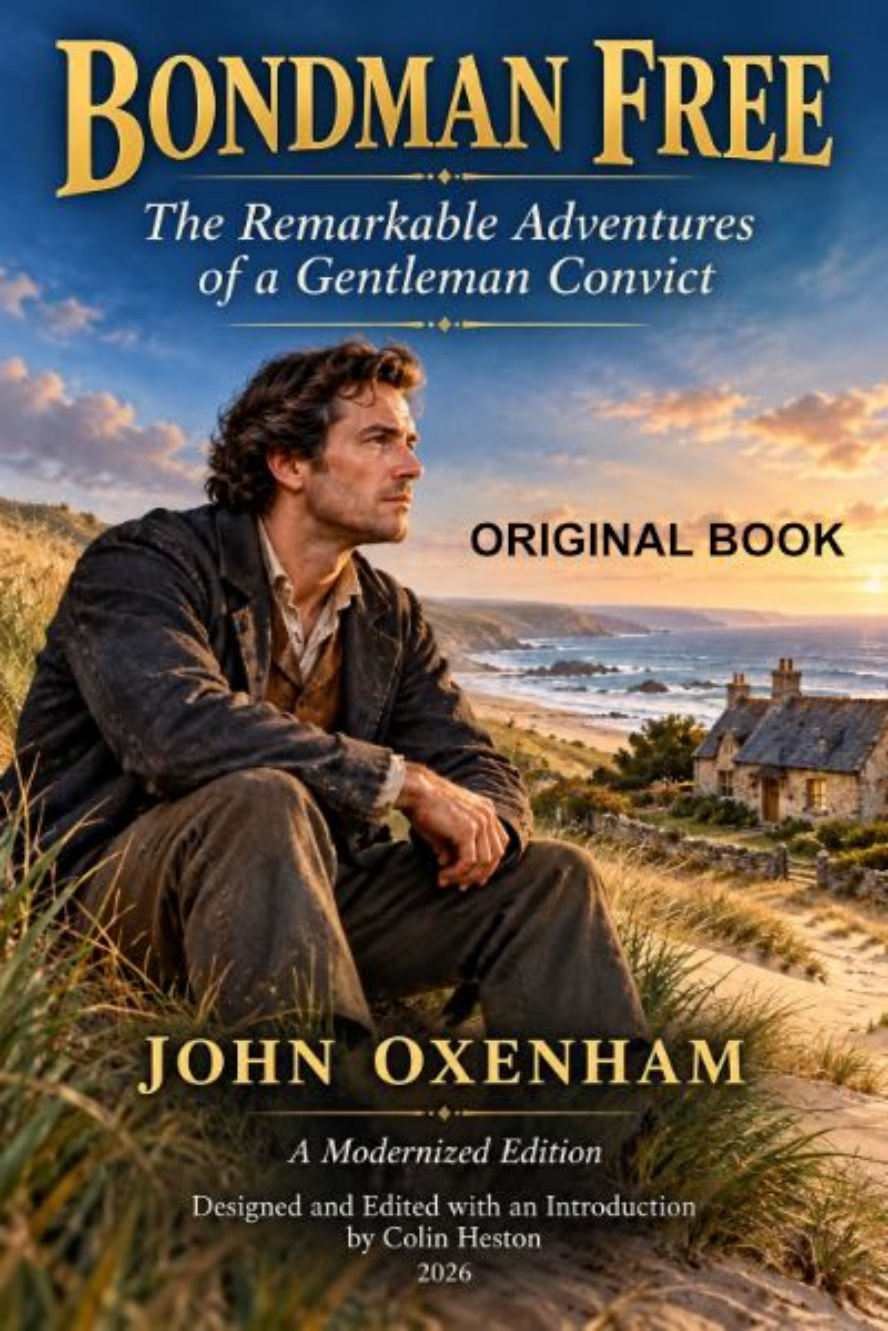
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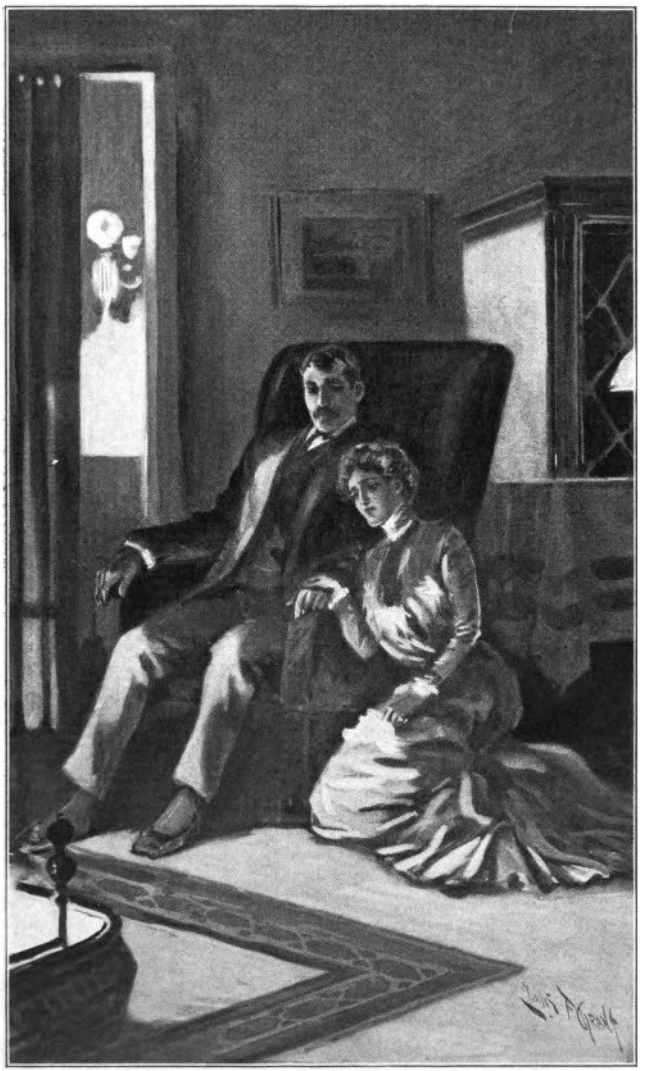
ORIGINAL BOOK

JOHN OXENHAM

A Modernized Edition

Designed and Edited with an Introduction
by Colin Heston
2026

BONDMAN FREE



SO THESE TWO HEARTS DREW CLOSER TOGETHER (*Page 300*).

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BONDMAN FREE

THE REMARKABLE ADVENTURES
OF A GENTLEMAN CONVICT

BY

JOHN OXENHAM

Author of "God's Prisoner" "Rising Fortunes" "Our Lady of Deliverance" etc.

With Illustrations
BY
LOUIS F. GRANT

NEW YORK
THE FEDERAL BOOK COMPANY
1902

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BONDMAN FREE

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE JUDGE.

"To BE hanged by the neck till you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul."

And his lordship removed the fatal black square from the top of his wig and sat back in his chair.

The shuffling of feet as the prisoner was removed alone broke the dreadful silence.

The judge's face was like a cameo, clean-cut, hard, marble-white. The voice that had just pronounced sentence sounded cold even in its last commendation of the prisoner's soul past the mercy of man.

In his twenty years on the bench he had had to send many a man to his doom, but usage had brought no familiarity and no relief. He felt it all to-day as dreadfully as on the trying first occasion. It jangled his nerves now as it had done then. For nights to come those hopeless eyes which had fluttered up to his as he spoke would haunt him.

And yet he was commonly known as "The Hang-

ing Judge," and those who listened to the cold, level tones of his charges to his juries deemed him hard and even wanting in heart. So mistaken may be the superficial judgments of men when based on appearances only. Circumstantial evidence is next to infallible compared with condemnation on appearances. Yet which of us is without sin in that respect?

But the judgments of Mr. Justice Alleyne were at all events never called in question—which was more than could be said of some of his colleagues. Stern he was, cold and hard he might seem, wanting in heart if you please, but never once had his strict impartiality and the righteousness of his judgments been called in question. As to his learning, he was said to be more deeply versed in criminal law than any other man of his time. He sat to administer that law, and he did it with the most unerring inflexibility. Many notorious criminals had received sentence at his hands, but the passing of the irrevocable sentence—for in his hands it was irrevocable—never ceased to cause him the most exquisite mental agony, a state of mind which stoically manifested itself in a face like a marble carving, and a voice that cut like a sword.

The gaslight over the jury box shone full upon

the white, impassive face. The foreman of the jury, glancing at it with a feeling of awe, the rightful due of one who carried judgment and death in his hands, was almost startled at sight of a tiny pulse throbbing furiously in the judge's temple. He remembered it when he was telling his wife all about the day's doings, and she remarked that she wouldn't like to send a man to his death herself, and maybe the judge didn't like doing it any more than she would have done. They called him "The Hanging Judge"—but you never could tell.

His lordship lay back quietly in his chair. He would have liked to suspend business for the rest of the day. But there was still an hour and a half left, and the work had to be got through.

"What is the next case?" he asked of the Clerk.

"Short case, my lord. Embezzlement. Prisoner admits. Circumstances somewhat peculiar. Chiefly a question of punishment."

"Very well. Call it, please!"

"John Bellenger!" and John Bellenger stepped lightly into the dock.

A well-built, up-standing man of thirty, pleasant face, tightly set, steady eyes in which resolution and endurance struggled for mastery over anxiety and foreboding. He examined his judge with curiosity.

He had been warned that justice rather than mercy would be his portion at this man's hands.

The judge impassively examined his prisoner. His appearance interested him, but he did not show it. The man seemed somewhat strangely out of place. But that, after all, was not uncommon. His lordship sat up in his chair, picked up a clean quill, turned over a new page in his big note book, and nodded to the Crown counsel.

The charge having been read over, prisoner pleaded "not guilty!" as a matter of form and as an indication of his desire that all the facts of the case should be made known.

Then the counsel for the Crown proceeded:

"Prisoner, John Bellenger, m'lud, was head cashier to Mr. Silas Bartram, banker, of this town. Been in Mr. Bartram's employ some twelve years. On August 1st he applied to Mr. Bartram for an advance of a certain sum—er, the sum of £75 in fact—for a specific purpose. Mr. Bartram refused, as a matter of principle. Prisoner thereupon abstracted the amount named from the funds under his charge, leaving an I. O. U. in its place and a letter to his employer, explaining what he had done and his reasons for doing it, and undertaking to repay the amount as soon as he could do so. Unfor-

tunately, he went further. It was necessary to his purpose that he should not be molested for a certain period. To secure that immunity he took with him securities of the value of £5,000 under the threat that, if he were interfered with, said securities would be immediately destroyed. When the object for which he took the money was secured, he returned to Cuddiford, gave up the securities and the balance of the £75, and surrendered himself to justice. The facts, m'lud, are not disputed. My learned friend will doubtless bring to your lordship's notice, and to the notice of the jury, any circumstances which in his opinion may tell in extenuation of prisoner's undoubted crime."

"Mr. Silas Bartram!" called the Crown Counsel, and the banker stepped into the witness-box.

Under counsel's gentle guidance he deposed to the facts above stated. He was a hard-featured, grizzled old fellow of sixty, possessed doubtless of many solid virtues but of no smallest tincture of sympathy or generosity.

Then prisoner's counsel took him in hand.

"Just a word or two, Mr. Bartram. When prisoner begged you to make him this advance of salary did he explain his reasons?"

"He did."

"Tell us what he said, please."

"He said his wife was very ill—dying, I think he said. And the doctors had said she must go away to some warmer place."

"In fact that was the one possible chance of saving her life?"

"I have no doubt he put it that way."

"Have you any reason to doubt the truth of what he told you?"

"No. I believe it was true."

"But you would not lend him the money?"

"I objected on principle. An advance of salary ties one to an employé until the advance is repaid. Then there is the risk of death, and so on."

"Did prisoner offer to insure his life and make the policy over to you?"

"He did."

"He had been with you some twelve years, and served you faithfully?"

"That made it all the more galling—to find my confidence abused."

"You received back the £5,000 worth of bonds?"

"Yes."

"And some £20 out of the £75?"

"Yes."

"So that the prisoner now owes you £55. Do you believe he will repay you that amount?"

"I believe he will, since he said he would do so."

"So that you still have a certain amount of confidence in him?"

"I always had implicit confidence in him—till this happened. I consider he went too far. It was a matter that could not be passed over."

"The bonds were returned to you without any negotiations? There was no suggestion made, for instance, that they would only be returned on condition of your overlooking the other matter?"

"The bonds were returned without any conditions whatever."

"And the balance of the £75 also?"

"Yes."

"But you felt the matter too grave to pass over?"

"Yes."

"Thank you! I think I need not detain you any longer, Mr. Bartram."

The superintendent of police spoke to the arrest of the prisoner.

"You received word from the prisoner himself, or from his lawyer, which amounts to the same thing, that he was waiting for you at his own house?" asked prisoner's counsel.

"From the lawyer—Mr. Baite."

"And prisoner was expecting you when you arrived?"

"He was."

The doctor who had attended Mrs. Bellenger gave evidence to the fact that he had informed prisoner that the climate of Cuddiford must prove fatal to her, and had advised him to take her south as speedily as possible. The chance of recovery was small at best, but such as it was he advised him to take it. Even if recovery were denied her, her last days would be infinitely less painful in a more genial atmosphere. He spoke very highly of prisoner's character, as the result of many years' acquaintance.

Others did the same. Prisoner's counsel made a strong appeal to the feelings of the jury. Then the judge, in his cold, level tones, presented the case to them in its naked, legal aspect, and told them that the matter they had to decide was whether the prisoner was or was not guilty of embezzling the moneys of his employer.

Put that way, of course, there could not be a moment's doubt; and they returned the only possible verdict, coupled with a strong recommendation to mercy.

"John Bellenger," said the judge, as Bellenger

stood before him straight and unshrinking, and his eye met his judge's as quietly as if they were discussing the weather, "you have been found guilty of the crime with which you stand charged, and which to all intents and purposes you had already confessed. The jury, very rightly from their point of view, have coupled with their verdict a plea for mercy. The facts of the case, as disclosed by the evidence, and very ably brought out by your counsel, prove beyond question that you were in an extremely trying position. As trusted cashier in Bartram's Bank you were in charge of considerable sums of money. As the husband of a delicate, and, it is proved, dying wife, you needed money to restore her to health or to soothe her last days. You applied to your employer for an advance. He declined it. It is not within my province to comment upon his action in doing so. The opportunity to take what had been denied you was under your hand. The temptation was too strong. You yielded to it. Possibly by leaving an I. O. U. for the amount, and a promise of repayment, you invested the matter in your own eyes with a different aspect from that in which I, as administrator of the law, am bound to regard it. Nine-tenths of the embezzlers who come before me are only borrowers who

have not had time to repay before they were found out. But this was no sudden yielding to temptation. You gave the matter most careful thought. Immediate arrest would follow the taking of that money, and so your end would not be served. You therefore safeguarded your position by the abstraction of bonds to a large amount, and held your employer at bay by threat of submitting him to very heavy loss if he lifted a hand against you. To my mind that is a grievous aggravation of your original crime. The law is the protector of the public weal. If the law may be broken with impunity the public weal must suffer. But the law may not be broken with impunity, and the individual who breaks it must suffer the penalty. I sentence you to two years' imprisonment, with such labor as the governor of the jail to which you may be consigned may see fit to impose upon you."

Prisoner bowed to his judge and disappeared.

When Mr. Bartram reached his bank next morning he found his clerks busily engaged clearing their desks of road metal and splinters of glass—the outward and visible expression of the feelings of some, at all events, of his fellow-townsmen on the previous day's proceedings.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING THE PRISONER.

AND, now, how had all this come about?

Four months before this, John Bellenger, the man we have just seen disappear from the painful publicity of the dock to the merciful obscurity of the prison cell, occupied the position of head cashier in Bartram's Bank at Cuddiford. He had been with Silas Bartram for over twelve years, and knew almost as much about the business as Bartram did himself—in some respects perhaps more, since he came into closer personal touch with its customers. He had entered the Bank as junior clerk, and worked steadily up the ladder till the top was reached. It was not, indeed, a very tall ladder, nor were the emoluments great. Bartram's was only a small country bank doing business with the neighboring farmers and shopkeepers and some of the gentry of the district, who kept small accounts there for their own convenience.

Mr. Bartram had trusted Bellenger implicitly. That was what made him so implacable when he found his trust misplaced.

He was a hard man, difficult to get on with, rigidly honest, but cold and unsympathetic. A man whom everybody esteemed and trusted, but who made no friends.

When Bellenger's salary reached £150 a year he got married. His wife was Ellen Rich—only daughter of the late Nonconformist minister of the neighboring village of Greenford. She was governessing at the time on twenty pounds a year, and as her father's stipend had never exceeded £80—how many thousands of times had he gratefully cited Goldsmith's "passing rich on forty pounds a year," to prove to himself how very much better off he was than the parson of Sweet Auburn?—the sudden jump into such a fortune as one hundred and fifty a year might well have turned a less well-regulated head than Ellen's. But a life-long experience had taught her how to make the best of everything and a very little go a very long way, and the first year of Mr. and Mrs. Bellenger's married life was an unusually happy one.

Bellenger loved his wife with the absolute devotion of one whose boyhood and youth had been of the loneliest, and who looked upon the sweet girl who had given her life into his keeping as God's best gift and the crown of all his endeavor.

When baby Jack was born his cup was full to overflowing. He set those two idols up on high and came near to worshipping them. For their comfort and well-being he would have sacrificed his life gladly. To compass their happiness it is hard to say what he would not have done. In the balances of life they outweighed all else.

Perhaps he idolized them too much. Perhaps they became as a veil between him and higher things. Perhaps—but these things are beyond human understanding, and speculation as to the workings of Providence are useless waste of time.

Ellen's health was never quite so good after Jackie came. She did not pick up her strength as she should have done. She could not nurse him herself, which was a cause of very great sorrow to her. Her own old nurse, Martha Platt—a wise woman if ever there was one, and better than gold—came to the rescue, and in her experienced hands the boy thrived in spite of his deprivations, and waxed strong as the little mother drooped and weakened.

At first Bellenger put this down to natural causes, and lived in daily hope of improvement. But, as the months passed and improvement still delayed, he grew anxious. And at last he grew frightened, and went about his work with the cold fingers of an aw-

ful fear twisting his heart-strings, and frosting his hair at the temples, and deepening the upright furrow in his brow.

Old Dr. Baylee did everything in his power, tried remedy after remedy, and pondered Mrs. Bellenger's case at nights when he should have been sleeping. But against the decree of Providence doctors' remedies are fruitless.

"You must take her away. Cuddiford is too bleak for her," he told Bellenger, as autumn faded toward winter.

"I can't get away," said Bellenger. "Besides—"

"Besides" meant that from a financial point of view a residence down south was out of the question.

And the cold fingers wrung his heart-strings to breaking point, and that line in his brow got deeper and deeper.

He was a great favorite with the customers at the Bank. Not one of them but preferred doing business with him to doing it with Mr. Bartram himself. They noticed that deepening furrow, and the tightening of the mouth, and the new abruptness of manner which was so unlike him. Some of them knew what caused it and accorded him their sympathy. Some, who did not know, said he was

growing into the likeness of old Silas—like master, like man, and so on.

But he found it hard to go about his daily work unmoved, with a cheery greeting to every man, and a hopeful word as to the crops and business outlook, as he used to do, when there was that in his heart tolling like a heavy bell, "Going—going—going."

Time came when Dr. Baylee, having exhausted his own powers, requested permission to call in another doctor, a specialist from Saltpool, to advise with him.

They came, they saw, and Bellenger, waiting down below in his desolate little parlor, received their verdict with bowed head and pale lips and eyes a-swim with despair.

"The only possible chance is for her to winter on the south coast—say Bournemouth," said the doctor from Saltpool, gravely.

"Will it save her?"

"It may."

"Will—it—save—her?" he asked again, doggedly. "Speak out!"

"It is very doubtful. One can never say."

"How long?" jerked Bellenger.

"A few months at most, I fear. But there is always the chance."

Bellenger dropped his head into his arms on the table and the two doctors went quietly away, saddened by that saddest of duties that ever falls to a doctor's lot, the cutting of the thin gold cord of life.

Bellenger sat bowed with his grief long after they had gone. He could hear Jackie crowing in the kitchen, and he was trying to think, and not to think.

His brain racked wildly to and fro. The foundations of his life were suddenly cut from under him. Suddenly—though he knew now that this was what he had feared all along. The certainty is always sudden, come when it may, and no matter how long the fearful looking forward to it. Chaos ramped within him; outwardly he sat motionless as a stone image.

A few months!—and then—? For he was not deceived by the doctor's last words.

A few months! And even that short respite dependent on the impossible! A hard case, my masters! Pray you never know the like!

One week later Mr. and Mrs. Bellenger and Jackie and Martha were installed in a little house in the Alum Chine Road, Bournemouth. And the sun shone bright and warm, and the soft sea breezes mingled with the scent of the pine woods, and life

was bright and beautiful—brighter and more beautiful than Ellen Bellenger had ever known it before in all her life.

And she said it was doing her good and that she felt stronger every day. And truly there were light in her eyes and color in her face that had long been absent, or that one had not been able to distinguish in the thick, damp atmosphere of Cuddiford.

And John Bellenger's face was bright and smiling, too. He seemed to have left all his cares behind him. Life seemed to have taken on a new keen edge for him. He lived as though every single moment were a precious gift to be turned to the very best possible account.

He wheeled Jackie and the little mother down the winding chine to the sands each day, and they sported before her there as though their years were equal. They dug holes and built castles and made gardens. Or he wheeled her chair through the sweet-smelling woods, over carpets of soft pine needles, and almost buried them both in pine cones, which later on made the most delightful amplification of the evening fire, with coal at sixpence the scuttle.

And Martha Platt had never seen the likes of it; and enjoyed the novel experience with great gusto, and felt herself a traveller beyond most.

And sometimes of an evening, when Jackie and his mother had gone to bed tired with the day's delights, Bellenger would go for a stroll by himself, and in some quiet nook of the chine or the woods would fling himself down and let his troubled soul groan out its agonies, in silence maybe, yet possibly not unheard, till it grew quiet again. And next day his face would be as before, and his spirits apparently of the best. For shadows are best kept for the shadowy woods where no human eye can see them. And for that sweet soul whose days were running out more swiftly than she knew, he was determined that those days should be bright days, though all the years of his life that followed might be black in consequence.

The day after the doctors had given their verdict he had gone to Mr. Bartram and told him the state of matters.

"I have served you well, Mr. Bartram——"

"I've paid you for it," said old Silas.

"You have. Now, I want you to do me this very great favor. Advance me half a year's salary, £75. I will pay you any interest you like. It is a matter of life and death. And give me a week's holiday, to take my wife down south somewhere and see her settled there."

Bartram shook his head. "What security would I have that you'd ever repay it?"

"You can pay me half salary in future and stop it each week out of what's due to me."

"And suppose you die?"

"I'm sound enough. But I'll insure my life if you require it and make the policy over to you."

"It'd just mean that I'm bound to keep you on, whatever turned up, for another year."

"Can you find anyone to do the work better than I do?"

"I'm not saying I can, but that would be the position. I don't like the principle of the thing. Can't you raise the money some other way—your furniture?

"I've had to get an advance on it already. A sick wife makes a good deal of extra expense besides doctor's bills. I've done my best, but £150 a year left no margin for an illness like this."

"Well, I'd like you to find some other way out, Bellenger. It's the principle I object to."

"I'll undertake to make it up to you, Mr. Bartram, in the future. You've never had to complain of my work."

"It's the principle of the thing I don't like"; and with that parrot-cry old Silas headed him off and

would have none of it. He was hard and narrow at best, and he had just had a bad knock over some shares he had invested in with less than his customary shrewdness. Bellenger knew all about that, but Silas had confidence in his discretion. A country banker is not supposed to make bad investments. The bucolic mind is slow of movement and slower still of utterance, but it has its rooted beliefs, and it is just as well that these should suffer no shocks.

A week later Mr. Bartram arrived at the bank for once before his head cashier. In place of Bellenger he found a letter, and after reading a few words of it he locked the door of his private office and swore roundly for two minutes, and then gave himself up to some hard thinking.

Bellenger's letter was as follows:

"Mr. Bartram:

"I begged you last week to advance me half my next year's salary—so that I might take my wife to some place where her last few days might be spent with such freedom from pain as is not possible here. You refused my request.

"I have now taken the amount without your permission. You will find in my cash drawer an I.O.U. for £75, and attached to it a promise of repay-

ment as quickly as I can accomplish it. I clearly understand the consequences of the step, and after my wife's death I shall be prepared to pay the penalty.

"But lest you should, as you naturally will, be inclined to visit me with that penalty as speedily as possible, I have taken with me also that parcel of £5,000 Argentine Bonds. You cannot be called upon to produce them for at least six months, and before that the end will have come. Understand clearly—I hold this £5,000 simply as security against your lifting a finger against me till I say the word. I shall deposit the parcel with a friend, who will receive from me each week a letter bidding him hold them still. If any week passes without his receiving such a letter he will forthwith burn the parcel unopened. If you attempt anything against me till I am ready you lose your £5,000.

"A very little generosity on your part would have saved all this—and me from a broken life. But you would not. JOHN BELLENGER."

Old Silas regretted for once that the little people when they visited his cradle had forgotten, or purposely neglected, to gift him with a little spark of generosity. And now it was too late.

He saw that Bellenger had him in a cleft stick,

and that it would pay him better to sit quietly than to raise a hue and cry. Besides the £5,000, his other losses might come out if he made any trouble.

He sealed up Bellenger's letter, and the I. O. U., and the promise to pay, in a stout envelope and locked them up in his private safe, gave out that the head cashier was away on leave of absence on account of his wife's serious illness, temporarily promoted the next man on the ladder to Bellenger's position, and himself undertook more of the routine work of the bank than he had done for many years past, to the great discomposure of the rest of the staff and the great discontent of its customers.

And at Bournemouth the bright, sad days ran all too swiftly, and the inevitable drew nearer and nearer.

Jackie was supremely happy, since his soul was too small for burdens, and he lived by faith alone, though by no means lacking in good works. If his works tended at present solely to his own enjoyment, therein was his mother's highest delight; and so he did his little work in the world and was happy, and made those about him happy, too.

Bellenger indeed suffered torment. His nature was an honest one. The thing he had done was, in its stark nakedness, repulsive to him. He clothed

it indeed in his own mind with a garment of justification which at times made it almost presentable. At all times he forced himself to gay spirits, and feared only lest his wife should penetrate the mask and discover what lay below. But her weakness lay heavy upon her and tended no doubt to blunt her perceptions to some extent, and he played his part admirably.

These latter days were to be bright days for her, and every faculty he possessed he bent to that sole end. Her every want was anticipated, her comfort and happiness his sole endeavor.

At times she felt stronger and had hopes of recovery. But such times were followed by others of greater weakness, and she came at last to understand that it was hopeless.

They even came to talk quietly and resignedly of it together, and that with no feeling of incongruity on his part. Her earlier feelings of extreme surprise and gratitude at Mr. Bartram's generosity in assisting them to so delightful a holiday—which was the way he had had to put it to her—he had quietly acquiesced in. She had wanted to write and thank him herself; but he had told her it was not necessary, and the days slipped past without her doing it.

"I cannot get over Mr. Bartram's kindness, John," she would say, as she lay with her thin hand in his—the little hand that used to delight in roughening its softness by the household duties she undertook for him.

"It was very good of him," he would make face to reply. "I must try and make it up to him."

"It is so different from what one was always led to expect of him."

"Yes, one can't always judge a man by what other people say, dear."

"I pray for a blessing on him every night for his goodness to us."

That gave him a pang—so sweet a blessing wasted—yet who knows?—perhaps it might tend to make the old man less harsh in his judgment of the matter.

"You will thank him again for me when you get back, won't you, John? I really ought to have written. But I was lazy, and the time has passed so delightfully. Tell him how very much I enjoyed it"; and he promised her everything.

If the wringing of his soul out of its body could have compassed her happiness he would have sacrificed body and soul alike with eagerness.

It was a strange, sadly happy time for him, and

for her a gentle loosening of life's bonds, a gradual slipping away. She was going from him, but her passing had been smoothed and softened, and he would always think of her as she was in those days, sweet and gracious and full of gratitude for everything that was done for her.

And he, tender and smiling, tortured and troubled, spent himself in her service and kept a brave face through it all, and said to himself that to have won her that brief gleam of happiness he would have done the same again and more. You who are stainless, and perchance have never been tried, may throw stones at him. I cannot.

CHAPTER III.

WITH EYES WIDE OPEN.

JOHN BELLENGER buried his wife in the quiet little graveyard among the shrubs and pines, then, desolate and broken, turned to pick up the heavy burden of his life.

First he had to explain matters to Martha Platt. She was, as I have said, a wise old woman. Whatever her real feelings may have been in the matter, she listened understandingly, and gave him no word of reproach. On the contrary, "'Twere hard, 'twere varry hard," she said; and after a pause she added —and the recalling of her simple words brought consolation to Bellenger's sore heart many a time in the dark days that followed—"But yo' made her varry happy."

"I did my best, God forgive me!"

"Now, Martha," he said, presently, "the past is past, and we've got to think of the future. I want you to take charge of Jackie. I shall leave you all the money I can, and you must keep him till I come out."

She looked at him in sharp questioning.

"I am going right back to Cuddiford, to stand whatever the penalty is."

"Must you?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes. It's my only way back. I've broken the law, and I must suffer for it. I want to suffer for it. There may be something amiss with my conscience, but I don't feel there as if I'd done any great wrong. Ellen understands it by this time. God has understood it all through. I doubt if He would punish me, as man will. But until I have satisfied the law I can't get back. When I come out I will come to you for Jackie. Then I will work my fingers to the bone till I have paid Silas Bartram his money back, and then, please God, I shall feel myself again."

"Yo'll have a weary time, I doubt," she said, with a dismal shake of the head.

"We've had a happy time here, and now I've got to foot the bill."

They packed up their few belongings, said goodbye to the pines, and the sun, and the sea, and her they were leaving behind, and reached Cuddiford one gloomy December evening in a heavy fog. Bellenger took Martha and the boy to her sister's house, where she lived before undertaking Jackie, and after a meal and a cup of tea there, he set out to find Mr. Robson Baite, a young solicitor with whom he had

been on friendly terms—first to his office, and then along to his house, where he found him just finishing dinner.

Bellenger heard him jump up when the maid took in his name, and he came quickly across the hall to the room where Bellenger stood waiting for him. He welcomed him with outstretched hand.

"Why, Bellenger, what's had you all this time? Everybody's been aching for you back at the Bank. Old Silas has been like a bear with a sore head, and setting everybody by the ears. How's the wife?"

"She died a week ago," said Bellenger, quietly.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, very sorry. And the boy?"

"Jackie's all right. I want a quiet talk with you, Baite, to-night if possible. Can you spare the time?"

"Of course. Come in and see the wife first for a minute. She'll be mighty sorry to hear of your loss."

"If you don't mind I'd sooner not see Mrs. Baite to-night."

He felt the taint already, and shrank from the idea of meeting anyone under what might be afterward looked upon as false pretences.

"All right. I quite understand. Come along to

my den. It's all right; I'd quite finished, I assure you. Now, sit down there, and help yourself to one of those cigars. I'll tell them to bring coffee in here"; and he rang the bell. Bellenger lit his cigar and sat looking thoughtfully into the fire till the coffee had been brought and the door had closed on the maid.

"Now, Baite, I'm going to surprise you—perhaps to stagger you. I've come back here to give myself up for embezzlement——"

The lawyer looked at him sharply.

"No; I'm all right in my head. Here are the facts"—and as rapidly and clearly as he could he told Mr. Baite all that had happened.

"Those are the bonds," he said, handing him a flat paper parcel. "Here is the balance of the money—£20 odd. I would like you to act for me and get it all over as quick as you can. Sell my furniture—there is a bond on it against an advance I got some time since. There may be a small balance. If so, I will ask you to give it to my wife's old nurse, Martha Platt. She is going to take care of Jackie till—till I can take him again myself. Poor little chap! Fortunately, he is too young to understand."

Baite listened with great amazement. When the story was finished he reached out and gripped Bellenger's hand warmly.

"I'll see you through, old man. With those bonds in our hands we may even be able to pull you through entirely."

"That's not what I want, Baite. I may be a fool for the thing I've done, and for the way I look at it. But I did it with my eyes open, and I'm prepared to accept the penalty. I don't want any bargaining. I want you to take the bonds and the money to Mr. Bartram, and tell him I am at his disposal. If he should be so good as to forego his rights and give me the chance to work out my redemption without suffering the penalty, of course I would be very grateful. You can tell him I shall repay him in any case, punishment or no punishment, as soon as I am able."

"Don't be a fool about it, now, Bellenger! Bartram's as hard as nails, as you know. Let me do the best I can for you on my own lines."

"I have broken the law, yet I don't feel anything of a criminal. But if I escaped the penalty by means of the crime I would never feel clean again. I mean it," he said, in answer to Baite's stare of surprise, "though I don't wonder at your not seeing it quite in the same way."

The lawyer shook his head disappointedly.

"My hands would always feel dirty," insisted

Bellenger. "Punishment will purge the offence and satisfy the law. Unless you will promise me to lay the matter before him just as I say, I must go to him myself."

"If you insist I must do it," said Baite, gloomily; but, candidly, I think you're——"

"I know. But I've had plenty of time to think the whole thing out, and I believe I'm right. If you'll do just what I ask you'll be doing the greatest service you can render me, Baite. What is the penalty?"

"Depends who it is. If it was me it would be nothing at all."

"I'm devoutly sorry it can't be you. But, seeing that it can't, what is it likely to run to?"

"Depends largely on who it comes before. We'd better have a jury and let all the facts be known."

"Yes. I think I should wish that."

"I'm bound to tell you that in the eyes of the law it's a very grave offence. The taking of those bonds and so on, you understand——"

"You quite understand my reason for that?"

"Perfectly. But to the judicial mind it aggravates the offence, you see. Removes it out of the category of sudden temptation, and so on. Points, the judge will probably say, to deep, deliberate scheming."

'Well, it was, and I don't see how I can get out of it."

"Unless you'll let me——"

"No, I'll go through with it on my own lines."

"You don't know what it means. You'll find it a stone round your neck all your life."

"I shall change my name and start afresh when I am free."

"You don't know what it means," said Baite, gloomily, once more. "Where are you stopping?"

"At the old house. Martha Platt's sister has been looking after it, and I told her to make me up a bed. I shall wait there till I hear from you."

"Let us keep the boy for you, Bellenger. My wife would delight in him. I think she's always envied you Jackie."

"It's too good of you to offer it, Baite. But, candidly, I think it will be better for him and for me that he should stop where he is. Old Martha will give him every care, and it will be better for him to rough it a bit. It'll do him no harm, and—afterward, you see, he may have to rough it with me. I wouldn't like him to feel when he came to me that he was coming down to me. You see?"

"I understand. We'll keep an eye on him all the same."

"For that I'll be grateful. Now good-night. I shall be at the old house till I'm wanted."

He was arrested there next day, and what followed we know.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE MILL.

I AM not going to tell the story of John Bellenger's imprisonment. He never spoke much about it. Besides, he has told it himself in a way no one else could approach.

One or two incidents only must be mentioned on account of their bearing on after-events.

He served his time at Helstone Jail, and there never was a better behaved prisoner within its dismal walls.

The Governor was a strict disciplinarian, but withal a humane and progressive jailer. He was never tired of improving the property in his charge, and many of the ingenious ideas he worked out at Helstone have been adopted in the jails throughout the kingdom. He was a great hand at drawing plans, and he worked out all his ideas on paper to exact scale measurement before he attempted to carry them out. In his private office he had books full of such plans, all neatly pasted in and indexed so that he could turn to them at a moment's notice, which official visitors from or on behalf of similar establishments frequently called upon him to do.

Bellenger could not be daily under his observation without his keen eye singling him out from the rest. He knew his story of course, and when by an unfortunate accident he himself was deprived of the use of his right hand for a considerable time, he sent for Bellenger and set him working out the details of some new ideas he was deeply interested in at the moment. This was almost equivalent to translation to a better world for the prisoner. He entered into the Governor's ideas with eager interest, and displayed such capacity for the work that he returned no more to the deadly dull routine of prison tasks.

One probably unique incident Bellenger himself told me, and it found no place in his book. He was not proud of it. He regarded it as a declension.

He was busy at work one afternoon in the private office, coloring a plan of some intended alterations, when a visitor was announced, and presently the Governor brought him in with him.

He was a tall gentleman, clad in a frieze ulster and a top hat. He had come to get some points concerning some improvements at N—— Jail. And the Governor went into the matter with him *con amore*.

The room was well warmed, and the visitor was

heavily clad. Presently he threw off his big coat, and when the Governor, in explanation of some detail of the business he had come upon, took him into an adjoining room, hat and coat and umbrella lay there on the chair, shouting dumbly of the freedom of the outside world.

Bellenger had never had thought or wish to escape. The possibility of it had never occurred to him, and here it was suddenly pushed right under his nose. Scarcely knowing what he did he found himself in a moment inside that big ulster which reached down to his heels. He turned up the collar, clapped the hat on his head, picked up the umbrella, walked out into the passage, and down it into the vaulted entrance hall, waited quietly while the warder unlocked the door for, as he supposed, the Governor's visitor, whom he had admitted a short time before, and so into the street.

He has assured me that it was not till he found himself at the end of the street that he quite knew what he was about. Then he turned on his heel and walked back to the prison.

He rapped on the door, passed through in front of the warder, who supposed he had forgotten something, and so back into the Governor's office.

The Governor and his visitor were standing there,

looking at one another in amazement. Their amazement doubled at sight of the prisoner walking quietly in and taking off the missing garments.

"What the—dooce—is the meaning of this?" choked the Governor.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Bellenger. "It came upon me like a fit at sight of the things lying there. I was at the bottom of the street before I realized what I was about."

"You were—at the bottom of the street?" gasped the Governor. "Well, I'll be——"

"And what brought you back?" asked the visitor.

"I came to my senses, that was all. I have never had the slightest desire to escape. In fact——"

"In fact——?" queried the visitor.

"I need never have come here at all if I had not thought it my duty to do so."

"Is he quite right in the head?" asked the visitor.

"He's right enough," said the Governor, "and it's perfectly true what he says."

"Well, I should keep an eye on him if I were you"; and the visitor got into his coat and hat, and took his departure as quickly as possible.

"That was a poor return for my kindness to you," said the Governor, when his visitor had left.

"It was, sir, but if I hadn't come back it would have been worse."

"You might have made very serious trouble for us all."

"It was not even that which brought me back. I suppose it was the instinct of the caged for freedom took me out. As soon as I came to myself I came back."

"Instincts have no place in prisons. Shall I send you back to your old work, or——?"

"It won't happen again, sir."

The Governor could ill spare him, and so kept him on; but at the same time kept a sharp eye on him, as his visitor had suggested. But it was his first and last attempt at escape, and I have only told the story because it gives one a little insight into the man's character.

The most troublesome prisoner in Helstone while Bellenger was there was a negro sailor or 'longshore loafer, who was entered on the books as Napoleon Buonaparte, but went generally by the name of Black Sam.

He was in for murderous assault, and when the Judge sentenced him he stooped quickly and before the warders knew what he was at had flung his heavy boot at the judicial wig. It took effect, and

his Lordship lay in bed three days with a broken head, and Napoleon's original term was lengthened by twelve months. He was lazy and he was violent, and much of his time was spent in the punishment cells. His original sentence called for floggings at stated periods, and the rest of the convicts were treated to the spectacle as a deterrent to their own evil tempers.

Napoleon howled like a steam siren while the punishment was under way, but the moment he was cast loose he took to cursing his jailers and all and sundry in most blood-curdling fashion. He undertook to pulp the warder who had mishandled him, to rip the Governor into cats' meat, and to Bellenger, who was taking down an official shorthand note for the Governor for inscription in the journal, he howled: "I'll eat yo' heart, yo' white-faced skunk!" and Bellenger thought no more of it—till afterward.

