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THE BROKER'S WARD.

BY BERTHA THORNE BISHOP.

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THE BROKER'S WARD;

OR

BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

A ROMANCE OF A LOST DIAMOND.

1840.

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CHAPTER I.
THE WEAVER'S HOME.

The heavy spring rain streamed and dashed against the small patched windows of Giles Hilton's house in Spitalfields. The equinoctial gale roared and battled round the humble dwelling as if seeking some mode of entrance by which it could invade the frail tenement and scatter it to destruction. In gusty puffs the smoke from a little miserable fire, composed of a few shavings of wood and some bones, came out into the room—that room which presented such a picture of wretchedness and despair.

Giles Hilton was pale—very pale: it was want of food that blanched his cheek. Light, small, and agile of frame, the weaver had worked cheerfully late and early for his wife and his two little ones. The click of the loom and the whirr of the shuttle had been the constant household sounds of Giles Hilton's home. The children had learned to sleep soundly, despite the noise; and long habit had made the weaver and his wife totally oblivious of the fact that hand-loom weaving was rather a noisy occupation.

But now the loom was still enough, and the silence in the cottage was painful. It was that period when the introduction of machinery had thrown so many of the hand-loom weavers out of employment—when gaunt hunger and despair went through Spitalfields like twin spectres.

Giles Hilton and his family were starving.

With a fixed and stony sort of gaze, the poor father stood in the middle of the floor of his little home—that home once so cheerful—once so happy. It was a small, detached cottage; it had its garden—its little patch of flourishing tulips; its pigeon-house, from which in airy circles the fluttering brood would take their flight, to come back again as Giles on a sweet summer morning would wave a mimic flag at the end of a long wand. Then his wife met him with smiles and his children with happy wirth and soft caresses.

Now the wild wind roared around his wretched home, and the rain dashed in masses against the front casements. Like a statue—so still, so cold, so inanimate, his hands clasped over his head, stood poor Giles. Despair was at his heart, wild thoughts in his brain. The children were waiting for food. His wife screamed, and wept, and implored him to look at her—to speak to her; for never yet had she seen him as he now was—so stern, so silent, so unlike himself.

"Husband—Giles—dear Giles. Oh, say a word to me—to the little ones. God sees us yet, dear Giles, and will send us help. I am not hungry—oh, no, no! and I don't think Mary and Luke are very hungry, dear Giles. They will soon sleep. I will go out and see if—if I can borrow—"

"Hush, Emma, hush—no, no! It is not borrow. It is beg—beg. You mean beg."

Mrs. Hilton wept bitterly, and still she clung to her husband, and with gentle violence she took his hands from their clasped position about his head.

"Now, now you are better, Giles; dear heart, you are better; and so better times will come to us. This distress will pass away. I am not hungry. Do you not, dear Giles, think the storm is passing away? Nay, it is hardly a storm—it is only the spring rains that will make the earth so beautiful; and the wind is soft and warm after all. Hush, children—oh, do not cry. Mary, dear, and you, Luke, sleep—sleep. Be still, dears, be still."

She clasped the children by turns in her arms, and kissed them eagerly. She left her tears on their fair young cheeks, but she strove to stifle her sobs, and then she was back again to her husband, and she flung her arms about him, and placed her face upon his breast, as she said: 
"Giles, you are not like yourself—you do not speak to me. O God! this is worse than all."
"No—no!" said the weaver. "Oh, no; not that. Emmy, Emmy, I was thinking."
"Thinking, Giles?"
"Yes; of the day when we were married. When you, a young, smiling lass, with such a pretty wreath of spring flowers."
Tears choked the utterance of Giles Hilton. He sank to the floor, and fairly succumbed to the grief of his heart. For days and days—ay, for weeks, he had seen his wife pining away before his eyes. He had seen his little children growing thinner and more puny. Distress in Spitalfields had come to be a topic of the press; but the public were not yet fully aroused, and the relief had not reached the sufferers. Poor Giles Hilton cried like a child, and his two little ones were waked into silence when they heard their father weeping; and the young wife wrung her hands and prayed.

Then a more violent puff of wind at once blew out the litte apology for a fire which was in the skeleton grate; and as the sun had set, the twilight deepened, and another night of misery seemed to be before those poor lost ones. Little Luke held his sister Mary in his arms; and terrified and exhausted with cold and hunger, the two children gently lapsed into sleep, and drooped together on the miserable mattress they were on, in oblivion of suffering for a time. And the gloom of feeling passed away from the poor father, and he rose to his feet.

"Emmy, my dear!"
"Giles—my Giles! You do not speak in your own voice. You speak so low now, and so altered."
"I fear I am weak."
"No—no! Do not say that, Giles. I can—I will—yet there is one resource. John Long, the lapidary, will buy it. I shall not be long gone. Now, dear Giles, it is well that in such an emergency as this—we have it; you know—you will not object! You are a man—I—I—a poor, faint-hearted woman, may cling to such things; but you see, Giles, I—even I can see now that—that it must be done."

Her ring—her wedding-ring—how easily it slipped over her thin, wasted finger. It was the last earthly possession that Emma Hilton, the weaver’s wife, had, upon which she could depend to raise a small sum that would, for a few days, keep off the pangs of hunger.

"You, my Emmy?"
"Yes, Giles. It is not the ring, you know, that unites us. It is our own hearts, dear Giles. Heaven knows that. What is there in a ring? Only a circle of gold—only a ring!"
How fast her tears fell on that circle of gold, though; and how near and dear it was to her heart; but she was a woman—a wife—a mother—and she was a heroine; huddling together as best she might the few and scanty garments she had to defend her against the inclemency of the night, she kissed her husband tenderly, and tried to speak cheerfully.

"If I could only see you smile, Giles—only once. If I could only see you look a little hopeful."
"God bless you, Emmy!"
"What is that?"
A strange, fluttering noise was at one of the windows of the cottage. It was different from the splashing of the rain—different from the rattle of the little casement in the wind. Then there was a “cooing” sound, and Giles said, at once:

"It is a pigeon."
"Not ours, Giles. Alas! all our dear birds have perished, one by one, as our children must have perished."

For a moment, the old feeling of his love for pigeons came over Giles, and made him forget his miseries. He had taken such a pride in his dove-cot, when he was prosperous and happy—his pigeons and his tulips. They had been his delight; and now he opened the casement, and a pigeon, drenched with rain, fluttered into the room.

"I know it, Emmy—I know it," said Giles. "It is our own. It has not been in the cot for nearly a month. It has been carried off, but has found its way back again."

The bird knew him, and perched upon his hand, and with a “cooing” sound spread its wings and walked round and round in a circle.

"No, no; I cannot," said Giles. "I cannot kill it. Emmy, let me spare this one."

"With all my heart, dear. Wait but here awhile. The presence of the bird will cheer you. I will soon return with food and firing. Thank God, the children sleep!"

The young wife again flung her arms around her husband for a moment; and then, without a word—for her heart was too full to speak—she went from that room to the next one, which would lead her from the cottage to the open doorway.

It was a very small, humble little dwelling, with two rooms and a kind of outhouse on the ground-floor, and one little sloping-roofed attic above. It was in the back room of the two that the weaver and his wife and children were; for that room commanded a view of the garden and the dove-cot, and there, as Giles Hilton had day by day plied the shuttle, he could see his pigeons and his tulips.

Mrs. Hilton reached the cottage door, and her hand was on the latch, when she drew back in terror, as loud shouts came from without.

The flare of torches came into the room through the lattice window, and there were cries, and shouts, and wild laughter, and imprecations, and yelling demonstrations of those who were supposed to be the cause of the distress among the weavers.
One voice then yelled out:

"Giles Hilton, come out—come out! Fire to the machinery that ruins the poor weaver! Come out—come out! Fire, fire! Set them all ablaze! Come out, Giles Hilton, and see how the machinery will warm you!"

Mrs. Hilton, with a cry of terror, hastily shot a bolt into its socket, and secured the door.

"No, no, Giles—never that! Oh, do not join them. They are bad and frantic men. Suffer, but do not seek to make that suffering greater still by lawless violence."

They hammered violently at the door.

Giles had reached the front room, and stood by his wife's side.

"What is it, Emmy?"

"The machine-breakers again, Giles. They seek to make you join them. For my sake, do not go with those men, if you would not see me die at your feet."

"Be it so," said the weaver—and he let his hands drop from the bolt of the door—"be it so."

He threw open the little latticed window, and cried out:

"No, Matthew Parrs—no. I know you. I won't come. I suffer; but your way is not my way."

An impulse from the rough voice that had called to him, was the only reply; and with yells and shouts the mob of machine-breakers passed onward, waving their torches in the night-wind, and battling through the drenching rain.

Mrs. Hilton waited until the sounds had died away, and then she opened the cottage-door; and throwing as much cheerfulness as she could into her voice, she said:

"Soon back—soon back, dear Giles. John Long's is not five minutes' walk."

The door was closed, and the poor weaver was alone. He crept quietly into the next room, and lit a small end of a candle, and held it in his trembling hand as he looked at his children.

They still slept, and the pigeon had nestled down by them, and slept likewise.

Tears dimmed the eyes of the poor father for a moment; but since the arrival of the pigeon, there had been something hopeful at his heart, and he did not utterly despair.

But he was very cold; he was very hungry; and he shuddered as he heard the gusty wind roaring around his dwelling.

"Poor Emmy!" he moaned. "Her ring—her wedding ring. Alas, alas!"

Giles Hilton started. A sudden rush, as if of many feet, came past his dwelling; and then there was a pistol-shot, and he heard voices.

"He's off still!" shouted one.

"Did you hit him?" cried another.

"No, no!"

"This way—this way!"

"Hunt him down—hunt him down!"

The sounds died away. Whoever was pursued appeared to have passed on, and the pursuers to have still followed in chase.

All was still again.

The little candle-end was burning low, for the flame was made to flare to and fro by the currents of air that found their way into the weaver's dwelling. Each passing minute was to Giles Hilton an hour of anxiety, and a thousand fears began to take possession of him for the safety of his wife. There was a strange feeling, too, rapidly growing stronger and stronger at his heart, that something unusual was about to happen—a presentiment—a consciousness before the event. The shadow of something not yet visible, but certain in its coming. Call it what you will, he felt it strongly; and when suddenly there came a heavy blow on the door of the cottage, he started, as he said:

"That is it!"

Yet what it was, or who it was, he had not the most distant idea.

Before Giles Hilton could reach the front room of his cottage, he heard the latch lifted; and his idea then was, that his wife had returned. Shading with his right hand, while he held it with his left, the little candle-end, he stepped into the front-room.

"Help—help! Oh, help!"

It was a low, plaintive voice that uttered these words, and Giles saw a stranger—a man, well-dressed, and with a handsome cloth cloak half-trailing behind him—stagger across his threshold.

"Help! The villain! Faint—so faint! Help me! Do you know if—if one—so faint! Water!"

An old rush-seated chair, with arms—an heirloom of the Hilton family, two generations of whom had lived and died in that cottage—received the stranger, who sunk down into it with a deep groan.

The door slowly closed of itself, and the latch, with a click, resumed its place.

"You are hurt, sire?" said Giles.

The stranger kept his hand upon his chest, and spoke thickly.

"Hurt? Yes; dying! The villain! I suffer. It was but a blow. He has my watch—that was it. I always knew—have known for years—a blow on the chest would kill me. It has come! My Blanchie! my child! my dear, only, only one! Water!"

"Yes, yes," said Giles. "Be composed. I will fetch you water. God knows it is all I have to offer you."

"To come to this!" moaned the stranger, "and not with her! All alone—this great city! O God, help her! Seeking to do good, too. Oh, cruel, cruel fate!"

Giles returned with a small earthen vessel,
in which was water. He placed the little candle-end on the window-sill. The stranger tried to speak again; but his voice died away in an inarticulate murmur. He sighed once, then deeply, and his head fell listlessly against the old chair.

Giles Hilton felt that he was alone with the dead.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIAMOND.

The first feeling of the poor weaver was one of horror; and he shrunk back from the still form that was in the old wicker-chair. Then he opened the door hastily, and called out into the night air:

"Help—help! Is any one passing? Help! Is anyone near? Help!—there is murder done!"

All was still. The wind was decreasing in its violence, and the rain did not beat so heavily.

"What shall I do?" said Giles Hilton. "Would that Emma were here!"

He stepped back into the room again; and again the door slowly closed—latched itself. It was set on its hinges so to do. But on this night, although he, Giles, had seen his cottage-door so closed for as long as he could remember, there was something solemn and strange in the act that made him shudder, as if it were done by some unseen agency that was not of this world.

And there was the stranger in the old wicker chair! so still, so solemn, and so awe-stricking—the rich cloak, with its silken tassels trailing on to the floor, and in such contrast with the abject poverty of that dwelling.

He seemed—that stranger—a man in about the middle of life. His face was sad-looking, independent of the hue of death that was upon it. Giles Hilton began to have strange thoughts.

"This stranger," he said, "so richly attired! Here in death—my children starving—no one knows it! What if this is to be the means by which I am to save those whom I love from destitution—from famine? What if he have about him money—gold, perchance, such as I have not seen for many and many a day? I would not rob the living; but to leave with the dead that which may save the living is no policy; and to take it, if it be there, no—no—crime, surely! I do not know him; no one will seek him here. What if—if I search him, and find gold; and then—place the body outside, in the road-way? Oh, no—no! Giles—Giles! what are you dreaming of? What fiend is whispering to you now to be dishonest?"

The weaver clasped his hands, and paced the little room to and fro. His wife came not.

The candle-end was within half an inch of expiring.

Giles Hilton paused again.

"It cannot be wrong. My poor Emmy's wed-
the cottage. It did not seem to the weaver so
reminiscent a thing now to touch the dead stranger.
Wrapping the body carefully round and round in
the ample cloak, Giles Hilton, with some diffi-
culty, conveyed it up the eight narrow stairs
that led to the attic with the sloping roof.
There was nothing there but some old lumber;
but he laid the body quietly down; and closing
the door, he slunk down the stairs again, feeling
heated, and flushed, and guilty.
Yes, the peace of mind of Giles Hilton was
gone. A future of luxury might be before him,
but he would carry about with him a constant
dread.
He heard the latch of his cottage-door open.
"Giles—dear Giles!" cried his wife.
"I am here."
"You have thought me so long; but I could
not help it. John Long was out. I have got
four shillings, dear Giles, and some food, and
light, and a little wood for a fire."
"I am here!?" said Giles.
"Yes, dear, I know. How strange you speak!
Oh, say something kind to me, for—for I am
very broken-hearted, dear Giles—very broken-
hearted indeed!"
She had tasked her strength and her spirits
beyond her strength, had that poor, half-fam-
ished woman; and she sank to the floor, and
wept.
The darkness was increasing; for clouds had
filled up the rift through which the young moon
had looked; so that it was only dimly that the
husband and wife could see each other.
Giles Hilton folded his arms round his wife,
and, in a strange, cracked voice, he said:
"No more poverty—no more cold—no more
boas!""Giles?"
"No more struggles with want! Joy! joy!"
"O husband!"
"Be still. I will tell you.
Giles then was silent for a few moments; for
this was the first time in his life that he had
ever tried to shape his lips to utter a falsehood
to the loving and loved partner of his heart.
He felt it a hard task.
"O husband! what has happened?" said
Emma Hilton. "You speak so strangely. I
want to see your face. Let me get a light!"
"No, no, no!"
"But, dear Giles—"
"No, I say. I prefer this light—that is, the
darkness. Listen, Emmy, listen!"
"Yes—yes! I will listen. You are merciful
to me, Giles. Our little ones. It is of them
you are about to speak; and you would spare
the poor mother's heart. I am so faint and
weak. It is God's will."
Giles Hilton comprehended what his wife
meant by these broken sentences to imply. She
thought that in her absence possibly something
had happened to one of the children. She
orgot, in her mother's terror, that the woods
used by her husband had been those of triumph
and exultation. He hastened now again to lift
her heart from the abyss into which it had fallen.
"No—no! Emma, our dear little ones are
well. They sleep yet. But I was about to tell
you, scarcely had you been gone five min-
utes, when there were sounds as of a scuffle with-
out the house, and I hastened to see the cause
of it. I feared for your safety; and my heart
was agitated, as I fancied I heard a cry for help.
Into the cold night-air, into the falling rain I
went, but no one was there, and then—then,
Emmy, I saw a something lying near to our
door-step."
"A something, Giles?"
"Yes! I saw wealth—warmth—food—sun-
shine—luxury—joy! I saw a future of de-
light, of ease and enjoyment, for ourselves—for
our children, all lying at my feet."
Mrs. Hilton shuddered! She felt convinced
now that the mind of her husband—of that
poor weaver—had given way before the mis-
eries around him. She feared to speak. She
listened for more words from him; and in the
darkness, she tremulously held one of his hands
in hers—in both hers.
He spoke again.
"You know, Emmy, I have often told you that
the early years of my life were spent in refine-
ment and luxury, and that I received—what
shall I call it—a sort of half education, which
made me thirst for more knowledge. Then
came the change. Poverty stalked in at the
door of my father's house, and refinement, ease,
and elegance, fled. I was adopted by Gideon
Fitch, the master-weaver, and he made me what
I am—a workman merely. I was alone in the
world till your dear eyes beamed upon me.
"But you found something, Giles! What
was it? What is it?"
"A light—a light now! I can hear a light
now. I will show you what will gladden your
eyes."
Mrs. Hilton eagerly lit one of the rushlights
she had brought in with her; and as the little
flame flashed through the dark atmosphere—
so dark now, and so cold, in that wretched
home—the children awakened, and cried for
warmth and for food. They soon had both.
Wood and coke struggled into ignition in the
cold, damp fireplace, and the little ones eagerly
devoured the coarse bread and cheese which
had been purchased with the produce of the
wedding-ring.
On to the little rickety table—too old to sell,
too useful to burn—which was in the room,
Giles now emptied the contents of the bag we
had taken from the stranger, who was so still and
calm in the attic above them.
"There," he said; "gold, silver; but more
precious, I fancy, than as if this room glittered with both these, is this jewel."

The diamond, as Giles tipped on one side the little case that held it, rolled half over the table, and as it did so, with what rare and refulgent lustre it sparkled and shot forth rays of beauty as the little flickering flame of the rushlight played upon its facets.

"A diamond!"

"Yes, Emmy, and such a diamond! You never saw its like. But you have seen diamonds!"

"Yes, in shop-windows; and John Long showed me one once, not nearly so large as that. He said it was worth—worth—oh! what shall I say?—quite a dream of money!"

Bang—bang! came two heavy blows at the door of the cottage. Giles Hilton uttered a wild kind of cry, and clutched at the diamond. His voice was high, strange, and unnatural, as he cried out:

"No—no! Not with my life; not if I had twenty lives, and all to lose. It is mine—mine! I will not give it up to mortal man!"

Bang—bang! came the knocks again.

The children screamed, to see their father's excitement; and poor Mrs. Hilton sunk on to her knees in an agony of terror.

"The bolt! the bolt!" cried Giles. "They shall not have it—my diamond! my treasure! Not while I live—while heart and brain live. No—no! Keep them out—keep them out!"

The door was opened, for it was only on the latch. Giles uttered a howling cry of rage, and Mrs. Hilton wrung her hands and wept. It was a mild, soft, kindly voice, that spoke from the front room of the weaver's cottage.

"Mrs. Hilton! Mrs. Hilton! Are you here? May I come in? You know me. I am Louis—Louis Long, you know; don't be alarmed; I heard all; I cannot bear it; you will forgive my father, I know, for he has been so long in business, that—that you see he has become so—so—I know not what to say; but he bought your wedding-ring of you, and I have brought it back to you, thinking you would be unhappy without it; and there are a couple of pounds, too—all my own, Mrs. Hilton—that may be useful to you. Are you there?"

Foot Mrs. Hilton sobbed aloud.

"Oh the good heart!" she cried. "It is Louis Long's husband, the son of John Long."

"Brave spirit!" said Giles Hilton, in a low tone. "Noble spirit—wife! take the ring. Take his money, for the present. Take it."

"God bless it! But we have money now, Giles."

"Peace—peace! It is too soon. We must be wary—wary and cautious—to account for the possession of wealth. You see, there might be inquiry. There might be suspicion—alarm. Peace! Seem poor yet, awhile, till I can think."

"Ah! yes, I see now. This money and this jewel are not ours.

"Yes—yes! But—no more. Go to him. Thank him. Go—go!"

"Mrs. Hilton," said Louis, again. "I will leave the ring and the money here on the wicker chair. I will not disturb you. Good night."

Mrs. Hilton went hastily into the front room. She spoke with difficulty, for tears nearly choked her utterance.

"May Heaven, dear Mr. Louis, ever bless and reward you. Your own good tender heart must feel even now some of that reward. God bless you!"

"Good-night—good-night!" said Louis. "Keep a good heart, and better times will soon come."

"Gone?" said Giles, as he looked in from the back room, with the rushlight in his hand.

"Yes; and here is money, and here is my ring. Lend me the light a moment, Giles. These wet clothes cling to me so. I have some old things in the attic, which at least are dry."

Mrs. Hilton took the light, and had reached the foot of the narrow stairs leading to the attic, when her husband sprang toward her with a cry of alarm, and she half fell in her terror at the foot of the stairs, and held up the light, tremblingly.

"No, no! not there! Anywhere but there! You must not—you shall not go there! You dare not—I dare not! What am I saying? No, no—wife! trust me. Ha! ha! It is cold, damp, up there; the wind howls, and drop by drop the bitter rain comes through the broken roof. I am not mad! do not look at me in such a fashion; but you must not go up those stairs!"

"Not up these stairs, Giles?"

"No, no! You will not go."

He knelt by her side, and clasped his arms about her. How fearfully he shook! how wild and anxious were his eyes! how blanched his lips.

"Not for all the world, Giles," said his wife, "if you say so."

"That is well—that is well. Of course, I knew that, Emmy. Not up there! Not that it matters, only you see I have said it—that is all. Here is money—money from Louis and money from me. Why, what says the old proverb? 'It never rains but it pours.' That is it. Go again, Emmy, and get more food—better food—more fuel—coal. No more light, or—or stay! What say you to taking our children in our arms and flying from this cottage—from this neighborhood at once, and forever, where they will never find us?"

"Who never find us, Giles? We care for no one finding us, surely?" "Oh! no, no! Ha! of course not, and yet—yet you see, Emmy, the diamond!"

"It has an owner. It has been lost by some one who will surely seek it."
"Who knows?"
"Surely, such will be the case. You know, Giles, that no one would lose such a jewel, unless they lost life with it, who would not seek it."
"Ah! that is true!"
"And so, Giles, we ought to stay here; because, if we leave our house, suspicion will light upon us that we wished to steal the diamond."
"Gospel, that," cried Giles; "as true as gospel! Let me think—fire! Yes, that is it. Wife—Emmy, this money of Mr. Louis's, you can take that. Go again. There are good shops where for good money you can buy comfort. Go, now, again. I would go, but I feel not well—not very well. Fire!"
"Why do you say fire, Giles?"
"Did I say fire?"
"Twice you said it."
"I merely thought that fire consumed all, and what a glorious thing it was. Take the money, Emmy, and go. The daylight will come soon—our children sleep again; they will wake to new wants."
"I will obey you, Giles. The cottage is warmer, now. I will soon return to you."
"No hurry—no haste."
"And the night so cold; the rain so chilling! Ah! Giles, you forget that it is your Emmy who will shiver in the cold wind."
"No, no! what did I say? It is nothing. There will soon be more warmth. Heed me not, just now; I am not what I was, and it is for you and for our children that heart and brain are at work—go, go. I send you forth, but it is because I love you. Now!"

This last word was uttered by Giles Hilton as his wife crossed the threshold of the cottage. Without, then a moment's pause, he went through the back room in which his children slept, and into the little out-house we have mentioned. He returned with an armful of hay and straw, which he flung on to the little staircase that led to the attic.

That attic in which was the dead stranger—the owner of the diamond.

Some oil that he had in a tin can he poured on the hay and straw; he piled up the rickety old table and the wicker chairs on the whole, and then he went to the fire that was in the back room. It was burning weakly and dimly. An old shovel, half worn away, was in the grate, and with that he lifted off half of the smouldering embers and carried them to the staircase. He flung them on to the table, the chairs, the hay, and the straw; then he held shut for a few moments the door that closed in the staircase from the lower room.

"Fire! fire!" he said. "That will do the work! All will perish but the diamond, and the gold, and the silver: it is not murder! Quite as well that the dead should pass away in flame as becomes food for worms—better! better! I did not kill him! Let the body perish—all else is then lost, and I am rich! rich!"

He placed his ear against the panel of the door. There was a dull, roaring sound.

Giles Hilton glanced around the miserable apartment, and there was a strange light in his eyes as he did so. The dull, roaring sound on the stairs continued. The room got lighter and lighter each moment. Was it the dawn coming? No, no! The door fitted badly, and there was an opening of about an inch in width between it and the floor. It was through that opening that a glare of reddish light came.

Then a few sparks fell through.

"It burns! it burns!" cried Giles.

The light increased. He opened the door a short space, and with a wheel and a rush the ignited hay and straw roared up the staircase.

The cottage was on fire.

"Now for the little ones!" cried Giles; and he dashed into the inner room. He snatched his children from their poor bed on the floor, and held them close to his heart. He heard the roaring of the flames, and each moment the red light of the configuration grew stronger and stronger.

"It is done! it is done! All will be safe! Fire! fire! fire!"

Giles heard a scream, and he rushed into the front room. The outer door was swung open and his wife was on the threshold.

"Fire! fire!" he shouted. "Fire! Emmy! I have our little ones here, safely—let it burn!"

With a crash the floor of the attic fell in, and then a bright flame shot up into the air. Spitalfields was illuminated, and the ery of "fire" began to resound through the district, and a tumultuous crowd to rush toward the weaver's cottage.

"Come!" said Giles Hilton.

He held his wife by the arm; and with his two children clasped to his breast, he fled through the night wind and the still lightly-spattering rain.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORPHAN AND HER FOE.

A bright and beautiful morning succeeded the equally night in Spitalfields, and even that poor and dreary district looked cheerful and light, but much more did the easily room to which we would now direct the attention of our readers.

It is ten o'clock. The bright spring morning has only just temptet from their repose the votaries of fashion. The sun glitters upon the plate-glass windows of one of the most aristocratic hotels at the west end of London.

The slightly-opened windows allow the soft morning to enter the rooms and to puff gently on one side the silken curtains. The odor of spring flowers comes from the balcony into one of
these rooms on a table on which the costly preparation for breakfast waited the arrival of those who were to partake of the meal.

Busy waiters flit in and out of this room, and it is evident that it is considered to be in the possession of some one who can well afford to command all the attentions and all the luxuries of that well-conducted establishment.

Ten o'clock.

A little tinkling sound from a French clock on the chimney-piece announced the fact, and then the door of that breakfast-room was flung open by an obeisant waiter, and a young girl entered it.

So young and so fair! so gentle-looking, and with such a calm, happy look upon the innocent face; that young creature courteously acknowledged, by a slight movement, the attention of the waiter, and then cast a rapid glance round the room.

"Pa not down yet?"

"No, miss," said the waiter. "Mr. Ratcliffe, miss, has not come down yet. Blis you!"

The waiter uttered these last words to himself as he left the room, and carefully closed the door as if he were shutting the lid of some casket on some rare trinket that might be damaged if he were rough in the process. The beauty, the gentleness, and the thousand graces of that young, fair girl had touched the hearts of all in that house.

And she was alone in that gorgeous room—she, the fairest ornament it now possessed. The light air that puffed in from the slightly-open window was pleasant and grateful to her, and she widened the opening of the casement and looked out over the balcony and into the wide, bustling street below.

Hurrying on in pursuit of business or pleasure was the busy throng of London, and to that young girl who had been brought up in the quietude and isolation of a country school, where she had resided until the last week, the scene in the streets of London was most animating, and picturesque, and full of interest.

"Ah!" she said, "I must get my dear father to show me all this great city. What a gay and charming place it is!"

Then she looked into the room again. No! The father she expected to join her at the morning meal was not there yet. It is half-past ten.

An undefined feeling of uneasiness began to steal over the mind of Blanche Ratcliffe—that was the name of the young girl. She had been at that hotel one week with her father—severely a week, for that made only the sixth morning, and he had always hitherto been waiting for her at the breakfast-table.

Well, now she waited for him, surely, that was all. And yet, as minute after minute flew by, poor Blanche began to feel more and more uneasy. We call her poor Blanche because we pity her, and our readers will soon pity her, likewise.

The waiter came in with a flourish of his table-napkins. He coughed, slightly.

"Did you ring, miss?"

"I—Oh no!"

Blanche had never thought of ringing.

"Perhaps, miss, you would like to begin your breakfast?"

"No, not without my father. But stay! he wishes to be up at this hour, I am sure. Will you go to him and awaken him, and say to him that it is—oh, yes, twenty minutes to eleven; will you, if you please?"

"Well, miss, the fact is, that Mr. Ratcliffe has not been home all night."

"Not been home all night!" How strangely these words sounded to the ears of Blanche! They seemed to be something quite incredible to attempt to convey an idea that was scarcely to be received. "Not home all night?" she repeated.

"Mr. Ratcliffe went out, miss, after you had gone to bed, and has not been home since."

Blanche burst into tears.

"Oh, don't you cry, miss: it's all right, no doubt. Your father will come home soon, and the best thing you can do will be to take some breakfast, miss."

"He will never come home!" said Blanche Ratcliffe; and she clasped her hands together and looked so desolate that the waiter could not bear to look at her, and he hurried off to seek the landlady of the hotel.

The cup of joy was dashed from the lips of Blanche. A dreadful certainty seemed to come over her that she would never see her father more. It was not of herself she thought, but of him—of that dear father who had been absent from her for years, leaving her at a quiet country school, and who had only returned to her from India, as she had heard him say, to be with her six days and then to disappear forever."

"Forever!" sobbed Blanche; "it is forever! O father! father! why am I not with you?"

The door of the room opened, and the landlady of the hotel made her appearance.

"Miss Ratcliffe."

Blanche started and looked up. The landlady smiled.

"Come, my dear, don't you be crying your pretty eyes out for nothing; you take your breakfast, and your father, no doubt, will soon be home. Gentlemen often stay out all night—yes, quite often. Come, now, you think no more about it. It is nothing."

Blanche shook her head, but she made an effort to look consolled; she made another effort and took a small portion of breakfast.

Then she sat deep in the recesses of an easy-chair and waited—waited, oh, so long, hour after hour; but he came not.
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

The day passed away. The dim evening pressed the shadowy night; and he came not. The waiter brought wax-candles. "Miss, you have had no dinner."

"No; I don't want any."

"I can't make it out now, miss. Mr. Ratcliff don't come; and I am afraid that—that something has happened, and I only hope it is not much—nothing very serious, miss."

"I thank you; you are very kind."

"Oh no—no."

"What?" cried a sharp voice. "Loitering here, as usual."

"No, ma'am—beg pardon, ma'am. Coming, coming!"

The waiter feigned to hear some bell, as an excuse to get away; and the landlady of the hotel stepped up to Blanche Ratcliff.

"Miss Ratcliff," she said—and there was something harsh in her tone—"Miss Ratcliff, I don't at all comprehend this affair."

"Affair, madam?"

"Yes; about your father coming here with you, and running up a bill—eight pounds ten—and then disappearing."

"A bill?" said Blanche, looking up into the landlady's face as innocently as possible.

"Oh, come; that won't do. You pretend to be such an idiot that you don't know what that is? There's no luggage to speak of—only two small boxes. We don't know who and what you are; and if you have no money, why, all I can say is, that something must be done."

"Oh no, madam; I have no money."

The tones of the landlady partook more and more of a certain brassy character that was excessively unmusical.

"Well, I don't mind for to-night, just to see what happens; but we cannot keep you here, in the best rooms, too. There is a family—a most respectable family—of the name of Hilton, who want these rooms—Mr. Hilton, his lady, and their two charming children. These are the best rooms, and they are kind enough to wait till they are vacant."

"I am going now," said Blanche.

"Going now?"

"Yes. They shall wait no longer. I will go back to school. I will take my own box, and go there again."

"Well, miss, as regards taking the luggage, I want to know about the bill. I cannot allow any luggage to go till the bill is paid."

"Very well; I will go, then."

Poor Blanche rose, and in a straggling sort of way went to the door. There was then some human compunction in the landlady's heart, and she said:

"You had better stay another night. Your bonnet, too. Come, don't cry, but stay another night."

Blanche turned, and looked her in the face. "I am not crying, madam. I will go at once, I can fetch my bonnet; it is up-stairs in the bed-room. I will go at once."

"Well, if you must."

Blanche sought the bed-room she had occupied, and was in a few moments ready for the streets. She gilded down stairs, and reached the hall. There was a bustle of waiters and guests, and a rushing to and fro. She pushed open the swinging glass-door, and reached the steps. Then she paused for a moment, and looked out at that world which was all before her, and she like a child upon the threshold.

"Father, father!" she said; and she looked upward.

She thought of two fathers at that moment: her father who had been upon earth, and her Father in heaven.

Ah, no! Blanche Ratcliff is not alone—not deserted yet. The Father that is in heaven was with her, and the shield of His love and mercy is around the innocent girl.

In the streets of London! A young girl! almost a child. Destitute, and with such a wondrous beauty that it became a perilous gift! It was with a vague, dreamy sort of feeling that Blanche walked some pace from the hotel.

She heard a hasty step. It was the waiter. Blanche was glad to see his kindly eyes.

"Oh, miss, don't go; or, if you must, say where you are going. Mr. Ratcliff may come back, you know, and I should be glad to be able to tell him where you can be found."

"Oh, yes. Thank you. Rock House Academy, Chisle, Isle of Wight. I will go back there." "That's right, miss. Good-night—God bless you!—good-night."

"What is this?"

The waiter had thrust into Blanche's hand a little paper parcel.

"Oh, only a small sum, which will be useful to you. Mr. Ratcliff will pay me back. If you go round the first turning, you will come to a coach-office, where you can book yourself to the Isle of Wight. Good-evening—good-evening."

The waiter was gone.

"Book myself to the Isle of Wight?" said Blanche, with a very undefined idea of what that meant.

She walked on a few paces.

A man roughly ran against her, and another said: "Now, stupid, what do you mean by pushing of the young lady? Ehi?"

In a moment, then, the small paper roll of money that the waiter had given Blanche was snatched from her hand. There was a sharp whistle, and the two persons who had perpetrated the robbery were gone.

"My dear young lady," said a voice, in a soft, low, insinuating tone, "I'm afraid you have been robbed. Dear me! Is this possible? Why, is not your name Ratcliff, my dear?"
"Yes!"

"Mr. Ratcliff's daughter, who came from India in the 'Ganges'? I thought I knew you, my dear. Well now, really. This is quite, I may say, providential. I knew your father so well, and he was so fond of me."

"Was I—knew?" said Blanche. "You speak, sir, of my father in that way."

"I mean that I know him well, and that he is fond of me. Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Eh? Oh, dear. Good, that! Good, good!"

This person who had accosted Blanche now stood by her side, and looked toward the hotel, at which a handsome carriage had stopped, and from which, first of all, there alighted a gentlemanly-dressed man, and then a lady, and then two children, all attired in rich clothing, and glittering with jewels.

"He, he! Oh, oh!"

"What is the matter, sir?"

"Nothing—nothing. On the contrary, it is all right. I am delighted—quite delighted!"

The party from the carriage went into the hotel, and as they did so, the richly-dressed lady said to the gentleman:

"Yes, Giles; I repeat that I am very unhappy."

"Peace, Emmy—peace!" said Giles Hilton, the weaver. "All is well. It is our own."

And the poor weaver and his lately-starving wife and children were ushered into the apartments at the hotel lately occupied by Mr. Ratcliff and his daughter Blanche.

Where was Mr. Ratcliff? A few charred bones in the ruins of the wretched cottage in Spitalfields were all that remained on earth of him. Where was his much-loved chind? A destitute wanderer in the streets of London, and even now in company with a villain.

"You know my father, sir," said Blanche, continuing the conversation that had been interrupted.

"Yes, Miss Ratcliff, quite well. I can take you to him."

"You can—you will? Oh, how good and kind of you. Let us go at once, dear sir. I am so much obliged to you. At once—at once?"

"Hall! Hall!"

"You laugh!"

"Yes, my dear. I am forced to laugh, but it's all right. The world makes me laugh. It's such a funny world. You are your father's only child, and heiress of all he possesses. You and he were alone in the world. He left you at school at Chisle, in the Isle of Wight, while he went to India to seek his fortune. He was a lapidary. He did well in India. Get into the service of a native chief, and was so useful to him, that he gave him wealth—well—well. He was very fond of me. So very fond of me, I mean, my dear Miss Ratcliff. Oh, dear, what a game?"

"A game, sir?"
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

If you can? You are not sure? Ah, now I begin to feel that I am wrong.”

“Wrong?”

“Yes. I ought to have staid at the hotel, or on its door-step, if I could not stay within it, in the hope that my father would return. I ought to go back.”

“No.—no. Here is my mother’s cottage, and there is the old dame standing on the threshold. Come in now, at once; and I promise you that, if I cannot find your father, I will take you back to the hotel again.”

“Or to Chale? Better to Chale.”

“Chale?”

“Yes; I told you, in the Isle of Wight—my old school. My father will be sure to seek for me there again. I will go there.”

“You shall; but come in here now.”

Nagle, by a gentle kind of force, led the young girl into the miserable cottage of his poor mother, who, on recognizing that bad son whom she had not seen now for four years and more, screamed aloud, and then burst into tears, “Shut the door!” cried Nagle, “and don’t make all that rout. What is the matter now?”

“O John—John! My Johnny!”

“Bah! bo! Look you, mother, this young lady—. Stay, Miss Ratcliffe; you are tired. Go into that next room and rest. I have something to say to my mother. You will excuse me.”

The natural courtesy of poor Blanche at once led her to obey this mandate, and she went into the adjoining room—the only other one, in fact, of the little cottage. There was a wretched little trundle-bed there, and Blanche sat down upon it; and resting her fair face on her hands, she wept in bitterness of spirit.

And as she did so, she heard the confused murmur of voices in the outer room; and at times she fancied the old woman spoke in tones of remonstrance, and that her late companion was using threatening language.

We will step into that front room, and listen to what is passing.

“Mother,” said Nagle, “I tell you the exact truth—nothing more nor less. This young girl is an heiress; she is quite alone in the world—no mother, no father, no friends—no relations whatever. She don’t know the secret of her own wealth; but I do, and my wish and my intention is, to marry her, and then turn gentleman and be steady.”

“O John—John!”

“Don’t be going on in that way, mother. It is your duty, as I hope it will be your wish, to help me in this matter. I mean fairly and honorably by this young girl, or I would not have brought her to you, as you may well suppose.”

“But is it fair not to tell her of her fortune? She should know all, and then choose for herself; and then, Johnny, if she likes you—”

companionship with one of his own race and creed, been patronized by Mr. Ratcliff.

Nagle had repaid the kindness of the merchant by base ingratitude; but he had, although repudiated by him, come over in the same vessel to England, where, however, for a time, he had lost sight of Mr. Ratcliff.

It was by accident that, after committing an outrage in his old haunt of Spitalfields, as he was about to claim a temporary shelter in the cottage of his poor mother, that Nagle, purposed by the officers of justice, got into the garden of Giles Hilton’s cottage.

Hilton had heard some slight sound while engaged with the dying stranger who had staggered into his abode. That sound came from the accidental stumbling of the concealed Nagle.

The crafty villain had heard and seen all, and he had made up his mind at once as to how he should act.

Climbing up into the attic of the weaver’s cottage, he had fully satisfied himself that the dead body there was that of his old master in India, Mr. Ratcliff.

A further search of that body than Giles Hilton had cared to make, had placed him in possession of a memorandum of the address of the hotel where Blanche was left, as well as of a ruby ring of a very remarkable shape and make.

It was the confabulation at the weaver’s cottage that had forced Nagle to leave it, and he at once made his way to the West End of London, and matured his plans.

They were just these:

Such a diamond as Mr. Ratcliffe had possessed, and as Giles Hilton had appropriated, could no more be hidden than a landed estate, and whatever hands it might pass through, it must—her father being no more—belong to Blanche Ratcliffe, and prospectively to her husband.

Nagle meant to be that husband. His plan was to let Blanche see that she was utterly and entirely destitute and forsaken, and then to take advantage of such depression, and with an affectation of generosity, offer her his hand.

So soon as she should then be legally his wife, he would set about having the diamond and claim it as his own.

A good plan, but marred in its progress by some little circumstances which Nagle, with all his clearness, did not foresee.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESCUE.

Weary, very weary and footsore, poor Blanche at length reached Spitalfields with Nagle.

“Is it far now?” she asked, timidly.

“No, close at hand.”

“And I shall see my dear father?”

“Yes. You can stay with my mother until I fetch him, if I can.”
"Bah! Don't be going on in that way. It is misery only that will make her like me; she must suffer so much wretchedness and want that I shall appear like a miracle of generosity to her, and then she will marry me."

"No, Johnny—no."

"No, say you?"

"I do say, No. I am very old; I am very poor; and I have suffered much. I will work for you, Johnny; and if you will repent you of the past, and try to lead an honest life for the time to come, I will help you, if I work my fingers to the bones; but I will not be one in the deceit on this child—for she is but a child. No, my son—no. I will tell her all."

"You dare not!"

"John! John! Your eyes look evil."

"There is evil in my heart, too. Do you remember when and how we last parted?"

"O Heaven! I do—I do! John—John! my own son! You raised your hand against your poor old mother!"

"Beware, then, now."

"No! no! I will not beware. I will do that which Heaven lets me know to be right. This young creature shall not be your prisoner. I will not have her deceived!"

"Idiot!"

"Help—help! Mercy on me!"

The door of the room was dashed open, and, pale and agitated, Bianche appeared on its threshold. She had heard the last part of the conversation—for both the speakers had been too much excited to speak low—and she felt that she was in danger, and had been betrayed in some way by the man who had brought her so far.

"I will go!" she cried. "Let me go. I will go at once!"

"Not while I live!" shouted Nagle. "Stir hand or foot to leave this cottage, and it will be the worse for you."

"Father! father! help me!"

"Peace, I say! You don't know me yet!"

"Alas! I fear she does now," said poor Mrs. Nagle.

Bianche made a rush toward the door, but Nagle, with fury in his looks, darted to it first, and set his back against it, and spread out his arms, as, with a brutal laugh, he cried out:

"Come on—don't stop! Ha, ha! Fair means or foul, my beauty. Mine you are, mine you shall be! Things have taken another turn. I would have been fair and civil to you, but this old lady would not let me. You have her to thank for it!"

Bianche screamed aloud.

"Oh, go on—go on. That won't do much good to you in Spitalfield, I can tell you. And yet I won't have it; some chance meddling passers-by might hear you. Peace, girl, or—"

He was at the point of making a rush forward toward Bianche, who uttered a shriek of terror, when the door immediately behind him was dashed open with such force that it struck him a blow that flung him to the floor.

Another moment, and with one foot on Nagle's back, as he lay half-stunned by the fall, a young man stood two paces in the room.

"What is all this?" he said.

There was an honest flush upon the fine features of the young man as he glanced around the room and took in all the particulars of the scene.

Poor Mrs. Nagle was crouched down on the floor, whether she had shrunk to avoid the threatened violence of her bad son. Bianche made one dart forward, and grasped the left arm of the stranger, as she cried, frantically:

"Oh, save me—save me! Protect me, and God will reward you!"

"You are saved—you are protected. There is no more danger now."

The young stranger flung his left arm around the trembling girl, and took his foot off the ruffian, Nagle, as he then added:

"What wretch in the shape of man would offer in-ut or injury to this young creature?"

Nagle sprang to his feet. His countenance looked demoniac. With a yell of rage, he rushed at the young stranger, but, slight and fragile as was the power of him whom he thought to bear down at once by violence, Nagle had sadly miscalculated his powers of resistance.

The young stranger, only by a slight muscular movement, settled himself firmly on his feet; and at the same moment, straight as an arrow from a bow, with his disengaged right arm he darted a blow forward, which caught Nagle on the forehead, and interrupting him in his rush, sent him, with a crash, into a further corner of the room.

Nagle rolled over twice, and then he regained his feet.

"Oh, a bruise, are you?" he shouted. "Ha, ha! A bruise! I'll kill you or her!"

This time it was with dastardly malice that Nagle tried to strike Bianche; but the young stranger was too quick for him. Divining the movement, he slightly shifted his position and shielded Bianche, while he again met Nagle in full career with just such a blow as the last; and the villain flew again into the corner, where he half-sat, half-lay, looking confused and helpless.

"I think that will do," said the young stranger.

"If you want me again, at any time, my name is Louis Long. Mrs. Nagle, I am sorry for you from my heart."

"O brave, dear friend!" said Bianche, as she flung her arms round Louis; "with you— with you—I will go with you, and you will be good to me! You will find my father, and I—that is, he—will love you."

Louis looked into the face of that fair girl as with her eyes beaming gratitude upon him, she
regarded his countenance, which was flushed by the recent excitement he had gone through; and, at that moment, he felt that never, in his wildest dreams of beauty and tenderness, had he ever pictured to himself one like that young creature who was at that moment so full of admiration and gratitude to him. The light of love beamed from his eyes, and he replied by a slight caress, and then he said: "If my life could contribute to your happiness—"

Louis paused at this; and then, still keeping the agitated girl close to him, he said: "Mrs. Nagle, what is the meaning of all this? and who is this young lady?"

