FARNORTH.

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1866.
The smoke and the sulphur have died away. It is only three months since the rockets and Roman candles were flinging their bright sparks all around, and now not even a charred stick remains to point out that evanescent splendour. The curtain has risen to the new company who have taken Becklands, and the actors are performing to an admiring audience. Yes; I am sorry to say to an admiring audience. Boxes and pit clap their white gloved hands, and fling bouquets to the beautiful Prima Donna. The gallery does not fill, the gods stand aloof, and cry aloud in vain for the old dramas which were acted by the late company. Those old dramas will never be put upon the stage again by the present manager. There was no show, no glitter,
about those old-fashioned affairs, and the present manager goes in for spectacle and sensation; his prices are high, and orders are only given to white kids and fine broad-cloth; and so fustian and ungloved hands hoot and hiss outside the door, and bewail the late, and savagely abuse the new company, on all and every occasion. There are still some, even amongst the white-gloved audience, who look back with regret to those days when the grave master of Becklands and his little daughter trod the boards which Algy and his wife and beautiful Clara are now treading; but the greater part of Farnorth is dazzled by the spectacle and sensation pieces, of which the present manager is prodigal, and there are few empty benches at the theatre of Becklands.

To quit metaphor and descend to matter-of-fact narration, the Silvester family are happily established in the home which Zóé relinquished to the traducers of her father's memory. They have already lived down a good deal of the indignation which was first poured upon them as robbers and defrauders of the orphan, and have attained a certain amount of popularity in our town. That visitor who cast such a gloom over the ménage at Belle Grange, does not interfere with the comfort
of this new home. The "unfortunate lady" is dead, and Algy has administered to her effects in a very satisfactory manner to himself; but not, as we shall presently see, in a very satisfactory manner to those collateral branches of the deceased barmaid, who have sprung up on every side since that ill-used person was laid under the sod. Far-north speaks approvingly of the care and attention which were bestowed on the last moments of the late Mrs. Harding; indeed, Mrs. Silvester calls out lustily for applause from every one. "I'm sure if she had been a dook's daughter, she could not have had a finer funeral," Algy's wife says; "and what I went through whilst we had her in the house, no one can tell. I declare it was enough to throw me off my head; but I did my dooty to her, no one can deny that." Mrs. Silvester holds herself very high indeed now: she rarely alludes to her dead brother, and when she does so, it is in a querulous, peevish strain. She has greatly modified her mourning. The crape, which looked "as dismal, as dismal," is entirely removed, and replaced by bugle trimming and bright mauve ribbons. Her orphan niece figures frequently in her conversation: she expatiates largely, to a safe audience, on that ingratitude...
which rejected the benefits so liberally offered by her uncle. "The law would have given her nothing, and Mr. Silvester did really behave so very handsomely," his wife says. "Ten thousand pounds he would have given her, and to think of her refusing that; but after all, when I say Mr. Silvester would have given this or that, of course it was my poor money all the time," she adds, reverting to the familiar grind. Algy's wife prates continually now about this second fortune she has brought her helpmate. I am grieved to say all the luxury which surrounds her has not made her any more amiable. Mrs. Silvester, as her husband says, takes great care that the peas in her shoes are boiled to a paste; but all her selfishness cannot exclude those pebbles and sharp-edged stones, which will force an entrance and cause us to hobble painfully as we toil along on our weary pilgrimage. Very small pebbles they are which torment Algy's wife at present; but she makes the most of them, and limps about to her heart's content. Her latest wound has been inflicted by her husband's extravagance. "He is flinging about this money like I don't know what. Two hundred pound for a horse, and fifty pound for a nasty dog, only the
other day, Mrs. Bland. And he looked as black as black yesterday when I spoke to him about the diamonds I must have; and such jewels, emeralds and pearls, and things, as he has given to Clara! It is very hard when all the money came from my side, you know," she wails.

Algy does not deserve his wife's reproaches, as far as a lack of liberality to her is concerned. If he has looked as black as black about the diamonds, it is the first time he has shown the slightest resistance to the constant appeals to his purse. That he is extravagant I will not attempt to deny. Algy is adding to the stables at Becklands; he is building dog kennels; he is going to keep a pack of fox-hounds. Mrs. Silvester has talked about two hundred pounds for a horse—two hundred pounds indeed! Her husband has given more than two thousand for that splendid racer he has entered for the Goodwood. "I flatter myself we shall astonish them a few, Clarry," he says to his daughter, as he launches into some new extravagance every day. The establishment at Becklands is something princely now, and the entertainments are far more splendid than those which caused Farnorth to open its eyes during the old régime. But as yet neither the 'Farnorth
Advertiser,' nor the 'District Reflector,' have had to chronicle any act of charity of the new manager at the Becklands Theatre. Those liberal donations which were wont to head every list during the lifetime of the late owner of the Weasle Mine, will never I am afraid emanate from the present one. Those munificent charities are the old-fashioned dramas which fustian and ungloved hands deplore, and which are not likely ever to be put upon the stage again during the Silvester rule.

"Äde Algy," as the miners call him, is not any more popular amongst his work-people than he was some months ago; indeed, I believe they have a poorer opinion of him than ever. They always speak of him as "it," and a Farnorth rustic cannot give a stronger proof of his contempt and disrespect for any person than by adopting this inferior pronoun when discussing him. "It chitters an' it tokes, but it knäs nowt; it 'ul spoil t' spot if it gangs on as it does; it says it 'ul larn us summat new; it wants us to start frai t' boddum, 'stee'ad o' warking t' heights as they sud be; it wants ut mak t'mind dick: it's nin fit ut clean t' äde maister's boots, wi' aw it's chitter an' it's toke," they say.
Things have not certainly been going on quite so flourishingly at the Weasle since it passed into the hands of the present proprietor. Those three giants, who held regal sway there before Zoé's father subdued and chained them down, are straining at their bonds. Algy, who knows nothing whatever even of the genesis of mining, but who thinks himself so mighty clever on every subject, has been foolish enough to introduce a new system of working at one or two of the shafts; and the result of his experiment has brought with it no slight triumph to Giant Sand, who has choked up some of the drifts, and is at this moment running about and enjoying himself wonderfully. The Cornish captain has looked very grave about this matter, and frightened the cadet of a noble family into passiveness, from which I think he is not likely again to emerge, as far as carrying out any theories of his own about mining is concerned.

The triumph of the Giant at the Weasle Mine is not the only thorn in Algy's pillow. The deceased barmaid's loving relatives have been grievously harassing the administrator to her effects. Legal proceedings have been threatened, and have only been staved off at a considerable sacrifice on the part of the person to whom the late Mrs.
Harding is supposed to have willed her belongings. And so, in spite of the sensation pieces and applauding spectators, all is not exactly couleur de rose behind the scenes at the Becklands Theatre; and the manager has held more than once anxious conferences with his beautiful Prima Donna in the green-room there.

The beautiful Prima Donna does not, truth to say, give very much attention to her father's gloomy words. A strange dreamy lassitude has fallen upon Algy's handsome daughter. Before the crowded boxes and the applauding stalls she is brilliant as ever; but, when the company disperses, when the curtain falls, and the foot-lights go out, the bloom on her face and the brightness of her eyes seem to fade away as well. She is fitful and moody, and so nervous that solitude is intolerable to her. She prefers even her mother's society to her own. Clara, who was so intolerant of her young cousin's listlessness and abstraction in those days which preceded the sudden storm and shipwreck, is at times far more listless and abstracted than poor Zoé ever was. Clara, who denounced so bitterly the puling sentimental regrets which would intrude during the pretty Peruvian's short reign as the destined queen of Fox-
croft, is yielding to them herself now far more weakly than the Spanish maiden ever did. The pomp and splendour which surround her are powerless to arouse her. The ambitious woman has scaled the height she so eagerly longed to reach, and she cannot gaze with pleasure on the magnificent landscape beneath; her head is dizzy and confused. The fruit she greedily desired is at her lips; it is an apple of the Dead Sea, dry and tasteless. The ardour of pursuit is over; the end attained, at what fearful risk she herself best knows, and Nemesis has already appeared.

Only behind the scenes—on the boards—Algy's daughter carries all before her. The rustic belles who once dressed after and imitated Mr. Harding's young daughter, make Miss Silvester their model now; they imitate her abjectly; her coiffure, her dress, her walk, her manner of conversation, the turn of her head, the movement of her hands, are all rendered by the fair provincials with pre-Raphaelite minuteness. Haughty Clara is a queen amongst them. At first, when the odour of brigandage was upon her, she conciliated her admiring subjects; now she is beginning to take very little notice of them. "Our society wants weeding," she has already observed to her father;
and there will not be many indigenous flowers allowed to remain when she once commences to clear her social parterre. I do not fancy the white kid gloves will applaud so vociferously in the course of a few months.

The self-constituted champions of the defrauded orphan have, some of them, already deserted her standard, and are rallying around that of the new Queen of Beauty; and it is with pain I record that Mr. Montagu stands a very good chance of being permanently banished from Grandly Manor by reason of his foolish flutterings about the dazzling Circe at Becklands. Poor patient Adeline has already received a letter from her lover whereon a coming willow casts its shadow. In that communication, an overstrained sense of honour, which recoils from shackling his beloved any longer in the unhappy chain which binds her to a man without fortune, is magnificently paraded; and unalterable friendship is offered in lieu of a hopeless love. We most of us understand the meaning of such fine noble sentiments. If Adeline be as wise as a Grandly ought to be, she will at once give the honourable man his quietus, and have nothing whatever to do with that unalterable friendship, which may be called the Chiltern Hun-
dreds of Love's parliament, and possesses all the solid advantages of that valuable government sinecure. In spite of the exclusiveness of the patricians at the Manor House, rumours of the threatened defection of the fickle Montagu are already whispered about in Farnorth.

Giles Houndly, Esq., never misses a representation at the Becklands Theatre. I believe the old bison has an ivory ticket for the stall he occupies there; he is one of the greatest applauders of the new company, and almost the only reviler of the old.

I have not yet made any mention of the Plantagenets. It is only a week since they returned to Foxcroft; her ladyship has not once appeared in the royal box at the new theatre, but her son has attended even the morning rehearsals, he has never been absent one evening, and the choicest bouquets the Prima Donna has ever received have been flung by the white hand of Monseigneur.

"What do you mean to do with the Baronet, Clarry?" Algy says to his daughter one day after his majesty of Foxcroft had been more than ever demonstrative in his homage. "What do you mean to do with the Baronet? it is clear enough
what he means; he was over head and ears in love with you at the time he was engaged to Missy. You can have him if you hold up your little finger. Will you accept the red hand, ma fille?"

"What red hand?" Clara asks dreamily.

"Why, where are your wits wandering, ma belle? There is only one red hand in this neighbourhood that I know of, but 'gad, it's not a good enough match for yours now, Clarry; with your beauty and position you might marry a dook," said the father with some excitement.

"Strawberry leaves do not grow under the hedges here," replied Clara, rousing herself, and striving to speak in her usual manner; "and as you say the red hand is within my grasp, perhaps it would be wise to accept it. I am very fond of Plantagenet Park, I have almost a tendresse for its old moat, but I should be glad to possess them unencumbered by the Baronet and his mother."

"By Jove! if ever you do consent to reign at Foxcroft, the dowager will have to look out for another berth: you would never submit to have your absolute monarchy disputed by the queen mother; you are not a bit like your cousin as I have often said; Missy would have knocked under to her crippled ladyship: poor little girl, she had
not much go in her; I wonder what she is doing now. I tell you what Clarry, if she would only have taken that ten thousand pound, I should be a dooced deal easier in my mind. 'Gad, I had such an ugly dream about her last night, I can't get over it."

"Your digestion is out of order; you have been indulging in too many dinner parties lately. I shall give orders to your chef not to season your dishes so highly."

"'Gad, you may chaff away Clarry if it amuses you, but I should be glad if I could believe it was only overfeeding which is playing the very dooce with me at times. It's no such thing, worse luck," Algy said gloomily, as he paced to and fro; "I am like that crooked-backed fellow in the play who smothered his nephews, Clarry, it is conscience which is pulling me to pieces, ma fille."

Clara looked at her father with a mocking smile.

"You must be ill," she said; "or stay, did Saint Mary leave any of her tracts behind her, any of her holy herbage for lost souls? She must have done so, and you have been cropping the pasturage of Mount Lebanon, and lubricating your sinful self with the unctuous ooze of Gilead."
"I have not been reading any tracts or rubbish whatever, Clarry; I said from the first it was dooced hard lines for Missy, and I say the same now; and the Baronet, although he is your admirer, and always was for the matter of that, treated the little girl confoundedly badly," said the model of constancy, who had thrown his own first love over.

"Hang it, he had a right to stand to his bargain you know; but after all, she may perhaps be happier with the soldier. Banques declares the red-coat will marry your cousin if he returns safe and sound from the wars."

The mocking smile faded from the beautiful lips of Algy's daughter, hard lines replaced the dimples in her cheeks, and a ghastly pallor swept away the faint impress of the roses there. But the father had no suspicion of the bitter pain his words were inflicting on the handsome girl of whom he was so fond and proud.

"He was always spooney on Missy, and I believe she liked him, even at the time she accepted the Baronet," he continued; "and now they can make a match of it, the scholar and the saint are pretty well to do, and Farnorth says —— "

"For heaven's sake, do not bore me with the wretched gossip of this miserable hole; I hate Far-
north, and I wish with all my heart I had never seen it,” cried Clara passionately.

Algy was, to use his own words, considerably taken aback; he gazed with some anxiety at his daughter, and uttered a very strong exclamation as he observed the whiteness of her face.

“What on earth has upset you, ma belle?” he said, with a tender interest which made even his vulgar accents pleasant to the ear. “By Jove, you have no more colour about you than a sheet of note-paper. You said I must be ill a few minutes ago, but I am sure you are not well, Clarry; and here I have been worrying you about one thing or another—confounded ass that I am!—and all the time you have been suffering—and——”

“It seems I have nerves like other fine ladies,” interposed his daughter, speaking calmly enough now. “I did not know I was troubled with any until they developed themselves a few weeks ago. You need not summon medical aid, mon père—I can prescribe a remedy for myself—I want change of air and scene.”

“And that you shall have, ma fille, as soon as ever you think proper,” cried Algy, very earnestly. “Old Polwhele, the Cornish humbug, may croak
as he likes about Running Sand & Co., and the defunct barmaid’s relatives go hang themselves; we will be off together, Clarry, and enjoy the dolce far niente on the shores of the blue Mediterranean. Your mother must stay at home and attend to the duties of her household. She’ll kick I dare say when I make the suggestion, but I shall tell her she is not in a fit state of health to travel.”

Mrs. Silvester most assuredly did kick, as her affectionate husband had prophesied, when she was told of the proposed tour, and of her exclusion from any participation in its pleasures.

“IT was always the same,” she declared, “I have always been the last to reap any benefit from my own money. I’m sure if Clara requires change of air, I do, after all I’ve gone through, and every one knows what a wretched invalid I am; but it don’t matter to either my husband or my daughter what becomes of me, so that they go gallivanting about together. I shall be as dull as I don’t know what, for the Plantagenets are going abroad too, and the Grandlys are so stiff and stuck up—they wery never very amusing—and now since Mr. Montagu has been making up to Clara—I believe he is only after my poor money—Adeline Grandly looks as sour as anything—and how can I help it?”
[I don't suppose Mrs. Silvester could help it, but I think she might have expressed a little more sympathy for poor deserted Adeline. Deserted the patient waiting maid is, and after the manner of her sex, she is far more bitter against the syren who has inadvertently lured away her lover than she is against the fickle swain himself—(Mr. Montagu was most contemptuously rejected by Clara Silvester, I am glad to say)—but the youngest daughter of the noble house of Grandly relieves her mind with denunciations against her rival quite as emphatic as any ever uttered by Dolly the dairy-maid in a similar position. You see the best cream-laid and the coarse whity-brown have their origin in the same source, and it is wonderful how their common ancestors in Rag Fair will assert themselves exactly alike in both, at times.]

In spite of Mrs. Silvester's feeble protest, that lady was left to preside over her household gods, and Algy and his beautiful daughter bade farewell for a short time to Farnorth. Our town sympathised with Clara, and said that her uncle's death and the estrangement from her cousin, to whom she was so much attached, had made the poor young lady very ill; her champions sheltered her with their unmailed breasts from the deadly spears
aimed by the willowed maid at Grandly Manor. The Baronet's devotion was patent to the whole neighbourhood—he made no secret of his intention to follow in the wake of his enchantress. Giles Houndly, Esq., raised her trumpet and blew an inspiring blast that made the vales and thickets ring; and the rockets and Roman candles and the red and blue lights which had blazed only four months ago for little Zoé, scattered all the colours of the rainbow over the father and daughter as they made their exit by the mid-day train.
CHAPTER II.

The Cornish captain at the Weasle Mine has his hands very full at present. A second ogre has escaped from bondage, and is waging war with its iron opponents. The engines are working night and day. Two or three of the rival mine-owners are a little exultant. "Old Polwhele must keep his wits about him," they say, "or Sam Gravell will not be over well pleased when he receives his royalty dues this year. Poor Harding was the only man who thoroughly understood the Weasle. I hear they have raised a vast deal more sand than ore lately, and now the water has got ahead of them, and the pumps pretty nearly given out."

Some of these evil tidings are forwarded to Algy, but he turns a deaf ear to all the "confounded croaking," as he calls it. The new master of Becklands and his handsome daughter are enjoying themselves to their heart's content. I do not believe Zoé's uncle has his rest disturbed.
by any unpleasant dreams now, and Clara is more like herself than she has been for some months. A foreign tour is an agreeable relaxation enough when you have plenty of money, and the owner of the invalid Weasle has not been sparing of that great motive power. Viscount Shorthorn and his three honourable daughters have encountered at Nice the cousin of whom they have been so shy for so many years, and the peer has fraternised with the wealthy cadet of his family, and even condescended to borrow money of him. Intelligence of this reconciliation with his noble relative has been transmitted by Algy to his wife, and the good lady has babbled considerably about it. Farnorth's respect for the Silvesters is mingled with almost awe now, and speculation is afloat as to whether even the Baronet will have any chance with the beautiful heiress of Becklands.

The royal fowler has spread his net with the greatest care; but as yet his majesty of Foxcroft has not snared his splendid bird. The queen mother lends no assistance to her son's wooing this time. Indeed, she is an opposing party, and this opposition has elicited some angry words from the enamoured Baronet. Monseigneur is really as much in love with Clara Silvester as it is
possible for him to be with any one but himself, and he has followed her about from place to place with wonderful devotion. His pursuit is conducted in altogether a different manner to that he adopted when he was a suppliant for the hand of the little Peruvian. The moral stalking-horse is never trotted out, or made to show its ambling paces before the woman of the world. The Baronet has the tact to know all its fine evolutions would be wasted, and so if his love-making is not quite so graceful, it is infinitely more natural and congenial to himself than it was in the old times.

That engagement of his with the Spanish maiden is an ugly hole in the fine net the royal fowler is attempting to throw over his present prey. I believe Clara takes some pleasure in tormenting and discomfiting her would-be captor by pointing out this rent. If the Baronet were a wise man, he would not attempt any bungling patchwork or darning; but he is not altogether wise, and he does insinuate a little delicate needlework, by suggesting that his mother was entirely to blame in that misfortune—and as this thread he uses is to a certain extent genuine, it may perhaps be in time accepted.

For three months did Algy and his daughter
amuse themselves in foreign countries, and then they returned to the white cliffs of Albion, but not to the grey crags of Farnorth. "'Gad, I've no fancy for the country in November, Clarry; we'll make the Londoners open their eyes *ma belle*, and let them see what real beauty is for once in their lives," the father says. And so, notwithstanding the unfavourable bulletins still received from the physician of the invalid Weasle, a fine house, very different to those apartments in Noname Street, was taken in the most fashionable part of the metropolis. The establishment at Becklands—Mrs. Silvester included—was transplanted, and a career of magnificence commenced. Farnorth is disposed to resent this desertion, and Polwhele, the Cornish captain, is pretty nearly at his wits' end; he has received very short answers to his letters, and his difficulties are daily increasing. "The old guv'nor would have put up one or two more engines by this time," he says; "Mr. Silvester don't know any more about mining than one of my little maids. We must have more power—and he will pinch and screw. You *kaint* carry out economy with a mine like the Weasle."

And so there is a continuance of the dismal
epistles, and at length they begin to have some effect upon Algy. That fine balance which was standing to poor Mr. Harding's account at his banker's at the time of his sudden death, has very rapidly diminished since it was seized by the cadet of a noble family. The barmaid's relations have made raids upon it—the sensation pieces and spectacle have engulfed a very considerable amount; and Algy has lost much more than he would like to admit to either his wife or daughter, over the Goodwood. The last settling day at the corner was a very black one for him. "You must make hay whilst the sun shines, Clarry," he says, dolefully. "I have received such a confounded budget to-day, that I shall begin to think fate is pursuing us. Polwhele is croaking worse than ever. Make your most of Vanity Fair, ma belle, for 'gad, it will be some time before we shall be able to show our faces in it again."

The booths in Vanity Fair were not very crowded during the thirty days of fog and spleen; but still there were some dealers willing to display their wares; and with the aid of the noble Viscount, and a free use—in spite of the diminishing balance—of that motive power to which I have referred, Algy, his beautiful daughter,
and even his peevish wife, were welcomed with some *empressement* at most of the gay stalls. Clara gathered an average crowd of worshippers around her. The season was not favourable for strawberry-leaves—only one or two were to be found in the Babylonian hot-houses; but an elderly, bald, and richly pimpled coronet fluttered about our lovely syren at some of the drawing-rooms to which she had access, until cruel podagra suddenly put an end to its fluttering. I think, if this accident had not occurred, the Baronet would have had no chance whatever of winning his coveted prize.

As it is, his prospects are decidedly brightening. Monseigneur, as an elegible *parti*, is much courted by Tyburnian mothers, and makes the most of this halo which surrounds him. None of Clara’s worshippers can compare to him in good looks and polished elegance; and very few surpass him in social position. Then again his mother’s opposition acts powerfully in his favour; our beautiful red republican has a haughty contempt for the “tailor’s daughter,” and the more her ladyship evinces a repugnance to her son’s second choice, the more does that second choice favourably incline to her persevering admirer. Still,
I doubt very much whether Clara would have ever accepted the red hand held out to her, had it not been for those gloomy epistles her father was daily receiving. Miss Silvester knows very well that the cadet of a noble family has a facile faculty for spending possessed by very few. Although Algy has not taken his daughter into confidence with regard to those losses of his on the Goodwood, the young lady has formed shrewd suspicions as to their extent, and has determined in her own mind to resort to very vigorous measures if there is a recurrence of the same thing. But though she may be able to control her father's expenditure, she cannot control those rebellious giants at that hitherto Fortunatus' purse, the Weasle. The Baronet little suspects how much old Polwhele has had to do with the nimbus which is gradually surrounding him, or perhaps he might not be so elated as he is.

Rumours of the Silvester metropolitan magnificence permeate the whole of Farnorth, and the rival mine-owners shrug their shoulders ominously, and say that some of the money flung away in London follies would have been better bestowed over the Weasle; but Giles Houndly, Esq., fights manfully for the absentees. "Old Polwhele
only wants to make himself of consequence," he declares; "they have mastered the sand already; and Silvester will be able to buy us all up in ten years." I am certain, the master of Gothic Hall believes in this prediction, or he would not be so devoted as he is to the Silvester interest; he is a very Boswell to them—a Boswell without any of the good nature and abnegation of self, for which the great toady was remarkable.

There were some other reports circulated in connection with the metropolitan magnificence, to which Giles would not at first give any credence whatever. These reports had a reference to an engagement which it was asserted had already taken place between his majesty of Foxcroft and the beautiful heiress of Becklands.

The ex-lawyer flatly denied the existence of any possibility of the kind as long as he could; and when the report was subsequently confirmed in a long letter supplemented by a chorus of groans from Mrs. Silvester to Mrs. Bland, Giles was considerably disgusted. "It is no match at all, sir, for that magnificent woman," he said; "there is no flaw about the Silvesters; ahem! no tailor's blood there. Clara Silvester is fit to wear a crown. The Empress of the French is nothing to
her; and it is my opinion that if Napoleon had seen her before he closed with his present wife, Eugénie would not have stood much chance. I cannot think what Silvester is about to give his consent. The Baronet was all very well for Harding's bit of a chit; but he is no match at all for Silvester's handsome daughter. However, we shall have quite a new rule at Foxcroft, that is one blessing. The tailor's daughter will find her proper level; and as to that poor imbecile old scarecrow, Miss Winifred, it is to be hoped Far-north will be altogether relieved of her gaunt presence. Clara Silvester has a spirit of her own, sir, and she is not one to endure a step-mother, or consent to be perpetually haunted by such a grim old ghost as the baronet's half-sister.”

Boswell did not mingle any depreciatory remarks with those congratulations he was the first to offer to the future young sovereign of Foxcroft when she appeared again at Farnorth.

And now the sensation pieces are once more going on at the Becklands Theatre, but very few orders are given, and there are many empty benches. The popularity of the new company is rapidly fading. Clara has commenced the clearance of her social parterre. The Browns, the
Joneses, and the Thomsons, have been uprooted, and are rabid with indignation. It seems to me that, as the aroma of brigandage so lately rested on the Silvester shield, it was a dangerous experiment on the part of a daughter of that house to begin her weeding process. When indeed is it a safe undertaking to slight your old acquaintances? Your pedigree must be spotless, your hands and actions cleaner and whiter than mortal hands or actions have ever yet been, before you venture on this act. If you wish your family skeleton to rattle its bones perpetually, look coldly on your former friends. If you have a fancy to hear your wooden leg stumped about far more perseveringly than ever Mrs. Bland stumps about hers, cut your ancient comrades. If you desire the ghost of your cobbler great grandfather or your sempstress grandmother to walk continually, cry aloud, "Not at home!" when quondam companions call, and assuredly your wish, fancy, or desire will be gratified to the letter. But if you have any dread of that Vehme-Gericht over which awful Mrs. Grundy presides, never be guilty of the folly which Clara has hazarded.

I am the more surprised that Algy's daughter should have behaved so unwisely, because she has
Renovation at Foxcroft.

acknowledged more than once her respect for that terrible tribunal. The height she has attained has surely dizzied her steady judgment. She acted with more discretion during the Bohemian days.

But whilst envy, hatred, and malice are raging in the breasts of the uprooted subjects of the future queen of Farnorth, house decorators and painters are very busy at the palace. One entire suite of rooms is undergoing ornamentation at Foxcroft. His majesty's orders have been issued with a disregard for expense very unusual to that economical monarch; he is in love, you know, and the settlements, if not so handsome as those drawn out on a former occasion, are not to be despised. A new chariot with splendidly emblazoned panels has already arrived for the royal bride elect. A pony phaeton with a most exquisitely matched miniature team is shortly coming for that brilliant and fortunate lady. She forms the principal topic of conversation in the servants' hall at Plantagenet Park. Various opinions are advanced about her; but one decision is unanimous, namely, that the old sovereign and the young one will never be able to wield the same sceptre.

Such a trousseau as that provided for Algy's
daughter is never likely to be seen again at Far-north. Poor Zoe's was nothing at all in comparison. The indignant uprooted ones, the weeds of Clara's parterre, are eloquent on this subject; they quote unflattering proverbs which allude to mounted beggars. What was good enough for the real heiress is not good enough for this stuck-up peacock, they say (the weeds are not always elegant in their abuse). Miss Clara, who had not a shilling to call her own when first she came to Farnorth, must have everything far more magnificent than her pretty unassuming cousin—the cousin who has been robbed by a set of swindlers for whom the gallows is too good. Yes, this fine lady, who had barely a rag to her back when her poor dear uncle took her in out of charity (the weeds in their excitement are leaving truth at the bottom of the well), must have a trousseau forsooth fit for an empress! No local celebrities are to attend the lovely bride at the altar; even the Grandlys have not been solicited to take an important part in the forthcoming ceremony. Viscount Shorthorn has consented to grace his young cousin's wedding! The three honourable Misses Frontdeboeufs are to attend the fair bride to the altar. "They are weedy-looking screws, and a
trifle long in the teeth, Clarry, but they will look well on paper," Algy said in confidence to his daughter when this last important question was decided. It is fortunate the viscount's daughters will look well on paper, for they certainly are not calculated to shine to advantage anywhere else.

Even the indignant weeds are a little overawed when they are told the Most Noble the Viscount is actually coming. The weeds are overawed and the favoured flowers are greatly excited; it is very rarely they have had an opportunity of sunning themselves in the beams of a peer of the realm. The Grandlys, who had at first some thoughts of refusing the invitation to the wedding breakfast, abandon that intention now. I fancy Adeline would willingly have absented herself, but she could not well do so. The Lovelace of Foxcroft has wisely remarked in these pages that Lady Clara Vere de Vere must submit to be jilted quietly, and so the poor forsaken daughter of the most exclusive autocrat in Farnorth remembers that she is a Grandly, and smothers her plebeian sobs as she gives orders for the disinterment of the blue silk dress which was to have worked such wonders on her faithless lover.
Mrs. Bland is not invited to the wedding breakfast, but she and Lucy have received cards for the large evening party which is to be held at Becklands the day after the ceremony. It is worthy of record that the widow is having a new dress made up expressly to wear on this auspicious occasion. "I picked it up for next to nothing when Miss Benton was selling off her summer stock," she will tell you; but at any rate it is more suitable to the relict of the late James Bland, Esq., than the dyed moiré in which she has hitherto appeared. The widow and her fair young scion have not been uprooted from the Becklands parterre, but they would have been if Algy's wife had not pleaded for them. Mrs. Silvester is as arrogant as her daughter. She was quite willing to sweep away the Browns and Thomsons, but Mrs. Bland is a mine of gossip and twaddle which can never be worked out, and an admirable listener as well. Algy's wife delights in small scandal, and is so fond herself of talking, that, like the squire of the Knight of La Mancha, she would rather commune with her ass than hold her peace; and so the relict and her daughter have not been thrown on one side.

Giles Houndly is going about waving the Silvester flag. "Ahem! we shall have such a spec-
tacle to-morrow as will not be seen in Farnorth for many years, sir. Are you going to the wedding, sir? No? Ahem!—ah, you see the Silvesters are obliged to be very select now the Viscount and his daughters are coming. I will give you a full account of it, sir. Ahem! I think I was about the first who received an invitation."

The celebrated Gunter is providing the wedding breakfast; the celebrated Gunter is providing the wedding cake. Farnorth is very much displeased. If there is one thing more than another in which our town shines, it is in the manufacture of that delicious bilious compound—bride-cake. I have never tasted anything to equal Farnorth bride-cake. I challenge the whole of the United Kingdom to produce its parallel. I think Farnorth has good reason to be displeased. I think, taking into consideration that the whole of the Silvester wealth has been dug out of the bowels of our neighbourhood, it would only be fair that some of it at least should be scattered over the surface. Our Gunter, our Swan and Edgar, our Madame Tournure are, with justice, very angry; not one order has come to them, and yet they have composed that pit at the Becklands Theatre which
has been applauding the new company so vociferously. I prophesied a falling away in those crowded benches, and I think I shall prove a true prophet.

The important day has at length arrived, and the greater part of Farnorth is utterly bouleversé. Even the angry tradespeople, to whom I have only just referred, forget their wrongs, and strive and wrestle with each other to obtain the best seat in church to view the approaching ceremony; but curiosity is powerless to overcome the deep-seated wrath of the slighted Thomsons and the Browns; they draw down their blinds as the wedding cortège passes; they are deaf to all accounts of its splendour; they are contemptuously indifferent now about the Viscount and his honourable daughters. Lord Shorthorn is only an Irish peer, miserably poor, and the Honourable Misses Frontdeboeufs have been in the matrimonial market for the last thirty years, they say. Bessie Thomson, who is a pretty black-eyed girl, sees nothing to admire in that great bold-looking Clara Silvester, with her red hair and made-up face; her cousin was lovely, if you like, Bessie says; but this Amazon! Well, she is really sorry for
Sir Mortimer; and, as for poor Lady Plantagenet, it is known for a fact, that she went down on her knees, poor crippled thing that she is, and begged and prayed her son to have nothing to do with this proud, stuck-up woman, who is thirty, if she is a day, Miss Thomson declares. The Joneses and Browns prophesy a case for the Judge-Ordinary in about two years from this day; they would not have gone to the breakfast if they had been asked; they would not have lent their countenance to these robbers of the fatherless.

But if the Browns and the Joneses and the Thomsons thus isolate themselves, they are about the only people in Farnorth who do so. The church is cram-full, and swarms over at the pulpit stairs. In spite of what Miss Bessie Thomson has said, I must confess that I never in my life saw anything more lovely than Clara Silvester in her bridal dress. If that secret arrow that we know of has been sharp to bear on this the last morning of maiden life, there is no outward evidence of its presence. The voice of Algy's daughter never once falters as she utters her marriage vows; she is perfect in her part. The Baronet is nervous and confused; he is in earnest, and the oath he swears before the holy altar is, at any rate, not a false
one; and so, being opposed to his ordinary declara-
tions, the novelty of his position may account
for his awkwardness: however, he looks remark-
ably well. I think you would have some difficulty
to find two handsomer persons than the couple
who on this day were joined together in the bonds
of matrimony.

The Honourable Misses Frontdeboeufs supported
the beautiful bride with great elegance. They
wore very gushing toilettes. Farnorth did no
venture to criticise their appearance. A strong
feeling pervades the town and neighbourhood that
high noses, long necks, and a general scragginess
of outline, are a sort of aristocratic prerogative of
physique; and, as the honourable ladies were not
lacking in these patrician attributes, they were
pronounced very "distangway" by more people
than Mrs. Bland. The Viscount, who was bald,
and stout, and somewhat mottled in the face, was
said to have a "certain air," whatever that pecu-
liar element may be, about him; and the grooms-
man, a languid London swell, also commanded
some admiration. Indeed, the hearts of our rustic
belles palpitated a little, as, with an abstracted
manner, and gracefully linked to one of the
Honourable Misses Frontdeboeufs, the Metropolitan
exquisite lounged elegantly past them. When the handsome bridegroom offered his arm to lead his beautiful bride from the altar, Davids, the organist, who is the Handel of Farnorth, played a voluntary, and played it, too, in such a manner that the town had great reason to be proud of its native talent, and the assembled multitude some difficulty in suppressing a slight murmur of applause.

A crowd of fustian, linsey-wolsey, and serge, in different stages of dilapidation, had mustered in the churchyard to receive that largesse which it is the custom in Farnorth to bestow on all bridal occasions. The cheers of this motley company contended with the loud clang of the bells as the wedding party appeared in sight, but those cheers were quickly transformed into groans and hisses when the fine carriages drove away without that silver shower, which was, as a matter of course, expected. "It was a beggar's wedding, nowt but a beggar's wedding; an' neea good wad ivver kom on it," the indignant and disappointed rustics protested.

