Susan A. Atkinson
from
Mary Catherine Key

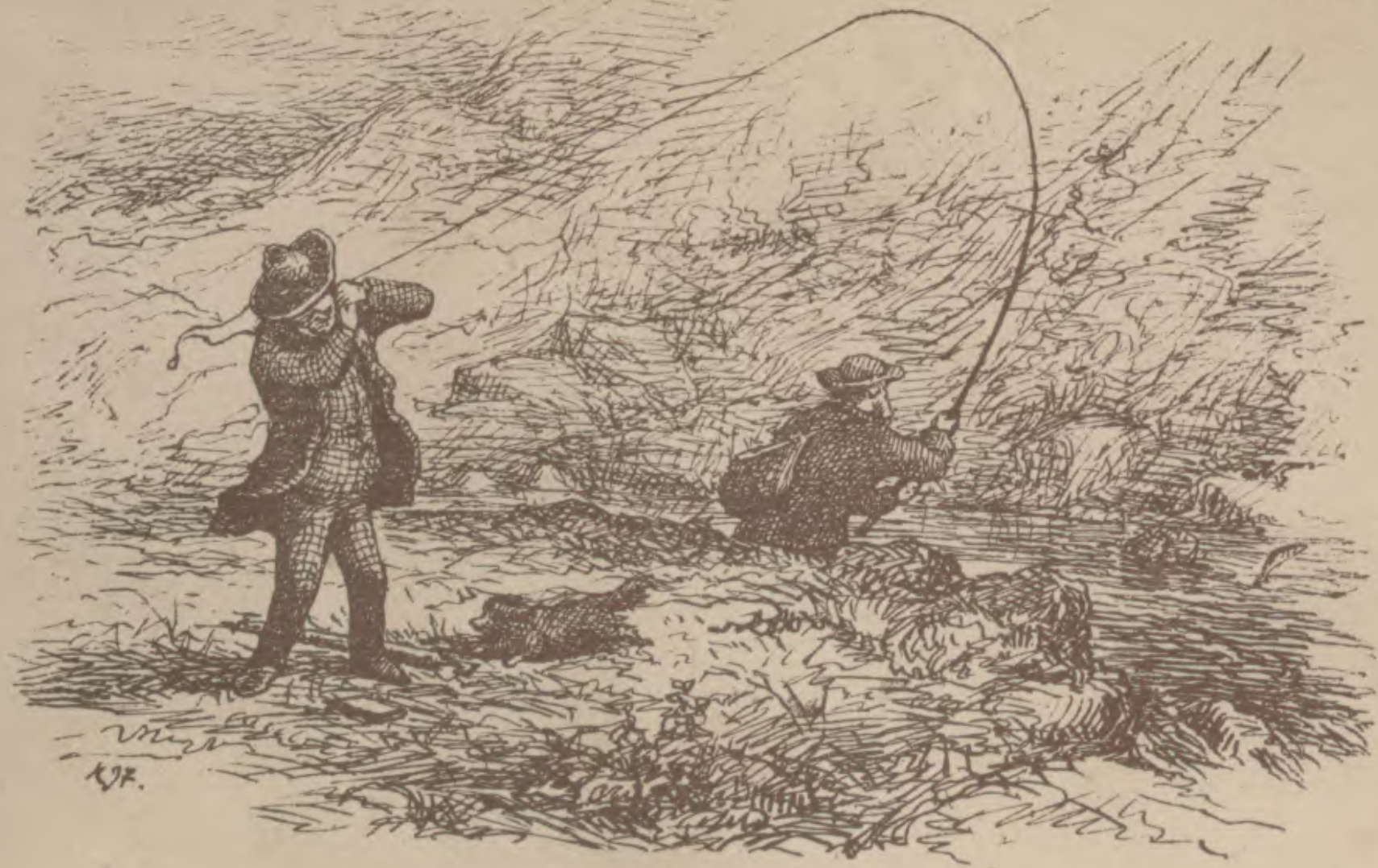
ALWAYS IN THE WAY.

Printed by Schenck & M'Farlane,

FOR

EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS, EDINBURGH.

LONDON, . . . HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.
CAMBRIDGE, . MACMILLAN AND CO.
DUBLIN, . . . M'GLASHAN AND GILL.
GLASGOW, . . JAMES MACLEHOSE.



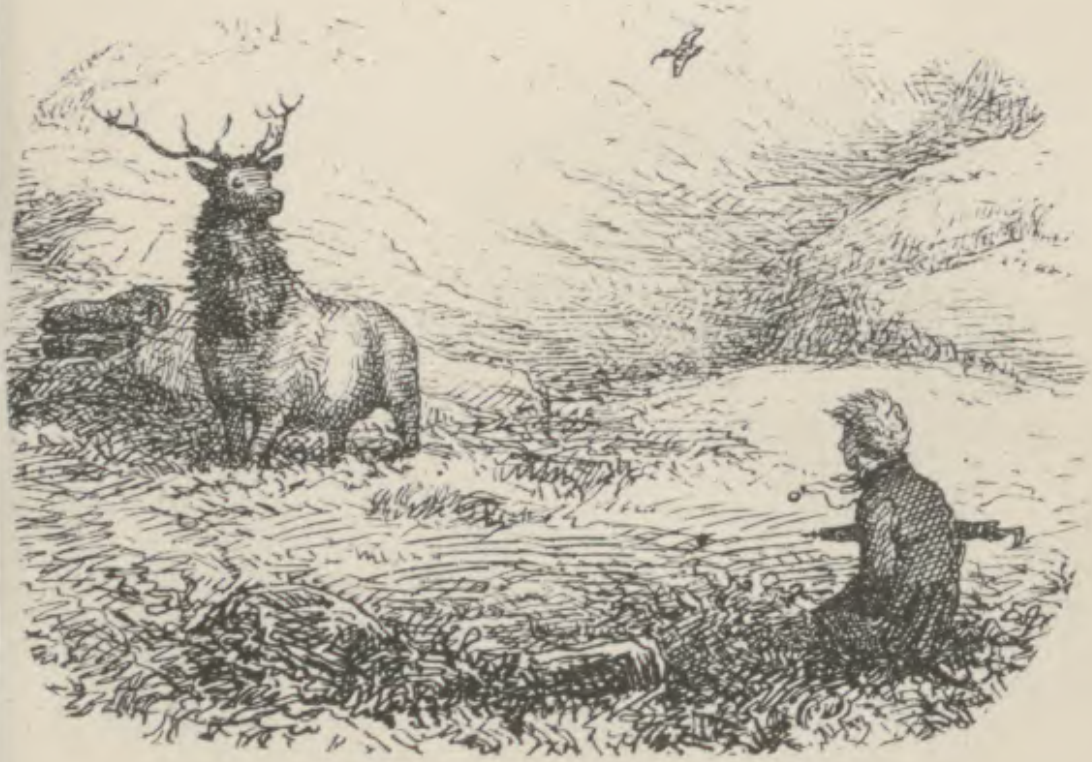
A RETREAT IN THE BAVARIAN TYROL

ALWAYS IN THE WAY:

A LITTLE STORY.

BY THOMAS JEANS,

AUTHOR OF THE "TOMMIEBEG SHOOTINGS."



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY K. J. F.

EDINBURGH: EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS.

1868.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

PAGE

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

ALWAYS IN THE WAY.

CHAPTER I.

I HAVE made up my mind on the subject. I will run the risk of being stigmatised as illiberal, narrow-minded, churlish, selfish. Tittlebat may write letters to the *Field*, and call me all the hard names he can find in his pocket Johnson; and all the small fry of sporting newspaper correspondents may make common cause to abuse me; but never will I divulge, save to mine own familiar friends, the exact whereabouts of a snug, cleanly, well-conducted roadside inn, in a remote part of the Bavarian Tyrol, which I discovered years ago, when good King Ludwig reigned at Munich, at a time when an Englander

was looked upon as a *rara avis;* and in whose neighbourhood I have spent many a happy day on the banks, or, to speak more truthfully, in the bright sparkling waters, of the beautiful grayling stream that lends its name to the village, as it flows tranquilly under the crazy wooden bridge.

I may not say correctly that I was the actual first discoverer of this charming spot, because, some twenty years or so prior to my expedition on foot into this far-away region, an English fisherman had stopped there for some days, who had left behind him a reputation almost fabulous. He it was who had first astonished the natives with the science of fly-fishing, till then unheard of, and still unpractised at the period of my arrival there.

My landlord, a simple-minded but intelligent fellow, told me how this wonderful man had been his guest for many days, how he used to go to the river alone, and how the villagers, himself among the number, used to watch his proceedings at a distance. He actually cozened the trout and grayling out of the water, this extraordinary being; but what was yet more inexplicable, he would frequently seat himself on the bank, and, pulling

out some sort of instrument, cut open a fish, examine it carefully, and afterwards throw it away, to be picked up as soon as he was out of sight, and be commented on by the curious lookers-on.

It remained a mystery to them ever after what his object could have been in cutting a trout to pieces and leaving it on the shingle. I would not aver it was not assumed to be a sort of incantation—a victim sacrificed to propitiate the tutelar deity of the river.

Being aware that the author of that delightful book *Salmonia* had penetrated into many an out-of-the-way nook in the Tyrol and Styria, in pursuit of his favourite sport, I had little difficulty in recognising in my English predecessor the immortal Sir Humphrey Davy. It was obvious he had dissected the fish either for the purpose of ascertaining what it was then feeding on, or, what is quite as likely, of examining its vertebral structure, since it not unfrequently happens that a trout of unusual shape and marks is taken amidst commoner species in a new river.

But I have wandered into bygones. I am not,

however, sorry to have made this digression, since it is no slight testimony in favour of the much-abused science of angling, from the great Lexicographer downwards, that a philosopher so distinguished as the man I have mentioned should not have considered it unworthy the indulgence of a most enthusiastic passion.

At the period I speak of, the fishing of the rivers was property. Portions of the stream were, as they are at this day, let to fishermen, who, with clumsy nets, and with still clumsier tackle and coarse bait, contrived to earn a livelihood—the fast-days always securing them a certain market. These poor fellows would frequently entreat of me to give them a day or two on their water, and used to accompany me with a long barrel, slung across the shoulders, to keep the fish alive till they should be transferred to the floating boxes. Many a time, to do a good turn to two or three of them in a day, I have gone a considerable distance up or down the valley.

A certain length of the river, however, was always reserved by the proprietor—the great man who lived at the Schloss—and many is the hospi-

table reception I have met with formerly from the Herr Graf or the Herr Baron—Freiherr, I should say—on inclosing my card in a civil note, begging the permission to have a day or two's fishing in his preserved water.

All this is now changed. The country has been overrun with travellers, many of them armed to the teeth with tackle for lake and tackle for river. Our countrymen, I am sorry to say it, have on the Continent very different ideas of the relative meanings of the words *meum* and *tuum* to what they profess or are compelled to observe in England, and they are too apt to resent as a personal insult any interference of the rightful proprietors of the water with their sport.

Besides this, the arts of fishing with the fly and of spinning the minnow have become more widely known, and are successfully practised wherever there has been much intercourse with English fishers: thus, the real value of the fishing, as a sport, is fully recognised, while at the same time the poor fish, whose ancestors would have risen at your hat if thrown into the water,

have become shy and wary, as well as less abundant.

Hence it is that the proprietors are now all more or less jealous of interlopers, and unless a portion of the stream near the towns happens to be rented by the landlord of his hotel (which is not unfrequently the case), the traveller has the utmost difficulty, without an introduction to the owner of the water, in getting any fishing whatever. I *could* name one old Graf, the proprietor of a large extent of country, with one of the best fishing streams in Bavaria running through the length of it, who, in reply to a request for permission for me to fish *with the fly*, made to him by his own daughter, scarcely professed his regret for a vow he had registered, that no Englishman should, in his lifetime, ever throw a line in his waters. Nay, I fancy the old gentleman took a positive pleasure in refusing me.

I never succeeded in getting the exact version of the incident that caused him to make such an unpleasant resolution; but some free-and-easy traveller had, I understood, persisted in flogging

his water after being formally warned off; and, after thrashing the keeper, had actually bearded the old noble in his own ancestral castle, and threatened to have him out at ten paces.

My village lies far away from the great travelled road; so far—thanks to its situation—that the wildest speculation is not even likely to project a railway to invade its privacy, corrupt its people from their almost primitive simplicity and frank honesty, and vulgarise the beauty of its picturesque and romantic neighbourhood.

Think not, then, O Tittlebat! that thy envious reproaches shall cause me to turn the stream of civilisation (?) into the simple valley of the—well, we will call it the Aschthal. My village you will have some difficulty in finding in the map under the name of Aschbrück. But this much I promise—if by chance thy good star should guide thy steps to my happy valley when I happen to be there—thou shalt not find me the jealous churl thou takest me for. It shall be my pleasure to lead thee to the best grayling streams, to show thee where to cast for the big trout, so rare in our times. I will furnish thee with *the*

fly, invented and tied by myself; and if it so please thee, thou mayest call it by thine own name in thy next letter to the *Field*.

And then, O Tittlebat! if thou art a lover of nature—and every angler is or ought to be one—I will put before thee such pictures! such grand compositions of forest and mountain, with a glacier rising above all! such gems, too, of river scenery!

Every bend of the river offers some new point of view, which thou wilt never discover if thou goest on whipping the water continually—that exquisite bit, for example, just above the village, where we get a long reach of the river, now dashing madly through the dark masses of rock, rounded and scooped out and honeycombed by the action of the water; now rippling gently in the middle of the wide bed of boulders and pebbles, which tells us that the peaceful murmur of its music is sometimes changed to the angry roar of a seething torrent. How well that old timber bridge comes in with its grey mossy piers of roughly-hewn stone, backed by the wood beyond, which seems to stretch across the stream

and bar its progress! The shingle-covered spire, too, of the quaint old church, almost bleached with the weather, cuts admirably upon the dark forest of pines which clothes the mountain side. Beyond, mountain upon mountain, peak upon peak, and on the sky-line far, far away in the distance, eternal snow—a glacier of the Tyrol Alps.

Thou couldst never find by thyself the dark deep pool in the wood yonder below the Schloss, so still, so clear, that thou canst not distinguish the reflection of the alders on the opposite bank from the tree itself. There is a legend, too—a sad tale—connected with that dark pool (the Rittersprung it is called): I may tell it thee some day.

Nothing could be more comfortable than my quarters at the little inn near the bridge—everything so clean, so neat, so orderly. Never were hosts so attentive, so friendly. There are three generations in the family. The dear old lady in the trim dark boddice, with silver chain festooning across it, and the quaint close-fitting cap, is the grandmother. Her husband, one of a long

line of Gastwirths at the "drei Forellen," sleeps in the churchyard yonder, and she may be seen there sometimes in the evening with two of her son's children, a fat chubby boy, and a nice, well-behaved, pretty little girl, standing reverently near a certain gilt cross, more elaborate than the other mementos in its neighbourhood, with a painting of the Virgin in the centre, and a wreath of fresh flowers suspended on its ends: it is his grave.

Mine host is a good, honest, hearty fellow, and a fine handsome man, too. You should see him on Sundays and *fête* days, in his brown cloth jacket, with rows of bright silver zwanzigers, nearly overlapping one another, for buttons—those of his waistcoat are half-zwanzigers—with his close-fitting breeches of black velvet, and his legs cased in brown leather boots reaching to the knee!

You must not think it a liberty if he comes and sits by you when you are eating your dinner; he always does so when I am alone, and I am glad of his company. His wife, a comely, active dame, who is always busied in household matters, for

she has a large dairy to manage, as well as the economy of the inn and the kitchen department, generally steals a few minutes from her important avocations at my dinner-time, to ask me whether the fish was cooked to my liking, and if I approve of the *Mehlspeise*. She is a capital hand at puddings, and her resources are infinite. I see she piques herself greatly on this peculiar talent, and I would not for the world find fault, if I could; that is, however, impossible.

Opening from the gallery near my room is the most delightful of wooden balconies, capacious enough to allow ample space for a table and chairs: it looks upon the river, and I can see the fish rise. This I have found to be a great advantage, for the grayling is the most capricious of fishes. The water will be alive with them sometimes for half-an-hour, and then not a fin moving. My rod is ready below, and I have only to go to the river, and be sure of taking fish.

The wide-projecting eaves of the roof form a sort of awning over this balcony, and there, in fine weather, I take my meals, and read, and

write, and draw, as the whim takes me, or tie my flies, if there is no wind.

I envy not the man who finds himself bad company. Many people would consider it dull living alone in this way, but, for my part, I never find the day long enough to get through the work cut out for me. People who know nothing about it call fishing an idle pursuit, whereas it is a business;—very hard work, too, I find it tying new flies, and repairing and keeping my tackle in working order, for accidents will happen, and there is no "Bowness" nearer than Temple Bar. I am often glad of a bad fishing day to work up arrears; and then there are letters to write, and journal to be posted up.

Sometimes, though rarely, I have a chance companion to share my balcony. The last time I was there it happened that a most agreeable fellow, a captain of engineers, who was engaged in making a Government survey, or rather in measuring the heights of the mountains, was with me for some days. We fraternised admirably. He was a mighty chess-player, and as I confessed to a love of the game, we set to at

once, and having made a chess-board of paper with Indian ink, we contrived with slices of bottle-cork, long pins, a rosary of beads, and some black and red sealing-wax, to turn out a most respectable set of men, who did duty as well as a set of "Stauntons."

We never finished our last game, the Hauptmann Tischemacher and myself, in which I am certain *I* had the best of it: *he* said not. An express came for him one morning summoning him to head-quarters: he drank my health in a big glass of Bayerishe beer, of which he used to imbibe an unheard-of quantity in the twenty-four hours, and left me sole proprietor of the chessmen, to play out the game by myself.

My introduction to my next companion took place in a rather unusual manner. It was my own doing. I protest I never meant to attach myself to him so suddenly, nor could he have so meant it himself, in the precise manner, at least, in which it happened.

The road to —— (I was nearly divulging the real name of the nearest town)—let us say Siegdorf, runs along the side of the river for some

distance. I was fishing down a capital stream in sight of this road; the grayling were taking freely, and I was intent upon hooking a big fellow that had been up two or three times to look at my fly, turning over in the porpoise-like fashion peculiar to that fish.

I knew he was mine. I must have him the next cast.—

"Oh! I say, you know." I heard these words, pronounced in a sort of plaintive, apologetic tone, close to me, as I felt, at the same time, I had fouled something behind me, and turning round, I saw a little figure of a man in an unmistakably English suit of grey material, who was applying both his hands to one side of his head.

"Hold a moment!" I cried out, as I threw down my rod, "I am afraid I have hooked you —don't move!" Hooked he was, sure enough, most firmly in the upper rim of the ear.

"Upon my life, you know," said the unfortunate individual, "I am very sorry indeed I got in your way. I'm always in the way. Came to this place on purpose to get out of the way. I can't help it."

"Believe me," I replied, "I am exceedingly vexed at being so unfortunate. If you will allow me, I will cut it out; it will not hurt you; it is only in the cartilage of the ear." And with my lancet (always carry a lancet!) I had the hook out in a moment, and had soon strapped up the wound with strips of court plaister.

The good humour of the little man under the operation, and the humble, reiterated apologies he made for being in the way, were quite touching.

"How, if I may ask," I said, "did you get here? Are you staying in the neighbourhood?"

"O dear, no!" he replied, pointing to a *char* of the country I had not before observed standing in the road. "I came in that, and seeing you a-fishing, I thought, you know, I would just get down and have a look; but, upon my soul, I am very, very sorry I got in your way."

I asked him where he was going. He said he did not know.

There was something so comical in the whole thing, that I fairly broke into a fit of laughter, in which he joined most heartily; and when we

recovered from our outburst, the little man sat down on a big boulder, and, wiping the tears that ran down his cheeks, began laughing again. The fit was catching.

He was a curious little fellow to look at. I do not ever remember seeing a more insignificant figure, or such a mild, smooth, guileless face. He might almost have passed muster for a raw schoolboy, but for his long straight hair and scanty whiskers, which had already assumed an autumnal shade, and made him out to be a man grown, of some two or three and thirty years of age, at the very least.

"Do you mean," I asked, as soon as I was able to speak, "that you really do not know where you are going?"

"I give you my word," he replied, in the most innocent tone, "I have not the slightest idea. Wait a bit, though, I will ask my driver."

So saying, he took from his pocket a well-thumbed volume, and having turned over several leaves, ran his finger down a page, exhibiting the while a feeling of embarrassment and vexation.

"I say, do you speak German?" he asked, after looking, apparently in vain, for what he wanted.

"Yes," I replied; "enough at least to get on comfortably.

"That's all right," he said, as he returned the book to his pocket with a look of the greatest satisfaction. "Just have the goodness to ask that fellow yonder where we are going, and while you are about it, pray inquire of him what time we shall get there. These stupid dialogue books, you know—and I have got lots of them with me—have never got the questions you want in them."

"Do you know nothing, then, of the language?"

"Not a word. I will tell you how I get on. I find the question I want in one of the dialogues, and make the fellows read it and find the answer. French is not a bit of good, and I do not know much of that."

"Not even good German will serve you here. It has taken me some time to pick up the *patois* of the country."

"Do you live hereabouts?" he asked.

"I have been staying at the village yonder—

you can just catch the church spire there among the trees—for some little time."

On inquiring of the driver of the car, we ascertained that it was to *my* village they were bound for the night.

"By Jove!" said my new acquaintance, "it is an out-of-the-way place rather."

"Particularly so," was my reply; "that is one of my reasons for being here."

"Very singular, very! most extraordinary!" he said, half in soliloquy.

"I beg your pardon, what is extraordinary?"

"Oh, you know, your getting out of the way here. I have been looking for weeks for a place to get out of the way in. It *is odd!* isn't it?"

I own I did not exactly see wherein lay the oddity of the circumstance, which seemed to strike him so forcibly. As, however, he was to be my companion for the rest of the day, I thought it would be but civil, the more especially as he made no show of leaving me, to propose his remaining with me for an hour or so while I fished down to the bridge. He expressed himself grateful for this offer, so we sent on the car with a message to say

at what time we should be home, as well as two or three grayling to add to the dinner.

I was not long in finding out that my new friend, who told me he rejoiced in the euphonious name of Rummins, was a remarkably shy, quiet fellow, and it struck me at first a rather commonplace sort of person. He did not seem to care a kreutzer about anything but being in my way. He did not appear to have a grain of humour in his composition, and yet, on my drawing him out, he told me stories about himself in a serious, matter-of-fact sort of way, which sometimes convulsed me with laughter; he seemed to consider that quite natural, though he never changed a muscle himself. The little man would have made his fortune on the stage, if he had only known his talent. "Full many a flower," etc., I thought.

Days passed, and I heard not a word of my new companion's continuing his journey; he seemed to like his quarters amazingly, and often gave me to understand how happy he was. At first I considered Mr Rummins a dreadful bore; he was in the way—in *my* way most decidedly. Not that there was anything at all objectionable in

the man; on the contrary, he was the most inoffensive little creature possible—but he haunted me. I had not a moment to myself. He accompanied me fishing, and sat most patiently on the bank watching my proceedings while I fished down a stream, and then moved on, observing always to keep at a most respectful distance, for fear, as he oftentimes expressed himself, of being in the way.

