

A
DEAL
WITH
THE
DEVIL

Eden
Phillpotts



A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

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A DEAL
WITH
THE DEVIL

By

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF

"IN SUGAR-CANE LAND;"

"THE END OF A LIFE;" "FOLLY AND FRESH AIR;"

"SOME EVERY-DAY FOLKS;"

ETC.

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A Deal with the Devil.

CHAPTER I.

GRANDFATHER'S BIRTHDAY.

Before my grandpapa, Mr. Daniel Dolphin, comes down to breakfast on the morning of his hundredth birthday, I may tell you something about him. He has been married three times; he has buried all his wives and all his children. There were five of the latter, resulting from grandpapa's three marriages; but now I, Martha Dolphin, the only child of grandpapa's eldest son, am the sole survivor and living descendant of Daniel Dolphin.

Frankly it must be confessed that grandpapa has been an unprincipled man in his time. Among other inconveniences, resulting from unedifying conduct, he suffered five years' imprisonment for forgery before I was born; but when he turned ninety-five I think he honestly began to realise that this world is, after all, a mere temporary place of preparation, and from that age up to the present moment (I am dealing with the morning of his hundredth birthday) he abandoned the things which once gave him pleasure, and began to look seriously towards another and a better life beyond the grave. Indeed, thanks to my ever-present warnings, and the Rev. John Murdoch's ministrations, grandpapa, from the time he was ninety-five, kept as sober, as honest, and as innocent as one could wish to see any nonagenarian. He regarded the future with quiet confidence now, feared death no longer, and alleged that his approaching end had no terrors for him. The dear old fellow was very fond of me, and he often said that, but for his patient granddaughter, he should never have turned from the broad downward road at all. I can see him now coming in to breakfast--a marvellous man for his age. Bent he was, and shrivelled as a brown pippin from last year looks in June, but his eyes were bright, his intelligence was keen, his wit and humour ever active, his jokes most creditable for a man of such advanced age. In his antique frilled shirt, black stock, long snuff-coloured coat, and

velvet cap, grandpapa looked a perfect picture. I cannot say there was anything venerable about him, but he would have made a splendid model for a miser or something of that sort.

"Many, many happy returns of the day, dear grandpapa," said I, hastening to kiss his withered cheek and to place a white rose from our little garden in his button-hole.

"Thank you, thank you, Martha. Have you got a present for the old man?" he asked, in his sharp, piping treble.

"That I have, dear grandpapa--a big packet of the real rappee you always like so much."

"Good girl. And this--Lord! Lord!--this is my hundredth birthday!"

Presently he wrestled with a poached egg and some bread-and-milk. He spoiled his beautiful frilled shirt with the egg, and used an expletive. Then he remembered a comic incident, and began to chuckle in the middle of tea-drinking, and so choked.

I patted him on the back, cleaned him up, and pulled him together. Then, spluttering and laughing, all in a breath, he turned to me, gradually calmed down, and spoke:

"A dream--it was a dream that came to me last night--a vivid incubus, mighty clear and mighty real. It must have been the tapioca pudden at supper. I told you it was awful tough."

"Indeed, dearest one, I made it myself."

"Well, well. To the dream. I thought a figure stood at my bedside--a figure much like that in the flames on the old stained-glass window at St. Paul's. He wore horns too, but certainly he had the manners of a gentleman. Of course we all know he is one. It's in the Bible, or Shakespeare, or somewhere."

"A fiend, grandpapa!"

"The devil himself, my dear, and a very tidy personage too. Bless your life, he bowed and scraped like a Frenchman, apologised for troubling me at such a late hour, handed me my glasses, that I might the better see the friendly look on his face, and then asked me if I could spare him ten minutes. You know nothing ever alarms me. I'm 'saved,' if I understand Parson Murdoch rightly; and, therefore I've no need to be bothered about the other place or anybody in it."

"Don't talk like that, grandpapa."

"Why not? 'Well, fire away, Nicholas,' I said, 'but candidly you've come to the wrong man, if you imagine you'll do any business here. I was off your books five years ago. You know that well enough.' 'Daniel,' he answered, with more familiarity than I cared about, 'Daniel, it is only because you were on my books for ninety-five years that I've dropped in this evening. One good turn deserves another. You are probably not aware that, in the ordinary course of events, to-morrow morning--the morning of your hundredth birthday--will never come for you. The sun will rise and find you lifeless clay; your granddaughter will knock at your chamber door and receive no answer; for your days are numbered, your span of life, handsome enough in all conscience, is done. But listen, I can guarantee ten more years. We only do these things for very old customers. Put yourself in my hands and ten more mundane years of life shall be yours.'"

Here my grandpapa broke off to chuckle, which he did very heartily. Then he took snuff, and it dropped about his shirt-front, where the poached egg had already fallen, and imparted to the dear old man his usual appearance.

"What are the terms, Nick?" I asked," continued grandpapa. "'The ordinary terms, Daniel,' he answered. 'This is a little private speculation of my own, and I want to point out the beauties of it to you, because it's a bit out of the common, even for me. You see, Daniel, as a rule we grant these extensions only to gentlemen in dire distress--on the days before executions and so forth. But in your case you might justly consider that no offer of increased life was worth accepting. You are right. More it would be. A man cannot get any solid satisfaction out of life after he is a hundred years old. The body at that age is a mere clog; eating and drinking become a farce; the pleasures of sense are dead. As to brain, even that's only a broken box full of tangled threads. Intellectual enjoyments are no longer for

you. Not, of course, that they were ever your strong point. You can only sit in the chimney corner now, and blink and sleep, and wait for Death to come and roll you over with his pole-axe, like the worn-out old animal you are. No, you shan't grow older, Dan, you shall grow younger if you please. You shall cram another lifetime into the ten years which I promise. Each of them will extend over a period of ten earthly years. That is the offer. It should work out well for both of us. Read this. I had the thing drafted; in fact, I did it myself to save time.' Then he handed me a form of agreement duly stamped."

"My dear grandpapa, what an extraordinary nightmare!"

"It was. I read the bond critically, and, for reasons which I cannot now remember, determined to sign it."

"Grandfather!"

"Well, it was only a dream. Ten years more life, remember. That was worth a slight sacrifice."

"A *slight* sacrifice, grandpapa!"

"Anyhow, I said I'd sign, and Nick took a red feather out of his cap in a twinkling. 'A matter of form,' he said, 'one drop of venous blood is all we shall require.' Then he dug the pen into my shoulder and politely handed it to me. 'Of course witnesses in these cases are very inconvenient,' proceeded Nick, 'but between gentlemen our bonds will be sufficiently binding.' So I signed, and he bowed and wished me joy and went up the chimney. But a funny coincidence is that this morning my shoulder has a round red mark upon it like a burn."

"A flea, dearest one."

"Possibly. In fact that is how I explained it to myself. As you know, a dream often occupies the briefest flash of time, and it may be that some chance insect biting my shoulder produced a moment's irritation, and was responsible for the entire vision. But I still think it may have been that tapioca pudden. Mind you are more careful with my food in the future."

CHAPTER II. ***IN THE CUPBOARD.***

We laughed the matter off, and should probably have forgotten all about it but that grandpapa suffered a great deal of inconvenience with his shoulder. The round, red mark gathered and grew very painful. Indeed it only yielded to a long course of bread poultices. Thanks to tonics, however, he soon recovered his health; and then it seemed that his splendid constitution had almost enabled him to take a new lease of life. He actually gained strength instead of losing it, and his faculties became clearer if anything. We lived in Ealing, Middlesex, at the time, and when my grandpapa's health was thoroughly re-established, his medical man wrote to the *Lancet*, and a deputation waited on my grandfather from the local Liberal Club to congratulate him. The dear old fellow became quite a celebrity in his way, and, what is more, there was no backsliding; he went to church with me every Sunday in a bath chair, and at home he kept his temper better, and nearly always did what he was told.

But six months after his birthday the thunder-cloud burst upon our little home. I was sitting in the parlour, doing household accounts, and grandpapa was in his own room, playing the flute. He had not touched this instrument for at least five years, but to my amazement, that afternoon he dragged it out of some old cupboard and began to play it, with runs and shakes and false notes, just in the old pleasant way. He stopped suddenly, however, after giving a very creditable rendering of the "Old Hundredth." I feared this effort had been too much for him, and was just hastening upstairs when he came hurrying down and tottered into the room. Fright and dismay sat on his wrinkled face; his knees shook and knocked together, his eyes protruded like a crab's, and his poor old jaws were

going like a pair of nut-crackers, but he could not speak.

"My dearest, *what* is it?" I cried, running to him as he subsided on the sofa. "Oh, why will you be so active at your time of life? You'll *kill* yourself if you go on so. What have you done now? You've strained something internal with that flute--I know you have."

"I've found it! I've found it!" he cried, trembling all over.

"Of course, or else you couldn't play it," I replied.

"I've found IT," he repeated, raising his hand wildly and waving a manuscript over his head. "Read that--Oh, why was I ever born? Read it, I tell you. It's a real agreement, on parchment, not a nightmare at all. He's got the other, no doubt; the one I signed. I've bartered away my immortal soul for ten more years of horrible life, and *I'm growing younger every moment!*"

"Where did this come from?" was all I could say, taking a parchment scroll from my grandpapa's shaking hand.

"It fell out of the cupboard where I keep my flute music," he groaned. "Read it, read it slowly, aloud. Is there any escape? It seems very loosely worded. Oh why, why didn't Jack live? He would have got me out of this appalling fix if anybody could."

Jack, or John, was my father--a very able solicitor; but what law is capable of coping with utterly unprincipled people who live in another world? I read the thing. It was written in English, and signed with a strange scrawl, like a flash of black lightning. Attached to it hung a seal of flame-coloured wax. To show my unhappy grandparent's exact position I had better transcribe this document. Thus it ran:

"Know all men, and others, by these presents that in consideration of a compact, signed, sealed, and delivered by Daniel Dolphin, of No. 114, Windsor Road, Ealing, County of Middlesex, England, I hereby undertake to provide him with certain years of life, to the number of ten, over, above, and beyond the number (of one hundred) which it was originally predestined that he should exist. And, further, it is to be noted, observed, and understood that each of the said ten years hereinbefore abovementioned shall embrace a period of life formerly extending over a decade of ordinary mundane years; and it is also understood, granted, and agreed that the aforementioned Daniel Dolphin do henceforth and hereafter grow younger instead of older, which provision I hereby undertake for the reason that human life protracted beyond a century, ceases to give the possessor thereof pleasure or gratification in any sort."

Then followed the date, the signature, and an address, which need not be insisted upon, but which was sufficiently clear.

"What does it mean, grandpapa?" I asked faintly.

"Mean?" he screamed, "it means that in less than ten years' time I shall be a bald-headed baby again. It means that I shall live a hundred years in ten and *go backwards* all the while. It means I'm faced with about the most hideous prospect ever heard of. And I've got nothing to make me suffer with Christian fortitude either, for look at the end of it! It's a shameful programme--frightful and demoniacal: ten years of the most fantastic existence that ever a devil designed, and then--then *my* part of the bond has to be complied with. This is the result of turning over a new leaf at ninety-five. Why didn't I go on as I was going, and only reform on my death-bed like other people?"

My grandfather sat in a haggard heap on the sofa, cried senile tears, wrung his bony hands, and, I regret to say, used the only language which was in his opinion equal to describing his shocking discovery. I procured brandy and water, tried to say a few hopeful words, and then went out to seek professional aid of some sort.

I was a woman of fifty then--accounted practical and far-seeing too. But the terror of this stupendous misfortune fairly set my mind in a whirl and quite clouded my generally lucid judgment. I hardly knew where I

should apply. My thoughts wavered between a clergyman, a doctor, and a solicitor. In some measure it seemed a case for them all. Finally I determined to speak to our Vicar. He was an old man, and mainly responsible for grandpapa's conversion. I must have been quite hysterical by the time I reached the vicarage. At any rate, all I can remember is that I sank down in Mr. Murdoch's study, and wept bitterly and sobbed out:

"Such a dreadful thing--such a dreadful thing. Grandpapa's growing younger every minute; and he's gone and sold himself to the Devil!"

CHAPTER III. COLD COMFORT.

Mr. Murdoch came round and saw my poor grandpapa at once. He was a pompous, kind-hearted man, but proved of little service to us, being unpractical, and unable apparently to grasp the horrid facts. Grandpapa felt better, and rather more hopeful when we returned to him; but I fear that alcohol alone was responsible for his improved spirits. I usually kept the brandy locked up, because the dear old man never would understand that it should only be taken as medicine; but I forgot to remove it before going for the Vicar, and grandpapa had helped himself.

"Here's a rum go!" he said, as Mr. Murdoch arrived, with his face a yard long.

"My poor friend, my dear Dolphin, I cannot believe it; I refuse to credit it."

"Read that then," said grandfather, kicking the Agreement across the room with his felt slipper. Mr. Murdoch puzzled over it. Presently he dropped the thing and smelt his gloves.

"It has an evil odour," he said. Then he sighed and shook his head and seemed more concerned for the parish than for grandpapa.

"That such a thing should have happened in Ealing, of all places, is a source of unutterable grief to me," murmured the Vicar.

"Smother Ealing!" piped out poor grandpapa. "Think of *me*! Generalities are no good. Be practical if you can. Is it a ghastly hoax or a hideous fact? Hasn't anything of the kind ever happened before? And couldn't something be done to wriggle out of it? Regard the thing professionally. You're always talking about fighting the Evil One. Well, here's a chance to do it."

"I shall mention the matter in my private devotions," said Mr. Murdoch mildly.

"Don't do anything of the sort," snapped back grandpapa. "This affair shan't get about if I can help it--least of all in the next world. If you can't do anything definite, keep quiet. It must not be known. I believe the thing's a paltry joke myself. I don't feel a day younger--not an hour. We shall see. I'm going to let Nature take its course for six months more; then I shall be a hundred and one, or else only ninety, if this dastardly Deed speaks the truth. Then, should I find I'm growing younger, I shall take steps and see George Lewis, and the Bishop of London, and Andrew Clark. I'll back them to thrash this thing out for me anyhow. Meanwhile, please refrain from alluding to the subject anywhere. Give me some more brandy, Martha."

So Mr. Murdoch, promising to preserve absolute silence, went away like a man recovering from a bad dream, and grandpapa, having taken a great deal more spirit than was good for him, slumbered uneasily on the sofa.

In his dreams I could hear him wrangling with something supernatural, and evidently getting the worst of the argument. "It's too bad," I heard him say. "It's simple sharp practice to jump on an old man like me, and make him sign a one-sided thing like that when he was half asleep!"

The cook and I presently helped the unhappy old sufferer to bed. Then, locking up the Agreement, I sat down to

think. We were alone in the world, grandpapa and I. He looked to me for everything, and I devoted my life to him. In person I was a plain woman, with simple tastes and a tolerable temper. My life had been uneventful up to the present time, but it looked as though a fair share of earthly excitement lay before me now. I tried to picture the future, and my brain reeled. I saw my grandfather renewing his youth day by day and hour by hour. I pictured him going back to his old, unsatisfactory ways, with nothing whatever to check him, and nobody to speak a word of warning. I saw Time winging backwards with grandpapa and onwards with me. When I was fifty-five he would be fifty; when I was fifty-six he would be forty; when I was fifty-seven he would be thirty, and so on. As his future was now definitely arranged for, no existing force of any sort remained to keep grandpapa straight--none, at least, excepting the police force. He would get out of my control when he was eighty, or thereabouts. From that time forward I shuddered for him, and for myself. We belonged to the lower middle-class, and had made a good many friends since grandpapa's reformation; but now our relations with our fellow-creatures promised to present some rather exceptional difficulties. In fact, I wept as I thought of the future. If I had known a quarter of what awaited me, I should probably have screamed also. Somehow it was borne in upon me from the first that we were faced with no imaginary problem. The Agreement had a genuine, business-like look, in spite of the loose wording.

"This woe will last ten years," I told myself. "Then something of a definite nature must happen to grandpapa, and I shall be left to go into the world once more--that is, if I outlive him, which is more or less doubtful." For his dear sake I prayed and trusted I might be spared to see him to the end of his complicated existence.

Dull gloom and dread and misery settled down upon our once happy little establishment. Grandpapa appeared to lose all hope after the effects of the brandy and water passed off, and he found that I had locked up the bottle as usual. He eyed me, as though measuring his strength against mine, but he did not attempt any encounter then. From that time forward he spent the greater part of his days worrying in front of the looking-glass and trying to find fresh signs of infirmity and decay. He grew morose and moody, and used some harsh language to me because I could not observe a new wrinkle which he alleged he had discovered.

"Any fool but you could see that I'm growing weaker every hour, both in mind and body," he said; but the truth was that everything pointed in the opposite direction. His appetite for solids improved, he slept less by day, he began to "take notice" when people called, and showed little gleams of returning memory. To my bitter regret he gave up going to church, and resumed the habit of smoking tobacco. He tried one of his old, favourite "churchwarden" clay pipes, but it was a failure, and he told me next morning with delight that the thing had been too much for him.

"That's a sign I'm growing older, anyhow," he declared. But he was not. I could see the early dawn of middle-age already creeping back over him, and sick at heart it made me.

I pass rapidly to his hundred-and-first birthday, upon which anniversary there was a scene--the beginning of a series. My friend Mrs. Hopkins called to drink tea. She has a good heart and always tries to please people. We have known one another for many years, and she has no secrets from me. She called, and ate, and drank, and, in her cheery way, congratulated grandpapa upon his appearance.

"Positively, Mr. Dolphin, you grow younger instead of older. You don't look a day more than ninety, and I doubt if you feel as much," she said, very kindly.

"Bah! Stuff and rubbish, woman! I feel a thousand and look more. Don't talk twaddle like that. It makes me sick. Personal remarks are always common, and I'm sorry you can allow yourself to sink to 'em."

Then he went out of the room in a pet, and I saw that he hobbled away quite easily without using his walking sticks at all.

"Lor, Martha!" said Mrs. Hopkins. "What corn have I trod on now? I thought the old gentleman would have been pleased."

I explained that grandfather felt very keenly about his age, and did not like people to imagine that he looked

any younger than was in reality the case.