One day, the prisoners were taking their usual exercise along the strictly defined lines of the flagged paths, circling round and round like a kindergarten illustration of the planetary system, while the Governor surveyed them like a benevolent but strictly disciplinary sun. Bellenger came out of the office to consult the Governor on some point in connection

with his work, and stood for a moment by his side till he should be pleased to attend to him.

It was a melancholy procession—the rough, coarse faces, the downcast eyes, the prison gait, the all-pervading hopelessness, as depressing a jaunt as one may see.

The Governor turned his back on it at last and gave his attention to Bellenger. They were discussing the point at issue when a sudden warning shout broke from the warder in charge. Bellenger heard the quick pad of feet behind him, and had just time to turn and catch on his upthrown left arm a smashing blow intended for the Governor's head. It was the big negro bent on his revenge. The warders had him down in a moment, but he fought so savagely that it took four of them to punch him into submission. It was a bruised and bleeding Napoleon they conveyed at last to the cells, and a badly bruised and broken Bellenger that sat in the office waiting for the doctor to set his arm. The black had been at work on some repairs, and had managed to conceal about him a short length of rusty iron piping that he had dug up. It was only a foot long, but it was enough to smash in a man's head, and he had done his best with it.

Black Sam got a long spell of solitary confine-

ment and a general curtailment of even the narrow privileges of a prison, and the biggest flogging he had ever had in his life. To Bellenger the Governor said little, but what he said was to the point, and he showed what he felt in ways that were stronger than words.

The black was in the hospital for some days after his punishment, and there he and Bellenger came into contact again.

Bellenger, with his left arm in a sling, was serving at the moment as extra hospital orderly—work which appealed very strongly to him. Under his charge, among others, was an elderly man doing time for fraud. He was in weak health and the lowest of spirits, and Bellenger did all he could for him on both counts.

The old fellow, Balshaw, he called himself when he was not known by a number, would lie for days without speaking a word, except in necessary reply to the doctor's questions. Bellenger did his best to rouse him with cheerful talk and sympathetic attention to his wants, but made little progress with him. His attempts, however, excited much blasphemous comment from the black, who seemed filled with altogether unreasoning venom against him, the greater because Bellenger paid no heed to his words,

but gave him equal care and attention with the rest.

Except for that one instinctive lapse into the stranger's coat and hat, Bellenger proved himself a model prisoner, and at last the time came slowly round when the doors opened for him, and he was free to go.

The kindly Governor would have kept him on as his clerk or private secretary, but Bellenger thanked him cordially, and said that his work lay outside.

"You'll find it hard, you know," said the Governor.

"I expect so, sir; but it will get easier as time passes. But I have got certain things to do, and I could not do them here. I'm going to pay back that money I—borrowed—from my late employer; and there is a little lad waiting for me as soon as I can claim him."

"I wish I could be of any service to you."

"I'm afraid not, sir. A reference to the Governor of Helstone Jail might not help me much," Bellenger replied with a smile.

"I should like to know how you get on. You've made me interested in you."

"That is very kind of you, sir. I shall not forget it."

"Where are you going first?"

"To see my boy. I am hungry for a sight of him. Then—I don't know. I have friends in Cuddiford still. Perhaps I can find something through them."

"Well, good-bye, and better luck to you. I think you'll live it down."

"I intend to, sir, and I thank you again. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER V.

BACK TO LIFE.

It was a novel sensation to him, this freedom to go where he chose, do what he chose, speak when he chose to any man he met, to dawdle, run, or shout, and no man to have the right to say him nay. He had never known before all that freedom meant, because he had never before suffered imprisonment.

It was hard to walk quietly through the streets to the station. He wanted to put his grand new power of liberty to fuller test. He would have liked to wander in green fields—and smell trees again; but the streets were deep with mud, and the fields, when he saw them from the train, were heavy brown mould, and the trees were naked skeletons swinging their black bones sadly in the winter wind.

He stopped before shop windows and admired them as though he had never seen shop windows before. Besides the money due to him from the prison, the Governor had given him a sovereign. The feel of money was delightful to him again. Seeing a toy-shop he went in and bought a wooden horse and a cart with a tilt for Jackie. He had

never enjoyed buying anything so much in his life before. He began to feel himself again. Newspapers he had had an occasional glance at in the Governor's office, so he knew generally how the world had been wagging in his absence. He bought one now for himself; and at the same place bought a briar pipe and some tobacco, and then turned into a small restaurant which offered the temptation of a smoking-room to its customers. He called for tea and toast, and smoked a pipe with much enjoyment while it was getting ready. He talked to the waitresses and to another man who came in. Not that he particularly cared to talk to them—he was anything but a talkative man as a rule—but talking to them was an expression and confirmation of his liberty.

In the train he tried to talk to the only other man in his carriage. But he was a commercial traveller returning home from a bad journey, and was in the dumps and would only growl through his smoke.

Cuddiford at last, and just the thick, muggy kind of an evening that showed Cuddiford at its worst.

He went straight to Martha Platt's cottage. His knock was followed by the harsh scraping of chairs on the brick floor, and Martha herself flung open the door, and at sight of him cried, joyfully, "Jackie!"

And Jackie hurled himself into his father's arms, and was clasped very tight for a minute or two, while hot kisses rained upon him, and his hair was softly stroked by a hand that trembled though it was strong, and then he was set on his feet to show how he had grown and what a fine sturdy lad he was becoming.

Martha and her sister gave the traveller motherly welcome, and he knew again that in the eyes of two good old women, at all events, he was none the worse for what had befallen him.

He went along after tea to see Robson Baite, who also gave him warm welcome.

'Here's John Bellenger home again, Meg," he cried, dragging Bellenger into the dining-room. "Sit right down, and have some coffee and a smoke. Remember the last coffee and smoke we had, when I did my very best to persuade you not to be a fool? I've always considered you were, you know, in that matter. If you'd let me have a free hand——" and so he rattled on, just to smooth Bellenger's path and round off corners.

But Mrs. Baite's welcome was as warm as her husband's. She had been very friendly with Mrs. Bellenger, and she knew that what Bellenger had done he had done solely for her sake, with his eyes

wide open to the consequences to himself. No jury of women would ever have condemned him, she had told her husband, and he quite agreed with her.

"You're looking first-rate," said Baite. "Seems to have agreed with you."

"I am all right, and don't feel one bit the worse, bodily, mentally, or spiritually," said Bellenger.

"What a fine boy Jackie is getting!" said Mrs. Baite. "Did he know you?"

"He knew of me at all events—and was expecting me. Those two dear old souls have kept me alive to him. He came at me like a thunderbolt."

"He's a dear little fellow," she said, with a sigh. Her own boy had died before he was a year old. "Will you be taking him away with you?"

"Not at once. I must find something to do first. And even then not for some time, perhaps. I want to pay back the whole of that money to Bartram, and I must live very small till that's done. Jackie will be the prize I work for. Every pound I pay off will bring him so much nearer to me."

"The old skinflint!" said Baite, hotly. "I bet you he's cursed himself a thousand times for not lending you that money, and he's paid through the nose for it. He'd got out of touch with the folk you used to deal with, and many of them took offence at his stiff

ways. Then the Northern Counties have opened a branch here, and they took a good deal of business from him. Serves him right—cast-iron old humbug! I'm inclined to think he'd be glad to have you back in spite of what's passed."

"I couldn't do that. My idea is to get right away and make a clean start."

"Nobody who knows all the facts thinks a bit the worse of you, I'm quite sure," said Mrs. Baite.

But he shook his head. "I'd sooner start afresh, where it could never be cast back at my boy that his father had been in prison. I was wondering if you knew of any opening at all," he said, looking wistfully at Baite. "And I want to ask how you'll feel if I have to refer anyone to you as to my character. It's a ticklish thing, I know; and the sorest part of the business to me. But I think you know me well enough——"

"My dear fellow, refer 'em all to me—as many as you like. If you'd taken my advice over that last cup of coffee, you'd have had no trouble of this kind, you know."

"That will be a great help to me. All I want is to get into harness again and I'll work like a horse."

Baite slapped his knee suddenly. "I've got the very thing for you, if it's not too late. My brother

Jim—you've heard me speak of him—he's got a paper-mill up at Bassenden Foot. He wrote me about ten days ago, asking if I could find him a book-keeper. It's not much—thirty shillings a week, I think he said. But it would be a start——"

"I'll be glad of it."

"I'll write this minute and ask him if it's still open. You two go on talking. I won't be five seconds." He scribbled a note at his wife's writing-table in the window, and sent the maid off with it to the post at once.

"It's not much of a business, I'm afraid. That mill never has paid, and I told Jim he was a fool to take it up. But he would do it, and it's all the better for you, old man."

Jackie and his father spent the next day with the Baites, and they all went to chapel together. Bellenger would have preferred stopping at home with Jackie, but Mr. Baite, who had stoutly championed his cause throughout, urged him to come with them, and, as he said, "let folks see you're not feeling any the worse. And, besides, I bet you they'll be glad to see you and tell you so."

But he had too generously gauged other people's feelings by his own. Some few indeed came up and spoke to Bellenger and welcomed him home, but

many, who in old times would have been the first to greet him, only looked at him curiously and got away as quickly as they could—apparently lest he should speak to them, which was the very last thing he would have thought of doing. The pastor, after service, came down and shook him by the hand, but there was frost in the air generally, and even the pastoral greeting seemed to him to have a thin coat of ice on it. No doubt Bellenger was hyper-sensitive, but he could not but notice the chilliness of the atmosphere, and his face and his manner stiffened under it. It was his first taste of the excommunication of public opinion, and it hit him hard.

He walked home with Jackie's warm little hand wriggling in his; Baite on one side and Mrs. Baite on the other, talking more than their wont, to make up for other people's silence. And warm-hearted Robson Baite was very angry with his neighbors, though he said nothing about it, and did not show it. Only, when he was alone with his wife, he said hotly, "Your Cuddiford people run milk in their veins instead of blood." And Mrs. Baite said, "They very soon forget. I'm surprised at them."

Next morning Baite came swinging round to Martha Platt's cottage, with a telegram from his brother at Bassenden Foot.

"Here you are, Bellenger," he cried, with great heartiness. " 'Send your man along at once.—Jim.' That's all right. I'll give you a letter to him; and I've been thinking—if I were you I'd change my name—for a time at all events. Now, don't ruffle up! Yesterday gave me a taste of the milk of human kindness, and I tell you it's thin-skim and deucedly sour at times. But you've got to take it as you find it, and it's not a bit of good making it any sourer than it is. I understand just how you feel, my boy, but it's just as easy to go soft as to go hard, and a sight more comfortable. Take my advice now."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SMOOTH AND THE ROUGH.

THE upshot of their discussion was that two days later the vacant stool in the little glass office at Bassenden Foot Paper Mill was occupied by the new clerk, John Bell, who brought with him from Mr. Robson Baite a letter of strong recommendation as to his personal character, though it said practically nothing about his antecedents, and Mr. James Baite was highly pleased with his new employé.

Mr. Baite himself was a somewhat fussy, self-opinionated man, with no practical knowledge of the business he was in, and largely dependent on his manager for what little understanding he had of it. He had married money, had made an advance to the late owner of the mill on mortgage, and had had to foreclose. And, as a paper-mill improves no more than anything else by lying idle, he had started to run it himself till someone else should be found desirous of doing so.

He rode over two or three times a week from his big house, Basen Hall, which lay some four miles away down in the valley, and strolled round the mill

with his hands in his pockets and a cigar in his mouth, and occasionally fished out a handful of pulp from the tanks and looked knowingly at it. But the practical working of the business was in the hands of the manager, Abraham Fellows—who had been in charge for many years, and had seen more than one change of proprietor.

The hard-headed common-sense of the county wondered at times if Fellows was the best man for the post, and if a change in the management might not have produced a change in the fortunes of the mill. But the fact was, Bassenden Foot was a very long way out of the world—away over the moors and up among the hills—and it was not everyone who would put up with the exile for the none too magnificent salary offered. The country round about, however, was very beautiful, especially to eyes whose late horizon had been the high stone walls of a prison. The very loneliness and out-of-the-worldliness of it commended it greatly to John Bell, and he settled to his new work with a sigh of great content, and the resolution to do it to the very best of his powers.

He found lodgings in the village, and reckoned that by close economy, after sending five shillings a week to Martha Platt for Jackie's keep, he could

save ten shillings a week of his salary. In two years he could repay Bartram every penny he had had from him. Perhaps before that time, when he got more settled down, and if things were shaping well, he might venture to have Jackie with him, and that was the thing he craved most in the world.

Meanwhile the slow, remote life was full of quiet enjoyment for him. He scrimped on his own share of the thirty shillings to buy a few books, but he could not afford very many. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays he spent much time on the hills, followed the foaming brown Basen from the turbines at the mill almost up to its source in High Tor, discovered quiet little rocky pools where he bathed at times when the weather was warm, and promised himself to teach Jackie to swim when the good time came. He read much, thought more, and began to put down his ideas and experiences on paper, and found therein a new and growing enjoyment. He would have been quite content to pass the rest of his life there on thirty shillings a week, and said to himself that, once his debt was paid, and his boy his own again, he would have little left to wish for.

Each week he wrote to Jackie in big capital letters, which Jackie had hardly yet mastered, but was

striving manfully to attain to. And each week he received from Martha a few words telling that the boy was well and happy, and a sheet of hieroglyphics from Jackie himself, which evidently meant more than appeared on the surface, and were treasured beyond price for the hidden meanings which the receiver read into them.

His work in the mill was easily within his grasp. With Mr. Baite he did not come personally much into contact, and with the rest of the small staff he got on well enough. They looked upon him as unnecessarily reserved and inclined to be "stuck up," and were first disposed to resent it. But his unfailing good humor and readiness to help wherever a hand could be given disarmed them by degrees, and they put up with the reserve for the sake of the all-round assistance he gave them.

The manager, Fellows, however, he found a somewhat difficult man to get on with. He was domineering and overbearing, and "sat" upon the office generally. He seemed to have his suspicions from the first that the newcomer might have been introduced with the idea of ultimately taking his place. He recognized in him intelligence and business capabilities beyond the general run of thirty-shilling-a-week clerks in a paper mill, and he at once assumed a

position of armed neutrality with regard to him which afforded Bell no little amusement.

Fellows was constantly trying to surprise him into an exhibition of a knowledge of paper-making which he did not in the least possess; and he showed himself extremely jealous of the newcomer exhibiting any interest in the business outside the glass walls of the office. The processes of paper-making were full of interest to Bell, and he would have liked to study them with a view to a fuller understanding. But the manager would have none of it; and sooner than risk a collision, Bell kept his tongue from inquiries, though he could hardly keep his eyes from seeing much that went on.

Suspicion inevitably breeds suspicion. Bell acknowledged to himself that the manager's ideas concerning himself might not be unnatural, but he came by degrees to wonder if there might not be, on other counts, some grounds for Mr. Fellows' fears concerning his own position.

As to the manager's suitability for his post he could of course say nothing, since he knew nothing whatever of paper-making. But, in spite of his own experiences, he thought he knew an honest man when he saw one, and somehow Abraham Fellows did not entirely fill his ideas of one. There was a

furtive look in his eyes at times, which might indeed be born of his own suspicion of others, but which might equally arise from fears of other people's suspicions of himself. And whether there was anything more behind that stealthy outlook than fear of being superseded, Bell could not for a long time tell. Accident furnished him with a further possible clue.

His own book-keeping work chiefly concerned the stock—the incoming heterogeneous raw material and the outgoing paper. The accounts and all cash matters were in the hands of Mr. Fellows and a young man named Brown, who acted as cashier and seemed to have the manager's confidence.

One day, when Brown was posting from cash book to ledger, Bell came up to consult him on some item of his work, and the cash book lay open before him. His eye had, in its time, been so accustomed to running up totals that it ran over that cash book instinctively, and he saw that the total of the cash received was incorrect according to the items. The amount as entered made the curiously coincident total of £222 2s. 2d., and he wondered momentarily what the average of chances was against such a conjunction. It was with a slight feeling of regret that he saw that the total should have been £225 2s. 2d.

That was nothing. Anyone is liable to make a mistake. He simply said:

"There's a mistake there. Your total's wrong."

"That so?" said Brown. "Where?" and slowly added it up. "Yes," he said, as he inserted the correct amount in pencil. "He's always making mistakes, and I'm always finding 'em out—and he doesn't like it," he added, with a grin.

Bell thought no more of the matter at the time. But no further opportunities of discovering mistakes in the cash book were permitted him. Thereafter it was kept in the manager's private office, and Brown did his posting there.

Mr. Baite, when he wandered about the mill, was always very genial to his employés. Certainly, it was the irresponsible joviality of the capitalist who can afford, without loss of dignity, to pass a joke with those who labor on his behalf, but over whom he is not called upon to exercise any personal control. But it was a decided change from the manager's surly, overbearing humor. From the dusty girls in the rag-sorting room to Henderson, the old Scotch engineer, who looked after the machinery, everyone greeted his coming with a smile. He would casually ask Miss Maggie Henderson, the head of the sorters, if she had found any diamonds sewn up

in any of the rags, or something equally absurd, and solemnly remark to her father that the sight of so much water running to waste must make him terribly thirsty, and suggest that an infusion of whisky might have an exhilarating effect upon the turbines.

He strolled up to Bell one day when he was checking in a new delivery of esparto.

"Well, Bell, settling comfortably to the collar?" he asked, as he had already asked a dozen times before.

"Quite comfortably, thank you, Mr. Baite."

"That's right. I like to see folks happy. Seen my whip round here? I've stuck it in some corner or other. Let me see—where did I light this cigar? In the office, I think. Would you mind slipping in and seeing if it's there? You're limberer than I am. Then I'll go out this way."

Bell put down his book and pencil, and went along to the office. The dinner-hour had just struck and the office was empty. The manager's office was locked, but the key was in the door. He turned it and went in. The hunting crop lay in Mr. Fellows' chair, and on the desk lay the cash book, open, and moreover, as it happened, open at exactly the same page as it had been that other day a month previously. He knew it by the curious total in which

he had pointed out the mistake to Brown. To his surprise, the mistake had not been corrected, and Brown's pencilled figures had been rubbed out. He saw all that at a glance, and it struck him as so very odd that he could not refrain from running his eye up the column again to make sure. To his very much greater surprise, the addition came out correctly this time.

He heard quick steps coming along toward the office, and thinking it might be Mr. Baite coming after his whip, he picked it up and hurried to meet him. It was not Mr. Baite, however, but Mr. Fellows; and when the manager saw that he had come out of his private room his face twisted into a black scowl.

"What the devil are you doing in there?" he growled.

"Mr. Baite asked me to get his whip."

The manager muttered something and went on into his room.

Bell pondered this whole matter not a little. He had a pretty shrewd suspicion that things were not as they should be. But it was only a suspicion, and he is a foolish man who stirs up trouble without very adequate grounds to go upon.

At the end of his first six months he had managed

to send £10 to Robson Baite for account of Silas Bartram, and had received Bartram's receipt by the same means. He had a few pounds in hand toward the next ten, and was living a quiet and contented life, desiring nothing more at the moment than its continuance and the much longed-for company of his boy. At times that longing grew so great that he was sorely tempted to send for him. The one thing that kept him from doing so was the ill-feeling evinced for himself by Mr. Abraham Fellows. He felt certain in his own mind that the manager was not running straight, and that he was feathering his own nest, or at all events playing for his own hand, at Mr. Baite's expense. If he had had anything definite to go upon he would have gone straight to Mr. Baite and told him so. But he had nothing more than his own belief, founded on that very slight incident of the cash book, and a general feeling of mistrust of the man. Then an incident occurred which gave the manager the whip hand, and ended John Bell's career at Bassenden Foot.

One Saturday, a day on which Mr. Baite never turned up, Mr. Fellows had a visitor. After a look over the mill they were closeted together most of the morning in the manager's room. He was an elderly man, tall, thin, well-dressed, and possessed

of a quick-glancing eye, and Bell recognized him instantly. He had nursed him too many days in the hospital at Helstone Jail not to know him again. He bent over his books, and hoped the recognition was not mutual.

The visitor was still closeted with Mr. Fellows when the dinner-bell rang and the week's work was over. Bell got away as unobtrusively as possible, and flattered himself that the other had not seen him.

It was quite a fortnight later when Mr. Baite called him into the manager's office one day, just as he was going out for dinner, and with some hemming and hawing, said: "Er—Bell—would you—er—mind answering me a question or two? Very unpleasant of course—er—but—er—is Bell your proper name?"

"No, my name is John Bellenger, Mr. Baite."

And Mr. Fellows, who was at his desk, pretending to be busy writing, gave a sniff and jerked up his head with a quick look at Mr. Baite. To Bell it seemed to say, "I told you so."

"H'm! And why, may I ask——"

"Your brother knows all about me, Mr. Baite. It was he who was good enough to recommend me to you."

"Yes, I know. But he said nothing of all this. I'm surprised at him."

"I may say that it was his suggestion that I should adopt another name."

"Very extraordinary. Robson's no fool as a rule——"

"Mr. Robson Baite is anything but a fool, and he has acted the part of a very good friend to me."

"You had—er—been in trouble?"

"I had been in trouble—under perhaps rather peculiar circumstances. What I did I did deliberately with my eyes open to the consequences, and I did it for someone else, not for myself. I took the consequences, and am doing my best to make reparation."

"If the circumstances occurred again you might do it again?"

"No," said Bell, slowly, "the circumstances could not occur again. What I did was this, Mr. Baite. My wife was dying; the doctors said I must take her south. The chance of recovery was small, but it was her only chance. I begged my employer, Silas Bartram, the banker, to advance me some of my salary. He declined. I took it, and left him my undertaking to repay him. I took my wife to Bournemouth, and she died there. Then I came

back and took my punishment. I have since repaid part of the money. I intend to repay every penny of it. Your brother knows every circumstance of the case, and acted for me throughout. He would have got me off free, he said. But I preferred going through with the matter. I do not consider that I stole the money. I never intended that Bartram should lose a farthing. But I broke the law, and I had to pay the penalty."

"H'm!" said Mr. Baite, doubtfully; and Mr. Fellows vented his own feelings in a disdainful snort. "I'm afraid——"

"I quite understand how it all looks to you, and I suppose you would sooner I left. Before I go I would like to say in Mr. Fellows' presence that I quite understand why he wants me out of the way."

"Eh? What's that?" said Fellows, getting up with a jump.

"That man you had here one Saturday about a fortnight ago was in Helstone Jail with me. I nursed him in the hospital there. I hoped he did not recognize me, but I see he did. He was closeted with you in this room all day. He was in jail for fraud. If you take my advice, Mr. Baite, you will look after your own interests here——"

"What do you mean, you——?" began Fellows.

"And if you put an accountant on to the books I should not be a bit surprised if you found out several things that would astonish you. If you lay a finger on me, Fellows"—as the manager made a threatening movement toward him—"I'll mop you round the office, big man as you are. Look at him, Mr. Baite. Is that the face of an honest man? Will you trust your cash book to me for half-an-hour while Mr. Baite's here, Fellows?"

"If you're not out of this place inside half-an-hour I'll hand you over to the police," said Fellows, hotly.

"Oh? And what for?"

"Never mind what for. We'll see about that."

"Then I'll sit right down here and wait for them; and, as you say, we'll see about that. You can't bully me with your threats, man. I've had my suspicions for a long time past——"

"Who cares a hang for your suspicions—you jailbird?"

"Mr. Baite does, I think, and he'll find it pay him to do so. Your plan, I imagine, is to run the mill into the ground—so that Mr. Baite will be glad to get out of it. Then your old swindler will come along and buy it at a knock-down price, and you'll have your finger in the dirty pie. A nice little game, but I hope I've upset it."

"By gad! I'll knock you——"

"If you come one step nearer I'll drive this ruler down your throat," said Bell, and he picked up a heavy ebony ruler.

Mr. Baite was in a state of extreme discomfort. He hated a row. He liked all things to run smoothly and quietly. But the fact that the mill did not pay had been a sore point with him for some time past. His eyes were being opened somewhat violently, and he did not enjoy the process. He looked at the two men—Fellows on the verge of apoplexy with rage; Bell cold and quiet, but no less excited.

"Be quiet, Fellows," he said at last. "If there's nothing in this there's no need to get angry about it."

"If—if——" foamed Fellows.

"Let me see your cash book," said Bell. "I've never seen but one page of it, but if they're all the same I'll stand or fall by it."

"If Mr. Baite likes to send in an accountant he's welcome to. Who are you that I should submit my books to you, I'd like to know?"

"I've seen enough of books to know when they're being tampered with," said Bell.

"Yes, you know too much about that kind of thing."

"It's you we're discussing just now. If you take my advice, Mr. Baite, you'll take the cash book and ledger away with you now, and put your own accountant on to them."

"I've no objection," said Fellows, calming down suddenly. "Of course, you understand, sir, that would be tantamount to saying you distrust me, and I couldn't think of stopping here if you see fit to take that course. I'm not the man to stop on where I'm not trusted."

"Quite so, Fellows, quite so," said Mr. Baite.

He was extremely upset. His suspicions were fairly aroused. But he felt himself in a tight corner. If he insisted on taking the books the mill would be left without a manager, and paper-mills don't run themselves. He was an easy-going, prosperous country gentleman, and knew little more about paper than most people do, except indeed that from his own experience it was unprofitable work making it. But the Baite family did not lack brains, and he saw his only plan was to temporize. If Fellows had been "rigging" things, as Bell hinted, it was not likely he would or could do much more within the next few days. He would wire to his Manchester solicitors to find him a manager to fall back on in case of need, and then have a rake over the books.

"I'm afraid you've gone too far in your anger, Bell," he said. "And, of course, you couldn't stop here after this. You and Mr. Fellows would be at one another's throats all the time."

"All right, Mr. Baite, I'll move on," said Bell.

"I don't like turning you off at a moment's notice like this. You will give him a month's wages, Fellows. Give it him now. I don't want any fighting after I'm gone."

The manager got out the money and counted out a month's wages.

"I'm obliged to you, Mr. Baite," said Bell. "Take my advice and don't let the matter stop here. Good-day, sir!" And he left them in the office and went out through the mill to the street, and home to his lodgings.

He was sorry to go. He had been, on the whole, very comfortable at Bassenden Foot, and it put Jackie further away from him. He was glad the explosion had come before he had got him over from Cuddiford. He knew now that the expectation of something of the kind happening had been with him for some time past, and now that it had come he was not greatly surprised. The manager's dislike had been too clearly evidenced.

He wondered much if Mr. Baite would let matters rest as they were. He was half-inclined to go across

to Basen Hall and urge him to action. But it seemed to him that he had done all he was called upon to do. Anything more would seem like venom. If Mr. Baite chose to shut his eyes and ears to the warning it was his own look-out.

He wrote to Robson Baite at Cuddiford telling him just what had taken place, and enlarged somewhat to him upon his own suspicions of Fellows. He had little doubt that Robson would press his brother to an overhaul of the books, and he asked him to let him know the result if it took place. He would be interested to learn if his estimate of Abraham Fellows was a correct one. He promised to send his new address as soon as he got one, but gave no indication of his next move.

He hesitated for some time as to whether he should not ask Mr. Baite for a character, and decided at last that it was doubtful how he would receive such a request. He could always get one, however, from Robson Baite, of Cuddiford.

So, as there was nothing to keep him at Bassenden Foot, he packed up his few belongings, to be sent wherever he might direct, and set out next morning to cross the hills on foot to Crowleston, the most thriving town in the neighborhood, where he hoped to find work of one kind or another.

He loitered among the hills with great enjoyment, and spent two full days on the road. As he said to himself, if he found work at Crowleston it was little more of the hills he would get, so it behove him to make the most of them while he had the chance. For Crowleston lay round its coal-pits in the waste country, and was a place of factories and belching chimneys and all uncleanness, where nothing would grow because of the all-pervading smoke and chemical fumes, and even the people were puny, white-faced creatures who seemed to wilt away with the rest of Nature's products.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM PILLAR TO POST.

For twelve bitter months he fought at Crowleston the all too common losing fight of the man under a cloud. He had three places in that time, gave satisfaction in each, until upon each a sudden frost settled, and it was intimated to him in one way or another, but always unmistakably, that his presence was no longer desired.

Robson Baite had written him at once, as soon as he sent his address, and had thoughtfully enclosed a letter of recommendation, which proved of the greatest service to him.

A couple of weeks later he wrote again, giving him the latest news from Bassenden Foot. Mr. Baite, having heard of another manager, had suddenly introduced an accountant into the office. That same night Mr. Fellows departed hastily and returned no more. The result of the accountant's work fully justified Bell's suspicions, and Mr. Baite intimated through his brother that if he cared to come back he would be welcome. Bell was tempted, for the news reached him at a despondent time, before he had found work at Crowleston. But he

felt doubtful if he could ever feel comfortable again at Bassenden, as Fellows would be certain to have talked about him, and he determined not to be beaten by Crowleston till he had given it a fair trial.

He got a place a few days later in the busy office of one of the great chemical works, for which Crowleston is at once famous and infamous, at the same salary as he had had at Bassenden Foot. The work was novel and interesting. He tackled it with a determination to give satisfaction, and settled down for what he hoped would be a long spell in Crowleston, though the outside surroundings were little to his taste. It took at least a generation to feel at home in that land of smells and slag heaps. Only those born to it, and who had never in their lives known anything better, could suffer it with anything like contentment.

But within a couple of months, and just when he was congratulating himself on having got acclimatized to some of the vilest smells that the ingenuity of man can devise, the manager of his department called him in quietly one morning, and told him he was sorry to part with him, but unfortunately he found it necessary to make a reduction in the staff, and so on. It was very delicately put, but Bell knew what it meant, and went without a word.

Very much the same thing happened at two other places he got there. Whose the malign influence that blighted his prospects wherever he went he never could find out, but the fact remained—and a hard, bitter fact it was—the endless ripple of his crime.

The atmosphere at Crowleston was at all times depressing, but as door after door closed behind him, he grew so despondent that at times he was more than half inclined to throw up the sponge and have done with it all. He was overmatched—and the fighting was not fair. Some unseen enemy was constantly shooting at him from behind hedges, and stabbing his unprotected back; and he grew sick to death of it all. Only the thought of his boy, left alone if he went, kept him from opening the final door for himself, and time after time that thought screwed him back to the forlorn hope. He never said very much about these dark days, but he has said that the days he spent in Helstone were light compared with them. Then he had hope. Now hope was slowly dying in him. If Jackie had been with his mother there is little doubt that he would have followed them—as far as he was able.

Long after he left Crowleston he used to awaken suddenly in the night, shuddering back from those

dark pools among the slag heaps which he had to pass on his despondent rounds in search of employment. The slimy, pestiferous things lay in wait for him round every corner as he tramped doggedly day after day, from one impulse to another. "Here you are! Now's your chance! You're out and you'll never get in. Just one jump and end it all," so they cried to him. And he would set his teeth and avert his eyes lest the invitation should be too strong for him, and as he stumbled on he came to doubt at times if they were not right and he a fool to struggle longer.

At night in his room, when he had made some tea and eaten his bread, often without even a scrap of dripping to flavor it—for funds were low and Martha Platt never once failed to receive her five shillings a week for Jackie—he would smoke a cheap pipeful, and read by the guttering candle, and so for a time escape into a wider world.

Then out again on the morrow for another weary round, with its endless repulses and the mocking invitation of the slag-pools. A heart-breaking time, and the recollection of it never left him.

After his third ejection, from a post where he was giving every satisfaction, for no adequate reason, though he had been as sensible of its coming as is

the autumn flower of the coming of the first night frost, he decided to make a complete break.

How he had longed for the sweet, bracing air of the Bassenden hills, and the slow, quiet life of the village by the brawling brown river! How he regretted now the hyper-sensitiveness which had made him reject Mr. Baite's offer. He wrote to Robson Baite to inquire if the position was still open. But it was too late; the place had been filled.

Crowleston was working into his blood and thinning it to dirty water. If he stopped there much longer, rambling about the filthy streets and among those suicidal slag heaps, he knew the poisonous pools would get the better of him.

The coast lay some twenty miles to the west. He packed his things one day, in a sudden fury of revolt against his surroundings, paid his rent, told his landlady to keep his box till he sent for it, and shook off the grime and smells of Crowleston forever.

He tramped away through the scarred desolations among which the town lay like a hideous vampire, till he came to blessed green fields, and trees with leaves on them, and his shoulders braced themselves to the clean, sweet air, and he fancied he could already smell the salt in it.

There were towns and villages scattered along the

coast. He would find the quietest and most distant and take what work he could get, and if none was to be had he would at all events die clean. One other matter he decided in his own mind as he tramped through sun and wind. He would take his own proper name and stand or fall by it. There was no compulsion on him, he thought, to enter into the details of his history. But at all events he would not cloak it.

He struck the coast at a little fishing village and spent two delightful days in it. But there was no work for him there, and he started off along the shore, with the wide, blue-green sea on his left and a long, wavering line of sandhills on the right.

He had not thought so lonely a region could exist in this over-populated England. He tramped for hours without meeting a soul, and it was well on into the afternoon before he came to a solitary fisherman's cottage and asked if they could take him in for the night. The old fish-wife looked askance at him at first, but thawed at sight of money, and offered to make him up some kind of a bed if he could put up with the best she could do. The sand had proved heavy walking and he would have been glad to put up with a couple of chairs and a blanket.

The old woman gave him an exceedingly great

supper of fried fish and coarse bread, and introduced him to novel faring in the shape of cockles and mussels. Her husband was out with his boat, and would not be back till the morning.

As Bell ate, she discoursed with the volubility of a lonely woman whose chances of talk were limited. She gave him the history of the family on both sides of the house for some generations back. Future history there would be none, both her boys having been drowned at the fishing. She had seen a railway train once but had never ventured upon one, and of things unconnected with the sea and boats and fishes and nets she was as ignorant as a savage. And yet a kind-hearted old soul, though her language was at times difficult of understanding. And when he had done eating, and pulled out his pipe, she joined him with a little black cutty which glowed just under her nose. And she derived so much enjoyment from his tobacco that he emptied his pouch into her trembling hand before he left in the morning, all except one pipeful for himself.

He slept like a top on the shakedown she made up for him, and which he shared with a comfortable black cat. He breakfasted very early on another plentiful supply of fish, sent the old lady into the seventh circle of happiness with a couple of shillings,

and set off again between the sandhills and the sea. As he passed through a tiny fishing village he bought some tobacco, of inferior quality but the best they had, and some biscuits to eat on the way, and tramped on along the crackling path formed by the flotsam and jetsam of the high spring tides.

Away in front, dancing like a mirage in the noonday vapors, he saw a spectral line of houses and knew them to be Wytham, the watering place where he hoped to find work. The houses were still rocking unsubstantially on the skyline when he climbed a sandhill to eat his biscuits and smoke a pipe and rest his legs. Behind him, inland, he saw the chimneys of a great stone house surrounded by trees. It looked very substantial and spoke of wealth. He mused upon the reasons which might have made a man of means bury himself in so great a solitude, and felt something of a fellow-feeling for him. Perhaps he had passed his life in the turmoil of the cities and grown weary of it. Perhaps he had made his money amid the crying desolations of Crowleston. To such a one, as to himself, the solitude of such a dwelling would carry infinite appeal.

At Wytham he found great choice of lodging, and settled himself at last in an unobtrusive hostelry near the station, which, since it sold no spiritu-

ous liquors, he imagined would be more suited to a slender pocket than one that did. It was a little temperance hotel—the resort of commercial travellers of frugal mind, who made a point of saving what they could out of their expenses for the benefit of wives and families at home. One such had left that morning's London "Standard" on the table in the gloomy little smoking-room, and as he sat there after his tea, watching some of the commercials busy over their letters, he picked the paper up and glanced over the news and cast a casual eye over the advertisements.

The word "Wytham" caught his eye.

"Wanted, private secretary, man of intelligence and education, good penman, must not object to country.—Apply by letter, J. A., Brant, Near Wytham, Sandshire."

He read it over several times, at first from curiosity, then thoughtfully and with growing purpose. Finally he went out to the little office and asked the landlady:

"Can you tell me where Brant is? Is it a place or a house? It's somewhere in this neighborhood, I believe."

"It's a big house about five miles away, sir—right among the sandhills; as lonely a place as ever you saw."

"Do you know who lives there?"

"Surely. It's the Alleynes' place. Mr. Justice Alleyne; you've heard tell of him, maybe. He's just retired and gone to live in the old place. It was his grandfather built it, close on a hundred years ago. A terrible lonely place, they say, but I've never been there myself."

He went back to the smoking-room and smoked several pipes, and watched the commercials finish their letters and grow hilarious over cups of coffee and cocoa. The place was too small to maintain the arbitrary lines of distinction between commercials and outsiders, but they did not recognize him as one of themselves. Either he was a new beginner and had had a bad day, they thought, or he was outside the commercial pale, and they left him alone. At times a flicker of amusement passed briefly across his face, but for the most part he smoked stolidly and seemed full of thought.

Before going to bed he went out and bought a clean collar and a pair of cuffs, as those he had with him in his small parcel were showing signs of distress and long usage.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNS.

TEN o'clock next morning found him footing it along the solitary high road which runs between Wytham and Wynsloe.

It was a crisp autumn morning; the smell of salt was in the air; the sun shone brightly but without much heat; the cattle in the long, lush, water-intersected meadows on either side raised their shaggy heads, and even stopped their slow-working jaws, to look at him till he passed safely out of sight. They seemed so very much surprised at the sight of him, and pondered the matter so heavily, that he laughed rudely in their faces more than once. They seemed to say each within himself, "Well, by Grass! there's a man! Now what in the name of butchers does he want walking along there? He's not got a smock on, it's true—but one never knows with men. Best keep an eye on him till he's out of sight." And up above him the clear, blue sky rang with the carolling of many larks and carried his thoughts up with their songs.

He came at last to a road striking off to the right toward the sea, and here a white fingerpost stated

in one word that Brant lay down that way. He had not met a single soul since he left Wytham.

Twenty minutes' walk down the by-road brought him to large, white, wooden gates, which again informed him emphatically that he had arrived at Brant. He passed through into a long, wooded drive, and came at last to the gray old house which he had seen from the sandhills the previous day.

His ring at the front door bell brought out in due course an ancient gray-haired serving-man, who eyed him with surprise, but apparently no disfavor.

"Can I see Sir James?" asked Bellenger.

"He's out i' th' grounds; but if yo' like to come in and wait he wunnot be long," said the old man. "What is it yo' want wi' him?"

"I've come to see if he'll try me as his private secretary," said Bellenger, with a smile.

"Ay, ay. Well, mebbe! It's a lonesome place till yo' get used to it. It's not iverybody could put up wi' it."

"I think I could put up with the loneliness for the sake of the place. It struck me as very pretty as I came along."

"Ay, ay. Well, that's a good job if he taks yo' on. But it's gey lonesome and it's worse i' winter. Sit yo' down till he comes."

They were in a comfortable study by this time. Books all round the walls, a cheerful wood fire on the hearth, windows looking out through the trees toward the sea, and a fragrant smell of mixed wood and tobacco smoke. Very comfortable indeed, thought Bellenger, and longed more ardently than ever for the place, and felt still more doubtful of getting it.

There came a shrill whistle outside and a peremptory call, then the scrabbling of canine feet in the hall, and Sir James Alleyne entered the room with a cheerful "Hello!" at the sight of his visitor.

