people and said, "Children, children, do, pray, be quiet."

But the brothers went on at each other furiously; one brother taking one sister's side and one the other; and the young ladies began scratching their brothers' faces. And I don't know how it would have ended, only Pryce walked into the room as calm as a judge, and they all sat down as if by magic.

I found out afterwards they were afraid she would tell their father; they knew their mother wouldn't. Pryce was the master when the master was away—there was no mistake about that; and I've heard her go into Mrs. Owen Wales's room, and order her to get up—not exactly order her, but you know what I mean—tell her it was late in a way that was as good as an order to get up.

The constant scenes when their pa was away quite wore me out, and I said to Harry that my nerves wouldn't stand it. They always used to quarrel at the top of their voices, and the young ladies used to scream and rush out bathed in tears, and bang the doors and run upstairs into their bed-room; and I said we might as well keep a lunatic asylum at once—better, for we should have keepers and strait-jackets then, and padded rooms.

Harry said they were a queer family, certainly. But he supposed it was their

being kept under so awfully by their pa made them burst out when he wasn't there—and perhaps that *was* it; but whatever it was, it was very unpleasant in an hotel, which had always had quiet, steady-going people.

And it was not only quarrelling, but they were all over the place. The young gentlemen would come into the bar, and into the bar-parlour, and go on anyhow; and one day I found Mr. David sitting on the table in the kitchen, and making the servants roar with laughter at a figure which he had got, which was an old man on a donkey, that worked with strings; and Harry came in one day and told me that he had seen Mr. Robert walking with our nursemaid, while she was out with baby in the perambulator.

I said to Harry that the sooner their pa came back again the better it would be for us, for the place was being turned into a bear garden, and their ma was a poor, helpless creature to be left with such a lot.

But the worst that happened was one afternoon. Mr. Robert and Mr. David came down and said to Harry, "Mr. Beckett, we want you to do us a favour." "What is it?" said Harry. "We're going up to London, and we can't get back till the last train, which gets into ——" (a station four miles from us) "at one in the morning. Will you let some one sit up for us, and not say anything about it to Pryce or pa?"

Harry, in his good-natured way, said, "All right," and off my lords went. I was very cross when I heard about it; but Harry said they were grown-up young men, and perhaps they wanted to go to the theatre.

I wouldn't let Harry sit up alone, so I sat up too. And, if you please, it was past two in the morning when a cab stopped at the door. And, when Harry let them in, if these two young gentlemen were not in a nice condition! Their hats were stuck on the backs of their heads, and they could hardly stand upright—they were so much the worse for what they had had.

They grinned a most idiotic grin when they saw me, and tried to say something polite; but they couldn't get a distinct sentence out.

While I was lighting their candles they sat on the stairs and talked a lot of gibberish, and looked like idiots. It was really quite painful.

I said to Harry, "Get them up to bed, for goodness' sake, and carry their candles,

or they'll set the place on fire."

Harry tried to get them up, and by propping one against the wall and holding him up with one hand, while with the other he helped the other to get on his legs, he managed it at last. Then they both took hold of his arms, and they tried to go upstairs three abreast, but before they got half-way they both tumbled down, and pulled Harry on top of them, and the candlestick fell out of his hand and came clattering downstairs.

Harry laughed, but I was awfully wild. It wasn't the sort of thing for a respectable house like ours; and I was so afraid some of the other customers would hear the noise and be disturbed by it.

I had to help Harry to get them up again, and I said, "Do please try and go to bed quietly, there's good young gentlemen. You're disturbing the whole house!"

They said, "All right, Mrs. Beckett. You're goo'short, you are." And they did try to steady themselves, and we managed to get them all right to the first landing, I going up in front with the candles. I wasn't going behind, for fear they should all fall down on top of me.

But when we got to the top of the landing I thought I heard a slight noise. I looked up, and there, with a candle in her hand leaning over the banister, was that Mrs. Pryce.

She was fully dressed, and had evidently had an idea what was going to happen, and the cat—that ever I should call her so!—had sat up and listened for the young gentlemen to come in and go to bed.

When they looked up, too, and saw her it seemed to sober them for a minute. "It's all right, Pryce," said Mr. Robert. "We've been to the misshurry meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Beckett, and losh lash train."

If a glance could have withered them that old woman's would have done it. "Very good," she said; "your father shall be informed of this." Then, looking at me, she said, "As to you, ma'am, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—encouraging young men in vice and drunkenness."

"Oh!" I said, almost with a shriek; "oh, you wicked creature! How dare you say such a thing?"

Harry had heard what she said, too. He left go of the two young men, and they both went down bang on the landing; and he jumped up the stairs, two at a time, till he reached Mrs. Pryce, and then, his eyes glaring (he looked splendid like that), he almost shouted, “Apologize to my wife for your insolence, this minute!”

“I shall not,” she said, never flinching an inch. “It’s disgraceful, and you ought to lose your licence.”

“Do you suppose they got drunk with us?” yelled Harry.

“I don’t know, and I don’t care,” said that female; “but they *are* drunk, and you and your wife are up with them at two o’clock in the morning. I shall inform my master at once. This is not a fit house for respectable people.”

“Isn’t it?” shouted Harry; “it’s a d—— sight too respectable for you and your lot! You and your master can go to the——”

“Harry,” I said, running up, and catching hold of him; “Harry, be calm; think of the other customers.”

It was too late. People hearing the row had got up, and I could see white figures peeping through the half-open doors, and one old lady rushed out in her nightgown shrieking, “What is it? The house is on fire—I know it is. Fire! fire! fire!—--”

“Hush, hush!” I cried, “don’t, don’t!”—and, in my horror, I put my hands over her mouth to stop her. “It’s nothing; it’s only two gentlemen drunk.” The old lady caught sight of the two young Mr. Owen Waleses sitting on the landing, and remembering how she was dressed, and that she hadn’t got her wig on, bolted into her room and banged the door to after her, and I went to the other doors and told the people it was nothing, that they weren’t to be frightened; it was only two of our gentlemen had been overcome by something which had disagreed with them.

Oh, it was dreadful! I didn’t know where the scandal would end, or what would be the consequences of it. How we got those two young fellows to bed—how I quieted Harry down, and left that wretched woman Pryce triumphant on the staircase, with a wicked, fiendish glare in her eye—I only remember in a confused sort of way; but I know, when it was all over and I got to bed, I had to

have a good cry to prevent myself having hysterics. And Harry, as soon as he'd got me round a bit, worked himself up into a temper again, and, instead of going to sleep, kept on turning from side to side in his indignation, and saying, if it hadn't been for me, he'd "have wrung that old cat's neck for her."

* * * * *

The next morning the two young gentlemen came into our private room after breakfast, and apologized, like gentlemen. They said they were very sorry for what had occurred, and they hoped we shouldn't think too badly of them. I said I should think no more of it, though, of course, it had made a terrible scandal in the house, and would probably injure our business; but I should not forget the impertinence of the woman Pryce, who was only a servant, and had no business to dare to interfere or to speak to me in such a way.

They said that I was quite right; but they daren't say anything to Pryce, as their only chance of getting her not to tell their father was by being very humble to her and smoothing her down.

I don't know how they tried to smooth her down; but they didn't do it, for their pa came down the next day, and that Pryce told him everything, and a nice row there was. The way that little man went on at those two great six-foot fellows was awful. They shook like aspen-leaves before him—I expected to see him set to and thrash them every minute, though he would have had to stand on a chair to box their ears. Of course, they deserved all they got; the cruel part was that he bullied his wife as well, and told her it was all her fault, and she was ruining her children, and she wasn't fit to be a mother, and I don't know what. Really one would have thought she was a little girl herself. I wondered if he was going to stand her in the corner, or send her to bed. The poor woman trembled and sobbed before the little bantam, till I quite lost patience with her. Why, if she had given him a push, she could have sent him over into the fender, for he stood on the hearthrug, and foamed and swore till he was nearly black in the face.

The door was wide open—the sitting-room door—and we heard all he said, and he rang the bell, and sent for me and Harry, and demanded to know "the rights of it."

It was very awkward; but I got out of it. I said, "If you've anything to say, sir, you can say it to my husband;" and with that I vanished out of the room. He didn't frighten Harry, though he tried to; but the end of it was, he said he

shouldn’t stay in the house any longer, and Harry said he was glad to hear it, as it saved him the pain of having to present him with the bill, and ask him to take his custom and his family somewhere else.

When Harry said that, he told me, the little man swelled out to such a size Harry thought he was going to burst; but he only swore, and ordered Harry to leave the room instantly, which, to avoid a disturbance, he did.

And, thank goodness, the next day they all departed; but not without a good many d——s from Mr. Owen Wales over the bill. The young gentlemen looked very sheepish, as well they might, and the whole family were tamed again, and hadn’t a word to say among them. Their tamer was there, and they quailed before him. Pryce was the first to go; she went in a fly by herself with the luggage. Harry was at the door as she drove away, and he raised his hat, with mock politeness, to my lady.

She gave him a look, and turned her head, and sniffed, and said, “Good afternoon, sir; it’s the first time I’ve stayed at a pothouse, and I hope it will be the last!”

A pothouse! Oh, when I think of it even now it makes the blood rush to the roots of my hair. I do believe if I had been at the door when that creature said that I should have——

* * * * *

Miss Measom not in yet? Why, it’s past eleven!—what does she mean by such conduct? She’ll have to go. I will not have a barmaid who cannot come in at a decent and proper time. When she does come in I shall give her a piece of my mind. She’s much too flighty for her place; I thought so when you engaged her. You go to bed, Harry; I’ll sit up for *her*.

# CHAPTER XVIII.

## *MR. WILKINS.*

Looking over what I have written about Mr. Wilkins, who was for such a long time one of our most regular customers of an evening at the ‘Stretford Arms,’ I feel inclined now to cross some of it out; but, of course, it would be difficult to do that, because at the time I wrote of him things were different to what they are now, and I only made the remarks about him which I thought at the time he deserved. Even that which was written after he had left the neighbourhood referred to the part he took in things which happened at the time he was with us, and so of course it wouldn’t have done to anticipate.

Poor Mr. Wilkins!

He offended me very often, and at times he was rather a nuisance, poor old gentleman, because he was one who would have a finger in everybody’s pie, and was fond of giving off his opinions, whether he was asked for them or not. But that is all forgiven and forgotten now, and I only think of the old gentleman at his best. We all have our peculiarities—I dare say I have mine—and certainly Wilkins had his; but it would be a very queer world if nobody had any crotchets, and everybody was exactly alike. There wouldn’t be any novels, and there wouldn’t be any plays—at least, I suppose not—though, of course, if we had been all alike in our ways and in our dispositions, authors would have had to get over the difficulty somehow.

You remember that Mr. Wilkins had a daughter in service in London, and it was through her that he found out that I was the Mary Jane who had written her “Memoirs” when she was in service. He was very proud of his daughter, and he had every reason to be so, for she was a very good girl, and had only lived in good families. He had also a daughter who had married, and had gone out with her husband to Australia. She used to write to her father now and then, and when he had a letter he was very proud of it, and he would bring it round to our house, and read bits of it that were about the life there out loud to the company, and he used to say, “My girl writes a good letter, doesn’t she, Mrs. Beckett? She could write a good book if she liked, and it would be very interesting.”

Poor Mr. Wilkins, I'm quite sure he had an idea that his daughter could write a book on Australia because she had been there a year or two and could write a very fair letter. Some people think that you've only to write what you have seen, and it will be as interesting to the public as it is to you and your friends. I believe much cleverer people than Mr. Wilkins think that, because I've seen books advertised in the newspapers, such as "A Month in America, by a Lady," or "Six Weeks in Russia, by a Gentleman," and all that sort of thing, and one of the gentlemen who stayed at our hotel left a book behind him from Mudie's, and I read it before sending it after him, and it was nothing but a lot of letters, which a lady, who had gone abroad for her health, had written home to her children. Very interesting to her children and her friends, I dare say; but I thought a lot of it quite silly, and I thought to myself that she must be pretty conceited to fancy everybody wanted to read her letters that she wrote home. But I must not say any more on the subject, because people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, and perhaps somebody will say that I'm a nice one to talk, seeing that I am always writing down everything that happens to me, and having the impudence to try and get it published.

What brought it up was Mr. Wilkins being so absurd about his daughter in Australia.

In most of these letters there was a glowing account of how well she was getting on, and how her husband had been very lucky out there, and was making money and getting property. It seems he had bought some land, or something, "up country," which meant a very long way off, and it had turned out so well that he had bought some more, and, according to the young woman, they were on the high road to fortune.

Then, her letters began to ask her father to come out to them and settle down with them. She was sure he would like it, and he could be a great help to them as well, as her husband wanted somebody he could trust very much.

At first Mr. Wilkins shook his head, and said he was too old, that he couldn't go across the seas, and he thought he should feel more comfortable if he died in his native place and was buried in the old parish churchyard.

But by-and-by something happened which made him hesitate. His daughter up in London was engaged to a young man, and they were to be married in a short time. He was a young man in a very fair position, being head barman in a public-house in the City, and a good deal of the management was left to him, the

proprietor having a taste for sport and going away racing a good deal, and the wife not knowing much about the trade, and not being a good business woman.

Mr. Wilkins's daughter in London was very fond of her young man, who was very sober and steady, and getting on well and putting money by.

All went very well until the landlord of the public-house went one day to the races at Epsom—the City and Suburban day, I think it was—and he drove down with some friends in a trap. What happened afterwards came out at the inquest. They may have had too much to drink; but, at any rate, driving back home in the evening they ran into a lamp-post, and the landlord was thrown out on his head, and when he was picked up it was found that he was seriously injured, and he never regained consciousness, but died the next day.

After that Miss Wilkins didn't see so much of her lover. He said that, the governor being dead, he had to be always looking after the business, and that prevented him getting out so often as he used to do. The poor girl didn't suspect anything at first; but, at last, she would have been blind not to see that something was wrong. After a bit the young man tried to get up a quarrel with her; but she, being a sweet temper, wouldn't quarrel, and then he told her that he had changed his mind, that he didn't think they were suited to each other, and asked her to break it off.

It upset her terribly, and made her quite ill. It wasn't only a blow to her pride; but she really loved the fellow. She found out what it all meant when, six months after the landlord met with that fatal accident, her young man married the widow and stepped into an old-established City public-house doing a big trade.

That was the worst blow of all to poor Miss Wilkins. It showed her how unworthy her young man had been of her, having thrown her over to marry a woman old enough to be his mother, and all for money.