But when she went away, he came down again and dared me to bring any more old women in to snigger and make jokes at his expense, as he angrily put it.

"And another thing," said grandfather, "you can give Jane and the cook warning, and see about sub-letting the house. I'm leaving Ealing at the quarter-day. Here's half a column about me and my wonderful age in the *West Middlesex County Times*. I'm not going to make a curiosity and a raree show of myself in this place for you or anybody. They'll have me at Tussaud's Waxworks next. We clear out of this on June 24. I'm going back to town."

CHAPTER IV.

HIDDEN IN LONDON.

I was sorry to leave Mr. Murdoch, Mrs. Hopkins, and other kind friends at Ealing; but, as I always said, I did not mind changing residences, for No. 114, Windsor Road, was an old-fashioned dwelling house without a bathroom, which is a great drawback.

Grandpapa's hair began to come back now, in little silvery tufts over his ears. He also lost something of his old stoop, and took to using one walking-stick instead of a couple.

He grew terribly sensitive and bad-tempered as his powers increased; and with access of mental strength the agony and horror of his position naturally became more and more keen.

We had a long conversation as to where we should take ourselves and our secret. Grandpapa first changed his mind about London, and wanted to leave England. He had an unpractical yearning to sail away and hide his approaching manhood on some desert island; and for my part I wish now I had fallen in with this project, and taken the old man off to the heart of the tropics, or the point of the Poles, or anywhere away from civilization; but in a weak moment I urged him to abide by his original opinion, that the metropolis was a place where he might best hide his approaching transformation. I forgot my grandfather's different weaknesses, when I made this suggestion. I should, of course, have recollected that the ruling passions of his life would reassert themselves.

However, he consented to come to town, and away we went--suddenly, mysteriously, without leaving any address, though not before I had settled every outstanding account. Our means were fortunately ample for all moderate comforts. We took a little house at West Kensington--No. 18, Wharton Terrace--and there, having engaged a cook and housemaid, we settled down to face what problems the future might have in store for us.

Grandpapa continued to hug his hideous secret, nor would he suffer me to seek spiritual, legal, or medical aid. For the present he had abandoned his design of consulting the Bishop of London, and the other celebrities he had mentioned in the first agony of his discovery. In fact, as time passed, I could see he was trying to banish his position from his mind. He fought against his growing strength, and attempted excesses in the matter of eating and drinking with a view to impair his constitution.

"Don't be chattering about the matter, for heaven's sake!" he said to me on the occasion of his hundred-and-second birthday. "You're always whining and making stupid suggestions. Do try and look cheerful, even if you don't feel so. It's bad enough to be the sport of fiends without having a wet blanket like you crying and sighing about from morning till night. You make every room in the house damp and draughty with your groans and tears."

"You are now eighty," I said, "eighty, according to the New Scheme, and you look less. Are you going on without making any effort to throw off this abominable curse? Are you content to let matters take their backward course? Do something--anything, I implore you. Take some steps; try to stem the tide; be a man, grandpapa!"

"A man!" He laughed bitterly. "Yes," he continued, "a man first, then a conceited puppy with a moustache and ridiculous clothes; then a long-legged lout of a boy, with a pimply face that blushes when the girls pass by; then a little good-for-nothing devil at school; then a fat, sweetmeat-eating child in a straw hat and knickerbockers; then a small, red-cheeked beast in short frocks; then a limp, putty-faced, indiarubber-sucking, howling fragment in long frocks; then--then--My God! It's terrible."

He hid his old face and cried. I noticed the blue veins that used to cover the backs of his hands in a net-work, like the railway lines at Clapham Junction, were dwindling. The shiny skin was filling out; the muscles were developing once more.

"Terrible indeed, dear grandpapa; but I will never, never, leave you."

He brushed away his tears and stood erect.

"You may do what you please. And now I'll tell you what *I'm* going to do. No more crying over spilt milk, anyhow. I've got eight years left, and I'm going to use 'em. I'm a man without a future--at least without a future I can make or mar. Everything's settled, but I'm free for eight years. We've got five hundred a year; that means a principal of fifteen thousand pounds. I shall leave you five thousand, and spend the other ten thousand during my lifetime."

"Grandpapa!"

"Yes, I'm going to enjoy myself. It isn't as much money as I should like, but my tastes are fairly simple. I shall keep the bulk of the coin until three years hence. Then I shall be fifty. From that time, for the next three years, until I'm twenty, I shall paint the town red. Then, from twenty downwards, when I shall begin to shrink very rapidly, you may look after me again, if you're still alive."

"Thank you, grandpapa, but I shan't be. Such a programme as you are arranging would certainly kill me. I'm getting an old woman now. I couldn't stand it, I couldn't see you dragging an honoured name in the dust. Oh, think what this is you propose to do! What does your conscience say? What would my father, your eldest son, have said?"

"My conscience!" he cried, "a pretty sweet thing in consciences I must have! If my conscience couldn't keep me out of this hole I should think he had mistaken his vocation. You wait, that's all. I'll pay him back; I'll give him something to do presently! I'll keep him busy. I guess he'll be about the most over-worked conscience, even in London, before long."

It was in this bitter and irreligious way that grandpapa had now taken to talk. He picked up all the modern slang, and waited with almost fiendish impatience for his strength to reach a point when he would be able to go out once more into the wicked world. But, of course, the instincts and habits of old age were still to some extent upon him. He continued to read the political articles in the papers, and give vent to old-fashioned reflections. He was a Tory, left high and dry--a man who even yet declared that the Reform Bill ought never to have been passed.

About every six weeks grandpapa had to change the strength of his spectacles, for his sight became better daily; and with it, one by one, the wrinkles were blotted out, the hearing grew sharper, the round, bald patch on his head decreased, and a little grey already sprinkled the silver of his hair.

He joined an old man's club in our neighbourhood called the "Fossils"--"as a preliminary canter," so he told me; and from this questionable gathering, which met at a hostelry in Hammersmith Broadway, he came home at night very late, and often so worn out and weary that he had not strength to use his latch-key. I always let him in, and supported him to bed on these occasions.

Then, when he was about seventy-five, according to the New Scheme, he kissed Sophie, the housemaid--a most respectable girl and engaged. She gave warning, and I felt that poor grandpapa had now definitely set out on his great task of "painting the town red." This expression was often in his mouth, and I began to dimly gather the significance of it.

CHAPTER V.
THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR.

When the builders took a piece of Hammersmith and called it West Kensington, no doubt they did a wise thing. I think a house in West Kensington sounds very genteel myself, and Wharton Terrace was an exceptionally genteel row even for that neighbourhood. Young men went off to the City from it every morning, and young women walked out an hour later, with little string bags, to do the shopping and arrange nice dinners, and so on. They were mostly youthful married couples in Wharton Terrace. One end of the row was not quite completed yet, but the other extremity had been finished two years, and there were already perambulators in the areas at that end. When perambulators set in, I notice that the window-boxes begin to get shabby, and the pet cats have to look after their own welfare.

At No. 16, next door to us (for the numbers ran even on one side of the road, odd upon the other), were some very refined people, who called on me the day after Mrs. Hopkins drove over to see us from Ealing, in a hired brougham. Grandpapa said, in his cynical way, that they supposed the brougham was Mrs. Hopkins's own, and that, for his part, he didn't want to know the neighbours. But he soon changed his mind.

The Bangley-Browns were four in family: a widowed mother, florid, ample, sixty, convincing in manner, full of the faded splendours of a past prosperity; two daughters, also florid and ample, but quite refined with it; and a son of thirty, who worked in a lawyer's office by day, and toiled at the banjo of an evening. They used to keep their drawing-room blind up at night, so that people passing might see pink lamp-shades throwing a beautiful reflection on their pretty things; and at such times the Misses Bangley-Brown would sit in graceful attitudes in their evening toilets, and Mr. Bangley-Brown, who wore a velvet coat after dinner, would play the banjo and sing. There was often quite a little audience outside on the pavement to watch them. They were most high-bred gentlepeople, and one could see at a glance that evil fortune alone brought them to Wharton Terrace.

The head of the family became very friendly with me. Her husband had been most unfortunate in speculations on the Stock Exchange. They were the Sussex Bangley-Browns, not the Essex people, so she explained. She asked me if we were related to the Derbyshire Dolphins, and seemed disappointed when I informed her that we had been Peckham Rye Dolphins until the past five years.

She took a great fancy to grandpapa, and he showed pleasure in her society. I cannot expend time on their gradual increase of friendship, but it did increase rapidly, and I believe, towards the end of it, that grandpapa had no secrets from Mrs. Bangley-Brown--none, that is, excepting the one awful mystery of the New Scheme. But he told her about his money and position, and she, taking him to be a well-preserved man of seventy-five or so, met him half-way. Already the old love for the sex was beginning to reappear in my grandfather. It soon became a very trying sight for me. Grandfather constantly dropped in at No. 16 after dinner, and sat under the reflection of the pink lamp-shades, and behaved in a manner which might have been gallant, but was also most painful under the circumstances. The two poor girls soon confided in me. They saw whither things were drifting. "It would never do," said they, "for your father[#] to marry our mother. Such marriages are not happy, and do not end well." I assured them that I was of the same opinion.

[#] *Father.* I may say here that, in public, I now posed as grandpapa's daughter. I was averse to the deception, but he insisted. "I'm not going to have you giving me away at the very start," he said. Our relationship changed every two years at first; afterwards, more rapidly.

"There are sufficient reasons why such a match should not take place. Indeed, I cannot think my father contemplates any such action," I said.

"What does he contemplate then?" asked Florence Bangley-Brown. "He constantly gets us theatre tickets and so on, and I believe pays Fred to take us off out of the way. He haunts the house. He buys us all sorts of presents. It must mean something."

I knew well enough what it meant. It meant a move. It was high time we left West Kensington: the pilgrimage must be begun. Like Noah's dove, there would probably be no more rest for the soles of our feet until the end of dear grandpapa--according to the New Scheme.

CHAPTER VI.

RETREAT.

I had it out with him after breakfast, on the morning which followed my conversation with the Bangley-Brown girls. He took it better than I expected, and seemed more amused than angry.

"She is a fine woman, and would be a satisfaction to me for quite six months. Then she'd pall. I only realised last night that she was not growing younger. Whereas I am. I realised it about two minutes after I'd proposed."

"Proposed"! Oh, grandpapa!"

"Yes, while the gals were in here. Bless you, Martha, the gals begin to interest me more than the mother now."

"But she--Mrs. Bangley-Brown--what did she say?"

"What do you think? Jumped at it. Was half in my lap before I'd finished. You're quite right: she's not the woman for me. We'll up anchor before there's trouble, and away. I don't care how soon we go."

It was fully time. Apart from the monstrous step my grandfather had taken, his own condition threw us more and more open to comment. The servants noticed it, and imagined the old man got the effect with hair-dyes and cosmetics. But as a matter of fact, every change was in the ordinary, or rather extraordinary course which Nature now pursued with grandpapa.

He was on thorns to be off after his engagement became known. "There's no fool like an old fool," he said. "I hope I shall soon outgrow this sort of weakness. Marriage indeed! I rather think my time will be too fully occupied during the next few years to waste much of it on a wife."

So he resigned his membership of the "Fossils," avoided Mrs. Bangley-Brown as much as was possible under the circumstances, and sent me out into the suburbs to find a new house. I pointed out the needless expense of such a course; I explained that furnished lodgings would much better meet the case. What was the good of taking another house, which we should certainly have to vacate in a year? I explained that three moves were generally held to be as bad as a fire, and so forth. In fact, I used every argument I could think of, but he was firm.

"Find a house, and be smart," he said. "This old hen-dragon's beginning to worry me to name the day. We'll flit by night. And when you do get diggings, better keep the address extremely dark. I don't want my approaching manhood to be spoiled by the shadow of Mother Bangley-Brown."

Thus did he speak of a loving, if ample woman, to whom but a short fortnight before he had offered his heart and fortunes. The Misses Bangley-Brown cut me after the engagement was announced, and, for my part, I was glad of it. It prevented the necessity for prevarication, or perhaps untruth, because I could not have told them that I was going to take grandpapa away, though doubtless they would have helped me to do so very gladly.

But for the time I escaped much deliberate falsehood, although I already saw, with a horrified prophetic eye,

the awful pitfalls which lay before me. Grandpapa was dragging me down with him. My religion, my morals, my probity--nothing would avail. If I spent the next eight years with him, it appeared certain that I should spend eternity with him also.

I felt myself gradually drifting away on to the broad, downward road with grandpapa. And yet I would not leave him--I could not do so. His horribly defenceless condition made me feel it must be simple cruelty to let him fight this awful battle alone. And I will say for grandpapa that, now and then, he quieted down and picked his language, and had beautiful thoughts about the solemnity of his position. At such times he was goodness itself to me. He thanked me for my attention, for the courageous way in which I clung to him, for my cool judgment, and invaluable advice.

"Be sure, Martha, that you will reap your reward some day," he said. "Such attachment and devotion to a suffering grandparent will not be forgotten."

I thought so too. If ever a woman deserved some consideration hereafter, I was she; but, as I have said, I began to fear that blind support of grandpapa would only serve to place me, in the long run, under conditions of eternal discomfort with the poor old man himself. Of course, he never talked about his own future, and I felt, under the circumstances, that it would be bad taste for me to do so.

We went to Chislehurst, a pretty suburb in which I hoped that grandpapa would occupy himself with the beauties of Nature, and dig in the garden and plant seeds, and watch them come up, and be quiet and good. But though he accompanied me willingly enough to the little red-brick, modern, 'Queen Anne' residence I found there, he refused to dig in the garden, or plant seeds, or be quiet and good.

It was one of his bad days when I suggested horticultural operations.

"Seeds be shot!" he said. "I shall set about sowing my wild oats pretty soon--that's the only gardening for me!"

He had not threatened to paint the town red since we left it, but now his constant allusion to wild oats caused me much uneasiness.

He was not interested in the works of Nature, but showed a craving to get into society. Nobody called, however, and I was glad enough that people did not come to see us. The longer we were left alone, the longer we should be able to stop there. But grandpapa was now fast reaching an age when no mere passive part on life's stage would suit him.

"I must be up and doing," he said to me. "'Satan finds some mischief still,' etc.," he added, with an unpleasant laugh. "You know the rest."

"I only wish you would try and occupy yourself in a profitable way, dear grandpapa," I said, ignoring the allusion, which, to say the least, was unhappy.

"I'm going to," he answered. "I've got eighteen months yet before I'm fifty. For that period of time we shall be able to stop here. And I'm going to take up pursuits fit for my age. I'm going to do a bit of good if I can."

It was an answer to my prayers, no doubt. But for all that I could scarcely believe my ears.

"You are going to teach in the Sunday-school!" I cried with sudden conviction, flinging myself on my knees beside my dear old hero.

"Get up," he said, "and don't be an idiot. I'm going to run for the Local Board; and if I get on, as I think I shall, I'll raise Cain in this place. We're all asleep here."

The Chislehurst air, which is bracing, had simply taken years off my grandfather's life, and I was conscious that he would make himself heard on the Local Board pretty loudly if they really elected him. This, I doubted not, was what he meant by the peculiar idiom that he would raise Cain. The old man was always picking up new expressions now. His refined, old-world diction had almost entirely departed from his tongue.

CHAPTER VII.
"VOTE FOR DOLPHIN."

"The truth is," said grandpapa, "that I have got to know some of the shop people here. Not the stuck-up cads who live in the big houses by night and sneak up to London to sell boots and beer and underclothing by day; not the purse-proud rubbish that sticks 'Esquire' after its name without any right; but genuine people, who live over their shops in Chislehurst, and sell boots and beer and underclothing openly, and don't mind admitting it. Mr. Lomax, our butcher, is proposing me, and Rogers, the landlord of the *Eight Bells Inn*, has seconded my nomination. I'm going to write an address to the electors, and leave no stone unturned to get in."

"Is it worth while, my dearest?" I ventured to ask.

"Of course it's worth while," he answered testily. "You're always nagging at me in a quiet way to use my precious time; and when I undertake a big enterprise like this you throw cold water on it. And another thing: it's rather doubtful taste your questioning my actions at all. I look sixty and I feel sixty, but I am a hundred and four and your grandfather. Don't let appearances make you forget that. Rogers says I'm safe to get in. Then I shall wake this place up a bit, and say a thing or two that wants saying."

He had Mr. Rogers and his wife and daughter in to dine. "Socially they are nothing," my grandpapa admitted; "but when you're running for a public appointment you must be all things to all men, and not disdain to make use of mere *canaille*."

Mr. Rogers was a very vulgar, plain-spoken man, and his wife had caught his manner. Their daughter I liked less than them. She allowed herself to worry too much over her parents' ignorance. She corrected their grammar openly; shivered ostentatiously when they dropped an "h" or inserted the aspirate unexpectedly; told them plainly where to use a fork when habit and inclination led them to employ a knife, and so forth. After the meal we went to the drawing-room, and when her mother had gone to sleep in a corner, Miss Rogers told me that her parents were a source of great sorrow to her. They had given her an education of exceptional thoroughness and gentility; which was weak of them, because it enabled her to see their shortcomings, but had not made her a lady or anything like one. She was called Marie--christened Mary no doubt--and she was engaged to a life insurance agent in a fair way of business--so he said.

This young man--one Mr. Walter Widdicombe--and his prospective father-in-law, the innkeeper, worked very hard on grandpapa's behalf. Mr. Widdicombe understood canvassing, and he gladly accepted a sovereign a day for his expenses, and went about beating up voters and making people promise to poll for Daniel Dolphin. Grandpapa's election motto was "Advance," and he wrote a manifesto in the local paper. It was full of suggested reforms and plain-speaking and hard hitting, and made the old man a great many enemies.

If grandfather had been a peaceful, unassertive person, he might have slunk through those terrible years of his existence without attracting undue attention; if he had even been a moral and fairly religious man, his position (and mine) would have presented less frightful complications. But he began to grow more boisterous and unprincipled as his vital energy returned. His disposition had always been at once cantankerous and pushing, and now the circumstance of his prospects only embittered and accentuated the worse traits in his character. He was reckless, unbound by any ordinary guiding and controlling views of this life or the next, simply determined to "make the running," "go it up to the knocker," and so on. The expressions, of course, are his own. I was ignorant of their exact meaning until he practically illustrated them.

