

# Four Stories High

**Clarke, Marcus (1846-1881)**

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**Melbourne**  
**A. H. Massina**  
**1877**

TO WILLIAM SAURIN LYSTER.

Four Stories High.

## Four Stories High.

“AND what is the name of your Christmas Story Book?” asked my old friend, Tityrus Tallowfat, as we adjourned to the verandah.

“I am not going to publish one,” said I.

“You are getting lazy,” said Marston, flinging himself into the most capacious of the lounging chairs.

“Everybody is publishing a Christmas book,” said Falx, lighting his cigar with the first proof-sheet of his review upon one.

“And who is Everybody?”

“The universe generally: England, Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man, France, and the still vexed Bermoothes. More immediately: Mr. Walch, Mr. Whitworth, and the ‘Vagabond.’ ”

“I have promised to write both for Walch and the ‘Vagabond,’ ” said I. “Whitworth usually writes his books himself.”

“And do you intend to keep your promise?” asked Marston.

“I have not yet made up my mind. Probably not.”

“But that will not prevent you bringing out a book yourself,” said Falx.

“No. But I am sick of Christmas books. I tried to write one last year. Indeed, I got as far as being paid in advance for it — and there I stuck.”

“Your admission justifies me in the belief which I have always privately had of you,” said Marston. “You are utterly without Moral Principle.”

“I have often been uncomfortably inclined to think so myself,” said I. “But I will make a proposition.”

“A penny in the pound was the last one, wasn't it?” growled Falx, under his breath; “and *not* accepted, I believe, by our numerous creditors.”

“Don't, Falx,” said dear old Tallowfat; “we may all be offering a penny in the pound shortly if this Bursting Up Act becomes law.”

“No politics,” said Marston. “Let us hear what the gentleman has to say.”

“I was about to observe,” said I, “that I *do* know a story which seems to me to be rather curious and entertaining; I will tell it, and we shall see if it suggests any idea of another story to any of you.”

“So that you may get an original idea out of each of us,” said Marston, “and sell the same to your own profit. I have hopes of you. You are becoming a Man of Business.”

“And what may be Mr. Marston's notions of man of business?”

“A man of business,” said Marston, oracularly, “is one who becomes possessed of other people's money without bringing himself within the purview of the law.”

“But I haven't got any original ideas,” cried Tallowfat, in alarm.

“No man ever sounded the depths of his own ignorance,” said Falx, coolly. “You are only a wealthy squatter, and little is expected from you.”

“Well,” said Marston, “the notion is novel. Pass one of the claret bottles and the cigars, and proceed.”

“The story which I have the honour to submit to you, gentlemen,” said I, “I have called the ROMANCE OF LIVELY CREEK. The claret is in the ice-chest, and the cigar-box on the cane-chair.”

## The Romance of Lively Creek.

THE township of Lively Creek is not the sort of place in which one would expect a romance to happen; and yet, in the year 18 — , when I accepted the secretaryship to the Mechanics' Institute, occurred a series of circumstances which had in them all the elements of the wildest French fiction.

The unwonted impetus given to social relations, which was effected by the “opening up” of the Great Daylight Reef, brought together those incongruous particles of adventurous humanity which are to be found floating about the gold-mining centres of Australian population, and in six months the quiet village — up to that time notorious for its extreme simplicity — had become a long street, surrounded by mounds, shafts, and engine-houses, and boasting a court-house, a mechanics' institute, half-a-dozen places of (variously conducted) religious worship, and some twenty public-houses.

The thirst for knowledge which attends upon worldly success soon made my office a laborious one, for, in addition to my duties as librarian, I was expected to act as master of the ceremonies, conductor of *conversaziones*, curator of a museum of curiosities, and theatrical manager. The committee of management were desirous that no attraction which might increase the funds of the institution should be passed over, and when Mademoiselle Pauline Christoval (of the Theatres Royal, Honolulu, Manilla, Singapore, and Popocatapetl) offered a handsome rent to be permitted to play for six nights in the great hall, I was instructed to afford every facility to that distinguished actress.

Mademoiselle Pauline was a woman of an uncertain age — that is to say, she might have been two-and-twenty, and was not improbably three-and-thirty. Tall, elegant, self-possessed and intelligent, she made her business arrangements with considerable acuteness, and having duly checked all items of “gas” and “etceteras,” announced that she would play the “Green Bushes” as an initiatory performance.

“I always act as my own agent,” said she, “and my company is entirely under my own direction.”

Upon inquiry at the Three Star Brand — where the company were lodged — I found this statement to be thoroughly correct. Miss Fortescue (the wife of Mr. Effingham Bellingham, the “leading” gentleman) had already confided to Mrs. Butt, the landlady, several items of intelligence

concerning the tyranny exercised by the lady-manager. Mr. Capricorn, the “juvenile man” (husband of Miss Sally Lunn, the charming *danseuse*), had hinted vaguely, with much up-lifting of his juvenile brows, that mademoiselle was not to be trifled with; while I found that old Joe Banks, the low comedian (the original Stunning Joseph, in the popular farce of “My Wife's Aunt”), had shaken his venerable head many times in humorous denunciation of “the artfulness of Christoval.”

There was much excitement in the bar-parlour of the Main Reef Hotel at dinner hour. So many reefers took me mysteriously behind the door and begged me to bring them casually behind the scenes during the performance, that it was evident that for the first night of the six, at all events, the improvised theatre would be crowded. The only man who manifested no interest was Sporboy — Sporboy, the newly-arrived, Sporboy the adventurer, Sporboy the oracle of tap-rooms, Sporboy the donor of curiosities to our Museum, Sporboy the shareholder in the Great Day-light, Sporboy the traveller, the narrator, the hot whisky swiller; — honest Jack Sporboy, the richest man, the hugest drunkard, and the biggest liar in all Lively Creek.

“I've seen enough of them sort o' gals,” said he. “I'm getting old. My hair's gray. Pauline Christoval, of the Theatres Royal, Manilla and Popocatapetl, eh? Bosh! Hot whisky.”

“But, Captain Sporboy, your influence — ”

“Oh, yes! All right. I've been in Manilla. I've eaten brain soup and *basi* in Ilocos, my boy. *Human* brains! Devilish good, too. Ha, ha! Another lump of sugar.”

“Human brains, you old cannibal!” cried Jack Barnstable. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say, dear boy,” returned the old reprobate, wagging his Silenus head. “When I was in Sampalo we made a trip to Pangasinan and assisted at a native feast. The Palanese had just achieved a victory over the Guinanès, and seventy-five heads were served up in my honour. Gad, gentlemen, the fellows cracked 'em like cocoanuts, and whipped out the brains in less time than you would disembowel a crayfish!”

“But a theatrical entertainment, my dear Captain Sporboy, merits your patronage.”

“Seen 'em all, sir. Tired of 'em. N'York, Par's, London. No! Jack Sporboy, sir, is tired of the vanities of life, and prefers the elegant simplicity of whisky hot! I had the theatre on Popocatapetl myself once, and lost 4000dol. by a *mêtis* that I hired to dance the tight rope. Fine woman, but immoral, gentlemen. She ran away with my big-drum-and-cymbals, and left me to support her helpless husband. Never trust a half-caste; they are all treacherous.”

So we left the virtuous old gentleman to the enjoyment of his memories, and went to the Hall. My anticipations were realised. The

“Green Bushes” was a distinct success. Joe Banks, as Jack Gong, was voted magnificent, and for the Miami the audience could not find words enough in which to express their admiration. Madlle. Christoval added to the attractions of her flashing black eyes, streaming black hair, supple figure, and delicate brown hands, a decided capacity for the realisation of barbaric passion, and her performance was remarkably good. The *Lively Creek Gazette*, indeed, expressed itself on the following morning in these admirable terms: — “Madlle. Christoval's Miami was simply magnificent, and displayed a considerable amount of dramatic power. She looked the Indian to the life, and her intense reproduction of the jealous wife rose almost to mediocrity in the third act. Indeed, in the delineation of the fiercer emotions, Madlle. Christoval has no equal on the colonial stage, and we have no hesitation in pronouncing her a very nice actress.” After the drama was over, I took advantage of my position to go “behind the scenes,” and while Joe Banks was delighting the public with the “roaring farce” of “Turn Him Out,” to compliment the lady upon her triumph. I found the door of the improvised dressing-room besieged by the male fashion of the township, who (having made Lame Dick, my janitor, drunk) had obtained introductions to the eminent *tragedienne*. Foremost amongst these was Harry Beaufort, the son of Beaufort, of Beaufort's Mount.

“Ah!” said I, “are you here?”

“Yes,” said he, blushing; “rode over to-day from Long Gully.”

“Mr. Beaufort and I are old acquaintances,” said the soft tones of the lady, as, emerging, cloaked and bonneted, from the rough planking, she melted the crowd with a smile, and turned towards me. “Will you join us at supper?”

I looked at Harry and saw him blush again. It struck me that he was only two-and-twenty; that his father was worth half a million of sheep, and that Mad e. Christoval was not a woman to marry for love. “Thank you,” said I, “I will.”

We had a very pleasant supper, for though I was evidently a skeleton at the banquet, the actress was far too clever to let me see her uneasiness. Harry sulked, after the manner of his stupid sex, but the lady talked with a vivacity which made ample amends for his silence. She was a very agreeable woman. Born — so she told me — in the Phillipines, she had travelled through South America and the States, had visited California, and was now “doing Australia” on her way to Europe. “I want to see life,” she said, with extraordinary vigour of enjoyment in her black eyes, “and I must travel.”

“Why don't you take an engagement in Melbourne?” I asked.

“Can't get one to suit me. I don't care about sharing after everything a night but the gas. Besides, I only want to pay my way and travel. I should have to stop too long in one place if I took a Melbourne engagement.”

“And you don't like to stop in one place?” asked Beaufort.

“No,” said she, decidedly. “I am an actress, and actresses, like fine views, grow stale when you see them every day.”

“But did you never think of leaving the stage?” asked the young man.

“Never. I was born in a theatre. My mother was a ballet dancer. My father was an actor. My grandfather was clown in a circus. I have played every part in the English language that could be played by a woman. I could play ‘Hamlet’ to-morrow night if the people would come and see me. Why should I leave the stage?”

“True,” said I, “but you may marry.”

Oh! the vicious look she gave me! — a dagger sheathed in a smile.

“I never intend to marry. It is growing late. I am an actress. The people will talk. Good-night.”

We parted with mutual esteem; and as she shook hands with us, I saw, lurching up the passage, the whisky-filled form of the Great Sporboy. His eyes, attracted by the light from the room, fell upon us, and — surprised, doubtless, at the brilliant appearance of Mademoiselle Pauline — he started.

Mademoiselle Pauline grew pale, alarmed at the manner of the intoxicated old reprobate, and hastily drew back into her chamber.

“Go away, Sporboy, you're drunk!” said Harry, in a fierce whisper.

“Of course I am,” said Sporboy, advancing diagonally, “but that's my business. Who's that?”

“That is Mademoiselle Pauline,” said I.

“Ho!” cries Sporboy, his red face lighting up as if suddenly illumined by some inward glow. “Ho! Ha! That's she, is it? He, he! A fine woman! A fair woman! A sweet woman!” [It was a peculiarity of this uneducated monster to display a strange faculty for mutilated quotation.] “Ho, ho! I wish ye joy o' the worm! So a kind good-night to all!”

Busy all next day, I found in the evening that the *tragedienne* had been indisposed and had kept her room. Harry Beaufort, who informed me, said that she had intended to throw up the engagement and quit the town, but that he had persuaded her to remain. “I do not want her to do anything that may appear strange,” he said. Then, sitting in the little room off the bar, underneath the picture of the Brighton Mail, he told me the truth. He intended to marry Mademoiselle Pauline. “But,” said I, “do you know anything about her? I tell you frankly that I don't like her. She is a mystery. Why should she travel about alone in this way? Do you know anything of her past life?”

“No.”

“So much the worse. One can always obtain the fullest account of an actress's life, because she is a notable person, and the public takes an interest in the minutest particulars concerning notable people. If, as she says, she is the daughter of an actor, fifty people of the stage can tell you

all about her family. Have you made inquiries?"

"She came from California," said he. "How should they know her? Come, let us go into the theatre."

I went in, and I saw, to my astonishment, the cynical Sporboy seated in the front row, applauding vehemently, and sliming Miami with his eye as a boa slimes a rabbit it intends to devour.

"Capital!" he was exclaiming, "Capital! What a waist! What an ankle! What a charming devikin it is! Black blood there, boys! Supple as an eel! Ho, ho! Good! Our Pauline shall receive the homage of her Sporboy in the splendid neatness of a whisky-hot!"

The stage being of necessity but three feet from the front seats, these exclamations were distinctly heard by the actress, who seemed to shiver at them, as a high-bred horse shivers at the sight of some horrible animal. But she never turned her flashing black eyes to where the empurpled vagabond wheezed and gloated. She seemed, I thought, rather to avoid that fishy eye, and to feel relieved when Sporboy went out for the "splendid neatness" and did not return. I complimented her — in my official capacity — upon the success of her performance, but she seemed tired and anxious to get to the hotel. I offered to escort her, and when on the steps, was met by Sporboy.

He lifted his hat with a flourish which made the rings on his fat hands flash in the gaslight. "Introduce me! Nay; then I will introduce myself. John Sporboy, madam, late of Manilla, 'Frisco, Popocatpetl, and Rawker's Gully. John Sporboy, who has himself fretted his little hour upon the stage, and has owned no less than ten theatres in various parts of the civilized world. John Sporboy craves an introduction to Mademoiselle Pauline Christoval."