She fretted so much that she became quite ill, and wasn't able to stop in a situation, and so she came home to her father. But that didn't do her any good, for she moped terribly, and was always brooding, and couldn't be roused, or persuaded to go out.

I felt very sorry for the poor girl, and I asked her to tea several times; but she only came once, and then she was so miserable that it was more like a funeral feast than a friendly tea-party.

She began to get paler and thinner every day, and Mr. Wilkins grew quite alarmed about her, and the doctor said the only thing for her was to go right away and be among fresh faces and fresh scenes, and then, perhaps, in time she would make an effort and forget her trouble.

I don't believe myself that a woman ever forgets a trouble of that sort. They may seem to before the world; but it is only put away for a time. It comes back again. But there is no doubt that it comes back less in a new place than in an old one, where there is nothing to take your attention off it.

It was just after the doctor had told Wilkins this that another letter came from Australia, from the daughter there, almost begging her father to come out to them. The doctor said, when he heard of it, "Why not go, Wilkins, and take your daughter with you?" And at last the poor old gentleman made up his mind that he would. Miss Wilkins was eager to go too. She said she should be glad to get away from everything that reminded her of the past. I think Wilkins would still have hesitated, but for the fact that just at the time our clergyman was changed, the Rev. Tommy going away to a seaside place, and a new clergyman coming—quite a young fellow, who looked almost like a boy, and had a lot of new notions that poor Wilkins said were dreadful. He and Wilkins didn't get on at all from the very first, the old fellow rather resenting what he called the young clergyman's "new-fangled ways." And the young clergyman got wild with Wilkins, who, he said, was "an old fossil," and "behind the age," and they had words. And then Wilkins in a pet said he should resign, and the young clergyman said he was very glad of it, and he thought it was about time, as Mr. Wilkins had been spoiled, by his predecessor allowing him to have his own way, and was too old now to learn different.

The end of it was that one evening Mr. Wilkins came into our bar-parlour very excited, and said he had given that whipper-snapper a bit of his mind, and resigned his place, and he was going to accept his married daughter's offer, and go to Australia.

At first, when he said it, his old friends who were present said, "Go on!" But he soon let them know that he was serious. And the next day he went up to London to make arrangements about a passage for himself and his daughter.

It made quite a sensation in the village, as soon as it was known that our old

parish clerk was going to Australia. A committee met at our house, and it was determined, in recognition of his long connection with the parish, and the esteem in which he was held by everybody, to give him what Graves, the farrier, called "a good send-off." There was a lot of talk about how it was to be done, and at last it was determined to get up "a Wilkins Testimonial and Banquet." It was settled that the banquet was to be at our house, and Harry entered into it heart and soul, because he liked Wilkins very much. There was a lot of dispute as to what the testimonial was to be, and at last it was decided that something that an inscription could be put on was best—something that he could keep and show to everybody and leave behind him as a family heirloom.

Harry suggested a piece of plate, and that was agreed to after some absurd remarks by Graves, who wanted to know what a piece of plate was like; and when it was agreed to be a silver tankard, with an inscription on it, Graves said he thought a plate was something to eat off, and he couldn't see how anything that you drank out of could be a plate.

I dare say he thought it was very funny, but nobody laughed at the joke except himself; but, as he laughed loud enough for twenty people, perhaps he was satisfied.

As soon as the preliminaries were settled, Harry and Mr. Jarvis, the miller, the one that was nearly run over on the night of the burglary at the Hall, were appointed to collect the subscriptions, and a day was fixed for the banquet, which was to be the night before Mr. Wilkins left the village to go to London, where he was going to stop for a day and a night before he sailed from the docks for Melbourne.

The Rev. Tommy was written to, and he headed the subscription with a pound, and the doctor gave a pound, and several of the gentry people gave the same, and the rest was made up in ten shillings and five shillings from the little tradespeople, and smaller sums from the working folks. It was a success from the first, for Mr. Wilkins was very much respected, and everybody was sorry he was going to leave. The new clergyman—the "whipper-snapper"—wasn't asked; but when he heard what was going on, he came into our place one day and gave Harry a pound, and Harry said he wasn't such a bad sort after all.

We got so much money that it was more than enough to buy the tankard, and Harry suggested that we should put the rest into a purse and present it to Mr. Wilkins, as it would be very useful for the journey. Mr. Wilkins had been a

saving man, and he had a nice little sum in the bank; but, of course, money is always welcome, especially when there are two fares to Australia to pay.

The banquet was left to us, and, after we had thought it well over and consulted the committee, it was agreed that it was to be five shillings a head, and that everybody was to pay for what they drank extra. This was better, because, of course, the company would be rather mixed, several of the better people, such as the doctor and some of the young gentlemen from the private houses, having promised to come, to show their respect for Mr. Wilkins, and they would drink wine, while the ordinary people would drink beer.

Harry said to me, “We’ll show them what the ‘Stretford Arms’ can do, my dear.” And we arranged a banquet that I am sure would be no disgrace to a West End London hotel. Knowing our company, we arranged accordingly; having dishes to suit the gentlefolks, and hot joints and things to suit the others. The banquet was to be in the coffee-room, and that would hold a lot of people, by making one long set of tables run all round it. The doctor promised to take the chair, and Mr. Wilkins, of course, was to be on his right hand, and Harry was to take the vice-chair. There were to be no ladies, which I opposed at first; but it was thought better, as it might have led to quarrelling.

Of course Wilkins knew what was going on, and he was very proud, though it touched him deeply. And when he shook hands with us, the night that the deputation waited on him and invited him to the banquet, the poor old fellow’s voice was quite husky, and his hand trembled.

It was very funny the way he tried to pretend he wasn’t listening, when any of the arrangements were discussed in the bar-parlour. And sometimes we used to be talking about what the inscription was to be, and that sort of thing, and in would walk Wilkins himself; and then we all left off and whispered, and first one would be called out of the room, and then the other, to settle a point, Mr. Wilkins all the time smoking his long clay pipe and looking up at the ceiling, as though he hadn’t the slightest idea that he was in any way concerned in what was going on.

One day, just before the banquet, Harry came to me and said, “Missus, you know all about these things—how do you invite the Press?”

“What Press?” I said, wondering what he was driving at.

“The newspapers,” he said. I’ve had a hint that Mr. Wilkins would like the Press to be present. He’s going to make a speech.”

I thought for a minute, and then said that I supposed it would be better to write to the editor of our county paper and send him a ticket.

“Yes,” said Harry, “but I fancy Wilkins would like the *Times* and the *Morning Advertiser* to be present.”

I couldn’t help laughing at that. Of course it was absurd; as if the editor of the *Times* and the *Morning Advertiser* would take the trouble to come down to our place to hear Mr. Wilkins speak!

I told Harry that it was ridiculous, as it was only a local affair, and I wasn’t even sure if it was big enough for our county paper to come to.

Harry seemed a little disappointed. He said that it would have been such a good thing for us, if it could have been got into the London papers; because in all the accounts of banquets that he had read it always said at the end something about the hotel or the restaurant, and the way in which the banquet was served.

“Well,” I said, “I’m sure the London papers would laugh at us if we invited them; but there’ll be no harm in asking the local paper.”

The committee met and talked it over, and a nice invitation was sent to our editor, and we got a letter back in a couple of days, saying that he feared he could not send a reporter, as the affair was not of sufficient general interest; but if we sent a short account of the proceedings it should be inserted.

Somehow or other, Mr. Wilkins got to hear of it, and, though he was disappointed about the *Times* and the *Morning Advertiser*, he paid me a very pretty little compliment. He came to me, and said, “Mrs. Beckett, ma’am, I have heard that our county journal is anxious for a report of the farewell banquet which is to be given in my honour. I am sure that there will be no one so fitted in every way to draw up that report as yourself. You are an authoress, and well known in literature, and can do the subject justice.”

I blushed at that, and went quite hot. “I’m not used to writing in newspapers, Mr. Wilkins,” I said, “which is quite different to writing books.” But the old gentleman was so anxious that I should write the report that I promised I would.

After that I read all the reports of banquets I could find in the newspapers, so as to get used to the style, and the only thing that bothered me was how I should be able to write out all the speeches, and I told Mr. Wilkins so. He relieved me on this point by saying he should have his speech written out beforehand, and he would have a copy made specially for me.

For two or three days before the banquet we were very busy getting everything ready, and I was very anxious, as it was the first public dinner on a big scale that we had done. But, thank goodness, nothing went wrong, except that the woman we had in to help our cook turned out a very violent temper, and in a rage pulled our cook's cap off and threw it on the fire, and she, trying to snatch it off again, upset a big saucepan of custard that was boiling, and it all ran over into her boots, and made her dance about, and shriek and yell that she was scalded to death—(she really was hurt, poor woman)—and that made the kitchen-maid, who was subject to epilepsy, fall down and have a fit. And as we sacked the assistant cook for her behaviour, and cook and the kitchen-maid were too ill to do anything all the next day, we had to send out right and left to get help. And we got a woman who was an excellent cook and very handy; but had a baby that she couldn't leave, and so brought it with her. It was the peevishest baby that I ever came across, and shrieked itself into convulsions from morning till night, until at last the people staying in the hotel sent down and said, if that child didn't leave off they should have to go. Except for these little things everything went on as well as could be expected, seeing what a strain it was on the resources of the establishment. That last line is a line out of my report, which I wrote for our county paper. It isn't in the report which they had printed, but I wrote it, having seen it in a report of a banquet I had read, and I think "strain on the resources of the establishment" a very good expression under the circumstances.

But all's well that ends well, and when the eventful evening arrived everything was right, and the coffee-room looked beautiful with the flags which we had put up, and evergreens, and coloured paper, and a big device over Mr. Wilkins's head, on which was written—

England’s loss is Australia’s gain;
God speed Mr. Wilkins across the main.

When the company had all assembled there were fifty-one altogether who sat down, and it was a very pretty sight. We had extra waitresses in to help, and I remained in the room and superintended them, keeping near the door, of course. Harry behaved beautifully as the vicechairman, taking care never to be the landlord, or to interfere with anything, only once, when Graves—who, of course, couldn’t behave himself even on such an occasion—said, “I say, Mr. Vice, don’t you think this beer is a bit off?” Harry replied, “I don’t know, Mr. Graves; I’m drinking champagne,” which made everybody laugh.

There was plenty of champagne drunk, too, at the head of the table, Mr. Wilkins tasting it, as he said afterwards, for the first time in his life, and everything went off capitally, and not too noisy at first, though the way some of them ate, at the lower end, showed that they meant to have their money’s worth, as well as to show their respect for Wilkins.

After the cheese and celery the doctor rapped the table, and then Harry rapped the table too, and said, “Order for the chair.” And Mr. Wilkins, who knew, of course, what was coming, looked at the pattern of his cheese-plate as though it was a very beautiful picture, and made little pills with the bread by his side, and twisted the tablecloth, and did everything except look at the company.

The doctor made a very nice, kind little speech about Wilkins, referring to the many, many years he had been parish clerk, and how he was looked upon by everybody in the place as a friend, and how sorry they all were to lose him, and how they hoped that a long and happy life with his family awaited him in the new country.

Everybody cheered, and said “Hear, hear,” to the sentiments, the only person interrupting in the wrong place being Graves, who said, “Hear, hear,” when the doctor said, “and now Mr. Wilkins is about to leave us, perhaps for ever.”

At the end of the doctor’s speech everybody got up and raised their glasses, and shouted, “Three cheers for Wilkins!” And then they sang, “For he’s a jolly good fellow,” and kept on till I thought they would never leave off.

After that, Mr. Jarvis, the miller, sang a song, to give Mr. Wilkins time to pull himself together for his reply, and then Mr. Wilkins rose, and the company

banged the table till the glasses jumped again, and I thought the whole arrangement would come down with a crash, the tables being only on tressels.

Mr. Wilkins rose and said, “Ladies and gentlemen”—(there were no ladies, so he looked hard at the door where I was trying to keep out of sight)—“this is the proudest moment of my life. I thank you, gentlemen, one and all. I—I had prepared a speech, but every word has gone out of my head. (‘Hear, hear,’ from Graves.) I cannot say what I feel. I have known the company here for many, many years; I have lived among you man and boy, and at one time I thought I should die among you. (‘Hear, hear,’ from Graves again.) But I am going away to a foreign country. I shall find, I hope, new friends there; but I shall never forget the old ones. I thank you one and all, high and low, rich and poor, for your great kindness to me this day. It’s more than I deserve. (‘Hear, hear,’ from Graves again.) This beautiful mug”—(I forgot to tell you that the doctor wound up his speech by presenting the piece of plate and the purse of gold)—“will be treasured by me to the last hour of my life. I shall hand it down to my children untarnished. For that, and the generous gift which you have also given me, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and, ladies and gentlemen, I can’t say any more, except to say, ‘Good-bye, and God bless you all.’”

Mr. Wilkins, when he came to that, broke down a little, and then everybody cheered, and he sat down. It wasn’t a bad speech—much better than what he had written out to say, which was nearly all taken from an old book of speeches, published at a shilling, as I found out afterwards, and which was what the Prince of Wales might have said at a State banquet, but was all nonsense for a parish clerk.

After Mr. Wilkins’s speech the doctor said, “You may all smoke.” And they did smoke! In five minutes you couldn’t see across the room. And then they had spirits and water, and there were more speeches, and the doctor’s health was proposed, and then Harry’s health coupled with mine, and they would make me come in and stand by Harry while he replied, and I tried to look as dignified as I could, though I felt awfully hot and flustered, till Harry gave me a dreadful slap on the back, which he meant to emphasize what he was saying about me, but which made me feel quite ill for a minute or two. And then they all began to talk at once, and sing songs; and when the banquet broke up, everybody insisted upon seeing Mr. Wilkins home. And it was just as well, for, what with the heat, and the excitement, and the smoke, and the champagne, and hot spirits on the top of that, poor dear Mr. Wilkins was glad of somebody’s arm to lean on.

But it all ended well, and was a great success, though the cleaning-up to get the coffee-room straight for the next morning was awful, especially as the strange people we had in to help, emptied all the bottles and all the glasses, and, the contents being rather mixed, some of them were a little excited, and made more noise about their work than they ought to have done.

The next day I sat down to write my report. Mr. Wilkins, who came round to say good-bye privately to me, as I couldn't go up to the station with the others to see him off, asked me to put in the speech he had written out, instead of the one he delivered; but I couldn't do that. I wrote a nice account, giving a few details of Mr. Wilkins's life, and the names of the principal guests, and, of course, I said what I could about the banquet, and how much everybody enjoyed it, and I put in a nice little line about Harry, though it seemed so funny for me to have to call him "mine host of the 'Stretford Arms';" but I knew that was the right way to do it.

