

scarcely five minutes, Bobby standing with his finger on the street-door latch. Barney walked 'like man new made' to the spot where the boy, with a candle twixt his fingers, in fine *chiaroscuro*, awaited him. Now Barney, looking down upon the urchin, saw his eyes twinkling with meaning, and his mouth drawn up like a rabbit's into a smothered titter. On this, anticipating somewhat his dominorial rights, Barney boxed the boy's ears, calling him 'a damned sneering little scoundrel.' He then strided into the street, and like a lover gazed upon the moonlight. The clear beam fell upon the house, and as Barney gazed at the golden letters 'Blond,' he might be dreaming—but he saw them fade and disappear, and in their place beam forth, in burning brightness—'Palms.'

But a few days and Barney was wandering—musing on wedding-rings—on the Sussex shore. It had been arranged by the widow and himself, that they should separately leave town, and meet at the church door on the appointed morning. Barney had engaged the best apartments at the best inn, and in eight-and-forty hours he might call the widow, with all the funded wealth, her stock, and outstanding debts, his own. His feelings seriously directed by the coming event, he attended the parish church with the best intentions. But where shall weak man hide where temptation is not? Placed immediately opposite to the destroying eyes of woman, do not our resolutions, though built of granite, melt like wax? Thus it was with Barney; he was stared into weakness, falsehood—but let us not pursue the theme: a syren voice whispered in his ear—'to-night—at eleven—the churchyard'—and then the blooming tempter vanished.

If there be a dreary 'aching void' in the time of man it is the four-and-twenty hours preceding marriage, though culprits may differ—hanging. Now Barney, though brimful of love, was in a strange town, with nothing to do but to count the minutes. Thus, if at eleven o'clock he walked to the churchyard, it was not to lose his innocence, but his time. As for bed, could he sleep on the eve of the glad to-morrow? To the churchyard then he sauntered, the night was dark, the wind cold, he listened for the 'voice of the charmer,' and heard the owl hoot from the belfry. Thinking he was tricked, he felt a touch of compunction for the widow: blushing for his weakness, he turned to seek his inn, when he felt his hand grasped, and a low soft 'hush' fell upon his ear. Ere he could reply to the admonition, his legs were off the ground, a bandage over his eyes and mouth, and his arms pinioned. Could Barney have been an impartial judge, he himself would have eulogized the celerity of the operation. In a thought he felt himself rocking in a cradle: the splashing of oars convinced him of his error: he was on 'the wide and open sea.'

To be sold for a slave was the least Barney looked for; perhaps to become the property of the Grand Turk—to be promoted—(promoted!)—to a keeper of the seraglio! Barney thought of the widow, and grew cold from head to sole. Barney was blindfolded; yet did he plainly see a gang of buccaniers with mustaches long as ordinary pig-tails. The boat was speedily alongside a very suspicious looking craft. Barney was happily spared the sight of her—the captive was lifted aboard, and unceremoniously, as a bale of coarse merchandise, flung into a corner called a berth. This act seemed to be a preconcerted signal with wind and wave; for almost on the instant, a stiff gale sprang from the north-west—the sea rose in mountains, and the vessel, light as a cork, danced upon their crests. In this uproar, what was to be expected of the stomach of Barney, any thing but amphibious! It was evident that his keepers had formed a right opinion of its weakness, for with a latent feeling of humanity—let us praise where praise is due—they had taken the bandage from Barney's mouth.

The storm roared itself, like a wilful child, to rest, and the morning dawned upon the wave, bright and gorgeous. It was the wedding morning of Barnaby Palms; and lying coiled like a distempered dog in his nook, he told the hours struck from the church, where, in brief time, a disappointed bride would weep for him. Barney sighed; the time wore on, he groaned: another hour, he called aloud; another and another, and he raved and stormed and begged to be put ashore. Coarse and violent as his persecutors had shown themselves, they still were men; and knowing that the situation of Barney was, as the newspapers, when the fact was known, would propound, more easily felt than described, they opened the door of his prison and suffered him to feel his way upon deck. Barney saw no slave-ship, but the 'Jemima,' smuggling cutter of Hythe.

'Shore! shore!' exclaimed Barney, and he looked with devouring eyes towards the beach.

'Ay, ay, sir,' was the dogged reply of an old tarpauling, 'all in good time, your honour.'

'Mayhap the gentleman never see'd Flushing,' conjectured a second. 'If so, we'll give him passage free.'

'My good fellows,' cried Barney, whose extreme agitation rendered him insensible to the cold irony of his captors, 'my good fellows, I forgive the joke—I—ha! ha!—'twas a capital hoax—but don't push it too far. I must go ashore!'

One of the crew approached him, and with a confidential air, asked, 'Can you swim?'

'No, no, no!' cried Barney, scarcely repressing his tears.