He would sit for hours on the balcony, while I was too busily employed to talk to him, poring over the columns of one or other of his numerous vocabularies, or taking note of the country people as they crossed the bridge.

I had not the heart to show by my manner that his company was distasteful to me. He seemed so happy in attaching himself to me that I would not for the world have wounded his feelings.

At length he confessed to me that he had now discovered the spot of which he had been so long in search—a place quite out of the way of everybody. It was clear he intended passing the remainder of his days at Aschbruck. What could

I do? Day after day he followed me, something after the manner of a faithful dog, with apparently as much feeling for the beautiful scenery he passed through, and with about the same amount of animal enjoyment. It was impossible to be out of temper with him, he was so humble-minded; and he expressed himself so truly grateful to me for allowing him to adopt me as he did, without giving him room to think he was at all in my way.

After a time I got to pity poor Mr Rummins, and then I came to like him. It was rather more than I bargained for, the having so uncongenial a companion thrust upon me, *bon gré, mal gré;* but there he was—there *we* were—and I must needs accept the situation. He made a point of never obtruding his conversation upon me, contenting himself with speaking when spoken to; but whenever I did lead him to speak of himself, there was something at once so eccentric and mysterious about him, as to render me very curious to learn a little more about his life and adventures.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, you know," said Mr Rummins, one day when I begged him to satisfy my curiosity, "every fellow must take his chance. Some folks are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, some with a wooden ladle. I should be disposed to think mine ought by rights to have been a spoon with the Hall mark upon it, but it turned out to be either German silver or plated.

"Our family boasts of a descent from a certain Sieur de Romyns, who came over to England with the Conqueror; so at least my grandfather used to assert, and it is not for me to dispute the fact. That excellent man had been a wholesale grocer in Thames Street, and common councilman of his ward. Somewhat late in life he retired from business with a considerable fortune, bought a pretty estate in Surrey, and having made the discovery of the antiquity of his family, he took

the resolution of changing his name of Rummins to 'De Romyns,' and set up for a country gentleman.

"Now, as he was a portly, consequential-looking man, as I have been told, with a very aristocratic nose—he was very proud of his nose, was my grandfather—and as he had mixed a good deal in the world, *he* might have passed muster very fairly; but my grandmother, Mrs De Romyns, had rather unfashionable notions of life, and was an obstinate stickler for sundry plebeian observances and habits. Her mode of expressing herself, too, had been too deeply ingrained in early life for her to adapt it to the new sphere of society in which her respectable husband aspired to gain a footing. My grandmother was in the way—that is the truth.

"They did not get on well in the country. The poor lady was rendered very miserable by the greatness thrust upon her; and my grandfather, at last finding it hopeless the endeavouring to impress the neighbourhood sufficiently with the importance of himself and his family, gave up the attempt, and retired into private life.

"He consoled himself for his disappointment by erecting for himself a superb mausoleum in the cemetery nearest his place, and wrote his own epitaph, wherein he set forth his many virtues and his noble lineage, concluding it with the intelligence that he lived respected and died lamented. This he had duly engraved upon the marble, leaving a blank for the date of his decease; and he derived great satisfaction in visiting it frequently, and taking off his hat to it.

"Ill-natured people used to laugh at this little eccentricity of my grandfather's; but after all, you know, 'de mortuis nil nisi bonum.' And what was the harm of recording his own virtues? Who so likely to be cognisant of their real intrinsic worth as the proprietor himself? as was pertinently remarked by persons of much discrimination.

"One day the date was filled in, my grandmother put on a widow's cap, and went back to her old home, leaving the hall to be tenanted by her son, my honoured parent.

"I suspect my father had had the prefix 'De' rubbed out of the noble name rather uncere-

moniously at Rugby, and so, like a sensible man, he allowed it to lapse gradually into the old respectable patronymic Rummins. It was under this name — which I confidently assert is no common one—he married my mother, the eighth daughter of a neighbouring squire; nor could any persuasions of hers induce him again to assume a designation which had become hateful to him for the handle it had given to boys at school to bully him.

"Perhaps he was right. The old name of Rummins, he used to say, had a good, honest Anglo-Saxon twang about it. There was nothing to be ashamed of in the name; and I am told he went the length sometimes, when my mother was unusually tiresome on the subject, of reminding her good-humouredly that she had taken him for better and for worse, and expressing in mild terms to her his regret that she had not considered sufficiently the sacrifice she had made in changing her own elegant and aristocratic name of Fitzfogle to one so plebeian and unpretending as Rummins.

"I have been told my mother spent the first

year or two of her married life in lamentations over this obstinacy of her husband in not assuming, or rather retaining, what she called his birthright, and in ruminating over the hateful name of Rummins, which seemed in fact to have cast an unhappy spell on her existence.

"All this family history I had, over and over again, related to me by my aunt Harriet, or, as she chose to call herself, Miss Har-yet De Romyns, who sided with my mother, and deplored, with her, my father's want of proper feeling and respect for the family, as well as his forgetfulness of his own dignity, by degrading thus into the old civic name.

"At last I was introduced into the world. My advent was so far opportune that it gave my mother something else to think about for a time; and as my father, good man, did not care to be always opposed to his wife's fancies, he propitiated her—though sadly against the grain—by allowing her to have her own way in choosing my baptismal names. As soon as she had extracted this promise from him, she studied Burke and Debrett for authorities, and made me ridiculous for life by giving me no Christian name at all.

"I was baptized at the parish church, was duly booked in the parish register, and my health was drunk at the christening dinner under the names 'Fitzfogle Isambard Granby Rummins.'

"'Well, my dear,' said my father, when the festivities were over and the guests departed, 'you have done the poor boy's business—you have given him a name that will stick to him through life—see if it doesn't—look at that spoon.' It was not the one I was born with in my mouth, but a handsome silver-gilt one, the gift of my godfather, Mr Granby, which reposed in a morocco case lined with white velvet, in company with a knife and fork to match.

"'Observe, my dear, the initials,' my father went on, 'F. I. G. R.'

"'Very good, my love,' returned my mother; 'what of that? The names are all good names, all borne by members of my family.'

"'I do not speak of the names,' said my father, mildly: 'what I wish you to look at are the initials.'

"'Well, my love, there they are, plain enough to be seen—F. I. G. R. What is there in those letters?' asked my mother, smiling.

"'Simply, my dear, that the first three are unfortunate—that's all.'

"'How—unfortunate?'

"'Why, you see, my dear, F. I. G. spells fig—F. I. G. Rummins—Fig Rummins. It is unlucky my father dealt in that commodity—that is all. I fear our boy has a nickname cut out for him for life.'

"My father was a far-seeing man, and knew the world.

"My mother saw the thing at once. It was too late; the thing was done. She saw, too, that my father had the best of it, because he had formerly expressed a faint desire that I should be christened plain John. He had now got the vantage-ground, and as it was my fault, I fancy, she never forgave me.

"Of course I do not speak of my own knowledge, but I have been given to understand I was a tiny, weakly child, whom no one considered likely to live beyond the period of long clothes; but I was the hope of the family, the heir to the family honours, and I suppose the innate consciousness of my importance carried me through.

"In process of time, however, an event occurred

which must, even then, have lowered me in the opinion of all the household, as it seemed to do from the earliest dawn of my childish remembrances. This was the birth of my brother, who happened to be the very opposite of what I was—a great, fat, chubby, laughing baby; and I verily believe, from that moment everybody in the family, from the heads downwards, began to look upon me as an interloper—a little insignificant creature, who was in the way: my own earliest impressions are that I *was* in the way.

"There was my brother Jack—for my mother's first venture in naming me had so disgusted her that she readily allowed my father this time to have his own way—a strong, rosy-cheeked boy, full of health and strength, weighing twice as much as I did, though a full year younger. I felt myself in Jack's way as a child—much more so as I grew older, and learned the value of coming before him into the world; which knowledge, by the way, was imparted to me one day in the codicil of a conversation between Jack's nurse and mine, while I was so young that they did not give me credit for understanding what they meant.

"'Ah! my precious pet,' said Jack's nurse, hugging the child, who was crowing merrily and struggling with all his might to get at me, as I was playing with a Noah's ark on the nursery floor; 'it deserves to be the oldest, it does! He shall be a great gentleman, he shall—and have the pretty house, and the pretty carriages and horses —a darling! It's a naughty, naughty brother, to stand in his way—it is!'

"Though I could not take in the full meaning of these words, they made a lasting impression on me, child as I was, and as I grew up the feeling of being in the way never left me. My mother, I believe, hated the sight of me, and Jack was my father's favourite. He tried to be kind to me, I dare say, but his kindness rather looked like tolerating me. I might have been wrong—I dare say I was—but I fancied even *he* seemed to consider me in the way. However it might have been, certain it is that I only played second fiddle to Jack's first.

"Nevertheless I loved my brother dearly, and attached myself the more to him from the consciousness that he was my superior in everything,

and that I injured him by being his elder. I would have changed places with him willingly, had it been possible. Then at school Jack was my only friend, and instead of licking me, as big brothers always do little ones, he used to stick up for me, did my verses for me, and got me out of many a row, for he was clever, as he was strong and active. Few fellows were a match for him in pluck or talent—he was the champion of the school, carried off everything, and ended by getting an exhibition at Cambridge, which led to a fellowship.

"When I was about twenty, I lost my father and mother, within a few months of each other: as the former died without a will, I found myself heir to his landed property, which, notwithstanding his professed disregard of my excellent grandfather's ambitious views of founding a family, he had gone on steadily increasing, by buying up every portion of land, contiguous to his estate, that came into the market. I found myself under the paternal wing of the Lord Chancellor, who made a very liberal allowance for my education and maintenance.

"This I shared with my brother Jack, who was at Cambridge; and I went to live with my aunt,

the only other member of my father's family extant. This good lady, the Miss De Romyns I have already spoken of, contrived on small means to keep up a respectable appearance at Cheltenham. The large addition to her income proceeding from my contribution to the expenses of her establishment, ought to have made her more happy, as it enabled her to move into a better house in a more fashionable neighbourhood, and to set up a brougham and a boy in buttons; but unluckily she had inherited from her departed father, of sainted memory, all his pride of family. She had resolutely asserted for herself the more imposing name of "De Romyns," while *I* stuck out manfully for retaining the more plebeian name I had been used to bear.

"Here was a hitch at once. Like all little people who set up for great ones, her pretensions had, I fancy, subjected her already to much mortification and many rebuffs in the select circle of which she aspired to be a segment; and now the absurd incongruity of the two names of aunt and nephew was too obvious to pass without malicious comment in the world at large. This was so gall-

ing to her feelings, that I verily believe there was a violent conflict waging for some time in her mind, whether she could bring herself to meet this dreadful contingency, or forego the advantages accruing to her from my residence under her roof.

"The brougham and the buttons carried the day, however; but she could not help every now and then letting me know I was sadly in the way. I did not go tea-drinking much with her. I tried it a few times, and gave it up; which relieved the poor lady's mind a good deal, inasmuch as one of the most trying awkwardnesses was removed, viz., the dreadful announcement of our names, which she declared the servants always took an especial delight in enunciating when we entered a drawing-room together. 'Miss De Ro-myns and Mr Rum-mins' would no longer jar upon her sensitive ears, and cause the astonished guests to prick up theirs. She had gained something; but still I was in the way.

"As soon as I came of age I had a lengthened interview with the excellent guardian my country had provided for me, who gave me some friendly

advice, and, shaking me by the hand, pronounced me my own master. From him I went straight to see my brother Jack, who was established in chambers on the top storey of a dingy, begrimmed, black brick house in Pump Court in the Temple.

"'Jack,' I said to him, after we had greeted one another, 'just shut up that book, will you?' It was a thick volume, in a bilious-looking rough calf binding.

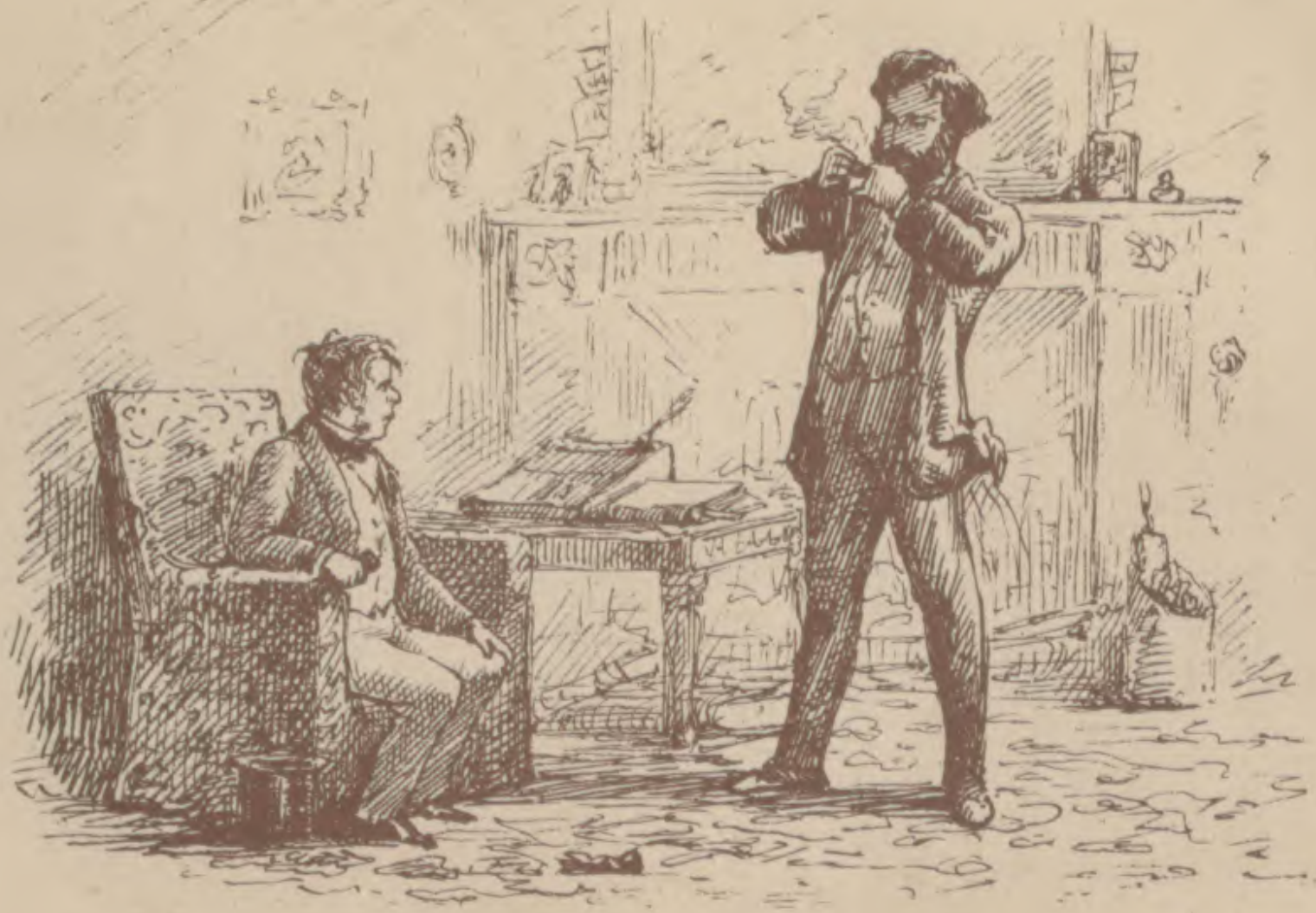
"Jack put a paper-knife on the page he was reading, and closed the book; then, filling a little dirty black pipe, and lighting it carefully, he addressed me thus:

"'Fig, I wish you smoked; you don't know what a comfort it is.'

"'Well,' I replied, 'I wish I could manage it; but it makes me ill. I don't mind the smell.'

"'All right, old fellow!' said he, puffing away vigorously in a manner to show how he enjoyed it. 'Now then, what has brought you up to town this dirty November day?'

"I had been for some time previously preparing a speech to announce to my brother a certain resolution I had come to; but somehow I forgot



BROTHER JACK

every word of it now, and blurted out plainly what had long been upon my mind.

"'Jack, you know, I have always been in your way.'

"'None of that, Fig, my boy, if you love me.'

"'You know, Jack, I *do* love you, and am therefore going to give you a bit of my mind. You know I am my own master now. The Vice-Chancellor has just taken off my leading-strings, and I am come into my property, which, but for the negligence of our father, ought to have been divided fairly between us; that is—I mean—*you* ought to have had the larger share, because you are a better and a cleverer fellow than I am. The fact is, you know, Jack, I ought by rights to have died. Everybody said I ought. They ought never to have reared me; and then I should have been out of the way, and you would have had it all.

"'Now, *do* wait a bit, Jack,' I said, interrupting him as he was bursting into an indignant protest against my proposition, flourishing his pipe the while in a savage manner. 'I wish you would hear me out patiently. My wants, as you are aware, are few, and lie in a very small compass.

I only desire to have enough to live upon quietly in some out-of-the-way place. There will be more than enough left to enable you to enjoy life thoroughly, while life is worth having, instead of wasting it in this dismal place. One of these days, you know, you will see my death in the morning papers. I am but a poor weakly creature, and then you will inherit all, as a matter of course.'

"Jack's pipe was broken off short at the bowl; he had dropped it carelessly on the floor; and he sat staring at me, his eyes dimmed with tears, I do believe.

"'Dear old Fig,' he said, rising from a well-worn venerable leather chair, once black, now of no colour, with a row of brass nails round the back and seat. (It was a veteran, that old chair. I could not help looking at it with somewhat of respect; and I didn't like to look Jack in the face—it made me feel uncomfortable.) 'Fig,' said he, as he took both my hands in his, and drawing me gently towards him, kissed me on the forehead, 'you are a worthy good fellow. I owe already everything to you, and I will not say I

must not look for some little time yet to your generous assistance to pull me through till I can earn my own living; but not a moment beyond that will I draw on your bounty.'

"'But Jack, I say, *do* now — there's a good fellow. You would make me so happy, you know'——

"'Fig, my dear boy, listen to me. *You* have your fancies, *I* have mine. I am not going to make even an attempt to tell you how deeply sensible I am of your unheard-of kindness; because words would not convey to you the reality of what I feel. *Your* feelings I will not hurt by rejecting altogether your brotherly assistance; but I love the profession I am entering upon. I am encouraged by men whose judgment is infallible, to persevere in reading for the bar; and their prognostications, not less than a certain inward confidence of my own in my resolution and strength of purpose, assure me of a successful if not a brilliant career. This would be checked at its outset if my means were such as to render me independent of a profession. I will receive from you, with the same hearty goodwill with which you offer it,

enough to support me comfortably, besides a little over to pay my club subscription, and to keep me in bird's-eye.'

"He spoke so resolutely that I was quite put out of my purpose. It would not be fair to stand in his way of achieving success; and yet there we were, exactly where we started.

"'Now, look here, Fig,' said my brother, as he took up another dirty pipe from the chimney-piece, filled it artistically, and applied a light to it, 'I have been thinking a good deal about you, old fellow, and how you are to get on, now that you are started in life, and have made your bow, as I suppose you have, to that most absurd old aunt of ours at Cheltenham. You are not made for a country life; that is, you would not fall readily, I think, into the pursuits and habits of a country gentleman. You will scarcely think of setting up at Romynsdale.

"'I will tell you something,' he went on, as he lighted the pipe, which had gone out during his speech, 'but, first of all, I am going to put before you a few reasons for the proposition I am about to make to you. A big place in the country is an

uncomfortable property to hold, if you do not mean living there yourself; there is always the uncertainty of letting the place; there are always great outgoings, especially if the proprietor is non-resident; you will be perpetually bothered with complaints and lamentations from your tenants—always something to be done in the way of alterations and repairs, and then you are at the mercy of your agent.

"'You have no affection for the place, and, as far as I am concerned, I have no interest in it whatever. You must sell Romynsdale. I know that the Diddleham Junction line of rail is to go through the kitchen-garden, and right along the property, from end to end. The station—also on your land—will be a great centre, and the company will want acres and acres of ground, for which they will pay as much per square yard almost as it is worth per acre. We will parcel the rest out in lots, my boy, for villas—detached and semi-detached—which we can sell, or let on building leases, and you shall have your income trebled, at least, in amount, and invested in safe, honest, Three-per-Cents. Do you see it, Fig?'

"'All I see is, that you are injuring yourself, Jack,' was my reply. 'If it remains mine, you are sure to have it, you know, as soon as I am out of the way; and if it is all turned into money, you know, perhaps I may spend it, or lose it somehow. I don't quite see it.'

"'Why, look here, Fig, if my calculations are right, I will back you to have at the least a couple of thousands a-year added to your income—at the very least, I say. You shall, if you like, make over to me, in the event only of my being right, as much of your principal as will return me the same sum as you have in your generosity allowed me—two hundred a-year. I do not want more, and had rather not, for the reasons I have already given, have more than that, for, you know, I have something of my own besides. Say done, old fellow! and leave the thing to me. If you do not, I shall believe you are in your *own* way, to use your favourite argument.

"'But,' he went on, as he saw me hesitating, 'I give you notice, I will have nothing to do with the thing if you insist upon my taking more from you. I make that stipulation.'

"Well, to cut a long story short, I left it to Jack, and it turned out pretty much as he had foretold. Romynsdale became a sort of California, and I continued to live with my aunt, the brougham, and the buttons.

"When I say I took up my residence at Cheltenham, I mean that it only became my head-quarters: it was necessary for me to have a sort of home, a place of refuge, somewhere: and this arrangement saved me a deal of trouble, besides helping my aunt to hold her own; but I used to get out of the way every now and then, and there is hardly a part of England or Scotland I have not visited. As soon as ever I found myself in the way in one place, I was off to another, but it seldom happened that my stay was very prolonged anywhere. Something or another always turned up to make me feel I ought not to be there. It was my fortune to be ever in the wrong place; it was the same wherever I went.

"I hated the very sight of a railway carriage, and never got into one without making an apology for intruding. I have observed that everybody who is already seated, looks at the new comer as a

natural enemy. Some few persons do, to be sure, get in coolly, and look blandly round upon the scowling occupants, and it has astonished me greatly to see these very persons the next moment looking daggers at another traveller who presumes to enter the carriage. I wonder whether other people ever think they are in the way.

"It does not signify where I go—what I do—it is all one. I am no sportsman—never fired off a gun in my life—but I have been taken up for a poacher by a savage gamekeeper, and was once put in bodily fear and treated as a watcher by some horrid fellows in Scotland, who were shooting across country. They made me carry their game, and left me at last, tied hand and foot, on the moor, to be released by a shepherd they sent to me for the purpose.

"I have never been hunting but once, and then I distinguished myself as usual. I never meant to go deerstalking, but I did, nevertheless. Did I not go to have a look at your fishing the other day? and what happened?"