She paused a moment, and then — probably seeing that opposition might expose her to insult — said to me, "Pray introduce your friend, if he is so desirous."

"Spoken like a Plantagenet," cried Sporboy. "Mademoiselle, I kiss your hands. If you will permit me, I'll sing the songs of other years, of joyful bliss or war, and if my songs should make you weep, I'll touch the gay guitar!"

"Pray come upstairs," said she, coldly; "all the people are staring at us."

The Great Sporboy was never greater than on that well-remembered evening. He talked incessantly, and when he was not devoting himself to the "elegant simplicity of hot whisky," he was singing Canadian boat songs to his own piano accompaniment, or relating anecdotes of his triumphs in Wall-street, his adventures on the Pacific Slope, or his lucky hits in every kind of speculation.

"I have been through fire and water. I know most things. I have been up some very tall trees in my time, and looked round upon some very

queer prospects. You can't deceive me, and my advice is, don't try, for if you do I'm bound to look ugly, and when I knock a man down, ma'am, it takes four more to carry him away, and then there's five gone! Tra-la-la! Pu-r-r-r-r!" And he ran up and down the keys with his fat fingers.

"I think Mademoiselle Pauline looks tired," said I.

"Oh, no," she returned, uneasily. "Not at all. Captain Sporboy is so amusing, so vivacious — so young, may I say?"

"You may, Mademoiselle," said Sporboy, "say what you like. To lovely women Sporboy was ever gentle as the gazelle. Pray" — suddenly wheeling round upon the music-stool, and liquorishly facing her — "have you heard lately from your sainted MOTHER, ma'am?"

They say that a creature shot through the heart often leaps into the air before it falls dead. Mademoiselle Pauline must have received at that instant some such fatal wound, for she leapt to her feet, standing for an instant gazing wildly at us, and then sank back into her seat speechless and pale.

"What do you mean? I do not understand you," she gasped out at length; and then, as though her quick intellect had assured her that deceit was useless — "I have not seen my mother since she left me, seven years ago, at St. Louis."

"As she left *me* once before!" said Sporboy, with a savage triumph in his bloodshot eyes. "I thought I knew you, Miss Manuelita. Should old acquaintance be forgot, eh? I hope not."

I rose to go, faltering some lame excuse, but Sporboy stopped me. "Nay, my young and juvenile friend (as I used to say in Chadband), be not hasty. This lady and I are old friends. We met, 'twas in a crowd; and I thought she would shun me! Ho, ho! Let us drink to this merry meeting! For when may we three meet again? I will order Moet and Chandon."

"I think, Sporboy, that you have drunk enough." (She was sitting motionless, waiting, as it seemed, for the issue of events). "Let us go home."

"Home. It's home I fain would be — home, home, home, in my ain countrie! Eh, Mademoiselle Pauline, I'd be a butterfly, born in a bower, EH?"

"If you have anything to say to me, sir," said she, the dusky pale of her cheeks illuminated by two spots of crimson, "you had better say it."

"I, my enslaver? No not I, no not I, no not I! What was it Vestris used to sing?" (humming it) " 'I'll be no submissive wi-ife; no not I, no not I!' Would you like to be a submissive wife, ma'am? God help the man who gets you! Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, r-r-remember me!"

"Good heavens, Sporboy," said I, when I got him outside, "what on earth did you go on in that way for? What do you know of her?"

"Ho, ho!" chuckled Sporboy with thickening utterance. "What do I know of her? Tra-la-la! Tilly-valley! No good, you may depend."

“Tell me what you do know, then. Young Beaufort wishes to marry her.”

“I know,” said Sporboy, with another chuckle; “he told me. He's gone to Melbourne by the night coach to make arrangements.”

“When will he be back?”

“The day after to-morrow. Tra-la-la! Oh, haste to the wedding and let us be gay, for young Pauline is dressed in her bridal array. She's wooed and she's won by a Beaufort's proud son, and Pauline, Pauline, Pauline's a lady!”

“But, Sporboy, if you know anything absolutely discreditable about her, you ought to tell me.”

“Not to-night, dear boy. To-morrow! To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, creeps on this petty pace from day to day, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Where's the brief candle? So to bed, to bed!”

All night I tossed uneasily. The strange mystery of this handsome and defiant woman affected me. Who and what was she? What did the profligate old adventurer know of her? Was she innocent and maligned, or a guilty creature to be unmasked and abandoned to her own fortune? The hot morning streamed into my window, and woke me from some strange dream in which such conjectures as these had taken visible shape to torment me. I sprang up and opened the jalousies. My bedroom was the last of the sleeping apartments on that side of the house, and the verandah upon which it looked was separated from the dwelling-rooms by a high and close lattice-work. Presently I heard voices approach this lattice-work, and distinguished the tones of Sporboy and Mademoiselle Pauline.

“Why do you wish to persecute me?” said she. “I am not interfering with *your* schemes. This boy is not a friend of *yours*. I have not seen you for years.”

“No, my charming child, you have not. You thought me dead, eh?”

“I had *hoped* so often,” said she, slowly.

“But we don't die young in our family, my dear,” he laughed. “We live and love together through many a changing year — ay, and *hate* together! Ho, ho!”

“What do you want to do, then?”

“To make you suffer for your mother — for your infernal witch of a half-bred, Spanish-blooded, treacherous devil of a mother — my young lamb!”

“How?”

“By waiting until your lover comes back with his license in his pocket, and then telling him as much of your history as I know, and as much more as I can invent.”

She fell upon her knees.

“O, no, no! You will not do this. I will go away to-night, to-day, this hour. I never injured *you*. If you knew the life I have led. I am weary, weary. This boy loves me. He is honest and — and——”

“And *rich*, my Manuelita?”

“I cannot marry a poor man. You should know that. I have suffered poverty too long.”

“But have you not your profession? Are you not an eminent *tragedienne*? Do not the diggers throw you nuggets? I am ashamed of you, my Manuelita,” and he began to whistle as though intensely amused.

She rose to her feet. “My Profession! I hate it! — hate it! hate it! I never wished to belong to it. I was forced into it. Forced by my mother and by you——”

“And by others, my pigeon!”

“When I was thirteen you sold me. When I was fifteen I was a woman. I am thirty now, and do you think that fifteen years of sordid cares and desperate shifts have led me to love my Art — as you call it? An Art! It *is* an Art! But you, and men like you, have made a Trade of it — a trade in which bare bosoms and blonde hair fetch the highest prices.”

“Gently, sweet Manuelita! Tra-la-la-la! Tum-tum! Tra-la-la-la!” And he stopped his whistle to hum, beating time with his hand on the verandah rail.

“All my life I have been told to get money — money — money — money! Modesty is worth — money. Good looks are worth — money. Health is worth — money. I am taught to sing, to play, to dance, to talk, that I may bring — money. Well, you have had your profit out of me. Now, I am going to sell myself for my own benefit!”

He stopped whistling, and caught her by the wrist.

“I'll tell you what you are going to do. You are going to do just as I tell you until this time to-morrow morning. You are going to stop acting, for I won't let you out of my sight. (Don't start; I will pay the salaries of your people.) You are going to remain with me all day. We will visit the claims, the shops, the museum, the places of interest, and then this time to-morrow your lover will arrive, and I shall have the honour of relating to him the particulars of your lively career in the United States, Mexico, California, and the great Pacific Slope.”

“I will not obey you. Let me go!”

“Does my Manuelita wish that I relate her history to the world, then? That I print it in the local paper; that I tell my friend Craven, the Police Magistrate and Warden, that — ” And he approached and whispered something in her ear which I could not catch.

There was silence for a moment, and then the sound of suppressed sobs. Sporboy had conquered, for he walked away humming, and in a few minutes I saw him pass out of the door below me, and — with no

trace of the debauch of last night upon him — call out to the waiter, “Mademoiselle has asked me to breakfast, Chips. When the heart of a man is oppressed with cares, the mists are dispelled when a woman appears! Rum and milk, Chips!”

I went about my business that morning rather more satisfied than I had been. It was evident that, however infamous, from a moral point of view, might be the behaviour of Sporboy, the woman was an adventuress who merited exposure, and that the action proposed would liberate my foolish friend. I resolved to wait events.

The first event was the arrival of Sporboy to pay me for the Hall. “Our charming friend — I knew her poor dear mother in 'Frisco — is unwell and cannot play. Genius, dear boy, is often a trying burden. I have taken upon myself to show her about the township, to take her for a drive to the dam — to amuse her mind in fact. Is that whisky in that bottle? No? Ink! Ah, I will not trouble you. Till we meet, dear boy! Ho, let me like a soldier fall. Tum, tum! Ti tum! Tum, tum!”

The second event was the report started at the Main Reef Hotel that Sporboy was going to marry Mademoiselle Pauline, and that he was taking her down his claims to show her his wealth.

The third was the appearance of the pair themselves in Merryjingle's new buggy, to “look at the Museum.” “We have done the dam, seen the claims, been down shafts, and exhausted nature generally,” said Sporboy. “Ma'amselle is almost expiring.”

In truth she looked so. She was very white and nervous, and glanced about her with the stare of a hunted animal. Knowing that which I did know, I thought that Sporboy might esteem himself fortunate in not having been precipitated down a shaft by the little hand which so nervously twitched at the magnificent shawl of Angora goat's hair which had been the envy of Main-street for the last three days. I almost pitied the poor creature.

“Show us the wonders of the Museum,” cried the vivacious Sporboy (smelling strongly of the elegant simplicity of hot whisky). “Let us see your fossils, your emu eggs, your Indian shields, and your savage weapons of war! Ho, ho! here is a canoe, Ma'amselle! How would you like to be floating in it away back to your native land? Here we have a model of the Great Lively Creek Nugget! How would you like to have that now, and live in luxury all your days?”

If this was the method of torment he had put in practice since morning, she must have had more than human patience to endure it in silence.

“Here we have a club from New Caledonia. How nice to cleave the skull of your enemies! Our charming friend Pauline, if she *has* enemies, might long to be able to use so effective a weapon! Or this spear! Adapted even to a woman's hand! Ho, ho! Miami, would you not like to draw this little bow and spit your foe with this arrow? By the way, how

goes the time?"

It was two o'clock, and I told him so.

"The coach for Melbourne passes at three; would you like to go by it?" he asked her. "But no, I would not recommend it. And yet the company is paid a week in advance. They would not stop you. Shall we make a trip?"

She turned to him half hopefully, as though deceived by his tones, but catching the malignant glance of his eye, flushed and turned away.

Skipping from case to case like an overgrown bee, he paused at last.

"Ho, ho! What have we here! Ah! *my gift. The Sumpitan, or blow-pipe, the weapon of the natives of Central America, presented, together with a case of poisoned arrows, by John Sporboy.* Tra-la-la! Observe this: — The fellow takes one of these little wooden needles stuck into a pith ball, puts it into the pipe, blows, and — puff! — down falls his dinner!"

He commenced capering about with the long reed to his lips, swelling out his cheeks as in the act of blowing, and looking — with his big belly and tightly-buttoned coat — like a dissipated bull-frog.

Mademoiselle Pauline seemed roused to some little interest by this novel instrument. "But how can they eat poisoned meat?" she asked me.

"The poison does not injure the meat," I replied, with the gravity proper to a secretary. "It is the celebrated Wourali poison, and effects no organic change in the body of the animal killed by it. You fire at him; he feels the prick of a needle, and, as Captain Sporboy says — puff! — he falls dead in a few minutes!"

"Ho, ho!" cries the exhilarated Sporboy from the other end of the room. "See me slay the secretary with his own weapons," and wheeling about, he blew at me a pellet of paper, propelled with such force that, narrowly missing my face, it struck and knocked to the ground a little Indian figure, which shivered into fifty pieces.

The gross old villain was somewhat sobered by this incident. We both hurried to pick up the fragments of the shattered idol, and then Sporboy taking the quiver from the hands of Mademoiselle, replaced it, together with the reed, in its accustomed rack. "I am an ass," he said. "Let us return to the hotel and see the coach come in. We may have news of absent friends, who knows? My Pauline, thy Sporboy awaits thee!"

Paler and colder than ever, she allowed him to lead her away, and they departed. The manner in which Sporboy treated the wretched woman whom he had vowed to unmask disgusted me. It was unmanly, cruel. That she should be prevented from ruining a young and wealthy fool was right and necessary, but there was no need to torment her, to play with her as the cat plays with the mouse. Surely the best thing to do with her would be to let her go her own ways back into the great world out of which she had come. I determined to see Sporboy, inform him of that which I had overheard, and beg his mercy.

At four o'clock, the hour for closing the Museum, I went down to the hotel. At the door I saw Stunning Joe Banks.

"I was coming to see you," he said; "I want to take the Hall."

"Oh, certainly, but I must see Mademoiselle Christoval first."

"She's gone!"

"*What!*"

"Gone to Melbourne."

"When?"

"By the three o'clock coach. It's all right. *We're* all square."

"But," said I, bewildered, "what about Sporboy?"

"Which?" asked Joseph, with one of those fine touches of humour for which he was so distinguished. "What?"

"Excuse me a few minutes," I said. "There is something strange here," and I hastened down Main-street. "Captain Sporboy in?" I asked Chips.

"He was here this afternoon, sir."

"When did Mademoiselle Christoval leave?"