The great Gunter has excelled himself in the breakfast he has provided; it is altogether magnificent. The cake which ornaments the centre of
the table is of colossal dimensions, and the design in sugar which forms its apex is quite a work of art. "Half of it plaster of Paris," our local confectioner says, as he gloomily surveys the London chef-d'œuvre. "I should be sorry to eat it, or any of these poisonous things either," he adds, as he points to the coloured jellies and other sweetmeats. The pit, under the surveillance of that pompous stage-manager, the butler of Becklands, has been admitted to a private view of the scenery and decorations, before the curtain is drawn up for the actors to perform; and thus our Farnorth Gunter has had an opportunity of making his depreciatory comments.

I have already, in one of these chapters, attempted a description of the manners and customs of the English at their nuptial feasts, and I shall not again dilate on this subject. The Becklands déjeuner was infinitely more grand than the one over which the Dean of Blankstir presided; but, in all essential particulars, it was very much similar. There were the same dreary old jokes; the same mangled speeches. Sir Mortimer Plantagenet did not on this occasion acquit himself as an orator one whit better than the Reverend Archibald Middleton had done; and the Most
Noble the Viscount was not a Demosthenes; however, this latter gentleman was profuse in his encomiums of "our hospitable host with whom I have the honour of being very nearly connected;" and Algy acknowledged the compliment with a very liberal display of his ivories, but he made his own remarks upon his cousin's civility afterwards. "Who would think, Clarry, that the ponderous old swell refused me a fiver only two years ago?" he whispered to the lovely bride. "Things are changed, ma fille; he has got two hundred pound out of me, but he'll not get any more, the Viscount won't, for all his humbug. We have utilised him and his weedy old screws, my beauty, and I don't mean to pay any more for the honour of their company. 'Gad, how he is walking into the champagne! Won't he be crippled with gout after this?"

The dowager Lady Plantagenet was very grave and quiet during the whole of the somewhat noisy breakfast, and Miss Winifred looked as if she and her dark blue moiré had been carved out of stone.

And now the new carriage with the emblazoned panels, in which the red hand is very prominent, is standing at the door with its prancing grey
horses, and the beautiful Lady Plantagenet is taking leave of her friends. Algy is a good deal overcome as he bids farewell to his daughter; his affection for her is the best quality he possesses; it is sincere and strong enough. The Viscount sheds a tear or two, but the champagne is entirely to blame for this weakness on the part of the noble gentleman. Mrs. Silvester is too much absorbed in the splendour of her costume to have space for maternal distress; but the baronet's mother is violently agitated as she embraces her son at parting. His majesty, although he exerts himself to calm and soothe her, is a little impatient of this unwonted emotion, and he murmurs something about "disliking scenes," as he hurries away from the weeping woman. A very cold salute is exchanged between the bride and the Dowager Lady Plantagenet, and then the prancing greys bear away the happy couple.

A brilliant account of the wedding occupied two columns of both the 'Farnorth Advertiser' and the 'District Reflector.' It was wonderful how ingeniously the two papers contrived to convey exactly the same information in totally different words. The 'District Reflector,' which is ultra-liberal in its principles, was exceedingly happy in
its manner of bestowing unqualified praise on the aristocrats without impugning its own consistency; and the ‘Farnorth Advertiser’ employed a very charming and poetical simile, as it described the beauty of the bride. Both the local vehicles of news concluded with emphatic words of praise for “that enterprising and energetic gentleman, the present owner of the Weasle Mine.”

Only eight months ago the ‘Farnorth Advertiser’ and the ‘District Reflector’ were bordered with black as a mark of respect for the late master of Becklands.—Le roi est mort: Vive le roi!
CHAPTER III.

Christmas has come again! Christmas has come with its snowy mantle and icy breath. Has peace returned to us with the hoar frost and the holly berry? Alas, no! War is still raging in the East, and some of our best and bravest lie buried far away from fatherland. The allied forces are entrenched before Sebastopol. The glorious battle of the Alma; the magnificent action at Balaclava, with its never-to-be-forgotten light cavalry charge; the victory on the fields of Inkermann: all these grand triumphs over the foe of Europe shed the twilight of their splendour on the columns of our journals. England speaks proudly of the deeds of daring done by her brave sons. Paladins, as self-devoted, as chivalrous, as noble as any of the vaunted knights of old, have arisen out of that band of languid exquisites, who whilom lounged listlessly in Belgravian drawing-rooms. Hearts throughout the land throb exultant over British valour. England's banner is waved proudly aloft.
The fall of Sebastopol is confidently predicted. The Czar, it is stated by his friends in London, has expressed his willingness to listen to proposals of peace; but France and Great Britain have lost too many brave men in this struggle; they will not accept terms now which they would willingly have accorded ten months ago. A peace, dictated at the cannon’s mouth, is the only form of peace that the Allies will offer to the fanatical tyrant who has brought such misery on the whole of Europe—so say the belligerent papers, whose cry is still for a war à l’outrance—and beacons blaze, and banners wave, and cannons boom, exultant over the victories already won.

But whilst this jubilant feeling pervades the greater part of the land—ah me! how many eyes are weeping, how many hearts are well nigh broken, as they mourn the loss of father, husband, son, or brother, the victims whose blood has purchased a nation’s triumph! The telegram which lights the beacon and proudly rustles the banner’s folds, brings a sickening dread to many a quiet household. God help those who will see the names of their loved ones in that sad official list which ever follows in the wake of victory! Heaven sustain them in their great agony!
There is a home in Devonshire where anxious hours have been passed for many a weary month now. Anxious hours have been passed, and dreary vigils kept, and earnest prayers each moment uttered. Divine mercy has been extended to the weeping suppliants; desolation has not fallen on that Devonshire home. Horace Snowe has passed almost unscathed through all the horrors of the war; he has won words of praise from his brave commander; he has lost a dozen drops of blood, and gained that prefix to his name he once so much desired. The artist's base-born son is Captain Snowe now; he is in the trenches before Sebastopol, and he writes letters to that Devonshire home, almost as exultant in their tone as the leaders in Miss Alathea's favourite newspapers. He prophesies a speedy end to the war, but I think he only prophesies that which he earnestly desires. He is very eager to return to fatherland. Has all his warlike ardour died out? Has he already had quite enough of that war he coveted with civilized white men? I do not know; but I do know that his letters are full of a yearning desire to join the dear friends so far away. He is an excellent correspondent. Miss Alathea is loud in his praise. Never was there
such an affectionate nephew, that accomplished lady declares. Mary does not say so much on this subject, but possibly she may think the more —and Zoe?

There are no secrets now between Mary Snowe and her little friend. One flower of comfort has grown out of the child’s great misery; she knows that the soldier loves her, but she has purchased this knowledge at so terrible a sacrifice, that as yet it brings but little consolation to her wounded heart. The dank mould of the churchyard overpowers the perfume of the sweet rose; Zoe’s regret for her dead father is all too poignant for this new fragrance, but still she has shared the anxieties of the sisters during these many weary months, and joined in the prayers so earnestly breathed to heaven for the soldier’s welfare.

Madame’s old regard for Horace Snowe has returned; I am afraid she takes a lenient view of that sad blot on his career, which still darkens the martial hero in my eyes. I am afraid the French-woman reasons very much as Mrs. Bland reasons. It is a subject which is never alluded to ever so remotely in the Devonshire home, but Madame frequently ponders over it, and the result of her ponderings has been I believe to remove the
whole blame of the proceeding from Horace Snowe, and place it on the shoulders of the Snowdrop, who was never a favourite of hers, as we know.

Most of the principal events which have happened at Farnorth have been wafted to the exiles. Clara’s marriage has not surprised any of them; they know that beautiful young person thoroughly well now, at least they think they do. Zoé scarcely ever mentions her cousin, but Zoé is only mortal, and she feels very bitterly towards her. Madame is threatened with incipient apoplexy whenever she alludes to Algy’s daughter; she hates her with the savage hatred of an undisciplined nature. The sisters do not often speak of the Silvesters, but Miss Alathea sometimes cites the Baronet and his bride when she wishes to advance convincing evidence of the truth of her favourite study.

The *bas bleu* is not however so much addicted to phrenology as she was; indeed, I have some faint hope that this hobby may in process of time find its way to the knacker’s yard; she spends most of her time now in poring over maps; like every one else, she found out her weak points in geographical knowledge during that Russian war. She is grappling with this difficulty as she has grappled
with so many other difficulties during her learned career. Geology has been sadly neglected lately: the four groups of the grand tertiary strata have no longer any charm for her. Miss Alathea is heart and soul in the great Eastern struggle; she has assumed a confident tone in her discussion of the question. I believe she has suffered quite as much anxiety as her sister, but she is of a more sanguine temperament, and Horace's cheerful letters have their full effect on her. She quotes from the leaders of her newspapers—(I am sorry to say she still appropriates their wisdom as her own in the true Pecksniffian manner)—and she abuses John Bright's friend with a will.

"He is a liar who heaps the Pelion of falsehood upon the Ossa of mendacity. He excites fanaticism, and revenge, and lust of plunder; he has brought his slaves to the field by truckling to their worst passions; he will keep them there by the knout, if other means fail," she declares to an admiring audience. The Devonshire villagers consider that the social laws and regulations which exclude petticoats from a place in the forum, are a great mistake, whenever they listen to the bas bleu's declamations. "The Pelion of falsehood on the Ossa of mendacity" never loses its effect on
the unsophisticated natives. There is a grand classical obscurity about the expression which almost appals them, and so Miss Alathea is hailed and admired as a bright intellectual star, and shines with a light which assuredly is not her own.

They are indeed simple folk enough, these inhabitants of the quiet Devonshire village where the exiles from Farnorth have pitched their tents. The iron arteries of civilization are far away from this peaceful spot. The shrill shriek of steam, and the fierce white breath of the imprisoned giant, will never, I think, awaken an echo in the hills which shelter the white houses and thatched cottages of Friendlycoomb. Fishermen, and their wives and daughters, occupy the straw-covered tenements, and Mary Snowe and Zoe are ever welcome visitors to these humble homesteads. The Devonshire peasantry are altogether different to our Farnorth rustics. They acknowledge caste, and are meek and lowly enough to the yellow streaks on the forehead. They kotow before the Brahmins who inhabit the white houses.

There are not many Brahmins in Friendlycoomb, and these few are sociable enough the one with the other. Those fine distinctions for which
Society at Friendlycoomb.

Farnorth is remarkable are unknown here. The squire, the parson, the lawyer, and the doctor mingle harmoniously together. The Miss Snowes brought no letters of introduction with them, but a week after they were settled in the pretty white house facing the sea which they now occupy, all the élite of the village called upon them, and welcomed them kindly. We know how very differently Farnorth had behaved when the poor ladies drifted upon that inhospitable coast. The Brahmins, one and all, now take quite a personal interest in the fortunes of the maiden ladies' nephew; they listen with the greatest attention to extracts from his letters, which the bas bleu is at all times ready to read to them, and they say they have obtained a clearer view of the Eastern question from Miss Alathea than any of the newspapers have given them; indeed, altogether the Admiral's daughters are very popular in Friendlycoomb, and Zoé is not less so. When first the poor child came, her deep mourning dress and her sweet pale face occasioned quite a whirlwind of sympathy. The squire's eldest son, a young Cantab home for the long vacation, fell hopelessly in love with her, and never missed one service at the village church during the whole of the time.
he passed at \textit{Dulce Domum}. The soft Devonshire air has called back all the strayed away beauty of the pretty Peruvian. She is the acknowledged belle of the village.

Those lares and penates which surrounded Zoe's dear friends in their Farnorth home, are gathered around them in their white house by the sea. The great grandmothers and grandfathers adorn the walls; and so likewise does that picture of the fair-faced girl which Zoe at one time never remarked upon. She knows the grievous legend attached to that portrait now.

Rose Cottage is let. Mr. Giles Houndly always expected it would be, he says.

"Ahem! not the slightest chance of Miss Mary's return now, sir. No bird to lime, you know. She would have been nicely sold, as things have turned out, if she \textit{had} succeeded in her little game; but she did not, in spite of her saintly doings. I wonder whether the nephew will be as eager in his pursuit after Miss Zoe now she is no longer an heiress. I doubt it, sir; although it would be a suitable connection, as I said before. I should like to know what he has done with Mary Dalton? Most disgraceful thing, sir; nothing heard of that girl yet. Our police are not
sufficiently active; there has been supineness shown. Ahem! they say—but perhaps it is scarcely advisable to repeat what they do say.”

And I think Mr. Houndly was wise to draw rein when he did.

Mrs. Bland is the correspondent who places the exiles *au courant* with all the news of Farnorth. Her last letter was crowded with elaborate details of the royal marriage. The widow has rather a difficult part to play in these communications. You know she has to a certain extent gone over to the enemy. She has been a spectator, if not an applauding one, very often at the Becklands Theatre; and although it is highly probable the young Lady Plantagenet will entirely uproot her out of *her* social parterre, the relict is likely to flourish as a goodly evergreen of gossip in that garden over which Mrs. Silvester presides. And so, amidst the genuine sympathy for the swindled orphan, of which she is not chary in her epistles, her fraternisation with the mammon of unrighteousness now reigning over that swindled orphan’s domains must occasionally of necessity betray itself. “I called on Mrs. Silvester the other day. I see her very frequently,” she writes, her treason creeping out with this admission. “I don’t go to Becklands
very often; it is so different to what it was” (here is an obeisance to the old sovereign). “But I did happen to go there after the wedding, you know, and the bride’s mother was not in good spirits—she was full of complaints about her husband’s extravagance. It seems he has had some heavy losses on the Goodwood; and then that pack of hounds he is keeping must be frightfully expensive. Poor dear Mr. Bland used to say that people who kept dogs frequently ended in going to them.” And with this sapient remark of her late husband’s the relict concluded her long epistle.

I must observe that some of the deeds of prowess done by Horace Snowe have already been chronicled by the ‘Farnorth Advertiser’ and the ‘District Reflector.’ These two papers have spoken in very eloquent and laudatory terms of their “gallant young townsman.” Farnorth identifies itself with the soldier’s triumphs. The obscurity of his birth is forgotten, and the scandal about the Snowdrop is utterly ignored by most of our townspeople. Giles Houndly, Esq., sniffs the air very indignantly whenever the red-coat’s praises are sounded in his presence.

“Ahem! you need not tell me anything about
British valour, and all that humbug, sir," Giles says. "You will never make me believe that the son of a trumpery sign-painter—and the illegitimate son, you must remember—will ever turn out a hero. Dutch courage, sir, nothing else, you may depend. Pot valiancy is the only valiancy for which this so-called Captain Snowe will ever be remarkable. They say, ahem! that all our soldiers, aye, and our officers as well, are primed with brandy before they go to battle. If the papers will persist in bespattering anything with their fulsome praise let them offer up the ovation where it is due—and that is to the black bottle, sir. All the bravery we hear of comes out of it, you may be perfectly convinced of that."

But Giles's venom does not penetrate to the calm Devonshire retreat, and all the numbers of the 'Farnorth Advertiser' and the 'District Reflector,' wherein any reference to our "gallant young townsman" is made, are forwarded by that well-meaning traitress, Mrs. Bland, to the exiled ladies, whose eyes fill with very happy tears as they rest upon the laudatory paragraphs, so deprecaded by the amiable owner of Gothic Hall.
CHAPTER IV.

The Dowager Lady Plantagenet is lying on that couch where she has passed so many weary hours. She is studying a letter just received from her son. His majesty writes in very excellent spirits—his beautiful wife is creating quite a furore in the Parisian salons, and Monseigneur is basking in the sunshine and himself emitting a borrowed light. I think he will soon weary of playing the moon, but at present he is very well satisfied with his inferior rôle, and his mother rejoices over the happiness of her handsome son. "Perhaps, after all, this proud woman is better suited to him than my pretty favourite would have been," she murmurs, and then she falls to thinking how she herself will be able to adapt herself to her haughty daughter-in-law. "There can never be any sympathy between us," her ladyship sighs; "but we need not interfere with each other—I will bear anything and everything rather than be separated from my darling boy."
The newly married couple are not likely to return to Farnorth for some time, our town says. The ornamentation of Foxcroft is still going on, and the invalid lady of the house is permanently located in that pretty boudoir which immediately adjoins her bedroom. These two rooms are in a wing of the building, far removed from the bustle and discomfort which pervades all the other apartments. Miss Winifred frequently brings that everlasting embroidery of hers to this retreat. Lady Plantagenet and her step-daughter are very good friends, as you know; but her ladyship is alone this morning. Miss Winifred is closeted with her maid, holding a solemn council about some of those fripperies in which the poor lady so much delights.

"A person has called, mileddy; she wishes to speak to you. She says her business is most important. Will your leddyship see her?" a liveried vassal demands.

"It will be the woman from Grant's about the muslin curtains. She was to call this morning," her ladyship mutters. "I will see her," she added aloud, in a languid tone habitual to her now, but which was adopted by Nelly Brown when first she became a fine lady. "You may show her into this room."
Plush did not trouble himself to give the person a name when he opened the door of the boudoir for her. There was a slight rustling of petticoats which announced to Lady Plantagenet that the emissary from Grant's was waiting to receive her orders; but her recumbent ladyship did not turn her head to look at the "person."

"You have called about the muslin curtains," she said in her fine-lady voice. "I am not at all satisfied with those Grant has sent. Have you brought any patterns with you?"

"I have not brought any patterns of muslin curtains, Lady Plantagenet," said the intruder.

Her ladyship started perceptibly, and raised her eyes suddenly. They fell upon the figure of that strange person whose rude scrutiny had attracted Mrs. Bland's attention at the railway station eight months ago. Some change has taken place in the appearance of this woman since that time. The sun-burn and weather-stains have been chased by the pallor of recent illness. You may trace some remains of beauty in the face, now that the unbecoming solar painting is removed, and you may trace as well the owner's appreciation of those well-preserved ruins. Her mourning dress is arranged with the greatest care. The blackness
of her eyebrows is I think a little assisted, and although those false dark braids of hair which rest so harshly on her forehead do not really add to her charms, they are evidently intended to do so.

The Dowager Lady Plantagenet looked fixedly at this woman I have described for some moments, and then she turned away. She was clearly unknown to her.

"If you have not brought the patterns I ordered, what is your business here?" her ladyship enquired, haughtily.

"I have called to see you, Lady Plantagenet," answered the stranger. "I came here eight months ago for the same purpose, and I should have been here long before this, had I been well enough to travel. You do not recognise my face, Lady Plantagenet, but you remember my voice, I see."

Her ladyship had paled to an ashen grey before the woman had ceased speaking.

"Good God!" she gasped, "it cannot be—you cannot be my Rose!"

It was the royal favourite Eleanora, who, faded and worn, had thus suddenly appeared before the once imperious Marie of Foxcroft.

"Time has not stood still with either of us, Lady Plantagenet," the visitor said in a clear
ringing voice, "and sorrow and sickness have done their work on both as well. I should scarcely have known you. It is six-and-twenty years since I last saw you. I know you have not forgotten that meeting, Lady Plantagenet."

Not a sound escaped from the pallid lips of the invalid, but the quick throbbing of her heart fluttered the muslin which was folded across her bosom.

"When I bade you farewell on that wretched evening," continued the once-powerful favourite, "I never hoped to see you more—I—"

"You have broken your oath," interrupted Lady Plantagenet, in a hoarse whisper. "You swore most solemnly never to return to England again during my life."

"I could not remain, desolate and miserable as I was," cried the woman, passionately. "I would have broken fifty oaths rather than have done so."

"It is true, then—that—that which we were told," said her ladyship, speaking with some hesitation, but with great eagerness as well—"your husband—and the—the—boy—are dead?"

"They are both lost to me," answered the withered Rose, as a spasm of agony convulsed her faded features.
“If you were indeed left thus desolate, I can forgive you for your broken oath,” said my lady, whose manner and tone of voice were entirely changed now. “Come near me, my poor Rose; I am a wretched cripple, utterly helpless and dependent,” she added, with a heavy sigh, as she held out her hand to her old favourite. Tears rose in the eyes of the returned exile; but she did not accept the offered hand, and her accents were low and broken when she spoke again.

“I have deceived you, Lady Plantagenet. I and my husband deceived you, when we told you that Sir Frederick — —”

“Hush! for God’s sake,” cried my lady, all her late excitement suddenly returning. “Not another word, for your life; that is my stepdaughter’s voice.”

Miss Winifred entered the room. She was more girlishly arrayed even than usual—bright-coloured ribbons fluttered around her, and her thin flaxen ringlets danced about with childish glee.

She started a little when she saw the stranger standing near her step-mother.

Lady Plantagenet controlled her agitation with a violent effort. “An old friend has come to see me, my dear Winifred,” she said. “I see you do
not know her, neither did I; but I am sure you have not forgotten the name of Rose Dacre."

Miss Winifred more than slightly started now. A shiver of strong repugnance passed over her worn frame.

"I should not have recognized her," she said at length very coldly.

"I should have known you anywhere, ma'am," said the unwelcome guest, speaking in a fawning hypocritical voice, altogether different to that she had adopted in her conversation with Lady Plantagenet. "You are very little altered, Miss Winifred; but time has not dealt so gently with her ladyship and me."

The insinuated compliment had no effect on the grand-niece of the Duke of Overall. Her light blue eyes were dimmed with tears, and she made no effort to conceal that second shudder which shook her when she looked at her step-mother's old confidante.

"I am afraid the sight of me recalls past times very unpleasantly to you, Miss Winifred," continued Rose deprecatingly. "I have agitated her ladyship more than I should have wished. Six-and-twenty years bring great changes, ma'am. They have brought great suffering to me; but it
is not likely you will take any interest in what has happened to such a poor creature as I. Her ladyship is different; she has known me all her life. I have a great deal to say to her and ——"

"You are quite right, Rose," interposed Lady Plantagenet, whose utmost efforts could not steady her tremulous accents. "Miss Winifred cannot possibly be interested in you as I am. It will give me pleasure to hear the events of the last six-and-twenty years. Wheel my couch into the next room, and you can attend me there."

The widow of the valet of Miss Winifred's dead brother dropped a humble curtsey to that lady before she complied with the request of her old mistress.

When left alone, the grand-niece of the Duke of Overall abandoned herself to the emotion which the sight of this woman, so closely connected with the blackest page of her own life's history, naturally awakened. Every line in that dark page rises vividly before her as she covers her face with her thin white hands. She recalls the angry words spoken at that last parting with her unhappy brother—the sullen, silent interval that followed—and then the crushing misery of his untimely death, and all the mad despair, the
passionate regret brought with it. Bitter un
availing tears well from her eyes as they rest on
the gloomy mirage; and then the vague thoughts
and shadowy doubts which have spread a veil of
mystery over the last hours of the old baronet’s
eldest son, take some tangible form in the mind
of his weeping sister. Had he really perished, as
his valet declared he had done? Had he ——

Strange sounds are proceeding from the next
room, sounds of shrill agony which shake Miss
Winifred in every nerve as she rushes wildly to
the closed door. It is locked; but it is presently
opened by Rose Boyne, whose face is even paler
than it was a quarter of an hour ago.

“Her ladyship has been suddenly attacked with
spasms at the chest!” she said hurriedly; “have
you any sal volatile or ether, Miss? Is her lady
ship often attacked in this way?”

Her ladyship certainly never had been attacked in
that way within her step-daughter’s experience—her
ladyship was remarkable for the elegant calm of her
manners on all occasions—and the agitation she
had shown at her son’s marriage had provoked
some observation in consequence; but that agita
tion was a light summer breeze compared to the
wild tornado of passion which tore and rent her
now.
"Oh! please get some sal volatile, Miss Winifred, or some ether, if you will be so kind," said the valet's widow. "Thank you, Miss, it was on the dressing-table all the time; but I am so flurried, it makes me quite stupid. She used to have these attacks when she was a young girl. Are the spasms very bad, my lady?" she added, in a tender tone; and as she bent down over the convulsed woman, she whispered something in her ear.

Whatever that whisper might be, it produced a very magical effect. The sobs and shrieks suddenly ceased. Lady Plantagenet raised herself upon her couch, and turned her tear-blurred face towards her step-daughter. "I am afraid I have alarmed you, my dear Winifred," she said, forcing herself to speak calmly. "It is many years now since I have had such a violent attack at—the—chest—as this. Rose understands how to treat me. I suffered from the same thing when I was a girl, did I not Rose? and I want Rose to remain with me, Winifred. She must never leave me again. She knows my constitution better than any one else."

Her ladyship spoke these last sentences very hurriedly, and like a child which repeats a lesson it has been taught.
"My lady used to suffer from these spasms when she was a girl, as she says, Miss Winifred. A little more water, if you please, ma'am. I have given her this mixture very often in her young days. Drink this, if you please, my lady, and you will soon be better."

"You had much better have medical advice, Lady Plantagenet," said Miss Winifred, with some anxiety.

"The pain is nearly gone. I shall be well directly, my dear, thank you," said her step-mother, tremulously. "I am very sorry I have distressed you. These attacks do not alarm me when Rose is with me; they only upset me for the time. I had them when I was a girl; had I not Rose?" she repeated.

"Yes, my lady; and your poor, dear papa, used to be so frightened, but I never was. I knew it was only a nervous affection."

"I want Rose to stay with me; to live here always, I mean," said my lady. "She has no ties now, and I should so much like her to remain with me. You must stay with me, Rose: do prevail on her to consent, my dear Winifred."

If her ladyship had been unlike herself during that hurricane of excitement, she was quite as much unlike herself now.
Mrs. Boyne Entreated to Stay.

"Rose is so sensitive. I know she will go away, if she thinks she is not welcome. Do assure her that you are willing she should remain, my dear Winifred," she continued entreatingly.

"Mrs. Boyne is aware that I never did interfere with any of your domestic arrangements," answered Miss Winifred, coldly; her antipathy to the valet's widow was very great indeed.

"I know you never did, Miss. I know you were always so very meek and mild," said the withered flower, with more than a touch of irony in her accents. "And Sir Mortimer—do you think he will not object to my presence, my lady?"

"You know very well he will not, Rose," answered the invalid, whose dark eyes had a piteous bewildered look in them; "you know he will be only too glad to have you here; and you consent to remain, Rose, not as a servant, but as a valued friend?"

"I hope I shall never forget my place, my lady; and if you really think I should be a comfort to you, I will stay; but then there is her young ladyship to consider—she may not——"

"Don't think of that for one moment," inter-
rupted my lady, eagerly; "my daughter-in-law has nothing whatever to do with my ser— friends I should say; for it is as a friend you are to remain here, you know, Rose."

"Oh, no, my lady, not as a friend; I know better than that. I never was anything but a poor servant, and I never expect to be anything else; but I should be glad to end my days with you, my lady, if it would give no offence to anybody," she persisted, evidently aiming the last part of her sentence at Miss Winifred.

Once more Lady Plantagenet addressed her step-daughter entreatingly—

"Oh, my dear Winifred, I told you Rose was so sensitive. She thinks you are averse to her presence. Do assure her of the contrary. Do be a little more cordial in your manner, my dear."

Miss Winifred drew herself up haughtily.

"I am not remarkable for the cordiality of my manner to any one," she said, "and particularly to— to—" and she hesitated.

"Servants, you were going to say, ma'am," suggested Rose, respectfully. "I don't expect it, ma'am, from you. My lady was always condescending to me; but then that was very different."
"We were more like sisters than anything else when we were girls together," said Lady Plantagenet, who was haughtier than any duchess in the land with her underlings in general.

"Oh, no, my lady, don't say that, if you please; I always knew my place, I hope, although your poor papa was very kind to me, and I shall never forget I am only a poor servant, however condescending your ladyship may be to me; and as you are good enough to wish me to remain with you, and Miss Winifred does not object, I shall be very happy indeed to stay. I have a few things I left at the hotel—I will go for them—and perhaps you will tell the housekeeper that —"

"I will send one of the servants for any luggage you may have," said her ladyship, who seemed unwilling to part even for a moment from her old servant. "And you must not consider you belong to the servants' hall. I shall put you on quite a different footing. I shall not allow any of my people to call you by your christian name; it is a privilege I reserve for myself and Mortimer. Will you be kind enough to ring the bell, Winifred? How nicely your maid has dressed your hair, my dear, and what a charming costume you have
honoured me with. Does not Miss Winifred look well, Rose?"

"I can scarcely believe so many years have passed over when I look at Miss Winifred, my lady," said Lady Plantagenet's old servant, gazing admiringly at the floating pennons, and venturing even to take one in her hands. "Blue was always so becoming to you, ma'am, you are so very fair."

Miss Winifred shrank from the woman's touch, and was stonily indifferent to her fawning flattering words. The artistically-assisted eyebrows of the powerful favourite met together in an ominous frown. Poor Lady Plantagenet again interposed, and spoke in the same flurried and unnatural manner for which she had been remarkable during the whole of the interview.

"You look pale, my dear Winifred," she said, unmindful that a few moments ago she had complimented her step-daughter on her bloom. "I am so very sorry I alarmed you so much just now. Be advised, my dear, and take a walk. I am sure the fresh air will do you good. Don't you think a little exercise would do Miss Winifred good, Rose?" she added, again drawing that objectionable person into the conversation.
“Miss Winifred’s nerves have been slightly shaken, and there is nothing so good for the nerves as plenty of fresh air,” replied the valet’s widow, stiffly and sententiously. “For yourself, my lady, I should recommend sleep, if you can get it. I will go and take off my bonnet, and ——.”

“Go into the next room, it is my dressing-room, Rose,” said my lady, eagerly. “I will have a bed put up for you there, and then I shall have you with me always. I have such confidence in you. I will keep perfectly quiet now, and try to sleep as you advise me; these attacks do wear me out; so, if you please, my dear Winifred, will you leave me for a little while?”

The step-daughter could not very well refuse this request, and so she quitted the room where all these wonderful transformation scenes had taken place. She went into the garden to cultivate the fresh air which had been prescribed for her disordered nerves; but I think she will have to inhale many tons of the ethereal restorative before she recovers from the flurry produced by that morning’s work.

There was almost a revolt in the servants’ hall at Foxcroft when its members were told of this unexpected addition to the establishment. The
housekeeper, the porter, and his aged helpmate, were the only feudal retainers who had any personal recollections of the royal favourite; but tradition had handed down her name in such unpleasant colours, that a hyena suddenly let loose amongst them could scarcely have created more confusion in the sanctum of her ladyship's "people" than the advent of Rose Boyne did. My lady's lady, a smart London maid, gave notice to leave on the spot, and declared she would rather forfeit a month's wages than remain a single night under the same roof with "this nasty purring smooth-faced cat, who made your very flesh creep with her soft sycophantic ways."

Backstair gossip very quickly wafted the intelligence of Eleanora's return to most of the houses in Farnorth; and Mr. Houndly, who had been comparatively fasting from scandal for some little time—having lived for a week on such soupe maigre as his bench duties and other local matters afforded him—made at once a carnival of this news. Giles's allegiance to the young sovereign of Foxcroft has not altered his relations with the old, and he was delighted to seize the opportunity given him for stabbing the "arrogant tailor's daughter" with some of his "they says."
"Ahem! and so the bosom friend and confidante has appeared again. The so-called foster-sister has returned to her loving relative, after an absence of more than a quarter of a century. I wonder what new mischief will be hatched now, sir. They say, ahem! that all the servants are leaving Plantagenet Park; and I am not at all surprised; any person with a proper respect for themselves might hesitate to remain in a house where the widow of a foraging Italian vagabond is welcomed, sir, as if she were a princess of the blood royal. Some of us have long memories in Farnorth, sir. We have not forgotten one or two little incidents connected with the mysterious disappearance of the late baronet's eldest son. I repeat, mysterious disappearance, sir. What assurance have we of the unfortunate young man's death saving such as we received from the garbled statement given by that scoundrel Boyne, at the judicial inquiry made at the time? I think we have not to carry our memories very far back to recall a case where an unhappy person was reported to be dead when she had actually been living for years in a lunatic asylum! They say, ahem! that Lady Plantagenet has given thousands of pounds to this fine favourite of hers and her
rascally husband. I know for a fact she pawned her diamonds for them when Boyne was obliged to fly the country. Does the tailor's daughter think we are green enough to believe she would make such a sacrifice out of mere affection for her maid-servant? I tell you, sir, if she does think so she is very much mistaken."

Giles would occupy half a volume if I allowed him space to continue his vituperations, and so I shall not register all his malice; let it suffice for me to assure the reader that he left nothing unsaid that was wicked and spiteful, and calculated to injure Lady Plantagenet in the opinion of Farnorth, and then he enjoyed himself to repletion after his short Lenten fare.

Mrs. Silvester ordered her carriage and drove to Mrs. Bland's directly the news from Plantagenet Park reached her, although she expressed herself disgusted that the coming of "only a servant" should have created any sensation at all.

"But you know she was never treated in the least like a servant," the relict explained. "Rosé Dacre lived with the Browns, and was brought up almost on equal terms with the"— and the widow stopped in some confusion.

"Tailor's daughter, I suppose," supplied Algy's
Rose Dacre's Antecedents.

wife. "You need not mind alluding to it. I know very well Lady Plantagenet was a nobody, although she is as proud as I don't know what, and takes far more upon herself than I do; and I'm sure I was born and bred a lady."

[Mrs. Silvester is very fond of dilating on this fact, but I have known kitchen maids who possessed far more of the feelings of a real gentlewoman than she does.]

"All Farnorth knows that your family is high, Mrs. Silvester," said the pedigree worshipper; "and I must confess we shall all of us consider ourselves superior to Lady Plantagenet to the end of the chapter, with all her haughtiness. But, as I was saying, Rose Dacre lived with the Browns at the time old Caleb was in good circumstances; and when Nelly Brown married the late Baronet, she very soon introduced her foster-sister into her household, and when your son-in-law was born she became his nurse, and wonderfully fond of him she was, I believe; but when poor Mr. Frederick brought that horrible Italian valet of his to Foxcroft, there was an end to all friendship between the mistress and her maid, as I told you."

"And quite time there should be, I think," said Algy's wife, who has frequently incurred that
gentleman's censure by reason of her love of gossipping with her handmaidens. "Familiarity breeds contempt—servants should be kept at a proper distance."

"Lady Plantagenet certainly did not observe that rule with Rose Dacre. She had immense influence over her mistress, and could twist her round her little finger."

"And where has she been all these number of years?"

"Nobody knows. Nothing has ever been heard of the valet and his wife since he committed that forgery; and Rose and her child came down in such a dreadful state of distress to Foxcroft, and made it all up with her ladyship, who pawned her diamonds to help her old favourite, Mr. Houndly says. And now here she is again, a widow; her child dead; and she is so altered I did not recognise her a bit when she stared at me and Miss Snowe so rudely at the railway station—as I think I mentioned to you—although her face did somehow seem familiar to me. But widowed, and childless, and altered as she is, you will see it will be who but Mrs. Boyne at Foxcroft now, Mrs. Silvester."

"It won't be who but Mrs. Boyne when my
daughter returns to Plantagenet Park," fumed Algy's wife, as she rose to take her departure. "Clara will soon teach the dowager her proper place. Clara is as haughty as haughty—I have good reason to know that," she added in a *sotto voce* whimper, as she sailed from the room.
CHAPTER V.