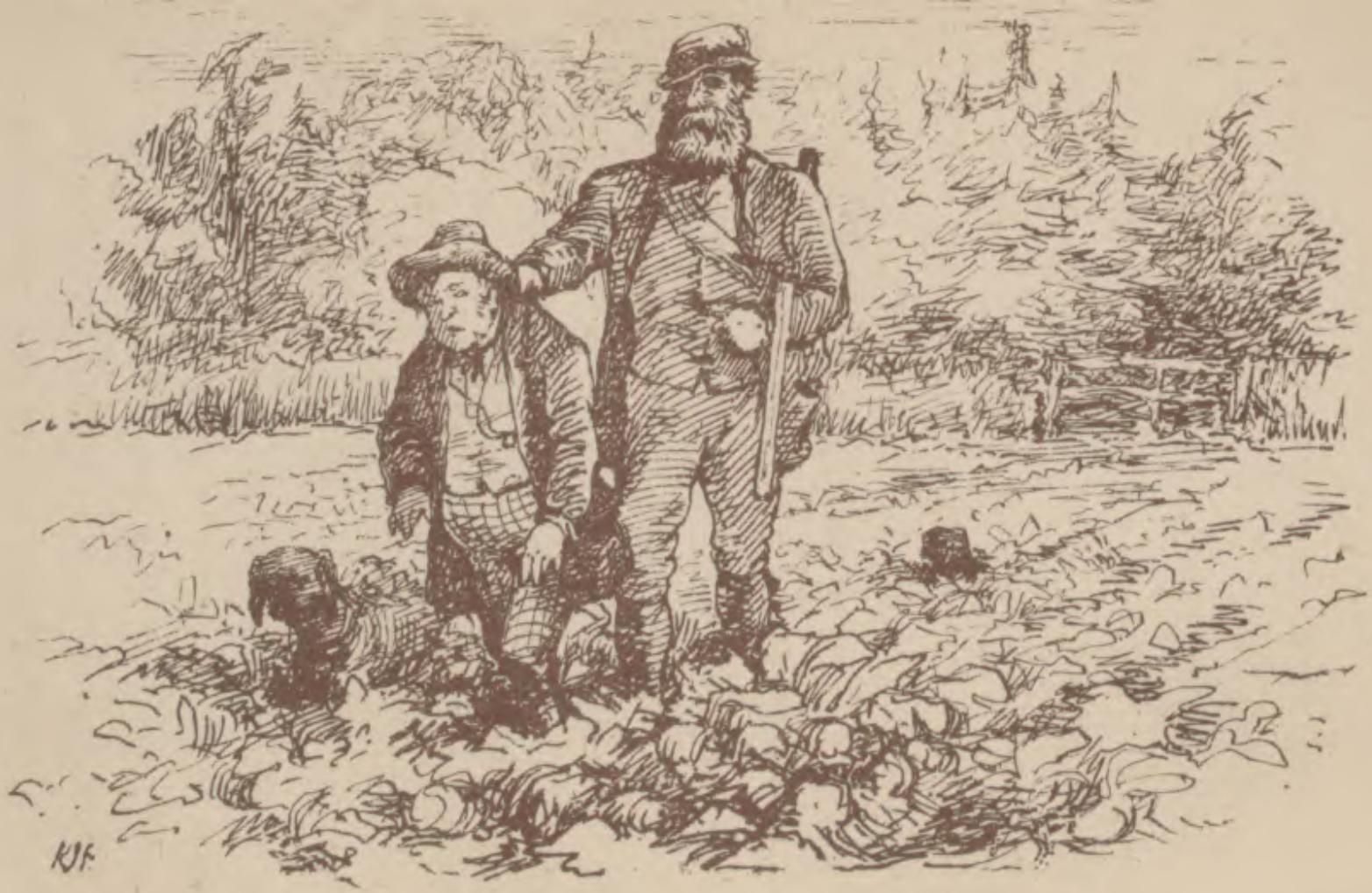
CHAPTER III.

MY curiosity was greatly excited by these little confidences, which did not at all come at once, be it said, but bit by bit, as I contrived to turn the conversation to my companion's former life. Mr Rummins was very desultory in his narratives, too, so that I only got the history of his adventures piecemeal. Sometimes he would volunteer, *à propos* of some word or some remark, to tell me an episode of his life; at other times I would set him going, and on he went talking.

"I was mentioning the other day," he said, "my being brought before a Magistrate for poaching. If you like, I will tell you all about it: it was no fault of mine, you know, but it shows how a fellow with the best intentions may sometimes get into a scrape.

"I was stopping at a little roadside inn at a village in Yorkshire, as quiet and retired a spot

as you can conceive. There was no one to molest me; my landlord and his wife were good people enough, and made me very comfortable. My great amusement was walking about the neighbourhood, which abounded in nice out-of-the-way footpaths across the fields: it was in one of these, which skirted the side of a wood, my foot caught in a briar, as I thought, and tripped me up. I found, however, it was a snare that had fastened itself right over my instep, and, having released myself, I pulled up the peg by which it was secured, and put it into my pocket. Being now on my guard, I kept a good look-out, and presently I discovered another—then another. I took possession of them all, because, you know, I thought it was the right thing to do, and at last came upon a poor rabbit who was crying dismally, and struggling to get away from a wire which held it by the neck. I was in the act of letting him out, when—crash! through the hedge of the wood jumped a fierce-looking man in a velveteen coat and a red waistcoat, right upon me. Seizing me by the collar, he proceeded to search my pockets, making use of the most disgusting language all the while.



BROUGHT UP FOR POACHING

"'Ho, ho!' cried the fellow, as he pulled out the snares one after another. 'You're the wery identikkle chap I've been a-looking after for ever so long, and a werry nice little sneaking varmint you are, as ever I set eyes on. It's my opinion you've been a-hiding yerself in a rabbit-hole or a fox-earth, you little atomy you—and that's how you've been a-dodging of us.'

"This very illiberal allusion to my smallness of figure he accompanied with a shaking such as a terrier might give a rat. My feelings were too much hurt to allow me to make any reply to the coarse brute, who made me walk, or rather run—for I could not keep pace with his long strides—to the house of the nearest Magistrate, about half-a-mile from the village in which my inn was situated.

"Hot, and out of breath, bespattered with mud, and wet up to my knees, for my captor had led me across country, over ploughed land and fields of turnips, over, or rather *through* terrible hedges and a thick copse or two, I found myself in the presence of a rather pleasant-looking gentleman, who I saw had composed his features for the

occasion; but while he listened patiently to the gamekeeper's story of my misdoings, of my desperate character, and of the adroit way in which I had hitherto beat all the combined energies and stratagems of my lord's watchers to come down upon me, he took an occasional glance at me, and—I might have been deceived—there was a nervous twitching about his mouth, and a merry twinkle in his eye, which seemed to threaten to disturb the gravity and solemnity he was trying to maintain.

"'Well, Leggins,' he said, as soon as the complainant had told his long and prolix story, 'so, you caught this desperate character in the very fact of taking a rabbit out of a wire?'

"'Exactly, your honour; and here's the werry wires that came out of his pocket.'

"'Now, sir,' said the Justice, addressing me, and coughing rather unnaturally—(he must have been troubled with a bad cold, too, for he kept putting his handkerchief to his face)—'what have you to say to this charge? What account have you to give of yourself?'

"I told him how it had happened.

"'What is your name?' he demanded.

"'Fitzfogle Isambard Granby Rummins.'

"'That's his aliases, in course,' put in Leggins. It was too much for the gravity of Justice, and its administrator fairly burst out laughing.

"'Rummins, did you say?' he inquired as soon as he was able to speak.

"'Rummins,' I replied.

"'That is not a common name. Have you any relative of your name reading at the Temple?'

"'It is my own brother, Jack,' I answered. What a relief it was to me!

"'And a very good fellow he is—and a clever fellow too,' said the gentleman. 'He is my son's greatest chum: they are reading together in London, and Harry has brought him down to us two or three times. We hope, indeed, to have him with us at Christmas.'

"'My eye!' exclaimed Leggins, turning to me with a look of extreme disgust; 'if you ain't a good 'un at doubling, that's all! It's gammon, your honour, every bit of it. That little chap there is down upon you, as he's been down upon

all of we. I should like to have it out wi' un—that's what I should!'

"'I gave you credit, Leggins,' said the worthy Magistrate gravely, 'for being a sharper fellow than you have proved yourself to be: your zeal has run away with your discretion. This gentleman has explained how he became possessed of the wires, and I am perfectly satisfied with his explanation. Now, Leggins, look at him. Does he look like a poacher? Do poachers usually wear eye-glasses hanging to their necks by a black ribbon, and gold chains to their watches? I am afraid, Leggins, you have been only losing your time, and while you are occupied here on this silly business the fellow you are looking for is most likely hard at work with his friends, beating Tangley Shaws or Brocklesby Wood.'

"Poor Leggins forgot his manners, and, without waiting to give a parting salutation, made for the door, and left me face to face with the good-natured Magistrate.

"'The stupid fellow!' he said, indulging in a hearty laugh, which I believe he had been longing for for some time. 'So, Mr Rummins, he has

actually brought you all the way from Tangley Shaws on this ridiculous charge. However, it is,' he continued kindly, 'an ill wind which blows nobody any good;' it has procured me the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Your brother, I assure you, is a great favourite with us all, and my young folks are always talking about him'——

"'O papa, dear! what have you been doing to that long-legged keeper that is always bringing poor fellows here for poaching?' exclaimed a lovely, laughing girl, who might have been about eighteen years of age, rushing into the room, holding up the skirts of her riding-habit, her face beaming with health and good-humour. 'The man,' she went on, 'is for all the world like a mad dog, running straight, you know—they always do—across the park. Oh, I beg your pardon!' she said demurely, as, turning to caress a little spaniel that was jumping upon her, she caught sight of me—'I did not perceive—I will leave you.'

"And she was hastening towards the door when her father called back—

"'Don't run away, Flo!' he said. 'Let me introduce my eldest daughter to you, Mr Rummins: Miss Ingleby—Mr Rummins.'

"'Mr Rum—Rummins!' she uttered the name involuntarily, as she courtesyed low, and then, with a puzzled air, looking from me to her father, and from him to me—'O papa?' she said at last.

"Now I knew as well what was passing in her mind as if she had spoken the words: 'Can this little man possibly belong in any way to our tall, nice-looking Mr Rummins?' I give you my word I never, never did feel so much in the way as I was at that moment; I had rather have faced the entire Leggins family—such a figure as I was—I wished I was dead.

"'Mr Rummins, whose acquaintance I have just had the pleasure of making,' explained Mr Ingleby, 'is brother to *our* Mr Rummins, Harry's friend. He has just been brought before me for snaring rabbits, by your long-legged keeper, and I hereby, in virtue of my office, sentence him to dine with us to-day.'

"In vain I tried to get off by making the

most abject excuses, all which the old gentleman laughed away. 'There is no appeal,' he said; 'you must undergo your sentence;' and I assure you it was with the utmost difficulty he could be prevailed upon to allow me to go to my inn to dress, under a solemn engagement to appear at seven o'clock. I was in for it. There was no escape.

"Well, all went on comfortably enough at the dinner. The rector of the parish and his wife, with two or three other guests, and myself, with the family party, consisting of Mr and Mrs Ingleby, the daughter I had seen, and the son, a young middy about sixteen, sat down to table. They all laughed heartily at my adventures, and I laughed too, and everybody was so kind, and said so many nice things about Jack, who seemed a universal favourite, that I really began to feel almost at my ease. Nothing could exceed the attentions shown me by the worthy master and mistress of the house; and the manner of the pretty Miss Ingleby to me was perfectly charming. How grateful I was to Jack!—I owed it all to him.

"After dinner, three or four young children came down to dessert: how I wish people would send them their fruit and cakes to the nursery! —do not you?

"'Who is that small man, mamma, sitting next Mrs Farley?' asked a little girl in a loud whisper.

"'Hush, my dear! Little children should be seen and not heard,' said mamma, chidingly.

"'But tell me his name, mamma; please do.'

"'It is Mr Rummins, darling.'

"'Oh no, mamma,' said another darling on the other side of her. 'Mr Rummins is a nice, handsome man—*so* handsome—and that man's a little, ugly'——

"Mrs Ingleby good-naturedly stifled the rest of the sentence with a loud remark to her neighbour, the rector, about the clothing-club. I tried to look as if I had heard nothing.

"Presently there was a pause in the conversation, which had been running on smoothly for some time on parish roads and the union. This was taken advantage of by a chubby-cheeked little boy, about eight years old, sitting by his

papa, who had been stopping his mouth for some time with orange and sponge-cake.

"'I know something—*I* do—papa!' said the child, loud enough to attract the attention of all the table.

"'Well, Charley, what is it, my man?'

"'Oh, I mustn't tell, because Flo will be so cross with me.'

"'Nonsense, my boy. Now, then, out with it like a man!'

"Miss Ingleby, I fancied, looked rather uncomfortable.

"'Well, I'll tell you, then. Flo won't love *this* Mr Rummins half so well as she loves our *pretty* Mr Rummins,' cried the little wretch, with a knowing look, as if he were conscious of having said a clever thing.

"My discomfiture was hard enough to bear, but nothing to that of the poor girl, whose neck and shoulders were suffused with the blush she strove to hide by holding her handkerchief to her face. She rushed from the room, and the ladies made a general move.

"I was ever to be in the way—it is my destiny.

I made my escape without going to the drawing-room, and the very next morning was in Edinburgh, on my road to John O'Groats. Somehow I could not help thinking that if Jack had been in my place he would have remained at Ingleby Hall.

"In Scotland I discovered so many nooks and corners quite out of the world, that for some years I regularly went to the north in the summer. On my way through London I used generally to look in upon Jack; but he was always so busy, I knew he thought me in the way, notwithstanding all the kind efforts he made to put me at my ease. He was now getting on famously with his profession, and began to be talked about. You ought to have seen his face when I told him I could guess why he liked going the Northern Circuit. He made me repeat the after-dinner adventure at Ingleby ever so many times."

CHAPTER IV.

"WELL, it *was* rather an absurd occurrence," said Rummins one day. "I have often heard fellows talk since of the difficulty of getting up to a stag; it seemed to me easy enough, I know. I will tell you how it happened.

"I was going, I did not much care where, in what they call in the north a mail-cart—a rough, shaky, comfortless sort of open carriage. It was raining heavily; I was wet and cold; and the wide expanse of moor before us looked so dark, and bleak, and wretched, and the peat fire glowed so cheerfully and felt so grateful at a little inn at which the driver pulled up to give his horses water, and himself something stronger, that I determined to stop there.

"The good people of the house were very civil, and made much of me, for I fancy they did not often get a guest, since no one, unless he was in

search of an out-of-the-way place, like myself, would ever have stopped there if he could help it.

"The so-called 'town'—the veriest hamlet in Scotland is a town—of Drumkettle consisted only of about half-a-dozen cottages or cabins, built of rough, unhewn stones, and these seemed to have been pitched at hazard on the surface of the black, boggy moor. It suited me exactly, however. I could range about just as I liked; and there was no one likely to trouble me. The poor people at the inn did their best for me, and, I should have imagined, concerned themselves very little with speculations on my account, had not I happened to overhear, one afternoon shortly after my arrival, a conversation between the landlord and two or three men who had dropped in to get a dram, which made me for some time rather uncomfortable.

"'What like o' man is yon?' asked a voice.

"'Hech! weel,' answered the landlord, 'he's just a wee bit ceevil creature eneugh; but I'm thinking there'll be something no that canny aboot him, for a' that.'

"'He'll be frae the south?' inquired another.

"'Nae doot o' that,' replied mine host, 'his speech is just the high English.'

"'And he's no a shooter—and he's no a fusher—and he's aye speering about the moor; I'll be bail he'll just be a principal gauger — may be the Board o' Excise himsel,' said a third voice, solemnly.

"'Na, na—it canna be that, Archie,' was the reply; 'it's no that. The likes o' them dunna drink water, an' it's no a taste o' whusky he's ca'd for in the house. It's no that, man.'

"The old proverb, that listeners never hear any good of themselves, occurred to me, as I sat in the adjoining room, with the door ajar; but the natural curiosity to know the opinion they held of me, determined me to remain quiet.

"'Aiblins,' put in one of the party, "he'll be a ne'er-do-weel that's rinned away frae his creditors"——

"'Or his wife an' bairns,' suggested another.

"'Ye're a' wrang—wrang a' thegether,' said the landlord, gravely; 'it's mair likely he's a puir daft body, with no a freend on airth to see till him.'

"'Whisht! whisht!' I heard the voice of the

woman of the house, as she entered the room in which the speakers were in conclave.

"All was hushed immediately; and presently afterwards I saw two of the fellows so interested in me pass my window, peering in rudely as they went by, to catch a sight of the object of the conference.

"Although it *did* strike me as hard they would not let me alone, my aversion to moving about again in search of another quiet retreat determined me to remain so long as the people behaved decently. It did not much matter, after all, what they thought of me.

"The families that were living in the cabins on the moor were miserably poor; and there was a deal of sickness among them besides. I did not know how to set about doing anything for them—my apprehension of being considered an intruder prevented my going to visit them; so I began by making friends with the little bare-legged, half-naked children, that were running about in the road. They were shy at first—poor little things!—and used to run away from me to hide themselves, and peep out at me from behind a wall or a peatstack.

"There was, luckily, a shop in the *town*, where they sold everything you can think of; and I began making their acquaintance by giving them *sweeties*, such as sugar-candy and peppermint-drops.; and somehow, little by little, they grew tamer; and the mothers used to smile, and thank me; and the men had always a pleasant greeting for me when we met.

"So, by degrees, I got at last to look in at their poor huts as I went by; and it went to my heart to see the dirt and wretchedness, and the absence of all comfort common to them all. My dealings with the *merchant*, as they called the man who kept the store, became now more extensive and more varied: you never saw such curious bills as I used to run up with him—tea and sugar, and washing-tubs and *girdles*, and woollen stuffs, and snuff and tobacco. But what was better than all, I procured the services of a doctor, who lived ten miles off. He used to look in occasionally, and helped me to a knowledge of the real wants of the poor people.

"Well, I found this all very pleasant. I had now something to think of. Nobody seemed to consider me in the way; and even the landlord

must have come to the conclusion that I was not a very dangerous body, though he did set me down for a lunatic.

"One of my delights was walking about on the hills on the springy, heathery carpet, trodden, apparently, only by the grouse and myself. They did not seem to trouble themselves much about me, knowing by instinct I did not come among them with any murderous intent. They used to strut about quite close to me. Sometimes an old cock would get up almost under my feet, with a merry laughing crow, and, settling again close by, challenge me to come and play with him. I liked the grouse, because they did not seem to think me in the way. We had the wide moor all to ourselves; for I never met a living creature besides. The whole country round, I was informed, belonged to a great Scotch laird, who had not yet come north.

"This state of things, although I could not foresee any occurrence likely to drive me away from quarters that suited my tastes so exactly, I felt, nevertheless, was too good to last, and my anticipations were one day realised in a way which

was excessively disagreeable to me, and made me despair of ever finding a spot where I *could* be out of the way.

"I was tempted by the brightness of the weather to prolong my walk one day far beyond my usual limits; the excitement of exploring a new country, together with the fine bracing effect of the air on the hills, led me on farther and farther, and, imagining it impossible to lose sight altogether of certain familiar landmarks, I hoped, by making a circuit, to drop down upon the village by another way.

"Onward and onward I walked. I do not wonder at people taking shooting places in the Highlands, for, independently of the sport, one experiences a certain exhilaration of spirits imparted by the mountain-air which makes one defy fatigue. I had followed for a long time in fancied security a sort of track. This got gradually less and less marked, and it was only when it became no longer traceable, that I stopped to consider my whereabouts. If I had been dropped suddenly from a balloon in an unknown country, I could not have felt myself more at a loss to know my bearings; but the idea of being fairly lost never

even occurred to me, since nothing was easier than to find the old track again, and to follow it back.

"This turned out to be by no means the case, and I wandered backwards and forwards, and round and round, for a considerable time, till, to my extreme vexation, I lost all kind of recollection of the direction from which I had come.

"It had not struck me before what a wild, dreary spot it was. It seemed doubly so now. I looked for sheep on the mountain side; and though there were many rich grassy patches amid the heather, no flock was there to crop it.

"A rude building, with an enclosure of rough stones, caught my eye at last, and, full of hope, I hastened towards it, only to find it unroofed, and of course untenanted. As the undulating nature of the ground prevented my seeing far around me, I resolved to climb a hill at the back of the deserted cabin, by what had the appearance of an old track, and thus to get a survey of the country. Arrived at the summit of the ridge, I commanded a wide panorama; but no familiar mountain-form was visible to tell me in which direction my village lay. I espied, however, in a valley below me, a

stream of some size, and this I determined to follow down. It must, I thought, strike some road, some path, in its course, or lead me to some shepherd's hut, perhaps to a hamlet.

"After a tedious and difficult scramble down the steep declivity, in the performance of which I lost my hat, tore my clothes, and wounded my hands in letting myself down by holding on to the sharp ledges of rock, I arrived safely at the bottom. It was a success; and right thankful was I to find myself safe and sound in the valley. Fresh troubles here awaited me. The river, sometimes brawling and dashing along through the rocky bed, led me for some distance over hard ground, which I got over famously; but presently it lost itself in a small reedy lake or tarn, whose shores were so soft and boggy as to make me despair of ever finding my way across it, and it was only by making a long circuit at the foot of the hill that I was enabled to reach better ground, where the stream, after flowing smoothly for about half-a-mile through a dreary flat, forced its way through the barrier of rock, and, leaping madly down a steep ledge, formed a series of foaming cascades, which I dare

say a painter would have rejoiced in, but I did not at that moment appreciate. In my present state of mind the only satisfaction I derived from this increased rapidity of the current was, that the faster the water flowed the nearer it was getting to the level I hoped to find.

"After hurrying on as fast as I could for a mile or more, I perceived before me, on my side of the river, a narrow valley opening between the hills; and you may imagine my dismay when, on reaching it, I found my further progress cut off by another stream which added its waters to the one whose course I had been so long following.

"In vain I looked for a place where I could ford it; it was hopeless. So there was nothing for it but to follow up the bank of this new torrent.

"It was a narrow gorge; the mountains on the opposite side rose almost abruptly from the bed of the river, whose course it had tried to dam up by huge boulders and masses of rock, hurled down from above in grand confusion, through which the water was obliged to find a channel, now surging and roaring in angry foam, now forming deep, dark pools and eddies, as if to gather strength for a new

assault on the barriers it had to encounter on its way onward. On my side of the river the declivity was less rapid, and excepting in places where the water-courses, swollen with rain, had brought down avalanches of rock and stones and earth, spreading desolation in their track, the hill-side was covered with luxuriant heather and tufts of whinberry: while on the level ground near the stream a few stunted, half-blighted alders, varied with the silver-stemmed birch and tangled brakes of wild raspberry bushes, left occasional patches of rich short grass, soft as a carpet, through which trickled tiny streamlets of peat-coloured water.

"I am not by any means superstitious, nor do I put any faith in omens, but somehow a sense of my loneliness and helplessness came accross me when a great raven, whose privacy I had invaded, wheeled round and round near me, with harsh, hoarse croak. I could not help recalling to mind how I had been flogged at Rugby on his account—at least for that ill-omened line of Virgil in which he figures—

'Sæpe sinistra cavâ prædixit ab ilice cornix.'