Grandpapa got in by twenty votes, after a great struggle. He gave a dinner, to men only, at the *Eight Bells*. They

had a large public room there, used for important occasions; and ladies were allowed to sit in a little gallery which ran round it, and listen to the speeches and watch their heroes dine. The same thing is done on a bigger scale by more important people.

I sat by Miss Rogers, who nearly fell out of the gallery on to the table below when her papa began to eat peas with a knife. She suffered also during his speech, which was faulty in manner, though I thought the matter excellent. He praised grandpapa's good qualities, noted his fiery, manly spirit, hinted that in approaching old institutions the reformer must begin with caution and the thin end of the wedge. But grandpapa showed by the tone of certain remarks, in which he responded to the toast of his health, that "caution" was not going to be his watchword by any means. He was flushed with success, and hardly looked a day more than fifty. He alluded to the "bright-eyed angels" hovering above him in the gallery, and hinted at garden parties in our back garden, and made me extremely uncomfortable by ordering a dozen of champagne to be sent up to us.

I left him smoking cigars, and getting very noisy and excited. He came home at half-past one o'clock, between Mr. Rogers and Mr. Lomax, our butcher. I need not dwell upon his condition. I saw everything in the moonlight through my Venetian blind. One of his supporters found grandfather's latch-key and opened the door with it. Then both dragged him up to his room and went home, shutting the front door behind them. Grandpapa was very poorly indeed during the night, but refused my aid. I offered to fetch a medical man, but he told me to let him alone and go and bury myself. Of course I could not disguise the truth. Grandpapa had taken too much to drink. The thought went through me like a knife. Indeed, I cried all night, and when I rose my pillow was still wet with tears.

In the morning he was looking ten years older, and for a short time I thought and hoped the New Scheme had broken down. But, after a glass of brandy and soda-water, he brightened up, and his headache went off. He declared that he had enjoyed himself extremely, spent a royal night, and felt all the better for it.

"I find," he said, "that I don't care a straw for wine yet, but the old taste for spirits has come back. We must get in a few gallons at once. And cigars, too; I'm taking to cigars again."

He was rather sulky when I did up his accounts, but he considered it money well spent. Then he put on his hat and went out "to see the boys."

He came back in a terrible rage, and used three new expletives, and hinted at murder. It appeared that his defeated rivals on the Local Board had lodged a protest against him for bribery and corruption. Grandpapa nearly went mad with rage. He knocked a man down in the open street, and was summoned and appeared at a police court, and had to be bound over to keep the peace. Finally he lost his seat on the Local Board, the case going against him; and as he dashed into the kitchen, where I was showing the cook how to make something, he absolutely foamed at the mouth. He threatened to buy dynamite, to blow Chislehurst to the skies, to destroy his political opponents with poison. Then he talked seriously of ending his own existence, from which step I dissuaded him, feeling at the same time, that he could hardly make worse arrangements for his future than he had already done. After dinner on that day he said he should give up trying to do good, and he kept his word. He took to living at the *Eight Bells*, and to writing insulting letters to the local papers. One of these cost him a hundred pounds in a libel action. Then (and I was not sorry for it) he found some brown hair on his head. This threatened to spread and attract attention, so I considered that the time had come for us to make another move, and begin life upon a new plan with altered relationships.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIE ROGERS.

Heaven knows that I do not wish to show up grandpapa in this narrative, or make the unhappy old sufferer appear worse than he was. Indeed, my desire is to write with a dispassionate pen, to state facts, and leave scientists, legal experts, and students of ethics to draw their own conclusions. But I do not intend that anything shall blind me to what I owe my grandpapa; and I will say that in the matter of Marie Rogers he was not entirely to blame. The girl set her cap at him, haunted him in the tap-room at her father's place of entertainment, sent him flowers, gushed about him to me, and did everything she could to flatter his vanity. This had always been extremely easy. He was still old enough to feel tickled by the attention of a woman of thirty. Miss Rogers had a childish prettiness of manner, which might have been effective when she was younger, but struck me as rather ridiculous now. She talked young and dressed young, and pretended a general ignorance of the seamy side of the world which took in my grandpapa completely. No doubt it had similarly deceived the life insurance agent. That young man lost his temper with Miss Rogers over the matter of my grandpapa, and received short notice in consequence.

"Gad!" said grandfather, "it's very gratifying--an old buffer of a hundred and six to cut out this youngster. What d' ye think of her, Martha? Not a day older than thirty--eh?"

"I think you are on the verge of a volcano, grandpapa. You are doing a most dangerous thing by stopping here. Already people laugh at your new piebald wig, as they call it. You ought to have left Chislehurst three months ago, as I urged you at the time."

"Well, well, let 'em laugh. Who cares? I'm sure I don't. This girl takes my fancy, and that's a fact. She's in love with me, and can't hide it, and Rogers hasn't any objection."

"Of course not; he knows what you're worth."

"I've been wondering if I could run away with her and marry her somewhere in Scotland," said grandpapa, winking at me. I did not understand the wink, and asked him what he meant.

"It doesn't matter," he answered, "only she might get tired of me when I grow younger; and I myself might fancy something a little fresher later on."

"Once and for all," I said, "this inclination towards matrimony is reprehensible and must be crushed, dear grandpapa. I implore of you to fight against it. Don't let every woman you meet fool you into a declaration. Do be circumspect; for Heaven's sake, look on ahead."

"It's brutal always asking me to do that," he answered, shedding tears, for it was one of his maudlin days; "I don't want to look ahead. The future can take care of itself. I'm spoiling for somebody who would be a comfort to me at home--somebody who would take a bright view of things and not always be ramming the future down my throat, like you do. I see no reason why I should not marry."

"Then let me give you some," I answered desperately. "You must remember what lies in store. No woman shall suffer as I have suffered and am suffering. This girl, Marie Rogers, is thirty or more; you are--say, five-and-fifty. In four years' time you will be *fifteen*! You cannot get away from that. The horrible fact is reached by simple arithmetic. Imagine yourself at that age saddled with a wife, and perhaps a family! If you can face such a prospect with a good conscience, I cannot. I'd rather die than see you in such a position."

He laughed bitterly.

"What relation would you be to them, I wonder? The brats would be your uncles and aunts, and my wife your grandmother! What a fool you'd look!"

I couldn't see it, and for the first time since the commencement of the New Scheme, I lost my temper with grandpapa.

"Oh, you horrid, depraved old man!" I cried, "will no words, or tears, or prayers, make you pause and reflect? Cannot your only surviving relation, your own son's child, carry any weight with you? Would you rather have this flighty female at your side than me? Cannot you realise what I am doing for you, what you would be without me? I

blush for you; I blush for your disgraceful tastes and wicked ambitions. You, who ought to spend all your time on your knees and in church, calling on Providence to avert this doom! You shall not marry. Hear me, I say, once and for all, you shall not. If you dare to get engaged again, I'll tell the woman's people. I'll make a clean breast of it to Mr. Rogers. Then you'll have to leave this place whether you like it or not. I've done a great deal for you, but I'm only human, and you've stung me beyond endurance to-day. Let us have no repetition of this terrible conversation. Make your choice once for all. Take Marie Rogers, or let me stay with you, and fight for you. But you cannot have both of us."

He was rather cowed by my vehemence.

"Of course, if you're going to make such a fuss, I must debate with myself," he said. "Only it's rather awkward now. Why didn't you speak sooner? You must have seen the woman adoring me for the last six weeks."

"I gave you credit for a certain amount of proper feeling," I answered.

"That was weak," he said. "I've made a law unto myself lately. As a matter of fact we are engaged. I popped the question yesterday in the bar-parlour, and she cried and asked me to see the old man. He was delighted. I didn't explain things to him, but it's a very good bargain--for Marie. She'll have a rum time of it certainly for five years and six months; then I shall fade away, or be carried off in a fiery chariot or something, and she can take the money. Still, I may be doing a foolish thing. My tastes are changing so readily. I'm certain to drop my eye on something more up-to-date as soon as I'm booked to her."

"I implore you, grandpapa, to throw her over. She doesn't love you. She is marrying you for your money. Her regard will never stand against the shock of finding out the New Scheme. She will confide in others and ruin your peace of mind. Possibly she will run away altogether when you begin to--to shrink, as you must. I, on the contrary, am prepared to face everything. Tear her image from your heart! Fight the passion and conquer it. Rest on me!"

My grandpapa smoked and drank whisky, while I sat up into the small hours and argued with him.

"I believe you're right," he said at last. "I can't face the girl, nor yet her father now; but I really think we'd better drop the connection. Socially, of course, it's not satisfactory at all. No doubt young Widdicombe, the life insurance agent, will come back when I'm gone. Yes, we'd better make tracks, perhaps. She hasn't got anything in writing. Besides, I'm sick of this place. I've quarrelled with pretty nearly everybody in it, and I'm owing some money too--some debts of honour--that I think I can wriggle out of paying. I'll try and forget Marie. We'll 'shoot the moon' before quarter-day."

By "shooting the moon," my grandpapa explained that he employed a well-known technicality which meant leaving Chislehurst at night, in an abrupt manner, without letting our departure be known beforehand or advertising our new address in the local newspapers, or even mentioning it at the post-office.

CHAPTER IX.

IN LONDON ONCE MORE.

Of course, a hale man with a strong will of his own, numerous vices, rapidly-decreasing years, and strong, if misplaced, convictions, was more than an unmarried, inexperienced, woman of my age could be expected to manage.

As time progressed I gave up attempting to reform grandpapa, and simply contented myself with praying that he might complete his career without falling into absolute crime. The thought of seeing him in a felon's dock at the last haunted me like a nightmare. He would get younger and less familiar with the wicked ways of the world daily.

As a young man, he was one for whom traps, snares, and pitfalls had never been set in vain. When he reached a hundred and eight he would look and feel twenty years of age under the New Scheme. Then, how probable that the poor old man might fall a prey to some iniquitous schemer! I told him my fears, and he sneered bitterly, and said:

"Yes, a pretty old cough-drop I should look, shouldn't I, being sentenced to penal servitude for life--at a hundred and nine years of age? Then you'd see an advertisement in the papers, 'Wanted, at Portland Prison, a wet nurse for the notorious forger and embezzler, Daniel Dolphin.' Bless you, Martha, there's some real fun in store for you and me yet."

I cried and begged him not to say such things. It was a horrible thought, and yet had a ray of comfort in it, that if I could only keep the old man fairly straight for the next five years, or less, he would then be at my mercy again. By that time somebody would certainly have to be a second mother to grandpapa.

We "shot the moon" on a night when there was none. Our next move took us back to town. I hired a little flat, No. 1, Oxford Mansions, a snug place enough, near Earl's Court. According to custom, we left no address behind us, and began life anew. I was obliged to drop all my old friends in Peckham Rye and Ealing for grandpapa's sake. I had met Mrs. Hopkins at Whiteley's, and told her the old man was dead. She pressed me to come and see her, and I answered that I would write. Then I hastened away to the Drugs Department, leaving her in the Haberdashery, astonished and disappointed. My heart sorrowed, for I loved the good woman; but there was nothing else to be done. On another occasion grandpapa took me to the Royal Figi Exhibition at Earl's Court, and we ran right on top of the Bangley-Browns. The girls recognised me, and whispered to their mother; but, of course, they did not know grandpapa. He was twenty years younger than when they last saw him. Mrs. Bangley-Brown turned very red, and sailed towards me; but I dodged with my grandpapa round a refreshment building, and then dragged him through a crowd to the entrance of the Exhibition, finally escaping in a hansom cab.

"What do I care?" he said. "I'd like to have spoken to her again. I spotted 'em before you did. She wasn't half a bad old boulder. Those gals don't go off apparently; too much torso and not enough tin, eh?"

In this painful style did the old man speak of two perfect ladies, whose only crime was a hereditary inclination to *enbonpoint*. I toned him down when I could, but he rarely listened to me now. It was as his sister that I posed at No. 1, Oxford Mansions. He had grown into a very corpulent, big-bearded man. He wore white waistcoats, and followed fashion, and took particular pains with his person. He abandoned politics and began to develop interest in City affairs. Once he brought home a new friend who he said was on the Stock Exchange--a most gentlemanly, polite individual, who treated me with a courtesy and consideration to which I had long been a stranger. After he had gone, grandpapa told me he was somebody of great importance.

"He's floating a fine scheme that's got thousands in it," he explained. "We dined at Richmond with some friends last week, and, coming home in the drag, Phil Montague--that's his name--let me into a secret or two, and promised me shares. Mind, Martha, I'm doing this for you. Don't say I never think of you. When I'm gone, you'll draw many a fine dividend from the 'Automatic Postcard Company.' And when you draw 'em, think of me, far away--probably frying."

Mr. Phil Montague called again, and, finally, I know that grandpapa took at least a thousand pounds of his capital out of Something Three Per Cents, and put them into Automatic Postcards. Then he suddenly determined to go upon the Stock Exchange himself. I think that he would have carried out this mad project, but other affairs distracted his attention. Hardly was the company of Mr. Phil Montague well floated when that gentleman called again, dined by invitation, and broached a new scheme to grandpapa.

This man represents my own greatest failure as a student of character. I was utterly deceived in him. He simply laid himself out to deceive me. Doubtless he felt that if he could get me on his side he would be able to deal with grandpapa all the more easily. Outwardly Mr. Montague was both religious and modest; which qualities, openly

paraded in a stockbroker, appeared very beautiful to me. He also quoted Scripture, not ostentatiously, but evidently from habit. He constantly alluded to his dead mother, and told me that he took exotics to her grave at Brompton every second Sunday afternoon. How many financiers would do that? He never talked business in front of me, and I found after he had known my grandpapa about a month that the old man began to grow very secretive and peculiar. A cunning furtive look appeared in his eye; he was away from home--in the City and elsewhere--a great deal; he avoided discussion of his affairs as far as possible. Once I asked him some question about Mr. Montague's own status, and he laughed, and answered in bad taste--

"Spoons, eh? Well, Martha, old chip, I believe he's gone on you, too, or else he's playing the fool because he thinks it will please me. 'Fine woman, your sister,' he said to me last week. 'Fine for her age--she's sixty,' I answered."

"Grandfather, you *know* I'm not!"

"Well, you look it, every hour of it. But he pretended to be surprised, and said it was strange you hadn't made some good man happy before now."

"I think he is a very worthy, honourable gentleman, grandfather, and I wish you would try and be more like him."

"Bless you, Phil's all right. We're great pals. And he's got some brains under that sanctified manner, too. We have a little bit of fun in hand just now that means a pile for us both, if I'm not mistaken."

At this moment Mr. Montague himself was announced, and, without waiting to enquire of grandpapa whether I might do so, I asked him boldly of what nature was his new enterprise.

CHAPTER X. ***THE CRUSADE.***

"I will tell you with great pleasure, dear Miss Dolphin," he said, in his sad, rather sweet voice.

He sat down, stroked his clean-shaven chin, drew up his trousers that their elegant appearance might not be spoiled by his sharp, thin knees, and then spoke:

"Your brother and I are engaged in a crusade. Is not that the word, Mr. Dolphin?"

"As good as any other," said my grandpapa.

"Better than any other. You have doubtless heard of Monte Carlo, Miss Dolphin? It is a plague-spot on the fair face of France. God made the Riviera; man is responsible for Monte Carlo. The Prince of Monaco is the landlord, so I understand; the Prince of Darkness is the tenant. Miss Dolphin, it is often necessary to fight the Devil with his own weapons. We are going to Monte Carlo with a golden sword. Your brother finds the sword--I wield it."

"In plain English, Martha, Montague's worked out a dead snip----"

"A system, pardon me."

"Well, a 'system,' that will take the stuffing out of the strongest bank that ever robbed innocents. We are both going."

"Grandf--! Daniel! Going to Monte Carlo!"

"Yes. Don't want you. It's simply a matter of business."

"Let me explain," said Mr. Montague. "You are rather startled, dear Miss Dolphin, and I cannot wonder at it." He blew his nose. His handkerchiefs and shirt-cuffs and so on were always beautiful. He said:

"The facts are these. I have had an inspiration. Heaven has from my earliest youth been pleased to bestow upon

me certain mathematical gifts denied to most men. This power of dealing with figures was not given me for nothing. It is a talent not to be hidden in a napkin."

"No fear," said grandpapa.

"I have long been seeking some outlet for my peculiar ability, and I have at length found it. In my hand is a power, that rightly exercised, will extinguish one of the greatest evils of the present day. Under Heaven I have been mercifully permitted to discover a system which rises naturally from certain processes in the higher mathematics. This system applied to the laws which govern chance produces a most startling result. It annihilates chance altogether, and substitutes certainty. Do I make myself clear?"

"Clear as crystal," said grandpapa, chuckling.

"A lady can hardly be interested in my deductions, but their conclusions, their practical results, will not fail to interest her," continued Mr. Montague. "My system, once grasped and accepted, becomes a law, and the effect of that law must be a revolution in human society. Think, dear Miss Dolphin, of a world from which all element of chance is eliminated! The vices of gambling and betting vanish. Mathematics will rise superior to human roguery. We know when to expect red or black--I refer to card-playing; we know which horse ought to win every race, and if it doesn't we know where to throw the blame; we know everything; we are become as gods!"

"But what has that to do with Monte Carlo, sir?" I ventured to ask.

"Good old Martha! Go up one," said grandpapa.

Then Mr. Montague turned to me and answered my question.

"I expected you would ask that, Miss Dolphin, and I gladly explain. Monte Carlo is the headquarters of this pestilential passion, this love of gambling which dominates mankind. We are going to begin a crusade there, and fight against the most powerful troops the enemy has at command."

"That's so! I'm planking down a thousand; and we're goin' to play a big game and make some of 'em hop, and wish they had never been born," said grandpapa.

"In other and more seemly words, Miss Dolphin, we design to crush Monte Carlo, to wipe that blot from the fair face of France. The gambling hell shall be no more; treachery, falsehood, knavery shall cease out of the land."

"And we'll come home with flags flying, in a triumphal car drawn by oof-birds," said grandpapa.

"That, of course, is a circumstance incidental to the scheme," explained Mr. Montague to me. "You do not understand your brother, naturally enough, but what he means is that a large sum of money will accrue to us. With this wealth we shall develop my system, and place it within the reach of the misguided speculators of all countries."