The health of the Weasle is greatly improved now, and its owner is not annoyed with any more unfavourable bulletins. Giles Houndly amuses himself by boasting to all the rival mine-owners about the quantity of ore daily raised at the California of the district, and his hearers no doubt take a Christian-like interest in the success of their neighbour. Algy does not pay many visits to the source of all his greatness, and has not ventured to introduce any more of his new and original systems of working again. Having, as he says, an excellent head for figures, he busies himself with calculating profits and forming estimates as to the possible amount of his income, and, being of a sanguine temperament, he multiplies those possibilities, and arrives at very magnificent conclusions. "'Gad, if the money pours in as it promises," he says, "I shall be puzzled to know what to do with it." [I think there are some
ancient creditors of his, scattered about the whole of the United Kingdom, and some on the Continent as well, who could give him some useful instructions likely to benefit themselves on this subject.]

Whatever may be thecomings of the present master of Becklands, they will have some difficulty to keep pace with his outgoings. The quantity of money that the Sultan Algy has already expended must be enormous, and he is daily increasing his disbursements. You should hear Mrs. Silvester dilate on this matter.

"There are more than a dozen great lazy things eating their heads off in the stable, and I don't know how many nasty dogs," she moans piteously. "And Mr. Silvester was as angry as anything about Miss Benton's bill. It is such a shame to make a fuss about my poor little spendings. He don't care what he wastes on himself and Clara, and he grudges me a bit of point lace! As if I could wear diamonds and velvet without real point. It is very hard, you must say. Poor me, with my two fortunes, grudged a bit of point lace, and Mr. Silvester spending hundreds and thousands of my money over horses and dogs; but men are always so selfish."
The extravagance of the Sultan of Becklands excites some curious gossip in the town and neighbourhood. Those near relations, Poverty and Gentility embrace each other lovingly, and declare that great and sudden riches invariably vulgarize the possessor. It is, indeed, a difficult art to grow rich gracefully, and I am bound to confess that Algy is not gifted with that rare knowledge. There is more than a touch of vulgarity in the ostentation and display of which he is so lavish; and there is not merely a touch of that failing, but unmitigated vulgarity itself, in those allusions he is perpetually making to the extent of his possessions.

But if the Poverty and Gentility of our district are holding up the nouveau riche to contempt and ridicule, there are some amongst our minor magnates who, like foolish frogs, are attempting to expand themselves to the dimensions of the bovine millionaire. I think their Candlemas bills will astonish these ambitious crapauds, and teach them some wholesome lessons. Algy's income is five times larger than that of the wealthiest of our county cedars, the Plantagenets alone excepted. It is madness in any of them to attempt to compete with him; and, indeed, whatever they do,
Algy caps, as the school-boys say, all their efforts. If a well-to-do country squire adorns his grounds with a new green-house a hundred feet long, the present master of Becklands brings misery and desolation upon him by building a crystal palace which renders his glass dwelling a mere pig-sty in comparison. If a county cedar gives a dinner-party where slices of two-guinea pine apples are handed to his guests, Algy dwarfs his neighbour's prandial splendour by flinging a shower of peaches half a guinea a-piece amongst the *gourmands* he entertains. As to pine apples, the owner of the new crystal palace speaks contemptuously of them, and declares they are consumed in the servants' hall.

The ambitious magnates who thus expand themselves in vain, will, I think, very soon combine with Poverty and Gentility in reprobating the bloated prosperity which so vulgarly thrusts itself above them. The boxes and stalls at the Becklands Theatre will not be tenanted long, unless the manager makes some change in his entertainments, but I fancy the pit will fill pretty well again shortly. The cadet of a noble family is striving to earn for himself a reputation for a certain amount of what he terms "square-toed
respectability." The *quondam* companion of black-legs and swindlers is striving to leave off sack and live cleanly. Farnorth has already conferred on him some of her local honours; and Algernon Charles Silvester, Esq., talks in a slightly magisterial tone at the Poor-Law Board, and hopes soon to take his seat upon the bench; he has hinted an intention, too, of contesting the county at the next general election; but, as he has only an unlimited amount of money, and no other interest whatever to assist him in his ambition, of course, in these days of a pure franchise and electoral freedom from bribery and corruption, his laudable desire is not likely to be gratified.

Algy's idea of "square-toed respectability" is strictly limited to paying his way honestly, as he says, and prosing at public meetings. No record of any princely donation has found its way into the columns of our papers. The would-be senator, indeed, adopts a high tone, and declares that it is a mere encouragement of idleness to give away money in a district where able-bodied men can earn their four shillings a day, and small boys of twelve "addle," as Farnorth has it, enough almost to keep themselves and one or two small brothers as well. The owner of the Weasle is well sup-
ported in this decision of his by the master of Gothic Hall.

Giles Houndly, Esq., is as constant a visitor as ever at Becklands. He is present at nearly every dinner-party, much to the disgust of Grandly of Grandly Manor, who is as good as a refrigerator in freezing the slightest attempt at familiarity on the part of the ex-lawyer. It is whispered in Farnorth that Giles is striving to purchase a small share in the Weasle, and that he has already offered twenty thousand pounds for a very limited partnership. If this report be true, it speaks volumes for the mine. Mr. Houndly's money is so dear to him that his coffers might safely bear the inscription which formed the epitaph over the hidden treasure of the licentiate Pierre Garcias. I cannot testify to the truth of these rumours; but certain it is that Boswell toadies Johnson more than ever now.

Notwithstanding all his splendour and his strivings after respectability and senatorial greatness, I believe the late Mr. Harding's brother-in-law is not nearly so free from unpleasant dreams now, as he was during that three months tour on the Continent. Clara is no longer by to laugh at the small prickings of his conscience; the feeble
glimmer within him is no longer paled by the blaze of her ridicule; and the father, when oppressed by uneasy punctures, anxiously desires the return of his handsome daughter. "By Jove, Clarry is the only one that brings real comfort with her," he decides, inwardly. "I feel so confoundedly low at times. 'Gad, I don't know what mad thing I may be up to!" The beautiful young Lady Plantagenet has an excellent correspondent in her admiring parent, and his letters have not only their own intrinsic value to recommend them to her favour.

No very great intimacy exists between the Becklands people and the inmates of Foxcroft, in spite of their recent marital connection. Mrs. Silvester has, in her arrogance, asserted that the Plantagenets and the Grandlys are the only families in the neighbourhood with whom she ought to exchange visits; but neither of the two families is really congenial to Algy's wife; they are very recherché dishes, no doubt; but, sad to say, the grandchild of Sir Theodore Baynes likes more than a soupçon of garlic in her daily fare, and the stimulating flavour is wanting in the plats of the palace and the manor; and so, Mrs. Silvester's fine carriage may far more frequently be seen
standing at the door of the relict’s modest dwelling than at the magnificent portico at Foxcroft, or the patrician entrance to the Brahmin’s temple.

If the society of Lady Plantagenet was never very well suited to the taste of the querulous mistress of Becklands, it is still less likely to be so now. The baronet’s mother is strangely altered, and this sudden change in her is discussed in a very free and able fashion in the servants’ hall. All manner of tales are in circulation amongst those members of her ladyship’s household who sit below the salt. Some of the maids declare that my lady has turned “Methody,” as Farnorth terms the Independent form of religious persuasion; others maintain that she is a rank Papist, and that Mrs. Boyne is a Jesuit in disguise, who has converted her mistress to her own faith. All the inmates of the salle unanimously combine in their detestation of the royal favourite; and yet it would be impossible for any one to interfere less with them than the faded Rose does. She glides about the house harmless as a shadow, and passes the greater part of her time alone with her mistress in those apartments in the wing of the house; but Lady Plantagenet extends a degree of favour to her maid which the other domestics
cannot tolerate. "She is no better than we are. Why should she be waited on, with her four-o'clock teas and her things, as if she was a fine lady?" they demand, indignantly. Then, again, they date the serious tone which now pervades the whole of Foxcroft back to the very first day of Mrs. Boyne's arrival. Matins and vespers have been rigorously enforced since that period, and they are not acceptable to the thoughtless irreligious retainers; and so they relieve their minds by discussing my lady's strange conduct, and abusing the Jesuit in disguise.

Miss Winifred has left the palace, and her departure has been much animadverted upon. She has really and simply gone to pay a long promised visit to her sister Marguerite; but Farnorth has chosen to build a mysterious fabric on this commonplace foundation, Giles Houndly, Esq., being naturally the principal architect. There is no fear of fasting or soupe maigre for Giles now. He is likely to have a perpetual carnival so long as Mrs. Boyne remains at Foxcroft.

Lady Plantagenet has had no return of those violent spasms at the chest, but she looks miserably ill. Those who knew her only a year ago
would scarcely recognise her now; the dignified ease of her manner is altogether gone; her nerves are frightfully shattered; she declines all visiting, and denies herself to nearly every morning caller; she attends the three services at the Parish Church, and her Bible is scarcely ever out of her hand. Eleanora’s influence over her royal mistress, even in the days of her youthful prime, was never greater than it is now. Lady Plantagenet is agitated and restless if her maid is out of her sight for an hour; even in the drives which she still occasionally takes, she is invariably accompanied by her shadow.

Farnorth declares that the Baronet and his beautiful bride will never endure this changed state of affairs at Foxcroft; and the Sultan Algernon is very decided in the opinion he expresses on this subject. “’Gad, Clarry is the last in the world to submit to a canting conventicle like that,” he says. “She’ll soon bundle that vampire of a woman out of the house. The dowager may look out for squalls when her ladyship comes back to take the helm.”

The Thomsons and the Browns turn a deaf ear to all the stories about Rose Boyne; they contend that poor Lady Plantagenet is dying of a broken heart because of her son’s marriage; their sym-
pathy is entirely given to the elder Lady Plantagenet; they pity her from the very bottom of their hearts. "She will never be able to live under the same roof with her insolent daughter-in-law; and what a cruel thing it will be, if she is compelled to turn out of her own home in her old age!" they say.

All the ornamentation of Foxcroft has long been finished now. The rooms are as gay as gilt and paint can make them. The young couple are expected home in a week or two. Algy is positively pining for his daughter. Mrs. Silvester is not very much interested in the matter; she does sometimes talk pompously about "my daughter, Lady Plantagenet," but she mingles even this reference to her only child with complaints about the fuss she says Mr. Silvester always makes with Clara. "I believe he would feed her with gold if she could eat it, Mrs. Bland. I am certain he has sent her money over and over again since she has been in Paris, and it is such a shame when she had those handsome settlements, you know," the mother wails; "but Clara is just like her father, and they are both as extravagant as they can be. I dare say she has bought some more dresses and things in Paris, and such a trousseau as she had!"
"Well, I must say my girls have never given me any trouble of that kind," said her gossip and confidante. "They are both economical enough, poor things."

"Your daughters are very different to Lady Plantagenet," said Algy's wife, suddenly setting upon the widow, and striving to crush her with her magnificence; "my daughter is the wife of a baronet, and of course any comparison between her and——"

"Sophy's position as the wife of a rector, and the rector, too, of such a living as Slippersly, is not so contemptible a one as you seem to imagine, Mrs. Silvester," broke in the relict, firing up in defence of her young. "My daughter will be received into any society that your——"

"Oh pray don't agitate me," interposed her companion, relapsing into her normal peevishness; "you are growing so touchy, Mrs. Bland; I'm sure I've heard you say often and often that our family was much higher than yours, and just because I made the same remark, you speak as cross as I don't know what. You have made my poor heart beat; I wonder you will excite me, when you know how dangerous it is for me, Mrs. Bland."

The good-natured widow was all contrition, and
harmony was restored between the two. But you perceive that though Mrs. Bland is at some pains to point out the hole in her own stocking and stump about her wooden leg, she does not care that any one else should do so for her. I am not surprised she should resent the slighting tone adopted by Algy’s wife when referring to the Reverend Mrs. Archibald Middleton, because I know the relict is proud of the good match Sophy has made. The Rector of Slippersly is a much better husband than the Curate of Farnorth promised to be; he is very fond of his pretty wife, and a devoted paterfamilias to his lately arrived son and heir, a young gentleman only remarkable at present for the mobility of his features and the strength of his lungs. Sophy is greatly admired in the Middleton circles, in spite of that dairymaid colour reprobated by her sisters-in-law, and her husband’s family are all beginning to admit that Archibald might have done worse. I think it is more than probable that Mrs. Bland, and her coadjutor, Mrs. Jellybags, will shortly have to busy themselves with another wedding breakfast. There is not much matrimonial pasturage at Farnorth, but the widow’s daughters seem to possess the art of cropping what verdure there is. Lucy
is engaged to young Newcome, who is a partner now with Dr. Banques. The unmarried belles of the district are very much disgusted. They stigmatise Mrs. Bland, and affix opprobrious names to her. They say she is an old spider who weaves traps to snare all the innocent flies that come to the town. They pity this last entangled fly very much, but he seems to me remarkably well satisfied with the web that surrounds him.

But Lucy's engagement, and the widow and all her belongings, are matters of great insignificance compared to the excitement the approaching return of the Baronet and his bride is creating in Farnorth. The housekeeper has already received written orders from the young Lady Plantagenet to have everything in readiness for the large party of friends who are to accompany herself and the Baronet to Plantagenet Park; her young ladyship has utterly ignored the presence of the elder one in the directions she has given. The servants' hall is once more very busy. "Two queen bees will never do in one hive," the butler, who is figurative in his language, declares. "Young Lady Plantagenet is no Methody," the maids say; "she scarcely ever went to church at all before she was married; she'll never do with all this fasting and
praying.” [The fasting, I must observe, is a pure invention on the part of the lady who made this last observation. The dowager has introduced no new dietary regulations into the household.] When the mistress of the salle communicated to the baronet’s mother the instructions she had received from the young Lady Plantagenet, that once all paramount lady did not offer any remark whatever. “She means to give up as meek as a lamb,” the châtelaine informs her underlings. “There never was a haughtier lady than she used to be, and that only a month or two ago, and now she might be flesh and blood like werselfs,” she adds with the latent satire of her species.

Farnorth is very curious to know who these fine visitors are for whom such grand preparations are being made; and the rustic belles are longing to see the new fashions which the young queen will import from Paris. Poor Miss Benton’s “latest spring novelties,” have this season been a dead failure; her bonnets, mantles, and dresses, are all distrusted; no one will purchase anything from the local Madame Tournure until they have seen the costumes worn by Clara, Lady Plantagenet. Giles Houndly, Esq., has scattered her continental triumphs perseveringly about the
town; he declares she has turned all Paris crazy.

"At a ball given at the Tuileries, sir," Giles says, "the Emperor was so much attracted by Mr. Silvester's daughter, sir. [I always said that if he had seen her before he married the handsome Spaniard, Eugénie might have quaked for her present position.] And it seems, ahem! that the Emperor was so struck by Lady Plantagenet, and paid her so much attention, that the Empress was jealous, and left the room in a pet. That's between you and me, sir: I should not like it to go any further."

Of course very few people believed any of Boswell's rhodomontade. Still it would appear from all accounts that Clara has, indeed, succeeded in planting her fulcrum in a satisfactory manner.
CHAPTER VI.

In the handsomest room of the handsomest hotel in mighty London, breakfast is being served. Delicacies from every clime have been gathered together to form that morning meal. Strasbourg pâtés, Russian caviare, and other foreign dainties, fraternise amicably with the insular rarities which are gracefully arranged on the damask cloth.

There are only two persons seated at this well-filled board, and they have been accustomed for so many weeks now to all kinds of hotel splendour, that this metropolitan magnificence is a good deal lost upon them. These two blasé listless sybarites for whom cooks and waiters have laboured in vain, are Lady Mortimer Plantagenet and her husband. I say Lady Mortimer Plantagenet and her husband advisedly; the Baronet is rarely spoken of in any other way now; into that subordinate position has Monseigneur fallen. Two or three months ago Lady Plantagenet had received letters from her
son, detailing with delight the Parisian triumphs of his beautiful bride; he was satisfied to shine with a reflected light then; but he is weary of mere lunar notoriety now. Sir Mortimer has, so to speak, held his wife’s opera-cloak in nearly every capital in Europe; and this subordinate rôle is becoming exceedingly distasteful to him. He has struggled to assert his prerogative, but he has hitherto struggled in vain; he is simply Lady Mortimer Plantagenet’s husband; and simply Lady Mortimer Plantagenet’s husband he must be contented to remain.

The chains of wedlock begin to press heavily on the Lovelace of Foxcroft; and yet, as I have said, it was no false oath the Baronet swore on that day when admiring Farnorth witnessed the royal marriage. Sir Mortimer was as much in love with the woman who plighted her troth to him, as it was possible for him to be with any one. But was that love at all likely to be an evergreen that no marital tempest or snowstorm could ever uproot or wither? I think not. Such sturdy plants are very rare, and the soil of Monseigneur’s heart is not suited to their growth. It was, alas! no hardy shrub that the beauty and manifold attractions of Algy’s daughter had forced
into bloom, but only a feeble exotic—and already many of its leaves litter the ground. The fickleness of his majesty is not entirely to blame for this early autumn. A healthier flower than that the Baronet had presented to his wife might have sickened and died, as it has done. No ray of womanly sympathy has rested on the poor frail thing. Cold contempt and icy indifference have blighted its most promising buds. Clara, Lady Plantagenet, has in her arrogance trampled down as a worthless weed the fairest produce of her conjugal garden.

Algy's daughter is assuredly not a model wife. She reigns an absolute queen abroad and at home. She asserts her superiority at all times over the king-consort; she makes very free with the funds of the royal treasury. Some strong words have been exchanged between the newly-married pair on this subject; but the beautiful lady paramount has always been triumphant in these encounters. The gibes and sneers with which Sir Mortimer had tortured poor Miss Winifred, have no effect whatever when employed against his handsome helpmate. Clara breaks down his majesty's best guard with the fatal bodkin which is held in such terror by the tailor's grandson; her merciless use
of this weapon has lent its aid in strewing the leaves of the Baronet's dying love on the ground.

But if that poor plant is fading in the marital atmosphere, the beauty which first called it into bloom has lost nothing of its dazzling splendour. Clara, Lady Plantagenet, is as lovely as Clara Silvester was four months ago. Our rustic belles will be driven to desperation when they see the new coiffure my lady has imported from Paris. Clara's luxuriant hair is arranged in that fashion introduced by the most beautiful woman in Europe, and the style is very becoming to the classical line of her features. Miss Benton would be seized with spasms of despair, and be disposed to throw up her business in disgust, if she could see the elegant morning dress worn by Algy's daughter. How she would execrate those "latest spring novelties" which she had exhibited with so much pride only a month ago! Our modish misses were wise to distrust those rococo productions; it is well they have not invested in such provincial delusions; it is well they have delayed the making up of their best silk dresses until the return to Farnorth of Clara, Lady Plantagenet; for even Madame Tournure's choicest works of art would be eclipsed by the exquisite costumes the young
queen of our district will shortly exhibit to her admiring subjects.

Noiseless waiters, shod with the shoes of silence, are removing the home and foreign dainties. Very few syllables have passed between the royal pair; and but little inroad has been made on the delicacies which are now rapidly vanishing from the snowy damask.

Sir Mortimer's appearance has not improved with foreign travel. The last few months have done the work of years upon his handsome face. He is much thinner; the pale unwelcome intruders in his dark hair have gained strength and number, and there is a nervous movement about his lips, and a restless uneasy fire in his eyes, I never observed during his bachelor days. He has eaten even less breakfast than his wife, and has tossed about the costly viands in a discontented manner. He has mentally calculated how much he will be called upon to pay for the princely banquet and the fine room wherein it has been served. Monseigneur's mind has been busy very often lately with similar bourgeois calculations. My lady always insists on frequenting the most expensive establishments. My lady always insists on joining in the most expensive amusements.
Nothing but golden galleys will suit this magnificent Cleopatra, and for the golden galleys Monseigneur has to pay, and very dearly too. Her ladyship’s splendid appointments, her carriages, her dress, her jewels, have attracted almost as much attention in continental cities as her marvellous beauty. The light that has fallen upon her husband from all this magnificence has become odious to him, and no wonder. Those liberal remittances which Algy has forwarded at different times to his handsome daughter have not greatly benefited his noble son-in-law. They may have slightly lessened the agony of the jeweller’s account, but they have not assuaged the torture of the hotel bills. Sir Mortimer shudders to think of the reckless expenditure of the last few months. He shudders to think of the sums of money likely to follow those already dissipated. He would have returned home long before this, but for the persistent resistance of her ladyship. No persuasion could induce my lady to leave the continent until she had exhausted all its fashionable resources. At length the happy pair are en route for the north, but this fact does not bring the satisfaction to the mind of the Baronet that might reasonably be expected. In the calm seclusion of Foxcroft
he sees a vista of golden galleys and banquets of pearls. My lady has invited a large party of fashionable friends to her northern dominions—butterflies, whose sunshine is the perpetual glitter of wax candles—butterflies who look for summer flowers amid snow and hoar frost—butterflies, in short, who are expensive guests to entertain, but who are not the less welcome to her ladyship on that account. Sir Mortimer is aware that his lady-love has already issued her orders for the proper reception of her friends, and the unhappy Baronet knows very well what that proper reception means, and what it will involve. A hideous phantasmagoria of figures dances for a while before his eyes, and then arranges itself into a sum total that absolutely appals him as he sinks back in despair in his velvet-covered chair.

My lady is sublimely unconscious of the sums in compound addition that her lord is working out in this dismal fashion—her fine eyes are fixed on one column of the ‘Times’—she is eagerly reading every syllable of that portion of the newspaper which is devoted to the details of the Russian war. If the Baronet were not so absorbed in his mental arithmetic, he might observe the many changes which flit over the beautiful face of his wife, as
the glowing leaders rivet her attention; but the Baronet is too busy with his pounds, shillings, and pence to be aware of anything else. He is rallying a little now—he is dividing the sum total with one or two figures from the profits of the Weasle Mine—and the quotient is much more endurable than the original array of figures. Her extravagant ladyship is after all the only child and heiress of the richest man in Farnorth, and there is so much consolation in the thought, that something of his bachelor devotion lingers in the accents of the married Lovelace as he suddenly addresses his sovereign lady—.

"Do you know what time it is, my dear Clara? The train starts at ten—and—"

"I have not decided whether I shall travel north to-day," her ladyship says, impatiently, as she looks at her jewelled repeater.

"But, my dear girl," remonstrates the henpecked monarch, "it was arranged yesterday that we were to leave London to-day."

"The Viscount has written to say he is uncertain whether he can accompany us by this morning's train. I have no fancy for a matrimonial tête-à-tête for nearly three hundred miles, and so I shall regulate my movements by those of my

H 2"
cousins; but that need not interfere with you, of course."

The Baronet struggled manfully to suppress his indignation.

"Do you know that my mother expects us at Foxcroft this evening?" he said as calmly as he could.

"Oh, pray don't, if you please," Clara replied, with a deprecating shudder. "The mere mention of the name of the Dowager Lady Plantagenet totally unnerves me. My very dreams are disturbed by visions of her ladyship and the grim shadow she has chosen to attach to her royal person; some connection, I believe, is she not?" she added in the most innocent manner possible.

Sir Mortimer muttered a plebeian exclamation, but he did not make any reply to her ladyship's last query. He rose and rang the bell violently, and then he spoke a few words to his wife quietly enough, though his voice shook with suppressed agitation.

"I do not intend to disappoint my mother," he said, "but as you wish to travel with your cousins, the delay of a day or two is of no consequence as far as your return to Foxcroft is concerned. Send my servant to me," he said hastily, discharging some of his impatience at the mild waiter who had answered his summons.
The valet was quickly in attendance.

"Order a carriage to be at the door in a quarter of an hour, and be in readiness to attend me; her ladyship and her maid remain here until tomorrow."

The Baronet strove to deliver these instructions in an easy unembarrassed tone, but he was not altogether successful.

"Your filial piety is really charming," Clara said, when she and her ill-used husband were once more alone. "The patriarchal simplicity of our ménage will be something delightful—two generations abiding together in holy harmony. Let me see—there is my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law, and what did you say my other new relative was?"

"To whom do you refer?" demanded the Baronet, trembling with passion.

"Why, to whom should I refer, but to the all-powerful Mrs. Boyne, whose influence appears to have transformed Foxcroft into a dwelling-house for saints? Are you surprised that I—sinner as I proclaim myself to be—should hesitate to intrude my wicked presence into that blessed community? Do you wonder that I should be curious to know what affinity I bear to the pious and all-powerful
reformer? Tell me, is she my cousin-in-law, or my aunt-in-law, or what she really is?"

"I have told you more than once that Mrs. Boyne is simply my mother's maid, and was many years ago my nurse—but—"

"I know you have told me so very often," interposed her ladyship; "but I have always been rude enough to disbelieve you. I want you to tell me the whole truth. You have no occasion to conceal anything from me. I am aware of your sensitiveness on one subject, your foolish sensitiveness I must term it, for after all it is not your fault that your maternal grandfather was only—"

The tortured monarch rose hastily, and flung a murmured oath or too at his wife as he rushed from the room.

Was I in error when I said that a healthier affection than that which had grown in Monseigneur's heart for Algy's handsome daughter, might have perished in such an atmosphere? When the door had closed on her angry lord and master, the mocking satirical smile faded from Clara's lips, as we have seen it die away before. It was replaced by a look far more wan and dreary than that it had worn in those apartments
in Noname Street, when first this beautiful woman was introduced to the reader. Is she any happier than she was in those mountebank days? If you saw her at this moment you would not say so. She has triumphed in that war of words lately waged with the man she had promised to love, honour, and obey; but her laurels do not give her any pleasure.

My lady had, in my opinion, behaved very badly in that marital conflict. She had insulted her husband most gratuitously. Sir Mortimer had not said one word to justify the punctures he had received, and why had he been submitted to such rough discipline? The unfortunate royal consort had presented himself as a target for his haughty queen’s arrows at a moment when her thoughts were wandering into that forbidden land, where they so often stray now. Clara’s heart was beating in unison with the grand words which chronicled a noble deed done by one of England’s sons. Horace Snowe’s name had been more than glanced at in the official report from the East, and the soldier’s daring was made the subject of one of that day’s leaders. The noble accountant little dreamt at what an inopportune moment he had clanked the nuptial chains, or he might perhaps
have occupied himself with his compound addition and division for some time longer.

And now the newspaper is again raised in the small white hands. Again the fine eyes are fixed on that record, whose bright and glorious colours pale for that moment the red hand and the Plantagenet estate to a dull grey hue. Alas! unhappy Baronet, if your fine belongings lose their roseate tint when submitted to such a test, what chance have your poor glass beads, your tinsel, and your tawdry trappings? Algy's daughter was never dazzled by those stage properties even when the glare of society's lamp showed them to the best advantage, is it likely she will be deluded by them now when the noonday sun of every day intercourse has betrayed all their trumpery make-believes and gaudy false seemings? And yet she is now mercilessly placing the cut-glass next to the diamond without a flaw; the tinselled calico near the jewelled cloth of gold. Clara is drawing comparisons between the man to whose destiny she has linked herself, and that other from whom she has for ever removed herself now; and the contempt which she has always felt for her husband becomes almost hatred as she thus contrasts him with the only being who has ever yet
Visit of Fashionable Friends.

had power to awaken any womanly tenderness within her. If the marital chain already presses heavily on the still slightly enamoured Baronet, how much more must it gall and chafe the haughty woman on this morning, when the old feeling has returned with renewed force, and even the title and estate she has married become almost worthless in her eyes. If she had waited for some little time longer. If ——

"Visitors for Lady Plantagenet!"

The motley is rapidly donned; the gay mask assumed; my lady is charmed; my lady is enchanted to welcome her fashionable friends at such an early hour; and the fashionable friends reciprocate the cordial tone. The posture making is so graceful and natural, that no one would suspect any of the cramps and tortures that sometimes follow on these elegant contortions.

The fashionable friends are delighted to hear that their dear Lady Plantagenet is going to remain a day or two longer in London. Clara is excessively popular amongst the gay votaries of fashion. There is to be a grand gathering at one of the temples of La Mode on that morning; a second in the afternoon; a third in the evening. The fashionable croupier does not allow his players
much time for contemplation. "The ball is rolling—make your game, ladies and gentlemen."

[Ah me! Clara, Lady Plantagenet, is the game you are making, worth all the candles you have even now consumed.]

Monseigneur enters the room to speak some graceful words of parting to the wife of his bosom: not a trace of the conjugal storm lingers on his handsome face as he dispenses some airy nothings to the assembled butterflies; and yet the noble accountant has had his powers of endurance very severely tried, for the hotel bill has been presented to him, and its sum total has bravely accounted for the fine rooms and the princely banquets.
CHAPTER VII.

There was a considerable hubbub in Farnorth when it was known in the town that the Baronet had returned to Foxcroft unaccompanied by his wife! What had happened? Had the young couple quarrelled hopelessly? Had my lady eloped with one of her foreign admirers? Would there be a case for the Judge Ordinary shortly? The Thomsons and the Browns were busy with all manner of conjectures and all manner of suggestions; they were not at all particular in what they said. "So it has come to this already!" Bessie Thomson cries, as she raises her pretty hands in pious horror. Well, even she had not expected such a sudden climax. The poor Baronet! All the young ladies in the neighbourhood are so very sorry for him; most of them have been slightly wounded in the royal battues. To think that he should have made such a fatal mistake—so handsome, so elegant, so charming, so exalted
in position as he was proclaimed by all his fair admirers to be. The Rachael of Grandly Manor, who had always been far more intolerant of the second Leah than the first, is made dismally happy by some of the local gossip which penetrates the aristocratic seclusion of her home, and poor willowed Adeline shares in her glee.

But Sir Mortimer knows nothing whatever of the interest and sympathy he is exciting; he has scarcely ever left the queen dowager's private sitting-room since he arrived at the palace. At all times, to give him his due, an attentive son, his marriage seems to have strengthened rather than lessened his filial affection. Never within the memory of the oldest retainers had Monseigneur from his earliest infancy passed so many hours alone with his mother as he has done since his return. I ought not, however, to have used the word "alone," because Rose Boyne has been present during the whole of these interviews. If any of the rebels in the servants' hall had hoped for the downfall of the royal favourite when Sir Mortimer appeared, they must be grievously disappointed now. His majesty of Foxcroft, so haughty and overbearing with all his other helots, had been positively affectionate in his welcome of his old nurse.
Those of the domestics who have seen the Dowager Lady Plantagenet within the last few hours declare there is already a marked change for the better in her appearance and bearing. The Baronet has been at home only a day and half; but I am sorry to say the matins and vespers have been neglected. The thoughtless flunkeys and the giddy maids draw favourable auguries from these signs and symptoms, and presage a speedy return of the old godless régime. They hail with delight the coming of the gay visitors to Foxcroft. My lady and her fashionable friends are expected to arrive on the morrow.

This last fact is now known in Farnorth, and all those promising young crowing chicks which the Browns and the Thomsons have hatched are lying dead. Giles Houndly, Esq., has destroyed several of them, and has been loud with indignant words, as he has wrung the neck of every separate scandal viciously. Sir Mortimer and his handsome wife have not quarrelled. My lady had not eloped with one of her foreign admirers. The Judge Ordinary would not be called upon to decide on any shameful question. It was only in such a wretched gossipping hole as Farnorth that such infamous stories would ever draw breath for a
moment, Giles declared. "Silvester's daughter is so handsome, sir, that all the women in the place from the time she first came here were ready to tear her eyes out for very jealousy. And now they would tear away her reputation if they could. Does that look very like quarrelling or Divorce Courts, sir?" he added, triumphantly, as the Plantagenet carriage rolled past in all its crimson splendour to meet my lady and her friends.

But if Giles is thus vigorous in his defence of the young sovereign, he is by no means equally loyal to the king consort. "Whatever mystery there is between the tailor's daughter and her so-called foster-sister, sir," he said, "the Baronet is cognisant of it."—[The master of Gothic Hall uses tall language sometimes, and never clips his words, as you may perhaps have observed].—"Nothing will make me believe, sir, that mere regard for the woman who nursed him alone influenced his reception of her. They say, ahem! that Rose Boyne has complete sway at Foxcroft, sir. She will be taught a different lesson in the course of a few hours, you may be very certain."

There were many eager faces gazing from the windows of some of the Farnorth houses as the
Plantagenet carriage returned from the railway station. Even Bessie Thomson had stationed herself at some loophole where she could see and not be seen, and had a good stare at the beautiful young queen of Foxcroft seated in her car of triumph. My lady's new coiffure was not lost upon the spectators.

"She looks bolder than ever," Bessie Thomson said. "She has dragged her red hair off her face, and set herself up, forsooth, to imitate the beautiful Empress of the French. Just like her insolence." But Bessie spent an hour that evening in trying to twist her black hair into something of the same fashion, in spite of her savage animadversions.

* * *

The Plantagenet carriage has reached the noble portico of Foxcroft, and my lady and her fashionable friends have alighted.

Clara's proud heart throbs with triumph as she leads her guests through the line of serfs stationed in the fine old hall of the palace. Perhaps she had never before so fully realised her exalted position. Gratified ambition overthrew sentimental regrets, and the heavy nuptial chain was a light gossamer bondage as she acknowledged the humble curtseys and reverential bows which greeted her on every side.
The Baronet advanced gracefully forward to welcome his beautiful wife and her aristocratic relatives. The royal pair have always hitherto kept up appearances in public.

"My mother is in the drawing-room; she is very anxious to see you, Clara," Sir Mortimer said, after he had exchanged the usual courtesies with his guests.

My lady made a movement of impatience. Already the cloud had appeared to obscure her Italian sky. She did not immediately reply to her husband.

"You will like to go to your rooms at once," she said to her cousins; "and you too, Viscount. Railway dust is no respecter of persons. Is it absolutely necessary, Sir Mortimer, that I should present myself in this travel-stained condition to your mother?" she added, coldly.

"She is anxious to see you," the Baronet repeated, as he offered her his arm, and bowed politely to the aristocrats, who were being led away by obsequious attendants to their different chambers of state.

Sir Mortimer did not speak one word to his handsome helpmate as he passed with her through the corridor leading to the room where the
Dowager Lady Plantagenet was waiting to receive her son's wife.

The drawing-room of Foxcroft was *en grande tenue*. No holland bag obscured the glories of the lustrous chandeliers; no chintz coverings eclipsed the sheen of the satin damask; no filmy muslin concealed the gilded beauty of the frames which shrined the many mirrors; but the splendour of this holiday toilette was scarcely seen by Algy's daughter as she was hurried unwillingly towards that pale figure lying on the couch near one of the large satin-draped windows.

The invalid lady was not alone. The favourite was in attendance and stationed close to her royal mistress. When, indeed, are these two women ever separate? Whatever bond of union there may once have been between them seems indissoluble now. They have met together after the sundering of many years; widowed and prematurely old, their beauty broken on the rocks of passion, tempest tossed by sickness, and well nigh submerged beneath the waves of time. They have met again, the mistress and the maid, thus outwardly changed and faded, and yet the friendship of their girlhood has lost nothing of its strength and comeliness—it is fair and vigorous as ever.