"I know not. I know but little of it all," sighed poor Mrs. Nagle. "She has not been here one hour. Do not ask me more, but take her away with you, I implore you, Mr. Louis. She ought not to be here. Take her with you, and then she will be safe."

At these words of Mrs. Nagle, Louis Long was bewildered and astonished, as well he might be. That he should be asked to take charge of a young lady of whom he knew nothing—he so young—so completely himself helpless as regarded the means of aiding and protecting her, as so extravagant a proposition that he could hardly believe his senses.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Nagle, that you do not know the young lady?"

"No, no."

"But I do I" cried Nagle, still sitting in the corner.

"I did not ask you."

"No; but I spoke for all that. I have had quite enough of your girl, Mr. Louis Long."

"I should think so."

"But you don't take away the young lady. Her father gave her into my care."

"Oh, that is false!" said Blanche.

"Of course it is. Hark you, John Nagle! I know you, although you and I were both boys when last we met. I warn you, now, if I hear of your attempting any violence toward your poor mother—Mrs. Nagle burst into a vehemence of sobbing at these words—" if I hear of that, I will come to you again. Good-bye, Mrs. Nagle."

Louis placed the arm of Blanche Ratcliff gently and tenderly beneath his own, and left the cottage. She looked up into his face with an assured and contented expression.

"Your name is—is it?" he said.

"Blanche Ratcliff; and yours, Louis Long."

"Ah! you know that?"

"I heard it in the cottage, there. He—that bad man—said it."

"Yes, he did, Miss Ratcliff."

"You will call me Blanche—will you not? My father and you only."

Louis felt as if something choked his utterance at that moment. He was much affected by the childlike innocence of that young girl. It was a moment or two before he could reply:

"Yes, dear, dear Blanche."

"Yes, Louis," she said, gently. They stood for a few moments looking upon each other, in the soft sunlight of that fair spring day; and then Louis said:

"Shall I take you home?"

"Yes, Louis, if you think that—that—"

"That what, dear Blanche?"

"That I shall not be troublesome, and a burden to you."

"Troublesome! a burden! I meant your home."

Blanche shook her head.

"Oh! I have no home!"

Louis looked confounded. There was that beautiful and elegantly-attired young girl, with her fingers two rings, the gems in which sparkled in the sunlight; and around her neck an exquisitely-made gold chain, from which depended a locket set with pearls; and every article of her dress so rich and so good, saying that she had no home. It was quite inexplicable.

"Blanche," he said, "you astonish me. Tell me all your history."

"Oh, yes, Louis. I was at school at Chale; my father was in India. He came home six days ago and fetched me away, and brought me to a five hotel in London. Last night he went out for a walk, and never came back; so they turned me out of the hotel because I could not pay; and then that bad man, Nagle, met me, and said he would take me to my father; and he led me to that cottage, and there I overheard the poor woman say to him, that he was very wicked, and was deceiving me; so I wanted to leave the place, and he would not let me; and I screamed, and you came, Louis."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"And you have no notion of where your father is, Blanche?"

"None, none; but you will find him for me, if—if he lives?"

The tears started to the eyes of Blanche.

"Be comforted," said Louis. "It cannot be but that your father will be found, and then all will be well. I am so happy that I happened to pass the cottage of Mrs. Nagle and heard you—so very happy."

"And I, too, Louis. If I could but see my dear father again, I should be very happy indeed."

"Louis was thoughtful for a few moments, and then he said:"

"Blanche, dear, I will take you to my father's house. He is a lapidary."

"A lapidary? Why, my father was a lapidary—a dealer in precious stones that is."

"Yes; that is a strange coincidence, dear Blanche. I have no mother."
"Nor I, Louis. Is that another strange coincidence?"

"I suppose it is."

They both smiled.

"Come," added Louis. "I will tell my father all about it, and our old housekeeper will look after you. She is an honest, kind-hearted woman, and we may hit upon some means of soon finding your father."

"Yes, Louis, yes," said Blanche, as she held more firmly by his arm, "I will go with you."

The trusting simplicity of this young girl; the charming, child-like innocence with which she relied upon him, an entire stranger as he was to her, touched the heart of Louis Long, the lapidary's son, most sensibly, and he said to himself, with a sigh:

"Ah! I shall never, in all my life, see one whom I can love as I now love this fair young girl; and if it be my fate never to call her mine, then let it be in happiness in this world."

The distance to the lapidary's house was but short, so that Louis and Blanche soon stood upon his father's threshold. The shop of John Long was a little, beetle-browed-looking place of ancient construction, and in it he had carried on, for nearly half a century, a sort of pawnbroker's, huckstering business among the weaver population with which he was surrounded.

When trade was prosperous, John Long sold trinkets to the wives and daughters of the weavers. When distress was in the district, he lent small sums upon the same trinkets which he had charged large ones, comparatively, for, and upon the cherished little heir-looms of the families, in the shape of silver spoons, and other articles of intrinsic value.

And John was what was known, in Spitalfields, as a "hard man". He had never been known to withhold his grip of some articles that had become his by course of time, or to advance so much as a penny-piece without adequate security.

Adequate security to John Long meant something like five times the value of the loan.

Poor Louis' heart beat apprehensively as he stood upon his father's threshold with Blanche, and dreaded the sort of reception that the old man would give to him when he should present him with a burthen instead of a profit.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED ACCOMPLICE.

Return we to Giles Hilton, the Spitalfields weaver, and his family.

The raging flames that had destroyed his old cottage-home had struck terror into the heart of poor Mrs. Hilton. The real or the fancied danger that her children had been in, absorbed for a time all other thoughts and considerations.

As the poor mother clasped her little ones to her heart, she could think of nothing but of thanks to Heaven for their preservation. They were unhurt, and all was well.

And then she clasped her arms around her husband, and sobbed upon his breast in thankfulness; for he was safe likewise, and it was he who had, at she knew not what risk (for she had an exaggerated and horrible dread of fire), saved them.

There were plenty of kindly-disposed neighbors who would have afforded a shelter to the burn-out Hilton family—neighbors quite as poor as they were supposed to be; but it was no part now of Giles Hilton's calculations to remain in Spitalfields.

The once pure-minded man had crossed the line which had hitherto separated him from falsehood and deceit, and in the short space of two hours he had committed more acts of dishonesty, trickery, evasion, and duplicity, than he could ever have imagined it possible for him to crowd into a life-time.

He had robbed the dead stranger—he had uttered falsehoods to his wife. He had become an unscrupulous and no wonder, therefore, was it that he was eager to leave the neighborhood.

"Come, wife—come," he said. "This, after all, is quite providential. It is a notice to us that we are to remain here no longer. Come this way."

"Neighbor Ampton will take us in, Giles, until the morning, when we can think what to do."

"No—no—no neighbors for me. Follow me. I will take the children."

"No—you take Luke; I will take Mary."

"Be it so. Come on." He felt not the cold. He felt not the fierce wind which still at times came with a full gust in his face. He felt not the spattering rains that now and then threatened a continuance of the equally weather; but on went Giles Hilton—on toward London, properly so called (for Spitalfields might at that time be considered as a town by itself, with a community, the manners and habits of which were as wide apart from those of the actual metropolis as might be those of any far-distant country-town).

The children dropped to sleep in their parents' arms; and as the bright morning—that bright succeeding morning which we have described as so fair and beautiful—began to shine around them, they reached one of the principal thoroughfares of the city.

Then Giles Hilton paused.

"Wife—Emmy!"

"Yes, Giles."

"You know I have money. You know how I got it?"

"You told me, Giles."

"Do you doubt me?"

"Oh, no—no. Doubt you, Giles? Oh, no. That is not possible."

A choking sensation prevented Giles from swerving for a moment, and then he said, hus
"Well—well—of course. We must never doubt each other. I have decided that, having found the money and the diamond as I did, I am entitled to make use of both. The bag was flung, so to speak, in my path."

But, Giles, there is, there must be, an owner—"

"What is that to me?"

"What is that to you, Giles? Oh, it is surely all, everything to you. Our utmost exertions, now, should be to find that owner."

Giles laughed bitterly, and in a mocking tone, as he replied:

"Very well, Emmy. You use your utmost exertions to find that owner, or that supposed owner; and when you have, you can tell him that I have spent some of his money, and you can see me consigned to a prison. That is all—that is all!"

"O Giles, Giles!"

"Peace, I say! I have been poor too long; I have suffered far too long. I will live now."

He strode on.

Poor Mrs. Hilton felt all that struggle between abstract right and present feeling and affection which it is so difficult to sustain. She clung to her husband's arm then, as, in imploring accents, she said:

"Do what seems to you right, Giles, and I will not question it. Your way shall be my way. I will not oppose you. The rest is with Heaven."

One hour after that, and the Hilton family were, by the expenditure of some of the gold that the bag had contained, warmly and well dressed. A substantial breakfast at an old city inn made the children all happy; and as the little party sauntered out into the sunny streets, it would have been difficult to recognize in them the so-recently starving Spitalfields weaver, his wife and his children.

A passing hackney-coach was hailed by Giles Hilton.

"To Bond street."

He had heard of Bond street as the emporium of fashion. He knew that in the splendid shops of that thoroughfare there were exposed for sale the silks that his busy shuttle had contributed to produce; and so he directed the coachman to go to Bond street, as there he proposed to find some pleasant home for himself and family, where the change would be as complete from Spitalfields as from one planet to another.

The children were weary; and when the party was set down in the fashionable locality, Giles was glad to see the door of a hotel close at hand swinging open.

"Here—he said—here we shall find a temporary home, wife."

Mrs. Hilton made no further objection; and Giles Hilton, the weaver, and his family, were soon accommodated with rooms in the hotel until the best ones should be vacant—which, the landlady told him, were in the occupation of a Mr. Ratcliff and his daughter.

Then, on the soft down of a bed such as she had never even seen in all her life, poor Mrs. Hilton sank into deep repose with her children, and Giles sauntered into the crowded streets of London.

That the diamond he had in his possession was one of great value he did not doubt, but what that value might be, even as an approximation to the truth, he had no idea. He felt all the danger of any precipitancy in parting with it, or even in trying to part with it.

So Giles thought the matter over; and as he had to wait at the opening to a livery-stable to allow some carriages to pass in and out, an idea struck him, which he forthwith set about carrying into effect.

He had still, in ready money, about twenty pounds; for, doubled up at the bottom of the stranger's bag he had found several notes. One of such notes he had handed to the landlady of the hotel, with directions to keep it on account of the bill that would accrue. Another of them he thought he might now make useful.

He strolled down the yard of the livery-stable slowly and heavily.

A man with top-boots and a cut-away coat soon met him.

"Servant, sir? Want anything, sir?"

"Yes. Can you lend me or hire a carriage and pair of horses? My party are at yonder hotel."

"The St. James's, sir?"

"Yes. You see it—with the portico. We have just come to town."

"Oh yes, sir! carriage and pair. Two guineas a day, sir?"

"Never mind the price."

These words were sufficient. It is needless to pursue the negotiation further. Giles Hilton parted with another of the bank-notes, and was soon issuing from the livery-stable as the occupant of a carriage.

"If," he said, as he stepped into the vehicle, the door of which the livery-stable keeper held open for him—"if there be any first-rate jewelers about here, I want to go there, as I wish to make some purchases."

"Oh yes, sir. Drive to Burt's."

The coachman touched his hat, and off went the carriage. It was but a short drive to one of the most fashionable jewelers that part of London; and then Giles Hilton, as he alighted and entered the shop, felt that something like a crisis in his fate had arrived, which required all his coolness and all his reason to carry it through with success and effect.

But Giles was disappointed at the effect which his carriage produced. The fashionable jewelers saw, in the course of the day, too many vehicles stop at their door to care much for that which
brought Giles Hilton. Still, there it was; and they gave him a certain sort of reception, in consequence, perhaps just a little more respectful than as if he had come on foot.

"I want to know if you have any loose diamonds in stock?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Step this way. Loose diamonds, Mr. Mears!"

"Yes, sir—loose diamonds, Jennings."

"This way, sir."

Giles Hilton was passed from one person to another, in this cool way, to see loose diamonds, as if they were quite matters of course, until he was in an inner room, and then a quiet-looking man said:

"About what value?"

"Oh, show me what you have! The best and largest, if you please."

The quiet-looking man smiled, and unlocked a small mahogany cabinet, and drew out a little drawer, lined with purple-velvet, and placed it before Giles Hilton.

These diamonds reposéd on the purple-velvet in glittering beauty; but Giles saw at a glance that the whole there would not, if combined, have made up the size of the one he had in his pocket.

"The price of this?" he said, touching one lightly.

"Two thousand five hundred pounds."

"And this one?"

"Three thousand five hundred."

"It looks nearly the same as the other."

"It is a trifle larger."

"And that trifle—"

"Makes a thousand pounds difference in value."

After a certain size, the increase in the value of diamonds is great."

Giles breathed heavily. He mentally asked himself, what then must be the value of the jewel he had with him? "Are these the largest you have?"

"No, sir.

"Show me."

The quiet-looking man now opened another of the little drawers. There was but one diamond in it. It was about half the size of what might be called Giles Hilton's jewel.

"That," said the jeweler, "belongs to one of the royal family of Spain—the deposed branch of the family. They want money. We have advanced twenty thousand pounds on it. It is for sale."

"For how much?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"Ah!"

Giles turned pale and leaned on the back of a chair for support.

"Are you not well, sir?"

"Oh, yes, yes! A slight passing spasm, to which I am occasionally subject—that is all. It has passed away. Twenty thousand pounds! And that is the largest diamond you have?"

"It is, sir. I do not think a larger is to be found in London. We do not know of one in the market, at all events."

"I regret, because I wanted to match one that I have."

"Larger than this, sir?"

"Yes. It is here."

Giles Hilton took from his pocket the little case in which was the diamond, and rolled it out on to the purple-velvet that lined the drawer containing the twenty-thousand-pound jewel; and there it lay, sparkling in beauty, and quite eclipsing the other. The jeweler looked astonished, and eagerly lifted the diamond and held it between him and the light; and then he stood between it and the light, and held it in various ways.

"Magnificent!"

"You say so?"

"Of course I do, sir. It is the first time I have seen such a jewel in private hands. Among the crown-jewels there are some its equals, probably."

"And its worth?"

"I am afraid to say, Mr. Mears!"

It was surprising how close at hand Mr. Mears was. Probably it was not considered quite prudent to show a perfect stranger such valuable property without a second person at hand. Mr. Mears, in fact, emerged from behind a screen, and the moment he saw the diamond, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"There is nothing like this in the market," he said. "Nothing at all like it."

"Well," said Giles Hilton, "one of two things I will do—match it, or sell it."

"You can't match it, sir."

"Then I sell. What will you give?"

Both Mr. Mears and the other man shook their heads; and then Mr. Mears said:

"The price of a jewel like this is a thing out of all ordinary calculation. It is, in fact, just what it may fetch from some of the crowned heads of Europe. We cannot buy it. It is too great a venture—too large a sum to be idle."

Giles Hilton looked perplexed. At that moment, he devoutly wished that his large diamond was in three or four pieces, in order that he might sell it at once; but he was relieved when Mr. Mears added:

"I dare say Mr. Burt will advance you, on interest, whatever in reason—and on up to twenty thousand pounds—on it, while he tries to sell it."

"That will do."

Another half-hour, and Giles Hilton left the fashionable jeweler's, feeling like a man walking in a dream; for he had in his possession ten thousand pounds, and might call for another ten thousand any time after three months.

He did not notice, as he stepped into his carriage, a shabby-looking, little, old man, who reached the jeweler's at that moment, and shuffled into the shop in a humble attitude.
If Giles Hilton had noticed that little, shal-by
old man, he would have seen him start at sight of
him, and rub his eyes, as if he doubted their
evidence of something; and so he did, for that
was other than John Long, the lapidary; and
what he doubted was evidenced by his mutter-
ing to himself:

"Giles Hilton! Giles Hilton! Pho, pho!
No, it can't be—very like him though."

"O Mr. Mears! is that you?"

"Yes, Mr. Mears. I want some seed-pears,
if you please."

"Certainly. By-the-by, you used to be,
when with us, a good judge of diamonds."

"Yes!—I know something of them—I ought
—ugh!—ugh! My winter cough, Mr. Mears,
I'm an old man now. Ugh! Ugh! ugh!

"Step this way."

"Yes, sir—ugh!—ugh!"

The old lapidary, who had once been in the
employment of the jeweler's firm, followed Mr.
Mears, and the large diamond that Giles Hilton
had just left behind him was shown to him.

John Long's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"Oh, the beauty! Oh, the sparkle! A
prince's treasure! Beautiful! Beautiful! In-
dian!"

"You think so."

"I know it. East Indian. Beautiful! Beau-
tiful! Let me see. There is the Russian.
Hm!—In Brazil they have one. Imported.
Hem!—UGH!—UGH!—Whose is it?"

"It belongs to a private gentleman—a Mr.
Hilton."

Old John Long staggered back.

"A Mr. who?"

"Giles Hilton."

"Har! ha!—ugh!—Oh! oh! I saw him!
Giles Hilton, the weaver! He! he!—UGH! Oh.
dear—oh, dear, I'm dead, and this is the
other world where weavers—starving weavers
—have diamonds worth a hundred thousand
pounds. Mad, mad! You are mad—I'm mad!
He is not worth a groat—starving—his wife
raising four shilling—one of them was a bad
one—hem!—ugh!—on her wedding-ring."

The jeweler looked aghast.

"True, all true!" cried old John Long. "Let
me see it again. It's false—stop it!"

"No!"

"I—I—ugh!—no—no—real. It is a dia-
mond! Wake me up—pinch me—scratch me
—bite me! I'm asleep! I'm asleep!"

"You know this man?"

"Ugh! Yes; a miserable hand-loom weav-
er. Wife raised four shillings on her ring—one
bad—he! Starving! Starving! Thieves!
thieves!"

"Where? where?"

"He—he must have stolen it."

"You frightened me, John; don't ever, act in
that way again, I pray."

"He stole it. I might have stolen it. I had
not the chance. Whose is it? You stole it—
no, I mean he—I—you—O gracious?"

Old John Long took such a fit of coughing
that he was nearly choked, and had to sit down
and kick and struggle for breath. Then, with-
out another word, as soon as he could do so,
he rose and hobbled out of the shop, and
his route home.

John Long had an idea.

"Well," said Mr. Mears, "it don't matter.
We don't part with the diamond without our ad-
vance and interest, and, after all, old John, who
is in a kind of second childhood, may be mis-
taken."

Giles Hilton, with a wild sort of look about
his eyes, and a flush upon his face, stood in the
sitting-room of the hotel. His wife and chil-
dren were there.

"Joy, joy, now!" he cried. "It is done!
Poverty and misery are but things of immi-
gation. We are rich! Behold our wealth!"

He dashed on to the table a heap of notes
and gold, and then, in a wild strain of exulta-
tion, he declared upon the delights of the
time to come, and became half-delirious in his
joy.

Poor Mrs. Hilton trembled, but she said lit-
tle; and then Giles, gathering together the
money, hid it carefully in a box he had bought,
and seizing the bell, he called out, when a wa-
ter appeared.

"Hilton! Are the best apartments not yet
vacant?"

"No. There is a young lady—"

"Nonsense! What are young ladies to me?
You can say to the landlady that I must have
the best rooms or I will go to-morrow."

"Yes, sir.

"Wife—Emmy?"

"Yes, Giles."

"I don't approve of that wogebone look of
yours. Please to look pleasant—will you?"

"O Giles, Giles!"

"Father, dear," said little Luke, "mother is
crying."

"Get out, brat!"

He pushed the child from him. His vision
was obscured by gold. Giles Hinton was an al-
tered man. He had contended with poverty
bravely—wealth turned his brain.

CHAPTER VI.

GILES HINTON'S VISITOR.

Terrorized and subdued, that loving wife and
those little ones, who had never before received
aught but kind and loving words, now heard
other than gentle words from Giles Hilton, now
shrunk from the proud man, who began to see
all things through the golden mist that unex-
pected prosperity had gathered around him.

There was a strange, flashing look about his
eyes—a look new and terrible to those who loved
him; and as to and fro he strode in that fair
apartment, he clenched and expanded his hands alternately, and muttered disjointed and feverish thoughts.

From wealth—wealth almost unbounded, and all my own! I emerge from my great estate, and spread my pinions now to fortune's favoring breeze—I, the poor weaver—I, the wretched, toiling man, thankful if coarse food and a mean house were granted me as the reward of all of my labor. Now, now! I am a patrician of the land; for I have the yellow mineral to which all bow down and worship! I am no longer Giles Hilton, the poor weaver. I am a man, now—a new man. The blood flows with a jingling music in my veins; and each limb of this once poor body feels lithe and fresh. There is music in my heart; and from the hidden chambers of my brain spring forth a thousand thousand pleasant fantasies. I shall live, now; I have but existed. hêre-t-fôrce."

His wife crept toward him. Tears—tears such as in her utmost poverty and want she had never shed—were in her eye. True, she had often wept, but not such bitter drops as these; and inasmuch as Giles Hilton's whole thoughts and feelings were changed, so was the character of her grief. And as she now clung to him, he looked like the good angel who does battle with man's evil spirit, and with imploring voice and gesture, and gentle, loving violence, would lure him to goodness.

There is an old painting at Nuremberg, in which is represented such a struggle. The dark spirit is hovering over the tempted man, and by the flutter of its wings is causing the fire of his passions, while a radiant emanation of divinity seeks, by clinging around his heart, to make him turn his eyes from earth.

And as Giles Hilton's wife clung to him, unconsciously taking the attitude of the angel in the old picture, there might be supposed to be the tempting spirit, tall and depraved, fluttering the false prismatic light of its pinions around him, and luring the ambitious soul to ruin.

Giles Hilton clasped one hand upon his brow, and held the other aloft.

"Wealth, rank, honors, luxuries—all, all for me! A new world—a new world! Land, ho! I have traversed the stormy sea of poverty, and the pleasant breeze of riches swells my sails!"

"Giles! O husband! You rave—you know not what you say to me. Listen to me, your own wife, your Emmy, to whom you have been over so good and so true—listen to me, only for a moment. Do not turn from me. I know all, I see all, as if in a glass: this diamond, and all the gold that springs from it. Lucre!—lucre, my own Giles, of the Evil One. It is to your soul I cling, and I will not have it riven from me by this golden dream. Giles, Giles—listen to me! Seek the owners of the glittering toy, give it to them, and let us return to our honest labor, our humble estate, our happy home!"

"Yes," said Giles Hilton; "I, too, see all—I, too, know all. Ten, twenty, thirty thousand pounds! The senate, the court! I live—I live!"

"Mercy! mercy!"

"I saw it in the sparkle of the glorious gem as it rolled in glittering beauty from my hand! I saw the future in every beam of celestial light that in dancing glory burst from its fiery surface! There were bright eyes, fair landscapes, honor, renown, all within the adamantine breast of that exquisite crystal. I saw it all; and I heard voices, too, and they told me that the talisman which was to open the doors of a new world to me were then there, and as yet that I had but trodden my weary way without the threshold of enjoyment. Gold, gold, now. The king of the great world, man's honors, maiden's love, priest's homage. Ha, ha! I have gold, now, and the world is all mine own!"

"No, Giles, no. You must, you will hear me!"

"What is it? Oh, you are my wife. I know what that. Well, what says the old song you used to sing? 'And ye shall walk in silk attire.' Yes, that is it. Ha, ha! Have I been rough and rude? No; I think not."

"Giles! on my knees—"

"Well, on your knees—what then? The world is on its knees, or I am rich!"

"I implore you, in the name of Heaven!"

"There must be counte a diamonds in heaven. I think they are made there, and only now and then dropped on earth to dazzle mankind. Or what say you to a new theory: ances' tears crystallized, and so condensed in the blue ether that they leave their starry homes, and plunging downward, ages in falling, at length sink deep into the earth, from whence, with toil, we dig them out and cry: 'A prize! a prize! Behold, a diamond!'? Well, well, wise, what would you?"

"You do not hear me."

"On my soul, I do I."

"You look so wild—there is such a strange sparkle in your eyes."

"I caught it from the diamond. Contagion, Emmy—contagion!"

"You call me Emmy once again."

"Twice—three—a thousand times! Emmy, Emmy! You shall go to court, and you shall be so gowned and decked that you shall seem a glittering apparition."

"No, no. Children, come hither. Cling to your father; hold him back; cry to him as I shall, as I do! Luke, dear—Mary, my own babe! Now, now, Giles, your own diamonds, your own jewels—these little ones and my fond heart. Take us, keep us, and cast away the
BLANCHE RATCLIFF’S TRIALS.

evil gem that would hurl you to destruction!”
She clung to him frantically. The little chil-
dren clasped their gentle arms about him, and
rested their soft cheeks upon his face.
“Husband! husband!”
“Father! father!”
Giles shook with emotion. He made gasping
efforts to speak.
“Hear us—hear us, dear Giles! I speak with
their voice, and they fill up my power with
their tears. Hear us!”
“I hear.”
“That diamond; seek its owner at once.
Make those who are in authority, some magis-
trate, some good neighbor, any one who can raise
a potent voice, say: ‘The honest man came to
me and told me all.’ To such a one go and say:
‘This I found. I am Giles Hilton, the weaver, of
Spitalfields—do you see? I am poor, but my heart
and mind are free from the taint of dishonesty. There
is the jewel. An owner for such a gem will surely be found. It
is not mine—it is not mine! And there can be
no enjoyment, no pleasure, no heart-happiness
meet you, Giles, because the means are not your
own. And better times will come; and the
shutter will again, as if a living thing, take its
course in the clanking loom.”
“Never, never! The loom, labor, poverty,
want? Never! I am what I am. I walk,
beneath, in the sunshine—”
“Not of heaven.”
“Of gold!”
“A false glitter—”
“Ask the world.”
“Which will fade away like a leaf in au-

tumn.”
“Lights! lights! Enough! Lights, I say!”
The doors were flung open, and a glittering
array of wax-lights were placed on the table.
Mrs. Hilton and the children shrunk back;
and Giles looked haughtily about him. Obese-
quious waiters placed dinner upon the table,
which was soon a mass of silver and crystal.
And so the first repast of the rich Giles Hilton
and his family passed off in that palatial apart-
ment. It was the saddest poor Mrs. Hilton had
ever known.
“To-morrow,” said Giles, when the cloth
was removed and the rarest wines from the sunniest
daimes glinted before him—“to-morrow shall
commence such a round of enjoyment that
there shall be no time for tears. They shall
evaporate ere they can gather on your eyelids,
my Emmy, in the sunshine of our prosper-
ity.”
There was a touch of the old kindness of
tone in these words, and his wife flung herself
in his arms and wept aloud:
“Giles, Giles! with you ever! As you de-
cide—as you please. I will share all with you;
and I will suffer with you, if suffering come. I
will pray Heaven, if retribution must be, that I
may lift from your heart some of the bur-
then!”
“Hush—hush! All is well—quite well. Come,
come. We shall be as of old, only so rich—so rich!”
“Mr. Nagle!” said a waiter, flinging open the
door of the apartment at this moment, and ex-
hibiting on its threshold a crouching figure,
which seemed to wince, and blush, and draw back
involuntarily from the blaze of light in the
apartment.
“Nagle!” exclaimed Giles Hilton; and a pale
cast came over his face.
“Nagle!” said the visitor, who was no other
than the villain who had sought to inveigle
poor Blanche Ratcliffe into aiding him in his
schemes.
Giles Hilton had a dim notion that he had
heard the name before—and so he had, in Spita-

tfields; but he was already beginning to be
forgetful of names and occurrences during his
residence there. It seemed to him as if an age
had passed since he was the poor weaver.
Nagle a glanced two steps, and the door was
closed behind him.
The dress of the ruffian had undergone a great
change. He was what he considered irresistibly
genteel now: a bright-erimous ervat, top-
boots and cords, and a green ent-away coat,
with fox-head buttons, made up the costume of
Mr. Nagle. He thought, as he had great expec-
tations, he might as well expend present moneys
in making himself worthy of them; so a second-
hand-clothes warehouse had made Nagle the
man he was—the first-rate gentleman he thought
he was.
“Nagle,” he said—and he bowed and smiled
—“Nagle.” “How do, Mr. Hilton?”
“Sir!”
“How do? Bright and shining—eh? Tight
and right, and all serene!”
A faint feeling of fear crept over the heart of
Giles Hilton.
“Do you want to speak to me?” he said, in a
low voice, as he approached Nagle.
“Yes; to be sure. Come all the way to do
so.”
“All the way—”
“From Spitalfields. Mum is the word. Tt
me. Jolly companions, every one.”
Giles Hilton now began to perceive that his
visitor had been indulging in some potations,
which gave just that airy lightness to his words
and manner which otherwise would not have
belonged to them.
“My dear,” he said to his wife, “will you take
the children with you?”
“Yes, yes.”
Mrs. Hilton shrank from the room with Luke
and Mary. As she went, Nagle made a frolic-
some sort of effort to kiss little Mary, but the
child screamed, and pushed him back.
“Oh! well, my little lady, it don’t mater-
He, he! Nagle, I am; and I rather think I look the thing.

"Now, sir," said Giles Hilton, sternly, "what do you want with me?"

"Good, good!"

"I say, sir, what do you want with me? I am busy; and I don't know you—I don't want to know you."

"Oh, indeed! Take a chair. A glass of wine, Giles Hilton. Where's my hat? Bless me! Oh, here it is; white, you see, with a crape weed. Now, don't look cross. A glass of wine. What's this? Put! vinegar. What do you call it—red ink? C-l-a—. Oh, I see: claret. Well, if that's your taste. Haven't you something stronger, and not so like bad vinegar?"

"This insolence!"

"Phoo, phoo! I know you, Giles Hilton, the weaver. Yes, you know me. I'm John Nagle. Don't you know me? The little house with the red tiles—eh? Mrs. Nagle, the old girl, you know, lives there; takes in washing, and so on—eh?"

"John Nagle, of Spitalfields, you were transported!"

"Hush! Really, now, don't. I came back; didn't like kangaroo soup, you see, so was obliged to come back. I went to the old woman's to see if she had got anything for me. I thought she might have her rent saved up, or something of that sort, and I wanted money. It rained, it snowed, it hailed, and it blew. How did it blow, to be sure?"

"What do you mean? Speak plainly. What do you want with me?"

"I'm coming to that. Why, this is only another sort of vinegar! What's this? Bah! I wouldn't drink such stuff for all the world. What is it? I-o-o-k. Oh, hock! J-o-o-h—. Oh, Johnny's burg, or something of that sort. Well, I don't like it, and Johnny may take it back again, for me."

Giles Hilton dashed his hand on the table with a force that made the glass jingle again, as he cried, in a loud tone:

"This is trivial, sir. What do you want here? Tell me, at once, or I will cause you to be turned into the street."

"Oh—will you? Well, I'm coming to it. It blew—how it did blow! Well, I didn't know if the old girl—my mother, I mean; it's an affectionate way I have of talking of her, you see—I didn't know if she had any money, and I wanted money; so I knocked down a gent in a coach; but I didn't get much from him, as some troublesome people saw me, and raised a hue and cry, and gave chase; but I was too many for them, you see. How it did blow, to be sure!"

"Giles Hilton stood entranced, and glaring at Nagle as if he had now lost all power to interrupt him."

"Well, I fled, they after me. I knew Spitalfields better than they did; and I got into your garden, you see, and then through the little wood-house, and into your back room. There I was safe, and there I had such a good sight of what happened. Bless you! you had no more idea of my being there than of nothing in the world. Had you, now?"

Giles Hilton groaned.

"Hilton! Ain't you well? Take a glass. This—no, this—that's the Johnny What's-his-name."

Giles sunk into a chair.

"Go on—go on!"

"Won't you drink?"

"No, no! Go on—go on!"

"Very well, I hid there. Well, then there came in by the front door the very same gent with the cock that I had knocked over by a tap—only a slight tap, upon honor—on the chest; and he seemed bally, you see. You spoke to him, and he spoke to you. He went off soon—dead, very dead; and you looked out for yourself, properly enough. You found a diamond. Good! You were Giles Hilton, the poor, slaying weaver. Now, here you are. Ah! producer of the diamond; sold it, of course. I was John Nagle, poor and half-starved. I am now rich, jolly, prosperous. Producer of the diamond. Now you know all about it."

The insolent leer with which Nagle now regarded the terrified Giles Hilton must have been seen to be appreciated; and Giles, with a deep sigh, let his head sink upon his breast as he said: "All over—all over!"

"What's all over—eh? What do you mean? What's the matter now? Halves—halves! All I say is, halves! I can keep my tongue in my teeth as well as any one, when I like. Come, now. We comprehend each other, and it's all right. Halves, I say,"

"John Nagle."

"Giles Hilton."

"Don't laugh! Don't do that! The retribution has begun."

"The what?"

Giles Hilton rose, and paced the room, and wrung his hands; and then he paused on the opposite side of the table to Nagle, and said, huskily: "I sold the diamond!"

Nagle nodded, and with a wave of his hand seemed to say: "That is evident. Behold the result."

"For a thousand pounds."

Nagle shook his head.

"Here are five hundred as your share. Will you leave England and never let me see your face again?"

Nagle laughed. In a half-tripa sort of voice, he cang:

"'England, O England! With all thy faults—With all thy faults I love thee—I love thee still—I love thee still!'"
No, my boy. Give us the five hundred. Good-bye. Your hand, comrade mine. That will do. Eat, drink, and be merry! I wish you joy! When I want to see you again, I will find you. Where's my hat? Oh, here it is. Don't you be drinking that Johnny stuff. It will kill you, and then what should I do? He, he! My goose dead, and no more golden eggs. He, he! Remember me to the missus and the little ones. Nice little girl that, wouldn't be kissed! Bye-bye!

"England, England! With all thy faults I love thee—I love thee still!"

Giles Hilton fell to the floor in a swoon, and the blood trickled from his forehead.


capter VII.

John Long's Idea.

John Long had an idea, and it concerned the rare jewel which he had seen with such admiration and such envy. John thought the idea, in its way, was as sparkling and radiant a mental effort as nature in its great laboratory, the earth, had made in the production of the diamond which had to such an extent excited his caprice.

The old man shuffled along from the west end of London, with his hands clasped across his chest, as was his custom, and his head bowed down, as though he meant to use it as a kind of catapult to force his way through the throngs of passengers in the city; and occasionally he muttered to himself:

"Good—good—a good idea! a glorious idea! Eugh! A capital idea! Eugh! eugh! If my cough now would but get well, I should be quite a young man, quite—in constitution! Ah! a good idea—Giles Hilton, with a diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds! He stole it, of course—of course!"

So full was the mind of the old lapidary of the "idea," that the distance, long as it was, between the jeweler's and Spitalfields, appeared as nothing, and he was in sight of his own little, beastly-browned, miserable shop before he could ask himself if he were fatigued or not.

And still muttering to himself, he crossed the roadway and was in the shadow of his own residence.

"Yes—eugh!—a bright idea! An idea with many facets. He! he! he! No—no—don't laugh, John Long—not yet! A good proverb: 'Don't laugh till you are out of the wood'; but it is a good idea! He stole the diamond—it was somebody's—it is his—anybody's—mine, if I can get it! He a poor weaver—half starved—wholly starved! His wife selling her wedding-ring for four shillings, and one of them bad! I knew I should get off that bad shilling to some one—eugh! Well! well—eh? What? What? What is it now?"

"Father!"

Blanche Ratcliff's Trials.
"Ingrate! Ingrate!"
"You consent?"
"Never!"

Then farewell! I will seek work elsewhere, and I will place the orphan girl with some kindly people, whom I will pay."

"Yah! Stop, Louis!"

"Well, sir?"

"You kill me—you kill your old father! You say you will work harder—so hard that I shall profit instead of lose by the child?"

"I have said so, and I will keep my word."

"Ah! but—but, Louis, you might, you know, have done all that as it was, and then I should have profited still more."

"I could not. I should have wanted the impulse."

"Oh! the ingratitude of the generation! Oh! the bad world! Here, now, is a youth that I have fed, clothed, brought up as if he were my own—"

"Your father! Sir! What words are these? As if I were your own?"

"Words—words! — but words! Why, you are my own Louis! Whose else? Eh? He, he! Eugh! Of course. Well, boy—well, I accept—I accept the terms. Work hard, and let the child stay. Does she look like—eh?—like—"

"Like what, father?"

"A great enter?"

Louis smiled, and shook his head.

"You shall not complain, father. I will see that you profit by her presence."

"Ah! well! Now, tell me all about it."

Louis told the short story, and old John, with his brows knitted, and a painful contorted expression of all his features, listened in silence, and then he said, in a much calmer tone:

"Louis—Louis, I have a job for you. What crystals we have—best crystals, that will work up well to imitation-diamonds?"

"Plenty. Have you an order, father?"

"Yes, for one. I have an idea! Ah, yes! this will do—a fine, fine crystal this; I should say, without a flaw. Here, Louis, you will work it into an irregular, egg-shaped stone, with two large facets and a multitude of small ones."

"Yes, father; I will do it, and do it with a will, too. You shall see that I will keep my word. Perhaps you would like, now, that I should introduce to you the young lady."

"Bah! bob!—young lady! I shall see the child soon enough—at dinner! A strange story—a very strange story. We may find her friends yet, perhaps, and then they may pay. It may not be so bad after all. No, no—not so bad. Who knows but Providence may yet make a good speculation of it to me? Hs! Eugh! Ah! and Louis, too—Louis, too! there may be good fortune there some day; and while I wait he costs nothing. He is a profit. Well, well, John Long, you will prosper yet. You are not old—only sixty-eight. Bah! bobs! nothing! It's constitution does all—constitution."

In an antique room, the old wainscoting of which was yellow with age, and the roof of which was composed of as many cross-beams as would go half way to providing the timbers for a modern house, sat poor Blanche Ratcliff, on a low settle, at the feet of a kindly-looking old dame, who was holding one hand of the young girl in both her own, and listening to her with deep and earnest attention.

"And so, my dear," said Mrs. Mills, the housekeeper and only servant of John Long, the lapidary—and so, my dear, you have no clue to your poor, dear father?"

"None—none. You know all—all! I shall never, never see him more!"

The young girl hid her face in the lap of Mrs. Mills, and cried, sadly.

Then the door slowly opened, and Louis stepped gently into the room.

When he saw Blanche in such grief, he would have gone back, but Mrs. Mills beckoned to him to come in, and he slowly approached. Blanche did not hear his footsteps for some few moments, and, indeed, it was not until Louis spoke, saying, in tones of great sweetness and emotion, "Let us try if, by our kindness, we can charm away those tears," that Blanche knew he was there; and then, as a summer-cloud floats off and exhales in the blue ether after scattering its moisture on the earth, the tears of Blanche ceased, and she looked up at Louis.

"Dear friend!"

"Yes, ever a dear friend, if you will let me be so. My father has come home, and I have spoken to him."

Louis, as he uttered these words, rather seemed to address Mrs. Mills than Blanche; for well he knew that she would be full of anxiety and dread in regard to the reception which the destitute girl would receive at the hands of the old lapidary.

"I have spoken to him," added Louis, after a slight pause, "and all is well."

"Thank Heaven!" said Mrs. Mills.

Poor Blanche Ratcliff looked from one to the other of them without precisely understanding what was meant. That some painful thought, some dread or apprehension, had passed away, she could see by the look of relief that there was upon the countenance of Mrs. Mills; but what it had been, she had no means of even conjecturing. A painful idea, though, did for a moment cross her mind, that she must be a burden in some way; and she said, very gently:

"If I have—I have—some one more... that—that I shall be able—to go back soon to Chale, if my father?"

"Nay, nay!" said Louis, who saw that the chord of feeling was touched in the heart of Blanche, and that a powerful dread of being in some way burdensome was rising in her imag-
In the street—"may, do not think of Challe. I will, or you, dear Blanche, can write to the good folks there, saying where you are; so that, should your father go there to seek you, they will be able to tell him you are here, and in safety. Stay here, I beseech you. The place is but a gloomy one—it was gloomy, I should rather say; but now—now there is sunshine within the old walls. You will obey?"

"Yes, Louis; and—and will you let me call you brother?"

"With all my heart."

"You have no sister?"

"None; no sister—no brother—no mother—no."

"Yah! Bo!" said old John, at this moment, as he put his head in at the door, to the key-hole of which he had had his eye for the last few minutes. "Yah! Bo! I suppose you will say you have no father next—ugh!"

"No father."

Blanche looked with her sweet, earnest, quiet gaze in the face of the old man; and he, too, regarded her with fixed attention. Never, perhaps, had the power of youth and beauty a greater triumph than at that moment over the piteous soul of the old lapidary. He even tried to get up the ghost of a smile as, slowly rubbing his old wrinkled hands one over the other, he said:

"Welcome, quite welcome—a delicate and dainty jewel. Like an opal!—like an opal! Eugh! My dear, you are very welcome—very, oh, very! Eugh! Who knows? who knows? Something may come of it yet. Who knows? She looks delicate—a light appetite—a very light appetite, no doubt. Eugh!"

It was as he slowly took his way down the rickety old staircase to the shop again, that John Long muttered these last remarks, and then he sat about his good "idea."

And so Blanche was fairly established at the lapidary's house, in Spitalfields; and little did she dream that John Long had actually seen and had in his hand, her fortune—her fortune in the shape of that resplendent jewel which had already supplied Giles Hilton with the means of effecting such a change in his condition—which had placed a sum of money in the possession of Nagle that his wildest dreams never imagined as possible to become his; and which, when she herself should cast her eyes upon it, would be the herald of such agony and woe as her young heart had never surmised there could be in the world to suffer.

"Louis! Louis! Eugh! Louis, I say!"

"My father calls me," said Louis, starting from long and rapturous gaze into the eyes of Blanche.

"Go, dear Louis."

"Yes, Blanche, yes. I will do as I say. I will go to the hotel and pay what is owing, and get your box, and your father's things, likewise, you are sure, dear, they said eight pounds and some shillings?"

"Yes, Louis."

"God bless you, dear!"

"And you, too."

"Mrs. Mills, you will be very, very careful of her—I am sure you will."

"Deary me," said Mrs. Mills, "what do you suppose is to happen to her? Go along—do."

"Louis! Louis! I say."

"Coming, father! And—and Blanche, dear, you will not fret? You will be as happy as you can?"

Louis placed a cassock beneath the fair young girl's feet, and then he held his hand between her and the window, as he said:

"I think no draught."

"Now, do go!" cried Mrs. Mills. "Do you think she will be blown away?"

"No; but I was afraid. Hush! Mrs. Mills, a word. Let her have my room, and remove all the things out of the spare room, that I will sleep in, into hers. She will be more comfortable. I want nothing; you know. Good-bye, dear."

Louis took Blanche's hand in both his, and then, with a childish action and simplicity, Blanche put her sweet face forward, for one bewildering moment, to poor Louis; their lips met, and the gentle kiss of that innocent young creature fell like a touch of Heaven upon his soul. It was with difficulty that the young man abstained from a cry of joy—abstained, too, from a gust of tears. He left the room precipitately. How he reached the old, gloomy, dingy shop, he knew not; but he leaped over everything in his way, and looked so happy and light-hearted, that old John Long gazed at him through his spectacles in amazement, as he muttered:

"Eugh! eugh! Changed! changed! What is it? Yah! Bo! And all for a child with a baby face. Like an opal, though!—like an opal!"

"Father, why do you say she is like an opal?"

"Eugh! all tints, and a delicate roseate color through them all that looks like the fair morning fresh out of Heaven. Yes, like an opal! like an opal!"

"You are right, father."

"To work, now—to work! This crystal—I have told you how to do it. It is wanted quickly. I have a customer for it, Louis, and it will be your first piece of work on account of that young girl who is up-stairs. Do it well."

"I will, indeed."

And Louis set to work on the crystal, and he sang joyously as he toiled, and the crystal grew under his hands at the buzzing wheel, by the aid of which he cut its facets into the imitation of a diamond—even of the diamond which was reposing on purple velvet at the jeweler's in St. James.'
And by that toil, Louis was working out John Long's "idea."

From time to time, the old man looked at the progress of the mock-jewel; and as he did so, he would, after a few moments, shut his eyes and think, and then he would say:

"Louis, a little off this corner; grind down here somewhat." And Louis would set to work again, and the wheel went whizzing round, and the crystal sparkled as the young lapidary gave the last polish to it. Then as, toward night, old John held it in his hand and turned it about with evident satisfaction, Louis said:

"Father, I want nine pounds."

John nearly dropped the mock-diamond.

"Nine pounds?"

"Yes—a speculation. Blanche has some property, and so has her father, at the hotel where they were staying. It is detained for the bill, which is about nine pounds. No doubt the boxes are worth, with their contents, much more; so you see it is a good speculation."

The idea of getting nine pounds out of old John on any other grounds than speculative ones, Louis knew well was out of the question; so, after cogitating the thing over, he had come to the conclusion of putting it in the way he had.

"Humph! Well, well—if it be so—"

"No doubt of it, father."

With several groans, old John handed Louis the money. John always groaned when he handed anybody money. If some one would have accepted two shillings for half a crown, John would have groaned as he parted with the two shillings.

But the mock-jewel was finished. The night had come, and there was deep silence in the old, dilapidated house of the lapidary.