"She came down with the Captain in his buggy, and went upstairs with him. Presently she rang the bell, and told me to take her passage by the coach. She paid her bill, sent down her boxes, and was O P H, sir."

"And was not Captain Sporboy with her?"

"No, sir. Didn't see him after he went upstairs with her. P'rhaps he's in his room."

I went upstairs and knocked at the Great Man's door. No answer. I opened the door, and nearly fell over Sporboy's body. He was lying on the floor just inside his room — DEAD!

My hurried summons filled the room with people in a few seconds. We lifted the corpse from the ground. There was on it no mark of violence, save that in falling the dying man had struck his nose against the floor, and the blood had slightly spotted his shirt-front, and that his right hand, doubled under him, was bruised and discoloured.

"I wonder," said the coroner, taking his Three Star afterwards in the bar, "that a man of his habits was so apparently healthy. He drank whisky enough to have killed a regiment of dragoons. Those sort of subjects almost always die suddenly."

Suddenly indeed when he was last seen by Mr. Butt, in perfect health, shaking hands with Mademoiselle Christoval at the threshold of the room that was his death chamber.

The romance of Lively Creek was over, buried in the grave of the friendless adventurer. No one ever knew the nature of the secret which bound the Great Sporboy to the travelling actress, for when Harry Beaufort returned by the morning coach he found a letter awaiting him, containing three lines of farewell from the unworthy woman he had hoped to marry, and who disappeared into the unholy mystery out of which she had emerged.

Was it Accident or Murder which removed the profligate prosecutor of Pauline or Manuelita so opportunely and suddenly from her path? In common with the rest of the world I believed the former, until the day on which I resigned my post, and handed over the contents of the Museum to my successor. That day, on taking down the Sumpitan quiver, which had hung upon its accustomed nail for the last ten years, under the noses of all the world, I found that the tiny, poisoned, thorn-point of one of the wooden needles had been broken off, and, caught by a splinter in the little cane ring which sustained the mutilated shaft, was a fine white thread — the hair of the Angora goat, the hair of the shawl of Mademoiselle Pauline.

“Then you think she pricked him with the poisoned arrow?” said Falx.

“I am afraid so,” said I.

“Serve him right!” cried Marston. “I am not an indiscriminate admirer of women; but they are very hardly treated sometimes.”

“This from you!” said I, reproachfully.

“Yes, from me. I once knew an instance——” and he stopped.

“Capital!” said Tallowfat. “Why he has the second story already!”

“Fairly caught!” said Falx, lighting another cigar. “Go on, Marston.”

“It is about a girl I knew as a boy,” said Marston; “a girl called ‘La Béguine.’ ”

“A curious name!”

“A curious story, perhaps. Well, come, I will jump with your humour for once, and tell it you.”

## La Beguine.

“GOOD gracious!” said I, “what are *you* doing here?” She was a childlike little creature, having brown hair and brown eyes. She was dressed in black silk, and wore a white lace veil tied in a quaint, coquettish way over her head. She looked up and recognised me.

“Donnington's gone away,” she said, simply, “and I don't know what to do.”

“Don't stay here, at all events. This is not the place to cry in. Come, let us walk down the street, and tell me all about it.”

I was a schoolboy of sixteen, Donnington was a man about town, she was one Fanny Robinson — called, from her fanciful method of dressing, La Béguine — and the place was that huge building in Great Globe Square which, commencing as a Pantechnicon, budded into a Circus, and was now the Escorial Palace.

My old and esteemed friend, Mrs. Grundy, who declines to read Fielding, but for whose behoof Aphra Behn's novels have lately been reprinted (and such trash as “Anonyma,” “Skittles,” and “Agnes Willoughby” are sold openly at railway stations), will probably feel inclined to draw her petticoats together and metaphorically cross over to the other side. Wait a moment, dear Mrs. Grundy. With all your prejudices, you have a good heart; and I think you will be more grieved than shocked at what I am going to tell you.

We walked out into the Square — I, Horatius Marston, pupil at the Rev. Dr. Crammer's, home for the holidays, and this wicked woman. There was no doubt about her character. She had lived with Teddy Donnington for nearly a year without being married to him, and called by their Christian names some of the best and worst people in Babylon. She was always well dressed, had as much money as she could spend, and was treated with the utmost respect by her acquaintances. What a charming life — do you say, Miss Matilda Jane? Charming, indeed, when her only refuge from the melancholy caused by the sudden desertion of a man whom it is possible she loved, was the Escorial Palace! Stay, I am wrong — there were the Macallumore Rooms, the Vampire Café, Madame Ponceau' (Unclear:)Katherina's, Mrs. Carey's (or the Chateau d'Enfer), and the Streets.

“You are a good boy,” said this little person to me between her sobs, “and you ought not to be out in these places. Let us walk up the Strand. I

am glad I met you.”

“Hadn't you better go home, Mrs. Donnington? Let me call a cab.”

“No, I shall never go back any more — never! Leave me, and go home. It is wrong of your people to let you see this sort of life. You ought to have been in bed hours ago.”

She looked so charming as she spoke, so prettily formed to be some grandfather's darling, or some honest man's household pet, that my schoolboy heart began to thump with honest emotion.

“You are not much older than I, Fanny.”

“I! I am nineteen,” she said, and sighed.

So we two experienced profligates walked up moonlit Oxford-street together.

Let me take an instant to explain how it came about that a pupil of the Rev. Crammer's, up in town for his holidays, should have owned such an acquaintance. My holidays, passed in my father's widowed house, were enlivened by the coming and going of cousin Tom from Woolwich, of cousin Dick from Addiscombe, of cousin Harry from Colchester or Knightsbridge. With Tom, Dick, and Harry came a host of friends — for, as long as he was undisturbed, the head of the house rather liked to see his rooms occupied by the relatives of people with whom he was intimate — and a succession of young men of the Cinqbars, Ringwood (and, I am afraid Algernon Deuccace) sort, made my home a temporary roosting-place. I have not space to explain how such a curious *ménage* came to be instituted; indeed, I scarcely know myself; but such was the fact, and “little Marston,” instead of being trained in the way he should morally go, became the impertinent companion of some very wild young bloods indeed. “I took Horace to the opera last night, sir,” or “I am going to show Horatius Cocles the wonders of Cremorne this evening,” would be all that Tom, or Dick, or Harry would deign to observe, and my father would but lift his eyebrows in indifferent deprecation. So, a wild-eyed and eager schoolboy, I strayed into Bohemia, and acquired in that strange land an assurance and experience ill suited to my age and temperament. Remembering the wicked good-hearted inhabitants of that curious country, I have often wondered since “what they thought of it,” and have interpreted, perhaps not unjustly, many of the homely tendernesses which seemed to me then so strangely out of place and tune.

As we walked, my companion grew calmer, and by-and-by related what had passed. Donnington had been called away to Scotland on “family business” (so he said), and had left her. The usual letter of farewell, in which affectation of regret thinly veiled indifference, contained the usual “provision,” tendered in the usual manner. Fanny passionately tore up the note with her little gloved hands, and demanded to be led to the Serpentine, in order that she might at once end her sorrows. In vain I urged her to go back to her house. “It is yours, you

know, for six months longer. He has paid the rent. Why wander about the streets, when you have a home to go to?" "I will never go back any more, Horace, so it is no use asking me. Oh, I am very wretched!" What was to be done? It was impossible to take her to the paternal mansion — *that*, at all events, would not be endured — and it was impossible to leave her desperate in the streets.

Mrs. Quickly — I allude to the period before she married Pistol — was, with all her faults, a jolly soul, and, despite her liberality in the letting of lodgings, not without a touch of romance. Fanny's breakfast, furnished in that long parlour looking from a second floor upon the Haymarket, was, I have reason to think, prepared in a great measure by the hostess' own hands; and the slovenly domestic who waited upon her — the waiting was the great blot on Mrs. Quickly's household management — smiled maternally upon her youthful head.

"Now, Fanny," said I, looking round upon the worm-eaten splendour of the chamber — the George the Fourth chairs, the convex mirrors, the gilded console tables, the cloth-of-gold sofa with but three castors — and sickening in the atmosphere of secondhand prodigality, "it is impossible for you to stay here."

She produced a handful of bank notes. "I had forgotten these." There were some half-dozen £5 notes, I suppose; and she smoothed them out and sat looking at them with whimsical affectation of intense gravity.

"But you must keep those. No? Nonsense, put them back. Let us consider, my dear. I am at School, you know."

She burst into a ringing laugh, and then as suddenly ended in tears. "I ran away from *my* school," she said.

I suppose when one is young, one is not quite hard-hearted, or, at all events, is softer-headed than when one grows older. I went to her and tried to persuade her to go home. "You have a father and mother, Fanny, have you not?" She shook her head. "Well, one or the other, then?" No. "Relatives?" Oh, yes, she had *relatives*, but — with a shudder — had rather die in the streets than go back to them. "And He — the man, you know, Fanny — what of him?" Had I been older, I should have known how useless was such a question — how useless is always such a question. Faithful in all her misery, poor child, to that one dream of first affection, she resolutely put away all thoughts of betraying, by name or description, the lover who had betrayed her. "He was no one whom I knew — no one whom I was ever likely to know. Never mind him. He could do nothing. He must not be disturbed." So — baronet or butcher (probably butcher) — his ghost was driven from us, and we tacitly agreed to mention him no more.

"At least, you will let *me* write to your friends, Fanny," I urged with boyish vehemence. "Think of this life — think of what it must end in. For men," I added, with boyish philosophy, "such an adventure as this is

but an episode; for women, it is an existence. You are nineteen. What will you be at thirty-nine?"

"Frank Decimal says that many of — of us — marry well," she returned, with a woman's greed of argument.

"But Frank Decimal didn't tell you," said I, remembering a remark of Frank Decimal's Chief at my father's table, "that the average life of 'us' is four years and a half. Fanny, you *must* let me write."

"Well, then, *write!*" she exclaimed, passionately, "and see what good it will do."

The person to whom, by her unwilling direction, I wrote, was a Mr. Jonas Crampton, a draper in a country town, who was her stepfather. I set forth the case to the best of my boyish ability, and begged him to reply by return of post.

"And now, Fanny, you must go back to your house and wait his answer. Nonsense, you *must* go. You have no clothes with you, and I cannot remain away without some reason."

She went back, and the day following I called at Mrs. Quickly's for the reply to my letter. It was written on blue paper, in a hard, commercial hand, and was very brief. Mr. Crampton would have nothing to do with "that abandoned girl who had so ungratefully left a good home. She had disgraced herself, and disgraced her friends. If she desired to reform, let her go to the Refuge." I showed her the tradesman's cold-blooded reply.

"Well," said she, "you are very good. Let us go and look at the Refuge."

We went. A hideously clean, white building on the sordid outskirts of Babylon. The high walls suggested a gaol, and a cart stood at the barred gates. "What have you there?" I asked the driver. "Washing," said he, with a grin; "they washes cheap in there." It is possible that my youthful mind had not grasped the great Social Question, but at the time — with this elegantly-dressed, soft-voiced girl hanging on my arm — I felt that a Refuge which took women, accustomed to fare delicately and to be complimented by men of talent and fashion, and set them at a washtub, was not founded by Samaritans who possessed much knowledge of human nature. A hard-featured woman — the matron, perhaps — came to the gates, and interchanged looks with the driver of the washing-cart. They evidently understood our errand.

"For Heaven's sake take me away!" cried Fanny, trembling like a leaf.

God will deal justly, I think, both with me and with Mr. Jonas Crampton. I was not a Social Reformer, and I took her away.

I was chagrined at my signal failure in the cause virtue, and my peculiar Mephistopheles seized the opportunity to score a point in the game he is perpetually playing with me. "Fanny!" I cried, "it is no use trying to be good against these odds. I'll get some money, and we'll go to Paris until it is spent. What do you say?" Fanny clapped her hands

delightedly — alas! for the Refuge. “Donnington was always promising to take me to Paris. When shall we start — to-night?”

Two days afterwards we were supping at the Pavilion Hotel, Folkstone. That obliging man the jobmaster, Mr. Levison, had bought the furniture left by Donnington for £100 (I did not know, then, that one of Mr. Levison's multifarious professions was the purchase of furniture under such circumstances, and that he usually cleared 150 per cent on his outlay), and I had borrowed £30 from Ringwood, and obtained £25 from my father. “What do you want this money for, Horatius?” my father had asked. “I want to go to Paris, sir.” He looked at me with his cold and penetrating glance. A word, and I should have told him all. “Well, do not write for more when you have spent that; though what you mean to do in Paris with £25 I cannot imagine. There — shut the door.” So we eat Mr. Giacometti's cold fowl in high spirits. “Fanny, you must be careful of that £100. I have only enough to last us for a week or two, and then, you know, you will want your money.” “My dearest Boy,” she cried, opening her brown eyes to their widest extent, “why didn't you say so before. I spent every penny yesterday in gloves and things!” How we laughed — we pair of unsophisticated Bohemians — and struck out next morning boldly for the ocean of Paris with a lifebelt of £50!

