

### CHAPTER III.

To return to my business affairs. When I was comfortably settled in the prison, and knew exactly what I owed, I thought it my duty to my father to give him the first chance of getting me out. His answer to my letter contained a quotation from Shakespeare on the subject of thankless children, but no remittance of money. After that, my only course was to employ a lawyer and be declared a bankrupt. I was most uncivilly treated, and remanded two or three times. When everything I possessed had been sold for the benefit of my creditors, I was reprimanded and let out. It is pleasant to think that, even then, my faith in myself and in human nature was still not shaken.

About ten days before my liberation, I was thunderstruck at receiving a visit from my sister's mahogany-colored husband, Mr. Batterbury. When I was respectably settled at home, this gentleman would not so much as look at me without a frown; and now, when I was a scamp, in prison, he mercifully and fraternally came to condole with me on my misfortunes. A little dexterous questioning disclosed the secret of this prodigious change in our relations toward each other, and informed me of a family event which altered my position toward my sister in the most whimsical manner.

While I was being removed to the bankruptcy court, my uncle in the soap and candle trade was being removed to the other world. His will took no notice of my father or my mother; but he left to my sister (always

supposed to be his favorite in the family) a most extraordinary legacy of possible pin-money, in the shape of a contingent reversion to the sum of three thousand pounds, payable on the death of Lady Malkinshaw, provided I survived her.

Whether this document sprang into existence out of any of his involved money transactions with his mother was more than Mr. Batterbury could tell. I could ascertain nothing in relation to it, except that the bequest was accompanied by some cynical remarks, to the effect that the testator would feel happy if his legacy were instrumental in reviving the dormant interest of only one member of Doctor Softly's family in the fortunes of the hopeful young gentleman who had run away from home. My esteemed uncle evidently felt that he could not in common decency avoid doing something for his sister's family; and he had done it accordingly in the most malicious and mischievous manner. This was characteristic of him; he was just the man, if he had not possessed the document before, to have had it drawn out on his death-bed for the amiable purpose which it was now devoted to serve.

Here was a pretty complication! Here was my sister's handsome legacy made dependent on my outliving my grandmother! This was diverting enough; but Mr. Batterbury's conduct was more amusing still.

The miserly little wretch not only tried to conceal his greedy desire to save his own pockets by securing the allowance of pin-money left to his wife, but absolutely persisted in ignoring the plain fact that his visit

to me sprang from the serious pecuniary interest which he and Annabella now had in the life and health of your humble servant. I made all the necessary jokes about the strength of the vital principle in Lady Malkinshaw, and the broken condition of my own constitution; but he solemnly abstained from understanding one of them. He resolutely kept up appearances in the very face of detection; not the faintest shade of red came over his wicked old mahogany face as he told me how shocked he and his wife were at my present position, and how anxious Annabella was that he should not forget to give me her love. Tenderhearted creature! I had only been in prison six months when that overwhelming testimony of sisterly affection came to console me in my captivity. Ministering angel! you shall get your three thousand pounds. I am fifty years younger than Lady Malkinshaw, and I will take care of myself, Annabella, for thy dear sake!

The next time I saw Mr. Batterbury was on the day when I at last got my discharge. He was not waiting to see where I was going next, or what vital risks I was likely to run on the recovery of my freedom, but to congratulate me, and to give me Annabella's love. It was a very gratifying attention, and I said as much, in tones of the deepest feeling.

"How is dear Lady Malkinshaw?" I asked, when my grateful emotions had subsided.

Mr. Batterbury shook his head mournfully. "I regret to say, not quite so

well as her friends could wish," he answered. "The last time I had the pleasure of seeing her ladyship, she looked so yellow that if we had been in Jamaica I should have said it was a case of death in twelve hours. I respectfully endeavored to impress upon her ladyship the necessity of keeping the functions of the liver active by daily walking exercise; time, distance, and pace being regulated with proper regard to her age--you understand me?--of course, with proper regard to her age."