It took me nearly all day to write out the report; and then I made a nice clean copy of it, and sent it to our county paper.

And when the paper came out, we couldn't find it for a long time, till right down in a corner we found three lines: "Mr. Wilkins, for many years parish clerk of ——, was entertained at a banquet by his fellow-parishioners on Thursday last, on the occasion of his departure for Australia."

I could have cried my eyes out with vexation. The nasty, mean editor had not even said *where* the banquet was held.

Harry was in an awful rage. He had ordered and paid for a hundred copies—to send away. Thank goodness, poor Mr. Wilkins had sailed for Australia before the paper came out, and so he knew nothing of the cruel treatment which my first attempt at writing for the Press had met with.

That is how Mr. Wilkins left us. It was a pleasant way certainly; but I know he felt going very much indeed. He was an old man to begin life again in a new world. But he has his daughters with him, and if his eldest daughter is as well off as he says she is, perhaps in time he will get reconciled to the change.

We have had one letter from him since he arrived in Australia. The invalid daughter was better, and he gave a wonderful account of the place where he is living. It is a long way "up country," and he says it is all so new and strange, that

sometimes he expects to wake up in his easy-chair in the ‘Stretford Arms’ and find out that he has dropped off for forty winks, and has been dreaming.

He wrote a lot about the wonderful things he had seen and the wonderful adventures he had had. He says that he has to ride on horseback to get about, and it was very awkward at first; but his son-in-law gave him lessons, and now he is all right. He says he is going to learn how to throw the lasso and catch cattle. I think he has learnt to throw the hatchet. The idea is too absurd of our old parish clerk, the respectable Mr. Wilkins, galloping about the country and catching animals, like those wild fellows you read about on the great American plains.

Still, he is there in the midst of it all, and I don’t suppose we shall ever see him again. It is a strange end to the career of a quiet, old-fashioned old fellow like Wilkins—a man who all his life had hardly spent a week away from the quiet little country place in which he was the parish clerk. I often say to Harry, when we speak of him, “Who ever would have believed such a thing could happen?” And Harry says that in this world there never is any knowing *what* may happen; but one thing he knows will never happen again, and that is that I shall spend a whole day writing an article for our county paper.

And Harry is perfectly right. But never mind, we have had our revenge. We always took the local paper every week before, and now we have given it up. “That’s the best way to make newspapers feel that you——”

* * * * *

Mr. Saxon arrived! And he never sent word that he was coming! Oh dear, dear! I must come at once. Nothing will be right, and there’ll be a nice to-do if his liver happens to be wrong.

# CHAPTER XIX.

## *ONE OF OUR BARMAIDS.*

Good barmaids are as difficult to get as good servants. It is, perhaps, even harder to get just what you want in a barmaid, because so many different qualities are required, and the work has to be done under such different circumstances.

Some girls are very quiet and nice in business, and very ladylike, and a credit to the house out of it; but are still not good barmaids, because they are not able to suit their manner to the class of customer they happen to be serving. Some of the best barmaids for work and smartness aren't nice in other ways, giving themselves airs and showing off before the customers, and being fond of talking with the young fellows who come in and loll across the counter; and some of them dye their hair gold, and make themselves up, and look fast, which is a thing I have always had a horror of; but some of these girls are, as far as doing the trade is concerned, among the best barmaids going, and often there is a good deal less harm in them than in your quiet girls, who seem as if they couldn't say boh to a goose, and look down on the floor, if a young fellow pays them a compliment.

A good, smart, showy barmaid has generally learnt her trade and knows her customers. The compliments paid to her run off her like water off a duck's back, and she knows how to take care of herself. But her very independence makes her a trial to put up with, and if she's a favourite with the customers she soon lets you know it.

Your quiet barmaid, who doesn't dress up a bit, and only says "yes" and "no" when the customers talk to her, is generally slow and makes a lot of silly mistakes, and is afraid of a bit of hard work. She is the sort of girl who can't take more than one order at once, and draws stout for the people who ask for whiskey, and opens lemonade and puts it into the brandy for gentlemen who have ordered a B. and S. We had one of these extra quiet girls once, and she nearly drove me mad. On Saturday nights, and at busy times, if I hadn't been in the bar half the people would have gone away without being served. But it was while she was with us that we began to feel uncomfortable about the state of the

till, and, after we'd sent her off, it was found out that she'd been giving too much change every night to a scamp of a fellow that had made her believe he was desperately in love with her.

Miss Measom was one of the best barmaids we ever had, *as a barmaid*; but she was much too flighty for me. I didn't like her the first day I saw her in the bar. She was what Harry called "larky," and in a quiet place like ours that sort of thing attracts more attention than it would in London.

But when I knew her better, I really began to like her, and thought that there wasn't any harm in the girl. It was just her animal spirits. She was full of mischief, and had the merriest laugh I ever heard, and used to say the oddest things. What annoyed me at first was that some of the young fellows who used our house for the billiard room gave her a nickname. They called her "Tommy," and she liked it. I didn't. One evening I was in the bar and one of them said, "Tommy, give me another whiskey cold," and I thought it wasn't respectful to me, so I said, "That's not Miss Measom's name, Mr. Smith, and if you don't mind I'd rather you didn't call her by it."

He was an impudent fellow, and he said, "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Beckett," and then he said, "May I have the honour of asking you for another whiskey cold, if you please, *Miss Measom*?" And then a lot of the young monkeys that were with him began "Miss Measom-ing" all over the place, and the grown-up men, who ought to have known better, did it too, and I was so indignant, I went out of the bar and left them at it.

It was Saturday evening, after the football, and that was always what Miss Measom used to call "a warm time," because the young fellows in the club got excited, and they brought in the club that had come down to play them, and I was generally rather glad when it was time to shut up.

The night that this happened in the bar that I have told you about, after we'd shut, Miss Measom came to me and she said, "I hope you're not cross with me, Mrs. Beckett. I can't help them calling me Tommy, and they don't mean any harm." "I am cross, Miss Measom," I said. "It doesn't sound nice, and it isn't the sort of thing for a place like ours. If you didn't encourage them they wouldn't do it."

"I don't encourage them—indeed I don't!" said the girl; "but it's no good my being nasty about it."

I don’t know what I should have said; but Harry came in at the moment, and, hearing the conversation, he joined in and said he was sure Miss Measom couldn’t help it, and, after all, it was nothing, because young fellows would be young fellows, and you couldn’t expect them to behave in a bar as if they were in a chapel.

That put my back up, and I turned on Harry quite indignantly, for I didn’t like his taking the girl’s side against me.

I don’t know what possessed me to say it, but I said, “Oh, I know Miss Measom is a great favourite of yours; wouldn’t you like me to beg her pardon?”

It was a very foolish thing to say. I felt so directly I’d said it; but I was in a temper, and wouldn’t draw it back.

Harry bit his lip; and Miss Measom flushed scarlet, and went out of the room.

“You’re very unwise to say a thing like that,” said Harry. “I can’t think what’s come to you lately.”

“I will say it,” I said; “and I am not the only person who says it. You are always sticking up for that girl against me. Both of her last Sundays out she has been home half an hour late, and you told me not to be cross with her about it.”

“You’re a foolish little woman,” Harry said. “Let’s talk about something else.”

“Oh, yes; I dare say it’s not an agreeable subject.”

“No, it isn’t; get on with your supper.”

“I shan’t; I don’t want any supper,” I said, pushing my plate away.

“Oh, very well,” said Harry; “perhaps you’re better without it. I should think you’ve got indigestion now, and that’s what makes you so disagreeable.”

With that he got up from the table, and went and sat down in the armchair and lit his pipe, and took up the paper.

And we didn’t speak another word to each other that evening.

* * * * *

The next morning was Sunday, and, after breakfast, Miss Measom came to me and said, “Mrs. Beckett, can I say a word to you?”

“Yes,” I said quite sharply. “What is it?”

“I think I’d better leave.”

“As you please, Miss Measom.”

“Then, as soon as you’re suited.”

“Certainly!” and with that I turned on my heel and went upstairs to dress for church.

I didn’t say anything to Harry about Miss Measom having given notice. To tell the truth, I was beginning to be a little bit ashamed of myself, and to think that I had been too hasty.

After that Miss Measom’s manner quite changed in the bar. She hadn’t a smile for anybody, and the customers asked me what was the matter with the girl. The next Saturday when the young fellows came in one of them called her “Tommy.” She looked up quietly, and said, “Mr. So-and-so, I should be much obliged if you wouldn’t call me that. There are reasons why I ask you, which I can’t tell you.”

The young fellow, who was a gentleman, raised his hat, and after that nobody called our barmaid “Tommy” again.

The night before it was Miss Measom’s day to leave, after business she went straight up to her room. When I went up, I had to pass her door, and I thought I heard a strange noise. I stopped and listened, and then I knew it was some one sobbing. I went to Miss Measom’s door and knocked. It was a minute or two before she opened it, and when she did I saw that her eyes were quite red.

“What’s the matter, Jenny?” I said, calling her by her Christian name, feeling rather sorry for her.

She didn’t answer for a second, and then she began to cry right out. So I pushed the door to and made her sit down, and then I said, “Jenny, I don’t want to part

the door to and made her sit down, and then I said, "Jenny, I don't want to part bad friends with you. You're in trouble. Won't you tell me what it is?"

She looked at me through her tears a moment, and then she said, "Oh, Mrs. Beckett, I'm so sorry I'm going away like this."

"So am I, Jenny," I said; "but you gave me notice; you know I didn't give it to you."

"I couldn't bear to cause trouble between you and your husband," she answered. "You've been the nicest, kindest people I ever lived with, and I've been very happy here—till—till—till you said what you did; but you didn't mean it, did you? Tell me you didn't mean it."

I hesitated for a moment. But the girl looked so heart-broken that I said, "No, Jenny, I didn't; and I'm very sorry I ever said it."

That broke the poor girl down altogether. So I put my arm round her waist, and drew her to me, and kissed her.

"There," I said, "all is forgiven and forgotten, and if you like to stay on I'll pay the new girl that's coming a month's wages, and tell her she isn't wanted."

"No; you are good and kind, as you have always been; but I can't stay with you now—it wouldn't be right—unless—unless you know all, and forgive me."

When she said this it gave me quite a start. A hundred things came into my head. What had I to know, and to forgive when I knew it?

Without meaning it my manner changed, and I said, almost coldly, "What is it that I ought to know?"

"What I am," she said, looking straight before her at the wall." If my story were ever to come to you from some one else, after what you said that night, you might think worse of me than perhaps you will when you hear it from my own lips."

"Go on," I said hoarsely.

"Mrs. Beckett, you've been very cross with me once or twice, when I've been late in on my nights out. Shall I tell you where I'd been, and what made me late?"

late?"

"Yes—if—if you think you ought to."

"I had been to London to see my baby."

"What—are you—are you—a married woman, then?"

"No! God help me, no!"

* * * * *

I can't recollect what happened, or what I said or did for a few minutes after that. It was such a shock to me—so unexpected—that it almost took my breath away.

All I know is that presently I found Jenny on her knees by my side, pouring her story into my ears, telling it quickly and excitedly, as though she feared that I should refuse to hear her, if she didn't get it out before I could stop her.

It was a very sad story.

Jenny Measom had been well brought up by her father and mother until she was fifteen, and then her father, who held a good position in a big brewery, had a paralytic stroke. The most unfortunate thing about it was that it happened a week after he had left his old firm of his own accord, and gone to take a better position in another, so that he had not the slightest claim on either firm for much consideration, and the stroke meant ruin. He got a little better, but not well enough to get about or to do anything, and so Jenny's mother had to take needlework, and Jenny was, by the kindness of the old firm, got into a public-house as a barmaid, and her earnings and her mother's were all that kept them from the workhouse.

Jenny, with her bright merry ways and her smartness at her work, soon got on as a barmaid, and left the first public-house, and went to a big West End house, where the trade was of a higher character.

It was when she was eighteen, and in this swell West End house, that the great misfortune of her life happened to her. Among the young fellows who came to the bar was one named Sidney Draycott. He was a handsome young fellow, the son of an English doctor who had at that time a practice in Paris. Sidney

Draycott was studying for his father's profession, and, like most young fellows of his class, he spent a good many of his evenings in bars and billiard-rooms.

He fell awfully in love with Jenny, and the poor girl fell in love with him, and they walked out together. It never entered the head of the young girl that the difference in their stations made the acquaintance a dangerous one, for "Sid," as she called him, had asked her to be his wife. She spoke well, and played the piano, and had learnt quite enough before she left her good school to hold her own in conversation, and to appear a lady.

But the young fellow begged her to keep the engagement secret for the present, as he didn't want anybody to know until he had passed his examination and become qualified to set up for himself, which would be very soon.

Jenny was in the seventh heaven of delight. She was going to be married to the man she loved, and he was a gentleman. The only person she told was her mother, and she was one of those simple-minded women who know very little of the world, and thought her dear, good, clever Jenny was fit to be a nobleman's wife.

So things went on, and the young fellow passed his examination, and then he proposed that they should be married quietly before the registrar, and the day was fixed.

The Sunday before the wedding, which was to be on the following Wednesday, was Jenny's Sunday out. She went with her lover into the country to look at a place where he thought of asking his father to buy a practice. They missed the last train, and they stayed at a little hotel something like ours in that country place.

The landlady took them for a man and wife, and—well, need I tell you any more?

On Monday morning Jenny went back to her business with an excuse about her mother having been ill, and having had to stop with her all night, and in the afternoon Mr. Draycott came in looking very worried, and told her he had just had a telegram calling him to Paris, as his father had been taken suddenly ill, and it was feared that he was dying. The marriage would have to be postponed; but he would hurry back as soon as things turned either one way or the other with his father.

He crossed to Paris by the night mail. What happened nobody ever knew. He was seen at Calais to get into a carriage where there were two other men—Frenchmen—and when the train stopped at Amiens, where there is a buffet, and it waited for a short time, a passenger from Amiens to Paris going to get into the carriage, which was empty, noticed something wrong. There were signs of a struggle, and there was blood here and there.

The guard was called, and a search was made. The two men who had been seen at Calais, the guard then remembered not to have seen get out at Amiens, nor the young Englishman either. No trace of the men was ever found; but the young Englishman was discovered lying on the line half way between Calais and Amiens, with his pockets empty, his watch and his diamond pin gone, and with a terrible injury to his head.