The whole proceeding was, of course, utterly foolish and indefensible; yet, when I look back upon that merry, youthful time, I confess it seems to me, despite its folly, one of the most innocent periods of my life. It was early spring. Two children, we strolled arm-in-arm — I had almost written hand-in-hand — about wonderful Paris, peeped into bookshops, loitered in print-rooms, drove, rode, lounged, just as the humour took us. Fanny was as happy as a schoolgirl escaped from the backboard, and I, gay with the gaiety of careless sixteen, rejoiced in the absolute pleasure of living. We were not extravagantly luxurious. The desperation of improvidence, the choice suppers, the sumptuous fêtes, the water-parties, the jewel-cas s — all these things belong to maturer years — and the simple pleasure of being free was enough for us. If we did not say to the passing moment, “Stay, thou art so fair!” it was because we never dreamed but that each moment would be as fair as this. Yet our lifebelt of £50 soon began to fail us. We were not extravagant, simply because we had no need of the luxuries of extravagance; yet Fanny, with her vague notions as to “gloves and things,” played havoc with my Napoleons. She was by taste and temperament a true Bohemian. Having money, anything she desired she purchased. Being without money, she would laugh and forget. Did she wish to drink champagne, she ordered it; and did the whim seize her to drink water, she did not think it needful to countermand the champagne; yet bad I told her that we could not afford to drink champagne, she would have ordered Comet hock at once — as being less expensive. She was not beautiful; she was not well-born; she

was not well-educated — few women who have bewitched the souls of men have been either; but she had intensely that extraordinary sixth sense that nature gives to some women of never doing that which, at the moment, would appear to *you* to be wrong. For the rest, we were young. Ah! thou Alchemist Experience.

*“Tout l’or pour toi, mais rends moi mes beaux jours!”*

At last came the fatal “quarter of an hour.” We had expended our last franc. I wrote to benevolent Ringwood for another £10 — the good fellow sent me £20 — and we returned to London. We had been away nearly three weeks; and, as we sat after dinner in the Great Midland Hotel, I awoke to the debasing consciousness that I must go back to school in two days. To dispel care, we adopted Rousseau's famous plan — ran away from it; and by some curious chance that was not without a sort of premeditation we found ourselves at the Escorial. A dozen men of Fanny's acquaintance presented themselves at once, staring at me with an indifference against which my youthful impertinence was barely proof, and somebody asked where Donnington was, with an air which plainly said, “We are not to accept *this one* in his stead, surely!” To my relief, Rouge-Dragon appeared, and under the protecting aegis of his nascent dukedom I felt my position assured. He asked after my father, said he had dined yesterday with Tom or Dick or Harry, and was pleased to take great notice of Fanny.

I need not elaborate details. My money was spent, Dr. Crammer was imminent, and — we both had our way to make in the world. A few tears, a sigh, a kiss or two, and I reported myself to my father, with the consciousness that Fanny was “provided for.”

That term was my last at Crammer's. On the day following my return home, I saw in the Park a tiny carriage drawn at a furious pace by two ponies, and driven by a lady whose parasol-whip concealed her face. Two mounted grooms followed it.

“And who pays for that extravagance?” I asked.

“Rouge-Dragon. Don't you know? I though everybody knew. That is La Béguine.”

It was so. Sicilia no longer ignores Bohemia. La Béguine become the fashion, was as much a fact of modern civilisation as the Bishop of Bloomsbury. Fashionable newspapers chronicled her movements, Countesses copied her toilette, the best (male) society in England attended her parties, and she spent the in ome of a Princess. I never spoke to her again, for Rouge-Dragon was far too great a nobleman to ask *me* to his select assemblies; yet when I returned her bow, on the rare occasions when we met, I sometimes thought she did not look so happy

as when in Paris.

And now methinks I hear the rustling of Mrs. Grundy's indignant skirts, and catch a sigh of envy breathed by Miss Matilda Jane. "Is this your promised moral, sir? To scoff at Refuges, and leave your abandoned hussy riding in a pony-carriage under the protection of a Duke's son!" "Madam," I reply, with all humility, "you have not heard me to the end. So surely as this poor girl — who, when rescue was possible, was refused shelter by her cold-hearted relatives — became a woman whom the World (including Mr. Grundy) delighted to honour, as surely did the awful punishment decreed by Society for such offences overtake her." Two days ago, in an English paper lying on my club table, I read this: —

"A woman, once notorious in the *demi-monde* under the name of La Bégnine, died yesterday at St. — Hospital, from the combined effects of exposure to the late severe weather and habitual intemperance."

There is your moral, Miss and Madam. I present it to you instead of a sermon, for you may deduce from it this maxim —

**"PUT MORALITY AND ORTHODOX RELIGION OUT OF THE QUESTION, BUT YOU WILL FIND IT BETTER TO ENDURE THE STUPEFIED OF HUSBANDS, THE MOST COLOURLESS OF LIVES, THAN TO OUTRAGE SOCIETY."**

God may forgive you, my dears, but Society never will.

"Thank you, Marston," said I.

There was silence for a little, and then Falx said, quietly,

"That story suits my humour. I was at a funeral yesterday."

"An old friend?"

"No, I had known him but a few months. I fell across his path by accident. A sad story. I'll tell it as a pendant to 'La Béguine,' and will call it the tale of THE POOR ARTIST."

"Poetical and Pretty," said I. "Let us have it by all means. How does it begin?"

"It begins in my room in the *Peacock* office," said Falx.

## The Poor Artist.

“ ‘THERE is a fellow who has been painting some picture,’ my editor had said, handing me a note written in a woman's handwriting. ‘I wish you would go down and have a look at it. He wants a notice, or something.’ “Mr. Bell, artist, the studio, 3005 Bourke-street,” was on the printed card, and I called the next day. The studio was difficult to approach, for the building in Bourke-street was one of those overgrown places in which a dozen trades are carried on under one roof. The ground floor (bisected by the staircase) was occupied by a hairdressing tobacconist on the one side, and an umbrella-maker on the other. On the second floor, Messrs. Gripe and Squezem, solicitors and proctors, had established their offices. On the third floor, two working jewellers, an engraver, and a myall-wood pipe-maker burrowed together, and on the top of the fourth flight of stairs lived Mr. Bell. A glass door with the word ‘studio’ on it gave token of his artistic claims, and a sort of aerial conservatory strongly smelling of collodion, and littered with photographic portraits, betrayed his profession.

“Getting no reply to a knock at the studio door, I turned into the photographic-room, and, with an unpleasant feeling that someone was inspecting me from the purblind window of the ‘dark-house,’ sat upon a chair, and awaited the advent of somebody connected with the establishment. There is to me nothing more depressing to contemplate than the photographs of common-place people; for such folk — worthy citizens in ordinary working days — indulge, on such occasions, in such monstrosities of costume, and in such sadly ludicrous assumption of ease and wealth, that the tender-hearted spectator cannot but sigh at the horrible evidences of the prevalence of “Sham.” A “group” (Father, Mother, Mary, Jane, Tommy, Sukey, Jacky, and Baby) which, gorgeously painted, and framed in stamped leather-work to imitate oak, had attracted my attention by reason of the amount of gold leaf expended on the family electro-plate, caused me to wonder what artist could endure life among such vulgarities, when the door opened, and a middle-aged lady entered. She was dressed in greasy black, was busily rubbing her hands as though she had but just washed them, and from certain sucking noises made by the twitching of her lips, I concluded that I had disturbed her at an early dinner. When she saw that I was alone, a certain heartiness of welcome, which had marked her hasty entrance, vanished.

She had expected a "group," perhaps.

"Is this Mr. Bell's studio?" I asked.

"It is, sir."

"I have — um — called to see a picture," producing the letter.

"Oh! Certainly. From the *Peacock* office? Mr. Bell is out just now — my son, sir — but it's in the studio. Will you sit down a moment? I didn't expect you so soon. Dear, dear, if Tom had only been at home now!"

Mrs. Bell retired, and from certain whisperings which reached me, mingled with the muffled clattering of plates, I concluded that the studio was sometimes devoted to the study of the art of dining. Presently she reappeared in a clean apron and another cap (women can on occasions make such changes of costume with the rapidity of pantomimists), and smiling, led the way.

The studio was a large, bare room, hung round with casts of feet, clenched hands, and flowers. Some photographs were strewn upon a table. A violin depended from a nail. In one corner was a cupboard. The "dinner" was upon a tray with a cloth thrown over it. At the further end of the room stood an easel of portentous size, and on the easel stood it.

"I am *so* sorry Tom is out," repeated Mrs Bell. "But he gives lessons, you see, sir, and he's gone to Hawthorn this afternoon. You might wait, sir; but it is a long walk, and he started later than usual today. However, of course, you can judge, you know, sir, just as well; but I *wish* Tom had been here."

I stood before the canvas. A tall man, dressed in flowing robes and crowned with feathers, occupied the centre of the picture, leaning on the arms of two other feather-bearers. Over the heads of the trio two brown, half-naked slaves held a canopy, which also sprouted with plumes. On the right hand, and in the extreme foreground, stood a man in armour, with a woman dressed in boy's clothes holding the bridle of a horse whose nose only was visible. A priest talked to another man in armour on the left, and in the background arose the ruins of a windmill.

"Pray, madam, what is the subject of this work?"

"It's Cortez, sir. Cortez meeting the King of Mexico after burning the capital."

The windmill, then, was a sacrificial tower.

One glance was enough. Had I been alone I should have turned on my heel and departed straightway. The figures were not in drawing, the background was not in perspective, the composition was common-place. But the anxious eyes and restless hands of the poor mother forbade me to quit without the utterance of some cheering platitude.

"Mr. Bell has spent some time over this?" I hazarded.

"Indeed he has, sir — worked at it from daylight till dark (often when he might have been earning money, too); but he's devoted to his art, Tom

is. You see, sir, he always had a taste for drawing, and went to a school of design, and that, and worked hard at it. Photography pays best, though, as I tell him, but he will be a painter, sir. He thinks — he hopes — oh, *what* do you think of it, sir?”

“Your son has been very careful.”

“He has, sir. The books he's read to get ideas, too! But there, you see — I'll send for Polly, she can talk about it better than I — Polly!”

Polly was evidently Mrs. Tom, and, unless my ears deceived me, I heard the querulous wail of a sickly infant from the adjoining room.

“She is quite an artist, Polly is,” said Mrs. Bell, as the dark-eyed, slim girl removed a paint-brush, which she blushing remembered was sticking behind her ear. “Tom often says he wouldn't know what to do without Polly.”

It was evident that Polly coloured the photographs.

“I am sorry that Mr. Bell is out,” said she; “but — if you will allow me I will move it a little, so — now you get a better light, see. You know the story of Montezuma, sir?”

“I have heard it.”

“Mr. Bell has seized the moment when the fallen sovereign approaches leaning on the arms of his brothers. Cortez you see in the foreground with his wife, Marina, holding his horse. The priest on the left is Father Olmedo. Mr. Bell copied it from an engraving.”

“The head of the priest, you mean?”

“Yes,” she returned quickly; “the rest is quite original.”

There was a painful pause, and though I did not see the glance, I was conscious that the two women looked at each other with eyes unfavourable to me. They had divined that I did not appreciate Tom.

“Well, I will say good-morning,” I said at last. “Many thanks for your kindness.”

“Oh, it is no kindness, sir,” said Polly. “I, I *hope* you like the picture. Mr. Bell has set *such* hopes on it. He thinks it will make our fortunes, and though I am not so hopeful as that, I *do* think that he should get a good price for it.”

I looked at the thin face and the shabby gown, and said honestly that I hoped Mr. Bell *would* get a good price for it.

“I was thinking that some of the rich merchants might buy it,” she continued; “there are so many of them in Melbourne, but Mr. Bell says that it is a national work, and that the trustees of the Public Library ought to take it. Do you think it would be of any use to offer it to them?”

“I don't know,” said I, knowing right well. “They *might* buy it; but then, you see, they have commissioners in London who purchase for them.”

“That is true,” assented Polly; “and, as I tell Tom, a national work should be something about Australia, shouldn't it? But he says that

Australia is mean and stupid, and that there is no romance about it. Of course High Art, you know, sir, is very exacting, and — but I am keeping you. I *wish* Mr. Bell had been here.”

What could one say under such circumstances? The picture was only, in journalistic phrase, “worth a paragraph,” but of what nature should that paragraph be? My duty was very plain. “We have seen a picture by Mr. T. Bell, *The Meeting of Cortez and Montezuma*. It is simply execrable.” Had Mr. Bell himself, blatant, rubicund, and self-conceited, bored me for an hour with a sermon upon his own merits, I could have written such a paragraph with a savage joy; had caprice of fortune brought me accidentally before the daub, I could have justly consigned it to limbo, but — with the memory of that struggling household, that hopeful mother, that plucky Polly, “who was quite an artist,” — it was not to be thought of.

“I saw that picture of that fellow's,” I said to my editor that evening. “It is — well — it is deuced bad, but the poor fellow — struggling beggar, don't you know?”

“Oh, confound him, yes,” said my editor, with roseate smile. “Let him down easy, poor devil.”

So I wrote my paragraph thus: — “We have been invited to inspect a picture by Mr. T. Bell. It represents *The Meeting of Cortez and Montezuma*. The Spanish conqueror stands, &c., &c., &c.; on the right, &c.; on the left, &c.; in the distance, &c. The subject of the painting has evidently been carefully considered by the artist, who has reproduced the scene as described by old Bernal Diaz with commendable accuracy. The figure of Marina is graceful, and the left nostril of the charger, &c., &c., &c. The painting will, we believe, be offered by Mr. Bell for sale in a few days.”

The next day I was visited by Mr. Bell. He was a thin, consumptive, young man, with dirty nails, long hair, and a red beard.

“I have come to thank you for the notice of my picture, sir,” he said, with a proud, constrained air; “but I am sorry that you did not see fit to mention the expression on the face of Montezuma.”