I construed it, you know, *cavâ cornix*, the hollow

raven; *sinistra ab ilice*, from the oak on the left hand; and then I thought how all my life long it had been my object to get out of the way, and now that I was as much out of the way as a fellow could wish to be, how that I was grumbling and discontented. It seemed like a visitation on me for indulging a taste so peculiar. But with this sense of loneliness came another feeling or two more hard to bear. Up to this time excitement and anxiety had carried me on without giving me much time for thinking of anything but escape from this wilderness. When once, however, the two appalling enemies, fatigue and hunger, obtruded themselves, there was no reasoning with them—no staving them off.

"I will not say that, while I was pricking my fingers in gathering raspberries, the affecting history of the children in the wood did not recur to me. There was something analogous in our respective situations, only they were better off, as they had one another's society in life; and in death there were tender-hearted robins to cover them up with leaves. Here there were no leaves for me, and that croaking, restless bird in mourn-

ing, the flapping of whose wings I could hear above the roar of the torrent, as he swooped near me, would be my undertaker, and be as jolly, probably more so, over my remains, than undertakers are in following their craft.

"I felt better for my chance meal of delicious wild fruit, and plodded on in something better spirits, leaving the raven behind me. He had been disturbed most likely from a more substantial meal than mine had been. Onward I went. Not a sign of life. I could find no opportunity for crossing the river. Two or three times I was tempted to jump from rock to rock, but my heart failed me; their rounded faces looked so polished and slippery I was afraid of losing my footing.

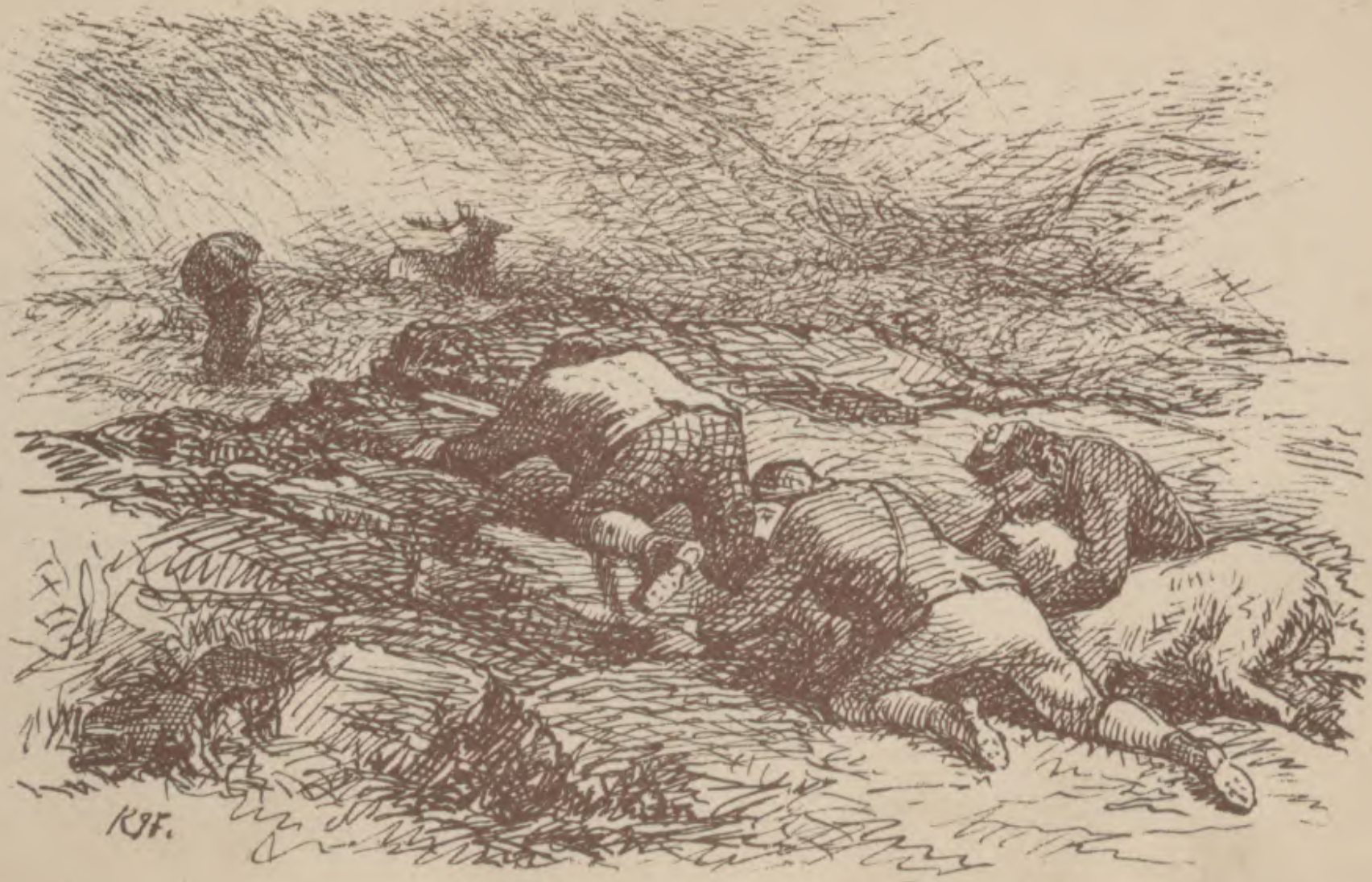
"Some unusually strong and rank heather made my progress very difficult and tedious, and I was about to sit down to rest on a stone, when suddenly, from the side of an isolated mass of rock not ten paces from me, arose a monstrous animal, as big as a horse, with horns of prodigious size. Fallow-deer I had often seen—we had some at Romynsdale—and often had wished to see a red-deer in its wild state; but this creature was

infinitely bigger than I could ever have imagined the stag to be.

"For some seconds he stood gazing straight at me, and looked so formidable that I began to fear he meant mischief; then, throwing back his immense antlers, he lifted his head high in the air and seemed to sniff the breeze. I could see his nostrils expand, and could hear him breathe. He seemed satisfied with his observations; for he quietly shook himself, lifted his head gracefully, cleared with a bound a low rock that stood in his way, and trotted off down the valley with the most dignified air. I watched him till he was out of sight.

"Never was there, I thought, anything so lucky. I would have gone through twice the fatigues of the day to have seen so grand a sight: it was worth a journey to Scotland: it was an event in my life.

"'It never rains but it pours' was my reflection, naturally enough, as I caught sight of a human figure at some distance before me—a second figure appeared—and then a third. They were visible only for a moment, as they followed



A WALK IN THE HILLS

one another rapidly across an opening in the heather. I waited for them to come up, and sat down on a rock.

"The movements of these persons puzzled me immensely. There they were again, all the three, on their hands and knees, crawling positively on all fours over a bit of rising bare ground. Presently they dodged in single file from one rock to another, so intent upon their object, whatever it might have been, that they did not perceive me till they were close to where I was sitting.

"'Holloa!' I cried out loudly, as I saw them cautiously but rapidly stealing away rather out of my direction. 'I say, will you just'——

"'What the devil's that?' was growled in an angry tone.

"'It's only me!' I bawled out. 'I've lost my way, you know: just have the goodness to put me on my road!' and I hurried after the strange trio.

"'Will I throttle him, Sir James?' hissed a savage voice, as I felt myself almost flattened upon the ground by the weight of a heavy hand laid upon my head. The hand belonged to a huge hairy ruffian in a dirty kilt and a grey bonnet.

"'If your honour 'll only gi'e the word, I'll just squeeze the breath oot o' him.'

"'Can't you see, you stupid fool,' said a gentlemanly-looking man, in a loud whisper, who was on his knees, behind a rock, engaged in taking a rifle out of its case,—'can't you see we are after a deer?'

"'Down with you, idiot!' he continued, as I attempted to rise. 'He ought to be by that rock yonder, Donald!'

"'Just wast o' yon rock, yer honour!'

"'Oh! I see it all now plain enough!' I said out loud; 'you want to shoot that splendid stag I saw just now; that is just where it got up, you know. It *was* a monster! *Such* a pair of horns! I think he must have been asleep, for he looked so astonished when he jumped up, and saw me within ten paces of him.'

"The effect of this speech of mine was to bring all the party upon their legs as if by enchantment, and I do not suppose it often happens to a fellow to hear such a chorus of uncomfortable language addressed to him as was my lot at that moment.

"'Upon my honour, you know,' I said, when there was a lull, caused, I fancy, by their all being at a loss for more expressions of indignation and disgust; 'I am uncommonly sorry I got in your way—I can't help it—I am always in the way, somehow—I don't mean it.'

"'But what the devil brought you here?' demanded the gentleman.

"'Oh! nothing whatever. I did not mean to be here.'

"'But how, in the name of all that's damnable, did you get here, and where are you going?' asked the same person, who seemed the most put out by my unlucky appearance; the man in the kilt was evidently a gamekeeper; the third was a fine, handsome young man, who stood by all the time, with both his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his loose wide trousers, looking me over with a droll, serio-comic expression; while the kilted man, as he returned the rifle to its case, glared at me more like a savage beast than a human being.

"'Why,' I replied, 'I went out for a walk in the mountains, and lost my way and my hat as

well; but, I give you my word, I am very sorry to have got in your way.'

"'You do not expect me to believe that?' said the elder.

"'Walker!' said the younger gentleman, in a contemptuous tone, as he performed a pirouette, still with his hands in his pockets.

"This invocation of an absent individual of a not very uncommon name struck me at the time as peculiar. I have since learned that it is an expression indicative of incredulity, though I have never been able to get any reliable information about the legend which has rendered that respectable name a by-word of reproach.

"'An' whar' have ye hided the rifle? I'm thinkin' it will be no sae far frae the hat,' growled the savage, turning upon me suddenly, and gripping me by the coat-collar. 'Whar's the rifle, ye'——

"'Leave the fellow alone, Donald,' said the elder gentleman; and then, turning to me: 'I am not going to let you off till you have satisfied me you are as innocent as you make yourself out to be. Tell me who you are, and where you come from.'

"'My name is Rummins'——

"'My name is Norval. On the'——

"'Do be quiet, George; you are always doing something absurd,' said the elder gentleman to the younger, who had thrown himself into an attitude, and was cutting the air with one hand, while the other remained buried in his pocket.

"'My name, sir, is Rummins,' I went on; 'I have been stopping for some weeks at Drumkettle'——

"'At Drumkettle!' exclaimed my questioner, with a look of surprise; 'you have been staying *for some weeks* at Drumkettle'——

"'I have, indeed. I like the place because it is out of the way. It is my taste, and nobody has got any right to quarrel with it.' This I said sternly, and tried to look down that very eccentric young man, who continued staring at me, indulging every now and then in the strange gymnastic feat of jumping up, turning round in the air, and coming down face to face with me, his hands still in his pockets, and swelling out to their full width his capacious peg-top trousers.

"'O, my eye!' exclaimed this young gentleman, after a successful performance of this *pas seul*; 'if

it isn't as good as a play! Only fancy a fellow stopping *some weeks* at Drumkettle!'

"'How can you be so silly, George?' said the elder, almost laughing, in spite of the annoyance he had met with. 'I hardly know what to make of it,' he continued, half to himself.

"'Hech! Sir James and Master George!' bawled out the ill-favoured savage, who had vanished a few minutes before. 'Gude be here!' the brute went on, pointing to a deep indent in the heather. 'See ye there noo! Yon's the verra lay o' the muckle beast—his heed pointin' wast, an' the ither end east, as I telt ye.'

"'An' here—ay, an' here again is his foot,' he went on, as he stopped to examine the ground two or three yards from the rock. 'Saw man ever the likes o' that? It's big as a coo's hoof. Said I no it would be Squaretaes himsel? An' we so nigh hand till him!'

"'It is too true!' said the elder gentleman, in a tone expressive of his vexation, as he observed the wide cloven footprints on the short moss. 'We are not likely to have such a chance again. Nobody ever saw him twice in the same season.

You do not know the mischief you have done by your confounded intrusion on the ground,' addressing me; 'and now what is to be done I do not know. He can never find his way, Donald, to Drumkettle over the hill.'

"'If it was me,' answered the savage, 'I'd just leave the ill-faured carle in the strath. The de'il wull tak care o' his ain, I'm thinking.'

"'Oh!' I put in—it was time for me to speak —'Don't mind me, you know. It doesn't signify much what becomes of me. I am in the way everywhere. But, before you go, let me again apologise for my ill-luck in spoiling your sport. I didn't mean it, I am sure.'

"'Look here, governor!' said the young fellow, who had actually taken both hands out of his pockets, and was filling a short pipe from a seal-skin pouch; 'just you leave him to me. I know every bit of the ground. There is day enough yet for you and Donald to get another stalk; you are safe to find deer in Glenfannich. I'll go with this little man to Drumkettle, and get a pony there to take me to the lodge. It's all right. Come on,' he said to me.

CHAPTER V.

"THIS arrangement was agreed upon in spite of my remonstrances, and the elder gentleman, without as much as returning my 'good-bye,' went off up the glen, followed by the savage, who gnashed his teeth and growled awfully, as he strode after his master. Master George began our journey by making me take a fearful leap or two from rock to rock, to cross the river.

"'Well done, old fellow,' he said, when he gave me his hand to help me over the last chasm, in which the water was boiling and foaming some twenty feet below us. 'Now—just you stay there quietly for a minute or two.' Saying which, he climbed up a bit of rock more elevated than the rest, and remained there looking about him for some time.

"'It's all serene now!' he observed, as he returned, puffing away manfully at his pipe. 'They

are well out of sight now—we will go back for your hat and your rifle.'

"'My hat,' I replied, 'is miles away: it is lodged upon a ledge where only a bird can get at it; and as to rifle, I never had a rifle in my hand in my life.'

"'Well, if you ain't capital!' he said. 'You must be own brother to little Keeley. The way you came over the governor was first-rate—couldn't be beat. Have you been on the stage?'

"'No,' I answered; 'I came as far as Drumkettle on the mail-cart.'

"'Oh! don't—I wish you wouldn't—you're too good!' he cried out, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"I really began to entertain very serious doubts of my young companion's sanity. There was nothing to laugh at; at least I did not exactly see the joke; and told him so in as many words, but very civilly, because it would have been ungrateful in me to affront him, after his kindly undertaking to be my guide.

"'But you do not mean to say seriously,' he asked, 'that you were really and truly only taking

a constitutional in the forest, and that you actually did walk up to within ten paces of Squaretoes?'

"The nickname of Squaretoes I had always considered as belonging essentially to an obdurate parent or an uncompromising uncle. I now learned that the stag I had roused was universally known by that highly respectable name. This animal was, in fact, quite a character. He must have been very old and very wary, for year after year he had been stalked in this and the neighbouring deer-forests, and had somehow always contrived to escape being shot. His fame was now such that the achievement of killing him would confer a world-wide celebrity on the lucky shot. The name of Squaretoes was given him from the broad spread of his foot.

"On learning all this, I felt how much I had been in the way. After my companion had imparted this information to me, he strode on in silence for some time, till, seeing me begin to flag, he stopped at a spring, and pulling out a paper of sandwiches and a flask of whisky, he kindly shared the former with me, and persuaded

me to take the chill off the water with a dash of Glenlivet. This had the effect of reviving me a good deal, and Master George, having lighted another pipe, became more talkative.

"'I say,' was his remark, after he had made me relate fully my adventures of the morning, 'you are in for it, you know. The governor—my excellent uncle that is, Sir James M'Intyre—although he looks so mild, is, between you and me, a regular Tartar, and I'll be bound, he and that fellow Donald are at this moment planning some way to get rid of you. As to Donald, he is the sort of rascal that would murder his father for half-a-crown, and you may just fancy his rage at your putting up the deer. It would have been a sovereign—a golden sovereign, at least—in his pocket, if the governor had bagged Squaretoes.'

"'If that is all,' I replied, taking out my purse at the same time and offering a sovereign to my companion—'if that is all the harm, it is easily repaired. Have the goodness, will you, to give this to the man? I should be sorry to stand in his way of a tip, although, to confess the truth, I

take him to be a ferocious beast. The fellow looked as if he would murder me if he could.'

"'On mature consideration, I think,' answered Master George to this proposition, 'you had better, perhaps, tip him yourself. It won't be long, mark my words, before he gives you an opportunity. You were never tarred and feathered, were you?'

"'Tarred and feathered? No! Why?'

"'Oh, nothing! I merely asked from curiosity. You observed how quietly the governor walked off. That's always his way when he has anything on his mind. If he had gone on for another hour or so abusing and threatening you, you know, it would have been all right. His anger would have gone off, phiz! like a bottle of soda-water, and *there* would have been an end of it. But when he is calm and placid, look out for squalls! I can't help thinking how lucky it was for you I happened to be there. This is entirely between ourselves, of course, and goes no further. It is a privileged communication, you know; but the governor and Donald by themselves, with no one near, are up to anything.'

"'But,' I remonstrated, 'surely they dare not

break the law, and revenge themselves on an individual who has done them no injury!'

"'Well—that is a matter of opinion; *you* have done them injury, in balking them of a shot at that stag, such as a Highlander will never forgive or forget; and as to law! you don't suppose a chieftain, with his whole clan at his back, troubles himself much about that. Why, my great grandfather, of blessed memory, strung up three fellows one morning, on the march away east there, for trespassing on his grounds; and happening to dine on the same day with the provost and bailies of Perth, he entertained the company after dinner with a lively description of the hanging, and how his piper played, and the poor devils danced upon nothing to the music.

"'Of course,' he went on, 'the chief hasn't it quite so much his own way in these times; but woe be to the unlucky fellow that offends him; there's not a man in the whole country round that will not look upon him as his own personal enemy.'

"'I have already made up my mind to leave the neighbourhood,' I said.

"'By Jove! you're right, and you had better lose no time about it,' was the reply.

"It was a long and weary walk we had over the roughest ground—now ascending, now descending; now over rock, now over bog; and but for the encouragement and kind assistance of my light-hearted companion, I must have given in altogether. He lightened the road, and contrived to cheer me on with all sorts of stories of school adventures, of hunting, and shooting, and yachting, varied with a stray legend or two of ghosts or bogles, the familiar spirits of the country round.

"We arrived at last at Drumkettle, and most gratefully I thanked him for his good offices: I wanted him to stay and dine with me, but he would not hear of it.

"'No, no, old fellow!' he said, 'I do not like being in the way any more than you do. My advice to you is, to turn in at once, and put off dinner till to-morrow. I've got a nine-mile trot over the hills before me.'

"We got a rough pony for him, and I saw him canter off, his last words being—'Good-bye, old

boy! Take care of yourself; good people are scarce!'

"The mail-cart going south would pass the door on the following morning, and by that I determined to go before I got into fresh difficulties.

"I was putting up my things while breakfast was getting ready, when, hearing the sound of voices in the road below my window, I looked out, and the first object that met my eyes was the figure of that hateful ruffian Donald. He was holding forth to two or three idlers, who were always loitering about the inn door, while a boy in a kilt, holding a shooting pony with great saddle-bags on his back, and a brace of setters coupled together, looked on.

"The ill-looking vagrant, I was certain, was telling about the adventure of the day before, and the others were listening, open-mouthed, to his story. There was a blood-thirsty look about the fellow, which augured badly for any one who thwarted him, and quite in character with the sad account given of him. Giving credit to Master George for all he had told me of his uncle's

vengeful nature, I came to the conclusion that the precious pair were well matched.

"Scarcely had I sat down to breakfast, when an open carriage, drawn by a pair of beautiful horses, drove by my window, and pulled up at the inn door, and in a few minutes the landlord brought me a card, on which I had hardly time to read the words, 'Sir James M'Intyre,' when that gentleman himself entered the room followed by Master George.

"'Mr Rummins,' said the former, 'I have taken the liberty of calling upon you to offer you my apologies for sundry angry expressions I made use of yesterday, and for which, believe me, I am heartily sorry. The disappointment I felt at losing a shot at a stag who has given us a good deal of trouble must be my excuse.'

"I was quite overcome, and I suppose I muttered something about my regret for having got into his way.

"'Oh!' he continued, 'I know all about that. My graceless nephew there has told me how it came about, your being in the glen; and he has confessed, with extreme contrition [the young dog

was winking at me behind the speaker], that he has been amusing himself by what he calls cramming you with all sorts of idle stories; that I am indebted to him for the reputation of being an unconscionable tyrant and a terrible Tartar. Come forward and speak for yourself, you young scapegrace,' he said, as he took his laughing nephew good-naturedly by the ear and put him in front.

"'I am under too great an obligation to Master George to make any apologies on his part necessary,' I said, taking the young man's hand and shaking it heartily.

"'Oh! it was all my fun, you know.' He spoke, I fancied, as if he was half ashamed of himself. 'I am very sorry, really; but somehow I couldn't help it. But, to set the governor right in your opinion, I would have you believe he is the exact reverse of what I told you'——

"'To make the *tableau* perfect,' put in Sir James, 'we want one more character.'

"'You mean, I suppose, the miscreant who would murder his own father for half-a-crown,' I observed, laughing, as his nephew went to the window and called out to Donald to come to us.

"'Poor Donald!' said Sir James; 'who is, in truth, as quiet, simple, and soft-hearted a creature as ever breathed, notwithstanding his uncouth outside. Now, then, Donald'—he addressed himself to the poor fellow as he sidled awkwardly into the room, and stood against the wall, flattening his long fiery locks with one big hand, and twirling his bonnet by the rose in the other—'what have you got to say to this gentleman for threatening to throttle him yesterday, and laying violent hands upon him?'

"After looking from his master to me, and from me to his master, once or twice, with the most puzzled air, he said, in a sing-song tone—

"'Ye ken verra weel, Sir James, it was just yer honour's ainsel that was sae sair fash'd wi' the loss o' Squaretaes; an' did yer honour no say ye wushed yon confounded—yon shentleman—would hae been at the bottom o' Loch Fannich wi' a stane fast abune his craig? An' ye ken it wasna for the likes o' me to say it was just a puir mischancit body that had nae thocht to spoil a shot.'

"There was a comical look about the corners of the man's mouth, and a bright twinkle in his eye,

as he drawled out this speech with apparently the most childlike simplicity. He looked as though he felt satisfied he had turned the tables quietly on his master.

"He then continued, apologetically—'But 'deed it was a sair trouble whatever—an' hard to bear wi'—we'll maybe ne'er hae sic a chance wi' Squaretaes.'

"I dare say he would have gone on in the same strain for some time, but I stopped his mouth by assuring him of my forgiveness of the share he had in my discomfiture, and gave weight to my words by slipping into his hand something which drew from him, as he made an awkward salute, and ran against the door-post as he retreated, the words, 'Ech, sir! it's too much trouble!'

"Sir James now told me he had heard how bountiful I had been to his poor cotters. He informed me he had offered every facility to them to emigrate to America, or assistance to them in finding employment in the south; but whether from indolence or a fond attachment to their miserable holdings, they preferred leading the hopelessly wretched life I had witnessed. He

went on to say he looked forward to the pleasure of introducing me to Lady M'Intyre, who interested herself greatly in the welfare of these poor creatures, and who would, he said, be charmed to make my acquaintance. If I would not then name a day, I must think it over, and write him a line to say when I would come and stay at the Lodge.