He was tall, gray-haired and clean-shaven, but had permitted himself a tiny side-whisker on each fresh red cheek since he retired from active service, and this redeemed somewhat the severity of his face, and gave it a wide-awake, old-country-gentleman aspect, with a tendency toward horse, which was decidedly pleasant. He had always been regarded as a severe judge. If the counsel who had pleaded before him in the courts could have seen him now they would hardly have recognized him. Perhaps it was the fact that he was no longer dispensing justice and dealing out punishment to his fellowmen, but spending his days with Nature and

such higher thoughts as may well occupy the well-earned leisure of a busy man, which was imparting a more benevolent cast of countenance to one who had been known as "The Hanging Judge." He was dressed in an old Norfolk jacket, the belt of which hung down behind, and knickerbockers, and thick stockings, and thicker boots. Three dogs—a black spaniel, a yellow collie, and a black and white terrier—leaped about him.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully, as Bellenger stood up at his entrance.

"Young man come to be yo'r sec'tary," said the old waiting-man.

"Oh!" said the Judge. "You've answered in person, eh? Not come all the way from London on purpose, I hope?"

"No, sir. I happened to be in Wytham and saw your advertisement in the 'Standard' and thought I would try for the place."

"I see. Down, Lassie! Flick, you rascal, come here! Been out before? Bagot (to the old man), take the dogs with you; they're too lively for business."

"I have been in business, Sir James. Not as private secretary before."

"What kind of a fist do you write? Readable?

Just scrawl your name and address there and then I can judge"; and he pushed pen and paper along the table, and snipped a cigar while he watched at what speed his would-be secretary wrote.

Bellenger wrote his name in full, and for address put the Temperance Hotel, Wytham, and after a moment's hesitation added—No. 5, Marriott's Cottages, Cuddiford.

"John Bellenger—Cuddiford! I seem to have heard the name somewhere"; and he looked searchingly at Bellenger.

"Nearly four years ago, Sir James, you sent me to penal servitude for embezzlement at Cuddiford Assizes."

Sir James' match burnt his fingers as he gazed, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, with the cigar in purgatory between match and mouth.

"Well, I'm d——d!" he said at last, and then proceeded to light his cigar without ever taking his eyes off Bellenger.

Bellenger was about to speak again when Sir James put up a peremptory finger to silence him. He smoked thoughtfully with his eyes fixed on the young man's face in a somewhat disconcerting scrutiny. Bellenger was not quite sure whether he actually saw him or whether he was only using his,

face as a quickener of his memory. He returned his look quietly and straightforwardly.

"I remember," said the Judge at last. "I remember the case perfectly. Do you find any fault with my finding and sentence?"

"Not in the very least. I came home and gave myself up the day after I had buried my wife. My solicitor said he could arrange the matter and get me off free, but I would not allow him to try. I broke the law with my eyes open to the consequences. I wished to pay the penalty and start afresh. In my own conscience I was no criminal. In the eyes of the law I was, and I knew I must pay."

The Judge nodded.

"I served my time and gave satisfaction. The Governor of Helstone was very kind to me. Since then"——and he related briefly what had happened at Bassenden Foot and his trials at Crowleston.

"I know," said the Judge. "Only those who have tried it know quite how hard it is to step back to the ranks when once they've stepped out."

"It is very hard," said Bellenger. "I have almost begun to doubt if it be possible."

"Did you come here with the intention of telling me all this, even if I hadn't recognized you?"

"I did. I had got so sick of losing place after place under a false name that I had determined to use my own in future whatever the consequences might be. To another man I should not have told my story. As soon as I learned at the hotel last night who it was who required a secretary I made up my mind to see you and tell you the whole matter. I believed you would understand as another might not."

"It's an odd kind of recommendation you bring. Don't you think so?" asked Sir James, with something not far from a twinkle in his eye.

"I suppose it is," said Bellenger. "But, in spite of all that has passed, I consider myself an honest man. I was with Silas Bartram for twelve years. Hundreds of thousands of pounds passed through my hands, and there was never a penny missing. I begged him, almost on my knees, to lend me that money to afford my wife her one small chance of life. She died in the belief that he did so. I have been repaying him what I could ever since I came out, and intend that he shall have every penny of it back. Here are Mr. Robson Baite's acknowledgments of the amounts I have been able to send, and Bartram's own receipts. Here is a letter asking me to go back to Bassenden Foot——"

"Why didn't you go?"

"I had been very happy there—compared with Crowleston it was heaven—but I knew the people there could never be quite the same to me again. I was over-sensitive perhaps—for a criminal," he added, with a touch of bitterness.

"You'd have lived that down in time," said the Judge, with a nod through his smoke. "It was part of your punishment. You shouldn't have shirked it."

"I shirked none of my legal punishment. This other is supplementary—and I think unjust—though I'm afraid, as you say, the one is an inevitable part of the other."

"And you think you'd make a good secretary?"

"If faithful service and hard work, and—and—" he choked—"the gratitude of a very grateful man can make a good secretary, I should do well."

"Well, we'll try what all those good things can do for a man," said Sir James, kindly. "I've had to put many a man down. It'll be a novelty to try to build one up. Send for your things. The salary is thirty shillings a week. You live here, of course. You'll find it quiet in winter. One man I got on the thirty-first of October last year walked off the second week in November. I've had one a month since then."

"I will thank you in my work, Sir James. The quietness will be one of its greatest charms to me."

"How soon can you be here?"

"I will write at once for my box to be sent here from Crowleston. I have some small things at Wytham. I will walk over and be back this evening if that will do?"

"That will do, all right. And I'll take a holiday for the rest of the day."

"The fact that you know all about me is like the loosing of a steel fetter," said Bellenger, with strong emotion. "I cannot tell you the relief it is."

"I know," nodded the Judge. "It's just what a man feels when he's given himself up to face the music—only a good deal better.

"My man is going into Wytham this morning with the trap. He can give you a lift," he said, and added suddenly, "Gad! I think I'll go myself. It's a week since I set eyes on any man's face except the postman's, and he's the ugliest old fellow in Sandshire—after Bagot. Bagot runs him close. I think they must be relations. Do you know, Bellenger," he ran on—and Bellenger understood and appreciated the kindly tact that dictated it—"that dogs are on the whole much better-looking than men? How do you account for that now?"

"I should say because, as a rule, they care more for other people than themselves, and are not afraid of showing it."

"The last chiefly, I think. A dog's eyes hold no equivocations—as a rule. There are exceptions. That little terrier of mine now—she's one of the best actors I ever saw. But I can always tell by her eyes if she's been in mischief."

He rang the bell and the old man appeared.

"I am going to Wytham myself, Bagot. Tell Kenyon to bring the dogcart round as soon as he can."

"H'm!" said the old fellow. "Yo're going yo'r-self?" and he looked half-disposed to raise some objection.

"Yes. Tell Kenyon to hurry up."

The old man turned reluctantly and went slowly on his errand.

Sir James began to describe the nature of Bellenger's duties. "I am writing my recollections of some of the principal cases which came before me," he said. "They are intensely interesting to myself, and I think they will be so to others. I have my notes of every case, but my handwriting has degenerated into hieroglyphics which I find difficulty in deciphering myself at times. Fortunately I have a

good memory, and a word here and there is generally enough to bring it all back to my mind."

Here the door opened and a very charming little old lady came noiselessly in. She was like a dainty bit of biscuit ware, frail and delicately tinted in white and dove color. Face and hair white—the former smooth as ivory and barely wrinkled; the latter clinging to the white temples in little shell-like curls in the fashion of very many years ago, the rest hidden under a white lace cap. Her eyes were dark and bright, her dress Quaker-like in its color and spotless simplicity.

She stopped at sight of Bellenger. He bowed when she entered, and at that the Judge turned round to her.

"Ah, Cordelia!" he said. "This is my new secretary. Bellenger, my sister, Lady Welde."

The bright eyes of the little lady examined him with the inquisitive shyness of a robin, and she inclined her head slightly in response to his further bow.

"You are going to Wytham, James?" she asked, with, it seemed to Bellenger, a touch of anxiety in her voice.

"Yes, dear. It's seven whole days since I set eyes on a human being outside Brant, except old

Birstle, the postman, and he's three parts machine. I'm going to take Bellenger back to get his things and he'll begin here at once. What's keeping that dogcart now?" and he rang the bell again and the old man came in.

"Bagot, is that conveyance coming round to-day or to-morrow?"

The old man's eyes flickered questioningly across to Lady Welde.

"Just a-comin', Sir James. That Kenyon do be so slow. I'll go and——" and he hobbled away to wake him up, and a moment later Sir James followed him.

"I hope you are prepared for a very quiet life, Mr. Bellenger," Lady Welde had said to him as her brother rang the bell.

"I am hoping even to enjoy it, my lady," he said quietly; and it seemed to him that she looked at him with fresh interest.

"It is not everyone who can do so," she said. "We have been rather unfortunate in our secretaries. Young men as a rule do not like to be buried alive."

"After all, it is better than being buried dead," said Bellenger, with a smile. "I cannot imagine anyone feeling buried when there are such things

as sun, and wind, and woods, and sea, and the larks to be enjoyed."

"Do you know anything about parrots?" she asked, hopefully.

"I'm afraid I don't," he said. "I have had no experience of cage-birds at all."

"He lives on a perch," she said quickly, "but he seems out of sorts lately. He's getting old and perhaps the thought of the cold weather troubles him. I tried to make him wear a coat last winter, but he tore it all to pieces the first day. And he does look so miserable, sitting there, opening and closing his eyes and never speaking a word."

Here at last the dogcart came past the window, and Sir James put his head into the room and cried cheerfully, "Come along, Bellenger."

"You'll—you'll be careful, James," said Lady Welde, anxiously.

"Careful, my dear? I'm always careful. Is there anything you want me to get for you?"

"No, thank you, dear—only—only—you know—remember!"

"Tclk!" to the horse, and they were under the trees of the avenue. Kenyon, much more elegantly attired than his master, in top boots and tall hat, swung up on to the back step, and jumped down

again to open the gate, and they were spinning along the high road, with the three dogs frisking and racing alongside. The larks were bursting themselves up in the sky, and the cattle in the water-meadows gazed gloomily at them as they flashed past, and switched their tails nervously, sure now that such haste and bustle on the road portended evil to themselves.

Sir James' handling of the reins betokened no necessity for his sister's parting injunctions. The big bay stepped out with a great, free stride that was a delight to sit behind, and they did the four miles and a half in eighteen minutes without any approach to accident.

"I'll drop you at your place," said the Judge, "and when you've got your things together, come along to the front. You'll find me somewhere about there."

Bellenger bought a few more necessaries and made them up into a neat parcel, wrote to his late landlady at Crowleston to forward his belongings to Brant, and a line to Robson Baite telling him of his great good fortune, also a little printed letter to Jackie telling him where to write to, and then went down to the sea front. It was some time, however, before he caught sight of Sir James swinging up

out of a side-street with his dogs gamboling about him. He had evidently been shopping. His pockets were bulging wide, and his keen, clear-cut face was full of enjoyment. He was a striking-looking personage, and the visitors, strolling aimlessly about, turned to look at him, and now and again one would inquire of a boatman who he was.

"Ah, Bellenger, here you are!" he said, briskly. "Now we'll have a bite at the Grand by way of change, and then we'll go home, and you'll have time to shake into things before we start work to-morrow."

They lunched at the big hotel on the front, where Sir James was evidently well known, and the three dogs sat round in cheerful expectation, which was not disappointed. They never took their eyes off their master, except for an occasional fleeting glance of hope at Bellenger, as though his presence doubled their chances, and caught and swallowed their morsels with automatic promptitude.

Sir James chatted pleasantly of the changes time had wrought in Wytham since he was a boy. "When my grandfather built his house there wasn't another one except fishermen's cottages within many miles," he said. "He was a student, and an old bookworm, and a great lover of Nature. And really,

when you get used to them, these mighty stretches of sand have a beauty of their own."

"They give one a greater sense of wideness and freedom even than the hills, I think," said Bellenger.

"That's true; and it grows upon you the longer you live among them. And the sea is always new. There are some really fine fellows among our fishermen, but you've got to know them fairly well before you find it out. They seem slow and heavy, but there are big hearts below the rough jerseys, and good solid brains inside the old sou'-westers. Are you a sailor?"

"I've had no chance," said Bellenger; "but I can imagine it a very great delight."

"You won't get much chance here," said the Judge. "It's a bad coast for anything but walking on. The tide runs out about a mile, and the banks out there are very bad. A yacht would be more trouble than it's worth. But the swimming is good when you get to it. Do anything in that line?"

"I must plead guilty again, sir."

"Well, that's easily remedied, at all events. It's a pretty lonely place is Brant, but it has its advantages. Think you can stand it, do you?"

"If I had searched all over the world I don't think I could have found anything more to my

liking," said Bellenger, with an earnestness that made the Judge smile cheerfully.

"Well, that's all right!" he said, with much heartiness and a clap on the shoulder, as he got up. "If you keep in the same mind I think we shall get along well together." And a few minutes later they were spinning back along the road to Brant, and John Bellenger was asking himself if it were possible that he was the same semi-outcast who had stumbled along the crackling causey of the seaweed into Wytham but the day before.

CHAPTER IX.

OPENING WAYS.

In his comfortable, chintz-furnished bedroom, away at the top of the gray stone house, John Bellenger, ex-convict, knelt by the side of his bed for a very long time that night. His heart was too full to say much, but he was thinking many thoughts—of his dead wife, of his boy, of all the past, and of the future—and for thoughts such as these one's knees are the most appropriate. He was a very grateful man.

He applied himself to his new work with an appetite that seemed only to grow with what it fed upon. It was work in which he found immense interest. Perhaps it appealed to him more than to most.

Sir James was an early riser, and was out as a rule before the rest of the household was awake. Bellenger was awakened by the lively barking of the dogs the first morning, and from his window he saw the old gentleman striding off among the trees with his towels round his neck. It was such a glorious morning that he was tempted to go, too. But he bethought him that it might be as well to

wait till he was asked. So he dressed and went off for a stroll through the woods, and came out at last on the sandhills, with the shimmering, green sea beyond.

He heard the dogs barking down on the sands and presently saw Sir James coming leisurely toward him among the hummocks.

"Ah, Bellenger! This is a morning worth living for. Why didn't you come for a swim? Nothing like a cold dip to set the blood going."

"I'll be delighted to come to-morrow, if I may."

"That's right. I'll give you a lesson in the morning. There's an old bathing-suit of mine somewhere about—unless Cordy's cut it up for dusters or made it into clothing for that disreputable bird of hers. You quite won her favor by talking parrot last night and getting that book for her," he said with a laugh. For Bellenger had taken advantage of his visit to Wytham to purchase a small book on the management of parrots, and when he produced it after dinner the little, old lady almost fell on his neck.

After breakfast they shut themselves up in the study, banished the backward-glancing dogs to the stables, and started work. Sir James lit a big cigar and bade Bellenger fill his pipe, if he felt like it,

which he did. Then the Judge unlocked a tin box crammed to the top with papers and MS. books, and placed a pile of both on the table.

"This," he said, handing Bellenger the thick bundle of writing, "is the work as far as it is done. It would be an advantage if you would read through it by degrees, carefully and closely. Anything you think wrong, or capable of improvement, call my attention to. You will find a great number of handwritings, I am sorry to say, but they are most of them fairly legible. Better than my own, at all events," he said, with a laugh, as he opened one of the large foolscap notebooks. It was filled with a most undecipherable scrawl.

"That would need a little getting used to," said Bellenger, examining it. "But I'm rather good at handwritings. I think I could soon make it out."

"Gad! It's more than I can sometimes," said the Judge, with a laugh. "Now I'll dictate from my notes. If I go too fast stop me. In the afternoon till four o'clock you will trim, revise, and copy out. Then your time is your own till dinner. After dinner you will read over to me what we've done during the day. It's the case of Luigi Ferrario we're on. One of the most vindictive ruffians I ever came across, and for me the case has a somewhat peculiar

interest. He killed the captain of his ship and the first mate, and held the rest of the crew in terror at his revolver point—or rather the captain's revolver. When they came near enough to the land for him to row ashore, he ordered a boat down and decamped. He was captured a fortnight afterward in the fo'c's'le of a ship he had joined at Liverpool, and was tried at the Assizes there. His defense of course was that he was not Ferrario at all, but quite another kind of man altogether. Burton, Q.C., was defending him, and he got those sailor men so tangled up that they didn't know which were their heads and which their heels. I could hear them cursing him as they left the box, and it looked as though the fellow might get off on the question of identity. One Italian sailor looks very much like another, you know. Then a man from among the spectators got an usher to take him to the Crown counsel—Felton, I remember—and after two minutes' whispering Felton got up and put this man into the box, and at sight of him the prisoner went the color of lead. He stated that he was an old family enemy of Ferrario's, and that he had once had the pleasure of stabbing that gentleman in the back between the shoulder blades. He esteemed it a high privilege to give any testimony which might help

him out of the world. Ferrario was examined, and the mark of the old wound found. Fortunately for him and greatly to the disgust of the other the jury brought it in manslaughter—because of the provocation he had had. The captain was an American and a known nigger-driver, and no doubt richly deserved shooting. Ferrario got twenty years. He broke jail three years afterward—from Northallerton—and a few days afterward as I was driving in to York Assizes, I got a bullet through the wrist and into my side that put an end to my work for a couple of months, and has made writing difficult for me ever since. Ferrario got a life sentence for that and he's in Borstal now. We're just on that question of identity——" and he proceeded to dictate from his notes, choosing his words and phrases with such care and deliberation that Bellenger had no difficulty whatever in taking it all down. Occasionally in hammering out some point the Judge would get up and stride about the room, or stand looking out over the trees toward the sea, or drop into a chair and gaze intently at the lighted end of his cigar, while he swung one leg over the arm to assist the action of his brain. But his memory was wonderful and his hesitancies were only as to the clearest and concisest methods of expression.

They worked steadily till mid-day, and then Sir James set off for a brisk walk with his dogs, and Bellenger was free to do what he chose till the luncheon-bell rang. He chose to attack the pile of variegated MS. on the table, and determined to devote his spare time to it till he was acquainted with all that had so far been done. But it was not a task requiring much determination to stick at. He found it so interesting, and grew so mightily absorbed in it, that the luncheon bell rang unheeded, and it was not till Sir James came in search of him that he sprang up in confusion and full of apologies.

"I was in the middle of the Stanborough case," he said; and the Judge laughed out with the enjoyment of the writer who sees his readers pleased.

"You find it interesting?"

"It's absorbing." And the Judge carried him off to lunch in high good humor.

Lady Welde was in a happy state of mind also. Robert, the parrot, was better. She had studied Bellenger's book all morning, and then administered a dose of cayenne pepper, and a warm douche by means of a watering pot, which combination of internal and external heat had electrified Robert into a new lease of life and quieted his mistress' fears on his behalf.

"It does seem such a pity," said the little lady, plaintively, "that he can't tell you what is troubling him. He talks so very sensibly at times."

"Just a bit tautological at times, Cordy, isn't he?" said Sir James, "or perhaps one should say tautophonical."

"I don't know what that means—but I'm quite sure he understands what I say to him, and his eye is really most intelligent. He seems to look right through you at times, and then he laughs and chuckles in the most knowing way, as if he knew everything there was to know. I'm inclined to think in some previous state he must have been a judge." At which Sir James laughed aloud.

Sir James always indulged in a short half-hour's nap after lunch, and after that they worked steadily till four o'clock.

"I will ask you just to write two short letters for me, Bellenger," he said, "and then I would advise a stretch along the flats. Plenty of time for the Stanborough case after that, and the flats will give you a rare appetite. Leave the letters on the table in the hall," he said, when they were finished. "The postman calls for them at five; and now run away. If you like to take the dogs they'll thank you."

The dogs needed no invitation. They circled him in a yelping crew, and as he crossed the lawn in front of the house he saw Lady Welde returning from a drive in her pony chaise, with Kenyon in attendance. He raised his hat and dived into the woods.

He enjoyed his walk immensely, and, as Sir James had said, it gave him so great an appetite that even the absorbing intricacies of the Stanborough case could not keep him from an alert interest in the dinner-bell. The illimitable stretch of sea in front, and the wide sweep of the flats on either side, with no living thing in sight except the dogs racing through the shallows, and half-a-dozen seagulls wading in the lip of the tide, and two or three brown-sailed boats far out at sea—these things wrought in him a feeling of rest and peace and freedom to which he had long been a stranger. His gratitude to Sir James was in proportion to the depths of these novel sensations, and he vowed in his heart to serve him as he had never been served before.

After dinner he read aloud the work they had done during the day, and Sir James made a few alterations and improvements, while he smoked at his ease. When that was finished he got up, saying

very kindly: "Just turn in when you like, Bellenger. I'm an early bird myself, but there is no need for you to follow suit. You can always use this room after dinner for as long as you like. See that the window is fastened and the lamp properly out when you go. Now, good-night. I have an idea we shall get on very well together. You are interested in the work, and that's a great thing"; and he nodded and went. But he was back in a moment to put his head in at the door with, "Don't forget that swimming lesson in the morning. You'll find the bathing-suit up in your room."

Bellenger filled his pipe and drew his chair up to the fire and sat looking into it, and asked himself once more if this was really and truly the John Bellenger who sat on the sandhill two days ago, munching his dry biscuits and smoking his third-rate tobacco, and wondering who lived in this old gray stone house among the trees, and why? It was truly a strange chance, or Providence, that had brought him there. But he was well satisfied and very grateful.

His thoughts turned to his boy. He could not quite see how this good fortune to himself brought the little lad nearer to him, and he longed very greatly for him. His own expenses here would in-

deed be very small. He could save almost the whole of his salary, and so would be able to pay off his debt to Silas Bartram more quickly than he had expected. But the utmost he could hope for was that when that was done he might be able to find a home for his boy at Wytham, and so be able to see him at times. Even that was much to look forward to, and he turned again to the table and concocted a letter to Jackie, all in printed capitals and full of hope for the good times to come. Then he took up the Stanborough case and read till the fire got low and old Bagot came in with his bedroom candle.

"Yo're working late," said the old man.

"Just going, Bagot. I got interested in it."

"Ay?" grunted the old fellow, doubtfully. "Dry stuff, I reckon."

"Not a bit of it. It's better than a novel."

"Ay?" once more. "I'm no hand at reading myself. What'n yo' lost?" with a sharp look at Bellenger.

"My penknife. Don't trouble. It'll turn up again. I thought I'd left it on the table here."

"It'll turn up again, mebbe. Can yo' snib that catch at the window?" which was above his reach. Bellenger fastened it, and stood looking for a moment out into the night.

"We might be a thousand miles from everywhere," he said.

"Ay, it's like that at night. Yo're not feeling lonesome a'ready?"

"No, I like it."

"H'm, well, that's a good thing. Some doesn't. If yo' like it lonesome it'll suit yo' fine. He wunnot pull down his blinds," he said angrily, and pulled them down and drew up from the window seat heavy wooden shutters which were hung on pulleys, with weights which bumped and jangled inside the woodwork of the window-frame. "I allus think someone's looking in at me till th' shutters is up"; and he bolted an iron bar across them. "F'r a man that's been that mixed up wi' criminals yo'd think he had no sense."

"Has anyone ever tried to get in?"

"Naw, but they might. Iv'rything's got to have a beginning."

"We can dispense with that anyhow. Now I'll put these papers away and clear out and let you get to bed, Bagot."

"Night!" grunted the old fellow, and Bellenger lit his candle and laid Jackie's letter on the hall table for delivery with the rest to the postman, and went up quickly through the quiet house to his own room.

CHAPTER X.

STILL WIDER WAYS.

WHEN Sir James and Flick turned out next morning, they found the front door open and the secretary waiting for them on the steps with his towels round his neck.

"Ah!" cried the Judge, gaily. "Early to bed and early to rise. You didn't stop up all night over the Stanborough Case, I hope?"

"No, sir; Bagot saw to that. He expressed great surprise that anyone should want to sit up at all to read such 'dry stuff,' as he called it."

"We'll hope he won't be called upon for an opinion if it's ever published."

They went round to the stables to release the rest of the party and set off for the shore. The tide was very far out. They stripped on the soft, silver sand, up above high-water mark, and the race over the firm, ribbed shallows and through the shimmering pools was a new delight to Bellenger. The swimming lesson went off very well, and the Judge assured him he would soon be quite at home in the water. Then another race over the flats in the

warming sun, with the dogs yelping round them in high delight at the entertainment, and they were dry before they got back to their clothes, with mighty appetites for their breakfasts and the day's work.

Old Bagot met Bellenger as he came downstairs to breakfast and handed him his knife.

"Keep it in yo'r pocket, then yo' won't lose it again," he said.

"Thanks, Bagot. Where did you find it?" But the old man had gone on into the breakfast room.

The compilation of the reminiscences went on more rapidly than ever it had done before. Both their hearts were in the work, and Sir James was in the highest of spirits at the progress they were making, and at his own acumen in the selection of an assistant. Bellenger toiled indefatigably. He sat up night after night reading up the former portions of the work, and, while modestly disclaiming any pretension to literary knowledge, marked a number of places which seemed to him, purely from a reader's standpoint, capable of improvement either by compression or expansion. Sir James had expressly asked him to do this, and in most cases he agreed with him as to the suggested alterations. They rewrote such passages till they were both satisfied with

them, and more than once fell into lengthy discussions, the Judge arguing from the judicial point of view, while Bellenger took the simple stand of the ordinary reader. He felt somehow on a different footing with his employer from that which an ordinary secretary might have taken. This man knew all his life and yet trusted him. The very fact broke down the regulation barriers and rendered their intercourse unusually free and open.

The Judge, from his long and special experience, was a keen judge of character. He looked deep into this man's heart, often led him into discussions and took up opposing views for the simple purpose of probing deeper still, and was satisfied with what he found. He saw that, in spite of his slip—his open-eyed leap rather—he was at heart a true man and an honest man. From his history he knew that he was capable of the greatest devotion. He rejoiced at the good fortune that had enabled him to stretch out the helping hand just when it was needed.

When all the past points had been threshed out and settled to both minds, the manuscript presented such a mass of scorings and interlineations, and such a diversity of handwritings, that Bellenger, of his own accord, began transcribing it all in his own clear hand during the hours that were at his own

disposal, rising early and sitting up late. And when, after two months' hard work, he was able to hand the Judge the clean copy that gentleman was highly delighted and not a little surprised.

"Now that is really very good of you, Bellenger. I heard you'd been working very hard at something, but I thought it might be something of your own. Have you never tried writing on your own account?"

"I jotted down some of my experiences while they were fresh in my mind. That was while I was at Bassenden. But I've never looked at them since."

"Would you mind my seeing them? It always interests one to see things from another man's point of view, and to me it would be particularly interesting."

So Bellenger rooted out his notes from the bottom of his trunk and handed them over for perusal, and went steadily on with his other work.

He found it an advantage to take down the Judge's dictation in pencil, and only to copy it out in ink when the reading over had taken place and the corrections had been made. And it was in this connection that his pocket-knife became a standing joke between him and old Bagot. That knife was always going astray. It seemed to take legs to itself and

steal away into corners. Almost every night he had to confess to Bagot that it was lost again, and the old man would grunt, "Ay, ay! Well, mebbe it'll turn up"; and he always had it for him in the morning. For it was so constantly in use during the day that it was impossible to keep opening and shutting it every time he needed it. It lay on the table by his side, and it disappeared as regularly as—the Judge.

It was a long time before his eyes opened to this fact. But opened they were at last, and the matter puzzled him exceedingly. He remembered distinctly one day leaving the knife among his pencils when he got up to take some letters out to the hall table. When he got back it was gone. Sir James was leaning back in his chair smoking, just as he had left him, and most certainly no one else had been in the room. He happened to want the knife, but managed to get through without it. Next morning when Bagot returned it to him as usual, Bellenger looked at him questioningly; but the old man only grunted testily:

"Why can't yo' keep it i' yo'r pocket?" and went on about his business.

Twice again under very similar circumstances the same thing happened. Then one night when Bagot came to rout him out to bed he tackled the old man.

"Now, see here, Bagot. Just explain to me about that knife of mine. What's the meaning of it?"

"Ugh!" grunted Bagot. "Can't yo' see for yourself?"

"Sir James takes it?"

"Ay."

"But why?"

"Dear knows. It's way he's made, an' it's come nigh driving me crazy sometimes."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I bin wi' him over thirty years, and half my time's bin spent i' giving people things back he took from 'em. Yo'd hear it i' Wytham if yo' ever went there, so it's mebbe as well yo' hear it from me. It's his failing—and he can't help it. He don't mean anything wrong, but when he sees things about he just puts 'em in his pocket. Have yo' never noticed 'at my lady goes to Wytham next day always after he's been there?"

"I noticed she always went out driving. Of course I didn't know where she went to."

"Ay, well, it's just that. He'll go into a shop to buy something and he'll just pick up a thing here and a thing there and slip 'em in his pocket. Things he don't need and don't want and hasn't any manner o' use for—just like an old jackdaw. An' when

he comes home I just empties his pockets and my lady takes 'em back. They all know him and his little ways and they knows it's all right. But when we was on circuit"—and the old head wagged mournfully at the recollection—"ay! it took me all my time to keep him from being run in. But it's just his little failing, yo' ken; an' he don't know nothing about it. He takes the things and brings 'em home, and when I take 'em away he never misses 'em and never asks after 'em. It's curious how folks is made."

"I'm glad you've told me, Bagot. It's just as well I should know."

"I wouldn't ha' told yo', but yo'd be bound to hear. And 'sides, I know he's got a great idea of yo', an' so's my lady."

He had never asked any questions about his employer. A natural sense of delicacy had withheld him therefrom. But the old man, having unburdened himself so far, went on:

" 'Twere after my lady died——"

"Sir James's wife? I always thought him a bachelor."

"Naw, he's a widdy. 'Twern't till after she died that this came on him—so far's I know. It gev him a shock an' a twist; an' he's felt it ever since. She

were killed in her carriage while he were away, an' he took it very hard."

"And he has no family?"

"Ay, he's one son," the old man admitted reluctantly. "He's in Australia. He were a wild un," with a shake of the head. "They do think he's dead, 'cos he's never writ a word since he got there. An' mebbe it's best if he is."

Next day Sir James received one letter among the rest, which he read carefully and then tossed over to Bellenger with a curt, "Do you know the writing?" and Bellenger read:

"Sir—It is only right that you should know that the man you are employing as your secretary is an ex-convict. His real name is John Bellenger. He was convicted of embezzlement at Cuddiford and served his time at Helstone. VERB. SAP."

Bellenger flushed as he read. He looked up when he had finished and said, "I'm more than ever thankful that you knew all about me, sir."

"Yes, it's probably the same hand that got you out of your other places. Do you know the writing?"

He examined it carefully, but it was evidently disguised. He shook his head.

Sir James dropped the letter into the fire. "We'll keep the envelope," he said. "The postmark is Liverpool. Rascally work, but it's failed this time. The man who can do that kind of thing deserves hanging. It's probably your old manager at Bassenden. You spoiled his game and he doesn't forget. Now let us get to work."

It was a very quiet life, but it was just what Bellenger needed. He rarely went beyond the grounds except to the seashore, which was an endless delight to him. But he asked no more, and in the peace and quietness of Brant, in his absolute devotion to his work and to the kindly hand that had been stretched out to him, and in the growing esteem of those about him, his nature deepened and expanded. It was like the beginning of a new life to him.

They did not keep much company at Brant. Of invitations, indeed, there was no lack, but neither Sir James nor his sister found any great enjoyment in the formal dinners of the Sandshire gentry. Just now and again at long intervals they put in an appearance, by way of not withdrawing entirely from society, and once in these two months they had given a dinner party in return. Sir James had tried to persuade Bellenger to be present, but he begged to be excused and no pressure was put upon him.

As long as the weather permitted he and the Judge had their morning bathe and scamper on the sands together, and at times the laughter bubbled up in Bellenger as he contrasted the rosy face and light-clad figure panting alongside him over the hard-ribbed sand, with the stern-faced judge in scarlet and ermine of their first acquaintance.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Sir James, one morning, when this feeling was strong in him. "Am I getting fat and out of condition? I feel very fit."

"I was thinking of the first time we met," said Bellenger, laughing out.

"Ay?" said the Judge, joining in his laugh. "Well, this is rather different. Change for the better, isn't it?"

"A very great change for the better, sir. I can hardly believe this is really me sometimes."

Then dark days, of storm and stress at sea, and strife in the woods, drew on, and it was hard to tell which made the greater noise—the thrashing of the great waves on the sandy beach or the grinding and clashing of the great, bare trees in the woods. It was one mighty, continuous roar—and when they breasted the gale and crept through the woods at imminent peril of their lives from the treacherous

elms, Bellenger was astounded at the changed aspect of their usually placid shore. He had never dreamed of such mighty waves in such a place, and stood fascinated at the turmoil.

Much going abroad was impossible, and the work progressed so rapidly that they found themselves with much time on their hands. Sir James urged him to his own literary work. For when one day he handed back to Bellenger the reminiscent notes he had borrowed, he had said, "They are intensely interesting to me, Bellenger, and I feel sure they would be to others. You have material there for a first-rate book. Now what form shall it take?" and he entered at once and with great zest into a discussion of the various possibilities that occurred to him. Essay—autobiographical reminiscence—story. He found objections, under the circumstances, to all but the last.

"I have read plenty of stories, but I never thought of writing one," said Bellenger.

"There's a beginning to everything. Think it all over. As a matter of fact it will be, to all intents and purposes, autobiography in the guise of fiction. Take a week to think out your possible characters, and I will be turning it over, too. Between us we ought to be able to evolve a set of characters to work

out the story I can see in those notes. Gad! I think I'll take to writing fiction myself. But, joking apart, Bellenger, I think you might make something very good indeed out of what you have there. If you can it will be almost as pleasant to me as I am sure it would be to you."

So for a week every moment of Bellenger's spare thoughts were focussed on this matter. They then compared notes, and from their different conceptions of the characters required by the circumstances the story would have to deal with they at length evolved a set that seemed human and workable, and John Bellenger set to work on his first attempt at fiction—fiction, however, which, as many have since guessed, was very largely fact, very hard fact, in which he had himself been a prominent actor.

One writes best what one knows best; and once he had got over the first difficulties and the ship was fairly in the water, the delight of it took hold of him. He began to get glimpses of the great fact that to the man who has a story to tell, and finds growing within himself the power to tell it—not, indeed, as he would; no one ever quite does that; but still to be able to come within distant view of that—there is no work in the world that approaches it. He wrote, and rewrote, and wrote again, very many

times, the first two chapters before he would submit them to the Judge. And when he did at last, with extreme diffidence, place them in his hands, he was so doubtful of their value that he could not sit there and see him read them. He left the room hastily, and picked up his cap and made for the shore, and wandered about there among the clusters of flying spume and the sweeping sand, till he was soaked with the one and plastered with the other out of all recognition.

He got back to the house only just in time to scrape and wash himself clean and to change his clothes before dinner. Sir James was in such very high spirits during the meal that Lady Welde peered at him through her little, mild, brown eyes in much astonishment and wondered what he was up to.

When they returned to the study, and Bellenger got out the daily portion of the Judge's own memoirs to read over to him according to custom, Sir James stopped him.

"Put that away," he said. "We'll reverse positions to-night"; and he proceeded to read aloud Bellenger's own work, while Bellenger sat and listened and tried, impossibly, to judge it from an outside standpoint.

"I want the next chapter," said Sir James, when he had read all there was.

"There isn't any more, sir—yet."

"Well, get on with it as quick as you can and keep it up to this. I'm hungry for it."

"You think it will do?"

"If you can keep it up to this, my boy, I should say you have found your vocation. Injudicious flattery never does anyone any good, and I'm the last man to administer it. But I consider this excellent—excellent."

"I don't feel quite satisfied with it yet. I'm not sure if——"

"If I know anything about it you never will feel quite satisfied. I doubt if anyone but a fool ever is. That's as it should be. But keep it up to this and I'm certain you'll make a hit with it. You've gripped it; and the story has gripped me. I want the next part."

"You give me great hope," said Bellenger, with much feeling.

"It may be the beginning of great things for you. I see no reason why it should not. If it is I shall rejoice greatly."

Too full for words, Bellenger laid his head in his hands on the table for the space of a minute or two

till he got control of the feeling that was in him. For, when he thought of all this good man had done for him, he choked, and his eyes swam, and his face would not keep straight.

Then he got up and filled his pipe nervously, with his lips still twisting a little. And when they settled to the pipe stem he turned to the Judge and said quietly:

"You are making a man of me, Sir James. I have no words to give you——"

"Nay, it was all there, my boy, it only wanted a little encouragement," said the old man, heartily.

"I thank God every night and every morning for bringing me here," said Bellenger quietly, with his pipe in his hand and his eyes fixed on the fire, and the fire gleamed brightly in the old man's eyes, too.

"If you make a success I shall be looking out for another secretary," said the Judge, presently.

"Never!" said Bellenger, quickly, "until you tell me to go. If anything comes of my life it will be your doing, sir. I would ask no better than to serve you all my life—with my life if need be."

CHAPTER XI.

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME TO BRANT.

CHRISTMAS was almost within sight. Literary work was progressing famously all round; Robert, the parrot, was in voluble health; Lady Welde was happy, and Brant was possessed of a spirit of active contentment. Sir James flung a sudden bombshell into their midst, just seven days before Christmas Day, by the announcement that he must leave for London the next morning, in connection with a trusteeship in which he was interested.

Lady Welde viewed the idea with consternation. Could it not wait till warmer weather? Could he not do his business by letter? Could not the other people come to Brant? Could not half-a-dozen other utterly impossible things be done to obviate his going?

"But, my dear," said the Judge, "it's quite impossible. Old Tantallon is eighty-two, and he's got gout, and rheumatism, and sciatica, and weak heart, and no lungs, and incipient paralysis. It nearly kills him to get out of bed of a morning. There are certain things we must discuss before he goes, and he

can't last long. That harum-scarum grandson of his will need a pretty tight hand, and I don't intend to take him bodily on my shoulders. I'll be back inside four days, and—Bless me! I'm not in my dotage."

"At all events, you'll take Bagot with you?"

He looked across at her humorously, and then whimsically at Bellenger.

"My sister got so accustomed to mothering me when I was a little chap, you see, Bellenger, that she never quite recognizes the fact that I am now of age and can look after myself."

Little Lady Welde glanced deprecatingly at Bellenger, and he understood perfectly what was in her mind.

"I have no doubt you would find Bagot an assistance, sir. In fact," he said with a smile, "I doubt very much if he would consent to be left behind"; and Lady Welde threw him a grateful look.

"Oh, well, I'll take him and look after him as well as I can," said the Judge, laughing. "You're evidently all of one mind in the matter."

"If you will entrust me with the journal you are at, Sir James," said Bellenger, when they were in the study that evening, "I will get on with the work while you are away. I can make the most of it out,

I think, and we could correct mistakes when you get back."

"I would trust you with anything, my boy," said the Judge, as he lit his cigar. "But the journal can wait very well, and I want you to get on with your own work. By the way, how are you getting on with your payments to that man Bartram?"

"I have sent £20 since I came here. That leaves me £25 still to pay before I am clear. Seventeen weeks will do it."

"And what news have you of your boy? He is keeping all right and happy?"

"Mrs. Platt reports him strong and hearty. She is a faithful old soul. I would have been very badly off without her, and so would Jackie."

"Homely virtues flourish best in homely soil. In fact, I'm not sure that one might not drop the first qualification altogether and put it that virtues flourish best in homely soil. Which is a somewhat grave reflection on the so-called classes. But undoubtedly my own experience is that if the preponderance of crime—let us say discovered crime—is among the lower classes—and that is largely due to their environments and their temptations—the balancing virtues, generosity, self-sacrifice and the most wonderful unselfishness, have far larger place among

them than among the well-to-do. I have seen many extraordinary instances of it. The more a man gets the less generous he is, as a rule. If he gives, it is of his superfluity. If you want to see pure generosity, by which I mean sharing with another what you need for yourself, you must go right down to the gutters and ditches." After delivering himself of which discourse he sat smoking for a while in silence and with his eyes fixed on the fire.