“Ah!” said I.

“But no matter — you write, of course, according to your lights. Now, having so favourably reviewed my work, I have come to you, sir, to ask you to help me to sell it.”

“Upon my word, Mr. Bell, I——”

“My dear sir, *you* are a writer, I am an artist. What need for more words. You will help me in this. In fact, just now, ha, ha! — you know Art is not appreciated here — well, in fact, I am rather poor — ha, and if that work could but be brought under the notice of men of taste, I am convinced, *convinced*, sir, that our little difficulties would be——.” Here a fit of coughing cut him short.

“Mr. Bell,” said I, “I will do anything I can to help you, but do not place your hopes of fortune upon the sale of that painting. It is” (my heart failed me) — “it is a subject unfamiliar to many. It does not appeal to public taste. It — in fact, there are reasons——”

“There are *no* reasons,” said Mr. Bell, tossing his long hair. “Look here, sir; I must walk to Kew to give a lesson in drawing to a pawnbroker's daughter. I can't stop now. Will you come up to my studio and have a pipe this evening?”

“Thank you, Mr. Bell, but——”

“But you are engaged, I can understand. You have many——”

“No, no — I will come,” I interposed, hastily, with a thought of the poor, proud fellow trudging to his accomplished pawnbroker's. “Expect me.”

I went. We smoked, we drank Mrs. Polly's tea, we talked. He was the feeblest of mediocrities, and those dear, good women believed him a genius and worked for him, and admired him, and loved him.

“If Tom only had a chance,” said Mrs. Bell the elder, stitching her stocking.

“This is such an envious place,” said Mrs. Bell the younger, stippling her photograph.

Tom smoked, and talked Art, and raved about his Mission, and the Genius that was in him, and which (with a bang of his wasted hand upon the table) should come out of him — “by God, sir!”

I suppose we have all met with those unhappy souls who, only powerful enough to admire, are cursed with a desire to create. I have often thought what a work might be written upon the lives of unsuccessful men. It is easy to revere the genius who succeeds, though it is probable that the man whom the world delights to honour has suffered some heart-pangs; but, oh! with what infinite tenderness and pity should we regard those poor, unsuccessful ones, who, tasting all the agony of martyrdom, die without having grasped the crown!

Cortez and Montezuma steadily decreased in the estimation of all who saw it. I lied (Heaven forgive me) like a friend for the man. The truth was sufficiently plain. Mr. Bell would never be an artist. He was an enthusiast in art, that was all. He could but “copy” at the best. Some might think it manly and just to say, “Tom, you are an ambitious incapable. Your great picture is not worth twopence. You would earn a better living for your wife and mother if you were a bootmaker or a saddler.” But I — seeing how gallantly the poor fellow strove to keep his silly noddle above water; how manfully he tramped through the mud to his vulgar patrons, and how sweetly these two good souls bore with the ill-temper caused by anxiety, sickness, and hope deferred — I did not, could not, wound them by the declaration of the cruel truth. I was an ass, dear Dives; pray, let me admit it! I brought merchants galore. I invited

drapers (Mr. Stuckely, who had been “dresser” in Ribbonman's years ago, and now, being worth £20,000, bought pictures and went a-hunting on a fifty guinea horse which he couldn't ride). I besought Mr. Nosey (the ex-eating-house keeper — the celebrated Welch rarebit-and-glass-of-ale-for-sixpence-man) to untie his purse-strings. I even got old Gripe out of his cobwebbed sanctum, and condescended to slap the contemptible hunks on the back in the hope of slapping some compassion into his sordid soul. In vain. Montezuma stared at us unmoved. “They *shall* buy you!” poor Bell would cry, shaking his fist at the unlucky monarch, but the vigour of the sentiment was its only recommendation.

Meanwhile, summer waned to autumn, autumn sank to winter, and Polly's fond eyes would fill with tears when the artist's hacking cough was heard on the stairs. What need to prolong the tale! The poor mediocrity died last week, with the daub that was to make him famous yet on the easel.

Polly, the mother, and I buried him in Carlton Cemetery.

“He's happy now, poor dear,” said Polly, amid her sobs, as we turned to leave the humble grave, “and *some* day they will appreciate his genius.”

God bless the faithful women, they——

“Why Tityrus, what's the matter?”

“The smoke went the wrong way,” said Tityrus, wiping his eyes. “Confound you, sir! what are you staring at?”

“I did not know you had so much heart, Falx,” said Marston.

“Thank you. That muscle is of normal size I believe. Some people have fatty philanthropic degeneration of their heart — our friend Tallowfat here, for instance.”

“I don't disguise the fact that I am easily moved,” said Tallowfat. “But I prefer to be merry. Confound it, those two stories have made me miserable.”

“Tell us a lively anecdote then, and make us laugh.”

The good old gentleman paused, wiped his spectacles, felt in all his pockets, and at last produced an enormous official envelope marked On Her Majesty's Service. The sight of this seemed to cheer him; he drew himself up, then smiled, then laughed gently, and finally committed himself to a peal of cacchinary convulsion which nearly shook him off his chair.

“What on earth is the matter with the man?” asked Falx.

“Matter!” cried Tallowfat, regaining his composure. “Listen, my dear fellow, and I will tell you the romantic history of KING BILLY'S BREECHES.”

## **King Billy's Breeches.**

### **A ROMANCE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE.**

“IT is perfectly monstrous,” said I; “this is the ninth pair he has had since shearing. Buckmaster himself would be ruined at this rate.”

“My love,” suggested Mrs. Tallowfat, “he can't go about without them.”

I made some pettish observation about the “poor Indian,” and “beauty unadorned, &c.,” but Mrs. Tallowfat said “stuff!” in a tone which precluded argument. “The Bellwethers are coming up to the station next week,” said she, “and to have a black-fellow walking about — Oh, it's not to be thought of.”

“Budgeree, climb tree,” says King Billy, turning his dilapidations towards us with the elegant simplicity of the savage. “Slip down long o' 'possum. Bigfellow hole that one!”

There was no disputing it.

“Well, my dear,” said I, “he'll get no more from me. I'll — I'll write to the department!”

His Majesty King William the First was the chieftain of the Great Glimmera blacks, and carried on his manly breast a brass label, inscribed with his name, date, and title. He was general “knock about man” on the station, and as I had been idiot enough to allow myself to be made a corresponding member of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, William imagined that he had a right to demand from me unlimited clothing. The Board liberally supplied the few blacks who yet survived the gin bottle with a blanket per year (by the way, the storekeepers who gave rum in exchange vowed the quality was most inferior), and by some accident the blanket intended for the monarch had been captured by some inferior aboriginal, and had never been replaced. William indignantly demanded to be clothed, and to quiet his outcries I gave him a pair of pantaloons. The gift was so highly appreciated that, when the blanket did arrive, His Majesty declined to wear it. “What for you gib it that? No good!” said he, with profound contempt, and continued to eat, drink, sleep, ride, and climb trees in my pantaloons.

“Mrs. Tallowfat,” said I, “I'll write to the department.”

I did write — a forcible, and, I flatter myself, even elegant, letter, setting forth the poor savage's yearning for civilisation, begging that the

Board would take the matter into their favourable consideration, and supply the dethroned monarch with one pair of moleskins a year.

A week passed, and I received a letter from the secretary.

8796/B.

“BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF ABORIGINES,

“*July 27, 186 — .*

“SIR, —

I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of the 20th inst. requesting that the aboriginal named in the margin may be supplied with one pair of moleskin trousers annually by this department, and, in reply, have the honour to inform you that I will lay the letter before the Board at their next sitting, and communicate to you their decision on the subject.

“I have the honour to be, Sir,

“Your most obedient humble servant,

“JOHN P. ROBINSON.

“Secretary to the Board.

“TO TITYRUS TALLOWFAT, Esq., J.P.,

“Cock-and-a-Bull Station, Budgeree Flat, Old Man Plains, Great Glimmera.”

This, so far, was very satisfactory, and I triumphantly snubbed my wife, who had ventured to hint that I should find my application treated with *nonchalance*. Weeks, however, rolled away, Billy wore out two more pairs of trousers, and the Board did not write. I sent another despatch. No answer. Another. No answer. A third. Still no reply. I got angry, and penned a sarcastic note. “Am I Briareus?” I asked, sardonically, “that I should keep a hundred pairs of breeches on hand?” My sarcasm had the desired result. It provoked an answer.

No. 11289/C.

“*28th September, 186 — .*

“SIR, —

I have the honour, by the direction of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, to acknowledge the correspondence cited in the margin, and to inform you, in reply, that the Board have given your application their fullest and most complete attention. The practice, however, of supplying breeches to blackfellows is one which has not hitherto obtained in this department, authorised, under Act Vic. cxxii. sec. 4001, to provide blankets and petticoats only. I am directed, however, to inform you that the Board will again consider this somewhat important matter with a view to bringing it under the notice of the Hon. the Chief Secretary at an early date.

“I am further instructed to say that your observation on the subject of

Briareus is not only incorrect, but considered by the Board to be quite uncalled for.

“I have the honour to be, &c.,  
“JOHN P. ROBINSON.”

I was staggered. What vast machinery had I not set in motion! Good gracious, I had no desire to trouble the Hon. the Chief Secretary. I would write to him and apologise. Like an ass, I did so.

In three months I received back my letter, marked in red ink, in blue ink, in green ink, minuted in all directions, and commented upon in all kinds of handwriting.

“Noted and returned W.P.S.” “Not on the business of this department O.P.G.” “Refer to the Paste and Scissors Office M.B.” “Apparently forwarded in error S.B.O.” Across the right-hand bottom corner of this maltreated document was written, in a fine bold hand, with which I afterwards became hideously familiar, “Communications on the subject of Clothing of Aborigines must be made to the Hon. the Chief Secretary through the Gunnybag and Postage Stamp Department ONLY, O. K.”

This was decisive, though who “O. K.” was, and what the Gunnybag and Postage Stamp Department had to do with the clothing of aborigines (who wore neither gunnybags nor postage stamps), I could not tell. However, I was not yet beaten. I wrote to the Hon. Silas Barnstarke, then Comptroller-General of Gunnybags, enclosed the returned letter, and begged that he would use his influence in the proper quarter to procure a pair of moleskins for King Billy. The Hon. Silas Barnstarke was an official by nature, and he replied, after six months, accordingly.

8024/8749 362 B.

“GUNNYBAGS AND POSTAGE STAMP DEPART.

“3rd July, 187 — .

(OFFICIAL.)

“SIR, —

In reference to your note of the 24th of January last, I have the honour to inform you that no official cognisance of blackfellows' breeches can at present be taken by this Department.

“I have the honour, &c.,

“SILAS BARNSTARKE,

“Comptroller of Gunnybags.”

(SEMI-OFFICIAL.)

“MY DEAR SIR, —

I have to regret that I am unable to comply with your very reasonable request.

“Yours faithfully,

“S. BARNSTARKE.”

(PRIVATE.)

“DEAR TALLOWFAT, —

I can't do anything about this confounded blackfellow.

“Yours,

“S. B.”

In the meantime King William wore out three more pairs.

I wrote again to the Board, and, after waiting the usual time, received the following reply: —

3684/X

“9th October, 187 — .

“SIR, —

I have the honour, by direction of the Board, to inform you that they cannot at present move in the matters named in the margin.\* The subject of the clothing of Aborigines in general has occupied the gravest attention of the Board for the last six months, but, after mature consideration, they fail to see how your request can be in any respect complied with unless by the direct authority of His Excellency the Governor in Council.

“I am instructed to suggest that perhaps in the meantime, as the case seems urgent, and His Excellency is in Adelaide, a kilt might meet the difficulty.

“I have the honour, &c.,

“JOHN P. ROBINSON.”

A kilt meet the difficulty! No, nor half of it. In indignant terms I wrote to this half-hearted Robinson. “No one but an idiot,” said I, “could make such a preposterous suggestion.” The phlegmatic creature replied (after three weeks) as follows: —

3784/X

“1st November, 187 — .

“SIR, —

I have the honour to acknowledge your communication of the 12th October last, in which you inform me that I am an idiot, as per margin, and in reply thereto beg to inform you that on that point a difference of opinion exists in this Department.”

And he had again “the honour to be.”

This seemed a fatal blow to my hopes, but I wrote again, begged to withdraw the offensive expression made in the heat of the moment, and to request that the Board would condescend to take my petition into earnest consideration. Mr. Robinson replied in a temperate and forgiving spirit.

“The Board,” he observed, in the most elegant round-hand, “are most desirous to promote the welfare of the Aborigines in the minutest particular, and I am directed to state for your information that a proposal to amalgamate the votes for flannel petticoats and patent revolving beacons will be made to the Government, which amalgamation will enable the Board to issue one pair of moleskin trousers, as per schedule B, to every three adult aboriginals in the colony. I am directed to ask if you have any suggestions to offer with regard to cut, number of buttons, flap or fly, &c.”

I could not see how one pair of breeches between every three adult natives would “meet the difficulty,” as Mr. Robinson elegantly put it, nor did I understand why the votes for flannel petticoats and patent revolving beacons needed amalgamation, but I replied, thanking the Board, and wrote to my friend O'Dowd, member for the Glimmera, to beg him to make a “proper representation” on the subject. O'Dowd was at that time “in Opposition.” I saw in the *Peacock* that “the hon. member for the Glimmera gave notice that he would ask the hon. the Comptroller of Gunnybags, on the following Thursday, if he was aware of the particulars attending the case of an aboriginal known as King Billy.”