'What a pity—for we can't spare you a boat. Up with the anchor, lads.'

'Gentlemen—I tell you I am looked for—I am expected—I—I am going to be married!'

'Oh!' cried three or four, as though at once won by the necessities of Barney, 'he's going to be married, lads—let's give him a wedding-suit.'

Ere Barney could enquire into the liberal proposition, a bucket of tar was placed at his feet. 'Now, sir, asked one of the sailors, with forced politeness, at the same time poising in his hand a brush full of the unsavoury liquid—'Now, sir, which will you have on first, your waistcoat or your breeches?' Barney opened his mouth, no doubt to proclaim his preference, when the brush, maliciously directed, stopt the communication. Then straightway, Barney grinning horribly the while, was he daubed from head to heels. The clock struck as the operation was finished.

'Ugh! oh! murder! let me go ashore—let me fly!'—gasped the now water-proof Barney.

'Jack, the gentleman wants to fly; where's his wings?'

With a noble sacrifice to the desires of the visitor, the only feather-bed aboard was brought upon deck, instantly unripped, and its contents carefully distributed about the person of Barney. As he picked the feathers from his eyes and mouth, and blew out his big cheeks, he looked a monstrous mixture of the ape and penguin. 'There—I declare,' exclaimed one of his valets, 'talk of a wedding!—why you're drest for Neptune's daughter.' The boat was then brought alongside, Barnaby very gladly took a seat in it, and four of the crew prepared to pull him ashore. 'I wonder,' said one of the men, 'what's become of that fellow—Barnaby Palms I think they called him, who, when he was turned from the firm of Nokes and Styles, informed about that little matter of French lace? I wonder what's become of him!' Here Barnaby might have been communicative; he said nothing but shook his feathers. Having reached the shore, the men insisted upon carrying Barney into the churchyard—to the very spot where he was to have met the false fair, from certain after circumstances shrewdly suspected to be the lawful wife of one of the smugglers.

In a thought the conspirators were vanished, and Barney was alone among the tombs. Hearing the sound of voices, and confused by the ludicrous spectacle he presented, he ran blindly forward, was tripped up by some osiers, and rolled headlong into a grave, dug, as it would seem, on purpose, that very morning. As he lay stunned and confounded, the bells rung out a merry peal, striking into Barney a sense of his situation. He rose upon his feet, and with his hands grasping the edge of the grave he lifted his head half-way above the surface, and saw—proceeding from the church—a blushing, new-made bride, in the person of the late Mrs. Blond—and in her happy husband, the silkman from the opposite shop. Mrs. Blond had long reflected on his secret offers, but the wisdom of Barney—his fine delicate sense of feeling his way—had fixed her for ever. The silkman walked on, a bridegroom: Barney stood where he was, a bachelor: his rival was bound for life: Barney was only tarred and feathered!

#### CHAPTER IV.

In the foregoing Chapters we have confined ourselves to two great disappointments of our hero, who, however, as he felt his way through life, had manifold small successes. It is true that Fortune, when she promised most, had shown herself most fickle; yet had she rewarded Barney with a thousand gifts. Thus, ere he had completed his three-and-fortieth year, Barney had 'land and beeves.' His miraculous sense of touch, like that of Midas, had turned some of the dirtiest matters into gold. (Indeed, when we daily witness the kind of alchemy exercised by some folks, we little think of the wonders of the long-eared king.) It is confessed he had groped in dark corners for his wealth—but then, how much higher his merit—how much greater the discovery! It is only the vulgar mind that thinks to win its fortune along the broad highway of life, in clearest day; the nobler genius, hugging itself in its supremacy, searches pits and holes—with this sustaining creed—that though the prize acquired be not really of half the worth to that picked up in open light, it has to the finder a double value, because obtained in secrecy and gloom.

'A broken heart, Mr. Palms! you don't believe in any such nonsense?'

In truth, Barney was not so weak; since he felt himself a reasoning creature he had ever doubted that much talked of phenomenon; moreover, a recent visit to the museum at Surgeon's Hall had confirmed him in his unbelief; he had seen, to the best of his memory, no such preparation. Hence, he had used the words 'a broken heart,' as, we trust, a pardonable figure of speech. 'To be sure not, Mr. Fitch; to be sure not. All I meant to say was, that if Louisa—'

'You are a steady, sober man, Mr. Palms—what is more, you have an excellent business. Louisa wants a husband—you want a wife—I consent to the match—you don't object to it—then what more need be said about the matter?'

The speaker who was thus smoothing Barney's walk to the church, was, in the course of events, soon destined to go thither himself; certain it is, he looked affianced to the undertaker. 'A broken heart! ha! ha!' and the old white-haired gentleman crowed like a cock at the extravagance.

