

confusion; much malice and no little cowardice. He coughed, but, strange enough, no subject seemed to present itself. Luckily, he glanced at the streaming eyes and quivering paw of Kitty. 'So—humph! a dog-fight?' 'It's very odd,' replied Styles, with the learned air of an F. R. S., 'it's very odd—but though Kitty and Madge have been together these five years, they can't agree. It's very odd.'

'When people can't agree,' returned Nokes, and he looked a Columbus as he propounded the moral discovery, 'they had better part. Mr. Styles, for these three months I have been confirmed in this opinion.'

'Longer—Surely, longer. 'Tis two years since Mrs. Nokes had a separate maintenance.'

Nokes, touched by the indelicate allusion to his domestic infelicity, in silence passed his five fingers across his brow, and said, with very cold dignity, 'Mr Styles, fortunately there are partnerships which may be dissolved.'

'Fortunately,' acquiesced Styles, stroking the head of Kitty.

'You wonder, Mr. Styles, why your dogs can't agree. Perhaps I can explain; it may be, that one is sporting out of doors all day, whilst the other is left at home to bark and keep house.'

'What do you mean, Mr. Nokes?' asked Styles; and with forced tranquility, he placed the bitch upon the hearth-rug. Had an oracle put an interrogative, it could not have been more searching—more impressive.

'I mean, sir, that I have a partner in view, whose habits of business, Mr. Styles—'

'Glad to hear it,' interrupted Styles, 'as I have some time contemplated a dissolution, we can the sooner get rid of one another.'

'No house can stand against the chance of such bets,' cried Nokes. 'Hundreds vanishing after hundreds.'

'Bets! hundreds! No, Mr. Nokes, let us keep to the serious truth; guinea points, sir,—guinea points don't become a tradesman.'

'Guinea points! guinea! but, as we are happily of the same mind to separate, we won't talk nonsense.'

'Tisn't necessary,' accorded Styles; 'therefore, as we understand each other, may I not ask the name of your new partner?'

'Oh, certainly; a most industrious, pains-taking young man.'

'Glad to hear it,' said Styles again. 'I think, indeed I am sure, I have for myself just such a partner in my eye.'

'I wish you all success,' cried Nokes; 'may I know who he is?'

'To be sure; a most business-like, prudent person. But, first, the name of your partner?'

'He doesn't yet know his good luck. But,' and Nokes looked with the eye of a fox over a farm-paling, 'Can't you guess?'

'Hav'n't a notion. Yes, I think, I—'

'To be sure,' cried Nokes, 'Barnaby; though I hav'n't told him—Barnaby.'

Styles hardly repressed a smile at the credulity of Nokes; then, with a serious air, observed, 'My good friend, don't count upon him. Allowing that I myself—though he is quite ignorant of the fact—were not determined upon offering him a partner's share, I am sure he would not—and, forgive me, my friend—he could not join with you.'

'Not!' exclaimed Nokes, and his eyes glittered like brass buttons—'And why not?'

'The lad is scrupulous; he can't abide cards,' said Styles.

'You mean bets squandered upon fillies,' replied Nokes, sarcastically.

'Pshaw! between ourselves, the young man has talked to me with tears in his eyes about your nightly whist; guinea points, Nokes, guinea points!'

Nokes leapt to his feet, and extending his arms, projecting his breast, and throwing back his head, cried aloud to the vacant ceiling, 'Twopenny! As I have a soul to be saved—twopenny!'

Styles, subdued by the fervour of his partner, in a modulated tone proceeded, 'I do assure you, Barnaby has always sworn to a guinea.'

'A household crocodile!' cried Nokes. 'Ah, friend Styles, had you lost as little by the last favourite?'

'As little? How much, now—how much?' asked Styles with a bridle air.

'Wasn't it five hundred?'

'A hat, a single hat to Jerry White: he wore it this very day at church—five hundred! Upon my conscience, and may I die a sinner, but 'twas a hat.'

'Barnaby protested 'twas five hundred pounds.'

'The hypocrite, he shall this moment speak to our faces.'

'I wish he could; but though he told me you had asked him here to-day, he avowed he couldn't spend the Sabbath with a blackleg and a horse-racer.'