*VOL. III.*
The dowager raised herself slightly as her daughter-in-law appeared, and nothing could be more gracefully affectionate than the reception she extended to her. She did not speak many words, but those few syllables she did utter were so elegantly significant of her resignation of the crown and sceptre, that even the arrogant new queen felt some slight thrill of admiration for the woman who abdicated her throne with so much dignity.

"And now I have a favour to ask of you, my dear Clara," the dowager said, after she had placed the crown on the head of the young sovereign. "I have to solicit your favourable notice for a very dear friend of mine. Come forward, Rose, and let me present you to my son's wife. Rose is my foster-sister, and was your husband's nurse, my dear Clara; it is my earnest wish to retain her near me as long as I live, but she is shy and sensitive, and fears her presence in the house may not be agreeable. I want you, my dear, to assure her of the contrary, and so does Mortimer—don't you, Mortimer?"

The mother-in-law, who during the ceremony of abdication had been so gracefully composed in her speech and manner, now spoke with a nervous eagerness very painful to hear.
"I am certainly anxious that an old friend so deservedly dear to us as Rose Boyne, should never have occasion to think her presence in my house could be anything but welcome to every inmate of it," said Monseigneur, sententiously, and speaking and looking more like a sovereign lord and master than he had ever done since his marriage.

His foot was on his native heath, you know; and he no doubt wished his wife to understand that his name was now Macgregor.

Clara simply honoured the valiant chieftain and his mother with a stare of surprise, and then she fixed her eyes on the woman for whose benefit this little tableau was being enacted.

There was not much in the appearance of the favourite to rivet long the attention of Algy's daughter. The waifs and strays of her charms were still made the most of—and in this respect you might observe a distinguishing difference between the mistress and the maid. The dowager seemed contented to drift calmly away from the wreck of her beauty; Rose Boyne clung to every frail spar of her's with the tenacity of drowning despair. Her dress was this day more carefully arranged than ever. Shy and sensitive as she was represented to be, she did not seem in
the least oppressed by the scrutiny to which she was submitted by the new sovereign. Her black eyes returned the gaze of the violet ones with interest, and she was the first to break the interval of silence that followed on the Baronet's pompous speech.

"I have had the honour of seeing your ladyship before to-day," she said, in her soft fawning accents. "It was only for a few moments, but your ladyship's face is not one easily forgotten."

Clara frowned slightly, as though haughtily protesting against a continuance of this address, but she did not make any other acknowledgment of it.

"Your ladyship had not such a beautiful colour, I think, then as you have now," continued the favourite. "The first time I had the honour of observing her young ladyship, my lady," she added, turning to her mistress, "was on that morning the temperance meeting was held in Plantagenet Park; I was passing the Lodge at Becklands just as her ladyship was coming out of the Laurel Walk there."

Algy's daughter stood as if suddenly transfixed to stone. The valet's widow, to all appearance unconscious of the effect produced by her inoppor-
tune words, leant over the couch of the invalid, and with her usual stealthy gentleness arranged some of the pillows. The Baronet was the next to speak.

"Were you at Farnorth then, Rose?" he asked, with some surprise. "Why did you not come at once to Foxcroft?"

"My lady knows what prevented me. I sprained my ankle, Sir Mortimer, just after I had seen your beautiful lady. I was laid up for a week, and when I was able to move again you had gone to Harrogate. I tried to follow you there, but I was seized with that dreadful illness. I really did think at one time I should never see my lady and you again, Sir Mortimer."

A keen observer might have detected an expression in Monseigneur's gipsy face suggestive of a suspicion that such a sequence to her illness as that indicated by his old nurse, would not have been altogether unacceptable to him; but his manner was as affectionate as ever when next he addressed her.

"Your fears were groundless, as you see, my dear Rose," he said, as he took her hand for a moment in his patrician palm. "And now, since you have seen my ogress of a wife, do you think
she will banish you from her castle?” he added, with rather awkward playfulness.

“I’m sure I don’t know; her young ladyship seems to shrink away from me, as, indeed, Sir Mortimer, every one else does; perhaps it would be better for me to go away—perhaps—”

“For God’s sake, do not whisper an intention of anything of the kind!” cried her mistress, rising from her couch in the violence of her agitation. “Mortimer, speak to her! If Rose leaves me I shall die. Clara, it is the first and only favour I shall ever ask you. Assure my dear friend that she is mistaken. Do tell her that she will ever be welcome here.”

The stupor which had fallen on Algy’s daughter when that chance reference to the day of her uncle’s death was made now yielded to surprise. Who, and what was this woman, whose influence had power to awaken the old baronet’s widow from all the lethargic torpor of fine-ladyism? Clara had not time to follow out this train of thought; she was again energetically called upon to speak by her mother-in-law.

“I really am at a loss to understand you, Lady Plantagenet,” she said, at last; “you are of course at liberty to select your own personal attendant;
it must be a matter of perfect indifference to me."

"But Rose is my friend and companion, Clara," pleaded the poor invalid lady, whose worn and haggard face, and nervous broken voice, would have aroused some feeling of pity in anything save a caryatid, or Algy's daughter. "I do not wish you to look upon Rose in the light of a servant. My earliest recollections are associated with her. She was a most devoted nurse to my son, and—"

"Oh, please, my lady, say no more to her young ladyship," remonstrated the friend and con-fidante. "Do not agitate yourself on my account. I never expected Lady Plantagenet would ever look upon me in any other light than that she evidently does; but she says my presence here is a matter of perfect indifference to her, and so, if you and Sir Mortimer still wish me to remain—"

"You may be perfectly assured of that, my dear Rose," interposed the Baronet, in a tone not the least resembling his own, "and so we will con-sider the matter finally settled. I am sure you will never distress my mother again by hinting at a possibility of your leaving her, and I will take care that every inmate of my house makes you as welcome to its hospitality as I do."
This second edition of the Macgregor on his native heath aroused rebellion in the heart of the chieftainess, and Clara, Lady Plantagenet, was herself again when she rose to take her leave.

"Since this momentous matter is so decided," she said, as satirically as need be, "perhaps I may be allowed now to retire. I presume I shall see you at dinner, Lady Plantagenet?"

"My mother has no great fancy for mingling amongst strangers," the chieftain said, "and she has decided upon strict privacy during the stay of all these people."

"Under such circumstances I fear her ladyship's seclusion from the world is likely to extend over an indefinite period," replied the sovereign lady of Plantagenet Park and its master. "My friends have kindly promised to have compassion on me during the whole period of my banishment. I hope there will not be a room in Foxcroft unoccupied by the end of the week. Your apartments are in the wing of the house I believe, Lady Plantagenet, and so your placid retreat will not be disturbed by any of our noisy amusements."

The queen mother had to put a great stress upon herself to reply quietly to this speech. She had already in those long private interviews with
her son listened to some bitter complaints launched by the lately married Baronet against his haughty wife, and she now saw that the Benedict had not groaned without good reason; and yet she controlled her own imperious temper, and answered her overbearing daughter-in-law calmly. She had registered a vow to bear anything and everything rather than separate herself from her only child, and I think she is acting up to that determination.

"My rooms are, as you say, far removed from any of these apartments," she said, after a moment's interval. "I shall not interfere in the least with either your friends or your amusements, my dear Clara. I am a wretched invalid—more so than ever now—and I should be sadly out of place amongst all your gay companions. Mortimer will, I know, be a pretty constant visitor to my retreat; but I cannot either hope or expect you will care to enter my sick room. I wished very much to see you, and it is on that account only you have found me here to-day."

Clara did not make any answer to this speech, but she inclined her head with some graciousness to her mother-in-law, as she glided gracefully from the presence-chamber. She did not, however, glance even for an instant in that direction where
Rose Boyne was standing with her hands meekly folded; had she done so, she would have seen a sinister gleam in the dark eyes of the favourite which might have startled even her bold heart.

There were a great number of guests assembled to partake of this first dinner given by the queen of Foxcroft and her consort. Invitations had been forwarded to all the mightiest of our barons ten days previous to the return of the royal family.

Algy occupied the post of honour next to his cousin the Viscount, and Mrs. Silvester, magnificent in velvet, point-lace, and diamonds, was distributed amongst the three honourable misses. Algy had been at the railway station to meet his daughter, and his delight at seeing her had been unbounded. She was grown handsomer than ever, he declared with a great many more oaths than were necessary. His aspirations after square-toed respectability have not as yet cleansed his conversation from those foul stains.

The major-domo and housekeeper of Foxcroft have both of them very creditably carried out the commands of their young mistress. It is no Barmecidal repast over which my lady presides. Algy himself could not have collected together a greater
number of expensive luxuries. The Baronet's heart sinks as he makes more *bourgeois* calculations. We know that under the old dynasty glitter and tablecloth atoned, or were expected to atone, for rather meagre fare. Now, the costly dainties, buried in the gorgeous silver dishes are worthy their magnificent mausoleums. The Sultan gives an approving nod as he sips his wine; it is of the best vintage, my lady has taken care of that. My lady will take care that whatever money can purchase will not be found wanting in any part of her regal establishment.

And now the foot-lights are out and the boxes empty, and my lady in the privacy of her dressing-room is giving time and thought to the working out of that problem which had been placed before her in the presence-chamber. All her ingenuity is powerless to add the satisfactory Q. E. D. to this difficult proposition. Again and again she asks herself who and what that woman can be whose subtle influence over the baronet's mother has for years provided Farnorth with gossip. Is Rose Boyne a near relation of the tailor's daughter? Clara is inclined to think so, but even the holy dread entertained by the dowager and her son
for the shears and cabbages would not account for the extraordinary power possessed over them both by the valet's widow. What is it then? The shrewd judgment of Algy's daughter can find no answer to this question. She dismisses with the contempt they deserve all those hazy conjectures and wicked inuendoes to which the master of Gothic Hall has striven to give vitality at different times. "Ahem! persons, sir, have been taken up for murder on less suspicions than those which attach to Lady Plantagenet," Giles has said in these pages. Who but Mr. Houndly would have dared to breathe so foul a scandal? What was there in any of the circumstances attending the death of Miss Winifred's eldest brother that could in the slightest degree implicate the step-mother? What was there indeed in any of them that could even implicate the dead man's valet? Frederick Plantagenet had perished in the presence of the whole crew on board the ship where the accident occurred; and yet because Boyne, a foreigner with but very little knowledge of the English language, had broken down in his evidence when submitted to a fierce fire of cross-examination at the judicial inquiry, reports had cropped up (germinated entirely by the master of Gothic
Clara's Determination.

Hall) which had flung a veil of black mystery over the melancholy end of the old baronet's ill-used son. No one with any powers of reasoning would have given credence to such rumours, and as I have said, Clara dismissed them all with contempt. The secret power possessed by the favourite has no connection whatever with the death of Frederick Plantagenet—of that Algy's daughter is convinced. Eleanora's influence over the haughty Marie of Foxcroft existed long before that period, but what that influence is, there is not the slightest evidence as yet to show.

Clara has already conceived an aversion for her mother-in-law's friend and confidante. There is a feline stealthiness about this woman—a sinister hypocrisy which has affected my lady during that short interview with her, much more than she would condescend to own, and the insurgents in the servants' hall would rejoice if they knew the firm determination their young sovereign has formed to bring about the banishment of the unpopular favourite from the palace.
CHAPTER VIII.

Not even in the best days of the late baronet—those palmy days when the Plantagenet sun was in the meridian of its splendour, and a royal personage entertained at Foxcroft—not even in those days had the walls of that ancient tenement reverberated to the sound of so many patrician voices as they do now. My lady’s guests have arrived; all the state bed-rooms are tenanted by aristocratic visitors, and the dormitories apportioned to their vassals and serfs are filled to overflowing. Cleopatra’s reign of magnificence has, indeed, commenced at Plantagenet Park; the weeds grow pale with spite as they dilate upon the golden galleys and the banquets of pearls. Nearly every inhabitant of Farnorth is a weed now. Algy’s daughter has cleared her social parterre more rigorously than ever since her marriage. Some ambitious Farnorthites, who had been tolerably intimate with Clara Silvester, have left their cards
on Clara, Lady Plantagenet, and have brought degradation on their heads by so doing. My lady has swept past the owners of the pasteboards with as slight an acknowledgment of any previous acquaintance with them as their best friends could possibly desire. There is no word in the English language sufficiently strong to express the bitter feeling entertained by the town against their new and beautiful sovereign. It is not only a strict regard for *les convenances* which will protect her majesty from the rievers now. The Dowager Lady Plantagenet is spoken of in quite favourable terms. Her reign was a reign of *égalité* and *fraternité* when compared to this; her haughtiness was affability itself when opposed to the insolent arrogance of the queen regnant. “Oh, how very different it would have been if pretty Miss Zoé had married the Baronet!” the uprooted ones repeat again and again; “how different it would have been if her poor papa had lived! how different it would have been if this parcel of adventurers had never come to the neighbourhood!”

But the beautiful queen knows nothing of this disaffection amongst her subjects, and, I am afraid, she would have cared very little if she had known
it. She has quite enough to occupy her mind at present—every hour of the day is devoted to some fresh amusement. Riding parties, driving parties, skating parties, croquet parties, dinner parties, follow each other in rapid succession. Private theatricals, charades, and *tableaux* are also very popular entertainments at Foxcroft.

Algy has never been so happy before in the whole course of his life. He joins in all the riding parties, all the croquet parties. His handsome daughter's triumphs are his triumphs. He watches with delight the admiring crowd who surround her. Gay cavaliers flutter about her, but the father observes with satisfaction she is discreetly distant to all. My lady intends to pay that black mail at least to society.

Whenever a southerly wind and a cloudy sky proclaim it a hunting morning, Nimrods and Dianas emerge from the court-yard of Foxcroft. The baronet's lovely wife never misses a meet. She is a splendid horsewoman, but Sir Mortimer is a timid rider, and seldom appears amongst the royal *cortège*. As my lady and her lady friends, with their attendant cavaliers, canter through our town, the Browns and Thomsons toss their heads indignantly, but they dare not say much. If the
Baronet does not always lend the sanction of his presence to my lady's riding parties, her father does. Algy never leaves his daughter's side one moment; the admiring knights may rally round their queen, but Algy is her shield and buckler. Scandal itself cannot pierce through the paternal ægis—it is powerless, though it longs to tear and rend to pieces the fair-haired Amazon, as savagely as the yelping pack she follows longs to tear and rend its miserable prey.

It is not only the sons of Albion, with their clear skins and tawny beards—the war in the Crimea has brought that hirsute blessing upon us, if it has brought nothing else—it is not native produce alone which fills the bachelor rooms at Foxcroft. Faces, embrowned with their southern sun; black heads, cropped so closely that the hair stands upright as stubble in a field; chins, lividly blue with the razor's cruel work; figures, ill made themselves, and clad in worse made garments; snub-noses, fringed with heavy wax-ended moustaches—all these foreign attractions abound amongst my lady's visitors. Farnorth looks scornfully on these Continental importations. The denizens of our hills and dales are still steeped in pre-Waterloo prejudices, in spite of l'entente cordiale so
paraded in every paper. All my lady’s Parisian guests are marquises or counts, or, at any rate, have the patrician prefix, *de*, attached to their patronymic; but Farnorth is insolently contemptuous of French titles. Farnorth is as surlily rude about poor polite Johnny Crapaud as John Bull sometimes is. Farnorth impertinently advocates the Monboddo doctrine whenever it discusses the harmless strangers. There is much more of the ape than the angel about Mossoo, Farnorth declares.

If I have but slightly glanced at the name of his majesty of Foxcroft, in my records of the gay doings there, it is because Monseigneur has played so unimportant a part in all those festivities. Even in his own palace, and amidst his own feudal retainers, the once-powerful monarch is only the husband of the beautiful Lady Plantagenet. My lady is the real sovereign. The king consort has striven harder than ever for supremacy. Matrimonial tournaments are of everyday occurrence. There is not a leaf remaining on the poor shrub forced into bloom some months ago. Whatever of verdure remained to it from my lady’s contempt and wilful extravagance, has been lightning-scathed by jealousy now. Sir Mor-
timer has found out the reason for his wife's daily study of a certain portion of the 'Times' newspaper. I think some Iago has assisted the noble Othello here: but, be that as it may, the Moor of Venice himself never evinced a more phrenzied jealousy of his supposed rival than Sir Mortimer does of his. Fierce quarrels have arisen out of my lady's reign of splendour; fiercer still out of the efforts she has persistently made to banish the favourite from the palace; but fiercest of all has been that cruel war of words which has grown from the fatal promptings of the green-eyed monster. The Baronet has had the best of it in this last mêlée. Algy's daughter has striven to parry each impetuous thrust from her half-maddened opponent with cold scorn and cutting irony; but her pulses have throbbed very thick and fast the while. Desdemona has defended the absent Cassio, and, with her usual candour, pronounced him to be a fine brave man, in whose welfare every woman in the land must take an interest; but her lips have paled, and the light in her eyes died out, even whilst she has spoken her bitter sneering gibes.

The butterfly guests know nothing whatever of any of these matrimonial skeletons. My lady is
all smiles in public, and the fashionable insects enjoy themselves very much at Foxcroft. The sun they delight in is perpetually shining, the flowers necessary for their existence always in bloom. There is no vulgar cloud of any kind to shadow their enjoyment.

The Dowager Lady Plantagenet has not mingled more than once or twice amongst the guests of her daughter-in-law, and I doubt whether she would have appeared at all had it not been for the urgent solicitations of the favourite. Eleanora does not approve of this total abdication of power on the part of her liege lady. Humble always in tone, and deprecating in every movement, she contrives nevertheless to impress a sense of mere viceregal authority on the baronet's haughty wife, whenever she addresses her. If the instinctive aversion originally conceived by the young sovereign for the friend and confidante of the queen mother, be on the increase daily, there is, to use a common saying, no love lost between my lady and the valet's widow. All Clara's efforts have been powerless to exile Rose Boyne from her Castle, but Sir Mortimer's old nurse is well aware of those efforts; she is well aware, too, of the contempt and annoyance which my lady has extended to her
lord, in lieu of the love, honour, and obedience she swore at the altar. The Baronet has not hidden his wedded sorrows from his affectionate dependent. And so it has come to pass that, amongst all the enemies which the pride and insolence of Algy's daughter has secured to her, not one amongst them is so implacably bitter as the meek-voiced personage whose noiseless omnipresence is becoming almost insupportable to the reigning queen of Foxcroft.

But if the valet's widow is thus unfavourably disposed towards the Lady paramount of Plantagenet Park, she is by no means on equally bad terms with that high and mighty lady's lady. An intimacy, almost amounting to friendship, has sprung up between the queen dowager's favourite and the young sovereign's mistress of the robes. Rose Boyne has been the cultivator of this amicable feeling; she has made no effort to overcome the prejudices of any other inmate of the servants' hall, but she has taken some pains to conciliate this one member, and has to a certain extent succeeded. Her slight softly-draped figure may be often seen emerging from the private sitting room, devoted to the personal attendant of Clara, Lady Platagenet. That haughty beauty is the
principal subject of conversation between the two maids during the séances they hold. My lady's lady lavishes not a little abuse on her arrogant mistress: "Never once has she spoken to me, but to give her orders, since with her I have been, Mrs. Boyne," the indignant soubrette complains; "my last lady was the wife of a belted Earl, and she always bade me good night as civil as you please; she never gave herself hany of the hairs my Lady Plantagenet does. She's no lady born and bred, it's my belief, with her nasty low ways, her lockings up, and her peerings, and her pryings. She always gets out her own joolry, and she wears the keys to her dressing case, and her desk, fastened to a chain she never takes off her neck; and do you call that real good breeding, Mrs. Boyne?" No; the valet's widow did not consider such conduct a proof of good breeding, and she sympathises with her companion; and so the harmony between them increases in tone every day.

Weeks pass, and still the revelry goes on at Plantagenet Park; some aristocratic visitors have left, but others have arrived to fill the rooms occupied by their predecessors. There has not
been a moment's lull in the dinner parties, concerts, private theatricals, *tableaux*, &c.; there has not been a momentary cessation of that golden shower which my lady has scattered about her so continuously since her marriage. More fierce conjugal quarrels have passed between the royal pair on this subject. Bills have sprung up, rank as weeds, in the tracks of my lady's car of triumph; bills, whose sum total has almost stopped the beating of Monseigneur's heart as his unhappy eyes have rested on it; bills, which have raised a marital storm that would have wrecked and submerged the best built life-boat ever launched by Hymen. Sir Mortimer has flatly refused the money to satisfy my lady's claimants, and Clara has been driven again to that harbour of refuge, the paternal bank.

Even Algy's face lengthened considerably when he heard what sum was expected to be forthcoming from his coffers, but he did not refuse the request.

"'Gad, Clarry, you *must* draw in, *ma fille,*" he said, as he handed her a cheque. "You cannot carry on the war at this rate; do you know how much money you have had from me since you married?—two thousand pound! By Jove, it won't do, *ma belle*; you *must* pull up."
Algy's remonstrances had no effect whatever on his daughter. Alone with him, my lady was exactly the Clara of old; and it was in that manner so familiar to us that she now replied. "Thank you for the cheque, but spare me the lecture, if you please; remember I am just come from a grand conjugal charge. I have no fancy for doing battle with you."

The candidate for square-toed respectability looked grave.

"I am sorry to hear you have had another row with the Baronet, Clarry. 'Gad! they will begin to cackle about it in Farnorth, ma fille. I wish," he said, with some little hesitation, "I wish you would consider your husband a little more than you do. You know, ma belle, that after all it is the duty of a wife to ——"

Clara interrupted him with a merry laugh.

"Pshaw, papa! do not attempt to play the heavy father; the part is not suited to you. Duty! how many years is it since you and I invested in that old-fashioned material, and how much is there of that stock remaining to us? Is it fresh enough to display in the windows? I think not."

"Well, but Clarry, you know," remonstrated
the would-be senator, "it don't do for husbands and wives to be always squabbling, and really, ma fille —-

"I have been trained in such a peaceful conjugal ménage, I ought to know better, I suppose. Bah! mon père, let us be honest with each other at any rate. We need not indulge in private theatricals, when there is no audience to applaud our paint and tinsel."

And so Algy did not venture to resume his lectures.

You must not imagine that Mrs. Silvester has been keeping silence all this time. Algy's wife is the last in the world to observe that admirable suggestion of the first Napoleon, with reference to a private laundry. My lady's reckless expenditure is very eloquently deplored by her mother. Mrs. Bland is growing weary of the dirge.

"She is even worse than her father," moans the Sultan of Becklands' better half. "I have never seen her in the same dress twice since she came home; and as to jewels!—my poor diamonds that Mr. Silvester made such a fuss about are nothing to those Clara wears, and they are not the Plantagenet ones I know; and then she has sets of rubies, and emeralds, and pearls, all as handsome
as handsome, and all bought out of my poor money, Mrs. Bland. Mr. Silvester gave her a cheque the other day, I'm quite sure; they were closeted together in the library, and I always know what that means. This second fine fortune I have brought my husband will go as the first did, and I shall be left a beggar," she cries piteously.

The relict murmurs a few incoherent words, and endeavours to turn the conversation, but her efforts are all in vain.

"If you could only see the dinners that are given at Plantagenet Park!" Mrs. Silvester continues; "but for the matter of that there is plenty of extravagant folly of that kind done at Becklands. I'm sure the money Mr. Silvester lavishes on expensive indigestible things, which, of course, I can't eat with my weak digestion, is enough to provoke a saint, and all to feed a parcel of people for whom one don't care a pin; and then to be spoken to, as crossly as I don't know what, whenever I ask for any of my own money to spend over my poor little fancies—and all the time to hear those nasty dogs yelping and yelping; and to know, as well as I do, how much it takes to make them yelp—and the horses and altogether—
you must say it is very hard. And now that Clara has taken that fine house in Park Lane, I have lost all pleasure in going up to London for the season. Who will have to pay for this grand palace that my daughter has engaged? Not the Baronet; for between you and I," whimpered the faulty grammarian, "my son-in-law is as mean as mean."

And now there is at length a lull in the revelry at Plantagenet Park. The London season has commenced, and the butterflies have flown away to sip the sweetness of metropolitan flowers. In two days, my Lady Plantagenet and her husband are to take their flight to their bower in Park Lane.

The happy pair are at present enjoying a domestic tête-à-tête. Sir Mortimer is pacing restlessly to and fro—his invariable custom after he has been closeted with the lady of his affections for ten minutes. The domestic tête-à-tête has evidently been conducted in the usual pleasant manner. There has been a marital storm, and now there is a very dangerous calm. More of those weeds which will spring up in the tracks of my lady's car of triumph have appeared, and have
met with a savage greeting. The battle of words has been well sustained on both sides, but Monseigneur has at length been made to bite the dust. My lady has shivered his best lances.

Wicked impish thoughts are running rampant in the heart and brain of the defeated Baronet, as he paces the tapestried floor. Cruel cowardly desires are flushing his cheek, and firing his fine black eyes. His majesty is more changed in appearance than ever now—thinner even than he was when last we saw him. The sulphured pheasants who dropped down at the royal sportsman's feet in the days of his glorious battues, would scarcely recognise him now; his brow is scored with lines, and his raven locks have enough to do to hold their own against their pale opponents. There is a negligence, too, in the arrangement of his dress, once so daintily cared for, which tells of a growing indifference to his handsome looks I should never have expected would arise in the Lovelace of Foxcroft.

My lady is a striking contrast to her royal consort. She is exquisitely dressed; her hair is so artistically arranged, it is a marvel to behold. Whatever inward wound she may have sustained
in the late conflict, there is no outward evidence of its pain. Algy's handsome daughter is altogether calm and unruffled, as the surface of Windermere on a July evening. She has, half in bravado, taken the newspaper in her hands. (Othello has fiercely endeavoured to smother Desdemona with jealous accusations, in the battle wherein he has been worsted.) She is haughtily parading before the tortured Baronet her interest in that portion of the 'Times' she always studies—it is altogether an affected interest at this moment. She has not read a line of the printed page before her. There has been a dearth of excitement in the news from the seat of war lately. The armies are still entrenched before Sebastopol. The great Czar is dead; but the death of the autocrat has been a matter of no consequence whatever in the eyes of Clara.

Monseigneur continues his uneasy walk; the impish thoughts grow each moment more rampant. Every now and then he glances at his wife, with such a glance of hatred in his eyes that it is terrible to see. My lady is unconscious of these connubial telegrams. A slight movement of her handsome shoulders alone betrays her irritation at the restlessness of her lord.
More fierce telegrams—still unanswered; the Baronet observes that the pretended student has all at once become really absorbed in the columns she is perusing. Her face is flushed; there is a nervous trembling about the corners of her mouth. The impish thoughts become full-grown devils, as Sir Mortimer watches these signs of interest in his haughty wife; he walks still more restlessly to and fro; suddenly he is arrested, a shrill cry of anguish rings through the room.

Algy’s daughter has fallen back in her chair; the paper has dropped from her hands. She has fainted dead away.
CHAPTER IX.

Sir Mortimer scarcely looked at his insensible wife; he made no effort to restore her; he did not summon any assistance, but with a prescient jealousy he seized the paper which had fallen from her hands.

He was so much excited that the words swam before his eyes, and he could not distinguish a letter in that column which his instinct at once sought. With a powerful effort he controlled his agitation, and now a frown contracts his brow as he reads the same stereotyped phrases which have latterly been the only news from the seat of war. "The siege works are pushed forward with great activity." "The railway from Balaclava to the English camp is far advanced." There are also the old complaints against the commissariat; the same bitter wailings about chilblains and frost-bites. The Baronet mutters impatient interjections, not one particle of sympathy does he feel
for the poor half-hungered frozen soldiers. Presently he starts convulsively, and a cruel light comes into his black eyes.

The war column has closed with a detail of the sortie of the 23rd of March. The gallantry of that little band which had dashed right into the Mortar Battery is dilated upon with rapture; but, alas! the usual fatal entry follows the triumphant trumpet blast of victory. The Baronet's cruel eyes flash wildly, and he can scarcely draw his breath.

Foremost in the most fatal entry of that fatal list is recorded the name of his hated rival—Captain Horace Snowe!

Sir Mortimer hurries from the room, still holding the paper which has conveyed this welcome news to him, in his trembling hands. As he passes his unconscious wife, he again glances at her, and this time with an uglier scowl than ever on his face.

The Baronet rushed impetuously along in the direction of his mother's apartments; he had not, however, advanced many steps, when he was met by the favourite who, indeed, has latterly seemed almost ubiquitous at Foxcroft.

"Lady Plantagenet has fainted. Go to her at
once, Rose, if you please. Don't stand staring, but go at once," he says hastily.

Sir Mortimer's agitation is so great, that even his manner to his old nurse is influenced by it.

The valet's widow did stand staring, in spite of her young master's somewhat arbitrary commands. She stood staring for a few moments, and then she glided rapidly and noiselessly forward, and entered the room where the still insensible young Lady Plantagenet was lying.

Five minutes have passed, and she is once more on the threshold. Again she walks hastily along. Now she quickens her stealthy pace to a run, and is quite out of breath when she appears in that sanctum where she and my lady's lady have held their conferences.

"Sir Mortimer is enquiring everywhere for you, Dixon," she gasped. "My Lady Plantagenet is ill. She has fainted, I believe, and Sir Mortimer wished me to go to her; but her ladyship dislikes me so much, I did not venture to intrude myself, and so——"

"My lady fainted!" cried Dixon. "Wonders will never cease. I should have thought she was about the last in the world to——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in the

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rush of crinoline that followed. When Dixon had disappeared, Rose Boyne closed the door of the room and went towards the window. In her hand she held one of those small pieces of wax which sempstresses employ in their mystic arts. It was soiled, and crossed and scored in some places with innumerable small lines. It did not seem to be an object deserving of much attention, and yet it was submitted to a very close scrutiny by the royal favourite. Not satisfied with her own unassisted eyes, she examined the disfigured ill-looking thing attentively for three or four minutes with a magnifying-glass; and then she folded it carefully in tissue-paper before she consigned it to the darkness of her pocket. After this strange proceeding she left the room in her usual quiet feline fashion.

My lady had recovered from her fainting fit when Dixon arrived to offer assistance. She was still deadly pale, and there was a wild scared look in her beautiful eyes; but she dismissed her waiting-maid with her customary arrogance.

All her self-possession was however powerless to hide the evidence of the suffering wrought by the few printed words, at dinner that day. There were many guests present. The royal pair never
by any chance took this meal alone. Algy was not one of the visitors. The Sultan of Becklands and his wife are in London; if Algy had dined at Foxcroft on this occasion, I think he would scarcely have known his daughter.

But if my lady sits white and still as though carved in marble, the Baronet this evening is no stone image. The king consort reigns an absolute monarch as he heads his board, and raises his voice right royally above those of his barons assembled there. The so lately taciturn Sir Mortimer is noisy almost to boisterousness; he has not talked in such a brilliant joyous manner for months.

Giles Houndly, Esq., is to-day a consumer of the many good things which are always to be met with at the palace since the last coronation; he is very frequently invited to the state banquets, much to the disgust of our townspeople, who are perpetually calling up the ghost of his barber grandfather in consequence. Giles has been compelled to eat his fish and soup in silence—and he is not gifted with that talent as we know; he has striven very hard for a conversational innings; he has attempted to bowl his coarse abject flattery, as it is his manner to do when at the Foxcroft enter-
tainments, but he has each time been hit away by the fine batting of Monseigneur. The master of Gothic Hall is obliged now to content himself with a very moderate fielding. At his right hand is seated Grandly of Grandly, as much of a refrigerator as ever; his left hand neighbour is a perfect stranger to him. To this last personage, a handsome young man, with something of a military air about him, Giles presently addresses himself.

"Seen the evening papers, sir? No? Ahem! a full account of that affair on the twenty-third. Much ado about nothing, sir, as it seems to me. Some poor devils of Russians sent to their last account, and just a hundred of our fellows disposed of. Ahem! one of our townspeople has come to grief there, sir. A sad thing, of course I do not mean to deny that; but the fact is, the local papers do make such a fuss about anything of the kind, that they positively warp one's sympathy, sir. Ahem! I expect to be perfectly nauseated with paragraphs glorifying the memory of our gallant young townsman," and the speaker emphasised these last words satirically, "Captain Horace Snowe."

"Horace Snowe a native of this place, do you
say?" enquired the stranger, with very consider-
able interest.

"Ahem! why, I suppose he is as much a native of this place as he is of any other," answered Giles. "No one, ahem! seems to know where he was born, sir; but at any rate all the world will be told where he has been killed."

"Killed!" cried his neighbour. "What do you mean? I heard from my brother only this morn-
ing—he is in the same regiment as Horace Snowe, and very fond of him, and he——"

"Snowe's name headed the list of killed in to-

day's paper, I know that, at any rate," said Giles, sulkily.

"It must be a mistake; Captain Snowe was wounded at that sortie on the twenty-third, but not dangerously. He is on his way home, I believe, and——"

"Sir Mortimer," cried Giles, struggling desper-
ately for an innings now, "Snowe is not killed, after all."

He had struck the wicket away with a vengeance this time.

The Baronet half rose from his chair.

"What do you say?" he said in a hollow voice.

"This gentleman has a brother in the same regiment, and he——"
"If any of Captain Snowe's friends have been distressed by this report," said the handsome stranger, "I am very happy to be able to remove their uneasiness. The entry of this morning is a false one, I am convinced."

There was a dead silence for some minutes after this remark. Three persons at table were the only ones present at all interested in this intelligence. Of these three persons the Baronet was the first who spoke.

"My acquaintance with the gentleman is so very slight," he said, haughtily, although his white lips shook at every word, "that I cannot really pretend to care whether this report be true or false."

"My acquaintance with him is not slight," said Giles's neighbour. "I am proud to call him my friend. There is not a more gallant fellow breathing than Horace Snowe."

The speaker was the second son of a most noble marquis. Every one at table was aware of this fact, with the exception of Giles Houndly, Esq. That gentleman not feeling any particular respect for a person who could so boldly avow his friendship for that legal outcast, the poor soldier, continued his conversation very much in the same style as he had commenced it.
"I think, sir, you can scarcely know the antecedents of this man of whom we have been speaking; I think——"

Giles would most assuredly have floundered into one of the stagnant ponds which were his natural element had not my lady interposed.

Algy's daughter looked and spoke now as she always looked and spoke. She was altogether unlike the pale, silent hostess, who had presided at the table ten minutes ago. The black gloom which overshadowed her had suddenly flown away, and settled grimly on the shoulders of Monseigneur. The Baronet scarcely opened his lips again during the whole of the evening; but my lady, after she had, with ready tact, rescued the master of Gothic Hall from the fate which threatened him, was her brilliant self again; and the last entertainment of the season given at Plantagenet Park was pronounced to be equal to any previous one.

The next day the royal pair departed for London.