"No, no," said John Long, in the morning, when he saw Louis about to go out—"no, no. I am going on business—keep house till I return. Who knows what may happen? Eugh! eugh! We were both out yesterday, and there came a person with some old copper to sell. Stay till I come back."

"Yes," said Louis. "And besides, I think, now that we have such a treasure in the house, father, either you or I ought always to be at home."


"Nothing; I only alluded to Blanche."

"Yah! Bo! A treasure, indeed! Can you put her into the melting-pot? Is she worth so much an ounce? Eugh! Bo!"

Old John gathered his threadbare old coat about him, and set off. In the lowest depths of one of his most secure pockets he had the imitation diamond; and by making much greater speed than usual, he was soon (taking the distance into consideration) at the jeweler's in St. James's.

"Halloa, Mr. John Long?" said Mr. Mears, who was in the outer shop. "Is that you?"

"If you please, Mr. Mears. Hope you are well, sir. You look well, sir."

"Oh, all right."

"Some more seed-pearls, sir. Eugh! my cough is bad. I am not getting younger, Mr. Mears. I am making up a gaudy ornament—seed-pearls, sir. Eugh! I am an old man now, and can't expect to last long. O Mr. Mears! O Mr. Mears! O sir!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Old as I am, I think that the sight of that Indian diamond you showed me when I was last here made me young again—young again. It is the feeling of an old lapidary, I suppose, but it did me good—it me good. Eugh! eugh!"

"Well," said Mr. Mears, laughing, "you shall see it again, if you like."

"No?"

"Yes, you shall. Come along."

"It's a go! it's a go!" muttered old John. "Good Lord! I shall have it. Oh, the fool! Oh, the idiot! Eugh! eugh! The idiot!"

"Eh?"

"Nothing, sir. Bless you! I'm coming."

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN LONG CARRIES OUT HIS IDEA—MR. MAGLE ENJOYS HIS RICHES.

Through the jeweler's shop, and straight to that sanctum in which the loose gems of highest value were kept, went John Long, after the complacent Mr. Mears.

The old lapidary's hand was in his pocket, and grasping the imitation-diamond.

"It's a rare stone," said Mr. Mears, who, to tell the truth, had quite a professional pride in looking at the diamond, and in showing it—"a very rare stone; and I begin to think that although there are larger, there is not its equal for lustre in Europe."

"Very like—ah! ah!—very like, Mr. Mears; and, if you say so, why it is so—for where is there a judge like you? Where? where?"

"Well, John Long, my old partner, Mr. Phillips, used to say, that for an eye that could see what a stone was at a glance, you stood alone."

"Ah, Mr. Mears! the eyes are old now—old now—very old. Eugh! Ah, glorious! Very—you—glow—burn! Beautiful, magnificent, and glorious! You have not sold it, sir?"

"No. We have had one offer."

"Eh?"

"One offer of eighty thousand, on speculation, to take to Russia."

"Really? Well, it's worth it—worth it. He
he! Only to think, now, that in this little piece of crystalized carbon there should reside eighty thousand pounds! A thing one may hide in one's hand — hid in one's pocket!"

John first of all clasped the diamond in his hand, and then thrust the doubled hand into his pocket — the pocket at the bottom of which was the mock-crystal, which, with such consummate art and recollection, the old man had caused to be made like the real gem.

"Come, come," said Mr. Mears, as he shook his head and froze in a waggish kind of way, "don't you pocket the diamond, John!"

"No, no. But it does me good. I have had eighty thousand pounds in my pocket! Henceforth it will have a yellow, golden lustre about it. He, he! Won't it, Mr. Mears?"

"Well, I don't know that."

"And there is the beauty. Shut it up — shut it up! My old eyes get dazzled and my mind shaken by its rays!"

The change in the pocket of John Long of the mock-javel for the real one was effected in a moment. The likeness between the two was very strong, although, if Mr. Mears had taken the glass in his hand, he would at once have felt the difference. He did not, however. He saw a gliterer, and he closed the little drawer, and locked the cabinet.

"Why, what's the matter, John?"

A pale, yellow color had come over the face of the lapidary. It would seem as if the gold which was his idol was beginning to pervert his system with its reflection. He shook, too, in every limb.

"Nothing — nothing! Old — old; that is all."

"You don't look well."

"No, I don't look well. Never did look very well. Some seed-pearls, and then I am off home; and I thank you, Mr. Mears — I humbly thank you."

"Oh, don't mention it. You will get some seed-pearls of Mr. Mills, in the shop."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Mears, humbly thanking you the while for your goodness."

Old John strayed, in a straggling kind of way, into the front shop; and the livid look that was about his face, and his evident agitation, excited the attention of all who saw him.

"Oh," said Mr. Mills, "by-the-by, Mr. Mears, did you show John Long that letter?"

"Letter?"

"Yes; about Colonel Franklin, from the United States."

"Oh! sh! To be sure. John?"

"What?" cried the old lapidary, with a kind of yell that startled everybody — "what now? What now, to dash the cup from the lip! What now, to kill when life begins! What — what!"

"You seem strangely excited to-day, John. You cannot be well. It is only a letter that we have received from a gentleman — a Colonel Franklin; and as you were with us — indeed, it was just before you left our service, seventeen years ago, that the circumstances to which it refers happened, I said I would show it to you."

"Yes," gasped John Long, "seventeen years ago. Go on."

"This is the letter."

"I will come again tomorrow — next day — not now. I don't want to hear it."

"Why, what an odd fellow you are, John to be sure. Come, it won't take you a minute, and you may recollect something to enable you to answer the inquiry, which is all a surprise to us."

John rubbed his shriveled hands slowly one over the other, and groaned; while Mr. Mills read the following letter:

"MERRION'S HOTEL."

"GENTLEMEN: — As I am diplomatically in London, I write to you, to endeavor to satisfy an undefined feeling which has been on my mind for many years; and any assistance you can render me will be most gratefully appreciated."

"Exactly seventeen years ago this day, my elder brother, by ten years, started from New England, United States of America, accompanied by his wife, Thomasina Franklin, and infant son. His object in England was to take possession and realize some family estates that he inherited in right of his wife, who was an English lady. Their affection for each other forbade a separation, and the young mother would not part with her infant; so the voyage was taken together. That they arrived safely, and that Mr. Phil- lips, who was senior partner in your house, and one of the trustees of the property in question, assisted them in every way, I have letters to prove. The estates were sold, and we had a letter, stating that my brother, Mr. Felix Franklin, would leave England, on his return, in an English trading ship, called the 'Isabella Forbes,' which was to start from Southampton."

"The ship arrived in the United States at the port of Boston; but my brother and family were not with her, nor did any one on board know anything of such passengers."

"From that day to this, nothing whatever has been heard of my brother Felix, his wife, or their child.

"Mr. Phillips, of your firm, in answer to inquiries by letter, stated that he saw them start for Southampton, and that he sent them with them safely off on the ship. John Long, a workman in his employ, on whom he could depend; as, at Southampton, Mr. Franklin wished to purchase, and learnt that there of the name of Barholm- day, some jewels, to take with him home. This work- man, Mr. Phillips in his letter stated that he actually saw my brother, and wife, and infant, leave the harbor at Southampton in a boat, to board the 'Isabella Forbes,' which was standing off and on about three miles down the Southampton waters."

"Can you, gentlemen, in any way aid me in an in-quiry which, now that I am officially, on account of the United States Government, in London, I am resolved to spare neither time, trouble, nor expense, in prosecuting it?

"Believe me to be, gentlemen, yours faithfully, "VALE FRANKLIN (Colonel)."

Yellower, and more livid and death-like looking did old John Long grow as this letter was read; and when the last words were uttered, he sprang to his feet from the chair on to which he had sunk, and lifting both his arms above his head, he said:

"What do I know? Why ask me? Why mar the life of an old man with such matters? What do I know? Let the brother seek the brother — on the earth, in the earth — on the
deep, in the waters of the earth. I know nothing of him. I know—nothing!"

"Well, John, nobody said you did."

"More trouble—more trouble! Let me go. I am sick, weary, old, and feeble, ailing, and near death. Let me go; I know nothing."

There was at this moment a sudden stop of a carriage at the jeweler's door; and as John Long was tottering out, he was met by a gentleman, who, with a courteous action, made way for the old man, and John would have passed out, but that Mr. Mills called out:

"This is Colonel Franklin. Stop, John Long, stop!"

John, almost bent double, recoiled a step, and looked askance at the colonel, who said, in a frank, manly voice: "Indeed! Is this then, the man who last saw my dear brother Felix in life?"

"Yah!" howled John.

"He is an eccentric old man, sir," said Mr. Mills; "but that is the person."

"Bo! Bah!" said John.

"I rejoice to have met with him," said the colonel. "Be so good as to give me your address, and I will call on you and ask of your kindness to indulge me by a long gossip of my poor lost brother. His every word—his every look, when last you saw him. His mitiest act will be interesting to me."

"My address?"

"Yes. I will call on you."

"I have no address. I'm a poor man. I don't want anybody to call on me. I know nothing—all at. I forget—all—a bad memory."

"But I am sure," said Colonel Franklin, "that you will try to think back."

"No, I won't. Bah! Bo! I don't recollect anything at all. I don't see visitors. Yah!"

Old John left the shop, and Colonel Franklin looked after him with surprise.

"Is he always thus?"

"By no means, colonel," said Mr. Mills. "We always looked upon him as a very courteous old man, and rather above his station."

"It is very strange."

"We can give you his address."

"I shall be beholden to you. More, you cannot, I presume, tell me."

"No, colonel, no. Mr. Phillips being dead, you see, sir, that puts an end to our knowledge of the affair, as in regard to his trusteeship for your brother's wife it had nothing to do with this business."

"No, no—truly not. I thank you, and will take this strange old man's address. Thank you, I will call on him were he ten times as repellant as he is."

Colonel Franklin stepped into his carriage and drove off. Old John Long, from the deep recess of a doorway, saw him go; and then he clenched his fists and gnashed his teeth, as he muttered:

"That to trouble me. That man to trouble me, too! Just as I had achieved so much. Off and away!—ha! ha!—off and away! To-morrow—to-morrow, I am off and away! I have the diamond—the beauty, the treasure—safe, safe. It is mine now—mine and mine only. Fortunel!—fortune at last! Rich now. I am rich, but I won't spend it. No—no! I am no spendthrift. What will become of me in my old age?—my very old age—if I spend all now? No—no! I have it, and I will keep it."

Old John made what haste he could homeward; but he was terribly startled in the midst of a wide crossing to hear shouts and cries, and to see people making sudden darts into open shops.

It was with great difficulty that John got on to a door-step and avoided the head-long career of a sort of chaise with four horses attached to it, and which was coming along at a furious pace.

Each of the four horses in this chaise seemed to have a will of its own, and to be involved in some complicated manner with the harness as it should not; so the whole affair came roaring and tearing on, and one wheel encountered a lamppost. Then ensued a crash; and the four horses and the chaise, and a personage with a crimson-silk cravat, and a white hat, was shot forward on to the horses, where he lay wrecked with them, in a ruin of harness and fragments of the vehicle.

John caught one glance at this personage, and he knew him.

"John Nagle," he said. "More trouble! more trouble! He has come back! Oh dear! oh dear!"

Faint, weary, and exhausted, old John reached Spitalfields; and he was surprised and disappointed with himself that he did not feel one whit the happier now that he actually had possession of the diamond.

And Mr. Nagle gathered himself up from the ruin of the chaise, and was not hurt in the least.

A respectable man, who would have been a loss to society, must inevitably have been killed on the spot, but such people as Nagle never get hurt to signify; so he was on his feet again quickly enough, and the shock of the tumble had sobered him.

"All right. Bravo! All right! Pick up the pieces!"

"Are you hurt, sir?" said an old gentleman, sympathizingly, to Nagle.

"Hurt? hurt? I should think not. Meant to do it, and did it well."

"You meant to do it, sir?"

"To be sure."

"To upset all the affair in that dreadful way?"

"Yes; all right. Part of my scheme. Always do it well if I do it. All right."

"Bless me!" said the old gentleman, as he made a precipitate retreat.
Nagle let who would pick up the fragments of his equipage; and with his hat on one side, and his hands in his pockets, he strutted jauntily away.

"Ah! let me see; only five pounds left. Hang the dice! I'm sure they were loaded. I must call on my friend, Giles Hilton, again. I want a fresh supply. All right. The idea, now, of poor Giles Hilton, the half-starved weaver, turning out to be my banker. Ha! ha!"

Nagle was not far from the hotel; and he sauntered along, making sure of finding Hilton at home, and of extracting from his fears a still further supply of ready money. The five hundred pounds had lasted him about eighteen hours.

But Hilton was not at home, and Nagle was disappointed, and stood whistling in the hall of the hotel. Then he asked for Mrs. Hilton; and declining to send up his name, but declaring himself an old friend of the family, he went up the staircase, and without ceremony, opened the door of the magnificent sitting-room.

Mrs. Hilton—poor Mrs. Hilton—was there, with her children. We call her poor Mrs. Hilton still; for what had she enjoyed of the riches that had so dazzled the imagination of her husband?

Poorer she was in heart and in spirit than she had been at the humble cottage in Spitalfields, with want staring her in the face, and her little ones craving for the food and for the warmth she could not find for them.

Nagle paused for a moment on the threshold of the room, but Mrs. Hilton had seen him, and, with a startled cry, she drew her children toward her.

"Help! help!"

"Hello! Don't be afraid of me—Jack Nagle. I don't want to do any harm."

"More harm!"

"More? What have I done?"

"You tried to kid him—my husband."

"I? Not a bit. I never touched him."

"He said you did. You left him senseless and bleeding on this floor. You robbed him, and it is well that I can give you up to justice, as he would do were he here."

Mrs. Hilton made a movement toward one of the silken bell-pulls, but Nagle held up his hand as he said:

"Beware! beware! When you talk of giving up, and of justice, it is some one else who has to be named as well as John Nagle."

That undefined dread which had been tugging at the heart of poor Mrs. Hilton ever since the change in the circumstances of her husband, attacked her now with full force, and made her a coward.

She had found Giles prostrate on the floor, and bleeding from a cut in his forehead, which he had received in his fall after Nagle had left him on the occasion of their recent interview; and Giles Hilton, fearing to tell the truth, as that would not have been in accordance with his previous story, had said that the villain, Nagle, had attacked and robbed him.

It was a foolish and vague idea of Giles Hilton, that the five hundred pounds he had given to Nagle would rid him of such a tormentor.

"Beware!" added Nagle. "I give you good counsel, Mrs. Hilton. It is Giles who is in danger, not I. I never wagged a finger against him, and know nothing of how he came by any hurt, but I do know all the rest."

"All what?"

Nagle made a gesture of impatience and scorn.

"Oh, that is too much. As if, now, you did not know—as if, now, you did not help him in the affair—afterward, I admit; after the fact, as the lawyers say. Hang them! they said that of me—before, and after the fact. They found me guilty of the little matter which sent me a long voyage."

"What do you want here? What do you mean? I do not comprehend you."

"No?

"On my soul, I do not."

Nagle whisked.

"Do you mean, Mrs. Hilton, to say you know nothing about a certain diamond? Eh?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Hilton, faintly. "Of course, you do. That's all. Well, I want some more of my share."

"Your—share?"

"Just so. I like it in installments. I know if I had it all at once I should just get rid of it all at once; and then I could not come to Giles for more, having had my share. Honor among—well, that's no matter. He's out—is he?"

"He is out. You bewilder me—you terrify. I don't know what you mean about your share. What has my husband to do with you, John Nagle?"

"A good deal. I saw it all. The staggering man who was so ill—the death—ha, ha!—the job he had to get him up in the attic. Dead bones weigh heavy!"

"Good heavens! are you mad?"

"No. Are you?"

Mrs. Hilton covered her face with her hands, and strove to ask herself what she should do? Was she on the eve of some frightful revoltsions concerning her husband, or were these suggestions on the part of Nagle but the vagaries of his villainous imagination?

"Hilton! What's that?" cried Nagle, suddenly.

"What? what?"

A confused shouting of voices and a trampling of feet sounded from the hall of the hotel.

"Bring him along!"

"The thief!"

"Ten thousand pounds!"
CHAPTER IX.

GILES HILTON FALLS INTO TROUBLE.

How long Giles Hilton lay on the floor of the hotel sitting-room, after his agitating interview with Nagle, on the occasion of his paying five hundred pounds as the price of the temporary secrery of that ruffian, the unhappy weaver did not know; but he was awakened to consciousness by his wife bathing his temples.

"He lives! Oh, he lives!" cried Mrs. Hilton.

"Giles! husband! What has happened?"

"Gone? gone?"

"What gone?"

"Has he gone?"

Giles looked, with a powerful effort, about him, and then he added:

"The villain, Nagle."

"Are you better, sir?" said a voice.

Giles Hilton started, for that was the first intimation he had that a stranger was present. The tears of Mrs. Hilton, when she found her husband in such a plight, had induced her to send for the nearest surgeon, and it was his voice that Giles heard.

"Who is that? What is it?"

"I am a surgeon, sir. I rejoice to be able to inform you, that what I suppose was an accidental fall has done but little mischief. An abrasion of the skin of the left temple; that is all. You feel better now, sir."

"Yes—yes; I thank you."

"Keep him quiet, madam. I will call to-morrow."

"Thank you—thank you! Oh yes; I am very much better now. An accidental fall."

"Just so, sir. Good-evening."

The surgeon left; and then Mrs. Hilton, as she folded her arms around her husband, said:

"Giles, Giles, was it an accident, or did that man, with whom we heard you having some words, do this act?"

"The villain, Nagle!"

"He did, then?"

"Why—a—yes; I may say he did, and he has robbed me, too, of five hundred pounds."

"You will punish him? The law—"

"No, no! Emmy, no. We are not in a position to invoke the law. Hush! do not reply to me; I know more—that is, I know all. You know all; but you do not so well calculate I do all consequences. The atrocious villain! To be the sport of such a man; subject ever to his exactions! Oh no, no, no!"

"Giles—"

"Hush! I am nearly mad. Let me think—let me think. Wife—wife, was I ever, in all our poverty, like this?—ever so wretched?—ever so full of fears?—ever so unhappy?"

"Never, never!"

Mrs. Hilton flung herself upon his breast, and burst into tears.

"To-morrow," he said,—"to-morrow we will fly from here. Far away, in some other land, unknown, and knowing no one, we will seek peace, which I see we shall never know here. Let me rest now; ask me nothing. Be content with what you know, and seek no more perilous information. To-morrow, to-morrow! I would fain sleep now."

Mrs. Hilton left him to repose; and when the morrow come, Giles awakened out of what appeared to be a long and dreamless sleep. It was late in the day, and he arose, looking more cheerful than he had done the day before.

Giles Hilton had matured his plans. What they were, we shall soon discover.

It was some hours after mid-day that Giles Hilton, after dressing himself with peculiar care, left the hotel, and took his way to the jeweler's of whom he had borrowed the ten thousand pounds on the diamond.

"Yes," he said; "I feel now a serenity of soul I did not feel before. All is for the best; and the visit of that ruffian has awakened in me the suggestion of what I had better do. I must fly from England—far away from all who know me, and who will be tempted to be busy and curious about my change of fortune, and to speculate upon me and it; and, above all, far away and out of the reach of this ruffian, Nagle. I will ask of the jewelers a further sum, and then they may have the jewel to do as they like with. Far better—oh, so much better!—and wiser, that, I am happier;"
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

Giles bowed, and so did the baron, who then added:
“Sir, I have seen your beautiful and rare diamond, and I have made an offer to these gentlemen to take him” (the baron was decidedly foreign, and called the diamond “him”)—“to take him to St. Petersburg under security.”

Giles Hilton licked his parched lips, and bowed.
“Surely!”, said Mr. Mears, “this way, sir. We have only one offer for your jewel, but that would not be money down.”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed!”

“Then I will give you my word of honor, that I will not sell it to any one but you.”

“Thank you!”

“Thank you!”

Giles Hilton took up the paper and held it up before his eyes; but he read not a word. The columns of print danced before his eyes, and he saw not what they related to. His heart began to beat quickly; and yet he knew not why. All was well—quite well. There was no danger.

“Mr. Hilton, this is not true.”

“Mr. Hilton, this is not true.”

Mr. Mears stepped to the room door: “Jackson, champagne and glasses!” Mr. Mears then rubbed his hands together, and laughed.

“Mr. Hilton, you will take away our working capital. Baron, you must sell as soon as you can.”

“I shall certainly sell him.”

The wine was brought on a gold tray, and placed on the table. The cork flew from the bottle, and hit the ceiling, and the generous liquor frothed up in the slim and elegant glasses.

“Success!” said Mr. Mears, “to the diamond!”

“Success!” cried Giles Hilton.

“Success to him!” said the baron.

“I will say,” added Mr. Mears, “that we

Speak, out of the stormy sea of perplexity and doubt, into the smooth waters of certainty he had made.

“You know me?”

“Mr. Hilton. Oh, yes. Step in sir.”

“I want to speak to you.”

“Certainly, sir. This way, if you please,” said Mr. Mears; “this way, sir. We have only one offer for your jewel, but that would not be money down.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, sir. A speculative offer, with security, if the sale should not come off.”

“To what amount?”

“Eighty thousand pounds.”

“But not ready money?”

“No. The parties are good, though—quite safe. Pray be seated, sir.”

“Well,” said Giles Hilton, as he drew a long breath, “I have come to make a proposition.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t want to be worried. I want to sell the diamond. I have had ten thousand pounds of you in cash at interest on it. Well, what say you? Give me twenty thousand more, and the jewel is yours.”

“Absolutely ours?”

“Yes, absolutely. I want to go to Italy. My family don’t like England. What say you? Is it a bargain?”

“One moment, sir. The sum is large. I will consult my partner. Pray excuse me a moment. There is the paper, sir.”

“Thank you.”

John Long had paid his visit, and gone home with the veritable diamond in his pocket. The counterfeit reposed safely in the little drawer of the jeweler’s cabinet, on its bed of purple velvet!

Fly, Giles Hilton, fly! You are in danger! Fly! You totter on the brink of an abyss! Fly! An avalanche slips over on to your devoted head! Fly!

It seemed to him as though invisible voices rang in his ears, and urged him to flight. He sprang to his feet, and let the newspaper fall crackling to the floor.

“Here is Mr. Hilton!” said a voice.

Mr. Mears, and Mr. Mills, and a strange gentleman, with a profusion of moustache, entered the room.

“Mr. Hilton,” said Mr. Mears, with a bow, “the Baron Quinquebey?”

“I have much pleasure, sir,” said the strange gentleman, “in making your acquaintance.”

“Giles, sir?”

“Giles, sir.”

“Mr. Mears, do not, I beseech you, make a joke at my expense.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.”

Giles Hilton took up the paper and held it up before his eyes; but he read not a word. The columns of print danced before his eyes, and he saw not what they related to. His heart began to beat quickly; and yet he knew not why. All was well—quite well. There was no danger.

Was there not? O Giles Hilton! was there not?

“Can you arrange all now?”

“Unquestionably,” replied Mr. Mears. “A note of the sale and the terms to us will be sufficient, Mr. Hilton, and you can have your money. But what say you, gentlemen, to a glass of wine?”

“Good!” said the baron.

Mr. Mears stepped to the room door: “Jackson, champagne and glasses!” Mr. Mears then rubbed his hands together, and laughed.

“Mr. Hilton, you will take away our working capital. Baron, you must sell as soon as you can.”

“I shall certainly sell him.”

The wine was brought on a gold tray, and placed on the table. The cork flew from the bottle, and hit the ceiling, and the generous liquor frothed up in the slim and elegant glasses.

“Success!” said Mr. Mears, “to the diamond!”

“Success!” cried Giles Hilton.

“Success to him!” said the baron.

“I will say,” added Mr. Mears, “that we
never before had such a perfect gem in our pos-
session!"

He walked to the cabinet and unlocked it.
"It does one's eyes good to look at it!"
He drew out the little drawer with the purple
velvet.

"Ah!" said the baron, "I shall always be
delight to look on him!"

Mr. Mears rolled the diamond out of the
little drawer on to the table. Over and over, with
a certain sort of glitter, went the false jewel.
There was a sparkle, for the lump of crystal was
pure and good. The baron clasped his hands
together, as he exclaimed:

"Beautiful! beau—beau—eh? Look at
him! Look at him!"

"There!" said Mr. Mears. "If the world had
never before seen a diamond—eh?"

"What is the matter?" asked Giles Hilton,
with the most innocent expression of counte-
nance in the world. He was no judge of dia-
monds; his eyes were not blinded by the sight
of a bit of well-cut glass in lieu of the costly
crystal. His faith in the diamond was as yet
whole and entire; but there was something ter-
rible as well as ludicrous in the expression of
the baron and in that of Mr. Mears.

For a few moments, neither of them could ut-
ter a word; and then they both made an effort
to pick up the supposed diamond. Their eyes,
so accustomed to the real sparkle—the now
kindling and then diffusing light of the jewel—
had recognized the dull reflection and refrac-
tion of the mock-gem. There wanted but a mo-
ment's closer examination to settle the question,
if, indeed, there might be said to remain one.
And so they both reached their hands tow-
ard the cut glass, and Mr. Mears cried out:

"Let me! let me!"
The baron drew back. Mr. Mears had the
mock-jewel in his hand. One touch was suffi-
cient, and he uttered a shout of dismay.

"False! false! It's false, by—"

Mr. Mears was a quiet man, and he stamped
on the floor and gulped down the rather too
impressive culmination of his speech.

"False!" echoed Giles Hilton.

"You villain!" shrieked Mr. Mears.

"Sir!"

"He is false," said the baron, as he held the
mock-diamond up between him and the light.

"He is false—very false, indeed."

"And we not to see it before," added Mr.
Mears. "Why, we are all mad! mad! Mr.
Mills! Mr. Mills! False! The big diamond
false—glass."

"Glass," added the baron, as he slowly but-
tioned up his coat.

"Glass?" gasped Mr. Mills.

A cold shudder came over Giles Hilton, and
he made a step backward, which Mr. Mears
continued into an attempt to escape; for, with
a yell that was quite demonic in its sound, he
dashed past Giles, and placing his back against
the door, he shouted:

"No, no! Not yet, you impostor! Our ten
thousand pounds! Where is our money—our
ten thousand good pounds, for your worthless
piece of glass. Villain! thief! our money!"

"Ha, ha!" said the baron, finishing the but-
toning his coat to the last button. "I have
one engagement somewhere else."

Giles Hilton clasped both his hands over his
head for a moment, and then he said:

"Stop—stop! What is it? Real or a dream?
What is it all?"

"You villain! you impostor! A false dia-
mong. O Mills! you—you idiot!"

"Mr. Mills?"

"Yes, you. You dolt, you!"

"Dolt yourself, Mr. Mears. You saw it as
well as I did. You saw it, and said it was a
diamond. You are an idiot yourself, sir."

"O gracious! And you, baron—you don-
key?"

"Bah! You call me one donkey?" shouted
the baron, thoroughly irritated, and at once
losing his command of the English language.

"You are all what you call—one ass with a
jack!"

"Hold! hold!" said Giles Hilton. "Hear
me; hear me, I pray you!"

"Police!" roared Mr. Mears.

"Yes," said Mr. Mills.

"A moment! a moment!" cried Giles Hilton.

"There is some strange mistake or some great
villainy. You, sir, and you, sir—you both
jewelers, and accustomed to the sight of pre-
cious stones, you declared that I brought you a
costly diamond. You saw it, you handled it,
commented upon it—no doubt weighed it; you
made a kind of show of it; and so convinced
were you of its genuine character, that you ad-
vanced me ten thousand pounds on it; and this
gentleman, who is, I believe, a judge of jewels,
saw it, and was wanting to take it to Russia with
him."

"Well, well!" cried Mr. Mears.

"I have an engagement somewhere else," said
the baron.

"Nay—one moment more," added Giles Hil-
ton. "After all this, the instant your experi-
cenced eyes light upon it now, you are able to
pronounce it to be a counterfeit. How is this?"

Mr. Mears looked at Mills, and Mr. Mills
looked at the baron.

"How is this?" added Giles Hilton. "I ask
you that plain question, and my mind, my com-
mon sense, my ordinary, sane judgement, sug-
gests but one reply."

"What? what?"

"That this is not the same stone you looked
at yesterday. It has been changed?"

"Changed?" they all three cried in chorus.

"Yes, changed. You could not be so mis-
aken; and even to my unpracticed, unknow-
ing eyes in such matters, the gem is not the same.

"Some trick!" cried Mrs. Mears.

"A juggler!" gasped Mrs. Mills.

"One affair of prestidigitation," said the baron, which you call slight of the hand."

He bowed, with a smile, to Giles Hilton, as much to say, I congratulate you on your cleverness.

"Police!" cried Mr. Mears. "Police! No, stop, Jackson, stop one moment. Mr. Giles Hilton, or whatever your name may be, are you prepared to produce the diamond again, or restore to us ten thousand pounds?"

"I can do neither. The diamond I left with you; and it is I who complain."

"Very well: very well. The police, Jackson. The police, at once, Jackson. The—yes—yes. What a day this is! What a piece of work! Oh, dear! oh, dear! You villain! you rascal! What a take-in! Glass, glass, only glass. Changed before my eyes, too, it must have been, for it never left my sight, never. It was a diamond! I can swear to that; and so can you—and you—and you—all of you. And so can old John Long, for he saw it; and there is not a better judge in all the city. Oh dear! oh dear! Glass, only glass! Ten thousand pounds—not a flaw in it—such a pearl! Wretch! wretch! The diamond! The money, wretch! Monster!"

Mr. Mears shook Giles Hilton to and fro; and, at that moment, Jackson flung the door open and cried out, sharply:

"The police!"

"Oh! yes, yes—police! This man, Giles Hilton, he signs his name—I charge him with robbery. Ten thousand pounds!"

"It is false!" cried Giles Hilton. "I brought him a diamond to sell."

"Stop! Stop!"

"Now, but it was a diamond."

You changed it. You must have changed it.

It was a diamond, we know."

"And why did you—why did you, the trickster, in this matter, who changes diamond for glass—"

"Stuff! nonsense! I give him in charge—"

"It's felony," said the officer. "You are our prisoner."

He laid his hand heavily on Giles Hilton's shoulder.

"A prisoner?"

"Yes; you had better come quietly, young man. We know you."

"Know me?"

"Oh, yes! Don't you know him, Brown?"

"I think I have seen him before."

"Of course. An old hand at these tricks."

Bless you, gentle, his name is not Hilton. It has as many names as there are days in the year, and a extra one for Sundays. Come on! this is a regular bad one!"

"No, no," said Giles Hilton. "Even now, my wife and family wait my return, at a hotel not half a quarter of a mile from this spot. There I am staying. There are my effects."

"And perhaps our money," said Mr. Mears, exultingly, slapping his hands together exultingly."

"The great bulk of it," added Giles Hilton, "is there. Oh, what a dream! what a dream!"

"My hat! my hat!" cried the jeweler. "Officers, I will go with you and with him to this hotel he speaks of. It may be true."

The officers smiled incredulously.

"It may be. Come along. Our money may be there. Ten thousand pounds! Come on. Hark you, Mr. Hilton, as you call yourself, will you lead the way—will you show the way to this hotel of yours?"

"No."

"No no? You won't?"

"Of course not," said the principal officer; "because there is no such hotel to show the way to."

"But it is here," said Mr. Mills. "He gave the address yesterday. The St James Hotel."

Mr. Mears slapped his hands together again, and uttered a cry of triumph; and then, in a dreadful state of excitement, he rushed into the street, followed by the officers and Giles Hilton, and by all the establishment that could be spared, and by that promiscuous throng of people which is to be picked up at any moment, on any occasion, in London streets; and Jackson followed in that throng, and told the story; and the mob shouted; and Mr. Mears, in a distracted, savage sort of way, ran on before, and, like a dog of too great vivacity, which in the joy of being out with his master traverses the road three times over, the excited jeweler sometimes trotted on in advance, and then ran back again, and then went on again backward, with his face to Giles Hilton and the officers, until the hotel was reached.

And then tumultuously came that throng of persons, and those cries which had reached the ears of poor Mrs. Hilton, while Nagle was enlightening her as to some portions of the history of that diamond which seemed doomed to be so dangerous a possession to all into whose hands it fell.

Alas! poor young mother! Alas! poor children! Brief, indeed, has been that snappy prosperity which, like the mirage of the desert, glistens on the senses for a moment, but to leave the barrenness and sterility more evident and cheerless than before."
CHAPTER X.

JOHN LONG PACKS UP.

It was with a strange sort of rush that old John Long made his way into his shop, after his expedition to the jeweler's, which had been so successful in regard to placing the diamond in his possession.

The old man was heated and panting; and it was some few moments before he could speak to Louis, who looked at him with surprise.

"What has happened, father?"

"Nothing—nothing! Close—the-door. I am cold; that is all. Pack up—pack up! At once. It doesn't agree with me."

"What don't?"

"Spitfields. Yah! Bo! What is it to you? Pack up at once, I say. Off—off by the morrow; it is too late to-day: off and away, boy. Ha! ha! I will fling them all—-all yet. They don't know old John. Ha! ha! He will pay me a visit, will he? No—no! And they, too. Yah!—bo! They will find it out to-morrow. Pack up! Pack up!"

"Father, I do not comprehend you. You take my breath away."

"Mine has been away for the last two minutes. I speak plainly, boy. I mean to leave this shop—this house—this neighborhood. I mean to retire. I—-I have made enough—quite enough, Louis."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, indeed, boy. You won't be sorry—and—and hark, you, Louis. The opal. He! he! That fair young thing, whom I call the opal. Well, boy, you shall have her. Don't say the old man was not good to you. I say you shall have her, and you need not work. Only pack up! Pack up quietly, so that—that we may be gone by the dawn—the morrow's dawn, Louis."

"If it be your wish."

"It is—it is! What's that?"

"Some one at the shop-door."

"No—no; not at home—ill—dead; anything so that I see no one."

Louis looked too much astonished to speak, but he went to the shop-door, and attended to some trivial order, and then went to the old man again, who was in the back parlor, trembling violently.

"What was it?"

"Only some one for some gift wire."

"Oh, that was all. Well, well, Louis, you are a good lad. You will pack up. I don't want the furniture. I mean only the valuables. The stock—you know, Louis. The gold, and the silver, and the pearls—that is all; and we will be off—off and away! To the East—the sunny East! My old bones will feel the reviving warmth of the sun. Pack up! pack up!"

"Father, why is there some reason for this precipitate removal?"

"Yah! Bo! What if there be? And what if there be not? Say it is my whim—my fancy. What then? What then, I ask?"

"Nothing, father—nothing! Only—"

"Only what, rebel—what?"

"It seems so strange and so sudden."

"Of course it does. Ha! ha! Of course it does. I am strange and sudden. I always was; I always will be. What now? Stop! Boy, I wish to speak to you. You are young—you are thoughtless. Come, now; what say you? Do you love the opal?"

"You mean Blanche! O father, do I love her, ask you? What can I say? What words can I find?"

"Yah! Find none. I have no objection. Come, Louis, you see in me your indulgent—over-indulgent old father. You shall take her with us, to the East. You say she is friendless, homeless—well, a good chance for her. That is settled."

"If she consents."

"Well—if she don't!"

"Then, father, I cannot go."

"In—deed!"

"No, father, it will not be possible. I have promised her that I would aid her in her search for her father; and if it should be, as probably it will, that she refuse to leave the search ere it be begun, why, I must stay with her."

"Very well. Help me to pack up. That will do. You can stay—ha!—as long as they let you."

"I can work."

"Bah! bo!"

"And Bert will employ me. Bert & Mears, who know you so well."

Old John uttered a sound that was something like the first efforts in the sharpening of a saw, and then a violent fit of coughing stopped his further speech; and when he recovered, he said:

"Louis, you can do as you like. I am off by the dawn. I don't like Spitfields, and Spitfields don't like me. I would take you and Mrs. Mills, and the opal, with me; but if you won't go, why, stay and take your chances. It is naught to me."

The old man then let his head drop upon his hand, and fell into a course of muttering to himself, keeping all the while his hand in his pocket—that pocket where lay sanguinely ensconced the diamond, which was at that time breeding such a tumult at the west end of London. Louis went up-stairs to speak to Blanche and Mrs. Mills, and the old man muttered and mum- bled to himself:

"Yes, to be sure; the East. They won't look for me there, even should they suspect me. I have it—I have the diamond—but—but I don't feel much, if any—no—no happier than before. I don't feel yet any great addition to my contentment, but I shall—of course, I shall in time. On the contrary, now, to-day, that I
have the diamond, I don't feel quite so well nor so comfortable as I did yesterday, that I had it not; but joy will come, of course; because a man who has a diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds, ought and must feel very happy. Had he?"

Louis looks sufficiently testified that he had something important to communicate when he reached the old room above, in which were Mrs. Mills and Blanche.

"Dear brother," said Blanche, "you are disturbed, and we have heard high words and strange cries from below."

Mrs. Mills shook her head, and sighed. She had often been there now, and John the high words and the strange cries that were new to Blanche.

"It was my father," said Louis. "He has become possessed with a strange idea of packing up all his property and leaving here tomorrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Mrs. Mills. Blanche turned pale.

"Yes," added Louis. "It seems to be a fixed idea with him. I never knew him so strange before. There appears, too, to be on his mind some terror which he will say nothing of."

"And where will he go?" said Mrs. Mills.

"He talks of going to the East; what part of the East, he did not say."

"Alas! alas!" said Blanche, as she wrung her hands; "and I shall lose you, dear Louis."

"No—never! I have told him that I would—that I will not go. That I have given to you, dear, dear Blanche, my heart and my mind, and that, come what may, I will stay by you as your friend and protector."

"You have said all that, Louis."

"I have, dear!"

Blanche went close to him, and rested her fair face on his own.

"Louis—Louis! dear Louis! No—no! Of selfish Blanche; I ought not, I must not—"

"Not what?"

"I will not separate you from your father, Louis. I know not what will become of me. Is it far to Culea? Surely they will let me be there. Oh, all this is very hard, and very sad. What will be the end? No peace. Father! father! where are you now?"

"Nav, nav, dear Blanche, do not grieve; Mr. Mills, I am sure you will not go to the East."

"Me? Dear me, no."

"Then you will stay with her, dear Blanche; and I will work for you both. I am a good lapidary. Why, it was only this morning that I finished for my father an artificial diamond which, he said, was admirable, and he is a good judge. All will be well. Come, come, dear sister Blanche, since you let me call you such. Be of good cheer, and all will yet be well."

Blanche tried to look comforted.

"I, too, will work," she said. "I will find out some means of helping you, Louis. You shall teach me to be a lapidary, dear Louis." She smiled gently, so Louis said yes, that he would; and while John Long was muttering, below, his discontents to himself, there was a glow of happiness about those young hearts, in the antique room above, although they had no diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds in their possession.

"And now," said Louis, after a time; "now that my father has come home, I will go to the hotel, dear Blanche, and get the boxes left there; for I have the money to pay the bill."

"Oh yes, Louis; and who knows but we may find some intelligence among my father's things that may guide us in our search for him."

"A happy thought," said Louis. "I will go at once."

And Louis went. But before he got to the hotel—fleet of foot as he was—all that storm of events and of feeling incidental to the arrival of Giles Hilton in custody of the police, had taken place. Among the baggage of Giles and his family—luggage that had been purchased with some couple of hundred pounds of the ten thousand—the jeweler and the officers found the balance of the advance—something like nine thousand pounds of the money.

And then Giles Hilton was again given formally in charge for passing off a sham diamond for a real one; or for effecting, by sleight of hand, a change of the real one for a sham one, on his second visit to the jeweler's shop. It was in vain that poor Mrs. Hilton implored them to take everything that had been purchased with the money, and to leave her and her children only their wretched apparel they had had before. The officers and Mr. Mears were inexorable.

Giles Hilton was dragged away. But before he went, he spoke, with more firmness than could have been expected, to his wife.

"Emmy," he said, "all is over now. What will yet come to pass, I know not; but there are those yet in Spitalfields, I hope, among our old neighbors, who, out even of their destitution, will help you and our little ones."

"O Giles! Giles! If I could only go with you."

"It cannot be. We shall meet again, though, Emmy; and, till then, why, God bless you! God who knows your innocence, who knows your guileless heart, and who surely will not desert you. For me, I must think of what is best. I have erred; but not as these men implore to me. There is yet a darker mystery in all this than I canathom."

The officers took him roughly away; and even as he had done on the departure of the villain Nagle, poor Mrs. Hilton fell to the floor in desolation.
"Good gracious!" said the landlady of the hotel; "was there ever such bad luck! Now, ma'am, if you please—if you please."

Mrs. Hilton looked up.
"What is it?"
"There is the door!"
"The door?"
"Yes. It is wide open. You will be so good as to take your brats and go!"

Mrs. Hilton seemed hardly to comprehend her for a few moments, and then she said:
"Is it of my children you speak?"
"Yes, to be sure; and well I may. Here's another bad debt, and for these very rooms, too. Was there ever such bad luck? but the boxes don't go till I'm paid, for all the police in the world, though they say they will send for them."
"Have mercy upon me!"
"Why, what do you mean, woman? Come, now, be off, do. How do I know a moment when some really respectable people, with money in their pockets, may come here and want these rooms—these actual rooms?"
"Oh, yes! You want me to go?"
"To be sure!"
"Quietly, yes, quietly, my children. Wait one moment. You see, madam, they are so terrified?"
"Oh stuff!"
"Come, come, Luke—Mary—come, come, dear! Don't cry. I am very sorry, madam, that we have incommode you—very. You see I could not help it?"
"Well, well; go now, that's a good woman. Go at once—do, will you?"
"Oh, yes! Hold by my dress, Luke, dear, while I carry Mary. Come, dear, come out into the world now—out into the world, and your father in prison.

Mrs. Hilton burst into a wild passion of weeping, and wrung her hands.
"O God! O God! O God! What shall I do? My children! my children! my little children! O God! look down on us, and send us some help—some one kindly eye to look upon us! Oh, have mercy upon us!"

The landlady of the hotel dr-w back appalled at this genuine passion of grief; and the waiter, that poor tender-hearted, friendly waiter who had berried the Blanche Ratcliffe, ran into the room with tears in his eyes, and cried out:
"I will carry the children, ma'am. God bless you all! yes, I will carry the children for you where you like."

Then there was a rapid, firm step on the stairs, and Louis Long appeared on the threshold of the room.
"I was informed below," he said, "that I should find the landlady here. Good Heavens! what is this?"
"Louis! Louis!" shouted Mrs. Hilton. "Louis! Oh, saved! saved! God has sent you, Louis!"

She screamed, and sobbed, and clung to his feet, while, with accents of intense surprise, she said:
"Mrs. Giles Hilton! How—how is this! Here, at this hotel! Do I dream?"
"No, no, oh, no. They have taken Giles to prison. He did not steal the diamond. He found it—found it, Louis! It was wrong to keep it, you see; but he did not steal it, Louis. Oh, take me away—away with you, Louis Long. You know me—you know the children? Luke, dear, this is Louis! Ah! he kisses my little children, and they are not yet deserted of Heaven!"

How the poor mother sobbed!
"Never! never!" said Louis. "Never deserted of Heaven! Mrs. Hilton, I am as one who walks in his sleep—so full of amazement am I to find you here. I do not comprehend it. I come to pay a small debt, and withdraw some boxes belonging to Mr. Ratcliffe."
"Bless us!" cried the landlady.

The waiter looked interested, for he had often wearied himself with conjecture as to the fate of the young girl who had left the hotel.
"Then, sir," he said, the dear young lady has found her father?"
"No."
"No? dear me!"
"She has found friends, though; and I bring the money to release the boxes."
"To be sure," said the landlady; "I always thought the young lady was a real young lady; but as for these folks, why—"
"Peace, madam," said Louis. "They suffer, it seems; so see that you add not to it."
"Hoity, toity! well, new! Perhaps you will pay their little bill, too?"
"I fear I cannot."
"To be sure not. Twenty-two pounds odd."
"No, I cannot."
"Then they shall move. Not a thing shall they touch, but what they have on."
"Come, then," said Louis, gently, to Mrs. Hilton. "I know your own cottage is burnt down, but I will find you a home. How or by what strange combination of events you are here, I cannot guess; but you shall tell me all as we go to Spitfields."
"I will, Mr. Louis—I will."
"Ah, you call me Mr., now; you said Louis, merely, a while ago?"
"I was so agitated."
"Call me Louis, still."

The young man paid Mr. Ratcliffe's account, shook hands with the friendly waiter, and having procured a hackney-coach, he placed Mr. Ratcliffe's two boxes on it, and Blanche's little school-trunk inside; and then, with Mrs. Hilton and the two children, he set off for Spitfields.

And on the road, Mrs. Hilton told him all, from first to last—all she knew.

Louis listened with the most absorbing inter-
est to the tale, and there was much in it that was suggestive to his mind.

What if, after all, this diamond had something to do with the mock one he had made?
That question occurred to him, and he could not shake off the idea.
"Mrs. Hilton," he said, "when we get home, I will get you to tell me all this more at length, and in more minute particulars."
"I will—I will."
"For the present, pray comfort yourself with the hope that things will not turn out quite so badly as they look."
"I will hope."

CHAPTER XI.

MR. NAGLE DECIDES UPON A CHANGE OF SCENE.