'A blackleg!' screamed Styles; and the exclamation was answered by a shriek in a yet higher note from the cupboard. Nokes at once recognised the voice of Barney, and ran to open the door, when Styles, preventing him, turned the key, put it in his pocket, and hurried his partner into an adjoining room, Barney still raving, as his masters conceived, to be heard in explanation. After a lapse of some ten minutes, employed by Nokes and Styles, in mutual assurances of renewed faith and friendship, the key of the cupboard, with a check for ten pounds, was placed in the hands of Betty, armed with final orders touching the prisoner. The door was speedi-

ly unlocked; and Barney, his hands crimsoned as the Thane of Cawdor's—blood on his face, and horror in his voice, rushed out, sank in a chair, and in a tone of mingled fear and veneration, exclaimed, 'The devil!' A common household occurrence will explain away the seeming mystery. The blessing of increase was upon all things owned by Styles; even his cats escaped not the general good. It so happened that seven kittens, scarce one day old, with their satisfied mother, were the unknown tenants of the cupboard previous to the occupancy of Barney, who, agitated by the colloquy of the partners, and having no thought, taking no pity of the blind, had walked upon the embryo hopes of future Whittingtons. Two of the kittens being killed, the maternal instincts of the parent were aroused, and when Nokes and Styles left their assistant, as they believed, yelling with compunction, he was suffering in various parts of his naked body, the teeth and claws of an all but maddened cat. It was with some difficulty that Betty explained to the confused young gentleman, the final decree of his late employers. They had sent him his salary for the current quarter, and Betty would lose no time in opening the door: a hope was expressed, that he would not show himself at the warehouse. Barney took his hat, and crawled from the house. The night was pitch-black, and the rain beginning to fall, he was soaked to the skin, ere he had felt his way to his comfortable bed in London.

CHAPTER III.

'Sir, you talk of coincidences,' thus one day spake to us a valiant captain of the local militia: 'I will tell you, sir, a most remarkable coincidence: it is this, sir, the very day on which Napoleon escaped from Elba, I marched with my regiment to Wormwood Scrubs!' We are about to match the coincidence of the gallant Middlesex warrior. Thus be it known, that the very night in which Barnaby Palms was swept from the firm of Nokes and Styles, the soul of Peter Blond, mercer and hosier, Bishopsgate-Without, was summoned to what is popularly called, a last account. From a subsequent calculation made by the widow, it was evident that Peter had vacated his house of clay the very instant Barnaby left the roof of Styles: yes, as Betty turned the key Peter expired. Who, when they have heard our tale, shall say that Fortune doth not sometimes look above her bandage, to take a peep at vagrant merit? Who shall call her a romping hoyden, playing at blindman's buff, catching the ill-favoured and the worthless, and hugging them in her arms, whilst the fair and virtuous stand untouched in obscure corners? Or, granted, that the goddess doth sometimes approach them, shall it be said, that it is only to show them her beautiful hands, and then to pass on? The truth is, we slander Fortune: because the wise and bountiful creature will not let us at all times and in all places have our wicked will of her, like unprincipled rakes, who take a poor revenge by calling her naughty names. We are rejoiced to say it, Barnaby was not of these evil speakers. However, to proceed with his obligations to what the unthinking vulgar would call good luck.

The second day after his dismissal, Barnaby, his clear spirit obscured by thoughts of future dinners, walked—we should rather say, was led by his good genius—up Bishopsgate-Without. Melancholy grew upon him as he went: balked in his best intentions by the ignorance and hasty prejudice of his employers—disappointed in his hopes of partnership—it might be, misrepresented to his fellow-creatures—the whole earth grew dim and black. At that moment, so great was his disgust of the worldly wealth which he could not obtain, that in all his previous life, he never felt so serious—so religious. Whilst in this dark, solemn mood, an undertaker's porter walked with the elastic step of death before him, and presented to Barney's meditating eyes, a coffin of satisfactory respectability. Here was an accident—or, as our friend the captain would have said, a coincidence! Were we not writing a veritable biography—were we hammering out a romance (hammering is a wrong term; considering the facility and the material with which such things are made, we should rather say glass-blowing), we would assure the reader, that Barney, struck by the omen, instantly foreswore the world, lived his future life in an empty vault, worked as sexton: but we write a stern, true thing, as the coming sequel will certify. Thus, as the eye of Barney fell upon the coffin-plate, his face brightened,—nay, became radiant as the visage of a saint in the cathedral window. Doubtless, urges the reader, Barney felt a spiritual ecstasy—a 'rapt,' as the mother Maria Teresa calls it? We do not speculate—we speak of facts. Barney, having devoured the inscription, brightened up, smote his right leg with much vehemence, and with huge strides walked onwards. The brief notice—that last short history of the noisiest of us—Peter Blond, aged 64, told Barney that Mrs. Blond was left a solitary widow, without a child, but with a capital connexion. Shame upon ye, Barney! And out upon the vile and sordid matters blighting this beautiful, this liberal world,—that we should ever look for self-promotion to the coffin-plates of our neighbours! In few words—the deceased interred—Barney became the widow Blond's first man of business.