My hopes rose high when, on the following Thursday, O'Dowd delivered himself of a terrific speech, in which he accused the Government of the most wanton barbarity, and drew such a terrible picture of the trouserless monarch hiding in the dens and clefts of the rocks, that it brought tears into my eyes as I read it.

Barnstarke, however, who had kept two clerks at work night and day copying the correspondence, replied in his usual calm and dignified manner. “The attention of the Government had already been called to the lamentable condition of the Aborigines in that wealthy and populous district where the hon. member who had just sat down owned such extensive property, and he might inform the hon. member that the Government had taken steps to remedy, in some measure, the effects of the apparent parsimony of the inhabitants of the Glimmera district, by a method which he was convinced would fully satisfy every intelligent and liberal member of that House.”

O'Dowd was muzzled, but, as luck would have it, little Chips, the leader-writer to the *Peacock*, was in the gallery, and wanted a “subject.”

“Monstrous case about that blackfellow,” said he to the editor later in the evening. “I should like to do a smart little thing on old Barnstarke about it.”

There was nothing better going, and the article was written. I forget it now, but I know it was vastly clever, quoting Horace twice, and comparing poor Barnstarke to Le Roi Dagobert. In fact, it was full of as much withering scorn as Chips could afford for £2 2s., and Chips was liberal.

Thus encouraged by the support of the press, O'Dowd moved for a Commission to inquire into the subject of Aborigines' breeches, with power to call for Persons and Papers.

The Commission was granted, sat at the Parliament Houses for nine mortal weeks, examined 300 witnesses, ordered "plans and specifications" of all the breeches since the original fig leaf, and, at a cost of £2000, published a Report of 1000 pages, containing a complete history of the development of breeches from the earliest ages. This Report contained my correspondence in an appendix, and advised that all the Aborigines throughout the colony, male and female, should at once be provided with three pairs of broadcloth pantaloons a-piece.

In the meantime, King Billy wore out four more pairs of mine.

Elated, however, by the successful issue of my labours, I gave him the garments, and waited for my revenge. I waited for three months. It was nearly the end of the session, and I had almost begun to despair, when I received a large packet from Mr. Robinson, enclosing a copy of the Report, and asking for a "return of the number, height, age, and weight of all the aboriginals in the district." I set to work without delay to furnish this return, and had the gratification of seeing by the papers that, "In reply to a question by Mr. O'Dowd, the Comptroller of Gunnybags informed the House that the Report of the Blackfellows' Breeches Commission had been referred to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, who would give the recommendation of the Commission their best attention."

It seemed that we had come back to the place whence we had started.

Nothing was done, of course, during the recess, but when the House was about to sit I saw that the *Peacock* was "informed that the Special Report of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, which, we understand, will be shortly laid on the table of the House, contains some startling revelations on the subject of blackfellows' breeches, and proves beyond a doubt the necessity for an absolute Free-trade policy for this colony."

The Ministerial journal (the *Peacock* was always in opposition) hinted that it was the intention of the liberal and intelligent Government to further Protect the native industry of the colony by placing a tax of 41/2d. a leg on every pair of imported moleskins — a proceeding which cannot fail to redound to the credit of that Government whose 'fiscal policy we have always upheld through the medium of our advertising columns." It was not to be expected that the *Peacock* could allow such a gross fallacy to pass unquestioned, so it inquired sarcastically the following morning if "its Little Bourke-street contemporary was aware that America had been plunged into a civil war in consequence of the bloomer movement, which deprived thousands of hard-working negroes of their nether garments." "The imports of the United States during the

year 1862, when a free-trade policy prevailed,” said the *Peacock*, “reached a total of 8,936,052-18dol. In 1863, when Henry Clay, a member of the notorious Pantaloon-and-gaiter Ring, levied a tax of one red cent on every article of clothing that came below the knee, the Customs returns showed a deficit of 18,000,000dol. This fact speaks for itself.”

At it again went the protectionist paper, and proved entirely to its own satisfaction that the only way to make mankind happy was to encourage the growth of a breeches industry by severe protective duties. “It is rumoured,” said the protectionist paper, “that an effort will be made by the soft goods faction to import the 200,000 pairs of breeches required for our aboriginal population. *Quem deus vult perdere, &c.* Such an act would blur the blush and grace of modesty. We trust that a patriotic Government will look to it. We have imported too long. Our short-sighted and venal contemporary, not satisfied with importing its Sparrows, Bulls, Editors, and Pedestrians, must needs attack the country in its most vital point, stab it in its very seat of honour. We are confident that Sir Ossian M'Orkney, however much he may have appeared to lean towards the unholy coalition of Flinders-lane, will draw the line at breeches.”

The controversy was highly interesting, but in the meantime King Billy wore out four more pairs — leathers. I wrote to Barnstarke, informing him that, while the great question of Free-trade or Protection yet remained unsettled, my wardrobe was becoming absorbed into the surrounding forest, and that unless something was speedily done I would send the monarch breechesless to Melbourne, marked “This side up with care,” and let his country deal with him.

Barnstarke replied that, “while deprecating the indiscreet haste which I had displayed in the treatment of a matter of so much importance,” he was willing to do everything in his power, and after consultation with his colleagues, had given instructions to the Chief Commissioner of Police to forward an old pair of regulation cords, which would perhaps satisfy me. No cords came, but a very large letter from the Chief Commissioner, in which he regretted that, all the regulation cords of the Department being in constant use, he was unable to comply with the request of the Hon. the Comptroller of Gunnybags, but that he had forwarded my letter (forwarded to him *through* the Department of the Hon. the Chief Secretary *by* the Hon. the Comptroller of Gunnybags) to the Commandant of the Local Forces, with a request that he give the matter his immediate attention.

Three weeks passed, and I received a letter from the Commandant of the Local Forces, who, in a military “memo,” in red ink, begged to forward me copies of the correspondence between the Hon. the Comptroller of Gunnybags, the Chief Commissioner of Police, and

himself, and to attach a list of the articles with which "it was in his power to supply me through the usual official channel." The list was five folio pages of close print, and contained, I believe, every article under heaven except the one I desired. I replied by marking a few dozen, convinced that nothing would come of it, and wrote again to Barnstarke. Barnstarke sent me a parcel with a private note.

(PRIVATE.)

"DEAR TALLOWFAT, —

I don't see how to please you, but as the matter will be brought before the House shortly, and those confounded fellows in the Opposition will be sure to make a handle of it, I have begged a personal interview with the Governor, stated your case, and asked him, as an old friend of my cousin, Lord Lofty, to help me. His Excellency, in the kindest and most delicate manner, has sent me an old pair of 'plush,' discarded, I believe, by one of the Vice-regal domestics, and placed them entirely at your service. For goodness sake, my dear fellow, keep the matter dark, for I sadly fear that so irregular a proceeding will result in some confusion in this Department.

"Yours,

"S. B.

"P.S. — I rely as ever on your powerful support in case of a general election."

We clothed King Billy in the Vice-regal Plush, and for some months he was happy. The papers having got hold of a Divorce Case, were engaged (in the cause of morality) in commenting on the particulars, and I had hoped that matters would now rest. But I had forgotten one thing — "The Audit Commissioners."

Early in the following spring, Tommy, the boy who rode for the mail to Bullock Town, informed me that there was a packing-case at the Post-office, marked "On Her Majesty's Service," and addressed to me. I sent a bullock-dray for it, and it proved to be a bundle of papers from the "Audit Commissioners," accompanied by a note from Barnstarke.

(PRIVATE.)

"DEAR TALLOWFAT, —

I knew that we should get into a mess about those confounded breeches. It appears that they had been re-seated by the Government contractor, and that no requisition had been sent into this office. The result is that the Com. of Audit (among other queries) desire to be 'informed' about this 'gross irregularity.' The whole of the accounts of this Department are in arrear in consequence. Can you tell them what they want to know?

"Yours,

“S. B.”

I rose every morning at daylight for the space of a month, and read away at the bundle. It contained some tolerably rough reading. All the accounts of His Excellency's household were there noted, and commented upon in the most acute and accurate manner. The Audit Commissioners were continually “dropping down” upon His Excellency, as thus — His Excellency's valet desires a water-bottle for His Excellency's bedroom, and is informed in a brief note from the Chief Clerk in the Water-bottle Department of the Government Stores that he “must requisition for it in the usual way.” He does so, and sends in the bill “in the usual form.” A voluminous correspondence then occurs between the Government storekeeper, the Commissioners of Audit, and the contractor, as to whether “cut glass bottles” should or should not be charged for at a certain rate. This question satisfactorily settled, the contractor applies to the Government storekeeper to apply to the Commissioners of Audit to “pass the account through the Treasury,” and is informed contemptuously that “the number of pints not being stated on the voucher, the Com. of Audit are unable to forward the account in question.” This causes another correspondence with the Treasury, and, just as I had worked myself into a fever of expectation, imagining that the money *must* at last be paid, the Treasurer triumphantly encloses a copy of the Registrar-General's certificate of the death of the applicant, and refers the whole matter for adjustment by the Curator of Intestate Estates.

I stumbled also upon an exciting chase after an item of 23/4d. overcharge for Farriery, which at last proved to have been paid for a threepenny drink to the smith, less the “usual discount on Government contracts;” but I found nothing bearing upon my breeches, or His Excellency's breeches, or King Billy's breeches, or, to speak more correctly, and in accordance with official exactness, the “one pair of double-plush extra super small-clothes, the property of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Fid. Def.”

With bewildered brain I returned the bundle to Barnstarke, and begged him to settle it anyhow. He replied that the only thing to do was to *at once* return the breeches to the Government storekeeper, “for,” said he, “if this is not done, we must move the Treasurer to put a sum of 5s. 4d. on the Supplementary Estimates, and such a course will naturally cause great inconvenience to this Department.”

I sent him down a blank cheque, begged him to fill it up for any sum he pleased, and settle the matter at once. Alas! little did I know the wisdom by which the world is governed. Barnstarke was most indignant.

“Not only,” said he, in his reply, “is the course you propose most improper, and utterly opposed to all the traditions of official business,

but it would put the Department to the utmost inconvenience to entertain, even for an instant, such a monstrous proposition. You will, I trust, excuse me speaking thus plainly when I inform you that, to enable me to receive the sum of money you so rashly proffer, I should require a special vote of the House. If it is absolutely *impossible* for you to return the breeches, the Treasurer must be moved in the usual way.”

What could I do? The breeches were torn to shreds by this time, and fragments of them gleamed derisively from several lofty gum trees in the vicinity of the station. There was evidently no help for it. The Treasurer, poor fellow, must be “moved in the usual way,” whatever that might be.

In the Supplementary Estimates for 187 — , accordingly, appeared the following item: —

“Comptroller of Gunnybags.

“Division 492.

“Subdivision 8.

“His Excellency the Governor-General and Vice-Admiral of the Colony of Victoria.

“For re-seating one pair of extra plush small-clothes £ s. d.

0 5 4

It was thought there would be a row. The Treasurer trembled when he submitted the fatal item to the House, and an ominous silence reigned. “I would ask the Hon. the Treasurer, said Mr. Wiggintop, rising, “if this piece of wanton extravagance is to be paid for out of the Imperial or the Colonial funds.”

“The colonial funds, of course,” says a rash member from the Government benches.

Wiggintop sat down quietly, and those who knew his antipathy to Downing-street trembled for the fate of the Ministry.

The next morning the *Daily Bellow*, a paper that went in for economic democracy, laughed bitterly. “So then *this* is the way in which the Victorian taxpayer is robbed to support the liveried myrmidons of an effete and palsied aristocracy. The representative of Downing-street, not contented with gloating over the Victorian artisan from Toorak, must needs clothe his footmen out of the proceeds of the hardy miner's toil. The rogue wants his breeches re-seated, does he? Pampered menial!”

There was no standing this. The Ministry resigned, and Wiggintop was sent for. He formed a Ministry in twenty-four hours, and went to the country with the breeches metaphorically nailed to the masthead of his future policy. “It shall be my business,” said he at an enthusiastic meeting of his constituents, “to see that every half-penny of that 5s. 4d. is paid out of the Royal Exchequer.” When Parliament met, Wiggintop called for “*all* the correspondence connected with this gross case of Imperial tyranny” (the Report of the Blackfellows' Breeches Committee

came in as an appendix this time), "in order that he might lay it on the table of this wronged and outraged House." He did so, and, to the triumph of the Colonial Progress Party, it was resolved by an overwhelming majority that the question should be immediately referred to the Privy Council.

I imagined that all was over. But by the return mail Wiggintop received the gratifying intelligence that a Royal Commission had been appointed, who would examine personally the witnesses in this most important case. A few days after the *Bellower* informed the public that the first blow had been struck, the "pampered menial" had gone home in the *Great Britain* to give his evidence.

By the following mail was transmitted a list of witnesses who were required to be examined before the fourteen noblemen and gentlemen of the Royal Commission. Of course, I was one, but my blood was up now, and I resolved that I would not shrink from my duty. I left orders with my tailor to supply King Billy, and started. With my gained experience of the celerity of officialdom, I spent a couple of months in London sight-seeing, and then, thinking it about time to attend to business, wrote to the secretary to the Commission, but received no answer. I waited two months more, and then, having primed myself with names, called at Downing-street. It was the "silly season," and London was empty. A messenger was elegantly lounging on the steps of the Colonial Office, however, and to him I addressed myself.