He was instantly attended to by medical men, and removed to a proper place; but though the wound in time got better, and his life was saved, his brain was affected. The doctors differed about him—some thought that in time he would gradually recover his reason, others that he would never do so. Poor Jenny couldn't quite explain what it was; but it was supposed to be a clot of blood, or something of the sort, pressing on the brain, which might become absorbed in time, and then he would be all right, but which might not.

The young man's father recovered from his illness, and had his son brought to Paris, and had the best advice, and it was recommended that he should be sent to an asylum—and there, said poor Jenny, as she finished her story, "the man, who was my affianced husband, now is; and my baby is with my mother, God bless her, for she has never given me one reproach. And so, you see, I have three to keep, Mrs. Beckett, and if I get out of a situation, and there is anything against my character, they must suffer as well as I."

Poor Jenny—it was a sad story. As soon as she was a little calmer I asked her if she had not let her lover's father know.

"No," she said proudly, "I would sooner starve. My poor Sid would have married me, I know; everything was arranged; but how could I go to his father in his great trouble, and tell him that which might perhaps add to his grief and despair?"

"Jenny," I said, when she had finished, "you have trusted me, and you shall never repent it. I think you are a brave girl, and you may stop with us as long as

you like. No living soul shall ever hear your story from me."

She flung her arms around my neck and kissed me, and cried a little again. And then she said, "Don't tell Mr. Beckett, will you? I should die of shame if I thought he knew. It's only a woman who could understand my story and respect me still."

I gave her the promise, and I kept it until—— But I must not anticipate. I understood now why she was so merry and so gay, and what I called flighty. She was doing as hundreds of poor women do—hiding her heart's sorrow under a mask of gaiety; forcing herself to appear bright and cheerful, lest the world should suspect her secret. I told Harry the next day that I was very sorry for what I had said about Miss Measom, and that I had determined to keep her on, as she was such a good barmaid; and he said, "As you will, little woman; I leave it entirely to you. I'm sure you'll do what your heart tells you is right."

Miss Measom soon recovered her gaiety; it was only when we were alone together that she was quiet and thoughtful, and when she went for her holiday I never grumbled again at her being a little late. I thought of her in the little home, cheering her poor mother and father, and loving her little baby, and thinking of the man who would have been her husband, and of the happy home she might have had but for that terrible tragedy.

Jenny stayed with us for about six months, and then she left us.

How she left us was in this way. One night after we had closed up we were sitting at supper—Harry and I and Jenny, and she picked up the London paper and began to read for a few minutes before going to bed.

Harry was smoking his pipe in his easy chair, and I was looking over some pages of manuscript that I had written in a hurry and wanted to see how they read.

All of a sudden Harry called out, "Look at Miss Measom!"

I looked up and there was Jenny just going down off her chair in a dead swoon. I ran to her and caught her, and told Harry to go out of the room. Then I loosened her dress, and bathed her forehead with some vinegar, and got her to.

"Jenny, dear Jenny," I said; "what is it? What's the matter? Are you ill, dear?"

"No," she whispered, opening her eyes slowly, "look—look at the paper!"

I kept my arm around her and stooped and picked up the London paper, which had fallen from her hands on to the floor.

I looked at it for a minute and couldn't see anything—then a name caught my eye, and I read this——

"It is reported from Paris that the young Englishman who was robbed and thrown out of a train some time ago between Calais and Amiens has at last recovered from the injury to the brain, which at one time threatened to be permanent. The case has aroused much interest in the medical profession in Paris, where, it may be remembered, his father, Dr. Draycott, has been for many years a resident."

"Oh, Jenny!" I said; and that was all I could say. But we had a long talk up in her room afterwards, and she decided that she would write the next day to Sidney, under cover to his father—only a line with her address, nothing to worry him, nothing to distress him, only these words:—"The present address of J. Measom is 'The Stretford Arms,'" and then she added the name of our village and the county.

She put "J.," not to put "Jenny," for fear the father might open it. Of course "J." might be a John, and she wrote it in a big, round hand that might be a man's.

Three days afterwards a telegram came. She showed it me. It was only this: "My poor darling,—I am coming back as soon as I can travel. Have written. God bless you!"

And then came a letter—a letter written in a shaky hand; but one that poor Jenny kissed and hugged and cried and sobbed over till I really was afraid she would make herself quite ill.

I had an idea that it would be all right for poor Jenny now; but I was a little afraid how the young fellow would take what had happened after he left England. Some men, under the circumstances, would have been heartless enough to—but what is the use of troubling about what some men would have done. Sidney Draycott behaved like a noble and honourable young Englishman. He came back to London a month later, and took Jenny to the church one fine morning, and he brought her out again Mrs. Sidney Draycott.

I went up to town for the day, and was at the church, and I was the only one invited except a great friend of Mr. Draycott's, who had come up from the country on purpose. Jenny cried, and I cried, and nearly spoilt my beautiful new bonnet strings letting the tears run down them, and after it was all over and Jenny had kissed her husband, she came up and put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and then we both had just one little moment's cry together, and then they both went off quietly in a four-wheel cab to see the baby.

* * * * *

Ever since Jenny Measom left us she has written to me and I have written to her. Some time ago, when I was not very well, the doctor said that I wanted a change, and so I wrote to Jenny, and said that perhaps I was going to the seaside, and she might not hear from me till I came home again. Two days afterwards I got such a nice letter back saying that she and her husband would be very angry if I didn't come and stay with them. It would do me quite as much good as the seaside and more, and her husband, being a doctor, if I was out of sorts could make me up all manner of nice things to take. Of course this was a joke, but the invitation wasn't, and I went. And I was very glad that I did, for they made quite a fuss with me, and I couldn't have been treated better if I had been a duchess.

They have the loveliest little place, in a nice country town, where Mr. Draycott is established as a doctor, and is doing wonderfully well. Quite a lovely home it is, and they are so happy. And Jenny has her baby and her mother with her to help her, and to keep her company when the doctor is out on his rounds.

The people about the place of course, don't know when they were married, as it has been kept quite secret. Even Mr. Draycott's father thinks they were married secretly before he left London for Paris and met with that terrible adventure. Old Mr. Draycott has been over once from Paris, and Jenny says that he fell quite in love with her before he left, and said that his son was a lucky dog. Wasn't it nice of him? Poor old Mr. Measom died very soon after the wedding; but he died very happy, knowing his daughter was comfortably settled. Poor old gentleman! it was the best thing perhaps, for he had become quite childish.

When I left to come back again to the 'Stretford Arms,' I was quite another woman. My cheeks were quite fat and rosy again, and Harry, when he met me at the station, pretended not to know me, but came up and said, "I beg your pardon, miss, but have you seen a pale young woman named Mary Jane anywhere about?"

The big goose! I gave him a kiss before all the railway porters, who *wouldn't* look the other way, and I said, "No, I haven't, and I hope she won't see me or she mightn't like me kissing her husband."

Before I left I told Jenny and her husband that I should insist on their coming and staying for a week at our hotel as our guests, and they have promised that they will. When I asked them, Jenny looked up, with a twinkle in her eye, and the old saucy look on her face, and she said, "I'll come; but you must promise not to be cross with Mr. Beckett if anybody calls me 'Tommy,' won't you?"

Dear old "Tommy!" Oh, how glad I am that I didn't let her go away through my nasty jealous temper! Who knows if things would have turned out so happily as they did if I hadn't made it up with her and asked her to stay on at the 'Stretford Arms.'

After Jenny left we had a barmaid, who——

* * * * *

Nurse, will you stop those children? Whatever are they making such a noise about? Master Harry and the baby fighting for the kitten! Then, take the kitten away from them! That poor kitten! I'm sure I expect to see it pulled in two sometimes. Can anybody tell me why cats and kittens and dogs let little babies pull them about and hardly ever scratch or bite? It is always a mystery to me.

# CHAPTER XX.

## *MR. SAXON AGAIN.*

If you look back at one of the chapters of these reminiscences of the ‘Stretford Arms,’ I forget which, you will find at the end that I was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Saxon. He came without having sent a letter or a telegram to say that he was coming, and, of course, knowing what a dreadful fidget he was, that made me a little nervous, and I had to throw down my pen, and rush downstairs to see him myself, and make things as pleasant as possible.

I was very glad that he had come again, because that showed he was pleased with our place, and had appreciated the attention shown to him; and that is one thing I will say for him, with all his odd ways, and his violent tempers, and his rages and fads, he was always deeply sensible of any little kindness shown to him. Poor man, he suffered dreadfully from his infirmity of temper; but I quite believe what he always told me—that it was nervous irritability, and that it was caused by his constant ill-health, and that awful liver of his.

“Mary Jane,” he has said to me often, when we’ve been talking, “if I’d only had decent health and a pennyworth of digestion I should have been an angel upon earth. I should have been too good for this world, and died young.”

“Well, sir,” I said, “then, under these circumstances, your liver has been a blessing to you instead of a curse, because it has prolonged your life.”

“Good heavens! Mrs. Beckett,” he almost shrieked. “Is it possible that you, you who have witnessed my awful sufferings, you who have seen me tear my hair and bite the chair backs and kick the wall and hurl the coals out of the coal-scuttle at my own grinning demoniacal image in the looking-glass, can say such a thing as that? A blessing to prolong my life! Why, if the doctor had taken me away when I was born and drowned me in a pail of warm water, like they do the kittens, he would have been the best friend I ever had.”

“Oh, Mr. Saxon,” I said, “how *can* you say such dreadful things? I’m sure you have much to be thankful for. Many people envy you.”

“Do they?” he said. “Then more fools they. Look at me, Mrs. Beckett. Do you see how yellow I am? Do you know I go to bed at night half dead, and get up the next morning three-quarters dead, having spent the night in dreaming that I’m being hanged, or pursued by a mad bull, or having my chest jumped on by a demon? Do you know that I can’t open a letter without trembling, lest it should tell me of some awful disaster? That I’m so nervous, that if I see anybody coming that I know, I bolt round a corner to get away from them, and that I’m so restless that I can never stay in one place more than a week together, and that I’ve had the same headache for ten years straight off?”

“Yes, sir,” I said; “I know that you do get like that sometimes, and it must be very unpleasant; but if you’d take more care of yourself, and not work so hard, and take more exercise, perhaps you’d be better.”

He laughed a contemptuous sort of laugh.

“Oh, of course, it’s all my own fault. Everybody tells me that. When I was a boy, the doctors said I should outgrow it; when I was a young man, they said after thirty I should be better. When I was thirty, they said it was a trying age; but by the time I was forty I should be all right. Well, I’m forty now, and look at me. I’m a wreck—a perfect wreck.”

“Oh, come, sir,” I said; “I don’t see where the wreck comes in. You’re broad and upright, and you look as strong as a prize-fighter. Everybody who sees you says, ‘Is that Mr. Saxon? Why, I expected to see a cadaverous skeleton, by what I’ve heard about his being such an invalid.’”

“Oh yes, I know,” he said; “people say the same thing to me. I never get any sympathy. I dare say when I’m in my coffin people will come and look at me and say, ‘What a humbug that fellow is! Why, he looks as jolly as possible.’”

I tried to turn the conversation, because when Mr. Saxon begins to talk about himself and his wrongs and his ailments he will go on for hours if you’ll let him, so I asked him if he was writing anything new.

“Yes,” he said; “I’m writing my will. I’ve come down here to be able to work at it quietly, without anybody coming and putting me in a rage, and making me say something in that important document, in my temper, that I may be sorry for afterwards. Mrs. Beckett, I’ve left instructions that I’m to be cremated. If you’d like to be present at the ceremony I’ll drop in a line to say that you are to be

invited. It is a very curious spectacle, and well worth seeing."

It was a nice thing, wasn't it, for him to ask me to come and see him cremated? But it was no good taking him seriously when he was like that, so I said, "Thank you, sir; you are very kind; but I'd very much sooner see you eat a good dinner. What shall I order for you?"

He thought a minute, and then he said, "Let me see, I have four hours before dinner. I can get my will finished in three, so you can order me for dinner some salmon and cucumber, some roast pork and apple sauce, and a nice rich plum-pudding, and, I think, if I have a bottle of champagne with it, and after that some apples and some Brazil nuts, and a bottle of old port, the chances are that I shan't linger long."

"Oh, Mr. Saxon," I said, "the idea of your eating such a dinner as that, and you complaining of indigestion! Why, it's suicide!"

"Of course it is," he said, with an awful grin. "That's what I mean it to be. It's the only way I can do it without letting the blessed insurance companies have the laugh of me."

I only give you this conversation just to show you the sort of mood he was in when he came on his second visit. He hadn't brought the Swedish gentleman with him to get into a temper with, and as he could not well go on at me and Harry, he went on the other tack, and turned melancholy.

I felt as if I should like to give him a good shaking; but, of course, I was obliged to be polite, so I said, "If you are dull when you've done your work, sir, I hope you will come downstairs and sit with us; my husband will be very pleased, I'm sure."

"Thank you," he said; and then he went upstairs, and presently when I passed his door I heard him giggling to himself, and presently he laughed right out loud.

I thought to myself, "I wonder what he's so merry about all by himself," so I knocked at the door, and made an excuse to go in.

He had several sheets of paper in front of him, and he was chuckling and writing, and grinning all over his face.

"Here, Mrs. Beckett," he said, "what do you think of this for a will?"

"Here, Mrs. Beckett," he said, "what do you think of this for a will?

"Good gracious, sir!" I said, "you're not laughing over your will, are you?"

"Yes, I am. I can't help it. It's so jolly funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

He began to read his will to me, and presently, I couldn't help it, I was obliged to laugh too. It was so utterly ridiculous. He had actually gone and made a comic will leaving the oddest things to people, and cracking jokes about everything, just as if it was the funniest thing in the world to say what's to be done with your property when you're dead.

"I say, Mrs. Beckett," he said, "won't it be a lark when the old lawyer reads this out? I hope he'll be a good reader, and make the points. I'd give something to see the people when they hear it read. I hope they'll be a good audience."

When he saw that it amused me, he was as pleased as Punch, and quite jolly. All his melancholy had gone. He read that will over and over again to himself, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy it; and I'm quite sure that he felt awfully sorry that he couldn't get all the people called together and have it read to them without his being dead, so that he could hear them laugh at what he called his "wheezes."

He said that he was sure his will would be a great success, and it put him in a good humour for the rest of the day, and he quite enjoyed his dinner, which, you may be sure, wasn't roast pork or salmon, as he had ordered; but a nice fried sole, and a boiled chicken, and a semolina pudding, which I knew wouldn't hurt him, and I wouldn't let him have the champagne, pretending that we were quite out of the only brand he cared for.