When that rout of police officers, infuriated jewelers, bewildered Giles Hilton, and spectators who gathered by the way, reached the hotel, in the palatial drawing-room of which Mr. Nagle was holding so interesting a conversation with Mrs. Hilton, we are aware that, with the natural bashfulness of his character whenever the police authorities showed a disposition to come on the scene, he at once retired.

He retired to the back drawing-room, which opened by tall folding-doors from the one in which he left Mrs. Hilton, to whom he was so very nearly disclosing the whole mystery of the diamond.

A few moments more, and Mrs. Hilton would have been fully aware of how the costly gem came really into the possession of her husband; but as it was, Nagle got out of the way, and in his place of retreat soon heard what was the state of affairs in regard to Giles Hilton.

From that moment, Nagle felt that he was, to use his own expressive language, "outside the transaction". That is to say, he felt that there was nothing more to be made by it, and that Giles Hilton's career was over in regard to him.

Whether or no the weaver of Spitalfields had really imposed a false diamond for a real one, or the jewelers or some one else were imposing upon Giles Hilton, did not matter to him (Nagle). His chances of further profit out of the transaction were over, and all he had to do was, to take care that Hilton's fall did not drag him into mischief.

There was a door from the back drawing-room which opened on to the staircase, and by that means Nagle quietly walked out of the apartment while all the bustle was going on, and descended the stairs.

There was a tray on a bracket about halfway down the stairs, in which reposed, in loving embrace, each in each, some dozen or so of silver spoons. No one was at hand, and Mr. Nagle had that gift of great men which enables them to seize the advantage of circumstances; so he seized the spoons.

Then, whistling carelessly, Nagle strutted out of the hotel.

He soon quickened his pace; and then, when he had placed three or four intricate streets between him and possible pursuit, he paused to think.

"That's all over," he said, to himself. "Here I am, with a few spoons and five pounds. Hum! Something must be done. Let me see. London won't suit. I never thought it would. They know me too well, here; I must turn provincial. Let me think—let me think. Yes, I will be off, but not wish five pounds. Oh dear, no. If, before I go, I could only make that young Louis Long remember me more unpleasantly than he will, what can I do? The girl is with him. I know more about her than anybody, but what's the use, now, of playing into their hands? None—none. I know she is the daughter of Ratcliffe; I know that Ratcliffe died in Hilton's cottage, and that Hilton stole the diamond from him. It's all clear enough to me; but what's the use of my shouting it out? None—none. The girl has slipped through my fingers, and the diamond, real or false, is no longer with Hilton. Let me think, now—let me think."

Mr. Nagle went on thinking until he got into such a maze of contradictory impulses that he was compelled—so he said—to procure refreshment at once; and the consequence was, that after a day of semi-intoxication he reached Spitalfields, penniless and wretched.

The dim shadows of the evening had just begun to confuse all objects, when the latch of the little cottage in which poor Mrs. Nagle resided was lifted, and her profligate and criminal son staggered in.

The old dame uttered an exclamation of surprise and terror, and Nagle, with violence, banged the door shut, as he called out:

"Silence! What's the matter now? Must you always try to alarm Spitalfields when I come home—eh? Must you?"

"O John! John! Home, said you?"

"Yes. Why not? I have no other, mother. My throat is on fire—my brain is on fire! Bar the door."

"Bar it?"

"Yes, I say. I know not but there may be people on my track. It rains, too, and I am soaked. Cold! No, I can't be cold, surely?"

The Russian shuddered.

"You have no fire?"

"No, John, nor means to make one."

"Cold comfort, that. A pretty welcome I get when I come home like a dutiful son—ha, ha! That fool Hilton! W. J. well—no more from him. It was well I got the five hundred I did. All gone, though—all gone. I was a fool, there."

"What do you say, John?"

"Never you mind. Hush! What's that?"
"Some one passing the door."
"Passing?"
"Yes. Do you not hear? The footsteps die away, John. They are gone."
"Yes; they are. I don’t know that any one is dashing me, but they may—they may. A hard world, this—a very hard world. Have you any money?"

Mrs. Nagle shook her head sadly.
"No, John; I have no money."
"Well, don’t be shaking in that sort of way. I am not going to eat you."
"But you terrify me!"
"Why, I should like to know? What for? Well, I didn’t think I was so bad-looking as all that. Ha! No fire, and no drink, and no money!"
"I have a little food in the house, John."
"Turn it into brandy and it will suit me. Hark you, mother: Old Long, the lapidary—he is still at his old shop—is he not?"
"Yes, John."
"Ah! Well! He must be rich, I should say."
"Very rich, my dear John; and his son, Louis—"
"Silence! I will not hear his hateful name. Oh, if I could only be revenged on him!"
"Alas! alas!"
"Yes; cry out alas!—do! You are more fond of those who are my enemies, I know, than you are of me. But I don’t want to plague you—not I. Ha! I’m too good-natured—I always was. Good-night. How cold it is! I want rest—rest! No money, no fire, no drink! Well, well; perhaps that can be put right—who knows?—who knows?—Mother?"
"Yes, John."
"Does it rain still?"
"Yes. I can hear the drops pattering against the casement."
"Is that wind I hear?"
"It is sighing round the house."
"Good, good! Let the rain patter, and the wind sigh and howl. It is all the better—all the better for me! I am tired. Don’t speak to me."
"Only a few words!" sobbed poor old Mrs. Nagle.

The ruffian had cast himself down along three miserable old chairs, from which he had extemporized a sort of couch by placing them together; and he now rested his head on his hand and looked up.
"What is it?"
"John, your father is dead, and—"
"News that! Ha! Queen Anne, too, is dead."
"Oh, hear me! I meant only to call your attention to our being quite alone in the world—you and I, John—that was all; and I wanted to say that, if from this time you will be honest, John, and stay at home, and be kind, and gen-

The poor old woman sunk on her knees and prayed; and when she had dried her tears, and when the humble supplication had ceased, she said: "Now, my son—now what say you?"

She listened attentively; and then, by the sound of the deep breathing, she became aware that he was fast asleep, and most probably had been during the whole period of her entreaties and supplications.

"Heaven help me!—Heaven help me! He heeds me not! He is lost—lost!"

With tottering steps, poor old Mrs. Nagle went to her own rest; but it was many a weary hour before sleep came to her; and once she started as she thought she heard the latch of the cottage-door move with a clicking sound that was peculiar to it.

She was right.

At about one o’clock in the morning, John Nagle had aroused from his sleep—which, after all, was a half-waking one—and sitting up on the chairs he had placed together, he listened attentively.

"All still—all still!" he muttered. "The old girl has gone to sleep. Good! I don’t want her to know. I am better now. This bit of sleep has done me a world of good. I wonder what the time is? Ah! the church clock. Well, that’s lucky!"

The chimes of four-quarters sounded in the stillness of the night from a church that was near at hand; and then, with a solemn boom, one o’clock was struck.

"One—one! The best time of all for me—one! That’s it! Lucky, lucky! Now for the tools!"

Nagle carefully groped about the cottage till he found some matches. His old familiarity with the place enabled him soon to place his hands upon them; and then he lit one, and shading it with his hand he looked warily round him.

"Ah! all right. So still, too; not too still, though, for the rain patters and the wind howls—Cold—cold!"

The ruffian shuddered; and then he lit a small end of rushlight that was on the chimney-
piece, and the faint flame irradiated the little cottage-room.

Nagle clasped his hands together; and then, going to one corner of the room, he took from his pocket a clasp-knife—one of those knives that have various tools along with several blades—and by its aid he picked up a piece of the thin boarding. From a cavity beneath he lifted a small parcel wrapped in leather.

"All right! I thought I should find them!" he muttered. "It was not likely the old girl would interfere with them. Ha, ha! She would be a good one to go on a house-breaking expedition, she would. Ha!"

He shook the parcel; and the jingle of the implements which it contained was a pleasant sound for him to hear, and came back to his memory crowded with recollections of the past—with recollections of old associates, who had forfeited liberty, perhaps life, in the game of existence.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I am pretty well alone now, out of the old lot. So be it. I can work alone."

By work, Mr. Nagle was far from alluding to any sort of recognized form of social industry. It was to house-breaking, which had been his former occupation, that his thoughts tended; and now, as was the custom with him, he rehearsed to himself what he meant to do, even to its details.

"It's all up with Giles Hilton. Real or false, the diamond will never be any good to him or to me; and as for the young girl, she won't now do anything but set up a squall if she so much as sees me; but if I can only manage to do some mischief at old Long's, why, I shall be content enough, and then off I go."

Nagle stooped low before he left his mother's cottage, and with his hand hollowed behind his ear, he listened intently for a few moments.

"All right. The old girl sleeps, and no one is passing. It is getting the dead and quiet part of the night in Spitalfields; and that little patch of rain is the house-breaker's friend, for it covers up many a little accidental sound. It is time—it is time. Good-bye!"

Mr. Nagle meant this good-bye in a kind of ironical sense as regarded his mother and her little home; for there was not a trace of kindly feeling in the utterance of the words. Then he lifted the latch of the outer door, and sunk out into the street.

There was more rain than he had anticipated; only, owing to its coming down for the most part nearly perpendicular, it had not pattered against the small eavesment of the cottage with sufficient vivacity to proclaim its real extent.

"Ah," he said, "better still! This will do. It's dark a night it is!"

It was so. The clouds from the south, which had brought up the rain, hung near to the earth in many a fold and stratum, one above the other, and a complete darkness was in and about the region where Nagle proposed commencing what he called "work" again.

That old John Long was rich, was the commonly-received opinion of all Spitalfields; and it was far from being an erroneous one. He was rich; but whether his riches were in such a shape or form or so disposed that they were at the mercy of a house-breaker, was quite another proposition.

Yet Nagle determined to make the attempt, partly because the lapidary's house was the only one he thought he had a chance of getting into which held out a promise of booty, and partly because there was a smothered volcano of rage in his heart against Louis Long.

Skulking along under the shadows of the old houses, and receiving a plentiful supply of moisture from the dripping rain that fell from their projecting roofs, Nagle made his way toward John Long's house and shop.

But it was not to the front portion of the old, dilapidated residence that Nagle made his way.

There was a narrow lane—so narrow that but one person could conveniently walk in it—at the back of the garden walls of the irregular row of houses of which John Long's was one. The wall of the house and those back gardens facing those of which we speak, constituted the other limit of the lane. It had been an old foot-path over a field, and when the land was built upon it, was preserved as a narrow thoroughfare—which, however, ran the chance of being soon covered in even to the height of the low garden walls; for not only were the topmost row of bricks in the habit of tumbling into the lane, but the inhabitants of the houses, both ways, used it as a kind of common receptacle into which to cast everything they did not want in their gardens.

Saturated, then, as this narrow way was with some hours' rain, it was anything but a pleasant path; and bitter were the maledictions that Nagle cast upon it as, in a crouching attitude, he hobbled up it, at times mounting on a heap of rubbish and then sinking with a splash into a softer part, and covering himself with mud and garden débris.

But this was the way to John Long's garden, and the garden was the way to the house.

It was an easy scramble over the old halfbroken-down wall into the lapidary's premises.

"Here I am," said Nagle, in a whisper, "and there is the old house. I know it by its great tiled roof."

The garden of John Long's house was not so absolute a ruin as one might suppose, for Louis had the natural taste of the pure mind and free heart. He loved the flowers that, with good care, he persuaded to bloom in the old garden; and the walks were trim and well laid with flowers; so that Nagle was in a very different region to that which the wrecked law presented.
The house looked like a black cloud before him—seen so dimly through the rain.

The housebreaker did not trust himself to walk even along the garden; but he crouched down very nearly to the earth until he reached the house, and then he stumbled over something.

It was a garden-roller.

Nagle uttered an exclamation of anger, but not at all in a loud voice; and then he felt carefully all around the back-door of the house. It was very closely shut, and so fast that it might have been taken for a portion of the wall itself.

The rain had beaten for some hours against the old wood-work, and had penetrated its fibres until they were swollen and expanded. In the dry summer-time, that old door shook to every breeze and presented many a crevice.

"Taps and bolts, no doubt," said Nagle.

Then he crept or still he came to a small window, which was not above two feet square, and that was secured by a shutter.

Nagle started back, for a slight gleam of light came through a crevice by the side of the shutter.

"Some one up!" he gasped; "some one up! The game is over!"

The gleam of light, however, had been so very transient, so flickering and sighing, that after a few moments Nagle began to ask himself if it had been a reality or only some fancy of his own—some sudden flashing from his own eyes, or possibly a reflection from some far-off light, elsewhere. Yes; that might be it.

At all events, it was gone.

Nagle took from the parcel he had with him a small iron instrument, which he selected by the touch alone, and then there was a very slight creaking noise, and the shutter was loose.

Another moment and he had the shutter down, and with his eyes close to one of the little diamond-shaped panes of glass in the old casement, he was trying to look into the room.

The darkness was profound.

Then Nagle felt convinced that the light that had startled him was either a matter of mere imagination, or, at all events, did not come from that room; and he set to work to effect an entrance by that small casement.

Nagle was thin and agile, and he soon worked his way into John Long's house. Then he felt about carefully with both hands and placed them on the floor, to ascertain if he were in a boarded room or not. No. The cold feel of tiles—those flat, red tiles which are so popular as a flooring for kitchens and outhouses in Spitfield—alone met his touch.

Then Nagle very nearly betrayed his presence in the house by an exclamation, for an unmistakable pencil of bright light streamed into the room for a moment, and then disappeared.

There could be no mistake, now. Some one was up and stirring in the house—who was it? That was the question—who was it?

Nagle knew the general shape and plan of the house pretty well. There was the outhouse or kitchen, in which he was. Then there would be a passage, and then there would be the room immediately at the back of the shop, and then the shop itself—that would be the arrangement.

Whence, then, could come this flash of light that had so disturbed him?

But it was gone—gone, and all was darkness again. Nagle abandoned his first idea (which was to retreat and give up the enterprise), and he crept to the door in the kitchen—the door which was opposite to the little window, and through some crevice or opening of which the pencil of light had come.

That door was open about half an inch. Nagle carefully enlarged the opening, for he was fearful of creating hinges, until he could pass through. Yes; there was the passage, and opposite the door he had passed through was another door. It was through a narrow slit in the actual substance of that door—a slit that probably had occurred many a long year since—that Nagle now saw a light. He put his eye to the slit. It was provokingly aslant, and he could see nothing; but he heard the murmur of a voice.

"John himself!" hurriedly whispered Nagle, for he knew his voice. "John himself! The old man is up!—up this hour. It may be worse for him and better for me."

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN LONG FINDS THE DIAMOND A TROUBLESOME POSSESSION.

Yes; John Long was up and stirring at that lone and silent hour of the night. How could he sleep? How could he rest? How could he, like the "happy lover", lie down, with the weight of that costly crystal on his heart, with its glittering facets illuminating his brain, with all its concentrated fires flashing through his veins—how could he sleep?

Up and stirring; packing no end of costly trifles, starting at every sound, heated, faint, and weary, with now and then such a burning, throbbing sensation in his brain that he had to clasp his head with both his hands and stop in his work to pant and groan. John Long had not yet found either contentment or exultation from his possession of the costly jewel.

Louis rested. Louis slept in his own little room—or, rather, the spare-room, which he had appropriated instead of his own—in the sloping-roof of the old house.

Blanche Rateiliff slept the calm sleep of innocence; and if at moments the long fringes of her eyes were damp with tears, they were those of sorrow, as, in the phases of Imagination's pictures, she saw her father.

And the good old housekeeper, who had not a penny-piece in the world that she could call
her own—for the voice of Want was in Spitalfield, and she gave all she had to the starving families of the poor weavers—she, too, slept solemnly.

But then Louis had not a diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds. He had a rarer jewel—in his heart of hearts—fit casket for that jewel—his own dear Blanche.

And Blanche was an orphan, without friends, without means, with a home that might be as precarious as the spring-breezes, for aught she knew; and yet she was slumbering at that still night-hour.

But John—John Long had the diamond. It was his. All that it might produce was his, and it behooved him to be watchful and wary. How could he lie down in peace?

"Off to-morrow!" he muttered; "off by the dawn! I—I will get all I want to take into these two large trunks—nothing but portable articles of value—and then off—off and away by the dawn. Well, well; if they will not go, let them stay I am off—off while I can, and with what I can. How successful, to be sure—how very successful! They cannot suspect me, surely? Will they come here? Will they remember that I had it in my hand? that I put it for a moment in my pocket? No, no; I think not. But I will be off for all that; and then, too, I shall avoid that Colonel Franklin. Yah! Bah! I don't want that man to look into my eyes again. He dazes and dazzles me!"

While John muttered in this fashion, he was still busy rolling up in old rags articles of gold and of silver—which he could not make up his mind to leave behind—and stowing them away with good art in the boxes.

He heard the rain pattering down, and for a time it had disturbed him greatly; for he could not help associating the falling drops with some alarm; but as some hours of it had taken place and passed away, he had begun to cease to regard it; and it was only when a more furious gust of wind than ordinary drove a shower of drops against the casement of the house that he would stop to listen.

And now Nagle, who had in an indistinct kind of way heard much of what the old man had muttered to himself, was full of thought and conjecture; for he knew nothing which would, to him, satisfactorily account for the packing up of the old lapidary, and his evident mental perturbation.

That the diamond, which had already supplied his extravagancies for a brief period, and had brought such trouble upon Giles Hilton, was in any way directly concerned in John Long's movements, Nagle never surmised for a moment.

To be sure, as he succeeded in widening a portion of the crack in the panel of the door sufficiently to enable him to obtain, to a certain extent, a sight of the room and of the lapidary, he could not but observe that the old man frequently felt in his pocket as if for the safety of some article of more than ordinary value; but little did he suspect it was the diamond which had, in the hands of the west-end jewelers, so mysteriously turned to glass.

And now Nagle began to get impatient for action. He did not see that he could learn anything further by watching the old man than that he was packing boxes, and that he kept mumbling something about being "off and away by the dawn":

"I'll relieve him of some of his trouble of packing," said Nagle to himself.

Then, after a moment's thought, the housebreaker determined upon his course of action. He stepped aside from the doorway opening to the passage, and then he made a light, scratching noise with his finger-nail on the lower part of the panel.

The effect upon old John was instantaneous. With a cry of alarm, the lapidary fell forward over the box he was kneeling before and packing, and spreading his arms over it, he gasped out: "Thieves! thieves! thieves! The Lord have mercy upon me! What was it?"

The scratching continued.

"A rat"—said John—"a rat!"

"That will do," thought Nagle; and after the pause of a moment he made a scuffling noise with his fingers on the floor, and then uttered a faint squeak, in so exactly the tone of a rat, that John was convinced to demonstration.

"The rats—the rats! I was never up so late, and they are disturbed. I knew not that they were in the house. They cannot eat the crystals and the pebbles. What do they want here? Hiss! hiss! What, you won't go? I cannot be disturbed in this way. The rain and wind are bad enough, but as for rats— Hiss! hiss! Whisht! Hiss!"

The scratching continued.

John got angry. He snatched up the little rushlight he had burning, and made a rush toward the door, which he thought would frighten the rats out of their wits, and then opening the door about six or eight inches, he projected his head through the opening.

"Hiss! Be off!"

"That will do," said Nagle, as he gasped old John Long by the throat and held him within a hair's-breadth of strangulation. "One word, one cry, and you are a dead man, John Long. Be quiet, and no harm will be done to you."

So completely taken by surprise was John, that one would have thought, just to see him at that moment, that the action had been pre-arranged, so still and passive was he in the hands of Nagle.

The housebreaker forced John back into the room again, and taking the candle from his hand, he placed it on a small shelf, and then thrust the lapidary into a chair, as he said:
"Well, that is sensible. You take the thing as you ought, John Long, and it will be all the better for you."

John plunged with his feet.

"Oh stuff! I am not hurting you. Come, now. If I take my finger off your throat, will you be quiet?"

John made some strange motions with his hands, which Nagle interpreted into a consent, and he freed the old man from his grasp. Then the lapidary shook his head and glared about him for a moment or two, as if he did not know where he was. He made several faint grasps at his own throat in an odd manner, and then he plunged one hand into his pocket.

The pocket where the diamond was.

The touch of the jewel appeared at once to have the power of dissipating the sort of paralysis than had come over the faculties of John Long, and he uttered a yell.

"What is it? Nagle struck him to the floor, and the imprecation of the Russian mingled with the echoes of the old man's cry.

"An alarm! an alarm!" he shouted. "They won't sleep after that! Quick! quick! It takes time to shake off sleep. I may still escape. But first—first what I can! I will not go empty handed. Ha, ha! Not yet; nobody comes yet. What's that? Some noise above? Yes; they come! More plunder; I have yet a moment—yet a moment!

Nagle was cramming his pockets with articles from the box nearest to him. He knew not what they were, but they were surely of value, as they had been so carefully wrapped up by John.

Another sound from above; some one had, apparently, fallen over a chair. Then there was a scream in a female voice.

"They come—they come! I am off now—off now. Oh! I could only stamp his old life out! The idiot, to cry out! The door! The shop-door is my way! Ha, ha! I am well-loaded now. That's Louis!"

There was a rush of footsteps above, and then on the staircase; and Louis's voice called out: "Father! father! where are you? What is it?"

Nagle felt that he had not another instant to spare. He made a rush over the prostrate form of the old man, treading heavily upon his chest as he did so, and then seizing the lighted candle, he flung it right into Louis's face as the young man dashed open a door that opened from the staircase into the back parlor.

Another moment and Nagle had passed into the shop and closed the door of communication.

"Thieves! thieves!" cried Louis.

"Watch!" screamed a voice from one of the upper windows.

That was Mrs. Mills.

"Ha!" laughed Nagle; "there is no watch in Spitalfields."

He reached the shop door and felt for what might be its fastenings. A bar. That was all. No—a bolt—two bolts. Nagle was getting furious.

Louis dashed the back-room door open, and made his way into the shop.

"Villain! villain! you cannot escape!"

"Take that!" cried Nagle; and he swung the bar he had lifted from the back of the shop-door around his head with a terrific sweep. It was a mercey that it did not encounter Louis, for it must have killed him. He heard the hiss of its passage through the air. Then Nagle dashed the shop-door open, and the profound darkness within the house was mingled up with a wild rush of rain and wind.

"Good-night!" cried Nagle; "good-night! Ha! ha! Find me who can—seek me who may! Ha! ha! Ah!"

He rushed out into the night air, and right into the arms of some one—no, no. He clasped him tightly, saying at the same time:

"I have him! A sight here!"

There was the flash of several lanterns, and bewildered and confused Nagle found himself surrounded by several men, whom he at a glance knew to be police-officers. One desperate struggle for escape he made, but it was in vain. He was flung to the ground, and a pair of handcuffs were placed upon his wrists.

"Now, young fellow," said one of the officers, "you are safe enough, and who may you be?"

Nagle fell suffocating with rage, and he would not utter a word.

Then a respectfully-dressed man stepped forward; and if Giles Hilton had been then present, he would at once have recognized in that respectably-dressed man no other than Mr. Mears, of the jeweler's shop at which he had trafficked with the diamond.

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Mr. Mears. "This is not John Long."

"Who wants John Long?" said Louis, stepping out on to the threshold of the shop-door, and showing himself to be but half dressed.

"I do," said Mr. Mears; "who are you?"

"I am Louis Long, his son. As for my poor father, I fear much that some mischief has happened to him. You have lanterns—be you whom you may—and I pray you to come in and help me to look for him."

"That is just what I came to do," said Mr. Mears; "and what I brought these gentlemen for. I may be wrong. I don't say anything just yet. I could not sleep until I had seen John Long, and asked him some questions while these persons, who are officers of police, searched his house."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, young sir."

"I am amazed. What—what?"

"Keep him! keep him!" cried Mr. Mears, as
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

Louis stepped a pace back into the shop. "Keep him. He is the son, and may be as guilty as the father."
"Guilty, sir, of what?"
"Come, come," said one officer, taking hold of Louis by the arm; "it's no use saying anything. If it's wrong it's wrong, and if it's right it's right—you are my prisoner. Come in, Mr. Harrison. I'm wet to the skin. Come in. Mobbs, and you, too, Bullings. Come in and shut the door."

"I'm a coming," said Bullings, who might be supposed to have already caught a bad cold, for he spoke as if his face were immersed in a quart pot.

Nagle was dragged into the house again very unceremoniously, and by the light of the officers' lanterns, the whole of the little shop was well illuminated. There on the floor lay the bar with which the ruffian, Nagle, had certainly attempted the life of Louis, and the door of the inner room was swinging partially open.

Nagle glared about him like a wild animal. He did not as yet understand how he came to be taken, nor what it was all about. Louis, too, was in a state of much mental confusion, and he said: "Pray explain to me of what I am accused, and how it is that you are all here, and that this man, whom I know not, is in your custody? Ah! Nagle—John Nagle!"

As the lanterns flashed upon the villain's face, Louis had at once recognized him.

"Oh, you are acquaintances, are you?" said Mr. Mears. "We shall come to something."

"I know that man," said Louis. Nagle scowled at him.

"Come on, I implore you," added Louis. "I have a dread of the sight that may meet us through this door."

The officer still kept his hold of Louis' arm, and the whole party made their way into the back room now, where a great scene of disorder presented itself.

There were the open boxes half packed—a number of valuable objects in gold and silver lying about. The candlestick and candle that Nagle had thrown at Louis were lying on the floor, and close to the fire-place lay John Long, apparently dead!

"Alas! alas!" cried Louis, "my father is murdered!"

" Murdered!" ejaculated Mr. Mears.

The officer let go Louis' arm, and the young man sprang forward and seated John in his arms and placed him on a chair.

"He is murdered! Murdered by that villain Nagle. I knew his voice when he cried out 'Good-night!' as he rushed out of the shop. There was an alarm in the night. I rose from my sleep and hurried down here. It was all wild confusion, but I begin to see it now. This villain came to rob the house, and you have secured him. He has killed my father!"

Mr. Mears looked at the officer and at Nagle, and then at Louis, and the officers looked mystified, and shook their heads.

"Louis Long," then said the jeweler, "I know you now, and you ought to know me, for you have been for your father's work once or twice to our place—Burt's."

"Oh, yes; I think I do recollect you now, sir. Dead! Dead! Dead! at last! And yet one may be deceived by a stupor that may look like death and not be it. I will fetch a surgeon!"

"Not so fast!" said the officer who had held of Louis' arm; "you forget."

"Forget what?"

"You are my prisoner."

"But this may be a matter of life or death."

"Can't help it."

"Are you human? What have I done that I should be a prisoner? I am not the house-breaker and murderer. There he stands. There he is, and his name is John Nagle."

Nagle curled his lips with a scornful laugh, as he cried:

"Don't let him go! Ha! ha! Don't let him go!"

"I must—I will seek medical aid for my father. His death may be on your heads."

"And I want to speak to John Long," said Mr. Mears; "so, in case he should be alive, one of you run for a doctor. One of you can be spared."

"Go, Bullings," said the officer, who seemed to command the party.

Bullings made a rumbling sound far down in his throat, in token of assent, and left the house.

Then, before another word could be uttered, the door that led to the staircase was pushed open, and Blanche, like a spirit, glided into the room. She had hastily dressed herself, and had thrown over her head, and clasped it by one hand beneath her chin, a mantle edged with some costly fur, which poor Mr. Ratcliff had purchased for her during the few days they were together, and which she had taken from her box which had come from the hotel.

Pale with anxiety and fright, Blanche paused when she had got two paces into the room, and she looked from face to face of those present as she said, faintly:

"There was an alarm!"

Louis flew toward her.

"Blanche, dear Blanche. Do not come here. It is—it is very sad, dear."

Blanche looked up inquiringly into his face, and the officers fixed their eyes on the sweet countenance of the young girl, and Mr. Mears involuntarily took off his hat and bowed to her.

"O beauty! enchanting gift of joy or peril! who is there so hard of heart, so adamantine of feeling, that does not feel the thrill of thy presence? A deep silence reigned for a few moments in the room, and Louis could only
hold the hand of Blanche in his and look into her eyes.

"The young lady," said Mr. Mears, has nothing to do with it."

"Oh dear, no," said the officers.

"With what?" said Blanche, quietly.

"Nothing—nothing, dear," said Louis. "Go to your rest again, let me beg of you. It is no time for you to be up, Blanche. It will end, I hope, in nothing; yet I fear my father is very ill."

"The doctor!" said Billings, as he re-ap- peared with a chemist who kept a little squaid shop a few doors from old John Long's. Then it was that for the first time, by the movement that took place in the room, Blanche caught sight of the old man in the chair.

"O Louis, Louis, is it murder?"

"Hush, dear, hush! We will hope not."

"No," said the chemist; "he is recovering now. Well, Mr. Long, how are you, sir? What has happened, sir. Eh! eh! Mr. Long?"

Old John opened one eye, and it glared about him like a live coal.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. NAGLE ADOPTS A NEW PLAN.

A very few words will explain the presence of Mr. Mears at John Long's. The sudden change of the exquisite and faultless diamond to a worthless piece of glass had so utterly confounded and confused the faculties of the jeweler that he had acted throughout the immediately following events like a man who was urged on by impulses too strong for his organization to resist.

There was the mock jewel, and there was Giles Hilton, the man from whom he had received it—the man to whom he had given ten thousand pounds on the fact of the costly character of the gem. It seemed like cause and effect that he, Giles, was the party who had done all the evil, and who was to be assailed upon as the guilty party; so, without reflection, Mr. Mears had acted, as we have seen, fully believing at the moment that he was the victim of some elaborate and clever trick of which Hilton was the projector and perpetrator. How the indubitably once real diamond had changed for the glittering mockery he finally had in his drawer, Mr. Mears had not the most distant idea; he only saw the fact.

And he only saw that Giles Hilton was, in point of suspicious compliety, the nearest to the fact. Therefore was it that with such vehemence, with such anger, and with such ferocity of prosecution, Mr. Mears attacked Giles Hilton, and gave him into the custody of the police.

And the jeweler, in so acting, only carried out a great principle of unreflecting minds. That which is nearest to any fact is by good numbers of people believed at once to be its cause. The last person seen in the presence of a murdered man is shrewdly suspected to have a hand in the deed of death, and is, so to speak, called upon to prove a negative, namely, that he did not commit the murder.

The diamond had been changed—"translated", as the old dramatists used to say, and Giles Hilton was the person most connected with the diamond; therefore it sounded logical that he was the guilty agent.

But when Mr. Mears got home again, after Giles Hilton was lodged in custody; when calmer judgment came to his aid; when Mr. Burt, the capitalist and sleeping partner of the concern, who had nothing personally to do with the affair, who had neither been dazzled by the real diamond, nor shocked by the false one; when he arrived and talked the matter over, various little circumstances came to light which imparted a new complexion to the affair.

First, it was proved to demonstration that there had been no original deceit in regard to the jewel. How it had come into the possession of Giles Hilton was another question; but the concurrent judgments of Mears, of Mills, of the baron, of several other persons who had seen it and been entranced by its beauty, left no room to doubt that during all the first part of the transaction, a really rare and costly gem had reposited on the purple velvet that lined the small drawer in the jeweler's cabinet.

And these were not days of magic. No "locusc-poems" trick could, with a "hey! pres- to!" change a diamond to a piece of cut-glass.

There were "two Richmonds in the field", the false and the true one.

Mr. Burt sat down with pen, ink, and paper, and carefully took notes of the whole transaction, and a list of the names of all who had seen the diamond.

The names were all set down, and then as Mr. Burt looked up, saying, "Is that all?" Mears slightly changed color.

"Stop!" he said; "stop!"

"Well?"

"John Long—he saw it."

"No harm in that; he is an old servant of the firm, I believe."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

Mr. Mears rested his head upon his hand for a few moments, and then looking up, he said:

"Mr. Burt, I think—that is to say, I don't exactly feel sure, but—but—you see, this old man. John Long——"

"What of him?"

"You shall judge—you shall judge yourself. I will just tell you how it happened that he saw the diamond twice."

"Tell me, then."

"Yes—stop! stop! Oh dear me!"

With a full tide, there was coming back to Mr. Mears all the particulars connected with John's first and second sight and examination of the diamond, and then, clapping his
hands together, he cried out: "I have it! He has it!"

Now these two contradictory expressions made Mr. Burt open his eyes very widely, and Mr. Mears hastily added:

"I mean I have the truth, or an idea of the truth, and John Long has the diamond."

After this, every new fact, however small—every little recollection of John's words and actions, strengthened the suspicion; and the result was, a determination to pay John a midnight visit, armed with sufficient authority to search his premises for the missing jewel, taking him so much by surprise that he should not have time to secrete it anywhere beyond discovery.

Hence, then, this domiciliary visit of Mr. Mears and the officer at so opportune a moment as regarded the apprehension of Nagle.

And now behold again that little back-parlor to John Long's shop, with so singular a group of persons crowding its small dimensions; so starting a combination of actions resulting in such complete antithesis of feeling.

There was the jeweler, only intent upon the recovery of the diamond. There were the officers, coldly and calmly in the pursuit of their profession. There was John Nagle, savage and famishing over his detention, and only striving to comprehend sufficient of what was going on to enable him to say or do something that should be mischievous to somebody.

There was the brave and gallant Louis—sans peur et sans reproche. His soul was in his eyes as they were fixed upon the fair face of Blanché. And there was Blanché herself, that young, pure spirit, the very atmosphere around which seemed to exercise a gentle and harmonizing effect even upon those rough officers who had become indurated against human feeling.

And there was John Long.

John Long, who was just recovering from the state of semi-insensibility into which he had been thrown by the ill-usage of Nagle; John Long, who, with only one eye open, glared at him, and strove to collect his ideas so as to be resistive, abusive, cunning, and successful.

"Well, Mr. Long," said the chemist, in that tone of suavity which medical men assume when they try to play the conjurer in the estimation of those around them by affecting to soothe a patient—"well, Mr. Long, and how are we now?"

"Yah! Bo!"

"He is better."

"Get along!"

"He is decidedly better."

"Father," said Louis—"father, how is all this? What has happened?"

Old John still kept one eye closely shut, but he made good use of the other, for he rolled it round and round from face to face of the group of persons about him, and then, without disagreeably replying to Louis, he said:

"What is it all about?"

"I fancy, father, that this man, John Nagle, whom you may remember, was trying to rob the shop.""Ah! I do remember now. And so—and so you heard him. You came down; you called the police. Ah! I see, I see. Yah! No, I don't—no, I don't! Ah! ah! ah!"

Old John had just, for the second time, carried his gaze from face to face; and it would seem that, on his first visual tour, he had not recognized individuals distinctly; for it was in acknowledgment of the presence of Mr. Mears that he uttered these half-cries half-groans that last came from his lips.

"Well, John Long," said the jeweler, stepping forward, "I am here. You know me.

"Yes, yes. Oh dear, oh dear! My humble honest! Quite an honor! Mr. Mears—the good Mr. Mears, of Burt & Company! How good — how good! Louis! Louis! Anything for Mr. Mears. A chair—a chair!"

"John Long," said the jeweler, "when you were at our place of business, I showed you a diamond."

"Eh?"

"A diamond; and the sight of it, or the knowledge of the name of the person from whom we had it, seemed greatly to interest or excite you."

"Boy!"

"You came again, John, and I showed you, at your own request, the diamond, a second time. Since then, we find it changed to this."

Mr. Mears took from his pocket the made jewel, and held it up.

"Why," said Louis, "I made that!"

If a bomb-shell had suddenly lit in the shop, and then there began hissing, preparatory to its ruinous explosion, the effect would scarcely have been greater than these few words from Louis produced.

The officers made a movement of interest.

Mr. Mears looked flushed and anxious. Blanché clinging more closely to Louis's arm. Nagle projected his head forward, and cried out:

"Ha, ha! I begin to see."

John Long sprang to his feet, and uttered a yell of rage.

The chemist, who was rather a timid man, ran into the shop.

"You—made—this?" said Mr. Mears.

"Yes, I am a lapidary. There is no difficulty. It is my work. I know it directly. I cut the facets, and polished the crystal. Yes; I made it."

John uttered another cry.

"And what for?" shouted Mr. Mears—"what was the object, the— the— the— why did you make it?"

"At the request of my father. He had an order for it—from you, I suppose."

"From me? Me? You wretched criminal,
what do you mean? I give an order for this trash, when I had the real jewel from Mr. Giles Hilton!"

"Mr. who?"
"Giles Hilton."
"The poor weaver?"
"No; the rich possessor of the diamond."
"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Nagle, now, with boisterous mirth. "Oh, this is good. A play—a play! Better than any play! Ha, ha! Ha, he!"
"Stop—oh, stop!" said Louis, as he clasped one hand over his brow. "What did Mrs. Hilton say to me in the coach? That Giles had found a seeming diamond, and raised money on it, and it had turned out to be false. Yes, yes; but that is not it. I myself cut and fashioned that at my own wheel in your work-shop. I do not comprehend it. What does it all mean?"

Old John sunk down into his chair again with a deep groan of anguish.
"My diamond!" cried Mr. Mears; "my real diamond! Thieves! Thieves all! It's plain enough now."
"What, sir, is plain enough?" said Louis.
"You scoundrel, you know better than I can tell. Your rascally old father here saw our diamond—and you and he concocted a scheme to make a false one, and change the one for the other. Oh, you are young in years, but old in iniquity, young man."
"You rascal, sir."
"Do I? Ha! Do I? Rave, do I? John Long, you—you old—well, it's no use saying what you are—my diamond! My diamond, I say! Where is it?"
"John slid off the chair on the floor."
"My diamond, you old sinner!"
"One moment," said Nagle, in a calm, clear voice—"one moment. Hear me, and I will confess all."
"Confess!"
"Yes, all!"
"John rolled over, and propped himself against the chair, and glared still, with only one eye, at Nagle.
"It is vain and useless," added Nagle, "to carry on this affair further, and involve it more and more in cross purposes. I am willing to confess and make all clear, if I have your word, Mr. Shears—"
"Mears—Mears."
"I beg your pardon. If I have your word, before these gentlemen of the police, that I shall be let free and made evidence against my accomplices."
"Accomplices?" said Louis.
"Yes; accomplices."
"Kill him!" gasped John—"kill him! Pour melted lead and copper down his throat!"
Nagle put on a look of candor.
"Gentlemen all, and you, Mr. Mears, in particular. I may say that John Long and I are old friends—very old friends. He is not particular what he buys that is not too large to go into the melting-pot. So, you see, we transact business together. Well, that is neither here nor there, as the saying is. Yesterday, we had a chat together. 'My dear Nagle,' he said, 'those people, Mears, the jewelers, have a diamond—a very valuable diamond. They have bought it of Giles Hilton; but how he came by it, I don't know. Come, my dear Nagle,' he said, 'advise me. Do you think you could get into their house in the night, and make a good job in the way of a robbery? I want the diamond—that one diamond—as my share, and you can have all else you can lay your hands on. I will help you, my dear Nagle, and dispose of the stolen property for you.'"

Old John Long, as Nagle spoke, slowly opened his mouth wider and wider; and Louis listened with painful interest.

Nagle continued:
"'No,' said I; 'my dear John, no. 'I have given up all such ideas. I won't do it.' Well, gent, he tried to persuade me, but I was inflexible; and then, all of a sudden, he said: 'I have it—I have it! Louis and I will manage it. He will make a sham diamond, and I will go to Messrs. the jewelers, and change it for the real one. You wait outside for me, my dear Nagle, so that, if I am pursued, you can assist me, and I will, in such a case, pass over the diamond to you, and we can meet at night and share the spoil.'"

John's mouth opened wider still.
"Well, gent, that was agreed; and this young man, Louis, distinctly knew of the whole affair, and worked as hard as he could to get this sham diamond made, under direction of his father, to look as like the real one as possible."
"False! oh! so false! I' cried Louis.
"Why?" said Mr. Mears, "you just now owned that you cut and fashioned this bit of glass."
"I did, but with no guilty knowledge or intent. I knew not what it was meant for, or for whom or for what object."
"Oh dear me!" said Nagle. "Well, well, of course, of course. He is not likely to admit it? Who would? who would?"
"You are a fearful villain, John Nagle," said Louis; "and you know that you are bearing false witness. Beware!"

"There! there!" cried Nagle. He is threatening me now; you all hear that!"
"It was of Heaven, I thought," said Louis. "Your retribution will come from there."
"Go on, go on!" cried Mr. Mears. "Let me hear all."
"I will, sir. Old John was successful. He did change the jewel at your shop, and I protected him all the way home; and then there was great excitement among us all—that is, the old man, Louis, and that young girl there."

THE BROKER'S WARD; OR,
"The—the—a young lady?" said Mr. Mears.

To be sure: she is mixed up with them all. It was arranged that I should come here tonight to get my share of plunder, which John Long was to give me, in the shape of goods of value from his shop. I have some about me now—there, and there, and there."

He took from his pockets some of the small packets of valuables he had hastily stolen, after striking John Long to the floor.

"Now, I have told you all," he added, "and I know it won't be the worse for me."

As he spoke he darted a malignant glance at Louis and muttered.

"I am avenged, now!"

"But my diamond," said Mr. Mears. "The real diamond—where is that?"

"Oh! John has it."

Mears was perfectly convinced that he was right in his conjectures that John had the diamond. The whole case was now quite clear to his perceptions; but amid the mixed web of truth and falsehood that he uttered, he still kept to himself the secret of Giles Hilton's possession of the jewel in the way that only he (Nagle) and Giles Hilton knew he had acquired it.

If he (Nagle) could only still establish Giles's right, or apparent right, to the jewel, who could still cry shares with him but he (Nagle)?

And now, as old John writhed, and shrieked, and groaned under the process, the officers searched him, and one held up the real diamond, which he took from his pocket, saying.

"What is this?"

Mr. Mears clapped his hands together with delight. One glance of his well-practised eyes was enough! There could be no mistake. The diamond that had glittered with such beauty in his eyes, at his shop, was once more sparkling with glory in the light of the police lanterns, and diffusing its prismatic rays about it.

"Mine! mine!" he cried. "It is the diamond! It is the jewel, once more! Oh! yes; I'd know it among a thousand! Ah! I breathe again. That is the diamond! O John Long! John Long! you old villain!"

"Louis, dear," said Blanche, "what is the meaning of it all?"

"Indeed I cannot tell you, Blanche. I only gather knowledge bit by bit, and that so succeeded by surprises and conjectures, that I cannot say what is imagination and what is fact."

Mr. Mears, now, was getting sentimental, and, as he held the much-coveted, much-contested diamond aloft, the tears stood in his eyes and he reproached John Long.

"John! John! I was it for this our firm took you as an apprentice, without a premium, and paid you no wages for the whole seven years, to make up for it? Was it for this we employed you as a journeyman while your strength and clear sight lasted? Ungrateful man, and now you rob us—now you come, like a thief in the night—and rob us. Oh! oh! is there no gratitude in the world?"

Then John—not that he was affected by the reproaches of Mr. Mears; not that he saw danger alighting upon the head of the innocent Louis; but because he saw his cherished dream of riches melting away—flung himself bodily to the floor, and beat his head against the old knotty boards and yelled and screamed with passion.

The sight was an awful one to see. It lasted but a few brief moments, and then the old man, with all his rage, all his hurts, all his excitement, and all his despair, fainted, and lay still as death.

"He has done it, now," said one of the officers.

"Of course he has," said Nagle. "You see in all this, gents, only a confirmation of what I have said. It's a wicked world—a very wicked world. I hope that, Mr. Mears you will keep your promise to me."

"Promise? What promise?"

"To hold me harmless if I told you all."

"Did I say so?"

"To be sure, sir, you did; and have you not got back the diamond all in consequence?"

"There is something in that," said Mr. Mears.

"Well, well, I have nothing to say to you, but these Longs, father and son, I give into your charge, Mr. Constable, for the robbery of the diamond."

"All's right, sir!"

"Hold, yet a moment, Mr. Mears," said Louis, and there was a heaving of the chest and a flush upon his face as he spoke. "Yet a moment, sir. It is true, for I myself, as you must recollect, declared it to you, that I made that mock diamond which you have produced here, and made it so recently, too, that I was able to recognize it at arm's length at once; but I made it in perfect innocence—having no sort of notion of the use it was to be put to."

"Oh! that's very likely, indeed," said Mr. Mears. "You can say that to a magistrate, if you like; but, so far as I am concerned, the—a—the a—interests of society—the a—my duty, sir, compels me to give you in charge along with your father."

"Quite right, sir," said Nagle.

"No, no!" cried Blanche, springing forward and clasping Mr. Mears by the arm. "You will not—you cannot!"

"My dear young lady, without knowing in the least who you are—"

"Blanche Ratcliff, sir."

"Oh! well, I'm very sorry, but I must do my duty to society."

"But, sir, that is Louis! You see that is Louis, and he is so good, so kind, so noble, so generous, and unselfish in all he does, that it is not possible he can be guilty. Oh! sir, you do not know him!"
"Ah, my dear," said Nagle, with an affected sigh, "it is you who do not know him."

Blanche turned at once and fixed her eyes on the ruffian.

"But I know you," she said. "I know you're the bad man who, with affected friendly words, waylaid me in the streets and persuaded me you would take me to my father. You are the man, then, who, by threats and evil words, tried to terrify me. You are the man who would have made a prisoner of me, but that I was rescued from you by Louis. Ah! yes, I see it now. It is revenge. Louis conquered you, and this is your revenge!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Nagle. "I advise you, Mr. Mears, to give the young lady in charge, likewise."

"No! no!" cried Louis.