"Do you know what is the greatest factor in the making of criminals, Bellenger?" he asked, after a while.

"Evil surroundings, heredity, sudden stress, I should say," said Bellenger, quietly.

"No—opportunity. Those others bulk largely, of course, but opportunity makes criminals."

"That is rather a bad lookout, sir. Opportunities must always exist."

"Yes—therefore you can never cure crime by restriction and punishment. That is the mistake well-meaning people make. Man is a free agent, and opportunity will never be wanting. Until you go right to the root and raise him above the inclination to take advantage of the opporunity you are only tinkering the wind."

"Yes," said Bellenger, thoughtfully. "I suppose

it comes to that. The outlook is not very cheerful."

"It will become more so when people tackle it properly. The old commandments were all 'Don'ts.' The new ones are all 'Do's.' There is a world of difference between them, yet the good folks will hammer away on the old restrictive lines and close their eyes to the fact that salvation lies along the new road. I'll rub it into them in my book. They've had some lively cases. They can stand a bit of preaching."

Sir James left for London the following morning, and in his absence, with all his time at his own disposal, Bellenger flung himself into his story with all the absorption of novel and much enjoyed work. He had his meals with Lady Welde, who remarked plaintively on her brother's absence each time they met. Bellenger did his best to supply his place with cheerful talk and unusual interest in the sayings and doings of Robert, a subject on which the little lady was never tired of enlarging. Between meals she saw nothing of him, and indeed he never left his desk from early morning till late at night except for these absolutely necessary breaks.

Just two days before Christmas he woke with a start to the fact that he had got no Christmas pres-

ents for Jackie; and set out immediately after lunch to walk into Wytham to remedy the default. It was a bright, crisp day, with a dry sprinkling of snow which made the land, wherever it had been ploughed, look like the top of a sugar-powdered plum cake. After his late confinement and inactivity, the sharp air and quick motion were a new delight, and sent the blood spinning through his veins. He felt suddenly more alive; and some points in his story, which had been confronting him for days past, cleared themselves up of their own accord, and he went on his way rejoicing.

He was half-way to Wytham when he met a telegraph boy loitering slowly along, between intervals devoted to the cows and seagulls and much discriminating choice of stones for their benefit.

"Now, you rascal, is that telegram for Brant?"

"Yus!"

"Let me see it!" and the boy, who was a new beginner, drew it out somewhat doubtfully.

"That's all right," said Bellenger, as he saw his own name.

It was from the Judge—"Arriving 2.45 train. Send dogcart." He scribbled a message on the back to Kenyon, telling him to inform Lady Welde and to come on with the trap at once.

"Now, see here, my boy, if you take this on to the house and give it to the man in the stable, he'll give you a lift home in the Judge's dogcart. But you must go quick."

"I'll go"; and he set off at a trot, and Bellenger walked on.

They caught him up just outside Wytham, and he swung up to the back seat, but got down again at the toy shop in the High Street.

"You go on, Kenyon," he said, "if the train's late I may be in time to go home with you. But beg Sir James not to wait a moment for me. I've some shopping to do"; and he went in and bought Jackie's modest Christmas presents—a book with colored pictures, a box of colored chalks, a very small box of tin soldiers—and he slipped into the letter he had written a bright new shilling he had been keeping for weeks for the purpose.

He had all his purchases made into a parcel, and borrowed a pen, and addressed it to Master Jack Bellenger, No. 5 Marriott's Cottages, Cuddiford, and went along to the post office to send it off.

He met the trap coming down the High Street, the Judge driving, Kenyon and Bagot behind. The Judge was evidently in the best of spirits. His face was all aglow, and his eyes sparkling.

"Hello, Bellenger! Just in time. Jump in. Going to the post? Oh, never mind that just now. I've got something for you. In you come. We'll see to the post later on." And Bellenger perforce climbed in, Kenyon and Bagot grinning welcomingly over their shoulders.

"Well, and how are you? And how's Lady Welde and Robert? Brant still stands where it did, I suppose? And how's the work been getting on? Steady there, my lad," to Bay Ronald. "Never seen a donkey before?"

They were out on the high road by this time and Sir James had been rattling on at such a pace that Bellenger could not get in a word. He felt something scratching his leg under the seat and moved it slightly. Another scrape and he bent down to feel.

"What on earth have you got down there, Sir James?" he asked. "A monkey?" and the Judge gave a great, hearty laugh.

Two little hands caught hold of his groping fingers, and with a shriek of delight his own little lad struggled up between his knees—springs in his feet, his round face and blue eyes blazing with excitement, his yellow hair tossing wild and free since his cap was under the seat. Sir James had slowed down

to a walk lest Bay Ronald should catch the infection and bolt, and Jackie clambered up on to his father's knee and flung his arms round his neck.

"My dear little lad!" said Bellenger with difficulty, as he kissed him heartily. Then he turned to Sir James. "It is like you, sir, but I never dreamt of anything so good as this."

"Was I a s'prise, father?" shouted Jackie.

"The very best surprise in the world, laddie."

"Ah, we thought we'd s'prise him, didn't we, Jackie?" said the Judge.

"And we did—didn't we, Serra James?"

"I rather think we did, my man."

"But he liked it, Serra James?"

"Well, by the look of his face I should say he did."

"Now I want to see the horse," said Jackie. "What's his name, Serra James?"

"He's called Bay Ronald."

"That's a nice name," said Jackie. "Why's he called that name, Serra James?"

"Oh, now you're beginning again," laughed the Judge. "He has an insatiable appetite for knowledge," he said to Bellenger.

"I'm afraid you must have found him a trouble, sir."

"The result is eminently satisfactory," said the

Judge. "He has been a great enjoyment to me, and we're very good friends—aren't we, Jackie?"

"Of course," said Jackie, with emphasis.

Lady Welde received the new arrival with courteously veiled surprise, but with no signs of disapproval. Her relief at having the Judge safe home again overlay all her other feelings. She had said nothing to Bellenger about it, but her anxiety had been apparent, and he quite understood that she was worrying herself with all kinds of fears of what might be happening to him. But Bagot had brought him back in safety, and her joy and satisfaction were great, and her welcome warm and inclusive.

Dinner was served early for the benefit of the travellers. Sir James was in huge spirits, and the ring of his hearty laugh tuned them all to equal gaiety. He told them stories of the times he had had with old Lord Tantallon, who, he said, in addition to all his other disabilities had become as deaf as a post and as stubborn as a mule since he saw him last. He had set his mind on certain utterly impossible arrangements for the contravention of his unruly grandson, and it had taken Sir James all his time and breath and energy to get him on to the rails again.

He had dined and lunched and supped with hosts

of his old friends at his club, and was full to the brim of their looks and sayings and doings.

Jackie, under his father's watchful supervision, behaved with most exemplary propriety, though everything was about as different from good old Martha Platt's modest ménage as it could possibly be.

But Martha had her own strong ideas of propriety of behavior, and by dint of much precept and a rigidity of personal practice, which must have sat oddly, not to say painfully, upon the kind old soul, she had even succeeded in instilling them into her little charge. He might be as wild a boy as he chose outside at his play. That was good for him, and made for health and happiness. But at table he must be "a little gentleman"—according to Martha Platt's ideas of what was necessary thereto. And since these ran in the straight lines of modesty of demeanor, and general restraint of desire, and very clearly expressed thanks for whatever he received, his manners were beyond his years.

He very distinctly "Serra James'd" Sir James. "If you please, Serra James." "Thank you, Serra James." "No, thank you, Serra James," in his clear little voice every time the Judge addressed him. A fresh smile flitted across the kind old face each time

the words slipped out, and he seemed to enjoy the sound of them. His father noticed the peculiarity of his method of addressing the Judge, and promised himself to correct it at the first opportunity. There was an appearance of familiarity in it which he knew was unintentional, but he feared it might give offense.

Lady Welde, too, caught the strangeness of it, and peered curiously at the small boy with her bright little eyes, and said at last, "What is it he calls you, James?"

"Sarah James, I think it is," said the Judge, with a humorous twinkle. "But he means well, don't you, Jackie?"

But this was rather beyond the young man, and he only stared with wide blue eyes.

"Now don't any of you stop it," said the Judge, looking pointedly at Bellenger. "I like to hear him. He's as fresh as a daisy."

Bellenger himself put the boy to bed, and a merry time they had over it—Jackie instructing his father with shrieks of laughter in the correct ordering of things, and arriving at last between the sheets in a state bordering on hysterics at the whole performance.

He sobered down sufficiently to repeat his prayers,

however, in a well-known formula into which he interpolated, after the names of his father and Martha and Martha's sister, a special petition for "Serra James and the little old lady and the dear little dog called Flick."

When Bellenger got down to the study, his heart brimming with the gladness of the feel of that dear little scrap of humanity upstairs, he was for attempting again to express what was in him. But the Judge stopped him at once.

"I know all you feel about it, my boy, and I believe I am enjoying this almost as much as you are yourself. We won't talk about it. Where's your story? I want to read it at once."

He read the chapters Bellenger had been working at in his absence and approved and enjoyed them all except the last one.

"That drags a bit to my thinking," he said. "I suppose you were working from dawn till dewy eve each day and barely had time to eat. Now confess. Did you have one single walk while I was away?"

"Well, no, I did not, sir—except the one to Wytham when I met you and Jackie, and then I rode half way."

"Exactly. And this"—tapping the manuscript—"shows it. The human brain is like any other ma-

chine—all the better for an occasional rest. It can do prodigious things at times, but ordinarily its best work will be done under the most reasonable conditions. I should be inclined to say three hours at a time is a long enough stretch without a break, then slack off, till the cords have eased themselves, and then on again. For creative work six hours a day I think ought to suffice. Try it. Now I've got some news for you. I was dining at the Carlton with my old friend Coleshill of the Western Circuit, and in the smoking-room afterward he introduced MacBraine, the publisher, to me. I'd been telling Coleshill I was employing my leisure in writing a book, and he booked a free copy on the spot. I had a long chat with MacBraine, and he's anxious to have a reading of it. He's an extremely good fellow, and a man of very good position and influence, and I promised him first go at it. Then I thought it would be a good plan to sound him as to yours. I gave him an idea of it, and I am quite sure I spoke moderately enough. He seemed taken with what I told him and begged me to secure him the first reading of that one, too. So I think our ways seem fairly clear."

"I never can thank you, Sir James, for all you are doing for me——" began Bellenger.

"Make a success of your life, my boy, and I shall be more than repaid."

"By God's help I will," said Bellenger, in a voice that told its own story.

When Bellenger crept quietly in beside his boy that night and drew the warm, round, little body into his arms and hugged it as tight as he dared, and felt the soft rise and fall of its even breathing against his own full heart, his gratitude for this crowning mercy could find no words. His heart had ached with longing for this, and now it was filled to overflowing. When Jackie's unconscious heels landed spasmodic kicks in his side they were like the healing touch of heavenly fingers. His wordless thanks went up on the soft breathings of his boy and he fell asleep at last to that gentle music.

The Judge peremptorily locked up all manuscripts till after Christmas.

"A life sentence," he said, briskly, "for anyone who touches pen or paper in this house till Santa Claus has come and gone."

And so they made merry, and the old gray house rang with the shouts and laughter of youthful spirits whose ages ranged from four-and-a-half to seventy. And the twinkling legs and merry eyes of the latest arrival quickened all their hearts and brightened all

their lives. So that Flick and Lassie and the old black spaniel found their bodies quite too small for their feelings, and Robert, the parrot, talked to the wide, round eyes of this new appreciative audience as he had never talked in his life before, and little Lady Welde's long-bereft motherly arms captured the mercurial figure whenever they could, and there were tears in the little, brown eyes as she kissed him. And even Bagot, the aged, was one time discovered running—actually running—downstairs to escape the bloodthirsty pursuit of a band of Wild Indians encased in one pair of very short, blue serge knickerbockers. At which sight Sir James buried himself in his study chair in convulsions of laughter—for Bagot had never run a step for twenty years, and would not have quickened his pace for the Lord Chief Justice or the Prince of Wales himself.

And the merry walks they had—through the enchantments of the frost-rimed woods, and away along the iron-bound flats, with the sea like a streak of lead behind the further banks, and the sun swinging in the gray sky like a blood orange, and the seagulls screaming overhead as they flew to battle with the crows for the pickings of the hinterland. A right merry time, a time of times—Christmas time!

On Christmas Eve Jackie duly hung up his stock-

ing, and Sir James and Lady Welde, who had neither of them set eyes on that most beautiful expression of a hopeful heart for very many years, both made pilgrimages to it, and paid their devoirs to such good purpose that Christmas morning came in at Brant, as it should come in everywhere where child hearts can be made happy at so small a cost, with shouts of amazement and delight, and thanks that tumbled headlong in their haste.

And for John Bellenger there was one small envelope addressed in the Judge's hieroglyphics, and inside it were two sheets of paper, one from Sir James himself, inscribed, "With kindest regards and best wishes," the other a receipt in full from Silas Bartram for the balance of the amount due to him on the old debt. And when Bellenger saw what it was, he managed to dress Jackie somehow, though his hands shook so that he could hardly button a button, and when he had packed him off to carry his own thanks to the Judge, he turned the key in the door and knelt down beside his bed.

God be thanked for Christmas time, and the widening and enlarging of hearts that it brings!

CHAPTER XII.

MARY BASSETT.

"JACKIE go?" said the Judge, glaring fiercely at his secretary one morning a few weeks later, "and why, pray?"

"We must not tax your very great kindness too far, sir."

"Is it showing signs of wearing out? Is it growing threadbare? Are there any seams visible?"

"On the contrary, but——"

"Of course, if you've both got tired of Brant and the quiet old fogies——"

"Don't, Sir James, don't—that cuts like a knife," said Bellenger, jumping up from his table.

"Very well, then; behave yourself and don't talk again of disturbing the community at large. Brant hasn't been as happy for—for very many years. Let us make up for lost time. But I'll tell you what I've been thinking, Bellenger," he said, as he looked musingly at him. "You know Charles Bassett——"

"The curate at Wynsloe?"

"Yes. He's a fine young fellow, and he's got a sister who's another. Cordy and I were over there

seeing them the other day. Now I've been thinking. They're gentlefolk—Bassetts of Wareham—and they're horribly poor. Old Throle gets his £1,200 a year and gives Bassett £120 and lets him do all the work of the parish by way of preparation for something better in the dim future. Now, my idea is to ask Mary Bassett to come over every day to give Jackie some lessons. It will be a godsend to them, and it will give me the opportunity of rendering assistance which I know is much needed, and which I could not offer directly without getting their backs up. I've no doubt you'd like to teach him yourself; but we mustn't harness Pegasus, and you have other work to do. I won't say higher work, for there is no higher work in the world than training up a child in the way he should go. And I can't imagine a woman more fitted for such work than Mary Bassett. She's a jewel of a girl. You won't mind——"

"There is no end to your kindnesses, Sir James."

"Tut, tut! I'm in love with Mary Bassett, and I want to help her. We'll consider that settled, then. I'll drive over with Jackie this afternoon and arrange it all. Now to our case——"

And so another new element entered into the old gray stone house. For as the ripples widen from

the falling stone, so the doing of one good deed—or of an evil one—leads on to another, and another, and another, and the eye of man may not follow them to their ultimate ends. They leap the shores of time, and may beat on through all the times to come. And in this matter, as in all other matters, the exception only goes to prove the rule.

Mary Bassett! Sweet Mary Bassett! If only you could see her as I remember her, and so save me the failure of an attempt at describing the indescribable!

Outwardly she was altogether good and wholesome to look upon, for at times the spirit within will manifest itself in the flesh. Her black hair, with a whimsical, silvery thread here and there—of which she was proud as a family trait, though she was only twenty-two—was brushed back in ripples from a wide, white forehead. Her eyes were radiant, and her face was always full of light which broke readily into laughter. And God knows it needed a valiant heart to maintain a cheerful countenance in Wynsloe at times. For all too often boats and men went down to destruction in the winter gales, and the place would be full of sad-faced women, and children wailing with hunger, and these must be fed, in one way or another, though the feeding might be of the scantiest, and the clerical seams showed white

and the clerical garments grew shiny and threadbare. Methinks there was a finer gloss on the covering of Charles Bassett's knees and shoulder-blades than ever finest broadcloth bore. His poor folks wore his new clothes inside them.

"Charley, old boy, you really must not give away any more of your—h'm—clothes," Mary Bassett said to her brother, as he came in from a round of visits one afternoon, and bent over the fire to warm his hands while she hastened the tea-making. "If you do you'll have to go to bed next time you get wet through—unless you'll let me make you a kilt."

"That's rather a good idea, Moll. Do you know I rather think I should fancy myself in a kilt?" and he drew up his full six feet to its utmost, and threw out his legs as though he could feel the free swing of the kilt against them already. "Clothes are part of the original curse," he said, presently; "and it was the woman who invented them."

"You've no authority for that, my dear."

"Common sense, that's all. I don't suppose Adam cared a fig-leaf about being naked, and besides—he wouldn't know how to sew till Eve taught him."

"I've heard you deal with the subject less literally. But, joking apart, Charles, your last largesse has reduced your stock of h'ms to the pair you've got on

and your best; so call a halt, old boy, or take to your bed."

"I am not of a grasping or vindictive disposition by nature. Even old Grimshaw"—one of the churchwardens, with whom he was always at loggerheads—"never accused me of that. But if the Very Reverend had earned translation and were given his reward I think I could make better use of his income than he does—if it chanced to come my way."

"But it wouldn't, dear—so it's no good worrying about it. And besides, the Very Reverend takes such very good care of himself that he'll live to be ninety-nine."

"Oh, I'm not worrying, but he is an old skinflint. Can you deny it? Do you wish to argue the point? I'll prove it to you on fifteen different counts"; and he prepared to tick them off on his long, white fingers with much enjoyment.

"We'll take it as proven. How is Grace Kent?"

"She is quite well. She is very happy. She is dead," he said quietly. "She died an hour ago."

"Poor Grace! She has had a hard life."

"Life is hard, but it generally has its compensations. Possibly when it is too soft it has its condemnations."

There was just a touch of bitterness in his tone, and it was not very surprising. The prospects of a curate without influence, no matter what his energy and talents, are not by any means brilliant enough to keep him awake at night, though they may well be dismal enough to do so.

"Have a cup of tea, old boy. It pays best to consider one's troubles after a cup of tea, not before it. I made those scones myself. If you don't praise them you'll probably choke. I really don't see why you won't let me set up dressmaking, Charles. I'm quite sure the women and girls would listen to your sermons a great deal better in the dresses I would make them than they do now, and I'm just aching for work."

"I know, dear—but it wouldn't do. Perhaps something else will turn up. I wish they'd make me Bishop of the South Sea Islands."

"Old Micawber! Who's this, I wonder?" as wheels stopped outside. "Sir James Alleyne!" she said, peeping round the window. "And that dear little fellow who was with him on Sunday. I wonder who he is? They're coming in, Charles."

"Ah, Miss Mary, how are you? And how is the Reverend Charles?" cried the Judge, heartily, as he shook both their hands at once.

"I'm all right, Sir James. The Reverend Charles is slightly in the dumps. He was wishing a kind Providence would make him Bishop of the South Seas," laughed Mary. "How are you, dear?" to Jackie.

"Ah, he's got a chill, I expect," said the Judge.

"Quite well, thank you," said Jackie.

"We've come to beg a favor of you, Miss Mary," said the Judge.

"A cup of tea and some of my scones? In two minutes, Sir James."

"The gifts of the gods may not be rejected with impunity," said the Judge, "and Miss Bassett's tea and scones are spoken of with bated breath through all Sandshire. But we have come to crave something more still."

"As long as it's not a pair of trousers, Sir James," laughed the Reverend Charles, "you are pretty sure of getting it. But I've just been receiving a curtain lecture on that subject, and I flatly refuse in advance to have any dealings with you in old clothes. Mary wants to set up as a dressmaker, and was proposing to try her 'prentice hand on a kilt for me. Do you think," he asked with solemn earnestness, "there would be any objections on the part of the lady mem-

bers of the congregation to my reading prayers in a kilt?"

"No, I should be inclined to think they'd rather like it. It would be a novelty, at all events. Might even draw in the Dissenters. When do you start?"

"He's talking rubbish, Sir James," said Mary. "What can you possibly want that we can do for you?"

But the Judge knew only too well that underneath the Reverend Charles's rubbish there was a hard foundation of fact.

"Well, now, this is it," he said. "This young man is Jackie Bellenger—the son of my secretary, John Bellenger. He and I are up to our necks in literary matters, and Lady Welde devotes all her spare time to Robert. Bellenger has got a book of his own on the stocks, as well as mine, and Jackie's craving for information is beyond our powers of satisfying. Lady Welde and I were wondering if we could prevail on you, Miss Bassett, to undertake his education."

"Oh, I would delight to," cried Mary, with clasped hands, eyeing Jackie with hungry anticipation. "Would you like me to teach you, dear?"

"Yes, please, ma'am," said Jackie, primly. "Serra James said you were very nice—and you are."

"It will take up a good deal of your time," said the Judge, "and it's a stiff walk——"

"I'm a famous walker," said Mary, "and I revel in a mackintosh and a real spate."

"I was going to suggest—if it does not upset your household arrangements—that you come in the morning and give him an hour and a half or so—you will know the kind of thing to begin with—and have lunch with us, and then give him a short spell in the afternoon as well. Would that be too much?"

"Oh, no, we'll arrange it all quite easily," said Mary, eagerly. "How soon would you like me to begin, Sir James?"

"Just as soon as you can without inconvenience to yourself and the Reverend, my dear. I think he will learn very quickly. He's as bright as a needle."

"Thanks!" said the Reverend Charles. "So glad you've noticed it."

"I'm speaking of Jackie. I'm delighted you can take charge of him"—to Mary—"for I know he couldn't be in better hands."

"I will do my very best," said Mary.

"I claim compensation," said Bassett. "What I want, Sir James, barring the bishopric of the South Seas, is an angel possessed of all the virtues and

graces and, say, a couple of thousand a year. Are there any knocking about Sandshire?"

"I must think that over and look them up," said the Judge. "How much of the two thousand would you solemnly undertake not to give away?"

"Ah! That might have to depend on circumstances."

"Your wife might object to depend on circumstances, you know."

"I stipulated that she should be an angel."

"They are not too common," said the Judge, "but they are still to be met with occasionally. Some of them even condescend to make scones. I expect they make them of manna."

So that was all arranged. No word of money passed between them, but when Mary Bassett received her first month's salary, she found that it came near to doubling the little income on which they had been scraping along, and there was another grateful heart invoking blessings on the Judge's head.

But Mary Bassett did much more than simply earn her salary at Brant. She brought into the old gray house the charm and grace of a very bright and beautiful nature, and not a soul there but felt the delights of it.

Lady Welde knew and liked her already. Sir James delighted in her, and came near regretting the existence of the Reverend Charles at times, since it prevented her living with them altogether. But he acknowledged to himself that Charles Bassett was an uncommonly fine young fellow, and worthy of a wider sphere and a larger outlook. And he quietly set to work to find out if he could not help him to both.

Jackie took to his new governess amazingly, and gave her all that was left over of his heart. She ruled him with a golden rod, and he learned from her many things not taught in schools, and sometimes not taught even in homes.

John Bellenger was at first, and perhaps not unnaturally, extremely reserved with her. She was for some time afraid that he was displeased at her coming in between himself and his boy, and the thought of it troubled her not a little. This reserve of his, and the fact that he was writing a book, and was deep in Sir James's literary matters, made her regard him with some little awe, which, if he had understood it, would have caused him very great amusement. But the result of it all was that there was a slight stiffness between these two, which obtained nowhere else in the house. The keen eye of

the Master noticed it, and he understood one side of the matter at all events, and took his own way of smoothing things out.

"Well, how do you think the boy's getting on?" he asked one night, as they sat smoking together for a few minutes after their evening's work.

"It's simply wonderful what he's picked up already. I can see his mind expanding like a flower. It's a little bit wider open every day, and what he knows he knows."

"Yes, there's nothing superficial about Mary Bassett. I think she is the very best and sweetest girl I ever came across."

"Jackie is very full of her. It is Miss Bassett says this, and Miss Bassett says that, last thing at night and first thing in the morning; and sometimes he laughs in his sleep at something she has told him."

"Yes, she's got quite a grip on him, and the right kind of grip, I'm quite sure."

"Undoubtedly the right kind of grip. It's a very great advantage for him to have such training."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it. I was just a bit afraid you—well, I don't know—hardly that you failed to appreciate her, but perhaps resented a little her occupying his thoughts so much."

"I hope there has been no sign of anything of the kind about me," said Bellenger, quickly. "Nothing has been further from my thoughts. I feel nothing but gratitude to Miss Bassett and yourself for all you are doing for him."

He smoked silently for a time, staring into the fire, and the Judge glanced at him once or twice out of the corners of his shrewd eyes. At last Bellenger said, quietly, "The fact is, sir, that I see now that I never can get quite away from the past. I believed it possible. I am afraid I was wrong. It is like the feel of your hat after you've laid it aside—only it lasts longer. A prisoner can never forget that he has worn bonds. I stand outside myself, as it were, at times, and say to this new John Bellenger, 'Is this really you?' I think I have been more conscious of it since Miss Bassett came. I do not feel quite worthy to associate with her."

"Now see here, my boy," and the old man's voice —the voice that had sounded like the stroke of an axe or the thrust of a sword as it sent men to their doom—was very soft and tender. "You must get rid of that feeling. You must get above it. It's morbid. It's wrong. You made a mistake—not, I will say it now, as most men make mistakes, from weakness, but in the strength of a false idea. You

stood your punishment like a man. You have been consistently strong throughout. Don't weaken now. You broke the law and the law exacted punishment. To yourself I fully believe your conscience was clear. Sin against one's conscience is the only thing that need make a man a sinner in his own eyes. 'You may hold up your head, my boy, and look the world in the face. You have gone through tribulation; the result I believe is fine wheat."

He stretched out his hand in his hearty, impulsive way, and Bellenger, as he grasped it, said, fervently: "You are a whole gospel of hope to me, sir."

And thereafter he set himself resolutely to put aside the shyness and diffidence with which he had cloaked himself before strangers. He entered into the cheerful rattle of talk at table in which the Judge delighted, and it became no uncommon thing for the two men to join Miss Bassett and her lively charge in their daily walk to the shore.

For Mary Bassett believed in lessons outside books as well as in them, and Jackie was learning that to the opened eye the great level of the flats was more than a big bank of sand intersected with splashable pools and running streams, and that every pool and every stream and every patch of sand teemed with life and beauty; and he made the

most wonderful new friends every day. He already knew more of such things than either his father or the Judge, and his enjoyment in imparting his knowledge, under manifold correction from its smiling fount, was almost as great as theirs in receiving it. A right merry party they were as they tramped the long stretch, almost up to Wynsloe on the one side and down to Wytham on the other, with the dogs racing in front, and the gulls screaming overhead, and the larks trilling up the wind above the sandhills. And Mary Bassett had never been quite so happy in her life before.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOUCH AND GO FOR JACKIE.

It needed, however, an agency outside the common to complete the friendly fusion of these stranger souls, and it was not wanting.

Mary's thoughts were so absorbed in her work at Brant that Wynsloe affairs were of necessity relegated to the comparative background of breakfast and supper chats with her brother, and trouble was brewing of which she knew nothing and he not much. He had his fears, but would not admit them even to himself—much less scare other people with them.

Wynsloe had had a hard winter, the fishing had been precarious, the people were half-starved, and there had been much sickness about.

Little Dr. Brand had his hands full. No matter how fast his little legs twinkled they could hardly carry him fast enough from cottage to cottage, and his cheerful little face lost its cheerfulness by degrees and grew longer and longer.

The Reverend Charles seconded all his efforts, and his muscular Christianity even went the length of

tucking up its skirts and handling a spade in the attempt to bring about by example the sanitary improvements which he and the doctor's energetic precepts had failed to produce.

When the west winds blew Wynsloe was comparatively free from evil smells. Lacking the winds, the smells had matters all their own way, and hung about full of terrible possibilities. Dr. Brand and Charles Bassett had raved and expostulated from the very first days their noses entered the village. The people listened and admitted all their strong impeachments. But their fathers had lived and—well, yes, died there—when they hadn't been drowned at sea, and what had been good enough for the old folk was good enough for them. No doubt a system of drainage and better ventilation, and the removal of pestiferous heaps of refuse, would have been advantageous to the community at large. But who was going to do all that? The men spent their working time on the water, and the women had their homes full of children, and it took them all their time to look after them and make both ends not quite meet.

The doctor and the curate scolded and complained. All the doctors and curates they had ever had there had done the same. That was what doc-

tors and curates were for. So Wynsloe mouldered on, and the refuse heaps grew bigger, and the invisible cloud grew denser, and at last settled down.

Dr. Brand met the Rev. Charles one day in the High Street, and stopped his meteoric flight for a moment. His usually cheerful face was twisted into a red scowl.

"Now, then, what's wrong?" asked Bassett. "That face means something or you ought to be shot."

"It's come, Bassett. It'll run through them like heath fire. We're going to have hell."

"Typhus?"

"Yes. When were you at the Bast's last?"

"Yesterday. He seemed pretty bad, I thought, rambling and excited."

"You'd best look out. I hoped it was only the usual thing; but the spots are out this morning, and there's no mistaking it. Did you see your sister last night?"

"Yes, of course. This morning, too."

The little doctor's face gave a twitch. "Better get her to stop at Brant for a time, till we get over the worst."

"She'll want to help, I expect. Besides—it may be too late. I was with Bast for quite a while yes-

terday, trying to quiet him. His wife was very much upset, and she's—you know."

The doctor pursed his lips tight—but he was not thinking of Mrs. Bast.

"We must hope for the best. But she must decide at once—either Wynsloe or Brant. She cannot do the two. I've wired to Liverpool for nurses. You're with me, of course?"

"Of course. We'll tackle it together. What fools these people have been—and how we've wasted our breath on them."

"They won't forget what's coming—those that are left. The place has been shrieking for typhoid this last six months. Don't go to Bast's to-day."

"Who's with him?"

"His wife."

"Man alive! I must go at once. That poor thing—it'll kill her."

"Well——" said the doctor, with pursed lips again, "send a note to Brant at once and give them warning.

And so, as they sat at luncheon at Brant, a hastily scribbled note was handed in to Mary Bassett, and her face was white as she handed it on to the Judge and got up hurriedly, and the whiteness of her face was not on her own account.

"I must go," she said. "Oh, I do hope——" and her eyes wandered despairingly toward Jackie.

"Must you go?" asked the Judge.

"Surely," she said, and went; and the Judge drove her over himself in the dog-cart.

"You will send me word instantly if——" she said, as she got down at her own door, and her eyes were full of tears.

"I will send you word at once, my dear—but we will hope for the best. God bless you!"

So there was an interval of expectant waiting at Brant, in which no lessons were done, and Jackie sorely missed his friend and counsellor. The while, at Wynsloe, Mary Bassett, clad in her oldest frock, went in and out among the cottages, and did her best to cheer the tight-lipped, despairing-eyed women, and tried hard to look cheerful, with a great dread gnawing at her heart.

Then more nurses came from Liverpool, and her work was somewhat lightened. But for the Rev. Charles and Dr. Brand there was no slackening and little enough time to eat or sleep. They toiled like heroes and fought hard struggles with death over each precious, pungent sufferer, and yielded them with a sigh when they had to, and began the stubborn fight all over again next door, and sometimes

in the next room. It was a terrible time, a time of heart-breaking and despair, a time for heart-searching and prayer. And little Dr. Brand was the more cheerful of the two—for he was seeing more of Mary Bassett than he had done for many weeks past.

A mounted messenger came over from Brant each day for the latest news, which could always be summed up in a terse verbal message—"Ten down." "Worse, fifteen cases." "Worse, twenty cases," and so on.

The Very Reverend commended his parish to Bassett and his people to God, and took himself off to Cannes, where he won much sympathetic commendation from elderly ladies of birth and means for the noble fight he had made—according to his own account—against the pestilence.

"But it was too much for me, anxious as I was to see it out to the end, dear Lady Fenixbrough. I felt it stealing on me like an icy—er—red-hot hand. Beg pardon? Oh, now, it is quite out of my system now. Never felt better in my life, I assure you. But it would have been suicidal to stay, since I could be of no more use. Under Providence I have been preserved for, I trust, still higher service."

"Such a valuable life!" murmured Lady Fenixbrough.

And Charles Bassett wrestled with Death over his dying parishioners.

It was about the tenth day after she left Brant that Mary, coming in wearily one afternoon from a round among the cottages, saw the Brant dog-cart standing before her door. She knew what it meant, and her face was white, in spite of the pumping of her heart, as she took the letter from Kenyon.

"Dear Miss Bassett,

"We fear Jackie has got it. He is down with high fever, and cries for you incessantly. We do not know how you may be situated, but if you can come we would be very grateful. Sir James and Lady Welde desire me to convey to you all manner of good wishes.

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN BELLENGER."

"Is he very bad, Kenyon?"

"They do say he be pretty bad, Miss. Mr. Bagot he come to me with the letter, and says he—"T on'y seems like t'other day 'at he were a Red Injin chasing me down th' stairs, Kenyon,'

says he; and I did think he were going to cry like a baby. I s'pose they does get better sometimes, Miss?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes. I won't be many minutes, Kenyon. You won't mind waiting?"

"Wait all day if you like, Miss," with a graceful pluck at his forelock; and to himself, when the door had closed—"That is a gal. Bonnie as a rosebush. But she's lookin' a bit peaked like, and she's got all her old clo'es on—which don't show her off to advantage."

In ten minutes, freshly robed from head to foot, and, in Kenyon's opinion, showing to much better advantage, she was racing toward Brant at Bay Ronald's best speed, but it seemed to her that they travelled very slowly.

They had already got in a nurse from Wytham, but Jackie's restless tossings and ceaseless cries were only stilled when Mary stole to the bedside and took the throbbing, little hand in hers, and lifted the clammy hair from the little, flushed forehead and soothed it with her soft, cool fingers.

"He knows you in some way," said Bellenger, who had led her up to the sick room after the Judge had given her a hearty, and Lady Welde a somewhat nervous, greeting.

"There are other senses than those we know," she said, smiling faintly.

The disease ran its course quite naturally, and with no complications. Still, the possibilities in such a case are always terrible, and they all had a weary time of it. Robert learned a curious little sniff during those days, which made you think there was an old lady in the room who was just on the point of crying. He was very proud of this new accomplishment and trotted it out on every possible opportunity. The dogs were relegated to the stables, and when they went walks were taken by circuitous routes which avoided the front of the house. The Judge and Bellenger tried their best to stick to their work since the time passed more rapidly that way. But Bellenger found it impossible to write a word of his own book, so they fell savagely on the Judge's journals, and the pile of his manuscript grew higher and higher.

Mary and the nurse from Wytham devoted themselves body and soul to their little charge, and Bellenger insisted on sharing the night duties with them. The Judge would have stood watch, too, but they would not hear of it, and would only allow him inside the sick-room door at intervals, to gaze from a distance at the tossing little body on the bed.

It was not much that any of them could do, beyond attending with the utmost assiduity to every possible want of the sufferer, and no prince of the blood was ever waited on with tenderer care than was little Jackie Bellenger.

But by degrees the fever fires burned themselves out, the leaping pulse grew more steady and regular, and at last the long strain was over, and Jackie was pronounced on the road to recovery.

Brant was full of grateful hearts, and none so grateful as John Bellenger's. He tried to thank Mary Bassett one day when they came across one another on the shore, where each had gone for a life-giving draught of the sweet salt air.

"Jackie owes his life to you, Miss Bassett," he said. "How are we ever to thank you?"

"I am so thankful he has turned the corner," she said earnestly. "I never could have forgiven myself if—if——"

"But you were in no way to blame. You knew nothing of it being at Wynsloe."

"All the same you would always have associated me with it if——"

"Ah, well," he said quickly, "the association will be a very much pleasanter one. Neither Jackie nor I will ever forget what you have done for us."

"He is such a dear little fellow. Oh, what should I have done——?"

"Do you think there is any good in torturing yourself with improbable problems? It is better to be thankful for what is."

"Yes," she said, "it is very much better. I will try and forget what might have been."

They had strolled along the shadowy flats and now turned their faces toward home.

"Were you able to work?" she asked.

"Only at the Judge's book. I could not write a line of my own. You see, he is all I have."

"And when are the books coming out?"

"The Judge's is nearly finished. My own will take another couple of months, I expect. I shall be glad to get to work again, now that the strain is off."

"It must be very delightful to create a set of characters and make them do anything you like."

"You can't always. Sometimes they persist in going their own ways."

"How very odd! But I can't quite see why. You can, of course, if you choose, make them do what you want."

"You can, of course—by violence, and by offending your own sense of the fitness of things; just as

you can tear your manuscript in pieces. The stronger one's sense of fitness the better one's work, I suppose."

"And you really sometimes find your characters go a different way from that which you had intended?"

"Undoubtedly, at times. It was a surprise to myself the first time it happened. I remember I sat and looked at them for some hours and reasoned with them, or perhaps with myself. But it was no use. They were right, and my idea of what they should have done under the circumstances was wrong, and I had to let them go their own way, or else set to work tinkering them round to fit my views. How are matters at Wynsloe?" he asked, by way of diverting the conversation.

"Bad enough, but improving. It is a good thing summer is coming on. If it were winter Wynsloe would, I think, disappear. The people are dreadfully poor, and this has been the last stroke."

"Your brother has come through all right?"

"I am thankful to say yes. He and dear little Dr. Brand have worked like heroes, without a thought for themselves."

"And the Rector?"

"He is at Cannes—taking care of himself."

CHAPTER XIV.

BULL'S EYES BOTH.

It was a very languid and shadowy Jackie that began to creep out into the spring sunshine at last. But it was Jackie, and that was the chief thing. Once in the sun and salt air he picked up rapidly; but it was months before he was quite himself again, and then he was an enlarged edition of the Jackie they had known, as though the roller of Time had passed over him and flattened him out unnaturally. But this, too, passed as he filled up and grew brown and strong, and his devotion to Mary Bassett grew with his growth, and became a part of himself.

They had a great time, correcting the Judge's proof-sheets, and probably drove their printers to the verge of apoplexy and madness. But they got them to their mind at last, and in due time the two handsome volumes lay on the study table, with the Judge walking round and round them, and stopping every time he passed to take another peep inside, and to read over the title-page once more, and to turn over the pages, and to see how they looked this way, that way and the other way, and to dandle

them in his hands—the first-born of his brain—and generally to act as any other young author does under similar circumstances.

"Do you know, Bellenger, they strike me very favorably," he said, all a-brim with delight—"very favorably indeed."

"They're just as handsome as they could be," said Bellenger. "The next thing will be the reviews."

"I've arranged with an agency to send them on to me. But the pleasure to me has been in the work. I don't know when I enjoyed anything so much."

"I should think there's material enough in the remaining journals for at least two more volumes—perhaps more."

"We'll see how these take first. Now, when will you get yours finished? I'm as keen to see it as I was to see these—almost," he said, with a laugh.

"Another ten days will finish the writing, I think. Then I would like to go over it all carefully again. And then——"

"Then we'll put fortune to the test. I may be wrong, my boy, but I've an idea it will make a hit."

"I am doubtful about one thing, sir."

"What's that?"

"Shall I put my own name to it, or——?"

"You would sooner not?" said the Judge, quickly.

"I think so—under all the circumstances."

"I have been considering it, too. I think it is a matter entirely for yourself. If you feel strongly about it use a pen-name."

"I think it might be better. One other thing, sir. You will permit me to dedicate it to yourself?"

"Surely, my boy, if you wish to. I shall feel honored."

"That is very kind of you, sir. If anything comes of this it will be entirely due to you. I am very grateful."

Bellenger found a copy of the Judge's book on his table when he went to bed, with a pleasant little inscription inside, in the well-known hieroglyphics, and Mary Bassett found another awaiting her at home.