"Is Lord Lofty within?"

"No, his Lordship is in Greece."

"Mr. Chichester Fortescue?"

"Gone to Norway."

"Mr. Washington White?"

"In the south of France."

"Mr. Fitz Clarence Paget?"

"Rusticating in Boulogne."

"Good gracious," said I, "is there no one to look after the interests of these two millions of colonists?"

"I think you'll find a young gentleman upstairs," said the messenger, carelessly.

I went upstairs, and after some investigation found the young gentleman who looked after the colonies. He was very spruce and very small, with his hair cut very short, and wore a rose in his coat and a glass in his eye. He stared at me as I entered as one who should say, "What the deuce do you mean coming into a Government office in this way?"

"Mr. Cackelby Jenks, I believe?" said I.

"Quite so. What can I do for you?"

"I have called about the Breeches Commission."

"Ah! door B, first on the right, third turning to the left. Not here.

Mistake.”

“Pardon me, sir, I have called there, and they referred me to you.”

“Oh, did they?” says Mr. Cackelby Jenks. “Ah, well, what is it?”

“I wrote some time ago to Mr. Washington White, who acts as secretary to the Commission.”

“What Commission?”

“The Breeches Commission.”

“Oh! ah! Is there such a thing? Quite so. Didn't know. Beg your pardon. Go on.”

“My name is Tityrus Tallowfat. I am an Australian, sir, and have come 30,000 miles.”

“All right, Marrowfat; sit down. Never mind the distance; every Australian tells us that. So you're from Victoria Island, eh?”

“Victoria, sir. Victoria; capital, Melbourne.”

“Oh! ah! yes, stupid of me, but the V's are not in my Department, don't you see. I take the B's, Bermuda, and so on; but, however, never mind, I daresay we shall get on. You want to see White.”

“Well, no,” said I, “I want to know——”

“Hadn't you better put it in writing, Marrowfat? Put it in writing now.”

“There is no occasion for that,” I said, taught by bitter experience how futile was such a course; “I have already written to Mr. White.”

“Ah!” says the young gentleman, at once relieved. “Why didn't you say so before? Tomkins, bring me Mr. White's letter book.” Tomkins brought it, and Mr. Jenks perused it. “You must be under a mistake, Marrowfat,” he said at last. “There's no letter mentioned here.”

“But I wrote one, sir,” I ventured to remark.

“I rather think *not*, Marrowfat,” said he. “You must be in error, Marrowfat.”

“But, my dear sir——”

“But, *my* dear sir, the thing's as plain as a pikestaff. We register all our letters, of course; now there is no letter registered *here*, so we couldn't have received one. Don't you see?”

“Perhaps it might have escaped you,” I hesitated again.

He smiled a patronising smile. “My dear Mr. Marrowfat, our system of registration is perfect, simply perfect; it *couldn't* have escaped us.”

Just then the door was burst open, and there entered another gentleman with a letter in his hand.

“Hullo!” said Mr. Jenks, quite unabashed. “Here it is! Egad that's strange. Thanks, my dear Carnaby, thanks. Now, sir” (to me, severely, as if I had been in fault), “perhaps you can explain your business.”

A bright idea struck me, — I would inquire as to the probable result of my inquiries.

“That letter, sir, fully explains my business. May I ask you what will become of it?”

“Become of it! It is the property of the office, sir.”

“But what will be done with it?”

“It will go through the usual official course, I presume,” said Mr. Jenks.

“And what is that, may I ask?”

“Oh,” said the young man, waving the letter as he spoke, “Mr. White will hand it to Mr. Paget, who will minute it, and send it on to Mr. Fortescue. He will pass it through his Department, and then it will, in the usual official course, reach Mr. Secretary Sandwith; he will send it to the Commissioners.”

“Oh! And what then?”

“Well, the Commissioners will have it read and entered in their minutes, and then, unless they choose to send it to the Privy Council, they will return it to us in the usual course.”

“As——?”

“From Mr. Secretary Sandwith to Mr. Fortescue, from Mr. Fortescue to Mr. Paget, from Mr. Paget to Mr. White, from Mr. White to me.”

“And what would you do with it?”

“I should hand it to the Chief,” said Mr. Jenks.

“And what would become of it then?”

Mr. Jenks admired his boot gloomily, and said at last —

“Pon my life, Marrowfat, I don't know. The Chief is rather absent, and — between ourselves — when once a document gets into his hands, 'gad, there is no telling *what* he may do with it!”

“Sir,” said I, in a rage, “I wish you good morning.”

“Good morning, my dear Marrowfat,” said Mr. Jenks, with perfect affability; “anything we can do for you, you know, d'lighted I'm sure.”

I did not pause to ask what would become of my letter in the alternative of the Commission choosing to hand it to the Privy Council, but left the office. Outside were some thirty or forty of the cloud of witnesses. “Ha, ha!” they laughed, “here is Mr. Tallowfat. He can tell us all about it. Where is the Commission, Tallowfat; we've been all over London looking for it.”

“Gentlemen,” said I, “it may be in the moon for all I know of it. If I don't go home and go to bed I shall be a subject for Bedlam.”

I waited in London ten months, and, hearing nothing of the Commission, returned to Melbourne. King Billy had cut the Gordian Knot by dying, and as, according to the custom of his race, he was buried dressed, he took my 53rd and last pair of breeches with him to his long home. The Commission is still sitting, I suppose, for we hear the most flourishing accounts from the Agent-General of the wonderful progress they are making with the collection “of the vast mass of interesting evidence, which I shall have the honour to transmit to you in the usual official course.”

But if ever I “write to the Department” again, I’m——

“Bravo!” cried Falx and Marston, simultaneously. “My dear Tallowfat, that is the best story told yet.”

“It is,” I assented. “Tityrus, you have developed your resources. Let us drink your health.”

The ceremony was performed, and Marston began to look uneasily about him for his hat.

“I suppose, then, we shall not see each other until after Christmas,” said Falx.

“I suppose not. Where do you go?”

“I am going to dinner,” said Falx. “I always amalgamate my meals during the last month of the year, and dine perpetually.”

“Falx is a man of fashion,” said Marston. “He goes into Society. You know what Society is in Victoria?”

“What is it?” asked Falx, with some beat.

“A collection of the lower organisms. Four shopkeepers of mixed sexes, a travelling creature who is cutting his brains, and some Falx or another.”

“The drawing-room from Rocke, and the wine from Gilbey,” said Falx, good-humouredly. “Well, be it so; it is the best that can be got.”

“I like a good dinner,” said Tallowfat, simply.

“So do I,” returned Marston. “You know the proverb: ‘God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks.’ There are no cooks in Australia. There are mammals who roast and boil things, but no cooks.”

“Australia is one of the suburbs of the Universe,” said Falx, “and we do not get the best things in the suburbs; moreover, indigestion is, at least, a proof that one has eaten.

‘Me doceat livor mecum habuisse meam.’ ”

“Well,” said Marston, “you are right to snatch the moment. Perhaps your friends may not be always able to give dinners, or willing to ask you to them. As one of my minor poets — you know I am editing the *Poetae Minores Britannici* — says: —

Love is so strange with wane and change,  
His mood is subtle as the air;  
Through long, vague years of joy and tears  
You never looked so fair.  
I never knew your eyes more blue,  
Your voice flow with so sweet a tone,  
Full of my bliss, I know this is  
The happiest day we've known.

'To-morrow, then, we'll find again  
These rocks between the sea and sky,  
To-morrow will prove happier still?'  
Nay, love, *to-day*, good-bye.  
We'll let love rest thus at his best,  
We will not dare to tempt delight,  
I'll kiss your brow, and we'll part now,  
Dear love — good-bye, good-nigh'"

"So," cried Falx, contracting his orbital muscle upon the rim of his eyeglass, "you would have me leave the table so soon as I have discovered that I can get something to eat!"

"No;" said I, "he would only have you leave while you were still hungry. But if you begin upon the immortal themes of Love and Dinner, you will talk till Domesday."

"True," said Marston; "let us be off. I have to catch the coach to my cabbage-garden in the morning."

"I will set to work to put your stories into shape," said I.

"I tell you what it is," said Tityrus; "suppose you all come and spend your Christmas at Old Man Plains. Falx will have had enough Society, and Marston enough Cabbage, by that time."

"Not a bad idea," said I.

"He wants to get four more stories out of us!" said Falx.

"And why not?" said Tallowfat. "A house that is only four stories high is not a Tower of Babel!"

"That sounds as if it ought to be a joke," said Marston. "Well, Four Stories High is a capital title, and if we can go four stories higher, I don't see why we shouldn't. Come, shall we accept the invitation for Christmas?"

"I think that we had better wait a little," said I, "and see what the Public say to it."

"A prudent scribbler!" cried Falx. "Well, I will hold myself in readiness for a favourable report. Farewell?"

"And I! — and I!" cried Tallowfat and Marston. "Good-night, and do not dream of story-telling."

"Dream!" said I. "I have proofs to correct. The printer's imp may be here at any moment. I have no time for dreaming."

The garden gate clicked for answer, and I was alone.

I sat down in my arm-chair, and, snuffing the candles — I detest pulled towards me the bundle of notes which contained the gist of my friends' contributions to my forthcoming venture.

The house was strangely silent — its mistress was sitting up with a sick neighbour — and I prepared for a quiet two hours' work. Just as I dipped the pen into the ink, there came from out the recesses of the house a

plaintive wail. I knew the sound at once, and it translated itself into three words pregnant with meaning for all fathers. The plaintive cry said, as plainly as a whisper in the ear —

“TOMMY IS AWAKE.”

I took up one of the candles, and proceeded to verify my apprehensions.

Yes, my son and heir was sitting erect in his bed, calmly surveying such portion of the universe as was visible, and howling at intervals.

The moment he saw me he stopped crying, embellished his general nakedness by taking a foot in each hand, and smiled patronisingly.

“Go to sleep, old boy,” I remarked, encouragingly. “Bye-bye, don't you know?”

Tommy shut one eye.

“Ain't seepy, tell I a tory!” said Tommy. There is a legend to the effect that there is a Temper in our family, and I knew better than to rashly provoke my offspring.

“Will Tommy be very good and go to sleep if Papa tells him nice story?” I inquired.

“Don't know!” says Tommy, with a combination of frankness and promise rare in one so young.

I wrapped the boy in a blanket, and took him to the study. What should I tell him? Should I practice on him like Moliere did on his housekeeper, and read him some of the forthcoming Christmas book? He wanted to go to sleep, and — but no, Miss Pauline Christoval and poor Fanny Robinson were not fit companions for little boys, and I doubted if he would understand Montezuma or King Billy.

I took him on my knee, and began to improvise.

Once upon a time, when pigs were swine, and turkeys built their nests in old men's beards, there lived a family of sparrows.

The Papa Sparrow was a gentleman of parts, and had the reputation of being a bit of a rake; but Mrs. Sparrow — poor soul! — was only a good motherly little bird, who looked after the house, and was wrapped up in her children. Mr. Sparrow was well connected, and had a cousin in the Household at Buckingham Palace; while his wife was a mere nobody, and had been hatched in a citizen's garden at Peckham Rye. His aristocratic friends at the clubs could not make out how it was that Mr. Sparrow threw himself away upon such a silly creature; but Mr. Sparrow winked his bright little eye and dropped hints of a tree root full of worms to which his wife was sole heiress, and then his friends were satisfied of course, for sparrows are quite as wise, in their own way, as human beings are, you know.

So they were married, and Mr. Sparrow disappeared from his favourite corner on the roof of the Rag and Famish, and went away to enjoy his worms. But after some little time he came back again, looking rather

ruffled in mind and feathers, and it was reported that the worm speculation had not turned out as well as was expected. However, Mr. Sparrow never said so — bless your heart, he was much too proud for that — and held his head as high as ever. A fat old Cockatoo, however, who had bachelor chambers in the Albany, said that the cousin in Buckingham Palace had told *him* that Mr. Sparrow was living over a livery stable in great poverty, and that he was only able to appear abroad because Mrs. Sparrow — “a good little body, 'pon honour,” the cousin said — was such an excellent manager.

Of course they had a large family — poor folks always have — and when Mr. Sparrow would come home from his afternoon's stroll in Pall Mall, and see all their little beaks gaping for food, his heart sank into his varnished boots, I can tell you. He got quite moody did this poor little fellow, and used to think about suicide in the horse trough, and other dreadful things.

“The country is overcrowded, my love!” he used to say; and Mrs. Sparrow, who thought her husband the cleverest man on earth, would sigh, and say,

“She supposed it was if he said so.”

Now in a milliner's window hard by lived a Parrot — a great green fellow with a red top-knot — who was a retired Port Admiral, and who had the reputation of being a shrewd man of the world, chiefly, I think, because he used to swear terribly. He was not a communicative bird, but everybody knew that though he did not say much, he thought a great deal, and that is of more importance.

To this parrot Mr. Sparrow applied for advice, and that Ancient Mariner, after turning himself upside down and drawing several corks, in order to show his loyalty, put his beak between the brass wires, and said, “Emigrate!”

“By Jove,” said Mr. Sparrow, “just the thing!” and went home by a short cut to tell his wife.

Says she, “What of the children?”

Says he, “Take them with us, my dear, of course!”

But when he looked round and saw the ten gaping beaks, his heart went into his boots again.

This conversation was overheard by the eldest of the family, a pretty little Cock-sparrow who was the image of his father.