Farnorth's occupation is well nigh gone. Becklands is quite untenanted, and Foxcroft will be altogether deserted in the course of a day or two. The queen dowager and the royal favourite are going to Harrogate.
Farnorth has only retrospective scandal to ruminate upon; but, to give our town its due, it makes the best of it, and chews the cud very industriously.

Algy had told his daughter—or rather warned her, I should have said—that the quarrels between her and her husband would soon become public property, and the Sultan of Becklands has proved himself to be no false prophet. Farnorth is perfectly cognisant of the royal duels. Back-stair gossip has helped them to this knowledge. Back-stair gossip has done more than this—it has hinted at the principal cause of these frequent battles. The human machines who minister to our wants so dexterously, are neither blind nor deaf, and alas! they are not mute. Back-stair gossip associates the soldier's name with some of the matrimonial tournaments. My lady's fainting fit—her pale, agitated appearance at the beginning of that last dinner, and the sudden change effected in her before the end—have been neatly linked together in the servants' hall, and the chain of evidence exhibited to disaffected townspeople.

How rapturously is this latest production handled by the Browns and Thomsons! My lady's conjugal quarrels had been greeted with delight, but
this new cause assigned for them meets with a yet more joyous, hospitable welcome.

No one is in the least surprised, of course. Let the scandal against our enemy be ever so ghastly, we accept it in this Christian community of ours. Bessie Thomson has always more than suspected it. She declares Mr. Silvester's daughter had tried her very best to entrap Captain Snowe when first she came; but he had never been in the smallest degree attracted by her. She had made up to him, with her great bold eyes, and he had been perfectly indifferent to her. Captain Snowe was known to be deeply attached to pretty Miss Zoé, the orphan who had been so shamefully swindled by these needy adventurers; and now he was coming home, and they would be married; and this fine stuck up woman at Plantagenet Park might faint away till she was black in the face—[Miss Thomson was growing vague in speech by reason of her indignation]—but all her faintings could not prevent this happy termination to her young cousin's troubles.

The Joneses have said from the first that there would be a case for the Judge Ordinary, and they are now inclined to think that the sooner her ladyship runs away with some one, the better it
will be for the town and neighbourhood, the unhappy Baronet, and his poor mother. These two last ill-used persons command universal sympathy. The queen dowager is declared to be dying by inches, and all on account of the treatment she receives from her arrogant daughter-in-law. The change in the handsome Baronet's appearance is patent to every one; and some of his victims, Miss Grandly amongst the number, have absolutely been melted to tears on this account. I think if his majesty chooses to pose himself in a sentimental Byronian fashion, he may yet become very dangerous at some of his battues; but he seems to have lost all interest in such sport at present: his domestic troubles absorb the whole of his attention.

Giles Houndly is still a staunch partisan of Algy's handsome daughter, and so all the gossip kindled in Farnorth has not the advantage of his breath to fan it; indeed he does his best to put out the flame.

"It is as I always said," he declares; "the women would tear her beautiful ladyship to pieces if they could, sir, all out of sheer spite and envy. They have got up some absurd rubbish about her and that red-whiskered soldier. Ahem! not a
particle of truth in it, sir. I was dining at Foxcroft the very day when she was supposed to have been so agitated by that false report, sir, and I never saw her in better spirits. Farnorth is made up, sir, of lies and scandal," [our town has been rather busy with some of Giles's own doings lately] “reports are circulated, sir, ahem! that are positively actionable, and this story about Lady Plantagenet is one of them. I am not going to deny that her ladyship may have an occasional tilt with the Baronet; she has a high spirit, and I knew, from the first, Sir Mortimer would have to knock under. The dowager is the principal cause of all their differences, sir; the dowager, and that favourite maid of hers. Let the tailor's daughter and her confidante take themselves away, and I will venture to say we shall hear of no more conjugal quarrels.”

But the disaffected subjects will not incline to this opinion. Mrs. Boyne is no longer unpopular amongst them. All the grim conjectures and stories which were once attached to the royal favourite are forgotten; disaffected Farnorth is really glad that the unhappy queen dowager has some one to turn to, as it says, even if that some one be only a servant. But after all, with regard
to that last fact, you know, it was of no very great moment, taking into consideration that the late baronet’s widow was only, &c., &c., &c.; for Farnorth, even amidst its sympathy for the de-throned queen, cannot resist a flourish of the shears and cabbages.

Anon the rebels apply themselves to wondering how much money her extravagant ladyship, the younger Lady Plantagenet, will contrive to waste during the London season; she is to be presented at the next drawing-room, they have been informed by her standard bearer, Giles. Well! they are not in the least overwhelmed with that intelligence. It is well known that tag-rag and bobtail attend the royal levées now-a-days. It was only at the last drawing-room, a draper’s wife kissed the white hand of her most gracious Majesty—that Miss Bessie Thomson happens to know, and so my lady need not hold her red head any higher on that account. No doubt, whatever can be affected by an ostentatious parade of her riches, will be effected by Mr. Silvester’s daughter, who is just as vulgarly fond of show as her father, or indeed all nouveaux riches in general. The poor Baronet has been nearly driven distracted by his wife’s extravagance as well as her other wickedness. The Plantagenets
have always been known to be greatly embarrassed, and no income in the world could stand the constant drains her ladyship's love of display makes upon it, Farnorth declares, and so it supplements all its remarks with prophesying the advent of sheriffs' officers at the Palace.

The master of Gothic Hall will have enough to do if he undertakes to blow out all this flame.
CHAPTER X.

Spring is breathing softly on the lovely hills of Friendlycoomb. Its jewels gem the high hedge-rows, its bright sunshine kisses the tender verdant buds escaping from their winter prison, and flings a golden beauty on the calm surface of the sea, which woos the cold grey rocks of the Devonshire village.

There are happy hearts in the pretty white cottages where the exiles from Farnorth have lived for some time now—happy expectant hearts rejoicing in the speedy return of their Crimean hero.

Horace Snowe is on his way home; in a few days the presence of the soldier will gladden many loving eyes. Those eyes have not been scared by a sight of that false entry in the fatal list. The hand which will some time claim the Victoria Cross had itself conveyed the news of the attack
on the Mortar Battery to anxious friends at home. Very lightly had the man of war alluded to the wound he had received, but he had dwelt with exceeding eloquence on the prospect of planting his foot again on British soil.

The Brahmins in the white houses are almost as much interested in the coming of the soldier as if he had been a native of their village. Miss Alathea continues to be regarded as an oracle by these simple people. The *bas bleu* is more belligerent than ever now that her nephew has left the scene of danger. Although the curtain of the grave has fallen between the Czar Nicholas and all living men, Miss Alathea still, as she herself would say, heaps the Pelion of abuse on the Ossa of contumely whenever she alludes to him. She beams on admiring Friendlycoomb with a borrowed light as she lashes his memory. She has no patience whatever with any of the peace negotiators. She quotes those words which Achilles uttered before the Grecian lords after his coalition with the Agamemnonites—"All we ask is war."

But Mary has not a spark of such ardour about her; she is not the least tenacious of England’s honour, its banner droops in her gentle hands. The peace negotiators have her most fervent
prayers for their success. Her tender heart aches as she thinks of the misery and desolation which this cruel war has brought upon so many homes. Amidst the delight with which she hails the speedy return of her hero, she can spare sympathy for those mourning ones who weep the loss of England's best and bravest.

Madame takes very little interest in either the war or the peace negotiators, but she is very much interested in the coming of Horace Snowe. The Parisian is building aërial castles, and is greatly assisted in her structures by Miss Alathea; between them they have reared a very fine edifice. Madame has busied herself with the ornamentation alone; but the strong sense of the admiral's eldest daughter has not limited itself to mere stucco; the interior arrangements engross the greatest part of her attention.

In plain English these two tried friends of the orphan have already in imagination wedded her to the coming man. The sentiment and orange blossom have the greatest charm in the eyes of the Frenchwoman; but Miss Alathea is much too practical to be contented with anything so flimsy; she is occupied with a consideration of ways and means; she has calculated the possible income of
the young couple to a nicety; she has added materially to it from her own store; she is perpetually studying furniture lists; she has invested in "Enquire Withins" and divers cookery books; she recommends 'Miss Acton' for Zoé's perusal, but if truth must be told, the little girl does not find it altogether interesting; she makes her young friend a present of a ready reckoner, as also of a splendidly bound edition of 'The Young Housekeeper's Guide.' And when these gifts naturally summon a brighter bloom to the cheeks of their pretty recipient, the student of domestic economy decides with Madame that their dear child grows lovelier every day.

And the bas bleu and her Parisian confidante are perfectly correct in this final decision. Zoé is prettier than ever. Her grief and regret for the father so deservedly dear to her are still very great, but the first sharp agony is smoothed away. Time has brought something of healing on its wings. Zoé can bear to talk of the dead man now to those dear friends who have so truly sympathised in her sorrow. And it is not time alone that has breathed its peace upon her. The mad rebellion which poor mortality too often wages with the decrees of Omnipotence is stilled in the breast of
the orphan girl. She can find consolation now in the promises of a Divine Saviour. Infidel doubts no longer blight her pure and loving faith. The cold shallow reasoning of materialism cannot dim the beauty of that blessed light whose ruby ray brings forth not only blossom but the fruit. Zoé still sorrows, but not as one without hope.

And so the dank mould of the churchyard does not altogether overpower the fragrance of the flower which has grown out of the child's great misery. Old feelings, dearly treasured many months ago, have returned to their hidden recesses. Fresh young thoughts, breathing of a blissful future, flutter about the threshold of the little maiden's heart, craving clamorously for an entrance. The radiance of a coming joy sheds its brightness on her girlish beauty. Friendlycoomb is very proud of its belle, and it has reason to be so. The squire's eldest son has been well nigh driven to desperation this Easter, and he has had reason to be so likewise.

News from Farnorth continues to be diligently transmitted to Friendlycoomb by Mrs. Bland. The relict's letters lately have been principally filled with accounts of the reign of splendour at Foxcroft. She has not hesitated to betray some
News from Farnorth.

of the confidential communications of Lady Plantagenet's mother. "But though I do learn a good deal about these gay doings from Mrs. Silvester," she said in her last letter, "she is not my only source of information. My housemaid, who has lived with me many years, is sister to the kitchen-maid at Plantagenet Park, and I naturally hear some of the gossip which passes between them; and from the accounts I gather, the late baronet's expenditure becomes rigid economy when compared with the wilful waste which prevails in the present Sir Mortimer's establishment, and yet you know his father, at one time, and within my recollection, too, entertained a royal personage"—these last two words were very heavily dashed, although the writer was not addicted to that feminine pen and ink emphasis. "The Thomsons declare there will be bailiffs in the house before the year is over. [There were sheriff's officers once at Foxcroft in the old baronet's days, and he dressed them in his livery and had them to wait at table so long as they remained. He was a very extraordinary and reckless person.] But I don't think anything of that kind will really happen; for you see Mr. Silvester is always ready to help his daughter: his wife has grumbled
dreadfully about this to me. There are some, however, in Farnorth who do not think his position so very secure; he has been dabbling in American speculations, and people say he will burn his fingers as he did before. There is a rumour that negotiations are pending between him and Mr. Giles Houndly, and that that gentleman will shortly have a small partnership in the Weasle Mine. "I think it has a very odd look, I must say; but you know there may be nothing in the report. The dowager and her maid are still at Harrogate. Miss Winifred has returned from Germany, and is now staying with her step-brother in Park Lane. I do hope Lady Plantagenet will treat her better than she does her mother-in-law, or indeed her husband. I am told the quarrels between the so lately married pair are of daily occurrence, no doubt arising from her ladyship's shameful extravagance" [the widow had the good taste not to refer ever so remotely to the last scandal in Farnorth]. "And now Lady Plantagenet goes her way, and the Baronet goes his; and a very bad way it is, if all that I hear be true." And with this innuendo the royal family were dismissed from Mrs. Bland's letter.
Nearer and nearer the day approaches which will bring such gladness with it to the inmates of the pretty cottage near the cliffs. Good-natured Friendlycoomb sympathises with the anxious expectants. Miss Alathea is so much excited that her toga is cast aside, and the rostrum very rarely mounted. She has scarcely power even to grapple with the question of domestic economy. Gentle Mary is quite as much agitated as her learned sister—and little Zoé? Well, those fresh young thoughts I have mentioned no longer flutter at the threshold of her heart; they have forced an entrance, and are tyrannically banishing almost every other occupant. Alas! for the squire's eldest son. He is still at Dulce Domum—still a regular attendant at all the three services of the village church. In a week from this time he will have to abandon himself to darkness and despair.

Madame wanders more than ever now in groves of orange-blossom and tulle; she never wearyes of her pleasant promenade. Horace Snowe is a paladin in her eyes fit to figure in any of her favourite romances, and even worthy of her beloved pupil; and so the Parisian wanders in orange-groves, and continues the ornamentation of her aerial castle with exceeding satisfaction. She is,
however, becoming a little impatient of her practical colleague’s interior arrangements. Butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers are not suited to Madame’s sentimental structure, and the *bas bleu* is perpetually introducing them there.

The Frenchwoman is not the only member of the quiet household who allows herself to be somewhat irritated against the strong-minded economist. The queen of the kitchen is showing symptoms of rebellion. Miss Alathea, not contented with mere theoretical knowledge, has invaded the sacred domain of the *chef de cuisine*, and propounded questions which have scandalised that important functionary, who sees in the queries possible raids on some of her perquisites. “Your sister is far too clever a lady to mix herself up with dripping and broken meat, Miss Mary,” she says. “I wish she would stick to her books, and her stones, and her heads, and her things.” I believe La Bonté inwardly agrees with the indignant speaker. The toga is certainly better suited to the *bas bleu* than the apron she has lately adopted.

The wounded hero has reached Marseilles. A letter from him breathing gladness in every line has arrived to brighten the Devonshire home.
Horace arrives at Friendlycoomb.

Friendlycoomb has convened a meeting which all its magnates have attended. Friendlycoomb has determined to mark its sense of the estimation in which a brave man should be held. Friendlycoomb is going to present the soldier with a sword of finest workmanship, enclosed in a scabbard glorious to behold. The Brahmins in the large white houses have subscribed very handsomely. The advent of the hero, who has played his part so well in three glorious victories, is causing the greatest excitement in the quiet Devonshire village. The squire’s eldest son stands sulkily aloof; he has not subscribed one farthing towards the fund; perhaps his exchequer may be low, for he has spent a fortune in kid gloves within the last few months. Still I am disposed to think he intuitively hates the coming man.

The days pass into hours—the hours into minutes.

The longed-for moment has come at last. The wanderer is clasped in loving arms. The wanderer is closely gathered to the thickly beating hearts that have ached so often for him in his absence.

The sun shines very brightly now on the cottage near the cliffs of Friendlycoomb.
CHAPTER XI.

The London season is at its height. The Great Metropolis has not been so gay for many years. An imperial beauty is shedding the lustre of her sweet face on the British Court. The Emperor of the French and his beautiful wife are the honoured guests of England’s Queen. *L'entente cordiale* is gaining power every day. *L'entente cordiale* is raising new sponsors for old bridges, statues, and buildings. *L'entente cordiale* permeates every nook and cranny of the modern Babylon.

An imperial beauty, haughtier than the lovely Eugénie, is reigning in one of the palaces in Park Lane. My Lady Plantagenet is almost as frequently discussed by London lips as Napoleon’s beautiful Empress. The triumphs she had won in continental cities were nothing to the triumphs she is winning now. The cream of society has thrown its doors wide open to the belle of the season. The cream of society struggles to secure her presence.
for its most recherché entertainments. Tyburnia and Belgravia pay homage to her. Tyburnia and Belgravia are only too happy to receive a card when my lady holds a levée. The levées are very frequent, and embrace every form of costly amusement. My lady’s banquets, my lady’s balls, my lady’s concerts, my lady’s conversazioni, pale the best efforts of Tyburnia and Belgravia. My lady is scattering the golden shower more recklessly than ever. My lady is going her own way with a vengeance—and Sir Mortimer is going his.

The flimsy veil of appearances, which the royal pair had once worn in public, is not rigorously adopted now. There has already been some gossip on this subject in one or two of the Tyburnian drawing-rooms. My lady’s manners are so fascinating, and her entertainments so charming; my lady’s regard for les convenances so great, her black mail so conscientiously paid—that her beautiful shoulders are scarcely tickled with the lash of censure; but Sir Mortimer is very severely knouted, and Sir Mortimer richly deserves this discipline.

The Baronet has plunged into the wildest dissipation; he is planting his feet more dutifully
than ever in the footsteps of his deceased father. During the first few months of his married life he commanded my sympathy to a certain extent; he has utterly forfeited it now.

Miss Winifred is staying with her half-brother, as Mrs. Bland has already informed us. Miss Winifred is positively enjoying herself at the palace in Park Lane. Lady Plantagenet treats the first cousin once removed of the Duke of Overall with the greatest kindness and consideration, and Sir Mortimer is almost civil to the poor lady. Miss Winifred, ruffling it bravely in the gauzy materials she doats upon, accompanies her beautiful sister-in-law everywhere, and her presence is as a coat of triple mail to Algy's discreet daughter.

The Sultan of Becklands and his wife have left London, and are once more located in Farnorth. Algy is in very bad spirits; he has not taken nearly so much interest in his daughter's metropolitan triumphs as he did before her marriage; and he has had good reason not to do so. The run on the paternal bank has been very heavy for the last two months. Marital storms have driven my lady very frequently into that harbour, and the consequences have been most disastrous. The owner of the Weasle occupies the debtors'
department at his banker's now, and the warders there are beginning to look rather grave. It is not by any means my lady's extravagance alone which has brought this unpleasant state of things to pass. The constant drain, added to his own lavish expenditure in the matter of spectacle and sensation pieces, might have slightly crippled him; but the cadet of a noble family would not be, as he now is, figuratively grinning through the bars, if it had not been for his own folly. He has been dabbling in American speculations, as we know; he has invested six months' profit from the Weasle in transpontine securities, and is not likely, as far as I see, to receive any dividends for some time. The once Director of the 'Amalgamated Anglican,' who ought to be wise with the knowledge gained from experience, again occupies a leading position in two or three bubble companies. The cultivator of square-toed respectability has been more unlucky on the Derby than he had been on the Goodwood, and so it is by no means extraordinary that in spite of his California, the owner of the Weasle should occupy the debtors' department, and his warders look rather grave.

Algy has made many wise resolutions since his return. One vow he has registered with some little
fear and trembling; he has determined to refuse the very next application made by his daughter. "'Gad, she must pull up," he says to himself. "No one but that fellow in the story-book could possibly have any chance with Clarry; and by Jove, I doubt whether the money in his purse would have come fast enough for her ladyship. She must pull up; and I’ll think over that proposition of Houndly’s."

Mrs. Silvester has really now some reason to complain—and she takes full advantage of it. She will not allow that she has derived the least pleasure from her London visit.

"How could I, indeed?" she cries; "left by myself so much as I was. Mr. Silvester out every day—not that I cared much for the loss of his society; but Clara might have come to see me; and as to the fine balls and things she gave—how could I enjoy them, when I knew very well who would have to pay for them, and who would have to suffer for it afterwards, Mrs. Bland? My husband is stingier than ever to me now, and grumbled like I don’t know what, when I asked this morning for ten pound! Ten pound of my own money, and he squandering thousands on the turf! Mr. Silvester can keep quiet and mute enough
over his losses; but I know, I know," she repeats dismally.

Mrs. Bland continues to be honoured with many visits from Algy’s wife, although the dowager and her shadow have returned to Foxcroft. Far-north says that her ladyship has derived some benefit from the Harrogate waters. She does not immure herself nearly so much as she did. The Thomsons declare that it is the absence of her daughter-in-law which has affected this partial cure.

The servants’ hall, although as rabid as ever against the favourite, has still some amongst its members who retain a remnant of their allegiance to their old sovereign; and these feudal servitors rejoice that the dowager is once more like herself. The young Lady Plantagenet will never win the affection of her dependants. No Eastern Sultana could more rigorously exact implicit obedience than she does; no Czarina accept the homage of her serfs more haughtily than Algy’s daughter receives the service of her underlings.

Rose Boyne is still the constant companion of her mistress. These two women are often seen abroad now. The poor of the neighbourhood have reason to bless the return of the baronet’s mother.
The Plantagenet family have not hitherto been remarkable for charitable donations: now, there is no one in the neighbourhood so liberal as her ladyship. She responds to nearly every appeal, but she does not allow her name to appear in any of the printed lists. "I am only my son's almoner," she says to the honorary secretaries of our local charities. "Write Sir Mortimer's name down, if you please." "You need not thank me," she repeats to the poor people she so frequently relieves now: "it is to Sir Mortimer you are indebted; it is his money I am distributing amongst you." I do not think the rustics altogether understand her ladyship's fine language, but they understand her gifts very well; and they are as grateful to her as it is in the nature of a Blankshire peasant to be, which is not saying very much, I am sorry to have to record.

The dowager does not now deny herself to morning visitors; indeed she has appeared at one or two of the entertainments given by our county cedars. [The Grandlys are abroad, on account of Miss Adeline's health, Farnorth says. I hope there is no truth in the report].

Algy discusses this sudden return to society on the part of his daughter's mother-in-law, with his toady Giles.
“Is the old woman going to make a stand?” he says. “Is she hoping to wrest the crown again from her young ladyship? By Jove! she will have the worst of it if she does; Clarry will die sooner than give up the sceptre now.”

Boswell pooh-poohs the idea of any such imbecile struggle on the part of the tailor’s daughter, sir. She will sing very small when my lady returns, he declares; and then he indulges in some of his “they says,” about the abdicated queen and her favourite, to which Algy does not pay much attention, for the scandal is not altogether agreeable to Clara’s father; he is not too fond of having any stains on the Plantagenet shield pointed out to him, for even amidst his monetary troubles, he is still proud of the position his wealth and his daughter’s beauty have secured to her.

The Sultan of Becklands and the master of Gothic Hall are scarcely ever apart now. Algy has taken Giles’s proposition about a partnership into favourable consideration; proceedings are already commenced to admit Giles into a small participation in the profits of the California of the district, greatly to the surprise of some of the mine-owners.

“You may take my word they have come upon
a rider* of rock in their best body of ore," suggests one of these gentlemen. "Silvester must be uncertain about a renewal of the lease," remarks another; "at any rate, on the same terms that Harding, poor fellow, first got it. Silvester is too sharp for Houndly, wide awake as he thinks himself. Twenty thousand pounds is a mere trifle for a tenth share in the Weasle, if there is not a screw loose somewhere; but there must be. You may rest assured that there is, and Giles will find it out too sometime—not now though; there is no holding him at present." Giles is, indeed, greatly elated; he has toadied to some purpose.

"Four thousand a-year for a certainty, and I see no reason why the income may not be doubled," he says to his own lawyer, who is drawing out the deed. "The value of the mine is something fabulous: twelve years of the old lease yet to run, sir; and who ever heard of a lease not being renewed, it would be a scandalous thing to refuse it to a man who has devoted his time and energy to develope the riches of ——." The speaker stopped rather awkwardly here: it may all at once have occurred to him that his friend was not exactly the person who had bestowed the pains

* A local term.
and labour which had transformed the Farnorth Minotaur into the purse of Fortunatus; and although I quite agree with the master of Gothic Hall that it would have been a scandalous piece of dishonour on the part of Mr. Samuel Gravell, had he refused an extension of the lease to the tenant whose untiring exertions had so greatly improved his property, I do not see that Mr. Silvester has any right to expect such stringent justice.

"There is not the least chance of anything of that kind, sir," Giles continues, after having cleared his throat several times, and shuffled about a little nervously. "Ahem! the suggestion has only emanated from one of our mine-owners, sir; and he would give his ears to stand in my shoes at this moment. I repeat that the value of the Weasle is something fabulous. No one knows the extent of its resources. Ahem! Silvester has a head on his shoulders, but he does not understand mining, and, ahem! if there is anything in the world that I do understand, I flatter myself it is that. I was overruled by What's-his-name, when we worked this identical mine years ago. I knew very well, ahem! that the ore did lay where the late Mr. Harding eventually found it; but my voice went for nothing, and the rest of the com-
pany were so confoundedly clever—a pig-headed lot of idiots, sir—that we made nothing out of the Weasle. But I mean to punish it now, sir,” Giles said, with very considerable emphasis.

I doubt very much whether Lady Plantagenet and her husband will approve of this partnership which is pending; but they have not been consulted in the matter. If Clara has any suspicion of the entanglement in her father's finances, she does not allow it to influence her in the least, in regard to her career of splendour. If she dreams of those prudent resolves which Algy has already formed, they give her no uneasiness; she knows the extent of her power over him, and so she gleams in Tyburnian drawing-rooms, as richly arrayed and as beautiful as a princess in a fairy tale. And as happy? Perhaps not. Algy's daughter has obtained excellent standing room whereon to plant her fulcrum. She is gratifying her ambition by raising the world of applauding wonder she had pictured in her Bohemian days; but it seems to me there is still at times more of real weariness and listless sadness in her lovely face than ever it had worn in her mountebank tent. She rushes into a constant whirlpool of excitement; she strives to put out the
slow fire of thought and care in the brilliant sunshine of admiration which spreads its rays around her; but the glorious beams cannot always extinguish the cruel flame.

Tyburnia and Belgravia, however, see nothing but the merry sunshine, and the belle of the season, as she treads the halls of dazzling light, is the envied of all beholders. The Baronet does not increase in popularity; the knout still descends heavily upon him; he neglects that magnificent woman his wife disgracefully, the young sovereign's admirers declare indignantly.

My lady does not require their pity; she is perfectly indifferent to her husband's desertion. Sir Mortimer appears for an hour or two whenever her ladyship receives; this is a penance exacted from him; but he rarely accompanies her when she goes abroad. Miss Winifred supplies his place, and his majesty of Foxcroft continues to console himself for the murkiness of his domestic atmosphere after his own fashion.

There are symptoms of a coming change in some of the booths of Vanity Fair; several are already closed, and their gay wares carried away. There is a decided lessening in the number of
aristocratic frequenters of the Row. Shutters and brown-holland bags have already hidden the splendour of some of the Tyburnian drawing-rooms. The managers of the opera-houses are advertising their extra-nights. The last Botanical Fête is announced. Prima donnas are thinking of the provinces. Materfamilias is discussing with the paymaster-general the Rhine or the Lakes as an autumn sojourn. Pine-apples are hawked about at a shilling a-piece. Carriages no longer block the entrances to the great emporiums of fashion. The London season is well nigh over.

Farnorth is anxiously looking for the return of its sovereign. The disaffected subjects have had secret cause for rejoicing lately. A coming event at Friendlycoomb is much discussed in the Brown and Thomson circles, and not alone there. Mrs. Bland has made pretty nearly every one in the neighbourhood acquainted with one of her ornithological confidences. The widow is busied with orange-blossom and tulle herself, for young Newcome is going to claim his pretty bride very shortly; but that does not prevent her from being greatly interested in a similar affair where Horace Snowe and our poor little Zoé will occupy a prominent position. Madame's aerial castle has a
very solid foundation now, and all the powers of the domestic economist are likely to be severely taxed. Mrs. Silvester prose a good deal about the approaching marriage of her niece, and the news has the effect of chloroform on Algy’s still, at times, uneasy conscience.

“’Gad! I’m glad to think the little girl will be happy, after all; and I’ll send her such a wedding present as will open her eyes, hang me if I don’t!” he says.

Disaffected Farnorth is also glad to think that the defrauded orphan has some prospect of happiness before her now; but this amiable feeling is not the principal source of that excessive satisfaction which the intelligence has conveyed amongst the Thomsons and the Browns. It is the conviction of the pain which the knowledge of this change in her hated young cousin’s destiny will bring to Algy’s handsome daughter, that makes the news welcome as rain in the desert to the uprooted ones. It is a longing desire to see in the beautiful face of their unpopular queen evidence of the secret arrow piercing her heart, that makes her return so eagerly looked for by her rebellious subjects.
The fête with which my Lady Plantagenet closed her reign of magnificence positively agitated the dead sea of blasé Babylon. It was so totally unlike the conventional entertainments of which Tyburnia and Belgravia had grown weary. The arrangements were so perfect; the company so well selected; there was no overcrowding; no chance of jostling against plebeian nobodies; it was altogether perfect, Tyburnia and Belgravia both decided.

And now the palace in Park Lane is closed, and my lady, her husband, and Miss Winifred have returned to Farnorth.
CHAPTER XII.

Again the walls of Foxcroft reverberate to the music of many voices; again the state bedrooms and the bachelor dormitories are filled with patrician visitors; again the gay butterflies are basking in the golden atmosphere of Plantagenet Park.

Farnorth has seen its young sovereign several times, and Farnorth declares that late hours, and the perpetual excitement of a London season, have left their traces on the lovely face of Algy's daughter.

Even the most devoted of her majesty's subjects—very few in number are these faithful ones—admit that Clara Lady Plantagenet has lost something of her beauty; the bloom has left the peach; but her champions, at the same time, contend that country air will soon restore the charms which the miasma from crowded ball-rooms has paled.

The rebels laugh to scorn the cause assigned by
my lady's partisans for her faded roses. They—the Thomsons and the Browns—know very well what has wrought this change, and they rejoice over it. She will look worse yet, they say; she will lose more of her beauty, if it be beauty, they remark parenthetically; in a month or so my lady will see something gazetted in the 'Times' which may cause her to faint away again. Faugh! she ought to be ashamed of herself for her white face; a married woman indulging in such wicked regrets! Bessie Thomson has no patience with her whatever.

There is some chance that a very unexpected recruit will shortly join the rebel party; Giles Houndly, Esq., is betraying symptoms of disaffection to the royal standard. Giles, when he called at the palace to pay his homage, has met with a glacial reception. My lady, who, for some reason of her own, has always been civil to the master of Gothic Hall, has now submitted him to the douche she has given to so many.

Algy's daughter does not approve of that business her father has transacted during her absence. I never expected she would do so. The master of the Weasle has been glad enough to silence my lady's remonstrances in the matter of the new
partnership by presenting her with a cheque of colossal dimensions: the vow he had sworn sleeps in the Walhalla of good intentions.

"Twenty thousand pound was a tidy sum, Clarry, you must admit that," Algy says apologetically. "The old lawyer had to mortgage every acre of the land he married to muster the money. I have invested it where it will return cent. per cent., ma fille, and, 'gad, I know who will reap the harvest I am sowing."

My lady has had no reason to have any great opinion of her father's business abilities; however, she accepts the bribe, and does not offer any further remark. But if it pleases her for a consideration to look over the folly of the Sultan of Becklands, it does not please her to forgive his successful toady; and so, as I have said, Boswell has met with an icy greeting, and is turning rebellious in consequence.

"Her ladyship must not try any of her insolence on me, sir," he fumes. "I know a little too much about her for that. It would be a rash experiment, sir; a very rash experiment. No one can say I have not done my best hitherto to shield Silvester's daughter from the gossip of the neighbourhood. Ahem! I considered myself bound to
do so, on account of the friendly relations which have existed between me and her father; but I do not pretend to be more than mortal, sir, and flesh and blood will rebel at times. Her ladyship has trampled on pretty nearly every one; but I tell you what, sir—she would be wiser to put her naked foot upon a viper than to attempt to trample on me."

And I think Giles had never spoken truer words than these.

"She has queened it over the Baronet, sir," the irate toady continues; "she has queened it over him until he dares scarcely say his soul is his own in her presence. But Sir Mortimer has only a craven spirit, sir, with all his arrogant insolence." [Monseigneur had pretty nearly always enforced a diet of humble pie on the speaker, even when he was so frequently allowed a place at the royal board.] "The tailor's blood preponderates over the Plantagenet fluid in her ladyship's husband, and so she has coerced him into submission; but she will not coerce me, sir. They say, ahem! that even that poor imbecile Miss Winifred lends herself to all the flirt—but I will not repeat that scandal; there may be no truth in it. Farnorth is a mischievous, gossipping hole, sir," the
sufferer from some of our latest on dits says severely. "There is one thing I have heard which I may repeat, though. They say, ahem! that the Dowager Lady Plantagenet and her favourite are making a stand at last against the tyranny of the baronet’s high and mighty wife, sir."

For once Giles’s “they says” are not the creation of his own fecund imagination.

My lady has returned home to a disputed sovereignty. War is raging at the palace. The queen mother has arisen in defence of her son, and the favourite is aiding and abetting her liege lady!

The circumstances attending the second arrival of Algy’s daughter in her northern dominions have been altogether different to the first. She has been welcomed only with vice-regal honours. There have been no conciliatory speeches made to her; no graceful abdication of all power; no subsequent coronation. The Dowager Lady Plantagenet seems suddenly to have emerged from the cloud which shadowed her. The mother-in-law, who had striven so hard to adapt herself to the arrogant wife of her son, appears, all at once, to have abandoned diplomacy and pacific nonentity, and to be struggling to reign again at Foxcroft.
Those rooms in the wing of the building are no longer occupied by the invalid lady and her attendant. The walls which have so long echoed the melody of earnest prayer and the wail of sincere penitence, now respond to the unholy sounds of mocking laughter and of scoffing jests. The secluded apartments are tenanted by some of my lady's foreign friends—gay, thoughtless Parisians, as thoroughly emancipated from all religious prejudice, as completely soaked in atheism and wickedness, as their prophet Voltaire could possibly desire.

The baronet's mother, and her friend and confidante, have taken forcible possession of two of the state chambers. They have located themselves there in direct opposition to some commands transmitted from London by their young sovereign, and the indignant autocrat has endeavoured to dislodge them in vain.

It would be well if the symptoms of revolt limited themselves to a mere change of location on the part of the dowager queen, but they do not. The dowager has already won over many members of the servants' hall to her cause; she has done more than this—half the barons in the neighbourhood are disposed to support her;
and even some of my lady's own guests are absolutely beginning to pay a certain deference to her invalid mother-in-law. Clara sees her rights on every side invaded, and her rage is beyond all power of expression.

In the excitement and perpetual whirl of noisy Babylon, Algy's daughter had well-nigh forgotten the very existence of that woman whose banishment from her castle she had, at one time, taken some pains to effect. She had almost ceased to remember the name of Rose Boyne; but the valet's widow is likely to be permanently stamped on her memory now.