Then the press notices began to come in, and the Judge sat reading them by the hour with extreme delight. Any work by a man so eminent in his profession as Sir James Alleyne had been was bound to attract considerable attention. But even case-hardened and weary-brained critics found the Judge's volumes of absorbing interest, and rang the changes of eulogium on them till the last comers found it difficult to say anything that had not already been said.

The old gentleman drove into Wytham and brought back—among other things which Lady Welde promptly returned next day—a great volume made specially for his purpose, and a big bottle of gum. And while Bellenger wrought away at his final revision the Judge sat pasting his precious slips into the big book, as happy as a king. It was a very long job, for he must needs read every slip over again before placing it in position, and some he read more than once with chuckles of delight.

Mr. MacBraine, the publisher, was in the best of spirits. The Judge had not haggled about terms for his own book, and Mr. MacBraine was doing exceedingly well out of it. In the fulness of his heart he wrote more than once, urging on the issue of John Bell's book, which he believed would go into the swim with the Judge's. For Bellenger's terms Sir James had haggled like any old fish-wife, and having pitched them high to begin with, found them not absolutely unreasonable when finally settled.

One's first proof-sheets! How the letters dance and dazzle! How the lines cavort and swim! How impossible it is to alight on all the mistakes even in three readings! How much better it looks in type than it ever did before! What a capital bit that

is, and what a time it took to get it right—well, as right as it is, anyhow! And might it not have been better after all to—— But steady! These are proof-sheets—and the story cannot be re-written. Besides, you considered all that before, and decided that this was the proper line to take. So, at it, and nail to the margin every mistake you can find. And pack it away back and possess your soul in patience, John Bell, till your first book lies on the table in front of you, and you behave just as your good old friend did when his baby came to hand!

"It's good, John Bell! It's—it's—good, if you'll pardon me the word! And if those young men of the Press don't say so they're—they're asses, sir—confounded asses; and may their end be ink and the piercing of rusty pens!"

Thus the Judge, in quite as much excitement as he had shown over his own work. For that, after all, had been pretty much of a foregone conclusion, and nothing but the honor of it had any great concern for him.

But this book of Bellenger's was of infinitely greater moment. Upon its success or failure the whole future course of his life might depend, and the Judge was in a state of nervous excitement very unusual to him.

MacBraine indeed predicted success and exhorted both of them to further labors on his behalf.

"Have you got any other ideas in your head, John Bell?" asked the Judge, when he read the publisher's letter.

"Oh, yes, several. But I'm inclined to fear, sir, that that book is going to be a blank and utter failure," said Bellenger, in a dolorous tone.

At which the Judge smote him jovially on the back, with a great, hearty laugh for the encouragement of his own soul. "I know. I felt just that way about my own. It strikes me very forcibly, John Bell, that we are much too modest a pair of young men ever to make our way in literature."

"I'm very much afraid we are," said John Bell, gloomily. "Modesty is no longer a virtue. It is a distinct disability."

Mary Bassett set off home with her copy under her arm. But she could not wait till she got there to dip into it. She was very late for tea, so late that the Reverend Charles had gone off to his week-night service wondering what accident had befallen her. She read it all tea-time propped up against the toast-rack. She declined all her brother's attempts at conversation during the evening, and finished it before she went to bed, with a little smile playing

about her mouth and a dreamy look in her eyes. The dreamy look was still in her eyes next day—but that might be because she had lost her beauty sleep the night before, and the several following sleeps as well; and it might be that she was simply sleepy.

John Bellenger awaited her appearance that day with a touch of the old shyness. He had said to himself that her opinion would be to him an omen of what he might expect from the larger public outside. He knew she would have read at all events some of it, and he knew that if she liked it she would say so; and that if she did not like it she would not say much, but he would know it as soon as he set eyes on her face.

But there was no shadow of reserve in the frank, dark eyes as she greeted him.

"I have read every word of it, Mr. Bell; and I want to be the first to thank you for it. It is a good book. I am quite sure it will go."

"Bravo, Mary!" cried the Judge, who had awaited her verdict with almost as much anxiety as Bellenger himself. "I'd back your judgment against all the papers in the world."

"I only hope——" began Bellenger, much relieved by her words. He had been going to say that he hoped her judgment had not been blinded

by her feelings of friendliness, but stopped short at the thought that that might be taking more for granted than he had any right to assume. So he switched off lamely enough on to "I only hope others will judge it as kindly as yourself, Miss Bassett."

By means known only to himself, clever Mr. MacBraine managed to work John Bell's novel into the flowing stream that had already carried the Judge's book into a third edition. While the one book was compacted of hard fact, and the other claimed to be no more than fiction, there was an undoubted distant family—well, hardly resemblance, rather say a similarity of atmosphere about them, which the reviewer did not fail to perceive. It was quite unintentional, of course, and sprang unavoidably, no doubt, from the community of thought between the two men while the work was in progress. But, however it came about, and however the gossip in literary circles was set afloat, whether the wily MacBraine set it going, and whether he believed it himself—as was by no means impossible, for he had never set eyes on "John Bell," and the manuscripts of both books were in the same hand—rumors got afloat that "John Bell" and Sir James Alleyne were one and the same person. And the Judge roared

over them till he could not see to read the slips that came streaming in from his press-cutting agents. The clever gentlemen of the Press solemnly proved their case to their own satisfaction, and refused to be blinded by so flimsy a red herring as the dedication of John Bell's book to Sir James Alleyne. They chuckled over their find with immense enjoyment, and reverted to it again and again; and the result was a sale beyond all expectations—for the novel especially, since that appealed to so much the wider public.

Of the success of the book there was no possible doubt, and when its triumphal progress began to translate itself into the unmistakable form of solid cheques, Bellenger was very grateful, and just a little bit frightened lest so surprising a bull's-eye at the first shot should result in a series of outers later on.

He urged the Judge to contradict the report. But Sir James, with a shrewd twinkle, said, "We'll get all the good we can out of it first, my boy, and then we'll contradict it. I expect MacBraine is at the bottom of it all. There is no doubt of one thing—John Bell's next novel will be waited for with eagerness, and if he can come up to the first one his future is assured. How's the new one getting on?"

"I would like to discuss it with you, sir—any time that suits you."

"To-night, then, after dinner. I want to see you at work again, and I'm as keen as a critic to see the work itself."

So, when Jackie was safely between the sheets that night, the two set to work on the foundation of John Bell's next book. The writing of the first one had been as the tapping of a rock. It had unloosed many streams of thought, and these, as they cropped out, had been duly noted down for future consideration. He went carefully over them while the Judge sat and smoked with one leg over the arm of his chair, and they turned them over and over, finding further light from the play of their mutual thought, and adding bits here and bits there.

"You've got what I never had, my boy," said the old man, longingly—"imagination. Character I believe I do know something about, but my life has been spent in dealing with facts—mostly very hard facts—and to deal with them efficiently and judicially I had to nip the other in the bud. I think your future is assured. You have material there for half-a-dozen books at least—and good books, too. Which do you feel most drawn to at the moment yourself?"

"The first one we discussed. I think I could do that best just now."

"I like 'em all," said the Judge. "But you can't do them all at once. Let us go through that one again. I've got a bit mixed among them all."

"Yes," he said, when they had gone carefully through Bellenger's notes again, "that should make a very fine book. Get to work on it at once, my boy, and let me begin enjoying it."

"I've been thinking, sir," said Bellenger, as they still sat over the fire, "that I have no right to go on taking a salary from you. I do next to nothing for it, you see, and——"

"Ah! getting tired of Brant? Wanting to spread your wings and fly away?"

"Brant has been salvation to me, sir, and the last thing I would desire would be to leave it. I am happier here than I ever expected to be again. But you have lifted me into a position where I can——"

"Get along without the old man's help. Our relations have been very pleasant, my boy. The old house has been the brighter for your coming and the boy's. We would all miss you greatly. Unless you have some better reason for wanting to go——"

"But I don't want to go, sir. It would break my heart to go."

"Then let things go on just as they are and never speak about it again. I must have a secretary, and I'm not likely to find one so much to my liking as the one I've got. We'll start another volume of the Reminiscences some time, if it'll make your mind easy. MacBraine writes once a week to ask when he may expect it."

"We enjoyed writing the other ones."

"We did that. But I want a rest. It's exciting work writing books, or at all events seeing them come out. And I want above all things to see how your Number Two goes, and then your Number Three. According to MacBraine, Number Three is the test. So get to work, my boy, and make the old man happy."

CHAPTER XV.

HOPES AND FEARS.

BELLENGER, in his quiet communings with himself—for the writing of stories is a great quickener of introspection—had to confess to himself that to leave Brant would be a sore trial for him.

It would have been a very strange specimen of a man who could live in intimate social intercourse with Mary Bassett and feel no stirrings of the blood and drawings of the heart toward so sweet a soul in so graceful a body.

Sir James and Jackie boldly proclaimed their love and admiration for her. How should John Bellenger, midway between the two, escape? He could not—and had no wish to do. So sweet a combination of charm and common-sense, of beauty inward as well as outward, is not cast into every man's life, for its downsetting or its upraising.

She was constantly before his eyes, a gracious thing to look upon, and she came by degrees to be much in his thoughts. That was inevitable. There was a twinkle in the Judge's shrewd old eyes at times when he saw them together.

His plans—if he had any—his enjoyment and his hopes, at all events—were greatly helped by the fruition of seeds he had sown some time before.

There came a letter for him one morning which made his face light up and set him nodding pleasantly to the tune of his thoughts. He laughed as he read it.

"How would you like Miss Mary to come and live here altogether, Jackie?" he asked.

"I would," said Jackie, eagerly.

"This is from the son of my old friend Coleshill. He tells me he has just been nominated Bishop of British Paphlagonia. He wants a muscular Christian, to accompany him as chaplain. The Colehills all run over six feet, and the new bishop stipulates that his chaplain shall be as big a man as himself. He says it's a mistake to send out small, skinny men with nothing but heads, and I'm inclined to agree with him. It's the very thing for Charles Bassett. He'll jump at it unless I'm very much mistaken. I'll go over after breakfast and see him jump."

He waited, however, till Mary came, and had a little talk with her; and she emerged from the interview with thoughtful eyes and perhaps a slight deepening of the wild roses of her cheeks. It is a good three miles from Wynsloe to Brant, and a

pleasantly warm walk on a fine summer morning.

"He was wanting to pack his portmanteau on the spot," said the Judge, when he met her at lunch. "It's just exactly the thing for him. Coleshill is a splendid fellow, and Charles is another. They'll be a highly representative pair, and ought to make a great impression on the heathen. If they find it necessary to sit upon them at all they certainly will do so."

"Charley will be delighted, I'm sure," said Mary. "Wynsloe has been a little narrow for him, and he always had a hankering for foreign parts, and the Very Reverend——"

"The Very Reverend is a tremendous old humbug. I shall tell him so one of these days," said the Judge.

"He'll stretch out two fat fingers and give you his blessing, and it won't trouble him in the slightest."

"I'm afraid it won't. The only thing that would upset his equanimity would be the necessity of doing something for somebody outside himself."

The Reverend Charles went up next day to see the new Bishop, who approved highly of his stalwart proportions. And the two struck up a prodigious

friendship, which carried them triumphantly through many a dark time, till, years afterward, they won through to the light together, shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart, as they had lived. The only record the Society ever received of their end was from a half-converted hanger-on of the Mission, who escaped with his life and the Bishop's prayer-book—that, at all events, was all the property he gave up, and it was obviously of little use to him. But there is treasure in that man's family to this day in the shape of white-handled table knives marked with a C, and monogramed hair-brushes, and plated spoons, and such like knick-knacks, which will probably become heirlooms in the family unless the new Bishop chances across them and makes inquisition into the matter. This man's story was that the last he saw of the Bishop and the Rev. Charles they were figuring prominently at a feast—neither as hosts nor guests, but as even still greater centres of attraction—and that when the feast was over they had disappeared. The man, however, was an inveterate liar, and those he pointed out as having been participants at that feast were all old friends, against whom he had grudges of his own. Some of them in later times became pillars of the Church; and when the new Bishop's eyes used to

rest upon them lustily singing their hymns in the mission house, this man's story sometimes came into his mind, and—well, yes, it was odd to think of.

So Charles Bassett disappears from our story. He was a good man, stalwart and true, and he died the greatest of deaths. *Vale*, Charles and Bishop Coleshill! Swifter than eagles and stronger than lions, lovely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.

Charles spent his last night at Brant, in spirits high enough to elevate an island thrice the size of Paphlagonia. The great desire of his heart was opening out before him. He foreshadowed the probable end that night, and it cast no shadow on his humor nor lowered his spirits one degree.

I do not know what the Judge had said to him in that first interview when he took him Coleshill's letter, but I know that Charles Bassett had no misgivings as to his sister's future, and that now and again his glance, after resting thoughtfully on her, passed on to John Bellenger's deep, steady eyes and gravely hopeful face, and he seemed satisfied.

The last they ever saw of him was a cheery wave of the hand as the dog-cart disappeared behind the trees round the bend of the drive, and Mary's spirits were somewhat under a cloud for a day or two.

But the cloud passed. Charles was completely happy, and she had within her the faith that removes mountains of difficulty by never attempting to climb them while they are still a great way off. She knew, too, that in Sir James Alleyne she had a friend of friends. Perhaps her thoughts went further still.

The atmosphere of Brant was brighter and more cheerful than its old gray stones had probably ever known. They were all very busy in their ways. The Judge had started on Vol. III.; Bellenger was deep in his Number Two; Lady Welde divided her time and affections among them all, including Robert; and Mary and Jackie were climbing the ladder of knowledge, and learning many things—both of them.

But life is no still pool, but a flowing stream. Like every other stream it has its gleams of sunshine and its deep, dark pools, where the waters seem to rest for a time between the rocks they have just fallen over and the rocks that lie ahead. And if the surface of the pool seems motionless, down below the current is moving on, moving ever toward that which is appointed for it, and deepening and widening as it goes.

Mary Bassett, as a member of the family, was a new element of delight to them all. She was a

good musician and had a sweet, flexible voice, from the loss of which the choir at Wynsloe suffered greatly whenever she missed a service there. The two men got into the way of extending their working hours during the day so that they might enjoy the music in the drawing-room at night. But the Judge always retired early, and as a rule Bellenger sat working in the study till old Bagot came on his nightly rounds and turned him out.

The friendship between himself and Mary grew with the days. For him, indeed, it had already passed its bounds, though never by word or sign did he show it. For her——? he could not tell. That sweet, frank manner of hers was an essential part of herself. It might mean nothing at all. It might be simply the natural expression of the sweet soul within. It might mean all that he had come to hope for as the best that Providence had in store for him.

The hope in itself was a treasure beyond price. He would not risk the loss of it by any premature word or look. But a woman sees most in a man's looks when he intends she shall see least, and Mary Bassett knew what was in him as well as if he had put it into writing.

She was greatly interested in his new book, and

now and again, and much to her satisfaction, the Judge, with an air of profound simplicity and perplexity, would call her in to their deliberations anent some knotty point, and vowed each time that she was the cleverest of the lot of them.

In some ways, perhaps, she was. Certain it is that John Bell learned much from her—and sometimes quite unconsciously on her part—and these were perhaps the things he learned best.

The Judge was in the habit of enjoying his paper and his breakfast together. He retailed scraps of interesting news for the general benefit, and frequently, and of *mal prepense,* provoked them into animated discussion by his comments.

When, one morning, while so engaged, he stopped suddenly and read some paragraph very carefully, Bellenger, looking at him, saw his face set, sternly and with less color in it than usual, and he knew that something was amiss. Sir James took up his parable again presently, but the ring had gone out of it, and he was obviously preoccupied.

When they reached the study the Judge turned to him and asked abruptly:

"Are you anything of a shot, John Bell?"

"A shot?" asked Bellenger, with surprise. "What with?"

"Say a revolver."

"I've had no experience, but my hand is steady and I see straight. Whom am I to shoot, sir?"

The Judge laid down the paper and pointed to a paragraph in it. It was headed, "Convicts at large," and described the escape of two prisoners from Borstal—one James Allen, and the other an Italian named Luigi Ferrario. They had slipped away in a fog, swum the Medway, and got clear away.

"I'm getting old. Maybe I'm worrying myself without cause," said the Judge, quietly. "But that man Ferrario is the fellow who shot at me before. He swore he would take my life. It will be as well to be prepared. Pshaw!" he said, shaking his shoulders, as though to throw off his momentary weakness. "The chances are ten to one he will never get this far. Convicts at large do not get very far as a rule."

"The chances are heavily against him, I should say," said Bellenger. "But since we know of this we can be on the look-out, as you say, sir, and if he comes we'll give him a warm reception."

"It's foolishness probably," said the Judge, "but it'll be a good opportunity for you to learn to handle a revolver."

"I'd as lief use my fists. I used to be a fair boxer."

"Fists are all very well, but they're no use against a revolver. It's got too long a reach. I have a pair upstairs. This place is so lonely that it has always been a satisfaction to have them. They're rather tricky things, but I'll give you a lesson or two and you'll soon get the hang of it. Just take care you don't pot Mary Bassett or Jackie."

Jackie was highly interested and pleased with the revolver practice, and Mary was disturbed. Sir James put it down to John Bell's desire for understanding, but she was only half-satisfied.

They fixed a paper target to one of the trees near the shore and blazed away at it, while Mary and Jackie sat watching behind them. They neither of them showed to very great advantage, but the practice at all events familiarized Bellenger with an unknown weapon, and a revolver holds many possibilities, and the very feel of it is an enlargement of one's capabilities in the way of defense.

"What kind of a man is the enemy?" asked Bellenger. "Swarthy, sallow, lank black hair, quick black eyes liked a whipped dog's?"

"That's him to a T," said the Judge. "Just a typical low-class Italian. His moustache will be off and his hair cropped close. Medium-sized, and something cat-like about him."

"Am I to shoot at anything of the kind I see prowling about?"

"I can't quite advise that, but if anything of the kind crops up it will be an advantage to know it, and we'll be ready for it."

The papers were full of the escape, but the days passed and no news came of the recapture of the convicts. To Bellenger, however, it seemed very unlikely that the bloodthirsty Ferrario would ever get the length of Brant, and that happened which drove all thought of him completely out of his head.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAST UP BY THE SEA.

THAT was a strange summer in more respects than one. Atmospherically, the calculations of the weather prophets were blown to pieces by a hurricane which got loose in America, and, not satisfied with the havoc it wrought there, came tearing across the Atlantic and strewed the English coast with wrecks.

Not even in the winter storms had they seen so furious a sea as now came thundering over the flats, and foamed up above the highest high-water mark, right in among the sandhills themselves. Mighty mountains of lead-colored water bursting and bristling with foam came tumbling headlong, as it seemed, out of a lead-colored sky, so narrowed was the horizon, and so close the scour of the driving clouds. To Bellenger, standing with the rest on a sandhill outside Brant grounds, it seemed incredible that so monstrous a commotion should have issued from so narrow a channel as lay out there among the treacherous Wytham banks. But the hurricane had been goading the waters for three thousand

miles, and now in their turn they rushed on the land as if they would overwhelm it. The shriek of the gale and the roar of the waters were deafening. The trees in the Brant grounds humped their backs and bowed their heads and roared in their extremity. The sandhills, which the ordinary southwester whips into life and activity, so that they move, and stir, and change their shapes from hour to hour, lay stark and stricken under the flying foam, like piles of giant corpses cast up by the sea. The spume sponges swept inland in clouds like mighty flakes of yellow snow, and the dwellers on far-off plains tasted salt that day.

Bellenger, after long peering through his narrowed lids into the yeasty turmoil in front, gripped the Judge's arm suddenly and shouted in his ear, "There is something out there!" and pointed.

But the Judge shook his head. "God help them if there is," he said, "but I cannot see."

Then, following his indications, Mary Bassett, hooded so that only her eyes and nose were visible, saw it too—a white flicker against the leaden sky, which remained a flicker while all around it the foam-flashes spouted and died and rose again.

"Oh, do something!" she cried to Bellenger, and he turned and ran to the house, and found the trees

all plastered, trunk and leaf, with the flying spume as with a sudden leprous growth of fungus. He bade Kenyon saddle Bay Ronald and go quickly and warn the Wytham men that their lifeboat was wanted. Then he gathered all the rope he could find, and ran back, for it seemed to him that the ship might break up before the boat could get to her, and in that case some human flotsam and jetsam might come within reach of their help, though indeed it seemed impossible that any living thing could win through so horrible a tumult.

Kenyon departed, and Bay Ronald did his best, but the Wytham boat never came. For she was at that moment washing bottom up in the surge, with five of her men dying beneath her, and the rest flung ashore bruised and broken.

When Bellenger got back to the sandhills and looked for the rag of sail he could not find it, and Mary greeted him with a gloomy shake of the head.

"It has just gone!" she cried, and they stood and watched without hope.

And presently in the welter they caught a glimpse of something that came and went, now flung up on a bristling wave, then lost behind it, up again, and lost again, but thrust always by the wind to the shore. And at last they made it out to be a piece of

a mast, with a dragging rag of sail, and some dark body clinging to it. It came nearer and nearer, swept up toward them, then rolled back, over and over, horribly, in the dreadful grip of the back-wash.

Mary wrung her hands at the sight, and the Judge stamped the sand while uttering strange words at his impotence. Bellinger, with a hopeless feeling that he must do something, even though it proved fruitless, bound a rope round his body, and thrust the end into the other's hands.

"Hold tight!" he shouted. "Next time he comes I will try."

The fragments came hurling in again, and he floundered out to meet them. His fingers touched the thrashing timber, but it was gone again before he could grip it. The race of the back-wash swept him off his feet, but the hold of the rope kept him from going out with it. He waited and saw it coming again, braced himself to the onrush, flung his arms around the spar, and fell on it bodily, anchoring it to the sand with his own weight and the hold the rope gave him. Then, bit by bit, he dragged it up a foot or two, for the body was tied to the spar and he could not unloose it. Another wave caught him, but he set his teeth and clung to his prize, and rolled over and under it, bumping

and bruising, and full to the mouth with sand and salt water. Then, while Mary and Jackie held the rope in their feeble grip, the Judge ran down, and between them they dragged their burden ashore, and Bellenger fell flat, gasping out sand and salt, and groaning for a free breath, while the Judge set to work to loose the man from the spar.

"I doubt it's labor in vain," he cried into Bellenger's drumming ear, as he came up, when his lungs had got into something like working order again.

It was not a nice sight—a burly, black sailor, bleached by the thrashing of the waters to a pale, unhealthy, gray-black color, his thick lips and the palms of his hands sodden, pinky white, his eyes closed, his limbs laxed as if in death.

"Is he dead?" asked Bellenger.

"Looks it, but we must do our best. Run, dear," to Mary, "and tell them to get blankets and hot bottles ready. We must carry him in."

He taxed their strength to the utmost, for the Judge was not as young as he had been, and Bellenger was still shaking with the strain of his wrestle with the waves. They got him along stage by stage, however, till Kenyon met them with his news of the lifeboat disaster, then he gave a hand

with the black man and they got along more quickly. The kitchen was turned into a temporary hospital, to the great disgust of the cook, especially when she saw that it was not even a white man who was to be benefited by her upsetting. And then the menfolk fell upon the waif and maltreated him back to life with a devotion worthy of a better object—as it turned out. But this they could not know. At present he was only a man and a brother in extremis, and their sole endeavor was to coax back the life that was almost gone.

They fought death back inch by inch all through the afternoon, but at last the black lids fluttered and disclosed the distended, black eyeballs rolling vaguely in their blue-white, bloodshot settings, and the thick lips retracted and displayed a set of tigerish white teeth, and the black man groaned dolorously and came back to life.

Then they left him in charge of Bagot and Kenyon, and by dinner time Bagot somewhat stiffly reported him as sitting up by the fire, eating soup as if he hadn't tasted food for a month, and asking for more brandy. The Judge and Bellenger, however, had had enough of him for one day, and Bagot was given instructions to see to his comfort for the night and they would see him in the morning.

And when, next day, they went to see how he was getting on, they found him still crouching as close to the kitchen fire as Mrs. Cook would permit, as though the chill of the sea was still in his bones. He stood up, grinning from ear to ear, and bobbing his head in jerks expressive of gratitude. Then his eye went past the Judge and fell on Bellenger, and the expansive smile slackened somewhat, and he kept looking at him in quick, rolling glances while he replied to the Judge's questions.

He was cook on the coasting brig "Jane," of Whitehaven, bound north with coals. The gale had driven them on a bank out there, and one by one all had been swept off, till at last he was the only one left. When she broke up he managed to get hold of one of the yards, and twisted a rope round it and himself, and so came ashore.

He spoke in a mixture of drawl and whine which was not prepossessing, and it set some chord twanging in Bellenger's memory with a sense of discomfort for which for a time he could not account.

The mind, however, is a wonderful trailer, and unconsciously his thoughts tried back along various scents till, with a sudden shock, they got home. He stopped abruptly as they reached the study and struck his right fist angrily into his left hand, so that

the Judge stopped with his match half raised to his cigar and looked across at him in mild enquiry.

"I thought I knew him, and I do," said Bellenger, disgustedly, and his feelings showed plainly in his face.

"Who? The black man?"

"Yes. He was in Helstone with me"; and the Judge's face fell to the level of his own.

"H'm!" he said meditatively. "Sure?"—with a gleam of hope. "Black men come mostly out of one mould, you know?"

"Oh, it's he," said Bellenger, sitting down grimly and greatly upset. "It's bound to be he."

"Well, if it is," said the Judge, between puffs, "I wish he'd washed ashore somewhere else."

"There's no end to it," said Bellenger, gloomily.

"Pooh!" said the Judge, with a volley of smoke. "Light up, man, and don't trouble your head about him." All the same, his own equanimity was not undisturbed, but it was wholly on Bellenger's account.

"Do you think he knew you?" he asked presently.

"I'm inclined to think he did. His eyes were rolling round at me all the time you were talking to him."

"We'll pack him off as soon as we can. Meanwhile take no notice of him."

Bellenger thought that might possibly not be quite so easy as it sounded; but he said nothing, and they got to their work. They were both, however, somewhat upset by obstructive thoughts of their unwelcome guest.

"Just tell me all you know of this fellow, Bellenger," said the Judge, breaking off suddenly from what he was at. "It may be useful for me to know."

"He goes by the name of 'Black Sam,' but was entered on the books as Napoleon Buonaparte. He probably had a final name and dropped it. He was in for assault. He made a savage attack on the Governor one day in the exercise yard. Tried to smash in his head with a bit of iron piping. It happened to fall on my arm and broke it. He was in hospital for a time, and I had part charge of him. On the whole I should say he is a pretty bad lot."

"And I should say the sooner we're rid of him the better. We'll give him one more day, and then I'll pay his fare to Liverpool, and that will end it —as far as we are concerned."

Bellenger hoped it might, but felt some uneasy doubts again; and as it turned out, his intuitions were correct. In spite of his discomfort he felt a certain curiosity as to what the black would do and how he would try to do it. It would take the form

of blackmail, of course. So much cash—so much silence. No cash—then take the consequences.

The Judge looked across at his frowning face once or twice, and was half inclined to suggest that discretion might be the better part of valor, and that a couple of days' holiday away from Brant might save him annoyance. And he would have been right. But he doubted very much if Bellenger would go. He judged, and correctly, that he was not the kind of man to shirk trouble, and that the last thing that would appeal to him would be to run away from it. So he held his peace and lived to regret it.

Unfortunately, Master John Bellenger's youthful imagination had been completely captured by the astounding advent of the black man. He regarded him with a fearful fascination, compounded of many feelings, jumbling together into the black man's skin vague memories of Mary Bassett's stories out of the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "The Arabian Nights," and of the Baby King who came ashore in a storm. He invested him with attributes of which it is safe to say Black Sam possessed no single one that was good, except such as were visible to the imaginative eye. He revolved round his black star at a distance which he considered consistent

with personal safety, and whenever Mary Bassett missed her charge she knew where to find him. She was amused at his enchantment, and knew no reason why she should interfere with his enjoyment.

The black soon managed to learn from the frequenters of the kitchen all he wanted to know of the occupants of the house. It seemed to him that the powers that take care of poor Jack had landed him in very comfortable quarters. He determined to make the most of them. This comfortable kitchen was heaven compared with any place he had ever struck yet, ashore or afloat. Perhaps if he played his hand well he might get stopping on there. It was not of his own accord that he had come. They had brought him. They had, indeed, saved his life, but he was not sure that he thanked them overmuch for that, if he had to go back to the life he had been accustomed to—cold and starvation, jeers and blows from any who were strong enough in body or position to bestow them, and constant imprisonment when his evil temper or the ill-treatment of others drove him to retaliation. He would try to work on their feelings first, and if that failed—well, he had recognized his fellow-prisoner of Helstone, and maybe he could squeeze him.

So for the present he was on his best behavior, and sat sleek and shiny by the kitchen fire, entertaining his new-found friends there with many marvellous adventures which had never happened to him, in the peculiar sing-song drawl of his race, which lent a flavor to all he said and disarmed even the autocratic cook.

Little Lady Welde grew very sympathetic over him, and, with a kindly idea of the fitness of things, insisted on bringing Robert on his perch to bear him company and make him feel at home. She probably thought they could exchange sunny memories of foreign lands; and when Robert, after a careful and prolonged inspection of the horny black finger held out to him, attacked it with his beak and mumbled it as a novelty, she was highly delighted, and suggested to the Judge that the black man would be an agreeable addition to the establishment.

"Hi-yi!" sing-songed Black Sam, as he scratched the parrot's neck. 'Howdy, ole man? You recknize me, hey? Sims ter me like we met befo' somewhars, hey, good ole bluetail?" And the smooth African voice appealed to Robert to such an extent that he winked solemnly three times and then clawed sideways along the black man's arm, to Lady Welde's great satisfaction.

"Why, he really seems to know you," she said, with her little eyes sparkling kindly.

"Oh, yaas 'm, parr'ts allus tek ter me, 's if we was brothers," said Sam. "They knows more'n mos' folks, does parr'ts, 'n' they knows who's good to'm."

He saw nothing of Bellenger that day, and he was quite content to wait on where he was. He wondered vaguely whether the other would tell what he knew about him. He would soon know that by the treatment he received. If he did—well, so much the worse for him. He would make him pay for it. Meanwhile all he had to do was to wait, and he could wait in such comfortable quarters as well as any man he ever met.

On the second day, when the Judge considered Black Sam had had ample time for recovery, he sent for him to the study, after first sending Bellenger away.

"Well, my man, how are you feeling by this time? All right again?" and somehow his face and voice recalled associations that were not of the pleasantest to Black Sam's mind, though he could not remember ever having met this tall, stern-faced gentleman before.

"Yes, sah! I'se gitt'n wahm agin by degrees. My! t'were cold, sah!" and there was no simulation in his shudder.

"Well, now, where do you want to make for?—Liverpool?—Bristol?——"

"I'se not pertickler 'bout mekkin foh anywhahs, sah," with an expansive grin and one restless foot trying to burrow into the carpet as if it were his racial sands. "Wus kin' o' hopin, sah, mebbe you c'd fin' me suthen t' do raound tha haouse"; and he looked hopefully across at the Judge.

"Ah, I'm afraid we can't quite manage that. You see, we've got all the assistance we need. But I shall be glad to help you on your way as far as I can, if you'll make up your mind where you want to go."

"Yes, sah! I did kin' o' hope," began the black downcast, once more. "I ain't got nowhahs I wants ter go to. I c'd wuk in the gyarden an' 'tend to ther parr't, an'——"

"But you see, we don't need anyone to do that. How do you think we managed to get along till you came?" asked the Judge, with a smile.

" I dunno, sah! But I did kin' o' hope——"

"Now, see here, my man. That is quite out of the question. Make up your mind where you want to go to and I'll help you to get there. You can stop for the night. Let me know to-morrow morning."

He could not well turn the man out by main force

after having saved his life, but he was not going to let him foist himself upon him in this way. All he wanted was to get rid of him as quietly and as quickly as possible.

The black looked at him and hesitated; then, deciding that he was not a man to be moved by words, said "Thank'ee, sah!" and went out of the room.

Bellenger, coming up from a stroll on the shore with Mary Bassett and Jackie, found the black man standing at the corner of the house, evidently on the watch for him. As they crossed the wide gravelled space, from the shrubbery walk to the front door, the black slouched forward and accosted him with "Hi, mistah, kin I speak t'yeh?"

"Certainly. What is it you want?" said Bellenger, and asked Mary and Jackie to go on. Jackie was for stopping to admire his fascinator, but his father peremptorily bade him go.

"Yew 'member me, I spec's, sah!" said Sam.

"What is it you want?"

"That's all right. Yew an' me wus tegether once befo'. What I want is 't we shed be tegether agin. See?"

"I don't understand you. If you mean you want to stop here you must ask the Judge. I have nothing to do with these matters."

"Hain't? Well, mebbe yew c'n wuk it with the ole man. He's gi'n me word to go."

"Then the best thing you can do is to go, my friend. He's not the kind of man to be trifled with."

"Hain't? An' what yew gwine ter do 'bout it?"

"I? Nothing! It's nothing to do with me"; and he began to move on toward the door.

"See hyah, mistah, thet won't wuk. If yew won' gi' me a han' I blows on yeh. See?"

"Blow away, my friend, as hard as you choose. Mind you don't waste your breath"; and he went on into the house, while the black growled curses inside his thick lips and slouched back toward the kitchen.

Bellenger judged it best to tell the Judge just what had passed.

"Don't trouble about him, my boy," said Sir James. "I've told him he must clear out to-morrow. He was anxious to stop, and suggested the post of parrot-keeper as being suited to his capabilities. I have told him I will pay his railway fare to Liverpool, or any other place he wants to go to, and he goes to-morrow."

"Suppose he declines to go?"

"Then we'll make him."

"We could put him out into the road, I suppose,

but I don't know that we could make him go away," said Bellenger, thoughtfully.

"He'd soon get tired of the road," laughed the Judge, with a whimsical look, as though he thought Bellenger was making a mountain out of a molehill. "If he gives any annoyance, we'll give him in charge."

And John Bellenger devoutly hoped that it might not come to that, for, from the moment he had recognized the black, he had been in a state of nervous apprehension lest that turned-down page in his life should come to Mary Bassett's knowledge by any other informant than himself. The Judge had his own feelings in that matter, too, but he kept them to himself.

When Bellenger sat working by himself in the study that night after the Judge had gone up to bed, Bagot came quietly in and closed the door. Bellenger's first glance at the old man's face, and the curious questioning look he caught in reply, made him feel sure the black had been talking about him.

"Mr. Bellenger, that black fellow says he wants to see you. I've been putting him off—saying he couldn't. But he's a-gitting angry and says he will. Strikes me, sir, he's no better'n he ought to be."

"I'm afraid he isn't, Bagot," he said, pursing his lips. "Well, bring him in and I'll see what he wants"; and presently the door opened again and the black came slouching in.

"Well, what is it now?" asked Bellenger, curtly, through his smoke.

"I'se a-gwine ahsk yew wunst mo', mistah, ef yew gwine help me," said Samuel, bluffly.

"You've had your answer already."

"See hyah, mistah, 'tain't no manner o' use talkin' that way t' me. I got a holt on yew and yew knows it. Yew got a nice soft crib hyah an' I ain't gwine empty-handed. Not if I knows it."

"You'll be in a jail in quicksticks if you don't take care."

"Ho! An' whaffaw'll I be in jail faw, mistah, eh? Whaffaw, eh? Jist yew tell me that. Whaffaw?"

"For attempting blackmail, you blackguard."

"Hi-yi! See hyah, mistah, yew gi' me twenty pounds an' I go 'way quiet and gi' no mo' trouble."

"Not a farthing on any condition whatever."

"Then, by gum, I opens my mouf to the old man in mawning, and blows on yew, by gum!"

"As you please. Anything else?"

"I'll bust you out'n hyah quicker'n a dog's bark. My soul, yes sah! Yew'd done well to speak me fair——"

The door behind him opened, and the Judge came in in his dressing-gown and slippers with Flick at his heels.

"Now then, what's all this?" he asked sternly, looking at the black till he grew uncomfortable.

"Me an' this gentleman was havin' a conversashun, sah——"

"He was just threatening to tell you all he knows about me if I didn't give him twenty pounds," said Bellenger, quietly.

"Ah; that's a matter for the police," said the Judge. "What kind of a return do you call this for all the kindness you've been shown here? This gentleman saved your life at risk of his own, and here you stand threatening him. If it is of any use to you, understand at once that you can tell me nothing I do not know about him. He was in Helstone when you were there. It was I sent him there. I know why he was there, and how he behaved there, and what is more, I know how you behaved there, and the kind of record you have behind you. I offered this afternoon to pay your fare to Liverpool. I'm mightily inclined now to hand you over to the

police instead"; and he looked angry enough to do it. "What do you say, Bellenger?"

"It might be the best thing to do," said Bellenger, quietly.

The black looked furiously from one to the other, and saw they were too strong for him. He changed his tone at once.

"Yew won't do that, sah! Yew gi' me what yew promised t' gi' me, an' I'll go 'way in the mawning an' trubble yew no mo'. An' I'm sorry——"

"You'll be a good deal sorrier before you're through with it, my man, if I have any more annoyance from you. The only proper place for you is the inside of a jail; and the sooner you're back there the better for the community at large. You'd better clear out of this at once. I don't care to have you in the house after this."

"Lawd's sake, mistah! Yew wudn't turn me out in mi'lle o' night like this?"

"You should have thought of all that before."

"Hi-yi! So should—so should. Say, mistah, lemme stop till mawning, an' I'll cl'ar out right smart. I swar I will."

"Just see if Kenyon has gone to bed yet, Bellenger, and if not ask him to come here."

When Bellenger returned with Kenyon the Judge

was smoking a cigar and Black Sam was shifting slowly from one leg to the other in considerable discomfort.

"Kenyon," said the Judge, "this man can sleep in the empty harness room to-night. Fling him down a bundle of straw, and shut the dogs into the outer room. You will hold no conversation with him, and you will put him outside the gates by seven o'clock to-morrow morning. If he refuses to go lock the dogs into the room with him, put the bay into the trap, and go over to Wytham for a couple of constables. Bring them back with you. You understand?"

"Yessir!"

"Right. Now, my man, away you go. And thank your stars that you have one more chance. It's the last you'll get from me." And Black Sam turned and went.

"The black cur!" said the Judge. "I heard you talking and guessed what was up. Are we rid of him?"

But Bellenger shook his head doubtfully. "I would gladly pay his fare to Liverpool," he said.

"So would I, several times over, but it wouldn't be the slightest use now. We must take our chance.

If he gives us any more trouble I'll jail him in a moment; and when he comes out he won't want to loaf about here any more."

Brant was free from contamination when the Judge strolled round the stables next morning, and Kenyon reported the black man as having gone quietly away.

"I thought common sense would prevail," said the Judge. "He saw the game wouldn't work and he's taken himself off."

Bellenger, however, did not feel so sure. But that was perhaps only natural, and he lived in daily expectation of the black turning up again.

A week later the Judge had occasion to visit Wytham, and, in satisfaction of Lady Welde's evident anxieties, Bellenger begged permission to accompany him on business of his own. So they drove in with Kenyon in attendance, and Bellenger's private affairs took up so very little of his time that he was at the Judge's elbow wherever he went, and nothing untoward occurred. They had a stroll along the front, just for a change of faces, as Sir James said, and had lunch at the hotel.

As they were driving home, about a mile out of the town, they overtook a burly figure plodding sturdily the way they were going. They knew him

at a glance when they drew near enough, but Sir James drove steadily past without a word.

"Hi-yi, thah! Yo' jailbird!" broke out behind them in a bellow. "Yo' mighty big man sett'n up thah, but yo' on'y a jailbird, af'r all! On'y a jailbird! On'y a jailbird!"