"With this friendly invitation, he shook me by the hand, and, mounting his pony, went off with his people and dogs.

"'I say, old fellow,' said Master George, as soon as we were alone, 'I wish you would take this!'

"It was a little silver drinking-cup, made telescope fashion, and folding in a morocco case. 'You admired it yesterday,' he went on, 'and it would give me so much pleasure if you would accept it; if you don't, I shall think you still mean to remember my stupid hoaxing, which I want you to forget and forgive. The initials G. R. will remind you of George Ross: you can have your own put alongside, you know.'

"Well, I tried to get off, but as he seemed vexed, I told him I would accept it on condition he would take a something to remember *me* by; and you should

have seen his delight when I fetched a huge sporting-knife I had been persuaded into buying by Weiss in the Strand, with all sorts of instruments in it.

"'I have not time now,' he said, 'to tell you how I shall value this most useful gift; it is the very thing I wanted; I must be off after the governor. But—you promise to come and stay with us; I mean to make a sportsman of you. Good-bye!' And he was gone.

"Now, you know, I might have remained till now at Drumkettle, which suited me so well, but for that threat of the good Sir James to introduce me to Lady M'Intyre, and to have me go and stay with him. The very notion of it was appalling; I could not face it anyhow, and there was nothing for it but to be off; so I wrote a civil note to Sir James saying how sorry I was to quit the neighbourhood without paying him a visit, and, leaving a little something to be divided among my old friends on the moor, I was carried off in the mail-cart; and I do verily believe I left behind me many sorrowing hearts. It has always been my intention to go again to Drumkettle, but something has always turned up to prevent my getting so far north."

CHAPTER VI.

"YOU never chanced, I suppose, to renew your acquaintance with your Highland friends?" I said one day to Rummins, who was seated on the balcony busily occupied in doing nothing, while I was employed in whipping a ring to the top joint of my fishing-rod. The river was swollen and discoloured with the last night's rain, and it was such opportunities as these I seized to put my companion *en train* for telling me his curious adventures.

"O yes, I did, with one of them at least —with Master George—and I got into the way sadly on that occasion. Would you like to hear about it?

"Well, then," he went on, after I had expressed my satisfaction at his offer, "it was in the month of November, a year or two after the Highland adventures I told you of, I had been driven away

from a nice retired spot in the lake country of Westmoreland by the dreadful rain, which seemed unceasing. It was a decided bore living under an umbrella out of doors, and feeling, when in-doors, like everything about me, damp, and limp, and comfortless; besides which, my chimney smoked, and a number of children of my host used to play all day long, except at meal-times, at hide-and-seek or puss-in-the-corner, in the gallery from which my room opened.

"I did not exactly know where I was going, nor had I made up my mind whether I would go farther that day or stay where I was, for I was in no particular hurry.

"The coffee-room of the King's Head at Rawdon had a snug, comfortable look about it; so I ordered a mutton-chop, intending to argue the knotty-point with myself whether to stay or go while engaged in discussing my lunch. Indecision has always been one of my weak points. I had got through my chop, and had turned, over and over again, the leaves of the well-thumbed 'Bradshaw,' lamenting, not for the first time in my life, that I had been born many years too soon, before that

useful volume had become an institution, and wondering how long it would be before it was introduced as an elementary book in our schools, and before a fellow would have to take up 'Bradshaw' as well as 'Euclid' in his examinations.

"I had devoted some time to inspecting the coloured prints with which the walls were decorated; they were all hunting subjects, and represented for the most part one or more fresh-coloured gentlemen, with very long necks encased in blue bird's-eye neckcloths and very high shirt-collars, and wearing remarkably scanty swallow-tailed scarlet coats, white breeches, and very tight top-boots—all mounted upon horses with little stumpy tails.

"I remember to this day the portrait of one fellow who was taking a flying leap over a piece of water about the width of an ordinary canal, his ridiculous little pointed coat-tails fluttering in the wind behind him like two bits of ribbon, one hand holding a big whip raised high in the air—the horse's legs stretched out fore and aft in a manner wonderful to behold.

"Over the chimney was a full-length engraving,

in a handsome frame, of a portly, comfortable-looking gentleman in hunting costume, with a dog-kennel in the background. The inscription below informed me that it was the portrait of Martin Gale, Esquire, master of the Quorley hounds, from the original picture presented to him by the members of the hunt.

"On a little embossed card below this were printed the different hunting appointments for the week; and between the windows was suspended a varnished map, on rollers, of the Quorley county, in about the centre of which I made out (although it was partially obliterated and had become a dirty spot from constant fingering) the name of Rawdon.

"These studies of mine did not bring me a bit nearer the object I had in view. I was still undecided what to do; so I looked out of the window by way of a change, for it has happened to me sometimes that my movements have been decided by something suggestive that offered itself by chance.

"There was not much going on in the street. A rather knowing-looking small-made man, in a catskin cap, and a red-striped waistcoat made for

a fellow of twice his length, whose weak knees and spindle legs were rendered more conspicuous by the enormous volume of corduroy from which they emerged, was engaged in an animated conversation with a big, horsey-looking man, and a very small edition of a groom in dark livery: the latter was smoking a large cigar with much apparent enjoyment, amusing himself at the same time by teasing a very unpleasant-looking white bull-terrier.

"A 'pharmaceutical chemist's' shop opposite rather enlivened the scene by a brilliant display of coloured globes in the window; and next door to that was a 'tea depôt,' kept by one Baggs, who wrote himself a 'family grocer.' While I was turning over in my mind what was meant by a family grocer, and whether Baggs would imply that he gave up to meaner tradesmen the custom of bachelor and spinster establishments, and devoted himself only to supplying families with tea and sugar, and soap and candles, I observed at the window of the first floor two girls peeping over the blinds, and giggling merrily as if something tickled their fancy. I had only time to see that they were very nice-looking, for as soon as my eyes

were turned in their direction they vanished suddenly. I now understood Baggs. Baggs was a family man evidently, and of course a family grocer. I suppose he was of opinion it added to his respectability as a grocer, the fact thus made known to the public in big gilt letters over the shop window.

"I was interrupted in my survey of the street by the incident of the omnibus arriving from the station. The small groom hurriedly knocked off the lighted end of his cigar by jamming it against the sign-post, and having deposited it in his waistcoat pocket, ran off, in company with the hostler, to be present at the unpacking of the passengers and their luggage.

"The horses' heads being towards me, I was unable to see the travellers descend, but the small groom was soon actively employed in getting down some luggage in which he had an interest. First a great portmanteau, then a gun-case; and I was admiring his dexterity in catching a hat-box tossed to him by the boots from the roof of the carriage, when the door of the room was suddenly thrown open, and I heard

my name pronounced in accents of delight by some one who entered.

"'Run to earth at last, old fellow!' exclaimed my old acquaintance Master George, as he rushed up to me, and shook my hand as cordially as if I had been a friend of ever so many years' standing.

"I was really glad to see the young fellow again, for I had taken a great fancy to him formerly, because of his hearty, cheery manner, which took me by storm from the very first, and I am rather slow naturally in getting on with people.

"I returned his greeting with real pleasure.

"'I saw your name on your luggage outside, there,' said he, 'and thought it must be you. But what brings you here? Where are you bound?'

"'Well,' I answered, 'I hardly know. I was just debating whether I would stay here or take the train to Derby—or somewhere in the direction of Cheltenham.'

"'That's all right!' he returned, rubbing his hands with glee. 'You've no excuse now: wait a bit.' He rang the bell, which was in-

stantly answered by the waiter. 'Tell my servant to put this gentleman's luggage into the cart. You are going home with me, old fellow. You gave us the slip once, but you are fairly caught now.'

"What *could* I do? I really had nothing to urge against this hospitable invitation, but I tried to get off, nevertheless. I might as well have talked to the winds. I never could say No; that's another of my failings; so, having paid my bill, I found myself presently by the side of Master George in a double dog-cart, my luggage stowed away in its recesses, and the miniature groom, perched up *dos à dos* to us, admiring the fit of his little top-boots on the footboard behind, travelling, I did not know where, at the rate of twelve miles an hour. It was all done so rapidly that I could scarcely realise my situation.

"This sort of thing, you know, might have been very pleasant for some fellows, the being forcibly taken possession of by a good-natured friend, and whisked off to good quarters, instead of having to drag through a long dreary evening in some dull

country inn parlour, with nobody to talk to, and nothing to amuse one; but to me it was awfully suggestive of some unknown unpleasantness, some dreadful combination of events, in which I *must* be found in the way.

"The appearing an unexpected guest in a house of which the proprietors were utter strangers to me, was deemed by me little short of a catastrophe, but my companion did not allow me much time for indulging in these unpleasant forebodings, for he rattled on incessantly from one subject to another. He made me tell him how and where I had passed the time since we parted, and he narrated to me in return how sorry both himself and his uncle were at my taking myself off so suddenly from Drumkettle, and how all the poor people there continued to talk about me, and looked forward to seeing me among them again.

"All this tale of the past was very pleasant to listen to, but the future loomed disagreeably before me all the while. It was very ungrateful of me—there is no denying the fact; it was, nevertheless, impossible to prevent myself wishing

I had not been in the way when Master George arrived at Rawdon. Never, never again would I put my name on my luggage as long as I lived!

"'There,' said my companion, pointing with his whip, 'you can just catch the chimneys of the house, above that beech-wood yonder. I want to persuade my mother to cut an opening there to let in the house—it would look well from hence; but she doesn't like to touch the old woods.'

"'And I am sure,' I remarked, 'if I were the possessor of fine timber, it would go to my heart to cut down one tree. I never see the woodman at work in felling an old tree without a feeling of sorrow.'

"'You only tell my dear mother that, and you win her heart at once. By-the-bye, that reminds me I ought to put you behind the scenes. I do not know whether we shall find any people staying in the house, for I am only just come from Scotland. Our family party consists of my mother, who is sister to Sir James M'Intyre, whom you know—(my poor father I lost some years ago)—a couple of tall girls, one older, one younger than myself, they are my sisters—a

French governess has still charge of Minnie, the younger one—and an old family curiosity, in the shape of an aunt of my mother's, who loves to retain the rank of her departed husband, and styles herself Mrs *General* Holdstock.

"'I ought to make you aware of one peculiarity of hers, which is sometimes not a little startling to a stranger; it is an absurd habit of thinking aloud. Whatever occurs to her, complimentary or the reverse, out it comes straight on end, without her being the least aware of her infirmity; and as she affects a great propriety of manner, and retains a good deal of the ceremonial and courteousness of the old school, this exposure of her real sentiments is, every now and then, so completely at variance with the opinions she avows, and the compliments she pays, as to produce a most ludicrous effect. You must not mind what she says—*we* never do; and after all, you know, this sort of double action in thought and word is common to half the persons one meets, only they do not make it known like this poor old lady.'

"We were now arrived at the entrance of the

park; two little girls came running out of the comfortable, cosy lodge to open the gate, and stood smiling and courtesying, Master George giving them a pleasant word as we drove through. The road wound for about a mile through a wild bit of forest, which, but for two or three trim, well-fenced plantations on the hill-sides, would seem to have been left in its primeval state. Here and there the gnarled stem of a venerable oak, almost bleached with age, or a dark yew-tree of rare size, remained, the patriarchs of the soil, conspicuous among the brakes of thorn, and holly, and silvery birch. The ground was covered with patches of gorse, and broom, and fern; rabbits were scampering away in every direction, and every now and then a hare crossed the road or bounded along before us at an easy, careless pace.

"We presently overtook a man with a gun, who, Master George told me, was the game-keeper, and pulled up to ask after his wife and family, and whether he had been lucky with his pheasants.

"'Glad you be come home, Master George,' said the man, and he spoke as if he meant it. 'The woodcocks be come: my boy do tell me he seed four on 'em in the clay pole spinnies only last evening as ever was.'

"'All right, Hounslow. Have the hounds been here yet?'

"'They haven't, not yet, Master George; but we got orders to put to, for they meets to-morrow at Marton Common.'

"'To-morrow!' exclaimed my companion in high glee, as we drove on. 'I shall be able to give you a mount, old fellow. Marton is one of our best meets, and if we can only get the fox away from Scatterby Gorse or Chewton Wood, with the wind as it is, he must go—he can't help it; and then, by Jove! I say—eh?'

"Now, this was to me a most disagreeable piece of intelligence. I never was a good horseman, and had never been out hunting in my life; and, what is more, I never meant to go. This fact I communicated to Master George, but it only seemed to increase his delight.

"'Never been out hunting! It is high time you should. Upon my word,' went on Master George, 'I am serious. I should never forgive myself, and you would never forgive me, if I allowed you to miss such a chance.'

"'But really and truly,' I said, 'I have a great objection to strange horses: something might happen, you know.'

"'Well,' returned he, 'that's a very right and proper feeling — generally speaking — but then it depends on who the fellow is who mounts you. Now, you see, I mean to let you have one of my horses, and it would vex me uncommonly if you declined it. If the horse comes to grief, there will be nobody damaged but myself.' He quite forgot the rider.

"'No, no! old fellow,' he continued 'I have taken possession of you, and don't mean you to get through a day with the women-folk all by yourself. Of course, I give up the day's hunting with pleasure, however much I may wish to go, if you are regularly set against going with me.'

"Here was a dilemma! The good-natured

fellow would deprive himself of a day's pleasure to accommodate me, or I must do what was most distasteful to myself. I must needs trust to the chapter of accidents to bring it about that neither of these contingencies should occur.

"My thoughts were now called away from this serious matter by our entering a double avenue of noble chestnut-trees, at the end of which was to be seen the house of Rookwood, an extensive irregular pile of building, without much pretensions to architectural design; and, as we drew near, I could perceive that it was of different periods and different styles, the whole forming an imposing mass, and covering a deal of ground.

"The old part of the house, which faced the avenue, was of rough grey stone, with quoins and window-frames of reddish-yellow material, carefully dressed. In the centre of this was a wide projecting porch with a pointed doorway, above which was a large oriel window, whose heavy stone mullions were arabesqued with delicate shoots of ivy. There were two storeys;

the windows long and low; and the whole was finished by a heavy battlement. Above this rose, in picturesque confusion, stacks of tall quaint chimneys of brick, and it was on the ornamentation and diversity of design of these that the architect would seem to have exhausted all his skill and genius.

"It was easy to see that the more modern part of the building, which in its proportions quite dwarfed the original mansion, had been added at different periods, as the requirements or tastes of the proprietors had dictated, and it was evident these had been rather directed to comfort and convenience than outward show and effect.

"Before the bell had ceased ringing, the glass door was thrown open, and an ancient, grey-headed butler hurried out as fast as his infirm legs would carry him, and Master George was shaking him by the hand; while an elderly footman in livery and a small page stood by, grinning with delight, and waiting for the kindly greeting they knew would be given them in turn.

"I do not profess to know much of the world, although I have been knocked about so much

in it, but I am inclined to think there is no better indication of the worth and goodness of the master of a house and the family generally than the behaviour of the servants, not to them only, but to strangers. My impression is, that good masters make good servants, and both know how to value each other.

"'Welcome, old fellow, to Rookwood,' said Master George, taking me by both hands and giving them a hearty shake when we had entered the hall. 'It is a quaint, old, out-of-the-way place—just what you like, you know—though not quite so forlorn as your old retreat at Drumkettle.'

"'Oh! Aunty mine! I am charmed to see you looking so well and hearty!' said Master George to a stately, prim-looking old lady, whom we found in the drawing-room, seated behind a large embroidery frame.

"While she was welcoming her nephew, I could see her looking askance at me all the time, and she soon betrayed her thoughts by saying, in a sort of minor key—'Hem! queer little man —wonder where George picked him up.'

"The latter cut short her soliloquy by presenting me to the old lady, Mrs General Holdstock, telling her how he had laid violent hands upon me, and brought me prisoner to Rookwood.

"'You know, dear George,' she said in the most pleasant manner possible, 'any friend of yours is sure to be a welcome guest at Rookwood—(how shy and awkward the man looks! hope he is not going to stay—quite gives me the fidgets). Is this your first visit to our neighbourhood, Mr Rummins?' she asked blandly; and then again to herself—'*What* a name!—wonder how people come by such names!'

"I answered her question by saying I had never been in that part of the country before; and I could not help observing that my name might appear strange to her, but it was originally De Romyns—a name, I believed, of great antiquity.

"'Oh *dear* no! it does not appear at all strange to me, I assure you—(very odd he should have guessed what I was thinking of).'

"I do not know how much longer this very objectionable old lady would have gone on with

these exceedingly unpleasant personal remarks, if the good-natured Master George, after ascertaining that his mother and sisters were out driving, had not carried me off to the stables, where we were welcomed by a little, wiry, dried-up, old man, who confided to me, before I had been long in his company, that he had lived 'well-nigh upon forty year' in the family, and had taught the old squire, Master George's father, to ride. It was with evident pride, too, he recalled to the latter's recollection his own first day with the hounds on Punch at Wadham Green.

"We visited in due succession every stall and loose box about the place, and I fear I was not quite so interested in the inspection as I ought to have been. This done, we all adjourned to the saddle-room, where Master George lighted a cigar, and assured me it was a pity I did not smoke.

"The old groom, who did the honours, hissed most professionally as he dusted a bench and drew it forth for us to sit upon, after which he introduced the subject of the morrow's hunting. I heard the whole thing settled with the greatest

dismay—how my friend was to ride Dundee, and Golumpus was the horse for me. He would carry me, said Master George, like a bird.

"Now, the singularity of the name 'Golumpus' had struck me in going the round of the stables, and I perfectly recollected its belonging to a great, tall, big-boned chestnut, whose manner of laying his ears, tucking in his tail, and showing the whites of his eyes, had given me a very disagreeable impression of the beast.

"I made a faint effort to get off, but had no chance, Master George assuring me he should feel awfully put out if any absurd scruples of mine prevented my accepting his offer, and old William left off hissing and arranging the hanging of a bridle, to back up his master with the words: 'Lor' bless ye, sir! why, he's well up to fourteen stun, Golumpus is—that's about twice your weight—and a babby might ride him, he might.'

CHAPTER VII.

"I DO not know whether it has ever occurred to you to hear yourself disposed of in this summary sort of way without the slightest appeal to the sentiments of the party most interested. In this particular case it was evident the bare possibility of the *hunting itself* being disagreeable to me never once crossed the mind of Master George, enthusiast as he was himself. He put down all my excuses to the score of an unwillingness to run the risk of laming his horse, and old William's verdict about the capabilities of the brute showed clearly the reason *he* assigned to my backwardness in accepting the offer of Golumpus.

"The sound of a carriage driving into the yard made Master George throw away his cigar, and he led me off at a run to the house.

"It was a beautiful sight the first meeting with his mother and a fine handsome girl, whom I

should have known, from her resemblance to him, to be his sister: that is, you know, it would have been a beautiful sight, and I should have enjoyed seeing it, had it not been for the feeling that I was horribly in the way all the time, that I had no business there; but I was glad to see my presence did not seem to cause any restraint, nor check in any way the fond greetings of the happy mother.

"Master George now presented me in form to Mrs Ross. She welcomed me most kindly, and apologised for her neglect of me.

"'He is my only boy, Mr Rummins,' she said to me, her eyes still blind with tears of joy, 'and if you have found him worthy of your love as a friend, you will be able to judge how dear he is to all of us.' And then she went on to tell me how she had heard from her brother, Sir James, of my kindness to the poor things on the moor at Drumkettle, and how he had met with me. Afterwards she expressed her happiness at making my acquaintance; and the beautiful girl smiled so kindly, and welcomed me too so prettily, that if it had not been for the terrible weight upon my

mind, caused by the disagreeable anticipations of the morrow, I really might have fancied I was not so much in the way after all.

Well, the dinner passed off pleasantly enough. The old relict of the General came out, every now and then, with some remarkable soliloquies, *à propos* of everything and everybody, which no one seemed to notice. *They* were used to it; but to *me* it was so novel and comical, I had much ado to keep my countenance. In the evening, however, the old lady was singularly disagreeable.

"On going to the drawing-room we found the younger daughter—a pretty, quiet-looking girl, about fifteen years of age—sitting demurely at crochet-work; and a dark-eyed, long-ringleted, rather good-looking personage, a Swiss governess, who, I had been informed, had but recently entered upon her charge.

"I soon found out that the aunt had taken a great dislike to poor Mademoiselle; and if the latter, who had only a smattering of English, could have understood the enunciation in the minor key of what was passing in the old lady's

mind, she would scarcely have remained in the room a minute.

"'Setting her cap at that little fellow—a forward, artful thing!—knew she would.' This came out shortly after Master George and I entered the room.

"'Mr Rummins,' she continued, aloud, 'you do not talk French, you say. Now, *do* come and talk to me in plain English;' and she made room for me by her side on the sofa. I had been turning over some drawings on the table at which Mademoiselle was at work knitting.

"'Thought I did not see her rolling her big eyes at him—pretty example to Caroline, indeed! —Ha, ha, yes!' went on the old lady, apostrophising the poor unconscious governess, always in the minor key. 'You may look angry—see through you fast enough—lucky there is *one* person with brains in the family. Why doesn't the man speak?' This was of course for me. 'Can't he get out a word?'

"Now, if there is one thing more embarrassing than another, it is the feeling of being expected to talk, and not knowing how to begin the con-

versation. It has often happened to me, but I cannot get over it anyhow. I winced under this dreadful remark, and although everybody had something to say, in order to give a turn to the tiresome old lady's thoughts, I could see the involuntary smile provoked by my discomfort, and that demure little puss opposite me was coughing perpetually with a handkerchief before her face.

"The tact of poor Mademoiselle suggested to her that something amusing had been said, and seeing everybody else inclined to laugh, she laughed outright herself. This was unlucky, for it had the effect of exciting the old lady still more.

"'Um—don't see anything to laugh at—nasty, tittering, giggling thing!'

"'Mr Rummins,' she said aloud, turning to me, in the most pleasant manner—the change was marvellous—'I dare say you are fond of reading. What is your favourite style? By-the-bye, have you seen the "Beginning of the End?"'

"'What on earth can the woman mean?' was my reflection.

"'The man looks scared!' was hers, in the minor key.

"'This woman's stark mad!' I ejaculated mentally—as the saying is.

"'What a little fool it is!' she expressed verbally, without knowing it.

"'My aunt means a little book with that title, Mr Rummins,' said the lady of the house good-naturedly.

"'Well, I'm sure! Did not I say so? What else could he take it for, I wonder?' This again in soliloquy.

"'Oh!' I observed; 'thank you—yes—I see—a book with a title—The End of the Beginning. No! I have not met with it.' My confusion was so great I hardly knew what I said. Oh! how devoutly I wished myself back in the coffee-room at the King's Head, with no other company than that of the red-coated men and the cock-tailed horses on the wall.

"Master George again to the rescue. He came and engaged the old lady in conversation; telling her of his adventures in the Highlands, and rattling on on all sorts of subjects, evidently with the design of keeping her from her loud style of thinking. He succeeded partially; but I could,

though pleasantly occupied in looking over an album with the two young ladies, hear from time to time little indications of what continued to run in the old lady's mind.

"'Can see through a millstone as well as my neighbours. Nasty, forward thing! There she goes again, making eyes at the little man! Well! what next, I wonder!'