"Oh yes, Louis! With you—with you ever! O father! father, where are you now?"

"Come, come," said Mr. Mears. "I cannot stay here all night. Take your prisoners, constables."

The police officers approached old John Long. They lifted him into the chair again; and then the affrighted chemist, who had run into the shop, came back again, and looked at the old man attentively.

"You may remove him," he said, "if you please, but his death will be on your hands."

"His death?"

"Yes. He may recover here, but if you take him away he will die in your hands."

The constables looked at each other in a doubting manner, and then one said:

"Oh! it has been done before. One of us will stay in the house."

"Very well," said Mr. Mears, who, in the possession of the diamond, was abundantly satisfied.

"Let it be so. We are Christians, I hope. The young man you can take away, and as soon as the magistrates are sitting I will appear against him and procure the release of—dear me!—that much-injured gentleman, Mr. Giles Hilton."

The officers laid hold of Louis, and amid the cries and shrieks of poor Blanche, they tore him away. Nagle made a kind of circular bow to the whole party, and then darted into the street.

The first faint light of the morning dawned in the eastern sky, and Louis, pale and sorrowful, was marched off to a prison, leaving behind him all he loved on earth—his own dear Blanche!

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW EXPLANATIONS.

It will be recollected that Louis, on the occasion of visiting the fashionable hotel for the purpose of releasing the property of Blanche and her father by paying the bill that had been incurred, had arrived just in time to witness the catastrophe of Giles Hilton's fortunes; and it will be remembered that the large heart of poor Louis forgot all other circumstances but its own generous dictates, and he had somewhat indiscreetly offered protection to Mrs. Hilton and the two children.

With Mr. Ratcliff's two boxes outside the coach, and Blanche's smaller one within, and with Mrs. Hilton and little Luke and Mary, Louis had quite a party; and it was not until they were all very near Spitalfields that the utter hopelessness of ever persuading old John to allow Mrs. Hilton and her children a refuge in his house came over him.

The pained expression of his countenance was apparent enough to Mrs. Hilton; so she laid her hand upon his arm and spoke to him very gently and sadly:

"Mr. Louis," she said, "I know well how good and how kind you want to be, for I have experienced all that before; but I will spare you much pain by what I am going to say to you."

"What is it?" said poor Louis, faintly, although he had a good guess of what it was.

"Your wish to aid me exceeds your means, and I would not subject you to—to what would vex you—your father, Louis."

"It is useless concealing it," said Louis. "If I had a home of my own to offer you, I would gladly ask you across its threshold, but as it is, I fear I must think of some other way of providing for you."

"There is a poor family of the name of Witham," said Mrs. Hilton, "and I am sure that, just for a day or two, they will let me and the children stay with them."

"I know them. They live in the old wooden house by the ditch."

"Yes—yes. O Louis! O Mr. Louis! O my dear children! Look! look!"

"What is it, Mrs. Hilton?"

"The charred and blackened ruins of our cottage. Oh, what a desolation!"

The coach was passing the still smouldering heap of ruins that had once been the cottage of the Hilton family; and circling round and round in airy circles far above the heat and the smoke, was a pavement.

Mrs. Hilton hung her head and wept.

"Come, come," said Louis, "be comforted. I wish that you would explain to me what seems to me so inexplicable in all this affair. What is all this talk and turmoil about a diamond, in which Giles Hilton is concerned?"

"I will tell you, Louis. Giles found not far from the threshold of our old home—the blackened, smoking ruins of which you see there—a small bag with some money and a diamond."

"Indeed!"

"But, Mr. Louis—O Mr. Louis! it is his secret—the secret, perhaps, of his life, now. I cannot help telling you all; but you will not use the knowledge to his prejudice—you will not?"
"I assuredly will not. Pray go on."
"I implored him not to think of the bag and its contents as a possession; but he would not listen to me. He spent the money, and he sold, I fancy, the diamond to these people, who, it seems, too late, have found out that it is but a mock jewel."
"And that is all?"
"Yes, yes—that is all, Mr. Louis."
"It is very strange."

Louis was lost in thought for a few minutes; and it seemed to him as if he were continually upon the point of getting the clue to something that would unravel all the mystery—that in some obscure and strange way he and Blanche would be found connected with it; but as often as he thought his mind was closing upon the subject, it eluded him, as the recollection of a proper name of a place or person will do, and which seems to frolic through the brain, refusing to be fixed sufficiently long to be recognized.

"No, no," he said, with a sigh.
"No, Mr. Louis?"
"I cannot make it all out, yet, but time will unravel the affair. I hope the matter will not prove very serious to Giles Hilton, and that the proper owner of the jewel will be found. He may then, with the power to be so, prove merciful."

Heaven send it may be so!"

And this was all that Louis knew of the story of the diamond up to then, for the vague words that had been uttered to Mrs. Hilton by the villain Nagle, just previous to the arrival of Giles in custody, had, at first, made but a faint impression upon her, and had, by subsequent events, been nearly obliterated from her memory.

Mrs. Hilton had now but one predominant idea. That was, to get her children to some place of temporary rest, and then to seek the place of confinement of her husband, and solicit leave to share with him whatever might betide.

Louis safely lodged her with the poor weaver's family in the "wooden house by the ditch," and he left her what spare change he had out of the money he had taken to the hotel; and then he reached John Long's house with Blanche's and her father's boxes.

"O, you good Louis!" said Blanche, as she placed her hands upon his shoulders, and let her fair face rest upon his breast—"you dear, good Louis! tell me—have they heard anything of my poor father?"

"Nothing, dear—nothing."

Blanche sighed deeply.
"Now," added Louis, "you must be brave."
"Brave, Louis?"

"Yes, Blanche. Your father has disappeared; and owing to your being at school, away from him so long, you have no notion of who his friends or connections in England may be."

"Not the least, Louis."
"Then that is why I tell you you must be brave, and open these boxes and look over their contents, like a heroine."
"Oh, no—no!"
"Come, dear Blanche, you will try."
"You say I ought, Louis?"
"I do, indeed."
"Then I ought."
"And you will?"
"You helping me, dear Louis."
"If you wish me so to do; but I feel that it is a sacred duty that you yourself have to perform, Blanche, in order that you may seek for some clue to your lost father."
"It is so—it is so, and I will do it; I will try to do it, Louis. The boxes are locked?"
"They are. You, of course, have no keys?"
"No, no."
"Then I will, with your permission, open them for you, Blanche."

Louis soon forced the two locks, and the boxes, with their contents, were at the disposal of Blanche. Louis then kissed her little, soft hands, as he said:

"I leave you alone, dear, with these relics of your dear father. I will come back to you, soon."

And now Blanche was alone, and her eyes filled with tears which she could not control, as she removed, article by article, the contents of one of the boxes; and as each one seemed to speak, as if with an audible voice, of that father she feared she should never see more, the feelings, the new, young grief of the sensitive-hearted girl overcame her, and she sobbed aloud.

"No, no! I cannot—I cannot go through this search, now; it breaks my heart—it breaks my heart!"

Louis, who had been lingering by the door, was by her side in a moment.

"Dear Blanche, cease, then, for the present. To-morrow—to-morrow—let it be to-morrow!"

"Yes, to-morrow," she said, faintly; and she sobbed herself to composure on Louis' breast. And so it was that the fate of Mr. Ratcliffe remained a mystery to all but Giles Hilton and John Nagle.

And the day wore on, and the night came, and then all those events which we have recorded, and which terminated in the arrest of Louis and the despair of Blanche.

And the triumph of Nagle—yes, the triumph of Nagle—for a time!

And in a cell—a cell, the high-grated window of which admitted but a melancholy ray of light, for it looked into a narrow yard, lay Giles Hilton!

Giles, the poor Spitalfields weaver—poorer now than he had ever been in his little cottage with his loving wife and his dear children about him; for although more than once the period of
poverty and depression for want of work had come, it had passed away like the sterile and grim winter, and the summer and the sunshine of honest prosperity had come again.

When would the winter of his present position pass away? What summer could ever come again to him?

As if dead. His poor heart was nearly dead—he lay in that narrow cell—without movement—without sighs—without tears. The magistrate had ceased his sittings for the day, and all the night that was coming—that strange, eventful night which had witnessed such mental shocks and untoward events at John Long's house—all that night that was coming, Giles would have to lie in that cell and think, and think, until thought was madness.

His wife—his Emmy. He saw her now as the fair young girl who had won his heart when he, a mere lad, first felt what it was to let the flattering tyrant find a home in his heart. He saw her "in his mind's eye" wayward a little, smiling a little, gentle, yet with a prettiness so scornsful, listening to his love. He saw her with all the homely finery of the poor weaver's bride at the altar, placing her hand in his, and looking in his eyes with that love inestimable that can be felt and seen, but not described. He saw her when first she held to her heart her little one; and again he heard the soft, faint voice which told him she had looked into the eyes of her own babe, and she had called it "a gift from God!"

Through storm and sunshine—through prosperity and want, she had clung to him, and now—now, where was she now? He in prison, and she an outcast—a beggar—a thing to be shunned and hustled in the public streets. His children trodden down, perhaps, in the rude jostle of the seafish mob.

He could bear the picture no longer. With a cry he sprang to his feet. He rushed to his cell-door. He bent at it with his fists till the blood trickled from them. He raved and shrieked.

"Out! out! out! I must go out! My wife!—my children! Out! out! out! I cannot stay! I cannot stay! Out! out! out!"

The heavy blows resounded against the door. Human flesh against wood and iron.

"Out! out! out! Mercy! In mercy let me out! Are you men or beasts? Out to my wife and children. I cannot, must not stay!"

There was a man sitting smoking a short pipe just outside the cell-door; and after Giles Hilton had beaten at the solid oak for awhile, the solid oak of that man's heart took cognizance of the fact.

"Ah," he said, as he shook the ashes from his pipe. That's what I call a rumpus!"

Then there was a heavy fall, and Giles Hilton lay insensible in the cell.

Poor heart! Poor heart! Peace, peace, now for awhile. You have expiated your fault surely now! Let gentle visions visit the slumbering brain. Pitying spirits hover around that battling soul! Rest, Giles Hilton. Rest! Rest! Rest!

It is past midnight—long past midnight. The fair spring morning in blushing beauty gilds the topmost spires of the great city, and the cell-door of Giles Hilton's prison opens.

"Hoi! hoi! Hilton!"

The weary man opens his eyes.

"Ah! well."

For a moment the dream from which he had been aroused was with him; but soon, too soon, the world had him back again.

"Are you awake?"

"Yes. God, yes!"

"Oh, very good. Here's your wife come to see you."

"Who? Wife? My wife—my Emmy?"

"Giles. Giles! my own Giles!"

His wife was in his arms—close to his breast—sobbing—crying to him—speaking faintly, and telling him that ever and ever she was his own loving Emmy.

He did not speak, but he clasped his arm about her and trembled excessively.

"Well," said the man who had charge of the cells, and who had given utterance to his feelings during the night. "Well, that's what I calls affecting, and I'll go and have a pint of beer."

The cell-door was closed and locked. They were alone.

Alone, all but the invisible throng of pitying angels, who could not but be there to welcome the expressions of pure affection from those two hearts, and to catch some of the glistening tears as fit offerings at the crystal altar of heaven!

And now it was the wife—the "weaker vessel," who was the comforter, and who was the strong, courageous heart; and she controlled her tears and strove to speak hopefully and cheerfully.

"Giles, dear Giles, all will yet be well. It was an error—an error of judgment, you know; and you will say so, and I will say so, and you will be forgiven, dear Giles. You could not know that the jewel was false? What should we know of such matters, dear Giles?"

"O Emmy—Emmy!"

"Yes, Giles, all is well."

"Our dear ones—our children?

"So well and so happy!"

"Where?"

"At poor, dear Mrs. Mathews—you know old wooden house, Giles?"

"Yes—yes. God be thanked."

"Amen! amen! always thanked, Giles."

"Yes, always. Wet—wet—you are so wet. Emmy!"

"It—has—been—a—rather wet night."
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEXT MORNING AT SPITALFIELDS.

It was no part of Mr. Nagle's idea to become at all prominent in the affair of the diamond. Sufficient for him was the impunity of the moment. Not only had he escaped detection in his burglarious attempt on John Long's house and property, but he was having his revenge.

Further association with the "gents," as he called them, who had accompanied Mr. Mears to Spitalfields, might be tempting fortune too far. Some one might probably recognize the convict who ought to be at the antipodes of Spitalfields, and might be anxious to know by what process he came to be in his present latitude.

Decidedly, a retiring policy was the only one that befitted Mr. Nagle's condition.

He adopted it at once.

And in the conflict consequent upon the proceedings at John Long's house, Nagle had not thought proper entirely to empty his pockets of their contents; therefore, by a rare good fortune, he walked quietly away with much of the plunder of the old lapidary.

To be sure, he had promised Mr. Mears to forthcoming when required; and on the head of a probable reward from that gentleman, Nagle had said that he would be at the shop at the west end of the town by an early hour; and Mr. Mears had not thought it necessary to retain him in custody, and the officers were indifferent about it.

In fact, the jeweler, now that he had recovered his diamond, felt a disposition to hush the affair up, and make as little noise about it as possible.

The affair looked altogether awkward, and did not redound to his credit or cleverness. He had given the wrong man, as he thought—Giles Hilton, namely—into custody; he had very foolishly paraded the diamond to old John Long, and still more foolishly permitted him to steal it before his very eyes.

"Well, well," said Mr. Mears to himself, "the less, now, that is said about the affair the better, only I suppose I must prosecute these Longs, both father and son."

It was in this mood, then, that Mr. Mears went home. By the earliest hour, however, that he could do so, he fully intended to make the amende honorable to Giles Hilton and procure his release.

Little did poor Giles and his wife suppose that in the mind of their prosecutor so very favorable a change was taking place.

But we will take our crowd of events in due order as we can; and we must now repair again to the lapidary's house, on which the sunshine of the new day was sweetly glistening.

John had passed a bad night. He was not struck to the death; but the injuries he had received in the scuffle with Nagle, and the blows he had struck himself in his rage, when he dashed his head against the floor, and the mental irritation and shocks he had received, all combined, placed the old man in a precarious condition.

When the dawn shone into the room in which old John lay, he opened his eyes and groaned aloud; and then some one said:

"Hilloa!"

Then John saw that in an arm-chair by his bedside there reclined a man; and as memory came back to him, he knew that that man was the officer of police who had been left behind to hold him in custody, and to remove him when he should be better able to be removed to a prison.

The old lapidary groaned again.

"What's the matter now?" said the officer.

"I am dying!"

"You don't mean that?"

"I do, I do. I am a dying man.

"Well, that is not at all handsome for you. You ought to live over your trial."

"Yah! Bo!"

"Oh! you're not so bad as you think. I shall be able to take you to the lock-up to-day."

"No you won't. I can't move, I can't see. I can't eat, drink, and hardly speak; but I will tell you all I know, and I will pay something to settle the affair."

The officer shook his head.

"It won't do. Your accomplice has turned evidence, and the prosecution has acquitted him."

"My accomplice? What accomplice?"

"That fellow with the big whiskers and top-boots."

Old John uttered a snarling kind of howl. Up to that moment he had forgotten Nagle and his share in the business; and now to be told that he was his accomplice, was too much.

"The rat! the rat!" he groaned. "The villain! the rat!"

"Eh?"

"No, no! I will tell you. It is of no use to conceal it now. I will tell you."
"Well, it ain't of much use, I admit, because you see, he has told all!"

"He? He? The villain knows nothing to tell. He is a thief, a housebreaker, a convict, John Nagle—I know him well!"

"So he says."

"No, no! not as he says. I do not know him as he says. He broke into this house last night, intent on plunder. That was the first I had seen of him for years. He struck me down, and then came all the confusion that I can scarcely yet comprehend. That I took the diamond, I admit."

"From Mr. Mears?"

"Yes; from Mr. Mears."

"Well, I must repeat that."

"You may."

"And your son helped, by making it for you?"

"My son?"

"The young fellow that was walked off in custody of my mates, last night, and who admitted that he cut the sham diamond."

"Ah! Is that it?" said John; and this being a new bit of information to him, he came to the conclusion that he did not as yet recollect one half that had taken place on the previous evening. He reflected for a few moments; and then, as he did not see that it would do him the remotest good for Louis to be in custody, or in any way compounded in the affair, he spoke the truth as regarded him.

"No," he said; "he is innocent! He knew nothing of it."

"But he said he made the sham diamond."

"Yes, at my request. It is his trade—a lapidary—but he knows nothing of it guiltily. He knew nothing of either the real diamond or the sham one, except making and fashioning the latter as I told him."

"Well, I hope it may turn out so. He seems a decent enough young chap, and if it was only for the sake of your daughter, say one would wish to see the young fellow clear."

"My daughter?"

"Yes, and a real beauty she is, too. My gracious! what eyes! I suppose you are pretty proud of her, old un?"

"Oh! ah! my daughter. What good—what good can it do Mears to prosecute an old man like me? what good—what good? He has got his diamond and he had better keep it. The more inquiry there is, the more danger there is. Giles Hilton! ha! ha! The poor weaver. His wife sold her wedding-ring for four shillings, and one of them a bad one. Ha! ha! He, the possessor of a diamond worth a hundred thousand pounds. Bah! bo! I see it, now; how it flashes—flashes in the sunlight? Now that corner of it has become a ruby, and that an emerald. Bursting rays stream from it. It collects fire, and changes it by its own alchemy to precious gems. Give it to me—give it to me! I have it now—deep, deep in this pocket! Oh! beautiful jewel! Beautiful jewel!"

"Why, he's cracked," said the officer.

John tossed wildly to and fro in the bed, and each moment the fever fire burned brighter on his cheek.

It was then that a carriage stopped abruptly at the door of the old house of the lapidary, and that the same quiet-looking, handsome, gentlemanly man, who had appeared at the jeweler's at the west end, and who was named Colonel Franklin, alighted.

John Long's shop had not been opened on that morning, for there was no one to do that duty since Louis was away; and Colonel Franklin looked up and down the dilapidated house for a few moments, in doubt as to whether he had reached the right place or not.

A lad who was carrying a basket ran up.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that's John Long's."

A previous inquiry had been made of this boy some dozen doors off, and he saw the hat of the colonel.

"Thank you; but the place seems shut up and deserted."

The boy kicked at the door; and, after a time, Mrs. Mills crept down stairs and opened it.

"Sir?"

"John Long? I wish to see him. I think he expects me."

Mrs. Mills shook her head.

"What has happened? I am not baffled by death, am I?"

"He's very bad, sir, and in bed."

"I must see him."

Colonel Franklin stopped across the threshold of the house, and then the officer made his appearance, saying:

"What is it, eh?"

"I want to see John Long, the lapidary."

The gentlemanly appearance of Colonel Franklin was mentally admitted by the officer at a glance, and the words, "Who may you be?" died away upon his lips, giving place to:

"There's no objection to a gent seeing him, sir, but he ain't in his right mind."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps you don't know, sir, that there's been a row here, and all that sort of thing, and that the old gent is in custody, and the young un in prison."

"Indeed, I do not. I am ignorant of all that you speak of. My errand with John Long is to get from him some particulars of events which happened seventeen years ago, and of which he must know more than any one else. My name is Franklin."

"Franklin!" exclaimed Mrs. Mills, who was standing by, and listening to this little dialogue between the colonel and the police-officer.

"Have you heard that name ever from John Long?" said the colonel, eagerly.

"No, sir; but I have seen it."
BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.

"Seen it? How do you mean?"

"The name of F. Franklin is on a quantity of infant's clothing that is hidden in this house."

"Hidden?"

"Yes, sir; in the bottom of an old press or bureau that Mr. Long has in his own room. I say hidden, because there is a piece of board exactly the size of the bottom of the bureau which covers them up, and it was only by accident that one day I found it unlocked, and took out the drawers to dust them, that I saw the piece of wood was loose."

"I thank you from my heart," said the colonel, "and will speak with you again. I pray you to permit me now to see John Long. I fear—I fear—"

"What, sir? Oh! what, sir?"

"I cannot shape my fear yet to my imagination; but there has surely been foul play somewhere."

"This way, sir," said the officer. "The old gent is up stairs."

Mrs. Mills was thrown into a state of great agitation by this visit of Colonel Franklin, connected as it now was in her mind with the secreted infant's clothing she had discovered in the old cabinet, and of which she had never spoken to any one but to John once, when he had fallen into such a fit of rage that she had never dared to speak of the occurrence again.

The officer conducted Colonel Franklin to John Long's room; and there was the old man, tossing his arms about, and glaring wildly around him, in all the delirium of fever which the pain and the excitement of the past might have brought on.

"Yes," said Colonel Franklin, "this is the man. This is John Long, who was pointed out to me by Mr. Mears, the jeweler."

"That's the old gent, sir."

"It is mine," murmured John. "I tell you it is mine—a hundred thousand pounds—all in new, bright shining pieces. I want to see them piled up before me. I want to see the air take a yellow tinge as it nestles over them. Help! Oh, the villain, Nagle. Help, I say! A rat! A rat—surely a rat?"

"That's how he goes on," said the officer.

"I will speak to him. John Long! John Long!"

"Eh? Eh?"

"John Long!"

"Perhaps, sir," said the officer, "you don't want me. It's a very private affair, sir."

"Not a bit; not a bit. Pray, stay. I would rather you would, as I may want your help."

"Very good, sir."

"John Long, I say! Do you hear me, John Long!"

The old man glared at the colonel, and then he spoke:

"Dead! dead! They are coming, are they? Dead! dead! Free of that! Free of that!"

He shook his chest as he spoke, and turned aside, as if with a desire to avoid the eyes of the colonel.

"Listen to me, John Long. Without a thought, and without as yet an idea of accusing you of anything, I come to you for information. Try and collect your senses to answer me. Don't you remember that I saw you at Burt's, the jeweler's, and they told me you were the man who, seventeen years ago, went with my brother, Mr. Felix Franklin, to Southampton?"

John uttered a cry.

"Oh, you do remember."


"I know nothing of your diamond; but you shall answer me, John Long. I ask you now if you do not remember Felix Franklin, and an expedition to Southampton, to select jewels for him from one Bartholody?"

John raised himself up in the bed, and with his long, shivered hand he pointed at the colonel, as, with a hideous laugh, he cried:

"I know you now. I know you now."

"You know me?"

"Yes! You are late in coming, and the "Isabella Forbes" is in full sail for the Solent. The breeze blows freshly, and the foam-track follows her. Too late! Too late! I know you now."

"And who am I?"

"Mr. Felix Franklin."

"Indeed?"

"Yes! You have bought the gems of Bartholody, and he has used you fairly. Why do you come now to vex me, and I so full of trouble? Go—go—go!"

"I do not want to vex you, John L. But I want you to tell me all you know."

"All I know?"

"Yes; and freely. It shall benefit you. I am rich."

"I know that. But what do I know that you know not? How did you get up again from sand and weed? That is very strange!"

"Is it so?"

"Yes. Let me feel your hand."

"There, John Long."

"It feels like life. Well, I am glad o't. I am very glad of it now; for with my diamond—it is worth one hundred thousand pounds, all piled up in glittering heaps—oh, what a sight for human eyes!—with my diamond, I say I do not want your brilliants and rubies: those you bought of Bartholody, I mean. A thousand pounds worth. They made a fair show, but what are they to my diamond?"

"John Long, you believe me to be Mr. Felix Franklin?"

"Believe? Believe? I know it. Where is the fair and gentle wife? The mild, smiling wife. I think I see her now. Where is she?"
"Ay, where is she, John Long?"
"Deepen in the old sea-weed, say you? Washed off, and way away into some of the old cavernous tidal recesses where creatures live who never see the daylight of the upper world. Is the little one resting on her breast? Where are they? You are in life, or seemingly in life. Where are they?"
"What does he mean, sir?" said the officer.
"Hush! hush! John Long, it is said that you have on your soul a load of guilt, and that its heaviest portion is that which concerns Mr. Felix Franklin, his wife and his child. Can you say anything which will lift some of that load off you?"
"What? what? It is false!"
"Tell me freely all you know. Tell me what became of the three living persons whom you must have last seen at Southampton seventeen years ago, for they have never been heard of since."
"I have naught to tell."
"You have, John Long. It is the only restitution you can make."
"Restitution? That means giving back. Never! never! I am rich, now. Oh, so rich!"
"Then you must come with me."
Colonel Franklin spoke sharply and abruptly, and laid his hand upon John’s arm. The old man shrieked with terror.
"No, no! not to the sea-deptths—no, no! Spare me! Why should I?"
"Tell me all, then."
"I will—I will. Let me think. I will try to think. You do not want to take my diamond from me, sir? If you do, I shall go mad."
"No, I do not."
"That is well. Let me see—let me see. How hot I am! There is surely a fire in my brain. Felix Franklin, the wife—the gentle, mild-spoken wife—and the babe. Bartholomew wanted more for the diamond collet, but I interfered, and it was well sold, even then; and the ship sped her way with the tide down the Southampton water. Too late—they were too late."
"Who?"
"Mr. Franklin, the wife, and the babe. They said it was then only one year old. Making all sail, a favoring breeze, the ship sped on her way; and then the chaise dashed onward by the line of shore, past the old abbey ruins, and on, on, still, till the castle—that was Colisiot—was seen, cold and gray, in the midst of the winter-trees. And we hailed the ship, and she shortened sail, and only stood off and on; and the fisher-boy got his boat in readiness, and they went away—the husband, the wife, and the babe, and the "Isabella Forbes" grew more and more indistinct, and to all appearance swept over from the south, and sea, and air, and water, and castle, and ship, and boat, all vanished—vanished as in the clouds."

"Go on! Oh, go on!"
"Yes; and there I stood. The water laved my feet; and I heard a cry—a cry through the murk air—and the fog still thickened, and the wind rolled it in toward the shore from the misty channel, and something dashed on to the shingle. It was the fisher-boy’s boat; and then a something else came to my feet. It was the large, leather portmanteau in which the jewels were; and the boat rolled over, over, and over, and something white and fluttering hung by it. That was the babe—the one-year old babe. The father and the mother had gone, hand in hand, heart to heart, to the waving sea-weed—deep down; but the babe was saved, and the leather trunk; and the fisher-boy went to deepsea fishing—ha, ha!—where he was caught instead of catching—ha! Well, what would you? what would you?"

"More! more, John Long. What then?"
"Eh?"
"What then? I ask."
John uttered a cry, and fixed his eyes on vacancy.
"There! there! there! Well, do not look so sternly upon me, I am neither the mist, nor the wind, nor the sea. I did not do it."
"The child, John Long?"
"The jewels! the rubies!"
"Heed them not. The babe—the little one?"
"The diamond collet."
"No, no! keep them; do what you will with them, but tell me of my brother’s child. I can understand it all, now, but you said the infant breathed—lived. Lives it now? Speak to me, and tell me that."
"He’s gone, sir," said the officer.
"Dead?"
"Well—no, sir; but it’s a sort of a faint, a fancy. I don’t think he will last long, sir. Hilo! Mrs. Mills! Mrs. Mills!"
"Yes, yes," said poor Mrs. Mills, who had been on the landing. "Yes, I am here."
"The old man is worse."
"Attend to him, I pray you," said Colonel Franklin, in a voice of deep emotion. "I think I have heard some of the story I wanted to learn, but not all. I would fain speak with you when you can come to me. Where shall I wait for you?"

If you will step into that room, sir, along the passage, I will come to you. There is only poor, dear Miss Blanche Ratcliffe there. She has lost her father, sir; and now that our Louis is gone, it is so—so very sad!"

Mrs. Mills sobbed aloud; and Colonel Franklin, with his own feelings greatly excited by the narration he had heard from John respecting his brother’s fate, took the route indicated to him by Mrs. Mills, and entered the room that was immediately above the shop.
CHAPTER XVI.

MR. NAGLE VISITS BLANCHE RATCLIFF.

So absorbed had been Colonel Franklin with a consideration of the words which he had uttered by John Long—words which referred so pointedly to the fate of his brother Felix and his family, that although he had certainly heard Mrs. Mills say, that there was "Miss Ratcliff"— or "only Miss Ratcliff"—in the room to which she requested him to go, the sound had reached his ears without the sense of the words.

It was rather abruptly, then, and full of his own sad and anxious thoughts, that Colonel Franklin entered the room, which was that same one in which several interviews had taken place between Blanche and Louis.

Indeed, it was the only room up-stairs which could be made at all comfortable, with the exception of old John Long's own bed-room, from which the colonel had just come, so full of thought.

Poor Blanche! who, in her quiet home-life at school in the Isle of Wight, could never have believed that what might be called the outside world was half so full of disturbing influences as she had found crowded into a few days, was half-sitting, half reclining on a couch, and had very nearly sobbed herself to sleep.

That Louis could possibly be guilty of anything to which a shadow of blame could be attached, was an idea she did not entertain for a moment; and yet she had seen him borne away from her and from his home on a serious charge, and she could do nothing to help him.

Again and again had she asked herself if it were possible, by any effort or by any sacrifice of her own, to afford him aid; but the more she thought and the more she strove to bring her limited experiences into the consideration, the more confused and helpless she felt that she became.

At length, she dropped off into a disturbed half-sleep. Youth will claim its dues of rest; and her last idea was, that so soon as it was daylight enough, she would make an appeal to John Long, in favor of Louis; for she felt certain that, however guilty John might be, Louis was an innocent agent in his hands.

But the sleep of Blanche was very light, and it was disturbed by the abrupt entrance of Colonel Franklin, and she started and looked at him with surprise.

"I know not how to excuse myself. I was told to walk into this room, I thought; but I must have been mistaken. Pray, excuse me."

There was that kind, patient, and thoughtful look about the countenance of Colonel Franklin which always set him at once with the young; and Blanche, at a glance, seemed to feel instinctively that she was in the presence of a friend. Ah! how much she wanted a friend at that time! How much for Louis's sake, she wanted such a friend as Colonel Franklin might become.

"No sir," she said. "You are no doubt quite right in coming into the room; and it is I who, I fear, am in your way."

"Nay, nay. Do not go. Will you think me very rude if, not knowing you, I ask you a question?"

"Oh no—no."

"I will then ask it, but I will introduce myself first, if you please, that you may know your interrogator. I am an American, attached to the embassy of my country, here in London, and my name is Franklin. Now, what I want to ask you is—if you are John Long's daughter?"

"Oh no—no."

"You say that no, in a tone which encourages me. Are you any relation?"

"Certainly not. I am but a poor—very poor girl, I fear. I have lost my father."

Colonel Franklin bowed low, for he misunderstood the phrase; and as Blanche paused, he said, gently:

"All who live must die, passing through nature to eternity."

"Oh no—no! cried Blanche. Leave me hope, dear sir. Although lost, I cannot quite believe that my father is—is dead."

"Pray, pardon me."

"When I said lost, I meant lost. He left me only for a few hours at a hotel, but he came back; and then Louis—dear Louis—brought me here, because I was quite without a home—without a friend in all the world beside."

"Louis—John Long's son? I heard speak of him in the other room."

"Yes sir. John Long's son. But oh! to think that my Louis—that is—that he should have such a father. But I tire you, sir."

"No. On the contrary, you interest me greatly. You are listening. What is it that attracts your attention?"

Blanche sprang completely to her feet.

"You are alarmed."

"His voice—Nagle!" she said. "I know his voice. Oh sir; I am so glad!—"

"Glad of what?"

She moved gently to his side, and placed one hand gently on the colonel's arm.

"Glad sir, that you are here. He is a bad man; sir; and he accused Louis; and he is so wicked as any man can surely be. I fear him. He is holding some altercation with some one. I know his footsteps. He comes here. Sir—sir—you will not?—"

"Be calm; you are quite safe."

The quiet tone and the assured smile of Colonel Franklin completely restored the composure of Blanche.

"This man, you say, accursed your friend Louis, and you seem to dread him. Do you think his visit is to you, on this occasion?"

"O yes—yes. It is some new wickedness.
He threatens me as if he knew something which would be joy for me to know, and yet he tells me not, but persecutes those whom I love. He is a bad man."

"If I tell you, I must and will see her!" cried the voice of Nagle, on the stairs. I'm an old friend—a very old friend—a family friend—ha! ha!"

"He comes," said Blanche.

There was some growling reply on the part of the officers who had gone down to the back parlor, leaving John Long in the care of Miss Mills. Then Colonel Franklin said, quietly:

"I am here to try to discover truths amid falsehood; and, from what you say, you seem to be surrounded by some mysteries; and of this fellow's baseless threats which he may make to you alone, we may hope to gather something, and when you know that I am within almost arm's length, you will not fear him."

There was a large old leather-covered screen, with many tears, in the room, and as he spoke, the colonel stepped behind it. He was not a moment too soon; for the door was opened, and Nagle appeared on the threshold.

"Oh!" he said, "Here you are, my dear."

"What do you want?"

"You, to be sure. Ha! ha! Your bully is safe enough now, at all events. Ha! ha! Not a word! not a cry! I know who is at home. Ha! ha! The old man, Mrs. Mills, you, and an officer—he won't interfere; he's an old pal—do you know?—of mine. Set a thief to catch a thief, you know—a good old saying, eh?"

"I want nothing to say to you."

"Don't you? But I do to you. Come, now. Fast bird, fast find."

Nagle turned the key in the look of the room door, on the inside, and then advanced a few paces toward Blanche, who precipitately shrunk behind the couch.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of me. I'm Jack Nagle. You needn't look scared at me."

"If I call the officer—"

"He has gone out to get himself something to eat. He knows that the old man is dead or dying. Now, look you here, Miss Blanche Ratcliffe—for such I understand is your name—I will make a fair proposal to you. Here, you are a young girl—quite a young girl. You have lost your father. Well, there are only two people in all the world who know what has become of him. I am one of the two."

"Oh tell me—tell me."

"Stop a bit—stop a bit! Then you see, there is this affair of the diamond, with which you have nothing to do—ha! ha!—with which you have nothing at all to do—oh dear, no—nothing at all! Ha!"

"No," said Blanche, "I have nothing to do with it; but it seems, from all I can hear, and have heard, to involve many persons in much trouble."

"And Louis Long among the number."

"Yes," said Blanche, with a heightened color, "because you falsely accused him."

"Just so."

"Will you admit it? you admit your wickedness?"

"Bah! To you—yes. What's the consequence? You and I are alone here. I have taken good care of that. I make no secret, then, to you, that I had my ideas—my notions. Look at me! look at me!"

Nagle tried to put an amiable expression upon his face, but he only looked a little more hideous than usual.

Blanche shuddered.

"You don't much like me?"

"Not at all."

"Good! That's candid, at all events. It don't matter a bit, though. Now listen. I can do two things, both of which you want done."

And they—"

"I can take you to your father, and I can save Louis Long."

"Oh, yes—yes! Do all that, and I will indeed be grateful—I will, indeed."

"How?"

"I will forgive you all the past, and Louis will forgive you; and my father, who told me he was rich, will be generous to you."

"Ah! ha! I mean to be generous to myself. No, Miss Blanche Ratcliffe; my price is something different. You are poor—you are destitute. I offer you a husband. Come—how much? Sixteen—seventeen? I will marry you and make you a first-rate husband, and within twenty-four hours of the ceremony, I will take you to your father, and I will get Louis liberated from prison."

"If I," said Blanche, "and Louis, and my dear father, were all compelled to go hand in hand to death, and you only could save us—but why do I speak? Scorn! scorn! I am a girl, and I don't think that ever I pronounced that word in all my life. Hate, too! hate! Oh, you make me say bad and wicked words. It is the air you bring in with you. No, no, no! a thousand times no! I will trust my father to heaven, I will trust my Louis to heaven, but I will confide nothing to you!"

Nagle turned pale with rage.

"Beware!" he said—"beware! Are you not afraid? Have you forgotten what I said to you, that your bully was safe and away, now? There is no one else to step between us. Give me that!"

"What? what?"

"That necklace. By the look of it, it should be pearls. Give it me."

"My father's gift. Oh, do not!"

"Bah! I will have it. You are too pretty a girl, too, to leave without a kiss—ha, ha! Come, you had better be Mrs. Nagle. Hark you, girl, I can bring you a fortune.
much think you? A hundred thousand pounds.
What say you to that? Eh? eh? Give me
the necklace, I say; I will have it."

"Help!"

"I will have it! There's no help near you.
I see the game's up, and you won't help me to
the scheme I had in mind. Oh, you may call
out, but I will not only have the necklace, but
those little rings you have on your fingers.
Where's your bully, now? Ha, ha! Come
this way!"

"No, no!"

"Then I will take you!"

"I think not," said Colonel Franklin, quietly
stepping from behind the screen.

Two strides brought the colonel within arm's
length of Nagle, and with his right hand he
grasped the villain by the back of the neck, and
held him as if in a vice.

Nagle was so terrified, that for a moment or
two he stood as if paralyzed, with his arms ex-
tended and motionless. Then he uttered a cry
of dismay, and tried to turn his head; but the
effort was in vain. He could not even see his
assailant.

"Down!" said the colonel, quietly. "Down
on your knees! Down, I say!"

Nagle sunk to his knees.

"You will now humbly — very humbly,—
Do you understand me?"

Nagle made a struggle, on which the colonel
tightened his grasp a trifle, and shook him to
and fro until he was still again.

"You humbly you will beg this young lady's
pardon for the brutal, abusive, rascally manner
in which you have spoken to her."

"Oh! oh! No, I—I—"

"Begin!"

"Mercy! My neck!"

"Begin!"

"Yes, yes! Beg pardon!"

"No—that won't do. Follow me. What's
your name, thoug, to begin with? I forget it."

"John Nagle."

"Follow me, then. I, John Nagle, a repro-
bate and a villain. Go on."

"I won't!"

The grasp tightened, and the villain found
himself shaken to and fro as if he were in the
clutches of some powerful piece of mechanism.

"I will! I will! Mercy! Have mercy upon
me! I, John Nagle, a reprobate and a
villain —"

"Humbly, on my knees, beg pardon."

"Humbly, on my knees, beg pardon."

"Now get up, and if, by word or look, you
show the least symptom of independence, insu-
ordination, or violence, I will twist your head
off.

Nagle scrambled to his feet, and looked, cow-
ed and trembling, at the colonel.

"It is needless to say," added the latter,
that I have overheard all you have to say or
to threaten here. It appears you have accused
some one of complicity in a crime, or of the
commission of a crime, whom you know to be
innocent."

"Louis! Louis!" cried Blanche.

"Yes, that is the name. And you likewise say
that you can conduct this young lady to her lost
father. Now, I will set one of these things
against the other. You shall write a confession
of how you have falsely accused this Louis, and
you shall be free from the consequences of the
criminality, on condition that you conduct this
young lady to her father, or her father to her.
Is it a bargain?"

"And if I say no?"

"Then I will trust you like a bird for roast-
ing, and have you given at once into custody."

"No, you won't. Ha, ha! Cold steel! You
won't like that, I fancy. Come on?"

As he spoke, Nagle bounded back a few
paces, and took from his pocket a knife, which
he opened and held menacingly.

Blanche screamed.

"There is no danger," said Colonel Franklin,
calmly.

"Come on! come on! or get out of my
way!" cried Nagle. "I don't care which you
do. I don't want to have anything to say to
you. Get out of my way. Get from between
me and the door, and let me go!"

"Give me that knife," said the colonel, calm-
ly.

"In your heart! in your heart!"

"No. In my hand."

"Ha, ha!"

So cool, so calm, and so entirely self-possessed,
was Colonel Franklin, that nothing could be
farther from Nagle's thoughts than the sudden
attack made upon him. It was a leap on the
part of the colonel that brought him close to
Nagle, and he held of the wrist of the arm
of the ruffian which held the knife, and held
arm, hand, and wrist, above his head, as he
said, in the same, calm tone:

"Now, drop the knife."

"No, no!"

"Drop the knife."

"My wrist! you will break it. Oh! oh!"

The knife fell to the floor.

There was, at this moment, a confusion of
voices below in the house, and the colonel, as
he still held Nagle firmly, said:

"My dear young lady, I'm afraid this fellow is
not to be trusted. Will you be so good as to
see if those persons below are police? I fan-
cy they are; in which case I should like to sur-
render him into their charge, at once."

"Yes—oh, yes," said Blanche, and she left
the room.

"Let me go," said Nagle, "and I will tell all
you want to know, and do what you like."

"I don't want to know anything that you can
tell me."

BLANCHE RATCLIFF'S TRIALS.
"Yes; about the diamond.
"I know nothing about any diamond."
Nagle groaned.
"What have I done to you," he asked, "that you should detain me? I have done nothing."
"You have accused a young man of the name of Louis wrongly, and you tried to rob that young lady who was here. Oh! that is well."
The door of the room opened, and Blanche again appeared with a couple of police-officers. They had come to see if old John Long was then in a fit state to be taken before a magistrate.
"Take this man," said the colonel. "I charge him with what the English law calls felony; and, beside that, I and this young lady heard him confess that he had made a false charge against some one named Louis."
"Louis Long, sir?" said one of the officers.
"I presume so."
"It is not a false charge," said Nagle. "It is a real one, and I can and will prove it. Since I am in trouble, I will, nevertheless, say what is right."
"You will come with us then, sir," said the constable to Colonel Franklin; "for the charge must be properly gone into."
"I will soon. The hour is early now. There is my name and address. Tell me where I am to come, and the hour when I should do so and depend upon my punctuality."
"Very good, sir."
The officers wrote on the back of one of the colonel's cards the address of the police-officer he would have to attend, and then Nagle was hustled down stairs in custody.
It was at this moment that Mrs. Mills ran into the room, exclaiming:
"He is dying! he is dying!—Mr. John Long! He is dying, and he raves for a Mr. Franklin!"
"I come—I come!" said the colonel. "Now I shall know all."

CHAPTER XVII.
THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE TAKES ANOTHER TURN
FOR GILES HILTON.
Mr. Mears had a conscience; and very early on the morning after the occurrences at John Long's, it smote him.
It was quite astonishing what a savour of feeling—what a universal sort of benevolence had come over Mr. Mears since his recovery of the diamond.
It would seem as if the resplendent jewel possessed some special virtue in itself which calmed, soothed, and filled with love and charity the human heart.
Certainly, Mr. Mears, as he was shaving, that morning, very early, and as the slant beams of the spring sunshine came into his room, felt—along with the radiant satisfaction that filled his soul at the possession of the diamond—a certain amount of unessentialness and pain.
And his conscience would not rest—would not be quieted—would prick and goad him until he had made up his mind to go at once and procure the release of Giles Hilton.
Vague and uncomfortable ideas, too, began to obtrude themselves into the brain of Mr. Mears respecting actions at law for false imprisonment; and what might not the amount of damages be which the owner of a hundred-thousand-pound diamond would seem entitled to?
Mr. Mears was getting unhappy, and he uttered many sighs and groans.
But he had the diamond. That precious possession seemed to lie glittering at the bottom of his heart, and to lend the glow of its radiance and beauty even to his most uneasy thoughts.
So Mr. Mears made a firm resolve, and leaving Mills and Jackson in full charge of the prisoners and the diamond, he started to the "lock-up" for the purpose of trying to restore his own equipoise, by restoring Giles Hilton to freedom.
It was full two hours after the visit of Mrs. Hilton to the prison-cell that Mr. Mears arrived; but he came on business—he, on love! That made all the difference.
Those two hours of conversation between Hilton and his wife had bridged over the gulf which had been produced by the diamond between them. In all their struggles, in all their poverty, they had only seemed to cling closer together. It was reserved for the first glitter of that new fortune which had so dazzled the imagination of Giles Hilton, to wrench heart from heart, and to effect anything approaching to a separation of thought and feeling between the weaver and his wife.
And while Giles Hilton's eyes had been blinking and shivering in the inebriant lustre of that wealth which, in its first steps to his perceptions had been too much for his mental strength they might (that husband and wife) be said to have stood
"Like rocks which had been rent asunder,
A dreary sea now flows between;
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I wean
The marks of that which once hath been."
And now that the change had taken place in the mind of Giles—now that the glittering bauble that so dazzled his faculties was snatched away, his soul emerged from the false atmosphere in which it had been ingulfed, and he saw clearly about him.
The affection of his wife—the clinging tenderness of that gentle spirit which in his affliction sought him with more of the show and demonstration of love than ever she had exhibited in his transient prosperity, scattered to the wind the last exhalation of the dream that had possessed Hilton.
He was himself again.
But—but there was one thing which still
presage, heavily upon his heart. He had not yet dared—he did not yet dare—to tell his wife the exact particulars of how he had become possessed of the diamond.

He shrank with terror—terror lest he should lose the far more glorious jewel of her confidence if he should utter the words: “Emmy, I have deceived you, and by circumstantial untruths in regard to my manner of becoming possessed of this jewel, be it a true or a false gem. I have shown you that other times may come, and other events may arise, in which you will not be able to believe me.”

Giles shrank with terror from such a speech and from its possible consequences; and although during that twelve-hour conference—during that period of what might be called re-union with his wife, the confession was twenty times on his lips, he did not utter the words.

And Mrs. Hilton still believed that the culpability of her husband reached to the extent of finding a real or supposed treasure, and persuading himself that it was his own, and no further.

“But now, Giles,” she said, “all that has passed away, and we will seek a new home, however humble it may be.”

“Yes, dear—yes.”

“And we shall still be happy. We will not talk of all this affair, but now and then in a few words, so that it should not be to our minds like a spectre we are afraid to meet, or to look at; and gradually the memory of it will fade away.”