After dinner he smoked a cigar by himself, and then he came down into our bar-parlour and smoked a pipe.

Several of our regular customers knew him, through his having been with us before, and they remembered him, so he joined in the conversation, which got on foreign parts; and, as he was known to travel abroad a good deal, they asked him questions about the places he had seen.

I will say this for Mr. Saxon: he never wanted much encouragement to start him off talking, and when he did begin he went on.

I'm quite sure that it wasn't all true what he told the people in our bar-parlour.

He couldn’t help exaggerating, if it was to save his life; but I believe the stories he told were founded on fact, only he made them as wonderful as he could.

He had been in the winter to Africa, and he told us of a very wonderful adventure he had with a lion. It seems he was very anxious to kill a lion and bring it home with him. So one day that he heard a lion had been seen in the mountains near where he was, he went off on a hunting expedition and camped out in the open air. The first night he thought it was very jolly; but when he woke up in the morning he found he had got the rheumatics so fearfully that he could hardly move. So he told the Arabs, who were with him, to go hunting, and he would stop in the tent and rub himself with liniment, as he couldn’t walk till the rheumatics went off.

The Arabs went off to look for the lion, and soon after they had gone Mr. Saxon heard a curious noise, and looking up, he saw a great big lion coming stealthily towards him.

He was awfully frightened, and picked up his gun and went as white as death, and waited for the animal to come on. When it began to move, he noticed it was rather lame, and moved very slowly, so he aimed at it and fired; but not being a good marksman, the shot went a long way over the lion’s head.

Then he felt so frightened, he said, that he was quite paralyzed, and he fired again; but the bullet didn’t go near the lion.

Then he dropped his gun and tried to run away; but the rheumatism was so dreadful that he couldn’t move, and still the lion crept nearer and nearer. He gave himself up for lost, and thought he should never see anybody again, when the animal, who was evidently in pain, limped into the tent.

He thought it would jump on him and eat him, but instead of that it only sat down on its haunches by his side in the tent and groaned, and held up one of its paws.

All of a sudden, he having a lot of experience with dogs, guessed that the lion was suffering from rheumatism, and so he thought he would try an experiment. He got out his bottle of liniment, and took the lion’s leg and rubbed the liniment well into it, the lion sitting quite still all the time, only holding its head on one side, as the liniment was very strong, and it got up its nose and made its eyes water.

After he had rubbed it well the lion seemed to be better, and wagged its tail, and would have licked his hand, he said, only he didn't like the liniment that was on it. And presently it got up and went away, walking much easier than before.

Mr. Saxon said the relief to his feelings was so great that he felt quite exhausted, and fell asleep, and when he woke up, to his horror he saw three lions in his tent —it was the lion he had rubbed, who had brought his wife, the lioness, and his eldest son, a very fine young lion, and it was evident that he had brought them to be rubbed with the liniment, as they held out their legs towards him.

Mr. Saxon said that evidently all the family had slept in a damp place and got rheumatic. He rubbed the lioness and the young lion till all his liniment was gone, and then they went away.

When the Arabs came back in the evening they said they had had no sport, as they found the lions gone from their lair. "Yes," said Mr. Saxon, "they have been here." At first the Arabs would not believe him, but he showed them the footsteps of the lions, and then they did, and said it was very wonderful.

They had to camp in the same place that night, as Mr. Saxon was not well enough to go on. The next morning when they got up it was found that they were short of provisions, and they were wondering what they would do, when one of the Arabs said, "Oh, look there; there is a lion coming. Let us shoot him!" "No," said Mr. Saxon, "perhaps it is one of my friends." And so it was—it was the old lion, and he had a very fine sheep in his mouth. He marched into the tent, laid the sheep at Mr. Saxon's feet, and then, nodding his head to the Arabs, turned round and walked away again.

He had brought Mr. Saxon a present of a sheep, to show his gratitude for being eased of the rheumatism with the liniment.

Mr. Saxon said it was one of the most wonderful instances of gratitude in a wild beast that had ever been known, and we all thought so too.

Some of the people in our parlour believed it was all gospel truth; but Harry laughed, and so did I. I had heard Mr. Saxon's wonderful stories about his travels before.

I knew it was true about his suffering with rheumatism, though, because I had seen him; and I've heard the Swedish gentleman tell how, when Mr. Saxon was

in Rome, he had it so bad that he could hardly move, and the twinges used to make him yell out. And one day one of the Pope's chamberlains came to take him to the Vatican, and he couldn't crawl across the room. He was in an awful state, because he was to be introduced to the Pope, and it was a great honour, and it made him very upset to think he should have to lose it. The Pope's chamberlain, who was an Englishman, recommended a very hot bath. So Mr. Saxon had one put in his bedroom; and, in his hasty, impulsive way, got into it without trying the heat. It was so hot that he was nearly boiled alive, and he jumped out in such a hurry that the bath was tilted over, and boiled all the pattern out of the carpet, and went through the ceiling, and Mr. Saxon danced about, and swore, and went on dreadfully—like he can if he's put out. It cost him ten pounds for the damage; but his rheumatics had gone quite away, and he was able to be introduced to the Pope that afternoon; so he didn't mind the ten pounds. But the Swedish gentleman told us that he was the colour of a boiled lobster for a fortnight afterwards.

Another time that he had the rheumatism come on very awkwardly—so the Swedish gentleman told us, and I think he tells the truth—was at Madrid. Mr. Saxon was at a bull-fight, and after the third bull had been killed the beautifully dressed men who fight the bulls all went out, and the people all began to jump into the arena. Mr. Saxon and the Swedish gentleman thought that was a short cut to get out, so they got over into the circus too. Presently, to their horror, the doors were opened, and two bulls came galloping in. The Swedish gentleman jumped over the barriers quick; but Mr. Saxon, when he went to follow, had a sudden attack of rheumatics in his legs, and couldn't move. He gave a horrified look, and saw one of the bulls making straight at him. He turned round to try and run; but the bull caught him, and threw him right up on the top of the barrier, and the Swedish gentleman seized him and pulled him over, while all the people clapped their hands, and shrieked with laughter.

Of course Mr. Saxon thought he must be wounded, and couldn't make out why he didn't feel where the bull's horns had been; but when he looked round he saw all the people in the ring playing with the bulls, and the boys waving their cloaks in front of them, and then running away; and then he saw that the bulls had big indiarubber balls on their horns, to prevent them hurting.

It was explained to him afterwards by a Spanish gentleman that, after the real bull-fight is over, the young bulls, with their horns protected, are turned into the ring for the boys and young men to play with, and it is with these bulls that

many, who afterwards become bull-fighters, take their first lesson. But it was very awkward for Mr. Saxon having his rheumatics come on just as the bull was running at him, before about five thousand people in the great bullring at Madrid.

The Queen of Spain, Mr. Saxon told us, was in the royal box, and she laughed as heartily as anybody. So Mr. Saxon tells everybody that he has had the honour of appearing as a bull-fighter before the royal family in Madrid, which is much more true than a good many of the stories he tells about his adventures abroad, I dare say.

The next day Mr. Saxon was rather melancholy again, and he said he shouldn't stop, as he thought the country didn't suit him at that season of the year. It was the autumn; and he said the fall of the leaf always made him ill.

"Yes, sir," I said; "a good many people feel it. It's always a trying time for invalids."

"My dear Mrs. Beckett," he said, "all times are alike to me. In the winter my doctor says, 'Ah, it's the cold weather makes you queer; you'll be better when it's over.' When the spring comes, he says, 'People with livers are always queer in the spring.' When it's summer, he says, 'The heat always upsets livers.' When it's autumn, he says, 'People with the least acidity in their blood always feel the autumn;' and when it's winter it's the cold that's bad for me again. And that's the game they've played with me for the last ten years. It's just the same if I go out of town for the benefit of my health. If I go to the seaside, the sea is bad for bilious people. If I go inland, it isn't bracing enough. If I go to a bracing place, the air is too strong for me. If I go to a relaxing place, the air is too mild for me. There isn't one of the beggars who pocket my guinea that has the honesty to say that nothing will ever make me any better."

"I wonder you take their prescriptions," I said, "if you don't believe they can do you any good."

"I'm not going to take any more," he said. "Why, this last year I've tried the hot-water cure, the lemon cure, and the cold-water cure. I've worn four different sorts of pads and belts, I've been medically rubbed, and I've put myself on milk diet. I buy everything that's advertised in the newspapers and on the hoardings, and I take everything everybody sends me, and the only time I was really well

for a week was when I sent my little dog, who had a bad liver, to the veterinary surgeon, and he sent her some powders, and I took them by mistake for my own. When I went to get some more, the vet. had gone for his holiday and left an assistant. The assistant looked over the books and sent me some more powders. I thought they tasted different; but I took them, and ever since that I have never been able to pass a cat's-meat barrow without wanting to stand on my hind legs and beg. The stupid assistant had made up some powders to give a dainty pet dog an appetite instead of my little dog's liver powders."

"Oh, Mr. Saxon," I said, laughing; "you don't expect me to believe that!"

"I can't help whether you believe it or not, Mrs. Beckett," he said; "I'm only telling you what actually happened."

I stopped with him a little and tried to persuade him to give us a little longer trial. He couldn't expect changes of air to do him good in a day. He said there was something in that, and he'd try another day or two.

I got Harry to offer to go for a long walk with him; and when Harry came back, he said, "My dear, I really think this time Mr. Saxon is a bit dotty."

"Whatever do you mean, Harry," I said.

"Well, he's been asking me if I could get him a nice jolly crew of sailors to man a pirate ship for him, as he thinks of turning pirate. He says he's been ordered a sea voyage, and that's the only way he could take it without feeling the monotony of it."

"Oh," I said, "you mustn't take any notice of his talking like that. Once, when he was ordered horse exercise, I remember him saying that he'd turn highwayman, and wear a mask, and have pistols in his belt, as he must have something to occupy his mind while he was riding, or he should go to sleep and tumble off."

Poor Mr. Saxon! I often wonder whether people, who don't know him well, believe that he really means the idiotic things he says. He says them so seriously that you can't help being taken in by them sometimes.

After he had been with us a couple of days he sent a telegram to London and had a telegram back, and then he called me up, and he said, "Mrs. Beckett, I'm going to ask you a very great favour."

“Yes, sir,” I said, wondering what was coming.

“A very dear friend of mine,” he said, “who has been for five years in a lunatic asylum has been cured, and is to be released to-morrow. He has a wife and family. Before he goes home to them we are anxious to see how he will behave —if he is quite cured, in fact.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, still wondering what I had to do with his mad friend.

“I have asked him to come here and stay with me.”

“What, sir!” I said, starting. “To come here!”

“Yes; but don’t be alarmed. I believe he is quite cured, and as sane as I am now. He is a very nice man—a little odd in his ways; but he wouldn’t hurt a fly. He is coming to-night. I assure you there is no danger, or I wouldn’t have asked him: only his friends think it will be better for him to get accustomed to his freedom before he goes home.”

“Of course, sir,” I said; “but it’s a great responsibility for you.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid; but I want you to help me.”

“How, sir?”

“Well, please put him a very blunt knife at dinner, and if he gets up in the morning before I do and goes out, just ask your husband not to let him go far away or let him out of his sight. That’s all.”

“Very good, sir,” I said; but I didn’t like it, and I went down. I said to Harry, “Here’s a nice thing. Mr. Saxon has asked a lunatic to stay with him, and he wants us to look after him!”

That night the gentleman arrived. He was a very thin, very mild, amiable-looking gentleman of about fifty, with long black hair, turning grey.

Mr. Saxon told us he was a literary gentleman and a fine scholar, and had written a great many burlesques, and it was this that had brought him to a lunatic asylum. He certainly was a little odd, and seemed rather nervous. I thought that was on account of his finding himself without any keepers about him.

He spoke very nicely, and laughed a good deal, and seemed a little fidgety and funny; but that was all.

I put him a very blunt knife at dinner, and when he tried to cut his meat with it, he said, “God bless me; this is an awful knife! Give me another, please.”

I looked at Mr. Saxon for instructions; but he shook his head. So I said, “It’s the sharpest we have, sir.”

“Shall I cut your meat up for you, Bob?” said Mr. Saxon.

“No, thank you,” said the gentleman; and he made another try; but he groaned over it and went quite hot, and kept saying, “God bless me!” and muttering to himself.

He and Mr. Saxon sat and smoked pipes all the evening, and they went to bed early, Mr. Saxon telling me not to give his friend a candle, as it wasn’t advisable to trust him with fire.

The gentleman asked for a candle. But I said I was very sorry, but all the candles were engaged.

He went into his bedroom and went to bed in the dark. But he went on awfully, groaning, and saying, “God bless me!” and that he never heard such a thing in his life.

In the morning he got up early, and, to our horror, came down with his hat on and went out.

“Harry,” I said, “Follow him, quick; he’s going towards the horse-pond.”

Harry said it was all very fine. He wished Mr. Saxon would take charge of his own lunatics; but he put on his hat, and went after the gentleman.

They came in in half an hour, the gentleman looking very bad tempered.

At breakfast, I heard him say to Mr. Saxon that the landlord had been following him.

“Nonsense, Bob,” said Mr. Saxon. “Come, old fellow, eat your breakfast.” There were chops for breakfast, and I had put the blunt knife on again. The gentleman

tried to cut his chop with it, and then he flung it down, and said, “God bless me, Saxon, I can’t stand this place. I can’t cut my food; I have to go to bed in the dark; and I’m followed when I go out. One would think they took me for a lunatic.”

“Poor fellow,” I said to myself; “that’s always the way. They never have the slightest idea that they *are* lunatics.”

The gentleman and Mr. Saxon went out for a walk, and the gentleman came in first and went up to the sitting-room. I heard him open the window, and that gave me a turn. I thought, “Oh, dear me, he has given Mr. Saxon the slip. Perhaps he is going to throw himself out of the window.”

I rushed upstairs and opened the door, end saw that he was leaning half way out of the window. He made a movement, as if he was going to throw himself right out; but I rushed in, and seized him by the coat-tails.

“Sir,” I said; “come in, please; that window’s dangerous!”

“God bless me!” he said, turning round. “What does all this mean? Am I in a private lunatic asylum?”

“No, sir,” I said. “Pray be calm, sir. Come, sit down; you’re not very well. Mr. Saxon will be here directly.”