"The poor, unconscious subject of these ill-natured observations had, after answering in French some questions put to her about Switzerland, said to me in bad English, 'Ah! Monsieur has not yet travelled in la belle Suisse?' It was this question of hers that stirred up the indignation of her enemy.

"'Would like him to take her back with him, I dare say; wish he would—get rid of them both.'

"What a relief it was to me when I saw this terrible widow of the General begin rolling up her wools, and Master George hurrying away to light her bedroom candle! The old lady wished me 'good-night' in the politest manner possible, but as she sailed out of the room she fired a

parting shot which told so upon me, that I could not bring myself to join in the hearty laugh every one indulged in as soon as the door closed upon her gaunt figure.

"'Can't stand it any longer—makes me quite sick: a little simpleton! no match for the impudent creature.'

"As soon as the laughter subsided, my kind hostess made all sorts of apologies for the eccentricities of her unamiable relative. I said I did not care a bit about it; but it was an awful story, you know. I could not get over it, and Master George must have perceived my annoyance, for the good fellow came and sat with me in my room ever so long, after the family had all retired, and did all he could to put me at my ease. He went the length of calling the woman a disagreeable old cat, and wondered how his mother could put up with her vagaries.

"Luckily, an excuse turned up for me next morning for not riding the big horse Golumpus. It had never struck us before that I was totally unprovided with proper clothes for the hunting-field; and my friend's boots and cords, which

were duly paraded for my inspection, were acknowledged to be large enough for two men of my calibre. So, to my great satisfaction, it was decided that I was to ride Miss Caroline's pony to the meet: the ladies were going in the carriage.

"I will not tell you how excessively disagreeable the old lady was at breakfast. It was a great relief to me to find myself fairly mounted on 'Mouse' (Miss Caroline having obtained my willing promise to treat him kindly), riding by the side of Master George on his tall hunter, along the green lanes in the direction of Marton Common.

"As it had never happened to me to see any hunting, I contrived to get a few hints from my companion about the thing, and after he had enlightened me as to the significance of many of the terms that had always been incomprehensible to me, he said:

"'You know, old fellow! it is all your own doing the coming out on that rat of a pony; if you had only taken Golumpus, you might have seen something of the fun, without riding much. As it is, you must, I fear, resign yourself to seeing the hounds put into cover. When the fox is once

away, there is an end of it for you; and I advise you to return home by the road with the carriage, as you would have some difficulty in finding your way back to Rookwood by the lanes. It will, however, be rather good fun for you seeing the first burst, if the fox makes for the low country yonder, which he *must* do with this wind. By-the-bye!' he continued, 'don't forget, if you view the fox, to holloa, tally-ho! as loud as you can.'

"Two or three men came cantering up behind us, and after mutual expressions of pleasure at meeting exchanged between them and their old friend Master George, the conversation ran principally on a 'very pretty thing' these gentlemen had met with the week before. They found him, it appeared, as far as I can remember, at Swishton osier-bed, and ran him to something wood; got him away from that, and he then pointed for something Scrubbs; after crossing something cow-pastures, he crossed the turnpike road, where, being headed by an infernal sheep-dog, he doubled back, and, after skirting something park wall, crossed the brook just below something mill, and

was run into in the open on something common, in an hour and forty-one minutes.

"'The prettiest thing you ever saw,' said one.

"'Seven fellows in the brook at the same time, said another.

"'Two horses killed,' said the first.

"'Three or four baddish falls,' said the second.

"'Anybody hurt?' asked Master George.

"'Why, yes, they say old Grigsby has got a concussion of the brain, or something. By-the-bye, Ned, do you know how poor de Horsey is going on? He was picked up for dead, and carried away upon a gate,' inquired another.

"'Oh! he will be all right again,' answered number one; 'only a collar-bone, and some contusions somewhere inside: he is as hard as nails.'

"All agreed—Master George and all—that it must have been a very pretty thing indeed. It was only afterwards I learned that 'a pretty thing,' means a good run with the hounds, and of course I was led to believe that the thing is considered so much the prettier for the number of horses killed, the amount of collar-bones broken, and the variety of inward contusions, concussions

of the brain, and all that sort of thing, occasioned in the course of it.

"I do not know whether Mouse had ever been out hunting, but certain it is he exhibited very unpleasing symptoms as we came in sight of more red coats before us; pricking his ears, tossing his saucy head, whisking his long tail, and showing, further, the exuberance of his spirits by playfully kicking up his heels, which latter proceeding, I observed, when we came to the place of meeting, and Master George left me to shake hands with his numerous acquaintances, afforded much amusement to some of the crowd, while others moved out of my way with an ill-natured growl.

"I pretended not to see the carriage containing the ladies from Rookwood, which was drawn up in the road, near a patch of common, and was surrounded by a number of men in scarlet coats. At a little distance I could see the hounds and the huntsmen, with groups of horsemen, whose number was continually being added to by fresh arrivals from all directions. I kept well in the background, determined not

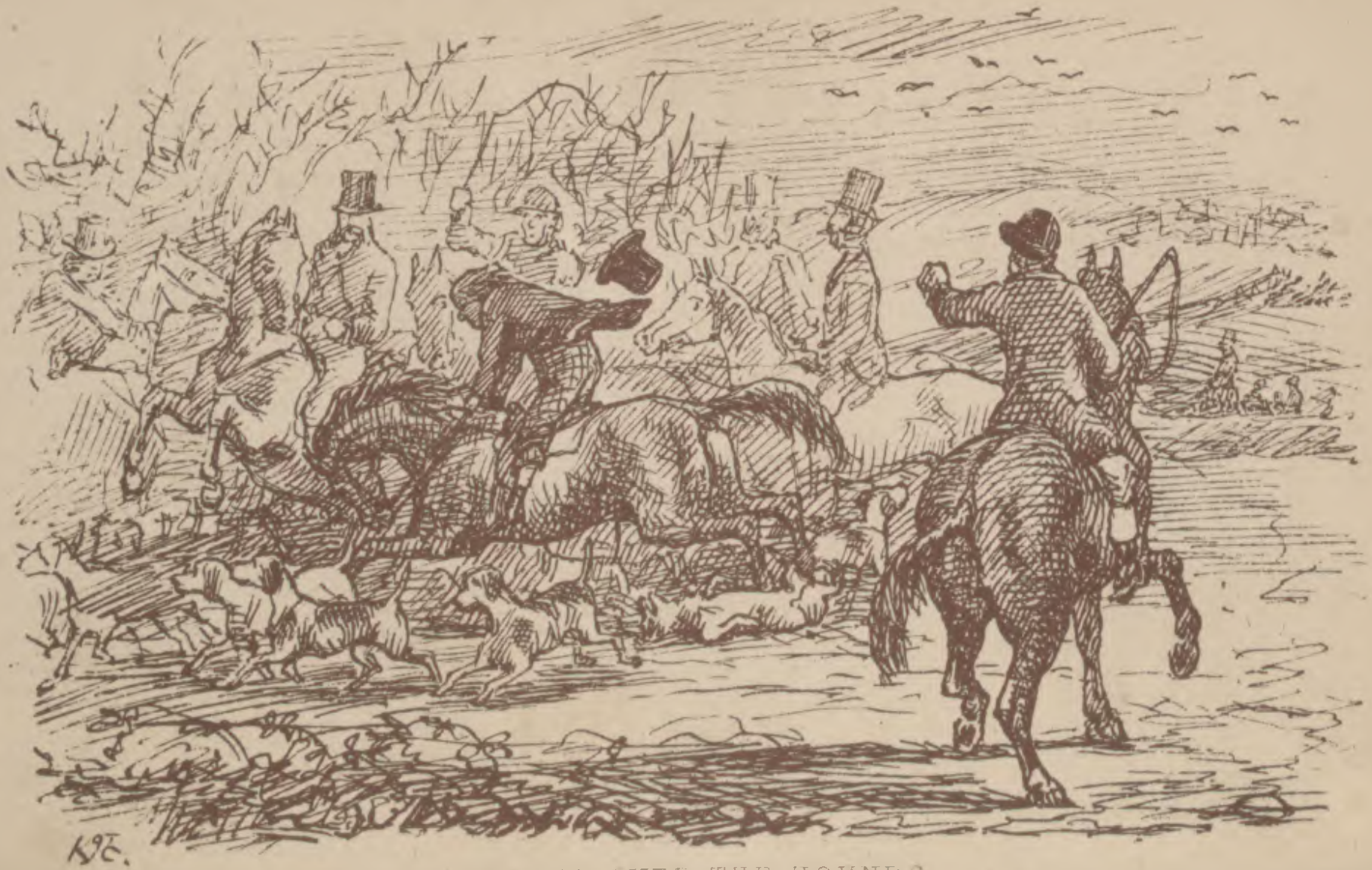
to get in the way at all, and to make my way back as soon as I could to Rookwood, after seeing the hounds put into the first covert.

"After some time there was a general move, and Mouse, who seemed to know better than his rider what was to be done, bounded off with me at a gallop, till we came up with the crowd.

"'Holloa! you sir! what the devil are you at?' I heard called out in an angry voice, as I brushed by a gentleman, and *ricochéd* from him against another, who was just then executing some manœuvre with his girths, and was nearly upset by the shock.

"'Confound the little beggar!' were the words I heard, as Mouse, in a high state of enjoyment, dashed on, and came up with the hounds.

"'Hoy! you! Will nobody stop that—double-dashed—little barber's clerk on the whitey-brown rocking-horse? Hold hard! I say! you—dashed—tallow-faced—herring gutted——.' I remember *these* compliments—they made an impression upon me; but I could not, in my state of mind, follow the long string of eloquent



RIDES OVER THE HOUNDS

and elegant epithets that I heard roared after me in a cracked voice, as the dogs yelped and howled under Mouse's feet.

"'Hoy! hoy!—dash the fellow! Hold hard! stop him!'—yelp! howl!—it was a Babel of tongues of men and dogs; but what could *I* do?

"Luckily Mouse began to be aware he was doing something wrong, and pulled up of his own accord, which enabled me to get out from among the dogs. A cut of a heavy whip across the pony's back, administered by the man in green, saved me the trouble of pondering on what I should do to get out of the way. It sent Mouse careering away across a wide heath, far in advance of the cavalcade. I could not stop him—so I let him go, you know, devoutly hoping he would carry me away altogether from the hunt.

"He never stopped till we came to the end of a long wood, and being by that time thoroughly blown, he came to a stand-still. I was quite out of everybody's way here, so I let him do as he liked, determined, as soon as the pony got his

wind again, to ride gently back to the high road, and inquire my way to Rookwood.

"While I was pondering on my unlucky specialty for getting into the wrong place, I was surprised to see Mouse suddenly prick up his ears; he also began to fidget in the most provoking way.

"To my horror, I now heard at the further extremity of the wood the bark of a dog, then two or three of them together, and presently a loud chorus of barking, with an accompaniment of shouting and cracking of whips. The sounds came nearer and nearer—it was very exciting, and I really began to think there *was* something musical in the cry of the hounds—and then it was so pretty to see the hares running away in every direction, and the pheasants getting up quite close to me, and the wood-pigeons flying about, and wheeling round in the air.

"Suddenly, to my great delight, I observed a fine fox come cautiously out of the wood about twenty yards from me; the crafty beast crouched down for a second or two, as if to listen; and now I remembered Master George's directions to me—

here was an opportunity of showing the fellows I was not altogether the novice they took me for.

"The baying of the dogs sounded nearer and nearer. The crafty beast knew it, and, bounding up, he was making off at a quick canter, when I shouted 'Tally-ho ! tally-ho !' as loud as I could bawl; so back he turned, and, skirting the fence for some little way, turned again into the wood.

"And now I heard the holloaing and the sound of a horn close to me. 'Gone away ! gone away ! Hi ! forrard ! hoick to him !' then more too-tooing of the horn. Out dashed the hounds, one after the other, in full cry, at the very place where the fox had come out.

"'Which way ?' roared the fellow in green. 'Which way ?' asked a red-faced, blue-nosed man in a red coat, who came up with several other horsemen.

"'Oh ! I saw the fox,' I said, modestly, 'and I cried "Tally-ho !"'

"'All right; but which way ?'

"'Why, as soon as he heard me holloa, you know, he turned back into the wood again down

there,' I replied, more boldly this time, with the conscious feeling of having rather distinguished myself.

"And now there was an increased barking of dogs, and more horn-blowing, and more shouting and who-ooping at the very corner of the wood to which I had directed the attention of the gentlemen.

"'Chopped him, by the Lord!' growled the red-faced man, mopping his face with a bandana handkerchief; and then there issued from his mouth a volley of abuse, and hard words, and foul language, such as perhaps was never levelled before upon any one individual.

"'Capital run spoiled! going right away for Barcombe!'

"'Deuced provoking!'

"'Infernal tailor!'

"'Who headed him?'

"'That's the fellow!'

"'The same little beggar that rode over the hounds!'

"The red-faced man having abused me till he was nearly choked, had trotted away to where the

row was; and these latter compliments, which were mild and gentle compared to those of his copious vocabulary, were thrown at me by different men as they came up—not one among them but had something uncomfortable to say.

"At last they all went off to where the hounds were busy eating the fox; and the coast being clear, I persuaded Mouse, sorely against his will, to take me away in the opposite direction.

"Always in the way, as usual. I could not help it, you know; but I registered a vow never, never again to go out hunting, and I have kept it.

"As soon as the pony was out of hearing of the hounds, and out of sight of the red coats, he went quietly enough. I got to the turnpike road by doubling back, and, trusting partly to the pony's intelligence, with an occasional help from people I met on the road, I found my way to Rookwood, and delivered Mouse to the care of the old groom, with something to stop his mouth in case he should hear of my misfortune. I then betook myself to my room, to meditate upon the most practicable way of making my escape from a place in which I had met with nothing but vexation.

"What a bore it is being in a strange house where you do not know your way about, and in which you are utterly ignorant of the ways of the family! For every household has its peculiar fashions and customs. Some fellows, I dare say, do not mind it; they do not care for being in the way, or, perhaps, the bare possibility of their ever being so never occurs to them. I envy them this feeling.

"It was now not more than three o'clock, and staying in my room till dressing-time was not to be thought of; so, having eaten a sandwich I had taken with me in the morning, I put on as bold a front as I could, and ventured down-stairs with much the same sort of trepidation and apprehension of coming across any of the people of the house as a burglar might experience in going his midnight round.

"I gained the hall, seized my hat, and, passing through a glass-door, found myself in the flower garden. There was nobody in sight, and I walked boldly on till I came to a little gate, which led to a gravel walk, planted on either side with laurels —just the sort of out-of-the-way place I wanted.

This walk I followed for some distance, and was just beginning to feel a little at my ease when I perceived, at a bend of the path, perhaps fifty yards before me, two figures approaching at a slow pace, and so absorbed in conversation that I was convinced they did not see me. In one of them I recognised the elder of the daughters of the house; the other was a gentleman in a hunting-dress.

"To advance would have been indiscreet, I thought; to retreat would be to leave me in view before them. There was no time for deliberation, and the horror of finding myself in the way made me instinctively turn off the path; and there I was, almost before I knew it, in the middle of the laurels, and quite concealed.

"I could hear the sound of their footsteps on the gravel as they slowly drew near—so slowly, that it seemed to me they never would go by my place of concealment. To my dismay, they halted close to me. I could hear distinctly the low, earnest, beseeching words of the one, and the softly-whispered accents of the other.

"'One—only one word, dearest; it is all I ask to make me perfectly happy!'

"'How unreasonable you are, Frank! what more would you have me say? Now do—do leave me. Some one will be sure to see us, so near the house. What would you have me do?'

"'If you will not say the one dear word, give me one poor leaf from the primroses you are so mercilessly picking to pieces, to tell me you are mine.'

"'There, then—they are all yours!'

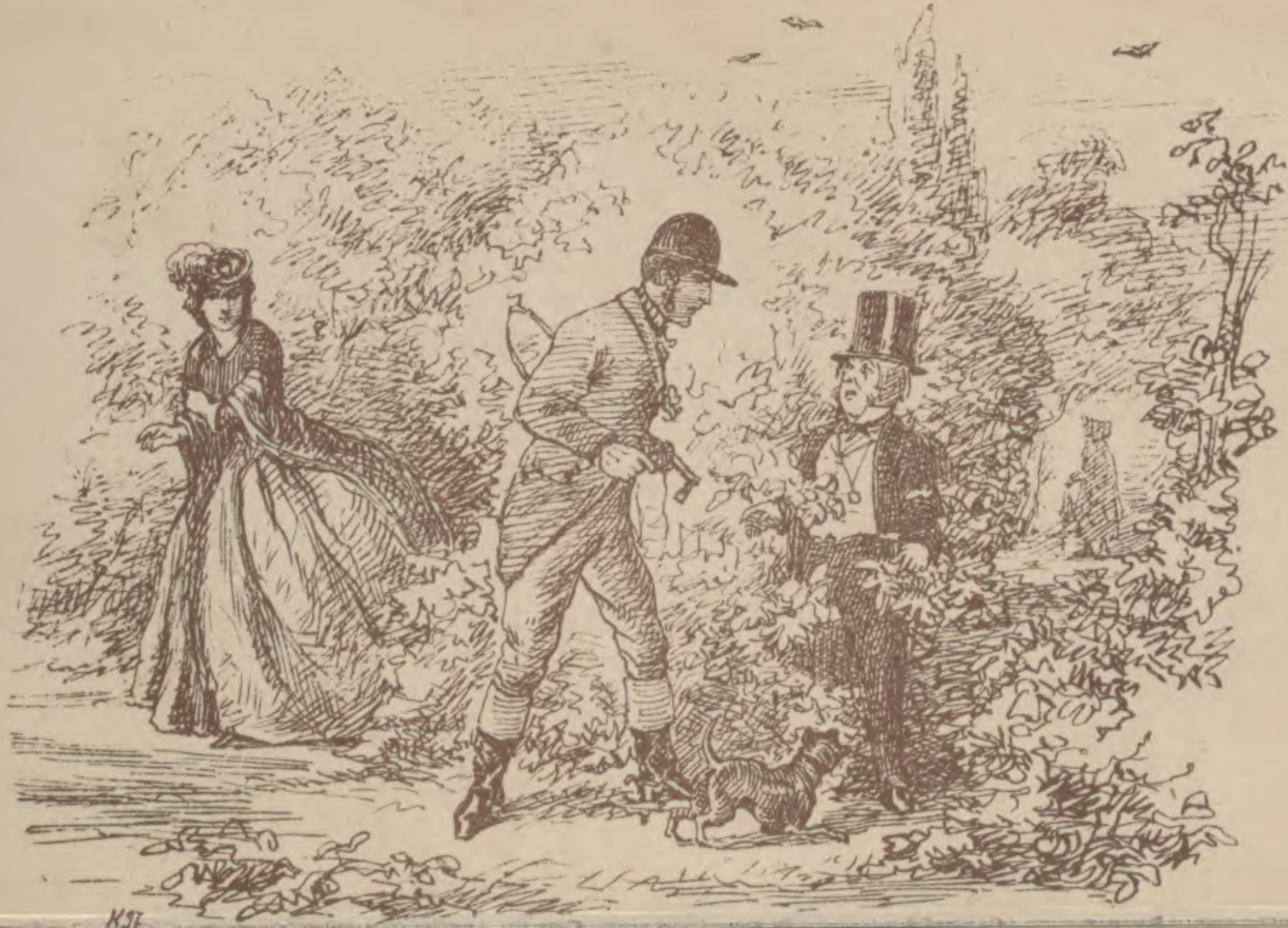
"'Thanks! thanks! dearest—a thousand'——

"Now I never could abide a lap-dog; and those nasty little toy terriers are hateful to me. I owe to one of these little beasts the being now placed in really the most embarrassing situation I ever was in.

"This deeply-interesting dialogue, to which I was an unwilling listener, was suddenly interrupted by the most noisy, shrill barking that can be imagined.

"'Be quiet, Tiny—be still, sir!' I heard pronounced in the sweetest of voices.

"'Bow-wow-wow! Bow-wow!' again, more angry and more sharp.



"'What on earth can it be? There must be something in the laurels!' in the man's voice.

"'Now do, dear Frank, I entreat of you, *do* leave me—you can go round by the stables—I would not see any one till I have told dear mamma. Come away you naughty little thing!' These last words were not addressed to Frank, but to the tiresome little brute, who got more and more outrageous, and was now barking his little heart out.

"'Bow-wow-wow-wow! wow-wow!' The more his mistress tried to pacify him the more violent he became.

"'I must see what it is,' said the gentleman.

"'It is only I,' I said, sheepishly enough, I dare say, as I stepped out from the shrubs, Tiny pulling away furiously at my trousers. 'I—I—upon my honour! I beg your pardon. I am uncommonly sorry.' What could I say, you know?

"'How long have you been there, sir?' demanded the gentleman, in the most excited manner.

"'Oh! I should think, five minutes—certainly not more; but really I am very sorry I happened to be in your way; it was not my fault—I did not mean it.'

"Miss Ross was gone, and Tiny with her. The gentleman, who was a fine, handsome, young fellow, looked daggers at me. 'And pray, what the devil were you doing there?' he asked.

"I told him how it had come to pass.

"He could not help laughing as I exhausted myself in apologies.

"'You are staying in the house?' he inquired.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I came down yesterday with my good friend George.'

"'You are a friend of George's, are you? That is all right. George is a dear friend of mine too. I am sure I need not suggest to you that whatever you have overheard must remain a secret—for some little time, at least.'

"'Of course, of course,' I replied, 'but I would not have had it happen for all the world.'

"'It can't be helped,' he said good-humouredly. 'We shall meet at dinner. I dare say there will be no secret to keep then. *Au revoir!*'

"With these words he took a little side-path leading into the plantation, and left me to meditate once more on the monstrous fatality that seemed to be my attendant wherever I went.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MY opinion is—I do not know whether you agree with me," Mr Rummins began one day when we had got upon the subject of the petty grievances of life, "that one's happiness or misery depends not so much on the great events of life as on trifles. A fellow who would snap his fingers at the loss of half his fortune, and devoutly thank God it was no worse, is driven half crazy by a lively blue-bottle or a tight boot; and a missing shirt-button or an ill-got-up neck-tie makes him positively dangerous.

"A heavy calamity we confront boldly; look it full in the face. It may stagger one at first, but there it is: we are obliged to reflect: the magnitude of the evil demands deliberation: and we find we must needs accept the situation. Our helplessness is apparent; maybe, too, a spice of pride, if not a better feeling, comes

to aid us, and we exhibit a becoming resignation to what we know we cannot avert. These hard blows are happily of rare occurrence.

"Petty annoyances and trifling inconveniences are apt to chafe and irritate from their very insignificance. We deem them unworthy of an effort to overcome them, or to meet them fairly, and give way to the movement of anger or irritation they provoke; and as these are of daily, almost hourly occurrence, they make up the sum-total of life, and inflict upon us much real misery.

"Now," he went on, "consider *my* case. Without any real calamity—without any grievous affliction—my life has been rendered very unhappy by an almost unbroken series of untoward, contemptible, worse-than-stupid dilemmas, which succeed one another as fast as the shadowy pictures of the magic lantern on the wall, but do not, like them, pass away without leaving a trace.