Barney smiled an instant approval of the old man's

merriment, and then, looking becomingly grave, observed, 'And—your fortune, Mr. Fitch?'

'Every penny yours—every penny, when—when I die,' and Mr. Fitch straightened his back, and shook his head and winked his eye, as though he had spoken of the Greek Kalends, or the coming millennium. Death himself, though about to strike, must have been tickled at the gay self-assurance of brave four-score.

'And the day—the happy day, Mr. Fitch?'

'Humph! the day? day? Thursday, Barney—yes, Thursday. We'll keep the wedding at my friend Clay's house—the Fox and Goose at Stepney.'

Now Barney, since his affair with the widow Blond, was become less confident of his sorcery over the gentle sex; and had thus, with the wisdom that haunted him through life, felt his way to the affections of Louisa through the medium of her grandfather. Sure we are that Barney, in all he had said or looked at his bride, had never transgressed the bounds of the coldest drawn civility; the iciest nun had not complained of the warmth of Barney. Louisa having no relative, no friend in the world, save her grandsire, was, naturally enough, in the opinion of the venerable man—wholly and unreservedly at his disposal. Having reared her from childhood, he looked upon her as so much live timber, to be carved into any image, after the fancy of the planter. She might—indeed we must say she did, venture some remonstrance; but surely four-score better knew what was fitter for eighteen, than witless eighteen itself. In a word, Louisa Fitch was to marry Barnabas Palms; the bride had received her orders from her rich grandfather—and Thursday was the day appointed.

At length Barney approached the haven of his hopes. He had felt his way to more than easy competence; he had now within a hair's breadth of his fingers a rich, a youthful and not an unhandsome bride; though, in the main affairs of life, Barney shut his eyes to what is vulgarly called, and paid for, in some sort of coin—beauty. Blind to outward bloom—he acknowledged virtue by the touch; and Louisa, on the death of her reverend grandsire, was to have ten thousand pounds. In the ears of Barney, the guineas were already ringing on the old man's tombstone!

Thursday came. We will not dwell upon the emotions of the bride; such trifling, the more as it was unconsidered by our hero, accords not with the gravity of our theme—with the deep lesson that we hope to teach. Old Mr. Fitch and some half-dozen friends were present, all gaiety and smiles; Barney was in his best; and Louisa was duly shrouded in white. The ceremony was concluded, despite the ominous spectres that even at the altar haunted the bridegroom. It might be the embarrassing novelty of his situation that deceived his senses, for, looking upward, he saw the wings of carved cherubim plumed with real feathers, and snuffing the air, he thought he scented the marine odour of tar. No matter; Barney was married; placing the marble hand of his bride under his arm, he quitted the church.

Up to this moment old Mr. Fitch was gay and chirruping, whilst his benevolent tyranny was in course of execution, he was in the highest spirits. The knot, however, was no sooner tied, than, possibly from excess of joy, the old man turned ghastly pale. He was led from the church; but ere he could gain the carriage at the gate, was compelled to rest himself; he sat upon a grave, and Barney approaching, looked at him, with an eye of anticipation. With some assistance, Mr. Fitch was placed in the coach; the party proceeded to the inn, and—the grandfather quickly rallying—there were high hopes of the festive dinner. Vain are all earthly promises! Just as the first course was laid the old man relapsed, was carried to bed, and in three hours was ready for the mattock and the spade. It was supposed that the extreme coldness of the church had quickened his end. We pass much wo and lamentations, to conclude our story.

Barney was the possessor of ten thousand pounds. Had he weakly consulted the wishes of Louisa, they had doubtless passed to another bridegroom: he had, he thanked his wisdom, felt his way through the grandfather!

It struck twelve as Barney sought his bridal couch. He had already one leg in bed, when a bright thought arrested him. Taking a candle, he withdrew from the chamber, to seek the room of the dead man. In good time Barney had recollected the silly vanity of old Fitch, who was wont to carry in his pockets a thousand or two in bank-paper. This might be stolen; he, as heir, should instantly seize the property. As he became fully confirmed in this idea, a current of wind extinguished the candle. For a long time, Barney continued silently to feel his way; but the Fox-and-Goose was an old, old house, with corridor and passages, and winding stair-cases, and—a shriek was heard, and no more!

A coroner's inquest, that sat next day at the Fox-and-Goose, on the body of a gentleman found at the bottom of the stairs, returned a verdict of 'Accidental death.' This was of course in default of full evidence, otherwise the verdict would have run—'Died of too much feeling his way.' Poor Barney! he had smiled—nay, in his heart had chuckled—when he saw old Fitch seated on a grave! And now, had Barney 'felt his way!'

'Well, Mary,' said a lawyer to a witness, 'if I may credit what I hear, I may venture to address you by the name of Black Moll.' 'Faith you may, mister lawyer,' said she, 'for I am always called so by the blackguards.'