Bay Ronald came round with a jerk that came near to unseating Kenyon, who had been looking for nothing of the kind, and they were up with the black before he had run a dozen yards. The way the Judge plied his whip on the running figure was a treat for the beholders and a source of vast enjoyment to himself. He said nothing, but his face was grim, and the lash whistled round Black Sam's neck and head, and cut and bit till he covered them as well as he could with his arms and tore along the road, head down, bellowing like a bull, and too bewildered with his punishment to leap into the hedge.

But the race came to a sudden end. There were stray lamp-posts scattered along the roadside, and into one of these the black dived headlong, and he and the glass top of the lamp came to the ground together.

The Judge drove on without stopping till he came to the police station. He sprang down and went inside, and before he climbed up again a couple of

constables had started off to gather in the black man. The dogcart passed them presently on the road and drew up at the broken lamp. But it takes more than a lamp-post to damage an African skull. The ground was strewn with broken glass, but there was no trace of Black Sam.

"He's gone," said the Judge, as the constables came up. "Keep a sharp lookout for him, my men, and bottle him up as soon as you can lay hands on him."

"We will, sir;" and the dogcart drove on.

They kept a sharp lookout themselves all the way home, but saw no signs of him. But from behind a quickset hedge, on top of a dyke dividing the water-meadows, a pair of quick-rolling eyes with streaks of blood in the blue-whites of them watched them pass, and a pair of thick lips dribbled curses without end.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BLACK REQUITAL.

THE black had done his best, after his expulsion from Brant, to interest the Wytham people in his distressful case. But they would have none of him. They did not like the look of him. They laughed at his wild stories and set him down as crazy. No one cared to employ him, and when he grew violent under his treatment and importunate and threatful, they refused him even the scraps they had before flung to him.

The police ordered him out of the place at last, and he was moving on in obedience to their orders when he came across the Judge on the high road that day.

And now there began for the people of Wytham and Wynsloe a time of extreme annoyance and exasperation. Outlying cottages were broken into night after night, and levies made on their slender provisionings. Wayfarers on the lonely roads went in fear and trembling, though no one had so far been attacked, probably because eatables were at the moment of more consequence to the marauder than

money which he could not spend. The police were at their none-too-efficient wits' end. Old Birstle, the postman, jogged his solitary round, past Brant to Wynsloe and back to Wytham, in company with a huge horse pistol, which looked fully as dangerous at one end as at the other, and vowed he would blow to pieces anything that interfered with him in the discharge of his official duties. He gave them the latest news at Brant each time he called with or for letters, and waxing valiant through immunity, began at last to express aloud his contempt for the local constabulary, and regret that no opportunity offered for him to distinguish himself.

"Ah just wish he'd teckle me," said the old man, boastfully. "Ah'd show him what's what. But Ah reck'n he knaws a man w'en he sees wan an' he kips out o' my way, an' plays hide and seek with them gallus bobbies. They'll nivver cop 'im, not if they lives to be's old's Methus'ler."

Nevertheless poor old Bristle was found next day lying on the road, less than a mile from Brant gates, with his head badly damaged and his dangerous armament gone. And when his wits came back he vowed he had seen nothing. Something fell on him out of the sky and that was all he knew about it.

"He's too clever for our police," said the Judge.

"But what can half-a-dozen men do when the rascal has twenty square miles of uninhabited sandhills to hide in? It's odd if he doesn't pay us a visit after our last meeting. Better carry that revolver in your pocket, my boy, and if you can wing him you'll deserve well of the community."

Matters reached such a pitch at last that the butcher and grocer and baker boys flatly refused to run the blockade of the lonely road. Brant was in a state of siege, and was only relieved from short commons by Kenyon's visits to town in the dogcart every second day, whence he returned laden with eatables and gossip. And as he went and came in broad daylight he suffered no molestation and enjoyed himself exceedingly. More than once the Judge went with him, and dropped off at the police station and delivered himself of his feelings to the Superintendent. But he had to acknowledge that he did not know what more could be done, unless the able-bodied men of the two villages would take a couple of days' holiday and ransack the sandhills systematically from end to end, leaving no foot unsearched.

"To tell the truth, sir, my men are getting a bit beat," said the Superintendent. "It's been night and day work for the last ten days, and one never can tell

where he'll break out next. There's places in those sandhills where he could lie hid while you walked over him. And he can get all the food he wants for the taking. I'm not at all sure he's not got someone to join him now."

"This is getting serious, Jessup. What makes you think that?"

"Well, sir, he's all over the place. Here's word"—he picked up an official paper from his desk—"of a breaking in at Etterton last night, and that's a good eight miles inland, and Holt's Farm was broken in, too, and that's the far side of Wynsloe."

"H'm!" said the Judge, thoughtfully. "That's bad! Very bad! If we don't take it in hand quickly every rascal in the country will join him and there'll be a fine to do. A thorough beat through the hills is the only thing, and the sooner it's done the better. We might get some more police down from Liverpool. I know Carr; I'll write to him. Now how many men can you get round here? It's a matter that concerns everybody, and every available man ought to help."

"They'll help quick enough if we can get their masters to let them off work. We ought to get close on a hundred, I should say."

"And Wynsloe should manage twenty or thirty.

With the extra men we get from Carr we ought to muster one hundred and fifty or so. If one hundred and fifty white men can't catch one nigger, he deserves to have the run of the county."

"When do you suggest trying it, Sir James?"

"This is Monday. Suppose we say Thursday. That's the half-holiday anyway—so it won't upset things more than is necessary. Can you work it here if I tackle Wynsloe? I'll write to Carr now if you'll give me a pen and some paper. Our posts are a bit irregular since Birstle got his head cracked. The idea will be to start at daylight and beat clean through the whole length of the sandhills, examining every hole in which a nigger could possibly hide."

"Take a good deal more than a hundred and fifty men to do that, sir," said the Superintendent, figuring on a bit of paper, "that is, to do it properly. Each man can examine about twenty feet on each side of him. The hundred and fifty men will spread out about a mile. In some places the sandhills are two and three miles wide. He can nip round the end of the line and laugh at us—or just move on in front when he sees us coming."

"I'll post a line of look-outs all along the Wynsloe end—that is, as far as they'll go—and we'll

work up toward them. Get all the boys you can to join us. Tell them all I'll give a pound to the man or boy who sights him first. I'll come in again on Wednesday and we'll discuss final arrangements. Whip in every man and boy you possibly can, Jessup. It's really not to anybody's credit that such a state of matters should be possible. Oh, I don't mean you especially," as the superintendent opened his mouth to reply. "But it's a fact all the same"; and the Judge drove smartly off, leaving Mr. Jessup with a feeling as though he had had a flick of the whip.

When the Judge reached Brant he found it in a state of wildest excitement and dismay. Jackie had disappeared. His father was out, searching for him, still. Miss Bassett was prostrated, and Lady Welde and Robert were in hysterics.

Bellenger had settled to his writing in the study that afternoon after the Judge left for Wytham, and was soon over head and ears in his work. Miss Bassett and Jackie had been warned to keep inside the grounds, and had not been outside them for a week—much to the boy's discontent. Never had the shore and sandhills seemed so desirable as now, when he might not go to them. It was all Mary could do to keep him within bounds. To appease

him as far as possible they wandered down among the trees, and Mary engaged him in a game of hide-and-seek round the trunks and thickets.

All went merrily till Jackie managed to hide himself so completely that she could not find him at all. She searched gaily at first, apostrophizing him blithely under the belief that he could hear her. Then she grew anxious and called to him sharply. The hair round her ears and neck began to bristle, and she ran wildly from point to point, searched every possible place, then, pale and wild-eyed, ran to the house for Bellenger.

She burst in on him in a panic, and between pumping heart and lack of breath could hardly speak.

"Jackie!" she gasped. "I can't find him. Come!" and turned and ran back the way she had come, and Bellenger followed at her heels.

"Here!" she said, between gasps, when they reached the place. "We were playing hide-and-seek. I was here. He went over there. I have searched everywhere."

Her face was desperate with fear. Her eyes shrank from his possible reproaches.

"He's probably run down to the shore," said Bellenger. "I'll go and look. You go back to the

house, Miss Bassett. You're quite spent. I'll find him all right"; and he struck at once through the bushes for the shore. When he got there she was close behind him.

They stood on the sandhills and called. They went down to the shore and called. They searched all the lower part of the garden, calling aloud everywhere. But there was no trace of the boy.

"He can't have worked round to the house just to tease you, can he?" asked Bellenger, at last.

"I'm quite sure he wouldn't. It wouldn't be the game; and he wouldn't do it."

"And you—saw nothing?"

"Saw nothing, heard nothing. He left me to hide as he had done before. When I had counted my hundred I followed and searched for a time. Then I got frightened and ran for you."

His lips tightened and he tried hard, for her sake, not to show the fear that was growing in him. But she saw it, and cried in anguish, "Oh, you don't think that man has got him? Oh, say you don't think that," and then, before he could answer her, she reeled and fell, and he caught her in his arms and carried her to the house. He carried her straight to Lady Welde's sitting-room and delivered her into the little lady's charge with a word or two of ex-

planation. He sent a maid to her assistance as soon as he could summon one, and then picked up cap and stick and went off with knitted face to search again for his boy.

He was still out searching when Sir James and Kenyon returned from Wytham, and when the Judge heard the news he used language which was unusual with him.

It was useless going after Bellenger. He might have gone in any direction. He was sure to come back sooner or later, with or without the boy. Without him—the Judge felt sure—as sure as he felt that Black Sam had been too much for them. He went in to Mary Bassett and got all the information he could from her.

She was breaking her heart at the thought of so dire a catastrophe having come upon them through her, and it took the Judge all his time, and his strongest assurances, to convince her that he did not so regard the matter, and to very partially reassure her with respect to Bellenger.

"He will think nothing of the kind, my dear," said the kind old man, in reply to some wild words of hers, whose self-revelation yet occasioned him a gleam of satisfaction. "He would say nothing if you had anything to blame yourself for. But you

haven't—and he won't even think it. Now, don't you think that again, my dear. I wish he'd come back. If I knew which way he'd gone I'd go after him; but a man in the sandhills is like a needle in a haystack."

It was long after dark when Bellenger came slowly up from the shore, and hung up his cap and dropped his stick into the rack. Sir James heard him and came quickly out of the study, and drew him inside.

"No signs?" he asked, anxiously.

"No signs!" replied Bellenger, hopelessly.

"Don't lose heart, my boy. It's that black rascal, of course; and his only use for the lad is to get money. Besides, he had no bad feeling toward him. He'll take good care of him."

But the father shook his head. He had his doubts and good reasons for them, after all that had passed.

"There's Mary Bassett crying her heart out," said the Judge, "and blaming herself for it all."

"Oh, pray assure her I have no thought of the kind," said Bellenger, quickly. "I am quite sure she did everything she could. It might have happened to anybody. What can we do more? I have been up and down among the sandhills, calling as long as I could see. But I saw and heard nothing."

"I would have followed you if I had known which way you'd gone," said the Judge. "He's been too much for us this time, but we'll have him yet." And he told Bellenger of the arrangements he had made for a general search.

That was, perhaps, as miserable a night as Brant had ever known. Bellenger was in the deepest depths of depression, and filled with gloomy imaginings. He saw his little lad in a dozen different cases, each more horrible than the rest, and the least horrible as prisoner to that brutal black in the chill loneliness of the sandhills. He paced the study like a caged animal, passing a word now and again with the Judge, and finding it impossible to sit still, though he felt utterly weary and unstrung.

Sir James had sent Kenyon back on Bay Ronald with word to the Superintendent of Police at Wytham as soon as he learned what had happened. And Kenyon had brought back word that the Superintendent and all the men he could spare would come round first thing in the morning.

They could do nothing more, and the hours of helpless waiting were a long-drawn agony. The Judge had suggested every scrap of consolation and hope that was in him, and spun them out to their finest threads till they were worn thin and would

no longer bear the weight of words, and they fell to silence scarcely disturbed by Bellenger's slow, unceasing footsteps.

The old man sat watching him through his smoke for a long time as he paced to and fro, to and fro, into and out of the circle of the shaded lamp, and his own kind heart was exceedingly heavy. He could feel what the other was feeling, but knew that his deepest depth was surface compared with the father's. He got up at last and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"Lad," he said, gravely, at last, "we are in God's mill and the grinding is bitter. But our little lad is in God's hands, and however it is with him it is well. Go and lie down now, or you'll not be fit for to-morrow. Even if you don't sleep it will do you good. And we will each of us ask God's good care for him."

Bellenger wrung his hand in silence, and they turned out the lamp and went upstairs together, and Brant was a house of prayer that night.

Mary Bassett knelt by her bedside for a very long time, with her swollen face pressed tightly into her hands, through which the tears still trickled slowly. And when, cold and cramped, she crawled into bed at last, she felt bruised and broken, and as

if she would like to sleep on and wake no more.

And the Judge prayed the privileged prayers of an old servant whose life had been spent in high and honorable service, and who had long since found the source of all comfort, and now brought to it a heart that was sore.

And John Bellenger knelt without a word, but with one cry ringing up from his aching heart in ceaseless iteration, "Help! Help! Help!" And at last he threw up his arms above his head, like a man in a pit reaching up toward the hand stretched down from above, and cried aloud his prayer of utter despair in so agonized a whisper, and with eyes so strained and hands that grasped so eagerly for what he sought, that it seemed as though, by the very strenuousness of his desire, he would drag down an answer to his prayer.

And at last he fell asleep from sheer weariness, and so maybe garnered the first-fruits of his prayers. For he woke at dawn refreshed and strong for the work that lay before him. And when the Judge's shrewd eyes leaped quickly to his face as they met he was relieved at what he saw there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WIPED OUT.

THE Wytham men were there by seven o'clock, but Sir James and Bellenger were waiting for them, and they all drank hasty cups of coffee and pouched the neat packets of sandwiches Mrs. Cook and Bagot had been preparing for an hour past, and set off at once for the sandhills.

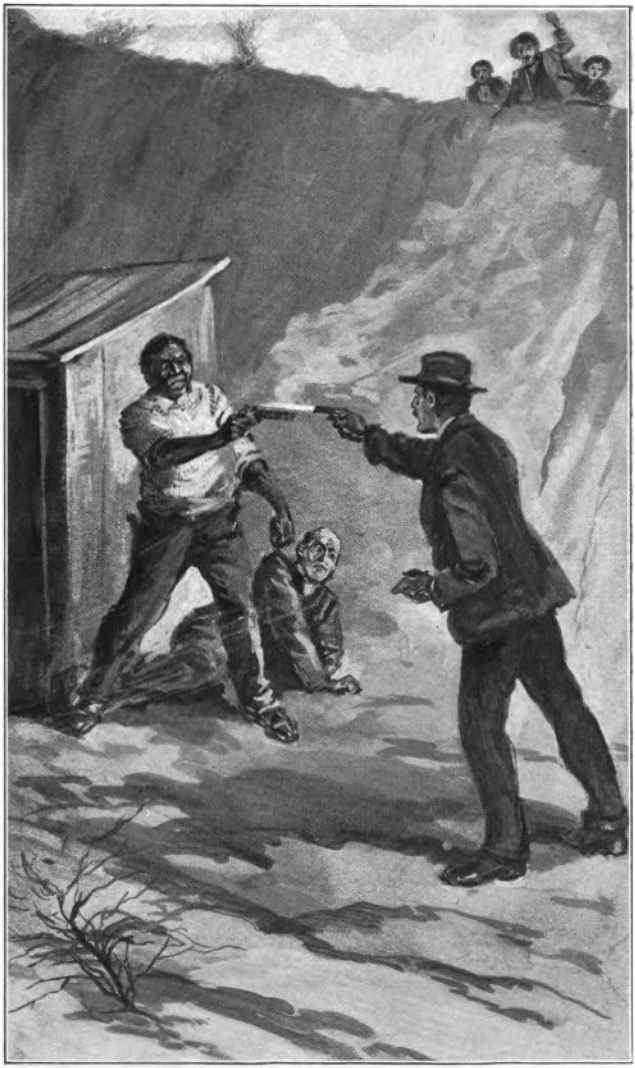
Mary Bassett came down stairs as they passed out of the front door, and the Judge saw her and plucked Bellenger by the sleeve, and they went back to her for a moment.

She looked up at them appealingly and then broke down again. Her face was very wan, and there were blue circles below her eyes.

"My dear child," said the Judge, "you are making yourself ill——"

"Oh, it was all my fault," she said, looking up at Bellenger through her tears.

"Pray don't feel that," he said very earnestly. "I have never thought it for one moment. But I hope we are going to find him," he said, forcing a smile.



BELLENGER FIRED, HEEDLESS OF THE BIG PISTOL.

"God grant it!" she said, and they followed the Superintendent down the wood path.

"She takes it very hard," said the Judge. "Looks as if she hadn't slept a wink all night."

"I am sorry she is feeling it so much," said Bellenger. "I am quite sure she did everything possible."

"Where shall we strike for, Sir James?" asked the Superintendent, as they came up with him and his men, all gathered in a bunch and all gazing helplessly over the endless range of softly-rounded sandhills.

The Judge looked at Bellenger.

"It is all guesswork," said Bellenger. "Suppose we try this side this time. I was round that way yesterday"; and they took the hills on the Wytham side.

To and fro they ranged, spread well out, and scrutinizing every foot of the ground, while the sun mounted higher and higher, and the dogs tore madly along the sandy gullies and round the sliding hill shoulders and spread consternation in timid rabbit hearts. It was heavy walking and depressing work, for each man felt that the chances were at least even that every step he took was one step further away from what they sought. They halted at mid-day, and sat in the sand to eat their sandwiches, and so

far they had not seen the smallest trace of anything outside the ordinary run of sandhill life.

While they munched, the Superintendent told the Judge of the arrangements he had made for Thursday.

"As soon as I got word of this matter," he said, "I wrote out a circular and my men are taking it round to-day. I shall have their report when I get back."

"How many do you expect to muster?"

"I think we'll manage the hundred and fifty all right."

"I'll increase my offer to £10 to the man that first sets eyes on him," said the Judge.

"And I'll add another ten," said Bellenger, "or as much more as you think fit."

"I'll send that round to-night and all Wytham will turn out on the chance," said the Superintendent.

"The more the better. It's a bewildering prospect," said the Judge, looking away over the hummocks dancing in the noonday heat as far as the eye could reach. "You'll come to-morrow?"

"I'll come with a fresh set," said the Superintendent. "We might light on him at any moment. There'd be no objection to any others coming that want to, I suppose?"

"Bring everybody you can. We can't possibly have too many."

Then to and fro again, while the sun sank lower and lower and dipped at last in the sea, and they turned homeward through the meadows, tired out and less hopeful than when they started.

But the Judge would not allow hope to die so easily.

"It would have been very extraordinary if we had struck the trail at the first shot," he said. "He could hide for a month from a handful such as we are. With more men we'll do better. Make the prize known, Jessup, and if I know Wytham, we'll have a good show to-morrow and a better still on Thursday. If we don't find him in the grand beat-up we'll go on till we do. I don't for a moment believe he'll harm the boy. My only fear is lest he should skip and take him with him."

"All the country offices have been advised," said Jessup, "and they're on the look-out for him. Fortunately, he can't change his color, and black men aren't as plentiful about here as blackberries. He'll not find many hiding-places equal to this. I bet you he's nesting in some cosy hole as comfortable as a what-you-call-it in a rug. He must have heaps of prog stowed away, and clothes more than he knows

what to do with. Oh, yes, he's all right—till we find him. What will he get for this, sir?"

"With his previous record he ought to get a lifer," said the Judge. "He would if I had anything to do with it—utterly irreclaimable, and a menace to society."

Mary Bassett met them, pale and woe-begone. She had seen from the window that they came empty-handed. She was surprised to find hope still in them. She said little, but set to work to supply their bodily needs. The men went to the kitchen, and Jessup dined with Sir James and Bellenger. Mary sat at table with them, but ate nothing. Lady Welde did not appear.

Wednesday's chase was a repetition of Tuesday's, but on a larger scale. Every man and boy in and about Wytham, who could get away on any pretext whatever, flocked to the sandhills and made a day's picnic of it. Twenty pounds for the first sight of the black man set them all on fire. Every man and boy of them started out with the determination that if eyes could do it that twenty pounds should come back inside his trouser pocket, and while his eyes were busy looking for the fugitive his thoughts were rioting gaily over the spending of the money.

Nothing came of all their searching, however,

beyond a clearing of the ground for the grand round-up on the morrow. They ranged far and wide over the hills on the Wytham side, and came to a practical certainty that the black's hiding-place was nowhere thereabouts. Never had Wytham sandhills had such a rake over. To stand on a hilltop and see the untrodden wastes dotted far and wide with roaming black figures was a very curious sight to anyone who knew the natural desolation of the place. Elderly Br'er Rabbits, who knew something of the wiliness of Mr. Man, watched attentively from coigns of vantage with twitching noses and sinking hearts. And Baby Rabs, who knew by report only of the evil doings of the Bogeymen whose very name was used to scare them to bed every night of their lives, crawled about the burrows on tip-toes and shuddered lest their footsteps should be heard up above. And when the prowling figures drew nearer, and awful four-legged monsters rushed to and fro and thrust damp muzzles into the front doors of the parental mansions and blew and snuffled and sneezed down the hallway, young and old alike flattened themselves against the farthest sandy walls of their deepest cellars, conglomerate masses of bristling fur, palpitating hearts and agitated white-lined tails.

But the longed-for shout of discovery never came to the ears of the Judge and Bellenger, and they went home through the shadows again a little less hopeful still, though Sir James asserted stoutly that he had never expected anything to come of the search until Thursday.

Brant was all astir at daybreak, and breakfast that morning was a perfunctory twilight meal. The Judge galloped away on Bay Ronald through the early matins of the larks to post his vedettes along the hedges at the Wynsloe end of the drive. Bellenger went in the other direction to meet and marshal with the Superintendent the horde of mercenaries from Wytham and Etterton. For Etterton had heard of the tempting offer, and there was not a man in Etterton who could not find just as good a use for £20 as any man in Wytham or Wynsloe. The contingent from the Chief Constable at Liverpool was there also, and the father's hopes rose somewhat when Mr. Jessup exultantly informed him that, counting boys, there were close on three hundred in all.

"We'll give each man ten yards on each side," said Jessup, who was great on figures. "Then we'll cover the whole stretch at its widest, and if he's anywhere there we're bound to find him. Some of

us'll know more of these sandhills than we ever did in our lives before."

With no little difficulty the long, wavering line was at last strung out across the width of the sandhills, like a huge rosary whose larger beads were burly, blue constables dotted here and there to brace the rest. Then the line began its slow forward movement—over hill, down dale, never at any time visible in its whole length at a single glance. To Bellenger, standing on the highest point he could find, it looked like a great, wounded snake rolling over and over in agonized convulsions that swept it from end to end and left no peace in any single joint. He watched its progress for a time, his heart pealing its wordless prayer for "Help! Help! Help!" Then with his hand on the butt of his unaccustomed revolver, which the Judge had bidden him carry and use in case of need, he followed the searchers.

No need to exhort even the smallest of them to a sharp look-out. All the talk of the neighborhood since ever the Judge's offer was made had been of the black man's possible hiding-places and how to find them. No hole but was scrutinized, whilst the inhabitants squirmed in convulsions at the far end. No hummock but was carefully prodded, with the fearful possibility of the sticks coming to sudden

stoppage on a soft, little body. Never did hungry ferret make more careful inquisition into the possibilities of burrows than did that slow-moving line of men and boys. For popular opinion ran to a sand-cave with a very small opening; and every possibility of disguisement from the inside had been considered and discussed with vehemence that ran at times to within measurable distance of blows. Progress was slow, but they had plenty of time, and the watchword was "Thorough." They ate as they went, when the spirit moved them, and most of them plodded slowly along, munching all the time, with their eyes riveted on the sand.

The Judge remained among the Wynsloe men. Bellenger moved up and down the long line of the main body. His chief fear was that if the black was still in the hills he would see what was toward, and slip away unperceived, taking the boy with him, if, indeed, the latter were still alive, and he persistently refused to admit any other possibility to himself. On the other hand he reasoned that as the outlaw's depredations were made during the night, it was not unlikely that he would sleep during the day, and so there might be reasonable hope of taking him unawares.

The long, silent line advanced slowly along, each

man hoping at any moment, as the time drew on, to hear the shout that would announce the find, at the same time hoping most fervently that he himself would be the one to shout. At last, as they climbed the shifty heights, they could catch a distant sight of the Judge's look-outs, and two-thirds of the ground had been covered.

Bellenger, prowling restlessly on the landward side of his line, saw black dots moving about the sandhills far away in front of him. The distance grew smaller between them, till at last he thought he could distinguish the tall, slim figure of the Judge as he topped a hill and disappeared into the next dip.

Then he heard a shout, just such a shout as he had been waiting for for three days past, and saw the tall figure wave its arms and then vanish as though plucked down from below, and he ran forward through the heavy sand to see what had happened.

When the Judge had posted his men, and had explained to them that their chances of sighting the fugitive were perhaps better than anybody else's, since the black would inevitably try to make off if he got wind of the beaters, he wandered restlessly about his line, just as Bellenger was doing about his.

He could not stand still, and at last he called together half-a-dozen of his extra hands and began a prowl through the adjacent hills and valleys on his own account. Each of his outposts received strict injunctions to vigilance as he passed them, and the last man on the circuit offered a suggestion in his turn.

"If you be goin' on, sir, try th' Owd Cutting."

"What's th' Owd Cutting—and where is it?" asked the Judge.

"It's where Tom o' Jim's o' Jack's murdered owd Bilson, 'bout half-mile over there. They do say th' owd chap walks there yet. I thowt o' it, but——" and a pregnant shake of the head expressed all the rest.

"You know the place?" asked the Judge of those with him.

They sheepishly acknowledged that they knew it, but——

"Pshaw! Grown men frightened of ghosts in full daylight! Come along! This may be a matter of life and death." And they followed him heavy-footed, for if there is any man steeped in the legendary lore of warlock, evil spirit, and things that flap and fly by night, it is the amphibious dweller on the flats and dunes. The equally amphibious

peasant of the coasts of Finisterre and the Cotes-du-Nord runs him close, but I doubt if he beats him for sheer superstition.

By persistent questioning the Judge drew from them that the place they were bound for was a kind of sand quarry, whence a contractor many years ago had drawn huge quantities of sand, which he sent away by the train-load to distant parts for purposes unknown. A single line of rails had crept bit by bit into the sandhills, with a strange machine in front which scooped up a wagon-load of sand at once and tossed it into the waiting trucks. Then suddenly the whole thing was abandoned. The "Devil," as they called the mechanical spade, lay rusting where it used to rattle and scoop so merrily. The rickety railway line remained, and even some trucks, and old Bilson was left to guard them from the violent attentions of the youth of the neighborhood. And one morning he was found with his head battered in, and the battering was finally brought home to one Tom, son of Jim, son of Jack, whose patronymic was lost in the mists of antiquity. Since then the "Owd Cutting," for the very best of reasons, had been left very much to itself.

"The very place," said the Judge. "Why didn't I hear of it before?"

"Well, sir, I did think o' it, but——" and that was all the explanation there was, and there was no getting beyond it.

They struck the railway cutting, and down below at the bottom they could make out the rusty rails and sleepers, almost hidden under swaths of wind-blown sand. They followed along the top of the bank till they came to the great excavation—a gloomy hole, and shapeless, as though the "Devil" had snapped viciously here and there, as his evil spirit moved him and on no regular plan. There were rain pools in places, with margins of spongy grass or moss. The great spade had fallen over and the sand had nearly covered it up. There were half-a-dozen broken railway trucks lying on their sides. In the corner, right below them, stood a dilapidated wooden hut, jutting out from the sandy wall. A film of thin smoke hung round it and the smell of it came floating up to them.

The Judge was contemplating a thirty-feet jump into the soft sand below, when suddenly the burly form of Black Sam came slouching out of the hut. He had evidently just awakened up. He threw up his big, black fists for a yawn that was altogether too large for the hut, and, as the sleepy head rolled back, a snarl like that of a caged tiger whistled

through the great, bared teeth. His rolling eyes suddenly lighted on the Judge up above. He braced himself with a jerk like the snapping of a knife and dashed into the hut. The Judge gave a shout and waved to the distant line of beaters, and at the same moment the undercut ledge on which he and the others stood gave way and they rolled in a heap into the pit. Before the Judge could rise, the black was out again with Postman Birstle's big horse-pistol in his hand. He took things in at a glance, and in an instant he was sitting on the Judge's body and the other men were seeking cover from the threatening pistol.

"Cl'ar out quick, all you uns," cried the black, "or I'se scatter the old gent'eman's brains. Out you go and don't you come back 'less you wanter git shot yo'selves."

Then Bellenger came panting up to the further edge of the pit, and hurled himself down the moment his eyes lighted on the black man. All the grinding agony of the last few days was in him and blazed into sudden fury.

Black Sam sprang up at sight of him and levelled his armament. He pulled the trigger, but nothing followed. Bellenger picked himself up out of the sand, and ran straight at him, firing as he went, and

heedless of the big pistol. He ducked as the pistol itself came flying at his head, and pulled away at his own trigger automatically. He could hardly see the black figure in front. Everything was dim, as though a red mist had fallen on him. When he saw the black sway and fall he stopped shooting, and then he saw the Judge gather himself up out of the sand and come toward him.

"I don't think he will trouble us any more," said Sir James. "Come!" and he turned to the hut, and they went in together.

But there was no suspense for them there. Jackie hurled himself at them with a shout of delight, and his father gathered him into his arms.

"Thank God for that!" said the Judge, fervently.

"Thank God! Thank God!" said Bellenger, and pressed the little clinging figure still closer to him.

The men came pouring in now from all sides, till the sand-pit was like an uncovered ant-hill, and when Bellenger came out with Jackie on his shoulder a great shout went up from them all. And then they overran the hut and clustered thickly round Black Sam's body. One or more of Bellenger's many shots had taken effect, and the black had gone out beyond the reach of the law. The constables were already tying planks together for a stretcher.

The Judge was somewhat shaken with his fall, but presently he pulled himself together sufficiently to thank them all for their help, and to rate the Wynsloe men especially for their superstitious fears.

"Why, if I'd known of this place I should have come straight to it at once. But I never even heard of it. And some of you knew of it and never said a word."

"Never would ha' b'lieved any living man would ha' stopped here, Judge," said one. "T' place is full o' boggarts at night time."

"Boggarts be—hanged!" said the Judge. "However, we've got what we wanted, and we're all very grateful that the little lad seems none the worse of it"; and he raised his billy-cock for a moment as though to emphasize his thanks.

"I think," he said, with a laugh, "I'm the man that's entitled to that reward, as I set eyes on the black man first. But I don't want it, and you've all worked so well that I'd like you all to get something. Suppose we say five shillings to each man and half-a-crown to each boy. What do you say?"

They said "Yes!" with much vehemence, and the only question was how to pay them.

Bellenger solved that difficulty. He had been inside the hut for a further inspection of his boy's

prison, and had seen there some mouldering books. One he found was an ancient hymn-book, with big print and a goodly number of pages. Either old Bilson had been of a religious turn of mind, which was likely enough—or the black had carried it off in one of his night raids. However, it could be turned to account.

"Give each man a leaf," he suggested to the Judge, "and each boy half a leaf, and let the Bank redeem them on presentation."

"That does it," said the Judge, and in ten minutes the novel cheques were distributed and the contingents were on their way home.

They struck across the sandhills, Jackie astride his father's shoulders, prattling away as hard as he could talk, to him and Sir James, the rest streaming out in a great, wide-spread tail, and in the rear a dark, little group who took turns to bear a burden.

Mary Bassett had climbed to the roof of the house by means of a skylight, and Bagot and the cook and housemaids had been watching with her, by turns. When she saw the great company coming toward Brant, she knew the search was ended, one way or the other. She could not wait, but flew to meet them. And when she saw Jackie raised on high, the grateful sobs broke out in her and she did

not try to stifle them, but sped on, sobbing gratefully, and almost fell at their feet when she reached them.

Bellenger handed Jackie over to her for a minute. He knew how she felt, what self-reproaches she had suffered. She clasped the boy to her and wept over him afresh, and the father's heart went out to her with exceeding tenderness.

Then Sir James drew her arm through his, for he saw she was still shaking with excitement. Bellenger hoisted Jackie up again, and they went on home. They stopped at the end of the lane leading down to the great, white gates, and as the company drew round, Sir James thanked them all once more and bade them "good day!" and the cheer they gave could be heard almost at Wytham.

A very grateful house was Brant that night. When John Bellenger crept softly into his bed, and drew the gently breathing little body into his arms, and felt the sweet, sturdy life pulsing in it, he thought how different it all might have been. Through the bruising of his own heart for love of this dear little scrap of himself, he caught a glimpse, as never before, and even yet perhaps but dimly, of that greater love which in its fulness passes all understanding of man.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

JACKIE had really very little to tell. He had run away among the bushes to get as far as possible while Miss Bassett was counting her hundred with closed eyes. A big arm had suddenly encircled him, and a big hand covered his mouth, and he found himself being carried quickly away among the trees. They were at the Wynsloe side of the grounds when he heard Miss Bassett calling, and the black man carried him straight across the hills to the hut where they had found him. He had had plenty to eat, but the black would not allow him outside. At night when the black was away, he was too frightened to go out, and besides, the door was always fastened, and in the daytime the black lay asleep in front of it so that nobody could get past him. He had not ill-treated him in any way, and in his own way he had tried to amuse him; but he had told him he would cut his head off if he tried to get away or made any noise. And he had never had a wash nor had his clothes off all the time he was in the hut. At first he liked that, but now he felt dirty, and please he would like a bath.

"I suppose there will be an inquest," said Bellenger, as they sat smoking for a few minutes after supper, while Mary and Lady Welde were seeing Jackie through his bath and into his bed.

"Yes, there'll have to be an inquest, but there's no need to worry about it. It's as simple a case of justifiable homicide as there ever was. If you hadn't shot him he'd have shot you, if that old pistol had done its duty, and then he'd probably have hammered my head in. I think you saved my life, my boy."

"I had only one idea, and that was to make an end of him. I really hardly saw him or knew what I was doing till he fell, and then I knew."

"We'll have old Screeve there to keep an eye on things. Country coroners are a little inclined to magnify their office at times, especially when they don't get much to do. But I'll give Screeve the points and he'll keep them on the rail."

Mr. Josiah Screeve was the family lawyer of Wytham and neighborhood. He knew a great deal more of most county family matters than most of the county families themselves. A good, general knowledge of law, wide experience, a quite unusual common-sense, sterling honesty, and a genial avuncular manner, suggestive at once of confidences, good

advice, and ways out of difficulties—all these, combined with force of circumstances, and the natural frailties of humanity, and of county families in particular, had made Mr. Josiah Screeve what he was. For forty years past Sandshire for twenty miles round Wytham had been confessing its sins—so much of them, at all events, as were absolutely necessary for purposes of alleviation or extrication—to Josiah Screeve, and his acquaintance with family skeletons was peculiar and extensive, and not by any means of his own seeking. It is not too much to say that, if there had been the slightest danger of Mr. Screeve's knowledge becoming generally known, more than one county family would have started for a more congenial climate without stopping to pack its furniture. For the stories hidden behind the placid exteriors of some of those ivy-clad mansions, and behind the equally placid exterior of Mr. Josiah Screeve himself, were very strange stories indeed, and it was just as well they should be kept out of sight. That Mr. Screeve should have retained any faith whatever in humanity above the grade of a fisherman or an agricultural laborer was marvellous. But he had, just as the Judge had in spite of his experiences; and these two were very old friends.

So next day Sir James drove over to Wytham, and was closeted with Mr. Screeve for a considerable time, and when the Coroner opened his Court on the following day his pompous equanimity was somewhat disturbed by the sight of the well-known face alongside Sir James and John Bellenger. For Mr. Coroner had heard rumors of there being more behind these strange happenings at Brant, which had so upset the countryside, than appeared on the surface, and he had promised himself to get to the bottom of things.

It needed a very clever man, however, to get round Mr. Screeve, and he raised so many objections to hearsay evidence and so on that the witnesses grew wary and kept off forbidden ground, and the Coroner grew correspondingly hurt in his feelings.

In reply to some angry remark of his, Mr. Screeve, in his blandest manner, said: "I am watching this matter on behalf of Sir James Alleyne and Mr. John Bellenger—who are primarily responsible for this man's death, as they were responsible for his life. We will have things done on strictly legal lines, if you please."

The simple facts of the case were easily arrived at. When Mr. Coroner attempted, time after time, to get behind those facts, Mr. Screeve quietly

interfered, and headed him back into the right road.

"Had deceased any reason for special ill-feeling against you?" Mr. Coroner asked Bellenger, as he was giving his evidence.

"It is possible."

"Why?"

"He had wanted me to assist him in getting a place at Brant and I declined."

"Why did you decline to assist him?"

"Because I did not think he would be a pleasant addition to the household."

"Had you ever met him before he came to Brant?"

"Come, come, Mr. Coroner"—in Josiah Screeve's blandest and most impressive manner—"if we are to go into the previous histories of everybody connected with the case we shall never get through. Can we not stick to the actual facts of this man's death?"

"There may be motives behind with which I am not acquainted," said the Coroner.

"The motive in front was ample justification for Mr. Bellenger shooting him. If that pistol had gone off he wouldn't be here giving evidence. What more do you want, man? Here are Sir James and the six men who were with him, all waiting to give

evidence on the specific point, and you are wandering away after will-o'-the-wisps of possible motives, which don't exist and are quite unnecessary. Really, Mr.——"

Anyone else the Coroner would have ordered out of Court; but he knew better than to try that on with Mr. Screeve. A dozen times he tried to drag in the rumors he had heard, and each time he was quietly headed off and led back into the straight road of legal evidence by the old lawyer. And at last he gave it up, and the jury returned a verdict of "Justifiable Homicide," and thanked Mr. Bellenger for ridding the countryside of its bogey.

So the episode of Black Sam ended; but as our slightest actions may entail consequences far beyond our understanding, so events so momentous as those through which our friends had just passed could not but leave their mark behind them. And later on the results became visible.

By degrees matters fell into their old routine. Sir James and Bellenger, immersed in their literary work, never gave a thought—never put one into words, at all events—concerning that other rumor, which had produced a ripple of untoward possibility in the smooth current of their lives and set them to pistol practice which had come in handy on a differ-

ent count. They had been living bitter facts, and the vague possibility of the convict Ferrario getting as far north as Brant had ceased to trouble them.

Bellenger was sitting writing in the study one night, about a month after Black Sam's death. All the rest of the household had retired except Bagot, who was later than usual, and had probably fallen asleep in his den.

The window blinds were, as usual, not drawn down, a state of matters which always provoked the old man's wrath. It was a black night outside, with a southwest wind blowing gustily in from the sea and driving wild splashes of rain against the panes from time to time. But Bellenger was deep in his work, and quite oblivious to his surroundings.

A sudden tap on the window brought him round to it with a startled face. From the blackness of the pane another face looked in on him.

It gleamed white through the dripping pane in the dimness of the shaded light. As he stood gazing at it a white hand stole into view again, and there came another impatient tap on the glass.

It could hardly be a burglar demanding entrance in so peremptory a fashion. He went to the window and opened it.

"Now then, what's this? Who are you—and what do you want?"

A tattered figure scrambled in over the sill—a young man of perhaps twenty-five, thin in the face, not a bad-looking face, weak if anything, and distinctly hungry, a week's growth of stubble bristling on it; light hair close-cropped, garments nondescript and wringing wet. Not Luigi Ferrario, at all events.

"Who the devil are you?" said the new arrival as he straightened up and gazed at Bellenger.

"Well, if it comes to that—who the devil are you? And what do you want here?"

"Where's the Judge?"

"He's not here. What is it you want? Just explain yourself or——" And Bellenger pulled his revolver out of his drawer and swung it gently in his hand.

"I want the Judge."