Grandpapa exploded with noisy laughter, and patted Mr. Montague on the back.

"Why not do so first?" I asked. "Why not publish this great discovery at once in the papers?"

"Give it away! Good Lord, Martha--and you a lawyer's daughter!" said grandpapa.

"I would do so willingly enough," answered Mr. Montague, "but advertisement is a costly business. To make the system sufficiently known would require an expenditure of many thousands of pounds. You see no better advertisement of it could be hit upon than breaking the bank at Monte Carlo. We shall go on breaking that bank until the proprietors are ruined and the place is shut up. Then we shall return home."

"By way of Paris," said grandpapa. "If you like to meet us there," he added, with his real affection for me bubbling up to the surface of his nature, "you may; and we'll make a bit of a splash among the frogs." But I had never been out of England in my life, and did not like the picture of splashing with grandpapa in Paris. At the same time the thought of him splashing there alone was even less pleasant.

Mr. Montague said a few more words, promised never to lose sight of my grandfather and then took his leave, kissing my hand on his departure, in a stately, old-fashioned way which was very pleasing to me.

I could not help contrasting him with grandpapa, to the disadvantage of the latter. They looked about the same

age, yet how different in their conduct, language, and attitude towards the gentler sex! One behaved, and thought, and acted as though he was forty-five; the other, who ought, heaven knows, to have been old-fashioned, and staid, and sensible, conducted himself like a fast, silly boy of twenty-one. For about this time grandfather began to grow young for his years, even on the New Scheme.

He bought some showy clothes, cloth caps, and knickerbockers, a meerschaum pipe, a spirit-flask, and several other things at the Army and Navy Stores. For these he certainly paid, but he gave the people who served him an imaginary name and ticket number. Rather than spend five shillings in a member's voucher, he told a lie to the officials of the Co-operative Society; which I should think was very unusual. Then the old man drew another precious thousand pounds out of Government securities, and went away with Mr. Montague to wipe out Monte Carlo.

I was fearful of the entire concern, but he told me to "keep up my pecker and watch the papers," and so departed in roaring spirits. The only thing which troubled him was that his time for "blueing the booty" would be so short. To this day I have never met anybody who could explain the meaning of the expression "blueing the booty."

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW LEAF TURNED.

I am a simple old woman, ready to see fine qualities in anybody, unwilling to doubt the honesty of fellow-creatures or the good faith of their assertions. Therefore I am not ashamed to confess that Mr. Montague entirely deceived me, and turned out, not merely no better than he should have been, but much worse. He deceived dear grandpapa, too, though in a different way.

"I thought he was a sly beggar who 'd found a plum in the pie," said grandfather to me afterwards; "but it wasn't so--a mere blackleg, a scamp, a devourer of orphans. Break the bank? No, we didn't break the bank, but I broke his nose, and scattered his false teeth from one end of the Casino to the other, and dusted the steps with him afterwards!"

These and other things grandpapa said when he returned from Monte Carlo. I watched the daily journals as he directed, and so was not wholly unprepared for the fiasco which resulted from his trip to the Continent.

Indeed two startling items, both involving dear grandpapa, met my eye on the same morning, in the same copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. Under the "agony column" of that periodical I read as follows:--

"Wanted, address of one Daniel Dolphin. The same to Rogers, 'Eight Bells,' Chislehurst, will meet with a reward."

And elsewhere, under the heading of "Scene at Monte Carlo," occurred this paragraph:

"The English here are making things lively. Two adventurers with a new 'system' began to play last night and lost a thousand pounds at a sitting. One appears to have been a knave, the other a fool. When their resources were exhausted they came to blows, and the bigger man, presumed to be the capitalist, fell upon his companion and thrashed him unmercifully. It appears they had come in great state with a flourish of trumpets; but their 'system,' like most others, though doubtless pretty on paper, broke down at the tables. Both men have disappeared."

Here was cause for alarm if you will. I could not be sure that the persons mentioned were my dear grandfather and his companion, but somehow I always fancied that the matter related to them. I also dimly guessed why Mr. Rogers wanted grandpapa's address. No doubt Marie's affections had been trifled with, and the law possesses power to estimate the value of such broken promises in pounds, shillings, and pence.

I waited a fortnight without hearing a word from grandpapa. Then he suddenly came home, penniless and destitute of everything but the clothes on his back. He had grown thinner, and nearly a year younger, but his health appeared excellent, though his memory seemed to be impaired. Of course time was winging backwards at such a hideous rate with grandpapa that events, which only seemed of yesterday to me, already grew dim in his memory.

I sent for the tailor to come and measure him for some new clothes, and then begged he would tell me all that had happened. He began immediately about Paris, but I reminded him of Monte Carlo and Mr. Phil Montague. Then he grew enraged, and explained to me how he had treated that gentleman.

"I left the place next day, and slipped back to Paris. There I've had a pretty good time, but it's an expensive place. I kept a few hundreds up my sleeve, you know, and after I'd lost the 'thou.,' which simply filtered away in a few hours, I reckoned I'd get better money's worth with what was left. So I went to Paris and had a gaudy fortnight."

"And now you will settle down, dearest, won't you, and drop all this speculation and money-making?"

"Yes, no more 'systems' for me. First settle up, then settle down. We must bolt out of London, anyhow."

"Why, grandpapa? We are safe for six months yet, if you keep quiet."

"I haven't kept quiet," he acknowledged frankly. "You'd better hear the truth. I'm in a very awkward position."

"Tell me everything, grandpapa. I can bear it."

"Well, I met her in Paris."

"Grandpapa! Another?"

"Listen. I met the woman in Paris. She was a Russian princess, stopping at the Hotel Bristol. She could speak English--worse luck. So we got on. No side at all about her. Let me take her everywhere and pay. One of those golden-haired, expensive women, but beautiful as a dream. Her husband still lives somewhere in Russia. He had a row with the Czar about her. She was nobody herself. They were separated through no fault of hers. She couldn't stand him because he funk'd the Czar. Plucky little woman; coming over to this country to play the harp at the music-halls. We're engaged."

"Grandpapa!"

"Don't criticise, I can't stand it to-day. She's called the Princess Hopskipchhoff. She said it was the dream of her life to marry me; that she's seen me in her sleep and that a fortune-teller, now in Siberia, had accurately described me to her years ago. She's twenty-five and true as steel. Socially it would have been a step in the right direction, though Russian Princesses are rather a drug in the market. But I can't marry her, of course. I've thought better of it since we parted, and I've had time to do up my accounts."

"You break hearts as a pastime, grandfather. Poor woman. I'm sorry for her."

"As to that, it wasn't a love match entirely either. She was fairly cute. I rather hoodwinked the girl, perhaps; but all's fair in love. I--well--I pulled, the long bow, certainly."

"You disguised your true condition?"

"More than that. I hinted at twenty thousand a year and a park."

"You will kill me, grandpapa!"

"And I also told her I was a Viscount, Viscount Dolphin, heir to the titles and estates of the Duke of Cornwall."

"Good heavens! The Prince of Wales is the Duke of Cornwall!"

"Is he, begad? I'd forgotten that," said grandpapa, with a painful, cunning look on his face, "then she can go and worry 'em at Marlborough House. She won't get any information about me there. Don't you bother. We'll smash her if she makes a row. I'll say she's a Russian spy or something. Anyhow the simplest way will be for us to clear out of town altogether. I'm sick of the wickedness of London. Every second man you meet's a swindler or a rogue. Give me the peaceful country--a bottle of port at the squire's mahogany, the *Field* newspaper, a decent mount, and pleasant feminine society. That's good enough for me. I'm a hundred and six in three days' time; forty by the New Scheme."

Yes, let me go and dwindle from forty to thirty amidst quiet, rural, agricultural surroundings."

I was delighted at this resolution. Grandpapa henceforth appeared as my son, made me wear a wedding-ring, and carried me away to a little honeysuckle-covered cottage near Salisbury.

CHAPTER XII. A SUGGESTION.

When I mentioned Mr. Rogers's advertisement to my grandfather he buried himself in the past, and by great effort of memory re-called his career at Chislehurst. It began to be a puzzle to him that time, which flew so fast where he was concerned, should drag so extremely with the rest of the world.

"Chislehurst! Why that's twenty years ago, or near it," he said. "The girl must be fifty if she's a day. No judge would grant her a hearing at all. Breach of promise indeed! But we're perfectly safe, they wouldn't recognise me if I walked into the *Eight Bells* to-morrow."

With fortunes to some extent impaired we set off for Rose Cottage, near Salisbury. Grandpapa had forgotten all about the "Automatic Postcard Company," but I reminded him of the affair, and he went to a meeting of shareholders and said some nasty things, and was cheered by the other victims. Of course we lost all the money he had put in.

And now, in the quiet country, my grandfather made his one solitary effort towards reformation. It lasted three weeks, and ended in failure, and a run up to town without me.

But grandpapa did try all he knew to be good. He lived a blameless life, kept early hours, became a practical teetotaler, played a little lawn-tennis at the vicarage, and went to church twice every Sunday. I think he expected too much, and was too hopeful.

He said on one occasion:

"If heaven don't take pity on me now, and put a spoke in the New Scheme, then I shall say Providence is simply played out. Look at the life I'm leading. Look at the way I talk; never a strong expression. I helped a lame woman across the road yesterday. Is that to count for nothing? One cigar a day, early hours, no liquor, no language, no flirtation--why, if I was on my death-bed I couldn't be leading a more insipid life. It *must* tell in the long run."

But he only got younger and handsomer. The early hours and exercise at lawn-tennis did wonders. Men do not alter much between thirty and forty as a rule, but grandpapa began to get absolutely boyish. Half the pretty girls in the place were in love with him. Everybody thought he was younger than even the New Scheme made him appear.

I felt all along that he was not conducting his reformation on right lines, for what hope of success could be expected when the entire structure of his life stood on foundations of falsehood?

At the end of a fortnight, finding no improvement, he grumbled at Providence, and slipped for a moment into his old methods of expression. Then I made a suggestion.

"You will never escape from this hideous predicament, dearest," said I, taking his great, muscular hand between my thin ones, "you will never put yourself on a proper footing with heaven again, unless you proclaim the truth, banish all these false pretences which now hem us in on every side, and explain your position to the world. Only old Mr. Murdoch, of Ealing, knows the truth. Rise up and tell everybody, grandpapa!"

He shaved now, with the exception of his moustache. This he tugged and twisted, and looked at me with undisguised contempt.

"Well, that fairly takes the crumb!" he said. "D' you actually suggest that I should go on the housetops and cry,

'Look at me, look at me, good people; I'm nearly a hundred and seven years of age; I've signed a treaty with the devil. He will have what is left of me in about three years. This ancient woman is my granddaughter. Come, all of you, pray for us'? Would you suggest I did that, Martha?"

"Something like it," I answered. "Then you would feel that you were telling the truth, at all events."

"Pretty true ring about it, certainly. Everybody would believe it, wouldn't they?"

"I could substantiate the facts, grandpapa."

"Which would merely place you in a lunatic asylum as well as me. If you are going to babble about telling the *truth* we may as well pack up our traps and take the train to Colney Hatch right away."

"But the world might watch you shrinking, grandpapa. A committee of doctors would find out in six weeks that you were telling the truth."

"And have people paying sixpence a head to come in and see me dwindling? I don't mean to make a circus of myself for you or anybody. If Providence can't do anything, then we'll just rip forward as we're going, and abide by the result. I'll keep up this psalm-singing one more week; then, if nothing happens, I shall go on the razzle-dazzle, and chance it."

"What d'you mean, grandpapa?"

"It doesn't matter what I mean. I shall do it anyhow."

And he did. A week later he went off for a couple of days "on the razzle-dazzle." I asked our curate if he knew the idiom. He was but recently ordained, after an undistinguished career at the University of Oxford. He said that to "go on the razzle-dazzle" meant a round of picture galleries, museums, and similar institutions, where healthy amusement might be found mingled with instruction.

"Many and many a time have I done likewise myself, Mrs. Dolphin, in the good old days of the Polytechnic," he said. "Your son will return all the better for his trip."

This, coming from a cleric, comforted me not a little.

Grandpapa certainly did seem happier after his holiday. He presently re-appeared devoid of money, but in an excellent temper. I trusted that he would take more of these excursions in future, for they served to distract his thoughts and do him good.

He was full of one topic.

"I saw the Hopskipchoff yesterday. She's quite the rage, and her romance about Viscount Dolphin is a regular joke in the music halls. I sat pretty tight, I can tell you. Not that she would recognise me, now my beard's gone. Fancy liking her! What beastly bad taste old Johnnies of five-and-forty have! Why, she's all paint, and eyes, and false hair--no more a princess than you are, Martha."

"I'm thankful you escaped that snare, dear grandpapa."

"Yes, but she's hunting for Viscount Dolphin still. Several chance acquaintances I made told me that she is. She tried Marlborough House, but that didn't wash. They shot her out mighty quick, and she says it's a conspiracy. Daresay she'll find me some day trundling a hoop or playing peg-top in the gutter. I shall be a legal infant before anybody can look round."

CHAPTER XIII. ***THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER.***

On his hundred-and-seventh birthday grandpapa gave up hope, went to London for some new clothes, started a

groom and two horses, laid in a stock of the choicest wines, and began to live on his capital. My little portion had gone in the "Automatic Postcards."

"What there is left over after the final smash you can keep," said he to me; "but I tell you frankly there won't be much. I've got about five thousand left, and I'm going to live at the rate of two thousand or more a year. That will enable me to get into society if I spend it the right way. In two years I shall be ten years old. Then you can look after me again. But, during those two years, it might almost be better if you left me and went to live somewhere else. You won't get any solid satisfaction out of watching me. I shall marry very likely, or do any other fool's trick that takes my fancy."

Of course I refused to leave him, and he said I might stay if I particularly wished to, but he warned me never to interfere with him.

"And if you must stay," he added, "I will thank you to buy some better clothes. You're getting too much of a back number to suit me. I don't like bringing classy people into the house. You're fifty years behind the times. I'm a particular man myself, and I wish my relations to look smart and prosperous. I'm sorry I didn't give out you were a rich aunt, and that I was your nephew, with expectations. Then it wouldn't have mattered. As it is, you must pull yourself together, and try to look as little like a guy as possible. I can hang on here for another six months--till I'm five-and-twenty. Then I suppose my moustache will begin to moult, or something cheerful. When that happens, we'll toddle back to town, and I'll finish my career there."

I humoured him, bought a silk dress in the latest fashion, and a few pieces of jewellery, for which he supplied the money. This was done with an object. Heaven is aware that precious stones gave me no pleasure, but I looked forward to the time when we should be bankrupt, or when grandpapa would depart, leaving me at the workhouse door, so to speak. Against this evil hour I bought the jewels and silk dress. They delighted my grandparent.

"Good old dowager!" he exclaimed at sight of me, "we are a proper old box of tricks now! I tell you what, Martha, my tulip: this must be shown to the county. We'll give a dinner--a regular spread. Men laugh at me for living on in this little hole, but I laugh back, and tell 'em I like it. They believe I'm enormously wealthy, and fancy that to spend but two thousand a year is miserly. Yes, they think me awfully eccentric--well, let 'em; God knows I am. As to this feed, we'll get the grub from Salisbury, open the folding doors, and ask twenty people. The Dawsons and the Westertons, and the parson and Squire Talbot and his wife and daughter. Then we'll invite a big clerical pot or two from Salisbury, and certain men I know. The affair will distract me. You must write the invitations and so on. If you don't know how to, I'll buy you an etiquette book, with all the rotten rules and regulations."

"One point only, grandpapa. Please, for my sake, don't ask the Talbots. It isn't right; it isn't fair to the girl. You're a man to make any pretty child's heart ache now. I know you ride with her, and spend half your time at Talbot Priory. Recollect----"

"That's enough," he said, shortly. "You remember, too. The Talbots are to be asked. Mabel Talbot and I are friends. That is all."

"That never is all with you," I answered, and then continued, undismayed by his frown. "If she comes here, and you dine well, and drink, and so on, you'll end by proposing. You'll blight another heart, and then come to me next morning, and say it is time we made another move. You may well blush. I will not stay to see it, that I solemnly vow. If the Talbots are to come, I leave the house."

"As you please--a good riddance."

My resolution was quickly formed. I left him, put on my bonnet, and walked up to Talbot Priory, a distance of one mile. Fortune favoured me, for Mabel Talbot, in a little pony carriage, alone save for the company of a small groom behind her, came driving from the Priory. She was fond of me for a private reason, and now she stopped her vehicle, leapt out, and gave me a kiss. The girl was beautiful and good, and hopelessly in love with my grandpapa.

He worshipped her too, and explained to me on one occasion, at great length, that this was, to all intents and purposes, his first real love.

"Cupid's a blind fool, we all know, and, of course, he didn't realise what he was doing when he dropped Mabel Talbot in my way," said grandpapa one day.

The old man gave out now that he had five thousand a year, for I heard the servants discussing it; and Squire Talbot, to whose ear came this rumour, believed it, and greatly desired grandpapa for his son-in-law. The Squire was a clever, cunning aristocrat, and played on poor grandpapa's love of admiration, and made much of him.

But to return; I met Miss Talbot, as I have said, and accepted her invitation to drive awhile.

"I want to talk to you, Mabel, about my grand----about dear Daniel," I began, as we trotted out on to Salisbury Plain. She blushed rosy red, and nearly overturned the little carriage.

"Oh, dear, dear Mrs. Dolphin, has he told you?"

Then, of course, I knew they were engaged.

"How far has it gone?" I asked wearily.

No doubt the same old, sickening flight was upon us once more. The life I led was killing me. I certainly began to grow old as fast as grandpapa grew young. But this time they might be secretly married already for all I knew.

"He is going to see papa. I know my father will consent. And you, dear Mrs. Dolphin? May I be a little daughter to you? I will love you so dearly. I do already."

"Child," I answered, "you must face the truth and be brave. Daniel is much older--I mean younger--at least, he is different to what he seems. He can never marry again. Daniel has a great mystery hanging over his life. Supernatural agents are interested in him. He has violated all the laws of Nature--at least, I fancy so. I am not his mother at all. He is my grandfather. His real mother has been dead nearly a hundred years."