“I hope not,” said he, for he was quite a man, and had already vowed eternal love for the pet Canary of the livery stable-keeper's daughter.

But the notion had taken firm hold of Mr. Sparrow's mind, and he liked it more and more.

But how about the children?

He asked the Parrot, but the Parrot was suffering from indigestion owing to sugar, and putting on his Quarter Deck manner, swore so

dreadfully when he was spoken to that Mr. Sparrow flew away in a fright.

He flew right into the back yard, where the Little Boy kept his rabbits.

“How am I to take the children?” said he to the Buck rabbit, and told him the whole story.

“Children!” cried Mr. Buck. “Why, look at Mrs. Doe! Children indeed — that is just what they want!”

And then he laid his ears back, and nipping a piece out of a cabbage leaf, said, “Assisted emigration of course. Try the Acclimatisation Society!”

So after a little trouble the passage was taken, and the Sparrows went on board. Mrs. Sparrow cried a good deal, and Mr. Sparrow sulked, for I am sorry to say that his genteel friends gave him a parting supper under the Haymarket Collonade, and he was brought home at six the next morning by the milkman, very rumped and with several feathers out of his tail. But they all got safely away, and on the whole were not sorry to go — all except the naughty little Cock-sparrow before mentioned, who said that he was sure it was a “horrible colony, and that London was the only place for a gentleman to live in.”

Now when they got to Melbourne it was blowing a hot wind, and the dust was whirling down the streets in big, red clouds. The Horses didn't mind it so much, but the prize Leicester Rams put their tongues out and panted; the little Cock-sparrow pecked at his wires, and said he was confident that he shouldn't live a month in such a climate.

But his reflections were put an end to by a sailor, who took the cage containing the Sparrow family and whipped it over the side, before they even had time to say good-bye to the one fowl that had escaped the curry-pot.

They went to the Society's Gardens, and were soon comfortable enough — all except the little Cock-sparrow, who said that he hated the place, and wished he was at home again.

There were many strange creatures in the Gardens. There was a Kangaroo, with melancholy eyes and long legs, who leapt twenty feet at a spring. There was a Black Swan, with a yellow bill and a red rim to his eye, who gave himself airs because one of his ancestors had been mentioned in the Classics. There was a queer animal with a duck's bill and a rat's body, whose life was a burden to him, because he couldn't determine whether he was a beast or a bird. There were white Cockatoos with yellow crests, who spoke a foreign language, and said that they knew nothing about the green Parrot at home, unless he came from the Sydney side. There were Hares and Rabbits, and even Axis Deer. There was a Llama — with long hair, like a walking she-oak tree, and there were several Laughing Jackasses, who called themselves Philosophers, and laughed at everything. Some people said it was because they were so

clever, and others, because they could do nothing else. I don't pretend to say why it was myself, — I only know that they laughed.

But our little Cock-sparrow turned up his beak at all his companions, and said they were people of no family, and had never been to London.

The Kangaroo hopped up with that sudden obtrusiveness which belongs to naturally timid people, and said, “How do you do my little brown bird?”

“Brown yourself!” said the Cock-sparrow. “I am a Londoner, and have lived in good society, I can tell you. Put that in your pouch, my long-legged friend!” Whereat the Kangaroo hopped off again, and talked to the Black Swan.

The Axis Deer passed the time of day, and said that it was warm. “Warm!” said the little Cock-sparrow — “warm do you call it? It was much hotter in London.” Nevertheless he was gasping for breath all the time.

“And what do you think of the colony?” said the Lyre-bird, spreading his tail out best side foremost.

“Oh, so-so,” said the little Cock-sparrow. “It is not half as big as London though!” At which the Laughing Jackass burst into such a roar that the Keeper, who was smoking his pipe at the door, began to laugh too, though he could not tell what he was laughing at for the life of him.

All this time poor Mrs. Sparrow was silently weeping in a corner of the cage, for two of her children had died on the way out, and being only a poor woman and a good manager, she felt the loss of them. But the little Cock-sparrow never went to comfort her. He was too much wrapped up in his own thoughts. “Never mind,” he said to himself, “wait till I get out into the world!”

The next day the Keeper came and put the Sparrow family into a cage, and sent them up to Ballarat by rail, for the farmers round about wanted Sparrows to kill the grubs, which were destroying their crops. So, when they got to Ballarat, they were taken outside the town and set free. Oh, how nice it was! A lovely summer's evening, with the sun going down behind the big purple hills, and the air cool and balmy.

“Here is a big worm!” cried Mr. Sparrow. “And another, and another!”

So they all had supper, and when they had done, Mrs. Sparrow put up her head, and said,

“Tweet, tweet!” which is the Sparrow for grace, you know.

Then Mr. Sparrow found out a triangular hole in a stable roof, and flew in among the sweet clean straw. A lovely nest! And his family all followed him; and, as he put his head under his little weary wing, he said,

“How — glad — I — am — that — we — have — em-migra — .”

And then he went fast asleep.

But the discontented little Cock-sparrow remained behind, and cried,

“What is the use of a vulgar stable? I have been used to live in a town. This is a horrible colony.” And then he flew away. “I will go into the world and seek my fortune,” said he.

The first place he came to was an Engine Shed — a thrashing engine, I mean — and he went in and slept upon some oil-rags. But before daylight a boy came to light a fire, and tried to catch him with his cap; but the Sparrow was too quick for him, and got away.

“Now, isn't this a horrible colony!” said the Cock-sparrow.

The next night he came to a Bush Tavern, where two men were drinking, and as he sat on the iron ring of the verandah post, he heard one say to the other.

“I say, Jem, I'll bet you drinks that I knock that bird over.”

“Done!” says the other.

And before our little Sparrow could fly away, a big quartz pebble came whizzing past his head, and the men burst into a roar of laughter.

“*That* wouldn't have happened in London!” said the Cock-sparrow.

By-and-bye he came to a Corn Field — for instead of going back to Ballarat he was flying further up the country — and he got down among the stalks for a night's rest, but just as he was dropping off, a big black snake glided by, and startled him.

“I *hate* snakes,” said the Cock-sparrow; “they have none in London.”

And he flew off again in disgust.

The next night he came to a Fruit Garden, and made a luxurious supper.

“Come,” he said, “the fruit is not bad anyway!”

But in the morning out came the owner with a big blunderbuss, and says he, “Small birds again!” Bang! bang!

But he had been sitting up late the night before, and his hand shook, so he missed; and the Cock-sparrow flew away, only singed.

“What a terrible colony this is!” says the Cock-sparrow. So he got quite discontented, and wished himself home again.

“I could do some good at home,” said he to himself. “London is a place where they appreciate talent. There is no opening for a bird of my abilities here. I do not so much mind the hot winds, or the rough living, but it is the gross ignorance of the inhabitants I object to! Fire at *me* indeed! I wonder what they would say to that in London.”

He told this to a Toad, who lived under a stone in a Squatter's garden, and the Toad said,

“Ah, you are young. You will know better one of these days. I thought so myself when I was a child.”

“Why, were *you* born in London?” asked the Sparrow.

“No,” said the Toad. “I was born in a British copper mine, about two thousand years before London was thought of.”

“Oh, what a story!” cried the Cock-sparrow; “why, London is as old as

the World!"

And the Toad said nothing, because he was ugly and poor, and accustomed to be contradicted.

There was a Hen in the Squatter's family, and when the Sparrow told her his grievance, she began to cluck in the most angry manner.

"Tut-tut-tut," said she. "You miserable little Cock-sparrow, go and do some good in the world. Don't twitter to me, don't! Can you lay eggs?"

"No," said the Sparrow.

"Tut-tut. Then what's the good of you I should like to know! Master Chickabiddy, if you don't come out of that kitchen directly minute, I'll peck your poll for you!" And she went off in high dudgeon.

"Oh, dear, dear," said the Sparrow, "what shall I do to be useful?"

So he went on, and on, and on, until he met a Mole.

"Please, Mr. Mole," said he, with his little heart sinking nearly as low as his father's did when the beaks used to gape, "tell me what I must do to be useful."

"Dig," said the Mole. "Everybody who is worth anything digs!"

"But I can't dig," said the Cock-sparrow. "I wasn't made for it!"

But the Mole didn't hear him, for he was already six inches below the surface.

Then he went on, and on, and on, until he met a Sheep-dog.

"Please, good Mr. Sheep-dog," said he, "tell me what I must do to be useful."

"Drive sheep," said the Sheep-dog. "Everybody who is worth anything drives sheep!"

"But I can't bark," said the Cock-sparrow.

"Hoot, mon," said the Sheep-dog — he was of Scotch extraction — "that's no affair of mine," and went away.

Then he went on, and on, and on, until he met a Magpie.

"Please, Mr. Magpie," said he, "tell me what I must do to be useful."

"Can't you steal?" asked the Magpie, with his knowing head on one side.

"I don't know," said the Cock-sparrow. "I never tried."

"Oh, you're a fool!" said the Magpie, and flew away in a hurry, for he was a member of Parliament, and had some "proper representations" to make.

So the poor little Cock-sparrow sat down on a stone by the road-side and began to cry.

"I *am* a fool, I suppose," said he, "and that is it. I can do nothing but eat and drink, and cry 'Tweet — tweet.' Oh, dear, why was I ever hatched?"

Now, close to the roadside was a little cabin, made of wood, with a brick chimney, and in this cabin lived an Old Woman and her son. The son used to be away all day sinking a shaft — for the cabin was on the outskirts of a gold-field, and in some of the great red mounds, that rose

up among the dusty gum saplings, much gold had been found in days gone by.

But the diggings were half deserted now, for the Quartz Reefs which had broken out some five miles off had attracted all the people, and only those who were very poor, like the Old Woman and her son, lived on the spot. They had built the hut in the good times, and had fenced in a little piece of ground with a wattle fence, thinking that the rush was going to last, but the tide of fortune had rolled back again, and left them stranded on the shore. The Old Woman said that she would stay in the old hut until she died; and her son, who was a good, stupid fellow, and loved his mother, said that he would stop with her. So all day the son went away, in his short-sleeved flannel shirt, and his moleskin trousers all stained red with earth, to the big mound, with the windlass standing up clear against the fierce blue sky, and every night he came back with as many gold grains as would pay the bill at the store.

The floor was of earth, the door was half off its bullock-hide hinge, there was a hole in the roof, and the Old Woman lay upon a stretcher, in the inner of the two rooms, dying.

The day was very hot, and the air seemed to simmer. The goats had all crept under the dusty gum saplings, and a hobbled horse hard by kept clanking his fetters, as he stamped to get rid of the flies. From a break in the purple line of hills, seen from the hut window, a thin column of white smoke rose up — a bush fire, — and no sound broke the stillness save the buzzing of the blow-flies and the occasional crack of the whip over the shoulders of the whim horse down in the hollow.

All of a sudden the little Cock-sparrow hopped up on one of the broken palings that surrounded the desolate place, and said “Tweet, tweet! Tweet, tweet!”

The Old Woman had been lying in a sort of stupor, looking at the sordid Australian landscape, and waving from time to time her withered hand before her face to keep the flies off. At the faint sound, she raised her head.

“Tweet — tweet!”

What was it? Did she dream?

“Tweet — tweet!”

She had not heard that sound for years; not since she was a merry young girl at service in the house of the merchant at Peckham Rye, where John wooed and won her.

“Tweet — tweet!”

She began to think of her childhood, in the old Kentish Farm, when the harvest moon rose, full orbed, over the apple blossoms, and the sparrows twittered in the orchard.

“Tweet — tweet?”

How pleasant it used to be in those times when she was young, and

rosy, and light-hearted! How well she remembered parting at the garden gate, with the coach waiting down the road, and her mother's white apron! She herself wore a print dress with lilac spots, and a straw hat with cherry-coloured ribbons.

“Tweet — tweet!”

Ah, but her courting days! The snug back kitchen in the prim merchant's house, with the cuckoo clock tick-tick-ticking from the snowy wall, and John, the carpenter, sitting on the edge of his shiny wooden chair, and looking sheepishly at her as she worked. Then the wedding dress, and the ring, and the clasped bible that her good mistress gave her. She remembered that the clergyman had an iron-mould spot on his surplice, and that it *would* catch her eye, do what she might.

“Tweet — tweet!”

The little home in the big city, with herself sitting working and rocking the home-made cradle, and John coming home to supper from the warehouse, long, long before they thought of emigrating. Ah! happy days of youth, gone never to return! She could see it all; the little by-street, the narrow lattice, with the box of mignonette, and the——

“Tweet — tweet!”

She raised herself, and turned her fast glazing eyes to the window.

There it was!

A little brown bird, perched, half-timidly, half-boldly on the wooden ledge, with his head on one side, and chirruping, “Tweet — tweet!”

A miscrable, dusty, acclimatised, discontented — London Sparrow!

A smile of strange sweetness passed over her withered lips, and then the eyes closed, and the weary head fell back on the pillow.

“A London Sparrow!”

When the son came home, his old mother was dead; and as he came near the body, a bird flew away from the window sill, crying, “Tweet — tweet!”

It went up, and up, and up, until one could see it no longer; for it had done its appointed task, and had gone to join the soul of the Old Woman.

But this is only a story.

“Very pretty indeed, my dear,” said a voice at the door. “But your audience is fast asleep.”

“Thank goodness, my love,” said I. “Take him to bed. If all my stories bring such healthy rest to all my audiences, I shall be quite happy.”

\* Blackfellows' breeches.

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