That the favourite is the prime mover in all these rebellious demonstrations, my lady is fully convinced. In the feverish assertion of her rights, evidenced in the changed manner of her mother-in-law, Clara traces the subtle and insidious influence, the underhand machinations, of the powerful friend and confidante. If the young sovereign wishes to regain her lost supremacy, she must bring the whole force of her intellect, the whole strength of her cunning, forward, and wage a war implacable—not with the mistress, but with the maid. And she has commenced that warfare. She is plying every engine for the overthrow of
her enemy. She is searching for the vulnerable heel in her foe where she can strike a deadly arrow; but hitherto she has had the worst of the combat. Clara has met more than her match at last. Something akin to fear is mingling with the instinctive aversion she had, from the first, conceived for her husband’s old nurse. And yet there is nothing in the tone and manner of Rose Boyne that can be construed against her. She has not returned one impertinent answer to the many insulting words with which my lady has favoured her. She never varies in her humble, deprecating accents; never, outwardly at least, presumes on the favour her mistress extends to her. Although clad in the richest silks and laces, and looking anything but the “poor servant” she represents herself to be, she never ignores her dependent position—her most fatal stabs have been given under this cloak. It was with a preliminary apology for using the freedom of an old servant, that the valet’s widow had heralded the congratulations she was the first to offer her young ladyship on the prospect of her cousin’s approaching marriage; and although Clara—a deadly sickness clutching her heart the while—had compelled herself to reply with careless arrogance, she knew
the stealthy eyes were noting every evidence of inward suffering, and greedily absorbing the dumb agony their persistent glare called still further into life. My lady learned, from that moment, who it was had played Iago to the Othello of Foxcroft. She has discovered now the donor of the best lance Monseigneur employs at the matrimonial tournaments. She knows she has a secret enemy in Rose Boyne. She is sensible of a constant espionage practised upon her. No wonder that fear is mingling with her detestation of the favourite; no wonder that she is striving with might and main ignominiously to expel her from the palace.

Will she ever affect her purpose? She has no one to aid her. Monseigneur adopts the chieftain's tone whenever his wife alludes to his mother's maid. Clara has plied the dreaded bodkin altogether in vain on this subject. The insinuation that some close relationship must exist between the dowager and her attendant has lost its power of tormenting the tailor's grandson; he meets it with calm contempt now. In that slough of degradation where the Baronet is, day by day, still further sinking, affection for his mother is not yet submerged; he is still an affectionate son; he
never relaxes in his attention to his only parent; never swerves in the kindness he observes to his old nurse. The two women are devoted to him; his decadence is as yet mercifully hidden from them. Sir Mortimer is a frequent visitor to the state apartments where the usurpers are reigning; he encourages every effort the queen dowager makes to assert her proper position in public. My lady has no chance of an ally in the king consort, but very much the reverse. In her despair she applies to Miss Winifred. She can gain no assistance from her.

The repugnance which the dowager's step-daughter had evinced towards the favourite on that day when she so suddenly appeared at Foxcroft seems almost to have faded away. She had never liked Rose Dacre, and she will never become attached to Rose Boyne; but she has no longer any horror of the valet's widow. The presence of this woman, at all times ready to discuss every particular connected with the unhappy death of Frederick Plantagenet, has, with the unfailing strength of matter-of-fact, chased away the unsubstantial gloomy doubts, the visionary hopes, and the horrible suspicions which had haunted the bereaved sister. It would have been impossible for
even Giles Houndly to wander into the wicked land of infamous conjecture, where he delights to stray, had he heard Rose Boyne repeat the story, clear in every detail, which Miss Winifred has learned to listen to with a dismal pleasure now; and so her repugnance to the favourite has almost faded away, as I have said, and Clara Lady Plantagenet can gain no assistance from her husband's half-sister. She will have to wage a single-handed combat with her dangerous enemy.

Court scandal is still scattered about Farnorth, through the usual medium. The royal battle at the palace is very interesting to our townspeople. The dowager has far more partisans than the young sovereign, but they dare not indulge in any hopes for her ultimate success. The Sultan of Becklands is, at present, only amused by "this row between the old queen and the young one," and says he is willing to give tremendous odds to any one who will take the bet he offers, which is to the effect that the "elderly party," to use his own words, "will be knocked out of time in a week." Mrs. Silvester is disposed to sympathise with the mother-in-law. "Clara has such a temper; I'm sure she used to hector over me like I don't know what," she cries. "I bore it, as indeed I am
obliged to bear everything; but I never expected my daughter and the dowager would be able to live peaceably together."

Miss Winifred does not side with either faction at Foxcroft. She observes a strictly neutral position. Clara is still excessively kind to her; but she cannot win her entirely to her interests. Miss Winifred has a kind heart beating beneath her gauzy costumes, and there is, at times, a look of so much anxious misery in the face of the dowager, that her step-daughter's sympathy is enlisted, and she will not lend her sanction to any insolent oppression practised by my lady, although I believe she is really attached to her beautiful sister-in-law.

The smouldering domestic fire at Plantagenet Park does not interfere with the blaze of perpetual fêtes and entertainments which are going on as brilliantly as ever there. Every day brings its new pleasure. My lady's ingenuity in providing amusement for her guests is beyond all praise. My lady's lavish expenditure is passing into a proverb.

But there will presently be a slight lull in the sounds of revelry; Farnorth will be robbed of the presence of its young sovereign for a few days. My lady, her husband, and Miss Winifred, are
going to Overall Castle! The Baronet has never before been included in the invitations his half-sister has at different times received from her august relatives. His lovely wife has won this distinction for him.

Farnorth is overawed. It may turn up its nose at continental titles, it may speak slightlyingly of Irish viscounts and their honourable daughters, but at the mention of the Duke of Overall, Farnorth is dumb. There is a dignity hedging in this mighty personage through which treason cannot creep. The Browns and Thomsons make some feeble efforts to pierce the grand surroundings with disparaging remarks, but their weak struggles are altogether in vain.

"Not one member of the family has ever taken the slightest notice of the dowager and Sir Mortimer during all these many years. There must be something strangely fascinating about her present ladyship," some of the townspeople, to whom success is the standard of merit, say. Algy, proud as he is—and the cadet of a noble family, in spite of his vulgar tongue and bearing, is not deficient in that aristocratic attribute—cannot conceal his elation at this last success achieved by his daughter.

"My handsome girl will astonish the big wigs a
few,” he says; “she will take the shine out of them all at Overall Castle. There will be no one there fit to hold the candle to my handsome Clarry.”

Her haughty young ladyship is very well pleased to have received this invitation. Her civility to that faded descendant of the mighty house, Miss Winifred, has not been altogether thrown away. I believe her eyes have been steadily focussed on Overall Castle during the whole of the time she has conciliated her husband’s half-sister.

It is well for my lady if strawberry leaves and coronets have power to distract her attention from her domestic anxieties. The revolt in her household is gaining power. The queen mother is daily increasing her number of partisans. Sir Mortimer is fighting for supremacy, and guarding the royal treasury with the courage of desperation. Rose Boyne’s banishment from the castle seems hour by hour a thing more impossible to bring about. Clara cannot repress a shudder now whenever the quiet figure, clad in thick noiseless silks, glides past her. The presence of the valet’s widow is a never-ending nightmare to Algy’s daughter, and she is yet powerless to remove the incubus.

And so, I repeat, it is well if the prospect of mingling with strawberry leaves brings any consolation.
CHAPTER XIII.

The cadet of a noble family is already beginning to regret the precipitancy with which he had accepted Mr. Giles Houndly's overtures. The master of Gothic Hall has not mortgaged every acre of that land which once belonged to poor Jane Hopkins for nothing; he means to have his money's worth out of the transaction, and he is taking most authoritative airs upon himself, and interfering with the workmen at the Weasle in a manner that is driving their captain almost wild. We know how very soon old Polwhele had frightened the Sultan of Becklands into quiescence after that first rash experiment of his; and now the irritated Cornishman is terrifying Algy again by prophesying the evils likely to supervene, unless immediate restrictions be laid on the new partner's powers. Indeed, one or two disastrous results have already followed on some of Giles's carried-out commands, and the rival mine-owners
are again beginning to shrug their shoulders. "Houndly is a conceited old idiot," they say, with more candour than politeness. "Polwhele trained under poor Harding, who proved himself to be the only man who could manage the Weasle."

And so the friendship which has subsisted for some time now between Giles and my lady's father, is sickening a little in the atmosphere of a business partnership. I doubt very much whether the fabled affection of Damon and Pythias would have lived in such an air. Already there is a grievous falling away in that ovation which Boswell once so persistently offered to Johnson. Already some sharp words have passed between the quondam cronies. Already that twenty thousand pounds about which Algy had boasted to his daughter is losing its importance in his eyes, as he finds how much of his freedom of action he has bartered away for it. Already Mr. Houndly has been indulging in some of his "they says," at the expense of Mr. Silvester; already, and at this very moment, the Sultan of Becklands is savagely anathematising the ex-lawyer.

And not only him. Algy is seated in his library writing very busily. The large secrétaire over which he is leaning is littered with papers: he
has just held an audience with old Polwhele, and it has not been a pleasant one. A shadow is darkening his face; there is not a spark of hilarity about the richest man in Farnorth. Every now and then he lays his pen aside, and his eyes wander over some of the opened letters before him. The post has not brought any better news than the Cornish captain. Algy gnaws his dyed moustache very viciously as he masters the contents of two or three billets.

One of the large windows in the library is open. There is no bitter east wind this lovely day in August, no smoky chimney to necessitate ventilation; but Algy had well-nigh worked himself into a fever during his late interview, and so he has admitted the soft autumn air. The perfume of flowers, and the sweet carol of birds, are borne into the room on the wings of the south breeze; but Algy is in no mood to enjoy either the fragrance of the one, or the music of the other. Algy is, as his wife would say, "as cross, as cross."

A tall figure glides past the open window; the rustle of a silken robe mingles with the notes of the feathered songsters; the sheen of a silken robe glistens in the autumn sunset; a beautiful face beams on the busy writer. "'Gad!" he
mutters, "I know what you are coming for, my lady; but, by Jove! you'll not get it this time;" and a stronger exclamation than I care to chronicle follows on the muttered words.

The door of the library is opened, and, unannounced by plush or powder, my lady enters the room. Beautiful, most beautiful, does my lady look, as with a winning smile upon her lovely lips, she advances towards her father.

But Algy's prescient fears blind him for once to his daughter's charms, and the welcome he gives her is only a cold one.

Clara does not seem in the least affected by the sultan's frigid reception.

"I have only a few minutes to spare," she says, hurriedly. "What on earth are you doing, papa; and what is the matter with you? Oh! I see," she added, as she lifted up one or two of the papers littering the secrétaire. "I can sympathise with you; I have just come from a similar levée. The rapaciousness of the canaille who carry out one's orders exceeds the exigance of the horse-leech. I want some more money, papa?"

"'Gad! if you do, want must be your master, Clarry," answered her father, speaking very de-
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you must pull up. We shall be ruined if you don’t.”

“And you seriously intend to adhere to this resolution you have so wisely formed?” demanded Clara, ignoring her father’s temperate remonstrances. “You seriously intend to ——”

“I tell you we shall be ruined out and out, Clarry,” broke in Algy, impetuously. “We cannot go on living at the rate we have been doing for the last twelvemonth. They were turning rather crusty at the bank a month or two back, that was the reason I closed with Houndly; and now, by Jove, he is doing more harm than his thousands have done good. Polwhele was here a few minutes ago, with as black an account as you would wish to see. That infernal sand is running about again, and all owing to Giles’s confounded folly. Old Polwhele says they won’t be able to raise an ounce of ore for a month.”

“And I am to suffer because you ——”

“I don’t want any of your lectures, Clarry,” said Algy, sharply. “I shall do what I like with my own property. I wanted ready money very badly, and I got it; and I gave you a share of it, too, my lady; you will remember that, if you please. Three weeks ago I gave you a cheque for
a thousand pounds. It is impossible to go on at that rate. You must pull up, Clarry; there is no help for it, hang me if there is."

"You are determined then to refuse my request? You will not give me this money I require?"

"I am determined to refuse your request. I will not give you this money you require," repeated Algy, doggedly.

Clara stood perfectly still in the position she occupied close to the secrétaire: her father took up a pen, and attempted to resume his writing; presently my lady spoke again, but her voice and manner were altogether changed.

"What a wonderful piece of furniture this is!" she said, airily, as she laid her delicately gloved hand on the large secrétaire. "What a marvellous amount of drawers. How long did you say the lawyer was examining all the papers they contained on that day when — —"

Algy raised his eyes suddenly, and looked with a bewildered air at his daughter. There was a defiant smile on her lips, which somehow affected him still more unpleasantly than even her words had done at the first part of their interview.

"Did he ransack all the drawers, do you think? Was he conversant with all the secret springs
and hidden nooks of this huge receptacle? Did he——"

"What on earth are you driving at, Clara?" interrupted her father, whose purple complexion had all at once toned down to a very delicate shade of mauve. "Confound it all. What are you driving at?" he repeated impatiently.

"I think, if I had been present on that memorable occasion I could have assisted the lawyer a little. I am on very intimate terms with this intricate piece of goods. Have you made yourself acquainted with all the mechanism of these innumerable drawers?" my lady enquired with a gay smile.

Her father did not reply for a minute at least; his eyes were still fixed upon his daughter with a vacant, helpless stare.

"What do you mean?" he gasped at length. "Good God! What do you mean? Are you trying to frighten me, Clarry? Do you want to make me believe that——"

"The lawyer might have found the last will and testament of the late Theodore Baynes Harding, Esq.," Clara said very slowly and distinctly, "if he had been fortunate enough to have secured my valuable services to assist him in his search. I do
want you to believe that, because it is the truth, *mon père.*"

Algy uttered a low groan, and dropped his head on his outspread hands. He lifted it again in a few minutes, but death itself could not more completely have changed every feature of his face, than that short interval had done.

"You—you—stole the—will!" he said; the words falling slowly as molten lead from his white and parched lips.

Clara was altogether unprepared for the violent effect her words had produced. She almost shrank from her father's gaze, so much of horror was there in it. She would gladly have recalled her confession, but it was too late, and so she strove to sustain the light airy manner she had adopted.

"Faugh! What an ugly accusation, papa," she said. "What reason have I ever given you to——"

"You—stole—the will," Algy repeated drearily. "My God! You stole the will in the presence of the dead man."

A shiver passed over my lady's frame; she started away from where she stood, and looked wildly around.

"Hush," she said in a hoarse whisper; "hush;
how dare you speak to me so? How dare you recall that—"

"I never thought you would have done such a thing as this, Clarry," the father said sadly; his own emotion made him blind and deaf to hers.

And there was not the slightest affectation in the horror he displayed. Algy's moral standard is not a high one, as we know; he has herded with jockeys and swindlers for more than twenty years, and such companionship is not calculated to elevate any one, I should say. During his Bohemian days, he had evinced an amount of carelessness with reference to incurring liabilities he had little intention, and less chance, of ever meeting, which must have prejudiced him very much in the minds of my readers. I am afraid the cadet of a noble family must be called a rogue; but he is not altogether a shameless one. He has been at all times capable of the meanness of obtaining goods on false pretences; but he never would have put his hand in the till. He has some hazy sense of honour, as I have frequently said; under no temptation whatever would he have been guilty of the crime he now imputes to his daughter, and he is as much shocked and horrified as if he had himself never diverged from the straight path of honesty.
"I can scarcely believe it yet," he continued, wiping the cold sweat from his forehead. "I shall never know an easy hour again, Clarry. I have been low enough at times as at is, and now I was just beginning to comfort myself with the idea of your cousin's marriage with the soldier."

Algy's clumsy hand was always probing the secret wound; but it brought about a good effect in this instance.

It was not the hoarse whisper of a terrified, conscience-stricken woman, but the clear voice of the Clara of old, which rang through the room now.

"You can pour the stream of Pactolus over your beloved niece at any moment, if you will," she said, mockingly. "You can raise the enchanter's wand, and transform ——"

"I wish I could think so," interposed Algy, gloomily; "but she won't take anything from me—that is the worst of it. I should have been quite comfortable all along, if she would have accepted that ten thousand pounds. By Jove! I would be glad enough to give her half my income now. I would, indeed, Clarry."

"Half will not do, mon père. You must give all, or nothing. Are you capable of this sublime
act, most loving uncle? Shall I send for the lawyer, and show him where he may find the missing will?"

Algy bounded from his chair, and confronted his daughter.

"What?" he said, huskily. "You have not destroyed it!"

"Oh, make your mind easy on that subject," Clara answered, wilfully misinterpreting her father's question. "The legal document is perfectly safe. I have taken the greatest care of it."

"You are mad, Clarry, stark staring mad, to keep such a thing in your possession, even for a day. Why, great heaven! you are liable to discovery at any moment, and ——"

"I know how to hide my secrets. I always did, papa; but you have not answered my question. Shall I send for the lawyer, and show him the trick of that secret spring which evaded his search? Shall Farnorth resound with praises of your sublime heroism? Will you restore the whole of her property to your orphan niece?"

Algy had sunk back in his chair, and again covered his face with his hands; he did not respond one word.

"It would be rather awkward, if you were called
upon to refund some of her dissipated thousands," Clara continued; "but I don’t think that evil is likely to accrue. Nay, she may possibly reward you for your honest surrendering of her estate—not very liberally I am afraid,—she has no reason to be fond of either of us, mon père; but still she may give you enough to keep you from the workhouse; you need have no dread of absolute pauperism. And so, will you make this restitution, papa? Will you banquet, for the remainder of your days, on that perpetual feast, a contented mind?"

No answer yet.

"Will your digestion endure the dinner of herbs? I am afraid not. You have not disliked the life you have led since the Weasle Mine reverted to you. A shadow or two may have crossed your sun’s disc, but still it has not been altogether a clouded existence. You owe some of your pleasantest hours to that act of mine which does not meet with your approbation. You owe the splendour and comfort which surround you to my close intimacy with this," my lady said, as she again touched the secrétaire with her gloved fingers; "had I not discovered the secret of the hidden spring, our days of brilliancy were numbered, mon..."
There was no hope of anything but a return into Bohemia. Your name is not even glanced at in the last will and testament.”

The hands were suddenly dropped, and Algy’s face again revealed; it was overspread with a purple flush now.

“Do you mean to say there is no reference made to me at all, Clarry?” he demanded indig-nantly, “after toiling and slaving for your uncle as I did.”

“Your services were evidently not appreciated; there is not the smallest bequest for you.”

“Then all I can say is, that I have been confoundedly badly treated, and I declare it almost—but no, I cannot admit that—I shall never be able to reconcile myself to the desperate measures taken by you, Clarry; I shall never——”

“It is not too late to make restitution,” persisted his daughter; “it is not too late to——”

“I can’t do it, Clarry,” groaned Algy. “It is too late now. I cannot make this sacrifice; I honestly confess it.”

Clara’s lips trembled with a repressed smile.

“I never thought you could,” she said, quietly.

“If it was only myself that had to suffer, it would not matter so much; but so many innocent
persons would have to be dragged in as well," said the father, striving to anoint his aching conscience; "there's poor Houndly, for instance; his partnership-deed would not be worth a rush, and although some of his money is safe enough in American railways, by Jove the greater part of it is gone; and it would be a confounded shame, Clarry, to——"

"Don't waste your time in airing any of your old stage properties before me, papa. I like your honest confession the best. You have not strength of mind to be sublime, it seems. I need not send for the lawyer; I need not show——"

"You must destroy the will, Clarry," cried Algy, his face paling again with agitation. "It is a terrible thing to do; but there is nothing else for it. I shall know rest neither by night nor day until it is done. Burn it, Clarry, or at any rate give it to me."

"In order that you may make your own terms in future? Merci, monsieur."

"I will fill up a cheque for the money you want this very moment," Algy said, nervously, as he seized a pen in his trembling fingers. "What is the figure?"

"Oh! you are very obliging now," said my
lady, coldly: "but how will you treat my next application? I will not part with my talisman, mon père, until——"

"Until?" repeated the father, eagerly—

"We will have an auto da fé, and you shall sleep the peace of innocence, the evening of the day you legally secure to me for my own separate use a third of your incomings, papa," Clara answered deliberately.

It was a cool proposal, and it did not meet with a good reception. But what chance had the sultan with the poor cards he held—only one honour amongst them, and that a miserable knave—playing against my lady's fine hand? She won all the tricks from him; the poor knave fell in the beginning of the game, and Algy had to own himself beaten.

"'Gad! if it is to be done, we had better set about it," he said, with a sigh. "I have to go up to London in a day or two, and I'll have the best opinions I can get out of Horsehair, and make it all taut, if I can. I do most devoutly hope, ma belle, we shall never hold such a tête-à-tête again."

"It was your own fault you had the electric shock to-day. I had no intention of charging my
battery when I first entered this room. However, it is a thing you must have known sooner or later; so it is just as well that it is over. Will you escort me home, or come to my grand reception this evening?"

The unhappy sultan declined the invitation, and was so low and wretched, that Clara remained a little longer with him, and did her best to cheer him. She was to a certain extent successful, and the parting between them was much warmer than the meeting had been.

The queen dowager and her favourite were left to an undisputed sway at the palace the next day. My lady and her attendant train have migrated to Overall Castle.
CHAPTER XIV.

Farnorth has been occupied for so many months now with court scandal and gossip gathered from high places, that it has ceased entirely to give any thought or consideration to that episode in humble life, which at one time engrossed some of its attention.

Farnorth has pretty nearly forgotten the mysterious disappearance of its Snowdrop; but the miner's daughter is about to be recalled to the memories of our townspeople. Half-a-dozen women are collected together at the door of John Dalton's cottage; they are gathered around his sister Jane Dalton, a quiet, civil-spoken woman, who has for more than a year now ministered to the wants of the bereaved father. "Nowt like t' way as poor Ann used ut du," the neighbours will tell you; "Jane Dawton's a decent body enoo, she nivver meddles nor makst, but she's nin fit ut be named in t' same day wi' Ann, war waishing an' cleaning koms; she's nobbut a slaf isn't Jenny."
Slaf or not, the miner's sister is this day at any rate an object of interest to the miners' better halves, who live in the same yard with her; they are clustered about her doorway like a swarm of bees, and are listening eagerly to some news she is con-veying to them.

"He wadn't wait aif an hour efter he'd gitten t' letter; he wadn't taste bite nor sup for aw as I said tull him," Jane Dalton says. "He's bin on t' neet wark at t' mines for happen a week, an' he was fast asleep this morning when t' postman kumt; but I wakkened him up, when I sä whä t' letter was frae."

"War is she?" interposed eagerly one of the listeners, whose toilet was somewhat neglected, to say the least of it.

"Soomwar i Lunnun, an' she's vara badly, amaist deeing, she says; an' she wants ut see her fath-er aforeshe dees. Poor lile Polly!" cries the tender-hearted aunt in broken tones, as she raises her apron to her eyes.

"Jane, I wonder at you," says a severe voice, which proceeds from a tall woman, whose dress is neatly arranged, and whose native Doric is slightly cleansed from its original impurity; "I wonder at you, after all that has been said an' done. Her
poor mother lying under the sod, an' her father, once so sober an' everything, sitting night after night at t' public as he does, an' all along on her. I wonder at you, Jane Dalton," the speaker repeats still more severely.

A chorus of voices echoed the sentiments of the tall neighbour, and the poor "slaf" was not a little overwhelmed by the sudden avalanche.

"I've knä'n her ivver sin she was t' height o' this," she says deprecatingly, as she indicates the original size of the Snowdrop, "an' she was cruel bonny; naibody can say owt agen that."

"Handsome is as handsome does," said the tall woman, sententiously.

"You're reet, quite reet, Mistress Atkins," chorussed the group around her. "Beauty's nob-but skin deep—handsome is as handsome does, Jane Dawton—Ellen Atkins is reet."

Ellen Atkins was considered quite an authority in most matters by the occupants of the cottages in the yard where John Dalton lived; she held the highest social position there; she claimed the yellow streaks of caste on the strength of six silver spoons and a pair of sugar-tongs of which she was the envied possessor, as also on the traditional glory of being the daughter of a distinguished
personage, "wha nivver wär owt but white cotton stockings, bless you, as long as she leeved," the neighbours inform all new-comers.

"Foke mon't think as yan is to forgit evverything for sake on a bonny face," said a lady not remarkable for that attribute.

"I'se nit saying as Polly's nit done wrang," the weeping aunt remonstrates; "but now that t' barn is like enoo ut dee, I'se fain ut look o'er evvverything, I mun say; an' as to our John——"

"Was it sodger chap as she run away wi'?" two or three of the women demanded simultaneously.

"I've tell't yo' aw as I knä," Jane replies, with some irritation; "it was nobbut a few lines as Polly wrote. She said nowt about t' sodger or anybody else, for t' matter o' that. Our John nivver believed any o' them stories efter he kom yam frai Ireland; he nivver believed as sodger had owt ut du wi' Polly's flitting. Happen nai-body had, happen t' barn went away just for a fancy; its mair than likely; I've hard her say often an' often as she'd give owt ut see Lumnun."

"Very likely, indeed!" said Mrs. Atkins, satirically.

"Nay, nay; that wain't du, Jenny," chorused
all the other women. "Yow'll nivver mak' any on us think that. Why, Dick Allonby sä her woking wi' t' sodger time out o' mind."

Jane shook her head sadly at this conclusive evidence; and the tears trickled still more rapidly down her cheeks.

"It's nai use takking on about it, Jenny," said one of the "nebburs," philosophically. "Fretting wain't mend it. It 'ull cost John a power o' brass ut get to Lunnun, wain't it?" she added.

"Ay, that it will," replied the miner's sister, wiping her eyes, and stroking down her apron with some little inward pride; "he tuk aw as was in t' house. But our John has gitten a nice lock in t' Savin' Bank, tho' he may now and then buy hissel' a pint o' beer efter a hard day's wark. He could have his silver spoons an' his sugar tongs as well as other foke, if he had a mind tull," she said, pointing her last remark at the high-caste neighbour, whose reference to public houses had clearly wounded poor Jane.

"I'm glad to hear he has put something by," said the high-caste, calmly. "He'll want it aw, Jane, if he's going to bring his doter home. Its not likely as t' quality will find her work after what has happened; and as to t' servant girls, an'
such like, as may give her a job, she’s not much chance of getting what ’ull find her in meat, let alone clothes, frai them.”

“She’ll nit gang to ye for owt,” said the Snowdrop’s aunt, firing up. “An’ I don’t see as you’ve gitten owt ut say about it. Our Polly’s nin like ivver ut be behodden tull ye, for aw your fine spoons an’ sugar tongs.”

“I’ll be bound she wain’t,” said one of the group, eyeing the possessor of the plate with anything but a friendly survey. “Some foke needn’t ho’d their heads so high; there’s nin sa mich i’ a few spoons as thin as egg-shells, or i’ white cotton stockings naither, as I can see.”

This speech was made by the lady whose toilette was, as I have said, somewhat neglected. She was a rebel in the yard, and at all times ready to dispute the standing given to the owner of the silver spoons.

The conversation now floated away from the Snowdrop, and drifted into a very stormy sea. Jane Dalton at length closed her door against the surging waters. She retired into an inner room to meditate over the events of the morning.

“Thar may be nowt in it, for aw as they say. Whä’s Dick Allonby, as foke sud swar by
what he says?" she murmured to herself. "Aw t' nebburs war ollus as spiteful ut t' barn, cos she was sa mich bonnier nor any o' theirs. Its just as like as nut as Polly has flit away by hersel. She nivver could abide this spot, that I do knä well enoo; an' then Ann, poor body, though she was sa terble fond on her, an' meant weel by her, dudn't gang reet way to wark, nor for t' matter o' that dud our John; but now he'll bring her yam wi' him, an' then we'll larn aw about it; an' as for Ellen Atkins saying as t' quality wain't give her owt ut du, she may happen finnd hersel' mistakken. Polly may ha' bin living aw this time warking for t' fine Lunnun foke. An' wars the harm i' that, I sud like ut knä? T'se gang this vara efterneean ut Mrs. Bland, an' tell her aw I knä. She 's ollus gitten a kind word ut say to a poor body, tho' she may be a bit near."

And Jane Dalton carried out her intention.

She could not possibly have secured a better audient. Mrs. Bland inclined a very willing ear to those suggestions of the poor aunt's which her "nebburs" had scouted, for more reasons than one. First and foremost, this clearing away of the mysterious disappearance of Mary Dalton, cleared away as well the only stain which rested
on the bright shield of the brave soldier; and the widow is so firm a friend of every member of the Snowe family, that she would have eagerly accepted a far more flimsy probability than that offered to her, to have wiped away the smear. Then, again, the economical relict is very busy with preparations for another wedding in her family, as I prophesied she would be, and her nightly rest has been disturbed by calculations and estimates. Miss Benton, with her facility for running up long accounts, has haunted the slumbers of pretty Lucy's mother. If this supposition of the miner's sister should prove correct, how invaluable the aid of the Snowdrop would be in the manufacture of a *trousseau* for young Newcome's bride. She was always such an excellent hand, and of course with her London experience she would be so much improved, that the relict, as these thoughts run through her mind, regrets she has given the local Madame Tournure any commission at all.

"No one ever did fit me like your niece, Jane," she said graciously. "Sit down, and we'll talk it all over. When do you think your brother will return?"

"He said as he would write an' let me knä,
ma'am, happen a day or so after he had gitten to Lunnun. Frai what Polly said, she's vara badly."

"Oh, she'll soon come round again in her own native air," interposed the widow, who was disposed to see everything couleur de rose. "I am so glad to think all that scandal about Captain Snowe has no foundation whatever."

"Our John nivver dud believe that; it was poor Ann as put it in till his head; but he nivver believed it really, he's tellt me sä. Many and many's the times he said as t' Captain was nivver a man likely ut du a thing o' that sort."

"And I have always said the same, Jane. I never believed the story." [We know she did, but that does not signify at present.] "It originated entirely in Mr. Houndly. Mind you come and see me again, directly you have heard from your brother."

This Jane Dalton promised faithfully to do, and retired from the audience greatly comforted.

"I shall wait to hear what the miner says, before I send off my letter to Devonshire," Mrs. Bland said to her daughter, after she had communicated all the particulars of her late interview to her. "I do hope this girl will be well enough
to make some of your dresses, Lucy, and mine too; no one has ever fitted me like Mary Dalton, I said so to her aunt just now, and really, Miss Benton is so expensive."

Lucy did not reply. If truth must be told, she did not hear the latter part of her mother's speech. Poor little Zoe's staunch partisan was inwardly rejoicing as she polished the soldier's shield. Lucy was quite as willing as her mother to accept the burnisher offered by Jane Dalton.

"Sophy's cake alone cost ten pounds," said the widow suddenly, and rather dismally, as she raised her eyes from the tablets she was consulting, "and the carriages were more than that."

Lucy roused herself to reply to the distressed economist.

"We need not have such a large cake as Sophy had, mamma; and as to the carriages, we could dispense with them altogether; the church is scarcely two hundred yards from our house."

"If it were only five yards, you should ride," said her mother, decidedly. "Walk to a wedding! —no, my dear, we are not come to that yet."

"We shall be spared one expense, Lucy," she continued, after having again glanced at her tablets. "We need not make any change in our
mode of living whilst those dear girls, George's sisters, are with us—so every way different to the Miss Middletons—when I was obliged to have fish and soup every day, and Mrs. Jellybags in the house all the time with her five shillings a-day, and drinking so much porter as she does. They were very expensive visitors, and then as supercilious as you please into the bargain. George's sisters are so very different; no airs or graces about them; and they are really higher than the Middletons after all—Mrs. Newcome, own niece to Lord Lindall as she is."

The blight which had partially withered the buds of poor Sophy's bridal wreath does not fall upon her younger sister's. Lucy's betrothed is the son of a country clergymen; he has not been elevated in that atmosphere of ton which surrounds the family of the Reverend Archibald. Lucy does not shudder as Sophy did at the stumping of the wooden leg. Uncle James's unfortunate marriage has no terrors for her. Mrs. Bland may open the door of the blue chamber as often as she pleases. George Newcome is not in the slightest degree scared by its inmate; he is only amused at the widow's frankness. His sisters are no more airish than he; indeed Lucy has been most kindly
welcomed by every member of the young doctor's family, and I am very glad of it.

Mrs. Bland paid a visit to Becklands the day after Jane Dalton had brought her news to the widow. Algy's wife was alone in her bower; her husband was gone to London. "After some nasty turf business, I suppose, though of course he never told me anything about it," Mrs. Silvester complains. [We know it is not exactly turf business which is engaging the sultan's attention in town.] The relict was received in rather a grandiose manner by her gossip. My lady's mother was studying a letter just arrived from her daughter, and dated from Overall Castle, and she was not therefore altogether in a frame of mind to extend a very cordial welcome either to James Bland's widow, or the intelligence she carried. Indeed she was quite indignant at first to have her thoughts diverted from the "dook's palace," and forced into such a mean hovel as the miner's cottage. However, her love of twaddle overcame her arrogance in the end, and she condescended to make some original remarks on the subject, which I shall not take the trouble to record. And then she indulged her visitor with a dirge on the subject of Zoe's ap-
proaching marriage. She had taken some interest in the event at one time, but Overall Castle has entirely altered her views with regard to what she had at first called a suitable match for her niece under the circumstances. "For you know, Mrs. Bland, if even it be true that this man never did elope with the girl, still his birth is so very dreadful," she wailed. "Certainly hers is very much the same, but then she is my own flesh and blood—I shall never forget that, although she did behave badly, refusing Mr. Silvester's handsome offer in the rude way she did—and I should have liked her to have done better than this. It is very hard to be dragged down by one's relatives making low marriages. Just look at the disgrace Theodore brought upon our family."

The relict rose hastily and took her leave.

"I had not common patience with her, Lucy," she said, indignantly. "To see her seated amidst all that luxury which poor Mr. Harding's enterprising industry had gathered together, and then to hear her abuse his memory! it was too much. If I had stayed a moment longer, I must have given her a piece of my mind."

Lucy thought it was a great pity her mother had not remained and presented her gift. Mrs.
Silvester stands very low in the opinion of both young Newcome and his betrothed.

Jane Dalton brought the first letter she received from her brother for the relict's perusal, as she had promised. Mrs. Bland and the miner's sister were closeted together for some time, but their interview was not, from all appearances, nearly so satisfactory as the last. The eyes of the Snowdrop's aunt were red and swollen with weeping when she took her leave, and the widow was pale and agitated. She returned very short answers to her daughter's questions, and set her lips very closely together as she added a postscript to the epistle she had already written to Friendlycoomb, but the posting of which she had delayed until she had seen Jane Dalton for the second time.

Not one word did the economical widow say again on the subject of Mary Dalton's dressmaking capabilities.
CHAPTER XV.

The court has returned to Farnorth. A more distinguished train than ever has accompanied the young sovereign to Foxcroft. Strawberry leaves, and coronets of English growth and manufacture, adorn the personal belongings of some of the exalted guests who occupy the state chambers at the palace.

The visit of Algy's daughter to Overall Castle has been no fiasco. My lady has created quite a sensation there; the brilliant group around her now are culled from amongst the corbeille of choice exotics blooming in those aristocratic precincts. England's proudest Duke and Duchess are to honour Foxcroft with their presence at Christmas. Farnorth knows this, and Farnorth is not so blatant as it was.

Mrs. Silvester has already denied herself to her gossip. It will not do for my lady's mother to be on terms of intimacy with the widow of plain
James Bland. Algy's wife must dispense with that *soupçon* of garlic in her daily fare which she so much loves, and cultivate a taste for patrician *vol au vents* and flummery.

The sultan is still in London; he writes regularly to his daughter. Negotiations are proceeding in a satisfactory manner, he says; and it is as well that they are, for, from all appearances, it is evident my lady does not intend to "pull up." She expands in magnificence every day; she will require the golden galleys to be studded with diamonds soon.