The girl's blue eyes grew quite round.

"Mrs. Dolphin!" she gasped.

"No; Miss Dolphin. He is my grandfather I tell you. I am unmarried. He has signed an agreement with--it doesn't matter. At any rate, he's already been married three times. He's a widower, and he cannot live more than three years, and----"

Mabel screamed, jumped from the pony carriage, and fell almost at the feet of a horseman who had overtaken us. It was grandpapa.

The girl ran sobbing to him, and I got out of the pony carriage. Grandfather, dismounting, took the trembling Mabel into his arms, on the high road, near some Druidical remains, and openly hugged her before me and the groom.

"What does this mean?" asked grandpapa fiercely, eyeing me with a scowl.

"She--she--oh, Daniel, she says you're her grandfather, and a married man, and--and I'm frightened--very frightened of her."

"You needn't be, darling," he said, with a bitter laugh; "she's quite harmless, poor old thing. It's only a passing attack. She has these fits from time to time in the hot weather. She's very mad to-day. Never mind; I rode out to find her, and I'm glad I have. I've tried to keep the malady a secret, but female lunatics are so cunning."

"Madness is hereditary. Oh, Dan, Dan, if papa knows that your poor mother is so very eccentric, he will never consent."

"He has consented, my darling. Fear nothing. My mother's insanity is not hereditary. She fell out of a three-storey window on to her head when she was seventeen. Since then the ailment has appeared occasionally. Her customary hallucination is blue rats. You say she thinks I am her grandpapa! Poor old soul! Go home, dear joy of my life! We meet to-morrow, after the Squire and I have seen the lawyers."

He kissed her, put her back in her pony carriage, and then turned to me, after she had driven away.

"Now, you old devil," he said, making his heavy hunting crop whistle in my ear, "you march home in front of me. And mark this, if you *dare* to come between me and my amusements again, I'll get two doctors to sign a certificate, and have you under lock and key in Bedlam or Hanwell, before you can say 'knife.'"

CHAPTER XIV. AT UPPER NORWOOD.

In a week from that horrible day grandpapa and I were on affectionate terms again, and living in furnished apartments at Upper Norwood, near the Crystal Palace. Events followed each other with such bewildering rapidity now, that I have a difficulty in remembering their correct sequence.

After grandpapa's brutal threat I felt my liberty, and even my life itself, began to be in danger; so that night, after a silent dinner, I waited until he went down to the stables to smoke, and then sending hastily for a cab, put one box, which I had already packed, into it, and drove away to Salisbury. I caught a late train to town, and lodged for the night at a little hotel near Waterloo. From here, next morning, I wrote to grandpapa, giving him my address, and telling him I was as ready as ever to help him and fight for him if he needed me. Then I went out and sold a brooch for five-and-twenty pounds, and bought myself a bottle of brandy. I want to hide nothing in this narrative. Of late my nerves had suffered not a little. Stimulant was the only thing that steadied them. I took more and more of it.

Three days later grandpapa turned up at the hotel. He had shaved off his moustache, was very frightened and cowed, and said the police were after him. He insisted on our changing our names, and getting off quietly into lodgings without delay. He studied an "A.B.C." Railway Guide, and said that Upper Norwood was a respectable sort of place, where they wouldn't be likely to look for him. Not until we were settled in furnished rooms, half-way up Gipsy Hill, and had ordered lunch, did he explain what had happened. Then he told the story.

"The day after you bolted I met old Talbot and his lawyer about a settlement. I talked rather big, and suggested fifty thousand. Then the brute of a lawyer said, after he had heard my name, 'How odd. Now there is a gentleman I have been wanting to find for the last two years nearly, and he is called Daniel Dolphin!' Like a fool, and forgetting the man he wanted must be years older than me, I lost my nerve, and the lawyer saw that I had. 'It's an odd name--perhaps a relative?' he said. 'The gentleman I mean used to live at Chislehurst. You will be doing me a kindness if you can tell me anything of him.' Instead of simply answering that I had never heard of the man, I replied that he was my uncle. 'How?' exclaimed the Squire, 'I thought you had no relations but your mother?' Then I tried to explain, and bungled it--I'm growing so damned young and silly now--and finally the matter dropped, but I could see that lawyer meant getting the truth out of me later on. I arranged the settlements and so on, and gave them a list of my imaginary investments, which, of course, I'd just picked out of the money columns in the papers. Then I wanted to marry at once, and get Mabel before they had time to find out my game. But the Squire said he wouldn't hear of it till the autumn. That wasn't good enough, so I saw Mabel and told her a yarn or two, and worked on her love for romance, and finally got her to run away with me. You needn't jump. The plot fell through. She weakly confided in a lady's maid. I saddled my horses myself, and rode out at midnight to abduct her in the good old style. I waited at a certain point by the Priory walls, and presently she arrived. But hardly had we galloped off--I meant to take her to Salisbury, and marry her before the registrar next morning--when we were confronted on the Plain by Squire Talbot and half-a-dozen mounted bounders he'd got to help him. The Squire collared his daughter, and left his friends to deal with me. They tried to take me prisoner, but I'm pretty fit just now, and pretty reckless too. I was mad to think

they'd scored off me like this, and I hit out and knocked one chap off his horse, and nearly strangled another, and fired my revolver at a third. I missed him, and shot his mount. When they found I was armed, they cleared off. It was an exciting, old-fashioned scrimmage, and I enjoyed it while it lasted. But of course, there's the devil to pay. I rode into Salisbury, put up my horse at an inn, dodged around all night, and took the first train up this morning. The bobbies were prowling about at Salisbury station, but they didn't recognise me. I'd cut off my moustache in the night, and looked not more than eighteen in the morning. The lawyer, of course, wants me for Marie Rogers; and Talbot will want me; and the chap whose head I broke will want me; and the man whose horse I shot will want me. Let 'em want!"

"This is the beginning of the end, grandpapa," I said, sadly enough.

"Not it! You wait and see what the next six months bring! I shouldn't wonder if I was in a tight place six months hence. This is nothing. I'll make some of 'em squeak yet before they've done with me."

It was in this wicked and reckless frame of mind that he prepared to spend the remainder of his days. However, he rested from his labours for about six weeks, notwithstanding his boast to make people "squeak." He read the reports of his performance on Salisbury Plain with great delight, and he found, as the matter developed, that sundry unexpected names appeared in it. Daniel Dolphin was "wanted" by the representatives of one Mrs. Bangley-Brown, to whom he had promised marriage; a man of the same name had performed a similar action at Chislehurst, the victim in that case being Miss Marie Rogers. It also appeared that some impostor, calling himself Viscount Dolphin, and claiming Royalty for his kindred, had met and proposed to Princess Hopskipschoff in Paris. These were all different persons of different ages, the newspapers admitted, but they might have a connection with the vanished rascal of the Talbot Priory business near Salisbury. There was a mystery of some kind, and the police naturally had a clue.

Grandpapa gloated over this confusion. He had changed his name now to Abraham Whiting--"another prophet and another fish," as he put it--but he longed to go back to his true cognomen and "keep the pot boiling." This, with difficulty, I prevented him doing for a short time. His monetary affairs were much simplified now: he had about three thousand pounds in hand in notes and gold. All the furniture, and horses, and effects at Salisbury were sold, and what moneys were not claimed, under legal and other expenses, went, I believe, into Chancery. But grandpapa had about three thousand pounds left, which, as he said, would last his time with care.

His moustache did not grow again to any extent. He took to wearing a straw hat with a bright ribbon, a blue and red "blazer," white flannel trousers, and tan boots. Thus attired he spent much of his time in the Crystal Palace, choosing undesirable friends at the different stalls and "growing blue devils under glass," as he tersely put it.

CHAPTER XV.

SUSAN MARKS.

I may say at once that the police never found grandpapa. Neither Le Coq nor Edgar Allen Poe's amateur would have done so, for the simple reason that my grandparent was growing younger at the rate of one year every five weeks or so; and though there is not much difference between one year and the next in adult life, yet when we deal with the period of adolescence, great changes become visible in brief periods. He was about five-and-twenty when we went to Upper Norwood, and two-and-twenty when we left that desirable neighbourhood, after a residence of about three months.

"You look your age; there's no doubt about that, Martha," he said to me once, in a very uncalled-for way.

"So do most respectable people," I answered sharply. "We can't all go backwards. The terms wouldn't suit everybody."

"You needn't be personal," he answered; "and you needn't lose your temper. I say you look your age, and more than your age; and I'll tell you why----"

He broke off and tapped a bottle significantly. "Go your own way, of course, but don't say nobody ever tried to save you. Don't say your grandfather didn't warn you in time. You were as stupid as an owl last night when I came in. Yes, I know what you're going to say: I had better look to myself before I criticise other people. But, remember, I don't matter; my tour's booked through. Things are different with you, and I tell you frankly it's a sorry sight to see an old woman of your age going down the hill so fast. No grandfather could view such a spectacle calmly."

How I wept to be sure. It was the first kind, thoughtful word I had ever heard from him since the commencement of the New Scheme. For several days afterwards his manner quite changed. He devoted himself to me, and, amongst other things, purchased me two dozen bottles of non-alcoholic bitter beer, and a book of intemperate temperance addresses.

All too soon, however, I discovered the reasons for this sudden outburst of affection. Dear grandpapa began to feel that he could not get on without me, and he had another little affair in hand.

I found a morocco case in his room one morning. It contained a very exquisite gold bracelet. He had been late overnight, and I had taken his breakfast up to him. The parcel with the bracelet came on the preceding evening while he was out. He had opened it on returning and left it open. As he was asleep when I took in his morning meal, I had time to examine the trinket. I looked at the costly toy, and then at grandpapa reposing peacefully and sweetly, with a glow of health and youth on his face. He lived out of doors now, and spent most of his time at the Palace. Of course the bracelet spoke louder than words.

He awoke, saw what I had seen, sat up, ate three eggs, much toast, and other things, then made a clean breast of his latest entanglement.

"It's the purest, truest attachment--my first genuine love, so to speak, and my last. And she's a girl to whom I can tell my secret; I feel that. Susan would believe anything. She will see me through the next two years or so, and then she will be left free to marry again. Yes, we are engaged. Socially it is a bit of a come-down from Mabel Talbot, but I don't want to found a family or go in for a swagger connection. The girl loves me, and that's quite good enough for me."

"Who is she, grandpapa?"

"Nobody; at least I don't know anything about her family. She doesn't ever mention them, and I make no enquiries. I don't want to be within the radius of another mother-in-law again at my time of life--I know them. We're going to be married privately, and then run out to America. Susan keeps a stall at the Crystal Palace. She's a model girl, and sells chocolate and sweetstuff generally. You might go and see her without saying anything. Just stop in a casual way and hear her talk. Buy a pennyworth of something and study the girl a little. She's a perfect treasure of a woman in my opinion. I've reached an age now when goodness outweighs beauty and everything. But she is beautiful too. She hangs out under that statue of the lady and the horse--lady and horse both dressed alike. You'll find her there, and you'll recognise her if you go this afternoon by this bracelet, which she'll have on by that time. Draw her out and you'll find I'm right. She would cling to me and comfort my declining years. I shall tell her I'm going away to London for the afternoon; then you will have it all to yourself and see what a girl she is."

I obeyed him, and that afternoon visited the Palace, found Lady Godiva without difficulty, and Susan Marks selling chocolate below. I saw the bracelet immediately. It was on the wrist of a big, dark girl, very showily dressed. She had bold, black eyes, that twinkled at the men as they passed, and a hard voice, which she endeavoured to make seductive as she lured visitors to the chocolate. She was talking to a young man when I arrived, and kept me waiting

a considerable time. But I did not mind that; I was listening to some interesting conversation.

"Yes, it ain't a bad bangle; my little mash, Dan Dolphin, gave it to me. He's fairly gone on me--that's straight. I've got fal-lals to the tune of three or four hundred quid out of him, and a promise of marriage."

"Promise what you like, Sue, but no kid. Mind what you said. I ain't jealous, but I'm No. 1, mind. He's only No. 2."

"No. 2! He's No. 20 more like. You're a fool, Tom, and you *are* jealous. And I like to see you angry. You know well enough, Tommy, that I never loved none but you. The fools come and the fools go, but Tom goes on for ever. This little chappie ought to be good for a hundred or two more--then we'll be married, you and me, and I'll cut the chocolate and the butterflies."

Had they arranged their conversation expressly for my benefit, neither could have made a more conclusive, satisfactory, and at the same time disgraceful statement.

My blood boiled when I thought of my grandfather's boyish passion being wasted on this minx.

"What are you starin' at?" asked the girl rudely, suddenly realising that I was standing by the stall.

"I'm waiting to be served," I answered. "I want one of those penny sticks of Cadbury's chocolate, when you can make it convenient to attend to me."

She gave me the refreshment, and I heard her utter a vulgar jest at my expense as I turned away. But, for all that, I hastened home with a light heart. Once more was I in a position to save grandpapa.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE RIVER.

It is not easy to describe grandpapa's indignation when I detailed the result of my interview with Susan Marks. I told him all about the young man to whom she had been talking, and he recognised the youth as one Tomkins. He had already quarrelled with Susan about him.

"But why, dear grandfather," I asked, "did you give this wretched woman your real name?"

"It was a safe thing to do," he answered. "All the old fusses have blown over. Besides, I should have had to give it when I married her. I meant most honourably by the jade, and this is the result. They're all alike, confusion take 'em. That's the last. I've done with women now. They don't interest me as they used to do. I shall go on amusing myself with the cats for another six months or so, till I'm a few years younger, but I'm blest if I ever take 'em seriously again. They're not worth it--excepting you. You're a good old daisy, Martha, and I'm much obliged to you."

Two days afterwards he gave Miss Marks a bit of his mind, and had it out with Tomkins, down among the firework apparatus. It appears that he punched Tomkins on the head, and then kicked him when he was down, and finally dropped him into one of the fountains.

"After that," said grandfather, as he gleefully narrated the circumstances to me, "I made tracks and hid among those great stone pre-adamite beasts at the bottom of the grounds. I squirmed down alongside of an ichthyosaurus or some such brute, and sat tight there until dark. Then I dodged out with the crowd. But they'll want me to-day, so I guess we must be toddling."

We talked the matter out, and he decided to go and rent lodgings somewhere near the river. He was now twenty-two, by the New Scheme, and his old love for athletics had returned.

"No more tomfoolery for me," said grandfather. "I've passed the silly stage now. I shall take up rowing again and join a cricket club, and lead a quiet, wholesome life. As the end approaches so rapidly, I begin to lose interest in

worldly affairs. Let us go to the river, and I will row you about, over the peaceful waters, under the trees, among the swans. If I find I have kept any of my old form with the sculls, I shall very likely enter for the 'Diamonds' at Henley. It would be a record for a man of nearly one hundred and eight to win 'em. But I doubt how I should shape in these gimcrack, new-fangled wager-boats."

I encouraged his simple, boyish ambition, and we took our way to Twickenham. Grandpapa, finding himself better and happier for the peaceful life, actually thought once more of reformation. It was summer time, and a sort of holy calm would settle on my beloved grandfather, as he paddled me about the river and drew up sometimes in the cool shadows of overhanging trees.

He was a handsome boy of one-and-twenty now. His face grew tanned by the sun. He wore a picturesque green and yellow "blazer," with a blue handkerchief round his waist and a big sunflower embroidered on his grey felt hat. He began to get quite simple in speech, and his interest revolved about the river races and the cricket field. He seemed to forget the past, and I often prayed that the past would forget him. But grandpapa had sown the wind and the whirlwind was beginning to spring up. Time did not fly as quickly with the world as it seemed to do with us. The young fellow with his simple athletic interests and ambitions, training quietly for the Diamond Sculls, was not destined to escape the fruits of those many indiscretions committed in his maturer years; and it is hardly the least of my griefs and regrets that, in a measure, I was the cause of keeping grandpapa's name before the world, and before divers more or less malicious women, who refused to forget his past relationships with them. I thought that by the quiet waters of the Thames, hidden in snug but comfortable lodgings at Twickenham, we should have escaped notice; but I soon found my mistake, for the river is a highway, a pleasure ground (so to speak) whereon all meet. Representatives of every London suburb pass and repass; respectable and questionable rub shoulders in every lock, exchange repartees at every bend, drift side by side in every backwater.

We were out one day after lunch, and I, steering carelessly, nearly ran into a boatload of ladies and gentlemen. Grandpapa reprimanded me, and apologised to the other party. Then somebody said:

"Positively it is--it is Miss Dolphin."

The speaker was Mrs. Bangley-Brown. She insisted on stopping and asking after grandpapa; and the old man, like a fool, forgetting the altered conditions, answered:

"I'm all right. Glad to see you again. Jove! how well the gals look. And you as blooming as a four-year-old. D--d if I don't think you're going backwards too!"

Mrs. Bangley-Brown glared at the youth, and grandpapa, with wonderful readiness, explained himself.

"Awfully sorry. Thought you must know me. My pals call me 'grandfather,' 'cause I'm a bit old-fashioned. No offence meant, none taken I hope."

She turned from him with disgust, and the two girls in the boat and some young men looked at my escort and tittered.

"Where is your grandfather?" said Mrs. Bangley-Brown to me, leaning over the edge of the boat and whispering. "I have been wanting his address for five years. Perhaps you can favour me with it. There is something fatal about the name, I think. I have heard it often of late, associated in every case with some broken-hearted woman."

"He treated you badly, I know," I answered, also under my breath. "It was a bitter grief to me at the time. But things are better as they are. He would not have made you happy."

"Probably not," she answered bitterly, "but he might have made me comfortable. And it is not too late. We need not discuss his conduct. I know what an English jury would think of it. Give me his address, if you please."

"Don't do anything of the sort, Martha," said grandpapa, in a great state of excitement. He had overheard Mrs. Bangley-Brown's last remark, and now turned to her.

"I'm only a youngster," he began craftily, "but I know the rights of that story. I heard it from the old man, and it don't do you any credit. You're an awful designing woman, and ought to know better. I daresay you've been after a dozen old fogeys since that."

"You little horror!" screamed Mrs. Bangley-Brown, "if I could get to you I'd box your ears."