He sat down, and looked at me, with such a strange look on his face, that I felt he had been let out too soon, and I made up my mind to advise Mr. Saxon to send him back. It wasn’t safe to have an only half-cured lunatic about the place.

“Go out of the room, if you please, madam,” he said. “I think it is very great impertinence on your part to come in without being asked.”

“No, sir,” I said; “I shall not leave you in your present condition, and if you make any resistance I shall call my husband. Now be a good, kind creature, and sit still till Mr. Saxon comes in.”

“God bless me,” he said, “am I mad? What does it mean? I—I—confound it, Saxon” (Mr. Saxon had come in), “what sort of a place is this that you’ve asked me to? Is it an hotel, or an asylum for idiots? This woman is certainly mad!”

“Poor gentleman!” I thought, “they always think it’s you, and not them, that’s

"Poor gentleman!" I thought, "they always think it's you and not them that's mad."

Mr. Saxon looked at me and then at his friend, and then he burst out laughing.

I don't know what put it into my head; but it came like a flash that I'd been "had," as Harry calls it.

I went hot and cold, and didn't know which way to look.

"It's all right, Bob," said Mr. Saxon; "don't blame Mrs. Beckett. It's my fault. I told her you were only let out of a lunatic asylum yesterday, and she and her husband have been seeing that you don't get into mischief."

I made for the door, and got downstairs quick. But I could hear the gentleman going on, and saying it was too bad, and that it was a shameful thing to have made out that he was a lunatic. But he was all right at dinner-time, and he laughed about it, and said Mr. Saxon was an awful man, and always up to some idiotic trick or other.

And so he was. But it was a long time before I felt quite comfortable with the gentleman we'd treated as a lunatic, and given a blunt knife to, and made to go to bed in the dark, and watched about wherever he went.

It was too bad of Mr. Saxon to play such a trick on us; for the gentleman was as sane as he was, and, if it came to that, a good deal saner. For sometimes Mr. Saxon does things, and says things, that are only fit for a lunatic asylum; and I've heard his friends say to him, "Why, if anybody who didn't know you were to hear you, they'd take you for a lunatic."

Mr. Saxon and the gentleman who wrote burlesques went away together. Mr. Saxon was really much better when he left, and he said so. He's promised to send us his portrait with his autograph under it to put up in our little private room, and before he left I got his permission to allow me to dedicate my next book to——

* * * * *

What! The billiard balls gone. Nonsense! You've looked everywhere for them, John, and they're not there? You don't mean to say they're stolen? Well, I

declare, what next! I suppose somebody has been in and found the place empty and walked off with them. I knew something would come of that separate entrance. It’s your own fault, for not locking the room up when you go to dinner. Your master will be in a fine way when he hears of it. I expect he’ll make you pay for them, and it will serve you right.

# CHAPTER XXI.

## *THE VILLAGE WITCH.*

People who have lived all their lives in London, when they come to live in a country place generally find the inhabitants what is called “behind the world,” and the village that our hotel is in is no exception to the rule. Even the railway, which has done a lot to take stupid ideas out of country people, hasn’t made our village folks quite as sharp as they should be. The old people—those who were born before School Boards and all the new-fangled ideas—have some awfully funny notions, and nothing you can say will shake their belief in them.

In our village there are still no end of old people who believe in charms, especially for warts; and one day that I had one come on my hand, Graves, the farrier, said quite seriously, “I’ll tell you how you can cure that, Mrs. Beckett. You get old Dame Trueman to charm it away for you.”

I said, “What nonsense, Mr. Graves! You don’t suppose I believe in such stuff as that?”

“Oh, but it isn’t stuff!” said Graves. “Dame Trueman has got charms for no end of things, and there’s plenty of people that she’s done good to, and cured, when the doctors had given them up.”

This Dame Trueman was quite a character, and lived up at the end of a village all alone with a black cat in an old broken-down cottage. Many years ago she had lost her husband under rather mysterious circumstances, and, it was said, she had bewitched him and caused his death, because he treated her badly.

He was a farm labourer, and worked on the farm that I told you about in “Old Gaffer Gabbitas,” called Curnock’s Farm; but he used to take more than was good for him at the village alehouse. People used to say, “How can he afford to spend such a lot of money out of his wages?” but the mystery was cleared up when one day it got all over the village that he had found out where his wife had hidden her savings, and that he had been helping himself for a long time without her knowing it.

It seems she had made a bit of money selling charms and telling fortunes to servant-girls and other foolish people, and had changed her savings into bank-notes, and sewn them up in the mattress, not telling her husband anything about it. But he had found it out, and had unsewn the mattress one day while she was out marketing, taken a couple of notes, and then sewn the place up again very neatly, and she had never noticed it.

How she found it out was through a neighbour who had seen Trueman change a five-pound note at the inn. Directly his wife heard of that, she went and unsewed the mattress, and the cat was out of the bag.

She was heard to say that he would never help himself to any more. And soon after that, one night he was at the alehouse, smoking his pipe, when a black cat, that nobody in the place ever remembered to have seen before, came into the tap-room and jumped up on his knee.

It was a very curious-looking cat, with very fierce eyes, and it had three white hairs on its breast. Trueman said, “Hullo, whose cat is this?” and he put his hand on its back and stroked it. Everybody in the room declared that as he did so they saw sparks fly out of its back, but the awful thing about it was that the man gave a sudden cry, as if some terrible pain had just come to him. The cat jumped off his knee, and ran out of the door and disappeared. Trueman tried to get on his legs; but he only staggered half-way across the room and fell down in a heap on the floor. They ran and fetched the doctor to him; but before the doctor could get there he was quite dead.

At the inquest the jury brought it in that he had died of heart disease; but everybody in the village declared that he had been bewitched by his wife for stealing her money, and that the black cat was the “familiar,” or whatever it is called.

Of course, when I first heard the story, I said, “What nonsense!” and I couldn’t understand how people living in a Christian country could believe in such rubbish; but there is no mistake about it that this very black cat, after the funeral, was seen in Dame Trueman’s house, and it followed her about like a dog, and nobody had ever seen it in the village before the night that it jumped on the poor man’s lap at the alehouse.

After that the old lady got quite the reputation of being a witch, and very curious stories were told about her, and the things that went on in her cottage. She was

always very clever with herbs and old women's remedies, as they are called, and she had, according to the ignorant people, wonderful charms for curing sore eyes, and wounds, and other things; and once when a man working on a farm had put his wrist out, he went to her, and she caught hold of his hand and muttered a charm, and pulled it and put it in its place again.

All these things made the old woman looked up to with a good deal of fear by the ignorant people. Nobody liked her; but they were all a bit afraid of her. And it was said that if anybody offended her she could put them under a spell, and bring misfortune upon them.

There was a boy in the village, a mischievous young imp, named Joe Daniels. His mother did washing, and he used to go round with an old perambulator and fetch it and also take it home. One day that he was wheeling his perambulator along with a bundle of linen on it, he met Old Dame Trueman coming down the lane, and after she had passed him he said to another boy that was with him, "Do you know she's an old witch, and rides through the air on a broomstick? My mother says she ought to be burned alive, if she had her deserts."

Dame Trueman, who was hobbling along, being a little lame with one leg, heard the boy, and she turned round and said, "Your mother says that, does she?—let her beware!" Then she made an awful grimace at the boy, and shook her stick at him. He declared that fire came out of her eyes, and that he felt an awful sensation go all over his body. When he got home he told his mother what had happened, and she was in a terrible state, and said she would be ruined, as the old witch would be sure to put a spell on her now. She was in such a state that she went off to the clergyman and asked him what she could do to guard against the spells. He lectured her, which was quite right, and told her it was very wicked to believe in such things as witches, as there weren't any. But it certainly was a fact that, from that day, nothing went right with Mrs. Daniels. She had the best linen, belonging to the richest family she washed for, stolen out of her drying-ground two days after; and her boy Joe, that the witch had shaken her stick at, was run over by a horse and cart the next time he took the washing home, and had his leg broken; and, to crown everything, it got about that she had taken washing of a family that had come down from London with the scarlet fever, and after that nobody would send her any washing at all; and, having been security for her married daughter's husband, and signed a bill of sale on her things, everything was seized one day, and the poor woman took on so about it that she died not long afterwards; and little Joe was sent away to a training-ship

to be made a sailor, and the first time he went to sea he fell down off the top of the mast into the water and was drowned.

This is one of the stories that I was told in our bar-parlour one night that we were talking about charms and things, and it brought up about old Dame Trueman. I said that all these things might have happened. I found out afterwards that they did—but that didn't prove that the old woman was a witch, or that her "charms" were anything more than ordinary remedies.

Our new clergyman, poor Mr. Wilkins's "young whipper-snapper," was awfully wild when he found that a lot of his parishioners believed in witches and spells, and he made it his business to investigate a lot of things that were being said about the old woman. He found out that she was telling fortunes by cards on the quiet, and selling a lot of foolish young women charms to make them get fallen in love with, and all that sort of nonsense; so he went straight up to the dilapidated old cottage where the old Dame lived, and he told her that if he heard any more of it he would have her up before the magistrate, and she would be sent to prison.

Of course she pitched him a nice tale, and tried to make out that it wasn't true; but that she was a poor, lone widow woman, and that these stories were circulated by her enemies to do her harm.

Graves, the farrier, said, when he heard that the young clergyman had been threatening the Dame, that something was sure to happen to him—that nobody ever crossed "the old witch's" path without coming to grief.

I laughed at the time, and told Graves that a great strong fellow, like he was, ought to be ashamed of himself for having such silly, childish ideas; but it was a very remarkable thing that, the week after, the young clergyman was riding past the Dame's door, when her black cat dashed suddenly across the road, and so terrified the clergyman's horse that it bolted and ran into a tree, and fell, and flung the young clergyman off on to his head, and he was confined to his bed for six weeks in consequence.

Of course it was only a coincidence; but Graves was quite triumphant about it, and he said to me the evening of the accident, "Well, Mrs. Beckett, what about old Dame Trueman being a witch now?"

Of course, things happening like this, and the things that had happened before,

made a great impression on the ignorant people; and even people who weren't ignorant said it was very odd that everybody who crossed or offended that dreadful old woman came to grief. It was no good arguing against it, because these things were known all over the village, and there is no doubt that the old hag made a lot of money out of her dupes, in consequence of her being held in such dread and looked up to as having supernatural powers.

As I said when I began to write about her, folks who live in London can hardly credit the number of people in villages who still believe in magic and spells and charms and witches. But even in some parts of London there are people who believe the same thing, because every now and then you read about "a wise woman" being brought up at the police-court for swindling young women by telling their fortunes, and selling them charms; and not long ago Harry read a bit out of the paper to me about "a wise woman," who had got five pounds out of a working man's wife for a bottle of something which she was to put in his tea to make him die, so that she could marry another man. A nice wife and a nice woman she must have been!

What has made me write so much about old Dame Trueman is this. There was an old gentleman who used to come to our smoke-room pretty regularly of an evening; but not till after Mr. Wilkins had left, and so he might be called a new customer. He was an old gentleman who took a small house in the neighbourhood, and it was said he was a retired builder. He was very nice and quiet, and I should say comfortably off, for his house was nicely furnished, and although there was only himself and his wife, they had two servants, and kept a pony and trap.

Mr. Gwillam—that was the old gentleman's name—began to use our house of an evening soon after he came, I suppose finding it dull at home, and he always smoked a long clay pipe, and drank hot grog in the good old-fashioned way. He didn't talk very much, only joining in the conversation now and then; but he was a wonderful listener, and the other customers soon found out that he was very simple-minded, because he took everything he heard for gospel. Some of them, when they found that out, used to start telling the most dreadful stories about what had happened in the place, and it was a sight to see the dear old gentleman open his innocent blue eyes, and to hear him say, "Good gracious!"

Somebody who knew him told us that what made him seem so simple and eccentric at times was that years ago, while superintending some building operations, he had fallen off a ladder on to his head, and it had affected him a

operations, he had fallen off a ladder on to his head, and it had affected him a little.

We liked him very much, because he was so nice and quiet, and, being an independent and retired person, he was just the sort of customer we liked to get into the smoke-room, as it brings others of the same class, and keeps the wrong sort out, as the wrong sort never feel comfortable where the right sort are.

The first thing that made me think Mr. Gwillam really was a little eccentric was his saying very quietly one evening that according to Revelations the end of the world would be at five-and-twenty minutes past six in the evening the last Friday in August, 1890. I thought it was a very odd thing to say, as nobody was talking about the end of the world, and, in fact, just at the time there was a dead silence.

I didn't know what to say, so I said, "Indeed!" Then he said, "Oh yes; but it's nothing to be frightened at, as we shall all be caught up by a whirlwind."

Graves, the farrier, looked at Mr. Gwillam for a minute, and then he said, "How do you know that, sir?"

"Oh," he said, "I read it in the *Evening Standard*, and that is a most respectable paper. It has been in several evenings."

"Oh," said Graves, "has it? It's very good of the editor to let us know. I hope we shall go up steady and not knock against each other. It will be very awkward if some of us turn over and go up head downwards."

I frowned at Graves, as it seemed to me wrong to jest about such matters; but I knew where Mr. Gwillam had seen it. It was an advertisement which some madman had put in for years, having nothing better to do with his money. But I thought it very queer that anybody in their senses could believe such mischievous nonsense.

After that I began to notice one or two queer things that Mr. Gwillam said, and I made up my mind that he must have what Harry calls "a tile loose;" but how loose it was I didn't know till he did something which made quite a sensation in the village. One night in our smoke-room he happened to mention that, coming out of his gate, he had come upon one of his maid-servants talking to a queer-looking old woman, and when he described the woman everybody said, "Why, that is old Dame Trueman, the witch!"

He looked very horrified, and said, “Do you mean to say that a witch is allowed to live in the place?”

That turned the conversation on to the subject, and everybody began to tell stories about Dame Trueman; of course, making them out as awful as possible to astonish the old gentleman.

He didn’t say much that night; but the next evening when he came he didn’t look very well, and he said that he had been awake all night thinking about the witch.

He smoked his pipe and had his glass of grog; but he went away early. After he was gone I said it was a pity for them to have told him such a lot of stuff about old Dame Trueman—he was just the man to take it all for gospel.

The next evening he didn’t come as usual, and I was afraid he was ill, and our doctor happening to look in, I asked him if he had heard if Mr. Gwillam was ill.

“Yes,” he said, “he is a bit poorly; but it’s nothing. The old boy hasn’t been able to sleep the last night or two, and it has upset his nerves. He’s got some absurd idea into his head that he is under a spell. He can’t be quite right in his head.”