"Well, you can't have him. What do you want with him?"

The young man sank down into the Judge's easy chair. The hungry, hunted look of him made a painful impression on Bellenger.

"I want food and drink and money."

"And why do you come here for them?"

The young man seemed to be considering whether

he should tell him, when the door behind Bellenger opened and old Bagot came in to put up the shutters. He stared hard at the newcomer, who stared back and then said, "Hello, Bagot," and Bellenger looked at Bagot.

The old man stood like one struck with palsy—his eyes straining, his jaw fallen, his hands hanging limp, his shaky knees knocking visibly against one another.

"Who is this, Bagot?" asked Bellenger.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" moaned Bagot. "Be it you, Maister Jim? Whativver——"

"Get me something to eat, Bagot, and some brandy. I'm clemmed to death." And Bellenger put down his revolver and went quietly and closed the window and drew down the blind. He began to understand dimly what it all meant.

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" said Bagot. "It'll kill t' maister"; and he turned and shuffled heavily out of the room, whether for food and drink or to fetch the Judge, Bellenger could not tell.

"I am the Judge's secretary," he said, quietly. "Who are you? If I have the right to help I will do anything I can—for his sake."

"I'm James Alleyne," said the other, sulkily. "You saw—old Bagot knows me."

"Sir James' son?"

The other nodded.

"And what are you doing in this plight? I understood you were in Australia."

"I wish I was."

"But what's the meaning of it all? Your father is the best friend I have, and if I can help you I will. But unless you explain matters I can do nothing."

Alleyne looked at him keenly for a minute and then said, huskily:

"I couldn't stand Australia. I came back, got mixed up with a bad lot, got lagged, have been in Borstal last two years, broke house five weeks ago——"

"James Allen!" cried Bellenger, with sudden illumination.

"That's me. Kept the old man's name out of it, you see."

"And Ferrario? Where is he?"

"In the woods—waiting for me."

"Good God! What made you bring him here?"

"He's all right. He helped me off. Now I'm going to help him."

"Does he know your proper name?"

"Not much. I thought of the old man all through and I've not cackled."

"Listen to me! You must get that man away. Two years ago he shot at your father and nearly killed him."

"What!" said Alleyne, with a jump. "He told me he was in for shooting the wig that jailed him first, but I never knew it was the governor. He's as close as the devil. He is the devil, I think, and he'll do for him sure if he finds out."

"You must get him away before he does find out."

"I can take him away if I get money. I can't go without money."

"Where are you hiding?"

"In the sandhills."

"Can you wait another day? I can give you a few pounds now, and I can get you more to-morrow. How much will get you away? What are your plans?"

"I want all I can get. I'm sick of being hunted like a beast. Go and call the Judge. If you don't" —as Bellenger hesitated—"I'll rouse him myself. He'll give me all I want."

Bellenger went quietly out of the room.

He leaned against the wall in the hall out-

side, his face twisting with the balance of his thoughts as he tried each road rapidly to its end.

The shock of such a disclosure to his dear old friend would be terrible. On the other hand, if it ever came to his ears that his boy had been there, no matter in what evil case, and had gone without seeing him, his grief and regret would be great. Then, again, might not an interview between father and son make for grace in the heart of the prodigal? It might and it might not. But his first thought must be for the Judge; and it seemed to him that his peace of mind would best be served by getting rid of the young man and his dangerous companion as speedily as possible.

Thoughts of all kinds whirled through his brain—of following young Alleyne and endeavoring to trap Ferrario, and then breaking the matter to the Judge. But trapping Ferrario inevitably meant the surrender of Alleyne to justice and the bowing of the good old gray head. He was half-inclined to go up to Mary Bassett and get her views. That meant disclosing the family skeleton to her and laying a burden upon her.

Old Bagot came shakily toward him from the passage leading to the back premises,

"What am I to do, Bagot? He insists on seeing the Judge."

"It'll kill t' maister," repeated Bagot, as though he had never ceased saying it to himself. "Git him to goo away, Mr. Bellenger. Git him to goo. It'll kill t' maister. Bring him to t' fire in t' kitchen and talk him fair there."

Bellenger decided on this course and went back into the room. The young man sprang up as the door opened, and sank back with a scowl when he saw it was only Bellenger and not the Judge.

"Come into the kitchen," said Bellenger, quietly. "There's a fire there, and food and drink."

He was starving for these things. He got up and went with him at once. Bagot turned back and closed the shutters and put out the light, and then went after them into the kitchen. It was shut off from the hall by a passage with a door at each end, and Bellenger felt easier in his mind when they were locked in there.

"Now," he said, "eat your fill, and here's brandy and hot water. You're starved."

"Right to the bones," said Alleyne, wolfing the bread and meat in huge mouthfuls, and gulping down great draughts of the hot liquor. "Nothing but cold scraps for over a month and sleeping in

ditches. Sight better off in Borstal. But we were free—which made up for it all."

The kitchen door had hardly closed on them when the Judge came quietly downstairs in his dressing-gown. He had fancied he heard voices in the study and had come to see what was the matter. But he found all dark, and turned and went back to bed, saying to himself that he was getting nervous in his old age.

Bellenger let young Alleyne satisfy his hunger, then he said:

"Now see here, Alleyne, it would probably kill your father to have this sprung on him. And, remember, he's a judge, and has the sternest ideas of duty. It is possible he might feel it his duty to give you up. If you take my advice you'll lie by till to-morrow night. Come then and I'll have £100 here for you. That ought to be enough to get you across to the Continent or even to America. When you get there you can write to him for more. But break it to him gently or you may kill him. The Continent would probably be easiest and safest, I should say. What were your plans?"

"Ferrario's idea is to get over to the east coast and then slip across. He's a sailor. He spoke of getting hold of a fishing boat."

"Well, you can hire one when you get the money. I should cut loose from Ferrario as soon as possible, if I were you."

"When we get clear. I can't yet. I must take him back some food. He's starving, too. And we want some tobacco."

They made him up a bundle of food, with a bottle of brandy and some tobacco, and Bellenger gave him what money he had on him.

"Come round to this door to-morrow night," he said, "and I will have the rest of the money here for you," and then, as he opened the outside door and saw the rain streaming in the wind, he added a suggestion fraught with fatality. He never ceased to blame himself for it, though the blame was in no way his. The poor fellow, in his sodden clothes, looked so unutterably miserable, and the thought of him lying out in the damp sandhills was too much for him.

"There's a fisherman's cottage on the sands about a mile out of Wynsloe. It's very lonely and the old woman is a decent soul. I think she would give you shelter for the night if you paid her for it."

"I know it," said Alleyne, "the Lone Hut. It'll be better than the hills"; and he slipped away into the darkness and the rain.

Poor old Bagot was quite broken up by his experiences of the night, and he showed it so plainly next day, in his trembling hands and doddery knees and heavy eyes, that Sir James could not take his eyes off him.

"I thought the old fellow would have lasted my time," he said at breakfast, when Bagot had gone tottering out of the room with the things he carried clinking in his hands like a peal of cracked bells. "But he looks as if he were going to break up. I think we must get him an assistant. I'd never dare to speak of retiring him. It would break his old heart."

Bellenger did not get through much work that day, and he, too, was visibly restless and preoccupied. Very little escaped the Judge's shrewd eyes. He asked: "Anything wrong, my boy? You seem below par, too, this morning."

"I was working rather late last night, sir, and I did not sleep over well. I think I'll take a long stretch this afternoon if you've no objections."

"Certainly. Remember what I told you, and don't overdo things. Make an easy day of it, and get to bed early."

So Bellenger walked into Wytham, and bought a couple of common blue jerseys and two woolen

shirts and two flat, cloth, sailors' caps. He also drew out one hundred pounds in gold from his small bank account, and worked his brains strenuously all the way there and all the way back, till he had conclusively proved to himself that he was doing the only thing possible to be done under the circumstances. And, in spite of what followed, it is hard to say what better he could have done. What followed was none of his doing.

He went up to his room early that night, and waited till he heard the Judge retire, and then stole softly down again to the kitchen, where Bagot was waiting for him—and the other.

The expected tap came on the door at last, and young Alleyne slipped in when they opened it.

He looked somewhat less forlorn. The food and a warm night's rest had done him good. His spirits had risen also, and he was inclined at first to try for better terms, under threat again of seeing Sir James himself.

"Ferrario says £100 is not enough," he began. And to Bellenger the natural weakness of the boy showed painfully through his assumption of bravado—so poor a branch to sprout from so stout a stem! In imagination he could see the skulking ruffian behind, with his shifty eyes and twisting face,

egging his companion on to get more and still more out of his people, with a single eye to the benefit of Luigi Ferrario all the time. He was sorely tempted again to try and separate the two and start the weaker vessel on a solitary line of escape, but a moment's thought showed him that it would not do. Ferrario would come prowling round the house and there would be trouble—of the very worst, perhaps. Even if they escaped scathless, he would follow up the deserter and exact punishment to the full. Once more he said to himself that he was pursuing the only possible course, and he would go through with it.

"Now, see here, Alleyne, if you give me any more talk of that kind I shall begin on a different tack myself, and the results may be unpleasant to you. Here are clothes, and I've got £100 in gold for you, and not another penny will you get this side of the water. Unless you pledge me your word to get away at once and take Ferrario with you I'll do what I ought to do now, and that is to give you up, whatever the results may be. Perhaps I'm a fool to trust you, but you're the son of the best man I know and the best friend I ever had, and I'll take the risk for his sake. God knows I've no right to judge you, and I don't. But I swear to you that

if you make any attempt to see the Judge I'll denounce you or shoot you down. That's my last word. Take it or leave it."

He was black with anger and disgust, and the other had the sense to see that he had gone too far.

"All right," he said, sulkily. "Give me the cash. We'll get away to-night."

"Does Ferrario know how much you're getting?"

"Yes."

"He's a dangerous fellow. You'd better keep your eyes open. Remember £100 will take one man twice as far as it will take two."

"What do you mean?"

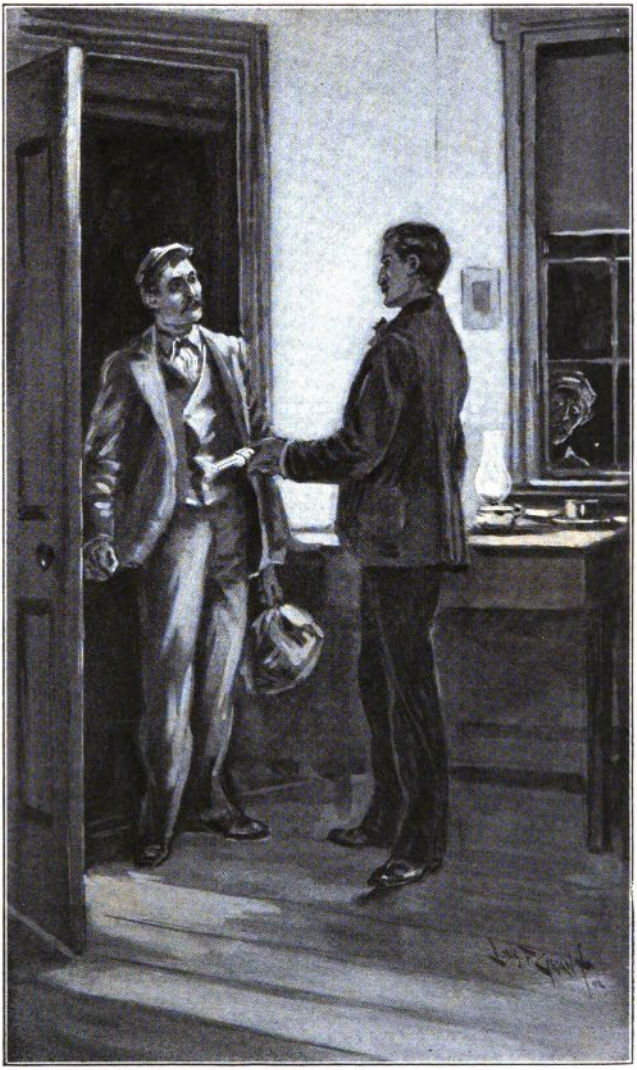
"I mean that I wouldn't like to travel myself in Ferrario's company with £100 in gold in my pocket."

"I've got to," said the young man, gloomily.

"If you can make him believe there's more to come when you get to safety it will be your best safeguard."

"I've told him that."

"Well, keep your eyes open. I've done all I can for you. If you could get to Australia and make a fresh start there, and then write to your father, it would be the very best thing you could do. Dishonor would, I think, break his heart. Here are



"TAKE THAT. YOU MAY NEED IT."

the things. Here's the money. Here's a parcel of eatables. Now get away and God help you!"

Young Alleyne took up the things in silence. He stood for a moment in the open doorway, as though still half-inclined to draw back from that dark journey.

"Remember what I said," said Bellenger again. "Keep your eyes open and don't trust that man. Here," he said, with a sudden impulse, and thrust into Alleyne's hand the revolver the Judge had lent him. "Take that. You may need it."

And out of the darkness not two yards away a pair of beady eyes saw, and a pair of sharp ears heard, and an involuntary chuckle clicked in an outstretched throat.

Alleyne slipped away into the darkness, and as the door closed a shadow rose from behind the big rain-water-butt and flitted noiselessly after him.

Bagot bolted the door and dropped into a chair by the fire, sniffing audibly. Bellenger lighted a pipe and sat smoking gloomily.

"Yo' think he'll get clear off, Mr. Bellenger?" asked the old man, shakily, at last.

"I think he'll get as far as it suits the other to take him, Bagot. It's a terrible risk. But I don't see what else he could have done, do you?"

"Naw, I don't. T'ud kill t' maister if he knew it all."

"We've done what we thought best for him, and we were bound to think of him first."

"Sure-ly," said the old man. And after a pause he added, "Such a nice little lad he were, summat like yo'r own little un, Mr. Bellenger. He's minded me o' Maister James often and often. But he were easy led, and he got among a wrong lot at school and got all awry. He were a sore trial to th' Judge. I'd sooner seen him dead than like this."

"While there's life there's hope, Bagot, and it's never too late to mend. He's had a bitter lesson. Perhaps he'll turn over a new leaf."

But the old man shook his head gloomily and sat before the dying fire like a broken monument of desolation.

They crept quietly up to bed at last, a pair of weighted souls, and Bellenger stood looking out of his window over the dark woods, wondering how the wayfarer would prosper, hoping for the best, telling himself again and again, as though in answer to an accusing conscience or a doubtful mind, that he had done what he could according to his lights.

The dark woods tossed in the southwest wind,

and a splash of rain broke on his window like a sudden fall of tears.

Once he thought he heard a shout, out in the darkness, and stood listening intently. But nothing came to him but the thrashing of the trees and the splash of the rain.

But his heart was heavy in him. He knelt long by his bed, where his boy was sleeping soundly, with his arms thrown wide, his round lips parted in an unconscious smile, and his fair hair clustering round the shapely little head like the nimbus of a saint, and with one hand on the little foot under the coverlet he prayed earnestly for his own little lad, that he might be kept from evil ways, and for the dear old man who had drawn his own life from the miry clay and set his feet on the rock. What would he not have done to save him from pain? He would have done anything and everything; and once more he said to himself that he had done the only thing that could be done, and he asked God's help for the poor fellow he had just turned like an outcast from his father's door. Then, shivering and heavy-hearted, he undressed and crept quietly in beside his boy, and drew the soft little body into his arms, and thanked God again for the comforting feel of his own flesh and blood, and fell asleep at last, thinking

of the fugitive and wondering how far he had got on his perilous journey.

God have mercy on us all, my masters! This is a sorrowful world and full of troubles.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MERRY MAN.

LUIGI FERRARIO'S eyes were the eyes of a treacherous cur, which waits till the friendly hand is close and then, with a gleam of white above and a flash of white below, buries its fangs in the too-confiding flesh.

The old wife at the Lone Hut felt it dimly as she sat smoking her black cutty over against him on the other side of her driftwood fire. It was sheer instinct on her part, for she had never seen anything like him before, and, as to his manners, they were as mild as milk, and his words dropped like treacle, slow and soft and long-drawn-out. But she did not trust him, and if he had come alone she would not have let him in.

The other one, sleeping still on the pile of old sails in the corner, she understood better—though he had much less to say for himself than this dark-faced man with the quick eyes and the oily voice.

They had come late the night before, after her man had left, and begged a night's lodging and offered to pay for it in advance. They were sailor-

men tramping to Liverpool, had been in trouble up north, had deserted their ship because the captain was a ruffian and bullied them to death, and so on.

Her man had growled at her when he came home for taking in tramps, but the sight of the money pacified him somewhat, and he was away with his share of it to the Fisherman's Rest, at Wynsloe, where a shilling laid out with discrimination could procure a very fair amount of fuddlement for a man who had not often a shilling to spend.

"An' who is it lives in the old house 'mong the trees—'way 'long the sands over there?" asked Ferrario.

"'Way over there?" said the old wife, pointing with the stub of her cutty with its thin curl of smoke. "Big stone house? Why, that's th' Judge, surely. Ye nivver heard tell o' th' Judge? Alleyne his name is. They do call him th' Hanging Judge—but I bet 'e on'y hanged them as needed it. He's a rare good man is th' Judge."

If she had looked closely at her guest she might have seen a spot of red burn out suddenly in each of his grisly cheeks, and a movement inside them as though the white teeth were grinding a tough piece of meat. But her old eyes did not carry a

great way past the bowl of her pipe, and that was just under her own nose.

It did not take Ferrario long, nor put any undue strain upon his brain, to put two and two together. He had never for one moment dreamt of Jim Allen the convict being connected with the great Judge Alleyne, whose blood he had sworn to have. But he saw it all now at a glance, and sat without moving a muscle, except those in his jaw, which worked in spite of himself, as he thought it all out, and laid his plans.

As Bellenger had warned young Alleyne, the money that would carry two men a certain distance would carry one man twice as far. But it was not the thought of the money that set sparks in the beady eyes. There were other things besides money —better even than money. He thought he saw his way to getting those other things and the money, too. It was delicious to think about. He hugged it to himself as he sat there smoking in silence, while the old wife prattled on and he heard no single word of all she said.

When Alleyne woke from his long sleep they ate up the remainder of the food he had brought the previous night, and finished what was left of the brandy. Ferrario was in high good humor. He

even gave the old crone a few drops for herself in a cracked cup; and she gloated over it, and wetted her lips at it, and licked them like a cat, and evidently intended to make the homœopathic dose last all day. And as Ferrario's spirits rose, his companion's fell—as though there were not enough to go all around. And so they sat there smoking all day long, and the eyes of the one man gleamed merrily, and the eyes of the other were full of gloomy forebodings, and looking at them one might have thought the one possessed of a merry devil, and the other possessed of a fear of death.

As it was getting dark the fisherman came slouching in from his troubled Rest, and swore thickly at finding them still there. He grew so unpleasantly demonstrative at last that they judged it well to clear out before they all got to blows.

It was a squally night and very dark, but they had seen worse, and better luck lay ahead. They set off along the flats, keeping by the lip of the tide to avoid any observation from Wynsloe, and all the way the merry man impressed upon his companion the fact that the more money he got the better it would be for them—for both of them.

"See, amico mio, if you can force a man to give you one hundred pounds against his wish, you can

make him give you two. It is not for love he gives it, and it is only another turn of the screw. *Ebbene!*"

"I can get more when we get out of the country," said Alleyne.

"Much better get it while you're here," urged Ferrario. "Out of the country you can only beg. Here you can demand. Take my advice and don't be fooled off with a scrape when you can get a full plate."

"You did not see the old man at all, then?" he asked one time.

"No," said Alleyne, gloomily. "I told you so, didn't I?"

"You lacked spirit. You should have insisted. You would have done better."

"I'd more likely have got shot."

"Bah! If I got the chance I would like to put my knife into this intervener."

"What good would that do?"

"It would give me much pleasure," said the Italian. "Click! between the shoulders—just there"; and he touched his companion lightly on the back, and Alleyne shook off the touch roughly and the other laughed. "You stick out for £200 and you'll get it all right. Just you try," he kept urging.

They drew into the sandhills and then into the woods round Brant. It was still early for their appointment. Through the trees the light in the study shone steadily.

"Let us see," said Ferrario, and began to creep up as close as he dared.

"Keep back, you fool!" said Alleyne. "If he sees us we're done."

"Bah! Bah!" chirruped the other. "We can see him. He cannot see us."

A tall figure strolled restlessly round the room and came and stood at the window and looked out into the night—straight at them it seemed to Alleyne—and he shrank down among the bushes and dragged Ferrario with him.

"Who is that?" asked the Italian in a whisper.

"That's him—the secretary."

But Ferrario knew better.

They lay and watched till the light went out suddenly, and all the face of the house was dark till a fresh light glimmered in a window up above.

"Now go!" said Ferrario, and they crept through the bushes toward the further side of the house. "I will wait here," he said, in the darker shadow of a clump of rhododendrons. "Hurry, and try hard for the £200. We shall need it."

As the kitchen door opened and closed he crept forward like a cat, and dropped down behind the water-butt. He drew a knife from a sheath at his back. It was the very first thing he had acquired after he broke jail. It was a common table knife when it came into his hands. His one enjoyment since had been to elevate it to the state in which a self-respecting Italian's knife should be. He had scraped it on stones chosen with infinite care for grain and texture, and fined it away to a point with the assistance of a sympathetic compatriot who tramped the country with a wheel, grinding more innocent blades, and given it an edge at the back as well as at the front, and polished it on his boot, till at last it was in fine murderous condition, fit to let out the life of any man.

He drew it deftly and caressingly across the palm of his hand, to and fro, to and fro, as if putting on the finishing touch. He put the point against the horny ball of his thumb and twirled it gently—a beautiful knife, fit for the heart of a king.

The rain dripped down on him from the roof, and gurgled spasmodically into the water-butt by his ear. He could almost hear their words. He thanked his saints that there were no dogs about. The big ones were curled up alongside Bay Ronald

in the stable, and Flick was asleep at her master's feet.

At last he heard the click of the side-door latch, and Alleyne came out. The croucher in the shadow heard Bellenger's parting injunctions and understood them with a chuckle. He saw the revolver thrust into Alleyne's hand. Then the door was closed and bolted; the knife flitted noiselessly after the revolver into the darkness; and the knife was carried where no honest knife is ever carried—up its owner's sleeve.

Alleyne stooped in the shadow of the rhododendrons to look for his companion.

"T-s-s-s!" and Ferrario joined him from the other side.

"All well?" asked the Italian.

"Come on!" said Alleyne. "Let us get out of this"; and they pushed on through the dripping woods for the shore. They turned to the right toward Wytham, and stumbled along through the soft wet sand.

The Italian glanced sharply about him. He was at the other's left side. They bumped against one another in the dark as they walked.

Then, without a word, Ferrario's right arm rose and fell, and Alleyne stumbled forward with a groan

and lay on his face in the sand. Whatever Bellenger heard that night it was not that.

Ferrario sat down beside him and cleansed his knife by thrusting it into the sand and wiping it carefully on the dead man's coat. He felt in the dead man's pocket for the revolver, and put it carefully inside his own shirt lest the damp should clog its action.

He sat there till the summer dawn glimmered in the sky, and now and again hummed a tune to pass the time. In the grayness of the dawn he sprang up and finished his work. He dragged the body with bumping heels into the sandhills, emptied it of treasure, took even the coat and waistcoat and boots, which were better than his own, then scooped a grave in the loose sand, flinging it out backward between his legs like a rabbit, and dropped the body into it along with his own boots, and covered it all up smoothly. Then he went back along the trail of the kicking heels to see if there was anything to cover up where it began. But there was not. He kicked the sand about, however, to make sure, and trampled the double score out of sight.

Then he sat down in the sandhills and took an inventory of his possessions. The jerseys Bellenger had bought met with his approval. He put them

both on, and Alleyne's coat and waistcoat on top of them, in addition to his own. To a haunter of hedges and ditches excess of clothing is never objectionable. The sailor caps he took exception to. They were too new. He thrust them arm's length into a rabbit hole near him, where they subsequently became highly prized cradles for rabbitskins. He counted the gold, piece by piece, with much enjoyment, and stowed it all away with loving care. Then, with the appetite of an honester man, he made a hearty meal, cutting up his bread and meat with the knife that had done other work that night.

And then, as the sun grew warm, he skulked away into the desolate waste of the sandhills, and chose a couch on the sunny side of a bank, where the wire grass grew thick, and lay down and went to sleep. For his work was not yet done, and that which he had to do was not for the light of day.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLACKEST DEED OF ALL.

THE southwest wind had died at dawn, and the sun was hurriedly drawing up a whole week's rain out of the sodden earth, and the air was thick and heavy.

Brant was not itself that day—that day whose dawn had witnessed such grim doings in the adjacent sandhills.

There was a shadow on the house, for which none of them could have accounted, but which all of them felt.

John Bellenger and old Bagot might reasonably have felt a sense of relief. Their late anxieties were past. They had, to the best of their power, averted a danger that had threatened the man whom they both honored and loved. The cloud seemed to have rolled by, thanks to their efforts, and yet for them the sun refused to shine.

Little Lady Welde was somewhat depressed because her pet was showing signs of decadence again, and no amount of red pepper, for which Robert had acquired quite a vicious taste, or of warm bathings, had so far availed to restore his natural liveliness.

Sir James believed Bellenger was overworking, and rallied him humorously on his haste after fame and riches. But even the Judge's spirits were hardly at their usual level.

Mary Bassett, perhaps, perceived more clearly than any of the rest that there was something more than weather and weariness behind all this. But that was mere intuition, and because she was a woman; and a woman's heart tells her many things before a man's head realizes them.

"I feel like a boiled owl," said the Judge, yawning in the middle of a sentence, "and you look as if you felt the same, my friend. Suppose we shelve things for to-day and see if there's any fresh air on the flats. Tell Miss Bassett and Jackie to come, too."

So they all put their work aside and went away to the sands. And Jackie must needs take with him an iron spade, which the Judge had presented to the students of Nature to aid them in their delving after things unseen.

There was not much air even out there; but the smell of the sea was fresher than the smell of the steaming earth, and their spirits all improved somewhat. Sir James came across a stream flowing from a pool past other pools to the sea. And noth-

ing would satisfy him but they must obstruct, divert, and interfere with Nature, and turn the stream from the way it wanted to go into a pool which was against its inclinations. And then he must cut canals from pool to pool, till that wretched stream was transformed from a merry prattler over ribbed sands into a sullen prisoner, fretting at sandy bars. It was quite an undertaking; and he made them all toil at it by turns, Jackie in high feather, working with his hands when he could not have the spade, and delighting in the mess and general skiddle, and Sir James himself acting as engineer-in-chief when he was not doing his spell as navvy. But it did them all good, and perhaps that was what the Judge had desired.

He was quite proud of the work when it was at last completed to his satisfaction, and he vowed that he understood better than ever he had done before the feelings of De Lesseps when the waters rushed through Suez.

"On a small scale we have fought and won the eternal fight, Man versus Nature," he said. "It's certainly of no use to anybody, but——"

"Oh, yes, it is," said Mary. "It's done us all heaps of good. Just look at Jackie. Hasn't it been of any use to him?"

"Is that Jackie?" asked the Judge. "Why, I thought it was a heap of sand"—which Jackie considered so exquisite a joke that he had to dance wildly for two full minutes to show that he was really he.

And so home at last, in better spirits and with even something of an appetite for dinner.

"We'll do no work to-night," said Sir James, when they went to the study. "Just a smoke and then we'll go and ask Mary Bassett to give us some music. Do you know, John Bell, that that is, in my opinion, one of the sweetest girls alive at the present moment?"

He was strolling about the room, with his cigar in his mouth, and his hands in the pockets of his jacket, and he looked whimsically out at Bellenger from under his brows.

"I agree with you," said Bellenger. "Miss Bassett is a very delightful addition to the household."

"They are a very old family," said the Judge. "Charles Bassett—the father I mean, of course—and I were at Oxford together and close friends always. He got mixed up in some company matters some years ago, and lost every penny he had. It broke his heart, poor fellow."

He turned and stood looking out of the window.

The sky over the woods was tremulous with silent summer lightning. It looked as though mighty fingers were playing up and down the slats of a great Venetian blind, so that they trembled spasmodically and let the radiance behind shine through. One waited for the distant growl of the thunder and missed it unnaturally.

Bellenger from his chair looked through his smoke at the tall figure standing out against the pulsing, yellow slabs of silent light.

Then, without an instant's warning, there came a single, sharp crack outside, a splintering of glass, and the Judge reeled and fell before Bellenger could reach him. Bellenger tore at the bell as he passed, and when Bagot came hastening in he was kneeling on the ground by the old man's side, endeavoring to stop the flow of blood from a bullet wound in the breast. Mary Bassett and Lady Welde came running in a moment later, and among them they lifted the wounded man and laid him on the couch.

Mary folded her handkerchief with hands that trembled, and yet were steadily insistent. She took Bellenger's handkerchief and Sir James's own and bound her pad tightly over the wound.

"Send Kenyon for Dr. Brand at once," she said to Bellenger, and Bellenger sped to the stables, and

in five minutes Bay Ronald's great hoofs were pounding the Wynsloe road—racing with Death for his master's life. Bellenger had hurriedly told Kenyon what was wrong, so that Brand would come equipped. Then he hurried back to the study.

Mary had got brandy and had dropped a little between the tightly clenched teeth. Lady Welde was sobbing quietly and wringing her hands. Bagot hovered round, anxious to help, but not knowing what to do. Sir James lay white and silent on the couch.

"How was it?" whispered Mary, her face drawn and white.

"He was standing before the window—just here," —said Bellenger—then, with a sudden quick movement, he swept her back. He sprang to the table-drawer, where the Judge kept his revolver, whipped it out, flung up the window, and leaped down on to the ground.

Dazed and terrified by it all, Mary heard the crack of another shot, and then the sound of running feet passed from gravel to grass, and all was quiet. She stole to the window and listened, crouching, with jumping heart and knitted hands, but she heard nothing more.

Up above the trees the sky pulsed silently, as

though mutely endeavoring to communicate some message to earth, and in the quiet room the Judge moved suddenly and opened his eyes and said, "Who?"

"I don't know, Sir James. Mr. Bellenger has gone after him. Are you in pain?"

"Yes," he said, and the tired eyes closed again.

"Kenyon has gone for Dr. Brand," said Mary, softly. "He will be here very soon." But the Judge made no sign.

Just as he spoke to Mary, Bellenger had seen the flicker of a face on the dim fringe of the light that streamed through the window. The rest was instinct—his first thought of her, the next for the wretch outside.

The revolver spoke from the further edge of the lawn as his feet met the gravel. He ducked and ran swiftly in that direction, with only one thought in his mind. He heard the rustle of the shrubs in the direction of the shore, and ran on without pause. Another thought shot swiftly through his mind—that the pursuit might come to a sudden end at any moment, if the man in front had the sense to stop behind a tree and plug him as he passed. But his brain was on fire, and his one only desire was to come up with the quarry.

His senses, however, were strung to full pitch. He heard the man go plunging through the bushes, and when he came out on the level of the flats he caught the pad of his running feet on the hard-ribbed sand. He was going Wytham way. Then the mighty fingers touched the shutters of the west, the yellow slabs of light rippled up and down, and for a couple of seconds the great, wet flats fluttered and gleamed like a mirror, and he saw the dark figure flitting in front, between the upper and the lower lights.

And presently, as they ran, steady beads of light broke out away on the right—the lights of Wytham. The fugitive saw them, and edged toward the sea to give them wider berth. With a sudden hope of attracting attention, Bellenger, without stopping to take aim, fired a shot in the direction of the running man.

On and on they went, panting hard both of them, and Bellenger fired again, while the great parallel bars of light went rippling up and down the sky in solemn silence, and flickered along the darkness of the flats and gave them momentary life.

A venomous spit of flame in front, a sharp crack, and a stinging in the left shoulder told him that the fugitive had stopped and fired with better effect

than himself. It did not feel much, and he fired back instantly, and immediately thereafter heard shouts break out from the Wytham front.

The man in front was speeding on his way again, and he followed. Fresher feet came pounding across from Wytham, obliquely to their course. The fugitive edged still nearer to the water.

"Hello! Hello! What's up?" pealed the Wytham men.

"Judge Alleyne—shot—man in front," he jerked out, and ran on. But they outran him, and all he could do was to toil on in the rear.

He heard their disjointed shouts, and another crack in front. But they were plucky fellows and they went on without stopping.

Wytham lights were far behind, and he could barely hear the men on ahead. They were not used to long courses, and were saving their wind.

Then a burst of exclamations in front, and presently he stumbled, panting in among them standing all in a clump.

"What is it?" he panted.

"Listen!" they panted back, holding their sides to still their breathings.

And from the darkness in front he heard shouts

and curses—and presently they rose to shrieks—and died into silence. And at lengthening intervals the pale lights flickered up the sky and fluttered along the flats.

"What is it?" he asked again.

"He's in th' sands," said one.

"Th' quicksands," said another.

"Ay, th' sands has gotten him, an' they nivver lets go."

"Sure he can't get out?" asked Bellenger, at which they laughed hoarsely.

"If he do he be first 'at ever did. They sooks and sooks, but they nivver lets go."

The watchers waited and listened. But there was nothing but the soft lip-lap of the incoming tide, and at last they turned and went home, questioning him as they went.

"An' is he dead—th' Judge?" they asked.

"I can't tell. I must get back. Let me lean on one of you. I think he hit me in the shoulder."

"Shot 'ee? Th' divvle! Well, he's gotten it"; and so they went back to Wytham lights more slowly then they had come.

The Judge seemed to have lost consciousness again, and Mary Bassett stole to the open window and looked out. She had done all she could, and

she ached now to hear the wheels that should tell of Dr. Brand's coming.

She heard the shots out on the flats and shivered. The very sky seemed to share in the general upsetting, and the silent, spectral gleams added to her discomfort.

When at last she heard the grinding wheels, and the dogcart dashed into the light, she was trembling so that she could hardly stand.

"Take a mouthful of brandy," said the little doctor, as soon as he set eyes on her. "This has been too much for you. Now, let me see"; and he bent over the Judge and removed the bandages and opened up his clothing.

"Get me more bandages and warm water, please," he said, and Mary and Bagot hurried off after them.

His lips pursed tight as he examined the lax figure on the couch, and he shook his head to himself. When the water and bandages came he washed the wound carefully and strapped it up tightly. Then he administered a strong cordial, and presently, to his great relief, the old man's eyes fluttered open.

"Where's John Bell?" he asked feebly.

"He's not back yet, Sir James," said Mary. "We expect him every minute." She hoped it might be

so, but the shots out on the flats came to her mind, and she could only hope.

"Mr. Bellenger went after the man?" asked Brand of her.

"Yes. He took a pistol from the drawer there, and went off through the woods."

"Did he see him?"

"I think he must have. He was telling me what had happened, just by the window. Then he swept me suddenly behind him, and picked up the pistol, and jumped out of the window, and somebody fired at him as he jumped."

"And what is it all about, do you know? Do you know?" he asked Bagot.

But the old man only shook his head. He didn't know what he knew, or what to think, or how much or how little to say. So he said nothing—which is always wisest under such circumstances, and generally wise under any.

Presently the sound of wheels again, and a fly from Wytham drew up to the door, and Mary Bassett's heart gave a grateful jump at the sound of Bellenger's voice speaking to Bagot in the hall.

He came straight in to them, and she saw that his face was white and his left sleeve dabbled with blood.

"How is he?" he asked anxiously.

Dr. Brand shook his head slightly, and Bellenger bent over his old friend with grievous sorrow in his face.

"Got him?" whispered the Judge, fixing his eye on Bellenger's sleeve.

"The Wytham men joined me, sir. He ran into the quicksands beyond there. They say he could not possibly get out."

"He's dead if he got into the sands," said Brand; and—using the Wytham men's own words—"they never let go."

"Wounded?" whispered the Judge, once more, with his eye on Bellenger's sleeve.

"Not much, I think. He winged me. Doctor, will you just take a look at this, if you're free."

The doctor helped him off with his coat, and ripped away his shirt sleeve, as the simplest way of getting at the wound.

"Gone right through," he said, after a short examination. "Muscles chiefly. No bones, I think. I'll strap and sling it for you. Soon be all right if you keep it quiet."

"How long do you give him?" whispered Bellenger, as the doctor sponged and bandaged.

"A few hours at most, I fear, perhaps less. It has

probably grazed the heart. It may have gone through the lung—there is internal bleeding."

"Better?" whispered the Judge, as they turned toward him again.

"It is a trifle, sir. Only muscles, the doctor says. How do you feel now?"

"Going," he said briefly, and closed his eyes wearily.

Bellenger saw his lips move again, and bent down to him.

"Mary?" he whispered.

"Miss Bassett." Bellenger beckoned to her, and Mary came softly to his side. Her eyes were full of tears, but she would not break down lest it should upset the old man.

His lips moved again.

"He wants to speak to you," whispered Bellenger, and she bent down.

"A good man, dear, and honest—remember—honest"; and his eyes fluttered toward Bellenger.

She kissed him on the forehead, and he whispered again, "The boy!" and she got up hastily and left the room, and came back in two minutes with Jackie in her arms, wrapped in a blanket, all rosy and tangle-headed from his sudden awakening, and John Bellenger's heart leaped out toward her at the sight.

She had been trying to explain matters to the small boy as she brought him down, but the upturning had made her somewhat incoherent, and Jackie did not understand at all what was happening. He looked round wide-eyed and frightened.

"Sir James is going away, Jackie," she whispered. "He wants to say good-bye. Kiss him, dear."

"Good-bye, Serra James," said Jackie. "Come back soon!" and the tired eyes opened fondly on him.

"Dear laddie!—meet me!" Then a rush of blood set him coughing and choking, and Mary carried the boy away. She laid her hot head on the cool pillow beside him and let her grief have its way.

Jackie put his arms round her neck, and kissed her, and did his little best to soothe her, quite thrown out of all his childish reckonings by this breakdown of one who had always seemed so omniscient and so strong. But it did her good, and she was calmer when she kissed him good-night and went downstairs.

She met Bagot limply assisting Lady Welde from the room. They both seemed to have suddenly grown smaller and older. Their faces were gray and running with tears. She kissed the little lady and went on.

Dr. Brand was holding the Judge's hand. Bellenger was kneeling by the couch, his face stony with grief. The doctor raised his other hand a few inches and she knew that Another was in the room besides themselves.

Then Dr. Brand quietly put the lax hand on to the quiet breast and silently bowed his head, and Mary Bassett went softly and dropped on her knees by the side of John Bellenger.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE JUDGE'S SOWING.

MARY BASSETT and John Bellenger were sitting in the study before a small wood fire.

They had laid their old friend to rest in the green garden under the old ivy-clad tower at Wytham, the old square tower whose chimes rang out peace and good-will over the sandhills and the flats and could be heard on a quiet Sabbath morning as far as Brant itself.

Bellenger's face was worn and haggard, and his arm was still in a sling. These last few days had been a trying time for him.

First came the inquest, at which he had told the simple facts of the Judge's death as he had seen them. Everything else he ruled out of his mind completely, and deemed himself justified in doing so, for his old friend's sake. Old Bagot needed no pressure to do the same. He had seen nothing and knew nothing, till Mr. Bellenger's pull at the bell brought him to the room, where he found his old master lying bleeding on the floor. He saw Mr. Bellenger leap out of the window in pursuit of some-

one whom he did not see, as he was busy with the Judge. He heard the shot fired at Mr. Bellenger. He knew nothing more.

Asked by the Coroner if he could offer any opinion as to the identity of the murderer, Bellenger stated that his glimpse of the face in the garden was too brief for him to distinguish anything whatever. He had no doubt that the man he pursued was the murderer, and the Wytham men testified that that man was undoubtedly dead, since the quicksands never let go. The verdict was the only possible one: "Wilful murder against some person unknown, who is believed to have perished in the Wytham quicksands."