"You could not possibly have given her better advice," I said. "When I saw her, as long as two years ago, Lady Malkinshaw's favorite delusion was that she was the most active woman of seventy-five in all England. She used to tumble downstairs two or three times a week, then, because she never would allow any one to help her; and could not be brought to believe that she was as blind as a mole, and as rickety on her legs as a child of a year old. Now you have encouraged her to take to walking, she will be more obstinate than ever, and is sure to tumble down daily, out of doors as well as in. Not even the celebrated Malkinshaw toughness can last out more than a few weeks of that practice. Considering the present shattered condition of my constitution, you couldn't have given her better advice--upon my word of honor, you couldn't have given her better advice!"

"I am afraid," said Mr. Batterbury, with a power of face I envied; "I am afraid, my dear Frank (let me call you Frank), that I don't quite apprehend your meaning: and we have unfortunately no time to enter into explanations. Five miles here by a roundabout way is only half my daily

allowance of walking exercise; five miles back by a roundabout way remain to be now accomplished. So glad to see you at liberty again! Mind you let us know where you settle, and take care of yourself; and do recognize the importance to the whole animal economy of daily walking exercise--do now! Did I give you Annabella's love? She's so well. Good-by."

Away went Mr. Batterbury to finish his walk for the sake of his health, and away went I to visit my publisher for the sake of my pocket.

An unexpected disappointment awaited me. My "Scenes of Modern Prison Life" had not sold so well as had been anticipated, and my publisher was gruffly disinclined to speculate in any future works done in the same style. During the time of my imprisonment, a new caricaturist had started, with a manner of his own; he had already formed a new school, and the fickle public were all running together after him and his disciples. I said to myself: "This scene in the drama of your life, my friend, has closed in; you must enter on another, or drop the curtain at once." Of course I entered on another.

Taking leave of my publisher, I went to consult an artist-friend on my future prospects. I supposed myself to be merely on my way to a change of profession. As destiny ordered it, I was also on my way to the woman who was not only to be the object of my first love, but the innocent cause of the great disaster of my life.

I first saw her in one of the narrow streets leading from Leicester Square to the Strand. There was something in her face (dimly visible behind a thick veil) that instantly stopped me as I passed her. I looked back and hesitated. Her figure was the perfection of modest grace. I yielded to the impulse of the moment. In plain words, I did what you would have done, in my place--I followed her.

She looked round--discovered me--and instantly quickened her pace. Reaching the westward end of the Strand, she crossed the street and suddenly entered a shop.

I looked through the window, and saw her speak to a respectable elderly person behind the counter, who darted an indignant look at me, and at once led my charming stranger into a back office. For the moment, I was fool enough to feel puzzled; it was out of my character you will say--but remember, all men are fools when they first fall in love. After a little while I recovered the use of my senses. The shop was at the corner of a side street, leading to the market, since removed to make room for the railway. "There's a back entrance to the house!" I thought to myself--and ran down the side street. Too late! the lovely fugitive had escaped me. Had I lost her forever in the great world of London? I thought so at the time. Events will show that I never was more mistaken in my life.

I was in no humor to call on my friend. It was not until another day had passed that I sufficiently recovered my composure to see poverty staring

me in the face, and to understand that I had really no alternative but to ask the good-natured artist to lend me a helping hand.

I had heard it darkly whispered that he was something of a vagabond. But the term is so loosely applied, and it seems so difficult, after all, to define what a vagabond is, or to strike the right moral balance between the vagabond work which is boldly published, and the vagabond work which is reserved for private circulation only, that I did not feel justified in holding aloof from my former friend. Accordingly, I renewed our acquaintance, and told him my present difficulty. He was a sharp man, and he showed me a way out of it directly.