“Yes, dear Emmy—fade away—fade away, as you say. But—but—”

“Yes, Giles.”

“It was a diamond, Emmy.”

“O hush! hush! I heed it not.”

“Let them say what they may—let them declare what they will—it was a diamond, Emmy. Matters not, now. But it was a diamond, Emmy.”

“Do not think of it.”

“I will not. It has passed away from me, as it was right it should pass away. It has not been a blessing.”

“Yes, Giles, yes.”

“Why, Emmy, look what unhappiness it has made for us.”

“And happiness, too, Giles. Our hearts have suffered hard; yet, in passing through this lesson, we shall see the love of Heaven yet in our path. You have ever, dear Giles, had wild and fervid dreams of wealth and of what happiness it would procure. Now you see that it is but an ignis fatuus, which is bright and beautiful while flying pursuant, but which, when attained, is but a sickly lure, held for a moment with curiosity, and then neglected.

“Our hearts have been saddened, Emmy—nearly crushed by these events.”

“But not killed, Giles. The wild flower that is trodden down for a time exudes its sweetest fragrance; and out of all these events we will extract the essence of new happiness and contentment.”

“It is hard, though, after all, that those who have no more right than we should profit by the jewel.”

“And think you it will bring them more happiness than it brought to you?”

“I know not—I know not. But I will say no more. You shall be my jewel—my diamond. Henceforth I will banish from my mind all vain imaginations; and as you say, dear Emmy, in some other humble home we will not dream of riches, but we will cling to contentment.”

“Yes, Giles. The time of depression will soon pass away, and your loom will again be busy.”

“Yes—work, work, work! Alas!”

Giles stretched out his arm and clenched his hand, as he then added:

“I had it once—I had it once!”

Mrs. Hilton sighed deeply. She saw that the golden vision yet hovered about Giles; and she strove to recall him to the present by saying:

“This charge against you. O Giles! what if they should try to separate us? What if they should endeavor to consign you to a prison?”

“No, no. What have I done? Nothing to them!—nothing to them! It was they who said the jewel was fair and costly; not I! There is some jugglery in this business, Emmy, which may yet come to light.”

The door of the cell was at this moment flung open, and Mr. Mears appeared at the entrance, with an expression of countenance which he meant should be at once sympathetic, friendly, and sorrowful.

“My dear sir—my dear Mr. Hilton—upon my word—my word of honor, sir—I know not what to say to you. But only place yourself in my position, sir, and then ask yourself what you would have thought—what you would have done! Such a stake, too! Give me your hand, my dear sir. Can you—will you forgive me?”

“Yes?”

“Nay, nay; do not be hasty—do not. I beg that you will be calm. The diamond is restored. It was stolen, my dear sir, and a worthless imitation in glass substituted for it. John Long, sir—one John Long, living in quite a low district—Spitalfields, sir—stole it. An infamous transaction, my dear Mr. Hilton. But it is all safe now—a! safe; and I am so thoroughly vexed—so ashamed—so badly hurt that you, sir, should have been inconvenienced for a moment, that I scarcely know what to say.”

“The diamond found—real—?”

“Quite real, my dear sir—as you brought it to us.”
A flash came from the eyes of Giles Hilton, and the color deepened on his face.

"Mrs. Hilton saw these symptoms, and she clung to him as she cried:

"'No, no! Not again, Giles! No, no!'"

"'Hush, wife, hush!'"

"'Wife?" said Mr. Mears. "Have I the honor of addressing Mrs. Hilton? Madam, allow me to hope that I have your forgiveness?"

"'You have, sir—you have; and his, too—and his, too. This, sir, is my husband. Giles Hilton, the weaver of Spitalfields. He owns no jewels—he wants none. Sir, sir, do not tempt the poor struggling heart!'"

"'Tempt? Wants no jewels? But, my dear madam, Mr. Hilton's diamond is worth a hundred thousand pounds.'"

"'But nothing to us.'"

"'Emmy! Emmy! cried Giles Hilton.

"'Oh, let me speak—let me speak, Giles. Do not contradict me, sir. The diamond has brought already suffering enough to us. It was found.'"

"'Found? Found? Oh, of course—all diamonds are found.'"

Giles crouched down and clasped his hands over his face; and his wife continued:

"It was found in the open thoroughfare, by my husband. It is not his. He does not want it. He will not touch it. There is an owner for it somewhere, who may now be found. Let him be heart-free in the transaction. I ask of you but to be merveulous, and assist him in leaving this dreadful place. He has but one wish, now; and that is, to reach with me and his children some humble home which can be made happy by honest industry; and the diamond he will really possess then, and which will be his beyond dispute, will be serenity.'"

"'Good gracious!' said Mr. Mears. "Mr. Hilton, can this be so? Speak, sir. Is it possible?"

A painful struggle seemed to be taking place in Giles Hilton's mind. The good and the evil that were in his nature fought for mastery. He shook with emotion, and cries and groans escaped him. He wrung his hands and he wept. He paced the cell to and fro in a disordered manner, and he cried out despairingly:

"Lost, lost—all lost! No, no! ... cannot be. A dream—a dream, wife—a dream! You speak the words of madness. Who says the glittering crystal is not mine own? Who will take from me the sunlight, the glory, and the lustre of riches? My wife—my own wife—the wife of my bosom! Who will plunge me into the abyss of poverty? God! not she. She raves—she raves! Never, oh, never can it be true! I am the owner of the diamond! From out the deep crevices of the earth in which it treasured up for countless ages its glorious beams, I wrenched it! It is mine! mine! What say you? What matters how I came—y it? Say I coiled—slaved for it! Say I fought for it! Say I bartered my soul for it! It is mine—it is mine! and even now again its wondrous beauty dazzles my eyes, and I see the prismatic tints of its magnificence! I am rich—rich again!"

Mrs. Hilton screamed, and sobbed, and clung to him.

"No, Giles, no! This is the old madness! It is not so, sir! Do not hear him! Do not listen to him! We are poor—poor—so very poor! We wanted bread, sir, only a few short days ago—bread!"

Mr. Mears looked confounded.

Giles Hilton tore his hands away from his wife's grasp, as he whispered:

"Peace—good God, Emmy, peace! I will wrap you up in cloth-of-gold and velvet, and you shall never again feel wanton poverty. Poor heart! poor heart! You see, sir—you see, Mr. Mears, that this poor wife of mine is mad!"

"No, no! It is you, Giles, who are mad!"

"You hear her, sir. A certain sign of insanity. She accuses another."

Mr. Mears corrected that he was exhibiting the same "certain sign."

"I don't know what to think," said Mr. Mears. "I certainly dealt with you about the diamond Mr. Hilton; and I have it now."

"You deal with me still, sir. And even if—if merely for argument's sake—I had found it, what then? He keeps wife finds, if no better title appears."

"That is true enough."

"And, so, sir, the diamond is mine—mine only, and I am rich again. My home a palace—a retinue of humble menials waiting on my very looks; fair strains of music filling the sunny air of my palatial abode. The sparkle of bright eyes at my festive board. All that can delight the senses and elevate the imagination around me, and I the centre of all. I the fountain of enjoyment—the dispenser of smiles and happiness. Yes, the rays of that diamond shine upon the days that are to come, and the wildest dreams of my fancy become tangible realities. It is mine—it is mine!—the glorious jewel!—mine, and mine only! Now, sir, this place is it fit for me?"

"No, Mr. Hilton, and my carriage, which is at the door—"

"Yes; a carriage, to be sure—a carriage. Ha! ha! That is well. Come, wife; Emmy come—on my arm. This side. It is next my heart, and you are next and nearest to it. Come. Our children? Where are they? Is it the dread winter-time? Wrap them in costly and royal furs, and let the winds of heaven be tempered ere they touch the darling faces. Is it the soft summer? Why, then, let them revel in the beauty of a world which, for
them, shall be a garden of delight. The carri-
gage! What do, there! Mr. Hilton’s car-
gage! Who made the wind in the skies, and does the rain
splash, upon the earth? What matter! what
matter! Way for Mr. Hilton and his wife!
The carriage! Gold! gold — more gold! Pile
it up. I like to see it. Who knows but other
jewels may yet shed their lustre on my path.
The ruby is a lordly gem. Fire! fire! What,
then? Let the old house blaze. The ancients
were wise, and they burned their dead! Ha! ha!
I live again; I live again.

Mr. Mears looked surprised, and held open
the door of the cell, ready to make an abrupt
exit, if the seeming insanity of Giles Hilton
should by chance take a dangerous phase, and
induce him to attempt some violence; but such
was not the case. Giles was in the seventh
heaven of mental exaltation. Although not ac-
tually at that moment insane, the revulsion of
feeling, from utter prostration and dejection,
had made him heedless of his sayings.

And poor Mrs. Hilton sobbed, and wept, and
prayed, and clung to him; but she ceased to
speak now, for she saw that all she might say
would be in vain.

And the door of the cell was swung wide open;
and Mr. Mears, who had already explained to
the authorities that he meant to withdraw the
charge against Giles Hilton, preceded them
to the door.

“My dear sir,” said the jeweler, “pray be
calm. Do, now, be calm, and let us talk the
thing over. Pray, now—do, now, my dear sir.
You are calm, now.”

Giles Hilton, so to speak, bent the brightness
of his eyes upon Mr. Mears, as he said:

“And well, sir, what would you?”

“About this diamond, my dear sir. Hem, I
hope—I most sincerely hope that there will be
no disputed property in it. Dear me! dear
sir! Here’s my carriage, Mr. Hilton. Step in,
sir. Pray, madam, step in. Where would you
like to go to?”

“One moment, Giles, before it be too late,”
said Mrs. Hilton, imploringly.

“Is it late,” said Giles, looking round him
on the morning, as though her remark had applied
to time.

“Giles! Giles!”

“Emmy, Emmy, I love you as my life!
May the great God above us ever bless you!
Come! come!”

By a gentle sort of violence he forced her
into the carriage, and then he said:

“To the hotel again; there again. I left it
with an appearance of disgrace. I return to it
triumphant. No! Stop! No!”

“My dear sir, what is it?”

“Giles sunk down to the bottom of the carriage,
and a wild, affrighted look was upon his face.

Is he gone?”

“Who—who—Mr. Hilton?”

“John Nagle, I saw him even now. I saw
him yonder. Is he gone?”

“Alas! alas!” said Mrs. Hilton. “Where will
be the end of all this wretchedness?”

“Whoever you saw, Mr. Hilton, that might
annoy you,” said the jeweler, “has been left
far enough behind. My horses go at good
speed.”

“Gone! gone! I breathe again. Be still,
poor heart! Sir—Mr. Mears.”

“Yes, Mr. Hilton.”

“I will still take the other ten thousand
pounds, and you shall have the jewel.”

“Yes, my dear sir; but really, now—really.
Pray, be candid with me.”

“Well, well!”

“If there is likely to be any claimant to the
diamond, why, you know, my dear sir, that our
firm might be in a very awkward predicament,
indeed. Dear me, I don’t know if we should be
able to establish even an equitable lien on it
to the extent of our advances.”

“There is no claimant but myself in this
world; and, as regards the other, I fancy they
don’t care to come from it in search of dia-
monds. I will not go to the hotel.”

“Then where to, my dear sir?”

“To any other. Not there. The villain will
find me there.”

“What villain, sir?”

“Nothing—nothing. It is nothing.”

The carriage, as Mr. Mears had said, went at
a rapid pace, and soon distanced Nagle, who
was intent on that visit to John Long’s, which
had been to him, as it had turned out, anything
but an agreeable one, owing to the presence
of Colonel Franklin.

Mr. Mears directed his coachman to go to a
hotel, which he named; and he made a mental
resolution that, before he advanced any more
money to Giles Hilton, he would make some
inquiries, and better assure himself of his true
position as regarded the diamond; for what
had been said by Mrs. Hilton had thoroughly
alarmed him.

“Mr. Hilton,” he said, when the carriage
stopped at the door of the hotel, “I will see
you soon. In the mean time, you will be very
comfortable here.”

Hilton alighted, and so did his wife.

“Come, Emmy.”

“Giles, hear me.”

She drew back on the threshold of the hotel.

“Come, come!”

She burst into tears.

“Giles, Giles, our children! Our little
ones!”

“Aha! I had forgotten.”

“Forget them?”

“For the moment—for the moment!”

Then Heaven decides for me. I had a
divided duty. God bless and guide you, Giles;
but I seek our children. They are, and they
will be with me, at Mrs. Witham’s, in Spital-
fields. You will know where to seek us; and,
when you do so, we shall know again the dear
husband and the father.”
Mrs. Hilton did not pause to say another
word, or to hear what reply Giles would make;
but she fled as swiftly as she could from the
spot.

“Stay! stay! Emmy, you are mad! Yet a
moment stay! I pray you, stay! You know
not what you do.”

He saw her rapidly-receding figure turn a
corner, and he darted off in pursuit of her. He
had lost sight of her, and he soon became in-
volved in an intricate mass of streets of which
he was ignorant. Still he ran on, and doubled
and turned, in the hope of seeing her, until he
pounced in an exhausted state, and found himself
at the door of some public building, in and out
of which many persons were passing.

An irresistible curiosity came over him to
know what the place was, and he asked a man
who was lounging at the door:

“What place is this?”

“The Marylebone police court?”

“And there is something interesting?”

“Well, yes. The diamond robbery. That
young fellow who stole the diamond from
Burt’s will be brought up at twelve.”

“Young fellow! Diamond! Burts! Who
—who?”

“Louis Long ne calls himself, but we think
that’s an alias.”

“Oh!”

“It’s a bad case.”

“Is it?” Can I go in?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you.”

Giles Hilton staggered, rather than walked,
into the court, repeating to himself, in a con-
fused manner

“Louis Long! Stole the diamond from
Burt’s! Louis! Louis! Oh John Long’s son! He
steal the diamond! Oh, I am mad! I am
mad!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOHN LONG’S LAST WORDS.

When Colonel Franklin turned into the bed-
room of old John Long, on the outcry from
Mrs. Mills that death was so near at hand as
regarded the lapidary, a glance was sufficient to
let him see that such, indeed, was the case.
The old man sat up in bed and seemed, after
a few moments, to be fighting for life. Fight-
ing with the air about him to force it to enter
his lungs, and bring with it its vital principle,
but it would not come; or if it did, it was but
in faint, gasping particles, which kept the lamp
alight without illumination.

“Help! help! help!” the old man tried to
cry, but his voice was faint and low.

Colonel Franklin sprang to the bedside, and
placed his arm around the attenuated frame of
John Long, as he said in deep, earnest tones.

“Now—now that you are passing away from
this world—now that all its interests and all its
hopes and fears must be to you as nothing, I
implore you to tell me what became of my
brother?”

“Ah! ah! sir.”

“Yes, that is better.”
The colonel, with his hand as a kind of fan,
agitated the air close to the old man’s lips, and
he seemed to drink in some of the principle of
life.

“Ah! ah! good God!”

“Yes; ever good—ever good and merciful to
all!”

“Who—who—are you?”

“Mr. Franklin’s brother—you know, John
Long. I am the brother of the Mr. Franklin
who went with you to Southampton—his bro-
ther.”

“Not—him?”

“No—no—no. Look at me.”

“So like.”

“Yes, we were alike. But now, John Long,
now that you are a little better, but still dy-
ing—”

John shrieked aloud:

“My money—my jewels—my gold and ingots
—my pledges—my debts. I cannot—I need
die. No—no—no.”

“Not all the wealth of all the world a thou-
sand thousand times multiplied, can save you.
Your time has come, John Long.”

“Go away! go away! It is you—you—who
you who use it up.”

“Use up what?”

“The air—the air. There is—not enough—
for both—in the room—you breathe it all
—up. I—cannot—I cannot. Air! air! I say,
air! A guinea—no, half a guinea—five shil-
lings for one clear breath. A shilling.”

“Mr. Franklin—Bartholdy—come. The ‘Is-
abella Forbes’—are you listening to me?”

“What is it?”

“I got this from what you have already told
me, that some accident in a fog came over the
boat in which my brother and his wife and in-
fant son embarked to board the ship which had
started before they reached it.”

“Yes. The vessel was on the water.”

“Just so. You had no hand in that?”

“None. A hand that you nor I can stay.”

“Well. That is well.”

John Long’s head was thrown back, and al-
though he spoke in a very low voice, yet he
seemed much better, and was able to reply to
the colonel in a connected manner.

“The boat foundered?”

“The boat foundered.”

“No fault of yours, John Long. But you
said that it drifted to the shore.”

“The boat foundered. I was a poor man. A
thousand pounds worth of jewels. A fair voyage to you, sir, and to you, madam. I will say I saw you safe off, for I will wait here till you join the ship. See, she shortsails for you; now, boy, pull with a will. It is a short mile. Now—now. Is that a mist coming up the old Solent? Ay, ay; it is. Now the headland is wrapped up in the fleecy vapor—now the flag-staff of the old castle—now it creeps on like a wall over the crest of the waves, and it swallows up the ship in its feathery embrace; now the boat, the fisher boy; the husband; the wife and the babe. Hush! what is that? a cry—a last cry from earth to heaven! How sold the surf let! Heavy, too, the boat. What! all drowned? No; the child is saved, and that trunk. Why, it is the jewel trunk! The child breathes; there is life in the little one yet. John Long! John Long! you have a soul, John Long! Come, careful, ye little heart—you and the treasure trunk. Home, home. To London now, as all is well. Who shall say me nay? What should I tell of the drowning? I did not do it. The wind, the fog, and the merciless sea. Hush! hush! do not cry, little one! do not cry, for you are saved, and you will live with the childless man."

"John Long I understand you," said Colonel Franklin. "You saved the child from the surf and the swamped boat."

"Yes."

"And the treasure trunk, or chest?"

"Hush. That is hidden."

"And the child—what of it? Speak now."

Now that Heaven hears you especially at this last hour of your life, speak."

"The cabinet—"

"Yes; the cabinet."

"The clothes—a paper in the pouch—I wrote it all. Let right be done when I am dead."

"Yes; yes. And the child?"

John was silent.

"Hold up, John. Speak again."

"Clari! Clari!" cried John, "I did love you."

He burst into tears, gave then one sob, and all that rested upon the arm of Colonel Franklin was the mortal remains of old John Long, the lapidary.

And who shall say to what day-dream of his fancy when he was young, those last words of the old man had referred? Who shall say that his cold, stern heart had not at one time known the thrill of young affection! He had loved Clari! Who was Clari? What had been the story of that love? Clari! alas! alas! The colonel gently laid the head of the old man down upon the pillow.

"Rest in peace," he said, "and may God be merciful to you, as to us all."

He covered the dead, still face over with the sheet, and he slowly left the room.

Mrs. Mills was outside the door.

"He is dead," said the Colonel.

Mrs. Mills wept.

"Sir," said she, "you saw the worst of him. He had good feelings at times."

"No doubt; no doubt."

"And only yesterday, sir, he gave me this letter. It may have something in it that Louis ought to know."

"Let me see it."

On the outside of the letter were the words:

"To be opened by Louis, if ever he should be in any trouble about a diamond."

"This is a strange superscription, Mrs. Mills."

"Yes, sir. But it is quite clear that Mr. Long meant to go away and leave us all here, this morning; that is clear, by his packing up. Will you open the letter, sir?"

"No. It is not addressed to me, but to the old man's son."

"Ah! sir; I don't know that."

"But it says so; read for yourself."

"I mean about his son. I don't think, and I never did think, that Louis was his son."

"Indeed? Good heavens! If it should be."

"You are unwell, sir; you look so pale."

"No; no. But I have to tell you that I came here on purpose to get some particulars from Mr. John Long, about a very old transaction, and he has told me with his dying breath that I shall find them in the old cabinet, where you tell me there are certain clothes that awakened your attention."

"Indeed, yes, sir; it is in this room. And here is poor Miss Blanche, too, the lamb, all alone."

The colonel walked into the room, and, catching Blanche's hand, he said:

"My dear girl, Mr. John Long is dead; but if, by the strange circumstances that have occurred in this house, you have lost some protectors, be assured that you have gained another in me."

"Alas, poor Louis!"

"It is of him that I wish to speak to you. Come in."

There was a tap at the door, and now a man appeared, who said:

"Sir, if you don't come at once to the police-office, the magistrate will let that man, John Nagle, go, for want of some one to appear against him."

"I will come at once. He is a most consummate villain. But I would not trouble myself about him if I did not think he possessed secrets which it concerns the happiness of others should be got from him."

"He said, sir, that he would take me to my father," remarked Blanche.

"Yes, I am mindful of that; and my only hold of him will be a prosecution. I have much to interest me in this old house, and will return as soon as possible, when you and I, Mrs. Mills, will look over that old cabinet together. I am ready, officer. Lead the way."

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Colonel Franklin left the lapidary's house in company with the police-officer. The distance was very short to the police-office of that district, and on the way the colonel learnt from the constable that Nagle would certainly be committed if he (the colonel) chose to press the charge of threatening violence and robbery against him.

"He is a great ruffian," said the colonel; "but I must be guided by many considerations in what I shall do."

The look of anxiety upon the face of Nagle was very evident to all in the court when he was brought up in custody of the officers; and if they had only known as much of his history as he did himself, they would not have waited for any charge from Colonel Franklin on which to detain him.

Thus he was a returned transport, who at once had been sufficient to place him in a very, to him, unsatisfactory condition; and that piece of information might at any moment come out by some officers recognizing him, was what imparted to Nagle the look of anxiety which was on his face.

Colonel Franklin spoke to the magistrate in a low voice, saying,

"Sir, the man now before you knows of some matters, the knowledge of which are so essential to the happiness of others, that if he will disclose them to me, I shall not feel inclined to press this charge against him. May I speak with him?"

The magistrate paused for a moment, and then he said

"It is irregular, but, as the charge has not been as yet formally before me, I think I can consent."

"I thank you, sir."

The necessary directions were given, and, to the surprise of Nagle, he found himself in the course of the next few moments in a small, private room, face to face with Colonel Franklin.

"You know me by this time," said the colonel.

"A great deal too well."

"That is as it should be. You know that I choose to make a charge against you of attempted robbery and murder, you will be committed on it."

"Yes, sir."

"But you have said that you are able to conduct Miss Blanche Ratcliff to her father?"

"I can."

"And that you can clear Louis Long of all participation in the diamond robbery?"

"I can."

"Then, on condition that you perform those two acts, I will not appear against you; and as far as I am concerned, you can go free."

"Agreed, sir."

"Very well. I will not lose sight of you until you have fulfilled the conditions, and you know, from your acquired experience of me, that you have no chance of escape, either by fraud or violence."

"I won't try it."

"That is wise."

"Stop, sir. A moment, if you please. You will consider that I keep my word with the young lady about her father, so long as I show him to her, let it be how it may."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean let him be where he may."

"Of course—of course!"

"Then, sir, in regard to Louis Long, all I can say is just this, and if it is not sufficient, I can't help it. I believe his old father got him to make the false diamond without telling him what it was to be used for, and I dare say the jeweler, now that he has got the real diamond back, will readily enough believe that, and the old man himself will tell the truth, as it can do him no good to pull in the young one as well."

"The old man is dead."

Nagle whistled.

"And I suspect that if the affair were thoroughly sifted, you know more of the events of last night, and they take a different shape than that you put upon them."

Nagle looked uneasy.

"But as I know nothing of my own knowledge, of all that, I have nothing to do with it. Keep faith with me, and, so far as I am concerned, you are free."

"I will, on my life, sir."

There was a covert smile on the face of Nagle which the colonel was far from liking the look of, but he had no means at that time of appraising to it any plausible theory which should alter his course of action; so he determined to abide the result.

Going then to the magistrate, he said to him:

"I think that I shall get the information I want, and therefore do not wish to press the charge."

"Very well. No charge has as yet been made before me, therefore I do not adjudicate on it. He is in custody, and must be placed at the bar. I will discharge him on his own recognizances to appear again, if called upon."

"That will be the very best course."

"Very good."

Nagle was then brought into court, and the ceremony was soon over.

"Now, come with me," said the colonel; "and I warn you that, on the slightest attempt to elude me, I will take a step that will be most uncomfortable to you."

"I won't, sir."

What step it was that Colonel Franklin would take in the event of his trying to escape seemed to Nagle all the more to be dreaded on account of its indistinctness; for he had by this time a morbidly-sensitive idea of the colonel's personal prowess.
The covert smile then again came over the face of Nagle, and betrayed itself about the corners of his mouth.

"This rascal is, indeed, on some villainy," thought Colonel Franklin to himself. Then he said to Nagle:

"You comprehend you are to take the young lady who is at John Long's to her father?"

"Just so, sir."

"Miss Blanche Ratcliff?"

"Oh, yes, sir! The young lady knows me, and I know the young lady. I will keep my word."

"Is it such a secret that you could not tell me beforehand where Mr Ratcliff is?"

"It is a secret. I will keep my word."

"Cannot he come to her?"

"He cannot."

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know."

"All this is very strange. But it will be the worse for you if there be any attempt to keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to hope."

"I don't know what you mean by that, sir; but I am not answerable whether Mr. Ratcliff be alive or dead. All I can do, is, to take you and the young lady to him. I have done nothing to him, and never spoke to him in all my life, nor to me, in this country."

"In this country?"

"Don't ask me more, sir. That is enough."

"Quite enough, I fancy."

"Very well, come in."

They had reached John Long's house, and the colonel spoke to the officer, who still remained in it.

"All I want you to do," he said, "is to let this man stay with you for a few minutes, and to call me if he attempts to get away, or is troublesome.""

"Yes, sir."

Nagle smiled.

"I don't want to get away, nor to be troublesome either."

The colonel went up stairs to Blanche, and in his kind and quiet, gentle way, he said:

"My dear Blanche Ratcliff, that bad man who threatened you, and against whom I was obliged to interfere, John Nagle, declares that he can take you in some mysterious way to your father."

Blanche raised a cry of delight, and the tears stood at once in her eyes.

"Be calm, hopeful, and patient, my dear girl. Recollect that it is far better you should know the worst, if there be a worst to know about your father's fate, than that you should be, perhaps, for all your life tortured by uncertainties in regard to him; and if he be no more—if he has passed away from this world, you must recollect that we are all mortal, and submit with patience."

Blanche sobbed, but she felt the influence of the calm and quiet reasoning of the colonel, who then said:

"Get yourself ready then, and come with me. Nagle is below, and promises to solve the mystery. I am with you, therefore you have nothing to fear."

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. NAGLE KEEPS HIS WORD AS HE BELIEVES.

Blanche Ratcliff, trembling in every limb, and with her eyes so suffused by tears, that but for Colonel Franklin's guiding arm, she would not have seen her way, accompanied him to the lapidary's shop, where Nagle waited, under the surveillance of the officer.

She, too, with the quick perception that belonged to her sex, saw the smile that struggled for both suppression and existence about the lips of the ruffian, and she shrank back as she said, in a low, cowed voice, to the colonel:

"No—no! That man will never take me to my father. I do not trust him."

"Hush, Blanche; I, too, have but little, perhaps no, faith in him, but what can we do? No good instrument offers to us, and we accept a bad one, with but the faintest possible hope that it may lead to some ray of knowledge where all is darkness."

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"You comprehend me! You know nothing. You have no theory even regarding the fate of your father; and, therefore, any hope—any chance that may place you on the right track of thought or conjecture should not be cast aside."

"I will go, sir. Oh yes, you are right—who shall say but that he may know something. I will go, sir: And poor Louis! What of him? Is this man free, and Louis still seized?"

"That, too, is one of the conditions of his freedom—that he should withdraw the accusation against Louis, and I will not lose sight of him until that be done. Arm yourself, dear girl, with such firmness as you can call to your aid. I cannot say that this man has it in his power to cast the faintest glimmer of light on the mystery that surrounds your father's fate, but I may be wrong. Let him try to keep his word."

"Yes—yes, sir. I am ready."

Poor Blanche fancied it indeed a hard task to command even the outward semblance of composure, considering the errand she was upon.

There was something so alarmingly vague—so suggestively afflicting in the words, "I will conduct you to your father", which Nagle had uttered, that at times she felt as if she could not proceed another step, and that the state of uncertainty and apprehension she had been in was, after all, better than the realization of some horrible calamity which might be disclosed to her by Nagle.
And yet there is a fascination in the truth, and even in remote particulars of truth, although they may strike like barbed arrows at the heart; and Blanche made a great effort, and served herself as best she could to endure whatever might betide.

There was no hopefulness in the heart of Blanche now. She felt that there must be some calamity to hear of or to see.

Had her father been able to do so, he would have come to her, as it would not be necessary that such a man as Nagle should, at his good will and pleasure, affect the union between the father and child.

It must be a calamity, then, that she had to be made aware of, and the undefined nature of it preyed so strongly upon heart and brain that she leaned each moment more heavily upon the arm of the colonel, and then, with a sudden burst of hysterical weeping, she said:

"This is cruel—this is too cruel! I cannot suffer so much! Why am I not told what I should strive to endure? It is too cruel."

"You are right, Blanche Ratcliffe," said the colonel. "Half, in Nagle!"

"Well, sir."

"This reticence and mystery, on your part, is carried too far. Whither would you lead, and what is it to see?"

"I will keep my word."

"You must do more. You cannot injure yourself by now declaring whither we are bound, and what you really know of the fate of Mr. Ratcliffe."

The covert smile came over the face of Nagle again, and he said, calmly:

"My promise was to conduct you and Miss Ratcliffe to her father."

"It was. But—"

"Nay; hear me out. I will keep the promise; and but for this pause, and this interruption, it would have been carried out, even now."

"So soon! So near!" exclaimed Blanche.

The colonel looked about him with an air of suspicion and surprise. They had reached the corner of a street, and there was nothing to be seen but dim, old dilapidated-looking houses, which even the glancing spring sunshine could scarcely lend any beauty to.

"Let there be no delay, then," added Blanche, in agitated tones. "On—on! I will follow, and I will pray for strength."

The colonel drew her arm closer within his own, as he said, gently:

"Amen to your prayer, my brave girl. I do not understand the fellow; but if he be playing with your feelings, let him beware of me."

"Come," said Nagle.

They all then turned the corner of the street. That at once brought them into the irregular half-tane, half-street in which Giles Hilton's college had been situated, and in which the blackened ruins, soaked by rain, and lying in a confused heap, that no one had cared to interfere with, were to be seen.

The sor: of gap left in the irregular row of cottages by the ruin of Giles Hilton's was noticeable enough. An elder tree, that had escaped the flames, was putting out its young, fresh leaves to the springtime, and that seemed to be the only living thing in or about the spot.

Oh no! There was the circling pigeon, taking its wild airy flight over what had once been its home.

All else was blackness and desolation.

Poverty and destitution were too rife in the district for any one to heed much the fire and brief burning of one of the old cottages, and the fate of Giles Hilton had been consumed amid the indifference of the neighborhood.

A few futile attempts to extract from the ruins some only half-burnt timbers that might serve for firewood, had been made, and that was all.

In an irregular heap—here, a black charred spar standing up and shaking in the breeze—there, a portion of a casement lying shattered, and the flutter of some half-burnt rags now and then giving a dreary kind of vitality to the ruins, lay the remains of the weaver's cottage.

Nagle paused.

"What is this?" said Colonel Franklin.

"Why do you stop here?"

"Here!" said Nagle.

As he spoke he gave his right arm a kind of wave which embraced the ruins.

"What is here, and what would you suggest?"

"Come on!"

Nagle passed the elder tree, and trod upon the burnt pavings of the little front garden of the cottage. The remains of the wood crumbled under his feet.

"Come!" he said again.

"No—no!" cried Blanche. "My father is not there! Whither would you lead me?"

Nagle had gained about the centre of the ruins. He stood upon the irregular heap, which crumbled and craked under his feet. He pointed downward, and he spoke in a high, defiant voice:

"I keep my word! I keep my word! Here, in the middle of all this heap of ruins—the ruins of Giles Hilton's cottage—if you search deep enough, you will find Mr. Ratcliffe. I bring you to him! I keep my word!"

Blanche uttered a cry of dismay, as she sprang forward, and reached the spot upon which Nagle stood.

"As you have hope of Heaven!" she said—"as you have one kind feeling, or—or—gentle touch of pity left—"

"Well?"

"You will tell me that this is not true!"

"It is true! Here lies your father, beneath
that your father's remain are there; but the better part of him, if such should be the case, is in heaven. Think—think, Blanche Ratcliff, and tell yourself that such must be the case. I will see that all respect be paid to what may remain in these ruins of your father; but he cannot be in life. He has gone before you, my poor girl, and may even now be looking down upon you with the ineffable love of an immortal spirit. Be comforted! Oh, be comforted! for you will meet again—you and he—who there are no tears, no sorrow! Be comforted! It is but a short delay."

Blanche sobbed for a moment or two, and then her fair head dropped upon the breast of the colonel, and she was no longer conscious of surrounding objects, nor of the agony that had wrung her poor, fond, gentle heart.

"That is well said, Colonel Franklin. As for you, villain—revengeless, heartless villain that you are!"

He looked for Nagle; but the Russian had taken advantagae of the entire pre-occupation of the colonel with Blanche, and had made his escape.

A look of scorn then came over Colonel Franklin's face, and he said, "Let him go! Let him go! It is as well to leave him to himself!"

With the light form of Blanche in his arms, the weight of which he scarcely felt, the colonel, with rapid steps, took his way back again to John Long's house. The three or four people of that poor neighborhood, who met him, got out of his way and looked after him; for they thought that the fair young creature he carried so gently in his arms was surely dead.

But a very few minutes sufficed to traverse the short distance from the ruins of Giles Hilton's house to John Long's.

The colonel never paused in his onward march until he reached the upper room of the house; and then, as he placed Blanche gently and tenderly on the couch, he said to the terrified Mrs. Mills: "She has had a shock, poor young thing! Attend to her, and when she awakens from this swoon, tell her that I am gone on an errand she can guess at, and that I will do all that she could wish in the way of respect to the remains of one she loved."

"Oh dear, sir, is it the dear, young thing's father?"

"He is no more."

"Alas! Alas!"

"He perished in a fire, it seems. How, or under what special circumstances he came there I know not; but I suppose, bit by bit, we shall know all in time."

"Yes, sir. Dear me! Dear me! Then she is an orphan?"

"I fancy so."

"And quite friendless and destitute?"
"O no—no! Not at all that!"
"Not so, sir?"
"No! I am here, and Blanche Ratcliff can never be friendless or destitute while I live!"

Mrs. Mills clasped one of the colonel's hands; and while the tears streamed down her cheeks, she tried to speak, but could not for a moment or two, then she said.

"You, dear sir—you will have your reward! I would not have said what I did, sir, but the constable who is in the house, and says he must stay all the same, although Mr. John Long be dead, says that poor Louis will never come back to us, for that the case is clear against him, and he will be sent to banishment."
"I do not believe that yet," said the colonel.
"Be of good cheer. I will be back soon."

The colonel went down to the shop. The constable was sitting on the counter smoking a pipe.

"You saw that man who went out a short time since with me and the young lady?"
"Yes, sir."
"Should he come here again while I am absent, do not let him get further than this room. Tell him he may stay here until I return; but I beg of you not to let him further."
"All right, sir."
"I thank you."
"Lord bless you, sir. I know him now."
"You know him?"
"Yes, sir; I thought I did, but I wasn't quite sure, till he went out with you. He is a returned transport, and will have to be nabbed, and grabbed, and legged again."
"'Eh?"
"I mean sir, sent off to a chain-going. Don't you be uneasy about him, sir. Time enough. We will have him when I get clear of this job here, sir. All's right, sir."
"Very well, I shall return soon."

The colonel saluted out into the street, and paused and looked about him for a few moments, till he saw a boy creeping along.

"Halloa, boy! can you tell me of an undertaker about here, where I can get a coffin?"

There must have been an earnestness of manner about the colonel which, for the moment, fixed the attention of the boy, and then at this request for a coffin a sudden panick took possession of him, and he ran off with a howl of dismay, and the full conviction that the coffin was intended for him.

Colonel Franklin then hurried down the street, and at the corner he met a party of working-men, with spades and pick-axes, who were going to or from some road opening.

"Stop my men!" he said. "A couple of sovereigns among you, if you will come with me and do a little job."

"I believe you, sir," said one. "That's about as much as we all four earn in a week, now-a-days."

"This way—this way! One of you go and find some place where a coffin, or shell, I think you call it here in London, and let it be brought. What I want of you is, to dig a body out of the ruins of a fire."
"All right. Where is it?"
"Follow me. There."

They all turned the corner and came in sight of the ruins of Giles Hilton's cottage. The colonel scrambled on to the heap of charred remains of the building, and stood close to the cloak which poor Blanche had recognized.

"Dig here, and carefully, he said. "There is one, at all events living, who will be thankful to you for your kindness to the poor remains that lie here."

The nature of the task cast a sombre hue over the proceedings, and the men were silent and respectful.

From the neighboring cottages, some of the half-starved weavers and their families came out to see what was going on, and one cried out:

"Why, they be a digging in Giles Hilton's old house for something. Some folk's troubles be over."

The men slowly removed, piece by piece, the rubbish around the cloak; more and more of it came each instant into view. Then there was a sort of cry and a hustle among the increasing crowd, and the shell, which the colonel had sent for arrived, accompanied by two undertaker's men.

It was placed on the heap of ruins close to where the cloak still was held by the charred timbers of the cottage.

"A dead body, sir?" said one of the undertaker's men to the colonel, as he touched his hat respectfully.

"Yes I sent for you. Some one has perished in this fire."

"Yes, sir."
"'Here's all that's left of the cloak,' said one of the workmen; and he held up about one-half of what had been a blue-cloth cloak, the remainder having been burned away.

"Go—go on;" said the colonel, anxiously.

The work continued. Not a piece of blackened wood or a broken tile escaped investigation. The ruins were searched right down to the ground, and not the slightest vestige of human remains could be found.

The men wiped the perspiration from their brows, looked up at the colonel, and shook their heads.

"There is no body here, sir."
"It is very strange."

The undertaker's men shook their heads likewise, and looked disappointed.

"Can it have been wholly consumed?" said the colonel.
"Oh dear, no sir—oh dear, no! It has never been there, sir. It's all a mistake, sir."
A warm glow of hope rose up in the heart of the colonel, to the effect that, after all, there might be some mystery yet undeveloped, which would restore Blanche to her father, in life. And yet the cloak that she had recognized as his, how came there, and how came Nagle to speak so confidently upon the subject, when he would have had no interest in giving false intelligence, for he could have seen that he might have commanded his own price for restoring—if he could—Blanche to her father?

"I can make nothing of it," said Colonel Franklin, after a long pause. "There is evidently no dead body here. There is your money; and there is something for your trouble in bringing this shell here, which it seems is not wanted. Give me the remnant of the cloak. It may be of use at some future day."

The crowd made way for the colonel, and looked after him as, with slow steps and a thoughtful brow, he made his way toward John Long's house again.

When there, he found the officer still on the counter, with his pipe. No one had called but a boy who had left a scrap of paper. The colonel read on it these words:

"If any one can aid me, from home, come to the Mary-lebone Police Court, at 12 o'clock. Louis Long."

"Eleven, now," said the colonel, as he hastily consulted his watch, and then he ran upstairs. Mrs. Mills met him as he went out.

"Well—well. How is Miss Ratcliff?"

"Better, sir."

"Is she up?"

"Yes sir; in the room, here."

The colonel made his way into the room, and went quickly up to Blanche.

"My dear Miss Ratcliff; a search has been made, and no trace of the body of your father has been found. He has not perished in the fire of that house, he is assured. Whether to tell you to hope or not, or what to tell you to hope, I know not; but you have the fact as I have it. There is the portion of the cloak which you say was his. I am off now, to see what I can do for Louis Long. God bless you!"

The colonel did not wait for a reply. He saw the tears gathering in the eyes of Blanche, and he only pressed her hand in his for a moment, and then left the room.

"Hope again!—hope again!" cried Blanche; and she sank to her knees, and with her hands clasped over her face, prayed fervently.

CHAPTER XX.

LOUIS EMERGES FROM A CLOUD OF TROUBLES.

What a strange position was that of Giles Hilton. In the obscurity of the crowd at the police-office, to which an impelling destiny, that had seemed in vain to contend with, had conducted him!

There was he, a spectator—a looker-on and spectator—upon the fate of one who, solely by his (Hilton's) acts, had been placed in the situation of peril from which he might or might not emerge free and scathless.

Giles Hilton sighed, and struck his breast as he heard a cold, loud voice cry out:

"Next case."

Some examination of a prisoner had been going on in the police office, but the mind of Giles Hilton had been far too much preoccupied for him to be able to attend to what had been proceeding.

All that he knew was, that he was swayed about by the crowd, and that there was a cry of "Make way there!"; and that the officers passed him with some one in custody, whose brutalized features sufficiently proclaimed him to belong to the criminal class of society.

Then had that high, cold, formal voice called out, "Next case!"

There was a certain sort of hush about the auditory now, and the heart of Giles Hilton felt cold, and the blood seemed as if it surged through the throbbing organ with a ripping sound as he saw pass him Louis Long.

Pale—very pale! The paleness of pride and the conscious guilt of oppression, of being mistaken, and yet of having gathered courage to say! "So be it! Let me suffer this like a man!" was Louis. There was the compressed lip, there was the lofty courage—the clear, open brow, and all the indications which Nature delights to confer on her choicest creations; and as he passed Giles Hilton, he—the really guilty man—he, who stood in that crowd, unknown and unsuspected, sank lower and lower, and he felt that he no more dared to meet the eyes of Louis than he dared look upon the sun in all its midday glory.

And poor Louis was what was called in the phraseology of the usher of the court, "next case".

Then there was the compressed movement of the crowd to get a nearer view of the prisoner; to hear without a doubt all that he should say—all that could or should be said for or against him: so that Giles Hilton was left in a comparatively open space near the door of the court.

But he needed not to press forward to look in that pale, hard, some countenance, on which truth and integrity shone as with twin banners that could never be mistaken. He needed not to press forward to hear every sound that might come from that voice, which would be sure to find a dismal, self-accusing echo in the inmost recesses of his heart.

He knew, he felt that Louis was innocent of all that had been imputed to him. The jeweler, to be sure, had told him (Giles Hilton) that the diamond had been stolen, and that Louis Long and John Long were the guilty parties. But no—no! a thousand times in regard to Louis, Giles felt that he was innocent, and he knew that only in some involved way poor Louis
was becoming submerged in the whirlpool cre-
ated by (Hilton's) original offence.
He was the centre around which all these
events, so calamitous to others, revolved. Let
him sink, and the waters of affliction would be
calm again; but so long as he floated buoyant
on the surface, with his heart and brain unab-
solved of guilt, so long would the widening eddy
sweep to destruction the innocent alike with
the guilty.
"Are you ill, sir?" asked an officer of the
court.
Giles looked.
"No—no. Oh no.
"I beg your pardon. I thought you were."
"No, thank you. The— the—case?"
"Si-le-nce!" Cried a voice.
The officer gave a friendly sort of nod to Giles
Hilton, as though he would say: "You see we
must not carry on this pleasant little chat just
now."
Then there arose a voice which Giles did not
know. It was that of the constable into whose
charge Louis had been placed.
"Father and son, your worship," he said,
"were charged by Mr. Mears, of Burt & Co.,
goldsmiths and jewelers, with stealing a dia-
mond."
"Is the father not here?" remarked the
magistrate.
"No, your worship. He was taken so very
ill that we were compelled leave him at his
house, under charge of an officer."
"Then I will remand this prisoner, after hear-
ing just enough evidence to justify me in so
doing."
"Yes, your worship. Here is Mr. Mears."
Giles Hilton started, and shrunk closer up into
the dim, dark corner of the court.
Another voice now said, in formal accents (it
was the magistrate's clerk who spoke):
"Prisoner, what is your name?"
"Louis Long, I believe."
The calm, gentle accents of Louis's voice fell
painfully on every heart. There was music
in the tones, although the strain was sad.
"You believe?" said the magistrate. "What
is the meaning of that qualification?"
I have a doubt if I really am the son of the
man whom I have been in the habit of calling
father— but I know as yet of no other name
than that of Louis Long."
"Very well. What are you?"
The magistrate had now himself taken these
preliminary questions from his clerk.
"A lapidary."
"Very well. Now, Mr. Mears, we will go
you, if you please."
Mr. Mears was nervous. Mr. Mears dropped
his gloves, and then he dropped the little dirty,
snicky, dilapidated book which they handed to
him, as part of the ceremony of taking his oath.
It fell at the feet of Louis, who picked it up,
and handed it courteously to Mr. Mears.
"Oh, thank you. I—I—am very sorry."
"You are doing, sir, what you think right,"
said Louis, "although you are wrong. The best
of us can do no more."
Mr. Mears was sworn. He drew a long
breath. He spoke hurriedly:
"A most respectable man, sir, came to us and
sold us a diamond—a very valuable diamond—
worth about eighty or a hundred thousand
pounds."
The crowd after this looked much more inter-
ested even than before. To be sure, so far as
guilt or innocence was concerned, a hundred
thousand pounds or a hundred thousand pounds
weighed nothing in the balance on either side,
but still the mention of such a sum at once
invested the case with an importance it had not
had before.
The silence was profound.
"John Long," continued Mr. Mears, "an old
servant of our firm, and the father of the pris-
oner at the bar, came to our warehouse, and we
showed him the diamond."
"What for?" asked the magistrate.
"Well—no—for nothing. Just as he hap-
pened to be there, and as an old lapidary was
sure to take a certain pleasure in the sight of
so rare and so beautiful a jewel."
"Yes—I see. Pray go on."
"John Long was very much struck with the
diamond, and after attentively examining it, he
went away."
"Then he did not steal it?"
"Not then, sir. I am quite certain that it
was safe in my possession after that first exhibi-
tion of it to John Long. But he came again
the next day; and, as upon carefully consider-
ing all that passed, I can now swear that he
very artfully induced me to show him the dia-
mond again, and then he stole it."
"Pray be particular. How did he steal it?"
"He pretended to fall into raptures with it.
He held it in his hand, and he thrust his hand
with it clenched in it, into his pocket, which I
objected to, but not in a serious manner; so he
produced it, as I thought; and without more
than glancing at it, I looked it up, and he went
his way."
"Well, sir?"
"But he had taken with him the real dia-
mund, and substituted for it a very clever im-
itation, of glass."
There was a movement among the crowd, and
a suppressed murmur of intense interest. Louis,
who had listened with great attention to Mr.
Mears, gave a slight inclination to his head, as
though he would have said: "I see—I see it
all, now, quite clearly!"
"At first," added Mr. Mears, "when we dis-
covered the fraud, which was not for some hours
afterward, our impression—our most erroneous
impression—was, that we had been deceived, from the first, by Mr. Hilton, and we gave that gentleman into custody; but that was a hasty conclusion that reflection soon dispelled, and suspicion turned upon John Long, to whose house I went last night, with constables; and not only did we find upon him (John Long) the real diamond, but this young man now before you, sir, admitted that he and his father manufactured the false one."