"Why was I, I thought, to be always in the way? Did anybody else ever get into such difficulties as I did by being always in the wrong place. The very efforts I make to avoid such scrapes only plunge me deeper in the 'Slough

of Despond.' What am I to do? How can I ever face that young lady again? The gravity of this last adventure quite swamped all the uncomfortable feelings connected with the morning's mishaps.

"I was indulging in some such mental soliloquy as this, while I stood transfixed on the spot where the late actors in the interesting love-scene had left me, when I heard my name pronounced in that detested minor key which betokened the near approach of one of my tormentors, and betrayed her train of thoughts at the same time.

"'Only *that* Mr Rummins—thought he had gone a-hunting.'

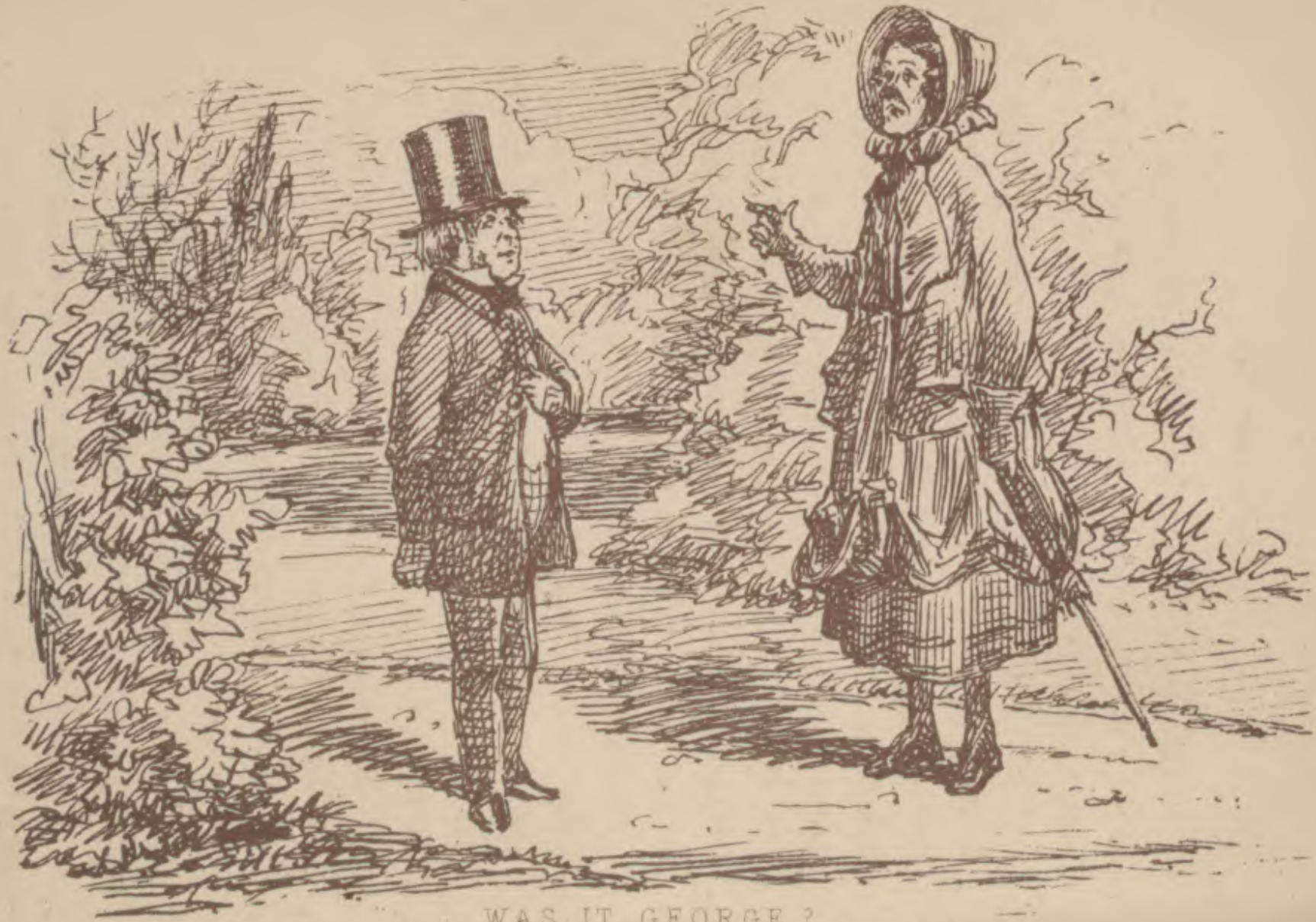
"Turning round, I found myself face to face with that fearful relict of the General. A strange figure she was in her walking-dress.

"On her head she wore a huge black silk machine, something like the head of a carriage half-up; a rough pilot-coat, with big wooden buttons, encased the upper part of her tall, gaunt person, and a grey linsey-woolsey dress appeared below it, looped up so high as to display a considerable length of coarse blue worsted stockings

which lost themselves in a pair of thick ankle-boots, as heavy as a ploughman's. Her hands were protected by a monstrous pair of tan-leather gauntlets, one of which grasped the crook of a long yellow cane, tipped with a brass ferule; the upper end forming the stick of a short inverted umbrella or parasol of dark cotton held together by a wide ring. An immense pair of green spectacles contrasted fearfully with her cheeks, all the colour of which seemed concentrated in her nose.

"I was horrified at this unlooked-for apparition which was there before me, standing in the great walk. The boots were in what my dancing-master used to call 'the third position,' and the gauntleted hand was stretched out at arm's length, holding the umbrella staff firmly planted on the ground.

"'Hum,' said this dreadful female, in the minor key—'looks scared—afraid I'm going to eat him.' —'Oh! Mr Rummins!' she went on, without a check, in the most courteous tone, 'I did not expect to have the pleasure of meeting you. I fancied you were out with the hounds—(am sure I saw a red coat—he knows something, I'll be bound).'



WAS IT GEORGE ?

K97.

"'Yes, madam!' I answered, as soon as I recovered my voice, 'I did go hunting, and—I came back again.'

"'Oh! by-the-bye, Mr Rummins, was it George I saw just now in the shrubbery?—there!' she said, pointing in the direction the young fellow had taken, and then saying, *sotto voce*—'Tries to look innocent—can't deceive *me*.'

"'Oh, no!—by no means,' I answered; 'it was not George: that is—I have not seen George—I do not know whether he is returned.'

"'Hum—knows something—who *could* it be? Lizzy looked so scared as she rushed by me—wouldn't stop—I'll have it out in spite of him;' and the terrible woman lifted the staff and dug the ferule deeper into the gravel.

"'Mr Rummins' (this was in alto), 'pray, who was the man in the red coat?'

"'Really, madam, I have not the remotest idea of anything.' I was very confused, you know, at finding myself pumped in this sort of way.

"'Looks as if he hadn't' (*sotto voce*).

"'Oh, fie! Mr Rummins. Oh, fie!' she said, in a fearfully playful tone, as she shook the long,

tawny forefinger of a gauntlet close to my face. 'Now, you know all about it, you do—you *must* tell me.'

"I was driven to desperation.

"'Madam,' I said, in the most determined tone I could get up, 'I don't know anything, I have not seen anything, nor heard anything, and I am not going to tell anything. I came out for a stroll, and I have had it; and now I am going back again. I wish you a pleasant walk.' And I verily believe I ran away to the house.

"'It is all right, Miss Ross. The old lady tried very hard, but she got nothing out of me,' I said to the young lady, who crossed the hall as I was taking off my gloves.

"'Oh! thank you, Mr Rummins,' she replied hurriedly, but in a tone so happy as to make me feel quite delighted I had mentioned the subject, though, to confess the truth, I was rather astonished at my boldness when I came to reflect upon it. I thought, you know, the poor thing would be so glad to know her secret was safe from that prying old woman.

"Soon after the dressing-bell had rung there

was a knock at my door, and Master George, still in his hunting-dress, came laughing into my room.

"'I say, old fellow,' he exclaimed, 'what is this turn-up you've been having with the old General? She has been making such a piece of work all over the house. She declares there is something dreadful going on, in which you and a gentleman in a red coat, unknown, are the principal parties. It is you, however, who came in for the lion's share of her anger. What on earth have you been doing to her to put her back up thus? I should not have suspected you.'

"Nothing would have pleased me more than to tell him all that had occurred; but I was bound to secrecy; so I merely said the old lady had found me in the shrubbery, and cross-questioned me, and that I had left her planted there.

"'But what is up? What is it all about? There she is, shaking her head wisely, and winking mysteriously, and making all sorts of inuendos about young women not being flurried and frightened for *nothing;* and how young women don't rush from the garden to the house with

flushed cheeks and agitated manner if *nothing* had happened; and how gentlemen don't stand gaping about in gravel walks by themselves, and don't give crooked answers when they are asked civil questions, if *nothing* had happened. You should hear her.

"'The best of the fun is,' he continued, 'my mother does not seem the least alarmed, and takes it quite easily, though, to my mind, nothing short of the conviction of some very imminent catastrophe could have worked up the old lady in such a way. The more my mother tries to pacify her the more excited she becomes; and she declares that if it were not for herself the whole house would be turned topsy-turvy.'

"It was impossible for me to help smiling as he went on: 'And then I gather from her disjointed, incoherent "asides" that you—"*that* Mr Rummins whom George brought down with him"—are in league with some mysterious personage in a red-coat. Now, out with it, man! The dinner-bell will soon ring, and I must be off to dress; but *do* ease my mind, there's a good fellow, or else I shall not have nerve to carve.'

"I burst out laughing, and bid him go away to dress. All would come out in good time, I added, but that I was 'mum.'

"'Well, you are a pretty fellow,' he said, gaily. 'A quiet, retired character like yourself, to be involved in some important family secret before you have been twenty-four hours in the house. But I have my suspicions of the plot—about that red-coat, and—never mind—I only hope I may be right; but it *does* beat me quite how you have got mixed up in the thing.'

"'I say,' he added, as he left the room, 'look out for squalls with the old General.'

"This was not encouraging. I positively paused in my dressing, and sat for some time before the fire debating within myself whether I would not sham a headache, and make excuses for not going down to dinner. So great was my horror of encountering the angry old widow that I had almost decided on taking this step when Master George rushed into my room, dressed, as I imagined, in an incredibly short space of time. I must have been looking at the figures in the fire longer than it seemed.

"'What! not ready yet!' he cried. 'Look sharp, man! and we will go down together. On with your tie. What bores washerwomen are! they never fold them properly.' I was making a clumsy effort to effect a neat tie. 'That's capital!' he went on. 'Now then, that's all right; come along!'

"It was no good resisting, so I followed him down stairs to the accompaniment of the dinner-bell: it was something, at any rate, to have got off *that* quarter of an hour before dinner.

"I observed four or five strangers assembled in the dining-room; among the rest, the gentleman of the red-coat, to whom Master George introduced me, and I was a good deal pleased by the hearty shake of the hand Mr Langford—that was his name—gave me. It proved, at all events, he bore no malice. I had only time to get a glimpse of my old enemy's face, which seemed to be composed into an expression of offended dignity, as Master George led her off to dinner. Mr Langford possessed himself of Miss Ross, of course—I thought he would; and I took out the mistress of the house. Langford and his pretty partner were

opposite me, and so was the old General, but at the other end of the table.

"Everything went on smoothly till Master George took advantage of a pause in the conversation to ask Langford how he had missed him in the morning, as he had hoped to ride home with him.

"'My horse,' replied the latter—and he looked, I thought, a little confused—"cast a shoe early in the day; and as there was no blacksmith's shop near, I walked him home.'

"'Hum,' I could hear in the minor key; 'it's coming out now. Wonder what that little man had to do with it! Mr Rummins,'—the voice was now loud and tart,—'*your* horse lost a shoe too, I suppose; and you rode home with Mr Langford?'

"'Oh no!' I replied, 'not at all, quite the reverse. At least I hope not; but I never looked.'

"Everybody seemed to think this a good joke but the old lady, who pursed up her mouth, and was preparing some stinging speech, when a cheery-looking man on my side of the table suddenly said—

"'You missed a capital scene to-day, George. Fancy a fellow riding right into the middle of the hounds! It is a mercy if old Gale gets over it this season. I have heard him come out pretty strong at times, but he out-did himself to-day.'

"'I heard fellows talking about it,' replied George, 'but I was behind with the carriage. Is it known who he was?'

"'No, that's the odd part of it. It was a little man—nobody knew anything about him—on a pony. But the best of it was his heading a fox—the very same fellow, by Jove—when he was going straight away from Chewton Wood for Barcombe; positively holloaed him back into the covert, and the hounds chopped him. It nearly gave old Martin a fit of apoplexy; he swore till he couldn't articulate, and got quite black in the face. What became of the little man afterwards nobody knows.'

"Imagine my consternation if you can. Whenever a fellow wants to look unconcerned he always looks more conscious. I don't know whether it is so with you; it always is with me.

"'Tell us, if you please, Mr Boldero,' said the

old General, looking wickedly triumphant towards me, as much as to say 'I have you on the hip now' —'what sort of pony it was.'

"'A whitey-brown, madam; at least so Mr Martin Gale called it, and his descriptive powers in the way of men and horses, when he is labouring under strong excitement, are singularly felicitous and graphic. *I* should have called it mouse-colour.'

"'And the wretched man?' asked the abominable woman—'What sort of person was he?'

"'The same discriminating gentleman who gave such a happy description of the pony,' replied Mr Boldero, 'invested the rider with the character of a barber's clerk.'

"'Mr Rummins,' said the spiteful old cat, in a pleasant tone, '*You* were out to-day—perhaps *you* can tell us who the ridiculous little man was on the mouse-coloured pony—(paid him off now I think).'

"All the strangers on my side of the table leaned forward to see the person so directly appealed to, and I dare say Mr Boldero recognised in me the subject of his entertaining anecdote. He

kept his counsel, however; and Langford, taking up the reply, said, as he looked over at me with a comical expression—

"'Oh! Mrs General! I can tell you thus much: it was a little fat, punchy fellow in a white hat: comes from Rawdon, I rather think.'

"'I know the man you mean,' put in Master George: 'red face—green coat—brass buttons—leather leggins—pony about thirteen two to fourteen hands—rat tail'—

"'That's the very man!' affirmed Boldero, entering into the joke.

"'Don't believe a word of it—all in league together—it's a horrid story!'—in the minor key.

"No one could stand this, and there was a general laugh, which one of the party contrived to turn off in some clever way.

"'Well, after all, you know,' I said when I was telling the story of my morning's hunting adventures, after the ladies had retired, 'I could not help the pony bolting with me, and as to getting in the way afterwards, it is just what might have been expected of me, because I am always in the way. Master George knows that of old. By-the-bye, I

should not have cried "Tally-ho!" if *he* had not put me up to it.'

"The men were all very good-humoured, and thought it capital fun. I should say, too, that Mr Boldero apologised most handsomely to me for having introduced the subject, and I should have been very happy now, if it had not been for that old widow's persecution of me. I will not tell you how she went on thinking aloud, in the evening, about poor Mademoiselle, who continued to share with me all her ill-natured asides, till she took herself off to bed in a sad ill-humour. But the old lady came to grief the next morning, as you shall hear.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE windows of my room looked out upon the garden, and commanded a view of the walk in the shrubbery as well. Just as I had finished dressing I saw Miss Ross trip lightly across the garden, and go through the little gate I had passed through in the morning.

"Well, there was not much in that—she liked a walk before breakfast—so do I, too; and so it appeared did the General's relict; for no sooner was the young lady out of sight, than I saw the old lady stalking along, with long strides, in her wake. Everybody seemed to like the fresh air of the morning, for as soon as *she* had vanished there was young Langford lounging out in the same direction.

"He never could have seen the old lady, it occurred to me, and it would be doing him a good turn, perhaps, to let him know she was in chase;

so, opening my window, I whistled to him, and having attracted his attention, I made signs to him to wait for me, and in a minute or two I had joined him.

"I told him how the land lay.

"'Ho! ho!' said he, 'that is her game, is it? Now you and I will try if we cannot take the wind out of her sails. Do you, like a good fellow, go after her and keep her in view, and I will manage the rest.' With these words, away he ran at his best pace to the further end of the flower-garden.

"I soon sighted the old dame. She was labouring on, as fast as she could, right on end. On—on *she* went. On *I* went. She stopped to get her wind. I halted too, always at a respectful distance, keeping out of her sight the while. Forward again. At last she stopped, as if uncertain what to do. We had already travelled more than half-a-mile.

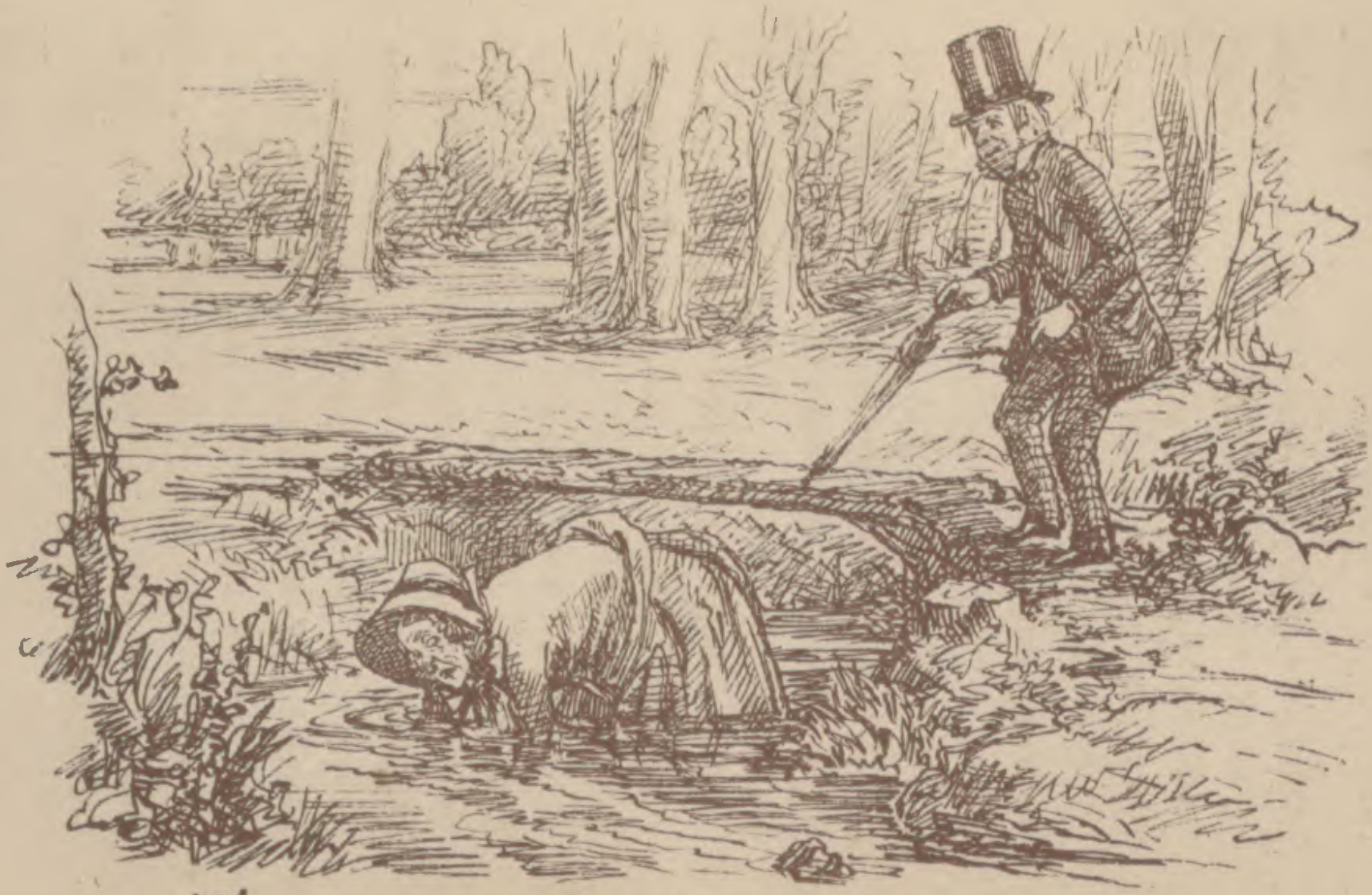
"A little brook ran for some way parallel with the walk, and some distance back we had passed a bridge that carried over it another path, winding, I could observe, up into a wood on the other side. At places the stream was so narrow I

could have jumped it easily, but here and there a plank was thrown across it. All at once I could see the old lady peering eagerly into the wood, and, following the direction of her gaze, I distinguished Langford through the trees, moving slowly forward, and a red shawl by his side.

"And now the old lady turned sharp round, and I got into the laurels. I knew my way *there*, you know. She was *thinking* very audibly as she came near me.

"'Was certain of it—pretty goings-on, indeed! All blind as bats. Shall miss them if I go back to the footbridge.'

"I saw her now cautiously feeling one of the planks across the brook with one foot. 'Got them safe enough now—can't escape me! These last words were followed by a heavy splash, and there was my old enemy floundering in the water. I expected a shriek. Nothing of the sort. The water was not deep, but the bank rather high. I saw there was no danger; and I let her make an ineffectual effort to effect a landing before I rushed to the rescue and hauled her out.



THE GENERAL GETS A COLD BATH

"She uttered not a word, but stood dripping upon the bank.

"'Do you not think, madam,' I said, 'you would do well to hasten home—you may catch cold. Can I be of any service to you?'

"'Sir, I never catch cold!' she replied tartly; 'and if you want something to do, you may fish out my shoe, which is stuck in the mud.'

"While I waited for the water to clear, you would hardly believe the way that woman went on *thinking*—

"'Drat that little fellow'—(*drat* was the word she used) — 'always in the way.' That was nothing new to me. 'He'll go and blab it all over the house, of course.'

"'Madam,' I said to her, as I recovered her shoe, which I had been grappling for with a crooked stick, and now presented to her, 'I have the pleasure of restoring your property to you—it is not quite so dry as I could wish. If you wish your extempore cold bath to be kept a secret, you have only to say so—*I never blab.*'

"'How very odd! — guessed my thoughts!' This was *sotto voce;* and then she said, in an

oily tone—'You know, my *dear* Mr Rummins, it may be as well, perhaps, not to mention this unlucky accident of mine—it might perhaps make the kind creatures anxious about me—(provoking little monster!—he is laughing in his sleeve. I can see him grinning inwardly—little wretch!')

"'We shall meet presently at breakfast,' she added gaily, 'till then good-bye.'

"And away she strode, muttering savagely, and leaving a track of water in her course. I jumped the brook, and came up presently with Langford, who was flourishing a shawl triumphantly in the air.

"'Is not this a clever dodge?' he asked. 'I came up long ago with Lizzie—Miss Ross, I mean—this is her shawl. I sent her back, and she is to meet the old lady in the flower-garden. I think we have given the General a famous airing this morning, as well as something to damp her ardour. A prying, disagreeable old cat!'

"'She is not,' I observed, 'a very captivating member of society. She has been abusing me in the most outrageous manner, just as if *I* had tumbled her into the brook instead of lugging her

out. I am very glad I gave you a hint about her proceedings, for I owe you a good turn for giving me a lift yesterday at dinner when she was badgering me.'