But Bellenger's mind was racked with thoughts of young Alleyne and what had become of him, and Bagot's not less.

They discussed the matter in all its bearings in the solitude of the kitchen, while the dead man lay upstairs on his bed, with a peaceful smile on his clean-cut face and a crouching terrier at his feet. For poor little Flick refused to be driven away from her accustomed place, and howled so pitifully till she was let into the room again that they had to give way, and she lay there, head on paws and hopeful eyes fixed steadily on her sleeping master,

waiting for the awakening that would never take place.

Bagot gave it as his firm belief that Ferrario had killed his companion before making his attempt on the Judge. And Bellenger's heavy heart inclined to the same opinion. For there had been no smallest trace of the young man in the later affair, and it was inconceivable that the Italian would part company of his own accord with the man who had the money. The bullet, which Dr. Brand extracted after death, was, as far as he could judge, of the same calibre as those in Sir James' own revolver, but there was no conclusive proof in that, since such were open for any man to possess. But it all weighed upon him terribly. He felt as though the responsibility for what had happened rested on himself. And though he said to himself a hundred times a day that before God he had done what he thought best, the weight remained and his life was burdened. Of himself, and his own future, and the difference this would make to him, he had as yet barely begun to think. That was another dark cloud ahead—but at present the cloud he was walking in hardly permitted him to see it.

After the funeral, to which the whole countryside had thronged, he wandered forlornly about the

house and grounds with Jackie and Flick and the two other dogs, all supremely depressed, and he the only one that fully understood, and so the bearer of the heavier burden.

Lady Welde had been prostrated by the shock and had not so far left her room. Mary, Jackie, and his father dined in solemn silence, and when Mary insisted, as she had done each night since the tragedy, on putting Jackie to bed, Bellenger retired to the study and sat before the fire smoking gloomily, with the empty chair on the other side crying mutely for him who lay in the shadow of the ivy-clad tower.

The door opened presently, and Mary came softly in, and he jumped up and swung the Judge's chair closer to the fire for her.

"May I sit here for a little?" she asked with a shiver. "It is so dreadfully lonely everywhere else."

"It is kind of you to come," he said, and rapped out his pipe.

"Please go on smoking or I shall go away. I like it. Charles always used to smoke."

She knelt on the rug and deftly tidied up the hearth, and then coaxed and patted the fire into more cheerful countenance. It warmed his heart to see her at it. It seemed to him that the very essence

of homeliness, wifeliness and motherliness was in her as she did it.

"Have you heard from him lately?" he asked, as he filled up again.

"He wrote from Port Said. They were in the best of spirits, he and the Bishop. He has got the desire of his heart, and I am very glad for him. I doubt if it happens often in this world that a man gets just what he wants."

"Not very often, I'm afraid," he said. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward," as the logs in the fireplace settled down under her gentle ministrations with an upward flight of sparks.

She poked thoughtfully at the fire for a moment, and then said softly, "Tribulation—experience—hope!" and thereafter they both sat in silence for a time.

"Brant will never be itself again," said Mary, breaking it, at last.

"Never," he said, with a dismal shake of the head. "What are you—— Will you be stopping here?" he asked, after another pause.

"I don't know. I have hardly thought about it yet. It seems to have numbed my senses—the awfulness of it all. I think Lady Welde may want me to stop for a time. And you?"

"I feel the same. I can think of nothing but the Judge. He was my Providence; he represented all my future. My world is empty for want of him. I had had tribulation—and bitter experience. He gave me hope when I was almost hopeless. He was the best man I ever knew—and they used to call him 'The Hanging Judge'! To me he was next to God; and I know God the better for having known Sir James Alleyne."

"That is the highest possible tribute," she said softly.

The sore heart is tender. And, wholesomely, the bereaved heart, when the first numbness of loss is past, seeks new supports for the twining of its golden tendrils or clasps the closer those still left to it.

So these two hearts drew closer together under their common cloud. He remembered her with his boy in her arms that other night, and how his heart had leaped toward her at the sight as toward the consummation of its highest good. She recalled all the gentleness she had seen in him toward his boy—toward herself—toward the dear old man who was gone. She remembered his quick thought for herself that other night, and his instant bold leap after the danger without.

"He had a great liking for you," she said. "Had you known him long?"

And in a moment his mind was made up.

"May I tell you?" he asked.

"If you will."

And he told her his whole story, honestly and truly, covering nothing.

"Now you understand all that he was to me and what his loss means to me. He drew me out of the miry clay and set my feet on a rock. And now—he is gone, and my life feels snapped in two."

"No," she said quickly. "You must not feel that. It is only beginning." She stretched an impulsive hand toward him, and he saw that her eyes were brimming—and for him. "You must go on and do all he would have had you do."

He clasped the little hand tightly—and held it—and asked, "Will you help me?"

And she said, softly, "Yes."

"Do you know what it was he said to me just before he died?" she asked presently, as they sat still hand in hand.

"No, dear."

"He said, 'A good man, dear, and honest, remember—honest'"; and the drops rolled down her cheeks at the recollection of it.

"That was like him."

"I think," she said, very softly, "he wanted this"; and she pressed her hand the closer into his.

"Yes. I believe he did."

"Now may I unburden my soul of something else?—not about myself," he added quickly, lest she should think he had still reservations. "I have told you everything about myself"; and he told her all about young Alleyne, and Ferrario, and all that he feared and his own torment of mind.

She was staggered at the thought of it all.

"How very terrible!" she said at last.

"Did I do right?" he asked, with his eyes fixed anxiously on her face. "I did what I honestly thought for the best."

"I think you did quite right. It was not that. I was thinking of Sir James' son. Oh, surely he could not have had any hand in the—the shooting?"

"I don't think so for a moment. He did not look like it. And the moment he knew of the Judge's danger he was anxious to get Ferrario away. But the thought of him tortures me. The other was capable of anything."

"It is terrible," she said again, "to think of what may have happened to him. But I don't see what you could have done beyond what you did. The

disgrace would have killed our dear old friend as surely as that bullet did. It would have been worse, I think."

"I'm glad you think I did right, anyway. It has been troubling me greatly."

"You were working to save a good old man trouble and disgrace," she said, "and that could not be wrong."

Bagot found them sitting there when he went his rounds, and they made him sit down and talk things over with them.

"I have told Miss Bassett all about Master James, Bagot," said Bellenger.

"Ay?" and the old man looked at her vaguely.

"And she thinks as I do—that what we did we did for the best."

"Ay? Mebbe. But I blame myself all the same."

"I am quite sure you have no need to, Bagot," said Mary, gently. "Your thought was all for the Judge, and he knows all about it now."

"If I thought that——" he began, gazing at her with a wandering hope in his eye.

"I am sure of it, Bagot, and he won't misjudge you."

"Naw, not if he knows, he won't. I know that."

"It was a terrible thing to have to decide, and I think you both did the right thing."

"I'm feart Maister Jim's dead," said Bagot, gloomily.

"We can only hope for the best. Perhaps sometime we shall know."

They talked of the dead master, and at last the old man went away somewhat comforted. And in spite of their own great sorrow their hearts were strong and full of hope.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRISONER'S REAPING.

It was two days later before old Mr. Screeve, the lawyer, came over from Wytham with the Judge's will. He had been in London on delicate and pressing business, and heard the news there, but could not get back sooner.

He had a long chat with Bellenger, and learned all the generally known particulars from him. Then he assembled them all in the study, Lady Welde still much broken with her grief, and read the will to them.

Bellenger and Mary Bassett had not supposed their presence would be required—but the old lawyer quite insisted.

The estate was much beyond Bellenger's expectations, but Sir James, before he was elevated to the Bench, had been a noted advocate and had had a very large practice. Except Brant it was all personal estate, and it amounted to close upon £120,000. Bagot had a pension of £100 a year "for his long and faithful service"; and the old man sobbed audibly. All the other servants were remembered,

and there was even £20 for old Birstle, the postman.

"The sum of £1,000 to my little friend John Bellenger, the younger, to be invested on his behalf. The interest to be devoted to his education, and the principal handed to him when he attains the age of twenty-one.

"To my dear young friend Mary Bassett the sum of £5,000, in token of the great affection I bear her.

"To my friend, John Bellenger, in token of my affection and esteem for an honorable man and a most faithful and painstaking secretary, the sum of £1,000, and further the sum of £1,000 per annum during each of the next five years immediately following my death, on condition that in each of such years he publishes at least one book of his own writing. The money to be paid to him on publication of each book. And I beg him, as my best wish, to remember, when writing said books, that the dearest wish of my heart was to see him rise to honor in the path of letters. In addition to the above bequest I leave to the said John Bellenger, all and entire, the copyrights of such books as I have published with his help, and also all my manuscripts in preparation and my journals, to use as he pleases."

Lady Welde already had ample means of her own; but they were increased, and Brant was to be hers for life with all its furnishings, etc., etc.

A further sum of £5,000 was left in trust to Lady Welde and Mr. Screeve for a specific purpose, details of which were contained in a sealed envelope in Mr. Screeve's possession, and with the contents of which he was acquainted.

The residue of the estate was left in trust for his son, James Merton Alleyne, at present in Australia, and failing him it was to go to the next of kin.

Bellenger's eyes were very bright at this final testimony of the exceeding kindness of their friend, and when his eyes sought Mary's he saw that hers were shining very brightly also.

"Does anyone know Mr. James Merton Alleyne's present address?" asked Mr. Screeve, peering round at them through his gold glasses.

No one knew Mr. James Merton Alleyne's present address.

"It is over two years since my brother heard from him," said Lady Welde. "He had begun to fear he was dead."

"Yes," said Mr. Screeve, "I had been making inquiries for him."

Bellenger felt Mary's eyes fixed on him, and he

nodded slightly to her. He saw that it would be necessary to admit the lawyer to their confidence.

When Mr. Screeve was preparing to go he begged a few minutes' talk with him in the study, and called in Bagot also, and then and there they told the lawyer all they knew and feared concerning the residuary legatee.

"Good God, Mr. Bellenger!" said the astonished old gentleman, mopping his head and his eyes. "This is the most awful thing I ever heard of in my life. Is it possible there is any mistake?"

"I can only speak to what I saw, of course. He came through that window as if he had a right to come. And the moment Bagot saw him he recognized him."

"And you are quite sure, Bagot?"

"I only wish I weren't, sir," said Bagot. "It were Maister James."

"Alleyne's son in prison—broke out—starving—murdered!" said the lawyer, slowly.

"We don't know that he is murdered, you know. But we know that he was in the company of a most unmitigated scoundrel, and in my own mind I am convinced that it was Ferrario who shot the Judge and came to grief in Wytham sands. The question is—what has become of young Alleyne?"

The lawyer sat drumming his fingers on the table, full of thought.

"We can advertise, of course, here and in Australia," he said at last, "just as we would have had to do if you had told me nothing. Then if there is no news of him after a certain time the next of kin will come in. That, I think, is the best course to pursue. For my dear old friend's sake I hope nothing will turn up here. It's a ghastly business all through, and the closer we keep it to ourselves the better. Bagot, my man, you must keep that mouth of yours shut tight."

"I've scarce dared open it since t' Judge died," said Bagot, gloomily.

They sent him away and remained in talk for some time longer.

"Sweet girl that Miss Bassett," said Mr. Screeve, as he got up again to go.

"Yes," said Bellenger, and under the impulse of his own great happiness in that quarter, he added: "Miss Bassett has consented to become my wife."

"Really!" and Mr. Screeve looked quite pleased at the news, though it in no way concerned him. "I congratulate you, sir. I congratulate you."

"We're inclined to think it was Sir James' wish," said Bellenger.

"Shouldn't be a bit surprised," said Mr. Screeve. "He was always planning things to make people happy"; and as he drove home in his fly, he chuckled to himself now and again, at such times as he was not pondering the very strange story Bellenger had told him.

Lady Welde wept when Mary approached her as delicately as possible as to the future.

"Don't, my dear! Don't talk of going. You wouldn't leave me to live in this big house all by myself? Tell Mr. Bellenger I w-want things to go on just as if the J-Judge were here. If he'll just go on wr-writing his books and taking care of us I shall be grateful to him. You don't want to go away, Mary, do you?"

"No, indeed, I'm perfectly happy here, dear Lady Welde. But we could not tell what your plans would be, you know, and—well, Mr. Bellenger has asked me to marry him, and——"

"And you will?" asked Lady Welde, eagerly.

"Yes, I have promised."

"I am so glad, dear, so very glad"; and the little old lady gave her a motherly little kiss. "Do you know, dear, I've an idea James wished that," she said, with a sagacious little nod and a knowing little look.

"I really believe he did," said Mary. "How kind and good he was!"

Bellenger, when he learned Lady Welde's wish, was grateful for the privilege of staying on at the old gray stone house which had seen so great a change in his life and prospects, and which afforded so pleasant a home to the two beings dearest on earth to him. He refused to accept a salary for doing nothing, when the Judge had provided for him so far beyond his deserts and so altogether beyond his expectations.

So they all three stayed on as Lady Welde's guests and dear friends, and Lady Welde herself was grateful in turn for their company and the cheer they brought with them.

Bagot flatly refused to retire as long as he could walk. He missed his master sadly and said very little, but seemed to think much and soberly.

So Brant settled down into its old groove again—with the difference which none of them ever for a single day lost sight of. It never could be quite the same to any of them. The great wheel had given a slow turn and wrought changes in their lives. But, if the sense of loss was never absent from them, the sense of gain was ever present—to some of them, at all events. And if they missed

the tall, active figure and the keen, clean-cut face and the shrewd, kindly eyes, in their hearts he lived and reigned, and they could hardly believe him gone.

For Bellenger, especially, it was strange to be working away as usual at the Judge's Reminiscences, with no kindly supervisor lounging in the big arm-chair, full of quaint digressions and caustic comments on men and things. A hundred times a day he looked across for him and then bent sadly to his work again with an aching sense of loss.

Eventually, out of the manuscript in hand at the time of the Judge's death, he completed two more volumes of the Reminiscences—not quite so large as the first two, but still large enough. He found it quite impossible to carry them a single page beyond what the Judge had himself dictated, nor would he have felt justified in doing so. Material he had in plenty in the unused journals, but the personal touch was wanting, and no one could supply it but he who was gone.

He closed the record with a brief account of Sir James' tragic death, and an appreciation of his dear old friend, written, as an enthusiastic critic later on said, "in words of glowing gold," though to himself they seemed poor and inadequate. There was of necessity so much that he could not tell.

In reply to Mr. MacBraine's incessant queries he informed him that he would see him upon the whole matter as soon as his own book was ready. Then he turned to his own work and flung himself into it with all his heart and soul.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RIPENING FRUIT.

Two months' steady work brought John Bell's second book to a conclusion. Mary Bassett dropped into the position of friendly critic-in-chief, as she had dropped into the vacant chair in the study. Her judgment was sound and her comments free and unrestricted. Her heart was in her friend's work, and from all these things he benefited not a little.

Life went very smoothly with them, but the primrose path is only found in patches, and between the patches as a rule lie thorns and briars. They had one increasing anxiety, and that was Lady Welde.

Always frail, after her brother's death she seemed to grow frailer week by week. Dr. Brand attended her, but no doctor in the world could arrest the gradual decay of a fragile constitution. There was no immediate cause for anxiety, he said, but the shock of the Judge's death had been a severe one and her heart was constitutionally weak.

The little lady, however, would admit nothing wrong. She blossomed into cheerfulness at times,

as roses bloom again after a frost—and then one morning one wakes to find the whitened grass strewn with their petals.

Mr. MacBraine, the publisher, had written many times to the Judge's literary executor, asking anxiously when he might expect a further instalment of the Reminiscences. The time, he urged, was ripe for them. To which John Bell replied that he was busily at work on them and his own book, and he would see Mr. MacBraine about them in due course.

When his own work was finished to Mary's satisfaction, and to within measurable distance of his own, he packed up his manuscripts, commended the inhabitants of Brant to the care of Bagot and Kenyon, and started on a week's visit to London.

Mr. MacBraine gave him a very cordial reception. He could well afford to do so. He had done extremely well out of the books he had had. He expected to do extremely well out of those shortly to be discussed—even though the owner of them did much better than he had done before.

"I'm really glad to meet you in the flesh, Mr. Bell," he said, as his eyes snapped on to the square brown paper parcel under Bellenger's arm, "for I candidly had my doubts at one time as to your actual existence."

"I trust the doubt was profitable," said Bellenger, at which Mr. MacBraine laughed quietly.

In appearance he somehow suggested a Methodist parson of mature years, whose lines—marriage lines instinctively suggested themselves—had fallen to him in pleasant places, and whose wife's heritage was a goodly one. He was member for a county borough, and had been on a copyright committee. He rarely spoke in the House, but was a personality in the precincts, a member of several clubs, and a first-rate man of business in his own special line. He had white hair and a clean-shaven face, with a fringe of white whisker and beard, which added to his old-fashioned clerical appearance.

"Yes," he said, in reply to Bellenger's remark, "there is no doubt that rumor assisted your book somewhat—gave it a start, anyway. But it was a good book, I am bound to say—a good book, and it would have made its own way in time without any adventitious assistance. However, we must not complain. What a very sad end for our old friend! Truly in the midst of life"——and Bellenger was confirmed in his belief that Mr. MacBraine must have spent some portion of his life in the ministry.

"And now," said the energetic publisher, switching briskly back out of the sympathetic siding on

to the main line, "what about the new books? How soon can you let me have them to look over, Mr. Bell?"

"Any time, but first as to terms, Mr. MacBraine. I don't wish to appear grasping, but Sir James left me his copyrights with a distinct object in view, and I consider I should be failing to carry out what I believe to have been his wishes if I lost sight of that object. You see, the circumstances are different. To my old friend money was no object. To me, unfortunately, it is—as I have to work for my living."

"Fortunately, my dear sir, fortunately—for you at all events. Not quite so fortunately for me, perhaps, but I must not complain."

"I should be very sorry to think you had had any cause for complaint so far——"

"Oh, not at all, not at all, I assure you. Far from it. Well, now, what are your views, Mr. Bell? Shall we say twelve and a half per cent. all round?" asked Mr. MacBraine, with a broad, bland smile.

"Well, suppose we say twenty-five?" suggested Bellenger.

"That is high—very high"; and the readily smiling lips screwed themselves up like the mouth of an old-fashioned purse. "Very—high—indeed!" and the long, white fingers met in an attitude

suggestive of prayer—an appeal, perhaps, for lower terms and larger profits.

"It would be a great pity to break the uniformity of the volumes," suggested Bellenger, "and I am anxious not to do so if it can be avoided. But, to tell you the truth, we had quite a number of offers as soon as it became known that more of the Reminiscences were in course of preparation."

"I—see!"

"As to my book, Sir James must have had at least a dozen letters from various publishers begging the first reading of his next novel. They afforded him infinite amusement. It was all I could do to prevent him solemnly promising it to each separate one of them."

"Ah!"

"So, you see——"

"Quite so, Mr. Bell, quite so. Well, as a matter of form—purely as a matter of form—you will permit me just to glance over the new works. And I see I must agree to your terms. They are high, as I said—very high, very—high—indeed. But doubtless some small pickings will be left for the poor publisher."

"I hope so."

"And now, having decided that matter, what

can I do to make your stay in London agreeable, Mr. Bell? Any special things you want to do? Any special people you would like to meet?"

"About a thousand of each," said Bellenger, "but I am afraid they must wait. I want a couple of days at the British Museum concerning some points in my next book, and there are several places I want to see in that same connection. After that I shall feel somewhat more at liberty. I will leave these manuscripts with you now, Mr. MacBraine. When shall I see you again about them?"

"A couple of days will be enough for me. It is, in this case, a mere matter of form. If you can come in on Friday I will have the agreements ready to sign. If you have no engagements for Sunday will you favor me with your company at dinner? And I will ask a few other men whom I am sure you would like to meet."

So that was arranged, and Bellenger sped away to delve into the draughty gold mine under the great dome in Russell Street.

At the British Museum Bellenger had a curious meeting with an old friend. On the opposite side of the table at which he was sitting, raking out the vitals of the books which had been brought to him by the attendant, was an elderly gentleman of sternly

beneficent aspect, and Bellenger knew him the moment he set eyes on him. He wondered whether the old gentleman would recognize him. He had no great desire that he should. It would recall painful memories—on one side at all events. He could not, however, change his place, for the room was filled, and he had taken the only vacant seat he could find —and it was not in him to run away.

He worked away at his books, and glancing up involuntarily one time saw the old gentleman regarding him steadfastly. Their eyes met with knowledge, and the old gentleman got up quickly and came round to where he sat.

"Is it possible?" he said, in a whisper, shaking Bellenger's hand with great heartiness, and holding it while he continued speaking.

"It is, sir," said Bellenger. It was his old friend the Governor of Helstone.

"I could not believe my eyes," said the old man, beaming. "The times I've thought about you and wondered what had become of you! Why did you never let me hear from you?"

"Well," said Bellenger, with a smile, "perhaps I ought to have done so after all your kindness to me. But you can understand one's wish to leave the past in limbo and turn the key on it."

"Quite so, quite so. Come along and have some lunch. Your books will be all right there till you come back."

So the old gentleman carried him off to the quiet little hotel he was stopping at just round the corner.

"And what are you doing!" he asked, on the way.

"I'm writing."

"Writing? Writing what?"

"Oh, books and——"

"Writing books?" exclaimed the Governor. "Well, I never! That is a change!"

"Yes—a decided change for the better."

"And what have you written?"

"My first was 'A Man's Friends.'"

The old gentleman stopped in his tracks and looked at his companion. "You wrote that?"

"Yes. I wrote that," said Bellenger, quietly. "Have you read it?"

"I've got it. I've read it more than once."

"That is very pleasant to hear."

"What else?"

"Well, a good deal of my time has been spent preparing Judge Alleyne's Reminiscences. I've just brought up two more volumes to the publishers."

"That's good news. But, my dear boy, you astound me. How did it all come about?"

And Bellenger told him the whole story, much to his enjoyment.

"I knew you had good stuff in you when you were—when you stayed with me," said the Governor. "But this is truly an amazing jump. I congratulate you with all my heart, my boy. Had you seen me in the Reading Room before I saw you?"

"Yes. I saw you."

"And you wouldn't have spoken to me if I hadn't spoken first?"

"Well, you know, when one has once turned down a page in one's life one does not willingly reopen it."

"That is so. But I hope you won't consider me turned down. You saved my life, you know; and one does not readily forget a thing like that."

"Do you know what became of that fellow?" asked Bellenger.

"No. He served every minute of his time. He was not the kind to earn remissions. It must be six months since he left me."

"He's dead. I shot him."

"You? Tell me all about it. How did it happen?"

And Bellenger told him that story, too, and the old man was mightily interested.

They had a very pleasant chat and smoke, and Bellenger left his old friend at last, still in a state of profound amazement, and went back to the Reading Room.

He had been out since breakfast-time, and when he got back to his hotel, a telegram was handed to him. It was from Mary Bassett and was fatefully brief: "Lady Welde died in the night. Please come quickly."

He packed his portmanteau at once, wrote a line to Mr. MacBraine, sent a wire to Mary saying what train he would come by, and started for home.

It was after midnight when Kenyon and Bay Ronald landed him at the front door, and Mary was on the top step waiting for him.

"This is very sudden and very sad," he said, as he greeted her, and they passed in together.

"Very sudden, but quite painless the doctor says. She just fell asleep and never woke. She looks just as if she were still sleeping."

"Poor little lady! This is a house of sorrows. How is Jackie?"

"Life is not without its compensations. Jackie is very well," she said, smiling up at him. "I really cannot feel sad on our dear old friend's account.

She was so very frail that it seemed as if any wind would blow her away. And she is far better off."

"It will make changes for us," he said, for he had had time to think out many things during his journey.

"Yes"; and a brighter color flushed her face, for she had thought of many things also.

"Did you think of sending word to Mr. Screeve?" he asked presently, as he sat at table eating the supper she had had waiting for him.

"He will come round in the morning to talk things over. How did you get on with Mr. MacBraine?"

He told her; also of his meeting with the Governor of Helstone.

"It's a strangely small world," he said. "He was the last man I would have expected to meet in the British Museum."

"And so were you to him, I expect. He would be pleased when he heard all you had to tell him."

"He was very much surprised and delighted, and as cordial as a man could be. He is pleased to consider that I saved his life, you know."

"You did not tell me about that. What was it?" for he had given her no details of his prison life, but had passed it all over in a few brief words. He told her now, and she rejoiced in his previous reticence,

and the love she had for him cast out all fear that his past held anything that he had not told her or that she would not like to hear.

When he had finished his supper they sat for a while before the fire, talking discursively of Lady Welde and of little happenings on both sides, with avoidance of the subject that occupied both their minds.

"We have got to face the fact that Lady Welde's death places us in an awkward position here, Mary," he said at last, bringing it on to the board all in a heap, as is a plain man's way.

"Yes. I have been thinking of hardly anything else. How far have you got?"

"To the point, dear, that we must get married as soon as possible. We don't want to be parted; at least, I don't"——and looking across at her he saw the same mind in her.

"Yes," she said, with a rosy face. "I think that is the way out of the difficulty. I am ready, dear, at any time."

"I will speak to Screeve about it in the morning. I don't know how Brant will be situated now. But Screeve can tell us all about it. What a very strange position we are in here! And what a change our coming here has made in both our lives!"

"It has been the making of our lives," said Mary, softly.

"Where is Jackie?" he asked, as he put out the lights and they went quietly up the stairs together.

"He is sleeping with me. Come and have a look at him"; and he followed her into the sanctuary of her room and bent over his boy.

"It was such a comfort to have him with me," she said.

He kissed the boy softly, and then kissed her very tenderly and went away up to his own room. And his heart was very full at the thought of them both and of all her love and confidence in him.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM BEYOND.

"BRANT," said Mr. Screeve, as he sat discussing matters with them next morning, "reverts to the Judge's next of kin, along with the rest of the estate, failing his son, of whom we have as yet no news. Until that matter is settled it remains in my hands as executor. I could, of course, let it, but I am under no obligation to do so, and I doubt if our old friend would have liked it. In fact I am sure he would not. Why should not you go on living here?" and he looked humorously first at one and then at the other of them. "Why don't you get married?"

"We're going to—at once," said Bellenger. "That is, as soon as we can. But—Brant!" and he looked at Mary. "That is rather a big undertaking."

"Well, you can go on living here rent free for the time being, if you choose."

"We couldn't get a cheaper house than that, from the rent point of view," said Bellenger, "but it must cost a good deal to keep up a house like this, and I don't know that we're justified——"

"Well, stop on anyway till after the wedding," said the lawyer. "If you don't I shall have to put in a caretaker; and it will probably all go to rack and ruin."

They laid Lady Welde by the side of her brother in the garden below the ivy-clad tower, and returned to the home which was so strangely at their disposal.

Old Bagot came to them that evening and said sturdily, "We're all summat i' th' same boat, Mr. Bellenger, and if you'll let me stop on till you go I'll serve you just as I did th' Judge, wi'out any pay. He's provided for me an' I'd like to stop i' th' old place as long as I can."

"We'll be very pleased to have you stop, Bagot, I'm sure," said Bellenger. "Brant wouldn't seem itself if you weren't in it."

So that was all arranged and they set about preparations for their wedding, intermingling these with the perpetual reading of proof-sheets, which came pouring in from Mr. MacBraine, and with discursive planning-out of the next book.

As a muzzle to irresponsible chatter, and for the satisfaction of his own grateful feelings, Bellenger brought up old Martha Platt from Cuddiford and installed her as housekeeper—much to her own amazement, for hitherto Lady Welde had kept the

reins of the establishment in her own little hands. But Martha was a notable housewife. By her careful management she saved them considerably more than she cost, and relieved Mary Bassett of many mundane cares.

Jackie received the news, that Mary was to be really his mother, with exuberant satisfaction. The little fellow barely remembered his own mother, and Mary had been all to him that the other little mother could have been, since ever he had fallen into her gentle hands.

And so the day came round and they were wedded in the old red stone ivy-clad church at Wytham, with Mr. Screeve, radiant and gurgling delights, as best man and heavy father, and Jackie as principal page-in-waiting and bride-admirer in particular. And as they got out of their hired carriage at the white gate of Brant they all stood to listen to the merry pealing of their wedding bells on the still autumn air.

Martha had prepared a homely feast for them, and Bagot made so brave a show and looked so spruce and preternaturally youthful that Bellenger whispered into his wife's ear that he was quite certain the old boy had his eye on Martha Platt, and that there would be another wedding from Brant before long.

Mr. Screeve, in his various capacities, had accompanied them home to join in the wedding feast. He beamed on them so paternally, and laughed to himself so joyously and spontaneously, and for no visible reasons beyond general ones, that the hearts of the newly married pair were quite touched.

Mr. Screeve, however, had his own good reasons for his own enjoyment, and when the feast was over, and they turned their backs on the ruins and sat in a little family circle before the fire, he took a sealed letter from his pocket and looked at it, and his face was grave and yet glad.

"This," he said, "concerns you two. It is a message from our old friend the Judge," and he broke the seal, and read:

"To my Executors:

"Two new lives have come into mine of late, and it is the hope of my heart that they may incline to one another and become united. I believe they are in every way worthy of one another, and their union would make for their strength and happiness. I refer to my dear young friends John Bellenger and Mary Bassett. In the will I have signed to-day I have made a slight provision for each of them separately. I have also left in trust to my executors

a further sum of £5,000. If the consummation which is so near to my heart should come about during my lifetime, it is my intention to beg their acceptance of this sum as a wedding present for having brought much happiness into an old man's life. If in the providence of God I should not be spared to see their wedding, I desire this letter to be handed to them on their wedding day, and the money to be placed at their disposal as soon thereafter as possible.

"JAMES MERTON ALLEYNE."

"To John and Mary Bellenger.

"My dear young friends:

"If your eyes ever see these lines that which I desired will have come to pass, and from where I now am I pray for God's blessing on your new life.

"God bless you both! J. M. A."

It was a message from the dead to the newly living. And when Mr. Screeve had read it aloud he handed it to Mary, who bent her head over it to hide her tears.

"I saw him write it with my own eyes," said Mr. Screeve. "It is a great pleasure to me to hand it to you under these pleasant circumstances."

"The dear old man!" said Mary. "How very, very good he has been to us!"

And if Bellenger did not say much, as is a man's way when he feels most, his heart was as much touched as his wife's at this last token of their old friend's kindness.

"Did Lady Welde know what was in it?" asked Mary, presently.

"Yes, she knew," said Mr. Screeve.

"I remember how pleased she was when I told her John had asked me to marry him."

"She came over and told me about it next day; and I didn't dare tell her that I knew it already."

"Why, how did you know?" asked Mary.

"Oh, Mr. Bellenger was so full of it that he let it out the day I was here about Sir James' will"; and Mr. Screeve laughed a laugh of quiet enjoyment.

"You will stop on here—for the present at all events?" he asked.

"We will stop—for the present," said Bellenger, looking at his wife. "I've an idea the Judge would have liked it," and his wife nodded acquiescence.

So they remained at Brant, and the old gray stone house was witness to the very great happiness that was theirs.

The books were out the following month, and

Mr. MacBraine's ministerial features began to beam with satisfaction as he turned over the leaves of his day-books and estimated the crumbs that would ultimately fall to his share.

The tragic death of Sir James Alleyne and the brief account of it in the final volume, and the glowing appreciation from the pen of the unknown John Bell, attracted great attention to the books. The identity of John Bell and Sir James was now admitted to be an impossibility, but the conjunction of their names once more in these volumes—for Bell's book was again dedicated to the Judge, but this time to his memory, as were all his subsequent books—gave rise to considerable discussion, of which clever Mr. MacBraine was not slow to take advantage. The general expression, however, was that, since the two men had evidently worked in some way together, if John Bell's future work did not suffer by Sir James' death, then the world had still much to expect from him, and his next book would be anticipated with much curiosity. Mr. MacBraine arranged for the next book at once on John Bell's own terms, and prayed him as he valued his own reputation and his publisher's pocket to let it be a good one. At which John Bell smiled hopefully as he handed the letter over to his wife.

In their memories they could hear again the delighted ring of the Judge's laughter as he read the notices of his books, and the only shadow on their lives was the fact that he was not there to enjoy these later notices with them.

Then they set to work, just as he would have had them do, on the next book, and in it and in the later ones Mary Bellenger shared all her husband's labors and filled the Judge's place as far as she was able. To that fact may, of course, be traced the finer and subtler delineation of female character, which was more apparent in the third book than it was in the second, which in its turn was an advance in that respect on the first. All that was due to the influence and association of Sweet Mary Bassett, and John Bell rejoiced exceedingly at the widening and deepening of his powers through her.

They were very happy, all three of them. Book No. III was planned, and discussed, and mostly thrashed out and put together, all except the purely mechanical part of putting it down on paper, on the sands in front of Brant, while Jackie, in light marching order, raced to and fro with the dogs, or busily dammed up incorrigible streams, and his four-legged friends sat watching him in open-mouthed

impatience and occasionally raked down his embankments by way of protest.

The strange alterations made in the configurations of the sandhills by a continuous heavy wind had for Bellenger a certain fascination. He would stand by the hour perched on a hummock with his back to the gale, while the drifting pellicles stole past in a ceaseless, silent stream and changed all the faces of the hills. Stranger still, when the northeaster blew, to see the smooth, round hill-tops melt away and come sweeping along the flats like smoke, quietly burying every obstruction and raising an instant monument over it.

He was out early one morning after such a storm, to see its work on the hills. The dogs sped round him in high glee, now chasing one another in simulated anger, now speeding off into the sandhills with a common wild idea of rabbit for breakfast, then shooting up into sight on some distant point and tearing back over the sands toward him as though they had not seen him for a month.

After an unusually long absence one time he heard them carrying on in the hills as though they had found something at last—short, staccato barks, excited yelps—evidently something out of the common. Presently Flick appeared, smothered with

sand and almost unrecognizable. She danced frenziedly before him on thin air, and begged him to come as plainly as dog could speak.

"Well, old girl, what is it?" he asked.

"Come on—come on quick and see!" said Flick, too excited even to blow the sand out of her nose.

The other dogs were still barking in the hills, and Flick darted off to join them. Bellenger followed and found them presently in a little hollow, rooting furiously at something that lay under the sand. They looked up and barked joyously at sight of him, and then went diligently on with their work. Then, to their astonishment, he drove them hurriedly away, stamping angrily, and throwing futile handfuls of sand at them. Too bad when they had found it. It was theirs, and he had nothing to do with it.

But Bellenger, with a grave, pinched face, after driving them off, carefully covered over what they had found, and circumvented them a dozen times in their attempts to sneak back before he had got them home, and then told Kenyon to tie them up in the stables and to have the trap round in half-an-hour.

"Hello! What's wrong?" asked Mr. Screeve, as Bellenger was shown into his private room.

"I've found what I suspect to be the body of

young Alleyne—or rather the dogs found it this morning in the sandhills."

"Good God!"

"I want you to come back with me and see it. But I'm afraid it's past identification. Meanwhile just consider what is best to be done in the matter."

"What makes you think it is he?"

"I felt sure it was as soon as I saw it. I think I have been expecting it to turn up in some such way."

"You did not examine it?"

"No," said Bellenger, with a gesture of repugnance.

"No one else knows?"

"No one but me and the dogs, and they are tied up."

"Pity it's come to light," said Mr. Screeve, after a thoughtful pause.

"Yes. The north-easter uncovered it partly, no doubt. Then the dogs smelt it out."

They drove back to Brant and Mary was somewhat surprised at the unexpected sight of Mr. Screeve.

"It's part of my duty to take a look at the property now and again, you know, Mrs. Bellenger. And the air was so fresh after the gale that I thought I'd come out and have lunch with you. Well, little man of the hills, how are you?"

"I'm all right," said Jackie. "So's Robert. Bagot's going to marry Martha Platt if she'll have him, but she hasn't said 'yes' yet. I do hope she will, don't you?"

"I think it would be a capital match, Jackie."

"Then their little boy could play with me, you know. And I want a little boy to play with awful much."

Mr. Screeve insisted on having lunch before he did anything else. Then he and Bellenger went for a smoke and a stroll, and Jackie, to his great surprise, was not allowed to accompany them.

"Can you bring a spade?" asked Mr. Screeve, as they were going down the wood path, and Bellenger went round to the tool house and got one, profoundly glad that that was to be the end of it.

"I'm glad you've decided that way," he said, as he rejoined Mr. Screeve. "It would be very horrible to rake the whole matter up again."

"We've no right to do it," said Mr. Screeve, "but we'll do it all the same—for our old friend's sake. It is better all buried out of sight, and this time we'll bury it deep."

"Can you identify it?" he asked, when they had gently uncovered what lay there, and stood looking down at it with pinched faces.

"The hair is the same color as the young man's who came through the window that night and whom Bagot identified as young Alleyne. That is as far as I can go."

At the lawyer's suggestion they managed to turn the body over, and the stab between the shoulders became visible.

"There's no doubt about it, I'm afraid," said he. "Now let us get it out of sight."

They dug deep in the bottom of the hollow till they got to wet sand and stones, and there they buried him safe from the touch of any gale that might ever blow across the sandhills.

"Now," said Mr. Screeve when the sand lay smooth and firm, "we'll forget all about it, and things will go on as before. It seems a ghastly farce to be advertising for him when he's lying here under our feet, but I think we are doing the best thing for our old friend's memory."

"Tell me, Mr. Screeve—you knew him better than I did. What would he have done if he had happened to come downstairs that night and found his son there? I have often wondered."

"Impossible to say," said Mr. Screeve, after a thoughtful pause. "But if he had given him up I wouldn't have been the least bit surprised. His

views on matters touching the law were inflexible. He was generally reckoned a severe judge, but he was one of the kindest-hearted of men, but with a very stern sense of duty. Severe or not, his judgments were never called in question. I doubt if he would have countenanced the boy's escape. But the knowledge of it all would have been a terrible blow to him."

"Then you think I was justified in what I did?"

"I think you saved the old man much trouble; and I'm afraid the young one was bound to come to a bad end in any case. He got a wrong twist at school—and he never had much backbone. If his mother had lived it might have been different."

That night Bellenger quietly told his wife of their discovery and what they had done. She was shocked and saddened at the thought of it all, but considered they had done the best thing under the circumstances.

She looked hesitatingly at her husband once or twice, and said:

"Would you mind very much if we left Brant for a time, John? It is the dearest place in the world, but——"

"I am ready, dear. Say the word, and we will go anywhere you please. Where shall it be?"

She smiled at his eagerness, and they understood one another.

"What is the very nicest, brightest place you know?" he asked.

"There is a little place called Tamaris down near Toulon. I was there once. I would very much like to see it again."

"We will go at once. You would like to take Martha, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; I couldn't do without Martha."

"And Bagot can't do without her either, I expect. So we'll take him, too."

They are very happy—doing their appointed work in their appointed spheres in the way that God intended them to do and under the best possible conditions. No higher happiness is possible to man or woman than that. So very happy are they that John Bellenger finds it difficult to realize at times that he is the same John Bellenger who stood in the dock that day at Cuddiford Assizes. At times there comes over him a recollection of the cold, incisive voice and the calm, white face of the Judge who pronounced just sentence on him. But when these thoughts come he resolutely turns them down and thinks instead of the warm-hearted, high-souled gentleman who reached a hand to him at his time

of need and drew him up out of the miry clay and set his feet upon a rock.

Jackie has brothers and sisters of his own to play with, without troubling Mr. and Mrs. Bagot, who have quite enough to do looking after these newcomers and himself without troubling about any children of their own.

And Brant has other occupants, who have no idea that the heir who was lost in Australia, and whose return they still speak of sometimes as a by-no-means-impossible eventuality, lies quietly asleep in his unknown grave within half-a-mile of the old gray stone house among the trees.

And when the winter winds blow, the sandhills waken out of their sleep and steal about and change their faces, but nothing disturbs the sleep of him who lies so quietly below.

[THE END.]