The next day after dinner Graves came in in quite a bustle, and said, “I say, Mrs. Beckett, whatever do you think has happened?”

“How should I know?” I said. And if you come to think of it, it’s absurd for people to ask you what you think has happened. As if, out of the thousands of things that might happen, anybody could think straight off at once of the one that has happened.

“Oh,” said Graves, “there’s been an awful scene in the village! Old Gwillam was out for a walk this morning, and he saw old Dame Trueman coming along, and he ran after her and seized her by the neck and tried to push her into the horse-pond, shouting out that she was a witch, and a crowd came round, and some of them said, “Serve her right!” But the others interfered and dragged the old woman away, half-choked and black in the face, and then he ran after her, and laid into her with his walking-stick, shouting and cursing, and saying that she had bewitched him, and prevented him from sleeping; and the end of it was that Jones, the policeman, had to come to the rescue, and rush in and stop Mr. Gwillam. But he was so excited that he whacked into the policeman, and for that he was marched off to the police-station, all the village tagrag and bobtail

following.”

When Graves told me that, I thought it was a very dreadful thing. I laid the blame on the people who had told the poor old gentleman all that nonsense about Dame Trueman being a witch.

Harry went up to the police-station to make inquiries, and he told me that Mr. Gwillam had been allowed to go home; but he was to be summoned for assaulting the policeman, and also that Dame Trueman had been and applied for a summons against him for assaulting her.

There was a lot of talk about it in our bar and in the parlour that evening, and it was the biggest sensation we had had in the village since the inquest on the London gentleman, who was found dead in the wood near the Silent Pool, with a pistol in his hand, and a letter in his pocket saying he had committed suicide because he heard voices. It was a dreadful letter, and showed the poor fellow was quite mad. I cut the letter out from our county paper, and kept it, because I thought it so curious, as showing what extraordinary delusions some people go through life with, appearing sane in every other way. This was some of the letter —

“I have committed suicide to escape from the pursuit of a devilish agency. This is the story of my life. When I was a boy of tender age, some organization of individuals erected—where, of course, I cannot tell—an elaborate scientific contrivance for conveying all kinds of sounds and disagreeable sensations to the human frame. At the time this was first erected it was not brought into full play; but at a very early stage these persons worked upon my feelings by simulating the voices of persons with whom I was brought into contact. But, since then, wherever I go I have been annoyed by this scientific agency. Wherever I go the sound of human voices is conveyed to me. When I sit down an intense heavy pressure is brought to bear upon my body, destroying the effect of the food I eat, and producing great discomfort. This and the voices have at last driven me mad, and as no human agency will protect me I am determined to end my life, believing that beyond the grave those voices will not be allowed to pursue me, and I shall be at rest.”

Poor fellow!—but I suppose it is a common delusion, that about voices.

Of course Mr. Gwillam wasn’t as mad as that; but it was certain that he must have delusions because of his believing about the end of the world coming at

twenty-five past six on a Friday, and about our going up into the skies on a whirlwind. And it was a delusion for him to believe that Dame Trueman had bewitched him.

When the summonses came on for hearing before our magistrate, the little justice-room was crowded almost to suffocation. Mr. Gwillam, poor gentleman, had gone about the village, and got all the people who had anything to say against Dame Trueman to promise to come forward and prove that she had practised witchcraft, and what he called the black art.

He was very troublesome directly the case began, interrupting every minute, and saying that by the law of the land all witches had a right to be burned at the stake, and a lot of nonsense, and the magistrate had to speak quite cross to make him be quiet.

Old Dame Trueman was in court, and they say she looked most malignant—in fact, as much like a witch as it was possible to look without being one—and she told the magistrate how she had been assaulted. The magistrate asked Mr. Gwillam what he had to say, and he told the most extraordinary story you ever heard in your life.

He declared that “the old witch” had put a spell upon him so that he could not sleep. He had seen her plotting with his servant at his gate, and that night he couldn’t sleep, nor the next night either, and that he never should have slept again, only he was determined to find out what the spell was; and so he got up in the middle of the night and went out into his garden, and there, under a clod of earth, he discovered a toad, that was walking round and round. He said the toad had been charmed and put there by the witch, and as long as it kept walking round and round he could not go to sleep, so he had killed the toad, and the proof that it was a spell, was this—that directly he had killed it he went back to bed again and fell asleep, and he had not had another bad night since.

The magistrate looked over his gold spectacles very hard at Mr. Gwillam, and he said, “My dear sir, I’m very sorry for you; but we can’t accept your explanation. No toad could have anything to do with your sleeping, and there is no such thing as a witch.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Gwillam, “no such thing as a witch! Why, this woman is one! I have dozens of witnesses here to prove that she has put them under her spells. I demand that she shall be punished as the law directs, and burnt alive, or

drowned in the horse-pond!”

The magistrate, of course, had heard the rumours about Dame Trueman, because they had been the common talk in the village for years, so he thought it was a good opportunity to give the people a lecture, and he made a long speech, saying how wicked it was to suppose that anybody had supernatural powers; that witches were only believed in when people were ignorant and degraded and knew no better, and he was ashamed to think that in such a thriving place as our village there were still people so foolish as to entertain such beliefs. As to the story about the toad, it was too absurd. It was trifling with the Court to make such an excuse for a wanton attack upon a feeble old woman.

“It is no excuse!” exclaimed Mr. Gwillam indignantly. “She is a bad old woman, and she put that toad in my garden to charm me. She charmed me, and I got no rest day nor night for her till I found this walking toad under the mould. She dug a hole, and she put it there to have a spell on me. She went round and round this walking toad after she had buried it, and I shouldn’t have slept till now if I hadn’t found it and killed it.”

The magistrate called the doctor up and whispered with him for a little, and then he said that no doubt Mr. Gwillam, who was a very respectable person, was the victim of a delusion, and had allowed himself to be carried away by his feelings. He must mark his sense of the impropriety of the proceedings by fining him ten pounds—five pounds for each assault—or a month’s imprisonment.

“I won’t pay!” shouted Mr. Gwillam, brandishing his umbrella. “I’ll go to prison!”

He was quieted down a little and taken into another room, and the crowd was got away while a consultation was held. The old gentleman’s wife saw the magistrate, and asked to be allowed to pay the ten pounds without her husband knowing it, and this was done, and presently he was released believing that the magistrate had altered his mind.

That evening he came into our bar-parlour as calm as though nothing had happened. I had begged the customers not to say anything about the affair to him, and they didn’t. But just as I thought everything was all right he startled everybody by saying that he was going to wait for the witch at midnight, and rid the place of her.

“Harry,” I said to my husband in a whisper, “you must see Mr. Gwillam home, and don’t leave him till he’s safe in his own house. He isn’t fit to be trusted alone. He’ll murder that old woman, or some awful thing.”

So Harry went home with him that evening, and saw him safe indoors, and told his wife to look after him; but we all agreed that he ought to be watched, or something dreadful would happen, as he’d evidently got the witch on his mind.

But before anything was done, a most extraordinary thing happened. One morning soon after the trial, the neighbours noticed that there was no smoke coming out of Dame Trueman’s chimney. They thought it odd, as she was generally up and her fire alight very early. About twelve o’clock a young woman, who, it seems, had an appointment with her to get a charm for her lover, who was going to sea, called at the house, and knocked at the door, but couldn’t make anybody hear. Some people saw her knocking, and getting no answer, and made up their minds something was wrong, so they went and forced the door open.

“When they got inside all was quite still. They called out, but got no answer. One of them then went into the kitchen and gave a cry of horror. There, on the hearth, by a fire that had gone out, lay something that looked like a heap of cinders. And walking round and round the heap was a black cat with three white hairs on its breast.

The heap of cinders was old Dame Trueman. The witch was dead. It was supposed that she fell forward in a fit of some sort into the fire, and her clothes caught, and that she was burned to death on the hearth. Nothing else had caught light from the flames, as the kitchen was all paved with bricks.

That was the end of “our witch,” and a very awful end it was, and a nice sensation it made in the village. Of course she wasn’t a witch; but I’m afraid she was a very wicked old woman, and was quite willing to be thought to be able to cast spells, because she made money by it.

When her house was searched, over a hundred pounds was found concealed in different places. The black cat disappeared the day she was found dead, and nobody ever saw it again.

I know there are lots of London people who will think that I am like the customers in our smoke-room, and that I have exaggerated; but I have not. I have

just told you the true story of our village witch—and I can show you the county paper with the account in it of Mr. Gwillam's trial for beating her; and the very words he said about the walking toad are in it.

After the witch was dead, Mr. Gwillam seemed to get better; but to the last he persisted that it was his killing the toad that had brought about the old woman's death. It was one of her "familiars," and he had slain her in slaying that. Nobody attempted to argue with him on the question. He didn't come to our place very long afterwards, because he got an idea that whenever he went out he was followed by a shadow, and if ever the shadow overtook him it would kill him; so his wife had a man to look after him and go about with him, who was really his keeper, and he was never brought out after dark. Poor gentleman, I have no doubt it was all the result of his tumbling off the ladder on to his head before he retired from business.

The cottage that "the witch" had lived in so many years was done up and thoroughly repaired; but nobody would live in it, as it was said to be haunted. Some boys declared that late at night they had seen a black cat with three white hairs on its breast prowling about on the roof and making a most unearthly noise, and that——

* * * * *

The post! Thank you. Oh, Harry! who *do* you think this letter's from? It's from Jenny. She and her husband are coming to stay with us at last, and they're going to bring the baby. Oh! I am so glad.

# CHAPTER XXII.

## *CONCLUSION.*

I don’t know why it is, but when I sit down to write this “Memoir,” knowing that it may be the last that I shall ever write, it makes me feel a little sad.

In all human probability I, Mary Jane Beckett, am writing the last few pages of the last book that will ever come from my pen. We are leaving the ‘Stretford Arms,’ and going into a much larger house—a real big hotel in a well-known county town—where we shall have waiters in evening dress, and a big coffee-room, and a large commercial-room, and we shall make up over fifty beds, besides having a large room for sales and auctions, and another very large, lofty room for balls and big dinners and assemblies, and that sort of thing.

I am very sorry to leave the dear old ‘Stretford Arms,’—our first house, and the one where we have spent some happy years, and where my little Harry and my little Mary were both born; but we have made money, and we must not stand still. We have sold the house most advantageously, and made a very large profit, as we ought to do, for we have worked the business up and improved the premises very considerably.

It was a long time before we made up our minds, and we had very long and anxious talks; but a friend of Harry’s told us about the big hotel that was to be had in a Midland county town, and which was just the place for us to work up and do well in, and Harry, having a means of getting all the extra money, wanted to take it. It seemed a pity to let it go, especially as we could never hope to do better than we were doing at the ‘Stretford Arms,’ and if we are not going to work hard all our lives we must get into a place where we can make a bigger profit, and get more scope for our capital.

I have been to see the new house, and a very fine place it is. The rooms are simply grand. It is right opposite the Corn Exchange, and has a noble entrance-hall with statues in it, and is called the “Royal Hotel,” because Queen Elizabeth once slept there. Harry says that Queen Elizabeth seems to have slept at nearly every old hotel in the kingdom; but that is all nonsense.

The place is in really excellent order, having not long ago been refurnished by a great London firm, and some of the bedrooms are fit for Queen Elizabeth to come to now.

It will be quite a different trade, of course, to what we have been accustomed to, as coffee-room customers and commercial gentlemen come in every day by the trains, and it is a big racing house when the races are on, and they are very famous races indeed. It will be something new for me to study the commercial gentlemen and the sporting gentlemen, as we didn't have any at the 'Stretford Arms,' not having any shops or a racecourse. I am told that I shall pick up a lot of character among the commercials, who are most entertaining and full of anecdotes; but it will be too late to put them in my book, as I must finish it now. I know I shall have no time at the "Royal Hotel," for it will be a big task to manage it, and take us all we know.

I am told, too, that some of the sporting gentlemen would make capital stories, one of them being a young marquis, who is very odd and goes on anyhow. I suppose it will be what Harry calls "a warm time" at race time. I rather dread it. If it is too warm I shall keep out of the way.

But that is like me. Here am I beginning to worry about things before they happen, and instead of that I ought to be getting this chapter finished, for to-morrow is "the change," and the new people take my dear old home over and enter into possession.

Everybody about the place is *so* sorry that we are going, and the nicest and kindest things have been said of us. There was some talk of giving Harry a banquet; but we thought it best not for many reasons, and so last night a few old friends and customers came into our bar-parlour and had a little supper with us, and during supper the Doctor, who has been one of our best friends, presented us, in the name of the company, with a most beautiful silver salver for our sideboard, and on it was engraved "To Mr. and Mrs. Beckett, from a few old customers of the 'Stretford Arms,' wishing them long life, success, and happiness."

It was very kind of them, wasn't it? and we both felt it very deeply. It is a most beautiful salver, and we shall treasure it as long as we live, and I hope our children will treasure it after we are gone. It is very gratifying, when you have tried to keep up the character of your house and to make your customers comfortable, to know that your efforts have been appreciated, and that

everybody wishes you well in your new undertaking.

We are going to spend a week in London before we take possession of the "Royal Hotel," as Harry has his solicitor and the brokers to see, and a lot of business to attend to, and I want to take my boy to the Zoological Gardens. He is very fond of his Noah's Ark, and is always delighted to hear his father tell him about the great big animals that live in foreign parts, and I am most anxious to hear what the dear child will say when he sees a real elephant and hears a real lion roar. He is most intelligent for his age, and, though we were rather afraid while he was teething, he has had the most perfect health ever since, and is as fine a little fellow as you could find in the kingdom, and very sturdy on his legs. He has a little sailor suit now, and marches about as proud as you please; but he will keep his hands in his pockets. The sailor suit which I bought him included a knife on a piece of whip-cord, which was the terror of my life for a long time. I wanted to take it away; but he screamed himself almost into convulsions, and I was obliged to let him keep it; but I lived in hourly dread of nurse coming rushing in to say Master Harry had cut himself.

I can't think why it is that boy children always want to keep their hands in their pockets, and so dearly love a knife. Little girls don't care about knives; but, then, little girls are easier to manage in every way than little boys, who begin to assert their independence at the very earliest age.

I hope where we are going to will suit my little ones as well as this place has done; but everybody tells me that it is a most healthy town, and so I won't begin to fidget on that score, though I should feel much happier if our nice, kind, clever doctor could be near us. But, of course, that can't be.