She rose and made the boat shake, and her daughters implored her to sit down, or they would all be in the river.

"Yes, you're a bad old lady--a regular old fossil-hunter, and no mistake," said grandpapa, shaking his head at her. "Shocking example for the gals!" Then he began to row away.

"Follow them! Don't lose sight of them!" cried the angry woman; but grandpapa was a fine oar and had a light load. He simply laughed at their efforts to keep pace with him, and fired off all sorts of jokes at the pursuers. Finally he spurred when near the "rollers," had our boat over them in a twinkling, and setting to work, bustled me up to Kingston with extraordinary celerity. After dark we paddled quietly home again.

"It is a warning to me," said grandpapa. "In future if we meet old friends, I am your young nephew from Oxford; and your grandfather, should they ask after him, has been dead for some years. I wish that was true."

CHAPTER XVII.

PHYLLIS.

Misfortunes never come singly. After the meeting with Mrs. Bangley-Brown I was nervous of going on the river at all, but upon the following Sunday grandpapa persuaded me to accompany him. Most young men would have chosen the society of their own sex, but grandfather was loyal to his old granddaughter; and I will say that with regard to my growing weakness for stimulant, he did everything in his power to shame me out of it. I tried my best, but alcohol had become a necessity, and, as I have said elsewhere, was the only thing I could rely upon to keep my nerves steady at a crisis.

To return, we proceeded that Sunday to Teddington Lock, when suddenly, alongside of us, waiting for the lock to open, appeared Susan Marks and the young man Tomkins. The woman recognised us both instantly, and proclaimed the fact.

"Lor! if that ain't that little beast Dolphin! Look, Tommy; and it was that old Guy Fawkes as 'eard me 'n you talking. She split an' told him. But it shan't wash; I swear it shan't. He's promised marriage, you know that; and all the old grandmothers in the world shan't save him!"

"Who are you, you brazen creature? I don't know you--never saw you before in my life," said grandfather, calmly.

"Don't you talk to me like that, you wretch," bawled the virago, "or I'll come over and wring your neck."

"Poor soul! Take her out of the sun and send for a medical man," said my grandfather.

Then Tomkins spoke. He was a small, weak person.

"You can't bounce it like that, you know," he said. "You're Dan Dolphin, engaged to Miss Marks; I ought to know you well enough; I've had a summons out against you for three months. You'd better give me your address, and not make a scene here."

"You're labouring under a case of mistaken identity," said grandfather, not taking any notice of the intimation to give his address. "And as for that beauty there, if she's engaged to me or some other fellow, what are you doing with her here on the river? Now row away, and try and behave yourselves. I'm afraid you're no better than you ought to be, either of you."

In this cool manner, with a quiet air of experience and superiority, did grandfather cow the man Tomkins. The woman Marks, however, was not cowed. She shook her fist and raved and disgraced her sex and made a scene; but grandfather only laughed and proceeded. As he truly remarked, they had got "precious little change" out of him.

Not less than an hour later, I saw another of grandpapa's old flames; one whom I had never met before. The Princess Hopskipschoff, with a party of younger sons and music-hall artistes, passed us in a steam-launch. Grandpapa was very excited, and his admiration for her, which waxed at forty-five and dwindled to nothing at thirty, now at twenty-one, burst out anew.

"A glorious woman--a goddess, by Jove! How sickening she must find the twaddle of those boys!" said grandpapa. "Ah, she doesn't know, as she glances at me from under her dark lids, that the young fellow in the yellow and green 'blazer' was once engaged to marry her. How sweet and fresh she is still! I wonder if she'll be at Henley?"

Then he sighed and caught a "crab" in the wash of the steamer. I was amazed to hear him talk thus, and ventured to expostulate.

"The big woman under the red-and-white parasol? Why, grandpapa, she's forty, and painted up to the eyes!"

"Don't blaspheme," he said. "Don't discuss her. You needn't be jealous of the princess. To think that she has never forgotten me, that she seeks me yet! But her dream would be rather rudely shattered if she knew. Well, well, let us talk of something else. What fiend made me leave her? To think of all I lost!"

From which I have since drawn the curious conclusion that very young men and quite middle-aged ones are often attracted by the same sort of women.

"A fellow cannot get on without woman's love," said grandpapa, suddenly, after a long silence. "At least, some fellows can't--I can't for one."

"A mother's love is what you will soon be needing, dear one. I shall do the best I can."

"Bosh!" he said angrily. "That's not love at all; it's instinct. And I don't want you to fuss over me when I become a child, mind that. Just keep me clean and tidy, and give me toys and tell me Bible stories. But don't pretend you're my mother then, because that's outraging the laws of Nature, and people will laugh at you. I'm not talking of those matters now; I'm alluding to love."

"You said, when you left Upper Norwood, that you had done with that for ever."

"Yes, very likely; young men say foolish things. You can't help fate. Marriages are made in heaven wholesale, though I admit they never guarantee the quality, and turn out a lot of goods that don't wear. You observe that lock ahead? We're going to lunch there. The lock-keeper is called Rose, and he has a daughter named Phyllis. She's the daintiest, most exquisite, human thing I ever saw. No brains, thank God--I've had enough of clever women--but the disposition of an angel, eyes like grey rainclouds with sunshine in 'em, hair brown, lily-white hands, tiny feet, and everything complete. What's more, the girl understands me."

"I may assume, then, grandfather, that you are engaged?"

"I will not deceive you, Martha; we are."

"How far has it gone?"

"To the 'second time of asking.' I mean business this journey. We're to be married after Henley. I didn't tell you, because it would only have worried you, and, I fear, make you take kinder than ever to stimulant. I've arranged it all. We're going to Scotland. Then, when I get a bit younger, I shall leave her a letter with all my money in it, and clear out and make away with myself. I was only pretending just now. I couldn't stand childhood again, not even with you, let alone as a married man. I want you to be friends with her, and live with her after I am gone."

His voice broke, and, at the same moment we reached the lock.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I FORBID THE BANNS.

"There you are!" said a soft, musical voice above us, and glancing up I saw Phyllis Rose. She was in truth a beautiful girl, dressed in her Sunday clothes, looking the pink of health and happiness.

"I've watched you ever so long, dear Dan; and this is your dear, dear grandmother? Oh, I hope she will let me love her for your sake."

She kissed me, and, I confess, my heart warmed to her. She was as pretty and tender a little soul as ever lived to make sunshine for other people. I soon found that she worshipped the ground my grandfather trod upon. She slipped her little hand into his as she walked up to her father's cottage, and talked pleasantly and happily with a London accent.

At her modest habitation an excellent meal and a bottle of very passable red wine were prepared. The girl's parents seemed delighted to see us, and welcomed me in a most hearty, but at the same time respectful manner. I tried to banish the real, fatal aspect of the position and live in the passing hour. Grandpapa seemed very cheerful.

"Were the banns called again to-day?" he asked.

"That they was," said Mr. Rose; "and Phyllis, the little silly, got as red as a peony, and her mother, no better, blushed like a school-girl, too. That's the second time of asking. Don't you have no more fruit pie, Dan. Remember Henley."

But my grandfather explained he had not gone into regular training yet. "Sam Sturgess and I begin hard work together on Monday week," he said. "We're both very fit, and if I don't pull off the 'Diamonds,' I ought to go near winning the 'double sculls' with Sam. It's a month next Monday."

The young things went off together presently, and I had a thimbleful of cold punch with Mr. and Mrs. Rose, and chatted to them. It was seldom I got an opportunity to talk to my fellow-creatures now, and I must admit that I enjoyed doing so. They were quite willing to listen, and tried to turn our talk to grandfather; but I said as little on that head as possible.

"What d' you think of her?" my grandfather asked, as he rowed me home in the evening.

"She is a pearl of a girl. But it must not be, grandfather. You contemplate a most wicked action. I pray you abandon the idea. Stop till Henley, if you must; then let us hurry away. We can write and break it off, and send her a present in money. They are poor, and it would be very welcome."

"You may talk yourself inside out, Martha, but it won't alter me," he said, with quiet determination. "This is the only girl I've ever really loved, and the Devil himself won't stop me. For that matter, he's the last who 'd try to, no doubt."

"It is necessary to have your banns called in your own parish as well, grandpapa."

"I know, I know. I wasn't married three times without getting a pretty good knowledge of the ropes. My banns have been called twice at St. Jude's. You never go to church now, or you'd have heard 'em."

"St. Jude's is not much patronised. The service is long and low, and the church half empty."

"So much the better."

Then he changed the subject, and as the moon rose and made the river look romantic, grandpapa tried to invent a bit of poetry about Phyllis, and failed.

"Oh, Phyllis mine, come let us twine our arms about each other's necks," he began. Then he turned to me and said--

"Put that flask away, Martha; you think I can't see you, but I can. 'Our arms about each other's necks.' Then, let

me see, what rhymes with 'necks'?"

"Cheques," I answered, humouring him.

"Ah, that would come in if this was an ordinary, modern sort of love match, but it isn't. I want something pastoral or idyllic. Let me see, where 'd I got to? 'Come, Phyllis mine, and let us twine our arms about each other's necks.' Wrecks, decks, specks, flecks, pecks. Necks is 'off.' Let's try 'each other's waists.' Waste, raced, paste, taste, graced, laced, haste----"

Then he ran into the bank and abandoned verse, and fell back upon lurid prose, which he applied to me and my management of the rudder lines.

"What d' you think you're doing, you muddle-headed old mummy? Sit straight and look at the river, not at the moon. I'll make you sign the pledge to-morrow, blessed if I don't! You'll have more water with your whisky than you want in a moment. Oh, Lord! never again--never. Pull the right string--the right. Holy mouse! On Sunday evening too!"

Finally I gave up the lines, being really far from well, and he unshipped the rudder and made me sit in the bottom of the boat. I don't know what possessed me, but I felt quite happy in spite of my passing dizziness, and when a boat went by us, with a young man in it playing on a banjo and singing, I sang too. It was the first time I had done so for forty years.

"Shut up, you ruin!" gasped grandfather. "Stop it, for the love of the Lord. D' you think I want the whole river to know? It's like a cargo of corncrakes. You're enough to frighten a steam launch!"

I stopped then and cried at his cruelty.

"Don't be harsh, grandfather--don't be brutal to your only grandchild," I sobbed.

"Behave yourself, then. When you take to singing in public it's about time I spoke out."

We got home somehow, and never returned to the subject. He did not desire to be reminded of his poetry, and therefore was careful not to allude to my passing indisposition.

But I never hesitated to speak on the subject of poor Phyllis. I implored him, by everything that was sacred, to abandon this undertaking. Each day throughout that week I attacked him, until in sheer despair and rage he would take his hat and fly from the house. But nothing availed--grandfather would not alter his intention; and I therefore determined to forbid the banns. The thought was naturally very distasteful to me, but I could see no alternative. Grandpapa, never dreaming of such a thing, rowed up the river as usual on the following Sunday, and I went to St. Jude's.

In due course the minister published the banns of marriage "between Daniel Dolphin, of this parish, bachelor, and Phyllis Rose, of"--somewhere else, I forget the name of the place--"spinster." It was for the third and last time of asking.

I got up, grasped the pew in front of me, and exclaimed:

"This--this mustn't go on. I forbid the banns!"

"Which?" asked the minister. He had read out a string of names.

"Those between my grand--between Daniel Dolphin and Phyllis Rose."

"Will the individual who has forbidden these banns of marriage meet me in the vestry at the end of the service?" said the clergyman. Then he proceeded.

In the vestry he asked me for particulars.

"In the first place," I answered, "Mr. Dolphin is not a bachelor at all. He is married. He has been married three times."

"D' you mean to say that mere boy's been married three times?"

"It's the solemn truth."

"No wife alive, I trust?"

"Oh, no--the last died sixty years ago--at least--that is----"

"Woman," said the pastor sternly, "what do you mean? Mr. Dolphin came to see me himself. He is twenty, so he says, but does not look that. You have told me a transparent lie. Do you know Mr. Dolphin?"

"Know him! He's my grandfather."

The Vicar looked round to see if the coast was clear. He prepared to escape if I should grow violent. His manner instantly changed.

"Keep cool, dear madam. I quite understand. Let me get you a glass of water to drink."

Then he withdrew, and I heard him whispering to an old woman who opened the pews. He bid her run for a doctor and a policeman. Upon this I rose and came home.

To my surprise, grandpapa rowed back pretty early in the afternoon. He was in a terribly depressed and agitated condition, so I did not tell him just then what I had done.

"What's the matter, grandfather? Phyllis is well?"

"No, she's not well. A brute got up at her wretched church and forbid the banns. She fainted, and her father met the person and somebody else afterwards. Whether it was Tomkins, or Talbot, or Rogers, or the Princess, I don't know. But it's all up. Old Rose is going to arrange an action for breach of promise. His wife came home from church and gave me the particulars, and some pretty peppery criticism at the same time. We must clear out of this, but I'll row for the 'Diamonds' if the heavens fall. Get your traps. We'll go up the river by easy stages, and lie low in the day-time. I can enter for the regatta under a feigned name."

Thus had my poor grandparent's banns been forbidden at both places of worship simultaneously.

CHAPTER XIX. ***COUNSEL'S OPINION.***

Grandpapa decided that Sunbury would be a likely sort of place to "lie low" in, so we went up after dark that same Sunday evening, reached our new halting-place soon after midnight, and took some lodgings by the water-side. The affair was in the papers next day, and the name of Daniel Dolphin echoed in people's mouths once more.

Grandfather now called himself Elisha Spratt, and he entered under that name at Henley. By a curious coincidence, the first heat for the Diamond Sculls fell on grandpapa's birthday. Nearly a month, however, had yet to pass by before that elate. Mr. Rose's added another to the long list of indictments against grandfather, but the old man cared nothing. He went on steadily and quietly with his practice and training, and the harder he trained, the younger he began to look.

A painful incident, out of which arose another still more trying, has here to be recorded. Grandpapa, while discussing the different processes at law which he had incurred, told me, in some glee, of matters I did not know.

"I did a smart thing recently," he began. "Of course, a man must help his chums where he can, and I've been able to do so without any hurt to myself. People on the river think I've got pots of money, because I spend very freely. On the strength of this I've been asked to lend my security on about twenty different occasions. I never refused. Men thought I was a fool, but I knew what I was about very well."

The old, cunning look came back into his eyes once more. It had a very painful appearance on the face of so young a man.

"What have you done now, dear grandfather? Hide nothing from me," I said.

"I've backed a lot of bills, and gone security for thousands and thousands. A good few of the Johnnies can't pay, and they'll come down on me like a ton of bricks. Ha, ha!"

"I don't see what there is to laugh at, grandpapa. So little amuses you now."

"Why, *I'm under age*. That's where the laugh comes in. I'm a legal infant, or something of that sort. They can't touch me."

"A legal infant! Why, grandfather, you're a hundred and eight years old in a few weeks' time."

"Not by the New Scheme."

"What's the New Scheme got to do with the money-lenders? They'll fight it out on the Old Scheme, and trace you back and back, and confront you with your past career. It was madness to do such a thing."

The old man grew rather wretched and uneasy, but he soon cheered up again.

"I thought it was such a smart move; and, after all, no harm's done, for I haven't got the money. In fact, fifteen hundred or less is about my limit now. I'm safe enough if you don't go and give me away. People recognise you, but, of course, I shall begin changing and dwindling at a deuce of a rate, after Henley. To think that my mental powers will begin to fade, too--that's what cuts me up."

What he called his mental powers had already begun to fade. He was stupid for his age now, and would be a mere clown of a boy in six months' time. But I did not tell him so. I said nothing; and soon afterwards he went to bed.

In the morning he came down to breakfast, fired with an extraordinary new project. And yet, in justice to myself, I cannot say strictly that it was a fresh idea. I had advised him to take the step he now contemplated any time this five years.

"I have been reading the agreement," said grandpapa, "and, upon my soul, it looks to me, duffer though I am, as if the thing didn't hold water. I don't know anything about law, but the question is simply a legal one, after all; and if there's a flaw anywhere, I don't see why I shouldn't benefit by it. Any way, it's good enough to get an opinion on. I shall go up to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and see Messrs. Tarrant and Hawker. They helped me in the matter of the Automatic Postcard swindle, if you remember. I shall pretend the agreement is a joke, and, of course, they won't know me from Adam. Just think if they discovered a flaw, now, at the eleventh hour, so to speak!"

"Go, by all means, grandpapa, but don't buoy yourself, my dearest. Recollect Who wrote that agreement. He may not be skilled in legal matters himself, but he must have had ample opportunities for submitting the draft to experts."

"That's the point," answered grandpapa. "He expressly said he'd drawn it up himself. It was a new thing in agreements, even for him. He fancied it too. But there may be a slip somewhere. I want a day off the river, and I'll go up with this document after lunch. You sit tight at home and don't show yourself. If people see you--Rose or any of the rest--they'll know I'm not far off."

"And take care yourself, grandpapa. They are on the look out, no doubt. If you are arrested, I shall go mad."

He started, and I spent the afternoon reading disquieting paragraphs about Daniel Dolphin. Many papers made mention of him, and certain of the comic organs printed what they doubtless regarded as jokes. My name appeared. There was much diversity of opinion about me. Some said that I was his daughter; others that we were brother and sister; others, again, that Daniel Dolphin's mother or grandmother or great-aunt assisted him in his pernicious career. The *Star* fancied that Daniel Dolphin often masqueraded as an old woman. Everybody agreed that the truth would soon be known, because the police had an undoubted clue, and the matter was in most experienced hands.

My grandpapa returned to dinner. He wept into his plate all through that meal, and showed me in a thousand ways that his enterprise had produced no good results.

"Speak, my treasure!" I cried at length, unable to bear the suspense; "is it as bad as you thought?"

"A million times worse!"

"Worse! What could be worse, grandpapa?"

"I'll explain. This fool--Nick, I mean--has drawn out the thing single-handed, and defeated his own object, and wrecked me utterly. I saw Mr. Hawker himself. He studied the agreement for an hour, then gave judgment on it. He said, tapping it with his eyeglass, 'Now this document is curious--very much so. The--the person who wrote it appears to have had a certain smattering of law terms, which he sprinkles over his remarks without any legal knowledge, without any familiarity with their forensic significance. The most remarkable thing about this agreement, however, is that by the processes to be applied to Daniel Dolphin, the said gentleman will absolutely cease to exist at the end of the specified time. The deed is amateurish in many respects, but in none more than this. It defeats its own object, for on the completion of the period herein set out, *there will be nothing of Mr. Daniel Dolphin left to go anywhere!* He said that, and I thanked him and paid six-and-eightpence, and came away, feeling about as cheap as a bad egg."