"'Now then for breakfast!' he said, as we proceeded to the house; 'but let me assure you that not only I have to thank you, but Lizzie—I mean Miss Ross—is very much obliged to you for making us aware of the old General's tactics. The fact is, there is no good making our engagement the talk of the neighbourhood; so we thought it better not to take her into our confidence; not that I think she really means any harm, but she is always meddling and mischief-making. If Mrs Ross was not of the most angelic temper she would have given her ancient relative notice to quit long ago.'

"Not a word was said at breakfast of the old lady's misadventure. She appeared very late, having had to make a fresh toilette. Stern and uncompromising was her look, bitter and mysterious were her outspoken reflections. These did not, however, seem to impair her appetite, and when the meal was over she did not greatly

surprise us by announcing in a solemn manner that she wished to have some private conversation with her niece, Mrs Ross. The latter looked half-vexed, half-amused, as she led away the General to the library.

"'Oh! I am so jolly!' exclaimed Master George, coming into my room where I was hard at work packing up my things, for I had made up my mind to be off—to get out of the way as fast as possible. 'Wish me joy, old fellow!' he went on; 'Frank Langford has proposed to Lizzie!'

"'I knew that yesterday,' I replied, quietly; 'I am glad it seems to please you.'

"'Delighted we are; all of us—but how in the name of all that's miraculous, came you to know anything about it?'

"'Never mind,' I said, 'I was as usual in the way, that's all;' and then I told him how it happened.

"'Well, you have a talent that way, my good fellow, it must be confessed; but what are you doing with your portmanteau there? You are not going to run away, I hope?'

"'You are a strange person,' he continued,

as soon as I had declared to him my resolution to go that day, alleging some lame excuse or other.

"'We have had such a scene this morning—it is too absurd,' he went on, after he had tried in vain to get over my objections. 'As you were a party to the row, I am bound to tell you all about it. My mother could scarcely relate it to me for laughing.

"'I knew she was in for a lecture when a conference was demanded so solemnly by the General. Well, as soon as they were by themselves, the latter opened by saying that the sad goings-on in the family had given her the greatest uneasiness, and that she had passed a sleepless night in consequence. There was some plot, she knew, brewing—something dreadful, in which "*that* Mr Rummins" was mixed up. She went on to narrate how she had detected you yesterday plunged in deep meditation, in the pleasure-ground, after meeting Lizzie flying to the house, excited and alarmed; how she had also caught a glimpse of some gentleman unknown, in a red-coat, about whom she questioned you, and you prevaricated

so, and looked so conscience-stricken, she was sure of your participation in some vile conspiracy or other.

"'Again, this morning, she averred to having seen Lizzie run across the flower-garden into the pleasure-ground. She had followed her immediately, nearly as far as the home-farm, and positively saw Mr Langford—she was certain it *was* Mr Langford—walking with a female in the plantation.

"'She would not allow my mother to speak till she had told her whole story, and then went on to say that, in her anxiety to know for certain who the female was, she tried to cross the brook, and, losing her footing, she tumbled into the water, when who should suddenly appear but "*that* little Mr Rumnins." He seemed to come *out of the ground*, she said, and, after helping her to land, behaved shockingly to her.

"'But the strangest part of the story was, that on her return to the house, there was Lizzie herself talking to the gardener. She ran on for some time, asseverating that, if it was not for *her*, she did not know what would happen. Everybody

else in the house was stone-blind, but she had lived in the world, and knew the world, and people could not throw dust in *her* eyes.

"'And now, aunt,' said my mother, as soon as the old lady had blown off the steam, 'what am I to gather from all this story? I am sure I am very grateful to you for your interest in the family, and for the benefit of your experience; but what comes of all this story of yours?'

"'What comes of it?' the old lady repeated, sternly. 'Why, there's something wicked, something clandestine going on. No daughter of *mine* ever laid *herself* open to even a shadow of suspicion'——

"'Suspicion! my dear aunt,' said my mother—'suspicion of what?'

"'Of flirting, my dear; of running about in shrubberies with a parcel of young men dangling after them. No son of *mine* ever brought *Rumminses* to *my* house. Why, that odious little man—(what could you have been doing to the old widow in the shrubbery, Rummins?)—had not been at Rookwood twenty-four hours before he is implicated in some underhand plot.'

"'Then she proceeded to upbraid my poor mother with a want of common prudence and supervision of her daughter, till she fairly made her almost angry; and it must have been something very aggravating, indeed, to disturb her temper.

"'Do you imagine, aunt,' she said, 'that I am blind? Do you go the length of thinking for a moment that my dear girl has a thought which her mother does not share? You have only anticipated a piece of news which I had purposed shortly announcing to you, and which has filled us all with the liveliest joy. Lizzie is engaged to Mr Langford. I had long seen his admiration of the dear girl, and longed from my heart that she might be not insensible of his attentions. He is all that I could desire. He proposed to her yesterday afternoon; and when you met the agitated, happy girl, she was hurrying to throw herself on her mother's neck and confess her happiness.'

"'My mother said the expression of the old General's thoughts was too ridiculous to allow her to listen to her without laughing; at length she gave up *thinking*, and said, doubtfully—

"'Ah, well! perhaps it is all as it should be—may be it is all for the best, and, if you are all pleased, I am. But how about *that* female in the wood? and then that Mr Rummins?'

"'I think it not unlikely,' returned my mother, 'that all parties were a little jealous of your interference with them; and perhaps—I do not say it *was* so—they gave you a "Roland for your Oliver."'

"'But "*that* Mr Rummins,"' said my aunt, musing. The conference was ended—they were her last words.'

"I had the greatest difficulty in withstanding the kind entreaties of Mrs Ross and the whole family, excepting the General's relict, to prolong my stay. The dread of getting into some new dilemma, from which it might not be so easy to extricate myself, made me strong in my purpose. Mrs Ross made me promise to pay her a visit at some future time, and George gave me an invitation to the wedding, which Langford and his pretty intended warmly seconded. The old General also took leave of me with many soft speeches, but, alas! betrayed her insincerity by adding in that

detestable minor key—'Glad he's off—good riddance of bad rubbish!'

"So terminated my visit at Rookwood, where, you will agree with me, my peculiar talent for getting in the way was singularly exhibited. I did not go to the wedding, but to Hunt and Roskell's instead, and you should have seen the pretty letter I got from the bride, and the kind messages sent to me by every member of the family at Rookwood, excepting always my old enemy, Mrs General Holdstock."

CHAPTER X.

ONE hot, sultry afternoon, Rummins and myself had sought the friendly shelter of a grove of firs, for the sun was scorching; there was not a breath of air; the sky was bright, the river fine and low, and the fish were too lazy to move, wisely preferring the deep, shady, cool pools, to getting parboiled in the shallows. My good-natured friend was busying himself in gathering a quantity of wild strawberries that peeped out coyly from the green mossy turf all round us, while I was watching the wreaths of smoke which curled languidly upwards in the air from my cigar, and musing on the simple, lovable character of the man, of his quiet retiring manner, his utter unselfishness, and his happy, easy temperament. I had long since made up my mind that, in all the accounts he had given me of his scrapes and adventures, he must have hidden

very much, from the fear of becoming his own laureate.

It was assuredly so, because it was plain to be seen that, notwithstanding the sort of fatality which always pursued him, he had contrived to make friends wherever he went.

"It seems to me," I said to him, after we had succeeded in finding a spot less haunted by midges than the one we had first chosen, "you always fall upon your legs, and although you may at times get into the way, as you call it, you generally get out of it very pleasantly. Now, I confess to a great curiosity to know what prompted you to leave England. It must have been some event more than ordinarily grave to induce you to come abroad, especially to bring you so far as this remote place."

"The old reason, of course," returned he. "I remember telling you as much when we first met; if you really would like to know the circumstances which drove me from home, I shall be delighted to tell them.

"Well, then, there were two occurrences, happening about the same time, and you shall hear them in their order.

"I had taken my place at the York station in a carriage going south. It was on the point of starting, and I was congratulating myself on having it all to myself, when two gentlemen looked in at the window, tried the door, which was already locked, and, calling the guard, invaded my solitude and established themselves opposite one another in the corners.

"Their conversation, which went on for some time on matters connected with the courts, soon gave me to know that they were barristers, who had just been at the York assizes. This did not interest me much, and I was just beginning a study of a new Bradshaw, when my attention was roused by hearing one of them mention the name of Runmins.

"'A very rising young man,' said the elder of the two, whom I set down, from a certain deferential manner of his companion in addressing him, to be a leader on the circuit. There was a something about him, too, notwithstanding his slovenly style of dress, his wild long hair, his careless disregard of the little comforts most men like to have round them on a journey, that seemed to betray

the feeling of his being *somebody*, to whom all such adventitious things could give neither gratification nor *prestige*. The guard had himself, with much assiduity, stowed away under the seat of the carriage a corpulent, well-used carpet-bag, containing probably all that he considered necessary for the road, and he held between his knees a big alpaca umbrella with a heavy handle and crook to it, which bespoke a man of strong mind. These observations I had ample time to make before I was attracted by the name of Rummins, pronounced by the younger man, and the reply of the elder one.

"'A very rising man, indeed. It was, as you say, a very clever hit of his: he quite carried the court with him: he demolished Wigsby's arguments one by one, without leaving him a leg to stand upon. A clever young man—very,' he went on. 'By-the-bye, did not somebody tell me he was going to be married? Bad look-out that for a young barrister. Take the advice of an old man, Seagrave, don't marry—don't marry—till you are *rectus in curia*. I never had time to marry, and don't suppose I ever shall.

"'There is no danger, I fancy,' said the other, 'of poor Rummins marrying just now, though I happen to know he has been engaged some time: a monstrous good match too—Miss Ingleby. You know old Mr Ingleby of Ingleby Hall—his daughter, an excessively pretty, accomplished person: but he is a fine fellow, is Rummins. He has declared he will never marry till he is assured of being able to give his wife a home with the comforts and luxuries to which she has been accustomed. They say he is such a favourite with the old people that he would have something handsome with her; but that will not do for Jack Rummins—he is too proud to be dependent.'

"'He is a rising man, sir. That man will *do*, or I am no true prophet!' asserted the elder.

"Now, do you know it was quite as much as I could do to keep myself from thanking this old gentleman, and asking him to shake hands with me, but I did not. What they had said, though, made me very happy, for I *did* love Jack. Besides, did I not know Miss Ingleby? it was so nice, you know—it was so clever of him to find

me a sister-in-law who would not be an utter stranger.

"Instead, then, of going to Cheltenham, where I was bound, I went straight to London, and transacted a little business with my broker there, which left Master Jack no excuses for shilly-shallying any longer with that nice girl. I thought, at the time, what fun it would be to see Jack when he went to receive his dividends or get his banker's book; but, mind you, I would not have been near him for a trifle—he would have gone on so.

"I had already made up my mind to get well out of his way, to some place where he could not find me out, and the idea of making a tour on the Continent had suggested itself. An event that happened a day or two afterwards settled it.

"Delighted with this trick I had played my brother, I betook myself to Cheltenham. I had always looked upon my aunt's house as my home, and not unfrequently arrived there without giving her notice, because really it was not easy to foresee what might occur to drive me home, or send me in another direction.

"On this occasion I had been a long time away in the south of Scotland, and not being able to announce the exact day of my return, I had neglected writing.

"It was about six o'clock one fine evening, I drove up to the door in a fly; the flyman knocked at the door, and an unusual interval elapsed before the summons was answered. There was a strange boy in buttons, to whom I was obliged to explain that I wished to have my things carried up to my room immediately.

"An unwonted sight met my eyes as I deposited my hat on the hall-table. There were two hats already on the slab; but it was not so much the fact of the hats being there, as the sort of repose manifest in their arrangement —a pair of gloves was neatly disposed on the brim of each of them. Then there were two or three greatcoats hanging on the pegs; and half-a-dozen walking-sticks of varied taste— some thick and heavy, others more slim and dressy—were ranged by the side of a masculine-looking umbrella in the stand. What could all this mean?

"The boy looked scared as the fly-man brought in my luggage, and deposited it in the hall. I paid the man, and dismissed him.

"'Please, sir, what name shall I say, sir?' asked Buttons, looking at me with surprise, not unmixed with awe.

"'O, never mind announcing me—it is all right—I'll announce myself.'

"Buttons looked puzzled. 'Please, sir,' said he, 'they're jest a-goin' to dinner. Cook's a-dishin' up now.'

"'I am glad of it,' was my reply, for I was very hungry, and had so arranged my journey as to hit the dinner-hour.

"Buttons looked aghast.

"'Any company at dinner to day?' I inquired.

"'No, sir, *nobody* was expected, as I knows on. Missis didn't mention nobody.'

"'So much the better,' I said, as I walked upstairs, leaving Buttons transfixed on the rug at the foot of the staircase. There was not much time for pondering on the strange display of man's panoply below.

"I opened the drawing-room door with some

misgivings. My aunt rose from her chair, and welcomed me with a constrained and awkward manner; but who could he be, the stout, vulgar-looking, black-whiskered man, in a black-and-white check shooting-jacket standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, in the attitude historically given to the Colossus of Rhodes?

"'Isambard,' said my aunt, 'let me introduce you to Major O'Toole. This is my nephew, Major, she continued, in a flurried sort of way—my nephew, "Isambard Rummins." The old lady, for reasons of her own, loved to give me this name in preference to my other three. Perhaps she fancied it sounded more grand than Fitzfogle, although all the rest of the family used to think *that* the more honourable appellation. In fact, my father's alliance with that noble family had been considered a great lift for us in the world.

"'Rummins! I'm charmed to make your acquaintance!' said the black-whiskered Major, in a rich brogue; and, seizing my poor little hand in his huge paws, he squeezed it till the tears came into my eyes.

"'Yer aunt there's bin telling me of ye, many's

the time. Give her your arum, my boy!' he continued, as Buttons announced dinner, 'and I'll bring up the rear. Bedad!' he cried out in a cheery voice, as I conducted my aunt down stairs, and felt her arm tremble on mine, 'it's by no manes a bad nose ye've got. Ye've just dhropped in in the nick of time. We'll have a hansum tatertate of three, anyhow."

"'Isambard,' said my aunt meekly, when she saw me about to take my accustomed place at the bottom of the table, 'come and sit here by me. The Major sits there—he is fond of carving.'

"What *had* happened? Who *was* the Major? I had never heard the name, and here he was as much at home as if he had been master of the house all his life.

"A faint odour of stale tobacco smoke prevaded the room. Now, my aunt used always to hold me up as a model young man for not smoking. It was one of her antipathies; she loved to quote Sir Benjamin Brodie, and all the great authorities who had run a tilt against the narcotic weed.

"Who could the Major be? It all resolved itself into this. Who *was* this man who had in-

vaded my aunt's solitude, usurped my seat, abused the soup, anathematised the fish, and made Buttons tremble in his shoes ? I *saw* the boy tremble.

"My aunt was evidently not herself. The dreadful Major ate with his knife, smacked his lips in eating, and drank sherry out of a tumbler.

"We arrived at the cheese without a word in the way of conversation, the Major confining himself to coarse observations on the cookery, while his acts were belying his words. My poor aunt looked disconsolate, and only played with her knife and fork; as to me, I was too sharp-set not to eat whatever was set before me, but my whole thought was naturally enough occupied with this new state of things in the hitherto well-regulated, orderly *ménage,* and in speculations about this extraordinary importation into the family.

"I could call to mind no cousin, no connection of our family, at home or abroad, to account for the coarse, ill-bred monster who presided at our table. Was there any one belonging to us who had gone to the gold-diggings or the back-woods of America, who might have made a fortune, and meant generously to endow thc oldest mcmber of

the family with the fruits of his industry? His old habits in the bush might have made him careless of appearances or ignorant of the usages of society—would make him sit down to table in a soiled shooting-jacket without shocking the correct notions of that very punctilious lady, his hostess—she would concede this liberty to him because he did not know better.

"But no. I could not fasten upon any cousin, however remote, who was known to have emigrated.

"Could he be 'the man in possession?' Was it possible my poor aunt had put her name to paper, speculated in railways, invested her money in a bankrupt bank of deposit, or lived too extravagantly? I had never seen an execution put into a house; but knew there were such functionaries as bailiffs, who were apt to make themselves quite at home in the prosecution of their duties.

"*That* would hardly do; because the old lady, though rather ostentatious in her mode of living, abhorred all sorts of securities but the Three-per-cents. I had heard her say so over and over again.

"My ruminations were disturbed by their subject addressing me.

"'There's nothing like the native pewter, Rummins,' said the mysterious Major, as he blew off on the carpet the foaming head of a pot of porter, just handed to him by the boy. 'Here's good luck to ye, my boy!' he continued, as he hid his face behind the battered public-house pewter pot, which, after a long draught, he presented to me. I was so confused I did not know what to do with it.

"'That's a liquor beats all the whishy-whashy French wines ever I met with. Have a dhrain of it, my boy,' he went on, as I set down the pot upon the table. My aunt looked ineffably disgusted with this familiarity of her visitor; and took the earliest opportunity, after the removal of the cloth, of leaving the room.

"'Now, then,' said the Major, as soon as I had closed the door behind her, 'make yourself at home, my boy! just wheel that arm-chair close round the fire,' while he established himself comfortably in the fellow to it, stretching his long legs out, and putting his slippered feet upon the

fender, with the air of a man who meant to enjoy himself.

"'What do ye dhrink? There's port and sherry wine on the table; or, if ye prefer something stronger, here comes the spirits and wather. Did ye think, ye young spalpeen, two people's going to dhrink out of one tumbler?' he said, in an angry tone, to the boy, who brought in a tray with a big black bottle and a tumbler of gigantic growth.

"Buttons vanished, to reappear shortly with another glass and a large box of cigars. I was much too preoccupied to speak.

"'Now, you young divil! turn the table round so we'll have a corner betwixt us,' he now said to the lad. This done, he helped himself to an enormous cigar, and pushed the box over to me.

"I scarcely know what I should have said or done in my utterly bewildered state, but fortunately a knock at the street door caused a diversion; and presently there entered the room a man who might almost have passed for the Major's brother; he had the same *roué*, devil-may-care swagger, the same vulgar look, the

same boisterous voice. Of this latter quality I was enabled to form an opinion from a remark he made as soon as he set foot in the room.

"'The old 'un skedaddled already! It's in luck ye are to-night, Major.'

The latter stopped his saying more by introducing me—'My *nephew*, Mr Rummins, Captain Gahagan.' I vacated my chair for the newcomer, and left the precious pair together.

"'Who on earth, aunt, is that horrid man?' I asked of my miserable-looking relative, whom I found sitting with her hands before her, deep in thought.

"'Oh, dear Isambard! I—I thought you knew. He—Major O'Toole—is your uncle—my husband.'

"The murder was out. It was the old story—a silly old woman with some money, and a needy adventurer—with a fine estate in Ireland, of course. They had been married, it appeared, about six weeks. After the ceremony the happy pair had started to spend the honeymoon in Wales; but the Major found it dull: he missed his billiard-pool and his rubber at whist: so

they had returned after a few days to Cheltenham.

"It was a sad tale I had to listen to. My poor aunt was but too sensible of the imprudent step she had taken. Her husband had not waited long to throw off the mask he had worn so successfully, and he had already come out in his true character—that of a coarse, selfish brute. His mornings were passed in billiard-rooms at pool, and his evenings in drinking brandy-and-water and smoking at home, in which laudable pursuits he found plenty of congenial spirits to join him. Already the poor woman found herself coldly looked upon by her old friends and acquaintances; and her house, lately so prim, and neat, and quiet, was turned into a bear-garden—a house of call for all the old associates of its new master.

"There was nothing to be done for it. I had now no home in England; besides, I was determined to get out of my brother Jack's way, for he was just the sort of fellow, you know, to be affronted at my taking such a liberty with his Consols. It seemed to me better to let him

know what had been done; so the day before I left England I wrote to tell him my reasons for sharing my income with him—how I had heard of his self-denial, and was determined he should have no excuse for delaying any longer the giving me such a nice sister-in-law as Miss Ingleby. I begged it as a personal favour, and informed him it was not in my power to be present at the wedding, as I was going to make a long tour on the Continent.

"Before I quitted the house at Cheltenham, I had a long conference with the Major, in which I told him my mind pretty plainly about his goings-on. Somehow or other, I could not help telling him some rather hard truths, and ended my oration by informing him that I was pay-master for a certain—no inconsiderable—portion of my aunt's income, and that it depended on his behaviour to her whether I continued it or withdrew it altogether. This rather brought him to book, and may do something towards bettering his poor victim's condition.

"I have been wandering abroad for some months, and have had two couriers, both of whom robbed

me. The last fellow, an Italian, I discharged the other day at Munich, for the most barefaced cheating in his accounts, and he threatened to murder me because I refused to give him a certificate of good conduct.

"Not caring to risk taking another, I bought all the dialogue-books I could find, and you cannot think how capitally I have got on. I can now go where I like, and stop as long as I like, which was out of my power before. Moreover, I have managed not to get in the way till you found me so unexpectedly in yours."

My little friend, having brought his history down to the day when he had, as we have already seen, put himself so inconveniently in the way, both of himself and me, was most profuse now in his thanks and acknowledgments for the kindness he said he had received at my hands. So lively were his expressions of gratitude, that, in very truth, I was ashamed of myself for the unfriendly feelings I had at first experienced towards him. These had long since evaporated. At first I had tolerated him. As his shyness wore off he amused me; and there was something so winning in the manner he

attached himself to me, and appeared to put himself under my protection, that at last it was impossible to help feeling drawn towards him.

I had now learned to honour him as well as like him, and fairly considered the obligation was all on my side.

To an almost childlike simplicity of character was added a kindliness of disposition, a sweetness of temper, and an abnegation of self, as rare as they are lovable qualities. Without knowing a word of the language, he was on the most friendly terms with all the villagers, and the delight of the children, for whom he always contrived to have something in his wonderful pockets.

I had invited the good priest of the parish to dine with us, and Rummins at once struck up an intimacy with him, and made him his almoner in the neighbourhood. As to the good people of the "drei Forellen," from the old grandmother down to the baby in arms, I fairly got jealous of the love they bore him.

The time arrived at last for my departure from the happy valley, and it was with sincere regret—I truly believe, mutual—I took leave of Rummins.

I left him there, seemingly established for life; and as it is not easy to foresee any occurrence likely to disturb his happiness, I look forward, some day, to finding him "in the way," and still the cherished guest at the "drei Forellen" at Aschbrück.

By-the-bye, if the reader of his story takes any interest in the family of Rummins, he will be glad, as I was, to learn that Jack took his brother's interference with his Three-per-cents. in very good part, and gave him Miss Ingleby for a sister-in-law. A day or two before I left, a letter, forwarded by his banker at Munich, announced to Rummins this happy event. He actually cried for pleasure.

"And to think, too," he said, "of that dear, nice girl, Miss Ingleby—Mrs Rummins, I should say—sending me the prettiest of notes in her own beautiful handwriting, on pink paper! I should have thought she had quite forgotten that so insignificant an individual as myself had ever existed."

THE END.

Schenck & M'Farlane, Printers, Edinburgh.