"You have a good eye for a likeness," he said; "and you have made it keep you hitherto. Very well. Make it keep you still. You can't profitably caricature people's faces any longer--never mind! go to the other extreme, and flatter them now. Turn portrait-painter. You shall have the use of this study three days in the week, for ten shillings a week--sleeping on the hearth-rug included, if you like. Get your paints, rouse up your friends, set to work at once. Drawing is of no consequence; painting is of no consequence; perspective is of no consequence; ideas are of no consequence. Everything is of no consequence, except catching a likeness and flattering your sitter--and that you know you can do."

I felt that I could; and left him for the nearest colorman's.

Before I got to the shop, I met Mr. Batterbury taking his walking exercise. He stopped, shook hands with me affectionately, and asked where I was going. A wonderful idea struck me. Instead of answering his question, I asked after Lady Malkinshaw.

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Batterbury; "her ladyship tumbled downstairs yesterday morning."

"My dear sir, allow me to congratulate you!"

"Most fortunately," continued Mr. Batterbury, with a strong emphasis on the words, and a fixed stare at me; "most fortunately, the servant had been careless enough to leave a large bundle of clothes for the wash at the foot of the stairs, while she went to answer the door. Falling headlong from the landing, her ladyship pitched (pardon me the expression)--pitched into the very middle of the bundle. She was a little shaken at the time, but is reported to be going on charmingly this morning. Most fortunate, was it not? Seen the papers? Awful news from Demerara--the yellow fever--"

"I wish I was at Demerara," I said, in a hollow voice.

"You! Why?" exclaimed Mr. Batterbury, aghast.

"I am homeless, friendless, penniless," I went on, getting more hollow at every word. "All my intellectual instincts tell me that I could



retrieve my position and live respectably in the world, if I might only try my hand at portrait-painting--the thing of all others that I am naturally fittest for. But I have nobody to start me; no sitter to give me a first chance; nothing in my pocket but three-and-sixpence; and nothing in my mind but a doubt whether I shall struggle on a little longer, or end it immediately in the Thames. Don't let me detain you from your walk, my dear sir. I'm afraid Lady Malkinshaw will outlive me, after all!"

"Stop!" cried Mr. Batterbury; his mahogany face actually getting white with alarm. "Stop! Don't talk in that dreadfully unprincipled manner--don't, I implore, I insist! You have plenty of friends--you have me, and your sister. Take to portrait-painting--think of your family, and take to portrait-painting!"

"Where am I to get a sitter?" I inquired, with a gloomy shake of the head.

"Me," said Mr. Batterbury, with an effort. "I'll be your first sitter. As a beginner, and especially to a member of the family, I suppose your terms will be moderate. Small beginnings--you know the proverb?" Here he stopped; and a miserly leer puckered up his mahogany cheeks.

"I'll do you, life-size, down to your waistcoat, for fifty pounds," said I.

Mr. Batterbury winced, and looked about him to the right and left, as if he wanted to run away. He had five thousand a year, but he contrived to took, at that moment, as if his utmost income was five hundred. I walked on a few steps.

"Surely those terms are rather high to begin with?" he said, walking after me. "I should have thought five-and-thirty, or perhaps forty--"

"A gentleman, sir, cannot condescend to bargain," said I, with mournful dignity. "Farewell!" I waved my hand, and crossed over the way.

"Don't do that!" cried Mr. Batterbury. "I accept. Give me your address. I'll come tomorrow. Will it include the frame! There! there! it doesn't include the frame, of course. Where are you going now? To the colorman? He doesn't live in the Strand, I hope--or near one of the bridges. Think of Annabella, think of the family, think of the fifty pounds--an income, a year's income to a prudent man. Pray, pray be careful, and compose your mind: promise me, my dear, dear fellow--promise me, on your word of honor, to compose your mind!"

I left him still harping on that string, and suffering, I believe, the only serious attack of mental distress that had ever affected him in the whole course of his life.

Behold me, then, now starting afresh in the world, in the character of a portrait-painter; with the payment of my remuneration from my first sitter depending whimsically on the life of my grandmother. If you care to know how Lady Malkinshaw's health got on, and how I succeeded in my new profession, you have only to follow the further course of these confessions, in the next chapter.