My grandfather flung himself on a sofa, and cried again.

"Then you can't go to--to--!" I said, with a thrill of exultation.

"I can't go anywhere at all," he moaned; "I go out like gas when it's turned off at the tap. You don't understand--it's terrible, it's unheard of. I'd rather have gone down below than nowhere at all--anybody would. But now--now I shall become as extinct as the dodo. He's spoofed himself, and squelched me. Talk about justice!"

I cannot dwell upon his sufferings. He had always believed firmly in a life beyond the grave. Now it was snatched from him by a juggling, muddle-headed, self-sufficient fiend, who ought never to have been allowed the use of writing materials. The matter was a logical one; the end of the New Scheme simply meant eternal annihilation for my unhappy old grandfather.

CHAPTER XX.

A CLIMAX.

Grandfather had little time to concern himself with his new and terrible sorrows. All his hopes and ambitions now centred in the race at Henley; but adequate training became very difficult, because we were marked people now, despite the fact that we had changed our names. Detectives were constantly watching us and taking photographs of us in a hand-camera, and doing all they could to identify grandpapa with Daniel Dolphin. We moved higher up the river, then proceeded above Henley, then retreated back again to Kew. This threw the police out for awhile, but as time went on they found us again, and finally the first writ arrived. But this and others concerned money affairs, and grandpapa brushed them away with contempt. Anon, however, a more serious injunction fell upon us. Mr. Rose, satisfied that grandfather was no other than Daniel Dolphin, and doubtless advised by those familiar with the law, brought an action in the name of his daughter for breach of promise of marriage.

"It's pretty rough on me," said grandpapa, "that the one girl of the lot that I really was faithful to, and wanted to marry, and meant to marry, should jump on me like this. I couldn't help the banns being forbidden. And now I have got to appear in the Queen's Bench Division, and very likely get run in for all I'm worth, and a bit over."

"D'you observe the date?" I asked, after looking at the document.

"By Jove! my twentieth birthday by the New Scheme--same date as first heat of the 'Diamonds.' Well, I can't attend, that's all. They'll have to put it off."

A sort of fatality attached to subsequent summonses for grandpapa. The Salisbury people got wind of his

address too, and he was ordered to repair to that city on divers charges. I think about six detectives, all working in different interests, were now employed upon grandfather. He was commanded to appear in the Queen's Bench Division on no less than three different counts, for Marie Rogers brought a case against Daniel Dolphin, and Mrs. Bangley-Brown did the same.

"They'll look pretty complete fools, those women," said grandpapa grimly, "when I do turn up in the box--a callow, lanky lout of twenty. The detectives have marked you down, Martha, and associate you with the missing Daniel Dolphin. So they think they are on the right track. You'll have to come and swear anything I tell you to."

But I had my own troubles. There were several summonses out against me for "aiding and abetting" grandpapa in his different enterprises.

"Shall you employ a solicitor?" I asked.

"Not I," he answered. "No good chucking money away. I shall plead infancy, and if that won't wash, I shall throw myself on the mercy of the Court. I shall get up some legal expressions, like *ultra vires*, and *sub judice*, and *suggestio falsi*, and *prima facie*, and so on. With these I shall endeavour to conduct my own case. As a last resort I shall try an alibi. But my own impression is that these fools of women will cry off the moment they see me. I don't want to drag in the New Scheme if I can possibly help it. What a cur Nick is not to lend a hand at a time like this!"

"And what am I to do, grandfather?"

"Well, you'll have to stand your trial. As far as I can see, you'll get about five years if they're lenient. You might bounce it with an alibi. After all, what does it matter? Quiet rest in a prison cell would be luxury after this life. I've foreseen it for some time. In your case it might be the best thing that could happen. You'll have to be steady there. It's about the only thought that really worries me, to remember that when I'm a defenceless babe I shall be in the hands of a woman who drinks."

"Grandpapa! you know how I try."

"I know how you succeed. Any excuse is good enough for a whack with you now. Every time a new injunction or process or writ drops in, off you go to the brandy bottle and carouse, as though they were matters to rejoice about. What was the good of signing the pledge if you never meant to keep it?"

"I find my system must have stimulant now, and I take it medicinally."

"Oh, of course--the same old lie that's been on people's tongues ever since Noah invented it. It's your business after all, only you might look on ahead a little. Not long ago you were always telling me to do so. One of these days, after I'm a poor bawling infant in arms, you'll see purple centipedes or something just when I want your attention, and I shall get left."

The subject dropped, and I turned the conversation to a pleasanter theme. We were within a week of the race, and grandpapa, in the pink of condition, only hoped and prayed that the law would not put violent hands upon him before Henley Regatta. The complications of the position had now become impossible to describe in words. We were lodging at Henley, and already letters, signed "Verax" and "Scrutator," were appearing in the sporting papers hinting at matters mysteriously connecting the young sculler, Elisha Spratt, with the scoundrel, Daniel Dolphin. Mr. Rose was responsible for these; at least, grandpapa thought so.

But nobody interfered with him. He wound up his training, and backed himself with a thousand pounds, which was all we had left in the world. On the night before the race some policemen made an endeavour to arrest grandpapa, but he escaped, and joined me at a mean hotel near the river, where with great difficulty we succeeded in getting two adjoining bedrooms. A good night's rest was absolutely necessary for him.

"You see, I've got to win the Sculls at Henley, and answer for myself at Salisbury and in the Queen's Bench Division, and before a magistrate at Twickenham, and in three police-courts elsewhere, so I shall be fairly busy tomorrow," he said, with a rather pathetic smile. Then he kissed me, and went to bed in perfect good-temper. He was

happily too young now to thoroughly realise his awful position.

CHAPTER XXI.

MY NIGHTMARE.

I did not sleep that night for many hours, and when I finally slumbered there came to me a nightmare, involving grandpapa, which took ten years off my life.

I dreamed that the morning had come, and that I went into grandfather's room to wish him many happy returns of the day--a thing I should certainly not have done in reality. But I was in the spirit, and never shall I forget the spectacle which greeted me as I stood by the old man's pillow. Instead of the ruddy, healthy boy I had left over-night--instead of the muscular, deep-chested, deep-voiced young athlete who was that day to row at Henley, there sat up in the bed an uncanny, wrinkled, decrepit mummy of a creature. It was bald, save for a thin tangle of white eyebrow over each bleared eye. Its mouth was a mere slit, its nose and chin nearly met, its cheeks had fallen in. One thin skeleton of a claw held the bedclothes up to its scraggy neck. Its head shook, its under jaw dropped, its back was round as a wheel; the thing manifested indications of profoundest age.

"What--what is this? Who are you?" I gasped, turning faint and clutching at a chair-back for support.

It laughed a little squeaky, wheezy laugh, and a cunning expression came into its dim eyes.

"Keep your nerve," it said. "The show's bust up; the New Scheme's broken down!"

"Grandpapa!"

"He--he--he! Yes. A hundred and eight, not twenty. I've downed him."

"Downed him, grandpapa?"

"That means bested him, beaten him, scored off him. Lord! Lord! You'd have laughed to see what went on here last night. Nick swore and cussed and stormed and stamped round and perspired brimstone; but it wasn't any manner of use. He'd given himself away by his own foolishness."

"Tell me, grandfather, tell me all about it. This is a happy day indeed!"

In my dream I gave the old hero an egg-and-milk with a little brandy. Then he sat up, and in a weak, trembling voice, broken with fits of senile chuckling, he told me about his interview.

"Nick came in just for a chat. He always goes to Henley. He mentioned the 'Diamonds,' and guaranteed I should win 'em. He was friendly as you please, and hoped I'd had a good time, and didn't regret my bargain.

"Then I told him of my visit to the lawyers, rapped out at him for a blundering, unbusiness-like ass, got the agreement out, went through it with him, and showed him what he'd really done. He was fairly mad, but he couldn't get away from facts. I said:

"'The point lies in a nutshell. There'll be nothing of me left to go anywhere; and even you cannot arrange for the eternity of a non-existent being, can you?'

"He had to admit he couldn't. He was properly cross. He tore the agreement to little pieces, and stamped on it. He argued some time with me, and pointed out a fact that I had fully grasped already. He said:

"'Yes, it's pretty clear I've over-reached myself. My fiendish conceit's always tripping me up. I ought to have got my lawyers to help me; but I thought I could thrash a simple thing like that out alone.'

"He said that much, and then I made some satirical remark which stung him, for he turned on me, about as short and nasty as they make 'em, and said:

"'Blest if I know what *you* want to snigger for! You don't seem to realise what a unique fix you're in. You *won't*

go anywhere now! That's what's the matter with you. Nothing to chortle about, I should think?'

"I'm not chortling at that,' I answered, 'I'm merely smiling a bit to see you getting so warm. You'd better listen to reason and leave the past alone. Is there any way out of this? Of course, I want to go somewhere. I've got a strong objection to becoming extinct. How would you like it? I suppose even you would rather hang on where you are than be blotted out altogether.'

"We can't get away from a signed agreement,' he said sulkily.

"Yes we can, if we draw out another, cancelling the first,' I answered.

"No more writing for me,' he said.

"Well, then, let us have an oral understanding,' I suggested.

"I'll entertain any proposal in reason,' he replied.

"But, of course, I was unprepared with suggestions. The interview had been sprung upon me, and I had not bestowed a moment's thought upon preparations.

"You're in a fix, I know,' he remarked, 'a mere temporal quandary, only involving certain ladies and so forth, but still troublesome so far as it goes. I might do this; I might quash all these earthly suits by the simple expedient of restoring you to your real age. As it is, you will upset a good many of them, because old Bangley-Brown, for instance, is on the look-out for a man of seventy-five; and the publican's daughter, Marie Rogers, expects a man of five-and-forty or fifty. But, by returning to the ripe old age of one hundred-and-eight, you reduce the whole series of proceedings to a farce, and leave the different police courts and places without a stain on your character. In any case, you can only live one year more, but the difference is this: that if you go on as you're going, you go out altogether; whereas, if you consent to my alternative, you'll die in your bed, and have a future.'

"As you may imagine, Martha, I grew very excited.

"A future--where?' I enquired, in my dream.

"Exactly. Where? There's the rub," grandfather answered. "I asked Nick the same question, and he said:

"I wonder you can inquire. If you've got any sense of justice or gratitude, you ought to feel the extent of your debt and not hesitate to pay it. In any case, whatever your private ambitions may be, your past record is such that, if you go anywhere at all, your destination is practically determined.'

"I did not argue upon this point," continued grandfather, "feeling it would be better tact to slur it over, and leave a loop-hole, but he held me to it, and finally got me to promise that I would never attempt to reform or amend my ways during the last year of my life. He insisted all the time that it would not alter the result, but I could see, from his great anxiety upon the point, that he knew there might be plenty of opportunity for me to turn over a new leaf, and make a good end, if I chose to do so. However, I promised him to lead as abandoned and dissolute a life as could be expected from a man of one hundred and eight, so we effected the compromise. He was nervous about it to the last, but felt it to be the only way out of the *cul-de-sac* his own stupidity had placed him in. Then the change was made. I went to sleep a boy and woke as you find me. I'm all here, but stiff about the legs, and deucedly rheumatic. Go out and get me a tall hat and some black, ready-made clothes, and some easy felt boots and a few walking sticks, and the strongest spectacles you can buy. Then I'll get up."

So ended my clear grandpapa's astounding statement, but my dream went on. I made him some bread-and-milk, fed him with it, and then hurried out to purchase necessities.

The world, had turned upside down for me. I expected the newspaper boys to be yelling out "Failure of the New Scheme!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DWINDLING OF GRANDPAPA.

But there was no truth in the vision. I awoke unrested--rose, and, of course, found grandpapa under the New Scheme, as usual. He had arranged to hide somewhere in a backwater, and only paddle out when the race for the Diamond Sculls was beginning. I tried hard to dissuade him from making the attempt. I pointed out that arrest was sure to follow the struggle, and that, once taken, there would be sufficient legal complications all over the country to last him much more than the remainder of his life. I said:

"In a year's time you will be ten; in two years you will be nothing. Let us hide this tragedy if we can. Publicity now means that the concluding catastrophes of your life will be watched by the whole of England--perhaps by the entire civilised world. Surely that would add another sting to extinction? Let me implore of you, dear one, to give up this aquatic enterprise. We will fly together. I have done up the accounts this morning, and find we have exactly nine hundred and ninety-eight pounds left. This is ample provision for your approaching childhood. Come and dwindle by the sea--at Margate or somewhere. Or let us go abroad, if that idea gives you pleasure."

"Not me," he said. "I shall flicker out in the old country. And as to not rowing, that's absurd. This race is my last flutter. In six months I shall be a boy of fifteen. I must make my final adult appearance to-day. It's jolly lucky there's only one other entry besides myself, as I certainly shall have no chance of appearing more than once. However, this morning I mean to row the course, and then keep on the river and pull quietly into the backwater, and lie low till dark. Meantime you can go to Margate if you like and find new diggings, and I'll join you to-morrow."

With this arrangement I had to be content. I took a train to London, and managed to escape comfortably in it with my box. I journeyed to Margate, took three fair rooms overlooking the sea, and waited with deepest anxiety for grandfather's arrival. On the following morning I purchased the *Sportsman*, to find that the dear old man had managed to elude the detectives and win the Diamond Sculls! I felt that this was probably the last piece of real joy he would ever have. But the report in the *Sportsman* quickly quenched my passing happiness. Satisfaction, indeed, was turned into black despair, when I read what my grandfather had done on the completion of the boat-race.

"Elisha Spratt," said the *Sportsman*, "the mysterious young oarsman who has suddenly burst into fame, won the 'Diamonds' with ridiculous ease, and simply played with his better-known opponent. The sensation of the race, however, was reserved for the finish. Hardly had Spratt passed the winning-post when a boat, full of police-constables, pulled quickly out from the crowd of craft that thronged the course and made towards him. Spratt, it seems, has been 'wanted' for some time, being mysteriously connected with what is known as the 'Dolphin Mystery'; and the preservers of law and order believed that by taking him in mid-stream, immediately after the race, they would ensure an easy capture. Their judgment, however, proved faulty. Spratt, who was nearly as fresh as when he began to row, made a vigorous defence, and when he ultimately succeeded in capsizing the boatload of Crown officials and escaping, the enthusiasm of the sightseers knew no bounds. Finally he disappeared up stream, and has not since been heard of. He is certainly a magnificent sculler, but we fear his next appearance in public will not be in a wager boat. The constables were all rescued, though one of them, a well-known detective, is said to lie still insensible, and little hopes are entertained of his recovery."

This was the end of it then--murder! My grandfather had taken a life. Now, if they caught him they would doubtless endeavour to hang him. Even the New Scheme could hardly continue if they succeeded in hanging grandfather. At least, so it struck me. But first they had to catch him. Luckily, he was just at a difficult age to catch. We had arranged I should wait for him at the station, and presently he came down from town, travelling third-class, in the same compartment with part of a Sunday school treat. He had disguised himself, and was wearing a false nose

and little imitation whiskers hooked over his ears. He saw me, and followed at a distance as I walked from the station, but he did not join me until I had reached the doorstep of our lodgings. Then he approached and entered. He was very excited, and full of a new idea. He had already quite forgotten the race on the preceding day, and talked of nothing save the nearly-drowned detective.

"You see, if he pops off, they'd hang me," he explained eagerly.

"Grandfather, I implore you not to talk so," I sobbed, quite giving way.

"But I want 'em to. Nothing better could happen. The next two years won't be much of a catch from my point of view; and if I'm executed, of course, the New Scheme must be upset. I shall have to go somewhere then; I shan't become extinct anyway."

His hopes in this direction were doomed to disappointment, however. The detective recovered, and we were unmolested. We had, in fact, thrown the Scotland Yard people completely off the trail. But grandpapa still longed to be hanged. He even discussed the feasibility of a capital crime at Margate, and, as it was all one to him in the matter of a victim, he generously offered to put anybody I liked out of the way. He even bought a revolver.

"To be executed it is necessary to take a life," he explained. "The question is, whose life? If you've got an enemy, Martha, now's your time to name him or her. If you've no fancy, then I shall pip a prominent member of the Government."

But two months passed by, and my grandfather's horrid ambition gradually faded. When he was eighteen, and after we left Margate for Ramsgate, which step was taken about this period, he acquired a passing passion for sea-fishing, bought a rod and line, and angled uneventfully for days together off the pier-head or out of an open boat. From Ramsgate we proceeded to Deal, then lurked a week or two at Dover, and continued our tour of the south-coast watering-places, secreting our sorrows in turn at Folkestone, Hastings, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, Eastbourne, Brighton, and Bognor. I thought we might winter in the Isle of Wight, but grandfather was for Cornwall and conger-fishing, so we pushed onwards to Fowey, and arrived there shortly after Christmas, when my grandparent was about fifteen.