Sir Mortimer has shone with a very mild lunar light at the castle of his step-sister's relatives; but could the tailor's grandson expect anything else? The quarrels between him and the wife of his bosom are not so frequent as they were, but I think their mutual dislike is intensified. Monseigneur has however some suspicion of that business which is occupying his father-in-law's time and attention, and so he does not now interfere as he did with my lady's lavish expenditure.

The dowager queen and her prime minister are still in open revolt, but the visitors from Overall Castle are acquainted with the humble antecedents of the elder Lady Plantagenet; and so the
sovereignty of the younger one is not in the slightest degree invaded in the drawing-room. The beautiful young autocrat reigns supreme there at least.

But the partisans of the baronet's mother have not fallen off in number without the walls of the palace. She commands the sympathy of most of our townspeople. They know what that motive power is which the favourite has employed to induce her mistress to strive again for the sceptre. They know that maternal love alone led to that graceful abdication of all power, that patient endurance for a time, also, of the insolent arrogance of Algy's daughter; and they know now that maternal love alone guides the tottering steps of the dowager queen as she attempts that painful ascent to the throne, and so they lend her the crutch of their best wishes to lean upon.

My lady's antipathy for Rose Boyne has not lessened. The war between them is fierce as ever; openly prosecuted by her ladyship with studied insults and words of haughtiness; secretly maintained by the valet's widow with the deadly weapon she employs so well.

Sir Mortimer does not honour the visitors at his palace with much of his august presence; he
is frequently from home for hours together; he is fond of riding about the country alone and unattended. Important business he assigns as the reason for those solitary rides—business connected with some property he wishes to purchase, he tells his mother; and so it may be, but I do not fancy the poor lady would take much interest in that purchased property if she knew what it was. My lady's guests do not very much regret the absence of the somewhat gloomy, taciturn husband of their hostess, excepting perhaps a few elderly spinsters, amongst whom, in default of more attractive sport, the lady-killer has fired a few shots.

Farnorth has already commenced some gossip about his majesty's lonely rides; and Giles Houndly, who has never been invited to the palace since that partnership deed was signed, has aired one or two of his "they says" for the benefit of our population.

The servants' hall discusses this subject as well, and it likewise busies itself a good deal about my lady's faded looks; for neither country air, nor the atmosphere of Overall Castle, has entirely restored her ladyship's charms, though she is still lovely enough in all conscience.

The Browns and the Thomsons, who have not
been overawed by this influx from Overall Castle, as some of our town folk have, are as bitter as ever. They are not in the least surprised that the poor baronet should prefer his solitary rides to the companionship of his odious wife, who is growing more shameless every day, Bessie Thomson says. "But she may wear herself to a skeleton," that young lady declares triumphantly; "it is of no use now. What business has she to make herself thin, the wicked creature, with falling in love with other people's husbands?—for I hope by this time Captain Snowe is married to dear, pretty Miss Zoé."

Not exactly yet, Miss Thomson; but I think it is more than probable the bells of the church at Friendlycoomb will ring a merry peal before the month is well out.

A week has passed since the Court returned to Foxcroft. The weather has been hot as mid-summer for many days. The harvest is well-nigh over. Our lovely neighbourhood wears its most richly-tinted autumn dress. Some of the dull, dark, heavy green of summer, seems to have passed through the crucible of the alchemist. Golden leaves glitter on the graceful beech, and
gild the edges of the sturdy oak; but the feathery larch is almost sable in its hues, as though it mourned the bright days for ever fled; and the ash, whose black and lagging buds so long defied the breath of verdant spring, has now some green young beauty lingering amidst its foliage. The hills and dales are glorious with the beauty of decline: there is the advent of death in the magnificent landscape. Farnorth is never so grand as in the autumn season; but it is a grandeur which speaks too surely of decay and of the tomb to make it pleasant in my eyes.

The solitary horseman who is riding slowly along the undulating lane, which leads through the most picturesque part of our picturesque country, takes little notice of the beauty which surrounds him. The day has been hotter than ever, and one or two heavy drops, harbingers of a storm, have already fallen. The hills and mountains stand out in dark relief against the lurid sky, and there is a dangerous calm in the atmosphere, which Sir Mortimer, for he is the solitary rider, does not altogether like. The baronet is a timid rider, as we know, but the horse upon which he is mounted is quiet enough, and answers willingly to the hand which now
urges it onwards. The minarets of Foxcroft appear in the far distance. Monseigneur is some miles yet from his ancestral home. A low sullen roar from the black clouds is echoed again and again by the grey hills. Sir Mortimer encourages his horse to still further exertion; the animal, so quiet in general, seems affected by the threatened war of the elements, for it starts and swerves to one side whenever the ominous sound from the black clouds is heard.

The horse and its rider have left the undulating lane; the minarets of Foxcroft are plainly to be distinguished now. The golden beech, the sturdy oak, the still verdant ash, are nowhere to be seen on the rugged, sea-girt ground Sir Mortimer is traversing. Very little sign of vegetation is there about this wild, desolate spot; very scanty herbage is there for the patient sheep, which meekly crop its surface. The bracken and yellow-flowering furze grow luxuriantly enough amongst the huge stones and granite caverns, which were fathoms deep beneath the ocean when the world was young. The shrill scream of the curlew mingle with the bleat of the fleecy flock, but it is rarely any other sound is heard in this stony desert. There are four roads, cut in the form of a cross,
dividing the barren region—there are four lane-ends for the youngest prince's choice whenever he comes from Fairy land. Our prince has now reached these termini: he has accomplished the most toilsome part of his journey. Heavy drops, much more frequent now, are splashing the hard ground; the sullen roar from the black clouds gains each moment in power. A thunder-storm is awful enough at all times, but here its terrors will be intensified. Sir Mortimer would gladly give a thousand of his dearly beloved guineas to be comfortably settled in the home of his fathers. I have said more than once that Monseigneur is not brave—he is not, indeed; his face is pale now with craven fears; his heart beats loud and fast as he presses onwards; he is as much unnerved with the coming horrors of the storm as the animal he bestrides.

Suddenly horse and rider are brought to a dead halt. A heavy hand is laid upon the reins which the baronet holds in his trembling fingers. A tall figure stands before the affrighted monarch of Far-north. The figure is clad in ore-stained garments, and carries a heavy stick under his brawny arm.

The baronet's alarm subsides as he sees the friendly ochre-stains. It is no brigand, no local
Dick Turpin, who has stopped him on the Queen's highway. All the miners of the district are notoriously quiet and inoffensive. I do not know that I ever heard the name of one of them connected with robbery of any kind. After the first start, I think his majesty was glad to see this man. Monseigneur's horse was growing restless with its nervous fears; it might at any moment become unmanageable. After a moment's thought, he was not at all sorry to have secured a strong hand to curb the timid creature, in case its terror made it dangerous. And so it was in tones very unlike his own that he addressed the gigantic miner.

"You thought my horse was about to stumble, did you not?" he said graciously. "I am not sorry to have met you, my good man, I——"

"Thou's nut sorry thou's met ma? happen thou will be though, afore I've done wi' the'," the man answered. "I mean ut larn thee a lesson thou'll nut forget i' a horry. I'se gitten summut ut say to the,' Sir Mortimer Plantagenet."

The words, insolent enough in themselves, were nothing at all to the manner in which they were uttered. Surprise, as well as alarm, kept the baronet silent for a moment; but presently it
occurred to him that his assailant must be intoxicated, and it was with his usual hauteur that he commanded the miner to remove his hand from the rein.

"How dare you venture on the liberty?" he "I do not know you; but ——"

"Thou doesn't knä ma?" interrupted the miner, fiercely. "Thou doesn't knä ma? I'se Polly Dawton's fath-er. Does ta knä ma now? —— the'; does ta knä ma now?"

It was evident that Sir Mortimer did indeed now know the man he had so strangely met; evident by his terrified start; evident by the blanching of his trembling lips.

"I'se fath-er on her as was cawed t' Snädrop o' Farnorth," the miner continued, and there was a wailing pathos in his rough accents. "I'se fath-er on her as was t' bonniest lass in t' country side. What is she now? What is our Polly now?" he repeated, sadly. "An' whä was't as med her what she is?" he cried, savagely, changing his tone in the rapid manner peculiar to our peasantry. "Whä was't as med her what she is? Whä was't as kompt wi' his —— leeing tongue an' ticed poor silly thoughtless barn away fra' yam? Whä was't as swar he'd mak a
leddy on her, if she'd gang wi' him to Lunnun? Wha was't as flang her away ut dee in t' gutters thar for owt as he car'd, efter he was teeared on her bonny face? Wha was't as med my barn what she is? A clout for mucky hands; a flai crä for aw t' nebburs ut point out tull their barns! Wha was't as dud this? Wha was't, I say? —— the'; wha was't?" he shrieked with furious energy.

Not a word did the baronet reply: he was trembling as one ague stricken; his face was moist with the damp agony of fear; he had no little difficulty to retain his seat on the plunging terrified beast on which he was mounted. The greater dread of falling into the hands of the gigantic miner alone kept him from falling to the ground. He turned his white face helplessly around on every side.

"Thou may leeak, an' thou may leeak," his terrible companion said. "Thar's naibody as will save the' beeeans this time, baronet. Thou's nobbut a white-liveried cor, wi aw the' brass an' the' fine neeam. I'se nut gäen ut morder the'; thou needn't be flate o' that. I'se nut gäen ut get gibbet' for sake o' a thing sic as thee; but I'se gäen ut leave my mark across the' back.
I’se gäen ut gie the’ soom reason now ut war the’ arm i’ a sling. Ay! thou knäs what I meean; thou thowt thou did gradely when thou had put-ten fause yar o’ the’ face an’ teed up the’ arm, so as aw t’ foke might think it was t’ sodger as had ’ticed away my poor silly barn; but thou’s fund out, my lad, an’ thou’s i’ a fair way ut smart for the’ play-acting tricks. Get off!” the giant said, imperiously. “Get off, or I’ll finnd a way ut mak the’.”

Suppliant words issue from the pale lips of the haughty baronet. Craven prayers for mercy are breathed by the heartless betrayer of the Snow-drop of Farnorth.

A bright flash illumines the lurid sky. A deafening peal of thunder shakes the very earth. The miner’s brawny arm is impotent to control the maddened animal on which the miserable suppliant for mercy is mounted. The bridle snaps in his strong hand like a rotten thread, and away —away—the horse and it’s hapless rider tear along the hard, stone-littered ground.

John Dalton remained standing perfectly still for some moments after Sir Mortimer was hurried out of sight. The war of the elements had commenced in good earnest now: flash followed on
flash, peal succeeded peal; but the miner seemed totally indifferent to the raging of the storm.

"He's gitten off scot free this time efter o," he muttered; "but I'se meet him agen, I'se meet him agen;" and so speaking, he walked rapidly forward through the heavy blinding rain.
CHAPTER XVI.

The gay visitors at Plantagenet Park have been a little unnerved by that thunder storm which has just passed over Farnorth. Sal volatile and red lavender have been in requisition amongst the fairer portion of the patricians. The rage of the elements is over now, and rain is pouring from the sky as though the heavens were weeping tears of penitence for their late passionate outbreak. The terrified butterflies have expanded their gay wings, and bright and beautiful as ever, are fluttering in the beams of those wax tapers in which they delight. Silken curtains have fallen on the twilight of the autumn day; the dull splash of the heavy rain on the broad terraces is lost in the murmur of merry voices. The splendid drawing-room of Foxcroft glitters in its evening dress; the large mirrors reflect many fair faces, but not one so lovely as my Lady Plantagenet's stamps a momentary impress there; the light of the wax
tapers falls on many sparkling gems and lustrous sheeny robes, but the jewels on my lady's white bosom, and the splendour of her rich drapery, pale the magnificence of all around her into moonlight beauty.

She is seated at her harp, and some of the most distinguished of her visitors are grouped around her. She is in the midst of a grand rehearsal of an operatic performance which is to take place in a few days. My lady has had need of all her diplomacy to arrange her programme for this entertainment. She has had some trouble to reconcile the noble artists in her troupe to anything but letters an inch long in her playbills. Prima donnas and first tenors have abounded amongst her guests; but the second lady, the second gentleman, the choruses and subordinates, have been very difficult to find. The matter is amicably settled now. The two posts of honour have been assigned to the most exalted of her exalted visitors. Strawberry leaves will sustain the principal part in the forthcoming opera; and a Leonora, whose fair brow is licensed to carry a coronet, will respond to the vocal vows of a ducal Manrico.

They are slaughtering poor Verdi at this very moment. My lady herself accompanies the two
noble performers. The full chords of her harp efface some of their assassin work, and the duo wins applause from the patrician listeners.

There is one person in the room on whom the melody of Manrico and his Leonora is sadly wasted. There is one poor faded woman present who is sadly out of place in that gay crowd. The dowager Lady Plantagenet is posed in her usual weary attitude. She is handsomely dressed, and there is something of her old beauty in her face this evening. She is slightly flushed, and her dark eyes have a little of the lustre of her girlhood in them; but, as I have said, she is sadly out of place in that glittering thoughtless throng. There is something painful even in the beauty which flickers over her. The flushed cheek and the bright eyes speak of imprisoned excitement: they tell of a fettered restlessness; the thunder-storm, which unnerved the butterflies and drove them to sal volatile and red lavender, seems to have affected the baronet’s mother. The murderous assault of the coronet, and the plaintive bleat of the strawberry leaves, have been lost upon her. She hears nothing but the dull splash of the heavy rain. She has no thought for anything but her absent boy. She starts whenever the musical
timepiece—a gorgeous piece of mechanism, which had once adorned the boudoir of unhappy Marie Antoinette—chimes the half hour. Sir Mortimer is later than usual: some of the patricians are not in a temper to feed only on harmony; they have plebeian longings for the sound of the dinner gong. My lady has glanced once or twice at her jewelled repeater.

"Shall we see your husband at dinner?" eagerly enquired a hungry guest in the lull that followed on the last duo.

"I believe so," replied the fair hostess. "Sir Mortimer said he would be home at the usual hour; did he not?" she added, addressing her mother-in-law.

Several pairs of eyes, which had hitherto been unmindful enough of the quiet recumbent figure, were now turned towards it.

"He told me that he hoped to return in time for dinner," said the dowager, whose poor face now wore a very anxious look. "He is late; is he not? Was not that the half-hour after seven which chimed last?"

"Your son is never remarkable for punctuality," said my lady, coldly ignoring the dowager's eager questions.
“He has very possibly sheltered somewhere from the storm,” suggested another hungry guest. “I have no doubt he is at this moment seated at some hospitable board.”

“I asked Plantagenet to carry a message to one of my fair cousins who is staying at Blankshire Abbey,” interposed the strawberry leaves. “He told me he was going to ride in that direction. Plantagenet is not the wise man I have always found him to be, if he has ventured to leave comfortable quarters to face this pitiless rain.”

A sigh of relief escaped from the prostrate invalid figure, as the ducal Manrico concluded his remark, and a sigh of relief escaped from several waistcoats likewise, as my lady requested the wearer of one of them to ring the bell for dinner.

There was no immediate response to that summons. My lady was occupied with the accompaniment to some aria which had to be transposed to suit the limits of the prima donna’s voice: there were red-hot notes in this fine composition; even the ambitious soprano dared not venture on them, though she consoled herself with abusing the composer.

“He seems to think one ought to have the register of a Cremona violin; here is absolutely a
sostenuto on E above the line," she said, as she pointed indignantly to the reprobated semibreve.

"That fellow Verdi would ruin the best voice in Europe," cried the aristocratic tenor. "I think I may without vanity call mine a ———"

"Pardon me, your grace, for a moment," interrupted a patrician wolf; "shall I ring the bell again, Lady Plantagenet? perhaps I did not pull it sufficiently."

My lady bowed her beautiful head. There could be no mistake about the pulling of the wire this time; the hungry guest tugged at it with a will.

A plushed official appeared.

"Dinner," said my lady, who had again seated herself at the harp, her taper fingers already arranged for a sweeping arpeggio.

The powdered serf did not immediately leave the room on receiving his order. There was clearly some cog-wheel or chain out of order in this human machine. His eyes wandered vacantly about the room, his lips moved, but if any sound escaped, it was lost in the full vibrating chords which my lady had drawn from her harp.

Still the plushed menial lingers in the doorway. Again his lips move, but Manrico has by this time seized a note which he does not mean to part with
until he has shaken all existence out of it. Leonora has drawn a long breath preparatory to a shriek which will set the teeth of her hearers on edge. My lady's eyes fall on the loitering servant-man; she waves her hand impatiently, and the powdered serf, after flinging another helpless, bewildered stare around, rapidly disappears.

Disappears down into the depths below, and mingle with fellow-machines whose interior mechanism is as much disordered as his own. What is the matter with the cog-wheels and chains?

When the first summons from the hungry guest reached the servants' hall, the members of it were listening with bated breath to a communication made by an under-groom. The baronet's horse was in the stable, the man said; it was covered with foam, and the bridle was snapped off close to the bit! Sir Mortimer must have been thrown, there could not be a doubt of that, and the horse had found its way back to its stall. What was to be done? No time must be lost in making a search for their missing master,—that was universally decided; but, in the meanwhile, who was to acquaint the baronet's wife, and, what was far worse, the baronet's mother, with this only too probable accident? There was not one amongst
the white-faced officials who would volunteer to lead this forlorn hope; but several voices suggested the same delegate. Mrs. Boyne must break the news to her mistress—of course she was the most likely person. Where was she? The housekeeper had just propounded that question when the drawing-room bell was rung, as we know, furiously enough for the second time. The élite of the kitchen started; one of the number must obey that summons.

"It is your place to answer that bell, Thomas," said the stout butler, mopping his moist white face. "Stay a minute," he added, as a thought seemed suddenly to strike him; "try to speak to Miss Winifred; I think it will be the best thing to do after all."

The plush addressed was a raw recruit who stood not a little in awe of his bald-headed out-of-livery superior. He did not venture to dispute his orders, but sped away on his mission with what success we have already seen.

The musical timepiece has chimed another half-hour. The hungry patricians are becoming utterly intolerant of the operatic rehearsal. The voices of strawberry-leaves and the haughty coronet are mingling together in a final scream, when the welcome prandial summons resounds through the
house. It is well the noble performers are aided with this chorus, for they have secured applause they would not otherwise have won.

It took my lady some little time to marshal her guests with a due regard to their different declensions. At length the brilliant butterflies were all judiciously mated, and they fluttered gaily down the handsome stairs.

If my lady had not been so pleasantly occupied with her hostess duties, she would have heard that violent ringing of the door-bell which has called almost a youthful bloom into the faded cheeks of the elder Lady Plantagenet.

"Thank God!" the anxious mother murmured. "That is my son at last. I am afraid he will be very wet," she said to the lounging exquisite on whose arm she leant.

That blase gentleman was not particularly interested in the return of his host. Moreover he was inwardly fuming at being "paired off with the old woman," as he said, and so he only stroked his well-waxed moustache, and made some vague, Dundreary-like reply.

The dowager and her discontented companion were a little in advance of the other party, and the exquisite had to exert his lazy limbs to keep
pace with the rapid movements of the baronet's invalid mother.

My lady, who is gracefully linked to strawberry-leaves, does not listen with so much attention as usual to the ducal tenor. The sovereign lady of Foxcroft misses some of the appanages to her state. Where are the liveried officials, whose duty it is to form a living lane for my lady to pass through? A frown shadows her ivory brow, as she mentally asks this question. She has traversed the corridor and arrived at the first landing on the winding staircase, and as yet no powdered serf has been seen!

The elder lady Plantagenet and her exquisite attaché, have made the descent of the stairs, and are landed in the passage which leads to the grand entrance hall.

"Go back, go back!" cries a wild piercing voice. "Take her away! Take her away! You must not come, my lady. Take her away, for the love of heaven! She must not advance another step."

Rose Boyne, almost delirious with excitement, is standing before her mistress. She places her arms around her; she strives to arrest her progress; she pours out entreaties to her. It is all in vain. With a smothered cry, like the last wail
of a hunted animal, the dowager breaks away from her grasp. She rushes forward and enters the large entrance hall. A pallid, shivering group is gathered around a dripping burden supported in the arms of two men. The baronet’s mother flings aside the shivering, pallid group. She takes one long look at that dripping burden, and without a word or sound, the miserable woman falls a senseless heap upon the marble floor.

* * * * *

Some of the butterflies have already left the house, others have fled to their fastnesses in the state bed-rooms, and there sheltered themselves from that grim presence which is hovering over the hapless husband of Algy’s daughter.

Only hovering as yet. Sir Mortimer is not dead, but he is lying motionless on a couch. The dripping raiment has been removed. Dr. Banques and George Newcome are earnestly watching the prostrate figure. Despairing glances pass between the two doctors; but that pale anxious watcher, kneeling on the ground, does not see those fatal signs; her eyes are fixed on the handsome face of her son.

The baronet has sustained very little external injury. A slight cut on one temple is the only outward evidence of his accident.
His wife is in the room; the soft colour has been chased from her cheeks by this sudden horror; but it is horror alone that my lady feels; horror which is more physical than mental; horror which is intensified by the sight of that flickering of life still lingering about the sufferer. My lady will not be sorry when all is over.

Poor Miss Winifred is wringing her thin hands, and weeping bitterly; her flimsy muslin dress, and her bright coloured ribbons, hang limp and disorderd about her.

Half a dozen white-faced servants are gazing with tear-dimmed eyes on their dying master. The baronet had never taken much pains to win the affection of his dependants; but the old feudal spirit will never be uprooted from our English soil, and so tears and sobs are plentiful enough amongst the old retainers of the Plantagenet family. The housekeeper has hidden her face in her withered hands. Rose Boyne has abandoned herself to despair. Sir Mortimer’s mother is perfectly calm; she is buoyed up with false hopes, and is quite impatient of the noisy grief around her.

"Why do you weep, you foolish Rose?" she says. "Why do you not rather return thanks to
the Almighty, who has so mercifully preserved my only son. See, there is but this slight cut here; he will be well to-morrow. Will he not, doctor?” she adds, as she fixes her tearless eyes on the doctor's face.

There was something written there which chilled the heart of the wretched mother. She half raised herself from her kneeling position.

“You do not think there is any danger?” she gasped. "No, no, no, it cannot be. Mortimer, Mortimer, my darling—my son—my only son!” she cried in tones of agony that wrung the hearts of nearly every one present.

There was a slight convulsive movement in the prostrate figure—a slight tremulous agitation about the rigid lips of the dying man. He had heard that piteous appeal which had burst from his mother's lips.

The anxious watcher eagerly noted this change.

“He knows it was I who spoke to him—he is reviving,” she whispered tremulously. “Hush, we must be quiet, Rose; we must be calm, or we shall frighten my boy with our noisy grief. He is only stunned by the fall—I know he is only stunned,” she added as she again fixed her poor eyes appealingly on the doctor.
There was still not the frailest bud of hope to be gathered from that sympathising face, and the half-maddened mother saw that there was not.

"He will not die—he must not die—he shall not die!" she cried passionately; "so young, so fair, will death take him and leave me a miserable crippled block to cumber the ground? No, no, no, Mortimer shall not die. Oh, my God, my God, have mercy on me, and spare my only son!" she wailed, as she threw her arms around the motionless form.

Too late, too late, unhappy mother! Already the flickering light is out. The King of Terrors has claimed his stricken prey.

That awful summoning away is known to every one in the room but the kneeling woman who is praying so earnestly.

Her son's hand is clasped in her feverish fingers, and it is the cold thrill of the stiffening limb which first presses a conviction of the dreadful truth upon her.

Piercing shrieks resound through the room; the desperate misery of the bereaved mother appals even Algy's daughter.

Rose Boyne has wrestled with her own grief, and is striving in vain to compose her mistress. Miss
Winifred, pale and trembling, comes forward to speak some words of comfort.

The sight of her step-daughter appears strangely to calm the agony which had seemed only a moment ago utterly beyond the control of the dead man’s mother. The wild piercing shrieks are suddenly stilled. She raises herself from the ground, her cap has fallen from her head, her long white hair is streaming over her shoulders, her large dark eyes are blazing with a lurid light; she passes her shaking fingers over her worn brow as though seeking to collect her scattered thoughts.

And now words pour like a torrent from her parched and fevered lips, words of bitter self-upbraiding, words telling of hidden sin and hidden misery; words of such a strange mysterious import, that they blanch the face of Algy’s daughter to the hue of the corpse in whose presence she stands.

“She is mad!” my lady cries at last; “this sudden grief has turned her brain. Leave the room,” she says imperiously to the servants who are pressing eagerly forward.

The obedient underlings stifle the curiosity which is consuming them, and hurry towards the door. Their flight is suddenly arrested.
Rose Boyne has separated herself from her mistress, and now she is standing in the middle of the room. No longer humble and drooping, but with a defiant air totally unlike her usual manner.

"Remain where you are," she says to the retreating vassals in tones as imperative as those uttered by Algy's daughter; "remain where you are. Let no one leave the room until I have told what must be known to all this night. My lady is not mad. She has spoken the truth, so help me God!"
CHAPTER XVII.

It is half-past nine. The Thomsons, the Joneses, and several other of Mrs. Bland's friends, are gathered together in her drawing-room. A perfect stampede to the widow's establishment had taken place immediately it was known that young Newcome had been called away from his pretty fiancée to attend the last moments of Sir Mortimer Plantagenet.

The utmost horror prevailed in the town when it first heard of the baronet's accident, and the greatest sympathy was expressed for his mother. The fatal bodkin was not once brought out during the whole time the matter was discussed. I cannot give a stronger proof of the genuine sorrow Farnorth felt for the tailor's unhappy daughter.

The news of Sir Mortimer's death was conveyed to Mrs. Bland and her guests almost directly after it had actually occurred. We know the relict's
medium of communication. She has told her Devonshire friends how she contrives to place herself *au courant* with the principal events which happen at Foxcroft.

"Mary's sister has run all the way here; she knew how very anxious I should be. It is all over, poor young man; so handsome too!" the relict said, in a choking voice. "George promised to call on his return from Plantagenet Park; but I am so uneasy, I have sent Mary to Foxcroft with her sister on purpose to learn how the baronet's poor mother takes this dreadful loss." Tears gathered in the eyes of all present at the mention of that wretched lady. Farnorth is anything but heartless, in spite of its tendency to gossip.

"He cannot have lived more than two hours from the time he was carried home," remarked one of the self-invited guests; "it is only just ten o'clock now."

"Some of the gay visitors have already left Foxcroft," said another; "I wonder what my lady will do with the rest of her fine friends."

This reference to the younger Lady Plantagenet infused an entirely different tone into the conversation. Eyes were rapidly dried, and lips which
had only expressed tender womanly sympathy a moment before were now curled with indignant spitefulness.

"Some good always comes out of evil," observed Bessie Thomson, with copyhead philosophy. "We shall have no more of my lady's insolence. She will not be able to queen it any longer at Foxcroft. She must satisfy herself with Becklands until she has caught some other poor man with her great bold eyes."

There was something very comforting in this assurance certainly.

"The Dowager Lady Plantagenet has a right to remain at the Park as long as she lives, I know," said Miss Clio Jones, who wore her hair parted on one side, and was the intellectual young lady of Farnorth. "It is only a very small portion of the estate that is strictly entailed. Do you know to whom the property will revert, Mrs. Bland?"

The widow was a great authority in all matters connected with the aristocracy of the neighbourhood.

"To quite a collateral branch of the family," replied the relict, who always took great pains with her English when she spoke to the genius of the
town; "Sir Reginald Montmorency Plantagenet is immensely rich; this property will be a mere—"

I am afraid the widow was going to say "flea-bite," but if she were, she was fortunately prevented the utterance of the vulgarism by a sudden question from one of her visitors.

"Is he married?" said this interrogator, rather eagerly.

"Oh, yes," answered the student of Barker; "and has as many children as he has estates."

"I wonder what will become of the Dowager Lady Plantagenet?" said another of the group.

"She will never be able to remain at Foxcroft; she will go abroad, I should say, if her son's death does not kill her, which is more than likely, poor thing!" remarked Mrs. Bland, with a sigh.

"George is very late," interposed pretty Lucy, who had said very little hitherto. "I hope he has not been called away to attend another case."

"I hope not, indeed," said her mother. "I shall not be able to close my eyes until I have heard all particulars about the sad end of this poor young man. Mary's sister did not remain at Foxcroft a moment after she was told that all was over; the silly girl did not stay even to wrap herself up properly from the weather. I am afraid she will
have done her clothes no good," added the careful soul, who was as economical for other people as she was for herself.

"It still rains heavily," said the young doctor's betrothed; "I wish I knew whether George has really been called to another case." Œillades pass between some of the spinsters; several pairs of shoulders are raised contemptuously.

"Lucy was always such a simple little creature," Miss Clio Jones' blue eyes telegraph to Bessie Thomson.

"As if nobody had ever been engaged to be married before!" is the very intelligible response of the black optics.

But still the time goes on, and George Newcome does not appear.

The widow extinguishes two of her candles; if her self-invited guests choose to remain, they must be satisfied with semi-obscure. The fair intruders begin to feel a little awkward, and are extra civil to their hostess in consequence. They have, every one of them, inwardly registered a vow that they will not go home until they have seen the relict's intended son-in-law; and so one or two of the most diplomatic evince a great interest in the anti-macassar with which Lucy's mother, whose
hands are no more idle than her tongue, is occupied.

Half-past eleven. The widow's maid has returned with a white face, bewildered staring eyes, and a very avalanche of mysterious news.

She is utterly unable to disburthen herself of this load at first, but the few words of extraordinary significance which mingle with her many interjections so interest and excite her mistress, that she drags the girl forcibly in amongst the visitors assembled in the drawing-room.

"George will be here directly," the widow gasps; "he has been at Foxcroft all this time, and so has Dr. Banques; but Mary has brought the most extraordinary news. I can scarcely make head or tail of what she says, but the little I have made out has quite taken away my breath. Tell them what it is the servants of Foxcroft say; and, for goodness' sake, do make yourself intelligible."

"Oh, please, ladies," cried the excited Abigail, "they say that the Baronet is not the Baronet. Lady Plantagenet and Rose Boyne have confessed everything."

"Confessed everything!" repeated the amazed multitude.

"Oh, yes, please, ma'am; all about Mr. Frede-
rick's private marriage, which no one knew anything about but Mrs. Boyne and her husband; and about his little son, please, ladies, which did not go along with Rose and her husband when he was forced to run away. It was Mrs. Boyne's own son as she made believe to Lady Plantagenet was his, when she come down that time as I've heard you speak of, mum, when the diamonds was pawned for to get the money for her; and it was Mrs. Boyne's son which died out in Australia just before the family came back to Plantagenet Park, and not Mr. Frederick's little boy at all, which has been alive all this time, and kep out of his legal belongings by the diseased gentleman."

It certainly was not a very intelligible communication which poured, without stop, let, or hindrance, from the lips of the servant-maid; but it was nevertheless a very exciting one, and raised a Babel of enquiring tongues.

"Mr. Frederick privately married! Mr. Frederick's little boy alive! What is he? Where is he? Who is he?" cried half a dozen voices together.

"Oh, please, ladies, that's the most astonishing-est part. I was just going to tell Missis when she brought me to you here," replied the nearly
breathless servant-woman. "Please, mum, they say that Mr Frederick's little boy, which has been kep out of his loful property all this time, is nobody else but Mr. Horace Snowe!"

Every inmate of the room was stricken dumb; perfect silence for at least three minutes reigned after this last astounding piece of intelligence. Mrs. Bland was the first to regain her speech.

"Captain—Horace—Snowe—the son of Mr. Frederick Plantagenet!" she cried, jerking out each word with the utmost difficulty; "it is impossible! it cannot be!"

"Mrs. Boyne has tuk her bible oath as he is, mum," persisted the maid; "and so likewise has Lady Plantagenet. They have sworn it, mum, in the ofullest manner. That's Mr. Newcome's knock, mum; and now you will hear all about it from him," she added, as she ran to open the street door.

I think George Newcome would have willingly dispensed with the presence of the greater part of his future mother-in-law's fair guests, although he was too well-bred to allow any of his inward dissatisfaction to rise to the surface. The young doctor looked greatly harassed; the scene he had witnessed and the story he had heard were
Mr. Newcome attempts to explain.

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certainly of a nature to upset the nerves of most persons; but very little mercy for his jaded appearance or his shaken nervous system was extended to him by the eager ladies, whose hungry curiosity had only been made still more avide by the misty morsels thrown to them by the widow’s maid. Questions were poured upon him, and, though his answers were clear and lucid enough, the attacking party contrived to entangle them in such a manner that, were I to write down the conversation word for word, the reader would be lost in a hopeless fog. I must therefore take the narrative out of the hands of Lucy’s betrothed, as I once before took it out of the hands of her mother, and endeavour to give form and substance to that hazy communication which Mary had breathlessly brought with her all through the pitiless rain from Foxcroft.

I fancy the Abigail’s words have not astonished and bewildered the reader nearly so much as they have astonished and bewildered Mrs. Bland and her visitors. Frederick Plantagenet’s identity with the mythical Mr. James Smith has doubtless, for some time, been transparent enough to the discerning eyes which have glanced over the pages of this history. But the circumstances which led to that extraordi-
nary travesty, and the events which followed on it, would have remained an impenetrable mystery to the most acute observer, had it not been for the confession made by Rose Boyne in the presence of her dead master.

The valet’s widow has cleared away the mists of shame which have so long shrouded the memory of our brave soldier’s young mother.

It was during his wanderings in foreign lands, in those days when the tornadoes raging so constantly at his paternal home forced him to be a roving Englishman—in those days when he was chafing in the bonds of a distasteful engagement, and writhing in fetters forged out of interested motives—it was during those inauspicious days that Frederick Plantagenet first met Emmeline Snowe. She was at that period a pupil in an almost conventual establishment in a small German town. How little did the jealous guardians of the fair girl dream of any lurking danger in that closely watched sanctuary; and yet it had crept in, glazed with the delicious film of romance—environed with the attractive halo of mystery. When Emmeline was carried away to her Devonshire home by her unsuspecting father, she had
already held more than one interview with Miss Marsden's betrothed husband.

That he had yielded to no evanescent feeling was evident enough. The beautiful school-girl had completely bewitched him, and he followed her at once to England. We know what means he employed to force an entry into Trafalgar Cottage. We know how poor Emmeline had bloomed and brightened under the incapable teaching of her drawing-master. We have been made acquainted with the revelations of the good-natured neighbour, the savage court-martial held, the ignominious dismissal of the principal culprit, the locking-up on bread and water of the other. We have bewailed the flight of the Admiral's youngest daughter and her mysterious miserable end; and now Rose Boyne has filled up the interstice, as yet unknown to us, from the time of Emmeline's disappearance in the pride of her youthful beauty, to that ghastly meeting between the bereaved sisters and their lost darling in the room where the plaintive cry of her child was first heard.