"So you have your diamond?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It is here. Here is the true one, and here the false."

The crowd in the office trod on each others' toes, and made frantic efforts to get a sight of the real and the false jewel."

"Very beautiful," said the magistrate. "I congratulate you, Mr. Mears, upon the recovery of the gem. The case is uncommonly clear. I think, though, we ought to have this Mr.—"

"Hilton, sir?"

"Yes—Hilton, the original owner of the diamond, before us, in order that it may be sworn to by him, as well as by you, since, for a time, it was out of your possession; you see, Mr. Mears?"

"Yes, your worship; yes. We—that is, we have advanced ten thousand pounds upon it. I have no desire to make any concealments. It is stated, by Mr. Hilton's wife, that the jewel was found."

"Found?"

"Yes, sir. I mention that now, because, whatever may happen, it shall not be said that we concealed anything. It was only this morning that we had any idea of that fact, and I don't know it now of my own knowledge."

"Then," said a gentleman, who happened to be lounging against the clerk's desk, "no one knows, at present, who the diamond belongs to; in which case, I don't think the prisoner at the bar can be detained."

The magistrate at once recognized this gentleman as one of the most eminent members of the bar, and he said, with a smile:"

"Do you appear for the prisoner, Sir George Evesham?"

"Oh no, sir. But I have no objection. And now, sir, I want this Mr. Hilton."

"Certainly. Mr. Mears, can you produce him?"

"Oh yes, yes."

"Silence, there!" cried the usher of the court, as a confusion arose near to the door, caused by the efforts of a man to leave it. That man was Giles Hilton.

"Open! Open!" he said, as he grasped nervously at the door. "I am ill—dying! Open!"

Upon this, quite heedless of grammar, Mr. Mears clapped his hands together, and called out:

"That's him! that's him!"

"Who? Who is it?" said Sir George Evesham."

"Mr. Hilton?"

"Ah! Stop that man! stop him!"

"Close the doors, officers!" cried the magistrate.

"Well, I never!" said the officer who had had the little friendly chat with Giles Hilton. "Well, I never! You are wanted, it seems. This way, sir—th-th-a way!"

Pale, trembling, and with a wild look of excitement about his eyes, Giles Hilton was brought through the crowd, and confronted with the magistrate.

"Giles Hilton!" exclaimed Louis."

"Yes!" gasped Hilton."

"The poor, starving weaver of Spitfieldss!" Hilton licked his parched lips, and gazed from face to face of those around him. Then, elevating both his hands above his head, he cried out:

"Yes! Yes! I am Giles Hilton, the poor, starving weaver of Spitfieldss! I am that Giles Hilton who has heard his children crying for bread, and seen the wife of his heart growing weaker, day by day, for want of food! I am that Giles Hilton who has suffered such pangs, that tongue of man can give no utterance to them! I am that Giles Hilton who found a diamond! It is mine! mine! mine only! Take my blood! take my eyes! take my life! but give me my diamond, for it is mine!"

The wild, excited manner of Hilton, the high, screaming voice in which he spoke, and his torn and tattered aspect—so he had made no change in his apparel since his incarceration in the prison-cell—all made up an amount of interest in him, and in what he said, that was most absorbing and intense.

It was Sir George Evesham alone who seemed to be not in the least discomposed, but who said, in quite a calm voice:

"Very good. I think, sir, after this, the diamond is anybody's or nobody's. At all events, I should like to know in what way the prisoner at the bar is proved to have had it ever in his possession."

"If," said the magistrate, "John Long stole the diamond from Mr. Mears, it appears that the prisoner at the bar was an accomplice before, and probably after, the fact, which will make him equally guilty."

"No," said Louis."

"I warn you," said the magistrate, "and probably this gentleman, learned in the law, who has so kindly interested himself in your case, will warn you, likewise, that you are not called upon to say anything unless you like, and that what you do say will be taken down, and, if necessary, used against you."

"No," said Sir George Evesham. "I feel convinced this young man is innocent, therefore I give him no such warning. A guilty man is
in danger every word he utters, lest he should blunder out with that which shall confirm suspicion against him; but one who is innocent cannot say too much. He cannot accidentally disclose what has no existence. I advise you, my young friend, to tell your story."

"It is simple, sir. My father—or my reported father—John Long, has taught me his trade of a lapidary, and I polish crystals indifferently well. He gave me verbal directions to make an imitation diamond with such and such facets, and himself carefully superintended the work. He said he had a customer for it. I made it, and he took it from me. What was its object, what its destination, or who the customer was, I had not the slightest idea."

"Just so," said Sir George Evesham. "That is the whole story. As simple as possible."

The magistrate shook his head.

"This may be, or it may not be," he said.

"At all events, I shall not decide the matter one way or the other, until I have both the prisoners before me. John Long, the father, may be able to attend in a week; and for that period, I will remand Louis Long, the son."

"With submission, sir," said a calm, clear voice, as a gentleman made his way through the crowd, and reached the magistrate. "With submission, sir, permit me to interrupt you."

"Sir!"

"Many apologies, sir, but I have a statement to make, which may influence the decision in which you are arriving. John Long is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Louis."

"Dead!" cried Mr. Mears. "Bless me! Yes. It's all right."

Mr. Mears appeared to have some indistinct and mysterious kind of fear that John’s death might in some way affect the diamond, for he took both it and the counterfeit from his pocket, and looked gratified to see that he had them both.

"Dead, is he?" said the magistrate. "And who are you, sir?"

"My name is Vale Franklin. I am on diplomatic service here to the British court from the United States Government."

"I have the pleasure of knowing this gentleman," said Sir George Evesham.

"Ah, Sir George Evesham, how do you do?" said Colonel Franklin.

The magistrate looked dubious, and rubbed his nose with the feather end of his pen, while Colonel Franklin and Sir George Evesham shook hands.

Then the colonel added:

"Permit me to state that I was present at the death of John Long, and here is a letter addressed to Louis Long, which his housekeeper gave me. What it relates to, I have no conception, but I have a strong opinion in regard to the entire innocence of this young man of any complicity whatever as regards the doings of John Long."

The colonel handed the letter, of which former mention has been made, to Louis, who eagerly opened it, and after rapidly casting his eyes over it, he handed it to the colonel, saying:

"Sir, will you read it?"

"Aloud?"

"Yes, sir. If you please."

It seemed now, for the first time, that Colonel Franklin had fully fixed his eyes upon Louis Long, and as he did so, an aspect of deep interest came over his countenance, and emotion was visible in every rapidly-changing expression.

CHAPTER XXI.

COLONEL FRANKLIN ATTENDS BLANCHE BATCOIFF.

A strangely-assorted group was that which now confronted the magistrate at the police-office. A group in which was probably to be found more variety of human feeling than any similar aggregation of persons exhibited in the whole of the great city, with all its various pulses of life around them.

There was Giles Hilton, fevered, flushed, and with a paint-box of intense interest, casting his anxious gaze from face to face. There was the jeweler, with his right hand plunged into the depths of his pocket—that pocket that contained the diamond, and only half satisfied then that he really and truly had it in his possession.

And there was Louis Long, so noble, so patient, and yet so defiant, with his look of high intelligence, and that "sparkle of innocence" about his eyes, which said more than the tongue of the eloquent advocate could ever have given utterance to in his behalf.

Then there was the crowd of eager faces that, with various agitations, as fact after fact, surmised after surmise came forth, swayed to and fro, and rippled like the surface of the sea in an April day.

There were the cold, business-like looking officials—the thoughtful-looking magistrate; and last, though not least, in interest, both in and for that scene, there was Colonel Franklin.

We have said that he had almost for the first time taken a long and steady look at Louis Long, and as that look deepened and prolonged itself, his mind seemed to travel far away from the court, from the magistrate, from the anxious and interested crowd of spectators, and from the story of the diamond; and there appeared to grow upon his fancy some saddening vision of the past which troubled his heart, and which revolted from the most hidden chambers of his brain, memories, thoughts, affections, and feelings, that had only slumbered because there had been no touch, no cry to call them into life again.

Back to his early home in the bright and beautiful New World. Back to the days of his early youth, ere yet the boy began to dream that he stood upon the threshold of that life
which to the young imagination is full of rare delights and countless blissful emotions. Back years and years ago, to the time when he was young, younger than Louis Long, and when he had a dear companion—a friend—a brother, ever by his side. Back to all those early sights, sounds, and recollections, which had long passed away, flew the imagination of Colonel Franklin; for he looked into the eyes of Louis, and then he seemed once again to see his own brother, Felix, as he remembered him in their boyhood together at their father's house.

The form, the look, the gentle smile, all were there; and with the full tide of feeling gathering in his eyes, Colonel Franklin stretched out his hands; and grasping those of Louis, he cried out:

"In the name of Heaven, who and what are you? Speak. Oh, speak, young man, and tell me what you are?"

"There was so much genuine emotion in the manner and words of the colonel that Louis was deeply touched by them. He returned the kindly pressure of the colonel's hands, as he replied:

"Oh, would that I could reply to you as my heart seems struggling to dictate. Alas! I know not who or what I am."

"The voice, too!" cried the colonel. "Ah, I am once again a boy, and I wander in my father's orchard. Louis—Louis! if that be your name, speak to me, and tell me if you have no thought of the past? No early recollections. Think—oh, think! A pleasant, happy home, beneath the overarching boughs of giant trees well saved from the primeval forest, to lend their darkling shadowy beauty to the glowing summer days—a home so full of pure affections. Louis—Felix—do you remember our own dear mother?"

The colonel clasped his hands over his eyes for a moment, and then looking again at Louis with a faint and gentle smile, he said:

"Pardon me. The flight of time has for the moment bewildered me. It is to the new generation you belong. It was of my brother—my lost brother, Felix. I was speaking; and as you are now, so was he some thirty years ago."

"Felix?" said Louis.

"Yes; that was his name."

"How strange!"

"Strange to you?"

"No. The name seems to find an echo in my memory as though I had heard it long, long ago. It is very strange!"

The colonel turned abruptly to the magistrate.

"Sir, I know not if nature speaks out in this fashion, but something seems to tell me that this young man now before you I shall find a long lost nephew."

"A nephew, sir?" said the magistrate.

"You my father's brother?" cried Louis.

"Yes, my heart tells me that it is so. A thousand circumstances all confirm the thought. You are the very image of what he was at your age, and if you be not indeed the son of John Long, I am willing to claim you as my own lost brother's child."

Louis was fain to cling to the bar of wood in front of him for support.

"That there was ever some mystery about my identity, I always knew," he said. "Many a chance word, many a stray expression from John Long awakened that idea in my mind; but what it was, I could form no conception of. If, however, dear sir, it should chance to be true that in you I find a relative, why, then it is a chance that I will say 'redeems all sorrows', and I shall lift from my heart one of its heaviest burdens."

"Yes, yes, Louis. It must be. We will believe it, dear boy; and we will believe, too, that in such a conviction we stand but upon the threshold of those abundant proofs that heaven in its goodness has preserved for us."

"Amen!" said Louis.

The colonel stood very near to him, and looked with joy in his face.

"That letter, sir," said Louis, in a low, sweet voice.

The colonel started, and closed his eyes for an instant, as he said:

"You spoke?"

"Yes, dear sir. That letter from John Long."

"My brother Felix!" cried Colonel Franklin. "There I heard him! Louis, Louis, he speaks to me from his ocean grave through your lips."

"I am much delighted, sir," said the magistrate; "if, through all these circumstances, you should recover a lost relative; and since John Long is no more, I will now put it to Mr. Mears here if he feels inclined, on the evidence produced, to pursue the case as against the persons now before me?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Mears. "I am content."

A shout of applause burst from all in court, which the magistrate did no more to repress than to shake his head, and say:

"Hush! hush!"

"Si-lence!" cried the usher, with a frantic look, and his face so red with the agony of his feelings from the applause in the court that there was a burst of merriment now at his expense.

The magistrate held up his hand, and all was still.

"Under these circumstances," he said, "and the evidence of complicity in the affair of the stealing the diamond from Mr. Mears being quite circumstantial, and evident as against the prisoner at the bar, I shall discharge him."

Then there was another clapping of hands; and Louis bowed to the magistrate, as he said:
"Sir, I thank you. I am indeed as innocent as I am sure you wish me to be. It is possible, that in this letter from John Long to me, there may be something that bears a relation to this matter; and if this dear friend will still read it—"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said the colonel.

"And if you, sir, will kindly listen to it, I hope it will throw some further light upon transactions concerning which I am as ignorant as any one else can be."

"I shall listen with pleasure," said the magistrate, "if Colonel Franklin will read the letter."

The colonel broke the seal, and opened the letter, and at once read as follows:

"Louis—When you get this I shall be far away. I am now packing up to go. You do not feel disposed to go with me, I can see. Your heart is with her whom you have brought to my house. What I leave behind me, take to yourself. I leave all to you, and if any one should come to you and question you or accuse you of anything concerning a diamond, show them this letter, in which I now write these words. As I believe in Heaven, and as I have a hope yet of its mercy in a world to come, you, Louis, have had no part or knowledge in the abduction of the diamond from Mr. Mears. I alone received the thought. I alone carried it out—innocent on my part; and at my orders you made a false diamond, not knowing the use I intended to put it to. This is the truth, and the whole truth, as help me God!"

"John Love."

The voice of the colonel was clear and distinct, as he read the exculpatory epistle; and at the last words, as he ceased, there was not the faintest sound in the crowded court.

"Thank heaven!" he said.

"That," said the magistrate, "is like a voice from the grave exculpating you. I congratulate you, and you leave this court without a stain upon your fair name, or a shadow of suspicion attaching to you."

A glow of pleasure was upon the countenance of Louis as he turned to the colonel, who said:

"You mark, Louis, that nowhere in this letter does John Long call you his son."

"I did remark that, sir."

"Come, then. Come. Come to your old home. There is one there who will rejoice over this complete exonerations. Come at once."

"But, sir, your worship!" cried Mr. Mears.

"I hope that your worship thinks I have a first right, under the circumstances, to keep the diamond."

"The magistrate shook his head.

"No!" cried Giles Hilton. "It is mine!"

"Yours!" shouted Mr. Mears; "you only found it after all."

"Did you find it?"

"I—I—gave you ten thousand pounds."

"Of which you took nine thousand from among my effects at the hotel when you wrongfully accused me of robbery."

"Well, well! Really, Mr. Hilton!"

"Well, sir?"

"If you can substantiate your claim to the diamond, I shall be only too happy to treat with you further about it."

"And until then, sir?"

"Well, until then, I—a—that is—hem! I think I ought to take care of it!"

"Then I appeal to the magistrate. Admit that I found the jewel. In whose custody should it be until the owner comes forward but in his who found it? I claim the diamond."

"Nay!" cried Mr. Mears, as he produced the jewel and held it up. "Nay! I bargained for it, and it is mine, and mine it remains! Give me my thousand pounds and interest for the money—I have no objection to you having the jewel."

Giles Hilton sprang upon the jeweler like a tiger, and they both rolled to the floor of the court-room together.

"Murder! Murder! Help!"

"Villain! My diamond! I have sinned for it, and I will have it!"

The constables present made a rush to separate them, and they were dragged from each other; but Giles Hilton had the diamond.

"Who will wrest it from me?" he cried, in a loud, exultant tone. "It is mine! Not with my life will I part with it! Not with my life!"

"Stop him! Stop him!" shouted Mr. Mears.

"Good gracious, he has it!"

"Your wig, sir," said an officer, holding out to Mr. Mears a handful of hair; and then the jeweler, putting his hand on his head, found out that in the scuffle the wig, which he believed defied detection, had been torn from him. With a groan he hastily put it on again; but unhappily, the hind part before, which so utterly confounded his identity that he looked like quite a different person.

"The diamond! Sir—your worship! Stop that man—stop him!"

The magistrate had made a sign with his hand, and the door of the court had been closed. Giles Hilton had been just a moment too late to get out with his prize, and now he stood panting and baffled, glaring at the jeweler and at the magistrate.

"Mine! Mine only!" he gasped. "It is surely mine!"

The magistrate spoke.

"It is quite clear that the real owner of the diamond in question is not at present forthcoming; but a little publicity given to this transaction will no doubt remedy that state of things. In the meantime, for the interests of all parties, and the furtherance of justice, the jewel must remain in the hands—"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Giles Hilton.

"In mine! in mine!" cried Mr. Mears.

"Of the authorities," added the magistrate.

"It will be my duty to lodge the jewel, which is of such value that I should not like to keep charge of it, in the hands of the highest author-
ity over me—namely, the Secretary of State for the Home Department; and when the owner appears, he can have it."

"If he should not appear?" said Giles Hilton.

"Then it is yours.

"I am content."

Mr. Mears groaned.

Giles Hilton placed the diamond in the outstretched hand of the magistrate.

"How long?" he said.

"I should advise six months, with every publicity, and if at the end of that time no claimant appears, why, I do not see who can interfere with your possession of it. It is not in the shape of a treasure trove which is usually found beneath the surface of the earth. This is a something, as I understand it, picked up in the street?"

"Yes!"

"Like a coin, or a purse, or an ornament; and there can be no better title than that of the finder, if an owner of it, previous to its being so found, does not come forward."

"I am content," said Giles Hilton.

Mr. Mears groaned again.

"The case is over," said the magistrate's clerk.

"Next case," called the usher. "Silence!"

Giles Hilton walked from the court with a proud look, and a wild flush about the eyes.

Mr. Mears ran after him.

"Sir, sir? Mr. Hilton?"

"Well, sir?"

"You think—that is, you seem to think, sir, that a—eh?—that the owner—that no owner will be forthcoming?"

"I know it!"

"You know—eh?"

"I know that no owner will be forthcoming."

"My dear sir?"

"I know it well. The diamond will be mine."

The owner is—ah! He will not be forthcoming."

"Then, Mr. Hilton, give me your hand. Let bygones be bygones, my dear sir. Business is business, you know. Ha! ha!"

It was a little, weak kind of laugh that Mr. Mears indulged in; and he looked very comical with his wig on the hind part before. Some very engaging curls, which Mr. Mears took great delight in, hung in a strange fashion just behind his ears now, and the scruffy look of the wig over his forehead was not enchanting.

"Well, sir," said Giles.

"Very good. Take my arm, my dear Mr. Hilton—beau! on the supposition—a supposition which, to you, appears to be a certainty—eh?"

"Go on."

"That the real owner will never appear."

"Never!"

"Well, sir; and that as the diamond will be yours at the end of six months, what do you say to our still doing business—eh?"

"How?"

"I will still buy."

"Good!"

"Exactly, my dear sir. Now, what say you to our bill at six months date for twenty thousand pounds, and the diamond will be ours? A bill with a condition in it. A promissory note, I should say, with a little condition."

"What?"

"That if the owner should appear, it would not be payable by us."

"No."

"You agree?"

"No, Mr. Mears, I will not agree to that condition. I have already had of you one thousand pounds, or thereabouts, I believe."

"Yes, yes."

"Then I will make these terms. I will take of you one thousand pounds per month during the six months in question, and at the end of that time, the diamond shall be yours for thirty thousand more."

"But, but, sir—but, Mr. Hilton, if an owner should appear?"

"He will not."

"But if—"

"He cannot. You now know my terms. Agree to them or refuse them, I care not; I can wait.

"Agreed, agreed, then, my dear sir—agreed. And now that we are friends again, I hope all the little—a—a—disagreements and disagreements will be forgotten."

"When will you pay me the first thousand pounds?"

"My dear sir, you have it."

"No."

"Nay; I only got back nine thousand. Wait a month from now.

"No. I have no money, and I must have one of the thousands this day, or our agreement is as naught. What say you?"

Mr. Mears uttered a sigh and a groan, and then he replied:

"Very well—very well. Come with me, and you shall have the money."

"I live again!" muttered Giles Hilton.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD CABINET AT JOHN LONGS.

As fast as a couple of good horses could whirl Colonel Franklin's carriage to Spitfield, went the colonel and Louis to John Long's old house.

Well they both knew that there was one there waiting, who would receive with a joy, that it would be another joy to look upon, the news of Louis' liberation.

The colonel paused in the old shop, and turning to Louis, with a smile, said:

"I will wait here. You can best be the bearer of your own news, dear Louis."
The young man thanked him by a look and a pressure of the hand, and then bounded up the dark, narrow staircase that he knew so well, to the upper room.

"Blanche! Blanche! dear Blanche! It is I! All is well!"

With a cry of joy, Blanche Ratcliff sprang forward and rested on his breast.

"Louis! Louis! dear brother!"

"Do not, Blanche, call me by that name."

"Louis! not call you brother? You said I might, and that we would make up to each other all that we had not in dear relationship."

"We will, dear Blanche; but that name of brother, you see, dear—"

Blanche shook her head.

"No, Louis, but I see that you are safe, that you have come back to me, and I can see when I look into your eyes that the danger that threatened you has passed away—I can see all that, Louis, and from my heart I thank Heaven that it is so!"

"Yes, Blanche, dearest, and best, and you you will not call me brother, because—"

"Because, Louis?"

"Because I hope that a dearer name still will come from your lips, in time to come, Blanche. Shall it not be so in time to come that the love of twenty thousand brothers shall not reach the sum of our affection? You will be my wife, Blanche."

"Louis! Louis!"

There was a tap at the door of the room, and Blanche started from the breast of Louis, who cried out:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and rather a strange spectacle presented itself. Without a word, for it would seem that her intense interest in what she had been about paralyzed her utterance. Mrs. Mills half stumbled into the room, and dropped on the floor a confused mass of wearing apparel.

"What is it?" cried Louis.

"Oh, what?"

Mrs. Mills sat down by the side of the things she had brought with her, and cried out:

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!"

Then it was evident both to Blanche and to Louis that the various articles of wearing apparel that Mrs. Mills had brought with her were such as might belong to an infant or a child not many months removed from infancy, and they recollected what had been said about the contents of the old cabinet in John Long's room.

And Mrs. Mills, finding breath to speak, now made up for her past silence by a volubility that at first rather obscured than eliminated her meaning.

"It's here," she said; "it's all here—a F and a F: two F's if you please, Miss Ratcliff. Oh, what will become of this world?"

How the world in general was to be compro-
"And your friend, let me hope," said Colonel Franklin, as he took Blanche's hand in his, and by a slight movement placed it in that of Felix.

Oh, how happy that mute recognition of their love made them. They could not speak. They could only look in the faces of each other, and then at Colonel Franklin, with so much gratitude and joy that his own eyes sparkled with delight as he returned the gaze.

"It has so happened," he said, in that low, deep voice of feeling which at times came over him. "It has so happened that I am placed in the position of a father to Felix, since my poor brother, his real father, has passed away; and I hope, too, that you, Miss Ratcliff—"

"Sir, will you not call me Blanche?"

"I will—I will. I hope, then, that you, also, Blanche, will permit me to call you my daughter, and that in thus thinking of you both in that other relationship, I shall be able to say: Be happy, my child."

Mrs. Mills looked amazed, and scrambled up from the floor.

"Oh sir," she said; "then Mr. Louis is not Mr. Louis?"

"No, my dear madam; he is Mr. Felix Franklin, and in his own great and glorious country, whether I hope he will return with me, he will find many a kindred heart and hand to welcome him."

"His—own—country, sir?" said Blanche, hesitatingly. "And is not Louis an Englishman?"

"No," said Colonel Franklin, with a smile; "but he is the younger brother of an Englishman, and about him, and me, and all Englishmen, there is that one touch of nature which makes the new and the old world kin. A common language, feelings, and affections, virtues and aspirations, and that indomitable courage and energy which belong alike to England and the United States, bridge over the stormy ocean which nature rolls between the brethren, and each to each feels the tie of a common origin—a common sympathy."

"Yes, dear Blanche!" cried Felix; "I am not the less your own Louis, although my native land is far away, and my home will be with the good and the free!"

Blanche crept close to him.

"Your home, Louis, or Felix—be you which you may—your home shall be my home, your country my country, your friends my friends."

"Why, that is well," said the colonel. Fair English rose, we will make much of you in our land of the West, and not more cheerful should you be beneath the bright, sparkling canopy of your English heaven than you shall find yourself honored in the star-spangled banner of the Great Republic. But we have yet much to do, dear Felix, and we will not add to the agitation of this gentle girl. The revelations made to me at the last moment by John Long, conjoin-

to the circumstances that have so strangely turned out since his decease, points to me, in all its details, the sad story of your parents."

"Tell me, uncle—oh! tell me, did he—did that old man contrive aught against my parents' life?"

"No. He was innocent of that."

"Thank Heaven!"

"They perished by the fiat of Nature, and he preserved you. Peace be to him!"

"Amen!" said Mrs. Mills.

"A further search in that cabinet," added the colonel, "will, I feel convinced, bring other secrets to light. He intimated to me as much, and now I would be glad to commence that search, at once."

On the moment, they repaired to the cabinet; but notwithstanding all the explorations of the colonel and Felix, they could, for a time, find nothing. Then they turned it onto its face, and it was not until then that they heard a movement as of some loose articles still in the ancient piece of furniture.

"We must arrive at the secrets of this cabinet in any way we can," suggested the colonel.

"A chisel or an axe, now, Felix, would help us."

"Stav, uncle; what is this?"

"Ah! an indentation, as if to enable one's fingers to get a hold."

"It is done."

The whole of the lower compartment, which had seemed, at first sight, to be the solid bottom of the cabinet, divided, and one-half slid out, disclosing a shallow receptacle beneath. A quantity of dust was there, and shining through it, what were evidently jewels of different descriptions. A folded paper lay on the top of them, and the colonel read from some faded writing that was upon it these words:

"So help me Heaven! I solemnly make oath that the boy named by us Louis is the son of Mr. Felix Franklin, an American gentleman, who, with his wife, drowned at the mouth of the Solent, near to Southampton, in endeavoring to board the 'Isabella Forbes,' a vessel bound to America. The precious stones in this receptacle are all that belonged to the child's parents. I have not had the heart or the courage to make use of one of them. There should be twenty-two in all, and they are worth one thousand pounds."

"John Long."

There needed not, in truth, this crowning proof of who Louis really was, but still, as making assurance doubly sure, it was welcome; and Blanche, as she held his hand in hers, said:

"Dear Felix, you are rich, now."

"Not so rich, dear, but that I was as rich as I could be."

"But your jewels, Felix?"

"And my jewels!"

He indicated what he meant by the look of fond affection he gave to her. And then, as the colonel counted the stones, and found exactly the number that John Long had specified, he said:

"John Long."
"I am glad these are recovered, my dear Felix. Your own fortune in America is considerable, and these jewels will be a little trousseau for your bride."

Felix at once placed the gems in Blanche's hands, and then his uncle added:

"Now I am going to pain Blanche, but I hope she will forgive me."

"Me, sir? You pain me?"

"Yes, Blanche. Can you say to me that you, too, have done all that you can to solve the mystery that surrounds you?"

"Oh, what can I do?"

"I have been told by Felix, here, that he brought from the hotel where your father made a brief stay with you, certain boxes belonging to that lost father, and that a not unnatural feeling so overwhelmed you with grief when you tried to examine their contents minutely, that you gave up the matter, and they still remain much as they were."

"Yes," said Blanche, with a sigh; "that is true."

"Then it is thus I fear I shall pain you. I want you to be courageous enough to pursue the search minutely in your father's boxes, and to let us, if you will, help you."

"I will! I will! I am weak-hearted, but I was so full of grief! Come, sir. Come, Felix, I will try to look on this task with different eyes, now."

"That is well," said the colonel; "and who knows, since we are in the discovering vein, today, but we may find yet a something that may guide us on your father's track?"

"Heaven grant it may be so!"

The two boxes that had belonged to Mr. Hilton were in the front room of the old house—that room immediately over the shop; and with silent expectation, now, Felix and the colonel took the contents of the first out, one by one, while Blanche knelt down by the side of the box, and only saw the things through a mist of tears.

Clothing; a few curiosities from India; some papers of no value or account, and the box was empty.

"There is nothing," said Felix.

"Nothing," whispered Blanche.

The other box was opened; and, at once, the colonel saw that it was in several compartments, each of which could be opened by lifting a little flap lid, which could be easily laid hold of by a piece of tape affixed.

Various small articles for the toilet were in one compartment. In another, a purse with about a hundred pounds in gold, and a tolerably complete collection of Indian gold coinage. The third compartment was empty.

"Nothing but the money," said the colonel.

"Nothing," sighed Blanche, again.

"This seal? What is the meaning of it here?" said Felix.

There was a seal apparently at the bottom of the empty compartment, and hanging to it a slip of paper. On the slip of paper was written this sentence:

"Only to be opened, my dear Blanche, if you do not see me for three days."

Blanche uttered a cry as the colonel pronounced the words, and she eagerly placed her hand on the seal in an endeavor to tear it from the box. It did come away, and it brought with it from a slit in the lining of the trunk a letter.

"The mystery is solved!" said Colonel Franklin.

"It surely is," said Felix.

Blanche only took one glance at the superscription of the letter, then she burst into tears and clasped it with both hands to her heart, as she sobbingly said:

"It is—it is from my dear father."

"Come, Felix," said the colonel. "Such grief as Miss Ratcliffe's is sacred. This is a communication to her alone. Come, come."

"No, no," cried Blanche; "oh, do not desert me now."

"Desert you?"

"Stay with me, stay with me. I cannot read it—I should blot out every letter of every word with a separate tear. Felix, Felix, you love me, you read it to me, and I will try to listen."

"I will, dear Blanche."

The colonel held her gently by the hand, while Felix took the letter.

"Blanche, dear," he said; "Blanche?"

"Yes, Felix."

"Will you break the seal?"

"You."

"No, no. The letter is from your own father—do you break it?"

Blanche felt the delicacy of the request, and with trembling hands she broke the seal of the letter and handed it back again to Felix, who opened it carefully; and then, amid such a stillness that the distant roar and hum of the giant city so nearly around them came along with his voice like the waves upon some distant beach, he read:

"My DEAR CHILD—I know not how or why it is, but this night, while you sleep, I feel impelled to write this letter or memorandum, hoping the while I write it, that there will never arise an occasion for it to meet your eyes."

"You know, my dear, that I have been in India in the pursuit of my profession as a legateary. I have been very successful, and from one royal court to another of the noted chiefs, I have gone prospering as I went. I have made it a rule to exchange all I earned into jewels, and from time to time I exchanged all these jewels for some one of greater value. At last, from one of the princes of Myoro, I have received a diamond, with which I come to England. It is worth one hundred and ten thousand pounds. It is your fortune, my darling."

"Your mother, my dear, has been dead twelve years now. She was a poor man's daughter, and I was a poor workman when we joined our hands. With the excess of sister of hers, I don't think you and I, my Blanche, have a relative in all the world."

"Now, my dear, I have a sort of fear that my heart—"
somewhat diseased. Perhaps it is a fancy, only, but the notion of some sudden disease has come over me—perhaps as I am in the street, and far from you. Well, my love, let me trust in God, and do the best we can. If that should happen, I have the precious diamond always with me. Remember that, and that it is yours, honestly and fairly. To-morrow evening I intend to go to Spitalfields in search of your poor mother's sister, who I was informed had married a washer of the name of Hilton. Should they be poor and honest, and lovely people, what a joy it will be to you and to me, my darling, to bring prosperity into their humble home. Perhaps they have little children, too—God bless them! And you, too, my heart's treasure—my own darling child—our father kisses you in your sleep, May Heaven guard you, ever and ever! Your own father.

Poor Blanche! Alas! that poor stricken heart! How she sobbed, shrieked, and wrung her hands. That poor, poor broken-hearted Blanche!

CHAPTER XXIII.

GILES HILTON VISITS HIS FAMILY.

It was at the precise moment that the letter from Mr. Ratcliffe, which we have recorded, was opened at John Long's house, that a dark and gliding figure stopped on the threshold of one of the wretched cottages of the poor weavers of Spitalfields.

It would have been difficult to have hazarded a guess with regard to what might be the intentions of this shrinking, hesitating visitor at that poor dwelling. His manner was so strange, and compounded apparently of so many different emotions, that as each one dominated for a moment or two, he seemed a different man.

Poverty of the most glaring and unmistakable description was in and about the humble dwelling, and indeed, so much had the poor inhabitants of that place seemed to suffer, that they had lost all pride in the neatness and exterior pleasantness of their home.

There were trees, bushes, and plants that, had they been attended to, as once they no doubt were, would have made the poverty of the place graceful; but now that a kind of semi-destitution had made itself known in the humble home, the amenities of life had died out.

The struggle to live had become the one absorbing thought and pursuit. And yet—and yet these people, so poor that they knew not, from meal to meal, if that of which they partook in its sparing quantities, might not be the last—these people, so situated, had had the heroism to take into their poor, sad house, a woman and two children.

That woman was Mrs. Hilton, and the two children were those little ones who, bewildered by the varied changes in their fortunes, from poverty to luxury, from luxury back again to poverty, could only, with terrified glances into their mother's face, cling to her in trembling silence.

This cottage in Spitalfields was, then, that in which the wife of Giles Hilton had found a refuge when he was dragged to a prison. It was the refuge she preferred still to the gilded miseries which he again offered her when he was liberated by the jeweler.

And now that Hilton felt himself once more at liberty—now that he seemed again, although at a distance of six months, to hold the glittering bauble in his grasp, from which as yet he had neither gained happiness nor peace, his thoughts turned to those dear to him, and he sought them at their wretched home.

And it will be seen and noted that Giles Hilton was not a bad man; but he was a weak, vain, imaginative one. No voices, properly so called, found a home in his bosom. He loved his wife and children fondly; he would have been ready, quite ready, without a murmur, to suffer or to do anything for them, and would have looked like a saint, a hero, or a martyr; but there was in his mind a spirit of romantic ostentation—a glittering, grasping longing to look high, and bright, and good in the world's eye.

And so he fell.

The fresh prismatic rays of that diamond which so possesed him, had dazzled his understanding; and all he did and said did not so much spring from the heart and brain of Giles Hilton, as from the man who is walking in the sun and cannot see his way before him.

He would have said, as he did say, that the diamond belonged to him.

O fatal mistake!

It was Giles Hilton who belonged to, and was the slave of the diamond.

But still he did not forget those whom he loved; and with the first thousand pounds in his pocket of the six installments he was to receive from Mr. Mears, he sought his wife and his children, where during their conversation in the dreary prison-cell, Mrs. Hilton had told him they had found a shelter.

That she would go back so that poor house and to those little ones when the fatal diamond again separated them, he felt certain. Therefore was it that he paused upon the threshold of the half-starving weaver's cottage, with the certainty that he would find those he sought there.

No one called out to know who the intruder was on the threshold, and Giles paused to listen if he could hear the voices of those dear to him.

He thought he heard a faint murmur, half sighs, half low-spoken words. But he was not sure, as he gently raised the latch of the door.

A man, gaunt and attenuated by suffering, rose up and met him.

"What is it? Who is it?"

"I, Giles Hilton. Do you not know me?"

"Good God!"

"Hush, oh, hush. Is my wife—are my children here?"

"Sleep," said the man. "There!"

He pointed to the door of an inner room, and
then he added, with the brusque shortness of speech which was either habitual to him, or which his manners taught him to affect:

"Wife gone to John Long's. A boy came to say some one was to go."

"To John Long's? Why, John Long is dead."

"Is he? A good thing too."

"Why a good thing?"

"He can't be hungry, thirsty, or cold. Ha! Three things to get rid of. I wish I was dead, my wife dead, and my children dead!"

"Hush! Do not say that. When things are at their worst they mend."

"Ha! ha! Do they?"

"They do. Look here. How long would your loom, were it even clacking day and night, take before it produced you as much as this which I now freely give to you?"

Giles Hilton took from his pocket a handful of gold, and scattered it on to a moulder, half-broken down old table that stood in the middle of the room.

The glittering pieces rolled some on to the floor, some into the chinks and hollows of the old table, and they sent up their yellow lustre into the eyes and into the brain of the half-famished man.

"For me! for me!" he gasped.

"Yes, all for you. I give freely. Take you as freely. All for you."

"Oh, joy! joy! Why, Giles Hilton, you are a prince. You are a king, Giles Hilton. God bless you! No! oh, no! What am I saying? Oh, no! no!"

"Why do you say no?"

The door of the inner room opened, and Mrs. Hilton stepped forth.

"Do I dream, or is that the voice of my husband? Ah, yes! It is Giles! My Giles yet! Yet, as ever, my own! Oh, so welcome! so welcome! All forgotten—all forgiven. You have come back to us, dear Giles, and we will be so happy and so poor again."

She did not see, for the moment, the glimmering coins on the table. She flung herself on to the breast of her husband, and rested her face upon his head.

"Yes, said Giles, yes Emma; we will be very happy—very happy, but not poor."

"Oh, yes! Poor as we were."

"Not so. You do not comprehend. A great change has taken place; my heart is much at ease now. I have told all, and I am declared to be the possessor of the diamond, if no veritable claimant should appear to it, so that all is fair, open and—and—trueful before the world. There is no concealment you see now. There is no dread of this man or of that man. I stand clear—clear of all. The diamond even is not in my possession. I have given it up to the proper authorities, and it will be surrendered back to me at the expiration of a period of time which will enable those authorities to feel that no other claimant will appear."

Mrs. Hilton looked up into his face and seemed to watch every movement of his lips as he spoke, and then she said to him very gently:

"But it is not our diamond, Giles."

"We found it; and if no claimant should appear for it—"

"Ah, but there must be some one who can say, that is mine, for if you found it, Giles, some one lost it."

"That is true, but—"

"And," interrupted Mrs. Hilton, people do not lose such a treasure as that, and go quietly on their way taking no heed of its recovery."

"Peace, peace. All will be well. I fear no claimant for the jewel, and while the time rolls slowly by during which it waits until it can be handed to me without a doubt and without a scrape, I have more wealth than will suffice to place us on such a height that the brightness and beauty of life and of the world will seem to open before us, like the coronal of some fair flower that has needed the golden sweetness of morning to charm it into existence."

Mrs. Hilton trembled.

"Yes, added Giles," all is well now. Time was when only in secret could I enjoy the results of that most fortunate hour when the diamond glistened before my eyes, but now—now it may be proclaimed from the house-tops that Giles Hilton found a diamond, and waits its full possession."

"Giles, I will trust in you."

"You may. You will ever!"

"I have ever!"

"And yet you tremble."

"I know not why, but it seems even now as if there were something in the air."

"In the air?"

"Coming nearer and nearer."

"Fancy, imagination, Emmy. Do not be so weak, I pray you."

"Hush!"

"What is it? Why seek to dash the cup of joy from our lips. All is well, I say. Henceforth we walk not in secret paths. On the broad highway of prosperity we take our course, and all is sunshine, and peace, and serenity about us. Let people point to me, saying, 'There is the man who found a diamond.' What then? What then?"

"There again!"

"Wild again."

"These footsteps, Giles."

Bang! came a blow upon the outer door of the little cottage. A flush of color dashed over the face and brow of Hilton, and then slowly receding, as though all the blood had rallied round his head, he became deathly pale.

Bang! went the blow at the door again.

"Who is it? What is it?" said Hilton.
"Raise the latch!" cried the starving weaver, and as he spoke he placed both his hands over the gold that Giles had scattered on the table.

The latch was raised, and the door swung slowly open.

"Do not let us intrude here, said a voice.
We bring help and consolation, I hope, to all in this house. Is Mrs. Giles Hilton here?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hilton. He knew that voice at once. He had heard it too recently not to know it. It was the voice of Colonel Franklin, and as the door swung, and shut behind him, and the colonel stood in the little room, Giles Hilton fell back, step by step, until he reached the threshold of the inner apartment, and keeping his eyes fixed on the face of the colonel, he said:

"What more have you to say to me?"

"In good truth, said the colonel, I did not think to find you here, Giles Hilton."

"No?"

"But my errand is twofold."

"Well, sir; as you say, twofold. What then?"

"It was to bring successor to your wife and your children, and to all in this house."

"Ah!"

"And to inquire where you could be found."

"I thank you—I thank you, but go! No, sir—no! Your successor is not wanted—as you know well. What have you to say to me?"

"Much. Will you step out into the air with me, for in truth I have much to say to you."

"Into the air?"

"Yes. Come, Giles Hilton—come."

"What is that?"

"What?"

"A shadow passed the window even now—past the little casement it went slowly. Who is that? I tell you, sir, I do not wish to step out into the air. I am a man, sir, who has suffered much; but now all that has passed away, and I am rich—rich! What you have to say to me, sir. I listen to you."

"And I," said Mrs. Hilton.

The colonel bowed to her; and then he said, in those low, melodious searching tones, which he used when the subject-matter of his words was of deep interest:

"Giles Hilton, I have to tell you that the owner of the diamond is found!"

It seemed as if these words, aimed directly at the heart of Hilton, had plunged him at once into his utmost recesses, for he reeled back a pace, and only saved himself from falling by a plunge of both his feet.

"You rave!" he shrieked. "Sir, you rave—"

"Thank God!" cried Mrs. Hilton.

"For what?"

"That the owner of the diamond is found."

"No! A thousand times no!"

He shook his wife roughly from him, and she fell to the floor.

"No! If all the fiends that people the lower world were to come to tell me that, I would not believe it. No! I say no! a thousand times, no! Find me the cunning alchemist that can frame upon the thing, it seemed to him, and again consubstantiate it into forms and substance. Find me the man who can breathe again the breath of life into the dead! Tell the all-consious flame to crush down, and by some most amazing force to in-dume its victim. Speak to the grave, to death, to destruction, to decomposition, and then show me the owner of the diamond, and he shall have it! He shall have it then, and I will take his place and become a heap of carbon. Ha! ha! The owner of the diamond is here! Here, sir, before you! I—I—Giles Hilton!"

"You are a man of rare gifts," said Colonel Franklin; "and fortune has dealt badly with you, perhaps, in your entire life. I pity you."

"You—pity—me?"

"From my heart. And still I tell you I have found the owner of the diamond."

"And still I tell you it is false!"

"There was a man," added the colonel, "who, in the dim and dusky evening of new several days since, sought his way in Spitalfields. He wore a cloak."

"Ah!"

"A cloak of blue cloth, and the remainder of his apparel was costly, and such as a man of wealth might wear. He had an object in visiting this district. It was an object of kindness and goodness. It was an object that should have brought with it its own protection, which should have encompassed him as with a shield of triple steel. How, in what way, or by what means the owner of the diamond with which your fortunes have been so intimately interlaced for the past week, became separated from that condensed fortune which he unwisely carried about him, it is not for me to hazard a guess."

Giles Hilton had to lean on the wall for support, and he kept his eyes fixed upon Colonel Franklin with a terrible expression.

"But it will suffice that the question of who is the owner of the gorgeous gem is answered, and that it is no longer now or in prospect the possession of the lucky finder."

"Finder!" gasped Giles Hilton. "There, you don't. That is, you—you—"

"Giles! Giles!" screamed his wife, as she clung now around him once again. "Giles, I can see that some terrible secret hovers on your lips, and does battle with your soul. Oh, tell all! Tell all, and seek forgiveness and for pardon."

"Pardon? I, pardon?"