I believe I shall cry to-morrow when we leave the dear old 'Stretford Arms;' but I shall try not to. I have been very happy in it, and we have been very fortunate, far more than we had any right to expect, seeing that we were only young beginners.

The packing up has been an awful job. It is really wonderful how things accumulate. We have had to buy boxes and I don't know what, and we shall want a big van to take everything, as we take some of our furniture away with us, the new people having some of their own they want to bring in. I am very glad, as it will always be something to remind us of the old place.

Things in this village haven't changed much since we first came. Dashing Dick's

things in this village haven't changed much since we met last. Dashing Dick's grandmother, poor old lady, is now quite paralyzed; but the lad has turned out much better than was expected, and has been sent to sea, and writes very nice letters to her from foreign parts, and has begun to send her a little money. Old Gaffer Gabbitas, his daughter, who lives in the village, told us, a little time ago was found dead in his armchair one Sunday afternoon, with his Bible on his lap open at the place where he had been reading it when he fell asleep for the last time. We have written out to Mr. Wilkins in Australia, giving him our new address, and saying we shall always be glad to hear from him; and dear Jenny has another baby, a little girl, so, as she says in her letter, we are both equal now.

Graves, the farrier, has much improved lately. He is more civilized since he took to use our house regularly, and gave up going to the other place. He came out quite nobly not long ago, in a little affair which made some talk in the village. One of his men injured himself while working at the forge, he being, I am sorry to say, the worse for liquor at the time (the man, not Graves), and was so bad he had to be sent to a London hospital, where he remained some time, and all the while he was away Graves paid his money to the wife, because she was an invalid, and had a large family. This shows that there is often a lot of good under a rough exterior; but I believe blacksmiths and farriers are very good-hearted men as a rule, and I always respect them, for I never see one without thinking of that noble-hearted blacksmith in the beautiful piece of poetry which I also heard as a song one night when there was an entertainment at our national schools. It was a lovely idea, that brawny fellow going to church of a Sunday, and thinking of his dead wife when he heard his daughter singing in the village choir, and wiping away a tear.

Graves isn't the man to do that sort of thing—he couldn't, because he has never married, and I don't think he is so regular in attendance at church as the other blacksmith was; but his keeping that poor woman and children all those weeks, shows that his heart is in the right place, if he doesn't always pick his words as carefully as he might.

Miss Ward, our barmaid, that you may remember was so unfortunate in her young man, that horrid fellow Shipsides, has married well, I am glad to say, and she and her husband have been put in to manage a public-house in the South of England. She wrote to me, and told me when she was married, and sent me a piece of cake, and I wrote her a nice letter back, and said how pleased I was to hear it.

Of course, directly I knew we were going to move, I wrote to Mr. Saxon, and told him what our new address would be, and said that he might be sure if he paid us a visit no one would be more welcome. He wrote back and said perhaps he would come when the races were on. I hear he has taken to go racing lately, which is a thing I should never have expected, though I remember hearing that, years ago, he used to be very fond of sport, but got too busy to keep it up. I hope it will do him good; at any rate, it is a change, and the fresh air is just what he wants. But I hope he won't gamble and lose a lot of money; but I don't think he will, as he has to work too hard to get it. I have been told that he takes that nice Swedish gentleman about with him to the races, so perhaps he will come, too. I shall be very glad to see him again, as he was one of the nicest gentlemen I ever talked to, and had been all over the world, and was full of information. Poor fellow! he ought to be taken about; for he must have a bad time of it at home with Mr. Saxon, whose liver seems to get worse as he gets older.

The last I heard of him he had been to Italy for a month, for the benefit of his health, and came back in a fortnight, swearing that he had shortened his life by ten years, by going. Fancy a man going away for rest, and to benefit his health, and travelling five thousand miles, night and day, in a railway carriage, and then going on because he felt knocked up. But, with all his faults and his queer ways, there will be nobody that I shall be more pleased to see at the "Royal Hotel" than Mr. Saxon.

The new clergyman, the young fellow who was the cause of Mr. Wilkins going to Australia, has turned out what Harry calls "quite a trump." There is no mistake about the impression he has made in the place. He has woke it up, so to speak, and, though nobody liked him at first, resenting his new-fangled ways, now he is the greatest favourite with everybody. He is a fine cricketer, and has made a cricket club, and he sings capitally, and gets up penny readings and entertainments in the winter, and his sermons are first class. The first Sunday some of the old-fashioned people were horrified. He made a joke in his sermon, and it was such a good joke that it made the people laugh before they remembered where they were. He said afterwards that he saw a lot of people were horrified, but that it wasn't wicked to laugh. He said being good didn't mean being sulky and gloomy and pulling a long face, and there was no more harm in feeling glad and gay inside a church than outside it; in fact, if there was any place in which people ought to feel comfortable and happy, and ready to smile on the slightest provocation, it was when they were worshipping One who had done so much to make His people glad and gay and happy here below.

It took time to get the old-fashioned people round to his way of thinking; but he did it at last, and now our parson is the best-liked man in the place. Everybody respects him and likes him, and nobody is afraid of him, except the bad characters, and they are afraid of him because he don't care whether they are high or low, rich or poor. He tells them straight what he thinks of them. The Rev. Tommy was a dear nice old gentleman; but his mind was always wandering away to before the Flood, and he let everything after the Flood go its own way. The new man, "the whipper-snapper," doesn't bother himself even about yesterday. He makes the best of to-day, and looks out for to-morrow, and, after all, that is the only way to take life practically, and to make the best of it.

Which reminds me that I have to make the best of to-day myself, and to look out for to-morrow as well, for I shall have all my work cut out, so my dear old "Memoirs" will have to be cut short, and wound up, and put away, for there won't be any "Memoirs" at the "Royal Hotel."

I think I have told you nearly everything about the people you know who have been mixed up with the 'Stretford Arms.' We leave it with plenty of friends, and, I honestly believe, without a single enemy. And we leave it with a first-class reputation and an excellent connection. It has become quite a "pulling-up house," as it is called in the trade, with people who drive from London, and is now well-known as a quiet and comfortable country hotel for ladies and gentlemen and families, who wish to stay for a little time a short distance from town. The local connection has not been neglected, and our smoke-room has become quite a nice little local club, while the billiard-room has brought many of the young fellows from the best private houses to make it a rendezvous. We have been very particular to keep the billiard-room quiet and select, and to discourage gambling, and this has made it a boon to the neighbourhood, when with bad management it might have become quite the reverse.

The new people who are coming in are luckier than we were, for they will find a good business ready made for them. All they have to do is to keep everything up to the mark, and I think they will. I have seen them several times, and I like them very much. Their name is Eager. Mr. Eager is a man of about thirty-five, tall and dark, and I think rather handsome, and his wife is a pretty little woman of about five-and-twenty. They have both been in the business before, her papa having been an hotel-proprietor in the North of England, and he having been manager to a small hotel at the seaside, where the proprietor was his uncle.

They are very nice, quiet, straightforward people, and our business with them

They are very nice, quiet, straightforward people, and our business with them has been done very pleasantly indeed. They are what we were when we took the ‘Stretford Arms’—a newly-married couple—and they seem most affectionate and amiable.

Mrs. Eager and I had a quiet cup of tea together while the gentlemen were talking business over a cigar and a glass of whiskey-and-water, and she told me all about their meeting, and falling in love, and it wasn’t at all a bad story.

It seems that Mrs. Eager, who was a Miss Braham, was staying with her papa, who was not very well, at the seaside place where Mr. Eager’s hotel was. Her papa was a good swimmer, and used to bathe early in the morning from the beach. One morning he was swimming when suddenly he felt very bad, and found he was losing strength, and being carried too far from shore in a rough sea. Another gentleman who was swimming, saw what was the matter, and swam towards him, and managed to help him, and keep him up and shout till a man on the beach saw them, and jumped into a boat and rowed out to them, and rescued them both. The old gentleman (he wasn’t very old) was very grateful, and said the young fellow, who was Mr. Eager, had saved his life—and that was quite true, for, but for him, he would have been drowned, as his strength was fast deserting him.

That began the acquaintance, and Mr. Eager was invited to come and stay at Mr. Braham’s hotel up north, and he did; and then the daughter, as well as the papa, took a great liking to him, and they were very soon engaged to be married. When the father found how the land lay he was very pleased, and he said he would start the young couple in a nice little hotel of their own as soon as they were married, and that is how they came to take the ‘Stretford Arms’ of us.

I hope they will be as happy in it as we have been. I shall often sit and think of an evening, when I am at the “Royal Hotel” of the little ‘Stretford Arms,’ and, in fancy, I shall see the dear old bar-parlour and the smoke-room, and the customers sitting there smoking their evening pipes, when I am far away.

“What is it? Come in. The master wants me? All right; say I’m coming directly.” I must finish. I have promised Harry that I won’t start any more “Memoirs” in the new house, as he says, when I have a few minutes to spare, he wants to enjoy the pleasure of my society; and so I am going to get every bit of this book written and finished to-night, and then good-bye to pens and ink, and all the pleasure and all the pains of authorship.

Looking back on all that has happened since I left service, and married Harry, and went into this line of business, I feel that I have every reason to be grateful. We have had good luck, good health, and a good time, and not one really great or serious trouble. If we go on as we have begun, perhaps before we are too old to enjoy it we shall have made enough money to retire and live in a pretty little house, and devote ourselves to each other and our children. That is my idea of happiness.

When that time comes I may perhaps be tempted to write some more of my experiences. I dare say I shall have had plenty by then. But till that time does come I have made up my mind to think about no books but the books of the "Royal Hotel," and to study no characters but the characters of my servants. And so, gentle reader, though it makes me feel sad to say the words, I have at last to wish you good-bye—a long, long good-bye. I hope you won't forget me altogether, but that sometimes, when you are reading other people's stories, you will say to yourself, "I wonder how Mary Jane is getting on;" and if any of you are ever near the Midland town we are going to make our new home in, I hope you will come and stay at the "Royal Hotel," proprietor Harry Beckett, late of the 'Stretford Arms.' You may be sure that we shall make you as comfortable as possible, and I think from what you know of my husband and myself you will be able to rely upon finding a good kitchen and a good cellar, and comfort, cleanliness, and attention, combined with moderate charges.

Please don't think that I say this by way of advertisement. I should be very sorry to make my book an advertisement for my business, as I don't believe in that sort of thing. I have written the "Memoirs" of our village hotel as I wrote the "Memoirs" of myself in service, because I thought I had something to write about that would be interesting to the people who read books. As a landlady, I have had as many opportunities of observing people and hearing their stories as I had when a servant—more varied opportunities as the landlady than as the servant. I hope that now, as in the former "Memoirs," I have written nothing which can offend or be considered a breach of confidence. I have tried in my humble way to describe everything I have seen and heard faithfully, and to give a correct description of all that happened in our hotel.

"All right, dear; I won't be one minute." I *must* finish this chapter now, or I shall not have another chance. To-morrow we shall be moving up to London, and I shan't get a minute. Good-bye, dear reader; that impatient husband of mine won't let me have another minute to myself, and so I can't write the nice finish

that I wanted to. All I have time to say is this. Don’t all of you go and take country hotels or village inns because we have done so well and been so comfortable. For one that succeeds in our business there are half-a-dozen who fail; and I have told you a good deal more about the bright side of our business than about the dark side, because I don’t think people nowadays want to look on the dark side of anything more than they can help. We have been fortunate; but you might get a business that would nearly drive you mad, and ruin you. I told you about a few of the dangers of taking a business in our line in my first chapter, and since I wrote that I have learnt a good deal more. I could tell you some stories of hard-working young couples who have put all their capital, and a lot of their friends’ and relations’ capital, into a licensed house, and come to the most dreadful grief. I know there is an idea that a public-house or an hotel is a royal road to fortune. The money makes itself, and all the landlady has to do is to dress herself up and wear diamond earrings and a big gold chain, while the landlord drives a fast trotter in a gig, and goes to races, and comes home and spends the evening in smoking big cigars and drinking champagne.

That is the idea some people have of being a licensed victualler, and it is a very nice one. Go to the Licensed Victuallers’ Asylum and ask some of the inmates what *their* idea is, and you will hear a different tale.

We have done well because we have worked hard, and because we walked before we tried to run, and looked after our business ourselves, and didn’t expect it to go up all by itself in a night, like the mushrooms grow. “Luck,” you say. No, that is a word that has no right to come into business at all. I was reading a book of poetry the other day, that one of the gentlemen who stays with us left behind him, and I came on something about Luck which I thought was so good that I copied it out.

It was this——

“A right hand, guided by an earnest soul
With a true instinct, takes the golden prize
From out a thousand blanks. What men call luck
Is the prerogative of valiant souls—
The fealty life pays its rightful kings.”

Of course I don’t mean to say that Harry and I are “rightful kings.” That is the way a poet has to put it to make it poetry, I suppose; but I do mean to say that the first part of the verse is true about us and the way we got on. And so, if we drew a prize where others get blanks, it isn’t fair to put it down to our “luck.”

But, luck or no luck, we did draw a prize, and I hope we are going to draw another. The “Royal Hotel” will never be to me what the ‘Stretford Arms’ was. There won’t be the romance about it, and perhaps it is as well, as a woman with a big business and two little children to look after hasn’t much time for romance. The romance of the ‘Stretford Arms’ was very nice though, for it enabled me to write these Tales of a Village Inn, and to ask the reader to share in the joys and sorrows, the pains and pleasures, and the trials and adventures of Mary Jane Married, and—no, not settled—anything but settled.

If you could see the way this room is blocked up with boxes half packed, and how things are lying about all over the place, you wouldn’t say settled—unsettled, just at present, would be the word. Never mind; I dare say it will come all right, and in a few weeks we *shall* be settled at the “Royal Hotel,” and I hope it will be a very long time before we make another move.

And now, farewell, dear reader; I must write the word at last. Harry sends you his kind regards, little Harry says “Ta-ta,” and my dear little baby girl puts her little fat hand to her mouth and blows you a kiss, and, with just one little tear of regret in her eye, Mary Jane Beckett, formerly Mary Jane Buffham, and late of the ‘Stretford Arms’ Hotel, wishes you all a long and happy life, and bids you slowly and sadly a long “Farewell.”

* * * * *

It is written, the last line. Perhaps the last line I shall ever write for print. Think kindly of me, won’t you? and let my book have a nice place in your library. I can promise you that it will be a nicer cover than the last. No grinning policeman this time, with his arm round my waist. This will be a book that I can give to my husband, and be proud of, and write his name inside—

"*To my dear Harry.*
*From his loving wife, the Authoress.*"

THE END.

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