That Lady Plantagenet's favourite maid was the handsome landlady who had received Alathea and Mary Snowe I need scarcely say. Her
Italian husband had played throughout the part of Varney in this Amy Robsart episode. He it was who had first suggested to the enamoured Leicester the possibility of a secret marriage; he it was who had contrived the escape from Trafalgar Cottage; he it was who, in conjunction with his wife, had witnessed the private nuptials of the young couple; and he it was who had secured a safe retreat for the child-wife in an obscure Welsh village.

In what manner Frederick Plantagenet ever hoped to extricate himself from the coils in which he was entangled, I do not know; possibly he trusted to time and chance, as many other foolish persons have done before him. He was not remarkable for moral courage; he was disposed to temporise on most occasions. It would seem he had some intention of revealing his position to his aunt and sister during the last visit he ever made to Foxcroft, but the fierce storm which raged on every side on account of the opposition he again, as he had so frequently before, evinced to fulfil his compact with his cousin, swept all such purpose from his mind, and he left his home with anger against its every inmate burning in his breast, but with his secret untold.
And now a time was fast approaching when the poor young wife would stand in need of greater skill and care than the obscure Welsh village could provide. Varney was once more called into council, and was fertile as ever with expedients. His wife had apartments in London: thither he proposed that the fair expectant mother should be conveyed.

Unfortunately, at this inopportune moment business of imperative necessity required the presence of Frederick Plantagenet at Calais: it is doubtful, otherwise, whether he would have closed with Boyne's proposal. He had not much confidence in his step-mother's maid; but the urgency of the case did not admit of delay; and so, in an evil hour for her, poor girl, Emmeline was placed under the care of Rose Boyne, whilst her husband and his valet undertook that journey which terminated so tragically.

Up to this period there had been nothing in the conduct of the Italian and his wife that was not, to a certain extent, venial. A change for the worse came now.

When the terrible intelligence conveyed to her by her husband's servant, had caused the death of the wretched young wife, the two
witnesses of the secret marriage were awkwardly situated. To reveal their share in this transaction would submit them at once to furious indignation, and to no possible benefit. Would it not be wiser to conceal it, at least for a time?

Rose Boyne made a great parade of her affection for her mistress and her mistress' son when she came to this part of her story. She declared it was love for her foster-sister alone which had induced her to listen to the suggestion first made by her husband, and it is possible that it had greatly influenced her. But Boyne himself had evidently, in spite of the sophistry with which his wife strove to shelter his knavery, been impelled by cupidity alone to form this scheme of concealment. It placed him in a position to appropriate at once all the jewellery and other valuables which poor Frederick had heaped upon the unhappy child he had wooed and won. It enabled him to employ for his own use the money which had been entrusted to his wife to provide everything necessary for the comfort of her charge. He had deliberately robbed his dead young master and mistress; and the hesitation and confusion of manner he had betrayed at the judicial inquiry cease to be a matter of any wonder.
Even before the letter was written, summoning Alathea and Mary Snowe to London, their sister Emmeline was lying a corpse, the wedding-ring had been removed from her slender finger, and the infamous lies concocted which so completely imposed on the two poor girls.

Rose and her worthy husband did not long enjoy the wages of iniquity. Ere a twelve-month was over the valet was implicated in that felony which compelled him to fly the country. Before he fled, however, he left instructions with his wife—whose infatuated affection for him made her a mere tool in his hands—to commence a traffic now of that secret known to themselves alone. But there were difficulties attending the carrying out of this undertaking that the wily Italian had not calculated upon. All trace of the Admiral's daughters was lost, and the last intelligence that had been heard of them was of a nature to render a discovery of their whereabouts valueless. It was said that the child who had accompanied them from London had since died of scarlet fever.

There was no time for prosecuting any further enquiries. Eleanora's anxiety to join her Concini triumphed over what little sense of honour re-
mained to her. More lies were cleverly manufactured. A child had been born to her three months after the death of Frederick Plantagenet. With this infant in her arms she presented herself at Foxcroft, demanded and obtained an interview with her offended mistress, told her story, and imposed her own son on the old baronet's young wife as the real heir to the entailed property and title.

The shock produced by such a revelation may be easily imagined. Farnorth has gossipped considerably about this meeting, as we know, and Mr. Houndly's story about the pawned diamonds was no fabrication—it was indeed the only morsel of truth in his shameful "they says."

Lady Plantagenet's principles were not strong enough to stand the test applied by her maid. She became a party to the scheme of suppressing all evidence of her step-son's marriage, and may safely be said never to have enjoyed a happy moment from that hour.

With the money coined by her lies, Rose emigrated to Australia with her husband and her infant son. Boyne had now secured to himself a bank where his drafts were pretty certain to be honoured, and you may be sure he was not
tardy in availing himself of the means in his power. Lady Plantagenet's pin-money had heavy raids made upon it during that foreign exile of hers. But not long before she and Sir Mortimer returned to Foxcroft intelligence reached her —through what channel is not known—that both the valet and his son were dead; and she began to breathe freely for the first time for many years. The drain upon her purse ceased. All danger seemed over.

This state of comparative peace and security was not however to continue long. Rose Boyne, who had solemnly sworn never to return to England during the lifetime of her mistress, broke her oath, appeared suddenly at Farnorth, and came at once upon that clue which had previously eluded her search. She saw, and immediately recognised, Mary Snowe at the railway station, and from subsequent enquiries learned that the son of her husband's master was living; and by one of those strange coincidences—occurring as frequently in real life as in fiction—had actually grown up to manhood in the very vicinage of that home to which he had a legal claim!

When next this woman presented herself before her unhappy foster-sister, and received that stormy
greeting which we have witnessed, she had taken care to provide herself with every legal evidence to substantiate the truth of her new story. In the fabrication she had before foisted on her mistress, the maiden name of Frederick Plantagenet's young wife had been—either through accident or design—suppressed by Rose Boyne. Now she brought with her the certificate of his marriage with Emmeline Snowe.

Such an attestation was not to be refuted. Lady Plantagenet collapsed utterly under this new trouble, and that change in her took place which was discussed with so much interest in the servants' hall of Foxcroft. The influence which the favourite maid had obtained over her mistress in her youthful days was naturally strengthened now; but although Rose Boyne made full use of the power she possessed to work out her own advantage, it is not the less certain that she was attached to her foster-sister, as also to her foster-sister's son; and it is beyond all doubt that the history I have been narrating would never have been known to Farnorth had it not been for the untimely death of that man so long known to us as Sir Mortimer Plantagenet.

* * * * *
George Newcome's patience and good humour have survived the severe ordeal they have passed through, and he has arrived at last in a very exhausted condition at the terminus of his story. A Pandemonium is raging in the widow's drawing-room. The relict herself—who has lit every candle in the room, even down to the wax-tapers on the mantel-piece, never before so profaned within the memory of the oldest inhabitant; and who is magnificently unmindful of a grease spot, gradually expanding itself to horrible dimensions, which has fallen on her best silk gown during her hurried illumination—is so much excited that she can scarcely speak a word distinctly. The sympathy she had at first felt for Lady Plantagenet is submerged in the tide of satisfaction that flows in as she thinks of her dear friends in Devonshire.

"And Farnorth turned up its nose at them forsooth, when they first came; and we all of us behaved as meanly as we could!" she cries with indignant self-upbraiding; "and now, after all, their nephew turns out to be the real heir to Plantagenet Park, without a flaw of any kind on his pedigree, closely connected to the Overalls, the first family in the kingdom you know; and
then dear Zoë, who has been so shamefully swindled, will, in spite of everything, take such a high position, and we shall have her back again amongst us. I wonder whether she will come to Foxcroft at once? but——"

"She will never cut her old friends and acquaintances like some one we know," interposed Miss Bessie Thomson, raising her voice so as to be distinctly heard amidst the din. "But Mr. Newcome has not yet told us how Rose Boyne's confession was received by Mrs. Mortimer Plantagenet."

There was an unctuous emphasis laid by the young lady on this bourgeois prefix, which no sign in typography can possibly render.

"Mrs. Mortimer!" repeated Mrs. Bland. "Oh, of course, Mrs. Silvester's daughter is only Mrs. Mortimer now. What a blow it will be to her! Do tell us, George, what she said and did when she was told everything."

"She was quite startled out of her usual calm haughty demeanour," replied the young man. "She launched the most scornful abuse at Lady Plantagenet and her maid, denounced the latter as an impostor, and threatened her with legal proceedings, and then she rushed from the room,
before Rose Boyne, who was speechless from passion, could——"

"Oh, if you please Mr. Newcome, you are wanted directly. John Dalton has come here to look for you. He says his daughter is in a very bad way indeed," said a maid servant, who entered at this moment.

George Newcome rose at once. A meaning glance passed between him and his future mother-in-law. He did not however speak a word, but hurried away on his professional errand.

Nearly every candle composing the widow's brilliant illumination was flickering in its death struggle before her guests departed to their several homesteads.

The extraordinary revelation made by Rose Boyne was soon known throughout the whole of Farnorth; and although the grey dawn of morning is breaking, our town has not closed its eyes, nor do I think it is at all likely to do so.
CHAPTER XVIII.

The whirlwind of passion which had uprooted and torn away the haughty reserve of Algy's daughter, is over at last. She is alone in her splendid dressing-room, calm and collected now. Her beautiful face is hidden in her white hands. She is thinking—thinking.

Not one shadow of doubt does she entertain of the truth of that story which has been told in the solemn presence of her dead husband.

Why had she not penetrated this mystery before? Why had she not better interpreted the signs and symptoms of that powerful influence possessed by Rose Boyne over Lady Plantagenet and her son? Clara reproaches herself again and again for her miserable and blind stupidity.

It was all made clear to her now. Her husband's hatred of Horace Snowe; his cruel triumph when he had seen the soldier's name in the fatal list; the blank disappointment which had
fallen upon him when the entry was proved to be false.

And *this* was the end of her brilliant career; *this* was the end of her splendid reign. To be placarded before the world, and her world too, as the widow of an imposter and a cheat! To be discussed in the booths of Vanity Fair in terms of pity! To be prated about by babbling lips as *poor Mrs.* Mortimer Plantagenet, who had been so shamefully cozened and swindled! To be triumphed over by the common vulgar mob she had trampled upon only yesterday! She had a prescient consciousness of the delight her degradation would bring to many, and she knew that a fluttering volatile pity would be the highest sympathy she would receive from any. Pity! She had sinned, and lied, and schemed, and plotted, only to elicit compassion at the end!

This arrow was sharp to bear; but the pain of it was as nothing at all compared with the fierce agony of that other poisoned dart, which was well-nigh piercing her to madness.

The thought of her humiliation in the eyes of *her* world would have been endurable, the knowledge of the vulgar mob's triumph would have been stingless, had it not been for the bitter
conviction of the happiness this story, which had brought nothing but misery and degradation to her, would bring to others. And to what others?

The hated young cousin, whom she has so wickedly injured, will fill the throne from which she herself will presently be hurled. Zoé is the happy betrothed—not of a nameless soldier, dependent on the affectionate charity of two unselfish women—but of a man whose pure lineage is without spot or stain. Zoé has won the disinterested love of a brave, manly, honest heart. The orphan girl, defrauded of her wealth and robbed of her father’s name, has gathered a blessed conviction, which might never have grown for the rich man’s heiress. Mutual love and mutual trust will encircle, with an abiding nimbus, the future of Sir Horace Plantagenet and his pretty wife, and Algy’s daughter is powerless to wither this coming happiness.

This it is which has made the proud head droop, and hide its beauty in those jewelled hands. This conviction it was which had raised that whirlwind of passion, and broken down the barriers of haughty reserve with which this crafty woman had hitherto surrounded herself; more of her real nature had burst out during that sudden
storm than she had betrayed for years. It was not a time, it was not a presence, in which to raise the veil, but Clara's mad rage had triumphed over her cunning brain.

She is conscious of this now. She regrets that passionate outbreak which had stripped off her dignified robes, and shown her, to common eyes, a mere noisy turbulent scold. Why had she not gathered her cloak around her and died, like Cæsar, gracefully?

* * * * *

The beautiful face is no longer hidden within the jewelled fingers. A bright light is shining in the eyes of Algy's daughter; her thoughts are still busy, but sunshine has broken through the clouds.

All is not lost yet.

She is free. The chain which had linked her to that cheat and counterfeit, the tailor's grandson, is sundered. She is free, and her matchless beauty is unimpaired!

She will gather the folds of her mantle gracefully around her now. She will breathe her last sigh as queen of Foxcroft, so as to win the admiration of the multitude. She herself will be the first to convey the news of her own degradation to
her young cousin. She herself will write the first letter of congratulation which will hail the nephew of the maiden ladies as lord of Plantagenet Park.

She has drawn her chair opposite the large brilliantly lighted mirror. There is something more than the gratification of mere womanly vanity, which leads her to consult so earnestly this reflection of her beauty. For three or four minutes she gazes on that lovely phantom of herself, which smiles so triumphantly before her.

She is as gloriously beautiful as ever; even the horrors and agitation of this dreadful night have left no impression on her loveliness. She is as gloriously beautiful as ever, and she is free; free to wander amongst coronets and strawberry leaves; free to scale yet more giddy heights than she has already scaled; free to repose in more splendid golden galleys than she has hitherto reposed in.

Do you wonder at this sudden brightening of her eyes as this mirage rises before her? Do you wonder at the partial lull in the pain of the wound which the poisoned arrow has made?

Her reign of splendour has not been altogether wasted; it has obtained for her an entry into that charmed circle, wherein she can ply her magic
arts. It is true she is the widow of a man who will shortly be proclaimed to the world as an impostor and an usurper; but she is not the less the only child and heiress of the richest man in Farnorth. It is true she will have to resign the sceptre at Plantagenet Park; but she will still hold a lien on its acres which equity cannot dispute. Beautiful, fascinating, accomplished, well-dowered, and with brilliant prospects; very few of the booths in Vanity Fair will be closed against the dethroned young sovereign of Foxcroft.

She encircles the fair brow of the lovely phantom, smiling before her, with the coronet of a duchess; she adorns its neck and bosom with diamonds, far outshining in lustre those which deck it now.

She rejoices, with a cruel joy, over that terrible accident which had stricken down her young husband in the pride of his strength and beauty. The natural horror, which even she had been unable to resist, as she watched the flickering away of life in the hapless son of Lady Plantagenet, had been absorbed in her mad rage, when the imposition which had been practised was revealed to her. And now her heart is filled with a shame-ful gladness, because she is free.
But it is not her freedom alone which has kindled that light in her eyes; it is not even the prospective coronet and visionary diamonds, worthy a king’s ransom, which have spread this wild unearthly beauty over her lovely face.

Fancy is busy with other dreams as well. She is once more the friend and confidante of her young cousin. She is once more busy with her fiendish arts, and wicked spells. She sees again the withering of that fair cheek, the fading of those bright eyes. All is not lost indeed. The beautiful Pythoness is only too powerful still.

"I will write to Mademoiselle at once," she murmurs; "and to the soldier as well—there is no time to be lost—I will send a telegram to papa as soon as it is daylight; he will be useful now." She sat pondering for a few moments after she had uttered these thoughts half aloud, and then she rose and approached a table upon which a desk, heavily made, and clasped with brass, rested.

She selected a key from a small bunch attached to that chain, which Dixon has declared never leaves her mistress’ neck by day or night, and applied it carefully to the lock.
Has the wand of an enchanter been busy in this gorgeous modern room? Where is that lovely phantom, with the lustrous eyes and wild unearthly beauty, which smiled so triumphantly on Algy's daughter? It has fled, and in its place has risen a ghastly gibbering thing—a spectre, with eyes horribly staring, and features hideously convulsed with the agony of fear! Jewels gleam and glisten on this weird creature, bright silken drapery flutters about it.

Again the magic wand is busy. The hideous spectre has vanished, and the clear surface of the mirror reflects the image of a corpse-like figure lying, helpless and unaided, on the gaily tapestried floor.

Papers litter the ground—papers which have been scattered wildly by a maniac hand. The desk is emptied of all its contents, but its most carefully guarded treasure is nowhere to be seen. The talisman possessed by Algy's daughter has been filched away!

An hour has fled, and a wretched woman is crouching on the ground; an hour has fled, and a half-maddened being is striving to collect her wandering thoughts. Now she has started to her
feet, and is closely examining the lock of the rifled desk.

It is intact. No effort has been made to force that masterpiece of Bramah.

Who has been the stealthy thief? Alas! only too well does the instinct of Algy's daughter answer this question.

She is in the power of her most implacable enemy; she is at the mercy of that inexorable woman whom she has loaded for months now with insult and contempt. Her future destiny is in the pitiless hands of Rose Boyne!

What mirage is it that arises as these thoughts repeat themselves in her frenzied brain with a horrible monotony?

A dark, cold cell—a breathless crowded court—the prisoner's dock—the felon's doom!

Another half hour has passed away, and the sheen of silk, and the glitter of gems, no longer flash in the light of the wax tapers.

Clara has removed her gay dress and bright jewels, and is plainly clad. Her face is hidden in the folds of a thick veil.

She has collected her diamonds, her emeralds, and her rubies together. She is about to fly away
Trapped and Caged.

from Foxcroft—away from disgrace and shame—
away from misery and despair!

She draws aside the soft curtain which shades
the large window, and looks out into the dark
starless night. She shivers as she gathers her
shawl yet more closely around her.

The dull splash of the heavy rain is the only
sound to be heard in this quiet chamber; the
stillness of death has fallen on the walls of
Foxcroft.

If ever the trembling, miserable, guilty woman
is to steal away, unnoticed and unseen, it is
now.

It is three hours past midnight; in two hours
more the down train will stop at the Farnorth
station; if she can only reach that goal, she is
safe!

Eagerly clutching the casket she holds in her
quivering fingers, she advances noiselessly towards
the door of her room. She draws the bolt with
nervous care, and quietly lifts the latch.

It resists her efforts; the door is locked and
barred on the outer side. The wretched fugitive
is trapped and caged!

With a suppressed cry of anguish, she has again
fallen a senseless heap upon the floor.
The swoon does not last long. Consciousness returns, bringing with it the stony calmness of despair.

Hush! there is something more to be heard in the quiet room than the dull splash of the heavy rain. Some hand is busy with the cruel iron bar. Is her jailer about to visit the unhappy captive?

Clara has bounded forward, with what intent Heaven only knows. She is standing wildly expectant of the coming figure.

The iron bar and lock yield to the hand laid upon them: the door is stealthily opened.

Her dead husband's step-sister appears before the fiercely burning eyes of Algy's daughter. She is as welcome to the despairing woman as an angel of light.

Miss Winifred is frightfully agitated; red rims encircle her poor faded eyes, and her white lips are tremulous with emotion.

"You must fly! fly at once!" she gasps, hoarsely; "fly at once, if you would avoid disgrace more bitter far than death! She has revealed everything; she has sworn to be revenged; and she is pitiless as stone. You have not an instant to lose!"

Clara's presence of mind seemed to have utterly
deserted her. She was staring helplessly at her sister-in-law.

"You have not an instant to lose, I tell you!" repeated Miss Winifred, excitedly. "She does not dream that I saw her bolt and bar this door, or she would be watching now. She is without mercy. She has sworn to be revenged, and yet you loiter! Are you mad? Come at once, for the love of God!"

She seized the arm of Algy's daughter as she finished these words, and dragged her from the room with a force and passion strangely at variance with her usual manner.

With loudly beating hearts the two women steal along the corridors and down the thickly-carpeted stairs. Silently they tread the marble hall, and enter the large dining-room.

The window of this room opens on to the broad terrace, and it is through this window that Zoe's cousin is to make her flight from disgrace and bitter shame.

Not a word has Miss Winifred spoken since she left the gorgeous dressing-room, and she is dumb as death now as she busies herself with the closed shutters.

The window is open at last; the chill moist air
glides in and extinguishes the light which Clara holds in her trembling hand. It is a sombre, sullen night. The ground is soddened with the heavy rain—a dull soughing wind moans amidst the autumn leaves—but Algy's daughter does not shiver now as she rushes out into the black gloom. There is hope for her in that sullen darkness; it is a friendly cloud that will shelter her from danger and pursuit.

She has flown without a word of thanks to her deliverer; but Miss Winifred is all unconscious of anything save a feeling of relief that the victim has escaped. The one seed of kindness which Clara had sown had brought its fruit for her in the hour of her degradation and misery.

The down-train is stopping at the Farnorth station. A closely-veiled woman, her dark dress saturated with moisture, is running along the platform.

The bell rings; the officials push past the dripping woman with very little ceremony.

"No first-class compartment vacant, ma'am; second-class carriage here. Make haste, if you please; the train is late already. You are very wet, ma'am. No shawl? no rug?"
The guard hurries the wet passenger into a second-class carriage; the door is violently banged; the engine screams; and the haughty woman, who had reigned a queen twelve hours ago, is thus ignominiously borne away from Farnorth.
CONCLUSION.

Four years have passed away since Algy's daughter made that stealthy flight from Farnorth.

Very little of her subsequent history is known to our town and neighbourhood. It is known that she and her father succeeded in making their escape to America; it is known that those securities in which Algy had invested some of the money obtained from Giles Houndly, Esq., were valueless as paper by the time the fugitives had crossed the Atlantic Ocean; it is known that Algy's ill-gotten gains were all submerged in that panic which swamped so many transpontine speculators; it is known that the cadet of a noble family and his beautiful daughter were landed friendless, and well-nigh penniless, on a foreign shore; but what absolutely followed on that melancholy landing is not known.

Many rumours are in circulation about them nevertheless. The weeds are always starting new
suggestions. They have not forgiven their enemy, in spite of her bitter humiliation, and in spite of the years which have flown away since her departure. The last report which has gained credence amongst us is that Viscount Shorthorn's cousin is earning a precarious living as a marker at a billiard-table in New York, and that his haughty, handsome daughter is treading the boards of one of the minor theatres there. I cannot vouch for the truth of these statements; I simply relate the freshest gossip in circulation.

Knowing Mrs. Silvester, as you must do by this time, you will easily believe she did full justice to that large stop which was suddenly added to her barrel-organ of grievances. The loss of this second fortune which she had brought her husband will, I think, in the end supersede the original grind. I do not fancy that she bewailed the flight of Algy and his daughter very much. She took that loss with very tolerable philosophy. Her portly person is no longer to be seen at Farnorth. She has left our town for more than three years now. She declared it was "as dull as dull." And so, in company with a long suffering maid, she migrates from one fashionable boarding-house to another. She is bountifully supplied
with money from liberal hands, but is by no means grateful for this largesse; indeed she is never weary of expatiating on the hardships of being dependent "on my niece and her husband, even for the bread I eat, and I with my hundred thousand pounds to my fortune when I first married, and then coming in, as I did, for that fine property, when my brother died so suddenly—it all came to me—his daughter was illegitimate, you know—it is very hard, you must say."

Mrs. Silvester’s reasoning powers are very limited. I think she would have been wiser had she never referred at all to this last accession.

Notwithstanding her grumbling, there is little doubt that Algy’s wife is really happier now than she has been for years. She has no one to bully her, and she can serve up the Woolwich triumphs whenever it pleases her so to do.

Mrs. Silvester is not the only person lost to Farnorth. The pale worn face and the crippled form of the dowager lady Plantagenet have long been gone from amongst us. She did not survive her son many weeks. She had made her peace with heaven before she died, and death was as welcome to her as sleep to the weary wayside wanderer. The ashes of unhappy Nelly Brown mingle with
the mighty dust of the Overalls. Edward Sparkles' old love had not sold her truth, and bartered her honour, altogether in vain.

She was tenderly nursed and cared for during her last illness by her step-daughter and Rose Boyne. That latter person does not know to this day who it was had stepped between her and her revenge. Soon after the death of her mistress she, too, disappeared from Farnorth, but not until she had lodged in legal hands the will she had abstracted, and the certificate of the marriage of Frederick Plantagenet with Emmeline Snowe; also a written confession, properly attested, of her share in that mystery which had caused so much misery.

There have been many stories afloat in Farnorth about the foster-sister and favourite maid of poor Lady Plantagenet. Some of our townspeople assert that her husband Boyne is still alive, and that it was at his instigation she had returned to England to extract money by working on the fear of her old mistress; but I believe this is mere conjecture.

Sir Horace Plantagenet and his pretty wife have tenanted Foxcroft for three years and a half now. The soldier had not much difficulty in
substantiating his claims to that property. Never were a couple so popular in Farnorth as the baronet and his little lady. Never was a master more revered by his workmen than Zoé's husband is by the miners at the Weasle. That leviathan is mighty as ever, and gives no signs or symptoms of decay. The rival iron-masters are reconciled at last to the unremitting prosperity of the mine. Riders of rock will not appear in the best veins of ore. Water will not drive the workmen out of the drifts. Running sand will not be disobedient to command. The three giants are totally subdued, and old Polwhele has left off croaking now.

If ever two mortals enjoyed real happiness in this world, I think the Admiral's daughters are those favoured beings. The shadow which had so long obscured their lives has been gloriously cleared away. No blush of shame need mingle with the tears they shed now over their dead Emmeline. A duplicate of that portrait which we remember so well in the drawing-room at Rose Cottage occupies a very prominent position in the picture gallery of Foxcroft.

Miss Alathea has flung aside Miss Acton and the 'Young Housekeeper's Guide.' She has been grappling with another domestic difficulty for the
last two years. This domestic difficulty has presented itself in the shape of a sturdy and decidedly handsome young gentleman, whose tenure on existence has not as yet been very long. He is the real king of Plantagenet Park. The *bas bleu*, who, I am sorry to say, has returned to Spurzheim and Combe, has had an opportunity of studying the head of the infant sovereign when no superfluity of hair interfered with her manipulations. She has, I believe, mapped it out to a nicety. If there be any phrenological organ which indicates a tyrannical disposition, I should say Miss Alathea's great nephew has this development in its highest perfection. He is a dreadful young autocrat, and all his feminine relatives are his obedient serfs, with the exception of La Sagesse, who is making feeble efforts for mastery, and weakly striving to form the character of the imperial young czar. I do not envy her. It is not only feminine relatives who bend the knee before him; he has a French subject who is a wonderful devotee: Madame worships the lilliputian monarch, and, I think, has assisted not a little in making him absolute.

Miss Winifred is a totally altered creature; she appears to have transferred the whole of the
affection she had once felt for her brother Frederick to her nephew, his wife, and the imperial czar. *Son altesse* comes in for a very considerable share. She passes her time either with her sister Marguerite in Germany, or with Sir Horace and Lady Plantagenet. Foxcroft is her favourite sojourn. There is no painful struggle with the inevitable evidenced in her toilette now. She has abandoned the flimsy muslins and the gay ribbons, and looks almost handsome in the rich silk and velvet dresses in which her nephew's liberality allows of her indulging herself in unlimited profusion.

Zoé has not altered in the least: she is girlish-looking and lovely as ever. Her husband adores her. She is the same pure-minded, ingenuous, unworldly being that won his heart so many years ago. Her high position has not affected her in any one respect. She gives herself no airs and graces, Farnorth says. She has attempted no clearance of her social *parterre*. Visitors are very plentiful at Plantagenet Park, but they are not exactly of that description my Lady Plantagenet—*Mrs.* Mortimer, I mean, Miss Bessie Thomson—so loved to entertain.

There is no lack of amusement under the present *régime* whenever the warlike baronet and
his pretty wife fill their grand old house with guests. All the Friendlycoomb neighbours—the squire's eldest son, of course, excepted—have stayed at different times at Foxcroft. They speak in raptures of their sojourn there.

Zoé and her husband have tried very hard to bring about an amalgamation of the different cliques; but hitherto their efforts have not been attended with success. One or two of Sir Horace's dinner parties have indeed been decided failures by reason of these rash attempts. "Social distinctions must be properly respected," Pliocene and Miocene say, as they group themselves in the grand tertiary formation.

The Duke and Duchess of Overall have electrified Farnorth more than once by their gracious presence at Foxcroft. Another duke is also a frequent visitor there; but the strawberry leaves are so modestly borne by this nobleman that our townspeople are not nearly so much overawed by him as they are by Sir Horace Plantagenet's cousin. However, they like him a great deal better, and some of our democrats are never tired of drawing invidious comparisons between the affable good breeding of this really well-born man, and the insolent assumption of several of
our small gentry. I think myself our county magnates would be greatly improved if they reformed their manners on this ducal model.

Our bench of magistrates has lately been deprived of the proudest and most pompous of its members: Grandly of Grandly has been carried to that narrow home where flowing robes of state are not of much account, I am afraid. Young Grandly is no longer the victim to an unfortunate attachment: he is a married man, and his wife is a very charming little person.

Miss Grandly is still single, but Adeline has been a happy wife and mother for some time now. She made a very good match I am glad to say; and is so much improved in appearance that I think you would scarcely recognise the patient waiting-maid of the fickle Montagu.

That false lover is unwedded, and likely to remain so. He is by no means calculated to inspire another grande passion. Mr. Montagu has grown immensely stout, and his hair has modestly retired to the very nape of his neck. His smooth forehead and crown would no doubt present a fine study for Miss Alathea, but they are rather inimical to romance and sentiment. Something has at length happened to Montagu, senior; but
it is not that something which I fear his nephew too earnestly desired. The uncle of Adeline’s false love has taken to himself a young wife—the orange blossom has dissipated the hopes which the cypress might have realized. Altogether, it seems to me that Montagu junior may—to borrow Mr. Silvester’s manner of expression—consider himself scratched from the marital entry.

I have said that Grandly of Grandly has been removed from our magisterial bench. Another member of that forum is no longer to be seen there now. Giles Houndly, Esq., has never recovered from that paralytic attack which laid him low when the news of the flight of Algy and his daughter reached him; he is a helpless, miserable cripple; his wicked tongue is as impotent as though death had laid its hand upon it. Gothic Hall, with all its lands and tenements, has passed into the ownership of cruel mortgagees, who foreclosed as soon as it was known that the ex-lawyer had been, in spite of all his cunning, remorselessly swindled, and was, in short, an utterly ruined man. Giles would have had to taste poverty in his old age had it not been for the conscientious liberality of the present owner of the Weasle Mine. Sir
Horace Plantagenet allows the paralysed snake in the grass a competence.

Farnorth says that Edward Sparkles felt the death of the woman who had so cruelly embittered his life very severely indeed. He is a very welcome guest at Plantagenet Park, and he too is an obedient slave to the will of that imperial czar, to whom I have had occasion to allude. Zoé is very fond of the lawyer; he is closely linked with the darkest episode of her life. Her father's memory is green as ever in the heart of his loving little girl, and many and long are the conversations she holds with that dead father's best and truest friend.

Dr. Banques has not entirely given up his practice; but I think he would have done so had it not been for his desire to be considered the medical attendant of the family at Foxcroft. His professional ability is not very frequently called into request. The huge warlike baronet defies illness in any form, and Zoé, refined and pretty in appearance as she is, has never any occasion for his potions. Her young ladyship is really as healthy as a milkmaid. The imperial czar has a soul above the incidental evils of teething, and so his highness has not made many demands on the
skill of the worthy doctor. Nevertheless, the good man's brougham may very frequently be seen making its way through Plantagenet Park, for he too is a very welcome guest at Foxcroft.

As to Mrs. Bland, it would indeed be an extraordinary circumstance if her pleasant face did not beam upon the members of the baronet's household some time in the course of every day. The widow is a very happy woman; her daughters are comfortably settled, and she herself on the terms of closest intimacy with the first family in Farnorth. The stumping of the wooden leg is considerably abated now, much to the satisfaction of the Reverend Archibald Middleton. There is no longer any necessity for the economical widow's shifts and contrivances; no longer any necessity for dyed gowns and hybrid domestics. The Dean of Blankshire is dead, and he has left something more tangible than his blessing to his niece-in-law and her daughters. The relict has quite a nice establishment of servants now, and keeps a neat close carriage and a real coachman. She is a much more important person in Farnorth than she was at the commencement of this history.

The reversion of the Dean's thousands has made a change too, as you may easily imagine, in
Sophy's position amongst the members of her husband's family. The Miss Middletons no longer speak slightingly of Mrs. Archibald—they admit that their brother has really made a very tolerable match after all. Those aristocrats are still on their preferment themselves. They are so high in their notions, Mrs. Bland says. The widow had never much patience with their high and mighty airs—their family was of too modern a creation for this worshipper of old bones to kotow before.

George Newcome is one of the most popular men in Farnorth, and his gentle young wife may very frequently be seen lying gracefully back in the grand Plantagenet carriage. Our Brahmins must make up their minds to come in contact with the young doctor and his pretty helpmate, if ever they hope to partake of those choice banquets which are so frequently given at Foxcroft. Our grandees may ostracise the other natives, but the banishment of these two they will never effect.

The 'Farnorth Advertiser' and the 'District Reflector' have again to chronicle princely donations. The present owner of the Weasle strives in that respect to follow in the footsteps of the
unhappy man who first developed its great wealth. The tide of popular opinion flows ever now in praise of Zoé’s father; his one crime is engulphed in the recollection of his many good deeds. Even in that last will of his, the poor, whom he had in life so much befriended, were not forgotten. The Harding Charity will be an abiding blessing to the widow and the fatherless for many years to come. Farnorth has reason to be proud of this noble charity, and Farnorth is proud of it.

Those tiny guests the pretty Peruvian was wont to entertain at Becklands, are very often gathered together in the large servants’ hall at Foxcroft. The faithful negro, and Annette, who are lord and lady paramount in the salle, delight in these réunions, but war has still persistently to be waged against cliqueism, and aristocratic exclusiveness. Zoé fights very hard to maintain a strict democracy, but she has not been successful hitherto. An aristocracy asserts itself in spite of her utmost efforts. Last year it was an aristocracy of hair-oil, vilely scented, and rancid into the bargain, but not the less an exclusive one on that account; this year it was an aristocracy of white pocket-handkerchiefs. Caste develops itself even amongst the miners’ children, and unoiled hair and coloured
pocket-handkerchiefs bring with them the isolation of the pariah.

Do you remember the lovely figure that flitted about at the last infantine entertainment Zoé gave at Becklands? Do you remember poor Ann Dalton's bonny barn? Where is she now?

It is more than three years since John Dalton carried his faded Snowdrop away from Farnorth. The girl had well-nigh died when the news of her betrayer's death was first conveyed to her. When she recovered, the miner's neighbours behaved exactly as he prophesied they would do. They tossed their heads and held up "Polly Dawton" as a warning to their daughters, and so the father has taken his child "reet away beyont Lunnun," his sister says. I hope his unselfish tenderness will meet with its reward. I hope the cold selfish heart of the erring girl will be melted at last. I hope the last years of the hard-working miner's life may be cheered with the love of a penitent daughter; but I entertain grave doubts on this subject.

And now we must bid farewell to lovely Farnorth; now we must look our last on pretty Zoé and her brave manly-hearted husband. Now we must press, for the last time, the hands of the
gentle maiden sisters. No longer shall we be edified by the learned Alathea; no longer be consoled in sorrow by tender-hearted, sweet-faced Mary. We leave them with the sun of happiness shining very brightly; may dark clouds never again obscure its blessed light!

THE END.