"Yes; for let the secret be what it may, you are at least guiltless of any crime that one of less heart than yourself might not shrink from. Giles—Giles! Speak to me. Oh, speak to me,
I pray you, and put once and forever an end
To this agonizing doubt, say that there is
Some error, but not a guilty one.
Giles Hilton clasped his hands over his face,
And rocked to and fro, and then suddenly ad-
vancing a step toward the colonel, he said, al-
most fiercely :
"What owner of the jewel? Who is your
Owner that you so boast of?"
"A father or a daughter. I know not which
at the present time; but it is one of those two;
and failing one, it shall be the other."
"Daughter? What daughter?"
"His daughter. The daughter of Mr. Rat-
chiff, who, with the diamond in his possession,
sought this obscure poverty-striken district of
London in order that he might bring peace and
comfort whish he had well earned, and was able
to dispense to his wife's sister."
Mrs. Hilton dashed the hair back from her
ears, and seemed to have a presentiment that
some revelation was now about to take place
which would fall sadly upon her senses.
"Wife's sister?" said Giles Hilton, coldly.
"Yes; who has married with one Hilton, a
Spitalfields weaver—one sister married a poor
journeyman lapidary—the other a weaver. The
poor journeyman lapidary went to the East,
and made a fortune. The poor weaver stands
now before me in his original poverty, and a
sadder man than ever poverty could have made
him.
"O God!" said Giles. Mrs. Hilton clasped her hands, and gave one
convulsive sob, but she said nothing.
The colonel slipped from between Hilton and
the door of the cottage.
"Go," he said, "if your conscience bids
you. Go if your heart is corrupted, and your
brain dizzy with the remembrance of crime—
go, and I, and she, who is fatherless, will try to
forgive you. Go!"
Giles tottered two steps toward the door, but
his wife, even on her knees, made speed after him,
and caught him by his hand—his apparel—his
knees, around which she clung, and
she cried, shriekingly, to him:
"No—no—no, Giles, you did not kill him.
There, I have spoken it. I have uttered the
dreadful thought which sits brooding at all our
hearts. You did not kill my sister's husband,
Giles!"
Hilton held up his right hand above his head,
as he said solemnly—
"I did not, I hope—"
His hand fell powerless, and he sighed deep-
ly.
"Go!" said the colonel. "Wretched man,
I can well perceive that some fearful secret
rests heavily upon your soul. Go and settle it
with your Creator.
"Mista—mista all," shouted Giles Hilton,
"I swear it from my mental vision! What is all
this that I should cower down like a second Cain,
who has seen the blood of his brother reeking
in the face of Heaven? The mark is not on
my brow! I found the jewel! I found the
jewel!"
"You did!" said a sharp voice; "you did—
I will swear to that, for I saw you find it."
The door swung open, and Nagle made one
step within the threshold.

CHAPTER XXIV.
GILES HILTON MAKES HIS CHOICE OF TWO EVILS.
This sudden and most unexpected appearance of the villain Nagle upon the scene of ac-
 tion caused a general commotion in the little
miserable hovel.
There was such a look, too, of satisfaction on
the face of the reprobrate, that one would al-
most suppose that he had himself a chance of
becoming possessed of the jewel in dispute. It
was quite clear, too, that he calculated upon
perfect impunity so far as Colonel Franklin was
concerned, for he looked with an air of careless
defiance at him, as he added:
"Yes, he found it, and I found it. Bless
you all! I know all about it. He and I found the
diamond, and I will tell you how. We
agreed, too, to share whatever reward the real
owner or owners might offer for it. Did we
not, Hilton? Hem!"
"Eh?"
"I say, we go shares—don't we? and if ever
there was any fuss about it, I was to come for-
ward and say what I knew. Was I not, Hilton? Hem!"
Whenever Nagle said "Hem!" he perpetrat-
ed, at the same time, an elaborate wink, which
was meant to let Hilton understand that how-
er apparently uncomfortable or threatening
present circumstances might be, he, Nagle, was
the man to bring him through, on condition of
sharing with him in all pecuniary results.
And by the time Nagle had got thus far, it
became evident to those least experienced or
suspicions in such matters that he had been for-
tifying himself by some ardent potations; for
Nagle was in that stage of drunkenness when
such men think themselves so fearfully cunning
that it is a wonder they let the world quietly
revolve on its axis.
"All right, Hilton—all right! Lord bless
you! I have had my ear to the door there for
these ten minutes; I know all. Give me your
hand, old friend—your arm, old friend. We
found the diamond. We—we—together. What
is the reward? If we can't have the diamond
all to ourselves, what is the reward? That is
the question. It should be something hand-
some. What is it, sir? What is it?"
"Viper!" said Hilton.
"Eh?"
"Touch me not!"
"What?"
"Lay but one polluting finger upon me, and I will strike you to my feet. Have I, indeed, sunk so low that I am claimed as boon companion by a thing like you?"

"Giles Hilton, beware!"

"I sorne you!"

"No you don't. Shares! Half and half! I forgive you, old friend. Come—I tell you, sir, you big fellow, we found him. The diamond, I mean. Hilton, he says—no, I says. 'Hoi!' says I. 'Hi!' says he. 'What's that glittering?' says I. 'Oh,' says he, 'it's a bit of glass.' 'No,' says I, 'it's a diamond.' And that's how we found it. Give us the reward. Come on, Giles. Come and have a drop of something to drink, and you won't look so like a piece of bad whitening."

Nagle brushed up against Hilton, and to save himself from falling, as well as to improve upon his former terms of familiarity with him, he grasped him by the arm:

"Off—off, snake!" cried Hilton.

He struck the villain roughly, and Nagle rolled over on to the floor.

"Oh, that is—it is? That's it? You will not be friends with me? No shares, eh? Very well. Murder! murder! murderer!"

"What do you mean?" said the colonel.

Nagle half sat upon the floor, and half raised himself on his left hand, while he pointed to Hilton with his right, and yelled out:

"Seize the murderer! I saw him do the deed! It was a murder! I saw it all. I denounce Giles Hilton as the murderer of Mr.—Mr.—ah! the man with the cloak!"

"No, no!" screamed Mrs. Hilton.

The colonel stepped toward the door.

"Yes, yes!" yelled Nagle, again. "I was hidden in the cottage. The traps were after me, and I hid in the old caboose. Ha, ha! I saw the man come in, and he said something. What did he say? No matter. Hilton, there, killed him—murdered him in cold blood—foully murdered him. I saw it. He dragged the dead body, after he had robbed and rifled it, up the little stairs to the roof room above. His wife—that woman—there she stands, looking like an image of fright done in flesh and blood—she was gone to sell her wedding-ring for bread. She came back, and he, Hilton, would not let her go up-stairs. Fire! fire! fire! He set light to the house. Fire! fire! He burnt house—dead body! Fire! All he burnt. The ashes lie yonder. The ashes of the dead! Murder! murder! I'll accuse him of that deed in any court in all the world. Now it's out—out! Murder will out!"

"Liars!" cried Giles Hilton, and he made a rush toward Nagle.

"Ha! ha! Come on! come on!"

"No!" said Colonel Franklin, as he stepped between Giles and Nagle. "No. This is a dreadful accusation; and but that it burrows some semblance of truth from other known circumstances, I do not say that I, for one, would lend a ready ear to it."

"False—false as his own heart!"

"True! All true!" shouted Nagle, as he clapped his hands.

"Speak," added the colonel, to Giles Hilton.

"Speak, if you will. You have already told one tale."

"And I am punished. God help me!"

"He will, Giles," said Mrs. Hilton, "for the tale you have told is the true one."

"Look!" cried Nagle. "To get me to hold my tongue, he gave me this ring. I forgot it, and put it on my own finger. A red sort of a stone. Is it what you call a ruby? He said it came from one of the fingers of the dead—the murdered man. He gave me five hundred pounds, too; but no, no! Perish the thought. My lord and gentlemen of the jury, I'm a bad fellow; I have seen a bad fellow; but I can't no, hang it! I can't set still and know that a murder has been done. It hurts my feelings, my jury and gentlemen—no, I mean my lord and gentlemen of the jury. What's the reward, eh?"

"I will go," said Hilton, faintly. "Come, Emmy. Come, where are the children?"

"Here, Giles—here."

"It is well. Sir—sir, I will admit—I will take your word that the real owner, or a real owner, of the diamond is found. Well. Be it so. I give it up. I will go away, now, at once and forever. You taking my word that I am not guilty of the murder this man imputes to me."

The colonel shook his head.

"I am sorry."

"Sorry, sir? Well, so am I. Come, Emmy."

"I cannot let you go."

Giles Hilton stepped back.

"Sir, did you never hear or read of the imprudence of setting a desperate man at bay?"

"Often."

"Then let me pass, sir."

"No. There is yet more in all this matter than at present meets the eye. Without saying that I believe or disbelieve this accusation, I feel that I ought to detain you. Your version of the story of how you became possessed of the diamond is meagre."

"Sir? sir? I pray you! I will go far off—so far off, with those I love."

"Nay, Giles Hilton, I dare not."

"Dare not, sir?"

"I dare not let you go now. I could not tell the story to my own conscience if I now let you pass."

"Then, sir, I will tell you all. I did not find the jewel."

Mrs. Hilton fell to the floor with a cry of agony.
"That is well," added Giles; "she will be all the happier, perhaps. Does she hear?"

"She swoons. Alas! poor thing!"

"Yes, alas! alas! a thousand times. Now, sir, I will unfold my breast; that villain shall no longer rejoice in the success of one falsehood over another, for there is a sound majesty about the truth that shall put both to shame."

"I ought to warn you."

"Warn me, sir? Of what?"

The colonel opened the door and said:

"Come in!"

An officer of police entered the room.

"I was seeking you, Hilton, and brought with me here this constable, not expecting to find you here, but expecting to hear of your whereabouts. Now, if you please, you may go on."

"I will tell all—so help me Heaven!"

The constable, with one of his hands behind him, quietly and cautiously drew a bolt into its socket that was on the door.

"I will tell all. A few evenings since, while sitting in my wretched home—while this poor wife of mine was gone to shake her gentle woman's heart by parting with her wedding-ring for me and our children—while the wind roared and moaned around our cheerless home, and while the splashing rain battered over their casements, there trotted into the place a man. He was ill—dying. He scarcely spoke ere Heaven lifted his last breath away. He died—so to speak—in my arms."

"Indeed?"

"It was the will of God, that! No act of mine!"

"Go on! go on!"

"His rich attire, his very appearance of wealth, tempted me, and I rifled the pockets of the dead. So I found the jewel; and from that moment, the body became an embarrassment, and I burned down my house to destroy it. You now know all. Do with me what you will, or what you may, the load is off my breast. I am myself again!"

The colonel glanced at the constable, who then stepped up to Giles Hilton.

"You are my prisoner!"

"Yes."

"My prisoner—do you hear?"

"I do hear."

"I arrest you for felony."

"Murder!" screamed out Nagle, who up to this moment had been, so to speak, charmed into silence by the simple eloquence of truth, and the words which detailed the real circumstances of his (Hilton's) possession of the diamond had come from his lips.

"Yes, murder!" said the constable.

Giles Hilton bowed his head.

The colonel flung wide the door of the wretched cottage, and a beam of bright sunlight streamed into the miserable abode, tinging with the glory of its beauty the old table, and dancing among the gold pieces that still lay upon it. That sunbeam, too, crept gently and eerily over the inanimate form of Mrs. Hilton as she lay upon the floor.

"Come!" said the officer. The two little children raised wailing cries.

"Come!"

"One moment. You are human!"

Giles Hilton knelt down by the side of his wife; gently—so gently that the tenderest affection could not have been more suggestive of care. He raised her in his arms; he parted the disordered hair from her brow, and away from before her eyes.

"Emmy! Emmy! Do you hear me?"

She shuddered and opened her eyes.

"Morning—Giles?"

"Yes, dear, it is morning—a brighter morning, now. The night of dread has passed away. When you think of me, dear, let it be gently, and with such loving charity and forgiveness as you can spare to me. Do not let our children hate their poor father. An evil spirit had me in the fascinating glare of its gaze, dear Emmy, and I knew not what I did. Will you try to forgive me?"

"Forgive you? O Giles! dear husband, you are yourself again, and we will never part more!"

"Hush! hush! I am going now!"

"Going? going? J, too; where you go, Giles, I go! What is all this? What does it mean?"

Giles pressed his lips to her brow, and then strove to rise to his feet.

"No! no! Giles! husband! What fearful look is that upon your face? Whither go you? Who are you? What man is that?"

"He has confessed," said the constable.

"Hush!" interposed Colonel Franklin. "Mrs. Hilton, some new lights have shone upon transactions that will yet, I fear, produce you much sorrow. I do not say—God forbid—that I should say it—that your husband is guilty, but it is proper you should know he is accused of possessing himself of the diamond which has worked you so much woe—"

"O God! yes—so much?"

"By the murder of its real owner!"

"Mrs. Hilton did not cry out at this. She did not shriek; she did not rave, but she turned toward her husband, and placing one hand gently on his shoulder, she kissed his cheek, as she said:

"No, Giles; I know you. No! no! You have done no murder, my husband! You could not!"

She slid her arm beneath his, and added:

"I am ready! We will both go, either they may please to take us. No murder! Oh no! no! I am heart-whole with that accusation ringing in my ears!"
A look of admiration came over the colonel's face, and he exclaimed:

"O admirable love! O rare, heavenly affection! of what are you not capable? I, too, will doubt the guilt of any one who can awaken such devotion. Hear me, Giles Hilton, you shall be fairly judged. From this moment I will banish all idea but that you are possibly innocent, and in me you shall find a friend who will spare neither time, trouble, nor cost to see justice done you."

"Sir, I thank you. Emmy, I am so much happier!"

"You look happier, Giles."

"I am; I am! Oh, one moment!"

He took from his pocket a canvas bag, and placed it in the hands of the colonel.

"There are notes and gold for the better part of a thousand pounds I have this day received from the jeweler. Let him have all back, sir. Now I am ready!"

"Yes, we are ready," said Mrs. Hilton.

"But I cannot arrest you, madam," said the officer.

"Nevertheless, I go." Mrs. Hilton caught up one of the children and placed it in her husband's arms. The other she held to her own breast.

"Now, now! we will all go!"

The officer shook his head.

Nagle crawled slowly toward the door.

"I will order a coach," said Colonel Franklin, "and for the present we will at all events, go together."

Nagle was some feet nearer to the door. It was little Mary that Giles had in his arms, and the child patted her father's check, and then flung her little arms about his neck. Giles Hilton burst into tears; his full heart overflowed with that child's caress.

Nagle was at the door—his hand on the bolt; he raised a yell of terror. The colonel, with one spring, had reached him, and had hold of him by the back of the neck. Nagle knew that grip well; he had once before felt it.

"We shall want you as a witness," said the colonel; "and besides, as you received a ruby ring that Mr. Ratcliff wore—"

"I did not! It's a lie; I did not!"

"It makes you impulsive in any charge that may arise out of his disappearance."

"No, no; I'll give it up. Take it. I don't want it. Take it."

"I take it."

"Oh, thank you."

"But with the recollection that I so take it from you to produce at your trial."

"No, no."

"Constable, I give this man into your charge for feloniously having in his possession a stolen ring. If you like, I will take care of him for you."

"Thank you, sir."

"O Lord!" said Nagle; "then there's no chance at all of getting away."

"Not the least."

The colonel strode out of the cottage, and as he passed Nagle, he placed him flat against the wall, as though he could by some means make him adhere to it, and said:

"Stay there!"

Nagle did not move an inch.

A lumbering old hackney-carriage was passing at some distance, and the colonel hailed it. A few moments more, and Giles Hilton, with his wife and children, were within the vehicle with the constable.

"What about him, sir?" said the officer, in discovering Nagle.

"Oh, he will get outside, on the roof."

"I won't! I won't! Murder! Fire!" cried Nagle. "I won't! There, now!"

He flung himself flat down, close to the threshold of the cottage. The colonel stooped for a moment over him, and then, with a crash that threatened to break in the vehicle, Nagle found himself flung on to the roof of the coach.

"Lie still!" said the colonel, as he got on the box with the driver.

"The police office!" cried the constable; and the coach rumbled off.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SICK MAN AT THE LION AND LAMB.

A rushing, tearing excited crowd followed the coach which conveyed Giles Hilton to a prison on that charge of murder, which had now assumed a congruous shape, that even Colonel Franklin, with all his disposition to put the most liberal construction upon human actions, shuddered to admit its probability.

An exultant crowd, so to speak, for those who composed it roared out to each other in apparently pleased excitement that there was something going on which would awaken interest, and perhaps horror—a human tragedy afloat, in which the actors were not people playing their own parts upon the stage of life.

How it became known that the vehicle, on the roof of which sat Colonel Franklin, and on the roof of which lay Nagle, conveyed some of the dramatis personae of the piece, it is hard to say; unless the two or three people, who heard the constable cry out, "To the police office," jumped at the conclusion, and infected all they met.

But so it was. By the time the coach reached the police office the crowd was rapidly increasing, and it was something of a relief to Colonel Franklin when he was told that the magistrate would sit no more that day.

"That is better," he said; "much better."

"Sir!" said the constable, doubtingly.

"Yes, it gives time for thought."

"Oh yes, sir; and the prisoners will be well taken care of till to-morrow morning."
"Be it so."
"Who makes the charge?" said a rather pompous official.
"This man," said the colonel, pointing to Nagle, "accuses this other man of murder, and admits at the same time that he, himself, has been an accomplice in the transaction. That, I presume, is sufficient ground on which to detain both."
"Yes, sir; if you will promise to attend to-morrow."
"I will."
Giles Hilton said not a word as he descended from the coach; but he smiled faintly. It was strange to see how very different he looked now to what he had done formerly in the hands of the police on the charge of merely stealing the diamond from Mr. Mears. Then there had been a feverish and wild excitement about him, which shone forth in lightning-flashes from his eyes, and which betrayed the instant conflict of his feelings and passions.

Now all was calm, and his look was mild, calm, and gentle.

The mob took some erroneous impressions into their heads, to the effect that Giles Hilton was some terrible and blood-thirsty monster, and that he had committed some murderous attack upon either Nagle on the roof of the coach, or the female and children within it; and when Giles alighted, and the constable held him by the cuff of his coat, he was saluted by a roar of exhortations.

"What is this?" he said.
"Don't know," said the constable. "It don't matter.

"No, it don't matter."

Mrs. Hilton descended from the coach; but the colonel placed his hand gently on her arm.

"Nay," he said. "Think, now, if you have not thought on our progress here, you know that you cannot accompany your husband. Come with me to where that orphan niece of yours is to be found. I will show her to you, and she will be glad to see her mother's sister, and you will be glad to hold to your heart one so nearly allied to you. Come with your children, and be assured that justice shall be done."

Mrs. Hilton looked in a bewildered fashion from the colonel to her husband, and from her husband back again to the colonel; and then Hilton said:

"That is right, Emmy; go, and when you see this child of your sister, tell her that your husband is not the murderer of her father."

"I will Giles—God bless you!"

"And you, and you ever?"

She flung her arms around him for a moment, and held him in her embrace, and then she turned away.

"I am ready," she said.

The colonel held the door of the coach open, and she made an interrogative kind of gesture, as if asking him if she were to get into the vehicle again.

"Yes. The children would be tired," he said. "I will ride outside again."

Mrs. Hilton got into the coach. She caught one more glance at the pale, calm face of her husband, and then she sunk low down in the vehicle; and with her hands clasped over her face, she sobbed bitterly.

The little children added their wailing cries to hers, and in vain tried to drag her hands from her face, that she might hear them.

"Now, young fellow!" said the constable to Nagle, who had not yet descended from the top of the coach.

Nagle pretended not to hear him.

"Oh! won't he come down?" said the colonel.

"Let me, then—"

"Yes, yes I will," shouted Nagle. "I'm coming. I didn't say I wouldn't come down. Let a fellow alone, will you. There, I am down. Now what have I done, eh? that I should be locked up."

"Above all, I beg," said Colonel Franklin to the officers, "that you will be careful of the custody of tis man, whom I expressly charge with robbery."


"Of a ruby ring, if nothing else serves."

"Where is it, eh? Ha! ha! Where is it?"

Nagle held up both his hands. The ring was gone, and as the officers hustled him into the police building, he laughed, grimly, as though he had done rather a clever thing.

The colonel took no notice of him, but getting on to the coach-box again, he directed the driver to go to John Long's house.

It seemed now to Colonel Franklin that, with the exception of what further light might possibly be thrown upon the asserted murder of Mr. Ratcliff, the end of the mysteries connected with the diamond had arrived.

That the jewel would easily now be proved to be the property of Bianche Ratcliff, he did not entertain a doubt; and his heart was full of pity for the poor woman whose sores, accompanied by the wailing cries of her children, came plainly to his ears from the interior of the coach.

Suddenly, then, these sores ceased, and the colonel heard louder cries from the children, and they beat with their little hands upon the front glass of the vehicle, by which he began to think that something special was out, and he ordered the driver to stop.

"Yes, poor Mrs. Hilton, from grief and positive exhaustion—she had not tasted food for four and twenty hours—had fainted in the coach.

If so happened that the vehicle drew up opposite to a little old-fashioned public-house, or inn, in Spitalfields, which for a hundred years had been known as 'The Lion and the Lamb',

as
This ancient little hoteltry had a deep doorway, over which projected a balcony right into the street, and there were two windows, one on each side of the entrance gate, like two little eyes trying to peep out into the world through a perfect maze of old ivy that almost choked them up.

The entrance to the "Lion and the Lamb" went down a good foot in depth, and then the whole place was dark and poky, and low-roofed and uncomfortable.

But it happened that the coach halted exactly at the door of this old place; and when the colonel sprang down from the coach-box, and opened the door of the vehicle, and lifted Mrs. Hilton carefully out, there hustled to the porch of the "Lion and the Lamb" a pretty-looking woman, with a widow's cap; and the moment she saw Mrs. Hilton, she cried out:

"Goodness gracious! here's another, Thomas! Thomas! No—Martha! I mean! Martha! My smelling-salts! vinegar. Now if Dr. Dotts were only to pop in at this moment, what a mercy it would be. Poor thing, is she very ill, sir?"

The earlier portion of this speech from the landlady of the "Lion and the Lamb" bore relation to so many matters with which he was not at all acquainted, that the colonel was glad to hear two or three words toward its conclusion to which he could reply, and he said, at once:

"No; I think she has only fainted, poor thing."

"Poor thing, indeed. Carry her into my parlor, sir, and we will soon bring her around again. This way, sir. This way. Well, I'm sure it's a good thing the old 'Lion and the Lamb' is still in the land of the living. Martha! Martha, I say!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"My smelling-salts."

"Yes, ma'am. He's kicked once."

"What?"

"Kicked once, Thomas says, ma'am, but never a word yet."

"Dear, dear. Run for the smelling-salts."

"Yes, ma'am. They are in the sick gentleman's room, ma'am; and Thomas will be glad to get 'em away, ma'am, as he says they make him sneeze dreadful."

"Go along, do."

"Martha, after opening a multiplicity of funny little old doors in all sorts of odd corners of the ancient inn, at length made her way up a dark staircase to the upper regions of the house, in search of the smelling-salts."

The colonel placed Mrs. Hilton gently in an arm-chair. She sighed deeply.

"I think she is getting over it," said the landlady.

"I hope so." 

"Is she your good lady, sir?"

"No." 

Mrs. Hilton opened her eyes and looked languidly about her.

"I cannot help thinking now," said Colonel Franklin, "that this is exhaustion for want of food. If you can let her have a little wine and water, and a rusk, or a biscuit, she will gather strength."

"To be sure—to be sure. Of course, sir. Oh, the smelling-salts."

"No," said Mrs. Hilton, faintly—"no. I am very, very wrong. For their sakes, for my dear children's sakes, I should think of myself. It is hunger. That is all. It is want."

"He's tried to say something, mum, Thomas says," said Martha.

"Well, well, never mind now. Where's the nutmeg? Oh, here. Toast some bread, then."

"Yes, ma'am, but Thomas says he couldn't make anything of what he said, and he's a trying to amuse him now; if so be as he's sensible enough in his inside to know what is said by reading to him last year's almanac, ma'am."

"Go along, do. You will excuse Martha, sir, but we have a sick gentleman in the house."

"I am sorry to have troubled you."

"Oh, it ain't that, but Martha can think of nothing else but what the sick gentleman may say when he does speak, which he hasn't now for four days, or thereabouts. We are doing all we can for him."

"That I am sure of, madam, from your kindly looks and attentions to my poor friend here."

"God bless us, sir; what are we here for in this world—a dog sort of world—but to do as we can for one another, I should like to know? You are better now, my dear, are you not?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Hilton; "I can go now. I am very much better, and thank you with all my heart."

"Don't mention it. Will you stay an hour or two? Would you like to rest?"

"No—no. I will go now, sir."

"Very well," said the colonel, as he took out his purse, but the landlady shook her head.

"No—no. I won't be paid for such a thing as this. Oh dear, no."

"Then I shall much prefer," said the colonel, "remaining your debtor for the kindness as will, I am sure, Mrs. Hilton."

"Mrs. Hilton?"

"Yes. "That is my name."

"Are you the wife, then, of Giles Hilton, the weaver?"

"I am—I am!"

"Dear, dear. I heard—perhaps it is not true, but only a little while ago, some people came in here and said he was taken up for the murder of a Mr. Ratcliffe."

"Yes; but he is innocent."

"Thank God for that. Dear! dear!"

"It is true, my dear ma'am," said the colonel, "that Giles Hilton is accused of that mult.
THE BROKER'S WARD; OR,

der, and is now in custody. On the morrow he
will be tried. When he goes before the magis-
trates, he satisfactorily cleared of the charge
which I cannot bring myself to believe him
guilty of. He is accused by one named Nagle."

"Nagle? Nagle? John Nagle?"

"Yes," signed Mrs. Hilton.

"Why, he was transported some years ago
for a robbery at this very house, and should not
be here at all."

"Indeed!"

"O dear, yes. Thin—two odd eyes and
light hair."

"That is the man."

"The villain!"

"He is, indeed; and if you will promise me
to come to the police office to-morrow and iden-
tify him as the same John Nagle who was trans-
ported, you will be doing a great kindness to
possibly an innocent man; for surely the testi-
mony of so attainted a ruffian should be of no
avail, unless well corroborated."

"To be sure I will come, sir."

"Mem, he's tried to speak again; but Thomas
says it only sounds like 'Guggie, guggie.'"

"Go along, Martha, do, and don't worry."

"Yes, mem."

Colonel Franklin took a kindly leave of the
landlady of the "Lion and the Lamb", and
helped Mrs. Hilton into the coach again, which
very soon halted at the door of John Long's
house.

Leading Mrs. Hilton's two little children in
his hands, Colonel Franklin conducted Mrs.
Hilton and them to Blanche Ratcliff.

"My dear Blanche," he said, "here is your
mother's sister—the sister who was being search-
ed for by your poor father on the night of his
mysterious disappearance—and here are her
little children. I will leave you together, and
she will be able to tell you all that has arisen
since I left home, and which at once renders
your father's fate more complex and more sad."

Blanche looked with tearful eyes at the col-
nel; and then she placed her hands in those of
Mrs. Hilton, as she said:

"And are you my aunt?"

Mrs. Hilton could not speak for sobbing; but she
made a great effort, and, after a few moments,
managed to say:

"He is innocent. Oh! do not—do not—"

"Do not what?"

"Do not think that my husband is guilty of
the death of your father!"

"Good Heaven! What is this? How could
it be thought? Oh! what have you to tell me?"

"I see, said the colonel, that you will never
get on together, unless you know all, my dear
Blanche, and that at once. There is unmistakable
evidence that your father sought and found the
house of Giles Hilton, the weaver, who is the
husband of this sister of your mother. That
from that moment no trace of him (except the
cloak we found in the room of that house) can
be found, is likewise true. Giles Hilton then
appears in possession of the diamond spoken of
in your father's letter to you. His story is, that
your father, sick and dying, came into his
house, and he knew not who he was; that he
died there and then, leaving him—Giles Hilton—
still in ignorance of his identity; and then that
he, finding the jewel, yielded to the impulse to
appropriate it; and that he burned down the
cottage, with the hope that your father's body
would perish in the conflagration!"

Blanche turned very pale, and her lips quiv-
ered.

"Hear me out, dear girl. I am using the
plainest words I can find to you in telling you
all this, because it is proper you should know it,
and that, too, without doubt or misconception.
Consolation will come afterward, dear Blanche."

"Go on, sir. Yes; tell me all."

"I will. That man Nagle, whom you have
already seen, states, then, that he knows all
about the affair, and that Giles Hilton murdered
your father?"

Blanche uttered a cry.

"Murdered your father," added the colonel,
"and so got possession of the jewel. Giles
Hilton is in prison on that charge; and Nagle,
likewise is a participator in it."

"Lost—lost! Never again, then, shall I hear
your voice, father! Father! Oh, now I can feel
that there was a hope still deep in my heart
which had not been destroyed! Never again,
father!—never again!"

"Now you know all," added Colonel Frank-
lin; "and I will tell you my own opinion, which
is, that Giles Hilton's story is true."

Mrs. Hilton tried to grasp out her thankfulness.

"And my poor father, then, was not murder-
ed?" said Blanche, eagerly.

"I do not think he was. Now tell me, had
your father a ruby ring in his possession?"

"Oh, yes! he wore one when last I saw him."

"Then that implisitor, the villain Nagle. Now
I will leave you with Mrs. Hilton; for you will
have much to say to each other; and may Heav-
en send you both consolation!"

The colonel left the room; for he was eager
now to hold a consultation with his nephew,
Felix, in regard to the new light which had
been, by the strange occurrences of the morn-
ing, thrown over the probable fate of Mr. Rat-
cliff, and the strange story of the diamond.

Loni at once stated his opinion, that the last
tale told by Giles Hilton was the correct one;
although they could neither of them decide in
their own minds, satisfactorily, what precise
connection Nagle had with the affair.

"It must be verified;" said the colonel,
"which has put him in possession of Giles Hil-
ton's secret; but what has really become of the
body of Mr. Ratcliff I cannot even conjecture."
"Unless Nagle removed it for his own security," said Felix.

"It may be so—it may be so. To-morrow may yet clear up some of these perplexities, Felix; but I fear that our dear Blanche must make up her mind to mourn for her father, as I for my brother and you for your father."

Felix bowed his head, and sighed, as he replied:

"Yes, dear uncle. I fear, indeed, that it is so. And yet, as you have said to me, certainty, even if it be of the loss of those most dear to us, is not so agonizing as doubt of their fate. In the one case, we know they are with Heaven; in the other, they may still be enduring the world's persecutions. So, in time, Blanche will smile again."

"She will, Felix. When we are all far away from the distressing scenes of these troubles, they will fade away, leaving behind them the dim memory of a gentle regret."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONCLUSION.

It is morning again—bright, beautiful, and spring-like. And in the old-fashioned room above the shop of old John Long a party is assembled, in all of whom we have a kindly interest.

There is Louis Long—the Louis Long of the early pages of our story—the Felix Franklin of its later episodes. And there is that gallant gentleman who has played so prominent a part in the elimination of the mysteries connected with the diamond, Colonel Franklin.

Mrs. Hilton, too, is there, and on a couch sleep her two children; and last, though not least, we will believe, in our readers' dear esteem, there is Blanche Ratcliff, who, in her first experiences of the great world, upon entering it from the academic school at Château in the Isle of Wight, has found its paths so rugged and its ways so full of sadness and of alarms.

There is, too, as a minor personage, Mrs. Mills. She has put on black for her dead master, old John Long; and she has been rejoiced to find that, "after all, he was not quite so bad as he seemed to be."

There is over the hearts of this little party a gentle stillness, and it is evident that they are prepared to go out, and are only waiting for some one who is to accompany them.

A carriage drives rapidly up to the door, and a gentleman alights, and walks hastily up the stairs.

"Sir George Evesham!" said Colonel Franklin, as he opened the door of the room, so as to cast as much daylight on the old dark staircase as possible. "Sir Evesham, we are all here and ready. Let me introduce you to Miss Blanche Ratcliff, and to Mrs. Hilton."

Sir George bowed; and then he said, in that assumed, sharp sort of tone, which was habitual to him:

"There is no time to lose. I have seen the presiding magistrat of this district, and he is of opinion that the whole case had better be carried before the same court where Giles Hilton has already appeared, and in the custody of which the diamond is. Your letter, colonel, let me know everything, and I have cited Mr. Mears to appear."

"We are ready, then," said the colonel. "Come, all who are here present who wish to come."

He looked at Mrs. Hilton as he spoke, and she felt that the question was addressed to her. Her color faded for a moment, as she said:

"Mrs. Mills will kindly look to my dear children; so that I may go; but—but I will find my way there easily."

"No, no. You go with us of course, Mrs. Hilton; and all I have to say is, what I am sure Sir George Evesham will likewise say, hope for the best!"

"Yes," said Sir George. "The evidence is only troublesome as against Mr. Hilton, but not at all conclusive. It won't do to convict a man of the murder of any one because he was the last person in his or her company."

The whole party descended the little narrow staircase, and as Blanche leaned upon the arm of Felix, he said, gently, to her:

"My dear Blanche, how strange it would be if the possession of the diamond should, after all, be but the precursor to such information of your father as may moderate your grief."

"How so, dear Felix?"

"I know not, but there is a strange feeling on my mind that we are not yet at the end of all these most strange events, but that something is still to happen that, although I cannot define it, yet seems to cast about my heart a halo of satisfaction."

"Yes," replied Blanche. "It is strange; but I do not feel as if I were grieving for my poor father as I ought; and I have accused myself over and over again of indifference to his memory.

They reached the door of the old dilapidated house, and there was the barouche which Sir George Evesham had brought, and which by just a little management, held the whole five of them comfortably enough.

The horses set off at a rapid trot, and as eleven o'clock was striking from the clock of many a church-tower and steeple, they knocked at the door of that police-office from which Felix had so lately been freed from an odious suspicion of guilty knowledge of John Long's peculation of the diamond.

MURDER! What a sound the word has to human ears; and what a myriad of associations—terrible, interesting, shocking, yet fascinating, it engenders. This whisper of the terrible
charge that was about to be investigated went far and wide; and the court, though spacious, was crammed by an eager multitude; so that when the magistrate took his seat, he was fain to enforce the necessity of order by direful threats of instant expulsion to any one who should give utterance to either applause or censure in the course of the proceedings.

And then the crowd was hushed, and Sir George Evesham, and Colonel Franklin, and Felix and Blanche were admitted within the pale of those numerous wooden barriers which shut off the multitude from the seat of judicial investigation.

"Mrs. Hilton," said Blanche, in a low tone, to the colonel, "she is not here."

"Let her be, my dear. She has her duty to do. Let her do it."

There was now a vast commotion in the court. Giles Hilton and Nagle were brought in together. Mrs. Hilton battled her way to her husband, and clung to his apparel.

"With you, Giles. I am with you."

"Dear Emmy!"

"Oh, all is well. God be thanked! That is the old smile. Those are the old tears."

"Come, ma'am, you can't go into the dock," said a turnkey.

"I will sit here, if you please," she said, gently; and she crouched down on a wooden bench, the end of which was sufficiently near to the prisoner, that, by stretching forth her arm, she could take the hand of Giles.

Nagle looked uneasily about him, but as a general thing he kept his eyes down; and it was evident that, for some purpose or another, he was contorting his features so as to present different varieties of the human countenance every other minute.

Nagle was modest, bashful, distant, shy. He had been abroad; and he by no means wished to renew his acquaintance with any one who had known him before his little voyage to the Antipodes.

"Now, what is the charge?" distinctly said the magistrate; "for I hear so much on this affair of the diamond that I wish to be quite clear in respect to what we are investigating. What is the charge now, and who makes it?"

"I make it, your worship," said a superior police-officer. "It is better for me to make it, and to say that, from information I have received, I bring these two persons before your worship on suspicion of murdering Mr. Ratcliff, the sole possessor of the diamond left in your worship's possession on the termination of a claim against Mr. Louis Long."

"Very well. That is distinct. I will take the case as from you in your official capacity. Where is your evidence?"

"Colonel Franklin, sir!"

"Allow me," said Sir George Evesham; "allow me to make a remark, sir."

"With pleasure, Sir George," said the magistrate.

"I appear on this occasion to watch this case for Miss Blanche Ratcliff, the only daughter and heiress of Mr. Ratcliff, who will be proved to have been the real owner of a diamond, or, I may say, the diamond which was in the possession of one of the prisoners at the bar, Giles Hilton. What I wish to beg of you, sir, is, that you will be so good as to allow a somewhat irregular investigation to proceed here, the object of which is to discover, amid a maze of error, some few simple truths which can then be judicially acted upon."

"I can have no object, Sir George," said the magistrate, "but the discovery of the truth, and although my duties may be at any time clearly defined, yet it is well known how much irrelevant matter gets imported into cases in police offices, despite every precaution and resolution to the contrary; so in this special case we need not be critical on that head."

"Very well, sir. With your kind permission, then, I will ask general questions as the case goes on."

"Then," said Colonel Franklin, "I hope I may be permitted, as the friend of this young lady, Miss Blanche Ratcliff, to formally claim for her the diamond left in your hands, sir, on the examination of Giles Hilton in regard to how he became possessed of it, the last time he was before you. Here is a letter in Mr. Ratcliff's handwriting, stating that he started from the hotel, at which he put up with his daughter, for Spitalfields, with such a jewel in his possession; and the next we hear of it, that it is in the possession of a Spitalfields weaver, named Hilton, while Mr. Ratcliff has disappeared, and Hilton's house is burned down, leaving in the ruins a portion of a cloak worn by Mr. Ratcliff."

"It is needless," said Giles Hilton, in a sad but firm voice—"it is needless, sir, to endeavor to multiply proofs of that which I will admit. I now know all. Mr. Ratcliff did come to Spitalfields—he came, as I heard since, in search of me and my poor wife. He came to benefit us; and as Providence willed it, some sudden indisposition overtook him, and he staggered into my cottage to die. I knew him not; but I took the jewel from his corpse, and then I set fire to my house, to consume all evidences of his presence. That is the amount of my offences; let me suffer for them. I am, to that extent, most guilty."

He bowed down his head meekly.

"Now hear me," said Nagle; "and I hope, when a fellow tells the whole truth, that you won't be hard on a fellow, even if he shouldn't be exactly the sort of a fellow you like a fellow to be. Hem! My name is Noggle."

"Noggle?"

"No; Nagle," said a voice at the back of the court. "John Nagel."
"Who told you to speak, eh? It ain't John Nagle. Its Timothoe Zachariah Noggle, stupid. I turn evidence, your worship, and will tell you all about it. Your worship sees that I'm a poor fellow—a bad fellow, perhaps—well, your worship, I didn't know where to pass the night, and I crept into the cottage of this Giles Hilton, and I saw Mr. Ratcliff come in and ask his way to that very place. 'What,' says Hilton, 'you want me?' says he. 'Yes,' said Mr. Ratcliff, 'and there is some money for you, which I hope you will make a good use of.' And with that he laid some money on the table; but Giles Hilton was furious and mad like, and he closed in on him, crying out, 'All or none,' and he killed him! I say killed him. And I was so frightened I could not interfere; and I saw him carry the body up the stairs to the upper room, and there he set fire to the house and burned the body."

"Do you swear to that statement?" said Sir George Evesham?"

"To be sure I do.""

"Let him be sworn, then," said the magistrate, "as this is only a preliminary investigation. Mr. Hicks, do you think that you will not be able to make your case without this man's evidence?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," said the officer. "Perhaps he may as well be let in as a witness against the other."

"Very well. Nagle or Noggle, whichever your name may be, you may give your evidence, but I cannot hold out any formal promise to you. However, it will be a recommendation in your favor, that you tell all."

"Very good, your worship."

"I may simply say," said Giles Hilton, "that what this man asserts is false."

"Yes, Giles," said his wife, and she stretched forth her arm and held him by the hand. "Yes, dear Giles. Simply false."

Nagle was duly sworn, and he then looked around him with a little more confidence. Sir George Evesham whispered to the magistrate, who nodded, and then Sir George said to Hilton:

"Have you any special remark to make about this man's evidence, or account to give of him, or other version of your connection with him?"

"Yes. That he must have been, as he says, secreted in the cottage, and saw all that happened. I believe, for he came to me after I had made money of the diamond—"

"Of me! Of me!" cried a voice. "God bless us all! Of me! here I am—Mr. Mears! Somebody sent for me."

"Silence, sir!" said the magistrate. "Siknee, I beg of you."

Mr. Mears struggled to the front of the crowd, and looked so woebegone and alarmed that one would think he was being accused of murder, and not Hilton.

"Go on, Giles Hilton," said Sir George.

"This man, Nagle, came to me when I had made some money of the diamond, and terri

""That is all."

""Very well. Now, Mr. Nagle."

""Now sir?"

""Oh, it is Nagle, then."

""Well, where's the odds?"

""Not much, I will admit. Where do you live?"

"Anywhere and nowhere."

"Did you call on Giles Hilton at a house in Spitalfields, where his wife and children were staying?"

"Well, I did."

"Did you then and there propose to him that you and he found the diamond, and were part

"No; I did not."

""Oh! do you forget there is such a person in the world as Colonel Franklin?"

"No, I don't—I wish I could. But I tell you it's no use a badgering of me. Giles Hilton did the murder, and he knows he did. I think, after telling of such a thing, a fellow ought not to be plagued about what a fellow has done in little ways that have nothing to do with murders."

"But you did get five hundred pounds of Giles Hilton?"

"Well, I did."

"And you wanted more?"

"Of course, I did, till my feelings got the better of me, and I thought I'd tell all about it."

"Allow me to add a word," said the magistrate. "It may save all parties trouble, if I state that this is hardly an affair of mine that I shall take upon myself to decide. I shall not feel justified in so doing, but shall send the case to a jury. There is abundance of suspicions, and I must say, that if the tale told by the prisoner at the bar can find belief in the breasts of any twelve intelligent men, then the age of credulity has come again."

Giles Hilton bowed his head, as he said in the same mild, calm tones he had used through out:

"It is fit that I should suffer. God help my innocent wife and children! I am not a murderer, though."

"As he pronounced these words, he looked boldly up, and held his right hand above his head."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Nagle. "We shall see."

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed Mrs. Hilton."

"Indeed, sir, he is innocent."

"I, too," said Blanche. "I do not believe that that man killed my father."
"My dear young lady," said the magistrate, "you had better leave all these matters to older heads."

"If murder has been done," cried Felix, "it is far more likely that Nagle himself is the criminal."

"Yah! cried Nagle. "So you speak—do you? No! Giles Hilton is the murderer. I swear it. Away with him! Murder! I saw it done. Murder! I heard the poor man scream! Do you hear that?—scream. He called out, 'Have mercy upon me!' and Giles Hilton, after he thought him dead, hit him again, saying, 'Ha! ha! he lives yet! he lives yet!'"

A screaming voice at this moment at the door of the court echoed the words of Nagle:

"He lives! He lives yet!"

Nagle uttered a cry, and held on to the wooden bar before him.

He lives yet! He has spoken—spoken at last! Doctor Dott is here! He heard him! He has spoken at last! He lives; and he says his name—"

"What is all this?" cried the magistrate, rising to his feet. "Silence, there! Officers, do your duty!"

There was a swaying to and fro of the crowd, wild exclamations of wonder and delight, and then the voice screamed out:

"And he says his name is Ratcliff!"

The shout—the ringing shout that arose from the crowd defied all control.

"Ratcliff!" added the voice. "The 'Lion and the Lamb'. He says his name is Ratcliff; and he is here!"

"My father!—my father!" shouted Blanche. She bounded into the body of the court—through the throng of people, who made way for her, pushing, crowding, and trampling upon each other. There is a carriage at the door of the court—the steps are swinging from it; and within, an elderly gentleman is partially supporting in his arms Mr. Ratcliff.

"My child! my own! my darling!"

Another moment, and Blanche was in her long-lost father's arms.

Nagle made a desperate rush to escape; but he was knocked down by Colonel Franklin, and the officers secured him.

Pale and wan, but with the flutter of a smile upon his lips, Mr. Ratcliff was led into the Court.

"I know not," he said, faintly—"I know not what all this is well about; but my name is Ratcliff, and this is my dear child. I was struck by a ruffian in the street, in Spitalfields, and I staggered into a house—ah! that is the man!"

Mr. Ratcliff pointed at Nagle.

"False! false! I didn't hit you! I never saw you in all my life before!"

"Why, you said you saw him murdered!" cried Sir George Evesham.

"I think I swooned," added Mr. Ratcliff. "Once before I did, in India, and remained motionless for four days, and spoke not. I had a dream surely of a fire, and I staggered from out the blazing ruins, and left my cloak behind me."

"Yes," said the landlady of the inn; "and he came to our house; and it was not till this morning that he spoke a word; and then he asked for his daughter, and said his name was Ratcliff; and I had told Doctor Dott all about my having to come here; and he said: 'Why, bless me!' says he, 'it's the gentleman they say Giles Hilton has murdered!'"

"Officers," said the magistrate, sternly, "you will be answerable for that man!"

"That man?" said Nagle, pointing to Hilton.

"No; you, I mean. Mr. Ratcliff, here is your diamond, and there is Giles Hilton. If you have any charge to make against him, you can make it. He took the diamond from you, believing you dead."

"No charge, father," sobbed Blanche, upon his breast. "All is forgotten—all forgiven."

"Yes, dearest, all forgotten—all forgiven!"

"Then Giles Hilton is discharged," said the magistrate.

Mrs. Hilton folded her husband in her arms, and sobbed convulsively upon his breast; and then Giles spoke, in a voice shaken by emotion:

"My lesson in life is over. It has shaken me; but it has left me you, Emmy, and I am content. To my loom again—to honest labor once again, which will bring with it no shame and no reproach! Come, Emmy. We will seek another home. I am a wiser, and, I hope, a better man!"

"No," said Mr. Ratcliff—"no. Henceforth your future shall be my care. I sought you, and I seek you no more; for I have found you annealed and purified by temptation and by suffering. This jewel, like some necromancer, has done its work; and, in happy days to come, let none of us shrink from gathering wisdom and charity from the story of 'The Lost Diamond.'"

*[THE END]*
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