For three years did Barney, with exemplary skill, direct the affairs of the late Peter Blond. For three years did he proceed, cautiously feeling his way, as he believed, to the respect of the trade, and as he hoped, to the affections of his mistress; who, be it known, had some

five-and-twenty years the advantage of her deceased lord, being all that time his junior. The house flourished—the widow had long since cast away an unbecoming mourning—Barney grew sleek as a beaver—and all things promised—no, one doubt, one fear would haunt our hero. With a curious superstition, Barney felt all about him insecure, until the church had laid its hands upon it. Besides—and why are we thus tardy in our justice—Barney had his principles. As he became prosperous, he felt a growing respect for character; nor was it altogether self that rendered him thus sensitive; he had the feelings of a man, and saw the situation of the widow. Let the following dialogue be his testimony.

'For the world, Mrs. Blond, depend upon it, the world grows wickeder and wickeder.' So saying, Barney moved closer to the widow, whose good-natured face seemed little shadowed by the misanthropy of her managing man. The place was the back-parlour, the time, the hour of supper. The meal despatched, moral reflections—of which the above is not an unfavourable sample—flowed like a stream from the lips of Barney, evidently deeply impressed with the worthlessness of all living flesh. 'It's enough, ma'am, to make a young man go into a wood, and turn hermit.'

'What's the matter, Mr. Palms?' asked the still unanswered widow, for the sixth time.

'Tis a hard thing to say, but I really do believe that all mankind are villains.' (Whenever a gentleman says thus much, be assured, considerate reader, that he contemplates instant offer of himself as a choice exception.)

'What—all! Mr. Palms?'

'Nearly all, ma'am,' responded Barney, showing his teeth. 'Human creatures! snakes upon two legs, Mrs. Blond.'

'Why—what—what has happened?' asked the widow, her face looking all the prettier for the earnestness of its expression.

'I am sure, ma'am, if this house had been roofed with silver, and floored with gold, I could not have been more contented with it. Since the death of your husband, no one has been so happy as I.'

'Mr. Palms!'

'I—I won't say no one, ma'am; but it's hard to leave when one might be so very, very comfortable.'

'Oh, I perceive, Mr. Palms,' tranquilly remarked the widow: 'you have in view a better situation?'

'Better!' echoed Barney, in a hopeless tone, at the same time venturing a leer of soft reproach: 'better.'

'Then what compels you to leave me?'

'You do,' and Barney was almost strangled with tenderness.

'I! Mr. Palms!'

'For myself, ma'am, I care little for what the world says. I hope I am an old file that defies the tooth of slanderous serpents. Yet, ma'am, I can't feel myself a man, and stand by to hear you wronged. What is gold to a good name?'

'Pray explain, Mr. Palms. In a word, sir, what?'

'The neighbours, ma'am—the neighbours,' replied Barney, in deep expressive tones.

'And what of the neighbours?' briskly inthrogated the widow.

Barney, with exquisite delicacy evading a reply, proceeded—'I have made up all the books; the accounts are balanced to a farthing. Since your affairs have been in my hands, Mrs. Blond, I hope I may say they have not suffered.'

'There never was a better book-keeper, Mr. Palms. But, sir, you spoke of the neighbours—what do they say—what dare they say?'

'Well, ma'am,' and Barney did a violence to his feelings as he spoke, 'the woman to the right tells every body—the Lord forgive her—that we—that is, you and I, ma'am, are truly and lawfully married!'

'Married!' cried Mrs. Blond, in a voice that spoke a full knowledge of the awful responsibility.—'Married!'

'That's not the worst—that's not the worst: for the woman to the left, with all her teeth and nails, denies it. She says—'

Little Mrs. Blond breathed hard with suppressed disgust at the malevolence of the world. 'And what does she say?'

'She swears we certainly are not married; but swears as strongly, that—that—we—ought—to—be.' Mrs. Blond sat silent and flushing. Barney, with profitable insensibility, mistaking the blushes of offended beauty for the tumultuous confusion of a surprised heart, dropt upon his knees, and seized the hand of the widow. At that instant—and as though by conspiracy—out went the candle!—at the same point of time, to complete the confusion of the widow, Bobby, the boy, coming to the door, bawled through the darkness—'Is Mr. Palms gone home, ma'am?—may I lock up?' Barney scrambled to his feet—and the widow unconsciously called for a light. A light was instantly supplied by the staring boy, who was directed by his mistress to attend Barney to the door. Palms followed Bobby a few paces, then stopping short, returned to the widow. 'As I said, dear Mrs. Blond—as I said, ma'am, what is gold to a good name?' Mrs. Blond said nothing. Barney, taking the silence for his best friend, in plain direct terms urged his suit. It was apparent that late incidents had had their due effect on the prudence of the widow. For at his vigorous solicitation, she promised to meet him at the church. That the ceremony might attract no attention on the part of gossiping neighbours, the widow stipulated that it should take place at a certain little village on the Sussex coast. All this negotiation was the fruit of