His wardrobe became a greater difficulty daily. The poor old sufferer shrank in a heartbreaking way. I had always to be taking in and turning up and reducing his different articles of apparel. He was now mercifully allowed to lose intelligence very rapidly. He lived more and more in the passing hour, and began to develop simple boyish ambitions and hopes and complaints. As he gradually fell completely under my control, a certain peace of mind, to which I had long been a stranger, returned. The position was harrowing enough, heaven knows, but whereas throughout grandfather's career under the New Scheme, he had played his own game, so to speak, and never paid much attention to the faithful woman always at his elbow, now the position was rapidly changing. He had to look to me and rely upon me more and more. Indeed, he did so as a matter of course. I held the purse, and took good care to keep it. The dear old man never wanted for anything, but I had to think of my own future. When he was gone, there would only be a few hundred pounds between me and starvation. However, I denied him nothing in reason, allowed him gradually decreasing pocket-money, and, as he grew younger, exercised entire authority. To this he submitted humbly enough now. He was a bad boy, as boys go--a sly, calculating, cruel boy; but a circumstance happened soon after we left Fowey which practically made grandfather helpless, and placed him under my complete control. It was this. With dwindling intellect his memory also waned, and ultimately broke down altogether. He forgot the past, he forgot his own extraordinary situation and destination, he quite forgot our relationship, and soon simply believed that things were as they seemed. One day he electrified me by talking with bright, boyish confidence of "growing up" and marrying a bonny bride, and becoming a smuggler. "Growing up"! Poor little darling, he was growing down at the rate of a year every six weeks. But now the old man's mental troubles were practically at an end, and I thanked heaven for it. Literally he was twice a child. He gave up cigarettes and took to chocolate, and stupid little toys. At

rare intervals, inspired by the friends he picked up in our wanderings, he showed flashes of ambition, and pestered me to know when I was going to send him to school like other boys. He grumbled and said he believed he was backward. I denied it and temporised. I told him he was more than clever. Of course, to send him to school would have been a frank and senseless waste of money. Besides, the New Scheme must have been discovered in a fortnight. He travelled half price now, for he was not more than ten years old when I took him to Dawlish. Before we had been at that small but delightful sea-side resort six weeks, grandfather openly bought a little iron spade and bucket, thereby proving that childhood had set in. I had him well in hand in Devonshire, and I may state that my own peace of mind was comparatively such that I had almost cured myself of a weakness I have not hidden here--a weakness brought on by the terrors of the past. And dear grandfather's own favourite beverage, subject to my sanction, was sherbet now. Indeed, taking one thing with another, that last summer in the West of England with my grandparent, proved the happiest time I spent from the beginning of the New Scheme to its close. He was quite happy too. He made sand castles, and tormented the shrimps which he caught from time to time, and otherwise conducted himself like a simple, healthy little lad of eight years old.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"FINE BY DEGREES, AND BEAUTIFULLY LESS."

I would willingly draw a veil over the last year of my grandfather's life, but I have set my hand to the pen and will not turn back, though nothing but grief and horror and the ghosts of dead miseries haunt me as I write.

When the old man was about eight years old, I put him into a blue sailor suit, bought him a wooden hoop, and took him to a new locality. We left Dawlish and went up to Tavybridge--a pretty spot on Dartmoor. Here I proposed staying for at least a month. It now became necessary to regulate his hours, see that he had fairly wholesome food, and keep him clean. His memory had long grown an absolute blank. He put his little hand in mine, trotted about over the moors and through the country, and clamoured first for a pony, secondly to be allowed to sing in the choir at a quaint old country place of worship. I did not see my way to gratifying either ambition. At Tavybridge grandpapa speedily waned. He called me "Granny" now, and quite believed it was so; I addressed him both in public and private as "Daniel," and let people believe that his parents were in India. Though I lacked the comfort and support of having a man in the house, to whom I could go with all my sorrows and anxieties, yet the loss was more than compensated by the relief of knowing that my ancient grandparent was now powerless to do further ill, either to himself or other people. But, strange to say, though absolute infancy now threatened him, his love for the sex was not even yet wholly dead. I well remember grandfather coming to me, hand in hand with a little village maid of some six summers, and acquainting me with the fact that they were engaged.

"This is Bessie Wiggles, grandma," said the venerable sufferer; "I met her down by the bridge over the river, and I gave her sweeties and a kite, and she gived me a kiss for them, and we's going to be married, Bessie Wiggles and me, when we's grown up."

I promised them they should be. This was an attachment which really mattered nothing. It kept grandfather out of mischief, and made him part with at least a proportion of the deleterious rubbish he bought with his weekly sixpence of pocket-money. I felt that two small stomachs might carry a load of toffee and other horrid stuffs, which must certainly upset one. It was an idyllic engagement. Bessie Wiggles came to tea constantly, and grandpapa would talk with confidence of his future and the great things he should do when he was a man. The children walked about the village hand in hand. The villagers smiled and said it was pretty to see them. Then one day a herd of cows, going

to be milked, knocked grandfather down accidentally and bruised him, and terrified him to such an extent that he prayed I would take him away from Tavybridge instantly, to some remote spot where there were no more cows. He abandoned Bessie Wiggles without a murmur, and I took him away to Exeter. He was rapidly approaching the age of five years or one hundred and nine and a half, according from which Scheme you looked at him.

My stay at the old cathedral city was even shorter than I had intended, for grandfather got damp on a bleak December day, and abstracted some almonds and raisins out of a cupboard when I was not by. This combination of circumstances resulted for him in a bad attack of croup. Very foolishly, and forgetting that in such a case appearances must be much against me, I did not send for a doctor, but contented myself with patting the old man on the back and giving him repeated drinks of Eno's Fruit Salt. This I knew was not the right treatment for croup, but what did it matter? Grandfather would certainly be perfectly well again in the morning. After all his adventures, this paltry childish ailment was not going to destroy him now. I felt very certain of that. But, unfortunately, the landlady heard grandfather making a great deal of noise about two in the morning, and, being a mother, she recognised the sound, and was instantly up in arms to help me. When she found I did not intend sending for a medical man, she became both vulgar and offensive. She accused me of fooling a helpless child's life away. She said:

"I know what it is to be a mother, though you've forgotten, it seems. Eno's salts for croup! Lord! You be daft, I should think. What would that poor lamb's ma say if she knowed?"

I said:

"Its ma's in heaven long ago; probably she does know. I venture to think she would be quite satisfied with my treatment."

"Shame on 'e!" she answered. "A horphan--that makes it wus and wus. I guess you be no better 'n a baby-farmer--now then!"

Thereupon I declined further conversation, and gave her notice that I should leave that day week. She replied that it would be impossible for me to leave too soon for her, though her heart bled for the ill-used child, meaning my grandparent. Stung to anger, I was almost tempted to hint at the New Scheme, but bitter experience and my better judgment told me such an action, taking into consideration the mental calibre of the woman, must be worse than futile. So I bid her go to her room; she departed with the word "murderess" on her lips, and the incident terminated.

Of course, grandfather was pretty right the next day, but disorders now gained upon him rapidly, and I know I was to blame for adding a good deal of unnecessary suffering to those last fleeting years of his life. His stomach-aches, his rashes, his mumps, might all have been avoided had I understood better the care of the extremely youthful. Everywhere I went I heard expressions of open surprise that I, a woman of seventy-five apparently, and a grandmother, should know so precious little about babies. And, of course, the old man was shrivelling with such cruel rapidity now that my knowledge could not keep pace with him. When I understood the nature and requirements of a child of five he was already four; by the time I grasped his needs at this age he had sunk to three.

We were at Bideford when I put him into short frocks and kept flannel next his skin and looked round for a second-hand perambulator. He was always ailing at this stage, and frightfully fretful, owing to a complication of disorders. He had whooping-cough and a slight touch of congestion of the lungs, and measles and a sore throat. His teeth worried him terribly, too. God alone knows what was happening to them. The process put the poor old man to evident torment, and to hear him say again and again: "Oh, ganny, my toofs *is* hurtin' me so," would have made angels weep. For all I know it did. The celestial being who could gaze unmoved at Daniel Dolphin's sufferings during those last, awful, loathsome years of his earthly life would have been hard-hearted indeed. And heaven must have pitied me a trifle too--especially at Bideford, after I had put him into short frocks.

When he was one hundred and nine and three-quarters--when but three months remained before the climax--he lost the art of walking and talking about the same time. He seemed easy to manage without these accomplishments. I

certainly missed his childish prattle as it gradually dwindled and ceased, but when command of locomotion slipped from him my work was much lightened. As a young child he had been very trying; now, on the dawn of babyhood, he enjoyed better health and got prettier to look at, at least, so it struck me. Indeed, he gradually grew to be the dearest, best-tempered little mite any woman ever loved and cuddled. I thought how proud his dear mother must have been of him more than a century ago. I also marvelled that so bonny a babe should have blossomed into such a funny child, and such an unsatisfactory man. Of course, I was led by appearances myself now. I could not revere the aged man I danced on my knee and fondled and hugged. I could not realise that this blue-eyed, thumb-sucking, crowing, kicking atom was my grandfather. My imagination was not equal to the task of grasping these facts. I only know that we lurked at Basingstoke three weeks, and then at Brixton; and that I lived night and day for grandfather, as his sun sank to the setting. I took him for long rides in his perambulator, and looked to his every want and joyed in his innocent, little, waning life. His curls went at Clapham Junction; the short, lanky locks of a year-old infant soon covered his bulbous skull; his proportions were those of tenderest youth. An awful expanse of brow and a triangular mouth had appeared; his nose had dwindled to a mere upturned lump, his eyes assumed the fatuous blear and blink of babyhood; he gasped and he gurgled, and jerked and panted, and stretched out fat fingers to me. He was always good-tempered to the last, though his intervals of weeping grew longer and longer. One thing he never could stand: my singing. When his first teeth were undergoing some unhallowed metamorphosis he had a succession of very bad nights, and at such times, until I realised the facts, I endeavoured to soothe him with musical lullabies. But I soon found my voice exercised a peculiarly irritating effect on grandfather. He had not enjoyed it even in the past, so I ceased from vocal efforts and never sang again.

Anon we went to Kilburn, when grandfather had but one year left to live by the New Scheme and rather more than five weeks by the old. Then he began to play with his toes, and that was the beginning of the end.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PASSING OF GRANDPAPA.

I shall not set down here the hard words hurled at me by different lodging-house keepers, who took it upon themselves to criticise my management of grandfather. Because, for instance, I persisted in feeding him latterly on condensed milk, instead of wasting money upon a wet nurse, I was unmercifully abused. But I went my way, and soon had him in long frocks, and took him from Kilburn to Ravenscourt Park. Here I was accused of being a baby-thief, because I explained as usual that the infant's parents were in India.

"Its ma must be a pretty quick traveller then," said the sceptical landlady. "That hinfant ain't a day more than three weeks old, or I'm no judge."

She was nearly right. It wanted now but one month to make grandfather a hundred and ten or nothing at all. It was, in fact, twenty-nine days before he was born, or after, according as you look at it. I got very muddled over his age about this time myself. I only remembered the date of his birthday, and realised that on the night before that anniversary the New Scheme would come to an end. The old man was now a mere hairless, blotchy, howling fragment, needing ceaseless attention at all hours of night and day. A bitter thought often came to me while I was getting his bottle--that my tiny grandfather should be going to such an unsatisfactory place so soon. For I never could believe, despite what the lawyers said, that his fiendish opponent had made any radical blunder in the agreement.

As the long days followed each other I became overstrung and hysterical, and felt that a very little more of it

would send me mad. I let grandpapa drop out of his perambulator one day in Ravenscourt Park, where I had taken him for an airing. Of course, he screamed as only a frightened baby can, and attracted the attention of a policeman. The constable merely addressed me good-humouredly, but a ribald crowd collected in no time. Boys chaffed, women cried shame on me; an officious old fool, who said he belonged to some institution for the Prevention of Brutality to Infants in Arms, insisted on taking my address. I gave it to him, trundled grandfather home, and moved to Turnham Green the same evening. At our new lodgings I told the truth for once, and said grandfather's poor mother was dead. The landlady here was young, and had a baby of her own, and showed me great kindness and sympathy. She prophesied all manner of hopeful things for grandfather, but feared that I should never live to see him grow up. There were reasonable grounds for such a doubt, for I was now much more than my age, and growing somewhat infirm. The last ten years had added not less than thirty to my own life. I looked pretty nearly eighty now, and felt considerably older.

A feeling of awe and horror daily gained ground upon me at this season. I was haunted by the thought of that awful night so close at hand, and I pictured a thousand terrors. I strung myself up to the task of facing the future alone, but I would have given all I possessed to feel that during those supreme last moments some fellow-creature--a medical man or one of the clergy for choice--would be with me. But I had kept my poor grandfather's secret for ten years, and meant keeping it to the end. The final problem, however, was quite full of horrid possibility. One night I thought of an idea that made me turn goose-flesh all over. What if on the expiring of the New Scheme grandfather should revert to the old? What if on the morning of his hundred and tenth birthday, instead of finding nothing in his cradle, I should rise and be confronted with the withered remains of a centenarian? Of course, it would not matter much to grandfather, but an event of that kind must leave me in a dilemma, beside which the New Scheme itself was a mere child's problem. What would the landlady say? What would anybody say? I determined that no one should have half a chance to say anything. It was merely justice to myself. I arranged a programme for that last night. The time of the year was late June, the weather beautiful, so a week before the end I took train to North London. I made up my mind to spend the last night of grandfather's life quite alone with him on the wilds of Hampstead Heath. Then, if he suffered any further outrageous transformation at the last, I could just leave him there, and he would be found and duly buried after a coroner's inquest, and I could put flowers on the grave anonymously afterwards. If, on the other hand, he simply went out, I should be able to rejoin my boxes, which would be waiting at the nearest railway station, and go upon my way unsuspected. If he suddenly disappeared in a lodging-house, it seemed clear to me that I should probably be arrested on suspicion of murder. I took two rooms not far from the Heath, and watched grandfather's last week pass away in ceaseless wailing. Then came the night before his birthday. That evening I gave up the lodgings, sent my boxes to the station, and after a meat tea and the first dose of stimulant I had taken for a year, went forth to the final scene. Every seat upon Hampstead Heath that night seemed to be engaged by parties of two. The daylight waned slowly. Not until nine o'clock did the moonlight begin to grow strong enough to throw shadows. By ten it flooded the Heath with soft grey light. The scene was extremely peaceful; it even soothed to some slight extent the chaos in my heart. Grandfather slept. He had been unusually silent all day. He had shrunk, of course, to a mere red, new-born atom now. I had him snugly in a bundle all done up with safety pins. I remember wondering, even at that solemn time, how the Devil would be able to get grandfather out of that bundle without undoing the pins.

About eleven o'clock I threw his bottle away, for I knew he would never want it again. It was a beautiful night for the passing of grandpapa. I only hoped and prayed that he *would* pass, and have done with it. I rambled about in the shadows cast by the moon, and peeped from time to time into the blanket I carried to see if anything was happening to grandfather; but he nestled there, silent and wide awake. I shivered as I looked into his round, open eyes, bright with moonlight. There was an unutterably weird expression in them, for they had intelligence once

more; they were the eyes of a thinking being. It would hardly have surprised me at that moment if he had spoken and exchanged ideas with me. But he kept deadly silence, looking out of his blanket with those round moon-lit eyes that haunt me still. And then a strange thing happened. Despite my agitation, and the fact that I was now shaking with excitement, and suffering from palpitation of the heart, a great longing for sleep crept over me. I yearned to close my eyes; an astounding feeling, almost approaching indifference, rose within me. I actually heard myself saying, "I must sleep, I must sleep; it won't make any difference to him." I fought against the overpowering drowsiness, being sure that it was simply sent by some malevolent, supernatural power, in order to prevent me from being in at the finish, so to speak. But my efforts were unavailing. As a distant church clock chimed half-past eleven, I sank down at the top of a bank under some gorse bushes, and the last action of which I am conscious was that I drew grandfather close to me and put my arms tight round him--those poor old arms that had been of some use to him in the past, but were powerless now.

Doubtless I slept for half-an-hour. Then I was awakened suddenly by the wail of a new-born babe. I sat up wildly. The bundle with grandfather in it was not in my arms. It had apparently rolled to the bottom of the bank. But even as I rose to struggle after it, the shrill cry of the infant changed to the mumbling groan of one infinitely old, and across the gorse bushes, in the haze of the moonlight, I saw the passing of grandfather. Whether the vision came out of my own brain, or was actually visible to my eyes, I cannot say. All I remember is that I distinctly heard my name, "Martha, Martha!" called twice in weak but frenzied accents, and saw an old, bent figure, with the moonbeams shining on its bald head, move across the light. It was stretching thin, bony fingers out towards me, and wringing its hands at the same time. I struggled to reach it, but suddenly grew conscious of something that came between--something formless and unutterable. There was a laugh in the air, harsh, unearthly, like a parrot's. It died away, and the echo of a moan seemed to crawl as though alive through the high gorse. Then there was silence, and I, with my hands groping in front of me, fell forward unconscious.

I cannot have been insensible for very long, as facts proved. When I recovered again the moon still shone brightly, but the east already trembled with dawn, and it was cold. I staggered down the bank to where the baby's cry had come from, and there lay the bundle, just as I had clasped it to my heart. I opened it; it was still warm as a nest from which the sitting bird has just flown; but it was empty. At the moment I awoke I must have missed grandfather's birth or death, or departure or arrival, by the fraction of a second. I searched frantically round for him; I tore my face and my gloves in the furze and briars; I raised my voice and shrieked to him, and fell on my knees and prayed for him; but under my mad frenzy there throbbed a thought that spoke to me coldly and told me he was gone--clean gone, and vanished away for ever.

Presently I found a vacant seat, where I sat and collected myself. I dried the blood from a thorn scratch across my face, brushed the mud from my dress, and then, as a golden dawn flashed over the dew and woke the birds, I crawled away towards the railway station. A train for working men went at five, but I had to wait an hour and a half for it, and the time dragged. Every moment I expected to hear grandfather's cry, and once I found my foot mechanically rocking his cradle. Then they opened the station, and I took a ticket to Baker Street, and saw my two boxes labelled, and went back into the world--alone.

* * * * *

I have set this narrative out with my own hand, and left it in safe keeping. When I am gone, and not sooner, I have directed that it shall be given to my fellow creatures. There is nothing more to add. For my own part, I am passing the fag-end of my life in seclusion--unknown, forgotten. So I would have it. I recently put up a cenotaph to grandfather's memory in the little village church which I regularly attend. There can be no harm in that. I still think

the old man was most unfairly treated, and I shall not hesitate to say so hereafter if opportunity ever offers. As for my own dismal part in probably the most awful tragedy earth's annals ever recorded, I need say nothing. Those ten ghastly, sunless years are always with me, and I should have hesitated before adding another sad book to the many in the world, but that I hold it my duty to record these facts. My object is that a materialistic age may be confounded, that those who do not believe in the principalities and powers by which mankind is secretly led and guided, blinded and befooled, may pause and reflect before they find themselves meshed in some muddling devil's web, from which there is no escape.

If an outrage of this sort can happen once, it may again. Who is safe?

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